

The Praemonstratensian Canons in the Renaissance Century *)

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Per quatuor annos Praemonstratensium scripta saeculi duodecimi perlustratus sum. Spero fore ut per publicationem huius laboris veniant correctiones additionesque ; hac ratione scriptores illi pleniori lumine dotati, plenius pro nostratibus coruscare poterunt.

I must say shortly that I obviously cannot purpose now to define either the 12th Century Renaissance anew or the role of the Praemonstratensian Order in it. The Praemonstratensian Order and that member of the order I will discuss here, Philippe de Harveng, have for so long lain buried with other obscurities of the Middle Ages that to pretend complete treatment in a paper would be impossible. Nevertheless, with little to go on from others, caught by an infection of interest in the Praemonstratensian writers, I have read almost all their 12th century works. What I will say today is only a gesture in the direction of what I think may be large new area, the role the order played in the intellectual history of the years 1150-1250, Professor Haskin's years for the Renaissance of the 12th century ¹⁾.

Philippe de Harveng has all the equipment of hagiography that seems a conditional part of medieval sanctity except canonization, either by Papal or popular authority. He was born of poor parents, rose from his limited environment to be the abbot of a great house, preached to and taught royalty, died, undoubtedly, grown great

¹⁾ CHARLES HOMER HASKINS, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1927.

before his God and his contemporaries. His life and works have since fallen into obscurity, and obscurity characteristic for a good reason of the Order to which he belonged when he was a living member of it, and for some unknown reason in the history of modern scholarship ²⁾).

Philippe was a Praemonstratensian, a member of the Order of Prémontré, founded by St. Norbert in 1121 in the village of Aisne. He rose to the position of Abbot of Bonae-Spei and distinguished himself by his counsel and his writings.

Because of time, I must say simply that the good reason for the obscurity the order knew in the traditional roads of fame during the 12th and 13th centuries, the intellectual activities of the schools, was that by regular purpose, the Order preferred to avoid the controversy which led to recognition, to develop attitudes of good compromise and conciliation. The Order quotes St. Norbert: *Reconcilians male dissentientes et inveterata odia et bella ad pacem reducens* ³⁾. The aim of the order, on the other hand, so influenced all their congregational intentions, that their almost every evolution was intended toward conversion of the faithful toward a revived apostolic life.

This purpose, and the success of it, came to be known as the Apostolic Movement of the 12th Century. In the modified rule of St. Augustine, the canons of St. Norbert carried on a campaign to urge themselves, and later the members of their Second Order, the nuns, and eventually the Third Order of laymen to restore in the 12th century feasibility Christian life of the age of the Fathers.

This was essentially an anti-monastic movement. The purpose

²⁾ Generally, I believe, it is suggested that the descendency of the Praemonstratensian Order coincided with the ascendancy of the new Dominican Order. My opinion of this, which could not be included because of its status as only opinion, is that a good part of the cause should be sought in the sharp change in intellectual climate between the 12th and 13th centuries. The spirit of the Premontré and that of the Dominicans contrast accordingly. I believe that within the history of the years of the renaissance, 1150-1250, a strong argument for this could be built. See, of course, R. P. François PETIT, *La Spiritualité des Prémontrés aux XII^e et XIII^e siècles*, Paris, 1947; H. M. COLVIN, *The White Canons in England*, Oxford, 1951.

³⁾ I have explained this point with some reference to sources in my own unpublished dissertation: *The Ordo Praemonstratensis and Chretien de Troyes' Graal: A Study in the Judaeo-Christian Theory of the Grail Legend*, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1956. The evidences are too lengthy to include here. For the quotation, see P. L. CLXX, 1270.

was a reform of the secular clergy by providing a group of regulars who, while toiling in the parochial order, were maintained by the community and rule to which they belonged. In some ways it was kin to the rebellion by the laity against the over-ascetic spirit of the Medieval Church which rebellion had been described by Professor Hatzfeld as central to the 12th century Renaissance, because the isolation of both learning and sanctity in a monastic structure was opposed by many of the Praemonstratensians, among them Philippe de Harveng.

If the 12th Century Renaissance is, as it has been described, a kind of prologue and analogue to the later Humanistic Renaissance, and if the evidences which will support the truth of it are to be found in the vernacular and nonspiritual literature of the times, and in the individualism of Peter Abelards and the medieval classicism of Marbod, Baudry, and Hildebert, then further support for their cause must be counted as evidence of the 12th century Renaissance also.

It seems that study would show that there great kinship between this religious innovation inspired by St. Norbert, his Apostolic Movement — and that it had much in common with the innovations during the century in traditional philosophy, in the uses of vernacular writing, and in the uses of Latin.

