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‘A desire to see more clearly’: theological device and sociological innovation of scholars in the 13th-15th centuries

Antoine Destemberg

The observation of medieval social groups undoubtedly formed a conceptual framework for the emerging sociology of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Otto Gerhard Oexle thus recalled the role of Ferdinand Tönnies’ work in establishing a lasting opposition between the notion of community (*Gemeinschaft*) and society (*Gesellschaft*).¹ While *Gemeinschaft* was seen as the fundamental structure of the medieval order – based on kinship, friendship and neighbourly ties formed within guilds, fraternities, professions, villages, etc. –, the *Gesellschaft* was based on individual and contractual social relations, with a rational division of social labour resulting in social differentiation.² Weberian sociology, however, brought nuance to this system of organisation. Max Weber favoured the concepts of ‘communalisation’ (*Vergemeinschaftung*) and ‘sociation’ (*Vergesellschaftung*), two types of social relations that he considered complementary, both of which participated in a historical process of institutionalising social groups, particularly in the context of the medieval city.³ As Otto Gerard Oexle emphasised, the perspective opened up by Max Weber was therefore ‘to take into account the rationality implemented by individuals within groups’, so that these same groups ‘develop a quality of order’. In other words, to observe the process of social objectivation of these groups and their institutionalisation in an urban and State order that emerged at the end of the Middle Ages.

From this perspective, the community that formed around universities is a privileged field of study for two reasons. First, this was a new community emerging from the medieval urban world: its scholars and students had to deploy strategies to assert themselves as a specific social category during the 13th-15th centuries.⁴ Second, this historical process lifted their group from a status of *community* to that of *category*. It thereby revealed the new conceptual tools forged by these intellectuals, which enabled them to consider society as a whole, to identify distinctions and categories, and, ultimately, to sketch out a new sociology during the last centuries of the Middle Ages. Georges Duby noted that as of the 12th century, Parisian scholars were emancipated from the restrictive functional tripartition of feudal society and, more generally, of a system of thought relying on orders (*ordines*). Instead, they applied themselves to ‘sifting through the substance of society’: ‘Thereupon a new domination began: that of the doctors, knowledgeable, loquacious, and lording it over their students. [...] Accordingly, they were asked to focus more systematic attention on the social sphere. [...] Motivated by a desire to see more clearly [...] these scholars employed the same methods and pursued the same goals as their predecessors. [...] Their efforts went toward refining their predecessors’ ideas about

¹ Otto Gerhard Oexle, ‘Les groupes sociaux du Moyen Âge et les débuts de la sociologie contemporaine’, *Annales ESC*, May-June 1992, 751-65.

² Ferdinand Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft. Abhandlung des Communismus und des Socialismus als Empirischer Culturformen* (Leipzig: Fues’s Verlag, 1887).

³ Max Weber, *The City* (London: The Free Press, 1958).

⁴ See Antoine Destemberg, *L’honneur des universitaires au Moyen Âge. Étude d’imaginaire social* (Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 2015).

social organisation in order to make them more practicable and to bring them into line with the needs of the pastoral mission. [...] The clergy produced its own version, based on clear-sighted observation of particulars [...]. It emerged slowly from painstaking research that might well be called sociological.⁵

The community of university scholars was thus an actor in urban society in the last centuries of the Middle Ages. Their ideas filtered up to the spheres of power, carrying with them a form of sociological innovation and contributing to the development of refined analytical tools used to observe the social world of the 13th-15th centuries. The pastoral mission of these scholars certainly supported their classification endeavours, but it is important to note to what extent this new social theology could act as a device – or *dispositif* as defined by Michel Foucault –,⁶ i.e. as a ‘technology of power’ serving a learned aspiration: to establish a form of hermeneutical dominion over the social world.

Secundum genus: biblical exegesis and thinking in categories

From the earliest times of the Church, Christian theology and ecclesiological thought were undoubtedly a useful framework to develop a social doctrine heedful of the faithful's place within the *ecclesia*. Starting with the foundational theology of the celestial and earthly order provided in the 6th century by Pseudo-Dionysius, clerics continued to reflect on the social order and its hierarchies, seeking the harmony and conformity of earthly order with divine intent.⁷ Between the 9th and 11th centuries, this ecclesiological thinking gradually moulded society to reflect the Church. A semantic transfer occurred from the ecclesiastical context onto the social world, describing it in terms of orders (*ordines*), and most often reserving the notions of grades (*gradus*) or dignities (*dignitates*) for the ecclesial institution.⁸ The view of historians is nevertheless that the 12th-13th centuries represented a decisive shift to a more refined sociological approach on the part of clerics. The system of penance during this period reveals new socio-professional categories reflected in pastoral tools, such as confession manuals and *ad status* sermons.⁹

⁵ Georges Duby, *The Three Orders. Feudal Society Imagined* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 309-10 and 318.

