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GEOFFREY D MADDEN

Assignment Title: Explore and Discuss the theological concerns and attitudes
and conclusions of Marsilio of Padua. Topic No: _____

Lecturer's Name Dr. Ian Gillman

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Approx. Number of Words Written: 2500

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Comments <i>A clear & wide aude presentation of the views of Marsilio. You may like to reach to the conclusion of Etienne Gilson that with Marsilio "the disruption of medieval Xendom is an accomplished fact". Cover all the politics involved there is here a push back to bases, echoed less intellectually in Francis of Assisi Peter Waldo, eg. Little wonder that this Cromwell had the IP translated & circulated in England while he was in prison. See...</i>	(FOR OFFICE USE ONLY)	
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Marsilius of Padua, writing in the fourteenth century, confronts the problem, "Why is there no peace?" His answer is found in the book "The Defensor Pacis," in which he argues that the Church, by leaving its role in spiritual affairs and entering secular politics, has undermined the stability of the state. In his exposition of this view there is revealed the voice of the educated layman, dedicated to the Church as he sees it revealed in the Bible and horrified by the perversion of its current form. While his politics are classifiable as organicist conservatism and seem based on idealising the degree to which human legislators had controlled an essentially sinful populace in the past, Marsilius can be seen to prefigure our secular society. He theorises on organising the Church to protect the people from the priests' human failings. To this end the clergy should aim for poverty, the distribution of benefices and bishoprics should be taken over by the legislator to prevent ecclesiastic corruption, and most importantly the plenitude of power assumed by medieval papacy should be repudiated.

RE113

G.Madden

Explore and discuss the theological concerns and attitudes of Marsilius of Padua.

Marsilius of Padua's theology is couched in the politics of his book, "The Defensor Pacis," in which he advances the voice of a lay Christian, educated enough to read the scriptures for himself, and disgusted enough with the machinations of the Church of his day in the temporal realm of war and wealth to defy the Papacy. While his secular approach has a familiar resonance to our modern ears, Marsilius is no prescient being. Rather, not only is he a creature of his time but is what would be seen today as a conservative, looking back to a more ordered and united community under a strong emperor which he tends to idealise. He sees this ideal as having been destroyed by a Church so perverse he describes it in apocalyptic terms borrowed from the book of Daniel.(1)

While his theories are illuminated somewhat by the circumstances surrounding his writing of "The Defensor Pacis", and I will briefly allude to these, it is the book itself which provides the source of his thoughts on

scripture, the Church, the priesthood and the Pope. It is through his theoretical ideals for these institutions, his exposition of the their failures, and his plans to correct these that we hear his voice. Since the second discourse deals largely with the religious issues, I will concentrate largely on that portion of the work.

Of his life, all that is terribly relevant is his birth in Padua, his time at the University at Paris, the writing of the Defensor in 1324, and his protection by Ludwig the Bavarian.(2) His origin amongst the shattered City-states of Italy perhaps explains his desire for stable government. His time in France during its conflict with the Papacy at the beginning of the fourteenth century may have caused some cynicism about the Church's temporal concerns, and his time at university may explain the perversity of thought that seems to be able to derive Machiavelli from the Gospels.

*Along with
William of Ockham
he was an advocate
of the separation of
church & state.*

While Marsilius writes to a pressing purpose, dedicating his work to the emperor, he approaches this from a universal argument based on his interpretation of the Bible and Aristotle, with rather different results ^{found} to that obtained by Aquinas with the same raw material. The "Defender" of the title is the faithful Christian emperor who protects the faithful from the excesses of the Pope. "Peace" is seen in Biblical terms as what Christ wished for his followers.(3)

Marsilius establishes his lay perspective of the Church at the outset of Discourse Two. He offers four definitions of the Church before settling on one as most fitting:

The "Church" means the whole body of the faithful who believe in and invoke the name of Christ. (4)

cf. Vol II on the Church.

He prefers this definition to those concerning physical buildings and especially to those in which the "ministers, priests or bishops and deacons"(5) are referred to as the Church. He supports his preferred

option from scripture and links it to soteriological concerns in the writings of Paul in which Christ is described as having "delivered himself up"(6) for the Church. Marsilius argues that this must be for all believers, as to limit the term "Church" to just the clergy would cut across the saving nature of the Christian message.

Marsilius objects to the term "spiritual" being used to refer to the actions of the clergy, as this implies an independence from the temporal powers for these men and their possessions. He quotes Paul and Ambrose to the effect that the clothes and food which sustain an apostle are still carnal even though they make the work of the Lord possible.(7) He then lowers the tone from scriptural proofs to a common sense appreciation of the evil actions to which the clergy may stoop which can hardly be thought of as spiritual.

His concern to limit the spiritual to what is truly of God impacts on his appreciation of Scripture. He

limits what needs to be believed for salvation to the canon, even regarding the respected Church Fathers with suspicion unless they tally with canonic writings, which elevates the power of the Bible at the expense of more recent tradition. He quotes with approval Augustine: "do not show deference to my words as if they were the canonic Scriptures."(8) The boldness of this reductionist approach to Catholic tradition opens new vistas of opposition to the Papacy for Marsilius.

