Rethinking "Continuity": Erasmus' *Ecclesiastes* and the *Artes Praedicandi*

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Summary: Erasmus' "radical orientation towards continuities," coupled with a series of congruent physical and philosophical circumstances, suggests a possible relationship between certain medieval *artes praedicandi* and the *Ecclesiastes sive de Ratione Concionandi*. By exploring the parallels between these texts, especially in the areas of sermon structure and function, the meaning of amplification and allegory, and specifically used terminology, this study extends the parameters of continuity by allowing the earlier allusive material to enrich one's understanding of the great Renaissance sermon manual. Thus, Erasmus' achievement can be viewed, not as a miraculous aberration, but as part of a long and variegated preaching tradition.

Resurgent interest in rhetorical *doctrina* and burgeoning fascination with the great Desiderius Erasmus have recently provoked considerable scholarly study of his *Ecclesiastes sive de Ratione Concionandi*.¹ Like many entries in the Erasmian canon, this preaching manual is difficult to pigeonhole. Indisputably, it is a "great watershed in the history of sacred rhetoric."² Yet, to assert that it destroys "almost at a blow" the longstanding tyranny of the *artes praedicandi* and is relatable only to Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*³ undercuts Erasmus' "radical orientation toward continuities," his emphasis on "connections and connectedness."⁴ Certainly, if one defines "continuity" in the strictest sense of direct textual citation, then it is very difficult to establish linkage between Erasmus and the arts of preaching. But is such strict constructionism really necessary? Is it even Erasmian? Since parallels between the medieval texts and the Renaissance manual are demonstrable,

especially in the areas of allegory and amplification, perhaps it is time to extend the parameters of continuity, and allow the earlier, allusive material to enrich one's appreciation of the *Ecclesiastes*. Such a stance also makes possible the positing of an intermediate rhetorical reference point between Augustine and Erasmus, thus narrowing a large gap in the history of sacred rhetoric.

The *Ecclesiastes* itself employs several different aspects of rhetoric's methodology in order to perfect both sermon and sermon-giver. A sincere minister/orator, who must experience spiritual catharsis and become a living sermon, is the ostensible subject of Book I.⁵ Erasmus seems to structure most of his initial commentary upon the model of a Ciceronian oration with *exordium*, *narratio*, *partitio*, *confirmatio*, *refutatio*, and *peroratio*; and, like its classical counterpart, this first section is not book-centered.⁶ At the outset, the audience's attention is captured by an explanation of the title, by a discussion of the significance of the word "concio," by a comparison of the teaching function in preacher and Christ, and by a wonderfully detailed description of Satan's enmity to both. The *captatio benevolentiae* completed, Erasmus begins his *narratio* by elaborating on the spiritual qualities which must characterize the sermonizer: a "*cor purum, novum, mundum*" and a "*cor et lingua ignea*" as well as "*modestia*" and "*fortitudo*": also explored are the conditions to be shunned absolutely: superciliousness, superstition, acceptance of mediocrity.⁷ The heart of the book consists of a division of material into the dual considerations of the dignity of the preacher's task and the difficulties inherent in it. Both are "confirmed" by reference to Scripture and by acknowledgement of the power of divine grace. The decadence Erasmus discerns in the current status of preaching acts as a refutation and the grand peroration re-emphasizes the significance of the preaching function which is superior in both difficulty and dignity to that of kingship, monastic life, prophecy, the angelic state, even to the vocation of John the Baptist and various other miracle workers (to column 828). Having completed his classical exposition, Erasmus returns to the items he wishes to reiterate: the necessary spiritual preparation of the preacher and the pitfalls which must be overcome.

In Books II and III Erasmus espouses Augustine's effort "to enlist classical rhetoric in the service of Christian eloquence,"⁸ but the result is distinctly different from the *De Doctrina Christiana*.⁹ Book II defines preaching as a practical discipline requiring certain preliminary skills and discusses it with reference to the rhetorical types, the three ends of oratory, the five areas comprising the art of rhetoric, and the six parts of an individual oration. The last-named (which identifies the third part as *divisio*, following pseudo-Cicero's *Rhetorica ad*

Herennium rather than Ciceronian *partitio*) becomes the subject of the rest of the book.¹⁰ By far the lion's share of this section is devoted to the development of proofs (*probationes*); it weaves together standard methods of confirmation by means of multiple "authorities" with arguments developed through dialectical and rhetorical processes. Erasmus understandably ignores *confutatio*, although he does recommend that any conclusion advanced by the preacher have a quasi-emotional effect and inspire piety in the congregation.

Book II operates in a largely theoretical fashion; Book III sets out to be more "practical." It begins with a review of the areas covered by rhetorical artistry with special reference to arrangement's four senses and with distinct criticism of the dispositional usages of Erasmus' own day.¹¹ He then commences a brief discussion of *memoria* and *pronunciatio* and a very lengthy commentary on modes of amplification and figures of speech. The 55 final columns of this book treat subjects which are strange bedfellows by any standard. Most of columns 1016-62 could probably have been a separate treatise on scriptural analysis if their critique of monasticism had been excised. Erasmus' comments on allegorizing contained here are probably the most clear and practical of all those made in his many works. He distinguishes between types and allegories,¹² names several purposes of the allegorical method, and cautions against too ready a flight from the literal. The *sensus germanus* must always be sought, he maintains¹³; only when a text fails to make sense, or proves itself useless in furthering the spiritual life, or conflicts with moral piety should allegory be the primary interpretive tool.¹⁴ His statements about the abuses of allegorical exegesis stem from the rule that allegories must not undermine the historical sense but must be built on the grammatical-historical understanding of the passage. In what appears to be his most direct bow to Augustine, he concludes with a citation to and explication of the seven "rules" or keys to figurative expression attributed to Ticonius, a move similar to chapters 30 to 37 in Book III of the *De Doctrina Christiana*.¹⁵ But Erasmus did not curtail his remarks at this juncture. The nine last columns on the hortatory style to be used and the prudential judgments to be exercised by the preacher probably belong in Book I or with Erasmus' earlier declarations about decorum in III, cols. 966-67. Perhaps its author's well known dissatisfaction with the *Ecclesiastes* has roots in this section of Book III where material is either poorly integrated with the rest of the treatise or is handled so extensively and theoretically that it seems an excrescence.

