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The *artes praedicandi* (arts of preaching) were better known in the Middle Ages than they are in our own day. This is not for the lack of scholars working in this field. Siegfried Wenzel has been working on the subject of preaching most of his scholarly life. Sometimes he attacked the subject indirectly through a tangential field, such as virtues and vices:[1] *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* (1960) and *Summa Virtutum De Remediis Anime* (1984). Other times he approached it obliquely through medieval verse:[2] *Verses in Sermons: Fasciculus Morum and Its Middle English Poems* (1978); *Preachers, Poets, and the Early English Lyric* (1986); and *Elucidations: Medieval Poetry and Its Religious Backgrounds* (2010), so preaching has been at the core of his studies. Therefore for understanding the Middle Ages comprehensively,[3] he has addressed preaching directly as the key to medieval culture and communication: Fasciculus Morum: *A Fourteenth-Century Preacher’s Handbook* (1989); *Macaronic Sermons: Bilingualism and Preaching in Late-Medieval England* (1994); *Latin Sermon Collections from Later Medieval England: Orthodox Preaching in the Age of Wyclif* (2005); and *Preaching in the Age of Chaucer: Selected Sermons in Translation* (2008). It is precisely in this field of the *artes praedicandi* that Wenzel has worked to great effect for his latest production: *The Art of Preaching: Five Medieval Texts and Translations*.

This attractive volume includes a preface: “It has been my aim to understand and elucidate the finer and sometimes recondite points of medieval teachers who instructed their readers and perhaps listeners in how to structure a scholastic sermon” (p. vii).[4] In the genre of homiletics, scholastic philosophy supplied an almost inexhaustible store of information. It trained the mind in analysis and precision, and at the same time, it supplied a lucidity of order and cogency of arrangement unparalleled in even the great orations of Chrysostom. The result of the application of scholastic philosophy to homiletics was the scholastic sermon.
The introduction further presents the scholastic sermon: “This new form has been labeled the modern, or university, or thematic, or scholastic sermon, and throughout the later Middle Ages, from the thirteenth to at least the end of the fifteenth century, it remained the dominant sermon form, attested by the artes as well as countless extant sermons” (p. xii).[5] They were called university sermons because most of their practitioners were educated in their craft in the universities of Paris, Oxford, and others. One of those artes theoreticians was Robert of Basevorn who “frequently distinguishes sermon usages at Oxford from those at Paris” (p. xii n2). They were also called thematic sermons because they took the thema from a short string of words from scripture, which they then divided into parts for further development. So the thema, division, and development are the dominant forms of the “modern” sermon after the advent of scholastic philosophy.

Wenzel’s work presents five medieval artes praedicandi in both the Latin texts and English translations. He leads off in chapter 1, “Jacobus de Fusignano,” with the Fusignano’s Libellus artis predicatorie. Fusignano was an Italian Dominican writing in about 1300. The treatise is complete and detailed in its directions on how to construct a sermon. Fusignano illustrated his steps with examples, which must have been as great a help to his medieval readers as to his readers in the twenty-first century. The work survives in more than twenty manuscripts, including the Oxford, University College 36 MS (O) written in England. The treatise had a further distribution when it was included in the pastoral manual Manipulus curatorum, by Guido de Monte Rocherii composed in 1333. Fusignano is important in the genre of the artes praedicandi because he comprehensively covered all the necessary parts of sermonizing. Wenzel conveniently analyzes the nineteen chapters of Fusignano in his headnote to the treatise. Many of these chapters will be recognizable to students of classical rhetoric as represented in Ad Herennium.[6] The work that Wenzel applies to the Latin text aims to make it both readable (by dividing it into sentences and paragraphs, as well as correcting scribal errors) and semi-critical (through collating and inspecting the relevant manuscript and incunabula editions). Of the witnesses used, the Oxford, Merton College, MS 102 (M), produced in Italy with Italian scribal hands and orthography, becomes the logical candidate for the base text because the others fail the test of completeness. However, even (M) has a peculiar peccadillo. For example, in the first introduction of a word (conducta for inducta or virtutum for in truncum), the scribe is likely to get it wrong the first time but subsequently gets it correct. Wenzel humorously calls this “the dropping penny phenomenon” (p. 8). He has not attempted to construct a stemma codicum (a family tree of manuscripts) which would have required a complete recension of all extant witnesses.

Fusignano’s treatise, which Wenzel publishes in its entirety, betrays its scholastic roots from the beginning of its first chapter, “The Four Causes of Divine Exhortation”: “Every deed and every action must not only have something efficient that carries it out, but also an end which its agent intends, a subject matter that its agent works with, and a form which he imposes on his work” (p. 11). Fusignano followed this principle with several applied examples throughout the chapter. Fusignano’s second chapter discusses the preacher as the instrumental efficient cause. The three characteristics of this cause are: “it must have some other action that derives from its own nature”; “the instrumental agent as a mover is himself moved”; and “the instrumental agent sometimes attains the ultimate effect of the principal agent, and sometimes not” (p. 15). It is in this third characteristic of the preacher as the instrumental efficient cause that Fusignano acknowledged by principle that he would not always have his desired effect through his sermon on the listeners.

