

IN MEMORIAM EELCKO YPMA¹

Sible Jan Ypma was born on April 7th 1917 in Tjerkwerd (municipality of Wonseradeel) in the province of Friesland. He was the son of Jan Ypma and Agatha Hettinga. Both his father and his mother were of farming stock. His place of birth was close to Bolsward, a centre of activity for the Franciscan friars. When as a boy he felt the vocation to become a priest, he moved from Friesland to Limburg, to complete his secondary education at the seminary of the Franciscan Friars in Venray. He finished his secondary education with a gymnasium alpha (grammar school) diploma.

However, he did not enter the Franciscan Order, but rather the Augustinian Order. On September 9th 1936 he received the habit at Witmarsum and begun his noviciate, adopting the religious name Eelcko. A year and a day later, on September 10th 1937, he took his simple vows at Witmarsum. As frater clericus he stayed in Eindhoven for two years, where he was instructed in philosophy, next in Culemborg for one year, where he was taught fundamental theology. On September 10th 1940 he made his solemn profession at Culemborg. In the same year he moved to the Augustinian monastery at Nijmegen to continue his theological studies. On May 30th 1942 he was ordained priest in 's-Hertogenbosch.

In August 1943, after completing his theological education within the Order, he was ordered as a conventualis of the monastery of Nijmegen to finish his theological studies at the local university. He took classes with, among others, Prof. Frits van der Meer. On June 17th 1947 he graduated with distinction. Under the guidance of Prof. Reinier Post he specialised in medieval church history. On March 24th 1949 he received his doctorate in theology after defending his dissertation on the "Generaal Kapittel van Sion" (Chapter General of Sion).

At the monastery of Nijmegen he filled the posts of magister caeremoniarum and of socius of the magister of the fratres clerici from August 20th 1949 to August 11th 1952. Apart from providing liturgical assistance to the numerous churches in and around Nijmegen, he also held, during that time, the position of secretary to the *Encyclopaedie van het Katholicisme* (Encyclopedia of Catholicism), a project set up by the Augustinian Friars under the redaction of his fellow brethren Ephraem Hendriks, Caspar Doensen and Winfried Bocxe. During the years 1950-1955 he carried out research on the Augustinian conventicles in the

¹ Translation by Willem Erven.

northern part of the Netherlands. On this subject he published, then as well as later, several articles. Of the relevant archival material he transcribed a substantial amount. This transcription is at the present time deposited in the Archives of the Dutch Augustinian Province at Eindhoven.

On August 11th 1952 he received an appointment for France. The Dutch Augustinians had decided in 1948 to establish themselves in Paris in order to restore the Order there. In France the Order had collapsed and been disbanded as a result of the French Revolution. Two convents were established, one in Bagneux, in the vicinity of Paris, and one in Paris itself. Originally the convent in Paris was housed in the Rue Xavier-Privas in the Quartier Latin. In 1958 it was transferred to the Rue de Javel, in the fifteenth district. In Paris Eelcko led the life of a studious monk until 1978, devoting himself to prayer and hospitality, whilst also carrying out research on the history of the Augustinian Order in France, more particularly the medieval Augustinians working at the Sorbonne. During this period he also published studies on the First Augustinian School and was engaged in editing a critical edition of the works of James of Viterbo.

In 1956 the seventh centenary of the foundation of the Augustinian Order was magnificently celebrated. From this same year dates his first publication on the history of theological education within the Order, particularly at the Sorbonne. He had been given the task by Athanasius van der Weijden, Prior Provincial of the Dutch Augustinian Province, to write a monograph within the framework of the centenary. As it turned out, he ended up writing a study on the organization of the "studia" in the Augustinian Order during the first century of its existence. The work has thoroughly proven its soundness and is still cited with approval. It contributed to a broader awareness, both inside and outside the Order, of the importance of Augustinian theological studies in the 13th-15th centuries. The publication, bearing the title *Le développement de l'enseignement chez les Ermites de Saint Augustin au XIII^e siècle*, also served as a second senior thesis. On June 8th 1956 the Conseil de la Section des Sciences Religieuses expressed a favourable opinion of it. As a result he acquired the grade of Élève diplômé of the École Pratique des Hautes Études.

In these circles he became acquainted with, among others, medievalists such as Mgr. André Combes, editor of numerous medieval manuscripts. To him he communicated the request of the Prior General for Mgr. Combes to edit the works of James of Viterbo (†1308). Within the Augustinian Order James had been revered as blessed for centuries. In 1911 his veneration was confirmed by Pope

Pius X. After this the postulator of the Order applied himself to collecting material which should ultimately lead to his sanctification. His miracles aside, the writings of the beatified man also had to be studied. In order to do this they had to be published first.

