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A STUDY IN CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM WITH SPECIAL  
REFERENCE TO THE WRITINGS  
OF  
JOHN WESSEL GANSFORT  
A PRECURSOR OF  
THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION

by  
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A THESIS

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"Mysticism has been the ferment of the faiths, the forerunner of spiritual liberty, the inaccessible refuge of the nobler heretics; the inspirer through poetry, of countless youths, who know no metaphysics; the teacher through devotional books, of the despairing; the comforter of those who are weary of finitude. It has determined directly or indirectly, more than one-half of the technical theology of the Church."

—Josiah Royce—

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### A. The Subject.

##### 1. The Subject Stated.

"Mysticism is the genius of religion. It stands to formal Religion as creative genius in art does to mere imitative reality." William Kingsland makes this statement in his book on Rational Mysticism. (1) The subject of this thesis is a study in Christian Mysticism with special reference to the writings of John Wessel Gansfort a precursor of the Protestant Reformation. This subject is chosen for the purpose of discovering the place of Mysticism in the Christian Church and especially to discern the presence of mystical elements in the Church as they might lead to or influence the action which took place in the Protestant Reformation.

##### 2. The Subject Delimited.

For the purposes of this study there will be no attempt to make a careful critical study of types of Mysticism. The subject of mysticism has many ramifications. It might well be treated psychologically as Leuba has done. Or it could be treated philosophically

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(1) William Kingsland, Rational Mysticism, p. 266.

or historically. It will best suit the purposes of this thesis to approach the subject from the historical standpoint with special analytical treatment of the writings of John Wessel Gansfort. We shall thus delimit the study to a survey of Mysticism as it has appeared in the Christian Church from its inception to the time of John Wessel Gansfort. Our purpose is not to criticize Mysticism, or to explain it psychologically, or to give all its philosophical implications. Rather we shall be content to view the appearances of Mysticism in the Church and to discover what implications it had for organized religion.

### 3. The Problem Stated.

Therefore the ultimate problem of the thesis will be to study the writings of John Wessel Gansfort in the light of mystical elements as they had appeared in the Church. The study of the writings of Wessel will be for the purpose of discovering elements of mysticism in his teaching. Therefore elements of mysticism that are discovered in Wessel will have a bearing on Protestantism in so far as Wessel is shown to be a precursor of the Reformation. Hence the problem may be stated as, To discover in the teachings of John Wessel Gansfort as a precursor of the Reformation elements of mysticism as manifested in the Christian Church from its inception.



## B. The Method of Procedure.

### 1. The Method Explained.

The method to be followed in this thesis will be first to define historic Mysticism as it has revealed itself in the Church. Certain characteristics will be given in order to elucidate the subject. The next step will be to view the Mysticism of the early Church as it appears in certain outstanding leaders. There has been included in this study a brief survey of the works of Plotinus although he was outside the Christian Church. He is mentioned because of the unique place he holds in Christian thought inasmuch as Church leaders were indebted to him for their sources. Then Mysticism will be seen in certain organized groups of the medieval Church. A difference will be noted between the types of expression of Mysticism in the medieval groups and the earlier mystical thought. With this study as a background the writings of Wessel will be analyzed to note the influence of mysticism on his teaching. And as a final step in the thesis Wessel will be viewed as inculcating the spirit of Protestantism.

### 2. Sources used in the Procedure.

It may be well here to acknowledge my indebtedness to certain sources. Dean Inge has been used as an authority in his interpretation of the early Mystics. His work on Christian Mysticism has been followed close-

ly in the second chapter of the thesis. His interpretation has been used rather than a personal investigation of the men presented. Rufus Jones is largely responsible for the set-up of the third chapter. Many of the ideas were taken from his work on Studies in Mystical Religion. The translation of the works of John Wessel Gansfort was made by J. W. Scudder of the Albany Academy.

PART I

CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM AS MANIFESTED IN THE  
CHURCH FROM ITS INCEPTION TO THE TIME OF  
JOHN WESSEL GANSFORT

CHAPTER II

DEFINITION AND CHARACTERISTICS  
OF  
EARLY CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM

## PART I

### CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM AS MANIFESTED IN THE CHURCH FROM ITS INCEPTION TO THE TIME OF JOHN WESSEL GANSFORT

#### CHAPTER II

##### DEFINITION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF EARLY CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM

###### A. Definition and General Characteristics.

###### 1. Definition of Christian Mysticism.

The Mystic according to Rufus Jones is "that person who insists on a somewhat wider range of first-hand acquaintance with reality or of direct experience than that of which is confined to the operation of the five or more special senses". (1) Dean Inge, in his monumental work on Christian Mysticism says that religious mysticism is "the attempt to realize the presence of the living God in the soul and in nature, or more generally, as the attempt to realize in thought and feeling, the immanence of the temporal in the Eternal, and of the Eternal in the temporal". (2) From these two definitions we understand that mysticism may be a subject for the intellect and also the feelings. Hocking has a definition of mysticism which he uses in relation to the subject of worship. He says, "Mysticism is a way of dealing with God, having cognitive and other fruit. Affecting first the mystic's being and then his thinking,

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- (1) Rufus Jones, Some Exponents of Mystical Religion, p.5.
- (2) Dean Inge, Christian Mysticism, p. 5.

affording him thereby answers to prayer which he can distinguish from the results of his own reflection. Since the Pseudo-Dionysius, 'mystical theology' has not meant a rival theology, but rather an 'experimental wisdom', having its own methods and its own audacious intention of meeting deity face to face". (1)

There are many and diverse definitions of mysticism. Usually a writer phrases a definition to suit the subject with which he is dealing. We are only treating the subject from the historic point of view, and that confined to the Christian Church. Leuba gives several definitions which he claims are the generally accepted understanding of mysticism from the Protestant Church point of view as follows:

"Mysticism is a deification of man; it is a merging of the individual will with the universal will; it is a consciousness of immediate relation with the Divine; it is an intuitive certainty of contact with the supersensual world". (2)

Although Leuba says that the Catholic Church places the emphasis not upon union with the Divine, but upon a superhuman knowledge, we find in studying the subject that both conceptions of mysticism were prevalent in the Christian Church previous to the Reformation. It is the Protestant point of view that caused trouble for the legalistic system of the Catholic Church and therefore condemned by the Church. Indeed, Inge contrasts mysticism with legalism saying that we might almost say that everyone is naturally either a legalist or a mystic. (3)

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- (1) William Hocking, Meaning of God in Human Experience, p. 355.
- (2) Leuba, Psychology of Religious Mysticism, p. 1.
- (3) Inge, Christian Mysticism, p. 5.

Historic mysticism in the Christian Church has assumed three general aspects. These are, first, mysticism as a philosophic system; second, mysticism as a practical and devotional way of life; and third, mysticism as a system of symbolism, commonly called Nature-Mysticism. (1)

Philosophic, or speculative mysticism is represented in the writings of both John and Paul in the Bible. Plotinus, the Pseudo-Dionysius, Erigena, and Meister Eckhart are speculative mystics of a very high order. As a practical and devotional way of life, mysticism is well represented in the German mystics of the fourteenth century, namely, Tauler, Suso and Thomas à Kempis. Nature-Mysticism is seen in the writings of the English poets, of whom Wordsworth is a representative type. Nature-Mysticism holds to the belief that everything, in being what it is, is symbolic of something more. This is illustrated when we say that Nature half conceals and half reveals the Deity, in which sense Nature may be called a symbol of the Deity.

## 2. General Characteristics.

As a type of religion mysticism seems to rest upon these propositions: first, the soul can see and perceive; second, since we can only know what is akin to

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(1) The general divisions followed by Inge in his Christian Mysticism.

ourselves, man, in order to know God, must be a partaker of the Divine nature; third, without holiness no man may see the Lord; fourth, the true hierophant of the mysteries of God is Love. (Love is here defined as interest in its highest power. It is of the essence of Love to be disinterested.)

It is the life aim of the mystic to be transformed into the likeness of Him in whose image he was created. This is brought about by three progressive ways, first, by way of the purgative life, second, by way of the illuminative life, and third, by way of the unitive life or state of perfect contemplation.

The ethical system of the Mystics is contained in these steps of the upward life. The purgative life consists of contrition, confession, hearty amendment, and self-discipline. But in this regard, "The true mystic never withdraws himself wilfully from the business of life, no, not even from the smallest business!---There is nothing in Mysticism itself to encourage men to maltreat their bodies. Mysticism enjoins a dying life, not a living death". (1)

The illuminative life of the Mystic is the concentration of all the faculties, will, intellect and feeling, upon God. Good works are performed willingly and spontaneously. The struggle of life is transferred to the inner life. The third step which is the ideal limit of religion is the unitive life which is complete union

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(1) Inge, Ibid, p. 11.

with God. In the writings of the Fathers even the word deification holds a large place. We find "deificari" in the writings of St. Augustine, and the word "θεοποίησις" in origin.

The question of visions often arises in the discussion of mysticism. The statement of Inge on this point is very significant.

"The Mystic is not as such a visionary; the desire to find for our highest intuitions an authority wholly external to reason and independent to it, - a 'purely supernatural' revelation, - has been the cause of the longest and most dangerous of the aberrations from which Mysticism has suffered. --- A revelation absolutely transcending reason is an absurdity; no such revelation could ever be made. Reason is still king." (1)

Christian Mysticism appears first in history as an intellectual movement, the foster-child of Platonic idealism. Mysticism has performed the same function in the field of philosophy as it has in religion, namely, that of restoring the fresh springs of life. Mysticism in religion appears in revolt against dry formalism and cold rationalism and in philosophy it takes the field against materialism and scepticism. We are very near the heart of philosophic Mysticism when we view Reality as a vista which is opened gradually to the eyes of the climber up the holy mount. It rests on the faith that the ideal not only ought to be, but is the real. And a sunny confidence in the triumph of good shines from the

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(1) Inge, Ibid, p. 19.



writings of most of the Mystics.

The methods of the Mystic mind seem to be divided into two classes, namely, those practiced by men who believe that in the higher stages of the spiritual life, we learn most about the nature of God by close, sympathetic, reverent, observation of the world around us, including our fellow men; and those practiced by men who believe that we learn most about the nature of God by sinking into the depths of our inner consciousness, and aspiring after direct and constant communion with God.

The subjects most under consideration in speculative Mysticism are, the immanence of God in nature, and the revelation of human personality to Divine. One of the fundamental doctrines of Mysticism is the "unity of all existence". "The Mystics are much inclined to adopt, in a modified form, the old notion of an anima mundi, - that the Logos is a cosmic principle, the personality of which the universe is the external expression or appearance". (1)

Then the question arises with the Mystic concerning the possibility of the soul having a consciousness of a life distinct from that of the Word, after it has attained fusion with its Lord. The question is one of retaining a distinct personality.

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(1) Inge, Ibid, P. 29.

"But it is possible to save personality without regarding the human spirit as a monad, independent and sharply separated from other spirits. Distinction not separation is the mark of personality; but it is separation, not distinction, that forbids union. ---So far, is it from being true that the self of our immediate consciousness is our true personality, as spiritual and rational beings, by passing beyond the limits that mark us off as separate individuals. Separate individuality, we may say, is the bar which prevents us from realizing our true privileges as persons."

"So the mystic interprets very literally that maxim of our Lord, in which many have found the fundamental secret of Christianity: 'He that will save his life,--his soul, his personality, shall lose it; and he that will lose his life for My sake shall find it.' It is a process of infinite expansion--of realizing new correspondences, new sympathies and affinities with the not-ourselves, which affinities condition, and in conditioning constitute, our true life as persons." (1)

Another characteristic theory of the Mystics is that man is a microcosm, a living mirror of the universe. This theory is developed in two ways. First by Plotinus who holds that "every man is double", meaning that one side of his soul is in contact with the intelligible, and the other side with the sensible world. The second development of the theory is that man in his individual life, recapitulates the spiritual history of the race, in much the same way in which embryologists tell us that the unborn infant recapitulates the whole process of physical evolution. This has an important implication, for it follows that the Incarnation, which is the central fact of human history, must have its analogue in

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(1) Inge, Ibid, p. 30-31.

the experience of the individual.

Thus we have given the definitions and characteristics of Mysticism as manifested in the Christian Church. No attempt is made to investigate Mysticism before the Christian era, although many forms of it appear in the ancient religions. Neither has any attempt been made to criticize the various definitions of Mysticism or to compare favorable and unfavorable attitudes toward the subject. The characteristics of Mysticism as set forth by Inge ~~HAVE~~ been accepted as authoritative for our study and ~~HAVE~~ been followed in this presentation.

The following sections of this chapter will demonstrate the characteristics as evidenced in the writings of representative men in the Church to the time of Erigena (?-c. 877?).

B. Characteristics Demonstrated  
According to Representative Speculative Mystics.

1. New Testament Mysticism in the Gospel by John and the Epistles of Paul.

The Gospel by John has been called the charter of Christian Mysticism. Dean Inge says that Christian Mysticism as he understands it might almost be called Johannine Christianity. He treats the mystical element in the Gospel by studying first, the teaching concerning the nature of God and second, that concerning human salvation.

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On the nature of God, John teaches that God is Love; God is Light; and God is Life. And the personality of God is not attenuated in any way by the application of these qualities to him. God is active. He "so loved the world" that He sent His Son into the world. Christ is identified with the "Word" or "Reason" of the philosophers. The pre-existence of Christ is declared; He is the Instrument of creation, but He is more than that. He is the Life itself. "That which has come into existence was in Him life." (1) Mystical theology generally follows John in making the Incarnation, rather than the Cross, the central fact of Christianity. The supreme doctrine for John is that "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." Christ is both the Revealer and the Revealed. The teaching on the Holy Spirit by John is important to our subject. God the Father was revealed by the Incarnation. The Office of the Holy Spirit is to reveal the Son. The Comforter takes the place of Christ on earth as a living, active principle in the hearts of Christians. Truth was fully revealed in Christ but men were not ready to receive it in its fulness and therefore this doctrine of development is expressed in John.

John's doctrine of salvation is indeed mystical. First there is his teaching on the New Birth. This is

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(1) Gospel by John, Prologue

explained in the symbols of the water and the Spirit. It suggests the ideas of purification and life. (1)

John teaches that Faith is an act of the whole personality, a self-dedication to Christ. It begins with an experiment and ends with an experience. Faith to John is akin to Love; and love of the brethren is inseparable from love of God. The mystical union in John is a bond between Christ and the Church, and between man and man as members of Christ.

"The personal relation between the soul and Christ is not to be denied; but it can only be enjoyed when the person has 'come to himself' as a member of a body. This involves an inward transit from the false isolated self to the larger life of sympathy and love which alone makes us persons." (2)

Eternal life to John is the state of progressive unification, in which we receive "grace upon grace" as we learn more and more of the fulness of Christ.

John's mysticism is also shown in his use of symbols. The eight miracles seem to be chosen for their symbolic value. Christ is symbolized as the Bread of Life, the Light of the World, The Door of the Sheep, the True Vine, and the good Shepherd. (3)

The Mysticism of St. Paul is evident throughout his writing. He is ushered into the Christian experience by a spiritual revelation. The carnal mind according to

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(1) Gospel by John 3:1-13.

(2) Inge, op.cit.p. 51.

(3) The interpretation of John's mysticism is that of Inge.

