Monasticism, Universities and Vernacular Spirituality: the evolution of monastic learning and teaching, and their place within late medieval culture

Monasticism and education

- In lecture 3, we discussed the important place that monasticism came to occupy in education from late antiquity onward.
- "Monastic schools" became the pre-eminent centres of education in medieval Europe, a place they occupied up until the 11th/12th century
- But we also saw, from the early middle ages, the emergence of competing "cathedral schools", usually founded by bishops.
  - Heavily influenced by monastic schools: the formation of early communities of "canons" often takes place around cathedral schools.
  - Nevertheless, they represent important and prestigious competition.
  - E.g. Anglo-Saxon England: the great intellectual centres of the 8th century are the monasteries of Wearmouth-Jarrow and the cathedral school of York

New types of schools

The socio-economic and political changes we discussed in the last lecture also help to change the nature of educational competition in the Latin West, from the 11th/12th century onwards

- The increasing complexity and mobility of society enhanced educational needs.
  - Expanding bureaucracy: the post-Gregorian reform Church and lay governments were constantly expanding their administrative arms, especially their legal courts.
  - Expanding commercial opportunities and trade: greater need for reading and writing, for bookkeeping, and, crucially, for lawyers, especially in towns and cities
- Existing monastic and cathedral schools cannot entirely meet this demand.
  - New **monastic schools** continued to appear in the 11th century – e.g. Bec in Normandy under Lanfranc (d. 1089) and Anselm of Canterbury (1109): both these educator monks became archbishops of Canterbury in a period of administrative expansion.
  - Nevertheless, the more powerful reaction took place elsewhere: **Cathedral schools** – located in cities – were better placed to expand.
  - Alongside them other smaller **urban schools** appear, as noted teaching *magistri* (masters) spread out to different towns and cities looking for gaps in the market.

New frameworks of knowledge

If educational institutions were evolving against a background of wider changes, so too was intellectual culture itself.

- The growth of schools of every variety and rising levels of education provided room for new investigations of a more advanced type. Scholars began the task of trying both to broaden and to integrate their knowledge of both the worldly and the divine.

The possibilities for this project were also enhanced by access to a broader range of texts:

- The Norman conquest of Sicily, the progress of the Reconquista in Spain, and the Crusades brought men from the Latin West in contact with Arabic learning: crucially, the Muslim world had preserved (and translated into Arabic) many classical works derived from ancient Greece that had long been forgotten in the West.

- The discovery and Arabic-to-Latin translation of these works – above all, some important works of Aristotle, previously thought to have been lost by Westerners – opened up new intellectual landscapes in both philosophy and science.

Out of these influences, a new intellectual style emerged

- New methods of learning and teaching came to the fore: e.g. dialectical reasoning – i.e. a pitting two opposing arguments against each other.

Scholasticism vs monasticism?

We describe this new intellectual style as "**scholasticism**" (esp. when applied to theology – always considered the most prestigious field of study): i.e., associated with the new "schools".

- It seems quite different from the monastic intellectual style we have seen in earlier lessons, focused on coming to God through ascetic striving and (from the 11th/12th century) through growth in love – Jean Leclercq described this as "monastic theology" in his important book, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God.*

This division now seems somewhat simplistic. Such approaches to knowledge and learning were in no small part **pioneered within monasteries in the 11th/12th centuries.**

- The school of **Lanfranc** and **Anselm** at Bec, in Normandy, was one of the first places where the study of theology took on more systematic aims. Similar studies also took root among the Cistercians. The same men who were the fathers of the "affective piety" were also the fathers of more logical and systematic intellectual approaches to God and man.

- **Constantine the African** (d. 1098/1099): a former North African merchant who travelled to Italy and eventually became a Benedictine monk of Monte Cassino. His knowledge of Arabic and Latin allowed him to bring previously unavailable classical and Islamic works on science and medicine into the Latin West.

Nevertheless, the new trends in intellectual culture were **particularly accelerated by wider patterns of greater social – and thus intellectual – mobility**: i.e. travelling scholars, not constrained by monastic boundaries

The fruits of these labours become **especially influential at the growing cathedral and other urban schools.**

Peter Abelard – a controversial life

The best known 12th century scholastic theologian was not a monk, nor a even a cleric for much of his life, but rather a controversial scholar and teacher active at the urban schools: **Peter Abelard (1079-1142)**

- From a minor Breton (Western France) noble family. An able scholar at a young age, he travelled widely looking for teaching.

