

St Thomas's sermon *Puer Iesus*: a neglected source for his understanding of teaching and learning¹

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Abstract

There are a number of places in his works where Thomas Aquinas writes about teaching and learning. Following a summary account of his understanding of education, this paper presents and discusses a neglected source on these matters. The sermon *Puer Iesus*, probably preached in January 1271, contains thoughts on pedagogy that are, in the words of its Leonine editor, 'original and of great interest'. The sermon offers a broad sketch of human development in which the adolescence of Christ, the 'most excellent of teachers', is appealed to as an inspiration and an example. It raises Christological and pedagogical questions and it is the latter that are considered here. Encouraging his student congregation to listen generously, enquire diligently, respond prudently and meditate attentively, Aquinas outlines for them a practical method of learning that is at once critical and contemplative.

Keywords

Thomas Aquinas, learning and teaching, pedagogy, medieval sermons.

Just after Christmas 2006 I was delighted to receive, from Father Louis Bataillon, the as yet unpublished Leonine edition of St Thomas Aquinas's sermon *Puer Iesus* [PI]. Fr Bataillon, a leading authority on many aspects of medieval homiletics, has devoted many years to preparing the critical edition of the sermons of St Thomas. He had read a piece by me, about Aquinas's views on teaching, due to be published in a book on Dominican approaches to education, and

¹ This paper was presented at an Aquinas Study Day at Blackfriars, Oxford in March 2007. It has benefited from the discussion that followed its presentation.

noticed that I had neglected this sermon.² Unknown to Fr Bataillon I had also recently completed a book on the same subject in which, once again, I had nothing to say about PI.³ He generously forwarded the text of the sermon to me, saying that I could make whatever use of it I thought fit. I want to offer this presentation of the teaching of PI not only as a mark of gratitude to Fr Bataillon for his intellectual generosity but as a way of honouring his exceptional academic achievements.

Aquinas on Teaching

To realise that I had neglected this sermon, completely unaware of any significance it might have for St Thomas's views on teaching, was not as devastating a development as it might seem at first, if only because I knew that none of the other commentators whose works I had consulted in preparing my book had mentioned it either! It is only recently that scholars have begun to take Aquinas's scripture commentaries seriously, never mind his sermons, as sources that might have something important to add to what he says in his major systematic works, in particular the *Summa theologiae*, which for many seems to be the only work one needs to consult in order to know Aquinas's mind on any of the topics he considers there.

The argument implicit in my title is thus already established: this sermon was neglected by me in writing a book about Aquinas's views on teaching and learning as well as by everybody else who has written recently on this topic. For what Aquinas has to say on the question 'can one human being teach another', commentators tend to be content with what is said in *Summa theologiae* [ST] I 117 and *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* [*De veritate*] 11 (entitled *de magistro*, 'on the teacher'). A further tendency is, having focused on these two texts alone, to take them then quite out of context, without reference to the location in ST and *De veritate* in which the process of teaching and learning is considered.

Prima facie one might expect that a consideration of teaching would be found in the moral part of ST, somewhere in ST II.II most likely, where human actions, relationships and professions are considered in detail. There is much to be found there that is relevant to his views on teaching and learning. There is the virtue of *studiositas*, for

² 'The healing work of teaching: Thomas Aquinas and education', in Gabrielle Kelly OP and Kevin Saunders OP, editors, *Towards the Intelligent Use of Liberty: Dominican Approaches in Education* ATF Press, Adelaide (to be published in 2008)

