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**"SACERDOTIUM, IMPERIUM ET STUDIUM": POLITICS AND THE
CURRICULUM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PARIS
IN THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY**

by

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HY 490
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April 21, 1995

**"SACERDOTIUM, IMPERIUM ET STUDIUM": POLITICS AND THE
CURRICULUM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PARIS
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For Alexander of Roes, writing in 1281, the priesthood, the empire, and scholarly study were the three powers, or virtues, which sustained the life and health of Christendom.¹ These three institutions were exemplified by the Catholic Church led by the pope in Rome, the feudal hierarchy headed by the Holy Roman Emperor and the university, especially the University of Paris.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries western European thinkers recovered the writings of the Greek philosopher Aristotle, preserved since ancient times by the Islamic kingdoms of the near east. Historians have long viewed this rediscovery of Aristotelian teaching as a turning point in history. With Aristotelian ideas, they argued, the medieval world, steeped in Christian dogma, began the transition to the modern, secular world.²

¹Hastings Rashdall, The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages, 3 vols., eds. F. M. Powicke and A. B. Emden (London: Oxford University Press, 1895; reprint 1936), vol.1: 2.

²J.B. Bury, A History of Freedom of Thought (London: no publisher, 1913); William J. Courtenay, "Inquiry and Inquisition: Academic Freedom in Medieval Universities," Church History 58:2 (1989):168-81; Etienne Gilson, History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages (New York: Random House, 1955); Charles Homer Haskins, The Rise of the Universities (Providence: Brown University Press, 1923; reprint, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1957); Gordon Leff, Paris and Oxford Universities in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries: An Intellectual and Institutional History, New Dimensions in History: Essays in Comparative History, ed. Norman F. Cantor (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1968); and Fernand van Steenberghen, Aristotle in the West: The Origins of Latin Aristotelianism, trans. Leonard Johnston (Louvain, Belgium: Nauwelaerts Publishing House, 1970), and The Philosophical Movement in the Thirteenth Century, (Belfast: Nelson, 1955).

Historians have based their arguments on two related propositions: that modern secular thinking is better than medieval religious thinking and that the newly recovered Aristotelian corpus provided the key for a progressive step. The evidence for the proof of the first proposition has been taken as too obvious for discussion. The conservative reaction of the church to the re-introduction of ancient, pagan philosophy has been the evidence for the second. The church's reaction has been characterized as the clash of two titanic ideologies, Christian Augustinianism and pagan Aristotelianism, and is represented in the prohibitions against Aristotelian philosophy at the University of Paris in the thirteenth century.

The two aforementioned propositions are not entirely correct. Historians, in interpreting their sources, have been perhaps overly influenced by biased Renaissance accounts of medieval thinking. More fundamentally, however, they have neglected the human nature of the men involved in these events. Ideas do not act, only people act. Ideas provide a framework for the actions of people. By rejecting interpretations which cannot be grounded in the evidence and by examining the social, that is to say political, context of the events of the thirteenth century, we will see that the much heralded restrictions placed on Aristotelian teaching have been over-emphasized and were never true prohibitions.³

³ I am using an Aristotelian notion of "political" here that is actually interchangeable with "social." While large-scale "national" politics did play a part in the development of the university, politics on the small-scale (i.e.,

Italian humanists of the Renaissance consciously identified themselves with their classical literary ancestors over and against what they considered to have been a long period of darkness, devoid of any intellects or institutions worthy of imitation: the middle age which separated the glorious classical past from its glorious rebirth. Similarly, the writers of the Romantic era of the nineteenth century longed to separate themselves from their coldly rational Enlightenment forefathers. These Romantic writers hearkened back to a crude and barbaric yet heroic past. The production of the vast majority of writers during this time cannot be considered "historical" by contemporary definition, but rather literary. The value of this work lies in the influence it had on later scholars.⁴

In the nineteenth century scholars of "scientific" history identified, collected and published as much manuscript material as they could. All later historians owe much to the pioneers in this field such as Henri Denifle and Emile Chatelain, who collected and published most of the documents pertinent to the first three hundred years of the University of Paris.⁵

university and faculty governance) was more important to the particular decisions concerning Aristotle's works.