- Taught by Rosellinus, a canon of Compiegne and very early "scholastic" theologian/philosopher; he then moved to the cathedral school of Paris.

- Became well known for his dialectical logical approach. His work *Sic et non* (yes and no), poses apparently contradictory statements by Church fathers next to each other. He became master of the Paris cathedral school in 1113.

- Had an affair with **Heloise d'Argenteuil** (d. 1164) – a rare female scholar at Paris, who was there due to being the niece of a canon of Notre Dame cathedral. Having impregnated her, Abelard agreed to marry her but only secretly (perhaps because he was planning to be ordained a priest in order to advance further as a teacher). This led to an argument with her family, that led to Peter being castrated by hired thugs.

- After this (in 1120), he retired to become a monk at the Benedictine monastery of Saint-Denis. Falling out with the community there, however, he was allowed to leave.

- He lived in several other Benedictine communities – including as abbot of Saint Gildas in Brittany, but by the late 1130s, he was back in Paris, teaching, effectively departing from his monastic duties to do so.

Peter Abelard and Bernard of Clairvaux

The theological and philosophical influence of someone who was at first essentially a layman and then a not-very-committed monk caused concern, not least to some of the great monastic reformers of the day.

- They asked, how could a man who did not fully devote his life to God claim to understand Him and his creation?

- In addition, his explorations of virtues, vices and their relation to sin – highly influenced by Aristotle – were also challenging to monastic outlooks: Abelard took the quite extreme view that active consent in knowingly doing wrong was the only criterion for sin.

- Even if intellectual monks believed some degree of consent was always required for sin, they also saw this consent to sin as something that could not so easily be separated from man's corrupted nature after the Fall of Man in the Garden of Eden. They were concerned about sinful emotions, sinful thoughts that crept in at all times, and that only an ascetic life could control.

Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) – the most influential Cistercian of the 12th century – made it a personal mission to effectively destroy Abelard's career and to have many of his propositions condemned from the late 1130s. He succeeded at the Council of Sens in 1141.

- Nevertheless, Bernard and other coenobitic monks could not entirely turn back the clock. Advanced education would increasingly escape the control of monastic institutions.

University formation

The institutional changes to education - e.g. expansion of cathedral schools, formation of new urban schools – and the ambition of intellectual culture accelerated to the point where certain cities and towns become famous for their "schools" and the masters teaching there.

Simultaneously, both Church and lay authorities sought to gain a measure of control over these fast-growing educational centres.

The result: **universities (**from the latin *universitas* – i.e. the whole, a corporation).

Bologna: gained its first organisation through a guild of students formed in 1088; the Holy Roman Emperor Frederik Barbarossa provided its first university charter in 1158. Particularly famous for its contributions to legal thought.

Paris: grew primarily out of the Notre Dame cathedral school of Paris. The corporation of teachers and students was recognised as a university in 1200 by the French king Philip Augustus.

Oxford: urban schools existed by 1096; became formally recognised as a university over the course of the first half of the thirteenth century (1200-1250).

Mendicants and Universities

The formalisation of universities and other schools under church and lay supervision occured at exactly the same time when Mendicant orders emergeed.

- Saint **Francis of Assisi** (d. 1226) was initially very suspicious of education, thinking it led to arrogance.

- But friars of both his order and others **existed in the same urban locations as the new schools and universities,** and the cultural trends intermingled.

- Moreover, mendicant vows – *poverty, chastity* and *obedience* - were strong on moral obligations but presupposed freer movement and travel (for men at least); unlike traditional Benedictine vows, which included a vow of *stability* to a fixed house (alongside vows of *obedience* and *conversion of morals*) that helped to engender greater expectations of enclosure.

- Friars thus had greater freedom to go out of their houses, to take up residence in other houses of the same order, and even to travel far beyond them: **they could thus go far and wide to teach and learn**. The centralised congregational networks of the new Mendicant orders in turn became scholarly networks that created links between intellectuals at different universities across Europe

The rapid appearance of mendicant friars at almost every school in Europe led to **the formation of houses in the same locations**. These in turn naturally **attracted young scholars** to their ranks (joining an order effectively guaranteed financial support for education)

- The effective colonization of urban schools and universities by Franciscans, Dominicans and other mendicants – centralised orders with their own hierarchies and authorities – also came to cause problems, however.