³ *St Thomas Aquinas* (Continuum Library of Educational Thought) Continuum, London and New York (to be published in November 2007)

example, a part of temperance that manages the desire for knowledge (ST II.II 166). There is *docilitas*, which is a part of prudence (ST II.II 49,3). There are sub-virtues of courage and justice such as patience, perseverance and truthfulness that are also relevant (ST II.II 109; 136; 137). The closing questions of ST II.II contain a long consideration of the traditional contrast between the active life and the contemplative life, ways of living that are focused on the one hand on the exploitation and manipulation of the world for human purposes and on the other on the pursuit of knowledge and truth for their own sake (ST II.II 179-182; 188). Famously, and not surprisingly, Aquinas decides that the best human vocation is the one he himself pursued, a contemplative life that also seeks to communicate to others, through teaching, the fruits of what has been contemplated (ST II.II 188,6). In the earlier questions of ST II.II we find considerations of the Holy Spirit's gifts of knowledge (*scientia*), understanding (*intellectus*) and wisdom (*sapientia*) (ST II.II 8-9; 45). For Aquinas these gifts bring the virtues of faith and charity to perfection. His is a high, theological vision of the fulfilment possible for human beings which goes far beyond ordinary human experiences of knowledge, understanding and wisdom, while remaining dependent on the processes and modalities of those ordinary human experiences.

As already indicated, however, Aquinas's explicit treatments of teaching are not found within this kind of moral consideration. They are actually found within what we might call his 'metaphysics of creation'. In both ST and *De veritate* the question of whether and how one human being can teach another arises as part of his reflection on how creatures might act within creation to further the purposes of creation itself. Can creatures participate in any way in the distinctive work of the Creator? Well, not if it is creation itself that is meant: only God can do that. But if what is meant is providence, God's wise and loving government of the things he has made, in order to lead them to their destiny, then there are creatures who can share in that divine task. The task is the communication of truth with a view to goodness. *De veritate* is structured according to the three different minds which Aquinas believed could be involved in this task: the divine mind, the angelic mind, and the human mind. He considers each in turn, how it knows truth, how it enjoys truth, and how it communicates truth with a view to goodness. When he turns to consider the human mind in relation to this task the first question he raises is whether one human being can teach another (*De veritate*). The context in ST I 117 is similar.

Apart from these texts on teaching, considered in relation to their immediate context, there are other ways of getting at his understanding of learning and teaching. There is what we know about the ways he experienced these things and carried them out. There are texts in which the issue of pedagogy – teaching method as distinct from a

more philosophical account of what teaching involves – is directly addressed. Most important among these are his commentaries on Boethius' *De Trinitate*, on sections of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, and on parts of *Liber de causis*. There is also what one might call the 'whole work context' in which his pedagogical concerns become clearer. The prologues and other linking passages in the systematic works explain the structure and development of each work. In all cases what he is trying to enable his readers to understand, and how he is trying to assist them in doing this, are clear. Mark D. Jordan has written about this sustained pedagogical concern of Aquinas but the original insight seems to go back to Leonard Boyle's well known lecture on the setting of ST, which can only be properly understood, Boyle argues, when the (experimental) pedagogical concern that informs its structure is kept in mind.⁴

Aquinas's views on teaching and learning culminate in theological, particularly Christological, considerations. The opening chapter of *Summa contra gentiles* says that the end of the universe is truth because its origin is intellect (*primus autem auctor et motor universi est intellectus . . . oportet igitur ultimum finem universi esse bonum intellectus*: SCG I 1). The most excellent of teachers is Jesus of Nazareth, Thomas says, because he is the one who leads the universe to its destiny, showing in himself the way of truth (ST III prologue). The full theological context of Aquinas's account of teaching and learning, then, may be summarised by saying that for him creation is a teaching – its purpose is to manifest and to communicate the glory of God – and redemption is a learning – Christ comes to establish the way by which human beings can finally know, understand and savour the truth that means life and bliss.⁵

So much for general background regarding Aquinas's views on teaching and learning. Before turning to PI itself, however, we must mention another short work attributed to Aquinas and concerned with pedagogy. This is *De modo studendi*, or *Letter to Brother John on Study* concerning which the critical consensus is that it is spurious. Sixty years ago Victor White translated it into English and published it with a commentary. He clearly wanted it to be genuine (*se non è*

⁴ Mark D. Jordan, *Rewritten Theology: Aquinas After His Readers* Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2006; Leonard E. Boyle, *The Setting of the Summa theologiae of Saint Thomas* Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Toronto, 1982. With Jordan's work, Boyle's insight has perhaps developed legs and gone places he would not have anticipated, but the basic insight is worth holding on to.