Paul is disqualified from understanding Divine truths. "It cannot know them because they are spiritually discerned." St. Paul makes much use of the word "mystery" in his writing. Chrysostom's definition seems to be the sense in which Paul uses the term, namely, a mystery is that which is everywhere proclaimed, but which is not understood by those who have not right judgment. It is revealed, not by cleverness, but by the Holy Ghost, as we are able to receive it. And so we may call a mystery a secret, for even to the faithful it is not committed in all its fulness and clearness. (1) The visions of Paul are not of the essence of mysticism. Paul does set forth the idea that the individual Christian must live through and experience personally, the redemptive process of Christ. Christ in St. Paul is seen as the universal source and center of life. "All things are summed up in Christ." "Christ is all in all."

Man is essentially the glory and image of God. "Until Christ be formed in you." (2) A death blow is dealt to religious individualism in Paul's teaching of Christ as the "Light and Life". Just as an individual cannot reach his real personality as an isolated unit, he cannot, as an isolated unit, attain to full communion

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(1) cf. Ephesians 1:9; 3:9.  
(2) Colossians, 1:27.

with Christ. There is recognition of the spirituality of matter and of the unity of all nature in Christ.

The true Mystic follows St. Paul in choosing as his ultimate goal the fulness of Christ, and not the emptiness of the undifferentiated Godhead.

Paul's attitude toward ceremonies places him in the class of genuine mystics. He seems to teach an extreme disparagement of external religion. But Paul wages his polemic against formal religion in an attempt to preserve the spirit of religion. The Cross was central in the Mysticism of Paul. (1)

"Paul had an intuitive perception of 'truths which never can be proved' a conviction of knowing the unknowable; a consciousness of partaking of the ineffable; a sense of personal contact with the ultimate realities which lie behind all outward religious phenomena." (2)

## 2. Mysticism of St. Clement of Alexandria and Origen.

St. Clement of Alexandria, (?-c. 215), attempted to interpret Christianity, as Philo had done for Judaism, by philosophy, into scientific dogmatics. (3) His aim was to construct a philosophy of religion which shall initiate the educated Christian into the higher "mysteries" of his creed. To Clement, reasoned belief is the superstructure of which faith is the foundation.

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- (1) The treatment of St. Paul is taken from Inge, op. cit., p. 59-72.
- (2) James M. Campbell, Paul the Mystic, Introduction.
- (3) Williston Walker, A History of the Christian Church p. 77.

He defines knowledge as scientific faith, and on the wings of the "knowledge of God" he sees the soul rise above all earthly passions and desires, being filled with a calm and disinterested love of God. The highest life is attained through purity and love plus a diligent study of the Scriptures, although mental cultivation may be and ought to be a great help. Moral evil is caused either by ignorance or weakness of the will.

Clement shows a characteristic of many of the Mystics in his doctrine of God. He approaches God through the negative method which he calls "analysis". According to this method we cannot say what God is, but only, what He is not. The Son of God is God's consciousness. God sees the world as reflected in the Son. (1) The writings of Clement are full of Mystery language. We find such expressions as "The Divine Mysteries", "The Divine Secrets", "The Sacred Word", and Jesus Christ is the teacher of the "Divine Mysteries". (2)

Origen, (182-251 a.d.), was a pupil of Clement. He was Clement's successor in the Alexandrian School. His theological structure is the greatest intellectual achievement of the ante-Nicene Church, and it influenced profoundly all after-thinking in the Orient. (3) He

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- (1) Inge, op. cit. p. 86-87.
- (2) The principle writings of Clement are Exhortation to the Heathen; Instructor; Miscellanies.
- (3) Walker, op. cit., p. 83.



divides religious life into two parts, namely, faith and knowledge. The life, death and resurrection of Christ ~~ARE~~ regarded as one manifestation of an universal law which was enacted in the eternal counsels of the Most High. In his doctrine of God he attributes self-consciousness and reason to God. But God is above or beyond reason; yet He can be approached by reason and not alone by ecstatic vision.

Christ is the spiritual activity of God. He is the "Idea of Ideas". (1) "Christ is the 'mediator' between God and His world of creatures, the Being through whom they were made. Highest of these creatures is the Holy Spirit, whom Origen reckons to the Godhead, by reason of Churchly tradition, but for whom he has no real necessity in his system."

"Salvation was wrought by the Logos-Son becoming man, by uniting with a human soul, that had not sinned in its previous existence, and a pure body."

"From Christ there began the union of the divine with the human nature, in order that the human, by communion with the Divine, might rise to be Divine, not in Jesus alone, but in all those who not only believe but enter upon the life which Jesus taught." (2) (3)

Man is seen as a changeable creature while God is immutable.

### 3. Platonic Mysticism as Represented in the Writings of Plotinus.

In this section of the chapter we present the philosophic system of one of the world's greatest thinkers, and one who makes a notable contribution to Chris-

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(1) cf. Inge, op. cit., p. 89-90.

(2) Walker, op. cit., p. 82.

(3) Origen's principle work in theology was De Principiis.

tian thought although he himself was not within the Christian body. Rufus Jones says of him, "It seems pretty clear that no other single person outside the New Testament group and outside the group of early Christian Fathers contributed so much to the stream of Christian thought as Plotinus did". (1)

Plotinus was born in Egypt about the year 205 . . . . After an adventurous career he settled in Rome in A.D. 244 . . . as a teacher. He is said to have known Plato better even than Aristotle did, although Aristotle was the pupil of Plato.

"His philosophy is essentially the logical development of the highest level of Greek thought as found in Plato and Aristotle, but there is apparent in him an extraordinary religious intensity, a passion for the experience of the divine and a flight from the temporal to the eternal which are more truly characteristic of the East than of the West." (2)

The Mysticism of Plotinus is of the intellectual type. As Jones says, "He goes up the ladder of the intellect to the last round of it and then he finds that there are wings at hand for the rest of the journey".

The speculative system of Plotinus is given at this point because of his influence on the Mystical thought of the following centuries. He has been called the Father of Western Mysticism. The discussion of his theory will follow that of Inge, who is one of his best interpreters.

God, in the system of Plotinus, is the fundamental Reality. The Absolute is the One or the Good. God is the

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- (1) Rufus Jones, Exponents of Mystical Religion, p. 45.  
(2) Ibid, p. 49.

eternal Source of all that is real. Attributes are not predicated to God; but rather, God is Love and Truth and Beauty and Goodness. In the One all that is Real is held together. At the center of all things is the One who is the Absolute unity, complete fulness, the ultimate source from which all truth and beauty and goodness have flowed out and spread through the world. (1) Ideas are immanent in the universal mind. The real world--"the intelligible world", the sphere of Ideas--is in the mind of God. The world is an emanation from God. The world flows from God or proceeds from God.

An important place is given to the doctrine of vision; the idea of revelation was new in Greek philosophy and Plotinus takes it into his system. The supreme aim of life to the mystic is the mystic ecstasy of union with God.

Christian Mysticism is most indebted to Plotinus for his theory of psychology.

The Soul is the meeting-point of the intelligible and the phenomenal. There is a Soul of the earth which sees and hears. It is immaterial and immortal, for it belongs to the world of Real existence, and nothing that is can cease to be. The body is in the soul rather than the soul being in the body. The soul creates the body

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(1) cf, Rufus Jones, op. cit., p. 60-62.

by imposing form on matter, which in itself is No-thing, pure indetermination, and next door to absolute non-existence. Space and time are only forms of our thought. The nature of the soul is triple and this triple division of the soul according to Plotinus corresponds to the three stages of Christian Mysticism. The first is the animal and sensual soul, which is closely bound up with the body. Next is the reasoning soul, the logical soul, which is the distinctively human part. And the third is the highest or superhuman stage, in which a man, "thinks himself according to the higher intelligence, with which he has become indentedified, knowing himself no longer as a man, but as one who has become altogether changed, and has transferred himself into the higher region". The soul is not altogether incarnate in the body; part of it remains above, in the intelligible world, whither it desires to return in its entirety.

The World is an Image of the Divine Mind, which is itself a reflection of the One. It is therefore not bad or evil. The world may be compared to rays of light shed abroad from one center; everything flows from this center and everything desires to flow back to it.

There is a very definite doctrine of the Trinity in Plotinus. The One or the Good is above all existence. God as the Absolute. The Intelligence is that which occupies the sphere of real existence--the organic unity

comprehending multiplicity. It is God as Thought. The Soul is God in action. It is God and Intelligence occupying the sphere of appearance or imperfect reality.

Plotinus has an interesting theory of evil. He sees evil as disintegration. In its essence it is not merely unreal, but unreality as such. The "Lower virtues" which are the duties of the average citizen are not purgative, but teach *US* the principle of measure and rule, which are Divine characteristics. (1)

Plotinus had a doctrine of ecstasy which is of interest to the student of mysticism because it is practically the same as that held by certain Christian mystics, namely, St. Juan of the Cross.

"The soul when possessed with intense love of Him divests herself of all form which she has, even of that which is derived from Intelligence; for it is impossible, when in possession of any other attribute, either to behold or to be harmonized with Him. Thus the soul must be neither good nor bad nor aught else, that she may receive Him only, Him alone, she alone. 'While she is in this state the One suddenly appears', 'With nothing between', 'and they are no more two but one; and the soul is no more conscious of the body or the mind, but knows that she has what she desired, that she is where no deception can come, and that she would not exchange her bliss for all the heaven of heavens.'" (2)

#### 4. The Mysticism of St. Augustine.

St. Augustine was a diligent student of Plotinus and remained half a Platonist all his life. Although there are some parts of the teachings of Augustine which

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(1) cf. Inge, op. cit., p. 91-98.

(2) Ennead VI, 7. 34 (Translation by Inge. Quoted by him)

have no affinity to Mysticism, yet he was not ashamed to learn from Plotinus. He had early come in contact with the mysticism of the Manichaeans and the Gnostics which taught him to distinguish between true and false Mysticism. It was in Plotinus that he discerned true Mysticism. The system of St. Augustine bears a very definite relationship to our subject because of the fact that John Wessel was indebted in many respects to the teaching of Augustine. Since we gave so much space to Plotinus, it will be necessary only to mention the main elements in the teachings of Augustine which show traces of mystical thinking.

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His doctrine of God is that God is above all that can be said of Him. He is not even to be called ineffable. Adoration to God is best given in silence; God is best known by nescience, and best described by negatives. God is absolutely immutable. Augustine's doctrine of the world is that the world pre-existed from all eternity in the mind of God. The time-process is not a process but is gathered up into one harmonious whole in the mind of God. Augustine is fond of the word Beauty. He speaks of the beauty of God. He sees Righteousness as the truest beauty. God is the meeting point of the Good, the True and the Beautiful.

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- (1) I am indebted to Inge for this interpretation of Augustine. Augustine's chief works are the Confessions and the City of God.

This early thinker of the Western Church was friendly to the idea of a World-Soul; the universe is regarded as a living organism. But he guards against identifying God and the world, or supposing that God is merely immanent in creation. This is one of the errors of many mystics. The Platonic idea about the relation of individual souls to the World-Soul may have influenced Augustine in his teaching about the mystical union of Christians with Christ. He uses the phrase that Christ and the Church are "una persona".

The ascent of the soul is arranged in seven stages, the last three of which are the three stages of mystical thought, namely, purgation, illumination and union. The last step is called the vision and contemplation of truth and is not only a step but rather the goal of the journey. The blessedness which attends this final state of the soul is described as follows: "I entered and beheld with the mysterious eye of my soul the light that never changes, above the eye of my soul, above my intelligence. It was something altogether different from any earthly illumination. It was higher than my intelligence because it made me, and I was lower because made by it. He who knows the truth knows that light, and he who knows that light knows eternity. Love knows that light." (1)

In his mystical thought Augustine was not led astray into the aberrations of Nature-Mysticism. He had nothing but contempt for theurgic superstition. His

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(1) Augustine, Confessions, VII. 10, Bigg's translation.

judgment on the cultus of angels and spirits is very instructive. He says, "Whom should I find to reconcile me to Thee? Should I approach the angels? With what prayers, with what rites? Many, as I hear, have tried this method, and have come to crave for curious visions, and have been deceived, as they deserved". (1) (2).

5. The Pseudo-Dionysius and John the Scot, called Erigena.

Rufus Jones uses the term "Spiritual bee-bread" for the Neoplatonic philosophy which was brought into the thinking of the Church. This is seen first in the case of St. Augustine. It is carried on through the Dark Ages by other men, notably, the writing of Dionysius, "The Areopagite", and its interpretation by John the Scot, called Erigena. Dionysius is a historical mystery. The place of his origin is not certain and the time of his writing has not been definitely established. Mature criticism has, however, placed his date as not later than 500 a.d. Inge thinks that he was perhaps a Syrian monk, who perpetrated a deliberate fraud, by suppressing his own individuality, and fathering his books on St. Paul's Athenian Convert.(3) His writings are quoted by the Severians at a Council held in Constantinople in 533 a.d. Gregory the Great refers to the writings about the year 600. Louis I, son of Charlemagne, turned over a copy of the Dionysian writings

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- (1) Inge, op. cit., p. 132.
- (2) cf, Ibid, p. 128-132.
- (3) cf, Ibid, p. 105.



to the abbey of St. Denis in 827. And during the reign of Charles the Bald (843-76) John the Scot translated the works into Latin. (1)

The Mysticism of the West differed in this respect from that of the East, that it carried with it the spirit of revolt and reformation. And it is in relation to its spirit of reformation that our special interest lies.

So it is of significance to our subject that Jones says of the works of Dionysius, "But in many ways this anonymous monk, who was to teach the foremost Christians for ten centuries to come, served the truth. He kindled in multitudes of souls a pure passion for God, and taught that the one thing worth seeking with the entire being is God. He iterated and reiterated that God Himself is the ground of the soul and that there is an inward way to Him open to all men. He insisted on personal experience as the primary thing in religion, and so became the father of a great family of devout and saintly mystics, who advanced true religion in spite of errors of conception. And he did well in maintaining that there is an experience of Reality that transcends mere head-knowledge--a finding of God in which the whole being, heart, will, and mind, are expanded and satisfied, even though language cannot formulate what is being experienced". (2)

Dionysius presents a religion of ripe speculations based upon Neoplatonism. It became the form and type of mystical religion within the Church, and its influence is seen in every mystical sect of the Church. The central point of the whole system of Dionysius is that common to all classical mysticism, namely, that the Godhead is a Unity, a One, beyond all difference, above all qualities

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- (1) cf, Jones, Studies in Mystical Religion, p. 98-100.
- (2) Jones, op. cit., p. lll.

or characters. (1)

Two seeming errors of the system of Dionysius should be mentioned because they are the cause of much of the perversion of Christian Mysticism. One is the *via negativa* and the other is pantheism. By the *via negativa* the mystic attempts to find God by negation. He can only describe God by saying what He is not. God therefore becomes a dark Nothingness. This was one of the points at which Luther broke with the mystics of his day.

Any system which regards the cosmic process as a real becoming of God may be called pantheistic. According to this theory God comes to Himself, attains full self-consciousness, in the highest of His creatures, which are, as it were, the organs of His self-unfolding Personality.

(2) Inge thinks that Pantheism is a pitfall for Mysticism to avoid, and not necessarily an error involved in its first principles. (3)

The best interpretation of the writings of Dionysius was given to the world by John the Scot, called Erigena. It was through him that this system of Christian speculation was transmitted to the Mystics of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It is also in Erigena that we see the first real spirit of revolt from

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- (1) Ibid, p. 104.
- (2) Inge, op. cit., p. 119.
- (3) cf, Ibid, p. 121-122.

the teaching of the Church. And therefore it is a definite contribution to our subject to view the work of this man. He was a scholar at the court of Charles the Bald, in France. He seems to have been of Celtic origin. Inge calls him a bold and independent thinker, who made it his aim to elucidate the vague theories of Dionysius, and to present them as a consistent philosophical system worked out by the help of Aristotle and perhaps Boethius. (1) Erigena first comes into prominence with his publication of the tract on "Predestination" written in 851.