- Secular masters (often priests, but not in a religious order) struggled to keep a measure of control over corporate university institutions and often became resentful at what they saw as high-handed behaviour from mendicants. **The earliest literary attacks on mendicant friars emerge from this university context.**

Mendicant scholasticism

The most famous "scholastic" theologians of the thirteenth century all belong to Mendicant orders. To take just two examples:

Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274)

- First educated at the schools in Naples. He came under the influence of the Dominican order there. He joined, and was allowed to go to Paris and Cologne. Eventually became "regent master in theology" (the highest Dominican position at the university) at Paris.

- Leaves for Italy in 1259 to allow other Dominicans to advance at the University of Paris, and teaches at Rome, with the support of pope Clement IV.

- Returns to Paris in 1268 to confront radical-Aristotelian doctrine of the "unity of the intellect" (that all people share in the same universal intellect), since it represented a potential challenge to the Christian idea of individual souls. At the same time, he continued to defend other Aristotelian positions and their compatibility with Christian faith.

- Most famous work: the *Summa theologica* (literally, "the whole of theology"), begun in the 1268, but never fully completed. The *Summa* leant heavily on Aristotle in an attempt to produce a Christian theory of everything. He sought to address every theological question, from the nature of God and Christ to religious law and the sacraments of the Church. As a result, it features a very strong defence and rationale for vowed religious (i.e. monastic, including mendicant) life.

Bonaventure (1221 –1274)

- From Italy, he joined the Franciscans in 1243. His intellectual potential meant he was sent to the university of Paris.

- He became the leading Franciscan theologian at the university – a contemporary of Aquinas

- His theology leans in a different direction however. While certainly influenced by Aristotle, he leant heavily on the Church Father (and promoter of monasticism) Augustine of Hippo, as well as Neo-Platonist classical philosophy.

- His work thus took a more "mystical" approach to knowledge: he emphasised that rational learning had to be completed by the approach of the heart to God. He effectively combined twelfth century "affective piety" with elements of scholasticism

The result: through mendicant influence, monastic tradition and outlooks becomes increasingly woven into scholastic thought (in comparison to Abelard)

Coenobitic monasticism and education

What about more traditional coenobitic monks (rather than mendicants) in this revolution?

- Benedictine schools continued to provide a point of initial (i.e. childhood) education to those whose status and means allowed them access to it. For women, female enclosed religious houses were one of the few ways to gain any significant education at all.

- Nevertheless, the prestige of Benedictine schools and even their ability to provide basic education gradually waned: universities – and perhaps especially the mendicant orders within them – represented the most straightforward path into advanced study, and were thus very attractive to the brightest men (i.e. those most capable of teaching others.)

- The Cistercian order – with its central organisational structure (led by the Abbot of Citeaux and a General Chapter meeting regularly held there) – was able to respond quickest: from the mid-13th century, they established *studia* (houses of learning) in university towns and cities and sent monks there.

- For more traditional independent Benedictine houses, this sort of concerted action was not possible, and the papacy become increasingly concerned about the potential effects of the movement of intellectual talent away from them.

- The efforts of **Clement V** and **Benedict XII** in the first half of the 14th century to reform Benedictine life aimed in part to ensure that promising young Benedictine monks were given allowance to leave their monasteries, at least for a time, to attend university, and to bring this intellectual culture back to their own monasteries as teachers.

Coenobitic monks at university

As a result of these reactions, Benedictine and Cistercian monks do become an important part of university life in the in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries [see Clark].

- Their most famous masters are less noted than the mendicants – in part because they flourished after the early period of university scholasticism –, but by 1450 they dominated many of the key positions at the higher faculties of Paris and Oxford.

If coenobitic monks followed the mendicants in engaging with university life, they also had some quite profound influences on it.

- Student life and educational norms had always had a "monastic" quality to them: young men trained at the feet of a master; their lives sometimes even had a forced ascetic quality to them, due to lack of funds!

