The works of Wessel Gansfort (1419-89) have never yet been charted in a satisfactory manner. As a critical theologian the author is widely known. A collection of his works was published as early as 1614 in Groningen, the town where he was born and where he died. Even so no modern survey of his writings, offering an inventory, date and brief description is available today. In his standard work on Wessel published in 1917, the Utrecht church historian M. van Rhijn did not include such a survey. Although he added an appendix on the subject of Wessel’s lost as well as extant works, he only provided a list of the latter according to the printed edition of 1614, stating rather glibly that there was little certainty about their actual dates. Rather than in Wessel’s individual writings, Van Rhijn was interested in the main themes of Wessel’s theology, and the importance of his work lies in the valuable outline of these themes and of their position in the history of dogma that it provides.

In the Opera of 1614 nine letters written by Wessel were printed, as well as a letter addressed to him and another from a disciple containing a series of theses written by Wessel shortly before his death; the texts are not always complete. Other old printed editions (1503, 1651) yield another two letters addressed to Wessel. In toto the corpus comprises, therefore, thirteen letters. Van Rhijn not only failed to provide a survey, the letters whose senders were unknown to him were left undiscussed, and in such matters as dates of composition


2 M. van Rhijn, Wessel Gansfort (s-Gravenhage, 1917), pp. Ivi (note 5)-Ivii. There are more indications of time than the three referred to, for example, Wessel refers in De providential Dei to the Neusser Krieg (1474-75), at that time three years earlier; Opera (see above, n. 1), p. 728. This means that he wrote this passage in 1477-78.
he was only moderately interested. In the same year (1917) all thirteen letters were discussed, however, in an American publication. In it, the church historian E.W. Miller sketched Wessel’s life and work, while the classicist J.W. Scudder provided a translation of a large part of Wessel’s writings, among which also his correspondence. In his discussion of the letters Miller made many factual mistakes. Like Van Rhijn, he did not make any attempt at ordering the material.

Since 1917 Wessel’s correspondence has not been the object of study. A collection of articles on Wessel and his contemporaries, published in Groningen in 1993, did not offer new perspectives on this material. As a corpus the letters seem to have disappeared from sight. F. Akkerman, for example, an expert on the correspondence of Wessel’s friend Rudolph Agricola, also from Groningen, referred in 1997 to Wessel’s four letters.

This article is concluded by a list of Wessel’s correspondence in which the letters have been arranged chronologically. Each letter has been given a number to facilitate future reference. In addition the location of the letters in the editions, as well as their incipits and explicits, are provided. First, however, such matters as Wessel’s later years, the survival of the letters, and aspects of individual letters are discussed. I shall limit the discussion to historical-biographical matters; their intrinsic thematic content requires another study.

1. The chronology of Wessel’s later years

Wessel’s correspondence dates almost entirely from the last period of his life, when, after more than twenty-five years of travelling through Western Europe, he had settled down once more in his native country. However, the one letter bearing a date (ep. 1) appears

5 Wessel Gansfort (1419-1489) and Northern Humanism, eds. F. Akkerman, G.C. Huisman, and A.J. Vanderjagt (Leiden, New York, Cologne, 1993).