

Boekbespreking - Compte rendu

Kaspar ELM, *Mittelalterliches Ordensleben in Westfalen und am Niederrhein*. (Studien und Quellen zur westfälischen Geschichte, Bd. 27). Paderborn, Bonifatius Verlag, 1989, 258 p.

It was a happy idea to unite in this single volume twelve previously published articles of the highly qualified professor of the Free University of Berlin, Kaspar Elm. All of them discuss religious orders and monasteries in the medieval period in Westphalia and the Lower Rhine. It is true that Elm himself, if he had planned a monograph upon this subject, would certainly have offered a more unified work with fewer repetitions than are, almost necessarily, found here. In addition, he would have added an alphabetical index which would have greatly facilitated access to the numerous riches contained in this volume. In any case, the present reviewer has read here with great pleasure and profit these articles which were spread over three decades of diligent research.

The foreword by F.G. Hohmann points out a highly useful feature of Elm's writings: since he has labored for years in the field of religious orders in the Middle Ages, what he writes about any single order is considered in comparison with and in relation to other orders also. And this is always done by Elm in the context of his rich knowledge of the whole historical period. In other words, Elm avoids the defect from which some historians of religious orders suffer: they write *in vacuo*, that is, with little or no relation to the general background of the medieval period. Exactly the contrary occurs in Elm's writings. Hence, the reader of these valuable studies will be guided by a master hand throughout the interesting history of medieval orders, always presented by Elm in their well documented relations to their predecessors and their contemporaries.

The essays are classified under three headings (not necessarily mutually exclusive). After dealing in the first section with the Premonstratensians, Cistercians and Williamites, the author deals in the second section with mendicants - and here the Augustinians receive the lion's share. In section three, Elm treats of the *devotio moderna* and the Crosiers. It is perhaps chiefly in this third section that Elm shows the great originality of his investigations. His custom is to accept no statement, no matter how often repeated, that contradicts known facts or which has only insufficient arguments to buttress it. This appears particularly in his refusal to deny the dependence of the Crosiers upon the Brothers of the Common Life for at least a goodly part of their spirituality. It appears again in the discussion of St. Norbert, whose figure as a saint is not denied, but is

accompanied by various indications of his political and polemical activities.

It is most helpful to follow Elm's treatment of the Cistercians in their development from a hermit-like existence to a more urban form of life. Their influence upon the Williamites is brought out by concrete examples. This is done for the Cistercian constitutions also, which had such an influence upon the Dominicans and other orders, including the Augustinians.

The treatment of the Augustinians in the regions handled in these essays is quite satisfactory. Particularly illuminating is the discussion of the union of the Williamites and other groups with the Augustinian friars in 1256 and of the reasons which prompted the Williamites (consistently with their Benedictine outlook) to apply almost at once for liberation from the forced union. Again, Elm's treatment of the *Terminien* is admirable. He shows from the sources that these houses were by no means destined merely to be storage places or dwelling places for the friars assigned to seek alms in various forms, but had in addition a definite pastoral function. Many friars with university degrees were assigned to these houses to help in the confessional and pulpit and to recruit new members of the order.

Elm shows well how the papal influence in the great union of 1256 left upon the Augustinians a lasting devotion to the Holy See, which they regularly served and defended by their books and sermons (p. 210). Contrary to his regular custom, however, the author makes on p. 140, the unproved assertion that the Augustinians in the regions under discussion almost completely went over to Protestantism. Not only does this contradict the strong attachment of the Augustinians to the papacy which Elm himself has so well documented, but it leaves us with the pressing question: where are the statistics to back up this assertion? Elm himself points out on p. 228 a fact which we already knew, namely that various religious communities in the sixteenth century were expelled against their will from their houses in cities which became Protestant by *Rat und Stadt*. Again, the too general assertion on p. 132 that Gregory of Rimini directed the Augustinian school towards nominalism should be corrected by some of Damasus Trapp's studies, not cited here, which were published in the sixties.

But these few points of disagreement in no way destroy our admiration for this highly useful work. We thank the publishers and the financial backers who made it possible.