



Franz Xaver Bischof & Martin Thurner (eds), *Die benediktinische Klosterreform im 15. Jahrhundert* (Veröffentlichungen des Grabmann-Institutes zur Erforschung der Mittelalterlichen Theologie und Philosophie 56), Berlin: Akademie Verlag 2013. 315 pp.

This collection of articles on the reform of the German Benedictine order contributes to an on-going discussion on the crisis and reform of the late medieval Church. It is a topical theme at the eve of 600th commemoration of the Council of Constance and 500th Anniversary of Martin Luther's (1483–1546) reformation, and for example the International Medieval Congress at Leeds has selected 'Reform & Renewal' for its thematic strand in 2015. Hopefully, this book receives attention as it offers new insights on the fifteenth-century renewal of Benedictine monasticism that has somewhat been left in the shadow of corresponding Observant reforms in the mendicant orders.

This particular volume is a result of a seminar held in 2010 in the Benedictine monastery of Plankstetten, including scholars from the fields of history, Latin philology and theology. All contributors come from the Bavarian, Austrian and Swiss universities, archives and libraries or monasteries. This area is also the geographical focus of the anthology. Consequently the articles treat only two of the three important German-speaking Benedictine reform centres of the fifteenth century, namely Melk-Tegernsee and Kastl. It is common practice that conference proceedings are a sum of the papers held, but from a more general point of view it is regrettable that the Northern German reform of Bursfeld is not covered in this volume.

The editors themselves have grouped the chapters under three themes. This division is not, however, followed in the disposition of the volume, and it is left to the reader to conclude which article belongs to which group. I have made my own interpretation, and in the following I will treat each article within this proposed schema.

The first theme is the reform of the monastery of Tegernsee, situated in Upper Bavaria, and especially the career and writings of its important prior Bernhard von Waging (ca. 1400–1472). This crucial figure of the fifteenth century Benedictine reform has been a focus of study at the institutes of Catholic theology and Medieval Latin at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München. Not surprisingly articles in this group include some of the most original contributions of the volume. The opening chapter of the volume, Susanne Kaup's article on Bernharnd von Waging's literary works in the light of central themes of Benedictine reform is a balanced introduction to the life-story of Bernhard and his literary oeuvre. Describing and analysing several texts in a concise scholarly article is a challenge, but Kaup's solution of discussing each text in relation to the tasks and responsibilities of a Benedictine prior creates a solid structure to the treatment. Kaup also provides in the attachment an edition of the chapter titles in Bernhard's works. The titles are informative, but their relation to the actual analysis is rather superficial.

The long chapter 'Kloster Tegernsee im 15. Jahrhundert' by Roland Götz is more an overview than a new opening, but it offers a much-needed background for the case studies on Bernhard von Waging, and thus has its place in this collection. It is followed by more specific case studies. Ulrike Treusch discusses the treatise *De esu carniūm* (On eating meat) by Bernhard von Waging, an issue topical again in our twenty-first century. Strict abstinence from meat became a fundamental requirement in the reform circle of Melk-Tegernsee, and Bernhard appears as its late but eager proponent.

Victoria Hohenadel has composed her article '*Sequere me* – Ein Brief an Bernhard von Waging' around a letter from Wilhelm Kienberger to Bernhard von Waging. Wilhelm was the first of the three Augustinian canons of Indersdorf who defected to Tegernsee, and his friend Bernhard followed him shortly afterwards. The article treats an important feature of the monastic reform, the will to leave an order or monastery in order to move to a stricter one. Yet, the title is perhaps misleading, since although Hohenadel provides an edition of the letter, the actual letter plays minor part in her study, emphasis being in the broader argument caused by these defections. Still, an even more general discussion might have been in order here: the reader is left to wonder, if the crossover from one religious order to another was a common or extraordinary phenomenon. Only in the end of her article does Hohenadel refer to 'mehrere übergetretene Mönche' who came to Tegernsee from other monasteries, but this is stated without further explanation or references.

Yet another aspect of Tegernsee abbey is covered in Julia Rinser's article 'Tegernseer Kosmos', where she explores the correspondence of Nicolaus of Cusa (Cusanus, 1401–1464) with Abbot Kaspar Ayndorffer and Prior Bernhard von Waging (1451–1456). Despite the 'Kosmos' in the title, Rinser's thorough and intriguing analysis reveals very down-to-earth side of the reforming bishop

and the two monks: learned men asking another to send the treatises lacking from one's own library, office-holders tiring in the face of challenges, and reformers doubting their chances of success.

The second group of articles treats the reform initiatives of Kastl, Melk and Sankt Gallen. Christine Glaßner opens this topic with her article on the reform of Melk. The dependency of the reform in Melk from the University of Vienna is rather well-known in the scholarship on the late medieval Benedictines, but this relationship receives new depth in Glaßner's treatment of both archival documents and manuscripts from Melk. The reform of Kastl, and especially the renewed interest in reading and exposing the Rule of St. Benedict has been surveyed by Beda Maria Sonnenberg.

