

INITIATING YOUNG FRIARS
INTO A CULTURE OF PREACHING:
THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THIRTEENTH CENTURY
PREACHING AND BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

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It is strange that Thomas Aquinas's sermons have garnered so little attention over the years, given that he was a prominent member of the Order of Preachers, a group that identified itself by its *preaching*, and that, moreover, as a Master of the Sacred Page at Paris, one of Thomas's official duties, along with lecturing on the Bible and engaging in disputation, was preaching, whereas all of his commentaries on the texts of Aristotle were, by contrast, largely products of his spare time.

According to his earliest biographers, Thomas was renowned as an excellent preacher, not only to the educated, but also to simple uneducated laymen. Bernardo Gui reports that the common people 'heard him with great respect as a real man of God,' whose words 'had a warmth in them that kindled the love of God and sorrow for sin in men's hearts.'¹

Thomas's proficiency in preaching was no accident, however; it was, I suggest, the result of long training and the by-product of a reform movement which had begun decades before his birth whose goal was producing good preachers like him.

The Homiletic Revolution of the Thirteenth Century

It may seem odd to modern church-goers to imagine a time when preaching was not a regular occurrence at Mass. But such was often the case in the twelfth century, when most of the preaching was done by monks for monks. The ordinary parish priest was not expected, and often not competent, to prepare and deliver regular sermons. The task of routine preaching to the laity was the responsibility of the bishop, who was supposed to preach each Sunday. When this requirement was fulfilled, and it often was not, the result might be no more than one sermon per diocese per week.²

¹ Cf. Bernardo Gui, *The Life of St. Thomas Aquinas*, c. 29; quoted from Kenelm Foster, ed., *The Life of Saint Thomas Aquinas: Biographical Documents* (London: Longmans, Green, 1959), pp. 47-48.

² See Richard and Mary Rouse, *Preachers, Florilegia and Sermons: Studies on the Manipulus florum of Thomas of Ireland* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval

A key event that contributed to what has been called the ‘homiletic revolution’ of the thirteenth century was the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 which decreed that bishops should henceforth provide men ‘suitable for carrying out fruitfully the office of sacred preaching’ and supply them ‘appropriately with necessities.’³

The goal of the Council was to encourage not only *more* preaching to the laity, but also more *learned* preaching. The problem was not only that many of the faithful were not hearing the Word of God preached to them, but also that when they did hear it, it was too often from preachers incompetently prepared to preach the faith accurately and reliably.

Providentially, the Franciscan and Dominican Orders had been founded at around the time of the Fourth Lateran and made themselves well equipped to be able to take up the charge of the Council to provide doctrinally correct, well-trained preachers to minister to the increasingly educated laypeople in the towns and cities.

Near the end of the twelfth century, Peter Cantor (d. 1197), had written in the *Verbum Abbreviatum* that the three duties of a master of theology were *lectio*, *disputatio*, and *praedicatio*, comparing the relationship between the three to the parts of a building: *lectio* to the foundation, *disputatio* to the walls, and *praedicatio* to the roof.⁴ Note that, on this view, preaching, *praedicatio*, is understood to be the goal of the other two. Indeed, later in this same work, Peter spends an entire section inveighing against prelates who ‘evilly pass over in silence when preaching is to be done.’⁵

By the time Thomas was a student at Paris, all bachelors of theology were required to preach several times a year. It is not clear how

Studies, 1979), p. 43. Compare this scarcity with the surfeit of sermons in the thirteenth century, about which Jean Leclercq points out, ‘Le sermon est sans doute le genre littéraire le plus abondamment représenté dans la production du XIIIe siècle.’ J. Leclercq, ‘Le Magistère du Prédicateur au XIIIe Siècle,’ *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age*, vol. 15 (1946), p. 105.

³ On the ‘homiletic revolution,’ see James J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetorical Theory from Saint Augustine to the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 309 ff. For the texts of the Fourth Lateran, see *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, curantibus J. Alberigo, J. A. Dossetti, P. P. Joannou, C. Leonardi, P. Prodi, consultante H. Jedin, 3rd ed. (Bologna: Istituto per le scienze religiose, 1973). On-line at: www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu.

⁴ See Peter Cantor, *Verbum Abbreviatum*, 6. See also P. Tombeur and M. Boutry, eds., *Petrus Cantor, Verbum Abbreviatum Textus Conflatus*. Instrumenta Lexicologica Latina. Series A, Enumeratio Formarum, Concordantia Formarum, Index Formarum a Tergo Ordinarum; Fasc. 161 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004).

⁵ *Verbum Abbreviatum*, 62.

instruction in preaching was done, but what is clear is that proficiency in preaching was required. The master's inception ceremonies required a public display of all three duties of the master. He had to determine a series of four disputed questions over the course of two days. And on the second day, he also had to deliver a sermon in praise of sacred Scripture — the so-called *principium in aula* in the hall of the bishop. Then, on a subsequent day before the commencement of classes, he had to preach yet another sermon in praise of Scripture, at the end of which he was required to set out a *divisio textus* of all the books of the Bible.⁶ This last inception address — sometimes called a 'second *principium*' — was a model of the addresses masters were required to give on the first day of the term, which was also called a *principium*. If the master's lectures on that book of the Bible were published, that first-day address, the *principium*, became the prologue of the volume.⁷

All such *principia* — whether it was the master's inception address or the first lecture of the term or the written prologue to a biblical commentary — were all delivered as sermons using the sermon style common at the time — what was called the 'modern sermon' or *sermo modernus* style of preaching.

The *Sermo Modernus* Style of Preaching

Due to the unique and somewhat odd characteristics of this style, perhaps a few words are in order by way of introduction. In this style of preaching,

⁶ For an invaluable introduction to the inception ceremony and to the entire genre of the medieval *principium* address, see also the dissertation by Nancy Spatz, *Principia: A Study and Edition of Inception Speeches Delivered Before the Faculty of Theology at the University of Paris, ca. 1180-1286* (Cornell University Dissertation, 1992), esp. pp. 39-50. All contemporary descriptions of the inception ceremony for the masters at Paris are based ultimately on the early fourteenth century document that can be found in the *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis*, II, 693-4. Volumes 1 and 2 of the *Chartularium* can both now very helpfully be found on-line. See also the description of the inception ceremony in James Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Works* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1974, 1983), pp. 96-110.

