CHAPTER 1

Filiae Magistri: Peter Lombard’s Sentences and Medieval Theological Education “On the Ground”

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Introduction

The utility of Peter Lombard’s book as a pedagogical tool is conspicuously attested by the fact that from the thirteenth until the sixteenth century the Sentences became the standard university text on which all aspiring masters of theology were required to lecture publicly. Indeed, there is no piece of Christian literature, save the Bible, that has been commented on more frequently: Friedrich Stegmüller’s 1947 Repertorium lists 1,407 commentaries on the Lombard’s book, and a number of others have been uncovered in the six decades since this publication.1 Despite the great fame that both Peter Lombard and the Sentences enjoyed throughout the high and late Middle Ages, most modern scholars (even scholars of scholastic theology and philosophy) have tended until very recently either to disparage or to completely overlook the man and his achievement. Peter has been generally viewed as little more than an uncreative compiler of ancient texts, rather than an innovative author or an original thinker.2 Simply put, the Lombard’s purpose and method in this work do not comport with the modern scholarly assumptions concerning great thinkers and good books: in fact, they run contrary to them.3

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1 See Rosemann, Peter Lombard, 3.
2 See Colish, Peter Lombard, 1.4–11.
3 Giulio Silano explains: “We tend to like authors who self-assertively speak in the first person singular and who tell us with some degree of brazenness how original they are. If this becomes what we require in the books we read, then what were regarded as the virtues of
Lesley Smith has recently provided a much-needed corrective to our modern, anachronistic assumptions about and valuation of medieval literary production. By looking at the collaborative context at Saint-Jacques in which Hugh of Saint-Cher and his Dominican confreres produced the *Postilla in totam Bibliam*, itself an updating of the *Glossa ordinaria*, Smith demonstrates that “the way we have studied the thinkers and writings of the early schools has done violence to a fuller understanding of what the participants themselves thought they were doing—and so to our historical picture of the time.”\(^4\)

Particularly in the case of authorship, Smith notes, modern scholars have the tendency to wear Romantic spectacles, employing the notion of the author—whether it be of a text, a picture, a sculpture, or any other piece of creative work—as an individual (and preferably tortured) genius. This perspective is inimical to the medieval view of authorship, which was focused strongly on purpose rather than on a sense of authorial originality or even creation for its own sake.\(^5\) Indeed, as Alain Boureau has noted in a study of Hugh of Saint-Cher’s *Sentences* commentary, the concern with originality, singularity, and individual variation had virtually no place in the theological culture of the Middle Ages.\(^6\) Boureau estimates that eighty percent of the questions that constitute Hugh’s *Scriptum* represent more or less literal rewritings of material from William of Auxerre, Alexander of Hales, and other contemporaries.\(^7\) And it must be kept in mind that the texts of Augustine constitute approximately ninety percent of the *Sentences* themselves. Furthermore, Peter Lombard did not individually peruse and uniquely excerpt from the late antique bishop’s writings; rather, he mined the collections of his own contemporaries (most notably, Abelard’s *Sic et non* and Gratian’s *Decretum*) in producing his compilation.\(^8\) It is surely significant that at several points throughout his work, Peter apologizes to the reader if his own voice, his own opinion as distinct from that of the *auctoritas* works like Peter’s . . . become vices” (Peter Lombard, *The Sentences*, Book 1: *The Mystery of the Trinity*, trans. Giulio Silano [Toronto, 2007], xxx [hereafter: *Sentences*, trans. Silano, Book 1]).


5 See ibid., 255.


8 See *Sentences*, trans. Silano, Book 1, xxvii.