⁶ Michel Foucault, ‘Le jeu de Michel Foucault’, in *Dits et écrits (1954-1988)*, t. III: 1976-1979 (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), pp. 298-329; for a rereading of Michel Foucault and a perspective on the *dispositif* in the context of Christian theology, see Giorgio Agamben, *Qu'est-ce qu'un dispositif?* (Paris: Payot & Rivages, 2007).

⁷ See *Hiérarchie et stratification sociale dans l'Occident médiéval (400-1100)*, ed. François Bougard, Dominique Iogna-Prat and Régine Le Jan (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), and especially Dominique Iogna-Prat, ‘Penser l'Église, penser la société après le Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite’, pp. 55-81.

⁸ Dominique Iogna-Prat, *Cité de Dieu, cité des hommes. L'Église et l'architecture de la société* (Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 2016). See also, Hans-Werner Goetz, ‘Les *ordines* dans la théorie médiévale de la société : un système hiérarchique ?’, in *Hiérarchie et stratification sociale dans l'Occident médiéval (400-1100)*, pp. 221-36.

⁹ Jacques Le Goff, ‘Métier et profession d'après les manuels de confesseurs au Moyen Âge’, in Id., *Pour un autre Moyen Âge. Temps, travail et culture en Occident : 18 essais* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), pp. 162-80; Pierre Michaud-Quantin, ‘Le vocabulaire des catégories sociales chez les canonistes et les moralistes du XIII^e siècle’, in *Ordres et classes. Colloque d'histoire sociale, Saint-Cloud, 24-25 mai 1967* (Paris-La Haye: Mouton, 1973), pp. 73-86. On *ad status* sermons, see in particular: Nicole Bériou, *L'avènement des maîtres de la Parole. La prédication à Paris au XIII^e siècle*, 2 vols (Paris, Institut d'études augustiniennes, 1998), I, pp. 293-383.

These examples support the notion of a slide of moral theology towards what might be qualified as social theology, with biblical exegesis seemingly presenting a useful framework for reflection. Indeed, Georges Duby was quite right to illustrate the ‘resistance’ of Parisian scholars to the tripartite functioning of the feudal system through the biblical commentary of Stephen Langton (c. 1150-1228) on the Book of Isaiah.¹⁰ The last decades of the 12th century and first decades of the 13th century saw the theological affirmation of a group of Parisian scholars – notably through their work as exegetes –, forming what Martin Grabmann called ‘the biblical-moral school’. Within the latter, there emerged a theological concept of the ‘world as a book’. This was the idea that God uses the world as a book, and that all realities are divine signs to be deciphered. Exegetical work was therefore conceived of as semiology, a permanent observation of the realities of the world. Thus, we can read the following in the commentary of the *Book of Proverbs* proposed by William of Auvergne (1180-1249) (Prov 8. 22): ‘Creatures are the roads of God by which He comes to us, or rather we go to Him, through the knowledge of creatures [...]. So the whole world, that is to say the totality of creatures, is like a book drawn from this [divine] model’.¹¹ In the opening of his treatise *On the Sacraments*, the same William of Auvergne delivers his definition of the earthly commonwealth (*civitas*), which according to him is an ordered society of men and the hierarchical expression of visible and symbolic emblems of the duties (*officiis*), honours (*honores*) and dignities (*dignitates*) that set them apart.¹²

As repositories of this moral and social exegesis,¹³ the *Bibles moralisées* produced from the 1220s for royal and princely circles constitute, in this regard, ‘a wide social spectrum’ (Gerald B. Guest). This exercise in rendering theology more accessible to the highest circles of society provides abundant evidence of a sociological thinking in categories, which was produced by clerical scholars and delivered a systemic vision of an ordered society. In these manuscripts, each biblical extract is accompanied by what is termed a ‘moralisation’: an allegorical interpretation drawn from the spiritual meaning of Scripture.¹⁴ For the most part, these manuscripts are richly decorated. They thus offer a double exegesis, textual and visual, characterised by its aspiration to be anchored in a form of social and political immediacy, which reinforces its perspicacity. From this perspective, the seminal episode of Creation is treated in a manner that seems to perfectly illustrate the social and moral concerns of this milieu of

¹⁰ Duby, *The Three Orders*, pp. 371-86.

¹¹ Quoted by Gilbert Dahan, ‘L’exégèse biblique de Guillaume d’Auvergne’, in *Autour de Guillaume d’Auvergne († 1249)*, ed. Franco Moranzoni and JeanYves Tilliette (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), pp. 237-70, especially pp. 259-61: *Creature vie Dei sunt quibus venit ad nos, vel potius nos ad ipsum, per cognitionem scilicet creaturarum, [...] Unde totus mundus seu universitas creaturarum est quasi liber quidam extractus ab illo exemplari.*

¹² William of Auvergne, *De sacramento in generali*, II, in *Guilielmi Alverni Opera Omnia* (Orléans/Paris: 1674), p. 410aE. See also: Jacques Le Goff, ‘Ville et théologie au XIII^e siècle : une métaphore urbaine de Guillaume d’Auvergne’, in Id., *L’imaginaire médiéval. Essais* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), pp. 242-48.