- From the mid-13th century, colleges – residential communities of students – begin to take shape, at the same time as coenobitic monks begin to establish small communities in university towns: these colleges – designed to support and lead students through a programme of study – even take on the architectural appearance of coenobitic monasteries
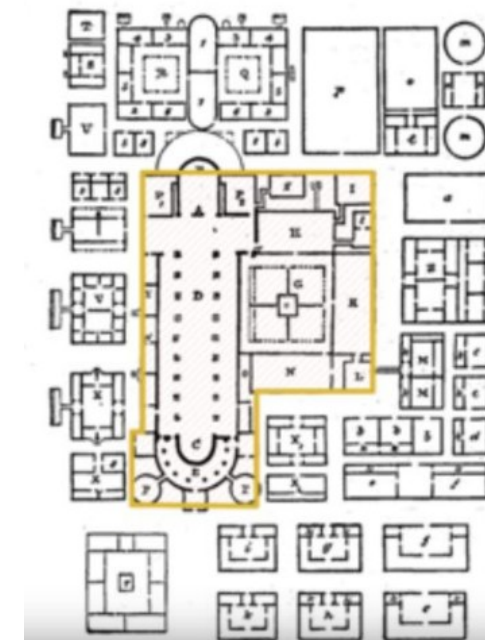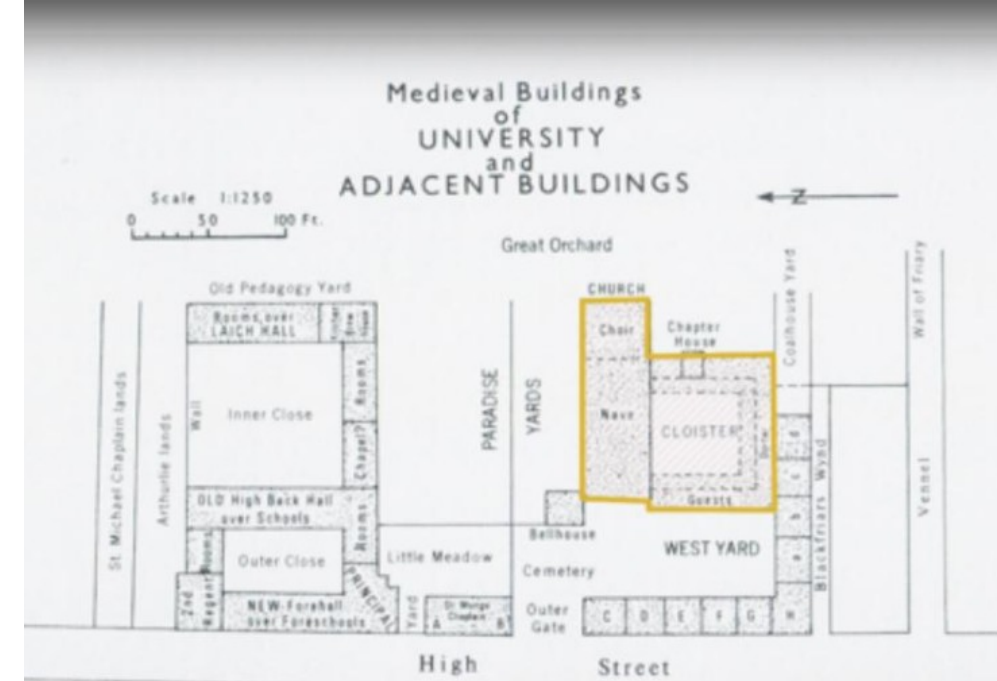
A comparison of the early buildings of Glasgow University (mid-fifteenth century – top) and the 9th century buildings of Saint-Gall monastery (bottom)

pic 4,5: Diagram. Comparison of Glasgow University reconstruction plan and plan of the Abbey St. Gall

The rise of "humanism"

The late 14th and 15th centuries witnessed **a new evolution in intellectual tastes**

- A new passion for classical (ancient) texts emerges: if the scholastic trend looked primarily to the terse, logical methods of ancient philosophy and science, alongside it a greater interest now emerged in rhetoric and literary expression, aided by rediscoveries of some ancient Latin works on the subject (e.g. Quintillian).

- This also helped to inspire a closer analysis of the Bible: by the turn of the sixteenth century, scholars like **Desiderius Erasmus** (d. 1536 – based at the University of Paris) were learning Greek and trying to understand the new Testament in its original textual form, rather than St Jerome's Latin translation.