I have formed the conclusion from the reading of the main Praemonstratensian writers of the 12th century, besides Philippe, Adam Scotus, Rupert de Deutz, Herman de Cologne, and Luc de Mont-Cornillon, that the interest and success of the Apostolic life of the early Fathers, and their writings, revived the same controversy in the 12th century between the ascetic and monastic group and the Christian humanists, that had risen in an earlier age. That the canons regular of St. Norbert should study the Latin Fathers for knowledge and support of their Apostolic Movement would seem obvious even if their writings did not testify to it. The Augustinian view toward pagan learning, or even any learning, was held by no less a man than St. Bernard of Clairvaux, whose attitude toward the schools of Paris was regularly one of horror, and who urged all the students therein to flee them.

The Praemonstratensian Philippe de Harveng, whose writings I have thought to be most representative, presents three areas of interest. He opposes, first, the all-embracing monastic compulsions of St. Bernard, secondly, he not only contradicts the traditional

monastic fear of the study of letters, as quoted in St. Bernard just before, but he encourages both clergy and laity to letters and praises the schools of Paris. Third, he urges in his *De Institutione Clericorum* a revived and stricter course of preparation for clerks, throughout referring to the study of non-religious learning. In saying he was representative, I mean these three attitudes appear in many of the Orders writings ⁴).

Philippe was engaged in some debate with Bernard over the justness of purpose of the canons. Bernard's letters, which do not seem to have come down to us, can be judged from Philippe's letters to have been directed toward his familiar purpose of exhorting all men, from all vocations, to enter the service of God under the roofs of monasteries. Philippe writes Latin quite well, and one can hear in this summation of arguments to Bernard the sarcasm which threads his letters to him :

Quod si nulli fidelium est offensionis quippiam inferendum, quando amplius clericis est a monachis deferendum, ut quorum est quasi cognata religio, eorum cor unum et animam unam efficiat spiritalis dilectio ? ⁵).

Next he defines limits of the conflict which has been said to be the core of the lay reaction to asceticism for all, and it can be seen that in as much as Bernard apparently was not making distinctions among non-monks, the new white canons had much the same reaction.

An monachorum Deus tantum ? Nonne et clericorum ? Imo et clericorum, quorum unus Deus qui justificat tam clericos quam monachos ex fide et per fidem ⁶).

There is much more to indicate the same ideas, but one passage more refuses to be eliminated by space, and it is a passage worthy of a real calssicist :

Attendens igitur quia religio proficit, hilaresco, sed attendens quia dilectio deficit, contabesco ; et utrum simul considerans, obstu-

⁴) I am preparing, through the kind suggestion of Prof. Astrik Gabriel, O. Praem., director of the Mediaeval Institute at Notre Dame University, a monograph entitled: « The Educational Program of Philippe de Harvengt », for the Institute's series, *Texts and Studies in the History of Mediaeval Education*.

⁵) P. L. CCIII, 82 (D).

⁶) Ibid.

pesco, quoniam ad videndum quomodo ista conveniant, nullatenus invalesco. Putavi aliquando ut modernis temporibus [and I think this phrase should be repeated] (*ut modernis temporibus impleretur*). quod per Isaiam Dominus polliceretur : Ponam, inquiens, iudicium in pondere, et justitiam in mensura, ut scilicet inter religiosos sic alter alterum judicaret, quomodo se judicari ab altero praeoptaret, et quod sibi non vellet fieri, nec etiam faceret alteri ⁷⁾).

The second aspect of Philippe, his encouraging recommendations to both cleric and ruler to the study of letters, takes a positive form. In his letter to Heroaldus ⁸⁾), he analyzes the study of the classical authors as a wise step in the development of learning and love of Sacred Scripture. In a long simile on taste, he insists that by the love of reading is developed an appetite for more that can be satisfied only by turning to the Sacred books. He compliments Heroaldus on the training he has received in the schools at Paris, which he claims are worthy of much praise because of their understanding of the principle he (and I) have just mentioned above, and for their contribution to its effect students.

The content of his letter to Engelbert ⁹⁾ provides the most fascinating material of all. He directs the study of letters and philosophy to the interior spiritual perfection of man, again praising the academies at Paris for their accomplishments. He cites examples three times from the lives and studies of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, and he cites instances of similar intellectual dedication in Cicero. A paragraph here might be quoted to illustrate his attitude toward these classical figures and his use of them, which I think different from what is normally considered the medieval attitude and use.