¹³ William of Auvergne is sometimes cited as one of the possible instigators of the theological discourse of the *Bibles moralisées*. For a discussion of this view, see Yves Christe, ‘Grossement’, in *Autour de Guillaume d’Auvergne († 1249)*, pp. 341-67.

¹⁴ Among a lengthy bibliography on the *Bibles moralisées*, here we specifically refer to: John Lowden, *The Making of the Bibles moralisées*, 2 vol (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000); Id., ‘“Reading” Images and Texts in the *Bibles moralisées*: Images as Exegesis and the Exegesis of Images’, in *Reading Images and Texts. Medieval Images and Texts as Forms of Communication*, ed. Ariëlle Hageman and Marco Mostert (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), pp. 495-525; as well as Guy Lobrichon, ‘La bible des rois capétiens’, in *Tout le temps du veneour est sanz oyseuseté. Mélanges offerts à Yves Christe pour son 65^{ème} anniversaire par ses amis, ses collègues, ses élèves* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), pp. 205-28.

Parisian biblical scholars: in a game of allegory, each element created (water, earth, sky), each category of plants (trees, grasses) and each type of animal (fish, beasts of burden, birds, reptiles) corresponds in the moralisation to a category of men.

The interpretations of the third and fifth days of Creation are particularly suggestive. On the third day, the biblical text (Gen 1. 12) states that God wanted fruit trees to bear fruit after their kind (*secundum speciem suam*). The *Bibles moralisées* produced for the court of Blanche of Castile and Louis IX, in the second third of the 13th century (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 270b), then for that of the first Valois kings in the mid-14th century (Paris, BnF, fr. 167), give particular attention to this formula. Indeed, they respond with a moralisation (in Latin and French) explaining that the fruits of the trees, according to their kind, are the fruits of the good deeds that men – assimilated to ‘rational creatures’ in the hierarchy – must perform according to their grade (*gradus, degre*), state (*status, estat*), condition (*cumditio, condicion*) and dignity (*dignitas*).¹⁵ On the fifth day, the exegesis of the creation of birds, reptiles and fish of different sizes (Gen 1. 20-22), provides the material for a social reading which echoes the moral concerns of urban clerics in the early 13th century and their condemnation of the figure of the usurer.¹⁶ The first *Bibles moralisées* (Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Codex Vindobonensis 2554 and 1179), made for the court of Philip Augustus and Louis VIII at the end of the first quarter of the 13th century, state that: ‘La terre senefie sainte eglise, li oisel senefient les diverses genz del monde qi acrochent sainte eglise, li gros poisson senefie les gros usuriers qi mainjuent les petiz ce sunt la pouvre gent’ (Codex Vindobonensis 2254, fol. 1c). A second moralisation accompanies the creation of fish and, according to a biblical typology approach, establishes a correspondence between the creative gesture of the *deus artifex* and the gesture of Christ, the founder of social diversity within the *ecclesia*: ‘Ce que Dex garnist la mer de diverses manieres de poissons senefie Iesu Crist qi garni le monde de diverses manieres de genz’.¹⁷ The associated medallions (ill. 1 and 2) offer a remarkable iconography in which the world is represented in the manner of a *mappa mundi*, surrounded by sea and split into continents by rivers, which also help to divide the image into four registers associated with four categories of people: in the top left, a rider on horseback holding a bird of prey on his right arm; in the top right, a butcher behind his stall seemingly cutting a pig in front of one or more women; in the bottom left, a money changer (or usurer) handling a scale and appearing to fill its tray with gold coins; and finally, in the bottom right, a cleric equipped with a rod or a ferrule, lecturing two students bent over their books. This image of an established and ordered social world therefore abandons the functional tripartition and instead offers four categories of people in scenes that refer to a resolutely urban world of schooling and culinary and financial trades. Together with Otto Gerhard Oexle, here we seek to highlight the extent to which the city played an essential role in remodelling the social order from the 12th century onwards. Indeed, the urban framework

¹⁵ Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 270b, fol. 4a: *Lignum pomiferum faciens fructum quisque fidelis faciens fructum bonorum operum juxta genus suum ut sedem speciem suam id est sicut decet rationalem creaturam videlicet sicut exigit gradus status cumditio et dignitas cuiusque*; Paris, BnF, fr. 167, fol. 2a: ‘Tel bois segnefie chascun bon crestien qui fait fruit de bonnes œuvres selonc ce quil appartient a creature qui use de raison et selonc son estat son degre et sa condicion.’

¹⁶ Jacques Le Goff, *Your Money or Your Life. Economy and Religion in the Middle Ages* (New York: Zone Books, 1988).