This tract was written in refutation of the work of Gottschalk, who had pushed the Augustinian doctrine of Pre-destination to such an extreme that there was practically no room left for the function of the Church. But Erigena went further than the Church leaders of his day could follow. He took as his fundamental thesis the statement that true philosophy and true religion are identical. And his central position is the absolute unity of God, which implies a unity both of will and knowledge. This leads him to the conclusion that sin is simply perverted individual will; evil is no part of God, for God is Good. This Tract was twice condemned by Church Councils.

He also took part in a controversy on Transub-

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(1) Ibid, p. 133.

stantiation, in which it is thought he took issue with the position of Radbertus, who presented the extreme view that at consecration the Bread is completely transformed into the very Body that was born of the Virgin Mary, and the Wine into the actual Blood of that Body. A book on the subject ascribed to Erigena was condemned by a Church Council in 1050. His position on the Sacrament was that there is nothing in the visible and material world which does not signify something immaterial and reasonable, so that everything is a symbol and has a sacramental significance. (1) Jones says of Erigena in respect to his

position, "We may safely conclude that though his arguments were powerless to beat back the set of materialistic tendencies, which fastened transubstantiation on the Church, bringing with it the blight of moral character and the supremacy of the priestly order, there was at least a champion there of the other view of religion. There was--the hostility of officialdom to John shows it--a voice crying in the wilderness that the seat of religion is in the soul of man". (2)

The most interesting fact for us is that Erigena translated the writings of Dionysius, which became the great source of devotional reading for the mystically minded men of many succeeding generations. From his study of the work of Dionysius John the Scot received the background for the great work of his life, namely, the book on The Division of Nature. The work is written in five books and gives the complete system of

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- (1) cf, Jones, op. cit., p. 120-121.
- (2) Jones, op. cit., p. 122.

Erigena. John was the last flower of Neoplatonism. He was the father of Western Mysticism and scholasticism as well as rationalism. His doctrine of God placed him above all the categories including that of relation. The Persons of the Trinity are fused in the Absolute. He follows the "negative road" of Dionysius. To "rest and be quiet" is the destiny of all things. And to return to God raises creatures into a higher state, in which they first attain their true being. Creation is the necessary self-realization of God. The Son is the Idea of the World. Thought and Action are identical in God. His root conception of the soul of man reveals his mysticism in a special way. Man is an epitome of the universe, a meeting place of the above and the below. There is an ultimate ground of truth in the depth of personal consciousness. Man at the depth of contemplation, finds God, because in this state, God is finding Himself in man. Like knows like and the soul is what

it sees. (1) Jones says truthfully, "The speculations of this bold thinker of the Dark Ages made little stir in the busy world in which he lived. There was a strong current setting in toward materialism in religion, and this Irish scholar was a voice crying in the wilderness. There came another age, however, to which this voice spoke, and it awoke movements of vast significance.-----There was in him a loftiness of spirit, a boldness of vision, a viril idealism, which were sure to be an inspiration to many noble minds in later ages who were, as he was, consecrated to the service of the

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(1) cf. Inge, op. cit., p. 135-37; cf. Jones, op. cit., p. 113-129.

Invisible Church". (1)

John the Scot wrote, as we have already noted, about the middle of the ninth century. His great contribution to the mystic life of the next few centuries was his translation of the Greek works of Dionysius into Latin, which was widely used. But John was a mystic only in his speculation. Our next contact with mysticism will be in the organization within the Catholic Church which grew up as a protest against the formalism and legalism of the Church body.

C. Summary Statement.

It has been our purpose in this chapter to give ~~SOME~~ definitions and characteristics of Mysticism as they are revealed in the Christian Church. The study has resulted in a definition of Mysticism, which makes it a type of religion including both the intellectual faculties of man and the "inner-soul" of man. Mysticism deals with the relationship of God and man. As an intellectual system, it speculates on the nature of God, and Christ and the Holy Spirit. This speculation also includes the nature of the world of matter and the soul of man. But Mysticism is not confined to speculation, it is also a fact of experience, which may transcend all the known senses of man. In this transcendent state man may experience complete union with

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(1) Jones, op. cit., p. 129.

God; a complete absorption with the Oneness of the universe.

This union of the soul of man with the being of God is accomplished through three progressive steps of the individual soul, namely, the purgative life, the illuminative life and the unitive life.

Mysticism as set forth in the definition and characteristics was found in the writings of men of the Christian Church from its inception with the teachings of St. John and St. Paul to the time of John the Scot, called Erigena. It was also discovered that whereas in the Mystics of the Eastern Church there was not the spirit of revolt and independence from the Church, in the Mysticism of Erigena there appeared the spirit of reform and revolt. The very essence of Mysticism, the immediacy of communion of the soul with God, gives a freedom of spirit which is antagonistic to legalistic means of worship.

CHAPTER III

AN EXAMINATION OF MOVEMENTS IN  
THE WESTERN CHURCH  
WHICH SHOW MYSTICISM AS A TYPE OF RELIGION  
IN PROTEST AGAINST LEGALISM IN WORSHIP



### CHAPTER III

#### AN EXAMINATION OF MOVEMENTS IN THE WESTERN CHURCH WHICH SHOW MYSTICISM AS A TYPE OF RELIGION IN PROTEST AGAINST LEGALISM IN WORSHIP

##### A. Introduction.

So far in our study Mysticism has been a system of thought confined largely to the realm of speculation and not out of harmony with the spirit of the Church of which it was an integral part. This is true of all the mystics studied except Erigena who dissented from some of the doctrines of the Church. It is now our purpose to present certain movements in Western Christianity which were a distinct protest against the legalism of the Church. And it WILL be shown that these movements had within them the essential elements of mysticism which had been present in the Church previously only in the form of speculation. The central principle of speculative mysticism was seen to be the ability of the soul of the individual to experience immediate union with God. This principle as translated into life WILL be shown in the studies of this chapter. It is a historic fact that there were organized groups of Christians, originating in the eleventh and twelfth centuries and extending to the time of the Reformation, who were not only following speculative mysticism in their thinking but were putting it into practice in their way of life. Mysticism as a type of religious experience is an express-

ion of the inner spiritual life of man. The Roman Church with its comprehensive system of formalism and legalism did not provide an adequate place for the expression of mystical religion.

"The Roman Church achieved its world supremacy only to find itself incapable of satisfying the inner, spiritual hunger of vast multitudes of people within its wide fold. The twelfth century which marked the culmination of the apparent power of the Church, also marks the beginning of a revolt against its supremacy which finally ended in the Protestant Reformation four centuries later." (1)

It ~~WILL~~ be ~~THE~~ purpose in this chapter to present a brief survey of the movements arising in the Church as a demonstration of mystical religion seeking to express itself. The studies in this chapter will show that there was a progression of mystical thought translating itself into life, leading from the Waldenses to the Brethren of the Common Life out of which movement came Wessel Gansfort as a precursor of the Reformation.

#### B. The Waldenses.

The argument of this chapter might well be prefaced by the words of Josiah Royce, who said, "Mysticism has been the ferment of the faiths, the forerunner of spiritual liberty, the inaccessible refuge of the nobler heretics; the inspirer through poetry, of countless youths, who know no metaphysics; the teacher through devotional books, of the despairing; the comforter of those who are weary of finitude. It has determined directly or indirectly, more than one-half of the technical theology of the Church". (2)

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(1) Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion*, p. 130

(2) Herman, *Meaning and Value of Mysticism*, p. 283  
(quotation).

## 1. Origin.

The first movement of great significance for our study is the Waldensian. This was a revolt against the worldliness of the Church and proved to be one of the most genuine attempts to revive apostolic Christianity. The origin of the movement is not established with exactitude. But there are grounds for belief that the movement is connected in origin in some way with the Cathari of the West. Walker has the following reference to the Cathari.

"The Manichaeism of the later Roman Empire, of which Augustine was once an adherent seems never absolutely to have died out in the West. It was stimulated by the accession of the Paulicians and Bogomiles whom the persecuting policy of the Eastern Emperors drove from Bulgaria, and by the new intercourse with the East fostered by the Crusades. The result was a new Manichaeism. Its adherents were called Cathari, as the 'Pure' or Albigenses, from Albi, one of their chief seats in southern France. With the ascetic and enthusiastic impulse which caused and accompanied the Crusades, the Cathari rose to great activity. Though to be found in many parts of Europe, their chief regions were southern France, northern Italy and northern Spain. In southern France, Bernard himself labored in vain for their conversion. With the criticism of existing churchly conditions consequent upon the disastrous failure of the second Crusade, they multiplied with great rapidity. In 1167 they were able to hold a widely attended council in St. Felix de Carman, near Toulouse; and before the end of the century they had won the support of a large section, possibly a majority of the population of France and the protection of its princes. In northern Italy they were very numerous. The Cathari in Florence alone in 1228 counted nearly one-third of the inhabitants. By the year 1200 they were an exceeding peril to the Roman Church. In the movement the ascetic spirit of the age found full expression, and criticism of the wealth and power of the Church saw satisfaction in complete rejection of its clergy and claims." (1)

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(1) Walker, History of the Christian Church, p. 249

Although the Waldenses did not spring directly out of the Cathari movement there can hardly be any doubt that the antisacerdotal spirit and the moral standards of the Cathari had a weighty influence on the Waldenses. (1) Peter Waldo is the one to whom the Waldenses owe their direct origin. His ancestry is unknown; he appeared in Lyons, France, about 1155 and became a successful merchant and money-lender. About the year 1176 he was greatly impressed when, suddenly one day, a dear friend fell dead before his eyes. Shortly after this experience he encountered a minstrel singing the sacrifices of St. Alexis. He went to a master of theology and asked the 'best way to God'. The teacher answered in the words of St. Matthew, "If thou wouldst be perfect, go, sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." (2) Waldo took the words literally, made provision for his family, and with the remainder of his funds started on his mission to the poor.

## 2. Conflict with the Church.

Within a year Waldo was joined by others who were impressed by his sincerity and good works. They took it upon themselves to carry further the directions of Christ

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(1) Jones, Mystical Religion, p. 136, footnote, 2.

(2) Walker, op.cit, p. 251

by preaching repentance to the poor. In 1179 they applied to the Third Lateran Council for permission to preach. Pope Alexander III, thinking them ignorant laymen, refused permission. This led to decisive action on the part of the Waldenses, and they continued their preaching, as obedience to the voice of God. But they were disobedient to the Church and therefore were excommunicated in 1184 by Pope Lucius III. The Waldenses were now joined by the Lombard Humiliati a group of like minded men who had suffered excommunication in 1184 for the same offence of disobedience to the Church, namely, that of preaching. (1)

### 3. Characteristics.

The followers of this movement were not mystics of the speculative type. They were, as Jones says, "Unspeculative, simple Christians, sternly hostile to the corruption and sacerdotalism of the Church, concerned for a return to Gospel simplicity and consecrated to a proclamation of an evangel which the poorest and most illiterate could understand". (2)

The most important points of the organization were: 1, non-obedience to Pope and prelates; 2, everybody, even laymen can preach; 3, according to the Apostles, God is to be obeyed rather than man; 4, women can preach; 5, masses, prayers, and alms for the dead are of no avail, and some denied that there was any purgatory; 6, prayer in bed, or even in a stable, is as efficacious as in a Church. (3)

The special point to note about the Waldenses is their

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- (1) Walker, op.cit, p. 252.
- (2) Jones, op.cit, p. 146.
- (3) Ibid, p. 141.

spirit of protest against the formalism of the Church and their conviction that the individual has power of personal communion with God without the intermediary of the Church and its offices. They held that supernatural powers come directly from Christ to the individual and that these powers are not conferred by ordination. (1)

### C. The Franciscans.

#### 1. Origin.

Mysticism of a very distinct type shows itself in the movement known as the "Spiritual Franciscans". Francis was born in Assisi, 1182, the son of Pietro Bernadone, a rich merchant. After spending a gay youth in his home town and spending some time on a military expedition, Francis turned to religion. In him we find a type of Christocentric mysticism. It is not speculative, but rather practical and devotional. He sought a higher companionship with God. "He felt again as men had felt in the days of apostolic faith, that the veil was rent, and that there was free access for even the poorest, meanest soul to go direct to the Father". (2) St. Francis' apostolic attitude was shown in his spontaneous uncalculating love for men. Jones says the attitude of Francis was the beginning of the Reformation for, "it was a genuine

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(1) Jones, op.cit, p. 145.

(2) Ibid, p. 151.

recognition of a new centre. The Church was no longer the pivot--man himself, with his human hopes and his human needs, was the centre, and religion here began again in earnest to be life--a way of living". (1)

## 2. Treatment by the Church.

But Francis and his followers were not treated by the Church as were the Waldenses. Two years after the death of Francis, (1226), he was proclaimed a saint by Pope Gregory IX and his followers were organized as an integral of the Church. The movement initiated by Francis was clearly a protest against the legalism of the Church of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

## 3. Characteristics.

In Francis there is demonstrated religion of the first-hand type. In the place of rites and ceremonies, we find, fellowship with God, the imitation of Christ, enthusiasm and love and joy springing out of the life because God has come into it. (2) The theological system of St. Bonaventure is the most representative of Franciscan theology and in it we find distinct mystical elements. A study of this theology has been made by Dunstan Dobbins as a Thesis for a Research Degree at Oxford. In his conclusion he says, "The Supreme guide presented by the Franciscan's Mysticism is Jesus Christ

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(1) Ibid, p. 152.

(2) Ibid, p. 167.

in His twofold Nature, Divine and Human. Our Lord is the Guide in word and deed. Only by imitating the many virtues of which Christ in His Human Nature is the Exemplar, only by attempting to re-live His life in some fashion, can the soul enter into communion with the Divinity. An imitation of Christ, determined as to details by diversities of vocation, is the Via Illuminativa which constitutes what may be called the 'bridge' between the purgative life and the more developed life of the Christian Saints". (1)

#### D. Other Protest Groups.

##### 1. The Amaurians.

The Franciscans were kept within the Church. But another group of Mystics, namely, the disciples of Amaury were condemned and persecuted by the Church. Amaury, who was a teacher in Paris in the later part of the twelfth century, (died 1205), followed the speculative system of Erigena which led him directly into pantheism. But he initiated a group of thinkers who declared their freedom from the Roman Church. Amaury taught that God is all, that He is incarnate in the believer as in Christ, and that the believer cannot sin. He was compelled to recant by Pope Pius III, but he left many followers. (2)

##### 2. Brethren of the Free Spirit.

A sect somewhat similiar to that of the Amaurians sprang up in Strasbourg, having as its leader a man named Ortlieb. They were called the Brethren of the Free Spirit. They practiced an extreme form of pantheistic mysticism. They held that man is of the same

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- (1) Franciscan Studies, No. 6, Sept. 1927, p. 197.
- (2) Walker, History of Christian Church, p. 282-83.



substance as God and therefore capable of becoming Divine. As soon as man reaches the state of union with God he experiences a glorious freedom. He then follows only the promptings of the spirit within him, giving no place to the authority of externals. Jones says of these two

groups of mystics, "They were endeavouring with the dim light at their command, to find the spiritual trail to the Father's house. 'Every man ought to be a member of the Christ', is the gospel of the leader, Amaury. 'Every man ought to follow the Divine Spirit within himself', is the gospel of the disciple, Ortlieb. For both, the true earthly life is a personal manifestation in the flesh of the Divine life--a finite personalization of God". (1)

### 3. Beguines and Beghards.

Other groups of men and women known as Beguines and Beghards manifested somewhat the same spirit as the Amaurians. They were found in the Netherlands, Germany, and France in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The men and women had separate organizations, which were not recognized by the Church. They were semi-monastic in form. There seems to be no question but that the groups sheltered antichurchly sympathizers. The central idea of the doctrine of the groups is the same wherever they are found, namely, that God is all; He goes out of His unity into plurality and differentiation; in this universe of multiplicity everything real is divine; man has within himself the possibility of return--he can become

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(1) Jones, Mystical Religion, p. 195.

like Christ, like God. He can even become God. In man's state of perfection God does all in him that he does. The Church is therefore unnecessary. Man himself is a revelation of God. The Council of Vienne, (1311), called for the suppression of the Beghards and Beguines. The decree of the council was carried out at the cost of much hardship to both the men and the women of the groups. (1)

#### E. Fourteenth Century Mysticism.

So far in this section we have been showing the rise of groups in the Church demonstrating the elements of mysticism which were manifesting themselves in the spirit of reformation within the Church. This study has carried us from the later part of the twelfth century with the rise of the Waldenses to the beginning of the fourteenth century and the condemnation of the orders of Beghards and Beguines. The chief value of the study of these movements is to show the trend of movements within the Church which gives a historic background for the understanding of the fourteenth and fifteenth century movements which led directly to the great Protestant Reformation. The men of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries made no contribution of special significance to speculative mysticism. Their chief contribution to our study is the manifestation of Mysticism as a way of

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(1) . . cf. Jones, Mystical Religion, p. 206.

life.

