

Henry Bitterfeld of Brzeg and the Observant Reform of the Dominican Order. Critical edition of the treatise 'De formatione et reformatione Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum'.

The aim of the project is to identify the theoretical assumptions and the historical circumstances of the observant reform of the Dominican Order at the end of 14th century as well as some aspects of its development in the 15th century. It will also show a role of the Polish Province of the Order in the Dominican observant movement. The bases of the research will be a treatise of Henry Bitterfeld of Brzeg „De formatione et formatione Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum”. Its critical edition will provide an illustrative material for a series of analytical studies.

The Order of Preachers was one of the most numerous and influential male congregation of the late Middle Ages. The Dominican were important figures in the university universities, they were deeply involved in the life of the Church and they carried out as well an intensive pastoral activity. They were taking a part in all the most important debates of the time as well. One of them was a discussion around a reform of the Church. Dominican observant reform starting at the end of 14th century was a manifestation of the so called „reforma in capite et in membris”, which dominated a history of the Church in the 15th century.

Even though the Dominican observant reform has attracted attention of numerous scholars yet no comprehensive study has been published. Some critical editions of primary sources for a history of the reform are still missing as well. Also a Polish chapter of this history is virtually absent.

One of the aims of this project is to fill, at least partially, this gap. Henry Bitterfeld of Brzeg was a member of Polish Province of the Dominican Order and a professor of the University in Prague. His treatise in the observant reform of the order was the first text of this kind. Henry probably has written it on the request of a General Master of the Order – Raymond of Capua, who has started the observant reform of the order. The treatise contains both a diagnosis of the sources of a crises of the Dominicans, description of the abuses committed by the friars, and solutions leading to the reform and return to the faithfulness of Order’s regulations. A number of quotations taken from the texts on religious life (of Fathers of the Church, Bernard of Clairvaux, Thomas Aquinas) place Bitterfeld’s text in the Christian theological tradition. It is also an important voice not only about a reform of the Dominicans but also about a reform of the church in general.

A critical edition and an analysis of the treatise and its manuscript tradition will allow to describe theoretical assumptions of a the Dominican observant movement, its place in a Christian theological tradition of religious life and in a history of the Church. It will also allow to trace how the ideas of Polish Dominican did spread around the whole Order.

Besides a paper publication of a collection of studies followed by a critical edition of the treatise a digital edition of the text will be published on the website of the Department of Medieval Latin of the Institute of Polish Language of Polish Academy of Science (<http://scriptores.pl/en/utilia/editiones/>), both as a text and included into the corpus of the Polish medieval text to make it accessible for further language analysis (e-Fontes: <http://scriptores.pl/efontes/en/>).