¹⁷ Vienne, ÖNB, Cod. 2254, fol. 1va; Vienne, ÖNB, Cod. 1179, fol. 3va: *Quod deus ornat mare de diversis generibus piscium significat quod deus ornat mundum des diversis generibus hominum.*

made it possible to overcome established categories, such as the *ordo*, in favour of the *habitus*, i.e. the visible signs of a way of life.¹⁸

Through both textual and visual exegesis, the *Bibles moralisées* thus provided the princely readership with a lexicon of social taxonomy as well as a repertory of iconographic forms used to classify the world. By referring to the diversity of genera and species, the biblical periscopes of the story of Creation contributed to the emergence of an exegetical space for the elaboration of classifying images. Jean-Claude Schmitt stressed that these reflect the advent of a new ‘graphic reason’ (Goody) in the 12th and 13th centuries. This was the period when the ‘image-vision’ asserted itself: an iconography to elucidate the world through geometric diagrams which serve to organise, order and make visible a mode of thought based on lists.¹⁹ In the *Bibles moralisées*, the iconography of Noah’s ark also responds to this principle (ill. 3-4).²⁰ Directly echoing the myth of Creation – as its anti-myth in the book of Genesis –, the destructive episode of the Flood arises from God’s desire to bring order back to a world led astray by human violence. In the illuminations, the ark is thus presented as the architectural framework of a new organisation of creatures and a chosen motif for classifying thought. The related biblical text specifies that men, women and animals ‘according to their species’ (*secundum genus*) take their place in the ark, two by two, in an orderly manner (Gen 7. 14).

On the various states and duties in society

The hermeneutics at work in the *Bibles moralisées* descended from a long exegetical tradition, which the ordinary gloss gradually established over the first two-thirds of the 12th century.²¹ The interlinear glosses of Genesis contained abundant commentary from Isidore of Seville and Rabanus Maurus, who had already established social equivalences to the elements of Creation.²² However, the lexicon in biblical moralisations partially broke with Augustinian influence. In his commentary *De Genesi ad litteram*, Augustine had refuted the idea that the expression *secundum genus*, used for plants and animals, could also apply to men, since they were unique in their likeness to God.²³ In the first half of the 13th century, the rhetoric

¹⁸ Otto Gerhard Oexle, ‘Deutungsschemata der sozialen Wirklichkeit im Mittelalter’, in *Mentalitäten im Mittelalter. Methodische und inhaltliche Probleme*, ed. Frantisek Graus (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke Vorlag, 1987), pp. 65-117; Id., ‘Perceiving Social Reality in the Early and High Middle Ages: A Contribution to a History of Social Knowledge’, in *Ordering Medieval Society: Perspectives on Intellectual and Practical Modes of Shaping Social Relations*, ed. Bernhard Jussen (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), pp. 92-145.

¹⁹ Jean-Claude Schmitt, ‘Les images classificatrices’, *Bibliothèque de l’École des chartes*, 147 (1989), 311-411; Id., *Penser par figure. Du compas divin aux diagrammes magiques* (Paris: Arkhè, 2019).

²⁰ Maria Teresa Lezzi, ‘L’arche de Noé en forme de bateau : naissance d’une tradition iconographique’, *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale*, 148 (1994), 301-24; Mira Friedman, ‘L’arche de Noé de Saint-Savin’, *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale*, 158 (1997), 123-43; Marianne Besseyre, *L’iconographie de l’arche de Noé, du III^e au XI^e siècle* (unpublished ‘Thèse de l’École des chartes’, 1996).

²¹ Philippe Buc, *L’ambiguïté du Livre. Prince, pouvoir, et peuple dans les commentaires de la Bible au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1994), pp. 71-122.

²² Isidorus Hispalensis, *Quaestiones in vetus testamentum : In Genesim*, cap. 1, in *Patrologia latina*, t. 83, col. 209-212; Rabanus Maurus, *Commentaria in Genesim*, lib. I, cap. X, in *Patrologia latina*, t. 107, col. 467-468.

²³ Augustinus Hipponensis, *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim* (I-VII), ed. and trans. by P. Agaësse et A. Solognac, in *Œuvres de Saint Augustin*, t. 48, 7^e série (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1972), pp. 244-45: *Non enim multa genera hominum, sicut herbarum, lignorum, piscium, volatilium, serpentium, pecorum, bestiarum, ut sic*

carried by the *Bibles moralisées* was largely removed from this constraint. It presented a specific lexicon related to the observation of the social sphere, with words to distinguish ‘different types of people’: *gradus*, *status*, *cumditio*, *dignitas*, *genus* and *specie*.

