The Metaphor of the *duo luminaria* and Its Political Impact in the *De potestate regia et papali* of John of Paris

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Abstract   This article aims to shed a light on the use of the religious metaphor in its link to political discourse. Particularly emphasised in the *De potestate regia et papali* of John of Paris, this argumentative method is aimed to give strength and representativeness to the political speech by sustaining it as a communicative tool. If we have chosen to discuss this question in the treatise of John of Paris it's for his original use of the metaphor, notably the one called *duo luminaria* in the course of his tract insofar as it serves him as a basis for destroying the theocratic positions he denounces.

Keywords   Religious metaphor. Politics. Theology. Philosophy. France. Ecclesiology.

Summary   1 Introduction. – 2 The Exegetical Method of John of Paris. – 3 The Metaphor of the *duo luminaria* in the *De potestate regia et papali*. – 4 Conclusion.

1 Introduction

It is in chapter V of the *De potestate regia et papali* that John of Paris expresses himself quite directly on his position on causality and interdependence regarding ecclesiastical and royal power.

> Et ideo potestas secularis in aliquibus maior est potestate spiritu-
> ali, scilicet in temporalibus, nec quoad hoc est ei subiecta in al-
> iquo quia ab illa non oritur, sed ambe oriuntur ab una suprema
> potestate, scilicet divina. (Leclercq 1942, 184)

> So therefore, in temporal matters the temporal power is greater
> than the spiritual since it is not derived from it. Both take their or-
> igin from one supreme power, namely God. (Watt 1971, 93)

This conclusion, of which we have taken up a few lines above, per-
fectly sums up the original direction that John of Paris political dis-
course was to take and allows us to enter the heart of the matter
concerning the argumentative method that he was to put forward as
a legitimate and rational demonstration of his intellectual position.

It is also in this chapter that, for the first time in the treatise, John
of Paris refers to the metaphor of the *duo luminaria*, which he cites
from Innocent III's Decretal *Solitae*. Supposed to be the representa-
tion of the sun and the moon through their causal link, in the image
of the pontifical power and the royal power, the metaphor of the *duo
luminaria* transports us into an argument that is both moral and ju-
ridical; its true function is then to give contentment to the political
discourse by serving as a rhetorical support thanks to its represent-
ative scope, and this at different levels to which we will return later.
But before doing so, we need to recontextualise our discussion in or-
der to account for the intellectual approach of John of Paris, which,
in our opinion, is one of the keys to interpret the real argumentative
content of this religious metaphor.

Indeed, if the *De potestate regia et papali* is known in the field of
medieval politics, it is mainly for its synthetic and reasoned reinter-
pretation of the French political and ecclesiastical situation at the
beginning of the 14th century. Theologian and philosopher, member
of the Dominican convent of Saint-Jacques in Paris, John of Paris, or
John Quidort, was one of the first theologians of his generation to re-
think the juridical, physical and metaphysical links between the pope
and the king of France, offering a new conclusion, particularly re-
garding to his vision of royal autonomy. For John of Paris, the aim of
the *De potestate regia et papali* was to give a clear and precise outline
to the exercise and functions of the two political powers of the time,
which appeared of being since several years, an important question.

We will not repeat here, in its entirety, the context in which the *De
potestate* was written, but it is not useless to recall that, at the time
when John applied himself to show that *sunt potestates distincte epis-
copalis et temporalis* (Leclercq 1942, 194) ("episcopal power and tem-
poral power are distinct powers"; Watt 1971, 115) and, moreover that
they are *non solum re sed subiecto* (1942, 195) ("not only in them-
selves, but also in relation to their own subject"; 1971, 115), the French

political and intellectual situation has been more than tense for the last ten years, particularly in relation to the conflicting relations between Philip the Fair and Boniface VIII on one side and, on the other, in relation to the equally conflictual situation of the Parisian academic milieu, which is more or less a direct reflection of questions of authority in terms of social status but also, scientifically speaking, in relation to theological authority. In this environment, which we will briefly mention, the question of the relationship between temporal and spiritual power in varying degrees, whether in terms of authority, dignity or even legitimacy, is a burning issue.

