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Psalms and the City: John Halgrin of Abbeville and the Paris Context of a Scholastic Psalms Commentary

Though they were at the core of monastic prayer and a staple of contemplative practice, the Psalms also lent themselves extraordinarily well to addressing the dangers and temptations of the active life. In this short essay I would like to explore scholastic exegesis of the Psalms as a means of addressing social and moral issues in the context of Paris in the early 1200s. The real-life context of medieval scholastic commentaries on the Psalms is something of which few modern scholars make note, and one might argue that these commentaries are not even “scholastic,” as they lack significant “rational organisation” (commentaries are, naturally, constrained to the order of the text they comment). Still, the phrase “scholastic Psalms commentary” is not an oxymoron. These commentaries were generated in the cathedral schools, embedded in their urban context, and as the Parisian schools developed into the University, traditional commentaries on the Psalms changed as they continued to reflect the real-life environment and the immediate concerns of their scholarly authors and audiences. The range of emotions and human experience that fill the Psalms provided opportunity to connect to the spiritual lives of clerics in training as well as the urban laity; the immediacy and intimacy with which the Psalms text is applied can provide us with a vivid portrait of a commentary’s moment in time, its sense of place.

There are over seventy solidly attributed secular and mendicant Psalms commentaries from the “long thirteenth century,” at least twenty of which were produced in Paris, and many more anonymous and pseudonymous.¹ It seems as if

1. See the painstaking work of Martin Morard, “Entre mode et tradition: Les commentaires des Psaumes de 1160 à 1350,” in *La Bibbia del XIII secolo: Storia del testo, storia dell’esegesi*, ed. Giuseppe Cremonesi, Convegno della Società Internazionale per lo studio del Medioevo Latino (SISMEL), Firenze, 1–2 giugno 2001 (Florence: SISMEL, 2004), 323–52; urban contexts of commentaries, esp. 330–32; list of seventy-two principal attributed commentaries at 350–52. As Morard points out (344), these are only the ones that were written down; many more must have been taught orally but never “published.”

almost every important (and unimportant) theology master in the urban schools produced Psalms commentaries, whether they wrote them up or lectured on them only, since they could not afford to neglect a text so fundamental to the divine office and so familiar to both clerical and lay audiences to whom most of their students would presumably be ministering. It should not be surprising, then, that the commentaries they wrote reflected not only the latest methods in pedagogy and organisation, but also the environment of their daily lives – their clerical duties, their extra-curricular audiences, current affairs, and the moral challenges presented by a bustling and presumably sinful city.

In a series of conference presentations I have worked through some issues regarding this “urban” angle of Psalms commentaries: how the need to teach and train new preachers affected the methods and formats used to comment the Psalms and how the content of the commentaries reflected the urban context of the students and their intended audiences. In this essay, I will look at some ways one particular Psalms commentary directly addressed the social, economic, and moral environment in which these masters and students lived: the commentary by John Halgrin of Abbeville,² written between 1210 and 1218 in the city of Paris. I will begin with a sketch of the great issues which exercised the Parisian masters of the day, after which I will describe John’s career and the manuscript tradition of his commentary. Last, I will explore how John’s commentary – both in content and in format – responds directly to events that caused great religious tumult in Paris at the time, while also revealing the tensions generated by the social and economic mobility among the academic community in a great city, especially the attendant dangers of arrogance, ambition, and greed.

The Urban Context

Obviously, these last three constitute the great trinity of vice that so monopolises the wave of sermon-writing of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.³ It is already at the core of the “moral school” associated with Peter the Chanter.⁴ Beryl Smalley, with typical perspicacity, noted that John’s Psalms commentary “represents a link between the era of the ‘biblical moral school’ and the second decade

2. See below, note 55 and Appendix II, for manuscripts and a (misattributed) edition.

3. Nicole Bériou, *L’avènement des maîtres de la Parole: La prédication à Paris au XIII^e siècle* (Paris: Institut d’Études Augustiniennes, 1998), 1: 63.

4. Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 197; citing Martin Grabmann, *Die Geschichte der scholastischen Methode*, vol. II, *Die scholastische Methode im 12. und beginnenden 13. Jahrhundert* (Freiburg: Herder, 1911; reprint Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1988), 467.

of the thirteenth century” and indeed a link between the teaching in Paris and in England.⁵ But aside from her astute observations (tangential to a study of the sermons of Robert Bacon) this commentary, while occasionally mentioned, has received little attention. Extensive consideration has been given to John’s thoroughgoing post–Lateran IV reforms as papal legate to Spain, shedding light on his career-long devotion to its themes.⁶ In addition, John’s single crusades sermon (also dating from his sojourn in Paris) and to a lesser degree his Sunday sermons and other exegetical writings⁷ have been studied in light of recent interest in the important role of Parisian masters in training preachers and preparing preaching materials, especially regarding heresy and crusades.⁸ Otherwise John’s teaching and his Paris career have gone largely unexplored.

John’s commentary reflects the environment of Paris in the 1210s. As scholars from John Baldwin to Jacques Verger and Nathalie Gorochov have highlighted, the academic community in Paris, and to a degree in other large cities, was a social and economic anomaly. Both urban and ecclesiastical organisational idiosyncrasies play into this. On the one hand, students and masters in Paris were granted special clerical privileges, shielding them (and, in general, their entourages) from the heavy hand of the secular courts. The provost of the city of

5. Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 265; and her “Robert Bacon and the Early Dominican School at Oxford,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, Fourth Series*, 30 (1948): 1–19, especially 4–8.

6. Peter Linehan, “A Papal Legation and Its Aftermath: Cardinal John of Abbeville in Spain and Portugal, 1228–1229,” *A Ennio Cortese: Scritti promossi da Domenico Maffei ...* (Rome: Il Cigno, 2001), 236–56; reprint *Historical Memory and Clerical Activity in Spain and Portugal* (Milton: Taylor and Francis, Variorum Collected Studies, 2018), 236–56; *The Spanish Church and the Papacy in the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), especially 48–49; I am grateful to Jessalynn Bird for letting me see proofs of her article “Inquisitorial Identity and Authority in Thirteenth-Century Exegesis and Sermons: Jean Halgrin d’Abbeville, Jacques de Vitry, and Humbert of Romans,” in *Inquisition and Knowledge*, ed. Lucy Sackville and Peter Bille (York: York Medieval Press, forthcoming).

7. All, apparently, composed during his years at the Curia, though presumably based on material from his teaching days.

8. Penny J. Cole, *The Preaching of the Crusades to the Holy Land, 1095–1270* (Cambridge, MA: The Medieval Academy of America, 1991), 150–56; her edition of the sermon *ad crucisignatos*, 222–26; Jessalynn Bird, “Crusade and Reform: The Sermons of Bibliothèque nationale, Ms. nouv. acq. lat. 999,” in *The Fifth Crusade in Context: The Crusading Movement in the Early Thirteenth Century*, ed. E.J. Myland, Guy Parry, Thomas W. Smith, and Jan Vandeburie (London: Routledge, 2017), 92–113, especially 97–98; L.J. Bataillon, “Early Scholastic and Mendicant Preaching as Exegesis of Scripture,” *Ad Litteram: Authoritative Texts and Their Medieval Readers*, ed. Mark D. Jordan and Kent Emory Jr. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 165–98, especially 172–74; his edition of John’s sermon for the second Sunday of Advent, 177–86.

Paris could arrest them but (in theory) had to avoid physical harm and keep them in a respectable location until able to hand them over to ecclesiastical authorities for judgement.⁹ This set them apart from their fellow urbanites even as they participated in the daily interactions that led – apparently so easily – to disturbances of the peace and infractions of the law. It was a constant reminder of their status as “those who prayed,” but equally clearly engendered a smug sense of privilege among certain members of the academic community.¹⁰ On the other hand, the natural mobility of the city militated against a rigid reflection of “standard” medieval social hierarchy. Serfs were allowed to redeem themselves for cash; artisanal and real estate transactions provided means of economic fluidity; “foreign” merchants and moneychangers become local fixtures; professional royal administrators, many “new men” themselves, settled in the new capital.¹¹ Legal and social statuses changed along with economic status, and those fluctuations could cause consternation.¹²

On the Left Bank, the University and the schools that preceded it¹³ provided a parallel environment to the social and economic fluidity of the Ville. The normal hierarchies of noble and common, of rich and poor, of local and foreign, could not be effortlessly maintained in the seething meritocracy of scholarship. While one’s family connections and personal wealth – if one had any – would

9. John W. Baldwin, *Masters, Princes and Merchants: The Social Views of Peter the Chanter and His Circle*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 1: 137–39 and 2: 96–103. Note that although theoretically the masters and students, as clergy, should be under ecclesiastical control, in reality it was a hotly contested issue, and Philip Augustus’s granting of *speciale prerogativum defensionis* was a major concession: Baldwin, “Masters at Paris from 1179–1215: A Social Perspective,” *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, ed. Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 138–72, at 142.

