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Geert Groote was a Dutch Theologian who founded a movement of sisters and brothers that was labeled the Modern Devotion. As a religious teacher and preacher, he adopted a lifestyle that was heavily focused on penitence. His pursuit for reform in the Catholic faith with his appeal towards ethics or what was right or wrong attracted many young followers to his cause. The sisters and brothers were devoted in bringing religious work and scriptures to the common people. They brought education to those of unfortunate circumstances that couldn't support themselves. Important scholars such as Groot himself and religious figures like Pope Adrian VI, played influential roles in the movement to restore religion in Europe during the 15th century. During this time, there are 80 extant letters written by Groote. These letters conveyed the serenity and enlightenment of the spirit that he had wished he was able to nurture in his disciples. Such letters like Letter 29 revealed what his conversion sermons were like when he was trying to convert new followers. Another key aspect of this letter was that it showed what was needed for religious renewal. Then there was Letter 62 on Patience and the Imitation of Christ that conveyed the necessary aspects in becoming Christlike. Both letters worked to show what were principles in this new devotion for spiritual renewal.

Letter 29 was written to Johannes ten Water. He was a man who was a part of one of the earliest houses for devotes when the movement began. A magistrate or a civil officer at the time had encouraged Water to pursue a university education. Groote saw this as a challenge, a trial that made by the devil so that it can lure away one of his devout. Through this letter we get a <https://assignbuster.com/dutch-theologian-geert-groote-and-his-letters-on-modern-devotion/>

glimpse of his conversion sermon. A main principle in this religious renewal was having a powerful sense that death and judgment is coming to everyone. He used this fear to try to encourage people to stand up for themselves and persist in a new life of devotion. In the letter Groote writes, “ See the treachery of the enemy. How forcefully he draws you away from your good intentions under the guise of study so that you turn your face away from the Lord and your own good resolutions and then descend into all manner of carnal, worldly, and vain desires.” (Engen 74). Here Groote is talking about how this evil force is in disguise and in this case it’s the form of study. This evil is trying to pull Water away from the devotion and away from God. Water is conflicted with himself and is being pulled in two separate ways. One side being the devotion for God and the other the college studies. Once you turn away from God you will go down a path that will only result in being lustful and sinful. This is the main message that Groote is trying to get across to Water through this letter. Once he turns his back on God it will be hard for him to return as he will be pulled in by his desires and never look back. He also says, “ See now how your eyes wander about, how distracted your heart is, how brazen your face, how laborious the way you have started down. If only you would observe how many evils threaten, how many instruments have been fashioned by diabolic powers to advance your evil and punishment” (Engen 75). Once you turn away from God you begin to form doubt and become lost in your ways. When you stray from a straight path the wilderness will continue to confuse you and pull you farther away from the right way. This fear of losing your way, becoming lost isn’t something you should be afraid of. It should be used as a strength.

This idea of using your fear is a key principle towards spiritual renewal.

Groote said to, “ Stand in horror...of a hard heart through which infinite evil enters a man. Shun the inner darkness that follows upon sin, continuously becoming deeper and denser until at noon you are groping about as in the shadows” (Engen 75). Even when evil strikes at you, you should stand strong up against it or the evil will use that fear to turn it against you. The body isn't what defends against it, it is the heart and soul that fights the evil. Time that is spent on the earth is short. The lives of people are just a small fraction compared to the entire lifespan of the world. He said that, “ many of your companions, kin, and forefathers died in sin” (Engen 75). Their deaths happened to them, because they did something bad. Turning your back on the devotion and going against God to satisfy your desires and needs causes a quick death. This letter shows how the evil forces can turn you into something you shouldn't be in the eyes of God. The sins that evil come from bring death and it is the acknowledgement of that fear of death and conquering it will it bring you to spiritual renewal.

Letter 29 proves to be important because it shows the underlying principles that Geert Groote used in his sermons to very to convert people into his new devotion. This is most likely the reason that this letter was preserved even after his death because it a means to convert new followers. It also showed what Groote emphasized on when he was doing his sermons. He would use the powerful and fearful sense of the imminence of death to encourage people to start a new. Realizing that death would come eventually it would cause people to go through a spiritual change. Groote's devotion in a way was like an eye opener shedding a new perspective on life for people. He

wanted the people to see the reality and finality of death. Once they see that Groote wanted the people to bring themselves up to find a purpose in life, to do something with the time you have in your lifetime. He made it possible for people to find purpose through joining him in his new devotion.

Letter 62 on Patience is one of Geert Groote's most well-known letter as it is frequently copied. The letter shows an aspect of this spirituality. It is through the necessary bearing of suffering, trials, and temptations that one can become Christlike. Groote saw that this world was corrupted by this evil and that it was a test. This was test was meant to teach the devout in the virtues that would allow them to become one like Christ. The book states that, " God is faithful, and he promised not to permit man to be tempted beyond his strength (cf. 1 Cor 10: 13). But just as in proving someone, he permits him to be tempted, troubled, and distressed, so he also gives the ability to bear up and resist" (Engen 79). God has given the people the ability to have temptations, but also the ability to resist those temptations. This is saying that in order to be like Christ you must be able to resist temptations. Many will fail by either not acknowledging and learning our abilities to resist or by not working to resist the temptations hard enough. Groote said in order to resist your temptations you must be in constant prayer so that you wouldn't be subjective to ignorance or foolishness.

