

POLITICIZING THE BIBLE

THE ROOTS OF HISTORICAL CRITICISM AND THE
SECULARIZATION OF SCRIPTURE 1300-1700

SCOTT W. HAHN AND
BENJAMIN WIKER



A Herder & Herder Book
The Crossroad Publishing Company
New York

CHAPTER 2

THE FIRST CRACKS OF SECULARISM: MARSILIUS OF PADUA AND WILLIAM OF OCKHAM

We first examine the two figures who, by their use of Scripture, initiated a radical break with antecedent tradition, and set the West on the *via moderna*, that distinctive path that led to modern scriptural scholarship.¹ In regard to Scripture, this break occurred through the effort—especially by Marsilius of Padua—to politicize the biblical text. William of Ockham's contribution consisted not so much in consciously as in *accidentally* politicizing the text.

The relationship between the two figures is complex. As a Franciscan friar involved in the poverty controversy with Pope John XXII, Ockham's main goal was to preserve the distinction between *use* and *ownership* that allowed the Franciscans to continue as scholars, priests, and mendicants faithful to the order's charism. In pursuing this project, Ockham ran headlong into John XXII, and became convinced that John was acting heretically, that the Avignon papal court was itself debased by luxury, and that the papal claims to superiority over temporal rulers entailed absolute power that exercised a degrading influence. For Ockham, John XXII's claim of the right to overrule his predecessor's decisions, and the papalist assertion that the spiritual realm rules the secular, had a common source—the corrupting desire for absolute power. But in arguing so fervently against papal supremacy, Ockham inadvertently aided Marsilius's far more radical case for the complete subordination of the Church, theology, and Scripture to the secular political order.

It is precisely this subordination of the spiritual to the secular order that puts the West on the centuries-long march to complete secularization. On this *via*, this road, we shall find, slowly unfolding, the distinctively modern approach to scriptural scholarship.

Maintaining that the desire for secularization is the historical root of modern biblical scholarship will no doubt strike many as a contentious argument. Few would deny, however, that modern scriptural scholarship, especially the historical-critical method, contributed significantly to the secularization of the West in the nineteenth century and beyond. If this is granted, then we only ask readers' patience in making

¹ We would like to thank Vasileios Syros for his many helpful comments and bibliographical suggestions.

the case that the "fruit" of secularization, including the secularization of Scripture, was present in seed form many centuries before.

As is well known, Ockham is also considered to be one of the great intellectual precursors of modern philosophy (and by some, of modern science). But even here, we will find significant ambiguity, since the great shift effected by Ockham philosophically was in the service of a decidedly premodern theological goal: the affirmation of God's absolute, free power. Whatever his motives, the effect of Ockham's revolution was to shift the West onto intellectual paths leading to modern philosophy, thereby contributing to the larger intellectual transformation in which the subordinate development of modern historical-critical scholarship developed.

These abstract assertions will remain unconvincing until we descend to our analysis of the particulars. This is always a daunting undertaking, and the historical context that makes the disputes that embroiled Marsilius and Ockham is no exception. It is well worth our effort to spend some time setting up this context in some detail because this period helps to define the theological and political developments that will unfurl in the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries (and beyond). Understanding this political-theological context will illuminate why and how Scripture would become politicized.

The Avignon Papacy and the Politics of Empire

It is in the context of the Avignon papacy and the ongoing political machinations of imperial and papal politics in Germany and Italy that we encounter the first sustained modern, or protomodern, contributions to the formation of modern scriptural scholarship.

With the death of the notorious Frederick II in 1250, the Holy Roman Empire came to an effective end (despite its many ineffective centuries to come). Although his grandson Conrad IV ruled until 1254, the real power now lay not in a German emperor but in the German electors and nobility (a political situation that is essential for understanding the politics of the Reformation almost three centuries later). After the death of Conrad, the seven great electors saw no reason to elevate anyone to the imperial crown. They were more than satisfied to enjoy their increasing power. The other, lesser noble houses of Germany likewise welcomed their freedom from imperial rule. We thus have an imperial interregnum from 1254 until the election of the next emperor in 1273, Rudolf of Habsburg of the house of Austria. On the larger historical-geographical scene, we therefore see a diffraction of power in Germany—and just the opposite in France and England, where power was successfully being centralized in the monarchy against the nobility.

When Rudolf was elected in 1273, imperial authority was consequently weaker in comparison to the power of its Germanic electors, weaker than royal authority as exercised in France and England, and weaker in regard to the papacy. It was precisely this situation that Ludwig the Bavarian (or Louis IV, his imperial title²) of the

2 We will use his German name Ludwig, rather than Louis. The title Louis IV was, of course, his imperial title, which he was never able to make good.

powerful Wittelsbach house hoped to reverse when Emperor Henry VII (ruling from 1308) died in 1313, leaving the imperial office open for a successor. At Henry's death, the most prominent factions in Germany's dynastic struggles were the Wittelsbachs (Bavaria), the Habsburgs (Austria), and the Luxembourgs (Bohemia). The Wittelsbach and Luxembourg houses allied against the Habsburgs, and the result was a double election in October 1314. The Wittelsbach-Luxembourg alliance elected Ludwig, and the Habsburgs elected Frederick I.³ The contested election took place in a papal vacuum, since Pope Clement V had died in the spring of 1314 and no successor would be named until 1316. There was a double coronation in different cities, and the two "emperors" were soon at war. Seeing the confusion of this election and its aftermath as an opportunity, the newly-elected Pope John XXII (1316–1334) in his bull *Si fratrum* (1317) called on both Ludwig and Frederick to abdicate within three months or face excommunication, and claimed the right to rule Germany himself in the meantime during imperial vacancy.⁴

To fully appreciate this conflict, especially its pervasive political aspects, one need only look at a map. Imperial German designs were constantly focused on Italy (especially insofar as it seemed easier to control and milk for funds, as opposed to recalcitrant Germany), while the popes were continually trying to extend their territory further north to create a buffer against imperial or other foreign dominance. Continual discord among Italian states was a papal preoccupation, especially as enflamed by Guelph and Ghibelline, pro-papal and pro-imperial, factions. Northern Italy was therefore a kind of battleground. In H. S. Offler's words, "At the root of Lewis' [Ludwig's] controversy with the papacy lay this clash of interests in Italy. To it, the religious issues arising from Lewis' choice of methods and allies were only consequential."⁵ That is certainly true in regard to Ludwig, whose motives seem entirely political.

But we must not forget that this fateful link of Germany and Italy was not merely geographical. "The German empire was linked to the papacy like no other European power; it was after all the German kings alone who had been crowned emperors by the pope since the revival of Charlemagne's empire by Otto I in 962."⁶ Going all the way back to Pope Innocent III (1198–1216), the popes had considered the rule of the empire

3 Adding to the irony and confusion, "The coronation was equally disputed: Frederick was crowned by the duly qualified archbishop of Cologne with the true insignia but in the wrong place (Bonn). Lewis [Ludwig] in the right place (Aachen) but by the archbishop of Mainz (who had no authority to do so) and without the lawful insignia." Peter Herde, "From Adolf of Nassau to Lewis of Bavaria, 1292–1347," in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, Vol. VI, ed., Michael Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 537.

4 As Herde notes, "On the basis of a decretal of Innocent III, issued in an insignificant lawsuit in the Papal State, the popes considered themselves vicars of the empire during imperial vacancies, a right they claimed and tried to make good in Italy above all, in view of the almost total breakdown of imperial power there." Peter Herde, "From Adolf of Nassau to Lewis of Bavaria, 1292–1347," p. 538.

5 H. S. Offler, "Empire and Papacy: the Last Struggle," in Offler, *Church and Crown in the Fourteenth Century*, A. I. Doyle, ed., (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), II, p. 25.

6 Herde, "From Adolf of Nassau to Lewis of Bavaria, 1292–1347," p. 522.

to be at the behest of their spiritual power, and that meant oversight and approval of the imperial elections via the German prince electors.⁷

Ludwig ignored the call for his abdication, and in pursuit of his crown, finally subdued his rival, Frederick, in 1322, imprisoning him for three years, and then releasing him only to make him joint (but honorific) king in 1325. The papacy issued a declaration against Ludwig in October 1323, threatening his excommunication for daring to assume power without papal approval, and for aiding the excommunicated Giovanni Visconti of Milan, an enemy of the papacy.

Ludwig responded to Innocent's threats by calling for a general council to judge the claim of the necessity of papal sanction for imperial election, and further, by publishing the Sachsenhausen Appeal in 1324, a resounding indictment of papal abuses (including a charge of heresy), which included the call for a general council. At almost the same moment, the pope formally excommunicated Ludwig. Ludwig's response was momentous both for history and especially the history of scriptural scholarship. He soon took under his protection (in 1326) two fellow fugitives from the papacy—Marsilius of Padua and John of Jandun—who would provide Ludwig with the philosophical and theological justification for imperial supremacy.⁸

At the request of the pro-imperial Ghibellines, Ludwig undertook an Italian expedition in 1327–1329, marching into Rome for his coronation in January 1328, a city that had been deserted by the papacy (now at Avignon). “The fact that Lewis [Ludwig] was prepared to do so was the result in no small part of the arrival of Marsilius of Padua and his friend John of Jandun at his court in 1326. In June 1324 Marsilius, a supporter of the Ghibellines in his native city, then master and rector at Paris university, finished the *Defensor Pacis* (Defender of Peace) which laid him and his assumed co-author, John of Jandun, open to accusation of heresy and forced them to flee.”⁹ Again, they fled to Ludwig, a refuge that made sense, given the radical subordination of the spiritual to the temporal power advocated in the *Defensor Pacis*. Now both Marsilius and John of Jandun were at Ludwig's side, in every sense, at the imperial coronation.

Ludwig was crowned at St. Peter's on January 17, and four days later, without having learned of the coronation, John XXII called for a crusade against Ludwig. Upon

7 In regard to the supremacy of the papacy, Pope Innocent III (1198–1216) is usually taken to express the height of papal power. Innocent offered an allegory from Scripture, reaffirming the superiority of his spiritual office over earthly kings. “Just as the founder of the universe established two great lights in the firmament of heaven, a greater one to preside over the day and a lesser to provide over the night, so too . . . he instituted two great dignities, a greater one to preside over souls . . . and a lesser one to preside over bodies. . . . These are the pontifical authority and the royal power. Now just as the moon derives its light from the sun and is indeed lower than it in quantity and quality, in position and in power, so too the royal power derives the splendor of its dignity from the pontifical authority,” Brian Tierney, *The Crisis of Church & State, 1050–1300* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), p. 132.

8 For a discussion of difficulties and disagreements in discerning the historical particularities of Marsilius's connection to Ludwig, see Frank Godthardt, “The Philosopher as Political Actor—Marsilius of Padua at the Court of Ludwig the Bavarian: The Sources Revisited,” in Gerson Moreno-Riaño, ed., *The World of Marsilius of Padua* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), pp. 29–46.

9 Herde, “From Adolf of Nassau to Lewis of Bavaria, 1292–1347,” pp. 540–541.

hearing news of the ceremony, John declared the coronation void on March 31, and to return the favor, Ludwig then deposed John XXII, naming him a “Destroyer of the Peace” on April 18 (a move obviously done “under the influence of Marsilius”¹⁰). On May 13, Ludwig elected his own pope (a Franciscan friar, Peter of Corbara, or Corvara, who took the name Nicholas V), and subsequently had himself reaffirmed as emperor by his new pope. Marsilius was appointed the spiritual vicar of Rome, and immediately set about the persecution of all of John XXII's supporters. Ludwig's own support was not strong, however—especially among his own troops, whom he had continual trouble paying. He therefore withdrew from Italy, and returned to Munich. During his return, a group of Franciscans fleeing from John XXII joined Ludwig; one of them was William of Ockham. Under Ludwig's protection, both Marsilius and William would champion imperial over papal power.

We must add another layer of complexity—the great disputes about poverty between the Franciscans and Pope John XXII that brought William of Ockham to Ludwig. As we shall see, Ludwig was shrewd enough to use Franciscan opposition to John XXII as a purely political tool to resist the papacy.

The Sachsenhausen Appeal mentioned above included the charge of heresy against John XXII—specifically, the charge that he had wrongly condemned the radical Franciscan claim of the total poverty of Christ and his disciples. Since there were not as yet any Franciscans at Ludwig's court when the appeal was made (1324), news of the controversy must have arrived with his ambassadors from Avignon.¹¹ It was certainly reaffirmed with Marsilius of Padua and John of Jandun (since the poverty dispute appears prominently in the *Defensor Pacis*).

Briefly, the poverty dispute arose from the radical affirmation of poverty by St. Francis himself. Because of the very success of St. Francis, his order grew tremendously, but with expansion came compromise, especially in regard to the nature of poverty. Those who sought some pragmatic easement of Franciscan poverty formed the party of the Conventuals; those who embraced St. Francis's austerity literally were called the Spirituals (or Zealots). The Conventuals were not engaged in diluting their order's ideals, so much as applying them prudently. Entailed in St. Francis's own charism was the demand to preach. Preaching in turn demanded education (especially as the order attracted more educated brothers); education, books; books, libraries; libraries, buildings to contain them, and so on.

A solution of sorts was finally hammered out, one that was clever but not convincing. The Franciscans declared that, while they might *use* such things as books and buildings, they did not *own* them—a view given papal sanction in Pope Gregory IX's bull *Quo elongati* (1230).¹² This view was reaffirmed by Pope Nicholas III in *Exiit qui seminat* (1279), in which Nicholas declared that things given to the Franciscan

10 Ibid., p. 541.

11 Ibid., p. 539.

12 The immediate point of the bull was, more famously, to declare that St. Francis had no right to demand obedience to his “Testament,” a document written near the end of his life, expressing his desire that the friars return to radical poverty.

Order for use could be considered the property of the papacy, thereby relieving the conscience of the friars. As the disputes seemed endless, Nicholas also forbade any glosses on, or further disputation about, the matter. This distinction between use and ownership was again affirmed by Pope Clement V in *Exivi de Paradiso* (1312). In *Exivi*, Clement also dealt with the divisions still festering between the Conventuals and Spirituals, the latter bent on pulling the order back to its founder's mode of complete poverty, the former arguing that in doing so they were pulling the order apart. The Spirituals maintained that the distinction between use and ownership of goods allowed many Franciscans to live in (relative) luxury while declaring that they still owned nothing; but in their zeal for poverty, the Spirituals pushed against their vow of obedience to their superiors.

In 1316 John XXII was elected pope, and Michael of Cesena was elected the Minister General of the Franciscan Order. Each had as his goal reining in the Spirituals. John's bull *Quorundam exigit* (1317) ordered all Franciscans to obedience. But beyond this, and against Nicholas's *Exiit*, the pope reopened the debate about the use-ownership distinction, which he considered disingenuous. When certain Franciscans argued that Nicholas had forbidden further discussion, John issued *Ad conditorem canonum* (1322), which declared that as reigning pope he did indeed have the right to overrule decisions of his predecessors. As if to illustrate, he proclaimed that the papacy did not own goods that the Franciscans used; the Franciscans who used them owned them. The Sachsenhausen Appeal, issued in response from Ludwig's court in May 1324, declared John XXII a heretic for rescinding the decision of a previous pope. There is good reason to believe that the Appeal was influenced both by Marsilius and by certain unknown Franciscans. John's subsequent *Quia quorundam* (1324) simply reaffirmed his right to rescind.

