PREFACE

Much fruitful study has elucidated the emergence and early history of the University of Paris in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but relatively little attention has been paid to its maturity, even though the documentation for the fourteenth century is much fuller. One of the most complete dossiers in the later period is a product of the rebellion that dislodged the capricious and corrupt John Blanchard from his position as Chancellor of Paris in 1386. In the course of that conflict, the university masters promulgated statutes forbidding the chancellor’s alleged abuses, the pope sent a delegate to investigate, the opposing sides drew up position papers, and eighty witnesses testified on them. The case then moved to the Parlement of Paris, where more testimony was heard. The resulting documentation, permits the most detailed picture of the university available since the end of its formative stage in the mendicant controversy.

The issues debated in the Blanchard affair are fundamental to an understanding of the university, its self-government, its relationship to the chancellor and to the pope. But beyond institutional history, the affair has connections with the crises swirling about France and the Church at that time, the Great Schism and the power struggle early in the reign of Charles VI. In addition, the university’s spokesman throughout the conflict was the outstanding Paris theologian, Pierre d’Ailly. The reform provides an excellent look at his early career, while he was in the process of using the university as a springboard to preferment in the ecclesiastical hierarchy and into politics, where he would eventually become a figure of European importance. In the two speeches against the chancellor edited in the Appendix and analyzed in Chapter VI, we see how he sprang into the limelight; how he adapted the principles of university autonomy not only to oppose Blanchard, but also to work out larger ecclesiological ideas drawing on Gallicanism and conciliarism.

In the study that follows, the Blanchard affair is analyzed as a phenomenon in its own right, but also as inhering within a historical, political, institutional, and intellectual context that affects and informs it. The exposition proceeds from context to core: from the history of the license to teach, the political crisis imposed by the Great Schism, and the intellectual ferment that helped prepare the Church for the councils of Pisa and Constance; to Blanchard’s administration as
chancellor, the attack mounted against him, and his defense; and finally to the speeches themselves.

In presenting the revolt against Blanchard, I seek also to describe the connection between internal university affairs and the broader movements of politics, reform, and ideology in France and the Church at the beginning of the Great Schism.

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