

**'Saving Dionysius': Aquinas' Exemplary Reception of the Dionysian *corpus*
-a Metacritique.**

Alan Philip Darley
University of Nottingham

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ABSTRACT

The enigmatic collection of texts known as the *corpus Dionysiacum* is well known for sourcing a particular sensibility in theology known as apophatic theology or *via negativa* which seeks to give due weight to the transcendence of God in relation to the contingencies of human language. This approach has found a new hearing within the contemporary world, especially amongst postmodern and pluralist thinkers, such as Jaques Derrida, Jean-Luc Marion, Catherine Keller, William Franke or John Hick. This thesis explores how Thomas Aquinas' reception of the Pseudo-Dionysius (who is Thomas' third most cited authority) might offer a fruitful dialogue or critique of these other receptions. Aquinas is particularly valuable for this role because he is recognised as a foremost Doctor of the Church and a 'classic' intellectual defender of orthodoxy.

Aquinas notices that the 'Blessed Dionysius' writes in an 'obscure' fashion and this fact is what permits the divergent receptions to arise. I have schematised these receptions broadly into two streams: one radically agnostic and monistic and the other broadly orthodox. The radically agnostic stream traceable to Plotinus runs through John Scotus Eriugena, Meister Eckhart and Nicholas de Cusa through to Hegel and his followers, whilst the orthodox stream flows through Augustinians like Hugh of St Victor, Denys the Carthusian, Robert Grosseteste and Aquinas. The Eastern orthodox reception also falls within the orthodox stream, except that this also retains some of Dionysius' own ambiguity in its essence/energies distinction which (as far as the truth of things themselves is concerned), Aquinas helps clarify.

This study structures Thomas' reception around four systematic themes which illustrate the superiority of Thomas' reading over 'Plotinian' receptions old and new, especially allegedly 'anti-metaphysical' ones. These themes are Scripture, Language, Knowledge and Hierarchy. Saving Scripture (Chapter 1) is important for illuminating Dionysius' metaphysics and qualifying the nature of his apophysis against postmodern or pluralist readings of people like Hick or Keller who insist God can be named by any name of which none offers any knowledge claims. For Dionysius, by contrast the 'names' of God come from revelation and that revelation is rooted in holy Scripture. I show how Aquinas preserves and clarifies Dionysius' reverence for Scripture and its metacritical authority over other authorities. Chapter 1 underscores the best paradigm for understanding the historical Dionysius as in some sense an 'Origenian' Christian. This is not original as it has been defended in various forms by Perczel, Meyendorff, Kharlamov, Arthur, Ramelli and Golitzin. But the neglect of Origen's influence on the *CD* in other works has resulted in an impoverished understanding of its author, his metaphysics and Aquinas' contribution. Aquinas shares more in common with Dionysius in regard to the Divine inspiration, authority and canon of scripture than do his postmodern readers. He also shares the

participatory metaphysics behind Dionysius' Origenian hermeneutics which saves it from postmodern distortion. But if Dionysius is essentially Origenian; Aquinas is Augustinian which is a kind of reformed Origenianism, hence Augustine frequently is credited with 'a better explanation.' This framework provides a more nuanced and defensible understanding of the *literal sense* with its locus in grammar, history and authorial intention as the normative one for doctrine and the pedagogical foundation for the 'cathedral' of spiritual senses.

Chapter 2 demonstrates how true language about God can be saved through the Neoplatonic principle *omne agens agit sibi simile*, that effects share a likeness with their Cause. As Aquinas succinctly put it 'we know that this proposition which we form about God when we say "God is," is true; and this we know from His effects' (*ST1.3.4.2.*). Aquinas provides a metaphysics of being which addresses questions of perennial concern in a systematic and authoritative capacity. Chapter 2, in particular, uncovers Aquinas' transformation of Dionysian language of *hyperousios* into his own predication of God as *Ipsum Esse per se subsistens*. I show how the inclusion of *esse* within his ontology is one reason why Aquinas' metaphysics trumps postmodern and secular anti-metaphysics where something other than existence, such as potency, is posited as more basic, which is absurd. This chapter further demonstrates how the Byzantine essence/energies distinction, almost completely ignored in Western postmodern reception, illuminates the thought of Dionysius and renders some of his mysterious paradoxes more intelligible, but that this distinction is clarified within a more precise Chalcedonian Christology.

Linked to the question of being in Chapter 2 are the importance of first principles of knowledge, discussed in Chapter 3. Aquinas clarifies a superior and more lucid account of knowledge than postmodern and pluralist receptions through his explicit recognition of the necessity of first principles, especially the Principle of Non-Contradiction. These are essential to 'save knowledge' from a slide into nihilism. Against postmodern receptions I show that the PNC is still retained even within the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, so that Aquinas' reception is indeed exemplary. Chapter 3 essentially addresses an objection raised by the agnostic reception that if Dionysius is correct that God is 'beyond being,' then surely He is 'beyond knowledge,' and therefore 'Super-unknowable?' On this reading, negative theology is thus construed as an anti-philosophy to 'the philosophy of Logos' which seems on first glance to be compatible with Dionysius' language of 'unknowing.' However, I show through primary sources that the Dionysian unknowing is still paradoxically a form of knowing but in a higher mode as Aquinas recognises. Thomas' reception provides a rationally hopeful alternative to this agnostic stream which promises teleological fulfilment to the human instinct for intelligibility in the beatific vision which is to know God in his essence. This chapter brings a climax to the treatment of two

streams of Dionysian reception, one characterised by strong agnosticism, from Plotinus' account of the One 'above' Nous and therefore unknowable even to itself and the other following the 'positive' apophaticism of Augustinian orthodoxy which emphasises the Trinitarian Unity of the One and Nous by which the Cause can be known through His effects and through self-revelation. The difference has fundamental consequences for anthropology. We saw that Aquinas himself sees his project as saving Dionysius from 'a certain perverse interpretation'¹ (exemplified in Eriugena). One obvious strength of Aquinas' reception is that he retains a metaphysical basis for essences including the essence of human person which is a necessary condition for science.

A possible *objectio* is addressed in Chapter 4, regarding the exemplary nature of Aquinas' reception in that he still values Dionysius metaphysical vision of hierarchy, an exceedingly unpopular vision today. This chapter attempts to show how Aquinas transforms and 'saves' hierarchy from negative connotations through recovering its original context of Goodness and love in which the contemplative 'passes on' the fruits of his contemplation to those receiving instruction and specifically through its basis in the metaphysics of primordial Beauty in which all things participate. Forgetting Aquinas, secularists have taken the false turn of assuming that nature does indeed act 'in vain' and as a result have lost philosophy's birthing pool of wonder. As coextensive with both Nous and the Good, Beauty as a Divine Name provides a powerful and coherent counter-ontology to modern nihilism. The final section of this chapter on the greatness and limitations of Aquinas defends the Angelic Doctor by showing that even in those controversial but rare occasions where his reception is not true to the things in themselves (for example regarding the place of women, slaves or the Jewish people), his method of *disputatio*, from the emerging city universities and his commitment to the supreme authority of Scripture remains exemplary. This resists the *zeitgeist* (in which the idea of the university is in decline) by reaffirming the cognitive status of theology which flows from its origin in revelation. I show that Aquinas' reception of the *CD* is superior to the postmodern reductive reframing of theology as *theopoetics*, since the term itself is parasitic on the philosophical theology which it denies and therefore to which it is not entitled. Aquinas' reading of the *CD* is therefore a sharp weapon – a metacritique - *against* postmodern and secular thought.

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Abbreviations

Dionysius

CD	<i>Corpus Dionysiacum</i>
CH	<i>Celestial Hierarchy</i>
DN	<i>Divine Names</i>
EH	<i>Ecclesiastical Hierarchy</i>
EP	<i>Letters</i>
MT	<i>Mystical Theology</i>

Page references, unless otherwise indicated will refer to the Luibheid translation of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*

Aquinas

CAM	<i>Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics</i>
CAP	<i>Commentary on Aristotle's Politics</i>
CAPA	<i>Commentary on Aristotle's Posterior Analytics</i>
CJohn	<i>Commentary on John</i>
CEph	<i>Commentary on Ephesians</i>
CGal	<i>Commentary on Galatians</i>
CRom	<i>Commentary on Romans</i>
CEG	<i>Contra Errores Graecorum</i>
CT	<i>Compendium Theologiae</i>
DAF	<i>De articulo Fidei</i>
DE	<i>De Ente et Essentiae</i>
DM	<i>De Malo</i>
DP	<i>De Potentia</i>
DRR	<i>De Regno ad Regem Cypri</i>
DU	<i>De Unione</i>
DV	<i>De Veritate</i>
DSC	<i>De Spiritualibus Creaturis</i>
DSS	<i>De Substantiis Separatis</i>
IDC	<i>Commentary on Liber De Causis</i>
IDE	<i>Expositio libri Boetii in de ebdomadibus</i>
IDN	<i>Expositio In de Divinis Nominibus</i>
IDT	<i>Expositio de Boetii in de trinitatis</i>
In Hebr.	<i>Commentary on Hebrews</i>
LEJob	<i>Literal Exposition on Job</i>
SCG	<i>Summa Contra Gentiles</i>
SPsalms	<i>Super Psalmos</i>
SSS	<i>Super Scriptum Sententiae</i>
ST.	<i>Summa Theologiae</i>

Page references, unless otherwise indicated will refer to the Marsh translation of Aquinas' *Commentary on the Divine Names (IDN)*. *Summa Theologiae* will be referenced 1, 1-II, II-II followed by the number of the question, and article. Similar divisions follow in his other works.

AugustineCoG – *City of God*Cfaustum – *Contra Faustum*EIP – *Ennerationes in Psalmos*OCD – *On Christian Doctrine*DGAL - *De Genesis Ad Literam*DUC - *De Utilitate Credendi*DDQ - *De Diversis Quaestionibus*DT - *De Trinitate***Albert Magnus**CMT – *Commentary on Mystical Theology.***Basil**DSS – *De Spiritu Sanctus***Boethius,**COP – *Consolation of Philosophy***Eriugena, John Scotus,**DDN- *Periphyseon (De Divisione Naturae)***Germanus of Constantinople**EHMC – *Ecclesiastical History and Mystical Contemplation***Gregorius Nyssanus**DVM - *De Vita Moysis (Life of Moses)*CEunomium – *Contra Eunomius***Hugh of St, Victor**DeSac – *De Sacramentis***Iamblichus**DM – *De Mysteriis***Irenaeus**CH – *Contra Haereses***John of Damascus,**DFO - *De Fide Orthodoxa***Origen**OFP – *On First Principles*CJohn – *Commentary on John*CCant. – *Commentary on Song of Songs*CGen – *Commentary on Genesis*CCelsum – *Contra Celsum*HEzek – *Homilies on Ezekiel*HGen – *Homilies on Genesis*HJer – *Homilies on Jeremiah*HJosh – *Homilies on Joshua*

HLev – *Homilies on Leviticus*
 HNum – *Homilies on Numbers*
 PP– *Peri Pascha, Treatise on the Passover*

Nicholas Cusanus

DDI – *De Docta Ignorantia*

Proclus,

IP. - *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*
 IT – *In Timaeus*
 PT – *Platonic Theology*

Secondary Works:

De Lubac, Henri

Exégèse médiévale: les quatre sens de l'écriture, trans. E.M. Macierowski, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, Vols.1-3, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000

Pasquale Porro

TA - *Thomas Aquinas: A Historical and Philosophical Profile*, trans. Joseph G. , Trabbic and Roger W. Nutt, Washington D.C.: CUAP, 2016

Publishers

CLPC - Christian Literature Publications Co.
 CUAP – Catholic Univeristy of America Press
 CUP – Cambridge University Press
 DUP – Duke University Press
 FUP – Fordham University Press
 HUP – Harvard University Press
 IUP - Indiana University Press
 JHUP – John Hopkins University Press
 MUP – Marquette University Press
 OUP – Oxford University Press
 PUP – Princeton University Press
 SUP – Stanford University Press
 UCP – University of Chicago Press
 UNDP – University of Notre Dame Press
 UPP – University of Philadelphia Press
 YUP – Yale University Press

PG - Patrologia Graeca
 PL – Patrologia Latinum

Introduction:

In this way the saying of Dionysius is saved. (Aquinas, *De Spiritualibus Creaturis* 8.10) ²

In his seminal essay, ‘What is an author?’ Foucault observes that when an historic claim to authorship is no longer viable, the function of a text’s ‘name’ changes.³ One striking example of Foucault’s point is that enigmatic collection of texts known as the *corpus Dionysiacum* (hereafter *CD*). *Dionysius* possibly derives from *Dionysus*,⁴ a god famed for wearing masks,⁵ which is fitting, since the true author behind the pseudonym successfully disguised himself for nearly a thousand years and still remains shrouded in mystery.⁶ Aquinas,⁷ in common with other medievals, presumed the author to be the first century Athenian convert of Paul in Acts 17:34,⁸ who responded to Paul’s message about the ‘Unknown God’ and the resurrection.⁹ Modern research disproves this, firmly locating the author within the late 5th or early 6th centuries,¹⁰ chiefly from the parallelism between certain passages on *eros*¹¹ and evil with Proclus (412-c.485).¹² The *CD* thus bears, as it were, a palimpsestuous¹³ quality in regard to Dionysius’ Procline mentor. This metaphor gains significance since one candidate for the real *Dionysius* is Severus of Antioch, whose reused parchments form the prominent extant palimpsest *Codex Nitriensis*.¹⁴

² Henceforth *DSC*, trans. FitzPatrick and Wellmuth (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: MUP, 1949), 95.

³ Michel Foucault, ‘What is an author?’ trans. Robert Harby, in James D. Faubion (ed), *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, II: Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology (London: Penguin, 1994), 209.

⁴ The adjective *διονυσιαῖος* pertains originally to Dionysus and *διονύσια* to his festival. Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1872), 174. Socrates attributes the etymology of Dionysus to ὁ δίδους τὸν οἶνον (the giver of wine). Plato, *Cratylus* (406). Note also (395).

⁵ Fernand Comte, *The Wordsworth Dictionary of Mythology* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1994), 74-75.

⁶ In 1457 Lorenzo Valla exposed his pseudonymity in a note on Acts 17:34, first published in *Annotations to the New Testament* and subsequently in Erasmus’ Greek New Testament, distributed by Luther. Karlfried Froehlich, ‘Pseudo-Dionysius and the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century’ in Colm Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius, the Complete Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 37-40; Paul Rorem, ‘Martin Luther’s Christocentric Critique of Pseudo-Dionysian Spirituality’ in *Lutheran Quarterly*, 11 (1997), 298; Piotr J. Malysz, ‘Luther and Dionysius: Beyond Mere Negations’ in Sarah Coakley and Charles M. Stang (eds.) *Rethinking Dionysius the Areopagite* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 150, 161.

⁷ *STIII.44.2.2*

⁸ On the author’s self-identification with the Areopagite, see *DN3* (681C) and *EP7* (1081A). Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.4; 4.23, records a tradition that he became the first bishop of Athens.

⁹ *Contra Apollo* in Aeschylus, *Enmenides*, 643, who denied the possibility of resurrection in a speech at the Areopagus.

¹⁰ H. Koch, *Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita in seinen Beziehungen zum Neoplatismus und Mysterienwesen* (Mainz: Verlag von-Franz Kirchheim, 1900); J. Stiglmayr, ‘Der Neuplatoniker Proclus als Vorlage des sog. Dionysius Areopagita in der Lehre vom Übel,’ *Historisches Jahrbuch* 16 (1895), 253-73; 721-48.

¹¹ *DN4.11-18*.

¹² *De Subsistentia Malorum* with *DN4.18-35*. Aquinas adopts this Procline definition of evil in *II.SS.1.1.2*; *DM1.1*; *STII-II.158.1*; 162.1. See also H.D. Saffrey, ‘New Objective Links between the Pseudo-Dionysius and Proclus’ in D.J. O’Meara (ed.) *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought* (Norfolk, VA: International Society for Neoplatonic Studies, 1982), 65–74.

¹³ An adjective originally coined by Philippe Lejeune. Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Newman and Dubinsky (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1997), ix. A palimpsest was a page of vellum on which previous writing had been deleted and new writing superimposed, but which still bore the ‘trace’ of the original.

¹⁴ British Library Add. MS17211, f.20r. <https://blogs.bl.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/2010/03/codex-nitriensis.html>

For many (post)modern literary theorists, however, the writings of ‘Pseudo’ Dionysius are emblematic of all texts, since the real, flesh and blood author is inaccessible and ‘reception’ becomes everything.¹⁵ All texts are palimpsests.¹⁶ Thus, from the 1960s ‘Reception Study,’ has shifted the focus from the objectivity of the text, its form, author and intention to its subjective effect on, or interpretation by the reader.¹⁷ No one has expressed this more starkly than Roland Barthes: ‘the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author.’¹⁸ Our thesis will reject the relativism of this approach. Nevertheless, whilst traditionally, scholars have determined the meaning of an ancient text from its original context, our research finds value in the reception tradition itself as a worthwhile ‘road map’ or horizon of study, in harmony with theorists such as Dimock¹⁹ and Parris.²⁰ We argue that Thomas Aquinas provides a ‘classic’²¹ or ‘exemplary interpretation’²² of Dionysius which functions in a certain sense as ‘normative’ and corrective of other receptions.²³ One feature of a classic is its ability to ‘relegate the concerns of the moment to the status of background noise.’²⁴ By creating this different frame of reference,²⁵ it is able to disrupt dominant paranthocentric perspectives.²⁶

Willis has helpfully sliced up the modern idiom of ‘reception’ into three overlapping areas of enquiry: 1). Reception Study, examines the way readers interpret texts; 2). Reception History, examines the history and ‘afterlife’ of interpretations and 3). Reception Theory, treats the nature of language and meaning itself.²⁷ We argue that within the history of Dionysian reception, Aquinas’ treatment is an *exemplum virtutis*²⁸ which yields abundant fruit for language and meaning itself. As such, this study exceeds a strictly formal or historical one, since the specificity of Aquinas’ interpretation of the Pseudo-Areopagite points beyond itself to a normative account of being and a ‘science’ of theology potentially grounding Reception Theory itself.

¹⁵ Foucault (1994), 208.

¹⁶ Genette (1997).

¹⁷ Robert C. Holub, *Reception Theory* (London: Methuen, 1984), xii f.; Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Young, 1975), 27, anticipated in G.F. Hegel, *On Christianity: Early Theological Writings* (London: Harper, 1961), 256-7

¹⁸ Roland Barthes, ‘The Death of the Author’ in Stephen Heath (ed.), *Roland Barthes: Image, Music, Text* (St. Ives: Fontana, 1977), 148.

¹⁹ Wai Chee Dimock argues that the meaning of a text should not be ‘assumed to be the property of the historical period in which it originated.’ Willis, 155-156.

²⁰ David Paul Parris, *Reading the Bible with Giants: How 2000 Years of Biblical Interpretation Can Shed New Light on Old Texts* (Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2015), 101-143.

²¹ from Latin *classici*, ‘those of the first class’

²² (to borrow a phrase from Hans Robert Jauss). Willis, 50.

²³ We therefore take issue with Sheldon Pollock, ‘there can be no such thing as incorrect interpretation.’ Willis, 156.

²⁴ Italo Calvino, ‘Why Read the Classics?’ trans. Patrick Creagh, in *The New York Review of Books* 33.15 (1986), 4.

²⁵ See Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organisation of Experience* (Cambridge, MA: HUP, 1974).

²⁶ Mieke Bal, in Willis, 49. Carmelo Pandolfi undertakes a similar approach in his monograph on *SPsalms*. Thomas Ryan, *Thomas Aquinas as Reader of the Psalms* (UNDP, 2000), 2.

²⁷ Willis, 1.

²⁸ Ruth 4:11 (Vulgate).

