

# FRIARS' BOOKSHELF

## THE MEDIEVAL OPTION

Andrew Willard Jones, *Before Church and State: A Study of Social Order in the Sacramental Kingdom of St. Louis IX*. Steubenville: Emmaus Academic, 2017.

Having attended public schools, most of my history courses taught me that the politics of the Middle Ages involved nearly constant conflict between monarchs and pontiffs, and I almost found myself relieved, or encouraged to be so, to be living in a society in which politics and religion are so separated. With *Before Church and State: A Study of Social Order in the Sacramental Kingdom of St. Louis IX*, Andrew W. Jones, a professor at Franciscan University of Steubenville, provides a compelling alternative vision while at the same time showing the dangers in any attempt to impose modern political categories onto medieval social order. *Before Church and State* provides a fascinating historical exposition of thirteenth-century France with a recurring analysis of society as sacramental, wherein the modern understanding of “Church” and “State” has no place.

Jones centers his rebuttal around the life of Gui Foucois, a French layman and lawyer who later received Holy Orders, rose quickly to the episcopate, and eventually became Pope Clement IV. Gui’s entire life’s work revolved around the *negotium pacis et fidei*, the business of peace and faith. By opening for his reader a window into this “business,” Jones shows that the spiritual and temporal powers were, and were understood to be, both thoroughly “secular” and thoroughly “religious,” cooperatively caught up in the common pursuit of justice. Gui becomes a microcosm of this unity, secular and religious, and in no way did this dichotomize his

life. Though his means developed as his place in society changed, his goal remained ever the same: the building up of a society preparing for heaven.

Exploring the relationship of Gui and St. Louis IX, both before and after Gui received Holy Orders, Jones reveals a remarkable difference between modern and medieval governance. The medieval worldview, while acknowledging the fallen state of man, saw peace as natural. This is in contrast to later political theories, which suggest that man's primordial condition is violent and selfish. For Gui, peace was not an imposed absence of war but the positive harmony of society working toward its proper end. When someone fractured this peace, as fallen man was (and is) wont to do, it had to be restored by the temporal and spiritual swords.

Through an enormous amount of anecdotal evidence, Jones shows that medieval governance operated with radical subsidiarity and a primary reliance on prudential leaders, not legal codes. Despite this emphasis on subsidiarity, the social order was not thereby splintered. There was profound unity by means of networks of *consilium et auxilium*, of counsel and aid, through which leaders were united in friendship and cooperation, not coercion. These networks crossed the bounds of spiritual and temporal powers in a way that such a distinction was not even considered a special barrier to overcome; after all, the goal of each was the same.

Turning to St. Thomas toward the end of his book, Jones searches for a speculative foundation to the "sacramental" social order that he has been defending to this point as a historical reality. In doing so, his text acknowledges but seeks to avoid direct engagement with Thomist theoretical debates by keeping his commentary close to the concrete realities of thirteenth-century France rather than the abstract considerations of speculative theology. While this restraint could be considered laudable, as Jones explicitly avoids claims of expertise in theology or philosophy, Jones's approach in this section does leave a large speculative

lacuna in the work. Because of this, despite the insights that Jones provides here, Thomists may be less than satisfied with this chapter, especially because many of its claims that reach beyond historicity would require a far more sophisticated treatment of highly debated theological theses surrounding nature and grace. Further, he seems to read St. Thomas as if the Common Doctor is formulating his doctrine as a description of France, rather than as a speculative consideration of the nature of the temporal and spiritual powers. While considering St. Thomas's doctrines is undeniably important, *Before Church and State's* strength lies in its erudite historical analysis, not in its speculative explanations, which it offers as something "useful and perhaps thought-provoking, rather than definitive" (399).

Being a work of history, *Before Church and State* is primarily descriptive, but it is also implicitly normative. Jones's story of medieval France suggests that the spiritual and temporal powers have not always been (and therefore, need not be) divorced. In fact, he traces the roots of separation through the Reformation and to the so-called Enlightenment, which, he claims, leaves the modern age with a sort of despair with respect to the supernatural. If this is the case, Jones invites us, in light of St. Louis IX's France, not only to reconsider the mutual role of the temporal and spiritual in crafting and directing social order, but to reevaluate the living political philosophy governing the West.

*Before Church and State* is one among many pieces in a long project of reclaiming the narrative of history from the monopolization of "secular" historians. Replete with highly readable, and enjoyable, anecdotes, Jones's book merits a read from anyone interested in rediscovering the Middle Ages and considering that religion may be only as accidental to society as justice.

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