10. Jacques Verger, “Les conflits ‘Town and Gown’ au Moyen Âge: Essai de typologie,” in *Les universités et la ville au Moyen Âge: Cohabitation et tension*, ed. Patrick Gilli, Jacques Verger, and Daniel Le Blévec (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 237–56, especially 242, 247–48, 252–54.

11. Simone Roux, *Paris in the Middle Ages*, trans. Jo Ann McNamara (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 20–21, 66–68; Keith D. Lilley, *Urban Life in the Middle Ages 1000–1450* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 200–204; Anne Lombard-Jourdan, *Paris – Genèse de la “Ville”: La rive droite de la Seine des origines à 1223* (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1976), 141.

12. Simone Roux repeats an enduring bromide: that many, including the lowliest, would have taken comfort in the rigidity of the social structure and their fixed place within it: *Paris in the Middle Ages*, 66. I have always suspected this to be wishful thinking on the part of the non-lowly.

13. I am a gradualist regarding the question of when the schools officially became the University: somewhere between the privileges granted by Philip Augustus in 1200 and the statutes of Robert of Courçon in 1215; that is, during the time John was there.

naturally be of tremendous help, the academic world was precisely the place to go to hitch oneself up out of one's birthright and into higher spheres of action. In his look at the three decades before Lateran IV, John Baldwin was able to ascertain the social status of about a third of forty-seven identified regent masters active in Paris: of that third, half came from the lower levels of landed aristocracy, i.e., castellans and below.¹⁴ Yet of those masters whose subsequent careers are known to us, nearly half rose high in ecclesiastical ranks: bishops, archbishops, and cardinals.¹⁵ Nathalie Gorochov's prosopographic study of the period 1200–1231 confirms that at least a quarter of her rather larger database was of the *petit et moyenne noblesse*, come to the Paris schools from Italy, England, and all over France.¹⁶ She posits that the Italians and Romans precipitated the trend in order to gain an advantage in the skirmish for top ecclesiastical positions, the English and French following their lead with hopes of social ascent.¹⁷ Her sources confirm that the bourgeois, artisan, and peasant classes are represented, albeit weakly, and concludes that there were quite marked socio-economic contrasts and tensions among the community of masters in Paris.¹⁸ Just as John was arriving to study in Paris, ca. 1200, across the Channel Walter Map was also satirising

14. Baldwin, "Masters at Paris from 1179–1215," 150–51.

15. Baldwin, "Masters at Paris from 1179–1215," 151.

16. Nathalie Gorochov, "Les maîtres parisiens et la genèse de l'université (1200–1231)," *Cahiers de recherches médiévales et humanistes* 18 (2009): 53–73, at 58. For many of her masters, the original social status is simply unknown; this holds true for Baldwin's study too. As to the social rank of the masters who were not so identified, one might speculate whether a master's elevated or lower-class origins would have been considered more worthy of record: was it more noteworthy whether a master was of noble stock or whether he rose from nothing by dint of intelligence and grace? If a master's humble rank is not identified, is it because it was an embarrassment, or too normal to notice? There may be more artisan and even peasant masters than we know of. See also Nathalie Gorochov, *Naissance de l'université: Les écoles de Paris d'Innocent III à Thomas d'Aquin, v. 1200 – v. 1245* (Paris: Champion, 2012).

17. Gorochov, "Les maîtres parisiens," 61. Gorochov cites confirmation from English sources in Julia Barrow, "Education and the Recruitment of Cathedral Canons in England and Germany (1100–1225)," *Viator* 20 (1989): 117–37. Earlier, Lothario dei Segni, from a family of minor nobles, studied in Paris from about 1170 before becoming pope 1198–1216; his predecessors Celestine II (1143–44), Alexander III (1159–81) and Celestine III (1191–98) were also products of urban schools. Later in the thirteenth century, of course, Jacques Pantaléon, the son of a cobbler in Troyes, rose through study in Paris right to the papacy as Urban IV (1261–64), and from the same time Jacques Verger offers the example of master Robert of Douai (d. 1258), who rose to wealth and high connections from the "petits gens": "Deux maîtres parisiens du XIII^e siècle dans la société de leur temps, à travers leurs testaments," *Itinéraires du Savoir de l'Italie à la Scandinavie (Xe–XVI^e siècle)*, ed. C. Péneau (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2009), 201–17, at 204 and 221.

18. Gorochov, "Les maîtres parisiens," 63–65.

rustici who sent their children to be educated in the arts, “non ut exeant a viciis, set ut habundent diviciis.”¹⁹ Though social climbing seems to have been regarded askance since the dawn of time, or at least since the dawn of society, criticism of the connection between education and upward mobility seems particularly acute at the turn of the thirteenth century.

The natural meritocracy fomented by scholarly competition seems to have created a distinct sort of awareness of the artificiality and randomness of social and economic status in the academic community. Having stepped away from the family circle and into the world of academic Paris, one’s income might be patched together from small prebends or benefices, eking out enough to make ends meet. A benefice “back home” was likely to be a sinecure, or at least absenteeism in the post was more or less expected, despite reformist murmurs.²⁰ The accumulation of plural benefices *per se* does not seem to have been a topic of debate in Paris at this time, though the calculated amassing and commutation of them for venal reasons was widely condemned as simony.²¹ John himself was supported by at least one such position, though its details are unclear; if it did involve absenteeism, one wonders, in light of his later reputation as a stickler about this particular clerical vice, how he felt about it.²² But there was a practical need to finance academic careers, because not all masters had access to personal wealth: the delicate admission by theologians and canonists that fees paid to penurious masters

19. Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, ed. and trans. M.R. James, rev. C.N.L. Brooke and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), I.10 (p. 12 Latin, p. 13 English). One might loosely render Walter’s pun “not to lose a wealth of vice but to gain vicious wealth.” It works better in Latin. Walter himself rose through schooling to be chancellor and then precentor at Lincoln, and ultimately archdeacon in Oxford; he never quite made it to bishop: *De nugis* xv–xix.

20. On the use of benefices and prebends in the schools, see Gordon Leff, *Paris and Oxford Universities in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (London: Wiley, 1968), 67–68; Gaines Post, *The Papacy and the Rise of the Universities* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 178–80, 212–15.

21. Charles de Miramon, “La place d’Hugues de Saint-Cher dans les débats sur la pluralité des bénéfices (1230–1240),” *Hugues de Saint-Cher* (†1263) *bibliste et théologien*, ed. L.-J. Bataillon, G. Dahan, P.-M. Gy (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 341–86; especially regarding John of Abbeville, 348–53. See also Jacques Le Goff, *Intellectuals in the Middle Ages*, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan (London: Blackwell, 1993), 96; originally published as *Les Intellectuels au Moyen Âge* (1957; repr., Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1985).

22. See below for John’s Paris career. Peter Linehan notes John’s “novel” and very unwelcome insistence on liturgical participation by prebendaries in Iberia during his tour as papal legate 1228–29: no pray, no pay. See Linehan, “A Papal Legation and Its Aftermath,” 243. For a nuanced look at how John understood canon *De multa* of Lateran IV, see Charles de Miramon, “La place d’Hugues de Saint-Cher,” 351–52.

did not count as simony was a tacit recognition of the economic unevenness within the community.²³

As other scholars have argued, it was in part the extreme and unusual heterogeneity of this interest group, this community of scholars, that pushed them to create various means to unify against outside pressures and threats: from rent controls and distinctive garb to forcing the chancellor of the cathedral to license the candidates forwarded by the corporation of masters.²⁴ But we can also see this tension in their academic writings. It does not manifest in an anachronistic orgy of egalitarianism, but it does show up in the sensitivity to ambition, wealth, and pride which, it seems to me, is notably more specific than the expected Christian generic admonitions against *avaricia* and *superbia*. Pointed criticism of students who specialised in the *artes*, medicine, and law reflected, naturally, the theologians' sense of superiority over all other disciplines; but it also signaled unease with the striving for economic upward mobility that these lucrative career choices made possible.²⁵ Careerism, rather than dedication to spreading the Word of God, was associated with simony and usury: all three were putting Mammon before God and prioritised things of this world over things of the next.²⁶ This worry was concretised at reforming councils in Paris (1213) and Reims (1214) which passed decrees prohibiting clergy with pastoral duties from following courses in medicine and law.²⁷ Already teaching theology in Paris when these

23. Baldwin, *Masters, Princes and Merchants*, 1: 122–29.

24. Peter Classen, "La curia romana e le scuole di Francia nel secolo XII," *Le istituzioni della Societas Christiana dei secoli XI–XII: Papato cardinalato e episcopato* (Milan: Vita e pensiero, 1974), 432–36; Jacques Verger, "À propos de la naissance de l'Université de Paris: Contexte social, enjeu politique, portée intellectuelle," *Les Universités françaises au Moyen Âge* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 1–35; Stephen Ferruolo, *The Origins of the University: The Schools of Paris and Their Critics, 1100–1215* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985).