⁷ For example: Mariken Teeuwen, *The Vocabulary of Intellectual Life in the Middle Ages*, Études sur le vocabulaire intellectuel du Moyen Âge 10, Comité international du vocabulaire des institutions et de la communication intellectuelles au Moyen Âge (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), esp. p. 315: 'The term *principium* is generally used, in the context of the medieval university, for the inaugural lecture of a course. In the context of a student's career an inaugural lecture of this kind marked the transition from one phase to another, and was, usually, a solemn and public occasion.'

instead of a line-by-line commentary, the parts of the sermon were developed from the words of one biblical verse called the *thema*, which served as a kind of mnemonic device for developing and remembering the entire sermon.

So, for example, in Thomas's advent sermon *Ecce rex tuus*, listed in the Leonine edition and in Fr. Hoogland's translation as 'Sermon 5,' the *thema* verse is taken from Matthew 21:6, 'Behold, your king comes to you, meek,' a passage from the prophet Zechariah quoted in Matthew's Gospel during Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.⁸

The casual reader might be tempted to think: here we have a verse dealing with Jesus's coming into Jerusalem; the sermon is supposed to address Jesus's coming at Advent; so clearly (we assume), the sermon will take its theme from, and perhaps be a commentary on, this biblical verse. Just as Jesus came triumphantly into Jerusalem (we expect Thomas to say), so also will He come triumphantly at the end of time. But this is not what we get at all. Instead, we find that each word of the *thema* verse serves as a mnemonic device—a memory aid—providing structure and order to the points the preacher wishes to make.

In Sermon 5, Thomas says, for example, that there are four different 'advents' of Christ: the one in which He came in the flesh in the Incarnation; the one by which He comes into our minds; the one in which He comes at the death of the just; and the one in which He will come at the end of time in the final judgment—none of which, it should be noted, involves the coming of Christ into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the obvious literal referent of the text in Mt 21:6, but all of this is rather standard theological content. What Thomas does, however, is to associate each of these four 'advents' of Christ with four different uses of the word 'behold,' the first word in his *thema* verse.

So, for example, we say 'behold' when there is something of which we are certain ('Behold, it is true'); so too we are certain that Christ will come to us after death. We say 'behold' to indicate a determinate time ('Behold, the time has come'); so too the Incarnation happens at a determinate time. We say 'behold' when we point out something we wish people to see ('Behold the Lamb of God'); so too although the coming of Christ into the mind is hidden, yet His coming in the flesh was visible. And finally, we say 'behold' when we've won victory over our enemies

⁸ The Latin text can be found at *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera Omnia*, vol. 44.1, ed. L. J. Bataillon, O.P. (Rome: Commissio Leonina, 2014). See also the invaluable English translation of all the sermons by Mark-Robin Hoogland, C.P., *Thomas Aquinas: The Academic Sermons*, The Fathers of the Church: Mediaeval Continuation 11 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010).

(‘Behold, the day has come’) and when we obtain something good (‘Behold how good the Lord is’); so too with the coming of Christ, we have victory over the enemy and hope for future good.

Thomas turns next to the words that immediately follow, in this case *rex tuus* (‘your king’). A king, says Thomas, suggests, first, unity; second, a fullness of power; third, an abundant jurisdiction; and fourth, equity of justice.

With regard to the first, there must be *unity* for there to be kingship; otherwise, if there were many, dominion would not pertain to any one of them. ‘Thus we must reject Arius,’ says Thomas, ‘who was positing many gods, saying that the Son was other than the Father.’

Second, Christ is king in that he has fullness of power. Thus laws are not imposed *on* Him, rather He has authority *over* the law, which is why He can say in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Mt 6): ‘You have heard it said of old [...] but I say to you,’ as if to say, ‘I am the true king who can establish the law for you.’

Third, Christ has an abundance to His jurisdiction because, whereas other kings have dominion over *this* town or *those* cities, all creatures have been made subject to Christ.

Fourth, Christ brings equity of justice. Whereas tyrants submit all things under their authority for the sake of their own utility, Christ selflessly orders all things to their common good. Notice, again, that all four of these theological points are associated with the single word ‘king’ from his opening *thema* verse.

Christ is called ‘your king,’ says Thomas—namely, the king *of mankind*—for four reasons: first, because of the similitude of image (man is made ‘in the image of God’); second, because of God’s special love for man beyond all other creatures; third, because of God’s special solicitude toward man and his unique care for him; and fourth, because of Christ’s conformity with our human nature.

And so on. Thomas runs through each word in the opening biblical verse in order (‘Behold your king comes to you, meek’), associating each with the points he wants to make in his sermon. We haven’t space to go into all the details for each word here, but I trust by now the pattern has become clear.⁹

⁹ Readers who are interested in a longer analysis of the entire sermon can consult my discussion in chapter 1 of *Reading the Sermons of Aquinas: A Beginner’s Guide* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2016).

Developing ideas based on a single word or phrase was known as *dilatatio* ('dilation'). A survey of late thirteenth century preaching manuals reveals that there were eight basic methods of 'dilating' a word or words from a *thema* verse in a sermon.¹⁰

1. Proposing a discussion based on a noun as it occurs in definitions or classifications.
2. Making sub-divisions of the original *divisio*.
3. Reasoning or argumentation (although preachers were warned not to make a sermon sound like a disputation and to avoid using certain locutions common in disputations).
4. 'Chaining' together concordant biblical authorities.
5. Setting up a series running from the positive through the comparative and arriving finally at the superlative in the manner of 'good, better, best,' such as 'abstinence is good;' 'fasting is better'; 'fasting and almsgiving is best.'
6. Devising metaphors through the properties of a thing.
7. Expounding the *thema* in diverse ways according to the literal, allegorical, tropological, and/or anagogical senses.
8. Consideration of causes and their effects.

Thomas employs all of these methods repeatedly in his sermons. And more to the point of our topic here, he also employs them repeatedly in his *biblical commentaries*. Indeed, in his biblical commentaries, he switches seamlessly back and forth from one to another just as he does in his sermons.

While it is certainly true that young prospective preachers learned to preach by listening to preaching each day, they were also prepared to

¹⁰ This appears to be a fairly standard list. My source, Robert of Basevorn's *Forma praedicandi*, can be found in the Latin original in Thomas Charland, *Artes Praedicandi*, 233–323, and in English translation in Robert of Basevorn, *The Form of Preaching*, tr. Leopold Krul, O.S.B., in *Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts*, ed. James J. Murphy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

preach, I submit, *by the way they were taught the Scriptures*. Throughout Thomas's biblical commentaries, we repeatedly find passages that employ one or more of these methods of dilation and could have been lifted directly out of one of his sermons.

