

CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM - 13TH AND 14TH CENTURIES

These two centuries saw the flowering of mysticism. If the book "The Imitation of Christ", which stands at the border of the 15th century is considered, no other era has produced so much in the way of mystical interest and enduring devotional writing.

In mystical and devotional writing the torch passed northward, mainly to Germany and the Netherlands and to a lesser (tho important) extent, England.

To the north the groundwork was already being laid in an accent on the individual's approach to God rather than on sacramental salvation or the power of ecclesiastical structure.

This, because of the renaissance which took the form of great advances in art and architecture.

The primary focus of the religious life lay within the soul and its sense of divine Presence, a foreshadowing of the reformation. Thus in the 13th and 14th century the reaction was a stronger defense of personal religion.

In this era, certain traits stand out. First, devotional writing has largely emerged from the cloister into the common life.

It centers more in the demands of the Christian way for daily life than in rare and ecstatic states, with some exceptions.

Its self-negation is tempered with a very positive love of God and with the duty of service to others.

And finally, this trend, with some exceptions here and there, was to become the dominant trend in Christian mysticism in later centuries.

THE BEGUINES---THE WOMEN BETWEEN

In 1274 a Franciscan friar wrote: "There are among us women whom we have no idea what to call, ordinary women or nuns, because they live neither in the world nor out of it. These women fell between the two sanctioned spheres considered legitimate for Pious women, home or convent.

These women have been called the first "women's movement" in Christian History and were religiously dedicated laywomen, who took no permanent vows, followed no prescribed rule and supported themselves with manual labor, interacting with the world, tho remaining celibate.

ORIGINS - Two important medieval reform movements gave rise to the Beguines. First, Monastic mysticism, which combined the practice of ascetic, contemplative devotion with efforts to attain union with the divine, best defined by Bernard of Clairvau and the VITA APOSTOLICA or apostolic life popularized by St. Francis of Assisi.

These two movements, sometimes called the medieval reformation, brought about the most ambiguous area in the Christian religion, that of the realm of the Holy Spirit. Spiritual power may dwell in anyone who is in contact w. the divine.

For medieval women, who were excluded from the priesthood, the new reform movements, with their emphasis on prophecy and evangelism, opened a theologically permissive "space" where they had liberty to develop their spirituality.

In both home and convent, women were externally constrained by men (either husband, father or priest). Even tho nuns must be enclosed they were still considered a source of temptation and more likely to be tempted than men.

She was also considered to be intellectually weak and thus more prone to demonic deception. These ideas held great significance for men in their percetptions of women, but was of much less importance to women themselves in forming their own identities.

Women with a strong religious calling saw themselves as Christians first and women second but the male attitudes towards women and women's conception of themselves, constituted a major detriment in the course of the Beguine movement.

The new "reform movement" coincided with the presence in late medieval Europe of large numbers of women who were unable to find suitable husbands. This has been called the "Frauenfrage, or "woman question". Many of these females embraced religion with enthusiasm but the idea of a woman without a place--ie, w/o a family or convent to anchor them in society--was extremely disturbing.

The Franciscan and Dominican friars (the 2 mendicant, or wandering orders) were not prepared for the influx of so many women who wished to adopt their life style.

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MARGINALIZATION- The new orders solution to the Frauenfrage problem was the cloister, which confined women and excluded them from the apostolic lifestyle and evangelization they wanted.

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Although prophesying was allowed for women (privately or in letters) preaching was not, as it was public. Thus for the Franciscans and Dominicans, the concept of un-cloistered, unmarried religious women was very unsettling.

Women were also seen by them as burdensome, both financially and spiritually that would keep the friars from their primary task: preaching.

Other orders including the Cistercians and the Norbeteans were also expelled from their respective orders by 1220 based on male constructions of the female genders danger to men.

Thus great numbers of women, who felt called to imitate Christ, were forced to authorized themselves, within the nebulous sphere of spirit and prophesy, to communicate with God and speak as His instruments.

