The Modern Devotion

Confrontation with Reformation and Humanism

R.R. Post

bron

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Preface

The book entitled *De Moderne Devotie, Geert Groote en zijn stichtingen*, which appeared in 1940 in the Patria series and was reprinted in 1950, could not exceed a certain small compass. Without scholarly argument and without the external signs of scholarship, it had to resume briefly what was then accepted in the existing state of research. However, since 1940 and even since 1950, various studies and source publications have appeared which have clarified certain obscure points. The prescribed limitations of this book also rendered difficult any research into the history of the German houses and in particular those of the Münster colloquium, upon which the documents of the Brotherhouse at Hildesheim had thrown some light.

A closer examination of old and new sources has led us to realize the necessity for a new book on the Modern Devotion, in which particular attention would be paid to the constantly recurring and often too glibly answered question of the relationship between Modern Devotion and Humanism and the Reformation. Here the facts must speak for themselves. Were the first northern Humanists Brethren of the Common Life or members of the Windesheim Congregation? Had the first German and Dutch Humanists contacts with the Devotionalists or were they moulded by the Brothers? Were the Brothers pioneers in introducing the humanistic requirements in teaching and education? These and similar questions could also be posed concerning the attitude of the Devotionalists towards the Reformation. In dealing with this complicated problem, scholars have contented themselves with advancing opinions, with noting points of similarity between the spirituality of the Devotionalists, notably the Brethren and the first supporters or certain groups of supporters of the Reformation - the Baptists for example in the Netherlands. Sometimes a negative answer was considered sufficient. Like the mystics, the Devotionalists found the outward ceremonies and various devotions of the late medieval church distasteful and felt themselves more in sympathy with the Reformers. This gave rise to a common struggle for change, a common feeling of non-conformity which prepared the mind to accept what was new, what was free, what was evangelical.

Such general considerations are usually not only vague, but also a little biased, since it is very easy to emphasise particular qualities in

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old and new so that old and new come to resemble each other. In this connection the mistake, serious for the historian, is often made of describing the attitude and ideals of the sixteenth century fraters with the aid of statements by persons over a hundred years dead, as though no change or development had taken place. The Brothers in their heyday, in the middle of the fifteenth century, were different men from Geert Groote, although his biographers described his life as they thought it must have been. The sixteenth century fraters were retiring, somber men who lived quietly in their houses or contentedly near the Sisters, while others worked in their hostels helping the boys who attended the city schools. The fact has often been ignored that the first Humanists had already acquired their new convictions before the Brothers had any school of note.

It is our intention here to examine those facts which have some bearing on these questions and to describe our conclusions. These facts must be sought in the history of the individual monasteries and Brotherhouses, which must, however, be viewed not separately but as a whole.

This book is based chiefly upon the data derived from the sources. In indicating the general literature I have thus confined myself to references to J.M.F. Dols, Bibliographie van de Moderne Devotie, Nijmegen 1941, and W. Jappe Alberts, Zur Historiografie der Devotio Moderna und ihrer Erforschung, Westfalische Forschungen XI (1953) 51-67. Other references are given for the individual foundations.

A difficult task was to define the limits of our subject. Given the fact that the Modern Devotion was a distinctive movement and was so referred to by its supporters in that period, it must be possible to define its boundaries both in time and place. It had a beginning and an end and extended over a particular territory. In this book the Modern Devotion is taken to be that late medieval ecclesiastic and religious movement, begun in the year 1379 by Geert Groote and moving through various channels - the Brethren and Sisters of the Common Life and the canons of the Congregation of Windesheim - into the sixteenth century and beyond, but losing much of its vitality after 1600. Anything falling outside these channels is not dealt with here, even though there is sometimes a connection with the Devotionalists. In the first place we do not discuss the German mystics and John Ruusbroec, except insofar as they influenced Geert Groote or the origin and development of the Modern Devotion. We also ignore the history of the Dutch Tertiaries, both men and women, whose origin
must often be sought in the initiative of Geert Groote, but who already lost their independence around 1400 and came under the influence of the Franciscans. Roughly the same must be said of the Chapter of Syon which originated around 1420 and shows much resemblance to the Chapter of Windesheim, except where it was necessary to clarify the attitude of the monasteries towards Humanism and the position occupied by Erasmus in his first years. Men too like John Cele and Alexander Hegius who were friendly with the leaders of the movement but who were neither canons nor brothers are only mentioned in their capacity of friends. Not everything that was devout in the late Middle Ages formed part of the Modern Devotion.

So far as we can deduce from the sources available, Henry Pomerius, the biographer of the mystic John Ruusbroec, was the first to apply the name Modern Devotion to the religious phenomenon to be dealt with here. In his Vita B. Johannis Rusbrochii, written between the years 1414 and 1421, he calls Geert Groote the fons et origo Modernae Devotionis the fount and origin of the Modern Devotion, thereby excluding his hero Ruusbroec from the movement.

It gives me pleasure to express my thanks to Mrs. Mary Foran, who has translated the Dutch text into English; to the Netherlands Organization for the Advancement of Pure Research (ZWO), which has borne the costs of the translation; to Professor T.A. Birrell of the University of Nijmegen, who has read the translation and the proofs; and finally to Professor Heiko A. Oberman of the University of Tübingen, who has been willing to include this book in his series ‘Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought’, and to Messrs E. Brill of Leiden, who have undertaken its publication.

Nijmegen, 1 October 1967.

R.R. Post
List of abbreviations


Archief Utrecht = Archief voor de Geschiedenis van het Aartsbisdom Utrecht.

Barnikol = E. Barnikol, Studien zur Geschichte der Brüder vom gemeinsamen Leben, Tübingen, 1917.

Busch, Chronicon = J. Busch, Chronicon Windeshemense und Liber de Reformatione monasteriorum, ed. K. Grube in Der Augustiner Propst, Johannes Busch, Geschichtsquellen der Provinz Sachsen XIX, Halle 1886.

Debongnie = P. Debongnie, Jean Mombaer de Bruxelles, abbé de Livry, ses écrits et ses réformes, Louvain-Toulouse, 1927.

Doebner = Annalen und Akten der Brüder des gemeinsamen Lebens im Lichtenhof zu Hildesheim, ed. R. Doebner, in Quellen und Darstellungen zur Geschichte Niedersachsens, IX (1903).

Fredericq = P. Fredericq, Corpus Documentorum inquisitionis haereticæ pravitatis Neerlandicae, Gent 1889 sq.


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Thomas a Kempis, ed. Pohl =


The maps, drawn by Dr. H.F.J. Lansink O. Carm., have the sole purpose of helping the reader to localize the many monasteries and convents referred to in the text. The particular spelling of placenames does not claim to be authoritative or definitive. Furthermore, it must be borne in mind that the object of this book is to give a history of the Modern Devotion as a whole, and not of individual houses, monasteries and convents.
**Introduction**

A considerable influence has long been attributed to the Devotio Moderna, that is to Geert Groote and his followers. It is thought to have been exercised, not only on the ideas and practices of many contemporaries, but to have continued throughout the whole of the fifteenth and part of the sixteenth centuries. The Devotionalists would then have contributed to the rise of Humanism, or at least to its dissemination in the first phase north of the Alps and, still more, to the origin and progress of the Reformation.

It is not in itself strange that Humanism and Reformation should be linked with the Devotio Moderna. Many indeed perceive related trends in Humanism and Reformation, and Luther in the beginning undoubtedly received much support and approbation from the German Humanists.

The inter-relationship of Humanism and the Reformation and that of the Devotio Moderna to both are two weighty problems which cannot be resolved by general reasoning. This reasoning must be supported by facts. There are not only isolated studies which are devoted to resolving the problem of Devotio Moderna and Humanism. Every writer who examines the history of the origin, progress and nature of Humanism, is compelled to tackle this problem and usually concludes, or at least asserts that the Devotio Moderna and notably the Brethren of the Common Life, fostered the rise of Humanism.

To illustrate this point further, I should like to refer to the works of a German, a Frenchman and an American: Paul Mestwerdt, Bonet Maury and A. Hyma, as well as to a few more recent authors who rely for the greater part on the above mentioned, or at least share their opinions. Mestwerdt examines this question penetratingly and in detail in his work *Die Anfänge des Erasmus. Humanismus und ‘Devotio Moderna,* Leipzig 1917. The author, then a young and promising scholar, soon to fall a victim of the first World War, devotes a large section of his work to this problem. He explores the philosophical, theological and cultural-historical aspects, but his work, in my opinion could profitably be more concrete and factual.

In order to illustrate more clearly the distinctive character of
Humanism as it developed north of the Alps, he first describes the attitude of the Italian Humanists to the classical culture and to the Church and religion. He refers in this connection to concepts which were later found also in the north, but is none the less of the opinion that the phenomenon Humanism displays different aspects above the Alps. This is due in part to its connection with the Devotio Moderna, which exercised considerable influence upon the origins and first development of the ‘German’ Humanists and notably of Erasmus.

Describing the Devotio Moderna, he first draws attention to an important aspect of its origin; the reaction against the unorthodox concepts obtaining among various Beguines in the South Netherlands and in the Rhineland. This would also largely serve to explain Geert Groote's heresy hunt. He also attributes to it the persisting dogmatic sensitivity which, despite the name *Devotio Moderna*, must be termed conservative Catholic. He then goes on to outline the character of the religiosity of this movement, aided mainly by texts from Thomas a Kempis. The emphasis on ethical requirements leads to the rejection of any intellectual speculation.¹ The Devotionalists have a *fides simplex*, acknowledge the power of grace, but deny man any possibility at all of contributing to his own salvation. Their concept of the sacraments diverges from the Catholic doctrine. The sacrament of the Eucharist is so spiritualized that a ‘spiritual communion’ has the same effect as actual physical reception.²

Man, finally, is thrown back upon himself. There is a pronounced personalistic and voluntaristic trend in their piety³ ‘*Das ergibt aber eine innere Bewusstseinsstellung, die dem Ideal der stoischen Ethik aufs engste verwandt ist. Die Vollkommene Devote ist zugleich das Bild der vollendeten stoischen Weisen.*’⁴ A few texts and statements show the permeation of classical philosophical ideas, notably of Seneca, who is repeatedly quoted by Geert Groote.⁵ These ideas constitute a preliminary stage of the more independent and immediate appreciation of non-christian morality which was to be clearly evident in the full flourishing of Humanism.⁶

Mestwerdt then goes on to describe the place of the *Devotio Moderna* in the current theological conflict between the Realists and the Nominalists, the old way and the new. In actual fact the Devotionalists took up no clearly defined position. In spite of a few Nominalists,

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¹ Mestwerdt 89.

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the movement ended in the dominance of realism with Alexander Hegius, the rector of the Latin school of Deventer. But even before he had accepted the rectorship, Ockhamist logic was taught in the school of this city, ‘wo der Unterricht wesentlich in den Händen der Brüder v.g. Leben lag.’ There are other indications too of a connection between the Devotio Moderna and the adherents of the via Moderna: the printing of a book by P. d’Ailly on the Brethren’s presses in Brussels, the studies of some of the Brethren in Prague, the sympathy of John Wessel Gansfort and Gabriel Biel for the Devotionalists. Yet it is impossible to determine their own distinct theological trend from their position within the theological conflict. They had links with both sides. They held aloof from the two extremes and can be credited only perhaps with a certain naive realism. As a result of this, their positive achievement in the domain of theology proper is but slight. We must make an exception here for John Pupper of Goch and Wessel Gansfort, for the former rejected philosophy and scholastic theology while the latter considered himself a Nominalist. Lack of a clearly defined theology led to Biblicism. The Devotionalists copied and printed the Bible, emended the Bible text and applied their piety directly to the context of the Holy Scriptures. Groote recognized in addition patristic and scholastic books. John Pupper ceased to do so.

Although it was easier for a layman to enter the community of the Brothers than a monastery, there was no desire at all to reform political, social or economic conditions. For them the aurea mediocritas was an ideal, and despite their criticism of the moral state of the clergy and of the non-reformed orders, they were preoccupied with their own aims. This explains their willingness to accept the clerical and monastic rules. Mestwerdt sees in the Devotio a stärkere Anpassung an die Bedürfnisse der Laienwelt. Sie geht auf einen zwar immer bedingten, dennoch praktisch hochst bedeutungsvollen Ausgleich des Christentums mit den Forderungen einer fortschreitenden und in höherem Grade weltlichen Geisteskultur. A related theme here is their attitude to the monasteries and to monastics. The known opposition of some Dominicans; on the other hand the foundation of Windesheim; the easy transition from Brotherhouse to monastery and, contrariwise the opposition shown by the

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1 Mestwerdt, 107.
2 Ibid., 109.
3 Ibid., 109.
4 Ibid., 111.
5 Ibid., 114.
6 Ibid., 116.
7 Ibid., 118-119.
8 Ibid., 120-121.
9 Ibid., 123.
10 Ibid., 125.
11 Ibid., 128-129.
rector of the Deventer Brethren, Egbert ter Beek - 'bis zu Hegius' Ankunft, Leiter der dortigen Kapittelschule, wie Allen vermutet,' are all discussed here. There is one essential difference between the Devotionalists and the monks. The Brethren were not bound by vows, but were committed to work and to pastoral duties. The contrast between monks and Devotionalists was clearly set out by the rector of Hildesheim, Peter of Diepburgh, and above all by John Pupper of Goch. So far as the 'Tätigkeit der Volkserziehung und Volksbildung' is concerned it appears that Mestwerdt is aware of the existing controversy over the question of to what extent the Brethren actually taught. He knows that, in the period before 1917, serious doubt had arisen concerning the part played by the Brethren of the Common Life in teaching. This is obviously of decisive importance for the question of the Devotionalists' contribution to the rise and first development of Humanism in the North. He quotes the usual arguments in favour: the statement of the Brethren sent from Zwolle to Culm in 1472 who countered opposition by saying: *ad profectum juvenum vestrorum in scientiis et virtutibus venimus prout sumus et vivimus in diocesi Trajectensi.* He also points out the close relations which existed between the Brethren and the public educational institutions and the founding or direction of schools in various places, including 's-Hertogenbosch, Liège, Utrecht, Brussels, Ghent, Groningen, Amersfoort, Gouda and Harderwijk.

In order to resolve the problems of the attitude of the Devotio Moderna to education he refers in addition to the christian-moralist element in the Brethrens' teaching. He refers to their libraries, to their 'Arbeitsfreudigkeit', to their textual criticism, to the many editions of classical authors at Deventer but not in his opinion in Brussels. He remarks on the speedy adoption of Humanism by institutions either directed or influenced by the Devotionalists notably in Deventer (under John Synthis and Alexander Hegius), to the use of humanistic grammars and schoolbooks and to a testimony of Melanchthon.

In Mestwerdt's opinion too, this influence was not confined to the introduction of Greek and a more classical Latin. There was also the adoption of a whole attitude of mind. He sees at least various points of contact between the religious ideal of the Humanists and that of the Devotionalists.

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1 Mestwerdt, 131.
5 *Ibid.*, 139-140.
Both movements strive to counter the stagnation of Christianity either by combatting those organs within the Church which tended increasingly to render religious life more materialistic or more a question of externals, or by infusing the complicated system of her theology with the vital force of a spiritual and personal religious feeling. In both movements the growing individualism, expressed in the relative indifference towards the sacrament, the priesthood and monastic life, is accompanied by a strong emphasis on the moralistic character of the Christian religion. The parallels are quoted here of the classical, notably the platonic and late-stoic ethic, although the emphasis is different.

It is clear that he considers it important to stress that religious experience to the Devotionalists was a personal and individual thing and that their attitude to the sacrament, the priesthood and monastic life was one of indifference. If this was indeed so, it would already facilitate the entry of the later Humanists to the houses of the Devotionalists. The latter, even though they had no schools, or any influence in the schools would already have been able to extol the forms of modern culture among the people in their preaching and pastoral work. With Mestwerdt thus, the disputed question of the Brethren's influence on education is of secondary importance.

‘Das Gesagte ist zunächst nur eine Konstruktion.’ In order to show the historical basis of this statement, he goes on to describe the humanistic religiosity of Alexander Hegius and Rudolf Agricola. He discusses Hegius' career and task. Hegius was a pious school rector who appreciated Valla's work: *Opus de vero bono* and regarded ‘felicitas’ as the most natural and highest goal of human actions.

Agricola's life and work had scarcely any contact with the Devotio, unless one considers as such his education at the school of St. Maarten in Groningen, the meetings at Aduard around 1480 and the friendship with Wessel Gansfort. Although even before Erasmus the Humanistic world of ideas impinged with Agricola upon the visible field of piety in the Netherlands - not only in the formal return to the ancient sources but also in the positive ideals of the Humanistic motives which in particular involved infusing the spiritual values of the religious life with the active creative powers of human nature, fashioned after God's
image, - he did not formulate any concrete directives for the further development of the plan to reform Christianity. His piety was of a more general and traditional character and ‘verrät nicht entfernt den Reichtum der in die Devotio moderna von Groote bis Goch und Wessel entwickelten eigenartigen Gedanken.’

These latter exercised a much greater influence on Erasmus: ‘Es ist ihr allgemeinster Einfluss auf Erasmus, dass das Christliche d.h. die Beschäftigung mit Christlichen Stoffen, d.h. mit den Problemen des christlichen Gedankens und der christlichen Gesellschaftsordnung zeitlebens bei ihm eine grössere Rolle spielte, als bei zahlreichen seines humanischen Gesinnungsgenossen. In der Form, wie sie ihm entgegen trat, hat Erasmus die devotio moderna freilich abgelehnt.’ In the first chapter of Part II (Die Anfänge des Erasmus) Mestwerdt deals with Schule und Kloster. It is an important exposition, based on all known data from Erasmus' letters and books, but depends too much on the mistaken idea that education was in the hands of the members of the Devotio Moderna. Apart from various minor points he deals excellently with Erasmus' study of Valla, the Antibarbari, the Christian religious poems in contrast with the letters and especially with the De contemptu mundi.

We shall have to examine Mestwerdt's (for the most part brilliant) conclusions in more detail. It is sufficient here to mention a few general reservations with regard to these conclusions.

In the first place he gives no indication of who actually belonged to the Devotio Moderna. He employs the writings of mystics, Geert Groote, Thomas a Kempis, the chronicler of the Brotherhouse at Zwolle, James de Voecht (or Traiecti), Peter of Diepburgh, Wessel Gansfort and John Pupper of Goch to describe the ideas of the Devotio, and then applies the whole to the Brethren of the Common Life of Deventer, ca 1480. He does not pause to inquire if these last in particular can be counted among the Devotionalists, or whether their ideas were shared by the Brethren of Deventer, (the city where Hegius was to teach and Erasmus received his education), not to mention the Brethren of 's-Hertogenbosch. There are no possible grounds for supposing that they even knew the works of John Pupper of Goch, still less that they studied them or assimilated them. He was, moreover, a secular priest and not a Brother of the Common Life at all (see chapter X).

Can the Devotio Moderna be termed anti-monachal, when the great

1 Mestwerdt, 173.
2 Ibid., 174.
3 Ibid., 207.
4 Ibid., 213.

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majority of the open supporters of this movement were monasteries and to judge from the expansion of their congregations and publications displayed great vitality, even during the rise of Humanism in the Netherlands and in Germany? I am alluding here naturally to the Windesheimers, but in a certain respect one may also consider as Devotionalists the numerous convents which adopted the rule of St. Francis or of St. Augustine before 1480 and supplanted nearly everywhere the Sisters of the Common Life.

I am also inclined to wonder whether, in assessing texts from the Imitation, one should not always bear in mind that Thomas a Kempis was a monk, and not a Brother of the Common Life, as Mestwerdt seems to assume.

It also seems to me a mistake to take too rigid a view of the Devotio Moderna. It is surely rash to assume that the ideals formulated by the founders Geert Groote, Florens Radewijns and Gerard Zerbolt were still being applied and practised by the Brethren who lived a century later. The history of the Dominicans, Franciscans and Jesuits shows that development does take place within monastic orders or similar institutions. Even in the late Middle Ages a century lasted a hundred years. It seems to me irresponsible, from a historical point of view, to equate the ideas and way of life of the Brethren of the last quarter of the 15th century with the ideals expressed in Groote's writings and letters. Groote for instance was a book lover, a well read and scholarly man, whereas none of the Brethren was ever sent to the University.

Mestwerdt in addition has a vague and even inaccurate idea of the conditions existing in late-medieval education in this particular field. Even his repeated reference to schools conducted or influenced by the Brethren is misleading. By adding the word ‘influenced’ he can greatly increase the number of schools which had any contact with the Brethren, but he should indicate at the same time of what exactly this influence consisted. Was it an educational influence, or the spiritual direction of the scholars or was it merely a friendship with the school rector? It would be important too to establish the duration of such influence. All this would have to be investigated and set down to render Mestwerdt's conclusions in any way tenable.

The Modern Devotionalists did not live in a vacuum. Outside them were the so-called mendicant orders - Dominicans, Franciscans, Carmelites and Augustine hermits, which sent several of their members to a University, had more contacts with Italy and France than the Brethren of the Common Life, and also showed more interest in study.

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The fact that they were called, and were in fact mendicant orders, does not mean that they did no work. Outside them too were the secular priests, some of whom were University-trained. Did they not practise piety? Or were they, in contrast to the Devotionalists, completely external and formalistic? Had not then the Windesheimers a more solemn choir than the mendicant friars? Did not the Brethren of the Common Life pray their breviary? It does not do to regard every expression of piety in the late Middle Ages as denoting a link with the Modern Devotionalists. In comparison with these groups the Brethren of various towns formed retired, petty-bourgeois, ill-lettered and cloistered communities. Their attitude to schools and education will also be described as well as possible in this book. We merely wish to state at this point that educational institutions existed in towns where the Brethren did not live - in Arnhem, Zutphen, Alkmaar, Amsterdam, Leiden, Dordrecht, Rotterdam, Roermond, Breda and Maastricht - to name but a few. We shall deal later with the question of whether the school of Deventer taught Humanism earlier than all the others. Even if the answer is affirmative, the question then arises as to how far the Brothers were concerned in the teaching or in the conduct of the chapter school.

The fact that the Devotionalists (Mestwerdt refers chiefly to the Brothers) remained impartial in the theologians' conflict concerning the via antiqua and the via moderna may be explained by their lack of interest in academic theology. The training of their future priests was completely a family affair with no interference from outside. Although we now have reason enough to doubt Mestwerdt's conclusions, even without being acquainted with all the details, the scholars of Germanic Humanism and of Erasmus, usually accept the nucleus of his ideas. They agree that the Devotionalists, confined to the Brethren of the Common Life, furthered the rise of Humanism.

I quote in example the recent book of Lewis W. Spitz 'The Religious Renaissance of the German Humanists' written in English by an American in Germany. It deals with the German Humanists and relies mainly on sources preserved in Germany. The book may serve as an example since I consider it an excellent achievement, being as factual as possible and written by a man whose religious ideas accord more closely with those of Mestwerdt than with mine.

While rejecting A. Hyma's theory of the influence of the Devotio

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Modern on the rise of Humanism, he does recognize that this influence existed.\(^1\) The Modern Devotionalists exercised it on nearly every Humanist.\(^2\) By Devotionalists he again means the Brethren, who possessed an ever deepening inwardness of faith coupled with self-knowledge, and led practical Christian lives. Their spiritualistic stress on religiosity and their almost stoical ethical standards led them to minimalize the effectiveness of the sacraments as channels of grace and of the church as the instrument of salvation.\(^3\)

Their influence was widespread. It is noted that they established schools, hospices for poor students in University towns and printing presses for constructive devotional literature. Among the famous men of the time directly educated or supported by them were Cusanus, Agricola, Celtis, Mutian, Johannes Murmellius, Herman van der Busche, Erasmus and Luther. Their importance for German humanism was great indeed, even though that importance was greatly exaggerated by some historians.\(^4\) This last phrase leaves him a loophole. The exaggeration of his own statement may already be judged from the fact that, of all the University towns, the Brethren had hospices only in Cologne and for a very short time in Louvain and Trèves (not in Paris, Heidelberg, Prague or Vienna!). It is also certain that several of the persons mentioned were neither educated nor supported by the Brethren. In Luther's case the statement may be assumed correct, for he stayed in the house at Magdeburg. So far as the others are concerned it is based on the false assumption that the school in Deventer was run by the Brothers.

Like Mestwerdt, and probably on the basis of his book, Spitz regards the similarity of aims and ideas of the Brethren and of the first Humanists as denoting a relationship between the two groups. He stresses the Germanic mysticism and voluntary striving after spirituality of the devotionalists. Their piety situates man immediately before the ineffable God and emphasises the inner depth of the religious experience.\(^5\) This was not only a negative reaction against the formalism of belief in dogma and in ecclesiastical ceremonies, but a positive power and an expression of the religious feeling widespread among the laity. They sought the fulfilment of the human striving for perfection in divine grace and in the example of Christ. They stressed not sin and redemption but practical piety. The three leading figures of

\(^1\) Spitz, 7.
\(^2\) Ibid., 8.
\(^3\) Ibid., 8.
\(^4\) Ibid., 8.
\(^5\) Ibid., 8.
15th century German mysticism - John Pupper of Goch, John of Wesel and Wessel Gansfort ‘stood in the Dominican neo-Platonic tradition.’

I am not clear about the meaning of this last remark in this context, but it is striking that Spitz evidently considers these three as in some way characteristic of the Devotio Moderna. In this he is following in the train of Mestwerdt.

After this general introduction in which he repeats that Nicolas van Cusa was educated by the Brethren of the Common Life and was a cultural symbol for the Germans, he deals separately with the first Humanists - Rudolf Agricola, Jacob Wimpfeling, John Reuchlin, Conrad Celtis, Ulrich von Hutten, Conrad Mutian, Willibald Pirckheimer, Desiderius Erasmus and Martin Luther. With the exception of Reuchlin, Celtis, von Hutten and Pirckheimer, all these, according to Spitz, owed their education and training in some measure to the Devotio Moderna. With Agricola this amounts to the fact that he attended the school of St. Maarten in Groningen, which was ‘under the influence of the Common Life’. This is not true or at least has no significance. Moreover, Agricola was a moderate realist, in line with the tacit assumption of the Brethren of the Common Life. Even if we accept this statement, derived from Mestwerdt, it still does not prove any mutual influence. Agricola may have acquired his moderate and mild wisdom anywhere. The same may be said of the practical Christian piety of the Brethren of the Common Life, whose influence he is supposed to have felt. And there is another matter. ‘At this point too, there was a easy coincidence of the quasi-stoical teachings of the Brethren of the Common Life, among whom Seneca was a favourite author, and the moral emphasis of the literary humanists.’ Was there a teaching by the Brethren and if so were they more inclined to Seneca than the other teachers? Or did they take Christ as their model as the Imitation desires. The Brethren's material for meditation was so directed.

Resuming his study of Agricola Spitz says of him, that ‘he stood with deep roots in the piety of the Brethren of the Common Life.’ In his person he showed how the basically non-speculative but practical and stoic-moralistic aspects of the Devotio Moderna could be reconciled with what he had learned from the pious Italian masters.
Spitz moreover attributes Agricola's enthusiasm for classical scholarship, acquired in Italy, to the Brethren of the Common Life in the person of the more conservative Hegius, the great teacher of Erasmus. This seems to be an echo of Mestwerdt, but it is difficult to reconcile Hegius in this manner with the Brethren of Deventer. In any case Erasmus only knew him for a short time as rector of the school and was taught by him hardly at all as we shall later see.

According to Spitz's thesis Wimpfeling's contact with the Brethren was only oblique. In his birthplace he followed the lessons of Ludwig Dringenberg who had attended school in Deventer and who stressed ethical and religious training in the best traditions of the Brethren of the Common Life. To this indirect contact one must presumably attribute the fact that 'his educational goal, like that of Gerard Groote was ethical and not eloquence.' Furthermore, 'he laboured for educational reform, but within the safe outline prescribed by the Devotio Moderna.' And thus a school rector's aims are transformed first into the ideals of the Brethren of Deventer and then suddenly into those of the entire Devotio Moderna!

Mutian (Conrad, Mutianus, Rufus born 1471 at Homberg) studied from 1481 to 1486 at 'the school of the Brethren of the Common Life at Deventer.' He was thus acquainted with the pietas of the Devotio Moderna 'with its mystic traditions, piety, and biblicism of the via Moderna' and underwent in addition the influence of the philosophical theologians of Florence.

The legend that the school of Deventer was an institution of the Brethren dies hard! I shall later (page 163) show that the via Moderna was already rejected by Geert Groote.

Next we have Erasmus. 'Under the influence of the Brethren of the Common Life at Deventer and at 's-Hertogenbosch from 1475 till 1486, the formative years, Erasmus (born 1469) absorbed both the religious views of the Devotio Moderna and the classical interest of Hegius and his colleagues. Religiously this meant an emphasis on the simplicity of truth, the spirituality and inwardness of the religious life and the imitation of Christ.' Apart from Erasmus' stay in 's-Hertogenbosch, the question once again arises - was it really so? Had Erasmus

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1 Spitz, 40.
2 Ibid., 42.
3 Ibid., 51.
4 Ibid., 59.
5 Ibid., 131-132.
6 Ibid., 135.
7 Ibid., 131.
8 Ibid., 199.
9 Ibid., 199.

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so much contact with the Brethren in Deventer that he absorbed the religious characteristics attributed to the Devotio Moderna? The school was not run by the Brethren and if he did stay with them it was only for a short period (see chapter IX).

Concerning Luther Spitz poses the question: What was the nature of the Brethren's influence? Luther's contacts with the Brethren should make this clear. These contacts began in Magdeburg, where the Brethren ran one of the schools and where Luther was a pupil.¹ He read the writings of John Mombaer, Ludolf of Saxony, Gerard Zerbold of Zutphen, of Wessel Gansfort, John Pupper of Goch, and Gabriel Biel, rector of the Brethren of Butzbach.² Luther praised the constructive work of the Brethren. He opposed them only once (over the printing of the Bible at Rostock).³ Luther was indeed a many-sided and well-read man. Even though his acquaintance with the Magdeburg Brethren was brief, he would easily have been able to grasp the Devotio Moderna, assuming all the writers mentioned to be Devotionalists. The fact is, however, that he did not read Wessel Gansfort and John Pupper until he had already completely formed his new theology. He was thus in no way influenced by the Devotio Moderna, despite the influence of Gabriel Biel. Although the latter entered a chapter-house which had adopted the communal life, this does not imply that he impressed his nominalist stamp on all the Brethren. Not all the Magdeburgers necessarily thought like Biel and influenced the very young Luther. Luther admittedly studied Gabriel Biel's books in principle and was brought up in an atmosphere of moderate nominalism. His real development, however, was achieved painstakingly and independently and was not influenced by the Devotio Moderna, no matter how broadly one understands the term. His piety too was acquired at home and in his monastery and also from Tauler and the 'theologia Deutsch' who can scarcely be classed with the Devotio Moderna.

Of the early Humanists studied by Spitz only two appear to have had any contact of importance with the Devotio Moderna, namely Erasmus and Luther. Agricola, Wimpfeling and Mutian may have absorbed a little influence from a distance. Yet not only these, but also Reuchlin, Celtis, Hutten and Pirckheimer were well-known Humanists. It was thus possible, at the end of the 15th century north of the Alps,
to become a Humanist without the influence of the *Devotio Moderna*, without contact with the Brethren. It was even possible to have ideas which were ascribed to the *Devotio Moderna* and even to the Brethren.

In Paris in 1889 the doctor of theology G. Bonet-Maury⁠¹ published a work on the educational work done by the Brethren of the Common Life in the Netherlands. This dissertation maintains the tradition (contested by Karl Hirsch among others) that the Brethren of the Common Life were principally teachers. Not only did they found various schools, they also greatly improved the teaching standards, lightened the lot of poor scholars and applied the educational theories current among the first Humanists. If the main part of this were true, the Brethren could rightly be termed the pioneers of Humanism in the Netherlands.

It is important to note that the writer confines himself to the Brethren and does not consider the entire Devotio Moderna, with its hazy limits, as participating in the work of instruction and education. This however tends to undermine the foundations of the argument that the ideas of Wessel Gansfort and John Ppper were propagated in the schools, since neither of these belonged to the Brethren. Bonet-Maury, however, does show a good grasp of one point. The Brethren's interest in education and their work in the schools did not remain constant. An important development took place. He distinguishes 3 phases; phase I from 1381 to 1400, which he calls the *aetas mystica*, in which only books were written and hostels opened. Phase II lasts from 1400 to 1505. A few Brethren began to instruct boys who later became school rectors - a sort of private education thus. During phase III, from 1505 to 1600, some of the Brethren's pupils won fame as pioneers of the Renaissance. These began zealously to give instruction in the classics and transformed the formerly undistinguished schools into gymnasias.² There was indeed a development but it does not coincide directly with this scheme. If the third period only began in 1505, it was not the Brethren who propagated Humanism, but rather those who had adopted the new culture from others. For the rest, this is the only part of the book of any value.

With the aid of a few statements by 16th century Humanists concerning the education of the Brethren, the writer attempts to prove

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² G. Bonet-Maury 3.
his theory, as though the Brethren were principally teachers, reformers of the educational system and pioneers of Humanism. The interpretation of these texts is not always certain. In any case they are valid only for their own period and usually at a distance. Maury's remarks on the individual houses and schools are little short of preposterous. Data which he did not possess have given a completely different picture on this point and brought completely new facts to light. He does not distinguish sufficiently between the work of the Brethren and the task of the teachers, nor between the hospitia of the Brethren and those of Standonck. He is unreliable too concerning the people who are supposed to have studied in the various schools of the Brethren. All this will be made clear as we go deeper into their history. I should indeed refrain from quoting this old book were it not still used as a reference work by various new French authors. August Renaudet, in his famous Préréforme et Humanisme à Paris, seems not entirely free from this opinion, although generally speaking he correctly evaluates the significance of the Windesheiners and the Brethren. He quite simply assumes, however, that the schools in the Netherlands, notably those of Deventer, Gouda and Zwolle, belonged to the Brethren, or at least that they were in charge of the teaching there. Every time he mentions the school-days of someone who is later connected in some way or other with the Préréforme et Humanisme in Paris and who went to school in the Netherlands, he speaks either of the teaching or of the influence of the Brethren. For example: Jean Wessel Gansfort, écolier à Zwolle chez les frères de la vie Commune; Jean Standonck (avait) suivi les leçons des Frères de la vie Commune; or le disciple des Frères de la Vie Commune; Thomas Hemerken à Kempen... suivi, au college de St. Lebuin à Deventer, les leçons des Frères de la vie Commune. Erasme, entré vers 1475 au collège de Saint-Lebuin de Deventer, il y subit comme Jean Standonck chez les Frères de Gouda, la dure discipline de la dévotion moderne.

These texts are sufficient to show the opinion held by M. Renaudet. Even more plainly and expressly indebted to Bonet-Maury are the authors of the recently published (1964) fourteenth volume of the Histoire de L'église (A. Fliche and N. Martin), especially when dealing with the schools and the Brethren. They call Bonet-Maury's book ‘le travail essentiel,’ and adopt his expression ‘après l'âge mystique, l'âge

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1 Parijs 1953.
2 Ibid., 82.
3 Ibid., 174.
4 Ibid., 182.
5 Ibid., 216.
6 Ibid., 261.

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scolaire’ Bonet-Maury is the author ‘d’ont nous allons désormais suivre le livre’. They were thus led astray and arrive at a completely wrong conclusion. ‘In the Netherlands alone there were soon twenty schools. It is easy to understand how the Brethren received the name Fratres scolares. Sometimes these schools existed before the coming of the Brethren. On taking them over they infused into their teaching and training a new spirit and a devotion which obtained for them remarkable success.’ This is an issue of generalities and inaccuracies, without dates or places. The authors continue thus for some time to dispense inaccurate information - that the Brethren gave popular instruction to pauperes scolares, and that some of their schools contained several hundred pupils.

The excerpts given here from a few modern French authors are, it would seem, sufficient to show the necessity for a new examination of the question, and a description of the spiritual situation based on concrete facts.

In America Albert Hyma, a professor at the University of Grand Rapids, Michigan, has written two books on the question under discussion: the first, *The Christian Renaissance, a history of the Devotio Moderna*, has all the qualities of a work of scholarship. The second is: *The Brethren of the Common Life*. As may be deduced from the title he sees the Devotio Moderna as a renaissance, a rebirth of Christian Life. In the fourteenth century this life had either disappeared or was in extremis, until Geert Groote and his disciples, the Brethren of the Common Life, revived and reanimated the Christian idea. At the same time they zealously applied the principles of Christianity. This revival or its consequences lived on in the 15th century, found supporters outside the Netherlands, in the German Empire and in France and came to be known as the *Devotio Moderna*.

The Brethren extended education, introduced new teaching methods and thus prepared people's minds for Humanism which, though it came from the South to the North, was accepted there by the schools and educational institutions. Humanism was animated by the Brethren

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1 Paris 1964, 928, 29.
2 Ibid., 929 no. 32.
3 Ibid., 929.
4 Ibid., 929.

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and the rectors of the schools. They fostered it and helped to spread it further. From the *Devotio Moderna* Humanism received its Christian Biblical character as it is displayed north of the Alps by Hegius, Agricola, Erasmus and others. It was thus also a rebirth of Christianity, a *Christian Renaissance*. In this Renaissance he also includes the Reformation, notably Lutheranism, since Luther's main theses corresponded to the teaching of the Groningen scholar Wessel Gansfort, a product of the Brethren's system of education. Luther said as much in the introduction to the edition of Gansfort's works in 1525. The Swiss Reformers, in particular Zwingli and Calvin, received their communion doctrine from the Netherlands, that is, the doctrine which Cornelis Hoen had derived from a letter of Wessel Gansfort, and which the Rector of the Brotherhouse of Utrecht, Hinne Rode, had transmitted to Oecolampadius and Zwingli in Switzerland. The 16th century revival of Catholicism, the so-called Counter-Reformation, also owes much to the *Devotio Moderna*. It might even be termed a direct continuation of it.

This remarkable and interesting opinion imparts to the Devotio Moderna a world-historical significance. It gave rise to the Christian Humanism north of the Alps, improved education and caused the counter-Reformation. Flattering though this theory may be for the Low Countries I am obliged to reject it, since it is based on various unfounded or inaccurate assumptions. In the first place Hyma has not enquired who actually formed part of the Devotio Moderna. In his opinion one must include not only Geert Groote, the Brethren of the Common Life, the Windesheimers, but also school rectors like John Cele and Alexander Hegius, and the friends who met together in the monastery of Aduard between 1480 and 1485. In addition he names theologians such as Wessel Gansfort and John Pupper of Goch and Humanists like Agricola and Erasmus.

There exist indeed various grounds for including several of the above-mentioned in the *Devotio Moderna*, and especially Wessel Gansfort. Erasmus may be accounted a friend and disciple. One should not forget however, that after leaving Zwolle Gansfort studied and taught for twenty-five years at various universities. All his ideas thus cannot be attributed to the Brethren (see further chap. X). Hyma considered the schools of Zwolle and Deventer to be no longer schools of the Brethren, yet repeatedly attributed any good that came out of them to the Brothers. Moreover, he assumes that the Brethren ran or directed schools in various other cities without adequately having studied

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or examined this question. He bases his arguments too on the faulty data of Bonet-Maury. It is also remarkable how this learned writer assumes that nothing existed or happened outside the Devotionalists. He ignores the fact that, in the 14th and 15th centuries, universities were founded in many towns. Here all sorts of persons taught and did scholarly work with no help at all from the Brethren of the Common Life. He also passes over in silence the rise of an observance-movement in various orders - by no means always through the intermediary of the Devotionalists, although the Windesheimers achieved a great deal outside their own congregation. He leaves out of consideration too the fact that fairly flourishing schools existed in several Netherlandish and in even more ‘foreign’ towns where the Brethren had ‘überhaupt’ no settlement. One thinks, for example, of Alkmaar.

Hyma also assumes that no piety or even inward meditation existed outside the circles of the Devotio. He does not wonder whether the Brethren of 1480, when the first signs of Humanism became manifest in this region, held the same ideas as at the foundation, which could thus partly be described with ideas set down by Groote himself in his books and letters. Neither Hyma nor anyone else thought of asking what training the Brethren themselves had enjoyed. It is plain from all this that much research remains to be done on this point. Too many things are too easily attributed to the Brethren, because not enough is known about them.

Much less ambitious is Hyma's second book on this subject, i.e. *The Brethren of the Common Life.*\(^1\) It consists of five chapters, on Geert Groote, on the rise of the Devotio Moderna, on the Brethren and Sisters of the Common Life, on the congregation of Windesheim and on the earliest version of the ‘Imitation of Christ.’ These are all subjects with which he is familiar and on which he gives a variety of important details, without altering in principle the opinion expressed in the first book.

We do, however, find another opinion in the work of William Spoelhof who obtained his doctorate in 1946 at the University of Michigan, under Professor Hyma one assumes, with the still unprinted thesis *Concepts of religious nonconformity and religious toleration as developed by the Brethren of the Common Life in the Netherlands, 1374-1489.* The writer, who sent me this typed book of 306 pages, has really broken

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1 Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1950.
new ground. It must also be mentioned that he has tried to support his arguments with numerous quotations from the authors he deals with. He thus shows that he has a thorough knowledge of the sources and literature of this subject and can make very good use of them. All assumptions concerning schools and teaching have now disappeared. He sketches the ideas of the ‘Brethren of the Common Life in the Netherlands’ in the domain of religious nonconformity and religious tolerance. He first describes the relationship between the mysticism of the Brethren and that of the Rhinelanders and Ruusbroec. Then he deals with the relationship of mysticism in general to the two problems, i.e. the easy attitude to the existing conformity, or lack of it, of their own religious concepts to those of the Church. This more or less indifferent attitude towards dogmas was the result of an attitude of tolerance towards the views of others. He then examines how these ideas appear in the work and concepts of Geert Groote, Florens Radewijns, Gerard Zerbolt, Henry Mande, Gerlach Peters, Wessel Gansfort and Thomas a Kempis.

It will immediately be remarked that, apart from the founder of the Devotio Moderna, only two of the persons mentioned belonged to the Brethren of the Common Life, i.e. Florens Radewijns and Gerard Zerbolt. Geert Groote might be numbered among the first group, although he was a man of broader allure that the first Brethren. His word was not confined to one house - he preached in several cities. Later we shall examine in more detail his activity in various domains. He was concerned not only with various local, regional and Netherland questions, but also with the great problem of his period, the Western Schism. Florens Radewijns and Gerard Zerbolt were also men of the first hour and belonged to the leaders of the house in Deventer. They worked principally for that house, although both fled Deventer in 1398 before the ravages of the plague. They lived for a time in Amersfoort and from there they established contact with friends in Utrecht, Amsterdam and Dikninge in defence of their institutions. Gerard Zerbold died as early as 1398 and Florens Radewijns followed him in 1400. They lived in the first period of enthusiasm, when the Brethren had no written rules or statutes.

Henry Mande, Gerlach Peters and Thomas a Kempis were all three Windesheimers, i.e. monastics who, unlike the Brethren, retired completely from the world and only exercised pastoral care among the members of their own monastery and congregation. They were bound by a strict organization with monastic rules and statutes. They
were thus concerned with the peculiarities of the institution, the institutional character which, according to Spoelhof, by its very nature leads to conformism and intolerance. He gives two examples which show that this was indeed so among the Windesheimers. Among the decrees of the general chapter from 1387 to 1520, there is one, dating from 1455 and ratified in 1457, which betrays the beginnings of a spirit of intolerance towards the Sisters of the congregation of Windesheim. From then on none of the Sisters might write or have written a book about dogmas or prophecies and revelations. The other decree dates from 1494, ratified in 1496. In four named places strong prisons were to be built, to incarcerate the fugitives who wished to leave the order (this in addition to the prisons within each particular monastery). The first decree might also apply to the Brethren and Sisters of the Common Life, but not the second. Fugitives (fugitivi(ae)) and apostates (apostatae) could not occur among the Brethren and Sisters since none of them had taken vows for life. The congregations of the Brethren lacked the institutional character of the Windesheimers. They also had an internal democratic system. The Brethren elected the Rector who, for the rest, had no official jurisdiction. His relationship to the rest of the Brethren was that of a headmaster to his pupils.

Officially the Brethren had no fugitives or apostates, but the rectors sometimes had difficulties with disobedient Brethren or with persons who could not settle in their own house. Accommodation was sometimes found for these elsewhere. Sometimes, too, a person would leave, without breaking with the fraternity. Certain conditions were made on his return but we read nowhere of a prison.

For the theme chosen by Spoelhof it was thus of importance to determine that the three Windesheimers in question had been admitted to the Brethren of the Common Life under Florens Radewijns before they entered the monastery (Windesheim or Agnietenberg). They thus entered the monastic state as Brethren. They had had the opportunity of reading, retaining and developing the nonconformity and tolerance attributed to the democratically organized Brethren. On these grounds Spoelhof considers the ideas of Henry Mande, Gerlach Peters and

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2 Spoelhof 21; *Decreta capitulorum* 93.
3 See Fredericq: *Corpus haereticae praevitatis* II, 177.

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Thomas a Kempis as characteristic of the Brethren. Their works owe their inspiration to the ideals derived from Radewijns. However, the conditions under which these three persons stayed with the Brethren are somewhat different. According to G. Visser, Henry Mande arrived in Deventer in 1391, under the influence of Groote's preaching, having abandoned his function as scribe at the court of William VI (then still William of Oostervant). He must have speedily transferred to Windesheim, however, where he must have remained for some time before Radewijns sent a letter to Johan Vos of Heusden, prior in Windesheim. This letter can be dated between 30th November 1391 and 5th June 1392. With such a short stay there was no question of his being admitted as a member of the Fraternity. For this a year's novicate was necessary, as in Windesheim. He appears to have already served this year in Windesheim when Radewijns interceded for him. Can such a short stay with the Brethren have had the influence on an adult man which Spoelhof assumes? Gerlach Peters, on the other hand, had, according to his sister Lubbe Peters, already felt the influence of Florens as a schoolboy. When he was still a clerk Florens often 'spoke to him of good things'. He was only too anxious to win him to follow the spiritual life. Gerlach heard the call while playing the role of Our Lady in a play being given in the great church. He showed this as arranged by kneeling before the child he was offering, (evidently a school play or liturgical sketch given at Candlemas and played by school children). Brother Gerlach then went to Windesheim. According to John Busch, Gerlach eagerly followed the Brethren's preaching after this event and was instructed by Florens in the principles of the religious life. Florens then sent him to Windesheim to be received into the religious state. Here too is not clear if he was first admitted to the Brethren. Florens Radewijns exercised considerable influence on the youth, but is it reasonable to suppose that this spiritual teaching influenced his future non-conformity or tolerance?

1 Spoelhof 170.
3 D. de Man, Hier beginnen sommige stichtige punten van onzer olde zusteren, Den Haag 1919, 16-17.
4 'wat guets'
5 That Gerlach Peters is here called Brother does not necessarily mean that he was previously a Brother of the Common Life. It may mean that he was the brother of sister Lubbe Peters, or that he was a novice in Windesheim.
Spoelhof also assumes Thomas a Kempis to have been for some time an actual member of the congregation of the Brethren (the inner circle of the Deventer Brotherhood). This assumption is based on evidence from Thomas's own works. He did indeed, encouraged by his brother, travel to Deventer as a boy of 13, probably in 1394. His intention was to enter the chapter school, depending to some extent, or even perhaps largely, on the charity of the city burghers and of the Brethren of the Common Life. His confidence was not misplaced! Florens Radewijns received Thomas for a time (aliquantisper) into his house (the house of the Brethren or their hostel), and placed him in school. Subsequently he found him free accommodation (hospitium) with an upright and pious woman who showed many kindnesses to him and other pupils. In the meantime he kept up the connection with Florens Radewijns and his Brethren. Thomas rejoiced in their exemplary life and in their preaching. Never before had he met such people, he later told his novices at the Agnietenberg. Meditative men who having first said Matins at home, proceeded to the church where they devoutly heard mass. Some of the Brethren preached in church. Finally he entered the Brothers' hostel (in domo antiqua, in communi bursa) which numbered about twenty scholars (clerici). All enjoyed board and lodgings and were under the jurisdiction of three laymen i.e. a procurator (later usually a priest) a cook and a tailor. From this house (not the Brotherhouse but the bursa, the hostel) some entered the order of canons regular and others became priests. Thomas remained in this bursa for about a year. One of his fellow students was Arnold of Schoonhoven with whom he shared room and bed. Here he learned ‘writing’ (calligraphy), to read the Scriptures, and the elements of good behaviour, not least through the encouragement of Arnold of Schoonhoven. What he earned with copying went to contribute to the general costs. He needed nothing more, for Florens provided him with everything. This Arnold was an exceptionally zealous and serious scholar who, when he had finished his schooling, was admitted to the Florens-house i.e. where the Brethren lived. He thus became a member of the fraternity. This year of Thomas's stay in the Brethren's hostel must have been the year 1398-1399, for it was in this latter year that he went to Zwolle as a scholar, to gain the

1 Spoelhof 189.
3 Ibid., 318-319.
4 Ibid., 322.

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indulgence granted by Pope Boniface IX: *ego Thomas Kempis, scholaris Deventriensis veni Zwollis pro indulgentiis.*

At the same time he visited his brother John who was then prior in the recently founded monastery of the Windesheimer canons at the St. Agnietenberg near Zwolle. This young man of about 18, who had been so kindly treated by Florens Radewijns, who had greatly influenced him in religious matters; this youth who had even lived for a year with 20 other boys in the *fratres'* hostel, did not enter the community of the Brethren, but that of the Canons regular. That Florens exercised a great influence on him is certain. Whether he trained him to hold democratic ideas on church organization or to practise an individual religiosity and incline towards non-conformity and tolerance is difficult to assess from these facts. Certainly Thomas a Kempis was never a member of the Brethren. This is even clearer in his case than with Henry Mande and Gerlach Peters.

We see thus that the historical connection of these three persons with the Brethren is rather different from what Spoelhof assumes. It is difficult to accept these ties as an explanation for the rise of the ideas mentioned above. If these really did exist they must have been formed in the monastery of Windesheim or in the Agnietenberg, a milieu with a clear cut rule and disciplined organization. They are unlikely to have been nurtured among the Brethren, who only had a democratic organization which they maintained and defended.

The contact of Wessel Gansfort with the Brethren in Zwolle was of the same kind as that of Thomas a Kempis in Deventer. He lived in one of the Brethren's hostels and had thus religious contacts with them. These contacts, however, lasted much longer than with Thomas a Kempis - from Gansfort's 13th to his 30th year. They continued until Gansfort was of an age to distinguish conformity, or lack of it, with the church, and the meaning of tolerance. As we shall see later, however, Spoelhof is not completely accurate concerning Gansfort's stay in Zwolle. He taught not in the *domus pauperum* (of the Brethren) but in the city school.

After characterizing the clear tendency to consider the Brethren of the Common Life as the true representatives of the Devotio Moderna, it is well to examine more closely the contents of this interesting book.

1 *Chronica Montis sanctae Agnetis.* Ed. Pohl, VII, 368.

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The author clearly described a factor often considered as one of the qualities of the Devotio Moderna, yet seldom expressly qualified or proved. This is the influence of the Brethren upon the rise and spread of Humanism and the Reformation. Those who support this thesis, being compelled to abandon their propositions one by one so far as concerns the Brethren's teaching, academic training and practice, entrench themselves on this domain, and it is very difficult to dislodge them. The thesis is vague and offers little grounds for certainty. This embarrasses both the supporters and the opponents of the theory. Spoelhof, on the contrary, is not vague. He says exactly what he means and tries to find support for his opinion in the writings of the authors mentioned above.

His view is clearly stated in the introduction. The Brethren of the Common Life did not strive definitely for complete tolerance, nor did they purposely hold themselves aloof from existing faith and rites. They adopted rather an attitude of deliberate and conscious indifference (not scepticism) towards the externals of institutionalized Christianity and by their practical mysticism they placed more emphasis upon personal piety than on the objective expression of religious feeling. The more they cultivated their religious ardour, the less importance they attached to formal ceremonies and the Roman Catholic articles of faith.

Their toleration and non-conformity reveal themselves in their attitude towards the external standards of institutionalized Christianity whereby conformity was prescribed. This does not mean that they fiercely defend the ideas of non-conformity and toleration, since these are in fact never goals in themselves, but always means to the goal. The goal of the Brethren was personal piety and immediate communion with God, which is the same thing.¹ Spoelhof deals only with the Dutch Brethren and covers the period up to the death of Wessel Gansfort (1489). In actual fact this marks the end of the history of the Brethren. They then lose their independent entity. In the last part of the fifteenth and the first quarter of the sixteenth centuries, the Brotherhood was absorbed into the intellectual and religious currents to which Humanism and the Reformation gave rise.²

On the basis of this, Spoelhof's main interest in the Brethren is to describe:
1. The organizational aspect of the movement, characterized, in the

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¹ Spoelhof, Introduction VII and VIII.
² Ibid., X.
case of the Brethren of the Common Life, by anti-institutionalism.

2. The mysticism of the Brethren of the Common Life, with its emphasis on practical ethics, the return to the first primitive Christianity and anti-intellectualism.¹

The first point is fairly quickly dealt with. The organization of the Brethren and Sisters of the Common Life who form the heart of the Devotio Moderna was never so strictly institutionalized as the congregation of Windesheim. The fraternity retained always the independent, democratic spirit intended from the beginning. There were no vows, they were free to come and go as they wished.² Although Spoelhof admits that this anti-institutional character was more passive than active he none the less thinks that from the very beginning this trait constituted a real power in the fraternity. They held that religion was a personal matter between a man’s conscience and God and not a question of an institution to be practised only within the cloister. It might be seen as a return to the communal life of apostolic Christianity.³ The fact that the Brethren adopted a completely monastic pattern of life and even founded and filled several monasteries and set themselves to train and fit young men for the monastic state does not detract from this anti-institutional character. The retention of the democratic character of their congregation was enough to save their independence. Spoelhof concludes from this that the Brethren of the Common Life indicated a reaction against the idea that a religious life could only develop within the walls of a monastery. This reaction, their lay character and their democratic government preserved the fraternity from absorption by the Windesheimers,⁴ whose institution led as we saw to intolerant regulations. It was different with the Brethren. There, individualism formed part of their teachings. theirs was not, however, a purely personal religion; this was discouraged. But they learned that in their form of communal life, each individual was of more account than if he lived and acted alone.

³Ibid., 9 en 10.
⁴Ibid., 18.
⁵Ibid., 22.
favoured personalism and individualism at the expense of institutionalism. In this deviation from the normal path lay the seeds of indifference to institutional Christianity and of non-conformity and freedom. This also springs from their mysticism, which differs from that of the 14th century German mystics and is unique of its sort. It knows no exstasy, with the exception perhaps of Henry Mande, but is entirely practical, ethical and social. It was, moreover, inspired by the example of the apostles (not only as regards community of possessions) and the imitation of Christ, described in the famous book of Thomas a Kempis which comprises the essence of the teaching of the Brethren of the Common Life. It is, in addition, anti-intellectual. This is revealed, not in an aversion to education and knowledge, but in a mistrust of formal scholastics, and emerges in a certain letter of Groote's and in the writings of Florens Radewijns, Gerard Zerbolt and especially in Thomas's *Imitation*.

Before demonstrating all this, Spoelhof deals with the thesis: mysticism produces religious individualism and thus is opposed to ecclesiastical conformism and unity. Or, to put it more positively, mysticism, by its very nature, leads to non-conformity and demands toleration. In all religions objective and subjective aspects must be distinguished. Among the objective must be numbered the externals, the rites, practices, decisive dogma and ecclesiastical organization and authority. The subjective, on the other hand, comprise the free inward life. Objective unity deprives subjectivity of inner freedom. It is thus with medieval Catholicism, in which the objective side is greatly stressed. The mystic strives for union with God and disregards the Church and the hierarchy. They are thus always opposed. Several writers like Jones, Preger, R. Bainton and J. Havelaar are even of the opinion that mysticism always leads to freedom and toleration. Spoelhof contests this, however. St. Augustine and St. Bernard were both great mystics, yet recommended persecution. One must agree with Harnack in dividing the mystics according to their degree, way and energy. It is precisely in these three points that the mysticism of the Brethren differs from that of the German mystics. They are not so absorbed in God that their individuality is neutralized or deified. According to Gilson they desire a practical Christian life and nothing more. For the rest, in the text quoted, Gilson says that this attitude is not mystic.

1 Spoelhof, 24-25.
Under the influence of the *Via Moderna*, the mysticism of the Devotionalists stresses the will more than the intellect. According to de Beer, Groote was anti-intellectual. Mysticism among the Brethren and according to the Imitation of Christ, which proceeds from the heart of the fraternity, had the qualities indicated in the beginning. These repose notably in the question of religious non-conformity. Dogma was not considered important, except for its consequences in the domain of morals. In this connection Spoelhof refers to a few texts from the first chapter of the first book of the Imitation. The Imitation is completely devoid of specific references to theological dogmas. The essential thing is the personal, virtuous life. Groote's sermon *sermo contra focaristas* has the same quality.¹ This anti-dogmatic attitude was passive. They took it for granted and did not devote much thought to it. The Brethren thus tended towards a spirit of indifference. Such personal piety could not be contested by the Church or state.² This Christian primitivism is revealed by the propaganda for the Imitation of Christ. The *fides simplex* of the Deventer circle was an indirect criticism, a drawing away from the ecclesiastical and the dogmatic, a putting into practice of medieval catholicism.³ This attitude also gave rise to a Biblicism which differs from that of the Humanists.⁴

‘The Brethren of the Common Life were not deliberate champions of religious toleration and religious non-conformity. They were not iconoclasts... However, in spite of a conscientious effort at ecclesiastical conformity there emanated from the Brotherhouses an equally strong inclination toward toleration of personal forms of religious life and faith’.⁵ Despite their pietistic forms of life, their tendencies towards mysticism and their orthodoxy with regard to the dogmatic churches, they were considered in their time as liberals.⁶

Spoelhof must naturally still give his argumentation for these theses: that their practical mysticism led the Brothers of the Common Life to contrast their personal religious life with that of the church and inner piety with its outward manifestations and, secondly, that their contempt for the dogma led to tolerance. These theses are, however, deceptive and it is understandable that they should attract sup-

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¹ Spoelhof, 94.
² Ibid., 48.
³ Ibid., 49.
⁴ Here a text of Mestwerdt is incorrectly quoted.
⁵ Ibid., 50.
⁶ This on the authority of Moll, 51.
porters. They do, indeed, offer the possibility of maintaining the theory of the Brethren's influence which many have rated highly for over a century. Here too we shall have to examine the argumentation more closely. First, however, a few general considerations. Spoelhof is here employing the ambiguous meaning of mystic or mysticism. The fact that some of the German mystics, and Eckhart especially, during the conflict of Ludwig of Bavaria with the Avignon Popes and during the interdict imposed at that time, may have sought union with God along mystical channels alone, (perhaps even to the extent of displaying indifference towards the Church), has nothing to do with the Brethren of the Common Life. They were devout men who tried, by meditation and 'rumination' to keep always before their minds the life and Passion of Christ and who directed their lives to this end. Their piety and the practice of virtues like humility, obedience, chastity and diligence demanded no aversion to the external cult and other usages or ceremonies. The external serves rather to define the inward life. The liturgy is in the first place a worship of God, but is intended also to associate the faithful inwardly with the prayers and acts and thus arouse inner piety. The contrast assumed by Spoelhof and others would imply that no inner piety existed in Christianity before the coming of the Devotio Moderna. It would even mean that one could scarcely speak of religiosity at all in the Eastern Churches, notably in the monasteries. Spoelhof's opinion assumes too that all who did not belong to the Brethren of the Common Life and who recognized the value of the external ceremony with which all churches and monasteries were filled, possessed no inner piety at all. It cannot be denied that the inner significance escaped very many and that too much emphasis was placed on outward devotion and on pilgrimage. Still less can one deny that the performance of the outward ceremonies left much to be desired. This is common to every period. One can safely assume that not all the Brethren imitated the ideals of inward piety, nor were they perpetually conscious of these ideals. Complaints of negligence at the outward ceremonies and of absentmindedness or wool-gathering at meditation are indeed means to improvement, like the repeated collation, the examination of conscience and fraternal admonition. A remarkable fact is that neither Spoelhof nor Hyma mentions that the Brethren of the Common Life began the day with the communal praying (or singing) of Matins; that they heard Mass daily and also prayed the other Hours every day, not to mention that for the canons of Windesheim, to whom H. Mande, G. Peters and

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Thomas a Kempis belonged, the choir prayer formed one of their principal duties. One sees how important it was for Spoelhof to associate these three as much as possible with the Brethren. And even if what he thinks of them is true, the fact remains that all three wrote their works as canons. It is thus a difficult undertaking to deduce from these particular works the assumed essential contrast between external and internal, between subjective and objective, between Brethren and Windesheimers. Besides, the non-mention of dogma is not necessarily a sign of contempt or indifference. The aim of the Imitation was the fostering of virtue, the intensification of spirituality, and not catechization. It assumes that the reader or hearer was already acquainted with the dogma as the basis of Christianity.

I shall be content, for the present, with these general considerations and refrain from taking issue on all points, for example that the organization of the Brethren and Sisters of the Common Life implies a reaction against the idea that a ‘religious life’ can only be lived within the limits of a monastic order. ‘Religious Life’ in this context is an ambiguous expression. *Religio* in the Middle Ages can be synonymous with the monastic life which can, naturally, only be experienced in a monastic order. But it can also have the general meaning of a life lived in the service of God. This could formerly also be led outside the monasteries. We have, for example, the third order of Franciscans and Dominicans, and the hermits and saints who never lived in a monastery like kings Stephen and Louis. Moreover, one must be careful with the statutes of the Master Geertshuis of which we possess two versions. They were drawn up not by Geert Groote, but by the city magistrates. That the Sisters were free to leave the house as they wished and that the mistress was elected yearly, refers to a time when the house was still an ‘almshouse’ and not a convent. As a proof of the democratic organization of the Sisters and Brethren it is valueless. The same can be said of the lay character of the Brethren.

After dealing with what might be called the general aspects of the question, Spoelhof turns to the particular, i.e. the attitude of the seven persons from the world of the Devoitio Moderna. He deals first with the founder, Geert Groote. How can he consider him as a man whose personal piety and individualism led to tolerance, when he is known to all modern authors, from Clarisse in the last century to the writers

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1 Spoelhof 17.
2 Spoelhof 14, R. Post, *De statuten van het Mr. Geertshuis te Deventer, Archief voor de geschiedenis van het aartsbisdom Utrecht* 71 (1952) 1-46.
of our day as the hammer of the heretics Malleus haereticorum? This chapter is accordingly entitled ‘Active Intolerance’ in the life of Geert Groote. Its nature and its object.’ For Spoelhof the name malleus haereticorum is a modern invention. According to him the earliest biographers of Geert Groote do not use this term. Spoelhof does not mean to deny that Groote opposed three named heretics, Mathias, Gerbrandus and Bartholomeus in particular and the brothers of the Free Spirit in general. That would be impossible. He does however think that one should bear in mind exactly why Geert Groote fought against this heresy. On the one hand it menaced his free foundation, the Sisters of the Common Life, since according to the statutes of 1379, they were threatened with being equated with the Beguines. But principally, Groote is a zealot for the preservation of moral life. The brothers of the Free Spirit were a threat to society in their propaganda for a life without penitence and without commandments. They are thus on a par with the focarists among the clergy of Utrecht; they lower the moral standard. This is why all Groote's biographers class the two struggles, against the focarists and the heretics, together. Groote is not a stern defender of Church dogma, but a champion of virtue. In this connection I must point out, firstly that the earliest biography, the rhymed text, does indeed call Groote malleus haereticorum, as did Salvarvilla in a letter dated 21st October 1383, haereticorum persecutor; next that the biographers do speak of Groote's struggle against the above-mentioned haeretici and finally that the section of the statutes of the master Geertshuis in which the Beguines occur, was not written by Groote himself. It was only formulated ten years after his death. Also, in addition to the dogmas which define what Catholics are to believe, there are also those which state how they must act. The heretics whom Groote opposed rejected some of the last and some of the first group. They were heretics, and Groote fought them by means customary at the time: spying on their conversations, bringing information against them, appeal to the inquisitions, offering himself as inquisitor, expressing dissatisfaction with moderate punishment. Finally, one could maintain that in the struggle against the focarists, Groote says little about the moral results of infringing the rule of celibacy. In other words, he deals not so much with the moral as with
the juridical aspect i.e. what are the legal consequences of their transgression of the law\(^1\) (see chapter I, no. O p. 129).

For all his love of the good Geert Groote is a juridical thinking man who does not stress tolerance either in theory or practice. He gives the impression rather of an uncompromising lawyer, who swears by the old rules and by stern commentators. In the next chapter (III) Spoelhof continues with Groote, his ideas of religious conformity and nonconformity. The author refutes (or attempts to refute) some opinions held by other writers, and then repeats his theory that Groote's struggle against error can only be explained by his practical ethics. He devotes two pages to showing that Groote conformed. He was always prepared to support the Roman Catholic traditions, preached a correct Roman Catholic doctrine and observed the rites, practices and institutions of the Church.\(^2\) He was a model of discipline and obedience and recognized the authority of the Church over all those under her jurisdiction.\(^3\) The strange thing is that Spoelhof suddenly confines this attitude of Groote's to externals\(^4\) and that he none the less observes in Groote's work a tendency towards replacing the institutional church by a personal approach to God. "To Groote the spirit of God was not in the hierarchy of the Church, but it was within the heart of the individual; hence the essence of religion demanded the cultivation of the inner life."\(^5\) In every mention of an inner life in Groote's letters and treatises, Spoelhof sees confirmation of his opinion that Groote finally rejected externals. He has found various texts which seem at first sight to justify his opinion, and contain a sort of contrast between inner and outer life. Some, however, admit of a completely different interpretation and have in their context a meaning different from that deduced by Spoelhof. Since this is an important question, I must quote these texts again here. "I believe," said Groote, "that prayer is of more use for him than regulations. Just as preaching and admonition are better than absolution or false penance. Only God can convert sinners."\(^6\) This text is taken from a letter to John van de Gronde, Groote's friend and pastor in Amsterdam. Groote considers the *regimen animarum* as

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1 J. Clarisse, Geert Groottes Sermo de focaris et fornicatoribus presbyteris facta in domo capitularis Trajectensi, *Archief van kerkelijke geschiedenis*, II (1830) 395.
2 Spoelhof 121-122.

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the highest art. It demands a knowledge of canon law and of theology and above all requires experience. A parish priest could derive much benefit from the ‘Pastorale’ of Pope Gregory I. But even a wise and good pastor cannot help those who are without hope or remorse. Then follow the words quoted. They are thus intended only for this particular case; the guidance of hopeless or unwilling parishioners. For them one can only pray. Such people are not helped by a sermon, admonition or absolution. God alone can help and bring about a change of heart.¹

A second text concerns the stressing of the inner communion which is at the basis of union with God in love for Christ.² These words are taken from the letter on schism, in which Spoelhof has found more proofs for his thesis, but in my opinion they refer more to excommunication than to a spiritual (inner) communion. The Church has cast them off because they proclaimed a doctrine which she did not approve (on the Holy Trinity for example) or because they persist in preaching error. They are thus excluded from Catholic society and from receiving the sacraments.³

Then follows the opinion of de Beer, which is not rendered completely accurately and need not be discussed here. Much more important is that Geert Groote, in his Zedelyke Toespraak, a small work but the only one written, or at least preserved, in the vernacular, says that the kingdom of God can not be attained by the strict observance of outward forms, since true religion presumes a personal relationship with God. ‘All external works, whether it be fasting, scourging, singing psalms, reading the pater noster ... do not in themselves make for righteousness.’⁴ ‘Such a dominant stress upon the inner life as the source of true religion goes far in denying the supremacy of the Church in its claim to mediation between God and man.’⁵ The text is well rendered, although Spoelhof has replaced by dots the phrase ‘all works that are good’ since it weakens his argument. In Geert Groote's address, these good works do not lose their value because they lack inward thoughts, but because they do not produce the righteousness (the giving to each his own), peace and joy which St. Paul poses as conditions for the Kingdom of God. Groote elaborates his point of view, referring to St. Thomas Aquinas. The supremacy of the Church and her claim to mediate between God and man is scarcely in question.

² Spoelhof 125.
³ Ger. M. Ep. 79-80.
⁴ Spoelhof 126.
⁵ Ibid., 126-126.

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It is, moreover, doubtful whether the concept of Church mediation went so far in Groote's time as Spoelhof appears to think.

Another equally padded quotation is taken from Groote's book *de Simonia ad Beguttas.* On the authority of Honorius of Auxerre (Augustodunensis), he wishes to make clear what exactly simony is. The spiritual thing (which it is desired to buy) is everything in which the Holy Ghost dwells; virtues, sacraments, miracles or prophecies. But a distinction must be made. The greatest spiritual good is virtue, and notably charity. This is greater than the other two, since virtue renders man more spiritual and binds him more closely to God than the signs of the sacrament, or miracles or prophecies. For both good and evil people can receive and confer the sacraments, and sometimes have the gift of prophecy and of working miracles. He refers here to St. Matthew and St. Augustine. From what St. Augustine says it can be deduced that the virtues are spiritual things. The greater and more inward divine virtue is, the more holy are faith, hope and charity. The sacraments, miracles and prophecies were ordained by God to foster virtue and to nourish the soul in charity and to unite it with God through virtue, the spiritual life and good works. It appears to me that this opinion, derived from Honorius of Auxerre, is a fairly general one. The sacraments give grace, which in various circumstances aids the practice of virtue.

Spoelhof also finds material for his thesis in the *Sermo contra focaristas.* This is important because it deals not with dogmas, with which Groote was not particularly concerned, but with Christian ethics. On this point he refuses to accept the leadership of the church, according to this Sermon. Groote complained that many people have more regard for the laws and judgments of the church than for the mandates and precepts of God and the laws of nature. According to Groote the darkness of their hearts blinds them to these divine laws and precepts because, like the scribes and prophets, they place human traditions above the law. This appears from the fact that the laws and instructions of the church are better observed than the precepts of nature and divine commands.

It seems that on this point Geert Groote is at variance with some (quidam; not many people) who tend to follow the positive law rather than the natural and the divine law. Not, though, because it is better, but because it is easier to know. Groote even goes so far as to liken

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1 W. de Vreese, 's-Gravenhage 1940. 21-22.
these persons to the Scribes and Pharisees. If it were indeed his intention to denigrate the positive law of the church and the canon law then it is strange that he does so in this Sermo, in which he has documented fully 90 pages with decrees from this law and the commentators glosses! Such an assumption must be wrong, the more so since Groote's letters and treatises are full of purely juridical arguments taken from positive ecclesiastical law.

The really difficult passage, however, is found in a context in which Groote attempts to explain why suspension for transgressing church laws is reasonable, whereas suspension for transgressing divine laws takes place not in this world, but only in the hereafter. He finds it just that human offences should be chastized by human punishments. Groote here is thus defending church law. But some, in his opinion, go too far. Groote concludes: a precisely because the matter is clearer - as regards knowledge - and because there is more chance of amendment, the church is led to indicate more the human than the divine supervision.¹ Spoelhof refers to these two pages in arguing that, according to Groote, the church's regulations were only 'man-made'. He is indeed referring to a suspension incurred for the breaking of a church law and one incurred for moral sin. The effects of the latter are to Groote's mind more important; mortal sinners will be punished later, the others here. Finally, a church law is a human law. It strikes me as not particularly remarkable that this should be recognized in the Middle Ages.

Spoelhof then refers to Groote's letter to Werner, a school rector of Kampen, who was persecuted for his support of Groote. Werner and his friends must bow to the magistrate, only insofar as such a decree is reconcilable with their belief.² This letter clearly shows Groote's concern for the preservation of dogma. For its sake one must be prepared to suffer persecution, as the saints have always done.³ Groote also thinks, according to Spoelhof, that the sacrament of Holy Supper would become inefficacious if administered by a priest known to be living in mortal sin; and that an order from the pope to receive the sacrament from such a priest is a human order.⁴ In my opinion the page in question refers only to a priest who is living in sin and who thus may not perform any sacred acts until he has repented, and neither

¹ Sermo, Archief van Kerkelijke Geschiedenis VIII (1837) 64-65.
² Spoelhof 128-129.
⁴ Spoelhof 129: Sermo, Archief enz. VIII (1837) 61.

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the pope nor any other church dignitary has the right to exhort the person to such an act ‘under human obedience.’ The pope cannot either give permission for a deed which gives rise to scandal.  

Spoelhof makes little use of Groote's letter on the Schism. He does mention that Christ is the head of the Church and the basis of its unity, and that the pope is only head of the Visible Church. Furthermore: ‘he considered a pope deposed and his decrees of no effect, as soon as he committed a mortal sin, even though that pope had been canonically elected. And furthermore, any pope committing such a sin was thereby outside the church.’ The last sentence may indeed be found at the place given, but not the first. Groote does tend to spiritualize the church immoderately and for him the rock upon which the church is built is Christ, not the pope. In this he follows St. Augustine to a certain extent. (see chapter I, no. Q, p. 149)

From all these considerations Spoelhof concludes that Groote had a personal religion. This conclusion seems to me erroneous, even if all Spoelhof's premisses are correct. Finally Spoelhof finds in this personal religion a radical element, notably because Groote addressed himself to the laity and made them conscious of their responsibility in religious matters. He preached them no new doctrine, but exhorted them to virtue. While the clergy were hostile to him, out of jealousy and an uneasy conscience, the people supported him. His attitude had a lay character and even acquired an anti-clerical spirit. This emerges too from the free organizations of the Sisters, confession for the laity, and the priesthood of all the faithful.

These conclusions are palpably exaggerated. Groote received support from various priests, whereas many lay people (particularly in Kampen) opposed him. The statutes for the Sisters are not his, and the magistrates drew up the first rules. Confession of sins without absolution was not confession in the proper sense. This only involved confessing open transgression of the rule and not absolution. The translation of the Bible was confined to the Penitential

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1 Sermo 61.
2 Spoelhof 130. Sermo, Archief VIII (1837) 13.
3 Ger. M. Ep. no. 21, 78-93.
4 Spoelhof 129.
5 Ibid., 130.
6 G. van Asseldonk, De Nederlanders en het westerse schisma (tot 1398), Diss. Nijmegen 1955, 185-186. Spoelhof, 131, also rejects Prof. Mulder's theory that Groote did not abide by the prohibition from preaching.
7 Spoelhof 135.

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Psalms, to prayers in fact. Spoelhof’s conclusions are unacceptable.

‘It would be an untenable claim to assert that this tendency in Groote’s teaching marked him as a precursor of Dutch religious non-conformity and religious toleration in a direct line. Yet it would be a difficult, if not an impossible procedure, to explain fully the attitude of the Dutch towards religious toleration without taking into account the basis laid by the father of the Devotio Moderna. Geert Groote performed a most significant mission for the religious life of the Low Countries, when he released religion from the bonds of sterile orthodoxy in the bosom of the church and placed it in the heart of the individual where it manifested itself in virtue and love.’

In the fourth chapter Spoelhof discusses: Concepts of non-conformity and toleration in the thought and expression of Florentius Radewijns and Gerard Zerbolt. Geert Groote thus did not transmit to the Brethren his character of malleus haereticorum, but continued to lay the basis of religious toleration.

When Geert Groote gave Florens Radewijn his permission for the democratic form of the new organization, the Dominicans were openly hostile. They considered this an attempt to undermine the authority of the Roman Catholic episcopate. To Florens Radewijns goes the honour of having established the democratic, the free religious association, devoted to the social and ethic programme of the ‘Imitation of Christ.’ Spoelhof accepts Ullmann’s opinion that this organization offered sufficient scope for the development of individual liberty. Radewijns, it is true, proclaimed no theory of an absolute or even comparative religious toleration. Spoelhof found little evidence of this in his writings and mentions nothing. Radewijns did, however, follow a social and ethic programme devoid of any intolerance. Spoelhof recognizes the passive nature of this tolerance. Absence of intolerance does not necessarily imply a striving after tolerance. In Radewijn’s treatise one finds the same attitude towards Roman Catholic dogma as is found in the writings of Geert Groote: on the other hand he mistrusted ‘mere knowledge’ and disliked scholastic

1 Spoelhof 137. He follows these words with the text of Bonet-Maury in which emphasis is also laid on the laity.
2 Ibid., 138.
3 Ibid., 139.
4 Ibid., 144.
5 Ibid., 144.
6 Ibid., 146.

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formalism. He was a man of exemplary life, who was good to men and to the sick.

Spoelhof's picture of Gerard Zerbolt's education and academic achievements is exaggerated, especially with regard to foreign schools. He did however work to gain approval for the Brotherhood in Utrecht and Dikninge, and the opponents of the Brotherhood evidently saw in his activities an undermining of the ties of conformity with the Roman Catholic hierarchy.²

Zerbolt defended the Brethren's way of life in his *Super modo vivendi devotorum hominum simul commorantium*. The objections to the Brethren are indicated better here.³ In the book *De libris teutonicalibus*, Zerbolt defends the reading of books, including the Scriptures, in the vernacular. He supports his arguments by quotations from many writers, including St. Thomas Aquinas. Spoelhof, however, incorrectly asserts here that the vernacular was employed "for religious worship" (if by this he means the liturgy): "One senses the free and independent attitude of the Brethren of the Common Life."⁵ Being a good Roman Catholic Zerbolt admits the church's right to forbid books containing errors of dogma. Spoelhof does not consider this a sign of intolerance.⁶ "He was not attempting to lay down a law of rigid conformity in Roman Catholic dogma, but he merely wished to indicate that the Brethren of the common life were in no way isolating the law of the church."⁷ None the less Zerbolt was a mystic.⁸ There is also the same insistence in the personal, virtuous religious life and disavowal of merely formal institutional religiosity as essential for union with God.⁹ This, however, does not prove anything. Does this follow from the two great works? In the *De reformatione interiori, seu virium animae*, Spoelhof finds "this personal approach to religion."¹⁰ Purity of life is the principal goal of the religious life. The greatest work *De Spiritualibus ascensionibus* also stresses love as the touchstone of Christianity.¹¹ He testified that: "the norm of a truly Christian life was not to be found in ecclesiastical positions and external observance, but love,"¹² practical mysticism which has been shown to be dangerous to the principle of institutional conformity etc. Zerbolt's book is thus "a

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1 Spoelhof 146.
2 Ibid., 151, 153.
3 Ibid., 154.
5 Ibid., 158.
6 Ibid., 160.
7 Ibid., 160.
8 Ibid., 162.
9 Ibid., 163.
10 Ibid., 164.
11 Ibid., 164.
12 Ibid., 165.
basis for religious toleration.’ It is always the same, but these are not proofs. There is an inner life, nourished by meditation, but there also exists an outward ceremony (worship); there is no contrast between the two and no sign of toleration.

In chapter IV Spoelhof discusses the three Windesheimers: *Three new devotionalists, Henry Mande, Gerlach Peters and Thomas a Kempis, followers of Florentius Radewijns.*

We have already indicated in how far this was true. Mande differed from the Brethren in being ‘an apocalyptic visionary who could not distinguish clearly between his own objective and subjective religious experience.’ And yet his work reveals the teaching of Groote and Radewijns. Take away the monastic traits and his work is nothing more than the elaboration of the idea and the expression of the Brotherhood. ‘There is the same professed attachment to Roman Catholicism’ as with the leaders of the Brethren. But: ‘In spite of this professed attachment to the church, Mande’s pronouncements in other places carry him, unconsciously, dangerously close to a disavowal of the great teachings of the church.’ Mande was a mystic, but in love, in devotion, in deeds of practical piety and imitation of Christ, he was one with the Brethren. Religion for him was a personal, not an institutional creation, although he would never be willing to admit it. It emerges in his ecstasy, in the striving for love. For him outward works are valueless and too highly esteemed by some. He adopted the same subjective standpoint towards knowledge. When a person has learned to know something in his inner self, his arguments can never be refuted. The testimony of the individual conscience is of the greatest importance in estimating the value of the entire body of revealed truth.

Certain remarks of his are striking and seem to justify some people (including G. Visser) in detecting in Mande certain traits which were also common to the sixteenth century Reformers. Others of his

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1 Spoelhof, 166.
2 Ibid., 173.
3 Ibid., 173.
4 Ibid., 174.
5 Ibid., 194.
6 Ibid., 176-177.
7 Ibid., 179.
8 I.e. the significance of good works, indulgences, G. Visser, *Hendrik Mande,* ’s-Gravenhage 1899, 83, 84 ... but not precursors of the Reformation; rather faithful to the Church, 85.

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pronouncements have led Spoelhof to classify Mande as a non-conformist and belonging to ‘the camp of the outspoken tolerationists,’ in imitation of the Brethren.¹ Both postulate that Mande remained faithful to the dogma of the church. They refer to various remarks of his, but do not take them as a sign that the Catholicism of the time had not forgotten the internal life, the correct intention, the imitation of Christ as much as is commonly supposed. Instead of that Mande and others are isolated from many predecessors and contemporaries who were also well aware that outward works like penance and fasting had little meaning without the right intention, who continually recommended the imitation of Christ and recognized the comparative nature of externals. These men, however, were never stamped as non-conformists or modern tolerant figures - men like St. Bonaventure, St. Bernard, members of the school of St. Victor, all mystics, but also theologians and preachers. Even the criticism of the clergy was, one might say, much more frequent despite the many tokens of respect, and the constant increase in the number of priests. In this connection one might think for example of Maarlant or of the author of Reynard the Fox. The utterances of Mande seem to me comparatively moderate, and it is not good to prise these remarks from the opus as a whole, to interpret them moreover, stringently, and thus to make of him a non-conformist. I do not think that one is justified in saying: ‘Mande's approach to religion undermined the prevalent popular conception of the efficacy of good works, while his almost anti-clerical attitude diminished the respect for those who sought to enforce conformity to Roman Catholicism. His exaltation of direct religious experience as well as his depreciation of pedantry among the teachers of his day were aimed to destroy mere formalism and sterile orthodoxy whose principal prop was enforced conformity.’²

Besides recalling that we cannot expect him to have written down all his knowledge or desires, I ask myself if every form of worship, every ecclesiastical decree may be classed as ‘mere formalism’ or every orthodoxy termed sterile. If this is so, our task becomes difficult indeed. Apart from this Spoelhof mentions the following three points: the rejection of the popular concept of the efficacy of good works; his almost anti-clerical attitude; his disapproval of the ‘pedantry’ among the professors. Spoelhof naturally refers to definite texts; ‘Our Lord does not say that one should go on a pilgrimage to this place or that,

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¹ W. Spoelhof, 182-183.
² Ibid., 175-176.

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or that one should sail over the sea, but he says that we should turn within to our own hearts and there we shall find this.\footnote{Spoelhof, 176.}

The words quoted by Spoelhof may indeed be found at the place indicated and he has translated them correctly. They do contain some depreciation of the custom of making pilgrimage, but Spoelhof forgets to mention the context. In the passage mentioned, Mande is discussing the meaning of sin. The words which precede are absolutely necessary for the correct understanding of this passage: ‘Furthermore our beloved Lord teaches us how we shall be converted and where when He says: you who have sinned, return to your hearts, there you shall find Me.’\footnote{H. Mande, Een Boecskyn van drien staten eens bekierden mensch, ed. W. Moll, Brugman, 264-265. ‘Voerthoewijonsbekerensullenendewair,datleertonsonseghemindeHeeren seyt:ghijdieovergetredensijtovermidssunde,keertwedertotterherten,dairseldymij vynden.’}

Then follow the words quoted above, and: ‘With remorse in our hearts we shall confess the evil paths.’\footnote{‘Wij sellen merken mit rouwe om herten die quade weghen enz.’} Mande thus, does not reject pilgrimages in general, but says that they have no value for the conversion of sinners. One can make pilgrimages after conversion or one might even become converted during the pilgrimage or after. But it is the conversion, the radical change of mind and heart, which is the condition, not the pilgrimage. I assume that every thinking contemporary agreed with Mande, even should he wish to retain the pilgrimage as an act of devotion. It does not follow from the words quoted that Mande rejected the idea of pilgrimages completely. As a monastic, he did not see much good in them, nor for that matter did his order Brother Thomas a Kempis.\footnote{See below.}

Spoelhof goes on to quote other texts which are intended to prove that Mande did not attach much value to good works: ‘some consider it of much worth that they fast much, keep vigils, sing and study much and do other outward works, and such people think that it (religion) consists in just that.’\footnote{H. Mande, Een Boecskyn van drien Staten eens bekierden mensch, ed. W. Moll, 287, Spoelhof 176.}

These words may also be found in the place indicated, but in a passage in which Mande addresses himself to persons in monasteries or congregations (houses of the Brethren) who mock his exhortations to the contemplative life. It is thus his opponents he is combatting. This is not a description but a reproach. He has difficulty in keeping himself in check: ‘these devils fast and keep

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vigil, yet they shall never enter the Kingdom of Heaven.’ In the other words quoted: ‘They sparkle and gleam outwardly because they have the appearance of being devout, but inwardly they lack the true virtues and do not possess the true freedom but only the appearance of such.’ Here too Mande is aiming at certain people who have no true knowledge of the things of the spirit, who do not know the immensity of the true sweetness. They have a false taste of the sweetness and they arrive at the wrong things: they lack the taste.

The text thus, is completely detached from its context. Mande is not talking about good works, but about the works of people in error who thinking they possess the superhuman vision and joy are in actual fact deprived of them.

Finally there follow two texts which are intended to show that Mande considered good works to be useless. The first concerns the status of the contemplating soul. In this stage all work, both inward and outward, ceases. It has no meaning at all. The second text follows on from the passage already mentioned, in which Mande attacks monastics and Brethren who laugh at his theories and practices. ‘They must know that religious feeling and the ardent love and desire for God and a loving attachment to Him are sufficient to gain eternal life, even though he had neither hands nor feet nor tongue with which to perform good works.’ It is the great contrast. Mande senses that he has gone a little too far and continues: you must not, however, think that external good works and the practice of virtue are bad. It depends on the intention with which they are performed. Mande is here referring to the Collationes of John Cassian which were widely known and in which every monk could read the correct evaluation of good works. The last text quoted by Spoelhof concerns a passage dealing with humility in man. We must not rate our works too highly, but

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1 Moll, 288.
2 Ed. G. Visser 12, Spoelhof 177, ‘die geen ware kennis hebben van de geestelijke dingen, die niet de onmetelijkheid van de waarachtige sueticheit kenden. Zij hebben een valse smaak van de zoetheid en zij komen tot verkeerde dingen; zij missen de smaak: aldus danighe menschen blenken en lichten van buten, want si hebben eenrehande ghedaente van devocieën, mer binnen sijn si idel van warachtighen doechden ende ende hebben die warachtighen vrijheit niet, men een schijn daeraf!’
4 Moll, 288, Spoelhof 178.
5 H. Mande, Het Devoot Boexken vander volmaecster hoechte der minnen; ed. Visser 71, ‘wi hebben dicwijl schoen begin ende cleyn vervolch van goede werken.’

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rather have regard to our littleness. Here he is not dealing with the value of good works, but combatting pride and encouraging humility, which in itself can also be a good work.

The question of the evaluation of good works is a topical one in the late Middle Ages, among theologians as well as among the practici. But the Canons were possibly familiar with the well known pronouncement of St. Jerome which they could probably read in their breviaries, in the third nocturn of the *communi abbatum*: Christ answered to Peter: Truly, I say to you, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones etc. Jerome remarks: He does not say - as Peter had done - you who have left everything. The philosopher Crates did so too, and many others have abandoned wealth. He says 'you who have followed me.' Only the Apostles and the faithful did this. The fact that emphasis is laid upon the intention behind good works does not indicate non-conformity. On the contrary, it was the commonly held opinion. This does not mean either of course that there were not some pious people who rejoiced especially in the quantity of fasts, prayers and good works, like the pharisees in the Gospel. Such people existed then and will doubtless continue to exist, but everyone who opposes such an attitude can scarcely be called a non-conformist.

Spoelhof rightly remarks: ‘Nevertheless, works were concomitant to true charity, for where there was charity there were also good works.’ That the value of the works, however, consists ‘only in the good intentions of the individual,’ is surely not found in the passages quoted. In Visser, page 30, mention is made of the first way to the heart of Christ. For this is required attachment to divine things, the right intention towards God ‘that is a basis and a beginning of all virtues.’ On page 7 of Visser's book there is mention of a certain work which is suggested by the devil without the persons realizing it. If he performs this work out of love of God, it must have merit, since it is performed from love. But the work itself is also good, even though it should prevent a better. On page 71 a struggle is mentioned against the desire of the eyes, the greediness of life. If we wish to please Our Lord we must avoid and despise temporal things. This idea is elaborated. Here the deed itself counts, as well as the intention. The latter alone is not sufficient. Again Spoelhof refers to Moll, 288 where Mande defends his ‘god-contemplative life’ against the mockers, and

1 Spoon 177. Here he refers to the works published by Visser 30, 51. Moll 285-288. He refers to page 12, but I have not been able to discover what he means.

2 Ibid. 177.
exaggerates somewhat, only to make up for it again immediately.

In the book: van der volmaecster hoechst des minnen ende hoe men dair toe sal pinen te comen, Mande gives a clear theory of good works. It is strange that Spoelhof does not refer to this place. Since the world will persecute the faithful - the servant is not better than the master - one must always practise virtue, not for the reward, not for position in heaven or on earth, but simply because it is due to the exalted dignity of God, who made and created human nature that we might praise and honour him. ‘And this is the way which the Son of God, our dear Lord Jesus Christ, followed before us and gave us an example, for during his earthly life he always performed the will of his father in all things, in word, in work, in love and sorrow, in high and low.’

What H. Mande says about our knowledge of God and what he has revealed sounds subjective in various passages, but is stated expressly and in detail in the book: ‘of the light of truth.’ Here he contrasts the masters and clerics, in my opinion professors (especially of Paris) and students. These know a great deal about the Holy Scriptures and about the Fathers, but Mande and all who are illuminated by the supernatural light, i.e. those who enjoy the gift of contemplating God, know much more. This knowledge is imparted to them directly by God, without books, without scriptures, without study or effort of any kind. In judging this passage one must bear in mind that Mande is speaking of a knowledge enjoyed by him (or some other persons) in the state of union with God. He recognizes only one truth, part of which is revealed to the professors by their study, but of which the mystics, in their union with God, see, understand, know and taste another aspect. The various ways in which knowledge is revealed are contrasted with each other, not the truth. That which proceeds directly from divine enlightenment is more lofty and more reliable, especially since the professors have recourse to pagan philosophy in order to know the Revelation or to prove particular points thereof. This is certainly an attack on the prevailing theological science, and on scholastics, but is this ‘testimony of the individual's conscience’ of great significance for the value of revealed truth? I think not. Mande defends his contemplative union with God and what he heard on this occasion, against the school which refuses to recognize this way. He is willing to accept belief in the Scriptures, but he himself knows even
more and attaches greater value to it than to what the professors have deduced from them. Whether this brings him closer to the toleration-ists is very doubtful, since he recognizes this toleration only for himself and for similarly privileged persons, animated with the love of God and graced with union with God. He would certainly not extend this toleration to people not so privileged, for example to the sort of person with whom Geert Groote had to deal, and not even to the scholastic scholars. He is especially bitter towards those scholars who are fonder of the teachings of the pagan masters, Hippocrates, Galen, Socrates and Aristotle, than they are of the doctrine of Jesus Christ. They devote more time to the lies of the poets than thought to the truths of the Holy Scriptures. Often, even, they mock at these truths and persecute their own brothers and the good Christians whose only desire is to model their lives on the Gospel and the sacred teachings. He compares the professors with the Scribes and Pharisees, whom the Lord preached against. He admits however, that the upright faithful scholars and pious clerics are different. The pious and loving Christian holds the law in his heart and follows its precepts.¹

This is, in the meantime, a very violent attack on the whole scholastic philosophy, and that by someone who has no respect for learning (knowledge). For he says: ‘Since there is no limit to the number of books and treatises and each writes according to his conviction, let us listen to the wise man, to all the readings necessary for sanctity, that is: fear God with childlike fear and keep His commandments with love.’² This is the rejection of all learning, not of nonconformity or intolerance.

As is already evident from what has gone before, Mande repeatedly spoke contemptuously or critically of higher clerics and scholars. His most violent attack is found in a well-known example: Christ, seated in a corner and crowned with thorns, appears to a Brother in his cell. The two walls press against the crown and make it even more painful. The Brother gives Christ a pillow and then learns what the walls signify: one is the spiritual and the other the temporal state. The prelates of the Church should be the ornament of Christ's head, but they consider my wisdom which I have taught as ‘foolishness.’ They

¹ Spoelhof 179.
² G. Visser 89. ‘Ende want der boeken ende schriften geen getal en is, ende want een ygelic scrijft na sinen gevoelen, so laet ons te samen mit den wissen man ein eynd horen alre lezinge, die ons noet is tot onser salicheit; dat is gode ontsien ende vruchten (vrezen) mit den kijntliken anxe ende van mynnen zijn geboden houden.’

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have more respect for the commandments which they have made and oblige the faithful to keep them to satisfy their own avarice. The pagans of the state plead the example of the clerics and do as they do. Thereupon the vision disappeared. The Brother came to himself and prayed for mercy on all Christians.¹

This is an extremely acute passage which clearly illustrates Mande's concern for the Church. One might perhaps call it anti-clericalism,² but it seems to me more to reflect the mind of a pious man, retired from the world, who views everything somberly. On this point I can agree with Spoelhof, although anti-clericalism is not so frequently expressed in the books as Spoelhof suggests. I do not think, however, that he has proved that ‘By insisting that religion was principally a personal relationship to God, Mande questioned the whole institutional approach.’³ Or that: ‘By exalting the place of religious experience within the heart of the individual, he reduced reliance upon an exclusive body of dogma as a guide to divine truth.’⁴ He certainly does not prove that ‘by stressing the inner intent of the individual and not the outward appearance of an act, he undermined belief in the efficacy of the outward forms of the church,’⁵ although there may be grounds for supposing that ‘By thoroughly castigating the ecclesiastical overlords, he diminished respect for that authority which enforced conformity to Roman Catholicism.’ Finally, I do not agree with⁶: ‘In other words, he created a distance for all those elements within the scope of religion upon which intolerance can be based. It did not require the taking of a big step to bring Mande into the camp of the outspoken tolerationists.’⁷

This last point is illustrated by a new text,⁸ wrenched from its context and, moreover, translated somewhat tendentiously. The passage quoted does not deal with the tolerance of another's opinion in acts of faith, but with the evil deeds and words committed and spoken against God. Mande would have an answer for everything, but he wishes to confine himself to his own task, which is to honour God and accomplish his own salvation. He leaves the deeds of others to their own consciences, or those of the prelate or Our Lord, for God has said: Vengeance is mine etc. Then follows the text quoted by Spoelhof. It is concerned not with persecution but with dealing with

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² Spoelhof 180.
³ Ibid., 181.
⁴ Ibid., 181-182.
⁵ Ibid., 182.
⁶ Ibid., 182.
⁷ Ibid., 182.
⁸ Visser, Bijl. IV. Spoelhof 182.
our neighbour, with the preservation of love. There is thus no question of tolerance. It must be proved, nor simply assumed that Mande absorbed the above mentioned ideas from the Brethren still less that this might not be an isolated case.

Spoelhof also deals with *Gerlach Peters*, without whom his book on religious non-conformity and religious toleration would not be complete. He does not, however, put forward any detail which would indicate that Gerlach in any way furthered non-conformity or toleration, except in exhorting to love. He certainly should have discussed what Gerlach's sister Lubbe Peters says of her brother: that he was particularly obedient and ready for every virtue in Windesheim. John Brinckering says that he felt happy for a week after hearing a mass said by Gerlach.¹ Gerlach had evidently found the secret of uniting the internal and the external. He exhorted his sister, one of the sisters of the Master Geertshuis in Deventer, to mortification and patience advising her not to concern herself overmuch with physical activities, but to offer herself perpetually to God.²

The last of this group of three is *Thomas a Kempis*. Spoelhof assumes that the Imitation of Christ reflects the spirit of the Brethren which the author had absorbed. We have already seen that the character of the spirit which Spoelhof attributes to the Imitation is not confirmed by the facts. He thinks that the Imitation expresses the mystic and theological, the social and ethical programme of the Brethren³ and sets out to discuss the meaning of the Imitation in this light.

He views first the negative aspect. Thomas never undermines the ties of conformity to Roman Catholicism. He ignores them and thus proposes the possibility of a tolerant attitude.⁴ He neglects the doctrine concerning the pope and the entire hierarchy.⁵ In discussing obedience he deals only with monastic obedience.⁶ He gives no apologia for the Roman Catholic Church and does not allude at all to the necessity for accepting the entire complex of dogma.⁷ To say that Thomas was not

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³ Spoelhof 195.
⁴ *Ibid.,* 196.
⁵ *Ibid.,* 196.
⁷ *Ibid.,* 197.
obliged to mention this, does not hold water (says Spoelhof), since Thomas does speak of other accepted principles.\footnote{Spoelhof, 198.} He is silent on the hierarchy, but does mention another authority - his own heart. This practically invalidates the Church's task of mediator. The well-known texts on the futility of learning show that 'he had nothing but contempt for scholastic formalism' (assuming here that scholasticism knows only formalism).\footnote{Ibid., 199.}

One must not conclude from this, however, that Thomas a Kempis condemned all learning: 'that would have run counter to the spirit of the Brethren of Common Life.' (N.B.) For them the religious life was based, not on dogma, but on practice, not on faith but on life,\footnote{Ibid., 200.} whereas in his time the emphasis was laid upon faith and upon the body of dogma, which the Church propounded. Thomas opposes this.\footnote{Ibid., 201.} He transfers the emphasis in religion from outward to inward faith. Faith thus ceases to be ecclesiastic and becomes individual.\footnote{Ibid., 210.} This description by Spoelhof is based in fact upon the authority of Mestwerdt. The spirit of the Imitation is mentioned in the trial of John Pistorius and of each of the other victims.\footnote{Ibid., 202.} Thomas has not the slightest respect for the outward life unless it is joined with the inward.\footnote{Ibid., 203.} Every opus operatum quality must disappear, for the Church exercised control in the name of these acts.\footnote{Ibid., 203.} Thomas rejects nothing of the outward life, but the significance of the external depends on the conditions within the heart.\footnote{Ibid., 204.} Here begins the positive exposition of Thomas' schema:

'If Thomas had completely divorced the subjective from the objective religious experience, he would have made a very poor representation of the Brethren of the Common Life. He realized, as did all the Brethren, that religious experience could not achieve its purpose if it failed to infuse the objective or outward life with some of the devotion inherent in the subjective.'\footnote{Ibid., 205-206.} 'Thomas was a practical mystic.' In four books he recommends self denial, love of one's neighbour, and the acquisition of virtue above knowledge.\footnote{Ibid., 206.} Is all this new? Is this characteristic for the Brethren of the Common Life? Spoelhof admits himself that: 'the contribution of Thomas a Kempis and of the Imitation to religious toleration must be considered as being principally

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There are a few distorted data which might indicate religious toleration and Spoelhof quotes one from a sermon, not from the Imitation. The Imitation exhorts more to virtue. These data show only that Thomas's spirit inclined towards toleration. His disciples must carry on the work. In conclusion Spoelhof says that the Brethren and the Devotio Moderna only give the basis for ‘religious toleration,’ namely practical mysticism. But, he adds, (and this, to my mind, is not proved): ‘Outward forms of religious worship were viewed as being merely relative. The inner religious experience counts more than mere subscription to a body of dogmas.’ They applied their ethical principle to the Church. They sought more a holy than a Catholic Church. The use of the vernacular too, indicates individual religion. All this is in fact a revolt against the methods by which the Church exercised control over her members. This tendency towards religious toleration revealed itself among the Brethren but also to a certain extent in the first monastic phase. It was, however, widely disseminated by the teaching and preaching of the Brethren.

In actual fact, Spoelhof has not proved that these principles obtained among the Brethren: only two of the fratres are discussed. So far as the Windesheimers are concerned, only in the case of Henry Mande are any significant texts quoted. Furthermore, the Brethren did no teaching for a hundred years and can thus scarcely have propagated in the schools the ideas attributed to them. Whether they still retained the same ideas around 1480-1490, or whether perhaps these were propagated more by others than by themselves, remains for the present uncertain.

The last two chapters are devoted to Wessel Gansfort and are intended principally to prove that the spirit of the Brethren described above, survived during the 15th century until the rise of Humanism. Thus, there existed among the Brethren a related condition of mind. Spoelhof discusses first: The fusion of the spirit of the Brethren of the Common Life and Dutch Humanism. Wessel Gansfort (chapter VI) Concepts of religious non-conformity and religious toleration in the teachings of Wessel Gansfort (chapter VII).

The exposition is important both independently and in connection with the problem under discussion here. We shall return to it again.

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1 Spoelhof, 206.
2 Ibid., 207.
3 Ibid., 208.
4 Ibid., 208.
5 Ibid., 209.
6 Ibid., 210.
We must draw attention here, however, to an incomprehensible lacuna in Spoelhof's story of Wessel Gansfort's life. This boy from Groningen went to Zwolle at the age of 13, found lodgings in one of the Brethren's hospices (domus parva) and followed the lessons in the city school, completing both the second and first i.e. the highest classes. When his schooldays were over at about the age of 20, ca. 1439, he was appointed master in the city school, to teach the third class (our fourth?).

He continued to live in the same hostel, on equal terms with the boys, accompanying them to the chapel and to the collation of Rutger the procurator, explaining what was important.\footnote{Schoengen, 156.} This lasted for about 10 years. From 1449 to 1476 he studied, taught or debated at various universities, Cologne, Heidelberg, Louvain, Paris. In 1470 and 1473 he visited Italy, returning then to the Netherlands where he stayed part of the time in Zwolle, certainly visited the Agnietenberg, but lived in Groningen with the sisters. He died in Groningen in 1489. Spoelhof, however, speaks only of the influence of the Brethren of the Common Life and of Humanism, ignoring the entire University period of 25 years (1449-ca. 1475). Only at the end will he have come into some contact with Italian Humanism in Italy, although we possess few details. But at the universities he moved in philosophical and theological circles and joined in the conflict between the realists and moderns, supporters of the old way and the new. He was first and foremost a theologian, and during his 25 best years he garnered the ideas which are to be found in his books and which Spoelhof has systematically set forth. It is thus completely wrong simply to introduce Gansfort's theological concepts as characteristic of the Brethren of the Common Life, and as a continuation of what Spoelhof imagines he has found in the works of Geert Groote, the Brethren and the three Windesheimers. This is especially so since these are points which found scarcely any echo in the works of Geert Groote and which were so far removed from the Brethren of the 15th century that we can safely assume they had never heard of them. The whole question becomes even more distorted if one simply assumes that Gansfort's ideas were adopted by the Brethren of the second half of the century, and attempts to describe, by what Wessel taught, the ideas which they would have had when the first Humanists made themselves heard in the Netherlands.

At this point I shall conclude my discussion of Spoelhof's book and
with it this introduction. The differences of opinion obtaining among the authors discussed, who may be considered representative of the opinions prevailing in this field, show clearly that one must attempt, utilizing all available data, to obtain a more exact insight into the significance of Geert Groote and of his foundations - notably the Brethren. All kinds of ideas and motives are attributed to them, yet we know so little of them. How did they live, how did they think, how did they work? It is time to view these questions lucidly and to cease writing only in superlatives.
Chapter One
Geert Groote as revealed in his Letters and Books

Letters are, in general, important historical sources. They usually reveal the ideas of the writer, the motives for his actions, his daily occupations, the milieus in which he moves and the persons to whom he is writing, more clearly and more reliably to posterity than the biographical stories of contemporaries and of later writers. With the works - in this case a couple of treatises or sermons elaborated into treatises - the personal element is not so clear as in the letters, but for us, seeking to learn as much as possible about Geert Groote's ideas, the treatises which have come down to us are also of great importance.

It is not unusual for a historian to study and discuss separately the letters and treatises of a historical personality. Letters and treatises can acquire an intrinsic value. They are historical documents which not only tell us something of the personality of their author, but also have some value in themselves. One could, for example study Thomas Aquinas' Summa Theologica without applying the data to the person of the author. We could thus do the same with the letters and treatises of Geert Groote. This, however, is not our intention. We wish to learn to know the person himself and his range of ideas. It will perhaps be remarked here that in that case we should also take into consideration the data from the Vitae. This would, indeed, be necessary in order to gain a complete picture of the person in question, in this case Geert Groote.

I think, however, that I have sufficient reasons to justify a departure from this plan: i.e. to deal first with the letters and treatises, and then with the Vitae.¹ I shall set out these reasons at the beginning of the next chapter.

A. Groote's Attitude to Monasteries

We begin with a group of letters in which Groote attempts to find a place in a convent or monastery for one of his acquaintances or

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¹ It is not our intention to write here a life of Geert Groote. The most detailed Life at present is that by Th. van Zijl S.V.D., Gerard Groote, Ascetic and Reformer (1340-1384), Washington 1963.

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protégés. These are Mulder's Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 12, 14, 24, 26 and 34. Mulder dates the first ca. 1374 without any particularly convincing reason, as he himself admits. The letters are concerned with one woman and six men. He is attempting to place the woman, Elsbe de Gherner, in the St. Clara convent in Cologne. This was probably a convent like that of St. Clara of Neurenberg, in which various female members of the Pirckheimers lived. It will have been intended exclusively for noble or high born ladies. Elsbe was a noble lady, ‘ene walgheboren joncfru’ - daughter of Albert of Gherner, one of the most powerful men in Salland, a sort of robber baron who was put to death in 1363 (during the time that bishop John of Arkel was setting things in order). She was thus of a ‘noble family of our territory’. The family made no difficulty and yet it cannot have been easy to get Elsbe into the convent. Usually there existed a numerus clausus for such an institution, and in any case there were applicants enough. Preference was generally given to girls from the city and surrounding district. Also a dowry or dos was usually required on entry, the amount to be fixed by contract. This requirement was an abomination to Geert Groote, since in his opinion it was in direct conflict with positive church law. This is a first sign of Groote's later bitter struggle against simony. The person of Elsbe herself seems to have offered no difficulty; she was not only the ‘joncfru’ but was also prepared to leave the world and her family and to choose God and the spiritual life or, as stated in the Latin letter to the Abbess: *eadem dudum iam Deo dispensata*, and long since betrothed to God. She despised the world and its outward pomp. Her inclination was towards heavenly things. To put it more biblically: ‘She went with Abraham in a spiritual manner from her country and from those near to her out of the house of her fathers, but staying a while between the Euphrates and the Tigris in Mesopotamia,

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3 Ibid., p. 1.
5 Friedberg II 1287.
6 Ibid., p. 1: ‘She was willie ende bekiert van der werlt ende van horen maghen toe Gode ende te geestelicheit.’
7 Ibid., p. 2.
she turned her eyes towards the holy city of Jerusalem and formed the desire to approach the dwelling of the promised land or a place nearby, and exerted herself to this end. I should not care to hazard an explanation as to the exact meaning of this promise to God in virginity and withdrawal from the world. Probably it was only a private promise to enter a convent. She may already have lived in Groote's house in the Begijnenhof which from September 1374 received such single and pious women. She wished now, on Groote's advice, to enter a convent. He sent the young lady off to Cologne, accompanied by Stinne of Bonne, a friend of the abbess of St. Clara of Cologne, perhaps the same as Bertuina, Soror Coloniensis and also by the joncfrouwe of Zutphen, an unknown young lady. Groote gave her various letters of recommendation, two for the abbess of St. Clara, one in Dutch and one in Latin (nos. 1 and 2), and one for two canons of Cologne, Arnoldus de Celario from Lochem, whom Groote probably knew from his student years in Paris, and Hermann of Lippe, canon of St. Severinus, a more intimate friend, to judge by the close of the letter.

The real motive for entering the convent was her vocation, her retiring nature, her distaste for the world and her sacrifice to God. An additional reason, however, was that it would be dangerous for her to remain in the world - evidently on account of her father's misdeeds. She could be obstructed by her friends in many ways ‘for the plant is delicate and she has not yet tasted the joys of the inner life,' or, as the letter to Herman of Lippe expresses it: ‘It is the via securior. Although narrow, it is the shortest and well trodden.'

Groote was thus convinced that convent life, as lived in St. Clara of Cologne, would suit this noble lady. He therefore turned with great insistence to the abbess and also enlisted the aid of two canons of the city. But the goal had to be reached without any obligation to pay a dowry. This is clearly stated in so many words in three of the five letters. There is to be no condition concerning, ‘what she shall bring, but that she will remain free to bring or give or not as she will.'

2 G. Dumbar, Kerkelijk en wereldlijk Deventer I, 548.
4 Cf. Ep. no. 1 and no. 5.
5 Ep. n. 4 and 5.
7 Ibid., p. 7.
8 Ibid., p. 1: ‘wat si breghen sol; mer dat in haren vrien wille bliven to breghen of to ghevene wat of niet.'
To Arnoldus of Celario, he says that all must be done: ‘without simony and without conditions, not even under the pretext of custom.’\(^1\) Whereas this is copiously repeated in the first letter to Herman of Lippe,\(^2\) he refers to it only in veiled terms in his Latin letter to the abbess: ‘I hope that you will deal with the request, not according to the decline of many monastic orders, nor following the decadence of the world and the church, but following the renewal of your spirit, in evangelical wise not seeking what is yours, but what is Christ’s.’\(^3\)

In the meantime Groote remained very business-like in the letters to the two canons. To canon Arnold of Celario or of Lochem he writes that Elsbe wishes to expend her inheritance from her father and everything she has obtained during his lifetime, in making restitution for her father's crimes. She possesses as a tithe 60 measures, half wheat and half barley\(^4\) (perhaps she might voluntarily give some to the convent if it were necessary). He besought Herman of Lippe in any case to find her a place in a convent. She has some sources of income and will probably obtain letters of recommendation from noble persons. If, however, she is not considered fit to take the veil, because she has little education and knows no Latin, let her then plough with such oxen as she has, or for lower services, if she is not suited for higher. Truly the lowest places in the ship of the church are the safest.\(^5\)

Groote's talent for choosing the right word is clearly displayed in the Latin letter:

‘First my humble greeting in Jesus Christ, most esteemed lady, according to the choice of your state and my hope in the Lord. I repeatedly try (whether it is well done or not I do not know, but I hope that it is done piously) to send my letters, I who am unknown, to people unknown to me, to whom I am known neither personally nor by renown, even though they are secular and worldly persons, but never in a secular and worldly manner, nor with worldly or secular intentions. But my confidence becomes much greater and my hope more efficacious, and disappointment more rare, when I, unknown as I am, write to those in whom the spirit which according to God asks for the saint, moves, especially if, according to my powers, I constantly try to write that which can and must strike straight to their hearts (not laved by milk nor shaped by earth and flesh, but open to the brightness

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2 Ibid., p. 7.
3 Ibid., p. 3.
4 Ibid., p. 5.
5 Ibid., p. 8.

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of the eternal sun and renewed after the image of God in the knowledge in Him and reformed according to the inner man) and be heard by them with love.\textsuperscript{1}

The play with the word ‘clarissima’ becomes in the end a veritable game: ‘\textit{Vale claritate, qua sancta clares et omnis clara anima, et omnis sancta vita et doctrina clarius clarescit et clarificatur que est Christus Dominus noster semper clarificans, clarificandus et clariosus, id est gloriosus in secula.}’\textsuperscript{2}

While it is sufficiently clear from this letter that Groote held certain ideas and could express them well, although his style was sometimes rather forced, he also shows here his love and esteem for inner piety. This does not prevent him from recommending monastic practices or from approving of a convent for aristocratic ladies. Renunciation of personal possessions and income and the practice of mortification can in these institutions be preserved. In these letters Groote reveals himself as an erudite scholar, who, to judge from the quotations and allusions, had a wide command of Bible texts. They seem to flow easily from his pen, which indicates a wide range of reading. In the notes to his edition of the letters, Mulder has noted the Biblical sources: Psalms, Canticles, Genesis, Exodus, the Gospels of Luke and John, Paul's Epistles to the Romans, Colossians, Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians and Galatians and the Epistle of James. To judge by the titles of the persons mentioned Groote had connections among the academic world of Cologne. He calls master Arnold his especial and dearly beloved friend who would become more agreeable, as he grew more hostile to the world. Groote impresses upon him that no man can serve two masters, and also quotes the text of James: he who would be a friend of this world becomes an enemy of God. (James 5,4)

‘Oh that you might be freed from earthly honour, which has robbed you of much honour. I shall see - God, when shall I see? - that that noble soul is made self reliant (sui iuris), that it breaks the stinking vault, and flees towards the freedom of those in heaven, to the peace of the celestials and to the peace of Devotionalists, to the joys of the true philosophy, that is God, in whom is the paradise of all joys, all that is desirable and giving of pleasure. Sweet Jesus, speak to his heart, draw him after you, give him the milk of your wounds, make him entirely free for you, that he may already partake of eternal life. May he live not only for himself, but for you, Christ, who will dwell in him, you the ineffable sweetness, the immeasurable virtue, the unending majesty.

\textsuperscript{1} Ger. M. Ep., p. 2.  
\textsuperscript{2} Ibid., p. 3.
To you, from him and through him (i.e. through Christ), entirely and always with the elect, glory and praise and thanksgiving for ever and ever.’ Groote is more personal in the letter to Herman of Lippe.¹ He writes here of his own condition: ‘I am slovenly and useless to myself and others, and compared with you and those like you, who seek God and not their own repose, I become even more indolent.’

Groote reveals himself as man with a social sense who had compassion on the unfortunate and pious daughter of an executed robber; as a devout and erudite preacher, a business-like advocate who, however, has nothing but contempt for himself.

Letter number 12² recommends a certain Gijsbert to a monastery, according to Mulder Monnikhuizen near Arnhem.³ This Gijsbert was evidently already living in the monastery as a postulant, for Groote speaks of ‘your’ Gijsbert. He thinks that the vocation is not a sudden inspiration of the Holy Ghost, but already of some duration, and hopes that it may be steadfast. He has told Gijsbert that the fathers have his spiritual welfare and God's glory at heart and, alluding to the text of the liturgy for the Sunday: Invocavit, on which he is writing the letter, gives his opinion that Gijsbert has behaved well and is entering the monastery with the best of intentions. Gijsbert's decision was an especial joy to him, so that he (Groote) is moved to tears. He hopes therefore that they will welcome him with joy - not that they are accustomed to do otherwise, but he asks not what is customary but a right, a favour, - for custom is no favour. He then proceeds to the business details: ‘I have told Gijsbert that I do not doubt but you will supply him with a sufficiency of material things, as I know you will.’ He goes on to speak of the copying of various books, which will be discussed elsewhere, and then concludes ‘Recommend me to the Lord vicar and all the community and especially to the two novices from Nijmegen and Zutphen, whom it is true I have never seen but who are known to my heart in the Lord. More I do not know.’ This is a precious expression of sympathy. He goes on. ‘Pray father, pray

¹ The inscription reads Hendrik van Lippe, but this should be Herman.
³ There is no title to the letter in the MS. What now stands at the top of the page is an inscription derived by Mulder. It seems to me hardly correct, since it mentions that one of the monastics was to bring books to Zutphen by way of Nijmegen, which is a strange detour from Monnikhuizen. Perhaps he means St. Geertruidenberg or Eemsteyn. This question is of no importance for Groote's character. He does his best to have Gijsbert admitted.

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insistently and often, for I was certainly more impure than I thought and I am still, and will not impute to myself the word, which I said to you secretly in my chamber; God knows with what feeling. I hope also, according to the knowledge of God, although I consider it indecent and unfitting for me to say such things and I have scruples about this. My seal and my signature.

The poor man probably has scruples concerning a confession, but his sympathy with Gijsbert and the two other novices is touching.

The same social sympathy is revealed in letter number 14, which Mulder dates with the preceding one ca 1380.

‘Our (in the Lord) Everard has been received into the monastery of Altenkamp,’ that is as postulant or novice, for a little further on it says that he is striving after the monastic state. The pronoun our is as typical of Groote as what follows. Everard needs money for clothes - most probably an outfit for the monastery - and Groote writes about this to John Cele, the school rector at Zwolle. ‘I really have not got it.’ Moreover Everard is a stranger in Deventer and it is dangerous for him to approach his parents on this subject. ‘Therefore I exhort you to help this poor clerk, who wishes to enter a monastery, and incite others to offer help.’ This alms is important, just because it concerns entry into a monastery. Groote identifies himself to such a degree with Everard's fate that he calls it his own - even Christ's. Another (John of Culemborg) will prevail upon his acquaintances to help the good work. In the same letter he implores Cele, as he had done before, ‘to receive your Matthias, because he is yours, poor and humble, into a hospice. Blessed be God, who gives you the opportunity to care for yours, entirely without votum.’

Letter No. 24, placed by Mulder in 1381, strikes a somewhat different note. Groote gives Herman Horstikena a letter of recommendation for Ruusbroec, requesting that he be admitted into the monastery of Groenendaal. This Herman is not mentioned again. Groote considers him, however, to be a man of good will, who wishes to serve God. He could give him no better or safer advice than to entrust himself completely to people of experience. He considers Ruusbroec and his Canons the most suitable for this purpose. ‘Moreover I heard from our John that you need a brewer. After some instruction as to how you want the beer, he could take over this task. In this way you would

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2 Ibid., 14.
3 Here too something about books which is important in another context.
be able to study whether he is suited to the monastic life, and only decide later if you will keep him or send him away.¹

The rest of the letter is addressed not to the prior Ruusbroec but to the fathers of the monastery at Groenendaal. It is probably another letter which was also given to Herman Horstiken. It is important for various points which must be discussed later. Here we will mention only what Groote says of himself. He speaks of his particular esteem for Ruusbroec and longs to be renewed and inspired again by the Canons of Groenendaal. For the time being, however, there seems little prospect of a journey to Groenendaal. His condition remains the same - ‘always useless, always garrulous and always longing and longing for books, as you know. I am obliged from now on to restrain myself and to put an end to this, for there is no money, and anyway I am tired of dealing with the writers and all connected with them.’² In actual fact Groote never gave up.

That the preacher of penitence was very careful whom he recommended to a monastery, appears from the 26th letter, dated 28 December 1381 and according to Mulder addressed to the reverend fathers of Monnikhuizen.³

‘Master Ricoldus, bearer of this, who for the rest has already visited you, is without doubt a man of keen and superior intelligence. He has an excellent and retentive memory and is most suited for many things, to practise any branch of learning and to understand any doctrine. He is suitably initiated into the various branches of the Artes, which help not a little on the way to God.’ Groote knew Ricoldus, who had attained his master's degree, well. He had had dealings with him shortly before writing this letter, since he was under consideration for the rectorship of the school at Zwolle. On this occasion, however, Groote gave clear preference to William Vroede who, for the rest, also wished to join the Carthusians (he did, in fact, finally do so) and therefore established contact with Groote. Since Groote was so well acquainted with him, he was able to be precise in his recommendation. ‘So far as I can judge Ricoldus devoutly desires a place in your monastery. He has given the matter a great deal of thought and he thinks with me, surely and certainly, that the monastic life is to be desired and striven for above all things in the world. Therefore we ask you, he and I, to

² Ibid., p. 108.
³ Ibid., pp. 117-118. In fact, there is nothing in the letter from Monnikhuizen. The person in question did indeed enter.

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consider his application favourably. I dare to add myself to this request that in my opinion he will be a fruitful olive tree for your monastery and for others, and will in time bear fruit. This, however, will only come about - and I do not seek to conceal this from you, my fathers - if he is inclined to submit all the acuteness and tenacity of his mind (to which he is driven by his informed nature and by custom) to the bridle of obedience, despising himself and his own inclinations, and to compel and bind it according to the discipline of the saints to the service of Christ.'

Master Ricoldus seems to have been somewhat opinionated and stubborn. Groote is well aware that the bad leaven spoils the whole dough. ‘But devout confession earns forgiveness. It opens the wound, seeks an antidote, longs to obey, to be tormented, cauterized and cured. And who more fitting physicians than you, true samaritans, true imitators of Christ. For near you is a monastery stable, nor are the implements of the stable boys lacking. And for what should this fertile root, once manured, be more useful, more fruitful than for your rich and fertile land and well tended cultivation. It is not so, my fathers that if Ricoldus is not at one with you, as he is not with us, he will offend your pious eyes.’

This appears to be a difficult case. Groote recommends Ricoldus yet does not hesitate to suggest that the authorities must be on the look out. What now follows is also interesting: Ricoldus wishes to go first to Rome, and Groote finds it reasonable that he should ask this favour and that he should go to Rome with the right intentions. Groote is convinced that, when Ricoldus returns chaste and purified, ‘he will apply to you without further study of place and monastery.’ Ricoldus is also inclined to do this. There is one striking exhortation: ‘help Ricoldus by buying a few generally useful books.’

There is another long letter, again addressed to his friend Cele, which for various reasons is interesting in this connection. Groote sees a prospective candidate for the monastery.1 ‘There is a certain relative of mine, whose father did not do very well. I should like to place him in the Cistercian monastery at Altenkamp, but he is neither pliable nor devout. I shall send him to Zwolle and place him under your guidance, so that he may be made more tractable and devout. Be good enough to help him as though he were my own brother, not by giving him what is yours, but by providing him with board and

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1 Ger. M. Ep. no. 34, p. 145.

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accommodation, and other things, as you know. I shall send you a sum of money when he arrives. Recommend him to Aleidis and Henry Mande and to John, my cousin so that we may draw him to devotion by our exhortation. I dare not recommend him for the monastery, however, unless he first becomes more devout."

I cannot quite escape the impression that, in this letter, as in the first, Groote tends to regard and use the monastery as a sort of charitable institution. He does, however, make the obedience and devotion of the candidate conditions for recommendation, and leaves the final decision to the head of the monastery. He certainly respects the monasteries and the life of the monks, to whom he recommends his friends. This attitude of the founder of the Brethren of the Common Life towards the monasteries is certainly rather remarkable. Yet he does not automatically regard the monastic life for everyone as superior to the task in the world. This appears from the case of John Cele who did such good work as rector of the school at Zwolle. This devout man had a leaning towards the cloister and wished, around 1380, to enter a Franciscan monastery. Geert Groote, however, exhorted him to have joy in the Lord. Cele must certainly be aware that this idea of joining the Franciscans, who were not yet reformed in this region, i.e. had nowhere adopted the observance, must be considered as an inspiration of the devil. The devil had the power to move the imagination to a votum (vow) and to reject it. Groote could quote various ‘authorities’ in support of this opinion.\footnote{1 Ger. M. Ep. no. 10, p. 37.}

Letter No. 48 has a rather different import.\footnote{2 Ibid., 190-191.} It is a pressing letter from Groote and the parish priest of Zwolle, Reynerus, addressed to John Cele who has suddenly left Zwolle and gone to Monnikhuizen. He must return to deal with various matters, and principally to testify in the legal action against Bartholemew (see pp. 120-122). Once the affair is settled he will be able to return to Monnikhuizen and stay there for the undetermined time which still remains to him. It does not seem to me absolutely certain that Cele wishes to enter Monnikhuizen as a monk. At this time he must still have been a young man, for he spent at least 30 years afterwards as head of the school in Zwolle. Groote's friendly relationship with this rector is symptomatic and will be discussed later.

The letter to the novice Matthias of Tiel\footnote{3 Ger. M. Ep. no. 15; dated by Mulder anno 1380 ex.} reveals Groote's attitude

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towards monasteries or at least towards some orders even more clearly than the letters of recommendation quoted above. Groote expounds to the novice the real meaning of entering a monastery and of the profession after the novitiate. He warns him at the same time to expect certain trials. To enter the cloister with the intention of choosing in this way a permanent state of life, is particularly pleasing to God. No better or safer state could be found. ‘And if later another state of life appears to you even safer - for the world is evil - remember then that the way of simplicity which you choose now is the best and most agreeable to God. Being received into a monastery is like a second baptism, a putting off of the old man, forgetting what is past: your people, the house of your parents, because the king has desired it. Apply yourself to the internal affairs which belong to the order, and only think of the world to pray and do penance for it. For God is your heritage.’

The description of the coming trials is resumed thus: the devil will make use of a physical weakness, a spiritual suffering to suggest to you that it was better before, or that you would do better in a different order; and he will encourage you to leave. But the very fact that such an inspiration would make you hostile towards your own order is a sign that this trial is sent by the enemy.

Groote partly repeats this and partly supplements what he had written to Matthias of Tiel in a letter to a newly entered monk.¹ I shall give only a short extract, but it would profit anyone who wishes to evaluate Groote's attitude to the monasteries to read the whole. He lays great emphasis on obedience, even when moderation in devotion or in eating and fasting are prescribed. The command of the superior must be considered as an order from God: ‘have confidence in him (the superior) and consider yourselves as he esteems you. Refrain from judging him and flee every thought directed against your Superior as you would reject thoughts of impurity. Do not permit anyone to speak evil of him’ - scandalmongering tends to occur in the monastic life. Then follows the warning against future trials as in the previous letter. The monastic must not allow himself to be influenced if he comes across a few less discreet or stupid and uneducated or less zealous monks, or monks who are much tormented by physical or spiritual trials. ‘It is always dangerous to judge others,’ remarks Groote, with a reference to Seneca. ‘He should rather - as Augustine says - admire

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¹ Ger. M. Ep., no. 16, p. 52-53.

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everyone and always assume the best intentions. Remember that you too can fall far in a short time. Finally, if you do persevere in the order, never strive after any dignity or office. 1

Groote expressed himself very forcibly in a letter to a person who had been placed by virtue of *primariae preces* in a monastery, according to the bishop's right. This ‘right of the first prayer’ was the bishops privilege, after his enthronement, of placing people in various monasteries, where the superior of the monastery was obliged to accept them. 2 It usually happened that one of the bishop's friends, servants or patrons asked him to place a son, cousin or frequently a daughter in some monastic institution. This was often done by a noble lord in order to be freed from the responsibility for such a child, while at the same time knowing it well placed. No mention is made of whether such a forced monk or nun agreed with this arrangement. Groote addressed his letter *De pacientia* to a man in this situation. 3 He exhausted himself in arguments to persuade this man, placed in a monastery against his will, to remain patient. The result was an extremely religious letter, but in the end Groote is obliged to confess that he cannot alter the situation which he considers deplorable. He has indeed made an attempt to speak with bishop Florens, but after waiting a day, had to go. He promised, however, to do everything in his power for the victim. But meanwhile he strongly advised him to remain in the monastery. ‘I do not say that you must take the vow, but that you must make a firm purpose to remain.’ 4 This piece is particularly rich in allusions to Biblical texts.

The letter to the mentally ill Carthusian does not deal with the monastic life, although it is mentioned incidentally when Groote says that this ill and scrupulous priest must not have scruples if he makes mistakes in reading the hours. He must not overestimate the requirements for inner participation. Groote gives this man some important pieces of advice, which have at times a rather psychic character. He recommends him to be joyful, ‘not to go to bed with cold feet, not to hold the head too low, to work: not to worry and not to have scruples about the impure images which the devil sends.’ Remarkable are the references to *De re militari* by Vegetius, *Collationes Patrum, De divinis nominibus* by Dionisius, the *Aphorisms* of Hippocrates, the 1st and 2nd *Moralia*.

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1 Ger. M. Ep. no. 16, p. 52-57, dated by Mulder anno 1381 in.
of Gregory I, to Anselm and Climacus, to Thomas Aquinas' (*secundum sententiarum*). There are fewer references to Biblical texts.

Finally, it appears from a letter, found and edited by sister Feugen several years after Mulder's edition of Groote's letters, that Groote had helped yet another person to enter a monastery. This is in addition to the person already mentioned. This man, whose name sister Feugen reads as Petrus Coning, is probably the same as the Peter of letter No. 6. At the time too there was some trouble with this Carthusian in Coblenz. He was under threat of being sent away. Groote put in a good word for him. If this is Peter Coning, the Petrus (Coning) did leave the monastery. He soon regretted it, however, returned to his institution and was readmitted. He seems, alas, not to have been able to persevere and left again. Groote felt this to be a reflexion on his own integrity, since he had recommended him and had declared that he considered him a steadfast man. Groote now wrote the letter in question to persuade the superior of the monastery to try again with Peter, and sent him back to the monastery with this letter.

Groote requests Godfried of Wesel, provost of Eemsteyn, to receive Berthold ten Hove, - who seems to have been some sort of relation - into the monastery. Not yet, it is true, as a postulant or a novice, but as a pupil. This young man, on Groote's advice, strove to flee the world, but his guardian and friends were doing their best to prevent him. The youth was thus exposed to all kinds of dangers and Groote hoped that the monastic atmosphere would not only preserve him from them, but also foster his vocation. Once again Groote shows his businesslike side and says that the young man can meet the costs. He hopes that the fathers will teach him Latin, but above all sanctity. Berthold evidently made good progress in Eemsteyn and some years later Groote writes that he has heard that he has promised himself to God and offered his body to God with a vow. This does not appear to be the same as being received into the monastery. Groote exhorts him to persevere. To preserve his purity he must avoid worldly and vain

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2 *Ons geestelijk Erf XV* (1941) 75.
company, beware of evil conversations and keep his eyes averted to avoid the sight of women and other vanities. When Groote wrote this he was staying in Woudrichem, near Eemsteyn, and would be pleased to see the young man. He was indeed worried that the world should hold attractions for him, since he was by nature ‘sweet (dulcis), unstable and easily swayed.’ ‘Come if you wish,’ Groote writes. ‘We can speak a little of our family and family friends.’ He cannot resist, however, instilling in him some fear of the God of chastisement.

Besides John Cele Groote advised another friend against entering a monastery. This was John Oude Scutte who, during Groote's years as a preacher, had laboured as a priest in Amsterdam and done much apostolic work. He expressed himself very cautiously: ‘I dare not advise you to enter a monastery. Not that I lack confidence in this way of the Lord. But I desire that you should remain in the world, without being of the world. There are religious who are of the world. But the true religious seeks not a particular place for himself, but the whole world and the eternal.’ For Groote, John Oude Scutte was one of these true religious, although he remained outside the monastery.¹

A remarkably large percentage of Groote's letters which have been preserved are concerned with admission to monasteries and with novices and young monks. He is perfectly acquainted with the monastic life and sees it in a work pleasing to God and a way safer than that of the world. Obedience, piety, humility and love are the conditions for success in monastic life. A special vocation is therefore necessary, and it is not easy to persevere. Groote shows his sympathy both with those who seek the monastic life and with those who experience difficulties once inside the monastery. In this his practical good sense and his medical studies stand him in good stead.

He seems to address himself to various orders or monasteries which evidently command his respect: St. Clara of Cologne, Monnikhuizen, Eemsteyn, Groenendaal, both of the Canons Regular, but to none of the mendicant orders. There was one condition, however, on which he insisted. There might be no contract for the giving of a dowry. If a novice wished to give anything on entering, this must be done voluntarily.

He considered such a contract a danger to the monastic ideal of poverty. There was also the danger that a poor and worthy person might be at a disadvantage compared with a rich and perhaps less suit-

¹ Ger. M. Ep. no. 61, p. 229-230.

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able person. The acceptance of rich novices easily led to the development of the prebendary system, by which each of the monastics drew part of the income, administered it and used it on his own behalf. Those who followed this system were called the *patres proprietarii*, the monks with personal possessions. This was one of the abuses which Groote tirelessly opposed in sermons and letters. He clearly sets out his spiritual ideal in a letter to an hermit.¹ Such a person must be truly a hermit, that is, lead an inner spiritual life. Living in a closed hermitage is not sufficient. The hermit must also close his ears, his eyes and his mouth to the outside world. He must read, fast and do other good works without being seen, without the city's knowledge. He must be content with the barest essentials, a sober garment of rough wool and a very plain bed. He may not beg, but must live from the work of his hands, as Bernard had already recommended to the hermits. He may speak to no one before Mass time, before praying the hours and after five and six o'clock in the evening. He must forbid people to bring him news of wars, fights, weddings, trade and especially he must not tolerate slander. He must also guard against private friendships with man or woman. In order to persevere it is necessary to rejoice inwardly in God and in the sweet things of God and with the best and most holy people.

Just as Groote often tried to place a young man or woman in a monastery or convent and exhorted the novice to persevere, warning him against temptations to come, so also he tried to persuade those who, having entered and taken their vows, afterwards wished to be released, to change their minds. One example is his letter to the so-called Carthusian,² who according to this letter, had had four pastoral positions and had probably been a member of the German order as well.³ He thought that he, with his talents, could do much better work in an order with pastoral care than with the Carthusians. He did not therefore wish to be released from every order, but to be transferred to an easier one, with the cooperation of the Holy See.⁴ Groote strongly and very cleverly opposed this idea. He realized that the unnamed monk longed in reality to return to the fleshpots of Egypt. He found that the monk had no need of philosophizing - that a monk's *simplicitas* was his phi-

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2 Ibid., no. 69, p. 269-281.
3 This opinion is based on the fact that the churches mentioned on p. 270 belonged to the German order; whereas Groote says that the Carthusian wishes to change for the third time. See Schoengen, *Monasticum Batavum*, Amsterdam 1941, under Doesburg, Rhenen, Katwijk and Schelluinen.
losophy. The monk wishes to return to the world. But what is the world? Groote gives a splendid description of the world from his point of view. The monastery is indeed a place of penance, mortification, monotonous and very sober as regards eating and drinking. But all this is good for the health. If everyone wished to leave the monastery because of a weak constitution, the entire order would begin to totter. If this anonymous father should leave the monastery it would give rise to all kinds of gossip. What ails this man to be changing his state of life again for the third time? This gives great scandal, for which the priest will be held responsible. Groote ends with a few warm words of encouragement to the fainthearted father and an exhortation to remain with the Carthusians. In dealing with this priest Groote stresses not the inner piety of the monastic life, but the abandoning of the world and the choosing of the place of fasting and poverty. His recommendation, however, is powerful and expressed with conviction. Contempt for and flight from the world are held up as ideals. In this letter too, and even especially, he displays once again his great knowledge of the Bible. He has an easy command of texts from the Old and New Testaments, and also of quotations from Jerome, Peter of Blois, St. Bernard, Hugo of St. Victor, and even of lines from Ovid and of an anonymous medieval poet. All these quotations are most aptly applied.

One may wonder whether Groote, in his letters and treatises, devoted as much attention to the religious training of non-monastics, notably his own direct pupils. These were the Sisters in his own house and the Brothers who gathered in the house of Florens Radewijns. There were, in addition, other groups of clergy or lay people, for example, the rectors of the schools of Deventer, Zwolle and Kampen who were his friends: William Vroede in Deventer, John Cele in Zwolle, Werner Keinkamp of Lochem in Kampen and Master Rycoldus who was at least in the running to succeed Cele in Zwolle. One might also attempt to answer this question with regard to those categories of people, who according to a letter to bishop Florens of Wefelinkhoven, were converted by Groote's preaching. Sufficient data is lacking, however, to provide any satisfactory answer.

2 Ibid., p. 276.
3 Ibid., no. 58, p. 216-217.
B. The struggle against the dos and the proprietarii

In the monasteries of the old order there were, however, two things which aroused Groote's indignation and which he fought against zealously and persistently. Here his combative nature was revealed which was soon to be evident elsewhere. The old orders and in particular, it would seem, the convents, admitted no one without payment of a sum of money on entry, a *dos* or dowry. This, from a certain point of view not unreasonable, practice was officially forbidden by various church regulations and Groote considered it as simony. Still worse, and completely in conflict with the rules of the orders, was the division of a great part of the monastic wealth and revenue into prebends, so that each member enjoyed his own income and also continued to own money he had brought with him or acquired later. This was at variance with the idea of communal property and had various detrimental effects on monastic life. The communal life was disrupted, individual property had to be administered and the produce from tillage and stock to be disposed of, thus breaking the monastic *clausura*. This further led to the use of individual incomes to buy better food and clothes and thus to the creation of rich and poor monks and sisters within the same monastery. It even brought about the ruin of the whole. The monks or sisters who enjoyed private incomes were referred to as *proprietarii* (ae) and it is these who were attacked by Groote, as indeed by all later monastic reformers. Neither he nor his successors however, were able to conquer this abuse completely before the great reformation - especially not in the so called noble abbeys, which sheltered mainly the daughters of the aristocracy. These knights considered a monastery with individual prebends as a means of assuring their daughters a position somewhat in keeping with their station. One radical way of legitimizing such a situation was to change the rule and the order - for example the transition of the Benedictinesses or Cisterciannesses to Canonesses - following the rule of St. Augustine. The former nuns were often given their own house, where the community life consisted principally or entirely of the communal singing or praying the hours in the same church. A section of Groote's letters carries on the struggle against the *dos* and against the *proprietarii*. We saw that this problem was already under discussion in the attempt to place Elsebe of Gherner in the convent of St. Clare in Cologne. In 1382 Groote seized the chance to initiate an improvement when the abbey of Altenkamp, mother house of the Cistercian convent of Ter Hunnepe, near Deventer, received a
new abbot. In a long letter\(^1\) Groote congratulated the new abbot and suggested a programme of reform, namely to eradicate the abuse of the *proprietarii* and to abolish the dowry. We shall return shortly to this first point. What interests us here is what he writes to the abbot concerning the dowry. As an example he names the convent of Ter Hunnepe near Deventer. Here a sister from Deventer has entered who, if admitted as heiress to the family estate in the name of the convent, will bring with her more than the convent has received in the past 30 years from donations and from all other *proprietariae*. However, according to the law of Urban IV\(^2\) she may, on reception into the convent, either before or after profession, receive neither ornaments nor jewels, gold nor meals under the pretext of custom, under pain of excommunication. What then must be said of those convents which accept only the daughters of rich and noble persons, and then only if they contribute a certain sum?. The wise, the devout, the accomplished, all are excluded if they are poor. Poverty is condemned and despised by those for whom the love of poverty is prescribed. Why? Because they wish to be rich and live after their reception, either entirely or in part from their own resources. By accepting a dowry, they are already turning the novices into *proprietariae*.\(^3\) This method has resulted in enormous poverty and want throughout the convent as a whole. This could be easily remedied if the father abbot would take the necessary measures. If he does so, his reward from God will be great, but if he does not, malédiction threatens.\(^4\)

Shortly afterwards Groote returned to the situation in Ter Hunnepe in another letter to the abbot of Altenkamp.\(^5\) Groote exhorted the abbot to help eradicate this loathsome abuse, this diabolical recklessness prevailing among the nuns of Ter Hunnepe. Great scandal will surely be occasioned by the *symoniaca pravitas* in this country where people in the world have abandoned their usury and other customs, less evil than simony. Lay people who wish to correct their vices, despise the religious who retain their greater failings. ‘In my opinion these sisters will bring mockery and contempt upon the rulers and the aristocracy. I myself, and the parish priest of Deventer and other devout people will consider them as excommunicated and rejected by the church. We shall avoid them and tell others to do the same. Their chaplain has

\(^{1}\) Ger. M. *Ep.* n. 41, p. 161.
\(^{3}\) G.M. *Ep.* 167-168.
\(^{5}\) *Ep.* n. 44, p. 174-176.
already departed since it is plain that the nuns wish to keep the girl from Kampen whom they have received contrary to the decree of Urban IV. For she has, under the pretext of custom, offered 60 old “scilts” and other things to the abbey and the nuns. If you are a good shepherd you must act against this, otherwise you are more the tyrant who is of the world and speaks from the world. The priest John, their confessor, also considers himself obliged to depart and to close the organ, fearful of the irregularity he would be incurring should he celebrate in the presence of these excommunicated women. You must help, you can help, and the symoniacal pravitas will then be abolished. For this God will bless you.’

In his book De Symonia ad Beguttas Groote discusses the question of the dowry and notably the problem of whether it is simony to buy a place (or prebend) in a Beguine house. After explaining the concept of simony and describing the state of life of the Beguines, Groote gives his answer. Beguines are not monastics, yet their clothing is different from that worn in the world. They consider their status as the best way to God, and they may not freely return to the world. Although they have monastic customs, they have no community of property - at most they receive something from a communal chest or pot. Groote calls the payment of money for admission simony, since admission opens the way to a more or less spiritual way of life. Although he has no law books to hand in writing this treatise, he recognizes that canon law does not forbid the payment of this dowry among the Beguines. With this, however, he cannot agree. This may not be simony according to the letter but it is according to the spirit. For this custom gives rise to great abuse! He poses the situation thus: Two candidates apply for a place; one is suitable but has no money; the other is unsuitable but has money. The rich candidate will be preferred, which is not good for the spiritual life of the other Beguines.

This contrast seems to me not entirely accurate. One might say: Two candidates are both suitable, but one can pay the dowry and the other not. In this case the preference did not lead to the fatal result, and the woman could live. But this treatise too confirms Groote’s particular care for the growth of the monasteries and other spiritual institutions. The remark that the laity act upon his sermons better than the nuns of Ter Hunnepe is not anti-clerical. His actions are always inspired by love

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1 Ed. W. de Vreeze, ‘s-Gravenhage 1940.
2 Ibid., 6-7. Groote also deals with the Third Order, p. 29, and Brethren of the Common Life p. 28.

R.R. Post, The Modern Devotion
for the spiritual institutions. For the rest Groote here reveals a stern mentality, a
tendency to rigorism. He takes no account for circumstances, finds the positive law
too lax, and now evolves the idea of a spiritual simony.

Possibly even more strongly than the giving of a dowry Groote condemns the
retention of personal property by monastics. The letter of congratulation to the new
abbot of the Cistercian monastery of Altenkamp, which we have quoted, is filled
with indignation at this deeply rooted abuse, which is in conflict with the monastic
rule.1 He lets it appear that he has every confidence in the new abbot, yet nevertheless
sends the monks a copy of the letter in question, together with an accompanying note
in which he exhorts them to support the abbot in his attempt to abolish the dowry
and personal property, particularly in the case of Ter Hunnepe.2 Groote hoped, he
wrote to the abbot, that following the example of Abraham, he would favour the son
of the promise, Jacob before Esau, and, with Abraham, would flee idolatry. ‘Are you
astonished?’ he asks the abbot, what idols must be driven out and avoided. I answer:
the monks with their own property (proprietarii monachi) are great and exceedingly
great idolators. They cannot be excused, either by the authority of the abbot, or of
the bishop or o the pope, or by any power on earth. ‘It is evident from the admonition
and excommunication that the church must consider them as pagan idolators. And
that they may be a warning to the living, their bodies are not buried in consecrated
earth, but on a dung heap and under anathema as required by the ecclesiastical law
and the fathers.’3

‘It is terrible to think what their life will be in the hereafter! How many are there
who try to excuse and exonerate the proprietarii by saying that what they possess,
they have with the permission of the abbot or superior. Woe to the monasteries, but
double woe to those through whom this scandal enters the monasteries.’ Groote
therefore exhorts the abbot to eradicate carefully and discreetly this abuse from his
own monastery of Altenkamp so that it may finally disappear from the dependent
institutions. It is difficult to eradicate a deeply rooted custom, but easy for a faithful
prelate who seeks, not what is his but, like the apostles, what is of many.

He must pour oil on the weak, but not without wine; that is, he must see that
generous portions are distributed from the communal coffers

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and also from the abbot's goods. His work must be accompanied, moreover, by soft
and gentle admonitions. But the wine of menace must also flow, and disparities in
food and clothing be abolished; the wine of the sacrifice of personal money and
incomes; the wine of excommunication. Groote elaborates this allegory further. It
must be pointed out, not only that personal property is a danger to virtue, but also
that it leads to discord, quarrelling, faction, disobedience, to excursions, diversions,
feasts, drunkenness, slander and other vices. On the other hand, if everything is held
in common, a good religious life prevails with the necessary quiet and an abundance
of what is essential. Surely it is well known that private property gives rise to poverty
and a dearth of possessions, as can be observed in practice.¹

Another result is that the monks become dependent on the world and upon their
blood relations.² They must sell, buy and exchange outside the walls of the monastery.
That is a return to Egypt, the introduction of reprehensible Egyptian customs. This
scandalous life affects those who come in contact with it; there is no sanctity within
the monastery or without. Donations to the monastery cease. All manner of lawsuits
follow and the rulers and judges no longer protect the monastic property. And so that
this may not be imputed to the evil of the times or to the aging of the world, but to
the proprietarii and the unworthy, he refers to the monasteries and orders where this
abuse does not exist. This legislation also contributes to the impoverishment of the
monasteries, and lay people in many countries will not have it that their inheritances
should go to their sons or daughters, monks or nuns, or to their monastery.³ They
apportion a small amount to them, either for their souls or for their life and thus cut
them off from the future succession of parents and friends. If the superiors had not
done their best to gain possession of this little immediately, although tainted with
simony and personal property the custom of exclusion from the family succession
would never have become current.⁴

Nor would the abuse ever have originated whereby every upstart worldling, whether
physically deformed, handicapped or mentally ill was received into the monastery,
(not as a sacrifice to God, but to their own advantage, not as an honour, but as a
charge to the cloister), or

¹ Texts follow from Augustine and Aristotle and a further discussion on the inequality of the
monks.
² Ger. M. Ep., 165.
³ Ibid., 165-166. On this see R.R. Post, De kerkelijke verboudingen etc. 197 sq.
⁴ Ibid., 166-167.
those who were unfit for marriage or unworthy of the paternal inheritance.¹ Should the abbot combat this evil, nothing but good will result, but if he does not, he will be accursed. ‘May God grant you the courage to reform the proprietarii. Do not repulse those who are willing to help you, and begin with soft admonitions to those who are prepared to follow you.’

‘Forgive me, Lord abbot if I have said anything to you which seems harsh. God knows how true it is and how useful for you. Love for you compels me confidently to express the truth. Pray too excuse the writing, since copying was distasteful to the wretched scribe, a poor artist’² A letter³ to the nuns is characteristic of Groote’s ideas. He writes to a superior who is attempting to lead the sisters according to Christ, ‘something which perhaps she does not know.’ ‘In some convents the individual nuns have their own incomes, assigned to them by parents or relatives. I hope that this is not so with you, but if you do allow it, you are at fault. For to the monastic life pertain the three substantialia, obedience, chastity and poverty.’ Groote does not speak of the first two, but poverty was recommended by Christ and practised early by the Christians, and the professed are strongly pledged to this poverty. ‘If a sister says, I could not live, if I had not my own possessions, I answer with Christ: why did you begin to build the tower, which you cannot complete? If she says: I did not know, then my answer is: this ignorance means that you do not know the law, but you do know the fact. The obligation is very clear. If she says: the abbot or abbess gave me permission, then I say that he or she had no authority to do so. The Canon Law is opposed to it. Moreover, personal property is contrary to the aim of the monastic life according to the Rules of St. Augustine and St. Benedict. It also follows clearly from what St. Gregory says concerning the burial of a monk having personal possessions.’ Then follow various casus with their solutions. He does not wish to judge, nor to reassure monks who possess property which they are willing to resign into the hands of the abbot. ‘They are, however, in great danger. They may hear confessions, and those whom they have absolved, are absolved. But I should prefer to confess to another. He, however, who is not prepared to relinquish his property, is living in mortal sin and is a son of destruction. He may not be required to hear

² Ibid., p. 169.
³ Ibid. 45, pp. 177-183. The monastery referred to is perhaps Ter Hunnepe.
confessions or to fulfil any other ecclesiastical function. The proprietarii do not harm the other monks who have no property. The former (the proprietarii), are not excommunicated by men, but by God. If one of them does fulfil an office, or celebrate Mass, he is committing mortal sin. If you should ask what advice do you give to professed sisters who do not receive sufficient clothing and food from the communal funds, then I say: they may accept something, and administer these goods, but as things alloted to them, not as their own property. They must be prepared to share what they have received with the other poor Sisters. I hope for salvation for such a sister, but it is seldom obtained.

The Palm Sunday sermon which Groote gave for a monastic community deals with the same subject, the property of the monks. Although this sermon begins in an oratorical form, its length (37 printed pages) and the nature of the last section would seem to indicate that Groote elaborated it into a treatise, as he did with the sermon contra focaristas. The contrast between the acclaim which Christ received at the Entry into Jerusalem and the actual poverty (no crown, riding on an ass) leads to the exhortation to the listeners to practise poverty. The monks are bound to poverty by the rules of the founders of the order and by church law. This obligation also appears from the well known story of Pope Gregory I concerning the burial of a proprietarius, from examples in the Vitae Patrum, from the decree of the fourth Lateran Council and from considerations of St. Thomas Aquinas. Christ's example renders poverty a duty for all Christians. It is, indeed, founded on love. The Pope cannot dispense from this obligation.

The second section is a praise of poverty, elaborated not only by texts from the Holy Scriptures, but also by parallels from nature (born naked and return naked to the earth) taken from various classical writers. The whole appears rather over-emphasised, heavy and exaggerated.

We have now dwelt sufficiently on Groote's attitude towards the proprietarii. It is a struggle of principle. Groote rejects any form of

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1 These thoughts recur in the sermon against the focarists. See p. 134.
2 Ger. M. Ep. 177-183. In letter no. 46, p. 184, Groote returns to roughly the same casus and gives the solution adding a few other matters.
3 Geert Groote's Sermon for Palm Sunday on voluntary poverty, dealt with by W. Moll etc. Studien en Bijdragen op het gebied der historische theologie II (1874) 425. Inleiding, Sermoen 432-469.
4 This has been quoted by Spoelhof (among others) in support of his opinion that Groote takes little account of the pope's powers ... but the fact that the pope has no power in this makes the gravity of the obligation clear.
personal property among monks and nuns, although he shows himself flexible in the application of the strict commandment. The authorities must try at first gradually, with care and understanding, to eradicate this evil. These *proprietarii* are not to be found everywhere. Groote has in mind particularly the situation in Ter Hunnepe, yet speaks none the less in general terms. The prebendary system had not been introduced in the monastery entered by Matthias of Tiel but from the difficulties experienced by the said Matthias, as a recently professed monk, when he saw that several of his fellow-monks possessed property and administered it, it would appear that there too this abuse had gradually become current. Groote displays extreme moderation in his answer to Matthias of Tiel: ‘do not accuse anyone, do not admonish other people.’

In his struggle against the *proprietarii* he bases his arguments on the Holy Scriptures, the history of the first Christians, the aim of monasticism itself and the rules and precepts of the Fathers. ¹ Although here he does not yet call upon the faithful to shun the services of these *proprietarii*, he is of the opinion that those who enjoy incomes against the will of the abbot, may not be encouraged to celebrate Mass and perform the offices. They commit mortal sin with each of these sacred acts.

C. Groote and the Brethren and Sisters

‘In various places many left the false and evil life and turned to the Lord, and virginal blossoms unfolded on the field of the Lord. Then there are the chaste widows and those who chose poverty of their own accord; those who forsook the world, or, who gave back what they had taken. Then too was achieved the return of the heretics, of the usurers in Salland, of those who erred through love and the priests who kept *focariae*.’ This somewhat broad and vague summary of the fruits of Groote's labours is intended chiefly to distinguish three groups; those who changed their way of life but remained in the world, those who entered a monastery, among whom he perhaps included his direct followers, the Brethren of the Common Life and the women he had received into his house and for whom statutes had been drawn up. Communities of women may also perhaps have been formed in cities other than Deventer, more or less under influence of Groote's sermons. In any case some could be observed shortly after Groote's death.

¹ Ger. M. Ep. n. 27. pp. 119-128.

R.R. Post, *The Modern Devotion*
It is striking that Groote in his letters speaks so little of the Brethren of the Common Life. So far as is known from the sources a divergent tradition existed about 60 years after Groote's death concerning the origin of the Brotherhood. One writer attributes its foundation chiefly to Florens Radewyns, the other (Busch) stresses the activity of Geert Groote. We cannot deal with this question in isolation from the later sources and solely on the basis of Groote's letters and works. We have to supplement these latter with data from other documents (see Chapter III). However the Brotherhood originated, it appears from Groote's letters that it already existed before his death. Groote demonstrates his love and care for this institution, but since he lived close to the first Brethren he did not write them letters. Florens Radewyns is mentioned a few times in Groote's correspondence, but we do not know whether Groote ever wrote to him. No letter addressed to him has been preserved.

The first letter which is applied to him, already presents certain problems. It is letter No. 6, in which Groote besought Herman of Deventer, a Carthusian of Koblenz, to recommend magister N, the bearer of the letter (socius meus) to the bishop of Worms, to be ordained a priest.¹ According to Thomas a Kempis² and Rudolf Dier, this magister N. must refer to Florens Radewyns.³ This is confirmed by the title magister, since only Florens among the first Brethren had a right to it, and by the words 'socius meus' by which Groote indicates his particular connection with him. These points are not without significance for the origin of the Brethren of the Common Life. For after gaining his Masters' degree in Prague, Radewyns had become a canon in Utrecht. He exchanged this benefice to become vicar of the altar of St. Paul in the church of St. Lebwin in Deventer. For his prebend as canon it was not necessary for Radewyns to be a priest, but it was for the vicarship. The transfer from Utrecht to Deventer will thus have been the reason for his ordination, and since letter No. 6, which mentions Florens' ordination, was only written in 1383,⁴ this ordination and the move to the vicarage can only have occurred in 1383. Now the Brethren are thought to have originated in the vicarage. If this is so, then letter 19

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¹ Ger. M. Ep. n. 6, p. 11, dated by Mulder in 1376, but more accurately by H.J.J. Scholtens in 1383, Reypens Album 388. The letter is addressed not to Henry de Lippe but to Herman of Deventer, who was prior of Coblenz from 1383 to 1387.
² Vita D. Florentia, ed. Pohl VII, 139.
³ Rudolf Dier, G. Dumbar, Analecta I 7.
which Mulder, without sufficient grounds, has dated in 1381, must be transferred to 1383 or 1384 for it seems to me that this letter already assumes that the Brethren were living together in Deventer, Zwolle and Kampen.

The letter in question contains advice concerning the punishment to be imposed by the episcopal commissioner on a priest who has been guilty of simony and has thus entered in bonis. After proposing a particular destination for the various goods which the priest must relinquish, Groote finally comes to the priest's house in Deventer. This house no longer belongs to the priest, and Groote advises that its ownership should pass to the ‘holy servants of God.’ Let us not now dwell upon the house or the question of its disposal, but rather on those who were to receive it. Who were the ‘holy servants of God?’

In my opinion, they are the Brethren of the Common Life. These servi\ores Dei \textit{et plene conversi} would not be able to occupy it for the present. For so long as they were not living there, the rent could be paid to the homines spirituales. The money might also be deposited in Kampen. The ownership of the house could be transferred to the homines presentes et futuri Deo servientes layci et clerici, or be used for their benefit. After the death of the condemned man, certain books would become the property of the servi\ores Dei et manifeste ad Deum conversi. The ownership of the household effects (utensilia) and beds would pass to the above mentioned Dei servi\ores in Deventer and Kampen. Two-thirds could be used at once, and a third retained for the man's use. The remainder of the money - insofar as it has not to be given to the priest John - can pass to the servi\ores Dei of Kampen and there be put at the disposal of Henry and Celia or of Florens and Gerard according to whether it is allotted to the servi\ores in Kampen or Deventer. These servi\ores Dei, these spirituales, these servientes layci et clerici who are to receive books, who accept beds and household effects, who live in Deventer under Florens and Gerard (Groote?) and in Kampen under a man and woman, these are the first beginnings of the Brethren of the Common Life. They have a direction, communal funds, incomes and property and live together.

It is, for the rest, a somewhat range idea that Groote advises so unashamedly to promote his own foundation. The fact that a married couple were included among the first followers in Kampen presents no difficulty. This also occurred in Zwolle, where the mother of the

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1 Ger. M. Ep., n. 19, p. 69.
first rector, John of Ommen, lived with the Brethren. According to the contracts of purchase of July 1384 Gerard Groote, Florens Radewyns and John van de Gronde acquired the joint ownership of a house in the Begijnenstraat in Zwolle. The foundation on the Nemelerberg dates from sometime earlier. Groote's later letters confirm that the servitores of Deventer refers to the Brethren. Letter no. 30 is addressed to one of the two groups (of Zwolle or Kampen). This may be assumed on the basis of the mode of address, frateres, and the fact that the warning against ‘your enemies and mine,’ Groote's, is used indiscriminately. In a letter addressed to William Oude Scutte, Gysbert Dou and John van de Gronde, Groote's friends and collaborators in Amsterdam, he calls them patres and frateres. They were priests and helped Groote in his work. He besought one of them, preferably John van de Gronde, to come to Deventer to help Florens Radewyns in hearing the confessions of the spirituales, the veraciter conversis ad Dominum. These must be in the first place the frateres, but also the women who lived in the Master Geert's house. John van de Gronde did indeed work there later in this capacity. In all probability Groote takes an even broader view of the concept ‘spirituales,’ i.e. in this sense of followers or supporters including those who wrote for him and the school-boys who lived in the vicarage or received material or spiritual benefits from Florens Radewyns. In another letter, which in my opinion must be transferred to 1384 (not long after Easter), Groote speaks of one of our members, unus sociorum nostrorum. Florens, as the head of this community (under Geert Groote) paid ten guilders for Groote for a future bull whereby pope Urban would again permit him to preach. Groote requested in addition the privilege of having an altar stone upon which Mass could be celebrated in the presence of himself and his socii and on which he might say Mass should he become a priest.

This group, no matter how few and uncertain, was vividly present in Groote's mind as his men, his socii and brothers, who must in the

1 Schoengen, 9
2 Ibid., 279-284.
3 Ger. M. Ép. p. 132. The word frater is not yet the specific name for the Brothers. Groote has also addressed other persons by this title, but the reference here is to a community of frateres.
first place be moulded according to his ideals of piety. The leaders among them would help him in his work. This work, however, was suddenly cut short in August 1384, without the group of *spirituales* and entirely-converted-in-God having attained complete development, not to speak of a proper organization. He also had similar communal groups in Zwolle, Kampen and Deventer. Those in Zwolle were perhaps the furthest developed, since they had received a permanent dwelling place in a house in the *Begijnenstraat* which was held in the name of Geert Groote and his principal friends from Deventer. These, who were later to be called *fratres vitae communis*, had to be moulded into pious people and animated with Groote's principles on religion, pastoral care, the monastic life, study, teaching and education. They were, in short, to become so many Geert Grootes, to work and pray as he did.

Comparable to these male communities was the society of women, for whom Groote (20th Sept. 1374) had destined his paternal house, with the exception of a small apartment which he retained for himself. While retaining the administration of the house, he threw open its doors to women, single or widowed. It would be, not a convent or a Beguine house, but an almshouse, so that the women only lodged there and were free to leave as they wished, if for example they wanted to get married.

The deed of foundation was given in the presence of the city magistrates who took clear measures to ensure that property held in mortmain would not increase through this foundation. Although in the beginning Groote remained responsible for the administration, it eventually passed into the hands of the magistrates, as was the case with the ‘Stappenhuis’ and the Hospital. They could ensure that the daughters of the city made use of it. Shortly after this deed was signed, Groote retired to the monastery of Monnikhuizen. When he returned there were so many women living in the house that statutes had to be drawn up. The regulations embodied in these statutes typify not only the situation of the women of Master Geert's house but also Master Geert himself. They are often quoted as proof of Groote's anti-monastic anti-clerical attitude, since Groote is considered to have composed them. At the same time several of the regulations show how suspect Groote's creation was from the very beginning to the inquisition, and how it was opposed, notably by the Dominicans, who were, the in-

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*R.R. Post, The Modern Devotion*
quisitors par excellence. Two texts of these statutes exist - one short and one long. I have shown in an former publication that the long text is an elaboration of the short and not the other way round. In other words that the short is not a précis of the long. I proved subsequently that both the long and the short were composed by the magistrates, not, it goes without saying, unaided, and that the long text is a forgery, drawn up in the years between 1393 and 1398. The long text, therefore, is not a work of Geert Groote, but it does touch upon the struggle endured by the Sisters (and Brethren) in the years 1394-98. If one wishes to deduce anything about Geert Groote from the statutes, one must use only the short text, and then only bearing in mind that it was composed by the magistrates of Deventer. Groote will have agreed to it, but naturally in the sense in which the magistrates intended it and not in the meaning imputed by modern authors, without taking into consideration the position of 14th and 15th century civil administration. We must assume that this short text was drawn up by the magistrates because they say so themselves¹ and because the document has been preserved in the city archives.² ‘All these matters were decided with the knowledge and consent of the magistrates, unanimously at their meeting.’

It is a sound document. It purports to embody regulations concerning the house which Geert Groote has given in honour of God. The house is not intended to found any new spiritual order or new religion, for no one may do this without the Pope's permission. This is one of the anti-monastic decrees for which one can find counterparts in various cities.³ In actual fact they were framed by extremely pious and church-loving persons who, however, were responsible for the wellbeing of the city, which implied in their opinion the curtailing of property held in mortmain. This is why they were opposed to new monasteries in the city, since their property finally became amortised and acquired exemption from taxation. The women who were admitted into this house would serve God, but join no religious order, - they will not be required to take vows. They are free to leave the house, but if they do, they may not return. They will remain lay persons and not become Lay persons and not become

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¹ See end of these statutes. _Archief Utrecht_ 71 (1952) 21 ‘Allen desen saken zijn gesat mit wetene ende toden der Seepene ende sinen hem voergelesen opde openbaert in hoeren raet daers hem wel behagede sonder wedersen.’

² _Ibid._, 32.

³ D. de Man, Maatregelen door de middeleeuwse overheden genomen ten opzichte van het economisch leven der kloosterlingen en leden van congregaties. _Bijdragen voor Vaderl. Geschiedenis_; 5e serie VIII (1921) 272-292.
members of a religious order. This decree sounds anti-clerical, but is merely the negative side of the first. Those persons dwelling in the house are not religious - they remain under the jurisdiction of the magistrates. Accordingly they must not wear a religious habit. They may not take on mortgages, nor extend the house, which has the same purpose. The duties and rights of the matron (‘meesteres’) are then described, but these are of little value in assessing the character of Geert Groote. It is, however, characteristic of him that everyone must work. Begging is not allowed. Geert Groote laid it upon the conscience of the magistrates and the ‘meesteres’ not to allow the members of the society to travel for trivial or dangerous affairs, or to visit chapters. Finally there will be an anniversary Mass for Groote's parents and grandparents and for himself when he dies.

It was not difficult for Groote to testify his agreement with these regulations. He was well aware of the intention behind the seemingly anti-monastic and anti-clerical decrees. It is noteworthy that these statutes contain no mention of a community of life, funds or incomes. This was first introduced in 1393.¹

D. Attitude towards the Mission

Geert Groote's spiritual care for these two groups could be exercised in person since he stayed either in the house of Florens Radewyns or in his own house, where the Sisters lodged. The piety which he recommended to various monastics was also to be the aim of these Brethren and Sisters and to some extent even of those who, converted by his sermons, strove after devotion, yet retained their position in the family and in the town. Are there letters or works which give a clearer description of the ideal of the Devotionalists? The fact that Groote calls his companions servitores, servants of God, does not in itself mean much. It is of more significance that they were called ‘spirituals.’

A letter to Salvarvilla, dated by Mulder in the year 1379,² testifies to the fact that Groote moved in circles other than those of monastics, or Brethren and Sisters of the Common Life. This Salvarvilla was at that time a professor in Paris, a fighter for the unity of the Church and thus an opponent of the recent Schism, whereby the University, under pressure from the king, inclined towards the Avignon pope. Salvarvilla recognized the legality of Urban VI's election and fought to have

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¹ Archief... aartsb. Utrecht, 28 (1925) 26.
² Ger. M. Ep. n. 9, p. 23-36.

R.R. Post, The Modern Devotion
him universally recognized. Since this rendered his position in Paris difficult, he contemplated a journey to the Near East, to do missionary work. He informed his friend Geert Groote of this plan. The latter, however, vehemently counselled him against it in the letter which has become a treatise. This document characterizes Groote both as a man with a limited horizon and as an erudite lawyer who can find sufficient arguments to support his ideas, in this case, to dissuade his friend from leaving, and to persuade him to stay and preach in France. In short, to do roughly what Groote was doing himself at that moment or would do later. Groote's view of conditions prevailing at the University of Paris and his more or less critical attitude towards the sermons of his day and towards the manner in which learning was practised there, are often quoted as proof of Groote's unease with regard to late-medieval learning and his longing for renewal. One must remember, however, that disapproval of an existing programme does not necessarily imply the existence of an alternative, and furthermore that we are dealing here with the lawyer, the man who wishes to prevail upon his friend to work in Paris and surrounding districts since there is so much to be done there. Groote appears to be acquainted with the courses at the University, not only in the faculties of philosophy and theology, but also in the juridical faculty. He recognizes that there are two sorts of vocation; one whereby God draws someone against his will, as with Jeremiah, and the other whereby a person willingly makes himself available, as with Isaiah. Salvarvilia felt the call to preach among the Greeks and Slavs, but not, however, among the Arabs and Mahommedans. In Groote's opinion he would do better to stay closer to home. The apostles began in their native land; even Paul, the apostle of the pagans, testifies that he would do anything to sanctify some among his own people. Moreover, the west has need of good preachers. Those of the present time seek self-righteousness, adopt an affected tone and their sermons, with introduction, division into sections and long quotations are learned, but not practical. The preachers are vain, and long for praise, but they do not touch the soul. They do not bring the heathen to repentance and a longing for heaven. Should Livy or Cicero or Seneca or Pliny be present at a sermon they would laugh at the cheap adornments, and the apostles too would laugh at what they now heard from the pulpit. This is where the need is, it is Paris he must help. The preachers are disturbers of piety and deceive the public. It is true that

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1 Ger. M. Ep., p. 25.

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they read the Scriptures, but what they read is not translated into pastoral care. They incite mockery of the Holy Scriptures by venturing into all sorts of questions in order to display their erudition, but any fourth year pupil of the city schools could raise well founded objections.

The jurists also stand in need of good preachers, for they no longer know epikie, piety, morality. They accept gifts and look for position and money and complicate matters unnecessarily. We must be on our guard against the Aristotelian hiding places. The jurists do not know the crafty Greeks to whom Augustine, Socrates and Plato referred. The poets too, whom they call seers, have plucked out the eyes of the wise. Seneca wishes not to pluck out the eyes, but to cut out the tongue of Aristotle among others, and even of Socrates who was steeped in the entire Ionic philosophy and was declared holy by the oracles. 1 These philosophers taint theological truth by mingling their wisdom with that of the Holy Scriptures: ‘God, God, what a mixture comes forth from the rind and the pith of the Holy Scriptures, and the song of the sirens!’ Rejection of the truth which leads to heresy, has seized Europe, and philosophy, which according to Jerome is the mother of all heresies. 2 Paul has already warned against it. The worst thing in the world is worldly learning which is no learning at all but merely its shadow. It is the source of all evil. The people in the gowns and the ignorant physicians do nothing to oppose this. It is for Salvarvilla to raise his voice in protest, ‘Preach the fall of the clergy and the decline of learning.’ 3 As much as the practitioners of learning err from the good, they lose the true. It is for this that Socrates, according to Cicero, called virtue learning.

Those living on the land, the simple people and the innocent, receive less from the theologians and their friends in the big cities such as Rome, Avignon and Paris, than in the smaller places. 4 It is for this reason that the trumpet must be sounded in Paris and battle joined with all the enemies of God. With those who make of God's house, that is, the wisdom of God, a den of thieves, who do not enter by the door of the imitation of Christ's humanity in order to attempt to attain to the Godhead through contemplation, or, going away, try to find the pastures through the active life. 5 At night he must retire to the mount of Olives, preach mainly in the villages but in the royal city on feast-

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1 Ger. M. Ep., p. 29.
2 Ibid., p. 30.
3 Ibid., p. 30.
5 Ibid., p. 32.
days in order to address the Pharisees and Scribes, Bishops and Princes. Groote considers this a digression in his letter, yet has none the less persevered for some say that Paris has preachers enough. In conclusion he sums up the reasons why Salvarvilla should not go to the schismatics.

1. You were brought up in the French way of learning and it is a thankless task to leave it.
2. The order of charity requires that the fatherland should come first; anyway there are no communications and you will receive no help from the home front.
3. You are a barbarian to them and they will not understand you.
4. There is only a very small group that will listen to you. There is no place for a sermon: it will become a private, acrimonious conversation.
5. You would achieve a better result by sending books from Paris.
6. You are alone among the schismatics, extremely isolated as a result of the corruption of books and ignorance of the language.
7. Consider how difficult it is to convert a philosopher, a garrulous lawyer or a student of profane learning to apostolic innocence or mystical theology.
8. Everyone is satisfied with his own opinion, everyone is happy in his own faculty.
9. The disputes in our own milieu prove how difficult it is to convince anyone by reasoning, and yet we have the same ideas, means of expression and arguments. This is also proved by the Academics and Stoics, not only Seneca. It is much more difficult among the schismatics who, moreover, feel irritated by our ways of reasoning.
10. They have their own language and call your translation corrupt. They laugh at the natural philosophy of Paris, at your sophistic subtleties and your dialectic trivialities. They quote books and translations of unknown doctors of theology.¹
11. The disputes are reduced to interpretations and conundrums.
12. They too have their methods and it might well be that you would have to concede victory to them.
13. How can you leave your own bishop? The limb belongs with the head. It may be that the bishop will allow himself to be prevailed upon to grant your request, but I consider it not permissible to ask for leave.

¹ Ger. M. Ep., p. 34.

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14. If he should ask me for advice I would strongly advise him against giving permission. For he has also many sheep and needs your help to guide them, either by your activities or by your medical or surgical skills.