The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries made significant contributions to the thought of mysticism. There was a flowering of mysticism in Germany and the Netherlands in these centuries. The great representative of mystical speculation of the period is Meister Eckhart, who gathered up the teachings of Augustine, Dionysius, Brigena, Albertus Magna, and Thomas Aquinas and interpreted the mystical message of these men to the people of his times. Eckhart died in 1327 and upon his system there flowered the thinking of Ruysbroeck, Merswin, Suso, and Tauler, who lived their lives within the fourteenth century. Following these men, who called themselves Friends of God, there arose the order known as the Brethren of the Common Life, which began with the life of Groot during the last half of the century, out of which grew Wessel Gansfort, whose writings are to be the subject of special study as representative or pre-Reformation mysticism.

1. Meister Eckhart, the Mystical Theologian. (1)

Eckhart was a Dominican Monk. He was born in 1260 and died about 1327. He studied in Paris, became prior of Erfurt, lived for a time in Strasbourg, and taught in Cologne. At the close of his life he was

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(1) The interpretation of Eckhart is taken from Dean Inge, Christian Mysticism.

under trial for heresy and two years after his death his works were condemned by the Pope. The aim of Eckhart was to find a speculative basis for the doctrines of the Church, which shall at the same time satisfy the claims of spiritual religion. Intellectually Eckhart was a Semi-pantheistic idealist; emotionally he was an Evangelical Christian. He taught that, that which is real in all things is the Divine. The Godhead is the abiding potentiality of Being. The Triune God is evolved from the Godhead. The universe is the expression of the whole thought of the Father; it is the language of the Word. The doctrine of immanence and the doctrine of the soul are especially important. The human soul is a microcosm, which in a manner contains all things. At the "Apex of the mind" there is a Divine "spark", which is so closely akin to God that it is one with Him, and not merely united to him. But in the doctrine of the soul, Eckhart holds that our own nature and personality remain intact. "The Highest Reason" is first among our faculties. Reasonable knowledge is eternal life. The fundamental truth with Eckhart, is the immanence of God himself. He places no intermediary between God and man. (1)

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(1) Inge, Christian Mysticism, p. 163.

But the speculation of Eckhart did not harmonize with the Church and within two years after his death twenty-eight propositions of his were condemned by a papal Bull, seventeen were pronounced heretical and the rest were called rash and suspect. But the writings of Eckhart were to bear rich fruit in the life of the Church, as was to be seen immediately after his death in the lives of the Friends of God of the fourteenth century.

## 2. Friends of God.

The Friends of God gave to the Christian Church one of the most important and remarkable expressions of mystical religion. This title does not designate a sect or even a Society in the Church but rather indicates a type of Christianity which manifested itself in the fourteenth century in Germany. The men of the movement were followers of the Speculation of Eckhart. The most important of the men were Ruysbroeck, Merswin, Suso and Tauler. Jones says of them, "Their religion was extremely simple and practical. They humbly claim that they have at the heavenly fountain, and have had their inner eyes opened. They were not primarily speculative, like Eckhart, but were rather concerned with the concrete matters of actual life, though they evidently put undue emphasis on experiences, and on visions, and they shared the tendency of the times to drift into exuberant apocalyptic fancies". (1)

The primary conviction of these men was that our communion with God must be a fact of experience, and not

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(1) Jones, Mystical Religion, p. 254.

only a philosophical theory. And therefore they set themselves to live through the mysteries of the spiritual life, as the only way to understand and prove them. The most outstanding attempt to experience the mysteries of the spiritual life is that of Suso, who exposed his body to the most severe tortures, in order to attain spiritual unity with the great Soul of the universe, God. But a speculative work arose out of this century which made a definite contribution to mystical thought of all time, namely, *The Theologia Germanica*. The authorship of the German Theology is not known, but it follows closely the known writings of Tauler. It is representative of the thinking of the four men of the period. "It is the crowning achievement of Christian Mysticism before the Reformation. It is a sound and complete system built upon Platonism." (1)

Luther was an admirer of Tauler and he thought so much of the *Theologia Germanica* that he had it printed in 1516 and 1518. (2) Tauler was a preacher of great helpfulness to his generation. There was religious and political confusion in Germany during the life of Tauler. The population of his generation was devastated by what was known in England as the "black death". In his preaching he emphasized the inward and the vital in

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(1) Inge, *op.cit.*, p. 182.

(2) Walker, *History of Christian Church*, p. 280.

religion, and condemned dependence on external ceremonies and dead works. He stressed the idea of 'union with the Divine', on 'God being born within'. (1)

### 3. Brethren of the Common Life.

The next step in our thesis is to note the origin of the order of the Brethren of the Common Life and their influence upon the men of the fifteenth century especially upon Wessel Gansfort, who, we desire to show, was influenced by mystical thought and who in turn transmitted his thought to the leaders of the Reformation.

Ruysbroeck is the connecting link between the Friends of God and the Brethren of the Common Life. He was a friend of Suso and Tauler and of Groot, who was the founder of the order of the Brethren. Ruysbroeck taught that in the inner life itself, not in outside props, lies man's salvation and power. And this is the very secret of mysticism. (2) In his Ladder of Love he follows the steps of the mystic system, namely, the Active Life, the Inward Life, and the highest or third stage--the Contemplative life.

The fourteenth century was calling loudly for a religion of experience, an intimate life with God, but at the same time for a religion more simple, practical, social, more Christlike than any of the types of

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(1) Walker, op.cit, p. 280.

religion which had appeared. Speculative mysticism could not meet the test, because it always swept by prevailing intellectual currents. The condition of the Church is given by Gerson who writes, "The body of Christianity is covered with sores from head to foot. Everything is rushing from bad to worse, and every one must take his part in the sum of evils". (1)

Jones states the need of the age when he says, "If the religion of Christ was to be revived in power and supplant the caricature of it, the age had to produce prophets of the invisible Church--voices of the Eternal Christ to cry in the ears of men--who could exhibit in powerful fashion new and compelling ideas of spiritual religion". (2)

Gerhard Groot (1340-1384) was such a prophet. He was a brilliant scholar and the most influential preacher of the Netherlands. He was a mystic after the type of Ruysbroeck, but not so radical as Ruysbroeck. He quickly attracted followers and shortly after his death, these were organized into groups for the purpose of maintaining a warm religious life. The leader in the organization was Florentius Radewyn, (1350-1400), who was instrumental in establishing the first house of Brethren of Deventer. The movement grew throughout Germany and the Netherlands. The Brethren of the Common Life, as they were called, grouped themselves in

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(1) Jones, op. cit., p. 299.

(2) Ibid, p. 299



houses and lived essentially a monastic life under common rules, but without permanent vows, engaged in religious exercises, copying books of religious edification, and especially followed the vocation of teaching. The mystic influence was strongly present in this movement. (1)

A movement is judged by the fruits it bears. The fruits of the Brethren of the Common Life were groups of devout and saintly men and women scattered through Holland and Germany, raising the spiritual level of religion among the people; and in the second generation of the movement there was produced a book which has influenced Christendom next to the Bible itself, namely, The Imitation of Christ, written by Thomas à Kempis, (1360-1471), who was a pupil of the Brethren of the Common Life in Deventer, and spent most of his life in the monastery of Mount St. Agnes, near Zwolle. Walker claims that few have understood the language of simple, mystical devotion to Christ as a Kempis did. (2)

"The eternal thing in the book is its calm and compelling revelation of the reality of the spiritual kingdom, and its complete sufficiency for the soul. All is well the moment the soul changes its center of gravity from the world of vain and fleeting things to the world of unchanging reality where God is all.---The soul must be kindled and burn with a holy passion of love which carries it above all dependence on and attachment to the fleeting, failing things of the world, and be 'inwardly

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(1) Walker, op.cit, p. 282.

(2) Walker, op.cit, p. 282.

united" to the Divine Fountain from whom all good flows-- then in this union with God, everything becomes a mirror of life". (1)

Thus we find in this work the representation of devotional mysticism of the fourteenth century. The theological and speculative mysticism of the period is represented in the writing of Gerson, a great teacher of Paris, and a contemporary of a Kempis. But he added nothing essentially new to the system.

One of the friends of a Kempis was Wessel Gansfort, whose works show the influence of fourteenth century mysticism. These works of Wessel were widely known in the sixteenth century and were a precursor of the Protestant Reformation as will be shown in the following chapters.

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(1) Jones, Mystical Religion, p. 327.

PART II

MYSTICISM IN THE TEACHING OF  
JOHN WESSEL GANSFORT A PRECURSOR OF  
THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION

CHAPTER IV.

CHARACTERISTICS OF MYSTICISM AS FOUND  
IN THE WRITINGS OF  
JOHN WESSEL GANSFORT

Paulus Pelantinus' Epitaph to Wessel

"This stone covers the white bones of Master Wessel,  
Who was a brave lion among philosophers.  
A triple tongue, Hebrew, Greek and Latin,  
Enabled him to mount the famous pulpits of the Doctors.  
Cologne and Paris, the two kingdoms of Minerva,  
Felt the strength and beauty of his genius.  
But the one merit of the man is that he knew every-  
thing knowable,  
And was a very hammer to those steeped in vice.  
The citadel of Friesland contains his ashes, Germany  
extols his honors.  
Loving reader, say (a prayer) that the Omnipotent may  
bear (away) his spirit."

## PART II

### MYSTICISM IN THE TEACHING OF JOHN WESSEL GANSFORT, A PRECURSOR OF THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION

#### CHAPTER IV

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF MYSTICISM AS FOUND IN THE WRITINGS OF JOHN WESSEL GANSFORT

##### A. Biographical Sketch and Justification for the Choice of Wessel.

##### 1. Biographical Sketch.

John Wessel Gansfort, in his youth, was educated in one of the prominent schools of the Brethren of the Common Life--Zwolle, near which Thomas d Kempis lived and did much of his writing. Gansfort was a friend of a Kempis and there is no doubt that he was influenced by this great example of devotional mysticism. According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, Wessel was born in Groningen, the Netherlands, <sup>in</sup> the year 1420 and died at the same place October 4, 1489. His first education was in the school of the Brethren of the Common Life at Groningen but he was soon transferred to Zwolle where there was a much better school. In 1449 he studied at the University of Cologne and in 1456 he was professor for a year in the University of Heidelberg. In 1458 he went to Paris to dispute with the scholars on the subject of Realism, which he advocated. But while there he was won to the side of Nominalism which he taught while he remained in Paris, to 1473. Wessel was in

Venice and Basle in the year 1474 after which he spent the rest of his life in the town of his birth, Groningen. The writings of Wessel were issued at Zwolle, in 1521 under the title, "farrago rerum theologicarum", and a reprint appeared at Wittenberg, in 1522 and at Basle in the same year. A complete edition of the works of Wessel was published at Groningen in 1614, with a biographical sketch by Albert Hardenberg.

The circulation of the writings of Wessel seems to have been very slow, and familiarity with them in America at the present time is not very widespread. Hardenberg, who was the early biographer of Wessel gives as the reason for the slow distribution of the works that "all the manuscripts found among Wessel's effects were, by the zeal of the Mendicant Monks and the fury, of some others, committed to the flames". (1) Luther suggests that the lack of attention given to these works, before they received wide circulation in the early part of the sixteenth century, was the fact that Wessel was a quiet character and lived an uneventful life as a man of the schools. And perhaps one of the chief reasons that these writings are not better known in America is that up to 1917 very few copies of his works were to be found in this country. Not more than a half-dozen copies were

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(1) E. W. Miller, ed. and J. W. Scudder, tr., Wessel Gansfort, vol. 1, p. 156.

available to students in the schools of America. In 1917 the first English translation of the original Latin works was made by Jared Waterbury Scudder, professor of the Latin language in the Albany Academy. The biography was written in English by Edward Waite Miller, sometime professor of Church History in Auburn Theological Seminary, and published by him with the translation. Previous to this work the only English edition of any consequence available on the life of Wessel was by C. Ullmann as a section in his *Reformatoren vor der Reformation*.

## 2. Justification for the Choice of Wessel.

I have chosen the works of Wessel for study because of the transitional place of his life in relation to the Reformation movement, and because of the high esteem in which he was held by the Reformers.

So far as I know there has been no attempt to analyze the writings of Wessel from the mystical point of view. C. Ullmann, in his work, *Reformatoren vor der Reformation*, discusses the theological views of Wessel, and E. W. Miller makes a biographical study with special reference to Wessel in his relation to Protestantism and the Reformation. Although Wessel has not been given great recognition as a man of influence in the Reformation movement, I feel justified in giving this attention to him because of the nature of his writings and the influence

he seems to have had on the men of his own day and those of the Reformation period. C. Ullmann gives Wessel first place in his study of Reformers before the Reformation. Rufus Jones, in his Studies in Mystical Religions, mentions Wessel, in a footnote, as a disciple and friend of Thomas à Kempis, and a precursor of the Reformation. The Catholic Encyclopedia cites three specific errors found in the theology of Wessel, some of which it says, were taught by Luther, namely, denial of the infallible office of the teaching of the Church, the Pope and of the Ecumenical Councils; disputing the right of the ecclesiastical powers to bind under sin; and emphasizing too strongly the subjective activity of the faithful in sharing the fruits of communion and of the Sacrifice of the Mass, (opus operantis ), so that the objective working of the sacrament, (opus operatum), seems to be impaired.(1)

After giving considerable space to the teachings of

Wessel, the New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia, says, "While Wessel has been perhaps too enthusiastically praised by Ullmann as a Reformer before the Reformation, it is equally a mistake to consider him an orthodox churchman. That he forshadowed the German Reformation is evinced by his teachings as set forth above." (2)

### 3. Plan of Procedure.

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(1) Catholic Encyclopedia, article, Wessel Gansfort.

(2) New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia, article on John Wessel.