... Plato, non mediocriter curiosus, ad investigandum eam factus est studiosus. Hac autem investigatione non contentus, inde Italiam requisivit, et inter Pythagoricos multam quoque scientiam acquisivit; tali studio deditus ad annum aetatis octogesimum primum venit, in quo finem studii nisi cum vitae termino non invenit ¹⁰⁾).

He recalls that Socrates, Plato's master, spent 99 years consumed in *Laborio litterario*, that Themistocles serves another worthy example, that Cato the censor, when he had perfected himself, as Philippe says, in learning among the Latins, with youthful alacrity

⁷⁾ P. L. CCIII, 83 (B).

⁸⁾ P. L. CCIII, 26 ff.

⁹⁾ P. L. CCIII, 32 ff.

¹⁰⁾ P. L. CCIII, 32 (C). Note especially Philippe's excellent style.

incandescit ad discendum Graecas litteras, et Latinorum doctor Graecorum discipulus fieri nullatenus erubescit ¹¹⁾).

In fact, Philippe employs anecdotes and illustrations from the literary works and lives of at least ¹²⁾ classical authors, and there are some quotations which I have been unable to trace so far. His use of the Oedipus legend on several occasions is particularly interesting. It is not, however, that he uses these classical references and materials that I make mention of them, because it can be argued that familiarity with florilegia would explain this. Instead I think it is significant in our concern for humanism that he uses them in a way a Christian humanist of the, say, third century would use them — as contributing learning to the Christian era, the New Testament, or the New age of Christian Latin learning. Indeed Philippe de Harveng bears real resemblance in his thinking to Lactantius, perhaps to Jerome.

His letter to Richerus ¹³⁾ plainly says *Studia litterarum ecclesiasticis viris esse necessaria*. The study of Plato, Aristotle, Quintillian, and Cicero form, and in his phrase, which I think quite fine, the *Caminus scholaris* ¹⁴⁾, along which the clerk must travel as he seeks knowledge. In another letter ¹⁵⁾ to this same man he commends the study of letters again, not only, he says, at Paris, but anywhere where one can converse in the sound of the trumpets of not only sacred letters put of the « *ethnicorum librorum* ».

I must point out again here, as I have elsewhere ¹⁶⁾, that Philippe wrote two letters of this kind, urging the study of language and letters for the education of young boys, to the two men of whom he seems to have been spiritual director, Philippe of Flanders and Henri of Champagne. His connection with the activities at Troyes by this are part of the influence by the Praemonstratensian Order on that literary center which I have tried also to demonstrate before in another paper ¹⁷⁾.

¹¹⁾ P. L. CCIII, 32 (D).

¹²⁾ Horace, Vergil, Ovid, Plautus, Aristotle, Plato, Cicero, Caesar, Seneca, Solon, Sallust, Persius, Ovid predominates as would be expected.

¹³⁾ P. L. CCIII, 157 ff.

¹⁴⁾ P. L. CCIII, 158 (A).

¹⁵⁾ P. L. CCIII, 175 ff.

¹⁶⁾ In my dissertation, referred to in note 2, see p. 60.

¹⁷⁾ Paper read in private session at the *Modern Language Association of America*, New York, 1954: *The Praemonstratensian Order and the Conte del*

The third great interest which I have found in Philippe is his program for the education of the clergy. This, of course, had been alluded to in the course of his letters, but the program itself, well developed, is found in his largest work, the *De Institutione Clericorum*. The chapters, — or books of this work reveal the virtues he assumed to be necessary for them: *Dignitas, Scientia, Justitia, Continentia, Obedientia, and Silentium*. Sprinkled throughout the work are over thirty quotations from Classical authors, including some less seen figures, such as Sallust, Solon, Persius, Lucan¹⁸). It is in the book, *De Scientia* that Philippe quotes the line from Ovid that seems to sound the dominant note of his program of study, a phrase which the few who have studied Philippe assign him as a motto: *Quod non novit, nemo dicere potest*. It must suffice to reiterate that Philippe's interest in the training of the clergy connects clearly with his exhortations to both clergy and lay in general to make the humane studies the center of intellectual development and spiritual perfection. He cites, he says, Pythagoras' description of a philosopher to clarify this wisdom: *sed (Pythagoras) philosophum appellavit, nec sapientem publice, sed amatorem sapientiae... 19*).