15. The fact that God no longer confers the gift of tongues, indicates that one must work more in one's own locality.

16. The example of Ezekiel: although he devoured the book of God and so obtained the Divine Word in his mouth, he was not sent to strange or far-away peoples.¹

We may assume that such a list of arguments made an impression on Salvarvilla. He did not go to the East after all, but on leaving Paris obtained a function in the church of Liège. Besides fulfilling his task as archdeacon he also worked to settle the schism. It was a long time, a couple of years, before he succeeded in persuading Groote to struggle with him in this field. In his last letters to Groote he tells him that he would like to live and preach in a region where he understood the language of the population.² He died in 1384/5.

Groote knew the peoples of Europe and Asia but scarcely mentions those of Africa. He is also familiar with Greek philosophy and its principal headings, the business of the University of Paris and the Latin authors: Livy, Seneca, Cicero and Pliny. This does not yet indicate the influence of Humanism, which had already blossomed in Italy. Although Groote refers to these writers as persons of authority this is not remarkable for a medieval scholar of any stature. Groote is ingenious in finding arguments for his purpose. This must be considered as a fruit of the dialectica and a consequence of his study and wide reading. The modern reader will be unable to agree with much of it, but Groote's ideal, preaching and practical activity interspersed with retirement and meditation, emerges clearly. There is a time for entering into the temple in order to attain to the divinitatem through contemplation, but there is also a time for going away to field work, per activam vitam.³

Salvarvilla remained Groote's faithful friend. He was his confidant until Groote's death. His Dutch friends were not of the same high standard. As we shall see, Groote kept Salvarvilla informed of the position in the struggle against the focarists. If he emerges from this letter as rather narrow-minded, it is that his judgment and advice in

¹ Ger. M. Ep., p. 35-36.
³ Ibid., p. 31.

R.R. Post, The Modern Devotion
matters of law are often somewhat harsh, especially in the question of simony. To my mind he displays the most likeable side of his character in his attitude towards young monastics, and towards priests troubled by difficulties. We have already seen this in part and it will become even clearer from the examples which follow.

E. Harsh Juridical Advice

Firstly two pieces of juridical advice: one, already discussed in another connection, delivered to, or at least intended for, the episcopal commissioner Henry.\footnote{Ger. M. Ep. n. 19, p. 65. Mulder mentions this Henry on p. 71. He is not to my mind the same person as the \emph{frater} Henry mentioned in letter no. 47. The inscription: \textit{Ad dominum Henricum de Schoenhove de Gouda} may be accurate, but all these inscriptions were not written by Geert Groote. Some were added later. This is certainly not the first Brother of the Common Life in Zwolle, Henry Voppenz of Gouda. This man would not have been made episcopal commissioner in such an important case. I assume that he must be sought among the canons in Utrecht.} After the customary \textit{arenga}, some religious observation, Groote establishes what must be done with a delinquent: a priest named John,\footnote{In Mulder he is called John on page 71. He is not, it seems to me, the same person as the \emph{frater} mentioned in letter no. 47.} who had been guilty of simony, and probably flagrantly so.

1. He must first be asked if he has given up all his property into the hands of the episcopal commissioner so that he may dispose of it in accordance with divine and human law and following the judgment of a good man, taking into account the requirements of divine justice and the sacred constitution, according to the evil that has been done.

2. The delinquent must show sorrow for having sold the spiritual things and the sacraments of Christ, and especially the sacred mysteries of the Trinity which are above any price or temporal thing. They lead to the life of grace and glory which is the end of all that is temporal, but compared to which the temporal possesses not the slightest proportion or value. He must regret having despised these values and having preferred the temporal to the celestial; and also having done this so openly that his shameful gain was plain for all to see. This has undoubtedly given rise to much scandal, and many sheep have been neglected or killed or have fallen sick.

3. It must be impressed upon him that he must commit no more such misdeeds of simonistic trading and profit for God and that in his ecclesiastical offices (celebrations, sermons and administration of the

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\footnote{R.R. Post, \textit{The Modern Devotion}}
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sacraments) he must keep God's glory ever before his eyes and seek divine profit above all things.

4. That he will avoid the occasions and causes which led to this evil.

5. He must be advised, when fulfilling his office and especially in building up a new state of life, that he must frequently ask himself: Why am I doing this and for what purpose?

6. He must try to avoid every appearance of evil.

7. He must know that the judges, when passing sentence, will propose that all his shameful gains should fall to the Church, for his crime was directed against her. The Commissioner must, however, provide him with enough to live on from his confiscated income, since he must not be allowed to fall into poverty and want. If the delinquent continues to conduct himself well, the Commissioner must return as much as possible to him. But if he again comes to enjoy a comfortable income, the Commissioner must tell him to consult holy men on the question of how much he may retain. The Church does not wish to make a profit.

Finally, Groote somewhat aggravates this advice after the example of St. Augustine. In relinquishing his goods the delinquent must declare that in conscience he would not dare to retain anything.

His books may be placed at his disposal for his lifetime. He may sell the land, whenever the time is right and use the money, as the Commissioner decides, to found some spiritual work, as we have already seen.

He may keep as much of the household effects, beds and requirements as he needs for himself, a priest and a housekeeper. The rest must be sold and the money placed at the disposal of the Commissioner. The valuables too must be sold. Expensive and superfluous clothing must be exchanged for simple dress and what remains must be sold. We have already seen how his house in Deventer, the Bible, and two thirds of his household effects were to come to the Brethren.

This is stern advice which, if followed, was bound to lead to a severe sentence.

The other piece of advice preceded the deed. Groote advised a young man of 24, fairly well grounded in Latin, against accepting a benefice with cura animarum, while his parents were so poor that the youth was obliged to offer them material assistance. Groote was asked why he had given this advice which seems to have occasioned considerable comment. He sets out his motives as follows: In accepting pastoral duties, it must be considered if there are impediments according to Canon law:
1. The young man must know if he is really 25, counting the nine months spent in the womb.¹

2. He must see whether simony is incurred. If the sisters look after him, then this is an intervention by the family (carnales); if they have thereby promised services to the collatrix then this is already simony. If the cura principaliter is obtained in return for a promised service then there is obvious simony. This is strengthened by the fact that the young man is unworthy, as Groote fears. Then follow sundry instances.

3. No one may request a benefice with cura animarum, even though he should be worthy. Again follows a lengthy, documented explanation from which it is concluded that anyone desiring a pastoral benefice, is committed to fulfil five conditions.
   a) His intention must be good, i.e. he must desire the cura principally in honour of God and for the salvation of souls. This young man desires it for his own sake and to provide him with a living, and finally for shameful monetary gain. He is thus committing sin and is consequently ineligible.² To allow oneself to be ordained priest in order to provide a living for oneself and one's parents is simony. He begins in sin and every one of his holy offices, hearing confessions, giving absolution and administering extreme unction, is performed in a state of sin. He cannot be absolved from this without altering his intention in being consecrated which amounts to giving up the cura.
   b) He must possess sufficient knowledge of God. Groote proves this by quotations from Gregory I, Bernard and Dionysius, but does not say what knowledge is necessary and what the young man lacks. He said at the beginning that the man had a knowledge of Latin. He had evidently attended only the city school and like so many others had studied no theology.
   c) He must have lived and continue to live an upright and exemplary life. Although this is self-evident, Groote offers certain proofs, including the etymology of the word presbiter as prebens iter. He does not say, however, that the young man falls short in this.
   d) He who has the care of souls must excel through inner love and life.
   e) He must despise the world. Groote says that he can be brief on this point. He only declares why it is necessary to excel above others. We should have liked to learn more about this inner life, which is

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¹ Ger. M. Ep., n. 73, p. 310-321.

R.R. Post, The Modern Devotion
usually considered the essence of the Devotio Moderna, but in this case Groote
disappoints us.¹

In conclusion Groote deals with a few of the pastors' difficulties. The rulers
(principes temporales) wish to stand above the priest and so direct the cura that it
furthers their own aims and power. They desire that the offices should be celebrated
whenever they command and that their wishes should be complied with in determining
the times of confession. If the pastor consents to this, he falls into an abyss of evil,
against God and against the canon laws. If he submits he will never again know
peace. It is also very difficult if the pastor has nothing else to do than to avoid the
excommunicated, those under the interdict or those who have been suspended, at the
religious exercises and in ordinary intercourse. If he does not, that is, if he does not
shun the excommunicated at Mass, then he is immediately suspended, ipso jure, and
if he celebrates after being suspended, he immediately becomes irregular. Nowadays,
if anyone wishes to be a good pastor, he must suffer much persecution, not only from
the princes but also from many under them. If, out of fear of such persons, he ceases
to exercise pastoral care and justice, then he is a hireling who flees from the wolf.
If, however, he acts vigorously, then he must tread the narrow path which is more
difficult than the young man can foresee. It is easier for him to go and beg for his
parents than to withstand all the difficulties of a pastor's life.

Groote then returns to contempt for ephemeral material things, but does not wish
to dwell upon this so as not to appear hard. In any case this is more applicable to
older people than to this young man.

It is indeed enough, and hard as well. It seems to me that the aims should not be
so sharply contrasted. Groote also has the progression of excommunication, suspension
and irregularity in his treatise against the Focarists.

Groote's legal mentality outweighs his sense of charity, pity, or magnanimity.
He displays a cool, businesslike approach.

F. The compassionate pastor

Groote, on the other hand, was deeply moved by his attempts to save a person who
either wished to enter the monastery as a young man, or experienced his first
difficulties within the monastery, or else

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fell from grace and is following the wrong path. This emotion is evident in the letter addressed to the priest Henry of Höxter.¹ Groote considered this man a good secular priest (*bonus mundanus presbiter*). There are others, however, *concinarii, fornicatores*, the ambitious, simonists, drinkers, misers who willingly work at the court, or gladly deal with worldly affairs.

This secular priest is treading the broad road which leads to death, according to Christ's word. Groote recalls the passage in the Apocalypse (13.16). ‘So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth.’

Woe to you and to all priests, soldiers of Christ, who do not fight, for you shall not receive the crown (Timothy 2,5). If you fight against the commands of Christ, you serve the devil. May you hold yourself aloof from the widespread idleness of the priests, the worldly life and the contamination of the world. You must begin a new life, a life to which few attain. The priest who moves in the world needs many books, masters and documentation in order to find the new way. You must not be misled by the frivolous and facile way of life of the ordinary priests. They are blind and leaders of the blind. Indeed, now they are more blind than robbers and harlots. In heaven and in the Church these will stand higher than the priests and receive less punishment. Oh, there are priests who neither act nor speak well, and are even a hindrance to those who do good, especially to the lay people.² Henry may not be satisfied with the ordinary life that the priests lead, but following the advice of Augustine he must try to understand spiritually what God is, and to assimilate this spiritually. If this is necessary for every Christian, how much more so for the salvation of the priest, who must impart to others the life of the spirit and give an example of spiritual life (*vita spiritualis*). The ordinary life of the clergy is fleshly and worldly. Fly, fly, break the chains of them and cast aside their yoke, for he who dwells in heaven, mocks them and God will put them to shame. Form Christ within you, so that you may wander spiritually in the midst of the wicked and that you may know and resist the flaming arrows of the devil and the world and the flesh through the divine dogmas and charismata.³

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¹ Ger. M. *Ep.* n. 22, p. 94. Also published by Sr. G. Feugen *O.G.E.* 15 (1941) 80-87. This text has three more passages and an appendix. The pieces contain mostly quotations from earlier writers, notably Bernard. I consider them to be interpolations; they give more material for the priests, but do not throw any further light on Geert Groote.


I should not go so far as to say that Groote was hereby attempting to gain Henry of Höxter for the Brethren, of whom his brother (John of Höxter) was already a member. What he was trying to do, was to imbue this priest at least with the same spirit as the *fratres*, the more spiritual ideal. He was successful to this extent, that Henry of Höxter later became a monk in the monastery of Windesheim.¹

Groote took radical action against Master Rudolf of Enteren, probably also his friend and fellow student.² After a few letters had been exchanged, Groote had besought him to come to Deventer. Rudolf, however, preferred to remain in Paris where he spent the entire winter refuting various errors of the Arabian astrologer Albumasar. Groote considered this attitude wrong, but since Rudolf would not come to Deventer, Groote was obliged to write to him. He thereby requested an answer to his letter, point by point. In Groote’s opinion Rudolf should reject the whole science of astrology. It contained not a grain of truth. It was not sufficient to refute a few points made by Albumasar. On the contrary, this might have quite the wrong results since it would lead to Albumasar’s work continuing to be read. Groote too had once studied astrology. He still felt guilty and found it better to forget everything. Rudolf too should reject the entire study. One peculiar factor was that Rudolf was ‘fallen’, ‘lapsus’. Groote does not say exactly what had happened. Rudolf had fallen into ‘societates’, associations and debts, and had borrowed money. He owed money to a certain John Lubertus.³ Groote besought him to pay this man back in full, since the money belonged to the poor. He would also inform the ‘lord’, probably the head of the College where Rudolf was living, and he would have to decide ‘whether to expel you, or whether you can remain as before. You must tell him everything. In this way you can make restitution. If you do not to this, I do not see how the sin can be forgiven, unless you give back as much as you can.’⁴

Henry of Höxter and Rudolf of Enteren, whom Groote attempted to lead back to, or keep on the straight path, were friends or acquaintances or particular relations. This is also true in the main of those whom he placed in monasteries or advised against entering. This may be one of the reasons why these letters (copies of them) were preserved. We must assume that he was called upon to deal with many more similar

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¹ J. Busch 81.
³ 5th March 1381, schoolrector in Deventer, Camerara Rekeningen V 355.
cases than are revealed in those letters which have come down to us. These last already give sufficient proof that Groote concerned himself with the affairs of the day.

G. Relations with School Rectors, especially with John Cele

As we have already said, Groote maintained close relations with the rectors of the schools of Deventer, Zwolle and Kampen, respectively William Vroede, John Cele and Werner Keynkamp. The subject of Groote's correspondence with Cele was the copying of books and, since everything on this topic contained in the letters will be dealt with when discussing Groote's attitude to learning, we shall omit it here. Groote's friendship and acquaintance with these men shows his interest in the schools. Bearing in mind the Common Life, it is of some importance to determine as far as possible the extent of this interest. Did he urge improvements in teaching or the theory of education or did he leave this to the rectors? Was his interest in the school confined to the virtue and religious sense of the rectors? Groote undoubtedly had great respect for John Cele, rector of the school at Zwolle from roughly 1375 until his death (9th May 1417). During Groote's time Cele was still a young man, and continued to direct the school for 33 years after Groote's death. He had studied in Paris and had there gained his Master of Arts degree. Having already become friendly with Groote he accompanied him on his journey to Groenendaal and was present at the conversation between Groote and Ruusbroec. This visit must in my opinion be dated after Groote's 'conversion' and before his stay in Monnikhuizen i.e. circa 1375. Cele's piety is evident, among other things, from his intention to enter a Franciscan monastery. Groote succeeded in dissuading him. We know this from John Busch, who later entered the monastery at Windesheim, is known as a chronicler, and was a pupil of the school at Zwolle. Indeed, while still a pupil in the highest class, he taught in the lower classes. He was full of praise for Cele's work in the school and his comments are acceptable, provided they are reduced to correct proportions. One should not notably overrate the biblical instruction on Sundays, since most of the pupils, being boys between the ages of 9 and 14, were not able to follow theology. This bible teaching probably consisted of a rather literal and edifying

1 Thomas a Kempis, ed. Pohl, 52.
explanation of the epistle and gospel of that Sunday, some religious instruction and a simple sermon. The question meanwhile remains as to what innovations Cele introduced into the school and when, and exactly what influence Groote exercised on all this. That Groote realized the importance of a good rector for such a school is obvious from his correspondence with William Vroede, from the year 1381. Vroede was rector of the school at Deventer from 1378 to 1381 when he was succeeded by John Lubbert (5th March 1381).1 In that year, 1381, the rectorship of the school at Zwolle threatened to fall vacant, since Cele wished to go to Prague for further study. Groote was sufficiently concerned with the succession to seek a serious man, a servant of God.

Cele shared his opinions. They mention master Ricold, who had probably already worked in Deventer and was so pious that he later entered a monastery,2 and became a Carthusian. Groote gave the preference to W. Vroede, school rector of Deventer, who would be free to take the post, and did his utmost for him. He tried to obtain a benefice for him which would augment his income as rector.3 Groote had made his acquaintance earlier, when he (Vroede) had entertained scruples concerning the payment of money to the Deventer Canonscholastic for the transfer of the school. At that time Groote had decided, on legal grounds, that the scholastic had been guilty of simony. He seems not to have been so clear about whether Vroede had also committed simony in making the payment. Master William Vroede was a man after Groote's heart, so pious that he had wished to enter the monastery at Monnikhuisen in 1381, when Cele was in Zwolle. Between 17th and 23rd July 13814 Groote is able to announce that Ricold has indeed declined the position. Affairs were going well in Zwolle. The pastor, Reinerus Drijnen, also supported Vroede and offered to put him up in his own house. Progress had also been made in the negotiations for the benefice. Vroede, however, hesitated. He had himself mentioned the rector of Zierikzee and written on his behalf to master John in Leiden.5 He considered entering the monastery at Monnikhuisen as soon as possible, perhaps even becoming a pastor. Mean-

1 Ger. M. Ep. p. 58, n. 1; 252 n. 1.
2 Ibid., p. 117, 225, 231. He is not the same as Ricoldus van Kleef, H.J.J. Scholtens, in Reypens-Album 385, 488.
3 Ibid., n. 18, p. 62-63. On this period see R.R. Post, Chronologie van Grootes brieven, Archief voor de geschiedenis van de katholieke kerk in Nederland 7 (1965) 263-269.
4 Ibid., n. 7, p. 14; Date, see R.R. Post, Chronologie etc.
5 Ibid., n. 8, p. 20.
while he continued to write and to have scruples. Another, much more serious case, came to Groote's ear. Willem Vroede's brother, who was himself too young to be appointed to pastoral duties, told Groote that William would accept the expected benefice with *cura* in his own name, but in actual fact allow the brother to do the pastoral work. Groote was indignant.¹ This was not only against the law, it was downright deception. Besides, the letters of presentation and collation would be false and unauthentic. Vroede, however, remained Groote's choice. He will probably have settled this affair with the interested parties.

Although this threat of a vacancy finally petered out, the whole affair shows Groote's interest in the school. The couple of letters also make it clear that the schools of Zwolle, Deventer, Zierikzee and Leiden already existed before Groote founded the Brethren of the Common Life or even thought of such a community. This comes as no surprise to the Dutch historians, since they list various other cities with schools as existing before the foundation of the Fraternity and long before the Brethren became widespread. Groote's (four) letters to Vroede did not deal with any questions of school or education. Neither do the letters to or about rector Werner Keynkamp have any reference to the school of Kampen, but only to the struggle against the heretic Bartholomeus who mainly worked and found support in Kampen, with the attendant consequences.² What of the letters to John Cele? Only a few of them have been preserved, and something there is mentioned in a letter to the pastor of Zwolle, Reinerus Drijnen. Most of the letters deal with the writing of books, and a couple with various matters of a social nature. One does mention the school, not exactly the teaching, but the apostolate. Groote exhorts the pastor in question, who was very well disposed towards him, to preserve peace and harmony, with magister Johannes Cele, a noble if somewhat difficult member of the church in Zwolle. ‘Do not lead the sheep to graze away from the Church, to the tents of the heathen. Do not cut off from you a sure and steadfast member, whose like you will not find among thousands, to embrace a less noble member.’³ A few years later, after July 1384, conflict does appear to have arisen between the pastor and the school rector.⁴ The pastor had forbidden Cele to admit certain persons to his sermons and to the school, good people at that! According to Groote the people in question were women who

2 See below.
4 Ger. M. Ep. n. 64, p. 254.
were prevented by the pastor from speaking with good men, and lay people who are not capable of discussing good things. These were evidently not school children, but a gathering of adults in the school, men and women who came and listened to what Cele had to say, and held a discussion afterwards. In Groote's opinion the pastor had no say in the matter. He had jurisdiction only in the forum of conscience. Cele must therefore ignore this injunction. Groote wrote as much to the pastor and Cele was allowed to open the letter, read it and reseal it! The pastor had probably not confided such a dispute to Cele, and considered that Groote was here poaching on his preserves.

It remains, for the rest, a remarkable initiative, though it probably had no connection with the teaching in the school. The various matters on which Groote corresponded with Cele, show the close friendship which existed between them, and at the same time Groote's concern with all kinds of people and problems. Groote's constant appeals to Cele for all manner of charitable works, characterize the rector as an exceptionally good man, of whom Groote was perhaps inclined to take a little advantage.

Letter number 13 to Cele, which deals chiefly with books,¹ also mentions pastor Drijnen concerning whom Groote wishes to speak with Cele when he arrives presently in Kampen. He warns him already, though, that the affair is no trifling matter: it is about clandestine marriages (de clandestinis).

He does not know exactly what the Synodal Statutes have to say about them; on this point his memory failed him. It seems to him that the man was excommunicated or certainly should have been. As regards the money, you must know that in my opinion he is bound to give back to the church what he has received and he must also be disposed to contribute an equal amount from his own purse to the Church at Zwolle. The sin will long remain, but so long as he is intending to pay from the Church's goods, which he cannot and may not do, so long remains the sin. But indeed, why am I writing all this? What has it to do with me? He stands or falls before God; let us pray to the Lord, let us not concern ourselves too much about this, lest we be embroiled in the sin. Ours, I mean mine, have been as great or greater. I did not see to it that Nicolas was placed in a house - I was not even able to do it, hindered as I was by many things. I did not even have time, except at night. This letter has cost me a night and one morning. We will discuss the other matters in Kampen’!

¹ Ger. M. Ep. n. 12, p. 46; dated by Mulder, 23 March 1380.

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In conclusion Groote exhorts Cele to joy and content; to cooperation, to a strengthening of their friendship and to secrecy concerning what they discuss together.

In another letter Groote encourages Cele to contribute himself and to beg for a certain Everard who, as we saw, entered Altenkamp. At the same time he besought him most earnestly to place ‘your Matheus, who is poor and good, in a guesthouse’. He blesses God Who has thus given Cele the opportunity to do good, entirely without a vow. Groote's intention with this last remark is probably to render life in the world attractive. He can serve his neighbour well, without entering a monastery.¹

The letter of May 1382,² is characteristic for Groote's special sentiments and ideas. He begins with a monastic question with which he was very preoccupied, for he enclosed in this letter a document of bishop Floris of Wefelinkhoven, destined for the abbot of Dikninge³ (who is not mentioned by name). This letter was written at the request of Herman of Blydenstede, probably pastor of that place and a monk of the abbey in question. Cele must see to it that Herman of Blydenstede gets this letter, in order to hand it to the abbot personally. What was the reason for this complicated process? Why did the bishop give this letter to Gerard Groote? In order that it should thus safely reach the abbot? The only explanation seems to be that Groote had intervened with the bishop in order to obtain this letter. For this document deals with a question which, as we have already seen, had a particular interest for Groote; that is, the bringing of a dowry by the sisters and the origin of the prebendary system. This particular letter is preserved in the Cartularium of Dikninge, and published in the roll book of Groningen and Drente.⁴ According to the bishop more sisters were admitted than could properly live from the incomes, with the result that some no longer lived in the convent and that the clausura was broken. This is precisely what Groote had been arguing so persistently. These dowries indeed raised the incomes of some individuals, but the community as a whole suffered harm. The bishop, however, did not decree that the dowries and prebends should be discontinued, only that there should be no more than 24 Sisters.

¹ Ger. M. Ep. n. 14, p. 48; dated by Mulder, ex Kampen, anno 1380 medio.
² Ibid., n. 32, p. 138, dated by Mulder as above.
³ Probably John, see A.J.M. Arts, Het dubbelklooster Dikninge, Diss. Nijmegen 1945, 270.
⁴ II n. 703, A.J.M. Arts, oc. 82.

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After this incidental question, the letter goes on to discuss the admittance of a woman to the Beguinehouse. A woman from Zwolle had sought a place in the Beguinehouse and Cele had asked Groote's advice. He had suggested that she should leave the house, since she caused trouble for the others and had not too good a name.\(^1\) It is difficult to decide if this woman is the same one concerning whom he is now writing to Cele; the first seems already to live in the house and the second is still seeking admittance. Be that as it may, Groote had come to hear that this woman had a daughter whom she wished to bring with her and keep by her until she married. This was too much for Groote. Although he loved the woman in the Lord, he did not entirely trust her in the matter of continence. He considered this an abomination, yet some measure must be taken whereby the woman would be saved and not fall away (on Groote's account).\(^2\) This attitude is typical of Groote, but still more so is his eulogy of manual work. All those living in this house had to work; no one was allowed to beg. Work is healthy and necessary for the spiritual life. It had to be a form of work, however, which did not distract from the contemplation of the divine, from meditation: ‘\textit{interius ruminandum.}’ For this reason trade was not particularly suitable; baking and brewing for others comes closer; brewing for one's own house is better. Then there is spinning, sewing and weaving. Groote thus advised Cele: ‘keep Aleida in the house she is living in now.'\(^3\)

Groote revealed himself as legal adviser to Cele at about the same time.\(^4\) First of all he dispatched Cele's messenger and friend, John by name, whom Cele had sent to Groote with letters, to the Carthusians with a recommendation: ‘but I also told him that, from what I had heard, there was no room.’ He furthermore advised Cele, on the authority of Hippocrates, not to take pills in the increasing warmth. As regards the case of perjury, the man will, if accused, have to suffer the punishment allotted by law and custom. He can however, in some mysterious manner, return the five pounds to the city through the confessor, so that it cannot be used to furnish evidence of the perjury. The ecclesiastical punishment may be moderated by a wise priest. Cele also entertained scruples concerning an annuity which he had bought, and asked Groote's advice. Groote did not dare to give judgment. He

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\(^1\) Ger. M. \textit{Ep.} n. 31, p. 137.  
\(^2\) \textit{Ibid.}, n. 32, p. 138.  
\(^3\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 140.  
\(^4\) \textit{Ibid.}, n. 34, pp. 143-145; dated by Mulder, June 1382.
quoted certain theologians and lawyers who considered it permissible, and others who held it to be usury. In the end he advised Cele to give up this annuity. As regards a house which he had received by legacy, he need not worry about it. Concerning the rent of 36 pounds, however, he need not convert it into a perpetual interest. If at all possible it was better to buy land with it and give it to a monastery for an annual rent. Groote himself had done this. He had given land to the Carthusians under similar conditions.¹

Finally there is yet another document from Groote to Cele, who stayed for some time in Monnikhuizen, with an earnest request to come to Zwolle to testify in some affair, of which no further particulars are given.² Cele refused to come at first since as he said, there were witnesses enough. This, however, was not the opinion of Groote or of pastor Reinerus Drijnen of Zwolle. Cele’s testimony was essential and Groote and the pastor besought him earnestly to come to Zwolle, even threatening to have him brought by force, on the Commissioner’s authority. He could then return to Monnikhuizen.

What was this urgent affair? In all probability the trial of Bartholemew, who had preached in Kampen and Zwolle. Cele was to be a crown witness against him. The matter in question was a maximum fidei negotium and the fratres of Zwolle were also implicated. It is not yet clear whether these were already the Brethren of the Common Life. If they were, then the letter must be dated a year later.

The pastor and Groote undoubtedly realized what authority Cele enjoyed in this case, but if he stayed away the others too would become timorous and Groote would be left powerless.

These letters show the vital friendship between Groote and Cele. Cele repeatedly assisted Groote, and for his part asked Groote's advice. Groote gave his opinion readily but in a somewhat authoritarian manner; probably the best method for such a vacillating person as Cele. He dealt with all kinds of questions from ordinary daily life, which clearly shows Groote's activity and interest in people. The school, however, is scarcely mentioned, while there is no word at all about education or teaching or the carrying out of innovations.

¹ Also comes the above mentioned passage on the training of a relative of Groote's, whom he wished to place in a monastery. See p. 58.
H. The Man of Learning

Groote was a well educated person, even a man of learning, extremely well read in the Holy Scriptures and in the writings of the Fathers, also in the classics and various medieval mystics, lawyers, theologians and philosophers. We shall give details of all this presently. Thirteen years of study in Paris bore fruit, despite the worldly life to which he and others have testified. The former Paris professor, Salvarvilla, enumerates Groote's branches of study as follows: *scientiae liberales, naturales* and *morales* and also *theologia* and *jus canonicum*. These terms, which must have been clear to the initiated, were indicated somewhat more briefly by Groote himself: *scientiae liberales*, theology and law. Both mean study in the faculties of Arts, theology and law. The Arts faculty comprised the seven liberal arts, but also natural and moral philosophy (i.e. physics and ethics). After the degree of Master of Arts (Magister Artium), began the study in the higher faculties: theology, law and medicine. Geert Groote combined theology and Canon law. After gaining his Master's degree in the preparatory faculty he continued to study for another eight years. It may be that he dabbled too much in both faculties, and thus was not able to take certain examinations. To judge from his letters he knew a good deal of theology, but his real subject was law, probably Canon law. He was trained as a lawyer and remained a lawyer all his life. He was completely at home in the law and in legal commentaries and moreover approached most questions from a juridical point of view, even crucial ones like the problem of the focarists. We shall see evidence of this later. He was thus appointed a student of law in 1365.

Groote's interest in learning is principally evident from his unquenchable desire for books, not only ascetic works but also theological tomes by which he could enrich his preaching and document his own works. He himself says that he studied not only the Bible, but also the Fathers - Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory, Jerome, Chrysostom, Dionysius and also the later writers like Isidore, Bede, Bernard, Hugo and Richard of St. Victor. The letters and works, however, show

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1 Ger. M. Ep. n. 60, p. 223.
4 R. Post, Geert Groote in pauselijke oorkonden, 40.
quotations from very many others - Aristotle, Seneca, Plato, Cicero, from theologians like Thomas Aquinas, Henry of Ghent, whom he calls *doctor solemnis*, and Duns Scotus *magnus in theologia*.¹ In all the struggles in which he was engaged, in his constant pastoral care and many worries he remained the scholar, the thirster after knowledge and collector of books. Several of his letters deal with the copying of books, which he wishes to possess himself in order to study and utilize in his apostolate. This desire for books is evident from the beginning of his preaching right up to his death. Several of his friends shared this longing and helped him and each other to fulfil their wishes. This perpetual activity to multiply books is illustrative of the medieval situation which preceded the invention of printing.

Groote was convinced that, in comparison with other servants of God, he was dull and useless to others. He already wrote as much to Herman Lippe, Canon of St. Severinus in Cologne in 1374² and repeated it in 1381 in a letter to Ruusbroec or his canons. He calls himself garrulous and always and ever desirous for books (*avarus et peravarus librorum*), as Ruusbroec well knew. He considered this a failing. He was obliged from henceforward to be more moderate in his collection of books, he writes, or to stop altogether, both because the money was running out and because he began to find it irritating to deal with copyists and everything else pertaining to this matter.³ Whether failing or virtue, his desire for books was in any case one of his most characteric traits. Even if the money seems to be running out in 1381 he continued until his death to negotiate with copyists concerning writing and payment.

He personally employed one or more writers. One of these was Gerlach, whom he esteemed very highly. Gerlach's writing was extremely useful and he worked continually.⁴ Groote was very upset when this Gerlach decamped with a sum of money and, it appears, something belonging to Gerard Haermaker, presumably one of his colleagues. He also took Groote's model books (for copying from) and his parchment. Groote did his utmost to persuade Gerlach to return. He would be even more kindly disposed towards him and Gerlach must not mind his colleagues and their talk.⁵ These colleagues

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⁴ n. 7, p. 16 (to be dated 1381).
⁵ *Ger. M. Ep.* n. 25, p. 113, 115.

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of Gerlach must, like Gerard Haermaker, have also been scribes employed by Groote. He had five writers in the spring of 1384 (according to Mulder 1383): *habeo de presenti quinque scribentes*, he wrote on the 5th of April 1384 to John van de Gronde in Amsterdam.¹

Were these writers also the first Brethren of the Common Life, as suggested by John Busch?² A few of the brothers may have been recruited from their ranks, but Groote's letters provide no evidence of this. They rather give the impression that these writers worked for Groote for a salary, in order to earn their living.

There were also others, besides these salaried copyists of Groote's principally John van de Gronde in Amsterdam, later one of the Brethren, William Vroede, school rector in Deventer, and John Cele, rector in Zwolle, who wrote themselves but also farmed out work.

Groote's correspondence with William Vroede is confined to the year 1381.³ This man, who at this time had been rector in Deventer for three years and wished to enter a monastery, was a person after Groote's own heart. He really would have preferred to retain him for active life in the world. It was he who found copyists for Groote and with whom Groote discussed, both orally and in writing, which books he wanted. A book dealing with the dissension between clergy and people need not be copied for the present. Groote wanted to see the book first and also ask the opinion of scholars. But he thanks Vroede for the *Glossa Senece*. He especially desires original works, and lists what he has in mind: all the books of Ambrose and Isidore, four of John Damascenus; the letters of Augustine, Gregory and Jerome, various books of Augustine. Of Augustine he possessed only: *Super Genesim contra Manicheos*. Have a few of these copied, he wrote to Vroede, and I for my part shall have something copied for you. I have given Gerlach 28 quaternions on which he will begin as soon as he has finished your book *De profectibus*. See to it that he writes as quickly as possible.⁴ Vroede then put various questions to Groote, in writing, some of them concerning the copying of books. Groote answered thus:⁵ I have not got Augustine's letter *Ad Julianum comitem*. I have only a few of the letters or of the sermons resembling letters of Augustine. I lent out a book containing many but not all of the letters. It is now being copied

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¹ Ger. M. *Ep.*, p. 204.
² Busch 253-254.
³ Ger. M. *Ep.* 7, 8, 17, 18, see above p. 90, 91, 92.
by John van de Gronde in Amsterdam. I do not know whether it contains the letter you want. In any case, they are given better in *Decretis* XXV di. c. ‘Unum’ ... I have a book of Augustine's sermons of which I have read only half; but I lent it to someone outside Deventer. I do not know if it includes the homily quoted, for special treatises of Augustine, such as the treatise *De penitentiae* and others, are often called sermons or books.

The well known rector of Zwolle, John Cele, also wrote for Groote or had books copied for him. In Groote's opinion Cele was too slow and kept the borrowed models for too long. Groote pointed this out to him, but did his utmost not to offend this man, who was his friend.

To the letter in which he adjured him not to enter a Franciscan monastery he added a note concerning the bags with books. ‘Send back the quaternions of the books which I sent you to copy and which you have already copied.’ And soon afterwards: ‘I am shortly coming to Kampen. Do not delay, I beg you, coming there with all the books of mine you have, and also the two which the priest Peter was to send me, or at least send them to me. Bring your travelling bag with you, for you will not be able to take mine back. I should like you to come on Wednesday; come or send as quickly as possible before Saturday. Bring with you the quaternions or the beginnings of the books you have begun.’ Cele may have brought many of the books back, but to judge from Groote's 13th letter he is not yet satisfied.

Learning and books were necessary for the edification of the faithful. Groote now proposes to Cele a *lex*, a rule to be voluntarily kept by them both and which is not all too clear for an outsider. It seems to amount to this, that neither of them is obliged to copy a book for the other, if this does not fit in with his work programme, with the sole exception that both must work as quickly as possible if this should be required by the general interest, by which Groote understands the benefit of the Church. Groote gives a few examples to show what he means. One of his aims in proposing such a rule seems to have been to ensure that Cele sent back the borrowed models in time. In the examples he took the opportunity of pointing out certain obligations to Cele, usually in the form of reciprocity. Cele must not only hasten and send back the borrowed models, but also lend his own books to be copied, in order to contribute to the production.

After a long introduction his whole purpose is suddenly revealed. ‘Friend, I am uneasy in my mind and ashamed that we keep the books

\[\text{1} \quad \text{Ger. M. Ep. 10, p. 37.} \]
\[\text{2} \quad \text{Ibid., n. 11, p. 39.} \]
\[\text{3} \quad \text{Ibid., n. 13, p. 42-47.} \]
\[\text{4} \quad \text{Ibid., p. 44.} \]

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from Amsterdam too long. There is no book in the world that I should wish to acquire in this way. I am grieved; I should like to return everything, as is proper, and yet I have kept for more than a year a book of sermons belonging to a person whom we do not know and with whom we are not linked in particular friendship. If I had lost my own sermons it would be a small matter, but it lies heavily on my conscience that I have kept another's property so long. If only they (the sermons) had never come, if only you had never had my model to start copying. I should not like to send another person's book from Kampen to someone I do not know. I should be more worried about that one little book, than about all my own books, if I had sent them. So send it in any case, or bring it to Kampen. I am sending you the material and the Summa Parva and Ethica. Besides a number of books you also have in your possession a few quaternion of the Meteorum et Ethicorum and perhaps others as well.' He ends with an exhortation to keep the rule.

The non-return of the books of sermons he had obtained from Amsterdam weighed heavily on Groote's mind, and when the priest Gijsbert Dou asked for them again, Groote turned once more to Cele.²

Another time, when Groote wrote to Cele on these matters, he ended his letter thus: 'Send me parchment, if you have received any. I should like to know the name of the parchment maker. Friend, I pay you well for copying although you scarcely reward me with your illegible and misshapen writing.'³

Shortly after this Groote wrote Cele a short note which deals entirely with letters. A self-accusation served as introduction to what follows: 'I am keeping the book Sapientis et providi (it is not certain what book he is here referring to) longer than is proper. If a book has been begun it must be completed, if it is to be ready between now and the octave of Whitsun. Let no one begin now on a new book. Send the book back around the octave day already mentioned. I shall most likely have writers here. I shall relieve you for the present, reserving your writing for another time. Will you please send me as well whatever money is over from the two old scills for I need money. I am, thank God, nearly depleted. Besides, I have here in Deventer a fitting and suitable market. My conscience does not wish to grieve the man whose book it is. I am sending you Supra primum psalmum of the seven (penitential) psalms, but do copy it, for it earns his bread. After writing this letter I re-

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2 Ibid., n. 14, p. 48-49.
3 Ibid., n. 32, p. 140.

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membered that the seven psalms have already been returned. I am sending them to you. Send them back quickly. Tell the priest Martin to send the *Orologium* back.¹ Shortly before his death on July 5th 1384 Groote wrote again to Cele: ‘I have commissioned two brothers from Zwolle to copy what I preached in Utrecht, at your expense. Further I ask you if you will have a book copied for us, one of those sent by the people in Kampen, in whatever script you like, so long as we get it.’ Groote is in full fettle. He also mentions: ‘Florens Radewijn will send you something so that you may translate something from my writings into Dutch, whatever seems to you useful for our frater John (van de Gronde) and his brothers (Brethren of the Common Life in Deventer). Let them speak courageously concerning the *notorii fornicatores*, according to the example of the document.’²

The third person with whom Groote repeatedly corresponded about books was the priest John van de Gronde. He was not a school rector but a pastor in Amsterdam, working with Gijsbert Dou and William Oude Scutte. Groote finally managed to have John van de Gronde called to Deventer to assist Florens Radewijn as spiritual leader of the Devotionalists (1384). He succeeded Groote as leader of the sisters in the Master Geerts house. He may be accounted as one of the first Brethren of the Common Life who, with Groote, held the possessions including the house in Zwolle, in his name as joint property.³

About the summer of 1381 Groote replied to a letter from John van de Gronde who had submitted to him a problem dealing with pastoral care, and had requested various books to be copied.⁴ Groote began by saying ‘I love you, because you love books (*biblia*). If I remember rightly you still have a book on the guidance of persons who remain obdurate and show no repentance or of whom men despair. Have it copied.’ After dealing with the question of pastoral care which van de Gronde had put to him (*ars artium est regimen animarum*), he finally returns to the books. ‘I have written that which really could not be written. I do not see how you can obtain a good copy through me. But in any case, send back a copy of this letter, written on two folios, so that it can be placed in a book. Yesterday I received the consignment from John of Frankfort. Someone in Zutphen whose life of Jerome is being copied for me, has the *Vitae patrum*. I dare not demand my

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¹ Ger. M. *Ep.* n. 33, p. 141.
³ Schoengen, 279-284.

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books back before I have returned what I have borrowed. As soon as this is done you shall have what you asked for. I recently began writing the Nijmegen letter and in the writing it grew into a book, written in small script, but not yet in easily readable letters. At about the same time Groote wrote to William Vroede that he had lent a book containing many of Augustine's sermons to brother John van de Gronde in Amsterdam, to be copied. Two This continued for a time but finally, on 27th December 1383, Groote requested John van de Gronde to come to Deventer. In this letter too, he cannot prevent himself from talking about books. It was in the days of his wretchedness and humiliation. ‘I shall send various books to Hugo (Goldsmit) of Haarlem (like this Amsterdam priest a kindred spirit of Groote's). I should be glad if master William (Oude Scutte) would have something copied for him from one or two volumes, if we need them.’ In the following year (5th April 1384) Groote repeats his request that John van de Gronde should go to Deventer, and once again discusses books. ‘I have received the books which you wrote. The friends in Kampen have the last section of Ruusbroec's *Van den gheestelijken Tabernakel*. They are going to copy it and when I get it back I shall send it to William Oude Scutte in Amsterdam. I do not remember ever having written anything about the *Curiositate vestium*. I am returning the volume of the *Passionale*. Send me one and a half écus worth of parchment from your supply and be sure not to delay. If you have none left, get it from master William (Oude Scutte) or Gijsbert (Dou). I have five writers at the moment, and they are busy on Augustine's *Super Johannes* and Bede's *Super Marcum*. I am afraid I shall not have enough parchment until the new supply comes for which I sent four scils to Gijsbert.’ Shortly after this (before July 28th 1384) Groote sent John van de Gronde the *Sententiae* of Peter Lombard, for which, ‘according to my records, I have paid from the sum reserved for the purchase of books, three francs, eight solidi, counting the franc as 13 solidi and the old scilt of France as 19 solidi. Will you give the money to Gijsbert (Dou) for the parchment and certain other things.’

According to all this data, writing was being done for Groote and his friends in Deventer, Zutphen, Kampen, Zwolle and Amsterdam.

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It was not all, however, intended for Groote. He himself wrote too and had things written for his friends. It was a continual exchange. If anyone wanted a particular book, he wrote to a friend to see if he could get hold of it and if so, if he could have it copied. The availability of models was no less important than the actual copying. In addition, money had to be found to pay the copyists and to buy parchment. Other people too were implicated in this business of lending and copying, notably the monastery libraries like those of Monnikhuizen and Groenendaal. In the 12th letter (12th February 1380) Groote wrote to a monk of Monnikhuizen or Geertruidenberg, or more probably Eemsteyn, to send him the remaining part of the Moralia of Gregory the Great, written on paper, and the Vitae Patrum of ‘which I lack one of the four parts,’ and also the Super Regum of Nicolas de Lyra (± 1340). ‘I hope to return them soon. When he (i.e. Groote's secretary Henry) comes back, let him bring with him one of my books which the procurator has, and another which brother John (a cleric) borrowed, and one of Jerome and also all the quaternions in Mr. Andreas' possession. Be so good as to help him to reach Zutphen safely (by way of Nijmegen or in another manner). Put my books in one of your bags intended for me. You have bags enough and I have too few. It must not be too big, but strong. I shall need it on my next journey, around Easter.’ As regards the books from Groenendaal, Groote is implicated in the publication of Ruusbroec's books. He has already passed on the first volume De XII Baguttis but he dare not publish the second volume. He advises moreover against publishing Ruusbroec's second book De Gradibus (1381). Later, in 1384, (or 1383) Groote urgently requested the Brethren of Groenendaal to allow him to give to Mr. B one of their large volumes of St. Augustine, which he has asked for in Groote's name, in order to copy something. ‘The man is strong, and will keep your book well. But if you should suffer some inconvenience, I promise you that I will more than recompense you. And if you wish to copy any books of ours, we will send them to you, just as you send us the books we desire.’

Even in Prague John Chrysostom's commentary on Matthew was copied for him. Vroede could copy the so-called Originalia, which were there.

The letters assume that the writers were paid. Groote, Cele, Vroede and van de Gronde also did some copying themselves, but it is clear that they usually farmed out the work or had it done at home under

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1 Ger. M. Ep., p. 41.
3 Ibid., n. 54, p. 207.
4 Ibid., n. 7, p. 15.

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their supervision. There is frequent mention of payment, and the work *facere*, to have written is constantly employed. For this reason, these salaried professional writers can scarcely be considered as scholars, or as the first Brothers with whom Florens Radewijns inaugurated the Brethren of the Common Life, as recounted by John Busch 80 years after the foundation of the Brotherhood. In the house of Zwolle the brothers have done some copying, at the end of Groote's life.\(^1\)

Although various books are mentioned, we really know very little about what was copied. Only incidental information has come down to us, which for the rest, clearly outlines the work, the difficulties and the general appreciation of books. However, those books which are mentioned as due to be copied, lent out or desired, characterize plainly enough the attitude of mind of Groote and his kindred spirits. Most of them are the works of the great Church Fathers, with the Gospel commentaries taking preference. For example, John Chrysostom's *Super Mattheum* (page 5) Augustine's *Super Genesis* (page 16); *Super Evangelium Johannis* (page 16). They also read the general works of these authors: *Libri Ambrosii*, Augustine, Gregory's *Moralia* (page 41) and *Pastorales* (page 101) and the letters, (*Registerum Gregorii*) (page 16); also the letters of Augustine (page 18). Then there were the ascetic works like *Vitae Patrum*, *Vita Hieronymi* (page 106). Of the medieval authors they read also the ascetic and mystical writings like the *Horologium* of Suso (page 15) and the *Profectus Monachorum* of David of Augsburg (page 16), but for the rest very few medieval works. A *Summa* is indeed mentioned on page 43 and on page 44 a *Summa Parva*, but Groote seems to have had little interest in the dogmatic works of the great scholastics, although he does quote Thomas Aquinas. He may have already acquired these in his student period or earlier, as he did the *Decretum* and *Decretales* with the numerous glosses. He repeatedly quotes from these works and is completely familiar with them, but there is no indication that he ever had them copied during his ‘public life’ as he did the book *Super Regum* by the medieval exegete Nicolas of Lyra (page 41). He did not possess Augustine's book ‘*De Igne Purgatorii*’ (page 17). He was also fond of sermons. Of the classics he possessed or acquired the *Ethica* and *Meteorum Aristotelis* and the *Glossa Senecae*.

It is a meagre list. If we should enumerate only the works Groote read, this would give an entirely different impression of his scholarship.

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\(^1\) Ger. M. *Ep*. n. 64, p. 254.
To compile a complete list of quotations would lead me too far from my original argument. I shall content myself with reproducing the works listed on the first fifty pages of the edition of the letters.

Old Testament: Gen. (pp. 7, 25, 49); Exodus (pp. 8, 10, 37); Psalms (pp. 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, 18, 27, 39, 42, 48, 50); Song of Sol. (p. 6); Isaiah (pp. 23, 24, 28, 42); Jeremiah (p. 23); Ezekiel (p. 36); Hosea (or Joel?) (p. 6); Micah (pp. 26, 42);

New Testament: Matthew (pp. 24, 25, 28, 31); Mark (pp. 28, 31); Luke (pp. 2, 5, 28, 31); John (p. 3); The Acts (p. 27); Paul, Romans (pp. 2, 25, 31); 1 Cor. (pp. 3, 7, 9, 24, 27, 42); 2 Cor. (p. 40); Gal. (pp. 6, 8, 30); Eph. (pp. 3, 8, 42, 43); Phil. (pp. 3, 37, 50); Col. (p. 28); Tim. (pp. 28, 59); Heb. (p. 37); Jas. (p. 5); 2 Pet. (p. 27); 1 John (p. 50); Jude (p. 27);

Other writers: Valerius (p. 28); Seneca (pp. 18, 26, 29, 34); Livy (p. 26); Cicero (pp. 26, 30); Aristotle (pp. 29, 33, 42); Stoics (p. 34); Gregory I (p. 23); Augustine (pp. 18, 21, 28); Bernard (p. 18); Law books (pp. 5, 18); Glossators (pp. 18, 19).

I. The inward Devotion and the imitation of Christ

The quotations given are sufficient to characterize the scholar, after all that has been said about Groote's love of books. Apart from what has already been mentioned concerning the monastic life, the place of friends in the monastery, the encouragement of monastics, and what is still to be written concerning the struggle against the focarists, I should like to make the following point. There are several letters which recommend the inner devotion, for example the letter to John ten Water\(^1\) and Berthold Ten Have\(^2\). This emerges most clearly in letter 62\(^3\) which we have already mentioned and of which the inscription, added later, made mention of the *Imitatio Christi*. This letter is therefore associated with the four treatises of Thomas a Kempis, which together are called ‘The Imitation of Christ.’ Groote addresses himself to a man who, as a result of setbacks, had fallen into a depression, no longer felt at home in a certain monastery and wished to transfer to another monastery which would be less strict. Groote was not in agreement with this last, but he recognised the monk's difficulties and pitied him. As a remedy he recommends prayer and the study (*lectio*) of the Holy Scriptures.

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This latter especially banishes sadness, teaches one to fight and overcomes temptation. This study is characterized by the words: *Masticande et ruminande sunt scripture* which occur frequently among the Devotionalists. The devout life, however, demands not only one fight but a continual struggle. This is underlined with examples from a theologian and a farmer. The straight path leads through afflictions. It is thus that one must keep in mind the passion of Christ, not only in the intellect, but also with the desire to share in Christ's passion and cross. *Crux Christi in ruminazione passionis fabricanda est.* We must bear contumely for the love of Christ and from the desire to become like unto Him. This is the imitation of Christ which is confined to Christ's passion and strikes a different tone from the *Imitatio* of Thomas a Kempis.

The letter to Rudolf of Enteren\(^1\) whom Groote, as we saw, endeavoured to wean away from astrology, also contains several expressions which are characteristic of the Devotionalists, including that he himself is so sadly deficient and enmeshed in failings (*in sordibus volutor*). This is for the rest only the introduction, for he is amazed that Rudolf complains so about faint-heartedness and the decline of virtue, comes to the assistance of others and cannot help himself. In this letter one can read the words which recall Thomas a Kempis: learning is conducive to pride and detracts from the love of God. Groote thinks however, that learning can also be directed towards God although care must be taken especially not to seek idle fame.

The letter to the hermits also contains all manner of advice on how to attain to a devout life, as might be expected from hermits, but also to the inward devotion.\(^2\) They must be closed with heart and mouth to people and to all human things, and turning within their own hearts, remain with God. Groote's spirituality will be discussed in chapter VIII.

**J. Various Questions**

If this love of books and continual striving to extend his own collection, even, one might say, at the expense of his last penny, can be said to signify an extremely positive attitude towards learning, the question remains whether Groote took any stand in the scholarly

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2. *Ger. M. Ep.* n. 68, p. 265. They must be closed with heart and mouth: ‘van den lieden ende van mennichvoudicheiden, ende inwendigh blive in sijns selves herte mit Gode.’

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activities of the time. Did he pronounce himself in favour of the realists or the nominalists, for the via antiqua or moderna, and what was his standpoint regarding the Church, especially in the difficult days of the Schism. All this can be better viewed and judged once we have dealt with Groote's struggle against the Focarists and the ‘Heretics’ as seen in his letters and works. We shall also, to this end, examine the isolated works, including the Christmas sermon on the four sources of meditation, the moral address and the letter on the Schism.

Before broaching this material, however, it is perhaps useful to mention a few more small details from the letters, which may serve to complete the image of Groote and his activities. First of all there is Groote's conviction that the book De amore which is attributed to Bernard and which Willem Vroede wanted to copy, was not actually written by Bernard. The important thing is, that Groote showed interest in such questions and employs arguments which are still valid. He points out that the style is not Bernard's as can be easily seen on comparison. The tenor of certain questions, whereby he makes reference to Augustine, does not accord with this latter and other ancient writers, but corresponds to that of recent and modern scholars. The manner of quotation differs from Bernard's method. The book De amore is not classified in old libraries under Bernard's name, not even in the monastery libraries of his order. On reading the book it is evident that the flores Bernardini are absent and that the writer, unlike Bernard, has not sufficiently penetrated and assimilated Augustine's ideas. Seneca already posed this as a requirement. This is immediately plain to anyone who has a taste for the spiritual in inner sentiments. The book is entered differently in different catalogues, which is not so with the other books of Bernard or Augustine. Groote thus gives here mainly the so called external evidence, and was conscious of this fact: I could submit to you many other arguments had I had time to peruse the book myself.¹ Then the internal arguments would be stronger.

Another point is the resolution of a moral issue, laid before Groote by William Vroede who once again shows himself harassed by scruples.² He asked whether the performing of a deed, small from the material point of view, out of contempt for God's law, could become a mortal sin. Vroede had read about this in Clincoek, which name must refer to Johannes Magires (Dencock, Klencock or Kleck) ca. 1374. He could not, however, follow his arguments and now asked Groote's opinion.

² Ibid. n. 8, pp. 19-22.
I doubt whether Groote's answer was of any assistance to him, for to me at least it is anything but clear. It does seem, though, that Groote can immerse himself in such subtle problems and form his own opinion. He begins, moreover, very sensibly with a pronouncement of St. Augustine that we can only know in the hereafter what is venial and what mortal sin. Groote was also of the opinion that it is easier to make this distinction in general than in particular cases. But he does finally suggest an answer, and one that diverges from St. Thomas Aquinas, who was unable to consider this particular case a mortal sin. Groote thinks that there can indeed be a question of mortal sin, but would defer to the judgment of someone more competent than himself. He is firm in his opinion that the aim can never make a wrong action right. The end does not justify the means. And what does he consider to be the good end? Building monasteries! Man must not relinquish his good intentions, even should an entire monastery or a thousand monasteries or a monastery for a thousand people be at stake - or whatever good he can set in train or accomplish. For small evil deeds must not be performed with a view to very good ones.

The questions dealt with in the letters are principally of a pastoral nature. Groote viewed the guidance of souls as an *ars artium*, the highest art, as did Gregory I. He found the condition of pastor so difficult that he dared not aspire to it himself. The fear of responsibility was the main reason why he did not wish to become a priest, except in cases of extreme need, when deacons were forbidden to preach. The greater part of his letter to his friend and later disciple John van de Gronde was devoted to the demands and difficulties of the *cura*. It is an interesting piece, but it is no wonder that certain texts occur therein which, taken in isolation, might be considered as proving that Groote doubted the value of sacramental absolution, or that in his view, the priest's absolution resulted merely in the restoration of the link with the visible Church. God alone converts the sinner. The priest shows that he (the unrepentant sinner) is absolved for the Church, but the true mother,

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5 Ger. M. *Ep.* n. 23, pp. 100-106. The treatise Cautele confessorum circa magnos peccatores adhibende, published by T. Brandsma in *O.G.E. XI* (1937) 11-12, with introduction, is nothing but a part of the letter referred to here. The comparison of the two texts gives some improvement and thus clarification.
6 *Solus Deus convertit peccatores*, p. 101

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the immaculate Church, does not accept him. He is admitted to the externals by the priest, but remains excluded from the internal life.¹

In actual fact he is referring to the penitent who comes before the priest without remorse and a purpose of amendment, confesses in the correct manner and displays outward sorrow and improvement and therefore receives absolution. It is well worth the trouble to analyse this letter more closely. With reference to a request by John van de Gronde to lend him a certain book dealing with the guidance of those who remain obstinate in sin, or sinners without repentance (non contriti) for whom there is no hope of conversion, Groote answers that he regrets he does not possess such a book. He then begins to discuss the difficulties of pastoral care. The exercise of the art of arts requires first proficiency in canon law and in theological science which in turn assumes a grounding in many other ethical and natural philosophical branches of learning - in other words a course of study in the faculty of arts, followed by one in theology and law. Groote, indeed, had pursued such a course. This must, however, be accompanied by experience, sufficient practice in the spiritual life and an insight into the minds and conditions of men (the human condition) which might today be termed psychological. Pope Gregory has described this very well and Groote hopes that John van de Gronde, who did pastoral work in Amsterdam without in fact being a parish priest would read Gregory's book and ponder on it. ‘But who is wise and good enough to guide the stiff-necked and those without hope, the non-contriti.’ It seems to me better to pray for these persons than to lead them. Sermons and exhortations have more effect on them than absolution and false confession. Only God converts the sinner. The conversion of sinners is more difficult than the creation of the world. The priest with his keys opens the school and the doors only for the contriti, for those for whom there is hope, who are not obdurate. Even God does not absolve such people without contrition. What does it signify when the priest absolves him on earth but he is not redeemed in heaven? The priest displays him as absolved for the Church - he who is not accepted by the true and immaculate Church. The priest admits him to the visible Church, but he is rejected by the invisible. But still the priest who has examined the person's interior depths shows that he is admitted to the invisible Church and at least acts accordingly. He says: absolvo te. He says something with which the internal is not accord. Is this person

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¹ Ostendit eum Ecclesie absolution, quem vera mater ecclesia immaculata non suscipit. Intromittitur ad extra per presbiterum, sed repellitur ad intra, p. 102.
then divided? Is he perhaps a liar? Is he different inside than out? He goes so far as to confess, yet remains different within from how he appears without; inside the devil and outside Christ, inwardly unrepentant and obdurate, outwardly as though converted through God by the communion and other things. Who would venture of his own accord into these snares unless he wished to be caught? In these evil times is it not already important enough if the good and learned abbot or prior lawfully governs twelve or twenty sheep according to a given rule, with whose entire attitude and spiritual visage he is familiar? It is especially dangerous for him, upon whom pastoral care is not imposed as a duty to entangle himself in the nets. Let these people go to their own priests who have accepted the cura as an unbearable burden, against their own will, not from ambition but sorrowfully and compelled by obedience. These are sent by the Holy Ghost and will be helped by the Holy Ghost. If another involves himself with these duties it is to be feared what is written: who loves danger, perishes in it. Let them brave the dangers. May God assist their hearts so that they may accomplish in full and eternal love what they have undertaken from a sense of ambition. I think that I have read in one of the letters of St. Bernard, that the great sinners were, on the advice of the confessors, directed to their own pastor. Do you perceive the danger? If such a priest feared to absolve the converted, what must we lesser men do?

It is thus that one must first strive to convert them through prayers, admonition, even by prescribing penances, before absolution may be given. The pastor must not prevent his subordinates from confessing, no matter how great the sinner is. If he is not converted, or will not refrain from sin or is obdurate, then he can not absolve him and lie before God, the penitent and the Church, and give him the opportunity to remain a sinner in the sins to which he is accustomed. But he may impose a penance, especially for him who will not amend his ways, so that the punishment of the penance may incline him to the good and to humility. Having regard to this, various decrees of the law must be understood which at first sight would suggest to the ignorant that the person who makes no purpose of amendment may indeed receive absolution. But he may not be absolved, but admonished, enlightened and a penance imposed on him.

If, for the rest, they say: we wish to make amends and the priest

1 Epistolae LXI and LXII, ed. Mabilloniana, Parisis 1719 I 63, see Ger. M. Ep. p. 102, n.e.
knows or assumes even on the basis of evident signs that they are still pursuing evil, or not sending away the focariae or not returning unlawful possessions, and that they do not really mean in their hearts what they profess with their mouths - in such a case I advise that the appointed pastor must deal otherwise than the freely chosen confessor. The latter in my opinion must not grant absolution, for although in confession the priest must believe what the penitent says about his own conscience, he who voluntarily hears the penitent and hopes that he will mend his ways is not bound to take him at his word. He may let him go, if he has seen the danger. It is very difficult to say how his own pastor must deal with such a man who says that he wishes to mend his ways; for in some cases he must simply refuse him absolution and communion on account of the contrast between his deeds and his words and say to him: You are making mock of the keys of the Church and the Sacraments. Take care! If you receive absolution and communion and have not a firm purpose of improvement and of sending the woman away, absolution and communion will not help you. They will even serve to your condemnation and punishment and to testify to your sins. Beware that you do not lie while speaking one thing and thinking another. The absolution is no absolution and you must later confess everything again. If, however, you speak the truth and show real sorrow and remorse, with the intention of sending her away, God will be merciful to you. After this he must order him to return and impose some penance on him, to cease whatever he has confessed so that he may admonish him later concerning the feigned penance. The confessor must not neglect to do this.

How great is this cura, this care and this vigilance! In some cases he must simply say: I beseech you, do not deceive me, yourself and others, for I see that you are making a bad confession and I see that you have no purpose of amendment. He must point out the lie to him clearly and hold up to him the example of the evil which proceeds from a false confession and also make plain to him his stony hardness of heart, and deeply rooted habit, and refuse to grant him absolution. If, however, the penitent persists in his assurance then he may sometimes simply give absolution, sometimes saying under threat: I see you returning to your own vomit; the next time I will not give you absolution.

Among lesser backsliders the guidance of souls is an extremely difficult and subtle task. Sometimes they must be granted conditional absolution, for example thus: If, and insofar as you wish to improve your ways from your heart, I absolve you. This must also be included
in the formula and after the absolution he must be told, in Dutch, that he is not absolved. If you say that you wish to make amends and do not mean it, then you must confess anew. And in such cases the freely chosen confessor must act more sternly than the confessor who is appointed. And I say this, if anyone should be willing to assume voluntarily such a heavy burden. All sorts of other varying circumstances may occur which may be better resolved by experienced people than by me. I omit to mention other considerable dangers which I, poor worldling, still afeared and vain, oppressed by the fame of a good name and still savouring human favour, should fear. In particular I omit the danger that, from fear of the face of a powerful man, who says what has to be done, I should either deal more severely with him (the penitent) or should hear him who ought not to be heard or absolve him who ought not to be fearful of reproaches, hate, or rewards. ‘It is therefore that I have resolved never to accept a gift from anybody. But this is not so for the good, pure men but for me, who have committed unchastity under every tree and upon every hill. Let my confessor, Gijsbert Dou, testify to this, who knows me better than anyone, since he has heard my confession from my youth and I advise you to follow in his train to the Holy Scriptures.’

In this treatise there is no question of contempt for priestly absolution but only a realization of the difficulties experienced by the confessor and Groote's fear of responsibility in this matter.

As we have already explained, Groote, with reference to the fact that a certain young man of little education wished to accept a position as parish priest, stressed again the responsibility of the pastoral state. Here too he employs the test of Gregory I; the guidance of souls is an *ars artium*. He lays particular emphasis however upon the difficulty of the pastor's attitude towards the nobility and upon the difficulty of adopting a correct attitude towards the excommunicated. This is a requirement scarcely possible of fulfilment.

Luckily for the parish priests of this period, not all their parishioners were hardened sinners or subject to pressure from the high and mighty, however much the right of patronage may have been conducive to this. Despite Groote's pessimism there was still considerable interest among the clergy for the position of pastor or for that of substitute parish priest (vice-curatus) which carried the same responsibility. Yet it is remarkable that Groote, who was not willing to accept such responsibility himself, nonetheless gave advice to his friend and to those whom he considered unsuitable. He was not afraid to express his opinion and
could build up a good argument, but displayed at the same time his pessimistic mentality which was inclined to severity.

That he was actively concerned in the daily events of his time is obvious, not only from the two important questions which will be dealt with shortly, the struggle against the heretics and the focarists, but also from his involvement with all manner of less important matters. A few examples will suffice here.

A certain foreigner arrived in Deventer who professed to be a Saracen and born in Jerusalem. He practised medicine without knowing the slightest thing about it. Two years earlier, and even in the preceding year, he carried on this practice in Amsterdam, passing himself off as a Jew. In Vianen, Zutphen and Doesburg too he carried on his deceitful practices although in Vianen he was unmasked by another Jew to the extent of showing that he wasn't Jew at all. In Deventer he opted to be a Saracen. Groote sent for him and questioned him in the presence of the parish priest. The pseudo-physician asserted that he had lived in Jerusalem up to his thirtieth year. Groote asked him what language was spoken there. He answered Hebrew - which is false. As little Hebrew was spoken in Jerusalem as in Deventer. The local language was Arabic. He knew no other language but Dutch: ‘I examined him on the subject of medicine but he is a complete layman on this topic’. In Groote's opinion he was helped by the devil and was a faithful servant of the devil. He had even, without knowing it, made a pact with the devil. He was not only a falsifier of medical science, but also a robber of other men's money, a deceiver of the people and of the simple folk.

Groote therefore wrote to his friends, the *Dei emulatores*, zealots for God, in Zwolle, Kampen, or elsewhere to banish him from their territory. They must see to it, however, that he was not mishandled or killed on account of this letter. Groote drove him out of Deventer within five days. ‘And if I had not feared irregularity and could have charged him, he would not have escaped so easily. I did not, however, notify the magistrates.’ In a postscript for Henry he adds (if the letter is addressed to the *Dei emulatores* in Zwolle this may perhaps be Henry Voppenszoon) a request to copy the trial which is being held in Harderwijk from beginning to end. As he has already told him in Kampen, he has forgotten all the finer details. I cannot answer just like that.1

This is a typically medieval case! In the first place the man, although unmasked, is able to recommence his activities in a neighbouring

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1 Ger. M. Ep. n. 28, p. 122-123.

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district. Then again, a serious case like this, concerning fraud and swindle, is dealt with by private persons, Groote and the parish priest. The charlatan's successes are then attributed to the devil and a devilish pact. This might easily have led to a trial for witchcraft resulting in the death of the accused. Groote feared that his letter might prove the instigation for such a trial. He prevents this, which says much for his humanity, but he is as much a believer in the work of the devil as his contemporaries. His fear of handing over the culprit to the magistrates is not so much inspired by human feeling as by the desire to avoid the danger of irregularity, probably because he would have thus condemned a person to certain death. On this point his mind runs on purely legal lines, while on the main point he entirely forgets all legal proportions.

*Justitia et pax osculatae sunt:* Justice and peace have embraced. This is also the case with Gerlach and his friend Gerard Haermaker, writers employed by Groote who had decamped with the models of the texts to be copied. They already reached Cologne or Strasbourg. This has already been mentioned in another connection. In a loving but very insistent letter Groote besought Gerlach especially, of whom he had great expectations, to return. He wanted to save this man but he also regretted the loss of his models. Finally he also had resort to threats. If you do not come back soon, just see what will happen if I should write to the official in Cologne, to your father and your city and your brother and your friends and the people with whom you are living in Cologne.¹

But little love emanates from a letter addressed to a certain brother John, whom it is impossible to identify with certainty but who seems to me to be a Franciscan, in view of his title of *frater* and his preaching in Kampen, Zwolle and Zutphen. Groote had heard from his friends that this John was preaching presumptuous, vain and slanderous words against himself and his doctrine. We find here the first signs of a rejection of Groote's ideas. He himself considered his doctrine as apostolic and evangelical, traditional and sacred. It is not said of what it consisted, but something may be deduced from the postscript. It is a point which does not appear to us very important. Groote was accustomed to say that Christ suffers more from those who deliberately restrain people from a holy life and from the straight path than He did long ago from those who nailed Him to the cross.

Groote called upon John to make amends, to give satisfaction and

to retract his slanders. He must do this in the manner prescribed by the pastors of Deventer and Zwolle, or one of them, otherwise things will happen which you will find difficult to bear. You must know that there are many actions I can take against you. I can enter an accusation against you at the Roman Curia. Beware of the punishments meted out to slanderers, to those who compose libellous writings. Have a care for what you have said in your sermons, which I shall not mention.

This is clearly a threatening letter from a person with a knowledge of the law. The letter was sent to Zwolle as a sealed open letter so that the pastor there could read it before it was handed to John.¹

**K. The Lawyer**

In the case we have just mentioned, Groote was the judge, but he was also an excellent lawyer. In order to appreciate him in this capacity one cannot do better than study his letter to the provost of the newly founded monastery of Augustinian Canons Regular at Eemsteyn, together with that to John of Arnhem, canon of St. Peter's.² The dispute was concerned with the parish church of Eemkerk. The Canons Regular had assumed the *cura* on taking up residence. It had been laid upon them at this time by the provost of St. Peter's, who possessed the patronage of this church. The Canons Regular found, however, that the serving of the church distracted too much from the fulfilment of their monastic duties and their opinion was upheld by Gerard Groote. The provost and the chapter demanded that the fathers should appoint one of the monastics and could support their demand by reference to the signed contract.³ Groote answered a request for help by a letter to the provost of Eemsteyn. He fully informed the prior of the monastery concerning his point of view, which did not prevent the prior from taking an opinion on his advice from a jurist and lawyer. The deacon of St. Salvator in Utrecht, Gerard Foec, would act as their counsel, and 'you must pay him two gilders or so to oil the wheels a little! You must show him the draft which I sent and a piece dealing with the three possible ways, but do not let him see the other piece, intended for the forum of your conscience. I think that he will prefer to advise against the deacon of St. Peter's than against the others. You must earnestly request him to pay very particular attention, for the lawyers' papers

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are often very superficial due to press of business or to negligence.‘ Groote then goes on to discuss various other pieces of business but returns to the advice: ‘you must make it your business to find someone to defend your affair in the chapter of St. Peter. John of Arnhem, canon of St. Peter, is the man. I am writing him a letter of which I enclose a copy.’ Other matters follow then: ‘Do not worry about the threats from the chapter of St. Peter. Even if they take you to court, do not be afraid or despair of your rights but resist courageously - for injustice often follows those that flee, if they fear and are silent. Offer resistance. Later will surely come a settlement and it will be carried out. Unfortunately I cannot personally take on your defence. I have too many pressing problems, otherwise I would do it gladly at my own expense. God will not forget us both.’

Groote thus arranges everything for the paters. He suggests a counsel who is no friend of the opposition. He must not act openly as such, but must be given a tip in advance. He gives them precise instructions how they must negotiate with this man - how they must pay. He indicates what should be shown and what not. They must seek support from a deacon who is not well inclined towards the chapter of St. Peter and from a member of the chapter itself. He exhorts them to act as though they were completely in the right.

L. Attitude towards Ruusbroec and Groenendaal

Groote displays his heart-felt sympathy with his friends and at the same time his business knowledge and love of truth in a document addressed to the paters of Ruusbroec’s monastery, Groenendaal, sent at the same time as a letter to Ruusbroec himself - probably to avoid hurting the old master's feelings. After testifying to his esteem for the company and giving a humble description of his own condition, he voices his objections to certain passages in Ruusbroec's works. He had distributed the first part of his Boec van de twaalf Beginen and was continuing to do so, among others to lady Margarete of Mekeren. The remainder, however, he did not dare to distribute (publish, in the medieval sense). He was convinced of the holy spiritual disposition of the author, but what is formulated and deduced from the stars and planets and from astrology concerning the spiritual meaning, does not accord

2 Ibid., n. 24, pp. 107-109.
3 Ed. by J. van Mierlo, Jan van Ruusbroec werken IV, Tielt 1948.
with the pronouncements of the holy Fathers. Indeed, the Fathers have even, on various occasions, branded the astronomers as ignorant, erring and superstitious because they attribute all sorts of things to the stars and planets and consider that man's moral actions are influenced by the stars. Matters are indeed wrong, as understood by the majority of the clergy and the astrologers. In the sacred exhortations and appeals it is not permitted to deduce from the natural phenomena unless they are true and on all sides based on truth, although in my opinion they contain an element of truth for the simple and something familiar for very few. I assume it is for this reason that they were formulated in the father's (Ruusbroec's) mind. For everything, heaven and earth and everything therein through movements, symbols, acts and results, cries, testifies and teaches God and good and pleasing morals-as Ruusbroec well knows. But very many of the results attributed to the planets or stars, are not real. And this is why the Fathers opposed the astrologers.

This constituted a fairly complete rejection of astrology, such as Groote had already expressed in his letter to Rudolf of Enteren. He had already banished it from his own studies at his ‘conversion.’ In the book too, the effects attributed to the stars and planets and sometimes even the names of the heavenly bodies are not correctly rendered in Dutch, so far as form and meaning are concerned.

‘For this reason I advise you not to publish the book (with the exception of the first part) until all the useful material, which is considerable, omitting what is less suitable, has been gathered together and, if Ruusbroec judged this profitable, added to the first part.’ He gave his judgment, subject to the opinion of Ruusbroec and the more competent among you. He said this openly to the fathers as, in his opinion, befitted the honour of the Church and the holy congregation of the fathers and corresponding to the profundities of Ruusbroec's doctrine.

He would also desire that the Dutch book *Van de VII trappen in den groei van de Gheestelyke minnen* should not be published, unless certain corrections were made, especially regarding the hierarchy of the angels. ‘I have made a few tentative corrections in these following words of the father in Latin.’ He concludes by offering his apologies for being so presumptuous.

It is certainly remarkable that Groote should have drawn attention to these matters in 1381, before Ruusbroeck's death (2nd December

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1 Ed. in *Jan van Ruusbroec Werken*, L. Reypens S.J. Mechelen, Amsterdam III 1934, 223-272.
1381), but this is no foreshadowing of Jean Gerson's attack on Russbroec in the
beginning of the fifteenth century.1 Groote commented on a few incidental matters,
but recognized the correctness of Ruusbroec's thought. He continued meanwhile to
further the distribution of Ruusbroec's books, not only in Dutch but also in the Latin
translation. He himself translated Ruusbroec's Die Gheestelycke Brulocht into Latin
and so helped to ensure that the book would be read by persons who did not
understand Dutch.2 It is probably in connection with translation and publication that
he suggested changing a few words to the fathers of Groenendaal. If they were simply
taken as they stood, they would have to be rejected. Groote, however, held the opinion
that Ruusbroec's intentions were pure and healthy. 'I have written to you time and
again that you must set your mind to make corrections and have offered my help, if
I had time and could be of any assistance.'3

These corrections, however, were never made or were in any case not sufficient
to prevent all opposition. When, shortly after the Easter of 1384, Groote again had
occasion to write to Groenendaal about the copying of one of Augustine's works and
a written attack on his theses as proclaimed in the struggle against the Focarists (the
Canons Regular of Groenendaal had the piece in their possession and had not yet
sent it on), he mentions two new attacks on Ruusbroec's Gheestelycke Brulocht. One
was by an anonymous doctor of Theology who had already died, and the other by
Henry of Langenstein from Hessen, a companion in misfortune and fellow combatant
of Salvarvilla. Langenstein had openly announced in Worms and Mainz that the book
contained many errors. Groote found that this criticism was not only directed at
Ruusbroec but also at himself, since he had translated and published it. It is thus that
he proposes that the fathers should request Henry of Langenstein to make known to
them his objections to the book, and 'if he has anything against Ruusbroec's opinions,
apart from the correction of certain words, I shall defend him with you against anyone
at all.'4

Groote thus entirely accepted Ruusbroec's ideas but wished to make some alterations
in the composition. He was enough of a theologian to penetrate every shade of
Ruusbroec's meaning and to note the wrong use of words to convey his ideas.

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1 A. Combes, Essai sur la critique de Ruysbroec par Gerson, Paris 1945.
2 Jan van Ruusbroec Werken, L. Reyppens S.J. t, 1948, p. 103-249.
M. Action against the Heretics

At about this same time, the spring of 1382, Groote warns his friends in Kampen against the false prophets and the teachers of heresy who preached not the word of God, but all manner of fables and led the people astray. They must be opposed by the truth which must be defended by the true testimony of God as found in the Holy Scriptures.¹ One of these false prophets was Bartholemew, an Augustinian from the monastery in Dordrecht, a new friar limitor in Kampen.² He had given three or four sermons there which, as Groote had been informed, showed great similarity to Gerbrand's manner of preaching and that of the heretical furrier and the supporters of the ‘Free Spirits.’ Peter Horn identifies the first (Gerbrand) with a Kampen surgeon³ of whom nothing else was known. We know just as little about the furrier. Rather more is known about the members of the Free Spirits, and Father Bartholemew repeatedly mentioned them by name and praised them. Groote gives a brief account of Bartholemew's doctrine and this does indeed coincide with what we know of the heresy of the Free Spirits. Bartholemew's ideas exceeded all that was understandable and imaginable. It is said (notes Groote) that he employs many profane words and propagates errors. Bartholemew himself denied this, but he frequented inns, sought the favour of the rich and found fault with no one. Nothing is more dangerous than to preach about lofty things without pointing out the way which leads to them, for holy Dionysius says in his Mystica Theologia that he who preaches such things must refrain from impurity. To wish to contemplate the inmost depths of God without preparing for this by purification, is to open the door to heresy. According to Bartholemew the good and perfect man need not live in isolation, and the life of the hermit is not a perfect state, for Christ did not live a solitary life. All that God is by nature, we become through grace. There is only slight need for penitence. The life of the perfect man must be based on pure nothingness. I fear, says Groote, that he is a wolf. Be on your guard if you see him coming.⁴ Groote wishes to hear him. He writes to the parish priest of Zwolle (Reinerus of Drijnen): ‘Bartholemew has no right to preach, but you may permit him to continue. See to it, however, that he preaches Christ and the Gospel and abandons those incomprehensible and profane matters. The

¹ Ger. M. Ep. n. 30, p. 132.
² Ibid. n. 31, p. 133.
³ See notes by Mulder 134, 135.
Augustinians of Dordrecht are reputed to harbour heretics. For years I have known that this was so in Utrecht and Holland. Invite him, though, and tell me when he comes. Then I will listen to him in secret with a notary public (clerk, shorthand writer). Thus we will catch him by stealth in his heretical words, and we will not prevent him from preaching, so that the devil will not be glorified in him.¹ This rather unpleasant plan does indeed seem to have been carried out! A complaint was entered against Bartholemew in Utrecht and he was interrogated by the episcopal inquisition, under the direction of the vicar general, assisted by a number of mendicant monks. The Augustinian, however, denied everything, including what was sufficiently attested in Kampen, Zwolle and Woudrichem, probably because his sermons were taken down by Groote's shorthand writers. Groote had certainly done his best to gather testimony against Bartholemew. For this purpose he had probably urgently recalled John Cele, who had shortly before retired to Monnikhuizen. In this he was supported by the parish priest of Zwolle, Reinerus Drijnen.² We can leave out of consideration here whether or not Groote actually took part in the trial in Utrecht, as John Busch relates. It would indeed be very characteristic of Groote's zeal, but Busch's account is dubious in that he concludes by saying that Bartholemew was humiliated, which conflicts with Groote's letters.¹ He was not condemned, but was made to proclaim personally in Kampen and Zwolle that he recognized the errors of which he was accused and had not preached them. Groote, however, was not satisfied with this decision. He wrote a letter to the bishop himself, Floris of Wefelinkhoven, who had reserved the right of examination for himself, should this still prove necessary. Groote besought him not to neglect the further examination but to ensure that such an ignorant fox, this liar, this brute, deformed by all manner of shameful deeds, and rightly suspected of heresy, should not henceforth be admitted to the office of preacher.⁴

Groote's letter was probably entirely unsuccessful. A short time later thus (in the middle of 1382 according to Mulder) he wrote again to bishop Floris: ‘You must know that already many and very secret heresies are creeping about. It is thus necessary for the Church and

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¹ Ger. M. Ep., p. 137.
² Ibid. n. 48, pp. 190 and 191.
⁴ Ger. M. Ep. n. 36, p. 149-151.

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the faith that a more stringent inquisition should be held. And if Bartholemew (here called Bertholdus) is let go free, the heretics will prick up their ears. So many evil results will follow that they will not be able to remain hidden from the Pope’. Having thus instilled a little fear into the bishop, he repeats the proposal that Bartholemew should be forbidden to preach. He adds a request that the bishop should commission someone in Overijsel to investigate this false prophet\(^1\) suggesting thus, in my opinion, that this task should be confided to him.

This did not happen, or at least the sources make no mention of it. Groote had no other recourse than to ensure that the recantation was made as effectively as possible in Kampen and Zwolle and was made known to the greatest possible number of people so that they too, who had heard Bartholemew, should forsake any errors they might have embraced. He wrote therefore to his friends in Kampen to see to it that the bishop’s letter \textit{Literarum presentacionis... fratris Bartholomaei} should be read aloud several times, clearly and understandably, in both churches of the city. They must also tell this to Werner Keynkamp, rector or teacher at the school in Kampen, who had probably (see further) been exiled.\(^2\) We do not know what the situation was in Zwolle, but in Kampen Bartholemew had found support from the magistrate. Groote writes that the magistrates belonged to the party of the monk Bartholemew. They have granted him compensation (\textit{emenda}) as some women have said. When these were questioned about it, however, they retracted their statement and were thus shown to be liars, which again helped Bartholemew's case. Groote thought that these women would also have to make a clean breast of it in Utrecht. Hence his appeal to suffer everything for truth and not to fear the struggle. Werner had not feared the struggle and for this he had been exiled. Groote considered him as a confessor and martyr as in the early Church. He said as much in a letter to the parish priest of Lochum, Stephen Vuerden. Werner came originally from this parish.\(^3\) It does not appear whether he worked on Werner's behalf. Groote reveals himself here as the fighter on principle for the preservation of what he thought to be the truth. He gives vent to all manner of violent epithets against the heretic

\(^{1}\) Ger. M. \textit{Ep.} n. 37, p. 152.
\(^{2}\) \textit{Ibid.}, n. 49, p. 192. This clearly shows that Groote opposed this error; on what grounds is another matter, see Spoelhof; and the introduction p. 29-33. Contrary to what Spoelhof thinks, Groote himself once says, in the struggle against the focarists, that he is concerned with the doctrine and not with correction. Ger. M. \textit{Ep.} n. 77.


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and does not rest until he has finally put an end to his undermining activities. To this end he employs every means at his disposal, friendship, eavesdropping, complaints to the bishop's suggestions, his own services as inquisitor. It did not trouble him that he thereby made enemies for himself and got his friends into difficulties. If everything of which he accused Bartholemew is true, then it is understandable that Groote should have acted so strongly against him. The judges, however, were more moderate than he. I must leave unresolved the question of whether the magistrates of Kampen really took the heretic's part or whether they were chiefly concerned for the independence of the civic tribunals.

**N. Action against the Building of Utrecht Cathedral and the cathedral Tower**

The first subject dealt with in this section is one for which the treatises, on account of their greater detail, are more important than those letters which have come down to us. This is so, not only in the case of Utrecht cathedral, but also for Groote's struggle against the focarists, against marriage under certain circumstances, and in certain smaller matters. These treatises resemble each other in this respect, that they all show a rigoristic tendency, are based mainly on legal arguments and proceed from a somewhat narrow, albeit utterly straight mind. This section deals with the contents of a document which Peter Horn classifies among Groote's works under the title: _Contra magna et superflua edificia_, and which the 16th century catalogue of Bunderius calls _Contra turrim Traiectensem_ and ascribes to the same author.¹ On the basis of this data Tiecke assumed that two works existed. This now appears to be incorrect. The book was lost for five centuries, which did not prevent various authors from rendering some of the contents on the basis of the title. Now that the treatise has reappeared, they seem not to have been entirely wrong. The work was found in an archive in Germany and photographs were sent to me. On the basis of these I have published the book.² I judge the writing to date from the beginning of the 15th century and from the various corrections and mistakes we may assume that we are not dealing with an autograph of Groote's work, but with a copy. I am convinced that there can be no question of a forgery. The piece has no title, but on the last page is

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found: ‘EXPLICIT OPUS VENERABILIS VIRI MAGISTRI GERARDI DE DAVEN'TRIA DYACONI CONTRA MAGNA EDIFICIA SUPERFLUA AC CONSTITUTIONES FALSAS PRINCIPALITER CONTRA TURRIM TRAIECTENSE.’ This sentence stands apart from the end of the text and seems to me to have been added in a different hand from the rest but still in the beginning of the fifteenth century. The mention of the name of Gerard Groote, Gerardus de Daventria diaconus is unusual and does not occur in the letters, neither in the initia nor the explicit of the manuscripts of Groote's other works, insofar as printed by Tiecke. The name Groote or Magnus was evidently so well known that its mention enhanced the authority of certain works. It is more puzzling to explain why the author here is called Gerardus de Daventria, without Magnus. It may have been written by someone who knew Groote under this name, in university circles for example. There is no doubt, however, in my mind, that Groote is intended. The explicit given in the manuscript joins the two titles already mentioned: Contra magna et superflua aedificia (P. Horn) and contra turrim Traiectensem (Bunderius) by adding in between: ac institutiones falsas, thus making it complete.

For Groote did not object only to the large and sumptuous church buildings and to the lofty cathedral tower. His principal objection was to the constitutions of bishop John of Arkel (1342-1364), promulgated at various synods. They were intended to strengthen the church fabric, that is the funds from which the building must be financed. Groote, for the rest, could not do much at this stage to alter the construction plans or to prevent the building's completion. ‘The tower,’ wrote Groote, ‘already exceeded in height the other towers of nearly the whole of Christendom, but would have to be built even higher, turris ultra ceteras omnes fere in christianitate turres ad miram deductam altitudinem altius adhuc extollendam, while what remained, the choir and the other parts of the building were already drawn up as to cost and size’. The church was already built in part and decorated so that the church services might be held in a fitting manner.

These are the only, and for that matter, quite valuable details for the building of the cathedral tower, from which we must deduce when Groote wrote this treatise. The history of the construction of the cathedral tower is not known in detail but only in general lines. Work was done on the tower from 1321 to 1382. According to an inscription

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1 Tiecke, 225-230.
2 Geert Groote’s tractaat etc., 24.
3 Ibid., 28.

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in the tower usually considered to be reliable, it was completed in 1382. The church seems already to have been begun in 1254, and was certainly started in 1288. The choir was the first section constructed. Nowadays different construction periods are distinguished. Groote's time falls shortly after the third construction period, from 1325 to roughly 1360 and before the commencement of the fourth period, 1396. Groote must have seen the choir and the transept for the greater part complete and joined to the existing church of bishop Adelbold which was already old at this time. He could thus say that the church was already built and decorated so that the church services could take place in a fitting manner and that the remainder, namely the choir and the remaining sections of the building, were both costly and grandiose in design. Taking all these factors together, one can deduce that Groote wrote his treatise before, and indeed well before, 1382, since the tower was already high but must be built still higher. The top part still had to be put in position and this had already been done in 1382.

If the construction of the cathedral and of the tower originally inspired Groote's argument, the greater part of the treatise is taken up with the struggle against the constitutions of bishop John of Arkel concerning the means to strengthen financially the church fabric of the cathedral. In his treatise he sums up thus the measures proposed by bishop John of Arkel: the less rightfully acquired goods and monies (the so-called male or minus iustae quaesitas), those from shipwrecks (probably flotsam), goods for restitution when it was not certain to whom this restitution must be made; further the general gifts and legacies for pious purposes, if these latter were not more strictly defined. All these had to be allocated to the church fund of St. Martin under pain of excommunication, until the church and tower were completed. In addition, all those who owed money to the church building funds and did not pay, or who deprived the church of any of the above mentioned sources of income, would be punished by excommunication latae sententiae. These decrees were indeed promulgated by bishop John of Arkel at the synods of 1340 and 1347 and in two undated letters. On

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two points they went even further than Groote's summary. Bishop John of Arkel also established that priests who were present at the drawing up of wills whereby legacies were made to the church building fund, must reveal this to the bishop at the next spring synod, and that a quarter of all collections and legacies obtained by the parish priests must go to the building fund. It is striking that Groote did not react to these points. The first means in actuality a violation of secrecy, if indeed it was intended that the contents of such wills should be revealed before the death of the testator. The second was a rather radical interference in the purpose of the collections and in the rights of the parish priest. Groote, however, will not have troubled about such points since, in his view, the clergy had to build the churches by virtue of the general church law. This decree of the bishop's was thus rather in accord with Groote's own ideas and he did not wish to contest it.

Groote argued that these decrees were illegal, for all sorts of juridical reasons which he mentions at the beginning of his argument and later elaborates. The law is unjust since it is not derived from the eternal law of God, and furthermore because it lacks three conditions. It is not directed at the general good, all subjects are not dealt with equally or in justice and the bishop is not competent to make such decrees. Now, according to Augustine, Ambrose and Isidore, an unjust law has no legal power. This law is thus not binding on the conscience and need not be kept by anyone, unless this should give rise to greater dangers or scandal. The real basis of Groote's argument is that the aim of the constitution is wrong, that is, the construction of inordinately large and really superfluous buildings. These are motivated by pride and vanity. The lofty tower also occasioned among the burghers and strangers visiting Utrecht, proud and vain thoughts. The building moreover costs a great deal of money, which could better be given to the poor. This is a theme which Groote elaborates in detail and for which he could cite Augustine, Jerome, Isidore and Bernard. He found the texts of the first three in the Decretum Gratiani, and that of Bernard in the latter's own works. Several of these doctores condemned the construction of over-large and luxurious churches but approved the acquiring of sacred vessels made of gold, since these could be melted down in case of need in order to 'feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty.' What was invested in the buildings, however, could not be
recovered. He also thought that various goods and incomes were given to the priests of the new Covenant (unlike the Old) so that they might be able to use them to build churches. This was their duty under the general church law. As regards the bishop's lack of competence he was of the opinion that the agreement of the general chapter (i.e. the collective chapter of the five churches of Utrecht) would have been necessary and that this was not mentioned in the documents. The bishop had no authority either to make such radical decrees, since this power was reserved for the pope. He forgets, however, to mention in this connection that the episcopal decrees had been promulgated at least twice at a diocesan synod at which the general chapter was present, and that on the other hand bishop John had recourse to the full powers of the pope granted to the bishops at the Council of Vienne. Groote's argument thus, seems not entirely devoid of sophism.

In my opinion the writing of this piece did Groote no credit. Despite his plea for the poor, the whole is characteristic of a narrow mind, although he was able to cite illustrious historical examples. The only question is, under what circumstances did they compose the texts quoted by Groote. It is well known, for example, that St. Bernard poured the vials of his wrath particularly over the abbey of Cluny, a monastery to which the earliest Cistercians had so violently objected for monastic motives. A cathedral in a prosperous city was a different matter altogether from a monastery church, although no one regrets today what was accomplished in Cluny. The monies which bishop John of Arkel wished to collect quickly belonged either to the cathedral or to nobody, or were voluntarily offered for the church building fund. Leaving aside the heavy church penalties imposed for tardiness in handing over the money, the gathering in of these goods seems more rational than the preaching of indulgences and the assignment of the offerings thus obtained to the church.

It is true that pride in these large, beautiful buildings and rivalry between the bishops, priests and cities of the various dioceses will have played their part in this zeal for construction. But is this not a justifiable pride, a justifiable zeal, provided they are not carried to absurdity? Can this be said of the cathedral of Utrecht? I think not. The contents of the document seem fairly grave. It is quite simply a declaration that no one need pay any attention to this synodal decree of the bishop, and this in a matter which, to judge by the repetition of his decrees, was very dear to the bishop's heart. Did this not constitute insubordination and an incitement to insubordination in others? On the other hand,
however, the question remains: did Groote ever actually publish this piece? Is the fact that up, till now, only one manuscript has even been discovered, perhaps explained by assuming that Groote retained the document himself? It must indeed have at some time passed out of his hands, for the manuscript we possess is not an autograph. Groote may perhaps have given it to somebody in confidence; perhaps it was only copied after his death. On the other hand it was not Groote's way to keep silent about his convictions. In 1383 he dared to preach before the entire clergy concerning the legal consequences of having *focariae*, and later organized the copying of the treatise *contra focaristas*. If the piece was written and published before 1379, which might be assumed on the basis of the remarks concerning the state of construction and the building history of the cathedral, it would be difficult to understand how this man, as deacon, obtained the favour of preaching in the diocese. If however the work was written and published later, then the apparent lack of reaction constitutes an enigma. One would imagine that the *vicarius in pontificalibus* would surely not have invited the writer of such a pamphlet to give the opening sermon before the assembled synod. A man of some renown was usually chosen for this honour. The theory that Groote might have published the piece after the suspension of his permission to preach, gives rise to even greater difficulties. In such circumstances he would surely only have been cutting his own throat. Moreover, we possess various personal statements by Groote and his friends dating from this period, and nowhere is there any allusion to the publication of this treatise. The simplest solution is to assume that Groote indeed wrote the treatise, but did not publish it, although there are also objections to this. It would then mean that Groote believed in the opinion expressed but did not consider it opportune to declare his opinion openly. Such a supposition would not be without importance in judging the man and his work, but it remains doubtful. One might conclude that it is a falsification placed in the mouth of the deacon Gerard of Deventer in order to silence him once and for all. Such a conclusion is however, not tenable in my opinion. The style and content of the document betray Groote's custom and erudition.

**O. The struggle against the Focarists**

Groote shows himself to be equally strong, persistent and fearless in the struggle against the Utrecht canons and other clergy who were living as married men. This struggle began with Groote's celebrated
sermon which has gone down in history under the name contra focaristas, but which in the manuscripts is usually referred to by the word Recedite, a word which introduces the closing formula of several chapters and which reflects the trend of the entire sermon. ‘Shun those priests, who live as married men and shun all sinners, isolate them, have nothing to do with them.’ This sermon was held in the cathedral in Utrecht on the 14th of August 1383, as stated by the manuscript of Darmstadt and those of Neuss and Vienna. The last adds that Groote preached communi clero ecclesie trajectensis. This information is confirmed by the (incomplete) manuscript of Wolfenbüttel, by Groote's own remarks in the five points and in the Vita of Rudolf Dier. The year 1383, which is not contradicted by any manuscript, is absolutely certain on the basis of a letter of Salvarvilla, and the connection of the latter with Mulder's numbers 20 and 95. On the basis of these three manuscripts the actual day is at least highly probable. The only difficulty is that the entire clergy of Utrecht or the synod, which amounts to the same thing, assembled twice a year, not on August 14th but on the Tuesday after Cantate Sunday (the fourth Sunday after Easter) and on the 2nd of October. If then such a synodal assembly was held on the vigil of the Assumption, it must have been an extra synod. In the discussion which follows, we have proceeded from the assumption that the assembly did indeed take place on August 14th. The 2nd of October is too late, since too little time remained for the reactions to the sermon, for the decision to withdraw permission to preach from the deacons and its restoration to all deacons with the exception of Gerard Groote. This must all have occurred before Salvarvilla's letter dated 21st October 1383. It was addressed to Pope Urban VI requesting papal authority for Groote to preach. The Easter Synod of 1383 (April

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1 J.G.J. Tiecke, De Werken van Geert Groote, Diss. Nijmegen, 1947, 144-152.
2 Already in the Vita van R. Dier, G. Dumbar, Analecta I 5.
3 Tiecke 145, n. 6.
4 Ibid., 148 n. 13. Neuss's Ms. which contains the previously discussed treatise on the cathedral, also has the text of the sermon Contra Focaristas, with the date 14th of August. Geert Groote's tractaat etc. 2.
5 Tiecke 150, n. 32.
7 G. Dumbar, Analecta I 5.
8 Found and published by Sr. F. Feugen in O.G.E. 15 (1941) 77-78.
9 R. Post, Brieven van Geert Groote, Datering en Interpretatie, Archief voor de geschiedenis van de katholieke kerk in Nederland 7 (1965) 270-271.

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21st) seems to me too early, since the reaction in this case was too late to establish and had in no way died down a year later.

Such a synodal assembly of the entire clergy consisted of most of the priests from the city of Utrecht and surrounding districts, and a few representatives from more distant deaneries. It began with a pontifical mass, usually celebrated by the suffragan bishop, and a sermon by a well known preacher or scholar. The fact that the deacon Geert Groote was invited for this purpose is evidence of the great authority he enjoyed at least as a preacher. It is probable that the then suffragan bishop, Huppert Schencke, bishop of Hippus had something to do with it. He was a Dominican! His respect for Groote's preaching emerges clearly from two of his letters to Groote which have been preserved. In the first he glorifies Groote's talents as the source of wisdom. He writes that through his preaching and admonition the word of God tises as from an overflowing well. According to him Groote drew both new and old from the treasure of wisdom, but especially the spiritual, i.e. the inner pleasures of his spirit and his burning zeal for souls. Because he invites some to taste with him the inner joys and adroitly tells others the truth, he is constantly under attack from those who regard his preaching with disfavour. The bishop exhorted him not to fear the attacks of the magistri whose ears were burning. Groote answered this letter in deep humility, too strong for the ears of the suffragan bishop. He insists that Groote's word flowed from the pure source. He calls him the old ox, with many virtues, grown fat on the fertile pastures. Groote would once again attain the summit of the mountain, weeping and sighing. He hopes that Groote's light is not hidden under the bushel, but will be placed upon the candle-stick. It must not be imagined therefore, that Groote asked permission to speak at the synod and then gave his sermon. He was invited and gave the customary inaugural sermon. It must have been known before-hand that the sermon would be out of the ordinary. This sermon has not been preserved in the form in which it was spoken, but as it was afterwards elaborated into a treatise. Sermon and treatise have become one. Anyone discussing the sermon, does so with the assistance of the treatise, and anyone dissecting the treatise, has recourse to the sermon.

2 Ger. M. *Ep.* n. 74 and 75, pp. 325 and 327.

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Thus, although the treatise was composed later than the sermon, they can no longer be kept distinct, although some indications do exist. The lengthy chapter VI which occupies 18 pages in the edition of Clarisse, and deals with the way in which a person who is only a notorious fornicator by repute, becomes completely notorious through not paying heed to a given warning, is according to Groote himself, not present in the sermon. Chapter XXI too, is not addressed to the listeners but to the reader: Rogete lector. This too is a lengthy chapter on what for Groote was an incidental matter, an elaboration which was perhaps not spoken. Moreover the final chapter ends with the remark that ‘Time does not permit more, since I have written this longer and in more detail than I thought, for the sake of the parvuli, in the name of the Lord, blessed be He in secula seculorum amen.’ The length, thus, is in the written piece. Moreover, Groote can scarcely have considered or addressed his hearers in Utrecht, the universus clericus, as parvuli. I thought for a time that the absence of the exhortative formula at the end of a chapter might be an indication that the chapter in question was only written and not spoken, and was thus added to the sermon. This assumption, however, is not borne out by the facts. Chapter VI which Groote himself qualifies as a later addition, has the formula Recedite etc., as does chapter XXI which is addressed to the lector and not to the auditor. It is impossible to make any further progress with these questions in the present position of study of the manuscripts. It may perhaps give cause for reflexion that chapters VII and VIII lack such a formula, while all those belonging to the second section have one. It is missing too in chapters 18, 19, 29, 25 and 26. If all these pieces were to be considered as supplements, then the sermo itself would be so much curtailed that it might perhaps have been pronounced, according to the custom of that time. One would have to assume too that it was not necessary to read the whole of all the pieces dealing with the positive law and the glosses. The preacher may have been content to impart the results of his studies, mentioning the names of the canonists and giving some indication of their assertions. Such a method would have saved a great deal of time, but would also have detracted considerably from the value of the first chapters which are undoubtedly the most important for Groote's argument.

2 Ibid., p. 71.
3 Ibid., p. 81.
What was Groote's real message?

Despite my admiration for Groote's extensive knowledge, especially of canon law and of legal literature and also of various medieval writers, I cannot conceal my disappointment with this sermon. In the first place, he does not touch at all upon the value and religious significance of the celibate life of the clergy. His knowledge of the Bible and of tradition is hardly used at all on this point. His approach to the question is purely negative. The church precept has been transgressed. What are the legal consequences of this transgression? Then again, he does not indicate the extent of the transgression, nor how far the evil against which he had taken up arms, had spread. Naturally enough he could not go into detail here, but some general indication would not have been out of place in a sermon. Nor does he recognize a ratio excusans at all. He took no account of circumstances, nor did he seek for causes. This being so, he did not devote any thought to whether an improvement could perhaps be effected by, for example, better training or teaching or by an easing of the housing situation. It is remarkable too, that he does not deal only with the focarists and their focariae but for a large part of the sermon or treatise addresses himself equally to the laity as to the clergy. Apart from the clergy living as married persons he was also concerned with sin and its consequences for the priestly office.

He himself divided the whole into 26 dicta or chapters, in such a way that the first eight, then chapter nine to eighteen and finally the last nine, form separate sections. They are distinguished not only by their content but also by the manner of argumentation. At the end of the eighth chapter Groote writes: 'Here end the first eight chapters or dicta dealing with the notorious fornicatores, taken from positive law. There follow eight others which are more concerned with the divine and natural laws and which are directed against all fornicatores, of whom the fatherhood is felt in the church of God, known or not, so that with one accord we shun the fornicatores themselves and their focariae.'

Groote begins the first section with the scriptural text as motto: Recedit, recedite(Is. 52, 11). Depart ye, depart ye; go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing: go out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord. This is applied to sinners and especially to the scandalous fornicatores: one must flee from them as from impurity and the church laws must be applied to them. Hence, Recedit: Withdraw from them! He concludes the introduction with a beautiful description of the priesthood, probably to arouse the sympathy of his audience, but also undoubtedly expressing his own deepest conviction.
The notorious fornicator is suspended by the very fact of his fornication and therefore the faithful must not attend his mass. This according to the unanimous opinion of all commentatores who have commented on the law books of Gregory IX with the later supplements. For good measure he adds the theologian St. Thomas Aquinas (1st chapter). According to this same Thomas anyone attending the mass of such a suspended fornicator is committing mortal sin (2nd chapter). The toleration of such persons by the prelates is no reason for not avoiding these fornicatores (3rd chapter or dictum tertium to which objection was later made). If such a suspended priest says mass he becomes irregular (this argument is also supported by various auctoritates).

In Utrecht there even existed a decree excommunicating them (chapter 4). The exposition of seven legal scholars shows that the bishops can grant no dispensation in this question (5th chapter) and the doubtfully notorious fornicator becomes absolutely notorious through having been warned (6th chapter. This last is an insertion, not dealt with in the sermon). The reasoning then proceeds. The suspended notorious fornicator is also excommunicated, and eo ipso vitandus (7th chapter). This is the final step. These people, who have formed a family, must be completely rejected by society. There only remains to punish the women, concubinae too. This must be done, for they live in adultery with the bridegroom of the church (chapter 8). After this chilling declaration and merciless rejection of the persons in question, based almost solely upon juridical commentators of the church law, Groote begins a second section, comprising chapters 9-16. At the end he characterizes them thus:

These eight preceding chapters (dicta proxima), with the exception of part of the first, deal with all points on the basis of the natural divine law, that is, the law of love, according to eternal truth. They all concern without distinction, the suspected and discussed fornicators whether notorious or not, if they are suspected or give scandal or may give rise to scandal. To these (9-15) chapter 16 is added since it proceeds from what goes before and concerns mainly those in authority.

The tone of this second section is rather less stringent. Groote does not forget, however, to add here that it is intended as much for the clergy as the laity. This is expressly stated of chapter 9 (omnibus christianis) 10 (people and clergy), 11 (every cleric and layman), 4 12 (laity

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1 Archief voor kerkelijke geschiedenis 8 (1837) 48.
2 Ibid., 8 (1837) 8.
3 Ibid., 11.
4 Ibid., 14.

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and clergy),¹ 14 (both layman and cleric)² and 16 (priests and all other christians).³ This change, however, does not alter the theme. Since Groote bases his arguments here no longer on the positive law, but on the law of charity, all that he says takes on a wider implication. The content of these chapters can be summarized briefly. Anyone who has a suspected woman in his house, or converses with one, may give scandal and this is in conflict with the law of charity. One must, however, interpret everything as favourably as possible. There are persons who do just the contrary. If the priest gives scandal, the consequences are calamitous. How much harm has been done to the church in Utrecht because the priests absolve these people in confession and allow them to receive Holy Communion although they are unworthy. Finally he propounds the theory which, as we saw, he had defended in other circumstances, that Christ suffers more through the torments imposed on Him by the sinful clergy and all sinful christians than through anything He suffered at the hands of Herod, Pilate and their soldiers. The general conclusion is given in chapter 17. The authorities must impose a purge upon the fornicatores and order them to send the women away.⁴

The last section extends the conclusion drawn in the first section to every mortal sin. This has for the priest the same consequences as described in the preceding chapters. Every exercise of the Sacred Office gives rise to fresh mortal sins. The priests concerned are therefore suspended. If this is known no one may attend their services or encourage them to perform such services. If, however, doubt exists concerning the fact of mortal sin, one may request the sacraments from such a priest. No one may ever leave the church on account of the evil committed by a few, or cut himself off from the community of the faithful. This remark may have been directed against Groote's contemporary Wyclif. The sinful state of the person administering the sacrament does not, however, affect its valid reception.

Groote made good use of the flattering invitation to preach. He fearlessly defended what he held to be true and must, after concluding his sermon, have had the feeling: that's told them! But, the reaction was not slow to follow. Was what Groote preached such a novelty as to make this reaction understandable? Groote constantly referred, and rightly so, to the existing law and to the commentators thereon, but

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¹ Archief voor Kerkelijke Geschiedenis 8 (1837).
² Ibid., 25.
³ Ibid., 39.
⁴ Ibid., 48.
in practice it had become a dead letter. Although in Utrecht canons, pastors and holders of benefices were forbidden to live as married persons, and although the bishops generally repeated this prohibition at the beginning of their administration, as for example Arnold of Hoorn in 1375, a few years before Groote's sermon, such persons, focarists, were tolerated in daily life. Neither the bishops, nor the parish priests, nor the archdeacons and deacons forcefully or persistently fought against this abuse. Neither the decree of bishop Arnold of Hoorn, nor the decisions of the Synod of 1310 under bishop Gui of Avesnes, nor the decree of the papal legate Petrus Capoccio which preceded them, seem to have had any influence whatever. The gentlemen of Utrecht will therefore not have been too deeply shocked when Groote gave his ‘fire and brimstone’ sermon at the opening of the Council. Something like this was only to be expected! But what they probably had not expected was to hear that these so called notorii fornicarii were, according to church law, suspended, vitandi, irregular and excommunicated. These strong words moreover, were well motivated. Could a bishop henceforth remain workless? Could the parish priests who respected their celibacy continue to associate with their colleagues, of whose situation they were well aware? Could they continue to attend their services and thus perpetually run the risk of falling into mortal sin, while continuing to aggravate the situation through their own offices and the administration of the sacraments? Could they maintain their attitude of tolerance and indifference if indeed the people should begin to boycott the functions of the notorious fornicators. Perhaps for a time they pondered on what attitude to adopt. They could find little to object to in Groote's arguments. Only the third thesis (or the third chapter) offered a weak point, that is, the question of when exactly the fornicator was notorious? If a canon entered the church with his children in his arms or leading them by the hand, there could obviously be little doubt; but the situation was not always so clear - could public opinion be relied on in this point or did it require first a pronouncement by a competent ecclesiastical judge to establish notoriety absolutely? Was not the absence of any measures by the bishop a sign that the fornicator was not notorious? Could not one say: the bishop makes no objection, thus the affair must be in order. If all these doubts could arise, then the basis of Groote's sermon, and

2 Ibid., I 380. Cf. I 177, 193.

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of his stern measures, collapsed. With most of the suspected persons the situation was not so clear. And no one needed to take measures against these non-notorious fornicarii.

P. The Struggle. Suspension from Preaching

Unfavourable reaction there certainly was, but at first it seemed that Groote had gained success. Joyfully he informed his friend Salvarvilla of the details. It must have been a disappointment for Groote, to judge from his answering letter, Number 20 that his friend and teacher did not share his enthusiasm. We shall return to this letter presently.

Something much more serious had occurred! Probably around September or the beginning of October 1383, the bishop of Utrecht, Floris von Wefelinkhoven (1379-1399) issued a decree forbidding all deacons to preach. Groote however, concluded that this decree was directed only against him since the other deacons, one after the other, had permission to preach restored to them. He wrote this plainly to the bishop, not concealing that in his opinion the clerics and priests with focariae had worked together to obtain this decree. This measure of the bishop hampered Groote in a great part of his task, preaching, and it is no wonder that he and his friends, in their attempt to regain permission for Groote to preach, stressed his success and the maintenance of the doctrine of the Bible, Tradition and Church. Groote testified to this openly, wrote a letter to the bishop and one to a friend, a certain Bernard who was to further his cause in Rome. Salvarvilla in the meantime was composing a petition for Pope Urban VI and one for a chamberlain. Only that of Salvarvilla to the Pope is dated, on 21st October 1383. The others must have been composed at around the same time. It was a worthy action which is interesting for various reasons. It shows principally how greatly Groote desired to be allowed to preach again. It also clearly demonstrates what he desired or con-

1 This may be deduced from Groote's letter Ger. M. Ep. n. 20, p. 75.
5 Ibid., p. 214.
6 Ibid., n. 58, p. 216-217.
7 Ibid., n. 59, p. 218-222.
8 For the pope: Ger. M. Ep. n. 60, pp. 223-224; that for the papal chamberlain has not been preserved.
sidered as unimportant, and how deeply he was convinced of his orthodoxy.

During this period Groote visited Liège, probably to speak with Salvavilla, who did not refuse to help him. The document which Salvavilla drew up to be presented to the Pope was very suitable for its purpose, composed by someone who knew the ropes. He began by listing the studies of the supplicant Groote, the deacon. After completing his course in the faculty of letters, he was instructed in two other high faculties (theology and canon law). He gave up his prebend and his considerable paternal inheritance, retaining only a small income to provide the necessities of life. He was completely dead to the world. He was in addition a persecutor of heretics, a zealot for the unity of the Church and a fiery preacher against the faults of both laity and clergy. He receives nothing from those for whom he preaches. This man asks no temporal or ecclesiastical benefice, but only requests that he should be given instruction to preach, under papal authority, so that he might be able to do so freely and without opposition. In Salvavilla's opinion it would be fitting if the pope conferred on Groote the authority to preach, and at the same time commissioned him to start an inquisition into the heretics. Furthermore he should be allowed to propagate the canonical vindication of pope Urban VI in the province of Cologne or at least in the diocese of Utrecht. Thus, to the request to be allowed to preach he added two further matters which would give particular proof of his zeal for Urban VI.

In this way Groote's affair almost becomes that of pope Urban VI, and on top of this Salvavilla cunningly conceals the fact that the bishop of Utrecht had forbidden Groote to preach. Groote needed only an extension of his territory and his task. It was Cologne that mattered and at least Utrecht.

Florens Radwijns would give the letters for the pope and for his chamberlain to a certain priest called Bernard, who was due to leave shortly for Rome, and would further Groote's cause. At the same time he would also give him two guilders in Groote's name. This letter was intended to accompany the two already mentioned of which Groote

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1 This may be deduced from letter n. 59, p. 220.
2 This may be deduced from the letter of February 3rd, 1384 O.G.E. 15 (1941) 77.
3 Ger. M. Ep. n. 60, p. 223.
4 The difficulties connected with this letter have been described by G. van Asseldonk, De Nederlanden en het Westerse Schisma (to 1398) Diss. Nijmegen p. 155, note. It mentions John, archdeacon of Kempen, whereas the person intended was certainly William (of Salvavilla), who was archdeacon of Brabant. Van Asseldonck rightly rejects the solutions proposed by Mulder and v. Ginneken as inadequate. Two mistakes, slips of the pen or incorrect readings must have occurred, either on the part of Groote or of one or more copyists, before this letter found a place in the collection of letters in the manuscripts which Mulder employed for his edition. One is at a loss to explain how these mistakes occurred. Was Groote so agitated when he wrote this letter that he confused the names? Or was it a draft from which William of Salvavilla had omitted his name for reasons of prudence? Salvavilla's letter of February 3rd also says: Si litteram non misistis ad Papam, expediet novam facere, quum aliqua ibi contenta non essent proposita. Asseldonck thinks that this letter probably refers to the letter of October 21st, 1383 to the pope. It seems difficult to accept, however, that Groote would have waited so long before sending this letter. If thus the letter is referred to, it would follow that we are dealing with an uncorrected text, which is, in my view, more apposite. Salvavilla may well have decided, on thinking it over, that it would be better to mention that the bishop had forbidden Groote to preach. Perhaps he wished to delete the passage dealing with the defence of the pope's right after he had become aware of Groote's vacillating attitude on this point.
gave a short resumé. In neither of these is there any mention of being forbidden to preach. Groote added three requests. He would like to have an altar stone, if one could easily be obtained, so that Low Mass could be said upon it in the presence of himself and his companions (the Brethren of the Common Life) and so that he, if he ever became a priest, could celebrate Mass on it. Further that a good man should be given the general authority to grant a dispensation to the notorious fornicatores who were suspended according to the general law, and who, if they had celebrated during their suspension, had in the opinion of many scholars incurred irregularity. There are only a few who hold a different view. Around Easter of the following year, 10th April 1384, he continues, the provost of the Cathedral Chapter of Liège, Jean Sillis, Doctor of Law, will go to Rome, where he has been the referendary of the pope. ‘I have discussed the matter of the fornicatores with him and believe that he would be willing to cooperate in obtaining this authority. Such an authority might perhaps be granted to the cantor, i.e. Salvarvilla, or the provost, and I believe that the provost will gladly give his assistance for my case (i.e. permission to preach). But he hopes that your zeal and that of the chamberlain will at least obtain the permission to preach before the provost arrives at the Curia.’

‘I am not especially interested in the honorary chaplaincy. My spirit is entirely set upon the preaching of the Gospel of Christ. If however the opportunity easily presents itself, and the chamberlain or provost show themselves favourably disposed to obtain it, you may attempt it.’ Then comes the description of Groote's attitude towards pope

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1 Ger. M. Ep., p. 221.
Urban of Rome. Bernard has to know this exactly since he will surely be questioned about it. The matter in question is to appoint a preacher with the commission to defend pope Urban. For the contents see page 151 where this letter is discussed in connection with Groote’s ideas on the schism.

Groote then goes on to mention a certain power, but impresses on him to keep everything secret. Then the pastor of souls comes again to the fore. Time is short, eternity long. ‘I should in the end desire more the good state of your soul than any thing you might obtain from the Pope.’ He ends with a not unimportant reflexion on the priesthood and the *cura animarum*: ‘You know that the priesthood is a lofty undertaking and demands a pure conscience, but in these latter days (from the decline of the world) and even if viewed solely from the spiritual side, the *cura animarum* is dangerous for anyone who wishes to enter the kingdom of heaven. For a person is scarcely sufficient for himself, seeing how charity grows cold and the unrighteousness of many is great. What St. Bernard said in his time is even more true now that the world is growing evil and old.’ Here too there is no word about the prohibition from preaching although this Bernard must have been well aware of it. Most significant, besides the permission to preach, is the request for an altar-stone and the slight value he attached to the honorary chaplaincy. On the other hand he continued to fear the responsibility of the pastor’s task. One strange item is the request for power to grant dispensations in the question of the *fornicarii*. What does he mean by this? Not, naturally, that anyone who had received the dispensation could carry on as before and live as a married man. It seems to me that dispensation could be granted in the case if any irregularity was incurred, since the scholars were not unanimous on this subject. At the same time we receive here the first indication that some church scholars opposed him, and precisely on this point, that the celebration of Mass by a priest in a state of suspension was necessarily and *eo ipso* followed by irregularity.

At or around this time Groote also wrote the above-mentioned letter to the bishop of Utrecht, with the object of having the prohibition to preach withdrawn in some way or other. He began by pointing out the evangelical and apostolic doctrine he had preached, directed principally against heretics, usurers and clergy with *focariae* and always with the permission of the pastor. It had borne good fruit. Now this

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2  Ibid., letter n. 58, p. 216-217.
permission to preach had been withdrawn at the instigation of the focarists, to the joy of the heretics and focarists. Groote would have preferred to devote himself to study, but love for his neighbour and zeal for the house of the Lord had compelled him to preach. He desired greatly to be allowed to continue.

If he could not obtain special permission, he asked that the pastors should be given the right, according to the custom in Utrecht, to allow him to preach in their churches. If it really was the intention to forbid him to preach then he humbly requested that the origins and reasons for such a prohibition should be revealed to him and that he should not be deprived of the right without any warning. He is prepared to give an account of his preaching and to support what he proclaims with the writings of the saints. If necessary he is prepared to lay the question before the pope. He did not mention that he was already working to obtain authority to preach from the pope, or was preparing such a step.

In the paper which was intended to be distributed he also testified to his orthodoxy, his obedience to the Holy See and to the bishop. That which is de fide he has preached and defended as the sure and untainted Catholic faith. In the domain of morals he has also taught the established and indisputable evangelical and apostolic doctrine according to the divinely inspired scriptures. In this he has followed the works of Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory, Jerome, Chrysostom, Dionysius, Bernard, Bede, Isidore and Hugo and Richard of St. Victor, whose books he - together with those of others - esteemed above the temporal and sought to obtain. ‘What I have written concerning human law and the matter of the Decretum and the Decretals especially with regard to the scandalous notorious fornicators will, I hope, be found by lawyers to be certainly or probably as I have presented it.’ He is ready to subject himself to the Pope and will also give to the bishop the honour due to him. This latter, however, only with the reservation which Bernard made to the pope, namely that our bishop is either deceived by lies or overcome by attacks which caused him a great deal of trouble.

The affair began to assume unpleasant proportions. Groote attempted, by means of small publications and the formulating of theses, to make his opinions clear. We have first of all the 24 articles which, apart from their sequence, show great similarity to the 26 of the treatise. In a Parisian manuscript they are attributed to Konrad of Soltau, at first a professor in Prague and later in Heidelberg, who outlived Groote by

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several years.' On the basis of this Tiecke suggests that these 24 articles, whether written by Groote or Soltau, were the basis, the preliminary sketch, of the sermon. Tiecke bases his opinion on a letter by Groote,\(^2\) in which he writes that he intends to come to Utrecht shortly to publish an *apologia* against the notorious *fornicatores* and ‘I then propose to return to Deventer in order to compose the piece as soon as I am free.’ The 24 articles would therefore be displayed in Utrecht and, thus fortified, Groote would have been able to elaborate them in Deventer. This would have been the origin of the sermon and the treatise. This work, which Groote calls an *apologia*, had still to be composed at the time of writing the letter. However, according to my study of the chronology of Gerard Groote’s letters,\(^3\) this letter must have been composed not on March 17th 1383, as suggested by Mulder, but on April 5th 1384. This does away with the grounds for this opinion. In any case the word *apologia* can hardly refer to Groote’s sermon, which was certainly given before the end of 1383, apart entirely from the fact that the meaning of the word would scarcely admit of such an interpretation. Tiecke derives his other argument from the fact that some manuscripts contain the mention: ‘I shall set down more carefully a paper on these matters which is partly ready so that all may know at once the roots with the branches.’\(^4\) It seems to me, however, that these words might apply equally well to a later document as to the sermon. The 24 articles were not the actual document referred to as the *apologia* but contained the matter to be dealt with in this document. It may have been the sermon, but can also have been a later writing, the treatise of the *apologia* in question. The other documents against the focarists have been described by Tiecke\(^5\) and at roughly the same time by T. Brandsma,\(^6\) who was also responsible for editing them.\(^7\) They are: *Magistri Gerardi Groet ad et contra obiecta*,\(^8\) *Videntur fornicarii presbiteri* which is shown by the inscription *Quedam extracta ex quodam sermone cuiusdam sollemnis doctoris utriusque iuris* (in margine G. Groote), to be by someone other than Gerard Groote himself, someone who

8. Cf. Brandsma, l.c. 40. Tiecke calls this *Contra dictum meum tertium*, which is not in the manuscript or catalogue and is misleading.
was making an abstract of the sermon. Finally the *Quinque puncta*, the five points, of which we possess the Latin text in two and the Dutch text in three manuscripts, published by T. Brandsma. The conclusion testifies that it is a work written by Groote himself: ‘In a sermon which I openly held at a synod in the cathedral of Utrecht I have expounded discursively and in detail upon these five theses or points held by me and many others on this matter and proved them by quotations from the sacred canons and the law and by the testimony of the Holy Scriptures and the doctors in theology. I afterwards wrote it (the sermon or treatise) down and give it to be copied by anyone who desires to write it and to copy it.’

This last remark alone is extremely interesting. Groote wishes to disseminate this work. At his own order he had the treatise copied by two of the first Brethren of the Common Life at Zwolle, Wichman Ruerink and Jacob Hermanus, and destined this copy for John Cele. Poor Cele was obliged to pay for it himself but according to Groote he would be pleased to have it. Anyone who showed an interest in it could obtain it: ‘But I leave the choice to them.’ Thus wrote Groote after July 5th 1384. The distribution was then in full swing. His promotion of this thesis shows that Groote clung to his opinion and withdrew nothing of what he had said. The Brethren therefore could speak out boldly against the notorious fornicators, so long as they keep to his document. The minor writings just mentioned also display Groote's steadfastness in this struggle. In the five points Groote starts by expressing his opinion that the validity of the sacraments was not affected by the fact that the officiant is a suspended, excommunicated, priest, under the interdict and removed from his office. That is the first point. The second point is a resumé of the sermon in which he states in the plainest terms that he is referring to the *fornicator* who is notorious by evidence of the fact, i.e. without a pronouncement by the judge. The third point (*tertium meum*) is similar to Chapter II of the *Sermo*: anyone who knowingly and willingly assists at the mass of such a notorious fornicator, is committing mortal sin. Here Groote relies principally on the authority of St. Thomas. The fourth point coincides with Chapter

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2 Tiecke 154-156.
3 *O.G.E.* 18 (1941) 54, 61.

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III of the sermon: Although the prelates tolerate such priests who are fornicators, one must shun them and not assist at their masses. The fifth point on the other hand, which concerns both the clergy and the laity, coincides with Chapters IX, X and XI of the second section which deals mainly with scandal and charity to one's neighbours. By conversing with a suspect woman either inside or outside the house, both clergy and laymen, without there being any question of carnal sin, may yet commit mortal sin by giving scandal.  

The piece: Videntur fornicatores presbiteri notorii ex multis causis de iure divino sive de nobis moribus vitandi, is written in the spirit of Groote's sermon, but in my view not derived from it, notwithstanding the inscription: quedam extracta ex quodam sermone. The first piece however (No. 1) coincides to some extent with Chapters XVIII and XXIII, No. 3 with Chapter XV.

The only piece of writing against Groote's thesis which has come down to us was discovered and published by Brandsma. It is evidently directed against the sermon and the treatise and not against the five points. Contrary to the opinion developed by Groote in his first chapters, this lawyer considers that the consequences for the notorious fornicator (suspension, expulsion) only hold good if the fornicator is declared as such by a judge. He thinks that the pieces quoted by Groote must be interpreted differently. Moreover, the general practice is different. Besides, it is absurd, since the enemies of the clergy (laity) have the right to expel an undesired priest. So long as the Church tolerates the fornicator, the faithful may receive the divine sacraments from him. In reply to the second chapter of the sermon he says simply that the person sins who assists at the mass of a fornicator whose suspension has been declared by the judge. To Chapter III the writer objects that, as St. Bernard has declared, one may receive the sacraments from any evildoer. The authoritates of the fourth Chapter, who say that the priest who celebrates mass becomes irregular, are matched by texts from other authoritative persons. The jurist also employs this method with the fifth chapter, saying that only the pope may grant a dispensation to such an irregular priest to say mass; he counters authority with authority.

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1 O.G.E. 15 (1941) 54-61.
2 Ibid., 21-39.
3 The first four points indeed run parallel to the *Sermo*, but the fifth concerns a further chapter.
4 Ibid., p. 28.
5 Ibid., p. 30.
In the face of this opinion Geert Groote insists that according to the *canones* the notorious *fornicator* is established as such *per evidentiam rei*, and that the theory quoted by his opponent is hackneyed. He is amazed that anyone should wish to abandon the theory approved by so many doctors, theologians and lawyers on the strength of opinions uttered by the ignorant, laymen and those with no knowledge of the law. It would be a dangerous matter for you, says Groote, to hold such an opinion, if it should come to the ears of the pope.¹ ‘It is not only Thomas who supports this theory, but all the foregoing whom I have quoted in the Sermo.’ No lawful custom to the contrary can exist in the face of the doctors, the ecclesiastical law, the trials and synodal statutes and the punishments.

In this manner, Groote undermined the arguments of his opponents. He did not deal with the two succeeding problems, namely that the notorious fornicator in question becomes irregular through celebrating mass and that in such a case only the pope can grant a dispensation. He will have been convinced that here his opponent had only countered one authority with another, and that no refutation was necessary. It does not seem needful here to refer to the concluding remark of the piece as though Groote had not completed his answer, surprised as he was by death, since the answer was found after his death, written on a few sheets of paper. In his own opinion he had sufficiently refuted his opponents' arguments. It does not say either that he had not completed his answer, but that it might contain errors. Groote indeed did not release it for publication.

Brandsma assumes that this piece is the same as the *scriptum* mentioned in letter 54,² a writing directed against his *dicta* (chapters), which was probably sent rather to the canons of Groenendaal than to Groote. This is possibly but not necessarily true. Groote asserts that he was surrounded by all sorts of barking dogs. It may thus be that others too wrote against his theories. Or perhaps these barking dogs did not bite? Be that as it may, Groote would be glad to have the piece mentioned in letter 54. He could then accept what was good in it, but chiefly refute what was wrong. It is clear in the meantime that his opponents too did not consider it permissible to keep *focariae* and that something would have to be done about these situations. The only opponent we know of found that Groote went too far in making the legal consequences of such a life on the part of a priest dependent only on sufficient know-

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²Ger. M. Ep. n. 54, p. 207.
ledge of the reprehensible fact. According to this opponent the application of the sentence had to be preceded by a juridical pronouncement. He also thought that in certain cases the bishop might give a dispensation (i.e. give permission to hear the mass of such a priest). We know, moreover, that Groote commenced the struggle on August 14th 1383, that he was forbidden to preach in October 1383 and that the conflict had not yet died down in July 1384. Shortly before this last date, on April 5th 1384, Groote wished to write an apologia against the publications, probably an apologia of his sermon against the Focarists. I would not be able to state which of the above mentioned works Groote wrote in April or May or later. It may have been the elaboration of his sermon for, as we saw, publication was still at its height in July 1384 and it was only then that John Cele received a copy. But was this indeed an apologia? Does not he himself call his sermon the dicta and is this not also rather late? He had already been forbidden to preach in October 1383. But what remains. It is extremely probable that Groote did not manage to write an apologia in the period after Easter 1384. Groote's letters to Salvarvilla and the latter's replies shed some light upon the course of the struggle and Groote's successes.

It is certain that Groote very quickly informed his friend and teacher of the situation. This will have been some time before 21st October 1383, the date of Salvarvilla's petition to the Pope. Groote was in Liège before this date - at least he spoke with the cathedral provost there concerning the fact of the fornicatores. He probably also met Salvarvilla. Shortly afterwards he must have written to Salvarvilla on this matter, in a document which preceded letter No. 20. This last must be dated at the end of 1383 or the beginning of 1384, in any case before 3rd February 1384. At the time of writing this letter Groote was fairly optimistic about the result achieved by his sermon in Utrecht. Salvarvilla did not share this optimism and replied in a letter which also precedes No. 20, and to which No. 20 is a reply: 'What you wrote,' says Groote to Salvarvilla, 'about the concubinarii is true; not all have been converted, but all have been reproved and the conscience of many has been touched.' This was not enough for Groote, however, and therefore he continues: 'Believe me, many have simply improved their lives, those whose hearts have been touched by God. Many are more

1 Ger. M. Ep. n. 64, p. 254.
2 Ibid. n. 60, p. 223.
3 Ibid. p. 220.
4 Ibid., 75.
careful in their actions. For many the fornicarii are a scandal, many shun their offices. The mouths of those who wished to defend the fornicarii and who are worse than they, are stopped. Before, doubt reigned, now certainty. A few of the chapterhouses of canons in Utrecht have been purged, others are still infected. The mouths of the heretics, who mocked the Church on account of these people, are stopped. The sin or scandal is no longer attributed to the Church; indeed, even all her opponents see that the Church is holy and her doctrine sure, no matter how her prelates and priests behave. The change for the better comes from God, but the reproof also comes from the people. “Grote makes this clear by various examples from the Bible and ecclesiastical history. Notably he refers to the actions of Gregory VII, Alexander II, Nicolas II and Urban II, from the history of the purification of the Church before and during the investiture struggle.” Must not we too work to purify the church. And if she cannot become completely whole, is it not worth the trouble to bear the lepra, prolong life and guard others from infection? You know, father, that according to the prophet of the Apocalypse the decline of the Church at the end of time will come through the deeds of the spiritual Nicolaïtes and through the teaching of Balaam, joined with the impure priests; yea, it is already pointed with the finger. Is not that being demonstrated in vain at the present time, which has already been so long predicted? And if no other good should be achieved than the pronouncement that the fall of the Church and the profusion of evils have proceeded from the remissness of those have gone before and not from the teaching or structure of the Church, then it seems to me that the work has been useful enough. It is clear that we are following not the old worldly life of the clergy, but the true preaching and doctrine of the Church, derived not from the works of the clergy but from the books and from the truth. Indeed, to tell you the truth, things have even come about, beyond my good intention, which I did not dare to imagine. I did not set out to improve the clergy in Utrecht, but openly to proclaim the doctrine of the Church, should there be any who held other ideas. For formerly, superficial Utrecht lawyers were wont to excuse it. It is useful and necessary that the good should have a firm foundation. The Lord reigns, the peoples are incensed. Passive persecution is a true sign of God’s people, just as active persecution is a sign of the race of Cain and of the devil, as Chrysostom says at or near the end of his book Operis imperfecti.1

1 Ger. M. Ep. 20 p. 75-77.
This was Groote’s view of the situation around the turn of the year 1383-1384. Salvarvilla had somewhat different ideas. On February 3rd 1384 he replied: I rejoice that your efforts against the *concubinarii* have borne and are still bearing fruit, but I pity the devout people who are troubled in their conscience on account of their association with the *concubinarii* in question. Truly, in my opinion and under correction, although you have acted well, you would have done even better to devote all your energies to working against the schism.¹

It was indeed scarcely encouraging. The answer followed quickly, even before 23rd February 1384.² Groote informed Salvarvilla that the focarists who had sent away their women, were taking them back again. He asked him if he would be willing now to defend the content of his document if he were questioned about it or asked for advice. If he had doubts on any point would he then examine his arguments and at the same time consider what harm the Church suffered through these practices. In his view this abuse was one of the principal causes of the schism. He had aroused the heads of the Church, and insisted that according to the doctors, the simonists and notorious focarists were more and sooner to be shunned than the other public sinners, even though they were tolerated by the prelates. For through them the sons of the Church were corrupted while she herself becomes old and sterile. It is important and fitting that all should confess this unanimously, otherwise we will bring the waters into motion.

As we saw, Groote remained preoccupied with this question until the last day of his life (†20th August 1384). He expressed himself more freely on this matter than on the prohibition to preach, probably hoping that the pope would again give him authority to do so. Did this permission ever come? It was written later that the document was received after his death, but we do not know. The archive of Urban VI has been badly preserved.

In the summer of 1384 Groote continued to work hard and showed interest in his books. Although he no longer preached, his difficulties did not cease: ‘The daily cares leave me no time to set down what I should like, or to write to those to whom I should wish to write, even what I have vaguely promised. I have promised to write on virginity and on other promised essential matters. There is no peace. I write almost nothing, except to reply to some who oppose me. I am ill in my mind and have no time to take care of my body or to write what would

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¹ O.G.E. 15 (1941) 77.
be useful for my meditations. I am very distracted. I am extremely touchy and excitable. I do my best to care for others, but I do not see what helps me. Pray for your unhappy and distracted Gerard.1

**Q. Attitude towards the Schism**

In this more or less depressed or despairing state of mind Groote wrote, against his will but at the urgent insistence of Salvarvilla, the celebrated piece on the schism. According to the oft-quoted letter No. 20, which must have been written around the turn of the year 1383-1384, Salvarvilla had asked Groote to write on the term schism and its legal content. Groote preferred to write on the schism in his own soul.

‘I am ignorant of the matter of the schism and it has not been precisely dealt with or published by the lawyers either in terms or in arguments or in definitions.’

Groote thus approached his task mainly from the theoretical point of view. At least he imputes the thus formulated question to Salvarvilla. It is difficult however to accept that this was the intention of Groote’s friend and teacher. Groote was by no means enthusiastic, perhaps also because too plain a pronouncement on his part might be harmful to his activities in the other obedience (including the province of Holland). Salvarvilla naturally intended that Groote’s piece should be published; he himself ardently fought to end the schism. After the failure of various attempts to bring this about, he considered the only hope of salvation to lie in a general Council, as he later wrote to Groote.2 At this point Groote agreed with him.3 But it is very remarkable that this active man, preoccupied with the Church and friendly with Salvarvilla, never mentioned the schism in his letters before the turn of the year 1383-1384. The entire Church was preoccupied with it, and Groote’s own field of endeavour was split into two obediences, one under Rome and the other under Avignon. In 1379 the diocese of

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1 Ger. M. Ep. n. 61, p. 225.
2 Ibid., 231. This letter, which Mulder places at the end of 1383, seems to me to belong to a later date, since John van de Groerde who had always worked together with the addressee William Oude Scutt in Amsterdam, had already left the city. This seems to have been only after 5th July 1484. Groote wrote to the Amsterdam priest: ‘Dissolvor valde’ (p. 226) and ‘pray for me, pro tuo misero Gerardo dissoluto.’
3 Ibid., no. 20, p. 75. For the dating see: R.R. Post, Brieven van Geert Groote. Archief voor de geschiedenis van de Katholieke Kerk in Nederland. 7 (1965) 269-79.
4 O.G.E. 15 (1941) 77.
Utrecht had been particularly implicated in this question and even afterwards various conflicts occurred in this frontier region, for example on the question of conferring benefices or on taxes. Still people seem to have found a tolerable *modus vivendi* in practice. Groote had in any case considerable contact with Eemsteyn and with three priests in Amsterdam who were officially obliged to recognize the Pope of Avignon. However this may be, Groote wrote *De Schismate* in a somewhat overwrought state of mind. He himself was not satisfied with the result and made his apologies to Salvarvilla. ‘Spare me, reverend father, and bear with this document, confused as it is and without shame and disfigured by various repetitions. I fear nothing that you have ordered. You know that I am not certain on this point... I do not willingly follow this trail. May I trample down my inner ambiguity.’ Van Asseldonk has rightly pointed out that in view of this passage and in view of what is said about the possession or not of books, it can never have been Groote's intention to publish this letter. It is a private communication to a friend, which is perhaps important when judging some of the passages. Groote's intentions were probably not in accord with the motives of Salvarvilla's request.

What Groote gives us in this hastily composed piece characterizes his opinion on the Church, the hierarchy, his faith and his manner of reasoning, more than it offers any significant solution for the existing situation. In view of the importance of this document and the controversies to which it gave rise and which exist up to the present day, we must give here a detailed analysis.

I am following here the excellent exposition of G. van Asseldonk who in his turn was able to utilize the study by L. Smit. This latter scholar, who is evidently more of a dogmatician than a historian, has expounded the first piece principally and the second to some extent, as a dogmatician, supplementing his arguments with ideas from other letters.

Van Asseldonk takes as his point of departure Groote's letter to Master Bernard, quoted above. Here, for the rest, I permit myself a shift in accent. Groote thinks and maintains that Urban VI is pope and that others too must recognize him as pope. The uncertainty which

2 G. van Asseldonk m.s.f., *De Nederlanden en het westerse Schisma* (tot 1398), Diss. Nijmegen 1955, 154-219.
3 *Studia catholica* 10 (1933-1934), 257-268, 367-277.
still exists, proceeds from the fact that a large section of Europe holds a different opinion. Because of this uncertainty he would be unwilling to declare under oath that Urban is truly pope, but his entire conviction (understanding, mind and thought), and also that of his bishop, tell him so strongly that Urban is pope that he feels he would have to choose death rather than align himself with Clement VII before the general Council. The less he was ordered to speak about Urban the better he liked it. He is an Urbanist, who realized, however, that important things would have to happen before unity was restored. A council would have to lay down the necessary measures and he would comply with them. His friend Salvarvilia had probably also reached this stage around the turn of the year 1383-1384 when he asked for Groote's opinion on the schism. Whereas at first he was mainly preoccupied with the question of how the breach could be healed, and as a professor in Paris he opposed the suggestion that the professors should be required to accept the Clementine obedience, he later evolved into an Urbanist. He was therefore compelled to flee Paris and accepted a benefice and a function in Liège in the other obedience.

It is possible to assume that Groote and Salvarvilia accepted the idea of a Council since it has been established that the letter on the schism was first written around the period in question, 1383-1384 - whereas Mulder dated it as early as 1381. This also complicated the interpretation for L. Smit. Salvarvilia did not ask Groote what seemed to him the best way to resolve the schism. He had already seen that the via cessionis and the via facti had offered no success. For him only one way still lay open - the general council. He was more concerned with the difficulty of how the schism affected the individual conscience. He desired a clear cut theological-legal definition of the concepts schism and heresy and an answer to the question whether a person, by denying the legality of one of the popes, lapses into heresy or schism. Salvarvilia defines the first as schismatis verbo et diccione in letter No. 20 and the second may be deduced from Groote's reply. Salvarvilia had long been preoccupied with this second question. It may be deduced from

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1 This diverges a little in three places from van Asseldonk. Ténere for example seems to me stronger than to consider; so strongly that is more than so that, corresponding to in tantum ur; he does not refuse to preach but hopes that he will not be called upon to do too much.
2 v. Asseldonk 160-164.
3 Ibid., 163, n. 37.
4 Ibid., 166.
5 Ger. M. Ep. 74.
the *epistola concilii pacis* of Henry of Langenstein that the *dubium* was proposed at the University at Paris in 1381, which *in concreto* may be formulated thus: must those who refuse to recognise the legality of Clement be treated as heretics and schismatics? More than two years later Salvarvilla posed the same question, but now in precisely the opposite meaning: must those who refused to recognise Urban VI as lawful Pope (*Urbanus non est papa* or *A non est Papa*) be considered as heretics and schismatics?³ Van Asseldonk sought for reasons which would have led Salvarvilla around 1383 to formulate this question for the obedience of Urban VI and finds them in a commission given to Salvarvilla by pope Urban VI. He was to act against the supporters of Clement VII, in Cambrai for example, as though they were heretics and schismatics.³

Geert Groote begins his answer to this question concerning the relationship between heresy and schism by declaring that nowhere among the newer theologians did he find clearer pronouncements than in St. Thomas, and that considerable confusion reigns in canon law regarding these two concepts. He for his part would wish to draw the sharpest possible line of demarcation between these concepts and their corresponding phenomena in church life. Here however, he immediately comes up against ideas which diverge from the general doctrine before him.

Heresy and schism have this in common, that both bring about a split. The nature of this split, however, differs in each case. Heresy is a separation of an internal nature in the domain of the intellect. Schism is an actual separation, directly affecting the external community. The heretic disagrees with the church on some article of faith, the schismatic refuses to conserve the unity with the members of the church and the community with the head and renounces obedience. Geert Groote agrees with the canonists in general that schism in itself does not imply heresy, although it conduces to heresy and in practice never exists for long without it. He rejects, however, the general opinion, also shared by St. Thomas, that heresy always accompanies schism. In his view a person can be a heretic without abandoning the ecclesiastical unity.⁴

This deviation which W. Spoelhof also considered as one of the signs of Groote's nonconformity, is explained by Van Asseldonk as follows: On the one hand Groote attributes a broader significance to the word

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1 v. Asseldonk 168.
2 Ibid., 168.
3 Ibid., 168.
4 Ibid., 169-170.

R.R. Post, *The Modern Devotion*
heresy, whereby he also includes the obstinate rejection of non-defined truths, and on the other he limits the idea of schism to the directly desired split.\(^1\) On this point one must bear in mind that according to Groote a heretic (also when contesting an article of faith) is always expelled from the Church, is thus separated from the Church and, like the excommunicated, comes to stand outside the Church.\(^2\)

Having made various other distinctions, Groote gives it as his opinion that the person who, under the given circumstances, denies the legal papacy of Urban VI, is neither a heretic nor a schismatic, provided he has the intention of abiding by the pronouncement of the general Church.\(^3\) This thesis is based principally on the conviction that such a person is acting in ignorance, notably in ignorance of what exactly has happened. The inclination to subject oneself to the general Church presumes that one does not wish to attack the legal institutions of the Church. In other words he only intends to deny that Urban VI lawfully occupies the position of pope and not to deny that one owes obedience to the Church of Rome. Furthermore this inclination carries with it the obligation of not breaking away from the ecclesiastical community in which one lives. In other words Geert Groote, who belongs under the Urbanist obedience, may not transfer to that of Clement even though he does not recognise Urban as Pope\(^4\). He who fulfils these conditions may not be branded as a heretic or a schismatic.

In an argument which is rather difficult to follow, Groote gives as his opinion that, viewed in abstract – whereby he does not detach himself entirely from the schism – refusal to recognize the legality of a pope can never be considered as heresy, although here one must exclude attacks upon the papacy as such.\(^5\) However, denial of the legality of a pope could indeed lead to schism, if the intention was to split Church unity. This is not so, however, in the present split, at least not for those who were not directly implicated at the outbreak of the schism. The situation was completely different from former schisms.\(^6\) Groote finally arrives at certain practical conclusions:

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1 v. Asseldonk, 170-171.
2 On page 171 van Asseldonk says that according to Groote the heretic can be excluded from the community. However, on p. 79 Groote does not say: can be excluded, but: ecclesiae eos dividit et separat. All heretics are in fact excluded. Ger. M. Ep. pp. 79-80.
3 v. Asseldonk 172.
4 Ibid., 173.
5 Ibid., 174.
6 Ibid., 174.
In his opinion the question of two popes should be no reason for the faithful to leave the bond of the Church or for the Church authority to expel anyone. Everyone must remain in the community with the regional Church to which he belongs. According to St. Thomas one may lapse into schism by cutting oneself off either from the community of the members among themselves or from the connection with the head. If doubt exists concerning the lawful head it is irresponsible to disrupt the certain unity of the members among themselves.¹ But even as it is not permissible for the faithful to secede from the church, still less is it lawful under the given circumstances for the popes to excommunicate each other and each other's supporters. By so doing they show that they esteem their own rights more than the unity of the Church²... If anyone is to be thought guilty of the schism it is the popes themselves and their cardinals, much more than the faithful.³ Indeed the lawful pope who, in such circumstances, insisted too much on his rights would be guilty of schismatic inclinations, and could thus become schismatic. These are strong words and it is evidently the only passage that gave Salvarvila pause and on which he later demanded clarification.⁴ In this connection Van Asseldonk rightly remarks that this idea pointed in the direction which finally led to the Council of Pisa.⁵

Geert Groote did not adopt a neutral attitude towards the two popes. He supported Urban VI, but in his opinion the latter must also be prepared to make some sacrifice to restore the unity of the Church. Groote did not view the schism from the standpoint of the lawful pope but with the eyes of the believer who sees the one Church divided.⁶ I doubt, however, if he went so far, as Van Asseldonk thinks, as to suggest that a person was free to follow an obedience on condition of subjection to the decision of a general Council. He had to support Urban - and might only recognize the opposing party after a decision by the general Council. The situation was different for the popes. They viewed the split as a common and true schism - and might thus consider their opponents and their supporters as schismatic and apply to them the appropriate church penalties. Groote did not regard the split as a true schism but as an actual division on the grounds of the disputed papal question.⁷

More important than all this is Groote's view on the unity of the

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¹ v. Asseldonk, 175.
² Ibid., 175-176.
³ Ibid., 176.
⁴ Ibid., 176.
⁵ Ibid., 177.
⁶ Ibid., 177.
⁷ Ibid., 178.

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Church. In order to preserve this unity one must not only be subject to the
pronouncement of the general Church, but more particularly to the authority of the
Church of Rome. Although in determining the idea of ecclesia he follows the general
doctrine as found in St. Thomas, he does stress the mutual ties of the members, the
bonds of love rather than the ties of authority.¹ In imitation of the patristic literature
Groote recognizes beyond the community of the faithful and their attachment to the
head, which are both outwardly perceptible, an inner and visible principle of unity
of the Church: faith and love, either faith working through love or love alone. The
attachment to the Church has a double aspect, one spiritual, inner and by its nature
invisible, formed by the bond of faith and love, and another external and visible; the
united society of the faithful in the community of the Church, directed and governed
by a visible head.

In thinking thus Gerard Groote is firmly rooted in tradition; the tradition itself,
however, has many nuances.²

Perhaps in order to refute some difficulty which may arise, perhaps to elucidate
his ideas further, he attempts to show that a person who denies the authority of the
lawful pope may still retain the link with the head of the Church, since he remains
bound to Christ. In order to prove this Groote draws a clear distinction between Christ
as head of the Church and the pope as head. It follows from this distinction that the
link with Christ is always necessary for membership of the Church, whereas in certain
cases association with the pope may be absent. The danger for the integrity of the
Catholic concept of the Church is clearly inherent in this idea.³ Spoelhof in my opinion
might use this argument with some (apparent) justification to support his theory of
Geert Groote's non-conformity. Groote based his theory principally on Augustine,
in part on his work De baptismo contra Donatistas but also on his ambivalent method
of reference to the petra passage, in Matth. XVI, 1-18, where on one occasion Petra
is not Peter, but Christ - without Peter's primacy suffering in any way.⁴ But it is as
though Geert Groote has seized upon Augustine's idea, only to accent the mystical
unity of the Church at the expense of the visible.⁵ Augustine lays the stress upon the
former. The Christian is only a member of the Church in the true

1 v. Asseldonk, 179.
2 Ibid., 181.
3 Ibid., 182.
4 P. de Vooght, Hussiana, Leuven 1960, 94 ss.
5 v. Asseldonk, 185.

R.R. Post, The Modern Devotion
sense of the word, who lives according to the faith. Augustine, however, does not distinguish an invisible and spiritual Church, to which only the righteous belong, alongside the visible. In reality he recognizes only one church of the faithful, that is, of righteous and sinners. Since Groote now has absorbed principally the idea of the Church, he too stresses the invisible element. It would be strange, however, if he should separate the visible from it.

For the rest he clearly states that Christ is in the true sense of the word the head, to whom the community of grace of the Church owes its life and its unity. He then goes on to discuss the pope.

Since the pope can take up a position outside the immaculate Church, he cannot be called automatically the head of the Church. The first impression, therefore, is that Geert Groote supports the doctrine of the double Church with double head, on the one hand the immaculate Church and on the other the visible, juridically organised community of the faithful.1

One must bear in mind, however, that Groote is making use of borrowed ideas, i.e. the church *columba*, both body and member, and *domus*, derived from Augustine. The latter idea is also found in Jerome. Despite the reference to the mystical element however, these ideas refer to the one Church, considered under different aspects. She is viewed as immaculate and holy, and a sharer with Christ in imparting grace, or as the visible community of the faithful on earth, subject to human limitations and imperfections. Groote brings out the one aspect more than the other.2

The visible head with whom the faithful must be joined may be the person of the pope, the contingent or singular head, but according to Aristotle it may also be the regimen, as with the state. If the king dies or is deposed, the administration remains, the apparatus of government. So also with the church. But what is the regimen? For him and for many of his contemporaries it is the Church of Rome, to which the faithful are subject, also as regards what they believe.3 Van Asseldonk now suggests an explanation for a hitherto obscure passage in Groote's letter, in which he speaks of Seraphim, Cherubim and Thrones. Groote is here preoccupied with the medieval concept of the angels and their hierarchy, to be found in the pseudo-Dionysius, the *Homilia XXXIV* and in the *Evangelia* of Gregory the Great and Hugo of St. Victor.4 The Thrones represent God's rule; God reigns in them immediately.

1 v. Asseldonk, 189.
2 Ibid., 192.
3 Ibid., 194-196.
4 Ibid., 198-199.
and completely and through them exercises his power over the lower creation. The choirs of the Seraphim, Cherubim and Thrones from the first hierarchy: ‘Each of these choirs of angels represents a particular principle: the Seraphim love, the Cherubim contemplation or faith, the Thrones God's dominion.’ Thinking along the same lines Groote makes the unity of the *regimen*, viewed hierarchically, correspond to the Thrones. His thesis is that the union with the head does not lie so much in the link with the person of the pope, but in the bond with the ecclesiastical institution which transcends his person. He finds his basis for this theory in the fact that the institute of authority stands in relationship to the Thrones, and the bond of unity, formed by the *regimen*, corresponds to the bond proceeding from that choir of angels. Considered from the viewpoint of the traditional doctrine on the hierarchy, this must mean that the *regimen* of the Church is a participation in God's rule, of which the Thrones are the bearers. This constitutes the hierarchical significance of the church's authority - in other words, for this reason the bond with the church's authority is a factor of union with God. For Geert Groote therefore the *regimen* of the Church, especially founded on the Church of Rome, is more than a purely human institution, and more than a factor of purely external association. In essence it represents God's rule.²

Van Asseldonk renders as follows the contents of the conclusion of the letter, which is so difficult to paraphrase and impossible to translate: Without the supreme or seraphic bond, that is, without love, all hierarchical and ecclesiastical bonds are sterile and vain with reference to the heavenly hierarchy. Unless love which unites all bonds, binds with a sweet and very lightest of bonds that which is already bound and that which is to be bound, there can be no question of the cherubic bond in true faith and true inner wisdom. For there is nothing then but a dead faith and assumed wisdom. There can be no question either of the true bond of authority reposing in the Thrones (which the schismatics reject), nor of any bond whatever according to a lower step in the order of the Hierarchy. The Augustinian and especially the pseudo-Dionysian inspiration for this text is plainly evident; Geert Groote simply intends to say that neither the faith, nor subjection to the Church's authority can unite man with God without the possession of love; without love faith is dead and the subjection to authority vain.³

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1 v. Asseldonk, 200.
On this point therefore, Groote cannot be accused of non-conformity. He views the unity of the Church in the same way as other Catholics. Unity is formed by outward as well as inward bonds: the Church for him is the community of the faithful, held together by the authority constituted by God and animated by the life of grace emanating from Christ.¹

Groote's emphasis on the mystical bonds of Christ diverges from the canon law in which he is usually so at home. His letter on the schism, which at first sight appears to be a theoretical consideration, is in fact an answer to questions which preoccupied Salvarvilla and others of the period. Groote shows that in a short time he could compile a learned and significant treatise on schism and Church. For his preliminary study he had access to works by Augustine and Jerome, Thomas Aquinas, Diederik of Niem and Conrad of Gelnhausen, while he had completely absorbed and assimilated the speculation on the hierarchy and choirs of angels by the pseudo-Dionysius, Gregory the Great and Hugo of St. Victor. He possessed an extensive knowledge and the medieval method of reasoning. Thus his exposition on heresy and schism and on the Church hierarchy could be brief, but at the same time extremely complicated. Although his principal study was law, he also had a penetrating knowledge of theology, history and patrology. No matter how complicated his exposition it commands respect for the subtle nature of the content and for the impartiality with which he dealt with these matters and succeeded in resolving the doubts of his correspondent and friend.

He will have previously reflected deeply on the schism and have discussed it with kindred spirits. He considered the schism to be only a symptom of the ecclesiastical upheaval of his time and a result of the violation of celibacy, the practice of simony by secular priests and the possession of private property by many monastics, contrary to their ideal of poverty and to their rule.

For him these were the causes of the phenomenon and were more to be combatted than the results. He thus associated reform and restoration of unity just as later the Council of Constance placed both items on the programme.² He esteemed the preaching of the Gospel above the combat of the schism and thought that Salvarilla worried too much about the latter. Deeply as he regretted this split, he seems not to have devoted much time to it in his work in the Netherlands. It is most

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¹ v. Asseldonk 205.
² Ibid., 216-217.

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probably for this reason that he did not take any public stand on this problem earlier. Salvarvilla, however, through his papal commission and his field of activity was deeply involved.

R. Attitude to Marriage

It was probably also in the last months of his life that Groote wrote the treatise *De Matrimonio*. Indeed, few data can be found to establish the time of writing, but dating it as late as possible makes it easier to find the person for whom this work was intended. According to Rudolf Dier¹ this must have been Andreas Kreijnck who was studying in Paris at the time of Groote's visit to that city after his conversion, that is *ca.* 1375. Judging from details given in the treatise *De Matrimonio* the person in question was a man of learning who up to this time had led a celibate life but who now, at an advanced age, wished to marry. Student years and advanced age are usually separated by a long period of time and thus the document would have to be dated as late as possible, namely, in 1384. The latest editor of the treatise, M.H. Mulders, CSSR, has found a canon of Cologne, A. Kreijnck, whom might be taken into consideration as the Kreijnck to whom Groote addressed his work.² In order to pass judgment on the treatise and its writer it is important to know the following. Groote addressed himself to an acquaintance or friend with the particular aim of dissuading him from marriage at an advanced age. He is speaking thus as an advocate. He wishes to achieve something with his treatise, although he does say that others besides A. Kreijnck may derive some benefit from it. This exposition thus has not a purely scholarly, but a practical aim. This may perhaps to some extent excuse or explain its somewhat drastic proposals. According to Mulders one cannot go very far in this.

As we shall presently see, Groote expressed himself in a radical manner. The new scholarly edition was prepared by Mulders, based on a comparison of various manuscripts and giving the variants.³ It comprises fifty pages of a modern octavo book. I am following here the resumé of the contents, also by Mulders.

The personal incentive to the writing of this treatise was Groote's desire to dissuade from matrimony an unmarried person of advanced years, of high repute and devoting himself to study. Groote's point of

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¹ G. Dumbar, *Analecta I 4*.
departure accords with his practical aim. Everyone must choose what is most perfect; everyone must strive *simpliciter* after perfection and not *secundum mensuram donationum*. Although marriage is good in itself, it is not permissible when it means a transition from a more perfect (i.e. unmarried) state, to a less perfect - in this case marriage. Or when marriage would give rise to scandal, which would occur by marrying at such an age and in such circumstances. Marriage is also not to be recommended when it would be a hindrance to holiness or to perfection.\(^1\) In Groote's view this latter is always true since marriage brings lusts which the married couple really may not enjoy. This is the medieval idea of the contempt for the world which rejects every human pleasure which does not proceed from devotion.

Groote goes so far as to consider marriage a greater sin than fornication or marriage arising from sensuality, since this latter deviates less directly from the final goal. According to Groote there are two lawful motives for marriage: the procreation of children and the avoidance of fornication. In discussing this latter he quotes Paul's text (I Cor. VII, 9 and VII, 5): *Melius est nubere quam uri*. He recognises this as a lawful motive but thinks that this ‘burning’ is not so easily present. Moreover, he considers marriage an insufficient means of quenching the fires of lust. The struggle remains; but no matter what, marriage for the avoidance of fornication remains a sin, albeit venial sin.

If the first motive, the procreation of children, is to be lawful, then it must in Groote's opinion exist expressly and deliberately. But other motives, such as the desire for an heir or to preserve the family name may conflict with this strict intention and so render the marriage unlawful. Groote indeed considers the plan foolish in itself and therefore sinful. The man to whom his treatise is addressed could adopt children of the poor and bring them up to the honour of God. In the procreation of children for its own sake there is the inherent danger of bringing a number of bad children into the world.

Marriage for the gratification of the senses is mortal sin since in this manner the sacrament is misused. The marriage act is commonly a sinful deed if only because the couple consent in sinful pleasure. The man must certainly abstain from the marriage act if the woman is pregnant or barren. The conjugal act may be performed *ad reddendum debitum compar*\(^i\), but even then with inner sadness. As with marriage

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\(^1\) Mulders, 98.

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performance of the marriage act in order to avoid fornication is venial sin, and in order to gratify lust, mortal sin.

In conclusion he describes the faults of the woman, the burdens of married life and the dangers to health. The marriage act even shortens life. Besides, it is difficult to find a suitable wife.¹

It does not occur to Groote that married life is an expression of love and that the marriage act strengthens the love between man and wife. For him there is always a sinful side to sexual enjoyment.

Argumentation ad hoc might serve to explain much of these strange, even reprehensible opinions, did not certain expressions in Groote's other works show that Groote was absolutely convinced of the rightness of his ideas. Mulders gives a few examples: a passage from the sermo contra Focaristas: that the sexual lusts, even when giving the debitum, are not yet completely regular: namely, maculatur et hebetatur mente. In the Simonia ad Beguttas he does admit that one may attain to a greater perfection in the married state, under condition, however, that the partners abstain from their conjugal rights.² Some have thought to detect a different note in The Moral Address, but there too Groote exhorts to abstinence, and that you will gladly be together, rather in the spirit than in the flesh.³

Mulder thus concludes: From a comparison of De Matrimonio with remarks made in other works we are justified in concluding that the doctrine of De Matrimonio was not formulated especially for the occasion, but really reflects the opinions generally held by Geert Groote.⁴

Groote attempts to find support for these rigoristic views on marriage, which Mulders has resumed in a few theses, in numerous quotations from the Fathers, theologians, profane authors and above all, the canonists. Various Church Fathers and also the canonists provided him with sufficient evidence for most of these theses, but not for all. Groote not only zealously sought for authors who supported his views, he even exceeded them. He was unique in the tradition of the Netherlands. This may partly be explained by his fight against the lax opinions prevailing, or at least the way of living which he saw around him and which he also perhaps regarded somewhat sombrey. And yet, in the so-called contemptus-mundi-literature, particularly of the twelfth century,
we find utterances against everything the monks termed worldly and which sometimes seems to be synonymous with the lay manner of life. Utterances which are closely related to those of Groote, for example in Peter Damian, who did not recognize such a thing as conjugal love and considered all marriage acts as unfitting and sinful, or at least only to be relegated to second place. Their ideal was to impose the monastic way of life on everyone: to make the world one big monastery.¹ I do not believe that Groote intends to go so far, yet his theories on marriage bear a strong resemblance to the ideas of Peter Damian and other authors of the *contemptus mundi*, or to those of the monastic preachers.

**S. Meditation and Philosophy**

There are still two shorter works which make a more pleasing impression, expressions of Groote’s inner life and of his theological-philosophical concepts and ideals. These are the *Tractatus de quattuor generibus meditationum sive contemplationum* or *sermo de nativitate domini*² and the ‘Moral Address’.³ The first work, which is called *Tractatus* or *Sermo* has something of both. It begins as a sermon on the text: *Parvulus nobis natus est*, sketches the greatness and humiliation of the new-born Christ child and exhorts to humility. It then however, develops into a treatise completely unsuitable for a sermon, since it is not intended to be heard and is difficult to understand even as a written piece. Neither is it a treatise on the four kinds of meditation considered as four methods, - as it has been classed -, but rather a critical estimation of the value and utility of the essential sources for the event of Christmas in Bethlehem, of the *cogitabilia*. The author distinguishes four groups: the canonical scriptures, independent revelation, the exposition of the doctors and what has been added to this by human imagination.

He deals first with the value of the last mentioned, human imagination - in this case the clear representation of the persons, their outward appearance and their clothes. This can be very useful for the person meditating, but too much value should not be attached to it. It must be constantly borne in mind that it is imagination and not really

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present. The largest section of the treatise, 20 out of the 50 pages, is devoted to the Holy Scriptures as a source of meditation. Distinguishing between the texts of the Old and New Testaments he gives his opinion that the former, which refer directly to Christ's birth and are designated as such by the New Testament, must be accepted de fide. Not everything in the afore-mentioned texts, however, need have happened literally, for example the presence of the ox and the ass from Isaiah, the fall of the idols during Christ's flight into Egypt. Groote explains these texts from an entirely spiritual standpoint and, interpreted in this way, they may contain truth.

We must accept the texts of the New Testament, but they do demand some explanation on our part, without which we know nothing of the external appearance of the persons involved. We must even already possess the concepts of virgo and to bear and here again not only are we exercising our imagination but generally speaking the value of human concepts has to be taken into account. This passage gives us an important insight into Groote's views on the practice of philosophy in his day. I reproduce it here as set down in the sermon (treatise)

Heu, quam malesuadi ex hoc hodie iuvenculi ex persona Aristotilis vel alterius philosophi, quem mente magnifice extollunt, plurima que vix ymno antequam medullultus intelligient sibi suadent et persuadent ex sola persona dicentis. Sed hoc hodie magnum unum impedimentum philosophie est, quod oritur ex reflectione intelligibilium ad dicentem et ad eorum circumstantias. Aliud vero hoc in philosophia maius et communi est impedimentum, quia omnes iuxta primum modum, cum de rerum essenciis, naturis, quidditibus, materia, forma, generibus et speciebus tractant, mente non in re, sed pro maiori parte in formis litterarum versantur. Sic fateor me diu valde philosophatum etc.¹.

The translation reads as follows:²

‘Alas, how misguided are the young people to-day, that they, depending solely on the personal word of Aristotle or of another philosopher whom they personally esteem very highly, persuade and convince themselves of many opinions which they scarcely understand, or indeed even before they have penetrated to the heart of them - solely on account of the person who expresses them.

But this to-day is only one great hindrance to philosophy; it arises from the fact that when reflecting on the intelligible, people take ac-

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¹ Archief ... aartsh. Utrecht 49 (1924) 315.
² Composed with the valued assistance of Prof. L.M. de Rijk, Nijmegen.
count of such an incidental thing as another's pronouncements on the subject.

There is, however, another greater and more widespread hindrance - and this lies in philosophy itself - namely that apart from the first mentioned method of philosophizing, all students of philosophy, when concerning themselves with the essentials of things, their natures, quiddities, their matter and form, and their genera and species, do not direct their minds to reality but for the greater part only to the verbal expressions themselves. I must confess that I philosophized in this manner for a very long time.'

Groote rejects two things: first the rash following of Aristotle or others; secondly Nominalism, which Groote first supported and now rejects. On these grounds we must assume that during his student-period in Paris (1355-68) Groote became acquainted with the Nominalism quite current there and that he convinced himself then generally speaking of its rightness for the approach to reality and had a high opinion of the value of human knowledge. When he grew older, however, he rejected this system and returned to the via antiqua.

He does indeed refer to his own philosophy two pages back - dico secundum modum mee philosophye. That in later times he supported realism and opposed nominalism is confirmed by his repeated reference to Thomas Aquinas - admittedly in more ethical and dogmatic questions - while the name of Ockham or of other nominalists does not occur in his works. Some have thought, on the grounds of extremely vague reasoning and the resemblance of the first word of the name Modern Devotion to via moderna - that Groote must have supported the via moderna in philosophy and theology. In the passage quoted above he clearly states the opposite.

Groote devotes only one paragraph to each of the second and third key sources for the event of Christmas. The second are the so-called private revelations. They may exist and they may be useful but one must examine critically by whom and under what circumstances they were given.

The third source - everything based on the assertions of authorities, on reasonable seeming reasoning or upon the triumphant intellect; all this offers possibilities. They must be carefully weighed up and criticized and if possible rendered free of errors.¹

By now it will be evident that not much remains here of a Christmas

¹ Archeif... aartsb. Utrecht 49 (1924) 325-326.

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sermon, nor of a description of the four methods of meditation. These passages
certainly cannot serve to show that as early as the very beginning of Modern Devotion,
the exercise which was later called ‘methodical meditation’ was already in existence.
The treatise is a kind of criteriological dissertation - the only one, indeed, we possess
of Groote. It gives an evaluation of biblical texts, particular revelations, learned
guesses and in general, of human imagination for our knowledge of some particular
event, i.e. of what occurred in Bethlehem.

T. The moral Address. Translations

The last work of Groote to be dealt with here is small in size, but not in significance.
The publisher called the work The Moral Address.\footnote{Ed. J. van Vloten, Nieuw archief voor kerkelijke geschiedenis inzonderheid van Nederland II (1854) 295 (in. 1) 299-307. In the manuscript it is attributed to Geert Groote.} This seems indeed to have been
an address which was not elaborated into a thesis. In other words, it was delivered
as it stands, which cannot be said for any of the other sermons which have survived.
It is a welcome exception, written as it is in the vernacular. Although Groote preached
a great many sermons and delivered many addresses most of them probably in the
vernacular, everything else that has come down to us is in Latin. The content too
differs from his other writings in that the author compares the outward devotional
practices and acts of penitence and mortification with inward devotion (innigheid),
not so much in order to reject all the externals as to propose certain conditions for
their performance.

Taking as his theme Paul's words: Justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (that
is in the Kingdom of God), he urges his audience to strive to attain these three; this
is after all, the same as to cultivate inward devotion. All outward practices such as
fasts, scourging, vigils, singing many psalms or saying several Pater Nosters,
mortifications such as lying on a hair bed or wearing a hair shirt; all these are good
enough, but lose their value if they do not bring forth the three already mentioned:
justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. The work which is otherwise good but which
would hinder one of these three, must no longer be considered as a good work. It
may still appear good, but it has become bad. Without inner justice a great number
of prayers or a life of mortification or penance are meaningless.
Groote then explains further the meaning and connection of the three requirements for the inner life: justice, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. One may not have what belongs to another; according to Thomas this is true even in very small matters. Every infringement of justice deprives people of joy and peace. This also follows from the text: Peace to men of good will. He alone is of goodwill who conforms his will entirely to the divine will. This is to strive after justice and to preserve purity of heart, this now gives peace of heart, a fervent or inner joy.¹ The just man bears every injustice for God. And yet, how many work themselves into a temper on account of a small slight. Groote gives the example of the man and woman who fly out at each other like beasts. This is wrong in general but particularly for married couples where the one must be subject to the other according to the ordinance of God. As the child must be subject to the parents, so the wife must be subject to the husband.²

He expresses this very plainly when he addresses the wife herself: ‘You have not power over your body.’³ But still his attitude to the relationship between man and wife is rather different from De Matrimonio. Love exists. ‘The husband must love his wife,’ says Paul, ‘even as Christ loves the Holy Church.’⁴ The husband must love her and protect her with his power and the wife will be subject to the husband.⁵ The woman, however, is subject to sterner duties than the man. She may not go out secretly, sojourn in strange company and in taverns, as the men do now. She may not eat outside her own house. Mulders, however has rightly observed that love between man and woman is viewed on such a spiritual plane, or at least so recommended that ‘Groote wishes to avoid promoting conjugal love through physical union: he even expressly exhorts to abstinence.’⁶

Since we are not concerned here with giving a complete list of Groote's works, we might be tempted to pass over the translations in silence. And yet there is usually a principle involved in the choice of the book to be translated. The translator considers it beautiful, or useful and wishes by his translation to render it accessible to a large circle of readers. The same motives can be said to have inspired Groote. While

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1 van Vloten 303 and 304.
2 Ibid., 305.
3 Ibid., 305 ‘Die en heeft dyns lijfs gheen macht.’
4 Ibid., 307.
5 Ibid., 306.
6 M. Mulders, Geert Groote en het huwelijk, Nijmegen, diss. 1941, 106.
he considered the second volume of Ruusbroec's book *De XII Baguttis* completely unsuitable for publishing in the vernacular, and only thought the *Boec van de XII trappen* fit after various corrections suggested by himself, he had no hesitation in translating Ruusbroec's *Chierheit der gheestelyker Brulocht* into Latin. He evidently valued the content of this book so highly that he took it upon himself to disseminate the work in much wider circles in a Latin translation. He was entirely successful. To judge from the manuscripts of the Latin text which have been preserved, the book must have had a very wide distribution. This fact is not without significance. Groote showed himself here to be a supporter of Ruusbroec's mysticism. He esteemed it highly and considered it a religious privilege, which he himself had not been granted. This higher mysticism, which we shall meet in a few of the Windesheimers, is not found among the Brethren, who content themselves with a stern asceticism on a religious basis, as they had learned from Groote. I have been able to find no evidence of whether they shared his esteem for the higher election.

In translating a group of hours (of Mary, the Holy Ghost, the Holy Cross, eternal wisdom, for the dead) Groote naturally intended to render these liturgical or semi-liturgical texts understandable for those who had little book learning, some of the Brothers for instance but chiefly many of the sisters. Similar translations existed before him but these were evidently susceptible of improvement. There must, moreover, have been a considerable demand for such translations owing to the enormous expansion of the monasteries and of quasi monastic institutions. In this connection there are two other things to be borne in mind. Firstly, that Groote's biographers do not agree on which hours Groote translated from Latin into Dutch. Secondly, that it is very difficult to establish if a particular text is indeed Groote's own work. We have to leave this to the experts to decide. Here the important thing is to establish that Gerard Groote felt it necessary to provide the many sisters, usually not entirely to be reckoned as nuns, with a Dutch text of the prayers of the Church. These texts could probably also be used in the choir. This is one of the expressions of his concern for pastoral matters.

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2 Tiecke o.c. 179 based on a statement by P. Horn; Ed. of *J. Ruusbroec's werken* door L. Reypens S.J., Tielt 1948.
U. Summary

So far as can be deduced from Geert Groote's letters and treatises, he was not a speculative theologian, a profound dogmatist who made a place for himself in the history of late-medieval theology, a man who clearly adhered to one of the schools of his time. In the treatise *De quattuor generibus meditationum* he says that he formerly philosophized differently. In other words, he progressed from the *via moderna* to the *via antiqua*. He does not quote Ockham but repeatedly cites Thomas Aquinas, both the *Sententiarium Liber* and the *Summa Theologica*. Groote recognizes the merit of human acts performed with God's grace. To a new monk, for example, he writes: *Et cogitatis, quod sepe plus homo meretur, quando est in minore fervore, quam quando est in maiore; et tunc est tempus merendi, quando Deus relinquuit hominem et retrahit manum suam, et homo manet vel confidens in Deo, etc.* Or: ‘But such a struggle is for the strong, and for these in consequence both the *meritum* and the reward are great.’ Grace is here assumed. This is the medieval idea of the common believer, which has been exactly described by theologians like St. Thomas. With Groote one finds nothing of a fitting (de congruo) merit of the primary grace for him who does what he can, or of a claim to heaven on the grounds of the same endeavour after receiving the first grace. Predestination is little mentioned, but where it occurs it is not only a prior knowledge, but indeed a prior predestination. After the model of St. Bernard he writes: ‘And this God does entirely, who from our wickedness brings forth good to our advantage and improvement. And we must surely hope for and hold fast to this, that for those who love God, all works together for good, for those who according to the decree are called saints, that is, those who are predestined for eternal life.’

There is no under-valuation of good works as might be deduced from Groote's *Conclusa et proposita*. At most the condition is made in the *Moral Address* that good deeds must be performed with the good intention, must be linked with the inward life. Groote cannot be reproached in any way with the neo-Pelagianism of which some authors have accused various nominalists and later also Thomas Aquinas.

