CHAPTER THREE

JOSEPH KLEUTGEN AND THE SPHERES OF PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY AS A MODEL FOR THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY

During the latter half of the nineteenth century Joseph Kleutgen would offer a new model of the history of medieval philosophy. He would furnish the broad framework which Stöckl would follow in writing his history of medieval philosophy, the first general history of medieval philosophy written according to the spheres of philosophical inquiry. An understanding of the background and education of Kleutgen helps to explain the philosophical, theological, and political reasons that lie behind the construction of this history. He was no armchair philosopher, but wrote his interpretation of medieval philosophy in order to restore stability to the traditional institutions of church and state. I will discuss the political and ecclesiastical context of Kleutgen in order to indicate why this university-educated German would, after the revolution of 1848, turn to the philosophy of the Middle Ages to discover a philosophical foundation for rebuilding Europe. We will then be in a position to appreciate his role in interpreting the history of medieval philosophy through the lenses of the standard areas of philosophy.

Joseph Kleutgen was born in Dortmund in 1811 during the political and ecclesiastical upheavals of the revolutionary period. Dortmund had been a free city of the Holy Roman Empire until the imperial decree of 1803, which ceded it to Nassau (Dortmund 1910). The French took over in 1806 and gave it to the grand-duke of Berg two years later, after which the king of the Netherlands ceded it to Prussia in 1815 as part of the land of Westphalia.

Kleutgen was baptized at the “Dominican” church in Dortmund, a church that had been a Dominican cloister for centuries before its secularization in 1803.¹ The state authorities decided in 1818 to

¹ Kleutgen was baptized on Good Friday, the day that Catholics celebrate the death of Jesus, two days before Easter. He would later consider this a sign that he was intended to suffer in laboring for the Catholic Church (Langhorst 1883, 106). There were three cloisters in Dortmund secularized in 1803, Franciscan, Dominican, and Katharine.
grant the former Dominican property to the Catholic community of Dortmund, which transformed the friary into a parish church the following year. In 1819, when Joseph was eight years old, a new pastor arrived, by the name of Laurentius Stratmann (Deufel 1976, 25). The first non-Dominican posted to the church, he could find no suitable rooms at the deteriorating cloister and moved in with the Kleutgen family.

Father Stratmann and religion were important to the Kleutgens. For instance, the number of Kleutgen children who became priests or nuns was high, an example for what has become a stereotype of the nineteenth-century revival of the Catholic Church. After the death of Joseph’s father and the remarriage of his mother, more children were born who would choose an ecclesiastical career. Two of Joseph’s full sisters and one half sister became nuns. One full brother and one half brother followed Kleutgen to study for the priesthood. Another full sister who wanted to become a nun, remained at home to take care of her aging mother and went about these duties dressed in the habit of a member of a religious order.

After completing his Abitur and spending a year devoted to the private study of classical Greek texts, Kleutgen chose to study philology at Munich (Deufel 1976, 28-29). At the beginning of the summer semester of 1830, he traveled to the university at Munich, “the Athens on the Isar,” where he attended lectures on Plato, Pindar, Demosthenes, Horace, philosophy, aesthetics, and art history (Langhorst 1883, 118-119). During his first semester Kleutgen joined a student association known as “Germania.” Ludwig I of Bavaria had legalized such associations in 1825 (Langhorst 1883, 121). The Munich branch of Germania numbered around 105 members out of a student population of 1,945 (Spindler 1974, 151). Kleutgen’s membership in this student association would have negative consequences for his studies and his relations with the Prussian government for years to come. This was after all the Summer of the

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2 Kleutgen would also spend time with a Father Rustemeier. When he was fifteen, he lived and studied for a year (1826-1827) with Father Rustemeier in Lippstadt. Beginning with the Eucharist each morning, he would study all day and read poetry along the Lipp river in the evening (Langhorst 1883, 113-114).

3 One brother was released from his studies and did not continue towards the priesthood and the other was ordained for the diocese of Paderborn, but left, was married, and became a Lutheran pastor (Langhorst 1883, 108-111; Deufel 1976, 24-25).