

A Response to William Short's "From Paris to Alcalá: The Franciscan School and the University, 1219-1533"

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Brother William, Dr. Short, it is a special privilege to hear you speak on this topic and to honor the contributions you and your brothers have made to the Graduate Theological Union over these many years. As an expert in the history of the early Franciscan movement and as a contributor to the order's tradition of education, I think you embody something of what the friars of FST have meant to the rest of us on the GTU's Core Doctoral Faculty and around the seminaries. It's hard to imagine our peculiar *sacrum commercium*, our holy bazaar, without our Franciscan friends. I know I speak for many when I say we do not suffer your move gladly. We will remain proud of the way your school has linked the beginnings of the project of 1962 to the first professors of any kind in the North American west, the Scotist Fray Lector Junipero Serra, and you've linked us to the 500+ year history of learning standing behind the 18th Scotist missionary. The CDF of the GTU will always claim you as an integral part of our history and of who we are. Remember us. Pray for us.

So your paper set off a cascade of responses in my cluttered mind. I managed to gather these cascading responses into two puddles. I'd like to describe these pools to you.

Pool number one contains the parameters of the history of education – and theological education – in and out of Europe, as you outline them. I want to suggest that you propose an important historical model.

Your model proposes a slightly unconventional historical landscape of education. Historians of medieval education have often emphasized the uniqueness of the university, a European invention. Now no one is claiming that Europeans invented a liberal approach to knowledge or the application of logic to mathematical, astronomical, medical, theological, and legal questions, the creative adaptation of authoritative texts to contemporary questions: all these methods had flourished in Islamic schools scattered from Tus in eastern Iran to Cordova for over three hundred years before the first European universities. And of course, as you say, Europeans borrowed liberally from the achievements of scholars of the Muslim world. It's the institutional frameworks and the fixed, regulated curricula culminating in degrees and diplomas that were unique and new. In particular, these curricula "formed" students through three rigors: textual exposition, formal oratory, and formal debate. The early university was a particular institutionalization of critical thinking, and theology was a vital component of it. Medievalists have been bewitched by this institution. Generations have been drawn to the early histories of Bologna and Paris, to some extent even Oxford and Cambridge, the schools with the broadest influence in European intellectual life. Their allure will continue to seduce. Ronald Witt in a recent book suggests that twelfth-century schools in Italy and northern France represent two distinctive intellectual trends, one more pragmatic and oriented toward law in Italy, the other more metaphysical and speculative oriented toward theology in northern France. The two trends marked out paths leading to both humanism and late medieval scholasticism. There is much to discuss here. A number of scholars have been studying the texts of masters working in the

formative years of the University of Paris, a period of extraordinary importance for the development of western science and philosophy. Riga Wood, in a project at a university with a big particle accelerator located somewhere south of San Francisco, has drawn attention to the central role played by an English Franciscan, Richard Rufus of Cornwall. Friar Richard is actually the earliest scholar known to lecture on Aristotle's physics and metaphysics at a western university, as early as the 1230's.

The usual picture stresses the domination of the intellectual landscape by Bologna and Paris until the second half of the fourteenth century, when new universities spread in Italy and northern Europe, making things much more complicated. But Bill, you call attention to the important and almost always neglected parallel development, namely convent schools, which Franciscans established before St. Francis died, and another well-known mendicant order also opened schools at the same time. By 1231, five years after Francis died, the Franciscans already had eight schools in Italy, France, and Germany. There were some dozens by century's end. These schools quickly developed a formal curriculum like the university's and proliferated, in spite of the suspicions of many theologians, priests, and prelates that these friars were surely heretics. You go further than challenge the standard di-chromatic Bologna-Paris view of the early thirteenth century, or trichromatic (Bologna-Paris-Oxford), or tetrachromatic (adding Cambridge). You point out that these mendicant schools participated in budding international networks, which is what medieval mendicant orders were, formally organized international networks – the only *cultural* organizations in Europe before the year 1500 to move significant numbers of personnel systematically between houses scattered across the world as they knew it, and between their schools.

These wandering friars and their promiscuous disregard for cultural boundaries! How we have loved them in Berkeley, at the GTU, a place where each of our seminaries and centers finds the integrity of a tradition not in cozy isolation, but in a *sacrum commercium*, in holy traffic. To be sure mendicant scholars do show us how the landscape of medieval education was about the reception of Aristotle, and about pressing the limits of Aristotle's physics and metaphysics, and about an extraordinary, growing sophistication in the analysis of theological and pastoral subjects. But if we examine Franciscans closely and pay attention to the full scope of their deeds and their passions, they carry us from our stereotypes of medieval Europe into the real world. I say "mendicant scholars" advisedly, because there are in truth more than one mendicant order carrying us down this highway across Europe, over to Alcala and Salamanca, and to mendicant colleges of the valley of Mexico.

