



*The Sound of Barking Dogs: Meister Eckhart & Saint Thomas Aquinas*¹

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Abstract

A defining moment for the Dominican Order was its defense of Thomas Aquinas. The General Chapters of Paris in 1286 and Saragossa in 1309 legislated that all friars promote and defend Thomas' teachings. Surprisingly, however, little has been written of the contributions of Meister Eckhart to this critical debate. Eckhart was a renowned preacher, master of Paris, provincial of Saxony (1303–1311), and vicar for three master generals. This lecture will offer a brief survey of the controversy, exploring the values Dominicans found in Aquinas' thought, and consider Eckhart's use of Aquinas. Finally I will indicate some themes in this debate that I believe are still valuable in contemporary Dominican studies.

Thirteenth century Paris was a great city, consecrated as the capital, protected by the Louvre Palace, encircled with fortified walls, and a great cathedral now rising above the town. Paris had one of Europe's largest populations, over 200,000. It was without a doubt one of the wealthiest cities in the West. It boasted the premier university of Christendom with privileges and exemptions for its students and masters but these had been hard won from the town and the Church. The Spring 1229 student riots against increased fees resulted in a brutal retaliation by town officials, with the killing of a number of students. This prompted the students and masters at Paris to go on strike shutting down the university for almost two years. The Dominicans, who eleven years earlier had set up their own school near the university by the south city gate of St. Jacques, had early on enraged the town clergy who saw them as a threat, both financially and pastorally. These begging friars lived off the alms they begged and were increasingly sought after as confessors and preachers. A Latin verse of the time summed up this mistrust of the friars as not being true religious and an escalating anti-mendicant mood saying,

¹ A version of this article was delivered as the Aquinas Lecture at the Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis, Missouri on January 29, 2012.

*Bernard loved the valleys, Benedict loved the hills, Francis loved lowly towns, and Dominic loved illustrious cities.*²

This ill-will was compounded when the friars received a teaching chair at the university in 1229, in the aftermath of the student riots. Just two years later, in 1231 they obtained an unheard of second chair, just as the strike was ending. The Dominicans had continued to teach, not joining the strike, which made students and masters resent them, even attacking them with vulgar shouts and gestures, flinging mud and filth at them, taunting them with the sound of barking dogs in drunken mockery, punning their vulgar mutt breeding as *domini canus*.

This taunt is the inspiration of my title for it reminds us that Dominicans have long lacked an easy location in ecclesial and social categories. The mendicant orders represented a challenge to the *status quo*. They promoted a vision of the Church that was less localized, and though some today may not agree with the model, the Friars Preachers were the beneficiaries of a centralized ecclesial authority that granted them the right to preach and teach, as well as protecting them from local jurisdictions. These privileges allowed them to be not only mendicant but itinerant as well. It was this lack of stability that was troubling and scandalous to many. The sound of barking dogs was not only a cruel lampoon, it was also the alarm these friar-hounds gave in the face of danger or error for the Church, in their hunt for Truth.

The thirteenth century was undoubtedly a time of incredible self-definition for the friars. The Friars Minor, or Franciscans, wrestled with the real question of evangelical poverty, the poverty of Christ and Francis, while the Friars Preachers struggled with an obedience to Truth and the necessary life of study so as to serve that Truth. The challenge for the Friars Preachers can be seen in Elizabeth Lowe's work, *The Contested Theological Authority of Thomas Aquinas*.³ She examines what I would say, and I do so as a Dominican and one who deeply loves my brothers, but what I would say was a barking, perhaps even growling, that Dominicans can do even at one another. Lowe studies the conflict between two Dominicans, Hervaeus Natalis and Durandus of St. Pourçain, as a way of addressing the larger realities at play in the Order's deliberate defense of Aquinas and his use of Aristotle; which it is fair to say made Thomas the gold standard of Dominican thought. This is the context in which I wish to explore Meister Eckhart and his sense of the *cause célèbre*, his order's

² *Bernardus valle, montes Benedictus amabat. Oppida Franciscus, celebres Dominicus urbis*. Cited in *Medieval France (Garland Encyclopedias of the Middle Ages)* William W. Kibler et.al. eds. (Routledge; 1995) 301.

³ *The Contested Theological Authority of Thomas Aquinas: The Controversies between Hervaeus Natalis and Durandus of St. Pourçain* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

appropriation of Thomas. My reason for this context is that I believe it represents one of the Dominican Order's defining moments,⁴ and the role of the friars themselves in supporting or undermining that definition is critical. To do this I will briefly survey this controversy and note the aspects of Thomas that the order valued before looking at Eckhart and his role in the defense of St. Thomas Aquinas. By way of conclusion I will offer what I consider to be key themes for Dominican Studies.

