CHAPTER THREE

BENE VIVERE ET BENE DOCERE: THE ROLE OF THE
LIBERAL ARTS IN BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

The academic culture of the eleventh century has commonly been studied as the precursor to the more remarkable trends of twelfth-century scholasticism. In the twelfth century, the study of dialectic superseded the other arts of the trivium (grammar and rhetoric), and the application of dialectic to doctrine permanently changed the methods, outlook, and even the physical institutions of the theological enterprise. The eleventh century is examined as the starting point of this change. This attention to Lanfranc’s era is evident in Haskins’s classic, The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century, and echoed in subsequent studies. Haskins directed that inquiry into the origins of the twelfth-century’s intellectual revival needs particularly to be pushed back into the eleventh century, that obscure period of origins which holds the secret of the new movement, well before those events of crusade and conquest which fail as explanations chiefly because they come too late. Meanwhile we may simplify the problem in some degree by remembering that we have to deal with an intensification of intellectual life rather than with a new creation, and that the continuity between the ninth and the twelfth centuries was never broken.1

This “obscure period of origins” has been studied for the development in its institutions of learning, the availability of specific texts, the transmission of manuscripts, and, particularly, for the evolving methods that culminated in twelfth-century scholasticism. Fundamentally, historians have looked to the eleventh century for the origins of a dialectical component to theological investigation.

Lanfranc’s school at Bec is looked to as one of the more tangible examples of eleventh-century learning.2 Certainly, Lanfranc was familiar

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2 This is also a theme established by Haskins, Renaissance, 27, 38–9. Surveys of western culture continue to include Lanfranc as an important example of eleventh-century
with the texts of the *trivium* arts. For instance, an eleventh-century catalogue from the monastery of St. Aper at Toul listed a book titled *Lantfrancus de dialectica*, and another eleventh-century catalogue from Saxony recorded the *Questiones Lantfranci* in its collection. Neither text survives. Several notes in the eleventh-century apparatus to the *Institutiones* of Priscian, known as the *Glosule*, were attributed to Lanfranc, as were surviving notes on Cicero’s *De inventione* and the *Ad Herennium*. Christ Church catalogues also recorded a copy of Priscian that was given to the library by Lanfranc. Lanfranc was the teacher of St. Anselm, certainly the most gifted early synthesizer of the arts and theology, and Lanfranc himself was among the earliest and most noted of the combatants of Berengar of Tours in the controversy that debated not only the meaning of the eucharist, but, fundamentally, the appropriate use of the arts in the formulation of theology. Meanwhile, his contemporary reputation included his facility with the arts. Pope Nicholas entrusted his own men to be educated at Bec: “To be taught the arts of dialectic and rhetoric in which we have heard God has given you a special ability.” For Lanfranc’s pupil Guitmund of Aversa, God caused the liberal arts to have new warmth and life through Lanfranc. Scholarly consensus, both medieval and modern, has attributed to Lanfranc a specialized skill in the *trivium* arts.

According to his contemporaries, Lanfranc’s reputation in the arts was associated with his emerging expertise as an exegete. Sigebert of Gembloux wrote:

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7 “...cumqueperi ipsum D. Lanfrancum virum aequo doctissimum liberales artes Deus recallecere, atque optime reviviscere fecisset....” Guitmund of Aversa, *De corporis*, *PL*. 149, 1428.