Book IV is the shortest. It surveys some commonplace topics treated by preachers: e.g. the five hierarchies as detailed by the Areopagite, the qualities

of the Godhead, the concepts associated with the term "law" — law of Nature, law of Moses, the new law of the Gospels — and the virtues and vices. The final columns are a potpourri of reference material and final instructions to the sermon-giver. Surprisingly, the hodge-podge quality of the Book is not jarring; it can be seen as a kind of topicon for the Christian orator: a brief review of sermon subjects and preaching themes with short notations on their various applications. Erasmus' closing plea for *concordia* between a man and God, among men, and within each individual is particularly compelling both in terms of his own time and of ours (*Ecclesiastes*, cols. 1099-1100).

In its theological justification of the preacher's role, even when that role embraces applied theories of classical rhetoric and homiletics, the *Ecclesiastes* occupies a unique place among Erasmus' many works and as such requires very clear contextualization. A brief survey of contemporaneous practice in the *artes praedicandi* does not, however, supply the requisite context. Definitively, the Renaissance manual's theoretical and practical bases and orientation separate it from those later medieval manuals which exhibited a fascination with the excessive practice of *dilatatio* (methods employed in expanding a commentary or padding an analysis) and with the dictional approach (matching chosen letters or words with sections of a sermon or manual). The latter had appeared as early as Hugh of Sneyth's *De arte praedicandi* and the anonymous *Tractatus de modo praedicandi* of the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century but had achieved a kind of structural importance in the fifteenth with the *De divisione thematis* of Simon Alcock and the *Ars dividendi sermonem* of John Felton.¹⁶ As surviving manuscripts show, the former, dilation or amplification, had always been an interest of the preaching manuals but it assumed strange settings in the later medieval period: Antoninus of Florence introduced dilation by discoursing on seven types of preaching; Michael of Hungary did so by defining rhetorical colors and by expounding the four characteristics "*sunt inquirenda in sermone, scilicet qualitas, quantitas, locus, et tempus.*"¹⁷ Other instances of late medieval malapropism in the use of logico-grammatical processes for sermon formats are likewise far from Erasmus' ken.

Nevertheless, rhetorical structures did influence content in some late fourteenth- and fifteenth-century texts. The point is demonstrated by the seriatim chapter headings in Thomas of Todi's *Ars sermocinandi*: "On Divisions," "On Subdivisions," "On Proofs," "On Expansion," "On Arrangement," "On Introducing a Theme," and "On the Formation of Rhythms."¹⁸ Cicero's dispositional ordering is a bit confused by Thomas; it is certainly

telescoped by John of Gwidernia who advocates assumption of theme, division, and exposition, by Alphonsus Bononiensis' introduction, division, and prosecution, by Stephanus Hoest's division and prosecution.¹⁹ But Henry of Hesse near the end of the fifteenth century still affirmed that incomplete sermons have two parts—theme and division—and that the fourfold structure of theme, protheme, division, and subdivision should continue to be stressed.²⁰

From the lingering rhetorical doctrine observable in the *artes* just mentioned, one might deduce that preaching manuals and classical *dispositio* had been conjoined at some time in the medieval period. Perusal of the available texts indicates precisely that: in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century, a pragmatic orientation in sermon construction is clearly visible, indeed modelled on the design prescribed by Cicero's *De inventione* and pseudo-Cicero's *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. The compositional frames espoused in the classical treatises (*exordium*, *narratio*, *partitio* or *divisio*, *confirmatio*, *refutatio*, and *peroratio*) are, however, wonderfully metamorphosed: Cicero's *refutatio* and *peroratio*, impractical in a sermon, are consequently omitted; likewise, the choice of a scriptural passage or theme which obviously postdates the Roman period becomes here the "given." But other aspects of medieval practice bear striking resemblance to the classical categories: the components of the *exordium* seem to affect the structuring of the protheme, the intercessory prayer, and some segments of the introduction of a theme, although the concepts developed in Ciceronian *narratio* can also be traced in the introduction; *partitio* relates directly to a thematic sermon's division and subdivision while *confirmatio*'s concerns are reflected in the use of authorities and other species of proof for purposes of dilation.²¹ This closely woven and classically oriented sermon format proved rhetorically viable and pastorally effective; it was carefully described in the arts of preaching composed between 1275 and 1350 by John of Wales, Robert of Basevorn, James of Fusignano, Thomas Waleys, and Ranulph Higden.²²

John of Wales' and Basevorn's *Forma predicandi*, Waleys' *De modo componendi sermones*, Fusignano's *Ars predicandi*, and Higden's *Ars componendi sermones* demonstrate how Ciceronian dispositional principles can be accommodated within a medieval form of discourse whose object is the communication of the Gospel message; as such, these manuals make concrete Erasmus' aspiration of conjoining the classical and the Christian. Their existence provides a reference point nearer in time for the study of the *Ecclesiastes* and suggests that some medieval developments in sermon manual history should be factored into its evaluation. Erasmus' achievement can then

be viewed, not by unsatisfactory comparisons with Augustine, but as part of a long and variegated preaching tradition.

The initiating work in this tradition was the *De doctrina christiana* which had, for at least one of its purposes, the refocusing of the classical rhetorical structures for use in the Christian pulpit. Nobly conceived and artistically expressed, Augustine's treatise was grounded in the Roman educational system, specifically in the training of rhetors.²³ That matrix disintegrates at the demise of the empire, taking down with it the Bishop of Hippo's grand scheme. Although homily-type preaching flourished in the monasteries well before the millenium and certainly in the century afterward,²⁴ the specifically Augustinian enterprise of christianizing Ciceronian rhetorical design for sermon use did not bear fruit until the educational system had re-established a quasi classical stance. But then in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the broad-based intellectual foundation which underlay *De doctrina christiana* was difficult to achieve. Consequently, it was the more prescriptive *De inventione* and *Rhetorica ad Herennium* which emerged as the formative rhetorical texts rather than the more theoretical *De Oratore* and *Orator* which had had currency for Augustine.²⁵ Despite this limitation, by developing manuals which enabled those charged with the *cura animarum* to preach clearly and artistically, Fusignano, Basevorn, Higden, and their contemporaries had admirably fulfilled the *spiritus* if not the *littera* of Augustine's treatise.

