1. The Paris and Oxford Condemnations and their Connection to Thomas Aquinas

It has been generally assumed that following the aftermath of the Paris and Oxford condemnations of 1277 and 1284 respectively, in which important Thomistic theses were at least indirectly compromised (in the case of the condemnation at Paris), a “movement” in defence of Thomas Aquinas’ doctrine emerged which eventually resulted into a “Thomistic school”. The main representatives of this movement were not only defending the person of their fellow brother, but also “the meaning and implications” of the “Thomist innovations”, their acceptance of which constitutes the characteristic mark of the members of this movement. Thus as early as the 1280s there was a Thomistic school of thought being formed mainly as a response to ecclesiastical intervention, and led by a group of English and French Dominicans who understood the full import of the current Thomistic tenets.


2 See F.E. Kelley, The Thomists and Their Opponents at Oxford in the Last Part of the Thirteenth Century, unpublished PhD thesis, Oxford University 1977 (MS. Bodleian D.Phil. D. 6258), p. ii. Kelley’s introductory passage runs as follows: “In the years following the 1277 condemnation of St. Thomas’ teaching at Oxford until the end of the century, there appeared by way of reaction to the condemnation what one might call the early Thomistic movement. Its literary remains are ample enough to enable the historian to form a picture of the principal persons of this school [. . .]”, p. i. (My italics) See also F.J. Roensch, Early Thomistic School, Dubuque, Iowa 1964, ix: “[. . .] the doctrine of the unicity of substantial form in creatures constituted the most basic yardstick by which to judge the character of any early Thomist at the time. [. . .]. It is by the acceptance or rejection of these theses [viz. the unicity of form, the pure potentiality of primary matter, the spirituality of separated substances] along with their correct understanding that the Thomism of an early defender of St. Thomas must be judged”. Subsequently, Roensch embarks on a bio-bibliographical account of the representations of an “early English school” and an “early French school”. Roensch, then, seems to make the same equation as Kelley between “Thomism” (i.e. a philosophical and/or theological allegiance to Aquinas’ main tenets) and a “Thomistic school”.

3 Kelley 1977 (op. cit., above, n. 2), 4. Also see F.E. Kelley, Two Early English Thomists:
This approach, in its turn, has been based on a traditional understanding of the 1277 and 1284 condemnations, particularly that of 7 March 1277 in Paris. According to this view, Bishop Stephen Tempier’s condemnation was a reaction to “heterodox” Aristotelianism at the faculty of arts. Tempier was acting after the orders of Pope John XXI, who had asked him to conduct an inquiry concerning dangerous doctrines reported to be circulating at the University. As a result, Tempier formed a commission of sixteen theologians, including Henry of Ghent, and had a list of 219 propositions drawn up somewhat hastily—so that the order of the propositions appears disorganised and the names of scholars behind these propositions do not appear specified. Without reporting back to the Pope, Tempier issued this condemnation on 7 March 1277 on his own authority. Within ten days, on 18 March, a prohibition by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Kilwardby, was issued in Oxford, this time envisioning directly Aquinas’ thesis on the unicity of substantial form. On 29 October 1284, in a visit to the Oxford Chapter, John Pecham, Kilwardby’s successor as Archbishop, ratified his predecessor’s


Among the main upholders of this view, are P. Mandonnet, Siger de Brabant et l’averroïsme latin au XIIIe siècle, 2 volumes, Louvain 1908-11, I, 28-9, 59-63, 142-95; F. Van Steenberghen, Aristotle in the West, Louvain 1955, 198-208; id., La Philosophie au XIIIe siècle, second ed., Louvain 1991, 354-59; and also by the latter, Maître Siger de Brabant, Louvain 1977, 149-58; R. Hissette, Albert le Grand et Thomas d’Aquin dans la censure Parisienne du 7 mars 1277, in: Miscellanea Mediaevalia, 15 (1982), 226-46, esp. 235, 237-41, 246; John F. Wippel, Medieval Reactions to the Encounter Between Faith and Reason, Milwaukee 1995; id., Thomas Aquinas and the Condemnation of 1277, in: The Modern Schoolman, 72 (1995), 233-72. For Wippel, however, it is clear that, as contemporaries such as William de la Mare, Godfrey of Fontaines, and John of Naples indicate in their different ways, a number of the propositions condemned on 7 March 1277 were aimed directly at Aquinas (cf. Wippel 1995 (Thomas Aquinas), 241, 268-9). In this Wippel’s position differs notably from that of Hissette, who believes that, although some of the propositions were common to masters of arts and Aquinas, the condemnation indirectly affected Aquinas.