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THE LOST MATTHEW COMMENTARY OF ROBERT HOLCOT O.P.

BY
WILLIAM J. COURTENAY

On a feast of St. Scholastica (February 10) in the early 1330s Robert Holcot gave the introductory sermon that began his lectures on the Gospel of Matthew [1]. Holcot was then a bachelor of theology. He had completed his lectures on the *Sentences* at the end of the previous spring but had been prevented by non-academic business and personal illness from immediately beginning his bachelor lectures on the Bible, which at Oxford followed upon the reading of the *Sentences* [2]. University-produced commentaries on the Bible at the bachelor level in the early fourteenth century were short works and do not appear to have been taken as seriously as lectures on the *Sentences*. This academic obligation was often fulfilled during the summer term, when the majority of students were away on vacation. But the lectures of the *baccalaureus biblicus* could have significant intellectual if not exegetical content. They could be structured around problems of speculative and moral theology, continuing the themes and debates of the *Sentences* commentary [3]. Holcot's commentary was, in plan, more substantial than those of some of his contemporaries. As he announced in his inaugural sermon, the commentary would consist of thirty lectures: the introductory homily, a

[1] The most likely date for these lectures is 1332, although they could have occurred as early as 1331 or as late as 1333. For a fuller discussion of the chronology of this period in Holcot's life see my Adam Wodeham (Leiden, 1978), 96-101. The text of the sermon can be found in two manuscripts: London, British Library, Ms. Royal 10 C VI, fols. 136ra-137ra; Oxford, Oriel College, Ms. 15, fols. 120ra-120va.

[2] Ms. Royal 10 C VI, fol. 136vb: « Ego autem, occupatione temporali distractus et dispositione corporali confractus, exilem illam oblationem, quam volui facere, non valui usque modo ».

[3] This is true for several bachelor lectures on the Bible by contemporaries of Holcot, for example those of Richard Fitzralph, Crathorn, and Grafton. See Adam Wodeham, 78-79, 107-108.

prologue, and a lecture on each of the twenty-eight chapters of Matthew [4]. The lectures would be divided into two parts. The first and thinner part was the literal exposition of the chapter. The second and deeper part would have been composed of *moralitates*, that is, moralized examples that would serve the homiletical needs of Holcot and other preachers, or scholastic questions occasioned by the text.

Beryl Smalley was the first to call our attention to this inaugural sermon, although she placed it in the years when Holcot, as regent master of the Dominicans at Oxford, lectured on the Bible in partial fulfillment of the requirements of that office [5]. However, as Heinrich Schepers noted, the work belongs to Holcot's period as bachelor of theology [6]. This is attested to in part by the reference to his poor health, mentioned also in the *Sermo finalis* [7] that marked the completion of his lectures as *baccalaureus sententiarius*, and is confirmed by the reference to his *socii*, who " in hac universitate lectores bibliae sunt hoc anno [8] ". *Socius* in the late medieval university was the usual term by which a bachelor referred to his fellow bachelors.

It is not surprising that Holcot's commentary on Matthew is generally thought not to exist. Biblical commentaries of bachelors are very rare. Commentaries that derive from a university setting are almost invariably products of the *magistri sacrae paginae* who were required by statute in all universities that possessed a faculty of theology to give formal lectures on the Bible. Unlike *Sentences* commentaries, which, although the work of bachelors of theology, were seldom replaced by a corresponding work at the magisterial level, the bachelor's lectures on the Bible were considered only a preparatory stage for the serious com-

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[4] Ms. Royal 10 C VI, fol. 137ra: « De hoc autem meo offertorio faciendo exponere possum illud Iudicum xiv: Dabo vobis triginta sindones et totidem tunicas. Cuius ratio est quod quia evangelium Mathaei habet 28 capitula, quae cum uno prologo et lectione hodierna faciunt 30, ecce triginta tunice; sed triginta sindones, qui sunt panni tenues, signant litterales expositiones, quae per me super illas tunicas valde tenuiter apponuntur. Dabo ergo vobis triginta sindones et totidem tunicas ».

[5] The discovery of the *principium*, or introductory sermon, was made by Joseph Wey, who passed on the information to Miss Smalley. She reported it in " Robert Holcot, O.P.," Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum, 26 (1956), 24; English Friars and Antiquity (Oxford, 1960), 142-144.

[6] H. Schepers, « Holkot contra dicta Crathorn », Philosophisches Jahrbuch, 77 (1970), 342-343, 353-354.