25. Cole, *The Preaching of the Crusades*, 153–54, in reference to John of Abbeville's sermon *ad cruce signatus*; Bériou, *L'avènement des maîtres de la Parole*, 64. See also Alexander Murray's musings in *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 81–109 and 218.

26. For discussion of the economic ideas of John's contemporaries Robert of Courçon and Thomas of Chobham, see Odd Langholm, *Economics in the Medieval Schools* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 39–62.

27. This concern is taken even further in 1219 when Honorius III issued *Super speculam*, banning (ineffectively) the teaching of law and medicine in Paris: *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis*, ed. Heinrich Denifle, 4 vols. (Paris: Ex typis fratrum Delalaine, 1889–97), 1: 90–93; cited in Cole, *The Preaching of the Crusades*, 154 n45. Yet we soon find in Paris Robert of Douai, commoner, *magister et physicus*, deeply involved in University culture and in royal courtly circles, leaving his *theology books* and a substantial sum of money to the new Sorbonne: Verger, "Deux maîtres," 202–3.

councils took place, John would have been among those concerned about the growing venality of the “modern” student.

Heresy was another issue that was intimately woven into city life while John was in Paris, where the first decades of the thirteenth century saw an intensification of the association between clerical vice – including the careerism mentioned above – and the spread of heresy.²⁸ The alarming affair of the Amalricians had to have shaken the city profoundly: the heresy was Paris-born, with Master Amalric of Bène using his position on the Paris faculty of theology to spread his ideas to clerics and scholars, many of whom were students of theology or the *artes* in Paris.²⁹ Amalric’s censure before his death ca. 1206, like his posthumous excommunication at the council held in Paris in 1210, may have been of interest primarily to his fellow masters (including John, newly licensed in theology that very year); but his macabre disinterment and burning as a heretic would have made for great public theatre. Even more flamboyant (literally) was the execution of ten of Amalric’s followers that same year in the great public marketplace at Champeaux, later known as Les Halles, the day after the important annual St Ladre fair ended.³⁰ Paris would have been teeming with citizens and visitors, and a good number of them must have been in contact with the condemned men, most of whom had held local positions that touched on cure of souls.³¹ This home-grown heresy fed the wave of clerical criticism inherited from an earlier period of reform. The pantheism of Amalric, for whom the Holy Spirit was incarnate in all humans, led inexorably to the notion that there was no need for sacraments, for the clergy, for the Church itself.³² As with the concurrent preaching against the Albigensian heresy, reformers felt the need to denounce the abuses of the clergy that would lend support to the anticlerical ideas generated by such a spiritual economy.³³ The council of 1210 that decided the excommunication of Amalric and the

28. Jessalynn Bird, “The Victorines, Peter the Chanter’s Circle, and the Crusade: Two Unpublished Crusading Appeals in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale Latin 14470,” *Medieval Sermon Studies* 48 (2002): 5–28, at 10–11.

29. J.M.M.H. Thijssen, “Master Amalric and the Amalricians: Inquisitorial Procedure and the Suppression of Heresy at the University of Paris,” *Speculum* 71 (1996): 43–65; Bériou, *L’avènement des maîtres de la Parole*, 51.

30. I.e., 20 November 1210. Thijssen, “Master Amalric,” 43; Gary Dickson, “The Burning of the Amalricians,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 40.3 (1989): 347–69, at 347; Lombard-Jourdan, *Paris*, 60.

31. Of the ten who were burned and four condemned to life imprisonment, at least six were priests, two were deacons, and three were subdeacons of local churches. Thijssen, “Master Amalric,” 55.

32. Bériou, *L’avènement des maîtres de la Parole*, 52.

33. See Bird, “The Victorines,” 10–11.

release of the ten confirmed and defrocked heretics to the secular arm also resolved to burn the notebooks of David of Dinant, prohibited the teaching of the newly available natural philosophy of Aristotle, and ordered the handing over of theological works in “romano” (French) – including the *Credo* and *Pater noster* – to the bishop. These conciliar decisions are further reflections of the council’s worries about the apparently free circulation of dangerous ideas between the Latinate, educated circles of the University and the citizens; as Nicole Bériou points out, the urban schools of Paris presented a real threat of intellectual and spiritual dissent and the spread of that dissent to the surrounding population.³⁴

Though its heartland was hundreds of miles from Paris, the Albigensian heresy also marked Parisian life deeply in these years, while at the same time, preparations for the Fifth Crusade were ramping up. Innocent III may have pulled the strings from Rome, but Paris was ground zero in the organisation of both operations from both a spiritual and a political angle. The canonry of St Victor, the bishop of Paris, and the masters in the University were all conscripted in the effort, and they acted with the assistance of a veritable army of preachers specially commissioned to promote the crusades and to prepare for them by recruiting warriors, raising the financial backing, and reforming the population.³⁵ The last of these was seen as key, for without the contrition, satisfaction, and penance of the Christian faithful (or more accurately the Christian unfaithful) any crusade was doomed from the start, as John of Abbeville himself warned in his sermon *ad crucisignatos*.³⁶ The general population was thus in desperate need of reform, as evidenced by the loss of Jerusalem; and the clergy, whose role was to provide the means of that reform, was in no better state. The correction of clerical abuses was thus an urgent theme for those who would fight both local and Cathar heresies as well as far-away “heathen” control of the Holy Land. Preaching, directed at fellow clerics as well as potential crusaders and the population at large, was underscored by frequent processions in Parisian parishes, which kept the subject of reform in the public eye and indeed wrote it across the parchment of the city. Masters scrambled to provide training and model sermons to ensure more and better preaching done by more and better men.

34. Bériou, *L'avènement des maîtres de la Parole*, 58.

35. Bird, “The Victorines,” is an insightful study of the Albigensian and the Fifth Crusade efforts.

36. Cole, *The Preaching of the Crusades*, 155 and her edition of the sermon, 222–26; “John of Abbeville and a Theology of War,” *Toronto Journal of Theology* 6 (1990): 56–62, at 59. John’s sermon is aimed at recruits for the Fifth Crusade, but as Cole points out (*The Preaching of the Crusades*, 173) its penitential focus makes it versatile for other purposes.

theology in Paris until he left to become cardinal-priest of San Crisogono by 1206, a position somewhat overshadowed by his appointment to the see of Canterbury the following year. He is known to have lectured on the Psalms, though no written commentary has been identified as his.⁴⁶ Peter of Poitiers succeeded Peter Comestor as chair of theology in 1167 and was chancellor 1193–1205. Despite having earned the disdain of Walter of St-Victor, who called him one of the “four labyrinths” of France for his dialectical bent,⁴⁷ Peter’s teaching on Scripture was geared towards creating good preachers. He left a set of distinctions on the Psalms for the training and use of preachers;⁴⁸ it is likely that John would have known this work, even if Peter were no longer teaching actively during his chancellorship. Prevostin of Cremona returned to Paris from Mainz about 1203, resuming his post as professor of theology and then becoming chancellor (1206–9); he also completed a *Summa super psalterium*.⁴⁹ Robert of Courçon taught theology in Paris from 1204 to 1210, becoming chancellor briefly in 1211. He took an active part in the Amalrician affair.⁵⁰ Nicholas of Amiens (d. after 1204), student of the Parisian master Gilbert of Poitiers, was possibly still lecturing on the Psalms, or perhaps on Gilbert’s Psalms commentary, while John was a student there.⁵¹ Philip the Chancellor (d. 1236) taught theology in Paris from 1206–17/8 before his eponymous promotion, so he too could have been one of John’s teachers. Philip’s Psalms commentary may not have been written down before John left Paris, but he presumably would have been lecturing on Psalms.⁵² Inter-

46. George Lacombe, “Studies on the Commentaries of Cardinal Stephen Langton, Part I,” *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 4 (1930): 5–151, at 16–17.