As fourteenth and fifteenth century education mired itself in the logical and grammatical absurdities of later scholasticism, rhetorical modelling in preaching design became confused, though not entirely lost. Perhaps Traversagni, Reuchlin, and Melanchthon²⁶ in the early sixteenth century acted like Thomas Chobham and Alexander of Ashby in the early thirteenth²⁷: harbingers of the re-emergence of a classical orientation in sermon construction. To see the *Ecclesiastes* as a kind of culmination to these efforts can be instructive because despite his frequent and complimentary references to the *De doctrina christiana* (often tagged "*eleganter explicat Augustinus*" as in col. 1047) Erasmus is not Augustine *redivivus* and his treatise needs a larger backdrop, a significant portion of which is occupied by the classically structured *artes* of the medieval period.

Positing such an orientation for some sections of the *Ecclesiastes* seems eminently defensible. Most of Erasmus' biographers and explicators agree that, at least until 1496, he was "a medieval man, formed by medieval methods in philosophy, theology, and even the liberal arts."²⁸ Unfortunately, the fine library at Steyn Monastery, where Erasmus lived between 1487 and 1492,

burned down in 1549 making unverifiable his possible early exposures to the *artes praedicandi*.²⁹ Nevertheless, evidence exists that he knew a great deal about the genre; when Becar needled him to write a preaching treatise, Erasmus responded: "Even the most fertile field becomes exhausted from over-cultivation. No one should expect more harvests from the sterile little plot which has already been damaged by too-frequent plantings."³⁰ Furthermore, the preaching manuals of John of Wales, Basevorn, Higden, Waleys, and James of Fusignano can even today be found throughout Europe; the majority of these manuscripts were copied in the late fifteenth century. John of Wales' treatise (*Incipit: "In isto libello"*) survives in 19 manuscripts from that period; and Erasmus, one remembers, flourished in England where Basevorn, Waleys, and particularly Higden were familiar names. It is also highly likely that Erasmus knew Fusignano's work since it survives in at least 22 manuscripts from the fifteenth century and was printed several times beginning in 1475.³¹

Erasmus' sojourns at the University of Paris further expand the parameters of contact and influence. From the thirteenth century onward Paris was a principal center for the diffusion of sermons and the processes involved in their construction and delivery were part of the university curriculum at least in the earlier period.³² When Erasmus arrived there in 1495, "Biblical scholars were still following the pattern marked out by the great exegetical works of the Middle Ages."³³ Young scholastics at Paris were consistently given some training in preaching and they appeared frequently in the pulpits of Parisian churches.³⁴ Erasmus reminisces about his own sermon giving in a 1523 letter to John Botzheim. In context it reads: ". . . *Intercidere permulta quae nolim superesse; cupiam autem extare orationes aliquot concionatorias quas olim habui Lutetiae, cum agerem in collegio Montis acuti.*"³⁵

Finally, Erasmus makes numerous references to the preaching advocated by the *artes praedicandi* within the *Ecclesiastes*. Although several of the comments are negative and form part of his general indictment of things scholastic ("*frigidus*" is a fairly definitive adjective), he finds some of the efforts of thematic preaching honest and effective.³⁶ The fact that he labels their authors "*recentiores*" may be as much a reflection on the anonymous transmission of many texts as an effort at dismissal.

Erasmus also seems very conversant with other, but related, medieval prescriptive texts, especially the *artes dictaminis* and *poetriae*, sister arts to the preaching manuals. Indeed, his specific debt to Geoffrey of Vinsauf, author of the *Poetria Nova* and the *Documentum*, has recently piqued scholarly interest.³⁷ But much more telling is the cast of Erasmus' own manual of letter

writing, the *Opus de conscribendis epistolis* of 1522. Drawing on a plethora of Greek and Latin sources, "its exhaustive arsenal of precepts and abundance of examples met with phenomenal success."³⁸ But Erasmus articulated a dilemma in this text when at one point he railed against the legalism of many medieval manualists and at another opposed those purists who would purge humanist epistolography of all vestiges of the *artes dictamines*.³⁹ He solved the dilemma inherent in synthesizing the medieval and the classical by redefining the letter,⁴⁰ allowing the applicable earlier material to assume significance for his own work. The immediately preceding period thus became a matrix rather than a vacuum; and the Erasmian stance of continuity ably demonstrated.

Erasmus' action in the *Opus* seems to provide a paradigm for his practice in the *Ecclesiastes* and a vantage point for critical detection there of the *artes'* shaping spirit. For example, in devoting the *Ecclesiastes'* first book to the minister-orator, he undoubtedly bows to Cicero's and Quintilian's lengthy disquisitions on an orator's education,⁴¹ but his actual words underscore and expand the admonitions of the classically structured sermon manuals whose initial chapters were consistently devoted to the life and habits of the preacher. Higden's assertion, "*Quando vero predicantis vita est sancta, sermo erit efficax et virtuosus*"⁴² is treated much more elaborately by Erasmus who, convinced of the exemplary nature of the preacher's ethos, cites the qualities necessary for a life of holiness: "*sobrietas, victus parsimonia, vigilantia, pudici mores, sermo parvus ac sale conditus, silentii fides, gravitas in moribus, in dictis veritas, comitas decenti gravitate temperata*."⁴³ Likewise, Erasmus shares the concerns of medieval manualists (especially Basevorn and Waleys) that both the internal and external facets of the preacher's life contribute to the "*gloriam Dei*." He reminds clerics that their head and their feet were anointed as well as their hands, that both the body and its clothing are consecrated. The resultant "*vitam puram*" should be manifest within and without "*velut in cibo, potu, cultu, vultu, incessu, domicilio, famulatio*."⁴⁴ As a result of his proper intention, the preacher's happiness will be assured "*non quod veneretur gloriam ab hominibus sed quod expediret evangelio*."⁴⁵

