



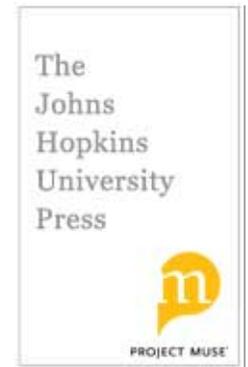
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*Medieval Artes Praedicandi: A Synthesis of Scholastic Sermon
Structure* by Siegfried Wenzel (review)

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Book Reviews

Medieval Artes Praedicandi: A Synthesis of Scholastic Sermon Structure. By Siegfried Wenzel. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015. ISBN 978-1-4426-5010-7. Pp. xviii + 133. \$45.

In his review of Marianne G. Briscoe’s *Artes praedicandi* (1992), Siegfried Wenzel enumerated the challenges faced by scholars working with medieval preaching texts: “few are available in modern editions, fewer still in translation, and their terms are part of a Scholastic vocabulary that relies on technicalities of logic, rhetoric, and occasionally even metaphysics that are utterly foreign to the modern student. There is, then, a great need to supply medievalists with reliable and clear guidance in this field” (*Speculum* 69.4 [1994]: 1124). More than two decades later, Wenzel has accomplished exactly that in a succinct survey that characterizes the genre by its essential features, summarizes forty-two treatises, locates relevant scholarly discussion, edits a sample sermon, and outlines its structure according to the terms established in this volume. This book is an essential resource for those working with medieval theological writings, including sermons, homilies, penitential manuals, and prayers; for historians interested in scholasticism, church practice, and ecclesiastical discourse; for scholars working with classical rhetoric and source studies; and perhaps even for modern theologians and preachers who are fascinated with their craft.

Wenzel introduces the “scholastic model” (xv) of preaching, also called the “modern, university, thematic, or scholastic sermon” (xv), as a form used in late medieval Western Europe employing a typical structure of *thema*, or “short biblical text” (xv), division of the *thema* into parts, and development, the expansion of these parts. Contrasting with the homily, this scholastic model was taught in the *artes praedicandi*, treatises designed primarily to “instruct beginning preachers in composing their sermons in conformity with the ‘modern’ usage” (xv). Although the general organization of these texts is similar, this close examination demonstrates that content, “approach,” and “style” (xvii) vary widely. Wenzel stresses that more of these treatises should be edited since only about thirty modern editions are available out of over 230 *artes praedicandi*. As Wenzel suggests in his review of Briscoe’s book and explicitly argues here, students and potential editors need a “precise knowledge” of the “structure, its concerns, and its vocabulary” (xvi). Additionally, Wenzel calls for more studies to discover how the treatises

relate to each other and to their sources and to understand further how the genre developed over time.

The first part of Wenzel's book identifies and describes forty-two Latin treatises that offer a "technique (*ars*)" (3) for preaching. These texts cover a broad array of subjects including a "preacher's moral life and study, his articulation and gestures while preaching, and the actual form of his sermon" (3). Generally Wenzel treats the treatises chronologically and identifies each author's ecclesiastical associations; notes the treatise's listing in Harry Caplan's *Medieval Artes Praedicandi: A Hand-List* (1934), Caplan's *Supplementary Hand-List* (1936), and Th.-M. Charland's *Artes Praedicandi: Contribution à l'histoire de la rhétorique au moyen âge* (1936); discusses "the number of known manuscripts" (3); names any modern editions and translations; records "significant discussions by previous scholars" (4); and designates source citations.

This valuable section offers readers an initial investigation of the primary sources and relevant scholarship and thereby provides direction for further study. For instance, the first entry on Guibert of Nogent identifies at least two ideas pervasive in these treatises: an emphasis on "the need to discuss vices . . . and to understand Scripture in its four senses" (4). Wenzel underscores the importance of Aristotle, Cicero, and Seneca to the *artes praedicandi* along with other classical and patristic sources (including Horace, Ambrose, Jerome, Chrysostom, Augustine, Cassian, and Gregory the Great). The emphasis on classical rhetoric may be surprising to those more familiar with the homily: Thomas of Chobham notably "reconciles scholastic sermon structure with the precepts of classical rhetoric" (7). Modern readers also may be interested in the attention these treatises give to the qualifications of the preacher (12, 15, 24, 30), the importance of emotion in preaching (10), and the needs of varying audiences (10, 20, 24). Wenzel notes that Alan of Lille, for example, writes ten chapters on "preaching to various social groups and *status* (knights, lawyers, priests, virgins, etc.)" (5). How might a modern reader recognize a good medieval sermon? Francesc Eiximenès identifies seven characteristics of good preaching: "brevity, fervour, breadth, devotion, moral teaching, prudence, and order" (28). Wenzel highlights practical advice offered in Eiximenès's treatise, including information on appropriate "facial expressions and gestures" and the preacher's proper response to praise (28). Wenzel similarly accentuates Thomas Waleys's pragmatic approach to the preacher's "attitude and disposition, clothing, gestures, speech habits, practicing, etc." (22). Preaching failures are also treated in the *artes praedicandi*, including "ignorance, a boring delivery, pointing one's fingers" (38). Ps.-Aquinas wisely warns preachers "not to discuss controversial matters . . . not to drop one's voice at the end of a sentence" (38). Through Wenzel's punctuation of such content, modern readers might more accurately evaluate the original reception and relative success of medieval sermons for their audiences.