As a kind of corollary to these illustrations of what I consider Philippe's Christian Humanism, mention must be made of what amounts to a real philological fascination that appears at least twice in his works. In the *De Silentio* book of his *De Institutione*, Philippe devotes three long chapters, 46-49²⁰), to the origin and the history of the alphabet, beginning with the Phoenicians, proceeding through the Hebrew, to the Greek, and then to the Roman. He discusses by way of elaborating on the Greek *sophi* the *septem sapientes*²¹), Pythagoras definition of a philosopher again, the origin of the Roman alphabet together with a criticism of those symbols which had been adopted from the Greek alphabet into the Roman, z, k, x, etc. which are unnecessary for it²²). Although there are real problems connected with his discussion of the alphabets — because

Graal: Preliminary. Abstracted in *Analecta Praemonstratensia*, XXXI, Fasc. 1-2, 1955, 166-167.

¹⁸) The 30 duplicate the list in note 11.

¹⁹) In the *Epistola ad Richerum*. P. L. CCIII, 167 (D).

²⁰) P. L. CCIII, 1021 ff.

²¹) P. L. CCIII, 1020 (C).

²²) P. L. CCIII, 1020, 1022.

he is obviously aware of at least three versions of it — nevertheless implicitly clear that Philippe pretends to a knowledge of Greek and Hebrew. This knowledge and in turn, his philological interests were apparently behind his writing of his longest Latin poem, *Logogrypha et Aenigmata* ²³). This poem, which is almost solved from its rebuses, ciphers, and enigmas, again demonstrates in solution that he knew Greek, and, incidentally, suggests a further connection with the vernacular literary activity of the day by its possible relationship to the Grail legend, as I have also pointed out elsewhere ²⁴).

Moreover, that he writes so many secular Latin poems, elegies often to the great men of his time, Abelard, William of Champeaux, Henry of England, Ivo of Chartres, and this rebus poem discussed above, adds a final touch to his character as a 12th century humanist.

Of course, as I have said at the beginning, a work of a man like Philippe cannot be made adequately clear in a survey. Nevertheless I think the character of his work and three main purposes, to defend the Christian world against the encompassing monastic insistence of Bernard of Clairvaux, to argue the worth of the study of language and letters, especially for clerks and rulers, and to forward a program for clerical study that was begun in humane — I think these draw a new part of the picture of the 12th century renaissance. Philippe de Harveng was representative of a forceful element in Praemonstratensian thinking, reading of the other writers shows, and this element, like the whole Praemonstratensian Order aimed at restoring among Christians of the 12th century the Apostolic life of early Christianity. Physically the Order was successful in the fact that, founded in 1120, it had spread by 1220 to England, Italy, Spain, Ireland, Scotland, Hungary, Germany and Poland, and numbered its houses in the hundreds, the chronicles of the Orders show. Materially it succeeded in that some real effect of both its Apostolic Movement has been seen in Franciscanism, and of its concern for learning and an educated clergy in the Dominicans.

Yet the fact remains that almost no one has paid any study to this early group or its movement. The most eloquent spokesmen for

²³) P. L. CCIII, 1396-1398.

²⁴) Paper read at the University of Kentucky, before the Mediaeval Section of the *Foreign Language and Literature Conference*, April, 1956: « The Holy Grail and Philippe de Harvengt's *Logogrypha et Aenigmata* ». Treated also in Appendix A of my dissertation, pp. 136-148. A study of this poem is in progress.

the cause of a 12th century renaissance, even Professor Haskins, have not considered them. It seems to me that the reason for this obscurity in modern times can be explained best by recalling the conciliatory spirit I mentioned earlier, which the Order inherited from St. Norbert, a spirit which some historians of the Order have seen as instrumental in the rapid recession the Order experienced in the discursive scholasticism of the later 13th century. It is known, for instance, that the Praemonstratensians held chairs in the University of Paris, but of the residents of these chairs not one name is known ²⁵).

Nevertheless a strong claim can be made, I think, for their part in the several attitudes which describe the 12th century renaissance. I suggest that their study of Apostolic life as it was discussed in the Latin fathers prompted in them as well a revival of Christian humanism — favor for the writings of the Classical age and once again the battle over the role of the writings in the life and training of Christians and Christian priests — a battle which had been fought among the Latin Fathers. I think that study further into the Praemonstratensians and their ideas will substantiate both this claim, and the proposal that they were integrally connected with the 12th century Renaissance. *If* this be provable, then the scholars' analogy of the 12th century to the so-called « humanistic » Renaissance of a century later can not be longer considered as adequate approach to 12th century intellectual activity. If the Italian Renaissance is a humanist renaissance, then the 12th century Renaissance is one of Christian humanism, and the canons of St. Norbert are its heralds.

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²⁵) I have been corrected on my generalization. Professor Gabriel and Mr. James John, of the Institute For Advanced Study (who has already given me much help) tell me some names are known.