Mgr. Combes advised Eelcko to undertake the critical edition himself. And so the latter set about editing James' work, partly motivated by the Order's desire to venerate the blessed James as a saint. He started by making an inventory of the numerous manuscripts of James' writings. In view of the number of manuscripts, he was in his own time almost as popular as Thomas Aquinas. To begin with Eelcko set himself to editing James' *Quodlibeta*. The first *Quodlibet* was published in a critical edition in 1968. After the series of four *Quodlibeta* had been published, he went on from 1983 with equal zeal to edit James' *De praedicamentis in divinis*. By 1987 two volumes had been published, containing seventeen *quaestiones* in total. Because his already restricted eyesight degenerated further, he published from then on each *quaestio* separately in the journal *Augustiniana*: the 18th in 1988, and so on, until in 1999 he published his 26th and last *quaestio*. His English fellow brother Edmund Colledge, editor of the writings of medieval mystics, had indeed, on account of their good relations, offered to help him finish the remaining *quaestiones*. The cooperation was started but not continued. The final *quaestiones* are still awaiting publication.

The Augustinian Friar James of Viterbo had been active both in Paris and in Naples. For the edition of his works his Parisian episode is most important. It was there that he became a baccalaureus formatus in 1288 and afterwards a magister of theology. In his writings he entered into dialogue especially with Thomas Aquinas, Henry of Ghent, Goffrey of Fontaines, and his fellow brother Giles of Rome. His knowledge of neoplatonically coloured Aristotelism was extensive. For centuries James was best known for his treatise on the Church, *De regimine christiano*, the first theological treatise on the subject.

James' thought fits into medieval Augustinianism as developed within the First Augustinian School. His theology presents a clear line of reasoning. He was capable of critically summarizing the opinions of his contemporaries, and to cite them accurately. James was creative in finding his own solutions, which is why he was called *doctor inventivus*. Because he managed to express his criticism of others in a congenial way, he is also known as *doctor graciosus*. The latter title may also refer to the remarkable way in which he regularly expressed his gratitude towards his teachers.

From the beginning of the 13th century there was a growing conviction that the study of theology should also be made to fit into Aristotle's scientific model. Attempts to do so entailed an objectification of the study of theology: the emphasis no longer lay on the subject who theologised, and by theologizing received salvation, but on the object, the science itself. In parallel with this way of thinking, thinking about man had changed. In the new conception of man, man was no longer dependant on God in everything, but only partially so, and, like a king, he was self-sufficient in so far as his own world was concerned. It was enough for his world to be controlled by reason. Human will was an interfering factor in this, whilst in earlier tradition rational will was pre-eminently the place where man could meet God. James' *quaestiones*, which come to the fore in the *Disputationes de quolibet*, reveal the actuality of this discussion, for the period around 1300 was marked at the university by a discussion of the question of whether will was superior to reason or the other way around. This had its repercussions on the manner of theologizing and on the interpretation of the statute of theology. In two fascinating contributions Eelckó's college friend and secular priest Francis Ruello, out of appreciation for his critical edition work, has given attention to James' analogy of being [Augustiniana 1970] and his view on the foundations of human liberty [Augustiniana 1975].

In the Parisian convent Eelcko Ypma was master of the novices, magister of the fratres clerici and sacristan. Out of respect for and admiration of his fellow brother and housemate Luc Verheijen, the expert on Augustine who lectured on texts of Augustine at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, Eelcko regularly found himself prepared to sign up as a student with him, in order for Verheijen to reach the required number of students for his classes.

To the many foreign guests staying at the Rue de Javel, (these were) often fellow brethren living for some years in Paris for the sake of study, he was always a friendly, benevolent, and patient host. He was always attentive to the welfare of the guests. A regular visitor to the Bibliothèque Nationale himself, he was always ready to assist them in library matters and in the secrets of town and university. He was interested in their studies, their thoughts and opinions.

In the convent at the Rue de Javel hospitality was from time to time given to the German-American Augustinian friar Francis Roth, who was involved in the *Augustinian Historical Institute* in New York. Roth had collected a lot of material on the English Augustinian Friars, and was author of the work *The English Austin Friars*. It was

he who encouraged Eelcko Ypma to occupy himself more intensively with the history of the Augustinians in France, which up until then historians had been totally neglecting. As a result, Eelcko collected a large amount of data on French Augustinian authors and monasteries. The material on the convents and monasteries, neatly arranged in a filing cabinet, is kept in the Archive of the Dutch Augustinian Province at Eindhoven. His work *Les auteurs augustins français* was published by the *Augustijns Historisch Instituut* (Augustinian Historical Institute) in Louvain. The *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* and the *Dictionnaire d'histoire et géographie ecclésiastiques* contain his contributions on several French Augustinians.