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1 Ger. M. Ep., p. 343.

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It has also been quite evident that the Holy Scriptures constituted an important, but never the sole source of Groote's works and letters. He draws equally upon the Fathers and theologians, and particularly the *Decreta* and *Decretalia* with their commentaries. He is, moreover, not alone in his use of the Bible - other earlier theologians referred to it. One remarkable fact is that, like some before him and Erasmus and others after him, he calls the knowledge of God ‘philosophy’: ‘When shall the soul depart from this damp cave and fly up to the freedom of the celestials, to the peace of the devout (*intemi*) to the enjoyment of the true philosophy, which is God.’

Although Geert Groote sometimes voiced his desire for a contemplative life, he led a very active one between the years 1379-1384. It was a life filled with preaching, the writing of treatises and letters which were sometimes elaborated into theses, and journeyings to and fro, so far as we can gather, between Deventer, Zwolle, Kampen, Utrecht, Amsterdam and Woudrichem with occasional trips to Paris, Groenendaal and Liège. He advises young men and women who wish to enter a monastery and uses his influence on their behalf. He busies himself with various matters, appointing school rectors, admitting various persons to hostels, unmasking a false physician, appointing parish priests. He gives legal advice or enlists the help of others. He founds houses for Brethren in Deventer, Zwolle and Kampen at least, and has numerous books copied, sometimes employing as many as five people for this work. Some of these persons are called *scholares*. The admission of schoolboys to their own hostels is, however, never mentioned in the letters. Geert Groote did not occupy himself with education as such. In addition to various small matters he fights against the violation of celibacy among secular priests, the giving of a dowry on entering a convent and the retention of personal property by monks and nuns, particularly the Cistercian nuns. He fiercely opposed the heretic Bartholemew. Finally he gave his opinion on various problems connected with the schism. He is a scholar, devoted to study, and has an extensive knowledge of the Bible, Church Fathers, a few pagan philosophers like Aristotle and Seneca and various medieval theologians, notably St. Thomas and Bernard. Of the Fathers, he is particularly fond of Augustine and St. Jerome. He is a passionate lover of books, not as a bibliophile, but in order to study them and to utilize their content for his own life and work. He worked extremely hard

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up to his final illness and death, and this in his own opinion distracted his mind too much from the inner religious life. In his predilection for the inner devotion, he did not neglect the oral prayers such as the breviary, but we know this chiefly from other sources which will be discussed later.

It is not known whether his treatises *De Matrimonio*, *De locotione ecclesiarium* and *Contra magna edificia superflua ac institutiones fiasas principaliter contra turrim Traiectensem*, were ever published. If they were this may explain why many considered Groote a dangerous preacher on account of his rigorism. This rigoristic attitude is also strong in the *Sermo contra focaristas*, not so much in the condemnation of keeping *focariae*, as in his ideas on the automatic legal consequences of suspension; excommunication, irregularity, prohibition from attending Holy Mass, all without legal sentence. Such ideas aroused opposition and even Salvarvilla was not too enthusiastic about them. He adopted the same rigoristic and personal attitude towards heretics - he was even more severe than the judges and offered his services as inquisitor.

On the basis of these facts it will not have been too difficult for his enemies to compile a report branding Groote as a dangerous preacher, and to convince the bishop that it was better to silence this deacon. He himself mentions that he was silenced on account of his preaching. The appeal to Rome was well within his rights.¹

¹ I can agree with Lindeboom in accepting that a certain relationship existed between Groote and the Beguines, while at the same time rejecting the ‘wrong’ Beguines. J. Lindeboom, *Geert Groote's preksuspensie*. Meded. d. Ned. Kon. Ak. v. Wet., Afd. L., new series 4 (1941) 99-131. This rejection appeared clearly enough from his conflict with the Free Spirits; the relationship is evident in his piety. It is certain that the enemies of the Brothers and Sisters and especially of the latter, thought, in the years following Groote's death, that the best way to combat them was to accuse the Sisters of being Beguines (cf. p. 261.). I have very grave doubts, however, whether this similarity between Groote and the Beguines and Bogards already existed to such an extent in 1383 and was so noticeable that it contributed to the bishop's decision to forbid Groote to preach. For at this time the Brethren and the Sisters of the Common Life scarcely existed as such. Those who wished to attack Groote could hardly do so by referring to his connections with the Beguines. For Groote was a man who fully participated in real life and proclaimed his opinions undaunted, unlike the retiring Beguines and Bogards. Lindeboom thinks that there was evidence of 'heresy' (his quotation marks) in the tendency or at least the possibility of falling into real heresy through the rigoristic, laicistic striving after poverty, in the critical attitude towards all that in any way diverged from the apostolic, in the subjectivist evaluation of the hierarchy and in the spiritualistic emphasis on the *vita interior* with the (again relative) neglect of all that had to do with the *vita exterior*. Yet no matter how carefully all this is phrased, it seems to me exaggerated. The striving after poverty is not to my mind a tendency towards laicization (as with his contemporary Wyclif), and he was certainly not critical of everything which diverged from the apostolic (at most he returned in certain matters to the apostolic tradition). He recognized the limitations of the power of the hierarchy and fought the bishops' usurpation of power, but on the other hand he was docile with regard to the pope and bishops and esteemed ecclesiastical law.

It seems to me to be going too far to speak of a subjectivist attitude, and finally his emphasis on the *vita interior* did not lead to an (again relative) neglect of the *vita exterior*, his resolutions clearly show his opinion on this subject and his letters the practice.

R.R. Post, *The Modern Devotion*
V. Did Groote carry out his intentions?

Did all these activities accord with what Groote formulated as resolutions and conclusions, probably shortly after his ‘conversion’ and perhaps in the first period of his stay in Monnikhuizen, as transmitted by Thomas a Kempis? He sums up all that he desires to abandon or renounce, now that he wishes to direct his life towards the glory of God and His service. He resolved not to esteem temporal advantage above the salvation of the soul, that is, never again to desire a benefice. The rejection of benefices liberated his spirit. Freedom is the highest good in the spiritual life. He wished to limit his possessions to essentials, to be content with what was in accordance with participation in the community life. He did not wish to enter the service of an ecclesiastic or temporal dignity for gain. Further he desired to renounce completely all astrological, superstitious practices and all profit which he might acquire from learning. He even wished to abandon all branches of learning (philosophy and theology are not mentioned). Of pagan learning he will retain only moral philosophy. At the same time he rejects the inquiry into the secrets of nature in the books of the pagans and in those of the Old and New Testament. God must be praised in nature. He does not wish to obtain any academic degree in medicine, in either branch of law, or theology. He will not devote himself to any field of study or write any book in order to enhance his reputation. He wishes to avoid the ‘public debates’ and considers those of the university inexpedient. He does not wish to dispute either with any private individual. He even refuses to continue his studies in Roman Law and

1 Conclusa et proposita, non vota in nomine Domini a magistro Gerardo edita, M.J. Pohl, p. 129 VII, 1922, 87-91.
2 Ibid., 88.
3 Ibid., 89.
4 Ibid., 90.
5 Ibid., 91.
6 Ibid., 92, 94.

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medicine. In the practice of medicine he will prescribe no uncertain cures. Further he will not occupy himself with trials, except to prevent evil, neither will he act for friends before the ecclesiastical judge or the Deventer magistrates, unless again it is necessary. He will not bring an action against anyone - even if one of his relatives should be mishandled, killed or molested. He will not return evil for evil or deal with problems of friends or relations, except in purely pious affairs or those which conduce to charity. These proposals, known for the most part from the *contemptus mundi* literature, are indeed entirely characteristic of a scholarly person. He virtually rejects scholasticism, its study terrain and its method. The compiler of this document is a scholar who mentions no other activities than those of study: he rejects astrology, and every branch of learning, especially when pursued for gain. Did Groote put all this into practice? The giving up of his benefices and of the paternal house and the sobriety of his life are sufficiently established. He probably gained no advantage from his later activities, nor did he acquire any academic degree. His efforts to keep his library well stocked, his sermons and letters with their many legal arguments, and his juridical advice and other pronouncements are, however, so many signs that he did not abandon learning altogether, but used it for the good of others. There is no indication whatever that he was ever rewarded for this. On the other hand, the *contemptus mundi* of this scholar fails to recognize many cultural values. If everyone were to apply these principles, it would mean the death of study and education, of all scholarly investigation, even of philosophy and theology. Had Groote applied them to the letter he would have been compelled to shut himself up in a monastery, in order to devote himself increasingly to pondering on the means of attaining his own salvation and the love of God. It would, however, have meant the end of any development of his particular gifts. It is striking that in this entire piece there is no mention of a struggle against abuses in church or society or of pastoral cure. In other words he never refers to the work which he began in 1379 and continued with so much courage and energy until his death. These resolutions are made in a monastic spirit and it is only later that Groote must have completely changed his plans. Then his intention was not to retire from the world but to return to it in order to preach the Gospel and to combat what he considered as abuses. As we have seen, there was much that aroused his disapproval and summoned him to fight. In so far, thus, as he changed his life's goal, the resolutions formulated here were not carried out. But his apostolate too was imbued with the
same spirit - the spirit of sacrifice and the rejection of all self-seeking, of the struggle for fame and fortune. He fought undaunted, but as we have seen, in a narrow and rigorous spirit.

Together with these general conclusions and resolutions of Geert Groote, Thomas a Kempis also mentions other resolutions by the same person which he resumes under the two titles: *De sacris libris studendis* and *De abstinencia*. Both are of importance for our knowledge of Groote:

‘I return to learning: the root of your knowledge and the mirror of your life is the Gospel of Christ’ (so preaches Groote to himself) for this is the life of Christ, and after that to the *Vitae* and the *Collationes patrum*, the epistles of St. Paul, the canonical letters and the Acts of the Apostles; then to pious books such as the *Meditationes Bernardi*, *Anselmi horologium*, the *Conscientia Bernardi*, the *Soliloquia Augustini*, the *Legenda* and *Flores sanctorum*, the teachings of the Fathers on virtue such as the *Moralia* of Gregory I, *De opere monachali beati Augustini*, *Gregorius super Job*, and similar works; the homilies on the Gospels by the Fathers and four Doctors of the Church. The explanation of the notes of the Fathers to the pericopes of Paul's epistles. Further study in the Books of Solomon, Proverbs, the Preacher and Ecclesiasticus, because they occur in church readings. Here he adds: ‘I shall pray with the spirit and with the mind.’ Then the book of Psalms and again: ‘I shall sing psalms in spirit and with the understanding.’ This repeated resolution to pray with mind and understanding when praying the breviary is a plain censure of the superficial praying of the psalms. It is, for the rest, a resolution which many make again and again but which appears extremely difficult to put into practice. He mentions in addition the books of Moses and the historical books, with the commentaries by the Fathers. He wishes to study these as well, in fact, virtually the entire body of the Scriptures, the books of the Old and New Testaments. Furthermore he desires to peruse the Decretals, not in order to master the contents but lest ignorance of them should lead to disobedience, and also to gain acquaintance with the great fruits of the Early Church.

In addition he intends to hear mass daily and High Mass on Sundays. He knows from experience that the singing incites the body to devotion. He defends the adoption of certain attitudes during mass, standing, kneeling, bowing etc. He resolves not to be occupied with other prayers during the reading of the Gospel. Whereas in the early

1  Pohl VII, 97-102.
2  Ibid., 102-107.

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Church everyone who attended mass also received Communion, only the Pax and the spiritual communion have remained. ‘Thus if you,’ he says to himself, ‘cannot communicate sacramentally, receive then at least the spiritual communion.’ Meditation on the passion of Christ is very helpful in this. From the Sanctus on, he wishes to join as closely as he can with the priest in order to hear Mass as well as possible, and to see the Sacrament. Finally he considers that he must be careful what advice he gives to anyone wishing to become a priest. The candidate must at least be very pious. In conclusion he gives his resolutions concerning fasting. In the first place he desires to comply with the rules of the law of fasting, then never to eat meat in Advent and always to fast in Lent. Secondly he will never leave the table completely satisfied. This advice is also given by every philosopher and notably Seneca and Aristotle. Fifthly, at the end of the meal consider if you should stop or not. Sixthly: fix the quantity at the beginning of the meal; seventh: nothing more than a cooked pear after the meal. Eighth: eat in the afternoon between 4 and 5. No less than 12 reasons are given for this resolution, mostly of a hygienic nature. Further, from the middle of September until Easter, eat only one meal a day like the Carthusians, Bernardines and others. If it is very cold then he may take something extra on the authority of Hippocrates and also sleep for half an hour or an hour after the meal. He would like to be able to drink no wine as long as he remained healthy and certainly not before and after a meal. Nor would he drink during work or after it.

He will try to fast every Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, without considering this as a resolution. Further he will not eat, write, talk or act in haste. Finally he will keep careful accounts and by sobriety in food and dress hold something over for the poor. He resolves never to give too large alms for there are always poor enough to whom something can be given. He will constantly reread these resolutions and thinks that the heart is perpetually lifted up to the Lord by ejaculatory prayers.

These resolutions too, typify Groote in his desire to render his inner devotion more profound and intense by studying the Bible and various other pious works. This inner quality however, is no enemy of outward practices: the Holy Mass, the breviary, bowing and kneeling and rigorous fasting are equally acceptable and defensible.

Finally Thomas a Kempis gives some other important pronouncements of Geert Groote¹ which characterize his devotion. For example,
the stoic quality: a person should not let himself be put out by any matter in the world; he who puts into practice what he knows is worthy of knowing a great deal, but he who does not put it into practice is blind. We must obey in what is repugnant to us or what is difficult for ourselves. Humility is important. Hence the sum of knowledge is to be convinced that we know nothing. It is vain to please oneself. Think good of others. We must persist in prayer. Temptation exists everywhere in the world and not to be tempted is the greatest temptation. ‘Always more hope than you fear for heavenly glory.’

If Groote’s continuous activity, his preoccupation with many matters, his journeyings to and fro, his rigoristic theories and practices might perhaps stamp him as a homo dissolutus, a man of many cares and thus distracted, then these last remarks serve to show how deep was his devotion and to what severities it would lead in his way of life. Have his biographers sketched him as he is revealed to us in the letters and books? We shall discuss this in the following chapter.

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Chapter Two
How is Groote's Life described in the Earlier Vitae?

The title of this chapter might be put more acutely: What have the biographers made of Groote's life? As already indicated in passing in the previous chapter, I have not kept here to the usual method of historiography, that of giving the story or the picture after all the facts have been assembled and coordinated. There were two reasons for attempting a different method. In the first place, those Vitae which have come down to us were written respectively 37, 45, and around 60 and 70 to 80 years after the death of the hero. In the second place we must take into account the possibility that the biographies were adapted to new or subtly different ideals. For such Vitae as a rule were not written for purely scholarly purposes, nor to make clear to the reader the course of the hero's life in all its motives and aspects. On the contrary, the chief aim of the biographers is to reveal what example has been given by the person in question or even perhaps what types of example were most appreciated in their day. This does not mean that the biographers conjured their Vitae out of thin air, but they selected and stressed what they considered most worthy of imitation in their own time and for their readers, and they may perhaps have coloured these facts.

The letters and books, on the other hand, reveal Groote as he was before the legend grew up about him. Since this present study deals critically with various questions, it seemed a good plan to keep separate the two kinds of sources, the letters and books on the one hand and the Vitae on the other. In my opinion too much reliance has often been placed on the Vitae, as if they possessed as much conclusive force as the letters.

As is known we possess two rhymed texts. One of these can be left out of consideration here since it can scarcely be called a Vita Gerardi Magni but rather a panegyric on Geert Groote, Florens Radewijns, the Sisters and Brethren of the Common Life and the Congregation of Windesheim. Of the 565 lines, 186 are concerned with Groote, but without mentioning any concrete matters.¹ Thus there remains in fact

only one rhymed text, the work of an unknown writer who was however attached as *donatus* to the monastery of Windesheim.¹ There exist in addition three prose texts, one by Thomas a Kempis,² one by Rudolf Dier,³ and one by Peter Horn.⁴ There has been some discussion on the relationship between these texts and their reliability. N.J. Kühler broached the subject in the preface to his edition of Peter Horn's *Vita*. He thought then that Peter Horn was indebted to Thomas a Kempis. Later he defended a different opinion. He assumed that one *Vita* had existed and been lost, perhaps the work of John Cele. This *Vita* would have been used in turn by the poet of the rhymed text, by Thomas a Kempis, by Peter Horn and by Rudolf Dier. Van Ginneken applied the results of Kühler’s theories in his *Geert Groote's Levensbeeld naar de oudste gegevens verwerkt*.⁵ At the same time and without knowing what had been done elsewhere on this subject, the writer of this present study published in *Studia Catholica* an article entitled *De onderlinge verhouding van de vier oude vitae Gerardi Magni en haar betrouwbaarheid*.⁶ In my opinion the arguments for assuming a *Vita deperdita* are insufficient. Moreover, such an assumption in no way resolves the difficulties of the interrelationship of the earlier *Vitae*. I still maintain today the conclusion reached in 1942-43. The rhymed text is the earliest *Vita*, completed in the year 1421. Then comes the *Vita* of Rudolf Dier, probably between 1420 and 1430.⁷ He did not use the rhymed text and represents an independent tradition. The work is admittedly brief, but very reliable. About twenty years later Thomas a Kempis, living on the St. Agnietenberg near Zwolle, wrote a life of Groote. He too represents a distinct and independent tradition. The existing, but extremely slight similarity to the rhymed text is not sufficient reason to assume that a Kempis had recourse to this text and still less that he was dependent on it. He diverges from the poet in various statements. There is no particular ground for doubting Thomas's veracity, which does not preclude the

¹ Ed. by V. Becker, *De Katholiek* 90 (1886) 199-207. After another MS by T. Brandsma, *O.G.E.* 16 (1942) 32-37. The numbering of the lines differs somewhat. Here the last edition is used.
² Ed. by M.J. Pohl, VII, 1922, 33-83.
⁶ *Archief... aartshisdom Utrecht*, 18 (1942) 313-336 and 19 (1943) 9-20.
⁷ According to G. Dumbar on the basis of notes by a Brother made in 1448; which would not be impossible: the reference, however, is to the entire *scriptum*.
possibility that he chose the material himself and may have dealt with it at length or in brief as he felt inclined.

The *Vita* of Horn on the contrary, is a compilation of the three earlier ones and of a few other pieces. Peter Horn's *Vita* is of little significance. He does not represent an independent tradition and gives very little that we do not know from other sources. The addition of certain dubious or untrue statements, the omission of other concrete and true details, the attempt to render the prophecies less vague and to apply them to particular persons cause us to view with scepticism those points on which Horn in any way differs from the other sources such as the *Vitae* of Dier and Thomas.\(^1\) But despite this unreliability in the historical sense of the word this *Vita* can be extremely important for our investigation. Since Horn probably wrote around 1460-70 it might be that his work reveals the ideal image of Groote as conceived at this particular time.

All the same it seems strange that no *Life* was written earlier than so many decades after Groote's death. This man who, by his sudden conversion, his writings and preaching, his founding of houses for Brethren and Sisters, his criticism of the existing Church conditions and his war against sin, had aroused so much sensation, had made so many friends as well as enemies, and was suddenly compelled to give up preaching after four years' work, dying unexpectedly a year later and leaving behind him a group of disciples who continued his work - surely such a man deserved earlier recognition? Had he been forgotten? Did no one dare write his *Life*? Was no one competent to do so? There was at least one of the Brethren who could write, namely Gerard Zerbold, and there were several among the first Windesheimers, for example Henry Mande or a little later Thomas a Kempis. One may ponder on this question, but it is difficult to suggest any well-founded solution. It happens not infrequently, however, that an important man's biography is not written until some time after his death. In the first years the disciples and followers may have felt no need of a written *Life*. They were all familiar with Groote's main deeds and aims. They gladly continued what he had begun and no one felt himself impelled to set down all the events of his life and what he had accomplished. Various stories about his life and work must have been current. Several letters were soon collected. The works were difficult to read. The rector of the Brethren and the Prior of Windesheim will on occasion have

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\(^1\) *Studia Catholica*, 19 (1943) 19-20.

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commemorated Groote in their addresses, thereby stressing in particular his example for imitation.\footnote{On may add to this the words of the prior of Windesheim at a meeting of the then Windsheimers and \textit{fraters}. See J. Busch, Chronicon Windsheemensi 47, 48, or the letter of William Vornken in J.G.R. Acquoy, \textit{Het klooster te Windesheim en zijn invloed}, 3 dln. III Utrecht, 1880, 235-255.} Gradually a picture of him must have been formed in the minds of his followers, a picture of his life, with details of his study, his behaviour at the University, his benefices, his sudden conversion, his visit to Ruusbroec, his stay in Monnikhuizen, his preaching afterwards as deacon, and his struggle against the heretics of Kampen and against the focarists in Utrecht with the well known consequences. These facts became the canvas into which the later authors could weave their strands of information, imparting to each a different colour.

The facts indicated above are also mentioned in the rhymed text, but it is not the poet's aim to celebrate these facts. He uses them rather to hold up Groote as an example. The family's prosperity, the brilliant study in Paris, the worldly life, rendered the conversion all the more remarkable (lines 5 to 27). A more important point is that according to the poet the conversion was predicted in Cologne and Arnhem (perhaps a slip of the pen for Aachen) (lines 27 to 42). Then follows the story of the conversion, evident from Groote's resigning of his benefices and the greater part of his property (43-56), and the description of his further life, the putting into practice of the \textit{contemptus mundi} (line 57). He is an apostle, a second Augustine, whose mortification and humility are celebrated in several lines (57-76). This man worked day and night, assisted many with advice; this humblest of \textit{magisters} did not despise the vernacular, but translated books by John Ruusbroec and John of Leeuwen, cook at Groenendaal, into Latin. He did not worry about who said a thing, but about what was said. He was always busy and journeyed much, but guarded his eyes lest his spirit be tainted. He was the same for poor and rich alike and fought against the failings of clergy and people. He was pure, prayed his breviary and began thereby spontaneously to sing (77-102). He could perform miracles - the liberation of Deventer at his prayer - yet he sought no display. But no one could resist his urging (103-116).

A brief mention is made of the sermon \textit{Contra focaristas} and his action against the heretics in Kampen: \textit{hereticorum est malleus} (117-119); he shows his humility by asking younger people for advice and by beginning to preach for schoolboys (119-126). He had several revelations.
(the death of Ruusbroec, the end of Purgatory for another, the disaster of heretical Kampen (127-142)). The devil visibly harassed him (141-144). He also made predictions which came to pass: two persons would become priests, the conversion of a brother, another's entry into a monastery, a holy death (147-158). Knowing that the Devotionalists and the simple were hated by the worldlings, he came to their aid by founding Windesheim (161-173). He continued his labours. Stricken by the plague, he predicted his approaching death (176-181). He died, leaving behind him books but no money; the tomb (183-185). The remaining lines deal with the Congregation of the Brethren and the monastery and chapter of Windesheim (187-239).

Only 185 lines are devoted to the life of Geert Groote, and most of these refer to his virtue, his mortification, his humility, his industry, his joyfulness, his prophecies and wonders, and to the devil's opposition. The author must have been familiar with the most significant aspects of Groote's life, his study, conversion, solitude, apostolate, sermon against the focarists and heretics, but these serve only to describe the virtues they reveal. His study is mentioned, as well as the fact that he left books behind him, but his erudition, his extensive knowledge of the law and its application in certain treatises such as the *Sermo contra focaristas*, or *De matrimonio, Contra aedificia superflua*, or the schism, these are passed over in silence, as are his actions against the custom of bringing dowries and against the *proprietarii*. There is no reference either to his astrological studies.

Rudolf Dier\(^1\) has a decidedly more concrete approach than the poet and a more sober view of the facts. His account of Groote's birth, family, life in Paris, conversion and his renouncing of house and benefices form a good historical exposition. Then, however, he begins his description of Groote's humility and mortification and here the legend has evidently begun to play its part. Groote exchanged his worldly dress for a humble habit (*habitus*), with a penitential garment over it and a hair shirt underneath. He cooks his meals himself - and in order to gain more time for reading and prayer he often cooks peas, because, they are easy to do. When they were ready he dropped a salt fish in, making a sort of fish stew. Rudolf Dier also tells a few stories which he had heard from certain people: from Lubert ten Bosch, ‘I was once asked to a meal, and then he fetched a piece of cold cooked beef from under the table and gave this to his guest and we ate it up together.’

\(^1\) G. Dumbar, *Analecta* I, 1-12.
Dirk Gruter, a teacher in Deventer, saw Groote with a wretched wornout cloak (*almutius*) and offered him a good one. Groote, however, refused to accept it and said: ‘Would you deprive me of my poverty?’ Another person saw Groote with a tunic, worn and torn by age and said: ‘Why do you walk about in that state when there is no need?’ ‘I do this, not because I have no better but in order to be able to conquer myself.’

In his brief biography Rudolf Dier devotes enough space to the description of this exercise of humility and poverty. Its significance only becomes clear when we see how much value the first Brethren attached to such humility in dress (see p. 241). Dier further informs us that Groote went to church with two cloaks and how he had a separate apartment in the Franciscan Church which could be entirely closed off, while through a window he could see the Holy Sacrament during the Consecration and receive the pax. He also tells us who Groote's confessor was and to whom he had once made a general confession. On this point too, Groote gave an example, but this is merely an intermission, for Dier continues the story of Groote's humility.

Groote once went to Paris in a worn or penitential garment in order to buy books. The narrative then proceeds to Groote's visit to Ruusbroec; his sermon there; his consecration as a deacon; his fear of becoming a priest, his Sermon *contra focaristas* at the Synod of Utrecht and the method of announcing when Groote came to preach anywhere. All this may be accepted as a sober historical narrative, but he intersperses it with accounts of how the devil harassed Groote and raised a storm on the Zuiderzee, whereby Groote's books barely escaped destruction. His remarks about the struggle against the heretics in Kampen are also enlivened with a prediction: that Christ would conquer the walls of the city - which really came to pass since Christ dwells there in the religious and the devout. It was the inhabitants of Kampen who had him prohibited from preaching. In the period of quiet which followed Groote translated, according to R. Dier, the hours of the Holy Virgin, the seven penitential psalms and the office for the dead from Latin into Dutch. He wrote a short explanation to some of the psalms. Dier thinks too that Groote also composed a litany on the seven psalms.

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2 Cf. on this p. 186. Groote considered this as a spiritual communion.
3 Dumbar, *Analecta* 3.
The Sisters still use these translations and litany. This is an important piece of information since the fact was not known from the letters, whereas the texts themselves have been preserved. The Sisters thus prayed some of the hours and other prayers in Dutch. I should not dare to state whether this was revolutionary, others may have begun the same thing earlier. The Sisters of the older orders may have been somewhat better educated than the many tertiaries. But whether or not he was the first, it was an important improvement and Groote obtained good results on this point for a long period. It may be, however, that these hours and certainly the seven penitential psalms and the litany were employed for private devotion alongside the officium divinum, the hours of the Church. Another example to be imitated was Groote’s custom of offering himself to the Lord several times during the day. He accused himself once of only having done this ten times on a particular day. In the evenings he and his companions usually assembled to pray: an examination of conscience whereby they accused each other of shortcomings if any had been noticed. This too was later a common practice among the Brethren. Groote, say Rudolf Dier, had shown them the way. He then refers to the good results obtained by the preaching, life and example of Groote. Then follow some important facts concerning the first Fraters which we will refer to presently. Groote again makes a prediction: the conversion of Henry of Höxter, and also that John of Höxter after death walked up and down in his room, draped in a beautiful garment. Another example of Groote’s humility: he had the custom of talking Latin with his companions under pain of penalty, namely that anyone who spoke Dutch should kneel down and kiss the floor. It so happened that Master Geert was caught speaking Dutch with his brothers. They dared not draw his attention to this, out of respect, but they smiled. He understood then and immediately fell to the ground and kissed it. On seeing John of Heusden Groote foretold his future. He did something similar for Florens Radewijns. Then follows the information concerning the two houses, on his property and his books. These were given to the community, while according to the law it would be a joint property, held by three persons. This college would choose another whenever one fell out.

1 Dumbar, Analecta, 7.
2 Cf. on this p. 166.
3 Dumbar, Analecta, 6-7.
4 It must be remarked that this was not a confession of sins. No one confessed anything but each accused the other if he had been at fault.
5 Dumbar, Analecta 8.

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The books would have to be freely lent out. Dier subsequently mentions that Groote had written down his sins on a piece of paper, ordering his pupils to burn it immediately after his death. This they did, but some disapproved of this action in the hope and trust that they would find on the paper various revelations of God to Groote. He did not wish them to be made known, perhaps in order not to seem full of vainglory, even though it was after his death. In the well known story of Groote's illness and death Dier mentions that Groote rejoiced in the hope for the future and despised all that was temporal. A final point: after his death in Deventer a preacher in Zutphen proclaimed his joy at Groote's death: ‘I tell you fresh rumours: Mr. Geert who by his journeys through the land led the people into error, is dead.’ But he has scarcely said these words before he collapsed and had to be carried away.

In giving all these exact and concrete details of Groote's life Dier loses no opportunity of depicting Groote as an example for his pupils, an extremely humble man and much given to self mortification, who made prophecies. A man of God who caused miraculous things to happen. He makes no mention of Groote's many activities, says little of his scholarship except that he forswore astrology. He also passes over any reaction against his sermon in Utrecht and his work to rid the monasteries of the proprietarii. No matter how sober this Vita is it remains a glorification of the deceased, a small panegyric. The writer assumes that the Brotherhood exists, but does not say how it originated. One finds nothing about education or 'hostels' for schoolboys. A teacher, Dirk Gruter, seems to have been friendly with Groote. The Vita has already suffered the influence of the legend. Groote is adapted to the ideals of the living: mortification, humility, little learning, a certain amount of activity but predominantly a retiring and religious life.

The life of Groote written by Thomas a Kempis comprises about fifty pages in the edition of M.J. Pohl. It is thus much longer than the other two put together, but does not give many more particulars. Around the well known facts, rather vaguely expressed, Thomas weaves his sermon for the novices of the monastery on the St. Agnietenberg near Zwolle. Groote is held up as a model. In this he is complying with a request by one of the novices who wished to hear something of the first fathers by whom the Modern Devotion was brought to flower. He

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2 Ibid., 10.
3 Ibid., 10-11.
4 *Opera omnia*, VII 31-84.

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wishes to hear particularly of their virtues, so that he may be aroused to strive more ardently and more zealously after virtue. Thomas is only too pleased to expound on these good examples and in particular on the life of Geert Groote. Although he did not know him personally, he has heard sufficient about his happy activities. He touches briefly on family and education; of more importance is the conversion, the change from the old life to a status of new *conversatio*, a more or less monastic way of life which amounts to a contempt for the world (*contemptus mundi*) and the humble imitation of Christ. Not only did he teach the rules of orthodox belief, but by his pious example restored the holy monastic life (*sacra religio*).\(^1\) He was successful in his studies in Paris. He was a *magister* at the age of 18 and in due course received benefices, including one in Aachen. He sought not the glory of Christ but to make a name for himself and for human renown. He walked the broad paths of this world.\(^2\) Then comes the conversion, predicted by a hermit in Cologne and brought to pass by a monk, namely the prior of Monnikhuizen, Henry of Calcar. He feared that the erudite *magister* would perish in the world. The world was then in a sorry state. There were but few who showed by word and deed that they understood the word of life and even fewer who aspired to abstinence. Even the name of the monastic life and devotion was tottering, except for the Carthusians.\(^3\) The prior wished to save Groote from the *saeculi fluctibus* and so praised the monastery, rejected the course of the world and showed that everything is fleeting. His efforts were crowned with success. God gave his blessing to Groote whom He predestined from all eternity to join Himself to Him.\(^4\) The conversion which quickly followed was revealed by Groote's renouncing his benefices and adopting the dress of a simple cleric. In other words he preferred contempt for the world to wealth. His actions aroused much comment but he paid no heed and did not allow himself to be turned from his purpose by a friend from the prosperous middle classes. He retired to Monnikhuizen, was given a cell as a guest and followed the ordinary life of the monastery. This is described as a joy and a purification from the old life and rendered attractive for the listeners.

Chapter III describes the monastic life in detail, plainly as an ideal to be imitated by the novice who here begins to join in the conversation: ‘Who are the enemies of the monastery, master?’ ‘The desires of the flesh, the attractions of the world and the temptations of the devil.’

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\(^1\) Pohl VII, 33, 34.
\(^3\) *Ibid.*, 37.

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After Geert's death a pious sister found his penitential garment (*cilium*) and felt it with her hand. It was long and rough and had many knots in order to increase the penance.¹

Groote did not remain in the monastery. Men of understanding and the monks themselves told him to go and preach. Thomas defends this decision but does his best to prevent the novice from wishing to follow this example. The master was fitted for preaching but less strong to bear the burdens of monastic life. He had learned to walk the way of humility and to despise the things of the world.² Then follows a general description of Groote's teaching. Opposition comes from the part of the *amatores mundi* and from the pleasure-seekers. Worse still, certain prelates and wandering monks (*religiosi circumvagantes*) were intolerant of his teaching and his zeal for sinners. They begin to slander him, as appears from a letter.³ He then describes the opposition Groote met with in Kampen and the prohibition from preaching whereby Groote even takes the part of the people of Kampen.⁴ He had books copied by schoolboys to whom he proclaimed the word of God whenever they came to him. He paid them in instalments so that he might see them oftener. In general he preferred to preach for the simple than for the educated.⁵ Opposition from a Dominican who wished to lay a charge against Groote in Rome but died on the way, was compensated by the defence offered by another famous preacher of the same order. In telling the story of the visit to Ruusbroec in Groenendaal Thomas does not forget to remark that Groote and his companions had no eyes for the tall and interesting buildings but regarded only the signs of simplicity and poverty which were the first traces of our King, the King of Heaven, who was born in poverty of the Virgin. Ruusbroec, informed by divine revelation, received Master Gerard with the utmost cordiality, immediately calling him by his name although he had never seen him before.⁶ Thomas also told his audience that God later revealed Ruusbroec's death to Groote. He saw his soul rising up to heaven after an hour's purification, as he made known to his friends in Deventer by tolling the bells. By quoting a passage from one of Groote's letters Thomas revealed that love for Ruusbroec increased after this. He omits to mention that Groote entertained certain reservations concerning two of Ruusbroec's works.

Then follows a chapter on Groote's austerity in eating and sobriety

¹ Pohl VII, 40.
² Ibid., 44-45.
³ Ibid., 46.
⁴ Ibid., 49.
⁵ Ibid., 50.
⁶ Ibid., 53.
in dress which seems to me to be entirely calculated for his audience. He was accustomed to eat once a day; to take seven hours sleep, not to eat away from the house, to invite the poor to his table and sometimes one or two lonely burghers whom he refreshed ‘by the sweetness of the heavenly tongue’; to read aloud at table with no laughing or joking. His conversation was ‘pithy.’ He kept his books in the dining room so that he could consult them. Patiently he ate unsalted or burnt food (for he cooked himself and was not very good at it). He only suffered the Sisters to serve him by buying things for him in the market. He did not permit them to enter his room and was content with the comfort of a cleric. He spoke to the Sisters only through a closed and curtained window and if they had anything to give him they passed it through a revolving hatch. His pupils considered this altogether too severe, but he said: ‘If I could shut my ears so as not to hear their voices I would do so.’ He used no milk or butter on Fridays and took salt instead of oil (he let the cats and mice lick the plates clean). On Thursdays he thoroughly scrubbed all pots and pans to remove all traces of fat. Groote wore grey, hard, old and worn-out clothes and a patched cloak like the beggars; a scandal for the rich but an example for the devout and a holy memory for those who came after. He also wore worn-out underclothes ‘to keep out the cold,’ he answered jokingly when someone passed a remark. Thomas can tell that one garment was ten and another twelve years old and that there were a hundred holes in a worn out cap! Groote did all this in penance for wearing luxurious clothing in his former life.\(^1\)

The chapter on devotion in prayer and the hearing of Mass also served to set up Groote as an example to the novices. Sometimes he cried his joy aloud on reading his breviary. When he prayed softly his spirit aspired more ardently to God. He found more pleasure in devout prayers than formerly in eating and song. On a journey with Brinckerinck they sometimes prayed the breviary together. Once he asked Brinckerinck if he understood what he prayed. When he answered no, Groote said: ‘A multiple and mystic meaning comes before my mind, I pass from one to the other, and I never weary of reading the hours.’ When on a journey each said his own prayers at night in the inn, but they never neglected to recall to each other the faults of the day.\(^2\) His prayer once drove the enemy from Deventer. Every morning, before beginning his worrying activities, he comforted his spirit by

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1 Pohl VII, 53-54.
2 Ibid., 59-60.
3 Ibid., 61-62.

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spiritual reading, meditation and prayers. He heard Holy Mass daily with great reverence and fitting devotion.¹ When he entered a church he did not stand looking at the excellent glass windows, but knelt before God and prayed. He did not speak there but wished only to listen to the praise of God, or to pray his breviary. Thomas also tells of the secluded place which he had in the church of the Franciscans, but so situated that he could see the Holy Sacrament at various places (probably during different Masses). Then follows a vague reference to the prophecies which Rudolf Dier also mentions.² When he once spoke to a disciple of his longing for heaven, the latter answered that they could not do without him yet. To this Groote replied: ‘I could ask God to help you and to complete the work which is begun.’

The account of his zeal in the reading of holy books and his love of books in general is linked to an example of his humility. He gladly learned from younger and less educated people. He did not desire beautiful books. His breviary was worn. The content of the books was more important than their appearance. Thomas hastens, however, to add that it is none the less fitting that the Bible and the liturgical books should be beautiful.¹ Not only did he read books, he also wrote some, compiled from the authentic sayings of saints and at the request of others. He also wrote important letters.⁴ The description of his scholarship is accompanied by a reference to his obedience to the prelates and to his humility. However, he always had books to hand to make use of them against his opponents. He also had his collected letters with him and he successfully used them to score off one of his opponents - who, for the rest, was suffering from jealousy.⁵ Thomas concludes this study by defending Groote against those who claimed that he was practised in astrology and black magic. Before his conversion he had indeed studied many wonderful things in the magic arts. But Thomas had questioned two of his pupils and come to the conclusion that he could not be reproached with anything on this point. One of them had heard Groote himself say: ‘I indeed gained knowledge of that art and read the books and possessed them. But I never practised magic wantonness.’ Another pupil, a priest, was better able to inform Thomas: ‘You must distinguish between natural magic, which is extremely subtle and is scarcely distinguished by some from the second, that is, devilish. Master Geert was familiar with the

¹ Pohl VII, 62.
² Ibid., 63.
³ Ibid., 66.
⁴ Ibid., 66.
⁵ Ibid., 68.
natural magic, but in my opinion, never learned the other. He did not make a pact with the devil. Be that as it may, if he did anything wrong, he has done penance for it.’ Then follows a piece of information which seems to have been adopted from Rudolf Dier. At least it corresponds to what he has to say about the story of the conversion: ‘As a sign of repentance Groote, when attacked by an illness, renounced all unlawful practices before a priest and had these codices of vanity burnt.’ Thomas evidently regarded this question of magic as a difficult point. He now draws the conclusion on behalf of his hearers or readers. ‘Let us recognize in all this the immeasurable treasure of divine love. The Almighty God allows some to exist in great sin and in protracted error, then secretly, with clear and all-embracing compassion, arouses the abandoned one to repentance, by not only granting forgiveness for past sins, but by giving an abundance of grace to the converted and to those who strive after good’ etc.¹

Under the title De multiplici fructu eius in conversione hominum Thomas gives a description in general terms of the fruits of Groote's work. One concrete detail he mentions: He was not only a preacher but also a pious doctor of the sick.² He despised that which was of the world and was conscious of his own weakness. These are the two properties of the already old monastic ideas of the contemptus mundi.³ Thomas also mentions Groote's learning and his action against the heretics, simoniaci, usurarii, proprietarii, focaristae. Groote loved God so much that he did not forget his neighbour. He was not only troubled for his own salvation but also worked for others.⁴ This linking of the monastic and pastoral life is followed by a comprehensive description from which his hearers could take profit.

The chapter on the pious congregations and monasteries which owe their existence to Groote deals with the origin of the congregations of the Brethren of the Common Life and the monasteries of Windesheim and St. Agnietenberg. Here he takes the opportunity to point out that Groote won over his hearers to the contemptus mundi not in words of human wisdom but more by the example of his holy life. He then describes how the people flocked to his sermons and how he sometimes preached for more than three hours and sometimes several times.

¹ Pohl VII, 68-70.
² Ibid. 71.
³ R. Bultot, La doctrine du mépris du monde, Leuven-Parijs 1963-64.
⁴ Pohl VII, 73.
a day. He names the places where this is said to have happened (in Amsterdam for one, where he gave his first sermon in the vernacular. How would the crowds have understood him otherwise?) He says that after Groote's death monasteries of the Regulars and houses of the Devotionalists arose in various regions of the Netherlands and in Westphalia and Saxony. It was Groote who proposed that his disciples should live together. In particular he desired the foundation of the Monastery in Windesheim (and St. Agnietenberg near Zwolle). ¹

The report of his agony and death is remarkable, firstly on account of the prediction that he would die soon, secondly for the Brothers' complaint that his passing left them without their defender (it seems doubtful to me, however, whether the congregation of the Brethren of the Common Life which was then not long in existence, and the Sisters who had not yet embarked on a communal life, would have already had so many enemies at Groote's death); thirdly for the fact that on his deathbed he appointed Florens Radewyns as father and rector of the Brethren; fourthly that he left only books and a few old things of no value, in signum contemptus mundi - displaying once again his contempt for the world; fifthly that schoolboys came to his deathbed who, having heard the good word from Groote, returned to their hostels and later practised mortification.

Thomas ends his Vita by explaining the purpose for which he wrote it. His story of Groote's life must serve for the edification (aedificatio) of the present and later Brethren of our congregation (i.e. the chapter of Windesheim), and for the praise of our Lord Jesus Christ. In any case he had made this clear enough. In all his activities - and notably in his sermons - Groote had really been for Thomas a monk who had affected contempt for the world, as it was understood by the monastics of those days. The facts of Groote's life as described by him make this sufficiently clear. One may perhaps dwell upon a few small points, such as the somewhat vague account of the origin or at least the communal life of the Brethren - which must be discussed later - or his fear of the women who lived in his house and whom he wished neither to see nor hear; an old theme of the contemptus mundi. But how could such a person preach for so many men and women; how could he travel and stop in inns; how could he preach in convents and care so well for Elsbe de Gherne, for Aleidis Dreyer, whom Cele had to keep in his house?² Thomas a

¹ Pohl VII, 77-78.
² Ger. M. Ep., p. 140.
³ Ibid., p. 255.

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Kempis made Groote into a withdrawn, world-shy, scrupulous (cleaning the pans for Friday) ascetic, despite the mention of his learning and his preaching. He does not bring out sufficiently the active, many-sided, extremely erudite and vigorous personality of Groote, who was unafraid and fought against all he considered unsound. A man who entertained rigoristic ideas on various points, and gladly gave his help to many, employing his extensive legal knowledge, who dared to speak his mind, even against the monks of Groenendaal, on the subject of their Master's work, for example.

Thomas drew a picture of Groote as he ought to be for the Windesheim monastics or novices and projected his ideals into Groote's life.

Did Peter Horn do the same?

Peter Horn was a Brother of the Common Life from the Deventer House. Born in Hoorn in 1424 he attended the school in that city and the highest class of the school in Deventer. Having finished school he entered the Fraternity of Deventer in 1442 as a young man and died there in 1479. He had obtained a good grounding in Latin at school and a fair amount of philosophy so that, having gained a certain degree of experience and maturity he was able to write a *Vita* of Groote with some independence. He belonged, however, to the third generation. None of his fellow Brethren had known Groote. He was thus thrown back upon the written sources, principally the existing *Vitae* of R. Dier and Thomas a Kempis, and also certain letters and a dissertation by Groote's friend Salvarvilla. Since his *Vita Magister Gerardi Magni* is not directly linked with Groote it cannot really be considered as a source, but rather as literature. It is indeed the work of a man who knew the religious atmosphere of the life which Groote had created. For the rest, he is thrown back upon the same sources as we, but we have the advantage of being able to compare various data, since the printed sources are much easier to consult. We also know more than Peter Horn about the universities and the studies there. He does not thus, contribute much to our knowledge except perhaps in what he tells us of a pair of heretics of whom nothing is said elsewhere so that we are virtually dependent on Horn's information. In his account of the facts of Groote's life he diverges little from his predecessors.

There are nevertheless certain small departures which must be mentioned here. For we are chiefly concerned with the question:

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What did he make of Groote? How did he see him? Did he view him independently? It is my opinion that he did, although he admittedly transcribed certain passages from Thomas word for word. Sometimes he elaborates on Thomas and sometimes he deliberately omits certain details, thus showing his independence of mind. The accounts of Groote's family and study in Paris are less concrete in Thomas, but Groote's student period is painted much blacker since Horn applies to Groote the parable of the prodigal son. The conversion is thus naturally all the more important. It is indeed already long predicted by three prophecies (in Aachen, Cologne and Prague). The first two differ in detail from Thomas's account while the last is not mentioned in his Vita. It is moreover the only report of Groote having studied in Prague, which in itself does not inspire confidence. Since however, there seemed to be a certain preference for Prague among the Devotionalists and other Netherlanders, the question of the relationship Prague - Devotio Moderna is here further discussed ex professo (see p.223). Following Thomas's example Horn also gives a long and somewhat different reflexion on the meaning of the names Gerard and Groote, and also on the meaning of the number 200, since 200 pounds is mentioned as the annual income of the student in Paris! The significant man in Groote's conversion was not Henry Eger of Calcar as with Thomas, but John of Arnhem, although Horn admits that others name Henry Eger. This may already reflect an attempt to limit in some way Groote's monastic spirit. The conversion itself and the stay in Monnikhuizen are told in Thomas's own words. The account is very brief. Then begins the preaching, on which Horn is much more detailed than Thomas. Groote is a second Paul, a vas electionis. The devil works against him, and two examples of this are given. Groote, moreover, works important miracles, such as cures, which are mentioned only here. He considers that it would take too long to mention Groote's efforts and all the conflicts he occasioned, in fact he names only the question of the focarists and the heretics, one of whom worked in Gouda and two in Kampen. Groote's sermon against the focarists and the subsequent controversy are mentioned in particular.

2 Ibid., 334.
3 Ibid., 341.
4 Ibid., 342.
5 Ibid., 344.
6 Ibid., 345-346.

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Groote travels through the land and writes many letters. Horn renders the general interest in Thomas's words, without saying that Groote gave the first sermon in Dutch in Amsterdam. Various people opposed him: some prelates, priests and the wandering monks \( (\text{circumvagantes}) \). Like Thomas, Horn defends the prelates against the public, using Thomas's words. He also tells that the schoolboys wrote for Groote and that Groote paid their salaries in instalments and sought and maintained continual contact with them. After being forbidden to preach Groote translated the hours from Latin into Dutch. This fact is also mentioned by Rudolf Dier, but Horn can list more: the hours of Our Lady, of the Holy Ghost, of the Holy Cross, the seven penitential psalms and the vigils. Horn remarks that this greatly increased the devotion of the laity, so that this translation must have been done on their behalf and not for the Sisters. The story of Groote's visit to Ruusbroec with his friend Cele and another companion named Gerard is told almost entirely in words taken from Thomas.

The subsequent description of Groote's mortification, his treading of the narrow path, also comprises a flight from the world in word and deed, in food and clothing, with the intention of not allowing himself to be contaminated by the world. This seems to be the \( \text{contemptus mundi} \) but Horn postulates that Groote did all this \( \text{absque votis} \), without vows. Horn retains the story of Groote's \( \text{austeritas} \) in eating and describes it chiefly in the words of Thomas a Kempis.

This also holds good for his relationship with women and his abstention from milk and butter on Friday. He omits, however, the scrupulous washing of pans in order to remove all traces of fat. Horn curtails the passage on the wearing of worn and mended clothes, but without changing the essential details. He deals in the same manner as Thomas with Groote's love of reading, especially of the Scriptures, his desire for books and his copying of them. On the other hand he deals briefly with Groote's knowledge of astronomy; there is no mention of astrology or black magic and he refers to Groote's eventual revulsion and his experience in these matters by advancing the larger part of a letter by Groote to Rudolf of Enteren. Groote's devotion too is described in practically the same words as in Thomas. Horn adds, however, that in his secluded place in the Franciscan church in
Deventer Groote often communicated spiritually, since he dared not receive the Holy Sacrament frequently.\footnote{With reference to this passage Horn twice refers to the Conclusiones which from the point of view of method is not completely accurate. The fact that a good resolution is made does not necessarily mean that it is carried out.} Groote's prophecies are then recalled. They concern a certain John, Florens Radewyns, John of Heusden and Henry of Höxter: all came to pass.\footnote{Horn, 360-362.}

Horn again employs Thomas's words when referring to the disciples and followers. According to him Groote indeed urged his disciples to meet together now and then in one house in order to encourage each other and to speak of God and love, but the disciples only adopted the communal life after Groote's death, on the advice and encouragement of their master.\footnote{Ibid., p. 362.} According to Horn Groote went a step further: after the words quoted above stands: ‘and if some wish to live in the same house (simul stare), let them earn their living by the work of their hands and let them maintain the communal life as much as possible according to the law of the Church.’ He did not allow anyone to beg.\footnote{Pohl VII, 77.} Horn again recounts the foundation of the monastery of Windesheim in Thomas's words, but does not mention St. Agnietenberg.\footnote{Horn, 363.} The same holds good for his description of Groote's death-bed, but there is one small difference. Thomas says that the codices and poor clothes and effects were willed to the Brethren in signum contemptus mundi;\footnote{Pohl VII 81.} Horn does not mention the clothes and other things, but only the books, and these naturally do not serve for contempt of the world. The Brothers were to use them and lend them out to reliable people. Thus, by lending out his books Groote continued to work after his death for the conversion of men just as he had done during his lifetime.\footnote{Horn, p. 365.}

Horn adds certain particulars to Thomas's story of Groote's death. He says that after he had passed away a great light was seen above Deventer, indicating the mysterium magnum. For from Deventer a great light illuminated the whole diocese of Utrecht, even almost the whole of West Germany. The piece ends with the story of the preacher of Zutphen who expressed his joy at Groote's death and was immediately felled by a stroke. We read this in the Vita of Rudolf Dier. There are
a few additional details, including some on Groote's preaching, but these are discussed elsewhere.

As a Brother of the Common Life Horn, more than Thomas a Kempis, sees in Groote the pastor, the preacher, the combatter of heretics, whose every effort was directed towards the conversion of his contemporaries. He is much less the monastic and the despiser of the world. He did not succeed in detaching himself completely from his source, but the light which emanated from Groote was not that of the monastic, but of the preacher striving to improve the spiritual life.

Two other Vitae exist which some reckon among the sources. One of these is in middle Dutch, the first of a series of biographies of famous men of the Deventer circle, preserved in the house of the Sisters of the Common Life in Deventer, in the so-called Master Geert's house. It was probably written around 1480-1490, thus a hundred years after Geert Groote's death. Even had it been written a decade earlier, this Vita is less important for our knowledge of Groote himself than for information on how he was viewed in later times or at least held up as example to the then Sisters of the Master Geert's house. Something similar can also be said of the Vita between 1502-1520, written by the famous Parisian printer of the Humanist period, José Bade (1462-1525), better known as Badius Ascensius, who was educated by the Brethren in Ghent and wrote of Groote what he had learned from the Brethren. It shows to what extent Groote's image had changed in the Humanistic period. Details from the two Vitae need not be discussed here. For the history of Geert Groote they have little significance.

The chroniclers too, like Thomas a Kempis (for the monastery on the St. Agnietenberg near Zwolle), J. Busch (for the monastery at Windesheim), Jacob de Voecht (for the house of the Brethren at Zwolle), and William Vornken (1373-1455) (for the monastery at Windesheim), mention certain particulars concerning Geert Groote.

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1 Ed. D.A. Brinkerink, Archief... aartsb. Utrecht 27 (1901) 400-434, 28 (1902) 1-37, 225-276; 29 (1903) 1-39.
2 Ed. H. Sommalius, Thomas Malleoli a Kempis opera omnia, Antwerpen 1607.
4 Liber de origine modernae devotionis, deel II van het Chronicon Windeshemense ed. K. Grube, Des Augustinerprobstes Johannes Busch Chronicon Windeshemense und Liber de reformatione monasteriorum, Halle 1886, 353-35.

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They refer mainly, however, to the foundation of the Brethren (or Sisters) of the Common Life and to the monastery at Windesheim, which will be fully dealt with in the following chapters.

The remarkable thing is how all these pious writers, from Thomas to Badius, are inclined to depict the period before Groote in the Netherlands in the darkest colours. Everything was wrong and decayed, but Groote came and set all to rights! One is put in mind of the Pharisee: ‘I fast every day and the others are worthless.’ This attitude does not correspond with what Groote wrote to the Abbot of Altenkamp: ‘in order to ascribe this (the despoiling of monasteries of possessions and incomes) to the proprietarii and the evil done by them and not to the wickedness of the times and the age of the world, one should regard the monastery of the Carthusians and other orders such as the Cistercians and the Norbertines, the Canons Regular, who have no proprietarii and who flourish. See how they are loved in these times and dowried and defended against the wicked and against the princes of the earth.’

All are convinced that the world has grown old. Yet nevertheless new life was emerging too. Thomas a Kempis says in his Life of Florens Radewyns that in that time, the beginning of the Brethren, there were several pious priests in the diocese of Utrecht. He names a few who, however, were all involved in the activities of Geert Groote. But he found them as they were and did not train them. And yet he writes in the Vita Gerardi: ‘At that time, around 1370, the world was in a sorry state, so that there were but few who preached the word of God through word and work, and even fewer who practised continence, and what is most regrettable, the name of the holy practice of monachism and devotion faded and departed from the traces of former persons. Among the Carthusians the light of the heavenly life continued to shine, although it was hidden. This life seemed severe to the judging prophets, but it remained pleasing to God and was desired and acceptable among ardent spirits.’

Werenbold, who had made various groups of Sisters of the Common Life into Franciscan Tertiaries and incorporated them in with the Utrecht chapter had already written or said in 1404: ‘Forty years ago I was already familiar with the situation in Overijssel, and at that time there

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1 Ger. M. Ep. 166.
2 Pohl VII 186-188.
3 Pohl VII 37.
was as much knowledge of God in Kampen, Deventer and Zwolle put together as there is now in one of you. Then there were but a few monasteries which lived according to the rule.’ William Vornken (1373-1455) who had been prior of two monasteries of the Congregation of Windesheim and afterwards of Windesheim itself, wrote in a letter to an unknown correspondent for example and edification: ‘But alas, so much had the old ardour and the keeping of the rule diminished or vanished altogether, that what remained of the spiritual life, except for the external element, was dissipated by the work of the devil.’ Jacob de Voecht paints the blackest picture: ‘Before Groote began his activities not alone the laity and secular clergy had fallen off and became useless, but also every monastic order and monastic discipline had broken away from the original purity and degenerated into a lax life outside the rules.’ For in the entire diocese of Utrecht, Cologne and Munster and the surrounding district there was not one monastery or convent in which the discipline and regular observance remained in force. Yes, even in the whole of Germany there were few monasteries to be found living a good life, with the possible exception of the Carthusians who, all things being equal, persevered better in the good observance. How, and by whom these calamities were improved - with the help of the Lord - I shall now briefly explain.’ Thus begins de Voecht's chronicle of the house of Zwolle, with the couple of chapters on the life of Geert Groote. In all this, however we must bear in mind that in 1480, when de Voecht was writing, the regular observance had a quite specific meaning. For instance, so much emphasis was placed upon ‘good deeds’ that Luther, who had originally been a supporter, protested against it. Others too termed it Neo-Pelagianism.

1 Epistula de prima institutione, Acquoy III 237-238.
2 Ed. Schoengen 1-3.
3 The word dissolutus is difficult to translate; dissipated or dissolute is certainly incorrect. Towards the end of his life Groote repeatedly speaks of himself as dissolutus, meaning by this absent-minded, distracted from the inner devout life.
4 Ed. Schoengen.
Chapter Three
The Disciples of Geert Groote

Continuation of his Work from ca. 1384 to ca. 1415/20
The Brethren of the Common Life of ca. 1384-1415/20

The premature and comparatively sudden death of Geert Groote greatly slowed down the normal and gradual development of the institutions which were to carry on his work or at least put his ideas into practice. Previously the foundations had been laid for the community which later received the name of the Sisters of the Common Life, for in 1374 Groote had given over his house and buildings as a dwelling for women on their own, either single or widowed. Groote had reserved for himself a few small rooms in the house where he lived completely apart, looking after his own needs.1

There is no evidence in the sources of any pastoral cure among these Sisters - but he will not have withheld his words of comfort from these more or less deserted persons. It is possible to trace the development to the Sisters of the Common Life after Groote's death, and we shall do so in Chapter V.

As we have already indicated it is not possible to determine precisely the time and manner of the origin of the Brethren of the Common Life, Groote's most beloved disciples. During Groote's lifetime a few groups of male disciples came together in Deventer, Zwolle and Kampen. Groote called them his socii2 and the house in Zwolle is known from chronicles and records (charters). But such relatively spontaneous communal groups are by no means houses of Brethren of the Common Life. They may have lacked any leadership, authority and community of possessions. Nothing more is heard of the Kampen groups after Groote's death.3

Two traditions exist on this question, one mentioned by John Busch and the other rather vaguely referred to by the Vitae.4 Ac-

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1 See above p. 77.
3 Schoengen 1 sq.
4 See J.H. Gerretsen, Florentius Radewijns, Diss. Utrecht 1892. 52-57.
cording to Busch the schoolboys who wrote for Groote, at Florens Radewijns' suggestion were to pool the weekly wage they earned from Groote to begin a communal life. Groote was surprised at the suggestion and exclaimed: 'Communal, communal - but the mendicant monks will never stand for it!' Florens reassured him and finally Groote agreed and promised to help them.1 Others see the beginning not in these schoolboys, but in Groote's pious followers, adult persons, laymen and clerics who felt impelled to go and live together in order thus to serve God better and to perform the pious exercises with more fruit. Florens Radewijns received these men into his house and finally Groote appointed Florens as rector, but only on his deathbed.2

Gerretsen, rightly to my mind, rejects Busch's proposal on various grounds, and chiefly on this account: the first Brethren of the Common Life were not schoolboys but adult persons, some of them priests and a few possessing academic degrees.

In Gerretsen's opinion the aim of this communal living was nothing other than the furtherance of devotion. The brothers were not impelled by any interest in education, learning or books. In addition Florens and not Gerard must be called the real founder. One might formulate thus the contrast between the two opinions. Busch assumes a spontaneous growth under Groote's influence which Florens Radewijns finally took over. The other opinion assumes an act by the leader in the beginning: one will which desired to found the Brotherhood and proceeded to do so when he acquired suitable members. In my view the line is too sharply drawn between Groote and Florens Radewijns. Even though Radewijns began by receiving people into his house, he will not have acted without consulting Groote. Groote after all called these first persons his socii. Groote had Florens ordained priest. He saw to it that John van de Gronde3 went to Deventer in order to help as spiritual father of the 'spirituales.' He himself could not undertake leadership in day to day matters since he was too often away on his travels. Even in the last months of his life he stayed for some time in Kampen, Utrecht and Woudrichem. The appointment of Florens as Groote's successor as described by Thomas a Kempis surely refers to his succession as rector of the house. Florens would be pater and

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1 Gerretsen 56; Busch 253-256.
2 Gerretsen 53-55. Where the texts of Petrus Horn, Rudolf Dier, Thomas a Kempis and William W. Vornken are quoted.
3 Ger. M. Ep. no. 51, 53.
rector for the Brethren;¹ in other words, whereas he had already been their leader in
day to day matters and had virtually occupied the position of pater and rector, he
would now continue in the same function but without Groote above him. It was
probably Groote's intention to exclude rivals and so prevent discord.

One should not either consider the contrast between schoolboys and others to lie
in the fact that the former were occupied with the practice of learning and the writing
of books and the others not. Just as Florens himself possessed an academic title, so
might others too have had one, or have esteemed learning of their own accord just
as well as the schoolboys.²

Such a somewhat unregulated living together naturally demanded a certain amount
of direction and division of tasks, for example preaching or work, writing or cooking,
cleaning or praying. It presupposes moreover a communal purse to provide funds
for paying the cost of the ordinary necessities of life. Florens, who had already placed
his vicarage at their disposal, could not be expected to pay for food and drink as well.
Everyone had to contribute his share, which meant a communal chest and presumed
a system of bookkeeping. This did not yet, however, necessarily signify communal
possession, or a resolution, not to speak of a vow, that the participants would remain
in the community for ever.³

Before we consider who formed the first socii, the Brethren of Deventer, when
they came together for the first time and what their aim was, it is useful to take a
look at Zwolle, where, towards the end of Groote's life, the beginnings of a community
of fraters also developed, without any particular regulation, but with Groote's entire
approval.⁴

There was in the first place a priest and disciple of Groote, Henry Vopponis or
Voppenszn, a native of Gouda who like Florens Radewijns in Deventer, received
schoolboys into his house in Zwolle.
young people who attended the city school. He did this at a time when, according to Rudolf Dier, he was a member of the Brotherhood of Deventer.1

This Henry Voppenszn from Gouda had the chief merit of being the spiritual leader of various Sisters of the Common Life in Zwolle, but he was not a member of the Zwolle Fraternity. No more than those in Deventer were his schoolboys the first members of the Zwolle community of Groote's disciples. This honour goes to certain others: John Essekenzoon of Ommen, Wittecoep Thomaszoon (the son of a city magistrate) and Wickman Ruerinck, all laymen. These were joined by Nicolas Schoonacker and James Hermanus. Pooling the cost they built a house next to the Beguine house in Zwolle, near to that of Henry Voppenszn. They took up residence there in 1384 and led a communal life, so that one of the founders, the blind John Essekenzoon van Ommen was rector and procurator, assisted by his mother who, however, died shortly after. These 6 persons, five men and a woman, all lay people, also copied books as probably did the first inmates of Florens' vicarage in Deventer.2

Wickman Ruerinck and probably also James Hermanus were occupied in May and June of 1384, with the copying of Groote's Sermo contra focaristas.3 They lived in community and served God in all simplicity and humility. They despised the world and did not imitate Groote in the apostolate which would in any case have been difficult for lay people at that time.

They considered the house in the town to be still too little outside the world, and when at the beginning of Lent 1384, Groote came to preach in Zwolle, one of the inmates spoke to him and told him that they could not bear the concourse of people and that they preferred a more solitary life. Groote understood their desire and the next day accompanied Wickman, Reinier (not mentioned in the narratio), Henry (Voppenzn) James and Wittecoep to the Nemelerberg (later the St. Agnietenberg) where they sought a suitable place for a monastery. When they had found it they began to build and this was the beginning of the monastery near the St. Agnietenberg, the monastery of Thomas a Kempis.4

For the time being they continued to live in the newly built house,

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1 G. Dumbar, Analecta I 24.
2 Schoengen 6.
3 Ger. M. Ep. no. 64, p. 254.
4 Chronica Montis Sanctae Agnetis, Pohl VII 338-341.
but already on June 5th 1384 they transferred this house (in the Beguinestraat) to Geert Groote.¹ He in turn, on June 13th 1384, turned it into a joint property, in the names of himself, Florens Radewijns and John van de Gronde, in order to avoid the ban on the increase of property held in mortmain.²

On July 25th 1384 they granted the house until further notice to the community on the Nemelerberg, represented by the three former owners, John Essekenzoon, Wittecoep Maassoen (Thomaszoon) and Wickmann Ruerinck. They were also allowed to accept new members.³ The move from Zwolle to the Nemelerberg might be called the first case of a transition from a Brotherhouse, now still in embryo, to a monastery. It was another ten years before a more regular group of Brothers of the Common Life was formed in the house in the city. It probably stood empty for some time.

All this is very instructive for what was happening in Deventer during Groote's life-time. Groote viewed such settlements with favour but was not entirely clear on what should happen next. The house in Deventer, however, begun thus spontaneously and without any particular form, held out. Who were the first inmates of Florens' vicarage?

The house in Deventer began, writes Rudolf Dier, because Florens Radewijns gathered together in his vicarage young men of good will, *iuvenes bonae voluntatis*. These included John Brinckerinck, John of Kempen, John Vos of Heusden and a few others.⁴ It is not possible to establish with certainty who these others were. J.H. Gerritsen mentions John van de Gronde, Henry of Gouda, Hubert ten Busch,⁵ persons who certainly belonged to the first *fraters*, although it is not possible to prove that they were among the very first.

John van de Gronde certainly worked in Amsterdam up to 1384. But the fact that he had long been Groote's friend, kindred spirit and helper does not mean that he was admitted to the Fraternity, no more than so many other priests who guided the devout in various cities. The important thing is to establish when this beginning must be postulated. Acquoy, Gerretsen and van der Wanse suggest 1380 or

² Ibid., no. 3, p. 283.
³ Ibid., no. 2041, p. 283.
⁴ G. Dumbar, *Analecta I 12*.
⁵ J.H. Gerretsen, *Florens Radewijns*, Diss. Utrecht 1891, 58-59. See also C. van der Wanse 50-67, although the date of Florens' ordination must be transferred to 1383.
1381 as the foundation year.¹ It can only have taken place however, when Florens was able to dispose of the vicarage in Deventer. In other words, after the exchange of his office of canon with prebend in the church of St. Peter in Utrecht, for the vicarship of St. Paul in St. Lebuin's in Deventer. Unfortunately no document of this exchange contract has been preserved, nor do we possess evidence of the relinquishing of the first and appointment to the second, although written evidence must have existed. In my opinion this exchange is connected with Florens' ordination to the priesthood. As canon of St. Peter's he did not need to be a priest, but he did as vicar of St. Paul's.²

Now it has in my view been rightly assumed, on the basis of the information given in the old Vitae of Gerard Groote, that in his letter of recommendation (of 1383) in favour of his socius, to have him ordained priest by the bishop of Worms, Groote was referring to Florens Radewijns.³ This means that the ordination only took place in 1383 and that Florens will only have been allocated the vicarage after this.

The foundation of the 'congregation' will hardly have taken place immediately, and thus we come to the last year of Groote's life. This immediately explains why so little is to be found in his life about the existence of the 'Brethren of the Common Life.'⁴ After Geert Groote's

1 Ibid., 58. Ger. M. Ep. no. 6, incorrectly placed by Mulder in 1376.
2 See also van der Wansem 56.
3 Ger. M. Ep. no. 6, p.11. This letter must date from around 1383; H.J.J. Scholtens, Dr. L. Reppeus Album 1953, 392.
4 C. van der Wansem (cf. p. 68) deduces from a foundation of 28th July 1383 concerning an annual income of 20 old ecus, founded by Henry Bijerman, a citizen of Deventer and intended for two or three priests, that from this date four prebends would be available to the Brotherhouse of Deventer: one from the vicarage of St. Paul and three from this foundation. This would provide a sound financial basis for the Brotherhouse. This foundation was to be administered by Geert Groote, John van de Gronde and two laymen from the city (charter re-edited by van der Wansem 174-181). It later appears that it was indeed usual for four priests to live in the house.

This is a tempting thesis which I nevertheless find myself unable to accept, although it must be admitted that the priests of the Brotherhouse probably fulfilled the conditions laid down by the donor of the foundation. My objections are these: if the position was as van der Wansem assumes, one would expect Florens Radewijns to have been one of the administrators. In addition, the choice of priests to whom to apportion the money would be virtually non-existent for the administrators, since it would always have to go to the three priests of the Brotherhood. They would in fact decide which of the clerics of the Brotherhouse were to be allowed to receive ordination. This situation assumes, moreover that the office of vicar of St. Paul's would always remain with the Brothers! The sum of 20 ecus also seems to me much too small to serve as a sort of prebend for two or three fraters.

The candidates had to excel as priests; they would thus already have to be priests in order to display the particular merits by word and example. In other words, the money could only really be given to the priest-Brother if he had distinguished himself for a reasonable time, and not just because he had been a good cleric.

Another question is whether, in his letter no. 51-53 Geert Groote was alluding to this foundation when he invited one of his Amsterdam friends, John van de Gronde, to come and work in Deventer among the Devotionalists and informed him that one of the citizens would provide for him. If this were so then John van de Gronde would be both an administrator and a beneficiary of the foundation, which seems strange to say the least.

It is indeed remarkable that John van de Gronde should be mentioned as an administrator, since he was still working in Amsterdam on July 28th 1383, at least according to the dating

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death Florens Radewijns became the founder of the house. According to Rudolf Dier he was the head of the Devotionalists, both in Deventer and outside the city.\(^1\) Energetically he set about expanding the Fraternity.

The first house, the vicarage of Florens Radewijns and naturally of no great size, still offered room for a few *fraters* and a couple of schoolboys. It appears that, like Henry Voppenszn in Zwolle, Florens Radewijns also received a number of schoolgoers into his house. Indeed, from the very beginning, he and his *confraters* displayed a particular interest in the pupils of the city school, and immediately devoted great care to them. Presently we shall examine more closely of what this care consisted.

Since lodgings for these young people were in great demand and it was undesirable that they should live with the brothers, in 1391 the brethren moved out of the vicarage to a roomier building in the Pontsteeg. The vicar's house in the Engelstraat was then furnished exclusively for the young scholars and was then, according to Thomas

\(^1\) Dumbar, *Analecta* I 52; Regestenlijst... Florenshuis en van het arme klerkenhuis te Deventer. *Verslagen van Rijks oude archieven* XLI, 2e deel (1919) 289-319. Florenswas a Master of Arts, gaining his licentiate at Prague at the beginning of 1378.
a Kempis, capable of accommodating about twenty boys.\(^1\) Perhaps because this again had grown to small and also probably because Florens Radewijns realized that the brethren would lose the right to dispose of their title to the vicarage at his death of shortly afterwards, he began to build a new house for schoolboys in the Kromme Steeg, henceforth known in the sources as Domus Nova, Nijehuis, Domus Pauperum, poor clerks' house, This last was after Olger van Hoorn who governed it for some time.\(^2\) It was built by a consortium of gentlemen and had originally a somewhat broader destination, but finally fell to the fraters.

When, two years after Florens' death in 1402, the Brethren lost the vicarage, they retained two considerable foundations in Deventer - the Master Florens' house for the Brothers in the Pontsteeg and the new house (or however it was known) for the schoolboys in the Kromme Steeg.\(^3\) The Brothers were able to adapt the house in the Pontsteeg to their vows and it was renewed in 1441 and 1487 in two phases.\(^4\)

In the exchange contract of 1396 concerning the houses, between the fraters and Mrs. Zwedera, she stipulated a condition important for our knowledge of the congregation. Always there would have to live in the Floren's house four or more priests with eight or more clerici and a few servants (familiares).\(^5\) This regulation, which after all originated in the brain of the Brothers' leaders, and notably of Florens Radewijns and Jan Brinckerinck, characterizes the situation of the fraters.

It is clear that the Fraternity, or for the time being only the Florens' House in Deventer, had a clerical character. The few lay people, the familiares, remain in the background. We do indeed discover them later as cook, tailor, shoemaker and in charge of the cleaning and similar humble tasks among the fraters and the schoolboys, but their voice was certainly not always heard at the election of a new rector or in the taking of other weighty decisions. This applies not only to

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1. Pohl, VII 318, Liber decanorum facultatis philisophae Universitatis Pragensis I, 1830, 180; in 1375 baccalaureus (ibid., 166).
4. Lindeborn 103.
5. Ibid., 98.
Deventer but also to Zwolle and every place for which we have relatively detailed information. They were considered as pious workers. Their piety, which revealed itself in industry, obedience and humility, was repeatedly praised. Certain wonderfully magnanimous souls, like John Kessel, originally from Duisburg, a merchant in Dordrecht and later in Bruges, and a well educated man who also left pious *exercitia*, or Henry of Gorcum, became cooks. Both had previously made over their money, which seems to have been not inconsiderable, to the Brethren.

The priests were the leaders, since the rector was always and the procurator usually a priest. At least others thus had to be ordained as well. This regulation was kept and served as a model for other houses. When for example the priests Gerard Zerbold and Lubbert ten Bosch (or Busch of Zwolle) died in 1398, rector Florens took immediate measures and had Amilius of Asch or Buren and Willem Clinckert from Schoonhoven ordained priests. Besides these four priests there also belonged to the house the spiritual director of the sisters of the Master Geert's house (and later of Diepenveen) John Brinckerinck, and those of various sister houses in Zwolle, for example, John of Haarlem, successor to Henry Voppenszn who had already replaced the sick rector in Deventer, Amilius, for six years. In addition the head of the schoolboys' house often became a priest and on the occasion of a new foundation the leader of the group being sent out received ordination.

Thus it came about that most of the *clerici*, usually young people who had entered after completing their studies at the city school, attained the priesthood.

Since not much is known of particular individuals in Deventer, the history of each is not as clear as for example in Zwolle. However, this necessary custom which arose more or less out of the situation, is revealed in a statement like that of Henry of Wesel, procurator of the Florens' House: he gloried in the fact that he had not become a priest... which was usually a condition of the procuratorship. But Henry died young of consumption.

It is noted as a peculiarity of Arnold of Schoonhoven, who was 31

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1 Pohl VII 292-306.
4 Ibid., 61.
5 Ibid., 67.
years a brother, that he remained in the state of *clericus*, never aspiring to the priesthood.\(^1\) Both, naturally, not from any objection to the priesthood, but out of humility.

Of the 25 members of the Fraternity whom we have learned to know from the first 30 years, 16 were ordained priest. Naturally enough, the priests, as leading personalities, were mentioned more frequently in charters and chronicles than the *clerici*. But how many of these died young, before they had the chance to become priests! In the long run, and given more complete data, the impression that most of them attained the priesthood is strengthened. From the very beginning thus the same custom obtained in Deventer as among the Norbertines, Dominicans and Franciscans. The candidate entered as a young man and after some years of study and preparation, received the priestly ordination in the normal course of events. The clerics of the Fraternity might thus be called future priests, priests in training or student priests, with, however, certain reservations. The name student, as we shall shortly see, would lay too much emphasis upon study.

In order to prevent the threatened destruction of the Brotherhouse during an epidemic of the plague in 1398, a section of the inmates fled from Deventer. One group went to Amersfoort, while some remained in Deventer. Those who went to Amersfoort and remained there for some time wrote eight letters to their colleagues in Deventer, mentioning the names of those they wished to greet.\(^2\) Although everything is not entirely clear, the following may be stated with certainty.

Two priests, Florens and Gerard Zerbold, went to Amersfoort accompanied by the clerics William of Schoonhoven, James of Schoonhoven, John of Haarlem and Reiner of Haarlem. There were thus six persons in all. The other two priests Lubbert ten Bosch and Henry de Bruyn remained in Deventer together with six clerics, Amilarius Asch (or Buren), Mathias of Mechelen, John (of Deventer?), James of Dordrecht, Tydeman Grauwerk and William of Vianen.\(^3\)

Amilarius of Asch or Buren, who later became rector, seemingly occurs here under the name of Amilarius Steenfordie.\(^4\) Otherwise there would have to be two Amilii, since Amilarius Asch was certainly in Deventer and assumed direction there after the death of Lubbert ten

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1 G. Dumbar, *Analecta* I 83.
3 These last two are never mentioned in the headings of the letters, although they were in Deventer.
Bosch. He is twice mentioned without the indication Steenfordie.¹

The cook, John Kessel, also remained in Deventer, but immediately fell victim to the dreaded sickness. Besides these there were eight other persons in Deventer, which made a complement of fourteen persons, four priests and ten clerics. John Brinckerinck went to Arnhem, but he is not counted in the documents of 1396. We must assume that fourteen was then the full strength, which may be taken as normal.

The school of Deventer, whose fame was widespread throughout the Netherlands, Westphalia and the Rhineland, offered a valuable source of recruitment to the Brothers.

By reason of their activities among the scholars, which we have already touched upon, the Brethren came into contact with many boys and this frequently led to vocations, not only for the Brethren but also for the monastic orders. Several of the pupils of the city or chapter schools were perhaps already inclined to such a choice. Gerard Zerbold,² Amilius of Buren,³ Arnold of Schoonhoven,⁴ Reinier of Haarlem,⁵ Henry Kixshof,⁶ Stephen of Liège,⁷ and Henry of Wesel,⁸ all had been pupils of the school of Deventer, as Godfried of Meurs (rector from 1410-1450) had been a teacher there.⁹

The chapter school of this city was already of a high standard when the Brotherhood was founded.¹⁰ Neither Geert Groot nor Florens Radewijns nor any of the Brethren of the first period contributed anything to the growth of the school. It was superior to the existing Latin schools in other cities, since it counted not only the six usual classes, from the octava up to and including the tertia, but also the two top classes, secunda and prima. In this it resembled the Zwolle

¹ G. Dumbar, Analecta I, 101, 106. I do not know how this is possible or in how far another solution can be found.
² Pohl VII, 276. J. van Rooy, O.Carm., Gerard Zerbolt van Zutphen, Diss. Nijmegen 1936, 24-29. The extraneae scholae, upon which his academic studies are usually based, is merely the school outside his own city, in other words, the school of Deventer. He can indeed have completed this school at the age of 17, just as many others after him entered on completing their schooling. To assume attendance at a University and afterwards at the school of Deventer is to misconstrue the nature of the teaching given in both institutions.
³ Ibid., 282 (soon in the highest class).
⁴ Ibid., 317.
⁵ Ibid., 56.
⁶ Ibid., 62.
⁷ Ibid., 65.
⁸ Ibid., 66.
⁹ Ibid., 64.
school under Cele and later. The subjects taught in these two highest classes also exceeded the normal subject matter of the city schools, namely Latin and dialectic.

The teaching matter in the highest class was fairly similar to what was taught in the Arts Faculty of the Universities, that is, chiefly philosophy. Those who had successfully passed through the two highest classes could, after a certain amount of orientation, enroll at the University for the Baccalaureat in the Arts. Hence the desire of prominent pupils and often schoolboys from other cities, to complete the second and first class. They desired to be *secundarii* or *primarii*, as was said of Amilius of Buren and later of Peter Horn.¹

The majority of the pupils did not go further than the fourth or third class. A large number of pupils left the school from the fourth or third class in order to enter trade or business, or to enter a monastery, or to prepare themselves somewhere else for the spiritual state.²

The monasteries of the mendicant orders were well fitted to receive such young persons, for they had their courses in philosophy and theology, usually conducted by professors who possessed University degrees in these subjects. This was not so well arranged for the old orders which admitted a few novices each year, except perhaps by the Norbertines, who later had to send their men to take up parish duties.

Did opportunities exist among the Brethren of the Common Life for studying the higher branches of learning and notably theology?

The young men who entered the Brotherhood, on completing their studies in the city schools, will usually have attained the age of 16, 17 or 18. They had learned sufficient Latin and if they had completed all the classes in Deventer, as had Amilius of Asch (Buren) they also had some knowledge of philosophy. But this remained the full extent of their studies. The Brethren's day was entirely filled with prayer, meditation and copying. Besides, there was not one competent teacher. Neither Florens nor Lubbert ten Bosch had acquired any theology at the University. They had only followed the preliminary study, and Amilius had only done the half of that. In any case, neither of them taught. They were active enough, but they had no time for study or teaching. If it was decided to let anyone be ordained priest, he presented himself to the bishop of Utrecht whenever he administered the sacrament of the priesthood. This happened six times a year. They

¹ Pohl VII 282; G. Dumbar, *Analecta* I 149.
had no scholarly preparation at all and their knowledge extended no further than what they had learned at the city schools or what they had acquired by independent study. In this they were admittedly no different from the great majority of secular priests, but the fact remains strange in connection with these Brothers who are often considered as pioneers of learning, educational reformers, and as preparing the way for Humanism. They became priests without any theological training at all. They evidently did not consider this in any way abnormal, but it is significant that they did not feel the need for more knowledge. They, who were continually copying books, remained ignorant. They did not know what was happening at the University and what theories came into conflict, and how this led to friction but also to new light. By this attitude they diverged entirely from their founder, Geert Groote, who although he may have considered the practice of learning as vanity, none the less availed himself of it and was continually adding to his knowledge by reading and study. The perpetual emphasis on the value of simplicity finally brought the Brethren close to silliness. The first of them still profited a little from the lessons of Geert Groote. One of the first Brothers from Deventer had at least some acquaintance with a university, but they knew no more of theology and church law than what they had picked up from self study and the practice of life. With Gerard Zerbolt this was quite an amount, but with the others nothing. It will have been for this reason that all the Brethren's scholarly work soon ground to a halt. They continued to write only in the field of biography. Here they had the same aim as in their collations and preaching, and they achieved important work in this field. There are few exceptions to this rule, and these had already acquired their knowledge or at least their interest, before joining the Brethren of the Common Life.

The Brethren never sent one of their members to the university. Gabriel Biel, who came later, lived in quite a different atmosphere from the Brothers we are discussing here. I shall leave this matter for the present, but in the course of this study the question will be posed: What signs of study can be discerned among the brethren, what task did they fulfil in education and in the training of young people. This last especially is not unimportant and must be mentioned in detail and the proper significance attributed to it.

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Naturally I do not mean to imply by all this that the various persons who were suddenly sent to receive the priestly ordination were unworthy. Far from it. These young men, for the most part isolated from the world, zealous, humble, obedient and sober, were models of virtue, outshining the secular and probably also most of the regular clergy.

The examination to determine virtue and ordination-title will have been quickly complied with, and these Brothers, who at least lived permanently in a religious atmosphere, will have been easily able to cope with the simple test.

Recruitment was entirely satisfactory in Deventer and might perhaps have led to over-population, had not many of them died much too young of exhaustion and consumption and the eternal curse of the Middle Ages, the plague, which, as we have already seen, raged in Deventer in 1384 and again in 1398.

Amilius of Buren, James of Vianen, Reinier of Haarlem, Stephen of Liège and Henry of Waal fell sick around 1400 or died of consumption.

On the advice of Werembold from Utrecht, the Brothers moderated their fasting at the beginning of the 15th century, shortened the work period before the midday meal, and returned to wearing linen underclothing.¹

This loss was purely negative, at least from the historical point of view: a more positive character was offered by the losses occasioned as a result of the new foundations which were partially populated from Deventer. There was to begin with the important foundation of the monastery of Windesheim in 1387, for which the Brethren provided not only a large part of the material means (see Chapter VII), but also various members.

Of the first six inmates of Windesheim, however, only John of Kempen, the elder brother of Thomas who was later to become famous, came directly from the Fraternity of Deventer. But in 1387, only a year later, he was followed by John Vos of Heusden and Henry of Balveren, who were given the cowl on June 22nd 1388 and after the noviciate received as Canons Regular.² The Brotherhouse provided further candidates, but these were no longer taken from the number of Brothers.

¹ G. Dumbar, Analecta I 69.
² J. Busch, 29.
In Almelo the parish priest Everard founded an aspiring fraternity in his presbytery, which he persuaded some priests and *clerici* to join. They had a communal table, read aloud during meals, practised certain acts of striking penitence, but all this seems to have perished with pastor Everard.

Everard, priest and at the same time practising physician, even among the brethren at Deventer, was a remarkable man, who also had a hand in the founding of the monastery of the Canons Regular at Marienbosch, near Northorn, and in the reformation of the Regular monastery near Neuss.

In his parish he founded a house of Sisters of the Common Life, but all these activities did not deprive the house at Deventer of even one man. Only a certain Henry, from the city on the I Jssel, who might otherwise have ended up in the Brotherhouse of his native city, placed himself under pastor Everard's direction and later entered the abovementioned monastery at Northorn. He considered the tower, however, a luxury.¹

A small fraternity in Amersfoort started as a direct branch of Deventer. In 1397, four citizens of Amersfoort requested Florens to found a house in their city and Florens sent three clerics to make a beginning. These were John of Lemego, Andreas of Attendoorn and Nicolas of Erpel. The first two were ordained priest in the same year, but Andreas died in 1397. His successor was Nicolas of Erpel.² These were the *devoti presbyteri*, who in 1398 received into their house Florens Radewijns and three or four Brothers who were fleeing before the plague, and placed two bedchambers at their disposal.³ After Florens' departure for Deventer the house in Amersfoort showed little growth. William Hendrikk Clinkart soon assumed direction, but in 1399 he and certain of his confraters went over to the Tertiaries and he became co-founder of the Tertiary Chapter of Utrecht. John of Lemego did not follow this transition. Both groups continued for a few years to live in the same small house behind the hospital of St. Peter's, but in 1405 the Tertiaries departed for St. Andrieskamp. Both William Hendrikk Clinkart and John of Lemego possessed a vicarship in the Church of St. George and carried out pastoral duties among the Sisters.

¹ G. Dumbar, *Analecta I* 61-63.
³ G. Dumbar, *Analecta* 41.
Although the position regarding living space improved in 1403 and subsequently some persons out of the school of Amersfoort and also some willing laymen were accepted,¹ the house did not really prosper under John of Lemego, perhaps because the rector had to devote a great deal of time to the sisters.² It was thus that at Lemego's death in 1421 the rectors of Deventer, Zwolle and Hulsbergen came together and ordered the rector of Hulsbergen simply to appoint one of his fellow Brethren as rector of the house in Amersfoort, and to send him to Amersfoort.³ This very unusual course of action indicates a depopulation of the house.⁴ He sent Gerard of Hemert and the house revived somewhat.⁵ Dirk of Herxen, rector of Zwolle, also appointed the rector of the Jerome house in Hulsbergen in 1411, but this was a different case. The foundation through Zwolle had not been long in existence.⁶ In 1444 the fraters of Amersfoort were better housed near a ‘St. Jansappel op den camp,’ and hence they are here called ‘St. John's Brothers opten Camp.’⁷

Attention is once again drawn to the three categories of persons: priests, clerics and laity; to the recruiting from the pupils of the school and to the easy transition from cleric to priest. The undertaking cost the Fraternity in Deventer at least three members.

In the year 1401 rector Amilius, at the request of the magistrates of Delft, founded a congregation of Brethren in that city. He dispatched his procurator Leonard of Eecht and some other Brothers. The house was duly founded⁸ but at first did not seem to flourish. The second rector, Peter Gerrits, who had been head of the Delft foundation since 1412, adopted the third order of St. Francis together with the fraters and in 1418 exchanged this rather elastic rule for that of St. Augustine, without joining with Windesheim. Not all the fraters took this step. Those who objected continued for a time to share a house with the Regulars. There were not many of them and it was difficult to make up the numbers. When thus in 1435 the Regu-

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1 Archief ... aartsb. Utrecht 74 (1955-56) 29; ‘wat personen aennamen, uuyt d'schole van Amersfoort ende oock sommige goed willige leekken.’
2 ‘die susteren der conventen goedertierlick regierend.’
3 Ibid., 32.
4 This may be to some extent deduced from the necrology of the house in Het Memoriaal van het St. Agnesklooster MS in the Royal library, the Hague, fol. 71² (information from J.H.P. Kemperink).
5 Archief ... aartsb. Utrecht 74 (1955-56) 32.
6 Schoengen 65.
7 Archief ... aartsb. Utrecht 74 (1955-56) 32.
8 G. Dumbar, Analecta I 54.

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lars departed for their own house, Brothers had to be sent from Zwolle to take their place.

Not every attempt had immediate success, as appears from what happened at Liège and Hoorn. In 1397 a number of Brothers, under the direction of Rogier de Wyert the, established themselves in Liège with the intention of taking over the direction in a House ‘des Bons-Enfants,’ which the prince-bishop had founded in the hospital of St. Elizabeth, close to the episcopal palace. We will leave aside for the moment the question of how far this can be called a Brotherhouse. The fact is, that in 1433 the Community went over to a Regular monastery and joined the congregation of Windesheim.

An attempt was also made in Hoorn to establish a Brotherhouse. On July 11th, 1385, five persons, including the three known friends of Geert Groote, the priests Gijsbrecht Dou from Amsterdam, John van de Gronde from Deventer and Paul Albertz of Medenblik, together with the Hoorn priest John Volmersz and the layman Outgkes Michelz obtained a house in Hoorn in joint tenure. The house was to serve as an establishment for unmarried men who wished to serve God there in humility and repentance. This certainly refers to a Fraternity. The vagueness of the terms is a characteristic way of referring to an institution in process of development. The goal was not yet entirely clear. Certain priests did indeed take up residence there. On May 2nd 1392, seven years after its foundation, there appear to be three priests, one from Hoorn, one from Edam and one from Lochem. But little interest was shown further and in 1416 the house was empty. Accordingly, the ‘procurators,’ the members responsible for the house, which was held in joint tenure, assigned it to the monastery of St. Cecilia in Hoorn (1429).

In the fruitful year of 1401 the ‘Modern Devotion’ also expanded in the direction of Germany. The way led not via Almelo and the monastery of Frenswegen, but through Münster, the capital of Westphalia, from whence various persons travelled to Deventer to meet the Devotionalists or to join them. Several sought to ease their

1 R.R. Post, Studien over de broeders van het gemene Leven, Nederlandsche Historiebladen I (1938) 308.
conscience by conversation or confession and others, for example Henry Mengedin of Ottenstein\(^1\) were received into the Florens' House. An anonymous priest was also admitted and a priest named Holto.\(^2\) There was also a noble married couple of whom the husband entered Windesheim and the wife Diepenveen. Jutta von Ahaus, too, became a Sister in the Master Geert's house and was among the first members of Diepenveen.\(^3\) A nephew of this Jutta, the bastard son of the house of Ahaus, Henry von Ahaus, who was born in 1369 and was already a priest, visited his aunt Jutta at the end of April 1400.

He will already have been aware of the existence and aims of the fraters of the Florens' house, but he allowed his aunt to persuade him to have a personal talk with the rector and the Brothers. They made such an impression on him that he asked to be admitted. His request was granted and he probably remained until August-September of 1401. He then returned to Münster and founded the house on the Hohenhaus in Münster. It flourished under his guidance, led to the creation of other foundations and finally, like Zwolle, became the centre of a group of houses in Westphalia, the Rhineland and even further afield. The beginning can be dated on October 26th, 1401, when Henry von Ahaus and two other priests (John of Stevern and Bernard of Holte) and a cleric appear to have acquired a house.\(^4\) Except that the aim of the house is described as in certain confirmations and charters, to be mentioned later, the legal content of the deed agrees with those of July 5th and July 13th 1384,\(^5\) in the sense that the Brothers converted the house into a joint property, so that it would remain in the hands of the Fraternity without becoming church property or increasing the goods held in mortmain. It was not hereditary but remained with the consortium of gentlemen who could appoint another member to replace anyone who dropped out. This is the method employed by Groote to leave his books to the Brothers of Deventer and to acquire houses.

A striking fact is that in the charter of the Münster house the books

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5 Schoengen, Bijl. II p. 279, 282.
and other already existing or future property were also taken into joint possession at
the same time. We do not know how they acquired the house. It may have belonged
to Henry von Ahaus, or to his family, or perhaps the four persons in question joined
together to buy it.

The legal content of this charter is not only of importance in establishing the nature
of the house, it also illustrates the difficulty of designating a head of the community,
in other words of stating that Henry von Ahaus was rector of the new foundation.
The founders had only to establish how the joint property was to be administered;
the four were to choose one or two from their group who would be in charge.¹

Barnikol denies that Henry von Ahaus was rector from the very beginning. We
know virtually nothing about it, since the next charter was only issued in the year
1422. Narrative reports, including that of the Frenswegen manuscript² offer no
solution. It does, however, seem likely that he was rector from the outset, whether
an institution already existed when he came to Münster in 1401 or whether he himself
gathered together the first pious brethren. In the few surviving reports he is always
called rector and it would in any case have been difficult for him to found the house
in Cologne, were he not rector of Münster as Barnikol assumes.³ Henry von Ahaus
was certainly rector later and remained so until 1439. We shall return to him again
in one of the following chapters.

Apart from the house in Münster, Westphalia received two other houses during
the period under discussion, namely, Osterberg and Osnabrück. Both of them,
however, had but a brief existence.

Henry von Ahaus collaborated in the founding of the house at Osterberg, between
Osnabrück and Tecklenburg, on the property of the Count of Tecklenburg. According
to a charter it was founded in 1410 and consisted from the beginning of two priests
and some clerics. One of the priests certainly came from the Münster house. But the
house could not flourish in this rural area and ceased to exist as a fraternity in 1427.
The Crosier Fathers took over the modest buildings.⁴

¹ E. Barnikol, 31-32.
² Rudolf Dier is the most informative; the Frenswegen manuscript, published by W. Jappe
Alberts and A.L. Hulshof, W.H.G. 3rd series 82, 1958, is extremely short compared with
the Vitae of other persons in this manuscript. The writer had no sympathy for Westphalia
and evidently did not know very much.
³ Barnikol, 38-39.
⁴ Ibid., 47-48.
In the city of Osnabrück the beginnings of a fraternity developed around 1415, founded by Henry Engeter with the support of Henry von Ahaus who sent a priest from Münster. But the house did not prosper. The company was dissolved around 1431 and was perhaps partly absorbed into the house at Herford which was founded around 1431.\(^1\)

The house in Cologne must have come into being around 1417, on the fringe of the period under discussion. Brothers from the house in Münster, notably the rector Henry von Ahaus, with another priest Nicolas Dents and a few clerics, took over the house in Weidenbach from a group of canons living in community who later joined the congregation at Windesheim, and began this house.

The deed of approval of March 7th 1417 delivered by Archbishop Dietrich von Nözz conferred upon the Brothers the goal of: \textit{studium frequentare}, which Barnikol terms \textit{‘eine Verschleierung des eigentlichen Brüderlebens’}.\(^2\)

Archbishop Friedrich III von Saarwerden clearly defines the aim of the \textit{fraters}, on the basis of a report of an investigation by certain doctors of theology, compiled after an annual visitation by the prior of the Canons Regular. The Brothers would live together communally, work and not beg in order to serve God.

Among these doctors was the Dutch scholar Henry of Gorcum.\(^3\) Julianus Cesarinus of Rome and the others thought that such communal living was permissible, but found it safer that the Brethren should attach themselves to an existing order, since the future Brothers would not be so circumspect and ardent as the present ones.\(^4\)

The house in Cologne prospered, but what happened in Münster, Osterberg, Osnabrück and Cologne cast no new light upon the institution of the brethren. This may partly be blamed on the lack of documentation, whether it never actually existed or just that it was not preserved. No documents, not even short biographical sketches of the first founders, seen to have been compiled on the spot.

Despite the role played by various lay people in the founding of these German houses, the communities consisted of priests and clerics with perhaps the isolated layman as in the Dutch settlements. The priests were in charge and as in Deventer and Zwolle, the clerics

\(^{1}\) Barnikol, 56-45.
\(^{2}\) Ibid., 43.
\(^{4}\) Barnikol 44.

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must probably be considered as future priests. There are however, no data for this period.

Deventer did not provide any men for the foundation of the four German houses, Münster, Osterberg, Cologne and Osnabrück. Nonetheless, Rudolf Dier asserts that in 1401 the house of Deventer sent forty persons to various places in the service of the Lord. This figure seems much too high to me. It can certainly not apply to the Brotherhouse alone, since it had not so many members and could not either allow itself to become depopulated. We shall have to take into account the people who lived in the ‘clerks’ house’ or hostel, or *domus pauperum* but since the number there was limited to twenty, the figure still remains incomprehensible. He may have meant that up to 1401 forty persons had been sent out as novices from Brotherhouse and hostel. Yet even so it remains high!

Shortly after 1400 thus, groups of Brethren existed in Deventer, Almelo, Münster, Liège, Amersfoort, Delft, Hoorn and Zwolle. Those in Almelo and Hoorn did not prosper and soon disappeared. Those of Delft and Amersfoort went through a difficult period. They lost many of their members to the Regulars, as did the house at Liège and that near Zwolle (Agnietenberg). In this last city, however, a new house arose which like those in Deventer and Münster, went on to flourish.

In Zwolle it was especially Henry Vopponis (or Voppenszn) of Gouda who from the very beginning upheld the ideals of the *Devotio Moderna*, notably the especial care for the schoolboys whom he admitted into his house and probably also into the neighbouring house which had been granted in 1384 to Geert Groote, John van de Gronde and John Brinckerinck. After it had been vacated by the gentlemen Wittecoep Thomaszoon, Wickman Ruerinck and John Eskenenzoon it appears to have been attached to the house of Henry Voppenszoon and used solely as a lodging for schoolboys. Henry Voppenszoon also devoted himself to the spiritual direction of the Sisters, who received new settlements in Zwolle. He continued thus until 1410 when he was succeeded as the Sisters’ spiritual director by a Brother from Deventer, John of Haarlem whom we have already met. While the *Devotio Moderna* in Zwolle lived and worked on the periphery, the nobleman Meynoldus, a somewhat disappointed episcopal advisor, conceived the plan of founding a Brotherhouse in Zwolle itself. In 1394, with the willing

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2. Schoengen 23.
cooperation of the pastor of Zwolle, Renier Drijnen, and of the chapter of Deventer, he obtained on long lease a piece of land belonging to the Church and built a house on it. He succeeded in having Gerard Scadde of Calcar, a pupil of the school of Deventer who had joined the Brothers of that city, sent to Zwolle after a period of preparation, to be the leader of the new fraternity.\(^1\) He was probably accompanied by the clerks Henry Zeefflic and Gijsbert van Vlijmen, for the land taken in long lease stands in their name as a joint possession as does the house built by Meinold.\(^2\) Meinold and his brother Wito were received into the house, but did not belong to the community of the *fratres* which was officially instituted at the beginning of 1396.

Although not yet a priest, Gerard Scadde was solemnly installed as rector by Florens and John Vos, prior of Windesheim. At this time there were only three *fraters* but a layman later joined them to take care of the cooking and all external matters. It would truly be a house for *fratres in communi viventes ad Dei cultum*, for Brothers of the Common Life to the service of God.

Meinold scarcely lived to see the result of his action. He died in the same year.\(^3\)

The first rector of the house of Zwolle, Gerard Scadde of Calcar, remained at its head until his death on December 23rd. 1409; he was a priest although his studies had not extended further than the school in Deventer.

The first were anxious years. Of the two clerics and one layman, namely the cook, Henry Zerflaxck died in 1398, leaving only the rector, one cleric (Gijsbert of Vlijmen) and the cook.

Florens Radewijs and the prior of Windesheim accordingly went to Zwolle to review the situation. They then transferred Henry Voppensz of Gouda, who was still officially a member of the Deventer house but had worked mostly in Zwolle, to the Zwolle house, making him the fourth member and provisor. He was a man of experience, but the numbers were not much augmented since the cleric Gijsbert of Vlijmen departed for Arnhem shortly after his ordination to be spiritual director to the Sisters of the convent of Bethany. He gained renown as a preacher, whose sermons appealed even to the Duke of Gelre, Reinold IV (1402-1243).\(^4\)

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\(^1\) Schoengen, p. 13, no. 4.
But the house soon got over this bad patch, so that the rector was able to collaborate in new foundations, to wit the house at Albergen in 1406 and at Hulsbergen in 1407.

Probably at the urging of or at least after consultation with, the pastor of Almelo, John Hilbinc, successor of Everard Eza, the brothers Schulte informed the rector of the Zwolle house that they were willing to give their property in Albergen near Almelo for the founding of a Brotherhouse (1405). Gerard Scadde dispatched two of his Brothers to reconnoitre and on receiving their report decided to accept the offer.

On Nov. 25th, 1405, the house ‘Hoberghen’ was transferred, or in fact sold to the Zwolle house. The rector sent four persons there at the beginning of 1406 to put the house in order. Two of them soon returned to Zwolle, but four others speedily arrived to reinforce the community in Albergen.

Up to this it was entirely a lay undertaking, but on July 2nd, 1407, the then rector Henry Wetter was ordained priest. He was thirty years old at the time, born in Marck in West Germany, a pupil of the Zwolle school, afterwards cleric in the Brotherhouse and now ordained priest for the new function. He fitted in well with his new surroundings, a farmer like the others, who liked to wear clogs even when visiting the deacon and chapter of Oldenzaal. Yet he governed the house for many years, for he only died in 1466 and so lived to see his house transformed into a monastery in 1447 and admitted into the congregation of Windesheim. Henry Wetter did not himself become a monastic. Although the transition to the monastery had not been intended by the Brethren of Albergen it was perhaps in keeping with the nature of the rural situation. It can nevertheless be said that the foundation was successful. This was partly due to the assistance which the rector Henry Wetter received from Henry ten Weteringhe who was sent to Albergen as a cleric but was soon ordained priest. He finally achieved the independence of the house of Albergen to which all the possessions were transferred.

Two laymen were also responsible for the foundation of the house at Hulsbergen. Two weavers, under the guidance of rector Scadde, came to the authorities, in order to begin a communal life. For this purpose they rented a house just outside the city of Zwolle and placed

2 Ibid., 31-32.
3 Ibid., 36-37.
themselves under the direction of the Gregory house there. They sought solitude, however, and in 1407 succeeded in obtaining from Ridder Henry Bentink a piece of ground two morgens in size in the neighbourhood of Hulsbergen near Hattem, in the parish of Heerde. In actual fact Henry Bentink made over this property on August 20th 1407 to the rector of the Zwolle house, Gerard Scadde, Master Peter Haefsch and Arnold of Broeckhuijsen, brothers from Zwolle, again in joint tenure. This was the beginning of the house of St. Jerome in Hulsbergen.\footnote{Schoengen 31, Archief ... aartsb. Utrecht II (1875) 247.} The frater Arnold of Broeckhuijsen remained there for some time, before he began his work in Albergen. Like Albergen, the foundation at Hulsbergen retained its rural character and the Brethren from Zwolle sometimes used it as a rest or holiday house, on Christmas Day 1409 for example when the Brothers from Zwolle were returning from the funeral of their rector Gerard Scadde van Calcar who had died two days before Christmas and was buried at Windesheim on Christmas Eve. After the funeral the Brothers crossed the IJssel and celebrated Christmas night in Hulsbergen, despite the poverty still prevailing there.\footnote{Ibid., 30, 42-49 with bibliography.}

In their agrarian character these two foundations differed from the other Brotherhouses which were all established in cities. The houses in the country only partly corresponded with the intentions of the first Brethren who carried on the work of Geert Groote to the extent that they aspired to an active life alongside the contemplative. Schoolboys had their especial interest and received religious guidance from them.

Albergen and Hulsbergen naturally possessed no schools, thus depriving the Brethren of one of their main tasks. It is obvious that these country Brothers will have tried to make their living from agriculture. This demanded so much of their energy that little time will have been left for the copying of books. They were outposts of the fraternity and constantly in danger of becoming monasteries - Albergen was not able to put up sufficient resistance. Hulsbergen would be saved for the time being by its close contacts with the Zwolle house. It might be assumed that the foundation of these two houses from the young house at Zwolle was a \textit{tour de force} which entirely drained its resources. This, however, was not so.

At the death of Gerard Scadde of Calcar (23rd Dec. 1409) the Zwolle
house consisted of four priests, four *clerici* and two laymen.¹ On the feast of the Epiphany 1410, these ten persons elected Theodore Hermanz of Herxen as their new rector.²

We have here the same categories as are met with elsewhere or for that matter everywhere: priests, *clerici* and laymen. The first are in charge; the laymen do the most humble work and rarely aspire to anything higher. A closer look at the names, however, shows that the clerics usually attain to the priesthood. There is first of all Gerard Scadde, a brother of the deceased rector, who had entered from the University of Prague shortly after 1400, appears here as a priest and later becomes rector in 's Hertogenbosch.³

We already know Master Gijsbert of Vlijmen as one of the first to enter. He had been for some time confessor and director of the Sisters of the house of Bethany in Arnhem and died in the year 1410.⁴

Dirk Hermanz of Herxen, whose life will shortly be discussed in more detail, entered the fraternity directly from the school of Deventer, first as a cleric. The date of his ordination is not known.

Master Rutger of Son was procurator of the Zwolle house in 1409. This dignity was usually reserved for a Brother who had been ordained priest. Shortly afterwards he was made rector of Hulsbergen.⁵

The four clerics mentioned here all occur later as priests; John of Rees became pater and rector of the Franciscan Brothers of St. Janskamp (Vollenhove).⁶ Goswinus Herck became confessor of the sisters at Goch,⁷ Hubert Helmond is later mentioned as a priest⁸ and finally Godfrid van den Bosch said his first mass as librarian in 1420.⁹

This tendency can also be observed later and to our mind is of great significance for the character of the Brethren of the Common Life.

We know nothing about the studies of most of these, but we are better informed concerning Gerard Scadde of Calcar, brother of the rector of the same name, and Dirk of Herxen.

This Gerard Scadde visited his brother in Zwolle in 1404, having recently returned from the University of Prague (*a studio Pragensi*).¹⁰ This is the fourth and last report which mentions the study of Dutch Modern Devotionalists in Prague. The students in question were

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¹ Schoengen 43.
² Ibid., 43.
³ Ibid., 43, 78, 79.
⁴ Ibid., 39.
⁵ Ibid., 64.
⁶ Ibid., 71.
⁷ Ibid., 77.
⁸ Ibid., 92.
⁹ Ibid., 76.
¹⁰ Ibid., 79.

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Geert Groote(?),¹ Mater Florens Radewijns who received the degree of Master of Arts there in 1378,² Lubbert ten Busch, and this Gerard Scadde.

Thomas a Kempis tells us of Lubbert Berneri or ten Busch of Zwolle, that having completed the Latin school he departed for Prague with several fellow students of his own age. He returned after gaining his baccalaureat (1385); secretly he sought to leave the world and to serve Christ. He approached Florens Radewijns in Deventer and was there admitted to the fraternity.³ There is also the report from the Narratio of Jacob Trajecti concerning Gerard Scadde of Calcar, the brother of the then rector, who entered around 1404, coming from his studies in Prague.⁴ There is no indication that these gentlemen studied any theology. In this connection it might also be mentioned that John Cele, a friend of Groote though not a Brother of the Gommon Life, also made plans to go to Prague. It is not established, however, whether these plans were ever carried out. His name does not occur in the Monumenta Universitatis Pragensis. The important thing is that all these completed their academic studies before entering the Brotherhood. Turning to the studies of the Brethren we find that no Brother studied at a university after entering. Only the short-lived house of Trier devoted any attention to higher education. This was around the year 1500 (see Chapter XIV).

I do not think one is justified in assuming that Geert Groote ever studied in Prague. To begin with the only evidence is that of Peter Horn who wrote a hundred years after the time of the supposed studies, i.e. between 1358 and 1362, and on the same pages mentions study at the school in Cologne for which there was certainly no time in Groote's life. Unfortunately the documents of the University of Prague only begin in 1367. In view of the fact that Groote obtained his Master's Degree in Paris in 1358 and is mentioned in 1362 as student, and in 1363 as a law student, one would have to possess extremely potent reasons for assuming that he spent the intervening

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1 P. Horn 334.
2 J.H. Gerretsen etc. On the basis of the Monumenta Historica Universitatis Pragensis I 180, which indeed mentions that he was admitted to the licentiate on January 24th 1378, since he is subsequently given the Master's title, one must assume that he did gain the licentiate followed shortly afterwards by the Master's degree.
4 Schoengen 78-79. not found in Mon. Hist. Univ. Prag.
years away. The Paris rotulus of February 7th 1366 assumes in fact that Groote was a student in Paris from 1358 up to that day, that is, ‘for more than seven years.’ Groote's studies in Prague thus must be relegated to the realm of fables until better proof is forthcoming. The importance of this conclusion lies in the fact that the beginnings of a religious revival can be ascertained in Prague from around 1360, while it is also established that various Netherlanders studied at the University of Prague.

This poses the problem of whether the Dutch Devotionalists may perhaps have acquired their ideals in Prague, and whether it should not be said that the Modern Devotion originated there. It is indeed possible that some Netherlanders may have come under the religious influence of Prague, for from 1367, the year for which we possess a list of baccalaurei and licentiati and professors, various Netherlanders attended the University. Searching for Dutch names in such lists is always a hazardous affair since the place names and the students' places of origin are often garbled and the names of some German places resemble those of Dutch towns. In addition the same names sometimes occur more than once - for baccalaureat and degree examinations. There are some, however, concerning whom no doubt can exist, for example Wilhelmus dictus Vroyde Trajectensis. He is the man who in 1381 was considered for the post of head of the school of Zwolle. The doubt about others is greater but I think one can safely say that, in the years between 1367 and 1383, about two or three Netherlanders arrived in Prague each year. Among these, as we have seen, were some who later became members of the Modern Devotion, for instance Florens Radewijns (ca 1378). After 1384 Lubbert (Beneri) ten Busch from Zwolle, and Gerard Scadde of Calcar only after 1400. Neither of these latter can be considered as having brought the ideas of the Devotion from Prague to the Netherlands. The Modern Devotion was already flourishing in the Netherlands when they left to commence their studies in Prague.

After Höfter in the last century, Ed. Winter in the 20th has defended the theory that the Modern Devotion originated not in the Netherlands but in Bohemia. His latest publication has even a somewhat propagandist character and contains various characteristics of the

2 Mon. Univ. Pragensis I 154.

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Modern Devotion which do not accord at all with what we know of the religious movement in the Netherlands.¹

When dealing with history the application of certain current names to similar phenomena is not generally to be recommended, since this tends to create confusion. In Prague, however, certain persons and institutions can be noted which bear some resemblance to what happened in Deventer. In 1938 Winter drew attention to the similarity between the congregation of Augustinian canons Regular and those of Windesheim, and further to certain penitential preachers in Prague, of whom one at least shows so much resemblance to Geert Groote, that he might have served as his model and example. There can even be said to have existed in Prague a house of Brethren of the Common Life. Ed. Winter develops this theme principally in his Academic Address of 1964.²

If one is to deduce an original connection from the similarity between the phenomena in Prague and Deventer, one must in my opinion examine and describe as thoroughly as possible the following points. In the first place the character, aim, means and period of activity of the penitential preachers between the years 1360 and 1384 must be defined as accurately as possible. Before 1360 there was little or nothing of note in Prague or in Deventer and after Geert Groote's death the Dutch Devotionalists no longer needed the example of Prague on essential points. Secondly, it must be proved that what happened in Prague was more than a normal reaction to certain abuses in the religious life within the Church which had their origin in history, and had possessed a distinctive character. Thirdly, in establishing the list of Netherlanders who studied in Prague one must bear in mind that during the period in question the organization and preponderance of the Germanic teachers and students led them to hold themselves aloof. It would be quite possible that the Netherlands Arts students, boys between 16 and 20, did not notice at all what was happening among the Czech population of the city of Prague. Fourthly, the Dutch Modern Devotion of the first years must be accurately described as it is revealed from contemporary sources.

Prague did indeed contain a monastery of the Canons Regular, Raudnitz, founded in 1333. From 1350 onwards this monastery gave rise to daughter foundations, including Glatz (1350), Karlshof, Wit-

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tingau (1367), Sternberg and Landskron (1371), and was thus the focal point of a
congregation called Raudnitz.

This was no world-shaking event and it is extremely doubtful whether it ever
reached the ears of the Dutch students in Prague. On the other hand it did not need
Raudnitz to inspire Geert Groote and later his pupils, to found Windesheim and three
other monasteries which formed the beginnings of the Congregation.

The idea of bringing together isolated monasteries was very prevalent in the 14th
century. The first Windesheimer had the example not only of the famous Lateran
congregation or that of St. Victor in Paris, but of at least 5 other European
congregations of their order.

There is thus no evidence at all for the influence of Raudnitz upon Geert Groote.
Meanwhile, attempts were being made in Prague to reform the Church situation.
To this end the Archbishop of Prague, Ernest de Pardubice (1343-1364) already held
synods and made the usual decrees. They may be compared with the various synodal
decrees promulgated by Pardubice's contemporary in the See of Utrecht, John of
Arkel (1342-1364). Geert Groote thus could make the acquaintance of such decrees
at home and did so, as he knew those of Arnold of Hoorn, promulgated in 1374.¹

In general the reformers did not suffer from lack of regulations. They required a
burning zeal which laid the finger on the wound without respect of persons. There
was no dearth of such individuals in Prague.

During the last years of the Archbishop in question, the regular priest, Conrad von
Waldhausen, who served as pastor in four churches successively in Prague,
commenced his preaching activities. He journeyed round and held many sermons
for students. Accused of heresy by the Dominican and Augustinian hermits, he was
obliged to justify himself in Rome, but seems not to have been condemned. He died
in 1369 and was buried in the ‘Teynkirche’ in Prague where he had been parish priest.

If one assumes that Geert Groote studied in Prague around 1359-1362, he might
have heard this preacher. However, as we saw, there is little or no justification for
assuming that Groote actually did study in Prague during this period.² In any case
Groote might have heard similar sermons in many places.

² Cf. p. 222.
Conrad von Waldhausen’s collaborator and in a certain sense his successor, was Militsch von Kremsier (Milič de Kromeříž). As a high official of Charles IV, he accompanied him on his travels (1358-1363), became a canon in Prague, was ordained priest, but in 1363 renounced his prebend and dignities and after a short retreat began to preach.

He gave popular sermons lasting two to three hours; his stringent fasts brought on a nervous condition so that he discovered that the antichrist was about to come (1365-1367). He took Charles IV to be the antichrist and widely proclaimed this fact. This led to his imprisonment, first in Prague and then in Rome. He was, however, released and was present at the return of Pope Urban V in Rome and at the visit of the Emperor (Oct. 1368). From this time on the antichrist lost his personal character. Militsch employs the term as a symbolic name for the failings of the Church.

In 1372 he began to concern himself with the fate of fallen women and established a house for them, the New Jerusalem. Those who were admitted to this house had to wear a sort of uniform and received daily Communion. When certain members of the clergy compiled a list of complaints against him, they included among their accusations the setting up of a house for these ‘prostitutes’ and the introduction of the communal life by a couple of priests.1 Arraigned in 1374 he went to Avignon, where he died on June 29th 1374. As Ed. Winter observes, his life shows a certain resemblance to that of Groote.2 He tries to persuade the reader, however, that this resemblance is in fact imitation, for example: ‘Über die Vorgänge die sich in Böhmen von 1372-1374 abspielten, war er (Groot) sicherlich unterrichtet. Die Gründung des neuen Jerusalem nicht zuletzt als Heimstätte für gefallene Frauen, die Errichtung eines Predigers seminar, das gemeinsame Leben von Frauen und Männern in Gemeinschaften, die keine Ordensgelübde kannten, alles das musste ihn (Groote) aufs stärkste bewegen, und ist es nicht zufällig, dass Geert Groote’s Leben von nun ab so viele Parallelen mit dem von Militsch aufweist.’3 And so it does not surprise us that precisely those reports, letters and conversations which Geert Groote exchanged with William Vroede of Utrecht from the decisive Bohemian years of 1373-74, have been preserved.’

Here the writer has ante-dated the letters by about 8 years. There is nothing about Prague in the letters except that a commentary on

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1 Paul de Vooght, L’heresie de Jean Huss, Louvain 1960 I, 16.
2 Ed. Winter, Frühhumanismus, 168-170.
3 Ibid., 168.
Matthew by John Chrysostom was being copied for Groote. ‘Aber wir können als sicher annehmen, dass die Aufsehenerregenden Vorgänge um die Musterpfarrer von Militsch nicht den Aufmerksamkeit Vroedes und Grootes entgangen sind.’

Vroede will probably have been in Prague at the time of Militsch's death: ‘It is thus no coincidence that Geert Groote's conversion falls in the history of religious thought in 1373-1374, years which were so stirring for Bohemia.’ From a comment made by Groote to Vroede that the particular book of Chrysostom was being copied for him in Prague, Winter deduces Groote's interest in Prague and its book market. He is supposed to have advised John Cele and Florens Radewijns to go to Prague and Gerard Zerbold of Zutphen was later sent there. All these suggestions are completely unsupported by fact. Winter considers them to be merely signs but is confident that on further study, they will broaden and deepen.

He deduces from all this that the return to the life of the early Church, the drawing of strength from the inner life, and the happenings in the chapel of the New Jerusalem were simply 'adopted and strongly developed' by Geert Groote. I shall not go into this here, except to point out that Groote did renounce his prebend, while Florens Radewijns did not. Groote moreover helped to ensure that John van de Gronde was provided with a permanent income.

The popular preaching in Prague did not cease at Militsch's departure. Others stepped forward to continue the work. Two speakers soon came to prominence; Matthias van Janov, who had studied in Paris from 1373 to 1381, and Thomas of Stitne (1331-1401).

Ed. Winter makes no attempt to show that they exercised any influence on Groote, although Stitne was his contemporary.

The time must indeed have come when Groote stood on his own feet, and in the years 1381 to 1384 he knew himself what he had to do and did it. According to Winter both Matthias of Janov and Thomas of Stitne influenced the later Devotionalists (notably Gerard Zerbolt and Thomas a Kempis.)

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1 Ger. M. Ep. 15.
2 Ed. Winter, 169.
3 Ibid., 169.
4 Ibid., 169.
5 Ibid., 169.
6 Ibid., 169.
7 Ibid., 169.
8 Ibid., 169.

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Matthias of Janov criticised many Church conditions and customs and urged a more simple and personal ‘evangelical’ concept. He thought the antichrist was personified in the pope. He expected no salvation from the Council, but rather from a detachment from the world and the imitation of Christ, to which the faithful must be exhorted by good clergymen. For the priests this entailed the relinquishing of prebends and for the faithful daily Communion. He advocates making a clean sweep of the relics with the accompanying indulgences and of the stories of false miracles. His doctrine on the sources of faith does not differ in essentials, although it does in vocabulary, from that of the great scholastics or even from that of the Council of Trent. He distinguishes between the visible and the invisible Church, but without sundering them entirely.

Thomas of Stitne (1331-1401) was not a priest, but a married layman. Through his works and preaching he clashed with the University, who wished to reserve preaching and spiritual matters for the priests. They also forbade the use of the vernacular (Czech). This problem will be discussed later, since it also occurred to some extent among the first Devotionalists. For the rest, Thomas of Stitne was no revolutionary in church matters. He disapproved of monasteries, however, mistrusted the pilgrims' tales of miracles and despised the too ardent veneration of statues and images. In Prague he preached the Bible and the Eucharist, urged a more personal religious conviction and piety, better religious knowledge and a firm hope of salvation in Christ. At the same time he opposed legalism, preoccupation with externals, fanaticism and corruption. A breach seemed to be developing between the visible and the invisible Church, between the community of the faithful (both the good and the bad) and the church of the righteous, which Wyclif was proclaiming in those days. His doctrine was arousing sympathy among certain reformers in Prague, including Jan Hus. Here the reformatores were approaching the boundaries of orthodoxy.

Certain similarities or analogies can also be detected here; the struggle against abuses, the fostering of inner religious feeling and the limiting of external and formalistic methods; the reading of the Holy Scriptures in the vernacular; the contempt for the world and the imitation of Christ. These are aims and objectives which occur frequently and in very many places, since they are expressions of man's struggle against temptation and sin. Also the introduction of the communal life by a couple of priests was done either too generally or with too little principle among the Czechs.
Groote's stress on the invisible Church of which Christ is head (not, however, to be separated from the visible, with the pope at her head) bears most resemblance to Stitne's way of thinking. But it is in no way surprising that, during the great Western Schism, such an opinion of the Church may have been formulated independently by various people, especially since sufficient support for these ideas could be found in many writers including St. Augustine. We have already seen, moreover, how personal was Groote's rendering of his theory, and linked with existing views on the Seraphim, Cherubim and Thrones.

Unlike their counterparts in Prague the first Dutch Devotionalists eschewed all radicalism. Although Groote's struggle against the Focarists may bear some resemblance to that in Prague, Groote's was founded on Church law. He was so convinced of the value of this law and of its absolute suitability that he can scarcely be associated with the Czechs as an opponent of legalism. The Modern Devotionalists never used the word Antichrist, of which the Czechs, like Wyclif, were so fond. They never even applied it to the heretics they opposed. The ideal of daily Communion for the faithful was never proposed either by Groote or by his first disciples. Groote's primary idea was a daily spiritual communion at mass. The Brethren and Sisters usually communicated in the real sense about every fortnight in accordance with the prevailing monastic practice. The first Devotionalists did not either suggest any limitation of the veneration of images or of indulgences. Indeed, from Groote's Vitae and from most of the Devotionalists one might deduce a complete absence of any critical sense regarding visions, prophecies and miracles. Thomas a Kempis expressed himself on the subject of pilgrimages, but one wonders if his disapproval is not occasioned more by his struggle not to leave the cell than by any lack of esteem for pilgrimages. He shared the Brothers' facility for accepting signs and statements as miracles and prophecies. It is therefore difficult to accept that the corresponding phenomena and analogies were brought from Prague to Deventer by students: Florens Radewijns, Lubbert ten Busch and about twenty years later Gerard Scadde of Calcar. They were not students of Theology but of the Arts, they were very young at the time of their stay in Prague and did not understand Czech. The Czech reformers of whom we have spoken were not popular in university and German circles.

Ed. Winter has accurately given the dates of the preachers' activities in Prague, but his chronology of Geert Groote is not acceptable.
Magister in 1358, professor in Paris in 1363 (he has *magister actu regens* in the *rotulus* of 1363, whereas in fact the entry is *scholaris in legibus*);\(^1\) between 1360 and 1365 he spent some time in Prague.\(^2\) As we saw, this last is based only on the evidence of Peter Horn, while the documents state that Groote was a student in Paris on Nov. 27th 1362, 17th Jan. 1363, 17th May 1365 and 7th February 1366. It is even said in 1366 that after gaining his Master's degree Groote studied various subjects in Paris for seven years.\(^3\) These facts are definitely established and while they do not rule out completely the possibility of a visit to Prague, they do exclude any lengthy period of study. Groote is supposed to have worked in Orleans from 1365 to 1370, which cannot be reconciled with the foregoing facts. From 1370 to 1373 he is said to have lived with the Carthusians in Monnikhuizen: ‘Auch mit den Karthäusern dürfte Groote sicherlich schon in Prag engere Verbindung getreten sein.’\(^4\) In 1374 he burnt his magic books on the market place, ‘more or less under the influence of events in Bohemia.’\(^5\) From 1374 to 1379 Groote fought for his new ideals and maintained contact with Militsch.\(^6\) In order to render this rather more acceptable Winter as we have said has ante-dated the exchange of letters between Groote and William Vroede.

Finally, the character given to the (Dutch) *Devotio Moderna* is completely at variance with the facts, as will be shown in this book. We shall mention here a few points which are demonstrably false: ‘*Die devotio moderna war eine Durchgangsstufe auf dem Wege zur geistigen Emanzipation des europäischen Bürgertum zur Befreiung von der allmächtigen Herrschaft des Klerus und von den mittelalterlichen Frömmigkeitsformen und Geboten.*’\(^7\) Imagine the poor Brothers, isolated from the world, acting as confessors to the Sisters.

‘*Die Devotio Moderna war in der Frömmigkeit eine Parallel-bewegung zur Via Moderna in der Philosophie,*’\(^8\) etc. This is an inaccurate use of the word *Moderna* - which in the Middle Ages had no connotation of *new* but of *now* - and is moreover in conflict with what is known of the

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3. R. Post, Geert Groote in pauselijke oorkonden 37, 39, 40, 41.

**R.R. Post, The Modern Devotion**
philosophy of Geert Groote. He was a Nominalist while a student in Paris, but later rejected this system.¹

The Devotio Moderna ‘appeals principally to the laity.’² But all the leaders of the Devotionalists, both Brethren and canons, were priests. While the clerics among the Brethren prepared for their ordination, the few laymen in the houses performed the most menial of tasks.

‘Die starken frühhumanistischen Anregungen dürfen beim Entstehen der Devotio Moderna nicht übersehen werden.’³ Winter reckons among these the individuality of the person: ‘Er steht der Einzelne vor Gott und die Gemeinschaft der Kirche tritt zurück.’ This is because they took no vows. They could opt out and retained their own property.⁴ This is a sweeping statement which recurs frequently and so long as no supporting evidence is offered, it is not so easy to prove the contrary. In actual fact the Brethren found it difficult to withdraw and they certainly did not keep their own property, not to mention the canons who were virtually excluded by this qualification from the Devotio Moderna. And yet they provided the best writers and were the most widespread throughout Europe.

If all this was so in Bohemia, as Winter imagines, he thereby gives so many proofs that the Devotio Moderna in the Netherlands was a completely different movement. But worse is to come: ‘Radjewijns begründete in Deventer und J. Cele in Zwolle gut ausgestattete städtische achtklassenschule die von den Brüdern des gemeinsamen Lebens betreut wurden. Diese lehrstätten entwickelten sich zu Musterschulen für Deutschland, ja für ganz Europa.’⁵ This statement was made at an academic lecture in Berlin in 1964, by a person who considers himself a specialist in the history of the Devotio Moderna!

Neither is it true that ‘die Devotio Moderna sich... nur unter grössten Schwierigkeiten gegen die kirchliche Hiërarchie durchsetzen konnte.’⁶ In the first place the Devotio Moderna is here again confined to the Brethren and Sisters. In actual fact the bishops, and notably the bishops of Utrecht, protected them against attacks by lower persons such as certain Dominicans. Nor did the Council of Constance offer any opportunity to their opponents. From 1439 onwards the Roman Curia showed the Brothers the way to be faithful to their ideals in a manner more in accordance with canon law.

Winter displays enviable certainty in his statement concerning the

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1 Cf. p. 161-164.
2 Ed. Winter, Frühhumanismus 165.
3 Ibid., 168.
4 Ibid., 166.
5 Ibid., 179, also 172.
6 Ibid., 173.
origin of methodical meditation. He bases his pronouncement on Groote's journals which were given to Thomas a Kempis, canon of the Agnietenberg, and on the orders of J. Vos, prior of Windesheim.¹

It is clear from all this that Ed. Winter has provided no proof that the Devotio Moderna originated in Prague and was brought from thence to the Netherlands. Apart from the fact that he gives an inaccurate picture of the Devotio Moderna in the Netherlands, we have shown that, despite a certain external similarity and perhaps some personal contact, the events in Prague in no way resembled what was happening in the Netherlands. The Netherlands Devotio lacked the radicalism of the Czech.

Returning from our excursion to Prague in connection with the education of the priest Gerard Scadde of Calcar at the University of Prague, we make the closer acquaintance of the new rector of Zwolle, Dirk of Herxen (1410-1457), one of the most prominent of the Brethren's rectors. He was the son of a well-to-do farming family from Herxen, a hamlet near Wijhe between Zwolle and Deventer. Of religious disposition and strictly reared at home, he wished after attending the school in Deventer - it is not known for how many years - to enter a Carthusian monastery, since he considered this the safest path for himself.² On the other hand he had an inclination towards active pastoral work. Unable to reach a decision he sought the advice of John Vos of Heusden, prior in Windesheim. Although the prior found him fitted for the monastery, he gave no thought to the advantages which might later accrue to Windesheim through this rich young man, but advised him to apply to the Brethren who at this time were very poor. There Dirk revealed himself as a suitable member of the Brethren of the Common Life, one who despised the world and himself, a hard worker, an extremely pious man, revered by the Brothers. When he was chosen rector at the age of 29 he was already a priest.³ He certainly studied no further than the Latin school, but by self-study acquired considerable knowledge of the holy Scriptures, theology, church law and history. He proved a model rector who despite his severity, retained the sympathy of the Brethren, brought the house to prosperity and enjoyed the general esteem of the ecclesiastical and secular functionaries. More and more convents requested a chaplain from the Zwolle house. Although it was not easy

¹ Ed. Winter, Frühhumanismus 165.
² Schoengen 50.
³ Ibid., 47.
for the rector to assume such duties he was opposed to the sisters taking a secular priest as confessor.1 He was however, clerical. He sent a priest as spiritual director to the brothers of St. Janskamp near Vollenhove, laymen who followed the third order of St. Francis, and ensured that the priests and clerics in this house received greater authority and exercised more guidance.2

Dirk of Herxen's activities, his direction, the founding of new houses, and his treatises do not come within the intended scope of this chapter and will therefore be dealt with later. Around 1415, he gave to Zwolle the consuetudines which will presently be discussed in more detail. At that time (2nd May 1415)3 the house contained three priests and twelve others (so far as I can make out ten clerics and two laymen). This leads us once again to discover whether all these clerics became priests. Shortly afterwards (around 1420) ten fraters died of the plague and according to the chronicle there was no priest among them,4 three noted among the non-priests in 1415, i.e. Dirk of Rijcroede, Stephen of Harderwijk and John Sijns and also two who are known to have died as laymen: Arnold of Vollenhove and Gerard Brand. Of the twelve mentioned above there remain seven clerics who must, if possible, be traced to the priesthood. We have already shown that three of them, John Rees, Goswinus Herk and Hubert Helmond did become priests, which leaves four. No further mention is found of Godfrid Vrient. Gerard Rees became a priest and the first rector of Doesburg.5 Gerard of Vollenhove later appears as a priest6 and John of Calcar was the second rector of ’s-Hertogenbosch and thus a priest.7

In the introduction to the Narratio de inchoatione domus clericorum in Zwolle, M. Schoengen examines the origin and date of composition of the statutes of the Zwolle house, which he published as Appendix II. He comes to the conclusion that the essential content of these statutes goes back to those of Deventer, that is, in fact, to Florens Radewijns. They were brought to Zwolle from Deventer by the first rector, Gerard Scadde of Calcar, and applied from that time onwards. In codifying them Dirk of Herxen altered certain passages and later they were to some extent adapted to the times. The chronicler tells us for example that Henry of Herxen raised the limit of expenditure on behalf of the fraters, which stood at 100 French écus. He justified

1 Schoengen 47.
2 Ibid., 71.
3 Ibid., 274.
4 Ibid., 73.
5 Ibid., 86.
6 Ibid., 95.
7 Ibid., 98.
this by the scanty proceeds from landed property and the increasing alms. It is probable however, that the rector was driven to take this step by the devaluation of money and subsequent rise in prices, if the Brothers were not to die of distress. Schoengen thinks that Dirk of Herxen wrote down these Consuetudines between 1415 and 1424, that is, between a certain document which he mentions, the significance of which has in my opinion been overestimated, and the founding of the fraternity in den Bosch. His arguments are not particularly convincing, but it is important for our purpose to know that these consuetudines reached the other houses of the Brethren from Deventer by way of Zwolle and were used as their rule of life.¹ They may be compared with the statutes published by A. Hyma which probably come from the house of Deventer.³

The consuetudines are conducive to the maintenance of peace and harmony and to progress in virtue. It is significant that their compiler feels himself obliged to prove from church law that it is permitted to have such statutes. This is evidently directed against those who objected that the Brothers acted as monastics yet belonged to no particular order. Hence he gives a fundamental exposition of the nature of the Brethren of the Common Life: the priests and clerics (laymen are not mentioned) who lead a communal life, living by the work of their hands, usually writing, and from church proceeds and properties? They live sober lives, visit the churches in a devout manner, respectfully obey the prelates and pastors, wear clothing that is simple but in keeping with their clerical condition. They zealously uphold the canons and decrees of the Fathers and show themselves not only irreproachable but exemplary for others, so that they may thus discharge to God a pleasing religion, not only through their own behaviour but also by that of others inspired by their preaching and example.

Most of these statements are derived from the Cologne doctors and will be discussed later. They were also incorporated into the induction deeds of bishops and popes so that they keep recurring. What follows next deals with the Brothers' ideas on the practice of virtue. The basis of their thought is purity. Virtue must be attained first of all by knowledge of self, and particularly of one's vices and passions. The Brothers

1 Schoengen, Introd. to the Narratio CXXXIX-CXLIX, see however C. van der Wansem. *Het ontstaan en de geschiedenis der Broederschap van het gemene leven tot 1400.* Leuven Univ. 1958, 25-47.
2 Compare also H. Miraeus, *Codex regularium et consuetudinum clericalium*, Antwerpen 1638.
3 Schoengen, 239-273.
must combat these by all manner of mortifications. They must zealously strive after humility, patience and obedience. Then follow certain writers whose books are mentioned. They describe this way of life as the safest path. To this end all spiritual exercise must be directed: prayer, meditation, spiritual reading, manual work, vigils, fasting, the inner and outward attitude.

Prayer is not mentioned for the moment, although meditation is. Here we touch upon the famous question of whether the Brothers practised and propagated the so-called methodical meditation so that it became customary in the monasteries and was finally adopted by St. Ignatius Loyola. We shall return to this problem after describing the development of the *Devotio Moderna*. Suffice it to note here that to my mind there can be no question in these customs of a methodical meditation to which an hour or half an hour was devoted every day. There was no place for such an exercise in the daily routine. The meditation we are concerned with here had to be done continuously by, so to speak, ruminating on the matter for meditation *indefesse ruminare*. All through the day, even during the task of copying, the subject appointed for that day had to be called to mind. In this matter were comprised the great mysteries of the faith, the Four Last Things, sin, the Redemption and the life of Christ. These subjects were apportioned throughout the week so that those which inspired fear were alternated with those which gave comfort. Meditation today on hell, tomorrow on heaven. In addition it was recommended to reflect on the passion of Christ every morning during Holy Mass. It was good to read a particular point every morning, afternoon and evening in order to refresh the memory.

In Zwolle the Brothers rose at half past three and as we saw, earlier in Deventer, at first at three o'clock and later at four, after seven hours' sleep. They had immediately to renew their good intentions and so prepare themselves for the praying of the hours (breviary). This was obligatory for the priests and clerics but not every day in the same manner. On feast-days the priests and *clerici* read the canonical hours in their chapel, together with the hours (*cursus*) of the Holy Virgin. On workdays the priests read the breviary together, but the *clerici* read two by two the hours of the Holy Cross with the *cursus* of the Holy Virgin, the psalms of the matins and the hours for the dead. Later this seems to have been changed; matins and prime were

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1 Schoenengen, 241.

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read together and the other hours and vespers separately, except on feast days. Nones were also prayed together.\(^1\) It will not be superfluous to point out that the prayers were said *moderate et modeste*.\(^2\)

An hour was set aside every morning, immediately after the breviary, for the study of the Holy Scriptures. This was a spiritual reading intended to serve as food for meditation and not as an introduction to theology. The Brethren had had no preparation for theological studies.\(^3\)

It is noteworthy that the Brothers went to the parish church every morning at the same time, but not in procession, to hear mass. They went on Sundays to High Mass and on week days to an early low Mass. Assistance at Mass and reflection on Christ's passion was intended to lead the Brothers to spiritual Communion.\(^4\)

After the model of various monastic foundations, the performance of manual work was viewed as a necessary variation to the spiritual exercises. Their writing bore some resemblance to the spiritual programme. The Brothers wrote from seven to ten and from twelve till three. The priests did an hour's less writing in the mornings, probably because they had the opportunity then of saying mass. In Lent they all worked on until eleven o'clock instead of ten, but then they only recommenced at one. While working they might meditate or keep their minds on God by offering up little prayers. There was reading aloud during meals and every now and then the rector would check by asking someone what had been read. During the summer the Brothers were allowed to take a little nap at their places at table until such time as the reader had finished his meal. This was not really permitted in winter, except for a few minutes - the time to sing a *miserere*. After vespers writing continued, from 5 to 7, until the evening meal and compline. The Brothers were ‘free’ from seven till eight o'clock to potter about in their rooms. At half past eight everyone had to be in bed.\(^5\)

On Sundays and feast days the Brothers came together after the midday meal for the collation. A previously chosen passage from the Scriptures was then read aloud and a discussion on it was held, not *ad scientiam* but to incite devotion and for the exercise of brotherly love. This discussion was continued after the evening meal.

In addition, on Sundays and feast days, after all the religious exer-

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1 Schoengen, 243.
2 Ibid., 243.
3 Ibid., 243.
4 Ibid., 243.
5 Ibid., 245-246.

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cises in the church had been completed, the fraters held a sort of instruction for the schoolboys and anyone else who wished to attend. A passage from the Scriptures was read aloud in the vernacular and afterwards a talk was given (not a sermon) on the virtues and vices, contempt for the world, God's works and so forth. In order that this exhortation directed at each individual might take better effect, each Brother took a boy with him to his cell to advise him personally or to help him, although not in difficult matters or in questions for the confessional. These had to be left to the rector to deal with. They were probably conscious that this practice was not without its dangers; the visit might not last longer than half an hour.

There is also mention of the correption, which resembled the monastic chapter, and of the task of the rector, procurator, librarian, the Brother who looked after the clothes, the infirmarian, and other more menial functionaries. It is striking that none of these surviving statutes mentions a teacher or any person who might have given lessons outside the house.

Then follow statements on the situation at the monthly meeting at which the Brothers discussed the ways in which the community might be improved and the qualities the Brethren should possess. Here too, there is considerable resemblance to the monastic noviciate, the clothing which, however, was not accompanied by vows. The recently admitted member had, however, according to these consuetudines, to declare before a notary and witnesses, that he had no proprietary right to the house or the possessions of the house and that should he leave or be sent away he could make no claim on whatever the house acquired from his side. In such a case he might take with him only his clothing. He also had to promise that his heirs would have no rights at all with which to worry the Brothers. A brother could thus only return very shabbily to the world!

According to these consuetudines it was the founders' intention to make religion an inner experience. Various means were employed to make the Brothers constantly aware of their work for God. Hence the making of the good intentions immediately upon rising, the rumination on the proposed subjects for meditation, the recollection of their resolutions during the day, the short prayers during work, the spiritual reading from the Bible, the collation and the correption, the reading aloud in the refectory with checks to see if the Brothers were

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1 Schoengen, 263. Several such documents survived; Ibid., 274, 405-424.
paying attention. All this demanded an exceptional intensity of spiritual life, scarcely relieved by the periods of writing. The fraters will have been only too pleased when evening came and they could spend an hour doing what they liked. This intense inner life seems to me to characterize these Brothers, this Devotio Moderna. But in stressing the inner devout life, the Brothers were not hostile to the outward ceremonies such as the Holy Mass, or the breviary and the hours. Here too they try to promote an inner sympathy. This appears especially from the direction to ponder on the passion of the Lord during mass and to attain a spiritual communion. The value attached by the compilers of the consuetudines to these church ceremonies is revealed particularly by what they say about prayer. If anyone was ill, a prayer was to be added to matins and vespers: Deus infirmitates humane etc. When anyone was anointed they daily read for him the seven penitential psalms. In case of a prolonged illness this could be replaced by a litany. At the hour of death, the others would pray the seven penitential psalms and say the litany. After the death of a Brother the remaining brethren would immediately pray the vigil with nine lessons and continue throughout the octave. Furthermore, until the thirtieth day, there would daily be the vigil of three lectiones and for a year an oration at the end of matins and vespers. In addition each frater will pray a psalterium for the deceased and the priests together will say thirty Masses. Finally there were the anniversary Masses. Vigils and Masses were also said at the death of the Brethren’s parents and at the deaths of members of the monasteries of Windesheim, St. Agnietenberg, Bethlehem, for the Sisters within the parish and the Brothers of the Florens house, St. Jerome of Hulsbergen and Albergen and also for deceased benefactors. These and others could make foundations for Masses and memoriae and from these arose the so-called ordinaria. A similar one has been preserved from the fraternity at Hildesheim and in no way diverges from those of other churches and monasteries. In this respect the fraternities are revealed as latemediaeval institutions attaching considerable value to the number of oral prayers, even to excess, and this despite all the emphasis upon the inner life, upon meditation and rumination, as revealed in the works of Florens Radewijns, Gerard Zerbolt and the Windesheimers which will be discussed later. The receiving of Holy Communion on 16 feast days in the year departed little from the customs of the religious of that time.¹

¹ Schoengen 272.
This linking of inward and outward devotion is revealed too in the biographies as transmitted by R. Dier. Florens Radewijns also visited the church at night when possible, and when the Angelus was rung during a meal he suddenly stood up from the ground where he was sitting, quickly laying down his plate. John Brinckerinck advised that one should very frequently offer oneself to God and never despair on account of one's own imperfection, but always call upon God's help in order to make progress and direct one's intentions to God in all works or seek only God as Florens said.

The *narratio* of the house at Zwolle is somewhat more modest in describing the virtues of the *fraters*, but here too devotion is highly esteemed. Thomas a Kempis lays emphasis upon the inward along with the outward devotion. Of Florens Radewijns for example, he writes: ‘He insisted upon the spiritual life and the proposed meditations.’ He compelled respect from everyone by his religious attitude in the choir. He was granted visions and his prayers were answered in a miraculous way. This devout spirit also emanates from Thomas's letter to the Windesheimer Henry of Balveren. His *quaedam notabilia verba* and another two works, which will be discussed later, give evidence of the same piety. The devotion and the prayers of Lubbert ten Bosch († 1398) on his deathbed were praised. He was subject to a remarkable temptation held out by the devil in the shape of John Kessel. ‘It was a bad thing for me that I had so many prayers said by the Devotionalists and that I placed so much trust in them. When I asked you to read *psalteria* a voice spoke from inside me: “Stercus, stercus, why do you trust in these psalms, in Mary, in Gregory, Jerome and suchlike? You must place your confidence in God. God grows angry with you that you trust so much in these things and not in Him alone. But because you are fearful and of little faith and do not do it out of malice He will forgive you, but do not do such things again.”’

One might think oneself in the 16th century on reading such a comment on Catholic practices! On the other hand, the fact that John Kessel escaped Purgatory because of his complete renunciation of temporal things and his perseverance in his humble kitchen duties proves the merit of his good works. The dream referred to above

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1 G. Dumbar, *Analecta I* 13, 14.
4 Pohl VII, 134.

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ends with a vision. The devil attempts to persuade Lubbert to trust in his own merits and in his own virtues. But this was going too far. Lubbert realised that these were promptings of the devil. He never relied on himself but trusted in God's mercy and in the prayers and merits of Mary, etc.¹

John Kessel pondered anew (ruminabat) on what he heard sung in the church.² Arnold of Schoonhoven, a friend and fellow student of Thomas a Kempis in Deventer, was already exceptionally pious as a schoolboy when he prayed the matins of the holy Virgin, assisted at mass or meditated during mass. When he had entered and was already set to copying, he prayed before beginning to write, raising up his spirit to God. He knelt before a statue and prayed every time the clock struck. He loved to enter the church before and after school and communicated with great devotion on the feast days of Christ and of the saints.³

According to the Biography of famous men of the Deventer circle Florens Radewijns was religious in his entire attitude. ‘On the street he was so lost in reflection that he did not notice when anyone greeted him.’⁴ ‘His attempt to improve his life and to keep himself free from all sin is of more value than feeding a hundred poor people.’⁵ John Brinckerinck was accustomed to make a lengthy preparation for holy Mass by meditating on the passion of Christ.⁶

According to Amilius van Buren, however, a thousand pious exercises are not so meritorious as one work performed from a spirit of obedience.⁷ Gerard Zerbolt sought his joy in Our Lord and in the sacred books.⁸

In his various notabilia Florens Radewijns has memorable words to say on devotion: ‘Learn to understand what you are praying and

¹ Pohl, 355.
² Ibid., 322-324.
³ Ibid., 296.
⁴ Archief... aartsb. Utrecht 28 (1902) 4. Florens Radewijns was ‘alsoe goddienstiech overal in sinen zeeden: als hij over die straete genck, so genck hij soe ingekiert, dat hij niet en merkede, wie dat hem grute.’ And: ‘al sijn levens neernstelie te beteren ende hem van alle sunden willen te hauen’ valued more than when he ‘hondert armen voedede.’
⁵ Ibid., 7.
⁶ Ibid., 235.
⁷ Ibid., 323, however ‘dusent devotien’ were ‘niet soe verdienstelie als een werk uijt gehoersemhet gedaen.’
⁸ Ibid., 336. Zerbolt ‘satte al sine genoechte in onsen lieve Heren ende in die heilige buecke.’
vague thoughts are thus banished. Shrill singing disturbs the mind and quenches feeling and devotion. In praying you must ask the Lord rather for grace and mercy than for great rewards. All becomes sweetness for him who meditates on the passion of the Lord. We should perpetually direct our hearts to heaven and find our refuge in the Holy Scriptures; and often sigh that we are so carnal and lazy to seek the things of eternity. Excess of haste spoils devotion.\textsuperscript{1} Lubbert ten Busch also had the habit of praying when the clock struck.\textsuperscript{2} Entirely according to custom the former merchant of Bruges and now cook in the Deventer house, John Kessel, filled his day with prayer, not only at matins and the other hours and at mass, but also while going about his work in the kitchen and doing messages. He meditated continually, and with him too this inward devotion was accompanied by outward forms, such as kneeling.\textsuperscript{3}

This prayer and meditation had to provide the Brothers with continual spiritual sustenance so that their zeal might not weaken in the struggle against vice and the practice of virtue. When such fruits were absent then prayer was vain and not from the heart. The \textit{consuetudines} mention other virtues which the Brethren must strive to attain and which were to some extent necessary if such a communal life, without monastic rule and without vows, were to succeed. These were mutual love and peace and harmony (humility and obedience already mentioned), communal possession or personal poverty, purity and sobriety.

The virtues of mutual love, poverty and sobriety need not be discussed here. The first speaks for itself, the second was Geert Groote’s main endeavour, and sobriety was sufficiently evident in the foundations of Delft, Zwolle, Amersfoort, Albergen and Hulsbergen.

Obedience usually accompanied humility, since the humble Brother did not object to obeying the rector, who for his part repeatedly used his authority to humiliate a Brother in a very harsh and to our way of thinking very unpleasant manner. Florens, for instance, struck John de Vos of Heusden in the face in the presence of the newly arrived Henry Bruyn from Leiden.\textsuperscript{4} It was common at this time for the Brothers to have to wear old and worn or mended and badly fitting clothes, not only indoors but in the street. This latter was especially for people who were well known in the place so that their former friends and acquaintances would laugh at them and make fun of them. John of Kempen for example, was obliged to wear a robe with a patch.

\textsuperscript{1} Pohl VII 200-201.
\textsuperscript{2} Ibid., 266.
\textsuperscript{3} Ibid., 310-312.
\textsuperscript{4} G. Dumbar, \textit{Analecta I} 12.
on it and shoes that were much too big.\(^1\) When the tailor had bought the coarse heavy material various brothers showed themselves willing to wear a robe made from it or even only a pair of sleeves. Florens himself gave the example and the material seems to have been so hard-wearing that Rudolf Dier in his novitiate was still wearing a gown which had once belonged to Florens. Reinier of Haarlem, a rich young man who was well dressed when he entered, was given a gown which was mended and much too short. Thus garbed, he appeared among his former friends, as he himself said ‘like a tail-less chicken.’ The young man also had first to have his beard clipped after the Carthusian fashion and later shaved off altogether.\(^2\) The poor novice who developed consumption had (it seems) to work on without a midday meal.\(^3\) John Kessel wished to sit with the poor in church and even beg for them, but Florens would not permit it.\(^4\) Similar practices also existed in Zwolle. When Henry Heussen, chaplain of the city, entered, the rector daily tried to humiliate him. He sent him out to fetch water in the river A, next to the market. The lay people who saw this took pity on him and offered to carry the water jug for him.\(^5\) He also had to fetch mustard.

Abasement and humility are the ever-recurring themes in addresses and sermons, coupled with obedience which is shown by carrying out an order. On his deathbed rector Amilius of Buren exhorted the Brethren to obey his successor as the *vicarius Christi*; not that God speaks to us in a miraculous manner, but obey men for God's sake.\(^6\)

In the practice of chastity they found it necessary to be vigilant and circumspect in their dealings with women. We have already seen how Groote's biographers gave an exaggerated picture of this caution. John Brinckerinck who, as rector of the Master Geert's house, had constant dealings with the Sisters, was extremely vigilant. When he had to hear the confession of a Sister who was confined to bed, he turned his back on the invalid. R. Dier even saw Brinckerinck speaking with a Sister, the head of the house at that, while keeping his back turned to her.\(^7\) He made a Sister throw an apple tree, which she had embraced with sensual love, into the IJssel herself.

These are symptoms of the narrow, small-minded striving after contempt for the world which grew up among the Brothers from the

\(^1\) G. Dumbar, *Analecta I* 13.
\(^2\) Ibid., 22-23.
\(^3\) Ibid., 56, 57.
\(^4\) Ibid., 16.
\(^5\) Schoengen 64.
\(^6\) G. Dumbar, *Analecta I* 59.
\(^7\) Ibid., 37.

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very beginning and through them infected the Sisters. These stories were recounted with immense satisfaction by the chronicler Rudolf Dier and to a certain extent by James de Voecht of Utrecht around 1480. It is clear that Geert Groote's biographers write as though Groote had given the example for all this.

It was fortunate for the Brethren and for the influence of the *Devotio Moderna* in general that, along with their monastic practices, they also worked for their fellow men. We shall go into this later. Little is said in the *consuetudines* concerning communal possession, but the regulation on this point was strict and contained the core of the foundation at Zwolle. The chronicler began his account of the Zwolle house by stating that Christ and the Apostles introduced the idea of communal property and observed this rule.\(^1\) It was often prescribed by the Church, and also frequently maintained by the fathers.

\(^1\) Schoengen, 1.
Chapter Four
The Task of the Brethren

Apart from prayer and the performance of other spiritual exercises, the Brethren as a community, thus not as individuals, fulfilled the following tasks. They copied and illuminated books. They preached and acted as spiritual directors to various individuals, but principally to two groups: the schoolboys and the Sisters. Thirdly they contributed in providing board and lodgings and even teaching and training for some schoolboys. It is not possible to distinguish these tasks throughout.

The *Vita* of Florens Radewijns and those of his disciples, written by Thomas a Kempis, have little to say concerning the Brothers' preaching in the churches. The monk evidently did not consider this important for his novices. Florens Radewijns worked easily on the consciences of his fellow men and especially upon the young, by personal contact. His influence came more from private conversations than through preaching in the churches.¹ John van de Gronde, on the other hand, was a brilliant preacher, possessing as he did a beautiful voice, excellent delivery and firm conviction. His sermons were very popular with the faithful. He preached often in Deventer during Lent, the time of frequent homilies - and also in Zwolle. One of his sermons on Good Friday lasted six hours, with a short pause for a meal.² He also heard confessions whenever he visited the Devotionalists, including those on the St. Agniertenberg. He died, however, as early as May 7th 1392, and was succeeded as pastor to the Sisters of the Master Geert's house by John Brinckerinck, who naturally also preached for the Sisters but sometimes too gave a sermon in the church at three o'clock. Thomas a Kempis was thus able to hear him twice - once a fairly long sermon on Good Friday on the Passion of Our Lord, and once at New Year on the name of Jesus.³

It appears however, that the Brother's activities in this field decreased or stopped entirely, with the exception of a few famous preachers who fall outside this period. Their sermons begin to be confined to the 'collations' which were held in private on Sundays

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¹ Pohl VII 134, 172, 176.
² Pohl VII 219.
³ Ibid., 233, 234.
and feast days after dinner and in the evenings. These, however, were more discussions than sermons. They further exercised their pastoral duties through admonitions, exhortations and instructions, also called collations, which they usually held in their houses after the church services. These were intended for the instruction of schoolboys and other good men, and were followed, as we have already said, by conversations with small groups, or even with individuals in the priest's own cell.\(^1\) The *collationes* in the form of devout exhortations are only seldom mentioned in the *Vitae*.\(^2\) When however Florens went to Amersfoort with a few of the brothers, he immediately resumed this work there.

The complete and direct pastoral care of the Sisters was in the hands of those brothers who were appointed priests and confessors to the various convents. John Brinckerinck, for example, succeeded John van de Gronde in the Master Geert's house and also served as confessor in the Sisterhouse, from *ca.* 1407 the convent at Diepenveen. A very famous confessor in various convents in Zwolle was brother Henry Voppenszn from Gouda. He exercised this responsible task in the houses of the Sisters of the Common Life, recently founded in Zwolle, the Kinderhuis, the Old Convent, Kanneters, later called St. Gertrude, ten Bosche and on die Maet. He died in 1410. He was followed as confessor of the aforementioned houses by John of Haarlem. This was evidently a position of trust and also a happy solution for anyone who was used to being independent. The increase in the number of Sisterhouses, which will be discussed later, laid a heavy burden upon the shoulders of the Brethren. It is one of the principal reasons why, as we have been able to confirm, the great majority of the *clerici* who entered had to become priests, and why the Brotherhouses became in part training institutions for priests. It was difficult, moreover, for those Brothers living outside the fraternity to maintain the strict regulations, notably those concerning communal possessions and personal poverty. Hence the caution exercised by the leaders in accepting new *onera* for Sisterhouses and the desire of some of the Zwolle Brethren to move to the rector's quarters attached to the convents and thus escape the strictness of the mother house. But this trend only emerges at a later period when the spirit of devotion was no longer so heroic.

Another group which enjoyed the especial care of the Brethren of the Common Life was that of the schoolboys, - girls' schools did not exist at this early period. It is striking how, from the very beginning, this preoccupation is revealed by the sources, and with reference to many houses. In order to appreciate fully the following particulars it is essential to know that flourishing Latin schools already existed in Deventer and Zwolle and many other Dutch and west-European towns, with individual schools emerging from time to time to particular prominence. We already saw how, during the first years of public activity, that is, before the founding of the Brethren of the Common Life, Groote was in contact with the rectors and teachers of the schools of Zwolle and Deventer and Kampen. The schools of these cities and of all the others where the Brothers came only later or not at all, existed before the founding of the Brotherhood. Although this is *luce clarius* and already evident from the number of students from all districts attending university, who must perforce have received previous instruction in order to be able to follow the courses - it cannot be stressed too firmly. For some seem still to hold the opinion that this education was introduced to the Netherlands by the Brethren, although such a thesis is already disproved by the *Vitae* of Gerard Groote and by his letters. For the Netherlands I may refer to my book, *Scholen en onderwijs in Nederland gedurende de Middeleeuwen*. Since the village schools, which were also already long established and often conducted by the verger, taught only reading and writing, the young people from the villages, and also from those towns where the schools had not developed, went to neighbouring or more distant towns which possessed a flourishing school. In this way John Hemerken and Thomas Hemerken of Kempen and numerous other persons from Cleves, Goch and even Krefeld, went to Deventer to learn more Latin and begin dialectics in preparation for the University or for a career in religion. Even various pupils from the towns of Holland, like Henry de Bruyn from Leiden, and Rudolf Dier from Muiden travelled to Deventer. John Brinckerinck and Gerard Zerbold of Zutphen also made the journey to Deventer. In the sources these pupils are called *extranei*, in contrast to the *intranei*, the children of the city burghers. The same situation that existed in Deventer also existed in Zwolle and several other towns. From various contemporary statements it appears that the schools of Deventer and Zwolle excelled through

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1 Utrecht, Antwerpen 1954.

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better equipment and bigger teaching staff but chiefly because they made a broader course of study possible. For besides the six classes which we later find in the gymnasia: octava (mostly preparatory), septima, sexta, quinta, quarta and tertia, they also possessed two top classes, the secunda and the prima. In Deventer Amilius of Buren, for example, soon attained the first class - in scholasticis artibus profecit, ut in brevi inter primarios unus de doctioribus fieret. The housing of these boys from outside, these extranei of from 9 to 15, was perhaps an even greater problem than was the finding of lodgings for the young Arts students of between 15 and 20 in the University towns.

Colleges (bursae) were established for the university students, in which they not only enjoyed board and lodgings, but were under supervision and compelled to follow a certain timetable. As is known the university colleges absorbed a large part of the university and so divided it, since the heads of the colleges, especially in the Faculty of Arts, acquired the authority either to teach themselves or to appoint teachers. In the same way similar collegia, hostels, bursae or, as they were often called, domus pauperum were established for the boys attending a well known school. In the main these had a better effect on the boys' studies and virtues than did lodging with some godfearing man or woman, no matter how well they looked after the students. In several towns there grew up boarding houses which regularly took in a number of boys. The lodging of such boys was sometimes purely a work of charity, and sometimes a way of earning a little extra. The teaching staff especially could add to their income by taking in such boys as paying guests. It is admirable how some people spared neither cost nor pains for these young strangers. This free lodging, however, led also to begging among the boys - an ordinary occurrence which was not considered humiliating and was to a certain extent an inevitable result of these boarding houses. A hostel was preferable in many respects, but like the university colleges, the bursae or domus pauperum or collegia also tended to absorb the school. Alongside a degree of religious instruction or exhortations to virtue in sermons and collations, the repetitor soon emerged who went over the school work in the evenings and helped with the homework. Several of the domus pauperum of the fraters tried to expand or did expand into schools. We shall give examples later.

1 Pohl, VII 282. On such top classes, R.R. Post, Scholen en onderwijs, 99 sq.
In general such attempts at expansion were opposed by the main school and its custodians, the city magistrates. One in the 16th century in Deventer was soon suppressed but in Groningen a similar school within the hostel of the fraters survived longer and even attained a certain prominence in the 16th century.  

All these boys who lived in boarding houses or hostels naturally attended the main school. This was the reason for their coming and in any case there was no other. This was so long before the Brotherhood of the Common Life was founded and remained so even after they established hostels.

It is very striking that from the beginning of their existence until the end, the fraters in all the foundations of which we possess sufficient knowledge interested themselves in the lot of these schoolboys, chiefly those from outside the town, but partly too in the sons of the city burghers (intranei). They found lodgings for many of the pupils of the city schools with private individuals and received others into their own houses or, subsequently, hostels. Yet, although this was a praiseworthy undertaking, they were not alone in this work and seem to have made no discoveries, nor introduced any innovations in their houses. In the Netherlands we have to rely principally on the sources for the history of the Brethren of the Common Life and thus it may appear as if they were the pioneers or at least the driving force behind this form of charitable work, which concerned both the material and spiritual welfare of the boys. According to Rudolf Dier in Florens Radewijns' time nearly every citizen of Deventer lodged a poor, pious schoolboy and gave him a bed, beer and stew for the will of God. A tailor, Lambert of Galen, who worked for the Brothers had always eight poor scholars in his house, sent to him by the Brethren of the Florens' house, as were those in the other houses in the town. Lambert van Galen built a room for these poor lads to eat in. And yet this Lambert had almost nothing but his house and the work of his hands! Apart from these poor scholars he also took in three or four rich and paying young men. The tailor now and then spoke words of encouragement to the boys, and the priest-brothers (fratres presbiteri) of the Florens' house also ate sometimes with the poor. The noble lady Bye of Dussen constantly had eight poor pious scholars in her

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1 Cf. Chapters IX and XIV.
2 G. Dumbar, *Analecta* I 23, 24. ‘lectisternia et potagium et tisinam.’ This did not include the midday meal.

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house, sent from the Florens' house. She offered beds, food and drink for the morning and in addition an evening meal (*prandium*) once a week. She had a very devoted helper who entered the Master Geerts' house after the death of the noble lady. Rembert, dean of St. Lebuin, proposed riding with three horses when he came to Deventer, but he changed his plans and took in six boys, sent to him by the Brethren. He provided complete board and lodgings and in addition outer clothing. They did not eat at table with the dean but there was reading aloud.\(^1\)

The provision of a midday meal seems to have been the main difficulty. In this connection Florens Radewijns annually invited twelve needy schoolboys to dine with him on the feast of St. Gregory, March 12th. Having eaten well they returned to school.\(^2\) The case of Thomas a Kempis is illustrative. His elder brother John had already come to Deventer to study ten years before. He was one of the first *fraters* and afterwards became a canon at Windesheim. Then followed Thomas. He too went to Deventer to study, probably without money, or at least without sufficient funds, relying on the charity of the people of Deventer and of his brother's acquaintances. He thus went first to Windesheim to visit his brother and ask his advice. John sent him to Florens Radewijns, from whom a great crowd of scholars sought spiritual assistance. Florens first took him into his house, sent him to school and provided him with the necessary books. Afterwards he obtained free lodgings for him with a respectable and pious lady who took a benevolent interest in him and other scholars. Meanwhile he attended school and heard the Brethren preaching on Sundays.\(^3\) He later obtained a place in the Brothers' hostel and remained there a year, sharing room and bed with Arnold of Schoonhoven.\(^4\) In his case,

\(^1\) G. Dumbar, *Analecta I*, 25.
\(^2\) Pohl VII, 155.
\(^4\) *Ibid.*, 318-319. The text reads *in congregatone illa cum Arnoldo permansi*. On the basis of the word *congregatio* it has been suggested that Thomas was also admitted to the Fraternity of the Brethren of the Common Life. Later at least this Fraternity is indeed called *congregation*, but in the foregoing passage the reference is clearly to the hostel where Arnold was staying at the time and where there was room for 20 clerics. This last is also the normal term for pupils of the school. The house is called *domus antiqua*, which at that time referred to the hostel. Three persons were appointed to take care of these boys. The paragraph which follows the *congregatio* also indicates clearly that this is not the Fraternity itself but the hostel. Thomas copies, earns a small amount and can dispose of this as he wishes. He gives it to the Brothers.

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thus, there was a transition. After a temporary stay with the Brothers, Thomas transfers to a private boarding house, run by a lady. After this comes the hostel. We shall see later that the various hostels run by the Brethren only admitted boys who had attained a certain age or a certain class in the school: (12 years or fifth class). This probably explains why Thomas was first sent to a boarding house.

It is clear that Thomas attended the Deventer school during this period, for he paid or at least offered school fees to the rector of the school, John Boom (de Arbore).\(^1\) He had received this money from Florens and for this reason Boom refused to accept it. Thomas also attended church (as a little chorister, \textit{choralis}, or with all the pupils) under the direction of this same John Boom who ruled school and choir with a firm hand.\(^2\)

The boyhood career of Thomas a Kempis and Arnold of Schoonhoven brings us from the boarding houses and private lodgings to the hostel (\textit{bursa} or \textit{domus pauperum}) of the Brothers. No more than they created the boarding houses were the Brethren the first to conceive the idea of setting up colleges for schoolboys or university students. Geert Groote had certainly made the acquaintance of such institutions in Paris and had probably lived in one since he began his academic studies in Paris as a lad of 15. Moreover the theologians and canons of Deventer knew the hostel of Perugia, founded in 1362 by Cardinal Nicolas di Capoccio and destined for, among others, a divinity student from Deventer. For since that year the Deventer canons sent a young man from the city to the Umbrian capital to study theology there and to live in the hostel.\(^3\) Similar institutions also existed in non-university towns before the founding of the Brothers of the Common Life, for example in Brussels, set up on Oct. 10th, 1377 by John Serclaes.\(^4\) It would even appear that such hostels and \textit{bursae} already existed in Deventer before the fraternity was established. We deduce this from certain remarks in the biographies of the Deventer circle, for Henry of Wesel and Godfried of Toorn from Meurs had lived together at this time in \textit{una bursa}.\(^5\) Their case is not without interest. They had both arrived in Deventer at the same time (Cleves and Meurs are not far from each other), had attended school together.

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\(^1\) Pohl VII, 177.
\(^2\) \textit{Ibid.}, 142.
\(^3\) G. Dumbar, \textit{Het kerkelijk en wereldlijk Deventer}, I 616, 620.
\(^4\) A. Miraeus-Foppens, \textit{Opera Diplomatica}, I, 783.
\(^5\) G. Dumbar, \textit{Analecta} I, 66.
there, were contemporaries in one *bursa* and had both, through Florens' intervention, become teachers in the Deventer school. Henry died in 1410, the year in which Godfried became rector of the Florens' house, with a long life still in front of him († 1450). A boy from the Liège district lived at this time in *quadam bursa*, where he had been placed by Amilius (rector of the Florens' house), together with others who were also under Amilius' supervision. It is certain that the Brothers' *bursa* did not remain the only one, if indeed it ever was. In 1469 the executor of Cardinal Nicolas of Cusa's will founded a similar institution in Deventer for twenty boys. It was modelled on the Brothers' hostel but was not under their direction. This farming out of the boys to boarding houses and other lodgings was necessary at this period since the vicarage, the house in which the *fraters* began their communal life, offered very little space.

After the Brethrens' move in 1391 to a larger building in the Pontsteeg, twenty boys could be lodged in the old house. This was the situation when Arnold of Schoonhoven and Thomas a Kempis lived there, two of the twenty who were looked after by three lay people: a procurator, who did the buying in, a cook and a tailor. Both Rudolf Dier and Thomas employ clear terms to refer to both houses: there is a difference between the *domus fratrum* and the *domus clericorum*. Florens soon realized, however, that his house, the old house, *domus antiqua* would shortly be too small and also that the brothers would have to give up this house after his death. He thus began to build a new and bigger hostel in the Krommesteeg. This house was probably already finished in 1398 when Florens fled with a few of the Brethren to Amersfoort and returned on November 11th 1398. From henceforth this house in the Krommesteeg is called *Domus nova*, the new house. (See page 204). In the end the Brothers had two houses in Deventer: the Master Florens' house for the *fraters* and the new house for the schoolboys. Several of these latter accompanied Florens to Amersfoort, obtained lodgings there in various *hospitia* and visited Florens frequently. Rudolf Dier gives a somewhat broader description of the *frater* intention in building the new house: *Intentio autem, quare edificatur hec domus, fuit ut devoti clerici, postpone to scholas, ibidem possunt*.

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3 Pohl, VII, 318.

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sedere sub regimine domus domini Florencii, promerentes panem suum cum opere sacre scripture; eo quod per id temporis paucā essent loca religiosorum vel devotorum, ad quod potuissent divertere. ¹ He speaks only of boys who had finished their schooling or, as we saw, had left school but still lived in the new house. There they earned their keep by writing, and were under the Brothers' supervision, waiting until a place came vacant in one or other of the monasteries. This was thus a transit house for the monasteries, a sort of pro-noviciate offered by the chance of circumstance. One such boy was the priest Holto. ² As we shall see from the later history of the fraternity, this activity did not however interfere with the other purpose of the house, to provide lodgings for schoolboys.

Although the distinction is clear between the two houses and between the Brothers and the city and chapter school, there is a passage in Rudolf Dier from which some, not entirely correctly, have deduced a closer link between fraters and school. This is the passage dealing with the return of the fraters from Amersfoort (11th November 1398) and the opening of the school in Deventer on 13th November. These dates suggest some connection, but other problems arise. Who attended the school? Many pious fraters and only one secular from outside? There were, however, only a few children from the city and these were the little ones. After the many deaths these few and somewhat extraordinary pupils were abnormally serious, industrious, taciturn, even admonishing each other. In this unnatural atmosphere it was only the secular pupils who made witty remarks. These scholars too obeyed Florens Radewijns and his fraters. ³ Brothers going to school with other pupils and all obeying Florens! This seems a strange sort of situation. The explanation will most probably be that these Brothers and the others lived in one of the houses and attended school. It is clear enough that Florens did not teach and also that the fraters in question were not teachers either, for they calmly awaited the master's (lector) arrival in the mornings. This entire situation seems to arise from the unusual conditions prevailing. The city children did not dare to attend school yet and others perhaps had not yet returned. The boys from outside still shunned the recently infected city. The fratres set the example to speed the return to normal. The new house was to some extent adapted to the circumstances; in addition development was still possible in the management and administration.

¹ G. Dumbar, Analecta I 39.
² Ibid., 27.
³ G. Dumbar, Analecta I 46-47.
The Brothers did not build this new house from their own funds, nor did they maintain the pupils out of their own capital or with money earned by their daily work. The dwelling of the poor scholars was sustained by the charity of the citizens of this prosperous merchant city. Both the building land and the building costs were donated by a company of devout persons and these later took in hand the extensions to the house. The inmates of this house frequently received legacies and finally the house itself achieved separate legal status, so that it could for example make contracts of sale or purchase. And yet the day to day administration and the care of the boys remained in the hands of a proctor, appointed by the fraternity, with two or three assistants. Although we shall continue to pay close attention to the development of the hostels during the course of this study for the proper understanding of the institution, we shall devote some time here to defining and illustrating an especial characteristic which is permanent and also applies to other sister institutions. The Brethren did not only recruit the majority of their novices from the hostel. They also provided from the hostel numerous candidates for the monasteries or priests for the dioceses. The statement by Rudolf Dier which we have already quoted proves that this was one of the Brothers' main aims. Such reports indeed continue right into the sixteenth century, and concern not only the institute in Deventer but also those in other cities. Thomas a Kempis already mentions that some, including himself, went from this house (he is referring to the hostel in Deventer) to the order of the Canons Regular and others received ordination. In a decree dated 23 August 1447 the governors of the Florens' house even declared that the hostel would be destined only for the first-mentioned category. The house would be reserved for those who were preparing for a monastic life, *disponentes se ad ingressum religionis*. In the same spirit, the superior of the order of the Crozier Fathers declared on September 24th, 1424 that the Brothers had provided numerous youths of good will for his order, who must have been trained in this and the other hostels. In 1471 the famous penitential preacher of the Franciscans, John Brugman, praised the

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1 Cf. the explanation of the provisors of the Florens' house, 23 aug. 1447. Royal Library, The Hague, Ms. 70, Ms. 75.
2 Regestenlijst van het Cartularium, e.c. no. 27, 28, 57, 66, 45, 55, 68.
3 Pohl, VII 318, 319.
5 Archief ... aartsh. Utrecht, II (1875) 272.
brothers in Deventer for their care for the education of the future clergy. ‘The Brothers,’ he says, ‘give to their pupils not scholarship and philosophy but the milk of Christ and thus provided many candidates for priesthood and monastery.’ This Franciscan was well acquainted with the aim of the Brethrens' hostel, for a year before writing the letter in question he had addressed the boys of the hostel as future priests and monastics. It was not long afterwards that John Butzbach came to Deventer and noted that in the Brother's hostel there was room only for those who had attained the fifth class of the city school and intended becoming monks.