In taking up our study of the mystical element in the teachings of Wessel, it will be helpful to note what the definitions of mysticism were as given in the second chapter, and also to note the characteristics. Jones was quoted as saying that a mystic is that person who insists on a somewhat wider range of first-hand acquaintance with reality or of direct experience than that of which is confined to the operation of the five or more special senses. (1) And Inge says that Christian Mysticism is the attempt to realize the presence of the living God in the soul and in nature. (2) Four propositions were given which sets mysticism off as a type of religion, namely, that the soul can see and perceive; second, that since we can only know what is akin to ourselves, man, in order to know God, must be a partaker of the Divine nature; third; without holiness no man may see the Lord; and fourth, the true hierophant of the mysteries of God is Love. The life aim of the mystic is to be transformed into the true likeness of Him in whose image he was created. This transformation is brought about by three progressive ways, namely, the purgative life, the illuminative life, and the unitive life. These three steps of the upward life contain the ethical system of the Mystics.(3)

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(1) cf. Above p. 7

(2) cf. Above p. 7 (3) cf. Above p. 10

The mysticism of Wessel will be studied according to his doctrine of the Trinity; doctrine of the soul; the hierophant of Love; attitude toward ecclesiasticism. The writings of Wessel studied for this analysis are, The Sacrament of the Eucharist, and the Farrago, which contains six chapters on the following subjects, The Divine Providence, The Incarnation and Passion, The Dignity and Power of the Church, The Sacrament of Penance, The Communion of the Saints, and Purgatory. Some of the letters of Wessel have also been used, especially, the Letter to the Nameless Nun. The translation from Latin to English, by Scudder, has been followed.

#### B. Doctrine of the Trinity.

##### 1. Doctrine of God.

The mysticism that we found in St. John's Gospel is found in Wessel **IN HIS** doctrine of God. He sees God as the creator through the Word. God is the uncreated Wisdom, He is Life and He is Light. In his treatise on the Sacrament of the Eucharist Wessel says,

"for John explicitly says that all things were made through the Word, and since this took place through the Word of uncreated wisdom and there was life in the Word, it is the light of men. Hence whatever was made through the Word was not only worthy to be made, but was so sublime in the Word that it makes alive anyone who apprehends things in the Word, and illumines him with wisdom; for the life was the light of men."(1)

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(1) Miller-Scudder, Wessel Gansfort, vol. II, p.69

Wessel follows Plato in seeing nature as the will of God.

"Now from this we readily see the truth of Plato's statement that nature is nothing else than the will of God acting with regularity, while miracle is an extraordinary operation of the divine will." (1)

Just as Plotinus holds that the One is the fundamental Reality, the Eternal source of all Reality--truth, beauty and goodness,--Wessel sees God as the primal energizing cause of all Reality. This is expressed in regard to intelligence. The intelligence of man he calls the potential intellect. But the potential intellect is powerless without the energizing function of the active intellect which is from God.

"----Just as God is the light of the potential intellect, causing it to comprehend, so also he is the standard of all values, the highest measure of intelligence, the first spark of the will, the primal energizing cause." (2)

The present active operation of the will of God in nature is according to Biblical teaching as well as mystical conceptions. God is the ruler of the universe not only in the sense that all things are done in accordance with his will but that all things are done by the exercise of his will. God rules because, "knowing, appointing and willing, ~~He~~ completely and essentially causes things to exist." But God is not to be completely

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(1) Ibid, p. 75.

(2) Ibid, p. 89.

known by the mind of man. Some of His judgments are "shrouded in dense darkness and hidden deep from the sight of all." In these words we have the earmarks of mysticism as expressed in Dionysius and others who fell into the error of the via negativa respecting the way to know God. Wessel did not commit this error. He had a positive idea of God. His God could be known. He was preeminently a God of Love. In chapter seven of the Sacrament of the Eucharist there is set forth in a very clear way the idea of God.

"Therefore in order that he may live, he must imitate God and be like Him. We cannot be like Him in being omnipotent, all-wise, all-dominant, but we are not commanded to be like Him in these respects. There is one thing which he especially wished to show, which He especially wished men to believe and extol in Him, viz., that He is *φίλων ὁ πῶτος*, i.e. a God who loves men, and so loves them that He gave His Son for the world." (1)

And the love of God is not an unreasoning love. It is a love of wisdom. The elements of the sacrament are spoken of as the bread and wine of eternal wisdom inviting us, even commanding us upon threat of death to eat and drink. God is addressed as "O Wisdom." (2) The wisdom of God is likened unto the wisdom of a father. The idea of the fatherhood of God as set forth in the Fourth Gospel is followed closely. In chapter twenty-

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(1) Ibid, p. 21.

(2) Ibid, p. 70.

seven of the Sacrament of the Eucharist several propositions are given from the Fourth Gospel based on the references of Christ to God as Father. (1) Depths of mysticism are reached when God is said to have created His own image in the inner man. The inward man is held to be the only image of God, who is made after the likeness of God, and created by God alone, and so has been subject to no other authority. (2) More will be said on this subject when we deal with the doctrine of the soul of man.

## 2. Doctrine of the Person of Christ.

Wessel deals with the person of Christ in typical mystical language. He follows Johannine thought, which Inge has said, might almost be identified with Christian Mysticism. Christ, the second person of the Trinity, is the Word made flesh. The relation between God and the Son is set forth in this proposition from the treatise on the Incarnation and Passion of Christ.(3)

"God, the Word, assuming flesh, loved the flesh he had assumed more than the whole of the rest of creation."

The conception of the body of Christ is given in the following language:

"By thy body therefore I understand in the first place absolutely everything corporeal in that sacred body of thine, in so far as it was capable of acting or being affected through the body. Hence that most sacred body

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- (1) Ibid, p. 62.
  - (2) cf, Ibid, p. 296.
  - (3) Ibid, p. 115.

of thine was broken not merely in the five outer senses, but also in all the inner organic powers of imagination contained in thy heart, head, nerves, system and constitution. But more than that, I understand that it was broken in thy mental faculties, the memory, intellect and will, in all that inward power which even the angels do not possess, but which thou hadst while on earth. Sublime indeed was the flesh which John the Evangelist meant when he said 'The Word became flesh'". (1)

Christ is very God. That the pre-existence of Christ is believed is proved by the statement in the

Incarnation and Passion of Christ, namely, "God so loved the world that He made His only begotten Son---the firstborn of the whole creation---the seed of Abraham". The work of Christ is to do the will of

God which is to give life unto men. Proposition

twenty-five of chapter twenty-seven of the Sacrament

of the Eucharist says, "I am come down from heaven not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me, i.e. that they should come to the Son, should not perish, should not be lost, but should have life, believing on him". (2)

The Word is the instrument of creation. The Word itself is not created but is of uncreated Wisdom. There is life in the Word and this life is the light of men.

"Let us note carefully that the Lord Jesus said, 'I'. (John 14:6) Who is that 'I'? Assuredly, 'I, the eternal, essential Word, existing of myself, the first life of the first Word living in myself, made flesh for your sakes'. Now just as the Word is the source (exitus) of existence for all created things, so also is the means (transitus) of blessed knowledge for all the saints". (3)

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- (1) Ibid, p. 8.
  - (2) Ibid, p. 64.
  - (3) Ibid, p. 120.

This doctrine of the Word--has many things in common with the theory of the Nous in Plotinus who is one of the earliest thinkers to formulate a doctrine of the Trinity. He calls Nous "a second God", "a first-born Son" who is eternally begotten. But in Plotinus the Nous had a less exalted position than the Christian word Logos, the Nous in Plotinus being what we call "Law", regarded as a vital force. The Johannine Logos is both immanent and transcendent. The mysticism of Wessel might even be called Christocentric in contrast to Theocentric.

3. Doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit and the salvation of man are closely related in the teachings of Wessel. As the Word is the revelation of the Father so is the Holy Spirit the revelation of the Son. The Holy Spirit is an active principle in the lives of believers. The doctrine is presented very clearly in the following passage:

"And in this we must note especially that the Father sends the Comforter in the name of Jesus, as is declared in the words, 'But the Comforter, even the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name'. For God bestows on us so freely of himself, nay, he loves our acceptance and belief of the incarnate Word so much, that wherever a rational mind piously accepts the Word made flesh, he will forthwith pour out his spirit upon him. And not only does God grant his spirit, but if two are gathered together in the name of Jesus, the Son of God is in the midst of them. And he is in their midst, not because they are gathered together, but for the sake of the name of Jesus. The name of Jesus, therefore, includes the Comforter and the Son; and not only these, but since the Father also comes wherever the Son enters, the whole Trinity together makes its abode there. Hence the straight-

est and shortest way between us and God is sweet and pious meditation on the Lord Jesus, since indeed, the Father, the Saviour, and the Comforter in a blessed company will come and make their abode with us." (1)

The Holy Spirit is the very inner life of the believer. And because the Spirit is both God and the life of man, therefore God and man are united in the Activity of the Spirit.

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Fourth Gospel is a distinct contribution to mystical thought. It is that the Comforter takes the place of Christ on earth as a living, active principle in the hearts of Christians. And that there is a development of truth through the ever present work of the Holy Spirit. God was fully revealed by the Word but the world was not ready to receive the full revelation so the Holy Spirit functions in developing the revelation. Wessel understands this Spirit to dwell within man as the very life of the inner man.

"He who thus eats the flesh of the Son of man need not dread the death of the inner man; for the life of the inner man (which is truly spirit and life and the third person in the Trinity and thereby the eternal God) cannot be 'of him that dwelleth or runneth', because it is the one Spirit of the Father and the Son. His life is solely in that Spirit, so that he who from eternity truly is the Spirit of the Father and the Son, becomes through God's compassion the life of that man who spiritually eats the flesh of the Son of man and drinks his blood. He also becomes one Spirit with him; for he who clings to God is made one Spirit with God".(2)

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- (1) Ibid, p. 117.
- (2) Ibid, p. 29.



The Holy Spirit thus functions in the life of man to the extent that the man becomes godlike. The Holy Spirit produces such likeness to God in the heart through grace, wisdom and love, until the sons of God become truly godlike, one in spirit with God. (1). True wisdom is a gift of God through the Holy Spirit. The wisdom of Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle was animal wisdom according to Wessel because it sprung from within themselves, and not from above. Spiritual wisdom is taught and breathed into man by the spirit of wisdom which has its source in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of authority to man, and the true authority for man superseding even the authority of Popes. (2).

4. Propositions on the Trinity.

1. God is the Creator of all things.
2. God is uncreated Wisdom.
3. God is Life and Light.
4. Nature is the will of God acting with regularity.
5. God is the primal energizing source of all Reality.
6. God is Active Intellect.
7. The judgments of God are shrouded in dense darkness.

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(1) Ibid, p. 211.  
(2) Ibid, p. 252.

8. God is Love.
9. The inward man is the image of God.
10. Christ is the Word made flesh.
11. Christ possessed all the faculties of man.
12. Christ is the firstborn of all creation.
13. The mission of Christ is to do the will of the Father.
14. Christ is the Word of uncreated wisdom.
15. Christ is the source of all existence for all created things.
16. The Word is life and is the light of man.
17. Christ is immanent and transcendent.
18. The Holy Spirit reveals the Son.
19. The Holy Spirit is an active principle in the lives of believers.
20. The Holy Spirit is the inner life of the believer.
21. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity.
22. God and man are united in the Holy Spirit.
23. Man becomes godlike through the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer.
24. The Holy Spirit is the source of true wisdom in man.

#### C. Doctrine of the Soul.

In the doctrine of the soul we strike the heart of mysticism. The union of the soul with God is the aim of all mystical thinking. This involves theories concerning the nature of the soul, the capacity of the soul of man to

partake of the Divine soul of the universe, and the ability of the soul to experience unity with God. As an example of the union of the soul with God I shall quote that great passage from Plotinus which has been called the source and inspiration of most Western mysticism.

"Since in the vision there were not two things, but seer and seen were one, if a man could preserve the memory of what he was when he was mingled with the Divine, he would have in himself an image of God, and retain no difference, either in relation to himself or to others. Nothing stirred within him, neither anger nor concupiscence, nor even reason nor spiritual perception or his own personality, if we may say so. Caught up in an ecstasy, tranquil and alone with God, he enjoyed an imperturbable calm; shut up in his proper essence he inclined not to either side, he turned not even to himself; he was in a state of perfect stability; he had become stability itself." (1)

#### 1. Nature of the Soul.

A distinction is made between the soul of man and the natural body of man. The soul is not produced out of the power of matter through some inherent force but is breathed into the body by the power of God. The soul is the breath of life. The soul is united to the body through divine power alone and this union continues until the separation is caused by the same power. The soul of man is the breath of life breathed into the body by God alone.

"However much the embryo may be intended to receive the human form, it is only potential, and subjective or material, without any power to produce the body which is to become man. In order that man may result, it is necessary that God should breathe the breath of life into the body and unite the one to the other. Hence that

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(1) Rufus Jones, Some Exponents of Mystical Religion, p.77.

union depends upon God alone; and that which when united depends upon God alone cannot be separated except by God."  
(1)

This breath of life which unites the soul and the body also gives the individual kinship with all that is divine in life. God takes the relationship of father and mother in all the vital relations of parent and son; the Word incarnate is as a brother and a sister; the Holy Spirit is a close friend. This breath of life of Wessel is contrasted to the natural soul of Aristotle, which expresses itself as conscience and reason pleading for the best things. Wessel ascribes conscience and reason not to any natural working of the soul but to the power of the breath of life giving divine assistance to both the will and the intelligence. (2)

The soul is not therefore dependent upon the body for life. Death of the body does not end the life of the soul but rather releases the soul for a more abundant life. But in all the teaching of Wessel the identity of the individual soul is never lost either in union with God or with other souls. (3)

## 2. The Soul as the Partaker of the Divine Nature.

One of the propositions that sets mysticism off as a type of religion is that the soul of man partakes of

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(1) Miller - Scudder, op. cit., vol. II, p. 92.

(2) Ibid, p. 90.

(3) Ibid, p. 97.

the Divine nature. Wessel's doctrine in this respect centers around the fact of the creation of the inner man by God in his own image. "Just as there is the outer man and the life of the outer man and the nourishment of the outer life, so there is the inner man, the life of the inner man, and the nourishment of the inner life." Paul defines the inner man as "that which hath been created after God". Wessel argues that the inner man, made in the image and after the likeness of God, lives when he is God's image and likeness. (1) Concerning the soul as the dwelling place of God, the argument of Augustine is given. "Just as the body can not live without the soul, so the soul cannot live unless God be present, dwelling within it and quickening it." (2)

The soul of man becomes the partaker of the Divine nature through the sacrament of the Eucharist. This becomes truly a mystical impartation of the Divine to the human. But Wessel does not hold the true Catholic doctrine concerning the Elements. Emphasis is placed on the idea of partaking of the Elements after the manner of the inner man. A quotation from the teaching on the Sacrament of the Eucharist will serve to demonstrate this point.

"Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourself." (3)

This is explained as follows:

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- (1) Ibid, p. 21.
- (2) Ibid, p. 199.
- (3) Ibid, p. 28.

"Manifestly it must be admitted that the life, of which he speaks, is the life of the inner man, i.e. life in the Holy Spirit. Necessarily therefore it must also be admitted that when he says, 'Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood', we are to understand that it is an inward eating and drinking, i.e. of the inner man. But how does the inner man eat the flesh and drink the blood, when he is nothing but mind, intelligence? The inner man, i.e. the memory, intellect, and will, should be occupied with the Word that became flesh, with God who became man, with his times, desires, doctrines, examples, precepts, benefits and promises, just as the mouth, throat and stomach of the outer man are employed with a feast." (1)

Eternal life is the result of this indwelling of the spirit in the inner man. Life is not true life unless it exists deep within the inner man. And it is through remembrance of Jesus that he becomes the wealthy guest, the inmate of the soul of man. And if the Spirit dwells within the man he is built up in proportion to his degree of remembrance. This building up of the soul reaches its highest point in complete union with the Spirit. This is described in terms of being eaten. Not only does the man partake of the Elements but he himself is partaken of so that there is a fusion of the partaker and the partaken. The illustration of the hot iron is given.