⁴For a more complete historiography of the Middle Ages, see Norman F. Cantor, Inventing the Middle Ages: The Lives, Works, and Ideas of the Great Medievalists of the Twentieth Century (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991).

⁵Henri Denifle, O.P. and Emile Chatelain, Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis, 4 vols. (Brussels: Culture et Civilisation, 1899). This collection will be referred to hereafter as CUP, followed by the volume number and page number wherein the document appears. English translations of most of the important documents relating to the University of Paris in the thirteenth century are available in Lynn Thorndike, ed, University Records and Life in the Middle Ages, Records of Civilization, Sources and Studies, ed. Austin P. Evans (Columbia University Press, 1944; reprint, New York: Octagon Books, 1971).

Historians next mastered these massive volumes, plus the numerous still unpublished manuscripts, and wrote the earliest narratives of the medieval period. Products of the Victorian era, historians like Hastings Rashdall emphasized the constitutional development of the universities.⁶ They described the universities' institutional evolution, but never really attempted any sort of analysis of why these evolutionary changes took place.

The next generation of historians began the process of studying the middle ages standing, as it were, on the shoulders of the Victorians. Early twentieth-century historians had a better view of the period as a whole, and began analyzing what they observed. However, their analyses were flawed. Post-Darwinian historians thought they saw mirrored in the past current scientific struggles against religious dogma. They described the medieval world before the re-introduction of Aristotle as they viewed their own world before Darwin, one in which "reason was enchained, thought was enslaved, and knowledge made no progress."⁷

Charles Homer Haskins (1870-1937) at Harvard and Etienne Gilson (1884-1978) first in France and later at Toronto identified medieval institutions with modern ones. Haskins concentrated on political rationalization and the medieval origins of the modern notion of state. Gilson believed in the unifying, synthesizing role of the Catholic Church. A monolithic view of medieval culture led Haskins to describe the debate over Aristotle as "an

⁶Rashdall, The Universities

⁷Bury, Freedom of Thought, 81.

intermittent fight between Christian theology and pagan philosophy."⁸

Contemporary with Gilson was Cambridge's Benedictine professor, Michael David Knowles (1898-1974). Knowles was largely self-taught and therefore avoided the narrow training of the majority of British historians. He devoted just enough of his histories to institutional narrative to be accepted by mainstream scholars, but, influenced by continental trends, his real strength lay in biography.⁹ He described the complex lives of people within medieval religious communities and was one of the first to place the development of medieval scholastic thought in a social and political context. His exposition of medieval thought and thinkers remains a mainstay of medieval intellectual bibliographies.¹⁰

One of Dom Knowles's students was Gordon Leff. Leff studied under Knowles in the early 1950s and learned from him the importance of the medieval intellectual tradition. Leff synthesized the work of earlier historians and brought together the narrow studies of the constitutional development of the universities and intellectual history. However, he rejected Knowles's political characterization of the events at the University of Paris.

Leff returned to the idea that the basis for the "opposition to Aristotle lay in the difference in outlook between arts and

⁸Haskins, The Rise, 52.

⁹Michael David Knowles, Saints and Scholars: Twenty-five Medieval Portraits (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962).

¹⁰Michael David Knowles, The Evolution of Medieval Thought (New York: Longman Press, 1962).

theology."¹¹ Ignoring the social context for the ideas of medieval men has led historians to overemphasize the events in Paris and to turn the disagreements of a few men into a struggle between ideologies, one pagan, the other Christian.

Christianity has long been a religion based on books. Christian philosophers and theologians based their studies on the Scriptures and the writings of the early church fathers. Medieval Christians regarded these writings as divinely inspired and believed they contained all the information necessary to live the life on earth that would guarantee salvation in the hereafter.¹² The people of the middle ages were preoccupied with the idea of salvation. Death and suffering were ever-present parts of their lives, and Christianity offered them a welcomed respite.

Just as important as the day-to-day lessons to be learned from the Bible were more abstract philosophical notions. Abstruse debates on the nature of being, so common in the medieval era, had as their justification the biblical identification of God in Exodus 3:14: "I am who am." To study God, then, was to study being. In the middle ages this study was supported by both the church and the empire and took place in the schools forming the third pillar which supported Christendom.