Sermon Material in the *Commentary on the Gospel of John*

Take, for example, 'proposing a discussion based on a noun as it occurs in definitions or classifications' — method 1 listed above. Much of the content in Thomas's commentaries is generated by distinguishing the different uses of words. In his commentary on the phrase 'In the beginning was the Word' (*In principium erat Verbum*) in the Gospel of John, Thomas notes that, 'according to Origen, the word *principium* has many meanings.' Thus when the Gospel says, *In the beginning was the Word*, 'this can be taken in three ways.' In one way, so that *principium* is understood as the person of the Son. In a second way, it can be understood as the person of the Father, 'who is the principle not only of creatures, but of every divine process.' And in a third way, *principium* can be taken as the beginning of duration, so that the phrase *In the beginning was the Word* means that the Word was eternal and before all things.¹¹

How about allegory and the other spiritual senses? By the late thirteenth century, they had become another method of dilation along with the others. Thus near the beginning of chapter 2, where Thomas discusses the marriage at Cana, he spends several pages setting forth an elaborate allegory about marriage signifying the union of Christ with His Church, complete with 'chained' biblical authorities. He writes:

In the mystical sense, marriage signifies the union of Christ with his Church, because as the Apostle says: 'This is a great mystery: I am speaking of Christ and his Church' (Eph 5:32). And this marriage was begun in the womb of the Virgin, when God the Father united a human nature to his Son in a unity of person. So, the chamber of this union was the womb of the Virgin: 'He established a chamber for the sun' (Ps 18:6). Of this marriage it is said: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a king who married his son' (Mt 22:2), that is, when God the Father joined a human nature to his Word in the womb of

¹¹ *In Joh* cap I lect. 1 n. 23. Latin: Roberto Busa, *Thomae Aquinatis Opera Omnia: Ut Sunt in Indice Thomistico, Additis 61 Scriptis Ex Aliis Medii Aevi Auctoribus* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1980), accessed at corpusthomicum.org. English translation: James A. Weisheipl and Fabian R. Larcher, trans., *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Albany: Magi Books, 1980).

the Virgin. It was made public when the Church was joined to him by faith: 'I will bind you to myself in faith' (Hos 2:20). We read of this marriage: 'Blessed are they who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb' (Rev 19:9). It will be consummated when the bride, i.e., the Church, is led into the resting place of the groom, i.e., into the glory of heaven.¹²

Two paragraphs later, Thomas proposes a discussion based on a noun as it occurs in a definition. The *place* for the marriage is appropriate, says Thomas, because 'Cana' means 'zeal' and 'Galilee' means 'passage.' He writes:

So this marriage was celebrated in the zeal of a passage, to suggest that those persons are most worthy of union with Christ who, burning with the zeal of a conscientious devotion, pass over from the state of guilt to the grace of the Church. 'Pass over to me, all who desire me' (Sirach 24:26). And they pass from death to life, i.e., from the state of mortality and misery to the state of immortality and glory: 'I make all things new' (Revelation 21:5).¹³

Each of these passages might have been lifted directly out of one of Thomas's sermons.

Thomas repeatedly uses division and sub-divisions, 'chains together' concordant biblical authorities, related often merely due to the repetition of a common word, and makes frequent use of the properties of an object in metaphors. In his discussion of the scene in John 8:6-7, where Jesus, challenged to pass sentence on a woman caught in adultery, bends down to write with his finger in the dust, Thomas comments:

We can see from this that there are three things to be considered in giving sentences. First, there should be kindness in condescending to those to be punished; and so he says, Jesus was bending down: 'There is judgment without mercy to him who does not have mercy' (James 2:13); 'If a man is overtaken in any fault, you who are spiritual instruct him in a spirit of mildness' (Galatians 6:1). Secondly, there should be discretion in determining the judgment and so he says that Jesus wrote with his finger, which because of its flexibility signifies discretion: 'The fingers of a man's hand

¹² *In Joh* cap II lect. 1 n. 338.

¹³ *In Joh* cap II lect. 1 n. 338.

appeared, writing' (Daniel 5:5). Thirdly, there should be certitude about the sentence given; and so he says, Jesus wrote.¹⁴

In this one passage we find a threefold *divisio*, a series of concordant authorities, and an exegesis based on the properties attributed to: (a) the act of bending down, (b) a finger, and (c) the act of writing — all methods characteristic of *sermo modernus* style preaching.

The Preaching Arts and the Commentaries on the Pauline Epistles

Since we have been looking at selections from Thomas's *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, perhaps it would be good to glance at a few examples from at least one of Thomas's other major biblical commentaries. The other major set of commentaries Thomas undertook as a Master, even more substantial than his *Commentary on John*, were his commentaries on all the epistles of St. Paul.

In this regard, consider the homiletic potential contained in Thomas's comments on Galatians 4:25, where Paul's text speaks mystically of the Old Testament and New in terms of the contrast between Abraham's two sons, 'one by a bondwoman' (Hagar) and 'the other by a free woman' (Sara). The 'bondage' of the Old Testament involves three things, says Thomas: feeling, understanding, and fruit. These three would be a common set of distinctions one might find in a medieval sermon. Using this threefold distinction, Thomas is able to set up a clear contrast between the Old Testament and the New:

As to understanding, indeed, according to knowledge: because in man is a twofold knowledge. One is free, when he knows the truth of things according to themselves; the other is servile, i.e., veiled under figures, as was the knowledge of the Old Testament.

As to feeling, the New Law engenders the feeling of love, which pertains to freedom: for one who loves is moved by his own initiative. The Old, on the other hand, engenders the feeling of fear in which is servitude; for one who fears is moved not by his own initiative but by that of another: 'You have not received the spirit of bondage again in fear; but you have received the spirit of adoption of sons' (Romans 8:15). But as to the fruit, the New Law begets sons to whom is owed the inheritance, whereas to those whom the Old Law engenders are owed small presents as to servants: 'The servant

¹⁴ *In Joh* cap VIII lect. 1 n. 1131.

abideth not in the house forever; but the son abideth forever' (John 8:35).¹⁵

Or consider how easily a young preacher could have slipped Thomas's meditations on judgment from this passage in Romans 2:1, 'For wherein you judge another, you condemn yourself,' into a sermon. Thomas comments:

This does not mean that every judgment is a cause of condemnation. For there are three kinds of judgment: one is just, i.e., made according to the rule of justice: *love justice, you rulers of the earth* (Wis 1:1); another is not just, i.e., made contrary to the rule of justice: *although servants of his kingdom, you did not rule rightly* (Wis 6:4); the third is rash judgment against which it is said: *be not rash with your mouth* (Eccl 5:2).¹⁶

He continues:

A rash judgment is made in two ways: in one way, when a person passes judgment on a matter committed to him without due knowledge of the truth, contrary to what is stated: *I searched out the cause of him whom I did not know* (Job 29:16). In another way, when a person presumes to judge about hidden matters, of which God alone has the power to judge, contrary to what is stated: *do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness* (1 Cor 4:5).¹⁷

Here Thomas has supplied not only the necessary distinctions, but also the associated, 'chained' biblical authorities to use with them.