The fact that a significant number of citations of the *CD* in Aquinas' *corpus* occur in *objectios* and *responsios*, evinces the breadth of possible and actual receptions. Aquinas acknowledges that the 'blessed Dionysius' says some things 'in an obscure style' which require clarification,²⁹ and Aquinas facilitates this clarity. By the 13th century the *CD* had been translated into Latin, initially by Hilduin (c.832)³⁰ and later with more precision by John Scotus Eriugena (c.867),³¹ John Sarracen (1167) and Robert Grosseteste (1235). Aquinas became introduced to Sarracen's translation through collating the notes of Albert Magnus' commentaries on *Divine Names* and *Mystical Theology*.³² From the inception of Thomas' ministry and spanning his entire *opus*, we have over 2100 direct citations from the *CD* (of which 542 in *Summa Theologiae*).³³ Outside of Scripture, 'Denys' (as he was popularly known), is Thomas' third most cited *auctoritate* after Aristotle and Augustine. His authority is considered sufficient to resolve certain questions: '(o)n the contrary, stands the authority of Dionysius.'³⁴

It is not surprising, therefore, that the Leonine revival of Thomism³⁵ which launched the critical editions of the Thomistic *corpus*, triggered a corresponding revival of interest in Dionysius. Another catalyst was the movement known as *La Nouvelle Théologie*,³⁶ which held considerable sway over *Vatican II*, in spite of initial reservations from Pius XII.³⁷ Its essence was a return to neglected sources (*ressourcement*)³⁸ within the tradition.³⁹ Overlapping concerns with

²⁹ IDN Proem.; Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to their Influence* (OUP, 1993), 5. Eriugena too finds the Areopagite 'obscure.' 'In his usual way he expresses himself in an involved and distorted language, and therefore many find him extremely obscure and difficult to understand.' *DDN1* (509C) in Rorem, *ibid*, 5, n.6. Amongst modern scholars, John D. Jones agrees that aspects of his language are 'fundamentally ambiguous,' in Knepper, 55, n.43.

³⁰ P.G. Théry, *Études Dionysiennes1: Hilduin, Traducteur de Denys* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1932), 11-100.

³¹ Aquinas, *In Hebr.*1.1.

³² Tugwell (1988), 3-200; Pasquale Porro, *Thomas Aquinas: A Historical and Philosophical Profile*, trans. Joseph G. , Trabbic and Roger W. Nutt (Washington D.C.: CUAP, 2016), 5; M.D. Chenu, *Towards Understanding Saint Thomas*, trans. Albert M. Landry and Dominic Hughes (Chicago: Henry Regnery,1964), 229. n.54.

³³ Roberto Busa, *Index Thomisticus*. See also the groundbreaking cataloguing and analysis in J. Durantel, *Saint Thomas et le Pseudo-Denis* (Paris: Librairie Felix Alcan, 1919), recently updated by John D. Jones, cited in Andrew Hofer, 'Dionysian elements in Thomas Aquinas' Christology: A Case of the Authority and Ambiguity of Pseudo-Dionysius,' *The Thomist* 72 (2008): 409-42.

³⁴ *STII-II*.180.6 sc.

³⁵ *Aeterni Patris* (1879). J. Weisheipl, 'The Revival of Thomism: An Historical Survey' in R. McInerney (ed.), *New Themes in Christian Philosophy* (UNDP, 1968), 164-177; Porro, *Thomas Aquinas* (henceforth TA), 403-4.

³⁶ Originally a pejorative term coined by Pietro Parente in *L'Osservatore Romano*, February 1942 and adopted by Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange (1877-1895) in 'La Nouvelle Théologie, où va t-elle?' *Angelicum* 23, 1947, <http://cfnews.org/gg-neotheo.htm>. Jurgen Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2010); Susan K. Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church in the Theology of Henri De Lubac* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 6-24; Richard Peddicard, *The Sacred Monster of Thomism: An Introduction to the Life and Legacy of Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2004), c.7; Brian Daley, 'La nouvelle théologie and the Patristic Revival: Sources, Symbols and the Science of Theology in I.J.S.T. 7/4 (2005) 362-82.

³⁷ *Humani Generis*, esp.21.

³⁸ The term *ressourcement* was coined by Charles Péguy (1873-1914). Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray (eds.), *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth Century Catholic Theology* (OUP, 2012), 4.

³⁹ Henri de Lubac and Jean Daniélou founded the series of translations of patristic texts *Sources Chrétiennes* in 1942 and Yves Congar *Unam Sanctum* in 1935. Flynn and Murray, *op cit.* 5-9.

Reception Theory included a rediscovery of the *CD*, which disrupted a previously accepted ‘canon’ of interpretive readings of Aquinas.⁴⁰

The growth of classic interpretations is analogous with the growth of the canon. The latter has a primary meaning in relation to the canonical Scriptures (ἡ γραφή or αἱ βιβλοὶ *par excellence*) and a derived one in relation to literary theory, so that we can speak of those within a certain ‘canon’ of poets, critical thinkers or theologians.⁴¹ Canonical authority in both senses emerges over time as it is tested through actual recognition and use by the receiving community⁴² (hence the absurdity of any individual authorising a new canon). Because of this, classics have the quality of a ‘gift that keeps on giving’. Calvino observes, ‘(a) classic is a book that has never finished saying what it has to say.’⁴³ Thomas’ reception partakes these attributes. One early biographer described his writings as ‘an object of admiration for almost the entire world,’⁴⁴ which enhanced the case for his canonisation in 1323. Although some aspects of Thomas’ thought were controversial in his lifetime and shortly after,⁴⁵ Thomas’ commentaries on Aristotle rapidly demanded the attention of the masters of the adjacent Faculty of Arts after Thomas’ death.⁴⁶ Time has vindicated their value. By the Renaissance, Thomas was recognised by Pius V as a ‘Doctor of the Church.’⁴⁷ Following the earlier lead of Leo XIII, Pius XII draws attention to the classical character of Aquinas’ thought in *Humani Generis*:

If one considers all this well, he will easily see why the Church demands that future priests be instructed in philosophy ‘according to the method, doctrine, and principles of the Angelic Doctor,’ since as we well know from the experience of centuries, the method of Aquinas is singularly preeminent both for teaching students and for bringing truth to light; his doctrine is in harmony with divine revelation, and is most effective both for safeguarding the foundation of the faith, and for reaping, safely and usefully, the fruits of sound progress.⁴⁸

⁴⁰ Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth Century Catholic Theologians* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2007), 130-132. Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics II: Studies in Theological Style: Clerical styles*, trans. Andrew Louth, Francis McDonagh and Brian McNeil (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995). Chenu, *Towards Understanding Saint Thomas*, 226-232. The beginning of this movement coincides with Pius XII’s, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*.

⁴¹ Alexander Souter and C.S.C. Williams, *The Text and Canon of the New Testament* (London: Gerald Duckworth and Co., 1965), 141-3.

⁴² We could usefully compare how Plato’s *Republic* has become a ‘classic’ through its enduring appeal (see Chapter 1); Parris, 103; Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 176-190; Rudolph Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship from the Beginnings to the End of the Hellenistic Age* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 203-8.

⁴³ Calvino, 2

⁴⁴ Bernard of Gui in Ryan, 2.

⁴⁵ Hankey (2019), 53-54; Porro, TA, 394-401

⁴⁶ Porro, TA, 372.

⁴⁷ *ibid*, 403

⁴⁸ *Humani Generis* 31. See also the earlier *Pascendi* (1907) and *Doctoris Angelicis* of Pius X (1914) and the later *Fides et ratio* of John Paul II. Porro, TA, 404-5.

Notably, the encyclical identifies the exemplary nature of Aquinas' philosophy not only in its content, but also in its method, which is a kind of *ressourcement* before its time. Thomas drew on the best, contemporary translations of primary sources,⁴⁹ whilst remaining 'in harmony with divine revelation.' This will be treated further in Chapter 4. Aquinas provides an orthodox framework for reading the sources and by standing on the shoulders of the 'Dumb Ox' we see further than otherwise possible.

Interest in the work of the Areopagite (itself a classic⁵⁰) has 'bubbled over'⁵¹ into the wider riverbanks of philosophy and theology, notably phenomenology,⁵² deconstruction,⁵³ feminist,⁵⁴ 'postmetaphysical',⁵⁵ and radical theologies and Radical Orthodoxy.⁵⁶ As Balaam prophesied over Israel, 'water shall flow out of his bucket, and his seed shall be in many waters.'⁵⁷ There are at least four drivers for this, evincing Foucault's observation of a changeable 'function.' Firstly, a rediscovery of a more apophatic theology appeals to those disenchanted with rationalism, especially post-holocaust,⁵⁸ and post-atomic bomb.⁵⁹ Theologians from the western *Nouvelle*

⁴⁹ James A. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas D'Aquino his Life, Thought and Works* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975), 152, 164, 168; Wayne Hankey, *Aquinas' Neoplatonism in the 'Summa Theologiae' on God: A Short Introduction* (South Bend, Indiana: Saint Augustine's Press, 2019), 33-34; and 'Misrepresenting Neoplatonism in Contemporary Christian Dionysian Polemic: Eriugena and Nicholas of Cusa versus Vladimir Lossky and Jean-Luc Marion,' *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 82.4 (2008) 687; Porro, TA, 176-7.

⁵⁰ Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Christian Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century*, The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism (New York: Crossway, 1995), 182.

⁵¹ EH4 (481C)

⁵² Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being: Hors Texte*, trans. Carlson (UCP, 1991); *The Idol and the Distance*, trans. Carlson (New York: FUP), 2001; *In Excess, Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Horner and Berraud (New York: FUP, 2002); Jean-Louis Chrétien, *The Unforgettable and the Unhoped for*, trans. Jeffrey Bloechl (New York: FUP, 2002), 116; *L'antiphonie de la nuit* (Paris: L'Herne, 1989).

⁵³ Jacques Derrida, *How to Avoid Speaking: Denials*, trans. Kamuf and Rottenberg (eds.), *Psyche: Inventions of the Other II*, SUP, 2008; 'Sauf le Nom (*post-scriptum*)', in Wood, Leavey Jr. and McLeod (eds.), *On the Name*, trans Dutoit (SUP, 1995); Kevin Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign: Deconstruction, Theology and Philosophy* (CUP, 1989).

⁵⁴ Marika Rose, 'The Mystical and the Material: Slavoj Žižek and the French Reception of Mysticism,' *Sophia* 53, (2014): 231-240. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11841-014-0407-3>

⁵⁵ Thomas A. Carlson, 'Postmetaphysical Theology' in Kevin J. Vanhoozer (ed.), *The Cambridge Guide to Postmodern Theology* (CUP, 2003), 58-76; John D. Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics* (New York, FUP, 1982); 'Apostles of the Impossible: On God and the Gift in Derrida and Marion' in Caputo and Scanlon (eds.), *God, the Gift and Postmodernism* (Bloomington: IUP, 1999); *The Weakness of God, A Theology of the Event* (Bloomington: IUP, 2006); *The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps* (Bloomington: IUP, 2013); Jean-Luc Marion, 'Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Summary for Theologians' in Graham Ward (ed.), *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 279-96; Peter Rollins, *How (not) to Speak of God* (London: SPCK, 2006); Catherine Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

⁵⁶ On the explosion of publications on Pseudo-Dionysius since the mid. 20th century see <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/dionysius>, accessed 5/9/15. For a comprehensive list see full bibliography.

⁵⁷ Numbers 23:7, Douay Rheims (1899).

⁵⁸ Mélanie V. Walton, *Expressing the Inexpressible in Lyotard and Pseudo-Dionysius* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2013); Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity, 1989); Kieran Flanagan, 'Bauman's implicit theology' in Mark Davis and Keith Tester (eds.), *Bauman's Challenge: Sociological Issues for the 21st Century* (New York: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2010), 92-127; Martin Terpstra and Theo de Wit, "'No Spiritual Investment in the World As It Is": Jacob Taubes Negative Political Theology' in Ilse N. Bulhof and Laurens Ten Kate, *Flight of the Gods: Philosophical Perspectives on Negative Theology* (New York: FUP, 2000), 319-53; William Franke, *A Philosophy of the Unsayable* (UNDP, 2014), 3, 32 and 80-135, although the Nazis too were fascinated with mysticism. Nygren, *Agape*, 633-634, n.5.

Théologie, as well as Eastern Orthodoxy,⁶⁰ where Dionysius has always been a venerated figure (see Chapter 2), have found resources in the *CD* to resist abstract conceptualism or dry ‘manualism,’ divorced from ‘life.’⁶¹ The *monster sacré*⁶² for the ‘new theologians’ was Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange (whom this thesis in part seeks to rehabilitate), caricatured for neglecting spirituality. We maintain, however, that a false dualism excludes logic and metaphysics from ‘spirituality,’⁶³ as is clear from the exemplary life of Aquinas himself.⁶⁴ Indeed, Garrigou-Lagrange’s doctoral supervisions specialised in the spirituality of St. John of the Cross.⁶⁵ But Garrigou-Lagrange also correctly discerned the necessity of a metaphysics of *being* (presupposed in Aristotelian first principles) as the crucial issue, over against the dialectical philosophy of ‘*becoming*’ (characteristic of Hegel,⁶⁶ Bergson⁶⁷ and Blondel⁶⁸). Whilst the motivation of his critics has been to ‘save’ Thomas from neo-scholasticism *via* Dionysius, our thesis in reverse aims to ‘save’ Dionysius, especially from post-metaphysical readings, *via* Thomas. Lagrange was rightly concerned that dialectical philosophy tends towards agnosticism which threatens orthodoxy. Chapter 2 of this thesis will investigate the centrality of being in Thomas’ reception.

Second, the Dionysian accent on the unknowability of God resonates with postmodern or ‘postmetaphysical’ theologians who, following Heidegger’s condemnation of *ontotheology*,⁶⁹

⁵⁹ See also Dom Denys Rutledge, *Cosmic Theology: The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy of Pseudo-Denys: An Introduction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), 3-26.

⁶⁰ e.g. Vladimir Lossky, *The Vision of God*, trans. Ashleigh Moorhouse (Wisconsin: The Faith Press, American Orthodox Press, 1963); Christos Yannaras, *On the Absence and Unknowability of God* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark International, 2005); Louth (1989); David Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom* (CUP, 2005), 181-191; Alexander Golitzin, *Mystagogy: A Monastic Reading of Dionysius Areopagita* ed. Bogdon G. Bucur (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013); John D. Jones, ‘An Absolutely Simple God? Frameworks for Reading Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite,’ *The Thomist* 69.3 (2005), 371-407; Tomasz Stępień and Karolina Kochańczyk-Bonińska, *Unknown God, Known in his Activities* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2018); C. Athanasopoulos and C. Schneider, *Divine Essence and Divine Energies: Ecumenical Reflections On the Presence of God in Eastern Orthodoxy* (Cambridge: James Clark and Co., 2013); Nikolaos Loudovikos, ‘Striving for Participation: Palamite Analogy as Dialogical Syn-energy and Thomist Analogy as Emanational Similitude’ in Athanasopoulos, op cit. 122-149; Vladimir Kharlamov, *The Beauty of the Unity and the Harmony of the Whole: The Concept of Theosis in the Theology of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite* (Eugene, Oregon: WIPF and Stock, 2009).

⁶¹ Boersma observes a similar perception amongst young evangelicals of ‘dry and lifeless’ handbooks of theology. Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of the Sacramental Tapestry* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2011), 27.

⁶² Françoise Mauriac cited in Peddicord, 2.

⁶³ John Macquarrie, *In Search of Deity: An Essay in Dialectical Theism* (London: SCM Press, 1984), 25.

⁶⁴ Ryan, 5,10; Lester K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1983), 173-6.

⁶⁵ Peddicord, 1 and c.8, against the distorted picture given by Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth Century Catholic Theologians* (2007), c.1.

⁶⁶ Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *God, His Existence and His Nature II. A Thomistic Solution to Certain Agnostic Antinomies* (London: Herder, 1936), 200.

⁶⁷ Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (New York: Modern Library, 1944), 384ff (revealing Plotinian influence).

⁶⁸ Maurice Blondel, *Action (1893): Essay on a Critique of Life and a Science of Practice*, trans. Olivia Blanchette (UNDP, 1950), 430.

⁶⁹ Hankey, ‘Denys and Aquinas’ (1998), 143ff. Hankey contests the basis of Heidegger’s ‘history’ in ‘Why Heidegger’s “History” of Metaphysics is Dead.’ *American Philosophical Quarterly* 78:3 (2004): 425-443. Franke goes some way to restoring the ‘true dignity and potency’ of metaphysics, 59.

pronounce the God of metaphysics ‘dead’ or ‘without being.’⁷⁰ This second motivation echoes the first in its suspicion of being, but *a fortiori* falls under Garrigou-Lagrange’s metacritique, since it more radically replaces metaphysics with hermeneutics; *theology* (as a science) with ‘*theopoetics*.’⁷¹ (We shall see in Chapter 4 how this stolen term can be reclaimed). Some feminist theologians have welcomed its potential as a tool of liberation from patriarchy.⁷² By extension, there are Deleuzian ‘anti-essentialist’ thinkers such as Butler (the ‘Kant of Queer Theory’⁷³) and Keller who seek to fund a post-feminist, ‘gender-fluid’ anthropology from negative theology generally⁷⁴ and Dionysian apophaticism specifically.⁷⁵ However, a radically eastern negative theology produces a correspondingly negative anthropology as its *imago dei*. The ambiguous notion of an ‘apophatic anthropology’ is critiqued particularly in Chapter 3.⁷⁶

Third, the rediscovery of Aquinas’ conception of ‘participation,’ ‘intensity’ and ‘plenitude’ has been correctly identified by Geiger⁷⁷ and Fabro⁷⁸ as derivative of Dionysian metaphysics.⁷⁹ It coincides with a more Neoplatonic⁸⁰ mode of thinking and spirituality⁸¹ which provoked criticisms from Jesuit, Henle⁸² as well as Lutherans Nygren⁸³ and (in a more measured way) Rorem.⁸⁴ Thus, unlike the aforementioned post-metaphysical theologians, Geiger and Fabro could use Dionysius *against* Heidegger.⁸⁵ Their insight has been welcomed by *Radical Orthodoxy* as

⁷⁰ Hankey (1998), 139

⁷¹ Caputo (2013), 15, 222, 272 n.4.

⁷² e.g. Vera Tripodi, ‘Beyond the Transcendence. The Feminist Critique of the Concept of God’ in Danièle Bertini and Damiano Migliorini (eds.), *Relations, Ontology and Philosophy of Religion* (Verona: Mimesis International, 2018), 171-180; Willis, 23-25.

⁷³ Keller, 221.

⁷⁴ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 195.

⁷⁵ Keller, 65-66.

⁷⁶ Charles M. Stang, *Apophysis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite: ‘No longer I’* (OUP, 2012), 153-196 and “‘Being Neither Myself Nor Someone Else’: The Apophatic Anthropology of Dionysius the Areopagite’ in Chris Boesel and Catherine Keller (eds.), *Apophatic Bodies: Negative Theology, Incarnation and Relationality* (New York: FUP, 2009), 59-79; Katherine Tanner, ‘In the Image of the Invisible’ in Boesel and Keller (2009), 117-137. Stang borrows the term ‘apophatic anthropology’ from McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart* (New York: Crossroad, 2001), 48.

⁷⁷ L.B. Geiger, *La Participation dans la Philosophie de S. Thomas d’Aquin* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1953)

⁷⁸ C. Fabro, *Participation et Causalité selon S. Thomas d’Aquin* (Université Catholique de Louvain, 1961) ; W. Norris Clarke, ‘The Meaning of Participation in St. Thomas’ in *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 26, 1952, 147-57; Fran O’Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (UNDP, 2005), 155-83. For a critique of Fabro see Rudi A. Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

⁷⁹ e.g. 1SSS22.1; DV29.3; DPI.2; 7.2.9; DM16.9.6; c.f. DN5.

⁸⁰ The ambiguities of this term are discussed by Porro, TA, 92 and Hankey (2019), c. 2.

⁸¹ Jean Trouillard, *La Procession Plotinienne* (Paris, 1955); Wayne Hankey, ‘Denys and Aquinas: Antimodern Cold and Postmodern Hot’ in Lewis Ayres and Gareth Jones (eds.), *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric and Community* (London: Routledge, 1998), 140; Kerr, *Twentieth Century Catholic Theologians*, 132; Rutledge, *Cosmic Theology*, 25.

⁸² R.J. Henle, *St. Thomas and Platonism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970) argues from IDC and IDN that Thomas uses DN as a polemic against the Platonists, but overlooks the extent to which Thomas is also unconsciously Platonic through the mediation of neo-Platonic ideas in Augustine and Dionysius and how he becomes progressively more Neoplatonic throughout his life.

⁸³ Dionysius is condemned as the ‘chief culprit’ for introducing ‘the *eros* motif’ into medieval theology by Anders Nygren, *Eros and Agape*, trans. Watson (London: SPCK, 1982), especially c.3.

⁸⁴ Rorem, ‘Martin Luther’s Christocentric Critique’ (1997), 291-307.