For centuries before the development of the universities the seat of Christian learning had been the schools of the monasteries. Here the knowledge of the ancients had been passed down from

¹¹Leff, Paris and Oxford, 192.

¹²Gilson, History of Christian Philosophy, 3-4.

generation to generation through hand-copied manuscripts and the efforts of monks assigned to teach novices. After the year 1000 and the rise of towns in western Europe, schools attached to cathedrals became more important than monastic schools. The university of Paris grew out of one of these, the cathedral school of Notre Dame.¹³

The head of the cathedral school was the *magister scholarum* or master of lectures. Later called the chancellor, this assistant to the bishop oversaw the administration of the growing cathedral schools. At Notre Dame, the chancellor granted a license, the *licentia docendi*, to those men whom he allowed to teach in the schools in and around the cathedral. The papacy placed a high priority on learning and in answer to complaints about overly generous licensing fees, the Third Lateran Council of 1179 forbade the chancellor of a cathedral school to charge any fee for the license or to refuse to license any qualified man.¹⁴

In the twelfth century the number of licensed masters in Paris increased steadily, drawing huge numbers of students. Each master ran a *schola*, or school, to which his reputation drew fee-paying students who wished to study under him, or to learn something of his particular specialty. By mid-century the schools of Parisian masters surrounded the cathedral and filled an entire section of

¹³ For more details on the early history of the University, see Stephen C. Ferruolo, The Origins of the University: The Schools of Paris and their Critics, 1100-1215 (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1985).

¹⁴CUP, 1, 10.

the city known, as a result, as the *quartier latin*, the Latin Quarter.

Most students came to Paris at about the age of 14 or 15 under the aegis of an ecclesiastical or royal scholarship or benefice. At Paris they studied under a master the "liberal arts," an ancient title given to a general course of study. The liberal arts included the introductory *trivium*, which consisted of grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic, and the more advanced *quadrivium* of music, arithmetic, geometry and astronomy. Medieval educators considered this basic education to be essential preparation for the study of medicine, law, or theology. After approximately seven years of study, a student sat for an examination and if he passed, was given the license to lecture on the liberal arts. This same man would also be taking advanced classes under a master of law, medicine or theology. Few men thought of the liberal arts as a teaching career and instead taught the arts only until they received a license to teach one of the advanced disciplines. At Paris the masters were famous for their knowledge of theology.

By the beginning of the thirteenth century, the masters at Paris had developed a strong corporate feeling. They demanded and gained concessions from the chancellor. The masters sought to control the quality of education they provided and therefore wanted the right to examine all degree candidates. The story of the schools of Paris in the thirteenth century is, on one level, one of

the masters' struggle for autonomy from the chancellor and the bishop.

Even though the chancellor began from a position of strength, the masters were not without power, especially after they joined together in their efforts. A master acquired students through his reputation which was largely word-of-mouth and gained through public debates with other masters. The chancellor could not force the masters to accept anyone he had licensed and without acceptance by the masters and their participation in debates, no man could gain enough students to support himself. Something of a compromise was reached early in the thirteenth century. The masters examined and recommended a student to the chancellor who retained sole authority to grant the license.

The term *universitas* does not appear in documentary evidence until the masters began their fight against the chancellor. A university indicated not a group of buildings, but rather all the masters who taught in Paris. In their efforts to control admission to their ranks and to oversee the quality of scholarship at Paris, the group of masters acted as a sort of scholastic guild.¹⁵ Popes, bishops, and kings upheld the right of the masters to elect leaders and to draw up regulations for themselves.¹⁶

The masters eventually gathered into sub-groups, or faculties, to oversee the teaching of the four disciplines, liberal arts,

¹⁵For a more detailed study of the constitutional development of the university, see Rashdall, *The Universities*, vol. 1; and Gaines Post, "Parisian Masters as a Corporation," *Speculum* 9:4 (October 1934): 421-445).

¹⁶CUP, 1, 59-61; 78-80; 136-39.

medicine, law, and theology.¹⁷ The Parisian masters were as concerned with maintaining scholastic standards as they were with achieving their autonomy. Complaints to the pope by Bishop Stephen of Tournai between 1192 and 1203 that the traditional liberal arts were being neglected at Paris for logical and philosophical studies resulted in efforts at internal and external reform.¹⁸ It is in this context of reform that the first conflicts over the works of Aristotle took place.