So too, a distinction Thomas employs in one place can do service elsewhere, either in a sermon or another biblical commentary. In this regard, consider Thomas's discussion of the different senses of the word 'servant' in Romans 1:1, where Paul begins: 'I, Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ' and his discussion of a related, seemingly contradictory verse in John 15:15 where Christ says, 'I no longer call you servants, but friends.' In his commentary on Romans 1:1, Thomas distinguishes between the servitude of fear and the servitude of love.

¹⁵ *In Gal* cap IV lect. 8 n. 260.

¹⁶ *In Rom* cap II lect. 1 n. 174.

¹⁷ *In Rom* cap II lect. 1 n. 174.

But one should say that there are two kinds of servitude: one is the servitude of fear, which does not befit saints: *you have not received the spirit of slavery again in fear: but you have received the spirit of adoption of sons* (Rom 8:15); the other is that of humility and love, which does befit saints: *say: we are unworthy servants* (Luke 17:10). For while a free man is one who exists for his own sake, a servant is one who exists for the sake of another, as moving by reason of another's moving him; if then a person acts for the sake of another as though moved by him, the service is one of fear, which forces a man to act in opposition to his own will. But if he acts for the sake of another as an end, then it is the servitude of love; because a friend serves and does good to his friend for the friend's own sake, as the Philosopher says in the ninth book of the *Ethics*.¹⁸

Thomas employs a similar distinction when he comments on that passage in John 15:15: 'I no longer call you servants but friends.' Instead of distinguishing the 'servitude of fear' from the 'servitude of love,' Thomas begins by distinguishing two kinds of fear: servile fear and filial fear. What differentiates them, however, is the presence or absence of love. For while 'servile fear' is cast out by charity, filial fear is generated by charity, 'since one fears to lose who he loves.' Hence, the distinction found in Thomas's *Commentary on Romans* 1:1 between the *servitude of fear* and the *servitude of love* is transferred into his *Commentary on John* 15:15 as a slightly more complicated distinction between the *servitude of servile fear*, which is the fear of punishment, and the *servitude of filial fear* which, although it is called *filial fear*, it is in fact generated by charity, since one fears to lose who one loves.¹⁹

Biblical Commentaries as an Aid to Preaching

Even in sections of his commentary which do not sound as if they were lifted directly out of a sermon, there are many places in Thomas's biblical commentaries where he is clearly communicating material helpful for preaching. That is to say, we should take more seriously Peter Cantor's claim that the *lectio* (medieval biblical commentary) and *disputatio* (medieval disputed questions) were understood as foundational (the floor and walls respectively) for *praedicatio* (preaching).

¹⁸ *In Rom* cap I lect. 1 n. 21.

¹⁹ Cf. *In Joh* cap XV, lect. 3, n. 2015. In both commentaries, Thomas also similarly distinguishes between those who are moved by another — these are 'slaves' — and those who move as their own cause in cooperation with the master.

Consider a few examples where Thomas's parsing of a word would have been useful for prospective preachers employing the *sermo modernus* style were they to come upon that word in a *thema* for a future sermon.

Let us say that a young preacher finds the word 'sent' in his *thema* verse. Consider how the following material might be incorporated into his sermon to dilate that division of the verse.

Note that there are three ways in which we see men sent by God. First, by an inward inspiration. 'And now the Lord God has sent me, and his spirit' (Is 48:16). As if to say: I have been sent by God through an inward inspiration of the spirit. Secondly, by an expressed and clear command, perceived by the bodily senses or the imagination. Isaiah was also sent in this way; and so he says, 'And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here I am! Send me'' (Is 6:8). Thirdly, by the order of a prelate, who acts in the place of God in this matter. 'I have pardoned in the person of Christ for your sake' as it says in 2 Corinthians (2:10). This is why those who are sent by a prelate are sent by God, as Barnabas and Timothy were sent by the Apostle.²⁰

So too with the word 'world,' whether the *thema* verse be taken from John 15:19: 'If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you; or from Psalm 96:13: 'For he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness.' In either case, the dutiful preacher might profitably employ these three distinctions:

[W]e should know that 'world' is taken in three ways in Scripture. Sometimes, from the point of view of its creation, as when the Evangelist says here, 'through him the world was made' (John 1:10). Sometimes, from the point of view of its perfection, which it reaches through Christ, as in 'God was, in Christ, reconciling the world to himself' (2 Cor 5:19). And sometimes it is taken from the point of view of its perversity, as in 'The whole world lies under the power of the evil one' (1 John 5:19).²¹

Consider, finally, the material we find in the following two examples, both having to do with individual persons. The first is from the *Commentary on John*, book 20, lecture 3, where the subject is Mary

²⁰ *In Joh* cap I lect. 4 n. 112.

²¹ *In Joh* cap I lect. 5 n. 128.

Magdalene, someone who not only had her own feast day but also appeared regularly in medieval passion plays. Here is what Thomas says about her:

Notice the three privileges given to Mary Magdalene. First, she had the privilege of being a prophet because she was worthy enough to see the angels, for a prophet is an intermediary between angels and the people. Secondly, she had the dignity or rank of an angel insofar as she looked upon Christ, on whom the angels desire to look. Thirdly, she had the office of an apostle; indeed, she was an apostle to the apostles insofar as it was her task to announce our Lord's resurrection to the disciples. Thus, just as it was a woman who was the first to announce the words of death, so it was a woman who would be the first to announce the words of life.²²

Or let us say that the sermon calls for some comment on the apostle Thomas. Here is material ready-made for a sermon:

The disciple who was absent is first identified by his name, Thomas, which means a 'twin' or an 'abyss.' An abyss has both depth and darkness. And Thomas was an abyss on account of the darkness of his disbelief, of which he was the cause. Again, there is an abyss—the depths of Christ's compassion—which he had for Thomas. We read: 'Abyss calls to abyss' [Ps 42:7]. That is, the depths of Christ's compassion calls to the depths of darkness [of disbelief] in Thomas, and Thomas' abyss of unwillingness [to believe] calls out, when he professes the faith, to the depths of Christ.²³

Note how, once Aquinas has interpreted the Apostle Thomas's name as 'abyss,' he can connect Thomas's name to the passage from Psalm 42:7 about the abyss calling to the abyss, which he then figuratively relates back to the scene in which Christ calls upon Thomas to put his hand in Christ's side. Modern biblical scholars would undoubtedly call this eisegesis, reading meaning *into* the text, since Psalm 42:7 does not appear here in John's Gospel. As a species of biblical commentary, the use of Psalm 42:7 may well be unwarranted; but it provides a beautiful image for use in preaching.