John XXII's position may seem like a common-sense readjustment of the questionable use-ownership distinction, but seen in context, we can perceive how inflammatory it was. For the papacy to declare suddenly that the Franciscans owned the vast resources they had been using was spiritually debilitating, a blow at the heart of St. Francis's most distinctive attribute and the order's most prized aspiration. Conversely, the Franciscan argument for the use-ownership distinction was always couched in terms of the superiority of the life of poverty as a direct imitation of Christ and his Apostles. The rich papal court at Avignon could hardly miss the point.

By 1328, John XXII was at odds with Michael of Cesena, the conflict serious enough that Michael fled with a number of fellow Franciscans, including William of Ockham—who had previously been summoned to Avignon on charges of heresy. They fled into the arms of Ludwig, who was all too happy to use their dispute with the papacy to his own political ends.

Obviously, from all of the above, we have some appreciation of how extraordinarily political the entire situation is. But because the poverty dispute ultimately turned on questions concerning Christ and the Apostles, it centered upon Scripture—whose exegesis could not help but be thoroughly politicized, as will become clear in our analysis of the work of Marsilius and Ockham.

Marsilius's Averroistic Revolution

A Paduan by birth, Marsilio dei Mainardini (c. 1275–1342), or Marsilius (or Marsiglio) as he is known to us, probably studied medicine at the University of Padua (which later became strongly Averroist, especially among the faculty of medicine), and was rector of the University of Paris at about the time (1313) Ockham was studying theology at Oxford.¹³ The University of Paris was also a stronghold of Averroism, and it was there that Marsilius was further influenced by the Averroist John of Jandun.

Averroes (or Ibn-Rushd, c. 1126–1198) was a Muslim philosopher,¹⁴ influenced by both Plato and Aristotle. In a Muslim culture that took the Koran to be the absolute and unquestionable revealed truth, Averroes's devotion to philosophy, especially pagan philosophy, made his situation at times uncomfortable. Despite this, he wrote extensively, his commentaries on Aristotle being of especial note precisely because certain conclusions according to the reasoning of Aristotle were incompatible with the Koran (such as the eternity of the world and doubts about personal immortality). In an effort to deal with contradictions between philosophy and theology, Averroes argued in his *On the Harmony Between Religion and Philosophy* that there is indeed one truth, but it is known according to the capacity of the knowers: at the bottom are those open only to rhetorical persuasion, in whom appeal is made to the imagination and the passions; above these are those capable of dialectic, who are satisfied with the probable arguments of theology; and finally, at the top and fewest in number, are the philosophical men who demand rigorous rational demonstration. Needless to say, the hierarchical ranking entails a superiority of the truths of natural reason to those of revelation, but it also includes the notion of control of the masses by the philosophers using the myths of religion.¹⁵

13 For a detailed account of this period see William Courtenay, "University Masters and Political Power: The Parisian Years of Marsilius of Padua," in Martin Kaufhold, ed., *Politische Reflexion in Der Welt Des Späten Mittelalters/Political Thought in the Age of Scholasticism* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 209–223. For a recent overview of the state of scholarship see Cary Nederman, "Marsiglio of Padua Studies Today—and Tomorrow," in Moreno-Riaño, ed., *The World of Marsilius of Padua*, pp. 11–25.

14 For a more extensive analysis see Gregorio Piaia, "Averroisme politique: Anatomie d'un mythe historiographique," in Albert Zimmermann and Ingrid Craemer-Ruegenberg, eds., *Orientalische Kultur und europäisches Mittelalter* (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1985), pp. 288–300; idem, "L'averroismo politico e Marsilio da Padova," in Carlo Giacon, ed., *Saggi e ricerche su Aristotele, Marsilio da Padova, M. Eckhart, Rosmini, Spaventa, Marty, Tilgher, Omodeo, metafisica, fenomenologia ed estetica* (Padua: Antenore, 1971), pp. 33–54.

15 See Averroes, *The Book of the Decisive Treatise: Determining the Connection Between the Law and Wisdom*, translated by Charles Butterworth (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2001), ch. III, and *Averroes' Tahafut Al-Tahafut*, Volumes I and III, translated by Simon Van Den Bergh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 580–588 ("About the Natural Sciences," Fourth Discussion, pp. 359–363). For a solid, short discussion in the context of the wider history of such political use of religion see Vasileios Syros, "Simone Luzzatto's Image of the Ideal Prince and the Italian Tradition of Reason of State," in *Redescriptions: Yearbook of Political Thought and Conceptual History* (Münster: Verlag, 2005), pp. 157–182, especially his short discussion of Averroes with bibliography in footnotes, pp. 160–163.

When Averroes's commentaries accompanied Aristotle's works into the West, the difficulty that had beset Islam fell upon Christians: What should be done when the philosophical arguments of Aristotle contradicted the truths of Christian faith? Aristotle could be rejected (the radical Augustinian approach); Aristotle could be corrected and worked into a synthesis (St. Thomas); or the truths of his philosophy could stand, in contradiction, alongside the truths of faith, creating a kind of double, incompatible set of truths, the truth according to reason and the truth according to revelation (the "Latin Averroist" approach of, among others, Siger of Brabant)

Such Averroism imbued Marsilius's thought, especially his most famous work (allegedly coauthored with John of Jandun¹⁶), the anti-papal treatise *Defensor Pacis* (1324), a work that the great historian of medieval thought Etienne Gilson aptly calls "as perfect an example of political Averroism as one could wish for."¹⁷

Before publishing the *Defensor Pacis*, Marsilius had actually been in the good graces of John XXII, with the pope offering him a canonry in Padua in October 1316, and reserving him a vacant Paduan benefice in April 1318.¹⁸ Marsilius was soon after to be found at Paris, lecturing in philosophy and practicing medicine. Sometime during this period, he was working on the *Defensor Pacis*. Although it was finished in the summer of 1324, Marsilius's authorship became public only in 1326. Once he was known as the author of the shocking treatise, he and John of Jandun (the alleged coauthor¹⁹) found that they had to flee, seeking refuge with the enemy of John XXII, Ludwig of Bavaria. In October 1327, the pope issued the bull *Licit iuxta*, proclaiming Marsilius and John heretics. He considered their threat so grave that he widely publicized the errors of the pernicious book, sending a letter of warning, *Certum processum*,

16 While it is almost certain that John of Jandun influenced the writing of the *Defensor Pacis*, that he was truly the coauthor has not been established beyond doubt. Thus, we shall generally refer to Marsilius as the author. For further details see N. Valois, "Jean de Jandun et Marsile de Padoue auteurs du *Defensor pacis*," *Histoire littéraire de France*, XXXIII (Paris 1906), pp. 528–623. For a convincing revision of this assumption, see Alan Gewirth, "John of Jandun and the *Defensor Pacis*," *Speculum* XXIII (1948), pp. 267–72, and C. Dolcini, "Marsilio da Padova e Giovanni di Jandun," D. Quaglioni, ed., *Storia della chiesa v. 9: La crisi del Trecento e il papato avignonese (1274–1378)* (Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo, 1994), pp. 435–46.

17 Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York: Random House, 1955), p. 526. For a solid overview of the contours of Marsilian scholarship see George Garnett, *Marsilius of Padua and "The Truth of History"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), Introduction.

18 An outline of Marsilius's life can be found in the Introduction to Alan Gewirth, *Marsilius of Padua and Medieval Political Philosophy*, Volume 1 (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1951). J. Miethke, *De potestate papae. Die päpstliche Amtskompetenz im Widerstreit der politischen Theorie von Thomas von Aquin bis Wilhelm von Ockham, Spätmittelalter und Reformation*, N. R., 16 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 204ff.; C. Pincin, *Marsilio*, Pubblicazioni dell'Istituto di Scienze Politiche dell'Università di Torino, 17 (Turin: 1967), pp. 21–54; C. Dolcini, *Introduzione a Marsilio da Padova, I filosofi*, 63 (Bari: Laterza, 1995); J. Haller, "Zur Lebensgeschichte des Marsilius von Padua," *ZKG* 48 (1929), pp. 166–199 [wiederabgedr. in: ders., *Abhandlungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters* (Stuttgart: Verlag, 1944), pp. 335–368].

19 As noted above, there is controversy on this point, but it seems highly likely that the allegation of coauthorship was more rumor than fact. See Garnett, *Marsilius of Padua and "The Truth of History"*, pp. 14–17, with attendant bibliography.

to his bishops.²⁰ It is famously (but apocryphally) reported that when Ockham later fled to Ludwig, he declared, "I will defend you with my pen, if you will defend me with your sword." For Marsilius the chronology was reversed. Ludwig was happy to protect Marsilius, because the *Defensor Pacis* already championed Ludwig.

But the *Defensor Pacis* is not merely a political tract aimed at a particular political situation. It is, in the deepest sense, revolutionary, a landmark philosophical document in the secularization of the West that enjoyed a wide circulation from the very beginning; indeed the very thoroughness of repeated condemnations ensured that the substance of Marsilius's argument would become well known.²¹ As Alan Gewirth notes, going far beyond the immediate needs of Ludwig, Marsilius' political Averroism provides a self-conscious foundation for a secular revolution.

The specifically political feature of Marsilius's Averroism consists in his completely secular approach to all aspects of the state, including those connected with religion, theology, and the church. The Averroist method meant that problems could be investigated by rational procedures alone in complete independence of faith and of the theological tradition founded upon faith. Marsilius attains this result by setting up a politics based upon reason alone in Discourse I, omitting the consideration of eternal life and divine causation on the plea that they are not amenable to reason. To be sure . . . he proceeds in the second Discourse to "confirm" by revelation the rationally established conclusions of the first. But the salient point of this procedure is that it permits the establishment of the central doctrines of a political philosophy in complete disregard of the supernatural order. Hence when revelation is invoked in the second Discourse to "confirm" the first, a complete rational, non-supernatural political system lies already at hand, and the texts of Scripture can be so selected and interpreted as to support that system.²²

This politicized selecting and interpreting of text has, for Gewirth, a larger secular aim that defines it. For our purposes, it is essential to see how Marsilius treated Scripture to support his secular goal in his *Defensor Pacis*.

Defending Earthly Peace: The Birth of the Secular State

The entirety of Marsilius's *Defensor Pacis* is designed, at least ostensibly, for curing a particular "disease" of the civil body, one that "[n]either Aristotle nor any other philosopher of his time or before" could have recognized because it was rooted in "a certain perverted opinion . . . which came to be adopted as an aftermath of the miraculous effect produced by the supreme cause long after Aristotle's time; an effect

20 Garnett emphasizes the wide-scale response of John XXII that scholars have neglected: Garnett, *Marsilius of Padua and "The Truth of History"*, pp. 19–20.

21 On this important point, see Garnett, Introduction.

22 Gewirth, *Marsilius of Padua and Medieval Political Philosophy*, Volume I, p. 43. Emphasis added.

beyond the power of the lower nature and the usual action of causes of things."²³ The miraculous effect, the reader assumes, is the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the perversion is, as Marsilius makes quite clear, the papal claim to a spiritual power to rule over secular, political life. At least on the surface, the *Defensor Pacis* is one, long anti-papal diatribe.

If that summed up the entirety of Marsilius's work, it would be of little importance for our understanding the history of modern scriptural scholarship. But far deeper things are going on in the *Defensor Pacis*. Although Marsilius is evidently concerned with undermining papal authority in the political realm, his ultimate concern is the radical reordering of secular and sacred authority, so that the priesthood is firmly subordinated to political power—a task that entails the biblical justification of political power and the subordination of biblical interpretation to it. This subordination is seen quite clearly in the very title of the work. As he notes in the very last chapter, the treatise is called *Defensor Pacis* "because it discusses and explains the principal causes whereby civil peace or tranquility exists and is preserved, and whereby the opposed strife arises and is checked and destroyed." It aims at civil peace or tranquility, or more accurately, it aims to teach the *defender* of peace both what civil peace is, and against whom and how to defend it. Marsilius therefore speaks not to the ecclesiastic but to "the ruler."²⁴

Marsilius is not concerned with civil peace as one worthy goal among many; rather, civil peace becomes for him *the* defining aim, the greatest good. Marsilius therefore lowers the aim of the "greatest good" from supernatural to natural or civil peace, turning away from the heavens and the city of God, toward the earth and the city of man. His primary concern, then, is "the truth which leads to the salvation of civil life," adding almost incidentally that it "also is of no little help for eternal salvation."²⁵

Thus, from the opening paragraph, Marsilius praises first of all "the tranquility or peace of civil regimes" as "the greatest good of man," or more accurately, he praises such tranquility for the sake of "sufficiency of life, which no one can attain without peace and tranquility."²⁶ Furthermore, this "greatest good" does not need revelation for its illumination. As Marsilius reveals quite soon, this earthly political goal, sufficiency of life, is based not on revelation but on reason, in particular, on a *modified* version of Aristotle's reasoned account of the end of political life.²⁷

We must be especially clear about this last point. Marsilius did not embrace Aristotle's entire argument, but a peculiarly blunted form of it.²⁸ In Aristotle, there is

23 Marsilius of Padua, *Defensor Pacis*, translated by Alan Gewirth (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), I, 1.3.

24 Ibid., III, 3.

25 Ibid., I, 1.5.

26 Ibid., I, 1.1.

27 Ibid., I, 2.3.

28 On this important point see Vasileios Syros, *Die Rezeption der aristotelischen politischen Philosophie bei Marsilius von Padua: Eine Untersuchung zur ersten Diktion des Defensor pacis*, *Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions*, p. 134 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007); idem, "Marsilius of Padua's Classical Sources," in Cary J. Nederman and Gerson Moreno-Riaño, eds., *The Life and Thought of Marsilius of Padua* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, in press).

always a certain tension between political and philosophic life. We are indeed political animals by nature,²⁹ but precisely because our nature, our form, is defined by rationality, the life of contemplation properly and ultimately defines our perfection, our *telos*, our final cause.³⁰ For this reason, the political life is, properly speaking, subordinate to the contemplative life, that is, to the contemplation of eternal truths. Such a philosophic life, argued Aristotle, is

above that of a man, for a man will live in this manner not insofar as he is a man, but insofar as he has something divine in him; and the activity of this divine part of the soul is as much superior to that of the other kind of virtue [i.e., ethical-political virtue] as that divine part [i.e., the rational part of the soul] is superior to the composite soul of man [consisting of the divine-like rational part, animal-like sensitive part, and the plant-like vegetative part]. So since the intellect [*nous*] is divine relative to a man, the life according to this intellect, too, will be divine relative to human life.³¹

For this reason, Aristotle asserted, we must not follow the recommendation of those who say that "men should think only of human things and that mortals should think only of mortal things. . . ." Rather, "we should try as far as possible to partake of immortality and to make every effort to live according to the best part of the soul in us; for even if this part be of small measure, it surpasses all the others by far in power and worth."³²

The analysis of the human good in terms of formal and final causes guides Aristotle's hierarchical ordering of political life, allowing him to rank different kinds of political regimes in accordance with their orientation toward the final cause, the proper perfection of human nature.³³ The flawed regimes (tyranny, oligarchy, and democracy) distort our nature; the good regimes (monarchy, aristocracy, and polity) order political life toward the proper perfection, the *telos*, of our nature.³⁴ The paradox, of course, is that in ordering political life toward the best part of the soul, we would be orienting political life beyond "human things and . . . mortal things" to *divine things*. The highest, defining political goal, the *suprapolitical* goal for any human being would be to live in a "manner not insofar as he is a man, but insofar as he has something divine in him."

