



The Merchant and the Church in the Middle Ages

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Guilherme Henrique Marsola

UEM (Universidade Estadual de Maringá)

Liliana Grubel Nogueira

UEM (Universidade Estadual de Maringá)

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1 INTRODUCTION

Two realities are intertwined in the context of the Middle Ages: affirmation of the idea of Christianity and the Commercial Revolution. From the middle of the 11th century, the European West presents a process of fragmentation of political power with the rise of the feudal regime, in which local landowners have a higher power than the monarchic authorities (FRANCO JR, 2001), creating a vacuum of political unity and making the Church the only strong and centralized institution in the midst of fragmentation (FOSSIER, POLLY and VAUCHEZ, 2001). It is in this context that Christianity takes command of medieval society and begins to dictate rules and conduct for various activities, seeking to link the principles of Jesus with earthly life (PERNOUD, 1997). Concurrently with the strengthening of the power of the Church, the merchants started to be notorious figures in the European West of the XIII century (LE GOFF, 1991), leading the phenomenon of Commercial Revolution, that is, new ways of practicing trade, such as the creation of trading companies, professionalization of the sedentary merchants, emergence of money, bills of exchange, navigation insurance and accounting techniques (LOPEZ, 1986). The emergence of merchants caught the attention of Church intellectuals (NOGUEIRA, 2019) and the new commercial agents were the target of a Christian moralization. The aim of this paper is to present two attempts to regulate commerce in the European West: the first described in the *Decree of Gratian* – elaborated in the 12th century by the monk and jurist Gratian - and the second in *Question 77* of Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*.

2 METHODOLOGY

The methodology used to carry out this research consists of an analysis of the two sources mentioned in the light of a bibliography pertinent to the theme. The documents were produced in a certain historical context, and the conjuncture has a direct influence on the authors, so there is a need to understand them. To understand the context, it is important to look at works such as *Merchants and Bankers in the Middle Age* by Jacques Le Goff, *The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages (950 - 1350)* of Robert Lopez and



Light on the Middle Ages by Régine Pernoud. The analysis and comparison of the two documents (*Gratian's Decree* and *Theological Summa*) is the second step of the methodological process, being important to perform an external characterization of the work, listing information about the authors, the purpose of the work and possible external interferences, as well as placing them in their historical context. After understanding the environment in which the sources were produced, it is time to read the works and understand what the individual thought of each author was regarding the activity of merchants in the Middle Ages.

3 CONCLUSION

Both the works of Gratian and Aquinas are similar in several aspects, in particular, that both were produced with the purpose of giving unity to Christian teachings, because before the eleventh century there were the teachings of the Bible, texts produced by the apostles of Jesus Christ, drafts of Church legislation, decisions of religious councils and philosophies developed by Christian intellectuals, becoming common attempts to unify the various teachings in a single order, and this is what Thomas Aquinas and Gratian sought to do in their works. However, when observing the normatization made by the authors towards the medieval merchants, it is possible to perceive a contrast, since Gratian condemns the commercial practice by mentioning the expulsion of merchants from the Temple by Jesus in a certain passage of the New Testament and associating the profession with greed and lies. In contrast, Thomas Aquinas relies on the same biblical passage to assert that the mere expulsion of merchants cannot be a reason to condemn any commercial practice, because it is possible to link commerce with the laws of God, and this is the aim of Thomas Aquinas when he drew up a series of norms for the profession of merchants. It is notorious the difficulty in understanding the thought of the intellectuals of the Church in relation to the medieval merchants, because there was no unanimity of thought in relation to mercantile activity, but the reading of the sources and the analysis of the historical context, allows us to understand that there was an attempt by the Church to regulate the mercantile activities and the action of merchants in the context of the so-called Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages.



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