

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Leif Grane. *Kirken i den Europaeiske Middelalder.* Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, 1999.
267 pp. Kr 255.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-87-12-03393-6.

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In this book, the late Professor Leif Grane (or “L.G.”) offers a short introduction to the history of the medieval church and its relationship with the secular powers that dominated various eras of the Middle Ages. Although it is brief—covering the history of the medieval church in only 267 pages—Grane’s book has turned out quite well.

As a first point, L.G.’s mastery of the Danish language makes the book a great pleasure to read. As a chronological frame, Grane concentrated on the centuries from approximately 700 until 1500 A.D. Because he was well aware of intense scholarly discussions in the last several decades regarding the appropriate division of history into periods (and especially of discussions on medieval European history), Grane dedicated the first and last chapters of his book to a discussion of his choices in chronology.

Kirken i den Europaeiske Middelalder is divided into four major sub-periods: from 700 until 900 A.D. (the early medieval period), from 900 till 1050 (a somewhat transitional period between the early and the high Middle Ages), from 1060 till 1300 (the high medieval period), and finally from 1300 till 1500 (the late medieval period). His account ends just a few years before the Reformation, in the first half of the sixteenth century. Still, L.G. cannot resist commenting on the Reformation anyway, since he was a specialist on this particular period of church history.

Due to the lack of space in his book, the author has clearly been forced to make some serious decisions concerning the topics he wanted to include. It seems to me that he managed this difficult task very well, and given the book a well-balanced form. In nearly every chapter,

the history of the church is dealt with in a threefold manner: presenting the medieval church in relation to the secular powers, to the theology, and to lay people of the time.

L.G.’s analysis was an overview of church history, rather than a work of primary research. He therefore depended heavily on the works of other scholars when writing this book. This is all very understandable, but it is rather remarkable that so many of the references he cited are rather old (not to say outdated!). In recent years, there have been some very important studies in medieval church history. This includes not only those which treat the relationship between secular powers and the church, but also studies of the theology of the church in relation to the religious life of the lay people. Not many of these books, published in the late eighties and the nineties, are mentioned in the bibliography. This oversight includes several very important books on these topics. One only has to think of the many books on late medieval religious life, as well as on the crusades, which were published in the last decade or so. This is clearly a serious drawback for the student who will have to look elsewhere for a list of more recent scholarly writings.

Despite this drawback, *Kirken i den Europaeiske Middelalder* is a very useful book for anyone with an interest in the history of the medieval church—not least of all for a student wishing to gain a Scandinavian perspective on the medieval period. No one can fully understand the church history of medieval Scandinavia without a proper knowledge of church history from this period of time, in general. Therefore I highly recommend this book as a very useful introduction on the subject.

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