It is therefore in this context that we wished to return to the use of religious metaphor in its relation to politics and, more specifically, in its relation to persuasion within the discourse. The question that needs to be asked first in order to analyse John of Paris' argumentation in a global way is the following: what rhetorical means are available to a theologian to write and discuss politics in the medieval period? If we start from this premise, we can already draw some interesting introductory conclusions, which will allow us to go further and question more strictly the argumentative value of the *duo luminaria* metaphor.

It is interesting to note that, throughout the *De potestate*, each argument put forward and each response to it is an expression of the author's desire to be both realistic by rooting his discourse in a specific context on the one hand, but also, on the other, to be literal in his interpretation of the Scriptures. Indeed, this literalness gives him the opportunity to furnish a clear and direct picture of the argumentative force of the Scriptures and of the way in which they must be interpreted in order to give an account of what they are really supposed to teach us in relation to the events that were contemporary to him. In the end for John of Paris, it is a matter of getting as close as possible to the French politico-religious reality, as he envisaged it, through its direct and current expression.

Indeed, we wondered earlier what rhetorical tools might be available to a theologian to discuss politics and, more broadly, to rethink the entire French ecclesiastical and social system according to his own understanding of their links and distinctions. It is in this vein that it is appropriate, in our opinion, to question the place and value accorded to the Holy Scriptures in the discourse of John of Paris. Indeed, in order to show the interest of the use of religious metaphor in his treatise, we would like to address the dialectical foundations of such an approach by asking the following question: what is the purpose, the interest and the argumentative power of religious metaphor in the *De potestate regia et papali*? In other words, it is appropriate to ask what is John's relationship with the Holy Scriptures and in what way do they act as guarantors of the argumentative value of his conclusions? If these questions seem a priori classical and common in the philosophical and theological literature of this period, we intend to show the specificity of John

of Paris thought in that he uses scriptural arguments to give back its autonomy to the royal power on the one hand, but also, on the other hand, to establish an ecclesiology rethought around the papal prerogatives, while respecting the limits of orthodoxy.

To do this, we would like to proceed in two stages: firstly, we will approach the problem from a more global angle concerning the place and argumentative value of the Holy Scriptures in the *De potestate regia et papali*, which will be the occasion to return to their precise role in his dialectical approach, and will allow us to shed a light on the rhetorical stratagems he uses, particularly regarding the metaphor of the *duo luminaria*, which will be the focus of the second part of our paper. This will give us the opportunity to refer to the argumentative polysemy of John of Paris, which is intended to serve his political ambitions which, although never explicitly expressed in the course of the treatise, seems to betray his penchant for a new French societal dynamic that we will call a posteriori, that of the 'nation-state'.[1]

2 The Exegetical Method of John of Paris

Who was John of Paris and what arguments did he choose to put forward in his *De potestate regia et papali*? In fact, little is known about his intellectual biography and much of his history still needs to be reconstructed.

We know him mainly for his political and social approach in the *De potestate regia et papali*. Written at the very beginning of the 14th century, the central argument of the treatise is based on a reconsideration of the powers of the pope through a new interpretation of the role and proper spheres of the spiritual and temporal powers. If the *De potestate* became more or less famous after the date of its writing, it is partly because of the context in which it was written and the problems it addresses, but also because of the sometimes-radical positions taken by John of Paris for his time, particularly regarding papal authority and the legitimacy of its intervention in relation to the power and authority of the King of France.

Reframing papal prerogatives and attempting to address the ecclesiological problem of the ecclesiastical hierarchy through a discourse that is both rational and demonstrative, John of Paris uses various rhetorical stratagems in the *De potestate regia et papali*, these are intended to establish the validity of his positions by means of a discourse that is meant to describe the immediate impact of the facts stated in a specific context: the political, doctrinal and social situation in France at the beginning of the 14th century.

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1 For example, see Jones 2011 whose point of view is very relevant in this case.