Dominican Identity a *res emergens*

Dominican identity is an emerging reality and it is important that we see this 'Aquinas moment' as consistent with earlier moments that more clearly defined the identity of the Dominican Order. The realities leading up to Thomas' igniting the Order as he did, had several significant elements. The Order founded by Saint Dominic in 1216 was grounded in one essential character, preaching the gospel *ad populum*, to the people. For the sake of that mission the Dominican Order embraced both evangelical poverty (trusting the people for the friars' daily bread), and itinerancy (moving among the people from convent to convent). The first general chapter of 1220 in Bologna legislated the formation of its friars, the Order's *ratio* of studies. In addition to poverty and governance it included a novel notion: priors had the power to dispense a friar from particular religious obligations for two key reasons – preaching or study.⁵ Here we see the essential relation of both study and preaching that name the Dominic charism.

In order to prepare themselves for this preaching mission the friars took on the discipline of study and organized themselves around centers of learning with a *ratio* to guide the formation of their young friars. In this nursery of meaning, Dominican identity came to birth. Dominican students studied at Dominican convents located in university towns where the Order could benefit from the faculty and attract students to the Order. This symbiosis between Dominican intellectual life and the university's intellectual life formally established itself at Paris, where in 1229 and 1231, as I mentioned, the first Dominicans of the Convent of Saint Jacques became masters in the university, notably Roland of Cremona and John of St. Giles.⁶

⁴ I would hold that the Order has had other similar defining moments since the time of Thomas (e.g. a Salamanca moment, a Jandel moment, etc.). Here I am focusing on what I would call the 'Aquinas moment'.

⁵ *The Dominican Tradition (From the Spirituality in History)*, Phyllis Zagano & Thomas C. McGonigle (Liturgical Press, 2006) pp. xvi-xvii.

⁶ *A History of the University in Europe: Volume I, Universities in the Middle Ages*. Hilde de Ridder-Symoens, editor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) p. 415. *The*

Another major growth in identity happened in the Order's *cura monialium*, its care for nuns. Increasingly Dominicans had been popularly sought out as chaplains to various convents of women outside of the Order. In an effort to safeguard the life of study and preaching there was an effort early in the mastership of John of Wildeshausen (1241–1252) to completely cut the friars' ties with these women. This debate shaped the Order's sense of itself as it met the new demands of study and preaching, but also the venerable memory of St. Dominic's brotherly care for the nuns at Prouille, Madrid and Rome. Historically bound to these three Dominican monasteries of nuns, the 1242 chapter of Bologna accordingly legislated against friars further caring for other nuns or women religious (*monialibus, vel aliis religiosis mulieribus*).⁷ The unexpected result of this action was that from 1245–1250 these Dominican nuns and Pope Innocent IV engineered a wholesale transfer of various convents of women under the rule of these three Dominican monasteries and therefore under the care of the Dominican Friars. In Germany alone thirty-two convents were incorporated into the Order.⁸

Additionally the friars were being widely sought out as confessors and ecclesial permissions had been granted to various groups, among them merchants, trade guilds and confraternities, lay folk who wanted to confess to and have their own chaplains as had many nobles.⁹ The Order's self-identity was further emerging in its caring

History of the Dominican Order. Intellectual and Cultural Life to 1500. v. 2, William A. Hinnebusch (New York: Alba House, 1973) p. 38.

⁷ Acta I,24 *Fratribus qui monialibus vel aliis religiosis mulieribus sacramentum extreme unctionis administraverunt vel prelatos earum instituerunt vel destituerunt vel officium visitationis in eorum in earum domibus exercuerunt. iniungimus vii dies in pane et aqua, vii psalmos et vii disciplinas et in virtute obediencie districte precipimus quod a talibus absteineant. et eas de cetero non communicent. Qui autem eas visitave rint. non excusentur ab hac pena vel precepto propter literas domini pape. nisi in eis continueatur non obstante privilegio. etc. vel domini pape preceptum speciale. Nec aliquis fratrum de cetero sermones vel collationes vel alias sacras scripturas de latino transferant in vulgare.* My translation: Brethren who minister to nuns or other religious women the sacrament of Extreme Unction whether establish by orders or prelates are to abandon their duty and, or visitation into their nunneries and houses. In virtue of strict obedience we command that you refrain from such things and enjoin a penance of seven days on bread and water, seven psalms and seven disciplines for those who disobey this in the future. Those who visit these women are not excused from this order even for a letter from the pope. Unless they are enclosed to us by special privilege of the Pope or the Order. No brethren may instruct them in collations nor translate for them the Sacred Scriptures from Latin into the vernacular.

⁸ *Women in Medieval Society*, Brenda Bolton & Susan Mosher Stuard (Philadelphia : University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976) p. 152. See also *The History of the Dominican Order: Origins and Growth to 1500* vol. I William Hinnebusch, OP (New York: Alba House, 1965) pp. 393–400.