Erasmus, who will have formed his own conclusions in Deventer concerning the purpose of the hostels and could speak of the hostel in 's-Hertogenbosch from his own experience, reproached the Brothers that they exerted heavy pressure on their pupils in order to gain them for the monastic state. He says that the Dominicans and Franciscans recruited the majority of their novices from the pupils - that is from those living in the hostels. The idea that the Brothers had appointed themselves as the educators of future priests and monastics is also expressed by the bishop of Utrecht, Fredetic von Baden, in a document dated Jan. 24th, 1514: ‘the fraters have their fruits in various churches and monasteries, for they seclude the schoolboys from the wicked world, educate and preserve them in virtuous ways and in the fear of God and so render them suitable for the religious houses and churches.’ Finally Josse Bade (1462-1535) (Badius Ascensius, the famous Parisian printer and publisher) relates his own experience in an edition of the works of Thomas a Kempis. He had himself lived with the brothers in Ghent. Having prefaced his remarks by saying that, according to Thomas a Kempis, the monasteries of the Carthusians, Cistercians, Benedictines and Canons Regular of St. Augustine were filled with the Brothers' pupils, he goes on to say: ‘It was the same in my time, for I have seen myself how very many from the house (domo, not schola) have entered the monasteries of the Minorites, the Observants, the Dominicans and Carmelites who have two monasteries there.’ He had also seen, from his youth, that they (the

1 J.W. Moll, Johannes Brugman en het godsdienstig leven onzer vaderen in de vijftiende eeuw, I, 1854, Bijl. p. 204, 205.
4 Opus epistolarum, Allen II, p. 295.
5 Schoengen, 533.

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Brethren) ‘in the observance of their order and by their shining sanctity, propagated
the sweet spirit of Christ to the edification of the people.’

For these reasons it is clear that the main aim of the Brethren in founding their
hostels was not the material well-being of certain schoolboys but to provide churches
and monasteries with good candidates for the priesthood and the monastery. We also
saw in fact that they were not to limit their pastoral task among the pupils to a small,
select group.

The existing Zwolle sources show more clearly than those of Deventer that the
first Brethren in Zwolle devoted their attention to the schoolboys. The first priest
sent from Deventer, Henry Voppenszn of Gouda, Brother of the Common Life,
received pious schoolboys into his house. This, as we saw, was even before the
founding of the Brotherhouse proper. When the Brotherhouse under Gerard Scadde
was ready, Henry Voppenzn's old house, which was first called domus vicina, was
used for the young people at his request. John Andernach was head of it for a time
and Helmich, formerly a farmer, was cook. The hospitium is mentioned in the
consuetudines of Zwolle. Just as the domus antiqua in Deventer was replaced by a
larger, this domus vicina also made way for a much bigger hostel. But this already
goes beyond our period. It will then be seen that this hostel has exactly the same
characteristics as that of Deventer. The reports of the other houses do not mention
the existence of a domus pauperum or hostel - which does not mean that the boys
were not being similarly cared for there. Florens put these aims into practice in
Amersfoort, where there is even mention of hospicia, but it is not clear whether this
refers to lodgings with private individuals or to some form of a college. They certainly
did not belong to the fraters.

Concern for the spiritual and temporal welfare of a section of these schoolboys
brought about various contacts between the rector of the fraternity and the school
rector. A friendship similar to that which grew up between Groote and John Cele
and William Vroede, among

1 H. Somalius, Th. Malleoli a Kempis, opera omnia, Duaci 1635; Vita Thomae a Kempis IX,
unpaginated.
2 Schoengen 12.
3 Ibid., 17.
4 Ibid., 69.
5 Ibid., 75.
6 Ibid., 262.
7 G. Dumbar, Analecta I 41-42.
others, also developed between Florens Radewijns and John van de Boom, school rector in Deventer, and between Dirk of Herxen, rector of the Zwolle house and Livinus of Middelburg, rector of the Zwolleschool.

The schools of Deventer and Zwolle, of which the first was called the chapter school and the second the city school, were essentially the same sort of school. Both were from the outset the school of the one city parish, but had come under the control of the civic administration in the 14th and 15th centuries. This was, however, only partly true of the Deventer school; here the canons had retained certain rights in the appointment of the rector. It was accordingly called a chapter school, which had not the slightest influence on the school programme. This school, which was so closely connected with the church, was called *schola publica*, a public school, and as such differed from the private schools, institutions which were barely tolerated by the civic administration. The city schools were also called particular schools in contrast to the general schools, *studia generalia* or universities. The legal position and to a certain extent the school programme of the other city schools were the same as those of the above-mentioned schools. It is necessary to bear this in mind in order to understand the position of the Brothers regarding education. Neither in the first period discussed here, nor in the one following, did they have any influence on the administration of the city schools. They had no say either in the appointment or payment of the rector. At most they could be consulted and offer advice, and this sometimes happened, since through their hostels and pastoral duties they came to know many people, some of them very well. They could also further a person's cause, especially in the case of a teacher, a *lector*, for these were appointed by the rector. Rudolf Dier tells us, for example, that Florens Radewijns succeeded in persuading the rector of the Deventer school to appoint Henry of Wesel and Godfried of Mörs as teachers at the school. They had not yet at this time joined the Brothers of the Common Life. During the first 80 years of their existence the Brothers nowhere - with a very brief exception in Zwolle - participated in the actual school teaching. This is evident from the fact alone that the teachers relinquished their posts as soon as they entered the fraternity. This happened at Deventer with Direk de Gruiter,^1^ Godfried of Toorn,^2^

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2 *Ibid.*, I 3-4 and Pohl VII 188.
3 *Ibid.*, 64.

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Henry of Wesel¹ and Bernard Meyer,² and in Zwolle with Henry of Herxen,³ Nicolas of Middelburg⁴ and James of Goch.⁵ During this period the leaders of the Brotherhouses did not consider it fitting that the Brothers should give lessons. The work in the school would distract them too much, divert them from the inner religious life and prevent them from giving themselves entirely to God. As late as 1485 the Zwolle chronicler expressed the unbridgeable contrast between the distracting school activities and the higher and surer spiritual life in no uncertain terms. ‘After this, inflamed by the desire to serve God more completely and rejecting the distracting activities of the teachers, he decided forcefully to consider where and how this might be accomplished in a more fitting manner and with greater fruit. And understanding that there is no safer and higher way to follow the Redeemer than that of humility, obedience, poverty and similar virtues, that is the way chosen and professed by all those in religion - although they follow this path in very different manners - he considered the way in our house to be for him the safest, the truest and the most fruitful in this life and decided to follow it.’⁶

Even when pupils left the school to enter the fraternity, the contrast between the old and new life, between the striving after knowledge and the practice of devotion, is strongly accentuated. Of his friend Amilius of Buren, for example, Thomas a Kempis wrote: ‘Thus leaving behind the school and his worldly friends, he became a humble brother and a disciple of Christ.’⁷ It is said of John Kessel: ‘he abandoned the rules of Alexander (de Villa Dei) and Donatus, and entered the school of the heavenly exercises.’⁸ Arnold of Schoonhoven left the business of the school and devoted himself entirely to spiritual studies.⁹ The Brother of the Common Life, Peter Horn, tells of Lambert van Tiel: ‘relicto studio tradidit se Domino.’¹⁰

Up to 1480 the Brothers certainly had no regard for study, nor for teaching at school, nor for theology, nor for a sound philosophical or theological training for their priests. There is no mention of any

¹ G. Dumbar, Analecta I, 66.
² Ibid., 143-144.
³ Schoengen 176, after having carried on his duties for a short time.
⁴ Ibid., 89.
⁵ Ibid., 202.
⁶ Ibid., 177.
⁷ Pohl VII 283.
⁸ Ibid., 294.
⁹ Ibid., 321.
¹⁰ G. Dumbar, Analecta I, 141.
scholar or even of a teacher in their letters or in their lists of the dead. The *Notabilia* of Master Florens, or *Collecta quaedam* from the pious exercises of Mr. Lubbert or the *Devotum exercitium*, have nothing of this nature. In this respect the Brethren still maintained the standpoint of the 12th and 13th century world-forsakers. Better the simple mind than much learning without devotion.\(^1\) It would be interesting to know, however, what learning with devotion would mean! Were learning and devotion irreconcilable? Florens did, however, consider that the Books of the Holy Scriptures should be preserved.\(^2\) Lubbert ten Bosch says: ‘Approach study as if to find food for the soul.’ You must never study anything which does not refresh the soul.’ Studying to acquire knowledge or to teach others or for any other reason does not nourish the soul!\(^3\) Is this attitude not in complete contrast to what is proclaimed by the Humanists of the 15th and 16th centuries?

Although an examination of the writings of the Brethren would be appropriate here in order to throw more light upon their spirituality, it seems to me preferable first to consider more closely the other two institutions, the Sisters of the Common Life and the congregation of Windesheim. We could then discuss in this section the writers among the Brothers and the Windesheimers during this first period.

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1 Pohl VII, 207.

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Chapter Five
The Sisters of the Common Life 1383-1420.

An important group of exponents of the Modern Devotion was the Sisters of the Common Life, in a certain sense the counterparts of the Brothers. While the Brethren lived in the house of Florens Radewijns and their motherhouse in Deventer retained the name of the Florens' house, they were the Sisters of the Master Geert's house which has become as famous in the history of the Devotionalists as the Master Florens' house. Somewhat in contrast to the Brothers, who disseminated the spirit of Groote through sermons and addresses, it was they especially who absorbed this spirit and applied it in their work and in their religious life. They were to a certain extent the passive members, passive inasmuch as they did not go out and preach, but active in that by their example and personal converse, and by cooperating with the rectors, they succeeded in gaining numerous other women to their ideals. These were people from all classes of society: aristocratic young widows like Zwedera von Runen, Jutte von Ahaus and Asebe Hasenbroecks of Oldenzaal, alongside daughters of poor mothers, who had to enter the house empty-handed. The historian of the Sisters of the Common Life is hampered by the lack of documents, and this group, moreover, has been neglected by writers on the Modern Devotion. Nevertheless it is important to devote them some attention, although only as much as is necessary to know and evaluate the Modern Devotion in general. It will thus be necessary to examine the origin of the first houses in Deventer and Zwolle, to consider the dispersion of the sisters and, since the Brothers of the Common Life acted as their pastors, to establish what consequences this may have had. Finally we must consider the nature of their devotion.

The oldest house is the Master Geert's house, the paternal home of Geert Groote in the Begijnenstraat in Deventer which, in his deed of 20th September 1374, he placed at the disposal of poor women, living alone. ¹ He retained only a small apartment for himself. This was perhaps the first overt act by which Groote revealed to his fellow

¹ G. Dumbar, Kerkelijk en Wereldlijk Deventer, Deventer I 548.
citizens the radical change in his attitude to life. It did not mean a complete flight from the world for, apart from keeping a couple of rooms for himself, he also wished to retain the administration of the property. It was only later that this would be left to the aldermen, as also happened with the Stappenhuis and the Hospital. But this handing over of his property was by no means the founding of the Sisters of the Common Life. Groote had as yet no idea of founding a congregation of Sisters who would share table, dormitory, income and possessions and yet were not bound by the three monastic vows. It would be several years yet before Groote and his followers conceived such a plan. Neither was the founding of the congregation of Brothers envisaged yet - this idea was several years maturing.

The nature of the institution which was begun here and flourished in Geert Groote's house, is known to us from the statutes which are dated 1379. These statutes, however, have been preserved in two versions, one long and one short, the first dated on July 13th, 1379 and the other on 16th July, 1379, so that some examination is necessary. Both were issued with the knowledge and cooperation of the aldermen, but in the long version it is stated that Geert Groote has attached his seal to it. The long version has been preserved in the city book and the shorter was formerly also in the city archives. This situation is peculiar in the extreme. Imagine that, on July 13th 1379, a long document is drawn up in which much stress is laid on the rights of the magistrates and which is ratified by Geert Groote's seal, and three days later a much shorter document is compiled by these same magistrates which does not express so clearly the rights of the magistrates. This piece does not bear Gerard Groote's seal, but is preserved in the city archives. It is difficult to accept this, for reasons which I have given in detail in an article: De statuten van het Mr. Geertshuis te Deventer in Het Archief voor de geschiedenis van het aartsbisdom Utrecht. For the sake of those who are unable to read the text I shall summarize the principal arguments proving that the long text is an interpolation and must have been composed after 1379. Since this piece is represented as being published three days before the other, it is called in diplomatic language an unauthentic document.

In the first place there is one very obvious interpolation. The long

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1 Ed. J. de Hullu, Archief voor Nederlandsche kerkgeschiedenis 6 (1897) 63-75.
2 Ed. G. Dumbar, Kerkelijk en wereldlijk Deventer, I 549.
3 Archief ... aartsh. Utrecht., 71 (1952) 1-45.
text has a fairly lengthy prohibition of the ‘blote ledicheit’, rejecting the quietism of certain German pseudo-mystics. This passage is followed by a short piece similar to the short text where it is advised ‘te schuwen’ (to fly) this ‘lediche bloetheit’. There is now no question here of the above mentioned quietism, but of the idleness which is the devil's pillow, a different concept entirely. And yet the author of the long piece links this passage with the preceding one by inserting the word ‘deze’ (this) for ‘lediche bloetheit’. This clearly reveals the interpolation.

In addition the long text mentions two companies and two ‘meysterkes’ in Groote's house, a situation which is known from other sources only to have existed later.

The decree on what was to be done with Groote's own two rooms after his death is also unacceptable for 1379, when Groote was 39 and had just commenced his career.

Finally, great emphasis is laid in the long text on the fact that the inmates of the Master Geert's house were not Beguines and did not fall under the papal condemnations which had been pronounced against some such groups. This is the main theme of the long text, whereas in the short one the Beguines are not mentioned. This now would seem to indicate a period in which the Sisters of the Common Life were under attack and that by an inquisitor. There was indeed such an attack in the years 1395-1397 and it is only then that this long document must have been compiled. The writer has carefully attributed all the decrees to Groote, by the cited reference to Groote and by making it appear as though the piece was sealed by him. It is noteworthy, however, that the short piece has only four references to rights held by Geert Groote, whereas there are eighteen in the long piece, but worded in such a way that Groote enjoys a certain right or exercises certain authority during his lifetime, but that this right or authority is transferred to the magistrates after his death. It was easy for the magistrates to determine this ca. 1396, twelve years after Groote's death. It is quite clear that they had a hand in composing the long text, but equally clear that they could not have done it alone. Apart from increasing the rights of the magistrates, the long text also comes out in defence of the Sisters, who since 1379 had ceased to be almshouse-dwellers and become Sisters of the Common Life, against unjustified attacks by slanderers, extremists and even by inquisitors. The Brothers themselves were the best informed on this point and it thus seems likely that John Brinckerinck, with the help of Gerard Zerbolt
for example, was also implicated in the compiling of this document. It would serve as a strong protection for the Sisters if it should appear from this piece that, in 1379 already, Groote had taken various measures to prevent the inmates of his house being considered as Beguines or from having contact with the members of the ‘Free Spirit.’ On the contrary he had seen to it that they rejected the eight articles which Clement V had framed against the Beguines and the 28 condemned articles of Eckhard.

However, the interpolated unauthentic document is of considerable importance for our knowledge of the Sisters of the Common Life in the first period. We can thus be said to possess three records dealing with the origin of the Sisters: Groote's disposal of his house for the benefit of pious women, dated Sept. 20th. 1374; the charter of the magistrates of Deventer of 16th July 1379 (the short text); and a piece compiled with at the very least the permission and cooperation of the magistrates and leaders of the Sisters, dating from roughly 1395-1397.

Geert Groote's intention in founding this company, insofar as he was able to obtain the cooperation of the magistrates, is expressed in the statutes of 1379 (16th July) given by Geert Groote, but drawn up with the knowledge and assistance of the aldermen.1

The house would not serve to found a new spiritual order, which in any case could not be done without the Pope's permission, but to provide a dwelling place for young women without binding them to any contract. Anyone, however, who left or was sent away, was not permitted to return. The inmates retain their lay state, are subject to secular law, and must be tried by the magistrates. Even before Groote's death the magistrates will have the right to decide who is to be admitted and who expelled, just as they had for the Stappenhuis. The inmates will not wear religious clothing, but act as lay people and very simply at that. The ‘meysterken’ must see to this. They may not demand a dowry from anyone desiring admittance but do this only in God's honour. Nor must they allow themselves to be guided by friendship. This seems to concern the magistrates who, however, are obliged to consult the ‘mistress’ and the wisest members. This holds good even for alterations to the house. The ‘mistress’ is elected annually, on the feast of St. Gregory, 12th March, by a majority vote. Her appointment must be confirmed by the magistrates. The ‘mis-

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1 This is the short piece, published by G. Dumbar, *Kerkelijk en Wereldlijk Deventer* I, 548, *Archief ... aartsh. Utrecht* 71 (1952) 3 sq.

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tress's' task is to administer the communal property, including the house and its income. She can also allot to the inmates the work to be performed for the good of the community. She exercises some supervision on the women's behaviour and must try to keep the peace among them. Important matters will be referred to the magistrates. Certain points are mentioned on the grounds of which a person might be expelled from the house: this is in fact the province of the magistrates. Each inmate must live by the work of her hands and no one may beg. If anyone dies (within the house or outside it), her clothes, bed, ornaments, tools, butter and corn become house property. No one may lodge a man within the building, nor invite him as a guest, nor offer him a meal (with the exception of workmen). No one either may keep a woman in childbed, or sleep away from the house without permission. Permission is also needed for journeys outside the city. Geert Groote had earnestly impressed upon the magistrates and 'meesterken' that they should not give permission for journeys which might be the cause of scandal or harm to the poor people - visits to chapters were notably forbidden. Further, an anniversary Mass will be said for the parents and grandparents of Geert Groote on the feast of St. Clara (12th August) and also for Groote on the day of his death ('op den dach daer God over hem gebiet').

These statutes describe the Sisters not as Sisters of the Common Life, but as almshouse-dwellers. Each one has cooking pots and cleaning materials, a supply of food and evidently does her own cooking. All this must be supplied by each from her own income, earned by her own efforts. Nothing is communal, neither earnings nor possessions which in any case, with a few small exceptions, return to the family. There is no communal dormitory or dining room, no communal purse to receive the individual earnings and cover the cost of clothing. There is no communal religious exercise, nor even mention of a communal prayer, except on the anniversaries of Groote's family. The only thing which the sisters have in common is the use of the house and its upkeep. This last includes firstly the cleaning, a duty shared by all and which may be apportioned by the meesterke, and also small improvements which may be paid for from the legacy of small properties already mentioned. The administrative duties of the 'mistress' are confined to these points. There is thus a small communal fund to finance projects for the good of the house and perhaps other charitable works, for example the care of the sick or of Sisters who were found to be handicapped and could no longer work or even...
beg. The statutes, however, make no mention of this. As far as we can gather there was neither capital nor cash for such work.

The situation had changed completely, however, when the long text was drawn up. Apart from the fact that Groote’s house now contained two communities or groups, each with its own ‘mistress’ yet so linked that they formed one family, there was now also a coffer, administered by the ‘mistresses’, which was shared out among all the inmates equally, unless anything special was given or sent to two or three or to bed-ridden invalids. This was at least a comfort for the old and weak who could themselves not work or even beg. This communal coffer was filled regularly. Whatever came from the dead, i.e. the same as before but now supplemented by books, dead meat (smoked meat?) and the income from one year, being the proceeds from cows, sheep, bees, etc., less the funeral expenses and anything owed the ‘mistress’ by the deceased, was destined for the house coffer, i.e. the coffer which had existed from the beginning. Anything willed to the ‘distribution’ falls to the second coffer. If anything is willed to both without distinction it will be divided into two parts, one for the building and one for the ‘distribution.’ The same will hold good for gifts among the living if it is not clear for which coffer they are intended. They are divided equally, but in such a way that certain foodstuffs (malt, fish and meat) and fuel are immediately apportioned to the ‘distribution’ while timber, stone, chalk and iron fall at once to the building coffer.

These regulations clearly show that the idea of ‘community’ had made progress since the statutes were drawn up in 1379. Along with the coffer for the building there is now another for the benefit of all members of the community, especially the old and sick. And yet there is little community life as such, nor community of possessions. The almshouse system has not yet been broken, only a little modified to the extent that all may contribute to the communal coffer, which the ‘mistress’ may dole out as the need arises. It follows thus that the statements in the biography of John Brinckerinck are based upon truth: ‘It was not yet the custom in the houses to have everything in common besides a coffer. The Master Geertshouse was the first to introduce this and the other houses afterwards adopted it, so that they now have nothing but communal property.’1 The author does not

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1 Archief ... aartsb. Utrecht 28 (1902) 26. ‘Ten was doe in die vergaderingen der susteren noch gene gewonte, dat sy enen pot hadden ende voert al dinck int gemeen. Dat began erst tot meyster Gerijtshuys ende doe voert in die ander vergaderingen, soedat sj nu al dinc hebben yut gemeen.’

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say when this came about, but it must have been after the unauthentic document was
drawn up and before the great attacks on the Sisters of the Master Geert's house and
of many other houses, especially in 1396, '97, and '98. We have seen that with the
Brothers it was the foundation itself that was attacked on the grounds that the forming
of a monastic community, with the sacrifice of all personal possessions and under
the direction of a master, even though no vows were taken, was none the less a new
form of monastic life and thus forbidden by the same law. The accent of these attacks
lay however elsewhere with the Sisters. They did indeed live together, had a ‘mistress’
but with little authority except in administrative matters, and had not yet total
community of possessions, table or sleeping accommodation, but they must have
closely resembled Beguines and it is remarkable how much care the composers of
the long text devoted to stressing that the women were not in fact Beguines, at least
not of the sort assumed. To the declaration that they did not intend to found a ‘free
religion’ is added: ‘nor to adopt the status of Beguines since the Beguines are
prohibited by the pope and the general church under jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical
law’. Concerning their dress it is not only stated that the Sisters may not wear
monastic dress, but also that they may not dress as Beguines. Furthermore no one
may remain in the house who holds any view ‘because of which the Beguines are
prohibited.’ As we have already observed the composition of the false text was an
attempt to preserve the Sisters from various other possible accusations, including
that they were supporters of the ‘Free Spirits’ and of the condemned theses of Eckhart.
All this will be discussed when dealing with the Brothers' struggle for existence.

Let us first try to obtain some idea of the dispersion of the sisters, who thus became
Sisters of the Common Life around 1398-99. John Brinckerinck, who had been
appointed by the Magistrates to succeed John van de Gronde in 1392, attracted many
girls to the Master Geert's house by his goodness and austerity, by his preaching and
also perhaps by his former relationship with Geert Groote. Groote's house soon
proved too small to contain all the aspirants. There was only room

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1 Archief... aartsb. Utrecht 71 (1952) 3 'noch om behghinen staet te maken, want die behghinen,
mit namen van der pawes ende van der ghemenen kerken verboden zijn onder de banne van
den gheesteliken rechte.'
2 Ibid., 4.
3 Ibid., 5. ‘daerdie behghinen om verboden sin.’
for 16 sisters, 8 in the back premises and 8 in the stone house. He advised those who could not be accommodated to go and live together somewhere in the city and thus constitute the beginnings of a new foundation. He had also gathered the noble ladies together since the statutes did not allow him to admit them to the house, for they were not driven to seek lodgings through poverty. Perhaps they could come under the rule that they desired to live in ('der herberghen mitten armen luden') in the same house as the poor people for God's sake and from a spirit of penitence. It was partly for the sake of these ladies that he built Diepenveen in 1400, a foundation outside Deventer, occupied by sisters of the Master Geert's house and others, and for another 6 years a house for Sisters of the Common Life. It became in 1407 a convent of Regular Canonesses and was incorporated in the congregation of Windesheim. At about the same time four other Sisterhouses were founded in Deventer, the houses of Brandes, Kerstenens, Buusken and Lamme van Dyese. Originally they were all under the leadership of Brinckerinck, but as the number of Sisters grew the institutions required separate directors and confessors.

This can be observed most clearly in the case of Zwolle. Henry Voppszn of Gouda, with whom we are familiar, a member of the house of Deventer and a well-known preacher, began also to preach in Zwolle while acting as rector et confessor of those widows and women who had begun their communal life a short time before. This was at the place known in the vernacular as Ter Kinderhuys, as there was not yet a house for the priests. This house, dedicated to St. Cecilia, was begun in 1384, according to the local historians. This does not mean to say, however, that they immediately adopted the communal life referred to by Jacob de Voecht ninety years later. Like the Master Geert's house it may have begun as a sort of almshouse or Beguine house and only introduced community of life and possessions some years later. Finally, however, it certainly became a house of Sisters of the Common Life. Its spiritual director was Henry Voppszn of Gouda, who lived elsewhere. Henry was also confessor to the Oude Convent, a Beguine House in the Raubstreet, next to the Brother-house and to the Zwolle Franciscans of the Third Order whom he detached from the Franciscan monastery at Zwolle. He also had a

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1 Archief... aartsb. Utrecht 71 (1952) 13.
2 G. Dumbar, Analecta I 16-17.
3 Schoengen 14.
4 Schoengen 15.

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hand in the founding of the Sisterhouses at Kaneten, begun in 1390, Ten Bosch and Op die Maet. Henry Voppensz died in 1410 and was succeeded as confessor by John of Haarlem († 1435), also a celebrated preacher who, however, quarrelled with the magistrate and was obliged to leave the city. Like his predecessor he served the four convents of Kinderhuis, Kaneten, Ten Bosch and Ter Maet.¹ So too did his successor Liefardus, except that he already lived near the house, while he was at this time perhaps not yet a member of the Fraternity. The remarkable thing is that he was succeeded or replaced in all the houses (Kinderhuis, Oud Convent, Kaneten, Die Maet, Ten Bosch) by a separate confessor for each house. And so it remained. Five priests were needed instead of one for the Sisterhouses in Zwolle. On one occasion a secular priest was called in to help but the fraters preferred to do the work themselves and were perhaps requested by the Sisters. Later they also had the care of the houses in Wamel,² Rossum,³ Oss,⁴ and sometimes other convents such as Bethlehem, outside the walls of Utrecht,⁵ Ten Orthen near ’s-Hertogenbosch,⁶ St. Ursula or Brantolie in Utrecht’ and Griet.⁷ This is sufficient to make it clear why the house of Zwolle needed so many priests. I have already referred to their function in their own house, to the direction of the hostel and also, during the first period, to the houses which were founded from Zwolle and run by priests from this house. Hence the facts prove that in the normal course of events every cleric who entered was finally ordained unless prevented by an early death or by very special circumstances. It is also clear that the Brothers considered the pastoral care of the Sisters and the direction of their convents an extremely important task. But there was also the danger that the motherhouse was deprived of too many of her members and that the Brothers grew accustomed to a somewhat freer life. The stern daily treadmill of prayer, meditation, long periods of work, sober meals, short sleep, obedience, humiliation, and ‘correction’ could not be maintained by the rector of a Sisterhouse, and in the outposts it even appeared difficult to persevere in poverty and community of possessions. There are signs, in the following period at least, that several of the Brethren aspired to such a post. Some may even have entered with the idea: just a few years and I'll land an easy job! All

¹ Schoengen, 19.
² Ibid., 145.
³ Ibid., 105.
⁴ Ibid., 104.
⁵ Ibid., 97.
⁶ Ibid., 147.
⁷ Ibid., 81.
⁸ Ibid., 21.
this must have weighed heavily on the entire discipline which, according to the Consuetudines at least, should have been very strict, apart entirely from the fact that some were unable to bear the luxury and the proximity of women. The Narratio of the Zwolle house provides certain striking examples of this. Liefardus, who had long fulfilled this task, finally did such peculiar things that the Sisters were not well directed. ¹ He was relieved of his position. William of Gelre, confessor and director at Die Maet cooperated in the Sisters' becoming Canonesses Regular and it was certainly after this, if not because of this, that he was displaced. He remained thereafter in the world and died there. ² The same thing happened with the Sisters of Ten Bosch when Dirk van Kampen was rector there. He too became estranged from the Brothers and died in the convent of the Canonesses. ³

The Brethren evidently found it difficult to approve of such a transition to the Regular state which, as is apparent here, was quite a frequent occurrence. Meanwhile the number of Sisterhouses increased. In Zutphen too a Sisterhouse was founded during John Brinckerinck's lifetime to be later joined by three others. The valley of the Yssel appeared to be the most fertile ground for these foundations, but three houses also arose in 's-Hertogenbosch, Amersfoort and Utrecht and two in Groningen and Amsterdam. This growth was so spontaneous and so sparsely documented that it is difficult to pinpoint the beginning with any certainty. It is, however, a fact that at the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth centuries such houses, congregations of women who ultimately became Sisters of the Common Life, sprang up from the ground like mushrooms. The following may be established with a fair degree of certainty. Before 1400, in addition to the houses already mentioned, congregations developed in Delft (ca. 1380, later St. Agatha), in Amersfoort (ca. 1380, later St. Agnes), Hoorn, Hasselt (1397), Leiden (1398, later Roomburg), Rhenen (1388, later St. Agnes), and Utrecht (1396, later St. Cecilia). ⁴ These are certainly but a few of all those which did spring up. From the dates of foundation it may be deduced that they were the direct result of Geert Groote's preaching and the consequent revival of the spiritual life. This revival led to a new wave of contempt for the world - the

¹ Schoengen, 20.
² Ibid., 21.
³ Ibid., 21.
⁴ D. van Heel O.F.M., De Tertiarissen van het Utrechtsche Kapittel, Utrecht 1939. This list is naturally by no means complete. Most of the houses are indeed of purely local importance, but the whole is impressive.

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contemptus mundi which may be considered praiseworthy from a certain point of view, but which was of no especial benefit to society, particularly since these Sisters performed no social work. Nursing of the sick scarcely existed as a profession, still less the education of girls. These Sisters did work, however. They spun and wove among other things, which later aroused general disfavour and opposition. For on the one hand they were a source of cheap labour for the employers, thus antagonising the workers, while on the other they offered cheap goods on the market, which was scarcely appreciated by the manufacturers.

All this activity, however, presupposes a comparatively large number of persons in these convents, and in fact, just as there were many more Sisterhouses than Fraternities, so there were many more Sisters than Brethren. Before the end of the 14th century there were already 16 girls living in the Master Geert's house, thus exceeding the number of Brothers in the Master Florens' house. At the death of John Brinckerinck, however, in 1419, the numbers had already risen to 150, despite the foundation of Diepenveen and its population with Sisters from the Master Geert's house. The Sisterhouse in 's-Hertogenbosch provides even more striking figures. In the middle of the century it housed 500 Sisters, so that an annex had to be built at Vught, intended for 200 persons. This was despite the fact that Sisters had already gone from the house in 's-Hertogenbosch to found institutions in Zalt-Bommel, Rossum, Wamel and Birckt. These few figures already show that Geert Groote was justified in claiming, in a letter to the bishop dated 1383, that: 'on the Lord's ground grew very many virginal flowers, fields of chaste widows and voluntary poor, all renunciations of the world.'

Perhaps because complaints began to be heard concerning these Sisters, who attracted attention by their very numbers, and perhaps too to introduce a little order in the affairs of the Sisterhood, various eminent ecclesiastical persons began to suggest, as early as 1397-98, that these communities of Sisters should adopt an approved monastic order and transform themselves into convents. A considerable campaign was conducted to this end at the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth century, among the Sisters and their spirit-

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1 Pohl, VII, 225.
2 Ger. M. Ep. no. 58, p. 216.
ual directors. Several Sisters and some of the Brothers were persuaded to accept at least the Third Order of St. Francis. This did not of course immediately transform the Devotionalists into monastics, since people in the world could also adopt this rule, for which the three monastic vows were not required. Yet still the inclination towards the monastic life was there. The community of life, possessions and income and the similarity of the practice of virtue according to a fixed time-table and according to this Third Rule, all these were conducive to it.

An additional factor was that these persons, bound by the rule of St. Francis, soon obtained permission to take the vow of chastity, and gradually the other two vows as well. They even became obligatory for certain groups. By adopting this rule, the Sisters (and Brothers) of the Common Life, gradually and almost imperceptibly, yet according to their own wish, were transformed into monastics. The taking of the vows changed the status of the Brethren and Sisters. A shorter road to transition was the adoption of the rule of St. Augustine. This was done by the Sisters of the two Zwolle houses at Die Maat and Ten Bosch, an example later imitated by several others, including the Tertiaries, i.e., those who had adopted the Third Order of St. Francis. This step gained the disapproval of various Brothers but it is remarkable how many friends or disciples of Geert Groote laboured to this end around 1400.

The adoption of this rule by several houses and their joining into one chapter seems to have been one of the important matters negotiated by Florens Radewijns in 1398 in Utrecht and Amsterdam. Others entertained a different opinion on this point.¹

Around Easter of 1399, an assembly was held in Amersfoort consisting of Master William Hendriks of Amersfoort, Master Gysbert of Amsterdam, Master Hugo of Haarlem, Master Pauwels of Medemblik, Henry of Gouda, and some others, all priests. They came to two decisions: firstly that the Brothers from Amersfoort should adopt the Third Rule of St. Francis together with the vow of chastity; secondly that the various convents which had also adopted this Third Rule and had probably first been inhabited in part by Sisters of the Common Life, should unite. In the same year already (September 1399) this group received a privilege from pope Boniface IX and, according to a letter dated 18th January 1400, the same pope gave the organization his official recognition.² They were entitled to hold an

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¹ G. Dumbar, *Analecta* I 91.
² v. Heel, o.c. 9, 10.

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annual chapter with the appropriate jurisdiction, and to choose a superior-general. The Brothers and Sisters who so desired might take the vow of chastity. They were also given the right to choose a member of the Order as visitator. Several houses must have adopted the rule in 1400 and even before, and thus been gained for the union. This movement expanded rapidly. It counted 40 to 50 houses in 1424, 70 in 1439 with a total of 3,000 monastics, and by 1470 there were no less than 82. These included, besides the Fraternity and Amersfoort, several famous houses of the sisters of the Common Life, like the house at IJzendoorn, the Master Henry's house at Zutphen, St. Agnes at Emmerich, St. Agnes at Amersfoort, Bethlehem in Utrecht, St. Agnes and St. Michael at Kampen, and the houses in Hasselt, Oene, Weesp, Enkhuizen and Texel. There were none from Deventer or Zwolle. The gentlemen who met in Amersfoort were all already active and convinced members of the Modern Devotion, according to what is said of them by Rudolf Dier and Thomas a Kempis.

They were all heads of houses and, with the exception of William Hendriksz, all of Sisterhouses. William Hendriksz was rector of the Fraternity in Amersfoort which had so hospitably received Florens Radewijns and his brothers in 1398. He later became General of the Utrecht chapter founded by himself and his friends. While Florens was staying in Amersfoort he must already have entertained the idea of adopting the rule of St. Francis for his house and of taking the vow of chastity. Master Wermbold was head of the convent of St. Cecilia in Utrecht and showed himself a firm supporter of the transition and new organization. He succeeded in winning St. Agatha in Delft for the Union. None the less he retained his friendship and authority in the Deventer house where he often acted as visitator, and his relations with the Brothers continued to be most cordial, even after 1400. Another member of this group was Gijsbert Dou, to whom Groote made his general confession and to whom he wrote a letter in 1383. He too must have continued on good terms with the Brethren, since Rudolf Dier mentions him. He was at this time rector of Sisters in Amsterdam. The same must be said of Hugo Goldsmit, rector of the

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1 e.q. St. Agatha in Delft, v. Heel, o.c. 11.
2 Ibid., 13.
3 See v. Heel in vocibus.
4 G. Dumbar, Analecta I 28-33.
5 Pohl, VII 187-188.
6 G. Dumbar, Analecta I 28-31.
7 Ger. M. Ep. no. 51, p. 197.

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Beguines in Haarlem and Paul Albertzn, rector of Sisters at Medemblik, while we are already acquainted with Henry Voppenszn of Gouda from Zwolle as head of the Brethren of the Common Life in that city and confessor of various Sisterhouses. There was no one present from Deventer, however. Florens, who had certainly been informed of the plans in 1398, held aloof, but retained his friendship with the leaders. This was nevertheless a significant change. In particular the taking of a vow (of chastity) radically altered the character of the Deventer institution. Florens must have hoped to be able to retain the Brothers. He died as early as 1400 and the Brothers did indeed firmly hold their ground.
Chapter Six
The Opposition to both Institutions, and the Defence

In the last year of his life especially (1383-84), Groote himself aroused much opposition, which eventually rendered it impossible for him to preach. This was an attack on Groote's activities, an attack directed against him personally. There can be no doubt that such opposition to Groote did exist and that it was successful. The question then arises, however: did Groote's personal opponents and victims also turn against the institutions which Groote had founded, the Brethren and Sisters of the Common Life? It has been assumed, mainly on the basis of statements made by John Busch, that the mendicant orders and notably the Dominicans, launched their attack on Groote's institutions even during his lifetime. In his *Chronicon Windeshemense*, John Busch devotes a separate chapter to this subject. According to him, members of the mendicant orders (*fratres mendicantes*) tried to have the communal life of the Modern Devotionalists condemned, but Groote got the better of them. He then gives the content of a sermon which Groote is supposed to have directed against these attacks.\(^1\) Van de Borne, however, has proved that this sermon is a fabrication on the part of Busch.\(^2\) This eliminates the main support for the theory that the opposition to Groote's institutions began during his lifetime. Random statements put forward by a member of the Fraternity are not sufficient proof that the mendicants joined battle so soon. Even Thomas a Kempis' story of the last conversations of the Brothers with Groote on his deathbed seem to have more reference to what was expected to happen than to what had actually occurred. The Brothers call Groote ‘our defender,’ *defensor noster*. ‘The opponents will rejoice and the worldly will mock us: they have no leader now, thus they will soon perish. If they have dared to laugh at us and curse us while

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you lived, what will they do when you are dead? May you pray for us and bring help
soon to your sons who have remained behind,’ etc. The words do lead one to assume
that the enemies had turned not only against Groote but also against his disciples,
and thus against their organization. It seems to me, however, that the affair may have
been dramatized from Thomas a Kempis’ later observations.

This explanation gains support from the fact that the Brothers had only been very
recently founded, so that the outside world scarcely knew what was going on. They,
were moreover, an extremely small group and dispersed over two or three places so
that they can scarcely have been seen as a menace or even viewed with disfavour.
People would have had to wait to see exactly what this foundation signified. The
Sisters, in the Master Geert's house, were in 1384 nothing other than
almshouse-dwellers, like those of the Master Stappen convent. It can scarcely be
supposed that the mendicants took the trouble to oppose them.

But the Brothers did not disappear after Groote's death! On the contrary, they
 gained several novices and many schoolboys as well. In Deventer they first of all
acquired the vicarage and afterwards a larger house which already proved too small
in 1391 and was exchanged for that of Zwedera of Runen. Shortly afterwards plans
were made for a larger hostel, since the vicarage could hold only twenty boys and
there was a great demand for places. The Brothers evidently received enough outside
help to cover the building costs. People of means did begin to enter the Fraternity
and bring their money with them. The Brethren made a particular impression on the
schoolboys, and they received the support of the parish priest, the school rector and
of some of the magistrates. Their preaching was popular, especially that of John van
de Gronde. Stories began to circulate concerning their great humility, their inner
devotion and their work. After the death of John van de Gronde († 1392) his successor,
John Brinckerinck, attracted an ever increasing number of women to the Master
Geert's house, and if there was no room for them there he sent them to found little
communal groups elsewhere in the city. It was known that he had also introduced
communal life in the Master Geert's house and that there would thus be Sisters of
the Common Life alongside the Brothers. The Sisterhood aroused considerable
interest, not only in Deventer but in many other cities as well. A pair of rich and
aristocratic ladies began to occupy themselves with this foundation and wished to
enter it themselves. It seems that
the Beguines were given a new lease of life, but these Sisters went even further. They renounced their incomes and their property. Had they not thus become monastics, like the Brothers, without adopting any particular rule? Were they founding a new order? There was every appearance of it, for the question did not remain confined to Deventer. Zwolle too had her Brethren. The former may have left the town but Henry Voppenszn copied in Zwolle exactly what Florens Radewijns had done in Deventer. He preached in the church, admitted schoolboys into his house and enjoyed so much success among rich and pious gentlemen like Meynold that he too founded a Brotherhouse in Zwolle. Henry also established contact with a few of the existing Sisterhouses and with the new ones, imitating the model of the Master Geert's house.

Priests came to Deventer from Twente to take stock of the situation and the then renowned pastor of Almelo, who enjoyed fame as a doctor, put into practice in his presbytery what he had observed in Deventer. Interested persons came from as far as Westphalia and priests from Münster joined the Deventer Brothers, evidently with the intention of introducing this Brotherhood in Münster. A Brotherhouse was begun in Amersfoort and another in Hoorn. Groote had friends among the priests in various cities in the province of Holland. Should they too undertake to found similar houses? Nothing seems to have daunted the Brothers. In 1387, three years after Groote's death, they founded a monastery in Windesheim and then in Marienboon in Arnhem and Nieuwlicht in Hoorn. They had very good contacts with the Canons Regular of Eemsteyn and thence even a link with Groenendaal. It really seemed as though something great was growing from all this. Even though the beginnings were still small, the Brethren had the sympathy of the young people. It might well be that vocations to the Mendicant Orders declined, since like them these Brothers aspired to an active life alongside the more passive routine of the monastery. They appear to have gained considerable influence upon the as yet rather unregulated communities which grew up in recent times. Moreover, it is said that these Sisters had strange customs, which the Inquisition would do well to look into. In actual fact both they and the Brothers are completely at variance with church law, for they are virtually founding a new order, which is forbidden. Even though they take no vows, their communal life under the direction of a rector or a 'mistress', their daily routine, their harking back to the early church, all these things must cause them to be regarded as monastics.

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If this was their opinion of the Sisters and the Brethren, it is not surprising that various Mendicants and notably the Dominicans, the men of the Inquisition, grew so uneasy and so irritated in the last decade of the 14th century that they decided to take action against these innovators who were, in actual fact, forbidden. And take action they did. They attacked the Brethren and Sisters on two points: firstly, that they were transgressing the law of the Church, and secondly, that as Bogards and Beguines they had already been condemned long ago. The Sisters, moreover, were given to peculiar practices which were dangerously reminiscent of the forbidden Beguines. These attacks began in the 1390's and the somewhat naive supposition mentioned by Rudolf Dier that this enmity would cease if they founded more monasteries, proved false.

The first clear sign that something was going on is found in the document dated March 19th 1395, in which the priors of the monasteries of Windesheim, Marienborn near Arnhem and Nieuwlicht near Hoorn, together with the sub-prior and a canon from Windesheim, testified before a notary and three witnesses that they had been long acquainted with the Brothers of the Florens' House in Deventer, and that after their entry into the monastery they had paid frequent visits to the Brothers of Deventer and that the Brothers had several times come to them. They were completely familiar with the Brethren's life and thought and were prepared to testify under oath against the envious and the slanderers: ‘We have not found amongst them any heresy, sect, schism or secret assemblies; nor have we observed them to preach outside the Church or to dispute the articles of faith or concerning the Holy Trinity of divine mercy. We have not seen either that they adopted any rule or a new order or any habit of a new order, or that they chose prelates who call themselves guardian or some other name while they make their profession before them and in their presence vow obedience, poverty and chastity. We have never seen amongst them any such unlawful and forbidden practices. We firmly believe of them that they live together in community, from the work of their hands and from the incomes possessed by some of them and which they voluntarily pay into the communal fund. We also believe that they humbly and modestly practise poverty, chastity and other virtues. They obey the Roman Church and her prelates. They visit the church devoutly and are not ensnared in error, but serve each

other in complete love, in the desire to serve God equally and together in the spirit of humility, according to the spirit of the Constitution of Gregory XI which begins *Ex injuncto*."¹

This declaration before a notary concerns only the Brothers. There is no mention of the Sisters. It deals with two main questions: there are slanderers who have uttered accusations against the Brothers in the domain of doctrine which bear some resemblance to what we shall meet presently regarding the Sisters, and secondly, that there is no question of a new order being founded contrary to the law of the Church. These are replies to two important accusations, and the canons are doing their best to exonerate the Brothers.² The above-mentioned persons finally declared that the Brethren were entirely innocent of error, as the pope had heard. Since the Council of Vienne (1311) had condemned various doctrines of the supporters of the ‘Free Spirits’, these had been repeatedly attributed to the Beguines and Bogards. The Dutch members especially had reacted to this. At their request the bishops and some sisters in Rome had declared that the Dutch Beguines and Bogards held none of the errors ascribed to them, with the result that they were not only allowed to continue in the Netherlands but were even very widespread. With his Bull of December 2nd. 1377, Gregory XI had taken these people under his protection, since they were not heretical but persecuted only on account of their dress.³ But even this protection did not ensure their safety. Apart from the fact that the inquisitors considered certain practices among the Sisters suspect, several persons were of the opinion that the very institution of the Brethren and Sisters of the Common Life contravened ecclesiastical law. For did they not live as monastics under the direction of a sub-prior? If this indeed constituted monastic life, then Geert Groote had founded a new order without the pope's permission, and this was forbidden. Or else the life lived by the Brethren and Sisters was not monastic, in which case they ought not to act as monastics. Such a community life was misleading and for this reason

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¹ And yet this piece, which purports to be a notarial document, arouses some suspicion. It contains too many persons who bear similar names whom we know to be at least friends of the fraters: William Hendrikx, notary, whom we have already met, Henry Mande, whom we have yet to meet; only Stephen Mulert and John Scutken were not fraters. Was this document composed by a group of fraters?


³ P. Fredericq, I, 338.

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they must be suppressed. They are in fact Bogards or Beguines and as such have
long since been condemned!

There must thus have existed some similarity between the Bogards and the Brothers
and between the Beguines and the Sisters for the condemnation of 1311 to be so
readily applied to them. The points of resemblance were that they all practised piety,
lived retired from the world in houses especially intended for them, were under the
direction of a sub-prior and for certain purposes held a communal coffer - all this,
however, without adopting one of the monastic rules. And yet the Brethren (and
Sisters) differed from the Bogards and Beguines in that they had carried their
communal life a step further. They had renounced all personal property and incomes
for the benefit of the community, so that they lived from the communal purse and
from a communal table.

That they were equated with the Bogards and Beguines appears already from the
document of 7th April 1374, quoted above (p. 277, n. 2), in which they themselves
adopted a passage from the papal deed concerning the Beguines, thereby virtually
admitting or at least fearing that they might be confused with the Beguines. This
emerges clearly in the long version of the statutes of the Master Gerard's house,
fabricated with this attack in mind. The Sisters evidently ran more danger than the
Brothers, for the simple reason that the Beguines were more widespread than the
Bogards. Moreover an accusation has been levelled against them in the domain of
church life. Hence this document adds to an article in the statutes of 1379 a clause
concerning the Beguines: No one has the right to transform their institution into a
new monastic order.’ To the decree (no 5) that the Sisters may not wear monastic
dress, is added: ‘the clothing which all the Beguines wear.’ Furthermore (No. 13):
No one may continue to live in this house who holds or teaches any point for which
the Beguines were condemned at the Council of Vienne’ or any other point contrary
to the Holy Church. Then follow certain particular questions, derived from the sect
of the ‘Free Spirits’ and which were thought to be held by some Beguines of the
Rhineland region. This probably explains why they were incorporated here. No one
may live in the Master Gerard's house who disputes the Holy Trinity, the simple
nature of God, the Holy Sacraments, the Holy Church or in general doubts lofty
matters

1 Archief... aartsb. Utrecht, 71 (1952) 3. See p. 265.
2 Ibid., 4, ‘de kleding die de baghijnen allen dragen.’
3 Ibid., 9, Denzinger-Schönmetzer, 22, Freiburg, 1953, p. 282, nos. 891-899.

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beyond his comprehension, who speaks or makes propaganda against the words of Christ and the Holy Father and the Holy Scriptures, or who lives contrary to the law of Christ or who holds the eight articles against the Beguines as found in Clementines, or who holds the 28 articles of Eckhart. They are also excluded who possess books containing these articles, which are often learned in Germany. Furthermore anyone is excluded who imagined or thought he saw God's essence in unity or Trinity without having practised particular virtues, who holds the opinion that all inner inspirations always come from God and the Holy Ghost and never from the evil spirit, who holds the quietistic conviction that the way of light leads to God without penitence, without the practice of virtue.

The rejection of the status of Beguines and of the errors attributed to them, and all which might be in the slightest way connected with them, proves that the leaders of the Sisters and the civic administration needed some document to prove that Geert Groote had already foreseen the possibility of such accusation, had entirely rejected the errors and had preserved his Sisters from them by strict regulations. When did this occur? All kinds of data exist, ranging between the years 1393 and 1398. We possess a petition to Pope Boniface IX, dated 7th January 1394, in which it is besought that the inquisitors should cease to trouble the Bogards and the Beguines, since they are obedient and virtuous persons. The Pope's reply, dated as was customary on the same day as the petition, (7th January 1394) must have been promulgated weeks, if not months later, since it had to be composed after the granting of the petition and to pass through the usual channels. The Pope ordered the archbishops of Cologne, Trèves and Mainz to institute an investigation into the condition of the Bogards and Beguines and to keep the inquisitors in check. There is also a decree by the same pope, dated two years later on 31st January 1396, in which he urges an investigation by the inquisitors into the Beghardi, Lollardi and 'Zwestriones.' This was probably preceded by a petition on the part of the inquisitors, dated 31st January 1396. During this period the function of inquisitor in West Germany and the Netherlands was held by Jacob of Soest and Eylard Schoneveld. The latter was a

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1 These are the same as those referred to above.
2 Denzinger, nos. 951-978 suggested by Joh. XXII, 27 March 1329.
3 Archief ... aartsb. Utrecht 71 (1952) 3-12.
4 P. Fredericq I no. 238, p. 253.
5 Ibid., I, p. 254, no. 239.
6 Ibid., I, p. 256, no. 241.
Dominican and the former may have been. From their hand or from their papers we possess two undated documents, the first of which is usually dated in 1393 or '94 and the second with more certainty after 1398. Both deal with the religious practices of the house (of Beguines, of Sisters of the Common Life) in Rhenen. It is probable that one or both of the inquisitors in question undertook an investigation there and sent a report to Rome, together with a petition which resulted in the document of 31st March 1396 (only sent later and known here much later still). It is striking, however, that the Rhenen case led to questions being asked about the Bogards and Beguines in general and finally to a generalization of the findings to cover the houses of the Brothers and especially the Sisters of the Common Life, who are even called Secta Gherardinorum in the introduction to the piece dated after 1398. It is no wonder that around this period the friends of the Brothers, notably the leaders of Windesheim, Marienborn and Nieuwlicht, should have sprung to action (19th March 1395) and that shortly afterwards the Brothers should have tried to elicit from high academic authorities a statement to the effect that their institution was not contrary to church law, as was continually asserted by their opponents. This led to the two replies by Everard Foec, deacon of St. Salvator in Utrecht, which have been preserved undated, by an anonymous writer, also undated and by Arnold, Abbot of Dikninge, dated on December 24th, 1397, and also by certain doctores decretorum of Cologne and others which are dated in the introduction in the year 1398.

The question of whether or not the congregations or houses of the Brethren and Sisters of the Common Life could be said to have a lawful existence, clearly exercised the minds of many in the northern Netherlands in the years 1394-1398, perhaps even somewhat earlier.

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1 Fredericq, II, p. 153, no. 106, preserved in the city Archives Soest (Germany).
2 Ibid., II, p. 181, no. 114.
3 Ibid., II, p. 256, no. 241.
5 Ibid., II, p. 155.
6 Ibid., p. 181.
7 Ibid., II, p. 181, no. 114.
8 Ibid., II, 156, no. 107; Schoengen p. 499.
9 Ibid., II, p. 159, no. 109.
10 Ibid., II, no. 111, p. 169.
11 Ibid., no. 112, p. 172.
12 In 1398 a collection was made of the separate letters and this has been preserved. Ibid., II 176, no. 113.
13 Ibid., p. 177.
and later. Everard Foec speaks of sermons and writings which condemn the state of
the Beguines as pernicious and full of defects.1 It is remarkable too how opponents
and supporters of this new form of community tend to equate them with the Bogards
and Beguines, as did the preachers and writers referred to above. Everard Foec,
deacon of St. Salvator in Utrecht, does not reply that the Brethren and Sisters have
no connection with the Bogards and Beguines, but shows that not all of them were
condemned in the papal pronouncements - only those who preached erroneous
doctrines. The Dutch Beguines were not included in this condemnation.2 In replying
to the questions put by the Brethren of the Common Life, this same deacon Foec
utilizes all the papal documents concerning Bogards and Beguines, including the
already quoted letter of Pope Gregory XI Ex injuncto, of April 7th 13743 written
before the Brethren and Sisters even existed. This same process was adopted by the
anonymous writer of the defence4 and by Arnold, abbot of Dikninge.5 The person
who summarized the contents of the letters by Cologne lawyers and others, simply
classes them as written in defence of the Bogards (pro munimine Beghardorum).6
Anyone wishing to refute these authors merely quoted in defence the findings of the
inquisitor Schoeneveld at a visitation of the sisters in Rhenen - as applying to the
Brethren and Sisters of the Common Life.7 It is thus understandable that the statutes
of the Master Geert's house should expressly state that they were not Beguines. This
had not occurred to any of the defenders. They were content to prove that not all
Bogards and Beguines were forbidden. In any case they viewed the matter from a
different aspect. Their task was to reply to questions put to them by the Brothers who
had probably set down a description of their organization and aims, together with a
number of questions, and submitted these to various lawyers.

Everard Foec and Arnold of Dikninge both mention the same seven questions and
reply to them. The anonymous writer deals with three while the rapporteur of the
Cologne doctores and other gives the answers to five questions preceded by a
condensed description of the Fraternity. It seems to me important, not only for the
matter under discussion, but also for our knowledge of the Brothers, to give an account
here both of the description and the questions.

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1 P. Fredericq, p. 168.
2 Ibid., p. 168.
3 Cf. p. 277.
4 Fredericq, II no. 111, p. 170.
5 Ibid., II no. 112, p. 173.
6 Ibid., no. 113, p. 176.
7 Ibid., no. 114, p. 181-183.
The Cologne rapporteur defines the case thus: In certain regions various persons have withdrawn from the world in order to live together as *clerici* (either clergy or schoolboys) in a house in which they copy books for money. There are others too who cannot write but who are skilled in all kinds of crafts which they carry out for gain in another house, or do other sorts of handwork. These persons work with their hands and live from what they earn by their work and from their property if they have any. They share everything freely in the interests of greater harmony or else deposit their money in a communal fund. They eat together and do not beg. They have among them, however, a reliable person, who looks after the house, whose admonitions they accept and whom they obey as good pupils their master. And they have embarked on this way of life in order to live more comfortably and to obtain the necessities of life more easily, but principally because they hope by living thus to please God more and serve Him better.¹

This description, compiled by lawyers, accurately renders the nature and aims of the Fraternity. It is doubtful, however, if this view of the rector's task corresponds to reality.

This definition of the Fraternity is followed by four questions with the appropriate answers.

Is it permitted to various persons to live together in one house, following no monastic order, in order to serve God more securely, to live more easily and to share voluntarily what they have and what they earn, living communally on the proceeds without begging? All answer in the affirmative, basing their decision on several papal pronouncements. Then follows a refutation of counter arguments.

The second question concerns the position of the superior. His authority over the Brothers and their corresponding duties to him causes the group to bear considerable resemblance to a monastic order. The lawyers accordingly only approve the existence of such a rector if no legal relationship exists between authority and subject, but all follow the superior's admonitions of their own free will, accepting them as the advice of a good friend.²

The third question deals with the revealing of individual temptations, passions and sins to another who is not a priest. All consider that this may be allowed, providing it be firmly borne in mind that

1 P. Fredericq, II, p. 177.
2 Ibid., 178. Here one finds the basis for the free organization of the Brothers, to which Spoelstra has drawn attention.

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this is not a confession, with no power of absolution or to impose penance. A sacramental Confession may only be made to a priest who has jurisdiction.\(^1\) The jurists can find no objection either to the brotherly admonition, the correptio fraterna.\(^2\)

Everard Foec and Arnold of Dikninge are completely in accord that the Brothers should have published books from the scriptures in the vernacular, provided that the translated text does not distort the meaning of the Holy Scriptures, the apostolic doctrine and the sacred canons.\(^3\) It is worthy of note that Everard Foec considers a knowledge of languages extremely useful for the faith; certain schools should thus have teachers in the Hebrew, Arabic and Chaldean languages.\(^4\) Such a requirement was already in advance of Erasmus in the 16th century who considered Greek and Hebrew, together with Latin, to be essential for a good scriptural scholar. The fact that both these lawyers regard the reading of the Bible in the vernacular as permissible clearly shows that the Brothers did not stand alone in this regard.\(^5\) If frater Gerard Zerbolt († 1398) really wrote the treatise De libris teutonicalibus et de precibus vernaculis,\(^6\) he was probably not so original as many have thought.

Neither lawyer has any objection, in the sixth place, to the Brethren following an order of the day, working with their hands, reading aloud during meals or praying Benedictine and Gracias before and after the meal. They are of the opinion that such monastic practices do not render the institutions of the Brethren and Sisters monastic.\(^7\)

In conclusion both jurists, in reply to the seventh and last question, considered that the inquisition had nothing to do with this affair. Their task was to deal with heresy, of which there was no question here, or even suspicion. It was at most a problem of church discipline to determine whether the Brethren and Sisters had transgressed any ecclesiastical law and notably that which forbade the founding of new monastic orders.\(^8\)

An anonymous jurist tackles the question differently. He refutes

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1. P. Fredericq, p. 179.
2. Ibid., p. 179.
3. Ibid., 163, 174.
4. Ibid., 164.
5. See hereafter p. 326.
7. Ibid., p. 164, 175.
8. Ibid., 165, 175-176. In a separate article Ed. Foec shows that, if the Brethren and Sisters are to be considered as Bogards and Beguines, then they belong to those groups which are approved by the pope.
the arguments of those who oppose the institution and stresses that there is no question of heresy. The matter is thus outside the province of the inquisition.¹

All these juridical opinions make it clear that the Brothers had to withstand a series of violent attacks. The most dangerous was evidently that of the Inquisition, whose main objection to the Brethren and Sisters was that they had founded a new monastic order and thus transgressed the laws of the Church. The inquisitors were in possession of a document which they considered as proof. This was a complaint addressed to the inquisitors, drawn up and confirmed under oath by several reliable persons, against the congregations and in particular against the house of Master Werembold of Utrecht.

Various points are mentioned in this complaint, but the majority purport to show that these congregations were in reality monasteries. The members eat together, pray Benedicte in Dutch, and books are read aloud in the same language. Martha (the superior) begins the thanksgiving and all take it up, as is done among the religious. They have a chapter of faults which concludes with a request by Martha to pray for her, and she gives psalms to be said as penance. The Sisters must ask Martha's permission before they can hear Mass, listen to a sermon, go to Confession or to Communion. She considers that it is more meritorious to do this out of obedience than from private inclination. Martha also tells them what priest or confessor they may attend and chooses only those priests who are well acquainted with their observances. If the Sisters disobey on this point they are openly reprimanded in the chapter and if they do not mend their ways they are expelled from the house. Sometimes Martha asks those who wish to confess why they prefer a particular confessor. On Holy Thursday she conducts the ceremony of the washing of the feet, while one of the Sisters reads aloud the sermon of the Lord in the vernacular. She sometimes requires that those Sisters who wish to confess tell her beforehand all they intend to say in the confessional, even though it concerned murder. It happened in Rhenen that a serious matter confessed by a Sister leaked out. When the priest questioned her about this Martha explained that she did it to prevent the Sisters from developing carnal affection for a particular person and from confessing more from frivolity than necessity. Although they make no official profession they have to promise to remain and to respect the ordi-

¹ P. Fredericq, no. 111, p. 169.

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nances of the house, which may not be revealed to outsiders. When two of the older sisters asked advice on the regulations from a Carthusian prior, he considered the rules to be contrary to the statutes of the Church; and when Werembold requested these Sisters to consult a legal adviser in Utrecht he sent Aleida Cluten, the Martha of the convent in Utrecht (St. Cecilia) to order the sisters to deny the existence of these rules even under oath. Werembold called those who left the house apostatae (like those who fled the convents). This Aleida Cluten persuaded persons in the world, even married women, to place themselves under her spiritual direction and to confess to her as they would to a priest.

This document then gives a statement on how an inquisitor should undertake to interrogate these congregations. It is important that the Sisters should begin by taking an oath, and if they refuse they must be considered as heretics. One of the most significant questions is: whether they had ever heard that the Church prohibited the founding of new monastic orders and that people should abandon those which were not approved.

The intention behind all this is clear. The inquisitor had to have the means of condemning the Sisters and Brethren on the grounds that they had set up a new order.

The inquisitor Eylard Schoneveld probably commenced his investigations in Rhenen or elsewhere on the basis of this complaint. This must have been about the same time, 1396-1398, as the Brethren sought the help of the above-mentioned legal advisers. An anonymous writer did in fact attempt, with data derived from the inquisitor, to refute the arguments of the legal scholars, again by stressing the point that they were in fact dealing with a new monastic order. This anonymous opponent suggests that the pronouncements of the Cologne lawyers have contributed to the spread of the 'sect of the Gerardini'¹ in the Netherlands, and that their letter is being used for this purpose wrongfully and contrary to their intentions. He again lists the monastic practices of the Brothers and especially of the Sisters, notably Martha's authority. This must clearly show that the Brethren and Sisters are acting in defiance of church law which states that new

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¹ P. Fredericq., no. 114, p. 181. This document is based for a large part on the above mentioned accusation, but on certain points it goes even further; hence my opinion that there was an inquisition. It is also possible that this 'advocate' only padded out the document somewhat, adding certain corrections. According to Rudolf Dier (G. Dumbar, Analect a 30-31) the inquisitor Eylard considerably harrassed the sisters in Utrecht (St. Cecilia) under Werembold.
congregations after the manner of monasteries may only be founded with the special permission of the Holy See. Martha's intervention in the Sisters' spiritual life and especially the secret ordinances, are all suspect, and no less so the fact that Martha and her assistants oblige the Sisters to reveal to them the points that they wish to confess. Finally, it is completely absurd that this Martha of Utrecht should act as general superior in other houses, hold visitations and recommend improvements, and that she should hear the confessions of married women. No less remarkable is the fact that a priest lives in the same house as Martha and functions as legislator and director of the congregation. The priest in question will be Werembold, who acts as though he were a superior general of an order. The secrecy surrounding the ordinances throws suspicion upon the entire establishment. They err, therefore, who defend this institution, so contrary to the constitution of the Church. The Sisters possess documents (probably those from their legal advisers) with which they attempt to defend themselves the inquisitors. They refuse, however, to accept an approved rule. The leader (Werembold) has even said that he would rather be in charge of a cattle-shed than accept an approved rule. In the last ten years three hundred girls of good family have entered. They refused to give up their property in order to enter a new monastery with an established rule and clausura to serve God without personal property. They prefer to deprive God of so many hymns of praise and the province of their example of virtue, rather than cooperate in founding such a monastery.

This is plain language. In the height of this controversy Gerard Zerbolt, one of the Deventer Brethren, wrote a treatise entitled: ‘Super modo vivendi devotorum hominum simul commorantium’ in which he makes considerable use of the recommendations of the legal advisers.¹ This treatise, comprising 100 pages of modern print, takes up the same questions dealt with by Everard Foec and Arnold, abbot of Dikninge. Several pages might be considered as replies to the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th questions. Only the seventh, whether or not the inquisitor is entitled to intervene, is omitted. Since the treatise offers more scope than the lawyers in their opinions, the author is


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lavish with his quotations from texts, his drawing of distinctions and his description of situations. It thus follows that the treatise is not a description of the way of life in these devout communities, but a defence of their design and aims. The writer is fully aware that it is forbidden to found a new order without the Pope's permission. In this connection it is interesting to note that Gerard Zerbolts does not confine the use of the term ‘religious’ to the monastics, but employs it too in the general sense of ‘devout,’ so that seculars and laity may also be called religious if they lead pious lives. His task, like that of the lawyers, is to show that the Brethren and Sisters did not found any new order, even though their way of life bears much resemblance to that of any established order. He sets about this in three ways: firstly that the Brothers reject what is essential for a monastery, namely the vows; secondly, this resemblance is not entirely accurate, for example their obedience to a superior, and the authority of this superior, are different from in a monastery; thirdly, what they have is permitted to everyone: community of property, simple dress, exhortation to the good, confession to lay persons under certain circumstances, or solely for the purpose of humility, which is a different thing from confession in the sacrament to a priest with jurisdiction; a simple yet not monastic habit, the following of a house rule, manual work and the reading of the Holy Scriptures and other pious books in the vernacular. For a self-trained scholar like Gerard Zerbolts, the writing of this treatise is an important achievement. This was not the full extent of his capabilities, as we shall see, but in writing this treatise he came actively to the fore in the great struggle for existence. His treatise, which was perhaps more easily disseminated than the personal recommendations, certainly helped to resolve the conflict. It ended in a victory for the Brothers, but Gerard Zerbolts did not live to see it. He died in Windsheim on December 4th, 1398, on the way back from Dikninge, where he had certainly conferred with the abbot on his treatise. When Florens and Gerard Zerbolts stayed in Amersfoort in 1398, the conflict was still at its height. The inquisitor was making life very difficult for the Sisters in Utrecht. Florens and Gerard held repeated consultations with Werembold in Utrecht and also discussed this important matter with Everard Foec. The leaders of other houses (especially Sisterhouses) were also asked for their opinions. Several wished to comply with the inquisitor's demands by adopting the Third Rule of St. Francis, with the vow of chastity. This also meant that the Tertiaries would become part of a community with, for the
present, not Werembold of Utrecht, but William Hendrikk, rector of the Brothers in Amersfoort, at its head. 1 Werembold, notwithstanding, gained considerable influence, witness the manner in which he admitted the Sisters of St. Agatha in Delft. He was a man of enormous energy, who was often on the road and did not spare himself. ‘If I had two bodies, I would wear them both out in the service of God.’ The inquisitor, Eylard of Schoneveld, accused him of dominating the Sisters of Rhenen like an abbot-general, and when he was chaplain in Kruiningen in Zeeland, with Rudolf of Enteren, he considered that the pastor was too generous to the poor. His influence was by this time so considerable, that the priest dared not give anything while the chaplain was in the presbytery and apologised to the poor who came begging: ‘He (the Chaplain) is in the presbytery, come back later.’ 2

The Brethren of Deventer suffered a defeat in that various houses and several leaders of the Devotionalists adopted a monastic rule, but this step may have served to calm the storm. Victory on the principal point was in sight. On April 30th 1401, the bishop of Utrecht, Frederic of Blankenheim 3 promulgated a decree in favour of the Brethren, in which he granted them permission to exist and approved their institution. He did this after considering testimony by theologians and jurists, at the request of the Brothers, by virtue of his own authority and the powers granted to him by Gregory XI, in order to restore peace to the Brethren and Sisters. He gives a brief summary of the characteristics of the Brethren: a communal life in honour of God and to live more easily; community of possessions earned by the work of their hands; no begging; a superior whom all obey as good pupils obey their teacher; they might live according to a fixed order, hearing Mass, visiting the church and working, provided they did not find any new monastic order. In addition they were free to practise the fraterna correptio, brotherly admonition in conversations, to obey the prelates, to inform a person, not a priest, of temptations and inclinations, so long as there was no question of absolution, penance or other sacramentalia. It was permitted to read the Bible and other pious works in Latin or in the vernacular. Although certain objections might be made to this decree, 3 it fulfilled its purpose. Whether authentic or not it existed from the 26th August of 1401, and could be

2 R. Dier, G. Dumbar, Analecta I 29.
3 Ed. in Archief ... aartsb. Utrecht, 2 (1875) 229-235; Schoengen, 512-514.
displayed. The bishop's approval will have contributed in no small measure to the first great expansion from Deventer in 1401, namely the founding of the Brotherhouses of Delft and Münster.¹

Life now continued peacefully for 15 years, until a fresh attack was directed at the Brethren during the Council of Constance, by the Dominican, Mathias Grabow. But times had changed. The Brothers immediately counter-attacked and Grabow lost his case. He was even condemned. Matthew Grabow belonged to the Dominican monastery of Wismar, in the diocese of Merseburg of the Saxon province, and around 1416-17 acted as lector of the Dominican monastery in Groningen. He wrote a book against the fraters and Beguines, as he too called the Sisters, but in addition proclaimed these which have little relevance in this connection. He was completely entangled in his own speculations. Although he revived the accusation that the fraters (and Sisters) had founded a new monastic order without ecclesiastical approval, giving as proof their assemblies, dress and obedience to a superior, he approached the question from another angle. He asserted that no one outside the monastery could maintain the three so-called Evangelical counsels, poverty, chastity and obedience, in a lawful and meritorious manner. He attempted to prove this by taking the example of the virtue of poverty, with which the other two are closely linked. In his opinion anyone who remained in the world after renouncing all his possessions was committing sin, since this would amount to suicide, seeing that no one can live in this world entirely without goods.² Certain these from his work are in direct opposition to the Modern Devotion. For example, No. XVII, which states that women who live a communal life in a separate house, commonly called Beguines, are daughters of perdition and their state of life is forbidden and condemned³ even though they hold or proclaim no error or are not suspected of errors or heresy. Those who renounce their posses-

¹ This document only survives in a transsumptus, made on August 26th 1401, whereby it is established that the official of the provost in Deventer, Lubbert of Rander, recognizes the authenticity of the document. Why was this done so soon after it was drawn up? Why could the official himself not authenticate the copy? Why did the bishop's seal disappear so quickly from the document? Is it possible that Frederick of Blankenheim had authority from pope Gregory XI?


³ P. Fredericq, II p. 219.
sessions, without entering an approved order, are committing sin. The reason is that, just as it is proper for religious to renounce their possessions, it is necessary for seculars to retain theirs. 1 Priests and clerics are not permitted to live a communal life outside an approved order, on pain of mortal sin. 2 All who by word or deed give support to those living a communal life outside an approved order, commit sin. 3 All who live a communal life outside an approved order, are excommunicated, 4 as are all who help them by giving alms, etc. 5 The Lord says that they who live a communal life outside an approved order, must be shunned as false prophets. 6 Following an investigation in Utrecht, Grabow appealed to the pope and so arrived in Constance. The affair was placed in the hands of the commission of theologians who were charged with reporting on suspect doctrines. Cardinal Pierre d'Ailly immediately came out against Grabow 7 and his pupil, Jean Gerson, drew up a report on April 3rd, 1418, which formed the basis of the Dominican's condemnation. He was accordingly imprisoned and threatened with death at the stake if he did not recant. 8 Grabow chose recantation, and withdrew his remarks shortly after May 31st, 1419. He was released from prison and allowed to return to his monastery on condition that he stayed away from the church province of Cologne and especially the diocese of Utrecht. The penalty for disregarding this condition was life imprisonment. 9

This last violent attack ended in a fiasco, with the Brothers springing to their own defence, aided by men like Henry Loder, prior of Frenswegen. The fact that it was necessary to stress so vehemently that the Brotherhood was not a new monastic order, provided the basis for the later opinion that the Brethren were hostile to the monasteries. It is indeed true that the Brotherhouses and Sisterhouses were not monasteries nor the inmates monastics, since they took no monastic vows, wore no monastic dress, followed no particular monastic rule and did not call themselves after any special saint. It was for these reasons that the Brethren and Sisters were so easily confused with Bogards and Beguines, for these also lived together, took no vows

1 P. Fredericq, 219.
2 Ibid., 220.
3 Ibid., 220.
4 Ibid., 220.
5 Ibid., 220.
6 Ibid., 220.
7 Ibid., 220.
8 Ibid., no. 134, p. 220.
9 Ibid., no. 135, p. 222.
10 Ibid., no. 136, p. 225.

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and in this period at least, followed no monastic rule. But they did not practise communal life in the strict sense, nor did they give up their personal possessions and incomes for the benefit of the community. The opponents of the Brotherhood attacked the innovations in their institution by accusing them of founding a new monastic order without the pope's permission and of adopting the monastic way of life, notably the community of table, work and property. They also followed a definite order of the day, under the direction of a superior whom both Brothers and Sisters were bound to obey. To the first objection the Brethren replied: we are not monastics; and to the second: our superior has no power of jurisdiction. We obey him out of love, as a good scholar obeys his teacher. Divergence of institution does not necessarily constitute hostility. In actual fact the first period at least saw the foundation of the monastery at Windesheim and they helped to found several others, including Marienborn, Frenswegen and Diepenveen. In their hostels, too, they fostered novices for the monasteries and even took over part of the noviciate during the first period. In their life, moreover, they followed all the monastic practices: fixed hours of prayer, work, church ceremonies, silence, reading aloud at table, examination of conscience, chapter of faults, brotherly admonition, subjection to a rector, visitations.

So much for the Brethren's attitude to the monasteries. The monastics' attitude to the Brethren, however, is not so clearly defined. It is impossible to give a clear 'Yes' or 'No' to the question whether the monastics hated them or regarded their institution with hostility. There is no sign in this early period that the old Orders devoted much thought to the new - which, for the rest, only occurred in a few cities - or that they opposed them. In all probability they were overjoyed with the well-disposed postulants they received from the Brethren. Hostility there certainly was among the Dominicans. The activities of the Dominican inquisitor Eylard Schoneveld and the Groningen teacher M. Grabow reveal this only too clearly. And it cannot either be assumed that these were isolated instances. These Dominicans must have had the support of public opinion in their own monasteries. We do not possess sufficient data to judge the attitude of the Franciscans, Carmelites and Augustinians.¹ John Brugman's remarks concerning his dislike of the Brothers would seem to indicate

¹ P. Fredericq, p. 225.
a hostile attitude of the Franciscans.¹ Most likely they feared them more than they hated them.

The minimizing of the role of the superior, thought necessary by the Brothers during the conflict, has led modern authors like Spoelhof to consider the Brethren as democrats and nonconformists. To my mind, however, one must not forget, when judging the Brothers, that they were fighting for their lives and thus on occasion exaggerated their statements. When one reads in Rudolf Dier of the degree of absolutism displayed by the rector toward some of the Brothers in order to humiliate them, there seems little evidence of democracy. The rector was admittedly elected by the Brothers, but this was also done in various monasteries, notably by the Dominicans and Windesheimers. The friendship with the Windesheimers is a clear guide to the Brethren's attitude towards the monasteries during this period.

Chapter Seven
The Monastery and the Chapter of Windesheim

Beginning of the Observance Movement. From 1387 to 1424

Preoccupied as he was with the reformation of the monasteries, it was to be expected that Geert Groote would found a model monastery which would serve, at the same time, as help and protection for the Brothers. His unexpected and early death prevented him from carrying out his wish or, one might rather say, from bringing his projected plan to completion. The Brothers in fact set to work so soon after Groote's death, that they were evidently fulfilling the wish of their dead father. The Brother Rudolf Dier quite simply says: ‘Three years after the death of Master Groote, Master Florens and his companions began to build the monastery in Windesheim (1387) and some of the disciples of Master Florens moved to Windesheim with his permission. Certain others remained in Deventer with Florens’.¹ In his opinion thus the monastery of Windesheim is quite simply a foundation of the Brethren. This is essentially true, but the first inmates were not restricted to Brethren of the Common Life.² There was, for the rest, nothing spectacular in the way the monastery came into being. The Brethren sought for a suitable spot and found this in the first place in Hattem, in the land of Gelre. Bishop Florens of Wefelingkoven, however, directed them to his own territory at the other side of the IJssel. There, in 1386, they received a plot of land from Bartholdus ten Hove, who had already entered the monastery of Eemsteyn under Geert Groote, and now transferred to Windesheim. This was in accordance with mediaeval ideas regarding the law governing particular monasteries. Following that law the founder entered the monastery he had founded and assumed direction. Barthold,³ however, was an exception. He did not come from the Florens' house in Deventer. This was in contrast to four of the first

¹ G. Dumbar, Analecta I 13.
³ Busch, 103-109.
five Windsheimers, Henry Clingebijl, Werner Keinkamp, John of Kempen, Henry Wilde and Henry of Wilsum. All these - except Henry of Wilsum - came from Deventer, but they did not all follow the same route. We are already acquainted with Henry Clingebijl of Höxter, as the secular priest to whom Groote wrote a letter. He was a brother of John of Clingebijl from Höxter, Brother of the Common Life. According to J. Busch he became a Brother in Deventer before entering Windsheim.\footnote{Busch, 84.} He was made the first prior of the new monastery (1387-1388). The same is true of Werner Keinkamp whom we know as a friend of Groote and a teacher in Kampen. J. Busch even mentions him as rector of the school. He had also previously joined the Brethren in Deventer (\emph{adhesit}). He became the second prior of Windsheim, until he relinquished this office in 1391, from excess of scruples. It is also clearly stated that John of Kempen was first a Brother.\footnote{Ibid., 89.} Henry Wilde was indeed a member of the Fraternity, but he was still young when he left for Windsheim. Henry of Wilsem on the other hand was a magistrate in Kampen when he decided to become a canon in Windsheim. He was also a merchant and captain of the bailiwick of Salland. He was very well-to-do and made over all his possessions to Windsheim.\footnote{Ibid., 34.} Like Barthold ten Hove he entered a monastery which was for the greater part founded from his money, and like his colleague he was not given any administrative position. It might be possible to view the time spent by several of these men in the Florens' house in Deventer as a sort of novitiate. In any case, events proceeded rapidly in Windsheim. On July 30th 1386 Bishop Florens of Wefelinkhoven took the abbey under his protection in advance, and transformed any subsequent gifts into church property.\footnote{Ibid., 101.} The \emph{fraters} began to build the church and the provisional living quarters in March 1387, and everything was ready for consecration on October 17th of the same year. On the day of consecration the six men already mentioned made their profession after a very short period of instruction and practice in the monastic life at Eemsteijn. This remarkable haste can only be explained by assuming that the new canons had spent their trial period in Deventer. The bishop raised no objection. He confirmed the foundation by charter on 13th December 1387, conferring upon it the promised ecclesiastical liberty, whereby the monastery's property became church property with the privileges.

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{1} Busch, 84.
\item \textbf{2} \textit{Ibid.}, 89.
\item \textbf{3} \textit{Ibid.}, 34.
\item \textbf{4} \textit{Ibid.}, 101.
\item \textbf{5} Acquoy III, 262-264.
\end{itemize}}

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which ensued.\footnote{Edited by Th.P. van Zijl, \textit{Archief voor de geschiedenis v.d. kath. kerk in Nederland}, 8 (196) 337.} In addition he regulated various matters: free choice of the prior, to be confirmed by the bishop; his authority; appointment of the procurator who was obliged to render an annual account; the right of burial and the right to administer the sacraments.\footnote{Busch 290-291.}

These last were rights and privileges denied to the Brothers. For the present their goods were not church goods; their superior had no authority; they had no burial rights. Their deceased brethren were buried in the church of St. Lebuin. They subsequently received permission from the parish priest to exercise pastoral cure among the schoolboys. For the rest the monastery resembled the Brotherhouse in many respects. Apart from the habit and the singing of the choir service, the canons lived much as the Brothers did. By meditation and the repeated renewal of their intent, they tried to link inward and outward devotion. They worked with their hands, copied books for the choir and the library; they were solitaries, however, and thus undertook no pastoral duties such as preaching or administering the sacraments among the parishioners, or among the schoolboys, or indeed at this time among the Sisters. They certainly retained, however, the zeal, the punctiliousness, the humility, the obedience, the communal life and rejected all personal possessions. In this they were acting only as they had been taught. There is no sign that in this respect they immediately initiated a ‘reformation’ or, which amounts to the same thing, that they gave rise to the observance-movement. Originally the situation was just as unpromising as with the Brothers: a fairly respectable church, the beginnings of a cloister, but wretched living quarters. There was not much concourse either in the beginning. In 1398 two persons made their profession, John Vos of Heusden and Henry Balveren, both sent by the Brothers of Deventer. The second rector, Werner Keinkamp, was an exceedingly scrupulous man and displayed little initiative. He resigned his position as rector and was succeeded by John Vos on November 30th 1391. This change seemed to infuse new life into the monastery. Novices appeared, and in the first years two were professed per year. Building was continually going on, so that the monastery took on an imposing appearance. Numerous benefactors gave goods or money. A monastery was evidently more highly esteemed than a Brotherhouse. None the less it was the Brethren who originally provided the motive force. Not only

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did the Deventer Brethren, and later also those of Zwolle, continue to send novices, they also persevered with the building of monasteries. Scarcely had the monastery at Windesheim begun to flourish, than the fraters took preparatory measures for founding a new monastery, at Marienborn in Arnhem in 1392. They had provided the labourers for Windesheim, and in Marienborn they took care of the finances. They were in a position to do this since they had received a considerable sum from the newly entered John Kessel. The first canons came from Windesheim and from the Florens' house in Deventer. In the same year (1392) the fraters from Deventer collaborated with the local Devotionalists, the priests Gerard of Horn and Paul of Medemblik, friends of Geert Groote, in founding the monastery of Nieuwlicht, near Hoorn. Both monasteries immediately proceeded to flourish.

After remaining at a standstill for so many years, the founding of three monasteries for Regular Canons in so short a space of time signified a renewed enthusiasm for the monastic life, evidently under influence of the Modern Devotionalists. Of much greater import, however, than the setting up of the above-mentioned monasteries, was the joining together of these three new foundations with Eemsteijn in 1394 or 1395 to form a close-knit monastic union. To use the current terminology, they formed a congregation or chapter. All four monasteries would follow similar customs and usages and continue to help each other to maintain their aims and austerity. To this end they instituted a central authority which would make regulations, supervise all four monasteries, determine the actual situation by an annual visitation of each monastery separately and take appropriate measures. Such were the modest beginnings of the later great and famous congregation of Windesheim, originally called simply the chapter of Windesheim. Up to the death of the third rector of this monastery, John Vos of Heusden (ob. 1424), four aspects of the history of this monastery demand our attention: the remarkably rapid growth of the monastic union, with the associated activity and exertions by the members of the main monastery (choirbooks, Bibles), the setting up of the administrative body for the entire congregation, and the theory and practice of the devotion.

The expansion was brought about in two ways, either by founding new monasteries or by incorporating existing monasteries into the

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1 Acquoy III 22.

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union. The initiative to found new monasteries must usually have been taken by prosperous and pious persons who possessed land suitable for this purpose. The Windesheim canons and members of associated monasteries had then to foster the religious life in the new and usually extremely small foundation by providing leaders, young canons, novices and laymen. They had to provide the furnishings and fit up the chapel or church, notably by supplying suitable choir-books which they wrote themselves. They were enabled to do this by the flourishing material position of the head monastery and the fortunate influx of new members there.

Although the leadership of the first two priors, Henry Clingebijl of Höxter (1387-1388) and Werner Keinkamp of Lochem (1388-1391), known to us from the life of Geert Groote, may not have been particularly fruitful, they prepared the growth which came to full flower under the leadership of John Vos of Heusden (1391-1424). This man, who had joined the Brothers in the Florens' house from the school in Deventer, proved extremely well fitted for this post, which was so important for the history of Windesheim. During his priorate he invested 32 persons as canons of the monastery, an average of one per year. This helped to increase the population of the monastery, as did a group of laymen who, like the future priests, ‘despised the world’ and wished to live and work in the monastery. These included four who received the habit of the donati.

The first four monasteries were followed by the Regular monastery of St. John the Evangelist in Amsterdam (1394-1395). Co-founders included Gijsbert Dou, John Goldsmid and Paul of Borselen. The second may have been the brother of Hugo Goldsmid, the friend of Geert Groote. The Windesheimer John Ottonis of Soest became the first prior here and held this office for twelve years.

The transition from a Brotherhouse to a monastery is seen in the founding of the monastery of Frenswegen, near Northorn, with the approval of the church authorities. The founders were two priests, Everhard of Esa, parish priest of Almelo, whom we know already as a physician in physica baccalaureus, and Henry, priest in Scuttorp around 1394. The first inmates were four priest-brothers from the presbytery of Almelo. In 1400 it was incorporated into the Windesheim congregation and placed under prior Henry Loeder (or Loder), an energetic

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2 Busch 294.
3 Ibid., 319-321

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person, who overcame the monastery's initial poverty and collaborated in the 
expansion of the congregation in Germany.¹ This foundation was followed three 
years later (1398) by the monastery on the St. Agnietenberg near Zwolle, which 
developed from a small community of individuals, now placed under the direction 
of Windesheim. Their first prior was from the same monastery, John Hemerken of 
Kempen, the elder brother of Thomas Hemerken of Kempen (a Kempis) who was 
later to follow him. John Hemerken remained prior for nine years and during the first 
years had to contend with lack of income and vocations. His successor, William 
Vornken, again a canon from the mother-monastery, succeeded in overcoming the 
first difficulties in a priorate lasting seventeen years. He must have seen the young 
Thomas of Kempen who had entered under his predecessor, grow to maturity and 
must also have allowed him time to write. What was later called the first book of the 
_Imitation_, was completed around the end of this priorate.² The monastery of 
Engelendaal in Leiderdorp, founded in 1400 by Peter van der Poel, a Regular Canon, 
was incorporated in the congregation in 1403 and placed under the direction of the 
Windesheimer William Vornken. It was his task to introduce the newly entered 
Regular Canons to the discipline of Windesheim. This venture, however, failed 
completely. The prior scarcely lasted a year. His successor, John Broekhuizen of 
Soest was able, by great austerity, to mould the canons to the pattern of Windesheim, 
but after four years the general chapter decided to recall him.³ The monastery must 
have functioned fairly normally after this, but we hear of fresh difficulties, late in 
the sixteenth century (1569). A new foundation, the monastery of St. Elizabeth near 
Brielle, started by Hugo of Heenvliet in 1400, seems to have been intended first as 
a small chapter attached to a church. A desire was then felt, however, to transform 
this small institution into a monastery by giving it three prebends and associating it 
with Windesheim. The remaining three canons would then do pastoral work in the 
parish. As usual the chapter-general first made an investigation on the spot, to 
determine among other things the material position. We hear now that one of the 
chapter's requirements for the adoption of a monastery into the union was that there 
must be a sum of 200 guilders available for the new foundation.⁴ Otherwise it was 
not considered viable. Somewhat later Busch expressed this in other terms which 
seem to me to amount

¹ Busch, 345.  
² Ibid., 348.  
³ Ibid., 349, 114; Acquoy III 38-39.  
⁴ Busch 350.
to the same thing. The chapter insisted that there must be a yearly income of 100 old French écus in the chapter church, and also 150 old écus to build a house. The first prior was John of Bochold, who remained for two years. Hugo Goldsmit, Groote's disciple, was also evidently more attracted to the monastery than to the Fraternity. Around 1400 he commenced a monastery of the Visitation near Haarlem and requested that it should be admitted to the Windesheim congregation. The congregation sent the scrupulous Werner Keinkamp, at that time prior of the monastery of Nieuwlicht in Hoorn, to make an inspection in Haarlem. He considered that the time was not yet ripe and suggested a delay of seven years, until the financial situation should be regulated. The monastery was admitted in 1406. Two members of the chapter were sent to Haarlem to introduce the canons already there to the Windesheim customs and to admit new members. John of Kempen became the first prior in 1407.

At about the same time a similar event had taken place near Sneek. Rienick Bockema, a Johannite of Sneek, desired a monastery to be founded on his own property. He appeared personally at the chapter general in Windesheim and offered them the ground. The usual inspection followed and was repeated after an improvement in the financial situation. Around 1407 St. Salvator in Thabor was associated with the chapter of Windesheim. Apart from three successive priors, it also received fraters from Windesheim. The founder himself was admitted to the monastery of Windesheim as a ‘redditus’ or ‘donatus’ and as such was also sent to Thabor. The next foundation of Pieterswiel near Zaltbommel and later in the town itself had a similar origin. A noblewoman, Lady van Brakel, offered the chapter a building with ground. It was accepted after inspection (1407), but at first had few inmates. Two or three fraters would be placed there without a prior. A prior would be appointed when the possessions had increased and he was in a position to accept novices. It was not long, however, before Windesheim sent men, and Northorn a few brothers. The monastery continued to struggle on until a canon from Utrecht and one from Deventer placed the foundation on a sounder financial basis.

This foundation completed the first dozen, twenty years after the foundation of Windesheim. The monastic union expanded twice as rapidly as the Fraternity and the end was not yet in sight. Up to this
these were virtually all new foundations, except for the nucleus existing here and there. Now followed a group of Brabantines who already possessed links with each other and had a history of half a century behind them. They included the foundation of Groenendaal which had become celebrated through John Ruusbroec and the cook John van Leeuwen. According to Busch they put the observance first and foremost, and it was precisely because they esteemed the ‘reformation’ of the Windesheim monastery so highly that they asked to be admitted to the union. This came about in 1413, after the Brabantines had thoroughly investigated their customs and methods. They immediately changed the title of provost to that of rector and, which is rather more important, subjected themselves in all things to the general chapter. The foundations in question were Groenendaal, Rooklooster, Zevenborn, Korsendonk, Bethlehem near Louvain, O.L. Vrouw ten Troon near Grobbendonk and the convent of Barberendaal at Tienen.¹

It may appear strange that Henricus Wilhelmi, formerly a Brother in Deventer and founder of the Brotherhouse in Amersfoort, the soul and originator of the Utrecht chapter of Tertiaries - the union of Tertiaries and monasteries of the Third Order - should have wished in 1417 for his monastery at Amersfoort to be incorporated in the Windesheim chapter. The Windesheimers approved after some hesitation. This was the monastery of Marienhof or Birket near, and later in, Amersfoort.² Even stranger is the fact that his friend Werembold de Boscoop, with him promoter of the Third Order among the Sisters of the Common Life, and on very good terms with Florens Radewijns, imposed the habit and customs of Windesheim on the monastery of Vredendaal (Vallis Pacis) near Utrecht, which was first populated by fraters of the Third Order, and joined up with the chapter.³ The process of growth continued and the new monasteries were increasingly distant from the central point. The Lord of Creyenhorn founded a monastery in Elzingen near Oudenaarde in Flanders. The inspection took place in 1417 and it was made clear to the canons that the monastery could only be admitted if an annual sum of two hundred guilders was available for the upkeep of the brothers, likewise two hundred

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2 J. Busch 354; Acquoy 75.
3 Busch 354; Acquoy 76.

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guilders for the building. The chapter accepted this monastery two years later, after the Eggert family of Amsterdam had contributed a great deal of money, including a sum to Windesheim itself. Then followed the new monastery of Dumo or Marienhage near Eindhoven, which was admitted without difficulty in 1320. Next came Esens in East Friesland, an existing but sparsely populated Benedictine convent, which was offered to the chapter by a Friesian 'hoofling' (capitanus). The Windesheimers were quite agreeable and sent Henry Loder from Northorn to look into the matter. He soon succeeded in persuading the Benedictine sisters to leave and sent Arnold Huls from his own monastery as prior, together with a number of fraters and laymen. Existence proved difficult at first but by 1460 the monastery and grangia together comprised about 200 brothers and laymen.

The foundation of the following monastery is an example of the power of the princes over church property, with the permission of the pope. There was, in Böddingen, a chapel of pilgrimage containing a much venerated statue of Our Lady. Many offerings were thus received, a portion of which was used for the maintenance of the four priests who sang the canonical hours there and said Mass in turn. Duke Adolf van Berg, seeing that the offerings grew and that the four canons did not agree either with each other or with the parish priests, conceived the idea of founding a monastery with the income from the chapel and maintaining the monastics, in this case, the Canons Regular of Windesheim. An embassy to Rome safeguarded the Duke from that quarter, and the Windesheim chapter was quite prepared to accept the suggestion. Windesheim contributed two fraters, Theodore Lyma van Goch and John Busch, and Northorn also sent two, Arnold Huls and William Keppel. Arnold Huls became the first prior. There was no scrimping and Busch lists all that Windesheim contributed to the new monastery: two missals, an antiphonal, a gradual, a psalterium and other good books. They also provided a double set of clothing for two fraters (all listed), together with four double eiderdowns which John Busch left behind, with the permission of the Windesheim fathers, when he returned to his own monastery four

1 The canons had apparently revalued these rates.
2 Busch 358; Acquoy 78.
3 Busch 358; Acquoy 80.
4 Busch 358-259; Acquoy 82.

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years later. Busch notes that, altogether, this makes 24 monasteries at the death of John Vos of Heusden († 1424). ¹

To these must now be added the five convents, which Busch lists elsewhere, and primarily the convent of the old nuns of Amsterdam, founded in 1384. Like the Regular monasteries the transition of this convent was principally the work of Gijsbert Dou, Gerard Groote's confessor. This convent, ‘The old nuns of Amsterdam’, was the first nunnery to join the Windesheim chapter. This, not unnaturally, gave rise to certain problems.²

The convent at Tienen, already mentioned³, was followed by the famous convent of Diepenveen, founded by John Brinckerinck in 1400 with the financial and moral support of the Sisters of Deventer, and admitted to the Windesheim chapter in 1408.⁴ Around 1460 the community of this convent comprised 90 sisters, 27 conversae and 15 other girls who had not yet received the habit - all these were enclosed. There were in addition 10 non-enclosed sisters and twenty lay sisters, together with a rector and two priests.⁵ This approached the large number living in the house of the Sisters of the Common Life in 's-Hertogenbosch.

An old foundation, already in existence at the time of Geert Groote, was the company of women at Bronopia, near Kampen. Around 1412 these women adopted the rule of St. Augustine and were incorporated in the chapter of Windesheim. They began with twelve Sisters but by Busch's time they had increased ten-fold, to a hundred and twenty.⁶ There were, finally two more convents: the convent of Jerusalem near Utrecht, founded by Master Bruno with Agatha Ernesti who is here called The Mother of all Religious, notably of the Canons Regular but also of the Tertiaries. She attracted many girls to the convent. This Jerusalem convent was incorporated in 1424, together with the new convent of Our Lady at Tongeren.⁷ At the death of John Vos of

¹ Busch 360; Acquoy 85.
² Busch 361; Acquoy 192. J.H. van Eeghen, Vrouwenkloosters en Begijnhof in Amsterdam van de 14e tot het einde der 16e eeuw, Amsterdam 1941, 273.
³ Busch 361; Acquoy 195.
⁴ Busch 361; Acquoy 197. W.J. Kühler, Johannes Brinckerinck en zijn klooster te Diepenveen, Leiden 1914.
⁵ Busch 362.
⁶ Busch 362-363; Acquoy 204.
⁷ Busch 363-364; Acquoy II 204, 209, III 202-203 is of the opinion that of the convent of Domus S. Mariae at Redichem or Renkum was incorporated in 1412, since the convent is mentioned in the official list of 1530 between Diepenveen and Bronopia. Acta capituli Windeshemensis 136, but Busch does not mention this house in the convents on 367. The question remains doubtful. Acquoy does not mention Redichem either in part I 13, no. 4.
Heusden, the Windesheim chapter consisted of twenty-four monasteries and five convents.

This was a much more rapid growth than that of the Brethren, although not than that of the Sisters of the Common Life. But since several of the Sisterhouses developed into convents from as early as 1398, it must be concluded that the Modern Devotion evolved strongly in the monastic spirit. It is interesting to note that those of Groote's friends and disciples who lived in the provinces of Holland and Utrecht all became supporters of monastic organisations. Not one of them founded a Brotherhouse. For these never developed in Amsterdam, Haarlem, Alkmaar, Leiden, existed for only a brief period in Hoorn and came very late to Utrecht, while the house in Amersfoort declined precisely because its members had become monastics. The expansion of the monasteries also covered a wider terrain than that of the Brothers in 1424, stretching further to the south, east and north. Despite the difficulties of the early years, several of the monasteries also seem to have attracted more candidates than the Brotherhouses. They differed completely from the Fraternities in one particular: most of the houses were founded in the country or near the cities; it was only later that the cities expanded to embrace them. The first four monasteries of Windesheim, Eemsteyn, Marienborn and Nieuwlicht, were situated in the country, although two of them were close to a town. Other rural foundations were St. Agnietenberg near Zwolle, Leidedorp, Elizabeth near Brielle, Thabor near Sneek and St. Pieterswiel near Zaltbommel, the monasteries of Brabant, The Visitation of Mary near Haarlem, Vredendaal near Utrecht and similarly Elzingen, Dumo, Esens and Böddingen. This was quite natural, since the Windesheimers performed no pastoral duties outside the monastic community. Their usual source of income was tillage and cattle rearing, of which there was no question among the Brothers. An unsuccessful attempt at agriculture was made at Doesburg, and Albergen soon developed into a monastery. Hulsbergen near Hattem may have been an exception.

Since most of these monasteries were new, the question arises of how it was possible to populate them all. In this connection it must of course be remembered that most of them grew from small beginnings. The new foundation generally started with four persons, borrowed from the old. They the put foundation on its feet and then
withdrew when enough local candidates had made their appearance. In the case of existing foundations, two people were usually sent to the newly admitted monastery in order to teach the new recruits the customs of Windesheim. The prior generally came from Windesheim or from one of the first monasteries to join the union. In this work John Vos seems to have been faithfully assisted by Northorn under Henry Loeder. The success of this undertaking shows that Windesheim and the first monasteries of the congregation must have been able to call on a number of most exceptional men who were possessed of a sense of sacrifice, devotion to their task, conviction and sufficient tact to carry out their onerous work in all parts of the country, and always, in the beginning, in comparatively straitened circumstances. This alone is proof of the excellent spirit animating this section of the Devotionalists. It was only sensible that they should require a reasonable, materially viable basis for a new foundation. Although this may have reduced the risk for the mother house in setting up new foundations, John Busch's testimony concerning the outfits of the Fraters going to Böddingen, including Busch himself, shows that Windesheim did not stint herself on such occasions.

This satisfyingly rapid development of the congregation demanded considerable effort of Windesheim in yet another direction. They were obliged to produce choir books, Bibles and texts of the Fathers, not only for their own use and for their own library, but also for the brothers of the other houses. The strong emphasis on unity of custom and manner of life in the various monasteries required the use of identical texts. Any divergence in texts, and especially any difference in indicating how a particular text should be sung, and where the pauses should come, gave rise to great confusion in the singing. This is also true, to a certain extent, of the Bible and the writings of the Fathers, for portions of these were also sung aloud in the choir. The Windesheim canons thus embarked upon a remarkable project in creating a uniform text of the choir books, the Bible and the Fathers.1 This desire for unity, principally in the ordinary, manual and calendar, was revealed in the assembly of the chapter and not alone in the monastery of Windesheim. The intention was to achieve uniform song and ceremonies. To this end the canons collected together the ordinaria of the various monastic orders and dioceses and found that they differed widely from each other. By dint of comparison and study and by

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1 Busch 310-313.

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consulting knowledgeable people, they were able to draw up their own distinct calendar, ordinary and handbook which were approved by the Holy See and which would be adopted by all the monasteries of the chapter. This, however, was only the beginning. The books used in singing the hours had to be corrected so that no variation of melody would occur in the singing of the Divine Office. This great work required much patience and devotion. The men appointed to the task collected various copies of missals, graduals, antiphonaria, lectionaria, capitularia and collectaria from other Windesheim monasteries and since they had to correspond, they examined them, compared them with each other and brought them into harmony with the ordinary and calendar and with each other. Nor did they stop at this unification. They dispensed with new, less authentic histories, legends, hymns and sequences which presented rather the frivolity of man than the seriousness of the Holy Church.¹ When the task was completed they had their work approved by the church authorities so that, when the chapter extended over the entire world, these books could be used everywhere.

When the choir books were finished, these same Windesheim brothers proceeded to further activities of general use (ad ulteriora communis utilitatis exercitia).² ‘They attempted to reduce all the “original”³ books of the Old and New Testaments to the text as translated by St. Jerome from Hebrew into Latin, using the best models obtainable.’⁴ This is thus an attempt to revise the current vulgate texts in order to arrive at the original text of the Vulgate as compiled by St. Jerome. This was a most remarkable plan which has since been projected time and again and which at the present time is occupying the attention of an extremely competent commission. The method they established was also remarkable. ‘They collected several codices from various libraries and dioceses’ and examined them painstakingly, finding, as Busch says, almost as many important variants of the meaning and word of the Bible, as there were codices. Animated therefore by a burning zeal to examine the truth in these, they searched the entire district and finally assembled three or four immensely large volumina, written formerly in very old characters. One of these was from Paris, one from the monastery of Bethlehem near Doetichem,

¹ Busch, 311.
² Ibid., 311.
³ They probably mean ‘the Latin’ books.
⁴ Busch 311.

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and one from the Knights of St. John, commonly called Op de Loe, and from other churches. In the one from the Knights of St. John found written in the margin: ‘This library was compiled from the library of Jerome,’ namely this manuscript was compiled from that of Jerome. They took this text to mean that this Bible conformed with the text of the Bible of St. Jerome, the first to translate the Bible from Hebrew into Latin, and that it was therefore pure. They zealously perused this very ancient text a couple of times, considered it on its own merits, coordinated the various statements and compared them. When they had finally reached complete agreement, they began to correct ‘our Bible’ in Windesheim. They devoted years to this work, corrected a host of Hebrew expressions and adapted the entire body of the Old and New Testaments to the early copies, esteeming the old witnesses more than the new. Thus they arrived at a Bible, of all the books of both Testaments, well written and brilliantly corrected, with every smallest detail punctuated and emended for themselves and for the entire chapter. It proved acceptable to the body of the congregation, who ordered that everyone should employ this text but that no changes must be made in it, even as the choir books were not allowed to be altered.

This was a remarkable example of medieval monastic academic practice, a mixture of scholarly sense and naivety. The first thing worthy of note is the existence of libraries in dioceses and monasteries, libraries which contained manuscripts of the Bible which they were prepared to lend out to reliable institutions. Windesheim was not even so well known at this time. This might be understandable in the case of monasteries, but one text came all the way from Paris. One can scarcely begin to imagine the problems involved in transporting such a Bible in this period. The comparison with other texts is a good scholarly method which is still employed today. Only the number of manuscripts was much too small, as was the case a hundred years later with the Greek edition of the New Testament by Erasmus. The monks, however, were also too naive. They had no scholarly training at all, either in theology or in history or in paleo-

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1 Busch, 312.
2 A very good characterization by N. Greiteman, De Windesheimse vulgaatrevisie in de vijftiende eeuw, Hilversum 1937, cf. 12. He has also instituted a comparison between a text which he considers to be the Windesheim text, and other vulgate texts used in the Netherlands in this period. In this way he can give the probable position of the Windesheim text in the textual tradition of the vulgate.

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They were well able to read the peculiar abbreviated script of their time and may perhaps have been capable of detecting that one manuscript was older than another. They possessed, however, absolutely no knowledge of the history of writing, hence their complete acceptance of the marginal statement in the Knights of St. John library. They did not inquire when or by whom, or with what intention this statement was made. Just imagine if it had been inserted by some ‘oriental’ after the Crusades in order to raise the selling price to the Knights of St. John! They did not ask themselves either what exactly the library ‘Sancti Hieronymi’ was. It may have had nothing to do with the Bible translation at all, but have referred to some monastery of St. Jerome. They accepted the remark in perfect trust and proceeded to adapt the text of their Bible to this text. For them this was the end of the affair. They had the correct Vulgate text in their possession and they had copied it. From henceforth it was forbidden to the fathers to alter one jot or tittle of the text, not even in the choir books, if these conflicted with the emended text. In this way they brought scholarly investigation to a halt. The matter was now concluded. The highest ideal had been attained! No more study in this field was necessary.

In my opinion the only explanation of this lies in the aim of this seemingly scholarly biblical work. They were not interested in the correct text of the Bible or in its meaning, but in uniformity at the choir service and in reading aloud. It was for this reason that Busch termed this text, compiled by the fraters: ‘diligentissime punctuatum.’ This does not mean that the punctuation marks are in the correct places, but that by writing dots above the texts it can be recited as traditionally desired. The text served not as the basis for a scholarly study of the Bible, but ensured that the tone adopted in reading aloud should be the same in the various houses. The Canons Regular employed the same methods of comparison and correction to obtain their own text of the four great church Fathers and of other orthodox Fathers; of the sermons, homilies, books and treatises. They also achieved their optimum text by comparison with the best models. They never reveal, however, just why a particular model is considered superior. These pieces too will have been read aloud in the choir service and in the refectory. Yet no matter how slight the academic value of the result of their labours and despite the fact that practical considerations outweighed the scholarly, this entire undertaking and

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1 Busch, 312.

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the multiplication of these texts for their own monastery, and for various recently founded houses of the same chapter, was an enormous achievement and as such commands respect. Busch rightly exults: ‘They have corrected all the books of the divine office, the entire Bible and numerous volumina of the first-rate scholars, and have written them in various sorts of script, punctuated them, accented them according to the spelling, and bound and annotated the choir books.’ ‘All this they have brought to a good end, labouring for the honour and love of God, for the communal good of the brothers (Canons) and for the harmonious uniformity of the entire chapter.’ The Canons wrote more than 35 large volumes for the religious services and these were still completely spotless around 1460. They also copied more than 100 codices of the Fathers on good quality parchment for the library of Windesheim, not counting what was sent elsewhere. ‘When we consider all this,’ says Busch, ‘then it is no wonder that we complain today of the neglectful and lukewarm spirit of the present times.’

The organization of the central authority of this Windesheim chapter, regulated by the statutes and by papal letters, is not of any great interest for our purpose. Unlike the colloquium of Münster and Zwolle the Windesheim chapter had a monastic authority. The members of the administrative college were priors of the monasteries in the union. They met once a year in Windesheim, at first on the second and later on the third Sunday after Easter, and sometimes convened elsewhere in times of war and interdict. After a period of rest and religious ceremonies, the delegates gradually appointed, by successive elections, twelve definitores, on the understanding that the prior of Windesheim, who was the prior superior of the entire chapter, was always a definitor by virtue of his office. These twelve thus took the lead in the deliberations. They examined the reports supplied by the various visitatores and appointed new men to this office. They also dealt with the dismissal and reappointment of the various priors who had all to vacate their seats. They were usually immediately re-elected, but if complaints had been received, the definitors decided whether they should be re-appointed or not. If dismissal followed, a new prior was chosen in the usual manner in the house where the place was left vacant. The assembly also dealt with requests to join the society. These

1 Busch, 313.

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were only granted after an investigation on the spot. Every matter which concerned the chapter as a whole was discussed.\footnote{Acquoy II 83-101. Scarcely any regulations have survived for the period before 1424. The picture changes in the following period. The \textit{Acta capituli Windeshemensis} are edited by S. van der Woude. Kerkhistorische Studien, ’s-Gravenhage 1953.}

The spiritual life of the Canons Regular of the Windesheim chapter was essentially the same as that of the \textit{fraters}. Had not the latter formed and trained the first Regulars? With the Canons too, the main emphasis was laid upon communal possession and the associated personal poverty. They also stressed the strict obedience to the superior who, in later times at least, was more subject than the rector of the \textit{fraters} to the regulations, the authority, and the supervision of the general chapter. Much value was also attached to humility and the accompanying humiliation through the wearing of old, worn or patched clothes, through humiliating punishments (eating from the ground, being struck in the face) and through the performance of humble tasks. Although the \textit{fraters} also sang part of the hours as a community, the Windesheimers devoted more time to communal choir singing which was considered one of their principal duties. They also attached great value to manual work, which for them as for the Brothers, consisted mostly in writing. Work on the land, however, occupied a greater place in their life than it did with the Brethren, since their monasteries were mostly founded in rural districts. The division of their day was scarcely different from that in the Brotherhouses. They too tried, by pious meditation, to elevate each new act or ceremony to a higher plane and thus maintain a constant link between inner piety and external religious activity. For them this consisted of meditation which, as among the Brothers, was usually based upon Christ's life and Passion and the four last things. A different aspect of Christ's life and Passion was reserved for each day of the week. The intention was that the Canons, like the \textit{fraters}, should dwell the entire day on the subject offered for meditation and not devote to it only the isolated hour or half-hour. Such at least was the original intention. To what extent this practice was adhered to in subsequent periods will be dealt with later. As we have already mentioned, the pastoral work of the Canons was confined to the inmates of their own monastery. There is no mention of any activity among the schoolboys. This is the main point on which they differ from the \textit{fraters}. The Canons Regular were, in
addition, monastics, bound to the monastery by vows. Any monk who did leave was a profugus or an apostate and could be sent back with the help of the temporal authorities and shut up in a dungeon. No such dungeon existed among the Brethren. Certain of the Canons aspired to a higher degree of mysticism. This will become apparent later when we are discussing the works.

It may be wondered whether the concluding of an agreement between the first four monasteries could be described as the beginning of the reformation of the monasteries or the propaganda for the observance for which the Windesheim congregation became so renowned. It is known that the popes of the fourteenth century already encouraged this trend and that in the Franciscan order especially a struggle was waged over the application of the rule and the use of the privileges. It was among the Franciscans that the words reformation and subsequently ‘observance’ first became current. There can be no doubt that Geert Groote was aware of this struggle. Did he not, around 1380, advise the school rector John (Cele) against entering the Franciscan order, since none of their monasteries in the region were ‘reformed.’ This technical term means that there were no institutions of the observance in the Netherlands at this time, as there were in France. Although Ruusbroec spoke of inobservance in monasteries, he retired to Groenendaal, wrote his books there, but took no action to reform other monasteries. Geert Groote, on the other hand did, and can thus be situated within the concept of the observance movement. The foundation of Windesheim was not yet a sign that his followers wished to continue the work of the master on this point. Bishop Floris of Wefelinkhoven made no mention of a stricter observance or of propaganda for this aim in either the charter of July 13th 1386 or in that of December 13th 1387, which respectively gave approval and confirmation to the monastery. It was not immediately perceived that a force for expansion lay dormant in the monastic foundations established by followers of Geert Groote, but evidence of this was not long in coming. The uniting of four monasteries (Windesheim, Marienborn, Nieuwlicht and Eemsteyn) in 1394 and 1395 to form the congregation of Windesheim, was of more significance than at first appeared. According to a petition to the pope, granted on the 16th of May 1395, they joined together since they knew

1 Acquoy II 262; Busch 290-291.
that several monasteries from all parts of the church had failed noticeably in the progress of the religious life and in the proper application of the rule, because they had lacked the fraternal visitation. It was precisely in order to maintain the observance that they had decided to hold an annual chapter which would have the authority to act against abuses. There is no notion yet of expansion, or of apostolic work in other monasteries, but the formation of such chapters was characteristic of the observants. Henry Pomerius, who between 1414 and 1421 wrote his chronicle on the origin of the monastery of Groenendaal and his *Life of John Ruusbroec* was aware that his order, i.e. of the Canons Regular, belonged to the ‘reformed,’ in other words, to the observants. He expressed this opinion on the occasion of the uniting of Groenendaal, Rooklooster, Korsendonk and Zeven Bronnen near Brussels in 1402. Bethlehem of Louvain and Barberendaal of Tienen became members in 1410. The Canons Regular, he says, in recent times reformed in newness of spirit, preserve the severity of the order under the observance of one chapter. The admission of the already mentioned observant Brabantine monasteries to the congregation of Windesheim resulted from the desire for expansion, but also from the longing to lead other monasteries to the observance. Their previous successes provided a great incentive. It may thus be said that observantism began in 1400 in the order of the Canons Regular and proceeded to grow in intensity and scope. It is no wonder that the head of the Windesheim congregation, John Vos of Heusden, described the life at Windesheim as the maintaining of the rule, the perpetual striving after observance. His successor, William Vornken, saw Windesheim principally as a contrast to the former free practice of the monasteries, while for John Busch a short time later, the reformation of the monasteries had become the mainspring of Windesheim's activities. His book on the reformation of various monasteries (*Liber de reformationibus monasteriorum ordinum diversorum*) begins with the period under discussion here. Observance commenced later among the various other Orders and to a large extent under the influence of Windesheim which had at least made the minds of the monastics receptive to such ideas.

One result of the ever increasing influence of the Devotionalists

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1 Busch 50; Letter ed. by Acquoy, III, 237.
2 Busch 373.
3 Busch 379-399.
was the establishing of a great number of convents and some monasteries for men who were usually called Tertiaries, since they originally followed the Third Rule of St. Francis. It is impossible in most cases to determine whether these foundations were preceded by a communal dwelling together without any monastic Rule. So many new foundations arose in the various regions of the Netherlands, especially in the cities, that they cannot all be mentioned here. They sprang up in such numbers that William Vornken, who succeeded John Vos as prior of Windesheim (1425-1454) could rightly ask: ‘What town, place or village is there now in the entire church province of Cologne which does not rejoice to have received the taste or the scent of the lilies?’

Without going into detail it may be remarked here that these brothers and sisters constantly desired a stricter life (arctior vita) and usually succeeded in introducing it into their houses by a majority or unanimous vote. Their first desire was to solemnly take one or all of the three monastic vows. Having thus become monastics, many of them directed their efforts towards cooperation, to uniting the monasteries, to the formation of chapters (Chapter of Utrecht, of Venlo, of Sion).

The next step for these monastics towards a stricter life was the introduction of the ‘clausura,’ or enclosure within which they remained and within which no one else was admitted. Another was the adoption of a stricter monastic rule. Many of them abandoned the Third Order of St. Francis for that of St. Augustine - by no means a harsh rule, admittedly, but one intended exclusively for monastics. By adopting the Rule of St. Augustine these persons again came within the domain of Windesheim, if indeed they had not already been led to adopt this rule by the influence of members and monasteries of this congregation. One group must be mentioned here on account of its resemblance to Windesheim. This is the congregation of Sion, established in this period. It did not, indeed, attain the size of Windesheim, but it included the monastery of Stein. It was chiefly the work of William Hendrixx Clinkard whom we have already met as superior of the Brothers at Amersfoort, and in 1399 as the first Minister-general of the Utrecht chapter - the union of houses following the Third Rule of St. Francis. He also founded the monastery of Hem, near Schoonhoven, where he placed a number of Brothers in 1407. In his attempts to have the Brothers adopt the rule of St. Augustine in order to found a new

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1 Letter ed. by Acquoy, III, 243.
chapter, he was assisted by Peter Gerrits, who was also a Brother of the Common Life from the house of Delft. They too had adopted the Third Rule of St. Francis. Together these two urged bishop Frederik of Blankenheim to grant general permission to members of the Utrecth chapter of the Third Order to transfer to the Rule of St. Augustine, on condition that those who took this step should in their turn join together to form a new chapter. They obtained their request on July 17th, 1418, and already on the 25th of July William Clinkard and his monastery of Hem near Schoonhoven and Peter Gerrits with his monastery of St. Hieronymusdal at Delft (former Brethren of the Common Life) took the monastic vows. They thus became monastics and the foundations of the chapter were laid. It was later called the Sion chapter after a new monastery near Delft to which the Canons of St. Hieronymusdal moved in 1433. Others followed: the house of St. Gregory in Gouda, transferred outside Gouda in 1419 and named Stein. This was later the monastery of Erasmus. In 1422 arose the convent of the new nuns in Amsterdam, then St. Elizabeth in Oudewater, St. Agnes of Delft and two from Gouda. In 1324, the chapter consisted of three monasteries and five convents, which remained independent while following the customs and usages of Windesheim. On account of their distribution throughout the province of Holland, this chapter also came to be known as the Holland congregation.¹

Chapter Eight
The Writings of the First Devotionalists on Spirituality and Piety

From 1384 to 1424

Spirituality, or to put it more simply, piety, may be considered as the attitude of the faithful to God and to Christ. This is not in the domain of dogma or morals, but in that of adoration, recognition, love, the desire for union, the striving after virtue, the avoidance of sin, the ways to achieve this, the exercises suitable for this end (ascesis), the paths which lead to a union with God and with Christ (mysticism), prayer, meditation, religious fervour, worship. This enumeration already shows that we are here touching upon the essential qualities of the Modern Devotionalists. They are indeed, devout, pious and certainly modern, in that they were of their own period and other than their predecessors and contemporaries. They even applied this name to themselves and were thus conscious that they possessed their own distinctive quality in the domain of piety, devotion and spirituality. They did not, however, clearly state in what this distinctive, modern quality consisted, although this spirituality, these ideals and the application thereof were constantly discussed among themselves. We have already noted this with reference to Geert Groote, and the matter was touched upon in discussing the Brothers. We mentioned that several members of the Fraternity, including Florens Radewijns and John of Kessel, wrote down their ideals in Notabilia Verba, and found these same ideals eloquently expressed in stories of Church Fathers and spiritual writings and sermons. They collected these in their notebooks, the so-called rapiaria. The study of these works is a subject in itself, a specialist branch, so to speak, the province of church historians specializing in the history of devotion. They have also devoted considerable attention already to the piety of the Modern Devotionalists, so that I can draw mainly upon their conclusions. For the rest, the question is not so easy. If the description is overly abbreviated, too compressed, this spirituality becomes a vague whole. It retains so little that is distinctive or characteristic that it strongly resembles every type of devotion that has gone before, or follows. If, on the contrary, too much stress is laid upon the
characteristic qualities, then the true situation tends to become distorted. Meanwhile
the ordinary communal element is so expanded that it entirely occupies the day of
the ordinary Brothers or Sisters or Windesheim Canons and of the many persons in
the world who came under Groote's influence.

Apart from numerous articles in journals, recent monographs have been devoted
either to the history of devotion in the Netherlands in general\(^1\) or to the leading
personalities such as Geert Groote, Florens Radewijns, Gerard Zerbolt, Henry Mande,
Gerlach Peters, Thomas a Kempis. These will all be mentioned here in due course.
Other writers, like J.J. Mak,\(^2\) D. de Man,\(^3\) W.J. Kühler\(^4\) and M.A. Lücker\(^5\) deal with
general questions from the history of the Modern Devotionalists.

We have already referred to Groote's spirituality in discussing his life as revealed
in his letters and works. We can thus confine ourselves here to a summary of the
conclusions as formulated by K. de Beer in the fifth chapter of his book on the
spirituality of Geert Groote.\(^6\) With Groote the essential point in orientating the spiritual
life is not so much union with God as the salvation of man which, indeed, proceeds
from the first. In order to attain it man must imitate the humanity of Christ, practising
asceticism and entering into the Godhead, in another word, mysticism. The highest
degree is perfect love towards God which accompanies the contemplation of God.
This, however, is exclusively a gift of God and Groote accordingly has little to say
about mysticism. The way up to God is a life of struggle, a purification from sin.
Then comes the imitation of Christ which contains three elements: prayer, a rejection
of worldly goods, and the practice of virtue. In his exhortation to particular virtues
Groote is practical and concrete, but also something of a rigorist. He thinks, for
example, that under certain circumstances venial sin can become mortal sin. He carries

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3 D. de Man, Heinrich Suso en de Moderne Devotie, *Nederl. archief kerkgesch.* N.S. 19 (1926)
   279; Meister Eckhart in Weespers Handschriften, *ibid.*, 20 (1927) 281; Een onbekende
   middelnederl. vertaling van Johannes Tauler's preken, *ibid.*, 20 (1927) 35; S.P. Wolfs O.P.,
6 K.C.L.M. de Beer, *Studie over de spiritualiteit van Geert Groote*, Brussel, Nijmegen, 1938,
   290-299.
the *contemptus mundi* so far that he advises against marriage. He holds the monastic life in high esteem, but if it does not correspond to the proposed ideal, then it is not to be recommended. The founding of a communal life without vows was a very distinctive step, despite the example of the Bogards and the Beguines. In conclusion de Beer recognizes in the spirituality of Geert Groote four clear characteristics. It is voluntaristic, practical, directed not towards the contemplation of God, but towards the love of God in all things. Since it has as its main concern the salvation of the soul and to this end constantly applies norms of utility, this spirituality acquires an anthropocentricutilitarian character. De Beer finds that this is accompanied by a somewhat mercenary spirit which requires a return for effort involved. Groote's spirituality means also a pre-occupation with the four last things and an indifference towards temporal matters. This attitude imparts a radical character to Groote's Christian concept.

In the third place, there is the concrete aspect, the emphasis upon the practice of virtue, what might be termed the practical side. Possible dangers must be calculated in advance, an appropriate attitude decided upon. Fourthly, Groote's spirituality has a sober sense of reality; it proceeds from, and is intended for, man in this world. He takes human limitations into account and what is within man's power, but his organization of the Brethren proves that he dares to transgress the prevailing norms. I am able to accept de Beer's opinions on Groote's distaste for all empty formality, since it is self-evident. The question is, however, what does Groote consider as empty formality? Certainly not every outward ceremony, for Groote's life of prayer was, according to de Beer, liturgically orientated. That it is not the outward state but the inward disposition that counts is such a general statement that it cannot be held characteristic of Groote. Exaggeration or over-emphasis of externals is possible but so far as Groote is concerned to my mind it is going too far to say that the outward state does not matter.

De Beer gives a list of the books which Groote had copied and which he liked to possess and of the authors to whom Groote constantly refers in setting out his opinions. They comprise nearly the whole of Christian literature. Evidently he was not inspired by any general

1 De Beer 292.
2 Ibid. 298. In particular the lay character of Groote's spirituality is in my opinion not proved. The clerical nature of Groote's foundation is much more strongly assumed by de Beer.
3 Ibid., 249-266.
dominating spirit. It is certain, however, that for his description of the monastic life and its origin, he had recourse to the Collation of John Cassian, for the Apostolate of the Monks to Jerome and to the Ascent in the Spiritual Life to Climacus, to Alan of Rijsssel, to the works ascribed to St. Bernard and to Bernard himself. Bonaventure is not mentioned here or anywhere else. Groote's spirituality, moreover, springs from the past and is in no way revolutionary, despite certain personal traits. It also underwent the influence of the Carthusians, with whom he spent some years, although he later gave preference to the active side of the life.

Chief amongst Groote's followers and helpers was Florens Radewijns. He spent less time at the university than Groote although his name was also entered in the Law faculty. His legal training, however, is not evident in his works. It is not known when Florens returned from the university. He will first of all have obtained a canonicate with prebend in the Cathedral of Utrecht, since Holy Orders were not required for this. It was only in 1383 that Groote sent him to Worms to be ordained. This is probably connected with the exchange of the Utrecht prebend for the vicarship of St. Paul in the Church of St. Lebuin in Deventer. Florens will not have settled in Deventer much before this. He is with Groote the co-founder of the Brethren of the Common Life and was at the head of the Devotionalist movement from Groote's death until his own, that is, from 1384 to 1400. We have already touched upon his work in extending the Brotherhood, the number of Sisterhouses, and in founding the monasteries of Windesheim and Marienborn. Apart from a few letters and various Notabilia Verba two works of his have been preserved. They are referred to by their first words, namely Multum valet and Omnes, inquit artes. According to M.Th.P. van Woerkum, S.C.J., Multum valet

1 Florens Radewijns was born in Leerdam. Nothing is known of the year of his birth or of his early education, but he was sent to Prague to continue his studies and admitted to the licentiate on January 24th 1378. He must have gained his Master's degree shortly afterwards and in 1378 had himself enrolled in the Matricula faculatis jurisdiro canonico, Mon. hist. Univ. Prag. p. 166, 180, II, p. 65.
5 Archief ... aartsb. Utrecht 10 (1882) 383-427, ed. by J.F. Vregt; previous ed. by H. Nolte, Freiburg, 1862.

R.R. Post, The Modern Devotion
was written earlier than *Omnes inquit artes*. The first purports to be a *tractatus devotus* and, unlike the second, is indeed a treatise. The contents are easily summarized. The intention behind every action must of necessity be directed towards two ends: purity of heart and love of God. The first is a condition for the fulfilment of the second. Virtue must be practised to attain the first, following the *via purgativa* which may be fostered by reading, meditation and prayer. All three are described in detail. Especially important is the question of meditation. Various subjects for meditation are suggested and certain texts are indicated. This meditation is also helpful in curbing the desires - manual work may serve the same purpose. These desires are then more closely defined, beginning with a general classification into kind (greed, impurity, curiosity, avarice, pride). Meditation also fosters benevolence towards all manner of narrowmindedness, notably towards the Brothers in the ordinary practice of the house (in their dealings with each other, over-sensitivity towards fraternal admonition and exhortations).

The second way is the *via illuminativa*, the luminous way, which is reflexion on benefits received from God. Here the writer only gives a few points and ends with suggestions for meditation; texts concerning Christ's Passion for every day of the week. It is a logically constructed treatise and the contents are repeatedly elucidated and proved by texts from the Holy Scriptures and from ancient and mediaeval writers. The textual reference is usually given. It is interesting to note that, while the *via illuminativa* is given only in points, the *via unitiva* is not given at all. This is the way to perfection, to union with God. The works of Ruusbroec are accordingly not mentioned as source. The treatise *Multum valet* has this rather anti-mystical quality in common with the work *Omnes inquit artes*. This latter work is in reality not a treatise, but a collection of texts from the Scriptures and from pious writings, a *rapiarium* thus, but so linked that together they form a logical whole, as in a treatise. The editor, M.Th.P. van Woerkum, has greatly facilitated the reading and study of this work by dividing it clearly into two books, each of a few chapters, which are in turn divided into paragraphs, all with headings. He had not passed off this division as his own work, since he found indications in the text for many of his classifications. His own contributions are placed in inver-
ted commas. That this collection of texts bears considerable resemblance to a treatise may be judged from the fact that certain chapters from the treatise *Multum valet* have been quite smoothly incorporated into this work. These chapters include pp. 22-41; Ch. 20, pp. 46-47, Ch. 21, p. 48, Ch. 23, p. 52, and p. 53. Van Woerkum has good grounds for considering this as a ‘*collatio* book,’ in other words a book used at the *collatio* among the Brothers on Sundays and feastdays. Someone read aloud a piece from the first book; a discussion followed, then a piece from the second book, referred to in the first, was also read aloud. This dealt with Christ's life or passion and concluded the collation. This fact greatly enhances the value of the book, since it gives us an insight not only into the devotion or spirituality of Florens Radewijns, but also into that of the first Brethren, most of whom were trained in Deventer. This collection of texts clearly shows which writers were esteemed by the Brothers. There are so many of them that I must refer to the book itself. Some works occur only once or twice, while others are quoted frequently or texts are taken from them. This agrees with the reading lists found in Groote, in an unknown canon’ and in Busch, and which may be considered as characteristic for the Brothers. In this respect, however, some development must be assumed. In the first lists the works of the church Fathers are well represented, while the great medieval theologians occur only rarely. Only Hugo and Richard of St. Victor are found, and only one little work of St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure. The German mystics and Ruusbroec are missing from all these lists, including that of Mauburn who wrote last. The speculative qualities of the first held no attraction for the Brethren, and Ruusbroec, who was highly esteemed by Groote and the Windesheimers H. Mande and G. Peters, seems to have been too elevated for the average Modern Devotionalist. Moreover, the objections made by Groote to some of Ruusbroec's works may have had their effect. I am in whole-hearted agreement with van Woerkum's further remarks concerning the nature of the Brethren's devotion as deduced from the above-mentioned works. Florens cherished aspirations towards the severely-ascetic, towards the practical-didactic and also towards the affecting and profound. He disapproves of purely theological learning as well as of speculative mysticism and

2 I 190.

R.R. Post, *The Modern Devotion*
scholasticism. In his opinion these hinder devotion and distract from the eradication of faults. This anti-intellectual inclination also persisted in later years, although the leaders had repeatedly to warn against the reading of subtle and lofty books. Even Rudolf Dier desired books which incited devotion, or ‘ardent’ books.

In this last statement we find the true literary criterion of the died-in-the-wool Modern Devotionalist. An attempt has been made to explain the Modern Devotionalists’ flight from learning, as also exemplified in the Imitation of Christ, as a reaction against the oversubtle dialectic of the university learning of the time, especially against Nominalism. Although this may well have contributed in discrediting learning among the founders of the Modern Devotionalists as worldly vanity and senseless preoccupation - Geert Groote and Florens Radewijns had both studied at the university - the real cause lies deeper. It lies primarily in the short-sighted and narrow-minded view which regards as useless or superfluous all that does not immediately serve the inner devotion or purity of heart. Their dislike of learning extended to include the best representatives of Scholasticism. According to the continuatio scripti R. Dier, written by Peter Horn, the fourth rector of the Florens' house is purported to have said when explaining why the Brothers might only enter the library through the librarian's rooms: ‘John Vos of Heusden, the first prior of Windesheim, dissuaded the Canons from studying the books of St. Thomas and of the other recent scholastic writers, who wrote on obedience and similar matters, so that the Canons might persevere in the simplicitas.’ The Brothers were not permitted any such study. Having mentioned this interesting fact, Van Woerkum continues his characterization: ‘No distinction was thus made between real and spurious learning, but only between studium devotum et morale on the one hand and studium intellectuale on the other. All scholastic learning was suspect and they followed the example of St. Francis of Assisi, whose opposition to study among his brothers was known to them from the Legend of St. Bonaventure.’

‘The old traditionally safe books, comprehensible to everyone, which Florens himself read and recommended, thus continued to dominate the reading of the Modern Devotionalists even in later years, (this judgment is based on a statement by Albert of Kalcar

1 Van Woerkum, 194.
2 Ibid., 194.
3 Ibid., 194-196.
4 Dumbar, Analecta 1117.
5 v. Woerkum 197.
from ca. 1485), although they will certainly not have satisfied everybody. This reading was indeed solid, but it is fairly certain that it imparted a pedestrian character to the practice of perfection among the Modern Devotionalists, since too much attention was given to restraining the body and its passions, while the positive aspect, the aspiration of the soul to God, was neglected. The zeal and energy with which the Modern Devotionalists pursued their goal of perfection deserves our admiration, but their spirituality does not appear to reveal any balanced and harmonious growth of the entire personality in the sphere of the spiritual life towards union with God. Their choice of reading in general and the difficulty in combining the divergent visions of those authors they did read into any coherent whole, already leads us to suppose that their attitude in the search for perfection was too negative. It can only be presumed, too, that they only half understood the best of their authors, such as Bernard and Bonaventure, if indeed they understood them at all. Indeed, this lack of intellectual penetration in the long run caused Groote's Devotionalist movement to shrivel and peter out. ¹

Having gained some acquaintance with the spirituality of the Devotionalists, we must now consider more closely the contents of Omnes inquit artes. In essence it resembles Multum valet. Florenses assembled and arranged the texts so that each idea is stated and elucidated with the aid of texts from devout writers. This at least holds good for the first book of Omnes inquit artes. The author Florens asks himself: What is our task? What is our duty? What is the fulfilment of God's will, sanctification. Then: What hinders us from attaining sanctification and what fight has to be fought? With reference to this latter Florens discusses the eight capital sins (gluttony, lust, covetousness, anger, spiritual sloth, vainglory, pride.) After a short passage on mystical grace, a condition for which is total detachment from self and from earthly things, he begins a positive exposition of which virtues must be practised - love of God and love of our neighbour. Among the Brothers this last must find expression in brotherly harmony, in giving and accepting fraternal reproof, and in obedience, which implies above all a renouncing of one's own will. We are already familiar with the aids to the development of virtue; study, meditation, prayer, making humble use of the spiritual leader, and manual work, to be accompanied by prayer and meditation.

¹ Van Woerkum, 198-199.

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The second book gives the matter for meditation; the life of Christ, particularly His birth, childhood (little of the public life) and the Passion, from the Last Supper to the Resurrection. Finally, the Four Last Things (death, judgment, hell or heaven), our sins and the benefits we have received from God. To render this acceptable to the reader and to incite him to the practice of virtue, Florens sought and found his texts among numerous authors who were frequently quoted towards the end of the Middle Ages and were considered as auctoritates. These he found sometimes in anthologies and sometimes in the works of the writers themselves. He was usually able to use the real significance, but was sometimes obliged to adapt the meaning of the text slightly. Van Woerkum points out that his selection includes a great deal of monastic literature: writings by and for monks. The principal factor, however, which determines the unity of the book, is that Florens derives the theoretical basis of his asceticism from one particular author who was highly esteemed throughout the whole of the Middle Ages and had either a direct or indirect influence upon most of the other sources of the book (Libellus) (Omnes inquit artes). This author is John Cassian.

Cassian is quoted approximately 120 times in Book I of the Libellus. Perhaps a third of the text is derived from him. For several themes only or mainly texts from Cassian are introduced, in for example the nature of perfection, the role of the devil, the struggle between flesh and spirit, vices in particular and in general, brotherly harmony, obedience, prayer and spiritual direction. Thus the spiritual doctrine of Florens Radewijns in the Libellus is chiefly determined by Cassian's fund of ideas.¹

The contents of Florens' letters and of his Notabilia verba are practical applications of his general concepts and thus do not require to be further developed here. Three questions, however, demand our attention. They concern Florens' attitude to learning, his opinions on meditation, and the relationship of these two works to those of his fellow Brother, Gerard Zerbolt of Zutphen.

I. His attitude to learning

1. The study of which Florens speaks in Book I, Chapter 10, p. 46 of his Libellus and, employing the same text, on p. 389 of the treatise,

¹ Van Woerkum, 214.
refers to the hour of study in the morning after the praying of the hours. This is mentioned in the Consuetudines of Zwolle and Deventer. 1 It is announced there as the study of the Holy Scriptures. He who devotes his hour to this must begin by so directing all his study and reading that he can rid himself of faults, inculcate virtues, and put into practice what he learns. This hour of study serves also to promote devotion, fasting, penance, and manual work. He must not study simply for the sake of knowledge or learning, for Augustine tells us: ‘Understanding without action is like wisdom without fear, while fear is yet the beginning of wisdom.’ Hence it is clear - continues Florens - that all study and reading of the Holy Scriptures must tend towards love and virtue. Again he refers to Augustine. And so, according to Florens, one must not seek the lofty or the interesting passages, or the problems in the Holy Scriptures for their own sake. The entire Scripture exists for the sake of virtue.

2. Reading must not be haphazard or superficial. The entire book must be studied, not just a folio now and then.

3. A person must study at the appointed times (according to St. Bernard).

4. He must write down any passage which particularly strikes him, in order to reflect upon it later (ruminare) and imprint it on his memory (Augustine).

5. According to Bernard he must, through reading, strive to awaken love, and through love, prayer, so that he may pray while studying and reading. Florens gives this a practical application: if the study has to be interrupted for a work of charity, for instance correcting a book for communal use, then this must be done.

Finally, he leaves aside the Holy Scriptures and turns to the study of other books. The devout man must choose books capable of promoting purity of heart and love, such as books on morals and piety. 2

The notabilia verba provide no supplement to these works, but only repetition. It seems to me that this study really serves as a preparation for meditation, with which at is it least, very closely connected.

II. Meditation

By meditation, Florens and the others understood something different from what is generally accepted today, irrespective of the

2 Archief ... aartsb. Utrecht 10 (1882) 389-391.

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method employed. Nowadays the usual idea of meditation is a period of reflection on one or more spiritual subjects, an inward prayer which includes good intentions for the day or for the future. This is the meaning of the expressions: meditation is prescribed there or not; or, he mediates daily, or she practises her meditation. Everyone understands this, although the method employed by each individual may differ. For Florens and the first Brothers, however, meditation has a more general meaning and is synonymous with *ruminare*. It is not, however, performed at any appointed time - there is no place reserved for it in the daily time-table. It is carried on throughout the entire day, in every free moment available; if a Brother is obliged to wait for another, or if anyone happens to be distracted at work, or even during Mass. These are moments in which the Brothers and Sisters must *ruminare* on the prescribed subjects. In the first place it appears from the customs of Deventer and Zwolle that the Brothers' time was occupied, at least from the time they rose in the morning until dinner, with prayers, matins and other hours, the Holy Mass, then an hour's study directly followed by manual work until dinner time. According to Florens, meditation, like all works, must be directed towards the fulfilment of our task, the eradication of defects and desires and the cultivation of virtues. It then coincides with the examination of conscience. It must sharpen the conscience. In the evening before going to bed, for example, the Brother must read something on death, judgment and or the Passion of Christ. He can fall asleep with these thoughts which he will recall on waking and so can easily put from him other vague thoughts. With such reflections then he prepares for Matins, and these same ideas can fill his heart as he works. He can speak of them with others and then he can ‘ruminare’ so that he may be aroused by such considerations to correct his faults and fear sin. Florens therefore suggests the material for meditation: namely *generalis modus meditationis de morte*. To my mind meditation for the Brothers is reflection at any moment of the day and in preparation for rest, worship or work, or at least a bringing to mind of the proposed subject. The ‘ruminatio’ on the life of Christ surpasses all other meditation. *Item modicum ante missam si habetur tempus vel post, de morte et vilitate*

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2 *Archief ... aartsb. Utrecht* 10 (1882) 392.
corporis. So too an aspiration requesting God's help before reading the hours, before the *Deus in adjutorium*. The *in corde ruminare* is of more value than all good meditations (*meditationes*) and exercises. Florens' statement: "*Ergo expedit, ut homo cotidie aliqua hora recordetur de hoc beneficio redemptionis sui*" must be understood in connection with what has gone before. It certainly does not mean that an hour must be set aside for meditation, but that the mind must be turned to redemption (or other subjects) at any hour during the day. This in itself provides material for 'rumination' throughout the day, so that the morning is the most suitable time, for example during Mass. This, however, is not what we understand by meditation. There is no space in the morning to reserve any particular hour - the various activities dovetailed too neatly. We shall see now how we must interpret Gerard Zerbolt.

**Gerard Zerbolt of Zutphen**

Van Woerkum examines the somewhat vague assertion made by Rudolf Dier that Gerard Zerbolt of Zutphen - it is said - found inspiration or material for his two works in the texts of Florens' *Libellus*. These works are *De Spiritualibus ascensionibus* and *De reformatione virium animae*. He examines the *De reformatione* since this is Zerbolt's earliest work and concludes that the similarity lies not in the construction but in the texts employed. Zerbolt, however, expanded the material, and sometimes referred back to the original work. The remarkable thing is that Florens also has a particular text which derives from Zerbolt's *De reformatione virium animae*. Unless this work was attributed to Florens by later copyists it is difficult to explain. In this connection I should like to recall the medieval method of publication. Even after a book had been released for copying, that is, for publication, the authors still retained the original manuscript. Florens thus may have had access to an earlier stage of Zerbolt's works. Both writers lived

1 *Archief ... aartsb. Utrecht* 10 (1882), 441
5 v. Woerkum (I 232-235) defends a different opinion. While recognizing that Florens' meditations constitute an exercise which must serve to keep the mind fixed upon God and perfection the whole day, not only *virtualiter* but, so far as possible, *actualiter*, he assumes in addition meditation at certain hours in the more modern sense. Here he is not distinguishing sufficiently between *lectio* and *meditatio*.
6 Dumbar, *Analecta I* 50.

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in the same house - and were perhaps working on these books at the same time. The authors may have consulted one another and lent each other the manuscripts without their being what we should consider ready for the printer.

Gerard Zerbolt of Zutphen was the most fertile and the most successful writer the Brothers ever produced, although he had no academic training and only lived to be 31. He was born in Zutphen in 1367 and after starting school in his native town, continued his education in Deventer. He was one of the first Brothers in Florens' vicarage and must thus have entered at about 17. It is not known when he was ordained, but the fact that Rudolf Dier calls him *Dominus* shows that he did become a priest. He assisted Florens, the rector, in difficult matters, notably in the defence of the Brothers, and fled with him in 1398 from Deventer to Amersfoort. He died in Windesheim in 1398 on a return journey from Dikninge. He wrote two pious treatises: *De reformatione virtum animae, qui incipit, Homo quidam descendit*, and *De spiritualibus ascensionibus, qui incipit: Beatus vir*. Since the 16th century other works have been attributed to him, including *Super modo vivendi devotorum simul commorantium*, which we have already mentioned, *De libris teutonicalibus et de precibus vernaculis; Tractatus de vestibus pretiosis* and *In quendam inordinate grados ecclesiasticos et praedicationis officium affectantem cuius incepit: consulet quidem clericus*. Zerbolt's authorship of these last four works has repeatedly been contested by some and defended by others. Gerald's biographer, J. van Rooy, has brought forward various arguments in his favour, so that I also consider him to be the author of the above-mentioned works, while understanding that not everyone will be convinced. However this may be, no doubt can possibly exist concerning Gerard's authorship of the two great and pious works. Both had a wide circulation. Van Rooy describes 32 manuscripts of the first and in addition 24 editions with the complete text. There were also translations. Both were widely read and influenced later spiritual writers. It is even said that they indirectly influenced Ignatius Loyola.

As we have already observed, Florens' two works provided Gerard

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1 J. van Rooy, *Gerard Zerbolt van Zutphen*, I Leven en geschriften. Diss. Nijmegen 1936. The words ‘extraneae scholae’ mean: school outside the city. For him the school of Deventer was an ‘extranea schola’. ‘*Extranei*’ in Deventer are all children who come from outside; ‘*intranei*’ are the sons of citizens of Deventer. It is impossible that he should have gone first to the University and afterwards to the school of Deventer.

2 G. Dumbar, *Analecta I 42*.

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with both the matter and the inspiration to write. Both are dependent on David van Augsburg and have recourse to the works of their predecessors for special points which will be discussed later in more detail (for meditation they are principally indebted to Bernard and Bonaventure, see p. 328). In essentials the contents accord with the two treatises of Florens; description of the way to attain purity of soul and the practice of virtue, and notably the love of God. This theme can be handled in very different ways. The first-mentioned book of Gerard Zerbolt proceeds from the decay or decline of the powers of the soul and notably of the intellect, the imagination and the will. These powers of the soul, which lost energy and proper direction through the Fall, must be restored. This can be done by self-knowledge repentance, combat of sin, mortification, the practice of humility and obedience, through prayer, spiritual reading and meditation. By such considerations the devout person can start from a certain niveau and ascend to a higher, whence he can climb higher still. Here we come to the subject of Zerbolt's second book, *De spiritualibus ascensionibus* (*Of the spiritual ascents*). By repentance to God, by contribution and confession, man can ascend from a state of sin to a state of grace. He can then proceed to combat and conquer sinful inclinations, to keep the commandments and to perform good works. In contrition itself three niveaus can be distinguished from whence it is possible to ascend; sorrow for fear of punishment, sorrow which springs from a desire for heaven and sorrow arising from a desire for union with God. The writer is very ingenious in inventing such ascents from one plane to another. It was evidently a very attractive allegory, as were the *scalae* or steps. The highest step attainable here on earth is the *contemplatio*; the mystical contemplation of God, still, naturally, in a glass darkly and not face to face. Gerard Zerbolt knows of this contemplation and gives the ways which may lead to it, such as spiritual reading and meditation via purification. He does not, however, like Ruusbroec, describe the state of contemplation. In so far one can say that these Devotionalists came no further than indicating the ascesis, than describing the purifying and light-giving way which is love. In the end, the struggle against sin and sinful inclinations, the pointing out and avoidance of dangers, acquired a greater place and more emphasis that the practice of the virtues, with the possible exception of humility, obedience and love. Finally, a large part of the book *De spiritualibus ascensionibus* consists of material for meditation, derived from the four last things, death, judgment, hell or heaven and the life, and especially the passion, of Christ.

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The description of this meditation material, whereby some have also noted a particular method and time, has led to the idea that the Modern Devotionalists introduced methodical meditation into the spiritual life. It is supposed not to have existed before them, whereas it later became, among the Jesuits, one of the most powerful methods of fostering, heightening and maintaining an extremely devout and effective spiritual life. One cannot deny that the later writers, John Mombaer and Wessel Gansfort, drew up a comprehensive and complicated method of meditating and keeping thoughts in check. L.A.M. Goossens O.F.M., has shown, however, that this cannot be said of the first Devotionalists, of those whom we are discussing in this first period of the Devotio Moderna. He has pointed out that the subject of meditation occurs frequently in the writings of Geert Groote, Florens Radewijns, Gerard Zerbolt and certain anonymous works or letters. The first Devotionalists view meditation as an important means of attaining a pure life, fostering virtue and especially of keeping alive the good intention of directing their prayers, works and exercises to God. They were aware of the association of spiritual reading (called study), meditation, prayer and contemplation, but their ideas on this subject were entirely traditional. What they mean by the word meditation, ‘rumination,’ is distinct from spiritual reading. ‘The concept of the Modern Devotionalists is similar to that of their favourite authors: William of St. Thierry, Bernard, the speculum monachorum, Bonaventura, David of Augsburg and other valued, pious writers. Meditation is distinguished from prayer, but not separate from it, insofar as a good prayer cannot be achieved without meditation, without reflection. This too is entirely traditional and can be found in Hugo of St. Victor. The above-mentioned writers, the fathers of the Modern Devotionalists, also called this examination of conscience meditation, as did their predecessors.’ The Devotionalist furthermore

1 H. Watrigant S.J., De examine conscientiae juxta ecclesiae patres, sanctum Thomam, et fratres vitae communis, Enghien 1909; La méditation méthodique et l'école des frères de la Vie Commune, Revue d'ascètique et de mystique III (1922) 134-155; Quelques promoteurs de la méditation méthodique au XVº siècle. Paris 1919...This opinion is generally accepted in the literature. Defended by, among others, M. van Woerkum S.C.J., who edited Florens' work: Omnes inquit artes, and J. van Rooy, the latest biographer of Gerard Zerbolt.


3 Ibid., p. 104, 118.

4 Ibid., 104-105.

5 Ibid., 118.

6 Ibid., 121-131.
must every day persevere in constant meditation. John of Kessel, the cook of the Master Florens' house, shows us how this was understood, in what he tells us of his daily task, his programme for the day and meditation.\(^1\) The Brothers must constantly entertain higher thoughts and at each succeeding duty of the day they must call these to mind, to inspire them to perform the next task, in the first hour or half hour that follows, with this particular higher intention. Just as the evening is particularly suitable for examination of conscience, the morning is the most indicated for determining that day's intention. But this is not meditation in the modern sense: 'The constitution of the Brothers does not expressly mention morning meditation as a separate exercise.'\(^2\) On the contrary the letter on the life and passion of the Lord desires that a short prayer should be said directly on rising. Busch takes this to mean that the Brothers on rising, should reflect on the first point.\(^3\) This morning meditation is not an exercise of longer duration, as Goossens deduces from various data,\(^4\) and as has previously been indicated. This is confirmed by a book published under the title *Consuetudines fratrum vitae communis*\(^5\) which gives a detailed account of how a *frater* spends his day. There is indeed mention of constant or frequently repeated reflection, but not of a meditation of any duration in the morning. One may agree with Goossens that 'a slight reservation must be made for the meditative hearing of Mass, insofar as this constitutes a longer meditation. By its very nature, however, and by the tradition with which the Modern Devotionalists are associated, this meditative hearing of Mass cannot automatically be considered as an exercise in meditation.'\(^6\)

Under the title of *modus* and *formula* Gerard Zerbolt does in fact give all kinds of examples of meditation (reflection on sin, on death, on the bounty of God and especially on the life of Christ). This however, is only material for meditation, on the basis of which one cannot speak of methodical meditation.\(^7\) Whatever system it did possess is certainly not new. It is to some extent inherent in the very nature of the thing and is already found in Bernard.\(^8\) The intention in speaking of sin,

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2. Ibid., 165.
3. Ibid., 166-167.
4. Ibid., 168.
6. Goossens 175.
7. Ibid., 187.
8. Ibid., 196.

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and the life and passion of Christ, is to provide a stimulus for pious thoughts and not a method for a long exercise in meditation.

Nevertheless, these oft repeated short reflections, this ruminating on the eternal verities which define the Christian life, created an intensive piety among the Brothers. This devotion, while retaining the outward forms of religion (hours, Mass, kneeling, rising, bowing) has yet an intensive inward life. For everything undertaken, Matins, Prime, Holy Mass, Vespers, morning and evening prayer, even eating and working, is always performed in the light of sin and redemption, purification, love of Christ, of God and of one's neighbour. The reports in the *Vitae* and the resolutions mentioned show that this goal was pursued with the utmost seriousness, so much so that it became almost intolerable for human flesh and blood, and only the strongest were able to persevere. The death rate among the young Brothers was high, not only on account of their abstemiousness, but also because the tension was too great. This attitude, however, was a fortunate stimulus for the religious life of the day. This inner life among the Brothers did not lead to extravagant behaviour and morbid acts, that is if one excepts the matter of dress and humiliation by a blow in the face. And yet it is possible to detect a proselytism which denies all family relationships, an inner conceit, contemptuous of all that was not theirs and especially of the worldly man.¹

John Brinckerinck, the pupil and faithful travelling companion of Geert Groote, rector of the Master Geert's house, founder and first spiritual director of the convent of Diepenveen, left no other writings than eight collations spoken by him and noted down by the Sisters.² These are simple addresses to the Sisters in which he reminds them of the obligations of their state. He touches upon the receiving of Holy Communion, whereby the reception must be accompanied by great fervour, a pure soul, with faith and love. He also mentions 'spiritual communion.' ‘Try to do all that Our Lord wishes us to do.’ The foremost duty is the love of God and of Christ, but just as there is no suggestion of higher mysticism with the first, the second lacks any incitement to union with the Bridegroom by the way of mysticism.³ Then follows love of one's neighbour, which in this case refers chiefly

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³ Kühler, 184.

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to the Sisters. It finds expression in the effort to promote the spiritual good of the Sisters, to help the sick and needy and to display charity towards those they have reprimanded. Also emphasized are obedience to the superior (this sometimes in very strong terms), patience towards fellow Sisters, and humility. He is thus more concerned in fostering virtue than in combating the corresponding sin which is by no means absent. He strongly warned against pride. Religious sensitivity was strongly developed among the Sisters. Several of them were repeatedly moved to tears at Holy Communion or when considering the Passion.\(^1\) They so earnestly desired to receive the Lord that they could not sleep for nights beforehand.Visions also occurred, but these were not frequent.\(^2\)

The Sisters too achieved some ascetic writings. The most important is undoubtedly the work already mentioned: *Hier beginnen sommige stichtige punten van onsen oelden zusteren*. This was only written in the following period, around 1480. We have already deduced from it details of the devout life of the Sisters. Their religious methods and practices were the same as among the Brothers. They took no official monastic vows but rose early and prayed the hours in the Dutch tongue. They attended Holy Mass and worked hard (besides the house and farmwork they also did spinning and weaving in order to earn a living), all this elevated and maintained on an exalted plane by pious reflections (meditation or ‘rumination’ and short prayers). The principal source of this meditation is the Holy Scripture, especially the life and passion of Christ.\(^3\) Gese Brandes can be quoted for example.\(^4\) Great emphasis was also laid on sobriety at table and to listening attentively to the Sister who was praying aloud. There is also mention here of humiliation by a blow on the cheek from the superioress.\(^5\)

Two writers, Henry Mande and Gerlach Peters, emerged among the Windesheimers of this period. They are related to each other, were contemporaries and their writings are still read.\(^6\) Mande was a

\(^1\) D. de Man, *Hier beginnen sommige stichtige punten van onsen oelden zusteren*, ’s-Gravenhage, 1919, Inleiding XLIII, L.
\(^3\) *Ibid.*, 154.
\(^4\) *Ibid.*, 20. Zij ‘was alten vuerigen, goddienstigen menxke, soedat si mit rechte wal “brant” mochte hieten, want si was ondertijden soe devoet ende ingekiet onder missen ende oek ander taeflen, dat si die devosie die si van bynnen gevoelde, van buten niet verbergen en conde.’
\(^6\) Thomas a Kempis also lived in this period, but had not yet begun his most important work. He will thus be discussed later.

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Hollander, born around 1360 in Holland's oldest and probably at that time, still largest city of Dordrecht. He worked as a writer (secretary or calligrapher) in the court of the Counts of Holland, not very accurately named by John Busch for William VI and Margaret of Burgundy, when he heard Geert Groote preaching.\(^1\) This brought about his conversion. A few years later he made his way to Deventer where Florens and his Brothers received him with open arms, and when he had passed some time with them (or spoken to them, \textit{conversatus}) he was sent to Windesheim. If the journey to Deventer took place in 1391, as is generally assumed\(^2\), this ‘stay’ can only have been of very short duration, since Florens wrote to John Vos of Heusden, prior of Windesheim (elected about the feast of the apostle Andrew, 30th November 1391) saying that he expected Arnold of Kalkar, John Broechusen and Henry Mande to receive their habits. The first two were indeed clothed on June 5th 1392. The letter must thus have been written at the end of 1391 or the beginning of 1392. Since the clothing had to be preceded by a novitiate, Hendrik Mande must already have left Deventer in the middle of 1391. His clothing took place on November 11th 1395 and he was only accepted as a ‘redditus’, not a canon, since there was some impediment for the priesthood.\(^3\) He continued to live quietly in Windesheim, glad that he was not called to any function in the monastery. He probably stayed there until Windesheim was deserted during the schism of Utrecht. In 1430 he sojourned in a monastery in Delft, together with his fellow Brother John Busch. He died in 1431 in Beverwijk.\(^4\) Henry Mande was contented in the monastic life. He occupied himself illuminating manuscripts and writing treatises in the Dutch language. John Busch has listed 14 titles in Latin\(^5\), supplemented in a later version.

Bibliographical data can be found in G. Visser.\(^6\) Of the fourteen, four titles are known in a Dutch text and can be obtained in modern print. The number of surviving manuscripts is small, less than those of the Latin works of Florens Radewijns and especially of Gerard

\(^1\) Ed. Grube, 122.
\(^3\) It is not known which, probably some physical handicap. J. Busch, 123.
\(^4\) G. Visser, 28.
\(^5\) Busch 124-125, while he edited the Apocalypse in the latin translation; Cap. XLIV, p. 125-126.
\(^6\) Pp. 38-58, later supplemented by others.

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Zerbolt. None of them seems to have achieved a previous printing. We give the titles here:

I. Een devoet boexken, hoe dat wij uit selen doen den ouden mensche mit sinen werken, ende ons met Cristo overmits warachtighe, doechden sellen verenighen.  

II. Een devoet boesckens vanden binnensten ons lief heren Jhesu Christi ende hoemen daer in comen mach ende wat wegke daarin leiden. The plan of this book coincides with Bonaventure's work: *De septem itineribus aeternitatis*, the last section even word for word.

III. Een devoet boexen van der volmaecster hoecheit der minnen ende hoe men daer toe sel pinen te comen.

IV. Van den VII gaven des heiligen geest en eerst van der gave der smakender wijsheet - survives in only one manuscript, but, apart from the curtailing of certain allegories, the book is the same as Ruusbroec's *Dat boec van den gheesteleken tabernacule*.

V. Een spiegel der waarheid.

VI. Dat boec vanden licht der waerheid.

VII. Een boesckijn van drien staten eens bekierden mensche, daerin begrepen is ein volcomen geestelic leven.

VIII. Enel claghe of enighe sprake des mijnender sielen tot horen brudgeom om verloest to (worden).

IX. Een corte enighe sprake der minnender sielen mit horen gheminden.

X. Een devoet boesckijn van der bereydinghe ende versieringhe onser inwendigher woeninghen.

XI. Dialogus sive collocucion devote anime cum deo amanto suo et

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2 Preserved in the same MS. Brussels, also one in Gaesdonck and 's-Gravenhage, Weesper collection no. 29, printed in Visser, App. II... p. 18-43.
3 G. Visser 35.
4 Preserved in aforementioned Brussels MS, ed. by G. Visser, App. III, p. 43-47.
5 G. Visser, 39-43.
7 Preserved in the same MS., as mentioned under 6; ed. by G. Visser, App. IV, pp. 77-89.
responsio eius ad animam devotam: or: Liber de vita spirituali et devota in quibus consistit et eius impedimenta.¹

XII. Liber de vita contemplativa, in quibus consistit et puncta, quibus impeditur.²

XIII. Eyne openbaringhe. Liber de raptibus et collucationibus cum deo et dei secum decem habens capitula secundum decem revelationes diversis temporibus sibi factas. Probably different titles for the same work.

XIV. The Dutch text of Hendrik Mande's Apocalipsis.³

Henry Mande was, like Florens and Gerard Zerbolt, a most remarkable man. He entered the monastery rather late, and was often ill, roughly a quarter of the year. Once restored to health, however, he resumed his work with enthusiasm, and he is spoken of as an extremely good painter and illuminator of missals, bibles and choir books.⁴ A man of deep devotion and ecstatic contemplation, he could never hear Mass without tears. He shed an abundance of tears especially at Holy Communion. During his periods of illness he received the Holy Sacrament every fortnight, whenever the Brothers in the choir communicated.⁵ He frequently had visions, notably concerning the fate of those who had already died. He spoke of these visions to the others, and was often consulted on the subject. Not all, however, believed in his assurances. In his books he interspersed his reflections with stories or examples in which a Brother applies in practice what he has expounded theoretically. They are interesting stories, usually set in a monastic cell, but in such a way that the priest or Brother or monastic is suddenly whisked away to another, higher world, where he sees, hears and works with different faculties than in this world. When the story was ended there was a return to the ordinary world and the pater found himself once again in his cell. The simple yet out of the ordinary characters of these examples render his works clear, readable and attractive. Since they were composed in the vernacular they will have been accessible not only to the priests, who understood Latin, but also the the Brothers and Sisters. It is doubtful, however, whether lay people outside the monastery would have been

¹ Not yet discovered, Nieuw archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis I, 250.
² Not yet discovered.
⁴ Busch, 123.
⁵ Ibid., 123-124.

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able to appreciate this literature. One cannot, in my opinion, consider these books as lay literature, simply because they were written in the vernacular. The content is clerical, even though it contains criticism of the clergy.

His works differ from those of Florens Radewijns and Gerard Zerbolt, not only in language, but also in content. In general they can be said to form part of those works of lofty mysticism which consist in the description of the ‘contemplation of God,’ the union of the soul with God. Several of the treatises, however, do not go so far, but they are a preparation for the extraordinary gift of God. This is held up as the highest goal, as the aim of the fervent devotion, even if it is not attained in this life, but only in the hereafter. No such description is found in numbers I, VI, VIII, or X (and perhaps not in XI), little in number III, but some in number II in imitation of Bonaventure, in number IV entirely in accordance with John Ruusbroec, more independently in numbers V, VII and IX and in a somewhat different meaning in number XIII, the Apocalypse. Number XII is still unknown. But apart from the very characteristic subject matter of this last group, they are unlike those of the Brothers' two contemporaries, since these lacked the ideal of achieving the extraordinary. In order to attain this end the devout must renounce many things. They must follow the way of purification. Here Henry Mande encroaches on the Brothers' domain, but his exposition of this way is not so scholastic. The point of origin is not the Fall, sin and the struggle against sin. Naturally Mande also finds it necessary to combat sin and mentions this, but always in the light of union with God. This renders his work more attractive and less oppressive, although he frequently denies that the main consideration is the sweetness and joy of a union with God. This is not even a sign of the genuine contemplative soul. He lays more stress upon virtue than on the struggle against sin. Appropriate emphasis is given to the virtues of faith, hope and especially of charity. He is most detailed and most devout in his treatment of charity. If the spiritual quality of the others can be characterized as negative, Mande is more positive - more exhilarating, encouraging and joyful. It is no wonder that he easily assimilated St. Bonaventure's exposition. The whole is more directly focussed on God. The imitation of Christ is one of the ways of attaining union with God. In indicating these ways he shows himself very fond of listing points, frequently remarking that, in order to attain this or that, four or five points must be borne in mind.
In order to give some impression of what he understands by this ‘contemplation’ of God in this life, I attempt here to translate into modern language a passage from the book called ‘a mirror,’ (No. V): ‘God dwells in us in four ways. By your eternal light, beloved Lord, I am taught that you dwell in me in four ways, that is, with four attributes. You dwell within me, merciful Lord, with your own clarity and richness, with your union, and with your being. And when I, full of love, turn about in the simplicity of my spirit, I shall find and possess these four attributes in God. And thus shall my spirit be transformed fourfold.

In the first moment when, entire and full of love, I penetrate in the simplicity of my spirit, then I meet the immeasurable divine clarity and my mind thereby becomes so bereft of activity and so empty of all images, as if I had never seen or heard any new thing.

Secondly you dwell, Lord, in the simplicity of my spirit with unfathomable richness. For this reason, in the same introspection in which I also encountered the divine clarity, then I apprehended this richness, and in this richness my spirit is so detached and so free from all wishes and desires, as if there were nothing in heaven or earth that I needed, for I am united with your richness, which is yourself. This emptiness of my “introspective” will continue with your richness, which is a foundation in the ground of my loving power. Thereby at the same moment that I retired within your divine clarity and in your richness I apprehended the third attribute, that is the union (enynge) which you, dear Lord, have made in my spirit. By virtue of this union I have become detached, which means that I have no desire to please anyone, so that no one, drawing me to themselves, can please me. No creature may shelter or dwell in this union and thus I remain always alone with you, and free of all things.

Fourthly, dear Lord, you dwell in the simplicity of my spirit with your being (nature) and therefore, when I, through your divine clarity and richness and union, leave myself with you, conquer everything and reject every multiplicity and every distinction, then I arrive at the simple nakedness of my being and this is (in my simple vision) as a desolate pride in which no physical or spiritual image can enter ever more.”

Such an experience or very special grace, is a very personal thing, reserved to a few chosen mystical souls. The church has no role to play in obtaining it, except perhaps to ensure that no excesses occur which she considers dangerous for the faithful. It is an extraordinary

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experience which cannot be attained either through her preaching or through her channels of grace. It is a personal contact of the privileged person with God himself - insofar as this is possible in this world. Even the imitation of Christ's life and passion can only serve as a preparation for it. That a person so privileged makes no mention of the Church's intervention, of her preaching or of her sacraments, in experiencing and describing such a superhuman condition, by no means implies that he rejects the church as such, holds her in less esteem or disassociates himself from her. This is clear in Mande's case by the very fact that he attends Mass and receives fortnightly communion, even on his sickbed, both with an abundance of tears. Here, the same over-sensitive contact with Christ is revealed, as in ecstasy with God. Both are essentially the same - the fullness of joy, although the sweetness is not the real cause of the value of this especial election. Nor has one the right to require of the fortunate mystic that he should compose a detailed profession of faith and acquaint us with it. There was nothing new in this for them. Mande, like his fellow Brothers, clung to this, and who can demand that he should explain this every time after having freely revealed so many particular gifts of grace?

The second mystical writer of the first period of the monastery at Windesheim was Gerlach Peters, from Deventer. He is thought to have been born in 1378, and certainly died on Nov. 18th 1411 as a canon of Windesheim.¹ He attended school in Deventer, then came into contact with the fraters of the Florens' house and notably with Florens himself. According to John Busch, Florens personally advised him to enter the monastery and also introduced him in Windesheim. The last possible date for this is thus 1400, the year in which Florens Radewijns died. He may already have undergone a sort of novitiate in the hospice in Deventer. This occurred most probably after 1398. Anyway, whatever the position, he was not invested as a canon until 1403.² Busch attributes the delay to Peters's poor sight. It appears that only one eye functioned, so that he was unable to read the notes and the script of the choir books. However, his fellow brother John Scutken made him two little antiphonaria and a graduale in his free time, while the conversus Bartholomew wrote a psalterium for him.

¹ His life is described by J. Busch, pp. 156-164. Some details of his youth in de Man, Hier beginnen sommige stichtende punten p. 16-48; in the life of Lubbe Peters, a sister of Gerlach.
² Acquoy III 268.
This appears to have furnished him with sufficient material to perform his duties as a canon. He was then clothed. His remarkable piety is revealed by his absorption in prayer and at Mass. The latter so impressed John Brinckerinck that the memory of it provided him with spiritual sustenance for a week. Peters was also renowned for his love of his neighbour and for his obedience. He wrote two or three works: the *Breviloquium* and the *Soliloquium* and the book *De libertatis spiritu* which has been lost, always assuming that it ever existed. His two letters to his sister Lubbe have also been preserved. Although Spoelhof considers that there is ‘nothing new’ in the writings of Gerlach Peters and that ‘they did not represent an advance in the ideals, which have been described as typically those of the Brethren of the Common Life’ he none the less also sees in Peters ‘the emphasis on inner freedom and personal independence in religious experience.’ Personal contact with God is peculiar to the mystic, but it is doubtful whether this is the same thing as ‘personal independence in religious experience.’ While inner freedom is indeed mentioned in the *soliloquium*, it is not a freedom of thought but a feeling free from all passions and a victory over all self-seeking. It results from complete submission to God, from a refusal to worry about one’s own illnesses, pain, setbacks or grief, since the joy of being united with God is much greater.

Of considerable importance for our knowledge of Gerlach Peters is the study by J.J. Mak, *De dietsche vertaling van Gerlach Peter's soliloquium*. Besides giving his estimable opinion of the Modern Devotionalists, he describes the history of the works of Gerlach Peters already mentioned, in manuscript and print, and the relationship between these works. He then edits the Old Dutch translation of the *soliloquium*. As introduction he discusses the content of this work in detail and examines the question of Peter's indebtedness to his predecessors, notably John Ruusbroec and especially the Germans Tauler and Eckhart. Gerlach Peters was acquainted with their writings and sometimes employs their terms. He shows more connection with Eckhart than

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1 Busch, 157.
2 D. de Man, *Hier beginnen* etc. 18.
4 Spoelhof also mentions the first, but evidently attached no significance to the second. 186.
5 Spoelhof 187.
7 Diss. Utrecht 1936.

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with Ruusbroec. For all these particulars I must refer the reader to the study in question. Since we are here concerned principally with the Modern Devotionalists, of whom Gerlach Peters was one of many representatives, I shall confine myself now to summarizing the characteristics of his work.

In all probability the works and the letters as we now know them are not in the form in which they were written by Peters. It is even likely that Peters never got around to compiling his *Breviloquium* and *Soliloquium*. He noted down his thoughts in his cell, elaborated them sometimes, but did not expand them into treatises. He even desired that the *scripta* should be burned after his death. However, on the prior's orders, canon John Scutken collected the papers and compiled both the two books and the letters from them. The texts do indeed seem to have been somewhat arbitrarily reshuffled, so that several similar passages occur in the letters and in the works. It thus sometimes comes about that passages of a purely ascetic nature and those which are purely mystical are linked together rather unfortunately. On whether everything was exactly as Mak states, I can offer no opinion. The *Soliloquium* gives the impression of being, not a well-reasoned book, but a random collection of ideas which have been elaborated and written down, and for which Scutken has provided his own headings. None the less, these thoughts are Gerlach Peters' own and may thus be used here to give some indication of his ideas.

The *Breviloquium*¹ may be compared with the *Proposita* of Geert Groote and the *quaedam notabilia verba domini Florentii*; or with the *Devota exercitia* of Lubbert Berneri or of Amilius of Buren or John of Kessel. He does, however, go deeper than these, since they confine themselves to the *ascesis* whereas Gerlach Peters hopes, prays and resolves to attain ‘union’ with God. This idea occupies chiefly the first sixteen chapters, for example number 2: In all grief, in inward and outward difficulties, have constantly a safer refuge in the Father, your Lord and Bridegroom,² and therefore respect and consider all men as the throne of the glory of the Holy Trinity, as the temple in which God dwells;³ but the search for the Lord must be of pure intent, without hoping for advantage or consolation.⁴ We must not

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1 Ed. W. Moll, *Kerkhistorisch archief* II (1859) 174-199. Also by J.J. Mak. This work is supposed to have been written before 1403 (i.e. when Gerlach was still a cleric), but there are so many references to illness, that a later period of his life seems indicated.
2 Moll, 174.
strive for heaven in order to avoid the cross; we must aspire not to joy, but to God.\footnote{Moll, 180.}

In No. 16 Gerlach proceeds to the good intentions for a regularly monastic life: Model all your outward and inner exercises on the example and the doctrine of Our Lord Jesus Christ.\footnote{Ibid., 182-183.} Then follows how the monastic must begin, live and end his day: Rise, pious thoughts, preparation for Matins; sleep, reject all imaginings and also all good thoughts (for it is time to sleep); do not singularize yourself when eating, act normally and remember that it is for your salvation. Then follows the reading, which must conduce to prayer and to reflection (meditation); after this the \textit{scriptura}, writing, that is the work of the hands. Chapters 24 and 25 are also concerned with this activity.\footnote{Ibid., 184-185.} This section follows exactly the rota laid down in the \textit{consuetudines} of the Deventer and Zwolle fraternities, which will have been the same for Windesheim. There is no place here either for any lengthy period of meditation in the mornings. Various resolutions follow, which I shall not enumerate here, but one remarkable feature is the bearing of pain and sickness with complete surrender to God. This is a frequent theme in the \textit{Soliloquium}. But Gerlach remains an optimist, \textit{semper tranquillus et spiritualiter laetus esto}.\footnote{Ibid., 186.} His opinion is also noteworthy, that incurable physical infirmities are sent by God (\textit{causa Dei}, or with His approval).\footnote{Ibid., 188.} Later he has only the \textit{causa Dei}.\footnote{Nonne qui quotidie et incurabiliter causa Dei hic infirmatur et tribulatur, p. 190, and further Ex multis annis et longo tempore in obsequio tuo et tua causa talem et tantam infirmitatem acquisivi 190-191.}

This is interesting, for it was in the 14th century that Bradwardine wrote a book called \textit{‘Causa Dei’} which ascribes all spiritual and material happenings in this world directly to God. The book aroused some attention when it was published, but was also attacked from several sides. A century later Wessel Gansfort ruled out the distinctive effect of the \textit{secundae causae}, and called them only \textit{occasiones}, occasions in which God acted. It is improbable that Gerlach Peters should have been aware of the controversy unleashed by Bradwardine, but it was evidently a widely held opinion at the time, appropriate too to the mystical idea of union with God. United with Him, Gerlach suffered all, since he was entirely absorbed in God's will. For him as for

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the Brothers, humility and patience were the source of all virtues.¹

Gerlach's first letter to his sister Lubbe Peters, procuratrix in Diepenveen, has come down to us in Dutch. The greater part is based upon the *Breviloquium*, but it is none the less adapted to the particular situation of the Sisters. She must perform the work assigned to them, but attempt to be united with God. The love of humanity which proceeded therefrom must be displayed particularly towards her fellow Sisters, by her joy, her esteem, her magnanimity, and by always thinking the best of them.² The second letter to Lubbe, also preserved in Dutch, shows on the other hand much similarity with Gerlach's *Soliloquium*.³ It contains the same mysticism, the same ‘union’ with God and the obligations and fruits which proceed from this.⁴

The *Soliloquium* was Gerlach Peters' greatest and best known work and the work which made him famous. Here I must refer again to the study of J.J. Mak who in 1936 could not only indicate the existence of 40 manuscripts, but also pointed out that the *Soliloquium* was used and highly esteemed by the Port Royalists in the 17th century and even enjoyed celebrity in the beginning of the 18th. I have had recourse here to Mak's Middle Dutch translation⁵ with its extensive analysis and linguistic introductions. In Chapter IX the Lord speaks and describes how he gave to Gerlach ‘zyн aansicht aenscouwende,’ the power to contemplate God, so that whatever is in him becomes ‘like unto God’ since, so far as is possible, he receives God's beauty and likeness. Gerlach was able to arrange his life in the power granted by God, and withstand all enemies. They could not withstand the likeness which Gerlach has received. He stands before God free and liberated from all historical memories. All confusion, doubt and fear have left him, since he is one with the spirit of God. Hence God accomplished all His works in him, so that no longer he works, but God works in him. This is because the passions no longer resist the things of God. This likeness to God has also taken over all sicknesses. God has all power over him, so that he has become a fitting instrument for God's work. God sees through Gerlach's eyes, speaks and sings through his mouth, and hears through his ear. This idea

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² Ed. by W. Moll, 189.
³ Ed. by W. Moll, l.c. 225-229.
⁴ J.J. Mak, 74-76.
This activity and this grace of God was preceded by a preparation described in the first chapters of this work, although not so scholastically or so systematically as in Florens Radewijns or Gerard Zerbolt. It consisted in the fulfilment of virtue by the combating of sin, and the complete sacrifice of oneself. It is God's intention that this state should be permanent, but it may disappear as a result of man's attitude. The possessor of this gift must defend it against the attacks of his self-love. All preoccupation with self, all worry about his illness, about the taunts of his fellow Brothers and especially about the devil, cease. A couple of chapters are devoted to this, alternated with fresh new descriptions of the ‘contemplative’ situation. These, however, do not add anything to what has gone before.