Particularly significant to a book that codifies scholastic sermon structure is Wenzel's highlighting of the kinds of preaching (39–40) and use of allegory.

Fans of medieval romance will be disappointed (but not astonished) to learn that Geraldus de Piscario denounces allegories related to castles and knights as “unscriptural” (17). Other allegories are considered more suitable to preaching texts. Alan of Lille, for instance, compares “Jacob’s ladder (Genesis 28:12) to the seven rungs or steps on the way of perfection, from confession to preaching” (4). Several treatises compare sermon structure to a tree, as in Jacobus de Fusignano (18), “Nota pro arte faciendi” (36), and Ps.-Aquinas (38). Another allegory Wenzel finds particularly compelling is in “Vade in domum tuam”: here the anonymous author likens the six parts of sermon to the six parts of a house (34).

The second part of Wenzel’s book meticulously delineates scholastic sermon type and structure. Wenzel identifies and defines the technical language for this genre (48–49), analyzes each part of the scholastic sermon based on the treatises he has examined, and provides specific examples from these texts. The *thema* (*materia* in Latin) presents a “word or string of words taken from Scripture upon which the entire sermon is built” (50) and parallels the foundation of a house or root of a tree, allegories spotlighted in the previous section. *Ars praedicandi* authors emphasize that the *thema* must be taken from a standard Latin translation of Scripture (51), and if from the Old Testament, it must be “explained with the gospels” (52). A complete sentence, the *thema* must also be brief, clear and contextual, appropriate for the occasion, and suitable for division. Wenzel clarifies that although the *prothema* is related to the *thema* and generally is short, this part of the sermon varies widely in the texts and changes over time (55–59). An initial *prayer* follows the *prothema*: the preacher might request wisdom for himself and his audience or recite a traditional prayer such as an *Ave Maria* or *Pater Noster*. After this opening prayer, the *thema* is repeated followed by the *bridge passage*, an introductory sentence designed to “establish a logical relationship between *thema*, introduction, and the following division” (62). Interestingly, the introduction of the *thema*, which comes after the bridge, “became a piece of highly crafted verbal art” (65) for preachers: Wenzel documents that authors employ various strategies, including a “popular proverb; a simile from nature, human behavior, or history; a scriptural authority, sometimes with its own division; a quotation from a saintly author, philosopher, or poet; any type of argument (syllogism, induction, enthymeme, or example); a distinction made by the preacher himself; or even a moralized fable or story” (63).

Wenzel justly devotes much of this section to division, a fundamental part of the scholastic sermon where the “*thema* is divided into a number of parts . . . starting points for further development” (65–66). Wenzel illustrates how division helps the preacher to “unfold the meaning” and supplies “ample material” for the sermon (66) through the *Ars copiosa sermonum*, which includes a lengthy explanation of division. A preacher, for example, could use the four senses of Scripture (literal, allegorical, moral, anagogical), an allegorical division, or a grammatical division. The confirmation “ideally” (77) follows each part of the division and offers proof

from Scripture, “an authoritative author . . . a reasoned argument, an exemplum, a simile, word etymology, etc.” (76). The development (*prosecutio*) breaks down each division into parts, as with twigs on branches (79) or the “three or four panes of the window” (79). Wenzel catalogues additional processes of dilation, or expansion, including the use of word studies, etymology, synonyms, properties of things, similes, and fables (80–81). In the combination of the parts (*unitio*), the preacher ties everything together with a single authority, and in the closing formula, or prayer, he generally prays for “grace” and “glory” (85) and links to the beginning of the sermon.

In the third part of his book, Wenzel applies this standardized structure to his edition of a sermon text preached for a monastic community (Worcester, Cathedral Library, MS F.10 fols 248vb–250va). Wenzel glosses sources, scribal errors and corrections, medieval spellings, scribal variations, and definitions of less common words in the footnotes. The following section then reiterates the structural elements of the *artes praedicandi* and succinctly applies these elements to the sample sermon. Wenzel argues that since the Worcester text contains scribal errors, understanding of scholastic sermon structure is especially crucial to the edition and its analysis. While Wenzel’s abbreviated “structural comment” (101) does indicate how scholars might apply the elements of the genre to an actual preaching text, it remains unclear exactly how such comprehensive knowledge of the underlying form contributes to a stronger edition. The reader is left wanting an expanded analysis with further discussion of the structural implications.

The last part of the book identifies miscellaneous observations not easily considered elsewhere in the volume, such as the distinctions between a *sermo* and *collatio*, which apparently followed the same subject of the sermon but in abbreviated form through *thema*, *division*, and *subdivision*. Wenzel also points out several strange omissions in the *artes praedicandi*: first, despite the strong awareness of audience shown in sermon salutations, a discussion of the *salutatio* is absent in the treatises. Also, these texts seemingly lack a “detailed engagement” with narrative exemplum (112). Wenzel concludes by reminding readers that the “scholastic sermon form was the product of new intellectual methods and endeavors that came to blossom in the transition from monastic ideals and forms of mental activity to those at the university” (113). Essentially, medieval students and preachers approach the biblical text by dividing it into its parts. Overall, Wenzel’s singular volume will aid students who are wrestling with the complexity of medieval sermons, as it undeniably furnishes scholars with “a systematic and orderly survey of what the *artes* teach about sermon structure” (xvi). Wenzel’s methodical review of these treatises should indeed inspire further study along with new editions and translations.

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