This trend – often called ***Renaissance humanism*** – has sometimes also been described as a coherent philosophical movement (e.g. by the 19th century historian Jakob Burkhardt) that challenged some established tenets of medieval Christian intellectual culture and prefigured some modern values: e.g.

- through renewed focus on pagan sources, including literary works (rather than philosophical/scientific works)

- through questioning the logic of scholastic theologians that attempted to reduce everything to a single system

- through, in turn, placing a greater value on the human individual and individual perspective

This view (humanism as a coherent, modernising philosophy) now seems significantly overstated, however. Humanism is better understood as **a revival of literary knowledge and linguistic skill, with participants taking a wide variety of outlooks.**

Late medieval intellectual culture and monasticism

In so far as we can speak of outlooks associated with humanists, one of the more common features appears rather unexpected given the 'modernising' image that Burckhardt presented: **an idealism concerning coenobitic and eremitic monasticism and its culture.**

- The affective monastic piety of the 11th and 12th centuries – with its eloquent discussions of divine love – often held more appeal than scholastic logic to men who appreciated the power and beauty of words

- Secular (i.e. non-monastic) humanist scholars like **Francesco Petrarch** (d. 1374) – who studied at the University of Bologna – and **Jean Gerson** (d. 1429) – who became chancellor of the University of Paris and arguably the leading intellectual of his age – also expressed an admiration of enclosed, contemplative monks and their "purer" approach to learning, undistracted by the confrontation and "arrogance" of university debates.

At the same time as these intellectual changes were occurring, some of the most strictly enclosed orders – e.g. the **Carthusians,** who had no participation in university life – benefitted from an influx of young, educated men, who moved away from the life of the universities. For example:

- Petrarch's brother, Gherado, became a Carthusian: Petrarch was full of praise for his learning and lifestyle.

- Jean Gerson's two youngest brothers joined the Celestines, another strictly enclosed Benedictine reform congregation that did not allow its monks to attend university.

Monasticism and the spiritual education of the laity

Ultimately, very few people in medieval Europe went to universities and engaged with the subtleties of scholastic or humanist thought.

But, as mentioned in the last class, socio-cultural changes helped to create an atmosphere in which religious curiosity – desire for knowledge about God and Christian life – grew deeper for more and more people

- **Mendicant preaching** to the laity had a significant impact here.

- But, in a society where rudimentary levels of reading and writing were becoming a little more widespread, especially for the middle classes, and where **vernacular languages – the spoken languages of day-to-day communication – were starting to take on written form**, there was room for some lay people to go further: **engaging directly with written religious texts**, by reading them privately and by reading them to other laypeople who could not read them themselves

- This kind of text-focused lay piety was **notably popular with middle and upper class women,** as well as men: for women, in particular, interaction with vernacular religious textual culture can be seen as a way to teach themselves something in a world that otherwise offered them few educational choices.

- **Lay reading circles became active in the sharing and even copying of texts:** e.g. "Modern Devout" groups in the Low Countries in the late 14th century and early 15th century – who took on a semi-monastic appearance – were well known for compiling lots of little excepts from texts, often in the vernacular.

- Nevertheless, such lay men and women also **drew on the help of able writers, copyists and translators from within religious orders.**

The spread of monastic texts to the laity

Interestingly, the most well known disseminators of spiritual texts - especially in the vernacular - to the laity in the late middle ages were perhaps not the mendicant orders who maintained a strong emphasis on oral preaching, but an enclosed, semi-eremitic order: the **Carthusians** (see lecture 4)

- While the early Carthusians (see lecture 4) had tended to live in quite remote areas, their late medieval successors became more open to taking houses in or near cities. While yhey remained **strictly enclosed within individual cells**, and could have little verbal contact with outsiders, **they had significant time to write and copy texts**, a factor that helped contribute to their popularity in this period. They spoke of "preaching with their hands" rather than their mouths and became recognised for this role throughout Europe. Jean Gerson celebrated their abilities in this role.

- While many of the texts they copied were for monastic or church audiences as well, a good number of Carthusians across the Latin West **were careful to feed the religious needs of the laity – especially their lay benefactors – with texts specially adapted for them**.

- E.g. **Nicholas Love** (d. 1424)**,** first prior of Mount Grace Charterhouse in Yorkshire, translated and adapted a well known anonymous Franciscan text on the life of Christ into English: *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*. This text was very widely copied in England, even receiving the approval of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Arundel, who saw it as an orthodox manual for lay devotion that might turn heads away from heretical "Lollard" teachings.

