Friars and the Preparation of Pastoral Aids

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It was a Dominican friar, Leonard Boyle, who pioneered the modern study of pastoralia. Boyle’s definition of what the genre comprised includes ‘any and every aid to the Cura animarum … [T]he term embraces any literary aid or manual which can be of help to the priest in the Cura animarum, whether with respect to his own education as pastor or to the education of the people in his charge.’ Such an all-encompassing definition was understandable in staking a claim for pastoral materials as an object of study; but its inclusion of materials for priests and laity, from episcopal constitutions to a saint’s life or a devotional commonplace book, leaves a chapter such as this with an embarrassment of riches. Should we try to touch on everything, or is it better to focus on those types of literature which seem to represent a peculiarly Franciscan contribution to the subject? We are at least able to ignore sermons and aids to sermon preparation, Rules and Rule commentary, and biblical exegesis, since these are addressed by other chapters in this volume.

Dominican examples predominate among those Boyle provides to illustrate his schema. Bert Roest’s specifically Franciscan compendium of the literature of religious instruction narrows Boyle’s definition and provides more pertinent material, but his examples are often European rather than English, and the majority were created much later than the mid-fourteenth-century terminus of this volume. Indeed, the English focus of the volume gives rise to other questions: May we include material written for English Franciscans but not by them? And what should be the status of English Franciscans working abroad? The answer to the first question is important for the space it affords Robert Grosseteste, first lector to the Oxford Franciscans from 1229 or 1230 to 1235.

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2 Bert Roest, Franciscan Literature of Religious Instruction before the Council of Trent (Leiden, 2004).
3 Richard W. Southern, Robert Grosseteste: The Growth of an English Mind in Medieval Europe,
His is arguably the best-known name of any mentioned in this chapter, and it seems perverse to exclude him entirely, especially since the raison d’être of the Oxford convent was to prepare brothers to be lectors in houses elsewhere.4 Although he never became a friar himself, Grosseteste taught theology to the brothers and shared their sense of the importance of the pastoral mission—something he vigorously put into practice when he was made bishop of Lincoln in 1235. His little treatise, *Templum Dei* (or *Templum Domini*) might indeed have been written just before he became Franciscan lector or as a response to his time with them.5 It was intended to provide a pocket guide for priests examining penitents, and about three-quarters of the text is presented in the form of diagrams, lists and charts; the rest of the work includes material on vices and virtues, the Lord’s Prayer, the Decalogue, the Beatitudes and much else. Like many of Grosseteste’s works, its structure is not always simple to follow, but the little book was clearly popular: more than ninety manuscripts are still extant. Grosseteste admitted to his friend (and friar) Adam Marsh that he was not himself very suited to pastoral care; but he was perhaps better at the theory than the practice.6

The second question, on the status of Franciscans working abroad, is pertinent because of the number of Englishmen among the most important theologians who were based in the Franciscan convent at Les Cordeliers in Paris, the most important European centre for biblical and theological research in our period. Alexander of Hales (the first Franciscan to hold a teaching chair in theology in Paris), William of Milton or Melitona, Duns Scotus and Roger Bacon, among others, wrote sophisticated works of speculative theology and biblical commentary. These Englishmen abroad were the brightest of their respective generations of Franciscan scholars. They had either themselves gravitated to the academic life of Paris, and then joined the order in the city, or they were

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5 In the introduction to their edition of the *Templum Dei* (Toronto, 1984), Joseph W. Goering and Frank A.C. Mantello argue for an early date of composition, between 1220 and 1230, although they acknowledge that the terminal date might be any before 1246.