Medieval students had studied some of the works of Aristotle for several hundred years. Passed on through the commentaries of Cassiodorus and the translations of Boethius and later Gerard of Cremona, some of Aristotle's books on logic, ethics and even physics, or natural science, were standard arts texts.¹⁹ Christian theologians, philosophers and lawyers had viewed nature as normative long before new Aristotelian texts and translations arrived in western Europe. Seneca's admonition, "*propositum nostrum est secundum naturam vivere*," (our purpose is to live following nature) was quoted in the twelfth century by scholars at

¹⁷ For more information on the development of the separate faculties at Paris, see Stephen C. Ferruolo, "*Quid dant artes nisi luctum?*": Learning, Ambition, and Careers in the Medieval University," History of Education Quarterly 28:1 (Spring 1988):1-22; John Marenbon, "The Theoretical and Practical Autonomy of Philosophy as a Discipline in the Middle Ages: Latin Philosophy, 1250-1350," Acta Philosophica Fennica 48 (1990): 262-274; James A. Weisheipl, "The Parisian Faculty of Arts in Mid-Thirteenth Century: 1240-1270," The American Benedictine Review 25:2 (June 1974): 200-217.

¹⁸CUP, 1, 47-48.

¹⁹William of Moerbeke, "A List of Translations Made From Greek into Latin in the Thirteenth Century" in Edward Grant, ed., A Source Book in Medieval Science (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 35-38.

Paris, such as Peter Abelard and William of St. Thierry.²⁰ The problem the masters of Paris encountered at the opening of the thirteenth century centered less on the introduction of alien, pagan ideas than on the actions of a few masters and their students.

In 1210 the provincial synod of Sens met in Paris, presided over by Peter of Corbeil, archbishop of Sens.²¹ The council met to consider the accusation of heresy against several masters and students at the university in Paris. Amaury of Bène had been a master of logic and theology until his death in 1206 or 1207. David of Dinant was currently a master. Both men used Aristotelian logic to argue for pantheistic notions. The writings of both men were very popular and both had numerous followers among Parisian masters and students.

The council denounced Amaury and David as heretics, ordered Amaury's body exhumed and placed in unconsecrated ground and imprisoned many of his and David's followers.²² The council ordered the writings of both men to be turned in to the bishop of Paris and burned. Anyone found in possession of the prohibited works after Christmas of 1210 would be considered a heretic.

²⁰D.E. Luscombe and G.R. Evans, "The Twelfth Century Renaissance," in The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought, c.350-c.1450, ed. J.H. Burns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 334 (translation mine).

²¹The details of the events preceding the 1210 council are sketchy. Apparently the masters referred the following cases to the council after an internal hearing of some kind. For more detailed biographical information on the people throughout the rest of this paper and a complete explanation of their philosophic doctrines, see Gilson, History of Christian Philosophy, Parts 6, 8, and 9.

²²CUP, I, 70.

In their decree, the council included only one sentence concerning Aristotle: "Neither the books of Aristotle on natural philosophy nor their commentaries are to be read at Paris in public or in secret, and this we forbid under penalty of excommunication."²³ According to the interpretation of Gilson, Leff and others this ban on Aristotelian books initiated a century-long struggle between philosophers and theologians. "Since nothing could stop the flow of philosophical studies," said Gilson, "the theologians attempted at least to dam it up."²⁴

The evidence, however, does not support the claim that Aristotle was banned, much less that the 1210 decree began a century of struggle. The verb *legere*, translated as "to read" meant more specifically "to read aloud" in the medieval world. In a scholastic context it meant "to lecture."²⁵ No one was forbidden by the council to keep the works of Aristotle on nature in his personal possession as was the case with the heretical writings of Amaury and David. Note also that the restriction applies only to scholars "at Paris." Scholars continued to read and lecture on Aristotle's natural philosophy at all of the other universities throughout the thirteenth century.

The first formal regulations for the university reiterated the decree of 1210. Cardinal Robert de Courson, a papal legate, acted

²³The translation is from Thorndike, ed., University Records, 26-27.

²⁴Gilson, History of Christian Philosophy, 250.