[7] Joseph Wey, " The *Sermo Finalis* of Robert Holcot ", Mediaeval Studies, 11 (1949), 220; Smalley, English Friars, 143.

[8] Ms. Royal 10 C VI, fol. 136va.

mentaries that lay ahead. They were, however, done at the same level of maturity and training as the *Sentences* commentaries that have survived in abundance.

Apart from the attraction that lost works always hold for scholars with an antiquarian turn of mind, the loss of this work of Holcot is especially to be regretted. Holcot eventually became one of the most popular of late medieval commentators on the Bible. His *Sapientia* was a late-medieval best seller. He also contributed to the style of late-medieval English commentaries and to the development of *moralitates* [9]. The Matthew commentary would have been Holcot's earliest exegetical exercise, one in which we might be able to trace the beginnings of the style of exposition that made him famous. Further, from the standpoint of the historian of philosophy and theology, we would also have a work written at the time of Holcot's controversy with Crathorn. Since Crathorn attacked Holcot in the *principium* of his biblical *lectura* as a bachelor, Holcot might have reciprocated in his commentary. There might thus be further evidence for what has become one of the important debates at Oxford in the generation after Ockham [10].

It is true to say that no extant manuscript is known to contain a commentary on Matthew attributed to Holcot or one following the description of contents proposed by Holcot himself. However, it may be possible to reconstruct portions of that lost work from among the literary remains of Holcot. Miss Smalley made the fruitful suggestion that some of the *moralitates* that appear in Holcot's sermons may have come from this source [11]. That search still needs to be conducted in a thorough way. Prof. Schepers made the further suggestion [12] that some questions from the Matthew commentary might be buried in the Quodlibeta of Holcot, for which there are three manuscript witnesses [13]. On the grounds of similarity of subject material Schepers selected questions 3,

[9] Smalley, English Friars, 133-202.

[10] J. Kraus, « Die Stellung des Oxforder Dominikanerlehrers Crathorn zu Thomas von Aquin », Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie, 57 (1933), 66-88; K. A. Sprengard, Systematisch-Historische Untersuchungen zur Philosophie des XIV. Jahrhunderts, Vol. II: Crathorn: Ein Oxforder Modernus des XIV. Jahrhunderts (Bonn, 1968); H. Schepers, « Holkot contra dicta Crathorn », Phil. Jahrbuch, 77 (1970), 320-354; 79 (1972), 106-136.

[11] Smalley, English Friars, 143-144.

[12] Schepers, Phil. Jahrb., 77 (1970), 353.

[13] Cambridge, Pembroke College, Ms. 236, fols. 117-221; London, Brit. Library, Ms. Royal 10 C VI, fols. 141-174; Oxford, Balliol College, Ms. 246, fols. 182-264.

4, and 15 (of the Pembroke manuscript) as belonging to the Matthew commentary [14]. These questions are: " Utrum beatus Matthaeus convenienter narravit Christi genealogiam "; " Utrum historia conceptionis Christi sit in toto vera "; and " Utrum beatus Matthaeus gaudeat iam in caelo de conversione sua a teloneo ad apostolatum ".

One can, I think, push Schepers' inspired suggestion much further. In a simpler and briefer form, the commentary on Matthew probably was structurally similar to the Sapiential commentary. Thus, imbedded in an exegesis of the text would have been formal scholastic questions stimulated by the material under discussion. These questions may have been the deeper substance to which Holcot referred in his introductory sermon, which would explain why some of them were preserved while the exegesis itself — the thirty thin shirts, as Holcot described it — was forgotten. Assuming there may be in Holcot's quodlibets a larger number of questions originally belonging to the Matthew commentary, how is one to identify them? Indeed, can we even be certain that the three that have been proposed came in fact from that source? The problem can be simplified and, perhaps, solved if we employ a combination of investigative procedures. We must keep in mind, however, that until we turn up a separate manuscript of Holcot's Matthew commentary or find references in the known works of Holcot and others that would make identifications certain, the following results must remain conjectural.

Among the various procedures for sifting out potential Matthew questions from among the quodlibets of Holcot, the similarity of subject material is an important one and needs no further clarification. However, not all questions that might arise in the course of a commentary on Matthew are so easily identified by the modern reader. Often the biblical text formed only a pretext for introducing a question on an entirely different theme. This becomes obvious when one looks at Holcot's commentaries on Wisdom or on Ecclesiasticus. Thus, in addition to the parallels in subject matter, one needs to consult other late medieval commentaries on Matthew in order to appreciate the range of scholastic questions that arise in this context. Important in this regard are commentaries within the Dominican Order, such as those of Thomas Aquinas and Nicholas Gorran, or commentaries of those who fall within the same intellectual tradition as Holcot, such as those by Marsilius of

[14] Schepers, Phil. Jahrb., 77 (1970), 353. On the numbering of questions see note 19.

