

REVIEWS

THE RELIGIOUS ORDERS IN ENGLAND, VOLUME II. By M. D. Knowles. (Cambridge University Press; 45s.)

There is, indeed, an 'autumnal tinge' about this second volume of Dom David Knowles's great work on the religious orders in England. The Constitutions of Benedict XII, with which his survey opens, represent the last attempt at monastic reform by a medieval pope; and they did little more than 'sanction and delimit existing practice.' If the English monasteries in the later Middle Ages were not notably less observant or more decadent than before, the age was undoubtedly 'marked by a lack of distinction, and by the lack of an absolute standard of excellence'. Among the black monks there was a progressive loosening of community ties, due to the non-residence of the abbot or prior, who now spent much of his time on his estates, or in the discharge of his public functions; to the growing taste for comfort and privacy; and to the universal adoption of the 'wage system'—a development perhaps not wholly unconnected with the contemporary change-over from direct exploitation of the monastic lands to 'rentier' landlordism. At the same time, the originally sharp distinction between the various orders, both of monks and friars, was gradually softened, and at length all but obliterated. Of the various personalities who emerge into prominence in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, none bears the unmistakable stamp of sanctity. Even in a monk of the calibre of Thomas de la Mare, abbot of St Albans from 1349 to 1396, 'the ultimate touch of holiness' seems lacking. As for the rank and file, Dom Knowles accepts the close agreement between Langland, Wyclif and Chaucer as proof of 'the worldliness of the monks and the rascality of the friars'—a judgment which may perhaps be thought to underestimate the element of 'common form' in the charges brought against the religious.

If he depicts the monasticism of the later Middle Ages in somewhat sombre colours, Dom Knowles does not fall into the common error of treating the fifteenth century as a mere prelude to the Reformation. We are shown the credit as well as the debit side of the account. Thus the Black Death, so often regarded as constituting a water-shed in monastic history, is here seen in its true perspective. Its immediate effect was to reduce the monastic population by about a half; but later there was a remarkable recovery, and by the end of the reign of Henry VII, the number of religious had reached the striking total of 12,000. The great abbeys were by then at the height of their external splendour. The abbots of the later Middle Ages were 'practical and munificent

builders of spacious cloisters and majestic towers and sumptuous chantries'. In particular, Ely in the time of Alan of Walsingham, and Gloucester under Abbot Wigmore, were the scene of architectural and artistic achievements of the first importance. Meanwhile, under the protection of the Benedictine constitutions, the higher studies of the religious continued to progress; and the controversies of the fourteenth century brought into temporary prominence a number of 'university monks', of whom Uhtred of Bolden was perhaps the most eminent. Although the great days of monastic historiography were past, the scriptorium of St Albans maintained not unworthily the tradition of Matthew Paris; and some have seen in the learned Abbot Whethamstede a precursor of the English Renaissance. The fifteenth century saw the beginning of the great age of library building, a movement in which the monasteries played an honourable part, although their collections never rivalled those of North Italy or South Germany.

If the development of the older religious foundations continued within the traditional framework, new trends were not wanting. Particularly noteworthy was the foundation, in the later fourteenth and early fifteenth century, of a group of Charterhouses, and the introduction into England of the Bridgittines. In this connection the role of the Lancastrian kings, and especially of Henry V, is of interest. Henry not only founded the Charterhouse of Sheen and the Bridgettine convent of Sion, but in 1421 he summoned all the black monks to a conference at Westminster, at which he proposed to them certain articles of reform—the last time, as Dom Knowles notes, that 'a strong, conscientious and benevolent monarch offered himself to the monks to help them set their house in order'.

Compared with the monks, the friars make a poor showing in this volume. Some space is devoted to the Carmelites and Austin hermits. Of the former, Thomas Netter achieved distinction as scholar, royal confessor and diplomat; while the latter experienced something of an intellectual revival in the second half of the fourteenth century. The mendicants as a whole came under fire in this period from the bishops and the 'possessioner' monks as well as from Wyclif and the Lollards. Richard FitzRalph, Archbishop of Armagh, was their irreconcilable opponent, as also was Uhtred of Bolden. The friars countered by attacking the wealth of the 'possessioners', and lending their support to the contemporary movement for their disendowment; but, confronted in the later fourteenth century by the growing threat of heresy, they forgot their rivalries and drew together in defence of the central tradition of the Church. As Dom Knowles writes: 'Whatever the faults of individuals, the services of friars to the Church were very real. . . . To them more than to the bishops as a body are owing the

firm condemnations and the clear apologetic that threw off the attacks of the Lollards: and it is clear . . . that they were ubiquitous as effective preachers to the city folk, and as confessors and directors to those who strove for a more perfect following of Christ.' But the final verdict remains: 'No Englishman arose in the fifteenth century to show his countrymen the truth and the charity of Christ, which alone would have been able to make the dry bones live, or to see himself, and convey to others, the fullness of meaning of the First Commandment'.

HELENA M. CHEW

THE FOUNDATION OF CONCILIAR THEORY. By Brian Tierney. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought; New Series, Vol. 4. (Cambridge University Press; 27s. 6d.)

The primary purpose of Dr Tierney's study is to trace the origins of conciliar theory on the writings of the canonists between 1140 and 1378. It is a radical criticism of Mgr Martin's conception of Conciliarism as a revolutionary development primarily due to the fact of the great schism and only heralded by Marsilius and Ockham, and of Arquillièrè's theory that the supremacy of the Council over the Pope was first affirmed explicitly by the Franciscan Spirituals in the early fourteenth century. For Dr Tierney Conciliarism is far older and more traditionally orthodox—the logical culmination of ideas embedded in the law and doctrine of the Church itself'. If his conclusions are accepted in entirety they must lead to a radical reassessment of medieval Church history.

No unbiased reader can doubt Dr Tierney's pure scholarship, worthy of his masters Dr Ullman and Dr Kuttner. Perhaps the most valuable section of his book is his sensitive analysis of the teaching of the Dominican John of Paris whose *De Potestate Regia et Papali* is a masterpiece of the new Thomist school. He was a conservatist conciliarist, and Dr Tierney is surely right in suggesting that his treatise is 'a turning point in ecclesiological theory', and in pointing out that his arguments could be more easily assimilated in the schools than those of Marsilius and Ockham since they were based upon generally accepted juristic principles. Besides, his orthodoxy was unquestioned and unquestionable. But his political background might well have been explored more thoroughly in the present volume. It is true that John is a moderate who accepted the resignation of Pope Celestine and wrote against the Colonna cardinals, but he was a Lector of the priory of St Jacques and the French Dominicans were solid in the support of Philip the Fair against Boniface VIII.

Conciliarism and 'Gallicanism' were integral elements in the medieval theory of the constitution of the Church, not fourteenth-