Medieval understanding about the definition and categorization of preaching may also have influenced Erasmus' vision of this task. Among his contemporaries in Italy, preaching had been placed under the umbrella of demonstrative or display oratory.⁴⁶ Both Melanchthon and Erasmus found themselves uncomfortable with this alignment, but whereas Melanchthon created a new category (*didascalicum ordidacticum*) which emphasized the teaching of doctrine, Erasmus decided to locate preaching in the *genus*

suasorum or *deliberativum*.⁴⁷ This action has been interpreted as an illustration of his anti-Mediterranean bias and as such a severe limitation in the *Ecclesiastes* as well as a spur to the centuries of moralistic preaching which followed. But Erasmus' comments in this matter were consonant with his lifelong efforts to inculcate and persuade to good morals and ethically correct behavior. They also reflect the pronouncements on the subject first articulated by Alain de Lille at the end of the twelfth century: "Preaching is an open and public instruction in faith and behavior whose purpose is the forming of men; it derives from the path of reason and from the fountainhead of the authorities."⁴⁸ Although Alan's definition was not adopted by all of the manualists, it was clearly enunciated by Higden: "*Predicatio est publica persuasio debitis loco et tempore pluribus facta ad salutem promerendam*."⁴⁹ Erasmus' observations on the function of the *exordium* ("*ad auditorum excitandum*") and on various aspects of delivery follow standard patterns of rhetorical advice, but in the enthusiasm and comprehensiveness of their commentary they have the flavor of those chapters in the *artes* which explain the "*auditorum alleccione*."⁵⁰ Like Higden, Erasmus recognizes that enticing material can be gleaned, not just from scripture and history but from many sources ("*multis modis*") and, in a discussion of "*parabolarum natura*," Erasmus allows — like his medieval predecessors — for wide-ranging accommodations: "*diximus idem sentiendum de exemplis aut naturis animantium, plantarum, gemmarum, aut aliarum rerum quarumlibet*."⁵¹ His Book II comments on delivery are both instructive and noteworthy. He carefully evaluates every part of the face in terms of its assistance in effective delivery; but he also assesses the arms, the hands, the neck, and even the feet!⁵² His concern about the proper tone of voice ("*optima vox*") which would allow the preacher efficaciously to transmit the verities "*in aures auditorum*" echoes Cicero but seems more pointed toward the preaching office by the words of Thomas Waleys who stresses that the manner of speech is as important as the message.⁵³

Although Erasmus' observations on delivery connect him not only to the dispositionally structured *artes* but to rhetorical texts from several eras, by dedicating his longest consecutive commentary to amplification he certainly seems closer to the orientation of the Middle Ages than to the classical-Augustinian framework. Amplification or "dilation" as it was called in the earlier era had been much in favor with medieval manualists from the thirteenth century onward, and its ramifications sometimes inspired texts concerned solely with its explication as the anonymous *Omnis tractatio* (?1250) and Richard of Thetford's (fl. 1245) *Ars dilatandi sermones*.⁵⁴

Scholars generally trace the formulation of the eight methods of dilation specifically intended for preaching to Richard and from him back to the *artes poeticae*, yet the line of descent is neither clear nor linear. Direct copies of the Thetford text were made well into the sixteenth century; however, his modes (interpretation, division, ratiocination, concordance of authorities, radical agreement with comparative differences, metaphor, fourfold scriptural exposition, and cause/effect) were not mutually exclusive and admitted different *foci* and explication. Manuscripts Gonville 439 and Harley 1615, for instance, extend the number to ten by concentrating more on the qualities of words as dilatory vehicles; James of Fusignano outlines twelve methods, Ranulph Higden ten — but they do not correspond with Gonville and Harley.⁵⁵ In most late thirteenth and early fourteenth century *artes*, dilation assumed a proportional place (12% of Higden's *Ars*, 20% of Waleys') as one of the standard aspects of sermon construction. A notable exception is Fusignano's manual where a heavy emphasis of dilation's rules and examples thereof seems to skew the text in that direction.⁵⁶ Erasmus' concentration on amplification situates him between Fusignano and Waleys as his some one hundred columns on the subject account for 30% of his treatise. From the outset, his view of amplification's function seems quite sanguine:

The preacher will best succeed in moving his hearers to a lively conviction of Christ by focusing on some general idea or commonplace drawn from the overall meaning of a biblical passage and by developing that with all the resources of forensic rhetoric for the copious amplification of a topic.⁵⁷

With the exception of the phrase "forensic rhetoric" in the above advice, Erasmus articulates a more focused version of Waleys' "*Quomodo praedicator dilatari se possit in sermone*":

*Et ideo debet principaliter praedicator laborare ut ea quae sequuntur sint bona et aedificatoria. Ne tamen sint impertinentia ad praecedentia, vel ne desit connexio debita inter ea quae dicuntur, et sic totus processus principalis sit quasi quaedam congeries lapidum qui sibi invicem non aptantur, similiter ne praedicatori desit praedicandi materia, oportet quod sciat quomodo, absque omni impertinentia et cum connexione debita, se possit dilatare.*⁵⁸

Other likenesses to his medieval predecessors are discernible first in Erasmus' admonition about the appropriate usage of amplification ("*ut res tanta videatur quanta est maior aut minor*"⁵⁹). In his chapter "*De dilatacióne faciendā per auctoritates*" Higden had warned: ". . . caveat predicator questionem movere nisi eam valeat aperte solvere. Caveat etiam ne magis bonum etiam ita

commendet quod minus bonum videatur deprimere. . ."⁶⁰ Erasmus' explanation of the myriad verbal devices appropriate to amplification is more sophisticated and more pointed than that of the medievals but his conviction about their importance is the same; his loathing for scholasticism probably accounts for the short shrift given to syllogizing, but Erasmus does agree that the preacher might employ it, especially when addressing the untrained masses.⁶¹ Unlike the earlier authors, he shuns the enthymeme; nevertheless his description of hyperbole, comparison, contrast and their immense variety can only be termed a tour de force on the subject.⁶²