47. Along with Gilbert of Poitiers, Peter Lombard, and Abelard.

48. Philip S. Moore, *The Works of Peter of Poitiers* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1936), 78–96. The work survives in two formats, as a continuous commentary and as schematic distinctions.

49. George Lacombe, *La vie et les œuvres de Prévostin* (Kain, Belgium: Le Saulchoir, 1927), vii–viii, 6–46 is still the standard summary. Why Prevostin returned to Paris from Mainz is addressed by Paul B. Pixton, *The German Episcopacy and the Interpretation of the Decree of the Fourth Lateran Council 1219–1245: Watchmen on the Tower* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 120–21.

50. John W. Baldwin, *Paris, 1200* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 240.

51. Frederick Stegmüller, *Repertorium Biblicum Medii Aevi*, 11 vols. (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1950–80), Suppl. 5669: “In Gilberti Ps.”

52. Alan of Lille and William de Montibus may also have been in Paris at this time, and may have lectured on the Psalms, but evidence is discouragingly thin. Other Parisian theology masters who wrote or lectured on the Psalms may have been too early or too late for John to have been a student: Peter the Chanter, Peter of Corbeil, William of Auxerre.

estingly, not one of these commentaries provides clear textual or methodological antecedents for John's.⁵³

John left Paris for Amiens in 1218, when he was made canon, chanter, and eventually dean of its cathedral. From his deanship at Amiens he was catapulted to the archiepiscopacy of Besançon in 1225, and from there he was brought to Rome in 1226 by Honorius III, who recommended and then ratified his election as Latin Patriarch of Constantinople – an honour which John managed to dodge when the brand-new pope, Gregory IX, asked him to stay in Rome as cardinal-bishop of Santa Sabina in 1227. He spent the final decade of his life employed in papal business, preaching reform in Iberia, becoming friends with the Dominican Raymond Peñafort, presiding over councils, and in 1230 even convincing emperor Frederick II to make peace (for at least a short time) with Gregory IX. John died on September 27 of 1236 or 1237.⁵⁴

The Psalms Commentary

John's comments on the Psalter enjoyed a certain popularity, as witnessed by about fifteen extant manuscripts.⁵⁵ His other works are all exegetical or pastoral in nature, including sermons on the Sunday Gospels and on saints' feasts, preserved in several dozen manuscripts, and a commentary on the Song of Songs; these seem to have been redacted later in life, though they presumably depend on his earlier teaching. He is also the author of a sermon *ad crucisignatos*, studied by Jessalynn Bird and Penny J. Cole, from the same period as his Psalms commentary.⁵⁶

John's writings on the Psalms are hard to classify. The nature and format of the work defy easy categorisation, but I think they can be explained as a response

53. Beryl Smalley ("Robert Bacon," 6–8) came to the same conclusion.

54. Ribaillier, "Jean d'Abbeville," 250 notes that the anniversary of his death was celebrated at Amiens 23 September; he is present in an act of Gregory IX on 21 April 1236, but by 13 March 1238 he is written of as *bonae memoriae*.

55. Stegmüller, *Repertorium Biblicum*, 3: 342–43, no. 4541; Johannes Baptiste Schneyer, *Repertorium der lateinischen Sermones des Mittelalters, für die Zeit von 1150–1350*, vol. 3 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1971), 539–58, "Sermones in Psalmos" numbered 396–672. See also André Callebaut, "Les Sermons sur les Psaumes imprimés sous le nom de S. Antoine restitués au Cardinal Jean d'Abbeville," *Archivum franciscanum historium* 22.5.2 (1932): 161–74. I say "about" fifteen since a few items in Stegmüller's list pose problems (erroneous numbers, etc.). I am tracking down the manuscripts and working on sorting them out for a future publication. Of the nineteen extant manuscripts signaled by Stegmüller, I have so far been able to see eleven and I have detailed information on three others.

56. See footnote 8 above.

to the perfect storm of challenges described above. The need to transfer scholarly, classroom knowledge of Scripture into a mobile and preachable mode resulted in the somewhat peculiar configuration in which this commentary has come down to us. The work consists of comments, primarily of a moral nature, on the Psalms, presented in their biblical order, though many verses are left out. Indeed in many cases only one or two verses per psalm are commented, though some psalms⁵⁷ have six or more verses that receive comment. A few psalms are omitted entirely.⁵⁸ I have been rather stubbornly calling it a “commentary” though it is more frequently identified nowadays as a suite of sermons, and there is some virtue in such an identification. Antonio Maria Azzoguido, the eighteenth-century editor who “discovered” them and printed them as works of St Anthony of Padua,⁵⁹ called them sermons, though since the first three pages of that manuscript were already missing in 1757, no medieval title confirms this. Unsurprisingly, contemporary titles in other manuscripts, when they exist at all, are simply *expositio* or *de psalterio*.

Azzoguido’s 1757 edition, based on Bologna, Biblioteca di San Francesco <dei Frati minori conventuali>, MS 91 (*olim* Bologna, San Petronio, 87), gives the impression that the label *sermo*, the numbers from 1 to 280, and rubrics indicating the occasion on which (or the audience to which) this “sermon” should be preached are all part of the original *mise-en-page* of John’s text. However, Benvenuto Bughetti points out that the rubrics are not part of the commentary in this manuscript: they were provided by Azzoguido from a table at the end of the

57. Psalms 7, 17, 67, 77, and (unsurprisingly) 118.

58. Psalms 13, 46, 116, 122, 126, 127, 129, 133. That the two-verse Ps. 116 is missing is no surprise. However, why John ignores Ps. 129 *De profundis*, with its importance for the very current topic of penitence, is a mystery. Similarly, Ps. 13 *Dixit insipiens* should have given him plenty to work with. Ps. 127 with its insistence on fruitful wives and many children may have been a non-starter for his clerical audience. As I continue to compare different manuscripts to each other, a slight increase in coverage is appearing, since some manuscripts include entries not covered in others.

59. *Sancti Antonii Paduani Opera omnia, Expositio in Psalmos, juxta Azzoguidi edit. anno 1757*: in *Medii Aevi Bibliotheca Patristica*, series 1 (Paris: Imprimerie de la Bibliothèque Ecclésiastique, 1880), 6: col. 575–1266. Reprint from the original edition, *Antonii Ulyssiponensis cognomento patavini Sermones in Psalmos*, ed. Antonio Maria Azzoguido (Bologna: Typis Laelii a Vulpe, 1757). Callebaut corrected this misattribution, “Les Sermons sur les Psaumes.” For a careful description of manuscript Bologna, San Francesco, MS 91, and its important differences from the edition, see Benvenuto Bughetti, “Il codice bolognese dei ‘Sermones in Psalmos’ attribuiti a S. Antonio di Padova,” *Studi francescani* 29.4 (1932): 519–26. Bughetti and Stegmüller knew the manuscript as Bologna, San Petronio, 87. My thanks to Katy Darr of the Newberry Library in Chicago and Patrizia Busi of the Bibliotheca Comunale dell’ Archiginnasio, Bologna, for their aid in tracking down this elusive manuscript!

Bologna manuscript; while the numbers, though they are present in the manuscript text, are Arabic and added in a later hand.⁶⁰ The manuscript is late thirteenth century, so not among our earliest witnesses. In only one manuscript that I know of can I confirm that a numeral and (sometimes) the word *sermo* occur with any regularity,⁶¹ while added rubrics and/or numbers, often differing quite radically from those in the printed edition, appear sporadically in a few others.⁶²

Whether or not John of Abbeville intended to “market” them as sermons, there are indications that these works were meant to be orally delivered, such as occasional apostrophes like *Videte, vos clerici*. This does not in itself rule out a classroom origin, for lectures were delivered orally too, of course. They are, however, manifestly not complete sermons in themselves. They are mostly quite brief, the majority running about seven to twelve minutes, read aloud. Sermons to clerics tended to run to just shy of an hour, and to the laity maybe twenty minutes;⁶³ these would fall far short. Again, that does not necessarily mean that they were not composed as sermons. Those that have come down to us from this time are sometimes abbreviated either by their authors (shorn of specifics so that they are more widely applicable) or by their “reporters.” Still, as sermons – whether “modern” sermon or old-fashioned homily – these have no beginning, middle, or end. There is no address or exordium; the pericope, the psalm verse that begins each unit, is not developed by means of division and subdivision; they offer no conclusion. Compared to his own Sunday sermons or his sermon *ad cruce-signatos*, or for example to Thomas of Chobham’s near-contemporary sermons,⁶⁴ they are clearly of a different order. John’s approach to commenting the psalms at first looks somewhat dated, almost as if an old-fashioned homily had been trun-

60. Bughetti, “Il codice bolognese,” 521–22. He also notes that Azzoguido sometimes “corrected” the order of the items, so the edition’s numeration does not match the Bologna manuscript anyway.