⁵ The preceding paragraphs summarise an account of Aquinas on teaching and learning that I have developed more fully in two recent articles, 'What happens when minds meet? Thomas Aquinas on the mystery of teaching and learning', *Doctrine and Life* 56.6 (July-August 2006) 3-17 and 'Truth, knowledge and communication: Thomas Aquinas on the mystery of teaching', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 19.3 (2006) 287-304

vero, è ben trovato).⁶ Antonin Sertillanges, in accepting that it was not genuine, nevertheless constructed his classic 1920 work *La vie intellectuelle* on the basis of the sixteen rules or guidelines given in *De modo studendi*.⁷ The content of PI however makes it easier to let go of the *Letter to Brother John*, since here we have a genuine work of Aquinas in which he speaks about learning and teaching in ways that are as practical and as encouraging as the spurious text. In fact he has a lot more to say in PI about the experiences of learning and teaching than we find in *De modo studendi*.

The Sermon *Puer Iesus*

Let us turn then to the sermon *Puer Iesus* to see what it has to say about these matters.⁸ It is a sermon on Luke 2:41-52, which tells of the finding of Jesus in the temple at Jerusalem after he had been missing for three days. Bataillon says PI contains thoughts on pedagogy that are original and of great interest. He knows of no other sermon offering such precise advice about how to conduct one's studies. Although PI is known from just one late 13th century manuscript, Paris BnF. lat. 15034 (f.47vb-51vb), where it is found with another sermon of Aquinas as well as sermons by Bonaventure and other contemporaries, Bataillon is confident that its attribution to Thomas Aquinas is very solid. The fact that its audience is clearly a university one, and in view of the use it makes of the *Catena aurea*, PI can be dated to Aquinas's second Parisian regency (1268-1272).

More specifically, it is a sermon for the Sunday after Epiphany for which Luke 2:41-52 was the gospel text. A speculation of my own, in view of the space given in the sermon to the theme of peace, as well as its difference from other sermons in not referring to contemporary events, is that it may have been preached in January 1271. In December 1270 the bishop of Paris had condemned several propositions of the 'radical Aristotelians' or 'Latin Averroists' in the arts

⁶ *St Thomas Aquinas: How to Study*. Commentary by Victor White OP Aquin Press, London, 1947

⁷ A.G.Sertillanges OP, *The Intellectual Life: Its Spirit, Conditions, Methods* Translated from the French by Mary Ryan, with a new foreword by James V. Schall SJ, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington DC, 1998. A pious reason why Dominicans particularly hoped *De modo studendi* might be authentic is because it is the only place in writings attributed to Aquinas where St Dominic is mentioned by name.

⁸ In the 'Parma' edition of Aquinas' *Opera Omnia* (Parma, 1869) the sermon is found in Volume XXIV, pages 220-24 and in the 'Vivès' edition (Paris, 1879) in Volume XXXII, pages 663-71. See J.-P.Torrell, *Initiation à saint Thomas d'Aquin, sa personne et son oeuvre: Initiation 1. 2^e édition revue et augmentée d'une mise à jour critique et bibliographique* Fribourg / Paris, 2002, pages 522-23,630 [English translation by Robert Royal, *Saint Thomas Aquinas. Volume 1: The Person and His Work. Revised Edition* Washington DC, 2005, pages 358-59, 438]

faculty of the University. These events brought to a head, and to a temporary resolution, arguments and debates that had been agitating the University for some time. In fact it was these debates about the reception of Aristotle that had brought Aquinas back to Paris in the first place. It is at least plausible that, in preaching to the university just a few weeks after this development, Thomas would have decided not to refer explicitly to contemporary events, which may have been still just a bit too fresh and painful, while spending a fair bit of time talking about peace and the need for it if people are to concentrate on their studies.⁹