This devotion, this mystical life of Henry Mande and Gerlach Peters, differs completely from that of the Brothers, who evidently shunned mysticism in this sense. It is thus difficult to accept that both writers gained their inspiration on this subject during their brief sojourn among the Brethren in Deventer. Gerlach seems to me to go further than Henry Mande. For Mande, ecstasy is an activity unto God. With Gerlach the activity appears only on God's side. This, for the rest, does not indicate any quietism on Gerlach's part, who in these spiritual moments had still to contend with the world, the devil and the flesh.
Chapter Nine
The Brethren of the Common Life From 1420 to 1480/85

Further dispersion. Closer definition of their task. Erasmus among the Brothers.

In the preceding chapter, we described the origin and development of the congregation of the Brethren of the Common Life, together with that of the Sisters and of the Windesheim chapter. We paid particular attention to the character, aims, task, life and religious experience of the members of these three foundations. This chapter now, will trace the further development and especially the dispersion of the fraters.

We shall examine whether any change took place in their character, aims, language, life and religious experience. We shall consider this new period as extending up to 1480-85, when the first Humanists made their appearance in the Devotionalists' field of activity. It was also around this time that certain houses had their histories written down and that the section of the Brothers in central Germany suddenly received the expansion with a somewhat different character. In addition, the competition of the printers must have made itself felt, or at least have begun to be feared around 1480.

The Fraternity of St. Gregory in Deventer had already embarked upon a house chronicle before 1480 and may thus have set the example for the other houses. These chronicles consisted mainly of short biographies of the deceased Brothers, arranged according to the year of death and sometimes preceded by the biography of the rector. In Deventer this was also placed according to the year of death. During this period the Deventer house had only two rectors, Godfried of Toorn (1410-1450) and Egbert ter Beek (1450-1483). As is usual with this sort of exercise, these biographical notices always bore the

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1 Whenever only little is known of certain German houses after 1485, then it is mentioned also in this chapter.
2 Scriptum Rudolf Dier de Muden. ed. G. Dumbar, Analecta I Deventer 1719, 1-113; Continuatio composita per Petrum Hoorn, 114-162, and the Vita Egberti ter Beek, 162-178; Vita Domini Johannis Hattem 179-223. Then follows a source of a different kind: Registrum bonorum domus D. Florencii, 224-244.

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character of a *laudatio*, a eulogy on the activities and virtues of the deceased. They must thus be read and used with a certain amount of scepticism. They do however provide many significant facts which cannot be doubted and also reveal the ideals which inspired the writers. These may be considered as the true characteristics of the Brotherhood.

There is no record of the number of inmates of the Deventer house during this period. They were certainly not very numerous, but still consisted of priests who are in charge, *clerici* who may reasonably be considered as future priests, and two or three laymen who performed the duties of cook, tailor and baker. There is no instance of a layman becoming a cleric. Anyone who entered as a laybrother continued in this position until his death. This held good no matter what his standard of education. Mathias Gerardzoon of Zutphen (ob. 1459) for example, was so familiar with the Holy Scriptures from reading and meditation ‘that he seemed not a layman but a cleric,’¹ and Paul Sceper from Kirtzich (Gulik) († 1466) who had attended school in Deventer and entered the Fraternity as a pupil of the second highest class (*secundarius*) worked there as a cook until his death. He had thus at least one year more of study than the boys who went from school to the university (*tertiani*), as Erasmus hoped to do as a pupil of the third class. In fact the syllabus of the second and first classes resembled that of the Arts Faculty in the university. This Brother thus had a broader school knowledge than most of the clerics and priests.²

The assumption that there were a great number of *fraters* is contradicted by the account of the deceased Brothers between the years 1428 and 1473. During this period 25 persons died, roughly one every two years, and this at a time when the plague was constantly recurring. In 1429 alone it accounted for 5 *fraters*.³ We may compare this figure with the fifty deaths suffered by the Sisters of the Common Life in Deventer in the same year.⁴ Of the Brothers in question 6 were priests, 12 clerics and 7 laymen. The death figure for the lay brothers was comparatively higher. The ratio of 6 priests and 12 clerics may be said to accord with our earlier report that the community probably consisted of at least 4 priests and 12 clerics. The data available are not sufficient to prove that those who entered as clerics usually became priests after a time, as I showed for the Zwolle house and will prove

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¹ Dumbar, *Analecta* I 126.
² Ibid., 139.
³ Ibid., 78-81.
⁴ Ibid., 124, 137.
for a later period. We may, however, recall that according to the Chronicle, such a promotion was considered normal (see pg. 206). Paul Sceper, who had received a good preliminary education, but who did not aspire to the priesthood, was asked if he did not resent the fact that younger candidates were elevated to the priesthood year after year. One could also cite John of Esch († 1453) who rejoiced shortly before his death that he had continued in the lowly state of clericus, while his uncle, the deacon of St. Severinus of Cologne, had done his best to have him ordained priest and furnish him with sufficient prebends. Priests were needed for the direction of the house, for the schoolboys' hostel, for the pastoral care of the schoolgoing youth and to be directors of the Sisterhouses. There were several of these in Deventer and Zutphen and they were served by the Brothers.

Deventer was little implicated in this progressive expansion. The house in Delft, which had been founded from Deventer, and where a large section of the Brothers had adopted the Rule of St. Francis in 1418, transferring to the stricter one of St. Augustine in 1433, was given a fresh chance in 1435 when the Regulars vacated the house and left the buildings to the fraters. It was from Zwolle however, and not from Deventer, that they received assistance, and even this aid was not yet effective. The exile of the fraters and their stay in Zutphen from 1426 to 1432, did not lead to a new foundation in that city, as did the sojourn of the Zwolle fraters in Doesburg. Shortly after the return to Deventer, however, news came that Henry Wellens of Sichem, chaplain of the Church of St. Peter in Louvain, had bequeathed the hospice he had founded to the Brothers (he died on Feb. 25th, 1433) for them to found a community. That very year the Deventer Brothers Gillis Walram and Werner of Zutphen left for Louvain. The first became rector and the second left the fraternity shortly before. On their journey to Liège, where John of Hattem, later procurator of Deventer, was to be ordained priest, he and Peter of Amsterdam visited their colleagues in Louvain. This was probably around 1435 when the Utrecht schism had not yet been completely resolved. It is possible that Peter of Amsterdam was also on his way to be ordained, since he is already called Dominus here and is later mentioned as a priest. In any case they were hospitably received in Louvain. Shortly afterwards

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1 Dumbar, 139. *Analecta I*  
2 Ibid., 121.  
3 Schoengen 19.  
4 Dumbar, *Analecta I*, 182.  
5 Ibid., 227.  
6 Ibid., 182, 227.

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however, Gillis Walram left the ranks of the Brethren of the Common Life - contemptible in the eyes of men - in quest of a more respected state within the Church. He became a Canon Regular. In 1447 the house was incorporated in the Windesheim union of monasteries as Vallis sancti Martini.\footnote{J. Molani, \textit{Historiae Lovaniensium libri XIV}, ed. F.X. de Ram I, 1861, 284, 293. Edw. van Even, \textit{Louvain dans le passé et dans le présent}. Louvain 1895, 483, 484. Louvain Archives MSS 4338, 4234, J. Lourdaux, \textit{De Moderne Devotie te Leuven} O.G.E. 17 (1963) 5, 402.} The Brethren from Deventer were not very fortunate with their foundations. A section of the Brothers from Amersfoort and Delft and all those from Louvain became monastics. Several years later the rector, Egbert van Beek, (1435-1487) attempted to establish a new foundation at Emmerich through his blood relative Dirk ter Wiel. After much effort and many difficulties he succeeded.\footnote{Dumbar, \textit{Analecta I}, 175. See further p. 415.} Nevertheless, the Deventer house remained a focal point in that it recruited its novices from a wide region. In this the city school was a great attraction. The Brothers came from Leyden, Amsterdam, Muiden, Hoorn, Arnhem and Zutphen, but also from Flanders, Brabant, the Rhineland, the Liège region and to a lesser extent from the surrounding districts. They feared that the relatives of these latter would cause too much trouble for the house. Egbert ter Beek was an exception who was only admitted after long deliberation. What an asset he turned out to be!

Throughout the whole of the 15th century, the school of the chapter church in the city of Deventer comprised more classes than those of the other cities, with the possible exception of Zwolle. Besides the normal classes of \textit{octava, septima, sexta, quinta, quarta} and \textit{tertia}, it had also \textit{secunda} and \textit{prima}. A longer study was possible than elsewhere, and students were better prepared either for the university or for a task in church or society. Henry Donkels from Tongeren for example, came to Deventer \textit{causa studii}, obtained lodgings in the fraters' hostel and entered the Fraternity at the age of 21.\footnote{Ibid., 124.} Rudolf Dier from Muiden too, came to Deventer in Florens' time as a boy of 13, and having completed school (\textit{completo scholasticali studio}) he was accepted as a novice by the Brothers and finally became a member of the Fraternity.\footnote{Ibid., 127.} Paul Sceper from Kirtzich in Gulik attended the school of Deventer and joined the congregation as a pupil of the second class.\footnote{Ibid., 139.}
There was also Bernard Meyer who was born in Deventer, attended the school and later became a teacher. It was only then that he entered the congregation, was ordained priest as a man of 31 and died two years later in 1467. To judge from the great humiliations imposed upon him and his task of *scriptorarius* in the house, he must have abandoned his teaching career on entering.¹ We must also assume that John Willemssen of Kempen in the Cologne region also attended the Deventer school. He worked as a brother for six and a half years, attending guests and the sick, and was ordained priest in the last year of his life.² This was certainly the case with Lambert from Hoey, who first lodged in the Brothers' hostel before he was accepted into the Fraternity³ and it is also stated clearly of Peter Horn, the famous biographer of Geert Groote. He went first to the school at Hoorn where he received instruction in the elementary subjects, probably reading and writing (*puerilia*) and singing. He then came to Deventer and went through all the classes including the first (*primarius factus*). He entered the Fraternity as a youth of 17.⁴ During his school days he lodged in the hostel.⁵ He became a priest, but the year of his ordination has not been recorded. Typical of the existing situation is the history of the youth of Egbert of Beek, rector from 1450 to 1483. He was born in Wyhe, twenty kilometres north of Deventer, and went to school in Deventer instead of Zwolle which would have been nearer. He did not live with the *fraters* but with an aunt, a widow woman. He did however, attend the collations at the Brother house, confessed there at certain times, and had his hair close-cropped like the schoolboys who lived in the hostel. This particularly scandalised one member of the family who went so far as to call him a Lollard. When the father heard that his son was progressing well with his school work, he wanted to send him to Cologne, to gain his Master's degree and perhaps even more exalted titles which would help to further his ecclesiastical or temporal career. Egbert, however, having finished school, went his own way. He first considered Windesheim, but finally chose the Brothers, being admitted to the noviciate in 1438. His father's offers to found a prebend for him if he would join the secular clergy, were of no avail. Egbert stayed with the Brothers, thereby forfeiting his academic studies in Cologne.⁶ After he had spent seven years in the Brother house, i.e., in 1445, he was ordained priest at the command of

² Ibid., 146-147.
³ Ibid., 147.
⁴ Ibid., 149.
⁵ Ibid., 157.
⁶ Ibid., 162-165.

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the rector and the Brothers. Five years later he was elected rector. John of Hattem, born in Wilsem near Hattem, south of Zwolle, received his first school education at Doesburg, where he reached the *grammaticales congruitates*, the principles of Latin, as was usual in the schools of such smaller places. The biographers do not say where he went to school after this, but they do mention that, having completed his studies (*completo itaque studio*) he was accepted as a boy of 16 by the Brothers of Deventer. At this time, between 1426 and 1432, they were living in exile in Zutphen. The authors praise him for his confidence in the *fraters* during their exile. At first he had to act as verger in their own chapel but later, probably around 1435, he was chosen by the Brethren, and ordered by the rector, to become a priest. As we have already said, he was ordained in Liège. At this time he must have been about 25 years of age. He later obtained the position of procurator.

These details concerning persons of no great historical significance clearly show that, like their predecessors in the first period, they underwent no theological training for the priesthood. They were well grounded in Latin and logic at school, and a few of them had acquired the rudiments of philosophy in the secunda or prima. By reading the Holy Scriptures and by meditation they were able to absorb various ascetic ideas, but they had never taken a course in theology. Anything they knew they had had to learn themselves in the few hours allotted them for free study. This study held no attraction for them. The word ‘theologian’ only occurs once in the script (*scriptum*) edited by Dumbar, in the life of Peter of Horn. It is said that not only very learned theologians but even lawyers were astounded at his knowledge of their subjects. Far be it from me to deny that gifted persons may achieve a great deal through self study. These, however, remain the exceptions. The Brothers, though, might be said to have made a system of it. Such statements could be considered as a eulogy; this often occurs in these small communities, where the members have only themselves for comparison. Peter of Horn approvingly mentions that rector Godfried of Toorn recalled the judgment of the prior John Vos of Windesheim, who was accustomed to dissuade his canons from studying the books of St. Thomas Aquinas and other modern scholastics dealing with obedience and similar questions. They would have to persevere in simplicity (*simplicitas*). After the death of Florens

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1 Dumbar *Analecta* I, 179-180.
Radewijns and Gerard Zerbolt, the Brothers of Deventer or indeed of most of the other houses, never published another work, except perhaps the house chronicles with the brief biographies of the Brothers after their death.

The Brothers' regular manual work still consisted in the copying of books. A large part of the day was devoted to this, and even the rector and the procurator did their part. This activity is mentioned so often in the chronicles that there is no need for me to offer illustrations here. It was also, for the Brothers, a means of earning their daily bread, although towards the end of the period at least, the competition of the printing press must have loomed ahead. The biographers, however, do not mention this cloud on the horizon. In the meanwhile, the Brothers had fallen upon better times. The register of the property of the Florens' house shows that the rector was in a position to buy various landed properties, interests and tithes of which the Brothers enjoyed the revenue. They also profited from the legacies and ecclesiastical foundations, bequeathed or established by various benefactors and friends. From the money brought by the Brothers on entering and from bequests, the rector was able to buy up houses and gardens to round off the terrain of the Brotherhouse, and to enlarge and restore the existing house. Towards the end of this period the house gave the impression of a prosperous establishment. The Brothers continued to live soberly, but were no longer compelled to do so by poverty.

The chronicle frequently refers in plain terms to the other task of the Brothers, that is, the care of the schoolboys. A distinction must be made here between the boys who lived in the new house, i.e., the fraters' hostel, and those who occasionally visited the fraters, either to hear some address, or to have a personal conversation with one of the Brothers, or to go to confession. Since this was one of the Brothers' most important tasks, which has often been misinterpreted, it is perhaps useful to give the relevant data here. Towards the end of his life, John Groda of Flanders, priest († 1443), was appointed 'to direct the pious schoolboys who lived in the new house.' He lived with them, put up with their ways patiently, and looked after them well. During this same period Theodoricus of Stamheyn († 1443) was cook there for seven years (ad serviendum devotis clericis in coquina). It was only afterwards that he went to work in the Brotherhouse.¹

¹ Dumbar, Analecta, 84.
² Ibid., 85.
Helyas Sybrands of Hoorn († 1450), a lay brother, also served the boys (*clericis et scholaribus*) in the new house. At the age of 23, Lambert of Tielt (of Flanders, † 1466) abandoned his studies and offered himself to the Lord and to the Brothers, in order to serve the schoolboys in the new house, by instructing them in school subjects and good morals (*instituendo ipsos in scholasticalibus et bonis moribus*) and by providing them with the necessary bedding and other things. He cared for these boys like a mother, and especially for the poor and sick. He also maintained discipline, however, and was pained if they did not behave as he wished. There is thus plainly a dwelling, and the *instituere in scholasticalibus* entrusted to this one man refers to the repetition of what the boys had learned in school. This is clearly stated in the statutes of the *bursa cusana*. As in the Brothers' hostel, the rector of this institution had to see to it that the boys were on time for their lessons in the city school, go over their lessons after school with the *bursarii* and instruct them in good learning and virtues. Bernard Meyer from Deventer († 1467) who had taught in the school at Deventer and gave up this position on joining the Fraternity, was not appointed to the hostel but became head of the *scriptorium*. Peter of Horn lived in the new house while he was still going to school. He retained a great interest in young people, whom he admonished in public addresses or personal conversation, and whose confessions he heard. As we already saw, Egbert ter Beek did not live with the *fraters*, but on his aunt's urging, visited the Brotherhouse, in order to hear the Brothers speak and to go to confession regularly. John of Hattem, procurator († 1485) heard the schoolboys' confessions during the whole of Lent and for the principal feastdays. He was much sought after as a confessor and nearly all the schoolboys, young and old, went to him. He often addressed the boys too, sometimes in his room, and they went away cheered and comforted. Was Erasmus one of them? He attended the Deventer school from 1478 to 1483 and it would be strange if he had

2 Ibid., 141-142.
3 Ibid., 142.
5 Dumbar *Analecta* I 143-144.
6 Ibid., 157.
7 Ibid., 157-158.
8 Ibid., 162.
9 Ibid., 183.
10 Ibid., 184.
acted differently from the majority of the boys. He is not mentioned, however, in the sources. He himself appears to have mentioned the Brothers of Deventer once in a work dated 1528:1 *Educabar apud hos (i.e. the Brethren of the Common Life) Daventurii nondum egressus annum decimum quintum.* To my mind, however, this refers to Erasmus' stay with the Brothers in 's-Hertogenbosch. This agrees better with the age. Daventurii looks more like Deventer (Daventria) than like 's-Hertogenbosch, but still it is not the normal word.2

The *Lives* (*Vitae*) often mention the pupils of the school, but never the school itself, nor the teaching. Nor do they mention that John Xynthen or Zynten taught in the school towards the end of this period, although this is stated in other sources. This Brother is only named in the Register for the year 1479, when the rector bought an annuity of 100 guilders from the city of Deventer with the money brought in by ten of the Brothers, including John Zynten.3 He is the last mentioned and will not have entered much before 1479. One must remember, however, that the biographers dealt only with the life of rector Egbert ter Beek and of the procurator John of Hattem. They are not concerned with the Brothers who died after 1479. In any case, this activity on the part of John Zynten (or Xynthen) ushers in a new period.

It is characteristic for the ecclesiastical concept and religious and devout practices of the Deventer Brothers, that, during the Utrecht schism, they firmly ranged themselves on the side of bishop Zweder of Culemborg, who had been appointed by the pope. For their obedience to the Church law they suffered all manner of torments and finally exile. The Brothers of Deventer were not alone in this. They had the support of the Sisters, the Brothers of Zwolle, and the Canons of the Overijssel monasteries of Windesheim: Windesheim itself, Bethlehem in Zwolle and St. Agnietenberg in the neighbourhood. The so-called Utrecht schism originated in a political difference, a quarrel over succession in the region: the Sticht. However, since the head of this little state was also bishop of a larger district, the diocese of Utrecht, this political difference acquired ecclesiastical implications, for the canons of Utrecht and in the last resort the pope, decided who would have the position. The parties revealed themselves very quickly

1 L.B. I 921-922 A.
2 *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 26 (1964) 499.

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after the death of the previous bishop, Frederic of Blankenheim, who died on October 9th, 1423. A remarkable feature is the activity shown by the people of Overijssel, the cities of Deventer, Zwolle and Kampen, on behalf of their candidate Rudolf of Diepholt. Despite the fact that he had not received a sufficient majority at the election, they supported him when no decision was forthcoming from Rome. In the autumn of 1424 they placed the castles and manor-houses and incomes from the land of Overijssel at the disposal of their candidate Rudolf. They were thus in a hostile position towards the bishop appointed by the pope, Zweder of Culemborg. He must have seemed to some the stronger candidate, since to a certain extent he enjoyed the support of duke Philip the Good of Burgundy. The people of Overijssel, however, did not falter in their attitude, not even when, in 1425, the pope excommunicated the opponents of Zweder and the adherents of Rudolf and placed the region of Overijssel under the interdict. In the opinion of the Brothers, monastics, and various members of the clergy, they might have no contact with the excommunicated, and they ceased to hold public religious ceremonies. Several of them left Overijssel and went to Gelre, and the Brothers and other monastics continued to hold their religious functions behind closed doors. This, however, was not good enough for the administrators of Deventer and Zwolle and of the province. They wished to compel the clergy to administer the sacraments, to provide church funerals and to hold religious ceremonies as in normal times. Several of the secular priests ignored the interdict and a few of the Deventer canons continued to sing the office openly. The majority of the Regulars, however, together with some of the secular clergy, the parish priest of Deventer, the guardian of the Franciscans and the priest of the church of St. Nicolas, left the district. Around Easter of 1426 (March 31st), the magistrates began to harass the rector and the fraters. At length they agreed to allow the fraters to depart with a few books and other necessities, leaving two of their number behind to guard the house. After a certain amount of preparation, the fraters left the city on April 22, 1426, and made for Zutphen, where they were admitted after some difficulties. They remained in Zutphen for 6 years, but had to change house four times.¹ The Zwolle brothers had already departed somewhat earlier, on Good Friday, March 29th 1426. They went first to Hulsbergen and later to Doesburg where they finally founded a new

¹ Dumbar, Analecta I 75.

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Brotherhouse. This continued in existence when the Zwolle Brothers were able to return home in 1432. The inmates of the five Sisterhouses in Deventer left the city around June 24th 1426. Those from the Master Geert's house found somewhere to live in Arnhem, though not without difficulty and expense. Those from the Busken house went to Lochem and founded another Sisterhouse in Wamel during their exile. The Sisters from the other three Deventer houses found lodgings in Zutphen; one with the Sisters there, in the house of Rondéél, the others in private houses. ‘Other Devotionalists too,’ continues the narrative of Dier of Muiden, ‘were banished for the same reasons, because they wanted to obey the Apostolic See.’ The canons from Windesheim were taken in by the monastery of their order in Noordhorn. They were subsequently offered a place in Bredevoort, where they founded a new monastery which continued to flourish even after their departure. The Regulars of the Zwolle monastery of Bethlehem even travelled as far as Koblenz, where they established a new foundation in a former Cistercian monastery. This also continued to flourish. Finally, the Canons Regular of the St. Agnietenberg, Thomas a Kempis's monastery, journeyed to the Ludingakerke in Friesland. They reformed it and made it into a *solemne monasterium*. Meanwhile John of Haarlem, who had been rector at Deventer from 1404 to 1410 and afterwards director of the Zwolle Sisterhouses, founded a new Sisterhouse at Elten. It was probably composed of the Sisters who had fled from Zwolle, although this is not expressly stated. Rudolf Dier exclaims triumphantly: ‘The devil wished to eradicate the Devotion from the province of Utrecht, where it had flourished since the days of Geert Groote, but the danger was transformed into gain.’ In 1432 all, with the exception of the new foundations, returned to their former houses.

Although this exile may be viewed merely as an episode in the history of the Devotionalists, it characterizes the movement as Ultramontanist. They wished to obey the pope; the Brothers as much as the monastics.

A few further remarks concerning the Devotion will not be out of place here. The priest Henry de Bruijn, who died in Zutphen in 1429, read the Holy Scriptures and prayed the canonical hours up to the time of his death. The third rector, Godfried van Toorn, of Moers, is

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1 Schoengen 84-86.
2 Dumbar, *Analecta I* 76.
3 *Ibid.*, 76.

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said to have loved books and relics.\textsuperscript{1} This same rector attributed the faint-heartedness and lack of progress of the fraters to the fact that they said their prayers carelessly and did not prepare sufficiently well for Holy Communion.\textsuperscript{2} He taught the boys to raise their minds to God through short prayers.\textsuperscript{3} Henry Donkels, stricken by the plague and with the prospect of death before him, visited the churches of Deventer and walked praying around the altars.\textsuperscript{4} This plainly refers to the visiting of seven churches or altars, a practice to which an indulgence was attached. Rudolf Dier carefully prepared himself for reading his breviary, read it with pious attention, pronouncing everything plainly and retaining all the ceremonies ‘as he had been wont to do formerly in our chapel.’ Until his old age he always remained kneeling during High Mass.\textsuperscript{5} According to the practice laid down by the first fraters, he lost himself in the passion of Christ, through prayer and meditation, whenever he was to say Mass.\textsuperscript{6} During his last days he tried to say his hours as well as possible and had himself carried into the chapel on a chair in order to hear Mass.\textsuperscript{7} The well educated lay brother, Paul Sceper of Kirtzich, never missed the hours and addresses of the fraters and repeatedly exclaimed in the vernacular ‘Oh that I might be in heaven.’\textsuperscript{8} Peter of Horn, Geert Groote’s biographer, also read the hours with the fraters, standing erect and in a fitting attitude. He read them with great care and rebuked one of the Brothers for performing this duty somewhat lazily.\textsuperscript{9} When Egbert ter Beek was rector he gladly prayed the hours with the Brothers, and it is said of him that he read the canonical hours, devoutly, precisely and audibly, even when he was praying his breviary in private.\textsuperscript{10} According to the biographer, John of Hattem, the procurator who died in 1485 and whose life is the last to be recounted in the Deventer scripta, prayed the entire day. Apart from the considerable amount of work he performed, he prayed the vigil for the deceased or at least three lessons on work days and nine on feastdays. He also said the rosary every Monday.\textsuperscript{11}

This should suffice to show that the fraters of Deventer had nothing against oral prayers and the outward forms of worship or devotion. They attempted, however, to perform them respectfully and atten-

\textsuperscript{1} Dumbar, \textit{Analecta I}, 116-117.
\textsuperscript{2} Ibid., 117-118.
\textsuperscript{3} Ibid., 118.
\textsuperscript{4} Ibid., 124.
\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., 133.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., 133.
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 134.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 136.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 139-141.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 151-152.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 169, 170.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 197-198.
tively, conscious of what they were doing or were about to do, through the renewal of their good intention, through short ejaculations, through ‘ruminating’ on the matter for meditation. It is indeed remarkable that the three persons whose life is described in somewhat greater detail, Peter of Horn, Egbert ter Beek and John of Hattem, all placed great emphasis upon maintaining the customs (consuetudines) of the house which regulated the religious exercises, work and meal times. Considerable stress was also laid, however, upon meditation, prayer, pondering on the aim of life, etc.¹ These leaders and the older Brothers evidently found it necessary around 1480 to stress the customs of the house, or at least the biographers thought it useful to mention this. It would be in no way remarkable if other ideas on discipline, work and devotion should have arisen a hundred years after the foundation, or that the older members should oppose them. Here too it was evidently no easy task to maintain the former zeal, as Egbert ter Beek had discovered on his journeys of visitation. From time to time he was obliged to relieve rectors and confessors of Sisterhouses of their office, sometimes in the face of opposition. Here the chronicler names Leiffard, confessor in the various Zwolle Sisterhouses, who will be mentioned again later, and a rector of the Brotherhouse at Groningen.² There is nothing strange or surprising about this. What is remarkable is that the biographers were still able to detect the old virtues in several of the Brothers: the simplicity and humility, enduring great humiliations including blows on the cheek from the rector.³ Godfried of Toorn (1410-1450) seems to have been very free with these, more so at least than Egbert ter Beek, who had been so shocked to witness such an incident on the first day of his life as a Brother. The biographers were also able to note the wearing of remarkably old or ragged clothing in public⁴ and also chastity accompanied by considerable reserve and caution in dealings with women. A love of poverty still persisted, expressing itself in loving admonitions, and also zeal in work. And yet Egbert ter Beek, in a plea on behalf of the Sisters, dared to speak of a cooling off the old love.⁵ Egbert had seen beyond the walls of his own house. On the orders of the colloquium Zwollense - a sort of general chapter of the Brotherhouses in the west, of which more will be said later - he had visited the houses of Hulsbergen and Doesburg, and those of

2 Ibid., 174.
3 Ibid., 119, 164.
4 Ibid., 144.
5 Ibid., 172.
Flanders, Holland, Gelre and of the diocese of Utrecht, in the company of Albert of Calcar, rector of the Fraternity at Zwolle. This is the only report in these biographies concerning the cooperation of the Brothers of Deventer with those of other houses. Despite the setting up of the Zwolle colloquium, the proximity of fellow-Brothers in Hulsbergen, Zwolle and of the related Regulars in Windesheim, Zwolle (Bethlehem) and near that city (St. Agnietenberg) the fraters lived to themselves, within their house, within their cells. They did not beg, they looked after a certain group of young people, and yet they were not popular. Admittedly they had a few friends who visited them, sometimes came to live with them as commensales, made over their property to the Brothers, left them legacies or left money for memorials or Masses. Yet the institution itself remained an anomaly within the Church polity. This aroused the suspicion of certain groups, to the extent that the Brothers of Deventer suffered from their attitude.

Three facts illustrate this. When, in the summer of 1451, the Apostolic legate Nicolas of Cues was either staying in Deventer (14-21 August 1451) or was approaching the city, a Canon Regular lodged a complaint concerning the state and the way of life of the Fraters.¹ During this time Egbert ter Beek even had fears that their ‘status,’ this new plant of the communal life, would be entirely uprooted, as some had threatened. He therefore prayed to God continually and even had a comforting vision. In reality he was called into the presence of the legate, who was residing in the ‘episcopal palace’ (bishops hof) in Deventer, and found him to be very favourably inclined. The legate himself praised their status, offered him privileges to strengthen their position, and wished to give the Brothers the canonicate with all the associated rights. Egbert, however, who loved simplicity, declined.²

It seems to me that one may deduce from this report that Nicolas of Cues did not stay with the Brothers when he went to school as a boy in Deventer. If he had, one imagines that they would have had more confidence in him and not been so afraid. For the community of the Brothers, the proposal to give the fraters the canonicate meant forming a chapter, while retaining the communal life and transforming the chapel into a collegial church. In this Nicolas was reverting to the privilege granted by pope Eugene IV on April 18th 1439 to Bernard of Büderich the representative in Rome of Henry von Ahaus, rector

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¹ It is not known who this plaintiff was; perhaps a canon from the monastery of Northorn, the legate's last stopping place before Deventer.
² Dumbar, Analecta I 173.
of the Münster Brotherhouse.¹ This privilege, which was originally intended for the houses of Münster, Cologne and Wesel, threw the Münster colloquium into complete confusion in 1439, and it was decided to conceal it, a state of affairs which lasted for at least ten years. For a long time the privilege continued to provoke discord among the Brothers, and the whole matter illustrates how strange the institution of the Brothers must have appeared to Roman, legal-minded officials and also to pope Eugene IV. To them, the Brothers bore most resemblance to canons of collegiate churches who had either retained the communal life since the eighth century or else had re-introduced it, as in the Lateran congregation, restored by Pope Eugene IV. In their opinion the Brothers had only to change their name and no one would trouble them further. The community of dormitory, refectory and property, the work and the practice of virtue, all could continue as usual. If they formed a chapter they would have to sing the hours in the chapter, just as formerly. Only a little change would thus be necessary. That such an idea should arise and be transmitted by the legate Nicolas to Egbert ter Beek, shows that these gentlemen had no idea of the Brothers' humility, simplicity and striving after inward devotion, but also that the legal basis of the Fraternity, despite the approval of bishops and council, was by no means sound. Well disposed church dignitaries wished to help them with a status which existed unopposed in Italy, but which was abhorred, perhaps unjustifiably, by the Brothers. In Germany especially this problem would crop up again repeatedly.

The attacks, the contempt and the neglect evidently continued, and rector Egbert ter Beek complained to John Brugman who had visited the Brothers on various occasions and, after some hesitation, had gained a great respect for their work and general religious attitude. In 1470 Brugman, the former penitential preacher, lay worn out and ill in the monastery of the Observant Franciscans in Nijmegen. He answered ter Beek in two letters, one in November 1470.² The second letter, which is dated 15th September, but with no mention of the year, seems to have been written later, and may be dated in 1471 or '72. Brugman consoles the rector and the fraters of Deventer. Although

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¹ E. Barnikol, Studien zur Geschichte der Brüder vom gemeinsamen Leben, Tübingen 1917, 99-100.
they are the youngest of the various orders and congregations, they are doing excellent work. He refers to the work of John Gerson on the bringing of boys to Christ and thus considers the Brothers' work among the schoolboys of the greatest importance. They must persevere in this work and not lose heart, remembering that they are only the stewards. Of these it is especially required that they should be found faithful. ‘The Church rejoices in your work. Do not desist from leading children to Christ.’

The second letter is again a reply by Brugman to the rector of the Fraternity of Deventer. The Franciscan expresses himself more sharply on the subject of the Brothers’ opponents. They must not allow themselves to be confused by the ‘barbarorum rabies.’ ‘O Deventer, from you flow not the living waters of salvation and regular life, but the dead water of tyranny and hate towards the elect of God.’ Yet the rector and his small flock must not let themselves be dismayed.

These expressions are very apposite during rector ter Beek's conflict with the magistrate over the Sisterhouses. It is a small but significant episode. The rector of the Brotherhouse, Egbert ter Beek, vigilant for the spiritual and temporal welfare of the Sisters of Deventer, obtained from the pastor, and subsequently from the bishop and the pope, the privilege of celebrating Mass within these Sisterhouses. The fraters were also permitted to hold collations freely, give Holy Communion, administer the Last Sacraments and hear confessions at the appropriate times. There appeared, however, to be some difficulty about providing a suitable chapel for the two Sisterhouses, Brandeshuys and Kerskenshuis. Still, they were situated side by side, and in 1470 ter Beek broke down the dividing wall and made the two houses into one. The two congregations were thus united into one, the Brandeshuys. As an addition to the privileges, however, he decreed that the Sisters henceforward would no longer visit the parish church, in other words they would stay at home. But this did not suit some of the freer spirits at all, Sisters who were already somewhat discontented. This measure deprived them of the freedom to walk abroad, look around, chat with friends in the town and sometimes visit their houses under pretext of necessity. They inflamed the burgomasters against the rector. These ordered, under pain of penalty, that the two houses should be separated once again, and that the Sisters should be allowed to visit the church in the normal manner, and that

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Egbert should not prevent them unless he could show the city administrators urgent reasons for his actions. The burgomasters must have felt sure of their ground, but Egbert ter Beek was more than a match for them! He pointed out that the Sisters in question were their own daughters and nieces, and that their spiritual welfare was at stake. They could please themselves whether or not they wished to bear the responsibility. The consequences would be on their own consciences. The gentlemen deliberated for a while and then charged the rector to do as he thought best for the Sisters' salvation.¹

He was also struck a cruel blow, in senio suo, in his old age, on hearing that the rector of the Fraternity of Doesburg had persuaded all his fraters to become Canons Regular and thus transform the house of Doesburg into a monastery of the Windesheim congregation. Things had already proceeded so far that the prior of Windesheim had arrived in Doesburg to invest the Brothers as Canons. On hearing this, Egbert immediately made for Doesburg, changed the fraters' minds for them and strongly condemned the prior's action. When the latter said that it was no harm to lead the Brothers from the secular to the religious state, Egbert answered: 'I have not come here because you are turning seculars into monks, but because, contrary to the law of charity, you are usurping our buildings for yourself. This house was given to the Brothers so that our fraters might dwell in it. Anyone who wishes to become a monk must leave it and transfer to the monasteries.' At this the prior slunk off.²

Although the financial position was sound in the Brotherhouse of Deventer at the death of Egbert ter Beek in 1483, and there was room enough, still the Brothers entered the period of Humanism with a certain amount of pessimism. They had no school, no university training and were not versed in theology. For the past fifty years they had to a great extent lost control of the Devotionalists outside Deventer. This control had passed to the Zwolle house, for the Netherlands, and to Münster for the foundations lying more to the East.

The data concerning the internal history of the house of St. Gregory, the Zwolle Brotherhouse, were provided by one of the Brothers of this house who wrote the narratio de inchoatione domus clericorum in

1 Dumbar, Analecta I, 171-173.
2 Ibid., 175. This matter will be dealt with again when discussing the history of the Brotherhouse at Doesburg.

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Zwolle. This was James of Utrecht, otherwise known as de Voecht. Unlike the biographies of the Deventer Brothers, this entire narratio is written by one person, between 1490 and 1500. It is a collection of biographies arranged according to the Brothers' dates of death, but with a fairly detailed biography of the rector preceding the Vitae of the Brothers who died during the office of the rector in question. An important factor is that the author usually mentions what functions each Brother had. In the second chapter, I have already been able to show, with these data, that the clerici usually became priests. We shall deal with this question immediately.

The prominent position acquired by the Zwolle house in this period, which exceeded the influence of the house of Deventer, is partly to be attributed to the three rectors who ruled the house at this time. These were Theodoricus Hermanssoen of Herxen, usually called Dirk of Herxen (7th January 1410 to 21st March 1457), Albert Paep of Calcar (24th April 1457 to 4th May 1482) and Henry Zwart of Herxen (before May 29th 1481 to 16th January, 1487). Although the latter's period as head of the house was short, in his position as procurator he took a considerable part in the administration of the house during his predecessor's time. The two Herxen were from Salland and Albert Paep of Calcar from the Cologne district. They thus represented the two regions which provided very many Brothers for the houses of Deventer and Zwolle and for the first monasteries of Windesheim. All three were of notable families, which will have contributed in no small degree to raising their prestige in the eyes of the Brothers and of the outside world. They may have had inborn qualities of leadership. Dirk of Herxen's father was a “rich man,” a property owner in the neighbourhood from which he derived his name, close by Windesheim. His family was not only rich, but also of high rank, according to Dirk's uncle Meynold, ‘armiger’ attached to the episcopal court of Florens von Wefelinkhoven, probably of knightly degree. The second rector, Albert Paep, must have been born around 1410 at Calcar. His father was an extremely learned and literate man who was highly esteemed at the court of the Duke of Cleves where he was adviser. When he sent his son Albert to the school in

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1 This Narratio is edited, with various Akten en Bescheiden concerning this Brotherhouse, by M. Schoengen. *Werken H.G. Nieuwe serie* 13 (1908), quoted as Schoengen.
2 Schoengen CXIII.

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Zwolle he sent a *paedagogus* or tutor with him. This, however, did not prevent the young Albert from establishing contacts with compatriots within the Brotherhouse, which furthered his vocation to the Common Life. He accompanied the Brothers into exile in Doesburg in 1426 and there joined the congregation, to the great distress of his father who had pinned all his hopes on Albert, to the exclusion of his other children. In the end, however, Albert succeeded in winning him over. He was followed by another from Herxen, a blood relative of Dirk's and admitted to the house under him. His family's position is sufficiently clear from the fact that his parents, together with other rich persons of the district, had appointed a good teacher (*informator*) who taught the young lads Latin and other branches of learning\(^1\) in the house of Knight Henry of Essen, on the property called Terwee near Zwollerkerspel. This private tuition continued for some time, but finally the young Henry aspired to higher things. He wanted to learn more. He went to the school in Zwolle where the rector, James of Hattem, a Paris Master of Arts and head of the Zwolle school since 1429, soon placed him in the next to the highest class, the second.\(^2\) Henry was a good pupil (*clericus*) and the rector asked him to teach for a time in the school, as Wessel Gansfort for example, had done. With the aid of the rector of the Brotherhouse, Dirk of Herxen, he managed to persuade him, so that Henry became a teacher at the school in Zwolle.

It seems as though the chronicler did not entirely approve of this step. He stresses that it was only a temporary post, that it was accepted in a spirit of obedience, that Henry hurried through the works of the poets and philosophers and if he did dally on any point it was from apologetic motives. Finally, however, Henry conceived the desire to serve God, *integralius*, with all his powers. He came to the conclusion that his school activities were too distracting\(^3\) and realized that there was no safer or more exalted way to follow the Redeemer than through the way of humility, obedience and poverty, chosen by all monks, even though they carried out their duties half-heartedly.

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\(^1\) Schoengen 175-176.
\(^2\) Schoengen 176. I used to think, with others, that this took place when he was already a cleric of the Brotherhouse. In this I was led astray by the double meaning of the word *clericus*, pupil and at the same time cleric, i.e. Brother of the Fraterhouse. That the meaning here must be pupil follows from the rest of the story which says that Henry was admitted to the Fraterhouse after relinquishing his position as teacher.
\(^3\) Schoengen 176, 177.
He finally elected to join the Fraternity. He was attracted by their humble state, the value which they placed upon love, the emphasis on poverty, the preference of work to begging and the opportunity offered to exercise practical pastoral care. He thus requested and obtained a place in the Brotherhouse.¹

These three rectors, Dirk, Albert and Henry, had entirely absorbed the principles of the Modern Devotionalists, and applied them in word and example. In this way they attracted many young boys, were obliged to expand their hostels, were able to found five new Brotherhouses and provide confessors for several new Sisterhouses. In addition, they, together with the rectors of Deventer and Hulsbergen, established a union of the various houses in the Netherlands, the so-called *colloquium Zwollense*. In this the rectors of Zwolle, with those of the other two houses, played leading roles. Dirk of Herxen was ‘*tanquam omnium devotorum generalis pater*.’

During this period the number of members in the Zwolle Fraternity greatly increased. As we saw, when Dirk of Herxen was elected in 1410 there were four priests, four *clerici* and two lay brothers.² In 1432, after the return from exile in Doesburg, the Zwolle company consisted of three priests, eleven clerics and two lay brothers—despite the fact that they had left some Brothers behind in Doesburg to form the nucleus of the new foundation there.³ At Dirk's death in 1457 the house consisted of eight priests, 15 clerics and one lay brother.⁴ At rector Albert's death in 1482, the community of the Zwolle fraternity totalled 35 persons. Of these 23 are given the title *dominus*, which indicates that in the eyes of the chroniclers they were either priests already or destined to become priests. They may still have been *clerici* in 1482, yet have become priests before 1490 (when de Voecht concluded his chronicle).⁵ The ratio of priests, *clerici* and lay brothers of 1410 and 1457, respectively: 4-4-2, 8-14-1, was thus only apparently interrupted with 23-10-2. The repeated use of *postea* indicates the accuracy of this explanation: for example *dominum Johannem Westerveroldt in Prutia postea primum confessorem op die Maet; dominum Petrum Dinxlaken, postea confessorem in Buscodocis the Orthen*. The title *dominus* was evidently applied to the persons in question since the chronicler was familiar with their later careers. There are two exceptions to this.

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¹ Schoengen, 105.

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Henry of Cleves and Dirk of Deventer are not called *dominus* although the chroniclers mention that the former was later confessor in Marienbosch near Zwolle, and the second in 's-Hertogenbosch.¹

What I have deduced from certain words in the chronicle regarding the house of Deventer, can be demonstrated again and again with respect to Zwolle. Those who entered as lay brothers only exceptionally attained the rank of cleric or priest, whereas the clerics as a rule were eventually ordained as priests. Of the *clerici* mentioned in 1457, the following were given functions for which ordination was required: Franco of Nijkerk became rector in 's-Hertogenbosch (ten Orten).² Henry Wachtendonk remained a cleric for a long time, became a priest out of obedience, but died not many years after his ordination.³ Arnold of Vollenhove was ordained priest, but seems to have been troubled by scruples, so that he did not occupy any priestly function.⁴ Henry of Alkmaar became confessor Op die Maet in Zwolle.⁵ Rutger of Doetinchen was priest-procurator of the *domus pauperum*.⁶ Gerard of Xanten was cook for a time with the schoolboys, but after his ordination he was appointed confessor in Calcar.⁷ John Westerwold went as priest with two clerics to Culm, to form the nucleus of the new house,⁸ Dirk of Calcar, the librarian, was chosen for ordination;⁹ Herman of Koevorden is later mentioned twice as *dominus*.¹⁰ The remaining four, William of Rees, Folker of Tunen, Jacob of Dalen and Hubert Goeden, all died young.¹¹ There then remains James Trajecti, or de Voecht, the chronicler, who says little about himself, but who is mentioned as a priest in the documents.¹² H. Wachtendonk was virtually forced into the priesthood¹³ and Rutger of Doetinchen still became a priest although he had not learned sufficient Latin.¹⁴

The Brotherhouse in Zwolle was thus, to all intents and purposes, a training college for priests who would later be called upon to take up functions either in their own house as rector, procurator or confessor to the students, or in the hostels, or else as confessor in the various Sisterhouses. In the introduction to the *Narratio* Schoengen

¹ Schoengen, 21, 173.
⁵ *Ibid.*, 152.
¹² Schoengen, 410 n. 7.
names 25 of these, six within Zwolle and 19 outside.\(^1\) This does not necessarily mean that all these houses without exception always received a Brother from the Zwolle house. The function was sometimes confided to a member of the secular clergy, for instance a friend of the Zwolle Devotionalists or one who had not been able to persevere as a Brother, yet still enjoyed the confidence of the rector. On the other hand, the confessor sometimes received an assistant, so that there were two Brothers living among the Sisters. Not all these houses belonged to Sisters of the Common Life; sometimes they had adopted a monastic rule.

The idea that the Modern Devotion was ever a lay movement is contradicted by the Brothers in the houses of Deventer and Zwolle. Judging from the deeds which have been preserved and the data given in the *Narratio*, all legal and administrative business was carried out by priests. It is interesting to see how at first one, later two priests, then three and finally and usually four, lived in the new house. In 1400 only the rector Gerard of Calcar was a priest. His administrative assistant, Gijsbert of Vlijmen had not yet been ordained.\(^2\) By 1404 the latter has also become a priest; both are mentioned in the charters as governors.\(^3\) In 1407 they have been joined by a third, Peter Hovesch.\(^4\) In 1420 Dirk of Herxen, Gerard of Calcar and Herman ter Maet\(^5\) are called priests and *provisores*. In 1451 Dirk of Herxen, Albert of Calcar and Henry Zwarte were priests.\(^6\) A few years later there were four of them, namely: *Wij, Theodoricus van Herxen, Gerardus van Vollenhove, Albertus Kalker ende Henricus Zwarte priesters (ende) provisores.*\(^7\) This was so in 1460, 1473, 1479 and 1484,\(^8\) but two of them, the rector and the procurator, sufficed to represent the house in law.

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1 In confirmation may I refer to a notarial document of October 7th. 1465, in which 14 *clerici* of the Zwolle house are mentioned, together with 7 priests. It can be proved that 8 of these 14 *clerici* became priests after 1465, according to the data given in the *Narratio*: Jacobus Traiect de Wijck (168) Petrus Dinslaken (210), Wilhelmus van Gelre (171), Egidius Weert (171), Paulus Lessen (167), Gerardus de Weerdt (172), Arnoldus van Emmerik (195) en Alardus van Calcar (189). Two died young: Fockerus de Runen (166) and Herman van Koevorden (193). Four are not mentioned again: Everardus van Calcar, Gherardus Zwart en Lambertus ter Starte and Jasper de Weynre.

2 Schoengen, 297, 299, 300.


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It is striking that, especially in the notarial documents, whereby the new clerics renounced all claim on their own property or that of the community, they are repeatedly given as *clerici Coloniensis, Leodiensis, or Traiectensis diocesis*.1 This evidently indicates their home diocese. It was merely a geographical concept, without rights or obligations on either side, or even without any previous contact between these persons and the heads of the dioceses. This also occurs in a notarial document with: *dominus Jacobus de Delft, presbiter Traiectensis dyocesis ac procurator domus scholarium divitum opidi Zwollensis dicte diocesis*.2 The Jacob in question was undoubtedly a Brother of the Common Life, but this titling might lead one to consider him as a secular priest of the Utrecht diocese. It is a misleading appellation which may perhaps be attributed to the tendency of the notaries of those days to state always the time, place and person in detail.

This conclusion concerning the priests gives rise to the question: what was the position with regard to the priest-candidates' studies? As we have already pointed out, these candidates were mostly recruited from the schools of Zwolle and Deventer, and it is sufficiently clear that the novices went directly from school to the Brotherhouse and were received as clerics after a trial period. The boys at Zwolle and Deventer could receive two years more schooling than elsewhere and were able to acquire some notions of philosophy. In the other cities and outside Zwolle and Deventer, the third class was usually the highest. From this the boys proceeded to the university, or to train as priests, or to take up a job. This was usually at about 15 years of age. Some boys began late and thus also finished later. As a rule, those who had gone through *secunda* and *prima* were about 17 when they left school.3

There is now sufficient data to show that the Brothers took their recruits straight from school, either as *tertiarii* or as *secundarii* and *primarii*.

Dirk of Herxen went straight from the Deventer school to the Brothers in Zwolle,4 Gerard of Vollenhove was ‘received into our house from the school’ (in Zwolle).5 Albert of Calcar attended school in Zwolle, lodging in the Brothers' hostel with the other schoolboys.

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1 Schoengen, 411.
2 Ibid., 480.
4 Schoengen 48, 51.
5 Ibid., 93.
When he had completed his studies he was received into the Fraternity.\(^1\) James of Wijck of Utrecht,\(^2\) James of Enkhuizen,\(^3\) Nicolas of Delft,\(^4\) Peter of Dinslaken,\(^5\) Folker of Ruenen,\(^6\) John Lennop,\(^7\) Reinier of Maastricht,\(^8\) - all these entered the Fraternity straight from school. Some of them had first lived in the domus pauperum. The fact that all the fraters, whose education is in any way mentioned, went straight from the Latin school to the Fraternity, is not unimportant. The others will certainly not have enjoyed a superior education, for the above mentioned nine include some prominent members of the community. There were three future rectors, Dirk of Herxen, Albert of Calcar and Henry of Herxen, all three from fairly prominent families. Two of them had attained the secunda.

Pupils of the fourth or third class were usually also admitted in the other monasteries. Several of the seculars were ordained without any further school instruction. The Mendicant Orders, on the other hand, possessed fairly well equipped schools to provide higher education for the members of the order. Was this also the case among the Brothers? The chronicler does not mention the subject at all. Evidently it did not interest him. None of these Brothers attended university. They remained in the house, copied books, meditated and were devout, zealous, humble, obedient and simple. After a few years they were ordained and entered into their function of confessor to the Sisters or administrator in their own house or in one of the hostels. Their philosophical and theological training must have been minimal. In this respect they were the lowest of all the clergy, perhaps on the same level with those of the older orders. Most of the secular clergy were scarcely more advanced, but they did include people who had imbibed the university atmosphere for a few years at least. The term in-breeding is often used in connection with such houses, but this is scarcely possible since they had never had any good breeding to begin with. Several of the Brothers had a comfortable time with the Sisters, some of them grew fat, and they regaled their fellow Brothers with cheese or received them in their houses.\(^9\)

The chronicler James de Voecht wrote a good Latin hand and had a perfect command of the Latin of his period. He was writing at the

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1 Schoengen 120, 171.
2 Ibid., 168.
3 Ibid., 190.
4 Ibid., 206.
5 Ibid., 209.
6 Ibid., 166.
7 Ibid., 146.
8 Ibid., 211.
9 Ibid., 169.
time when the first Humanists, trained in Italy, entered the Netherlands, but for this Brother, who after all had close contacts with the schoolboys and with some of the schoolteachers, the new culture remained a closed book. He makes no allusion to it in his chronicle. For him it does not exist! What a contrast to the founder of the Modern Devotionalists, Geert Groote! He was himself an academic and despite his pastoral work, continued to show a lively interest in books and learning. He possessed texts of the Holy Scriptures, the Church Fathers, a few of the classics and the medieval theologians and canonists. There is no mention of any of this here! The chronicler had eyes only for the physical perfections of the Brothers, for their works and zeal, for their skill in copying and illuminating books¹ and for their persistent labours. He looked then to their obedience, docility, humility and piety.

The chronicler had as little interest in the school subjects, notably Latin and the Latin authors, as he had in theology. The Brothers took no part in teaching at the Zwolle school. Henry of Herxen and Nicolas of Middelburg have been cited as teaching-brothers but this was not so. Henry of Herxen has already been discussed. Nicolas of Middelburg, a brother of the Zwolle school rector Livinus and an equally good friend of the rector of the Brotherhouse, Dirk of Herxen, whose advice they gladly followed, was a teacher at the school of Zwolle but not a Brother. Dirk of Herxen sent him as confessor to the Sisters of Oen on the Veluwe and he was still living there when James de Voecht wrote his narratio. One can see that he was not a frater from the final statement that Nicolas greatly enriched the Sisterhouse materially, with his own goods and with those of his brother Livinus.² A Brother of the Common Life could not possibly dispose of his own goods! James of Goch, lector of the third class, was not a frater at this time either.³

The author, however, did show some interest in the schoolboys, and particularly in those boys who lived in one of the Brothers’ hostels, the domus pauperum, as much as the houses for the richer or well-to-do students. There were separate houses in Zwolle for these last two groups. The mediocres amounted to 30 or 40 boys.⁴ A few were also admitted into other houses.⁵

¹ Schoengen 76, 77, 94, 103, 123, 143, 149, 151, 152, 159-161, 163, 167, 183, 190, 193, 208, 209.
² Ibid., 88-89.
³ Ibid., 202.
⁴ Ibid., 125.
⁵ Ibid., 196.

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De Voecht naturally informs us who the heads of the various hostels were and who were their assistants. In this he is more interested in the Brothers than in the boys. He can tell us that, because of his respect for discipline, John Lennop was appointed leader of the *domus pauperum* in which he himself had grown up, and that he looked after the poor boys well. When the Zwolle Brothers established a house in Culm he was sent there because he had gained his spurs as a leader of youth.\(^1\) The work they were commencing there must have been the same as in Zwolle. It seems to me that the words ‘We have come to further your boys in learning and in virtue’\(^2\) require some explanation. They received the boys into their house, kept them under supervision and tried, by word and example, to turn them into virtuous youths. They also went over their school lessons with them. This must be the *scientia* of which the chronicler speaks, for the Brothers knew no other. They therefore lost heart when they failed to attract many rich boys. Two brothers, Gerard Weerdt and Lambert Herck returned to Zwolle with the *rector scholarium*.\(^3\) One is perhaps justified in assuming that this was John Lennop.\(^4\)

The Brothers did not devote themselves exclusively to the boys in their hostels. As early as the 20th of December 1418, the parish priest of Zwolle, Henry of Compostella, gave the *fraters* permission to hear confessions, not only of the boys in the hostels, but also of the other pupils or schoolboys of his parish. He also allowed them, on feast days, to read aloud a passage from the Holy Scriptures for the schoolboys and any others who wished to attend, at times when no services or sermons were held in the church. Further, to converse with them on spiritual matters, provided that this did not take the form of a sermon, but remained merely a simple exhortation.\(^5\) Bishop Rudolf of Diepholt allowed them to distribute Holy Communion to the boys of the hostels, but the other pupils of the city schools were evidently excluded.\(^6\) (21st March 1452). The same bishop, on March 20th 1455, recognized the *fraters*’ right to exercise pastoral care among all the schoolboys\(^7\) and this right was ratified by his successor, David of

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\(^1\) Schoengen 196.
\(^2\) Ibid., 136.
\(^3\) Ibid., 137. What Schoengen writes in note 4, p. 137, is no longer tenable.
\(^4\) He had worked under John Westerwold in Zwolle; the latter was the first rector in Culm.
\(^5\) Schoengen 427.
\(^6\) Ibid., 430.
\(^7\) Ibid., 431.

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Burgundy, on Jan. 2nd 1457 and March 1st 1464. The same privileges were extended to the *fraters* in Groningen. During the second half of the fifteenth century, the spiritual independence of the Brothers with respect to their own brethren, *commensales* and schoolboys, was on the increase. In the last two charters mentioned, their property was also placed under the protection of the church in Utrecht, and amortised so that it was considered as church goods. This finally resulted in their obtaining full parochial rights and exemption from the parish priest and parish (on May 5th and 20th 1502) for the Brothers and Sisters of Zwolle, Groningen and Deventer. The rector of the Brotherhouse in fact became pastor to the Sisters and also to the schoolboys lodging in their houses, with the exception of those in the house of the rich pupils. This, however, seems to have been only an episode.

The gradual increase in the number of Brothers in Zwolle, which kept pace with the growth of the priestly activities, is all the more remarkable since they also established five new foundations in this period: at Harderwijk, 's-Hertogenbosch, Groningen, Doesburg and Culm (Prussia).

We possess few details concerning the setting up of the house in the Hinthammerstraat in 's-Hertogenbosch. According to the Zwolle *narratio* however, it was done on request, probably on the part of the city magistrate who will have appreciated the value of the Brothers' co-operation in the education of the school children. Rector Dirk of Herxen granted the request in 1424 and sent the priest Gerard Scadde of Calcar, brother of the first rector of the Zwolle house of the same name. This Gerard was one of his best assistants. He had studied for a time in Prague and had abandoned everything to become a Brother in Zwolle. An obedient and devout man, he despised the world. A number of *fraters* accompanied him to 's-Hertogenbosch. Gerard Scadde remained head of the new house until his death in 1435 and laid the foundations of this renowned establishment - the house of St. Gregory. An attempt to found a second house in 's-Hertogenbosch.

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1 Schoegen 433, 434.
3 It was thus impossible for the parish priest of Zwolle to require the Sisters to come to the parish church on feast days and also confess there, as had been demanded by Dirk Mengo around the middle of the century. One again the antipathy of the civic authorities and the people towards the Brothers became evident. Again they were vilified as Bogards: P.J.H. Knierim, *Dirck van Herxen*, Diss. Leiden 1926, 97.
4 Schoegen 78-80; see hereafter p. 391.

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was suppressed for the time being by the leader of the congregation. This foundation was the work of John of Wesel, rector of the Sisters of the house of St. Andreas at Ten Orthen. This house contained five hundred sisters, and John of Wesel required some assistance in looking after their spiritual needs. Having acquired helpers he received them into his house, at the same time making them Brothers of the Common Life, and under this title, probably had them ordained. All this was done with the approval of the episcopal curia of Liège. The brothers of the Fraternity proper complained about these actions and plans at the colloquium and the leaders came to take stock of the situation. These were Albert, rector of the Zwolle house, his colleague Egbert ter Beek from Deventer and Henry of Grave from the Doesburg house. They wished to relieve John of Wesel of his function and to this end undertook a journey to Liège in order to enlist the support of the episcopal administration there.¹ In the end they arrived at a compromise. John of Wesel was allowed to stay, but was not allowed to continue with his new foundation. Some of his collaborators departed, and others did penance.² The house however remained.

The house in Doesburg was a fruit of the exile of the Zwolle fraters under the leadership of Dirk of Herxen. On account of the interdict they left Zwolle in 1426 and settled in Doesburg. They were accompanied at this time by Livinus, then rector of the Zwolle school.³ According to the chronicle of Doesburg, Livinus was appointed head of the school there. This will have undoubtedly contributed in no small measure to its success. The Brothers continued the work they had been doing in Zwolle. They were evidently able to set up a hostel for schoolboys and accept new members. When they returned to Zwolle in 1432, they left a sufficient number of Brothers behind in Doesburg, so that from this date onwards the city had a new and independent Brotherhouse. The Doesburg chronicle mentions three priests and speaks rather exaggeratedly of quam plures fratres.⁴ After the initial ‘teething troubles’ the establishment proceeded to flourish. We shall later discuss those aspects of its history which are characteristic for the Brothers in general.

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¹ It is not entirely clear why this had to be done.
² Schoengen 130. Schoengen places these last events in the second half of 1459, p. 130 n. 4.
³ According to Schoengen 88; the chronicle of the house of Doesburg p. 7, states, wrongly, in my opinion, that this Livinus was rector of the parva domus, i.e. the hostel, in Zwolle.
⁴ Ibid., 9.
The same holds good for the house in Groningen, founded between 1432 and 1436 with the Zwolle frater William Wigbold of Groningen as first rector.¹ No details, however, have come down to us.

The origins of the foundation at Harderwijk are clearly defined. It was the civic administration, (as in 's-Hertogenbosch) who requested Dirk of Herxen to set up an establishment. They bought a house for the Brothers and placed it at their disposal on January 12th 1441.² To this was added the house next door, granted to the Brothers by a private individual, but certainly with the permission of the municipality (20th January 1442).³ It was a lavish beginning. Miss Knierim rightly connects the municipality's attitude with the school policy of the magistrate, who appointed a new rector about this time, (18th May 1441) and when deciding his salary took into account that he would attract 300 boys from outside the city.⁴ The houses of 's-Hertogenbosch, Doesburg and Harderwijk all took St. Gregory as their patron; Groningen, however, opted for St. Jerome.

The beginning of the house at Culm had a somewhat dramatic character. In order to strengthen the bonds of friendship, the rectors and Brothers of Deventer and Zwolle came together at a property belonging to the Deventer Brothers, called Middele. There they passed a joyful and festive day (probably on June 5th 1471),⁵ the anniversary of St. Boniface. When, after the midday meal, they were sitting outside in pleasant conversation, they were approached by a man, Balthasar Neymeyster of Prussia, who had attended school for a time in Zwolle, ‘together with our boys’ (‘qui ad tempus cum nostris scolaribus steterat in studio Zwollensi.’) He requested earnestly, and in the presence of all our rectors, that they should consider and decide to send a number of Brothers with him to Culm in order to found a new congregation, and promised them help. The fraters, he said, could acquire much fruit there, since the harvest was great but the labourers few. The rector of Zwolle, Albert Paep of Calcar, after deliberating the pros and cons, took the burden upon himself in a spirit of charity, and at the request

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² Archief ... aartsb. Utrecht V (1878) 117. Harderwijk Archiv. inventaris no. 798. 1 fol. 11 Reg. (samengesteld door P. Berends, no. 213).
³ Ibid., 118.
⁴ Knierim 77. R. Post, Scholen en onderwijs in Nederland, gedurende de Middeleeuwen; Utrecht 1954. 133, 166.
⁵ Schoengen, 134, n. 2.

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of Egbert of Deventer and of the Zwolle Brothers. Rector Albert was very willing to embark on a new foundation, but not close by, since the places there were full of monasteries! He preferred to begin at a greater distance where the need was greater according as the Devotion was more rare and thus of more value, while greater fruits might be expected. This comparatively modern missionary note does great credit to the Zwolle rector. He was, however, perhaps a little over-hasty in his actions, for the new foundation proved a problem child. With no preliminary investigation, depending solely on Balthasar’s word, the Rector despatched the priest John Westerwolt and two brother clerics with some money and other requisites. They found Culm, however, to be an impoverished town with few inhabitants. It did not even boast a carpenter! They were given a small and completely empty house by some laymen and were also gratefully welcomed by the townspeople. Some, however, murmured and asked: Who are these people and what do they want here? The fraters said: ‘We have come to help your sons to make progress in knowledge (scientia) and virtue, as we are and live in the diocese of Utrecht.’ And such were their beginnings: in poverty, in a town depopulated by the wars and deserted by the monks. Where only a few of those who remained had any knowledge of or respect for the truth, or learned the right way. Hence there was much misunderstanding and opposition, especially on the part of the non-observant mendicant monks.

What was it the Brothers began here (around 1472)? Was it a school where none existed before? If there was a school already, did the teachers simply resign their task to the Brothers? If there was not, were the Brothers able to conjure up such an institution without co-operation from the town? Were they capable of doing this? Was this their work in the diocese of Utrecht? Indeed it was not. At the very most they could receive boys into their house, as they did everywhere, train them in virtue and help them with their studies. This latter is encouragingly termed ‘in scientia,’ in the interests of propaganda. That this was their aim seems to me clearly evident from the statement that there, as was said, only few rich students desired to live with the Brothers. Hence their various difficulties, setbacks, helplessness and poverty. They despaired of success, of the necessity of the undertaking itself and of its use for others. After two years, the two Brothers returned home to Zwolle with the rector of their school-

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1 Schoengen, 134-135.
2 Ibid., 136.

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boys; *cum rectore scolarium ipsorum*. This last phrase has often been taken as proof that the Brothers had a school in Culm. If this were so it would be interesting to know the nature of this little school, the number of pupils and the subject-matter taught. It must in any case have been extremely small, for there was only one teacher. L. Schulze, however, thinks that the bishop gave the Brothers permission to set up a *studium particulare* which only developed with difficulty despite the additional rights granted in 1489.¹ In my opinion, however, the boys mentioned here are only inmates of a hostel, another unsuccessful attempt to provide themselves with an income and useful work. But John Westerwolt did not give in so easily. He wanted to persevere, and thus arrived in Zwolle after some time, promised all manner of good fruits and again asked for help in persons and money. He obtained both. He was given some schoolboys with *fraters* of very high reputation; first two experienced men and soon three more. ‘Then it went well’, says de Voecht. He mentions a very edifying letter sent to Culm by the Zwolle rector of the Brotherhouse, Albert Paep, shortly before his death. It is dated May 9th 1481, and will be discussed later.²

Balthasar, with whom we are already acquainted, had made it known some time before that he desired his estate - less the money intended for the payment of debts - to go to the Brothers at Culm. The draft of such a will was drawn up in Zwolle. The character of the Brotherhood of priests and lay-brothers is given in the more usual manner, but there is no mention here of education. It is not known if or when the house received these goods.

A school in Culm is mentioned twice more. This is already in another period, but since the reports are so brief they may be reproduced here.

‘Im Jahre 1508 ward den durch einige Mitglieder des Rostocker Hauses verstärkten Brüder die Leitung einer allgemeiner Landesschule übertragen in welcher sie die freien Kunst, voor nehmlih Philosophie lehrten.'³

The exaggerated tone of the last phrase tends to cast doubt on the first, but I dare not reject this statement without closer study. The

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¹ *Realencyclopedie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*. III 498.
² Ed. Schoengen, 490-492.
³ Th. Hirsch, *Die Ober Pfarrkirche van St. Marien in Danzig*, I, 252. L. Schulze, R.E. III 498, dates this assistance in 1508 and says that the Brothers relinquished school and house in 1509; this does not accord with the letter.
second report is in a letter from the *fraters* of Zwolle in 1539 to their fellow Brothers in Culm. They regret that they cannot send the men requested since they themselves have almost no novices. These Brothers asked for were intended to fulfil the wish of the bishop of Culm. He wanted five or six good men, well educated, scholarly, to take charge of the house and of the gymnasium and to assist in every good work. ‘If we do not agree to his proposal, the bishop will do something different from what we want.’ This was a threat! ‘Must everything for which we have laboured, and devoted our effort and money fall into his hands and be used for other purposes? We pray God that neither the bishop nor anyone else will do this.’!

This was the time of the Reformation. The Brothers could only save themselves for a time by acting as teachers, a function for which they were not suited, educated or trained. The Brothers in Zwolle were powerless to help, not only because they had too few recruits, but because they lacked erudition and scholars. If this ‘gymnasium’ in question is not yet being run by the Brothers one wonders if the ‘Landesschule’ of 1508 - which must be the same institution - was ever completely in their hands. The house fell into disuse during the Reformation and ceased to exist. Only one Brother showed any trace of sympathy for Luther.

Meanwhile the union of the Brotherhouses continued to develop. They received a ruling organ in the *colloquium Zwollense*, an annual gathering in Zwolle on the third Sunday after Easter, attended by the rectors of the Dutch Brotherhouses and the confessors of the Sisterhouses. This *colloquium* is mentioned a few times in the *Narratio* of the Zwolle house as an existing institution, familiar to the readers of that time. However, since the records and decrees have not been preserved, we know very little about it. It is only possible to gain a clear idea with the help of analogous gatherings. The spiritual and material interests of the various houses were discussed, probably with reference to the findings of the visitators. These were two rectors appointed by the *colloquium*, who examined the affairs of each house after the example of the monasteries. Decisions were also taken on admitting new foundations to their community or on granting personal or material aid to a developing house. Risky undertakings were discussed, not only to gain the advice of wise men, but in order to

1 Schoengen 497.
2 Schoengen 77, 169.
apportion the responsibilities and the risks. The Zwolle colloquium had frequent contact with the chapter of the Windesheimers who met nearby, and with the colloquium of Münster, an equivalent institution of the more easterly houses. It is striking, however, that none of the chronicles, either of Zwolle, Deventer or Doesburg, makes any mention of contacts with Münster, although these must have existed.

During this period the inmates of the house of Zwolle lived according to the same principles as in the preceding years. The basis of their life continued to be contempt for the world (contemptus mundi) and for themselves.¹ This life demanded the practice of many virtues, but chiefly of humility, obedience, patience, poverty, self-sacrifice and industry.² It was maintained at a high level by the study of the Holy Scriptures, by meditation, the renewal of good intentions, prayer, examination of conscience and spiritual reading.³ But these ideals could not be attained without love. Even the struggle towards them could not be maintained without love of God and of each other, but chiefly of their fellow men. Dirk of Herxen established a norm for the Brothers' upkeep—the rest had to be given to the poor.⁴ Humility was fostered by various humiliations, such as the wearing of torn, old-fashioned clothing,⁵ and obedience by beatings (per virgam) among other things.⁶ This contemptus mundi however must not lead to laziness and resignation. On the contrary, the Brothers had to put in long hours of intensive and painstaking work, writing or illuminating books. Their work was much appreciated. Yet this contempt for the world could still be carried so far that a Brother could rejoice on perceiving on his body the first signs of the plague.⁷ All had constantly before their eyes the four last things—death, judgment, hell or heaven.⁸ This emphasis on internal devotion, however, did not rule out externals—ceremonies, the praying or singing of the hours and of the rosary.⁹

This stern and sober way of life demanded perpetual self-control in eating and drinking, resting, walking, speaking and laughing. Everything had to be done in moderation. In the beginning this must have led to a very oppressive and anxious atmosphere, but signs of

¹ Schoengen 51, 79, 88, 185, 204.
² Ibid., 51, 53, 113, 123.
³ Ibid., 55, 68.
⁴ Ibid., 61.
⁵ Ibid., 79, 81, 123, 140, 187.
⁶ Ibid., 94.
⁷ Ibid., 73.
⁸ Ibid., 75, 121.
⁹ Ibid., 119, 149, 159, 162.

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humanity developed in the course of time. These took the form of joyous reunions with Brothers from the other houses in Hulsbergen or Middele; hilarity and hospitality, introduction at Christmas; an invitation to the magistrates, a treat for one of the Sisters' confessors, a most agreeable companion. Thus a little worldly sunshine happily penetrated the houses.

This prevailing austerity naturally did not transform the Brothers into saints, but only into zealous aspirers to sanctity. They also had their failures, like the first confessor of the Sisters, the highly esteemed Liefard, of whom so much evil was later spoken. Some left the house or had to be sent away: even Sisters were, perhaps slanderously, termed rebels.

The magistrate of Zwolle was not always well disposed towards the Brothers. Like the magistrates of other cities, the municipality of Zwolle, urged on in part by the Guilds, tried to prevent the increase of goods held in mortmain. Just as this attitude had originally held up the building of the Brotherhouse, so this policy in 1415 and 1416 led to a conflict in which the Brothers clearly took the side of the clergy and were finally justified by the bishops' intervention (Dec. 13th 1416). Dirk of Herxen was not perhaps the man to smooth out the tangles in this relationship. His successor, Albert Paep of Calcar, son of an official in Cleves, fared better. After his election (1457) rector Albert invited the magistrates to a meal, once all together and more often separately ‘insofar as they were well disposed to us and to our house. Hence, from this time, the aldermen become more favourable and more faithful towards us.' For the rest, all three rectors maintained the customs of the house. Prosperity, more extensive buildings for the fraters and the increase in the number of schoolboys and Sisters, rendered life somewhat easier, but the Brothers retained the custom of expending not more than a certain sum on their own upkeep. The remainder was given to the poor.

1 Schoengen 104.
2 Ibid., 118.
3 Ibid., 127.
4 Ibid., 169.
5 Ibid., 129.
6 Ibid., 108.
7 Ibid., 143.
8 P.H.J. Knierim 95, 96; Th.J. de Vries, Gildenwoelingen en interdicten te Zwolle 1413-1416 (Ov. R. en Gesch. 60ste stuk, 2de reeks 36 st.) 1-37.
9 Ibid., 127.
10 Ibid., 112, 122, 207.
The religious ideals and principles referred to here need not be deduced solely from the *Narratio* of James Voecht. Dirk of Herxen set down his ideas in several small and a few larger works which have been preserved in manuscript or in print. Albert of Calcar defined this in 1480 in a letter to the Brothers of Culm, so that we possess descriptions from the beginning and the end of this period.

For a description of Dirk of Herxen's works and their history I must refer to the study by Miss Knierim.¹ She reduces them to four groups: A. Paedagogical treatises. B. Pious *exercitia*. C. Collective works. D. Minor writings and poems. The content of the first group is twofold: ‘The writer addresses himself warningly, even threateningly, to the young people themselves: Repent in your youth, bid the world farewell and devote yourself to the service of God in this time which is the best for yourself and the most agreeable to God.’² He then exhorts the parents, teachers and spiritual guardians to help the young people in their struggle towards this ideal.³ Like Geert Groote, Dirk of Herxen is convinced that the world is declining and that unrighteousness reigns everywhere.⁴ The means to improve this condition are sermons, confidential admonitions, good example, prayer, mercy and charity and the hearing of confessions.⁵

This is the subject matter of three treatises of almost similar title: *Tractatus de juvenibus trahendis ad Christum; Libellus de parvulis trahendis ad Christum; Libellus de landabili studio eorum trahentium parvulos ad Christum*, and of a fourth with a different title: *De innocentia servanda*. This last is an exhortation to preserve the innocence gained at baptism and various ways to do this are suggested. The other three works deal with the advantages of the relationship with Christ, first for the *juvenes* (the young boys), then for the *parvuli* (the older boys) and finally with the beauty of the educators' task in leading the young people to Christ. In writing these treatises Dirk of Herxen is indebted both for form and content to Jean Gerson's treatise of the same name: *Tractatus de parvulis trahendis ad Christum*, but not slavishly so. He is aware that he is not speaking for university students, but for boys still attending the *studia particularia*.⁶

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¹ Knierim, 100, 104. In 1958 J. Deschamps found *De diete Kollatieboeken van Dirck van Herxen* which he has prepared for publication.
⁵ *Ibid.*, 111; this is often the task of the brothers.
The educational task of the Brothers was combined with the pastoral, notably their duties as confessors to the sisters. In this too Dirk of Herxen came to his brethrens' assistance with a little work ‘Hints for a Confessor’ in which the principles of the fraters were clearly stated: Wear simple clothes, hold short and moderate conversations (especially with women), live sober and industrious, exemplary and chaste lives, be cautious in dealings with women. He considers that the confessors should not concern themselves with the material aspects of the convents, but only with the spiritual salvation of the Sisters.¹

Miss Knierim takes the Devota Exercitia to consist of seven works, the titles of which are usually self-explanatory.² These are: 1. On the passion of the Lord. 2. On the Our Father. 3. On the Hail Mary. 4. On death and heaven. 5. Pious prayers. 6. Daily exercises. 7. Advice in various difficulties. They offer subject matter for meditation as it was understood by the Brothers in the first period. In the first four the author concurs with ideas which occur frequently among the Brothers and in the later Middle Ages. The Pious prayers are addresses to God, to serve as examples of similar conversations which must be the ultimate goal of their reading and meditation. The daily exercises mentioned under number 6 are in fact three methods of examining the conscience. No. 7, Advice in various difficulties, is given in the form of a dialogue between the foolish and the wise man. This form was utilized in Italy even in the pulpit.

There remain two further points of interest concerning these Devota Exercitia. In connection with the first, the considerations on Christ's passion, divided into 7 articles, each sub-divided into four points, the author of the Narratio tells that they are drawn on the hand, in manu depotita. They were found thus at Dirk's death in 1457.³ This is important because we have here the beginnings of methodical meditation. The writing of key words on the hand was a means of keeping one's thoughts concentrated on the meditation. This method was later employed by the Windesheimer John Mauburnus or Mombaer of Brussels, canon of the St. Agnietenburg, who in his Rosetum exercitium spiritualium, written around 1485, suggests a detailed method of meditation, giving thereby the articulations of the hand. He also employs various key words to focus the mind.⁴ In view of the dates

1 Knierim, 116.
2 Ibid., 117.
3 Schoengen 113.
4 P. Debongnie, Jean Mombaer de Bruxelles, abbé de Livry, Leuven, Toul. 1928, see below p. 545

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1457 (death of Dirk of Herxen) and 1485 (earliest text of the *Rosetum*) one is perhaps justified in assuming Dirk of Herxen's influence on John Mombaer.

The other point, to which Miss Knierim has also drawn attention, concerns the dialogue between the wise and foolish man. Here Dirk may have taken as his model Petrarch's famous *De remediis utriusque fortunae* - two books with dialogues between *gaudium, spes, ratio*, and *dolus, ratio* and *metus* on various cases from daily life, and a similarly titled work by Adrian the Carthusian.¹ So far as I can judge this is the first sign of familiarity with Petrarch's works among the Devotionalists. By this time, anyway, Petrarch (1302-1372) had been dead for three-quarters of a century and his works could thus easily have had a wide circulation in the Netherlands. He was certainly known and read by profane authors, especially poets. Dirk of Herxen may not have read this work of Petrarch himself, but have learned of its existence and contents from stories, sermons, anthologies, conversations or the works of contemporaries. It is striking that the first acquaintance of a Devotionalist with a Humanist led to imitation of form, the dialogue with a moral purpose. Here too, Dirk of Herxen deals with keeping thoughts in check during prayer, with impatience at the schoolboys's behaviour, but also, marvellous to relate, with threatened taxation, bad times, badly prepared food. These latter points came under the heading: ‘Be not troubled over temporal things.’²

Under the group *Compilations* Miss Knierim lists those works by Dirk of Herxen which he wrote in the manner employed by Florens Radewijns and Gerard Zerbolt, among others, in compiling their treatises. They gathered together various texts from the Bible, from the Church Fathers, from ecclesiastical writers and the later mystic or meditating theologians. Dirk's *opus* however, was an enormous undertaking. Under the titles: *Instructio religiosorum ex dictis sanctorum*, and *De dicta doctorum de quibusdam festis et sanctis*, together with the *tabula*, he made a collection of 400 pages, preserved in one binding. The first section of the *Instructio Religiosorum* comprises texts which touch upon the daily life of the Brothers and incite to the afore-mentioned virtues and attitudes (for example, contempt for the world). The part dealing with the *festis et sanctis* gives quotations concerning the feast days of the church year and various feast days of the saints, all providing matter for meditation on that particular day, on the nature of the feast,

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¹ Knierim, o.c. 129.

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or the history of the saint in question. Miss Knierim draws attention to the striking fact that while Gerson, Geert Groote and Gerard Zerbolt are all mentioned, Thomas a Kempis is not.

Among the fourth group of minor writings, Miss Knierim mentions a small work: De communi vita, in which Dirk defends the communal life, using arguments derived from the familiar lawyers and theologians. There is also the Notabilia Dicta, a collection of important sayings by various people which had made a particular impression on Dirk. In this he was following the example of the first Modern Devotionalists who were fond of compiling such rapiaria. Dirk of Herxen, however, is not indebted to any of the other collected Notabilia Dicta. This was an entirely personal work.

In conclusion, the poems of Dirk of Herxen are mentioned; a poem in praise of chastity, written in Latin, and a Christmas hymn in Dutch.

This zealous rector of the Zwolle Brotherhouse completely fills the first part of the period under discussion (1410-1457), but he also made his mark on the life of the Brothers. In this, for the rest, he was merely continuing the work started by Florens Radewijns and Gerard Zerbolt. A letter, dated May 8th 1481 serves to show that his successor, Albert of Calcar, was still striving after these same ideals towards the end of his life. He expresses his sympathy with the difficulties being experienced by the Brethren in Culm, but regrets that he is too old to come and take stock of the situation himself. He exhorts the Brothers there to reflect on the purpose for which they were sent there: to make God's name more widely known and, if it should please God, to enhance God's honour by increasing his cult and the salvation of souls. This should not be difficult for God. It is thus fitting that they should strive after humility. He refers in this connection to the exercitationes of Dirk of Herxen, who impressed upon them that they should begin a new house in the spirit of humility. 'As pope Gregory has pointed out, our progress is dependent on the divine blessing. This can be found in the books (always held in high esteem by the Brothers): De vitis sanctorum Patrum, Institutiones et Collationes sanctorum Patrum, Climachus, Sermones beati Bernardi, Profectus religiosorum, books with which we are already well familiar, which define the progress of the spiritual life, revealed by a previous complete and utter conversion

1 Knierim 131-132.
2 Ibid., 132.
3 Ibid., 140-141.
4 Schoengen 493-496.
and by subsequent sound instruction, by the suppression of faults, the fostering of virtue, which achieves perfect love of God and love of our neighbour. But if you do not yet follow this way, your efforts will not be crowned with success. You will help neither yourselves nor others, but by indolence, negligence and ingratitude towards God you will arouse loathing, and the Lord will spew you from His mouth, a cause of scandal to many and of confusion to yourself and to us all. He shall deprive you of dominion and give it to the people who will bear fruit. Therefore, to come down to particulars, retain complete confidence in and familiarity with your Father unto death, as is written in Climachus, by not judging and condemning his deeds, words and habits. Everyone must examine each movement of his heart, not only those which are plainly bad, but even those which have an appearance of virtue or fear of the Lord. In this one must not be too ready to believe oneself, for self-love is a ready deceiver. But everyone must believe in Him and trust in His judgment, thereby holding in check with sensible moderation all excesses of grace or gifts of nature. Each must beware of his own nature. He must beware of the poison of slander, rivalry, irritability, contradiction, rebellion, presumptuousness and contempt, which is the death of brotherly love and peace in the house, of humanity and of obedience, and signifies the end of the inner man and the enfeeblement of virtue. Futile chatter is to be avoided, either in public, which is contrary to discipline, or covertly and hidden, which is equivalent to slandering and stirring up strife. Let each keep to his exercises - meditation, study, work, as imposed by the superiors or the official. I beseech you, beloved brethren, to be calm and tranquil, to preserve unity in the bond of peace, in the interests of devotion. If everyone carries out his own tasks, the complaints, dissension and murmuring will automatically cease. We know that all disturbances, even the greatest, in the monastery and congregation, have their origin with the grumblers and the trouble-makers. None of you wishes to be called a grumbler or a conspirator even though he is constantly being found guilty of these faults. Grumbling and disapproving is nothing else than, under a pretence of making oneself useful, interfering in everything, disapproving of all measures, constantly passing judgment on the ruling of the house and on the changes made. It is the drawing aside of certain ones and saying: “We do not want him to rule over us.”

The rector of Zwolle writes thus - he continues - ‘as a precaution, and not because he thinks that any of you are guilty of these failings.

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He wishes to ensure that you will always live in complete community. Fulfil our desires, grant us joy, see that you make progress in humility, in love, in obedience, in peace: God will give you peace. All our Brothers greet you. (Zwolle, May 9th, 1481). Albert.’

This letter gives a clear indication of which virtues must be practised in order to preserve the community and to do fruitful work outside. This work is priestly and consists in enhancing the honour and the worship of God. The virtues mentioned occur again and again, in Florens Radewijns, Dirk of Herxen and now here with Albert. The methods of achieving these virtues are the same, as also are the books of meditation recommended. Man must make an effort, but he can do nothing without God. This theme also runs through Dirk of Herxen's works. While sometimes he stresses man's own activity, at others he points with emphasis to God's work. These authors write to encourage and exhort, not as dogmatists. In essence this is the practice of life, the medieval and later Roman Catholic piety, and also what the great medieval theologians like Thomas Aquinas describe as the co-operation of Creator and created. This idea only presents difficulties if one seeks to explain it too much in detail.

As we have already observed, the house in Doesburg originated from the Zwolle fraters' six years exile in that city. They continued their work there, and on returning to Zwolle in 1432, left behind in the city which had granted them hospitality, a rector and a number of fraters who carried on the communal life. The foundation of this house can thus be situated in 1432.

The history of the house is better known than that of many other foundations for we possess a house chronicle and many archivalia, preserved in the city archives in Doesburg. An edition of the chronicle is in process of preparation. Unlike the Narratio of the Zwolle house, which ended around 1485, this chronicle continues on until 1560. It bears much more resemblance, however, to a set of annals. The author recounts each year's happenings, without confining himself to the vicissitudes of the brethren. He discusses natural catastrophes, the scarcity and high price of foodstuffs, financial setbacks and windfalls, and above all the important happenings in the Dukedom of Gelre, the struggle between Dukes Arnold and Adolf, the conquest of the region

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by Charles the Bold, Maximilian's uprising and struggle, the release of Charles of Gelre, his turbulent years, the adoption of William of Cleves as Duke and the conquest by Charles V. He also relates some of the events in the neighboring regions, and some highlights in the history of the 'Reich', (Empire.) The most important of these are the reactions of certain Netherlanders and the fraters to Luther's activities. Like James de Voecht in the Narratio, the author of the Doesburg annals gives biographies of rectors and various Brothers. But apart from being short and often less approving, the Doesburg annals are arranged differently. The lives of the fraters are not classified with that of the rector in office at their death. They are simply listed according to the year of death. Just as the writer when giving the year of entry in later times also included dates of admission to the Fraternity and of ordination, he lists in addition any function held. Certain details indicate that the writer of the annals described the events at the time when they occurred, so that he does not yet know their outcome. He says for example, of John Frederic, Duke of Saxony, and Philip, landgrave of Hessen, that they, 'usque in hodierno die captivi tenentur.'1 This report, however, is wrongly entered for 1546 and not, as it should be, for 1547, although he cannot have written it before 1547. He may have entered the date 1547 somewhat too late in the text, when continuing with the vicissitudes of the Doesburg house. In the year 1547 the Brothers in the house were the same 'as above' (1546). The last author may have personally experienced the events of 1547, but not all the preceding ones. We must thus either assume that there was more than one writer, or take it that the one and last writer made use of the comprehensive notes in the house dealing with internal happenings, and also perhaps covering what was going on outside. If he did learn of the latter from outside sources, their inclusion in the chronicle or annals indicates some connection with the house. The house indeed frequently felt the repercussions of the activities of the Dukes of Gelre, of the city corporation and of the scarcity and high price of foodstuffs and other things. It seems to me then, that we can distinguish two authors, one working up to 1485-1490 and a second who must be responsible for the report of 1493. This first writer may well have been Theodoric of Sittard, who died in 1497 and is then called a magistralis scriptor; one who plura scriptit super omnes fratres istius temporis.2 Theodoric of Sittard was the third rector, and head of

1 Quoted here according to the pages of the MS.
2 Chronicle 200.
the house from 1473 to 1485. He was already mentioned in 1443 among the *clerici* of the house of Doesburg.\(^1\)

One characteristic of the second writer is that he always begins his annual report by stating which *fraters* formed part of the Doesburg house or congregation at that particular time, whether they actually lived in the house or were out working with the Sisters.\(^2\) Another is that he renders the concept of dying among the Brothers by expressions reminiscent of the Humanists, which are not employed by the first writer: *ad superos migravit*,\(^3\) or: *ultimum exsuffavit spiritum victurus in evum*\(^4\) or: *sed raptus est ad superos*.\(^5\) He also quotes the Holy Scriptures in his annals. These characteristics, however, disappear again, so that it would seem that another writer followed the second. However this may be, the annals make a reliable impression because the authors make no attempt to conceal the less pleasant circumstances. In this chapter I shall refer only to the first section of the annals, insofar as they concern the period under discussion here. In cases where the exact meaning is in doubt, in this case for the question of the school, I have had recourse to the later texts to elucidate the problem.

The foundation developed quite well from the very beginning. The first rector, Gerard of Rees, (1432-1443), turned to agricultural work as a main source of income. However, the Brothers considered this contrary to the purpose of their movement and lodged a complaint with the *visitatores*. This led to Gerard's dismissal in 1443 and the appointment of Henry of Grave (1443-1473).

Henry and his successors must have again fallen back upon writing to provide the Brothers' manual work, but it is remarkable how little the annals have to say on this point. With the exception of the text quoted, this copying of books is mentioned only once, although it is evident from statements made by the procurator that a profit was made from this writing. The *fraters* soon obtained three vicarages in the church which, together with the masses founded, required several priests. It is noteworthy therefore that the number of priests soon exceeded that of the *clerici* or student priests. This was in contrast to the Zwolle Brotherhouse. There were in Doesburg in 1440, two priests and four *clerici*,\(^6\) in 1443 three priests and seven *clerici*,\(^7\) and in

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1 Chronicle, 74. The last sentence may mean something entirely different, i.e. that he wrote or copied more than all the *fraters* of his time.
2 Ibid., 18.
3 Ibid., 82.
4 Ibid., 84.
5 Ibid., 86.
6 Ibid., 103.
7 Ibid., 12.

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By 1493 there were sixteen priests of whom six lodged near the Sistershouses, and only six clerici. This ratio was maintained up to the end of the house at Doesburg.

The position in Doesburg was the same as we have already noted elsewhere. Those who entered as clerici may be considered as student priests; in the ordinary course of events they later became priests. It is possible to show this by taking one generation as example. In 1443 the following seven are mentioned as clerics: Henry of Goch, who is later found working as a confessor in Cleves; Gerard of Tiel, who soon retired; Mathias of Zutphen, who was later confessor to the Sisters of Heusden; John of Millingen, later confessor in Maastricht; John of Doetinchem, who receives no further mention; Bitteres of Doetinchem, later confessor in Elten. Theodoric of Sittard became rector. Five of the seven clerici thus became priests. There is no mention of their training or study. It is not even said that several of these entered from the city schools, although this must indeed have been the case. According to reports in the chronicle, some of them zealously studied the Holy Scriptures, in default of a teaching staff. These zealous students included Theodoric of Urdingen and the rector Henry of Grave. The latter made such progress that in the eyes of the Brothers, and notably of the chroniclers, he attained the status of an expert in theology. He had undertaken various philosophical investigations. He even became competent in Roman and Canon Law, while continuing to acquit himself honourably as a farmer and carpenter. This person, however, who resembled the most talented and generally gifted of Italian Humanists, seems not to have done himself justice. He did not leave so much as one letter. The Doesburg fraters, like those of Deventer and Zwolle, had no university studies. Theodoric of Kampen admittedly had spent some time at university before joining the Brotherhood, but the chronicler has this to say of him: ‘He was not afflicted with those faults which commonly distinguish that sort of person. He did not follow either the customs or the boastful habits of the students.’ What a gap separated these Brothers from the university and from higher study in general!

What was the position regarding the school and the attitude of the

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1 Chronicle, 18.
2 Ibid., 44.
3 Ibid., 18.
4 Ibid., 19.
5 Ibid., 19.
6 Ibid., 20.
7 Ibid., 27.
8 Ibid., 4.
9 Ibid., 49, 54.
10 Ibid., 54.
11 Ibid., 42.

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students towards the city school? We know the situation in Deventer and Zwolle-there were one or more hostels run by the fraters. The pupils of these institutions attended the city schools, and one or other of the fraters helped them with their schoolwork in the hostel. For the rest the Brothers carried out pastoral duties among the schoolboys.

The scanty accounts of the educational activities of the Doesburg fraters are not entirely clear. Since the question is important I shall first mention all reports, including those of the 16th century. In 1459 Reinier of Kessel returned to the Brotherhouse in Doesburg from the convent in Doetinchem, where the Sisters would not obey him. Here he lovingly devoted himself in a praiseworthy manner to attracting the schoolboys.¹ In 1465 the annalist writes: ‘In that period the school teaching flourished fairly well (satis competenter) and many boys came from all parts. The fraters laboured amongst them faithfully and fruitfully, so that very many were sent out to various places and monastic orders through the zeal and devotion of the fraters, while the Lord helped in all things and confirmed the sermon (sermonem confirmanti).’² Statements like this, which we have met before, refer to the fraters' activities among all schoolboys who were willing to join them. They showed, yet again, that they had nothing against monasteries. There is no doubt either that the school in question is the city school (which was also the parochial school). Now follow years of plague, of storms, of attacks by the Duke of Cleves on the city of Doesburg and its destruction: tunc scolano nostra dispersa est et scolares effugati,³ ‘then our school was destroyed and our scholars dispersed.’ In 1469 the fraters had to start again from the beginning. It was a quiet time for them: they had no school (scola) and were not distracted by the pupils' visits as they usually were.⁴ One might suppose from this that the fraters had their own school and that its loss was something extraordinary. It seems to be a normal thing in Doesburg for the Brothers to have their own school. And yet, I cannot help feeling that the institution referred to here is a hostel, not a school proper. Since boys lived and had lessons in such a hostel or domus pauperum, the chronicler may also have termed this building a school. This building (scola) was later closed once again. It is thus that in 1490 the fraters did their best to restore the domus pauperum scolarium, the house of the poor schoolboys, which had stood empty for some years as a result of wars and general catastrophes. They took in a few boys in the hope of reaching the

¹ Chronicle, 25.
² Ibid., 28.
³ Ibid., 34.
⁴ Ibid., 46.

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parents through the children. They also accepted Gerlach of Rossum as a novice, so that he might help the boys of that house in their school subjects (nt exerceret pro iuvenibus ipsius domus in scolasticalibus). It is not quite clear which house is here referred to: the domus pauperum or the Brotherhouse. In my opinion it is the former. This Gerlach of Rossum unfortunately died in 1496, but the chronicler honours him as the teacher of the pious schoolboys (the boys who lived with the fraters, the young pupils who might be called 'little clerics,' clericorum scolarium instructor.) He credits him with an exceptional talent for teaching. The pupils referred to here are those who lived in the domus pauperum and who received some tuition from the young clerici. The school of Doesburg was something entirely different. One of its rectors was Livinus of Middelburg who had arrived in Doesburg with the Zwolle fraters. In the Brotherhouse documents he is called Livinus van Middelborch, rector quondum scolae Doesburgensis. It was he who made over his house, with garden and courtyard, to the poor scholars in 1456. Like similar foundations elsewhere, this house received its own income to be spent on the poor pupils. There is finally the privilege of bishop David of Burgundy (dated 23rd April 1478) whereby the bishop amortised the property of the Brotherhouse and took it under his protection, but also gave the fraters permission to administer the Sacraments to all the schoolboys studying in Doesburg. Here again mention is made of the general school and of the fraters' pastoral task among all schoolboys. This explanation of the somewhat ambiguous terms means that the situation was exactly the same as that in Deventer, Zwolle and 's-Hertogenbosch and which we shall also find elsewhere: alongside the city school there was the fraters' hostel. If the scola nostra is to be considered a proper school, it must be remembered that it can only have been a very small one. This hostel or domus pauperum which, as we saw, was restored by the Brothers in 1490, is mentioned once more in the important decree of 1571 whereby the congregation was abolished and the Brothers made vicars of the Doesburg church. The domus pauperum, increased by four bursarii would, just as in 1490, be placed under the youngest of the Brothers. Had the Brothers possessed a school in addition to this domus pauperum, it would also have had to be liquidated in 1571, or destined for a particular purpose, or at least mentioned. From the fact that it is not mentioned, one may deduce that it did not exist and never had existed.

1 Chronicle, 76.
2 Ibid., 84.
3 Ibid., 293.
The annalist has the custom of naming all the Brothers according to their place of origin, although some of them also appear to have other names. We are thus in a position to see from what places the novices came. There were candidates from Nijmegen, Zaltbommel, Calcar, Rees, Maesbommel, Doesburg, Kessel, Netterden, Antwerp, Deventer, Grave, Groet, Emmerich, Tiel, Goch, Doetinchem, Drempt, Wageningen, Zutphen, Millingen, Sittard, Groenlo, Coesveld, Cleves, Ahrwilre, Kempen, Berg, Horn, Dusseldorf, Bocholt, Delden, Krefeld, Zwolle, Haelen, Heusden, Elten, Utrecht, Nijkerk, Westervoort, Lochem, Xanten, Oldenzaal, Rossum, etc. Most of the novices come from places around Doesburg which now belong to Germany, like Bocholt, Emmerich, Rees, Xanten, Goch, Kempen, Krefeld. These also provided young men for the houses of Zwolle and Deventer.

The task of these Brothers and notably of the priests among them, was of a priestly nature. They served vicarages and were spiritual directors of schoolboys and Sisters. For some time the Doesburg fraters were responsible for the convents of Cleves, Zaltbommel, Maastricht, the two convents of Doesburg and for Doetinchem, Rees, Wamel, Elten, Duisburg, Huissen and Sion. In several of these they did not retain their function for long. One could say that this work was somewhat on the decline in the 16th century. In 1493 they served six Sisterhouses, in 1501 five, and in 1523 only two.¹ This decline in the 16th century is not to be attributed to lack of priests, but more usually to chance circumstances, such as competition by other clergy or incompatibility. Some were relieved of their function by the visitator. This, however, belongs to the following period.

The income of the house increased, usually as a result of gifts or bequests and church benefices and foundations. As regards these latter, the Brotherhouse in no way differed from the monasteries or parish churches. The rectors of Doesburg tried to maintain the customs of the fraters, and very little relaxation of the rules can be detected for this period. There were, however, a few crises, in which the visitatores had to intervene. Their intervention, however, did not always produce the desired result, as in 1443 when the Brothers were dissatisfied about the farm work they were given to do. The rector was dismissed and had to content himself with an annuity and the rectorship of the convent of St. Catherine in Doesburg.² The new rector, elected by the Brothers, was not recognized by the colloquium in Zwolle.

¹ Chronicle, 31, 46.
² Ibid., 16.

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so that a new election had to be held under the direction of the visitatores. This resulted in the appointment of another young man, Henry of Grave.\(^1\) In 1483 the building of a church with three altars in the new Brotherhouse led to a quarrel with the pastor and municipality.\(^2\) In 1469, the Doesburg fraters provided one of their members for the post of rector in the Brotherhouse at Amersfoort.\(^3\) If this was an honour, the summons of the procurator, Gerard of Berch, to Zutphen and his sudden transfer to the Dominicans, made quite an impression. The annalist takes care to mention that the man was soon stricken by remorse and died shortly afterwards.\(^4\)

In 1485 however, there was again tension between the Brothers and rector, Theodoric of Sittard. The Brothers called in the visitator to help, with the result that the rector was dismissed.\(^5\) The exact nature of the dispute is not mentioned. When the deposed rector died, a few years later, the annalist praised him as an industrious man with a great love for the house, who was happiest in his cell.

It is a remarkable fact that on several occasions, the frater-confessors of a house of Sisters of the Common Life persuaded these to adopt a monastic rule. The ex-rector Gerard of Rees, for example, confessor in the convent of St. Catherine in Doesburg, had the Sisters adopt the Third Order of St. Francis around 1445.\(^6\) Similarly, frater Theodoric of Emmerich in 1468 persuaded the sisters of Doetinchem to adopt the rule of St. Augustine and the clausura.\(^7\) The same Brother Theodoric also brought about the introduction of the clausura in the Sion convent,\(^8\) and Bitter of Doetinchem the acceptance of the rule of St. Augustine, with lausura, in Elten (1504).\(^9\) In 1459 the fraters John of Rees and in 1478 Peter of Hoen left the fraters and were received into monasteries of the Third Order.\(^10\)

The trek to the monastery still continued. In 1464 the rector Henry of Grave (1443-1473) made an attempt to join the Canons Regular of the Windesheim congregation, taking the whole of the Brotherhouse with him. He received the consent of all the Brothers, who gave their signatures to this effect. They had already received the bishop's permission, but in the end this move was prevented by Count Adolf and the municipality.\(^11\) The affair came to the ears of the rector and

\(^{1}\) Chronicle, 17.
\(^{2}\) Ibid., 29.
\(^{3}\) Ibid., 68.
\(^{4}\) Ibid., 48.
\(^{5}\) Ibid., 71.
\(^{6}\) Ibid., 16.
\(^{7}\) Ibid., 39.
\(^{8}\) Ibid., 90.
\(^{9}\) Ibid., 94.
\(^{10}\) Ibid., 37, 38.
\(^{11}\) Ibid., 37, 38.

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Brothers of the houses of Deventer and Zwolle, and caused them considerable astonishment and annoyance. They had had great confidence in Henry. The annalist makes no mention of the intervention by Egbert ter Beek, rector of the house of Deventer. This reproached the prior-superior of the Windesheim congregation with this activity in Doesburg. However, he could not entirely disapprove of the affair and so fell back on an incidental matter. He alleged that in this manner the congregation of Windesheim was depriving the Brotherhood of its buildings and property. This he considered to be against the law of charity.¹

This leaving the house and transferring to other orders may be considered as normal among the Brothers, who took no vows. On the other hand, this agitation for a monastic rule shows that the initial enthusiasm of the fraters for the distinctive quality of their institution was no longer such as we found it in Deventer and Zwolle. It appears, however, that the lectio, oratio and compunctio still existed, as in the time of Florens Radewijns, so that the principal means of keeping alive their inner devotion were still being practised.²

We know very little in this period concerning the history of the Groningen Brotherhouse at the Martini cemetery, the third founded by Henry of Herxen between 1342 and 1346.³ According to an Act dated 1478, it possessed, at a short distance from the Brotherhouse, a hostel.

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¹ Dumbar Analecta I 174-175.
² Chronicle of Doesburg 86.
³ The undated document, which is sometimes considered as the draft for the letter of foundation, and then again as the draft of the rules, appears to me to be neither. Characteristic of this document is the fear of the parish priests and the municipality on the one hand that the Brothers would violate the church rights of certain officials, and on the other that there would be an increase in the number of monasteries in the city, thus adding to the number of properties held in mortmain. This latter is especially typical of the Dutch cities in the 15th century. The church and civic authorities thus set out their requirements: no building expansion, no increase in the number of members, of the right of succession, of property held in mortmain, of privileges, of capital (only personal estate) brought in by children of the city. These points were made with regard to monasteries in many places, and must not be attributed to a sort of anti-clericalism. The emphasis was rather on the welfare of the small city of the time, so full of religious institutions. The document contains no privilege, nor does it impart any particular rights. Its purpose is rather to define what may not be done. It may have been put before the Brothers on their arrival, or have been composed later. It was never, however, legally binding. It will have been intended to impress upon the Brothers that they must keep to the city regulations concerning religious institutions and property, even though they were not monastics.

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(St. Jansstraat), a *domus pauperum*, in which live ‘arne clarken ende kinderen’ (poor clerks and boys). As in Deventer, Zwolle and Doesburg, it was under the direction of a procurator. This hostel was to have an important future. Soon it also admitted paying scholars, so that the buildings had to be extended in 1511. The peculiar circumstances prevailing in the domain of education, i.e. the existence of two parish schools, made it possible for the Groningen *fraters* to begin their own school, which achieved quite a considerable reputation. But such an undertaking was not yet envisaged, as will be indicated in the following period.

The declaration by the municipality (12th February 1566) that the property of the house was originally destined for the training and education of young people, as a ‘seminiari der heijlligen kirke,’ (a seminary of the holy church) lends weight to the assumption that the *domus pauperum* too was principally intended for the training of the clergy. The Brothers were especially concerned with the pastoral care of the pupils in general. William of Groningen, the first rector, was particularly renowned for his collations, so much so indeed, that on the occasion of the *colloquium* in Zwolle, he held a powerful ‘collation’ for the schoolboys there.

At their foundation or shortly afterwards, the two houses in ’s-Hertogenbosch received the same statutes as Zwolle. This is clear from a comparison of the surviving documents. They will thus have desired to live and act like their Brothers in Zwolle and did in fact keep to the essence of the statutes. One must hereby remember that the Brothers living in the Sisterhouse of ten Orthen formed a brotherhood *sui generis*, having for example no contact with the school and very little with the schoolboys. The company consisted of a few Brothers, whose task

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2 *Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis ...* Groningen VI (1869) 19, v. Dellen, 121.
3 Schoengen 101.
4 Those of the two houses in ’s-Hertogenbosch are published in *Analecta Gysberti Coeverincx*, II, but in such a way that the documents belonging to each house are combined. Moreover the edition is not complete. Several questions which are regulated in the Zwolle status are not copied by G. Coeverincx. What remains, however, is the same, word for word, as the Zwolle statutes, apart from the odd line or couple of lines which were either not adopted, were added later in the Zwolle version, or were missed by the copyist.

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was the spiritual care of the Sisters and who lived a communal life among themselves, inspired and supervised by the rector. The Zwolle statutes remained their model and ideal. This Brotherhouse continued to exist as such after the Council of Trent, and no real change was made in the institution at the Reformation of 1585.¹

The house founded in the Hinthamerstraat in 1424-1425 may be considered as the real Brotherhouse of ’s-Hertogenbosch, and its attitude towards the school, teaching and education during the period under discussion merits our attention. This institution is all the more interesting since, towards the end of this period, Erasmus lived and studied in ’s-Hertogenbosch. Most of his biographers, including the local ones, have him attending the city school, which however, was, in their opinion, under the direction of the Brothers. Either that or the Brothers taught there.

The school in ’s-Hertogenbosch was originally linked with the parish church of St. John. It already existed before the chapter was founded in 1366. In 1399 it had passed to the city, at least temporarily. Throughout the 15th and 16th centuries municipality and chapter disputed the so-called school right, the scholastria, which included, among other things, the right of appointing the rector.² According to a visitation report of 1573, the Canons were competely in charge of the school of ’s-Hertogenbosch.³

The ’s-Hertogenbosch school was certainly not in the hands of the fraters before 1573. That they were not in charge of the school is made plain by, among other things, a will of Jacob of Ostayen, dated 1561⁴ in which a distinction is made between the ‘meester van de scolé’ (the master of the school) and the pater or frater. The Brothers, who as we saw, had done no academic studies, were not especially suited to teach at the city or chapter school. Sufficient is known of most of the school teachers mentioned by Schutjens as fraters, to make it clear that they were never members of the Fraternity. Details of their careers are gleaned from their activities elsewhere, and from a comparison with the names of the fraters of ’s-Hertogenbosch professed

1 Analecta, II 121.
2 R. Post, Scholen en Onderwijs in Nederland gedurende de Middeleeuwen, Utrecht 1954, 52.
4 A. van der Does de Willebois, Studiebeursen II 263.
in the 16th century. A list of their names has survived. It was only at the end of the 16th century and the beginning of the 17th that certain fraters taught in the city school. These abnormal circumstances were occasioned by the decrees of pope Pius V, by the Reformation, and by the war, all of which will be discussed in due course.

There was thus no direct connection between the fraters, the school and teaching, in the sense that they neither directed the school of 's-Hertogenbosch, nor taught in it during the period under discussion, that is, from 1425 to roughly 1485.

However, on the basis of the statutes adopted from Zwolle, it may be assumed that, like the Brothers in Zwolle, they undertook the spiritual care of the schoolboys. It is at the same time certain that a domus pauperum scolarum existed around 1450. This was a house in the Schilderstraat, under the direction of the fraters. Evidence for this is provided by a charter dated July 28th, 1501, in which Jan of Hoorn, bishop of Liège, confirmed the foundation established by Gerard de Heer, fifty years before. According to this document, the boys admitted to this house were under the direction of the rector of the Brothers, and were obliged to obey him. The rector might also appoint one or more deputies. The boys attended the city school. The house was intended for the use of a few poor scholars who attended the school. There seems to be no real reason why this school could not have been within the house. However, since there was usually only one school in any city, that is, the one big school, for the teaching of the time, for Latin, it was so understood by everybody. The clause concerning attendance at the scolae (really classes) must mean that the boys had to attend the city school, the school which was the same as that of the parish or the chapter. If the reference had been to a school within the house, this would have had to be indicated more clearly, since it would have been something out of the ordinary. That the hostel boys of the domus pauperum did indeed attend the city school, is expressly stated in a letter by the aldermen dated February 6th 1485, precisely in the year of Erasmus' stay in 's-Hertogenbosch. This document confirmed the granting of certain goods for the benefit of the pupils who attended the city school and lived in the domus pauperum

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2 Compare Statutes in Gijsb. Coeverinx, II 100 and 101.
3 A. Miraeus, Opera Diplomatica IV, 451.
of the fraters: ‘ad opus pauperum fratrum, scolas in opido Buscoducis frequentantium, habitantium in hereditate olim domini Ludolphi van de Wale’ (that is, the domus pauperum founded by Gerard Heer). And so it remained. When the afore mentioned Jacob of Ostayen founded a bursary in the fraters’ hostel on Dec. 5th 1561, he stated: This schoolboy shall attend the big school within the city.¹ When Arnold of Esch founded a bursary in the same house on August 7th 1609, he decreed that only three of the pupils might avail of it, who have learned so much in the school that they might be accepted after the custom of the domus pauperum.² School and hostels were evidently two distinct institutions. Having once established this, our opinion is confirmed in the Vita of Nicolas Eschius, compiled around 1580 by A. Janssen: Translata jam pueritia, missus ad scolam Buscoducensem, habitavit in domo fratrum ut vocantur S. Hieronymi.³ Attendance at the city school of ’s-Hertogenbosch and living with the fraters, are two separate things.

Judging by what we have already seen in Deventer, Zwolle and Doesburg we may assume that the ’s-Hertogenbosch hostel or domus pauperum usually included, besides a procurator (and cook), a brother whose task was to help the boys with their studies. This was a sort of repetitor who went over what the boys had learnt in the various classes at school. The term repetitor is indeed found in the decree dealing with the domus pauperum, as it occurs under number 21 in the new statutes given to the fraternity on January 22 1573 by bishop Laurence Metz when the measures taken by Pope Pius V seemed about to lead to its disappearance.⁴ Item ad scholam quod attinet, ut uterque juventutis rector, tam in docendo et repetendo, quam in observando et corrigendo, diligenter institutum atque legum domus rationem habeat utque eorum unus coram dicta scholastica juventute e scholis egressa statutis diebus celebret, et alter eandem interim observet et in officio pio detineat.

Two persons are at the head of the house; one is the repetitor, the teacher; the other is the duty-master, the man who keeps order. The latter's duties even included supervising the boys when they heard Mass, usually after having already attended lessons at school in the morning from 6 till 8. The hour from 8 to 9 was usually left free in

¹ Van der Does, II 263: ‘Die welche scholier sal fragmenteren inne der grooten scole binnen derselven stadt.’
² Ibid., 277. ‘sooveel geleert zullen hebben in de scholen datsi nae de costuymen van het pauperhuis ontfangen mogen worden.’
⁴ Analecta Gijsberti Coeverincx, II 120.
the medieval schools in order to allow the priest-teachers, often possessors of a vicarage, to fulfil their duties as vicar. This report is rather late, but the same situation must also have existed earlier, since these two persons were indispensable in a hostel of any size. There are indeed references to them elsewhere.

Before examining now how Erasmus's statement concerning his stay in 's-Hertogenbosch corresponds to the situation as we have described it, two further points must be made. Firstly, that the Brothers of 's-Hertogenbosch, like those of other houses, used these hostels to recruit members for their congregation and for various orders, and secondly, that in 's-Hertogenbosch too they carried out pastoral work among the other schoolboys, i.e., those who did not live in their house. They preached to them and administered the sacraments. This last point accords with the statutes, but for both we have only later reports. These, however, can be said to apply also to the former situation. The fact that the house was destined for such aspirant monastics, either brothers or priests, accords well with the clause in the already quoted will of Jacob of Ostayen of Zudert (1561: a future Dominican received free board and lodgings with the fraters).\(^1\)

For the same reason Arnold of Esch founded three bursaries (August 7th 1609) considering that ‘this period requires learned men in the Holy Church as pastors, and other men and priests for the maintenance of the divine offices.’ It was thus also reasonable that this house in 's-Hertogenbosch should be transformed into a seminary, as happened elsewhere.\(^3\) Concerning the Brothers' pastoral duties: at the visitation of the chapter of St. John by bishop Francis Sonnius, in 1568, Canon Coolen expressed his desire to restore the old custom of leading the entire company of schoolboys on Sunday afternoons in procession to the Brothers' house, or to another suitable place, for them to hear a sermon.\(^4\)

Finally there is the question of Erasmus' stay and study in 's-Hertogenbosch. We have to determine if what he himself says of it corresponds with what we have described and if so, to what extent? Apart from the fact that Erasmus generally does not try to hide his
dislike of the so-called 'bij scholen,' private school enterprises which could compete with the official city schools, and of the institution of the fraters as such; he writes, in the well known tendentious letter of 1516 to the curia official Grunnius, describing his stay with the fraters in 's-Hertogenbosch. His intention in writing this letter was to obtain permission to wear non-monastic dress. Having read the study of R. Crahay, I consider the *compendium vitae*, which also refers to the stay in 's-Hertogenbosch, as an unauthentic document, probably composed around the middle of the 16th century in the circles associated with Peter Winckel. These persons naturally knew from experience the relationship between hostel and school as it existed in various cities. It might thus be possible to use this falsified *compendium vitae* as a new source for Erasmus. First, we shall deal with Erasmus' own letter. He writes in 1516 that on leaving Deventer he was fully ready for the university, since he had learnt sufficient Latin and the greater part of the logic book of Petrus Hispanus. He also refers to the spread of the Brothers and to their efforts to earn money by teaching (*instituendis*).

We have not yet seen any examples of this, and indeed, it is scarcely correct for this period, although it might apply to conditions in 1516. He considered his years in 's-Hertogenbosch as a waste of time, since he knew more than the teachers (*preceptores*). There were two of them in the school, but he continues... ‘unus praecceptorum talis erat, etc... alter vero qui...’

That there were two persons in charge (of teaching) accords with what we have deduced from the decrees of bishop Metz. One of the teachers—continued Erasmus—was the most stupid and self-satisfied man Erasmus had ever met. His like were often appointed, ‘for they are not chosen for their erudition, but according to the whim of the rector who is himself unlettered.’ The other teacher seemed to be particularly pleased by Erasmus' talent. When he saw that Erasmus wished to return to his native city, he began to play upon the young man's conscience in order to bind him to their institution. This he

1 Erasmus, *Opera omnia* I 504 D, 921D-922B.
2 *Ibid.*, 1 921F-922A.
6 *Ibid.*, p. 296, r. 120 vlg.

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did in private conversation by mentioning many things which appeal to children.

Erasmus later expressed regret that he had not agreed. Since the Brothers were not bound by vows he would have been easily able to leave. He continues his description of this teacher's efforts to win him over, but the latter finally desisted.

The unauthentic *compendium vitae* mentions only one teacher and calls him Romboldus. This may be considered accurate insofar as one of the directors was more concerned with teaching while the other had a supervisory task which included providing for the material needs of the house and its inmates. Like the author of the letter to Grunnius, the writer of the *compendium vitae* is of the opinion that Erasmus was ready for the university on leaving Deventer, since he had already reached the third class in 1483. This statement, which shows that the falsifier was well acquainted with conditions in the late medieval schools, is important for us since it follows that officially, and perhaps also in fact, Erasmus could not indeed learn anything more at the school in 's-Hertogenbosch, which had no higher class than third. He had after all completed the curriculum of the usual five classes (7-3) in Deventer, and his fellow students went from the same third class to the university. That this was also the case later appears from a bursary founded by Canon Burghardt van den Bergh. Erasmus, however, was placed in the hostel of the Brothers in Den Bosch. As was customary, the other boys in the hostel attended the school in the city, but there was no point at all in Erasmus doing this. He could better stay at home and try to make some progress with the aid of the house repetitor. However, as he later writes, he was extremely unfortunate in this, since the repetitor of that time was a stupid and complacent person. Erasmus will certainly have exaggerated the poor man's defects, but it is indeed very probable that his knowledge of Latin exceeded that of his teacher. We must thus conclude that, in his letter to Grunnius, Erasmus did not give a completely false account of the existing state of affairs, and also that the writer of the *compendium vitae* did not take many liberties with history on this point. It follows from this that Erasmus stayed with the Brothers in the 's-Hertogenbosch hostel in the years 1485-1487, that is in the years which saw the rise of Humanism in the Netherlands. During this period he had some private tuition from a Brother who

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was in no way trained for this task and possessed no talent for it either. The masters of the 's-Hertogenbosch school will not have been much better, but Erasmus had no dealings with them since he had already completed or nearly completed in Deventer all the classes which the school in 's-Hertogenbosch had to offer.

Another report, dated January 10th 1469, also falls within this period in the history of the Brotherhouse of 's-Hertogenbosch. In this the Apostolic legate, Onofrio Sewer, bishop of Troyes, at the request of the Brotherhouses of 's-Hertogenbosch, Gent, Brussels and Geraardsbergen, gives permission to apply in their house and church certain privileges granted to the Brotherhouses of Münster, Cologne and Wesel by pope Eugenius IV, and now placed under the name of popes Martin V, Eugenius IV, Nicolas V, Calixtus III and Pius II. With this report is associated a document of March 22nd 1469 by the executor, putting into effect the preceding Bull, or at least making it known to the houses in question.\(^1\) This was the privilege of transforming the Brotherhouse chapels into collegial churches, and elevating the Brothers to the rank of Canon, so that their house would then be a chapter. It is indeed this privilege which was offered to Münster in Rome in 1439, which the legate Nicolas of Cusa proposed to the Deventer Brotherhouse in 1451 and which now, in 1469, was granted to four Brotherhouses at once as something attractive and worth having. I very much doubt if this privilege was granted at the request of the rectors, or even that it was really put into practice. However, doubtful as the whole matter may be, we must bear it in mind. It is certainly of importance in the more easterly houses and will also come under discussion when we are dealing with Amersfoort.

We know very little in this period of the Brotherhouse at Harderwijk. The initiative for its foundation came from the magistrate of Harderwijk in 1441 and it was probably definitely established in 1442. We do know for certain, however, that the house went through a very difficult period under its first rector Godfried of Kempen. Although he succeeded in attracting a few suitable youths as *clerici* or lay brothers, the house was not financially sound, nor had it sufficient novices.\(^2\) The position was so bad that Godfried finally handed over his task to someone else and returned to Zwolle. However, like the *fraters* of the two houses of 's-Hertogenbosch, he and the few Brothers who

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1 A. Miraeus, *Opera diplomatica*. IV 442, 443.
2 Schoengen, 100.

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helped him begin the foundation, will have taken the statutes of the Zwolle house with them to Harderwijk and have applied them so far as was possible.

It appears from the available data that the city school already existed before the Brothers' arrival. The magistrates and city council also continued in control of the school during the following years of the fifteenth and sixteenth century. They appointed and paid the rector, decided the school fees and approved the curriculum. In the period under discussion the Brothers had nothing at all to do with the teaching in the school. True, they probably kept a hostel for the schoolboys, but this is only mentioned in the documents for the first time on September 2nd 1528. It was then called the small clerks' house. Since it was already flourishing at this time it is not unreasonable to assume that it had come into existence much earlier.

There is also a manuscript, originating from the Brotherhouse of Harderwijk, which was written by Cornelius Vianen in 1503 and has been edited by W. Jappe Alberts. This document, which is classified under the *consuetudines*, although the editor points out that it is not, in fact, a *consuetudo*, may throw some light upon the devotion in the Harderwijk house at the moment when the person in question was noting down his resolution or way of life. This must thus have been either in 1503 or before it. It is not possible to judge whether the manuscript was actually composed by Cornelius Vianen. He may have copied it from another who lived and wrote earlier. In any case I feel justified in using this document in order to describe the spirit prevailing in the house of Harderwijk (or even in any of the other Brotherhouses), at the end of this period. The document does not list the statutes of a Brotherhouse, nor does it codify its customs. It is rather a personal statement of the author's activities.

A Brother sets down how he will try to follow the prescribed order of the day. He says that he will perform every action with intense devotion and consciously direct every deed—rising, praying, working, eating—to God. This is putting into practice, or at least the good intention of putting into practice, the ideals of the Modern Devotionalists. His devotions are not solely inward, they are rather and more...
frequently outward, in the sense that certain prayers, certain formulas are employed, but in such a way that the inner man is completely involved. The precise intention of these prayers, which are sometimes only ejaculations, is to keep alive or revive the original good intention. This attempt on the part of one Brother characterizes the ideals of the Modern Devotionalists more clearly and more significantly than the statutes, or even the pious writings of the ascetic authors, which have been dealt with up to now. Here is the devout life in practice! The document moreover to some extent supplements the Brothers' order of the day as previously indicated, and is also important for what it does not contain. There is, for example, no time set aside for methodical meditation. It can thus be assumed that this did not yet exist, although in fact meditation went on throughout the entire day. This was the so-called *ruminatio*.

The writer first notes what prayers and aspirations he can say on waking, getting up and dressing, in order to direct his soul to God.¹ The hour for rising is not mentioned, but it must have been four o'clock, since the first ceremonies, matins and prime, are taken to be already over at five. When the Brother is dressed, he goes to the chapel and meditates, reflecting on some subject in preparation for matins. Various examples are given of how he might do this, for instance pondering on the words: *Psallite Deo nostro, psallite*, in which prayer the word *psallite* occurs five times. The Brother then can reflect on the five reasons for which he should praise God presently during matins. There are other possibilities, but one remark adds a human touch: ‘While you are thinking on this, you must not grow annoyed if others arrive a little late, even after matins have begun.’² This meditation can be brief or prolonged, depending on the amount of time you have. The matins, like all the other hours, begin with the *Our Father*. The Brother indicates what reflections this must arouse before and after the hours. Before: the hallowing of God's name; after: the forgiveness of our trespasses. Each of the hours has other preparatory prayers of which the Brother mentions the first words here: *Domine labia; Deus in adjutorium; converte nos*. These words offer matter for reflection. The first indicates shortcomings in pronouncing the prayer; the second implores God's help in prayer, and *converte nos Deus* which introduces the couplets, incites to remorse over the short-comings of the day. So also the conclusion; *te Deum laudamus*. The bow-

¹ *Consuetudines* 14, 16.
ing of the head at the Gloria Patri can arouse the attention and is necessary in order to gain the indulgences. He also suggests what certain prayers of the matins may mean, especially the closing prayer. This is to be supplemented by a prayer of thanksgiving during the first week after a communion.¹

From five to six: Read in your cell.

Then follows half an hour of writing (6-6.30) for which the Brother must prepare himself with a prayer and decide how he must write (accurately, useful matters, and that which arouses compunction). At half past 6 the bell is rung for Mass. The praying of the terce and above all meditation on the last psalm on the way to the chapel, serves as preparation for devout attendance at Mass. He gives in detail the various thoughts which must be aroused at the various parts and prayers of the Mass, and also at the end and during the return by way of the cemetery.² After Mass the Brother reads the sext and recommences writing from eight till ten o'clock.

A prayer follows the bell for the midday meal (10 o'clock) and even the rosary may be said,³ but the main concern is to what he should direct his thoughts during grace and the reading aloud. After the meal he will pray the none of Our Lady and of the Cross. He can then rest for half an hour, from half past eleven until twelve. This rest is preceded and followed by a prayer.

Writing follows from twelve to three, with a short prayer at one and two o'clock. At three o'clock preparation for vespers in the chapel, with an indication of his subject matter for reflection during the prayers, and notably during the confiteor. After vespers he can study in his cell, then come two hours' writing, introduced by a short prayer, with a brief pause at five o'clock and concluded by a somewhat longer prayer at six.

Then comes the evening meal and compline, with suggestions for meditation at the canticle of Simeon. After this there is silence for all; examination of conscience and prayers, reflection on the matter for the following day and on sins committed, until nine o'clock. The day's subject matter for meditation will correspond to what we have suggested before: episodes from Christ's life and passion and the intention of the day. These subjects can be reflected on at various odd moments (during the day), but there is no suggestion that a definite hour or half hour was set aside for meditation.⁴ It is a heavy day!

¹ Consuetudines, 20-21.
² Ibid., 22-24.
³ Ibid., 24.
⁴ Ibid., 29-31.

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The Brother is always spiritually occupied and must seize every means to fix his thoughts upon the higher goal. It is interesting to note that the ten fingers are used to count the ten verses of the Magnificat, and thus to concentrate the attention on certain verses.\(^1\) We saw something similar with Dirk of Herxen and it will occur again with Wessel Gansfort and John Mombaer. The ideal is a lofty one! No provision seems to be made for recreation, and there is no mention of teaching. The only form of work the Brother knows is the copying of books (*scriptura*). There is indeed some time for study but this is short. Pastoral work among the schoolboys was possible, however.\(^2\) The Brothers took no part in the teaching. It can be shown that several of those who were rectors of the school were wrongly considered to have been *fraters*, including Peter of Zevenaar, Reinier Sarcerus and Thomas Dinslaken.\(^3\) The house belonging to the *fraters* (the *domus pauperum* in my opinion) used as a boarding school for the future clergy was transformed after the Reformation into a hostel for theology students of the later high school.

So ends this period of the history of the Zwolle branch of the Brotherhouses-Zwolle, Albergen, Hulsbergen, Doesburg, 's-Hertogenbosch and ten Orthen, Groningen and Harderwijk. In this period Hulsbergen managed to surmount the difficulties of the early days and sometimes offered hospitality to the brothers of Zwolle and Deventer. On one occasion they even came to the assistance of Amersfoort. Despite the proximity of a town with a school, the house retained its agrarian character, so that the Brothers no chance of furthering Humanism. Important events occur here, however, in the following period.

Even more rural was the house at Albergen. After the usual difficult years, the house surmounted the worst of its financial worries and acquired an independent position distinct from Zwolle on November 15th 1420.

It provided more than one rector for the Tertiaries outside Vollenhoven, and also received ecclesiastical independence from the parish priest. The Brothers maintained a courageous and principled stand during the interdict of 1525-1531, but showed a disposition to exchange the old institution for a monastery. On January 26th 1447,

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\(^1\) Consuetudines, 28.

\(^2\) D. Buddingh, *Bijdragen of geschiedkundig en letterkundig mengelwerk betreffende de geschiedenis van opvoeding en onderwijs in de Nederlanden* 1843, I 133.

\(^3\) J. Schrasser, *Harderwicum antiquum* 1742, 47, 72.
the second rector of Albergen received the Brothers' agreement and co-operation for his plan. The transition to the Canons Regular became a fact on May 4th 1447, when the house was admitted to the organization of the Windesheim chapter, while bishop Rudolf of Diepholt approved the transition in a decree dated June 24th 1447. At this time the house consisted of ten members. Only one of them left, but he later continued to favour the monastery of Albergen.¹

With the exception of the houses around Münster, the Deventer branch had a much harder struggle than that of Zwolle. We saw that at the beginning of the period, in 1421, the Brothers of Amersfoort were given a rector from Hulsbergen. They gained more living space on settling in St. Janscamp in 1444, but this perhaps increased the difficulties of caring for the schoolboys' spiritual welfare. The first fraters devoted much care to the Sisters and this tradition was probably continued. I have been unable to decide whether a domus pauperum scolarium was established here. The fraters certainly had nothing to do with the teaching in St. George's school. The rector of the house who was sent from Hulsbergen, and died in 1456, was renowned as a good speaker, notably in the collationes for the young people.² It is not certain whether many Brothers remained after a series of migrations from 1412 to 1433.

The second house founded from Deventer, i.e., Delft, underwent a similar difficult development during the first half of the 15th century. Here too the majority of the Brothers had transferred to a monastic order, and here too the Zwolle house had offered help in 1433. When, however, the last of the monastics left the house around 1435, and a few Zwolle fratres either supplemented what life there was or started entirely anew,³ there was room for fresh growth. On August 27th 1433 the Brothers received control of a few houses in the city.⁴

The house made a such good progress that in 1446 it ventured on a new foundation. It started a house in Gouda which soon, however, proved a real problem child.⁵ The people of Gouda had offered the

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² Joh. Lindeborn, Historia sive notitia episcopatus Daventriensis Köln 1670, 107, based on lost reports from Hulsbergen.
³ Schoengen 19.
⁴ Ibid 19

R.R. Post, The Modern Devotion
Brothers a house and some sources of income, in return for nothing more than an extra sermon. Since this corresponded well with the fraters' activities, the rector of Delft, Henry Herp, accepted the offer against the advice of his confraters. In his idealism he had given no thought to his own poverty, and failed to realize that he did not possess the necessary means for a new foundation, either in money or personnel. At the request of the superior of the Zwolle congregation he himself accepted the direction of the Gouda house, and settled there with a number of fraters. His tender plant, however, refused to flourish. In 1450, the jubilee year, Herp, whose idealism had blinded him to reality, departed for Rome and there entered the Franciscan Order. Only one frater remained in Gouda, and he soon returned to Delft. Around 1454 a new rector found himself alone again and quitted the house. It was only then that Dirk of Herxen, father of all Devotionalists, rector of Zwolle, and president of the Zwolle colloquium, took a hand in the affair. He did this against his will and at the express request of his fellow directors. Zwolle accordingly sent a consignment of Brothers to this house, which in 1456 was officially recognized as a member of the Zwolle colloquium. Thus sustained and now assisted by the alms of the citizens of Gouda and by the setting up of a small school, it succeeded in surmounting the difficulties of the early years. The setting up of a small school is a new note in the history of the Brothers of the Common Life. Before going deeper into this however, we shall continue with the history of Delft after the decisive experience in Gouda.

Undeterred by this disappointment, the fraters of Delft began a new foundation in Utrecht in 1475. In this undertaking they were materially assisted by certain pious lay people of Utrecht. They gave their house behind St. Peter's to the Brothers of Delft, on condition that they should found a community there. In September 1475, shortly after the death of the last testator, the new inmates took possession of their inheritance, and by November 28th 1475 the new foundation was officially constituted as an independent Brotherhouse and placed under the supervision of the rectors of Zwolle, Deventer and Delft.¹ This last must have made considerable progress towards the end of the period, although the fraters appear never to have been exactly prosperous. A school also existed in Delft and was mentioned as early as 1322.² The school rights were then in the possession of the Count

² Buddingh, Bijdr. I 51; R.R. Post, Scholen en Onderwijs 39.
of Holland, but these rights, and with them the school, passed to the city as a gift, and were still enjoyed by the city in the 16th century.\footnote{H.J. Smit, De rekeningen der graven en gravinnen van het Henegouwse huis, Inl. W.H.G. Derde serie 69 (1939) 107. J. Soutenham, Mededelingen uit het archief van Delft, Delft 1862, 49. R.R. Post, Scholen en onderwijs 47.} The Brothers had no part at all in this educational institution and, since the city forcefully defended her sole rights to the big school, the fraters were unable to set up a private school on the side for teaching in Latin.\footnote{R.R. Post, Scholen en onderwijs 68.} They could, however, found a hostel, and indeed opened a domus pauperum scholarium in the Schoolstraat. According to P. Opmerus, who must have been personally acquainted with the situation, twelve boys lived there who followed classes at the city school (schola publica). In the hostel they were subject to stern discipline, learnt music and church singing and sang in the chapel of the convent of St. Agatha.\footnote{Printed by D. van Bleyswijck, Beschrijving der stad Delft, 1667, 519. The ‘constans fama’ of which Opmerus speaks at the end of the sixteenth century, contents that pope Adrian VI is supposed to have lived in this hostel. Dancwere, aangeboden aan D.Th. Enklaar, Groningen 1959, 242.} This discipline, church singing and the resemblance to other similar institutions, indicate that these twelve youths were destined for the clergy. Indeed, after the reformation, this hostel was transformed into a theological college in which future ministers could live free of charge.\footnote{D. van Bleyswijck, 323.} Although this was merely a small undertaking, similar to the small boarding schools attached to some of the chapter churches, the situation in Delft resembled that in Zwolle and Deventer. There is no mention of any further pastoral work among the schoolboys, which does not mean that it was not carried out.

As we said, the offshoot of Delft, the congregation or the Brotherhouse of Gouda, overcame the worst of its difficulties around 1460. For this they had to thank the alms offered by the citizens but also, as the chronicle tells us, a school, from which the fraters, according to the same chronicle, derived quite a considerable profit (satis lucrum bonum).\footnote{Henric van Arnhem's chronicle of the fraterhouse at Gouda, edited by A.H.L. Hensen in: Bijdragen en Mededeelingen van het Hist. Gen. 20 (1898) 45.} This is the earliest known school in the history of the fraters, roughly 10 years before that of Culm (1472) which is in any case problematical. This report is already in direct conflict with the opinion of those who call the Brothers pioneers of free education. The necessity for making money from other work than the copying of books, which would soon arise due to the invention and use of the printing press, may not

\[2\] R.R. Post, Scholen en Onderwijs 68.
\[3\] Printed by D. van Bleyswijck, Beschrijving der stad Delft, 1667, 519. The ‘constans fama’ of which Opmerus speaks at the end of the sixteenth century, contents that pope Adrian VI is supposed to have lived in this hostel. Dancwere, aangeboden aan D.Th. Enklaar, Groningen 1959, 242.
\[4\] D. van Bleyswijck, 323.
yet have been felt in Gouda around 1460. This teaching thus was not intended to replace the traditional activities of the fraters, but to supplement them. The report also shows however, that we should not have too high an opinion of the school.

Instruction was given in the guest-room, which also contained a bed.¹

It so happens that quite a good deal is known about the schools in Gouda in the 15th and 16th centuries. The institution of the fraters was very insignificant compared with the city school of the time.² In 1407 already, half a century before the Brothers obtained a firm footing in Gouda, the school there possessed a rector and three teachers, together with three hundred pupils.

The municipality was very vigilant in preserving the rights of this school. They would not tolerate the setting up of any additional school (for Latin and logic). This repeatedly formulated law suppressed the so-called private schools or prevented them from starting up at all. If the fraters' school was of any significance for this kind of teaching, it must have fallen victim to the afore-mentioned city laws and quickly disappeared. There is no further mention of it.³

Instruction in reading and writing was free in Gouda. These so-called writing schools were private institutions and several of them existed in the 16th century. Erasmus must have learned his reading and writing at one of them, and perhaps the very first principles of Latin.

Had the Brothers not ventured any further than this primary education, they would have gone scot free, but this would scarcely have helped their reputation as bearers of culture.

The fraters' other activities on behalf of the schoolboys were also to be found in Gouda. In 1471 Armbout Gerijtsoen bought a house which he placed under the direction of the fraters as domus pauperum scolarium.⁴ It seems possible to me that the school in the fraters' house was nothing but such a domus pauperum in embryo. A few boys probably lived with the fraters and received a few lessons there in the evenings in the guest-room. In any case, the chronicle says that the schoolboys and commensales attended the school.⁵

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¹ Henric van Arnhem, 45.
² In this period the school rights fell to the count of Holland. He usually gave them to some official, who either exercised them himself or leased them to the city. The parish school can thus be called the city school from an early date. R.R. Post, Scholen en Onderwijs, 47.
⁴ Kesper 113.
⁵ Kesper 112.

R.R. Post, The Modern Devotion
The *domus pauperum* was exactly the same as those in Deventer, Zwolle and Doesburg. Before entering the candidate had to have reached the age of twelve or at least attained the fifth class in the city school. The house indeed was intended, for the benefit of poor pupils who will live there permanently in order to attend school. ‘And they will have to have heard the first treatise of Petrus Hispanus; they must be able to sing, or at least be willing to learn to sing, be at least twelve or thirteen years of age and be willing to wear the gown.’ The first treatise of this particular book of logic, *summulae logicales*, was dealt with in the fifth class. Living in the hostel and attending school are quite distinct. The first is a step towards the second, and the school in question is the city school. Another condition was that the poor pupil who was admitted into this house must have the firm desire and intention of entering the monastery, if he has enjoyed sufficient education in the opinion of the aforementioned Brothers. As elsewhere, this house is destined for future monastics (and perhaps for aspirants to the priesthood). The fraters looked after the spiritual welfare of these boys and also of the pupils who visited this house. They were entitled to hear their confessions and grant them absolution and also to administer Holy Communion.

Just as the boys in other towns usually went to the fraters’ house on Sundays after vespers, those in Gouda were all to assemble in the school after vespers till they have heard the sermon. It is not stated whether the Brothers gave this sermon, but this is assumed.

The second foundation from Delft, the house of St. Jerome in Utrecht, began on November 28th 1475. We do not know whether the house developed rapidly or not. It was only in the 16th century that their school, which they probably established in the *domus pauperum*, began to flourish to such an extent that it overshadowed the other schools of the five chapters and of the four parishes.

Although the foundations from Deventer (Amersfoort, Almelo, Hoorn, Delft) may not have had the same initial success as those of Zwolle, that in Delft finally continued fruitful.

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1 Kesper 114, ‘tot behoeff der arme klerken(=schoolboys) di darin wonen sellen ter ewige dage om ter scoel te gaan ... ende sal moeten hebben gehoert primum tractatum Petri Hyspani ende connen of te willen leeren singen, ende wesend tenminste out twaalf of dertien jaren ende dragend sijn capoen aangetogen.’
2 Kesper 115, ‘sijn uiterste wil, sijn mening is ter cloester te gaan, als hij genooch geleert is na deze raet ende goedduncken der goede heren voersz.’
3 Kesper 113.
4 Kesper 88, ‘tot dat sij sermoen gehoert sullen hebben.’
Two more foundations originated from the Deventer house: those of Louvain and Emmerich. The first mentioned in its turn bore fruit in the southern Netherlands. Apart from the brief existence of the foundation in Liège, the oldest Brotherhouse in the southern Netherlands was that of Louvain. We have already given some account of its foundation.\footnote{See p. 345 Archief Leuven Reg. 42, 39.} What prospects lay before the Brothers! The university in Louvain had only been in existence for nine years and was in full process of development. The medieval university, including that of Louvain, had the tendency, at least so far as the faculty of languages and philosophy was concerned, to split up into \textit{paedagogia}: hostels or colleges. It would also have been possible for the Brothers to give tuition at university level in the \textit{paedagogia} entrusted to them, providing they had qualified teachers, or to have commissioned certain scholars to teach for them. Either way they could have become part of the university. In the meantime they could have extended their pastoral work to include the university students. But it appears that they made no attempt to do either of these things. In any case, the Brotherhouse in Louvain had too brief an existence, from 1433 to 1447. However, to judge from the privileges they obtained, the \textit{fraters} did begin their pastoral work among the students. As early as April 4th 1435, the deacon of Louvain gave the \textit{frater}s permission to hear the confessions of all \textit{clerici} in the city of Louvain.\footnote{Archief Leuven Reg. 4239. \textit{Ibid.}} These \textit{clerici} comprised the pupils of the parish or city school as well as the university students. The house seems to have grown rapidly. On March 6th 1439 the \textit{fraters} received permission to replace their chapel by a church with altars. At the same time they were allowed to hear the confession of the members of the house and bury them in their own ground. This privilege was confirmed by several ecclesiastical authorities and even by the Pope. It did not last long, however. The Brothers chose to become monastics and received their authorization to do so in 1447. They founded a monastery of Canons Regular, St. Maartensdal, and joined the congregation of Windesheim. Gilles Walrami, the first rector, became the first prior. Not all the Brothers deserted, however. At least two of them departed for Flemish cities, some succeeded in founding a house themselves in Cassel, although the Cassel venture failed and ended in the foundation of a Wilhelmitc monastery. Something similar must have taken place years before in Antwerp, in 1444,
when the proposal to found a Brotherhouse led to the founding of a Cistercian
monastery.¹

The Brother(s) who went to Ghent and to Geraardsbergen found there a building
to which he (they) could be admitted. The founding of the Brotherhouse in
Geraardsbergen must have taken place around 1437, but the circumstances are
unknown; the foundation in the greatest Flemish city, Ghent, was in 1438. A contract
dated April 28th 1439 has been preserved, in which H. Wernior, priest of the house
of St. Jerome in Ghent, pledges himself to write a missal for the church of Roerbeke.²
There also exists a privilege given by pope Eugenius IV, which allows them to have
priests ordained under the title of member of the Brotherhouse (i.e., without any
other benefice). The Brothers had no need to introduce teaching to Ghent in 1437.
The abbots of St. Bavo and St. Peter had long possessed sole rights to teach in the
schools belonging to their parishes. The school attached to St. Pharahilde was only
able to survive with special support from the Count. It is not entirely clear how many
schools there were or where they were situated, nor do we know what sort of teaching
was given.³ The contract concerning the missal shows, however, that here too the
priests formed an important element in the Brotherhouse and that, as elsewhere, the
Brothers earned their living by copying books, usually the Bible. We also know,
from a privilege received from pope Pius II (February 8th 1461)⁴ that they also carried
out their priestly functions among the schoolboys. By this privilege they received,
besides complete parochial rights, permission to hear the schoolboys‘ confessions
and to distribute Holy Communion to them. The papal document also mentions that
the ‘instructio scholarium’ formed part of the fraters‘ activities.⁵ If these words reflect
the actual state of affairs, they may refer to their teaching task in the hostel, although
they might indicate a wider field of educational activities. Papal documents like these,
as we know, do not afford much proof in such matters. However, that a hostel did
in fact exist in the 16th century is clear from the chartes et documents analysed by
V. Vander Haeghen.⁶

¹ A. Cassiman, De moderne devotion of Geert Groote in oost Vlaanderen O.G.E. XXVI (1952)
162–165.
² Fr. de Potter, Gent IV s.a. 526.
³ V. Fris, Bibliographie de l’Histoire de Gent, Gent 1407, 201.
⁵ Ibid., cap X 13.
⁶ V. Vander Haeghen. Inventaire des archives de la ville de Gand. Etablissements religieux
1887, 87-96. A. Cassiman, ibidem, 168.

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These documents are partly original and partly transcribed in *Den bouck van onser fondatie der XIII scolieren in den huijse van St. Jeronimus te Ghendt*. Although these pieces date from the 16th century, they may be referred to here since the hostel of which they prove the existence is probably very much older.

In 1521 (July 25th) Lievin van Pottelsburghe, knight, Lord of Vanderhaut, adviser to Charles V and receiver of the Count of Flanders, together with his wife Lievine van Steeland, founded a bursary for ten persons. This document was, however, withdrawn on May 20th 1529, to be replaced one more explicit. At this time there was room in the hostel for fifty poor schoolboys. Paying students were also accepted. These were divided into *divites* and *mediocres* as we already saw in Zwolle, but here they ate in the same room, although at different tables. The lowest age limit for the *bursarii* was 12 to 14 years and their studies lasted for four years. At this period there seems to have been a school within the house, consisting of different classes. The rector of the school there (‘recteur der scolen aldaar’) decided into which class the boys were to go. Having completed their four years of study, the boys were ready to proceed if they wished to go to the university. A list of boys who studied at the school between 1521 and 1529 has been preserved, but none of them seems to have won later fame as a scholar. It is possible that the hostel boys attended one of the city schools and that the rector of this school had to give them a place in some class, but as the document stands, the contrary must be understood. It is not clear when this teaching was introduced nor by whom it was given. The curriculum must have been similar to that of the other schools, for it was a preparation for university studies. This school may have existed when Josse Badius was a scholar in Ghent. Although we are straying a little outside our period here,

2. Ed. by H. Sommalius, *Thomae Malloeli a Kempis Opera omnia*, Col. Agrippa 1660. Since he merely states that in his youth many persons *e domo Gandavensi* entered the orders of the Franciscans, Dominicans and Carmelites, he is only speaking of the hostels and not of the school. In an edition of Alexander de Villa Dei, *Doctrinale* Pars I Antwerpen, Herm, Ecbert van Homberch 1 maart 1503, see Nijhoff-Kronenberg nr. 2278, there is a dedication from Judocus Badius Ascensius to the fathers Eligius Ghiès and Andreas Terreburgo. *scholasticorum domus fratrum divi Hieronymi Gandavi rectoribus et preceptoribus optimis* and to the other pillars of this house.-1500. We find two persons as leaders of a Brothers' school in the hostels, for example in 's-Hertogenbosch in Erasmus' time. It seems very likely that what is called a school here in Ghent is nothing more than the hostel.

*R.R. Post, The Modern Devotion*
and the end of the house and hostel is given later, we know from these same data that there were 11 priests, 4 clerics and 8 lay brothers in Ghent in 1529. This is quite a sizeable community, roughly the same as that of Doesburg.¹

The priestly element is by far the greatest, and here too the *clerici* will later have been ordained. There was no Master of Arts among the *fraters*, however, while the *pater* of this house was often rector of the ‘school’ too. The house of Ghent was one of the institutions which requested permission for their chapel to be elevated to a collegial church, a request granted by the papal legate Onofrio on January 10th 1469.²

Geraardsbergen also acquired a Brotherhouse before the middle of the century. The first document which has come down to us dates from April 16th 1452. In this bishop John of Doornik declares that the Bull of Eugenius IV, 1444, which permitted a collegial church, also applied to the Brotherhouse of Geraardsbergen.³ Here the patron was St. Gregory. In 1486 (May 16th) the Brothers of the Gregory house sold a house.⁴ We know that they had at least a hostel in the 16th century from a report that the school children of the ‘fraternye’ gave a Latin play on July 8th 1547,⁵ but we know nothing of the circumstances under which the house was founded.

The Brussels house seems to have come into existence quite independently of the northern Netherlands. The surviving documents at least show no particular contact at all with any of the other institutions, or with the colloquium of Zwolle.⁶ The Brotherhouse in Brussels owes its existence to a testamentary disposition by Philippe Vanden Rietveld and his wife Catharine Sloofs, dated May 15th 1422.⁷ The lawyer who drew up this will, however, must have had recourse to documents from other Brotherhouses. This is clear from the description of the nature and aims of the institution, and the obedience of the *fraters* to the church authorities.⁸ None the less, the Brussels

1 Van der Haeghen X p. 91.  
3 Staatsarchief, charter no. 21.  
5 Staatsarchief Ronse, Stadsrekening van Geraardsbergen 1547-48, fol. 61v. Communication of Dr. Lansing O. Carm.  

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R.R. Post, *The Modern Devotion*
foundation would be less independent than the houses in the northern Netherlands, insofar as it came under the supervision of four provisors who lived outside the fraternity. The rector would have to answer to these people for this handling of financial affairs. For the new foundation the testators destined their own house, situated in La Putterie (Putenhof or Putenof, near Bloemarts Borre), naturally after the death of the surviving partner. At the same time they made a vicarage in honour of the Annunciation in the chapel of St. Catherine, near the Flemish port. Since at least one of the testators died in 1449 the will can only have come into force around the middle of the century. This was thus after the transfer of the house in Louvain to the Canons Regular, and the setting up of the house in Ghent, so that the first fraters could be drawn from the surrounding districts. The earliest preserved deed dates from December 24th 1460, and is an agreement between the Brotherhouse and the chapter of St. Goedele. It was only drawn up, however, after some disagreement had arisen and a solution to this was discussed.

By this time the house had already made some development and the company consisted of at least three priests and three clerics. It had already had occasion to refer to papal privileges to counter the demands of the chapter. On the basis of this, the foundation of the house could be dated around 1455. The significant clauses in this agreement are these: the congregation might have only twenty members, who must lead a communal life as in the first days of the church, renouncing all personal possessions. The rules were relaxed with regard to the houses of Deventer and Zwolle, to the extent that anyone who left the house of his own free will after his official reception was to receive back anything he had brought with him on his entry, while renouncing all claim to the fruits of his capital or labours and to the property of the house. The congregation might introduce no innovations in the foundation without the permission of the chapter and the four provisors. They might not, for example, change the house into a monastery of Canons Regular.

The Brothers had free choice of rector, but the person elected required the approval of the chapter. Both rector and Brothers were virtually under the supervision of the chapter. The rectors had to

1 A. Henne Wauters, Histoire de ville de Bruxelles III 1845, 134.
2 Lefèvre, i.c. 57.
3 Ibid., 60.
4 Ibid., 62.
5 Ibid., 63.
6 Ibid., 63-64.
7 Ibid., 64.

R.R. Post, The Modern Devotion
take the same oath as the chapter chaplains. They had to ask to be allowed to participate in the choir prayers and for this they had to wear the prescribed dress. They also had to attend Mass and the office on at least four feast days, and take part in certain processions. There were clauses, too, regulating the ceremonies in their own chapel and the distribution of the offerings, the appointment and installation of the rector of the Brothers as vicar of two vicarageships (St. Agatha in St. Goedele and the Annunciation in St. Catherine’s), the administering of the Holy Sacrament to the members and inmates of the house, and other matters.

Several of these decrees concern the relationship of the fraters to the parish priest and the parish church. They also occur elsewhere and do not apply solely to the Brothers, although they frequently provide evidence of their priestly character and their desire for an active life, for pastoral work. What is more important is that they sought in the schoolboys particularly the objects of their priestly work. The agreement with the chapter, in which they had to renounce much of their independence, recognizes the sermon given in the Brotherhouse after vespers by one of the Brothers for the clerici and the students, and especially for the boni infantes, accompanied by their teacher. It also mentions the collation, being not a sermon or solemn discourse, but only a simple exhortation or brotherly admonition. This was to be held behind closed doors, with lay people excluded. This last is a regulation added by the chapter to the usual formula, in fear that the fraters should attract adults. A limit was also set to the praying or singing of the breviary by the Brothers in their own chapel, with the exception of Palm Sunday and the Feast of the Annunciation. So much for pastoral work among the schoolboys of Brussels in general. Had the fraters also a domus pauperum, a hostel for those whom they hoped would become more closely associated with them? There is no mention of such a hostel in the long contract under discussion, but it appears shortly afterwards in the surviving deeds, those of March 7th 1465 and April 2nd 1466. It seems from the first that the fraters did not confine themselves to going over the school subjects with the boys in the evening. They also gave formal lessons, so that their

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1 Lefèvre, 65, 70-71.
2 Ibid., 72.
3 Ibid., 73.
4 The first mentioned by Lefèvre 48, no. 13 and the second published by him 77 and 82.
hostel became a school in the strict sense, following the programme of the city school of the time: Latin, music and logic. This is an attempt such as we meet elsewhere, which was successful in a few places, but in most cases was hampered by the law. Here too, being directly contrary to the civic ordinances and the privileges of the chapter, it was also speedily suppressed. From henceforth the hostel boys had to attend the ‘big school.’ The same order is clearly expressed in the charter of April 2nd 1460.

The chapter itself maintained a boarding school for twelve boys *boni infantes*, *bons enfants*, in which a *paedagogus*, a teacher, taught singing, along with the ordinary school subjects. These boys often had to sing during the hours, or during Holy Mass, and were assisted in this by the other students, sons of the city burgers. In order to lighten their task somewhat, and take them as little as possible from their school work, the chapter wished to appoint a further six poor choristers. These were to be selected from boys who could already sing a little Latin and who had attended the great school of Brussels (*majores scholas Bruxellenses*) for at least a year. In order to qualify, the boys had to be at least ten years old and might not remain longer than their eighteenth year.¹

These six were to be distinguished from the above mentioned *boni infantes* and from the ordinary schoolboys by a tonsure and gown. Once a year they had to beg among the citizens with the other poor scholars. The rector and the sub-rector of the big school (*majoris scolae opidi Bruxellensis*) had to give them free lessons. I have not been able to decide whether these six poor choristers lived in the Brothers' hostel or in the house of the *boni infantes*, but they were placed under the guidance of the rector of the Brotherhouse and of the *receptor*, the head of the *boni infantes*. A peculiar feature is that the chapter declares that various wills of people mentioned by name, destined either for the *boni infantes* or for the *pauperes scholares*, the poor schoolboys who attended the big school of Brussels, should henceforth be applied also for the benefit of these six new *chorales pauperes*. This group was to be increased to twelve as soon as finances permitted, and they would be given their own house.²

It is clear that living and teaching are separate. This is notably so in the case of the *pauperes* who, to judge from the person to whom they were confided, lived with the *fraters* in their *domus pauperum*. This was also the only logical consequence of

¹ Lefèvre, 77.
the suppression of the school in the fraters’ house, one year earlier.

Here too, we must remember the privilege of pope Eugenius IV, applied to the house of Brussels at the rector's request by the papal legate Onofrio on January 10th, 1469. In other documents there is no mention of any change brought about by this.2

Around 1480 the fraters left their first house and settled in the lower town (in the neighbourhood of Saint Gery). They had acquired a house here, probably through inheritance, from the same family Van den Rietveld. This move resulted in a new agreement with the chapter, which somewhat modified the Brothers' obligations towards the chapter but in fact did nothing to make them more independent. They also retained their two vicarships. Six priests and three fraters are mentioned in the beginning of the document.3 Here too thus there was a preponderance of priests, with a tendency for the number of priests in the house to increase.

The Brothers' connection with the school was altered in 1491. In that year the ‘scholaster’ transferred the great school of Brussels to them for a period of nine years.4 But this brings us into another period.

For the rest the activities of the Brothers in Brussels were the same as elsewhere; they copied and bound books. They continued to do this even after the art of printing became widespread, but they concentrated especially on valuable books, or very large choir books. Lefèvre gives various examples.5 A more specific achievement of the fraters in Brussels is that they set up the earliest printing works in the city, but it only survived about ten years.6

The founding of the house at Emmerich in the second half of the fifteenth century is a remarkable proof of the continuing vitality of the house of Deventer. This latest offshoot was cherished by the Deventer Brothers in its early years and assisted both materially and by good counsel during its growth towards independence. The town of Emmerich, which now belongs to West Germany, formed part politically of the Dukedom of Cleves in the fifteenth century and later, although it stood under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the diocese of Utrecht. For this reason the Brotherhouse continued to visit the

1 A. Miraeus, Opera diplomatica IV, 442.
2 cf. p. 451
3 Lefèvre 81.
4 Ibid., 96.
5 Ibid., p. 112-114.
6 Ibid., 46. See hereafter p. 551

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colloquium of Zwolle and not that of Münster, as did the neighbouring, somewhat more easterly, Brotherhouse at Wesel. This latter foundation was much older, and situated south of the Rhine.

The house at Emmerich owed its existence to a more or less chance circumstance, namely the complete conversion of the well-to-do couple Dirk of Wiel and Belia of Dorsten. The husband was a ducal functionary from Emmerich, related to Egbert ter Beeck from Wijhe, rector of the Brotherhouse at Deventer (1450-83) who as a pupil of the school in that city had lodged with his relatives, the Dorstens. According to the chronicle of the Emmerich Brotherhouse, the couple had lived for several years in a rather worldly manner, but suffered a change of heart around 1466. They settled first in Deventer and renewed or prolonged their friendship with rector Egbert ter Beeck and the Brothers.

In 1468 this conversion and this friendship led to the founding of a new Brotherhouse in Emmerich. Dirk van Wiel, himself inclined towards the monastic life after the death of his wife, gave his own house in Emmerich for this purpose. The first inmates were three Brothers from Deventer, under the direction of the first rector, Peter of Maastricht. None the less, despite having acquired a roomy, though empty, house, despite repeated support from Deventer and the sending of young fraters or novices from the city on the IJssel, this house was slow in development. Rapid growth was hindered by lack of sufficient income, repeated infectious illnesses and deaths among the young fraters.

These difficult years, the upholding of the original ideals and the Brothers' courage, are described in a house chronicle similar to those of Zwolle, Deventer, Doesburg and Gouda. It is a series of brief biographies of recently deceased Brothers, compiled towards the end of this period (in 1490). The author was probably the third rector, but it was not continued later. The description of the difficulties, actions, attitudes and aspirations of the first fraters show the same aims and ideals as elsewhere, illustrated here by a few facts. These aims and aspirations are revealed even more clearly in the consuetudines or statutes of this house, renewed shortly before 1513. This was really done with the intention of stressing the original ideals once again, so that they may also serve to characterize the situation as it existed at this period. This document places the same stress on the significance of manual

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1 To be edited by W. Jappe Alberts.

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work for the brothers, which still consisted of seven hours copying a day;¹ (six for the priests). We also find in it the emphasis on the spiritual preparation for the outward prayers and hymns of the breviary, the intensely devout participation in the Holy Mass, the hour set aside for the study of the Holy Scriptures and other pious works which nourish the spirit, and finally the frequent meditation on the passion of Christ and on the four last things, together with the aspirations and examination of conscience. All of these are meant to keep the intention constantly pure and as active as possible. It is also noteworthy that the spiritual care of the Brothers for the schoolboys emerges clearly in these statutes, when for example it is said that the scholars must be sent away before the evening ceremonies begin.² It is also evident from the discussions on the pupils' (clerici) interests on Sunday evenings,³ and from the discourses (not in the manner of a sermon) held for the young people especially on Sundays and feast days after vespers in the church. Before the vespers individual persons could be given spiritual counsel.⁴ Many of the decrees resemble those drawn up for monasteries and are not particularly distinctive for the Brothers.

The biographies do not forget to mention either that this Brother or that was a good writer or preacher,⁵ which proves that, despite their inner devotion, the Brothers esteemed the active spiritual life and considered it in accordance with the aims of the Brotherhood. The basis of their devout life continues to be the virtues of humility (also in dress), obedience and poverty, while as means to their goal they employ frequent meditation, ejaculatory prayers, the renewal of the good intention, and the examination of conscience. It is noteworthy that, when recommending poverty, it is said that every religio, monastic order, is based on poverty.⁶ This was indeed in keeping with their statutes in which, copying those of Zwolle, they had established that roughly 100 écus would be sufficient to maintain 15 to 16 people. They thought they would be able to earn this by their writing⁷ and anything over and above would be given to the poor.

Did these fraters occupy themselves with teaching and school during the first 25 years of their existence? Although the Constitution established the number of fraters at 15 or 16, the house contained only

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¹ Chronicle, 10.
² Ibid., 10.
³ Ibid., 12.
⁴ Ibid., 13.
⁵ Ibid., 7, 28, 32, 49.
⁶ Ibid., 13, 20.
⁷ Ibid., 10.

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7 members in 1472, four fraters from Deventer and three novices. One of these died the same year.¹ This number was subsequently increased, despite the fact that several members of the community died at an early age. They will not have been able to develop any significant activity in the domain of education, for besides the seven-hour working day and the many prayers, they also, as we saw, undertook the spiritual care of these boys. One must also remember that, according to a contract dated April 26th 1445, the chapter held the exclusive right to keep a school and to give instruction in Latin.²

We are told, for several of the fraters, what studies they had completed before entering the Brotherhouse. Most of them had completed the classes of the schools of Deventer or Zwolle or some other city (although we are not informed whether this included the two top classes). Peter of Maastricht, for example, the first rector or Pater of Emmerich († 1472) attended the school of Deventer,³ John of Medemblik, the second rector, went to school in Zwolle and later in Deventer.⁴ The latter had even aspired to Paris, before he decided to enter the Fraternity. Although he later considered this plan as a deceit and inspiration of the devil, his heart was at first so firmly set upon it that the arguments used by the fraters to dissuade him seemed foolish and superfluous. But, as he recounted later, the Lord prevented his going in a miraculous manner, and this is confirmed by a story.⁵ This passage, which occurs in a chronicle compiled around 1500, is one of the strongest rejections of university studies by the fraters. The city school, with its Latin and logic, was enough for them! Philosophy was unnecessary, not to mention theology, law or medicine. Their Brothers came from the city schools. John Plech of Münster-Eifel († 1481), after having been a chorister in Münster-Eifel, attended the school of Deventer;⁶ John of Vlissingen († 1484) also came from the school of Deventer;⁷ Albert Borken († 1499) was from ‘our school of Emmerich;’⁸ Stephen ter Beeck († 1494) was from the Deventer school and entered the Brotherhouse in Deventer;⁹ Henry Rijck of Euskerken († 1494) attended the Deventer school;¹⁰ Engelbert of Rees († 1494) studied three years in Deventer;¹¹ Sibert of Gulik (cleri-

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¹ Statutes 3-4.
² Müller, Schulordnungen I 53.
³ Chronicle 8.
⁴ Ibid., 11.
⁵ Ibid., 12.
⁶ Ibid., 19.
⁷ Ibid., 28.
⁸ Ibid., 35.
⁹ Ibid., 39.
¹⁰ Ibid., 43.
¹¹ Ibid., 48.

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cus, († 1495) studied in Deventer. Albert Borken was one of the first three to come from the school of Emmerich.

It is no wonder that the Brothers came to the conclusion that, in order to recruit novices, it was important either to have a school themselves or to co-operate in developing the school in Emmerich. The school is mentioned quite frequently in the chronicle, yet still it is not clear what the author means. We must here examine all the data available and compare it with what we know from elsewhere. One thing is certain. In Emmerich, as in all similar towns, at least one Latin school existed before the coming of the fraters.

Here it was the school of the main church, at the same time chapter church, a parish-school or chapter-school or a city-school according to whether the parish, the chapter or the city controlled the administration. The school curriculum was the same in all such schools: Latin, logic and a little music. This school existed and flourished in Emmerich when the fraters settled there in 1468 and weathered their first years, rendered difficult by a lack of money and vocations. It is not likely that they founded a new school alongside the existing one, if indeed the municipality would have tolerated such a rival school. But here and there, towards the end of this period, around 1480, the Brothers underwent a change of ideas. Driven by economic necessity, they looked about them for new sources of income.

Before turning to what the chronicle has to say on this question, may I recall the passage quoted which mentions their disapproval of the idea of university study in Paris? It would at least seem to follow from this that the Brothers had no idea of training competently educated teachers. John Plech exhorted the inmates of the new Brotherhouse to ensure ‘that the pupils of the school visit us and that the school of Emmerich flourishes, so that according to the aim of our foundation, we may persevere in our vocation as children with children.’

Here the writer is concerned only with the school of Emmerich and with attracting the pupils of that school to the Brotherhouse for their spiritual welfare.

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1 Chronicle, 55.
2 Ibid., 35.
3 Ibid., 20.
4 Ibid., 20. Cepit itaque post hec multis modis animos patrum et fratrum tam ex domo Daventriensi quam ex domo nostra sollicitare, ut concursum nobis clericorum et scolae Embricensis promocionem procuraremus, ut sic in vocatione nostra secundum institutionem venerabilium patrum predecessorum nostrorum parvuli cum parvulis persistere possemus.
Albert Borken, who died in 1499 but whose date of entry is unknown, was admitted to the Brotherhouse with two others as firstlings of ‘our school of Emmerich’ and as ‘first fruits of our new house.’ He was two years ‘under our care while he attended the school of Emmerich.’ 1 Although the word noster here is not very clear, the reference is undoubtedly to the city school of Emmerich. There is a distinction between living, or at least being sub custodia nostra, and going to school. This living took place in the new house, since these novices are considered as its first fruits. A statement by Henry Rijck of Euskerken makes it clear which this new house was. Henry came into contact with the Brothers of Emmerich under the second rector John of Medemblik (1472-1478). He was the first procurator of the new house which lodged the pupils or schoolboys. 2 This is thus the hostel which admitted pupils from the big school, as we found everywhere else. The fact that this house received its own procurator, and a layman at that, even though he was subsequently ordained, proves that it was a building distinct from the Brotherhouse. It later appears that this house was built under rector Theodoric who succeeded John of Medemblik in 1482.

The chronicler, probably Theodoric himself, had the new house dedicated at the beginning of 1482, with the permission of the Brothers. This ceremony elevated it to the place ‘in which, according to the custom of our worthy fathers in Deventer and Zwolle, we might receive and train those boys who came to us with the intention of attending the school. They remained there under our supervision and there received instruction in knowledge (scientia) and in good morals and in the fear of God.’ The reference to the fathers of Deventer and Zwolle speaks volumes! The school referred to here is the city school of Emmerich. The word scientia offers no difficulty; it occurs elsewhere in a similar context, i.e. in the report on Culm, and refers to the hearing of the day’s lessons by one of the fraters.

More details of this new house are given. It was built on the grounds of the convent of St. Agnes, near the Brotherhouse. 3 Henry, the first procurator of this house, was ordained priest and entered upon his task between Easter and Whitsun of 1482. His work was crowned with success: very many pupils (clerici et iuvenes) came from neigh-

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2 Ibid., 43. Hic ... primus procurator fuit nove domus nostre quam scilicet clerici sive scholastici inhabitant.
3 Ibid., 44.
bouring towns and villages. For these he was at once pater, procurator, instructor et in omnibus provisor. From this alone it may be deduced that the teaching here was quite incidental. The large number of pupils also led him to extend an old building next door, in order to lodge more boys. With their help he built a wall around the whole.

Meanwhile, the plans for expansion flourished. A start was made on an even bigger house, but on July 11th, 1494, the dreaded plague put an end to the work of the enterprising Henry Rijck of Euskerken. It was at his urging that the Brothers thought of setting up in Emmerich a school in the strict sense of the word: pro habendo exercitio cum pueros et clericis sicut apud venerabiles patres nostros Daventrie et Zwolle fieri videtur: in order to have training (practice) with the boys and pupils as seems to be done by the reverent fathers of Deventer and Zwolle.

The chronicler expresses himself rather vaguely. The fathers in Deventer and Zwolle associated with and trained the boys, but they had no proper school. We must none the less assume that such were the plans of Henry Rijck of Euskerken, in the first place because he built a much larger building than was customary. He also discussed his plans with Arnold of Hildeshem, rector of the school of Emmerich, and these plans were welcomed by the city magistrature and the people.

The chronicler does not say whether they had suitable teachers. However, Henry's death and the flight of many of the boys before the plague, opened the eyes of the responsible authorities. The plans were shelved and the Brothers were thus cut off from the beginnings of a renewed education in the Humanistic spirit of which the appointment of Alexander Hegius to the school of Emmerich (1474-1483) may be considered a sign.

The foundation in Nijmegen also belongs to the third generation of Brotherhouses. It was an offshoot of the house in 's-Hertogenbosch, and likewise dedicated to St. Gregory, at the beginning of 1470. The

1 Chronicle 44.
2 Ibid., 45.
3 Ibid., 47.
4 Ibid., 48.
5 Ibid., 48.
6 From the undated leges domus fratrensium Embricae, edited by Joh. Petry, in: Städtisches Progymnasium zu Steele. Jahresbericht über das Schuljahr 1898-99. Steele 1899, p. 5 sq., it is clear that boys lived with the fraters but went to the city school: when the school bell rings the boys hurry to the school. p. 6: domus reversi per medium horulae lectiones auditas repetent.
7 Lindeborn 131; also F. Gorissen, Atlas van Nijmegen, Arnhem 1956, 119.
Brothers subsequently transferred to a house in the Boddelstraat which had been given to them in 1475. The donor was a canon of the church of St. Stephen in Nijmegen, Reinier of Os, who had acquired the house in 1475 from Reinald of Ooi who had gone over to the enemy during the siege of Nijmegen by Charles the Bold in 1473. This desertion so incensed the citizens of Nijmegen that they broke the windows of his house. The canon bought, probably for next to nothing, this windowless house, which had not been restored in 1475, and gave it to the fraters who had recently arrived in Nijmegen. The first rector was Master Peter of Os, most probably not entirely without the connivance of the family of the founder Reinier. It must have been difficult to make a start in such a dilapidated house, but judging from later events, the fraters simply followed what they had learned in 's-Hertogenbosch. As in this city, there was in Nijmegen a large city or chapter school which had developed long before the coming of the fraters. Since this Nijmegen Brotherhouse took quite some time to surmount its original difficulties, its history, apart from the foundation, falls in the following period.¹

With the exception of Emmerich, which belonged to the Utrecht diocese and was a late product of Deventer, the German houses either directly or indirectly owed their existence for the greater part to the first Brotherhouse in Germany, that of Münster. The inception of the houses of Cologne and of Osterberg and Osnabrück has been described in a preceding chapter. Both these latter disappeared as Brotherhouses around 1430, although in all probability the Brothers of Osnabrück simply transferred to Herford.² This transfer must have taken place under the direction of Konrad Westerwolt, who acquired a house in Herford in 1428. He took up residence here with three other priests, thus modestly initiating the Herford Brotherhouse.³ Westerwolt obtained the approval of the pope and of Henry von Ahaus from Münster and was in 1431 appointed rector of the congregation of Herford. This appointment was made at the meeting between four German houses which constituted the beginning of the colloquium of Münster. We shall discuss this meeting later. Both the consuetudines and the statutes of the Herford Brotherhouse have been preserved,⁴ although unfortunately they are not dated. It seems, however, that

¹ See hereafter p. 608
² E. Barnikol, p. 63.
⁴ Publ. in: Theologische Monatschrift II (1854) 543-582.