Philipp Lenz's re-evaluation of St. Gallen's reforms is perhaps the most critical and innovative contribution of this volume, as it also re-defines what monastic reform meant in the late Middle Ages. Lenz convincingly questions the prevailing narrative of subsequent influence of Hersfeld, Kastl and Subiaco-Wiblingen reform initiatives in St. Gallen, and demonstrates that reforms in the abbey lack all characteristics specific to any single Observant circle. Instead, the reforms in St. Gallen took place within conventional Church hierarchy and canon law: through the decrees and visitations ordered by the Benedictine provincial chapter, Council of Basel and to a lesser degree papacy. As a result, Lenz calls for opening up the concept of reform to include more general texts and decrees issued to the whole Benedictine order in German-speaking Europe, thus questioning the strict division between reformed and conventional monasteries. Hopefully, these important results will be brought into discussion with observations regarding other orders and geographical areas in the future.

The third group is about general legal, philological and editorial as well as literary and theological questions of the monastic reform. Stephan Haering's chapter on Benedictine reform initiatives from the perspective of canon law certainly belongs under this theme. Haering provides a more general context of reform relating the later German reforms to the initiatives of Santa Giustina in Padua, Subiaco and the provincial chapter of Petershausen. He points out some lasting legal results of the reform, above all the renewed limitations of private property among the Benedictines and the development of monastic congregations and as a result more unity in the government of different monasteries.

However, this important contribution could have profited from more careful editing and revisions. For example, the accuracy of the footnotes is very uneven. On one hand, many footnotes provide only lexicon articles for reference, some of them relatively old. On the other hand, the reader is left to wonder, why the decrees of the Fourth Lateran (p. 67, n. 42) and Tridentine Councils (p. 71, n. 47) are quoted in full in the footnotes, when these decrees are only briefly mentioned in the actual text.

The last two essays stand out from the rest as they draw the examples from the Carthusian order instead of the Benedictines. Nevertheless, they complement the whole by commenting on certain key characteristic of the fifteenth century reform and monastic life.

Victoria Hohenadel's second contribution to this volume analyses the debate between Johann von Eych, the Bishop of Eichstätt (ep. 1445–1464), and Carthusian monk Jacob von Tüchelhausen in 1458–1459, and illuminates the tension between *vita activa* of secular clerics, seen by monks as extremely dangerous to one's soul, and *vita contemplativa*, whose proponents were accused of fleeing from their clerical responsibilities to the isolation of monasteries. Marc-Aeilko Aris concludes the volume by discussing practices of reading in the late medieval society, exposing the dialogue '*De sapientia*' by Nicolaus Cusanus as well as the late-medieval Carthusian reading practices. The figure of *pauper idiota* in Cusanus's dialogue, an unlearned artisan who instead of priding himself on his knowledge of authorities reads all books and indeed the whole world as the work of God, is in Aris' treatment revealed to be the figure of a monk, or even a layman influenced by monastic reading practices. Thus in the last pages of this volume, the reform of the monasteries is brought into the world.

Quite often, a collection of essays titled generally includes very specific, even narrow studies that offer little to a reader who is not already acquainted with the topic. *Die benediktinische Klosterreform im 15. Jahrhundert* is an extremely broad title, and even if the book does not deliver all the title promises – what book ever could – it delivers a lot. The more general chapters on the reform initiatives of Tegernsee, Melk and St. Gallen make it possible for a reader not already familiar with personalities such as Kaspar Ayndorffer and Bernhard von Waging to follow up the case studies. Many students preparing their essays or theses on relating themes will surely appreciate this generality. Nevertheless, some background knowledge on the Great Western Schism and the general councils of the fifteenth century is recommendable for the reader.

Finally some minor stylistic remarks: the chapters of the collection vary from essay-like to overview and full scholarly article. This in itself is not a problem; actually I find it more a strength. Yet, for the sake of uniformity, the editors could have required the writers to abide by certain guidelines more strictly. For example the headings and subtitles seem to have no guiding principle at all. Just to give some examples: Julia Rinser's article has an introduction and a conclusion, as well as numbered headings in between. Stephan Haering uses two levels of headings, numerated with Roman and Arabic numerals respectively. Christine Glaßner has also a two-level division, but she has resorted to headings with roman numbering and subtitles in italics. Victoria Hohenadel's two contributions have no headings or subtitles whatsoever.

All in all, the collection is well worth reading also by those studying reform (or reformation) outside the Benedictine order. It likewise offers perspective to the discussions on the crisis of monasticism at the end of the Middle Ages, and the abolishment of monasteries during the protestant reformation. The vivid picture drawn in these articles of learning, devotion and accomplished administrative renewals and thriving economy in the Southern German Benedictine monasteries helps to understand why these prevailed in the tumultuous sixteenth century and emerged as the haughty baroque monuments that have come down to us.

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