"It is just as when iron is made red hot, the iron absorbs the fire and yet is entirely possessed thereby. Hence the fire eats the iron and is also eaten by it." (2)

Such language as this is pure mysticism of the very highest type. It is in line with all speculative mystics

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- (1) Ibid, p. 28
- (2) Ibid, p. 50.

especially those of the fourteenth century, namely, Tauler, Suso and Ruysbroeck.

Nor does the soul cease in its development when death separates the body and soul. After separation the soul, which is the likeness of God, holds fast to its prototype and becomes one in spirit with Him. (1) Thus the soul of man partakes of the Divine Nature to the degree that it is entirely fused. But we do not find in Wessel the idea that the individual soul loses its identity in fusion with the Divine.

### 3. Development of the Soul.

It has been previously pointed out that the life aim of the mystic is to be transformed into the likeness of Him in whose image he was created. This transformation takes place through the three ways of the mystic system, namely, by way of the purgative life, by way of the illuminative life and by way of the unitive life or state of perfect contemplation. Also it was noted that two of the propositions upon which mysticism as a type of religion seems to rest are, first, that the soul can see and perceive, and second, without holiness no man may see the Lord.

Wessel shows evidence of mysticism in his treatment of the steps of the soul to attain union with God.

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(1) Ibid, p. 283.

In the Sacrament of the Eucharist he seems to identify the Way, the Truth and the Life of Christ with the three ways of the mystic life. He says, "establish and strengthen me in the way of thy remembrance by which through thee, the Way, I may proceed unto thee, the Truth, and that I may finally attain unto thee, the Life". (1)

The purgative life is associated with bodily exercise through discipline; the illuminative life is associated with the mental and emotional life of discernment; and the unitive life is associated with contemplation which may rise above the five senses of man. These steps are evident in Wessel when he says, "But if he (the partaker of the Sacrament of the Eucharist) keeps and ponders them (these sayings), his heart will be strengthened, so that like Paul he shall discern; and discerning, like animals that are clean in accordance with the law he shall ruminate; and ruminating, like men after the Lord's heart he shall taste that the Lord is good; and tasting, he shall delight himself in the Lord, who now giveth him all the desires of his heart". (2)

To Wessel, therefore, the bodily function of eating and remembering is the discipline of the purgative life; remembering leads to discernment through the exercise of the intellect, feeling and will; this in turn leads to perfect contemplation when man shall taste of the delights of the Lord.

That Wessel used the mystical system of progression in his theological thinking is well seen in his

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- (1) Ibid, p. 14.
- (2) Ibid, p. 27.



treatment of departed souls. In his treatise on Purgatory the following propositions appear:

"22. If a blessed angel is purified, illuminated and perfected by hierarchic action, this process must necessarily be assigned to different parts of the soul."

"23. Therefore, purification must be assigned to the reason through the sapient knowledge of God; illumination to the intellect--through perfect glorification of God; perfection to the will--through blessed enjoyment of God."

"25. The Father cooperates with the angels that cleanse; the Word, the Life and glorifying Light cooperate with the angels that illumine; and cooperating with the angels that perfect and inspire is that flaming and eternal love and charity, most worthy of God who loves, and of God, the beloved, the Holy Spirit." (1)

But the steps of the soul to union with God can be taken while the soul and the body are united. These steps are elucidated in the treatise on The Incarnation and Passion of Christ. Proposition 22 says, "But in one's approach to God there is a beginning, the Gospel; then, a conferring together; afterwards, intercourse. And after these longing, discipline; then, counsel, cure, employment; then command, leadership, office. After these, judgment, the whip, zeal; then the feast, the kiss, marriage". (2)

Thus it is seen that the steps of the mystic life are present in the teaching of Wessel. And the final step of perfect contemplation is not confined to the natural faculties of man. The soul was able to see and perceive beyond the limits of natural mind. Through this higher faculty of perceiving man is able to imbibe

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(1) Ibid, p. 284-285.

(2) Ibid, p. 124.

life from all things created by the Word of uncreated wisdom.

"Such clearness of vision goes far beyond the natural limit of the mind, which knows the objects of creation only in themselves. Hence this clearness of vision is twofold. There is a certain vision in blessed spirits that are released from the body here on earth, whose natural horizon is greatly enlarged by their comprehension of things in the Word. There is another vision which belongs to the body that is to be resumed by us and fashioned after the glorified body of Jesus."  
(1)

Wessel believes that the gospel cannot be apprehended fully by any organic sense. This he believes is true because the gospel is without any mental images. We do not apprehend pure cognitions and our desires in God through mental images. From this he argues that the gospel will be preached to departed souls which are freed from the encumbrance of organic powers. (2)

Wessel held the mystic proposition that without holiness no man may see the Lord. One of the steps of the upward life is that of purgation. In the "Sacrament of the Eucharist" the idea is set forth that in our earthly pilgrimage we are to be pure and holy priests. We must be a "burnt offering of ourselves". We present ourselves holy before the Lord by loving Him. Magdalene is said to have "perfectly offered that most holy incense" when she perfectly loved the Lord.

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(1) Ibid, p. 69.

(2) Ibid, p. 308.

"I do not think that she reached the temple of God, the throne of the kingdom, the marriage chamber in any other way than by thus being holy, worthy, sublime and beautiful. I therefore believe that none of the sons of God will enter into that priesthood or kingdom or eternal wedding unless they mount up by such steps of cleansing and purification". (1)

The aim of man is salvation. And this salvation is perfect union with the Father. It is attained by the individual soul without the help of others. It is a relationship between God and the individual. "---our kingdom depends solely upon ourselves. ---We attain to it by the steps of our own minds and our own desires".

"Each man's turning toward God is the link that binds him to God in such a union that he partakes according to his desire, no matter by what celebrant the oblation is offered." (2)

#### 4. Propositions on the Doctrine of the Soul.

1. The soul of man is distinct from the body.
2. The soul is not produced by the power of matter.
3. The soul is the breath of life.
4. The soul is breathed into the body by God alone.
5. The soul has kinship with all that is divine in life.
6. The life of the soul is not dependent upon the life of the body.
7. The soul is made in the image of God.
8. The soul partakes of the Divine Nature.

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(1) Ibid, p. 32.

(2) Ibid, op. cit., p. 263.

9. The soul is the dwelling place of God.
10. The soul is identified with the life of the inner man.
11. The soul may have complete union with its prototype, God.
12. The soul develops toward perfection through the three steps of the mystic life, purgation, illumination, and perfect contemplation.
13. The soul may see and perceive independently of natural faculties.
14. Without holiness no man may see God.

#### D. The Hierophant of Love.

Whereas purification removes the obstacles to our union with God, so our guide on the upward path, "the true hierophant of the mysteries of God" is love. Love may be defined in a negative way by saying that, "Love is not love when it asks for a reward". R. L. Nettleship is quoted by Dean Inge as saying that "love is interest in its highest power". A somewhat contradictory way of saying practically the same thing is that "it is of the essence of love to be disinterested". The *Theologia Germanica* throws light upon love as disinterestedness when it says, "So long as a man seeketh his own highest good because it is his, he will never find it". (1)

#### 1. Conception of the Nature of Love.

Wessel shows himself in harmony with the thought

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(1) cf, Inge, *Christian Mysticism*, p. 8.

of all true mystics in his teaching concerning the nature and the office of love in the development of the soul toward its union with its prototype, God. He lays down the fundamental principle that love is the head and hinge of all our actions. And from this principle he draws the conclusion that if our love be right and perfect, sincere and genuine, all things will be pure to us. Love has its origin in the love of God.

"For nothing is wont to excite love as much as a lover's great favors, since these are the most potent proofs of his love. Love, however, is not only the incentive but also the origin of love. Do you wish then to love? Recall what the Lord Jesus has done for you. For it is impossible to ponder frequently upon what your Lord, your God, your Saviour has done and borne out of love for you without loving him in return. To a cold heart the contemplation of a lover, and such a lover, is a fire enkindling it, and constraining it to return that love. Whether one will or no, he cannot but love if he remembers and reflects upon the love and tender devotion of his lover." (1)

Love is conceived of as a relationship between God and man alone. Love is due to our neighbor only because God commands us to love our neighbor. We are debtors to God and therefore it is due him that we show love toward our neighbor. And as was stated above, love is due to God because he first loved us. (2) Love is developed through constant meditation upon the death of Christ. From our meditation "wisdom and glory will necessarily develop into the fruit of righteousness, even love,--and this as we the more persistently continue our

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(1) Miller-Scudder, op. cit., vol. II, p. 5.

(2) Ibid, p. 160.

meditation". (1)

The degree of perfection of the soul is determined by the degree of love. We begin with fraternal love in loving Jesus as the First-born among many brethren. This love of the human nature is of a lower degree than love of God. But as the love of Christ sets him above the many brethren and above himself, the individual then has attained the next degree, "so that Jesus ascends unto his Father in his heart, and so kindles him with the love of God that he also,--like the Lord Jesus, delivers, abandons, presents and offers Him as incense unto God". ---"This gradual advance from strength, I believe, was maintained by Magdalene, and I think that she not only rose to perfect love of the Lord Jesus, but more than that, in loving him perfectly, she perfectly offered that most holy incense." (2)

Wessel seems to grasp the true meaning of St. John's conception of God as Love. This apparently is revealed in the twenty-sixth chapter of The Sacrament of the Eucharist when he says, "Besides the life and nourish- of the soul is love". (3)

## 2. The Office of Love.

We take upon ourselves the cross of Christ through love of him. This seems to mean that we share the life of Christ. The words of Wessel are, "To one who loves the Lamb perfectly, the Lamb's cross becomes his own". (4)

Love makes one Christ-like. "Only perfect love of of the Lamb makes men lamb-like,--with the perfect prin-

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- (1) Ibid, p. 14.
- (2) Ibid, p. 14.
- (3) Ibid, p. 61.
- (4) Ibid, p. 134.

ciples, characteristic and weapons of the Lamb." (1)

The love of the Lamb is the fire, which when perfectly kindled, burns up the wood, hay and stubble completely, which is self-love. And love of the Lamb, when it is perfect, is the perfect key of the Kingdom of heaven. This love of Christ as ruler, is the throne and seat of the kingdom. Love acts as the purifier of the soul of man. (2) St. Augustine is quoted by Wessel as saying that the keys of the kingdom are defined as:

"(1) love diffused through the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the children of God, and, (2) the Holy Spirit". (3)

And these keys are available to every believer. Love is also the victor in death, "for love is strong as death". (4) Love is held by Wessel to be the means through which the believer shares in the treasure of the Church. This is a teaching which held serious consequences for the organized Church. And this was one of the points at which Wessel differed from the legalism of the Roman Church. His teaching is as follows:

"If, therefore, anyone truly wishes to share in the treasure of the Church, let him become a partaker of love. And if anyone wishes to be enriched out of the treasure, let him become rich in love and affection. But if anyone wishes to be made altogether rich, let him love fully and perfectly; every other way is vain." (5)

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- (1) Ibid, p. 134.
  - (2) Ibid, p. 135.
  - (3) Ibid, p. 188.
  - (4) Ibid, p. 96.
  - (5) Ibid, p. 251.

And another point at which Wessel held teaching which augured ill for the Roman Church was that love is the basis and only basis for reward at the hand of God.

"Moreover it is the measure of one's love of the fear of God and of them that fear God that determines what his reward will be among them:--And he on his part, does not receive his share from them that fear God, but from God who knows the measure of his love.--For his love, not his work, will be rewarded." (1)

### 3. Propositions on the Hierophant of Love.

1. Love is the head and hinge of all our actions.
2. Love has its origin in the love of God.
3. Love is a relationship between God and Man.
4. Love is developed through constant meditation upon the death of Christ.
5. Love is the life and nourishment of the soul.
6. The degree of perfection of the soul is determined by the degree of love.
7. Through love we share the suffering of Christ.
8. Through love we become Christ-like.
9. Love is purgative--purifying.
10. Love is the key to the kingdom.
11. By love we share in the Communion of Saints.
12. Love is the basis of reward from God.

### E. Attitude Toward Ecclesiasticism.

1. Sacrament of the Eucharist.

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(1) Ibid, p. 256-257.



The subjective nature of Wessel's mysticism manifests itself when he deals with the sacraments and rites of the Church. He believes so strongly in the ability of the soul to have immediate contact with God that he has a tendency to discount objective means. This is evidenced in his attitude toward the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

The emphasis of Wessel on the subject of the Eucharist is that the Elements should be taken in Remembrance. The bread and the wine are not efficacious without their spiritual meaning. Therefore it is the inner man that must be the principle in partaking of the sacrament. Spiritual communion is given a higher place than sacramental communion.

"To the spiritually faithful he is also given-- even in bodily presence-- outside of the Eucharist and apart from the forms of bread and wine, since he is given to those who believe on him. For if none hath life except he eat his flesh and drink his blood, and on the other hand, he that believeth on him hath eternal life, it must obviously be admitted that everyone that believeth eateth his flesh and drinketh his blood.-- Indeed in some respects spiritual communion is more fruitful than sacramental, at least in this respect, that in the former so far as the laity are concerned they both eat and drink, while in the latter they only eat,-- unless by a blessed draught they are filled with spiritual peace." (1)

The reasons for this position are given that in the sacramental communion the act is bound down by time and place, is permitted to certain persons only, and is

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(1) Ibid, p. 56.

observed in a particular form; while in the spiritual communion the act springs from a pious heart in faith unfeigned rejecting no age, sex or race, and is adopted to all times and places. Sacramental communion is often harmful; spiritual communion is always fruitful and salutary. The bread and wine are called the elements of eternal wisdom commanding us to eat and drink. Spiritual partaking is so acceptable to God that simultaneously he bestows the Spirit and life upon the partaker. (1)

"He who thus eats already has the benefits of outward sacramental eating, just as Paul, the first hermit, and very many after him had it even without the outward sacramental eating. To eat therefore is to remember, to esteem, to love." (2)

This teaching of Wessel on the Eucharist was a direct stand against the position of the Roman Church, that the communion must be sacramentally administered. His position is that of the subjective or introspective type of Mysticism, and it is plain that this form, when carried to its logical conclusion, is inconsistent with sacramental religion. There is<sup>a</sup> type of Mysticism which has a true appreciation of sacraments, namely, that which rests on belief in symbolism. (3)

## 2. Celibacy of the Priesthood.

The attitude of Wessel toward externals in religion is again demonstrated in the case of the celibacy of

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(1) cf, Ibid, p. 56-; 29.

(2) Ibid, p. 29-30.

(3) cf, Inge, Christian Mysticism, ch. VII.

the clergy. He is consistent with his mystical thinking. He holds that there is no virtue in the act of celibacy but only in the resolution. "For it is love--not celibacy--that makes the best ground to bring forth fruit a hundred-fold;" (1)

Peter is compared to Timothy, Peter being called to apostleship in marriage and Timothy in celibacy. Peter is given credit for more fruit.

"Married prelates, who love celibacy even more than celibates do, are held in higher honor than the latter, and receive the greater reward. Yet they do not gain the distinction of celibates, although they receive the greater reward for having loved celibacy more. For the one involves righteousness and purity of heart; the other, the inviolate sacrifice of celibacy. In the former love is crowned; in the latter celibacy." (2)

### 3. Theory of Double Priesthood.

When Wessel views the office of the priest he sees it through spiritual eyes and not through the organization of the Church. In this regard he adheres to his theory of the power of the individual to have direct communion with his God without the aid of material means, not even the aid of the ordained priesthood of the established Church. He is very specific in his views on this subject. In the Sacrament of the Penance he says, "There is a double priesthood; the one due to rank, and so sacramental; the other inherent in our rational nature, and so common to all men. The second is sufficient without the first. The first without the second involves guilt. The second imparts grace. Through the

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(1) Miller - Scudder, op. cit., vol. 11, p. 268.