The question of a sociological lexicon seems to have sufficiently preoccupied theologians for a scholar like St. Thomas Aquinas to have delved into the matter in his *Summa Theologica* (c. 1268-1272) and devoted question 183 of his *Secunda secundae* to the different states and duties in society (*De diversitate statuum et officiorum humanorum*).²⁴ In it, he primarily examines the distinction between the notions of *status* (state), *gradus* (grade) and *officium* (duty), emphasising that the existence of diverse states within the civil order (*civilibus*) implies a hierarchy between them:

Further, the word *state* seems to indicate height of a kind; because to stand is to be raised upwards. Now one man is made higher than another by various duties; and in like manner men are raised upwards in various ways by various grades and orders. Therefore the mere difference of grades, orders, or duties suffices for a difference of states.²⁵

Based at the outset on etymology, Thomas seeks to overcome a seemingly contradictory semantic situation which asks that the notion of *status*, evoking the idea of station (*stando*) and therefore immobility, can nevertheless account for social difference and mobility. Remaining faithful to this etymology, he proposes reserving the notion of *status* for a form of social stability:

[...] Consequently matters which easily change and are extrinsic to them do not constitute a state among men, for instance that a man be rich or poor, of high or low rank, and so forth. [...] But that alone seemingly pertains to a man’s state, which regards an obligation binding his person, in so far, to wit, as a man is his own master or subject to another [...] Therefore state properly regards freedom or servitude whether in spiritual or in civil matters.²⁶

Thomas Aquinas thus arrives at this first distinction: ‘Duty implies relation to act; while grades denote an order of superiority and inferiority. But state requires immobility in that which regards a condition of the person himself.’²⁷

Subsequently, the theologian asks whether the diversity of states and duties in the *ecclesia* – the society made Church – does not constitute a threat to its unity, since ‘distinction is opposed to unity’ (*diversitas enim unitati repugnat*). His view of society proves to be functionalist: the diversity of duties and states above all reflects the diversity of tasks in the administration of the *ecclesia*. He thus mobilises three types of arguments that all draw on an organicist understanding of Christian society, and which Saint Paul notably spoke of in the First Epistle to the Corinthians (1 Cor 12-27): ‘God hath tempered (the body) together that there

dictum accipiamus : secundum genus, ac si diceretur generatim, ut inter se similia atque ad unam originem seminis pertinentia distinguerentur a ceteris.

²⁴ *Sancti Thomæ Aquinatis Opera Omnia*, ed. léon., t. 10: *Secunda Secundae Summae Theologiae, a quaestione CXXIII ad quaestionem CLXXXIX*, (Rome: 1899), pp. 445-49. The English translations are quoted from *The ‘Summa Theologica’ of St. Thomas Aquinas, Literally translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province*, t. 14: *Part 2.2: QQ. CLXXI-CLXXXIX* (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1932).

²⁵ II^a II^{ae}, Q. 183, a. 1 arg. 3.

²⁶ II^a II^{ae}, Q. 183, a. 1 co.

²⁷ II^a II^{ae}, Q. 183, a. 1 ad 3.

might be no schism in the body, but the members might be mutually careful one for another.’²⁸ This organicist reading of society was reaffirmed from the 12th century, both through the work of John of Salisbury and that of preachers such as James of Vitry and John of Wales.²⁹ In fact, for Thomas Aquinas the diversity of states and duties does not hinder the unity of the Church; on the contrary, it is necessary for three reasons.³⁰ First, it is required to strive for perfection, because in the perfection of his work, God created the diversity of creatures, each containing an element of grace. Second, it is required for the actions necessary in the Church, since ‘a diversity of actions requires a diversity of men appointed to them, in order that all things may be accomplished without delay or confusion’. And finally, it is required to admire the structured works of the Church, since ‘this (diversity) belongs to the dignity and beauty of the Church, which consist in a certain order’. For all these reasons, Thomas Aquinas affirms that ‘there was need in the Church, which is Christ’s body, for the members to be differentiated by various duties, states, and grades’.³¹ As for the unity of the Church, according to Thomas it resides in faith, charity and mutual service, which act like the spirit on the various members of the body. His conclusion is thus very Augustinian in tone:

Now a man departs from this unity of spirit when he seeks his own; just as in an earthly kingdom peace ceases when the citizens seek each man his own. Besides, the peace both of mind and of an earthly commonwealth is the better preserved by a distinction of duties and states, since thereby the greater number have a share in public actions.³²

The Angelic Doctor is not satisfied with merely noting the existence of a diversity of social conditions in society. He asks for this diversity to be taken into account since it reproduces the perfection of the divine work, exposes the beauty of the Church’s task in organising it, and finally shows the usefulness of the division of social labour, presented as a factor of harmony and peace in the earthly commonwealth.³³ In this view, the diversity of the faithful in the Church must be established in three ways. First by the *status*, which is a moral state related to perfection. The *status* accounts for freedom or servitude in the face of sin, and is declined in three degrees of perfection, drawn from Pseudo-Dionysius’ Celestial Hierarchy of Angels: those who are beginning (*incipientes*), progressing (*proficientes*) and perfect (*perfecti*). Second, by the duty, which is defined by the actions carried out. And third, by the grade, which refers to the fact that ‘we distinguish various grades according as in the same state or duty one person is above another’.