To be sure, Aristotle was quite aware that most human beings and most regimes fall far short of perfection. So, even while the best regimes, monarchy and aristocracy, properly embody the *telos* of human nature (or at least approximate it as closely as

29 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a2–5; *Nicomachean Ethics* 1097b7–12, 1162a16–18, 1169b17–22; *Eudemian Ethics*, 1242a23–28.

30 *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097a15–1097b21, 1177a12–1178a8.

31 Ibid., 1177b27–32. Translation from the edition by Hippocrates Apostle.

32 Ibid., 1178b32–1178a2.

33 Cf. J. Miethke, "Marsilius von Padua. Die politische Philosophie eines lateinischen Aristotelikers des 14. Jahrhunderts," in H. Boockmann, B. Moeller, K. Stackmann, eds., *Lebenslehren und Weltentwürfe im Übergang vom Mittelalter zur Neuzeit: Politik–Naturkunde–Theologie* (Göttingen: 1989), p. 56.

34 *Politics*, 1278b6–1279b10.

possible), Aristotle spends a significant part of the *Politics* discussing oligarchy and democracy, since experience proves that these regimes are far more likely to occur. Although a true political science takes its bearings from the best regimes, it must also instruct as to how to live as well as possible in the actual, degraded regimes in which we are far more likely to find ourselves.

It is not difficult to see that this subordination of body to soul would weigh in favor of the affirmation of the superiority of the spiritual to the temporal by Pope Gregory VII, Hugh of St. Victor, Innocent III, and John XXII.³⁵ As a consequence, Marsilius could not simply adopt Aristotle's arguments intact. He therefore provides a truncated view of politics, one without any upward thrust, designating civil peace and not contemplation as the highest and defining good. This truncated view signals the origin of secularism in the peculiarly modern sense.

Marsilius begins with the Aristotelian distinction between living and living well—that is, between biological necessity (which is both common to and desirable by all human beings) and theoretical speculation (which, as Aristotle readily admits, is sought only by a few). This distinction between living and living well, the practical and the theoretical, defines two distinct ends, one that is “temporal or earthly,” and the other “eternal or heavenly.” This “latter kind of living, the eternal,” remarks Marsilius, “the whole body of philosophers were unable to prove by demonstration nor was it self evident,” but in regard to the earthly life, “the glorious philosophers comprehended [it] almost completely through demonstration.”³⁶

Heaven is obscure; earth is clear. Since politics cannot be built upon speculative obscurity, it must be confined to practical, biological necessity. Marsilius therefore lowers the aim, or final cause, of politics, confining it tightly within the lower two parts of the soul, the vegetative and the sensitive, the plantlike and animal-like aspects of our nature. As Gewirth points out, this results in a stunted account of politics that departs from both Aristotle and St. Thomas because it focuses exclusively on the needs and desires of the body:

35 To cite an example of their reasoning, in a letter to the Bishop of Metz in 1081, Pope Gregory VII (1073–1085) set out the proper relationship of the spiritual to the temporal powers, stating that “... every Christian king when he approaches his end asks the aid of a priest as a miserable suppliant that he may escape the prison of hell, may pass from darkness into light and may appear at the judgment seat of God freed from the bonds of sin. But who, layman or priest, in his last moments has ever asked the help of any earthly king for the safety of his soul? And what king or emperor has power through his office to snatch any Christian from the might of the Devil by the sacred rite of baptism, to confirm him among the sons of God and to fortify him by the holy chrism? Or—and this is the greatest thing in the Christian religion—who among them is able by his own word to create the body and blood of the Lord? or to whom among them is given the power to bind and loose in Heaven and upon earth? From this it is apparent how greatly superior in power is the priestly dignity. Or who of them is able to ordain any clergyman in the Holy Church—much less to depose him for any fault? For bishops, while they may ordain other bishops, may in no wise depose them except by authority of the Apostolic See. How, then, can even the most slightly informed person doubt that priests are higher than kings? But if kings are to be judged by priests for their sins, by whom can they more properly be judged than by the Roman pontiff?” Cited in Tierney, *The Crisis of Church & State, 1050–1300*, p. 70.

36 Marsilius, *Defensor Pacis*, I, 4.1–3.

As was to be expected from the biological context in which he places his politics, the “natural” as he conceives it is always the primitive, not the perfected; it consists in man's material endowment, physical and biological, not in his rational powers or virtues. Thus man's “natural” desire for the sufficient life is a desire which man shares with “every genus of animals.”³⁷

Since Marsilius confines politics to the needs and desires of the body, to animal existence, his analysis contains no ranking of regimes in accordance with the Aristotelian notion of the perfection of our rational nature. Doing so would obviously leave a large door open to papal arguments about the superiority of the spiritual to the temporal realm. Instead, he focuses merely on the *efficient* causes of this-worldly peace in the context of a view of politics confined to *material* needs and desires. As we shall see, this focus on efficient and material causes, at the expense of formal and final causes, will fit well with the modern concept of nature developed in the sixteenth and seventeenth century.³⁸

What part, then, does Scripture play in all of this? A quite subordinate one, to say the least: Scripture serves the secularizing aim of Marsilius's politics: Heaven serves earth, the spirit serves the body. Marsilius quotes Scripture to support his argument about “the greatest good of man” being defined according to the body, using both the Old Testament (e.g., Job 22:21, “Be at peace, and thereby thou shalt have the best fruits”) and citing many instances from the New Testament that emphasize peace, including the greeting of the heavenly choir in Luke 2:14 announcing the birth of Christ (“Glory to God in the highest: and on earth peace to men of good will”) and Christ's own post-Resurrection words to his disciples in John 20:19, Mark 9:50, and John 14:27 (“Peace be to you,” “Have peace among you,” and “Peace I leave with you: my peace I give unto you”).³⁹

Obvious tensions arise in thus bending the heavenly to earthly purposes. Could Christ *really* be referring to civil peace in these passages, especially as defined by Marsilius—the same Christ who says in Luke 12:51, “Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division . . .”? Could such civil peace be the same peace of which St. Paul speaks in Philippians 4:7, “the peace of God, which passes all understanding”? This tension is found throughout the entire *Defensor Pacis*, and in fact defines its very structure. Part I of the treatise deals with “living well” according to what is “temporal or earthly,” and Part II with living well according to what is “eternal or heavenly.” But as Gewirth rightly noted, the second half of the treatise is subordinate to the first; the heavenly serves the earthly, and religion must be redefined accordingly.

37 Gewirth, *Marsilius of Padua and Medieval Political Philosophy*, Volume I, p. 55. The quote at the end, which Marsilius includes in his text (I, 4.2) comes from Cicero, *De Officiis*, I, 4.11.

38 Again, see Syros, *Die Rezeption der aristotelischen politischen Philosophie bei Marsilius von Padua: Eine Untersuchung zur ersten Diktion des Defensor pacis*, passim.

39 Marsilius, *Defensor Pacis* I, 1.1.

The Civil Religion of Philosophers

Marsilius does not wait until Part II to discuss religion. In Part I, he addresses it from the “temporal or earthly” perspective. According to Marsilius, there is a natural place for religion in civil communities, a place that (unlike revealed religion) *does* contribute to political tranquility. Religion’s place is natural because it is not founded by God through revelation for the sake of heavenly bliss, but by philosophers for the sake of civil tranquility.⁴⁰ Marsilius’s words are well worth quoting at length, for it will become a familiar form of reasoning among those who follow:

[T]he philosophers, including Hesiod, Pythagoras, and several others of the ancients, noted appropriately a quite different cause or purpose for the setting forth of divine laws or religions [*sectae*]⁴¹—a purpose which was in some sense necessary for the status of this world. This was to ensure the goodness of human acts both individual and civil, on which depend almost completely the quiet or tranquility of communities and finally the sufficient life in the present world. For although some of the philosophers who founded such laws or religions did not accept or believe in human resurrection and that life which is called eternal, they nevertheless feigned and persuaded others that it exists and that in it pleasures and pains are in accordance with the qualities of human deeds in this mortal life, in order that they might thereby induce in men reverence and fear of God, and a desire to flee the vices and to cultivate the virtues. For there are certain acts which the legislator cannot regulate by human law, that is, those acts which cannot be proved to be present or absent to someone [i.e., those acts no one other than the doer witnesses], but which nevertheless cannot be concealed from God, whom these philosophers feigned to be the maker of such laws and the commander of their observance, under the threat or promise of eternal reward for doers of good and punishment for doers of evil. Hence, they said of the variously virtuous men in this world that they were placed in the heavenly firmament; and from this were perhaps derived the names of certain stars and constellations. These philosophers said that the souls of men who acted wrongly entered the bodies of various brutes; for example, the souls of men who had been intemperate eaters entered the bodies of pigs, those who were intemperate in embracing and making love entered the bodies of goats, and so on, according . . . the proportions of human vices to their condemnable properties. So too the philosophers assigned various kinds of torments to wrongdoers, like perpetual thirst and hunger for intemperate Tantalus. . . . The philosophers also said that the infernal regions, the place of these torments, were deep and dark; and they painted all sorts of terrible and gloomy pictures of them. For fear of these, men eschewed wrongdoing,

40 For an extremely insightful detailed analysis of the political use of religion in Marsilius and Maimonides see Vasileios Syros, “Did the Physician from Padua Concur with the Rabbi from Cordoba? Marsilius of Padua and Moses Maimonides on the Political Utility of Religion,” forthcoming.

were instigated to perform virtuous works of piety and mercy, and were well disposed both in themselves and toward others. As a consequence, many disputes and injuries ceased in communities. Hence too the peace or tranquility of states and the sufficient life of men for the status of the present world were preserved with less difficulty; which was the end intended by these wise men laying down such laws or religions.⁴¹

This is a revealing passage.⁴² As Gewirth points out, many other sources known to Marsilius set forth this notion of the invention of religion “for its this-worldly social utility”—such as Aristotle, Averroes, St. Augustine, St. Albert the Great, and St. Thomas Aquinas—but “whereas all these thinkers *except Averroes* treat this conception of religion with disparagement or indignation, Marsilius’s lengthy exposition of the idea is integrally connected with his naturalistic politics as a whole.”⁴³ Following Averroes’s positive assessment of the political use of religion,⁴⁴ Marsilius makes very clear that philosophers—“wise men,” as he designates them—fashioned religion for the sake of civil tranquility, knowing all the while that it was not true, but feigning belief for the sake of controlling men who could not be governed otherwise.⁴⁵ Even more telling, the philosophers pretended that God was the author of their merely human laws or commandments, and heaven (but especially hell) were fictions designed to lure nonphilosophers into civil obedience with eternal rewards, or failing that, frighten them with the specter of eternal punishments.

The attentive reader cannot help but ask the obvious question: Is Marsilius also a wise philosopher who feigns belief, or is he truly a believer? Given the assumptions and mode of his argument, it is impossible to tell. After this passage he does indeed say that “correct views concerning God were not held by the gentile laws or religions

41 Marsilius, *Defensor Pacis*, I, 5.11.

42 See Vasileios Syros, “Did the Physician from Padua Concur with the Rabbi from Cordoba? Marsilius of Padua and Moses Maimonides on the Political Utility of Religion,” forthcoming.

43 Gewirth, *Marsilius of Padua and Medieval Political Philosophy*, Volume I, p. 83. Emphasis added.

44 For example, Averroes’s comments on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* 1074b1–14. See Charles Genequand, *Ibn Rushd’s Metaphysics: A Translation with Introduction of Ibn Rushd’s Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics, Book Lām* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 1687–1690. Averroes’s point in this section seems to be that the ancient Chaldaeans were wise men whose philosophic sayings, over time, were presented as mythic symbols (such as the celestial bodies being gods). To these, additional layers of myth were accreted, argues Averroes, such as the gods being like men or in the form of animals, that “contain no truth at all” but were “aimed at persuading the people to improve their morals and (to do) that which is best for them; this is what is intended [in Aristotle] by ‘benefit of the laws.’” The difference with Aristotle is instructive. Aristotle actually asserts that “the ancients” were not wise men, or philosophers, but themselves offered the myth that the heavenly bodies were gods. But, in contrast, Averroes presents these ancient Chaldaeans as having “Wisdom” and that their ancient wise sayings were purposely re-presented over time in myths or symbols. Thus, in Averroes’s account, unlike that of Aristotle, the ancient wise men act as philosophic founders of popular religion, which is designed to control the masses.

45 Cf. Richard C. Taylor, “Averroes: God and the Noble Lie,” in R. E. Houser, ed., *Laudemus viros gloriosos: Essays in Honor of Armand Maurer, CSB*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), pp. 38–59.

and by all the other religions which are or were outside the catholic Christian faith or outside the Mosaic law which preceded it . . . in general, [correct views were not held] by all those doctrines which are outside the tradition of what is contained in the sacred canon called the Bible."⁴⁶ But it is difficult to know what to make of such an assertion. Marsilius has just informed us that philosophers, wise men, feign belief, and Marsilius is clearly an intellectual disciple of the pagan philosopher Aristotle, or more accurately, of the "Averroistic" reading of Aristotle. And again, Averroes (unlike Aristotle) was not concerned with the truth or falsity of religion, but only with its utility. Although Marsilius's intentions may have been entirely unambiguous, his presentation was bound to arouse suspicion. Marsilius's account of law, which firmly subordinates the interpretation of Scripture to the state, only adds to the ambiguity.

Law, Legislator, and Sola Scriptura

Marsilius puts forth four senses of the word "law." The third sense "means the standard containing admonitions for voluntary human acts according as these are ordered toward glory or punishment in the future world. In this sense the Mosaic law was in part called law, just as the evangelical law [revealed in the New Testament] in its entirety is called a law." A Christian would understand the evangelical law to be in a class by itself, but in his consideration of this third sense of the law, Marsilius includes "all religions [*sectae*], such as that of Mohammed or of the Persians," adding that "among these only the Mosaic and the evangelic, that is, the Christian, contain the truth."⁴⁷

The problem with this exemption is that, according to the "Averroist" Marsilius, its truth cannot be demonstrated. As he states elsewhere concerning the founding of the Mosaic law, "we can say nothing through demonstration, but we hold it by simple belief apart from reason."⁴⁸ This "simple belief" amounts to a kind of fideism, rationally indistinguishable from the fideism of other religions, and it is precisely because it is indistinguishable that Marsilius can consider both Judaism and Christianity as *sectae* along with other *sectae* such as "that of Mohammed or of the Persians." From the perspective of reason, one cannot distinguish between them in regard to truth or falsity.