The *De potestate*, despite its political ambitions, can't be read like a classic treatise teaching good government, like those in the literary genre of 'mirrors of princes', for example. At no point does John of Paris question the moral value of the person in power, at least not directly.[2] He is in fact interested in the position itself and the status of the institution, whether on the side of the pope or the king. In this sense, the *De potestate regia et papali* seems to be more the product of a reflection on the political institutions of the time, than an educational synthesis on the principles of good governance and the best possible regime. It is perhaps this argumentative approach that makes it an interesting treatise to study in the context of a particular rhetorical approach, especially in relation to religious metaphor as an instrument for discussing politics.

Earlier we emphasised the importance of one question in particular, that of interrogating the means available to a theologian to speak about politics and to produce a discourse worthy of being heard and noticed in this field. Also, in this vein the intervention of the Holy Scriptures but also of the canon law is fundamental. They are both the main routes to a structured discourse on the links, separations, and interactions between temporal and spiritual power. From a more strictly philosophical point of view, the importance of Aristotelian sources on politics and the form of discourse must also be emphasised in this scheme because precisely here, John of Paris is not an exception. Futhermore, like most political treatises written at that time, the *De potestate regia et papali* is the fruit, in part, of a reflection on Aristotelianism and, precisely, on Aristotle's *Politics*. We quickly underline this point because it is not useless to understand the impact of the metaphor of the *duo luminaria* in the *De potestate* to have in mind the form of the discourse of John of Paris, especially in terms of ecclesiology. Indeed, when John proposes to set up a more balanced hierarchy in the ecclesiastical field, he tends to take up the outlines that Aristotle had drawn up to discuss the organisation of the city, in order to apply them to a sphere that Aristotle himself would not have envisaged, obviously.[3]

It is thus easier to imagine the turn that John of Paris will take in the interpretation of this famous metaphor, if we are able to identify, globally, the general meaning of what he says in the *De potestate regia et papali*. Moreover, if John of Paris' rhetorical strategy is to be more 'literal' in the interpretation of the biblical sources, which is also an important element to understand the way he uses them in order to give value to his discourse, it should also be noted that this desire for interpretive clarity is based on his argumentative perspectives,

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2   On this point see Renna 1978.

3   See here the argumentation of the chapter VI of the *De potestate regia et papali* (Leclercq 1942, 185-9).

so it can also be assumed that his interpretation of the biblical sources is based on what he himself has decided to show, hence the need to question this apparent literalness in relation to the general argumentation of the *De potestate*.

In order to come more strictly to the evocation of the canonical image of the *duo luminaria* and its impact in the *De potestate regia et papali*, it is also necessary to underline the stylistic importance, as we can say, in the discourse of John of Paris, of a precise dialectic in which politics is said and discussed through faith insofar as the latter serves as a communicative springboard for the former, thus making it possible to make representable to readers the true epistemological function of the religious metaphor in relation to the specificity of a particular subject, namely, the distinction between temporal and spiritual power.

In sum, when it comes to arguing, John of Paris refuses to use allegory. Only the literalness of a biblical text, according to him, allows us to be able to produce a convincing discourse in the sense that it would be based on a discussion whose premises and conclusions could be justified. In fact, he engages himself in an analysis of the content of the sacred texts, thus proposing to give them an interpretation worthy of being directly and currently understood, in relation to the subjects he wishes to address. As we pointed out earlier, this rhetorical approach on the part of John of Paris is reminiscent of the aim of his treaty, which is to restore a certain form of autonomy to royal power.

What is interesting is the way he approaches metaphor. In fact, metaphor is not a direct transcription of reality, it is an image of it. Also, taking into consideration the fact that John of Paris is committed to putting forward a literal interpretation of the sacred texts by rejecting the allegorical meaning, why did he decide to use the canonical image of the *duo luminaria* as a justification within his discourse? In order to understand this, we need to look at the various allusions to it in the *De potestate*.