Within the general subject of amplification and strongly reflecting the interests of the Middle Ages falls Erasmus' discussion of scriptural exegesis. Medieval exegetical efforts are often summarized in Augustine of Dacia's jingle: "*Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia*" and to practically every preaching theorist can be attributed a statement similar to Ranulph Higden's: "*verba sacre scripture quadruplicem habent intellectum, scilicet: historiam, tropologicum, allegoricum, et anagogicum.*"⁶³ Ranulph's bald statement of the four levels was frequently adorned and/or varied by his colleagues. A case in point occurs in the seventh mode of amplification described in chapter 39 of Basevorn's *Forma praedicandi*: his explanation of how the text "*Jerusalem quae aedificatur ut civitas*" can be interpreted in quadruple fashion terms the initial level "*historice*" and relates it to terrestrial affairs; the second, "*allegorice*," he applies to the church militant, the moral level is the domain of the faithful soul, and the anagogical indicates the status of the "*Ecclesia triumphante*." Basevorn is certainly more forthcoming than Higden in spelling out the concepts behind quadruple exposition. Even though he vacillates between the usages of "*tropologice*" and "*moraliter*" and proposes an etymology for "*anagogice*" from "*sursum*" (*ana*) and "*ductio*" (*goge*) — so "*quasi sursum ducens*" — he connects vividly the moral exposition of the David and Goliath incident to the imperative that each and every faithful soul should vanquish the devil. Having linked the many mysteries of the temple to the heavenly church and those of the tabernacle to the earthly one, he ends by affirming "*Per allegoriam instruitur fides, per tropologiam formantur mores, per anagogiam elewantur contemplantes.*"⁶⁴

Among fourteenth century theorists, however, the fourfold exegetical methodology was not absolute. Thomas Waleys preferred to feature the "*sensus historicum*" and the "*sensus mysticum*"⁶⁵ reflecting an earlier interpretative formula. Erasmus himself was well aware of the two-level exegesis

practiced by the “*prisci doctores*” who “*non agnoscunt nisi duos sensus*,” and who were very inconsistent, he says, in their references to the spiritual sense.⁶⁶ It was also quite definitively in his purview that “... *in Scripturis quadruplicem tradere intellectum, Historicum sive Grammaticum, Tropologicum, Allegoricum, & Anagogicum*”⁶⁷ and he echoes Basevorn in defining “*Allegoria, quum Scripturum accommodamus ad Christum & huius corpus mysticum — Ecclesiam militantem*” as well as in his vision of “*Anagoge quum hinc evehimur ad Ecclesiam triumphantem*.”⁶⁸ In fact, Erasmus had acknowledged Scripture’s fecundity as early as 1499 and had developed his ideas on the subject in the *Methodus* and in the *Ratio verae theologiae*, maintaining that eternal truth shone variously in different ways, specifically: historically, tropologically, allegorically, and anagogically.⁶⁹ Possibly, his philosophical orientation toward multiple interpretative levels is grounded in Origen’s divisions of the person into body, soul, and spirit — and certainly Erasmus always revered Origen for his trail-blazing critical and exegetical expositions of the Scriptures — but in the *Ecclesiastes* he does not emphasize a triple paradigm.⁷⁰ Although wary of literalness, he sees the literal level as the fundamental basis for all exegesis and castigates Origen for his deprecation of it.⁷¹ Despite this criticism, Origen’s fascination with allegory must have exercised considerable force in prompting Erasmus’ 41 columns on the subject; yet, in light of Erasmus’ obvious acquaintance with preceding modes of thought as well as his efforts to build on the past — his “not only / but also” attitude⁷² — the ubiquity and longevity of medieval allegorizing should not be discounted as a motivational force.

In his development of this section, Erasmus’ penchant to explain, enhance, and embellish traditional material is everywhere apparent. He identifies allegory’s four purposes as (a) veiling mysteries from the impious; (b) exercising pious minds avid to explore hidden truth; (c) fixing divine truth in memory through the use of images; and (d) leading the willing by degrees to perfect knowledge.⁷³ Although he agrees with Augustine that allegories cannot prove but can confirm dogma, he underlines their desirability when the literal sense is of little or no use.⁷⁴ There is a decidedly medieval caste to his comments on the power and excitement of the allegorical patterns: “*Plurimum valent ad excitandum languentes, ad consolandum anima dejectos, ad confirmandum vacillantes, ad oblectandum fastidiosos*.”⁷⁵ Having incontrovertibly displayed allegory’s importance to Biblical interpretation, Erasmus the moralist proceeds to demonstrate that no sense is more significant than the tropological and, like Higden, he lists it immediately after the literal. Anagogy,

which adumbrates the last things of God's mystery,⁷⁶ is treated somewhat briefly as an inevitable step beyond the allegorical. Erasmus may have curtailed his remarks about the anagogical level because its bailiwick — touching on "an eschatological reality of the triune divinity itself"⁷⁷ — remains generally beyond the exegete's reach. Yet, anagogy is never slighted, even when the *Ecclesiastes* credits certain church luminaries with expertise in the four areas: Jerome in grammar, Gregory in tropology, Ambrose in allegory, Augustine in anagogy.⁷⁸ The ascriptions are both startling and amusing: the former because of Erasmus' oft-proclaimed distaste for scholastic categorization and the latter because, in a remarkable bow to medieval lore, he comments on how similar is attributions are to the practice of assigning different apostles to the various professions of faith in the Creed — a device roundly castigated by Higden.⁷⁹