Other **coenobitic** and **eremitic** monks would also take up this role of writers and text distributors for the laity too.

- E.g. **Walter Hilton** (d. 1396) – university educated (at Cambridge), but grew disillusioned with academic life: considered joining the Carthusians but ended up an Augustinian Canon Regular. Wrote a well-read Middle English work entitled *The Mixed Life*, which instructed a lay acquaintance with many responsibilities on how he might split his time between "active life"(i.e. worldly life) and "contemplative" life" (similar to monasticism).

Overall one can see how **more strictly enclosed or solitary monastic culture might come to hold some renewed appeal** in the 14th and 15th centuries:

- Their quieter, more contemplative mode of religion caught the eye of lay men and women who wanted to deepen their own religious devotion in the privacy of their own homes.

- The willingness of such monks like the Carthusians to respond to this through text transmission helped further these bonds.

The changing face of "monastic education" 1100-1500

In 1100, education was dominated by famous monasteries from the Benedictine tradition and cathedral schools.

- Over the course of the late middle ages, however, the importance of the former for the most intellectually advanced studies would decline, as universities became more prominent.

- The influence of monastic tradition on higher education remained strong, however, as mendicants rapidly colonized these new institutions, providing some of the leading intellectual figures of this age, and coenobitic monasticism influenced college formation and a new wave of humanist scholars

Meanwhile, new ties of spiritual education arose in the later middle ages:

- As seen last week, the mendicants were preaching to the laity in new, exciting ways

- But as seen today, some coenobitic monks and hermits were establishing new conversations with worldly society too in the 14th and 15th centuries, sharing their contemplative experiences in forms accessible to a lay audience and that appealed to the growing desire of the literate/semi-literate laity to form their own, personal connections with God.

Sources – Know Yourself, by Peter Abelard (before 1140)

Peter Abelard – discussed heavily in the lecture

Know Yourself (*Scito te ipso***)**

- Written before 1140, the text became well-known following Abelard's return to the schools in Paris, having effectively abandoned the monastic life he was compelled to join following his castration.

- A work of Ethics, one of it's primary focuses was a more rigorous, systematic definition of what was, and wasn't sin.

Sources – Know Yourself, by Peter Abelard

Mental vice [the inclination to do something bad] isn't the same as a sin. And a sin isn't the same as a bad action. […]

The body's very nature or structure makes many people prone to wantonness, just as it does to anger. But they don't sin merely by the fact that they are like this […] Vice makes us disposed to sin - that is to say, we are inclined towards consenting to what is inappropriate […] But it is this consent that should properly be called sin – the fault of the soul by which it merits damnation or is held guilty by God […] In my judgment it is clear from these considerations that no natural bodily pleasure is to be counted as a sin. It isn't to be regarded as a fault that we take pleasure in what is such that, when it has occurred, pleasure is necessarily felt. For example, if someone forces someone in religious orders, bound by chains, to lie among women, and he is led into pleasure – but not into consent – by the bed's softness and the touch of the women around him, who can call this pleasure that nature has made necessary a "sin"? […]

Now as for things that should not be done, I don't think it escapes anyone that they are often done without sin, for instance when they are committed under force or through ignorance. […] It thus isn't a sin to lust after someone else's wife, or even to have sex with her; the sin is rather to consent to this lust or to this action.

Sources - Letter to Pope Innocent II, by Bernard of Clairvaux (c. 1141)

Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)

- Described in previous lectures: not one of the original Cistercians, but a very early follower who became one of the most influential churchmen in medieval Europe.

Letter to Pope Innocent II (c. 1141)

- **Innocent II** (reigned 1130-1143) had benefitted from Bernard's influence to become pope. Hs election had been contested with a rival (Anacletus II): Bernard helped him win the support of the French monarchy

- Bernard's letter to him presented here occurred around the time of the council of clergy convened by the Innocent at Sens in 1141, at which many of Peter Abelard's doctrines were condemned – at Bernard's instigation!

- The letter is preserved as part of wider manuscript compilations of Bernard's letters, which, like so many of his other works, were popular with readers throughout the Middle Ages.