(2) Ibid, p. 68.

second, Anthony ranked above many bishops, and a tanner. above Anthony". (1)

This theory of the priesthood is carried to the Sacrament of the Eucharist. The example of Paul is given in substantiation of the claim that the established priesthood is not absolute<sup>ly</sup> necessity in receiving spiritual strength. From these words of Jesus, "Except ye eat, ye have not life in yourselves", Wessel gives the following argument.

"They however who believe on him have true life. Hence those who believe on him are they that eat his flesh. Now it is openly acknowledged that holy hermits had that life, though they hid in caves so many years. Therefore, Paul, the first hermit, did eat of the flesh of the Son of man even during the time when he did not see a single human being, not to speak of a priest, celebrating the sacrament. But he did eat of it because he believed." (2)

The moral life of the clergy of the Roman Church may have had some influence on the attitude of Wessel toward the efficacy of the ecclesiastical order. But certainly his mystical conceptions aided him in formulating his ideas concerning the place of the priest in the spiritual life of the believer. He did not hesitate to give his opinion of the moral life of the clergy.

"Our prelates on the contrary are characterized by negligence, lasciviousness, carelessness, ostentation, self-importance, censoriousness, severity, heedlessness in issuing their mandates, anxiety to retain their preferment. These characteristics I do not regard as keys to the kingdom of heaven, but rather the Pharisee's key, with which they neither enter themselves--nor do.

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(1) Ibid, p. 196.

(2) Ibid, p. 31.

they suffer others to enter, corrupting and hindering them by their bad example." (1)

#### 4. Conception of Indulgences and Penance.

The Church's use of indulgences and the Sacrament of Penance was in many respects very offensive to Wessel and he opposed many practices of the system. Opposition was based on his conception of the priesthood of the individual believer. He says in a letter to Engelbert of Leyden, "It is true that Peter and all the apostles had the power of binding and loosing on earth; but this they had in the exercise of their ministry, not of their authority. They had the power to provide the words of the gospel, and to believers they could minister the mysteries of grace, the sacraments of charisms, and the precepts of salvation. All who received these dutifully were truly loosed from the bonds of captivity to the devil. But I do not believe that Peter possessed the right either to loose whomsoever he pleased ~~from the~~ bond of Satan or to bind him therewith. For just as there is but one that baptizes in the Holy Spirit, so there is but one that binds and looses,--binds, I say, and looses with authority. For with what authority can the pope loose, when he does not know whether the person he has loosed has been loosed from the bond of Satan or not". (2)

The office of the priest is to be a minister and preacher of the word, by giving heed to which one may be converted. But the matter of forgiveness and the imputation of righteousness is a prerogative of God alone. The ~~distinction~~ between a minister of the sacraments and a dispenser of graces is made. A minister of the sacraments acts by virtue of his office and is not aware of what he accomplishes. The dispenser of graces acts on

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(1) Ibid, p. 179.

(2) Ibid, p. 187.

his own authority and grants as much as he pleases.

"If in the sacrament of reconciliation a confessor imposes penance after absolution, he confuses his office. (1) The minister of the Church merely administers the sacraments, but leaves their effect and fruit to the searcher of the heart. Plenary indulgence is the actual removal of every obstacle that hinders the beatific vision, just as perfect repentance is true and sincere purity of heart. Both are from God alone." (2)

Wessel holds to the proposition that the hearer is cleansed by faith, and not by the will of the pope. It is cleansed by a faith, made eager through love to be thoroughly cleansed until the heart is fit and meet to see God. This attitude is based upon Augustine's statement that "We shall never see God unless we already love him here and now". (3)

The most perfect penance that can be required of *MAN* is the injunction, "Sin no more". Wessel reasons that no one can grant plenary forgiveness unless he can give plenary indulgence; and it is further argued that no one can give plenary indulgence unless he can give what is required for it, viz. repentance, contrition, grace, love, purity of heart. (4) The authority of the Church in these matters is evaluated in the following words, "The Church could not be branded with any more serious scandal than that bishops should be empowered to issue commands by their own absolute authority. This ought to be a greater source of alarm to kings and princes than the approaching

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- (1) Ibid, p. 234.
- (2) Ibid, p. 237.
- (3) Ibid, p. 240.
- (4) cf Ibid, p. 243.

birth of Christ was to Herod and the Romans". (1)

#### 5. Doctrine Concerning Communion of the Saints.

Dean Inge points out that St. Augustine is thoroughly in agreement with St. Paul when he speaks of Christ and the Church as "unus Christus". This does not mean that Christ is "divided", so that he cannot be fully present to any individual--"that is an error which St. Paul, St. Augustine, and the later mystics all condemn; but as the individual cannot reach his real personality as an isolated unit, he cannot, as an isolated unit, attain to full communion with Christ". (2)

This union of the believers seems to Wessel to be a spiritual relationship. He inclined too much toward the mystical theory of the relationship of Christ with the separate person to allow Church organizations to interfere with the spiritual union. He says, "All the saints share in a true and essential unity, even as many as unitedly hold fast to Christ in one faith, one hope, one love. It matters not under what prelates they may live, or how ambitiously these prelates may dispute, or disagree, or wander from the truth, or even become heretical. It matters not by what intervals of years or distances of space the saints may be separated. This is the fellowship of the holy, concerning which we say in the creed: 'I believe in the communion of Saints'". (3)

The unity of the Church under one pope is held to be merely accidental, and not essential to the communion of saints since it depends upon the subjection to one ruler of those who may have no fellowship with him. (4)

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(1) Ibid, p. 243.

(2) Inge, Christian Mysticism, p. 68.

(3) Miller-Scudder, op. cit., vol. II, p. 249.

(4) Ibid, p. 250.

The believer is said to share in the treasure of the Church by becoming a partaker of love. And the pope is not regarded as having power to exclude anyone from the communion of saints. (1)

The ten steps of the ladder of ascent into the kingdom as given by Peter through the authority of God's Spirit speaking through him are accepted as the true entrance into the kingdom. This is called the ladder and genuine bull of indulgences: (2)

1. Escaping from the corruption that is in the world by lust.
2. Adding all diligence.
3. In your faith, supply virtue.
4. In your virtue, knowledge.
5. In your knowledge, self-control.
6. In your self-control, patience.
7. In your patience, godliness.
8. In your godliness, brotherly kindness.
9. In your brotherly kindness, love.

Communion is held therefore to consist of a fraternal relation to each other in God. And Wessel insists that none can exclude a man from this communion or make him share in it but God alone. (3)

#### 6. Attitude toward the Holy Scriptures.

Wessel places the authority of the Scriptures above the authority of the Church. He was a scholar in both the Greek and Hebrew and therefore understood the Scriptures in the original. (4) In speaking of the pope's authority

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(1) Ibid, p. 251.

(2) Ibid, p. 253.

(3) cf, Ibid, p. 254.

(4) Miller - Scudder, Wessel Gansfort, vol. I, p. 151.



he says, "Yet you admonish me in matters of this sort to regard the authority of the pope, not merely as a substitute for reason, but as superior to it. What, I ask, am I to regard as reason in these matters? Is it not the Holy Scriptures? Do you wish to put the authority of the pope above the Holy Scriptures? The will of the pope and the authority of Scripture have not been placed on an equal footing, since the will of the pope must be regulated in accordance with the truth of the Scriptures, not the truth in accordance with the will of the pope". (1)

He regrets the number of decrees that come from the Church which have a tendency to usurp the authority of the Scripture. Wessel believes in the authority of no man, but only in the authority of God as speaking to man through the Holy Spirit and the Scripture.

"Nay more, if the apostles themselves should do this on the authority of an apostle, they would not have to be obeyed. For in this letter to the Galatians, Paul warns the Church not to believe even on himself if he should preach anything else than the truth which they had received. Hence arises that dense forest of decrees and decretals which by their very minuteness abolish the study of the Sacred Scriptures, hinder our knowledge of them, and compel us to abandon them, thus causing guilt to arise because of the neglect of so great a command of God." (2)

#### 7. Justification by Faith.

Albert Hyma thinks that Wessel was as much in harmony with Paul, on the doctrine of justification by faith, as Luther was in 1522. (3) Wessel's teaching on this subject is very clear. In commenting on the Scripture, "Already ye are clean because of the word

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- (1) Miller - Scudder, Wessel Gansfort, vol. II, p. 190.
- (2) Miller - Scudder, Wessel Gansfort, vol. II, p. 245.
- (3) Hyma, The Christian Renaissance, p. 213.

which I have spoken unto you", he says, "Not because of your faith or because of the word of your confession, even though ye are clean, having the word of faith in your heart and the word of confession in your mouth, since it is he that cleanseth the hearts of the faithful by faith; but not because of faith, but because of the speech and word of God, which quickeneth a man". (1)

That man is justified by faith and faith alone is in accord fully with the mystical teaching of God's power in the individual life and of the ability of the soul of man to participate directly in the gift of divine grace. The works of the law are evaluated in the following way:

"By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified before him; even if one fulfil the chief commandment by his work, he will not because of this be righteous in God's sight." (2)

And the place of faith in the life of the believer is set forth as follows:

"But now apart from the law a righteousness of God hath been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets. Even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ unto all them that believe. Through the Lord Jesus Christ we have access by faith into this grace, i.e. of justification, and in this grace we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of the sons of God." (3)

#### 8. Propositions on Ecclesiasticism.

1. Spiritual communion is more efficacious than sacramental.
2. Sacramental communion is often harmful.
3. Spiritual communion is always fruitful.

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- (1) Miller - Scudder, op. cit., vol. II, p. 142.
- (2) Ibid, p. 144.
- (3) Ibid, p. 144-45.

4. The benefits of outward sacramental eating may be had in spiritual partaking.
5. There is no virtue in the act of celibacy, but only in the resolution.
6. The virtues of celibacy may be had without the act of celibacy.
7. There is a double priesthood: one sacramental; the other inherent in our rational nature.
8. The priesthood of the inner man is sufficient without the sacramental.
9. The pope has no authority of his own to bind or loose.
10. Plenary indulgence is from God alone.
11. The most perfect penance required of man is the injunction, "Sin no more".
12. Bishops should not be empowered to issue commands by their own absolute authority.
13. The communion of saints is a spiritual relationship.
14. All believers, wherever found, are united as they hold fast to Christ, in one faith, one hope, one love.
15. Unity of the Church under one pope is not essential to the communion of saints.
16. The pope has not power to exclude anyone from the communion of saints.
17. We share in the treasure of the Church by becoming a partaker of love.
18. The authority of the Scriptures is above that of the Church.
19. Righteousness is imparted by God through faith in Jesus Christ.
20. No flesh is justified by works of the law.

CHAPTER V

JOHN WESSEL GANSFORT AS  
A PRECURSOR OF  
THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION

## CHAPTER V

### JOHN WESSEL GANSFORT AS A PRECURSOR OF THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION

#### A. Introduction

##### 1. Purpose of the Chapter.

One purpose of this chapter is to examine the writings of John Wessel Gansfort for intimations of the Protestant Reformation. In the last chapter the works of Wessel were studied and certain conclusions drawn as to the position of Wessel on some of the principle doctrines of the church. Some of these conclusions will be examined in the light of Protestantism. Another purpose of the chapter is to note the influence of John Wessel Gansfort on certain Reformers.

##### 2. Relation of the chapter to the thesis.

The place of this chapter in the thesis will be to show Wessel as a precursor of the Reformation. This will follow logically in the plan of the thesis inasmuch as certain fundamental elements of mysticism were discovered in the writings of Wessel. It has been the purpose of the thesis to study mysticism with special reference to Wessel as a precursor of the Reformation. Hence at the conclusion of this chapter a view will have been given of certain elements of mysticism as they appeared in the Christian Church from its inception to

a forerunner of Protestantism. Therefore in showing Wessel to be a precursor of the Reformation we shall by that fact demonstrate the place we should expect mysticism to occupy in that movement.

B. Intimations of Protestantism  
in John Wessel.

1. Protestant Attitude of Mind.

The Protestant attitude of mind in contrast with the Catholic attitude might be stated by saying that the Protestant attitude is individual religion while the Catholic attitude is institutional religion. If this be accepted as a true distinction then Wessel will be found with the Protestants.

"He resented human authority in matters of faith, and human mediation in the great transactions of the soul with God." (1)

Religion to him was not something to be handed out in an unchangeable form, but rather was something to be discovered by a free investigation of Scripture and rational discussion. Wessel was not in sympathy with ascetic and other-worldly types of piety. His emphasis was primarily on faith and love toward God and secondarily on the active Christian virtues. He assumed the Protestant position on several matters of religious practice. For example he denied the

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(1) Miller - Scudder, Wessel Gansfort, vol. I, p. 147.

special sanctity of the celibate life. And he held that virgin purity might dwell in the devout heart of a Queen Mother as well as in that of a nun. This monastic ideal of holiness had dominated the clergy and the Church for nigh on to five hundred years, so it was a radical step for Wessel to take a different position. There was no place in his thought for certain conspicuous features of the Church life of his day such as devotion at certain shrines, pilgrimages, prayers to certain saints, the use of the crucifix, the rosary, and observance of special days. His religious life was enriched by the ministeries of the Church, but his instruction was drawn directly from the Word of God, and his joy and inspiration came directly from immediate communion with God. (1)

## 2. Priesthood.

The Protestant doctrine of the priesthood of all believers was taught by Wessel. The Church had gone over entirely to Cyprian's teaching that "no man can have God for his father who has not the Church for his mother". (2) This was consistently denied by Wessel in his teaching concerning the Sacraments, the rights of the Church to impose penance, and the rights of the individual to interpret the Scriptures. The function of the Church priesthood was conceived to be entirely

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(1) Miller - Scudder, op. cit., vol. I, p. 147.

(2) Ibid, p. 140.

pastoral. They are described as physicians of the soul ministering to the sin-sick. Assumptions of authority, interventions between the individual believer and God, and all attempts to lord it over God's heritage are held to be in the nature of usurpations. Sharp limits were set up to obedience to priestly or papal commands. The priest has no power to teach or command beyond the doctrines and precepts of the Gospel, and he has no judicial authority whatever. Any believer endowed with the Gospel and the Holy Spirit possesses the keys of the Kingdom just as much as does the ordained priest. Wessel was setting forth Protestant positions in these views.