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they were drawn up and formulated later than those of Zwolle, and agree with them on essentials. We find here expressed the same principles upon which the Zwolle Brethren's life was based: the combatting of faults and the sicknesses of the soul by the restraining of lust and the suppression of pride, by the practice of mutual love, obedience and chastity. One finds the same regulations concerning punishments, silence and speech and the collation. These include early rising, many external prayers such as the entire office supplemented by the seven penitential psalms and the little office of Our Lady. There was in addition, low Mass and High Mass. Even the regulations concerning the communal and private praying of the Matins on Sundays and feastdays and on weekdays-different for the priests and the clerics-coincide with those of Zwolle. It is interesting to note in this connection that various means are recommended to arouse and maintain inner devotion during these oral prayers; numerous reflections on rising, while preparing for the hours and at Holy Mass, before eating and working and going to bed. After Compline the Brother was free to do as he liked for a short time, but was warned to avoid idle chatter. The day ended with an examination of conscience and a thought for the first reflection of the next day.

The statutes mention the special tasks of the rector, procurator, librarian and others, but are silent on the subject of a school or hostel director. And yet the Brothers in Herford, like their colleagues in most of the other houses, will have extended their care to the schoolboys, although without having a school in the strict sense. But there is no mention of any of this.

During this second period the Brotherhouse in Münster experienced a time of great prosperity and growth. This is evident from several facts. In the first place they founded new houses; those of Cologne and Wesel in the first period and now those in Herford, Hildesheim, Rostock, Marburg, and Merseburg. They also collaborated in setting up the Rhineland canons-houses-with communal life and possessions. There was in addition the founding of Sisterhouses in which Brothers from the Münster house acted as chaplain. The number of members must have been considerable and not particularly easy to recruit. It is no wonder that in 1441 the rector proposed to the colloquium that a second house should be built in Münster for the clerici. When they had obtained permission for this venture in 1442 they

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1 Consuetudines, 547.
2 Ibid., 565.
proceeded to found the house and the rector earnestly impressed upon the Brothers that they should strive to attract new clerici. From what we know of the houses of Deventer and Zwolle, it seems that these clerici must be the young fraters who were being trained for the priesthood and who would be ordained in a few years. These were thus novices, and not to be confused with the inmates of the hostel who would have been pupils from the city school. Münster had a house for these boys too. It had to be restored in 1469 and incomes and beds acquired. Unfortunately we possess very few details of the internal history of the Münster Brotherhouse. As a result of the haphazard preservation of documents, our information in this period is virtually confined to the activities of the rectors of the house as presidents of the Münster colloquium, which is discussed in a different connection. We are not informed of any teaching task. The Brothers had not yet any connection with the school of Münster which gained a considerable reputation during the first period of Humanism.

The history of the Brotherhouse at Cologne by Henry von Ahaus, after the foundation comprises, so far as we know, the close association with the houses of Münster, Herford (later Wesel), while the collaboration in the founding of the houses of Marienthal, Butzbach, Königstein and Wolf is further discussed. In 1423 there were four priests and three clerici and in 1428 five priests and three clerici. The numbers probably increased later, but one would not deduce from the Gedächtnissbuch that there were very many. Löffler describes the fraters’ activities as the copying and binding of books and this continued to be so until the 16th century. There is no sign at all of the existence of a domus pauperum or of contact with students from the Cologne school or university. The Brothers are evidently simple priests who now and then arouse the opposition of small-minded city councillors or guild leaders but who nevertheless enjoyed the esteem of many persons: benefactors who frequently bequeathed to them foundation for Masses, vigils or other ceremonies. These benefactors

1 Doebner, 260.
2 Ibid., 260.
3 Ibid., 264.
4 See p. 454
6 Kl. Löffler, Das Fraterhaus, 106.
7 Kl. Löffler, Das Fraterhaus, 106.
included, besides various lay people, members of the clergy and also canons of the Cologne chapter churches, but no one calling himself a professor of the university of Cologne. Such a contact was evidently not in the Brothers' line. They did not study at the university, for none of the Brothers bears an academic title, and none of them is called *docent*, school rector, or schoolmaster. They are, however, mentioned as rector of the house, *procurator, scriptuarius*, tailor or confessor of convents. In so far the details of this obituary correspond with what we know of the Dutch houses.

The foundation of the Brotherhouse at Wesel is well known. It shows the same pattern as that of the other houses, i.e., the acquiring of a suitable house, usually as a gift, its extension by buying new property, the co-operation of the municipality or a higher authority, monetary acquisitions from one or other of the Brothers, the cooperation of the rector of the main house and his willingness to supply a number of Brothers. The *Devotio Moderna* was already familiar in Wesel from the Netherlands, since one of the four Beguinages, the Mariengarten, had become a Sisterhouse of the Common Life in 1429, being given a rector or confessor from Münster, Henry von Ahaus' right hand man, the *procurator* Herman of Wernen. The latter sought an opportunity to establish a Brotherhouse in Wesel as well. This became possible when one of the Münster Brothers inherited a house in Wesel on November 2nd 1435 and Henry von Ahaus acquired a property next to it, buying some of it and being given the rest. The plan of founding a Brotherhouse here and settling Brothers from Münster was already provisionally approved by the Münster *colloquium* in 1435. The approval of the municipality was obtained in 1436 and the foundation was completed before October 1436. Herman of Wernen was the first rector.¹ A link was established with Münster and Cologne and since this link persisted we possess some information concerning the rectors and Brothers of Wesel, preserved in the obituary of Münster and Cologne. There is no evidence of any contact with the school or schoolboys, such as might be assumed, nor is it said of any of these Brothers that they were schoolmasters. The rector and Brothers of Wesel are still being mentioned in the second half of the 18th century. It is perhaps characteristic of the later relationship that Brother Peter Uphoff is called *sacerdos et senior Wesaliensis et pastor im*

¹ Löffler, 65-72; App. VI, 196-197.
Spellen zelosissimus. He died in 1684. The fraters had become parish priests.

The beginning of the Brotherhouse in Rostock took place in 1469. In that year (on September 28th) two Rostock priests founded two prebends for the Brotherhouse. In 1469 the Brothers settled in a rented house (viridis horti). They were only able to start new buildings in 1502 when their financial position considerably improved.

Little is known of the Brothers' attitude to school and teaching. They were reputed to have a German school within their house, which at this period meant a school in which boys could learn reading, writing and some arithmetic before they started in the Latin school proper. Since this form of teaching was permitted to almost anyone, the report may be true. It also proves, however, that the fraters' activities in the educational field were negligible, even though they came to the assistance of the Brothers in Culm in 1508.

Two other houses were finally founded from Münster: Hildesheim and Marburg, while Merseburg was an offshoot of this latter. Since we shall have to devote special attention to Hildesheim, we shall deal first with Marburg and Merseburg.

From the very beginning the Brotherhouse in Marburg was a chapter with canons and a collegiate church where a provost (or rector) was to exercise authority and maintain the privileges such as those granted by Eugenius IV and Calixtus III to the Brotherhouses of Münster, Cologne and Wesel. This foundation was the work of a married couple, the Henry Bondes, who offered their house and garden with the intention of having a church built there. When everything was ready they wished to hand over the entire property to the Brethren of the Common Life, as they lived in the Brotherhouses. Henry asked Pope Sixtus IV's permission to carry out this plan, and received a letter of consent on April 25th 1477. The plan had already been discussed the year before at the Münster colloquium, and evidently in a positive manner, since the delegates took it for granted that they would have to give financial support to the foundation. There is no

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1 Kl. Löfler, Das Gedächtnisbuch 46.
3 Doebner 176.
4 Doebner 267.
mention of the Brothers' activities, only that they could pray (or ‘say,’ *dicatur*) the office according to the Mainz and not the Roman custom. One of the canons would act as pastor for the inmates of the house, namely the canons, priests, *clerici* and servants, while retaining the rights of the parish clergy.\(^1\) Despite the communal life, from the very beginning the emphasis was different from that in Deventer and Zwolle. Nothing at all is said of any hostel, teaching or pastoral work among the schoolboys. Little or nothing is known further about this house, apart from a few reports that it was officially visited by rector van Springborn of Münster in 1497, 1499, and 1502. He was usually accompanied by the rector of Hildesheim. The year 1526 saw the advent of the Reformation and in 1528 an agreement was reached with the eight Brothers still extant. Their incomes were transferred to the university founded in 1527.

The Brotherhouse in Merseburg\(^2\) was the last to be established, being founded from Marburg in 1503. The Brothers had no influence on education in the town, although they did accept boys in their house. The priests of the parish defended their pastoral rights against the Brothers—as often happened—but the *fraters* of Merseburg had neither the time nor the opportunity to overcome this resistance by tact, caution and devotion. It was only twenty years after this beginning that the Reformation penetrated, if not the municipality and the diocese, at least the minds of the common people. On August 9th 1526, a messenger from Merseburg approached the rector of Hildesheim and informed him that the *fraters* were no longer there (in Merseburg). The rector (of Hildesheim) was disappointed. He would have visited them had he not been prevented by poverty and his own tribulations in the religious dispute. According to L. Schulz the house perished in 1537, partly as a result of the last rector's over-lavish handling of the finances. One of the *fraters* became a parish priest.

We are much better informed concerning the origins and history of the house at Hildesheim, thanks to the Annals written by the fourth rector, Peter of Dieppurch (Deiburg, 1475-1491).\(^3\) To judge from his

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1. Doebner 178.
attitude to Münster's attempts to achieve a stricter organisation of the German Brotherhouses, thus strengthening the power of the rector of the Münster Brotherhouse, and from his additions to the first part of the Annals, he favoured the independence of each house or at least of his own. This aim might be considered a respect for 'liberty,' religious liberty, a preservation of what was felt to be the original ideal; a personal intense piety, not too hedged about by regulations. It is not unreasonable to attribute such motives to Peter of Dieburg, since an independent, free and open spirit seems to emanate from the four Excurses which he incorporates in his Annals. He also viewed in this light the activities of a Brother Godfried, who lived in Hildesheim for ten years in solitary piety, in order to prepare the leading spirits for the fraters' coming. According to another report he had done the same in Herford some ten years earlier. By his supplement to the Annals, Peter of Dieburg certainly tried to diminish the house of Münster's co-operation in founding the congregation of Hildesheim, and increase that of Herford.  

Barnikol devotes a chapter to Bruder Godfried, 'der Devoten Apostel.' In the ideas of Brother Godfried he sees die beste Tradition der Moderna Devotio, a contrast to the pedantic monastic reform of John Busch. Had he confined himself to this statement, I might have been able to agree with him, although even here he makes an arbitrary choice between the various forms in reality displayed by the Devotio Moderna. Barnikol, however, goes further: 'Für Bruder Godfried war die Kirche und der kirchliche Heilswege persönlich innerlich und praktisch überwunden: seine Frommigkeit war bodenständig, mündig und kirchenfrei. Kirchenglaube und Kirchenheilsweg stehen bei ihm nicht an erster Stelle, sondern sind ihm, wenn auch unbewusst gegenüber der Moderna Devotio minder wichtig.' 'Sein Leben und Wirken bleibt ohne Kirchenschutz und Kirchen Segen... einfacher Kleriker... ist er... für Tausende ein vorbildlicher devoter Priester und Seelsorger geworden.' On examining Dieburg's text it is clear that his statements in no way justify such a conclusion: 'Afterwards he (Godfried) came to Hildesheim and remained there in spite of everything, labouring for a future Brotherhouse, and gaining the souls of young and old. He had so much success in this work that he not only gained members for convents and monasteries from the neighbourhood of Hildesheim, but also extended his labours to Herford and the Münster region.

Inducing men and women to

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1 Barnikol o.c. 98-102.
2 Ibid., 76-111.
3 Ibid., 84.
4 Ibid., 85.
5 Ibid., 84-85.
6 Barnikol 83. Doebner 324.

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enter convents and monasteries seems to me the opposite of a ‘kirchenfreie’ religious belief. Here another attempt is made to change the true ‘Devotion’ of the fifteenth century into the sixteenth century reformation. This is all the more striking in Barnikol, since he later mentions with some approval: ‘Das Kolloquium suchte mit Bedacht dem unwesen umherstreifender Devoten zu steuern.’ Geert Groote too persuaded some people to enter monasteries, and the founding of monasteries is later considered as one of his titles to fame. This may be ‘bodenständig,’ but it was not ‘kirchenfrei,’ and not a disregard of ‘Kirchenglaube und Kirchenheils Weg’! With Barnikol one might sum up Brother Godfried's work in Dieburg's words: ‘non sumus religiosi, sed in seculo religiose vivere nitimur et volumus,’ but it is impossible to say that they: ‘das katholisch-mönchische Frommigkeitsideal des Mittelalters innerlich gesprengt und prinzipiell überwunden haben.’ For why did all the Brothers, those of Hildesheim not excepted, incorporate all the monastic practices in their customs and manner of life: they prayed the hours, attended holy Mass, held examinations of conscience, practised mortification and humility, lived in poverty and wore drab clothing.

It seems to me that Barnikol, on the basis of statements made by Peter of Dieburg, describes the first rector of Hildesheim, Bernard von Büderich (1441-1457), a contemporary and collaborator of Brother Godfried, with words more suited to the time and circumstances of circa 1491. They would then have the following significance: *mit diesser bewussten Abkehr von jedwedem Zwange in religiöser Entscheidungen ... verbindet sich das innige Verkenntnis zum Reich Gottes, das tatsächlich nicht der römischen Kirche entspricht. Die ecclesia Dei ... ist ein religiöser Begriff.* He thinks that the ideas of this Bernard, who had been to Rome, were not in keeping with the mentality which gained prominence in Münster after Henry von Ahaus, and that the *colloquium* hastened the founding of Hildesheim in order to get this Bernard away from Münster. He says that according to him: ‘Sorgsamer solle man darüber wachen, nicht in übterspannte Frömmigkeit (religiositas, Möncherei) zugeraten, als fürchten: man könne ja mit recht allzu grösser weltformigkeit und Eitelkeit beschuldigt werden,’ and finally that we must not sell our liberty, *singulare decus christianae religionis* at our expense, or force anyone to enter a monastic order. These eloquent texts, how-

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1 Barnikol 150, n. 7.
2 Barnikol 86, Doebner 113.
3 Barnikol 86.
4 Ibid., 110.
5 Barnikol 107.
6 Ibid., 109.
ever, lose much of their impact when one realizes that the first is a bad and tendentious translation of Dieburg's Latin and that the second has not the meaning imputed by Barnikol in the context in which it is used. In any case it is a thankless task to try to define with texts, taken from a letter written in 1491, the personal opinion, not of the writer, but of a rector who had been dead for more than 30 years. The first text is taken from a description of Bernard of Büderich, written after his death in the annals of the year 1467. They do indeed refer to the person in question here, but they are taken from a passage which describes how the congregation of the Brothers was attacked in the days of Bernard of Büderich. Certain religious were prominent among these attackers. The Brothers are in their opinion too strict and show up the looser monastic life in an unfavourable light. The devil plays his part because he sees his prey escaping as the monasteries and even the secular clergy mend their ways as a result of the Brothers' example. One must thus believe that certain magistri and doctores were set to work painstakingly to examine the law, not in the cause of their own salvation, but to see if they could find some description of religion (religio) which would make it possible to forbid the vita clericorum. Then follows the text of which I have given the translation above: 'Et sollicicuis inquiritur, ne excedatur in nimia religiositate quam timeatur ne quandoque argui contingat de nimia secularitate aut vanitate.' Dieburg is sometimes difficult to translate, and this passage is typical. In any case I should be tempted to read timeatur as timetur in the indicative; it is indeed in the comparative sense, after the comparative form sollicicuis. Thus we obtain ‘they are more solicitous in examining whether there is excess of piety (or monasticism) than they are fearful of being accused of too much worldliness or vanity.’ This is something completely different. In any case, it is not Bernard of Büderich who is speaking but the opponents of the Brothers. Nor is there any indication of a ‘must,’ a ‘sollen.’ It is merely stated that the opponents are seeking arguments against the Brothers.

Something similar could also be said of the second quotation. This and others are taken from a letter written by Peter of Dieburg in 1490 to his colleague, the rector of the Münster Brotherhouse. It was in answer to the latter's suggestion, to be discussed at the Münster Colloquium of 1490, that the pope should be asked for authority and privilege to consider as apostate those priests who left the Brother-
hood without entering a monastic order. They would then be seized with the help of the temporal powers and incarcerated in a monastery prison. Dieburg tells him of the attitude in his house towards such persons: ‘We allow them to go only after they have exchanged their Brother's habit for secular garments and promised to enter an order. Only those who have been ordained are really obliged to take this last step, but the lay Brothers too were permitted to leave under the plea of aspiring to higher things. If they do remain in the world, however, and retain our dress, they are excommunicated, unless they go to Hungary, Livonia or England. This seems to us in conscience to be sufficient, for we are not members of a religious order, but strive and desire to live in a religious manner in the world. It would seem to me to be to our disadvantage to try to obtain an order from the Apostolic See that such persons should be compelled either to enter an order or to return. It would do us no honour to sell our liberty, the great glory of the Christian religion, and with great difficulty obtain chains and prisons in order to please and copy the religious orders. We should then become slaves, just as if we had taken a solemn vow. The only thing to do then would be to accept a monastic rule. I advocated this at first, but having since heard Gabriel Biel, I think differently.’

Peter of Dieburg is thus quitesimplydefending the principles of the Brothers against the Münster trend which was developing in the direction of monasticism. In this he draws support from Gabriel Biel, although he had first thought differently. This alone should prevent us from taking these words to represent the ideas of the first rector of Hildesheim, Bernard of Büderich. The text has nothing to do with a conscious rejection of compulsion in religious decisions. Such compulsion may suit those who have taken monastic vows, but it is not good for the members of their institution, who, after all, made no vows. He is doing nothing more than defend his own institution. Nevertheless, the reference to freedom, as the singulare decus christianae religionis, has a remarkable sound for a person living in 1490. It reveals a desire for freedom which will not have been confined to Peter of Dieburg. If this desire, which is also found among the Humanists, was very widespread, it is no wonder that Luther was lavish in his use of the words free, and freedom. They sounded well. We should also bear in mind perhaps that since 1463 the company of Brothers formed a group of canons who served a col-

1 Doebner 113.
legiate church. They were therefore seculars in fact, those who tried to live in seculo. We shall discuss this later.

Before taking a closer look at the ideas of Peter of Dieburg, it would be perhaps useful to touch upon the history of the house of Hildesheim, although without going into personal or local problems which do not contribute to our evaluation of the whole. From 1436 to 1440 the foundation was prepared by Brother Godfried who had already done similar work in Herford. In 1439 he obtained the bishop's permission for the Brothers to settle in a small house. He then turned to the colloquium at Münster for approval and asked for Brothers to be sent. As usual the colloquium first sent two persons at their own expense, to size up conditions on the spot. These brought out their report in 1440 and the colloquium then decided to send the priest Bernard of Büderich to Hildesheim with another priest and two clerici from the Münster house. This was the beginning of the house of Hildesheim which, despite the support of Münster and Herford, had many difficult years ahead of it. The difficulties were caused by the inadequate accommodation, opposition on the part of many groups, runaway novices and clerici, and infectious diseases. Several passages in the Annals reveal that these three categories, priests, clerici and lay brothers were to be found in Hildesheim. It is, however, difficult to find out exactly who formed part of the congregation between 1440 and 1494. The first members from Münster and Herford were only considered to be on loan and later returned to their own house, as did those who later went from Hildesheim to the house's foundations at Kassel, Merseburg, (Berlicum) and Magdeburg. They remained part members of the house from which they had come. Despite a list of the deceased Brothers' and an incomplete account of those who lived in the house for a time and later went away again, it is difficult to follow the history of the whole. There was considerable movement in and out of the house. In the period from 1440 to 1468 five or six of the Hildesheim Brothers entered a monastery, three became rectors of Brotherhouses or Sisterhouses elsewhere and ten died. That Hildesheim, in spite of the difficulties of accommodation, the opposition of various groups, the disagreement with Münster about the union, was able to support such traffic, besides bringing about three new foundations, or at least providing members for them, speaks well for the vitality of this house.

1 Doebner 301.
2 Doebner 315.
3 Doebner 8.

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As a result of the plague of 1463, the house at Hildesheim had acquired a somewhat unusual collection of persons. This emerged at the election which was necessitated by the death of the second rector, John Loen († 1463). Seven priests and two clerics took part in the election. The novices and lay brothers were not considered entitled to vote. Here too the clerici will have eventually become priests, provided the circumstances were favourable. In the case of the priests, however, it is only possible to prove that two of them were present in the house beforehand as clerici. These were Herman of Rintelen and our friend Peter of Dieburg (Dieppurch) who had entered the congregation together. Herman of Rintelen was the first member to be ordained priest under Bernard of Büderich, the first rector of Hildesheim (1440-1457). He entered from the school of Hildesheim and for the last 17 years of his life was confessor of the Sisters of Eldages. He died in 1491. Peter of Dieburg began his career in Hildesheim as cook, but later became a priest and rector of the house of which he wrote the Annals (1475-1491). The sources give no further details of the lives of the remaining five priests before their ordination, but they do indicate their later career. John of Calcar, for instance, later left the Brotherhood, John of Wesel was rector in Berlicum, Herman Bruse became a secular priest, and Henninghus Zuchem of Lübeck later transferred to a monastery of the Canons Regular. It is reasonable to assume, however, that they all entered as cleric and were later ordained priest. The Hildesheimers were thus anything but fortunate in their first Brothers. The two persons mentioned in 1463 as clerici appear later as priests. Theses are Albert of Calcar and John Wessel who later became rector of the Wittenhof in Kassel. Of the Brothers who died between 1440 and 1490 twelve were priests, five clerics and four lay brothers.

It is clear from this that the community consisted of priests, clerics and lay brothers. These last performed the most humble work, although clerici were sometimes employed for this (for example the cooking). Others entered the novitiate to be clerics and eventually to become priests. The ordinary city school, in this case that of Hildesheim, was the fitting place for the training of the clericus. According

1 Doebner 74.
2 Ibid., 128-129.
3 Ibid., 316-317.
4 Ibid., 64.
5 Compare pp. 64 and 95.
6 Compare 64, 87.
7 Ibid., p. 300.
8 Ibid., 300-321; Johannes van Leeuwarden, see also p. 283.
to the statutes the novice master had to be capable of supplementing this school study somewhat: he should be a Brother qui eis doctrina et magisterio praesit et in artibus liberalibis instituat.¹ This last naturally means very little, since many things had to be crammed into the novitiate, which only lasted a year. These sources are as silent as those of Zwolle, Deventer, Doesburg, Gouda and Emmerich on how the clerici were trained in philosophy and theology-subjects which we consider essential for the priest. One thing is certain. None of these future priests attended university. These fraters were not interested in higher education.

The sources, which comprise roughly four hundred pages and give all sorts of details concerning the internal, external, financial, legal and administrative position of the house and its occupants, make no mention of study or the practice of learning. For the Brothers these do not exist. In the statutes too, various posts are listed such as: rector, vicerector, procurator, cellarius, head of the department for copying and book-binding, rubricator, novice-master, verger, cantor, librarian and so forth, but the post of professor or teacher does not occur.² And just as it was no one's task to instruct the members of their own house, so the fraters had nothing to do with the school of Hildesheim, which, indeed, is scarcely mentioned.

One trait, which we came across elsewhere, is clearly revealed here: the desire to concern themselves with the fate of the schoolboys and especially to house a number of them in a building intended specially for this purpose and under the direction of the fraters. The holding of collations for all the schoolboys was rendered difficult because the Brothers lived so far away.³ In 1491, however, the rector referred to the fact that for fifty years the Brothers had held collation for all the schoolboys who came to them.⁴ By this he understood short addresses and discourses for the boys. The Brothers were also much concerned with their temporal welfare. As early as 1466 they decided to devote their surplus to poor schoolboys and other poor people. They also looked after the boys' money for them.⁵ In 1491 the money chests for this purpose were entrusted to two Brothers. These chests had separate locks and each of these locks had two keys. The intention was that two Brothers could only open the locks together, so that no

¹ Doebner 229.
² Ibid., 224-235.
³ Ibid., 56.
⁴ Ibid., 125.
⁵ Ibid., 58.

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reflection could be cast on the ideal of communal property.\textsuperscript{1} In 1486 two executors of the will of the late provost of Wenden came to say that the latter had bequeathed the Brothers two hundred guilders to subsidize a house for schoolboys (a hostel or \textit{domus pauperum}) which they were to buy as soon as possible. The will laid down the purpose of the bequest: two hundred guilders for the purchase of a dwelling, a house in a place suitable for the lodging of schoolboys. The \textit{fraters} were to instruct them and lead them if possible to the priestly or monastic state, if God so willed it.\textsuperscript{2} The Brothers spent the whole summer searching for such a house, but without success. They had already attempted such a plan earlier, but the scholaster (of the cathedral) had forbidden it. They wanted thus to make certain this time. Meanwhile they enjoyed the interest and were able to use it for their own house. This was in accordance with the provisions of the will. In addition, a nephew of the provost had been an inmate of the house for almost two years. The provost rejoiced in the progress his nephew had made in learning and virtue. The Brothers, however, had not been paid for the last year. It had always been one of their ideals to have such a house as soon as possible and without delay: ‘but the chapter has ordered us-under pain of losing our possessions-not to do anything to offend the municipality, and the canons did not wish us to press the matter of the hostel, or at least counselled us strongly against this.’\textsuperscript{3} The municipality protects the city school and prevents the foundation of anything resembling a private school. Even the Brothers' plan for a hostel in which they could hear the boys' lessons already aroused suspicion.

Although we can still detect here the old desire to train candidates for the regular or secular priesthood, all the members were no longer so animated by the original ideal that this group could be held up as an élite in contrast to the various types of regular clergy. As we saw, there was considerable coming and going, even from the very beginning. Many of the \textit{fraters} could not stand the poverty and humiliation, or sought to realise their ideal in monastic orders among the Carthusians or Canons Regular, the Franciscans or Dominicans.\textsuperscript{4} The chronicler Peter of Dieburg sometimes complains that the function of confessor to the Sisters was too popular altogether.\textsuperscript{5} The living was easy and they enjoyed a freedom and independence in conflict with

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{1} Doebner 81.
\bibitem{2} \textit{Ibid.}, 208, 209.
\bibitem{3} \textit{Ibid.}, 110.
\bibitem{4} \textit{Ibid.}, 75.
\bibitem{5} \textit{Ibid.}, 129.
\end{thebibliography}
the ideal of a communal life. It was also difficult to retain the notion of communal property. The chronicler mentions three cases in which the holder of this function came to a bad end.\(^1\) One procured and collected money which he spent as he liked. When warned, he promised to mend his ways, but lapsed again and was sent away. Another had held this function among the Sisters for thirteen years, against the wishes of the authorities. He then desired to return, and was well received, but he had to promise to fulfil certain conditions, which he did. Another, Lambert of Rostok, who had run away, received permission from the rector to visit his friend in the house. The Brothers were rather critical of this decision. An attempt was made to lure Lambert back to the fold, but he preferred to become confessor in a Sisterhouse. Since the Brothers in Hildesheim served only one convent, which was already supplied with two fraters, he was sent with a dimissorial letter to Münster, to see if he could do any better there. However, he lost all contact with Hildesheim and died in 1481.\(^2\)

In the new statutes the duties of such Brothers living outside their own house were more closely defined. It was only after some hesitation that they agreed to send a confessor to the Sisters of Ploen at the request of the bishop of Lübeck.\(^3\) Meanwhile the house with church of Lüchtenhofe belonging to Hildesheim had received the statutes of a collegiate church in 1463. The first rector, Bernard of Büderich, had already insistently urged the community to take this step. It was he indeed, who had received the necessary privilege from Pope Eugenius IV in 1439. The need for such a status arose from the opposition which the Brothers were encountering in various circles in Hildesheim. Their institution was meeting with resistance. There were already so many monasteries that it was unthinkable for the municipality to permit another, even supposing they felt the inclination to do so. When Bernard of Brüderich was in Rome in 1439, while still a frater of the Münster house, he was advised to transform the institution into a collegiate church with chapter. This gave many legal advantages and would silence the opposition. It was not necessary for such a chapter and collegiate church to adopt the exalted titles of provost, deacon, canon and capitulum. The Brothers were allowed to retain their own customs but had authority to make new statutes. They could also hold collations for the schoolboys, as was done in Zwolle and Deventer.\(^4\) Bernard appeared

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\(^1\) Doebner 76.  
\(^3\) *Ibid.*, 133.  
to be in favour of the suggestion and supported it, but the Brothers were either neutral or against, and urged Bernard to postpone taking any action. The objections put forward by some of the Hildesheim Brothers are quite remarkable. Some of them thought that this renewal would lead them gradually to depart from the original humility and that they would be acting as seculars. The following objection is typical for the Brothers’ ideas on the devotion: the result of allowing such a college (of canons) will be that the canons will be constantly occupied with the ceremonies and singing, and would live in other matters according to their worldly position, walking according to the outward man and neglecting the labour of their hands and the transforming of the inner man. There is also the danger that those persons who can sing well will be selected, while those with better characters will be relegated to the background or even rejected altogether. To this Bernard replied that singing was not an essential part of such a college, and certainly not the daily singing. This happened more as a result of the foundations and the quantity of property, more from the established care and the competent administration of prebends and other necessities. He was therefore also opposed to any increase in income so that they would be obliged, even from necessity, to pay heed to their manual work. There was in any case little danger of wealth, in view of the many monasteries in Hildesheim. If people desired anything grandiose they should address themselves to these monasteries, and give us a pittance for Masses, vigils, psalms and suchlike. Wealth was certainly to be avoided. Fear of altering the character of the Brethren of the Common Life, and above all of losing their inner devotion, made the rector decide to shelve this proposal for the time being.

When the second rector, John Loen, died in 1463, and an election to choose a successor was imminent, while so many members had died of the plague that the foundation was again threatened with extinction, the survivors once more sought their salvation in the foundation of a college of canons and a collegiate church. They thought too that this step might lead the rector to consult the Brothers more about the problems besetting the house. They finally decided to accept the privilege and transform the fraternity into a college-always under condition that no changes should be made in the aims, customs, dress and name of the Brothers. Every candidate for the rectorship of the

1 Doebner 57.

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house would have to promise not to relinquish any of the old statutes.\textsuperscript{1} The introduction to the newly formulated statutes clearly states that, although they have adopted the title of college, the old rules are confirmed. They are to continue their care for the schoolboys and retain their communal life and possessions.

The introduction concludes thus: the aim is to lead a pure, communal life, without any personal possessions, and to dwell in harmony and love through mortification, abdication of individual will and the practice of obedience.\textsuperscript{2} The chapel of the house thus became a collegiate church and the Brothers formed a chapter which could draw up its own statutes.\textsuperscript{3} The statutes included the relevant bull of pope Eugenius IV whereby the same privileges were granted to the houses of Münster, Cologne and Wesel, although the names of provost and canon were retained.\textsuperscript{4} Hildesheim did not adopt this latter measure, although the Brothers did call the assembly of the associated houses in Münster the capitulum generale, and that of the members of their own house capitulum. Among the functions of this capitulum was the election of the rector (but not the provost who was later called senior).\textsuperscript{5} The members still consisted of priests, clerici and lay brothers, no one was accepted as novice before the age of eighteen or as member of the community before nineteen. Although no solemn vows were taken, the Brothers had to have the intention of remaining for the rest of their lives. Each Brother had also to declare before a notary that he renounced all claim to anything he might earn or inherit. This was to become communal property.\textsuperscript{6} In spite of this promise and renouncing of personal possessions, the Brothers were not regarded as religious. It was for this reason that rector Peter of Dieburg was unwilling to take compulsory measures against those who wished to leave. In this he was endorsing the opinion of Gabriel Biel († 1490).\textsuperscript{7}

This anxiety to preserve the inner devotion, which might perhaps be smothered by the many ceremonies of the collegiate churches, seems gratifying, but one must not deduce from this that the fraters

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{1} Doebner 63-64. The Brotherhouse of Münster and the other houses in the West had not yet adopted the privilege at this time.
\bibitem{2} Ibid., 208.
\bibitem{3} Ibid., 210.
\bibitem{4} Ibid., 210-211.
\bibitem{5} Canonici are, however, mentioned several times in the Ghent calendar, 336, 337.
\bibitem{6} Ibid., 219, 238
\bibitem{7} Ibid., 113.
\end{thebibliography}

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refrained from outward ceremonies. From the very beginning the Hildesheim Brothers prayed the Hours together as was done in Deventer and Zwolle. Just as in other churches the faithful could set up foundations for Masses, vigils and memorials. That many did so is evident from the necrologium of Lüchtenhof and from the list of benefactors. They even imitated the other monastics in issuing fraternity letters, whereby the benefactors of the house could share in the good works of the Brothers. The calendar of feasts and the regulations for the ceremonies testify to the anxiety that the liturgy should be celebrated with due solemnity. At the end of the sixteenth century the Brothers differed nothing in this respect from what could be observed in all the churches of regulars and seculars of this period. These ceremonies probably fulfilled the religious needs of the late Middle Ages. In all this the Brothers attempted to find some help in intensifying their inner devotion, but they could also descend to formalism. One is not justified in dismissing these rites and ceremonies among all non-brothers as mere externalism and formalism, while assuming the contrary with regard to the fraters. Or indeed, as more often happens, in ignoring this multiplicity of ceremonies which often appear to us excessive.

It was in the lean years, when the Hildesheim house had few members and a slender income, that a favourable opportunity presented itself for beginning a new house. On July 20th 1454 landgrave Ludwig of Hessen donated to the rector and Brothers of Hildesheim a house and garden, known as ‘Weissenhof,’ situated in the town of Kassel, to form the basis of a new Brotherhouse. This gift was negotiated by the priest Nicolas Tant of Alsfelt, Herman of Werhem, first rector of Wesel and subsequently rector of Sisters in Münster, and Bernard of Büderich, rector of Hildesheim, as laid down in the charter; but according to the Annals the prime mover was Herman of Werhem, who was born in Hessen and was acquainted with the landgrave. Any tension which may have existed between this Herman and Bernard of Hildesheim must have vanished by this period or at least to a great extent evaporated. The Hildesheim Brothers were to supply members for the new house, so that they might pray for the founder and his family through hours, Masses, vigils and other cere-

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1 Doebner 7.
2 Ibid., 283-298.
3 Ibid., 299-324.
4 Ibid., 330.
5 Ibid., 334-344.
6 Ibid., 350, 374.
7 Ibid., 25.
8 See above p. 437.
monies and prayers. This already venerable formula was well suited to the Brothers. The document makes no mention of their distinctive character except to note that they did not beg. No word is said of any pastoral or educational activities on their part. The founders may have had no desire for them, or they may not have known about them. What they wanted was people to pray for them and they therefore took measures in case the fraters were not able to take up residence. They decided who was to go in their place. The rector of the Hildesheim house sent two priests and two lay brothers to Kassel, and these set up a new foundation there in 1455. At the outset they received financial support from Hildesheim. The house also went through a difficult period at the beginning. It remained associated with Hildesheim and there is no report in this period of any educational or teaching activity. The Reformation was officially introduced in 1526. By 1529 there were still ten Brothers in residence, and these seem to have worked on until 1534, when they were banished. It was then, or perhaps earlier, that the rector John of Soest went to Hildesheim where, according to the necrologium, he lived for thirty years. He died in 1560.

When things had begun to look up for the Brothers in Hildesheim, and the house was well supplied with members and money, they decided to begin a new foundation to the east of Kassel, in Magdeburg. This was probably at the request of a physician, Dr. Thomas. The Hildesheimers bore far the greatest portion of the cost of furniture and installation for this new foundation. They rented a house in 1482 and sent two of the fraters to Magdeburg. However, the people's opposition was so great, inflamed by the deacon of the Magdeburg Neustadt, that the lease was broken. The purchase of a house in the Neustadt, with the assistance of the abbot of St. Janskamp, fanned the flames. Nevertheless, four Brothers settled there in 1483, and the Hildesheimers made considerable financial sacrifices. It was not until the papal legate, Berthold, had intervened in 1484, that the church and temporal administrations were in any way reconciled. The house, however, only began to develop in a subsequent period. It maintained constant contact with the Brothers of Hildesheim.

1 Doebner 166-169. Annalen 25.
2 Doebner 286.
3 Doebner 90-93.
What the Hildesheimers had introduced in 1564 after some hesitation and with certain reservations, and what had been proscribed in Marburg from the time of the foundation, i.e., the transformation of the congregation of Brothers into a chapter according to the privileges granted by Popes Eugenius IV and Calixtus III, now met with less resistance elsewhere.¹ Not only do various houses in the Netherlands seem to have adopted the privilege, several of those in Germany did so too—notably the houses of Münster, Cologne and Wesel.² On the other hand, certain German chapters, which had existed as such for a long time, pledged themselves to the communal life and to community of goods and incomes. From henceforth thus, they consisted of provost, deacon and canons leading a communal life. Such communities appear to have existed in the eighth century and were later found in various places in Italy. While the transition from Brother to canon was no great step, that from canon to Brother of the Common Life signified a complete transformation. Instead of living in his own house with a household, private income and complete liberty of movement, the canon was confronted with a common table and dormitory and was forbidden any monetary transactions. This must have seemed like renouncing the world and entering a monastery, except that the rules were different and no vows were taken. In the transition from Brother to canon, from chapel to collegiate church, from congregation to chapter, there was not so much emphasis placed on the singing of the hours that it smothered the inner devotion and relegated it to the background. We already saw, however, that the Hildesheim Brothers feared this might be so. Yet, if it was possible to overcome this danger here, the reversal from canon to Brother of the Common Life was more drastic. The chief promoter of the development from chapter to congregation practising communal life was the famous theologian Gabriel Biel. He may have made the acquaintance of the Brothers in the Cologne house of Weidenbach, during his theological studies in Cologne in 1453. The first evidence of this trend is the foundation of the Brotherhouse of Marienthal near Geisenheim in Rheingau,³ which became a Brotherhouse with canonical additions. The life of the house was to be modelled on that of

¹ See hereafter p. 449
² See hereafter p. 451
the *fraters* in Cologne, but the Brothers had to keep the canonical hours. In addition they had to sing a Mass every Saturday in honour of the Mother of God and four times a year a vigil and Mass for the founders of the house.¹

Some time later, in 1465, Cologne founded the house of Königstein, north of Wiesbaden, or at least contributed to its foundation. In fact, count Eberhard V of Königstein changed the existing priestly prebends of the parish church into a new fund destined for a chapter which was to consist of Brethren of the Common Life.² Thus arose a chapter of Brothers, *‘Kugelherren.’* They were to follow an Augustinian rule, without becoming Canons Regular, and fulfil the canonical hours day and night with prayer and singing. They were to help in caring for the sick and training the young. This included supervising their religious practices. The undertaking was approved by the archbishop of Mainz on August 23rd 1466.³ There is no mention of a school.

In 1468 Gabriel Biel took up the deanery of the church of St. Mark at Butzbach⁴ at the request of count Eberhart III of Eppstein and of other nobles of the district. The intention was to transform it into a chapter church so that the canons would become Brethren of the Common Life under Biel's direction. Biel had completed his organisation by April 30th 1470.⁵ In 1471 the houses of Marienthal, Königstein and Butzbach formed a union such as existed between Münster, Cologne and Wesel. Their relationship to the *colloquium* of Münster was very loose. The rector rarely visited it, nor did it succeed in drawing them into the larger union.⁶ It appears from the *Copialbuch* in Butzbach that a school already existed there long before the Brothers came, for it is mentioned in 1433. It was a parish school such as existed during this period in most places of any significance. The pupils were taught reading and writing and the very first principles of Latin. Those boys who wished to continue their education went on to attend a city school, for example that of Emmerich, Deventer, Zwolle or Cologne. Besides possessing the right of patronage of the church, the counts of Eppstein also had the right to appoint the school rector.

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¹ Landeen 153.
² Charter, Landeen 158.
⁵ Landeen 166.
⁶ Landeen p. 176.

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The count thus appointed the head of this school and also the bell ringers, which was the normal practice. It was not this school which was put on equal footing with those of Deventer and Zwolle but the domus pauperum or hostel which the Brothers founded later. ‘Zeu der Ere Goths in Nutze armer und ander Schüler, dí darin uffgenomen werden nach wyse der Schulen zu Deventer und Schwolle.’¹ The new school referred to in 1470 is not the school building, but the setting up of a hostel and this new building indicate an expansion in the educational programme. The Brothers did not give lessons at this school. In 1481 they hired a rector, a man who was not a member of the Brotherhood, just as the count had done before.² From the contract drawn up between the Brothers and the head of the school, it appears that he was required to set an example to the school children, to take charge of the school, draw up the programme of lessons and see that this was adhered to when the Brothers had given their approval, to sing during processions and with the boys in the choir, and to keep order. Each side could give six months notice. There was to be a separate teacher for each class, which also resembles the city school.

The Brothers were gradually beginning to think of themselves more as canons and adopted all the privileges of Eugenius IV and Paul II. Their language also became adapted to their new position. In the original charter of Königstein the Brothers are called ‘omnes fratres nostri concapitulares’: no one will be admitted to the house ‘in canonicum’, as a canon,³ so long as the canon shall maintain the union.’ In a document issued by the Brothers it is said that ‘Henricus Pulpeti praepositus et capitulum ecclesiae beatae Mariae virginis in Königstein Moguntinensis dioecesis’ joins the general chapter of the Brethren of the Common Life.⁴

We discover a similar situation in the monastery of Wolf, on the Moselle, founded in 1478.⁵ This place had formerly possessed a church of Our Lady, served by five secular priests. In 1476 the patrons of the church, Frederik, ‘palsgrave and Duke of Bavaria’ and his brother Christoffel, margrave of Baden, counts of Sponheim, requested pope Sixtus IV to be allowed to transform the church of Our Lady with the four altars into a collegiate church which would be served by a

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¹ Ms. 50 fol. 32a. Staatsarchive in Darmstadt; quoted by Landeen, no. 129, p. 171.
³ Landeen 174.
⁴ Ibid., 176.
⁵ Ibid., 178.
number of priests and *clerici* having a communal refectory and dormitory. This had already been done with the churches of Marienthal, Königstein and Butzbach according to the privilege granted to these churches by Paul II. The Pope granted this request on May 1st 1477 and the abbot of Sponheim also approved the plan. The month after, on June 18th 1477, the general union of Marienthal, Königstein and Butzbach met and delegated Gabriel Biel and Benedict of Helmstadt to hold the usual inspection and to put the plan into execution. By July 3rd 1478 the final touches had been put and the opening ceremony took place. This was followed by the election of a rector and the drawing up of the rights and duties of the Brothers. The foundation began in a small way with the rector and three Brothers and at the outset had to contend with the usual poverty and hostility on the part of the local inhabitants. This developed into a veritable struggle for life. The people clamoured for the return of the secular priests and they were finally given a chapel in the village. The first Brothers found the going too hard and had to be replaced by men from Cologne. These eventually overcame the resistance, but not until the 16th century, around 1517. Meanwhile, in 1499, the Brothers developed a most remarkable plan in the domain of study and teaching. But this belongs to the following period.

The founding of these canon-brotherhouses was naturally made easier by the fact that several of the older houses had already undertaken the transformation from Brothers to canons. These Rhineland houses in their turn could promote the founding of similar institutions in Württemberg. Here too Gabriel Biel was prime mover and principal leader and incidentally a welcome instrument in the hand of Count Eberhart I. This enterprising man, of sound but sometimes rather strange ideas, founded the University of Tübingen, and with the permission of pope Sixtus IV allocated two thirds of the income of the chapter of Regular canons at Sindelfingen to the University. The remaining income was destined for the Canons Regular of Windesheim and in this way he came into contact with the Modern Devotion. He was convinced that a third of the income reserved for secular canons would be quite sufficient for eight Regular Windesheim Canons. In this way the duties which weighed so heavy on the prebendaries could still be carried out. It seemed, however, that he

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1 Landeen 179.

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was out in his calculations. The foundation did not develop in peace and harmony. Disputes arose between prior and canons and in the end no more novices were accepted. Pope Leo X dissolved the foundation in 1517, after the Windesheimers had already, so it seems, been replaced by other Regulars. This episode has no bearing on the history of the Modern Devotion, but it does give an insight into the mentality of count Eberhart who promoted the practice of learning with the aid of church goods.\(^1\) He now founded within his domain several chapters of Canons who practised the communal life and may thus be termed Brethren of the Common Life.

The first to be transformed was the city church of Urach. On May 1st 1477, with permission from pope Sixtus IV, the count combined all the incomes from the benefices attached to the church, set up a college of canons with communal life, who would be supported from the general fund thus obtained, and made the church a chapter church or a collegiate church.\(^2\) In furtherance of his scheme he sought contact with the related chapter churches of the Rhine region and notably with Gabriel Biel in Butzbach. After the usual inspection Biel helped to put the plan into execution. The canons were to enjoy the privileges granted by popes Eugenius IV and Calixtus III to the houses of Münster, Cologne and Wesel; they were also to follow the liturgy of the church of Constance. The prior Benedict, who had been a canon in Marienthal, took up residence on August 16th 1477 with two priests and two deacons.\(^3\) He was soon succeeded in 1479 by Gabriel Biel who also became a professor in the theological faculty of Tübingen on November 22nd 1484, thus combining the offices of professor and prior. After relinquishing his professorship in 1492, he remained provost of St. Peter of Einsiedel in Schönbuch until his death in December 1495. This is the first time we have encountered such a learned person among the Brothers, and the combination of a University professorship with the priorate of Brethren of the Common Life is unique! These unusual circumstances can be explained by the transition of the Brothers to canons, by the changing times, i.e. the years 1484 to 1492, when a similar development seemed likely or actually occurred in several places, and by the personality of Gabriel Biel himself. He supported the communal life on principle and was also

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2 Landeen 199.

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a learned theologian. In Urach he was not the only person to combine the offices of Brother and scholar. The canons of Urach also served the chapel in the count's castle in Tübingen. Those who resided there enjoyed a respectable income and studied at the University. One of these was Wendelin Steinbach. He was admitted to the faculty of theology in 1468, was soon teaching and had already gained his doctorate in 1469. He too was later professor of theology at Tübingen. These canon Brothers displayed a similar interest in the teaching in the school attached to their church. In 1493 they appointed the Humanist Alexius Johann Brassican rector of the school of Urach, and he continued in this office until 1503. It is interesting to note that an indulgence was granted for the completion of the church on July 12th 1478, with the result that Urach attracted many pilgrims.

Encouraged no doubt by his success in Urach, count Eberhart undertook similar transformations in Herrenberg in 1480, where he banished the canons, in Dettingen in 1482 where the Brothers took the place of Augustinian Canons Regular, and at St. Peter at Einsiedel in Schönbuch in 1492, where the old Gabriel Biel became rector on January 20th 1492. The church of St. Peter was elevated to a collegiate church, *ad instar aliarum ecclesiarum et domorum predictarum*. This last foundation, however, was quite special, not to say peculiar. The members of the chapter of Einsiedel consisted of three classes: twelve canons with a provost (also called prior), twelve nobles under a master, and twelve burgthers, acting as lay Brothers, who had to assist the canons and the nobles. The canons had to serve the Lord ‘und sin Lob Tag und Nacht mit den göttlichen Ämptern (offices), singen, lesen, beten.’ It is not quite clear what the nobles' task was exactly, but they could keep their own horses and had their own hunting ground. They also bought better clothing. The classes remained distinct, each having its own dormitory. The refectory was communal, but there were separate tables for each class. No one was allowed to enter the chapter before his 34th year. A married man could then leave his wife. Since the Brothers (the Burghers) were not obliged to share their personal portions or the incomes thereof with the others, but could dispose of it to the honour of God, for the comfort of the poor,

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1 Landeen 202.

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and to buy clothes, O. Meyer considers this to be no longer a foundation for Brethren of the Common Life in the proper sense.

It seems remarkable that Gabriel Biel should have lent himself to such an experiment in his old age. Although it appeared viable at first, the death of Biel in 1495 and of Count Eberhart in 1496 deprived it of support and promoters. Under the succeeding Duke Ulrich there was opposition to all these Württemberg foundations, especially since many foreigners had found their way into these chapters. The number of members also decreased. When they were dissolved in 1517 the chapter in Urach consisted of thirteen, Dettingen of five and Herrenberg of sixteen. Duke Ulrich requested the Pope's permission to discontinue the foundation. Pope Leo X allowed him to change the regular foundations into secular. He absolved the Brothers of their obligations regarding the communal life and communal possessions, and allowed them to retain the prebend as a secular (April 19th 1516). A portion of the income, however, could be used to pay the thirty singers of the ducal chapel.

The splendour-loving Renaissance prince thus gained his wish, but the canons protested. The Papal bull was put into effect on July 30th 1517, before Luther began the Reformation. The theologian Gabriel Biel, who strongly supported the communal life of the clergy, spent about the last thirty years of his life in such a community. He explained his attitude in a treatise on The Communal Life of the Clerici. His chief aim in writing this work was to reply to a question which was frequently put to him: how did the order or institute of the Clerici of the Common Life originate? He gives first a few theoretical reasons: the concept of order; the well known text from the Acts of the Apostles on communal possession among the first Christians, and the later ideas on this subject as revealed in the writings of the Fathers and the medieval theologians. He also discusses the pronouncement of the Council of Constance at Grabo's sentence and the privileges granted to the Brothers by Pope Eugene IV and his successors to form a chapter and to elevate their chapels to collegiate churches. He then

1 O. Meyer, Die Brüder des gemeinsamen Lebens im Württemberg 1477-1517, Stuttgart 1913, 47.
2 Landeen 211; Landeen, Blätter, 16.
3 Meyer 53.
4 Ibid., 54-56.

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proceeds to the facts: the story of Geert Groote and the dark picture usually painted of conditions prevailing in the orders and monasteries, when the monastic rule was often neglected and observance was a rare thing. This state of affairs deterred many from entering the monastery, including Geert Groote himself, who thereupon founded the Brotherhood. Florens Radewijns continued his work, and founded Windesheim, a congregation which developed rapidly, retaining the observance in its own monasteries and applying it in others.

Several texts prove that the Brothers' communal life is in accordance with church law. The Brothers worked too, so as not to be a burden to the faithful, and because this provides a good variation in a day filled with study and prayer. This indeed was also praised and recommended by St. Augustine and St. Bernard. The copying of books provides most suitable employment since it gives little distraction and supplies the faithful with good books. Furthermore the Brothers practise *caritas*, humility and obedience. Their clothing is of the simplest, a grey-black robe, but not a monastic habit: they have no *cappa*, no *cuculla*, no scapular. They do, however, wear a *caputio ad collum* against the cold. They sing as they work.

This then was Biel's view of the Brothers. It is a simple picture and his treatise is by no means a penetrating dissertation. It is striking that he did not see the origin of the Modern Devotion, the rise of the Brethren, as a reaction to the external nature of pious practices. Nor indeed does he mention inward piety.

Accompanying the great expansion which took place during this period and the accompanying conquest of poverty in most houses, the improvement in housing conditions and better facilities for the work among the schoolboys-i.e., separate houses for certain groups of young people who were originally obliged to live in the Brothers' house-came a development of the Brotherhood as such in two directions. One was towards the chapter and canonicate, the other towards a tighter organization, a closer association of the separate houses under one head. Both these trends owed their origin, in part at least, to the same causes which also remained operative later. These were pressure from outside and the hostility of certain groups. Geert Groote had warned against the likelihood of this, and the first *fraters* had already experienced it. These hindrances continued even after Grabo had been condemned at the Council of Constance, and despite repeated ecclesiastic declarations of approval. Nearly all the new

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foundations went through a difficult time during the first years, largely as a result of this hostility and opposition. Even the older houses like Deventer suffered from this hostile attitude. The difficulties experienced by the Deventer house under Egbert ter Beek around 1470 are revealed in the correspondence, previously discussed, between this rector and pater Jan Brugman. Adaptation to existing church institutions like the collegiate churches on the one hand, and a powerful organization of the different Brotherhouses on the other, helped the Brothers to resist this pressure from outside. For the rest, this close-knit organization, this linking of several houses under one authority, could help to maintain the original spirit, to retain the old customs in practice and to suppress any sign of relaxation. This stricter organization was probably all the more necessary during this period of development from Brotherhouses to chapter, precisely on account of this threatened relaxation.

As we have already seen, opposition had to be overcome in the case of both trends. It thus seems worthwhile to examine both phenomena separately, while not, however, holding them entirely distinct from each other. The first suggestion for transforming a fraternity into a chapter came from pope Eugenius IV. We first hear of this so-called privilege in Peter of Dieburg's story concerning the sending of Bernard Büderich to Rome in 1437 by his rector Henry von Ahaus. He was to obtain certain privileges,\(^1\) although we are not told which. Once in Rome it was soon obvious to Bernard that certain authoritative persons among the lawyers and cardinals could not reconcile the Brothers' institution with ecclesiastical law, no matter how pope Eugenius protested to Bernard his regard for the life of the Brethren. Bernard was obliged to struggle with the *curia* officials, but had finally to return home with the so-called privilege promulgated by pope Eugenius IV in a bull dated February 14th 1440,\(^2\) in which it was advised to make the Brotherhouse into a chapter and the chapel into a collegiate church. The bull, published by Doebner,\(^3\) seems to be addressed to the churches of St. Trinitate or Springborn of Münster, St. Michael or Weidenbach of Cologne, and St. Martin in Wesel, now elevated to the status of collegiate churches, and at the same time linked with each other and made one to the extent that a canon of one church would possess the same dignity in another. It is also said that the canons had no personal possessions and had to live from the

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1 Doebner 28 sq.
2 Barnikol 100.
3 Doebner 210-212.
communal fund without begging. Each church would have a provost at its head to be chosen by the canons of the house who would thereby form the general chapter. This chapter might also depose the provost, granted sufficient cause, and make statutes for the order of the house.

Bernard brought home the papal letter and explained the gist of it to the colloquium of Münster of 1440 (probably on the Wednesday before Cantate, April 20th.). This colloquium consisted of the rectors of the houses of Münster, Cologne, Herford and Wesel, as well as the rectors of some of the Sisterhouses. The rectors were predictably taken aback. Was this what Henry von Ahaus had asked for? Had the ambassador not been able to prevent such a situation? They decided it was better to forget the whole thing. The letter was filed away in the archives, but Bernard of Büderich, who was appointed rector of the projected house at Hildesheim at the same colloquium, will have taken a copy with him to his new house. The rectors did, however, decide on the authority of the Holy See that the statutes they would make would not be binding under pain of sin (ad culpam) but only of temporal punishment, and that the rector would have the right of dispensation.

Bernard did not entirely forget the privilege and in 1449 he suggested to the Brothers of Hildesheim that they should put it into execution. The church would then become a collegiate church and the Brothers, canons. We have already seen the objections raised by the Brothers to this proposition, and rector Bernard considered it wiser not to insist.\(^1\) When, however, the papal legate, Nicolas of Cusa, visited the town of Hildesheim in 1451, on his journey through Germany, the municipality seized the opportunity to request that the congregation of the Brothers should be dissolved. The cardinal, however, pointed out to these gentlemen that this fraternity had the approval of the Holy See and that it was not in their interest to make difficulties for the Brothers. He advised them to leave the fraters in peace. A few days beforehand he had transmitted to the rector in a sealed letter\(^2\) the privilege of transforming the Brothers’ chapel and house into a collegiate church and chapter.

The cardinal legate continued his journey and probably delivered similar letters to other Brotherhouses. We know that he defended the Brothers in Deventer and wished to give them privileges which would safeguard their position. Rector Egbert ter Beek refused to accept

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1 Doebner 56-60.
2 Doebner 22.
them, however, since he clung to the old simplicitas.¹ As we have pointed out, this privilege will probably have been to raise the status of the Brothers to a chapter.² Rome's action, however, continued.

On March 3rd 1456, Pope Calixtus III ordered the abbot of St. Paul in Utrecht and the provost of St. Peter's in the same town to raise the chapel of St. John of the Brethren of the Common Life of Amersfoort to a collegiate church and to give to that house all the privileges granted to the houses of Münster and Cologne. The provost carried out this order, which had probably been made on request, on April 27th 1461.³ On December 1st 1460 pope Pius II sent a bull in which he granted the house of Hildesheim the privilege concerning the raising of the Brothers' house to a college of canons.⁴ Three years later the new rector of Hildesheim, Lambert Holtappel, put the privileges into practice immediately after his election-without however, introducing the titles of provost and canon.⁵ Shortly afterwards the plan must have existed of putting the privileges into practice at least in Münster and in the closely associated houses of Cologne and Wesel, since a union is proposed in a decree of the colloquium of Münster of the year 1470 which assumes this privilege. In this the rector is referred to as rector swe prepositus collegii Fontissaliensis.⁶ Finally, in a draft for statutes for a union in 1483, it is assumed that all participants have become canons.⁷

Meanwhile the curia in Rome continued its urging. On January 10th 1469 the aforementioned apostolic legate Onofrio in Brussels ordered two Utrecht prelates-again the abbot of St. Paul and the provost of St. Peter-to examine ‘the petition of the Brethren of the Common Life of St. John in Amersfoort, St. Gregory in ’s-Hertogenbosch, St. Jerome in Ghent, the Annunciation in Brussels and St. Gregory (popularly known as St. John's) in Geraardsbergen, in which they express their desire to change their chapels into collegiate churches, as has already been done with the chapels of the Brethren of Springhorn in Münster, Weidenbach in Cologne and of the house at Wesel.’ It is doubtful whether the Brothers' desire was so great as the legate suggests. In any case, the change did not proceed so smoothly

¹ G. Dumbar, Analecta I 173.
² See p. 357
³ A. Miraeus, Regulae et constitutiones clericorum, Antwerpen 1638, p. 15.
⁴ Doebner 61.
⁵ Doebner 61-64.
⁶ Doebner 265.
⁷ Doebner 272.

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in these last mentioned German houses as this document would imply. It is significant that the Brothers of Amersfoort, who had already received the privilege in 1456, are again mentioned here among the suppliants. Still, the legate's letter was certainly brought to the notice of the interested fraters.¹

I have not been able to decide to what extent the granting of this privilege had any effect. However, if the Münster and Hildesheim Brothers (probably not those of Cologne and Wesel) finally accepted the privilege, we may also assume this of the five Dutch houses. On the other hand it must be deduced from the extant documents and chronicles of the houses of Deventer, Zwolle, Doesburg and Emmerich, that the Brothers of these institutions never adopted this change. Still, the fact that virtually all the Rhineland houses of Marienthal, Königstein and Butzbach became chapters with collegiate churches between the years 1463-1468, and established closer ties with Cologne especially, which provided a number of Brothers, shows that this new form-canons who lived in community and retained no personal possessions-not only met with no opposition, but was considered as normal. It is thus no longer so strange when we know that this form may be said to have been introduced at the instigation of Gabriel Biel.

This means that at the end of this period, around 1485, a great majority of the Brethren of the Common Life were either called canons or were considered as such, were under the authority of a provost (sometimes senior) and served a collegiate church, as so many other churches were served by the secular canons.

Did this signify any great change? From the legal point of view, yes, since such a chapter was capable of making new regulations with effect in law, and the authority of the provost was legally greater than that of the rector, to whom the fraters legally owed obedience only ‘as good pupils to the master...’ In actual fact, however, the rector took a great many independent decisions and sometimes humiliated the Brothers in what seems to us an inhuman manner. As collegiate churches the former chapels of the fraters also stood on a sounder legal footing, since their rights were laid down by church law, whereas before the Brothers were dependent on the good will of the pastors and bishop. In actual fact not much was changed. Before the obtaining of this privilege many lay people, including schoolboys, visited the Brethren's churches and chapels. Several lay persons made foundations

¹ A. Miraeus, Regulae et constitutiones etc. Antw. 1638, Cap. XIII 16.
for Masses and for vigils and *memoriae*. The necrologium of the *Lüchtenhofes saeculis XV-XVI* looks no different from, for example, that of St. Salvator in Utrecht, although I must admit that most foundations date from after 1463. Such collegiate churches were more in touch with the life of the people than the *fraters’* chapels, and to this extent the opposition to the *fraters* may have declined somewhat. The attackers could no longer fall back upon too strictly interpreted legal regulations, such as the prohibition from founding new monastic orders without the Pope’s permission. More important, however, is the question of whether the old ideals of the *fraters* survived this transformation from *fraters* to canons with communal life and property. Strictly speaking there should have been no need for them to suffer: the former *fraters* also sang or prayed the hours, which the canons considered generally as their chief preoccupation. The new style canons could continue to prepare for this work and employ various means in order to transform outward prayers and actions so far as possible into inner experiences. They could carry on with their manual work, and continue to devote themselves to the pastoral care of the schoolboys and Sisters, while rendering their inner piety more intense through study, meditation and examination of conscience. They could practise the virtues of humility, poverty, obedience and chastity just as before. Yet with the loss of their own name, something of their ideals seemed bound to go. By adopting names like provost, canon, chapter and collegiate church, they came to resemble, at least in the eyes of the people, those secular canons who, through their carelessness in performing the offices, their anxiety to delegate these duties to vicars, their comparatively luxurious lives, and their flouting of the law of celibacy, helped to give the church the bad name she acquired in the late Middle Ages. No matter how earnestly the *frater*-canons tried to live according to the old *consuetudines*, the change of name alone was sufficient to lure them in the direction of the broad road. Unfortunately we do not possess enough data to decide whether this was indeed so and to what extent.

A tighter central administration was indicated to combat hostility and any relaxation of discipline. Several Brothers attempted to organize one, but others opposed such a move, wishful to preserve their

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1 Doebner 283-298.
2 Archief... aartsb. Utrecht IX (1881); X (1882) 270; XI (1883) 212; XII (1884) 105.
independence and with it the old freedom of action. The heads of the Brotherhouses then began to come together (with or without the confessors of the Sisterhouses), undoubtedly after the model of the related congregation of Windesheim, of which the priors met every year at Windesheim. One group met in Zwolle, the so-called colloquium Zwollense, and another at Münster, the colloquium Monasteriense. We know very little about the Zwolle colloquium, neither its origin, the number of members, its activities or its end. All we do know is that it existed and met every year in Zwolle in the middle and in the second half of the fifteenth century.

It decided, among other things, whether a new foundation should be received into the Fraternity or not— we already saw this when discussing the founding of the Brotherhouse at Gouda. The most frequent references to the Zwolle colloquium are found in the Acts of the Münster colloquium. E. Barnikol has published an important and critical study on this subject. He distinguishes first between two kinds of association of various houses, the first being a union which provided mutual help in calamities (fire, sickness, war) such as that set up in 1425 between the houses of Cologne and Münster, and in 1436 and 1442 among Münster, Cologne, Wesel and Herford. Anything which the treaty of 1425 contained of the second sort was omitted in 1436 and 1442. An agreement similar to that of 1425 continued to exist between these houses and was later adopted or imitated by neighbouring houses, for instance the aforementioned houses of the Upper Rhine and those of Hildesheim, Kassel and Magdeburg. Lack of documentation leaves us uncertain how far this cooperation went and in particular how far the authority extended. The second type of union was of a purely idealistic character. Its aim was to ensure brotherly cooperation in the domains of devotion and discipline among various houses. The colloquia of Zwolle and Münster were in this class. The Münster colloquium met for the first time in 1431 in the Westphalian capital. Neither the day nor the month of this meeting is known. The prologue stresses the necessity of communal life for the clerici. It goes back to the earliest history of the church and is

1 See p. 404
2 Doebner 246-282. (Protokolle u. Aktenstücke über die Colloquia der unirten Frater- und Schwesternhäuser in Münster (1431-1506).
3 E. Barnikol, Studien zur Geschichte der Brüder vom gemeinsamen Leben, Tübingen 1917, 112-155.
4 Doebner 246-242, 252-254.
expressly advocated in the Acts of the Apostles 4, 32. Such a community makes us strong against attacks from outside. But living together and holding everything in common means nothing unless there is mutual love. This must be fostered and therefore it is necessary to practice humility and obedience.\(^1\) For this reason, continues the text of the agreement, the rectors of the houses of Münster, Cologne and Herford, together with the rectors of four Sisterhouses (Borken, Schutdorp, Coesveld and Wesel) conclude a brotherhood in love, in which they bind themselves to meet in Münster every year on the fourth Wednesday after Easter, (i.e. the Wednesday before Cantate) and hold two days discussion on matters of service to their houses and persons. Hence the title colloquium or discussion, not chapter or committee. They wish to put into execution any decisions taken, always mindful of their debt of obedience to the church authorities. For they possess the power to make decisions concerning themselves and their houses and so to persevere in the good, the true faith, in communion with the Catholic Church and so attain the goal. In this way they safeguarded the principle which was already laid down in the charter of the priores, dated 1395, in that of Florens Radewijns of 1396, of Henry van Ahaus of 1401 and of the archbishop of Cologne of 1422.\(^2\) There is nothing new or unusual in this subjection to the authority of the church. Certain regulations were then drawn up concerning the direction and course of such a colloquium. The rector of Münster was made president and the office of secretary was virtually reserved for the procurator of this house. In emergencies, when the colloquium was not able to meet quickly enough, the rector of Münster could make decisions with or without consultation with rectors of neighbouring houses. One important point is that the visitation of each house by two rectors was laid down and that the manner of visitation was indicated. The visitatores enjoyed considerable powers in the choice of rectors and rectresses. They had to be present at the election and could consequently influence them. A rector might not be relieved of his office without their permission.\(^3\) Then follow regulations of a domestic nature concerning the holding of functions within in the house (no mention of a teacher or docent) and meals and fasts. When all this had been decided, the first sitting began. Various rules were drawn up and the first of any importance for us is that the rectors

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1 Doebner 246-247.
2 Doebner, add. I 156-169.
3 Ibid., 250-251.
were to ask everyone belonging to the house if they would be willing to abide by the decisions which the *colloquium* would make in the future. This was duly done and next year all the rectors were able to say that everyone had agreed.¹ This amounted in fact to a conferring of authority upon the *colloquium* and the rectors assembled there. The Brothers were bound to obey the decisions of the *colloquium* transmitted to them by the rector. It is not clear if these decisions were taken on a majority or a unanimous vote.² A measure was sometimes tried for a year, and made obligatory or not in the third year according to whether or not it was successful.³ It was also decided that a Brother might only preach in public, in a parish church for example, if he had received permission from the rector and Brothers. He must then exercise caution and discretion. A Brother might make a personal vow of obedience to the rector directly to God, but the rector might not praise such an action or even accept it.⁴ The other decisions concerned matters of less importance, or touched upon domains with which we are already familiar, for example, the election of the rector. One important decree was that which said that Henry Loder (1436-1439), prior of the monastery of Frenswegen at Northorn, and his successors, should be present at the *colloquia*, and could also be appointed *visitator* of the houses.⁵ It appears from this that a link was desired with the neighbouring monastery of the Windesheimer congregation. The prior of Windesheim fulfilled the same task at the *colloquium* of Zwolle. It may be assumed that in deciding what form their meetings should take, the founders of the *colloquium* of Münster and of Zwolle thought of the annual general chapter of Windesheim. They undoubtedly imitated it, but one should bear in mind that the priors who met in Windesheim had a firmer basis of authority in their monasteries than had the rectors. It is thus that the general chapter had more significance than the *colloquia*. In imitating this chapter the aim of the *colloquia* was to achieve a clear authority against the Brothers, which would fall to the rectors of Münster and Zwolle. To me this explains the opposition of the rectors of Hildesheim and later of the others to a closer union of the various houses with the Münster *colloquium*. They feared that the rector of this house would gain too much power. Barnikol has clearly shown that the prologue and text of the agreement were drawn up in the Münster house by rector Henry von

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¹ Doebner 248-249.  
² Ibid., 145-146.  
³ Ibid., 253.  
⁴ Ibid., 253.  
⁵ Ibid., 253-254.
Ahaus who was naturally held in high esteem in the then existing houses, since they all owed their existence to a greater part to his work.¹ Barnikol did not pause to wonder, however, whether perhaps the *colloquium* of Zwolle originated first and if so, whether the Münster text is perhaps dependent on that of Zwolle. Unfortunately we know nothing about the date or circumstances of the Zwolle *colloquium*. In 1437 however, the members of the Münster *colloquium* decided that two of them should go to the *colloquium partium inferiorum*, i.e., of Zwolle, and that two of that *colloquium* should come to Münster, to preserve mutual love. They immediately chose two persons who would go to Zwolle in the following year, where the *colloquium* met on the third Friday after Easter, i.e. the Friday before the Wednesday and Thursday of the Münster Assembly.² The Brothers of Münster were thus aware of the existence of the Zwolle *colloquium* in 1437 and also knew on what day it was held. The fact that from the very beginning they decided to hold their meeting during the week after that of Zwolle, might indicate that the Zwolle *colloquium* existed earlier. This seems not unlikely if one takes into account the position of the Dutch houses with regard to the German, the respect for rector Dirk of Herxen, the similar attitude of Windesheim and Freswegen towards the Brothers,³ and the matters dealt with-chiefly visitations and the question of the admittance of new houses. Unfortunately we have no evidence on which to base this assumption, but it would indeed show up the activities of Münster in a different light.

We must follow the further development of the Münster institution, without paying too much heed to those regulations which are of purely local importance. We shall however, consider certain noteworthy or characteristic decrees.

During the first years the assembly met regularly in Münster. In 1433 Godfried of Hemert, rector of the Brotherhouse at Amersfoort, was also present and even signed the decrees.⁴ How did this man come to attend the Münster *colloquium* and, apparently, not solely as a guest? Was he a delegate from the Zwolle *colloquium*? This is unlikely since the choice would presumably have fallen rather on Dirk of Herxen, rector of Zwolle, or Godfried of Toorn, rector of Deventer. Did

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1 Barnikol 125-126.
2 Doebner 257.
3 Both were founded by the Brothers, Windesheim by those of Deventer, Freswegen by those of Almelo (1394).
4 Doebner 254.

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R.R. Post, *The Modern Devotion*
Godfried seeks help in Münster in his then rather trying position in Amersfoort, where he was living with the Regulars. The matter remains perplexing since neither he nor any of his successors ever attended the Münster colloquium again.

The colloquium of 1433 took certain measures to safeguard the confessor of the Sisterhouses; they also decided that the members should burn a German book, De Vita Christiana. They would be careful in future about lending out books in the vernacular; the Brothers would not meddle with matters which were the concern of the prelates, for instance, taking action against unchaste monks and sisters; and in future the Brothers would also avoid the words bridegroom and bride in their talks for the Sisters. This last signified at the same time a rejection of the bride mystique, so popular in the late Middle Ages, which in turn is a sign of distaste for all mystique. It was the first time that the prior of the monastery of Böddiken was present. Henceforth he would attend the colloquium with the prior of Frenswegen. In 1435 the authority of the colloquium was increased when it was made obligatory for all the members to attend. If it was absolutely impossible for a rector to come, he had to give the reasons for his absence and send a representative, under threat of punishment. The Brotherhouse of Wesel was then accepted as a member.

Characteristic for the importance of the prior of the monastery of Frenswegen, Henry Loder, is the report of the meeting of 1436. This man being absent, nothing was decided. This shows a slavish subjection to the opinion of the Canons Regular. In 1437 follows the aforementioned collaboration with the Zwolle colloquium. There was no meeting in 1438 because rector Henry von Ahaus ‘had his reasons.’ The successor for the recently deceased Henry von Ahaus was chosen at the assembly of 1439; he was Herman of Wernen. Gerard of Rees, rector of Doesburg, was present, as the Zwolle delegate. In 1440 the colloquium decided to undertake the foundation of a house at Hildesheim. Münster sent the first Brothers and provided them with money. There was also mention of a second clerics’ house (domus clericorum) in Münster, repeated in the following year. To my mind this refers to a hostel, a house for pupils. In 1443 the obligatory participation in the colloquia...
was intensified. Each member of the house was required to have in his possession a copy of the list of decrees and also of the consuetudines.\(^1\) That nothing could be done without the prior of Frensweegen and the rector of Münster is clearly stated in 1444, when very little was discussed, because both these men were absent.\(^2\) We have no reports of any meetings from 1445 to 1448, but the annalist of Hildesheim expressly states that there was no meeting between 1449 and 1457 on account of party strife and disasters in Münster\(^3\), and of wars, including one in which several princes from the Low Countries were embroiled.\(^4\) Barnikol points out that this lapse in the colloquia was responsible for the failure of the plan to found a central administration of the German Brotherhouses and to impose a fixed organization on these houses.\(^5\)

The annalist of Hildesheim later adds in his annals that in his opinion the fraters who had come to Hildesheim from Münster had returned home,\(^6\) as though he, i.e., Peter of Dieburg, wished to say: ‘There is no reason at all why we should be subject to Münster.’ The colloquium revived in 1458 with the heads of the same houses as before being present. The rector of Hildesheim also put in an appearance. According to the text of the colloquium decrees, preserved in Hildesheim, the members decided that from henceforth the rector of Münster or his representative would be personally present at the election of the rector of each house. The annalist immediately notes however: our house is not accustomed to do this and never has done it.\(^7\) Münster's claims, which were partly realized since the rector of the Münster house was president of the colloquium, seem to me unusually high. In the following year the mentality of the rector of Münster-now Dirk of Wesel-was again revealed. The colloquium namely decided that henceforth the heads of the houses should come cum pleno consensu suppositorum suorum, with the full authority of their subjects.\(^8\) This offered the colloquium freedom of action, but the Hildesheimers voted against. In practice too, more unity was sought. To this end the colloquium decided in 1465 that the unifying and improvement of the statutes and customs should be discussed, and that the decrees of the colloquium should be written down in their entirety. Peter of Dieburg later added: this was never done. The Brotherhouse in Rostock, an offshoot of Springborn (Münster), was admitted to

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1 Doebner 261.
2 Ibid., 261.
3 Ibid., 262.
4 Ibid., 20.
5 E. Barnikol, Studien etc. 130.
6 Ibid., 262.
7 Ibid., 262.
8 Ibid., 263.
the colloquium in 1466. More remarkable however, was the admission, in 1469, with the colleges' approval, of the parish church of Butzbach. It was elevated to a chapter with communal life, the first of this kind which was admitted to the fraternity and hence incorporated; the houses of Marienthal, in Rheingau and Königstein were already incorporated. This signified a not inconsiderable extension of the Münster Brotherhouse's sphere of influence. On the other hand, the colloquium was unable to push through the measure that absent members should pay a double contribution. This was at the same time an ominous indication that there were no delegates from Hildesheim, Kassel, Rostock, Marienthal or Königstein.

The supporters of a stricter organization persisted, however; they wanted a general union of all the houses affiliated to the colloquium. But the realization of this project promised to be a heavy undertaking, since objections were already being made to a previously compiled agenda; to the payment of the cost of the meeting by those who were absent. There seems to have been an increase in non-attendance at the colloquia.

The general union remained an ideal for Münster. In 1470 the members of the colloquium expanded it further. All the rectors agreed to abide by the decisions and decrees of such a general chapter, in accordance with the tenor of the privileges obtained from Münster, and to work to bring about this union. The name of general chapter and the mention of the privileges of Münster indicate that the members were not averse to the idea of the chapter being transformed into a collegiate church, or indeed to becoming canons. The then rector of Hildesheim, Lamberts, had no personal objections-quantum in me est! But his successor, Peter of Dieburg, repeats his note to the acts of Münster, that this union never came about. The supporters of the union also wished to apply the privileges in question and decided that, once this union was an accomplished fact, the capitulum generale would consist of the rector or provost of Springborn (Münster), with four Brothers from this house specially chosen for this position, and also the rectors or provosts of the different houses, each with a frater selected by the house. If the rector could not get any delegate to accompany him to the chapter, he had to bring evidence to the effect that he possessed complete authority to represent the house.

1 Doebner 265-266.
2 Ibid., 263.
3 Ibid., 264.
4 Ibid., 264-265.
5 Ibid., 265.
According to Peter of Dieburg Hildesheim had not entered the union and thus the regulations were not binding on the canon-fraters of Hildesheim.

In 1471, says Dieburg, the rector of Münster tried to acquire the right of appointing with two others the visitators to each house. Hildesheim remarks, however, that the visitator for that house was appointed by the bishop on the spot.¹ The projected union appears to have been achieved in 1473 and was composed of the houses of Münster, Cologne, Wesel, Herford, Rostock, Kassel, Butzbach, Marienthal and Königstein. Dieburg, however, continues to assert: ‘it remained incomplete and was annulled.’²

In 1476 the rectors of Hildesheim and Kassel obtained the right to attend the colloquium only every other year.³ A communal fund was proposed in order to assist certain houses.

A decree dating from this same year, 1476, shows that the terminology is becoming increasingly monastic. It is said that the profugi fratres, the runaway fraters, should not be accepted as guests before it was established that they would be admitted and do penance.⁴

Hildesheim became isolated through her opposition to the union, hence the necessity in 1477 for expounding the Hildesheimers' point of view to the college in Deventer and Zwolle.⁵ In this same year the rector, Peter of Dieburg, drew the logical conclusions. He sent a message to the colloquium of Münster, whose authority he did not recognize but to which he desired to be joined in love. He would attend the colloquium of Münster or Zwolle once every three years and then pay the usual contribution. In special cases he would attend oftener. If the decrees of Münster were made known to him, he would accept them, assuming that they had to be put to the test.⁶ In 1481, when the rector of Hildesheim was absent and his name was called, someone cried: ‘Abdicatur,’-let him be excluded-but John Veghe, at that time rector of Münster, finally decided: let Hildesheim come once every three years.⁷ The year 1482 was the third year and Peter should accordingly have gone to Münster, but he was old, and there was a conflict in progress between the town of Hildesheim and the bishop. Instead he sent a representative with a letter of apology and the news that he had started a new foundation in Magdeburg. Peter

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¹ Doebner 266.
² Ibid., 266.
³ Ibid., 266-267.
⁴ Ibid., 267.
⁵ Ibid., 267.
⁶ Ibid., 267-268.
⁷ Ibid., 269, 87.

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Thymannus, who had succeeded John Veghe as rector of Münster, made him a pleasant reply.

But the members of the *colloquium* persisted. In 1483 a new project for a general union was drawn up, without Hildesheim's knowledge. The rector of Hildesheim, however, got wind of the document and incorporated it in the protocols of the *colloquium*. He gives first the proposed regulations and then his objections to them.\footnote{Doebner 272-277.} It would be a union similar to those which existed between the houses of Münster, Cologne and Wesel. Then would come a *generale capitulum* (no longer *colloquium*) after the pattern of the privilege of pope Eugenius IV—in other words, all the associated houses would in fact be chapters. Peter of Dieburg was not opposed to this transition from Brotherhouses to chapters—which in any event had already taken place in Hildesheim. But they would never again be able to found a new Brotherhouse if necessary, for there were already enough collegiate churches in all the large towns, with or without a cathedral, and the building of collegiate churches would be too expensive in the smaller towns or in the country, where usually dilapidated churches had to be restored. Moreover, there was no opportunity there of attracting school children.\footnote{Ibid., 272-273.} The assembly proposed holding the general chapter every three years—one in Upper Germany, the other in Lower Germany. A canon from one of the associated houses would be a member of another chapter at the same time. No one might transfer from one house to another, however, without the general chapter's consent. The houses must assist each other in case of calamity. No one might repair or accept another house or undertake extensive repairs in the house, without permission of the general chapter. One prelate (a rector, now provost) and a fellow canon would act as *visitators*.\footnote{Ibid., 276.}

This is indeed a far cry from the houses of the Common Life. The names are completely changed, and the centralization would become as great as with the new orders of Franciscans and Dominicans. The chapter is the head and administrator to which everyone is subject. It is precisely this last point which so annoys Peter of Dieburg. Those canons who are of good family and obtain academic degrees are not prepared for the work, he thinks. The humble, the simple, the unschooled, the poor Brothers, all would disappear.\footnote{Ibid., 276.} It is for this reason that Hildesheim refuses to accept such a union. Nor will it undertake
to obey decisions made chiefly by the rectors of Münster, Cologne and Wesel. This administrative power assumes a right of punishment which is already evident from the early decree that all rectors are obliged to attend the colloquium, and that those who do not must pay just the same; that the visitators are appointed by the rector of Münster and that he or his representative must be present at the election of a rector (provost).¹ The letter which Peter of Dieburg sent to Münster in 1490 and which we have already discussed, is written in the same spirit. In the years 1484, 1485 and also in 1490, representatives from Hildesheim attended the Zwolle colloquium a few times in order to discuss the question of Berlicum.² The rector of Hildesheim's excuse for not ‘visitating’ Münster in 1486, was accepted. The relations between Hildesheim and Münster seem to have improved somewhat after the death of Peter of Dieburg, but it is not entirely clear whether the union as intended above came into being without Hildesheim.

The negotiations between the Brothers of Münster and those of the other houses on the setting up of a closer union clearly revealed Peter of Dieburg's desire for independence. His opposition to such an association or union of the German Brotherhouses is not directed against any particular decree, but against the project itself, against any domination of other houses by the rector of Münster. He considered that for the individual houses to relinquish their independence to form an order under the power of the rector of Münster, would not only be contrary to the spirit in which the Brotherhood was founded, but would also be in conflict with the religious personality itself.

His consciousness of the necessity to preserve and defend the inner, individual religious spirit led him to include four Excurses in his Annals, in which he expounds his ideas on this point. All four were inspired separately and are therefore dated. The first is an expression of what he had observed during the two and a half years of interdict on Hildesheim. The fact that Mass was said only seldom in the Brothers' chapel had greatly enhanced the appreciation of this sacred act (1443).³ From this he concludes: ‘The richer the holy places and relics, and the more frequent the Mass, the more arid remains the heart.’ Only inner devotion can bring salvation here. Meditation and ‘rumination’ on the passion of Christ renders the receiving of the sacraments

¹ Doebner 277, compare 113.
² Ibid., 279-282.
³ Doebner, 144-150.

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more fruitful, not only communion but the other sacraments as well. He considers Christ as the temple; every Christian may enter and entry is forbidden to no one, not even the excommunicated or those who are excluded from church burial. One condition, however, was repentance. He found many priests who assumed the priestly function without possessing the necessary spiritual disposition or knowing the inner devotion, who indeed even scoffed at these things. He came out against the founding of more and more altars and vicarages. If there were less of them they would be more esteemed. The pope or his legate is naturally treated with more respect in Germany than in Italy.

The second 'Excurs' was inspired by a will made in 1447. Peter of Dieburg considered it better to bequeath one's possessions to the poor or to leave them unconditionally to churches or monasteries, than to reserve them for various Masses, vigils and memoriae. There is often a touch of egoism in this last and at the same time a lack of confidence in God, who after all knows very well what is given to the poor or to churches. However, he considers such bequests meritorious.¹

Peter's third 'Excurs' arose from his thoughts on rector Bernard of Büderich on the occasion of his death in 1457. He did not praise this man in order to glorify the holy Brothers. On the contrary, he found that too many shortcomings could be detected amongst them. There were many difficulties and several had left the institution. In his view, the more sanctity was brought to the light of day, the more rapidly devotion and humility disappeared. For the more outward respect we receive, the more we depart from the true and the inward. We have earned our bread by the work of our own hands, but not in order to hoard it. We must use the money for the schoolboys and the poor.²

The inspiration behind the fourth 'Excurs' was the death and the legacy of a suffragan bishop, Ernest, in 1467. Peter of Dieburg complains of the hostility encountered by his congregation from many directions. Not only did this opposition hamper the founding and first growth of a new Brotherhouse, it also led to many Brothers leaving the fraternity, either to return to the world or to enter a monastery. This transition to a higher and stricter form of life is in his opinion praiseworthy, but he cannot approve the propaganda made for it. He considers their references to the law, the rule and the

¹ Doebner 150-152.
² Ibid., 152-154.
vow rather irrelevant, since all these can be broken. The spirit is more important and the spirit is found among the Brothers.¹

In these ‘Excurses,’ as indeed in the Hildesheim annals and in his notes to the protocols of the Münster colloquium, Peter of Dieburg shows himself a confirmed supporter of the congregation of the Brothers. As he had formerly evinced his desire to preserve the independence of the separate houses so as to be able to attain the original goals of the Brothers, so in these dissertations he comes out strongly in favour of the internal life, inner piety, simplicity and humility. It is for him a constant source of scandal that the Brothers should be so harrassed by members of the orders. This defence of inner piety - so indispensable in receiving the sacraments - and his stress on the direct way to Christ, lead him to expressions which in theory will probably have been accepted without difficulty by his contemporaries, but which must have struck a strange note in the life of the times, if indeed they were known and published then. Everyone has access to Christ, and no one is rejected, neither the sinner nor the excommunicated person. Everyone can be made clean. They only are rejected who, ex contemptu, refuse to see and will not enter into the Kingdom of God. Repentance accompanied by faith and the desire for baptism may replace baptism and lead to the forgiveness of sins. It is thus that the holy doctors call inner penitence a baptism. Christ's mercy is boundless. The remark on the large number of priests and altars, and the significance of the founding of new vicarships, with the subsequent results, strikes a remarkable note for the 15th century. It testifies to an extremely independent spirit and a mind open to the facts. His works also display his great erudition which he must have acquired by his own study, but which seems to reveal that he had enjoyed a better scientific training than the other fraters. Not only was he a good chronicler, like some of the fraters from Emmerich, Deventer, Doesburg and Zwolle, he was also well acquainted with the Bible and with a number of medieval theologians. He leads us to examine the ideas of John Pupper of Goch, Wessel Gansfort and Gabriel Biel who are considered as the theologians among the fraters. Before proceeding to their works, however, let us make a short summary of our findings.

We have noted a gradual but steady expansion over a terrain which

¹ Doebner 154-159.
comprises the present day Netherlands, Belgium and a large part of West Germany. The Württemberg houses were the most southerly, with Rostock furthest to the north and Culm and Magdeburg away off to the East. All these houses had a difficult time in the beginning. They were made up of priests and clerici, with one or two lay brothers for the household work. These clerici may be considered as future priests. They entered when they had completed or almost completed the Latin course in the city schools. They had no further lessons, not even in theology. The only theological knowledge they were able to acquire was in their short study periods during the day. Not one of them went to university, and only very few, perhaps five in all, entered after having completed a year or two of university study. Their life was the practice of devotion-prayer, keeping alive the good intention, holding their goal constantly before their eyes, fostering the honour of God, being convinced of their own nothingness and desiring to remain as simple as possible, to be poor and to work. Up to the end of this period they devoted their time chiefly to the copying of books. It was only at the end that some of the Brothers undertook printing. In addition they devoted much care to the training of the students, boys who attended the city school. They did this in two ways: they received a certain small group into their house, originally their own house, but as soon as possible in a separate hostel which was usually called domus pauperum, although richer boys were also admitted from time to time. In some places there were even separate hostels for these rich students. In addition they attempted to gain as much spiritual contact as possible with all the boys of the city school, through their addresses, their conversations, hearing confessions and administering the Holy Eucharist. We have been able to establish the existence of such hostels in Deventer, Zwolle, Doesburg, Groningen, ’s-Hertogenbosch, Delft, Gouda, Nijmegen, Ghent, Brussels, Münster and Emmerich. An attempt was made to found a hostel in Hildesheim, but it did not succeed in this period. Everywhere the hostel boys attended the city schools which already existed in each city long before the Brothers settled there. The lessons in the hostels were confined to rehearsing and helping. This already follows from the fact that there were only two Brothers staying in these hostels, one to administer and keep order and the other to assist the boys. There is no mention at all of a docent or teacher in the lists of functions in the Brotherhouses. Those who had taught before entering relinquished their school positions on becoming Brothers. Teaching in the school
and being a Brother were considered incompatible during this period. Teaching is only mentioned in connection with two places, Gouda and Culm. The school in Gouda, however, was small and of no significance, while the report dealing with Culm is confused and doubtful. The question of instruction at Urach in Württemberg is somewhat different. There the Brothers were given charge of the church and with it of the existing parish school. They then extended this school, but entrusted the teaching to a rector whom they appointed, and to his assistants.

Another priestly function exercised by the Brothers was the pastoral care of the sisters, whether Sisters of the Common Life or sisters following an established monastic rule. They acted as rector and sometimes as confessor, and lived in near the Sisterhouse. These rectors were quite independent, visiting the *colloquium* of Münster or Zwolle and being considered equal with the rectors of the Brotherhouses. For this function, for the direction of their own houses and for those of the schoolboys and Sisters, the Brothers required a number of priests. Their houses can indeed be viewed in some measure as training institutions for priests, if one excepts instruction in theology.

It is a remarkable thing that the popes repeatedly attempted to persuade the Brothers to transform their chapels into collegiate churches, the fraternities into chapters, the Brothers into canons and the rector into a provost, retaining, throughout, community of life and property. So far as we can judge nearly all the German houses and perhaps several of the Dutch had adopted this form of existence by the end of this period. To a certain extent this signified the disappearance of the Brothers in Germany. From henceforth they were called canons, but they retained their ideals. It was only towards the end of the period that Humanism began to show itself very sporadically in those regions where the Brothers lived. However, far from there being any contact, this was demonstrably impossible, since the Brothers held aloof from all academic milieus. At most they had contact with the rector or teachers of a few city schools, but here too Humanism only made its appearance around 1483, and this will be discussed in the following period.

They cannot be said in any sense to have paved the way for the Reformation, either by their life, which was essentially monastic with no exalted mystical inspiration, being severely ascetic in character, or by their religious or ecclesiastical ideas. Only one of their members might conceivably be viewed as a ‘precursor.’ This was Peter of
Dieburg, a sober and independent spirit who stressed the importance of the direct link with Christ, more or less at the expense of the sacraments and the power of the Church. He was by no means a radical. His position was virtually unique, if we except the three persons to be discussed in the following chapter: John Pupper of Goch († March 8th 1473), John Wessel of Groningen († 1489), and Gabriel Biel († 1495). All three are considered as precursors of the Reformation and, by several who reject this concept, as proclaimers of dogmas which bear some similarity to those of Luther. They are even thought to have influenced Luther, and this is undoubtedly true of Gabriel Biel. All three were theologians of stature who diverged on several important points either from other reputable theologians like Thomas Aquinas, or even from particular points which must be considered as church doctrine. At the same time they are viewed as supporters of the Modern Devotion, either on account of their membership of a particular Brotherhouse or because of their association with the Brotherhood. Their learning is often held to be that of the Brothers or at least is seen as a fruit of their teaching or their milieu. We shall now turn our attention to this problem.
Chapter Ten

Since the relationship of each of these persons to the Modern Devotionalists, and in particular to the Brethren, differs, it must be more closely examined and defined. Although, as we shall presently show, John Pupper must, according to the archives, have been a secular priest of the Utrecht diocese, he cannot be passed over in this book. This chapter, indeed, also comprises a general problem. Supposing that these theologians were members of the Brotherhood or were at least in close contact with the fraters or with the Windesheimers, is one then justified in assuming that the individual opinions of these theologians are characteristic for the fraters or for the Devotionalists in general? Such an assumption seems to me indefensible. It might very well be that the fraters or their leaders did not accept these men’s ideas or forbade the young Brothers to read or study their books. In other words it must be shown that the person in question already embraced and proclaimed these personal concepts either before or during these contacts and not later and in other circumstances. It must also be proved that the Brothers or the Windesheimers adopted some at least of these opinions, that they welcomed them, or at least did not condemn them. It is even possible that the Brothers were so little versed in theology that they did not understand the full import of some of the tenets of the afore-mentioned theologians. They or the rectors may quite simply have said: ‘Do not brother me or the young Brothers with such matters. We are trying to learn to know Christ as our model through reading the Bible and the ascetic writings, and to imitate His life and passion. We do not trouble our heads with questions like the value of indulgences, the effect of the sacraments, the meaning of purgatory, or the relationship of grace and freedom, with predestination or the papal authority.’ Such a situation is indeed possible and it is this which complicates the question in hand. Assuming that Wessel Gansfort proclaimed his singular ideas in Zwolle, that John Pupper preached his in Malines, with the Sisters, and Gabriel Biel his in Butzbach and Urach and at the university of Tübingen, did the fraters of all the houses adopt them? Were these new concepts
already welcomed by the fraters of the first two periods, roughly before 1475, and
before these theologians had achieved any renown? Were the fraters who preceded
them familiar with these ideas? Did these ideas find an echo among the fraters of
the sixteenth century who had to absorb the shock of the Reformation? Or was it the
other way about? Was it the fraters who embraced these ideas and handed them on
to the three theologians in question? Were the fraters their instructors? Did the fraters'
doctrines come to light because they were set down by capable theologians who
could write? Were they no more than the mouthpieces of the Brothers, whose voice
we hear re-echoing in the words of Peter of Dieburg, rector of Hildesheim? This may
well be, but at the same time it is remarkable that only these three, or two of them,
taught and studied at a university, and more especially, that these concepts do not
entirely agree with each other. Moreover, it is well known that various university
professors held and proclaimed these ideas, without ever having been in contact with
the Brothers. It was precisely at the universities, where the Brothers did not go, that
factions existed, factions adhered to on their own testimony by Wessel Gansfort and
Gabriel Biel. However this may be, it is first necessary to determine exactly what
connection existed between the theologians and the Brothers, or Devotionalists, and
what contacts they maintained with each other.

The John Pupper of Goch we are concerned with here is named as the author of
certain theological works discovered around 1520 and afterwards published.
According to the finder and publisher of the works, he was rector of a convent in
Malines and died there in 1475. In actual fact, a John Pupper of Goch can be
discovered for this period in Malines. According to the archiepiscopal archives he
founded a convent there in 1459 and was previously rector in Sluis. The documents
also give further information on this John Pupper of Goch. There is admittedly no
record of his birth date, but it is established that in the fifteenth century a fairly
well-to-do family of Capupper 1 popularly shortened to Pupper, lived in the city of
Goch, from which he evidently derived his name. To this family belonged dominus
Johann Pupper of Goch, dioecesis Coloniensis, law student at Cologne, enrolled in
Cologne in 1453 by the rector Gerard of Venlo. 2 Is this our John Pupper of Goch?
Several have thought and still think that it is. They

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1 Annalen des historischen Vereins für den Niederrhein 11 (1855) 271.
2 Die Matrikel der Universität Köln, bearb. v.H. Keussen, Bonn 1892, Band I, 5 583, no. 74.
are also convinced that the theologian John Pupper of Goch was a Brother of the Common Life. A. Knaake especially undertook to prove this from the similarity between Pupper's writings and those of the other Brethren, but O. Clemen, in his detailed and profound study of John Pupper of Goch has taken over¹ Knaake's arguments, retaining what in his opinion was acceptable. In fact this amounts only to the vague conclusion: ‘dass Johann Pupper aus Goch höchstwahrscheinlich durch enge Beziehungen mit den Brüdern verknüpft war; wenn er ihren seinen jugendbildung zu verdanken hat, so dürfte er sie in Zwolle erhalten haben.’² There is no evidence at all for the latter statement and the first contributes virtually nothing to our investigation. Even assuming that it is true that this John Pupper, ‘durch enge Beziehungen mit den Brüdern verknüpft war,’ does this bring us any further with our problem? May we on the basis of these close relations, attribute John Pupper's theological ideas to the Brothers or, contrariwise, assume that he is indebted to the Brethren for these ideas? People have searched zealously for a John Pupper of Goch among the Brothers. Several Johns of Goch are mentioned in the documents of the fraters, but no John Pupper of Goch. It is impossible to discover our man.

Could he be the aforementioned student of Cologne? Enrolment as a law student in 1454 is somewhat late, since it is established that our John Pupper founded the Augustinian convent of Thabor in 1459 with several others and that before this he was rector of the Sisters in Sluis.³ It is not however entirely impossible, even though, on the basis of his later works, we should be more inclined to assume that he studied theology, rather than law. In addition, the statement that he was a priest, and from the archdiocese of Cologne, must be treated with reserve. The word dominus indicates that he was a priest. This would then mean that he was a priest of the archdiocese in question. This statement must perhaps be viewed merely as a geographical indication, just as in the case of non-priests only the place of origin is given. With the priests, however, the situation in such matricles was different, since a priest has to have a benefice and this can link him to a particular diocese. In all probability therefore, the enrolled student of 1454 was a priest of the archdiocese of Cologne. We find now that the

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¹ Leipziger Studien, zweiter Band, drittes Heft, Leipzig 1896, 13-25.
² Ibid., 25.
³ Archives archbishopric Malines, Monasteries: Bundle Thabor. No documents of the medieval monasteries survive in Sluis.

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chapter of Malines, which gave permission in 1459 for the founding of the convent of Thabor in that town, refers to the priest on the spot as Johannes Pupper, sacerdos Trajectensis.¹ This increases the doubt that the Cologne law student could be our Malines theologian. It is clear for the following reasons that he was not a Brother of the Common Life at the time of his enrolment in Cologne: firstly, no Brother ever studied at the university, unless it was before entering, and the number of such Brothers was very small indeed. In the second place he would most likely have been enrolled as a member of the congregation and not as a priest of the diocese of Cologne. The same rector a few days earlier had enrolled a Norbertine as: Johannes a Kreveldia O. Praem.² Since there is now considerable reason to doubt whether the Malines theologian and convent-founder of 1459 and the Cologne university law student and priest of 1454, are one and the same person, and since the latter was certainly never a Brother of the Common Life, we have no grounds at all for thinking that the Malines theologian of 1459 and following years was ever a Brother of the Common Life! The chapter document we have quoted mentions Johann Pupper sacerdos Trajectensis and states further that the rector was a secular priest.³ It is also prescribed in other documents that the rector should be (presbyter seu sacerdos secularis).⁴ The author of the extant theological treatises was thus a secular, not a frater, a priest of the diocese of Utrecht. We do not know how he ended up here, having been born in Goch. He probably acquired a benefice in the diocese of Utrecht on the basis of which he was ordained and was thus received into the diocese. His benefice in Sluis was of no use to him in this since Sluis belongs to the diocese of Tournai, not of Utrecht.

In my opinion all conjectures must give way before these factual data from contemporary archives. Other considerations are also quoted in an attempt to prove that John Pupper had a particular relationship with the Brethren of the Common Life. Reference is made to a text concerning the communal life which occurs in his book De quatuor erroribus circa legem evangelicam exortis et de votis et religionibus factitiis dialogus.⁵ Here one finds a recommendation of communal life.

² Die Matrikel der Universität Köln, I p. 381, no. 44.
⁴ Puncta quaedam: Archives archb. Malines.
and communal possessions as practised by the Brothers. This page, however, refers to something completely different from the Brethren's communal life. Communal life, says John Pupper, requires an abandonment of love for possessions but not of the right to them. In the first period of Christianity, Pupper states, the Jerusalem Christians did indeed renounce their property, while the Christians of the pagan world retained theirs, but assisted the poor with their incomes. The *vita communis* has no value as a virtue, nor any significance for supernatural bliss, unless it proceeds from love. Pupper thus is not concerned with community as such, but with the spirit, with detachment from money. This may exist along with personal possessions, provided that the poor are helped.

In the second place reference is made to the nature of the priestly office which he exercised, i.e. the rectorship of a convent. Several *fraters* did indeed fulfil such functions, most of them, however, with Sisters of the Common Life. But the Sisters in Malines were not Sisters of the Common Life but Augustines and strict at that. Many seculars also acted as rector in such convents, and the Malines chapter gave them the preference. With this, then, I might be justified in regarding the matter of John Pupper in this book as closed. There is no reason for classifying him as a Devotionalist, and certainly not as a Brother, and his theories thus have no bearing upon the mentality of the Brothers or of the Devotionalists. He may have thought them out for himself, or have acquired them at one of the universities and from books lent by the university teachers. However, since his name is so closely linked with the Brothers, I am unwilling to dismiss this question so easily, all the more since he is an interesting personality himself.

It is not known whether John Pupper studied theology at a university. In all probability he did not hear those theories attributed to him at the university of Cologne around 1450. O. Clemen, however, quotes one fact which makes it seem likely that John Pupper of Goch studied in Paris. During the time when John Pupper was living in Malines, a rather violent dispute was in progress at the neighbouring university of Louvain, between the professors Henry of Someren and Peter van den Beeken. In describing this dispute John Pupper quoted the text of a letter whereby bishop Stephen of Paris condemned 219 theses on March 9th 1278. It appears however, that the text quoted by him differs on five points, besides the date, from the manuscripts known from the period before Pupper lived, whereas his text on these

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same five points coincides with the original, as printed by d'Argentré: *Man darf wohl aus diesem Indicien folgern* - says Clemen - *dass Goch seine Kenntnis von diesen Begebenkeiten aus einer quelle schöpfte, die auf den originalakten direckt zurückging, wenn er nicht diese gar selbst eingesehen hat. Dazu würde sich ihn bei einem studienafenthalt in Paris wohl Gelegenheit geboten haben.*¹ This may well be, although the question does arise of whether medieval archives were accessible to students. I prefer the theory that during the dispute, which also extended to Paris, between the supporters of the *via antiqua* and the *via moderna*, and which led in 1473 to a prohibition forbidding the teaching of the *via moderna*, a new publication of the 219 theses was distributed. Such a publication was important for the Nominalists, the supporters of the *via moderna*, on account of the condemnation of St. Thomas' theses. It was also grist to Pupper's mill, for his leanings towards Nominalism are evident from his expressed ideas.

We possess four works by John Pupper of Goch. Chief of these is *De libertate religionis christianae*, written after April 1473, but never completed. The missing parts, of which the author gives the titles in the introduction, may perhaps be replaced by the other works, the *Fragmenta* which might be considered as a preliminary study for the missing sections. *De quatuor erroribus circa legem evangelicam exortis et de votis et religionibus factitis dialogus*, deals with the same subject as the missing section of the main work, and finally, *Epistola apologetica*, like the missing part IV, is a reply to a Dominican.² The manner of their transmission arouses some suspicion, for these books have come to us through the Humanists and first supporters of the Reformation, Cornelius Grapheus and Nicolas of’s-Hertogenbosch, who were both active in Antwerp in the years 1521-1522. O. Clemen had already observed that the style of the *Dialogus* differs from that of the other three. It seems to me that this might be attributed to a revision by the 16th century Antwerp Humanists. It is difficult to decide whether or to what extent the content suffered from this revision. On one notunimportant point at least, the hand of the Humanists seems to me clearly revealed. In the *Dialogus* the *canonica veritas* on which the expositions of *De libertate* and *De epistola* are based has been replaced by *evangelica veritas* and in one place even by *sola fons scripture canonice*

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¹ O. Clemen, o.c. 29.
(cuius auctoritas sola est infragabilis)\(^1\) in which the Lutheran scriptural principle is attributed to John Pupper. The *canonica veritas*, which occurs again and again in *De libertate*, contains the canonical scripture together with the pronouncement of the general church.\(^2\) Pupper recognizes the Bible as the source of faith, but it must be interpreted by tradition and the pronouncements of the Church. He rejects unconditionally the writings of the pagan philosophers. They are books, not of life, but of death, and lead to heresy, as appeared in 1277. Pupper also stresses freedom of will, which remains even when the will, fortified by grace, performs ‘good’ works. The merit, however, is caused (*causatur*) by the Holy Ghost in man and on the other hand is rooted in God's affection. For Pupper,\(^3\) therefore, Thomas Aquinas' doctrine on the merit of works is in conflict with canonical truth. In his opinion Thomas errs in assuming that the cooperation of man has any significance, since it is occasioned by grace; and also in thinking that the reward could be required *ex debito institiae*, that God could become man's debtor; that one good deed could have more value than another, and finally that any proportion exists between the deed and the reward.\(^4\) On the contrary, if a meritorious deed performed with the correct intention is to have its effect, it must be accepted by God.\(^5\) This idea approaches the acceptance theory of Duns Scotus and Ockham. Only in Christ are all the conditions for merit according to the *canonica veritas* fulfilled. He alone is free. He alone can exercise his rights. His act is accepted and the necessary proportion exists between his death and the heavenly reward.

Another extremely important question is the meaning of the monastic vow. In Pupper's view this is unknown in the Holy Scriptures and among the earliest Christian writers, and is in conflict with the evangelical law. For this is a law of freedom, having no place for compulsion or obligation; it is a law of love.\(^6\) He finds it Pelagian to say that the vow imparts a special, higher value to good deeds. This concept closely approaches Phariseeism.\(^7\)

In my opinion this view of the *votum* cannot be equated with the decree of the Brethren's founder, nor with the Brothers' custom of not

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1 Ed. Chr. Walch 77.
3 Bibl. ref. Neerl. VI, 141.
4 Ibid., 185-200.
5 Ibid., 209, 215, 223-225.
6 Ibid., 229, 232-233, 240.
7 Dialogus, ed. Chr. Walch 102.
taking any vows. They do not reject private vows and even consider it permissible to take a vow of obedience to the rector. However, they consider a vow superfluous. They think that religious life without a vow presupposes greater dedication, since the particular precepts of their religious life are constantly being performed voluntarily. The sacrifice of their life is greater than that of those who take a vow. Among the regular orders the complete giving and abandoning of self occurs only once in their life, whereas among the Brethren and Sisters it is perpetually recurring.

In the *Dialogus* John Pupper combats four errors with regard to the evangelical law: that the Mosaic law must still be observed; that all is permitted to those who believe; that no good works are required of these; and the modern Pelagianism of those who place too much reliance on their own natural powers with regard to justification and reward. They forget that there is something needed to bridge the great chasm between natural action and merited reward. This something is grace. Among these people Pupper includes the religious orders and notably the Observants who attach great value to ceremonies and often plead their own work. Among the Pelagians he includes Thomas Aquinas, with his views on the vow. Anyone hearing these ideas for the first time must regret that they only came to light in 1521-22, especially since they are supposed to have been written by a rector of Sisters who helped considerably in founding a Sisterhouse and in whose hands the Sisters made their vows.

In order to determine whether and to what extent this opinion must be considered as exclusive to the Brothers, it is important to know what Wessel Gansfort and Gabriel Biel thought of it. Accordingly it must first be established in how far they can be included among the Modern Devotionalists on the basis of personal relations. For Wessel Gansfort we can consult, not only his own principal works, but also modern studies about him. Wessel, born in 1419 in Groningen, where he died in 1489, had various contacts with the Devotionalists during his lifetime. The first of these was with the Brothers, during

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1 Doebner 253.
2 Ed. Chr. Walch 83 vlg., 92, 95, 102.
his youth. He began his school career at one of the two parish schools in Groningen and was then sent to Zwolle, with the financial assistance of Oda Jargis. The date of this transfer is not certain. The year most usually quoted, 1432, is based on the one hand on his age, deduced from his date of birth - he had now attained the age of 13 - and on the other on the fact that the Brethren only returned to Zwolle from their exile in Doesburg in 1432. Both dates are uncertain, for the school in Zwolle will have continued to function even when the Brothers were in Doesburg. As regards the first calculation, it is not known at what age Wessel Gansfort commenced school, nor how far he got. It was usual for a city boy to start school at the age of nine, in the first Latin class, or at the eighth or seventh in the preparatory class. Wessel Gansfort's career, however, remains uncertain. Assuming that he began in the seventh class as a boy of nine, in 1428, and completed five classes, from the seventh to the third, which was normal, then he would have been 14 on finishing the third class and the transition probably took place in 1433. Although this is probable, two years earlier or later starting in Zwolle is of no particular importance. It seems likely, however, that Wessel went to Zwolle because the school there had the two top classes, second and first. These had already been introduced by John Cele at the beginning of the 15th century. Since he was not able to undertake all the teaching himself, he took on two supplementary teachers, one as head of the first class and the other for the second. These were incidentally Cele's only teaching assistants. Pupils of the first class (primarii de primo loco) taught in the other six classes. This situation was probably unchanged when Wessel arrived. Jacobus Traiecti, alias de Voecht, says clearly in his Narratio de Inchoatione domus clericorum in Zwollis that: Wesselus, qui cum prius fuisset primarius vel secundarius Zwollensis etc., gave lessons. It may probably be deduced from this that Wessel went to Zwolle to complete the two top classes, and perhaps only for this. He lived in Zwolle in the parva domo, the house of the poor schoolboys, also called domus vicina and domus pauperum, and situated next to the domus divitum in the Begijnnenstraat. He dressed in habitu nostro, the grey calf-length woollen robe with openings for the head, arms and legs, and a black cap. This was the customary dress of such hostel dwellers and was adopted by the inmates of the Brethren's hostel in Deventer and in that founded

1 Johannes Busch, Chronicon Windeshemense ex., hrsg. K. Grube, Halle 1886, 206.
2 Ed. Schoengen, 155-158.
3 Ibid., 124 no. 4.

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After completing the highest (first) class, Wessel's extraordinary zeal and application led to his appointment as *lector tertianorum*, teacher of the third class. Everything continued thus as in the time of John Cele. There was probably an ‘ambulant’ rector and two qualified teachers, each at the head of one of the top classes. The fact that Wessel was given charge of the next highest class is proof of the esteem in which he was held. Our next question then will be what did he learn and what did he teach? On the basis of statements by John Busch, who wished to go to the university from the top class and had meanwhile taught in the lower classes, we must assume that the subjects taught in the two top classes diverged somewhat from the ordinary school curriculum. Busch speaks once of philosophy and once of ethics and philosophy. This was thus the matter of a university Arts faculty, all that remained of the former *quadrivium*. The material for the third class was nothing but Latin and dialectic (logic) from Petrus Hispanus. Having thus completed his school course, as a boy of 15 or 16, Wessel Gansfort must have known rather more of philosophy than the pupils who stopped their studies after the *tertia*, as indeed most of them did. He continued to teach for fifteen years and in that time had plenty of opportunity for practising his Latin, and perhaps too for enlarging and deepening his dialectical knowledge when expounding Petrus Hispanus' book. The chronicler narrates further that Wessel went with the other boys from the *domus parva* to the collation given by the procurator of the Brotherhouse, Rutger of Doetinchem, as the least of them, but that he asked questions as for the oldest (*et faciebat ibidem examen pro majoribus*). He was extremely devout and zealous and assisted the procurator Rutger in the evenings when he held his pious discourses for the boys. This collaboration incited the youth to virtue and the combat of vice. It also appears that this Rutger was not yet a Brother at this time; he was only admitted later. There is one rather charming snippet of information. John of Cologne, who had been an excellent painter and goldsmith during his career in the world, came to Zwolle to ask the advice of Dirk of Herxen and to find out how he should serve God.

2 Schoengen 155-156.
4 Schoengen 156.
He too was admitted to the ‘little house’ and was given a room next door to Wessel's so that they could converse with each other through a window pierced in the wall. Wessel imparted his learning to John, but John, who was completely zealous for God, taught Wessel fear of and love for God. There were evidently a couple of guest rooms in this small house for schoolboys, for Wessel remained here long after he had completed his studies, perhaps even until he transferred to Cologne in 1449, at about the age of thirty. It is extraordinary that the chronicler suggests that Wessel acquired his fear and love of God from the devout layman and not from the Brothers. His participation in the Brothers' collations, however, indicates that the Brethren did influence him. His ‘scientia’, however, his knowledge of Latin and philosophy, he owes, not to the Brothers, but to the school and his own studies. In 1449 he left Zwolle in order to enter the university. He was enrolled in the Arts Faculty of Cologne in 1450. From then on his studies progressed rapidly: he was baccalaureus artium on Dec. 1st 1450 and probably magister artium by March 1452. The fact that he commenced his studies in Cologne, the ‘bulwark of Realism’, proves that he left Zwolle as a Realist and wished to pursue his studies in the same direction. He was still a convinced Realist when he quitted the studium generale of the city on the Rhine, and also after a short sojourn in Louvain and Paris, and he was still a Realist when he taught in the Arts faculty in Cologne and in Heidelberg (1455-1458). In Paris he subsequently went over to the Nominalists, around 1459-60, as a result of discussions held with the Nominalists in order to gain them for his opinion. He remained in Paris for about 15 years, circulating constantly in university milieus, and enjoyed a very good reputation there as a scholar. He was witness there of the violent dispute between Realists and Nominalists in 1470, and made the journey to Rome in 1471, since he had had some acquaintance with Pope Sixtus before his election. He was back in Paris in 1473 when the king forbade the Nominalists to teach their theories, which again led to considerable conflict, and returned to Rome in 1474. Both these Roman journeys may have been connected with the dispute in Paris. He himself, or his party, may have thought that he would be in a position to do something for the Nominalists on account of his former acquaintance with pope Sixtus. It is not necessary to examine here what doctrine the Nominalists actually held. It is sufficient to make it clear that only after leaving Zwolle did Wessel enter academic circles in Cologne, Louvain, Heidelberg and Paris, and that he acquired his theological ideas there,
and not at the school in Zwolle, and still less with the Zwolle Brothers. After the Rome trip of about 1475-76, he returned to the Netherlands a famous man, *magister contradictionum*, renowned as a physician, theologian and Humanist. He was known as a man of liberal opinions so that he was held to be in danger from the inquisition. He was protected by bishop David of Burgundy who obtained medical advice from him. From our point of view it is important to know that he stayed for some time in Zwolle during this period. He was in Zwolle when the rector of the Brotherhouse, Albert of Kalkar, lay on his death-bed, too ill to attend the *colloquium* (he died soon afterwards, in 1482) and he at once offered his medical services, which Albert, however, declined.  

1 Wessel was thus aware of the rector's illness but it is not known if he had particular contacts with the Brothers. He was in contact though with the Canons Regular of the St. Agnietenberg,  

but spent most of his time in Groningen. He lodged in the convent of the Poor Clares, from whence he paid frequent visits to the monastery of Aduard.  

3 At the Agnietenberg he will have met John Mombaer who wrote the so-called *scala meditatoria* about 1485 in his *Rosetum*, for which he had recourse to Gansfort's work: *Tractatus de cohibendis cogitationibus et de modo constituendarum meditationum*. The visit to St. Agnietenberg, the writing of this book and its dedication to the Brothers of the St. Agnietenberg, all prove that Wessel Gansfort in his old age still valued the devotion which he had acquired from the Brothers in his youth, and wrote some works in this trend. Wessel, however, was never actually a member of the Brethren. In Zwolle he only lived in one of the Brothers' hostels, not in a Brotherhouse. It is clear, moreover, that apart from his interest in the devotion he did not acquire his 'singular' ideas - to use his own words - from the Brothers. It is thus not possible to equate the ideas held by the Brothers with the concepts proclaimed by Wessel Gansfort. We should therefore be able to confine ourselves to the pious works of Wessel Gansfort, quite simply omitting the theological writings, were it not that similarity to, or divergence from, the works of John Pupper and Gabriel Biel may nonetheless throw some light upon the question embarked upon here.

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1 Schoengen 169.
3 M. van Rhijn, *Wessel Gansfort 1917; Studien over Wessel Gansfort en zijn tijd*. Utrecht, 1933, 139.
4 This occurs in chapter XIII.
The ascetic works, and those intended to assist in meditation and pious reflection, form by far and away the greatest portion of Wessel Gansfort's oeuvre. The titles of these works already to some extent reveal the purpose for which they were written: De oratione et modo orandi cum luctalentissima Dominicae orationis expositione.\(^1\) Tractatus de cohibendis cogitationibus et de modo constituerandarum meditationum, with three examples.\(^2\) De causis incarnationis, De magnitudine et amaritudine Dominicae passionis libri duo.\(^3\) De sacramento Eucharistiae et audienda missa.\(^4\) The number of pages given in the notes, and the extremely compressed 17th century edition, already indicate the considerable extent of these works. Compared with them, the theological works collected in the Farrago Theologicorum are small treatises of 25 to 40 pages, while the extant letters comprise another 68 pages.

Although the first four titles given here consist chiefly of pious reflections and will thus be discussed in more detail when we are dealing with Wessel's spirituality,\(^5\) it is evident that they also express some of Wessel's theological concepts. This is especially true of the last mentioned on the Sacrament of the Eucharist and the hearing of Mass.

The theological works included in the Farrago lend themselves better to a description of Wessel's personal ideas and to a comparison of these with views held by Gabriel Biel and John Pupper.

They are: De benignissima Dei providentia.\(^6\) De causis, mysteriis et effectibus Dominicae incarnationis et passionis.\(^7\) De dignitate et potestate ecclesiastica de vera et recta obedientia, et quantum obligent subditos mandata et statuta praelatorum.\(^8\) De sacramento poenitentia et quae sunt claves ecclesiae; De potestate ligandi et solvendi.\(^9\) Quae sit vera communio sanctorum, De thesauro

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1. On prayer and the manner of praying, with a broad explanation of the Our Father. Opera Wesseli 1-191.
2. Treatise on keeping thoughts in check and the manner of constructing meditations, Opera Wesseli 193, 326, with three examples.
3. On the causes of the incarnation. Two books on the greatness and bitterness of the passion of the Lord, Opera 413-654.
5. See Chapter XIII.
6. On the benevolent providence of God, Opera 733.
7. On the causes, mysteries and effects of the incarnation and passion of the Lord, Opera 733, 748 which deals with the same material as above.
8. On Church dignity and power. On the true and pure obedience and in how far subordinates are bound by the orders and statutes of prelates, Opera 748-771.
9. On the Sacrament of confession and which are the keys of the Church. On the power to bind and to loose, Opera 771-809.

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Ecclesiae, De participacione et dispensatione huius thesauri, De fraternitatis. 1 De purgatorio, Quis et qualis sit ignis purgatorius, De statu et profectu animarum post hanc vitam 2 Epistolae. 3

Even the most cursory comparison of these titles will show that Wessel Gansfort deals with many more subjects than John Pupper. Wessel also differs from Pupper in quoting texts from Proclus and Plato in the very beginning of the first work on the divine providence. Pupper refused to cite the pagan writers as testimony in such questions.

There was also a great gulf between Wessel and Pupper’s ideas on the sources of revelation. Whereas Pupper, as we saw, clung to the canonica veritas, whereby the Church fulfils an important task, Wessel here rejects the role of the Church. Pupper recognized one rule: the conjunction of Bible and tradition and whatever could be deduced therefrom with common accord as a necessary consequence. Wessel too will have to concede some cooperation on the Church’s part in this latter. Instead of the one rule we might also speak of three sources: 1. Holy Scripture; 2. Oral Tradition; 3. The interpretation of both. 4

There is not, however, a great deal of difference between what Pupper writes on freedom and God as Prime Cause, and Wessel’s exposition on divine providence. Both retain freedom of the will and even laud it as a gift of Christ, but recognize God’s operation in creation, in the whole of nature and in man’s actions, both good and bad, to such an extent as virtually to nullify the contribution of the so-called second causes. They are reduced to occasions for God to work. The fire of the Babylonian furnace did not really burn the Chaldean, any more than it refreshed the three young men. God operated on both occasions. 5 As we saw, Pupper applies this theory to man’s cooperation in the matter of attaining justification and gaining heaven as a reward, and denies any meritorious collaboration on the part of man. Man indeed cooperates, but impelled by grace; in fact God does all. The human act is merely the occasion by which God works. Wessel does not go so far, although on the basis of this

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1 Which is the true communion of Saints; on the treasure of the Church; on sharing in and disposing of this treasure; on the fraternities, Opera 809-825.
2 On purgatory; the nature and quality of this purifying fire; on the state and progress of souls after this life, Opera 826-851.
3 Letters, Opera 853-921.
5 R.R. Post, De Betuward, 5e jaargang 1 (1920) 111.

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principle he denies that the sacraments have any causality to acquiring grace; sacraments can only be occasions which God pours grace into the soul.¹ He does, however, recognize the merit of man's good works.² Unlike Pupper, who denied that the vow played any part in the increase of virtue, and considered it to be contrary to the Gospel, Wessel recognized the significance of a vow, including that of celibacy (votum virginitatis).³

Despite these points of difference both John Pupper and Wessel Gansfort belonged to the same theological school which gained much support in the 14th and 15th centuries. It was based on the teachings of Scotus and Ockham, is sometimes called the Nominalist school, but is mostly known as that of the via moderna, the new way. Not only in logic and epistemology did they hold different theories from their opponents the Realists, but also on various points of theology. This is already evident from the fact that the two groups sometimes denounced each other as heretics, as when King Louis XI forbade the teaching of the via moderna in Paris in 1473. Wessel Gansfort's allegiance to this party appears not only from his transfer from one to the other in 1460, but also from repeated testimony in a letter to deacon James Hoeck of Naaldwijk.⁴

John Pupper reveals his preference for the new way by eliminating pagan philosophy as an authoritative factor in the practice of theology. He is also very opposed to St. Thomas and the Thomists who retain the old way, and continually accuses them of Pelagian ideas. Furthermore in the story of the conflict between the Louvain professors Henry of Zomeren and Peter van den Beeken, he unhesitatingly chooses the side of the Nominalist Henry of Zomeren.⁵ In this conflict he shows solidarity with Wessel Gansfort who followed the struggle at the University of Paris, where the supporters of the new way chose the part of Henry of Zomeren who was a personal friend of Wessel.

This partizanship, however, did not prevent John Pupper from holding a theory of grace, merit and the value of the human act for justification and for the gaining of the heavenly reward, which diverged from that of Ockham and most of the supporters of the via moderna. He does not, it is true, deny the cooperation of man, but this

¹ De Beiaard, 5e jaargang I (1920) 111, 112.
² Opera Wesseli, 817.
³ Ibid., 821.
⁴ Ibid., 876 sq. R.R. Post, De via antiqua en de via moderna, 12 sq.
⁵ R.R. Post, De via antiqua etc. 16.
is not taken into account in the determining of justification and reward. Although
differing from Ockham in this he again approaches Ockham's school by his reference
to God's free will to accept or reject a human act performed in a state of grace.
Gansfort does not follow him in this.

Wessel also differs completely from Pupper in the last three works included in the
\textit{Farrago}. In the first place he considers Church dignity and power to be extremely
relative. The authority of the pope and the bishops is also slight, even on the point
of doctrine and whether or not they are united in council. The individual, in fact the
simplest of the faithful, need only accept the decisions of the pope if these correspond
with Holy Scripture; the final decision rests with the individual. The obligation on
a member of the Church to obey the orders and statutes of pope or bishops is not
absolute.\footnote{\textit{Opera Wesseli}, 749, 750-751; 756.} He must decide for himself whether or not they are justified. This theory
does not correspond with John Pupper's line of thought. Pupper states clearly that he
does not wish to go counter to the Church's ruling, even in the matter of monastic
vows, although he considers the taking of a vow to be contrary to evangelical
freedom.\footnote{\textit{Dialogus}; ed. Chr. Walsh, 166, 167.}

Of the Sacraments Wessel deals extensively with the Eucharist, not so much in
the \textit{Farrago} but in the separate work: \textit{De sacramento Eucharistiae}. This work includes
some extremely devout stimulants and assumes the real presence of Christ, but he
considers such piety, such a lively faith and such a vivid representation of Christ's
passion necessary for the reception of the fruit of the Holy Sacrament, that the spiritual
communion does not differ greatly from the sacramental, and the spiritual communion
is just as fruitful for the faithful as the sacramental consumption of Christ's body.\footnote{\textit{Opera Wesseli}, 666, 669, 670, 673, 675.}

Wessel's treatise on confession is included in the \textit{Farrago}. By Christ's giving of
the keys he understands the same as the conferring of the Holy Ghost and of love
through the Holy Ghost. This is given to all. Confession is not absolutely necessary
and need only be done if it can be done with ease. The priest cannot judge and cannot
grant forgiveness.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 772, 776.} Sin, moreover, is forgiven by the ‘\textit{contritio}’ which usually precedes
confession. Since then absolution has no effect and

\textbf{R.R. Post, The Modern Devotion}
satisfaction is only the perfect life in God, little remains in Gansfort of the Sacrament of confession.\(^1\)

The treatise, ‘What is understood by the communion of saints,’ is of great importance for Wessel's view of the church. All saints are in communion with each other through a true and real union, so many as are joined to Christ by one faith, one hope, one love. It makes no difference under which prelate they stand, however ambitiously these may fight and differ from each other or embrace error or be heretics. Nor does it matter by what distance of place or time they are separated. This is the communion of which it is said in the *symbolum*: ‘I believe in the communion of saints.’ The unity of the church under the pope is a purely incidental matter.\(^2\) Perhaps he does not go so far as Wyclif who draws an unsurmountable barrier between the visible and the invisible church. The pope becomes an obstacle in attaining to Christ. He is the devil's vicar, the anti-Christ. Wessel too gave this name to those prelates who gave scandal.\(^3\) It is no wonder that Wessel, in the same treatise, discusses the meaning of the treasure of the church (*thesaurus ecclesiae*). The treasure of the church is the love of Christ; to share it is synonymous with ‘possessing the love of Christ.’ Similarly, to be a member of the invisible church means to be a sharer in the treasure, while the communion of saints has a similar meaning. It follows from this that the Church has no right to dispose of this treasure. The most she can do is arouse love by preaching. Excommunication is impossible and even to attempt it is already sin.\(^4\) This also removes the basis for indulgences. In a letter to deacon James Hoeck, Wessel challenges the latter's ecclesiastical view on this point, expressly citing the opinions of the Nominalists.\(^5\) Wessel continues to recognize the existence of purgatory, although the fire there in his opinion is not punitive but purifying.\(^6\) It is, for the rest, not a material fire, for this has no effect of itself; it is the ardent desire for God.\(^7\)

The opinions of Wessel and John Pupper thus differ considerably, although they both considered themselves Nominalists, supporters of the *via moderna*. Gansfort deals with many more points than Pupper and gives his personal opinion. The divergent views of these persons

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1. *Opera Wesseli*, 777; cf. also 790.  

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should already be sufficient to prevent us from simply attributing those of their opinions which differ from Church doctrine to the Brethren or to the Modern Devotionalists. We have already established, moreover, that Pupper did not belong to the Modern Devotionalists, and Gansfort not in the strict sense. It is certain that he acquired his theological opinions elsewhere, and most probably in Paris after 1460, where Gallicanism and Nominalism had adopted an anti-papal character. Their views bear no resemblance to what we know of the Brothers, whose theological knowledge was very slight and whose life diverged completely from Gansfort's theories on the Eucharist, confession and indulgences.

The third theologian who was associated with the Modern Devotion, and notably with the Brethren of the Common Life, or is at least brought in connection with them, is Gabriel Biel. Biel was born in the village of Biel near Speier, but the date of his birth is unknown. It is usually thought to be the first quarter of the fifteenth century, taking into account his ordination and the commencement of his academic studies in Heidelberg in 1432. Here he took his degrees in the Faculty of Arts, being made Bachelor on July 21st 1435 and Master on 21st March 1438. 'He remained at the University of Heidelberg for at least three subsequently years, and, served as an instructor in the faculty of arts.' As was customary he probably studied theology at the same time. At this period the University of Heidelberg was entirely Nominalistic in its outlook. We do not know how long he stayed in Heidelberg, but he is on record as having attended the university of Erfurt in 1442 and 1443 and again in 1451, and he was in Cologne in 1453. It is almost certain that he will have continued his theological studies at these universities, but there is no indication of where and when he took his degrees. That he did so is evident from a papal document dated 3rd December 1374, in which he is called licentiat us in theology. It is interesting to remember that at this time the theology course normally took eleven to twelve years. Meanwhile it is certain that the via moderna determined Biel's course, although

1 H.A. Oberman, The harvest of medieval theology. Gabriel Biel and late Medieval Nominalism, Harvard Univ. Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1963. 10. It is strange that ordination and the beginning of studies should coincide; the words may refer to the obtaining of a priestly prebend.
3 Oberman 10-11.
in Cologne at least he had had the opportunity of hearing professors of the via antiqua.¹ This explains his later knowledge of both systems. Having completed his academic studies, he became cathedral preacher in Mainz, where he continued to work until joining the Brethren of the Common Life in Marienthal (± 1364/65). As we have already explained, this was a rather special kind of Brotherhouse. It was a chapter of which the canons had adopted the communal life, and as such will have sought contact with the Brotherhouse in Cologne. We have seen that at this period the development from Brotherhouse to chapter, recommended by the pope, had not yet made much progress. From now on, however, the tempo increased. Hildesheim took the plunge in 1463, followed in 1469 by several Dutch houses. In 1470 it was the turn of Münster, Cologne and Wesel. What happened in Marienthal therefore, followed by the houses with which Gabriel Biel was associated, was not so exceptional as one might at first think.

In 1468 Biel transferred to Butzbach, where he became the first prior of the chapter of the Church of St. Mark, of which the canons had adopted the communal life. He continued in this office until 1479, and in 1477 played a major part in transforming the chapter of Urach into a Brotherhouse. This initiative was followed, first in Württemberg and soon by others. In 1479 he succeeded the first provost of Urach, became a professor in Tübingen in 1484, and acted as rector there in 1485 and 1489, while still retaining his function in Urach, to which he retired on leaving the university in 1489. His influence gained the theological faculty of Tübingen for the supporters of Ockhamism or the via moderna, whereas the majority had formerly oscillated between the two trends. After 1489 he acted as provost to the peculiar foundation of Einsiedel, already described, until his death on December 7th 1495.²

Two facts have importance for us, the first being the possibility of a meeting between Wessel Gansfort and Gabriel Biel in Cologne in 1453. If this meeting did take place, it must be remembered that Biel had already completed a long course in theology, whereas the young Wessel was only beginning. Secondly, when Gabriel Biel adopted the common life as a canon, defended and applied it, he was already a fully trained scholarly theologian and a preacher of some experience. He thus owed nothing of his training and development to the Breth-

¹ Oberman, 11.
² Ibid., 20.

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ren. They, however, - not the Dutch Brothers but the canons of Marienthal, Butzbach, Urach, Schönbuch and Sindelfingen - were greatly indebted to him. Those in contact with him adopted certain of his ideas, probably the devotion in particular. Some also absorbed his theological views, for instance Wendelin Steinbach, his successor as provost of Schönbuch and Professor of Tübingen, who later published Biel's works.¹

Biel's theological opinions have been analysed in all their aspects by H.A. Oberman, to whose studies I must refer here. We are merely concerned with Biel's opinion on those points which were also dealt with by John Pupper and Wessel Gansfort, since these are considered as theological representatives of the Modern Devotion.

In the first place Biel's theory on the devotion agrees with what we know from the writings of Florens Radewijns, Gerard Zerbolt and others, but Oberman points out that in the various studies - commencement, progress, perfection or purification, illumination or union - the devout man must, according to the Ockhamist principle, do what he can; facere quod in se est.² Like Pupper, Biel criticizes the presumptuous legalism which found expression in a niggling observance of the rules and in the many self-gratifying prayers. On this point it is noteworthy that he makes a distinction between the first and second generation of Devotionalists; the latter lay more emphasis on the formal side. Biel esteems the creation, perceives dangers in self-humiliation and still considers inner piety to be of greater decisive value than outward observance.³

He will have learned by experience just how far it was possible to carry this out with canons living in community and without personal possessions. He further retains the lectio, meditatio and oratio which with him culminate in contritio and not in contemplatio. This contritio renders the sinner fit for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.⁴ At this point Biel is preaching a strongly anti-Pelagian doctrine of unmerited love⁵ and is approaching the concept we have already discerned in Pupper, notably regarding the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which is the habitus of man and the basis of the supernatural act. Biel, however, also shares with Pupper the acceptance theory⁶ and the value of the right intention. In the matter of the sources of faith Biel,⁷ who accepts tradition as well as the

1  Oberman, 15.
2  Ibid., 341-342.
3  Ibid., 345f.
4  Ibid., 348-349.
5  Ibid., 349.
6  Ibid., 166, 354-355.
7  Ibid., 167.
scriptures as a religious doctrine, approaches Pupper with his *veritas canonica*.\(^1\)

This, however, is the full extent of their agreement. Not only did Biel pay little attention to the *votum* which forms one of the two main subjects of Pupper's oeuvre, but in the process of reward he repeatedly stresses the value of human actions for justification and for gaining heaven. In this he goes considerably further than the opinion of St. Thomas on merits. If Pupper reproached St. Thomas with Pelagianism, how much more from his point of view does Biel deserve this accusation of heresy on the basis of the latter's doctrine of justification. Man must always do his very best and have the intention of confessing as soon as possible.\(^2\) Biel is of the opinion that man, of his own powers, can love God above all things.\(^3\) He cannot earn the first grace *de condigno* through an act of love performed with natural powers, but he can merit it *de congruo*. *Meritum de condigno* is also possible if the deed is performed in a state of sanctifying grace and is accepted by God.\(^4\) Doing his utmost in these circumstances entitles him to heaven. God is obliged to grant it by virtue of the order once chosen and regulated by himself. ‘It is therefore evident,’ says Oberman, ‘that Biel's doctrine of justification is essentially Pelagian.’\(^5\)

Let this suffice here to show that Biel and Pupper - although they undoubtedly belonged to the same school or trend, the *via moderna* - differ so greatly on important points that they cannot serve to characterize the doctrine of the Brothers. There is the additional fact that Pupper was a secular and that Biel only came into contact with the Brothers after his theological views had already been formed. Compared with Biel, who discusses almost the entire field of theology, Wessel Gansfort concentrates on certain extremely topical questions of the time. Wessel, however, also expresses an opinion on the sources of the faith and it has been thought that, unlike Biel, he supports Wyclif in rejecting the extra-Biblical oral tradition (which Oberman calls *Traditio II*).\(^6\) It is true that Wessel usually relies on the scriptures alone, but in a letter to James Hoeck he recognizes the lawful existence of an unwritten tradition, handed down by the Apostles.\(^7\) The concept of the absolute power of God plays a much greater role in Biel than in Wessel, but although the latter does not employ the term, the con-

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1 Oberman, 393.
7 R.R. Post, *De via antiqua en de via moderna* 11.
cept itself is revealed in the introduction to the *Providentia divina*. Neither has any high opinion of the causality of the so-called second causes, but Wessel expresses his opinion more clearly.

However, much that is characteristic for Wessel, is missing in Biel, including contempt for the Church's dignity and authority, minimizing of its value and extent and of the corresponding duty of the members of the Church. He does not deny either the efficacy of confession, or indeed consider superfluous the absolution of the priest for anyone who feels contrition. He holds different views on the independent existence of the spiritual church, on the rejection of the *thesaurus*, on excommunication and indulgences, and has a completely different concept of purgatory.

These are all personal ideas of Wessel's which were not necessarily held by the school of Nominalists. He probably acquired them, however, in Paris, for the most part, among the Gallicans and the extreme Nominalists. It is precisely their divergence from those of Biel, who at the time of Gansfort's productivity was a Brother-canon of the Common Life, which shows that they were not common to all Devotionalists or all Brothers. Biel admittedly was an extraordinary member of the fraternity; never before had the Brethren numbered a professor among their members, nor even a doctor.

To a certain extent Frederik of Heilo may also be considered as a writer of the Modern Devotion, although he was not in the same class as the previous writers. He was probably a secular priest and subsequently rector of Sisters in Warmond, Leiden and Beverwyk. Having occupied this function for some time he was admitted as *Donatus* to the monastery of Canons Regular of the Visitation, near Haarlem, which was a member of the Windesheim congregation. The transfer to this particular form of monastic life probably took place in later life, around 1445. Only the convent at Beverwyk directed by Frederik of Heilo had any connection with Windesheim. It was founded in 1431 on the instigation of J. Busch, who with his fellow Brothers was responsible during the first few years for the Sisters' pastoral care from the nearby Windesheim monastery of Sion. The chapter of Windesheim eventually put an end to this and the Sisters then chose Frederik of Heilo as rector and pastor. He fulfilled this task for some time, but

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1 R.R. Post, 12.
was at length impelled by scruples to relinquish it and to end his life as a Donatus preoccupied with his own salvation. He gives his motives for relinquishing his rectorate in his treatise Apologia super resignatione regiminis sororum, one of the six works to survive of the nineteen attributed to him. If this work may be dated around 1445, then the next year: Epistola contra pluralitatem confessorum et de regimine sororum, a letter to a priest who had been appointed rector of Sisters, must have been written before that year, and probably also the Letter to the prior of the Regular monastery at Amsterdam, who had obtained the enclosure in 1443. When Frederik was already a Donatus, after 1445, he wrote the Tractatus de peregrinatione sive contra peregrinantes in which he expressly mentions that cardinal Nicolas of Cusa was appointed papal legate for the German Empire in order to proclaim the jubilee indulgence. This, therefore, cannot have been written earlier than 1451. He was also the author of the Liber de fundatione domus regularium prope Haarlem, of which the fragments preserved cannot have been set down before 1452. Among other things they contain a good historical account of the visit of the cardinal in question to Holland, and of his efforts to introduce a strict observance in the Benedictine monasteries and convents. He also mentions the cardinal's preference for the Windesheim observance.

Although this collection of works may faithfully reflect the ideas of Frederik of Heilo, it is not necessarily characteristic of the Modern Devotion. The closest approach is found in the Letter to the prior and the Rule of the Monks, probably written during the last years of Frederik's life, since they insist on the inner devotion which might suffer if the prior undertakes too much work outside the monastery. The Rule of the Monks presents the ideal of the monastic life: to live for Christ, to keep the passions in check, to fulfil the duties of love, voluntarily and not from fear of punishment. Three of the first writings refer to the pastoral work which Frederik carried out. He advocates a strict spiritual direction for the Sisters, given by one

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1 Published by J.C. Pool, o.c. 69-85.
2 Analysed by J.C. Pool 42-61.
3 Analysed by J.C. Pool, 62-64.
5 Published by J.C. Pool 116-129.
6 Ibid., 120.
7 Published by J.C. Pool 133-167.
8 Analysed by J.C. Pool, 86-91.
9 Ibid., 125.
person who can impose his will on them without competition from another confessor. This was the only way to prevent dissension in the Sisterhouse, but he forgets that he is hereby severely curtailing the Sisters' freedom of conscience. He has no high opinion of the Sisters, who are prey to all kinds of sensual inclinations. It was this which made the rectorship an extremely responsible, difficult and dangerous function. Here we have the real reason why Frederik relinquished it.

The Treatise on pilgrimages and against pilgrims shows the author to be a moderate man who does not reject pilgrimages out of hand.¹ To his mind they were unnecessary for the monastic and not the best way for others to obtain forgiveness of sins. The indulgences to be gained on pilgrimage are counterbalanced by the dangers of the journey and the company. Contempt for the world is more commendable and safer. In this connection he touches upon the then topical question of indulgences. He does not wish to belittle them, but only to inform the reader of their real meaning and use. The faithful may gain the indulgence offered by fulfilling four conditions: the indulgence must be given by a competent authority and from a reasonable motive; the person wishing to gain the indulgence must be in a state of grace and perform the prescribed act with the right intention.² A pilgrimage undertaken for love of spiritual progress may be useful, but not if it is made in order to escape from one's normal tasks.

These are by no means dogmatic writings, and the important questions of the day are scarcely touched upon. Frederik thus is not on the same level as Gansfort, Pupper or Biel. He subscribes to the generally accepted doctrines and may be reckoned among the Devotionalists, not only on the grounds of his function and relations, but also in view of his exhortation to inner piety and his esteem for the Windesheim observance which Nicolas of Cusa so strongly recommended to other monasteries.

¹ J.C. Pool 116-129.
² Ibid., 126.
Chapter Eleven
The Sisters from c. 1420 to c. 1480

More so than that of the fraters, the investigation of the history of the Sisters of the Common Life is rendered difficult by lack of data and uncertainty about the information we do possess. We have seen the rapid growth of the movement, especially in the cities of Zwolle, Deventer, Zutphen and elsewhere, not only in the number of houses, but also in the number of inmates of the various foundations. This was continued later in Flanders (Elsegem 1417; Oudenaarde 1420; Deinze 1456; Ghent St. Agnes 1433 and St. Barbara 1423, Assonide 1452), but it was checked in that several of these houses adopted a monastic rule. This was usually first the Third Rule of St. Francis, and subsequently that of St. Augustine. Those who adopted this latter became monastics in the full sense of the word, the others at first only gradually. The transition of the Sisterhouses of the Common Life to convents continued in this period. It is noteworthy, however, that even before 1430 many of the Tertiary convents adopted the Rule of St. Augustine, whereas those which did so between 1430 and 1450 were exceptions. After this the transition again became more common, so that between 1450 and 1480 about thirty Tertiary houses exchanged their Rule of St. Francis for that of St. Augustine. They were usually motivated by the desire for a stricter life; first for a monastic rule, then for a stricter rule and finally for the clausura. All this was achieved at the expense of the Sisters of the Common Life, so that the question arises whether any of these Sisterhouses in the strict sense survived and whether new foundations came into being. It seems to me that the question is an important one for the history of the Modern Devotion. One may take the attitude that the Sisters of the Third Order and the Augustinesses - including those which did not become associated with Windesheim or even with Sion - were products of the Modern Devotion and continued to form part of it even after the transition to a convent. This is so up to a certain point, but it appears to me that

2 Eeleko Ypma O.E.S.A., Het generale kapittel van Sion, Diss. Nijmegen 1949, 11.
3 Ibid., 11-13.
these became too tinged with monasticism to bear comparison with the first foundations of Geert Groote. The Tertiaries, moreover, soon gained contact with the Franciscans, or at least with the Franciscanminded Devotionalists. It thus seems preferable to exclude these groups from a description of the Modern Devotion. One might, indeed, protest that the Windesheimers were also monastics. This is true, but they owed their origin to Geert Groote and the first Brethren and maintained constant contact with the Brothers. We must not forget, however, that several Brothers worked as rector and pastor in the convents of Tertiaries or Augustinesses. This may warn us against drawing too sharp a line of demarcation.

In his *Liber de origine devotionis modernae*, i.e. the second part of his *Chronicon*, John Busch twice gives the number of monastic foundations since the initiative of Geert Groote, once in the prologue and once in the last chapter. Since he completed his book in 1464, one may assume that he is setting down the state of affairs existing shortly before. In the prologue he says that he is past 60 and has been a monastic for 40 years (44 years according to another manuscript). Since he was born in 1399 and was clothed in 1419, this brings us to the year 1460. The figures given for the foundations correspond. It is a remarkable fact that Busch sees the entire Modern Devotion as a monastic movement, namely, new foundations and reformation of the older. According to Busch there were at that period 80 reformed monasteries united with Windesheim and spread over 17 dioceses; more than 50 congregations of Brothers and Sisters and over a hundred foundations of the Third Order. The houses of the *fratres* around 1460 are known; I make the number 18: Deventer, Zwolle, Hulsbergen, two in 's-Hertogenbosch, Doesburg, Groningen, Amersfoort, Delft, Gouda, Brussels, Ghent, Geraardsbergen, Münster, Cologne, Wesel, Herford and Hildesheim. There would thus have been around 32 houses for Sisters of the Common Life in 1460. Unfortunately it is only possible to state very approximately which these were, since it is usually impossible to establish whether the various congregations maintained contact with the Brothers and at what period they adopted a monastic rule. With this reservation I mention the following Sisterhouses which existed around 1460 and still fully

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1 Publ. K. Grube, Halle 1886, 245-973.
2 This year would be 86 years after the beginning, which would then refer to Groote's conversion in 1734, 240.
3 Busch, 373, 246.

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retained the character of the Sisters of the Common Life. In Deventer the Buyskinhuis, the Lammenhuis, the Kerstekenshuis, the Master Geert's house and the Brandeshuis. In Zwolle, the house Op de Maat, the Kinderhuis, the Kadeneterhuis and the Bosch house; in Zutphen the Adamanhuis, the Master Henry house and the Rondeel. There were also houses in the following places: Gouda, Grave, Genemuiden, Groningen, 's-Hertogenbosch, (Ten Orten), Lochem, St. Michielsgestel, Nijkerk, Nijmegen, Rossum, Wamel, Brielle, Utrecht and in the German localities of Borken, Scuttorpe, Coesfeld, Wesel, Herford, Immenhausen, Kalkar, Cleves, Rees. This gives us 34 Sisterhouses in all.

It is a not inconsiderable number, if we compare it with the number of Brotherhouses. What we know of some of the houses indicates that the Sisterhouses contained a greater number of members than the Brotherhouses. Here and there a new Sisterhouse will have been founded after 1460 but the transition from Sister congregations to convents of nuns continued. To judge from the large number of convents well supplied with members, convent life held considerable attraction for girls. The hundred convents of the Third Rule estimated by Busch would not be an accurate number, but on the other hand it may not be so far out. The large number of such convents, usually well populated, is characteristic for the regions in which the Modern Devotion was widespread in the 15th and the beginning of the 16th century. It was these women who competed with the textile industry by their weaving and spinning. Not only could they offer cheaper products on the market, they sometimes provided the employers with cheap labour, for example by spinning for a particular manufacturer. In the Dutch towns especially this led to conflicts with both employers and employees around the middle of the 15th century. Complaints were made to the sovereign Lord Philip the Good of Burgundy, but the dispute never reached violent proportions. The following compromises were sought and found: limiting of the number of looms in the convent; contribution to the expenses of the appropriate gild; the fixing of a maximum income per nun; taxation of the convents; limitation of goods held in mortmain by forbidding the convents to buy property or to acquire it by gift or legacy. These measures were not too successful in the 15th century, but in the 16th they undermined the economy of many convents and even brought about their downfall. This is

1 Busch, 373.
certainly true of the houses of the Sisters of the Common Life.

Like the rectors of the Brothers, the rectors of the Sisterhouses attended the *colloquia* of Münster or Zwolle, to whichever their house belonged.¹ Often they constituted a problem for the members of the *colloquium*. Already at the first meeting of the Münster *colloquium* to make decrees, i.e. in 1433, the delegates decided that the rectors or confessors of the Sisters must so arrange their dwellings within the year that they were not joined to those of the Sisters. This was in order to avoid gossip. They also laid down that they had to have a companion (*socius*). If at all possible the dwelling must be so situated that the rector had not to pass through the Sisterhouse in order to reach the chapel. The sisters too might not enter the confessor's house, while their own house was closed to him and every other man, except in special cases. Even then the confessor had to be accompanied by the *socius*.²

Some of the Brothers aspired to the position of rector to the Sisters, as we have told.³ In 1486, the *colloquium* of Münster which met in November decided that the Brothers who resided with the Sisters and did not keep the statutes which applied to them, would no longer be considered as Brothers during their lifetime and would not share in the privileges of the Brotherhood after their death.⁴ This meant that they would not have the funeral service in the Brotherhouse to which they belonged, nor would they be listed in the book of the dead.⁵ But still the rectorate remained a sought-after position. Peter of Dieburg tells us that Herman of Rintelen, the first novice in Hildesheim to come from the city school, was appointed confessor to the Sisters ‘without having insisted or sought after this position, as alas is the usual custom.’⁶ The Münster *colloquium* accordingly decided in 1498 that those who put themselves forward for a post with the Sisters would never be sent to the place they had asked for.⁷ There were, however, exceptions. In 1496 the bishop of Lübeck and the cathedral deacon of Hildesheim requested the Brothers of that city to appoint confessors to the sisters at Ploem. This placed the Brothers in an embarrassing position. No one was very eager for the task and yet they wanted to oblige the deacon, since he was *collator* of the altar of St. Anthony which the Brothers served. Finally they agreed and

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¹ To Münster, Doebner 254; for Zwolle, see Schoengen 526, 532.
² Doebner 255.
³ Doebner 70, see p. 436.
despatched *frater* Henry of Göttingen, a sensible and virtuous man. He only allowed himself to be persuaded on condition that he would be allowed to return should he be in danger to soul or body.

The Sisters were the passive members of the Modern Devotion, in that they did not preach or exercise any religious influence on a certain category of people outside the community, unless by example. They wrote no religious treatises, unlike some of the Brothers, but put into practice what they had been taught by Geert Groote and his disciples. Like the Brothers and the canons of Windesheim, whom we shall mention later, they were the inner devout, who filled their day in humility, obedience and zeal with prayer, work and meditation. Even so, some of their members described the life of the Sisters, in short biographies of those who had put the ideals into practice and could thus be held up as examples.

W.J. Kühler has published some of these *Vitae* in the *Archief voor de geschiedenis van het aartbisdom Utrecht* and D. de Man has published and annotated the *Vitae* of various other sisters of the Master Geert's house described in a manuscript in Arnhem with the lengthy title: *Hier beginnen sommige stichtige punten van onsen oelden zusters*. In his detailed introduction he has given a good account of the task of the rector and of the ‘meysterke’, the clothing and daily routine of the Sisters and the nature of their spiritual life.

The Sisters often entered at a very early age, sometimes as girls of nine, thirteen or fifteen and usually not older than twenty. Several came with the complete agreement and cooperation of their parents, but the biographers seem to prefer tales of how a young girl succeeded in misleading her father or mother, or perhaps both, by all sorts of subterfuges and coming secretly to the Master Geert's house. There she would remain, despite the arrival of the parents, backed up by high authority, to remove their daughter from the house. The dramatic peak was reached if the father later changed his mind and became reconciled with his daughter's choice, especially if he was of the nobility, whose protection and inheritance were welcome to the Sisters.

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1 Doebner, 133-134.
2 36 (1910) 1-68.
3 ’s-Gravenhage 1919.

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The regulations concerning dress and daily routine were only formulated gradually, probably not until John Brinckerinck, the second rector after Groote, introduced the communal life. The maintaining of the *consuetudines* was then considered very important. The Sisters' day resembled that of the *fraters*: rise at 4 o'clock, even for very young girls, and to the chapel as quickly as possible to pray the Matins, for the Sisters prayed the Hours as well as the Brothers, and probably in Latin. The Hours which Geert Groote translated were the so-called Little Hours (of the Holy Ghost, the Holy Cross and the Holy Virgin) which each prayed or could pray individually. For the rest it is not certain that the Sisters prayed the complete Office. As with the Brothers their principal task was to pray and work, the whole day through, while keeping their minds fixed upon God. Gertrude ter Venne, the ‘little plant’, devoted so much care to her inner life, walking before God from the early morning until the evening, that often, when she examined her conscience in the evening she could scarcely find anything but that she had spoken some unnecessary word and could hardly distinguish whether she had been more pious and more fervent at Mass than at her loom. It was the rector's task to raise the Sisters' religious life to as high a plane as possible and this resulted in some exaggeration. The Sisters never saw John Brinckerinck face to face; he probably preached standing at the back of the chapel while the Sisters kneeled. John Brugman too says: ‘I see you sitting with your backs towards me.’

The rector was assisted by the ‘Meysterke’ who could deal with the Sisters personally, and allocated a task to each, sending one to work in the kitchen, another to do the cleaning, some to the brewery or the farm and others to weave. The life was often hard and humiliating, rendered more so by the wearing of worn out-clothes. The veneration of Christ formed the focal point of their religious life. They felt a devout fear of God the Father, but believed strongly in divine providence. All that was good happened through God's grace and this grace elevated natural goods deed to the supernatural. The terms

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1 ter Venne, 28, 34, 35, 42.
4 D. de Man, XXXVII.
5 *Ibid.*, XXXIII.
7 *Ibid.*, XLII, XLIII.

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of the bridal mystique were commonly used when referring to Christ. Christ was the ‘beloved bridgroom’ and the Sister could call herself ‘God’s bride.’ The way to Christ was through meditation on His life and especially on His passion. These pious reflections usually occurred during Holy Mass and moved some of the Sisters to tears. ‘In comparison with the worship of Christ, the glorification of Mary receded into the background.’ Repeated meditation and ‘rumination’ helped to keep alive the good intention; a ‘edercauwen’ (ruminare) as an early translation of W. Gansfort expresses it, assisted by short prayers and an examination of conscience in the evenings. Lofty mysticism is not found among the Sisters, but they practised a stern asceticism: self-immolation, humility and obedience. Several of the Sisters, however, were favoured with visions, presages or even the apparition of deceased persons, or else they were able to say that a loved or esteemed one was happy.

The Sisters had usually enjoyed some education, so that they could read and write. Books were thus provided in the houses. The same books in favour with the Brothers were also mentioned in connection with the Sisters; Pseudo S. Bernard, Speculum monachorum, Pseudo Bonaventure, Prefectus religiosorum, The hundred articles by Suso, The spiritual marriage by Ruusbroec, The soliloquium of St. Augustine and The pseudo-Thomist de divinis nominibus in the early Dutch translation. All these were read by the Sisters. It is remarkable that the manuscript makes no mention of a life of Christ, although the Sisters will probably have read one of the several in circulation. Finally, it is perhaps interesting to quote a small passage from what Rudolf Dier writes about Lutgard de Buryck (†1453): In confession she told of those shortcomings to which others had drawn her attention, relying more upon others than upon her own judgement. She was never seen to sleep during the Hours, discourse or Mass, so that she seemed to have conquered sleep. She seldom or never assisted at Mass without shedding tears. When the fire bell rang she fell to her knees, thus assisting the unfortunates by her prayers. When speaking to others

1 D. de Man, XLIII.
2 Ibid., XLV.
3 A.J. Persijn, Wessel Gansfort, De oratione dominica, Assen 1964, 45.
4 D. de Man XLVIII.
5 Ibid., XLIX.
6 Ibid., L.
7 Ibid., LVII, LVIII.
8 Ibid., LVIII.

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she often remarked: ‘O, how precious is time, which we often spend so fruitlessly.’
During her youth she meditated devoutly on the life and passion of the Lord, etc.
She was most attracted to Mary, the holy Mother of God. She also turned zealously,
with pious prayers, to the angels and all the ranks of the saints, requesting their help.
She devoutly venerated the relics of the saints. She was accustomed to offer herself
frequently to God, renewing her good intention, since in future she wished to follow
the rule of the house with more care.¹

To touch now upon communion, I conclude with what is told of sister Ysentrude
of Mekeren, Sister of the Master Geert's house (†1452): ‘Whenever it was allowed,
she fervently received the body of the Lord in communion, so that she would have
been ready every Sunday, had it so behaved. After communion she seemed to rejoice
in the Lord as with a fresh joy, and to be inflamed by a new fire of love, and she was
pleased when she saw many Sisters going to communion.’²

By around 1460 the Sisters of the Common Life had passed their peak. At this
time they were still writing with enthusiasm about the life of ‘die olde susteren.’ This
stopped, just as their expansion was almost entirely halted. A new Sisterhouse was
begun in Germany in 1466 in a place called Ahlen, near Münster, which was certainly
only incorporated in the colloquium of Münster in 1470, at the same time as the
convent at Büderich near Düsseldorf.³

After this we hear nothing more of new Sister foundations, which does not mean
that a successful attempt was not made here and there. The convents evidently held
more attraction for the girls than these Sisterhouses. In addition, the difference may
have become so slight that it was scarcely obvious to the outsider. The fact that the
Sisters did not take vows was certainly an important difference, but for several years
the Tertiaries did not take the three vows either, despite their monastic rule. They
certainly did not feel any less bound, since it was intended that the Sisters, like the
Brothers, should remain in their congregation until death - as single women, subject
to the authority of the mistress and practising complete community of property. The
daily life of these Sisters was scarcely different from that of many nuns, either
Tertiaries or Augustines. It was stricter than that of the Benedictine or Cistercian
nuns or the Canonesses of St. Augustine. Like the Tertiaries, the Sisters of the
Common Life worked hard

¹ Archief... aartsb. Utrecht 36 (1910) 34-35.
² Ibid., 60-61.
³ Doebner 263, 264.

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to earn their daily bread, although they afterwards acquired landed property and houses from which they derived an income.

They entered the new period of Renaissance and Humanism as a healthy institution of dedicated women, but they had no special task or aim. As indeed did most of the other monastics of the time, they lived for themselves, in other words they sought their own spiritual salvation in a retreat from the world. They did not occupy themselves either with education, or with nursing the sick or with helping or comforting the poor and unfortunate. Their enthusiasm for their own institution might be great and their observance of their customs irreproachable, yet the day might come when other tasks would be required of the Sisters. The question then would be whether, in the following period, which is a period of crisis, they could manage to preserve their existence in the old form.

It is however scarcely possible to follow their history in the 16th century.
Chapter Twelve
The Windesheimers from 1425 to 1486

This important period, which can be said to commence with the priorate of William Vornken (1425-1454) and to end with that of Dirk de Graaf (1459-1486), is characterized by a continual expansion of the congregation, and by a promoting of the observance, both within and without the Windesheim circle, not only among the Canons and Canonesses Regular but also among the Benedictines and Cistercians and their female branches. In some cases the expansion of the congregation is directly linked with the carrying through of the observance in certain monasteries, sometimes it is unconnected. The maintaining of the observance of the pious customs and principles within the congregation was one of the tasks of the general chapter, which in this period regularly met once a year,¹ and of its organs the visitatores and commissarii for the convents, who in their turn collaborated with the rectors of the individual houses. The Acta of this general chapter were kept so restrained that they tell us nothing of the outside activities of the Windesheim congregation in promoting the observance. The name of John Busch, who between 1440 and 1454 and from 1459 to 1479 initiated an exceptionally large and successful reformatory programme in Saxony, is not mentioned in the Acta capituli. Regarding cardinal Nicolas of Cusa's stay in the Netherlands and notably in Windesheim in 1451, the Acta give only the two bulletins published by the cardinal in favour of the Windesheimers, one in Zwolle and one in Louvain.² Fortunately these Acta can be supplemented by the Chronicon Windeshemense and especially the Liber de Reformatione Monasteriorum³ which it includes. We also possess a few chronicles of the individual monasteries.

This period is also the time of the important, indeed renowned, publications of Thomas a Kempis, who lived through a large part of it, and of John Mombaer who lived towards the end. He was a witness

1 With the exception of one year, i.e. 1472, in which probably only a so-called private Capitulum took place (of Windesheim and certain other neighbouring monasteries), Acta capituli 71.
2 Ibid., 49, 51.
3 Publ. K. Grube, Halle 1886.
and leader of one of the last great efforts to expand made by the Windesheim congregation.

There are thus three main aspects which demand our attention: first the expansion, the preservation or introduction of the observance, inside and outside their own circle, and finally the writings, which are all of an ascetic nature.

The men upon whose shoulders the main burden rested throughout this period were the priores superiores. As the title indicates, they were the priors of the Windesheim monastery who were at the same time superiors of the congregation. Windesheim was fortunate in having excellent priors who enjoyed a very long priorate. The period of William Vornken and Dirk de Graaf is interrupted only by the short priorate of John of Naaldwyk (1455-1459). These superiors were assisted, however, by several of their canons who were always willing to be transferred in order to introduce to a related monastery by word and example the Windesheim observance, customs and exercises. This was no easy task. Happily these persons received help from enthusiastic colleagues who desired union with Windesheim. Often, however, there was also a hostile group, or at least certain people who were indifferent or who opposed this move on principle. They wished to retain the old customs, since they had bound themselves to keep them and found them in no way worthy of condemnation. In addition the new or renewed foundations were usually or often poverty-stricken, a condition to which the Windesheim representatives had to resign themselves. For these men the cella dulcis lay elsewhere and they must often have felt like strangers or lodgers, unable to work in their new surroundings as well as they did at home. Men like John of Kempen, John Broechuis, Henry Loder, John Busch and various others showed themselves constantly prepared for these expeditions, and their work was often crowned with success. The members of the four oldest monasteries also made their contribution, just as did the more recent foundations, notably Frenswegen near Nordhorn and St. Agnietenberg near Zwolle. For more distant monasteries, members of the nearest foundation were called in. For example, the chronicle of St Agnietenberg mentions that in 1444, after August 24th, three priests of this monastery were sent to the new house at Roermond.¹

The men usually entered the monastery in their 18th, 19th or 20th year, were made canons after a year or eighteen months' probationary

¹ Ed. Pohl, VII 415.

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period, and were entirely steeped in the ideals and practices of Windesheim. Several of them, moreover, were gifted with a natural insight into human nature. They carried out important work in their circle, but they were not scholars, theologians or lawyers. No more than any of the Brothers had these men, celebrated in the literature of the Devotionalists, attended university. Several of these prominent persons can be shown to have attended no higher institute of learning than the city school, usually that of Deventer or Zwolle. This is expressly stated of John Vos of Heusden, who had learned chiefly Latin in Deventer at the schola particularis, i.e., the city school as distinguished from the schola generalis, the university. He joined the Windesheimers straight from school.  

1 Similarly we have Arnold Kalkar, later superior in Windesheim and Gerard of Delft, later procurator in the same monastery, 3 John of Kempen, brother of Thomas, prior successively of Mariaborn near Arnhem and St. Agnietenberg near Zwolle, who put St. Peterswiel near Zaltbommel on its feet, was later rector with the Sisters of Bronopia near Kampen and of the Visitatio of our Lady near Haarlem, and finally first rector of the convent of Bethany near Arnhem. He died and was buried here (4th November 1422).  

4 His brother Thomas had followed him to the school of Deventer and both gained their education there. 5 Thomas was not the only famous author produced by these schools. John Busch had passed through all the classes of the school in Zwolle, including the two top classes, and had also taught for a while there, first in the fifth class and for a time even in the third. When he was ripe for the university, he entered at Windesheim. 6

It is to such persons that the Windesheim congregation owed its greatness. Not only did they promote its increase and expansion, they also enhanced the quality of its spiritual life, rendering it attractive for the devout men of the 15th century. During this period the head monastery could rejoice in a steady increase in members. During the period of 61 years with which we are here concerned, 43 canons were clothed; this, however, is still less than one a year, rather less than under John Vos of Heusden (31 in 32 years). But the small community

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1 Busch 28.  
2 Ibid., 60-61.  
3 Ibid., 71.  
4 Ibid., 96-97.  
5 Dialogi noviciorum liber IIII, Pohl VII, 318.  
6 Busch 393-394.
suffered few losses\(^1\) so that we hear no complaints about too few members.

One of the first important problems which the prior superior William Vornken was called upon to resolve was the plan to incorporate the entire chapter of Neuss in the Windesheim union. The Neuss chapter comprised the monastery of B. Maria of Neuss, B. Maria in great Bethlehem near Doetinchem,\(^2\) B. Maria in little Bethlehem at Zwolle, B. Maria and twelve Apostles (‘Zakkenbroeders’ monastery at Utrecht), B. Maria in Gaesdonk, B. Catherine near Nijmegen, St. Meinulf in Bodeken, B. Maria in Reimerswaal, B. John the Baptist in Aachen, Marienberg in Bödingen near Sieberg, S. Salvator in Ewyck, B. Maria in Insula near Koblenz, Engelendaal in Bonn, B. Agnes in Dordrecht and Marienburg near Nijmegen. The desire for union does seem to have existed, but there appear to have been opponents here and there among the Neuss chapter. The members of Neuss, moreover, made conditions, or at least put forward certain requests. The discussions floundered somewhat at the outset, but the parties reached agreement at the chapter of 1427. Pope Martin V attempted to move things along by appointing three provosts to further the matter, and after a commission drawn from both parties had been set up, the last difficulties were resolved in 1429. The agreement was signed at Brielle where the general chapter was being held on account of the ecclesiastical disputes in Overijssel. The conditions formulated in 1427 were accepted, namely that the title of provost held by the heads of the Neuss monasteries should be changed into that of prior; that all members of the monasteries involved should give notice of their agreement in a sealed letter; that the aforementioned house of Utrecht and that of Zwolle (Bethlehem) should be free of the monastery of Bethlehem in Doetinchem; that they must relinquish those privileges which conflicted with the Windesheim statutes and not attempt to obtain similar privileges from the Holy See in the future; that on the contrary they must observe the Windesheim statutes, especially regarding the severity of the order, and also conform to the dress of the order. They might only retain their own distinctive cloak. At subsequent discussions it was also decided that the monastery of Neuss

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1 Acquoy III 267-270.
2 This monastery probably did not agree with the proposed condition. In 1441 the question of the incorporation of this monastery in the Windesheim congregation is raised again. *Acta Capitulii* 36.

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should be placed immediately after the head monastery of Windesheim in the official list of monasteries, even before Groenendaal. These last points have been termed, quite justifiably, rather petty-minded, but the essential thing is that they accepted the main issue, the severe life of Windesheim. The decisions taken at the chapter of Brielle in 1429 were confirmed at the next chapter meeting in 1430, again held in Brielle, so that this date, 1430, is considered as the official date of incorporation.¹

This was according to the usual custom: all decisions by the chapter were dealt with in three successive meetings: first came the decree (here in 1427: ordinata), then the approval (approbata; here in 1429) and finally the confirmation (confirmata: here in 1430).

At the same time proceedings were going on for the admission of four other existing monasteries, St. Martin in Achlum (Ludingerkerk) and the newly founded Beverwyk officially incorporated in 1431; and Bethania of Malines, admitted in 1430 after the three phases. The incorporation of Bethania near Arnhem was accepted for the first time in 1430 and approved in 1431, but was confirmed only in 1433.

During this period several of the associated monasteries evinced the desire for a somewhat stricter enclosure, following the method of the Carthusians. The general chapters about this time had repeatedly to deal with such requests. The monastery's desire was usually granted, but not always with the same severity. In 1431, for example, the question arose of what grounds would permit the enclosed Sisters to break the enclosure, but it is not clear what answer was given. In 1434, however, permission was given to the canons at Tongeren to initiate an enclosure, but one which would limit them only to the city walls.² Korsendonk and Elsinghem were enclosed in 1433.

According to Busch this desire for closer association arose from the monastics' discontent at the frequent visiting in the monasteries, which disturbed the peace and led to the receiving of guests and the taking of meals outside the monastery. The prior then had to make the difficult decision whether to allow the visits or not. Several prominent members, however, considered that such an enclosure was not in the spirit of the rule of St. Augustine. It was finally decided that each application should be considered on its own merits, but the opportunity of taking the daily walk must be retained. Especially on those days on which the monks were bled they had to be able to restore

¹ Acta capituli 22, 24, 27.
² Ibid., 27.
their physical forces by movement and recreation, so that the canons would still be
capable of visiting neighbouring and even more distant places. Yet still the desire
for a stricter form of monastic life persisted so strongly that fifteen monasteries
accepted the ‘enclosure’.  The number was later increased. (See p. 511)

The pastoral care of the Sisters constituted a problem for the fathers. It was not
considered advisable that too many of the priests should reside outside their own
monasteries. For this reason a resolution was passed by the chapter in 1431 forbidding
all who were subject to the chapter to propose that convents should be admitted to
or incorporated in the order.  This prohibition was approved in 1432 and confirmed
in 1433.  

On November 8th 1436, Pope Eugenius IV, probably at their own request, forbade
the Windesheimers to admit convents in the future. An exception was made for B.
Maria at Ghent and Facons in Antwerp (Ghent was admitted in 1438, Antwerp in
1441).  

Meanwhile the expansion continued. A new field of activity opened in Saxony.
Here lay the Regular monasteries of Wittenburg and Riechenberg near Goslar, both
in the diocese of Hildesheim. In both the canons were allowed to retain their personal
property which, as Groote had already predicted, led to the impoverishment of the
whole. The leaders and members came to hear of Windesheim and wished to adopt
this ‘reformation’. The reform of Wittenburg was brought about in 1423, after a
visitiation of Henry Loder of Frensweegen, by a group of Windesheim canons and lay
Brothers. Riechenberg was reformed in 1426, but we are not told by whom. Both at
first remained outside the Windesheim union, but in 1429 the bishop of Hildesheim
gave permission to incorporate, and the general chapter at Windesheim informed the
visitatores of the two houses in 1432 that they would be received into the union
provided they were willing to exchange the title of provost for that of prior.  This
seems to have been done, for they later appear as members of the congregation.

Meanwhile the monastery of St. Elizabeth near Roermond (Nunhem), in the county
of Horn, was incorporated in 1436.  

Requests for

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1  Busch, 370-372.
2  Acta capituli 24.
3  Ibid., 25, 26.
4  Ibid., 31, 33, 36.
5  Acta capituli 25: In my opinion one must assume et between ‘Wittenberch’ and the domo in
   Rieckenbergh.
6  Ibid., 29, 31.

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admission to the union became more frequent: Hertzenhagen near Frankfurt and Anjum (Marienberg) in Friesland in 1438-39; the convent of Galilaea in Ghent (1438) and the monastery of Nazareth, near Bredevoort\(^1\) (1439), the convent of Faonshof at Antwerp (1441) and Melle, near Ghent, also in 1441.\(^2\)

During this same period John Busch, the Windesheim canon and chronicler, was working in Saxony. He had gone to Wittenburg near Hildesheim around 1437 and had done very good work there as subprior.\(^3\) Having been there for two years he transferred on August 20th 1439 to the house of the Canons Regular at Sulta, also near Hildesheim.\(^4\)

This was naturally followed by the admission of the monastery of Sulta to the Windesheim congregation as early as 1441-42.\(^5\) Busch was the first provost, taking the title of prior, which was customary at least to the west of Münster. We shall return to Busch's reforming activities later. The admission of the monastery of St. Dionysius in Molenbeke, in the diocese of Minden, which was entrusted to the visitatores of Saxony in 1442 and certainly took place,\(^6\) was entirely unconnected with Busch's activities in Saxony. Molenbeke was a worn out and decrepit monastery from the time of the crusades. Arnold Huls, prior at Bodiken, was invited there in the hope that he would obtain some improvement. He bought out the persons he found there and populated the monastery with Canons Regular of the Windesheim group, with the result that it revived and soon flourished,\(^7\) just like the Domus B. Mariae in Insula (Niederwerth) near Koblenz.\(^8\) This was a relic of the exile of the canons of the Zwolle Bethlehem during the Utrecht schism in 1429-30, when they took refuge in this monastery.\(^9\) In 1443 the union gained Domus Busci Domini Isaac, the master Isaac's house near Nivelles, a monastery recently founded from Melle for the care of a chapel in which a miracle of the Blessed Sacrament is said to have taken place in 1405.\(^10\) Then came the monastery of St. Jerome at

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1 Ibid., 33, 35.  
2 Ibid., 36.  
3 Busch, introduction XXXV.  
4 Busch 408-411.  
5 Busch 427; Acta capituli 36, 38.  
6 Acta capituli 40.  
8 It was sometime before this was entirely settled, Acta capituli 42, 43.  
9 Acta capituli 39, Acquoy 123.  