In Paris Eelcko Ypma was a member of the circle of post-graduates who met on a weakly basis at the home of the famous medievalist and Ockham scholar Paul Vignaux to read texts of medieval philosophers. He was one of the most loyal visitors. Vignaux had suggested to him, in view of his profound knowledge of James of Viterbo, that he should obtain a second PhD degree. In order to do so, Eelcko put together a reasoned list of James' works and the author's curriculum. On March 28th 1973 he received at the Sorbonne the degree of *Docteur de l'histoire de philosophie*, 3th cycle, with the honourable mention *très bien*. The title of his dissertation was *L'activité littéraire de Jacques de Viterbe OESA à Paris*.

Thanks to the intercession of Eelcko I myself in 1974 had several informative and stimulating contacts with the exceedingly affable mister Vignaux. It was at Eelcko's instigation that I was able to attend a few sessions at Vignaux's. They were on the teachings on the Trinity of John of Ripa. During an earlier stay in Paris Eelcko had helped me in learning to read the abbreviations that are found in the theological texts of incunabula. Since, at the time, I was preparing for a dissertation on the Trinitarian theory of Gabriel Biel, I was reading the editio princeps of his *Collectorium*. The Tübingen critical edition had not yet been published. In the matter of this sort of knowledge transfer Eelcko showed himself to be an able and sympathetic teacher.

In 1978 he suffered retinal separation in his left eye. Several years before, the same thing had happened to his right eye, with the tragic result of becoming completely blind in this eye. Due to the resolute action of his prior, Serge Arminjon, who had him immediately transferred by ambulance from Paris to Utrecht, a repetition of this loss was avoided. In Utrecht he was treated at the famous Ooglijders-gasthuis (Hospital for eye patients) by Prof. Hoppenbrouwer. The eye was saved to the extent that Eelcko regained 20% of his eye sight. In

order to recuperate he stayed as a guest at the monastery of Marienhage in Eindhoven, and from the 1st of July 1979 he lived there as *conventualis*. He never returned to his beloved Paris.

In Eindhoven, when his eye sight had sufficiently improved, he resumed his labours of textual criticism. He preferred to work in the reading room of the monastery library. Despite his severe handicap, no-one ever heard him complain and he always remained industrious. You can imagine the posture in which he performed his work: deeply bent over, armed with his magnifying glasses, his face floating over the text, then stretching his back to search for notes in the filing cabinet or to write something down in his characteristic angular handwriting, from time to time lifting his head to keep an eye on his surroundings, particularly when he heard voices he could not identify.

For years he was a member of the consilium of the convent of Marienhage and from 1995 to 1998 he was subprior. In the Augustinian church of Eindhoven he had a much frequented confessional, but because of his handicap he could not preach, nor was he able to act as first celebrant in the daily convent mass. His piety was simple and intense. He felt a great devotion for the sainted Augustinian friar Nicholas of Tolentine, who is especially worshipped in Eindhoven and its surroundings.

As he used to do in the town centre of Paris, so he now conducted tours of the more limited area of the monastery and the church. To visitors of the monastery of Marienhage he was a friendly and well respected doorkeeper. The position of doorkeeper gave him much pleasure, partly because in the doorkeeper's lodge he could continue with his textual criticism, and partly because of his natural interest in other people.

To his fellow brethren he was communicative and easy to be with. He often managed to steer conversations with his fellow brethren in such a way that they arrived at the topic of James of Viterbo. Austere by nature, alert and precise, he maintained his mental and physical vitality up to an advanced age. During the last years of his life his mind lost some of its mental acuity, although he could still immediately call by name all those who greeted him. But during the ensuing conversations he easily switched subjects.

Strengthened by the sacrament of the dying he passed away on Sunday morning, the 26th of August 2007 in the Orangerie at Eindhoven, the temporary place of abode of the convent during the renovation of the monastery. On Friday the 31th of August his funeral service was held in the Augustinian church. During the celebration of the Eucharist a passage was read from his beloved James of Viterbo. The

passage in question was the translation of part of the *quaestio prima* of the *Disputatio tertia de quolibet*: the goal of theology is our salvation. Eelcko Ypma was buried in the midst of his fellow brethren in the convent cemetery of Marienhage, where his body lies awaiting the day of resurrection.

Martijn SCHRAMA

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