The problem of distinguishing between true and false revealed religions is made all the more difficult in Marsilius's discussion of Christianity in Book II, one which bears directly on Scripture. Because he does not want to allow any argument that gives power to the Church hierarchy—especially the pope—Marsilius sets forth a kind of pre-Reformation doctrine of *sola scriptura*, asserting that "for salvation it is necessary for us to believe in or to acknowledge the certainty or truth of no statements or writings except those which are called canonic, that is, those which are contained in the

⁴⁶ Marsilius, *Defensor Pacis*, I, 5.14.

⁴⁷ Ibid., I, 10.3.

⁴⁸ Ibid., I, 9.2.

volume of the Bible. . . ."⁴⁹ By this maneuver, Marsilius hopes to nullify the authority of any and all papal bulls, decretals, and other pronouncements.

But how do we know the "certainty or truth" of the Bible? His only answer is, to say the least, both unsatisfying intellectually and pejorative in tone: "That the holy Scriptures must be firmly believed and acknowledged to be true is assumed as self-evident to all Christians; but since it could be proved only by the authorities of these Scriptures themselves, I have omitted such proof for the sake of brevity." In lieu of this much-needed proof of the truth of Scripture, Marsilius simply intones repeatedly that its alleged divine inspiration "must be piously held,"⁵⁰ but the piety is based on a curious circularity. The truth of Scripture is self-evident to those who already take it to be true, so that its truth can be proved as true only from Scripture. As much (or as little) could be said of any believing Moslem and the Koran.

But Marsilius's peculiar doctrine of *sola scriptura* goes far beyond merely wresting authority from the pope. It is carefully designed to serve the merely political end of the *Defensor Pacis*. Spiritual authority resides in the Bible, not in the ecclesial hierarchy; yet Marsilius places the authoritative *interpretation* of the Bible ultimately in the hands of the civil legislator, the *legislator humanus*. He argues that the power to interpret doubtful passages of Scripture resides not in the pope or any other bishop, but in a general council, one whose members are ultimately determined by human legislators.⁵¹ The outline of his "plan" for such a council is illuminating.

Marsilius suggests that "all the notable provinces or communities of the world, in accordance with the determination of their human legislators whether one or many . . . elect faithful men, first priests and then non-priests, suitable persons of the most blameless lives and the greatest experience in divine law." These men will represent "the whole body of the faithful by virtue of the authority which these whole bodies have granted to them," and they are "to settle those matters pertaining to divine law which have appeared doubtful, and which it seems useful, expedient, and necessary to define." Their power extends beyond the interpretation of Scripture, to "such other decrees with regard to church ritual or divine worship as will be conducive to the quiet and tranquility of the believers."⁵²

Hence the legislator has the ultimate power, since it is he who elects the members of the worldwide council. According to Marsilius, "the legislator . . . is the people or the whole body of citizens, or the weightier part thereof," and it is they who make the laws.⁵³ Furthermore, it is they who appoint both priests and bishops.⁵⁴ The result—and happily so, for Marsilius—is that the papacy can no longer control secular affairs through the appointment of bishops and priests. The power to "invest" ecclesiastical offices is placed firmly in the hands of secular powers.

⁴⁹ Ibid., II, 28.1. See also II, 19.1.

⁵⁰ Ibid., II, 19.1–3, 10.

⁵¹ Ibid., II, 19.3.

⁵² Ibid., II, 20.2.

⁵³ Ibid., I, 12.3.

⁵⁴ Ibid., II, 17.8–9.

Following upon this, no pope (be he Innocent III or John XXII) may quote Scripture to support his aims, for the legislators through their council representatives would determine the meaning of every contested passage. If there is a conflict between the Church and the State, the papacy and the empire, the State will obviously elect representatives who will vote for an interpretation in its favor. And as a safeguard against excommunication, Marsilius also bestows upon the legislators the power to compel a rebellious priest or bishop to administer the sacraments.⁵⁵

By placing the power to determine the meaning of Scripture in the legislator, Marsilius effectively subordinates the interpretation of Scripture to politics, and he vindicates his position by a politicized exegesis. As Gewirth notes, Marsilius proves his position through a quite selective scriptural exegesis. In the early Church (as reported in Acts 6:1–6), Marsilius argues, we find that the Apostles, overburdened with the administration of charity, appealed to the disciples to choose seven men to take over the task of the distribution of alms to widows—and by “disciples,” Marsilius argues, the text means the entire number of believers. This proves that the appointment of all ecclesiastical offices “pertains only to the human legislator or the multitude of the believers.”⁵⁶ In regard to the powers of the priesthood to administer the sacraments, and to bind and loose sins, every priest has these powers equally—as is proved from Luke 22 in which Christ commands all his disciples to offer the Eucharist. “Christ did not address these words to St. Peter more than to the others.”⁵⁷ As for binding and loosing, John 20:22–23 (where Christ gives the power of forgiving or retaining sins to all the disciples) takes interpretive precedence over Matthew 16:19 (where Christ seems to give the power especially to Peter).⁵⁸ That Peter (and hence the Roman pontiff) has no intrinsic superiority is also seen quite clearly, argues Marsilius, from the equal dignity of Paul, who was an “Apostle, not of men, neither by men, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father,” and who further corrected Peter in regard to circumcision (Galatians 1:1–12, 2:6–11; Acts 15).⁵⁹ Given that all priests are equally priests, there is no pre-eminence contained in the office of bishop or pope. On the contrary, they are purely administrative offices, with no coercive power at all.⁶⁰ The power to elect priests and bishops, the power to interpret Scripture and define doctrine and worship, and the power to coerce, are all vested in the legislator.

It is no accident that all the passages just quoted are from the New Testament. In order to demonstrate this position from Scripture more securely, Marsilius dismisses the Old Testament as irrelevant on the grounds that with the advent of the New Law, the Old has become obsolete and nonbinding.⁶¹ As with his doctrine of *sola scriptura*, the motivation is entirely political. As Gewirth asserts:

55 Ibid., II, 17.12.

56 Ibid., II, 17.9–10.

57 Ibid., II, 16.2.

58 Ibid., II, 15.3.

59 Ibid., II, 16.3–5.

60 Ibid., II, 15.6–7.

61 Ibid., II, 9.10.

The motivation of this removal [of the Old Testament from consideration] is to be found in the fact that the Old Testament was an outstanding source not only of papal “decretals” but also of papalist arguments: the exercise of judicial functions by Moses, Melchisedech, Samuel, and others was frequently cited as proof that priests were, and should be, kings or superior to kings, by direct appointment of God. In refusing to deal with the Old Testament, Marsilius is thus denying the relevance of one of the primary foundations of the papalist position.⁶²

In contrast to the Old Testament, the New Testament provides Marsilius with scriptural ammunition to support the complete obedience of all believers—whether laymen or priests—to the secular power. In perfect harmony with Marsilius’s political aims, Christ is said to have handed over full political power to secular authority. According to the Old Law, Moses as priest had coercive powers, but:

[S]uch commands were not given by Christ in the evangelic law; rather, he took for granted the commands which were or would be given in human laws, and he commanded every human soul to observe these and to obey the men who ruled in accordance with them, at least the commands which were not opposed to the law of eternal salvation. Hence in the twenty-second chapter of Matthew and the eleventh of Mark: “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s,” by “Caesar” signifying any rule. So too the Apostle said in the thirteenth chapter of Romans, and it bears repeating: “Let every soul be subject to the higher powers.” So too in the first epistle to Timothy, last chapter: “Even to infidel lords”. . . . From all these it is quite evident that Christ, the Apostle, and the saints held the view that all men must be subject to the human laws and to the judges according to these laws.⁶³

The same political motivation drives Marsilius to reject all allegorical and typological exegesis of Scripture; that is, his Averroist aim even reaches and reformulates the *method* of biblical exegesis. As Marsilius asserts, the papal plenitude of power has often rested upon “certain fictitious and foreign interpretations” of the Bible.⁶⁴ In order to make their case, the papalists must stray from the literal interpretation of the text, giving “wandering expositions of Scripture” that are “gladly accepted when such expositions seem to savor of their corrupt opinion and perverted emotions.”⁶⁵ That is, Marsilius maintains that papalists invoke nonliteral expositions when literal ones do not suit their needs; therefore, all allegorical or typological readings are inherently suspect as being politically motivated. That is not to say that Marsilius never has recourse to a nonliteral meaning of the text, when the literal one would too obviously undermine his secularist purposes. For example, in regard to the “two swords” passage

62 Gewirth, *Marsilius of Padua and Medieval Political Philosophy*, Volume I, pp. 72–73.

63 Marsilius, *Defensor Pacis*, II, 9.9.

64 Ibid., II, 1.3.

65 Ibid., II, 28.24.

used by popes to affirm the papal use of the sword, Marsilius states that "Christ was speaking metaphorically when to his disciples' words, 'Behold, here are two swords,' the Lord replied, 'It is enough.'" And so, rather than taking the two swords passage literally, "it is apparent that Christ's words had [only] a mystical meaning. . . ." This interpretation is confirmed when Christ elsewhere "said to Peter: 'Put up again thy sword into its place,' or, 'into the sheath,' wherein he showed that he had not commanded the Apostles to defend him by such swords, but rather had been speaking mystically."⁶⁶ However, such occasional use aside, Marsilius casts a pall of suspicion over nonliteral interpretation—one that will be reinforced in Reformation debates. Obviously, given his arguments as outlined above about the subordination of scriptural interpretation to the legislator, little allowance will be made for deviating from the literal meaning of the text, except when it will serve secularizing political ends.

We must turn to one last aspect of the law and legislators as understood by Marsilius that has indirect, but very important, implications for the politicizing of Scripture. It was a commonplace of medieval political thought prior to Marsilius that unjust laws were not laws at all; that is, the measure of any human law was the Natural Law, one written into human nature itself by the Eternal Law, God Himself.⁶⁷ Marsilius deviates—or perhaps better, shifts—from this standard, arguing instead that human law is to be defined not by natural justice but as "a command coercive through punishment or reward to be distributed in the present world . . . considered in this way it most properly is called, and is, a law." Thus, against the notion that an unjust law is no law at all, Marsilius maintains that "sometimes false cognitions of the just and the beneficial become laws," indeed sometimes they are based upon "absolutely unjust" cognitions. But rather than being no laws at all, Marsilius classes them as "not absolutely perfect," for they *do* have the "proper form, that is, a coercive command," even while "they lack a proper condition, that is, the proper and true ordering of justice."⁶⁸ As we have seen above, Marsilius has already removed the consideration of divine law and justice from the political realm. Here, he severely qualifies any appeal even to natural standards of law and justice, offering a near prototype (as we shall see in later chapters) of the Machiavellian and Hobbesian notions of law defined as simply whatever the sovereign commands. Precisely because Marsilius has already given the power to interpret Scripture into the hands of the legislator, unbridling the power of the legislator cannot but have ominous implications for the subordination of Scripture to a thoroughly secularized, and even quite brutal, notion of politics.

The Defender of Peace and Ecclesiastical Poverty

The arguments of the *Defensor Pacis* were not intended by Marsilius to remain merely theoretical, as should be clear from Marsilius's influence on Ludwig of Bavaria.

⁶⁶ Ibid., II, 28.24.

⁶⁷ See, for example, St. Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, I–II, 93–95.

⁶⁸ Marsilius, *Defensor Pacis*, I, 10.4–5.

Marsilius himself participated in Ludwig's Italian expedition of 1327–1328, in his crowning as emperor in St. Peter's on January 16, 1328, his imperial deposition of John XXII on April 18, 1328, in the election of Ludwig's own candidate for pope (Nicholas V), and in the subsequent persecution of John XXII's supporters in Marsilius's capacity as Imperial Vicar. The *Defensor Pacis* was written to be put into action. The papacy must be subordinated to the imperial crown, the sacred to the secular, and no one can doubt Marsilius's decisive influence upon Ludwig's actions during the Italian campaign. But the pope in Avignon was able to muster antagonism to the alien German presence in Rome, and Ludwig found it necessary to withdraw from Rome in the late summer of 1328, making his desultory way back up to Germany, finally reaching it by the end of 1329.

But there were more subtle ways to subordinate the sacred to the secular, and do Ludwig a good turn. One in particular tied Marsilius to William of Ockham—who, himself fleeing persecution, would meet Ludwig while he was still in Italy. Marsilius obviously wished to deprive the popes of their temporal power. The poverty dispute provided an additional argument to help accomplish this. Arguing on behalf of the absolute poverty of Christ and the Apostles through appeal to the New Testament, Marsilius sought to strip the papacy of temporal power so that a secular ruler could establish a purely secular rule.

For Ockham, the same argument for poverty had a much different end, the integrity of the Franciscan charism. Yet the more fervently Ockham argued his case, the stronger the inadvertent support he supplied for Marsilius and his radical politicizing of the Bible. This seemingly symbiotic relationship was actually parasitic.

Marsilius had not met Ockham before writing the *Defensor Pacis*, but most likely learned of the great poverty dispute while he was teaching at Paris, and hence knew of it while writing the *Defensor Pacis*. In line with his political Averroism, Marsilius argued that "Christ separated the office of priest or bishops from that of rulers," and that Christ came "to teach humility and contempt for this world, as the way to deserve eternal salvation." This "utmost humility and contempt for the world" is "poverty," and hence the embrace of poverty is the only way to follow Christ's call to perfection" (as is evidenced in Matthew 19:16–21, Mark 10:17–21, and Luke 18:18–22, where the rich young man is told, if he would be perfect, "sell all that thou hast and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven").⁶⁹ This disavowal of all worldly goods and embrace of poverty represents the supreme perfection, and hence is called "supreme poverty."⁷⁰ Marsilius provides ample support from Scripture: Luke 14:33 ("so likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot by my disciple"⁷¹); Matthew 6:21 ("Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also"⁷²); Matthew 13:22 ("the deceitfulness of riches chokes the word"⁷³); Luke 6:20

⁶⁹ Ibid., II.11.2.

⁷⁰ Ibid., II.13.22.

⁷¹ Ibid., II.13.23.

⁷² Ibid., II.13.24.

⁷³ Ibid., II.13.24.

("Blessed are the poor"⁷⁴), Luke 9:23 ("If any man will come after me, let him deny himself"⁷⁵); and Matthew 6:34 ("Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself").⁷⁶

Marsilius thereby put John XXII, ensconced at the rich papal court in Avignon, on the defensive: poverty "befits every perfect man, especially the disciple and successor of Christ in the pastoral office; indeed, it is almost necessary for the man who must urge upon others contempt for the world, if he wished to succeed in teaching and preaching."⁷⁷ Pope John XXII, the cardinals, and bishops display no such contempt for the world; in fact, to Marsilius and many others, they seemed all too worldly.