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Roermond in 1444, joined in the following year by the monastery of Segberg in Holstein which had been living according to the Windesheim customs for some time. The canons first asked for John Busch as rector, but when this met with difficulties in Windesheim, they chose another of the Windesheim canons. At this time the replacing of the Benedictine nuns by canonesses of the Windesheim group in the convent of Sylmonniken near Emden was already envisaged. This foundation was admitted to the congregation in 1446, after a thorough investigation. Something similar occurred with St. Peter at Hegene in the Worms diocese. This house had been reformed by the canons of Bodiken and was thus ripe for admission to the congregation. This took place in 1447. It was followed by Albergen which, as we have shown, was transformed in 1447 from a house of Brethren of the Common Life into a monastery, and was incorporated at the chapter of 1448. During the same period there were requests for incorporation from Corpus Christi, in Cologne, a monastery with a pilgrims' church (miracle of the B. Sacrament), from a monastery at Bergum near Leeuwarden, and from Daelhem in the diocese of Paderborn, inhabited by canons from Bodiken. The first two were admitted in 1453, and the date of the other admission is unknown. It must have been around the same time.

After 1450 the new admissions seem to have slackened off a little, but in 1453 the convent of Marienburg in Nijmegen was incorporated, followed by the house of St. Pancratius at Hamersleben in the diocese of Halberstadt, and of the Holy Ghost in Udem. The first was an original foundation, the object of reformatory activities by John Busch in 1451, on the authority of cardinal Nicolas of Cusa. This reformation was continued by John Havekenschede of Coesfeld, prior in Riechenberg. The other house only developed in the fifties alongside an existing chapel.

In 1457 applications were received from the old, but recently restored monastery of Rebdorf in the diocese of Eichstadt, and from Everhardsclausen in the diocese of Trèves. This latter was a small, new

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5. Acta Capituli 45.
8. Acta Capituli 54-56; Acquoy 141, 143.

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institution, a little monastery near a recently built chapel which attracted quite a number of the faithful. The first monastery was already incorporated in 1458, but Everhards Clausen had to wait until 1461.¹

A remarkable case was that of St. Jerome (Lopzen) in Leiden. This was a house of the Third Order of St. Francis, and we have already seen that several of these monasteries adopted the Rule of St. Augustine. The chapter of 1461 raised no objection to the incorporation of St. Jerome of Leiden, but at the same time it forbade all priors and persons of the chapter to encourage Brothers or Sisters of the Third Order in any way whatsoever, to adopt our order.² Was the chapter somewhat intimidated by the large number of these Tertiaries - were the numerous members of the congregation beginning to oppress them? Or were they fearful of the many convents in this group which would impose upon them a considerable responsibility for the pastoral care of the Sisters.

They preferred to receive into their order the Louvain Brotherhouse, St. Martin of Louvain, which had adopted the Rule of St. Augustine in 1447.³

As many as four houses were incorporated in the chapter in the year 1464. These were the nearby Haske (Rosaevallis in Friesland) and three far away in the south of Germany: Birchling, St. Leonard in Basle and St. Irenaeus in Marbach in the Basle diocese.⁴ This shows that the influence of Windesheim continued to penetrate further towards the south. This impression is confirmed by the admission of the monastery of Iterwile, in the diocese of Strasbourg, to the south of the city, and of St. John the Baptist of Volckerdinghusen in the south of the diocese of Paderborn. Both were united with Windesheim in 1467.⁵

In the following year the incorporation of Schaberheim in the diocese of Mainz was discussed, and the final decision was taken in 1470. There were two new admissions in 1469, the monastery founded by Count Adolf in memory of his victory over John of Cleves on June 23rd 1468, and finally the monastery of Ravensberg in the diocese of Mainz.⁶

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1 Acta Capituli 58, 63; Acquoy 145, 149.
2 Acta Capituli 63.
3 Ibid., 64.
4 Ibid., 66.
5 Acta Capituli 68, Acquoy 164, 165.
6 Acta Capituli 68, 69; Acquoy 169, 172, 174.
The most distant house, that of St. Martin, near Zürich, was incorporated in 1471. Then followed a period of calm, broken by the incorporation of two foundations. The first was Sindelfingen in Württemberg, the greater part of whose income had been granted to the University of Tübingen in 1477. The remainder was sufficient for the modest upkeep of a few simple Regulars of the Windesheim congregation.¹ The second was Blomberg in the diocese of Paderborn, another pilgrimage church of fairly recent date, but where the offerings were large enough to support a small colony of Windesheimers.² Finally, during the last years of the prior Dirk de Graaf († 1486) there were two new additions from the extreme south, Berenberg in the diocese of Constance (1485) and St. Lawrence in Hessa near Saarburg during the same year.³ According to Acquoy's calculations this completes the number 80, but the Acta capituli of 1530 sets the number at 79.⁴ Another 13 convents must be added to both totals. This gives us then 92 houses a hundred years after the foundation of Windesheim. This was undoubtedly an enormous success, far exceeding that of the Brethren. The territory covered by the houses extends from the north sea by way of Ghent, Brussels, Saarburg, Strasbourg to Basle, Zürich, Tübingen, Halberstadt and back again to Emden. The remarkable thing is that nowhere is a language frontier breached. Until the death of Dirk de Graaf, the Windesheim phenomenon was essentially Germanic (Dutch-German). In the period immediately following, however, the Windesheimers crossed the linguistic frontier and descended on Paris.

Throughout this period other phenomena make their appearance in the history of the Windesheimers. The already mentioned desire for a stricter enclosure persisted. Apart from the fifteen monasteries expressly mentioned by Busch, this enclosure was introduced in some form in the following foundations: Corsendonck, Elsinghem, Neuss, Nieuwlicht in Hoorn and Leiderdorp.⁵ This inclusio gave rise to various problems, which were resolved by the general chapter: for example, Brothers from enclosed monasteries who were transferred to houses which were not enclosed, had to retain the enclosure of their

¹ Acta Capituli 70; Acquoy 176.
² Acta Capituli 74; Acquoy 177, 178.
³ Acta Capituli 80, 81; Acquoy 180, 181.
⁵ Acta Capituli 27, 41, 48.
own monastery, but the *visitatores* would determine the bounds of the enclosed space.¹ The members of the chapter desired to be kept informed on this phenomenon and decreed in 1453 that all enclosed monasteries should acquaint the chapter before the next meeting with the form taken by their enclosure.² In any case the enclosure, once granted, had to be strictly observed.³

A concept which did not occur officially among the *fraters* is that of the *fugitivi* or *apostatae*, monastics who abandoned the monastic life, who simply left to take up another post elsewhere, often as a secular priest. Here the difference between the canons and the *fraters* is revealed. From a legal point of view any member of the Brotherhood was free to leave if he wished, even though his departure was made financially difficult. According to the Annals of the Brotherhouse of Hildesheim several of the *fraters* left their house without anyone going in pursuit. They were not considered as fugitives or apostates. We can thus easily understand Erasmus when, speaking of the pressure exerted on him to remain with the Brothers of 's-Hertogenbosch, he sighed: 'If only I had done so!' He would then be free now, but a monastic vow was much more difficult to evade. Anyone leaving his monastery without permission was held to be a fugitive and had to be brought back forcibly and against his will and lodged in the monastery prison to await his punishment. This absconding was a fairly constant problem in the fifteenth century, and may be partly explained by the great numbers of monastics and by the ease with which people were admitted. The Windesheim monasteries did not escape this phenomenon and the *fugitivi* or *apostatae* regularly come up for discussion in the general chapter.⁴ The attitude towards these persons was expressed in 1442: ‘That the *apostatae* and *profugi* of our houses, wherever they are found, should be placed under strong custody at the expense of the house to which they belong.’ The monastery superiors, the priors and prioresses, had to provide a *cella carceralis* - a cell furnished as a prison.⁵ All *vagi* and fugitives who were unable to produce their prior's permission to be away, had to be placed under heavy guard and their names sent to the appropriate prior, who was responsible for the expenses; one French crown per week.⁶ The

¹ *Acta Capituli*, 50.
⁴ *Acta Capituli* 26, 37, 38, 43, 47, 57, 67, 77.
⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.
monastery superiors considered themselves well rid of such persons and often acted as though they had never heard of such a *profugus*. The chapter, however, impressed upon them the wrongfulness of this attitude.¹

The *fugitivi* lost their vote in the chapter of their own monastery and could only regain it by decree of the general chapter.²

Still worse were the rebels, those who wrote or complained in an unreasonable manner or opposed particular rules. They too could be thrown into prison and the general chapter decided on their fate.³

All this in no way signifies laxity or retrogression. Mistakes do occur in such an enormous complex; however, it sufficiently characterizes the spirit of the order. The chapter's authority is considerable and this partly explains the fear of the Hildesheim Brotherhouse that the *colloquium* of Münster and the rector of Münster would imitate the Windesheim chapter in these matters. The whole constituted an important power within the church and it is clear that they preferred to communicate directly with the pope,⁴ avoiding the episcopal authority as much as possible. They accordingly preferred privileges such as that which decreed that they need not admit anyone to their monastery on the recommendation of a prince, for example the bishop at his first entry.⁵ The prior of the monastery of Basle was not allowed to oppose the pope in 1484.⁶ It may be explained by their preoccupation with maintaining the proper spirit, which led them to hold themselves entirely aloof from the parish pastoral work. On the incorporation of the monastery of Hamersleben, in the diocese of Halberstadt, the *visitatores* had to ensure that the canons there relinquished their pastoral duties with the parish church and school to another institution (1456).⁷ The general chapter of 1483 forbade the priors and members to allow the incorporated parish churches to be served by Brothers from the monastery. They had to leave this work to the secular clergy.⁸ At the incorporation of the monastery of Hessenhuis it was also decreed that the parish church must be served by secular priests.⁹

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¹ *Acta Capituli*, 57, 77.
² Ibid., 66.
³ Ibid., 50, 52, 55, 66, 76.
⁴ Ibid., 79.
⁶ *Acta Capituli* 79.
⁷ Ibid., 54. The text reads: *ad domum*, this should be: *et domum*.
⁸ Ibid., 78.
⁹ Ibid., 79.

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A somewhat more joyful spirit among the heads of orders is evident from their anxiety to ensure that the monastics, even the enclosed, should have their daily walk and that they should be allowed recreation after bloodletting. This more cheerful mood may also perhaps be manifested in the holidays, which were held in 1458 and 1459.\(^1\) Only one day is mentioned, but three holidays are assumed in 1458.\(^2\) Three holidays of a day each is not expressly stated, but this will have been intended. In 1465 there is even mention of a holiday list (\textit{tabula vacantiarum}), approved by the chapter.\(^3\)

None the less, life must have been a pretty gloomy affair. Even organ accompaniment was forbidden during the many religious exercises,\(^4\) nor was it permissible to play the organ in the dormitory in order to wake the canons.

The large number of widely scattered monasteries of the Windesheim congregation may be viewed on the one hand as the fruits of the so-called aspiration to monastic reform, to union and collaboration with the already ‘reformed’ institutions, to observance of the monastic rule and stricter regulations, while on the other this desire for reformation and union is the force which impels the monastic movement and gives it direction. To the extent that Windesheim was implicated in this movement, this reformation can be considered to form part of the Modern Devotion and must therefore have its place in this book.

However, as we have, seen neither the first Windesheimers, nor the founders of the union of the first four monasteries, envisaged a campaign leading to the reformation of other monasteries. They took various measures to ensure that they themselves continued to observe the rule as well as possible. This must also have been the intention behind the collaboration and association of the Brabantine monasteries of Canons Regular, Groenendaal, Rooklooster, Korsendonck and Zeven Bronnen near Brussels in 1402 and the founding of the chapter of Neuss around the same time. Around 1400 it must also have become apparent to the leader of the Windesheim congregation that the observantism of the monasteries could be fostered, not only by the founding of new observant houses, but also by forming contacts with existing monasteries and by uniting these with their congregation. In this they were complying with the generally expressed desire for

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\(^1\) \textit{Acta Capituli}, 56.
\(^2\) \textit{Ibid.}, 57.
\(^3\) \textit{Ibid.}, 67.
\(^4\) \textit{Ibid.}, 66.

\textit{R.R. Post, The Modern Devotion}
reform in head and members. Their actions were henceforth directed towards this goal. One of the reasons why they received support and various privileges from the Council of Constance was certainly that the Council Fathers like Pierre d'Ailly and Gerson saw in these people a practical illustration and application of their ideals. Naturally enough, the Windesheimers confined themselves at first to their own order, and principally to monasteries which wished to be incorporated. In this they were not alone, even in the Netherlands. Something of the same aspiration revealed itself in the fourteenth century among the Dominicans, while the observance gained ground among the Franciscans. In addition Boyn, a Cistercian, Abbot of Ternunten, in his position as visitator, introduced a ‘monastic reform’ in certain monasteries; in Schola Dei near Aurich in 1412, in Bloemkamp in 1424 and around the same time in Yesse, near Groningen, and Aduard. The events of 1414 and succeeding years in the double monastery of Dikninge in Drente, which belonged to the Benedictine order, are significant. In this year the Benedictine abbot of St. Paul in Utrecht, visitator of the Drente monastery, in the bishop’s name, drew up certain reforming statutes for this institution. They were extremely flexible, however, leaving open the possibility of limited personal possessions and outings with visiting members of the family. These statutes, however, were not found satisfactory. John Wael, provost of the monastery of Bethlehem in Zwolle, which was associated with Neuss but not yet with Windesheim, was consulted. He then prescribed stricter statutes which may thus be indirectly attributed to the influence of the Modern Devotion.

The canons of Windesheim and the associated monasteries did the same, thus paving the way for the union. This is clear from the history of the monastery of Wittenburg in Lower Saxony, where Henry Loder and his confrère from the monastery of Frenswegen brought about a reform as early as 1423, that is, ten years before the union with Windesheim. Similarly the monastery of Riechenberg near Goslar, which was also the work of Henry Loder of Frenswegen, was ‘reformed’ in 1419 and incorporated with Windesheim in 1432. The monastery Domus S. Meinulphi at Bodiken in the diocese of Paderborn likewise joined Neuss in 1412 and was there incorporated with Windesheim in 1430. Arnold Huls, prior of Frenswegen, was then appointed prior.

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2 Ibid., I 360.
3 Acquoy III 89, 96, 59.
Apart from Windesheim, St. Agnietenberg and Frenswegen, the three aforementioned Saxon monasteries (Wittenburg, Reichenberg and Bodiken) were especially active in helping the Windesheim canon John Busch who became renowned as the ‘reformer of monasteries’ and propagandist of the Windesheim customs in Saxony, Thüringen and Brandenburg, through the publication of the accounts of his activities: Liber de reformatione monasteriorum.

John Busch, a pupil of the Zwolle school under John Cele, clothed in Windesheim in 1419, was caught up in this work as early as 1424. From this year until 1428 he helped to found and guide the monastery of Böddingen in the archdiocese of Cologne. The years 1429 to 1431 saw him working in Ludingerkerk in Friesland and afterwards with the Sisters in Bronopia, a post which he resigned at his own request in order to return to Windesheim. Finally, in 1436/7, he found his best field of activity. He became sub-prior in Wittenburg, near Hildesheim, and in 1440 was made prior of this monastery. He then, with a reforming party in Hildesheim, reformed a number of monasteries, two in Hildesheim and Lauterberg near Halle. From 1440 to 1448 he was provost of Sulta. In this year he was made provost of the monastery of Neuwerk near Halle (1448-1454), a diocesan function which temporarily severed his connection with Windesheim, although he continued his work of reform. He took part in the provincial synod at Magdeburg, convened by cardinal Nicolas of Cusa, and obtained from him authority to reform the monasteries of his order, employing secular help. He had earlier relied upon a general commission from the Council of Basle, given to Rembert, first prior in Wittenburg and to the prior superior of Windesheim, to visit and reform the monasteries of the Canons Regular in the dioceses of Hildesheim and Halberstadt and also in the dukedom of Brünswick. His reforming activities were interrupted in 1454 by a journey and a stay in Windesheim, where he was once again entrusted with the care of the Sisters, first in Diepenveen and later in Bronopia. It is during this period that he wrote his account of the Devotio Moderna and his Windesheim chronicle. In 1459 he left again for Saxony, became for the second time provost of Sulta near Hildesheim, worked there until 1479 and died shortly afterwards. During these years he was preoccupied with the reform of various monasteries, including some outside his order. In this he received

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2 Busch 759.

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powerful support from prior Paul of St. Maurice in Halle, and from various persons whom he had inspired with his ideal or who had come from the West, in Wittenburg, Riechenberg, Sulta and Bodiken. His account of these reforming activities provides a vivid description of conditions in various monasteries, of Busch's courageous and resourceful actions with regard to them, of the assistance he received from the bishops of Magdeburg, and Hildesheim, from duke Henry of Brunswick, from some canons and in certain places from the municipality. He met with considerable opposition, however, from the monks, Canons Regular and Sisters, especially from the Benedictines and Cistercianesses. His narrative is generally held to be reliable, although he will not have been above a certain distortion in his own favour! In the first place it is, to say the least, suspicious that he everywhere plays the principal and most sympathetic role. He is never at a loss in his dealings with princes, bishops, lawyers, theologians, preachers. Sometimes he seems to enter the realms of fantasy, when he writes of murder threats or of assaults prevented in the nick of time, of being lured into the cellar by nuns and their attempt to lock him up. Equally fantastic is his story of how Albrecht, Duke of Austria, later King of Bohemia and Rome's king-emperor from 1438 to 1439 as Albrecht II, himself helped to reform the monks of the Benedictine monasteries. This prince asked the abbot and the monks if they would keep the Rule of St. Benedict. Those who objected were allowed to go, but were taken by his soldiers outside the hall, led away and summarily hanged. Still, though despotism was capable of almost anything towards the end of the Middle Ages, and it was not unusual for rulers to intervene in church matters, Busch's story seems to me a little far-fetched.

Although we do not possess any other data with which to compare Busch's accounts, he appears to have painted a very dark picture of the situation before the introduction of his proposed reform. Once the monks or sisters have complied, not only piety and happiness return but prosperity as well. This last accords with Geert Groote's opinion that the monastics cost much more to keep separately, as individuals, than if the expenses of all are met as one community from the communal fund. Busch undoubtedly reformed many monasteries. He suggests in his reports that the three essential vows were neglected before the reform and kept after, but with few exceptions the details

1 Busch 481.  
2 Busch 735.  

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he mentions are concerned with personal property and matters which may be considered as externals of little significance: the introduction of the Windesheim customs and choir service; the same books, the same ceremonies; that the monks should wear the same clothes and perform the same gestures when praying before and after meals. No matter how obstinately the monks and nuns sometimes resisted, there seem to have been no great principles at stake, with the exception of communal possession which is essential for the continued survival of any monastic community.

Although Busch is careful to present his activities in a favourable light, he gives the impression of being a man obsessed, blind to all but one possibility and one goal. His ideal was Windesheim, the customs and the rule as applied there. He saw everything in black and white. Monks, canons and sisters who had lived their whole monastic life in a manner not approved by Busch, were forcibly driven on to the streets and left apparently without a roof over their heads, without a source of income. There may have been some among them who had made a mockery of the monastic life, or who even lived in sin. Busch is very reticent on this last point. His action had the general approval. Everywhere people were crying out for reform, which will, indeed, have been long overdue. But had this to be accomplished through the might of the temporal rulers and with no discrimination? It might have been a long, even an impossible task, to win over the monks and gradually persuade them to mend their ways. None the less, it seems to me a dangerous thing to have placed so much power in the hands of two persons, John Busch of Neuwerk and Paul, rector of St. Moritz, both small town monastery rectors. Where was the curb to this power? Was there a court of appeal, a well considered answer to the proposals?

Where lay the dividing line between what was necessary for the decree and what may be considered incidental? What were the permanent consequences of such compulsion? Up to the end of this period Windesheim and its ever-increasing congregations command respect for its consistent campaign for observance and monastic severity and integrity.

When, on April 11th, 1486, Pope Innocent VIII granted the privileges of the Lateran congregation to the congregation of Windesheim - which will probably not have been done motu proprio - the highest leaders of the chapter were considerably alarmed. They feared that the privileges granted in this bull would offer some the opportunity to

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slacken the reins of monastic observance. They introduced the desired change. This may prove the seriousness of their intentions and their care for their monasteries, but it also shows that their idea cannot be considered as the only right one. *Variis modis bene fit* might also hold good here. There were in the Netherlands two other chapters - Delft and Venlo - which owed their existence to the Modern Devotionalists but were not associated with Windesheim and still followed an extremely good observance. In addition there were numerous other foundations which remained independent. The reforming activity of the Benedictine monastery of Bursfeld may have had some contact with Windesheim in the very beginning, through John Dederoth in 1430, but it later followed its separate way. In Frenswegen, Windesheim and Haarlem, cardinal Nicolas of Cusa showed a distinct preference for the regulars, but he did not enlist their help in his admittedly half-hearted attempts to reform Egmond and various convents.

This zeal for observantism continued to preoccupy the monastic world in the 15th and 16th centuries. Nearly all the orders saw the rise of groups of observants, with separate unions forming here and there congregations with their own administration. Windesheim's influence on all this, however, was slight. Scenes such as Busch witnesses or provoked in Saxony also occurred in other orders. The desire for a stricter life appeared strong and vigorous everywhere, but in most cases the supporters of reform could only gain their way with the help of forcible measures on the part of the secular authorities. Their powers of conviction appeared negligible - whether they lacked sufficient appeal or simply because their opponents refused to allow themselves to be convinced. This shows the weakness of the movement. Most of the observants tended to paint their opponents as black as possible. In Egmond they did not scruple to alter the chronicle in their own favour.

As appears from Busch's reports and other accounts of the forcible introduction of the observance, this observantism not only led to an extremely small-minded preoccupation with externals, like the shape and colour of the habit and various niggling details in the daily routine, but often too to an exaggeration of the number of oral prayers and an over-estimation of the value of human effort and collaboration in the process of salvation. This is the attitude which accords with a

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theological concept which many then called ‘Pelagianism’. It is known that the Reformers opposed this supposed Pelagianism of the theologians of their time. Luther notably attacked observantism in the Augustinian monasteries, although he had originally been a supporter and even a leader of this movement before becoming disillusioned. This observantism as advocated by Busch and applied by him in various monasteries, even outside his own order, which also received support from the other Windesheimers, contributed to the growth of a rather Pelagian mentality and one which it was reasonable to oppose. To this extent John Busch's activities in this matter come within the scope of our investigation, as do those of the leaders of the order elsewhere, notably in the Netherlands. Moreover, his work in Germany led several monasteries to apply for incorporation in the Windesheim chapter.
Chapter Thirteen
Thomas a Kempis, the Author of The *Imitation.*
The Methodical Meditation. Wessel Gansfort's ascetic works. John Mombaer.

The most famous work on the ascetic life as it was practised by the Devotionalists and held up to many as an ideal, was written during this period by Thomas a Kempis. He was himself a Windesheimer, that is, a Canon Regular of the monastery of St. Agnietenberg near Zwolle, which formed part of the Windesheim congregation. As we have mentioned before, this boy from the Rhineland town of Kempen had come to Deventer in order to be educated at the city school. His brother John had done the same ten years earlier as did many others from the same place. The school was the attraction, not the Modern Devotion, but several of the school's pupils soon came in contact with the Brothers and subsequently became zealous adepts of the Modern Devotion. In this way Thomas, who must have been born around 1379, arrived in Deventer c. 1392 and attended the school there until 1399. At least, he still speaks of himself as a schoolboy in that year, which does not mean that he cannot already have been living with the Brothers. In this year he travelled to Zwolle in order to gain a special indulgence and at the same time visit his elder brother John who was then prior of the recently founded monastery on the St. Agnietenberg. He probably already intended joining the monastery. He appears in fact to have become a member of the monastery then, although it was not until 1406 that he was actually invested. He was about twenty years old at his entry in 1399, and had probably followed all the classes in Deventer, including the second and first, the two top classes. He was certainly well grounded in Latin and had some knowledge of philosophy, but he was entirely ignorant of theology. He was ordained priest in 1413-14 and fulfilled certain monastic functions, including that of procurator. This, however, lasted only a short time, since he proved unsuited for the post. He had more success as sub-prior and held this position for a considerable period. Unlike his brother and many canons of his monastery and order, he was never sent out to help set a new house on its feet or to reform an
old. He virtually never left the monastery, except from 1429 to 1431 when
the monastics were exiled and found refuge in Ludingakerk near Harlingen in Friesland,
and shortly afterwards when he spent some time in Mariaborn near Arnhem. On this
occasion John, the prior, was seriously ill and died soon after. From then on until his
death in 1471 he remained in the St. Agnietenberg. His superiors evidently respected
his desire for an uninterrupted sojourn in his cell, and at the same time gave him the
opportunity to introduce the novices to the Modern Devotion and to write his ascetic
works. Thomas also achieved an immense amount of copying work - his talent for
this had already been discovered in his youth. Among other things he copied two
Bibles, each in ten volumes; one of these is now in the library in Darmstadt\(^1\) and the
other in Utrecht. He was also responsible for various missals and choir books. In
addition, however, he was the author of a series of treatises or books, preached
frequently for the novices, composed a number of hymns and wrote historical works:
the \textit{Vita}e of Geert Groote, Florens Radewijns, John van de Gronde, John Brinckerinck
and of various other \textit{fraters}; a chronicle of the monastery on the St. Agnietenberg;
the life of St. Lidwina of Schiedam. His chief claim to fame, however, lies in his
pious treatises, all written in Latin with the exception of one small work.\(^2\) The most
important of these works, whose authenticity is generally accepted are: \textit{Orationes et
Meditationes de Vita Christi}\(^3\) and \textit{Meditationes de Incarnatione Christi}, with sermons
and prayers having reference to this subject: \textit{De tribus tabernaculis} (poverty, humility
and patience); \textit{De vera compunctione cordis}; \textit{Soliloquium animae}; \textit{Hortulus Rosarum;}
\textit{Vallis Liliorum}; \textit{Consolatio pauperum}.\(^4\) The four books or treatises which later came
to be known as the \textit{Imitatio Christi}\(^5\) are preserved with nine other small treatises in
an autograph which Thomas completed in 1441 and which is now in the Royal Library
in Brussels. These latter include: \textit{De elevatione mentis} and \textit{Brevis admonitio spiritualis
exercitii}.\(^6\) All these works deal with the subjects on which the Devotionalists like to
think, to meditate and to write, and in which they found comfort in their cells and at
their work; the life and passion of Christ, the moral virtue and the spiritual exercises.
Some are related to subjects which have

\begin{footnotes}
\begin{itemize}
\item[3] Pohl V.
\item[4] Pohl III.
\item[5] Pohl I.
\item[6] Pohl IV.
\item[7] Pohl II.
\item[8] Pohl II.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotes}
already been discussed here, like the three tabernacles and the Soliloquium. Others reveal the late medieval fondness for allegory: the Garden of Roses; the Valley of Lilies.

Like the writings of the Brothers Florens Radewijns and Gerard Zerbolt, all these works are concerned with practical asceticism. Thomas thus did not continue in the path embarked upon by Henry Mande and Gerlach Peters. Should one be tempted to conclude from the works of these two writers that any contrast existed between the spirituality of the Windesheimers and that of the fraters, a perusal of Thomas’s writings would show the fallacy of such a conclusion, as indeed his contemporary John of Heusden, prior of Windesheim, had already done before. Thomas indicates in many ways how the devout man must order his life so as to do God's will and gain heaven. The way of purification and the way of illumination are given in all their variations, but Thomas is silent on the complete union of the mystic with God while still on earth, the contemplation of a mystic. No matter how sublime the dialogue of the soul with God in the third book of the Imitatio and in the Soliloquium, it is not yet the language of the mystic in ecstasy as in Ruusbroec or in Henry Mande and Gerlach Peters. There does however, seem to be one exception. In the small work De elevatione mentis, Thomas does appear to speak the language of the exalted mystic, of the soul in contemplation of God, and that from his own experience. However, in my opinion, there are valid grounds for disputing this presumed exception.

What we now know as the Imitation of Christ is a collection of four treatises which Thomas intended as separate opuscula. They were circulated separately and also appeared in different manuscripts, or at least in a sequence different from that with which we are familiar. The content accords with the other works of Thomas a Kempis and in general with what we know of the Devotionalists. The first three treatises are exhortations to a retreat from the world, to the practice of humility, obedience, purity and poverty, perpetual communication with God, with Christ and with the saints, and the keeping alive of the good intention by repeated or constant reflection on Christ's life and passion and on the four last things. These treatises, however, and especially the first three, are more successful than Thomas's other works. They excel by their depth of thought, by the ardour of the love expressed therein, and by their varied and unaffected, comparatively simple but rhythmical style. Everything is set down without any thought-out system, but only as it seemed good to the author. The
beauty of the style, the simplicity of the language, the depth of thought and the loftiness of the ideal, which is made to seem within easy reach - all these factors have contributed to making these treatises into one of the masterpieces of the religious literature of the world. It is a book which is constantly in demand and is thus continually being republished and translated. The very excellence of this work has helped to give rise to and sustain the doubt about the authorship of Thomas a Kempis, a simple canon of the St. Agnietenberg, living in a barbarous country which at this time had produced so little academic, religious or literary work. The author himself did nothing to dispel this doubt, for he never published this or any of his other treatises in his own name. When he had finished the work, or even before, a fellow Brother was allowed to copy it, use it for meditation, or even pass it on to friends who copied it in their turn. Who could stop the dissemination of the book after this. The work was thus published in the medieval fashion. Thomas did not even sign his autograph, an unsightly little book written in tiny script, as being from his own hand, but only certified that it was completed and ready, thereby leaving even modern critics doubtful. On the other hand the appreciation for this work aroused the desire to know who had written it - and this problem is still being debated up to the present day. When Thomas's name was mentioned as author during his lifetime, many will have found this difficult to accept, since people were so accustomed to ascribe certain successful works to people like Augustine, Bernard and Bonaventure. These were moreover the first offerings from this unknown author, for we must assume that Thomas had completed the treatises of the *Imitation* before his fiftieth year. The first book appears in a dated manuscript of 1424 and in another of 1425, while all four treatises occur in two dated manuscripts of 1427 (those of Gaesdonk and Nijmegen).

It may perhaps be said that Thomas wrote his best works while in the prime of life. The doubts entertained by some scholars concerning the authenticity of various treatises is no world-shaking matter, but the question of the authorship of what we now call the *Imitation of Christ* has been disputed for centuries. Towards the end of the Middle Ages this book, or these four treatises, were attributed to various authors, but gradually three parties emerged. One was composed principally of Italians (and later

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1 J. Huyben et P. Debongnie, *L'auteur ou les auteurs de l'imitation*, Louvain 1957, 4-5.

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the Frenchman Puyot) who propose Giovanni Gersen (Gesen or Gessen) as the author, a man who is thought to have been abbot of the Benedictine monastery of Santo Stefano in Vercelli, Northern Italy. Others, Frenchmen in the main, suggested the chancellor of the University of Paris in the beginning of the 14th century, Jean Gerson, whose name is suspiciously like that of the Italian candidate. The south and north Netherlands, and many Germans, consider Thomas a Kempis as the author, although he has had competition in the past forty years from Geert Groote. Since the French are no longer so active in recent times, and Geert Groote has lost ground to his pupil, Thomas a Kempis, one may now speak of two fronts-Italians backing Giovanni Gersen and the Kempists, as they are called, who support Thomas a Kempis.

It will not be out of place here to give a short summary of the present state of affairs. Although these two fronts had long been opposed, the struggle flared up anew in 1924. Now, however, the situation and the issue were completely different. On the basis of a comparison of the *Imitation* with other works by Thomas a Kempis, J. van Ginneken, S.J. professor of the University of Nijmegen and a well known philologist, found that Thomas could not possibly be the author of the four books of the *Imitation*, and that no one among the Devotionalists would have been capable of such an achievement but Geert Groote, the founder of the Modern Devotion. Soon afterwards his thesis received support in the form of the announcement, and subsequent publication, of a manuscript from Lübeck by Paul Hagen. This manuscript contained Books II and III as a whole in a shortened form and written in Low German. For van Ginneken and others this was the original, ‘die Urschrift’, of the *Imitation*. Van Ginneken knew precisely how the whole thing had come about. During the period which Geert Groote spent in the monastery of Monnikhuizen, he was under the spiritual direction of Henry Egher of Calcar. Here he wrote a journal, which is preserved in the first book of the *Imitation*. Afterwards he wrote Books II and III which were slightly corrected by Gerard Zerbolt and set in rhythmical prose by H. Egher. Thomas a Kempis, finally, would have given the finishing touches to the text, which would explain why he came to be considered as the author. Later, Thomas's role was confined to that of a simple copyist. A. Hyma, who had already displayed a particular preference for Gerard Zerbolt, modified van Ginneken's thesis by postulating Gerard Zerbolt as author of all three or four books. For him too, Thomas
had no longer any claim as author. He was a copyist of the *Imitation*. He had indeed shown particular skill as a copyist.

Van Ginneken perfected his thesis by drawing up a stemma of texts with the aid of a list of variants previously compiled by Ed. Puyol. He did this first for the first book and later for the second and third. With the help of certain dated manuscripts and many derivations, he could show particular texts as proceeding directly from the hand of Geert Groote and others as being the work of Gerard Zerbold and Henry Eger. Finally he published the so-called pre-Kempist texts of the first book and also a biography of Geert Groote compiled from a series of sources or extracts from such documents. In this way his candidate's life was adapted to his theory.

This all looked very imposing, but many scholars, both in the Netherlands and outside, remained unimpressed. Opposition arose from all quarters. It was pointed out that this theory did not accord with certain data from the life of Geert Groote; that the dates of van Ginneken's textual stemma were unacceptable; that the entire stemma relied much too much on subjective impressions; that the resemblance of the *Imitation* to Groote's other writings was much less than to those of Thomas a Kempis; that the theory had no historical basis in fact; that van Ginneken had suppressed all 15th century references to the authorship of Thomas a Kempis; that he had never studied Thomas's autograph; and more objections in this vein. Van Ginneken was not backward in answering his opponents. Until his death in 1946 he tirelessly carried on the fight through publications intended to confirm, adapt or modify his opinion and effectively silence all those who thought differently. No holds were barred. After his death some of his pupils, admirers and convinced supporters continued to defend, elucidate and modify van Ginneken's theory up to the years 1956 and 1957, when L.M.J. Delaisé published his codicological investigations on the autograph of Thomas a Kempis and P. Debongnie wrote and...

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published a comprehensive and detailed work - based on the foundations laid by J. Huyben which the latter's early death had prevented him from completing. By a very careful examination of the writing material, of the conjugation of the pages, of the script and of alterations made by Thomas a Kempis before 1441, Delaissé proved that Thomas considered the thirteen treatises in the manuscript in question as works of which he was the author. He was thus entitled to do as he wished with them and make any corrections he esteemed necessary. This holds good notably for the four books of the *Imitation*, which occur here as separate treatises and in a somewhat different sequence from that which later became common (Book IV comes before Book III). The plan and aim of the work of Huyben and Debongnie are entirely different from that of Delaissé, but perhaps even more convincing for many. As is usual in studies on disputed or unknown medieval authors, Debongnie begins by assembling, explaining and commenting on the testimony provided by various writers, manuscripts of library catalogues and the earliest bibliographers. At the outset, until around 1470, such testimony is rare, and not unanimous. Then, however, Thomas a Kempis begins to gain ground rapidly and appears to be in the lead, towards the end of the century, although Jean Gerson gained support in certain circles. To my mind these data provide sufficient proof that Thomas a Kempis must have been the author of the *Imitation*. I can, however, appreciate that not all moderns are convinced. There are two reasons for this. In the first place one might be tempted to assume the rapid growth of a legend, without sufficient historical foundation; secondly, due to the broken tradition and especially to the non-dating of these manuscripts, too much argument is necessary to explain why Thomas is mentioned as author only in this copy and not in another. If, however, one adds to the data and conclusions assembled and discussed by Huyben and Debongnie the results of Delaissé's investigation - as, indeed, Debongnie himself has already done, since Delaissé had allowed him to read the proofs of his book, the conclusion in favour of Thomas a Kempis appears reasonable.

The largest section of Debongnie's book is concerned with the modern theories of van Ginneken and Hyma, and the author repeatedly points out that these are based solely upon so-called internal critical

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arguments, in which subjective perception or, as van Ginneken expressly states, intuition, plays, if not an essential, at least a considerable role. Spurred on by the methodical remarks of Udny Yule, concerning the application of variants and the conclusions to be drawn therefrom, Debongnie, like Yule, who had to some extent preceded him in this field, arrives at a different stemma of the *Imitation* texts and at more reliable dates. On the basis of these he denies that any texts of one of the *Imitation* treatises can be proved to have existed at the time of Geert Groote and Gerard Zerbolt. On the contrary, he can shift the *terminus post quem* to 1393, and prove moreover that the Lübeck manuscript published by P. Hagen is not the original of the second and third treatise of the *Imitation* but a ‘corrected version’ *(remaniement)*. Utilizing Delaissé’s conclusions, he has compared what he considers to be the earliest text with the autograph and was able to prove that they completely correspond. With this he has already made a beginning with Delaissé’s desired comparison of his findings concerning the autograph with the existing manuscripts. This comparison reveals that some of the variants must not be attributed to slovenliness or mistakes on the part of the copyist, but result from corrections made by Thomas himself. Debongnie finally, sees no resemblance between the ideas, style, language and manner of quotation of the *Imitation* and those of Geert Groote, and ends with a comparison of the *Imitation* with Thomas's other works. He recognises that the *Imitation* is far superior to Thomas's other works both in form and content, but feels that the difference should not be exaggerated. He then gives his own explanation of the distinction. Most of the other works were either commissioned or requested, or arose from the function which Thomas held. The treatises of the *Imitation*, on the other hand, proceed from a purely personal inner compulsion. They result from his own meditation on and with the many texts which Thomas had collected in his *rapiarium*. Debongnie also points out that a similar phenomenon - an inequality of work in persons of world fame - occurs with such celebrated authors as Augustine and Dante.

I should not care to say that these books have silenced all opposition. B. Slaapen¹ especially has put forward various reasons why it is impossible to deduce Thomas's authorship from his work on the autograph. In my opinion one should not splinter the problem into

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too many separate questions, but review and judge as a whole the conclusions of the two aforementioned Belgian authors. In any case the struggle died down after 1957, although the last word has not been said by any means. The theories of v. Ginneken still have fervent supporters, including Mr. and Mrs. F. and L. Kern, and Louisa Veldhuis.

The advocates of Giovanni Gersen consider their position to be at least as strong. This appears from the two-volume work of Pier-Giovanni Bonardi, C.P. and Tiburzio Lupo, S.D.B. which appeared in 1965.¹ This book is a completely revised edition of an earlier work by Bonardi which came out in 1938.² The author, unfortunately, died while it was being printed. The finishing touches thus became the sole responsibility of Tiburzio Lupo S.D.B., who wrote a small work in 1960 on the same subject.³

Both authors are well acquainted with the questions under dispute and with what has been written on the subject in various countries during the past few years. They are convinced that the *Imitation* is not a collection of four treatises, but one work consisting of four books forming a coherent whole. It is indeed noteworthy how the earliest manuscripts found in Italy give the four treatises in their modern sequence. This being so, it is understandable that the two authors begin their book with an exposition of the *Imitation* as containing the purifying, illuminating and unifying ways of the soul with God - whereby the Eucharist strengthens the unity of the third book. It is also important to stress that a Benedictine spirit breathes from the *Imitation*, since in their opinion the author was a Benedictine. They devote a chapter to the Benedictine character, just as they favour similar opinions, most of them partly expressed in words, by certain writers who share their views. Some of these opinions are unsympathetic, sometimes even arousing mistrust of the authors' learning. It is scarcely fair to the *Devotio Moderna* to repeat frequently that this movement did not produce any canonized saint. Here the authors are confusing canonization with spiritual sanctity and suggesting that such a movement was incapable of bringing forth a devout work like the *Imitation*. The following passage also gives cause for mistrust: Noi aggiungiamo che la *Devotio Moderna* è oggi da parecchi studiosi con-

2 *L'autore italiano dell’Imitazione di Cristo, Giovanni Gersen*, Biella 1938.
3 *Validità della tesi gerseniana sull'autore della ‘Imitazione di Cristo’* *Biblioteca de Salesianum* no. 54, Torino S.E. 7, 1960.

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siderata come l'\textit{humus} da cui germoglio la Riforma luterana. Lutero del resto era stato allievo Fratelli della Vita comune a Magdeburgo e ad Eisenach; da tali scuole uscirono pure Erasmo, che fu poi per quattro anni canonico regolare a Steyn; Wessel Gansfort, da cui Lutero ebbe a dire che concordava pienamente in tutto con lui; Alberto Risaeus, detto Hardenberg, autore di una vita Wesseli, che negli ultimi suoi anni passò al protestantismo. Si sa inoltre che le cosiddette idee conciliari furono patrocinati dai priori de Windesheim nei concili di Costanza e di Basilea.\footnote{Bonardi-Lupo, 46, 225-226.}

A considerable amount of argument is necessary to render in any way acceptable the idea not only that Giovanni Gersen is the author of the \textit{Imitatio} but even that he ever existed, and occupied the position of abbot of the monastery of Santo Stefano in Vercelli. Lupo and Bonardi attempt to bolster up their theory by proving that the name Gersen was fairly common in a place near Vercelli (Cavaglia) and that there is a space left blank in the list of abbots between 1220 and 1243. It would thus be possible for a Giovanni Gersen to have existed and even to have been abbot of Santo Stefano in Vercelli between 1220 and 1243. His name is first mentioned as abbot outside the codices around 1500, when some already attributed the \textit{Imitation} to this hypothetical man. If he ever did exist and become abbot, the modern writers appear to be able to mould this unknown Benedictine into a suitable author of the \textit{Imitation}: he is a Benedictine, devout and possessing a fluent style, averse to philosophy at a time when philosophy was blooming. This is in contrast to Thomas a Kempis whose life and background are reasonably familiar, so that it is possible to compare them with what we learn from the \textit{Imitation}. It is thus that the two Italians raise all sorts of objections to the arguments employed by Huyben and Debongie and by Delaissé, by making use of details from the \textit{Imitation} which cannot be reconciled with what Thomas a Kempis writes in other books. Generally speaking, Bonardi and Lupo seem surer of their ground in fighting the Kempists than in proving that Giovanni Gersen is the real author. For this last theory they have no other proof than that twelve codices name him as the author, while eighteen mention Thomas a Kempis or at least a Canon Regular. Are there any grounds for believing the first group rather than the second? Not surely the fact that Bonardi and Lupo succeed in detecting more Italianisms in the \textit{Imitation} than the Kempists Dutch linguistic influ-

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ences! One of the Italians' great difficulties is their insistence that the *Imitation* must already have been written before 1243, whereas there are no manuscripts of the work dated earlier than a century and a half after the death of this writer. They can of course cite the example of other books, with which something similar occurred, but in so doing they omit to take into account the nature of the work, a pious work written in the period when many libraries were being founded in universities and monasteries, and in which there was considerable interest in this sort of literature. How did it happen then that the book remained in obscurity for a century and a half, and then suddenly sprang into prominence? How is it that the spiritual writers of the thirteenth and the first three-quarters of the fourteenth century never quote the *Imitation*?

Finally, the Italians emerge from the realm of speculation to give facts, or what they esteem as facts. Everything depends on the period in which some undated manuscripts were written. They reproach Huyben and Debongnie with keeping only to the dated manuscripts. In their opinion it is possible to put a certain date on several undated manuscripts with the aid of paleography and textual notes and they proceed to do so in their second volume, which gives the *Documentazioni*. They first publish a list of the *Codici Italiani*, dating the first nine, which are all undated, as follows: *De Advocatis* (Vercelli) Archivio Capitolare (Metropolitano) 1280-1330; *Cavensis*, fourteenth century; then one between 1330-1360 and five for which the first year suggested is before 1400. 1 It is clear that Thomas a Kempis cannot be the author of the *Imitation*, if any one of the dates suggested by the authors for these nine manuscripts can be proved correct. For Thomas was not born until 1379-80 and can certainly not have written anything of the *Imitation* before 1400. The two Italian authors state precisely and honestly which persons have studied the script of the undated manuscripts. The fact emerges that a considerable difference of opinion exists among extremely well-known paleographers. It will not do, however, to state uncompromisingly in the list of manuscripts that a particular manuscript dates from the fourteenth century. If certain specialists say that such and such a document was written, for example, between 1380 and 1420, then the possibility is not entirely excluded that Thomas a Kempis might be the author. There are really only three manuscripts to be considered according to the dating given by

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1 Bonardi-Lupo II, 1.
Lupo and Bonardi: *De Advocatis* (1280-1330), *Cavensis* (14th century), and *Aronensis* (1330-1360). The dating of *Cavensis* is based on a seventeenth century witness and upon the testimony of the librarian of the Abbey of Cavense, but Denifle is of the opinion that the manuscript dates from the second half of the 15th century. The *Aronensis* is a very disputed case; Huyben and Debongnie speak of ‘écriture archaisante’ - which is not very satisfactory. Udny Yule has devoted particular study to this manuscript and considers it later than the Transalpine. In his opinion it can not be dated before 1436. Bonardi and Lupo, however, disagree. The history of the *De Advocatis* manuscript is not entirely clear. Moreover, when this codex was found and published in 1830, some pages from a diary (*Diario*) were discovered in which it was stated that Joseph de Advocatis presented this codex to his brother on Sunday, the fifteenth of February, 1349. If this statement is true it would mean that this codex with all four books of the *Imitation* is earlier than 1349, which would disqualify Thomas a Kempis altogether! This report affected public opinion in 1833 like a bolt from the blue. Several feared that they would have to abandon their Kempist convictions. Closer investigation in Paris, however, revealed that some would be more inclined to place the codex in the sixteenth than in the fourteenth century. Several consider the *Diario* to be a modern forgery, but Bonardi and Lupo violently contest this opinion. Without entering into particulars I can merely say that the facsimile published by them gives a deliberately clumsy impression, chiefly because certain letters and even entire words project either above the normal line or below it. Furthermore, I can find no grounds in the arguments of the two Italian authors for ignoring the objections of certain eminent French scholars: J.B. Gence, Librarian of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, and J.B. Malou. In any case it is impossible to accept the list given by the two Italians without constantly having to refer back to what the book says about these codices. The list is naturally specific and the dates express what Bonardi and Lupo have gleaned from the opinions of others. This entire question proves once again how slight is our knowledge of the history of writing in the late Middle Ages and how little certainty exists in this field.

Within the scope of their two volumes, Lupo and Bonardi have

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1 Bonardi-Lupo, II 15.

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completely initiated us into the controversy surrounding the authorship of the *Imitation* and put forward what appear to me quite feasible objections to the works of Huyben, Deboncnie and Delaissé. It is not sufficient, however, to forsake Thomas a Kempis and accept the completely unknown Giovanni Gersen as author. It has not even been proved with certainty that the latter ever existed and that he was abbot of Santo Stefano in Vercelli between 1220 and 1243; there is no place for him in the list of abbots any later than this. A few codices, mostly preserved in Italy, which mention a Giovanni Gersen as author, are not sufficient grounds for accepting that the *Imitation* was written at such an early date, with all the resultant difficulties. The possibility indeed exists that this abbot Giovanni Gersen only appeared as an incorrect reading of Jean Gerson who is also proposed as author in the 15th century codices. I thus feel justified in considering the *Imitation*, originally consisting of four treatises, to be a work of the Modern Devotion. It can therefore be used to describe the devotion and ideas of the *Devotio Moderna*, in this case, of the Canons Regular.

Nevertheless, the contents of the *Imitation of Christ* are difficult to analyse or to evaluate properly. The first three books differ considerably and yet there is an underlying unity. All four were written for monastics and specifically for monasteries of the contemplative life. From the negative point of view this means that the reader finds no exhortation to pastoral care, to preaching for the faithful or for particular groups of the faithful, for example, schoolboys. R. Cruysberghs, however, has rightly pointed out that much that is given in the first books can be of value in active pastoral work and is thus profitable.1 From the positive point of view, the monastic virtues are described and recommended. For the most part these are the same virtues that we find among the Brothers: humility, prudence, obedience, mutual love, diligence. The author gives in addition the means to practise these virtues insofar as this is dependent on human effort: the reading of holy books (the Bible, the Fathers, and later religious writers), various religious exercises, meditation and ‘rumination’ on the life and passion of Christ, on death, judgment and punishment for sin. Not to delight in vanities, not to speak overmuch, to bear with the faults of fellow Brothers. All this is clear in the first book or the treatise, *qui sequitur me*. The second book, or the treatise, *Regnum Dei intra nos est*, undoubtedly devotes more attention to the inner devotion.

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and conversation with Christ, but here too he speaks of humble submission, consideration of self, the good intention and the pure conscience. Love of Christ, however, is more positively evinced than in the first book, even above all things; friendship with Jesus, but also love of His cross; the carrying of the cross is the via regia.¹ In the third book or treatise, the book on interior consolation, he (the author) begins by calling happy the soul and the senses which hear the Lord spoken of and which are intent only on interior things. God's word must be hearkened to with humility. The effect of the divine love can be great, but not without humility and contempt for man himself. The world too must be despised, which requires that human desires should be suppressed. Obedience too is a condition for understanding the divine dictates. Man must seek all his consolation in God and rely on God alone in every human difficulty. All temporal wretchedness and the injustice done to us is nothing compared with Christ's suffering. We must be gratefully mindful of God's benefits, but not be excessively curious about the life hereafter. Then follow considerations on prayer, hope, and again on controlling the desires, on giving oneself to God, on humiliation, on contempt for temporal honours, on the rejection of worldly learning, on forbearance, and again the exhortation not to rely on one's own works but only on the grace of God. Chapter XLIII, against vain and worldly learning, has met with a fair amount of criticism among modern scholars (including P. Mesnard). This pessimism would be fatal to human activities in the field of learning.² Everything is indeed attributed to God, who will teach all things: to despise earthly things, to loathe things present, to seek and relish things eternal, to flee honours, to avoid scandals, to place all hope in God, to desire nothing outside Him and above all things to love Him ardently, for anyone who loves Him entirely learns wonderful things. He makes more progress by forsaking all things than by studying subtleties.³ This text is not the only one in which Thomas speaks of learning as inferior to self-knowledge and contempt for the world.⁴ Thomas indeed, was in no way an academic. He had only completed the Latin school and had no more personal experience than the Brothers of university theological studies. And even if he knew

¹ Ed. M.J. Pohl, Thomae Hemerken a Kempis Opera omnia II, Freiburg 1904. Thomas's autograph gives the third treatise in the fourth place.
² R. Cruysberghs, Thomas a Kempis en de priester, Leuven 1953, 166-168.
³ Chapter XLIII, Pohl 221.
⁴ Various texts in Cruysberghs 153.

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from hearsay what theology was about or had read a few books, the actual practice of learning lay outside him. Love of God and with it contempt for the world were for him the true life. For him learning distracted from God and showed that the world was not sufficiently despised, although he admitted that learning or some simple knowledge of reality was in itself good and ordained by God. Statements like: ‘If thou didst know the whole Bible by heart, and the sayings of all the philosophers, what would it all profit thee without the love of God and His grace?’ prove that he had little esteem for such knowledge. It is noteworthy that he seems to delight in employing the concept of learning in a pejorative context, for example: ‘Learning without love and grace’ or ‘Learning without the fear of God,’ or ‘if I should know everything that was in the world,’ etc. and had not love, what would it help me for God. But what if learning should be linked with the love of God? Thomas never speaks of this - perhaps he does not consider it possible. This depreciation of the practice of learning is according to the spirit expressed by Geert Groote in his resolutions, but which he did not apply in his life. This standpoint expressed by Thomas a Kempis and which the Brothers shared, rendered them less than receptive to Humanism. The amazing thing is that this monastic devotion, this essentially medieval contemptus mundi, should have found so much appreciation in the christian world that the Imitation has remained constantly in demand, being translated and published again and again. It is probably the simplicity, the matter-of-factness with which this after all difficult way of life is presented, which makes it so attractive to reflect upon. It is indeed easier to agree with the way of life proposed and to see in it one's own ideal, than to put into practice these seemingly simple rules. Many too who are in spiritual distress find support in the consolation, peace, the love and hope which breathe from the Imitation of Christ.

The fourth book or the fourth treatise has a completely different theme: the Last Supper, communion, the Mass and the sacraments in general, whereas the Sacraments are scarcely mentioned in the other books. It has even been said that here a Catholic devotion is contrasted with the other, which might be esteemed as Protestant. This, however, is to push matters to extremes and to introduce distinctions that do not in reality exist. Just as outward ceremony is not excluded.

1 IC. 3n. 4. Cruysberghs, 139, 140.
in the first book, so must inner devotion be present at the receiving of the Sacrament. Thomas therefore begins his remarks on Communion with a description of the reverence with which Christ must be received: after an examination of conscience and mindful of God's goodness and love. The fruits of the Sacrament must incite the faithful to prepare themselves well. Thomas respects the status of the priest and recognises in the Mass a definite link with Christ's sacrifice on the cross, the commemoration of the mysteries of salvation from Christ's life. This explains why the Devotionalists were recommended to meditate during the Mass on Christ's life and passion, and why Thomas urges frequent communion. The Devotionalists were accustomed to communicate about every fortnight and on various feast days. Thomas says that Holy Communion is not lightly to be omitted, but that on the contrary they should ardently desire it, precisely for the sake of union with Christ and the blessings which this confers. This purely sacramental attitude on Thomas's part does not prevent him from reiterating in this treatise that the grace of devotion is obtained through humility and rejection of self. He ends by warning that men should not search too curiously into this Sacrament, but humbly imitate Christ by submitting the senses to holy faith. This is typically Thomas: humility, curiosity to be restrained, faith to predominate.

Although Thomas a Kempis lived a retired life in the St. Agnietenberg near Zwolle and as sub-prior devoted himself to fostering and intensifying the piety of his Brothers, he was not so cut off from the world that he did not receive visits from the neighbouring city - notably from the few intellectuals then resident in Zwolle.

Among these was Wessel Gansfort, who taught in the city school between 1440 and 1449, and displayed great interest in anything which might enrich his youthful heart and mind. A youth with a fresh and enquiring mind, knowing little more than the Latin school with the two top classes, joined in friendship with a sixty year old monk, ignorant of philosophy and theology but full of experience of the monastic life, innately devout, meditative and detached from the world. It is not to be assumed that Wessel learned much from Thomas, but he was deeply impressed by him and remained so all his life. When he returned to the Netherlands after twenty-five years of study in Cologne, Heidelberg, Louvain and Paris, and having conversed with the most eminent scholars of the time, he again visited the monastery on the St. Agnietenberg. There he now met a young canon from Brussels, John Mombaer, intellectually curious and diligent, a tireless collector
of texts and thoughts. Now the roles are reversed. Wessel is the master and the young monk pays heed to him. They were not concerned with theology and philosophy, but with the necessity for devotion, the difficulty of acquiring and retaining it which demanded greater knowledge and a method of meditation. A youth of a twenty-five (born in 1460), before 1486 or 1483, (since Wessel included a text from Mombaer in a book published in one of those years), John Mombaer was able to show Wessel a certain method of prayer and meditation which was called scalae - ladders.¹ Wessel was already acquainted with these ‘ladders’ in the development of theological reflection and meditation. Earlier authors, notably John Climachus, had set the Devotionalists an example in this. It was a good method of reviewing the various aspects of a fact or thesis step by step. Wessel also discovered these scalae in the Holy Scriptures. As we shall shortly see, he drew up a rather complicated Scala Meditatoria, as he says in the foreword of an Exemplum, before he had seen the ladders and the Chiropsalterum of John Mombaer. His scala must have been compiled later than January 25th 1486, and naturally, before his death on October 4th, 1489.² Wessel seems at that time to have seen Mombaer's projects and been influenced by them in completing his other books while conversely, John Mombaer included Wessel's scala meditatoria in his Rosetum, which appeared for the first time in 1491. Thus they underwent a mutual influence through personal contact on the St. Agnietenberg near Zwolle and through an exchange of writings.³

Wessel wrote four works which might be described as ascetic, being concerned with prayer and in particular with meditative prayer.⁴ To take first: De oratione et modo orandi.⁵ This comprehensive work consists of eleven volumes, of which ten deal with the meaning of the Our Father. Part I serves as an introduction in which Wessel discusses prayer in general and the purity of prayer. The first point he takes is distraction in prayer. It consists of a wandering of the mind which is preoccupied with all sorts of things other than prayer. Involuntary

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² A.J. Persijn, Wessel Gansfort, De oratone dominica in een dietsche bewerking, Assen, 1964, 42.
⁴ See p. 481.
⁵ Opera 1-191: the exposition of the Our Father appeared in a modern edition with Old Dutch translation, by A.J. Persijn o.c.
distraction can promote humility and thus be a means of acquiring grace. It can be fought by the use of numbers, but particularly by love. The purity of prayer requires a good intention and attentiveness, which need not be expressed. Too many psalms and long prayers are bad and in conflict with the first requirement. Attentive prayer requires the activity of the memory, the understanding and the will. An excess of words is fatal to this activity. Prayer achieves much that is good, but certain conditions are necessary: desire, expectation and examination; distinguishing and rejecting all that is extraneous. There are degrees of desire which must finally attain to a longing for heaven. Only good things should be asked for: best of all is to ask nothing and accept God's will. Christ has exhorted us to have confidence and persevere; we must pray always in His name, knowing ourselves to be worthy of nothing. Humility brings confidence and a childlike affection for the Father. Linked with these theoretical considerations is a detailed exposition on the \textit{Our Father}. This prayer provides much upon which the soul may meditate. Wessel gives the meaning of this prayer which was instituted by Christ, which can be pronounced \textit{vocaliter}, in words, but upon which, and this was Christ's intention, it is possible to meditate. Wessel describes the connection between the seven prayers and the meaning of the form of address: Our Father. This prayer is addressed to God, to the Father, but also to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. Some of the invocations are addressed more directly to the Father, others to the Son or Holy Ghost. He expounds upon the meaning and intention of each of the seven prayers.

Anyone who studies this treatise and absorbs it, is enriched with much matter for meditation. He is inspired to reflect upon these prayers which are so simple, yet so full of meaning. Here we have no tall ladders, only small. They serve more to amplify the contents than to keep the thoughts from straying. It was not Wessel's intention to expound or make propaganda for his own personal ideas on dogma, but it is not surprising that they find expression here and there. Persijn points out the Ockhamist note in the explanation of God's arbitrariness in granting prayers and in Wessel's presumed cooperation of man in the process of salvation, whereby grace, in fact, is the decisive factor. The sharply divergent standpoint of sanctity through works also emerges, which is a specific art of cooperation. He gives further his ideas on indulgences and on the Eucharist.\footnote{A.J. Persijn, o.c. 51, 68, 69.} He\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 70, 156-159.}
might have added that God so works in all things that the second causes lost their peculiar efficacy.¹

That this work engaged the interest of Wessel's contemporaries appears from the several quotations from it in Mombaer, and from a letter from Brother Valkenisse from Rooklooster near Brussels, to Mombaer, in which he again requests him to send Wessel's *Pater Noster*, and the contemporary translation.² Much more scholastic in tone is Wessel's treatise on keeping thoughts in check and on the manner of meditating. This book is also called *Ladders of meditation* and is dedicated to the Brothers of the Agnietenberg near Zwolle.³ The treatise consists of four parts or books. In the first he proves that the contemplative life is superior to the active, that Mary Magdalen earns greater praise than Martha. He is not, however, advocating any sort of quietism, but rather urging action. Examples are quoted from Solomon, from the Pythagoreans and from Pythagoras. In prayer as in everything else, we must always take care to keep our aim in view! The problem is, how to obtain sufficient matter to be able to ponder a subject well. Here the *Loci rhetoricales* (second book) are of considerable help; every sentence contains an abundance of ideas (*copia*). Much matter may also be derived from the *dialectica* as developed by Wessel in the third book. The ladder forms part of the auxiliary material. It is a rational ladder, as explained in the fourth book. It conduces to love, to enjoyment of the Lord, and is employed in the Holy Scriptures. It consists of various steps, by each of which it is possible to reflect on something different without departing from the ladder as a whole. Wessel first describes the rungs of the ladder, which all contain an act of meditation; then follow three rungs of the understanding and eight of the will or feelings, with another three to conclude. The book ends with the *complesio*, a linking together of the whole; a conclusion with intention. Unlike other writers, Wessel stresses the *copia* or *locus*, the means by which the mind discovers matter for meditation, by simply comparing the various rungs and pondering on them.⁴ The fact that Wessel dedicated this book to the canons of the St. Agnietenberg and that John Mombaer, at this time a canon in the aforementioned monastery included part of this *scala*

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¹ A.J. Persijn, 112-113.
² Ibid., 34-35.
³ Wesseli Opera 193: *Tractatus de cohibendis cogitationibus et de modo constituerandum meditationum*.
⁴ Ibid., 325.

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in his own work, to be discussed later, proves that he maintained close contact with the Devotionalists when writing. It seems to us that these scala not only conjure up thoughts and retain them in certain grooves, but also transform them into lifeless reflections incapable of stirring the emotions. They are also, in general, much too complicated. The monks of the St. Agnietenberg, however, were undoubtedly delighted with the three extremely detailed models for meditation with the aid of this ladder with rungs. They do indeed clarify Wessel's intention.

The broad study: *De causis incarnations; De magnitudine et amaritudine Dominicae passionis libri duo*, is also an ascetic work intended to provide the believing man with matter for reflection, for meditation. It differs from the preceding work in that it does not offer either a method or a model for meditation. The book fills the christian spirit with revealed matter for meditation concerning the great question of the incarnation of Christ and his passion. It is, moreover, much more dogmatic, and this emerges clearly in Chapter VII and Chapter IX. In the first Wessel poses and proves the thesis, that the word would have become flesh, even if man, or Adam, had not sinned (VII and IX). He defends the thesis that the angels gained in righteousness and bliss through the passion and the sacrifice of the high priest Christ Jesus (X). The author does not deduce the magnitude of Christ's passion from the suffering, humiliation and shame of the way of the cross and crucifixion, but from the consequences and the merits of Christ; His glory and that of God. It is Christ's glory that by His passion He redeemed the world from sin and bore our sorrows. This the good thief confessed and the prophets foretold. Furthermore that He obtained justice and entered into glory. The magnitude of the passion also appears from the precept of the Father, from the great love and obedience shown, from the temptations overcome, from the participation in His sacrifice by many who carry His cross. Here he brings up the (apparent) difference of opinion between Paul and James on good works, proclaiming his Scotist and Ockhamist ideas on their value. Works of faith are worthless unless accompanied by grace and free acceptance on the part of God (Chapters XLV and XLVI). With this he links various chapters on faith, on piety, on the image of God in man, on the love of God and the love of Christ for us, concluding with the thought that it is good and useful to meditate on Christ's passion.

This is a very learned work filled with all kinds of unusual theological speculations, which in my opinion did not contribute to the
accomplishment of good meditation or to the simple devotion advocated by the Brothers. Unlike the other, this book is not dedicated to the canons of Windesheim.

Wessel prefaces his fourth ascetic treatise, on the sacrament of the Eucharist and the hearing of Mass,¹ by a letter to a nun in which he outlines the aim of the work. The nun must not place too much reliance on her own work, for our own righteousness is worthless to God (pannus menstruatus). Nor must she be downhearted if she can only communicate once a week or once a fortnight. By meditating on Christ's passion she is also fulfilling Christ's command: ‘Unless you eat and drink you will not have life in you.’ Through this commemoration you will be joined with Christ. This is also the essential message of the treatise, which is more instructive than stimulating. One should not read during Mass, but meditate upon Christ's purpose in instituting this office. Christ has commanded us to receive and eat the body of the Lord, and this in commemoration of Him. Conversely thus in commemorating Him we eat, and are refreshed. Wessel devotes a number of chapters to this commemoration and this ‘rumination’. The Body of the Lord, the true bread, is man's nourishment and his life. But if this is received physically only and not spiritually, it does not give life. The sacrament must therefore be received with faith and in commemoration of Christ. The rewards are great for those who communicate in this spirit. One must therefore prepare for communion, but without relying on one's own righteousness. We truly receive Christ after such a preparation. Wessel recognizes the real presence in the reception of Christ's flesh and blood, but lays so much emphasis upon the commemoration that this alone seems sufficient to allow the believer to eat Christ's flesh and drink his blood. In other words the spiritual communion seems to be equal to the actual physical reception of the body and blood of Christ.

Although Wessel Gansfort in his youth maintained constant contact with the Brothers in Zwolle and during the last years of his life with the canons of the St. Agnietenberg, although he shared with both the Devotionalist view of life, he none the less retained his own personal opinions on very many extremely essential Christian doctrines, opinions which we do not encounter at all among the Brothers and the Canons.²

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¹ Opera 655-708.
² See p. 481-486.
Sometimes these individual ideas make their appearance in the ascetic works, as we have already indicated. In the book on the Eucharist and the hearing of Mass and in the introductory letter he rejects so violently reliance on one's own works, on individual merit, that it seems at least as if he opposed the excessively strict observantism practised by the Devotionalists, which they considered as their reformation. It seems to me that he differs from the Modern Devotionalists on this point, and also in his ‘singular’ ideas on dogma.

The writings of Florens Radewijns and Gerard Zerbolt, John Vos of Heusden's apportioning of the matter for meditation throughout the week, and most of the writings of Thomas a Kempis were all intended to serve as inspiration for the Brothers' meditation, which was supposed to continue with scarcely any interruption throughout the day. This was also the function of the *rapiaria*, the collections of texts from the Holy Scriptures, and from the Church Fathers and ecclesiastical writers; texts which appealed to the collector personally and could thus be pondered upon again. It remains remarkable indeed that the St. Agnietenberg near Zwolle had such a stimulating effect upon authors. Thomas a Kempis wrote his works there, evidently until his death in 1471; there Wessel Gansfort received his first impressions and later dedicated his treatise *De cohibendis cogitationibus et de modo constituerandum meditationum* to the Canons of the St. Agnietenberg. Finally John Mombaer (Maurburnus), born around 1460 in Brussels, who entered the monastery of the St. Agnietenberg near Zwolle about 1477-78, also wrote there. The modern biographer describes him as an indefatigable reader and a zealous collector of texts. His collection provided him with the material for his main work, the *Rosetum*. An extract from this, *Exercitio*, was published in 1491, and he was already able to show excerpts from it to Wessel Gansfort in 1486. The whole book includes smaller works which had a brief independent existence: the *Mendicatorium*, and the *Chiropsalterium*. When he later became implicated in a conflict between the Canons Regular of St. Augustine and the Augustinian Hermits he wrote the

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Veneratorium, a collection of saints' lives from his order. This work has little value or significance. For our purposes therefore, his real work remains the Rosetum which was written with the same end in view as the books of Wessel Gansfort, that is, as an aid to meditation. Like so many of his fellow Brethren, John Mombaer was sent outside his monastery either to resolve a particular problem or to set a new monastery on its feet or to help carry out the Windesheim reformation. In 1495 for example, he was despatched to Gnadental, but his work was not successful. He personally asked to be recalled and his request was granted in 1496.

In the year 1495, on receiving a letter from the Duchess of Burgundy (Margaretha of York, † Nov. 23rd, 1503) and probably at the request of John Standonck, the general chapter sent a delegation to look into the affairs of the monastery of Saint Severin of Château Landon, which wished to introduce the Windesheim custom. Shortly after the return of the delegation to the St. Agnietenberg, John Mombaer was sent as prior to France with five other canons of the congregation in order to accomplish this task. From this time onwards, until his death (29th December 1501 or a few days later) he worked in France. This work falls in a different period from the one to which we are confining ourselves here and will be dealt with later.1

However, the greater part of his main work, the Rosetum, was written before 1486 and can thus be included in this period. At the request of his colleagues John Mombaer published it in 1494, with no mention of place or printer (probably Peter of Os, in Zwolle), under the title: Rosetum exercitiorum spiritualium et sacrarum meditacionum. In quo etiam habetur materia praedicabilis per totum anni circulum.2 A new, scarcely altered edition appeared in Basle in 1509 after Mombaer's death; then followed a rather changed edition in Paris in 1610. The work later had two more editions (Milan, in 1603 and Douai 1620).

The aim of the Rosetum was to foster the inner life, first of the writer himself, then of his fellow Brethren and of all those who might wish to study the book. It was intended to help them in the three principal spiritual functions which the Devotionalists had to perform in their devotional life: the praying of the hours, communion and meditation. These three important beds in the garden of Roses had to be particularly carefully tended. This could only be done by not allowing

1 See p. 634.
2 Described by P. Debongnie, o.c. 24.
the mind to wander during the pious exercises. This did not mean that, when praying the hours, thought must be exclusively confined to the contents of the psalms and the readings. It would indeed be better if it were, but the writer expresses himself satisfied if those who pray the psalms do not allow themselves to be distracted, but reflect on all manner of events associated with Christ. This was the object of the *chiropsalterium* which Mombaer was already able to submit to Wessel in 1486 and which was included in the editions of the *Rosetum*. In praying the psalms the canon or Brother could stroke his thumb along the inside of his other fingers. Each articulation had a different meaning. On the four fingers of his left hand he indicated first a few, and in later editions twenty-eight very brief pious reflections or prayer intentions, that is, seven on each of the four fingers. Once the canon had learned these by heart and stroked along each finger in turn, the associated words or texts could arouse and maintain in him the desired pious thoughts and intentions. These were thoughts of repentance, asking forgiveness of sins, invoking God's help, praising God's glories, in order to reflect upon the ideas which recur constantly in all or many of the psalms, though differently expressed. All this could be brought to mind by anyone singing or reading the hours. But even if the text did not completely coincide, the person at prayer could keep himself devoutly occupied. This must be roughly the same as when we meditate upon the mysteries of Christ's life and passion while saying the *Hail Marys* of the rosary. The popular ladders, the *scala communionis* and the *scala meditationis* were again intended to assist, not in praying the hours, but in receiving communion and in meditating. The *scala communionis* served to receive the Holy Sacraments with devotion and to perform the thanksgiving in a fitting manner. The number of steps differs a little in the various editions of the *exercitia* and the *Rosetum*, but this does not alter the essential nature of the work. There also exists a contemporary translation of this work in medieval Dutch.1

The *scala meditativa* or *meditationis* which we already found in Wessel Gansfort is intended to help focus the thoughts on the matter for meditation, but also to assist the mind to develop thoughts on a particular subject. Mombaer adopts the *scala* from Wessel in its entirety. It is a schematic proposition: the middle column indicates what has

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to be done, sometimes in the form of a question, while this is more closely defined by a word at each side; for example:

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\begin{array}{cccc}
\text{quaestio} & \text{quam scilicet} & \text{quid cogito} & \text{exsuscitatio} \\
\text{quisque} & \text{a se requirat} & \text{quid cogitandum} \\
\end{array}
\]

So that this should not remain too schematic, John Mombaer makes use in this *scala* of the mnemotechnical verses so common in the Middle Ages and thus so effective and practical in this case. The essence of every part dealt with, or to be dealt with, is compressed into one or two points, so that the person using the *scalae* may recall it in the correct manner. One of the preparations for psalm singing was the intention to be reverent, attentive and devout. This idea was contained in the verse: *sis reverens, simul attentus, devotus in horis*. Unlike many of the others, this verse is easy to understand. A twentieth century reader sometimes has considerable difficulty with these verses, especially since some words are only half written and have to be counted in order not to distort the metre. Similar very brief indications of the subject matter can also be found on the hand of the *Chiropsaltierium* and in general in the meditations. Here, as with the first Windesheimers, the life of Christ is divided into seven sections, one particular facet for each day. Similar mnemotechnical verses again served as reminders. For the Monday matins, we have for example: *Jesus creator inclitus, coelestes firmans status*. Mighty creator, who divided the good from the bad angels.¹

We find such verses too in the *scala communions*. *Combrobet an careat, quae sita habeat, pia signa*. One must examine whether the obstacles have indeed disappeared and whether, on the contrary, the conditions are fulfilled and the signs of devotion apparent.

In the *scala meditationis* for instance, the conditions for a good meditation are given as: *sis purus, fervens, humilis, tacitus, fugi*. Be without sin, fervent, humble, silent and withdrawn (the derivative).² It is not always clear what exactly the writer meant by the various steps and how the activities of the mind (mens) and the judgment (indicium) can be distinguished and follow upon each other. Fortunately both Wessel Gansfort and John Mombaer illustrate their method by various examples from the life of Christ. They also point out that users of this method need not keep too strictly to the models; they have a choice.

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¹ P. Debongnie, o.c. 185.
² P. Debongnie, o.c. 203.
This method may well have required all a person's attention, thereby holding thoughts in check, so that the canon or Brother was entirely preoccupied with the subject. It is, however, complicated and artificial. One may even wonder if the disadvantages did not outweigh the advantages. Anyone who could not succeed in applying this method lost heart and abandoned both method and meditation. It is generally assumed that Wessel and Mombaer played their part in introducing methodical meditation to the Modern Devotion. As we have already shown, it did not exist in the beginning. A method must thus have developed in the course of the fifteenth century so that Wessel and Mombaer were able to propose this method or at least various artificial aids to meditation at roughly the same time, around 1485, although not entirely without contact with each other. It goes without saying that the problem of distraction had existed for a long time.

If indeed, the Devotionalists wished to meditate according to the *scala meditativa*, they had to have a considerable amount of time at their disposal, time which was difficult to come by in the obligatory order of the day of the Brothers and Sisters and canons, unless during Holy Mass. The first Devotionalists already urged meditation on Christ's passion during the Mass, as Mombaer expressly testifies.\(^1\) He employs the method in the so-called ‘rumination’, short bursts of meditation during preparation for the hours, for study, for a meal, for the collation and for the examination of conscience. The mnemotechnical verse came into its own in the repetition of the reflection. Anyone who had meditated on some detail from the life or passion of Christ in the morning at Mass, could recall it to mind during the day with the aid of the verses. That this was Mombaer's intention may be deduced from the following facts. The verses he gives in preparation for matins are different from those for prime. Thus these metrical verses succeed each other from hour to hour, from day to day, so that in a week the entire evangelical cycle is covered. This is - the author remarks - the most practical and easiest method of the saints.\(^2\) These statements hold good equally for the *chiropsalterium*, as for the *scala meditativa* and the rosary of meditations. Mombaer advises that his method should be employed at idle moments during the day; while waiting for a sign to go or to come.\(^3\) Oral prayer must be pre-

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ceded or accompanied by meditation. At this time the word ‘meditation’ becomes ambiguous among the Devotionalists. In the first place it was taken to mean to meditate for a time, to reflect on Christ's life or passion or on one of the four last things; it ended in the complicated method of Wessel Gansfort, adopted by Mombaer. The Devotionalists will have applied it particularly during Holy Mass, perhaps too during the hour reserved for the study of the Holy Scriptures and other religious works. In the second place they classify their so-called ‘rumination’ as meditation. This meditation has been described by Debongnie as: ‘une méditation attentive, une activité vigoureuse de l'esprit, des réflexions vives et appuyées nécessaires pour exciter la dévotion affectueuse.’ This is not a methodical, well deliberated activity, but a perpetual and constantly active state of being mindful of God or of Christ, a constant searching of the heart intended to ensure that the Devotionalists carried out their prayers, hours, study, work, eating and any recreation in the proper spirit. This form of meditation existed from the very beginning, but the first type only developed in this second period and owes much to Wessel Gansfort. He too was a much fiercer critic of oral prayers than the Modern Devotionalists. The Brothers and canons retained the choir prayers but tried to perform them inwardly and devoutly.

The fact that Mombaer frequently quotes Wessel's Oratio Dominica and adopts the scala meditativa in its entirety, leads one to wonder whether he and his followers did not also adopt several of Wessel's distinctive theological ideas. As we have already observed, these ideas were expressed not only in Wessel's Farrago theologicorum, but even in his explanation of the Oratio Dominica. In Debongnie's opinion John Mombaer and his followers completely dissociated themselves from these opinions. Whereas Wessel Gansfort entirely rejected the system of indulgences, Mombaer was well aware that various opinions existed on this subject, and found this no reason to ignore or belittle the idea of indulgences. It was important, however, not to gain too many of them. For Mombaer, meditative, inner prayer was of more value than spoken prayer. He even went as far as Wessel in considering meditation necessary for salvation. His school, the Windesheimers, did not follow him in this. Mombaer also diverged from the Windesheim tradition with regard to spiritual communion. Many theologians,

1 Debongnie, 250.
2 Ibid., 251.
3 Ibid., 240.
4 Ibid., 250.

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including St. Thomas, admittedly placed great value on spiritual communion, without thereby esteeming sacramental communion less highly. According to Mombaer and Wessel, however, there was little advantage in sacramental communion. It was even detrimental, if not accompanied by inner meditation. Spiritual communion, on the other hand, can be attained at all places and in all times, and gives all the advantages of sacramental communion, including (again according to St. Thomas) forgiveness of sins, preservation from eternal death and a sharing in Christ. Mombaer adopted this idea from Wessel Gansfort.

Finally the problem remains of whether this meditation, which some already detect in Gerard Zerbolt, was much employed. There is also the question of whether the method was introduced into Spain by the Benedictine Garcia de Cisneros, and perhaps influenced the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. The practical effect of the Rosetum was not significant. It was not particularly recommended in the order, and soon had to make way for other exercises, notably those of St. Ignatius. It was not popular in France, where it was introduced by Mombaer himself, despite the Paris edition of 1510. The exercises of St. Ignatius were introduced in St. Victor in 1602/3. Admittedly, the afore-mentioned Spanish Benedictine, on his visit to Paris during Mombaer's lifetime, acquired books of the Modern Devotion, including the treatises of Gerard Zerbolt and Mombaer's Rosetum, and took them back to Spain. The abbot of the famous abbey of Montserrat wrote two small treatises with the aid of these works. Both of these aspired to the aim of the Rosetum, inner participation during the singing of the hours and the employment of a strict method during meditation.

Now it is known that St. Ignatius of Loyola followed certain spiritual exercises in the abbey of Montserrat after his conversion in 1522. What he heard then seems to have been derived from Cisneros and indirectly from the Modern Devotion. This may have influenced the famous Spiritual Exercises which Ignatius later drew up, after first having practised them himself. The resemblance, however, is slight and the intention behind them even seems to be different. Nevertheless, the attempt to draw up a suitable method for use in daily meditation - an attempt which Ignatius must have appreciated,

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1 Debongnie., 200.
2 Ibid., 201.
3 Directorium horarum canonica, Montserrat 1500.
4 Ejercitario de la via espiritual, Montserrat 1500, or Exercitarium spirituale, Montserrat 1500. Debongnie 293.

R.R. Post, The Modern Devotion
is a remarkable one, and of great significance in the development of the spiritual life of the Church. The link, which the Modern Devotionalists form in this history, is concerned principally with practical ascetism. This they adopted in part from their predecessors, selected from it what was suitable to their purpose, improved it, and handed it on to posterity chiefly through their books, through their example and through their emphasis on the inner nature of the spiritual experience. It may be that on this last point they set too high an ideal, but none the less the development of spirituality, unlike mysticism, did not pass them by. The later Dutch mystics are linked more directly with Ruusbroec than with the masters of the Modern Devotion.¹

On reviewing this period we find very few signs that Europe is on the threshold of a new era, unless we count the general lamentation on the world's decay, found in Geert Groote, and the attempt to bring some improvement into the life of the Church and especially of the monasteries. During this period the Brothers show no sign of participating in or even being aware of the new culture, the Renaissance and Humanism which had been flourishing in Italy for the past century and which had been introduced to the Netherlands towards the end of this period, around 1480, by people like Rudolf Agricola who had studied in Italy. There is no mention of any contact between these persons and the Brothers. They did not influence the Windesheimers, who confined their outside activities to the reformation of monasteries and gave no indication of knowing or even caring what went on in the world. Wessel Gansfort is a case in point. In spite of his two visits to Rome, he was less of a Humanist than someone like Rudolf Agricola. He was certainly more interested in the late medieval theological conflict between the supporters of the old and new way. He met several Humanists at the gatherings in the abbey of Aduard near Groningen, but there too his especial interest went out to theological questions. As Rudolf Stadelmann rightly remarks: ‘es ist darum irreführend, wenn Nikolaus Cusanus und Wessel so häufig als Humanisten schlechtweg bezeichnet werden...neuerdings hat G. Ritter sich ausdrücklich korrigiert und ins besonders Wessel trotz dessen Italiën Reise entscheiden abgerückt vom Humanismus.’² There is the additional point that Wessel cannot be entirely counted as a Devotionalist.

¹ R.R. Post, Kerkgeschiedenis van Nederland in de Middeleeuwen I, Utrecht, 1957, 400-403.
² R. Stadelmann, Vom Geist des Ausgehenden Mittelalters, Halle-Saale 1929, 38.

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It is equally impossible to detect any preparation for the 16th century Reformation among the Brothers or canons. They scarcely practised theology and certainly showed no critical spirit. The only possible exception was perhaps Peter Dieburg. This rector of the Brotherhouse of Hildesheim, who also wrote the annals of this house, struck a somewhat critical note in a few of the *Excurses* which we have already discussed. The spirit of the first leaders still lived on in the Windesheimers. These were chiefly preoccupied with intensifying the inner devotion through meditation and rumination, while retaining all hours and ceremonies. They repeatedly showed themselves extremely dependent on the pope and the bishops, which did not prevent them from trying to escape the jurisdiction of the latter. Wessel Gansfort alone openly proclaimed opinions which were contrary to several church doctrines, concepts and customs. He, however, was not a Windesheimer, not a monastic and not a Brother of the Common Life, nor did he press his opinions in his ascetic writings, although he did not refrain from expressing them. Mombaer, who was most indebted to his writings, was very reserved on this point. The confrontation between Humanism and Reformation was yet to come.
Chapter Fourteen
The Brethren of the Common Life After c. 1485

Confrontation with Humanism and the Reformation

During this period the Devotionalists, and notably the Brethren, were confronted with new and considerable problems. In the first place there was the effect of the art of printing, invented and practised by John Gutenberg in Mainz, between 1450 and 1465. Printing works sprang up in various towns, principally those in which there was a flourishing school, and thus logically, where the Brethren had their houses and hostels. In the early days these printers, who were at the same time publishers, concentrated on school books and religious literature, for which there was evidently considerable demand. It is unlikely that the Brethren and canons were immediately aware of the possible threat to their own work of copying. In the first place they usually worked to order, their main output being fine editions. Moreover, the demand for books probably kept pace with production. But competition did exist and increase and it must soon have been obvious to the Brethren that they stood to lose a great deal of their income from the copying of books. Specialization and change were indicated, not only in order to maintain their income level, but also in order to find suitable hand work for the Brethren, for this was considered essential if the balance of their religious life was to be preserved. It is therefore not surprising that they too set up printing works and began to print books. They were, in this, merely continuing their original work in a new form. Their activity in this field, however, was not impressive. So far as I can judge, only the Brothers of Brussels, Gouda, and 's-Hertogenbosch in the Netherlands, and Marienthal and Rostock in Germany, seized upon this method of circulating books. The most important printing office set up by the Brothers was undoubtedly the Brotherhouse of Brussels, which began in 1475 already with a small work in the Dutch language and in 1476 produced a legend of Henry II and Kunigund. They also published breviaries, letters of indulgence, homilies and exegetic and apologetic works, besides the letters and sermons of St. Bernard, the *collationes* of Cassian,
and the *Vitae Patrum*. This printing office, however, seems only to have survived for about ten years.

The presses of the Brothers in Gouda were kept fairly busy from 1496, when the first book (a book of hours) was printed. They too showed a preference for pious works such as the life of St. Lebuinus (1496), hours of the life and passion of Our Lord (1496), and a Utrecht breviary (beginning of the sixteenth century). These Brothers persevered into the 16th century, producing hours of the seven joys ‘blitscappen’, of Our Lady (1504) and a Cantuale of Utrecht (1505), a Boeksken van de Missen (1506), a Utrecht Breviary (1508), another explanation of the Mass (1510), a book of prayers (1512), hours of the seven joys of Mary (1521) and two editions of the *Donatus*.

The Brothers in ‘s-Hertogenbosch also printed a few books in the 16th century, mentioned by Nijhoff-Kronenberg. In addition to a number of Fathers of the Church they also undertook some Renaissance works: *Martial, epigrammata selecta* (No. 3501), works of Faustus Andrelini, Jac. Faber Stapulensis and Marcus Ant. Sabelius (No. 3501, 3014, 1075).

Most active in this enterprise were the Canons Regular of the monastery of Hem near Schoonhoven, which has not been dealt with here because it was not associated with Windesheim. In Germany printing offices were mentioned in Marienthal, especially in the years 1474/1475 and 1478. Here too the emphasis was on pious works and books for the Church; a Mainz breviary, a work by J. Gerson and a ceremonial and *ordinarium* of Bursveld. The Brethren of Rostock (Domus Horti Viridis) also commenced this work in 1476 and continued it into the sixteenth century. They printed, among other things, sermons by Herolt (1476), a few classical works, and books by two Humanists, Jac. Poggius (Poggio) and Leonard Aretinus (*Historia Sigismundi*); a letter of indulgence, and *De liberali ingenuarum institu-

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2 *Catalogue IX. 40. Campbell I 543; Nijhoff, Kronenberg, Nederlandsche Bibliografie 1500-1540 II 260.*

3 *Ibid., III p. 263.*

4 *Catalogue of books etc. II, London 1912, 547.*

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tione et educatione,¹ by Vincentius Bellovacensis. These titles already show a remarkable variety, and it is known that in the sixteenth century, after Luther had started to act openly, they printed the Bible of Emser in the vernacular. The great reformer was not impressed, and tried in vain to prevent the publication.²

From the scarce data available, which might perhaps be supplemented by experts, it appears that the Brothers laboured modestly, but to good purpose, in this new branch, which may be considered as a continuation of their copying work. However, in comparison with the extensive production of the great printing works in Deventer, Antwerp, Louvain, Zwolle and Gouda, which were in lay hands, the production of the Brethren appears quite insignificant. These lay printers also published ecclesiastical, pious, theological and patristic works but in addition produced numerous classics, school books, commentaries on the classics and humanistica.

In this field too, the fraters revealed themselves as anything but pioneers, and remained far behind the lay printers. The old and famous houses of Deventer and Zwolle and very many others did not venture into printing at all. Another remarkable fact is that the Brothers printed nothing of the authors of the Modern Devotion. Two works by the Zwolle rector Dirk of Herxen appeared very early, but not with the Brothers. The Devota exercitia was published by Richard Paffroet in Deventer and the Speculum juvenum by John Vollenhove in Zwolle.³ The sermons of Thomas a Kempis were printed by Nicolas Ketelaar in Utrecht.⁴ On the other hand, the printing of the Bible of Emser at Rostock showed courage, conviction and a spirit of enterprise.

A more important enterprise, from our point of view, was the Brothers' attempt to extend their teaching activities among the schoolboys either by setting up schools themselves, replacing the purely supervisory work in their hostels by formal school teaching, or by allowing the Brethren to teach in the city schools. Their good relations with various rectors seemed to offer them fair prospects. However, they already knew from experience that those who held the

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1 Catalogue II 566, 567; Elisabeth Soltész in Gutenberg Jahrbuch 1963.
2 See p. 628.
3 Campbell I no. 1652.
4 Ibid., 1657.
school rights, usually the city magistrate but sometimes the scholaster, clung firmly to these rights, mostly on behalf of the city school and for the benefit of the school rector. They were above all anxious that the school fees should be reserved for the rector and teachers. There were already some indications that the Brothers wished to branch out in this direction. We shall now attempt to discover in how far they succeeded. The sporadic activities of the fraters in the preceding period, up to around 1485, were without significance.

Now too the Modern Devotionalists and in particular the fraters were confronted with the new cultural trend, Humanism, which towards the end of the preceding period, around 1480, reached those places in which the Brothers had their houses, both in the Netherlands and in the towns situated deeper within the German Empire. Although this new culture manifested itself in various fields, political, ecclesiastical and religious, during this first period it was chiefly active in the domain of the school, advocating better teaching and education in the city and parochial schools as well as in the universities. I have already explained in the Introduction that various present day authors consider the Modern Devotion and Humanism to have been closely connected. They argue that several of the first Humanists in Germany and the Netherlands attended schools run by the Brethren of the Common Life where they acquired the first principles of this new way of thinking. It is hence of considerable interest to determine the position of the Brethren in the culture of the time, especially with regard to teaching.

Finally, in the 16th century, the Devotionalists were also faced with the Reformation, which from 1517 onwards spread over the entire region where they had their houses and monasteries. The Reformation period was virtually the end of the Modern Devotion, although a few monasteries and some of the Brotherhouses survived this difficult time. They lost their driving force, their desire for expansion, their propagandist spirit, and, to a certain extent, their original character. Did they, or many of them, adopt the ideas of the Reformation? Were they obliged to bow to superior forces? Or were their ideals no longer suited to the changing state of affairs. An answer to these questions must be sought in the facts which will be dealt with in this chapter.

One of the main difficulties, however, is the absence of the house chronicles which provided some insight into the life of the Brothers during the preceding period. Those of the Brotherhouses at Zwolle, Deventer, Gouda, Emmerich and Hildesheim covered the period up
to about 1485, 1490. The Hildesheim annals went a little further, but the reports of
the years 1493 to 1505 are very brief. Only 1546 is covered in detail. Fortunately,
the still unpublished chronicle of Doesburg covers the middle of the 16th century
and provides important information concerning the attitude of the Brethren towards
the Reformation. This loss of documentation on the abovementioned houses, however,
is counterbalanced by the gain of certain annalistic notes from the house of Wolf on
the Moselle, which, as we saw, was founded at the end of the preceding period.
Valuable documents, such as charters, have been preserved from other houses, and
these inform us whether any change took place in the aims and methods of the
Brethren, and if so, what these changes were. None the less there remain several
Brotherhouses of which we know little or nothing. The religious, usually ascetic,
treatises of the fraters came to an end even earlier than the historical works, with the
exception of the sermons of people like John Veghe. In their place we have a number
of 16th century publications of a completely different nature, and characteristic of
the change, in two houses at least. Before going any deeper into the history of the
Brethren and the Brotherhouses in the sixteenth century, we must bear in mind that
several of the Brotherhouses had developed into canon-chapters, in other words,
colleges which served a so-called collegiate or chapter church. In consequence the
Brothers of these houses had become canons with communal possession. So far as
we can judge, this transformation took place in the majority of the houses, not perhaps
the house at Amersfoort, but probably in those of 's-Hertogenbosch, Brussels, Ghent,
Geraardsbergen, Cassel and Magdeburg, and certainly in Hildesheim, Münster,
Cologne, Herford, Wesel, Marienthal, Königstein, Butzbach, Wolf, Urach, Herrenberg,
Dettingen, Einsiedel and Marburg. Yet if, as we saw, the results of this change were
chiefly juridical, it cannot be denied that the choir prayers which the Brothers already
had, now received particular emphasis. This facilitated any future transformation of
such canons into secular vicars or canons enjoying their own income. And, although
men like Gabriel Biel praised such foundations and recommended them, from the
Brothers' point of view this change appeared to signal a decline of the old spirit, a
fading of the old ideal.

One sign of this weakening towards the beginning of this period is that there was
no longer such an urge to expand. During this time only two new houses were
founded, and one of these, that of Liège, really belonged to the transitional period.
The second house, in
Trèves, also displayed a distinctive character. The foundation in Liège, however, was a great success, and showed signs of being in tune with the times. The plan to found the house was conceived by bishop John of Hoorn and the city magistrate. They contacted the Brothers in 's-Hertogenbosch and invited them to begin a new Brotherhouse in Liège. It was an attractive offer, since the fraters were able to find immediate lodgings in the existing priory of Mary Magdalen, while the magistrate proposed to build the Brothers a church with hostel on the island in the Maas. Since this was situated in the middle of the city, the Brothers could use it as a centre to practise their normal pastoral duties. The fraters from 's-Hertogenbosch accordingly sent four of their Brothers to Liège and these took up residence in the priory of Mary Magdalen on June 26th 1496.1 The first stone for the church was laid on May 27th, 1497, but it was not consecrated until January 21st 1509. The new house was ready for occupation by rector and fraters in 1497. They began by taking the boys into their own house, but later placed them in a separate hostel which is mentioned in 1501. It was intended for the poor boys who attended the school. They had already received permission for this from the chapter in 1499.2 The school situation in Liège, where not only the parish, but also the chapter churches, had their own school, allowed more instruction to be given in this hostel than in those of other cities. Elsewhere, the one school enjoyed sole rights in teaching Latin, and this privilege was jealously preserved by the municipality, by force of law where necessary. Private schools were sometimes tolerated on condition that the pupils also paid school fees to the rector of the big school. In towns like Utrecht, Maastricht, and even Amsterdam and Groningen, where there was more than one parish church, the suppression of the private schools was rendered more difficult, or even impossible. It was thus easier for the Liège fraters, like those in Utrecht and Groningen, to give more instruction in their hostels than in Deventer or Zwolle, where the one old city school (or chapter school) carefully preserved its ancient rights. However, the fact that several Latin schools existed in one city, as for example in Utrecht and Liège, had the fatal effect of limiting the development of

1 L. Halkin, Le collège liégeois des Frères de la vie commune, Namur 1940, 6-7; Les frères de la vie commune de la maison saint Jérôme de Liège (1464-1545), Bulletin de l’Institut archéologique Liégeois 65 (1945) 5-70.
all the schools equally. The number of pupils was too small to attract several teachers, so that one man was usually responsible for the entire educational programme. This seems to have been tolerated in the Middle Ages, but it was scarcely feasible in the sixteenth century when the Humanists were advocating better and broader education. In actual fact the city authorities did take steps to achieve one large Latin school, either by amalgamating the existing schools or by forbidding the other schools to take Latin any further than the first principles and exercises. The real teaching of the classical language was to be reserved for one particular school.

To illustrate this situation, I refer here to a contemporary event in Maastricht in which no Brothers were implicated and in which Liège itself was expressly proposed as model. Here, on August 18th, 1516, a priest called Abraham, rector of the Franciscan nuns of the Nieuwerhof, received the municipality's permission to found a general school (*Gemeyne school*). It was intended for the children of the middle class citizens of Maastricht, and for those from outside the town. This one school would be the Latin school in Maastricht. The city would grant privileges for the children from other places, and be responsible for the school building. The school would be for the use and advantage of our town and the citizens sons, ‘tonsner stadt ende burgerskynderen.’ The city would defend this new venture against all opponents. The aim of this plan was clearly twofold: to increase the municipality's powers in matters of education, and to bring about the necessary concentration of teaching.¹ This measure threatened the existence of the two chapter schools (St. Servas and Our Lady) since they would scarcely be able to compete in the future with the new school, which might justifiably be called the city school. In order to quash any expected opposition well in advance, the city sought and obtained the support of the highest church authority in Rome, on April 20th 1517. However, by this time an agreement had already been reached with the chapter of St. Servas on September 9th 1516, whereby it was laid down that the rector and pupils of the new school had to pay a certain sum to the school of St. Servas, but at the same time the St. Servas school should be restrained in attracting pupils. Nevertheless, although the city supported this new school for a long time, and when appointing a rector mentioned a possible roll of four hundred boys, the attempt ended in failure. In 1554 the school was obliged to close.

¹ M. Schoengen, *Geschiedenis van het onderwijs in Nederland* 1912, 196, n. 2.

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The municipality then made the school of St. Servas the privileged school of Maastricht, by allocating a subsidy to this chapter school.

This episode may serve to throw light upon the situation in Liège to which we now return. Here, around 1500, the fratres began a school, probably in the hostel. In describing the history of the Brethren in Liège one must always take into account the three foundations for which they were responsible: their own dwelling house and chapel under the direction of the pater, also known as the rector; the domus pauperum under its own rector, sometimes called procurator, and on occasion also coming directly under the jurisdiction of the rector of the dwelling house; and finally the school, run by another person who also bore the title of rector. Naturally enough this school took time to gain a reputation. It had to compete against the various chapter and parish schools, and was of no great significance before 1515. In 1515, however, this school possessed a brilliant teacher in the secular priest Nicolas Nickman. Through his influence perhaps, and in any case before September 9th, 1515, an important change must have taken place. This is revealed by a decree of this date, whereby Liège was proposed as model for the suggested plans of Maastricht described above.2 This change amounted to the fraters’ school being recognized henceforth as the one main school in Liège, and as such being supported by the municipality. This meant that the Latin schools of the Liège chapters and parishes were curtailed in some way or another, as would happen in Maastricht. This is made clear by John Sturm, who went to school in Liège from 1521 to 1524. When, twenty years later, he was called upon to organize the educational system in Strasburg, he took as his model the school position in Liège as he had known it in his youth. This we know from a document dated February 24th 1538.3 It was necessary, in his opinion, to decide on having only one Latin school in the city. He based his opinion on the experiences in Liège, Deventer, Zwolle and Wesel. As he remarked in a marginal note this should succeed well in Strasbourg, since the city was smaller than Liège.4 This limiting of the number of schools to one must have been introduced before Sturm’s arrival in Liège since, as he says, a

2 Regest in: Publications ... de Limbourg 69 (1933) 173.
4 Ibid., 95.

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reaction began during his stay there. Some of the teachers of the school began to give lessons on their own account. If this initiative had succeeded, it would have meant the end of the ‘Hieronymitanum Gymnasium’. ‘For if each teacher attempts to acquire pupils, they learn not what is useful but what is pleasant, and adapt themselves more to the demand than to the understanding of their audience.’1 This statement is also important since it makes clear that not all the teachers of this one new school were members of the Fraternity. No one frater could have started a school entirely at this own risk. Fortunately, this difference of opinion was settled so that the school was able to go forward. Sturm reviews the subjects taught in the eight classes. These do not differ essentially from what we know of other schools. With a few exceptions the curriculum is the same as in the medieval schools. The most important difference is that the boys learn reading and writing in the lowest class, with the declension of nouns and the conjugation of verbs. There were several other places in which the boys could learn these subjects at school - the so-called writing schools - so that the gymnasium really began with the seventh class and then consisted of five classes, like the five which Erasmus completed in Deventer. Then came the two top classes, which were rare, but which did exist in Zwolle and Deventer. As we shall see, these classes offered different subjects. Two new subjects - Greek and rhetoric - were added to the normal curriculum of the medieval school. The Humanists were responsible for this innovation. The introduction of these new subjects meant that the teaching of dialectic suffered - it was relegated from the fifth to the fourth class - but Sturm adds that this subject and rhetoric were only touched upon in the fifth class (indicabantur). Greek and rhetoric continue to form part of the curriculum up to and including the second class (the first of the two top classes) together with philosophy (Aristotle, Plato), Geometry (Euclid) and even law. Some theology was given in Liège in the first (or highest) class, but this is found nowhere else. Each class has a separate teacher, who sometimes has to cope with 200 pupils, but this is not uncommon in the Middle Ages. What is new is that the second and first classes were required to have more than one teacher - the introduction of specialization. The pupils of the two classes were combined for some subjects - which again promoted specialization.2

1 Bonet Maury, 90.
Sturm included this programme in his proposal to the curators of the Strasbourg school, letting it appear that all this was already well established in Liège. But fourteen years had elapsed since his departure and on certain points the wish may well have been father to the thought. We catch a glimpse of this from time to time when he lapses from the usual imperfect tense into the present. In No. 5, for example, where he is speaking of the fourth class: ‘the method to be followed here must be established separately’ and in No. 6 about the third class: ‘here the method of imitation (of the style of Latin and Greek authors) must be indicated, and a certain form of exercises prescribed.’ The same is true of the specialization in the second and first class. It is difficult to accept his statement concerning theology as a subject for the first or highest class in Liège in the years 1521-24. In any case this subject is not found in the 15th century curriculum of the school at Zwolle, as given by J. Busch, nor in the 16th century programme of the Hieronymus-school in Utrecht, whereas J. Sturm seems to consider it normal for Strasbourg in 1538. Besides, the subject in this period was called Old and New Testament.

Two questions arise in this connection. Were the *fratres* themselves responsible for enlarging the curriculum by the addition of Greek and rhetoric, for cutting down on dialectics, for the reading of certain classical authors and for the introduction of the two top classes? Or was the influence of the Humanist school requirements already so great around 1515 that the Brothers simply adopted what had already been introduced in several places? Sturm unfortunately only mentions those authors read in the two top classes, and these were either philosophers or mathematicians, who offer little material for comparison. Nor do we know anything about the kind of Latin taught, about the grammars and other school books or even about the method of teaching.

The second question is: Did the *fraters* take the classes, or at least the majority of them, in their own school themselves, or did they leave the teaching to assistants from outside, while continuing to run the school as their fellow Brethren in Brussels had done, and as the Brothers in Utrecht later did with the Hieronymus-school. Did they

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1 Bonet Maury 91.
2 Ibid., 92.
3 Ibid., 92.
4 Busch 206.
6 See below p. 614.
7 See below p. 570.
find their rector and teachers inside or outside their community? If they taught themselves, had they received the necessary training? Had they received their Master's degree from the Arts faculty of a university, as had most of the other teachers, at least those of the top classes?

It is plain that the Liège fraters were not the first or the only ones to aim at an educational reform, employing such means as the addition of Greek and *eloquentia* to the curriculum. This movement towards reform had been in progress for some time now in the south of Europe, and had already achieved results in certain city schools. From around 1485 onwards some of the Dutch Humanists passed themselves off as reformers in the world of education, or, if they were not actually concerned with teaching, as the champions of new ideas in this field. Even before the Liège school reform, that is, before 1517, Rudolf Agricola, Desiderius Erasmus and Alexander Hegius were writing treatises and schoolbooks, as were others throughout the German Empire. Their main theme was the reform of instruction in the Latin language, by improving and simplifying the grammar and by reading classical authors in order to imitate their style. In addition several advocated the introduction of what they called *eloquentia*, by which they understood facility of language in conversation, correspondence and delivery. The first Humanists saw in the use of elegant language and a polished style (*eloquentia*) a means of improving both Church and society.\

Unfortunately there is nothing to confirm that this *eloquentia* was introduced as a separate subject in Dutch schools before 1517. Nor does this appear necessary, for as Paulsen says: ‘Eloquenz und zwar zunächst in lateinischer Sprache, ist das erste Ziel der gelehrtun Unterrichts, die Nachahmung der alten Schriftsteller das wesentliche Mittel.’

Greek, however, was an entirely new subject in these parts and at the outset a knowledge of this language was not very common among the teaching personnel. Hegius († 1498) had learned the language from Agricola, but his knowledge was not very highly thought of. Greek was offered as a subject at his school during his rectorate in Deventer (1483-1498). Geldenhauer from Nijmegen

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learned this subject when Hegius was rector of the Deventer school,¹ which seems to have been the first to offer it in the whole of the German Empire above the Alps. Greek was taught in Zwolle in 1516, as rector Listrius boastfully mentions to Erasmus, his former master.² In Alkmaar the subject was introduced by the rector Rutger Rescius, a young Laureate of Louvain who was appointed to this city in 1515.³ On the basis of this information it can be said that the school authorities of Gouda in 1521 had no need to wait for the Liège programme in order to draw up a humanistically orientated roster which included Greek.⁴ The programme with which J. Sturm was personally familiar from his school years 1521-24 is exactly appropriate to the period. It is not an invention on the part of the Brothers but an adaptation of the ideas prevalent at that time in the world of education, which many desired to see put into practice. It was an important step to take and one which did credit to Liège, but it was not the realization of a creative spirit. The fraters were merely practising what the Humanists had been preaching for the past thirty or forty years. Their work may still have been considered progressive around 1520, but they were certainly not pioneers.

The fact of having the two top classes in 1521-24, and the beginnings of specialization among the teachers, gave the Brothers' school in Liège a decided advantage over the schools in the neighbouring cities such as Maastricht and Brussels. However, these things were not entirely unknown. The school in Zwolle certainly had these two top classes under John Cele,⁵ and during the fifteenth century it is repeatedly mentioned in connection with the Deventer school that such and such a pupil had completed the first class on entering the Brotherhood.⁶ The city magistrate often urged the school rector to retain these two classes or, if they had been discontinued, to restore them. But it was difficult to get enough pupils, since this study did not contribute much to entering a university or to success in church or society. We might say that the grammar school course was completed after the third class, or that the leaving certificate was taken at the end of this year.

¹ Bot, 182, 184.
² Ibid., 185.
³ Ibid., 186.
⁵ R.R. Post, Scholen en Onderwijs, 100-101.
⁶ Ibid., 103, 106.
The subjects taught in these two top classes were indeed entirely different from those which the pupils had had up till then. Deventer and Zolle gave philosophy; Liège philosophy, law, geometry and theology; Utrecht, as we shall see, offered the mathematical subjects of the *quadrivium*, and Strasbourg followed Liège’s example with philosophy, law, geometry and theology. In the first class Capito, Bucer and Hedio taught the Old and New Testament.¹ In other words, the subjects taught in the two top classes were those which belonged to the Arts Faculty of any university. An exception must be made for theology, which may be considered Sturm’s own speciality. The specialization which Sturm regarded as necessary in the second and first class did not yet exist in Liège, no more than in Zolle and Deventer, but it may have been introduced in Strasbourg. Bucer (or Buzer † 1541 in Cambridge), Capito († 1541 in Strasbourg) and Hedio († 1552 in Strasbourg) may have been teachers of theology there.

It is not entirely clear what part the *fraters* themselves took in teaching, since we know the names of only a few teachers. In a letter from Strasbourg, dated May 18th 1563 and addressed to the bishop of Liège, or to the coadjutor with the title of administrator, Gerard of Groesbeek, and to the chapter there, J. Sturm mentions four of the teachers from the period when he attended the Brothers’ school in that city. They are *dominus* Nigmannus, *dominus* Henricus Bremensis, *frater* Arnoldus Eynatensis and *frater* Lambertus.² In this connection L. Halkin has written an important commentary, supplemented by a study of the same year, on the first-mentioned Nicolas Nickman.³ Nicolas Nickman is also mentioned in the correspondence of Aleander and Herman of Bremen,⁴ and in a poem by John Fabricius de Bolland celebrating the glorious reception in Liège of Queen Maria of Hungary by Prince-bishop Érard de la Marck which lasted from October 31st to November 5th in 1537.⁵ J. Sturm clearly distinguishes between the first two, N. Nickman and H. of Bremen, to whom he gives the title of *dominus*, and the remaining pair who are both called *frater*. This is confirmed from other sources: Arnold Eynatensis (from Eynatten, a

1 G. Bonet Maury, 96.

R.R. Post, *The Modern Devotion*
place between Aachen and Eupen) is repeatedly mentioned in charters and acts between 1542 and 1558 as a *pater* of the Brotherhouse;¹ Lambert (i.e. Lambert de Brogne) appears as a cleric on a list of the *fraters* of the Liège Brotherhouse of April 19th 1508.² Nicolas Nickman, on the contrary, appears to be a secular priest, in the first place because Aleander wished to obtain him as *paedagus* for an Antoine de la Marck, a nephew of the bishop, secondly because while a teacher he was also canon of St. Materne in Liège, thirdly because he fulfilled some function in Rome around 1540 and finally because he possessed his own capital, including a hereditary rent on the Brotherhouse which the *fraters* bought out in 1540.³ He was a Master of Arts, probably of the University of Paris, and is repeatedly given this title. He was already attached to the school in 1515, before it was reformed. Halkin thinks too that Henry of Bremen was not a Brother either. In the first place he is mentioned in Sturm's letter in the same breath as Nickman, and both are referred to as *dominus*. Moreover, in a marginal note to the poem he is called Master, and he is not found in any of the lists of *fraters* which have survived.⁴ We can thus take it that around 1520 there were two *fraters* and two secular priests teaching at the school of Liège. The last two had attained the degree of Master of Arts. The difficult circumstances prevailing at the beginning may have been responsible for this situation, but from what has gone before and from what we know of the Brothers in other cities, it was not entirely unfavourable. The Liège fraters certainly did not occupy a prominent place in education in 1521-24, either as leaders or as pioneers. The foundation of the trilingual college in 1520 gave the University of Louvain the lead in this field. From that time onward, numerous future teachers in Dutch schools began their classical studies here.

Later we find two Brother-teachers in the Liège school - Georg of Langevelt and Libert Houthem of Tongeren.⁵ The first, a *frater* of the house of ’s-Hertogenbosch, was lent to Liège and Utrecht, which indicates that the *fraters* were poorly supplied with teachers. Of course,  

3 L. Halkin, *Un humanist liégeois oublié maître Nicolas Nickman*, 9, 8, 13, 11 n. 2.

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he may also have been in demand for his excellence as a teacher. According to Halkin he most probably worked in Liège from 1525-1529(?), but his real field of activity lay in Utrecht. Frater Libert Houthem taught in Liège from 1570-1577, wrote a couple of school books, a larger paedagogical work (Ethicae vitae ratio seu moralis ... praecepta, Liège 1575), and a few poems and Latin plays. He was elected rector of the fraters in Brussels in 1577, but soon became a victim of the rising. After spending some time imprisoned in Brussels, he fled to Henegouwen and was given a teaching post there.¹ If these four were the only Brothers to teach at the school, this would be a very small percentage of the teaching staff, but this impression may perhaps be attributed to the lack of complete data. Léon Halkin resurrected the members of the Liège Brotherhouse from the 16th century deeds and accounts, since no narrative sources exist. These lists are extremely instructive for the history of this Brotherhouse. None of the fraters is listed as having been rector or teacher in the school, not even Lambert de Brogne and Arnold d'Eynatten.² However, these lists are of no use whatever in deciding whether and to what extent the fraters themselves taught in the school. On the other hand it is mentioned if a particular frater was pater, frater, rector, procurator or liberarius. Since these are mostly legal documents the first terms may have some significance but liberarius, to my mind, has as little meaning as schoolrector or teacher.³

None the less, the lists provide other interesting information. In the first place the old groups are still there: priests, clerics and the occasional lay brother (for example the tailor). From the lists which are considered to be complete it appears that there were in 1508 five priests

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¹ L. Halkin, 55-60.
² Georgius Macropedius and Libert Houthem are missing.
³ L. Halkin, Bulletin de l'Institut archéologique liégeois LXV (1945) 10. Since there were probably very few Brothers teaching in the Liège school it is of great importance to determine if the abovementioned teaching Brothers had pursued any academic studies to the degree of magister artium. None of the four brethren are given the title of Master, while the two non-Brethren are. The brothers were self-made men, perhaps of excellent qualities. According to L. Halkin, Henry of Diest, the first rector of the Brotherhouse, was a Master of Arts. If this is so, he may have gained his degree before entering; otherwise he was a rara avis. He was ordained (30th September 1495) by bishop John of Hoorn and was then referred to as presbyter dicte diocesis (L. Halkin in: Bulletin de l'institut archéologique liégeois LXV, 1945, 15 n. 1.) An episcopal official calls him, maistre Henri de Diest, frère de la dicte Vie Commune (19th October 1495) Ibid., p. 15, n. 7. It appears that the episcopal official was mistaken or excessively polite.
(including the rector) and six clerici. In 1542, the community consisted of twelve members. No distinction is now made between priests and clerics, probably since the matter in question was the election of a procurator and all had the same voting rights. In 1544 there were five priests and four clerici. Six months later, on February 18th 1545, the same nine are again mentioned, with the addition of two others. These may have been two new novices or two members of the community who happened to be away in 1544. In 1558 there were seven priests plus a tailor, but no clerics. Unfortunately there are no further accounts until 1581 when a new situation had arisen on the transfer of the Brotherhouse and school to the Jesuits. We will come back to this later. From the foregoing data I should be tempted to conclude that the situation in the Brotherhouse was normal up to about the middle of the century. It was not a large house, smaller than that of Zwolle, but roughly the same as that of Deventer with a regular, if small, intake of novices. Towards the middle of the century, the influx of new members fell off, while those who did seek admittance either found the life too hard, and left, or else were sent away. There are eight persons who are only mentioned in the surviving lists of 1540-1545 and never again. This may in part be attributed to the haphazard preservation of the documents, but the fact remains that one frater had to be sent away in 1553 for bad conduct and another in 1554 for disobedience. Since no clerics are mentioned for 1558 we can reasonably assume that the Liège Brotherhouse, like so many religious institutions of that period, suffered from a lack of vocations. The house never recovered. There were only seven fraters in 1581, and five in 1587, of whom two had already obtained a place as canon. By 1596 the numbers had been reduced to four, two canons and two priests.

It is unfortunate that the lists do not offer sufficient data to show that virtually all the clerics finally became priests and could thus be considered as future priests or priests in training; men who received no theological training or schooling other than their own private

2 Ibid., 11.
3 Ibid., 11.
4 Ibid., 13.
5 Ibid., 46-48.
6 R.R. Post, Kerkelijke verhoudingen in Nederland vóór de reformatie van ± 1500 tot ± 1580, Utrecht 1554, 180-181, 37.
7 Ibid., 13. L. Halkin, (see no. 1).
8 Ibid., 14.
study and conversations with older colleagues. It is noteworthy how the terms for the fraters' institution gradually approach those of the monastery. The house is a *conventus*, a monastery *monasterium* belonging to the ‘orde de saint Jérôme’ and the men are called *religiosi viri; professi et religiosi; frères et professe*; professing brothers, *religiosi professi*, all this without having taken any vows. However this may be, the school of the Brothers in Liège flourished. In a letter of August 28th 1530 a Benedictine writing with reference to a search for the forbidden books of Erasmus among the pupils of the Liège school of St. Jerome on the orders of Dirk Hesius remarks in passing: ‘this is the principal school of Liège.’ Such was the success of the Brothers in the field of teaching. Their own boys in the *domus pauperum* also profited by the school, and their house was moved closer to the school in 1544. However, despite their successes, the Brotherhouse lost ground and the role of the Brothers was soon played out. They belonged to a different period. Teaching was incapable of imparting a different spirit unless the conditions of life were completely transformed. The Brothers' aspirations to simplicity, even simplicity carried to excess, rendered them unsuited to the teaching profession. As Hieronymus Aleander observed to Érard de la Marck in a letter dated October 23rd 1515: ‘fraterculi quibus ut videre videor simplius nec ineptius dicam.’ Other religious orders came forward with ideals more adapted to the times, with a new programme of education and a more thorough grounding. In an act dated 28th September 1580 the *fraters* transferred their house to the Jesuits, who would also take charge of the school. In return they received a small house. In 1595 (March 23rd) Pope Clement VIII allocated all property and income of the *fraters* to the chapter of the collegial church of St. Paul. Each of the four *fraters* received a benefice and an annuity of a hundred guilders. One was appointed to St. Paul's, one to St. Denys' and two others received a parish. The end came a hundred years after the beginning.

As the antepenultimate Brotherhouse to be founded, the house of

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1 L. Halkin, 10.
2 Ibid., 12.
3 Ibid., 12.
4 Ibid., 11.
5 Ibid., 10, 11, 12.
Liège with the attached city school, can be considered unique. Only the last founded houses of Utrecht and Trèves have a similar history and thus qualify for a place in this chapter. The Brotherhouse in Utrecht, which like that of Gouda was manned by Brothers from Delft (November 1475), soon acquired a school which, unlike the Brothers' small school in Gouda, flourished rapidly in the sixteenth century and even excelled the other schools of the city. As in Liège the cause of this remarkable fact must be sought in the scholastic situation prevailing in Utrecht. Unlike most other Dutch towns, which had only one parish (chapter) or city school protected and favoured by the municipality, Utrecht had long possessed nine similar educational institutions intended for instruction in the Latin language, four parish and five chapter schools. Under these circumstances the municipality had little reason to favour one school more than another, and there could be no question of sole teaching rights. Permission from the cathedral chapter was necessary in order to set up a school, but if the canons were acquainted with the Brothers' primitive little school in Gouda and saw their modest beginnings in Utrecht, they will have had little objection to the Brothers starting a school. However, the activities of the Humanists caused educational standards to rise sharply. Accordingly, when the Brothers' school proved to be making favourable progress, the municipality thought it politic to foster it in preference to the others and to transform it into a model institution, while allowing it to remain in the Brothers' hands. Events in the nearby episcopal city of Liège, or those in Maastricht may have provided an attractive model. In any case the school run by the *fratres* became to all intents and purposes the city school.

We receive the first reports of this in 1536, but the transformation may have occurred ten years earlier, for in 1536 the city bailiffs were helping to collect the school money (fees) for the school of St. Jerome. According to a note in the city accounts of August 4th 1536, the civic officials kept this school under supervision. Men were chosen at this time in order to inspect the school and pupils of St. Jerome in this city: ‘omme aldaar’t school ende studenten of leerkynders van S. Hieronymous alhier te visiteren.’ The other Utrecht parish or chapter

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1 A. Ekker, *De Hieronymusschool te Utrecht*, Utrecht 1863, 102.
2 Dodt van Flensburg, *Archief voor kerkelijke en wereldlijke geschiedenissen* Utrecht, VII 168.
3 *Ibid.*, III, 217, ‘to inspect the school and the students or schoolboys of St. Jerome.’
schools were not subject to such an inspection. The civic character of the school becomes even more plain from a memorandum of 1580 which states that the municipality had long before granted the school of St. Jerome sole rights to teach Latin to all boys of a certain age. According to this document a rule had formerly been made whereby the magistrate decided that children below the age of twelve might attend one of the nine original schools in the city. Anyone, however, who wished to continue the existing school programme was obliged to go to St. Jerome. This Brother-school thus acquired a position similar to that held later by the city gymnasium. On the other hand - perhaps before this rule was drawn up - the five chapters were involved in the appointment of a rector for the school of St. Jerome. At least, they were called upon to intervene in order to have Henry of Almelo, then rector in Gorinchem and not a Brother of the Common Life, appointed as rector of the Utrecht school, although in fact he had already been engaged by the municipality of Zwolle for the school there.¹ The Brothers' school had evidently relinquished much of its private and independent character. It had become a public city school, the main school, and was no longer a private school. None the less, although it owed its dominant position to the patronage of the city fathers, this need not detract from the fratres merits as educationalists. They were in charge of the school and may have taught in it as well. However, the fact that a non-frater was sought as rector in 1525 is sufficient reason to examine the exact scope of the fratres' scholastic activities.

On this point one must bear in mind that in the Middle Ages a distinction was made between having a school and actually being in charge of it, that is, doing the actual teaching. The former was called the ‘scholastery’, gift, or collation of the school, the latter was the rectorship. These concepts developed analogously with those of the churches, where the patron (or collator) existed alongside the parish priest. The possession of the gift of the school was not without financial advantages, since the possessor could lease the school to a rector. It was for this reason that Count William III of Holland, Zeeland and Henegouwen gave the school of Rotterdam to one of his clerks (17th December 1328, 10th March 1336)², and on 12th Decem-

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² F. van Mieris, Groot charterboek der graven van Holland, Zeeland, en heeren van Vriesland (Leiden 1753-56) II 477, 575.
ber 1292 the Council of Dordrecht presented the gift of the city school to the city hospital.¹ This was clearly seen in Gouda where Jan Wilbroot, a singer of the imperial house chapel was rewarded with the gift of the school of that city, and leased the school to a teacher.² It would thus be possible that the fratres possessed the school of St. Jerome in roughly the same manner as the city hospital possessed the school of the oldest city in Holland. By virtue of the gift of the school they could either run it themselves or rent it out. They could even dispose of their right to it, which is exactly what they did in the second half of the sixteenth century. In 1565 the fratres leased their school (the school of St. Jerome) to three lay teachers, for 250 imperial guilders per year for a period of twelve years. The contract was to be reviewed after six years. The three gentlemen received ‘all the buildings of the school of St. Jerome, together with the teaching and administration’.³ The fratres were thus rid of the bother of the school while still continuing to profit by it. They had, however, stipulated that they should continue to be responsible for the pastoral welfare of the pupils, to supervise the use of good books and retain the right to provide these. With these two points they remained within the field of activity indicated by Geert Groote: pastoral care and the distribution of good books.

When the six years had elapsed the lease was not renewed, but in the same year the fratres sold the school, the ‘exercitium et administratio scholae’ as it was called, to an archiepiscopal commission charged with founding a seminary in the spirit of the Council of Trent.⁴ This commission consisted of canons of the five Utrecht chapters, who were from 1571 to 1576 the ‘administrateurs ende recteurs der school’ as the Brothers had been before them. There is no likelihood whatever that they did any teaching themselves. They, in their turn, could appoint a rector and masters or lease the school as the Brothers had done in 1565. They chose the first course and thus continued to direct the

¹ G.D.J. Schotel, De illustere school te Dordrecht, 1857, 1.
³ Dodt van Flensburg, Archief VII, 398. A. Ekker, De Hieronymusschool etc. 54 ‘gehele huysinge der schoele van S. Hieronymus, doctrine ende administratie vandien.’
⁴ Charter of 1571 July 18th, published in Archief ... aartsb. Utrecht, 26 (1900) 454. L. Miedema, Resolutiën van de vroedschap van Utrecht betreffende de Akademie, Werken Hist. Gen. n.s. 52, 1900, Inleiding LXXXIV.
⁵ ‘administrators and rectors of the school.’

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school for five years in the absence of any move to start the seminary. However, the
war situation caused the school to lose a great deal of ground in these years and the
canons also complained of the emergence of private schools which detracted from
this general school. Nevertheless, the fact that the fraters leased the entire building
and administration in 1565 and disposed of all their rights in the institution in 1571,
proves that they did not consider education as their principal task. It is therefore
important to discover whether they personally taught before 1565, or relinquished
this task, wholly or in part, to hired assistants as did the Brethren in Liège.

A. Ekker, the historiographer of the Utrecht St. Jerome school, names various
persons who are supposed to have taught at the school before 1565, but it is already
obvious at first glance that he has not sufficiently distinguished between being a
Brother and teaching. Of the ten ‘teachers’ he names, only three are fratres, and one
of these three, John Hinne Rode, the famous supporter of the Reformation, was,
according to the chronicle of the Doesburg Brotherhouse, not rector of the St. Jerome
school, but of the Utrecht Brotherhouse.¹ His two successors, rectors of the Utrecht Brotherhouse, Otto of Beek and John Huls, had no connection with the St. Jerome
school.

Ekker names Peter of ’s-Gravenland, Cornelius of Driel, Henry of Bommel, John
Hinne Rode, Lambert Hortensius, George Macropedius, Cornelius Valerius, Arnold
of Tricht, Cornelius Lauerman and Peter Memmius as Brothers and teachers. He has
simply copied the first two from Delprat, who, however, by no means says that these
men were connected with the school. Henry of Bommel is the well-known author of
the Bellum Trajectinum and of several religious treatises. He was rector of the
Magdalena convent in Utrecht and went over to Lutheranism around 1525.² Modern
researchers have been able to find no evidence of scholastic activities, which in any
case would be in conflict with the rectorate. The two last are two of the teachers who
leased the school from the Brothers in 1565, which proves that they themselves can
not have been fratres. Enough is known of the life and works of the priest Lambert
Hortensius to rule out the possibility that he was a member of the congregation. He
had his own house in which he received friends, he carried on an unlawful association
with a woman, and was taken up with his activities in

¹ The relevant section of this chronicle is published in: Kerkhistorisch Archief, 3 (1862) 109.
² Nieuw Nederlandsch Biografisch Woordenboek I, 397.
Naarden. He was indeed a teacher at the St. Jerome school, but not a *frater*. The same can be said of Cornelius Valerius, who after his post in Utrecht between 1538 and 1542 became a tutor to the children of notable families. His work as a tutor even took him to France, which was naturally impossible for a *frater*. There now remain only Arnold of Tricht and George Macropedius. The first was a native of Nijmegen, later wrote a history of Gelderland and is probably the brother Arnold referred to in the foreword to Macropedius' *Hecastos*. There are admittedly no data to prove that this *frater* Arnold was attached to the Utrecht Brotherschool as a teacher, but on the other hand there is nothing to prove the contrary.

Arnold of Tricht and George Macropedius are the only two of the above-mentioned gentlemen who were really *fratres*. George Macropedius or Van Langevelt already shows by the name he assumed that he was a supporter of the new culture. Although we have already met him in Liège, he was the celebrity of the Utrecht school and the glory of the Brotherhood there. In actual fact, however, he was a *frater* from 's-Hertogenbosch, admitted to the Brotherhouse of that city in 1502. It is here that he was buried and he may also have taught there. But one thing is certain. He was head of the Utrecht school of St. Jerome from 1537 to 1552. He was a dedicated teacher who took pride in his pupils' successes in the Latin and Greek languages and expounded on the utility of practising letter-writing in school and of putting on Latin plays. He wrote several school books (Latin and Greek grammars, a prosody, a book of dialectic and a book of letters) and was the author of twelve Latin plays which he had acted by his pupils. As a schoolmaster he placed great faith in the rod and cane as aids to learning and twice derived from them subjects for comedy (*Rebelles* and *Petriscus*). He was in truth a Humanist. This was practically inevitable for a school rector of the second quarter of the 16th century. He was a Humanist, however, who for all his knowledge of Latin, had absorbed little of the educational principles of Erasmus, Vives and others. To judge from the punishment scenes he had performed in order to frighten young people onto the strait and narrow path, he might have been one of the bullies who made life so difficult for Erasmus. A deed dated May 25th 1553 would seem to indicate that he was also head of the *domus pauperum* of the Utrecht *fratres* and thus

fulfilled the task to which he alludes in the foreword to Josephus.¹

The conclusion that only two of the people named by Ekker were both frater and teacher renders more understandable the appointment of Henry of Almelo, who was not of the Brotherhood, as rector of the school of St. Jerome in 1525. It is clear that in the main the Brothers employed outside teachers, not belonging to the congregation, to run their school. For their part, in Utrecht as elsewhere, they devoted their own energies to the pastoral care of the schoolboys. They had received privileges for this work from Bishop David of Burgundy (5th June 1476) and Bishop Frederick of Baden (14th January 1498). The domus pauperum which they also ran, had room for sixteen poor schoolboys ‘scamelijke clercken’,² had its own financial resources and received the charitable support of the citizens of Utrecht. The organization and rule of the house were similar to those of the St. Willibrord college in Utrecht. In fact these two institutions were amalgamated for a time following the Reformation. The domus pauperum served as a training house for priests. The pupils received a few lessons at home, but further attended the St. Jerome school.³ In all probability these poor scholars were not expected to pay any fees to the school rector, but had, in return for their schooling, to perform various little services in the St. Jerome school. These included opening the building and locking up, cleaning it on Saturdays and, according to the play Petriscus, handing the master the rod and holding the culprit while chastisement was being administered.⁴

To sum up, it may be said that despite possessing a school in Utrecht the Brothers considered that their first duty was to care for the spiritual and temporal welfare of the schoolgoing youth. For the most part they confided the task of teaching in their own school to others. Macropedius was an exception. He was a successful autodidact, and there is no indication that the fraters frequented the universities in this Humanistic period. Macropedius’ departure was a blow to the Brothers’ school, and shortly afterwards they suffered another great loss. The rector of the house, Master Otto, left in 1556 and became rector and pastor to the Sisters in Weesp. His successor did not come

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2 Ekker, 45. S. Muller Fz., *Oud-Utrechtsche Vertellingen*, 1904, 93.

3 This seems to have been a general custom which was, for example also applied in the Protestant Seminary in Utrecht; *Archief ... aartsh. Utrecht* 26 (1900) 463.

4 E. Miedema, *Resolutiën van de vroedschap van Utrecht* etc., XLIX-LIV.
from the Utrecht house. John Huls from the Doesburg Brotherhouse was appointed.¹

The Brothers’ days were numbered. The sale of the school to the bishop’s commissioners around May 1571 was also occasioned by the losses they had suffered, almost all were dead ‘bijnaest alle verstorven zijn’ and by the fact that no novices had come forward to replace them.² The Brethren here died, in fact, a natural death. By September 23rd 1578 the city council (vroedschap) had decided to take over the St. Jerome school, but it was not until 1585 that this decision was carried out. The property of the Brothers’ house passed entirely into the council hands in 1589.³

The reputation which the schools of Liège and Utrecht enjoyed among the Humanists lends support to the idea that the Brothers promoted Humanism. However, the attitude of the fraters of these two houses is no indication of what the remaining Brethren thought. Moreover, although we shall have to go more deeply into this question, it must already be stated here that neither the Liège nor the Utrecht Brothers were pioneers. They did no more than what was being done in city schools everywhere, for the heads of these schools had been Humanists since 1520. Even then, the couple of Brother teachers who gained some renown did not belong to the leaders, men like Agricola, Erasmus, Murmellius and Buschius.

In Liège we detected no sign of sympathy at all among the Brothers for the new religious ideas. This was perhaps difficult under the prince-bishops. In Utrecht too, it cannot have been easy up to around 1566. None the less, one of the priests of the St. Jerome house made a name for himself in the first days of the Reformation. This was Hinne Rode. It was he who personally conveyed to Zwingli in 1523 ⁴ a treatise of the advocate at the court of Holland, Cornelius Hoen, on the Eucharist, compiled with reference to the famous dissertation on the same subject by Wessel Gansfort and found among the papers of the

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¹ Kroniek van Doesburg, Archief Arnhem Handschrift D. 216.
² Thus in a document from the cathedral scholaster (1576) to the commissioners who wished to assume the school rights from possession of the building, whereas the cathedral chapter was of the opinion that they had been given to the religious on the implied condition that they retained the religio, disciplina and the habit.
³ L. Miedema, Pogingen van katholieke en protestantsche zijde aangewend tot oprichting van een seminarie te Utrecht, Archief... aartsb. Utrecht 26 (1900) 451. Resolutien van de vroedschap van Utrecht. Werken Hist. Gen. n.g. 52, 1900 LIV.c.
⁴ This is based on information obtained from Hardenberg's Vita Wesseli, which is not considered entirely reliable. L. Knappert, Het ontstaan en de vestiging van het protestantisme in de Nederlanden, Utrecht 1924, 138-139.
Naaldwyk deacon James Hoeck (died November 11th 1509). This was the so-called ‘Avondmaalsbrief van Cornelis Hoen’¹. Hinne Rode hereby showed himself to be a supporter of the new theology which was being openly proclaimed in Wittenberg, Basle, Zürich and many other places, and which was strictly forbidden by the temporal authorities in the Netherlands. He must accordingly have been known to other supporters. His precise views on the disputed point of the Eucharist are of little import here. Zwingli agreed with the contents of the letter, unlike Luther, to whom it had probably been shown earlier. Hoen, and after him Zwingli and Oecolampadius, went further than Wessel in rejecting the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. In assessing Hinne Rode's influence, it is not without significance to know that he was most probably not rector of the St. Jerome school, but of the Brotherhouse in Utrecht.² He had thus more contact with the *fratres* of his house, who formed only a small group, than with the more receptive schoolboys. Hinne Rode was either expelled from the congregation or left of his own accord. In 1524 he stayed with Bucer in Strasburg and visited Deventer in 1525. In 1527 he was a preacher in Norden, but was relieved of his function in 1530 because of his Zwinglianism. After this it is impossible to trace his movements with any certainty.³ There is no evidence that he had any disciples among the Brothers. The Utrecht Brotherhouse must have flourished during the first 25 years after Rode's departure, otherwise they would not have been allowed to take charge of the school. The lease of the school in 1565, however, was a bad sign. The Brothers were probably victims of the prevailing spirit of the times, which led to a decline in vocations to the priesthood. By 1571 they had almost vanished.⁴

The comparatively recent foundations in Utrecht and Liège were

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¹ Facsimile edition by Eeckhof, 1917; after the model of 1525 in the Royal Library in the Hague.
² The chronicler of the Brotherhouse of Doesburg calls him the rector domus clericorum, i.e. of the Brotherhouse. This function would virtually exclude the possibility that he might be at the same time rector of the school. Handschrift D, Rijksarchief Arnhem, 84. Nederl. Historiebladen 2 (1939) 142. Kroniek van het fraterhuis te Doesburg. Graheus calls him the teacher of John de Bakker and ‘Hieronymianni collegii praefectus.’ Although it is not so clear, the word collegium in this period refers more to a communal dwelling-house than to a school.
⁴ On the house of Sankt German in Trier, the history of which resembles that of the houses of Utrecht and Liège, see p. 621.
the places in which the Brothers’ schools developed most favourably. One must, however, bear in mind that this new development began more than a hundred years after the founding of the fraternity. We must now examine what progress was made in the remaining houses.

At the end of the last period and the beginning of this, from c. 1480 to c. 1499, the Deventer congregation showed a symptom of the new age in that one of the Brothers was a well-known teacher in their own school. This was John Xinthen or Synthen († before 1493), who was thus teaching in the ‘domus pauperum’ during Erasmus’ school years in Deventer. He was also a famous commentator on the grammar by Alexander de Villa Dei. In 1484, shortly after Erasmus' parture from Deventer, he produced, with Alexander Hegius, a commentary on this well-known and widely used grammar. According to D. Reichling the work met the requirements of the Humanists. No longer were the grammatical rules logically reasoned; the linguistic usage was elucidated, and compared with reference to texts by Latin authors and established in accordance with the writer's findings. This commentary, which will have been mostly the work of the Brother, enjoyed a certain authority in educational circles. It was reprinted 15 times before 1500 in Deventer alone. This fact is certainly not unconnected with the great influx of pupils to Hegius' school.

For the Brothers this school function signified a new office and a fresh departure. John Synthen was evidently a professional teacher. None of the Deventer Brothers before or after him published a school book. The *fratres*’ publishing or writing activities were confined to pious books or chronicles of their house of equally pious intent. John Synthen's position and work as a grammarian are symptomatic of an enormous change of mentality among the Brothers. This change will have been partly brought about by the necessity of finding suitable work now that copying had been rendered pointless by the development of the art of printing. Here the old foundation in Deventer set the example which was followed later on a larger scale in Liège and Utrecht.

Was this merely an isolated case in Deventer? Indeed it must once

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2 D. Reichling, *Das Doctrinale des Alexanders de Villa Dei*, Berlin 1893, LXIII-LXIX.
3 *Ibid.*, LXIX.
again be emphasised that the Brothers held themselves aloof from the school. They had no influence on the appointment of the rector or teachers, no share in the government of the school, no influence on the educational methods applied, and they did not cooperate in the work of teaching. The Brothers' task was, as it had always been, to exercise pastoral care among the students, to preach for them and to provide lodgings for a small group of 50 to 75 boys in their hostel, where they were prepared for the monastic life or for the priesthood. The traditional friendship of the Brothers with the school rector was also continued. They were on good terms with Alexander Hegius who was appointed rector of the chapter school in 1483. This man was a native of Heek in Westphalia, a pupil of the school of Zwolle, a teacher in Emmerich and for a time rector of the great school of Wesel. As a rector he proved himself both pious and zealous in his task, capable and devoted, and under his guidance the school reached its highest peak. Not only did the number of pupils increase, but the entire teaching system was gradually adapted to the requirements of the Humanists, by the introduction of better teaching methods, by the teaching of Greek and a more classical Latin, by the reading of Latin authors, and perhaps too by allowing more time for rhetoric. Alexander was held in high esteem by the later Humanists, even by Erasmus, although the latter admits that he seldom heard him. This concurs with what we know of the general set-up in the schools. Erasmus did not attain the secunda in Deventer, whereas the rector only taught in the secunda and prima. The school's success must be attributed to Alexander Hegius and to the favourable circumstances. To attribute its progress to the Brothers is not only historically inaccurate, but would detract from Hegius' personal merit. His friendship for the Brothers, his own devout nature which eventually led him to the priesthood, must not delude us into giving the Brothers the credit for his work. A devout way of life is not sufficient to make a Brother of the school rector.

During Hegius' rectorship John Synthen set up the fraters' own teaching establishment. According to John Butzbach, who attended school in Deventer towards the end of the century and wrote down his findings in 1508, John Synthen was for years head of a school in the clerics' house, i.e., the pupils' house, the domus pauperum or hostel:


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The words *solarium publicum*, an easily accessible attic, or one with windows, make it difficult to interpret this statement, but in the rest of the statement Butzbach makes it clear that the pupils were instructed in virtue and Latin (*bonae litterae*). This may of course refer only to the supervising of the homework in the hostel, to which Brother Synthen devoted his powers. But still there seems to be more than this, the beginnings of a complete school curriculum which would rival that of the main school. For Synthen also appointed his successor to the teaching post in the clerics' house: first James of Gouda and afterwards Henry of Amersfoort who died in 1503.\(^1\) Although it is not entirely clear what significance must be attributed to the school in the hostel, it seems reasonable to accept, on Butzbach's authority, that these two Brothers were not, as Delprat assumes, teachers in the big school;\(^2\) an assumption which Hyma elaborates into the conclusion that: 'the Brethren of the Common Life were at that time in nearly sole charge of the school.'\(^3\) This institution in the *solarium publicum* may be the same school which functioned for a time in the *Bursa cusana* and was later transferred to the fraters' hostel. It even obtained the municipality's approval, but was later a cause of anxiety to the chapter of St. Lebuin which stood out for the rights of its own big school. In this they followed the traditional educational policy. The chapter will first have made its objections known to the administration of the Brotherhouse. When the Brothers, however, quoted the approval they had obtained from the municipality, a conflict broke out between the city and the chapter. This must have reached its peak around 1530 and the years immediately following. In 1534 a court of arbitration gave a decision which is of particular importance for our purpose. The arbitrator restored the original situation, which meant that the chapter school retained the sole right to teach Latin. The fraters' school was forced to close, but in such a way that Master Lutger may continue as rector in the hostel, provided that he does not maintain or attract any other schools, pupils or students. The pupils of these hostels will attend the old school as has been customary from the beginning. This restoration of the *status quo* therefore, as we have described it here and in other cities, implied that the

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1. Butzbach, 243, 244.
2. G.H.M. Delprat, *Verhandeling* etc. 1850, 72.
pupils should live in the bursae or hostels and attend the city school with supplementary lessons from one teacher.¹

This attempt, even though it failed, shows that a fresh idea of their position with regard to education can be detected among the Deventer Brothers towards the end of the fifteenth and in the sixteenth century, that is, in the period under discussion here. And yet for them teaching remained something entirely incidental, of little interest to the majority. For neither the privileges, nor the other documents, nor the biographers, not even the necrology which, with a few gaps, covers the years from 1384 to 1568, make any mention of or allusion to the fraters' task in education. As elsewhere, the necrology mentions that the deceased frater was a cook, tailor, brewer, baker, rector and confessor of Sisters, but never that he gave lessons as a teacher. The deaths of John Synthen and James of Gouda fall precisely in that period in which the gaps occur in the necrology. Of Henry of Amersfoort the necrology states only that he was a priest.²

The old glory of the Brotherhouse in Deventer faded. Despite the short-lived school, the number of vocations fell off. In 1526 the fratres of Doesburg sent Henry of Meppen to Deventer because there were too few priests in the Brotherhouse.¹ It is improbable that the house ever made a recovery. The number of priests was decreasing everywhere, and here too it may be assumed that some of the Brothers deserted. According to the Doesburg annalist in 1522, the Florenshouse experienced many internal difficulties on account of Luther.³ Rector continued to succeed rector, but Lindeborn's account of the situation makes it plain that all was not well shortly after 1560. In 1561 Simon of Doesburg was deposed as rector⁵ and succeeded by Arnold Heutemius, who remained until 1569. The next rector, Andreas N., whose name is withheld, was relieved of his office in the very first year and forbidden contact with the community (familia) on account of his misbehaviour (demerita). A successor was found from the house

¹ J. de Hullu, Bescheiden betreffende de Hervorming in Overijssel I, 1899, 93. Archief Deventer no. 1201. ‘meyster Lutger rectoerin de vursz burse sal moegen bliven, maar dair sich geener ander schoelen, clercken off studenten onderwinden offte tot hem trecken. Oecksullende clercken van deze beurzen in de olde schoele gaen als van olds guwoenlickenis.’
² G. Dumbar, Het kerkelijk en wereldlijk Deventer, I 64
³ Kroniek van Doesburg, Handschrift D. Rijksarchief Arnhem 144.
⁴ Ibid., 129.
⁵ This may be connected with the attempts at reform made by the parish priest Carolus Gallus in 1560. L.J. Rogier, Geschiedenis van het katholicisme in Noord-Nederland in de 16e en 17e eeuw I, Amsterdam 1945, 543.

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of Emmerich, Henry Wachtendonck. Two more rectors followed him but under the second the entire community was dissolved and its possessions transferred to the municipality.\(^1\) This will have been around 1581, when the practice of the Catholic religion was forbidden in Deventer and church property was confiscated.\(^2\)

The house in Zwolle where the *pater omnium devotorum* still held sway and where the *paters* from the various Dutch houses met every year in the *colloquium* to discuss the situation in the different houses, in order to intervene where necessary, shows few fresh developments in this period. Unfortunately the faithful *Narratio* of James de Voecht now leaves us in the lurch. It was discontinued in this period, so that we are obliged to fall back on a few documents and other scanty sources of information. From these it can be deduced that the activities of the house were carried on as in the preceding period. The Brothers carried out their pastoral duties in many convents and among the many boys attending school in Zwolle. They provided lodgings and supervised the physical and spiritual welfare of certain groups of boys in their three hostels: for poor boys, for boys of wealthy parents who paid a fairly considerable fee for their board, and for sons of less well-to-do families. John Lindeborn quotes a text of Gerard Listrius, the humanistically-minded rector of the Zwolle school in the years 1516 to 1522, *trium linguarum interpres*, in which he praises the Zwolle Brethren for building a large hostel, a house which would hold 200 poor schoolboys, and for being useful to the city.\(^3\)

On July 18th 1514 the Zwolle citizen John Koickman and his wife sold the *fraters* a building plot in the Sassenstraat for this purpose, knowing that they would build on it a ‘clerckefraterhuis’, in other words a Brotherhouse intended for pupils of the school. One of the conditions of the sale indeed was that the ‘behuisinge’ in which the poor Brothers (the *pauperes*) were then living, would return to temporal hands. In other words, the new house would replace the old *domus pauperum*.\(^4\) Gerard Listrius may already have been able to affirm at his

\(^1\) J. Lindeborn, *Historia sive notitia episcopatus Daventriensis*, Coloniae Agrippiniae 1670, 105-106.
\(^2\) L.J. Rogier, *Geschiedenis van het katholicisme in Noord-Nederland in de 16e en 17e eeuw* I, Amsterdam 1945, 546. According to L. Schulze (on the basis of Revius) the house was given to the municipality in 1574 through lack of members. *R.E.* III 481.
\(^4\) Edited by M. Schoengen, 474-476.

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inauguration (1516), that the house was nearly finished. It signified an important extension of the fraters' activities, but still in the well-worn paths. The same is true of their other work referred to above. This may be deduced from the various letters of confirmation which the fraters received from Church authorities, the main purpose of which was to entrust them with the pastoral care of the schoolboys. It is also evident from the donations to the domus pauperum, for the support of poor scholars was still regarded as a much esteemed form of charity and benevolence.

Yet the Zwolle house also eventually reached the turning point. In 1537 a Brother from Culm again travelled requesting six good, erudite, learned men, fitted to take charge of the Culm fraterhouse and of the gymnasium and suited for every good work. They even threatened, if the Zwolle Brethren did not comply with their request, that the bishop would take steps which they would not like at all. Before replying, the Zwolle Brethren submitted the case to the colloquium, perhaps in 1538, perhaps only in 1539, perhaps twice. The fact remains that they did not give their answer until 1539, and then completely en mineur. They do, however, give us an important insight into the situation in the Brotherhouses and in society as a whole. The administration of the Zwolle house delayed the return of the frater from Culm (John) in order to consult with the colloquium first. There, however, they had been given little hope. All the delegates complained of these sorry times in which monastic life (religio) was nearly everywhere in difficulties. ‘Not only our order and life, but nearly all the orders in our district, have difficulty in finding persons who will leave the world and cling to their community and life.... We are very few; there are scarcely six of us... We do not know thus what we must reply.’ Finally they write that if the bishop perhaps intends to confiscate the property, then ‘we would have him know that we have spent a great deal on this house.’¹ This is a difficult situation such as we also encountered in Liège around this time. Still, it is unpleasant to reflect that in the face of so much spiritual need, the Brethren of Zwolle thought first of the money which they had invested in Culm. In 1544 a lack of members led the Zwolle Brotherhouse to request and obtain a priest from the Doesburg house, Theodoric of Wachtendonck. However, he only stayed until 1546, for Doesburg needed him as a confessor of sisters in Calcar.²

¹ M. Schoengen, 497-498.

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The celebrated Zwolle house with its once numerous members and flourishing institutions for schoolboys, now led a languishing existence. This was not so much because the members deserted or became Protestants, although this may well have happened, but because of a dearth of new members. The reasons for this lay in the flagging of spiritual sacrifice among the faithful, the decline in religious feeling, and the growth of a bias towards the temporal. Like the monasteries, the Brotherhouses gain too few novices or none at all. Although the Reformation was still suppressed in the Netherlands, there can already be detected among the population an aversion to the monastic life or at least an indifference to it, of which most institutions were already feeling the effects. It may be too, that the Humanists' optimistic esteem for worldly goods, their praise of worldly culture, weakened or even suppressed the very widespread medieval spirit of contempt for the world. The Humanists' reviling of the monasteries may have had the same effect. However, none of the Brothers in Zwolle seems to have gone over to the new way of thinking. M. Schoengen testifies at least that ‘despite a meticulous search I have not been able to discover in the Brotherhouse of Zwolle the name of any Brother suspected of heresy.’

Although the spirit of the Reformation may have influenced the decline in the number of Brothers in the Zwolle house, it is quite a different matter to determine whether those *fratres* who did enter helped to promote the new culture. The fact alone that none of the Zwolle Brothers taught in the main school shows that they held themselves aloof from the intellectual life. There is no historical justification for considering them as pioneers of the Humanistic culture. When the city went over to the Netherlands party (the party of the States) in 1580, the Brotherhouse shared the fate of the other monasteries and churches. On September 26th, 1581, the civic authorities decided to have the monastic property inventorized by a deputation, but this decision was never carried out in full. The magistrate allowed the monastics to continue living in their monasteries and foundations, certainly until 1590. The only exception was the Dominicans who were banished from the city by a decree dated May 13th 1580. On March 1st 1590 a *frater* still held the rights of the Brotherhouse property, so that he was able, on that date, to sell a small piece of land through the agency of the mayor and alderman. This was in fact the

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1 M. Schoengen, Inleiding CLXIV.

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last. At this time there were only four Brothers left in the Fraterhouse proper, two priests and two lay brothers, namely a brewer and a cook. The magistrate dissolved the community by an act of 3rd January 1592, and the remaining fraters were given an annuity and somewhere to live. The two priests received places in the Zwolle convents (one in the Maatklooster and one in Wittenhuis). They were appointed as paters and had to administer the property under the control of the city. The brewer received a place in the convent of St. Gertrude which ensured him a fairly comfortable living. With regard to the cook - who was evidently still well able to work - the magistrates would deal with his case as they saw fit and proper. There was also a Brother, Sanders Schimmelpenninck, still left in the hostel (domus pauperum). This house would retain its original purpose, and was for the present allowed to remain under the administration of the aforementioned Brother.¹

The Hulsbergen Brotherhouse remained an agrarian house. The proximity of Zwolle and Deventer made the pater of Hulsbergen a well-known and influential figure at the Zwolle colloquium, a person who was consulted from time to time during the periods between the colloquia. No one would attempt to describe the Brothers of this isolated house as pioneers of Humanism, but that some were inclined to favour the Reformation might be deduced from the rather dramatic history of this house in the 16th century. In 1525 some of the Brothers conceived the plan of transforming this rural Brotherhouse into a regular monastery. Duke Charles of Gelre, however, intervened - more or less under pretext of heretical inclinations among the Brothers - and settled Benedictines in Hulsbergen. He banished the Brothers from their house and settled them in convents. Some of them profited by this opportunity to bid the religious life farewell.² The Benedictines remained in Hulsbergen until 1539, that is, until the death of Duke Charles of Gelre. Then they were evicted in their turn and the Brothers came back.³ It is not known how many Brothers returned. They will have hung on until the Reformation and then most probably have been ejected by force.⁴

The house of Doesburg took no part in the dissemination of

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1 M. Schoengen, CLXIV-CLXVI.
3 Ibid., 184.
4 Rogier, Het katholicisme 1 538-541.
Humanistic ideas, although I think it possible to deduce from the terms which he uses for ‘dying’ that the more classical Latin was also employed by the house annalist.\(^1\) The fraters had no influence on the teaching and their only influence on the schoolboys was in the religious sphere. Some instruction was given in the *domus pauperum*, but it was adapted to that of the school. However, the Reformation did not entirely pass by this house without influencing the Brothers. It even gained some adherents.

Some measure of the spiritual situation of the region from which the house of Doesburg recruited its novices is provided by the list of inmates of the house. The number declined a little at first in the sixteenth century, but recovered somewhat later. In 1501 the house of Doesburg numbered 24 persons, mostly priests, six of whom lived and worked outside.\(^2\) There were still 21 left in 1523\(^3\) and in 1529,\(^4\) but only 15 in 1535. After this the curve rose again, to 19 in 1540,\(^5\) 20 in 1546\(^6\) and 22 in 1553.\(^7\) The number remained the same in 1558\(^8\) which placed the Doesburg house in the position of being able to help some of the other Brotherhouses. Henry of Meppen, for example, was sent to Deventer in 1526, because the house there had too few priests. Similarly, Theodoric of Wachtendonk was dispatched to Zwolle\(^9\) while the Doesburg Brother John Huls was elected rector of the Utrech house, when the rector Otto left the Fraternity in 1556\(^10\). The decline in membership was thus slight in comparison to the old house which had formerly been extremely flourishing.

Information provided by the Annals shows that the intake of novices, both lay and clerical, may be considered normal throughout the entire period. However, although the novices came, they did not persevere. Some of them left before being admitted to the Brotherhood, and some long after, on account of illness, disagreement with fellow Brethren or rector, or because they were able to obtain a freer spiritual function. Others departed because they sympathized with the new religious ideas emerging in Germany, or because they had rendered their position untenable by bad behaviour or evil suspicions and were expelled from the Brotherhood by the rector or the *visitatores*. Every *frater* was

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1. See p. 384.
2. Kroniek van Doesburg 92.
10. See 216. The recall of James of Bommel as socius from Elten in 1539 on the grounds of too few priests seems to have been a pretext, p. 185.
free to leave the Brotherhouse if he so desired, for he took no vows, but in practice to leave was considered as a sort of apostasy, the breaking of a solemn promise. On one occasion the annalist even speaks of such a departure, in 1511, as being contra votum. The case in question was that of a cook who left and took a job in a brewery in Utrecht. Such departures, of which there is little evidence in the chronicles of Zwolle and Deventer, occurred frequently in Doesburg in this period: the cleric Walramus in 1505; the priest James Beslick in 1504, the priest Arnold of Halen in 1507; Arnold of Deventer shamefully left Wamel, cutting himself off from us. James Beslick, who had left already in 1504 and become a vicar, wished to return. The departure of this man so early in the sixteenth century had naturally no connection with Lutheranism or the Reformation, yet this same James fled again from Doesburg in 1529, when Duke Charles of Gelre began a campaign in that city against the Lutherans. John Andrea, admitted in 1508, ordained priest in 1518, left, became a chaplain and later a vice-curate. The tailor Egidius Hendrik began the novitiate in 1508 and departed in 1511. In the same way William of Utrecht, a novice in 1508, and ordained in 1515, left three years later and returned home. Godfried of Krefeld, the cook who had left some time before, wished to return in 1514 but was not accepted. The tailor William of Bommel went away in 1517. In 1519 the Brothers had Gerard of Nijkerk, confessor in Elten, sent home on account of his evil life. And all this happened before the influence of Lutheranism.

The annalist mentions Luther for the first time in the year 1521. He knows that Luther proclaimed various new theses and that his ideas had gained ground throughout the whole world; that he was in conflict with the Holy See on many points; that he reproached the Church of Rome with avarice and with many matters regarding indulgences and prebends. Luther has brought the whole of Christendom in turmoil. It is said that he has been declared a heretic and condemned—but the writer is not convinced. There are, however, papal Bulls (if at least they are authentic) which forbid Luther's writings. Such is

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1 Kroniek, 107.
2 Ibid., 93.
3 Ibid., 95.
4 Ibid., 101.
5 Ibid., 94.
6 Ibid., 95.
7 Ibid., 160.
8 Ibid., 105, 117.
9 Ibid., 105, 107.
10 Ibid., 105, 113, 117.
11 Ibid., 112.
12 Ibid., 115.
13 Ibid., 119.
14 Ibid., 123.
the view of a contemporary-at-a-distance. A year later (1522) the writer is better informed, and the results of Luther's activities can be observed in the Netherlands! It seems as though Luther is preaching the truth and keeping to the Scriptures! But the fruits of his work prove the contrary and ‘by their fruits you shall know them.’ Hence his writings - perhaps wrongly interpreted - gave rise to rebellion and apostasy on the part of the religious, contempt for the clergy, the desertion of the monasteries and the plundering of Church goods. Many, too, who are less religious support him, attracted by the promised freedom, whereas they perhaps do not rightly understand Luther's intention. But, aspiring to the freedom which is not allowed them, they flee submission and obedience and say that they are called to freedom. The rector of the Brotherhouse in Utrecht, *dominus* John Roy,¹ was dismissed for his Lutheran sympathies. The Florenhouse in Deventer too has up to now experienced much internal strife on Luther's account. The writer's views have developed somewhat in the course of 1521-22. It seems to him that Luther is right up to a certain point, but that the freedom he proclaims is misunderstood, which leads to the evil ‘fruits.’²

A few of the desertions which follow now might be connected with the prevailing Lutheranism: Zylmann Emmerik leaves and marries.³ William Hecfort, confessor to the Sisters at Wamel, flees, under suspicion of incontinence and becomes a canon in Elten.⁴

In the year 1524-25 the Doesburg annalist has more to say about Luther. Various young scholars are associating themselves with Luther and proclaiming all kinds of new and unusual things in the Church. The pope cannot bind anyone under pain of mortal sin. No one is obliged to confess or to fast, or to keep the feast days or to refrain from eating meat according to the precept of the Church. Furthermore, priests are allowed to marry; they must also work with their hands. Only one Mass per day may be said in any city; anyone may consecrate, if chosen by the community. The Lutherans assert that they have scriptural proof of all these things.⁵

The annalist is evidently well informed. All the matters mentioned here were already proclaimed in 1524-25. The chronicler, however, makes no mention of the principal point - justification by faith alone, with its effect on the value of the sacraments and of good works. One

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¹ Hinne Rode.
² Kroniek 129.
³ Ibid., 126.
⁴ Ibid., 126.
⁵ Ibid., 137-141.
might say that he is a warning to us! In examining the influence of Luther and his followers in the Netherlands, we must not keep too strictly to the essential, the dogmatic points, but also have an eye to matters which are at first sight incidental. These may have been for the contemporary the most spectacular, and for many the most attractive aspects of Luther's preaching, namely all that may be comprised in the concept 'evangelical freedom.'

The annalist goes on to tell of the dispute among the scholars, that the various parties are in opposition. Lutheranism is gaining ground in Saxony, Livonia, Prussia and elsewhere. He finds it most distressing that the religious habit can no longer be worn there, unless one wishes to run the danger of being abused as a wolf, or dog. He knows that several monastics and secular religious there marry and work for their living. He does not wish to take sides yet, and fears that nothing good will come of all this as far as the Church is concerned. He ends his account with a reference to the peasant revolt and Luther's marriage.

Such rumours and snippets of information penetrated to the Doesburg Brethren. They continued to work as before, but some of the fraters were suspected of supporting the new ideas. ‘A complaint has been made about us to the Duke, notably concerning one of our priests at the ducal court.’

In the beginning of 1526 there was a considerable upset among the fraters and in the entire house. On the grounds of Luther's writings and in keeping with his teaching the younger Brothers refused to be shorn according to the customs of the congregation. They did not wish to have their heads completely shaved as was the custom up to now. They had only accepted such an unusual procedure out of weakness. They now resisted violently, and as one man, which caused a considerable upset in the house. After some discussion the fraters decided that this time they would be shaved above the crown and that subsequently they would abide by the decision and advice of the fratres in the colloquium, to whom the matter would be submitted. The fathers however decided not to permit such innovations, to retain the old custom even though some object: ‘Up till now, therefore, the old manner of shaving the hair has been retained,’ remarks the chronicler.

When the time came round again for the Brothers to be shorn, the layman, Gerard, a tailor, left the house (1526) and that for the time

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1 Kroniek 143.
2 Ibid., 144.
3 Ibid., 145.

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being was that. Speaking of this same year the annalist says that he knew nine religious, trained in the school of Doesburg, who had gone over to the Reformation.\footnote{Kroniek 148.} It is not possible to make out more accurately in how far the Brothers contributed to the training of these men or to the preparation of a mentality required for such a step. On the 8th of September 1527 the cleric Mathias of Kempen, a pupil of the school of Nijmegen, was accepted as a novice in the place of those who had deserted. Unfortunately, he was already infected with the new doctrine and departed before the year was out, in the octave of Peter and Paul in 1528. He returned after a few days and begged forgiveness, but he was not re-admitted.\footnote{Ibid., 151, 155.} A great loss to the house was the departure of the procurator John of Heusden, a man who had served twenty-one years in this function, but was now neglecting his duties on account of his partizanship for the new teaching of Luther which the annalist here calls ‘superstitiones novae Lutheranae.’ Personal warnings were of no avail. He wanted to leave, and according to the annalist he also had other motives.\footnote{Ibid., 152.} He did not chose his time too well, for on the fourth Sunday after Easter of the year 1529 (April 25th) Charles of Gelre arrived in Doesburg in order to persecute the Lutherans. He took two of them away with him, a Dominican who was a native of Doesburg, and a teacher. They were later put to death in Arnhem together with a Carthusian. John of Heusden and his predecessor James Beslick, who had already lived twenty-five years outside the Fraterhouse, were able to flee the city in time.\footnote{Ibid., 160.}

The chronicle makes no further mention of Lutheranism, and the account of the Anabaptists at Münster and elsewhere is too general to be recalled here. Meanwhile life continued. Rector John of Krefeld (1494-1534) was a good administrator and disciplinarian. His successor, Egbert of Delden (1534-1542), was confessor to the Sisters in Sion at the time of his election, and these were unwilling to let him go.\footnote{Ibid., 175.} They enlisted the help of the Duke in order to retain him, but without success. During his rectorship John Borghaert left the Doesburg house on account of a trivial matter, and returned to his mother.\footnote{Ibid., 179.} In 1546 Wessel of Achten left the house; his departure was connected with his sympathies for the sacramentarii. He did, however, wish to live in a Brotherhouse at the outset. He vainly sought admission to that of Utrecht and then applied to the house in Groningen. Here he
was accepted, but later ran away (*apostavit*) from this house too.¹

The entire situation does not make such a favourable impression as in the preceding period. The house suffered many losses, and despite the reasonable influx of novices it was difficult to keep up the numbers. Yet the house was still able to come to the assistance of other Brotherhouses. The new ideas of reform found some support among the younger Brothers and three of them left the house on this account. The difference of opinion between younger and older members - so natural in such circumstances - was focussed on the manner of shaving the head. A trivial matter, but one which brought out the conflict between liberty and the old customs. The latter prevailed. There is no need to take refuge in the similarity of religious conviction and practice between the fraters and Luther in order to explain the sympathy which some of the younger members felt for Luther's ideas. Such sympathy and dissent could have arisen without such an analogy, for the young people were by their very nature more predisposed towards what was new. Not being trained in theology they were scarcely in a position to judge the difference between old and new in the domain of doctrine. They had heard talk of liberty, evangelical freedom, and this was why they opposed the tonsure. In any case, their resistance was of short duration.

It is a remarkable fact that neither in Deventer nor in Zwolle, Liège or Utrecht is any mention made of the constitution of pope Pius V dated 17th November 1568, concerning the taking of the three monastic vows by those living in a community under voluntary obedience, and who wore a habit different from that of the secular priests.² This document would have shown that the Brothers had to choose between becoming monks or secular priests. The fact that such a decree emanated from a pope of the Dominican order recalls the actions of some Dominicans against the Brothers at the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth century. When, however, L. Metz, bishop of ’s-Hertogenbosch, visited the Brotherhouse in his city in 1573, according to the ruling of Trent, and had revealed his proposals for reform, he declared plainly that he did not wish to act against the constitution of pope Pius V who had disbanded and dissolved any congregation living in community without taking vows.³ When the Brethren of Doesburg disbanded the Brotherhood in 1571, they made

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¹ Kroniek, 197, 200.
² Edited in *Analecta Gijsberti Coeverincx*, pars II ’s-Hertogenbosch, s.y. 88-89.
reference to this document. According to the constitution of November 17th 1568 it was the will of Pius V ‘that every religious adopting a style of dress different from that of the seculars, should join a stricter order, approved by the Church of Rome, within a certain time, under pain of excommunication, or change his dress (habitus) and join the secular priests.’ They complied with this order, but they were the only ones to do so. No house but that of Doesburg disbanded itself on the grounds of the papal decree. Indeed, it seems to me that the canonists of the time could have found sufficient reasons for assuring the *fratres* that ‘this did not apply to them.’ In the first place, the introduction to the constitution states that the command to choose an order rule applied to those who did not relinquish their property or follow a recognized rule: *nec propriis renunciare, nec ullam profittenur (regulam).* The *fratres* thus could ignore this document since they had renounced all personal possessions.

Moreover, it seems that the document was directed against certain institutions and authorized those who, living in such a house, wished to take the vows, to do so, at the same time obliging others in the same house either to follow the example of the first or to adopt the status of secular clergy. The pope wished to restore unity to such houses, divided by differences of opinion, and compel all the inmates to follow the one strict rule. It is a little far-fetched to deduce from the constitution that the pope forbade the institution of the Brethren. It may indeed be regarded as forming part of the attempt to give the houses a stronger legal position. That at least one house and one bishop refer to the document proves that the Brothers had become aware of it. One can imagine that this papal constitution did little to encourage the already languishing houses.

The heads of the Doesburg house, whose membership had shrunk considerably during the past years, began discussions with the bishop of Deventer, Aegidius de Monte, with the commanders of the German order, and with the bailiff of Utrecht, who was the official pastor at Doesburg, with a view to secularizing the *fratres* and transforming them into vicars of the Church. They also touched upon the declaring of the Brotherhouse property to be vicar property, so that the possessors of the new vicarships, in other words, the *fratres*, might possess it. This discussion led to a decree by the bishop, set down in a letter dated

2 *Analecta G. Coeverincx* II 88.
June 26th 1571. At that time the number of inmates had shrunk to ten, and the disbanding could be proposed as an act of virtue, of obedience to the pope.

In addition to certain financial arrangements which, though interesting, are of no importance for our purpose, the document contains various other regulations defining the new activities of the Brethren turned vicars, whereby their former activities would be maintained as far as possible. These confirm what has already been set out. The Brotherhouse with all its possessions became church property and the profits were to serve for the maintenance of six vicarii. The Brothers were to contribute four hundred guilder to the church coffers, so that the six new vicars might share with the older members in the offerings. These six would serve three altars and also one inside the house in which six dwellings would be made ready for the six vicarii. Every Sunday and feast day they would sing Matins (preces matutinae), High Mass and vespers with the rector of the school, the verger and the school boys. In the afternoon of Sunday and feast days the oldest four of these six would take it in turn to preach for the people. The two youngest would do the same after the schoolboys' vespers. If there was then a vigil it would be sung by seven or eight schoolboys with the vicarii. The domus pauperum would remain in existence and one of the vicars, chosen for this purpose, would administer its property for the benefit of the poor students. One of their number would be rector to the Sisters (domus viduarum), while another (of the three youngest) would be in charge of the domus pauperum. Since there were ten of them, four of the young clerics were not able to become vicarius at once. They would live from the Brotherhouse property like the other six, succeeding the vicars as they died. They would then be ordained priest. When all four had had their turn, any later vacancies would be filled by the bishop of Deventer appointing someone from the Deventer seminary as vicar. All Brothers would renounce their distinctive dress and clothe themselves fittingly in the manner of the secular clergy. Thereupon the bishop secularized the fraters and appointed six of them vicars of the Doesburg church. The number of boys in the domus pauperum would be increased by four, according to certain funds destined for this purpose.

Certain facts stand out in connection with this secularization. To

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2 Ibid., 471-472.
3 Ibid., 473.
4 Ibid., 475.
judge from the Sunday preaching and the continuing office of rector to the Sisters, the fraters retained their pastoral functions. They also continued the collations for the schoolboys on Sundays after Vespers and their care for the boys living in their hostel. Another striking point is that the school was not implicated in this transition. It was evidently quite outside the Brothers' sphere of activity, and a non-Brother held the position of rector. Two people were in charge of the hostel, as was seen to be the case elsewhere.

Such was thus the end of the Doesburg Brotherhouse in 1571. It was not exactly brilliant, but typical of the spiritual activities of the Brethren in the later years of the institution. The Brothers, who had probably gained few novices, or maybe none at all, in the last few years, considered that their institution was out of date, but continued with their priestly work as before. It is clear that none of this group actively participated in furthering Humanism in the sixteenth century. The Reformation did indeed attract some, but the fraters never made propaganda for the Reformation as a group. The leaders were not even inclined to meet quite reasonable demands, and despite its losses the house maintained its position rather better than those of Deventer, Zwolle and other places. The secularization, it is true, changed the fraters' position, modified their work to some extent, and certainly increased their liberty, but this transformation did not lead them in the direction of the Reformation.

We have described the relationship of the fraters of the Brotherhouse of 's-Hertogenbosch towards the school and towards their hostel (domus pauperum) and the Brothers' task with regard to the schoolboys up to and including the period spent by Erasmus in their domus pauperum. It had really been intended that he should attend the chapter school or city school, but, probably quite justifiably, he found the idea superfluous. This Brotherhouse and hostel were under two fratres: one in charge of administration and the other to supervise the education of the hostel boys. Such was the pattern of the Brothers' life until their decline, which took place after the taking of the city by Stadhouder Frederik Hendrik in 1629. The fraters seem to have managed to preserve their institution through the great religious upheavals of 1566, 1577 and 1578 and to maintain a reasonable standard. There exists a list of novices who entered between 1496 and 1553 comprising some

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1 The surviving documents make mention of a hostel where the boys paid fees. A. van der Does de Willebois, II, 248-249.
thirty names. These were probably sufficient to maintain a community of about twenty persons. In contrast to what we saw in Deventer, Zwolle and Doesburg, the supply of novices if anything exceeded the demand in the middle of the century. Most of the rectors of this period are also known.¹

During his visitation of March 1573, bishop Laurence Metz found that the old regularis disciplina had suffered somewhat and that certain measures were necessary. The office, for example, must be celebrated slowly and devoutly, the rector must say a High Mass at six o'clock according to the Roman rite, he must lead the Collation among the Brothers on Sundays and feastdays from one to two. He had to hold a chapter of faults every two weeks and see to it that the lapsed disciples mended their ways. Anyone who dissented was to be reported to the bishop. He had to ensure that every one rose in good time, refuse to admit more Brothers than finances would allow, and abolish any personal property. No one was allowed to have alcoholic drink in his room, women were not admitted to the house, confessors of Sisters had to remain subject to the rector. These and similar regulations are such as can always be tightened up to some extent. Since there was no change in their position regarding the schoolboys, we shall return to it presently.

The will of James of Ostayen of 1561 ², which we have already quoted, and a report of a visitation by the chapter of St. John¹, show clearly that the school in 's-Hertogenbosch did not belong to the fraters, but was run by the chapter. On Sunday afternoons all the boys went in procession from the school to the house of the Brothers or another suitable place in order to hear a sermon.³ Every day a group of boys from the domus pauperum, together with those from the Bonenfanten house had to accompany the chapter choir with song. All pupils of the domus pauperum attended the city school.⁴ The sermon for the schoolboys is not mentioned in the visitation report of the fraters, but the domus pauperum is. It was largely in this house, as elsewhere, that the seminary, founded by the diocese of 's-Hertogenbosch according to the regulations laid down by the Council of Trent, was established. In 1571 money for the seminary was collected from

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¹ Analecta G. Coeverinxx II, 116.
² v.d. Does de Willebois o.c., II 277.
³ Archief... katholieke Kerk in Nederland IV (1962) 22.
⁴ Ibid., 23.
⁵ Ibid., 24.
various church institutions, and in 1572 it was functioning *apud fratres.* After his visitation of March 1573, however, the bishop decreed that the younger *fratres* should zealously attend a lesson in theology on each day appointed for that purpose. This is the first mention of any theological instruction for the *fratres,* an important innovation which unfortunately, so far as is known, found no imitators. Meanwhile the institution of the *domus pauperum* also continued to exist in its original form. The bishop Laurence Metz spoke of it as a school - *schola.* Just as in Erasmus’ time it was under the direction of two *fratres,* one in *docendo et repetendo* and one in *observando et corrigendo.* To both of these the bishop gave the title of rector. One of them had to say Mass for the boys while the other supervised. This Mass was held at an hour when the boys *scholis egressis,* i.e. around eight o'clock in the morning when they had already had their first two lessons at school. It is evident from this that they were still attending the city school, as they had done in 1568 and earlier.

The diocese appears to have bought the entire complex comprising the *domus pauperum,* for the bishop had to be given a list of all goods and the accounts for the last four years. And so the *fratres* carried on. In 1614 their community consisted of ten members and on September 12th 1615 they agreed with the bishop to make a complete separation between the Brotherhouse and the *domus pauperum* which, it seems, was mostly a seminary at this time. There would, however, be a gate through which the seminarists could pass on Sundays and feast days to the church of the Brotherhouse: ‘to hear this service of God,’ ‘om deze dienst Godts te hooren.’ The *domus pauperum* had certainly its own chapel, but, by going to the *fratres’* church the seminarists were preserving some of the old custom whereby the Brothers preached for the schoolboys. On the eleventh of March 1623 the Brothers rented their house and appurtenances to the prelate and canons of the Abbey of Berne, on condition that they should continue to live in the cells downstairs and have access to the Church. They could also get their meals from the abbey for a certain sum. This lease was already supplemented and explained a few months later. Why did the Brothers let their house? They were still a fairly flourishing community of ten

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1 *Analecta G. Coeverincx,* I 223.
3 *Ibid,* 120.
4 *Ibid,* 120.
6 *Ibid,* 134.
7 *Ibid,* 141.
or eleven persons. Perhaps they had been compelled to face the fact that in the last few years too few novices had come forward to enable them to continue on the old footing. Moreover, part of their original work, the copying of books, was no longer a realistic proposition and their printing work had little success. It was probably poverty which obliged them to adopt radical measures which enabled them, at the same time, to help the Norbertines whose monastic life in their Abbey of Berne was threatened as a result of the upheaval in the north. In January 1624 therefore they once again transferred to the bishop the administration of the domus pauperum, now principally a seminary. Three bursarii, who received their board from the fraters, would henceforth be maintained by the Abbey, which also took over all foundations for Masses and vigils.