61. Paris, BnF, nouv. acq. lat. 1371: fairly consistently, and apparently in the same hand as the text.

62. Paris, BnF, lat. 447: occasional numbers added later in margins; Paris, BnF, lat. 2519: some rubrics, or rather indications of topic (“de superbia” and the like) in margins; Soissons, Bibliothèque municipale, 137: numbers only, apparently in original hand; Troyes, Bibliothèque municipale, 1993: sporadic rubrics; Paris, BnF, lat. 14804: several later hands add occasional numbers, rubrics, and lots of marginal notes. The Soissons manuscript is among the earliest extant copies, dating from the time of John’s *sejour* in Paris (personal communication of Patricia Stirnemann, November 2019); unfortunately, only the first twenty-seven folios have come down to us.

63. Mark Zier, “Sermons of the Twelfth-Century Schoolmasters and Canons,” 335.

64. John’s *Sermo in secunda dominica adventus* is edited by L.-J. Bataillon, “Early Scholastic and Mendicant Preaching as Exegesis of Scripture,” in *Ad Litteram*, ed. Jordan and Emory, 165–98, at 177–86. *Thomas de Chobham: Sermones*, ed. Franco Morenzoni (Turnhout: Brepols, 1993).

cated and taken apart. But the problem dissolves if we look at them as school commentary re-tooled by their author as storehouses of themed material ready to be pillaged for the construction of a modern sermon, perhaps even for use by himself.

Beryl Smalley had suggested, on the model of some of Langton's biblical commentaries, that they are "moralities" excerpted from a (lost) longer commentary and most likely the result of student *reportationes*.⁶⁵ As I hope to indicate below, I believe she was correct on the first point but not on the second: I think these sermon-ready comments, really a sort of "concentrate of sermon," are the product of John's own response to the urgent need for preaching tools. Impelled by the same considerations that prompted others to compile alphabetic distinctions on certain books of the Bible, not the least on the Psalter,⁶⁶ John nonetheless decided on a different type of order: that of the Psalter itself. Knowing as we do that distinctions become the new technology in sermon construction, this may be seen as a rather conservative move on his part; yet considered objectively it strikes me as a rather fresh and idiosyncratic approach. It suggests that a master of theology in the 1210s was still confidently expecting his students to know the Psalter backwards and forwards, and yet his comments are a window on new world into which that master was sending his students. His comments on the Psalms are in this sense not unique: they are representative of the most significant driving force of twelfth- to thirteenth-century exegesis in the schools of Paris, namely the re-formation of a clergy that, embracing the *vita apostolica* and confident in their *scientia* of Scripture, would be properly prepared to preach that Christian perfection to the rest of the population.⁶⁷

John of Abbeville's "moralities," whatever their original composition, do not now have a prologue. That is a significant loss, since commentary prologues generally supply invaluable insights on the author's thoughts about exegetical method and the purpose of the text. However, since Psalm 1 was itself agreed

65. Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 265; "Robert Bacon," 5–6. She had access to very few manuscripts for comparison.

66. Richard H. Rouse and Mary A. Rouse, "Biblical Distinctions in the Thirteenth Century," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 41 (1974): 27–37, at 28; Siegfried Wenzel, "Distinctiones and Sermons: The *Distinctiones Lathbury* (*Alphabetum morale*) and Other Collections in Fourteenth-Century England," *Mediaeval Studies* 78 (2016): 181–202, at 182, 201–2. See also Bériou, "Les sermons latins après 1200," in *The Sermon*, ed. Kienzle, 380, 386–87.

67. Phyllis B. Roberts, "Master Stephen Langton Preaches to the People and Clergy," *Traditio* 36 (1980): 237–68.

(going back to Origen) to be the title or preface to the rest of the Psalter,⁶⁸ in the absence of a separate prologue it should provide clues to the author's program. We are instantly gratified: John's comments on Psalm 1 plunge right into the concerns that will occupy him throughout, namely the challenges outlined in the first part of this essay. John glosses Psalm 1, verses 1–4.⁶⁹ We will focus our attention on Psalm 1:1, which becomes the *thema* for a concentrated screed against the dangers posed by Paris in the 1210s: an academic community challenged by heresy, grimly justified anticlericalism, and rampant social ambition.

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat,” etc. This psalm, dealing with the “blessed man,” is to be sung during the feast of any martyr or confessor. Therefore it says: “blessed is the man who walks not” by consent “in the counsel of the wicked” – whose counsel is that wisdom of which James speaks in 3[:15]: “For this is not wisdom, descending from above: but earthly, sensual” – that is, carnal – “devilish.” For the flesh counsels, the world counsels, the devil counsels, earthly wisdom counsels.⁷⁰

68. Bruce K. Waltke and James M. Houston, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: An Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 118. Cf. *Glossa ordinaria* to Ps. 1: *Psalmus iste primus ideo videtur careere titulo quia de commendatione Christi principaliter loquitur, ad quem omnes alii psalmi pertinent ... quare videtur esse quasi titulus aliorum ...* All references to the *Glossa* on the Psalms are taken from *Biblia latina cum glossa ordinaria: Facsimile Reprint of the Editio Princeps Adolph Rusch of Strassburg, 1480/81*, vol. 3 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1992). A spot check against a random manuscript of the *Glossa* (Basel, Universitätsbibliothek, B II 3 f.1) shows quite different wording but the identical idea, and cites Hilary of Poitiers as the authority.

69. The manuscripts seem to agree that Ps. 1:1 can stand as its own as a unit, while comments on 1:2–4 are grouped as a second unit. Missing from Bologna, San Francesco, MS 91, they are nonetheless numbered *sermo* 1 and 2 in the 1757 edition, with an “argumentum” or rubric as place holder.

70. Ps. 1:1. I identify John's comments, *not* by the “sermon” numbers of the 1757 edition, but by psalm number and verse. There is no good reason to take the edition as standard numbering: its editor reordered some items, other manuscripts offer yet different orders, and there exist, in manuscripts, comments on psalms verses that are not included in the edition. I also note here that I do not consider the rubrics or arguments to be John's due to their absence from early manuscripts and the very erratic variants in later ones; they are left out of the discussion. For this essay I use Troyes, Bibliothèque municipale, 1387 checked against Arras, Bibliothèque municipale, 217; Paris, BnF, lat. 447, lat. 457, lat. 14804, nouv. acq. lat. 1371; Soissons, Bibliothèque municipale, 137 (all accessible online) and Paris, BnF, lat. 2519. Variants are negligible unless noted. Scriptural citations are rendered as in Douay-Rheims, with minor modernisations or alterations to bring it in line with John's vocabulary. Translations of comments are my own. My gratitude to assistance with some sticky Latin, given in her characteristically timely and generous manner, by Jacqueline Long; any errors and infelicities remain my own.

With his opening comment, John strikes directly at the dual scourge of simony and worldly ambition. The wisdom of this world, which counsels clerics to study medicine or law, or to neglect pastoral calling for more lucrative careers, cannot be excused as merely practical or sensible. It is “devilish” wisdom that will result in a venal clergy, avid for social and economic advancement, who will present a justifiable target for heretical anti-clerical sentiment. Even more appalling, it exacerbates the materialistic mode of life that makes it impossible for a reformed clergy to reform its flock and to regain Jerusalem.⁷¹ John understands his students: he assumes they have come to Paris to move up in the world, and he is here to remind them that this is not as innocent a move as they may think.