⁹ *The history of Medieval Canon Law in the Classical Period, 1140–1234: From Gratian to the Decretals of Pope Gregory IX (History of Medieval Canon Law)*. Wilfried Hartmann & Kenneth Pennington eds. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008) p. 384.

for these souls, its *cura animarum*, so that by 1285 the Dominicans had established a Third Order of Dominican laity as well as now serving as chaplains to various guilds. Both of these cases indicate a popular demand for Dominicans as a consequence of their educational training, their study formed them as preachers. This relationship further defined the Order, now its preaching was directed to religious and lay of a certain intellectual curiosity. This expanded reality, bridging the tension between study and the pastoral care of souls, was another defining moment that shaped the Order as preachers of doctrine for those seeking to understand the Faith. This emerging identity had taken on formal character in the efforts of Humbert of Romans (1220–1277) who after ending his time as the fifth Master of the Order, wrote his *Treatise on the Formation of Preachers*,¹⁰ establishing a theological and practical expertise among Dominican preachers.

In this emerging sense of Dominican identity as preachers of the Truth for nuns and intellectually curious laity, who wanted to better understand the orthodox teaching of the Faith, the next logical question was how best to pursue this Truth. The *status quo* was no longer adequate to convey the Faith in this new social and ecclesial context. Fortunately for the Order there emerged the unexpected brilliance of an Italian nobleman's son who saw in the pagan philosopher Aristotle a way to engage *sacra doctrina*, moving beyond the limited understanding of the day. Such a development, like the Dominican Order itself, was not easily understood by the institutions of the times and was regarded with suspicion.

The Controversy

It is important for us to appreciate that the well-known condemnations of Paris and Oxford had to do with a different way of thinking about the Catholic faith and that involved the use of Aristotelian thought. The general condemnation of radical Aristotelianism was made by Stephen Tempier, Bishop of Paris, in December of 1270. At first it was unclear as to its implicating Aquinas' own teachings but this was made clear three years after Aquinas' death, when in March 1277 Stephen Tempier opened a formal process against Aquinas among others, questioning 219 propositions as heterodox. This action was shortly followed by the Oxford condemnation. The Dominican Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Kilwardby, condemned similar propositions in Aquinas. Seven years later these condemnations were reinstated by Kilwardby's successor the Franciscan John of

¹⁰ Cf. *Early Dominican Selected Writings* Simon Tugwell, ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1982) pp. 181–325.

Pecham. This attack was compounded by the efforts of another Franciscan, William de la Mare, in his “corrections of brother Thomas.”¹¹

The Dominican Order took action, and as Torrell¹² rightly notes, the response came from younger Dominicans (307). By this he meant that the chief defenders of Aquinas came from among Aquinas’ students, all of whom had not yet achieved the status of regent-master. As up-and-coming thinkers they were clear about Aquinas’ sense of the Catholic Faith and Reason’s role in theology. The first legislation of the Order on this only took place in 1279 at the general chapter of Paris, which admonished friars to speak respectfully of Thomas and his writings, even directing superiors to punish severely (*punire acriter*) those who did not.¹³ This was, in my estimation, a ‘band-aid-approach’ hoping that the unkind cut would soon be gone. However, five years later the wound was re-opened by Archbishop Pecham. In 1284 he reinstated the condemnations of Oxford and it was these younger Dominicans, now more established, who began writing their defenses of Aquinas.

The seminal formation of a Thomistic *corpus*, though it lacked such formality as we know today, was taking shape. In addition, before Pecham’s action (between 1280 and 1283), John of Vercelli, the 6th Master of the Order, commissioned what was a condensed version of the *Secunda secundae* for Italian Dominicans to use in studying Thomas’s moral theology. As an aside here, I note that the popularity of the *Summa* grew because, as Torrell tells us, the 1308 Perugia chapter reprimanded the Italian friars for favoring the *Summa*, telling them to stick to the *Sentences* (Torrell, 316). I call attention to these developments because it indicates a significant movement among the friars from Thomas as just a commentator on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, to Thomas as an authority in his own right.

Two general chapters legislate the defense of Thomas’ thought. The 1286 chapter at Paris, where many of these young pro-Thomas Dominicans were lecturers at the university and *studium*, decreed:

We prescribe and strictly order that each and every friar work efficaciously in promoting the doctrine of the venerable Master Friar Thomas Aquinas of blessed memory – at least as a defensible opinion. If someone tries to teach formally (*assertive*) the contrary – be

¹¹ See Mark D. Jordan’s article “The Controversy of the Correctoria and the Limits of Metaphysics” *Speculum* 57/2 (1982):292–314.

¹² *Saint Thomas Aquinas. The Person and His Work* vol. 1 Robert Royal trans. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005/1996).

¹³ Item Cum venerabilis vir memorie recolende fr. Thomas Aquino sua conversacione laudabili et scriptis suis multum honoraverit ordinem nec sit aliquatenus tolerandum quod de ipso vel scriptis eius aliqui irreverentur et indecenter loquantur. eciam aliter scientes. iniumgimus prioribus provincialibus et conventualibus et eorum vicariis ac visitoribus universis quod si quos invenerint excedentes in predictis. punire acriter non postponant [Acta Capitularum Generalium vol I, p. 204 (1279 Paris Chapter)]

he master or bachelor, lector, prior, or other, and even if he thinks differently – let him be suspended *ipso facto* from his office and the privileges of the order until he be restored by the master of the order or a general chapter.¹⁴

Torrell's citation here stops short of the text's last sentence which gives to the visitators, who were individuals delegated by the chapter to enforce its legislation, the obligation of imposing fitting punishment (*et nichilominus per prelatos suos seu visitatores iuxta culparum exigenciam condignam reportent penam*). I mention this because it indicates the determination of the Order and a fuller appreciation of the role these visitators played in this pro-Thomas campaign, a role we will see that was entrusted to Eckhart as well.

