

Between Two Worlds: Review of the Digital Edition of *Summa de officiis ecclesiasticis*

S. Douglas Olson

Abstract Fischer's digital edition of Wilhelm von Auxerres *Summa de officiis ecclesiasticis* is in many ways a beautiful and thoughtfully constructed text. I nonetheless pose a number of skeptical questions regarding the structure and conception of its critical apparatus.

Zusammenfassung Franz Fischers digitale Edition von Wilhelm von Auxerres *Summa de officiis ecclesiasticis* ist in vielfacher Hinsicht ein sorgfältig durchgeführtes Projekt einer kritischen Edition. In meinem Beitrag stelle ich dennoch ein paar kritische Fragen bezüglich der Struktur und der Konzeption des kritischen Apparates.

Keywords visualisation of digital editions, apparatus criticus, methodology of critical editions

I find myself in an awkward position, asked to review a printed text that is only a limited proxy for the electronic document that is the object of primary discussion. What follows is therefore a response both to Franz Fischer's essay on his digital edition of Wilhelm von Auxerres *Summa de officiis ecclesiasticis* and to the edition itself (available online at http://guillelmus.uni-koeln.de/tcrit/tcrit_toc accessed July 10, 2017). This is in many ways a beautiful and elegantly constructed text. I nonetheless note three issues, all having to do with the apparatus criticus. The first is far and away the most significant and goes to the heart of the question of what a critical edition ought to be.

One fundamental characteristic of a proper modern critical edition of any text is that it offers a reliable report of all significant manuscript readings supported by a stemma that allows the reader to interpret those readings and thus to follow the editor's process of reasoning with them and perhaps resist it. This is in many ways the editor's most basic responsibility and cannot be handed off to others, at least to the extent that the editor wishes to claim to be doing something more than processing and repeating potentially unreliable information known only at second hand.

Nor—and this is in some ways an even more central point in the current case—can reports of the readings in individual manuscripts be allowed to stand in for those of entire families. The problem with this approach is that every individual manuscript of a text must be assumed a priori to be different from all others in ways that cannot be known before collation: if manuscript A has a variant reading, therefore, this tells us nothing about the reading in the common exemplar of the family consisting of manuscripts A, B and C, because what A offers may be an eccentric error and the exemplar may have had a reading shared by B and C. Nor can affiliations such as these even be reliably established before collation is complete (since some copies of a text have a complex history that may escape random spot-checking), and establishing them is a necessary preliminary step to producing a reliable text and apparatus (since only after one has worked out the relationship between the witnesses can one know how to evaluate the readings they offer, as well as what information is worth recording in the apparatus and what is “noise” that ought to be ignored).

Collation is a laborious and time-consuming process, particularly in the case of long texts, on the one hand, and those with a rich manuscript tradition, on the other. But this is among the most basic tasks that work as an editor involves, and a text in any format that fails to offer a complete report of the manuscript readings accompanied by a systematically argued stemma that helps make sense of them cannot be called a true critical edition, whatever else it may be. There appear to be about a dozen manuscripts of the *Summa de officiis ecclesiasticis*, but only three have been collated, with *P1* taken to be the most important, and *P2* and *T* taken to represent individual families. For the reasons noted above, this is an inadequate basis for creating either a reliable text or an authoritative and informative critical apparatus. If electronic editions are to match traditional printed texts in scholarly significance, they must adopt the established best practices of such texts. If they fail to do so, there is little academic point to the exercise, despite the undeniable advantages electronic format offers in terms of possibilities for display, distribution and the like.

Less significant but still important for consideration as we move across the electronic threshold are two matters of formatting. First, one elegant, highly serviceable feature of modern printed critical editions is the location of the critical apparatus, along with any relevant citation apparatuses, at the foot of the page rather than in an appendix or elsewhere. Standard practice is that the portion of the text covered by the apparatus will match exactly what is printed above, regardless of whether some space on the page must be sacrificed to make this possible. This arrangement is intended to allow the reader’s eye to move easily back and forth between text and apparatus, both of which must be visible at the same time for the latter to be used effectively. The architecture of the on-line text of the *Summa de officiis ecclesiasticis*, unfortunately, does not honor this tradition, but instead requires the

reader to abandon the text above to scroll or click down to consult the various apparatuses. This is not merely inelegant but has a substantial negative impact on the usefulness of the text precisely as a critical text. As we move forward as a field with similar projects, more attention ought to be given to issues of lay-out in electronic editions and to what can be learned from the print tradition in this regard.

Second, standard critical apparatuses have a highly refined conventional code for communicating information about manuscript readings as clearly as possible. Although these conventions are not rigidly fixed, they incorporate a certain established logic and style of expression, and can be regarded as another set of time-tested best practices. Thus if one wishes to communicate e.g. at Tractatus 1.7 “*quod laus dei ineffabilis est et incomprehensibilis*” that *P*₁ and *P*₂ offer “*et*”, while *T* offers “*et est*”, one might write “*et P*₁ *P*₂ : *et est T*”, or (more concisely, although perhaps less helpfully, and implying that *T*’s reading is truly an outlier) “*et] et est T*”, or (to put matters in a different way) “*est post et add. T*” (implying by the choice of verb that this is specifically an addition to the text and is not to be regarded as a potentially authoritative variant). To write “*et: est add T*”, by contrast, is to make matters unhelpfully obscure, both because the note does not specify where *est* is found and because “*add*” is not marked as an abbreviated word by inclusion of the period. It is precisely such confusion that the standard style of phrasing is intended to avoid. A good apparatus criticus also aims for as much regularity in the presentation of material as possible, above all else in order to spare the reader the difficulty of decoding what must otherwise be assumed to be significant variations in style. If one is going to write “*id est P*₂, *T* : om. *P*₁” at Tractatus 1.6, therefore, one ought also to write “*dicitur P*₁, *T* : om. *P*₂” rather than “*dicitur* : om. *P*₂” just below, or else have some very specific reason for handling seemingly identical stemmatic situations in different manners. Nor is it clear e.g. at Tractatus 1.19 “*imperfectiois, si non possumus habere statum*” what the note “*imperfectiois ... statum T; om P*₁, *P*₂; *imperfectiois, si non possumus statum P*₂” is intended to communicate about the reading in *P*₂ in particular, or at Tractatus 1.20 “*lectiones et duodecim psalmos*” what “*psalmos: ante lectiones exp T*” means. These are tiny points. But a critical text is made up of thousands of similarly tiny points and of the larger judgments that depend on them, and its general integrity and usefulness depend directly on a careful handling of such matters.