Inghen and Nicholas of Dinkelsbühl. Some of the parallels are striking. For example, compare Holcot's " Utrum Christus probavit resurrectionem suam convenientibus argumentis? " with Dinkelsbühl's " Utrum Christus sufficientibus argumentis manifestaverit veritatem suae resurrectionis? [15] " It is unlikely that Dinkelsbühl could have known Holcot's commentary on Matthew. These and other parallels [16] suggest that there may have developed some standard questions in late scholastic commentaries on Matthew — a possibility that needs to be explored further.

Neither of these procedures, of course, can guarantee that questions identified in this way derive from Holcot's Matthew commentary rather than some other scholastic work. The third procedure and critical check, therefore, lies in the process of transmission of text units in the manuscripts of Holcot's quodlibets. Many of the questions form groups that occur at different places in the three manuscripts. If, as seems likely, those groups betray the earlier existence of unbound *peciae*, they may also betray questions that come from a common source, especially if they are not found in all three manuscripts. Thus, where a group of questions contain several that concern problems in Matthew or are similar to those occurring in commentaries on Matthew, there is a high probability that these are questions that originally belonged to Holcot's Matthew commentary and later migrated into his *Quodlibeta*. This principle or procedure may need further clarification.

In the universities of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries copies of scholastic works were frequently made from unbound gatherings, or *peciae*, rather than from bound copies. This is true not only for those texts that were in great demand in the classroom and for which the *stationarii* maintained one or more *exempla* in an unbound state. It was also true for the early stages of transmission of many texts in the fourteenth-century university, even those that had limited circulation. It can be established that the early dissemination of the writings of Wil-

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[15] Ms. Pembroke 236, fol. 148rb; Ms. Balliol 246, fol. 208ra; Alois Madre, Nikolaus von Dinkelsbühl Leben und Schriften (Münster, 1965), p. 58; Melk, Ms. 504, fols. 376^{r}-378^{v}.

[16] Compare Holcot, qq. 5 and 64 in Pembroke, with Dinkelsbühl, qq. 4 and 7 in Melk. The list of Holcot questions is given in Richard E. Gillespie, « Robert Holcot's Quodlibeta ", Traditio, 27 (1971), 487-490; those of Dinkelsbühl are in Madre, pp. 55-59. Pembroke, q. 5: « Utrum virginitas beatae Virginis fuit laudabilior quam eius fecunditas » had been edited by M. Elizabeth Zanichkowsky as part of a Senior Honors thesis, Univ. of Wisconsin, 1978.

liam of Ockham and Adam Wodeham took this form, and probably those of Holcot as well [17]. While this fact makes difficult the construction of a *stemma* of the manuscripts and the process of text editing based on that principle, it does permit one to observe the movement in pieces of text before works reached their final, bound form (which for some works, such as the Holcot *Quodlibeta* and even his *Sentences* commentary, appears quite haphazard).

This is the best explanation of the differing order of questions in the manuscripts of Holcot's *Quodlibeta*, the inclusion or absence of certain questions, and often separate textual traditions. It has long been suspected that the quodlibets and determinations may be coming from several different sources, and the key to the problem, to the degree that one exists, lies in the groupings of text units.

Looked at in this way, one finds that those questions treating themes appropriate to a Matthew commentary and/or occurring as questions in other Matthew commentaries known to us, have two characteristics in common. First, although they appear in different places in the Pembroke and Balliol manuscripts, they generally appear grouped together and usually in the same order. In Pembroke with one exception, they fall within the first series of questions. In Balliol they occur in several clusters scattered throughout the manuscript. Second, with only a few possible exceptions, these questions are not found in the Royal manuscript, the third and last witness to the *Quodlibeta* of Holcot. Since Royal appears to represent Holcot's systematic grouping of the quodlibetic questions in preparing an *ordinatio* edition, the absence of these particular questions suggests that they may have come from a different source [18].

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[17] On this problem see: Jean Destrez, La Pecia dans les manuscrits universitaires du XIIIe et du XIVe siècle (Paris, 1935); introduction by G. Gal to William of Ockham, Summa Logicae, ed. Ph. Boehner, G. Gal, and S. Brown, in William of Ockham, Opera Philosophica et Theologica. Opera Philosophica, Vol. I (St. Bonaventure, N.Y., 1974), pp. 7*-8*; W. J. Courtenay, Adam Wodeham (Leiden, 1978), 27-28.