In 1309, a year after Perugia which cautioned against neglecting the *Sentences*, the general chapter held at Saragossa now legislated the Order's loyalty to Aquinas:

Again, we decree and strictly admonish all the lectors and sub-lectors that they should determine their studies according to the teachings and works of the venerable doctor, Frater Thomas Aquinas, being bound in conformity by such diligent and devoted study themselves. But anyone who shall be found to remain contrary to this when admonished or is not willing to revoke their ways are to be punished severely and quickly by the Prior Provincial or the Master of the Order so that these are made an example to the rest.¹⁵

Both of these legislative acts refer to Thomas's teaching as an authoritative corpus in its own right (...*ad doctrinam*..., ...*secundum doctrinam et opera*...).

Pro Thomas Movement

Why did these Dominicans support Thomas as they did? Is it too naïve to think they did so solely because of the attacks from

¹⁴ Torrell, 309. *Item. Districtius iniungimus et mandamus. ut fratres omnes et singuli. prout sciunt et possunt. efficacem dent operam ad doctrinam venerabilis magistri fratris Thome de Aquino recolende memorie promovendam et saltem ut est opinio defendam. et si qui contrarium facere. attemptaverint assertive. sive sint magistri sive bacallarii. lectores. priores et alii fratres eciam aliter sencientes. ipso facto. ab officiis propriis et graciis ordinis sint suspensi. donec per magistrum ordinis vel generale capitulum sint restitui. et nichilominus per prelatos suos seu visitatores iuxta culparum exigenciam. condignam reportent penam.* (Acta, 235)

¹⁵ Translation my own. *Item. Volumus et districte iniungimus lectoribus et sublectoribus universis, quod legant et determinant secundum dotrinam et opera venerabilis doctoris fratris Thome de Aquino, et in eadem scolares suos informant, et students in ea cum diligencia studere teneantur. Qui autem contrarium fecisse notabiliter inventi fuerint nec admoniti voluerint revocare, per priores provincials vel magistrum ordinis sic gaviter et celeriter puniantur, quod sint ceteris in exemplum.* (Acta, 38)

Franciscans and conservative Augustinians? While this all played a role, I see their defense of Thomas as also a self-defining act of the Order. It began to solidify the identity of the Order, now almost a century old, both for itself and for the Church. Though they would not, at the time, have thought of it as a reformation it was in fact the case.

We are able to better understand the merit of Thomas's attractiveness by surveying what it was that these young hounds of the Lord barked at the most, what they most wished to defend. We can see their concerns for they were Thomas' own concerns when he returned to Paris in 1268 for a second regency. The Belgian scholar G. Verbeke summarizes Thomas's issues telling us: "...he would have to battle the conservative minds in the theology faculty who saw in Aristotle only a danger for the Christian faith; in the other direction, he would have to oppose the Averroist monopsychism, and finally he would have to provide an apology for the mendicant orders against the seculars, who wished to exclude them from university teaching."¹⁶ Significantly one of Thomas's adversaries at this time was a Franciscan named John Pecham, the future Archbishop of Canterbury.

Torrell sees Thomas' second Parisian stay as defending three issues: (1) the eternity of the world; (2) the unicity of substantial forms; and (3) the uniqueness of the intellectual soul (179–96). It is important for us to see how these concerns were what a new generation of Dominicans found attractive and why they so strongly defended them. As these are critical I will comment on each.

First, the debate on the world's eternity had less to do with cosmological science than it did with Thomas' holding that Faith or theology could engage the big questions and acknowledge our limits of knowledge. While revelation tells us something about the world, it is possible to recognize that a sound contrary argument can equally be reasonably held. The value, I believe in this position was that rather than dismissing Aristotle, who held to the eternity of the world, contrary to common belief, Thomas allowed for the soundness of Aristotle's argument and accepted its merit even though it contradicted revelation. This was opposed by the majority of theologians like Bonaventure, Pecham, and the conservative Augustinians, who strongly suspected Aristotle as contrary to sound Catholic teaching. Pro-Thomas Dominicans were able to find in Thomas' use of Aristotle an intellectual integrity that rang true with reality even if at times revelation surpassed the Philosopher.