Fusignano’s third chapter, “The Quality of the Chosen Thema,” again has three parts for shaping
the ideal thema: “the quotation he chooses must make perfect sense”; “in the thema he chooses he must omit conjunctions and adverbs by which the thema continues or which link it to what has preceded”; and “not to choose his thema in a sense that is contrary to the meaning it has in Scripture” (pp. 21-23). Here it is the second point that the present reviewer finds particularly significant for shaping the style of the English Benedictine Ranulph Higden (writing about 1340) in most of his works, but particularly in his Speculum curatorum and his Distinctiones. Higden seemed to quote (and shape) scriptural passages to corroborate his points as if he were constantly creating thema according to the prescription of Fusignano. In Higden’s own narrative expositions, however, he employed conjunctions and adverbs liberally.

Chapter 4 of Fusignano’s treatise discusses the elaboration of the thema with either a prayer or a protheme. The latter “must agree with the thema” by either echoing “the word with which the preachers intend to have a verbal agreement”; or, “it would be fitting and beautiful if his protheme begins with the same word that ends his thema” (p. 27). Here we see the basis for the elaboration of texts by many medieval authors with the careful repetitions of words that are carried throughout the paragraph or even the chapter. That the stylistic characteristics learned in the artes praedicandi are transmitted well beyond sermonizing is a witness to the breadth and depth of its influence through the Middle Ages. Chapter 5 begins with the three types of sermon: “One way is when the preacher ... selects the beginning of the gospel lecture and then goes on to explain the entire gospel. This mode was very common in former times, as the homilies of Blessed Gregory... This is very helpful for simple people. Otherwise, for educated and intelligent people such popular exposition is not necessary” (p. 29). Fusignano betrayed his own intellectual condescension here and one might say that in practice he may have preached only to the university educated and never came into contact with the illiterate.

The remaining chapters of the treatise, 6 through 19, are devoted to the expansion of the sermon. Chapter 6 covers the subdivision of the thema; chapter 7 provides twelve further ways to amplify; chapter 8 looks into the help of concordant authorities; chapter 9 discusses words; chapter 10 focuses on interpreting and defining or describing; chapter 11 gives multiple explanations and meanings; chapter 12 offers comparison and various compound words; chapter 13 examines adorning through synonymys; chapter 14 provides the properties of things; chapter 15 addresses exemplification; chapter 16 covers stating the opposite; chapter 17 looks at dividing a whole into its parts; chapter 18 examines indicating or considering causes and effects; and chapter 19 focuses on reasoning.

The following three treaties that Wenzel examines in his chapters 2 through 4 present the same subject matter in different approaches. All three appear together in sequence in two manuscripts from England: Lincoln Cathedral Library, MS 234 (L) and London, British Library, MS Additional 24361 (A). The status of the treatises as different and separate works is demonstrated from their preservation as individual treatises elsewhere. Although the first, addressed in Wenzel’s second chapter, “Quamvis,” has been ascribed separately to an English Augustinian and an English Dominican, its author must still remain anonymous according to Wenzel. The Quamvis was used by Higden for his own Ars componendi sermones.7 In “Appendix C: Quamvis and Ranulph Higden,” Wenzel compares the many parallel parts of the two treatises and thereby establishes that Quamvis must have been composed before 1340. Both use the passage from Isaiah 62:5 Habitabit iuuenis cum virgine (The youth shall dwell with the virgin). He calls this passage a rara avis among the artes: “It may therefore be considered a give-away, a family
trait, a piece of rhetorical DNA” (p. 250). While all five ways of introducing the thema in *Quamvis* were reused by Higden, they are found in a different order in the latter (reordering is a characteristic of Higden's style in the reviewer's experience). Here Wenzel disputes the claim of Margaret Jenning's version of the relationship between the two, where she puts Higden's treatise as the chronologically prior text.

The *Quamvis* author rejected artificial sermon structures, such as the *sermo pyramidalis*, *linearis*, or *circularis*. His emphasis was on his lengthy third part, which is the development of the sermon's members. Wenzel provides a convenient outline of this third part. The edited version represents Lincoln, Cathedral Library, MS 234 (L) as the base text with emendations that seem required by logic or grammar.