So, ra ra, for the medieval university, but three cheers for mendicant schools and scholars. Historians and theologians interested in culture at its widest dimensions within and beyond medieval and Reformation Europe ought to pay more attention to mendicant schools. And we have only spoken of the lateral movement of friars across continents and cultural geographies. There is their *penetration* of cultural geographies. Because these imitators of the poor did in fact have the uncanny ability to reach and be a part of lives at every social rank. So here they are, producing some of the most important work in the history of medieval philosophy, science, and theology, but they also prized and worked hard to serve self-consciously the practical, spiritual needs of the humblest of men, the humblest women. Who else in medieval society in the west can you study on this social and geographical scale?

So the first puddle of my mind, Bill, consists of thoughts like these about a geography of medieval learning that you ambitiously outline for us.

Puddle number two contains Franciscans and ideas. For this, I'm just going to pull out one of the amphibious thoughts lurking in the murky waters of the my mind. It looks like this.

I'm so glad you mentioned Pope Benedict's Regensburg Address. Because not everyone knows why he was wrong. As a Protestant I actually get extra credit for saying the pope was wrong from a pulpit, the likelihood of wrong popes being a rare instance of agreement between 13th-century Franciscans and 16th-century Protestants. Benedict was vilified for criticizing Islam in that speech. I realize that's sort of complicated, because it was not actually Benedict's intention to criticize Islam. For example, in your quotation, Benedict is agreeing with many Muslim scholars that ibn Hazm was heretical. However, Benedict *did* intend to blame the Franciscan theologian John Duns Scotus for the rise of modern skepticism. This reproduces an old narrative circulating among some Catholic historical theologians in Germany before and after WW II. The narrative usually included a misunderstood William Ockham and Martin Luther, and in fact Lutherans had their own version of this narrative. For example, the brilliant, stodgy Lutheran historian of dogma Reinhold Seeberg agreed that Scotus and Luther were fideists, and what exactly is wrong with that? But let's not quibble. This narrative line, running from Scotus through late medieval nominalism through Luther to modern religious infidelities was also, at that same time, being problematized by a small army of Franciscan, Augustinian, and even Dominican (*mirabile dictu*) historical theologians and philosophers already in Raztinger's youth, these scholars taking the bold step of actually studying late medieval theologians rather than repeating the dodgy things others said about them.

And they rendered ludicrous the idea that a single system of thought, in a version declared normative by a nineteenth-century pope with an agenda against liberal republicanism should mark the highpoint of medieval intellectual achievement, against which high point everything inconsistent with a Leonine Thomism should count as decline. In the last half-century, even the theology of Thomas Aquinas has been liberated from this restrictive, suffocating assumption, and historical theology, as it turns out, was more diverse in the thirteenth century than anyone had imagined. It's worth glancing backward from the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, when the only truly normative, and equally maleable, theologian was Augustine; when Scotus was much more discussed than Ockham; when Albertus Magnus commanded as much attention as Aquinas; when a Scotist, John Major, mentored the young Francisco de Vitoria at Paris, who later went on to the Dominicans of Salamanca; when the foremost Thomist of the Reformation era, Thomas de Vio Cajetan, Scholastic theologian in bold type with a capital S, wrote commentaries on the bible that give evidence of a clearly humanistic imprint; and when the Grand Inquisitor of Spain, Cardinal Ximenes, could be one of the most important promoters and organizers of humanist projects in Europe. There just isn't much room for rise-and-decline narratives of late medieval and early modern theology.

That's out of my second puddle. Franciscans complicate our view of European intellectual life in a delightful way.

So here we are. You leave us drenched by Franciscan fountains, and theology is a journey, and a mixed metaphor. It's a caravan of between nine and twenty four busses, nine seminaries and between five and nine centers and programs, depending on how you count the centers. They're all barreling up holy hill. Now one of them is peeling away.

Bill, I will presume to declare that one of the special purposes you and the Franciscans and your students have had for the GTU, and perhaps a purpose we all have for each other, is to show us how to drive differently. May your spirit linger here; may it always animate our *sacrum commercium*, our ecumenical, cross-religious, inter-traditional traffic jam on top of holy hill. And may the grinding of our engines echo between the walls of Mission San Louis Rey!