Nevertheless, squarely in the tradition of the best medieval preaching manuals, Erasmus provides a practical application of the four levels in an exposition of Genesis 8, 1-18, where the Lord visits Abraham "as he sat in the entrance of his tent, while the day was growing hot. Looking up, he saw three men, standing nearby." Immediately, he treats "the Lord" with great hospitality and Erasmus likens Abraham's efforts to please his guests to the moral sense, observing "*Talem fere esse familiam, qualis est pater familias.*" But the heart of the explication begins "*Accedet Allegoria quae Christum qui velut hospes, venit in hunc mundum. Superest Anagoge quae nobis aperit mysterium ineffabilis . . . quae una in eademque est in tribus personis.*"⁸⁰ The interpretative position is simple, the pointing carefully done, the effect clear and concise. The exegetical pattern follows that adumbrated by the authors of the fourteenth century *artes praedicandi* and, although more sophisticated in expression, it develops along the same lines indicated by Higden's discussion of the four layers in John 2,1:

*Nupcie facte sunt in Chana Galilee; hec verba ad litteram intelliguntur de nupciis Iohannis evangeliste; secundum allegoriam de desponsione Christi et nostre nature in utero virginali; secundum tropologiam, id est, moralem sensum, intelligitur de unione humane anime ad Christum per gratiam; secundum anagogiam intelligitur de nupciis anime nostre ad Christum in paradiso.*⁸¹

Although the author of the *Ecclesiastes* would have been dismayed at Ranulph's understanding of the literal level, throughout his extensive treatment of amplification, and particularly in his nuancing of the "*sensus allegoricus*" it

seems that Erasmus has taken great pains to respond to the concerns articulated by Higden — concerns which so closely resemble his own: “an exposition of Scripture must not contradict the literal sense, not contradict an article of faith, nor go against the truth.”⁸²

No characterization of Erasmus’ exegetical system is complete, however, without reference to the verb “*accommodare*.” Walter calls it the basic concept underlying his hermeneutic and his theology, but he views its operation in each area as a distinct entity.⁸³ Hoffmann, by highlighting Erasmus’ synthesis of rhetoric and theology, identifies “*accommodare*” as his thought’s most ubiquitous and insistent principle. The impetus to accommodation was doubtless reinforced by Erasmus’ personal conviction about the validity of connections and connectedness as well as the importance of aspiring to transformation rather than conversion. As the major internal dynamic of his work and the acme of decorum, accommodation implies a movement from “*varietas* to *harmonia*, from individual meanings to a common sense, from *sensus* to *consensus*,”⁸⁴ primarily through the process of adaptation, but also by means of contextualization and integration. Accommodation as adaptation can be identified in practically every entry of the Erasmian canon and is especially evident in his prodigious efforts to validate, explicate, and illuminate the texts of Scripture; in the *Ecclesiastes*, it is mandated that the preacher “accommodate” to the circumstances of his flock, both exteriorly and interiorly.⁸⁵ The description of accommodation as contextualization arises out of Erasmus’ anxiety that scholars return “*ad fontes*” in order to explicate the Scriptures wholly and justly. In his preaching treatise, the assertion that source study will allow the accommodation of scripture to the subject matter about which instruction is being given signals a need for contextualization; also, as the process which points allegorical interpretation of Scripture toward Christ and his mystical body, the Church, accommodation embraces both the adaptive and contextualizing functions.⁸⁶ Accommodation as a unifying force appears sporadically throughout Erasmus’ work and operates in two spheres: practically, it is the motivational power behind his desire “to integrate the parts of speech into their overall arrangement, without violating, of course, the particularity of the parts”; theoretically, it is “required to bring about at first similarity and eventually unity in the present dichotomy of the invisible and the visible, the intelligible and the sensible, spirit and matter.”⁸⁷ Certainly, within the *Ecclesiastes*, “*accommodare*” is consistently employed to indicate adaptation, contextualization, or integration. But Erasmus states clearly in the dedicatory letter to the lengthy treatise that in the second and third books he

wishes to accommodate⁸⁸ the precepts of the rhetoricians, dialecticians, and theologians to the use of preaching; here "*accommodare*" seems to assume an expanded role—that of design feature. In this, the word's most comprehensive meaning, may lie a clue to Erasmus' ultimate stance toward the texts that emanated from preceding epochs in the history of secular and sacred rhetoric: he will adapt and contextualize their admonitions and advice in the light of early Renaissance perceptions and expectations and he will integrate his vast learning and humanist consciousness with some of their eminently practical and useful elements. For the last-named, the classically structured *artes praedicandi* were an obvious resource.

Finally, in providing a review of preaching subjects in Book IV, Erasmus might be offering an inclusive system of theological *loci*, "patterned in general it seems after the rules of Tychonius."⁸⁹ He could also be following yet another medieval precedent in that several authors of *artes praedicandi* compiled sermon handbooks as a corollary to their prescriptive manuals. This list would include Alain de Lille, Robert Grosseteste, Thomas Chobham, Ranulph Higden, and several other manualists,⁹⁰ although Erasmus' *topicon* is somewhat shorter than theirs. Actually, it resembles in length the *Pupilla oculi* of John de Burgo (1385), a successful recasting of William of Pagula's well-known *Oculus sacerdotis* which was very influential in the formation of medieval concepts of ecclesiology and piety and, like the preaching manuals, of significant assistance in the implementation of the Lateran Councils' program of *cura animarum*.⁹¹ If taken out of this context, the final book of the *Ecclesiastes* can seem unsatisfactory or even strange. In light of preaching's history, particularly in its medieval phase, the contents and shape of this fourth section are understandable.

A final example of the type of continuity explored in this essay exists in Erasmus' electing to term the sermon a "*concio*"—a choice which can be traced to the usages of Quintilian, Lorenzo Valla, or even Cicero⁹²—but which is not without medieval precedent. The word boasts a respectable entry in the *Mittelateinisches Wörterbuch*, was used to designate preaching in Canon Law and in the *Statuta Antigua Universitatis Oxoniensis*; it also appeared in a late medieval breviary as a synonym for "sermon."⁹³ In addition, the pseudo-Bonaventurean preaching treatise (*Incipit: "Omnis tractatio"*) which survives in at least five manuscripts from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was commonly called the *Ars Concionandi*.⁹⁴ The status of "*concio*," a word with strong classical/humanist ties but which also relates to medieval contexts, is emblematic of what occurs in several parts of the *Ecclesiastes* and results in a tantalizing flashback to a specifically medieval orientation within the preaching tradition.