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BIRTHPLACE of the Beguine movement was the low countries, where much reform went on. Mary d'Oignies (1177-1213) was the first. She probably would not have succeeded w/o the support of a dominican friar Jacques de Vitry.

She was a contemporary of St. Francis and in most ways his female counterpart. She renounced her wealth, practiced severe asceticism and was one of the first women to receive the stigmata.

By the time Jacques heard of her she had acquired a large group of followers, both male and female (including her husband) and was known for performing great feats of self-mortification and displaying gifts of the spirit. She seems to have been willing to adopt a public, active, & authoritative role

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Jacques was still a typical misogynistic male but somehow, like Jerome who had close female friends while despising the female sex as a whole, managed to re-categorize Mary and others like her because they overcame their "natural" fleshly lust. Ie, she and others like her were the "Other" or "Holy Female" gender.

Thanks to Jacques influence as a bishop in 1233 Pope Gregory IX brought the "chaste virgins in Teutonia" under papal protection. With this the movement thrived and many women found their calling with the beguines.

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HADEWIJCH and MECHTHILD OF MAGDEBURG - These two mystics came out of the height of the beguine movement and for the first time in Christian history certain major devotional, and theological emphasis came from women who influenced the basic development of spirituality.

HADEWIJCH (early to mid 13th cent.) works are considered to be the earliest vernacular prose in the Low countries--45 poems, 14 visions, 16 couplets, and she was familiar with Latin, rhetoric, numerology & astronomy, the church fathers and 12th cent. writers.

MECHTHILD (1212-1301) was the first German mystic to write in the vernacular, her book "The Flowing Light of the Godhead" made her a founder of German mysticism.

Both Hadewijch and Mechthild saw themselves as vessels of divine inspiration receiving authority to speak from God himself. They asserted that God uses the weak (women) to confound the strong. Both described their spiritual power as being an awesome and almost irresistible force.

Gender distinctions were seen as earthly, secular and temporal. Hadewijch, as leader of a Beguine group, wrote to a young Beguine saying: "Do not believe that anything which you must do for Him whom you seek will be beyond your strength, that you cannot surmount it, . . . if you would act according to the being in which God has created you."

Both used the nuptial imagery of the "Song of Songs" just as Bernard had done, to portray their mystical union with Christ. They thought of themselves as female, expanding the tradition of Bernard, by expressing their love for the human, masculine Christ. Sometimes their raptures were frankly erotic.

By assuming the identity of neither wife nor nun, the Beguines were able to assimilate the most desirable traits of both. The beguines were able to enjoy only a brief period of relative freedom before their activities drew official censure.

Hadewijch was forced out of her beguine colony by the church after several years as leader. Mechthild, who denounced immoral clerics and politicians was dogged thru her career and at age 62 had to flee to the monastery at Helfta, a center of German piety.

Thus, by around 1300 the Beguine way of life was virtually indistinguishable from traditional monasticism. They were in fact, institutionalized in beguinages, where they were not allowed to leave w/o permission and were under strict rules.

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In 1310, Marguerite Porete of France was burned at the stake as a heretic as one of the few Beguines who continued to assert their right to autonomy. In 1312, the council of Vienna formally condemned both the heresy of the Free Spirit and the Beguines as one and the same. John XXII in 1318 tried to categorize good and bad beguines but ambiguous wording allowed persecution by local authorities and by 1320 the Beguine movement was basically gone.

God and with the duty of living together.

He was a Dominican monk and philosopher who was born in Germany in 1224 and died in Cologne in 1328. He was a Christian mystic and philosopher who was known for his teachings on the unity of God and the soul.