Before exploring the way he elaborates this theme, we should note that John’s focus on the foibles of the unblest man is distinctly unusual. For medieval western Christian exegetes to this point, the “blessed man” is Christ, the New Adam, while “old” Adam illustrates the various abstract categories of sin into which the unblest man can fall. From Augustine and Cassiodorus, the recognised subject matter of this psalm as Christ becomes enshrined in the *Glossa ordinaria* and the “ordinary” or normal medieval exegesis of Psalms. As the very first words of the very first psalm – the “title” of the Psalter – *beatus vir* defines the *materia* of the entire book: *Christus integer*, as *sponsus* and *sponsa* or as head and members.⁷² Following Jerome, the blessed man could simultaneously *also* be David or “any just man.”⁷³ But always and necessarily the blessed man was Christ. We see for example in the *Distinctions* on the Psalms by Peter of Poitiers (presumably one of John’s teachers) the expected reference to the blessed man Christ as immune to all evil and full of all good, plus a completely unoriginal list of

71. Cole, *The Preaching of the Crusades*, 153–54.

72. *Glossa ordinaria: Materia est integer Christi sponsus et sponsa*; the incipit of Gilbert of Poitiers’s popular Psalms commentary of ca. 1112 is *Christus integer caput cum membris est materia huius liber*: Paris, BnF, lat. 14418, fol. 1r. Cf. Augustine, *Enarrationes in psalmos I–L*, ed. Eligius Dekkers and Johannes Fraipont, CCL 38 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1956), Ps. 1; Cassiodorus, *Expositio Psalmorum I–LXX*, ed. Marc Adriaen, CCL 97 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1958), Ps. 1 and at length in the Preface, Cap. XIII “Quemadmodum in psalmis sit de Christo Domino sentiendum.” For a new edition of the Preface and a study of the manuscripts: *Cassiodoro: Expositio Psalmorum*, ed. Patrizia Stoppacci, vol. 1 (Florence: SISMELE, 2012).

73. For Jerome himself, in fact, it could *only* be “any just man,” not Christ: Jerome, *Homiliae*, ed. Germain Morin and Bernard Capelle, CCL 78 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1958). Hilary of Poitiers agrees. However Cassiodorus, referring delicately to “some commentators” (i.e., Hilary and Jerome) who get this wrong, sets the medieval world straight on this point. Cassiodorus’s *Explanatio in Psalmos* was very influential for the *Glossa*, for Gilbert of Poitiers and consequently for Peter Lombard.

Adam's sins as *peccati cogitatione, delectatione et opere*.⁷⁴ John's opening comments indeed lead us to anticipate some "martyr or confessor" as his *beatus vir*. However, his commentary on Psalm 1, astoundingly, mentions Christ only a single time (at the end of his comments on verse 3) and not as subject or *materia* of the psalm. Rather, he immediately swivels his focus to the wicked man and his devilish wisdom. He uses this first verse of Psalm 1, the key to the entire Psalter, to direct his exegetical program not to Christological but to current affairs. It could not be a clearer statement of intent.

Having first adduced a New Testament passage to explain his theme, John continues with a series of Old Testament passages, each of which offers fuller understanding of what the blessed man is not. In his comments on Psalm 1:1–4 (comprising the first two "sermons"), John cites the Old Testament 27 times, referencing twelve separate books, including Lamentations.⁷⁵ This virtuoso show of erudition does not, I think, suggest that John's teaching or preaching was "overload[ed] with a stifling scholarly apparatus."⁷⁶ If these were meant as model sermon outlines, or distinctions, the expectation would be that the preacher would select among the references according to his preference and his audience.⁷⁷ If that were the case for this commentary, however, there would be gaps in the interpretation, as the following passages will show. John uses each scriptural reference to explain the previous, in water-tight logical sequence, so selecting some but not others would leave holes in the explanation. These biblical passages are not mere scriptural parallels or illustrations, as in distinctions, but form the very backbone of the commentary. In a sense, they *are* the commentary. One can see John's own classroom lecture notes here, complete with chapter (though not

74. *Distinctiones super psalterium*, Paris, BnF, lat. 425, fol. 1v.

75. Job (six verbal citations), Ecclesiasticus (five) and Proverbs (three) are the heavyweights, while Wisdom, Psalms, Lamentations, Jeremias, Ezekiel, 2 Kings [2 Samuel], Canticles, Isaias, and 2 Esdras [Nehemiah] all have one to three mentions. Besides the two references to James 3, there is one citation each to Matthew, Luke, and Apocalypse; John names Gregory the Great once, in reference of course to Job. After Paschasius Radbertus and the *Glossa ordinaria* on Lamentations, signed by Gilbert the Universal, there is little evidence of interest on this book until Stephen Langton, one of John's teachers, notably lectured on it. See Athanasius Sulavik, "Principia and Introitus in Thirteenth-Century Christian Biblical Exegesis with Related Texts," in *La Bibbia del XIII Secolo*, ed. Cremascoli, 269–322, at 280–83; edition of two versions of Stephen's *Introitus super Threnos*, 298–304. Another of Stephen's contemporaries in 1180s Paris, Thomas of Chobham, later composed a sermon using Lam. 1 and 3 as pericope: *Thomas de Chobham: Sermones*, ed. Morenzoni, 64–67, Sermon VI.

76. Part of the harsh assessment of John's work given by Peter Linehan, who otherwise seems to have rather appreciated his energy and integrity: *The Spanish Church and the Papacy*, 48–49.

77. Bériou, "Les sermons latins," 363–447, at 382 and n45.

verse) for his students' benefit, tightened up and excerpted by the master himself into "sermonable" blocs. Here Beryl Smalley's historical imagination did not let her down: John surely was excerpting the moral comments and disregarding the literal ones. In the course of this procedure, John's own words are relatively few. He lets the Bible speak, as it were, for itself: instead of using the expected patristic and "modern" commentators as his authorities as in the tradition of the *Glossa*, John decides to gloss Scripture using only Scripture.

This choice – using Scripture to gloss Scripture – offers another glimpse into John's exegetical thinking while reflecting the immediate context of heresy being combatted in and from Paris. Cathars were reputed to be particularly dangerous heretics because they argued using Scripture. Across the Pyrenees, Durandus of Huesca put his crypto-Waldensian finger on the problem: they are led to perdition by a text that is true! It is their interpretation that is false,⁷⁸ and the only way to combat them is to use Scripture to correctly explain the passages that the heretics are perverting. Of course for this strategy to work, one must use authorities that one's opponents also admit, and in the case of the Cathars that would exclude the Old Testament in its entirety, including the Psalms. In the present commentary, though not directed to Cathars, the principle of explaining Scripture by means of Scripture is retained. Closer to home, the Amalricians were evidence that interpretation of the Word was being vehemently challenged. Using Scripture to gloss Scripture was a way to model the correct ways to read these passages in context. John offers no explicit reflection on the correct use of allegory or the role of historical and literal readings in exegesis. His tacit rejection of these considerations, and of authorities like the *Glossa ordinaria*, reveal him to be pushing back against the tradition of scholarly exegesis as it had been developing in the classrooms of the previous century. Other commentators and sermon writers of the time embrace the concept of using Scripture to gloss Scripture, but John is seen here as an early adopter.⁷⁹ As Nicole Bériou points out, the turn of the twelfth to thirteenth century saw a flurry of efforts to bridge the gap between classroom exegesis and the sermon:

78. Christine Thouzellier, ed., *Une Somme Anti-Cathare: Le Liber contra manicheos de Durand de Huesca* (Louvain: Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense, 1964), Prologue (with French translation), 66–85, at 82–83: "... contra pravum intellectum et depravationem Scripturarum." The treatise was composed ca. 1224, though Durandus was active in combatting this heresy since his own conversion in 1207: Introduction, 31, 37.

79. Gillian R. Evans mentions Bonaventure's explanation of how this works (in his prologue to the *Breviloquium*), and discusses how ultimately this practice does not avoid the exegetical pitfall of taking authorities out of context: "Gloss or Analysis? A Crisis of Exegetical Method in the Thirteenth Century," in *La Bibbia del XIII Secolo*, ed. Cremascoli, 93–111, at 99.

we see distinction collections organised according to Scriptural order (as Peter of Poitiers' *Distinctiones* on the Psalms) and commentary that reads much like old-fashioned homilies (as Prevostin of Cremona's Psalms commentary).⁸⁰ John's so-called sermons may be seen as a step in between: a conscious effort to create an *instrument de travail* for preaching.