⁸⁵ Hankey (1998), 147

a corrective to the univocity of being, nominalism and voluntarism found in Cajetan, Scotus and Occam.⁸⁶

Finally, it is hoped by pluralists that Dionysius mirrors postmodern concerns for diversity and a multiplicity of voices.⁸⁷ The ‘unknowable’ God of the pluralists irenically beckons us⁸⁸ ‘to turn away from interdenominational strife towards the Indescribable One,⁸⁹ through either ecumenical dialogue⁹⁰ or else an experience of ‘silence.’⁹¹ This sensibility extends beyond the territory of internecine ecclesiological conflict into what Hick has called ‘the central problem of theology,’⁹² namely the relationship of Christian theology to other world faiths. On Hick’s reading, ‘Denys says in as emphatic and unqualified way as he can that the Godhead, the ultimate One, is absolutely ineffable, eluding all our human categories of thought.’⁹³ On the pluralist paradigm, appeal to Mystery is a strategy for uniting religious philosophy, east and west.⁹⁴ Consequently, for Keller the *CD*, ‘indulges in no polemic against wrong views or headless heretics,’⁹⁵ conveniently airbrushing out those passages where Dionysius denounces teachings unacceptable to the Church.⁹⁶ Willingly or not, the Pseudo-Areopagite has been co-opted for the modern pluralist project. Chapter 1 of this thesis includes a rebuttal of this approach by retrieving the propositional nature of revelation and the centrality of Christology for Dionysius.⁹⁷

⁸⁶ *ibid*, 147. Catherine Pickstock, ‘Duns Scotus: His Historical and Contemporary Significance,’ *Modern Theology* 21, no.4 (2005), 543-74; John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2002), 24-39, 127; John Milbank: *The Word made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 45; *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006); *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2005); ‘Christianity and Platonism in East and West’ in Athanasopoulos (2013), 158-209; Conor Cunningham, *Genealogy of Nihilism* (London: Routledge, 2002), cc.1-2; Boersma, cc.1,4; Franke, 215-218.

⁸⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Sauf Le Nom*, trans. Wood, Leavey and McCleod (SUP, 1995), 35; Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Continuum, 2002)

⁸⁸ Hankey (2008), 703; Franke, 149; David Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas* (UNDP, 1986).

⁸⁹ Rosemary A. Arthur, *Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist: The Development and Purpose of the Angelic Hierarchy in Sixth Century Syria* (London: Routledge, 2008/2016), xii.

⁹⁰ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Silence: A Christian History* (London: Penguin (2014), 228-231. ‘Eirenism’ was rejected in the preconciliar encyclical *Humani Generis* 11-12.

⁹¹ Marion (1991), 53-54.

⁹² John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths* (London: SCM, 1995), c.1, 1.

⁹³ John Hick, ‘Ineffability,’ *Religious Studies* 36.1 (CUP, 2000): 38 (in reference to *MT5*) in Knepper (2014), xv, n.4

⁹⁴ Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian*, trans. Edward Quinn (London: Collins, 1977), 93-4; Raymond Pannikar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (London: Dartman, Longman and Todd), 1968, 54, 132-138; Pierre Hadot, *The Veil of Isis: An Essay on the History of the Idea of Nature*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge MA: HUP, 2006), 71; Rutledge (1964), 3-26, esp. 25-26; Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing* (Santa Fe, New Mexico: Bear and Co., 1983), 78; Franke, 225; Keller, 72, 67 τα μυστήρια comes from the root μύω ‘to close the lips’ (Latin *mutus*); Walton, 172. For Dionysius’ use of ‘mystery’ see *EHI* (372A).

⁹⁵ Keller, 70.

⁹⁶ e.g. *DN8* (893B), *EP7* (1080B); *EP8* (1088A). Polytheists are roundly dismissed as those who ‘stupidly describe’ certain creative substances as gods. *DN11* (953D). Hence, Kharlamov counters the pluralists, ‘(t)he Dionysian system is not particularly all-inclusive and tolerant toward any religious practice,’ instead it exhibits ‘the universal order as the homogenous expression of one divine will with exclusively Christian worship.’ 143. Knepper (2014) also contests the pluralist reading.

⁹⁷ On Aquinas’ non-pluralist theology see *SCG1.6.4*.

Thomas' reading of Dionysius may assist in exorcising the *zeitgeist*, for whatever the connections or trajectories modern scholars presume to find in ancient writers, there may be, as Ginther warns, 'disastrous consequences' when this is employed as an 'interpretive principle'⁹⁸ Instead, we must respect the alterity of the text and accept the limitations of our expectations.⁹⁹ Ironically, in seeking affinities with previous ages, the theologians and philosophers of *différance* may have overlooked the *différence*.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, the resurgent interest in Neoplatonism (whatever that might precisely mean),¹⁰¹ threatens to obscure the ways in which it is transformed by Thomas' own condemnation of certain doctrines of the *Platonici*.¹⁰² Hankey helpfully traces how Augustine 'followed Plato as much as the Catholic faith would allow,' but in Thomas' judgement, Aristotle was closer to the truth of things in his account of knowledge.¹⁰³ Aquinas reads Plato 'whom, Dionysius imitates...in many things'¹⁰⁴ in the light of Aristotle and consequently reads Dionysius through Aristotle¹⁰⁵ ('Dionysius...almost everywhere follows Aristotle').¹⁰⁶ Following his erroneous belief that Aristotle wrote *Liber de Causis*,¹⁰⁷ early Aquinas reasons that its author 'seems to follow the judgement of Dionysius.'¹⁰⁸ In a previous article, Hankey¹⁰⁹ points out that this might in fact turn out to be true, since the author of the *Liber* possibly knew of Dionysius through Syriac versions of the *CD*. An exemplary lesson may be distilled from this contingent experience, namely how erring opinions may ultimately progress towards truth through the dialectical synthesis of a wide base of authorities. Hence, Thomas' suggestive phrase, 'in this way the saying of the Platonists is saved'¹¹⁰ and 'this conclusion saves to some extent the opinion of Plato.'¹¹¹

In response to problems collated by Nicholas of Durazzo, Aquinas discloses his general *modus operandi* for 'saving' the sayings of the Greek Fathers: 'after eliminating all ambiguity from the authorities found in the aforesaid book so that the purest fruit of the faith might be harvested, I have proposed first to explain what seems perplexing in the abovementioned authorities, and

⁹⁸ Ginther implores 'a renewed emphasis on a reiterated strangeness' of the past. James R. Ginther, *Master of the Sacred Page: A Study of the Theology of Robert Grosseteste ca.1229/30-1235* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 2.

⁹⁹ Hans Robert Jauss in Willis, 154; Knepper, xiv.

¹⁰⁰ Louth (1989), 126. Hankey (1998), 40 singles out Marion as an example of 'doublemindedness'.

¹⁰¹ Note comments in Porro, TA, 92 and Hankey (2019), c. 2.

¹⁰² *IDN, Proem.*; 1.1.34; 5.1; 11.4; *IDCV*1.175; *DV*5.9; 21.4; Henle (1970).

¹⁰³ *DSC*10.8 (1949), 122.

¹⁰⁴ *IDNV*.3, 12-30 (1994). Again in *DM*16.1.3, Aquinas tells us that Dionysius 'followed the opinions of the Platonists for the most part.'

¹⁰⁵ et scias, quod non perficitur homo in philosophia nisi ex scientia duarum philosophiarum Aristotelis et Platonis. Albert, *Metaphysica*1.5.15 in Hankey (2019), 32.

¹⁰⁶ *ILSS*14.1.2.

¹⁰⁷ corrected following William of Moerbeke's published translation of Proclus' *Elements of Theology*. Hankey (2019), 23-24.

¹⁰⁸ *IDC*4 in Hankey (2019), 30.

¹⁰⁹ (2008), 688

¹¹⁰ *DSC*8.10 (1949), 95.

¹¹¹ *SCG*1.54.

then to show how by means of them the truth of the Catholic faith may be taught and defended.¹¹² It seems entirely appropriate, therefore, to extend this salvation to Dionysius. Thomas' framework has the potential to 'save' Dionysius from popular readings, ancient and (post)modern. With good reason did Leo XIII extol the 'Angelic Doctor' for his 'comprehensive' inquiry into 'the reasons and principles of things' which, in its exemplary analysis, contained 'the seeds of almost infinite truths' which 'were to be unfolded in good time by later masters and with a goodly yield.'¹¹³ We shall see that whilst Thomas' reading of Dionysius may not always be true to the historical author's intent, it may nevertheless prove a useful resource against errors, ambiguities or incipient dangers within Dionysius' thinking, for which the *Doctor Angelicus* proffers a transformative interpretation.

In this study (following Proclus' wise example), I have not 'published' all that I have written,¹¹⁴ but to contain it within manageable limits, I have organised my material around four major themes of systematic theology present in the receiving text.¹¹⁵ These provide illustrative windows into how Aquinas might enable a 'metacritique'¹¹⁶ of anti-metaphysical receptions.¹¹⁷ For Thomas, *scientia divina* is based on the first principle of God's revelation of Himself in *sacra Scriptura*. Thus, the great *Summa* begins with 'the nature and extent of sacred doctrine' before proceeding to the nature of God in question 2. Our thesis follows suit. 'Saving' Scripture comes first, followed by the metaphysical chapters on language, knowledge and hierarchy which are closely intertwined.

To situate Thomas' specificity more precisely, I propose two distinct streams of Dionysian reception:¹¹⁸ one is a radically agnostic appropriation, beginning with the neo-Gnostic, Stephen Bar Sudhaili and later with John Scotus Eriugena, both of whom exhibit a broadly 'Plotinian' ontology. Joining this stream are those authors who may have begun in the

¹¹² *CEG*, prol., trans. Fehlner; Weishapl, 170.

¹¹³ *Aeterni Patris* (1879).

¹¹⁴ *IP1* (718), trans. Morrow and Dillon (PUP, 1987), 90. All future references will be to this translation unless otherwise stated. Before the invention of the printing press, to 'publish' meant simply 'to make available to the public' for copying etc.. Porro, TA, 26.

¹¹⁵ This thesis builds on and refines my previous published work, Alan Philip Darley, "'We Know in Part:": How the Positive Apophaticism of Aquinas transforms the Negative Theology of Pseudo-Dionysius', *Heythrop Journal* 63.4 (2022): 583-612 and 'The Epistemological Hope: Aquinas versus other receptions of Pseudo-Dionysius on the Beatific Vision', *The Heythrop Journal* 59.4 (2018): 663-688.

¹¹⁶ J.G. Hamann coined the term 'metacritique' in 'Metacritique of the Purism of Reason (1784)' in Kenneth Haynes (ed.), *Hamann: Writings on Philosophy and Language* (CUP, 2007), 205-219, specifically as a response to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*.

¹¹⁷ As is well known, *Metaphysics* was the title given to those unnamed writings of Aristotle which came after (*meta*) his book known as 'Physics'. Since these writings dealt primarily with the question of 'being *qua* being' or what Aristotle calls 'First Philosophy', the title evolved into a technical term. Erich Przywara, *Analogia Entis: Metaphysics, Original Structure and Universal Rhythm*, trans. John R. Betz and David Bentley Hart (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans [1962], 2014), 118ff; T.H. Irwin, *Aristotle's First Principle* (OUP, 2002), 18f. and comments by Hamann in Haynes (2007), 209.

¹¹⁸ Derrida identifies negative *theologies* rather than a single tradition in *Sauf Le Nom* (1995), a point underplayed by Franke, 218.

Augustinian/Thomistic stream but have subsequently taken an eastern turn, such as Meister Eckhart,¹¹⁹ Nicholas de Cusa and Jacob Boehme or *vice versa* with Gregory Palamas.¹²⁰ More recently, in various ways, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Marion, John D. Caputo, John D. Jones, Matthew Fox,¹²¹ John Hick, Charles Stang, Mélanie Walton, William Franke and Catherine Keller belong (in varying degrees) in this stream which drifts from divine revelation towards monism. Its existence has been acknowledged by Macquarrie, who labels it ‘dialectical theism.’¹²² The second stream, by contrast, remains within the parameters of classical theism and is discernible in John of Scythopolis,¹²³ Maximus the Confessor,¹²⁴ Germanus of Constantinople,¹²⁵ John Damascene, Gottschalk of Orbais,¹²⁶ Hugh of St. Victor,¹²⁷ John Sarracen, Albert the Great,¹²⁸ Robert Grosseteste,¹²⁹ Thomas Gallus, Thomas Aquinas and Denys the Carthusian. In Chapter 2, I argue that the existence of the two streams has arisen in part through ambiguity already present in the ‘obscure Dionysius’ arising from an early Byzantine conception of essence and energies.¹³⁰ I have located the early Byzantine reception within the ‘positive’ stream, with the caveat that it retains this ambiguity.¹³¹ Many excellent contributions to understanding the Areopagite are incomplete because of a lack of attention to this dynamic, which greatly illuminates Dionysius’ position and Thomas’ reconfiguring of it. A distinctive feature of my own thesis then will be an incorporation of this material into the overall analysis.

The methodology for this enquiry will focus on close textual analysis of the *CD* with selected primary background sources and specifically citations of Dionysius in the *corpus Thomisticum*, not

¹¹⁹ ‘Yet whatever fine names, whatever words we use, they are telling lies, and it is far above them. It is free of all names, it is bare of all forms, wholly empty and free, as God in himself is empty and free.’ *Sermon* 87 in Davies and McGinn (eds. and trans.), *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981), 180.

¹²⁰ On the influence of Aquinas on Palamas see J.A. Demetracopoulos, ‘Thomas Aquinas’ Impact on Late Byzantine Theology and Philosophy: The Issues of Method or *Modis Sciendi* and *Dignitas Hominis*’ in A. Speer and P. Steinkruger (eds.), *Knotenpunkt Byzanz: Wissensformen und kulturelle Wechselbeziehungen* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 333-410.

¹²¹ Appendix A of Fox, *Original Blessing*, 307-315 includes Eckhart and Cusa in the ‘Family Tree of Creation-Centred Spirituality.’ The ex-Dominican explicitly opposes this to an Augustinian family tree of Fall/Redemption in Appendix B, 316-319.

¹²² Macquarrie, 15, a term he roughly equates with ‘pantheism’

¹²³ John of Scythopolis, *In Librum De Divinis Nominibus* in Beate Regina Suchla, *Corpus Dionysiacum* IV, 1: *Ioannis Scythopolitani Prologus Et Scholia in Dionysii Areopagitae Librum De Divinis Nominibus Cum Additamentis Interpretum Aliorum* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011).

¹²⁴ *In librum De Divinis Nominibus*, PG4:346

¹²⁵ *On The Divine Liturgy*, trans. Meyendorff (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985).

¹²⁶ *De Trina Deitate* III, <http://Gottschalk.inrebus.com/lat030.html>. I am grateful to Bojana Radovanović for this reference.

¹²⁷ *Commentary on Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite’s Celestial Hierarchy*, c.1120-1140 [composed], c.1150-1175 [manuscript], 108 folios. British Library Catalog of Illuminated Manuscripts, 1100-1400. Burney MS308. <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/results.asp> accessed 24/02/18.

¹²⁸ *Commentary on Mystical Theology* in Simon Tugwell, *Albert and Thomas: Selected Writings*. (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 131-200 (henceforth CMT). Albert especially emphasises the *via eminentia* of theological language, e.g. c.1, 145.

¹²⁹ James McEvoy, *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011), 89-140; 241-257.

¹³⁰ Knepper, 48-55 has also commented on this ambiguity but without the Byzantine explanation.

¹³¹ Golitzin, 51-2 lists John of Scythopolis, John Philopenos, Maximus the Confessor, John Damascene, Symeon the New Theologian, Nicetas Stethatos, Gregory of Sinai and Nicholas Cabasilas.

only from such well known works as *Summa Theologiae* and *Summa Contra Gentiles*, *De Veritate* and *De Potentia*, but also, more comprehensively, from less reviewed works such as the Scriptural commentaries on Job, Psalms, John and Romans. I also draw deeply from Thomas' mature Neoplatonic commentaries on *the Divine Names*, *the Book of Causes*, *Boethius' De Trinitate*, and the mini treatises *On Separated Substances*, *On Spiritual Creatures* and *On Evil*, examining how these are appropriated within his underlying theological commitments. One of these important works, the *Commentary on the Divine Names* has no extant critical translation, so I am grateful for Marsh's translation within his doctoral dissertation for facilitating the vantage point of my thesis.¹³² Relevant (but not exhaustive) secondary literature, especially the most recent scholarship, will be used to illuminate and clarify these primary texts. Secondary literature will also be assessed in light of the primary sources. The findings will be offered as tools for a metacritique of modern readings and ontologies and as a contribution to the discussion of the intelligibility of theological language.

¹³² In *Librum beati Dionysii De divinis nominibus expositio*.3.1 trans. Harry C. Marsh Jr. in *Cosmic Structure and the Knowledge of God: Thomas Aquinas' In Librum beati dionysii de divinis nominibus expositio* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University, May 1994). Henceforth all page references to this commentary will refer to the Marsh translation unless otherwise stated.

CHAPTER 1. Saving Scripture

This chapter examines Dionysius' reverence for Scripture, whose metacritical authority is preserved and clarified by Aquinas on the basis of the participatory nature of 'Origenian' hermeneutics. We have already highlighted one exemplary feature of Aquinas' reception of Dionysius, namely that it is 'in harmony with divine revelation.'¹³³ Although the centrality of Scripture for Aquinas' life and thought has been widely acknowledged in recent decades¹³⁴ following the publication of critical editions of his commentaries¹³⁵ and sermons,¹³⁶ its significance for Dionysius has not yet received the corresponding attention it deserves.¹³⁷ There is perhaps, a lingering prejudice arising from Luther, who was surely wrong to claim, 'nowhere does he [Dionysius] have a single word about faith or any useful instruction from the Holy Scriptures.'¹³⁸ To the contrary, the entire *CD* is saturated with biblical citations and allusions from at least 54 canonical books¹³⁹ and *EH3* (429C-D) contains a synopsis of the entire canon.

They teach that God Himself thus gives substance and arrangement to everything which exists [*Genesis*], including the legal hierarchy [the Torah]. They lay down the divisions by lot, the distribution and the sharing that have to do with God's people [*Numbers, Deuteronomy*]. They teach the lore of holy judges [*Judges; Samuel*], of wise kings and of priests who live in God [*Kings and Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah*]. They express the powerful and unshakeable point of view which enabled our forefathers to endure various and manifold misfortunes [*Job, Psalms*]. From them come wise guidelines for living [*Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Wisdom, Sirach*], the songs which gloriously depict the love of God [*Canticles*], the prophecies regarding the future [the Prophets], the divine works of Jesus the man [the *Gospels*], the God-given and God-imitating communities [*Acts*] and sacred teachings of his disciples [the *Epistles*]. Here is the hidden and mystical vision of that

¹³³ *Humani Generis* 31

¹³⁴ J. Van Der Ploeg, 'The Place of Holy Scripture in the Theology of St. Thomas', *The Thomist* 10 (1947): 398-422; Norman Geisler, *Thomas Aquinas: an Evangelical Appraisal* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1991), 45; Wilhelmus G.B.M. Valkenberg, *Words of the Living God: Place and Function of Holy Scripture in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Leuven: Peters, 2000); Baglow, op cit.; Matthew Levering, *Scripture and Metaphysics: Aquinas and the Renewal of Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004); Per Erik Persson, 'Sacra Doctrina: Reason and Revelation in Aquinas,' trans. J.A.R. Mackenzie (Oxford: Blackwell [1957],1970), 4.

¹³⁵ e.g. Nicholas Healy, in Weinandy, Keating and Yocum (2005), Intro.; Ryan, op cit.

¹³⁶ Mark-Robin Hoogland (trans), *Thomas Aquinas: The Academic Sermons* (Washington D.C.: CUAP, 2010).

¹³⁷ Stang (2012) partially addresses the Scriptural influence on Dionysius from the writings of Paul.

¹³⁸ Jaroslav Pelikan (ed.), *Luther's Works*1, *Lectures on Genesis 1-5* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 235.

¹³⁹ Hence, Von Balthasar is partly correct: '[Pseudo-Dionysius'] stupendous knowledge of Scripture may not be overlooked; he does not quote much, but when he does it is with exactness and with sovereign mastery.' (1995), II.208c.

inspired man who was the most beloved of the disciples and the transcendent Word of God concerning Jesus [*Revelation* and the other Johannine writings].