Johann (Meister) Eckhart (1260-1328)

novice of the Dominican order he was sent to Cologne to study theology where he became involved with scholasticism of Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas.

he was able to combine both mystical experience and ability to express and write about it in an intelligent manner.

his thought comes from the two above mentioned sources on the one hand, and mystical neo-platonism of Plotinus, Augustine and Dionysius on the other.

he was tried for heresy, but died before they post-humously condemned him for saying the depths of the soul is God.

Like most Dominicans, he was mainly a preacher. His basic themes of teaching are as follows.

1. knowing God-there were two stages.

first, what he calls knowing God "in a mirror and mystery" and

second, knowing God "by a mirror and light."

knowledge of God in a mirror and mystery is the result of pursuing the method of the via negativa as defined by Augustine and Dionysius

knowledge of God by a mirror and light is given to those

who as the result of a process of discipline they are freed from the extravagances of self-reference and attain union with God and know him "face to face."

his second Theme is &The Nature of God&

Eckhart comes down heavily in the belief that God is to be conceived as primarily mind or intellect rather than Being.

God is because he knows. Exodus 3:14 (I am that I am) is not a revelation of the nature of God but to the fact that what God is can only be deduced from what he wills and does, so he is closer to the Hebrew origin in his understanding than Aquinas who argued for the nature of God as perfection of Being.

Being can be used of creatures not because they truly are but because they are related to God, who alone truly is. through creation creatures participate in the divine Being.

God is spoken of by Eckhart from two points of view.

1. there is God as He is, this is the ineffable mystery above Being. Here Ex 3:14 is interpreted as concealing the divine name.

2. there is God as He is known. He contains all perfection that he creates in creatures, especially Being. Here Ex 3:14 is interpreted as in Augustine to mean the revelation of the divine name.

* The Nature of God & the Nature of God

his third theme is The Unity of God

for Eckhart, God is ineffable perfection of oneness in contrast with the multiplicity of phenomena, and he relates this belief to the Christian doctrine of the unity of God in the trinity.

he distinguishes between Godhead and God. by Godhead he means the ineffable unity, the Godhead, which lies behind the revealed Trinity (God), and we must not identify God as he is revealed to us, known to us, and responded to by us in the Trinity with God in the perfection of his being, the One.

&Creation& involves God conferring himself on his creatures.

He has been seen as pantheistic for this and in rudolph Ottos &Mysticism East and West& has been compared to Shakara of India.

he speaks of creatures as being absolutely nothing, or of existence as being identical with God.

what he means is that in comparison with the Being of God the existence of creatures is so incommensurate that one can say God exists and they do not.

&the Incarnation& for him the historical birth of Christ is not important but rather the birth of Christ in the individual eternal soul is what matters.

&the divine spark& is in every human being and is uncreated and eternal. this is the root of the spiritual life.

it was his speaking uncompromisingly on occasions about

the definitely uncreated character of this divine spark of the soul that he was arraigned for heresy and condemned in Cologne in 1326.

he suggest that the beginning of the Son in the human soul is strictly like the incarnation, so just as there is in the son no human personality, in the human he seems to have taken the view that the seat of personality is the divine spark.

not only Otto, but D. T. Suzuki wrote a book &Mysticism: Christian and Busshist& which used Eckhart's views to comapre to the Buddhist view (Zen).

&John Tauler& (c. 1300-1361)

he was a Domiinicn Monk and disciple of Eckhart.

a dominant note in Tauler's thought is the need of unselfing, of following the way of the Cross through pain and suffering, and in Paul's terminology "dying into life."

mortification was much more than the denial of bodily pleasures and comforts, it was coming into new life thru self-surrender to God.

Tauler was much aware of the state of the soul which John of the Cross and others speak of the "Dark Night of the soul."--the sense of the absence of God, loss of peace and joy and the feeling of relapsing to lower spiritual levels.

to Tauler, as to other mystics, this was a form of divine purgation and a discipline by whihc they were led thru to a better and stronger life.

as he says, God will not always be carresing his

fullest expression in an often quoted passage, "I would fain be to the Eternal Goodness, what his own hand is to a man."

he has been charged with pantheism but in any case he is less open to the charge than Eckhart, for he is more noncommittal as to whether the center of the soul is created or uncreated.

what it lacks is the imperative to use many sources of personal growth for the sake of the fullest service to God and other persons, yet despite this lack, it contains a wealth of wisdom.