Similarly, Thomas' second notion of substantial forms appealed to these Dominicans who were edgier, who I think were more willing

¹⁶ Cited in Torrell, 182. G. Verbeke *Jean Philopon. Commentaire sur De Anima d' Aristote*, Louvain-Paris, 1966, pp. lxxiv-lxxv.

to risk the danger of critical thought in order to know the truth, and in this issue it was ultimately about the truth of humanity itself and of our salvation in Christ. Without going into a complete explanation and risk losing the key point allow me to simply say that Thomas opposed a plurality of forms. The substantial form in the human person, let us say, had to be united and one, for it to be substantial – that without which the thing would not exist. Think of it as the most basic category of being and the first thing we predicate of a thing. Suffice it to say that Thomas on this point was condemned by Kilwardby and Pecham. The pro-Thomists defended Aquinas' position because it ultimately was about a more complete sense of our being human. The uniqueness and unity of the human is key in appreciating the human vocation. For the Dominicans this humanity would be compromised if we were to think of the human person as a composite of distinct forms (vegetative, animal, rational). The theological problem for the conservative Augustinians was seen in the debate concerning Christ's body in the tomb,¹⁷ forcing them to posit an additional substantial form in Christ to preserve the continuity of Christ's body in life as well as in death. Thomas addressed his solution not on the basis of substantial form, but on the basis of the hypostatic union in Christ, safe-guarding the essential humanity of Christ. Pro-Thomas Dominicans saw in the unicity of substantial forms the critical safeguard of authentic humanity and it afforded them a fuller appreciation of the effects of the incarnation in Christ. For these Dominicans a 'corporeal form' apart from the soul, denied the true humanity of Christ, and the salvific character of the Incarnation.

The third area of concern that Thomas and these Dominicans defended was the uniqueness and the individuality of the human intellect. In this rather complicated and confusing "heresy" called "Averroism" we find the messy reality of interpreters interpreting interpretations of interpreters, i.e. Averroes interpreting Aristotle, Siger and Boethius interpreting Averroes on Aristotle, etc. R. A. Gauthier rightly observed that Averroism was a "heresy" which did not exist

¹⁷ See Torrell on this: "To sum up these matters in a somewhat simplistic fashion, for Thomas—in accord with the hylomorphic doctrine he got from Aristotle—the intellectual soul is the only substantial form of the human composite, and it exerts this function at different levels of the life of that composite: vegetative, sensible, intellectual. His adversaries held, on the contrary, for a plurality of forms according to the different levels and, in the eyes of these adversaries, Thomas's doctrine was heretical, for it put in doubt the numerical identity of Christ's body before and after death. In effect, the soul being the unique form of the body and Christ's body being deprived of it temporarily by death, one could no longer say that the body in the tomb was the same as the body of the living Christ. It was necessary therefore to admit in addition to the soul, a 'corporeal form' (or *forma corporeitatis*) that remained the same, inhering in the body before and after death, and thus was able to assure the continuity and the unity between these two states of Christ's body" (190).

before the theologians denounced it . . . ”.¹⁸ Averroism, if I may simplify, in this regard held that there was one intellectual soul in which all shared. This has been called monopsychism. Thomas argued that this position was contrary to both Aristotle and to the Catholic Faith. The pro-Thomas Dominicans also advocated this sense of the human intellect as emblematic of Dominican thought, the uniqueness of our human knowing.

Eckhart, for or against Thomas?

Here is where I wish to bring the barking dogs imagery into play. While there were Dominicans who opposed the Order’s defense of Aquinas like Robert Kilwardby and Durandus of St. Pourçain, I am increasingly of the opinion that Eckhart was not one of them. The tendency to label Eckhart as an anti-Thomist emerged in the early twentieth century in a 1927 study of Durandus by Joseph Koch.¹⁹ In 1942 Maur Burbach’s²⁰ essay in *Medieval Studies* suggested “an undercurrent of opposition” and he offered this as justification: “Otherwise how can we explain the wave of anti-Thomism which was soon to appear in the Order?” (150). He then goes on to name Dietrich of Freiberg, Meister Eckhart and Durandus of St. Pourçain. We see here nothing more than a guilt by association which is repeated in the mid-1950s by Armand Maurer²¹ who when speaking of Dietrich of Freiberg claims “. . . another German Dominican, Master Eckhart, was also actively engaged in opposing the Angelic Doctor” (173). Perhaps most significantly, in 1980 the influential work by Alain de Libera²² went so far as to say “anti-Thomism is one characteristic of the thought of Dietrich of Freiberg and of those who followed him . . . ” (12) among whom he lists Eckhart. de Libera understood the so-called ‘Cologne School’ as opposing the thought of Thomas Aquinas. This he traces to Albert the Great and sees it embodied most clearly in someone like Dietrich of Freiberg. But on closer inspection I think it fair to say that this so-called opposition is weaker than it first appears and seems more an invention of an Hegelian interpretation. The subsequent influence of this ‘pre-ordained’ antithetical norm has slanted the reading of Eckhart (among others) through a

¹⁸ Cf. Torrell 193, n.56.

¹⁹ Joseph Koch “Durandus de S. Porciano O.P.”, *Beiträge zur Gesch. der Philosophie des Mittelalters*, XXVI (1927), pp. 1–436.