[18] In Ms. Royal 10 C VI the questions are divided into three quodlibets consisting of nine (out of an original twenty seven), ten, and nineteen (out of an original twenty two) questions respectively. Each quodlibet is prefaced by a statement from Holcot on the circumstances and order of their composition. These " prefaces " were written after the quodlibetic disputes as Holcot sought to arrange and edit the questions for " publication ". The fact that the questions relating to the Gospel of Matthew do not occur among the quodlibetic questions in the Royal manuscript suggests that they may perhaps not belong to the *Quodlibeta* at all. On the prefaces

On this basis I have constructed a list of questions that may originally have belonged to the Matthew commentary of Holcot. The list is divided into two groups, each arranged according to possible location in the Matthew text. The first group consists in those I would consider highly probable in deriving from that source. The second group includes those that are possible but on which there is some doubt. The numbering of the questions in the Pembroke and Balliol manuscripts follows the system adopted by Heinrich Schepers and Richard Gillespie [19].

	Pembroke	*Balliol*	*Royal*	*Printed Ed.*
A. MOST LIKELY:				
Prologue: Utrum doctrina evangelica beati Matthaei de Christo sit generaliter tota vera.	14	—	*Sent.* III, 2	*Determinatio* XV
Utrum beatus Matthaeus convenienter narravit Christi genealogiam (Matt. 1, 1-17).	3	37	—	—
Utrum historia conceptionis Christi sit in toto vera (Matt. 1, 18-25).	4	38	—	—
Utrum virginitas beatae Virginis fuit laudabilior quam eius fecunditas (Matt. 1, 18-25).	5	10	—	—
Utrum Christus convenienter redemit genus humanum (Matt. 1, 18-25)	7	51	—	*Determinatio* XIII

and questions in the Royal manuscript, see F. Hoffmann, Die theologische Methode des Oxforder Dominikanerlehrers Robert Holcot. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters, Neue Folge, Bd. 5 (Münster, 1971), pp. 414-419.

[19] Heinrich Schepers, « Holkot contra dicta Crathorn », Philosophisches Jahrbuch, 77 (1970), 339; Richard E. Gillespie, « Robert Holcot's Quodlibeta », Traditio, 27 (1971), 487-490. There are some problems with this numbering. Both Schepers and Gillespie include the question « Utrum stellae sint creatae ut per motum et lumen sint in figura et tempore » as question 1. This question does not regularly occur with the quodlibets and is probably a separate treatise, a Tractatus de Stellis, as Hoffmann noted. The Pembroke manuscript initials « Utrum sola continuatio temporis addat bonitatem vel malitiam operationi morali » as a separate question, which would be 53 in sequence if one included the question on stars in the numbering. But this question, as one sees from the wording in Pembroke, fol. 162vb, and Balliol, fol. 222ra, is only the third article of the preceding question: « Utrum viae vivendi, quas Christus docuit, sunt meritoriae vitae aeternae ». Probably for this reason neither Schepers nor Gillespie number it as a separate question. For a different numbering of the Pembroke questions, see Hoffmann, 420-425.

	Pembroke	*Balliol*	*Royal*	*Printed Ed.*
Utrum divinitas sit pars Christi (Matt. 1, 18-25).	8	53	—	—
Utrum oratio sit ab ecclesia convenienter usitata (Matt. 6, 7-15).	38	39	—	—
Utrum oratio dominica sit rationabiliter ordinata (Matt. 6, 7-15).	39	40	—	—
Utrum beatus Matthaeus gaudeat in caelo de conversione suae a theloneo ad apostolatum (Matt. 9, 9).	15	15	*Sent.* III, 3	—
Utrum voluntas humana in Christo fuit divinae voluntati conformis (Matt. 26, 39).	10	54	—	—
Utrum Deus propter beneficium redemptionis sit amplius diligendus ab homine quam si nunquam hominem ab inferno redemisset (Matt. 27).	11	24	—	—
Utrum Christus probavit resurrectionem suam convenientibus argumentis (Matt. 28).	12	20	—	—
Utrum motus ascensus Christi in caelum fuit sensibiliter successivus (Matt. 28).	13	21	—	—
B. Less Likely:				
Utrum beata Virgo fuit concepta in originali peccato (Matt. 1, 18-25) [20].	6	—	—	—
Utrum filius Dei assumpsit naturam humanam in unitatem suppositi (Matt. 1, 18-25) [21].	2	—	*Sent.* III, 4	—
Utrum beatus Iohannes Baptista testimonium perhibendo de Christo placuit Deo (Matt. 3) [22].	—	91	—	—

[20] This question does occur in the middle of those questions in Pembroke that clearly belong together, and the subject matter is similar to questions in other Matthew commentaries. However, the question does not occur in Balliol.