For they who are teachers or pastors of others, and who possess such riches, do more to destroy men's faith and devotion by their contrary deeds and examples than they do to strengthen them by their words. . . . For if the future just judgment of God in the world to come is indeed believed in by most of the Roman pontiffs and their cardinals and the other priests or bishops . . . then by what conscience in accordance with God—let them answer, I beg—do they seize or steal, at every opportunity, all the temporal goods they can, which devout believers have bequeathed for the sustenance of gospel ministers and other poor persons, and donate or bequeath them to their relatives, or to any other persons not in need, obviously despoiling the poor thereby? And again—let them answer, I beg—by what conscience in accordance with the Christian religion do they consume the goods of the poor on so many unnecessary things—horses, estates, banquets, and other vanities and pleasures, open and concealed—when according to the Apostle in the first epistle to Timothy, last chapter, they ought to be content with food and shelter for ministering the gospel.⁷⁸

Rather than following Christ, and in contradiction to the Apostles whose successors they claim to be, "bishops and almost all other priests in modern times practice in almost every instance the opposites of the Gospel teachings whose observance they preach to others. For they have a burning desire for pleasures, vanities, temporal possessions, and secular rulership, and they pursue and attain these objectives with all their energies, not by rightful means, but by wrongdoing, hidden and open."⁷⁹ By such words, Marsilius tapped into the widespread (and well-earned) discontent with the all-too-worldly Avignon papacy.

Against the Church hierarchy, and in defense of the Franciscans, Marsilius then argued against John XXII that the embrace of supreme poverty allows for the

74 Ibid., II.13.25.

75 Ibid., II.13.27.

76 Ibid., II.13.27.

77 Ibid., II.11.3.

78 "There is great gain in godliness and contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world; but if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content" (1 Timothy 6:6–8). Marsilius, *Defensor Pacis*, II.11.4.

79 Ibid., II.11.6.

use of temporal goods—even buildings and real estate—and that this use does not entail *ownership*.⁸⁰ Since Christ obviously fulfilled supremely his own counsels for perfection,⁸¹ argued Marsilius, then he must have embraced poverty perfectly; yet Christ did make use of things, from the food he ate and the clothes he wore, to the money that Judas was keeping as a common fund;⁸² therefore, Christ must have used these things without owning them.⁸³ And indeed, the use of such things is necessary both for sustenance and for carrying on the exigencies of preaching the Gospel. From this reasoning, "it clearly follows of necessity that it is insane heresy to assert," as John XXII did in his bull *Ad conditorem canonum*, "that a thing or its use cannot be had apart from the aforesaid ownership. For he who says this thinks nothing other than that Christ's counsel [of perfection] cannot be fulfilled; which is an open lie and . . . must be shunned as vicious and heretical."⁸⁴

In arguing against the widespread and widely-known abuses of the Church hierarchy and affirming the Franciscan use-ownership distinction, Marsilius was far more concerned with subordinating the sacred to the secular than with reforming the Church. This is especially clear when Marsilius came to discuss who owns the goods of which the Franciscans claim use but not ownership. We recall that Pope Nicholas III's *Exiit qui seminat* (1279) declared that things given to the Franciscan Order for use could be considered the property of the papacy. Since that would only buttress the power of the papacy, Marsilius asserted instead that "the ownership of temporal things which have been set apart for the support of gospel ministers belongs to the legislators or to deputies appointed for this purpose either by the legislator or by the donors. . . ."⁸⁵ (The ripple effect of this assertion will be seen in the chapters on John Wycliffe and Henry VIII.)

Despite the initial success of the Italian campaign, Ludwig and his entourage (including Marsilius) were unable to effect anything so radical as the reduction of the papacy to apostolic poverty. The papacy, secure at Avignon, had no inclination toward Marsilius's demand to divest itself of its royal splendor in imitation of Christ and the Apostles, and even less to hand over its wealth to the imperial coffers. In the decade after Ludwig returned to Germany, Marsilius seemed to fade from view even while Ockham's star was rising. Yet the *Defensor Pacis* was destined to have its historic influence on other kings, as later chapters will show.

William of Ockham

In the same year that Marsilius's *Defensor Pacis* was written, 1324, William of Ockham left England for Avignon, having been summoned by the papal court to answer charges

80 Ibid., II.12.13–16; II.13.3–37.

81 Ibid., II.13.33.

82 Ibid., II.13.34–35.

83 Ibid., II.13.36.

84 Ibid., II.13.6–7.

85 Ibid., II.14.8.

that his writings were heretical (charges made by his fellow Englishmen, especially John Lutterell and Walter Chatton), the principal worries being Ockham's alleged Pelagianism and his Eucharistic theology.⁸⁶ About a year after Marsilius entered Rome with Ludwig, the head of the Franciscan Order, Michael of Cesena, also at Avignon, broke into open, heated disagreement with John XXII in regard to the poverty dispute. In May 1328, Michael of Cesena, William of Ockham, and some other Franciscans fled from Avignon to the protection of Ludwig of Bavaria, who was in Pisa at the time, making his way slowly back up the Italian peninsula to Germany. Ockham was excommunicated on June 6, 1328, for leaving Avignon without permission. From Pisa, Michael of Cesena issued appeals to John XXII (which Ockham signed) criticizing the pope's bulls. The pope's response was *Quia vir reprobus*, which simply reaffirmed John XXII's position and accused Michael and his fellow rebellious Franciscans of being heretical. Against John XXII, Ockham would take up his pen, and then soon enough turn to a defense of Ludwig against John as well, to spend his exile in Germany writing polemical treatises against John XXII and his successors, Benedict XII (1334–1342) and Clement VI (1342–1352).

As one might suspect, given that they were together in the court of Ludwig and had a mutual enemy in the papacy, there are connections between Ockham's political arguments and those of Marsilius. Unlike Marsilius, Ockham does not subordinate the ecclesiastical powers to the political powers; rather, he attempts to reinstate, against later papal pretensions, the generally accepted medieval view that the sacred and the secular are two distinct powers. Inadvertent support is given to Marsilius in the way that Ockham argues for the distinction, and the force by which he attacks any temporal claims of the papacy.

The Work of Ninety Days

Sometime between 1332 and 1334 Ockham wrote the *Opus nonaginta dierum* (*The Work of Ninety Days*, its title, coming from Ockham having written it in that amount of time⁸⁷). It is an enormous work that, after the manner of disputation, sets out both sides of the argument in the poverty dispute because "all things are examined and tested more effectively and 'truth hardpressed shines more into light' when arguments are strongly and sharply advanced on both sides of a disagreement."⁸⁸ The work proceeds as a debate on the text of John's *Quia vir reprobus*. Given the formal neutrality of the

presentation, Ockham's own opinions do not appear explicitly,⁸⁹ even though we are well aware that Ockham took the side of the Michaelists (the followers of Michael of Cesena) against John XXII in the poverty dispute. In this work at least, Ockham's focus is not defending Ludwig against John XXII, but the Franciscan distinction between use and ownership, for to deny this distinction "does destroy and confound every religious order which has a vow renouncing ownership of all temporal things" and "especially destroys and confounds the Order of blessed Francis."⁹⁰

Yet insofar as Ockham presents his case on behalf of the Franciscans against John XXII, he is duplicating and inadvertently reinforcing Marsilius's earlier arguments on behalf of poverty from the *Defensor Pacis*, which Marsilius made in order to support Ludwig and the subordination of the sacred to the secular. Needless to say, much ammunition for Marsilius and Ludwig was supplied by Ockham's charge that, in rescinding the use-ownership distinction affirmed by previous popes, and in declaring that the Apostles did own things, John XXII was a heretic.⁹¹

Ockham also supplied indirect support for Marsilius's politicization of the Bible. For example, Ockham's use of Matthew 19:21 ("If you wish to be perfect, go, sell all you have, and give to the poor"⁹²) or Matthew 8:20 ("Foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head"⁹³) in the service of his defense of poverty lent indirect support to Marsilius's politicized use of these very same passages of the New Testament.

But Ockham provided more direct support as well. Both Ockham and Ludwig wished to strip the papacy of all temporal claims, even though for quite different reasons. Ockham argued quite reasonably that John 18:36 ("My kingdom is not of this world") means that "the kingdom of Christ as man was not a temporal kingdom," and charged John XXII with a distorted interpretation of this passage, "dragging the divine Scripture—most clearly resisting—to his own sense" in order to assert that Christ did indeed have temporal lordship.⁹⁴ At first glance, this charge of manipulation is convincing, for John XXII asserted that Christ's statement "My kingdom is not of this world" should be interpreted in light of his immediate clarification to Pilate, "my kingdom is not *from* here [i.e., this world]" (John 18:36). "He did not say, 'It is not here,' but 'It is not from here,' as if to say, 'I do not have my kingdom from the world.'"⁹⁵ In short, the papacy's claim to temporal lordship, even over the emperor, comes from heaven, thereby making the pope's claims all the more compelling.

86 See the extensive bibliography in regard to John Lutterell and Walter Chatton in William Courtenay, "The Role of English Thought in the Transformation of University Education in the Late Middle Ages," in James Kittelson and Pamela Transue, *Rebirth, Reform and Resilience: Universities in Transition, 1300–1700* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1984), pp. 146–147, fn 7.

87 In his Epilogue, Ockham states, "This work of ninety days I have completed, although hastily and in a completely undecorated style, yet with much labor." William of Ockham, *The Work of Ninety Days* (2 volumes), translated by John Kilcullen and John Scott (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2001), vol. II, Epilogue, p. 848.

88 Ibid., I, Prologue, p. 47.

89 In his Epilogue, Ockham remarks, "What I myself think of all these things, however, I will attempt to explain if God grants grace, as far as the poverty of my talent permits for the time, in a certain thorough work upon all the constitutions of his [i.e., the bulls of John XXII] that others have attacked." Ibid., I, Epilogue, p. 849.

90 Ibid., I.8, p. 157.

91 Ibid., I.9, pp. 165–168.

92 Ibid., I.11, 201.

93 Ibid., I.11, p. 203.

94 Ibid., II.93, p. 583.

95 Ibid., II.93, pp. 576–577. Emphasis added.

It is easy to suspect, with Ockham, that John XXII is quibbling over words, twisting Scripture to his own dubious ends. But our judgment should be made in light of the larger political and theological context, and significant parts of that context are the arguments of Marsilius and the actions of Ludwig, both aimed at stripping the papacy of all temporal claims so that Christianity would serve the secular realm. Such servitude could not help but politicize the text. This will become startlingly clear, as we shall see, when, two centuries hence, England's Henry VIII will put Marsilius's arguments into action.

A Letter to the Friars

In the spring of 1334, Ockham wrote a far more personal work, the *Epistola ad Fratres Minores in capitulo apud Assisium congregatos* (*A Letter to the Friars Minor Gathered in Chapter at Assisi*), explaining why Michael of Cesena, Ockham himself, and other Franciscans had broken with John XXII—a most serious action, given St. Francis's adamant demand for the Friars' obedience to the papacy. Writing in his own person, Ockham states, "Know, then, and may all Christians know, that I stayed in Avignon almost four whole years before I recognized that the one who presided there had fallen into heretical perversity," and that, upon reading John XXII's arguments, "I found a great many things that were heretical, erroneous, silly, ridiculous, fantastic, insane, and defamatory, contrary and likewise plainly adverse to orthodox faith, good morals, natural reason, certain experience, and fraternal charity," and indeed, that John's arguments were "manifestly heretical."⁹⁶ As a result, "I gladly left Avignon to devote myself, in my small measure, to attacking that heretic and his heresies."⁹⁷ "For against the errors of this pseudo-pope 'I have set my face like the hardest rock,'" declared Ockham, using the words of the prophet Isaiah (50:7). And before he would ever affirm John's "errors as compatible with the faith, I would think that the whole Christian faith, and all Christ's promises about the Catholic faith lasting to the end of the age, and the whole Church of God, could be preserved in a few, indeed in one. . . ."⁹⁸

A Dialogue: The Birth of the Modern Exegete

Ockham's devotion, under the protection of Ludwig's court, to "attacking that heretic and his heresies," produced several important works during the period from 1334 to 1347, among them *Dialogus* (*A Dialogue*), *Octo quaestiones de potestate papae*

96 William of Ockham, *A Letter to the Friars Minor* in William of Ockham, *A Letter to the Friars Minor and Other Writings*, Arthur McGrade and John Kilcullen, ed., and translated by John Kilcullen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 3–4, 6.

97 Ibid., p. 8.

98 Ibid., p. 13.

(*Eight Questions on the Power of the Pope*), the *Breviloquium* (*Short Discourse*),⁹⁹ *De imperatorum et pontificum potestate* (*On the Power of Emperors and Pontiffs*), and, interestingly enough, a defense of the English king Edward III (1327–1377) against the papacy, *An Princeps*.¹⁰⁰

In the *Dialogus*, which takes the form of a dialogue between a student and master and that was influenced directly by Marsilius's arguments,¹⁰¹ Ockham again presents both sides of the argument,¹⁰² but his own position is easy to discern as he ever more thoroughly undermines the claims of the papacy. Especially notable for both the Reformation and the long-term secularization of the West that would mark the centuries ahead, is Ockham's assertion that

some believe that all the dissensions, wars, fights, and battles and the destructions and devastations of cities and regions and the countless other evils which have occurred in Italy for many years past, and still do not cease, have resulted from the riches of the Roman Church; it would have been beneficial for the whole Church of God if the Roman Church had in fact and deed imitated the Apostles' poverty and their way of living, putting at a distance all display in respect of vessels, clothes and furnishings generally, guards and every other kind of servant, and all sorts of other things.¹⁰³

In this, Ockham links the scriptural affirmation of poverty to civil peace in such a way that civil peace would seem to be assured if only the religious dispute can be resolved. In doing so, he prefigures the Enlightenment assertion made in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that religious dissension was the primary if not the only cause of war and civil discord (a view lent great support by the horrors of the Thirty Years' War).

Unlike Marsilius, Ockham's concern with the temporal power of the pope was not only the ill effects it has on civil peace. Temporal power also magnifies the effects of heresy, and "if a pope became a heretic, especially a pope with temporal

99 The full title of the last could hardly be more pointed: *Breviloquium de principatu-tyrannico super divina et humana, specialiter autem super Imperium et subiectos imperio, a quibusdam vocatis summis pontificibus usurpato* (*A Short Discourse on the Tyrannical Government Over Things Divine and Human, but Especially Over the Empire and Those Subject to the Empire, Usurped by Some Who Are Called Highest Pontiffs*.)

100 For an analysis of this latter treatise on behalf of the English king—which was written by Ockham, an Englishman in Munich pining for his homeland about 1338—see Michael Wilks, "Royal Patronage and Anti-Papalism from Ockham to Wyclif," in Anne Hudson and Michael Wilks, *From Ockham to Wyclif* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp. 135–163.

101 That does not mean, of course, that there was not some friction between Marsilius's and Ockham's arguments. See Garnett, *Marsilius of Padua and "The Truth of History,"* pp. 30–34.

102 "[I]n this tract, as in the whole of the dialogue, we will not say anything except in reporting. . . . In this tract. . . I will not indicate at all which of the reported opinions I think should be approved." William of Ockham, *A Dialogue*, in William of Ockham, *A Letter to the Friars Minor and Other Writings*, Part III, Tract II, Prologue, pp. 236–237.

103 Ibid., III, Tract I, Book 2, Chapter 2 (hereafter, III:I.2.2), p. 130.

power or temporally powerful adherents, it must be feared that he would infect almost all Christians with heretical wickedness."¹⁰⁴ Ockham's zeal to remove temporal power from the papacy was therefore doubled, given his belief that John XXII was indeed a heretic.