The examples I've given here could be multiplied endlessly, not only from Thomas's *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, but equally from any

²² *In Joh* cap XX lect. 3 n. 2519.

²³ *In Joh* cap XX lect. 5 n. 2546.

of his other biblical commentaries as well. Thirteenth century biblical commentaries may seem to modern readers more akin to medieval *quaestiones disputatae* than to homiletics. But this is only because we have failed to read these commentaries with an eye to the *sermo modernus* method of preaching.

The Early Cursory Commentary on Isaiah

Thomas's *Commentary on the Gospel of John* was a late commentary, likely delivered during his second regency at Paris. How about the early 'cursory' commentaries he did as a bachelor? Do they exhibit a similar concern for developing these methods of preaching? Several more examples will have to suffice from Thomas's early cursory *Commentary on Isaiah*.²⁴

Consider, for example, his commentary on Isaiah 1:2: 'Hear, O ye heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord hath spoken. I have brought up (*nutrivit*) children, and exalted them: but they have despised me.' Here are Thomas's comments, and remember, this was a *cursory, literal* commentary, not the extended commentary of a Master. The Lord, says Thomas, 'brought them up in the time of the law, when the heir was still a child (Galatians 4)':

First, by restoring the promises made to the fathers (*reficiens promissis in patribus*): *to Abraham were the promises made* (Gal 3:16).

Second, by governing with judgments by means of the lawgivers (*gubernans iudiciis in legislatoribus*): *he did not do thus with all nations, and he did not manifest his judgments to them* (Ps 147:20).

Third, by defending them with assistance by means of the judges and the kings (*defendens auxiliis in iudicibus et regibus*): *their God defends them, and we will be a reproach to the whole earth* (Jdt 5:25).

Fourth, he taught them through the oracles of the prophets (*erudit monitis in prophetis*): *and the Lord has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth* (Mal 2:14).

²⁴ Facing Latin and English text: Joshua Madden, trans., *Commentary on Isaiah* (Lander, Wyo.: The Aquinas Institute, forthcoming). Bilingual e-text: <https://aquinas.cc/173/513/~182>.

Fifth, by correcting them with the lash, by means of their enemies (*correxit flagellis in hostibus*): *for it is a token of great goodness, when sinners are not suffered to go on in their ways for a long time, but are presently punished* (2 Macc 6:13).²⁵

I have included the Latin text to indicate that Thomas has mostly maintained the structure of each parallel phrase as was stipulated by the preaching manuals as the proper practice for sermons. It would be difficult to tell that he had maintained the parallelism from the English text alone.²⁶

At this point, Thomas has no need to say more, since this is a *literal* commentary, but the association with the New Testament and Christ is never far from his mind, especially since in the *divisio textus* of the biblical books he gave during his *resumptio*, he made a point of saying that Isaiah was read by the Church during Advent because it dealt especially with the Incarnation. So having first commented upon how God ‘brought up children’ in the time of the law (*nutrivit tempore legis*), he contrasts this with how he exalted (*exaltavit*) them in the time of grace.

First, by taking on flesh: *for nowhere does he take hold of the Angels, but he takes hold of the seed of Abraham* (Heb 2:16).

Second, by his own preaching: *I am not sent except to the sheep which have been lost from the house of Israel* (Matt 15:24).

Third, by his own way of life: *many good works I have worked among you* (Jn 10:32).

Fourth, by the working of miracles: *for a great prophet has arisen among us, and because God has visited his people* (Lk 7:16).

Fifth, through the proclamation of the disciples: *instead of your fathers, sons have been born to you: you shall establish them princes over all the earth* (Ps 44:17).²⁷

²⁵ *In Is* cap I lect. 2.

²⁶ Strictly speaking, to preserve the parallel phrasing, Thomas should have written ‘*erudiens monitis in prophetis*’ and ‘*corrigenis flagellis in hostibus*,’ but this was still early in Thomas’s career.

²⁷ *In Is* cap I lect. 2.

Even though God had ‘brought up’ (*enutrivit*) His children in the time of the law and ‘exalted’ (*exaltavit*) them in the time of grace, ‘they have despised me’ (*spreverunt me*), says God through the prophet. How?

They despised the lineage of Christ: *is this not the son of Joseph?* (Lk 4:22).

They rejected his teaching: *from Galilee all the way to here, we have found this one to be subverting our people* (Lk 23:5).

They reviled his way of life: *why does your teacher eat with publicans and sinners?* (Matt 9:11).

They perverted his miracles: *by the prince of demons he casts out demons* (Matt 12:24).

They killed his disciples: *I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves* (Matt 10:16).²⁸

Not only has Thomas supplied his students with an allegorical and Christological interpretation of a fairly simple and straightforward text from the Old Testament in what is otherwise a mostly literal exegesis of the text, what is equally noteworthy is that he structures his comments in exactly the way it would be done in a *sermo modernus* style sermon. He has taken three terms from the biblical verse—*nutrivi*, *exaltavi*, and *spreverunt*—and dilated a list of points based on each of them in turn.

Making *Distinctiones*: Material for the ‘Modern Sermon’

As it so happens, one of the manuscripts of the Isaiah commentary we possess was written in Thomas’s own notoriously messy handwriting, the renowned *littera illegibilis*. In the margins of this manuscript, Thomas added a series of interesting marginal annotations, which Fr. Torrell, in his biography of Thomas, describes as follows:²⁹

²⁸ *In Is* cap I lect. 2.

²⁹ Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Volume 1, The Person and His Work*, rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), pp. 29-30. See also P.-M. Gils, ‘Les *Collationes* marginales dans l’autographe du commentaire de S. Thomas sur Isaïe,’ *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 42 (1958), 253-64. For an excellent commentary on each of these marginal notes, see J.-P. Torrell and Denise Bouthillier, ‘Quand saint Thomas méditait sur le prophète Isaïe,’ *Revue thomiste*, 90 (1990), 5-47.