The congregation to which Thomas gave PI seems to have been a student one for the most part: his illustrations and comments make this clear, as we shall see. It has the familiar structure of a medieval sermon, with *prothema*, sermon and collation, in effect a sermon in two parts with an introduction before the first part and a recapitulation before the second. The verse of the gospel on which Thomas focuses particularly is Luke 2:52: 'Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man', in his Latin text, *Puer Iesus proficiebat etate et sapientia et gracia apud Deum et homines*.¹⁰

The Adolescence of Christ

The first part of PI is about the Christological concerns raised by Luke 2:52, in particular what it might mean to say that Jesus *increased* in wisdom or in grace. There is some reference to pedagogy here but it is mainly in the second part, the *collatio*, that Thomas talks at length about learning, considering what 'increasing in wisdom' means and how human beings might do it. At the same time, the Christological concern continues through the second part also.

All that Jesus did, said and experienced, Thomas says, is an example for us. So the adolescence of Christ is proposed as an example for adolescents. Adolescence is about growth and making progress: the fact that Jesus made progress teaches human beings something about this period of development. The gospel tells us that he increased in

⁹ For a good sense of the turbulent events at Paris before and after the condemnation of December 1270, and Aquinas' involvement in them, see Fernand van Steenberghe, *Aristotle in the West* Louvain 1955, pages 198-229; James A. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought and Works* Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1974, pages 241-92 (especially pp. 272-85); Simon Tugwell, *Albert and Thomas: Selected Writings* Paulist Press, 1988, pages 225-32; and Torrell, *op.cit.*, pages 261-86, 358 [ET pages 179-96, 244-45]. Van Steenberghe hints that there was a calm in the immediate aftermath of the condemnation (*op.cit.*, p.210): my suggestion is that Thomas preached this sermon during that calm.

¹⁰ The word *puer* drops in from Luke 2:43

stature (or age: he grew physically) and in grace (favour with God), in wisdom (intellectual development) and in human relationships (favour with men). The first part of the sermon considers physical growth and growth in grace, speaking particularly about peace as the most important sign or fruit of grace. The *collatio* considers intellectual development as well as maturity in human relationships. PI as a whole gives us a sketch of human development, a portrait of the maturing human being.

There is something wonderful (in the sense of puzzling) about all four aspects in the case of Christ, Thomas begins. That he should grow physically is not all that remarkable once he had chosen to be born as an infant. But to say that he increased in wisdom can only mean that the wisdom that was his always was manifested and its effect in others increased. Jesus conforms to the norm 'lest people doubt the truth of the Word's assumption of human nature'. So at the age at which wise judgement is first found among human beings – the age of 12 as Jewish tradition still maintains – Jesus also began to reveal his wisdom. He showed his wisdom gradually 'to show the truth of his human nature and to give us an example of maturing in wisdom'.¹¹

For Jesus to have matured in body but not in soul (wisdom, grace) would result in certain inconveniences. It would have been, Thomas says, 'monstrous, damnable, laborious and dangerous'. If Jesus had matured in body but not in mind the situation would have been monstrous. If we imagine Jesus as an eight-month old infant speaking Russian or explaining Einstein's theory of relativity we get a sense of what Thomas means by 'monstrous' here. It is true we are to be like children always, he says (and this seems to be his first pitch to his audience), because children are of course kind and humble he adds (not without a certain irony perhaps), but other things we must leave behind as we grow up, in particular our lack of wisdom. We are to progress in mind as we progress in body. So, if one leg were to grow and not the other, we would put *totum studium* in the doctor to make the second one grow. Similarly 'you' (singular, a preacher's strategy) who are developing physically ought to place *totum studium tuum ut crescas etiam etate mentis*, your full passion into developing intellectually also.