Going beyond criticizing John XXII in particular, Ockham offers reasons (quite compatible with Marsilius's call for a general council to rule the Church) that "It is beneficial . . . for the whole congregation of the faithful to be ruled by many," i.e., a general council, "rather than by one," i.e., a pope,¹⁰⁵ and further that "if the Church notices that the Church is ruled perversely or less usefully because of the fact that one by himself [i.e., the pope] rules over all, it is beneficial for it to have power to change such a regime into another that will be more useful for the time."¹⁰⁶

Of course, the papacy could easily cite Scripture about the primacy of Peter against such a change. But Ockham argues that necessity and utility trump even divine commands found in Scripture. Thus Ockham asserts that

for the sake of necessity it is permissible to act against a divine commandment, even one that is explicit, in things not evil in themselves but evil only because they are prohibited. Therefore, also, for the sake of the common utility it is permissible to act against a commandment of God and an ordinance of Christ. Therefore, even if Christ had ordained that one highest pontiff should be set over all the faithful, it would be permissible for the faithful, for the sake of common utility, to establish some other regime, at least for the time.¹⁰⁷

Overriding a divine command has scriptural warrant, maintains Ockham, in the example that Christ himself teaches in Matthew 12:4 and Luke 6:4, wherein "David and those who were with him licitly ate the loaves of offering against a divine commandment, for God explicitly commanded that no one except a priest should eat that bread." This is an important example in regard to Ockham's situation. Implied here, was the power of a king to override the authority of a priest in cases of necessity, a scriptural lesson not lost on Ludwig.

To drive home the point Ockham points out that King David himself "appointed several highest pontiffs" (I Chronicles 24:5).¹⁰⁸ In his own time, this would entail a change, effected by the emperor, of the Church from a monarchy to an aristocracy (as manifested in the council). This change would not be done lightly, but is called for because of the extraordinary need for reforming the Church, for "there is one rule of living in a time of peace and another in a time of persecution," so that similarly, "notwithstanding Christ's commandment, there is one rule of living in a case of necessity and utility and another outside the case of necessity and utility. . . ."¹⁰⁹

104 Ibid., III:I.2.30, p. 206.

105 Ibid., III:I.2.2, p. 131.

106 Ibid., III:I.2.20, p. 173.

107 Ibid., III:I.2.20, p. 176.

108 Ibid., III:I.2.20, p. 177.

109 Ibid., III:I.2.22, p. 183.

Yet even a general council is not immune from error: it "can begin with a bad beginning . . . since the pope can sin and be damned and can err against the faith with a bad and corrupt purpose—indeed, he can assemble a general council with the purpose of defining something contrary to Catholic truth. . . ."¹¹⁰ More important for our purposes, a council's decisions may or may not be properly guided by Scripture. Councils "have decided questions of faith arising out of the Scriptures by means of the sacred Scriptures." In doing so, "those present in a general council . . . rely on human wisdom and virtue, because they rely on the expertise concerning the Scriptures that they have and can have by careful thought. But error can be found in all things that rely on human wisdom and virtue; therefore members of a general council can err in deciding a question of faith."¹¹¹

This brings Ockham to examine the question of scriptural interpretation, the "power to interpret a commandment of God or of Christ."¹¹² Here Ockham makes a decisive move; in light of the later history of scriptural scholarship, a seismic shift. He appeals to the authority of the experts (*periti*) over the papacy and Church councils (or for that matter, over the entire *traditio*).

Interpretation is necessary, argues Ockham, when words are *ambigua* (doubtful, ambiguous, uncertain). "Interpretation therefore pertains to anyone who knows the true meaning of what has to be interpreted" (*qui scit verum intellectum illius quod interpretandum est*).¹¹³ Ockham asserts:

But many experts [*multi . . . periti*] know the true meaning [*verum intellectum*] of the commandments of God and Christ. They can interpret those commandments to those who do not know, because such interpretation is nothing but an exposition, clarification, or making manifest of the true meaning of God's commandments [*nisi expositio vel declaratio seu manifestatio veri intellectus preceptorum Dei*]. And thus Christians have power [*potestatem*] sometimes to interpret a divine commandment, namely when they know its true meaning [*verum intellectum*].¹¹⁴

The "Christian experts" (*Christiani periti*) are empowered to interpret such commands and ordinances—including those in regard to the status of poverty and about appointing the pontiff—because interpretation is not a matter of office, divine sanction, charism, or tradition, but "can be known through reasoning and the Scriptures" (*sciri potest per rationem et Scripturas*).¹¹⁵ Although he may intend it, Ockham makes no specific mention of conformity with doctrine or of the personal holiness of the *periti*. Expertise is sufficient authority alone.

110 Ibid., III:I.3.8, p. 211.

111 Ibid., III:I.3.8, p. 210.

112 Ibid., III:I.2.24, p. 185.

113 Ibid., III:I.2.24, p. 186.

114 Ibid., III:I.2.24, p. 186.

115 Ibid., III:I.2.24, pp. 186–187.

Ockham does not leave the reader in doubt that the authority of the *periti* can override that of the pope because it is they who properly interpret the meaning of Scripture:

[I]t is not permissible for the pope to interpret the words of God or Christ otherwise than it is for another, nor do we have to believe him in such matters more than any other wise man—indeed, in such matters those more expert than the pope [*magis periti quam papa*] should be preferred to the pope himself . . . [so that] in explaining the divine Scriptures those who treat of the divine Scriptures are preferred to the highest pontiffs [*quod divinarum scripturarum tractatores in sacrarum scripturarum expositionibus summis pontificibus preferuntur*].¹¹⁶

The councils fare no better against the experts. Like popes, councils have no guarantee keeping them free from error. Thus they too must be judged according to their Catholicity and that means according to Scripture. But the appeal to Scripture, for Ockham, is really an appeal to the experts:

If it is asked who is to judge whether they [the general councils] were held in a Catholic way, it is answered that because they did not define anything except what can be drawn out from the divine Scriptures [*quod potest elici ex scripturis divinis*], therefore it is for experts in the Scriptures [*periti in scripturis*], and those having sufficient understanding of the other written sources [*aliarum sufficientem intelligentiam scripturarum*], to judge in the manner of firm assertion that the things defined by them are defined in a Catholic way.¹¹⁷

While the appeal to Scripture may seem to some, especially non-Catholics, both innocent and obvious, Ockham's particular mode of making it represents an immense shift of authority, one that, in many respects, is far greater and far more modern than the turn to *sola scriptura* of the Reformation. The shift of authority is not from the pope and council to the text itself, but from the pope and council to the expert in interpreting the text.

Herein lie the first awakenings of the modern biblical exegete. In regard to the order of authority, we are far closer in these passages to the nineteenth- and twentieth-century understanding of the role of the professional scriptural scholar than we are to the sixteenth-century attempt to root authority in the biblical text as against the papacy. The "expert" stands in authoritative judgment not just above Church councils and the papacy, but also above the inexpert who are the vast majority of the faithful. He even stands above the text itself, insofar as it is *his* expertise that unlocks its definitive meaning.

Of course, it was not Ockham's intention to create the modern academic exegete—although one must add that, as is clear from reading his works, Ockham was a

¹¹⁶ Ibid., III:I.2.24, p. 187.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., III:I.3.9, p. 213.

thoroughgoing academic, a man of the university. But we can see the importance of attending to the larger political context for understanding the rise of modern biblical scholarship: it was Ockham's wranglings with the papacy, and the consequent disagreements concerning scriptural interpretations of poverty and Petrine authority, that brought him to elevate the exegetical expert to a position of authority characteristic of later modern biblical scholarship. We must now turn to another important aspect of Ockham, his highly influential approach to philosophy that helped put the "modern" in modern philosophy, thereby creating the intellectual context for historical-critical scholarship.

Ockham's Nominalism?

In regard to philosophy, William of Ockham is most famous for denying the reality of universals. That is, he argued that when we utter the quite ordinary sentence "That sheep is good natured" or the more philosophical "Socrates is a man," the words "sheep" and "man" do not refer to any reality inside or outside that particular sheep or Socrates. In other words, according to Ockham, the species name, the universal noun, has no foundation in nature. In nature there are only particulars.

If such universals are not in nature, from whence do they come? The notion of universals arises because we human beings class together particular things that appear to be similar to each other. Based upon this appearance of similarity, Ockham argued, the abstracting intelligence creates general concepts that are then reflected in the universal names "sheep" and "man." Since these universal terms are not rooted directly in reality, but are really only names, Ockham's philosophical position was later given the name nominalism (from the Latin *nomēn*, name).¹¹⁸ This way of approaching philosophy would become known by the fifteenth century as the *via moderna*, and would be self-consciously defined against another approach, the *via antiqua* associated most famously with the realist philosophy of St. Thomas. Adherents of the two schools were also known (respectively) as the *nominales* or *moderni* and the *reales*.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ According to Marilyn Adams, "Ockham regarded the view that universals are real things other than names as 'the worst error of philosophy.'" Marilyn McCord Adams, *William Ockham*, Vol. I, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), p. 13.

¹¹⁹ This terminology can sometimes generate more confusion than clarity. First of all, as has been pointed out by others, the appellations are relative even during the later Middle Ages, wherein the use often depended on what a particular person thought was original and venerable, and what an innovation and hence modern. Ockham believed that he was restoring the truth against the innovations of the radical Aristotelians, yet he is taken to be the founder of nominalism, the school of thought that scholars now agree defines the *via moderna*. See Heiko A. Oberman, "Via Antiqua and Via Moderna: Late Medieval Prolegomena to Early Reformation Thought," in Oberman, *The Impact of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994). Following upon this, the *via antiqua* obviously does not represent the united front of all ancient thinkers (it includes Aristotle but certainly not Democritus, Epicurus, or the Pyrrhonists) nor is it truly defined in terms of antiquity, since the most eminent proponents of the *via antiqua* were St. Albert and St. Thomas Aquinas. The terms are best understood in regard to their respective intellectual assumptions and methods, rather than relative age.

Such is the standard picture of Ockham and his influence, which, under intense scrutiny by scholars, has become more and more blurred (or at least stands in need of further clarification). To begin with, while it is clear that Ockham denied the extra-mental reality of universals, he did not regard them as purely fictional (in a way that we find later in Hobbes). Is Ockham, then, really a nominalist?

In regard to nominalism as a school, scholars have uncovered a surprising and daunting diversity in the century and a half after Ockham of those who may be classed as nominalists,¹²⁰ but depending on the criteria used, the lines of descent from Ockham have been drawn, erased, and redrawn so variously that the picture has become less and less distinct.¹²¹ Given this, some have even despaired of using the term “nominalist” at all (as if to vindicate the nominalist disparagement of universals and affirm the existence of sheer intellectual particularity). Some have whittled down the number of true nominalists to a handful, excluding Ockham himself! To this development in scholarship, Charles T. Davis whimsically replied, “There is a certain irony in the fact that nominalism, the great dissolvent, is being dissolved itself.”¹²² Even more ironically, this dissolution would seem to shrink Ockham’s signal contribution to philosophy

We may take them, then, as they come to be defined in the 1400s, as distinct schools of thought, the *via antiqua* identified principally with St. Albert Magnus, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Giles of Rome, and the *via moderna* identified most eminently with Ockham, but also Jean Buridan, Marsilius of Inghen, and others of similar approach. Nor would we want to read back into this controversy, the later ancients versus moderns, Aristotelians versus anti-Aristotelians, debates. Both the *via antiqua* and *via moderna* in the fifteenth century were largely defined by their respective approaches to reading Aristotle, each school having “its preferred reading of the *corpus aristotelicum*.” The debate was largely over which side was properly interpreting Aristotle, or perhaps more accurately, which interpretation of Aristotle was in accordance with the faith. See Maarten J.F.M. Hoenen, “*Via Antiqua* and *Via Moderna* in the Fifteenth Century: Doctrinal, Institutional, and Church Political Factors in the *Wegestreit*,” in Russell Friedman and Lauge Nielsen, *The Medieval Heritage in Early Modern Metaphysics and Modal Theory, 1400–1700* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), pp. 11, 13–16. See also William Courtenay, “The Academic and Intellectual Worlds of Ockham,” in Paul Vincent Spade, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), especially pp. 28–29. For clarification of when the terms came to be applied with determinate consistency, see Neal Ward Gilbert, “Ockham, Wyclif, and the ‘*Via Moderna*,’” in Albert Zimmermann, ed., *Antiqui und Moderni: Traditionsbewußtsein und Fortschrittsbewußtsein im späten Mittelalter* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1974), pp. 85–125. For an insightful history of contemporary attempts to define the *via moderna*, see John Bossy, “Met on the *Via Moderna*,” in Peter Biller and Barrie Dobson, *The Medieval Church: Universities, Heresy, and the Religious Life: Essays in Honour of Gordon Leff* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 1999), pp. 309–324.

120 For an assessment of the difficulties see Alister McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993), pp. 70–75; William J. Courtenay, “Nominalism and Late Medieval Religion,” in Charles Trinkaus and Heiko Oberman, *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), pp. 26–59.

121 For a good introduction to the difficulties inherent in the diverse approaches to tracing Ockham’s influence see William Courtenay, “Was There an Ockhamist School?” in Maarten Hoenen, J. J. Josef Schneider, and Georg Wieland, eds., *Philosophy and Learning: Universities in the Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), pp. 263–292.