²⁰ Maur Burbach, O.S.B. “Early Dominican and Franciscan Legislation regarding St. Thomas” *Medieval Studies*, IV (1942) pp. 139–158.

²¹ Armand Maurer, “The *De Quidditatibus Entium* of Dietrich of Freiberg and its Criticism of Thomistic Metaphysics” *Medieval Studies* 18 (1956): 173–203.

²² Cf. Alan de Libera *Introduction à la mystique rhénane d’Albert le Grand à maître Eckhart* Sagesse chrétienne. Paris: O.E.I.L., 1984.

predominantly neo-Platonist lens, favoring, as seemed natural, works that most seemed to demonstrate this.²³ Significant works on Aquinas repeated this antithetical opposition and they cite de Libera as proof (e.g. Torrell, 313 and Lowe, 62).

To Maurer's credit, when he later wrote on Dietrich of Freiberg and Thomas Aquinas in 1956 he acknowledged that many of Dietrich's treatises were still unedited and that he based his understanding on what he called "correctives" by E. Gilson.²⁴ Maurer captured the issue thus:

The main concern of Dietrich's *De Esse et essentia* is to establish, against St. Thomas, the identity of existence (*esse*) and essence both in reality and in meaning (*ratio*). The theme running through it like a constant refrain is that essence does not differ from existence; rather, existence signifies the whole essence of any thing. The only distinction between them is their manner of signifying being; *esse* signifies being in the manner of an act, whereas "essence" like the term "entity", signifies the same being in the manner of a stable possession. (Maurer, 173)

This distinction of *esse* and *essentia* is critical. To be fair Maurer says that Dietrich and others have widely misunderstood Aquinas more so than opposed him. Maurer refers to Dietrich as "among the most clear-sighted and resolute critics of St. Thomas," (173), but I think it too much of a leap to say he was therefore an anti-Thomist any more than one could say that Aquinas was an anti-Neoplatonist.

This oppositional assumption has had its skeptics, though often hesitant and soft-spoken. For example, in 1955 the Dominican William Hinnebusch slipped a comment into a remote footnote saying, "Burbach is too harsh when he terms these scholars anti-Thomist".²⁵ In 1963 Frederick Copleston, S.J., in his discussion of Eckhart and Aquinas may have put it best saying: "The truth of the matter seems to be that there are various strands in Eckhart's thought."²⁶ And in Armand Maurer's²⁷ 1974 comments on the *First Parisian Question* we see that he tiptoes around this saying such things as: "verbally at least this contradicts Thomas Aquinas..." or "Eckhart does not seem to have been pleased with this [Aquinas'] way of putting the matter..." (13). Maurer speaks of it not as anti-Thomist but as "this

²³ Libera cites two works in particular *Maître Eckhart, Théologie négative et connaissance de Dieu*, by V. Lossky (Paris, 1960) and *Meister Eckhart. Analogie, Univozität und Einheit* by B. Mojsisch (Hamburg, 1983), see page 234.

²⁴ *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*. New York, 1955.

²⁵ William Hinnebusch. *The History of the Dominican Order: Intellectual and Cultural life to 1500*. II (New York: Alba House, 1973) p. 183, n. 45.

²⁶ Frederick Copleston, S.J. *A History of Philosophy: Volume III Ockham to Suárez* (London: Burns and Oates Lmt., 1963) p. 186.

²⁷ Armand Maurer. *Master Eckhart: Parisian Questions and Prologues* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1974).

initial divergence . . . ” (14) or later saying “he was dissociating himself from the Thomistic notion of being . . . ” (15)

I do not believe that ‘anti-Thomist’ is an appropriate label for Eckhart. In fact, the collection of authors who still use this label²⁸ justify doing so referencing the work of Alain de Libera who had set Eckhart in the so-called ‘Cologne School’ embodied in Dietrich of Freiberg. Upon closer inspection we can see, if I may summarize, that Libera’s argument rests on the suggestion that this Cologne school arose in opposition to the Paris school, or it arose independent of Paris, and so it was untouched by the successive condemnations that burdened the speculative spirit (Libera 10). He cobbles together a notion of Rhineland mysticism (*mystique rhénane*) that he claims is neo-Platonist, spiritual, speculative and expressive of Albert the Great’s scholastic theology (12). Dietrich of Freiberg is his champion for this ‘school’ and its standard. Consequently he claims that anti-Thomism is a characteristic of the thought of Dietrich and his followers [*L’anti-thomiste est un caractéristique de la pensée de Thierry de Freiberg et de ceux qui l’ont suivi . . .*] (12). De Libera acknowledges that there were Cologne Dominicans who supported Thomas, like John and Gerard of Sterngassen, and John Pichard of Lichtenberg, others like Nicholas of Strasbourg but marginally John of Freiberg who shared an affinity to the themes of Dietrich (13).