The theological and social architecture developed by Thomas Aquinas is all the more remarkable as it finally elevates the lexicon of the duties, which Thomas presents as the factor that most accounts for the diversity of members within the *ecclesia*. According to him, the *officium* – or the acts – should not only serve to highlight this diversity, but also to categorise society: ‘For there are infinite varieties of human acts both in spirituals and in temporals. Now

²⁸ II^a II^{ae}, Q. 183, a. 2 ad 3.

²⁹ Among an abundant bibliography on the subject, for a first overview, see Tilman Struve, *Die Entwicklung der organologischen Staatsauffassung im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann Verlag, 1978).

³⁰ II^a II^{ae}, Q. 183, a. 2 co.

³¹ II^a II^{ae}, Q. 183, a. 2 ad 2.

³² II^a II^{ae}, Q. 183, a. 2 ad 3.

³³ II^a II^{ae}, Q. 183, a. 3 co.

there can be no certain distinction among things that are infinite in number.³⁴ [...] The material diversity of human acts is infinite. It is not thus that duties differ, but by their formal diversity which results from diverse species of acts, and in this way human acts are not infinite'.³⁵ This promotion of the *officium* – understood both as a distinct set of formally coherent acts and as a tool for categorising social groups – is, in our opinion, revelatory. It shows the research undertaken by theologians, both in the exegetical and pastoral spheres, to find more efficient tools of classification to translate the complexity of 13th century (especially urban) society, accompanying the growing social functionalism of the later Middle Ages.

The masters of the classificatory word

Starting with the second generation of *Bibles moralisées* (made during the second quarter of the 13th century), the clerics' pastoral mission expanded with the proliferation of images featuring preachers bearing the attributes of the Mendicant Orders. Thus, the figure of the secular-religious thinker – present in the first generation of *Bibles moralisées* from the first quarter of the 13th century – was partially substituted with that of mendicant friars. This shift accompanied certain innovations in exegetical discourse: the third day of Creation (Gen 1. 12) was not a particular focus in the first manuscripts, yet it now gave rise to an iconographic parallel between the creative gesture of God and that of a preaching cleric, armed with a book (ill. 5-6). While God points with his right hand to trees producing fruit 'after their kind' (*secundum speciem suam*), the preacher makes good works flourish through his preaching, the fruits of which become accessible to the eight figures assembled before him. One of them appears to be crippled, and the various attitudes of all eight illustrate the diversity of *gradus*/'degré', *status*/'estat', *cumditio*/'cundicion' and *dignitas* among men. In this iconography of *auctoritas*, the equivalence created between the figures of God and the preacher tended to confer on the latter the power to also use a creative and classifying word. It is doubtless necessary to see in this image – intended for a princely audience – a request for the authority of the preacher's discourse to be recognised, along with its capacity to pronounce social norms, as reflected in scholastic lectures at the time.³⁶ Indeed, the development of *ad status* sermons, reflecting the advent of thinking in categories among theologians and echoed in this biblical iconography, must be considered for its performative value: by pronouncing these pastoral categories, the 'masters of the word' help to ensure their own elevation within the social psyche.³⁷

In this respect, some foundational elements in the development of this classification should be mentioned, namely the eight 'states' identified by Honorius Augustodunensis in the middle of the 12th century, and which Alan of Lille expanded to a dozen in his *Summa arte praedicandi* (before 1200). At the end of the 1220s, in his *Sermones vulgares*, the preacher

³⁴ II^a II^{ae}, Q. 183, a. 3 arg 1.

³⁵ II^a II^{ae}, Q. 183, a. 3 ad 1.

³⁶ Elsa Marmursztejn, *L'Autorité des maîtres. Scolastique, normes et société au XIII^e siècle* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2007).

³⁷ Nicole Bériou, 'Le petit peuple dans les sermons *ad status* du XIII^e siècle', in *Le petit peuple dans l'Occident médiéval. Terminologies, perceptions, réalités*, ed. Pierre Boglioni, Robert Delort and Claude Gauvard (Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2002), pp. 19-39.

James of Vitry distinguished thirty-one categories of listeners, identified according to their ‘duties’ (*officia*) and their morality and religious values. This categorisation was taken up and slightly enriched by Guibert of Tournai who, in his *Rudimentum doctrine* (before 1261), mentions thirty-five *status*. Finally, aiming to speak to ‘all types of men’, in his *De eruditione praedicatorum* (c.1270-1274) the Dominican Humbert of Romans identified around one hundred categories based on ‘a whole variety of considerations’ (*in omni diversitate negotiorum*).³⁸ His numerous categories take various criteria into account, including: sex, age, nobility, and marital status; wealth or poverty; health (infirm, sick); morals (good, bad); states of mind (joy, sadness); studies followed (disciplines); the level of intellectual ability; rank in the social hierarchy (*potentes, magnates, maiores*); the living environment (city, town, country); function or grade within the Church; membership of a religious or monastic order; and lastly, but to a lesser extent, occupation.

