An Unedited Principium Biblicum attributed to Petrus de Scala, O.P.

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Sixteen thirteenth century principia on the Bible have been edited,1 representing a very small fraction of those that have survived in manuscript form. For this reason alone the anonymous Principium bibliicum: "Habet argentum unearum suarum principia...", the subject of this article, remains a valuable document. It not only adds materially to our knowledge of biblical training during the second half of the thirteenth century, but also contributes to an understanding of the scholastic structure of biblical teaching, the place of the arts and sciences in the formation of a scripture scholar, and the rationale for dividing and organizing the books of the Bible. Apart from being a formal speech delivered by an incepting master of the sacred page, the principium also developed in response to a need by students for introductory material on the entire Bible that was both systematic and easily remembered.

Principium Biblicum: dubious authorship

The Principium biblicum by an anonymous thirteenth century biblicist is contained in MS Paris, BNF, lat. 15596 (P), a manuscript that also contains the Dominican Peter of Scala's Postilla super Matthaeum. Based on solid manuscript evidence, the postill on Matthew can be attributed to Peter of Scala. The same, however, cannot be said for the Principium biblicum, which precedes the postill, since it bears no ascription. Its authorship is therefore in doubt. Eight copies of the postill have been identified. Six were copied in the thirteenth century and are of pariscian provenance. Of the seven witnesses known, six containing the postill on Matthew bear Peter's name;2 the seventh bears no name at all.3

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3 Ibid., Paris, BNF lat. 12022.
The ascription in manuscript P, written in the same first hand, reads: "Explicitum postillae super matheum secundum fratrem petrum de scala ordinis predicatuum". It would be imprudent to attribute this principium to Peter of Scala given that it accompanies only one of the seven surviving copies of his postill on Matthew. It could well have been appended to Peter of Scala’s postill by a bibliclist who wished to present a general introduction on the Bible before proceeding to lecture on Matthew. However doubtful its link to Peter, the possibility that he may have authored it should not be altogether ruled out until philological evidence is provided.

Peter of Scala, O.P.

The Dominican historian Échard provides far more reliable information concerning Peter of Scala’s writings than he does concerning his life. He attributed both the Princpium biblicum and the postill on Matthew to Peter. He seems to have seen manuscript P, since he noted that it was the only manuscript to contain the Princpium biblicum. In addition to the postill, a sermon ad clerum can be added to his surviving writings. A fourth work, a postill on the Gospel of John that Pope Sixtus V (1585-90) claimed to have seen is presumed lost. He states that Peter was born at the beginning of the thirteenth century in the northern Italian city of Bergamo, a member of the Veronese ruling family of the Scaliger. He also claims that, according to an oral tradition, he received the habit from St. Dominic in 1219. However, these details make it difficult to accept that he was the same Peter of Scala, OP who was consecrated bishop of Verona in 1290. Were they the same person, he would have been in his eighties at the time. Peter died on September 12, 1295.

Date

There is no firm date of composition for manuscript P. However, it is possible to set some provisional dates for the composition of this principium. Given that manuscript P was one of eight manuscripts bequeathed to the Sorbonne by the French Cardinal, Guillelmus de Feuchteris, who died in 1295, it must

have been copied before 1295. In addition to this, there is a clear exchange of ideas between Peter’s text and the Lectura ordinaria attributed to Henry of Ghent. Although both Beryl Smalley and the editor of the Lectura ordinaria, R. Macken, were wary of attributing the work to Henry of Ghent, both agreed that it was probably the work of a master of theology produced sometime in the last quarter of the thirteenth century. The following passages show an exchange of thought.

PRINCIPIUM BIBLICUM

MS Paris, BNF lat. 15596

f. Srh: Qua enim pigri sumus ad faciendum precepta que in libris Moysi continetur, nobis additum duplex excitatium, scilicet per exempla in hystoribus libris et per admonitiones in libris Salomonis: exempla incitant per facta, admonitiones l5val per urba.

f. Sva: Doctrina mandatorum, id est Moysi, proprie dicta diuiditur in tres partes, scilicetprohemium uel prolegomum, tractatum et epi-

logum, scilicet diuiditur Liber predicamentorum in antepredicamenta, predicamenta, postpredicamenta. Prolegomum traditur in libro Genesis... Tractatus traditur in libris librorum sequentibus, scilicet in Exodo, Leuitico, Numeris, quibus dantur precepta. Epilogus traditur in Deuteronomio.

LECTURA ORDINARIA

p. 17, v. 68-71: Unde quia nos sumus pigri et ignari ad implendum nuda praecipu-

propter hoc nobis ad praecipientem necessarium est directio, ut sciamus qualiter ire agamus: quae fiunt et per verba exercitationis doctorum, et per exempla operis iustorum.

f. Svb: Si ut reparaturn justitiam perdita, sic
duplicitur: uel secundum statum contemplationis, sic dantur exempla in Esdra, qui reparat templum Domini et reformat cultum Dei; in templo enim erat sedes pontificialis officii et cultus diuin, uel secundum statum actionis, sic in Neemia, qui reparat chaitatem, in qua erat sedes regni.

p. 22, v. 18-23: Sequitur pars exemplorum de reparacione iustitiae deperditae, quae sunt duplicia: aut enim sunt ad reparandum iustitiam deperditam in regimine spiritualis vita contemplativa, quae habentur in Esdra, qui templum reparavit et cultum divinum in eo, aut in regimine temporali vita activae, quae habentur in Nehemia, qui reparavit civitatem et regimen in ea.

4 Cf. T. KAEPELLI, Scriptores Ordinis Praedicatorum Medii Aeivi (SOPMA), t. III, p. 260, n. 3356; SCHNEYER, Repert., t. IV, p. 357, n. 4; p. 82, n. 1; and C. LUNA, 16 Repertorio dei sermoni, in the series, Aegidii Romani opera omnia, Firenze Olschki, 1990, p. 57, n. 68.


6 Cf. SOP, t. L, p. 417A.

7 Cf. C. EUBUL, Hierarchia catholica medi aevis, Regensburg, 1898, p. 554.


9 For the text of the introductio generalis to the Lectura ordinaria, see: Lectura ordinaria super sacram scripturam Henrici de Gandavo adscriptam, ed. R. MACKEN in the series, Henrici de Gandavo opera omnia XXXVII, Leuven, 1980, pp. 5-27.


11 Cf. MACKEN, op. cit.
(i) ad ea que sunt fidei
(ii) ad ea sunt morum vel bone uti
iii. concordia ad prelato et superioris
(iv. exercitum boni operis
(i) faciendo bona
(ii) tolerando adversa
(iii) declinando a malo
iv. perseverancia finalis
(i) contra graue temptatione
(ii) contra graue temptationes

Vel:
(i) in operatione boni
(ii) in absentia boni

(b) prelati suae malore


3. Primo, debet esse purgatum ab omni errore et falsitate, ideo dicit Ps.: Eloquia Domini eloquia casta, id est ab omni errore et falsitate immanea; argumtum igne euminatum, probatum terre, id est a terra, scilicet ab omni terrenitate, purgatum sepulchrum, id est perfecte per septiformem Spiritum sanctum.


29 limam limam cod.: limam scripsi.