There are short, marginal annotations in a telegraphic form that accompany the text proper [...]. They appear in the form of outlines, in the *illegibilis* hand like the rest of the text, and they are linked, assembled, by fanlike lines. Starting with a word from the text of Isaiah, Thomas hastily notes suggestions that he has about it for a spiritual or pastoral expansion of his literal commentary.³⁰

Torrell notes that there were reportedly similar annotations in the margins of the manuscript of Thomas's *Commentary on Jeremiah*, but unfortunately that autograph copy has been lost.

Jacobinus of Asti, the first transcriber of Thomas's autograph, called these marginal notes *collationes*. 'The word *collationes* makes us think immediately of notes for preaching,' says Fr. Torrell, not only because a *collatio* was the name for a sermon given at vespers, but also because the primary sense of the word means simply 'things put together' or 'assemblies.'³¹ Another term, more commonly used, would be *distinctiones*.

Collections of biblical *distinctiones* were preaching aids that had only become available in the thirteenth century. They provided for a given scriptural term 'several figural meanings, and for each meaning provided a passage of scripture illustrating the use of the term in the given sense.'³² The *Summa Abel* of Peter Cantor was one of the most famous of these reference works (so-called because its first entry was 'Abel'), and under the entry for *avis* (bird), for example, one would have found the following:

Tending unto the heights, namely the just. Whence fish and birds are of the same matter. But fish, that is evil men, remain in the waters of this age; birds, that is good men, tend unto the heights.

Remaining on high, namely an angel. Whence: 'In the secret of your private chamber, detract not the king, because the birds of heaven will announce it.' (Eccl 10:20)

³⁰ Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, p. 29.

³¹ Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, p. 30.

³² I have taken this useful 'omnibus definition' from the invaluable book by Richard and Mary Rouse, *Preachers, Florilegia and Sermons* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1979), p. 68.

Falling down from on high, namely the proud. Whence: ‘If you ascend into heaven as an eagle, from thence I will bring you down.’ (Obadiah 4)

Rapacity, namely the devil. Whence in the parable of the seed it is said that the birds of the sky ate it. (Luke 8:5)

Consumption, that is, the tumult of evil thoughts. Whence Abraham drove birds away from the flesh of the sacrificed [animals] (Gen 15:11).

Prelates. Whence the bird nested in the mustard bush (Matt 13.31-32), that is, the prelate in the catholic faith.³³

If you were a preacher and found the word *avis* or ‘bird’ in your *thema* verse, you could develop your sermon in any of these ways, either about the height of angels, the rapacity of devils, or perhaps the problems of prelates.

Lists of *distinctiones* were often printed in a fan-like fashion with the key term, e.g. *avis* (bird) or *lectus* (bed) at the left and the *distinctiones* spread out to the right. This, significantly, is exactly what we find in Thomas’s marginalia: the original word, e.g., ‘saints’ (*sancti*) on the left, with all the suggested uses to which that word might be put fanning out to the right. Thomas, in other words, was creating his own set of biblical *distinctiones* while preparing his *Commentary on Isaiah*.

Let’s take a look at just a few examples. Consider, for example, this list in which Thomas lays out the ways in which the saints can be compared to eagles.

The saints are compared to eagles:

- on account of the height of their flight (*propter volatus altitudinem*): *shall not the eagle mount up at your command* (Job 39:27), wherein is the eminence of contemplation (*in quo eminentia contemplationis*): [*he shall dwell on high . . .*] *his eyes shall see the king in his beauty, they shall see the land far off* (Isa 33:16-17);

³³ See Richard and Mary Rouse, ‘Biblical ‘Distinctiones’ in the Thirteenth Century,’ *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen age* 41 (1974), 27-37.

- on account of the pervasiveness of their odor (*propter odoris subtilitatem*): *wheresoever the body shall be, there shall the eagles also be gathered together* (Lk 16:37), wherein is the fervor of love (*in quo fervor dilectionis*): *draw me after you, to the odor of your ointments* (Song 1:3);
- on account of their loftiness of their place (*propter loci sublimitatem*): *three things are hard for me, and the fourth I am utterly ignorant of: the way of an eagle in the air . . .* (Prov 30:18), wherein is the study of heavenly conversation (*in quo studium caelestis conversationis*): *our conversation is in heaven* (Phil 3:20);
- on account of the swiftness of their movement (*propter motus velocitatem*): *our persecutors were swifter than the eagles of the air* (Lam 4:19), wherein is their haste in good works (*in quo promptitudo bonae operationis*): *have you seen a man swift in his work? He shall stand before kings and shall not be before those who are obscure* (Prov 22:29);
- on account of their renewal (*propter renovationem*): *your youth shall be renewed like the eagle's* (Ps 102:5), wherein is the fondness for guidance and progress (*in quo studium emendationis et profectus*): *though our outward man is corrupted, yet the inward man is renewed day by day* (2 Cor 4:16);
- on account of the beauty of their members (*propter membrorum pulcritudinem*): *a large eagle with great wings, full of feathers, and of variety* (Ezk 17:3), wherein is the adornment of virtues (*in quo decor virtutum*): *you are all fair, my love, and there is not a spot in you* (Song 4:7);
- on account of their concern for their children (*propter filiorum sollicitudinem*): *as the eagle entices her young to fly, and hovering over them, spreads its wings, and has taken them and carried them on his shoulders* (Dt 32:11), wherein is the concern of the saints (*in quo sollicitudo sanctorum*): *my daily instance, the concern for all the churches.] Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is scandalized, and I am not burning?* (2 Cor 11:28-29).³⁴

Note the strict parallelism: In each item, we get a *propter* clause followed by an *in quo* clause. The *propter* is always followed by a genitive and then an accusative (e.g., *propter membrorum pulcritudinem*), whereas the *in quo* clause is made up of a nominative followed by a genitive (e.g., *in*

³⁴ *In Is* cap XL, 'collations.' In the Aquinas Institute text, the 'collations' are printed at the end of the chapter where they appear.

quo décor virtutum). That pattern is repeated throughout. This sort of parallelism was required by the *sermo modernus* style.