The interpretive schemes responsible for their elaboration quickly spilt over into moral and didactic literature, itself conceived as a vector for communicating with a part or the whole of the ordered social body. In this regard, an exemplary work is that of the Genoese Dominican Jacobus de Cessolis: his *Liber de moribus hominum vel officiis nobilium*, also known as the *Book of Chess* and probably written between 1259 and 1273, brings together preaching techniques – notably using *exempla* – and moral exegesis applied to social categories.³⁹ The author uses the chessboard metaphor to propose a figurative framework for the organisation of society into categories, attributing a square on the board to every social group as defined by its ‘duty’.⁴⁰ Following a process comparable to that of the *Bibles moralisées*, Jacobus de Cessolis proposes a ‘moralisation’, i.e. an allegorical reading of the chess pieces, associating them with identifiable social groups. As with the *Bibles moralisées*, the literary project serves a royal ideology: the scholar (presented in the text as the ancient philosopher Xerxes) addresses the king (Evil-Merodach of Babylon) and, while teaching him the game, in effect describes the social order over which he rules.⁴¹

Each chess piece is given a visual description, highlighting the instruments and gestures of the function it embodies. Thus, the alphins are ‘shaped like judges’ assessors, placed on a pulpit, bent over an open book’. The rooks, who are the king's curates or legates, are presented as ‘soldiers on horseback, wearing hooded leather cloaks and holding a staff’. The pawns

³⁸ Humbertus de Romanis, *De eruditione praedicatorum*, Lib. II, in Marguerin de la Bigne, *Maxima Bibliotheca Veterum Patrum, et antiquorum scriptorum ecclesiasticorum* (Lyon, 1677), XXV, p. 456F : *Et ideo expedit quod praedicator semper habeat in promptu materias ad praedicandum vel conferendum de Deo, sive ad omne genus hominum, sive in omni diversitate negotiorum, sive secundum verietatem temporum, sive secundum verietatem omnium festorum.*

³⁹ Jacques de Cessoles, *Le livre du jeu d'échecs ou la société idéale au Moyen Âge, XIII^e siècle*, ed. Jean-Michel Mehl (Paris: Stock, 1995).

⁴⁰ Jean-Michel Mehl, ‘Jeux et catégories sociales au Moyen Âge’, in *À quoi joue-t-on ?*, *Actes du colloque de Montbrison*, (Montbrison: 1999), pp. 105-16 (quoted in *Des jeux et des hommes dans la société médiévale* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2010), pp. 287-93). The author shows what Jacobus de Cessolis owed in particular to his contemporary, the Franciscan John of Wales († 1285), who, in his *Communiloquium*, was perhaps the first to use the metaphor of the chessboard to describe his organic vision of society. See also Sandrine Thonon, ‘Les métiers sur l'échiquier. Leurs représentations littéraire et figurée dans les traductions françaises de l'œuvre de Jacques de Cessoles’, in *Le verbe, l'image et les représentations de la société urbaine à la fin du Moyen Âge*, ed. Marc Boone, Élodie Lecuppre-Desjardin and Jean-Pierre Sosson (Antwerp: Garant, 2002), pp. 207-19.

⁴¹ Amandine Mussou, ‘La cité idéale selon Jacques de Cessoles : les échecs, instrument d'une propagande royale’, in *Les échecs comme représentation : univers clos ou reflet du monde?*, ed. Amandine Mussou and Sara Troche (Paris: Éditions Rue d'Ulm, 2009), pp. 25-36.

appear as tradesmen and are given particularly detailed descriptions, including the tools (hammer, dolabra, trowel) and gestures by which these ‘trades are represented’.⁴² The success of this work among an aristocratic readership was ensured by a double translation into French, by the Hospitaller Jean de Vignay (c. 1332-1348) and by the Dominican Jean Ferron (1347).⁴³ The 14th and 15th century manuscripts sometimes included an iconography that showed the *habitus* (clothing, tools and gestures) of these social categories, with around fifty distinct functions or duties identified in the text (Table 1).⁴⁴

⁴² Jacques de Cessoles, *Le livre du jeu d'échecs*, p. 60, 82 and 109-10.

⁴³ Jacques de Cessoles, *Le jeu des echaz moralisé*, trans. Jean Ferron, ed. Alain Collet (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1999).

⁴⁴ See for example, Ms Dijon, BM, ms. 268 (3rd quarter of the 14th century), fol. 22 (rook), 28 (ploughman), 30 (craftsman), 32 (stonecutter), 36 (merchant), 37ter (doctor), 40 (innkeeper), 46 (ribald/messenger), as well as the frontispiece image showing the king and the scholar playing chess (fol. 2).