122 Charles T. Davis, “Ockham and the Zeitgeist,” in Trinkaus and Oberman, *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion*, pp. 59–65; quote from p. 60.

considerably, and hence undermine in important respects the very attention scholars have lavished upon him and as well as upon nominalism.¹²³ Such are the confusions

123 To give an example, William Courtenay has done as much as Heiko Oberman to rehabilitate Ockham, and notes that the result of the combined research of Erich Hochstetter, Paul Vignaux, Philotheus Boehner, Ernest Moody, and Oberman himself “has been to establish the orthodox, non-radical character of the thought of Ockham and [Gabriel] Biel, and, by extension, [Pierre] d’Ailly,” as opposed to the radical nominalism of Robert Holcot, Adam Wodeham, Nicholas of Autrecourt, and John of Mirecourt. But he then argues that recent research has also found that even the radical nominalists weren’t radical nominalists, and in fact Nicholas of Autrecourt may be the only true nominalist left—although that may be due to scantiness of texts. See Courtenay, “Nominalism and Late Medieval Religion,” pp. 50, 54–57. He also notes the semi-Pelagianism of Ockham’s soteriology, citing Oberman as source, as if semi-Pelagianism is somehow within the domain of orthodoxy. But Boehner states—seemingly to the contrary of the near-dissolution of nominalism under scholarly scrutiny—that Ockham’s nominalism was epoch-making: “Almost all his predecessors had maintained that natures and essences considered in themselves had some kind of generality or commonness; in order to become numerical units or individuals or singulars, natures had to be individualized by a principle of individuation. Ockham’s predecessors had thus approached this problem from the side of the universal; Ockham attacked it from the side of the individual; a change of outlook almost as epoch-making as the Copernican revolution in astronomy.” See Philotheus Boehner, O.F.M., *Ockham: Philosophical Writings* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1990), p. xxvii. If it was indeed epoch-making, then it should not dissolve under scholarly scrutiny. Yet Alister McGrath cites Boehner’s account of Ockham’s epistemology (which Boehner denotes “realistic conceptualism”) as vindication that ascribing nominalism to Ockham is “an anachronism.” See Philotheus Boehner, O.F.M., “The Realistic Conceptualism of William Ockham,” in E. M. Buytaert, *Philotheus Boehner, O.F.M., Ph.D.: Collected Articles on Ockham* (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1958), pp. 156–174, and McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation*, pp. 71–72. One is left to wonder: If Ockham’s contribution was epoch-making, and it was not nominalistic, what was the Copernican revolution he initiated? Boehner himself is not clear. He argues that Ockham inspired not so much disciples as followers of a general trend called nominalism, united not around Ockham himself but “united at least against the realism of the older scholastics.” And this loose band, united by opposition to realism, are rightly called proponents of the *via moderna*, “not so much a school as a trend of thought.” See Boehner, O.F.M., *Ockham: Philosophical Writings*, p. li. But then it would seem odd of Boehner to think Ockham’s thought epoch-making and also call Ockham’s epistemology “realistic conceptualism.” Boehner’s explanation of this designation is as follows. It is conceptualism because of Ockham’s “affirmation of universals in the mind and by the denial of any universality outside the mind,” but it is realism because of Ockham’s “affirmation of a correspondence or similarity between concepts and reality . . .” See Boehner, O.F.M., “The Realistic Conceptualism of William Ockham,” p. 163. Assuming its accuracy, Boehner’s Ockham reminds one of something like the modern idealism of Fichte or Kant: Universals are not in things, nor are they fictions in the imagination; rather, “the concept or universal involved in a cognition is identical with the very act of abstractive cognition, hence it is a psychical entity . . .” See Boehner, O.F.M., *Ockham: Philosophical Writings*, pp. xxviii–xxix. Boehner vehemently denies that this is “idealism” in his “The Realistic Conceptualism of William Ockham,” on the grounds that idealism demands a divorce of thought from reality. But in calling it idealism, we are indicating the similarity to, e.g., Kant in affirming that universals are derived from the mind’s mode of knowing rather than from things, for while the similarity existing in individuals is real, and we have, argues Ockham, a true intellectual knowledge of the singular (*notitia intuitiva intellectiva*), the universality still comes from the mind directly. It is on the basis of Ockham’s affirmation of the intellectual, intuitive knowledge of the singular that brings Boehner to deny that Ockham is really an idealist. It is interesting to note that Ockham himself made two attempts at the formulation of universals. The original formulation of the status of universals, the so-called *fictum* theory, assumed that universals were in the imagination rather than in the intellect. In the revised theory, the *intellectio*-theory, they are in the intellect. According to Boehner, there was a greater dissimilitude between things

of scholarship. Perhaps the best way to sort things out would be to take another tack, and focus on the theological reasons for Ockham's assertions.

God's Absolute and Ordained Power

Given the effect of nominalism upon later philosophy, it would be reasonable to assume that Ockham's rejection of the reality of universals, of common natures, was at heart philosophical. But strange as it may sound, Ockham's philosophical nominalism was at heart theological. Ockham rejected the reality of universals because he believed that those who asserted their reality were somehow binding God's omnipotence to His creation. This notion of binding of God's omnipotence had two related sources in the Middle Ages, Islam and Averroism.

To set things out in the most general way, earlier Islamic thinkers (oddly enough, somewhat like Ockham) had desired to assert the fullest sense of God's omnipotence, and argued that God *immediately* caused the physical order to be the way it was, re-creating and sustaining it at every moment with no causal connections in time at all. They relied on a particular atomistic view of nature to sustain this theological view of God's absolute omnipotence, since they could imagine that things being made of atoms—created in particular configurations on the spot, so to speak—would eliminate the notion that common natures (i.e., universals like dog, cat, sheep, etc.) existed over time. Their reasoning: such common natures, if allowed to exist, would themselves provide the structure and continuity of reality, rather than having reality directly and continually depending upon God.

Against this view, Islamic thinkers—the most prominent being Avicenna (980–1037) and especially Averroes (1126–1198)—argued that God is bound to the order of creation (as elucidated by Aristotle), and so does not act like a kind of oriental tyrant in regard to natural things.¹²⁴ As we said above, on the Christian side of things those

and universals as *ficta* than things and universals as concepts in the intellect. Even so, Boehner makes the curious statement that in the “*intellectio*—theory . . . universals are real beings (that is real accidents of the mind)” and so this grants “more similarity between concept and reality. . . .” See Boehner, O.F.M., “The Realistic Conceptualism of William Ockham,” pp. 162, 169–174. Marilyn Adams uses the earlier and later theories as “objective-existence theory” and the “mental-act theory,” which undoubtedly confuses most readers, given that we associate “objective” with real. But for Ockham, the nonreal mode of existence is called “objective.” See Marilyn McCord Adams, *William Ockham*, Vol. I, pp. 73–75. It would seem that the universal had its origin in the *name* that we give to our abstractive cognition, a cognition that has its origin in the mind's comparison of similarities of individuals. As Boehner states, “Universality, therefore, is simply a manner in which a sufficiently generalised abstractive cognition is predicable, and thus it exists wholly within the mind. On the side of the individuals that are known, there exists only individuality and the similarity of individual natures.” See Boehner, O.F.M., *Ockham: Philosophical Writings*, p. xxviii. But this fits the classic definition of nominalism well enough to wonder why we should join McGrath in thinking that ascribing nominalism to Ockham is “an anachronism.” We seem to be back at our starting point, with the standard definition of nominalism.

124 E. Grant, “Science and Theology in the Middle Ages,” in D. C. Lindberg and R. L. Numbers (Hgg.), *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter between Christianity and Science* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 1986), pp. 49–113; “The Condemnation of 1277: God's Absolute Power and Physical Thought in

later Islamic thinkers informed the West's incorporation of the philosophy of Aristotle. For some, the Aristotelian approach was so lucid that they began to place the philosophy of Aristotle (as mediated especially through the commentaries of Averroes) above revealed truth.

Such an elevation of the philosophy of a pagan above the revelation of Christ raised Ockham's ire to defend the omnipotence of God against *any* philosophical attempts to mitigate His absolute will. For Ockham, any binding of God's will was an unconscionable violation of God's sovereignty and a direct contradiction to His omnipotence (*potentia Dei absoluta*). Ockham hoped to deny the “Greco-Arabian necessitarianism”¹²⁵ (to use William Courtenay's phrase) of Averroism by asserting that universals were merely names. If universals were actually in things, then not only would creation be determined by them, but also it would seem that God's actions as creator would be restricted by their existence and necessary relationships. Against this, Ockham argued that nature as it presents itself to us is merely one among the infinite number of possible expressions of God's creative will and power, and that God's power itself is so absolute that it is bound by nothing at all except the principle of noncontradiction. Thus, nature as it *happens* to be is entirely contingent, ordained by God as one among countless possibilities, although once God has so determined the order—expressed as His *potentia ordinata*—he binds Himself to that decision in a kind of covenant (*pactum*). For Ockham, the same reasoning applied to the *ordinata* of redemption. God could save by any means according to his *potentia absoluta*. Christ could be incarnated as a stone, a block of wood, or even an ass, or more importantly, God could justify sinners directly without creating any specific habit in the individual.¹²⁶ But in both cases, God has indeed chosen a particular *ordinata*.¹²⁷

Ockham's position had important implications. Since ultimately nothing can be read from nature (which was merely a particular expression of God's power) about His actual, inscrutable nature defined by His absolute power, then there could be no philosophical climbing from the contingent creation to an understanding of any necessary metaphysical principles or to God Himself. The only real connection that can be made is from the side of God, through revelation, and even here God's power is absolute and His ways ultimately inscrutable. He could have ordained any number of ways for our salvation as long as they weren't self-contradictory. Thus, the supernatural does not presuppose and build upon the natural; rather, the two are radically separate. The long-term tendency will be to make philosophy entirely independent of the truths

the Late Middle Ages” *Viator* 10 (1979), pp. 211–244. Cf. also D. Perler and U. Rudolph, *Occasionalismus: Theorien der Kausalität im arabisch-islamischen und im europäischen Denken* (Göttingen: 2000).

125 Courtenay, “Nominalism and Late Medieval Religion,” pp. 40–41.

126 Alister McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* pp. 21, 79–80.

127 It is important to understand that Ockham affirms that this distinction between the *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata* does not mean that there are in God two actual, distinct powers. The distinction is one in our intellect, in conceiving the difference between what God has in fact ordained, and what He could do (anything that is not contradictory). See Armand Maurer, *The Philosophy of William of Ockham in the Light of Its Principles* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1999), pp. 257–259, 265.

of revelation, and the truths of revelation themselves to be understood fideistically. Both tendencies reinforce Marsilian thought. Philosophy supports the secular order as the independent authority in natural affairs, and defines reason entirely since faith is entirely above reason. But in so radically disassociating supernatural revelation from creation, Ockham's thought tends toward faith understood as irrational fideism—exactly the assessment of Averroes and Marsilius. Ockham's argument seems to imply that about revelation (to reuse a quote from Marsilius) "we can say nothing through demonstration, but we hold it by simple belief apart from reason."

Ockham's philosophical revolution would also have long-term effects that are essential to grasp for what will occur later in regard to modern scriptural scholarship. First, it sets up for a law-based understanding of the cosmos that will eventually yield a natural philosophy in which the miraculous is impossible. How this happened is rather complex.

For Ockham, philosophy grasps only the contingent order of creation. Therefore, of the three greatest theoretical sciences as enumerated by Aristotle—metaphysics, mathematics, and physics—Ockham's analysis severely deflates the pretensions of two, metaphysics and physics, leaving only mathematics unscathed (an important result, we shall see, in regard to the development of modern science). In their stead, Ockham (albeit unintentionally) raised the merely instrumental science of logic, the tool by which we examine what is or is not self-contradictory. Some reflection will be necessary to bring out the implications.

In rejecting universals, nominalism rejected Aristotelian forms, and this rejection, we recall, was theological at root. The forms, even understood as ideas in the Divine Mind, seemed to Ockham to limit God's will. But the elimination of forms left reality as a collection of essentially unrelated particulars, each of which, presumably, could then be an object of empirical scrutiny.¹²⁸ Yet empirical examination of sheer particularity as such is notably difficult. The human mind understands more by similarity than difference. Rather than being left with an intractable mass of particulars, natural philosophers such as Galileo, Descartes, and Newton would substitute mathematical forms as the new universals, the ideal forms that define the shape and activity of passive or inert matter. For most theologians in the seventeenth century, these mathematical forms were taken to be impressed by God according to His will; they were the "forms" of His commands, or laws, of nature. Since for these theologians the laws had their origin in God's will, the laws could be otherwise, and so, presumably, would the mathematical forms they took.¹²⁹ But again, the theological belief in the ultimate contingency of the laws was short-lived. Within a century, the inner necessity of

128 In Francis Oakley's words, "The tendency [of the *via moderna*] . . . was to set God over against the world he had created and which was constantly dependent upon him; to view it now as an aggregation of particular entities linked solely by external relations, comprehensible . . . each in isolation from others, and, as a result, open to investigation only by some form of empirical endeavor." See Francis Oakley, *Natural Law, Laws of Nature, Natural Rights: Continuity and Discontinuity in the History of Ideas* (New York: Continuum, 2005), p. 53.

129 See Francis Oakley, "Christian Theology and the Newtonian Science: The Rise of the Concept of the Laws of Nature," *Church History* (1961), Vol. 30, pp. 433–457 (especially pp. 436–437).

mathematics was identified with the laws of nature, and nature came to be governed by its own laws, the result being that the "necessitarianism" of mathematics drove out the possibility of divine action (and soon enough, the Divine).

Again, we must be careful about what charge we lay against Ockham. Ockham's denial of universals allowed for, but did not of itself cause, the replacement of Aristotelian forms with mathematical forms. The most accurate characterization might be that Ockham's nominalism left a vacuum that would be filled by another kind of universal. If the modern account of the laws of nature did indeed have its origin in Ockham's desire to safeguard God's omnipotent will,¹³⁰ these laws would soon enough break away from the will of God (in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), and come to be considered self-subsisting causal powers that either limited or excluded divine action. One can hardly downplay the importance of this development for the judgment of nineteenth-century German scriptural scholars that the miraculous had to be excised from Scripture or be reduced to the mythological.

It is also fair to say that Ockham's denial of universals led to, or at least contributed to, a kind of reductionism in physics that favored materialism, another important development for setting the context of the development of modern scriptural scholarship. While Ockham seems to have remained something of an Aristotelian, he qualified it in such a way as to support the development of atomism.¹³¹ In addition, insofar as nominalism focused on particularity as the source of intelligibility, it would lend itself to the notion that particular parts are more essential than wholes. As will become apparent in later chapters, the acceptance of a reductionist mode of science will lead (by imitation) to an exegetical focus on the parts of the text at the expense of the whole. Further, the materialist assumptions of modern science will cause spiritual aspects of the biblical text to become more and more suspect. Again, Ockham did not cause these developments directly, but he did prepare the way for them.

There is another related and important effect of Ockham's philosophical-theological arguments. As should be clear, much of Ockham's analysis depends upon the

130 We might call this the Oberman-Oakley thesis, after two of its most significant recent proponents, Heiko Oberman and Francis Oakley. See the already-mentioned works by Oakley, and the works by Oberman mentioned below. As Peter Harrison has pointed out in some detail, there are other significant problems with Oberman-Oakley thesis about the relationship of Ockham's nominalism and voluntarism to modern science. See Peter Harrison, "Voluntarism and Early Modern Science," *History of Science* 40 (2002), pp. 63–89. While it has some merit—more, we think, than Harrison seems to indicate—there are serious flaws and oversimplifications. As a generalization, it seems safest and most accurate to say that Ockham prepared the way for later developments, but other contributing factors must be taken into account. The pertinent question, of course, is how all this bears on our understanding of modern scriptural scholarship.

131 See André Goddu, "Ockham's Philosophy of Nature," in Paul Vincent Spade, *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 143–167. The more radical nominalist Nicholas of Autrecourt (1300–1350) soon made the implicit sympathy to atomism explicit. This is all the more interesting because he did it through a revival of atomism as found in Democritus and Epicurus. It was more likely his association with Epicurus, rather than nominalism, that brought about the condemnation of his writings. See Bernard Pullman, *The Atom in the History of Human Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 99–100.

distinction between God's *potentia absoluta* and the merely contingent expression of God's *potentia ordinata*. In the expression of God's *potentia ordinata* in nature we are faced with a myriad of particulars, and there is no way, through analysis, to reach beyond the created effect to the metaphysical cause, God. There is no *analogy of being* connecting creator and creature.¹³² This will contribute to the displacement of typological, allegorical scriptural interpretation, a more profound displacement than may at first appear.