Sources - Letter to Pope Innocent II, by Bernard of Clairvaux (c. 1141)

In cities and castles, darkness is being spread in place of light; everywhere poison is being put forward to everybody in place of honey - or rather into the honey [...] A new Gospel is being forged for peoples and communities, a new faith is being propounded, a foundation that is different from what has been established. There is disputation that is immoral about virtues and vices, unfaithful about the sacraments of the church, and neither simple nor sober about the depths of the Holy Trinity; rather everything is served up to us as perversity, everything beyond what is normal and different from what we accept. Goliath [1 Kings 17.41] has advanced with his tall body, fortified with his noble weapons of war, with his shield bearer, Arnold of Brescia [a student of Peter Abelard], going before him. Armour is joined to armour, and there is not a breath that flows through them [Job 41.7]. A bee that was in France has hissed to a bee from Italy, and they assembled as one against the Lord and his anointed [Isa. 7.18].... Goliath, therefore, standing as one with his shield bearer between both sides, shouts against the armies of Israel, challenges the ranks of the saints, all the more boldly as he thinks David is not there.

Sources - Summa Theologica, by Thomas Aquinas (1265-1274)

Thomas Aquinas – discussed in this lecture

Summa Theologica ("The whole of theology")

- Thomas's unfinished masterpiece, discussing almost every aspect of Christian belief and practice.

- Arguably the most important work of Catholic theology ever and still highly influential within the Catholic Church today

- The following section discusses and explains the "religious state" (i.e. the way of life of monks, nuns, friars of various orders) within the Church

Sources - Summa Theologica, by Thomas Aquinas (1265-1274)

The religious state may be considered in three ways. Firstly, as the practice of tending to the perfection of charity. Secondly, as quieting the human mind from external concerns, according to 1 Corinthians 7:3: "I would like you to be free from concern." Thirdly, as a "holocaust" [a Greek word denoting sacrifice], whereby a man offers himself and his possessions wholly to God. In a corresponding manner, the religious state is constituted by three vows.

Regarding the practice of perfection, a man is required to remove from himself whatever may hinder his affections from tending wholly to God, for it is in this that the perfection of charity consists. Such hindrances are of three kinds. Firstly, the attachment to external goods, which is removed by the *vow of poverty*. Secondly, the longing for sensual pleasures, chief among which are sexual pleasures, and these are removed by the *vow of chastity*. Thirdly, the disorderly nature of the human will, and this is removed by the *vow of obedience*.

In a similar way, the noise of worldly concerns is heightened in man by three things. Firstly, the need to manage external possessions, and this solicitude is removed from man by the *vow of poverty*. Secondly, the need to control one's wife and children, which is cut away by the *vow of chastity.* Thirdly, the management of one's own actions, which is eliminated by the *vow of obedience*, by which a man commits himself to the will of another.

Finally, "a holocaust is the offering to God of all that one has," according to Gregory the Great (Homily 20 on Ezekiel). Now man has possessions in three ways, according to the Philosopher [Aristotle] (Ethic. i, 8). First, he has the possession of external things, which he wholly offers to God by the *vow of voluntary poverty.* Secondly, the possession of his own body; and this possession he offers to God primarily by the vow of *chastity* by which he renounces the greatest bodily pleasures. The third is the possession of the soul, which man wholly offers to God by the *vow of obedience;* by this he offers God his own will by which he makes use of all the powers and habits of the soul.

Therefore the religious state is fittingly constituted by the three vows [of poverty, chastity and obedience].

Sources – Letter to Étienne Coublans, by Nicolas de Clamanges (c. 1403)

Nicolas de Clamanges (1363 – c. 1440)

- A prominent French theologian, educated at the royal College of Navarre at the University of Paris

- Nicolas, along with his friends and fellow Navarre scholars Pierre d'Ailly and Jean Gerson (successive chancellors of the University of Paris) were very capable in scholastic methods, but they are remembered more for being the first generation of French 'humanist' scholars. They wrote in a more classical, eloquent Latin.

- They also showed a certain rebellious streak against what they saw as the vanity of academic debate, promoting some of the classics of monastic literature at the university instead. Nicolas himself would spend time as a guest at a Carthusian monastery, and wrote a treatise about the religious value of solitude.

Letter to Étienne Coublans

- Little is known about the early life of Étienne Coublans. He joined the French Celestine monks (a very strict late medieval Benedictine reform with an Italian semi-eremitic heritage) in 1403.