Let us return to John's comments on the unblessed man:

Solomon calls us away from this counsel in Proverbs 1: "Son, if sinners entice you, do not consent to them." And immediately is added the counsel by which they cajole, that is they deceive, the less provident: "If they say 'Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood, let us hide snares for the innocent without cause;⁸¹ let us swallow him up alive like hell, and whole as one that goeth down into the pit.'" ⁸² He "lies in wait for blood" who lies in wait to deprive someone of the property from which he takes his livelihood.⁸³ For "the bread of the needy is the life of man: he that defrauds him is a man of blood."⁸⁴ "Let us hide snares," as if these are the words of the wicked, and so that you understand why they do and say these things, Solomon adds regarding the wicked man's property, "in vain," as if speaking of temporalities,⁸⁵ which are nothing but vanity.

John is accusing the unblessed man of predatory economic behavior. Medieval economic theory saw wealth as a zero-sum game: one man's gain was necessarily another's loss.⁸⁶ Living off the loss of others was defined as usury: expecting back more than you have given, according to Gratian's articulation of the issue.⁸⁷ It was condemned with increasing shrillness in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century. While most masters would not gladly have identified with the much-maligned merchant class of Paris, they were certainly active in the buying and selling of real estate, and if they owned productive or rental property as well, there were other opportunities for them to sin by making unnatural

80. Bériou, "Les sermons latins," 366, 386–87 and 162. She does not however mention John of Abbeville's Psalms comments in this context.

81. *Frustra*: without cause or in vain; John uses this word in both senses in this passage.

82. Prov. 10:11–12.

83. The Latin is convoluted: ... *qui insidiatur dampno alicuius in rebus suis, unde vivit ...*

84. Ecclesiasticus 34:25.

85. Another obscure passage: ... *addit Salomon de suo 'frustra' quasi pro temporalibus ...*

86. Diana Wood, *Medieval Economic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 111.

87. Gratian, *Decretum*, c.14. q.3 c.1 col.735; cited in Wood, *Medieval Economic Thought*, 207.

profit.⁸⁸ While predecessors and contemporaries like Peter the Chanter and Thomas of Chobham find a moral space for merchants who after all can serve a social good, any sort of profit-making was looked on with deep suspicion. In his *Summa* (ca. 1208), Robert of Courçon, certainly one of John's masters, warns that morally, any profit – indeed, any property unnecessary to sustain life immediately – is tainted goods. It is theft, it is depriving someone of his livelihood, as John says; anything not strictly needed should be given to those who are in actual need, keeping only that which is necessary to sustain one's own life, as one might do in a shipwreck.⁸⁹

This rather theatrical insistence on the sinfulness of living on the loss of others not only echoes Robert's own pronouncements at the Council of Paris in 1213 where he went so far as to equate it with heresy;⁹⁰ it also reflects current sensitivity to the charge of luxurious living by the clergy. Locally-brewed Amalrician heretics must be given no more fodder for their disdain of the clerical orders; the looming threat of Catharism meant that like Caesar's wife, the clergy had to appear above reproach. Durandus, again, articulates the point of view of the heretics: "Your assertions cannot be correct because the clergy of the Roman Church ... are perverse and live against God and when they speak of God their speech is blasphemy."⁹¹ Robert of Courçon and John of Abbeville would grimly acknowledge the justice of the charge. That John seems to equate unnecessary and unrighteous ownership with temporalities, the property off which ecclesiastics lived, is not surprising given his immediate context. Abuse of benefices and prebends was so much at the heart of current issues that across the Alps, Francis of Assisi was in the process of subverting the whole problem by rejecting ownership of anything.⁹²

88. Simone Roux, "L'Habitation urbaine au Moyen Âge: Le quartier de l'Université à Paris," *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 24.5 (1969): 1196–1219. Roux notes the building boom of the early thirteenth century in the area of the Left Bank in the immediately vicinity of the schools; her sources are predictably meager for earlier centuries but still reveal a "master Pierre Léon" who owned a house in 1212, while in 1250 the bishop of Le Mans owned several houses with multiple storeys, of the sort that had rooms to rent – possibly to students and more penurious masters? Later in the thirteenth century, one Gautier d'Espagne owned two houses in the rue de Bièvre, and surely did not live in both.

89. Langholm, *Economics in the Medieval Schools*, 40–42; he cites Robert's unedited *Summa* section XVI (on robbery and the use of property).

90. Baldwin, *Masters, Princes and Merchants*, 1: 302.

91. Durandus, *Liber contra manicheos*, 95; cited in Evans, "Gloss or Analysis?" 109.

92. This proto-Franciscan sensibility is one of the reasons Azzoguido was so easily convinced that this set of "sermons" was by Anthony of Padua. The first Franciscans may have arrived in Paris as early as 1217, and there was definitely a Franciscan presence there 1218–19, about the time John left for Amiens, though their convent was not established until 1238.

John is not finished with the unblessed man. Still quoting Proverbs, the raptors are made to cry:

“Let us swallow him up alive like hell, and whole”; as if to say, hell devours man in pieces, but we will devour him whole, body and soul, carrying away his money. Behold how earthly wisdom counsels.

John notably uses the word for money rather than wealth, evoking the unease occasioned by the growing cash economy; and he improves on the horror of Proverbs by making the unblessed man, the medieval economic man, even more ravenous than the mouth of Hell itself.

John puts words of Wisdom 2:7–9 into the mouths of “carnal” men. Like their biblical models, they say:

Let us fill ourselves with expensive wine and ointments, and let the flower of the time not pass by us. Let us crown ourselves with roses, before they wither ... for this is our portion, and this our lot.

Surely this was the secret desire of every opportunistic young man who came to Paris, hoping that his school training would bestow the “portion and lot” that fate and birthright perhaps denied him. Now John moves from the “counsel of carnal knowledge” to “the counsel of diabolical knowledge,” returning to cite Proverbs:

“Let us oppress the poor man and the just, and not spare the widow, nor revere the greyed man of many years. But let our strength be the law of justice” – as if our strength should be in place of the law for us – “for that which is feeble is useless.”

The dangers that lay in wait for young clerics on the rise in Paris were not merely the carnal temptations of pleasures and comfortable lives: it was the more serious – “diabolical” – danger of abuse of power, perhaps especially in the hands of those unaccustomed to it.

And thus the wicked give counsel, but “blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, and does not stand in the way of sinners.”

As John describes the “way” of the unblessed man, he uses carefully curated biblical quotations to evoke – perhaps slyly – the muddy, unpaved, dubious, and

dark winding side streets of medieval Paris, as well as the rare new wide and paved streets that Philip Augustus was just then promoting. “The way of the wicked is dark”⁹³; their ways “are dark and slippery,”⁹⁴ and they cry, “Our steps have slipped in the path of our streets”⁹⁵ for they who hold the wide and spacious way rush from sin to sin.” For us, the road to hell may be paved with good intentions, but for John, it was just ... paved: “The way of sinners is made plain with stones, and in their end is hell, and darkness, and pains.”⁹⁶

Getting at last to the third prepositional phrase of his pericope, John reflects on where the blessed man properly sits:

... not in the seat of pestilence. No indeed, [he sits on] the throne from which proceeded “lightning and voices and thunder”;⁹⁷ by sending forth lightning of miracles, and the voices of preaching, and rebuking by thunder.

But his attention immediately drifts back to those who would be seated on the throne of pestilence. They turn out to be “evil prelates and false doctors, against whom Jeremias 23 says ‘I will feed them with wormwood and will give them gall to drink, for from the prophets of Jerusalem corruption has gone forth into the land.’”⁹⁸ John is accusing the clergy⁹⁹ and the masters of polluting the land with their speech. The horrors of the Amalrician heresy may well have been fresh in his mind. Those who should have been bringing their flocks to salvation have instead led them to their doom.

After a passage explaining that the Lord is reserving his “great vengeance” for the day of judgement – as a way perhaps of explaining the apparent worldly success of so many *prelati* – he quotes Exechiel:

“The rod hath blossomed, pride hath budded.” This will be done at the Judgment, when the “rod of punishment” will be exercised against the proud ... and this will be done primarily against the clergy because “iniquity has risen up into the rod of impiety.” For the “rod” of the Gospel, which was allowed to be carried only by preachers so they might request from their subjects the

93. Prov. 4:19.

94. Ps. 34:6.

95. Lam. 4:18.

96. Ecclus. 21:11.

97. Rev. 4:4.

98. Jer. 23:15.

99. It should be noted that John is targeting clergy broadly here, not just the mightier ecclesiastics. In the early decades of the thirteenth century, “prelati” still meant clergy in general.

things necessary for sustenance, now has grown through the wickedness of the clergy into the “rod of impiety,” by which they extort not just what is necessary for them to live, but whatever superfluities they can grab ... this proceeds from the avarice of the clergy.