One passage that the *Quamvis* author and Higden share is the charming effect of a virgin: “The elephant becomes pleasant and mild when a virgin sings and shows him her breast that he will lick. The unicorn also is a most fierce animal, and its ferocity cannot be tamed by any way or skill, yet when you bring a virgin to him, he grows mild in her lap. In the same way, when the very strong Son of God was shown the breasts of that Virgin ... he sucked those breasts after he had been drawn by the Virgin's song ... he became mild” (Latin, pp. 110-112, 253; English pp. 111-113). This passage exemplifies *Quamvis*’s turn for fancy as well as mild titillation, a sure way to get the attention of a congregation. Furthermore, it leads to this treatise's favorite exemplary passage: “And although this mystically refers to Christ and the Church ... yet it applies literally to Christ and the glorious Virgin, with whom he began to live today as with his mother, bride, and sister, just as Isaiah had foreseen it when he said, *The youth shall dwell with the virgin*” (p. 113). Both passages are somewhat abbreviated, shortened, and compacted in Higden as is characteristic of his style.

*Quamvis* is comfortable in quoting Aristotle and Seneca, as well as Augustine and Isidore to corroborate its own analogies: “According to the Philosopher in book 2 of the *Ethics*, according to the mean, namely sleep, a studious man is not any different from a wretched man, that is, when he is asleep” (p. 141). The appeal to reason, holding the readers to the highest standards of the intellectual life, is common here just as in Fusignano’s treatise.

In chapter 3, “*Hic docet*,” Wenzel prefers to attend to the needs of the spiritual director in addressing his spiritual novices in the *collatio* or collation (an exposition addressed to spiritual novices). The base text is Lincoln Cathedral Library, MS 234 (L). This manuscript has an enlarged “H” for the *Hic docet Augustinus*, the beginning of the treatise. Wenzel finds the very usage of *Hic* problematic, thinking that it should be *Sic* or *Sicut*, because *Hic* should refer back to an antecedent, but as this is the opening of the treatise, there is no previous referent.

*Hic docet* immediately distinguishes what a collation is: “First understand that a collation must be the subject matter of a sermon, and thus we must begin with the way and technique of making collations, because what is necessary for a collation is also required for a sermon, but not the reverse, for in a sermon more things come together than in a collation” (p. 149). *Hic docet* seems to be addressing an audience of students who will go out to compose enlarged sermons based on what they have learned in constructing a collation. Having addressed the collation in the first four parts, *Hic docet* in part 5 addresses what the students must go out to accomplish: “In making sermons something special is required. For in any member of the subdivision several authorities from Scripture or the saints may be quoted.... This procedure, however, is lavish and difficult, even if it is subtle.... Also, in order to dilate the sermon further, one can bring in *exempla* and stories from the lives of the saints” (p. 159). The author
encourages his students to go beyond the crip-
tures to corroborate their points, and of course
here he would have in mind Jacobus de Voragine’s
Legenda aurea.[8]

For “Vade in Domum,” chapter 4, Wenzel has
again chosen Lincoln Cathedral Library, MS 234
(L) as his base text. The editor informs us that the
author “introduces the image of a house, whose
parts—foundation, walls, entrance door (with
threshold, opening, key, and lock), windows, win-
dows panes, and roof—are then systematically
applied to the standard six parts of a sermon” (p.
163). This allusion to the house of memory, a com-
mon topos in the Middle Ages, familiar to students
of Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde (5.528-623), goes
back to classical rhetoric and is discussed in Ad
Herennium.[9] If one connected the items to be re-
membered to the visual map of one’s house, connect-
ing the unfamiliar to the familiar, it was both
an ordering and recalling device. The author of
Vade cites Peter Comestor, Historia Scholastica
(Migne, Patrologia Latina 198:1053) as the source
for his image of the house. The text follows this
metaphor of the sermon as a house so thoroughly
that historians of architecture could take notes on
how houses were constructed during the time of
the Vade in Domum. The treatise even cited Greg-
ory the Great and John Chrysostom as if they
were landscape artists, along with the carpenters
“Basil, Eusebius, John of Damascus, Cassiodorus,
Isidore, Bernard, Anselm, and many others with-
out number, to adorn and support it” (p. 187).

The fifth chapter, “Jean de La Rochelle,”
presents Rochelle’s Processus negociandi themata
sermonum. It presupposes the reader’s knowledge
of the parts of a scholastic sermon. Rochelle was a
French Franciscan and Paris master who died in
1245. He focused on seven aspects of “negotiating”
the sermon as alluded to in the title—“handling,
or dealing with, or developing, a thema” (p. 189).
Rochelle used the image of the tree and its parts
for his analogy with the sermon. The work was
edited in 1951 by Gustavo Cantini with a number
of errors, therefore Wenzel has reedited his own
text with the base manuscript of Lisbon, Bibliote-
ca Nacional, Fundo Alcobaça, MS 130 (P).