This last signifies the dissolution of the Brotherhouse. It is not known what happened to the Brothers after this. Perhaps they were given church functions. In any case it was only five years later that Frederik Hendrik took the city on September 14th 1629, to be followed promptly by a proclamation of the States General, forbidding the practice of the Catholic religion. This would certainly have put an end to the fraters' activities and religious practices, but the institution scarcely experienced this catastrophe.

There were no signs of any falling off in 's-Hertogenbosch, certainly no mass defection, not even in 1566, and, with the exception of Macropedius, no expression of Humanism. It is doubtful whether Macropedius ever taught in the great school. He must have been an old man when he returned to 's-Hertogenbosch, for it was here that he celebrated his golden jubilee.

It was in this later period that two Brothers became teachers at the chapter school in 's-Hertogenbosch, probably because even then other occupations had to be found. At the beginning of the sixteenth century Peter Vladderacus, son of the famous school rector Christoffel Vladderacus taught there. He was also rector of the Brotherhouse. He called himself cenobiarcha collegii fratrum Gregorianorum et gymnasiiarcha Silviducis. Shortly afterwards he became parish priest at Oirschot.

1 Analecta G. Goeverincx, I 142-143.
2 Rogier, Het katholicisme, I 605.
(1604), which would have been unheard of before 1570 because the Brothers' task lay in a different domain. The other, Lambert of Berchem, was rector of the domus pauperum while teaching at the school, and in 1602 bore the title of juventutis fraternalis rector et primariae classis pralector. The new functions of these two men show that circumstances had changed, but these late teaching posts are of no significance for the problem of the Brothers and Humanism.

In Groningen the relationship between Brotherhouse, hostel and school was essentially the same as in Deventer, Zwolle, Doesburg, 's-Hertogenbosch and elsewhere. Unfortunately what information we do possess on this period, when considerable changes were taking place, is scanty and not always clear. In interpreting the documents the local historians have not taken sufficient account of what is known to have happened elsewhere. Some of them notably have not sufficiently distinguished between the Brotherhouse proper at the Martini cemetery and the domus pauperum, also called clerics' house or cleric-Brotherhouse in the S. Janstraat. They certainly have not made enough distinction between the fratres and the teachers at the two nearby parish schools of the Martini and Onze Lieve Vrouw ter Aa. The first of these may be considered as the city school, since the rector was appointed by the municipality together with the two priests of St. Martin. Both schools were older than the Brotherhouse and the hostel, and both were well equipped. In the sixteenth century the school of St. Martin possessed four teachers besides the rector.

Our knowledge of the lives of the inmates of the Brotherhouse is of little importance in assessing the problem of their attitude towards the Reformation and Humanism. In this connection the rector Goswin of Halen, who faithfully fulfilled this function from 1507-10 until his death in 1530, is certainly the principal personality. As a boy he had probably been the famulus of Wessel Gansfort from 1481 to 1485 and again from 1488 to 1489 after a short period of study in Deventer. He then entered the Fraternity in Groningen, renouncing all his worldly goods on June 25th 1489. This was about four months before Wessel's death in Groningen on October 4th 1489. He soon gained the esteem of his rector John van der Oldekerken, who was head of the Brotherhouse from 1491-95 to around 1507.

1 R. Post, Nederlandse Historiebladen 2 (1939) 147; Scholen en onderwijs 49.
2 Bijdragen ... Groningen IV (1869) 144.
It is only natural that Wessel and his friends, notably Rudolf Agricola and all the Humanists who met together in the monastery of Aduard between 1480 and 1485, made a deep impression on this receptive boy, Wessel's *famulus*. In this way he gained some knowledge, even at second hand, of the ideas of these first Dutch Humanists. These sympathies will have grown during his period of study in Deventer, and he retained and cherished them after entering the Fraternity and being appointed head of the Brotherhouse in Groningen. This can be deduced from his two letters to Albert Hardenberg, from his encouragement of two people to write a *Vita Wesseli* and from his visit to Erasmus at the request of the Groningen priest William Frederiks.

To commence with this last: in the beginning of the year 1521, when Erasmus was still residing in Louvain, the Groningen priest William Frederik sent him a golden beaker - a chalice, perhaps - as a gift. The bearer of this gift was Goswin of Halen, at that time rector of the Brotherhouse in Groningen. The priest was probably delighted at the prospect of receiving a letter from Erasmus in his old age, and Goswin, who had formerly served as *famulus* of a Humanist will have wished to see and speak to Erasmus in the flesh. Erasmus sized up the situation very well and replying to the pastor spoke of ‘the welcome gift, offered by such an outstanding man and brought by such an excellent messenger.’

The first of the two letters referred to above is the celebrated one of November 23rd 1528, in which he reminds Albert Hardenberg of the various important persons who visited the monastery of Aduard, especially under Abbot Henry of Rees. This letter shows that Goswin’s respect for the first Dutch Humanists has grown. The following

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1 The names of these persons and their humanistic activities have been frequently given and described, see M. van Rhijn, *Wessel Gansfort*, 127-129. According to van Dellen, John van der Oldenkerken, Brother and subsequently rector of the Brotherhouse, 102, 103, 105, should be included, but he offers absolutely no proof for this theory and the others do not mention him. The matter would be of some importance for the problem in question, since we would then have a Brother among the first Dutch Humanists. However, van Dellen’s statement seems to me unacceptable, since this van der Oldenkerken would have been too young for such a company in 1480 and subsequent years. For Groningen, therefore, Goswin of Halen remains the first known Humanist among the Brothers, or at least the first man with humanistic leanings.


year, in the second letter to Hardenberg dated 14th May 1529, he lists the books which Hardenberg ought to read: Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the works of Virgil, Horace and Terence, also Plutarch, Sallust, Thucidides, Herodotus, Justin, even Aristotle and Plato, but above all Cicero. In addition to the classics Hardenberg should also study the Bible, the work of Josephus, the *historia tripartita*, and especially the Church Fathers, Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose, Chrysostom, Gregory, and ecclesiastical writers like St. Bernard and Hugo of St. Victor.

Of the Humanists he recommended especially Pico della Mirandola. He suggested that he should divide up his day into mornings spent in the study of philosophy and afternoons passed in the company of friends, looking after his health, and perhaps studying the poets and orators.¹ It is a Humanistic programme, but it must be remembered that he was living at this time in 1529, when Erasmus had done his work and the Humanist culture reigned triumphant in the schools, and among scholars and officials - if, indeed, the Reformation did not prove more attractive. Goswin speaks only of Northern Humanism, which Lindeboom has termed somewhat restrictively Biblical Humanism, thus relegating the study of the Fathers too much to the background.

Finally Goswin aroused the love for the humanistic culture in at least two boys from the *domus pauperum* in the St. Janstraat. These were Reinerus Praedinius and the aforementioned Albert Rizaeus Hardenberg. Both of these had lived as schoolboys in the *domus pauperum*, sharing room and bed. This must have been roughly between 1519 and 1524. Afterwards R. Praedinius probably spent some time as a teacher in the school of St. Martin in Groningen, from 1529 to 1535. He taught elsewhere from 1535 to 1545 and was head of the Groningen school of St. Martin from 1545 until his death in 1559. He was a pious and tolerant man. Like Erasmus he criticized the prevailing church customs, but he had no time for Luther at all.²

Albert Ritzer or Ritzaeus Hardenberg was born in the same year as R. Praedinius in Hardenberg in Overijsel. He remained at school longer than his room-mate and joined the Cistercians as a novice in Aduard in 1528. In 1530 he travelled to Louvain and was enrolled as a student in the Arts Faculty. However, his strongly expressed sympathy

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for the Reformation aroused so much opposition that he was compelled to leave the
University city. He continued his studies in Mainz where he already gained his
doctorate in theology in 1537 and became friendly with John of Lasco who had fled
from Poland. Together they tried to gain the abbot of Aduard, Godfried of Arnhem,
for the Reformation. Having once again been driven from Louvain, he was admitted
as a monk to his monastery of Aduard, despite his activities in support of the
Reformation. He left the monastery, however, in 1542, married, and continued to
fight for the Reformation in Embden where he died on October 10th 1561. Since
Goswin of Halen had already died in 1530 he did not live to see his pupil's defection.

Both these men contributed much to keeping Wessel Gansfort's memory alive. In
this they were helped and probably stimulated by Goswin of Halen, rector of the
Brotherhouse in Groningen. Of R. Praedinius' work only a few notes on Wessel
Gansfort, made between the years 1533 and 1556, have survived, but of Hardenberg
we possess a Vita in two versions. For our purposes it is sufficient to have made
clear from this that the frater-rector revealed to these men his liking for Gansfort
and in general his humanistic leanings.

The boys' stay in the domus pauperum run by the fratres in the St. Janstraat poses
the question of whether they only lived there, attending the school of St. Martin, or
whether they followed the complete school curriculum of the time in the house. In
other words, did the fratres run a school in their hostel in Groningen in the sixteenth
century or did they not? In company with many others it seems to me that, contrary
to what we saw in Zwolle, Doesburg, Deventer, etc. the instruction given here had
expanded into a complete school programme. I base this assumption on the following
grounds: the information contained in an extract from a missive of burgomasters and
council of Groningen, dated January 24th 1585, according to which the fratres had
a hostel in the 16th century in which three or four masters taught. To this hostel were
admitted for preference the sons of rich families from the city and countryside.' That
the education these boys received comprised a complete school programme may be
deduced from the number of masters and from the fact that the fratres had to pay
compensation for each pupil to the rector of the St. Martin

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1 v. Rhijn, Wessel Gansfort, Bijlage XI.
2 Ibid., Bijlage XII.

R.R. Post, The Modern Devotion
school up to July 24th 1549,\textsuperscript{1} after which date the city assumed responsibility for payment. That there were more teachers than a couple of fratres may also, it seems, be deduced from a pamphlet in which the financial manipulations of the fratres are criticized, with or without justification. This pamphlet was written by someone purporting to be a teacher at the hostel.\textsuperscript{2}

Two more documents subsequently came to light which also seem to offer proof of such a situation. The city's representatives by the governor were instructed to refute a request made by the fratres, and to plead for the transformation of the hostel into a seminary. They had to propose that the poor boys who would go to school in the cleric's house would be taught by three or four good masters.\textsuperscript{3} Finally, in an ordinance replying to this proposal, and dated February 12th 1566, burgomasters and council speak of certain learned and pious men who were to give lessons in the former hostel.\textsuperscript{4}

Although these last two reports refer more to the future than to the past, they none the less lend more credence to the first. We therefore appear justified in assuming that in the 16th century the Groningen hostel made more progress as an educational institution than the similar institutions in Deventer and Zwolle. This development may perhaps be explained by the fact that the school situation to some extent resembled that in Liège and Utrecht. There was no one predominant school which attracted all available pupils, but two perhaps equivalent institutions. This meant that the school of St. Martin, which was certainly the more important, was used to competition. Moreover, if the rector received compensation for the pupils of the hostel school, he will have had nothing to complain of. It must be deduced from all this that the education in the Groningen hostel in the sixteenth century had developed further than elsewhere. One might even speak of a fairly flourishing private school.

The existence of a private school which could hold its own does not mean that it occupied a dominant position in Groningen or enjoyed any special fame. On the contrary, it remained a private concern which evidently disappeared in the second half of the sixteenth century. We can judge that it was of no very great importance from the fact that Abel Eppens tho Equart, who progressed through the eight classes

\textsuperscript{1} Gron. Archives. 24 juli 1549.
\textsuperscript{2} van Dellen 113.
\textsuperscript{4} van Dellen 121.

\textbf{R.R. Post, The Modern Devotion}
of the school near Our Lady ter Aa from 1547 to 1555\(^1\) and may thus be considered well acquainted with the school situation in the city, always mentions only the two schools of St. Martin and Our Lady,\(^2\) never that of the *fratres*. It seems not to exist for him. Under the rectors Reinerus Praedinius and Gerlach Verrutius these two parish schools educated numerous boys from West Friesland, East Friesland and the surrounding country, who then went on to University.\(^3\) One may wonder where these boys lived. In the hostel perhaps, in which case they attended one of these two schools. It is obvious that for some the question of whether the *fratres* had in their hostel in the sixteenth century a school with a normal programme, will remain rather uncertain. Here too the *fratres*’ task continued to be the care of the schoolboys, both spiritual and physical.

Here as elsewhere the number of vocations seems to have declined since the middle of the century, so that the *fratres* were unable to do their chosen work efficiently. The first attack on the *fratres*’ hostel came in 1565 from the recently appointed pastor of St. Martin, John Eelts. He wanted to turn the house into an orphanage and enlisted the aid of the municipality, reproaching the *fratres*, justifiably or not, with mismanagement. The city authorities were only too willing to help. In 1565 they attempted to obtain approval for the plan from the rector of the Brotherhouse, and when he refused to give it did not scruple to offer him a good benefice of at least 200 guilders or 2,000 daler cash ‘to persuade him to quit his habit’ ‘ten eynd dat hij zijn habijts solde verlaeten.’ His acceptance would give them sufficient grounds for ‘expelling’ the remaining *fratres*, and their goods could then be used to further the new plan.\(^4\)

This scandalous proposal on the part of the Groningen municipality can only be understood by assuming that the Brotherhouse was already expiring. The city authorities began by transferring the administration of the *fratres*’ property and incomes to one of their own officials. They had already attempted to do this some years before. As early as November 15th 1565 they appointed a procurator with two assistants from the council to administer the Brotherhouse property,

\(^2\) Eppens, 126, 148, 149, 168.
\(^3\) *Ibid.*, 168.
‘as had of old been customary’ ‘woe bij olts gewoenlick.’ The Brotherhouse had no longer many members, and certainly had no power to resist, but the rector had still sufficient courage and energy to refuse the offer. He asked the *colloquium* at Zwolle for assistance. The *pater* of the Brussels Brotherhouse also took stock of the situation and thereupon applied to the government of Brussels with a request in which the hostel is again called a school. However, the municipality was not deterred. By an ordinance of February 12th 1566 the City Fathers decided that the hostel should be placed under the supervision of three administrators of the city. The *fratres* would only be permitted to undertake tasks for which they were fitted. It seems at this point that the intention was to retain the institution, but the administrators were virtually given a free hand in determining the suitability of the *fratres*, which did not hold out much hope for them.

However, the orphanage was not to be. In 1567 it was proposed instead to set up a seminary for the training of the clergy. Even before bishop John Knijff could get to Groningen, that is, before 1568, the municipality had decided on a seminary after the spirit of Trent and they wished to use the *fratres*’ hostel for this purpose. As early as 1566 the corporation had been attempting to have the property of the dissolved monasteries of Appingedam and Esens diverted to the upkeep of the seminary.

But at the end of 1567 and in 1568, the city took over the hostel to house ‘etlike landsknechten.’ This means that it was virtually lost to the *fraters*, and later it appeared to be unsuitable even for a seminary. However, to judge from a letter of this date, the bishop was not yet convinced of this on August 12th 1568. In actual fact nothing was done about founding a seminary during the existence of the diocese of Groningen in the sixteenth century. The actual Brotherhouse at the cemetery of St. Martin was destined to be a dwelling for the bishop. As stated in the letter of exchange of April 4th 1569, he received it in exchange for the *refugium* or monastery house of the Abbey of Wittewierum.

The days of the Brotherhouse were numbered. In 1578, deserted by his

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3. Ed. R. van Dellen 121.
7. *Archief ... aartsb. Utrecht* 15 (1887) 110.
fellow Brethren, the rector, Theodoricus of Zutphen, received an annuity of 200 daler, and some furniture from the aforementioned refugium.\footnote{1}

If my explanation of the complete school with more than one master within the fraters’ hostel corresponds to the actual state of affairs, then this house was of more importance for the cultural life of the sixteenth century than the houses of Deventer, Zwolle, Doesburg and various others. But the school had only a brief existence. By the second half of the sixties it had lost its credit. However, despite the fact that the main educational institutions, the two parish schools, attracted the greatest number of pupils, it was none the less possible that R. Praedinius and Albert Hardenberg - who certainly lived with the fraters around 1520 - also received a Latin education there. It must have been imparted in the humanistic spirit, for this was well established everywhere about this time. It is doubtful, however, whether Praedinius learned his broadminded tolerance from the Brothers, or Hardenberg acquired the seeds of the Reformation, which only emerged with the latter around 1530. One may assume though, that they received the love of Wessel Gansfort from the rector of the Fraterhouse (not of the hostel), Goswin of Halen. On this basis it seems to me excessive to consider the Brothers as pioneers of Humanism and the Reformation.

The fraters perished through a lack of vitality within themselves, since vocations declined as elsewhere, and they lost the sympathy of the people.

For a short period there was in Harderwijk a change in the relationship of the fraters to the school.\footnote{2} When, in 1511, the aldermen and city council appointed Mr. John of Wylsink as rector of the school, he was obliged to promise to employ and pay three lectors (or assistant masters) of his choice. In addition the pater of the Brethren and his fellow Brothers made frater John Hermszoon available as fourth lector and undertook to add four Philips guilders to the rector's salary.\footnote{3}

Two things must be observed in this connection. This seems to have been a temporary measure, and a school fee had to be paid for the young frater-teacher. Concerning the first point, neither he nor a successor was mentioned when the next rector was appointed. On the other hand, the following rector, John Voet, appointed March 5th 1522, had to make provision for four instead of three lectors.\footnote{4}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{1} A.T. Schuitema Meyer, Gron. Volksalmanak, 1950, 16.
\footnote{2} See p. 399.
\footnote{3} Oud-Archiefof Harderwijk, 1935, Reg, 521.
\footnote{4} Reg. 582.
\end{footnotes}

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Brother John Hermszoon, by fulfilling his task well, made it clear that a fourth teacher really was needed? Probably, however, this was no more than a normal growth occasioned by a greater number of students and a tightening up of the programme of studies to meet the requirements of the Humanists.

As regards the payment of a fee for the young *frater*, who had been appointed as assistant to the teaching staff, this may have seemed useful to the *fratres* since they were badly in need of such a person in the hostel for the homework supervision and supplementary lessons. It was rather a service which the *fratres* received from the school than the other way round.

The fact that the city magistrates assembled in the *fratres'* guest room to appoint a new school rector on March 14th 1548 may have meant nothing more than that the *fratres* were generous with their assembly hall. It may also be, however, that the magistrates asked the advice of the *pater*, as happened in Nijmegen. Sufficient explanation for this might be found in the *fratres'* pastoral activities among the schoolboys.¹

Here too the hostel, also called the little Brotherhouse,² served as a boarding house for the boys. The fact that they lodged there is mentioned in a letter of safe conduct written in the war year of 1528. The *pater* or the *procurator* was allowed to accompany the students who lodged in their house to Arnhem or Nijmegen or other places in order to receive money from the parents.³ One must deduce from this that the boys paid something for their board and lodgings. Mean-while, in Harderwyck too, donations were received for the benefit of these poor boys. On February 23rd 1555, Arent to Boecop and his wife Gese gave an annuity to the Brotherhouse, most of which was to be expended on woollen and linen sheets and on books, ink and paper for the poor boys.⁴ This is another indication that these poor scholars lodged and worked in the hostel attached to the Brotherhouse. Anastasius Veluanus or Jan Gerritz Verstegen, who fell foul of the Inquisition around the middle of the century on account of his preaching, and became a minister in May 1557 at Bacharach on the Rhine, attended school in Harderwijk, but not that of the Brothers.⁵ The house and congregation of the *fratres* disappeared after Count

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¹ Reg. 876.
² Reg. 1406.
³ Reg. 624.
⁴ Reg. 950.

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John of Nassau seized the Catholic churches and institutions in Harderwijk after 1580 and forbade the practice of the Catholic religion.¹

To turn to the Brotherhouses which were founded either directly or indirectly by the house of Deventer in the Netherlands, we shall deal first with the house of Amersfoort. Here the Brothers could carry out their pastoral duties among the school boys, particularly at the time when the city school (later the city gymnasium) was flourishing in the sixteenth century. It had six teachers, none of whom, however, were frатres.² The rector and the masters had to accompany the boys to church on Sunday and feast days, and repeatedly during the week, for the singing of Benediction.³ There is no mention, however, of any procession to the Brotherhouse in the St. Janscamp, nor of the existence of a domus pauperum. The Brothers possessed thus neither hostel nor school, for the Amersfoort administration kept strictly to the rule forbidding the founding of such so-called “private schools.”⁴

The Amersfoort Brethren were to be the first, and only, congregation in the Netherlands to be suspected of heresy as a group. On the basis of this suspicion they were driven from their buildings by a lieutenant of the Stadhouder in Utrecht, Hoogstraten. In the buildings from which the Brothers had been expelled the officer installed the Canons Regular from Vredendaal near Utrecht.⁵ In order to view this report in its proper perspective, two facts must be taken into account. Firstly, during the war the monastery of Vredendaal near Utrecht was burned to the ground during the night of 29-30th April⁶ with the result that the military commander will have felt himself obliged to provide the monks with shelter. Since they had originally come from the St. Janscamp in Amersfoort it will have seemed only natural that they should return there. Secondly, it was most unusual and against every law for a soldier to expel the Brothers on suspicion of heresy alone. Normally there should have been an investigation before

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¹ L.J. Rogier, Geschiedenis van het katholicisme, I 541.
² Gedenkboek van het stedelijk gymnasium te Amersfoort, 1376-1926, Amersfoort 1928.
³ Ibid., 116.
⁴ W.F.N. Rootsebaar, Amersfoort II, 98.
⁶ Acquoy III 77.

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sentence was passed. Even the fact of expulsion as punishment is strange! Acquoy indeed remarks that nearly all the inmates of the St. Jan's monastery in Amersfoort, in this case the Brothers - had left the house in connection with the Reformation, which was gaining ground. This, however, is contrary to the report. It is thus by no means certain whether we can consider this group as sympathetic to the Reformation. It may be that the unknown author of the chronicle was ill-informed and that the monastery (Brotherhouse) was indeed empty, either as a result of the preceding siege of the city or of the lack of vocations which we have also discerned elsewhere, though usually later. It is therefore dangerous to quote these Brethren of Amersfoort in support of the thesis that the Modern Devotionalists were connected with the Reformation and helped to promote it. There is no mention of any activity which might be interpreted as a sign of their Humanism.

The Amersfoort foundation appears to have died a natural death. Either the house was empty in 1529 or the few remaining Brothers gave accommodation to the monks.

The house in Delft which had once a small hostel alongside two parish schools was the first of the Dutch houses to disband voluntarily. When the chapel and various buildings were lost in the great fire of Delft in 1536, the Brothers could not summon up the courage to start all over again and continue to live according to their former rules. They were convinced that the religious feelings of the people had changed: 'and that the people's desire to give money to rebuild the Brotherhouse had cooled'. In any case only four Brothers remained, three priests and a deacon. They desired to be released from their obligation to live a communal life, and wished to form henceforth a college of vicars so that each might enjoy a fixed prebend from the sum of the property. They made their desire known to the bishop of Utrecht, Georg of Egmond, whom they considered as their superior, and he granted it on April 6th, 1537. Four chaplaincies would first be set up and what money remained would then be used for the restoration of their buildings. When this was done the number of chaplaincies would be increased by three. The city council also gave its

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1 Acquoy III, 77.
2 Rootselaar found no mention of such a fact in the protocol book, II, p. 257.
3 ‘Ook overmerckende, dat die devotie van die menschen van veel aelmissen te geven tot reparatie ende behoudnisse van convent seer vercoud is’.

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approval on June 22nd 1538 and made certain stipulations. The chaplains, for example, would not adopt the title of canon.¹

Here too we see a sharp decline in the number of vocations and a deterioration in the spirit of the Brothers. The enthusiasm for all that was distinctive in their institution disappeared. After the fire they seized their opportunity to dispense with communal possessions. They wanted to be able to possess their own incomes, although they wished to continue to live together for the present. Their role was virtually played out and their influence on devotion, culture and religion appears very slight. They certainly exercised no stimulating power in the direction of Humanism or the Reformation. They were men of a bygone age.

In this last period there seems to have been no change in the Brotherhouse in Gouda with the domus pauperum alongside the flourishing city school. The fratres continued to play no part in education, but looked after the spiritual needs of many of the pupils, and in particular of the hostel boys. The surviving documents from the fratres' archives show that their income from houses, lands and rents had continued to grow, while they also derived considerable profit from saying Masses and memoriae. On this point they adapted themselves completely to late medieval church practices. They offered, for example, to take the offices in the Jerusalem chapel, which was still to be founded (1497). This was a pious foundation, which was only realized around 1505 by a priest, Gysbert Raet.²

The house can be said to have experienced the difficulties of the time in that a number of fratres left and, contrary to custom, even contrary to their promise, demanded the return of whatever they had brought on entering. They even went to law on the matter. In 1545 Charles V forbade anyone to assist the ‘apostate religious’ of the Brotherhouses in recovering their property.³ The very term ‘apostate religious’ shows how much the Brothers were regarded as monastics. In actual fact it was not possible for them to be ‘apostatae.’

Their end, however, was not without glory. After the city had been taken by the Gueux (‘sea-beggars’) under van Swieten on June 21st 1572, the clergy were immediately seriously harassed. The pater and the procurator of the Brotherhouse, John Rixtelius and Adrian Texto-

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¹ D. van Bleyswyck, Beschrijvinge der Stadt Delft, Delft 1667, 322.
³ J. Taal, De archieven, p. 19, no. 15.
rius Lambertz, had the courage to approach Lumey on the occasion of his visit to Gouda to ask him to be allowed to live in peace or else to give them a safe conduct so that they might leave the city. They were badly received, however, delivered up to the soldiers and, after being humiliated and tortured, were killed by sabre cuts. Increasing difficulties emptied the house so that the *domus pauperum* (on October 17th 1573) and the Brotherhouse with its possessions (November 3rd 1573) were handed over to the Masters of S. Spiritus on condition that the remaining Brothers should be fed. The Brotherhouse became an orphanage and the remainder soon collapsed.¹

The main or general school in Nijmegen, i.e. the old Apostolic or parish school, was already completely under the jurisdiction of the city magistrate long before the coming of the *fraters*. According to the surviving city accounts the rector appointed by the municipality was considered as one of the civic officials.² The municipality accordingly made regulations for the school on August 13th 1567 and formulated the conditions for the rector who was to be appointed, Peter of Zevenaer for example, who was made head of the city school on December 9th 1573.³ It watched over the school and succeeded in providing the general school with an adequate teaching staff. In 1573 this comprised six masters and two singing teachers besides the rector. The municipality also protected the school against any competition from private institutions. In general these were free to teach the children reading and writing and even the first principles of Latin, up to Donatus, but nothing more.

Although these surviving regulations are fairly late, they are based on earlier ones and accord with the rules consistently laid down by the cities early and late. In such circumstances it was difficult, if not impossible, for the *fraters* to start and run their own school in their buildings in the Bodelstraat, that is, a Latin school with some chance of competing with the well equipped main school. It is obvious that these *fraters* tried to put into practice what they had seen in ‘s-Hertogenbosch and elsewhere. There are meanwhile enough texts which clearly define this situation. Others, however, are ambiguous and can

¹ J. Taal, *De Goudse kloosters in de Middeleeuwen*, 189-190.
² *Stadsrekeningen van Nijmegen*, ed. H.D.J. van Schevichaven and J.C.J. Kleijnjtes, IV, 1919, 78, 140.
in my opinion only be interpreted with the help of other documents. There is to begin with a report dated 1498 taken from the lost annals of the Nijmegen Brotherhouse. A certain Bartholomew Eck, a warrior who had fought for seven years in the armies of France and Liège, requested admittance to the Brotherhouse in Nijmegen in 1498. His request was duly granted and he astonished the fratres by his severity towards himself and his humble subjection to others. They placed him in charge of the pupils (scholares) in 1507 and he worthily and zealously continued in this function until his death in 1516. Both he and his brother, who entered in 1499, were great benefactors of the house. 1 Who were these pupils, of whom B. Eck was placed in charge? They were certainly not the boys of the city school, for the fratres had no jurisdiction over them. They must have been the scholars who lodged with the Brethren, the hostel boys who resided either in the same house as the fratres, or else in a separate house, a hostel or domus pauperum. It was this group of boys for whom Gertrud Kreyers destined the money which she donated to the Nijmegen Fraterhouse: ‘to allow six poor schoolboys to live with us and under our authority and guidance and to give them food and lodging as we do the other school-boys who live with us, and pay for these things’. 2 Here we have lodgings for poor and paying students after the Zwolle model. The conditions for admission also agree with what we saw for the Brothers’ hostels elsewhere. The candidates must have attained either a certain age or a certain degree of education, i.e. they had to be either fourteen years old or have reached the fifth class. An education which comprised only the first principles of Latin, up to Donatus, was of no use to such boys. Is it not likely therefore that just as in Zwolle, ’s-Hertogenbosch, Deventer and so many other places, they followed the lessons at the city school and only received a little supplementary tuition at home from the repetitor? This is fully confirmed by the remaining conditions of the foundation, for it is laid down that the pupil may remain with the fratres so long as he progresses in learning in the opinion of the schoolmaster of the time: ‘in lerynge by ons mach vorderen nae gueduncken onss schoelmeisters in der tijt.’ The one schoolmaster - note the resemblance to ’s-Hertogenbosch and the

1 Mentioned by Lindeborn 131.
2 Charter ed. by Guyot, Bijdragen voor de vaderl. geschiedenis en oudeidkunde, 1e reeks (1850) 38: ‘bij ons laten woenen en onsen bedwangck ende leringe sess aeme schoelieren ende geven dar potsijse vuer ende beddynge gelyck als wij doen onsen anderen schoelieren, die bij ons woenen om hoer gelt in heur kost.’

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contrast to the well-staffed city school - will surely have only been able to give supplementary tuition to these boys who had already done at least three classes. The fact that these boys attended the city school also emerges from a definition of the obligations of the *bursarii*. They had to pray at the grave of the foundress ‘des avontz na der lester lexen van der scholen’, ‘in the evening after the last lesson of the school.’ When the city school closed for the day the boys were at the cemetery and could fulfil their obligation.¹

The usual situation was that the boys lived in the hostel and had lessons in the school. House and school are indeed contrasted, as for example in a foundation of Henry Denys, canon of St. Stephen's:² a certain quantity of woollen material had to be divided among thirty schoolboys, twenty from the big school and ten from the Brother-house. This formula is repeated in the document in question. It seems to me that this contrast must also be made in the life of the famous parish priest of Amsterdam, Martin Duncanus, first written down in 1590. Duncanus left his birthplace of Kempen to come to Nijmegen in 1527 and: ‘after his arrival in Nijmegen obtained a meagre livelihood teaching children, but after he had been admitted to the Frater-house he completed his school curriculum.’ The contrast here is not stated in so many words, yet nevertheless it exists. Only when Duncanus has found somewhere suitable to stay can he attend school regularly in order to complete the highest classes.

On these grounds we must assume that Peter Canisius attended the city school and acquired his Humanism there and not with the *fraters.*³ The latter had nothing to do with the teaching in the city school. Although it is possible that one or other of them may have taught at the big school for a time, this would be most unusual and must be viewed as a great exception. There is no question of a Brother being rector of the school. Any such assumption is based on the wrong interpretation of an entry in the city's account book for the year 1552.⁴ ‘Our Burgomasters visited the *fratres* to see the rector of the Frater-house in order to appoint someone as rector of the school.’ This was taken to mean that the gentlemen approached the *Brethren* in order to appoint one of them, i.e., of the *Brethren*, as rector of the school. This

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¹ *Nederlandse Historiebladen* 2 (1939) 155.
² Gemeente-archief Nijmegen, Inv. O.R.A. II 80 fol. 31.
⁴ Published in an appendix to *Annales en Chronyk van Nijmegen*, Nijmegen 1792. 11.
is not the only possible interpretation, but is almost certainly the wrong one, for according to the same account book these gentlemen also conferred with a number of canons about new rector ‘omne enen nyhen rector’ and in 1553 ‘went to visit the rector of the Fratres with the new school rector.’ The school rector thus lived outside the Brotherhouse. In fact none of the school rectors who later became known were fraters, not even after 1550. There is no evidence that a separate building existed as a domus scolarium, alongside that of the fratres, but in 1481 and in 1520 the Brothers bought several houses next to and opposite their own in the Bodelstraat. Gorissen rightly assumes that these were intended as boarding houses for the growing number of pupils. This may also explain the change of patron from St. Gregory to St. Jerome. I assume that the latter was first used for one of the pupils' houses and later came to include the entire complex. Despite the indications discovered by Gorissen it may be that both names already existed for a long time side by side.\(^2\)

After the failure of their attempt to obtain their own school at the end of the preceding period, the Brothers of Emmerich resigned themselves. They therefore took no part in the school Reformation, which was accomplished in the beginning of the 16th century. They may, however, have contributed to the success of the chapter school in the beginning of the sixteenth century, which reached its peak under rector Matthias Bredenbach (1434-1559; † June 5th 1559). The number of pupils sharply increased, which explains why the deacon of the Emmerich chapter, William Bruins, founded the second hostel for 32 boys in 1514, the domus Hieronymiana, and placed the fratres in charge of it.\(^3\)

This expansion partly coincided with the Reformation in Germany, but the city of Emmerich did not feel the worst of its effects. The majority of the population retained the old faith and the chapter, the churches and the monasteries remained in existence. The Brothers' institution also survived. But the glory of the chapter school faded rapidly in the second half of the century, and the Jesuits, seeing this and urged on by a number of canons, gained the permission of the

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Duke of Cleves in 1592 to found a college in which they would apply their teaching and educational methods.¹ This undoubtedly meant that the fratres' activities among the schoolboys were curtailed, for the Jesuits will naturally enough have striven to fulfil these necessary tasks themselves. The Brothers, however, certainly retained their hostel, for which they compiled and had printed, shortly after the founding of the above-mentioned college, the ‘Leges domus fraternium Embricae’.² The boys lodged in the hostel and attended the chapter school. The hostel was run by a procurator and the prefect.³

And so the Brothers entered upon this new period. They retained their communal life and community of possessions, and took no vows, but by 1575, with the approval of the Duke of Cleves, they had already exchanged their ‘habit’ for the dress of the secular clergy.⁴ Subsequently the somewhat altered statutes were approved by Duke William of Cleves (July 1st 1575) and later confirmed by Sasbold Vosmeer, apostolic vicar of the Mission to Holland (January 13th 1612) and by pope Clement VIII (July 23rd 1671).⁵

But the number of fraters was small. Three of them left the house in 1594 so that only four remained.⁶ The rectors of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are known, but they were not forceful personalities who might have influenced the progress of education, religion or culture.

Together with the city, they were placed under the spiritual direction of the apostolic vicars of the Mission to Holland. These vicars indeed repeatedly mention the state of the fratres in their reports, for these were the sole surviving Brothers in this region of the Mission. Usually they contented themselves with stating that the community of Brothers still existed,⁷ but in 1656 de la Torre reported that the fratres collationairii in Emmerich consisted of six priests, one of whom was a parish priest. He also lists their names.⁸ Five priests were still working in the house at the beginning of the eighteenth century⁹ and it struggled

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¹ J. Kleyntjens S.J., Stichting van het Gymnasium der Jezuieten te Emmerik, 1592, Archief ... aartsb. Utrecht, 67 (1948) 134.
² E. Genniger o.c.
³ J. Köhler, Nachträge 99.
⁴ Ibid., 99.
⁵ Ibid., 99.
⁷ See the record of 1638, Archief ... aartsb. Utrecht 12 (1884) 201, and of Neercassel in 1662. Archief etc. 18 (1840) 198.
⁸ Archief etc. 10 (1882) 212.
⁹ Archief etc. 10 (1882) 451.

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on until November 14th 1811, when Napoleon disbanded the foundation by an imperial decree. There were still three priests living in the house at the time. The last of these, Gerard Mulder, (1779-1864) was parish priest in old Zevenaar until 1861, and died in that city, in retirement, on March 15th 1864.1 He was the last survivor, not only of the Brothers of Emmerich, but of all the *fratres collationarii* or whatever they were called.

In discussing the houses in the south of the Netherlands, we have begun by giving details of the Liège Brotherhouse, since the *fratres* there were the first to run a school of any reputation. The problems dealt with in this chapter could best be elucidated with reference to this house, which may serve as a model for the history of the other houses. Here then follow the remaining houses beginning with that of Brussels.

Before 1485 the Brussels Brothers had only a hostel for boys attending the city school, but in 1491 the situation seems suddenly to have changed. By an act dated May 10th 1491 the *scholaster* of Brussels confided the total direction of the school (*scholas majorum dicte ecclesie*) to the Brethren of the Common Life for a period of nine years.2 What was the significance of this?

In the first place there is only one school involved: *scholae* in the medieval document is a *plurale tantum*, probably because the word *schola* originally meant class. The big school (*majores scholae*) was at this time the only Latin school for boys in Brussels, which according to the decree of October 24th 1320 by Duke John III had the sole right to teach boys Latin, music and logic (dialectics).3 There was also a similar school for girls, the small school, and five lower schools which had to cease their Latin instruction at the Donatus. In the document of May 10th 1491 the big school is called *scolaemajores dicte ecclesie*, that is, therefore, belonging to the church of St. Goedele. It was therefore the chapter school, which does not make it any more important but merely indicates that it came under the direction of the chapter and that its pupils assisted in singing in the choir. In most cities such a school may also be called the city school, since the municipality had usually taken over the administration and management

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1 *Archief* etc., 2 (1875) 306-308.
of the school. The magistrate in Brussels, however, had not yet succeeded in doing this; he may not even have tried.

The *scholaster* in this case was Carolus Soillot, canon and *scholaster* of St. Goedele, but also secretary to the Roman king Maximilian.¹ This person can be compared with J. Willroot, singer at the imperial court in 1521, who received the ‘scholastery’, the school rights, from Emperor Charles V. He was thus entitled either to lease the school annually to a rector, or to transfer his rights for life to the municipality of Gouda, in return for an annuity. In this way the city would be able to appoint the rector. In other words J. Wilbroot could leave others to exploit the school, or run it himself or content himself with an annual fee.² This must have been the position in Brussels. The *scholaster* cedes to the rector and Brothers, *scolas maiores dicte ecclesie earumque totale regimen*, total charge of the big school of the above-mentioned church. Taking over the school carried with it the obligation of announcing to the *scholaster* or his representative the names of two suitable persons, one for rector and one for conrector. This had to be done every year before the feast of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist, June 24th. These persons had to swear, on their own behalf and on behalf of the Brothers, that they would recognize and defend the privileges of the *scholaster* and that, in return for his supervision they would pay one and a half old écus for each pupil attending the big and little school and paying school fees. Half of this was to be paid before Christmas and the remainder before the feast of St. John. In addition they would offer him a banquet. The Brothers had to preserve the school material in good condition and leave it in a good state when the contract expired in nine years³ time. They had to pay any charges on the school and supervise the small schools. The *scholasticus*, however, retained the right to appoint the teachers for the smaller schools. On August 25th 1491, the rector and submonitor (conrector) appointed by the *fratres* swore under oath to defend the rights of the *scholaster* and to act accordingly.⁴

The teachers appointed were James Zaffel, *presbiter Tornacensis*, rector, and John of Rotterdam, *clericus Trajectensis dioecesis*.⁵ The editor of the deed merely assumes that these two persons were *fratres* of the

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¹ Lefèvre 96.
² L.A. Kesper, *Geschiedenis van het gymnasium te Gouda*, Gouda s.a. 11-14, Bijl. IX-XII.
³ Thus in a notarial document of 10 May 1491; *Ibid.*, 96-98.

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Brussels Brotherhouse, which would simplify matters considerably. There are, however, various reasons for doubting this. In the first place, it is not stated that they were Brothers. In the second, they are called *magister* and up till now we have no example at all of any Brother studying at the university and gaining his master's degree. On the contrary, they repeatedly expressed their aversion to university studies and their fear of the dangers existing at the university. Finally, the diocese of both is given. While admittedly it was not uncommon for the diocese of the *frater* in question to be mentioned on his entry into the Brotherhouse, or when renouncing his possessions, this was probably done only to indicate his origin without meaning to imply that he belonged to the clergy of the diocese mentioned. The *clerici* indeed were pupils and had not yet been ordained. Their ordinations were administered, not on the grounds of a benefice belonging to a diocese, but on the basis of the communal possession of the Brother-house. It is thus difficult to call a *frater* ordained priest after his diocese of origin. On the basis of these considerations it is my opinion that James Zaffel *presbiter Tornacensis* and John of Rotterdam, *clericus Trajectensis*, cannot be considered as *fratres*, but as members of the secular clergy. Otherwise the notary would quite simply have written *frater James Zaffel*, or added to the name *fratre conventus fratrum domus Annunciacionis beate Marie de Nazareth*, as the same Brussels notary, John Pretio, had done in the preceding charter of May 10th 1491. After the names, *necnon religiosi viri pater Andreas Villicet Egidius Marie*, came the qualification, *fratres conventus fratrum*. For these four reasons we must assume that the *fraters* undertook to run the school, but confided the teaching to seculars, a priest and a cleric, both of whom had academic qualifications.

What were their reasons for this? In the first place probably the ideal considerations that by taking over the school they would gain more ease and freedom to carry out their pastoral work among the boys. But they will also have seen a material advantage in the undertaking. They would receive the fees of the pupils of the main school and whatever the pupils of the lesser schools had to pay to this school. On the other hand they were responsible for paying the teachers of the main school, for the upkeep of the building and for the rent to be paid to the *scholaster*. They may have estimated that they would still make

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1 Schoengen 418, 461.
2 See list of ordinands. *Archief ... aartsh. Utrecht* 24 (1896) 389-471 and of these esp. 416, 418, 426.
a profit, as had some of those who possessed the scholastery in Gouda and as did the Utrecht fraters later in exploiting the school of St. Jerome.\(^1\) Both the scholaster and the exploiter, in this case the Brotherhouse, stood to profit from the proceeds of the school. Their aim will thus have been as many paying pupils and as few teachers as possible. This situation resembled that of Gouda in the sixteenth century with all the attendant dangers - and also that of Dordrecht, where for a time the scholastery had been given to a hospital. The lessees of the school would be able to oppose the expansion of teaching facilities. It may be that the Brothers wished to seize the opportunity to introduce a complete school educational programme in their hostel, virtually unnoticed. As long as they themselves were running the main school this would harm no one, not even if it should lead to a decline in fees in the main school. Unfortunately their plan miscarried once again. By an act dated July 13th 1495 the princely administration ordered the Brothers to abandon their plan for the hostel.\(^2\)

There is no evidence to show whether the fratres again took over the running of the school after the nine years had elapsed. However, the magistrate and people of Brussels considered one large school insufficient for the boys of Brussels and urged the chapter to found a second large school for boys in the lower town. This school would give the full educational programme of the time. On June 10th 1504, the magistrate, through the intermediary of the pensionaris, requested the chapter to start una scola (singular now) in the lower town, and by July 18th of the same year the chapter had taken a positive but extremely peculiar decision. The scholaster had suggested two alternatives for founding a new Latin school, and the one which the canons chose was this: the second school was to be started with the fraters, but on condition that there would be only one rector for both schools (i.e. the old school and the projected school). This rector, who would thus be the rector of the old school, would have the right to appoint the teachers in the new school as he had in the old.\(^3\) The school would thus be situated on the Brothers' premises, probably in the hostel, but they would have no say in the school at all. They could let their buildings and perhaps manage the school, as they had done with the old school in 1491, but the actual teaching was no concern of theirs. This was done by persons appointed by the rector of the old school.

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\(^1\) See p. 570 ss.

\(^2\) Lefèvre 48-49.

\(^3\) Decrees edited by Lefèvre 106.
At the same time the *fraters'* hostel was suppressed, for the buildings were occupied by the other schoolboys.

This decision seems to have met with some opposition, but was finally confirmed by a decree of the *scholaster* Jan Zimmerman and by an ordinance of Charles V dated July 29th 1515. We must therefore assume that the plan was carried out. Meanwhile the life of the *fraters* continued, one rector succeeding another. After Theodoric de Porta († 1489) came Andreas de Meyer (Villicus) (1489-1506), Matthias of Helden (1506-1508), Roger de Palude († 1508) and Henry Duy († 1554). But the events of 1565 and 1566 were not without influence on the mentality of the *fraters*. In 1568 considerable tension and discord arose between the rector and two *fraters*, Simon de Beer and Cornelius Cuypers. The rector of Ghent - probably one of the *visitatores*-intervened, while the chapter profited by his authority over the Brotherhouse to demand that the two Brothers should be publicly reconciled with the rector and obey him in future. It is interesting to note that in this decree the terms are entirely changed. The Brothers who took no monastic vows have become monastics: the *fraters* must obey in all lawful and good matters pertaining *ad monasticam disciplinam.* They must eat in the refectory according to the old *ordines* and this *sub pena carceris.*

At this time too this and other Brotherhouses were already menaced. There is the aforementioned bull of Pope Pius V of 1568, but also the desire to obtain the hostels, even the houses of the *fraters* for use as seminaries, as desired by the Council of Trent. Profiting by this situation the vicar-general de Granville, and the provost Morillon, who had jurisdiction over Brussels, could use the debts incurred by the *fraters* and the house as an excuse to turn their house into a seminary and allocate the *fraters* an annuity (1570). This plan, however, was never carried out and the community of the Brethren was able to continue. Once again the rectors succeeded each other: Libert Houthen in 1577; Adrian Ghijselinck in 1579; Gerard of Berkel in 1585. But the end was near. In 1586 the (Catholic) magistrate gave this Brotherhouse (Nazareth) to the rich Poor Clares.

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1 Lefèvre 49.
5 Lefèvre 50.
vention on the part of the city magistrate was only possible if the Brotherhouse had already lost all viability. In all probability the Brethren had already departed.

In describing the relationship of Brotherhouse, hostel and school in Ghent in the preceding period we have already made use of the 16th century data, so that nothing new can be said on this subject. Here too the decline in the number of Brothers is striking. Whereas in 1523 this house with its eleven priests, four clerics and eight lay brothers was one of the most flourishing of the entire fraternity, rivalling the house of Zwolle,¹ by 1543 there were only nine priests, one cleric and two lay brothers.² And yet this house produced a man of academic stature, Chr. Masseus from Warneton (1469-1546) who gained a reputation in the academic world at the beginning of the sixteenth century by his publications and his teaching. He was responsible for a virtually unknown treatise on the Psalms which was never published and has since been lost; a world chronicle entitled: Chronicorum multiplices historiae utriusque testamenti ... libri viginti, Antwerpae excudebat Joannes Crinitus Anno MDXL, and a Dialogus in which he attacked the Apologia of Jean Martin, written in 1512, in which the latter had defended Origen against any accusation of heresy. He also wrote a Latin grammar in three volumes which was printed in 1536 and reprinted a few times after that. We are thus confronted with a Brother of the Common Life who was at the same time historian, theologian and grammarian. Was this man, who several times in his Chronica referred to himself as Cameracenatis yet never as Brother, who taught for forty years in the house of the Bons Enfants at Cambrai, really a Brother of the Common Life? His description of the rise of the Modern Devotion, his visits to the Brotherhouses of 's-Hertogenbosch and Brussels and his stay in the house of Ghent all suffice to show that he at least began as a Brother: his post as teacher in Cambrai might indicate that he later changed his way of life. He considered the Brothers most meritorious because they ran schools in which they not only taught the pupils languages but also trained them for life. In my opinion this not infrequently misinterpreted text refers to the Brothers' hostels, although in the sixteenth century the Brothers also possessed schools in the ordinary sense of the word in a number of cities.³

¹ Vanden Haeghen, Inventaire d'Archives de la Ville a Gand, 1896 X, 92.
² De Potter IV, 527.
The lack of clerics, the future priests, shows that new admissions had practically ceased. Not one of the Brothers possessed a Master's degree. For these Brothers too, time was running out. The diocese, set up in 1561, needed a seminary after the Council of Trent. Like several of his colleagues, bishop Jansenius cast a covetous eye on the fraters' buildings and on August 26th 1569 he made a contract with them whereby the house and possessions were transferred to the diocese.¹ The reason or pretext given for this transfer was that the Brothers had fallen badly into debt in the past thirty years; they owed 800 to 900 pounds, which could only be covered by the unconditional sale of the property. The Brothers therefore could no longer live on the income from the property, nor meet their obligations, which included the education (instruction) of the youth (quoad inventutis institutionem). The Brothers, who were now seven in number, namely five priests and two lay brothers, had no prospect of further recruits. It is noteworthy that alongside the pater senior the procurator is mentioned as gubernator scholae, a title which hardly occurs elsewhere in the sources. This title, however, merely refers to the director of the hostel, which may or may not have comprised a complete school. The Brethren relinquished their house, church, school, garden and movable property, and all rents, incomes and other sources of revenue. They also gave up their right to admit any more novices, but determined henceforth to maintain the statutes of their house until they had obtained a benefice with or without pastoral duties. To justify this transaction the bishop referred to the Council of Trent which had decreed that the property intended ad alendos vel instituendos pueros might be used for a seminary.

This was the end of the Brotherhouse in Ghent. To some extent it died a natural death, speeded on by the compulsory acquisition by the bishop. It is in any case clear that it was no longer viable, and that the Brothers raised no objection to possessing a benefice and relinquishing their community of possession.

We have already discussed the house of Geraardsbergen when dealing with the preceding period.²

As we have explained before, the chapters with communal life

¹ State Archives Ghent, S. Hieronymus anno 1569, 26 aug. no. 12.
² See p. 411
founded by Count Eberhardt in Württemberg were never really successful. As early as 1516-17 they were dissolved by Eberhardt's successor, with the pope's permission, to the extent that the canons were relieved of the obligation to lead a communal life. The related foundations in Rheingau, begun somewhat earlier, managed to hold out longer. They were never in the limelight and made no contribution to education or to the spread of the Humanistic culture. The inmates' dignity and function of canon focussed their attention on the choir service, which they considered as their principal obligation. One after the other these houses fell victim to the Reformation in those regions where it obtained political power. In Marienthal in Rheingau the Brothers only held out until 1540, after their house had suffered considerably. Königstein in Nassau also managed to survive until 1540, when the house was returned to the Count. At that time two of the Brothers, John Bingen and Nicolas Post, had already gone over to Lutheranism. In 1663 the house came into the hands of the Jesuits. Butzbach in Hessen must also have yielded to the Reformation around 1538, although the last frater only died in 1573. Earlier the Lutheran superintendent had appointed a school head of the new persuasion.

Only the house of Wolf, whose struggle for life during the first twenty years of its existence has already been described, began in 1499 an important and, for the Brothers, completely new undertaking. With the permission of the general chapter of the Rhine, and at the invitation of the archbishop, John of Baden (1456-1503), the fraters attempted to found in Trèves a new house with a somewhat different destination from the former houses. In Trèves a convent, Sankt German, had become vacant for want of Sisters. The archbishop had first offered this convent to the abbey of St. Matthias of Trèves, who used the buildings as a refugium. However, in October 1499, in spite of having already disposed of it, the archbishop granted the convent to the Brothers of Wolf, for them to found a new house there. The new inmates, canons, would have a provost at their head, and would celebrate the holy Office in a fitting manner. They would work as priests among the students, hearing confessions, administering the sacraments, even Extreme Unction, and 'preaching as the Dominicans

1 See p. 445.
3 Landeen 171.
This gift also envisaged the founding of the Brothers' own school but there is no indication what kind of school was intended. A bursa or boarding school seems already to have existed in 1501. Regulations were laid down in 1501 clarifying the relationship of this bursa and its inmates to the university and its associated colleges, and these regulations were confirmed in the years that followed. In the bursa of Sankt German a number of lessons might be given as preparation for the Arts Faculty examinations, but not all, except to the Brotherhouse's own novices. These lessons too were only allowed on condition that suitable teachers should be available in the hostel. In the beginning the canons possessed no such teachers, but this stipulation provided an incentive for them to go and study at the university themselves and thus cultivate their own competent teachers. Four of the nine Brothers known to us by name during the first twenty years studied at the university and took the required degrees. This was a thing unheard of in the history of the Brothers. More remarkable still, two of these Brothers were appointed to teach in the Faculty of Arts, where they fulfilled in their turn the alternative function of deacon.

The hostel too progressed favourably for a time. None the less, the Brothers' main task, apart from their pastoral duties, seems to have been in the domain of teaching in the Latin school. They certainly founded such a school, but the fact that it was placed under the supervision of a commission from the Councils of the city and diocese shows that it had become a privileged institution, a school which, like those of Liège and Utrecht, surpassed the parish and chapter schools, and probably attracted all the high classes. In fact, around the middle of the century, this school numbered 400 pupils. Just as they did elsewhere, the Jesuits first set up a rival institution which is mentioned in 1563. In 1569 they took over the Brothers' school, giving, among other reasons, the fact that there was only one Brother working there. Earlier too the Brothers will have freely employed teachers from outside the congregation.

Although Sankt German had adapted itself to the new situation, vocations continued to decline in the second half of the 16th century. The last and sole remaining Brother became parish priest of Echternach in 1569, thus continuing the priestly work.

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2 Landeen 192, translation.

R.R. Post, The Modern Devotion
The Brotherhouse (or canonhouse) of Wolf actually disappeared from history in 1525, but virtually continued a lingering existence until around 1560. At about the time when the fraters of Hildesheim were helping to found the Brotherhouse in Magdeburg (in 1482) the opportunity arose of preparing or beginning a new foundation in Berlicum in Friesland. There was a considerable contrast between these two undertakings. Magdeburg was a large city, the centre of a district containing an archbishop's see and an educational institution and comparatively close to Hildesheim. Berlicum, on the other hand, was an insignificant little village with scarcely any opportunity for pastoral work and no students. It really seemed more suitable for a monastery than for a Brotherhouse. It may indeed be compared with Albergen, where forty years earlier the Brotherhouse had been replaced by a monastery. However, an acceptable offer was made in Hildesheim and when the plague threatened, the fraters of Hildesheim decided to make a sacrifice and start a house in both Magdeburg and Berlicum (1482). It had come about that before September 29th a priest from Bolsward had arrived in Hildesheim as the representative of a hoofdling (capitaneus) named Hetto. He informed them, both orally and in writing that the capitaneus in question, with the agreement of the community, wished to found a monastery or a Brotherhouse with a church. He would prefer to have the fraters of Hildesheim rather than the Crosier Fathers or Franciscans, both of whom had made their interest known. Why did they approach Brothers from so far away, and not those of Groningen, Zwolle or Deventer? Perhaps the capitaneus had already drawn a blank there. In any case the Hildesheimers accepted the proposal and sent one of their priests, Gerwin by name, with a copy of their privileges, to find out whether the situation was as it had been described, and whether the founder and members of the Zwolle colloquium were willing to recognize the privileges of these Hildesheimers and act accordingly. They were willing to contribute a priest, with a cleric or lay brother, in the hope that the new foundation would grow in possessions and numbers. They were also relying on the nearby fraters of Zwolle and Deventer who would be responsible for the official visitations. Gerwin set off after the 29th of September 1482. In the spring of 1483 he visited the colloquium of Zwolle, and remained for a month in order to discuss the matter with the rectors there. After April 13th 1483 he announced that the majority were in favour

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1 Landeen 189.
of the undertaking according to the Hildesheim privileges, but that the *pater* of Deventer, Egbert ter Beek, objected to the title of college (of canons and provost) and therefore suggested that the matter should be referred to the *colloquium* of Münster. Egbert ter Beek was thus still opposed to the transformation of a Brotherhouse into a chapter, and the chapel into a collegiate church. He had already revealed this opposition to the cardinal legate Nicolas of Cusa. The Hildesheimers accepted this proposal and in 1483 dispatched the priest Gobelinus to Münster, where the privileges were approved. This Gobelinus was to collect further information on the spot and again speak with the *patres* of Deventer and Zwolle, notably on the character of the Frisians. His information and that of a colleague on the suitability of the place was not favourable. The Hildesheimers already regretted having agreed but they peopled the place (the house of Berlicum) to some degree. One of the priests, moreover, John of Wesel, died on the 8th of August 1483.¹

Meanwhile the first of May, 1484 had come, and the Hildesheim Brothers sent two priests to Berlicum, Gobelinus and Nicolas Dorsten, with money and various necessities. But Gobelinus, who was acting as rector, died in 1585, on the feast of St. Boniface (5th June). Two persons from Berlicum (Konrad Rad and Konrad Meppis) travelled to Hildesheim to inform the Brothers there of Gobelinus' death and the resulting consternation, whereupon on July 4th 1485 the administrators of Hildesheim sent two priests, John Hinsbergh and Konrad Rad to consult with the *patres* of Münster, Deventer, Zwolle and Groningen.² These advised that the undertaking should be abandoned. The two priests then proceeded to Berlicum to inform Hetto of this decision, and returned with a number of books. Only Gerwin remained longer at his post to put the affairs of the house in order. By August 27th 1487 the company was back in Hildesheim.³ In 1488 Hetto made an attempt to start up the house anew. Again Hildesheim sent delegates, but to no avail. In 1491 the *fraters* of Hildesheim wrote to Rome that they despaired of being able to continue the house in Berlicum and requested that, where the documents had *domus St. Anthonii to Berlicum*, ‘or another place’ should be added.⁴

The house of Hildesheim showed no new aspects during this period. So far as is known none of the *fraters* played an active role in

¹ R. Doebner, 103.
the Reformation. They only suffered by it. In 1526 already the heavy taxation commenced for Hildesheim and other houses, and when the fraters were unable to pay their taxes they were placed under house arrest. 1 Some feared that this meant the end of the Brethren and monks. On the seventeenth of August 1545 the rector of the house was banished for five years by the consulate on the insistence of the ministers. 2 In 1546 forceful action was taken against all the monasteries in Hildesheim. All fraters and monastics were summoned to the city hall on February 10th. Two went from every house, and the ‘proconsul’ or Mayor explained the purpose of the meeting. They had to bow to the authority of the municipality. They had to accept the ordinances and renounce all papal and episcopal privileges. Political and church matters were evidently mingled, but the aims of the church, in this case those of the reformed church, were the more important, for the clergy replied that they had obeyed the municipality in the many and heavy contributions, in putting off their habit and in abandoning the office. 3 They humbly requested that no further charge should be laid upon their conscience. After three days of reflection the fraters were informed that the corporation wished to turn the Brotherhouse into a college for students, employing for this purpose the incomes of the other monasteries and colleges. On February 16th, 1546, twelve men from the council, accompanied by various other persons, came to the Brothers and read out a letter in which it was made known that two citizens would be placed at the head of every religious institution to administer the property so that nothing should be lost. 4 They carried out this task for two years, then the register, the copy book of letters and the keys were returned. But on July 29th 1546, religion was forbidden, the churches closed, the chalices and other sacred vessels taken away, the bells destroyed, the Carthusian monastery in Sulta devastated and altar and tombstones thrown into a ditch. 5

One might think that this must be the end, but no. Even these seem to have been temporary measures in the Schmalkaldic war; at any rate the Brothers continued to pay taxes up to 1568. 6 In 1611 the house was transferred to the Carthusians. All outside spiritual activity was meanwhile rendered impossible. The Brothers did not promote Humanism, nor did they display any sympathy for the Reformation.

1 Doebner, Annalen 200-201.
2 Ibid., 141.
3 Ibid., 137, see also p. 201.
4 Ibid., 137.
5 Ibid., 141.
6 Ibid., 143.
Little is known of the other German Brotherhouses of this period. We shall give here what is characteristic for their attitude to Humanism and the Reformation.¹

The house of Herford contained at least one frater who made a name for himself among the Humanists around 1500 as the author of Latin school books and certain other works.² This was James Montanus who entered in 1486, acted as confessor to Sisters and died in the Brotherhouse in 1532. The Herford fraters were unable to weather the storms of the Revolution. During the Reformation they adapted their religious ideas to those of Luther, and saved the life of the institution by accepting Lutheranism and by Luther's personal intercession. They survived the Thirty Years' War and the Enlightenment, but not the rule of Napoleon, under whom their property was transferred to the State. The last Brother died in 1841.³ During the last two centuries of its existence this institution was of very little significance. It is one of the few houses of which the inmates adopted the Reformation as a group.

The fraters made no contribution to the renown achieved by the school of Münster which could already be forecast at the end of the preceding period. Certain leaders of the school, including Rudolf of Langen, Timan Kemner and John Murmellius, have wrongly been considered as Brothers. However, the fact that the Brethren did not participate in the teaching does not exclude the possibility of friendly relations between the fraters and the school masters. This may have led to some of the fraters being influenced by the teachers to show sympathy for the new culture which penetrated the Northern regions around 1480. For it must be remembered that the fraters had learned Latin and could well understand the wishes and ideals of the first Humanists in this. One such Brother was John Veghe, a member of the Münster Brotherhouse, rector there from 1475 to 1481, then rector and confessor of the Sisters in Mesing, who died in 1504.⁴ He made a name for himself as a preacher and his sermons for the Sisters may

¹ R.E. III³ 491.
³ L. Schulze, R.E. III³, 491.
still be appreciated for their lively simplicity and good taste. There is no proof that he was any more educated than the other fraters, but it is striking that, at a time when he had long been a member of the fraternity, he is mentioned in a deed of January 1st as clericus Monasteriensis publicus imperiali auctoritate notarius. This title strikes me as unusual, both on account of his description as a notary and his membership of the clergy of Münster. He was a man who inspired great confidence and verses were made to him by Humanists like John Murmellius and Herman van de Busche.¹

De Veghe gave evidence of possessing a broader outlook than the other Brothers. Around 1480, however, we can detect an interest in Humanism in Brother Friedrich Moorman, teacher in the Münster domus pauperum. Henry Hausman, brother of Rudolf Agricola, was probably a resident there at this time. Towards the end of 1479 and the beginning of 1480 Moorman announced Agricola's return to the fatherland from Italy and sang the praises of this Humanist from the North.² This is certain proof of Moorman's esteem for the new culture, but his teaching abilities were not very highly thought of by his fellow Brethren. Shortly after this utterance he was chosen to begin the new house at Marburg although there could as yet be no question of teaching there. He died at Marburg at an early age in 1482. Agricola praised his Latin and the provost of Münster, Rudolf of Langen, honoured him with an epitaph.³

About ten years later there was another Brother working in the Münster Brotherhouse who was held in particular esteem by the Humanists of the time. This was John Rotgers, to whom Murmellius dedicated his commentary on Prudentius. He for his part praised one of Murmellius' works in his Eligidion in librum Murmellii flores. He had probably acquired this love and esteem for Humanism during his years of study in Deventer. After having taught in Essen he entered the Fraternity where he became first lector (probably in the domus pauperum) and in 1516 even rector of the Brotherhouse.

The Brotherhood suffered considerably in the riots of the Anabaptists, but managed to survive until 1666, when the house was transformed into a seminary.

According to the description of the organization and statutes of the

2 J.B. Nordhoff, Denkwürdigkeiten aus dem ministerischen Humanismus, Münster 1874, 84.
3 A. Passner, Rudolf van Langen, Münster 1869, 196.

R.R. Post, The Modern Devotion
house of the Brethren of the Common Life *ad Fontem salientem* in 1741, drawn up on the occasion of a visitation by the bishop, the institution still retained in that year the traits which characterized such houses in the Middle Ages. They preserved the same ideals of purity, mutual love, renouncing of all personal possessions, devotion to work and the inner religious experience. This latter was nourished by spiritual reading, by meditation and by the praying of the hours. They followed the same daily routine and retained the same offices such as rector and procurator. Just as in former times there is no mention of a school rector, teacher or master. By means of their library they attempted to devote especial care to the young people with the expressed aim of gaining them for their ideal of contempt for the world. The Sunday collation was still continued. The customs however, had evolved in the direction of the monastic life, both in their own house and in the *colloquium Monasteriense*. They admittedly followed the privilege of Pope Eugenius IV, so that the members were called *frater canonicus* and formed a chapter, while their chapel was termed a collegiate church. But the powers of the provost had increased. Like the superior of a monastery he had the right to punish, even to imprison or expel any recalcitrant Brothers. He could, however, also dispense from the regulations. The canons of Münster still retained most power in the *colloquium*, which now bore the significant name of *capitulum generale*. It could issue regulations which were binding on all members, at least after they had been twice confirmed. In this way all Peter Dieburg's fears of centuries before were realized.

The Brotherhouse in Cologne had no contacts with the first Humanists, but did suffer losses through the Reformation. In 1525 the Brothers were accused as *Lutherei* and some of them were expelled. According to the proposals for the Cologne reformation in 1543, no changes would be made in the Brothers' way of life since they had lived together freely (without vows), had kept schools and done physical work. It is not clear what schools are referred to here. Later an attempt was made to turn the Brotherhouse into a seminary in the style of Trent, but it was not successful and the house (*premaevum institutum*) continued to exist until the death of rector Reiner Krott († June 6th 1772). However, it revived in another form, as a chapter with a particular aim. Those who were members of the foundation from 1772 until the time of Napoleon, were not Brothers but canons of one of the old Cologne churches. Of the four mentioned two were doctors of theology and a third became president of the seminary.

R.R. Post, *The Modern Devotion*
The Brotherhouse of Rostock gained some prominence in the sixteenth century for its activities as a printing house. In the first days of the Reformation the rector took it upon himself to print Emser's (1527) anti-Lutheran New Testament. When Luther came to hear of this he made a complaint in 1529 in a letter to the Duke, whereupon the latter wrote to the city council on December eighteenth 1529 forbidding the fraters to continue printing. By this time, however, the rector had made various contracts and gone to some expense, so that he published the text despite the prohibition by the Council (1532). As a result of this the city confiscated all the Brothers' documents and treasures, but these were returned in 1542. However, their printing activity seems to have ceased. In 1537 part of the house's possessions were ceded to the city and in 1559 the last of the Brothers presented the city with all their property on the condition that, should the religious question take a different turn, the council would help the Brothers to regain this property. When his position became precarious the last rector began to study at the university, gained his Master of Arts degree in 1539, and was subsequently appointed professor at the university. Despite his loyalty to the old religion he was made head of the paedagogium, but in the end religious pressure compelled him to abandon his post. He died as a Catholic priest in 1575 with the title of rector of the Brotherhouse. At this time the house was a dwelling place for students, and later became a paedagogium.1

One could pass over the fraterhouse of Magdeburg, founded in 1482 from Hildesheim, were it not that, according to tradition, Luther either went to school here or lodged with the Brothers. They might thus be considered to have played some part in the education of the great reformer, which would lend more credence to the idea that they contributed to paving the way for the Reformation. It may be recalled here how difficult it was to start the house in Magdeburg. It was only in 1484 that the emotions of both clergy and citizens had calmed sufficiently to allow the house to start developing slowly. Even then it was not until January 21st 1497 that the decrees of the city council ensured the Brothers of St. Jerome a legal and calm existence.2

In a letter dated 1522 Martin Luther informed the burgomaster of Magdeburg, Claus Storm, that he ‘zu den Nulbrüdern in die Schule

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2 O. Scheel, Martin Luther I, Tübingen 1917, 82.
 gegangen ist" and this letter appears to have been written in reliable circumstances. Most scholars have taken this information literally and have situated this school episode of the young Martin in the year 1497, when he was a lad of thirteen. Others, convinced that the Brothers had no school in Magdeburg, think that Martin lodged in the Brothers' hostel, or in their house, and received some instruction there. In his biography of Luther, O. Scheel has dealt broadly with this matter and proved that the *fraters* had indeed no school in Magdeburg, but also that Luther cannot have lodged with them.\(^1\) I can agree with this first opinion and shall presently give some arguments in support of it. His second opinion he based on a story by Luther himself, maintaining that he had not been properly looked after during an illness. Luther accuses the Brothers of all going to church, leaving him in bed with a high fever. Scheel refuses to believe such a thing of the Brothers and indeed I agree that one can not imagine them as failing in their duty towards the boys entrusted to their care. However, they may not have been convinced of the seriousness of the illness in question and thus left the boy alone without scruples.

Luther's assertion that during this period the Brothers taught in the cathedral school is completely unacceptable, as is the idea that they had their own school, advanced enough for a boy of thirteen. In such a case the curriculum would have had to be that of the city school, with Latin and logic; but the municipality would not have tolerated such competition from these Brothers who were newcomers and none too popular. All the more so since at this time the direction of the house was still entirely in the hands of the *fraters* from Hildesheim: the rector John of Boekold, and the brothers Gerard Capellis, John Dusseldorp († 1495) and Nicolas Dorsten († 1505).\(^3\) The Brethren never had their own school in Hildesheim, not even a *domus pauperum*, although they constantly aspired to this latter. On the other hand they did have boys to lodge with them in their house. To judge from a letter of Nicolas Dorsten, dated May 2nd 1503, the Brothers in Magdeburg were also willing to take boys: "The boys you write about have been admitted to our house and I hope that they will be zealous. But Henricus Pustman, parish priest of the Lambertikirche auf der Neustadt in Hildesheim has also recommended to us the son of the secretary of Hildesheim, Hottelem, and he too has been admitted."\(^4\) The

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1 O. Scheel, 71.
2 Ibid., 71.
3 Doebner, 301 en 287.
4 Ibid., 193.
boys mentioned here seem to have been hostel boys and not novices, for at the end of his letter he makes a distinction between ‘tam fratres quam juvenes.’ Finally it is difficult to imagine that the fraters from Hildesheim were competent to teach successfully. The only remaining solution is that the young Martin boarded with the Brothers and went to school elsewhere. His stay was only short and although Luther as a child was able to see something of the Devotion of the Brothers one can scarcely attribute any permanent influence to this brief contact.

The Reformation rapidly swamped the city of Magdeburg. Cardinal Albrecht of Brandenberg (1513-45), the bishop of the city, who lived at a distance, was not the man to take forceful action against it. From 1521 the new party made rapid progress. Several fraters left the house.1 The rector himself came under its influence. He changed completely and travelled abroad so that the Brothers did not know if he would ever return. This is stated in a letter, undated, but probably addressed to Conrad of Paderborn who died on May 15th 1536 at Hildesheim; a suis expulsus, as it says in the necrologium.2 It is assumed that this was the end of the Magdeburg house, which passed in 1562 to the chapter.

So little is known of the fraterhouses in Wesel, Kassel, Marburg and Merseburg in this period, that we need add nothing to what has already been said.3

Such was the actual confrontation of the Brethren of the Common Life with Humanism and with the Reformation. With regard to the first it was important to determine to what extent the Brothers participated in the teaching at the city Latin schools in the very first days of Humanism. It has been established that despite their merits in training and supplementing the education of small groups of students with a particular aim within their hostels, the Brothers were essentially pastors and not teachers in the late medieval and first Humanist schools. Their main task was the pastoral care of schoolboys and nuns. Only in exceptional cases and in a few cities did they introduce their charges to the humanistic culture, and here too they only developed after the new concepts had already gained a hold in the schools. In any case they were not trained to be pioneers in this domain.

Their lack of theological training also prevented them from becoming involved in the late-medieval theological controversies and in the religious conflicts of the sixteenth century. Conservative, retiring

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1 E. Schulze, R.E. III 3 495.
2 Doebner, 288.
3 See p. 426 sq.
and simple, they adopted a defensive attitude to any innovation. Only rare individuals and one or two groups showed sympathy for the ideas of the Reformation. Nevertheless, very many houses succumbed in the century of Reformation, usually as a result of compulsory measures on the part of the civic authorities. Previously, however, or simultaneously, the general religious change had caused the number of vocations to decline, just as in the monasteries. This secularization had already been made easier by an evolution towards the canonicate. On the other hand they tended to draw ever closer to the monastics in their terminology (order, habit).
Chapter Fifteen
The Windesheimers After C. 1485
Confrontation with the Reformation and Humanism

Towards the beginning of this period, the Windesheim Congregation consisted of eighty houses for men and thirteen for women. The number of these houses and their distribution indicate sufficiently that the Modern Devotion had extended over a wide terrain, even if we exclude those monasteries which were not associated with the congregation but had been led to observantism under its influence. This expansion did not immediately cease after 1485. The general chapter of 1491 incorporated the Domus B. Mariae at Bortesholm in Holstein, in the diocese of Bremen, that of 1493 the house of St. John the Baptist at Merkeshusen in Hessen, in the diocese of Mainz, and the succeeding one of 1494 the house of St. George at Sambach or Schamhapt in the diocese of Regensburg. This is the full quota for the fifteenth century. The next incorporation, that of Domus Montis B. Mariae near the river Jason in the diocese of Camin or Pomerlen did not follow until 1509. This was a late foundation and the last to be incorporated before the Reformation or indeed in the whole of the 16th century. The fact that the growth of the congregation first slows down and then ceases entirely shows that the foundation was ageing and losing its vitality. There was room enough for new foundations further away in Germany and Switzerland, and also a number of monasteries of the Canons Regular which needed reform and perhaps aspired to a stricter observance. But they no longer made the effort to seek contact with the Windesheimers, perhaps because other congregations had also sprung up. What then was to prevent the Windesheimers from crossing the frontiers of France?

The opportunity seemed to be presented when, in the spring of 1495, the president of the general chapter received a letter from none other than

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1 On the Windesheim lists of monasteries see Acquoy III, 1-7. To the lists mentioned here must be added that of 1530, preserved in the Acte Capituli of 1530, 137. It agrees entirely with Acquoy's reconstruction; only Reimerswaal is not mentioned and, naturally enough, the seventeenth century foundations.
2 Acta Capituli 89.
3 Ibid., 91.
4 Ibid., 92.
5 Ibid., 105.

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the Duchess of Burgundy, Margaretha of York, the widow of Charles the Bold, requesting that a visit be paid to a house near Paris. The chapter of 1495 entrusted the required investigation to the priors of the St. Agnietenberg near Zwolle, Marienborn in Arnhem and to an anonymous prior from Brabant, probably Jan Keynaerts, prior of Groendaal.

This is the only mention in the Acta Capituli of this important French undertaking, although its successes and failures, its hopes and fears, continued to preoccupy the prior superior and the small chapter for many years. Nevertheless, despite the significance of this affair, it did not lead to any of the French monasteries joining the Windesheim chapter. No further decree on the part of the chapter was therefore necessary and the acta are silent. Fortunately many of the letters exchanged have been preserved and these have enabled P. Debongnie, among others, to deduce and describe in detail what must have happened.

The man behind the plan, who was tireless in his attempts to interest extremely exalted and well-to-do gentlemen in the reform of a number of French monasteries, was undoubtedly the Belgian Jean Standonck, who had probably become acquainted with the Modern Devotionalists as a boy in one of the hostels. One of his ideals was the founding or enlarging of such houses with strict discipline for schoolboys or students. He was also interested in promoting the Windesheim type of observantism in French monasteries. There was reason enough for this, although one cannot speak of a prevailing demoralization. Some of the monasteries were practically empty, very many had been given in commendam to high members of the clergy or worldly persons. Usually the rule against personal possessions was not taken too seriously, so that the monks had their own books, their own hobbies and frequently their own money, some of which they used to buy clothing and food. The rule of the ‘enclosure’ which applied to some, was loosely interpreted, just as some monks easily found excuses for not taking part in the night office. Certain monasteries were stricter than those of Windesheim on some points, and the authority of the diocesan bishops over these institutions was certainly greater than with the almost completely exempt Windesheim foundations.

1 It is usually assumed that this refers to St. Victor in Paris, but in actual fact the Brothers did not go to Paris but to Saint-Severin de Château Landon. This going to Paris might mean simply to consult with John Standonck in Paris.
2 P. Debongnie, Jean Mombaerde Bruxelles, abbé de Livry, ses écrits et ses réformes, Louvain 1928, 81.
3 Particularly in the Bibliothèque S. Geneviève at Parijs.
4 P. Debongnie, Jean Mombaer etc., Louvain 1928, 68-149.
In the summer of 1495 thus, the above-named commission, led by Reinier Koetgen, prior of St. Agnietenberg, set off for Paris and district in order to take stock of the situation. As a result of their report, which seems to have been compiled rather carelessly and optimistically, the prior superior in September 1496 sent a delegation to Château-Landon by way of Paris. This delegation consisted of no less than eight persons, with John Mombaer of Brussels at their head. He had already acquired some reputation as a writer, although he had not had much success when in charge of the house of Gaesdonck near Cleves. However, as a native of Brussels he probably spoke French well. The company which took up residence on September 29th 1496 consisted of three priests, three clerics and two lay persons, of whom at least one had a good command of French. This was twice as many as were usually sent to new foundations.

From the preliminary discussions the prior superior was well aware that there was no question of incorporating the monastery of Château Landon in the Windesheim congregation. The aim was to reform a monastery of Canons Regular in the Windesheim spirit, just as John Busch had led many to a stricter observance in Germany. In addition the delegates were to introduce some moderation in certain strict regulations, for example in the matter of fasting. The bishop of the diocese would continue to exercise his spiritual authority over the monasteries.

A heavy task confronted the Windesheimers in Château-Landon; decayed and dirty buildings, the obstinate opposition of the old canons, and incomes too low to provide the canons with sufficient livelihood. But although some of the ‘newcomers’ lost heart, they finally succeeded in bringing about the reformation, thanks to Standonck’s support and the encouragement of certain exalted personages.

Despite the fact that the reformation in Château-Landon had not yet completely succeeded in 1498, John Mombaer was charged with reforming other monasteries, including St. Victor in Paris, Nôtre Dame de Livry, and Sainte Callixte de Cysoing. The first attempt failed, since it appeared that some customs were stricter in St. Victor than the Windesheimers had anticipated. The other two ventures succeeded, however, in 1499 and 1500, in the face of great difficulties. Prime mover in these successes was the canon of St. Agnietenberg near Zwolle, Reinier Koetgen. This led in 1500 to the founding of a reformed congregation in France, whereby the Windesheim customs were applied and the Windesheim ideals aspired to. This congre-
gation, however, had its own life, distinct from Windesheim, and each separate institution remained under the jurisdiction of its own bishop. John Mombaer, who was responsible for all this, was appointed abbot of Livry, where he had worked for some time, on April 9th, 1501. He was fortunate in overcoming the first main difficulties in Livry and in seeing the congregation expanding with the addition of the monastery of St. Saveur of Melun, but then died in the year of his appointment, on December 29th.\(^1\) Besides the nucleus of a small congregation living according to the Windesheimer customs, he also left behind a number of writings which influenced the Modern Devotion of around 1490. Erasmus, who was in Paris at this time, took an interest in these attempts at reform and worked to foster them.\(^2\) The Humanist, Cornelius Aurelius, canon and in 1494 prior of the monastery of H(a)emsdonk near Schoonhoven, who was a friend of Erasmus, took part in the reform of St. Victor in Paris.\(^3\)

In addition to the steady decline in the congregation's impulse to expand, and in its contribution to the reform of monasteries outside the congregation, the rules of the general chapter also reveal a diminishing of the former zeal. Some persons were lukewarm in the performance of their monastic duties while certain others even showed a rebellious spirit. The members of the chapter did not hesitate to adopt strong measures to combat this trend, which to my mind proves that there was no question of decline, at least before Luther began to preach openly. This would only be so if the leaders allowed all sorts of transgressions against the rule and against the custom to go unpunished.

The general chapters had to take measures against the disturbers of the peace and discipline\(^4\) and against others who stayed away from the monastery without the prior's permission.\(^5\) These would be considered as ‘fugitivi’, men who had left the monastery. Some refused to make amends in their own monastery, relying on their family's influence. These had to be sent to other houses.\(^6\) It was found necessary to construct very strong prisons in four places (Bethlehem in Zwolle,

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\(^1\) P. Debongnie, *Jean Mombaer* etc., Louvain 1928, 100-120, 272-278.
\(^4\) *Acta Capituli* 1488, p. 35.
Groenendaal, Bodiken, and Cologne), there to incarcerate those apostates, fugitives and rebels who could be apprehended. It would have been difficult to imprison them in their own monasteries.\(^1\) Mention is made of anonymous letters destined for the general chapter in which the writers complained of treatment by their own prior;\(^2\) of disobedience and running away.\(^3\) Those members of the order who served churches had to account for their incomes and outgoings, otherwise they would be considered as *proprietarii*.\(^4\) There are *fraters* who are slipshod and lazy in singing the office.\(^5\) It is difficult to collect enough money for the expenses of the general chapters.\(^6\) The priors must not allow the *primitia* (first Mass) to be held outside the monastery and they must oppose too much display and too many guests.\(^7\)

These chapter decrees date from a period which was too early for there to have been any question of Luther's influence. His name first crops up at the general chapter of 1522 in Neuss.

In the case of the convents, the retention of the enclosure involves certain difficulties for the rectors. The chapter wished to maintain control of the institution of these pastors\(^8\) and particularly to retain the enclosure.\(^9\) It forbade the admittance of girls to the convent at too early an age, but ten for clothing and twelve for admittance to the enclosure still seems very young.\(^10\) The Sisters were ordered by the chapter to confess at least twice a year and to pay a pension to those who had acted as their rectors.\(^11\) The general chapter of 1509 authorised the ‘visitors’ in Eindhoven to recall all *fraters* who resided with the Sisters without *socit*.\(^12\) The *fraters* and Sisters had also to be forbidden to receive money or ornaments.\(^13\)

Apart from the increase of measures against the *apostatae, fugitivi* and rebels and concerning the prisons constructed on their account, most of the regulations contain reproofs and not very radical steps to be

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taken against shortcomings and faults which occur in every community and must occasionally be pointed out.

In the beginning of this period vocations seem to be still quite numerous. With regard to the convents it is significant that in 1512 Bethany near Malines was forbidden by the general chapter to admit any more girls or other persons since the house was overburdened by the great number of people.¹ The same order was issued in 1518 to the prioresses of Diepenveen, Bronopia near Kampen and Bethany near Arnhem, until the prohibition should be relaxed.² There is no trace of heresy among the canons before 1523. Just as in the preceding period, an average of rather less than one novice a year took his vows in the chief monastery at Windesheim. It is not known how many left the monastery before Luther began to preach openly. Thirty-four novices made their profession between 1490 and 1517.³ After this, as in other orders, the decline set in. The list published by Acquoy mentions profession only in 1533, 1535, 1539 (he actually says 1529 but this must be a printing error) and 1541, that is, six professions altogether from 1518 to 1541.⁴ This situation was to be expected, for in 1522 the general chapter held in Neuss decided that no one should be allowed to take the monastic habit until the times had grown more peaceful.⁵ They would have quite a while to wait.

The aforementioned chapter of 1522 which could not be held in Windesheim on account of the war in Overijssel, but met in Neuss, was the first to react to Luther's preaching. This does not mean of course that this was the first the Windesheimers had heard of the great events in the German empire. No measures taken by the highest authority of this congregation have been preserved, but in 1522 it felt itself already threatened. Some of the houses had so few inmates that it was scarcely possible to sing all the horae in the choir. This led to the decree that in such monasteries the Mass, vespers and compline must none the less still be sung.⁶ After the aforementioned prohibition from accepting novices came the warning: ‘Since it is not our task to instruct the people openly, we admonish all who are bound to us by obedience, to refrain from various strange doctrinal opinions held by certain people, and to abide by the decision of the Holy Roman

¹ Acta Capituli, 109.
² Ibid., 116.
³ Acquoy, III 270-271.
⁴ Ibid., 272.
⁵ Acta Capituli 123.

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Catholic Church of God."1 In the following year, 1523, part of the chapter (from twelve provinces) met in Amersfoort, while fourteen assembled in Bethlehem in Zwolle. These latter soon joined those from Amersfoort. There can be no doubt that priors from Germany attended this meeting and were able to inform the others of what was happening in the German monasteries. In the opinion of those present, the people had been sufficiently warned by a mandate from the pope and an edict from the Emperor - probably that issued in Worms in May 1521. But since some showed themselves averse to the monastic disciplines and left the monasteries, the chapter ordered the priors earnestly to forbid the reading of Luther's books and to punish those found guilty of doing so. In harmony with this anti-Lutheran conviction is the Bull of Adrian VI, promulgated by Clement VII on November 26th 1523, in which the general chapter was authorized to bring back those who unlawfully resided outside the monastery, with the aid of the civil powers if necessary.2 This medieval notion would soon prove to be old-fashioned in Germany.

From 1523 onwards the question of Luther and Lutheranism crops up repeatedly in the general chapters. The delegates prayed for the unity of the Church, strictly forbade the canons to read Luther's works3 and ordered the imprisonment of those who propagated and defended Luther's teaching.4 Those who had left the monastery on account of Luther's doctrines and later returned might only be readmitted on the favourable advice of the prior superior. Lutheranism seems already to constitute an important threat. Peter Taborita (in Friesland) also mentioned the danger around 1524 in his Historie van Vriesland.5 In 1528 the definitors drew up rules concerning the punishment of the rebellious fraters, tainted by the 'Lutheran sect' in certain houses of Friesland, Holland and Flanders.6 The alms given to the monasteries were also diminishing.7 The chapter decided in 1529, in accordance with the edict issued at that time by the imperial majesty, to act firmly against the Lutheran supporters within their order by means of dungeon and chains, and by tracking down and imprisoning

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1 Acta Capituli, 123.
2 Ibid., 124.
3 Ibid., 125, 127, 128.
4 Ibid., 127, 128.
5 3de stuk 427-42; Fredericq, Corpus Inq. IV 246; Acta Capituli 128.
6 Acta Capituli 129.
7 1528, Ibid., 129.

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their ‘apostatae.’ There were several monasteries in which the ‘visitors’ had to deal with such persons.¹

The entire institution began to disintegrate; the vitium proprietarii, the retention of private possessions by the canons, crept in to some monasteries almost unnoticed. In addition, the fraters attached to convents began to make unnecessary excursions outside. They would henceforth be allotted a socius by the prior and each would have to be content with his partner whether he liked him or no.

The General chapter fought tirelessly against such diminishing of the original zeal. But worse was to come. In 1535 the chapter had to protest against the holding of eating and drinking parties in some monasteries,² against the requesting of privileges from the Holy See to be allowed to doff the habit and walk round the city in lay costume. The chapter decided to consider those guilty of such infringements of the rule as apostatae and to imprison them, with the help of the civil authorities if necessary.³ The discontent in Heilo, where the canons had been obliged to house the Amsterdammers from the burnt-out monastery of St. John the Evangelist, may be considered a chance phenomenon, but the admittance of lay people inside the convents and eating and drinking within the enclosure seem to be signs of degeneration in keeping with the spirit of the times.⁴ At this period the leaders were still opposed to the use of organs in the Church. This was permitted only in certain large abbeys.

One reason for this may have been the fear of a further decline in the monasteries' economic affairs. It certainly lay behind the prohibition from selling real estate.⁵

Up to this time - so far as we can judge what really happened from those acta which survive or were published - the chapters make no mention of the crumbling away of the congregations through the dissolution of various monasteries in Germany. Several members of the chapter must have been aware that this situation existed, but no decisions were taken on the matter. In 1538 the prior of Eemsteyn, John Gislen of Balen, gave the customary address to the chapter. In this he pointed out how the congregation was declining: ‘Where now are those famous houses, those chosen members of our magnificent chapter in Germany? Where is the once renowned monastery of Basle? Where Iterwik near Strasbourg? Where is that famed mountain of God, that fruitful mountain, that mountain of Turgau in the diocese

¹ Acta Capituli, 130.
² Ibid., 142.
³ 1536, p. 143.
⁴ 1538, p. 145.
⁵ Ibid., 145.

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of Constance? Where is the excellent monastery at Hisse? Where the flourishing Vredendaal? And others still which it would take too long to name?'

They lived indeed in the middle of the first phase of the decline of the Windesheim monasteries which took place around 1525-1540. Germany was particularly affected as the Protestant movement gained ground, with a sequel in the Palatinate around 1560. A second phase lasted roughly from 1560-70 to 1580-90, the period of the disturbances in the Netherlands which made existence impossible for all monasteries in the northern Netherlands and several in Belgium. Those institutions which escaped these two phases or eventually recovered (in Germany for example, after the peace of Ratisbon in 1629), managed to eke out an existence until the end of the eighteenth century, that is until they succumbed to the measures of Emperor Joseph II or to the French Revolution. There were several whose history extended to this period.

The general chapter long cherished the conviction, or vain hope, that some of the Windesheim institutions would soon recover after the calamitous happenings in Germany. The official list of Windesheim monasteries, compiled after 1530, contains all the houses which had ever been associated with the chapter, with the exception of Reimerswaal which had had to be abandoned shortly before on account of floods. Of the eighty-three monasteries listed, sixteen had certainly perished or could scarcely be said to exist. These are numbers 30, 34, 43, 45, 46, 48, 52, 58, 66, 67, 68, 69, 74, 75, 76, 78, 79 and 83. I have not included Vredendaal near Utrecht. The buildings here had been burned down in 1528 as a result of the war, but the community continued in the monastic life in the monastery of St. John in Amersfoort. I do include, however, Marienkamp near Esens in East Friesland, burned down in 1530, although some of the canons persisted for a time in the monastic life elsewhere. I list also Domus beatae Mariae in Wittenburg in Lower Saxony, in the diocese of Hildesheim, although this house revived in 1629; Domus B. Mariæ at Hertzenhage, near Frankfurt; Domus Sancti Dionisi in Molenbeke in the diocese of Minden, which revived in 1629; Domus horti beatae Mariae virginis near Worms; Domus B. Mariae et Joannis Evangelistae near Segenberg in

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1 Acquoy II 146-147.
2 Acquoy III 77.
3 Ibid., 83.
4 Ibid., 108.
5 Ibid., 111.
6 Ibid., 114.

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Holstein;¹ *Domus B. Mariae* in Sylo (Sylmonniken) near Embden;² *Domus S. Nicolai* at Trutenheim in the diocese of Strasburg, which seems to have continued for a time after its destruction in 1525;³ *Domus B. Mariae* at Birckling in the diocese of Würzburg;⁴ and the house of St. Leonard at Basle. According to a document dated 1525 this house was secularized so that the six inmates could continue to live there as secular priests, remunerated by the city, and fulfil parish duties in the church attached. They would abandon their habit and receive the garb of the secular priest. The building and all that went with it was transferred to the city. The pretext for this agreement was the decision taken by the general chapter in 1522 and 1523 that no new novices would be admitted for the time being.⁵ It is interesting to see how Erasmus reacted to this change, which he observed at first hand. He says in his account: ‘On Candlemas Day (February 2nd) all the members of the monastery of Canons Regular of St. Leonard, including the prior, renounced their habit. After this exchange of clothing all those who wished could continue to live there. The magistrate gave each one an annuity of sixty guilders, with the prior receiving a little more. No one was astonished at this and I fear that the same will happen often. The bishops wish to take stern measures to suppress the question, but I am afraid they will have little success. Other means are necessary. I issue frequent warnings and they admit later that my warnings were not without foundation.’ I include too the monastery *Domus Beatae Christinae* in Yterwijk, diocese of Strasburg⁶, which van Balen mentions as having disappeared; the reportedly vanished monastery of St. Martin in Zürich, diocese of Constance; *Domus Venerabilis corporis Christi* at Blomberg, dissolved in 1538 or shortly afterwards as a result of the introduction of the Evangelical church order;⁷ *Domus S. Martini* of Sindelfingen in the diocese of Constance, which disappeared when the Reformation came to Würtemburg in 1534;⁸ *Domus beatae Mariae Montisfragorum*, Beren-

1 Acquoy III, 119.
6 Acquoy III 164.

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berch in the diocese of Constance, mentioned by van Balen as having disappeared in 1538,1 like St. Laurentius at Hesse near Saarburg in the diocese of Metz;2 *Domus Montis Maria*, near the river Jason in the diocese of Camin, dissolved in 1535 when the church was reformed.3

Throughout the years that followed, from 1538 to 1555, the various general chapters were constantly preoccupied with the great questions of the period, and they tried to keep all in order by administering punishments. Even now no mention is made of the losses in Germany, although they do discuss personal possessions or merits4 and simony, which is so easily associated with these. The chapter also forbade the profession of girls under seventeen.5 The members of the general chapter complain that the authority of the institution has suffered greatly, that it is even despised.6

The chapter fathers carried on the struggle against personal property, the reading of Luther's books, the violation of the enclosure in the convents7 and repeatedly threatened offenders with imprisonment.8 The issuing by the Emperor (Charles V) of the *Formula reformationis* in Augsburg, provided them with a solution, since their actions would now receive the support of the temporal powers.9 This was probably quite necessary, since the word *rebelles* occurs frequently in the documents. A fresh complaint concerns drinking with others10 and play-acting on the occasion of a first Mass, clothing or profession.11

One gains the impression that the chapter at its annual assembly anxiously watched over the welfare of the congregation and adopted forceful measures to promote this welfare. However, the Brabant priors, heads of seven monasteries, thought differently. In a document dated 1555 and addressed to the General chapter which was then meeting in Neuss, they say that they had already urged a reform of the chapter in 1548, but without success. Now (in 1555) they are once

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1 Acquoy III, 181.
2 Ibid., 182.
3 Ibid., 187.
4 *Acta Capituli* 146, 147, 149.
5 Ibid., 148.
6 Ibid., 148.
7 Ibid., 149, 152, 153, 166.
8 Ibid., 150, 154.
10 *Acta Capituli* 153, 155.
11 Ibid., 155.
again placing on record their desire for a change. They point out that piety and religious feeling are everywhere declining, and notably in Overijssel and Friesland; the houses there have very few Brothers. They thus consider(ed) it wrong that the prior of Windesheim, elected by the canons there, should automatically become prior superior and head of the entire congregation. They proposed that henceforward they should have the right not to accept the elected prior of Windesheim as prior superior and that they themselves should then choose another prior superior. They allege that this too had been promised them. Moreover they consider that the chapter should not always meet in Windesheim, situated in an outlying corner of the congregation, but make the rounds of the various monasteries. In Windesheim the assembly had degenerated into a veritable fair with traders crying their wares and various groups drinking and joking in corners and even making fun of the monastics. On top of all this, the members of the general chapter who were not definitors, visited the neighbouring towns and villages, stayed there drinking until the evening was far advanced, and returned home late.

It is not entirely clear whether the proposal regarding the position of the prior of Windesheim was ever accepted. It is admittedly stated that the ordinaciones capituli generalis of 1555 received the necessary confirmation in 1557, but one wonders whether the letter of the Brabant priors must be included among the ordinaciones. It emerges from the chapter of 1559 that what had been decided was difficult to put into execution, since the definitores had a free hand in deciding either to leave the highest authority in the order (the superioritas) to the prior of Windesheim, or to transfer it to another prior. It was also they who decided whether the chapter should be held in Windesheim or elsewhere. In connection with this question, the chapter of 1559 - with confirmation in 1561 - decided to divide up the congregation into seven provinces. A prior provincialis was placed at the head of each province, while the prior of Windesheim would have a vicar in each province, with the exception of Overijssel where he exercised the power himself.

Apart from certain decrees which will be mentioned later, the division of the order into seven provinces, with mention of which monasteries belonged to which province, is interesting for the history of the Windesheim congregation. With this report the question again

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1 Acta Capituli 162-165.
2 Ibid., 167 sq.
arises of how far the heads of the congregations realized that various foundations had virtually disappeared. The document reflects the situation in 1559. The first province - that of Overijssel - consisted of twelve houses for men and three for women. So far as we know all these still existed. The province of Lower Germany was apparently made up of 14 monasteries and one convent; of the first only Hertzenhagen had disappeared. The province of Brabant had 17 monasteries and four convents, all still extant at the time of the report. Holland was the fourth province, with seven monasteries and two convents - all very much alive. The fifth was that of Gelderland. Its eleven monasteries and three convents were all still in existence. The sixth or Frisian province consisted of seven houses for men, of which two, Esingen and Sylmonniken near Embden, had disappeared. The seventh or Saxon province had been the most severely hit. Five of the nine monasteries listed had vanished.

The whole was thought to consist of eighty monasteries, but in actual fact several of these had disappeared or were on the point of doing so. It was not yet realized that the greatest trial of all was still to come, and was indeed imminent. Meanwhile the chapter was aware that all the houses suffered from a lack of vocations. It was decided that the other provinces should help on condition that board was provided. The visitation could not be carried out properly in Westphalia, Holstein and Upper Germany, and the chapter decided to send messengers annually. No one might attempt to obtain an alteration in the habit either in Rome or by application to a ruler.¹

In the years to come, which were critical for the history of the Windesheim congregation, these same problems and phenomena recurred, supplemented by new ones. Old, yet characteristic of the Windesheim mentality in 1560, is the chapter's decision vigorously to oppose the praecaria, a tax required from the monasteries for the joyful entry of the bishop.² More understandable is the chapter's decision to use every means possible in an attempt to reverse the pope's decree - which will be discussed later - which suggested employing a number of monasteries of the Canons Regular to support the new dioceses and their heads.³ They would also attempt to enlist the emperor's aid in preventing the plunder of their houses in Westphalia and Holstein and in punishing the plunderers. New, however, is the further decision concerning the provincial organization, the definition of the rights of

¹ Acta Capituli 170.
² Ibid., 171.
³ Ibid., 174.

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the *priores provincialis*, their election, and the meetings in the various provinces.¹ New too is the chapter's insistence that the priests should celebrate oftener and fulfil the *Missae privateae*.² In addition the priors decided to hold the provincial synods after the ending of the Council of Trent, to attend these, and there to defend their exemption and privileges.³ Meanwhile the priors were being increasingly called upon to deal with heretics, *apostatae* and *fugitivi*, even with notorious whoremongers, adulterers, thieves, blasphemers and those who had more than once defected from the order.⁴ The punishments meted out by the monasteries were no longer of any use against these - they were only laughed at. Now, however, the priors begin officially to expel such persons from the order (*dismembrari*)⁵ and to hand them over to the civil authorities to be lodged in the state prisons or even sent to the galleys.⁶ The convents too were giving cause for unease. The priors considered it excessive that the rectors should possess keys of such houses⁷ and that all sorts of men should be allowed inside the enclosure. They were even obliged to make a rule forbidding the nuns to lead dances at clothings or professions, or to put on plays in the presence of lay people. Some Sisters on these occasions doffed their habits and wore masks.⁸

At about the same time as the palfgrave launched an attack on the monasteries of the Canons Regular in his region, the pope took action against certain Dutch houses, five of them in the Windesheim congregation. In 1561 Pius IV issued the so-called dotation letters for the recently founded dioceses in the Netherlands. Hereby the monastery of St. John the Evangelist in Heilo was allocated to the episcopal table of Haarlem, to Deventer was given the St. Agnietenberg near Zwolle, to Leeuwarden, St. Nicolas at Bergum, to Groningen, Marienkamp at Eiske and to Roermond, St. Jerome in the same city.⁹ From any point of view this is a strange measure, only comprehensible for its useful effect. It seems to me even worse that the motive for this measure was stated to be the fact that the rules were no longer strictly observed in the monasteries and, in the case of the monastery of Heilo, that the canons had set it on fire. Although the first charge may well have been wholly or partly true in this trouble-torn period, the

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¹ Acta Capituli, 175-177.
² Ibid., 179, 187.
³ Ibid., 179-180.
⁴ Ibid., 181.
⁵ Ibid., 180.
⁶ Ibid., 187, 191.
⁷ Ibid., 181.
⁸ Ibid., 183.
⁹ Acquoy II 151.

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reproach appears to me too general, while the accusation against Heilo was patently untrue - which must have been well known to Sonnius, the man behind this measure. On the other hand there was reason enough to act for two of the monasteries. The house of Esinge for example, in East Friesland, no longer existed as such. As early as 14th April 1555, St. Agnietenberg had sent a petition to Brussels asking to be allowed to exchange the regular state for the secular. The number of members had grown too small to perform the choir prayers in the proper manner. The King granted the request on Feb. 14th 1556, so that a request dealing with this matter could be sent to Rome on April 2nd 1556. The pope's reply was in fact the incorporation with the diocese of Deventer. Since there was already a chapter in Deventer, there was no place for the St. Agnietenberg canons there. They probably became canons at Bethlehem in Zwolle, since the monks there also asked to be secularized in 1560. The fact that two of these Windsheim monasteries aspired to secularization in these years was an inauspicious sign for the glorious institution.

The monastery of St. Jerome did indeed become part of the diocese of Roermond, after having furnished two martyrs at the attack by William of Orange in 1572. In the monastery at Bergum the rights of the prior and the canons were redeemed for a sum of money, which also amounted to secularization. However, a preceding report had supplied the authorities acting as advisors to Rome with sufficient data to motivate the incorporation, although this data was probably grossly exaggerated. Finally, the incorporation of St. John the Evangelist in Heilo was based on false motives. The Canons Regular were to become members of the still to be founded chapter at the cathedral of St. Bavo in Haarlem, but at the outset they firmly refused. It was not until 1571 that six priests of the Heilo house became secular canons in Haarlem under pressure from the Duke of Alva.

The chapter held in Windsheim in 1569 decided to make known the decrees of the Council of Trent; it also passed a resolution to found

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1 Miraeus, Foppens IV 660. R.R. Post, Kerkelijke verhoudingen in Nederland vóór de Reformatie van ± 1500 tot ± 1580, Utrecht 1954, 315-316.
3 Ibid., 281-282.
4 R.R. Post, Kerkelijke verhoudingen, 238-239.
schools at three places in the king's domain in order to train up young people to piety and the monastic life. These institutions would function as seminaries to come to the aid of those monasteries with too few members. Furthermore, in every monastery, so far as income would allow, they proposed to appoint a theologian as lector, to give private lessons to the monastics. Such was the short report of the general chapter of May 4th 1569.

However, to judge from the correspondence which followed upon the meeting, the chapter went somewhat further. Apart from the above mentioned question of the schools and of a lector for the various houses, the chapter intended to gain the pope's support for a reform of the Windesheim constitutions. The most radical proposal concerned the appointment of a prior superior who would no longer be at the same time head of the monastery of Windesheim, or of any other monastery, but would be entirely free to take general charge. He would act as circulating head for the entire congregation, appointed originally for five years, but free to be re-elected. Since, however, there was no money available for this function, or for some of its subordinates, the chapter requested the pope to incorporate for this purpose four or five monasteries outside the territory of the king (Philip II) and the general chapter, since these foundations were no longer run by monastics but had been taken over by princes or city corporations.

This proposal corresponded to the step taken by pope Pius IV in 1561, the incorporation of monasteries and newly founded dioceses which the general chapter had opposed so violently. At the same time the chapter asked the pope to allow the monks and sisters to inherit. Anything thus obtained would be passed on to the community, so avoiding the abuse of the proprietas.

In addition, the priors requested the pope's approval of the division of the congregation into provinces, each under its own prior provincialis, and finally that the monasteries' wrong-doers might be lodged in the state prison. In an accompanying letter to the Duke of Alva they recalled the unlawful incorporation with the diocese of Leeuwarden, thereby condemning their own initiative in Rome.

The document is dated from the assembly of the general chapter at

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1 *Acta Capituli* 186-188.
Windesheim, on May 4th 1569; the accompanying missive to Alva on April 20th 1570. In this it is mentioned that the sending of the petition to Rome was delayed by the illness of the legate. His commission was approved on May 6th 1569. It is not known when the document reached Rome, but the reply was given first by pope Gregory XIII who succeeded Pius V on May 13th 1572. It is dated Dec. 16th 1573. All the requests were granted. The petition evidently served as basis for the papal document. The style is adapted to it with a few minor alterations. The additional point is made that the Windesheimers are not obliged to admit anyone on the archbishop's recommendation - a privilege he received at the joyful entry. The prior superior might be elected for a term of three years only and is then eligible for one more period of office. The incomes of the monasteries at Eemsteyn and the Hasker house, which had been destroyed, were allocated to the prior superior. The city of Amersfoort was suggested for the seminaries.

It will have been well into 1574 when the papal letter arrived at its destination in Windesheim. The copy is in the acta capituli after the meeting of March 1st 1573 and before that of September 15th 1574. The king's confirmation was requested on July 14th 1574, but the placet was only granted in Brussels on August 16th 1580. The situation had completely changed in the intervening six years, especially since the general chapter had not met between 1575 and 1585. Probably the members saw no opportunity of putting the decree into execution between 1575 and 1580, or even before 1586; perhaps they considered it unnecessary since the monastery of Windesheim no longer existed in 1586 and the entire congregation had shrunk to a small number of monasteries. These years were the most critical for the Windesheim congregation, since it was during this time that all the ‘Netherlands’ monasteries were lost. It is possible to deduce from the acta to what extent the congregation was a Dutch concern. Whereas the decline of the German monasteries had few or no repercussions in the acta of the chapters, the chapter was directly confronted with the decay of the Dutch houses and the consequences thereof.

The following monasteries were dissolved as a result of the reformation in the Palatinate: Domus S. Petri at Hegene in the diocese of Worms (1568); great Frankendaal in the diocese of Worms

1 Archief ... Utrecht 58 (1934), 231.
3 Ibid., 308-309.
4 Ibid., 311.
5 Acta Capituli 211.
6 Ibid., 213-214.
7 Acquoy III 122.

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(1562);¹ Schwabenheim in the diocese of Mainz;² Domus S. Christophori at Ravensberg in 1558, after an agreement with the prior.³ There is no trace of any of this in the acta. On the other hand, when some Dutch monasteries were threatened by the heretics and the Gueux, the prior was allowed to seek safety for the Brothers in citadels or towns.⁴

The first victim was the monastery of St. Elizabeth at Rugge near Den Briel, which was completely destroyed in a Gueux attack on April 1st 1572.⁵ The prior and nine fraters were obliged to seek shelter and since they had lost everything they had to be provided with various necessities. They went first to Eemsteyn, but later went on to different houses. They attempted to obtain money for their lands, probably with little success. The inmates of Eemsteyn - a prior with nine Brothers - left the monastery for fear of the Gueux and it was in effect burnt down by the Gueux on June 14th. Here the paters were at least able to save the ornaments and turn them into money.⁶ The house at Zalt-Bommel was ordered to gather together as much ready money as possible when it too was menaced with destruction.⁷ Yet despite this threat which came from the sea, and which caused various regulars to flee to more inland monasteries, a spirit of discontent, even revolt, continued to grow in some of the monasteries. This revolutionary spirit increasingly pervaded these Windesheim houses. Strong measures had to be taken against several persons, and the monastery superiors did not hesitate to act forcefully. Meanwhile the chapter urged that the refugees, who usually arrived destitute in other monasteries, should be lovingly admitted, while holding out the prospect that the hosts would be reimbursed for any expense incurred. Several people had fled from Eemsteyn, from Nieuwlicht near Hoorn, from Leiderdorp, Brielle, Haarlem, Zalt-Bommel, Beverwijk, Elizabethdal in Roermond and from Bredevoort.⁸ The private chapter which met in 1574 in Amersfoort and elected a new prior of Windesheim, Marcellus Lentius, former prior of Mariahof in Amersfoort, consisted

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1 Acquoy III, 168.
2 Ibid., 170.
3 Ibid., 173.
4 1577, Acta Capituli 195.
5 Ibid., 199.
6 Ibid., 200. It is remarkable that the Acta Capituli make no mention of the martyrdom of their fellow Brother John of Oosterwijk, Acquoy III 41. The notary of this chapter has John of Oosterwijk transfer to Rooklooster. Or is this James of Oosterwijk?
7 Acta Capituli 201.
8 Ibid., 207-208.

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almost entirely of delegates from Dutch monasteries, with representatives only from Aachen and Oudenaarde. The entire meeting was devoted to the problem of refugees from destroyed or threatened monasteries. The members agreed that those houses which were still intact had a duty to admit the refugees. Some were shocked at the thought that certain nuns who had always lived enclosed, those of Renkum and Bethany of Arnhem for example, now walked freely in the streets. The chapter tried to remedy such situations as well as possible and maintained its uncompromising attitude.

The reformation continued to gain ground in the Netherlands, taking over the provinces of Holland and Zeeland in 1572, Gelderland, Utrecht and Friesland around 1580-81, and Overijssel with the exception of the region round Oldenzaal. In consequence all Windesheim monasteries and convents in the Netherlands were dissolved and partly destroyed before the year 1600, as were all institutions belonging to other orders.

The property was usually confiscated, while the inmates either fled or enjoyed an annuity which the city authorities paid the monastics, especially the sisters, from the proceeds of the confiscated monastic property.

Among the institutions which disappeared are the twelve monasteries and three convents of the province of Overijssel, founded in 1559, and the twelve houses (ten for men and two for women) of the province of Hollandia. Eight of the monasteries in the province of Gelderland disappeared, together with the three convents. Finally, five of the seven Frisian monasteries went - two had already disappeared. Altogether, forty-three houses were dissolved, eight of them convents. If one adds to these those which had already gone, they form by far and away the largest part of all the Windesheim houses. Less than thirty remained of the original eighty-three and only four of the thirteen convents. It is true that a number of houses were founded or incorporated later, and that Germany made some sort of recovery in 1629. However, it was only in those regions of Germany which remained Catholic, principally in Westphalia (province of Saxony) and in the Rhinelands (Germania) that the monasteries survived in any numbers. In the province of Brabantia on the other hand, that is, in North Brabant and the southern Netherlands, all the religious houses survived.

1 *Acea Capituli*, 215.
Throughout the war in the Netherlands, which lasted for years, the surviving priors and canons, and especially the heads of the still existing monasteries, began to hold meetings again. For this purpose the houses in the southern Netherlands were found most suitable. Private or general chapters were accordingly held in Antwerp (1586), Brussels (1587, 1589, 1593, 1606), Louvain (1604), Liège (1608), Stralen (1610) Groenendaal (1611) and Tongeren (1611), so that the life of the congregation continued, although the acta of the later meetings were not published.¹ According to the published acts of the first assemblies, the confusion was considerable and the brothers were generally disheartened by the calamities which the congregation had suffered. Nevertheless, they courageously set about the work of restoration. The governing body was reorganized by the appointment of several priors and ‘visitors’, and measures were taken regarding the houses and property. These chiefly consisted of taking an inventory of what remained, notably of the lands and ornaments which had often been given to certain brothers or trusted lay people for safe keeping. A considerable amount appears to have been saved. Furthermore, an effort was made to gather the members together as far as possible in certain houses and to imbue them again with the aims and aspirations of the order. The statutes were revised, chiefly by confirming the decisions of previous chapters, for example those of 1572 in 1593, those of 1586-93 in the latter year.²

Gradually the situation appeared to be returning to normal, and there even seemed a reasonable hope of recovering some of the old position, when eleven Windesheim monasteries were restored to their former owners under Emperor Ferdinand II at the peace of Lübeck and according to the restitution edict of 1629. Some of these revived completely, while others had only a brief existence. Several of the monasteries managed to survive, either until the measures adopted by Emperor Joseph II, or until the French Revolution when practically all were lost.

The fact that in 1611 the Windesheimers decided to found a seminary for their order in Cologne may be taken as a sign that they had adapted themselves to the changed circumstances. It is interesting to note that the effects of the following Dutch monasteries, Nazareth near Bredevoort, Bethlehem in Doetinchem and St. Jerome in Roermond, were utilized for this purpose.³ In addition to the one in Cologne

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¹ Acta Capituli 220-276.
² Ibid., 238-239.
³ Ibid., 274-275.
they also founded a seminary in Louvain in 1618, here too making use of the income from the property of dissolved monasteries.\(^1\) Five surviving German monasteries each contributed 50 imperials a year.\(^2\) They also sent students from their monastery at Louvain *causa studii*, evidently in order to study at the university.\(^3\)

All this forms part of the history of the monasteries. While an offshoot of the Devotio Moderna, it has naturally little in common any longer with the undertaking begun by Geert Groote. I shall therefore content myself with a brief indication of the principal facts from the further history of the congregation.

These can be largely deduced from the decrees of the later chapter meetings, transmitted in books which have been described by S. van de Woude.\(^4\) From the so-called Hague manuscript, preserved in the Royal Library at The Hague (133, c.12), it appears that soon after 1611 the chapter meetings were held every two years and after 1630 every three years. These were sometimes supplemented or to a certain extent replaced by provincial chapters. As in former times these meetings were presided over by the head of the congregation, now called *prior generalis*, who usually did not remain long in function. At this period the congregation was divided into two provinces, each under a commissioner, who administered the whole, together with the prior general, and attended all the chapter meetings. These meetings were usually held in one of the south Netherlands monasteries, in Cologne or in Aachen. After 1629 there was a reasonable attendance at these meetings - between twenty and thirty persons. Part III gives a better insight into the situation, since the writer repeatedly gives the number of absentees. In 1728 there were 27 priors present and 6 absent,\(^5\) in 1731 respectively 23 and 8,\(^6\) in 1734 16 and 16,\(^7\) in 1737 20 and 13,\(^8\) in 1740 20 and 7\(^9\) and in 1752 18 present and 15 absentees.\(^10\)

In 1663 thirty-two monasteries (with a few small changes) remained of the former ninety-six. They were listed then in roughly the same sequence as in 1530: St. Marie of Neuss, Bloemendaal near Brussels, Rooklooster near Brussels, Frenswegen, Korsendonck, Gaesdonck, Bethlehem near Louvain, Bodiken, Grobbendonck, St. John the Baptist of Aachen, Elsegemen or Mariendaal near Oudenaarde, Weert

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\(^1\) Acquoy II 167.
\(^2\) *Acta Capituli* 278.
\(^3\) *Ibid.*, 277.
\(^5\) Hague ms., 306.
\(^7\) *Ibid.*, 314.

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(= Maria in Duomo near Eindhoven), Böddingen, Ewijk (diocese of Cologne), Tongeren, Riechenberg, Elizabeth near Roermond, Liège, Sulta, Melle, Domus Busci domini Isaac, Domus corporis domini in Cologne, Daelhem, Hamersleben, Udem, Rebdorf, Clus, Marbach, St. Baptist in Halberstadt, Schwabenheim, St. Maria in ’t Zandt near Straelen, and St. Georgerberg.

The subjects submitted to the general chapters resemble those of former days. In general they reveal a tireless striving to preserve the monastic life in a good state, while adapting it to the new times. In addition to what we have already mentioned concerning the improved intellectual training and education, this also emerges particularly from two facts: the incorporation of the Windesheim congregation with that of the Lateran, in 1628, and the chapter's urging of an intensification of the inner life. The first step had no noticeable results,¹ while the second led to a renewed interest in the early sources of the congregation, the *chronicon Windesheimense*, Thomas a Kempis and others. This inner life could be fostered by meditation.²

Like the Brethren of the Common Life, the Windesheimers in this period were also confronted with Humanism and with the Reformation, and there are various questions which must preoccupy the historian. Did they pave the way for this new phenomenon in the domain of culture, church and Christianity or did they foster it? Did they actively take part in it, since their ideas coincided with the new ideals and aspirations? In order to answer these questions it is as well to attempt to form some idea of the extent of the Windesheim monastic community at the beginning of this period, when the first signs of a humanistic culture could be detected in those regions where the Windesheimers had their monasteries. These included the greater part of the northern and southern Netherlands, the Rhineland, Westphalia and southern Germany. The farther away from Windesheim the fewer the number of monasteries. The most distant were in Zürich, Basle and Halberstadt. However, the influence of the Windesheimers on the monasteries extended much further than those which were incorporated in the congregation, since many Regular Benedictine and Cistercian monasteries and convents had experienced the beneficial effects of their reform work. Towards the end of the century even French houses in and near Paris were affected.

¹ Haguems., 98.
² Ibid., 119.
The Windesheimers were not pioneers in this observant movement, nor were they the only ones who supported and promoted it. In certain periods, however, and in particular regions, they may well have been the most successful leaders. Even where they were not directly involved, for example in the Observant movement of the Franciscans, Dominicans and Augustine Hermits, the Windesheimers contributed to producing and keeping alive a spiritual climate which required a strict observance.

In this way they also helped to further such observantist movements of reform, just as they also enjoyed the ideals which these latter orders put into practice. This may be said to constitute the sum of their outside work. They undertook no pastoral duties, had no parishes, preached only in their own monastery church for their fellow brethren and other persons associated with the monastery, such as the novices and donati. Naturally however, their ascetic works, especially those written in the second period, reached various other categories of people over a wide area: men or women in different monasteries, members of the clergy and very many lay people. In this the Windesheimers certainly surpassed the Brethren, yet their works formed only a small part of the considerable body of pious literature published towards the end of the Middle Ages and in the beginning of the sixteenth century.

The Windesheimers were directly concerned with the pastoral care of the nuns of the convents belonging to the congregation, but this was the limit of their pastoral activities. They found it difficult enough to organize and maintain this work in such a way that the religious needs of the nuns were taken care of, without the priests losing that monastic spirit which was so desired and considered so necessary. Life outside their own monastery and work among the nuns so easily led to independent comfort and superfluity, to the acquiring of personal possessions, to friendly relations with the Sisters and to the infringement of the rule of enclosure. The exalted monastic ideals on the other hand, which included contempt for the world, were conducive to a retreat from the world, to enclosure after the model of the Carthusians, hence blocking off any channels for exercising a religious influence on the world. An important factor is that they had no schools, and obtained their recruits either through personal contact in the parlour, through family relations, or through the brothers' hostels. Sometimes, however, the initiative came entirely from the side of the boys and their parents, since the monastery and monastic life not unnaturally held a great attraction for the people.
Was there any link between the ideas, doctrinal concepts and piety of the Windesheimers and Lutheranism, in other words, with those of the leaders of the Reformation with whom they were first and most closely confronted? To my mind there was not sufficient similarity either in the field of dogma or of moral theology or in the quality of their spiritual life, except of course for the fact that both parties were Christian. Like the Brethren, the Windesheimers did not believe in justification by faith alone, or in under-estimating the value of human cooperation in the process of salvation. They accepted no other certainty of faith than their contemporaries. They esteemed the Bible certainly, but no more than it was esteemed in other theological circles and they certainly did not rely on the spirit of the Bible alone. So far as the spiritual element is concerned, there was rather a contrast between the spirituality of the Windesheimers and that of Luther. This is true indeed of most of the people of the late Middle Ages. The Windesheimers held the office, and the Holy Mass, in high regard. They placed value on a large number of prayers, despite their continued emphasis on inner prayer, on meditation and the constant awareness of the good intention. Just as Luther finally rejected observatism in his own order, and was driven to opposition by the opinions of his fellow brothers when the rigid observantists did not help him in his moral conflicts, so must those who felt any sympathy for the new theology have viewed the Windesheimers with a critical eye. These latter may indeed have felt the attraction of the Lutheran principles from time to time, but precisely because they were so opposed to their own ideals and not because they resembled them.

It goes without saying that some of the hundreds of canons defected to Lutheranism but they formed only a tiny percentage. There were also a couple of priors who went over to the Reformers, either from a spirit of sympathy towards the new doctrine or from pure religious indifference. Some, in order to obtain a livelihood for themselves and the brothers, may have come to an agreement with the city council whereby they received an annuity in return for handing over the monastery buildings and incomes to the city. Among such houses were St. Leonard in Basle in 1525,1 Frankendaal in the Palatinate2 and Domus S. Christophori at Ravensberg in the Palatinate, in the archdiocese of Mainz.3 The number, however, is so small as to be negligible.

In the sixteenth century the Windesheim monasteries experienced

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1 See p. 641.
2 Acquoy III, 168.
3 Ibid., 173.

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the harmful effects of the Reformation in two ways. In the first place, several of the houses were vacated or destroyed because the regional or city authorities either forbade the practice of the old religion or rendered it impossible, confiscating church property and especially that of the monasteries. In other words the monasteries suffered the effects of violent action on the part of the authorities or of the forces of war. Here and there they were the victims of the revolutionary activities of the citizens. Secondly, there prevailed at this time a sort of religious malaise, an attitude of coldness towards the old foundations of the Catholic Church. This phenomenon was apparent in an expressed contempt for monastic authority and monastic customs and in a desire for renewal in prayer, liturgy, training, novitiate and dress. There was also a decline in the financial affairs of the monasteries, coupled with an unprecedented burden of taxation and a progressive struggle against any increase of goods or property held in mortmain. Strong criticism was voiced against the monasteries owning land, which was claimed by the nobles for their sons and, especially, for their daughters. There was in addition an aversion to the feudal rights of landed proprietors. All this was accompanied by a sharp dropping off in vocations, the results of which can be clearly noted around 1540. This turning away from the monastic life and criticism of monastic practices and authority led to desertion by some of the monks, either to join the Reformers or, more usually, to seek freedom in the world or as a secular priest. This resulted in the recapture of these persons by forcible means, their incarceration, widespread discontent and rebellion, and neglect of the rules concerning personal possessions, the enclosure and perhaps also celibacy. This degeneration, this decline, was surely promoted by the religious conflict, the dogmatic disputes, the attacks on the Church. It is a phenomenon which revealed itself also in the Lutheran church, even among several of the first Calvinist ministers. A new era brought improvement and various Windesheim monasteries were quick to seize their opportunity. But this section of the Modern Devotion was certainly no preparation for the Reformation, unless to some degree in the negative sense-insofar as the Reformation signified a reaction against all that was inherent in the religious life of the time, and Windesheim was an important part of this religious life. Besides being a dogmatic renewal and a reaction against the relaxation of all religion, the Reformation was also a reaction against a very particular expression of religion which was to be found among the Windesheimers.

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The problem of the relationship between Windesheim and Humanism coincides with the question: did the Devotio Moderna promote the rise and success of Humanism in those regions where it was widespread, and if so to what extent? Naturally enough, in using the term Devotio Moderna, one thinks first of all of the Brethren who are considered as having had a great influence on education. We have therefore discussed this question too in relation to the Brothers and have arrived at a negative conclusion. Was it any different with the Windesheimers? Can these, the most widespread, the most active, the most literary and the most productive of the Modern Devotionalists be said to have fostered Humanism? Did any of their members win fame as Humanists in the first period of Humanism? Were they the pioneers of this new culture? Since they kept no Latin schools it is not possible to approach this question by way of teaching and the schools. Moreover, the first gatherings of Humanists from the Netherlands and the region of Münster took place, not with the Windesheimers nor with the fraters but in the Cisterian monastery in Aduard after 1480. These were attended by rectors and teachers from the city schools and some aristocrats but not by Brethren of the Common Life and still less by Windesheimers. Nevertheless it was not long before individual Humanists or persons inclined towards Humanism began to emerge in the monasteries of Windesheim, as had John Veghe in Münster, James Montanus in Herford and Massaeus in Ghent for the Brothers. One of these was from Lopsen near Leiden, a certain Cornelius Gerardi or Cornelius Aurelius, a native of Gouda, from which town he derived his name Aurelius (from aurum = goud (gold) a word which was presumed to be concealed in the name of Gouda). There were, in addition two other Canons Regular, the contemporaries Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, who had spent his childhood in Gouda, and Willem Hermans. Both were members of the house of Stein near Gouda. This monastery was not incorporated in the congregation of Windesheim but in the small chapter of Sion near Delft. This congregation subscribed to the ideas and methods of Windesheim, while remaining independent. It can however be considered as forming part of the Devotio Moderna. They proceeded from the same spirit, just as did the many houses of the Third Order. These, however, developed differently from the large group of Modern Devotionalists and have therefore not been dealt with in this book. Neither did the members of the congregation of Sion add anything new to the Modern Devotion.
The three persons who worked together during Erasmus' period in the monastery and kept up a flourishing correspondence, pose the problem of Erasmus and the Devotio Moderna. This is a complicated question and much literature has been devoted to it. Did Erasmus, in his formative years in Deventer and 's-Hertogenbosch, and during his first years in the monastery, come into contact with, and absorb the combination of, devotion and humanism, enriching both and deriving from them an individual outlook on life which may perhaps be characterized with the general term philosophia Christi? Or did Erasmus absorb the principles or the spirit of the devotion in Deventer, Zwolle and Stein, later adding to these the humanism which scarcely existed in these circles, but which entered the Netherlands as a new culture, to some extent supplementing the existing school training? Must we assume that Erasmus, by his own efforts and utilizing what he already knew from the school, assimilated the new culture, afterwards developing it considerably, moulding it into a coherent system of thought, the philosophia Christi? It might also be that what he had seen with the Brothers of Deventer, found out to his cost in 's-Hertogenbosch and experienced somewhat reluctantly in Stein, had but little influence on him, since in all these places he retained his intellectual independence. He may indeed have gained the humanistic culture, as it was revealed in the Netherlands of this period, through his own great mental efforts and exceptional talent, and developed it without any fusion with the devotion which had been more or less imposed upon him in the early period. Only later would the link with Christian piety and the theological choice have occurred, inspired by his conversations with John Colet during his nine month's stay in England (May 1499-February 1500). It is certain that he there became acquainted with a philosophical Humanism after the model of Ficino and with a pious and learned theology. It was undoubtedly his stay in England which led him to resolve to devote his life henceforward to the study of the Bible and of theology.¹

Not all students of Erasmus resolve the problem of his relationship to the Modern Devotion in the same manner. The whole matter indeed is rather nebulous, although some facts are absolutely certain. The school of Deventer, which Erasmus attended at least from the beginning of 1478 until far into 1483, and where he learned Latin, was not run by the Brothers. It happened, however, that one of the fraters,

¹ J. Huizinga, Erasmus, German transl. by Werner Kaegi, Basel 1936, 38-44.

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John Synthen, taught at Deventer during this period. He had a good reputation as a teacher, and despite his use of the old-fashioned grammar of Alexander de Villa Dei, was conscious of the need for improvement in the teaching of Latin. Since he taught in the fraters' own school, Erasmus was never one of his pupils, nor does he often mention him later. There are no data which suggest that Erasmus lived in the Brothers' hostel in Deventer - in contrast to his stay in 's-Hertogenbosch, he never speaks of it. In any case he would not have fitted in, since the fraters really only took boys who wished to enter a monastery or to become priests, neither of which vocations appealed to Erasmus at that time. Nevertheless it was in Deventer that Erasmus acquired his taste for the classics and his high opinion of the Humanistic culture. This appears clearly from his letters to Cornelius Gerard¹ and to an unnamed friend.² His feelings were expressed at this period in a desire for a better Latin, and for more Latin authors to read, and in criticism amounting to complete rejection of most of the medieval school books. This opinion he shared with most of the other northern Humanists in this first dawn of 1480-1500. It was probably Alexander Hegius, a good pupil of Rudolf Agricola, who introduced the new spirit to Deventer after his appointment as rector of the school in 1483. Although these ideals were only put into practice slowly and gradually at first, the change in the general outlook, which aroused both admiration and criticism, signified a revolution in the whole concept of education. It is therefore understandable that Erasmus held the rector Alexander Hegius in particular esteem, especially in the first years following his school days in Deventer. Later, however, his opinion changed. In 1523 Erasmus wrote in his Spongia that he owed little of his education to Alexander and Rudolf Agricola.³ Apart from the fact that Erasmus left Deventer shortly after Alexander Hegius' appointment to that town, there are other reasons for assuming that he is unlikely to have been taught by Hegius. The rector was an ambulant head, gave only a few lessons in the first class and sometimes addressed the boys on Sundays. However, Erasmus will presumably have listened to such addresses which will have exhorted to love of study and esteem for the Latin writers.

Nothing is therefore known of any particular contact between Erasmus and the Brothers or the Modern Devotion in Deventer,

¹ Allen I, 23 line 60, 95.
² L.B. X 1666, A.
³ I, 31 line 37, 48.
although there is always the possibility that he heard the Brothers' Sunday sermon, that he received the sacraments there and even that he chose one of the fraters as his spiritual adviser. The only basis for this supposition, however, is the fact that the Brothers were responsible for the pastoral care of the schoolboys. The boys, for their part, were not obliged to make use of their spiritual guidance, except insofar as they went ‘in crocodile’ from the school to the Brotherhouse on Sunday afternoons to hear the sermon.

While the situation in Deventer is uncertain, there can be no doubt about what happened in ’s-Hertogenbosch (1584-1587). There Erasmus lodged in the fraters' hostel, but unlike the other youthful inmates, did not attend the city school. He was thus dependent upon what he was able to learn from either of the two Brothers who were in charge of the hostel. He seems to have been unlucky in his masters. One of his superiors he considered the ultimate in stupidity, while the other in his opinion was merely a recruiting agent for the monastery. He wrote as much in 1516 in his extremely tendentious letter to Grunnius' and repeated this view in 1528-29. Yet despite this exaggeration, his comments clearly describe the actual situation. Erasmus had been better taught and completely surpassed his master in his knowledge of Latin. It was for this reason that he later considered the years spent in ’s-Hertogenbosch as wasted. He would have liked to go to the University, but his guardians sent him to the Brothers. Is the devotion of these fraters likely to have had much effect upon this sensitive boy, who was completely, and rightly, convinced that he far excelled his masters in his knowledge of Latin and in his talents as a writer - who indeed despised these masters? Will he not rather have seen their pious exercises and the perpetual renewing of their good intention as a hindrance to the development of his talents, rather than as objects of admiration and imitation?

His sojourn with the fraters and his monastic life offered various possibilities for penetrating more deeply into the ideals and practices of the Modern Devotion. Did Erasmus make use of this opportunity? His frame of mind during the monastery years of 1487-1493 must be deduced from the works which he wrote at that time, notably the prose works: De contemptu mundi and the Antibarbari, the verses and the letters.

In De contemptu mundi his aim is to persuade one of his friends,
a certain Jodocus, to accept the monastic life, just as he had done himself. He is well satisfied with his choice, and since he wishes others to share in this felicity he writes a treatise on the subject. He hereby joins the ranks of the ascetic writers from Cassian to Dionysius the Carthusian, who have dealt with the same subject either in separate treatises or more or less incidentally in other works. These include Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory I, Peter Damian, Anselm, Bernard, Innocent III, Bonaventure, Geert Groote, Thomas a Kempis, John of Schoonhoven, Dionysius of Rijckel (the Carthusian) and several others. These writers influenced each other, and it is fortunate that after many monographs on the individual authors, a comprehensive work is being compiled on the majority of these writers under the general title Christianisme et valeurs humaines; A. La doctrine du mépris du monde en occident de S. Ambroise à Innocent III. B. Le thème de la dignité de l'homme au moyen âge et à la Renaissance.¹ Two sections of the part indicated under A have appeared. They have already clarified the problem considerably and have contributed important, although naturally not entirely new, information concerning the persons discussed. These works could be of great assistance to us in appreciating at their true value the contemptus mundi ideas of the Modern Devotionalists, as well as the book of Erasmus under discussion. It is curious, however, that those responsible for this publication have drastically curtailed its scope with reference to the late Middle Ages. They no longer intend to deal with the contempt for the world in the ascetic writers, but only that of the literary authors, and even here they confine themselves to France. Was their decision to introduce this limitation inspired by a conviction that the late medieval ascetic writers - including the Modern Devotionalists - the Carthusian Dionysius of Rijckel and the Windesheimer John of Schoonhoven, have really nothing fresh to contribute to this subject? In thinking this, of course, they would not be entirely wrong, yet even if these writers dealt with the same theme in a not strikingly original manner, it would still be important to round off the general picture. It is indeed already obvious from this study that the Modern Devotionalists, and also the Carthusian Dionysius, were able to draw upon an abundant heritage from the church Fathers and the medieval writers in dealing with this subject. The material was there for the taking and many will have

availed themselves of it. If therefore in this work *De contemptu mundi*, Erasmus sets down thoughts similar in style or content to those found in Thomas à Kempis or in other Devotionalists this does not necessarily mean that they were borrowed from them. Erasmus wrote in a monastery which, while not belonging to the Windesheim congregation, was yet fired by similar ideals. In every monastery he visited he must have experienced something of the contempt for the world which may have come straight to these canons from the followers of Geert Groote, but at the same time may simply be considered as the common property of the medieval monasteries. It may be directly derived from or motivated by certain Bible texts; such pious expressions are not lacking in Erasmus' treatise, but they form only a small part compared with themes derived from writers and examples taken from antiquity.

It follows from this that Erasmus' treatise might be included among the ‘thèmes de la dignité de l’homme au moyen âge et à la Renaissance.’ In my opinion the work must be attributed to the Renaissance, but it gives no theory on the dignity of man, which in any case only evolved slowly in the Renaissance period. The Middle Ages too were aware that there were degrees in the Imitation of Christ. They knew that some of the Apostles were married, while others were not, that some lived from what the faithful collected and that the bachelor St. Paul provided for himself. Some admired Paul for this, but did not feel themselves obliged to imitate him. St. Thomas Aquinas valued human powers as natural gifts which had to be developed, and thus to some extent supplied the man of the Renaissance with the grounds for his appreciation. Was the preoccupation with the salvation of souls and love for one's fellow not a lack of appreciation of the great contempt for the world as formulated in particular by Peter Damian and his twelfth century contemporaries? Everything referred to in the New Testament under the terms ‘flesh’, ‘secular’ and ‘world’, they interpreted in the sense of sin, or at least as obstacles to the love of God. In so doing they obliged themselves to make the choice: the world, or the monastery. The choice was not a difficult one in theory, but in practice to choose Christ was to be compelled to renounce the world, marriage, family ties and all possessions, an ideal in fact which could only be realized in the monastery. Certain texts of Peter Damian and Anselm show that they wished to impose this burden of choice on some of their relations or well-loved persons living in the world. They considered these losses not as deprivations but as joys, and certainly as
means to acquire the greatest or heavenly joy. Thus in the practical sense the choice was extremely difficult. Only a few could bring themselves literally to leave the world, which is perhaps just as well, or how would the world carry on? In actual fact the people of the Middle Ages did not embrace this stern conclusion en masse, yet they were certainly not persuaded that they were past redemption and would necessarily be relegated to the Lord's left hand on the last day.

The difficulty of the propounded dilemma led to the many treatises on the contemptus mundi, depicting on the one hand the world with its problems and dangers, and on the other the monastery with its spiritual joys. The world was a sea full of dangers - all was uncertain and short-lived. Of what significance were honour, riches, health, the family, office, when all could be lost in a moment through failure of crops, rebellion, war and death, which is the end of all? The monastic on the other hand, performed the service of God, was a stranger to fame and wealth and was always prepared for death. The life hereafter was merely a continuation of their life on earth. The author needed less imagination to describe the first than the second. As the term contemptus mundi already indicates, most attention was devoted to this. Anyone could testify to the brevity and precariousness of many things in the world, and the classical writers were in as good a position to do so as the Christian. These latter however, were able to contribute fresh concepts: original sin and personal sin; will of God, love for God, and for one's neighbour; reward and punishment; good works and merits. Jerome already pointed out that it was not sufficient to abandon all. Had not the philosopher Crates also done this? Many others despised wealth, but one must also follow Christ, and this was the privilege of the Apostles and the faithful.¹

It seems to me that on this point Erasmus' De contemptu mundi differs from the works of his predecessors, including the Netherlanders Dionysius the Carthusian and John of Schoonhoven.

John of Schoonhoven deals only with the first question: the reasons for despising the world, and not with the attractions of the monastic life. Nevertheless, in giving the seven reasons why it is comparatively easy to renounce the world, the love of God recurs again and again. The seven reasons are: the effort, which tires the lover of the world. He considers this effort vain, to a certain extent, unless it includes the knowledge of God. Only those who despise the world have the true

¹ Hieronymus. Liber 3 in Mattheus, chap. 19.

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knowledge of Christ. The second reason for despising the world is the neglect of the better, in other words, he who chooses to love the world, neglects the love of the eternal, hence the conclusion: take the way of Christ, serve Christ Jesus. The third reason for fleeing the world is its vanity, which contrasts with a love for Christ and life in eternity. Viewing the transience of the world (fourth reason) the motto must be: follow Christ. The world is a dangerous sea, and only the grace of Christ is of any avail (fifth reason), so he continues: to the burdens of the world is opposed the attraction of the service of Christ. The mention of this attraction may perhaps be attributed to the fact that, in those chapters which give reasons for despising the world, the author does not make any separate recommendation of the service of Christ. He has combined what Erasmus dealt with in two separate sections. This is acceptable if one remembers that for Erasmus the monastic life is not attractive because its principal aim is the service of Christ, but for completely different reasons; for the liberty, the peace and the voluptas which can be found there.

The form of Erasmus' book already diverged from all the preceding works. In the first place he wrote a different Latin, less flexible than that of John of Schoonhoven, but completely classical. Furthermore, he does not argue in general, but employs the form of a letter to a certain Jodocus whom he wishes to persuade to enter a monastery. This renders the question more concrete and adapted to a particular person. It is especially evident in the introduction, but most of the true motives which are intended to lead to a decision to enter a monastery are of a general nature. In his introduction he says how he has finally overcome his reluctance to write. He was impelled by his love for Jodocus, the necessity of the matter, their youthful friendship and common study and affinity. He wishes to dissuade him from the noise and life of the world and lead him to the solitary and peaceful life of the monastery. He is confident that his effort will be well received by Jodocus. All sorts of dangers threaten him, which become more menacing the more he ignores them or denies their existence. He compares the dangers of the world with those of the sea and refutes a supposed remark by Jodocus. This comparison is not valid: ‘I feel safe on earth.’ Erasmus: ‘As a young man you do not perceive

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1 Albert Cruys, Jean de Schoonhoven, De contemptu huius mundi, Bruxelles 1963, 51; Jean de Schoonhoven, Nimègue, 1967.
2 Ibid., 55.
3 Ibid., 56.
4 Ibid., 63.
5 Ibid., 65.
6 L.B. V 1239-1262.

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what dangers threaten you. David, Solomon and others also suffered shipwreck. See what measures Ulysses takes to avoid being enticed by the sirens. For you, Jodocus, there is little hope, since much contributes to your downfall; your exuberant youth, seductive beauty, wealth, freedom, dreams by night and songs by day. All this is endangered by the rocks, Charybdis, Syrtes; favourable and unfavourable winds, storms.’ Erasmus does not mean that the monks are saved while all others perish, but that he who loves danger will perish in it. (Chap. II). ‘Seek therefore the safest way. As Virgil has already said, men are blind to such dangers. The world holds many attractions for you, but look to the example of Ulysses. What could the world give you (Col. 1243)? Wealth? But the Holy Scriptures call this the root of all desires (theft, sacrilege, robbery). Incestus: see what Flaccus Horatius has to say on this subject, and how Eutrapelus renounced everything.’ Again he quotes a text from Horace and an example from antiquity, Vultreius. It seems that no one is satisfied with what he has, but always desires more, just as a dropsical man is always thirsty. But if the wheel of fortune spins, you are no longer a Croesus but an Irus, as has happened with many kings. But even assuming that your fortune stays constant, when you die you will have to leave it to another. Here he quotes the words of our Lord: Matth. VI, 19-20. Lay not up for yourselves treasure upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt and where thieves do not break through nor steal.

He ends the third chapter: it is very scandalous for a Christian man to seek along evil paths for that which endangers his salvation, which it was not difficult for the pagan philosophers to despise on account of their learning and fame.

The fourth chapter deals with the theme, the pleasures of the flesh are deadly and bitter. Erasmus proves the first by referring to Plato and the (almost Christian) ethici like Cicero and Cato, on the basis of what they had learned from Pythagoras. Erasmus considers this pleasure as a foolish joy. Compare it with the eternal punishments. But, you will say: I am thinking of a lawful marriage. Erasmus is unwilling to condemn this: Melius est nubere quam uri. Marriage is not evil, but it is unfortunate. A celibate life undertaken out of love for pietas is much better and in many respects much happier.

In the fifth chapter Erasmus points out that honour is vain and uncertain. All the applause of followers means nothing, but even the
honour which comes from the practice of virtue is uncertain. Consider Sisyphus who is condemned to roll a rock uphill forever. Hear what Juvenal says. And then death threatens! Where are the former tyrants? Where is Alexander, Paulus Aemilius, Julius, Pompey, where the princes of Greece, Rome, or of the Barbarians? He introduces Alexander, who laments and says that all the fame which he had gained has passed. ‘What use to me now are the marks of honour, the gilded monuments, the laboriously constructed pyramids?’

Erasmus devotes another separate chapter to the necessity of death, which renders everything short-lived (Chapter VI). He introduces this generally known fact, which is given so little thought, with Cicero's words and with a verse from Horace. Jodocus defends himself by saying: ‘I am still young, why should I trouble myself?’ which provides Erasmus with the material for the argument that many die extremely young or in middle age, and frequently just as they are on the verge of some important undertaking, for instance, marriage. In conclusion Erasmus refers to the seer, (Vates) who says: ‘Dispone domui tuae, morieris enim’ and to the Gospel: ‘Stulte, hac nocte animam tuam a te tollent et ista quae parasit cuius erunt.’ The words of Rudolf Agricola ‘omnia mors sternit, quod naturae est occidit. Una fine caret virtus, et bene facta manent’ (Death fells all and kills everything born; only virtue has no end and good deeds remain), give Erasmus the opportunity of describing the thoughts of a person on his deathbed: Where is my wealth gone? Where my own beauty? It is then that the uses of virtue appear.

That the world is unfortunate and evil is the theme of the seventh chapter. That it is unhappy is already evident from the many wars and calamities which Erasmus has already experienced, though he is not yet twenty-four (his birthday fell at the end of October 1493). Everything is so dear that one would need to be a Croesus to pay. This thought is clarified by a choice of texts. The world is not alone unhappy but also evil, full of perjury, deception, robbery. It is thus that St. Paul says: Totus mundus in maligno positus est. Jodocus, who evidently had means at his disposal, runs great moral danger in drinking bouts and gatherings. Hence the advice to flee the world.

With the eighth chapter begins the second and positive section of the work, being roughly the same length as the first, negative section. To the evil, unhappy and ephemeral world is contrasted the good, happy monastery, directly concerned with attaining the permanence of heaven.

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The eighth chapter is a warm, ardent and utterly convinced exhortation to Jodocus to decide now and quickly to enter a monastery. He mentions the service of God, which is so different from the service of the devil. The monastic places his faith in the word of Our Lord: ‘Take My yoke upon you and you shall find rest for your soul, for My yoke is sweet and My burden light.’ According to Erasmus the monastic life possesses three qualities which elevate it above the life in the world: it is free, it is peaceful and it has its ‘pleasure,’ voluptas. He elaborates the first in Chapter IX by refuting an objection based upon a definition of liberty given by Cicero: ‘Freedom consists in the power to live as one wishes.’ In the monastery, however, one may do nothing without the consent of the abbot, not even cough. Erasmus refutes this remark simply, but not very convincingly. The monk wishes for nothing that is not permitted, therefore he may do everything that he pleases. The remainder of his argument merely describes the lack of freedom in the world (authorities, married partner, passions, habits) without dealing in more detail with freedom in the monastery.

Chapter X bears the title: those who retire from the world (solitarii) enjoy a double peace, outward and inward. The first is the freedom from the noise and bustle of the world, which Erasmus skilfully describes. According to biblical and profane history, those who are accustomed to lead withdraw from the cities to mountains, caves, lonely or quiet places. Thus did Moses, John the Baptist, Christ, three Apostles, Pythagoras, Plato. A line from the philosopher Crates leads him to see the danger of this leading to laziness or crime.

Erasmus considers inner peace important, but he scarcely pauses to describe it. Again he confines himself to proving that the people in the world, whose evil ways he assumes, are deprived of this inward peace, since they are tormented by various fears. Here he refers to a text of Juvenal and to the example of Orestes, from the fables, to Lucius Sylla from Roman history and Cain from Biblical history. The monk need not fear either the human judge or God. He has his treasure in heaven, the thought of which imparts a great sense of peace. The monastery makes the bad good and the good better. The world on other hand makes evildoers of the good and rogues of evildoers.

Chapter XI is taken up with the ‘pleasure’ of the monastic life. This was originally the last chapter. It is strange that Erasmus employs the term ‘voluptas’ for the joys of the monastic life and that he defines these pleasures with reference to the ideas of Epicurus. He may have done so under the influence of Laurentius Valla, whose
works he was already studying or had studied. Those in the world hate the monasteries, since they consider life there to be horrible, inhuman and devoid of all pleasures. According to Erasmus it is nothing of the sort, so that he would dare to invite all Sardanapalici to learn to know our joys. Epicurus himself thinks that one must not accept pleasures if the difficulty of attaining them is too great. In any case we renounce various worldly pleasures - unchastity, drunkenness - for they bring more difficulties than joys. In this we do not differ from Epicurus. According to him one must not seek pains in order to avoid greater sorrows. Pleasures must often be renounced in order to attain even greater joys. So it is with us. We keep vigil, we rest, we keep silence in order that we may be spared greater pains. We do not drink to the point of drunkenness, we do not dance, we do not go where our fancy impels us, but anything we lack we receive again with interest. Our pleasures far surpass those which resemble those of the animals. We renounce the pleasures of the body, receiving instead those of the soul (this is essentially the same as what Epicurus advises). The contemplation of the heavenly and immortal pleasures for which we hope already surpasses the pleasures of the body which the worldling esteems so highly. It is true that here we receive only a small foretaste of the joys of heaven, but this is so great that we gladly abandon all other pleasures for their sake. Here Erasmus mentions the rapture of the mystics to which contemplation can lead. He himself has not yet received this gift, but he has often heard those so privileged confess with tears that worldly pleasures signified nothing in comparison with what they experienced. Erasmus then describes the parting meal of a certain Margaretha, whom he loved as a sister. Here he shows his talent in capturing such little scenes. He went to lend his assistance in persuading the father to give his consent. They succeeded, but at the end they were all, except Margaretha, crying like children, as if she were on the point of being laid in the grave. Well, Erasmus concludes, the joys which the parents offered Margaretha could not have been overcome, had not greater joys awaited in the convent.

Finally he quotes St. Jerome who says that in the desert he felt the joys of Rome, even the presence of the choirs of angels. That is the supreme voluptas. For the scholar there exists in addition the opportunity for the studia sacra, the time and the library where the following books are to be found: books of the Old and New Testament; the Fathers Jerome, Augustine, Ambrose, Cyprian; the Christian Cicero, Lactantius Firmianus, and for those who desire a more sober repast:
St. Thomas and St. Albert the Great. There too he will find various commentaries on the Holy Scriptures, and writings by philosophers and poets. You are completely free to use these as you will, and you have also at your disposition a park, a garden, delightful for walking in and musing. He therefore urges Jodocus to enter the monastery.

In an epilogue Erasmus briefly summarizes his argument, urgently repeats his message to Jodocus and attempts to clear up his last difficulties.

Erasmus first published the book in 1521. But in two editions of 1523 he added a twelfth chapter, the contents of which are so far different that he now proposes that Jodocus can best achieve the monastic ideal by living in the world. Suffice it to say that Erasmus strongly advises Jodocus against entering a monastery, for the monasteries have completely changed. They are no longer the places where a pure Christianity is practised, but where fugitives from the world often give themselves up to all kinds of sin and attempt to satisfy their own desires.

Erasmus' *De contemptu mundi* follows the same pattern as the previous works on the same subject to the extent that, like his predecessors, he speaks of the dangers of the world, of the vanity of honours and fame, of the precariousness and uncertainty of possessions and the brevity of all in the face of certain death, which can cut down the young and healthy without warning. He does not however define exactly which human qualities or spiritual possessions are threatened by the dangers he depicts. He seems to have been referring especially to human virtues and thus this work is an expression of Erasmus' moralism. There is no mention of any threat to man's belief or faith in God or attachment to the Church. Where this work does diverge completely from earlier, similar works, is in the fact that Erasmus derives many of his examples and illustrative texts from classical antiquity.

The second section is the weaker and at the same time the more distinctive, for the arguments employed in recommending the monastic life are those of a Humanist. The monastery offers freedom and tranquillity, not for introspection, meditation or prayer, but for study, of the classics as well as the Bible and the Fathers. These last are even mentioned before the medieval theologians. The joys of the monastic life are described according to the views of Epicurus. Erasmus is, however, convinced that mystical rapture can constitute the greatest happiness of the monk, the highest peak attainable in this world of which meditation is a foretaste. Even the hope of gaining this privilege is such a great joy that it compensates for all the deprivations.
Here Erasmus' description touches the monastic life itself, which is more than can be said for his eulogies of freedom and tranquillity. In this connection he devotes more attention to the lack of liberty, the noise and clamour in the world, and to the inner distraction of the worldling. No matter how he urges Jodocus to choose the monastic life, there is no attempt to describe this life. He gives scarcely one religious motive for entering; the love of God or of one's neighbour is not mentioned, nor is there any question of monastic virtues such as obedience, humility, poverty. He ignores the devotional exercises, like the hours, singing, the Holy Mass and the holding of the chapter. It is as though he is entirely oblivious to all this, and his whole day is devoted to his Latin and his Latin histories. One can detect few characteristic traits of the Modern Devotion. The flight from the world and the eulogy on monastic life are commonplaces in the Middle Ages. Erasmus' innovation is his motivation from the classics.

Plato and Cicero are religious authorities for him. In the classics and in the Bible Erasmus feels the presence of the writers. According to Kohls this was the ground of his programme - back to the sources - and of his zeal for the study of the classical languages.¹

However, although these dominate the work, there is no trace of the humanistic praising of the world, or condemnation of the contemptus mundi, a glorification of human powers, the development of which contributes not only to joy in this world and to the progress of civilization, but even to the attainment of man's supernatural goal. In the eyes of Erasmus, human intellectual activity is a virtue, but not of more value than humility and mortification.

At about this same time Erasmus must have been working on his Antibarbarorum liber² which seems to have been almost completed shortly after his departure from Stein but which, like the previous work, he only published later (in 1521). In a conversation among four gentlemen, the new practice of Latin and poetry by the Dutch Humanists is defended against the attacks of ignorant schoolmasters and magistrates, various members of the mendicant orders and the theo-

² Opera omnia. X. 1261-1744. A. Hyma has found a manuscript at Gouda that probably goes back to the first version of Erasmus. He has edited this in The Youth of Erasmus. Ann Arbor 1930, 229-331. It is not entirely clear how far Erasmus revised the first text in 1520.
logicians. His criticism of the schools and teachers is sharp, sharper than that of the other groups. All opponents are donkeys and ignorant clods. The Humanists defend themselves by rejecting any accusation of heresy and by referring to history, for it appears that Augustine, Jerome, Lactantius and Ambrose are on their side. There is thus, in Erasmus' opinion, no conflict between his Humanism and Christianity, between erudition and knowledge. On the contrary, the old culture has prepared for Christianity and made this young again. But we have no certainty about the text of 1493.¹

There is also trace of this fusion in Erasmus' poems.² Like many other Humanists, Erasmus began his humanistic career, if one may call it such, as a poet, and it was as a poet that he experienced 'for the first time the joy of seeing himself in print.'³ As a poet he obtained admission to Gaguin and Faustus Andrelini, and as such he was received and honoured for the first time in England. During the first year of his monastic life, 1487-88, he celebrated profane subjects, but in 1489 his attitude changed.⁴ Probably at the urging of Cornelius Aurelius, Erasmus resolved henceforward to sing only the praises of the saints and of sanctity. Huizinga considered this statement to be a spontaneous youthful pious resolve.⁵ C. Reedijk on the other hand thinks that it 'has a ring of sincerity, but it remains difficult to establish to what extent Erasmus was subconsciously seeking both protection and justification under the banner of piety for purely aesthetic ambitions.'⁶ For the most part Erasmus kept to this resolution, notably in the monastic years which ended in 1493-4. Since he made this resolution either at the urging or following the example of Cornelius Aurelius, the Canon Regular of the Windesheim monastery of Lopsen, near Leiden, his change of heart might be attributed to the influence of the *Devotio Moderna*. William Hermans, who lived in the same monastery as Erasmus, also sang the praises of the saints and of holy things. It was certainly the expression of a pious mentality, but this did not exist only among the Modern Devotionalists. It may be considered as a general late-medieval attitude of mind. As early as 1489 Erasmus had composed

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¹ Kohls, 35-68.
⁵ J. Huizinga, *Erasmus*, German transl. by Werner Kaegi, Basel 1936, 43.
⁶ C. Reedijk, o.c. 58.
a poem in which he had laid down the requirements of a truly Christian humanistic poetry:

\[
\begin{align*}
Huc si quem pia, si pudica musa
Delectat; nihil hic vel inquinatum
Vel quod melle nocens tegat venenum
Christum tota sonat chelis guelmi.\textsuperscript{1}
\end{align*}
\]

It is the pious, pure muse which pleases, not uncleanness; and nothing which conceals the hurtful poison with honey; Christ is the object of praise. According to Reedijk a similar attitude is also apparent from other texts: ‘Here we have a strong reaction against those who maintain that literary refinement cannot but endanger Christianity and that a clumsy style is a guarantee of impeccable piety.’ Here Erasmus takes very much the same attitude as Gaguin,\textsuperscript{2} (pure poetry is not necessarily a vehicle for impure and godless thought; bad Latin is not a guarantee of true piety; one can praise God and at the same time aspire to a classic purity of form.\textsuperscript{3})

Erasmus’ correspondence with his friends does not treat of the life in the monastery, but especially the school programme, the training which he and his friends enjoyed in Deventer, the unsuitable school books which were in use there even then, but which had all to be discarded; the best authors, the eventual dangers associated with the reading of some of them, the value of these for moulding their own style, the modern Italians like Valla and Poggio.\textsuperscript{4} For these first Dutch Humanists, the purity and elegance of Latin and the form of prose and poetry are the burning questions of the day, the essence of the new culture and the subject of conflict between old and new. It was a struggle for the schools. Teaching too thus came under discussion, but only insofar as they insisted on suitable, easy-to-use grammars, adapted to the childrens' needs, and reliable dictionaries. This is the full extent of the preoccupation with teaching in the letters of these Humanists. They make no mention of training the boys to be upright young men, or to the practice of the Christian virtues. Later, however Erasmus went further in his \textit{Antibarbari},\textsuperscript{5} but only after he had made contact with the English Humanists in 1499, and particularly with John Colet. The transition took place gradually and erratically and was never complete.

\textsuperscript{1} C. Reedijk, o.c. 56.
\textsuperscript{2} Ibid., 58.
\textsuperscript{3} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{4} Allen I no. 1-40.
\textsuperscript{5} Kohls 68-198.
There was no violent crisis and there is no road to Damascus. ‘For many a long year yet, without our being able to reproach him with hypocrisy, Erasmus can play the literateur or the theologian at will and as it best suits him.’ Reedijk too notes a development. Up to this time it was Erasmus’ dearest wish to be a poet among his peers, but just as his poetry gradually makes way for the prose writer, so ‘literature for its own sake lost his interest’. His didactical ambitions are the first to be roused, the *Familiarum colloquiorum formulae*, *De conscribendis epistolis* and similar works begin to take shape, although they will not yet appear in print for some years to come. His defective knowledge of Greek has to be improved, theology begins to attract him, even if this attraction is not in the first place due to the lectures at the Sorbonne. The poet is on the way to become one of the most original thinkers of the Renaissance era.

With Erasmus however the impulse for this transition had to come from outside. This impulse he received in England. Huizinga explains this clearly. In all the years preceding the first journey to England, a worldly way of thinking can be detected in Erasmus’ writings, and especially in his letters, which only leaves him in moments of sickness or weariness. Colet's words and example were the first to transform Erasmus’ inclination towards theological studies into a firm and lasting resolve, a life purpose. A more penetrating study of the Holy Scriptures leads him to his *philosophia Christi* as basis for his view of life. This emerges for the first time clearly in his *Enchiridion militis Christiani*. It is more than the ‘Reform’ depicted by Paul Mestwerdt: ‘Reform die mit den von ihm (Erasmus) gelegten humanistischen literarischen interessen zum wenigsten nicht im Widerspruch stand’. On the contrary, the humanistic literary interests constitute the best means of arriving at the desired reform. This reform embraces in the first place theology, Bible study methods and hence a simpler dogmatic, ethic, devotion, liturgy and spirituality. Mestwerdt finds it difficult to abandon the theory of the influence of the Modern Devotion upon Humanism and Erasmus, since he still believes that all schools in cities where the Brothers had their houses were actually run by the Brethren. But this was only so in isolated cases and certainly not in Deventer and ’s-Hertogenbosch, where Erasmus lived or went to school.

1 Huizinga, Kaegi 42.
2 C. Reedijk 62-63.
3 Huizinga, Kaegi 43.
4 P. Mestwerdt, *Die Anfänge des Erasmus, Humanismus und ’Devotio Moderna’* Leipzig 1917, 303; see Kohls 68-198.
On the other hand Cornelius Gerards or Aurelius (i.e. from Gouda), who corresponded with Erasmus from 1489 onwards, was a person well known in the circles of the Modern Devotionalists. There are indications that he attended school in Deventer and knew Erasmus there. In any case he was a relative of William Hermans who had certainly gone to school in Deventer, at which time he became friendly with Erasmus. They met again in the monastery of Stein, both Canons Regular of this monastery which belonged to the Sion chapter, and both fired with similar humanistic ideals. It appears that Cornelius Gerards too had been in a monastery, in Hieronymusdal or Lopsen near Leiden. He left this monastery in 1497 in order to join others in reforming the abbey of St. Victor in Paris, an activity in which Erasmus took a lively interest, visiting his friend there. When it became apparent that the goal was not achieved, Cornelius Aurelius also returned to his monastery, after having first described the catalogue of the abbey. This work is now lost, but became known about forty years later from Rabelais' *burlesque catalogue*. He wrote Latin verses (*Alphabeticum Redemptorium*, and *Mariad*), and received the poet's crown from Emperor Maximilian I in 1508. Cornelius Aurelius was deeply interested in the history of the Netherlands and wrote the following historical works: *Defensio gloriae Batavinae*, *Elucidarium Variarum quaestionum super Batavina regione et differentia*, *Die cronijcke van Hollandt-Zeelandt ende Yrisland*, the so-called *divisie-kroniek*. The fact that he wrote this last in the vernacular is extremely significant for a Dutch Humanist in this early period. In his *Apocalipsis Adriani VI*, written after the election of this pope who was a native of Utrecht (1521-22), he shows a certain predilection for the pure Gospel and a critical attitude towards conditions existing in the Church. Among other things he disapproved of church benefices being given to non-educated persons. The *conflictus Thaliae et Barbarei*, usually attributed to Erasmus, may also be his work. It is indeed found under the name of our Aurelius in the library of the canon Jan van der Haer, transferred to the court of Holland in 1531. Cornelius Aurelius had much

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1 C. Reedijk, 50.
earlier lost all contact with Erasmus. He died after 1523 (perhaps in 1529).  

Cornelius' cousin, the older William Hermans or Goudanus, a fellow student of Erasmus in Deventer and his fellow brother in the monastery at Stein, joined Erasmus in studying Latin and ancient history in the monastery. Apart from his historical interests - he wrote the *Hollandiae Gelriaeque Bellum* 1507-1510 - he also shared Erasmus' love for Latin verse. But his friendship with Erasmus was not based solely on their similar ideals, - there was also a close personal relationship. William was childishly hurt by Erasmus' sudden departure from Stein, but the correspondence continued. Together they wrote: *Certamen Erasmi atque Guilielmi de tempore vernali, quod per viridantia prata alternis ex tempore luserunt anno eorum decimo nono* (i.e. 1487). Erasmus made William Hermans one of the participants in the conversation at Halsteren in defence of the new culture, later published as the *Antibarbarorum Liber*, and visited him at Stein in 1496-7, taking away with him the *Silva odarum* which he published in Paris on the twentieth of January 1497, with an introductory letter he had succeeded in obtaining from Gaguin. However, as Erasmus' circle of friends grew wider his relationship with William Hermans cooled off. He died in 1510.  

C. Reedijk has compiled a list of Dutch Humanists who flourished between 1520 and 1540. To this might be added a preceding generation from around 1480 (85) to 1520. We should then see that with the exception of Erasmus and the cousins Cornelius and William, it contained no names which could conceivably be linked with the Modern Devotion as it had then developed. Georgius Macropedius, who entered the Brotherhouse in 's-Hertogenbosch in 1502 and whom we have already mentioned, would certainly find a place on it, but Humanists associated with and proceeding from the foundations of the Modern Devotion are very few in number.  

In the case of Erasmus and William Hermans the concept 'Modern Devotion' must be very loosely interpreted. Erasmus had no further connection with the Brothers after his departure from 's-Hertogenbosch. They are scarcely mentioned in his letters. One could almost count the references on the fingers of one hand. Apart from the well- 

1 P.C. Molhuysen, Cornelius Aurelius in *Nederl. archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis*, nieuwe serie 11 (1903) 1-35 and IV (1907) 54-73.  
2 C. Reedijk, o.c. 54-57. J. Romein o.c. 206.  
3 *Analecta Gijsberti Coeverincx*, II, 115.  

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known attacks in his autobiographical letters of 1516 and 1524 and the statement made in 1517 that they in no way resemble Jerome, whose name they often bear, there are only three instances. On 18th December Gerard Listrius, the recently appointed rector of the Zwolle school, wrote that the prior of St. Agnietenberg had openly declared himself a supporter of Erasmus, and that John Koeckman, rector of the Brotherhouse at Zwolle, sent greetings to Erasmus. In addition John Goswin of Halen, rector of the Brotherhouse of Groningen, conveyed a letter and present to Erasmus in 1521, in the name of William Frederiks, parish priest of St. Martin in Groningen. He also carried back Erasmus' letter of thanks to the parish priest. Finally, Conrad Goclinus, attached to the trilingual college of Louvain, informed Erasmus that according to current rumours, Theodore of Heze, a former assistant of pope Adrian VI had, after a thorough investigation, ordered all Erasmus' books to be removed from the hands of the pupils of their school, which is the principal school in Liège (August 28th 1530).

One must not take it for granted that everyone who showed any signs of piety at the end of the Middle Ages, or who was assumed to be devout, belonged to the Modern Devotion, or that any pupil from the schools of Deventer or Zwolle who achieved something in later life was a product of the Brothers.

**General Conclusions**

In his letters Geert Groote, the founder of the Modern Devotion, reveals himself as a very erudite and extremely active man, preoccupied with various questions of the day, a dauntless preacher with a rigoristic turn of mind. The later Vitae have the tendency to forget his academic work, making of him a simple monastic or an ascetic, somewhat scrupulous and rather small-minded frater, as an example of what the author of the Vita himself considers to be the most exalted attitude to life. Groote's three foundations, the Brethren and Sisters of the Common Life and the congregation of Windsesheim continue his work, but only up to a certain point. The Brothers are the closest to him.

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1 Allen, *Opus epistolarum* II, no. 447, p. 295.
2 16 September (1517) Allen, III no. 665, p. 91.
3 Allen, II no. 504, p. 422.
4 Allen, IV no. 1200, p. 483.
5 Allen IX, no. 2369, p. 17, r. 35-40.
Some of the earliest of them preached in the parish churches, but lacked their master's élan. Soon they confined their attentions to two groups, the schoolboys, and the Sisters. Without doubt the first group had their especial affection. From beginning to end, in all the places where the Brothers settled, they devoted their care to the schoolboys. Some they admitted to their hostels, a privileged group whom they prepared for the monastic life and for the priesthood. It was from these that they drew most of their recruits. Apart from providing them with board and lodging, they attempted to train them in religious matters and help them with their studies, supplementing and going over the lessons which these boys received at the city schools. Until about 1480 this was the limit of their work as teachers. Around this time, however, their attitude changed, probably as a result of the menacing competition from the printing houses which to a large extent rendered the copying of books unpractical. Until this they had devoted the greater part of the day to copying. Their intentions in doing so were threefold: to earn their living by their own work, as a change from their pious exercises, and to further the distribution of religious literature. Some of the Brotherhouses even started up printing themselves, while others sought to expand their educational activities. Neither of these undertakings was entirely successful. Only in a few towns (Liège, Utrecht and Trèves) did the Brothers' school flourish, and then due to favourable circumstances outside their control. Even in these towns they lacked sufficient well-trained teachers of their own. Several attempts to found schools had to be abandoned because of civic ordinances against the schools, and their printing houses were no match for the competition. The schools would in fact be the only means by which the Brothers might foster Humanism in the early period. Since these educational institutions were not at their disposal, their influence on the origins and development of this new culture was negligible.

The aforementioned flourishing schools of Liège, Utrecht and Trèves were indeed run in the humanistic spirit, but they were too late to count as pioneers. Since the Brothers did not attend universities, they were completely outside the academic world and accordingly their theological training was not of the slightest significance. Academics like John Pupper, Wessel Gansfort and Gabriel Biel can not in fact be considered as exceptions to this general rule. The first was a secular priest, and the second was only on friendly terms with the Devotionalists. He acquired his learning in circles far removed from them, although his ascetic writings agree with those of some of the

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Devotionalists, more of the Windesheimers than the Brothers. Gabriel Biel only entered the Brotherhood after he had already received his academic training, as an adult man who had already been a preacher in the cathedral. Those houses he did live in, moreover, had a somewhat peculiar character. The members of his Brotherhouses were canons and formed chapters, while retaining the communal life and community of possessions. From 1440 onwards this form had been recommended from Rome to all the Brothers and most of the German houses and several in the Netherlands adopted it in the course of time, but not, however, those of Deventer, Zwolle, Doesburg and others. This new method facilitated the transition to the secular state, as happened in Delft and Doesburg before the Reformation. If the Brothers cannot be called pioneers of Humanism, still less can they be considered as having furthered the Reformation. Admittedly the inmates of a couple of houses did go over to Lutheranism, more or less under compulsion, but nearly everywhere else they opposed this new doctrine and perished on this account in many German cities. In general they ceased to attract the young people and in the sixteenth century led a languishing existence, so that it was easy to commandeer their houses for use as seminaries. In some places the Brothers’ communities survived the Reformation. Apart from their pastoral work among the school boys and the Sisters, they derive their historical importance from their inner devotion, which they had in common with the Sisters and the Windesheimers, gaining many outsiders by their example.

From the very beginning the Sisters of the Common Life, who only received their special character c. 1392, attracted many young girls. The rapidity with which their various foundations sprang into existence is very striking, as is also the number of sisters they comprised, many more than the Brotherhouses. However, with the exception of a few houses, particularly in the Yssel region, they already changed character around 1400. Most of the houses adopted the Third Rule of St. Francis and became incorporated in a separate union, the chapter of Utrecht. It is remarkable to note in this connection that several friends and adherents of Geert Groote promoted this aspiration to the monastic life. The Brothers too did not entirely escape this trend. Throughout the entire century, however, the Sisters displayed a desire for a stricter life, so that several groups, having adopted the Order of St. Francis, went on to take that of St. Augustine, afterwards demanding the ‘enclosure’ after the model of the Carthusians.

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The Windesheimers, the congregation (or chapter) of houses of Canons Regular, with the rule of St. Augustine, owed their existence to the Brothers insofar as the latter, on the advice of Geert Groote, founded a monastery at Windesheim three years after his death. This was quickly followed by others. The first fact of importance is the rapid spread of their monasteries over a wide terrain, which recalls the great orders of the previous century, although several existing monasteries also joined this congregation. Evidently general opinion was still more in favour of the monastic life, in preference to communities without vows. Their especial character consisted in the strict observance of the rule and the custom they had adopted. They were thus in sympathy with the move towards observantism, which to some extent characterized the monastic life of the time. This was largely a reaction against what had gone before, and against what was customary in many institutions in that period. The desire for an *artior vita*, a stricter life, which we have noted among the Sisters, also motivated these Canons Regular, who attempted to introduce it as much as possible and often indeed by force, into other monasteries and even other orders. In this work they often obtained the support of the civil authorities. No particular influence on Humanism or the Reformation has ever been attributed to the Windesheimers, unless with regard to the latter, in a negative sense. Observantism could lead to what is called legalism and thus provoke a reaction from Luther, helping to render his doctrine acceptable.

All these groups practised what they called inner devotion. It is from this that their name is derived. By this they understood, in general, deep consciousness of the personal relationship with God and a perpetual and intensive striving to direct all their work, prayer and spiritual exercises to God. This presupposes, however the practice of the virtues of humility, obedience, purity, mutual love and mortification, out of love of God. With two of the Windesheimers this latter was intensified to an exalted mysticism, a ‘contemplation’ of God, insofar as this was possible in this world. The imitation of Christ helps us to make progress along this road, hence the constant meditation on Christ’s life and passion. In the beginning this meditation consisted of a brief reflection, repeated several times during the day whenever a new activity was embarked upon. This ‘rumination’ developed with Wessel and Mombaer into a complicated system of meditation methods destined to focus the mind on the desired subject. This more resembles meditation in the modern sense. The fraters, Sisters and...
Windesheimers attempted to put these religious ideals into practice. In addition, they described them in various treatises of which one, the *Imitation of Christ* by the Canon Regular Thomas a Kempis, has achieved world renown.

Their emphasis upon ‘inward fervour, conscious inner devotion’ did not, however, lead these Modern Devotionalists to reject or criticize the oral prayers such as the hours, the rosary, the psalms and vigils. They also held the Holy Mass in high esteem, although they strove, through their inward meditation, to prevent these exercises from becoming too formalistic. ‘It is our highest duty to meditate on the life of Christ.’ (Cor. I, 1.1.)

In all this they made use of the traditional Christian heritage which they collected in their *rapiaria*, without imparting to it any new character, unless by the intensity of their experience. Their devotion was modern only in the manner in which they put it into practice, reacting against the prevailing spirit of relaxation. In this way the Devotionalists brought a most necessary renewal to a wide area. They may indeed have propagated the *contemptus mundi* over too wide a field, permeating religious life with a pessimism, against which the optimism of the Renaissance and the evangelical freedom of the Reformation came as a reaction.

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