### 3. Attitude Toward the Sacraments.

The attitude of Wessel toward the sacraments was distinctly Protestant. His views were based on the New Testament and the usages of the early Church. He did not believe that the sacraments were automatic devices for the transmission of spiritual benefits. Rather they were means of grace like the Gospel itself and their benefit to the recipient depended wholly upon his attitude of receptivity. It is even hinted in the teaching concerning the Eucharist that there may be a valid celebration of the Sacrament, which is purely spiritual like that of the Friends, or Quakers. In this teaching Wessel was more in accord with the Reformers like Honius and Zwingli than like Luther, as



will be pointed out later in this chapter. (1)

#### 4. Justification by Faith.

It is generally agreed that the two great doctrines from which the Reformation derived its distinctly religious character were justification by faith and the supreme authority of the Scriptures. E. W. Miller says these two doctrines have been described as "the material and formal principles" of the Reformation. (2) And as for the intimations of Protestantism on this subject, Albert Hyma says that on the "doctrine of justification by faith only, Wessel was as much in harmony with Paul as Luther was in 1522, or any Protestant after him". (3) The doctrine is stated in no uncertain terms following Pauline thought. It is faith and faith alone that restores a man to reconciliation with God and all devices by which the medieval theologians had induced the penitent to purchase the mediation of the Church are dismissed or neglected. The following is a characteristic passage from the writing of Wessel on this subject:

"Whoever believes that he shall be justified by his own works does not know what righteousness is. For to be righteous is to give everyone his due, but who has ever been able to render his full duty to God or indeed to man? A person who imagines that he has,

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- (1) cf, Miller - Scudder, op. cit., vol. I, p. 145.
- (2) Miller - Scudder, op. cit., vol. I, p. 130.
- (3) Hyma, The Christian Renaissance, p. 213.

possesses no conception of the magnitude of the blessedness of the future, to which no works of his can ever entitle him. -----To everyone who believes, Christ is the end and the fruit of the law for righteousness, because it is he that gives to all that believe in his name the power to become sons of God." (1)

By faith Wessel means more than intellectual assent; it involves love and obedience and self-commitment. E. W. Miller interprets Wessel on this subject as follows:

"With justification God gives his Spirit, thereby infusing in the believer the beginnings of love and obedience; these will grow as faith itself grows." (2)

It was not difficult therefore for Wessel to harmonize the apparent difference of Paul and James on the subject of faith and works. Both apostles believe that it is faith that justifies, but James insists that it must be a genuine living faith that manifests its life by its deeds. But Wessel teaches that of all the functions of the soul, love is the highest, and is therefore the highest proof of the existence of spiritual life.

"Love is preferred above all duty and service; but as love is the offspring of faith, faith is acceptable not for its own sake alone but also for that of its offspring." (3)

It is in the combination of faith and love that Wessel centers his teaching about salvation. Miller points out that it is here that we have the combination

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- (1) Miller - Scudder, op. cit., vol. I, p. 131.
- (2) Miller - Scudder, op. cit., vol. I, p. 132.
- (3) Ibid.

of the two elements most characteristic of the best type of Reformation doctrine. He says, "Here the products of Humanism and Mysticism coalesce; the former in its emphasis on the historical and objective, on what Christ wrought for us to be apprehended by faith; the latter with its necessary supplement in what Christ works in us, evoking our love and thus uniting us vitally to himself". (1)

With his conception of justification by faith Wessel also taught a disparagement of the means by which the medieval Church made reconciliation with God seem, in large part, something to be merited by good deeds or penitential suffering or to be obtained through the good offices of the pope or the priest. In this respect he cut the very foundation from under the Church's penitential system. He belittled the value of confession, endowment of masses, repetition of prayers, pilgrimages, celibacy, and asceticism in general. Wessel held that these "good works" had nothing in them to merit salvation; that they were not even the proper proofs of faith, which were to be found in love to God and our fellow-men.

#### 5. Authority of the Scriptures.

The authority of the Scriptures was used by the Reformers as against the authority of the pope and the Church. In this they had the precedent of John Wessel Gansfort. When Jacob Hoeck, a friend, reminded Wessel

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(1) Ibid, p. 133.

that he ought to obey the pope rather than his own reason, Wessel replied, "What is reason to me in these matters? Is it not the Holy Scriptures?" (1) And he says again in the same letter, "So long as the pope or a School or any large number of men make assertions contrary to the truth of Scripture, it should always be my first anxiety to adhere to the truth of Scripture; and in the second place, inasmuch as it is not probable that such great men are mistaken, I ought most carefully to investigate the truth on both sides; but always with greater reverence for the Sacred Canon than for the assertions of men, whoever they may be". (2)

Wessel had been educated in the Schools of the Brethren of the Common Life and therefore had received a thorough training in the Scriptures. He had learned to read the Latin, Greek and Hebrew so that he was not dependent upon the Church for his interpretations of Scripture. Unbiased readers of the New Testament came to see that certain judicial decisions and customs of the Church which were supposed to be in harmony with the Scriptures were in reality at variance with the Gospel and Apostolic usage. Wessel therefore made the New Testament the norm of religious thinking and conduct. Nor did he reject the Old Testament. Although he recognized difference between the value of the Old and New Testaments, he held that both were free from error and that "all Scripture is a connected whole, whose several

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- (1) Miller - Scudder, op. cit., vol. I, p. 305.  
(transl. by Scudder)  
(2) Ibid, p. 287.

parts must necessarily be inspired by the Holy Spirit and true; for the whole cannot be true if even the smallest part be false". (1) Thus we see in Wessel a position for the authority of the Scripture which as Miller says, "was constructed in the form of an inverted pyramid, whose unstable equilibrium was to be the occasion of constant anxiety to Protestant theologians". (2)

#### 6. Penitential System.

In the former chapter on the teachings of Wessel we discovered his conception of indulgences and Penance. He had a Protestant point of view. He radically dissented from the current teachings of the Church on the Sacrament of Penance. The priest in the confessional was assuming judicial authority in forgiving sins. Wessel denied that the priest had any judicial authority whatever. He held that oral confession was not essential to repentance or to forgiveness. And on the subject of satisfaction for sins the only "works meet for repentance" were found in our study to be love and joy and gratitude. (3) With this denial of the whole penitential system of the Church, Wessel cut the ground from under the custom of granting indulgences, which he attacked in more radical fashion than did Luther himself. Whereas

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(1) Miller - Scudder, op. cit., vol. I, p. 135.

(2) Ibid, p. 136.

(3) See Above ch. IV, E. 4.

Luther had attacked only the abuses of indulgences, (1) Wessel attacked the entire system of indulgences as lacking warrant in the Scriptures or the usages of the early Church and as injurious to Christian morality. (2)

#### 7. Conception of the Church.

The medieval Roman Catholic conception of the Church was a visible institution, always and everywhere the same, deriving its unity from its relation to one person, the Vicegerent of Christ on earth.

Miller says, "Its membership was strictly limited to those who accept its doctrines, obey its authority, and receive its sacraments. Other Christians might exist outside its bounds, but they were either heretical or schismatic, and so formed no part of the Catholic Church". (3) Wessel's conception of the

Church was more subjective and spiritual. To him it was Christ and Christ alone who gave unity to the Church. And it is a certain attitude to Christ that constitutes a man a member of the Church. There were no national boundaries in the conception of Wessel.

The Church embraced all true followers of Jesus Christ. And it is the prerogative of the Holy Spirit Himself "To encourage, quicken, preserve, and increase the unity of the Church". (4) The pope at Rome was

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- (1) See Vedder, The Reformation in Germany, p. 397.
- (2) Miller - Scudder, op. cit., vol. I, p. 146.
- (3) Ibid, p. 137.
- (4) Miller - Scudder, op. cit., vol. I, p. 138.

not considered essential to the unity of the Church. In fact it was considered impossible for the pope to have jurisdiction over the whole Church in such a way as to insure its unity. The words of Wessel are, "Hence it is only the internal unity of its essential Head that is implied in the words of the Apostles' Creed. For today in accordance with the very word of the Lord the testimony of the Gospel has been received even at the ends of the earth, and Christians are actually to be found beyond the Hyperboreans, beyond the Indians and Sythians, beyond the Ethiopians, beyond the Tropic of Capricorn". (1)

And he holds that the words of the pope or the Church Councils cannot reach these people. But nevertheless these people together with the visible Church constitute "one Catholic and Apostolic Church in the oneness of faith, piety and true love, even if they do not know that there is a Rome or a Roman pontiff". Our treatment of the subject of the Communion of Saints showed the attitude of Wessel on this subject which also differed from that of the established views of the Church. His conception was that the communion of saints was essentially a spiritual brotherhood, which the powers of man could not destroy.

Thus we have seen the intimations of Protestantism in the writings of John Wessel. In this respect he was a real precursor of the Reformation. And we must remind ourselves that in the last chapter we discovered

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(1) Ibid.

that the element of mysticism was very prominent in the thinking of Wessel. In fact we can connect his attitude toward the legalism of the Church directly with his conception of the individual nature of man's relation to God. Thus mysticism was an inherent element in Wessel's point of view.

C. John Wessel Gansfort's Influence  
Upon the Reformers.

1. Wessel and Luther.

That John Wessel was a precursor of Martin Luther is proved by a statement of Luther himself in a preface to the works of Wessel which Luther wrote. In it he said,

"For behold! a Wessel has appeared, whom they call Basil, a Frisian from Groningen, a man of remarkable ability and of rare and great spirit; and it is evident that he has been truly taught of the Lord, even as Esaias prophesied the Christians would be. For no one could think that he received these doctrines from men, any more than I mine. If I had read his works earlier, my enemies might think that Luther had absorbed everything from Wessel, his spirit is so in accord with mine. But now my joy and courage begin to increase, and I have not the slightest doubt that I have been teaching the truth, since he, living at so different a time, under another sky, in another land, and under such diverse circumstances, is so consistently in accord with me in all things, not only as to substance, but in the use of almost the same words." (1)

At the end of the preface Luther says, "May the Lord Jesus add many other Basils to this one". It is to be noted, however, that Luther did not agree with the full position of Wessel on the subject of the Eucharist.

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(1) Miller - Scudder, op. cit., vol. I, p. 232.  
(transl. by Scudder)



In fact, Luther had the treatise on the Sacrament of the Eucharist excluded from the works of Wessel which he caused to be published. This document, (the Sacrament of the Eucharist), was taken up by other Reformers and made the standard of their position on the Lord's Supper. More will be said on this later. There were united in Wessel two distinct tendencies which were also found in Luther, namely, the mystical type of piety present among the Brethren of the Common Life and the rigid discipline of the Schoolmen. These elements are to be found also in modern Christian scholars in whom evangelical fervor and critical acumen combine.

## 2. Influence upon other Reformers.

It was largely through the treatise on the Eucharist that Wessel made such a distinct contribution to the Reformed branch of Protestantism. Rhodius, who was a disciple of Wessel, combated Luther's conception of the Eucharist in the Netherlands, in East Frisia, and in several of the Swiss cities. Rhodius sent the treatise on the Eucharist to Oecolampadius who heartily approved it and sent it on to Zwingli, who with other Swiss reformers were greatly influenced by it. Even Martin Bucer, who was one of Zwingli's supporters at the Marburg Conference, (1), was won to Wessel's point of

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(1) Vedder, The Reformation in Germany, p. 311.

view by Rhodius. In a letter to a friend Bucer says,

"I know of no one, not even Luther, whom I prefer to this man (Rhodius) in insight and judgment.-----Although recognizing Luther as his teacher he owes much more along certain lines to Wessel". (1)

Erasmus recognized the worth of Wessel's writings.

In a pamphlet on False Evangelists, he says, "Doctor Wessel has much in common with Luther. But in how much more Christ-like and modest a way does he set forth his doctrines than do most of those at Strasbourg". (2)

Melanchthon was a careful student of Wessel. He says of him, "in most matters he held the same truths that we are now teaching after the purification of the Church has taken place". (3)

In commenting on Wessel's influence on Melanchthon, Miller says, "There was much in the mental attitude and temperament of Melanchthon to render the teaching and spirit of Wessel acceptable to him, and it is worthy of special notice that the points of his final divergence from the positions of his great colleague were mainly those on which Luther differed from Wessel. This is but another indication of Wessel's significance in relation to the origins of the Reformed as distinct from the Lutheran type of Protestantism". (4)

That Carlstadt was influenced by the teaching of Wessel on the subject of the Eucharist is proved by the story related by Hardenberg, who says that at Luther's dinner-table, Carlstadt in the presence of other guests challenged Luther to approve Wessel's teaching on the Eucharist. This Luther refused to do and thus marked his separation from Carlstadt and the other Protestant

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- (1) Miller - Scudder, op. cit., vol. I, p. 160.
- (2) Hyma, The Christian Renaissance, p. 229.
- (3) Miller - Scudder, op. cit., vol. I, p. 163.
- (4) Ibid.

leaders in Germany and Switzerland. (1)

### 3. Testimonies to the Influence of Wessel.

C. Ullmann in his work, *Reformers before the Reformation* (2) places John Wessel Gansfort first among the precursors of the Protestant Reformation. The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia in the article on Wessel by S. D. Van Veen, holds that Ullmann has perhaps praised Wessel too highly as a Reformer before the Reformation, but adds that "it is equally a mistake to consider him as an orthodox Churchman. That he foreshadowed the German Reformation is evinced by his teaching".

The Catholic Encyclopedia says of Wessel, "His theology contains dogmatic errors, some of which were taught later by Luther".

Bayle calls Wessel "the precursor of Luther", and Doedes quotes an authority saying, "beyond doubt the most prominent of all those of the Germanic race who prepared the way for the Reformation, and stood nearer mentally to the Reformers than any other man of his generation". (3)

Albert Hardenberg and Gerhard Geldenhauer testified to their appreciation of the influence of Wessel

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- (1) Miller - Scudder, *op. cit.*, vol I, p. 165.
- (2) C. C. Ullmann, *Reformatoren vor der Reformation*.
- (3) Miller - Scudder, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

by each writing a sketch of his life.

## CHAPTER VI

## CONCLUSION

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### CONCLUSION

#### A. Restatement of the Purpose and the Method Pursued.

It has been the purpose of this thesis to make a study of Christian Mysticism from the inception of the Church to the time of John Wessel Gansfort with special reference to Wessel as a precursor of the Protestant Reformation. This study was undertaken to discover what intimations or tendencies there might be in mysticism that would cast an influence on the Reformation movement.

The method chosen was an historical and analytical study of Christian Mysticism from the beginning of the Church through the life and teaching of John Wessel. This investigation revealed the following results.

#### B. Results of the Investigation.

The first discovery was that mysticism, as defined by Rufus Jones, Dean Inge, W. E. Hocking and others, was present in the Christian Church from its inception in the Gospel of John and the Epistles of Paul. In the second place it was discovered that this mysticism manifested itself in the early Church as a speculative system in harmony with the established Church. This was demonstrated in the teaching of Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Augustine, and the Pseudo-

Dionysius. The third discovery was that whereas Eastern Mysticism had been in harmony with the Church the Mysticism of the West tended toward conflict with the Church. This was seen in John the Scot, called Erigena. He was a great speculative Mystic and dissented from certain teachings of the Church to the extent that some of his writings were condemned by Church Councils. Then as a fourth discovery, Mysticism was seen in the Christian Church manifesting itself in a practical and devotional way of life in protest against religious legalism. This was demonstrated in the Waldenses, Franciscans, Amaurians, Brethren of the Free Spirit and others. So we were led to the Mysticism of Germany in the fourteenth century, where there was a flowering of Mysticism in Eckhart, the Friends of God and the Brethren of the Common Life. Here also there was constant protest against certain practices of the Church. The fifth discovery, therefore, was that Wessel Gansfort, who was a disciple of the Brethren of the Common Life, and who lived just a generation before the Reformation, was largely influenced in his thinking by ~~CERTAIN~~ elements of mysticism. Then as a final step in our thesis it was revealed that such Reformers as Luther, Rhodius, Bucer, Melanchthon, and Oecolampadius acknowledged the influence of Wessel's mystical writings upon their own thinking and were indebted to him as a man who had

inculcated in his life and writings much of the spirit of Protestantism.

Therefore the conclusion of this thesis is that Mysticism was present in the Christian Church from its inception to the dawn of the Reformation manifesting itself as a speculative system and as a practical and devotional way of life in protest against religious legalism; and that this element of mysticism was especially evident in the life and writing of John Wessel Gansfort, a precursor of the Reformation, revealing itself as the rays of the dawn giving intimations of a new day which proved to be the day of Protestantism.



CHAPTER VII

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