¹¹ For recent treatments of Aquinas's views on the human knowledge of Christ see J.-P. Torrell, 'Le savoir acquis du Christ selon les théologiens médiévaux. Thomas d'Aquin et ses prédécesseurs' *Revue Thomiste* 101 (2001) 355-408 and 'Saint Thomas d'Aquin et la science du Christ. Une relecture des Questions 9-12 de la *Tertia Pars* de la *Somme de Théologie*', *Saint Thomas au XX^e siècle*, Edition Saint-Paul, 1995, 394-409; and Kevin Madigan, 'Did Jesus Progress in Wisdom? Thomas Aquinas on Luke 2,52 in Ancient and High Medieval Context' *Traditio* 52 (1997) 179-200. See also the insightful notes on ST III 9-12 in Liam G. Walsh, *St Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologiae Volume 49 (3a. 7-15) The Grace of Christ* London and New York, 1974, pages 82-151

Not to develop intellectually while growing physically is also 'damnable'. If someone has the time to acquire something great and lets that time pass in vain this is to be condemned. Examples he gives are a merchant who fails to take advantage of an opportunity to make money, or a scholar who believes he might hear a useful lecture but allows the time to slip by. The time you have been given is not about earning vile things and earthly prosperity but about God and heavenly goods: *a fortiori* you ought not to let this time pass in vain.

Not to grow intellectually as you are developing physically is also 'laborious' because you are simply making things harder for yourself in the long run. 'But I'm young', you will say, 'I want to play in my youth; when I'm an old man I will convert to the Lord'. Taking this attitude, Thomas warns, is simply storing up hard work for yourself. Just as now you would find it hard to do the work a peasant (*rusticus*) does more easily because he is used to it – another pitch at his audience: don't forget the privilege it is to be given time to study, and think of what you might have to be doing otherwise – so if you get used to doing your own will and living in sin then you either despair of eternal life or are storing up hard work for the future. Christ gives us an example about this in that from the age of twelve he 'grew', *crevit*, in wisdom.

It is, fourthly, dangerous to grow physically but not intellectually. We have been given time and there will be a reckoning – but of course we must never despair of the mercy of God.

So much for physical development, and the importance of other levels of development keeping pace with it. He speaks next about increasing in grace. The gospel text mentions wisdom in second place, but he says he will speak first of grace since the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Grace is hidden in the soul and is known only through its effects. No effect of grace is clearer than peace and St Paul always links the two (in the greetings that open his letters, and in Galatians 5:2, for example). Once we reach the age of discretion we ought to desire to attain true peace which will be *alta, consueta, perseverans et assidua*, and *cauta*. Peace is *alta* when the spirit prevails over the flesh and not vice versa. An occasional victory for the spirit is not enough, it must become habitual, *consueta*, and so we are told that Jesus went up to Jerusalem 'as the custom was'. He did not want to be singular, Thomas adds, because 'God abhors singularity'. Jesus did what was customary, conforming to the general practice. At the same time if your friends want you to do something contrary to virtue you cannot conform to them in that, Thomas warns. True peace is also persevering, *assidua*, and so Jesus stays in the temple after the festival, not turning to sinful living as many do after days of festival. Peace is, finally, cautious, wary when faced with 'the friends and familiarity of the flesh'.

Growing in wisdom – how to learn

The second part of the sermon, the *collatio*, considers the other two ways in which Jesus is said to grow, in wisdom and in favour with human beings. If maturity in grace is seen above all in peace, maturity in wisdom is seen above all in contemplation. Thomas follows earlier Christian teachers in linking *templum* and *contemplando* believing in fact that the Psalmist had already made the link: 'to live in the house of the Lord' (Psalm 26:4) means to visit the temple not for frivolous reasons but in order to contemplate the will of God. Christ's words and deeds in the temple show us what it means for a person to 'mature in the temple', that is to grow in wisdom. This is where Thomas has much to say about what learning involves. Growth in wisdom requires four things, that the student listen generously, enquire diligently, respond prudently and meditate attentively.