&Catherine of Siena (1347-80)&

The one Italian we will discuss was the daughter of a dyer, one of 25 children, Catherine had visions in her childhood, and despite home difficulties grew up practising the mortification of the flesh.

At 14 she became a Dominican nun and devoted herself to contemplation and good works.

in 1370 she experienced a mystical death and resurrection under the command of God to save souls and minister to those in need.

she tells of "the sweetness of serving God, not for her own joy; and of serving her neighbour, not for her own will or profit, but from pure love."

She saw love as the supreme reality of the universe, and says of Christ in a magnificent sentence, that "nails would not have held the God-man fast to the cross had not love held him there."

She had a deep devotion to Jesus, which found expression first in a mystical espousal to him and later in the experience of stigmatization, which only became visible upon her death.

This came to her in a vision of Christ crucified coming in a blaze of light, and five blood-red rays streaming from his wounds to her hands, feet and side, changing to the splendor of pure light as they came; "So great is the pain that I endure sensible in all those five places, but especially within my heart, that unless the Lord works a new miracle, it does not seem possible to me that the life of my body can endure such agony."

She set herself to reform the Church. She was in the counsels of the Pope, whom she addressed as "sweetest Babbo mine" and urged him in his vacillations to quench self love.

her object was that "Holy Church should return to her first condition, poor, humble, and meek, as she was in that holy time when men took note of nothing but the honor of God and the salvation of souls, caring for spiritual things not for temporal.

So she pressed on the Church leaders the need for a life of direct devotion: "I desire to see you seek God in truth, w/o anything between."

She could testify from her own experience that the soul "bears ever within it the place where God lives by grace - the house of our soul wherein holy desire, prays constantly."

She did convince the Pope to end the "Babylonian

captivity' at Avignon, France and return to Rome.

&Jan van Ruysbroeck (1293-1381)

is the greatest of the Flemish saints, a follower of Eckhart in his intellectual system but his major service lay in a clear and vital witness to spiritual realities.

he wrote many tracts and 11 books.

evelyn Underhill says of him: in Ruysbroecks works the metaphysical and personal aspects of mystical truth are fused and attain their highest expression. Intellectually indebted to St. Augustine, Richard f St. Victor and Eckhart, his value lies in the fact that the Eckhartian philosophy was merely the medium by which he expressed the results of profound experience."

he was born in a small village near Brussels, Belgium, spent his adolescent years with an uncle as spiritual guide, became a parish priest

at the age of 50, with the uncle and uncle's friend, he became virtually a hermit in a little community whihc they formed for trhe cultivation of the spiritual life.

he wrote books and drew about him a circle of devoted disciples. He remained there for 38 years, happily serving God in an unpretentious way.

Ruysbroeck took over from Eckhart the idea of the inaccessible and unknowable God in his essential nature, "Abyssmal," "simple Nudity," a pure, imageless Unity". But he could not leave his God in such vacuity.

He took also the idea of the ground or Spark of

divinity in the human soul by which God may be found and man may be purified by God's love.

he was much more careful than Eckhart to make it clear that man's union with God is one of love and not of any metaphysical merging.

"The creature never becomes God nor does God ever become the creature."

This certainty of God and his grace, and with it the certainty of the distinction between God and the creature, is relevant to vital issues in current theology. Without it, the immanentism or panentheism of process theology bogs down in pantheism.

&Gerhard Groote&

was one of those who visited this community and thru whom Ruysbroeck passed on an undying flame.