There is certainly nothing pluralistic in his approach to Scripture in our sense of toleration of differing interpretations. His idea of peace in society requires unity of authority including matters of faith. Scripture has therefore only one meaning which is revealed by the Spirit. Because disagreements do occur though, he proposes the concept of the general council which: "represents by succession the congregation of the apostles and elders and other believers of that time;"(9) that is, the early Church. As this applies to

doubtful meanings in Scripture he lays down the details of his scheme:

*of the early councils
of the church*

The decisions of the general councils receive the origin of their truth from the Holy Spirit, the coercive authority for their observance and acknowledgement from the human legislator..., and their promulgation and teaching through the priests and gospel ministers. (10)

That all this could just as easily be accomplished by the Pope with a good deal less fuss is dismissed by Marsilius with examples of heretical Popes.

Such a council adds weight to Marsilius' argument for lay involvement in Church affairs, as he notes with some scorn the clergy to be fairly ignorant of scripture and requiring the assistance of those learned in these fields from outside the Church to assist deliberations. The model depends on the coercion of the human legislator who, to preserve the unity of the empire, forces contentious issues to a conference. The obvious prototype for this is Constantine and Nicea. Marsilius uses the Codex of Isadore frequently for its

description of the council of Nicea and for the Donation of Constantine. While he hints that the Donation is not genuine(11), he is quite happy to use this pious fraud to support not the primacy of the Roman bishop as it was designed for, but the subservience of the Pope to the secular authority. These accounts of the conference are used to reinforce an unrealistic and idealised view of the past, to which Marsilius appeals as a model.

While Marsilius is virulently against the actions of the Church of his day, he is not opposed to the institutions as such. Priests are a necessary part of the State and even support for the Roman bishop as Pontiff can be found in the book. As Rome's claim to primacy is based on succession from St. Peter, Marsilius' views on Peter are pertinent. Having stripped belief back to Scripture, he arrives at a modern view of St. Peter. He states that Peter cannot be definitely placed in Rome by the Bible(12) and so emphasises that it is human tradition which puts him

He could not disprove its authenticity as Dalla was to do in the 15th cent.

there. The authority the Church derives from its tradition of Petrine origins is therefore a human matter. This said, he will allow that in the limited sense of: "maintenance of the stability of the faith,"(13) as commanded by Constantine, Rome can have primacy over the Church. This is very congenial to Marsilius' view of the virtue of stability, yet is not licence for the Papacy to determine what the faith is.

The end of the priesthood therefore is to teach and educate men in those things which according to evangelical law it is necessary to believe, do and omit in order to attain eternal salvation and avoid misery.(14)

The need for priests is derived from first principles without recourse to Christianity(15), and interestingly from Augustinian concepts of original sin(16), his idealisation of the past not extending to human nature. The clergy are to act as the physicians to a sick world, offering advice but unable to force acquiescence to their counsel.(17) They cannot judge in

a coercive sense since their role is spiritual, and God is the judge of such concerns with punishment or reward for the next world. He is very adamant that as successors to the Lord and the apostles the bishops and priests inherit not temporal power but the obligation to be subject to such power. The power of the "Keys" is seen as only having sacramental power granted by God and certainly unable to, for example, remit sins against the wishes of God.

As successors of Christ and the apostles the priesthood should likewise be poor, placing Marsilius with the Franciscans against the Papacy. This dovetails neatly with his views on the Church eschewing temporal concerns, as poverty prevents large scale secular adventures. His tediously long exposition of the feasibility of poverty without compromising the needs of the clergy and the support of the poor (Chap XIII-XIV) betrays a certain desperation to go to extraordinary lengths in this scheme to have a harmless Church. More

*with the Franciscans
W. of Occam*

cogently he points out the practical problems of wealthy priests, the dissonance between their words and their actions being of harm to the Church.(18)

Marsilius finds priests to require a hierarchy only because of their human failings. In terms of their function as priests they are all equal under God, being imprinted with "priestly character"(19), citing the early church as exemplified in the Pastoral epistles and Acts.(20) It is only the conflicting desires of priests which necessitate a hierarchy "to avoid scandal and schism"(21), and bishops assumed the role of overseers as a result. As to the appointment of these bishops, Marsilius argues that because they are only elevated from the priesthood to deal with temporal matters, they are the responsibility of the legislator. This is designed to remove from the Papacy one of the chief sources of corruption. Whether replacing Papal corruption with imperial corruption is a good idea is something he does not broach, but Marsilius may have at

least approved of unity, even of corruption. His argument from apostolic arrangements and divine revelation as methods of appointment as found in the Bible, to election by the believers and on to the choice of bishops by the legislator is tortuous and unconvincing in the compromises and excuses for eschewing the biblical example. He clearly here is operating under a different set of rules ^{found} to when he binds priests to the poverty shown by the apostles. More logical is his matter of fact exposition of the dangers a rogue priest has upon the welfare of the community, especially upon the women, as evidence for the need for secular control over the clergy.(22)