Listening generously

Wisdom is so profound that nobody is sufficient in himself to contemplate by himself. So we must listen or hear. You might be tempted to say 'I am sufficiently wise, I do not want to listen', which is why, Thomas says, Proverbs 1:5 adds that the wise man in hearing wisdom becomes wiser. Nobody is so wise that he cannot learn by listening and so Luke tells us that they found Jesus 'listening'. How ought one to listen? It should certainly be perseveringly. Some want to listen to one lecture about a discipline or science, to hear about it in passing as it were, but they do not put their heart into it, *non ponunt ibi cor*. His parents find Jesus in the temple 'after three days' which means he has been listening assiduously to the doctors. Anybody who seeks wisdom must listen in precisely this way (Proverbs 8:34).

Likewise we ought to listen not just to one but to many since Paul says 'there are varieties of gifts'. One person is not perfect in all of them: Gregory was top class in morals, Augustine in resolving questions, and Ambrose allegorized excellently. What you do not learn from one you learn from another (Sirach 6:35). What one does not tell, another will. 'I'm not saying', Thomas adds immediately, 'that when you first begin to hear some science that it is useful to listen to many teachers. You should listen to one until you are established in it and when you are thus established then you should listen to many so that you can pluck flowers from different plants', in other words whatever is useful.

So Jesus is found listening to many, not just to one. And, according to Thomas's Latin translation, he is found 'standing' in the midst of the doctors. The Greek tells us he was sitting: what Thomas says next is dependent on a faulty translation, therefore. The position of

standing is right for a judge, he goes on, since the listener has the task of judging rightly about what he hears. The listener must be a just judge. Some of course follow the opinion of masters just because they have heard them lecture. We should not 'have friends in the truth' but should adhere only to the truth itself. Differences of opinion are not repugnant to friendship, Aristotle says. Thomas says that this is because friendships are established by choice whereas judgement about speculative things is from the necessity of conclusions about them. It is not repugnant to peace that friends might have different opinions about intellectual matters. By January 1271 (if I am right about the dating of this sermon) he has had enough of factions and parties. Differences of judgement about action, however, are contrary to sustaining friendship (see *In Ethics* IX.6 §§1830-1839; ST II.II 29, 3 ad 2; *In epist ad Romanos* cap.XII, lectio III §§1003-1006). Again, the events in which they were all caught up were revealing the truth of this. But Jesus stands in the middle – truth itself, showing no partiality, we might say – and Thomas quotes Sirach 15:5, *in medio ecclesie apperuit os suum et impleuit eum Dominus spiritu sapientie et intellectus*, a verse used in his day in the liturgies for confessors of the faith (not only Augustine and Dominic, but John the Evangelist also).

Enquiring diligently

The second thing required for growth in wisdom is that a person should enquire diligently. A person needing temporal things will not be content to wait for them to be offered but will earnestly seek them. In the same way we ought to seek wisdom diligently, as if it were money (Proverbs 2:4). In fact, says Thomas, some people traverse mountains and seas to get money: so, if you really believe wisdom is more precious than all else that might be desired, you ought to labour for it in comparable ways (Proverbs 3:15; Wisdom 7:8). Jesus is found in the temple 'asking questions' and in this he gives us an example of seeking wisdom, where we ought to seek it and from whom.

There are three places in which we ought to seek wisdom. One is from a master, or wiser persons generally. 'Ask your father and he will show you', Deuteronomy 32:7 says. It means your master or teacher, Thomas says, who begets you spiritually just as your father begot you physically. 'Ask your elders and they will tell you': this refers to wiser people generally. But it is not enough to ask those present, we should ask also the dead and the absent. If you have not enough persons to ask you do have enough books, he says, raising interesting questions about the kind of access to texts which the ordinary student might have had at the University of Paris in the early 1270s. So when you

see books by Augustine and Ambrose, he says, 'interrogate them'. Ask former generations and diligently investigate the memory of your ancestors, the heritage they have left you. And there is a third place in which you can seek wisdom. Besides people and books there is creation itself. The works of God are *indicia*, hints and clues, of his wisdom, as the thing constructed always tells us much about the wisdom of its maker (Job 12:7).