- He was clearly a very capable monk, and would hold a number of important offices: he became the provincial prior of the French Celestines in 1423 for a three year term.

- This letter dates from the time of his joining. It was preserved by Nicolas, who preserved his own correspondence for the educational benefit of others. Due to their quality, Nicolas's letters were copied, and are know in tens of manuscripts in France and Central Europe.

Sources – Letter to Étienne Coublans, by Nicolas de Clamanges (c. 1403)

Most beloved Étienne, I took great pleasure from your letters; I was not alone in this, since there are several others with me who either read them or heard them read out and praised your decision […] Prominent among them was that teacher of mine, a man lit greatly by pious zeal in his soul, the duke of the divine path and also its best guide: the Chancellor of [the University of] Paris [Jean Gerson]. He is enthused with inner joy, not only from the evident praise in your letters of his brother [Nicolas Gerson, a Celestine monk] but also by the hope he conceived in you, just as if you were also his brother. […]

You have in your house – and abundantly so – a fertile school, where you might learn [humility and fear]. You are planted in good ground, in fertile ground, in ground that I would call celestial: the Celestine religion, which is not inappropriately named after heaven. The sons of which truly can say, in the manner of St Paul: 'our way of life is in heaven' (Phil. 3: 20). […]

Watch their lives diligently, review their acts and works, imitate their manners. Attentive, you must ask them, believe in them, and rely entirely on their doctrine and way of life. Unless I am mistaken, you will discover in them the best school of humility and true religion, which removes men from concern for earthly things, and directs them towards God.

Source – Life of Saint Jerome, by Simon Winter (c. 1430)

Simon Winter

- A canon of the Brigittine double-monastery of Syon in Isleworth (near London), founded by Henry V in 1415

- The Brigittines were a relatively new, coenobitic congregation for both nuns and canons founded by **Birgitta of Vadstena** (1303-1373), a Swedish princess who became religious visionary. Her male followers lived by the Rule of Saint Augustine as well as additional regulations written by Birgitta: the order was approved by the papacy in 1370

- Simon's duties involved performing clerical duties (mass, confession etc.) for the nuns in the monastery

- But he also fostered connections with pious lay people, and acted as a spiritual guide for them: the most prominent of these followers was **Margaret, duchess of Clarence** (d. 1436), a widowed sister-in-law of Henry V who sought his counsel towards the end of her life and took to living near the monastery: she was also a major benefactor of the house.

Life of Saint Jerome

- Not a famous or well-spread work, known in just one manuscript known at Yale. It is essentially a Middle English translation and compilation of Latin legends concerning the Church Father Saint Jerome (see lecture 2), who was also well-known for founding a religious community in Italy for widows and virgins.

- It was written, in the first instance, for Margaret, duchess of Clarence

- Despite it not being a particularly well-known it represents a witness to monastic-lay interactions in spiritual education in the late Middle Ages.

Source – Life of Saint Jerome, by Simon Winter (c. 1430)

Right noble and worthy lady, and my fully reverend and dear spiritual daughter in our Lord Jesus, I have remembered how on Saint Jerome's day, that is the day after Michaelmas day, after I told you something of the life and miracles of Saint Jerome, I said that with our Lord's help, when I had the time, I would write his life and miracles in English, for the praise and worship of our Lord and of him [Jerome], not only so that you would understand it more clearly for your own spiritual benefit, but so that it might remain available and be used to edify others who might read it or hear it read. Thus I desire that it should please your ladyship first to read it, and copy it for yourself, and then to let others read it and copy it. For there is something within this book that needs to be known and held in the minds of all people. For in the first and second chapters, we may learn and take an example of how to live a Christian life in penance and rectitude. And in the seventh and ninth chapters, we may lean how to die. And what is more necessary to any man or woman on earth, than to know how to live and how to die?

Bibliography

Beyond the general reading, the following may be useful:

J. G. Clark, "Monks and the Universities, c. 1200–1500." Chapter. in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Monasticism in the Latin West*, ed. Alison I. Beach and Isabelle Cochelin, 1074–92 (Cambridge, 2020.)

https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/cambridge-history-of-medieval-monasticism-in-the-latin-west/monks-and-the-universities-c-12001500/9A98B1F41A5F0EBAB48A0D15039CC887