Groote is important for three reasons. He was the principal leader of a thrust toward reforming the church through increasing the spiritual vitality of its members and

He was the progenitor of the "Brethren of the common life" an association of lay people w/o monastic vows who shared their possessions and a simple religious life.

third, tho not sure, is it was his diary that formed the backbone of the book &The Imitation of Christ&

this was edited by Thomas a kempis, as well as possibly added to by him and published in 1441. It is the most widely read devotional book outside the Bible and has passed thru more than three thousand editions.

all that can be said with certainty is that considerable portions of the Imitation were in circulation during the early part of the 15th cent, long before 1441.

the book shows deep psychological as well as spiritual insight, and with many a pungent sentence which still arrests our attention it counsels humility, patience, trust in God, self-subordination at the call of God.

it does not cover the whole gamut of Christian living but reflects the atmosphere of the cloister and says little of social action .

no book can contain everything which God says to the soul, but this one contains much.

now, on to England:

&The Cloud of Unknowing&

is an anonymous 14th cent. treatise in English owing some debt to Dionysius.

it is addressed to those who are seeking a way to contemplative living.

the first three chapters set out the central themes of the book.

God in His love is calling us to him, we must respond with humble love; but it will be hard work because we are continually reaching out through a cloud of unknowing; but the gift of contemplative union is God's.

throughout there is stress on the grace of God. when you cannot cope with distractions, cower before them; your

father will rescue you.

use God's word as a mirror to show you the smudges on your conscience.

if your house is on fire you cry "Fire" and should not be afraid to pray in the same manner, calling out God! or Love!

play hide and seek with God, taking care that you don't hide yourself away so thoroughly that He cant spot you at all.

the symbol of the &Cloud of Darkness& is central.

it is an image both of separation and of union. it seems to separate while it in fact unites. indeed, as we flounder in the cloud of unknowing we much persist by separating our self from material cares in putting a cloud of forgetting between ourselves and other creatures.k

so to the cloud of unknoing can help us to perfect humility and thru humility to love, to aspiration, to love-longing.

the author continually insists that it is tough going but infinitely rewarding, and the climax of his book is an exalted account of what it means to be united with God.

the last words of the book assert that God sees not what we are or have been, but what we would be.

&Julian Norwich (c 1342-1420)&

a benedictine nun of Conisford near Norwich. she is one of the greatest english mystics.

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JULIAN OF NORWICH (@1342-1420)

When Julian was about 30 in 1393, She was very ill and and in fact, they had given her last rites believing she would die. During this illness, she had several "shewings" or visions while meditating on a crucifix and Christ's suffering. She meditated on for some 20 years before writing anything down.

She considered herself as a "simple creature, unlettered" when she received them but during that time, she studied and gained some theological knowledge for she uses neo-platonic analogies such as from the "Cloud of unknowing".

She has great psychological insight and describes her condition, distinguishing the manner of her vision and recognizing when she has to deal with a mere delusion.

When she did write her REVELATIONS OF DIVINE LOVE it became one of the great classics of western mysticism. Julian is one of the most joyous of the mystics and a refrain recurs throughout her work. "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well."

She is gently concerned about evil. The revelation that she receives is that God, out of the fall, brings atonement again thru Christ's death, and says, "since I have made well the most harm, it is my will that you know thereby that I shall make well all that is less. Shame shall be turned to worship and more joy."

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She was troubled by the idea of God's wrath. One of her revelations gives her the answer to that idea which was that wrath is a human idea: She says:

"I saw no wrath but on man's part, and that He forgives in us. For wrath is nothing but a forwardness and contrariness to peace and love; and either it comes from failing of might, or from failing of wisdom, or from failing of goodness--which failing is not in God, but on our part."

God was revealed to her in life, love and light, which added up to one single goodness: She says:

"And at the end of woe, suddenly our eyes shall be opened, and in clearness of light is God, our maker and the holy ghost, in Christ Jesus our saviour. Thus I saw and understood that our faith is our light in our night, which light is God, our endless day."