[21] Again, this question is part of the early grouping in Pembroke, but is is not found in Balliol.

[22] The subject matter of this question is appropriate to a Matthew commentary, but the question is found only in Balliol. One question, « Utrum Christus incarnatus fuisset dato quod homo non peccasset », occurs early in Pembroke (no. 9, using Schepers' order) and also in Balliol. However, in Balliol it is surrounded by

When one looks through the list of questions in category A, arranged according to the thematic order in which they would have appeared in a Matthew commentary, one is immediately struck by the fact that the Pembroke manuscript more closely reflects that order than does the Balliol manuscript. Even questions 2 and 6, which have been placed in the second category, occur in the Pembroke manuscript in the order of Matthew. There are only three exceptions to this. The first is the " prologue " question (Pembroke 14), which occurs toward the end of the largest grouping. Being of a more general, thematic nature, it is understandable why that question might have been inserted after the main body of questions. The second exception are the two questions on prayer, which appear later in the Pembroke manuscript (qq. 38 and 39). The third exception is the question on Matthew's conversion, which has been placed with the " prologue " question rather than with the other questions. It is possible that these questions were placed in this order by the editor or editors of the quodlibetic questions, but it is far more likely that the order was suggested by the order in which they occurred in a previous source, namely the Matthew commentary itself. If so, Pembroke stands closer to the original source of these questions than does Balliol.

The prologue question and the one on Matthew's conversion may seem to present some problems, inasmuch as they occur in the Royal manuscript in the third book of the *Sentences*. It is doubtful whether either of these questions properly belong to the *Sentences* commentary of Holcot. Of the forty-two manuscripts of Holcot's *Sentences*, only three place these questions in the *Sentences* commentary, and all derive from the same source. It is significant that they do not appear in the Royal manuscript with the quodlibets. Further evidence that the " prologue " question does not belong to the *Sentences* commentary is provided by the remark in the text of the question: " Quantum ad primum alias in quadam disputatione de quolibet isto anno tenui partem negativam istius articuli " [23]. Holcot might have been participating in a quodlibetic disputation after completing his reading of the *Sentences*, but not during. But removing the question from the *Sentences* does not automatically place it in the Matthew commentary. Unlike any of

questions that do not belong to a Matthew commentary, and Holcot states in the Royal manuscript, fol. 157va, that this question, which occurs there, belonged to the third quodlibet. It was probably inserted into the early questions in Pembroke because of a similarity in subject matter.

[23] Royal 10 C VI, fol. 85vb.

the other questions in category A, this question is far longer and does not occur in the Balliol manuscript. Its absence in Balliol does pose a problem, but not the length of the question. It was normal for prologue questions in biblical commentaries to be lengthy scholastic exercises, in contrast to the shorter questions placed within the exegesis of the text. Whether from the Matthew commentary or a quodlibetic determination, the " prologue " question must be placed within the year after Holcot read the *Sentences*, that is, in the year in which he gave his lectures on Matthew. Holcot states in the question: " Secundo recitabo rationes cuiusdam socii quibus contra me multipliciter replicavit in lectione sua prima ad bibliam " [24]. A similar remark occurs in Holcot's *Sex Articuli*, and there the reference is to the prologue question in the biblical commentary of Crathorn [25]. The most heated part of the debate between Holcot and Crathorn took place in the year after Holcot completed his reading of the *Sentences*, and both the *Sex Articuli* and the " prologue " question must be placed in that context. The reference in the " prologue " question to an earlier quodlibetic dispute " isto anno " suggests that this question should be placed after the *Sentences* (completed ca. June, 1331, or 1332) and after the quodlibetic disputes of Advent (early December, 1331 or 1332), but before the end of that calendar year (on March 24). The prologue question in Holcot's Matthew commentary would have been given shortly after February 10.

For those interested in Holcot as a biblical interpreter, it is to be regretted that we lack the exegetical portion of Holcot's commentary on Matthew. But if the above methodology is sound and we have been able to identify several of the *quaestiones* that once belonged to that work, then some of Holcot's thought on Matthew has been preserved and we are able to place a series of Holcot's theological questions in a more precise temporal and physical setting.

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Schepers, Phil. Jahrb., 77 (1970), 344-353.