What I find thin are de Libera’s arguments for placing Eckhart in this anti-Thomist category. I think it fair to say that his argument is drawn more by way of suggestion, a kind of guilt by association, than by a clear demonstration. Libera writes:

Eckhart is truly heir to a tradition initiated by Albert the Great. He is a Preacher who has lived with the same texts and the same experiences as many of his confrères. In him, as [in] Dietrich of Freiberg, the *Lese-meister* and *Lebemeister* are inseparable. This is not only the person who comments on the Bible to his students, who takes on the spiritual direction of his Dominican sisters and who preaches in the vernacular, but the same thought and questions also express themselves, here and there, by means suited to the circumstances. So there is as much theology in the German sermons of Eckhart, as [there is] spirituality in his Latin commentaries.²⁹

²⁸ Jean-Pierre Torrell nuances his grouping of Eckhart with the Cologne School saying of Eckhart, “though not a Thomist, he nevertheless defended some of Thomas’s notions . . . ” (313) then he specifically labels Dietrich of Freiberg as “the most virulent of the anti-Thomist” (314) see note 64. Elizabeth Lowe states “But Cologne’s Thomism was overshadowed by its Albertinism and the Rhineland Dominicans would produce the Orders first critics of Aquinas to arise since Kilwardby” (62) see note 21. She follows de Libera’s casting Dietrich of Freiberg as the anti-Thomist of the day and disregarding the critical work being done on Dietrich mockingly says “The editors of Dietrich’s *Opera omnia* have charitably labeled him a ‘pre-Thomist neo-platonist’” (64).

²⁹ My translation. Libera, 236. *Eckhart est véritablement l’héritier de la tradition ouverte par Albert le Grand. C’est un Prêcher qui a vécu des mêmes textes et des*

I argue that Eckhart was not anti-Thomas for reasons I have treated elsewhere.³⁰ To briefly summarize these: Eckhart was sent twice as *magister regens* to Paris by general chapters of the Order, the second time voiding his election as provincial of Teutonia to do so. Furthermore, Eckhart's defense of Thomas at Paris in his Parisian Questions can be demonstrated. All of the currently authenticated questions can be seen as either defending Thomas's positions or developing them. Another factor is Eckhart's respected and trusted roles in the Order during its advocacy of Thomas, such as reforming the Bohemian Province or serving as vicar for three master generals (Aymericus Giliani, Béranger de Landore, and Herveus Natalis). In addition, at Eckhart's Cologne trial he makes appeal to Thomas and Albert in defending his position.

If we soften the rhetoric of twentieth century post-Hegelian scholars who posited a reactionary movement called the 'Cologne School' it becomes clear that Dominicans, even in their defense of Aquinas, remained open to alternate opinions on the theological use of Aristotle. In my opinion it seems too implausible to posit a faction within the Order that was not censored by the master or the general chapters. A group, if we are to believe it, who freely sought to undermine the general chapters of Milan (1278), Paris (1279, 1286), Saragossa (1309), Metz (1313), London (1314), Bologna (1315) and Bordeaux (1324). At this point I believe the most we can say is that research into the works of Dominicans between the condemnation of 1277 and Thomas' canonization in 1323 is yet emerging and I make a plea for scholars in these areas. If there indeed had been in Cologne a reactionary Rhineland Dominican tradition it has not been proven that it in fact was in opposition to Thomas. An academic conference on this question would greatly clarify the sources of this dialectical opposition between Paris and Cologne. The sound of these barking Dominican dogs has not, I am pleased to say, been at one another, but rather it has been the barking of hounds in pursuit of the Truth.

mêmes expériences que nombre de ses confrères. En lui, comme en Thierry de Freiberg, le Lesemeister et la Lebemeister sont inséparables. C'est non seulement le même homme qui commente la Bible pour ses étudiants, qui assume la direction spirituelle de ses consœurs et qui prêche en langue vulgaire, mais aussi la même pensée et la même quête qui s'expriment ici et là avec des moyens adaptés aux circonstances. Il y a donc autant de théologie dans les sermons allemands d'Eckhart que de spiritualité dans ses commentaires latins.

³⁰ "Defending Meister Eckhart: A Look at Suso and Tauler." *Eckhart Review* 16 (2007): 19–34 and "Meister Eckhart and the Controversial Corrections of Aquinas" *New Blackfriars* (2010) 91: 335–344.

Meister Eckhart and St. Thomas Aquinas for Today.

I would like to draw these comments together by using a notion from Alasdair MacIntyre, who is a beneficiary of Thomas' thought. In his work on virtue³¹ he uses the concept of the "narrative self" (216–22). By this MacIntyre means telling the tale of one's life. It is the narrative self which brings one to the moral sense of intelligibility and accountability. When we tell our story our lives are made understandable or intelligible and we are made accountable. The Dominican narrative likewise had to confront the moral dimension of its meaning, its intelligibility or *ratio* (one might say) as well as its accountability.