In order to combat distress Groote said that you must be reading and meditating constantly upon the Holy Scriptures. Reading and meditation aids in distress in three ways. Groote said that, " it drives away sadness, teaches fortitude, and promises a crown" (Engen 80). The Holy Scriptures doesn't teach the people to fight, but it teaches how to strengthen your heart. Those <https://assignbuster.com/dutch-theologian-geert-groote-and-his-letters-on-modern-devotion/>

that are despairing, grieving, and troubled can find refuge in the Holy Scriptures. Through meditation and reading a person learn to cope with the pain and strengthen their emotional state. The Scriptures also gives images of a promise for victory. By reading the Scriptures it draws out one's desires and troubles. Once you can overcome that you would be presented with glory. The letter makes a connection with the bible saying, " The sufferings of the present time are not worth comparing to the future glory that will be revealed in us" (Rom 8: 18). Groote explains that trials were to increase virtue and merit. Being able to take on trials and overcoming helps you learn different virtue that will add up and help you in understanding how to become like Christ. Through trials one can learn to be patient, humble, strong, cautious, and prudent. These virtues were ones that Christ had and if you learn these virtues just as Christ did you can learn to understand how he acted and treated the world.

Groote continued to talk about that through imitating Christ's suffering, abuse, and labors, people may come to be one like Christ in his goal of salvation for everyone. By taking upon the suffering like Christ did we can feel what he carried for the people's sins. That Christ's life is manifested in the mortal body, in our flesh. Christ's suffering gave the people and example to follow so that they too can walk along his path.

The reason why Letter 62 is the most frequently copied and well known is because of how deep the letter goes into in understanding how devotion operated and how Groote thought. This letter gives insight on how Groote spiritually thought. One of the many things that he preached was what is needed in order to become Christlike. One must bear the same trials and <https://assignbuster.com/dutch-theologian-geert-groote-and-his-letters-on-modern-devotion/>

suffering as Christ did in order to be like him. Walking through the same experiences that Christ did will allow Christ to be embedded in the body of those who follow. We can see how the Christians should be and what certain values they should uphold if they want to be like Christ himself and closer to God.

Geert Groote's significance doesn't necessarily come from his preaching but more from his vision for church reform that inspired all of it. It is because of him that inspired people to create institute that promoted his vision for the church. The Sisters and Brethren of the Common Life played very big roles in this quest for promoting Groote's vision. They were able to spread literacy in northern Europe. The group worked together to build libraries and copied manuscripts so that the common people can have their own religious works to read and learn off. Not only did they promote literacy but also, they built schools. By the start of the sixteenth century, almost everyone in that part of Europe had gone to a school that was created by the Sisters and Brethren of the Common Life (Dr. Sunshine). So just from how many people have attended their school just goes to show how their influence has spread far across different parts of Europe. The reason why they worked so much to implement more schools was because Groote saw education as an important step of his goal for church renewal. Because of the education system, it created a framework that would eventually lead up to the reforms in the Catholic Church. Greet Groote founded this core of a spiritual community that was focused on improving the life of common people by bringing education and religious writings into their homes. It was their day to day service to help the common people (Drs. Kaldenbach).

The education system had other ramifications past the church reforms that were just as important and impactful. It allowed northern Europe to develop in areas of science, law, government, and help work towards the spread of Renaissance thoughts into the Empire (Dr. Sunshine). New education allowed new thoughts to come forth which brought through change in physiology and science. And regardless of whether it was not the underlying aim, these consequences of Groote's education system helped work towards his objective of transforming church and society through comprehending the Bible and understanding the scriptural perspective.

An outstanding authority on the Modern Devotion names R. R. Post wrote articles about the Sisters and Brethren of the Common Life. According to him he said that initially the group was actually anti-intellectual (Strand 70). They didn't want to have to do with anything about education and learning. When the group first formed they focused only on spiritual activities and didn't copy books that were related to educational pursuits and teachings. So the only things they copied at first were just religious books and manuscripts. This is a very big argument against Groote's claim that education was actually a large part in his goal for church reform to be. However, I believe that this was mostly true. Groote may have not realized it at first that changing the education would help him in church reform. The most likely reason for the Sisters and Brethren of the Common Life to go under a change of ideas was the introduction of the printing press. With hand copying becoming obsolete they need to find a source of income so they resulted in pursuing the teaching field (Strand 70). This is what would eventually develop into a wide spread of the creation of schools under them. Having schools under them

also provided most benefits as it became a form where they would teach young students about the devotion and join them.

Greet Groote played a pivotal role in developing a movement that was known as Modern Devotion. It was his vision of the church that he left behind to his disciples that left him a legacy where he would be known to be an influential player in church reform. He saw that spiritual change was needed and his principles in doing so are seen in his letters. Letter 26 showed his conversion sermons using the fear of intimate death as a trial to overcome and become spiritual renewed. Letter 62 gave us an understanding how followers of Christ should be like. They should value in understanding his suffering and pain in order to be Christlike. These were just 2 of the many letters he wrote that showed his vision for the church and what needed to be changed. The legacy that he left behind with the Sisters and Brethren of the Common Life change most of Europe completely. Through their work not only did church reform occurred, but literacy and education expanded to new areas that would soon to develop into a form robust and impact movement of ideas.

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