3 The Metaphor of the *duo luminaria* in the *De potestate regia et papali*

The first occurrence of the image of the *duo luminaria* is found in chapter V of the treatise, which aims to question the superiority, in terms of dignity, of papal power over royal power. In order to answer this question, John of Paris follows a classical path, which consists in taking into consideration the end of each of the two spheres. Indeed, if the temporal sphere has as its end the life in society according to virtue, the spiritual sphere must lead us towards divine beatitude. Thus, not surprisingly, John of Paris asserts that because of these different ends, *potestatem sacerdotalem maiorem esse potestate regali et ipsam precellere dignitate* (Leclercq 1942, 183) ("sacerdotal power is greater

than the royal and excels it in dignity"; Watt 1971, 92). Now, not satis-
fied with this conclusion, which is as obvious as necessary, John of Par-
is will try by all means, to show that even if the dignity of the spiritual
power is greater than that of the temporal one, this conclusion cannot
be understood in a general and universal way for all the other points
that could be debated in terms of the distinction between the two pow-
ers, particularly in relation to their own field of action and legislation.

He then uses the metaphor of the *duo luminaria* to destroy its ar-
gumentative basis and to prove that it cannot be used as a theocrat-
ic argument. He explains that royal power does not derive from spir-
itual power and that in this sense it cannot be absolutely subject to
it. Indeed, both come directly from God, so neither has a direct im-
pact on the other. In fact, chapter V of the *De potestate* is crucial in
the overall architecture of the treatise because it is the first passage
where John clearly delineates the distinctions between the two pow-
ers by concluding that the temporal is not subject to the spiritual.
Moreover, if this conclusion is interesting, it is because it opens the
political discourse of John of Paris to crucial subjects that will make
his treatise original, such as conciliarism, which, moreover, is not
unconnected with his interpretation of the Scriptures.

Indeed, in the thinking of John of Paris, there is no pre-understood
universality in our reading of the Scriptures. To understand them, it
is necessary to be an enlightened man, that is to say, educated and
moral. Theological authority, which is gained through function and ti-
tle, is of primary importance here. John of Paris knows that as a theo-
logian he has the possibility and the duty to propose an interpretation
of the Scriptures that is in line with the subject they support.[4] Thus, if
God placed in the firmament of the sky two great lights, one to com-
mand the day and the other to command the night,[5] it must be un-
derstood in this sense and not in another. This is purely self-evident
and does not need to be carried over into another discussion to sym-
bolise the relationship between the temporal and spiritual spheres.

He thus addresses the problem again in chapter XI of the *De potes-
tate*, this time in connection with another central theme in his politi-
cal thought, namely the possession of temporal goods. Indeed, if the
central point of the *duo luminaria* metaphor in its relation to the two
powers derives from the interdependence of the moon in relation to
the sun, insofar as the sun provides the light necessary for the moon
to be (i.e., to exist), it follows that, if this is applied to both temporal

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4 It's an argumentative technic that is common to John of Paris. See for example his
Tractatus de antichristo.

5 "God made the two great lights: the greater to rule the day, the lesser to rule the
night [...]. God placed them in the firmament of heaven to give light to the earth, to
command the day and the night, to separate light from darkness" (Genesis 1.16-18).

and spiritual powers, the latter has precedence over the former in all circumstances. Thus, John of Paris understood that to differentiate the two powers in a conclusive manner, it would not be enough to say that each derived its origin directly from God, it was still necessary to be able to prove it by means of precise situations.

If he comes to discuss private property, it is because it is a subject of individual right that is close to his heart and on which a part of his thinking is based. Indeed, John defines private property in the temporal sphere, as the fruit of personal labour, which gives every individual the right to possess what he himself has created through his own work and efforts (cf. Coleman 1983). Thus, if this theory is to have any argumentative value, it must be both detached from papal power and authority on the one hand, but also, to some extent, from royal ones.

There is more to say on this point, but we will limit ourselves to a brief exposition, taking up the conclusion of John of Paris. If we are to consider the full extent of the right of each citizen to dispose freely of his property, we must admit that each person is detached from the jurisdiction of the spiritual power in the secular sphere. It is then easier to understand the need to separate the two powers not only in relation to their proper nature, but also in relation to their area of jurisdiction.