The importance of Aquinas' reception is here underscored as a salutary corrective to many postmodern ones and is one area in which this thesis hopes to make a modest contribution.¹⁴⁰ Building on previous work by Raith,¹⁴¹ we argue that biblical exegesis is never neutral, but inevitably carries metaphysical presuppositions which impinge on fields such as first principles, inspiration, prophecy, the relation between God and the world and the *locus* of authorial intent.¹⁴² We argue that in all these respects, the starting assumptions of Thomas and Dionysius are closer to each other than to those associated with postmodern *theopoiesis*. Although postmodern theorists have rightly highlighted the influence of prior commitments on the reader, their own presuppositions forbid any normative criteria for arbitrating between competing commitments. Barthes, for example, discovered that the new 'theory of the text' had opened a Pandora's Box which 'extend[ed] to infinity the freedoms of the reader.'¹⁴³ Similarly, the silence of Marion's *God without Being*, 'precisely because it does not explain itself, exposes itself to an infinite equivocation of meaning.'¹⁴⁴ Aquinas' pre-modern hermeneutic and its concomitant metaphysics successfully overcomes this *aporia*. It offers a promising searchlight to navigate contemporary hermeneutics, with its twin challenges from historical/critical methods¹⁴⁵ and neo-kabbalistic deconstruction.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁰ Adding for instance to the work of Dahan, 70.

¹⁴¹ Charles Raith, 'Aquinas on Paul's use of the Old Testament: The Implications of Participation,' in *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 18.2 (2015), 66-87.

¹⁴² *ibid*, 67.

¹⁴³ Roland Barthes, 'Theory of the Text' in Willis, 23.

¹⁴⁴ Marion (1991), 54.

¹⁴⁵ R.J. Neuhaus (ed.), *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: The Ratzinger Conference on Bible and Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 110. Ratzinger presents a metasuspicion of historical-critical assumptions in his lucid paper 'Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: On the Question of the Foundations and Approaches of Exegesis Today' (*ibid*, 1-23).

¹⁴⁶ Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (London: 1984), 156. Pico earlier synthesised Dionysius with the Cabbala. Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), 121-122; Elliot, R. Wolfson, 'Suffering Eros and Textual Incarnation: A Kristevan Reading of Kabbalistic Poetics,' in Virginia Burrus and Catherine Keller (eds.), *Toward a Theology of Eros: Transfiguring Passion at the Limits of Discipline* (New York: FUP, 2006), 341-365; Franke, 139; Thomas Aquinas, *The Literal Exposition on Job: A Scriptural Commentary Concerning Providence*, trans. Anthony Damico (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 2, 7; Christopher Baglow, 'Sacred Scripture and Sacred doctrine in Thomas Aquinas,' in Weinandy, Keating and Yocum (2004).

1. Scripture as metacritique

Aquinas' personal vocation to the pursuit of wisdom infuses his *opera*.¹⁴⁷ His inception sermon for *Magister in Sacra Pagina*¹⁴⁸ from the text Psalm 103:13 manifests Dionysian influence in discerning a hierarchy of Divine wisdom¹⁴⁹ and follows the established custom of extolling the virtues of Scripture.¹⁵⁰ Their scientific subject does not terminate with proximate causes, but in the Final Cause: Divine Wisdom.¹⁵¹ Consequently, the seed-bed of Thomas' theology is his Scriptural commentaries¹⁵² and the posthumously named *Catena aurea* (c.1263-67).¹⁵³ This chain of commentary incorporated Eastern patristic sources never previously used in the West¹⁵⁴ and became a much admired and exemplary genre in its own right.¹⁵⁵ Most of the extant commentaries, however, are *reportatios* from students,¹⁵⁶ including the incomplete *Super Psalmos*.¹⁵⁷ This very late work (1273) crowns Thomas' lifelong conviction that '(t)he Psalter contains the whole of Scripture'.¹⁵⁸ Similarly, Thomas' sermons were typically based on a text from the Gospels or Psalms, 'the most frequently used writings of the Old Testament in the Church',¹⁵⁹ expounded in the light of other Scriptures, following Augustine's rule of interpreting Scripture with Scripture.¹⁶⁰ As O'Regan memorably remarks, 'Aquinas is a Biblical theologian all the way down and across'.¹⁶¹

An excursion into Dionysius' treatment of Scripture reveals clear parallels with that of Thomas, thus vindicating Thomas' admiration for him. Dionysius does not strike us as someone who disingenuously scatters 'proof texts' to keep up orthodox appearances. Rather, his deep familiarity with and application of Scripture evinces someone with pious reverence for its

¹⁴⁷ *SCG*1.2.2; *CJohn*1.11.209; *ST*1-II.57.2; Porro, TA, 123.

¹⁴⁸ *Commendation of and Division of Sacred Scripture* (1256) in 'The Inaugural Sermons,' trans. Ralph McInerney, in *Thomas Aquinas, Selected Writings* (London: Penguin, 1998). A second *commendatio* on sacred scripture *Hic Est Liber* was given by Thomas at his *resumption*. Weisheipl, 374.

¹⁴⁹ c.f. *Sermon* 18 (2010), 278; *ST*III.42.4; 60.3; *DV*8.15, sc.1; *LEJob*28 (1989), 338-9; *DN*7.2; Weisheipl, 96, 373-374; 102-104; Elizabeth Reinhard, 'Thomas Aquinas as Interpreter of Scripture in the Light of his Inauguration Lectures' in Piotr Roszak and Jürgen Vijgen (eds.), *Reading Sacred Scripture with Thomas Aquinas: Hermeneutical Tools, Theological Questions and New Perspectives* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2015), 76.

¹⁵⁰ Ginther, 1ff.

¹⁵¹ which, Dionysius taught, is a divine name *DN*7 (868C); *SCG*1.1.1; Porro, 152

¹⁵² e.g. *Expositio Super Isaiab ad Litteram* (1248-54); *Super Ieremiam et Threnos* (1248-52); *Expositio super Job ad litteram* (1261-65); *Lectura super Mattheum* (1269-70); *Expositio et Lectura super Epistolas Pauli Apostoli* (c.1265-73). See the connections e.g. between themes in *CJohn*20 and *ST*III.51.4.2; 83.2.4

¹⁵³ *ibid*, 163.

¹⁵⁴ Ryan, 58; Porro, TA, 176.

¹⁵⁵ *ibid*, 58; Beryl Smalley, *The Gospels in the Schools c.1100-1280* (London: Hambledon, 1985); Weisheipl, 171-173; Reinhard, 73.

¹⁵⁶ Weisheipl, 117.

¹⁵⁷ *ibid*, 305.

¹⁵⁸ *SIsaiab*, prol.; *SPsalms*, prol.; *CRom*. prol.6; Ryan, 52; Porro, TA, 306.

¹⁵⁹ *CRom*. prol.6, trans. Larcher (Ohio: Emmaus, 2020), 21.

¹⁶⁰ Hoogland, 9-10.

¹⁶¹ Cyril O'Regan, 'Thomism in Ecstasy: Oliver-Thomas Venard on the Wording of Theology and the Expropriation of Cultural Discourses' in *Nova et vetera* 18 (Washington DC: CUAP, 2020), 701

authority.¹⁶² *EH* places his theology in a communal context, with public readings from ‘the sacred tablets’ (ἡ τῶν ἀγιόγραφῶν δέλτων ἀνάγνωσις),¹⁶³ following the Byzantine pattern¹⁶⁴ and ultimately the Jewish synagogue.¹⁶⁵ The teaching authority of the bishop was sacramentally symbolised in the ordination rite in which the Scriptures ‘crown’ his head.¹⁶⁶ Importantly, this indicates their preeminent place *above* all earthly hierarchy. ‘The Scriptures explain fully and understandingly the whole of theology: the operations of God and His manifestations, the sacred words and works, in a word, all the sacred and divine words and works given in our hierarchy by the beneficent Godhead.’¹⁶⁷ English translations deprive us here of Dionysius’ beautiful alliteration: θεολογίας, θεουρνιας and θεοφανείας.¹⁶⁸

Dionysius already transcends Plato and the pagan Neoplatonists by identifying the *locus* of revelation in the Christian Scriptures:¹⁶⁹ those ‘divinely inspired’¹⁷⁰ and ‘divinely transmitted,’¹⁷¹ ‘oracles’ (λόγιοι),¹⁷² whose human authors operated by a ‘power granted by the Spirit.’¹⁷³ Whilst Plato also attributes ecstatic inspiration to the authors of ‘oracles’ (distinguishing him from any anachronistic rationalism),¹⁷⁴ his later followers Iamblichus and Proclus extended this category to include Plato’s own writings¹⁷⁵ as well as the *Chaldean Oracles*¹⁷⁶ (quite plausibly the product of mediumistic trances).¹⁷⁷ Their notion of revelation may well have developed in competition with the Judaeo-Christian Scriptures¹⁷⁸ (hence Nietzsche’s famous jibe that ‘Christianity is Platonism

¹⁶² ‘Like the Areopagite, Maximus builds his doctrine of scripture into the whole of his fundamental theological position.’ Volker in Paul M. Blowers, *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy in Maximus the Confessor* (UNDP, 1991), 228.

¹⁶³ *EH3* (425C). Campbell, 142, 39 cites Maximus (*Scholium* MG4.136B) that readings were taken from the Old and New Testament; c.f. Justin, *Apologia* 1.67.3; *Apostolic Constitutions* 1.57; 5-8; 8.5.11.

¹⁶⁴ Thomas F. Mathews, *The Early Churches of Constantinople: Architecture and Liturgy* (Pennsylvania State University, 1971), 148-149; Meyendorff (1984), 19-20; *EHMC*, 24.

¹⁶⁵ Stemming from the second temple period. Nehemiah 8; Luke 4:20; Campbell, 142; Mathews, 150.

¹⁶⁶ *EH5.3.7*.

¹⁶⁷ *EH5.7* (1981), 70.

¹⁶⁸ Campbell, 190, n.283.

¹⁶⁹ *Laws* IV (715E-716D); John Finnis, ‘Nature, Reason and God in Aquinas’ in Paul E. Sigmund, *St. Thomas Aquinas on Politics and Ethics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1988), 191; Ramelli (2014), 188.

¹⁷⁰ *EH3* (432C)

¹⁷¹ *EH1* (376B), 198.

¹⁷² following Acts 7:38; Roms. 3:2; Hebs. 5:12; 1Peter 4:11 in common with *1Clement* 5.5; 19:1; 53.1; 62.3; Augustine, *De Magistro* 14.46; Athanasius, *Letter to Serapion* 1.15; Eriugena, *DDNII* (510A; 549A; 567A).

¹⁷³ *DN1* (585B).

¹⁷⁴ *Cratylus* (396e-397A; 407D); *Phaedrus* (244C); Sammon, 30; Josef Pieper, ‘Divine Madness’: *Plato’s Case Against Secular Humanism*, trans. Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995), 17; Hankey, ‘Misrepresenting Neoplatonism’ (2008), 683-703; Franke, 141-2.

¹⁷⁵ Proclus *IP*, preface (1987), 19; *PT1.i*; *ITIII.63.24*; *In Cratylus* 101,3; Marinus of Neapolis, *Proclus On Happiness* 38, trans. Edwards (2000), 115.

¹⁷⁶ E.R. Dodds, Proclus: *The Elements of Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon, Press, 2004), xii; Hans Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy: Mysticism, Magic, and Platonism in the Later Roman Empire* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1978), 6; Julian, *Discourse on King Helios* 28 (148A-B) in Hadot, 72. Proclus wrote a lost commentary on the *Chaldean Oracles*, of which a fragment remains. Bradshaw, 149.

¹⁷⁷ John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: A Study of Platonism 80BC-AD 220* (London: Duckworth, 1977), 392-397.

¹⁷⁸ Sammon, 71. ‘(a)fter a century or two, Neoplatonism is no longer the same as at its first appearance, and among the reasons for this is its co-existence with Christianity.’ Nygren, *Agape*, 565.

for the “people”).¹⁷⁹ Furthermore, the transformation of Neoplatonism was likely mediated through heretical forms of Christianity.¹⁸⁰

But for Dionysius, in disputes about the nature of the Trinity, it is to the Christian Scriptures he appeals as ‘the standard, rule and light,’¹⁸¹ as Aquinas observes.¹⁸² In sharp contrast with notable postmodern admirers,¹⁸³ the apophaticism for which Dionysius is most celebrated becomes the very principle which leads him to the indispensability of revelation for knowledge of God.¹⁸⁴ Natural reason is inadequate to reach that One who ‘alone could give an authoritative account of what it really is.’ (καὶ ὡς ἂν αὐτὴ περὶ ἑαυτῆς κυρίως καὶ ἐπιστητῶς ἀποφαίνονται).¹⁸⁵ This declaration, commencing Dionysius’ great treatise on the *Divine Names*, likely echoes Paul’s axiom: μάρτυρε τὸ μὴ ὑπὲρ ὃ γέγραπται φρονεῖν (1Cor 4.6),¹⁸⁶ having just referenced the same epistle in his opening remarks from 1 Corinthians 2.4 («οὐκ ἐν πειθοῖς σοφίας ἀνθρωπίνης λόγοις, ἀλλ’ ἐν ἀποδείξει» τῆς πνευματοκινήτου τῶν θεολόγων «δυνάμεως»¹⁸⁷). Revelation then, is not reducible to an ‘event,’ not even the eucharistic one privileged by Marion,¹⁸⁸ since propositional revelation must be presupposed even to speak of the ‘mystery of mysteries’ contained in that feast.¹⁸⁹ Rorem, therefore, is correct to identify Dionysian apophaticism as a *modus operandi* for interpreting Scripture rather than a ‘free-floating epistemological principle for individuals.’¹⁹⁰ This point is underscored by Golitzin: ‘one cannot emphasise too much his insistence on revelation and Scripture as divinely given,’¹⁹¹ highlighting

¹⁷⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Zimmern (New York: Dover, 1997), x.

¹⁸⁰ ‘There were in his time Christians of many kinds, and especially certain heretics who based their teachings on the ancient philosophy’ including those who ‘brandished apocalyptic works of Zoroaster, Zostrianus, Nicotheus, Allogenes, Messus and others of that kind.’ Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 16 in Edwards (2000), 28-29. Plotinus writes against Gnostics in *Enneads* II.9.5-11. The negative theology of the ‘Triple Powered One’ is presented as a revelation from Youel to Allogenes in *Allogenes*. Robinson (ed), *The Nag Hammadi Library* (1998), 490-501; R.T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1995), 39; Kharlamov (2009), 97.

¹⁸¹ DN2 (640A).

¹⁸² IDNII.1

¹⁸³ Marion (1991), 54, selectively cites DN1.3: ‘With a wise silence we do honor to the inexpressible,’ due to its resonance with Wittgenstein and Heidegger, yet omits the context of the Inexpressible expressing itself ‘in the holy words of Scripture’ DN1 (539B). Marion divorces the Word from Scripture: ‘The text does not at all coincide with the event...The text carries the trace of an event but no longer opens any access to it.’144,146. Milbank (1997) astutely rebukes Marion for ‘a self-sufficient metaphysics’ based on immanentist phenomenology, 47. See also Marion (2001), c.3; Keller, 72-78; Rollins; Derrida (2008); Arthur, 191-198. Early commentators such as Eriugena, DDN1 (509A), 188-189, by contrast, recognise the Areopagite’s commitment to Scripture and seek to emulate it (with varying success).

¹⁸⁴ DN1 (588C).

¹⁸⁵ DN1 (588B), c.f. John of Damascus, DFO2.

¹⁸⁶ Stang (2012) particularly draws attention to the influence of Paul on Dionysius.

¹⁸⁷ DN1 (585B).

¹⁸⁸ Marion (1991), c.5.

¹⁸⁹ EH3 (424C)

¹⁹⁰ Rorem, *The Dionysian Mystical Theology* (2015), 123, 128. See EP9.

¹⁹¹ Golitzin, 205-6.

its strategic position at the beginning of each major treatise.¹⁹² Dionysius would not have recognised the *via negativa* of deconstruction which is ‘anxious to render itself independent of revelation, of all the literal language of New Testament eventness, of the coming of Christ, of the Passion, of the dogma of the Trinity, etc.’¹⁹³ Nor would he have recognised the pluralist *via negativa* of Keller, Hick or Franke,¹⁹⁴ which ignores Dionysius’ restriction of Divine names to those given in, or at least grounded in Scripture.¹⁹⁵ This fundamental point, however, is not lost in Thomas’ master-commentary. Divine realities should be venerated according ‘to the truths of holy scripture revealed to human beings’ which illuminate the divine names, by which God is praised. ‘For through these we know to name God living, good and other names of this kind, since they are handed down to us about God in holy scripture.’¹⁹⁶ The terminology of ‘mystical theology’ is part of Dionysius’ enduring legacy to mainstream discourse,¹⁹⁷ but whilst many (post)modern mystics read *MT* in sequestration from the rest of the *corpus*, the treatise itself redirects the reader to *Divine Names* (*MT*3 (1033A-1033C)) for its interpretive key. Thus, chapter 1 exhorts that: ‘(w)ith these analogies we are raised upwards,’ that is the divinely given analogies of Scripture.¹⁹⁸ Dionysius’ mystical ‘ecstasy’ is framed within a warning not to misunderstand those divine names hymned by tradition through their limited human sense.¹⁹⁹ In this respect, as in many others, Dionysius stands in continuity with the Origenian tradition and the Cappadocian *via negativa* as we shall argue later.²⁰⁰ In sum, ‘mystical *theology*’ references a Scriptural discourse which presupposes propositional revelation,²⁰¹ and *a priori* excludes the (anti)theology of postmodern *theopoetics*.

Nonetheless, a renewed accent on ‘reception’ in postmodern literary theory has opened up the possibility of a new conversation with Dionysius on Scripture, since both discern the

¹⁹² *CH*1 (121A); *EH*1 (376B); *DN*1 (588A)-589D); *MT*1 (997A)

¹⁹³ Derrida, ‘*Sauf le Nom*’ (1995), 71.

¹⁹⁴ perhaps prefigured in Cusanus, *De pace fidei* and *Corpus Hermeticum* V.10. Franke, 242, 271, 279; Keller, 72.

¹⁹⁵ *DN*1 (589A); *EP*9 (1104C); *IDN*IV.6, 358, *contra* Denys Turner who names God by ‘all the names of creatures’ in *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (CUP, 1995), 24; Hart, 190-1; Franke, 289, 297.

¹⁹⁶ *IDN*1.2 (1994), 279.

¹⁹⁷ It is called ‘mystical’ because ‘in this kind of theology we rise to the knowledge of God by abstraction and at the end it remains a close and hidden secret what God is.’ Albert, *CMT*1 (1988), 134.

¹⁹⁸ *DN*1 (592C). See also *CH*4 (177C).

¹⁹⁹ *DN*7 (865D-868A)

²⁰⁰ ‘For Origen as for Philo, the incognoscibility of God implies the necessity of a positive revelation; conversely revelation makes a *cul-de-sac* of every other avenue to God.’ Edwards, *Origen against Plato* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 60. *OFPIV*.1 is dedicated to a defence of the ‘divine Scriptures’. See also *OFPIV*.2.3; *CCant*1.5; *CJohn*1.4.24; *CJohn*6.34 in R.M. Grant, *The Letter and the Spirit* (London: SPCK, 1957), 98; Ilaria Ramelli, ‘The Divine as Inaccessible Object of Knowledge in Ancient Platonism: A Common Philosophical Pattern across Religious Traditions’ in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 75.2 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 167-188

²⁰¹ L. Michael Harrington in *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Thirteenth Century Textbook of Mystical Theology at the University of Paris: The Mystical Theology of Dionysius the Areopagite in Eriugena’s Latin Translation with the Scholia translated by Anastasius the Librarian and Excerpts from Eriugena’s Periphyseon* (Paris: Peeters, 2004), 4.

transformative potential of texts.²⁰² A hermeneutics of suspicion gives way to a hermeneutics of hospitality.²⁰³ Dionysius models such hospitality when he compares scripture to a midwife²⁰⁴ through whom persons are ‘initiated’ into the truths of the faith²⁰⁵ and by whom they are kept in salvation.²⁰⁶ The sacred Scriptures are ‘enlightening beams,’²⁰⁷ moulding the illuminated for Divine worship.²⁰⁸ Consequently, the different levels of initiates are arranged according to their capacity to receive such formation,²⁰⁹ beginning with the catechumens who are ‘incubated’ by the ‘paternal scriptures’ and finally regenerated by them.²¹⁰ Even those initially excluded from the holy mysteries retain access to the Scriptures as a means of restoration.²¹¹ The Scriptures are poetically likened to dew, water, milk, wine, and honey on account of their life-producing, growth-inducing, reviving, purifying and preserving powers.²¹² Their transformative power will be reiterated by Aquinas. Barthe’s ‘pleasure of the text’²¹³ supplies a secular analogue to the threefold functionality of Scripture, ‘to teach, to delight and to change.’²¹⁴

How does Aquinas conceive the authority of Scripture? A superficial reading of the *ST* might misleadingly suggest that Thomas used Scripture as one amongst a number of equal *auctoritates*.²¹⁵ The delay in translation and publication of Thomas’ commentaries bolstered such a misconception.²¹⁶ Rosemann, for example, fails to give due weight to Scripture as the supreme arbiter over and *between* authorities.²¹⁷ By contrast, Aquinas explicitly states that acceptance of the authority of Scripture is what demarcates the catholic faith from Islam and paganism.²¹⁸ Here is no pluralist reception. This adjudicating criterion is also presupposed in the structure of Thomas’ disputed questions which typically includes a *sed contra* from Scripture as the *auctoritate*

²⁰² Jauss speaks of the ‘socially formative function of literature.’ Holub (1984), 68; 24, 43-44; Willis, 16-20; 152-157; Richard S. Briggs, *The Virtuous Reader: Old Testament Narrative and Interpretive Virtue* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010).