Responding prudently

The third way of maturing in wisdom is by responding prudently. A person acquires wisdom in communicating it to others (Wisdom 7:13). Thomas appeals to the experience of teachers at all times: 'everybody knows that nothing helps one grow in knowledge as much as communicating to others what one knows'. This is an essential aspect of scholastic pedagogical method, that the student was required to repeat what he had learned: only when it had become part of the person's understanding to the point where he could actually speak it back to somebody else, was it regarded as having become the student's own knowledge or wisdom. Seneca said this a long time ago, Thomas adds, and in the gospel passage we see Jesus answering questions from the doctors.

Prudence is required in answering and for three reasons. The response must be proportionate to the person responding: if you are asked something beyond your capacities, don't try to answer. It should also be proportionate to the hearer. It is not necessary to respond to everyone, Thomas believes, and one must evaluate the questioner's motivation. Perhaps they are seeking to tempt or to censure you, to catch you out for some reason. You will recognise such a questioner if his approach is insulting or attacking. Answer then, Thomas says, according to his foolishness lest you see yourself becoming foolish like him. Christ always handled such situations very well, Thomas adds: when people asked him by what authority he worked miracles, he answered with another question. Thirdly the response must be proportionate to the question, not stopping at the words but getting to the question itself. Otherwise ours will only be 'windy knowledge' (Job 15:2) unlike the wisdom of Christ who answered wisely and in a way that left his listeners amazed at his wisdom and his answers.

Meditating attentively

The final way of seeking wisdom is by meditating attentively. We have an example of this in the Blessed Virgin who 'conserved all these

words, pondering them, in her heart' (Luke 2:51). Thomas quotes here a passage he also includes in the *Catena aurea* at this verse, from a certain Greek, who speaks of 'the most prudent woman Mary, mother of true wisdom, who becomes a pupil of her boy, attending to him not as a boy or as a man but as God, and as she conceived His Word in her womb so now she conceives all his deeds and words in her heart'.¹²

Meditation, says Thomas, is 'the key of memory'. You can read and hear many things but you will not be able to retain them unless you meditate. As food does not nourish unless it is first masticated, neither can you progress in knowledge without masticating, by frequent meditation, what you hear. We need to chew over things, break them down, and digest them. Mary's pondering teaches us this. As well as being fruitful her meditation was integral and profound. She kept 'all these things' in her heart and we too should meditate on all we hear. If we cannot meditate on everything at once then let it be done over a period of time, one thing now and another thing later (Psalm 76:7).

Without doubt, Thomas concludes, the person who hears generously, responds prudently, enquires diligently and meditates attentively will make great progress in wisdom since this is the way to do it.

Favour with human beings

The final section of the sermon considers what 'increasing in favour with human beings' means. This is about *conversatio humana*, Thomas says, a phrase that means something like 'way of living' or even 'lifestyle'. It is used again about Christ in ST III 40, a question non-Dominicans are likely to find chauvinistic since Jesus is presented there as the first Dominican. Jesus' way of living is that of the mendicant preacher, living in poverty and simplicity but mixing with people in order to preach the truth to them. It is, Thomas says, yet again in order to teach human beings how to live, specifically, in the case of his public ministry, *ut daret exemplum praedicatoribus* (40 1 ad 3).