Ultimately, the famous ‘Dances Macabres’, or Dances of Death, whose literary and iconographic theme was established largely in the 15th century, appear to be a culmination of this social and moral theology of the late Middle Ages. The first poetic lists of the men forming a macabre procession seem to appear in the early 14th century,⁴⁵ but the first known pictorial representation is that of the Parisian cemetery of the Innocents, produced in 1424-1425, but which is only available to us through Guyot Marchant’s reproduction from 1485.⁴⁶ Representing in words and images a poem sometimes attributed to the theologian Jean Gerson (1363-1429), this first image showed a scholar, seated in the flesh in his study, pointing with his left index finger to the content on the wall of the cemetery that replicates that of the book before him. The mural thus offered a backdrop to the sermons which sometimes took place in front of it, representing about forty men ‘who live in various states’ (‘qui vives en estats divers’). It constituted a hierarchical panorama of society, ‘a mirror image of social functioning’, including:⁴⁷ the pope and the emperor; the cardinal and the king; the patriarch and the constable; the archbishop and the knight; the bishop and the squire; the abbot and the bailiff; the astrologer and the bourgeois; the canon and the merchant; the Carthusian and the sergeant; the monk and the usurer (the latter accompanied by a poor man); the doctor and the courtier; the lawyer and the minstrel; the priest and the peasant; the Cordelier and the child; the cleric and the hermit. To this list, the second edition of 1486 added: the legate and the duke; the schoolmaster and the sergeant-at-arms; the public prosecutor and the jailer; the pilgrim and the shepherd; the halberdier and the fool.⁴⁸ These Dances Macabres seem to have led to a lasting acceptance of the vocabulary of the ‘estats’, which rose above the contradiction once pointed out by Thomas Aquinas to designate a social mobility suggested by dance.

If, as suggested by Max Weber, the medieval city was a laboratory for the dual process of ‘communalisation’ (*Vergemeinschaftung*) and ‘socio-ciation’ (*Vergesellschaftung*) of its populations, the 13th-15th centuries proved a particularly animated period in the institutionalisation of social groups. This is doubtless in part due to the scholarly work of the community of university lecturers, dominated by theologians, who developed a new *dispositif* during this period: a social theology through which to rethink and reorganise the social order. Their theology was akin to a new semiotics based both on a precise lexicon valuing the *officium* and *status* rather than the *ordo* and *gradus*, and on a figurative classifying thought that visually translates the lists and categories developed. This sociological innovation relied on a biblical reading to define the foundations of a harmonious created order, and was addressed primarily to princely and royal power elites. The scholars were able to use these hermeneutical tools for the benefit of their own university community, making them available to the entire nascent

⁴⁵ André Corvisier, ‘La représentation de la société dans les danses des morts du XV^e au XVIII^e siècle’, *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 16 (1969), 489-539 (p. 504). Ms. Paris, Bibl. Mazarine, ms. 980, fol. 83 proposes the following list: *papa, rex, presul, miles, pugiles, magnus, logicus, juvenis, senior, dives, judex, pauper*.

⁴⁶ Alain Boret, ‘La danse macabre du cimetière des Innocents : une moralité pédagogique en action’, in *Le Mal et le diable. Leur figure à la fin du Moyen Âge*, ed. Nathalie Nabert (Paris: Beauchesne, 1996), pp. 79-94.

⁴⁷ Jean Batany, ‘Les Danses Macabres’: une image en négatif du fonctionnalisme social’, in *Dies illa. Death in the Middle Ages, Proceedings of the 1983 Manchester Colloquium*, ed. J. H. M. Taylor (Liverpool: 1984), pp. 15-27.

⁴⁸ *La danse macabre*, ed. Guyot Marchant (Paris, 1486). In 1491, the same Guyot Marchant published a *Danse macabre des femmes* (Women’s Dance of Death), in which he inventoried about forty additional, exclusively female, categories.

State apparatus. It would be worth examining to what extent their new theology also benefited the latter. Together with political anthropologists and State sociologists, we must emphasise that if the development of ‘institutionalised tools of classification’ – the production of a social nomenclature – does indeed constitute a fundamental lever of political domination (Pierre Bourdieu’s ‘State action’), then 13th-15th century scholars were certainly the ‘organic intellectuals’ of a modern State in the making, contributing to the apparatus of State dominion by describing an ordered society.⁴⁹

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⁴⁹ Georges Balandier, ‘Stratification sociale et pouvoir’, *Anthropologie politique* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1967), pp. 92-116; Pierre Bourdieu, *Sur l’État. Cours au Collège de France (1989-1992)* (Paris: Seuil/Raisons d’agir, 2012), pp. 26-30.

Captions:



ill. 1: Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Codex Vindobonensis 2554, fol. 1v (A/a), c. 1220-23.



ill. 2: Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Codex Vindobonensis 1179, fol. 3v (A/a),
c. 1223-26.



ill. 3: Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Codex Vindobonensis 2554, fol. 3 (B/b), c. 1220-23.



ill. 4: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 270b, fol. 10 (A/a), c. 1234-55.



ill. 5: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 270b, fol. 4 (A/a), c. 1234-55.



ill. 6: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fr. 167, fol. 2 (A/a), c. 1349-52.