²⁰³ The ‘readiness to have one’s purposes reshaped by the book one is reading.’ Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* in Willis, 75.

²⁰⁴ *EH6.1*

²⁰⁵ *DN1* (591D), trans. Jones (1980) 111.

²⁰⁶ *DN2* (640); *IDNII.1.92-108*. Reading and singing the Scriptures has the power to ward off evil spirits. *EH4* (477A).

²⁰⁷ *DN1* (589B), 50, corresponding to Eriugena’s *superiores claritates* in *DDN1* (509D), 190-191.

²⁰⁸ John of Apamea (ca.550 AD) exhorts the ‘assiduous frequentation of the Word of light,’ in Mary Hansbury (trans.), *St. Isaac of Ninevah On Ascetical Life* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1989), 18.

²⁰⁹ *EH6* (532A).

²¹⁰ *EH3* (432D), 215.

²¹¹ *EH3.6*; 4.3.

²¹² *EP9* (1112A-B), 286-287.

²¹³ Barthes (1975).

²¹⁴ *Hic Est Liber 1*; *SPsalms*, Prol.

²¹⁵ e.g. David Jasper, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2004), 50-51.

²¹⁶ Ryan, 6 opines, ‘a fuller picture of his intellectual achievement and theological ambitions will not emerge until the uses he makes of Scripture in his commentaries (and elsewhere) are studied more fully.’

²¹⁷ Philipp W. Rosemann, *Omne Agens Agit Sibi Simile: A ‘Repetition’ of Scholastic Metaphysics* (Louvain University Press, 1996), c.8. Contrast *ST1.108.5, sc.*. In a.6 *resp.*, Aquinas goes on to arbitrate between Dionysius and Gregory on the basis of what Paul says under inspiration.

²¹⁸ *SCG1.2*.

auctoritatibus. He reiterates the Augustinian principle that whatever truth reveals cannot possibly contradict what is written in the ‘sacred books.’²¹⁹ Since Hamann coined the term ‘metacritique’ in response to Kant’s agnosticism, Thomists could appropriate this term for the holy Scriptures against post-Kantian agnostics. Approaches such as Rosemann’s tend to level out the different authorities and overlook the fact that the very concept of *auctoritate* is a theological one, arising from a participatory ontology. As we have already seen in regard to the canon, the authority of Scripture overflowed into the analogous identification of esteemed authorities in all fields of knowledge.²²⁰ But, the relationship between the two senses of authority here, is *per prius et posterius*, that is to say between a primary referent and a derived one (in keeping with Thomas’ general conception of analogy).²²¹ Both ‘authority’ and ‘author’ derive from the same Latin root *auctor*, denoting ‘a person who took the initiative in an act.’²²² For Thomas the *Auctor* of Holy Scripture²²³ is the blessed Trinity.²²⁴ A related claim, found in the second inception sermon, *Hic Est Liber*, is that God is the ‘origin’ of Scriptural authority.²²⁵ Only this truth explains the unity of Scripture (‘your teacher is one’)²²⁶ in the midst of diverse authors and genres:²²⁷ Although Farkasfalvy has dismissed the idea of Divine *literary* authorship as anachronistic (restricting *auctor* to ‘origin’ or ‘creator’),²²⁸ we argue that human originators of writing are legitimately called ‘author,’ not only in modern times, but even within the *corpus Thomisticum*.²²⁹ Therefore, it seems right to analogously name God, the ‘chief (literary) Author,’ since human ‘authors’ are so named by participation.²³⁰ A key proof of this comes in *SPsalms* 44, where Thomas compares the Psalmist’s ‘tongue’ (*lingua*) with a writer’s pen (*sicut scriptor utitur calamo*) so that in this way, the ‘principal author is the Holy Spirit’ (*ideo principalis auctor hujus Psalmi est spiritus sanctus*).²³¹ This text underlines an incarnational model for inspiration deployed by Aquinas and defended throughout this thesis. Clearly the two natures of the Word are not in competition and this point should assist in resolving any misconceptions present in the parlance of ‘double-authorship’ as if this

²¹⁹ Augustine, *DGALII*.18 in *SCG1*.7.6. ‘(I)f philosophy is contrary to faith, it must not be accepted.’ *Sermon* 14.

²²⁰ Chenu (1964), 128.

²²¹ This is what marks out Scripture from other ‘classics.’ Parris, 104.

²²² Chenu, 130, e.g. in *Judges* 6:29 (Vulgate).

²²³ *ST1*.1.10; *DP4*.1, a proposition reflected in *Vatican 1, Constitution of the Catholic Faith* 3, Denzinger (1963), 3006. See also *STIII*.42.4.1.

²²⁴ *SPsalms*, Prol.; Ryan, 15-16.

²²⁵ *Hic est liber*1.

²²⁶ *ibid*; Ryan, 45.

²²⁷ e.g. *SPsalms*, prol.; *LEJob* (1989), prol., 68.

²²⁸ Denis Farkasfalvy, *Theology of the Christian Bible: Revelation, Inspiration, Canon* (Washington D.C.: CUAP, 2018), 2-3, 29-63, esp.50-51.

²²⁹ *CJohn*21.2652-3 calls John the *auctor* of his Gospel, which is a literary work (2655).

²³⁰ *ST1*.1.10; *DP4*.1; *STIII*.42.4.1.

²³¹ *SPsalms*.44.1. Gilbert Dahan adds helpful material from the Prologue to *Lamentations* in ‘Thomas Aquinas: Exegesis and Hermeneutics,’ in Roszak, Piotr and Jörgen Vijgen (eds.), *Reading Sacred Scripture with Thomas Aquinas: Hermeneutical Tools, Theological Questions and New Perspectives* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2015), 47ff.

implied univocity of causality. Consequently, Aquinas paves the way for a metacritique of hermeneutics.

As a general apologetic strategy, Aquinas appeals to authorities accepted by his interlocuters²³² which demarcates his approach from fideism, including modern presuppositionalism. Where no other common authorities are accepted, Aquinas appeals to natural reason.²³³ Although arguments from authority are the weakest of arguments from the standpoint of human reason,²³⁴ nonetheless, from the perspective of faith, the argument from God's authority must be the strongest and produces the strongest form of 'knowledge'.²³⁵ At this level, as Venard puts it, 'truth is its own proof.'²³⁶ Again, this point has greater force when understood within a participatory ontology, since 'authority' is not univocal of God and creatures.²³⁷ Consequently, Scripture is the meta-authority which transcends shifting philosophical opinion.²³⁸

A paradigmatic case is Aquinas' rejection of the past eternity of the world (taught by 'The Philosopher'),²³⁹ against enormous pressure from fashionable academia.²⁴⁰ Aquinas points out that, although it is logically possible that the world has always existed (i.e. it is not a self-contradictory proposition),²⁴¹ nevertheless from the point of view of faith, it is *de facto* impossible, because contrary to revelation.²⁴² This is by no means a grudging concession, but a conviction that 'everything that is not God is created by God.'²⁴³ Thomas is committed to the view that the temporality of the world can never be disproven by philosophical argument, since it is impossible for the truths of faith to be contrary to reason.²⁴⁴ Whilst Scripture condemns those who 'speak according to Platonic ways of thinking' on this matter,²⁴⁵ Aquinas does attribute an incomplete

²³² *Quodl* IV.9.3

²³³ *Quod N.* 9.3; 4.9.3; 5.12.1; Porro, TA, 122, 311.

²³⁴ *ST*1.1.8.2;

²³⁵ *ST*III.55.5 resp.; ad.1; *ST*III.55.6; Ryan, 40.

²³⁶ Venard (2020), 154.

²³⁷ *DV*14.8; *Quodl.* IV.9.3.

²³⁸ Serge-Thomas Bonino, 'Aristotelianism and Angelology According to Aquinas' in Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering (eds.), *Aristotle in Aquinas' Theology* (OUP, 2015), 30.

²³⁹ Aristotle, *On Melissus* 1 (974a), 2-4; Aquinas, *InPhysics* 8.2; *CAM*12.5; *LEJob*3.25; 5.2; 7.9; 17.9; 17.16; 37.18; 38.20; 40.11; *CAP*II.12.4; *SS*1.1.2; *SCG*II.16; *CRom*11.5.943.

²⁴⁰ Averroes, *InPhysics*8.1, 252.

²⁴¹ *IDC*11 (1996), 83, n.18.

²⁴² *ST*1.46.1 cites Gen 1:1; Jn 17:5 and Prov 8:22. See also *ST*1.44.2; 45.1-2; *DP*3.1; 17; *DP*7.5; *DSS*.18, 94; *SS*1.1; *SCG*1.7.6; *CT*1.69; *CRom*11.1.5, n.11; *SCG*II.31-38; *CAM*, *ad loc.*, sec. 2490, 2598; *Quod*III.14.2; 12. 6.1 and *St Thomas Aquinas, Siger of Brabant, St. Bonaventure: "On the Eternity of the World,"* trans. Vollert, Kendzierski and Byrne (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: MUP, 1964), 19-25. The Fourth Lateran Council rejected the eternity of the world. J.B.M. Wissink, *The Eternity of the World In the Thought of Thomas Aquinas and his Contemporaries* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 23.

²⁴³ *Sermon* 11 (2010), 140.

²⁴⁴ *DP*3.17

²⁴⁵ *Sermon* 14 (2010), 200. Aristotle accuses Plato of teaching a temporal creation (*DeCaelo* 1.12; 11.2). 2nd century Platonists also argued that the world had 'become' from pre-existent matter. P. Van Veldhuijsen, 'The Question of the Possibility of an Eternally Created World: Bonaventura and Thomas Aquinas' in Wissink, 21; c.f. Albert, *De Caelo* 1.8. Speusippus and Xenocrates disagreed. *Timaeus* 32c; Dillon, 7; Daniélou (2014), 41-43; *IDC*11 (1996), 83. Van Kooten is wrong therefore to conclude 'by adopting the view of a creatio *ex nihilo*, Christians did not move

doctrine of creation to Aristotle, whose God gives *esse* to the heavens, and not just motion.²⁴⁶ This is certainly a necessary but not sufficient strand of a true doctrine of creation, since Aristotle's specific error was in positing the world as existing *ab aeterno* against Genesis 1:1.²⁴⁷ Aquinas condemned as cowardly dissimulators those who passively quoted Aristotle's view whilst withholding judgement on it, because their approach failed to provide any intellectual defence for the weak in faith.²⁴⁸ The Christian Dionysius aids Thomas' rejection of Aristotle: 'the eternal beings cannot be thought to be absolutely coeternal with God, who is before eternity.'²⁴⁹ Thomas' reception of Dionysius has credible academic support today²⁵⁰ against both emanationist²⁵¹ and 'process' Dionysian accounts such as Keller's²⁵² or Macquarrie's.²⁵³ In contrast with Proclus' attacks on creation *ex nihilo*,²⁵⁴ the hymns of Dionysius, increase the volume of the initially *pianissimo*, Christian motif of 'the beginning of time.'²⁵⁵ This is marked in the first three days with 'unformed' light.²⁵⁶ Angels are known 'from the very beginning,' before God 'brings them into being.'²⁵⁷ If, as we will shortly argue, Dionysius is an Origenian Christian, creation *ex nihilo* is reinforced by an allusion to the *Shepherd of Hermas*,²⁵⁸ one of Origen's key 'Scriptures' for its defence.²⁵⁹ Other Scriptures include Colossians 1:16 and Psalm 104:30 in *DN2* (637B); Romans 1:20 in *DN 4* (700C) and Romans 1:25 in *EP7* (1080).²⁶⁰

beyond ancient philosophy,' in 'Paul's Stoic Ontotheology and Ethics of Good, Evil and "Indifferents": A Response to Anti-Metaphysical and Nihilistic Readings of Paul in Modern Philosophy,' Van der Heiden, Van Kooten and Cimono (eds.), *Saint Paul and Philosophy: The Consonance of Ancient and Modern Thought* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 133-165. Van Kooten confusingly conflates 'nihilism' with creation *ex nihilo* and misuses the Nicene Creed to ascribe to Paul a doctrine of Stoic emanationism. He fails to notice how this entails the divinity of creation. In *ST1.41.2* and *CRom11.4.944* Aquinas avoids this error. Gregory Rocca, 'Creation Ex Nihilo and the Being of Creatures' in Besler et al (ed.), *Divine Transcendence and Immanence in the Work of Thomas Aquinas* (Leuven-Walpole, MA, 2009), 1-19.

²⁴⁶ *Expositio super primam decretalem*, 40: E35, 11.432-437; *DP3.5*, ed. P. Pession (Turin: Marietti, 1965), 49; *CAMVI.1*, though Porro, *TA*, 314, n.62 regards this as a 'benevolent' interpretation of Aristotle.

²⁴⁷ *DAF1*.

²⁴⁸ *Sermon 14* in Hoogland, 202.

²⁴⁹ *DSS18*, 94 (1959); c.f. *IDNX* (43-57), 511.

²⁵⁰ Panagiotis G. Pavlos, 'Aptitude (Ἐπιτηδειότης) and the Foundations of Participation in the Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite' in *Studia Patristica*, Vol.XCV1.22, ed. Markus Vinzent (Leuven: Peeters, 2017), 378ff. and Kharlamov, 146.

²⁵¹ e.g. Bernard Brons, *Gott und die Seienden: Untersuchungen zum Verhältnis von neuplatonischer Metaphysik und christlicher Tradition bei Dionysius Areopagita* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1976), 168-236.

²⁵² Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London: Routledge, 2002); Fox (1983), 88-93.

²⁵³ Macquarrie (1984), esp. c.6.

²⁵⁴ *De Aeternitate*, trans. Lang and Macro (UCP, 2001).

²⁵⁵ *EH3* (429C); *CH4* (177C); *DN4* (700A; c.f. 700C). Aquinas notices this in *DP4.2* (2012), 112; reply to counterobjection 8, 131.

²⁵⁶ *ST1.67.4.2*; *ST1.70.1.2*; *DP4.2.8*; *DV21.6.11*.

²⁵⁷ *DN7* (869A); c.f. *DN5* (817C-D) where He is described as 'the Maker of being.'

²⁵⁸ *DN5* (824)

²⁵⁹ *Mand.1.1*. 'First of all, believe that there is one God who has created and arranged all things; who, when nothing existed before, caused all things to be and; and who contains all things, but himself is contained by none.' *OFPI.3.3* trans. Behr (2017) 1.69; II.1.5; IV.4.8; *CJohn1.103*; *CGen.14.3*; Behr 1.153, n.17.

²⁶⁰ all passages cited by Kharlamov, 146.

Rejecting Scriptural revelation on this question, some within the University of Paris exploited Dionysius' metaphor of the sun²⁶¹ to defend a *necessitarian emanationism*.²⁶² Absent the passages discussed, this would be a plausible *prima facie* reception, since fire, according to Proclus, 'creates not by choice but by its very being' and 'likewise the sun gives light.'²⁶³ Aquinas, however, retorts that his opponents were stretching a metaphor too far.²⁶⁴ Unlike the *esse* of the sun, the *esse* of God is its 'to understand' and is its 'to will'.²⁶⁵ Aquinas, therefore, limits the metaphor to the indiscriminate nature of God's goodness²⁶⁶ (with the caveat that he also accepts an election of creatures to particular goods).²⁶⁷ *SCG* provides further arguments against necessitarian emanationism,²⁶⁸ for example, Aquinas argues that, if true, every logically possible state of affairs would obtain, which is a *reductio ad absurdum*. Therefore, creation must be a result of divine choice.²⁶⁹ We might label Thomas' doctrine of creation *voluntary emanationism*,²⁷⁰ provided it is understood that what is emanated remains a likeness of God and not the divine essence itself, as Dionysius also makes clear (see our Chapters 2-3).²⁷¹ Thomas' reading is consistent with three other aspects of Dionysian theology. First is the supremacy of the Self-diffusive Good.²⁷² Second is the reality of free will,²⁷³ in common with the Origenian tradition, against pagan thought.²⁷⁴ Dionysius' maxim '(p)rovidence does not destroy nature',²⁷⁵ is the source of Thomas' famous principle, 'grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it.'²⁷⁶ If humans with free will are made to the image of God, this further suggests an analogous Divine freedom to create (against necessitarian emanationism). Thirdly, Aquinas agrees with Dionysius on the apophatic nature of theology,²⁷⁷ to which we shall return in Chapter 2.

²⁶¹ DN4 (693A-B)

²⁶² a view still defended in the Academy today by Knepper, 26, n.65 and Torstein Tollefsen. See Filip Ivanovic, *Desiring the Beautiful: The Erotic-Aesthetic Dimension of Deification in Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor* (Washington D.C.: CUAP, 2019), 42.

²⁶³ *IPII* (772), 137. Likewise 'if the cosmos is eternal...what creates it must create by its very being.' *IP.III* (786), 159.

²⁶⁴ *DV*5.2.1; *DV*23.1.1.

²⁶⁵ *IDNIV*-1, 339; *SCG*1.45

²⁶⁶ *ST*1.19.4.1.

²⁶⁷ *ST*1.23.4.1.

²⁶⁸ *SCG*II.23.

²⁶⁹ *SCG*II.23.2

²⁷⁰ *ST*1.45.1

²⁷¹ *IDNII*.3; Rudi Te Velde, 'Participation: Aquinas and His Neoplatonic Sources' in A. Hampton & J. Kenney (eds.), *Christian Platonism: A History* (CUP, 2020), 122-140.

²⁷² Ivanovic (2019), 43 and chapter 2 below.

²⁷³ *EH*2 (400A); *CH*9 (260C), *EP*8 (1093B); *DV*13.1.5. Ivanovic, 42; Golitzin, 171; Aquinas treats free will in *DM*1.3; 6.1; *DV*22.5-8; 24, 1-2; *ST*1.83.1; *ST*1-II.17.1; *ST*III-II.171.3; *Sermon* 12 (2010); *De occultibus operationibus naturae; De iudiciis astrorum; De sortibus*.

²⁷⁴ *DM*6.1; Campbell, 130, n.69.

²⁷⁵ DN4 (733B).

²⁷⁶ *ST*1.1.8.2; *DV*5.4.4.

²⁷⁷ Ivanovic, 43.

The metacritical stature of Scripture for Aquinas can be framed by Aristotle's insight that every science must have its own 'first principles' which are presupposed as axiomatic (see chapter 3).²⁷⁸ These first principles derive from a higher science in an order of 'subalternation'.²⁷⁹ Some arts are called 'architectonic' because they are 'ruling arts' within the hierarchy of disciplines.²⁸⁰ Porro explains how this schema permits Thomas to establish a *scientia* which is both separate from, yet related to, the *metaphysics* of the philosophers (the science of being),²⁸¹ a theme central to *On Boethius' "De Trinitate."*²⁸² Philosophy (metaphysics) is unable to ground itself and needs *aliquam aliam doctrinam esse altiore, quae per revelationem procedat.*²⁸³ This is the primary demarcation between *sacra doctrina* and philosophy, 'the teaching of philosophy is from creation, but the teaching of Sacred Scripture is from inspiration.'²⁸⁴ There is neither a loss of distinction nor a dichotomy here, *sacra doctrina* is knowledge based on revelation which can be rightly treated as a 'science' in the sense that it provides the principles which makes the lower sciences possible, even though it is not demonstrated by those sciences.²⁸⁵ These 'first principles' are grasped by faith, which is to say an intuitive knowledge analogous to God's own knowledge,²⁸⁶ which is not discursive, but all at once and timeless.²⁸⁷ The supreme first principle of the *scientia divina* is God's revelation, since it ontologically derives from God's *own* knowledge. Therefore the object of faith is God's knowledge in that mode by which it is partially revealed to creatures. On the foundation of this unified revelation, theological knowledge (*scientia divina*) can be built.²⁸⁸ This explains why the same conclusion may at times be reached through a proper use of reason and divine revelation.²⁸⁹ Nevertheless, divine revelation gets there quicker, it 'outruns' reason, so to speak.²⁹⁰ Revelation shames and uncrowns the Philosopher-Kings²⁹¹ as Aquinas explains to his 'dearest brethren (*carissimi*),' when reminding them that '(j)ust one old woman knows more about these things that pertain to the faith than heretofore all philosophers.'²⁹²

This does not entail a rejection of the Christian philosophical tradition of Dionysius. To the contrary, Thomas saves it by the aforementioned Dionysian principle: 'We should not venture

²⁷⁸ Origen, *OFP* (2017), xlvii-xlviii.