PI is not preached to Dominicans, however, but to students generally and so Thomas focuses at the end on moral virtues that are particularly needed if young people are to mature well into human society. There is lots in the gospel, he says, about subjects and prelates, but – and this seems like his final pitch to his audience who may even be getting a bit restless at this point – 'there are few prelates

¹² *Catena aurea: commentary on the Four Gospels collected out of the works of the Fathers. Volume III: St Luke* The Saint Austin Press 1997, pages 102-105

here so let's talk about subjects'. To mature in human relating as one who is under authority you need four things, piety, purity, humility and discretion. The life of study can become selfish with people content to be left alone to grow in wisdom. But piety requires also condescension towards others, that we be prepared to 'go down with them' as Jesus went down with Mary and Joseph. Thomas refers to the *Song of Songs* which speaks of the (divine) beloved 'going down to his garden' (6:2) as well as to Jacob's ladder (Genesis 28:12; John 1:51): we must ascend by spiritual growth and descend through piety to our neighbour.

Mixing with people has its dangers of course, and some go down to others for sinful purposes. The gospel tells us that Jesus went down to Nazareth, that is, to 'flower' or 'purity'. Once again he refers to verses from the *Song of Songs*: happy the one who has nothing rotten in his conscience or worthy of infamy but gives out instead the odour of good repute, by blossoming and bearing fruit spiritually and morally.

The third virtue needed is humility. Augustine has much to say, Thomas notes, about human pride which humbles God. Christ was subject to human beings as you are to prelates, he says (university students at Paris in his time already had occasional confrontations with authorities of one kind or another). Prelates too need to be humble because everyone has to be obedient. If a person is to arrive at maturity in human relationships he must have 'obedience as leading to good'. Christ himself showed the highest obedience, obedient not just in small things which most of us can manage, but obedient in great things. 'He was subject to them' (Luke 2:51). 'They', the Gloss says, 'were honest and just, poor and needy, seeking the necessities of life through continuous labours' and Christ worked with them. Perhaps Thomas wants to remind his listeners of the *rusticus* mentioned earlier, the peasant who must work hard physically and whose lifestyle the student might be tempted to denigrate. His next comment makes it clear that he does indeed intend this allusion: 'many come to study and want to mature in wisdom intending not to go down but to go up, not in order to be in Nazareth but in order to live in the ugliness of sin, not in order to be subjects but in order to be prelates – but Christ went down with them to Nazareth and was subject to them'.

At the same time, if we are to be mature in our dealings with others, discretion is required along with piety, purity and humility. Certainly we must obey superiors but it is God we obey rather than human beings. Christ was obedient to human beings but only in things that did not draw him away from the Father's business.

Conclusion

Fr Bataillon's claim that this sermon contains thoughts on pedagogy that are original and of great interest is borne out by an examination of its contents. The sermon does not pretend to re-consider the theoretical explanations of teaching that we find in ST 1 117 and *De veritate* 11, but speaks instead about the life of scholarship and learning within a broader human and theological context, identifying the spiritual, moral and practical considerations that the one seeking knowledge and wisdom needs to keep in mind. It is a text that also gives us a stronger sense of the personality of Thomas Aquinas than is usually available from his writings. Here we see him engaging with an audience of a particular kind and doing it with irony, humour and understanding. For him, as mentioned earlier, Jesus of Nazareth is the most excellent of teachers. In a sermon preached at a time of tension and bitterness in the university at Paris, Thomas opts to recall his hearers to their central concern and responsibility, the pursuit of wisdom and truth.

We noted that he emphasises peace in PI. In considering another moment in the life of Jesus the teacher, Thomas again makes reference to the necessity of peace for teaching and learning. Why does John 13:12 tell us that Jesus 'resumed his place' before he began to teach them the meaning of his action in washing their feet? Because, Thomas says, *doctrina debet esse in tranquillitate* (*Super Evang Ioannis lectura* cap.XIII, lectio III, §1770), teaching needs to be done in tranquillity. Throughout PI Thomas acknowledges more than once the turbulence of adolescence. As an adolescent Jesus went up to 'Jerusalem', to the 'vision of peace', thereby identifying with that youthful desire for a wisdom and a truth that will bear fruit in peace. Thomas teaches his listeners practical ways to fulfil that desire through listening, enquiring, responding and meditating, a method of learning that is at once critical and contemplative, in pursuit of knowledge and wisdom.

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