She tried from time to time, to discern the meaning of her visions. One of her most famous, and a good example of spiritual perception, may be seen in one of her most famous experiences. She relates:

"He showed me a little thing, the size of a hazel nut. I looked at it with the eye of my understanding, and thought, "What may this be?" and received the general answer "it is all that is made."

This along with other visions helped her understand that the whole meaning and purpose of existence is love. AS she says:

"I was answered in ghostly understanding, saying thus:
"Would you learn your lord's meaning in this thing? Learn it

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well: Love was his meaning. Who showed it to you? LOVE. What did he show you? LOVE. Why did he show you? For LOVE. Hold yourself within and you shall learn and know more in the same. But you shall never know or learn therein any other thing w/o end"

Thus did I learn that love was our Lord's meaning. And I saw clearly that ere God made us he loved us; AND this lover has never slacked, nor shall he ever. And in this love he has done all his works; and in this love he has made all things profitable to us; and in this love our life is everlasting.

In our making, we had beginning but the love within which he made us was in Him from without beginning. In this love we have our beginning, and all this we shall see in God without end."

Of all the doctrinal issues the one most of interest today is the insistance of "God as mother". This was not new and is found in Isaiah and from Jesus when he speaks of taking Jerusalem's children like a mother hen.

Clement of Alexandria speaks of "the milk of the Father" and of course, in Greek the Holy Spirit, Pneauma, was feminine, and still is in the Greek Orthodox church. Julian didn't invent the symbol of "Jesus as Mother" but her contribution was the theological precision with which she applied it to the relationship of God and Christ.

In the Trinity, "fatherhood means power and goodness, Jesus motherhood means wisdom and lovingness, and the Holy Spirit's meaning is that of "Help and grace." The purpose of all this imagery is to evoke a totality, which Julian expresses well as "all one love".

ROMAN CATHOLIC MYSTICS--REFORMATION TO TODAY

There are so many great mystics in the Roman catholic tradition that it will be difficult to cover, even the major ones from the reformation to today but I have tried to pick the most significant ones. , about a dozen or so, that I believe were important for one reason or another. these will be basically chronological.

CATHERINE OF GENOA (1447-1510)

died at end of 15th cent.

— I am actually backing up a century to catch Catherine of Genoa because I couldn't fit her in anywhere else.

She was of noble birth, married at 16, and for ten years lived a life of pleasure and luxury. at 27 she experienced a conversion: "Her heart was pierced by a sudden and immense love of God, and in a transport of pure and all-purifying love, she was drawn away from all the miseries of the world."

from this point on she led a life of profound practical devotion, on the one side receiving the eucharist almost daily (very rare at this period for a member of the laity) and an intense sense of the presence of God; on the other in work among the sick.

she wrote no books but her teachings were recorded and had great influence down the centuries, even on protestants.

She speaks of God under a variety of images; He is goodness, Beauty, Truth, Love. He is sun Light, fire, air, ocean. the essence, the very Being of all things, visible and invisible. He is the 'one true divine root-center of ones soul.'

the impulse to union comes from Love. "the love of God is our true self-love, since these selves of ours were created by and for love itself."

"Pure Love loves God w/o any why or wherefore. The soul offers and remits itself entirely to Him, so that it can no more operate except in the manner willed by tender love Himself; and from that point it does not produce works except such as are pure, full and sincere, wbrks which please God-Love."

since love seeks the God who is Love; so Catherine cries "Love, I want you, the whole of You."

The condition of union is purification, which takes ascetism, but Catherine is unusual in seeing the process of purification as continuing after death.

the soul actually is eager for Purgatory owing to the "impetuosity of that love which exists between God and the soul, and tends to conform the soul to God."

God, being Fire, burns away the imperfections in the soul till it finds its being in God.

in the experience of union Catherine (who was a stigmatic) goes beyond the language normally used by Christians: "My Being is God, not by a simple participation, but by a true transformation of my Being--God is my Being, my Me, my Strength, My Beatitude, My Good, my delight."