²⁷⁹ Porro, TA, 32-33. The term 'subalternation' derives from Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*.

²⁸⁰ *SCG1*, prol.

²⁸¹ Porro, 42; 102-115; *IDT2.2.5,7*; *SSS* proem. a.3.

²⁸² Porro, 97-102; Dahan, 56f.

²⁸³ *SSS* Proem. a.1

²⁸⁴ *Sermon* 13 (2010), 179. See also *ST1.1.1-10*; *SSS*, Proem.

²⁸⁵ *IDNII.1.92-108*.

²⁸⁶ *ST1.1.2*; *ST1.1.6*.

²⁸⁷ Aquinas uses Dionysius to justify this understanding. *DV2.1.4 (DN7.2)*.

²⁸⁸ *ST1.1.3,6*; *STII-II.1.7*; *II-II.8.6,2*; Rudi Te Velde, *Aquinas on God: The 'Divine Science' of the Summa Theologiae* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 18-28.

²⁸⁹ *ST1-II.109.1*

²⁹⁰ See Thomas' allegorical application of *John* in *CJohn20.2480*.

²⁹¹ See also *Sermon* 21 (2010), 317, but note *SCGIII.81.5*.

²⁹² *Sermon* 14 (2010), 202; *STII-II.1.8.1*; Psalms 119:100.

to say anything about God unless we can support what we are saying from the Scriptures.²⁹³ The famous warning against philosophy in Colossians 2:8, 18-19 is strictly limited to the deception of *false* philosophy, rather than a condemnation of philosophy *tout court*.²⁹⁴ Indeed, Thomas' master, Albert pioneered the study of pagan philosophers for the Dominican order.²⁹⁵ This highlights the exemplary nature of Thomas' reception of Dionysius. Those partial insights into the realm of creation²⁹⁶ gleaned from the philosophers are the 'breakfast' or perhaps the 'lunch' (the early meal), whilst the 'great dinner' of the higher truths of Scripture, such as the mysteries of the Trinity awaits consumption.²⁹⁷ To switch metaphors, if Wisdom mixes her drinks (Proverbs 9),²⁹⁸ it is not to produce a more intoxicating brew but, rather to *dilute* the neat alcohol which is too potent for the immature.²⁹⁹ The failure of philosophy to adequately explain providence underlines the necessity of revelation, but this does not excuse the theologian for intellectual laziness.³⁰⁰ Rather, Scripture provides the starting point to an infinite journey of discovery.³⁰¹

For Aquinas, Scripture possesses an authority surpassing the 'probable' one of pagan philosophers, or the even higher probability of doctors of the church, owing to its infallibility.³⁰² There is an analogy here with first principles of knowledge, to be discussed in Chapter 3, which also transcend 'probability,' through their infallibility.³⁰³ Aquinas repeats Augustine's rule:

Only those books of Scripture which are called canonical have I learned to hold in such honour as to believe their authors have not erred in any way in writing them. But other authors I so read as not to deem everything in their works to be true, merely on account of their having so thought and written, whatever may have been their holiness and learning.³⁰⁴

Aquinas agrees that 'if but one untruth be admitted into the Sacred Scripture, the whole authority of the Scriptures is weakened.'³⁰⁵ Since there is nothing false in the Divine knowledge,³⁰⁶ it follows as a hermeneutical axiom that, 'one ought not to say that something

²⁹³ DV7.8, sc, from DN1 (598B). See also IVSS8.2.1, qc.5, arg.1; DP10.4.12; ST1.29.3.4; ST1.32.2.1; ST1.36.2.1; 39.2.2.

²⁹⁴ *Sermon* 14 (2010), 203.

²⁹⁵ Porro, TA, 116-120.

²⁹⁶ STI-II.167.1.3.

²⁹⁷ *Sermon* 13 (2010), 178-179; *CJohn*21.2608

²⁹⁸ EP9.

²⁹⁹ *Sermon* 13

³⁰⁰ *Quodl.*IV.18; Porro, TA, 312.

³⁰¹ *LEJob*, prolog.

³⁰² ST1.1.10; 1.1.8; *CJohn*XIII.1; *Hic Est Liber* 1.

³⁰³ DSS20.112 ; DV12.1

³⁰⁴ ST1.1.8.2; c.f. Augustine, *Epistle* 82.3.24, also cited by Abelard in *Sic et Non*, Reginald Lane Poole, *Illustrations of the History of Medieval Thought and Learning* (New York: Dover Publications, 1960), 147.

³⁰⁵ STIII.55.4.3

³⁰⁶ STIII-II.171.6

patently false should be understood in the words of Scripture.³⁰⁷ Throughout his life, Aquinas is committed to this principle,³⁰⁸ whose exemplary nature is reprised by both Leo XIII³⁰⁹ and Pius XII. ‘For as the substantial Word of God became like men in all things, “except sin” (Heb. 4:15) so the words of God, expressed in human language, are made like to human speech in every respect, except error.’³¹⁰ Furthermore, ‘our faith rests upon the revelation made to the apostles and prophets who wrote the canonical books, and not on the revelations (if any such there are) made to other doctors.’³¹¹ The status of infallible revelation here is restricted to the canonical Scriptures, *sola canonica Scriptura est regula fidei*,³¹² prompting Milbank’s well-placed judgement: ‘Thomas Aquinas ... speaks of *sacra scripturae* as the sole authority for *sacra doctrina*, in a way that sounds ‘Protestant’ by later Tridentine standards.’³¹³ Ironically, the Council of Trent *breaks* with tradition and is not Thomistic enough in ascribing *equal* inspiration and *equal* veneration to non-canonical tradition.³¹⁴ Trent limits the possibility of a critique *of* tradition.³¹⁵

The difference between Thomas’ engagement with Scripture and Thomists within ‘Radical Orthodoxy’ has been a source of criticism of the latter.³¹⁶ RO finds roots in the theology of De Lubac whose *magnum opus* treated the fourfold sense of Scripture,³¹⁷ but whose teachings on nature and grace³¹⁸ arguably obfuscate the distinction between general and special revelation,³¹⁹ as seen in their influence upon Vatican II’s *Dei Verbum* (1965).³²⁰ This document marks a partial shift from preconiliar language of revelation as verbal/propositional³²¹ (or at least *intellectual*), to

³⁰⁷ DP4.1 (2012), 100. See also STII-II.171.6, sc.; DV12.9, sc.

³⁰⁸ e.g. in his mature work DSS18.91, 93, 95; 19,99.

³⁰⁹ Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus* (1893). Denzinger (1963), 3006

³¹⁰ *Divino Afflante* in Farkasfalvy (2018), 150-1; *Humani Generis* 3, 22.

³¹¹ ST1.1.8.2; ST1.50.3.3.

³¹² *CJohn*21.6.2656; c.f. STIII.55.5; *Quodl.*XII.16.2.1; DV14.10.11.

³¹³ John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 134.

³¹⁴ Council of Trent, Sess.IV (1546) in Denzinger (1963), 1501, Dulles, 292.

³¹⁵ There is an attempt to address this through the living role of the Magisterium and the criterion of *unanimous consensus*. Council of Trent a.215 in Rahner (1966), 60, but some doctrines, such as the status of deuterocanonical books or the meaning of ‘rock’ in Matthew 16 fail this test.

³¹⁶ Boersma, 4, 7-8, 141-42, 164-65.

³¹⁷ *Exégèse médiévale: les quatre sens de l’écriture*, trans. E.M. Macierowski, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, Vols.1-3 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), henceforth *ME*.

³¹⁸ Henry de Lubac, *Surnaturel: Études historiques* (Paris: Aubier, 1946); *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Sheed (New York: The Crossroad Publishing House, 1998).

³¹⁹ For example, John Milbank speaks of ‘the basic metaphysical convertibility between Christianity and theurgic Neoplatonism’ in ‘Neoplatonic Theurgy and Christian Incarnation’ in Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (Kettering OH: Angelico Press, 2014), xi.

³²⁰ However, the chief drafter of this document seems to be Yves Congar. Farkasfalvy, 78.

³²¹ The Anti-Modernist Oath (1910) defines faith as ‘a genuine assent of the intellect to truth externally communicated by hearing, whereby, on the authority of the all-truthful God, we believe as true what has been said, attested and revealed to us by the personal God who is our Creator and Lord.’ See also Vatican 1, ‘Constitution on Catholic Faith’ in Dulles, 43, 291; *Humani Generis* 3 (1950); Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *De Revelatione per Ecclesiam catholicam proposita* 1 (Rome: Ferrari, 1945), 141. On Vatican II, see Michael Barnes, ‘Opening up a Dialogue: *Dei Verbum* and the Religions,’ *Modern Theology* 29 (2013): 12.

a *locus* in the non-propositional activity of events and persons.³²² It is one of the areas in which RO (and Vatican II) is arguably not Thomistic enough,³²³ and militates against an otherwise high Christology. Indeed, *la nouvelle théologie*, from whose stable RO emerged, specifically intended to resist a preoccupation with Aquinas (at least as he was ‘received’ by the Neoscholastics) at the expense of other neglected sources within the tradition.³²⁴ Although such an approach could be defended by Thomas’ own *method* which was a kind of *ressourcement avant la lettre*,³²⁵ in this thesis, however, we maintain the stronger claim that Aquinas’ doctrine of Scripture, of revelation and inspiration is a more consistent outworking of that participatory ontology and Christology (which RO has rightly retrieved), prevalent in the wider catholic tradition. The prophetic state of inspiration in which the Scripture writers communicated truths inerrantly is a greater elevation of participation which ‘raises man to something above human nature.’³²⁶ The normativity of Aquinas’ doctrine derives (as with Aristotle before him), not least from his metaphysics of ‘being,’ discussed in our Chapter 2, which, if true must be true perennially.³²⁷

In his article in *Radical Orthodoxy*, Montag contests that the Vatican 1 notion of ‘revelation’ is not authentically Thomasian but it a product of modernity initiated by a false move of Suárez.³²⁸ We are cautious of this claim because, as we learn from Dionysius, the emergence of new technical terms does not automatically signal innovative teaching. It may indicate a re-worded defence of orthodoxy in the face of fresh challenges.³²⁹ Montag recasts Thomistic revelation as a mode of teleological perception in the minds of theologians,³³⁰ rather than as cognitive verbal content given to the human authors of Scripture.³³¹ Revelation is confined to the same ‘field of vision’ as ordinary vision,³³² a heightened consciousness of the one subject matter of the world, rather than of God as the subject matter of revelation. Montag’s approach emphasises

³²² Brian Daley, ‘Knowing God in History and in the Church: *Dei Verbum* and “Nouvelle Théologie”’ in Flynn and Murray, *Ressourcement* (2012), 347-348; Dulles, 19-30; 101ff; Farkasfalvy, 48, 78, 139. although to include ‘persons’ demands the possibility of verbal communication, since ‘by deeds even things manifest themselves, but only persons do so by words.’ Christian Pesch, *Praelectiones dogmaticae* 1 in Dulles, 41, 291.

³²³ See my ‘Is Radical Orthodoxy Thomistic enough?’ *Theofilus* 9.1 (2016).

³²⁴ Farkasfalvy, 2-3; ‘What does it mean for the Catholic tradition for one figure, Thomas Aquinas, to be reconfigured as the initiator of a tradition called “Thomism”, when Aquinas himself clearly saw his work within an inherited, defuse and polyvalent tradition stretching back more than a millennium before his birth?’ Aaron Riches, ‘To Rest in the Infinite Altitude of the Divine Substance: A “Lacanian” Response to the Provocation of Lawrence Feingold’ (unpublished), 3. Hence, Pius X was criticised for prescribing *only* the study of Thomas amongst the scholastics. Porro, TA, 404.

³²⁵ Chapter 4 below.

³²⁶ *STII-II*.171.2.3.

³²⁷ Peddicard, 54-79.

³²⁸ John Montag, ‘Revelation: The False Legacy of Suárez’ in John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward (eds.), *Radical Orthodoxy* (London: Routledge, 1999), 38-63.

³²⁹ Dulles, 20-21.

³³⁰ *ibid*, 28.

³³¹ Montag, *op cit*, 43.

³³² Montag, 46.

immanence at the expense of transcendence³³³ and consequently downplays the supernatural predictive content of prophecy accented by Thomas.

Against Montag, we would argue that Aquinas specifically does conceive of God as the subject matter of *sacra doctrina*,³³⁴ based on *revelatio*.³³⁵ Aquinas shows that *revelatio* is that ‘by which God speaks to the prophet.’³³⁶ Indeed, ‘prophecy (*prophetia*) is a revelation.’³³⁷ It is bound up with speech and this speech has determinate content for, ‘it was becoming that the authority of the ones who reveal and of the things that are revealed would be above all others, and in particular about the things that belong to the Holy Trinity’.³³⁸ This suggests pre-modern roots for a propositional understanding of revelation.³³⁹ Nor is it even the case that the term ‘proposition’ is alien to Aquinas’ vocabulary, rather, he explicitly rejects an *objectio* that the object of faith is not a ‘proposition.’³⁴⁰ Since faith is a mean between knowledge and opinion, its object must be on the same continuum of knowledge.³⁴¹ Because faith is an assent to truth, it is carried by a proposition³⁴² which is a sign of truth or falsity.³⁴³ Therefore, importantly and unlike postmodern versions, Thomas’ negative theology is not a negation of the propositional *per se*. To the contrary, ‘(w)e know that this proposition which we form about God when we say "God is," is true; and this we know from His effects.’³⁴⁴ Inversely, as Franke has argued, the collapsing of propositional truth into myth is a hallmark of Gnosticism.³⁴⁵

Nor does it seem from our discussion that Montag is Dionysian enough. We have already underscored the indispensability of revelation for Dionysian apophaticism. In agreement with Nyssanus who speaks of a ‘grace transcending nature,’³⁴⁶ Dionysius recognises ‘a law other than the natural’³⁴⁷ and it is only by grace that the hierarchy can do things ‘which belong naturally and supernaturally to God.’³⁴⁸ Some such logical distinction then must exist in Thomas’ mind.³⁴⁹ From the very outset of the *Summa*, Aquinas insists that for human beings to flourish in a way

³³³ See also Macquarrie, 94. However, it must be acknowledged that Milbank (2005) seeks a ‘suspended middle’ between the bottom up view of liberal theology and the Barthian conception of pure grace, 17-32.

³³⁴ *ST*1.1.7

³³⁵ *ST*1.1.1

³³⁶ *DV*12. 1.3.

³³⁷ *DV*12. 8.5.

³³⁸ *Sermon* 12 (2010), 160.

³³⁹ a propositional account of truth is already present in Plato, *Cratylus* 385.

³⁴⁰ *ST*III-II.1.2.1.

³⁴¹ *ST*III-II.1.2, sc.

³⁴² *ST*1.13.12; *DV*14.12

³⁴³ *DV*1.12, sc, following Aristotle, *De Anima* III.6 (430a 26); *DV*14.1

³⁴⁴ *ST*1.3.4.2.

³⁴⁵ Franke, 36 perversely wishes to rehabilitate Gnosticism.

³⁴⁶ *Beatitudes*, *Sermon* 7 (1954), 154.

³⁴⁷ ἑτέρω παρὰ τὴν φύσιν θεσμῶ διεπλάττετο. *DN*2 (648A), in reference to the Incarnation.

³⁴⁸ *CH*3 (168A); Ernesto Sergio Mainaldo, ‘The Transfiguration of Proclus’ Legacy: Pseudo-Dionysius and the Late Neoplatonic School of Athens’ in Layne and Buttorac (2017), 203.

³⁴⁹ *ST*III.55.1; *DV*12.2.4.

which surpasses human reasoning, ‘divine truths’ must be communicated through ‘divine revelation.’³⁵⁰ Aquinas clearly indicates what those truths are which are known solely by revelation and not by natural reason.³⁵¹ As we have seen, revelation is the condition of possibility for articles of faith to partake of the ‘higher science’ from which the lower sciences derive their first principles.³⁵² This surely is the necessary condition for theology to be truly called a ‘science.’

Such an account of revelation is entirely consistent with Thomas’ general understanding of miracles as acts of God not contingent upon secondary causation.³⁵³ In fact, the revelatory nature of Scripture is ‘divinely confirmed by miracles’³⁵⁴ and the divine work of inspiration itself constitutes a miracle: an ‘immediate’ work of God, in contrast with general providence in other human books.³⁵⁵ Significantly, Aquinas rejects the view that the human mind can only contain things naturally received from God.³⁵⁶ It may also receive perfections through divine power which ‘exceeds what is due to human nature.’³⁵⁷ From Dionysius, Aquinas learns that this supernatural reception is typically mediated through celestial powers.³⁵⁸ Thus, Aquinas distinguishes between ‘natural’ and ‘divine prophecy,’³⁵⁹ just as he distinguishes between an ‘order of nature’ and an ‘order of grace’³⁶⁰ (though not, of course, to imply any autonomous realm of ‘pure nature’).³⁶¹ Consequently, even miracles are not ‘transgressive’³⁶² or ‘violations’ of the laws of nature in the Humean sense. They are not ‘contrary to nature’ *per se*, but only ‘contrary to natural causes.’³⁶³ Rather, nature is created with a potency to receive things which happen miraculously.³⁶⁴ Therefore, inspiration, should not be misconstrued in any naive sense as mechanical dictation (although the Fathers and Aquinas occasionally use dictation metaphors).³⁶⁵ Ironically, it is the *Tel Quel* school of Barthes and Derrida who preeminently fall foul of such a charge. In their own parody of inspiration, the human author is reduced to an impersonal ‘scriptor,’ a ‘disembodied hand,’ ‘cut off from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of

³⁵⁰ *ST*1.1.1.

³⁵¹ *ST*III.1.3; *SCG*IV: Porro, TA, 137.

³⁵² *SSS* proem. a.3. Porro, TA, 42.

³⁵³ *DP*6.1

³⁵⁴ *SCG*1.9; *ST*III.43.1

³⁵⁵ *In 2 Timothy 3:16*; *ST*I-II.113.10; *ST*1.1.1 *sc.*

³⁵⁶ *DV*12.3.17.

³⁵⁷ *DV*12.3.17.

³⁵⁸ *DV*12.8, *sc*

³⁵⁹ *DV*12.3.10.

³⁶⁰ *DV*12.3.12.

³⁶¹ To imagine such a realm would, in Thomas’ mind, recapitulate the sin of Lucifer: *DM*16.3; Porro, TA, 279; Conor Cunningham, ‘*Natura Pura*, The Invention of the Anti-Christ: A Week With No Sabbath’ in *Communio* 37, Summer 2010; Milbank (2005), 17-32.

³⁶² Michel Foucault, ‘A Preface to Transgression’ trans. Bouchard and Simon in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984* (New York: New Press, 1988), II.69-87; Philip W. Rosemann, *Charred Root of Meaning: Continuity, Transgression, and the Other in Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 4.

³⁶³ *DP*6.1-2; *ST*III.44.2.2.

³⁶⁴ *DV*12.3.18.

³⁶⁵ Origen, *HEzek*6 (2010), 86, n.3; *ST*III.42.4.1; *SPsalms* 44.1

inscription.³⁶⁶ For these postmodernists, *all* authorship is ‘automatic writing,’³⁶⁷ flowing as it does from an impoverished anthropology, as we will argue in Chapter 3.