²⁵Fernand van Steenberghen, Aristotle in the West: The Origins of Latin Aristotelianism, trans. Leonard Johnston (Louvain, Belgium: Nauwelaerts Publishing House, 1970), 70-71.

under orders from the pope to help clear up the complaints of Stephen of Tournai and others. In 1215 Robert issued a decree which recognized and approved the regulations the faculty of masters had issued for itself some time earlier.²⁶ The regulations were separate for the faculty of arts and the faculty of theology. After prescribing the number of years that scholars must study the arts before receiving degrees, the books which they must have heard and in what order they should have heard them, Robert adds concerning the masters of arts: "They shall not lecture on the books of Aristotle on metaphysics and natural philosophy or on summaries of them or concerning the doctrine of master David of Dinant or the heretic Amaury or Mauritius of Spain."²⁷ This admonition is not repeated in the section on the regulations for the theological faculty. In fact there is far more space dedicated to the regulations concerning clothing than to the writings of Aristotle.

There is no evidence in the decree of 1210 or the regulations of 1215 that theologians were attempting to dam up the flow of philosophical studies. The archbishop of Sens and the bishops of the council met to determine a matter of doctrine in the traditional manner prescribed by canon law.²⁸ Their actions were against the teaching and publication of two men whose doctrines the council deemed heretical. The pope, through his legate, examined

²⁶CUP, 1, 78-79.

²⁷Thorndike, ed., University Records, 28.

²⁸Gratian, Concordia Discordantium Canonum, I, xviii.

and upheld their findings. It is not surprising that reading the works of Aristotle might be restricted when others had just put these works to dangerous use. At the beginning of the century the ecclesiastical authorities were more concerned with the actions of men than the encroachment of new pagan philosophies.

Between 1215 and 1230 the university continued to grow and consolidate its corporate structure.²⁹ The first Franciscan and Dominican schools opened in 1217-1219. These mendicant schools were a source of irritation for the secular masters. Mendicant scholars came from their own convent schools and did not spend any time in the arts classes, but went straight to the study of theology as was prescribed in their regulations.³⁰ Most galling of all was the rate at which their classes grew, drawing students away from the secular masters' classes and decreasing those masters' revenues.³¹ When the masters quit teaching and left the city in 1229 to protest the treatment by urban authorities of scholars involved in a tavern brawl, the mendicants refused to follow them and continued teaching classes.³²

Pope Gregory IX worked to restore the university during the dispersion of 1229-1231. His legates negotiated concessions between the masters and the Parisian authorities. In 1231, when

²⁹For a detailed account of the activities, regulations, and curriculum of the faculties of arts and theology, see Mary Martin McLaughlin, Intellectual Freedom and Its Limitations in the University of Paris in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries (New York: Arno Press, 1977).

³⁰CUP, 1, 112-13.

³¹Several attempts were made to limit the number of masters in theology and arts, none of which were very successful. See CUP 1, 65; 252-58.

³²Rashdall, The Universities, vol. 1: 334-36.

the masters finally returned, Gregory issued the bull "*Parens scientiarum*," "Parent of the Sciences."³³ In this document, Gregory reiterated all the privileges and regulations of the university. Only one paragraph deals with the curriculum. It states that the "books on nature which were prohibited in provincial council for certain cause they shall not use at Paris until they have been examined and purged from all suspicion of errors."³⁴ Aristotle was not even mentioned by name and once again the restrictions applied only to Paris. In fact, in 1229 the new papal university at Toulouse had advertised that, at Toulouse, "those who wish to scrutinize the bosom of nature to the inmost can hear here the books of Aristotle which were forbidden at Paris."³⁵ If Gregory was concerned about the new philosophical works, he was not concerned enough to prohibit their advertised study at Toulouse.

In a letter two weeks after "*Parens*," Gregory ordered the abbot of St. Victor and the prior of the Dominicans at Paris to absolve any masters or scholars who had been excommunicated for violating the council's decree of 1210.³⁶ There is much evidence in the extant writings of the theology faculty that many masters were studying and making use of Aristotle in one form or another.³⁷ Since these masters had to come from the faculty of liberal arts, it is probable that Aristotle was being studied there as well. As

³³CUP, 1, 136-39.