Now let's consider another passage, also dealing with saints, this time comparing them not to eagles, but to lilies. The saints are compared to lilies:

- on account of the height of their stem, whereby they are constant in adversity (*propter stipitis altitudinem, ex quo constantia in adversis*): *as the lily among thorns* (Song 2:2);
- on account of their sweet smell, whereby they are well known (*propter odoris suavitatem, ex quo bona fama*): *send forth flowers as the lily, [and yield a smell, and bring forth leaves in grace]* (Sir 39:19);
- on account of the strength of the humors, whereby they are strong of mind (*propter humoris virorem, ex quo virtus mentis*): *as the lilies that are on the brink of the water* (Sir 50:8); and
- on account of their adherence, whereby is the charity of the saints (*propter connexionem, ex quo sanctorum caritas*): *your belly is like [a heap of wheat, set about by lilies]* (Song 7:2).³⁵

Note the parallelism: in each case a *propter* clause followed by an *ex quo* clause. This strict parallelism isn't always so clear in English translation, but once you notice it in the Latin, it's hard to miss.

In this same place, Thomas immediately takes this occasion to add another set of *distinctiones*, this time expanding upon the notion of saints as 'lilies' and showing how these lilies can be related to Christ.

Christ clothes these lilies [says Thomas] as to the gifts of the virtues: *consider the lilies of the field, [how they grow: they do not labor, nor do they spin]* (Mt 6:28).

He gathers them, for everlasting rewards: *my beloved has gone down into his garden, [to the bed of aromatic spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies]* (Song 6:1).

He rests in them through tranquil delight: *my beloved is mine, and I am his, [who feeds among the lilies]* (Song 2:16).

³⁵ *In Is* cap XXXV, 'collations.'

And he is, himself, a lily: *I am the flower of the field, [and the lily of the valley]* (Song 2:1).³⁶

What verse in Isaiah generates all this marvelous imagery? It is the passage in Isaiah 35:1 which reads: ‘The land that was desolate and impassable shall be glad, and the wilderness shall rejoice, and shall flourish like the lily.’

Not all of Thomas’s *distinctiones* are multi-layered. But Thomas can and does string together complex images. Allow me just two more examples. In Isaiah 38:14, the prophet cries out: ‘my eyes are weakened looking upward’ (*attenuati sunt oculi mei, suspicientes in excelsum.*) Thomas has written in the margin:

The eyes are lofty (*oculi excelsi*):

- by the vanity of the heart (*per cordis elationem*): *Lord, [my heart] is not exalted, [nor are my eyes lofty; neither have I walked in great matters, nor in wonderful things above me]* (Ps 130:1),

And they are brought low (*attenuantur*) by God:

- by being pressed down (*a Deo per depressionem*): *the lofty eyes [of man are humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be made to stoop]* (Isa 2:11).

[They are lifted up]:

- by the curiosity of seeking answers (*per inquisitionis curiositatem*): *[why does your heart elevate you, and why do you stare with your eyes,] as if they were thinking great things?* (Job 15:12),

And they are brought low:

- by the harshness of light (*per luminis oppressionem*): *he that is a searcher [of majesty shall be overwhelmed by glory]* (Prov 25:27).

³⁶ Ibid.

[They are lifted up]:

- by contemplation (*per contemplationem*): *lift up [your eyes] on high, [and see who has created these things]* (Isa 40:26);

And they are brought low:

- on account of the smallness of knowledge (*propter cognitionis parvitatem*): *all men see him, [every one beholds him afar off; behold, God is great, exceeding our knowledge]* (Job 36:25-26).³⁷

This is a complex set of *distinctiones* based on two words in the biblical verse, contrasting the eyes which are ‘lofty’ or ‘lifted up’ (*excelsi*) with those ‘brought low’ or ‘weakened’ (*attenuati*). This sort of contrast is also a characteristic way of dilating in a *sermo modernus* sermon.

Here is another example of a multi-layered set of *distinctiones* whose organization is different from the others we’ve examined. Isaiah 44:3 contains the verse: ‘For I will pour out waters upon the thirsty ground, and streams upon the dry land: I will pour out my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thy stock.’ Thomas has written in the margin:

The Spirit is given to beginners (*incipientibus*):

- at the start of their being made alive (*in principium vivificationis*): *the spirit came into them, and they lived, and they stood upon their feet* (Ezk 37:10);
- in the bath of restoration (*in lavacrum renovationis*): *by the bath of regeneration and restoration of the Holy Spirit* (Tit 3:5);
- in the privilege of adoption (*in privilegium adoptionis*): *you have received the spirit of adoption of sons* (Rom 8:15).

[The spirit is given] to the advanced (*proficientibus*):

- for the instruction of the intellect (*ad instruendum intellectum*): *the Holy Spirit, the advocate, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all*

³⁷ *In Is cap XXXVIII, ‘collations.’*

things and bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said to you (Jn 14:26);

- to refashion the passions (*ad reficiendum affectum*): *my spirit is sweet beyond honey (Sir 24:27);*
- to assist activity (*ad adiuvandum actum*): *the spirit helps our infirmity (Rom 8:26).*

[The Spirit is given] to the perfect (*perfectis*):

- as a benefit of freedom (*quasi beneficium libertatis*): *where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Cor 3:17);*
- as a bond of unity (*quasi vinculum unitatis*): *careful to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace (Eph 4:3);*
- as a pledge of inheritance (*quasi pignus haereditatis*): *you were signed with the Holy Spirit of promise (Eph 1:13).*

Having made his way from ‘beginners’ up to ‘the perfect,’ which was itself a method of *dilatatio*, (proceeding from good to better to best), Thomas adds that the saints are:

- chosen by predestination (*electi per praedestinationem*): *he chose us in him before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4);*
- formed by the infusion of grace (*formati per gratiae infusionem*): *the Lord God formed man from the slime of the earth, and breathed into his face the breath of life, and man became a living soul (Gen 2:7);*
- righteous by love (*recti per dilectionem*): *the righteous love you (Song 1:3);*
- servants by the debt of service (*servi per debitum operationis*): *we are unprofitable servants, we have done that which we ought to do (Lk 17:10).*³⁸

I have included the Latin in parentheses throughout so that the reader can take note of the parallelism of the phrases in the list. All the contemporary preaching manuals make clear that maintaining this sort of parallelism was a fundamental requirement of the *sermo modernus* style. Note also that all of this extensive theological content, nicely organized for easy

³⁸ *In Is* cap XLIV, ‘collations.’

incorporation into a sermon, was generated by dilating just one word: *spirit*.