It is precisely in this sense that we pointed out earlier that the study of the religious metaphor of the *duo luminaria* in the text of John of Paris transports us into a moral and juridical argumentation: it is a question of understanding the way in which each of the two powers is established to lead men towards a virtuous life, which of course includes a moral aspect through the image of the good citizen, but also a religious one insofar as it must lead us to a higher level, which is that of eternal beatitude. Thus, the separation of the two powers which depends in the first place on the distinction of their origin insofar as they are not interdependent of each other, allows John of Paris to reconsider the legal contours of both spheres.

We now come to the last occurrence of this metaphor in the *De potestate*, which is in chapter XIV of the treatise. This chapter is constructed as an organised response to various theocratic arguments that John had discussed earlier in his text. The metaphor returns to argument four, which responds precisely to the argument in chapter XI, which we have just discussed. There are various elements here that deserve to be taken up such as John of Paris rejection of what he calls "mystical" (Leclercq 1942, 218)[6] explanations, which are similar to what we said earlier, namely, going against a literal interpretation

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6   John relies here on Dyonisus in his *Epistola* 9. c.1 by saying that *Mystica autem theologia, secundum Dionysium, nihil arguit nisi accipiatur eius probatio ex alia scriptura, quia mystica theologia non est argumentativa* ("According to Denis a mystical reading cannot be accepted unless a proof is found from other passage of Scripture, because mystical exegesis [is not argumentative]"; Watt 1971, 165).

of the sacred texts, and also his completely different explanation of the metaphor that he is going to give and which we will discuss below.

Indeed, there is one important thing that must be mentioned in John's relationship with the Scriptures in connection with this requirement for rationality: while he rejects the mystical interpretation of metaphor, he adds that he would be willing to accept it if there were other passages in the Scriptures that could attest it. Thus, the exegetical principle of John of Paris can be described as follows: the literal meaning is, a priori, the only one that can be worthy of providing a convincing argument but, under certain circumstances, if another passage in the Scriptures allows for allegorical meaning, then he would be ready to submit to it. It is therefore question of context and information to be brought into the discussion. Finally, to conclude on this last passage, it is interesting to note the way in which John skilfully manipulates the arguments of his opponents by turning their own interpretation of this metaphor against them. He then takes a more 'scientific' interpretation by analysing the qualities of the moon and the sun. Indeed, if the sun produces heat, the moon he says, produces humidity and cold. So, insofar as its effects are the opposite of the sun's, it can only be indirectly related to it, simply by the light it provides, like the spiritual power that illuminates the prince with its wisdom by offering him the instruction of faith. Thus, the fundamental differences in the effects that each produce can only be, according to him, the proof of their independence.

This last point is interesting because it reveals, in a few lines, the totality of John of Paris' thinking on this subject. We have already alluded several times to the fact that if John of Paris was in favour of the autonomy of royal power, this was to be understood within a precise framework. In fact, he was not a radical thinker since he did not envisage the total separation of the two spheres, but only their distinction, which is quite different. Thus, just as the moon and the sun would be linked by the light they share but distinct in the effects they produce, the temporal and spiritual powers are linked insofar as one cannot function without the other, although this does not mean that the temporal power is absolutely interdependent with the spiritual.

4 Conclusion

Thus, to conclude, it is very interesting in our opinion to note the crescendo of the use of the metaphor of the _duo luminaria_ in the _De potestate_, which makes it possible for John of Paris to elaborate his thought around an affirmation that is initially general, namely that of the distinction of spiritual and temporal powers, and then becomes more specific in relation to themes that are implied and interwoven in the course of his thought. The polysemy of his use of the metaphor

of the *duo luminaria* allows him to orient himself towards different subjects such as conciliarism through the reconsideration of papal power which becomes, in the course of the treatise, a question of ecclesiology, or the theme of private property that we have mentioned, and then to move on to a more strictly juridical issue, which is that of the distribution of the rights and functions of each of the two powers in relation to the place of the citizen within his kingdom.

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