³⁴Thorndike, ed., *University Records*, 38.

³⁵CUP, 1, 129-31; translation in Thorndike, ed., *University Records*, 34.

³⁶CUP, 1, 138.

³⁷Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy*, 244-46.

he promised in "Parens" Gregory established a commission to investigate the Aristotelian works and appointed as its chairman William of Auxerre, one of the theologians at Paris who used Aristotelian language frequently.³⁸ The committee did not complete its assignment, however, since William died later that year.

Gregory had studied theology at Paris as a younger man. He had firsthand knowledge of the philosophical climate there.³⁹ After William's death he did not make any move to reconvene the commission. After the bull of 1231, no one made any other proclamations, either locally or universally, concerning lectures on Aristotle. By 1255 all the works of Aristotle then available, which was most of the corpus and all of his books on nature, were required texts in the faculty of liberal arts.⁴⁰ It is difficult to find evidence supporting Leff's proposition that by 1228 "the growth of Aristotelian philosophy was coming to be regarded as a serious threat."⁴¹

After 1231 scholars such as William of Auvergne, Albert the Great, William of St. Amour, St. Bonaventure, and St. Thomas Aquinas began openly reading, assimilating and discussing all the new Aristotelian books and all the commentaries on those books. The writings on all sides of any particular question, theological

³⁸Ibid., 429-30.

³⁹Horace Kinder Mann, The Lives of the Popes in the Middle Ages. 18 vols. (St. Louis, Mo.: B. Herder Book Co., 1929) vol. 13: 171-75.

⁴⁰William of Moerbeke in Grant, ed., A Source Book, 43-44; For more information on the curriculum during the thirteenth century, see also Pearl Kibre, The Nations in the Mediaeval Universities (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1948).

⁴¹Leff, Paris and Oxford, 203.

or philosophical, were by mid-century completely subsumed in Aristotelian language and method.⁴² Also by mid-century the faculties in Paris were again having trouble assimilating the mendicants. A great quarrel developed between the Franciscans, who enjoyed papal favor, and the secular masters over the dignity of poverty. The Dominicans joined the fray over the prophetic writings of the Franciscan Joachim of Flora. The dispute brought in both the papacy and the king, Louis IX.⁴³ Just after this multifaceted disagreement died down, a young man named Siger de Brabant began to lecture in arts at Paris.

Siger began lecturing sometime between 1260 and 1265, when he was about twenty-one years old.⁴⁴ He had become fascinated early in his studies with metaphysics and natural philosophy and was by all accounts very capable. A dynamic speaker, it was not long before he drew a great number of students. His doctrines aroused the interest of Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas, both of whom argued against him in several treatises. The doctrines they opposed were a compilation of Aristotelian and other notions which denied the absolute power of God to do what Aristotle had claimed to be logically impossible. Siger and a compatriot, Boethius of Dacia, argued philosophic truth and theological truth could be opposed and yet both remain true.

⁴²Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy*, 248-49.

⁴³For an account of this quarrel, see Peter R. McKeon, "The Status of the University of Paris as *Parrens Scientiarum*: An Episode in the Development of its Autonomy," *Speculum* 39:4 (October 1964): 651-675.

⁴⁴For a more complete biography, see Van Steenberghen, *Aristotle in the West; and his The Philosophical Movement in the Thirteenth Century*, (Belfast: Nelson, 1955).

The doctrines of Siger and his followers and his increasing tendency to lecture on theology rather than natural science, prompted attempts by the faculty to regulate his lecturing. Regulations issued by the arts faculty in 1272 prohibit any arts master from lecturing or engaging in debate over "any purely theological question, as concerning the Trinity and incarnation and similar matters, since this would be transgressing the limits assigned him."⁴⁵ Other admonitions emphasize the division of labor between the arts and theology faculties.⁴⁶ The masters seem to have been more concerned with inter-faculty turf wars than they were with fighting pagan ideologies. Bonaventure, Albert the Great, and Giles of Rome all denounced Siger's doctrines on philosophical grounds equally or exclusive of theological grounds.⁴⁷ They admonished Siger not because he used the philosophy of the pagans, but because he used it badly and because he stepped outside the limits of his own faculty.