In examining the Order's defense of Thomas Aquinas as a self-defining moment, and by detaching Eckhart from the anti-Thomist polemic that has done more to confuse than clarify, we can appreciate the significance of Eckhart's relation to Aquinas as part of this Dominican narrative. By allowing Eckhart his voice within this Dominican moral self-definition we obtain a fuller reading of his works and his contribution to the Dominican narrative. The deliberate action of the Order, in its general chapters, the master generals and theologians, to appropriate the defining element of intelligibility as Thomas came to name it, made the Dominican Order accountable to a particular kind of study, one that was ordered to preaching for the care of souls.

The "sound of barking dogs" not only gave chase to its prey but it also guided the hunt. The hounds followed after the scent of their prey or the lead hound that kept the scent. Their barking then was directed to a common goal. The literature on Aquinas and the Order can overlook significant elements by isolating Aquinas, by excluding voices that have contributed to the very Dominican identity Aquinas was tracking. By allowing Eckhart's voice in this project we can shed light on key aspects of Dominican identity and thought. This is because Eckhart, in a Dominican context, helps us to focus on the Order's appropriation of its narrative.

As I have argued, we can appreciate Aquinas as part of an emerging Dominican identity and Eckhart as part of that narrative. In one sense by looking at the child we can better appreciate qualities and characteristics of the parent previously overlooked or even unknown.

Meister Eckhart, like Aquinas, was a Master theologian, both were sent to Paris twice. However, in Eckhart we are made more aware of something. The Magister of Paris was also the Meister of the Rhine. This is a critical part of Dominican identity. Dominican theology is ordered to meaningful preaching, a "holy preaching" (*sacra*

³¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1982).

predicatio) shaped by *sacra doctrina*. In seeing this so clearly in Eckhart we are reminded of Aquinas's own acclaim in Bologna, Orvieto, and Rome among others, for his holiness and his preaching. We would benefit from studying Aquinas' sermons on themes like: the Decalogue, the Lord's Prayer, the Eucharist and the Creed. Like Eckhart who is widely acclaimed for his German preaching, it is important to remember Aquinas' almost 60 known vernacular sermons in Neapolitan. If we hope to understand Dominican identity it must be tested by the relationship between study and preaching.

Eckhart, Aquinas, Albert, and countless other Dominicans shared in this theological engagement and it is important that we preserve the role of study as the preacher's wellspring, the *fons praedicatoris*. As we have seen, Aquinas focused the Dominican narrative which had been fashioned due to the need for meaningful content. The Order had already sensed the importance of preaching from the beginning and Humbert of Romans formalized this in his time as master general and his work *On the Formation of Preachers*. Along with this narrative a unique aspect of pastoral care for women religious and the laity further defined Dominican identity. It moved the narrative to respond to the pastoral needs of people seeking to know their faith and to live their faith more fully, with greater meaning (*ratio*). Thomas, not just his use of Aristotle, for other Dominicans did the same, but the way in which Thomas recast *sacra doctrina* made believing reasonable. The role of serious intellectual inquiry concerning faith is what gave the Order clearer self-definition. Revelation, reason, and holy teaching (*revelatio, ratio, sacra doctrina*) are essential to the holy preaching (*sacra predicatio*). Allow me to repeat that: Revelation, reason, and holy teaching are essential to the holy preaching.

Today we stand to benefit from our remembering, our mindfulness that the Order of Preachers predicates, names the divine revelation, the mystery of the Incarnation. From the time of Dominic's founding of the Order to today the preaching task has been our quest, the goal of our hunt. The "sound of barking dogs" suggests a full voiced engagement in the project. Assiduous study is the engagement of the Lord's hounds, drawing them into a community of inquiry. Disputation, the critical, thoughtful engagement of opinions, is an integral part of such inquiry, especially when it allows us to understand the various facets of Truth. However, full comprehension of *sacra doctrina* manifests itself in the moral burden of being made accountable. Dominicans have a moral charge for the salvation of souls. Eckhart's contribution to the Dominican narrative was his ability to take the insights of Aquinas and engage pastoral realities on behalf of these souls, especially women religious and the laity. In Eckhart we find the Dominican narrative focused in study and pastoral care, not one or the other, but both. On closer reflection we see too that this was no less true of Aquinas.

Dominican identity emerged over time from key critical realities. In the Order's appropriation of Aquinas's thought it had to face the formative aspect of study itself. Study is morally bound to meet the realities of the day and must challenge the stagnant, sluggish waters of reason. Dominican study is 'thought-on-the-hunt' and the sound of such barking dogs, names the revelation it seeks to know. The challenge for today is our willingness to enter into the moral demand of this Dominican narrative. The virtue of assiduous study calls us to speak to the heart and soul of people today who are hungry for real meaning (*ratio*). There is much for us to learn from the lives of Dominicans like Aquinas and Eckhart. In our seeing the larger narrative of Dominican barking, that is to say our collective theological pursuit of God's Truth in our world, we engage the challenges of our day, and enter the narrative that makes us Dominican. Preaching confronts us with the moral integrity of who we are. In addition to preach the Latin term *preedicare* means to proclaim, to predicate, to name. We preach, name the reality of our life, but something more acts on us, and we are named. *Praedicamus et praedicamur*.

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