Certainly, the *Ecclesiastes* presents its commentators with challenges much more pervasive than those indicated here; for example, the effect on Erasmus of the difference between Agricola's and Valla's rhetoric in the humanist tradition, the crucial problem of Erasmus' attitude toward dialectic as part of rhetoric, his acute awareness of the distinction between preaching as Christian instruction — especially understood in the wake of the Third (1179) and Fourth (1215) Councils of the Lateran — and the types of oratory (legal/political) practiced in ancient Rome. Nevertheless, recognizing the elements in Erasmus' preaching manual which are decidedly medieval in character and statement yields two benefits: first, it tempers the tendency to view the *Ecclesiastes* solely as a humanist and splendidly isolated document and second, it suggests that the great writer may "continue" or relate to the more valuable traditions of an earlier age by revamping, refashioning, and reflecting them and not just by direct quotation.

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Notes

1. A modern critical edition of the *Ecclesiastes* is in progress, but only one volume has so far appeared. We are using, therefore, the text printed in Vol. 5 of the *Opera Omnia* of Desiderius Erasmus, ed. J. Clericus (Leyden: Peter Vender, 1704). Book I: cols. 770-847; Book II: cols. 847-951; Book III: cols. 951-1071; Book IV: cols. 1071-1100. A shorter version of this paper was presented at the Learned Societies Conference in Montreal in May, 1995.
2. John O'Malley, "Erasmus and the History of Sacred Rhetoric: The *Ecclesiastes* of 1535," *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook Five* (1985), p. 13.
3. John O'Malley, "Medieval Preaching," in *De Ore Domini*, ed. Thomas Amos & al. (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1989), p. 11.
4. See John O'Malley, "Erasmus and Luther: Continuity and Discontinuity as Key to their Conflict," *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 2 (1974), pp. 51, 57, 59, 65.
5. James Michael Weiss, "*Ecclesiastes* and Erasmus: The Mirror and the Image," *Archiv für Reformationgeschichte*, 65 (1974), pp. 86-87.
6. O'Malley, "Erasmus," p. 20.
7. *Ecclesiastes*, cols. 773-84.
8. Weiss, p. 8.
9. O'Malley, "Erasmus," p. 12.
10. *Ecclesiastes*, col. 862.
11. "Audivi" usually signals a critical evaluation, see *Ecclesiastes*, cols. 954ff.

12. *Ibid.*, col. 1043.
13. *Ibid.*, col. 1019.
14. Jacques Chomarat, *Grammaire et rhétorique chez Érasme* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1981), vol. II, pp. 107ff.
15. Saint Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, tr. J. F. Shaw (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), vol. 18, pp. 668-74.
16. For Hugh, see Th. Charland, *Artes praedicandi* (Ottawa: Publications de l'Institut d'Études Médiévales d'Ottawa, VIII, 1936), p. 45; for the Tractatus, see Munich, Stadtbibliothek MS. 19130, fols. 42^v-44^r; for Alcock, see James J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 339; for Felton, see Oxford, Magdalen College MS. 11, fols. 186^v-190^r.
17. For Antonius, see his *Summa theologia moralis*, part III, ch. V and VI (Venice, 1582), fols 326-339 under "Titulum XVIII"; for Michael, see his *Evagatorium* (Cologne, 1504), part II.
18. Margaret Jennings, "Rhetor Redivivus: Cicero in the Artes Praedicandi," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge*, 68 (1989), p. 121. The *Ars Sermocinandi ac etiam Collationes Faciendi* of Thomas of Todi was edited from MS. Bibliothèque Nationale de France 15965 by June Babcock (Unpublished M.A. thesis, Cornell University, 1941, see p. 11.
19. For John, see Murphy's comments, *Rhetoric*, pp. 337-38; for Alphonsus, see London, British Library, MS. Hamilton 44, fol. 187^rf.; for Penketh, see London, British Library Additional MS. 24361, fols. 52^v-57^r; for Hoest, see his *Modus predicandi subtilis et compendiosus* (Strassburg, 1513), sect. II.
20. Harry Caplan, "Henry of Hesse on the Art of Preaching," *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, 43 (1933), pp. 348ff.
21. A step-by-step comparative analysis appears in Jennings, pp. 92-95.
22. Margaret Jennings, "The Preacher's Rhetoric," in James J. Murphy, ed., *Medieval Eloquence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 114-18.
23. James J. Murphy, "Saint Augustine and the Debate about a Christian Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 44 (1960), 400-10.
24. See Jean Longère, *La prédication médiévale* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1983).
25. John O. Ward, "Cicero's Rhetoric," in Murphy, *Eloquence*, pp. 27-8.
26. O'Malley, "Erasmus," pp. 6-8.
27. Murphy, *Rhetoric*, pp. 311-27.
28. Léon-E Halkin, *Erasmus: A Critical Biography*, tr. John Tonkin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 19.
29. Roland H. Bainton, *Erasmus of Christendom* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), p. 12.
30. Robert G. Kleinhans, "Erasmus' Doctrine of Preaching: A Study of the *Ecclesiastes sive De Ratione Concionandi*," (Th.D dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1968), p. 11.