Rochelle began his text by speaking of modes
of handling the thema. What becomes particular-
ly noteworthy is his dealing with the second
mode, “where an utterance is either directed to a
second person or is about a second person” (p.
203). His developing discussion shifts the burden
of action onto the listener, building a dynamic be-
tween the preacher and his audience, so that they
must be doers, not just listeners. Of the seven
modes, the second is justly the longest and most
pertinent for developing an active, effective ser-
mon: “For example, if the thema is the verse in
Genesis [35:10] You will not be called Jacob any
longer but your name will be Israel, and you say,
‘This is the voice of one calling to something bet-
ter,’ and next: Here are two things described: the
state of active people … and the state of contem-
platives to which he calls … then you can proceed
in this fashion: Jacob indicates the state of active
people for three reasons. For just as active people
naturally fight against three enemies—that is, the
world, the flesh, and the devil—so Jacob fought
against three enemies,” Esau, Laban, and the an-
gel (p. 215). Rochelle understood that the end re-
sult of every sermon is action in the world of real-
ities. The preacher must move the very personal
“you” of his listeners to do, to become, and to be.
Rochelle differentiated between this life and our
true home, those living here and those who enjoy
blessedness, the wayfarer and him who has ar-
ived, the inhabitant and the pilgrim, those who
just run and those who aim for the prize, the
fighting and the triumphant, those who weep and
those who rejoice, the weak and the strong, hope
and possession, faith and understanding, labor
and rest, merit and reward, Martha and Mary,
those who sow and who reap, seed and fruit, and
similar pairs.

Rochelle was not just a theoretician; he
demonstrated that he knew what it is to stand in
the pulpit and reach out to the people, each and every “you” in the congregation. There is nothing condescending in Rochelle as there was in some other authors. His traits are of one who has walked among and with his people, even though he became a master at the University of Paris.

After Rochelle’s treatise, Wenzel adds four appendixes, an index of biblical quotations, and a general index. “Appendix A: Reflections on Artes Praedicandi” makes the important distinction between the scholastic religious sermon based on a biblical text and the scholastic academic sermon, or rather a sermon-like discourse, speech act, introitus or introductory address to university courses, principia, or graduation speeches choosing as their thema a text from Aristotle or Gratian. The scholastic method is the urge to develop the entire discourse grounded on a “foundation” or “root” as used in the two most common metaphors of the house and the tree. “Appendix B: The Life and Transmission of Late-Medieval Artes Praedicandi” traces the subsequent history of the treatise Quamvis and the phenomenon of companionship. Manuscripts containing one artes praedicandi treatise would usually contain one to several additional treatises at the same time, as well as distinctiones and abbreviated biblical concordances to aid the preacher in his preparations for his sermons. Appendix C has been described above and Appendix D is described in endnote 5.

Wenzel has had a great deal of experience in turning out finely constructed studies of medieval culture centering on the sermon. This latest production only adds to and enhances that list. It is not the sort of book one sits down to read from cover to cover, it is a book of reference in which one can be assured that the texts are well constructed, accurate, and elegantly laid out. The translations are graceful, correct, and stay close to the Latin text. The introductory and supplemental materials are to the point and knowledgeable. The Art of Preaching will stimulate interest and new research into medieval homiletics, the predominant mode of communication throughout the Middle Ages until the advent of printing and lay reading in the Renaissance. The appearance of several of these artes in incunabula editions gives further witness to their longevity into early modern times.

Notes

[1]. Morton W. Bloomfield, Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature (1952; repr., East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1967) is the great seminal work in this field.


[6]. [Cicero], Ad C. Herennium: De ratione dicendi (Rhetorica ad Herennium), trans. Harry Caplan, Loeb Classical Library 403 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954). This classical manual had a great, but usually an unacknowledged, influence on medieval rhetoricians of various callings.

[7]. Ranulph Higden, The Ars componendi Sermones of Ranulph Higden, O.S.B., ed. Margaret Jennings, Davis Medieval Texts and Studies 6 (Leiden: Brill, 1991); Ranulph Higden: Ars componendi sermones, trans. by Margaret Jennings and Sally A. Wilson, Dallas Medieval Texts and Translations 2 (Paris: Peeters, 2003); and Margaret Jennings, “The Preacher’s Rhetoric: The Ars componendi sermones of Ranulph Higden,” in Medieval Eloquence: Studies in the Theory and Practice of Medieval Rhetoric, ed. James J. Murphy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 112-126, where Higden’s treatise is contrasted to Basevorn and compared to a “typical” example of the ars praedicandi. Jennings’s studies postulate the precedence of Higden’s work to that of the Quamvis which she attributes to a later Thomas Penketh, see her 2003 translation, 77n90.


[9]. [Cicero], Ad C. Herennium, 209-225.
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