Thus “the evil prelates sit ‘in the seat of pestilence.’” How does the blessed man sit? According to John, he sits like a woodworm: “Sitting on the throne was the wisest prince among the three; he was like the most tender little worm of the wood.”¹⁰⁰ Unless the key word *cathedra* led him inexorably to this recidite passage, it is hard to imagine why John would dredge up such a reference to describe the *beatus vir*. But we soon find out: he has a plan. Leaving the mysterious invertebrate aside for the moment, John goes back to James’s discussion of wisdom,¹⁰¹ which he had used to introduce the *beatus* at the opening of his comments, for a description of the blessed man’s attributes of modesty, mercy and good fruits. Then follows a pretty description of the rainbow’s two “horns” as knowledge of the two Testaments,¹⁰² by which preaching shoots arrows into hearts; this nicely insists on the role of biblical *scientia* in a preacher’s education. Still on the topic of preaching, John pulls yet another weapon from the arsenal of Ecclesiasticus: this time it is David’s sling, and he returns to a favoured theme:

“In lifting up his hand, with the stone in the sling, he beat down the boasting of Goliath.”¹⁰³ “The stone of the sling” is preaching; in a sling, whose straps should be of the same length, is the discernment of just weights,¹⁰⁴ so that he will equally judge himself and his subordinates.

Treating subordinates “equally” is a paradox: if they are subordinates they are not equals. Yet in a world where the relatively non-noble and the relatively impecunious could rise quite suddenly to lord it over their social superiors, this was a paradox that needed attention, in case unaccustomed power went to one’s head and created a monster. The blessed man cannot see himself as greater than his subordinates, but should be

100. 2 Kgs. / 2 Sam. 23:8. The phrase is peculiar to the medieval Vulgate: *Haec nomina fortium David. Sedens in cathedra sapientissimus princeps inter tres, ipse est quasi tenerrimus ligni vermiculus, qui octagintos interfecit impetu uno*. Other versions instead offer the name of the chief prince: Jesbaham the Tachmonite or some variant thereon.

101. Jas. 3:17.

102. This includes a brief citation from Ecclus. 50:8.

103. Ecclus. 47:5.

104. ... *iusti libraminis discretio*; other manuscripts have *iusti libramentis discretio*.

... “like the most tender little worm of the wood,” than which nothing is softer to the touch; yet nothing is stronger when it touches. For the good prelate ought to be soft when touched because of his mildness. But when he touches by preaching, he ought to be strong because of his hatred of vices and the threat of chastisement. He is “soft” to his good subordinates and strong and hard against the headstrong and bold.

The odd choice of 2 Kings 23:8 above is triumphantly validated; the woodworm is described in bestiaries of the time in just this way: as “smooth to the touch, yet when it touches [by gnawing], it penetrates tough things.”¹⁰⁵

The entomological subject perhaps inspired John to bring in another invertebrate. The good prelate, he continues, must

... not be like the myrmicoleon in Job 4: “The tiger has perished for want of prey.”¹⁰⁶ Where we have “tiger,” another translation has “myrmicoleon,” which is translated in Latin as the lion of ants ... It is a small animal which, concealed in the dust, lies in wait for ants, and eats them but is [merely] an ant in comparison to birds and animals, by which it is eaten. Thus the evil prelates make themselves lions towards their subordinates in order to consume them, but to the superior and powerful, they are ants by no means able to resist.

The myrmicoleon or “ant-lion”¹⁰⁷ also appears in twelfth- and thirteenth-century bestiaries, though those do not mention any moral degradation following change of social status. John’s younger contemporary Vincent of Beauvais (ca. 1190–1264) however expands on those entries in his *Speculum Naturale*. He notes that it is a “worm of the family of the ants,” with this deplorable habit: “So long as it is small and weak, it assumes a weak and peaceful air. But when it has grown strong it disdains its former associates and joins up with a crowd of bigger ants. And so increasing in daring, it conceals itself and lies in wait for the ants which are working for their own common good ...”¹⁰⁸ Like John, Vincent decries

105. *Vermis: fragilis est, mollis erecto capite prospicit ubi mollius incedat. levis etiam cum tangitur, sed c[um] tangit etiam dura penetrat.* Paris, BnF, lat. 11207, fol. 79v; thirteenth century.

106. Job 4:11.

107. Mia I. Gerhardt, “The Ant-Lion: Nature Study and the Interpretation of a Biblical Text from the *Physiologus* to Albert the Great,” *Vivarium* 3:1 (1965): 1–23.

108. Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum Naturale*, as given in George C. Druce, “An Account of the Murmecoleon or Ant-Lion,” *Antiquaries Journal* 3.4 (1923): 347–64. Cited by David Badke, *The Medieval Bestiary*, “Ant-Lion” (2000–2008), www.bestiary.ca.

the parvenu quality of this creature which subverts and perverts social and moral order when it has the opportunity to move up in the world.

Gregory the Great is surely John's immediate source for information on the habits of the myrmicoleon.¹⁰⁹ But Gregory's discussion runs to spiritual allegory: "So also the apostate angel, cast down on earth from heaven, ambushes the minds of the just as they prepare for themselves nourishment on the path leading to good works. And when he defeats them from ambush, he is like an ant-lion unexpectedly killing ants bearing grain ..." But just as John does not discuss Christ in this commentary, so he has no desire to discuss the Evil One. For him, the ant-lion is not Satan. It is the cleric with worldly powers, an ambitious, jumped-up prelate who lords it over his new subordinates.

Conclusion

Though John Halgrin of Abbeville never professed as a mendicant, the themes and concerns of his Psalms commentary show a striking parallel to that milieu. As already noted, by the 1220s Jean Halgrin had made friends with the Dominican preacher and canonist Raymond Peñafort, and was shown preferment by Honorius III and Gregory IX, both great friends of the friars. As archbishop of Besançon, he was responsible for the first Franciscan foundation in that city, and seems to have encouraged or supported the foundation of a Franciscan convent in his hometown of Abbeville in 1229.¹¹⁰ And John's only firmly identified pupil, that is, the only person we know (so far) who depended on his commentary on the Psalms, was Robert Bacon, who was a master in Oxford in 1219 and who joined the Dominicans in about 1230.¹¹¹ None of this is coincidental; his comments on the Psalms show him to be not at all "far from" a mendicant milieu, as Beryl Smalley opined.¹¹² In particular his scathing denunciation of wealth and ostentation among the clergy suggests that very openness to mendicant ideals that he had opportunities to display later in his career. Nonetheless, the commentary may not be proto-mendicant as much as it is simply squarely

109. Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, CCL 143: 5.20.40 and 5.22.43. Translation by J.J. O'Connell (unpublished) provided through <https://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/texts/moralias>; cited in *The Medieval Bestiary* website at www.bestiary.ca. For a newer translation, see *Moral Reflections on the Book of Job, Volume 1: Preface and Books 1–5, Gregory the Great*, trans. Brian Kerns, Cistercian Studies Series 249 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014).

110. Ribailier, "Jean d'Abbeville," 253.

111. Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 265.

112. Smalley, "Robert Bacon," 5.

facing the economic and social realities of the academic community in Paris at that time.

These “moralities,” not originally sermons but classroom comments on the Psalms excerpted to that purpose, are vivid indications of the environment in which John of Abbeville studied, taught, and wrote. The method he chose was novel, not exactly new but newly relevant: glossing Scripture with Scripture, not with established authorities. His focus on the fatal weaknesses of the clergy as the subject matter of the Psalms draws that text, so immediate to his clerical audience, to a new and intimate relevancy. It is directed not to the traditional interpretation of the Psalms as the book most directly connected to the life of Christ, as is found from Augustine to Nicholas of Lyra, but to the imminent dangers of heresy and anticlericalism, against a background of the social turbulence of a city and university in the throes of adolescence which throbbed outside his classroom in the streets of Paris.

Further study of the manuscripts will clarify to what extent John’s sermons were later expanded or abbreviated, and how and where they were included in or used to fill out other collections of sermons. The Psalms commentary of John Halgrin of Abbeville, condensed and culled into sermon-ready units, comes down to us as copied by readers and users into the late fourteenth century, and this will help us better understand how these writings were shared and appreciated. But more immediately, the comments reveal how in the second decade of the thirteenth century, a master of theology in the schools of Paris experimented with new ways to interpret an over-familiar biblical source for his students, and with new ways to deliver that information, through preaching, to an even wider audience.