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BROTHER LAWRENCE (1605-1691)

best known for the little and much published book The Practice of the Presence of God. Nicolas Herman was a soldier who became a hermit, and in 1649 joined the Carmelite community in Paris as a lay brother in charge of the kitchen.

His maxims were collected after his death and published.

Brother Lawrence practised a simple but profound mysticism which consisted in the "practice of the presence of God' at all times, in all places and in all activities.

His prayer was simply 'a sense of the presence of God'. At the beginning of the day he prayed to continue in the presence of God as he worked.

during the day he talked with God as he went about the duties of the kitchen. at the end of the day "he examined himself how he had discharged his duty'. If he felt he had failed, "without being discouraged, he set

children as he does at first for they must learn to serve the Lord with strenuous industry and at our own cost, yet not in vain, or w/o hope.

"Then first do we attain to the fulness of God's love as His children, when it is no longer happiness or misery, prosperity or adversity, that draws us to Him or keeps us back from Him. What we should then experience none can utter; but it would be something far better than when we were burning with the first flame of love, and had great emotion, but less true submission."

Tauler in the main took over Eckhar's philosophy but with a more evangelical emphasis.

he also believed there was an uncreated divine spark in everyone which remains in darkness as long as one's eyes are *not opened*.

then from it shines a divine Light which is the bearer of the grace of God.

from John's gospel he also calls it the inward Word.

"The inward Word is so unutterably near to us inwardly, in the very principle of our being, that not even man himself, not even his own thought, is so high, or is planted so deep within him, as is the Eternal Word in man."

it was in this inward Word that he found the deepest spiritual reality

the entire friends of God movement had an emphasis that was leading towards the Reformation.

Tauler believed that the highest spiritual goal in life is the attainment of union with God in the inner depths of one's being, but this was tested by the capacity to endure suffering and to act in love, compassion and service toward others.

&The Theologia Germanica&

one of the chief legacies of the Friends of God movement to posterity this anonymous book was given the name by Martin Luther, who published it in 1518.

Luther said that "Next to the Bible and St Augustine, no book hath ever come into my hands, whence I have learnt or would wish to learn more of what God, Christ, and man and all things are."

who was the author, all that is known is that he was a Teutonic knight, a priest and warden of the house of that order during the 2nd half of the 14th cent.

the dominant note in the book is the negation of self will, which is probably why he didn't name himself.

in contrast to Luther, Calvin called the book "a bag of tricks produced by Satans cunning to confound the whole simplicity of the Gospel."

it depends on how it is read for it is paradoxical, more than most mystical books. when viewed sympathetically all its major emphasis may be taken as reinforcing the basic tenets of Christian faith. when viewed adversely (as Calvin) they seem to range close to pantheism and masochism.

there is no evidence of intentional inconsistency by

the author but he tried to mediate the Bible and Eckhards tradition in it.

as mentioned the primary note is the conquest and eradication of self-will.

"all deception begineth in self deception."

the cause of the coming of sin into the world, says this author, is the self-will of Adam.

"had he eaten seven apples, and yet never claimed anything for his own, he would not have fallen; but as soon as he called something his own, he fell and would have fallen if he had nver touched an apple."

where is the remedy? in a Simple yeilding to God, whihc opens the way to divine grace."

his most famous statement is "Nothing burneth in hell but self-will"

he was non-commital about hell as a place of future torment but with a spiritual insight beyond that of most of his contemporaries, he knew that heaven and hell are present realities in the lives of persons.

he believed that sin was egocentricity and grace was needed to cure the soul.

he never sets forth the conquest of self-will as an end in itself; it is that God may abound in the life of the soul.

the more the Self, the I, the Me, the Mine, that is, self-seeking and selfishness abate in a man, the more doth God's I, that is, God Himself, increase in him."

this blending of the human soul with God comes to its