Usually Thomas's *distinctiones* are not quite so complicated; often they express fairly straightforward moral or spiritual material. So, for example, in the margin next to the verse 'Come near (*accedite*), ye Gentiles, and hear' (Isaiah 34:1), Thomas writes:

Man approaches God (*Accedit homo ad Deum*):

- by the reception of grace (*per susceptionem gratiae*): *we have access through him [into this grace wherein we stand, and glory in the hope of the glory of the sons of God] (Rom 5:2);*
- by contemplation of divine wisdom (*per contemplationem divinae sapientiae*): *approach him [and be enlightened] (Ps 33:6);*
- by the service of obedience (*per ministerium oboedientiae*): *the sons of Zadoc, [who are among the sons of Levi,] who approach the Lord, [to serve him] (Ezk 40:46);*
- by the expectation of firm faithfulness (*per expectationem firmae fiduciae*): *[approach her] as one who plows, and sows, [and waits for her good fruits] (Sir 6:19); and*
- by a spirit of harmony (*per spiritum concordiae*): *you have access in one spirit [to the Father] (Eph 2:18).³⁹*

So too, next to the verse in Isaiah 37:4 where Isaiah exhorts the people to 'lift up thy prayer' (*leva ergo orationem*) for the remnant left in Jerusalem, Thomas writes:

Prayer is lifted up (*levatur oratio*):

- by the eminence of contemplation: *I have lifted up my eyes [to the mountains, from whence help shall come to me] (Ps 120:2);*
- by the fervor of affection (*per fervorem affectionis*): *let us lift up our hearts [with our hands to the Lord in the heavens] (Lam 3:41);*

³⁹ *In Is cap XXXIV, 'collations.'*

- by the tears of compunction (*per lacrimas compunctionis*): *every night I will lift up [upon my bed] (Ps 6:6); lift up weeping (Joel);*
- by the practice of good works (*per studium bonae operationis*): *[let my prayer be directed as incense in your sight,] the lifting up of my hands, as evening sacrifice (Ps 140:2).*⁴⁰

These images can be quite creative as well, as when Thomas, prompted by Isaiah 37:29 — ‘When thou wast mad against me, thy pride came up to my ears: therefore I will put a ring in thy nose, and a bit (*frenum*) between thy lips’ — lists in the margin next to the word *frenum* (‘bridle’ or ‘bit’) the following:

[We speak of] the bridle (*frenum*):

- of human discretion: *if any man offend not in word, [the same is a perfect man; he is able also with a bridle to lead about the whole body] (Jas 3:2);*
- of divine governance: *for my praise I will bridle you, [lest you perish] (Isa 48:9);*
- of diabolical deception: *the bridle of error (Isa 30:28);*
- of temporal affliction: *[he has opened] his quiver [and has afflicted me, and has put a bridle into my mouth] (Job 30:11).*
- of eternal damnation: *with bit and bridle [bind fast] their jaws (Ps 31:9).*⁴¹

Or, having read the passage in Isaiah 41:18 which says: ‘I will open rivers in the high bills, and fountains in the midst of the plains: I will turn the desert into pools of waters, and the impassable land into streams of waters,’ Thomas makes this note:

Water:

- as of tears poured out (*effusae lacrimae*): *who shall give water to my head, and a fountain of tears to my eyes? And I shall weep day and night (Jer 9:1);*
- of baptismal cleansing (*baptismalis munditiae*): *unless a man reborn, he cannot see the kingdom of God (Jn 3:3);*

⁴⁰ *In Is cap XXXVII, ‘collations.’*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

- of spiritual grace (*spiritualis gratiae*): *he who believes in me, [as the Scripture says,] rivers of living water shall flow from his belly; now this he said of the spirit (Jn 7:38-39);*
- of divine wisdom (*divinae sapientiae*): *I, wisdom, have poured out rivers (Sir 24:40);*
- of internal joy (*interna laetitia*): *drink water out of your own cistern, and the streams of your own well (Prov 5:15).*⁴²

Fr. Torrell suggests that these *marginalia* allow us ‘to grasp in a very direct way the personal preoccupations of the young Dominican.’⁴³ They are therefore, suggests Torrell,

as important as the commentary itself for grasping how, from the beginning of his career, Thomas allowed the main traits of his style as a commentator on Scripture to emerge decisively. If the commentary gives the primacy to literal exegesis, the *collationes* show — and simultaneously confirm — the spiritual concern that animates the literal analysis.⁴⁴

I would simply add that the *collationes* or *distinctiones* show Thomas’s overriding concern as a Dominican for preaching. They reflect a culture and an educational program dedicated to preaching, especially preaching in the *sermo modernus* style, because this was precisely the sort of preaching these sets of biblical *distinctiones* were meant to foster. Even in a ‘cursory’ biblical commentary, Thomas was constantly on the lookout for the kinds of verbal associations he might make and how he might use them to preach well. That these sets of *distinctiones* exist in the margins of Thomas’s course notes suggests either (a) he wanted to be prepared to give his students a few good examples for preaching in each class, or (b) he was merely ruminating as he was working over the text, making notes for himself to help him in his own preaching. The two options are not mutually exclusive. What emerges in either case is the concern to provide resources for effective preaching in the *sermo modernus* style.

⁴² *In Is* cap XLI, ‘collations.’

⁴³ Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, p. 33.

⁴⁴ Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, p. 30.

The Arts of Preaching in a University Culture Devoted to Dialectic

In conclusion let me suggest that, doing this kind of exercise—noticing the specific words in the biblical text, imagining the various uses of the word, and then finding places in the Scriptures where the word is used that way—and then doing it over and over and over again, is precisely the sort of thing that made someone like Thomas the wonderful preacher he was to become.

The character and methods used in biblical commentary changed in the thirteenth century from those which were common in the eleventh and twelfth. We can account for these changes, broadly speaking, as resulting from the influences of the medieval university and the kind of education pioneered there. But what in particular was the character of that education? One answer is that it was characterized by *disputatio*. But one of the goals of the present study has been to show that an equal or greater set of influences on medieval biblical commentary (*lectio*) came from its intended use in *praedicatio*. The skills and habits of mind necessary for preaching were also those which became invaluable for engaging in biblical commentary.

I could have repeated this exercise with the commentaries of any number of thirteenth century masters of theology. The skills and habits of mind displayed in the examples above were common currency in the second half of the thirteenth century. Even if dialectic and disputation were key motivating factors drawing students to Paris, church authorities and the leaders of the new religious orders clearly viewed the emergence of this new educational institution, the medieval university, as an opportune place to train theologically well-formed and rhetorically well-trained preachers for preaching to the laity.