Montag is correct to point out that ‘revelation’ must be analogical when applied from creatures to God,³⁶⁸ but his own model falls prey to equivocity. A truly analogical understanding of revelation does not entail a denial of cognitive content. Although prophecy is the sight of things ‘beyond our ordinary knowledge,’ and thus ‘made manifest by a higher light,’³⁶⁹ it remains, ‘a kind of supernatural knowledge,’³⁷⁰ since it derives from the foreknowledge of God.³⁷¹ Since the Scriptures are prophecy in written form, this supremely applies to them. To address the specific question of whether prophecy can be natural, Thomas invokes 2 Pet. 1:21: ‘prophecy came not by the will of man at any time, but the holy men of God spoke, inspired by the Holy Ghost.’³⁷² This includes knowledge of future events, which is by definition miraculous, and therefore ‘from Divine revelation alone.’³⁷³ Aquinas’ understanding is at one with the classical Augustinian and Anselmian metaphysics, namely that God is Truth enjoyable by the intellect³⁷⁴ (see Chapters 2-3). Although it is true (against Barth) that supernatural revelation assumes a continuity with natural revelation for the purposes of intelligibility, as we have seen in the case of pagan philosophers,³⁷⁵ something additional (against Montag) is required for human salvation,³⁷⁶ which is communicated to the prophet by ‘the gift of the Holy Ghost.’³⁷⁷ This supernatural gift is not the permanent natural possession of the prophet but, ‘as the air is ever in need of a fresh enlightening, so too the prophet’s mind is always in need of a fresh revelation.’³⁷⁸ We conclude, therefore, that a distinction between natural and special revelation is assumed by Aquinas, even if lacking the specificity of later technical terminology.³⁷⁹

On the other hand, verbal revelation must not be naively conceived as akin to the mathematical propositions of Euclid or Proclus. Indeed, Thomas specifically cites Dionysius to this effect.³⁸⁰ Dionysius had spoken of those ‘mysterious representations’ of Scripture³⁸¹ and the

³⁶⁶ Barthes (1977), perhaps a parody of Belshazzar’s Feast in Daniel 5, immortalised in Rembrandt’s painting. Nicholas Holtam, *The Art of Worship: Paintings, Prayers and Readings for Meditation* (London: National Gallery Company, 2011), 17.

³⁶⁷ Barthes (1977), 144.

³⁶⁸ Montag, 43.

³⁶⁹ *DV*12.1; *STII-II*.171.2

³⁷⁰ *DV*12.7; *STII-II*.171.6;171.1

³⁷¹ *DV*12.10

³⁷² *STIII*, *suppl.*67.3.2; *DV*12.2, sc.; *CRom*1.2.27

³⁷³ *STII-II*.172.1

³⁷⁴ Bradshaw, 227.

³⁷⁵ *STII-II*.167.1.3.

³⁷⁶ *STI*.1.1.

³⁷⁷ *STII-II*.72.1, sc

³⁷⁸ *STII-II*.171.2; *DV*12.1.

³⁷⁹ *STII-II*.172.1

³⁸⁰ *DV*12.12.9; *LEJob*38.1 (1989), 416;

veiled apprehension of truth.³⁸² This is why Aquinas stresses '(i)n scripture, divine things are presented to us in the manner which is in common use amongst men.'³⁸³ Many sacred writings take the form of imaginative visions, some 'intellectual' consisting of 'judgement' alone or else 'judgement and reception together,' but specifically prophetic revelation is mediated through the imagination³⁸⁴ and therefore accompanied by an element of opacity.³⁸⁵ Prophetic knowledge, even in Scripture, falls short of that perfect knowledge to be revealed *post mortem*.³⁸⁶ Nor is the form of prophecy limited to the propositional, since there are prophetic deeds as well as words, including historical events, which in the providence of God carry prophetic significance (an important point we shall return to).³⁸⁷ But the import of this must not be misconstrued, since we only know that these events carry prophetic meaning as a result of their propositional explanation.

In conclusion, we could describe Scripture from a Thomistic stance as infallible *mediated* knowledge suited to this life, since one intellect can illumine another by means of a medium such as speech, writings or sign, but such mediation is unnecessary for angelic intellects.³⁸⁸ Human language is corrigible and partial, yet is rescued from the hopelessness of *différance* by its participation in the *Verbum*, which is Truth itself.³⁸⁹ Since God is simple, human knowledge of Him *in via* requires this mediation through complex likenesses,³⁹⁰ described by Paul as looking 'through a glass darkly' (1 Cor. 13:12). Aquinas picks up this theme when describing the prophet's mind (and by extension the Scriptures) as a "mirror of eternity."³⁹¹ *SPsalmos* distinguishes different levels of prophecy of which the highest transcends images and dreams as *per ipsius veritatis manifestationem*. David's prophecies in Psalms fall under this category.³⁹² It is not obvious to what extent this highest form is thought to be mediated, or even whether Aquinas conceives of David's prophetic experience as a foretaste of the Beatific vision (see Chapter 3), but broadly speaking we can summarise that, from God's point of view of God, the object of faith is something simple and not propositional, but from the creaturely perspective the object of faith is complex and propositional due to the human mode of knowledge.³⁹³

³⁸¹ CH1; 4 (177C);

³⁸² Matthew K. Ramage, *Dark Passages of the Bible: Engaging Scripture with Benedict XVI & Thomas Aquinas*, (Washington D.C.: CUAP, 2013), 7-8

³⁸³ CHeb1.4

³⁸⁴ DV12.12.10.

³⁸⁵ DV12.12; Venard (2020).

³⁸⁶ STII-II.173.1; 1Cor 13:12

³⁸⁷ DV12.9, sc; 12.13, sc, citing the Gloss.

³⁸⁸ DV9.1, citing EH6.5 and CH7.2; ST1.107.1

³⁸⁹ See Venard (2020), c.2; 112.

³⁹⁰ STII-II.171.6; LEJob38.1 (1989), 416

³⁹¹ STII-II.173; DP4.2.27.

³⁹² *SPsalmos*, prol.; Ryan, 16.

³⁹³ STII-II.1.2.1; ST1.111.1;

3. The Authority of Tradition and its Limits

The English word ‘tradition’ comes from a Latin root conveying either a positive ‘giving over/ transmission’ or a negative ‘betrayal.’ The choice to privilege Aquinas’ reception of Dionysius aligns with a high view of tradition in opposition to its later *destruktion* by Heidegger.³⁹⁴ But this ‘traducing’ of tradition is myopic,³⁹⁵ since, as Hamann ably demonstrates in his ‘metacritique’ of Kant, all writing takes place within a context of possibilities determined by, or entangled with, prior experience, language and tradition, including the tradition of critique itself.³⁹⁶ We recall Genette’s image of the palimpsest. Tradition is our ‘collective memory’³⁹⁷ and to presume to write without it displays intellectual amnesia. This truth explains why a cross-current of Biblical scholars, including the *ressourcement* theologians are re-reading texts through reception tradition.³⁹⁸ To defend Aquinas’ reception of the Dionysian *corpus* as ‘classic,’ is to stand in continuity with the shared value both writers place on tradition. Thomas, the ‘giant’ on whose shoulders we stand, rightly declares that all religious life after the Resurrection flows from that which has been passed down by the disciples.³⁹⁹ These traces of tradition are the footsteps of the flock.⁴⁰⁰ Nor is there any competition *per se* between Scripture and tradition, as Aquinas appeals to Scriptures (Deuteronomy 32:7 and Job 8:8) which *themselves* enjoin us to honour our forefathers. Indeed, Franke compares rejection of tradition to Oedipal patricide, killing one’s father in order to father oneself.⁴⁰¹ Aquinas singles out the ‘church fathers’ Augustine and Ambrose,⁴⁰² but he could easily have extended the parental lineage to Dionysius.

Although Scripture alone possesses ‘incontrovertible’ authority,⁴⁰³ it does not follow that in respect of pedagogy, other authorities are worthless, since ‘probable things’ are more profitable than ‘obviously false things.’⁴⁰⁴ Aquinas is therefore reticent to ‘condemn as erroneous’ the opinions of the ‘great teachers,’⁴⁰⁵ ‘it seems too presumptuous to assert that such great doctors of

³⁹⁴ *Being and Time* trans. Macquarrie and Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell (2004), 42-49. The Gnostics were previously dismissive of tradition. Irenaeus, *CH3.2.2*

³⁹⁵ Similarly Clayton Crockett writes naively of ‘the freedom of theology to think matters of ultimate concern – political, moral, existential, cosmological – without the constraint of tradition’ in Franke, 288.

³⁹⁶ ‘The first purification of reason consisted in the partly misunderstood, partly failed attempt to make reason independent of all tradition and custom and belief in them.’ J.G. Hamann, ‘Metacritique of the Purism of Reason (1784)’ in Haynes (2007), 207.

³⁹⁷ Rosemann, 2.

³⁹⁸ Parris (2015).

³⁹⁹ *STII-II.188.7*; c.f. *IDNII.1.92-108*; *CRom. prol.7*.

⁴⁰⁰ *Cant.1:9*

⁴⁰¹ Franke, 311.

⁴⁰² *Sermon 8* (2010), 102.

⁴⁰³ *STI.1.8*.

⁴⁰⁴ *CAPII.1.1* (2007), 81; *STI.50.3.3*. On ‘probable’ arguments, see Pierre Rousselot, *L’Intellectualisme de Saint Thomas* (Paris: Félix Alcuin, 1908), 156 ff.; Ryan, 40.

⁴⁰⁵ *DP3.18*.

the Church had strayed from the sound teaching of faith.⁴⁰⁶ Whenever the Fathers appear to err, Aquinas rescues them by means of a ‘pious’ or ‘reverent’ exposition,⁴⁰⁷ i.e. a generous interpretation consonant with orthodoxy, without prejudice to the author’s original intent. Granting authorities the benefit of the doubt is a general rule of thumb for Aquinas,⁴⁰⁸ but *a fortiori*, this principle applies to the doctors and fathers.⁴⁰⁹ ‘I have proposed first to explain what seems perplexing in the abovementioned authorities, and then to show how by means of them the truth of the Catholic faith may be taught and defended.’⁴¹⁰ *In nuce* this is the same strategy Aquinas will use for ‘saving Dionysius.’

As we have seen in our discussion of the theological nature of ‘authority,’ we can trace a certain hierarchy of normativity within tradition.⁴¹¹ First is the supreme and infallible tradition of Scripture itself,⁴¹² followed by the great ecumenical creeds and pronouncements of the Councils,⁴¹³ oral tradition, early writings of fathers and doctors of the Church, the Apocrypha (excluding heretical works),⁴¹⁴ medieval theologians⁴¹⁵ and finally pagan philosophical tradition, to the extent that it is compatible with orthodoxy.⁴¹⁶ This principle of hierarchical normativity is itself Augustinian.⁴¹⁷

Thomas’ increasing use of the Councils as a decisive *auctoritate* can be seen in *De Unione verbi incarnate*, *Catena Aurea* and the *sed contra*s of *STIII*⁴¹⁸ (see our section on Christology). Indeed, his use of the Greek fathers as a Latin doctor is *avant-garde*.⁴¹⁹ Nonetheless, the authority of Councils, is not intrinsic to themselves, but derives from participation in the revelation of Scripture which

⁴⁰⁶ *DSS*18. 96 (1959)

⁴⁰⁷ *ST*1.31.4; 1.40.4.1; 1.43.2.1; 1.93.5.1; III.4.3.1; I.55.1.2. See discussion in Janice L. Schultz, St. Thomas Aquinas, *An Exposition of the “On the Heptamads” of Boethius*, trans. J. L. Schultz and Edward A. Syman (Washington D.C.: CUAP, 2001), liv.; Matthew Levering, and Marcus Plested (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception of Aquinas* (OUP, 2021), 8.

⁴⁰⁸ *Sermon* 4 (2010), 53-54.

⁴⁰⁹ e.g. *ST*1.79.7.1; *STIII*.50.4.

⁴¹⁰ *CEG*, prol.; Levering and Plested (2021), 7-12

⁴¹¹ Levering, and Plested, 2

⁴¹² *ST*1.1.8.2

⁴¹³ Aquinas cites the ecumenical councils in 184 passages across his opus, ‘with the councils, the authority is displaced from this or that Father to that of the Church as a whole, and so assumes a greater authority.’ Levering and Plested (2001) e.g. *CJohn*3.6.542.

⁴¹⁴ *CJohn*2.1.364 ; *Hic Est Liber* 2. The term *apocrypha* (hidden) refers to the fact that these books were read privately rather than publicly as the holy Scriptures were. Souter (1965), 145.

⁴¹⁵ Levering and Plested, 11.

⁴¹⁶ Ryan, 40. A parallel hierarchy can be discerned within Judaism where the Torah is the highest authority, followed by the Prophets, then the Writings. Outside the Tanak there are histories which are ‘not deemed worthy of equal credit with the earlier records’ (Josephus *Against Apion* 1.8.38-41.). Afterwards are the apocalyptic books and the Mishnah etc..

⁴¹⁷ *Epistle* 82.3.24

⁴¹⁸ *STIII*.2.1-2, sc. cites Chalcedon. Weishapl, 164-6, 308-9. See also *SCGIV*.25; *DP*10.4.12-13; *DV*14.8; *Sermon* 11 (2010), 147-148; *De rationibus fidei*.

⁴¹⁹ Roger W. Nutt, *Thomas Aquinas: De unione Verbi incarnate* (Leuven: Peeters, 2015), 23-24. Porro, TA, 176-7 notes that Thomas quotes from 22 Latin and 57 Greek fathers.

their pronouncements elucidate.⁴²⁰ In *CEG*, Aquinas rejects the ‘absolutely false’ view that the Council of Nicaea ‘enjoys greater authority than the letter of the Old Testament.’⁴²¹ The task of Councils is to interpret explicitly what was already regarded as implicit within previous creeds and confessions, as distilled from the Scriptures and in response to heresies.⁴²² For example, if a new heresy were to arise which denied that the Holy Spirit created the world, this would need to be specifically confessed as an article of faith, because it is only implicit in the Apostle’s Creed.⁴²³ In true order, ‘the formal object of faith is the First Truth, as manifested in Holy Writ and the teaching of the Church, which proceeds from the First Truth.’⁴²⁴

We can only briefly here touch on the question of canon. Dionysius’ canon is based on the Septuagint rather than the Palestinian Jewish canon, like Augustine’s who reckoned the number of OT books at 44,⁴²⁵ including Wisdom and Sirach,⁴²⁶ Tobit, Judith, and I-II Maccabees. Hugh of St Victor (1096-1141), however, will differentiate these five as ‘books which indeed are read, but are not written in the body of the text or in the canon of authority.’⁴²⁷ Aquinas categorises them as *agiographoi*,⁴²⁸ in distinction from the ‘apocrypha.’⁴²⁹ Sirach⁴³⁰ will supply an epigraph for Thomas’ extended commentary on Boethius’ *Hebdomads*⁴³¹ and he occasionally cites Tobit and Maccabees as *auctoritates*.⁴³² Dionysius too cites Maccabees, esteemed for its depiction of the brave martyrs.⁴³³ Wisdom, which appears in the 13th century ‘Paris Bibles,’⁴³⁴ is regarded by Thomas as ‘holy Scripture’⁴³⁵ (though acknowledged as ‘not yet’ regarded as canonical in the time of Philo),⁴³⁶ following Augustine and therefore an *auctoritate* on doctrinal matters.⁴³⁷ He ascribes to its author the accolade *philosophus theologicus*, a *hapex legomena* immediately followed by a

⁴²⁰ DP10.4.13; c.f. Origen’s *Rule of Faith* in *OFP*, Preface 10.

⁴²¹ *CEG*1.32.

⁴²² *STII-II*.1.9.1

⁴²³ DP10.4.13.

⁴²⁴ *STII-II*.5.3

⁴²⁵ Athanasius (367) listed 39 OT books and 27 NT. He distinguished the *kanonizomena* from the *apocrypha*. Souter (1965), 142-3.

⁴²⁶ Aquinas cites Wisdom and Sirach in *SCG*1.2 which appropriately treat the pursuit of wisdom. See also *CJohn*21.2582

⁴²⁷ *De Sacramentis*, trans. Deferrari, prol.,VII, 7.

⁴²⁸ A term previously used by Jerome (PL28.552-554A) to distinguish visionary revelation from intellectual revelation put into writing. Farkasfalvy, 47.

⁴²⁹ *Hic Est Liber*

⁴³⁰ *LEJob*31; *CRom* prol.1, 4, 12; 6.1.471

⁴³¹ *IDH* (2001), 3; *CJohn*4.3.623; 4.7.693; *LEJob*17.9 (1989), 253.

⁴³² *DM*15.1, sc.2; *STII-II*.32.2.1; *STII-II*.103.2.4; *STIII*.55.6.1

⁴³³ *DN*1 (596B); Origen, *Exhort. Martyrdom* 22; Augustine, *CoGXVIII*.36 (1945), II.211.

⁴³⁴ The order of books in MS31, Lincoln Cathedral is, OT: Gen., Exod., Levit., Num., Deut., Ios., Iud., Ruth, I-IVReg., I-IIParal. (2040, 2100 vv.), I-IIEsdras (Ezra and Nehem.), Prov., Eccles, Cant., Sap., Ecclus. (+ Orat. Salomon, Is., Ierem. + Baruch + Lam., Ezech., Dan. Minor Prophets, Iob, Pss., Tob., Judith, Esth., I-IIIMacc.; N.T.: Matt., Marc., Luc., Ioh., Canonical Epistles, Pauline Epistles, Acts, Apoc.

⁴³⁵ *STI*.1.3, sc.

⁴³⁶ *IDNIV*.11.

⁴³⁷ *DSS*20, 110 (1959); *DV*5.3, sc.; *STIII*.55.6 sc.; *CJohn*21.2582, 2594-5; *CRom*1.25.

reference to Dionysius, suggesting an association in his mind.⁴³⁸ Dionysius counts Wisdom amongst the ‘introductory scriptures,’ a term probably referring to the Old Testament⁴³⁹ (‘the older tradition’)⁴⁴⁰ as ‘introductory’ to the New,⁴⁴¹ though it could plausibly refer to the introductory nature of *all* scripture.⁴⁴² Wisdom was probably composed in Alexandria, like the Septuagint, from which it cites Job and Isaiah.⁴⁴³ It provides an important precedent for pseudonymous (and anachronistic) authorship. At a time when Jews were wrestling with the question of religious identity, pseudonymity reflects a sensibility that Yahweh no longer speaks to His people as He did with prophets of old.⁴⁴⁴ Perhaps Wisdom functioned as an apologetic for the distinctiveness of the Jewish religion within the Hellenistic world.⁴⁴⁵ It is one of only two ‘deuterocanonical’ books (the second being II Maccabees) originally composed in Greek (the others being first written in Aramaic).⁴⁴⁶ For the author, Solomon’s encyclopedic knowledge, functions as a paradigm for a pansophism which appropriates the best of Hellenistic thought within the orbit of revealed truth.⁴⁴⁷ For Dionysius, too, all truth is God’s truth,⁴⁴⁸ ‘He is the giver of wisdom and reason,’⁴⁴⁹ which accounts for his special affinity with this work.⁴⁵⁰ Dionysius appropriates the language of Wisdom ‘permeating and pervading all things’ (Wisdom 7:24) to convey the ungraspable nature of God’s providence.⁴⁵¹ Although Origen describes The Wisdom of Solomon as ‘Scripture’⁴⁵² he acknowledges that not all Christians had so regarded it.⁴⁵³ By the time of the *Vulgate* (c.400 AD),⁴⁵⁴ the title had been shortened to *The Book of Wisdom* in an implicit acknowledgement of doubts over authorship.⁴⁵⁵ This supports the contention that although pseudonymity was an accepted practice in the ancient world, it remained an obstacle for a book’s full acceptance.⁴⁵⁶ However, Aquinas argues that not all canonical books receive their ‘force’

⁴³⁸ *Sermon 6* (2010), 80.

⁴³⁹ See a similar expression in *IDNIV.11* regarding Philo and *Wisdom*.

⁴⁴⁰ *EH3*(432B).

⁴⁴¹ *DN4.12* (709B), 81, n.154, c.f. *EH3.5* (432B).

⁴⁴² Origen, *CJohnXIII.5.37*, trans. Trigg (1998), 155.

⁴⁴³ Joseph Wilson Trigg, *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third Century Church* (London: SCM, 1985), 5.

⁴⁴⁴ Cohen (2014), 190

⁴⁴⁵ Wisdom 18:4; Ernest G. Clarke, *The Wisdom of Solomon* (1973), 1.4-6.8.

⁴⁴⁶ Geza Vermes, *The Authentic Gospel of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 2003), xiv.

⁴⁴⁷ Dionysius speaks of τῆ πανσόφω καὶ ἀληθεστάτη θεολογία in *DN1* (588A, PG00010).

⁴⁴⁸ Wisdom 7:15-22; *DN7* (868A).