132 More recent assessments of nominalism, especially by Heiko Oberman, have counted this as a gain. For Oberman, the old Thomistic charge that nominalism introduced an arbitrary God defined by an untethered will, misreads the distinction intended between the *potentia absoluta* and *ordinata*. "As far as the fourteenth-century intention of the distinction between the *potentia absoluta* and the *potentia ordinata* is concerned, there exists a firm scholarly consensus: it marks the voluntary self-limitation of the omnipotent God and hence the non-necessary contingent nature of the established order of creation and redemption. The older view of the nominalist God as the arbitrary tyrant by whose whim the present order can be suddenly overturned seemed discredited once and for all." See Oberman, "Via Antiqua and Via Moderna: Late Medieval Prolegomena to Early Reformation Thought," in Oberman, *Impact of the Reformation*, p. 20. For Oberman, nominalism of the *via moderna* is a boon for the development of modern science, for it "not only intended to establish the contingency of the created order but also to free physics from the embrace of metaphysics so as to allow the investigation of the world by means of reason and experience." See Oberman, "Via Antiqua and Via Moderna: Late Medieval Prolegomena to Early Reformation Thought," p. 11. Oberman would seem to tie this boon to the destruction of analogy, and his words are worth quoting at length because the issues presented are central to the analysis of the present book.

If God is no longer tied to creation by "deterministic" causation but related to it by volition, that is, by his personal decision, then all metaphysical arguments based on necessary causal links—as is indeed typical of the cosmology of Aristotle and the *via antiqua* of Aquinas—lose their cogency, if not their credibility. The actual situation is the exact reverse of what the modern critics of nominalism argue: it is not God who is arbitrary but rather human beings in their explanations of problems in natural philosophy, when these are not tested and supported by experience and experiment. . . .

In theology a parallel advance is achieved. Whereas in the realm of natural philosophy physics is freed from the shackles of metaphysics, in the realm of theology metaphysics is shown to be sheer speculation when not verifiable in God's self-revelation, which for the later Middle Ages means Scripture and tradition. If there does not exist a metaphysically necessary ladder along which the first cause has to "connect with" the second cause, the laws of nature can be derived no longer from illuminating the physical world from "above," but from this world itself. The same applies to theology, but vice versa. The truth about God can no longer be derived from "below": the second causality does not erect a Jacob's ladder which allows us to transcend the natural phenomena by reasoning back to the first cause, God. Not the reliability but the predictability of the established order is in doubt.

Oberman, "Via Antiqua and Via Moderna: Late Medieval Prolegomena to Early Reformation Thought," pp. 10–11. See also his "Luther and the Via Moderna: The Philosophical Backdrop of the Reformation Breakthrough," contained in Oberman, *The Two Reformations: The Journey from the Last Days to the New World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), especially pp. 22–23, 27, 33. While no one can gainsay the important work that Oberman has done to deepen and clarify our understanding of nominalism, one can take significant issue with parts of his analysis. To begin, we should distinguish between "Greco-Arabian necessitarianism" (to use Courtenay's phrase again) such as one would find in Averroism and the doctrine of the analogy of being as found in Aquinas. Averroism displaced revelation by exalting Aristotelian philosophy, so that the God of revelation had to conform to the god of philosophy as understood through a particular reading of the Peripatetic, one that was, arguably, in tension with Thomism in this regard is

logical, allegorical scriptural interpretation, a more profound displacement than may at first appear.

For St. Thomas,¹³³ since universal names do refer to the universal forms in real things, there is a real relationship when we signify a thing by a word. This bears an *analogy* to the Divine relationship of word and thing in regard to the biblical text, even while the Divine relationship remains qualitatively superior: "The author of Holy Writ is God, in whose power it is to signify His meaning, not by words only (as men can do) but also by things themselves," so that "the things signified by the words have themselves also a signification."¹³⁴ Thus, for St. Thomas, "the things signified by the words can be themselves *types* of other things."¹³⁵ Such was the foundation of biblical typology.

This distinction between the way human beings and God can signify allowed for the twofold distinction between the literal and the spiritual sense: the "first signification whereby words signify things belongs to the first sense, the historical or literal"; and the second "signification whereby things signified by words have themselves also a signification is called the spiritual sense, which is based on the literal, and presupposes it." (St. Thomas, following St. Augustine, maintained that "allegory . . . stands for the three spiritual senses."¹³⁶)

Both human beings and God can signify according to the historical or literal sense, but only God, properly speaking, can signify in the spiritual sense for only He can create real things that signify other things. The spiritual sense is, therefore, ontologically rooted. As Peter Harrison notes, it was this "representative power of natural objects" that allowed things, in allegory, to stand for other things, and "provided the world with its intelligibility."¹³⁷ God wrote allegories into creation itself before He wrote them into the Bible; the allegorizing of the biblical exegete had divine mandate.

Nominalism first of all severed the real connection between universal names and things, because it severed the real connection between the similar appearance of natural kinds and the actual species-universal in things (which God uses to signify other things, e.g., the nature of lion as a species, and not just a particular thing we happen to call lion by its appearance of similarity). Moreover, nominalism's rejection of the doctrine of analogy and its affirmation of the created order as completely contingent meant that *natural* things do not bear inherent spiritual meanings directing the human

much the same as to conflate Ockham with later nominalists such as Nicholas of Autrecourt and John of Mirecourt (or perhaps in light of what we say below, to conflate Ockham with later, more acceptable forms of nominalism, such as one finds in Gabriel Biel). Thomas's doctrine of the analogy of being is not meant to limit God, but to express the necessary relationship between the goodness of the Creator and the goodness of creation.

133 We do not imply, of course, that allegorical reading began with St. Thomas. Such readings can be traced back to Origen and St. Augustine.

134 St. Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, I.1.10.

135 Ibid.

136 Ibid., ad 2.

137 Peter Harrison, "The Bible and the Emergence of Modern Science," *Science & Christian Belief*, vol. 18, No. 2 (2006), pp. 115–132, especially p. 118.

mind to God (although, by contrast, particular things revealed in Scripture may).¹³⁸ Spiritual interpretation, in whatever form it may occur (the spiritual had been famously subdivided into the allegorical, moral, and anagogical senses¹³⁹), would then need to be downplayed or transformed (a development that will become apparent in later chapters). This is important for understanding why, in part, modern scriptural scholarship came to emphasize the literal-historical sense. Since the natural world no longer is analogically symbolic, the second way of signifying (the “signification whereby things signified by words have themselves also a signification . . . called the spiritual sense”) of which only God is capable, must drop out, leaving only one kind of signification for both God and humanity: the “first signification whereby words signify things belongs to the first sense, the historical or literal.” The result is that Holy Scripture itself comes to be understood as signifying *in the same way* as any humanly written book.

The End of Ockham and the Beginning of Ockhamism

Ockham died of the plague in 1347, but even before his death his work had gained a foothold on the continent in Paris. The works of Ockham were prohibited (but not condemned) at Paris by the Arts Faculty in 1339 and 1340.¹⁴⁰ In the statute of 1339 the prohibition had to do with the works of Ockham not being customarily read and officially approved, yet despite this, “some have presumed to dogmatize [*dogmatizare*] the doctrine of William called Ockham publicly and privately [*occulte*] by holding small meetings on this subject in private places. . . .”¹⁴¹ This was not merely a neutral decree, but promulgated to protect the Arts Faculty from intellectually dangerous ideas, specifically hearkening back to the famous decree of 1277 condemning Averroism.¹⁴² An oath was demanded of the English-German nation at Paris in October 1341 that demanded that they reveal any persons secretly supporting the *secta Occanica*. At about the same time, the Arts Faculty of Paris instituted an anti-Ockhamist oath against the *scientia Okamica*, and admonished its members instead to uphold (irony of ironies, in light of the edict of 1277) the “*scientiam Aristotelis et sui Commentatoris Averrois et aliorum commentatorum antiquorum in expositorum dicti Aristotelis*,” unless,

138 On these implications, especially as they play out in the Reformation and in early modern science, see Peter Harrison, “The Bible and the Emergence of Modern Science” and also his “Fixing the Meaning of Scripture: The Renaissance Bible and the Origins of Modernity,” *Concilium* 294 (2002), pp. 102–110.

139 According to St. Thomas (*Summa Theologiae*, I.1.10), the allegorical sense is applicable “so far as the things of the Old Law signify the things of the New Law,” the moral sense “so far as things are done in Christ, or so far as things which signify Christ, are types of what we ought to do,” and the anagogical sense “so far as they signify what relates to eternal glory. . . .” As noted above, the term allegory could stand for all three.

140 On these statutes see Courtenay, “Was There an Ockhamist School?” in Hoenen, Schneider, and Wieland, eds., *Philosophy and Learning*, pp. 276–284.

141 Ibid., “Was There an Ockhamist School?” p. 276.

142 Ibid., p. 279. There is, of course, an interesting irony here, given that the edict of 1277 would go a long way in preparing for Ockham’s rejection of Aristotle and use of the *potentia absoluta*.

of course, they are “*contra fidem*.”¹⁴³ Despite all this, by 1343 Ockham was cited often and positively by the Italian scholar Gregory of Rimini at Paris (even given his differences with Ockham), and by 1345 Paris seemed enthralled by English thought.¹⁴⁴ Interestingly enough, the flow of Ockham’s thought into Paris in regard to theology was, largely, by way of Italy.¹⁴⁵ And so, just before Ockham’s death, his thought was set to spread all over Europe, a point that we can understand, given the special academic place of Paris. Since Paris was the principal continental university granting theological doctorates, knowledge of Ockham and those influenced by him spread to all nations who sent students for this degree. It was at Paris (or at least from contact with Paris) as early as the 1340s that German students learned of the new English thought, although some Germans went directly to Oxford for study during this period and would pick it up there.¹⁴⁶ And so, Ockham and nominalism, however we may trace the complex lineage, would have a significant hold in Germany by the time of Luther a century and a half later.

Conclusion

We began with the assertion that Marsilius politicized the exegesis of scripture directly, and Ockham, indirectly or accidentally. Marsilius’s direct politicizing must be understood in terms of his secularizing goal; Ockham’s theological-philosophical and political arguments, which he meant to serve a higher cause, overlapped with and hence reinforced those of Marsilius. It is not the last time that we will see this kind of symbiosis.

Keeping the symbiotic nature of the arguments in mind, we may end by highlighting the specific contributions of each to the future development of the modern approach to Scripture that comes to define the historical-critical method. Much could be said, but at least the following points should be emphasized.

The first and most obvious—seen clearly in Marsilius—is the steering of the West toward secularization, toward a this-worldly focus that regards belief in the next world with suspicion if not contempt. In this view, religion is regarded as subrational, at best a step toward the perfection of reason in philosophy. We should not then be surprised that this common theme ties together—in form, if not by pedigree—Averroism and the Enlightenment disdain for revealed religion so characteristic of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. We might even see a link to the Hegelianism that sees history itself as an unfolding from the bottom to top of the hierarchy, moving from those

143 Ibid., p. 284.

144 Courtenay, “The Role of English Thought in the Transformation of University Education in the Late Middle Ages,” in James Kittelson and Pamela Transue, *Rebirth, Reform and Resilience: Universities in Transition, 1300–1700*, pp. 121–122. As Courtenay has pointed out, scholarship now points to a closer affinity between Ockham and Rimini, even though Rimini criticized the Pelagian tendencies of Ockham. Ibid., pp. 129–133.

145 Ibid., pp. 125–126.

146 Ibid., pp. 104, 137–145.

defined by their imaginations and passions and moved only by poetry and rhetoric, to the theologians moved by probable arguments, and finally culminating with the philosophers moved only by reason. According to this type of schema, wherever it occurs, the goal of scriptural exegesis will be either to rationalize Scripture for everyone's sake, or as Marsilius desired, to politicize it by reinterpreting Scripture to serve a merely moral function, keeping the unphilosophic masses orderly and happy with their lot in civil society. But ultimately it simply means leaving revelation behind for the maturity of philosophy. As a consequence, at least for the enlightened, the biblical text is of interest only historically.

A second theme in Marsilius, which he emphasized by innuendo, likewise leads to ever more thorough politicization of the Bible by modern exegetes, and so we can call it by a more modern name, the hermeneutics of suspicion. Marsilius implied that revealed religion always has a natural cause: at its best, the philosophic few who use religion to control the unruly masses for the sake of good political order; at its worst, the cagey priests who dupe the masses to fill their own coffers. Since Marsilius provides a rather tepid defense of Scripture in this regard, the reader is left wondering whether the Bible itself might be (along with *other* ancient religious texts) simply another example of such clever manipulation, either by the characters in it, or the editors of it.

On the less theoretical level, Marsilius placing in secular hands the ultimate interpretation of the Bible (along with Ockham's inadvertent support) will have immediate ramifications for the political use of Scripture, a use that, since it is bent to the particulars of political situations, cannot help but politicize interpretation. We will soon discover the ill effects of such bending in the chapters on Machiavelli and Henry VIII.

Turning now to Ockham in particular, nominalism and voluntarism will bear much and varied fruit over the next centuries. Although Ockham did not consider himself un-Aristotelian, his rejection of the reality of universals could not help but undermine formal and final causation, and hence prepare the way for the anti-Aristotelianism inherent in the new materialist reductionist science. In addition, his voluntarism would at least indirectly influence those who put forth the new mathematical law-based account of nature. Both aspects—materialist reductionism and mathematization—would help drive Divine activity out of the cosmos, and hence require its excision from the biblical text.

We have also noted the effect of the destruction of the analogy of being on allegorical biblical interpretation. If nature can no longer act in a real symbolic way, then traditional typology becomes more and more difficult to maintain, either disappearing so that only the historical sense is finally tenable or becoming entirely rarified as merely spiritual or literary. Because the human kind of signifying is the only type that remains, the biblical text will more and more be approached according to the mode of a human artifact.

Ockham's emphasis on the authority of "experts" in Scripture seems to lift exegetes out of the context of the Church and into an entirely academic realm, making it a kind of activity unto itself (in much the same way that, through his nominalism, Ockham lifts up logic out of the context of a much broader understanding of

philosophy, and into an art in itself). The tendency once this is done—and it is certainly beyond Ockham's intention—is to make exegesis an independent skill that can be practiced by anyone with the requisite intellectual abilities and training, whether or not the exegete believes the Bible is revealed (in the same way that, say, an atheist electrician can competently wire a church building).

Finally, Ockham's assertion that the faithful have a right to reject anything deemed unnecessary to salvation prepares the way for a future wrestling over the boundaries of the essential and adiaphorous, first in regard to theology using the Bible as authoritative (in the Reformation), and then sorting through the Bible itself to separate the wheat from the chaff (in the Enlightenment). In either case, the task of exegesis has turned from illuminating the fullness of the faith in light of the fullness of the revealed text, to delineating the essential from the adiaphorous within the text.

The history of Ockhamist and Marsilian thought is, to say the least, complex. We will now trace its effects in the latter fourteenth century in John Wycliffe's England, where this famous reformer adds further important dimensions to the politicization of Scripture that will help set up both for the Reformation. But perhaps even more important for purposes of tracing the history of scriptural scholarship, Wycliffe will help prepare England for the Henrican revolution, which in turn sets the stage for the political and intellectual transformations that eventually lead to Deism, the takeoff point of most histories of modern biblical scholarship.