31. Charland, pp. 48-9, and Harry Caplan, *Medieval Artes Praedicandi: A Handlist* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1934), *passim*; Supplementary Handlist, 1936.
32. Jennings, "Rhetor," p. 115; Paris' ascendancy is clear in David D'Avray, *The Preaching of the Friars* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), pp. 7 and 137.
33. Cornelis Augustijn, *Erasmus: His Life, Works, and Influence*, tr. J. C. Grayson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), p. 16.
34. R. J. Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe* (Savage, MD: Barnes and Noble Books, 1990), p. 165.
35. Translated by R. A. B. Mynors in the *Collected Works of Erasmus, Vol. IX: Correspondence of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), p. 351; Latin from P. S. Allen, ed. *Opus Epistolarum*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1906), p. 37.
36. *Ecclesiastes*, cols. 862-64, 953-55.
37. Paul G. Schmidt, "Erasmus und die mittellateinische Literatur," in August Buch, ed. *Erasmus und Europa* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1988), pp. 133-34, and Hubert S. Herbruggen, "Artes dictandi und erasmische Theorie in More's lateinischen Briefen," in S. Revard & al., eds. *Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Guelpherbytani* (Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1988), 503-12.
38. J. L. Vives, *De Conscribendis Epistolis*, ed. and tr. Charles Fantazzi (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989), p. 13.
39. Judith Rice Henderson, "Erasmus on the Art of Letter Writing," in James J. Murphy, ed. *Renaissance Eloquence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 331-32; cf. Erika Rummel, "Erasmus Manual of Letter Writing: Tradition and Innovation," *Renaissance and Reformation*, 13 (1989), 300-10.
40. Henderson, p. 355.
41. See Murphy, *Rhetoric*, pp. 128-31, and Jennings, "Preacher's Rhetoric," p. 125.
42. Ranulph Higden, *Ars componendi sermones*, ed. Margaret Jennings (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), p. 9 (In ch. III: "De conversacionis sanctitudine").
43. *Ecclesiastes*, col. 839.
44. *Ibid.*, col. 791.
45. *Ibid.* and col. 843 where Erasmus envisions the perfect preacher "*docens ignaros, blande revocans errantes, erigens aegrotos, consolans lugentes, opitulans adflictis, sublevans oppressos.*"
46. O'Malley, "Erasmus," pp. 12 and 23.
47. *Ecclesiastes*, cols. 857-59 and O'Malley, *Ibid.*, p. 27.
48. *Alan of Lille: The Art of Preaching*, tr. Gillian Evans (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1981), pp. 16-7.
49. From the "Prefacio" in Higden, p. 5.
50. A chapter similar to Higden's "*De auditorum alleccione*" can be found in almost every preaching manual.

51. *Ecclesiastes*, cols. 865-66.
52. *Ibid.*, cols. 963-65.
53. For the Waleys' text see Charland, p. 333 and Murphy, *Rhetoric*, p. 334; for Erasmus, *Ibid.*, col. 957.
54. Murphy, *Rhetoric*, pp. 326-30, and Jennings, "*Rhetor*," pp. 96-7.
55. Jennings, "Preacher's Rhetoric," p. 124.
56. Jennings, "*Rhetor*," pp. 100-01.
57. John Chamberlin, *Increase and Multiply* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976), p. 74 summarizing *Ecclesiastes* cols. 1035-36.
58. Charland, p. 386.
59. *Ecclesiastes*, cols. 968-69.
60. Higden, p. 63.
61. *Ecclesiastes*, col. 997.
62. *Ibid.*, cols. 970f.
63. Higden discusses the fourfold exegetical method in two chapters: "*De thematis introduccione*" (p. 35) and "*De facienda per auctoritates*" (p. 65).
64. Charland, p. 294.
65. *Ibid.*, pp. 387f.
66. *Ecclesiastes*, col. 1034.
67. *Id.*
68. *ibid.*, col. 1035.
69. Albert Rabil, Jr., *Erasmus and the New Testament* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1972), p. 110.
70. Joseph W. Trigg, *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third Century Church* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983), p. 125.
71. *Ecclesiastes*, col. 1028.
72. Contemporary studies of Erasmus (e.g. Chomarat, Hoffmann, O'Malley) emphasize the synthetic and inclusive nature of his work. For commentary on the pervasiveness of medieval allegorizing, see Murphy, *Rhetoric*, pp. 302f, and Jennings, *Higden*, p. 35. A comprehensive survey of Erasmus' understanding of allegory can be found in J. B. Payne, "The Hermeneutics of Erasmus," in J. Coppens, ed. *Scrinium Erasmianum*, vol II (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), pp. 35-47.
73. John B. Payne, *Erasmus: His Theology of the Sacraments* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1970), p. 49.
74. *Ecclesiastes*, cols. 1043-44 and 1047-48.

75. *Ibid.*, col. 1046.
76. Manfred Hoffmann, *Rhetoric and Theology: The Hermeneutic of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), p. 103.
77. *Ecclesiastes*, cols. 1034-35 and 1037.
78. *Ibid.*, col. 1034.
79. See Jennings' comments in Higden, p. xxxv.
80. *Ecclesiastes*, cols. 1036-37.
81. Higden, p. 35.
82. Murphy, *Rhetoric*, p. 335, translates the caveats in Higden, p. 68.
83. Peter Walter, *Theologie aus dem Geist der Rhetorik* (Mainz: Matthias-Grunewald, 1991), p. 33.
84. Hoffmann, p. 9.
85. Accommodation, tempered by prudence, is a recommended attitude for the preacher who must deal with the variety of gender, age, conditions, natural dispositions, opinions, institutions of life, and customs. See Hoffmann, pp. 41 and 45.
86. See n. 68 and *Ecclesiastes* col. 10261 which Hoffmann summarizes (p. 52): "To accommodate Scripture appropriately to the subject matter, it is not enough to cull opinions from modern anthologies. Rather, one must return *ad fontes* and elicit the genuine meaning from the scriptural context."
87. Hoffmann, pp. 109 and 9.
88. *Ecclesiastes*, col. 770 connoting "to take away from so as to apply to."
89. Hoffmann, p. 58.
90. W. A. Pantin, *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1955), p. 189-218 discusses at length the many sermon theorists who also wrote manuals of instruction; cf. Jennings' comments in Higden, p. xxxvi.
91. Both the *Pupilla* and the *Oculus* survive in numerous manuscripts; see Pantin, pp. 204-14. The best orientation to manuals of instruction is that of Leonard E. Boyle, "A Survey of the Writings Attributed to William of Pagula" (Unpublished D. Phil. dissertation, Oxford University, 1956).
92. O'Malley, "Erasmus," p. 15.
93. *Lexicon Latinitatis Medii Aevi*, p. 245; *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, p. 469; *Mittellateinisches Wörterbuch*, II, 11.
94. Charland, pp. 30-2.