

BARBASTRO GIL, L. (2019). *Los Premonstratenses: su presencia en España (1143-1835)*. Alicante: Instituto Alicantino de Cultura Juan Gil Albert, 317 pp.

I met Luis Barbastro Gil a few years ago, when both of us were teachers at *Francisco Figueras Pacheco*, a High School in Alicante (1979-2007). He has always been a devoted scholar who combined his teaching activity with academic research. He holds a degree in Theology from the Pontifical University of Salamanca (1968) and in Philosophy and Humanities from the University of Barcelona (1977), as well as a doctorate from the University of Alicante (1983). He is a renowned researcher for his studies on the history of the liberal revolution and the Church of Spain, and the author of numerous works that are mandatory reading in these fields. His methodology, the archival and bibliographic sources consulted, and his reasoned and always contrasted conclusions serve greatly to better understand the complex History of Spain in the first half of the 19th century. In the field of Church History, three main works stand out: *El clero valenciano en el Trienio liberal* (1820-1823), Alicante, 1985 (theme of his Doctoral Thesis); *Revolución liberal y reacción* (1808-1833), Alicante, 1987, and *El episcopado español y el alto clero en la Guerra de la Independencia* (1808-1814). *La huella del afrancesamiento*, Alicante, 2013. His study *Los afrancesados. Primera emigración política del siglo XIX español* (1813-1820), Madrid, 1993, is considered pioneering and innovative, from the perspective of analysis, motivations and quantification of the number of French people in the Valencian region. Other books of interest are *El señorío del Monasterio de Rueda* (1202-1835) Zaragoza, 1993, and *El Monasterio de Piedra. Historia y paisaje turístico*, Zaragoza, 2005.

Los Premonstratenses: su presencia en España (1143-1835) can be considered the first global and diachronic study of the Premonstratensian religious order in Spain. It treats the development of the order in Spain, from its beginnings in 1143 to its end in 1835. The book is organized in three distinct parts. In the first part, the author analyses the foundation of the order in the 12th century, the canonical nature of its members, the administrative and territorial organization of Premontré, the signs of identity of the order and the lifestyle of its members; as well as its extension through the different regions of Europe (pp. 17-57). The second part is dedicated to the expansion and roots of the Premonstratensians in Spain, followed by a detailed historical-artistic study of the three most important Premonstratensian abbeys in Spain: Santa María de Retuerta (Valladolid), Santa María de la Vid (Burgos) and Santa María la Real de Aguilar de Campoo (Palencia). In the last chapter of this second part, the crisis and reform of

the Spanish Premonstratensians in the 16th century is analysed. In the third part of the book, the author explains with precision the magnificent history of the Spanish Premonstratensian Congregation: its origins and statutes, its contribution to the culture of the Baroque and the flourishing and energy of the Premontré in the 18th century; and later, the author studies the decline and disappearance of the Premonstratensian order in Spain, the dynamics of the order in the 19th century and its end, with the exclaustation and confiscation of the assets of their abbeys caused by Mendizábal Disentailment. Compared to other monastic orders, what identifies the Norbertine order throughout its history is its monastic lifestyle, similar in many ways to the Cistercians, and its pastoral and missionary dimension or *cura animarum*.

The author points out the cultural bias and the intellectual profile of this order, which in the 17th and 18th centuries had splendid libraries, schools, academies or gymnasiums inside or outside the abbeys in Europe. In a few pages, he manages to reconstruct the vicissitudes experienced by the order over nine centuries, mainly the dialectic tension between centralism and autonomy suffered inside the organization.

The researcher distinguishes four periods in the life of the order in Spain: the first one corresponds to the 12th-14th centuries (medieval times), with phases of growth and cyclical crisis. The second one covers the 15th and 16th centuries: the first century of economic, moral and religious decline, and the second of defence of the order, about to be absorbed by the Hieronymite order, event that did not take place thanks to the actions of Gregory XIII and the nuncio Ormaneto (pp. 186-187). The third period comprises the 17th and 18th centuries, when the split of the Spanish Premonstratensian branch and the birth of the reformed Spanish Congregation occurred. It is a period that the author describes as «golden», due to the spiritual flourishing, and the existence of a group of theologians, preachers and writers who had a prominent role in the Church of Spain and America, some of whose dioceses would be governed by Spanish Premonstratensian bishops, to whom the author refers extensively, especially in chapter VIII. The fourth section describes the period from the last years of the 18th century to the first third of the 19th century: it is a time of decline, decline and extinction of the order. The war of the Convention (1793-1795) mortally wounded Urdax monastery and the political and military battles of the War of Independence greatly damaged all their monasteries. Finally, the ecclesiastical confiscations of Mendizábal in 1835 caused the closure of the sixteen existing Premonstratensian monasteries, and in the end, the religious order never re-emerged in Spain. The author highlights the fact that the Spanish canonical abbeys, unlike those in Europe, did not have an important pastoral activity outside the cloister, and did not run

many parish churches, with the exception of those of Aguilar, Ibeas, Bujedo, La Caridad and Urdax. Another differential characteristic is that the Premonstratensian order of the European abbeys had an aristocratic bias, whereas in Spain the extraction of the religious members was always very heterogeneous. In contrast to the perpetuity of the abbots, very common in Europe, in Spain abbots were elected every three years. The contributions of the Spanish Mostenses to the general order were modest, in relation to the origins, heritage and architectural wealth and their external projection. However, their contribution was very important when persecution broke out between 1567 and 1568 by the Hieronymite «Reformers» (pp. 187-192). The Spanish Premonstratensians defended the good name of this institution and its survival in Spain, exalted the figure of its founder, who was canonized in 1582, and made the spirit and charisma of the order revive. After the rupture, from 1600 on, the new congregation maintained good relations with the most vital Circaria in Europe (Bravante, Westphalia, Swabia, Bohemia and Bavaria).

To sum up, the reform of the Spanish Prémontré in the 16th century and the birth of the Spanish Congregation produced two important fruits: first, the revival of the Norbertine charisma, the spirituality of the Augustinian rule, the cult of the Eucharist and the apostolic mission; and second, the spread of the Spanish baroque spirituality of Marian devotion to the Immaculate Virgin Mary. In the epilogue, the author takes stock of the current fate of the main Mostensian monasteries after the confiscation of Mendizábal. Four of them have passed to other religious orders: Santa María de la Vid, to the Filipino Augustinians; Bujedo de Candepajares, to the Salle Brothers; Bellpuig, to the Marist Brothers; and San Leonardo de Alba de Tormes, to the Repair Fathers. The abbey in Aguilar de Campoo is owned by the community and has become the Centre for Romanesque Studies of the «Junta de Castilla y León». Three old abbeys (Retuerta, La Caridad and San Pelayo) are owned by private companies and others are in ruins or have practically disappeared. The main vestiges of the Premonstratensians in Spain are the current architectural buildings of Aguilar de Campoo, San Pelayo de Arenillas, Santa Cruz de Ribas, Santa María de la Vid, Retuerta, La Caridad, Bujedo, Bellpuig and Alba de Tormes and the nuns' convents of Toro and Villoria de Orbigo. The author closes the book with grateful acknowledgment of the order's legacy, endorsing the motto of their members: *prêt à toute oeuvre de bien*. The work is completed with an extensive and detailed bibliography, which gives us an idea of the conscientious work of its author.

EMILIANO BLASCO BARQUERO
Catedrático de Inglés de I.E.S.
 emilianoblasco@gmail.com