Another great source of ecclesiastic corruption, the distribution of benefices, is neatly removed from the Church's grasp in his scheme of things as with all such moneys being for the care of the poor, this function is a temporal concern, again a responsibility of the secular authorities.(23)

The most dangerous aspect of the Church against which Marsilius rails is the "plenitude of power" which the medieval popes had assumed in which they "try to prove that all kings, rulers, and individuals are subject to them in coercive jurisdiction." (24) This is of course the antithesis of the Marsilian view. The political implication of separate laws for the clergy is schism within the secular community and is in effect treason against the emperor. Marsilius ridicules the statements of Boniface VIII which assert this plenitude of power as being conveniently set aside for the French at least by his successor, Clement V. (25) The ultimate horror of the confusion of temporal authority with Church matters is the excommunication of people for failing to pay debts. Any suggestion that Marsilius was not a Christian is dented by his disgust at this abuse:

Christ and the holy apostles had brought these men into the church by means of many exhortations, hardships, and exertions, and finally through martyrdom and the spilling of their precious blood. For he who was "made all things to all men," in order that he might

win over all men, did not act in the way these bishops do.(26)

The chronicling of the litany of abuses of the Papacy under the umbrella of the plenitude of power is Marsilius at his most passionate and bitter, leading to the use of apocalyptic imagery from the book of Daniel. The institutionalisation of corruption by limiting election of provincial bishops to Roman canons, the use of Church finances to pay for mercenaries, the absolution offered to those who killed for Papal forces and the rise of the "shyster lawyers" as the preferred church official, are some of the abuses laid at the door of the Popes' assumption of this power.

Marsilius can be seen as conservative, an organicist, looking to stability in the state. With his pessimistic view of human nature he looks back to the past, not as a renaissance man does seeing human potential, but merely seeing the rabble better organised. His libertarianism seems to end where the will of the people does not coincide with that of the

legislator. While the Church interferes with the organic unity of the state and so undermines its authority and stability, there is also a definite sense in which politics has a hint of the disreputable, and that the Church ceases to be the Church when it attempts to rule. He quotes Paul to the effect that:

If ye have judgments of things pertaining to this world, appoint them to judge who are most despised in the church, that is, men who are wise, but yet of lesser merit.(27)

This could reasonably be applied to the shyster lawyers which the church was using so effectively to further its temporal fortunes. Further, Marsilius at his epigrammatic best writes:

It is most usually the stupid and ambitious, rather than the virtuous and wise, who seek and try to assume high office.(28)

His pessimism of the conduct of human affairs especially as the Church had been going about it, leads him to similar conclusions to those Machiavelli reached later on the conduct of politics.

The synthesis of his desire for peace and stability in spite of his pessimism concerning people, and his desire to therefore limit the Church to the things of God, led to a theory of the Church in a secular society which is largely as things are today. The Church is not a competitor with secular government, and has even at times become a champion of the poor and oppressed, witness liberation theology. The laity have an important role in most modern churches, and the clergy where freed of temporal concerns is certainly less scandal ridden. Where this is not the case, as with American tele-evangelists and perhaps the Vatican Bank scandals it would be well to heed the counsel of Marsilius today.

His limitations in relevance to today are largely those of the Protestant churches he prefigured to a certain extent. By stripping back what he believes to the canon, Marsilius finds a bedrock of God's word. Once that is revealed as being as much a product of

?) tradition as the later church writers Marsilius rejects, faith is left without a replacement for the ballast scripture provides. A Church which uses both scripture and tradition is better equipped to respond, albeit slowly, to changing perceptions of the validity of the Bible.

(which in fact every church does, whatever its protestations to the contrary. However, the relative weights given to scripture & tradition do vary considerably.)

Unfortunately for us all, removal of one barrier to peace in the corrupt Papacy has not prevented every other impediment to peace to continue to foment destruction and pestilence in the six and a half centuries since Marsilius. What appears to be a narrow view of the problem of lack of peace in the world today, in the medieval world with its all encompassing Church was a reasonable and politically brave attempt. Marsilius provides the theoretical basis from Scripture and philosophy for the rejection of Papal plenitude of power in favour of the Church assuming a role as a necessary but not ruling part of the state.

END NOTES

1. Marsilius of Padua, The Defensor Pacis,
Harper and Row, New York, 1967, p.329.
2. Emerton, E. The Defensor Pacis of Marsiglio of Padua,
Peter Smith, New York, 1951, p.19.
3. Marsilius, op. cit. p.5.
4. Ibid., p.103.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p.104.
7. Ibid., p.106.
8. Ibid., p.276.
9. Ibid., p.275.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., p.93.
12. Ibid., p.252.
13. Ibid., p.305.
14. Ibid., p.23.
15. Ibid., p.18.
16. Ibid., p.21.

17.Ibid., p.155.

18.Ibid., p.183.

19.Ibid., p.234.

20.Ibid., p.236.

21.Ibid., p.237.

22.Ibid., p.262.

23.Ibid., p.264-5.

24.Ibid., p.313.

25.Ibid., p.284.

26.Ibid., p.319.

27.Ibid., p.127.

28.Ibid., p.258.

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