

ALEXANDER HEGIUS (ca. 1433-98): HIS LIFE, PHILOSOPHY, AND PEDAGOGY

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Problem. There are scholars who have suggested that Alexander Hegius was one of the most important educators of the fifteenth century. Whether or not this can be substantiated is open to question. The fact remains that he was a pivotal figure in the development of education in the Northern Renaissance. Scholars have argued at length about his life, the obscure details of which are significant for understanding the youth of Desiderius Erasmus. There are also a few outdated studies that deal in a cursory manner with his pedagogy. Although some of this material is based on genuine primary research, only a small proportion of it is of any great consequence. Little of significance has been published in English. When it comes to an analysis of his writings, there has been no definitive study made in any language. In view of the paucity of scholarly material available, it is the purpose of this study, after giving a brief biography of Hegius' life, to examine his prose writings and to make an analysis of his philosophy and the consequent educational corollaries. The investigation is undertaken to evaluate Hegius' contribution to the emerging Northern Renaissance.

Method. An historical-documentary method of research was used in approaching this topic. The major primary source for the study is the *Dialogs of Alexander Hegius* published in 1503. Other sources include letters and treatises of Hegius' contemporaries.

Conclusions. Hegius was principal of the school at St. Lebuins in Deventer for sixteen years prior to his death in 1498. During that time the school grew and prospered. What had been a fairly typical school of the late medieval period in that area soon became one of the main centers for the study of the "humanities." It must consequently be acknowledged that Hegius' efforts had a considerable influence on the emergence of the Renaissance in the Netherlands. An analysis of Hegius' writings reveals a subtle shift in attitude towards a nominalist philosophy and away from the Thomism prevalent in the schools of the Low Countries. The complex interplay of this nominalism with Hegius' emerging humanism had far-reaching effects on the curriculum and methods in Deventer and made St. Lebuins an outstanding center of the new learning.