When the faculty's attempts to control Siger and his followers failed the bishop of Paris, Etienne Tempier, issued the Condemnation of 1277. Historian Fernand van Steenberghen has referred to this document as "the reaction of churchmen to the new threat of paganism."⁴⁸ Historians have located this event as the turning point at which pagan philosophy succumbed to Christian

⁴⁵CUP 1, 499-500; translated in Thorndike, ed., University Records, 85-86.

⁴⁶Gilson, History of Christian Philosophy, 402-06.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Van Steenberghen, The Philosophical Movement, 103.

theology to be saved only by the synthesizing work of Thomas Aquinas.

Bishop Tempier strongly worded but hastily assembled the condemnation. Its 219 propositions were not organized; many are repeated and some are contradictory. Some of them were orthodox, and the Thomistic ones were declared orthodox by the pope within a generation.⁴⁹ No specific person or philosopher is mentioned, although the document attacks the notion "that all things are true according to philosophy but not according to the Catholic faith; as if there could be two contrary truths;"⁵⁰ a proposition specific to Siger and Boethius.

While the condemnation does prohibit several philosophical doctrines which are Aristotelian, this hardly proves that Tempier "wished to break this menace [of Latin Aristotelianism] and save endangered Christian thought."⁵¹ In the same document he also condemned several works of courtly love, astrology and magic. Tempier sought only to control the actions of a few specific men, not the encroachment of an ideology.

If the ecclesiastical authorities had wanted to destroy Aristotelianism, they could have done so. The papacy and the French monarchy ruthlessly eradicated the Cathar and Albigensian heretics during this century.⁵² Ridding the university of errant

⁴⁹Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy*, 406-09.

⁵⁰CUP 1, 543-555; translated in Grant, ed., *A Source Book*, 47-50.

⁵¹Van Steenberghen, *The Philosophical Movement*, 104.

⁵²The Cathars were a heretical sect in eastern Europe who spread their influence especially successfully into the Albigensian region of France, near Provence. Innocent III ordered a crusade against these heretics in 1208 which

scholars who depended for their livelihood, at least in part, on the benefices doled out by the papacy would have been no great matter.

Historians who want to claim that philosophy and theology were locked in mortal combat throughout the thirteenth century must explain the flowering of philosophical and scientific thinking during that same era. The era was rather one of individual discovery and original thought. There were no rigid schools of thought, no learned societies with membership guidelines. Philosophers like Roger Bacon, Thomas Aquinas, and William of Ockham made great contributions to modern thought. They grounded their work in Aristotelian natural science, but they did not have to renounce their Christian faith to do so.

The constraints of Christian doctrine did not allow Aristotle (who was often wrong about natural phenomena) to dictate the power of God or the limit of the possible. Therefore, scientists had to think of ways that a vacuum or plurality of worlds might be physically possible, though Aristotle claimed otherwise.⁵³ The tension between the two world-views balanced each other and precluded a tyranny over thought by either. One cannot claim that modern, secular, scientific thinking is *a priori* a better system than the Christian philosophy of the middle ages.⁵⁴

ended in the death of the Albigensians' most influential protector, Count Raymond of Toulouse, some eight years later.

⁵³Edward Grant, "The Condemnation of 1277, God's Absolute Power, and Physical Thought in the Late Middle Ages," *Viator* 10 (1979): 211-244.

⁵⁴Van Steenberghen, *The Philosophical Movement*, 110.

The proposition that recovery of the Aristotelian corpus of philosophical writings marked a turning point in history is not completely misguided. The thirteenth century does seem to mark a period of transition. Since many Aristotelian ideas were already in place, historians need to ask what else there might have been about this era that prompted the changes. Many situations provide opportunities for innovation: war, famine, plague. What was there about the culture of the thirteenth century that made Aristotelianism so appealing that this pagan philosophy was taken up into the scholarly community that constituted one-third of the foundation supporting western Christendom?

This question can be answered best by looking at the actions of the individuals who lived through the time of transition and shaped it. The thirteenth century was not a time of dueling ideologies, nor of tyrannical religious dogma. It was a time of individual philosophic and scientific innovation and achievement which sometimes included personal conflict. This type of conflict was certainly present at the University of Paris and, not surprisingly, it effected decisions about the curriculum in the thirteenth century.

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