⁴⁴⁹ *DN7* (872C). See also *DV4.5* sc 5.

⁴⁵⁰ *DN4* (709B); *DN9* (912A); *DN7* (872C); Golitzin, 56.

⁴⁵¹ *CH13* (300D)

⁴⁵² *CCant.*, prol..

⁴⁵³ *OFPIV.4.6*.

⁴⁵⁴ On the name ‘Vulgate’ see Houghton, 32, n.43.

⁴⁵⁵ Clarke (1973), 1.

⁴⁵⁶ *Hic Est Liber 2*; Origen *OFPI*, preface 8; *2Thess. 2:2-3*. Thus, the authority of works falsely assigned to Augustine is weakened. *DSC3.6*; *DSC11.2*.

from ‘the authority of the authors but rather from their reception by the Church.’⁴⁵⁷ Wisdom could therefore be ‘saved’ in this way.⁴⁵⁸

Finally, we should mention that Dionysius makes an obscure reference to an unknown work by ‘Bartholomew,’⁴⁵⁹ but although there are apocryphal Gospels ascribed to this apostle, Tugwell is certainly correct to surmise that the apostle’s name has been invoked here to shore up Dionysius’ purported status and is not a genuine extant text.⁴⁶⁰

A legitimate role is recognised for oral tradition,⁴⁶¹ since the ‘hidden traditions’ are ‘learned in harmony with the writings (τὰ λόγια).’⁴⁶² Aquinas thus sanctions praying to the east,⁴⁶³ towards an image of Christ,⁴⁶⁴ or towards heaven during the eucharist.⁴⁶⁵ Dionysius commends facing east,⁴⁶⁶ triple immersion,⁴⁶⁷ infant baptism,⁴⁶⁸ putting on new clothes,⁴⁶⁹ signing the cross in oil,⁴⁷⁰ invoking the Trinity,⁴⁷¹ kissing the altar,⁴⁷² kiss of peace,⁴⁷³ prayers for the dead,⁴⁷⁴ and ‘secret invocations’ in ordination rites.⁴⁷⁵ Oral tradition has strong patristic precedent.⁴⁷⁶ Basil ascribes to unwritten words (ἄγραφοι φῶσαι) the ‘same strength for piety’ as the written scriptures and includes any doctrines which these rites imply.⁴⁷⁷ Certain ‘unscriptural’ formulae, such as μετὰ τοῦ Υἱοῦ σὺν τῷ ἁγίῳ can even safeguard Scripture’s true meaning against heretics.⁴⁷⁸ Within the hierarchy, however, Thomas more clearly subordinates the *traditio servanda*, to the *traditio credenda*, whose substance is located in Holy Scripture.⁴⁷⁹

If the fathers allowed an ancillary role for extra-Biblical tradition and extra-Biblical philosophy, Dionysius implies at times a *superior* authority when it is rendered ‘free from writing’

⁴⁵⁷ *Hic Est Liber 2*

⁴⁵⁸ Origen, *OFPI*.2.5; I.2.9; II.3.5; II.3.6.

⁴⁵⁹ *MT1* (1000C).

⁴⁶⁰ Tugwell (1988), 154, n.52.

⁴⁶¹ *STIII*.25.3.4 (and parallel in *Ad 2Thess.* 2.3 (60)); III.64.2.1

⁴⁶² *DN1* (592B), trans. Jones (1980), 111.

⁴⁶³ *The Lectures on St. Matthew*, Matthew 6:5-8, trans. Tugwell (1988), 459; c.f. Germanus, *EHMC11*

⁴⁶⁴ *STIII*.25.3.4

⁴⁶⁵ *STIII*.83.4.2.

⁴⁶⁶ *EH2* (396a); 4 (484B); 5 (508A), practised by Origen. *On Prayer*, Part 3, 7, XXXII (1979), 168. See also Nyssanus, *The Lord’s Prayer*, *Sermon* 5, trans. Graef (1954), 76.

⁴⁶⁷ *EH2* (396C); Aquinas, *CRom*6.1.474.

⁴⁶⁸ *EH7*.3; c.f. *DM4*.1, resp..

⁴⁶⁹ *EH2* (396B).

⁴⁷⁰ *EH6* (533B); c.f. *Apostolic Constitutions* VIII.12 (3638).

⁴⁷¹ *EH6* (533B).

⁴⁷² *EH2* (393C).

⁴⁷³ *EH3* (425C).

⁴⁷⁴ *EH7*.

⁴⁷⁵ *EH3* (533B).

⁴⁷⁶ *OPF*, preface, 2, (13); Irenaeus, *CH3*.2-3; Clement, *Strom.*7.16-17; Tertullian, *On the Soldier’s Crown*3.4 in Stevenson (ed.), *A New Eusebius* (1977), 182-183

⁴⁷⁷ *DSS*27.66-67; 29.71,75;10.25-26;30.79; Emmanuel Amand de Mendieta, *The ‘Unwritten’ and ‘Secret’ Apostolic Traditions in the Theological Thought of St. Basil of Caesarea* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1965); Louth (1989), 27.

⁴⁷⁸ *DSS*27.67 (1965), 56.

⁴⁷⁹ *STIII*.64.2.1; Persson, op. cit., 45-48, 67.

and thus ‘more immaterial,’⁴⁸⁰ by analogy with the celestial hierarchy in which angelic intelligences illuminate one another ‘from mind to mind.’⁴⁸¹ As Maximus comments: ‘(w)hen spiritual creatures meet and leave each other, one knows far more clearly what the other wishes to convey than were they to speak to each other. For, in some way, they silently discuss things and communicate their thoughts to each other.’⁴⁸² For Dionysius oral tradition safeguards sacred truths from the violation of the profane.⁴⁸³ Hence Dionysius penultimately concludes the treatise on the *EH* with a warning against publishing hidden traditions.⁴⁸⁴ Golitzin’s hypothesis that Dionysius’ esotericism is a stylistic contrivance for polemical effect is therefore unconvincing.⁴⁸⁵ Rather, it seems to us that Dionysius, from within the Origenian tradition, genuinely believes that divine discourse should be concealed.⁴⁸⁶ We shall return later to the paradoxical interplay between hiddenness and clarity in Aquinas’ reception.

4. Philosophical tradition

Dionysius’ affinity with the sapiential tradition re-appears in *EP7*, where he defends himself against the charge of ‘making unholy use of things Greek to attack the Greeks.’⁴⁸⁷ A chief concern of his critics (shared by some moderns) is his use of the term *eros*,⁴⁸⁸ which is absent from the NT. Dionysius retorts that this does not make it *ipso facto* ‘counter to Scripture,’ since:

(I)t would be unreasonable and silly to look at words rather than at the power of their meanings... It is as if it were quite wrong to explain “four” by “twice two,” “a straight line” by “a direct line,” “the motherland” by “the fatherland,” or to make any sort of interchange among words which mean exactly the same thing.⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁰ *EH1* (376B-376C), 198-199, perhaps justified by 3John 13?, c.f. the alleged inferiority of the written form in Plato’s *Letter 2* (314C), which if not authentic to Plato is at least Platonic; and *Phaedrus* (278d), cited by Aristotle, *Physics* IV.2.209b14-15; Dillon, 1-11.

⁴⁸¹ *EH1* (376C), c.f. *DV9.1*, resp. Rutledge, 10.

⁴⁸² *In librum de coelesti hierarchia* II (PG4:43) in Aquinas, *DV9.4.3*. See also *ST1.107.1*

⁴⁸³ *EH1* (376C).

⁴⁸⁴ *EH7* (565C)

⁴⁸⁵ Golitzin, 11-13.

⁴⁸⁶ *MT1* (977A); *EP9* (1108A)

⁴⁸⁷ *EP7* (1080B) which echoes Porphyry’s criticism of Origen: ‘while his manner of life was Christian and contrary to the Law, in his opinions about material things and the Deity he played the Greek and introduced Greek ideas into foreign fables.’ *Against the Christians* III in Stevenson (ed.), *Creeks, Councils and Controversies: Documents Illustrative of the History of the Church A.D. 337-461* (London: SPCK, 1966), 222.

⁴⁸⁸ Hathaway, 114.

⁴⁸⁹ *DN4.11* (408C), 80.

Dionysius' *apologia* reveals a principle which Edwards calls the 'translatibility' of revelation,⁴⁹⁰ one unsurprising for a Greek-speaking scholar, schooled in the Septuagint rather than the Hebrew text.⁴⁹¹ (Rorem's conclusion that Dionysius knew no Hebrew,⁴⁹² however, is underdetermined, since if Dionysius were a Syrian ecclesiastic, this would indicate at least a knowledge of Syriac, a variant of Aramaic.)⁴⁹³ Aquinas, on the other hand, knew virtually no Greek and relied on Latin translations.⁴⁹⁴ He followed Jerome in (generally) trusting the reliability of the Hebrew text over the Septuagint⁴⁹⁵ (although the LXX informs Jerome's Latin). By using Jerome's revision of Roman, Gallican and Hebrew texts (382-405 CE)⁴⁹⁶ Thomas produces a different accent to Dionysian teaching on *eros*. His use of the best textual apparatus of his day reflects Aquinas' commitment to the 'literal' sense of Scripture to which we shall return.⁴⁹⁷

Since language is always in process, the translatability of revelation is an essential principle for any adequate theological reception theory. It elucidates Dionysius' transformation of a multiplicity of 'pagan' terms such as 'theurgy',⁴⁹⁸ 'ray',⁴⁹⁹ 'flower'⁵⁰⁰ and 'anagogy' for Christian ends.⁵⁰¹ It also anticipates the odyssey of his own writings through their translation from Greek, firstly into Syriac by Sergius of Rashaina (d.536) and then Latin by Hilduin (c.832),⁵⁰² Eriugena (c.867),⁵⁰³ Saracen (c.1167), Grosseteste (c.1235),⁵⁰⁴ Gallus (1238), Traversari (1436), Ficino (1492) and Perion (1536), before their transformation into modern languages, beginning with

⁴⁹⁰ Edwards (2004), 56; c.f. George Linbeck, 'Scripture, consensus and community' in Neuhaus (1989), 86-87. John of Scythopolis' *Scholía* defends Dionysius' method. Andrew Louth, 'The Reception of Dionysius up to Maximus the Confessor' in Coakley and Stang, 47. The fruits of this methodology can be seen in Byzantium in the missionary use of the vernacular to the Slavs and Huns. Judith Herrin, *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire* (London: Penguin, 2008), c.12; Dimitri Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe 500-1453* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), 137-41, plate 42.

⁴⁹¹ Daniélou (2014), 26, 69 f.; Trigg, 5. The emperor Justinian outlawed Hebrew Scriptures from the synagogues during the lifetime of Dionysius. Kharlamov, 63.

⁴⁹² CH7 (205B); 13 (300B); EH4 (481C, 485A-B), 176, n.115.

⁴⁹³ Arthur, 19-20.

⁴⁹⁴ Weisheipl, 163.

⁴⁹⁵ following 2nd century Jewish scholars. Trigg, 11. For Augustine's view, see CoGXVIII.43 (1945), Vol.II, 216; Cohen, 182.

⁴⁹⁶ Ryan, 17.

⁴⁹⁷ Robert George Kennedy, *Thomas Aquinas and the Literal Sense of Scripture*, Phd, University of Notre Dame, 1985 (Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1986), 31-33.

⁴⁹⁸ EH3 (492C; 432B; 441C); Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis*; Shaw (2014); Alan P. Darley 'Ritual as Erotic Anagogy in Pseudo-Dionysius: A Reformed Critique' in Kotva, Sherman, Pickstock (eds.), *International Journal of Systematic Theology and Philosophy* 79.3 (2018): 261-78.

⁴⁹⁹ EH1 (372B); DN3 (680C); c.f. *Chaldean Oracles*, fr.115 in Dillon, 395; *Corpus Hermeticum* 10.22. Julian, *Orationes* V (172D); Plotinus, *Enneads* V.1.7; Proclus, *Republic* 1.152.14; 1.178.17; *InTim*III.82.11; Plato, *Republic* (533D); Lewy (1978), 186, 208, 60. Origen, *OF*P1.1.6; Nyssanus, *DV*MII.181.

⁵⁰⁰ See 'Hierotheus' below

⁵⁰¹ EH2 (397C).

⁵⁰² Théry (1932), 11-100

⁵⁰³ Théry, 63-121

⁵⁰⁴ 'the most literal of all of Denys' translators,' Rosemann, 129.

Dom Claude David (d.1705).⁵⁰⁵ A reverse passage occurs for Aquinas' works which were finally translated into Greek in the 14th century.⁵⁰⁶

Nor was Dionysius the first to express Christianity in Platonic categories. If we 'stand on the shoulders of giants', the shoulders of Father Plato are sufficiently *πλατὺς* to bear the weight of all future generations. Following the precedent of Philo within *diaspora* Judaism,⁵⁰⁷ this inculturation of revelation was already the mainstream tradition of early fathers from Justin Martyr onwards.⁵⁰⁸ It is not syncretism, nor mutation (a perennial danger), so much as contextualisation, since the Church has always been called to speak in many tongues.⁵⁰⁹ Hamann reminds us that, 'to speak is to translate'⁵¹⁰ and perhaps the eschatological fullness of God's revelation can only come through permeating all languages.

Indeed, this very strategy of clothing the Gospel in Greek culture⁵¹¹ led to the conversion of the biblical Areopagite.⁵¹² Not only in citing the poets on Mars Hill, Paul also wears Platonic attire in the expression 'through a glass darkly'⁵¹³ (belying anti-philosophical receptions of Paul).⁵¹⁴ Hebrews appropriates the Platonic term 'Demiurge',⁵¹⁵ as well as 'shadows' and 'ideas', to speak of two covenants or dispensations.⁵¹⁶ Within the wider NT canon, the writers make use of the Greek LXX,⁵¹⁷ fulfilling the rabbinic blessing, '(m)ay the beauty of Japheth [i.e. the Greeks] dwell in the tents of Shem [i.e. the Jews].'⁵¹⁸ Even the words of the historical Jesus have been translated from Aramaic to Greek.⁵¹⁹ Christ is the Alpha and the Omega of the Greek alphabet because of the metatruth that Language itself participates in Him.⁵²⁰

⁵⁰⁵ Philippe Chevalier, *Dionysiaca : Recueil donnant l'ensemble des traductions latines des ouvrages attribués au Denys l'Aréopagite* 1 (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1937), civ.

⁵⁰⁶ Herrin, 305.

⁵⁰⁷ Daniélou (2014); Dillon, 139-183.

⁵⁰⁸ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 8.1.4-6; Benedict XVI, *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, trans. Walker (San Francisco, 1995), 13-16.

⁵⁰⁹ Acts 2:4.

⁵¹⁰ Hamann, 'Aesthetica in Nuce' in Haynes (2007), 66; c.f. George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (OUP, 1976), 28.

⁵¹¹ 1Cor. 9:22. John of Scythopolis uses Paul to defend Dionysius against heresy in *Prologue* 21.1-4. B.R. Suchla, G. Heil, A.M. Ritter (eds.), *Corpus Dionysiacum* (Berlin, 1990-1991) in Rorem and Lamoreaux, 'John of Scythopolis on Apollinarian Christology and the Pseudo-Areopagite's True Identity' in *Church History* 62 (CUP, 1993), 477.

⁵¹² Acts 17.

⁵¹³ 1Cor. 13:12; *Phaedrus* (250), trans. Jowett; Plotinus, *Enneads* III.6.7-13; Proclus, *IPIV* (839ff).

⁵¹⁴ e.g. Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Brassier (SUP, 2003) and discussion in Van Kooten (2017), 133-164.

⁵¹⁵ *Hebs.* 11:10; Origen, *OFPI* 4.3; *CCelsus* 5.15

⁵¹⁶ *Hebs.* 10:1. Golitzin, 54 notes the similarity with Dionysius.

⁵¹⁷ Farkasfalvy, 200-7; Souter (1965), 138.

⁵¹⁸ *Megillah* 9b, Bavli, *Babylonian Talmud*, based on Genesis 9:27 in Cohen, 34.

⁵¹⁹ Some Aramaisms remain as transliterations in most English versions, e.g. Matt. 5:22; 27:46; Mark 5:41; 14:36.

⁵²⁰ Hamann, *Aesthetica in Nuce* in Haynes, 80, *contra* Rose (2014).

Though Tertullian rhetorically asked: ‘What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?’,⁵²¹ Clement of Alexandria regarded Athens as a providential propaedeutic for Jerusalem,⁵²² as serendipitously embodied in his birth in Jerusalem and death in Athens.⁵²³ He repeats Numenius’ hyperbole: ‘What is Plato, but Moses speaking Attic Greek?’⁵²⁴ This kind of appropriation is already encountered within the aforementioned Wisdom tradition.⁵²⁵ Origen called it ‘spoiling the Egyptians.’⁵²⁶ By developing this image, Nyssanus will provide another clear trajectory to Dionysius.⁵²⁷ It retains purchase for ‘pillaging’ contemporary discourse on behalf of orthodoxy.⁵²⁸ Significantly, Origen is the source of Dionysius’ contention that the Greek terms *eros* and *agape* are interchangeable:⁵²⁹ ‘It makes no difference...whether the Sacred Scriptures speak of love (*eros*), or of charity (*agape*), or of affection; except that the word ‘charity’ (*agape*) is so highly exalted that even God Himself is called Charity, as John says.’⁵³⁰ Later in this chapter, the relationship between these two terms will be teased out further.

If Aquinas’ reception of the Dionysian *corpus* is exemplary, it is fitting that he too harnesses Dionysius’ methodology, shared with Augustine as part of the mainstream tradition.

If those who are called philosophers say anything true and adapted to our faith, particularly the Platonists, far from shunning their words, we ought to claim them back for our own use as having been unjustly appropriated by the philosophers.⁵³¹

Within this normative framework, philosophy does not need ‘overcoming’ because it never acquired autonomous status in the first place.⁵³² Rather, to use Augustine’s celebrated image, philosophy is the ‘handmaid’ to Theology (following Philo’s ‘handmaid’ to Wisdom in his

⁵²¹ Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* 7 in Stevenson, 178. See discussion in Bradshaw, ixff and comments in Sergio Bonino, *Angels and Demons: A Catholic Introduction*, trans. Miller (Washington DC.:CUAP, 2016), 50.

⁵²² Clement, *Stromateis* 1.5.28.1-3 in Stevenson, 196-197, following Philo, *Allegories of the Laws* 1.108. Dillon, 143 and Aristobolus, “older partial translations [of the LXX] had already been read by Pythagoras and Plato,” Eusebius, *P.E.* 13.12.1 in Martin Hengel, *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture: Its Prehistory and the Problem of its Canon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 75; Aquinas, *1SSS*.3.1.4.1

⁵²³ noted by Keller, 54; Derrida (2008), 143-196.

⁵²⁴ *Stromateis* 1.150.4.

⁵²⁵ Daniel 1:8

⁵²⁶ *Letter to Gregory* in Trigg, *Origen* (1998), 211, citing Exodus 12:36. *OFPIV*.3.15 contains a striking parallel with Dionysius: ‘Therefore, everyone who is concerned with truth should be little concerned with names and words (c.f. 1Tim.1:4), because different nations have different customs about words. And he should pay more attention to what is meant than how it is expressed in words.’ Payne, 204.

⁵²⁷ *DVMII*.115

⁵²⁸ See Venard’s (2020) use of the profane poet Rimbaud, 198-226; Franke, 243; Rosemann (2018), 6; Milbank (1997), 97ff; O’Regan (2020), 702.

⁵²⁹ David Dawson, ‘Allegorical reading and the embodiment of the soul in Origen’ in Ayres and Jones (eds.), *Christian Origen: Theology, Rhetoric and Community* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 38-43.

⁵³⁰ *CCant.* prol.2 (1956), 32.

⁵³¹ *OCD*2.40.60 in Aquinas, *Contra Impugnantes Dei Cultum Dei et Religione* 11 (1988) 610.

⁵³² Benson, 236.

allegorisation of Hagar and Sarah).⁵³³ Within the Socratic tradition, true philosophy has always acknowledged its own limitations,⁵³⁴ confirmed in biblical revelation by Solomon's insight that 'the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.'⁵³⁵ Jerome was rebuked in a dream for over-indulging on Cicero,⁵³⁶ but remained sanguine regarding Philosophy's capacity to receive a 'make-over,' as it were.⁵³⁷

5. Hierotheus

A preeminent example of tradition honoured in the *CD* is that purportedly received from, the esteemed hierarch 'Hierotheus,' revered as second only to the apostle Paul as Dionysius' 'elementary instructor.'⁵³⁸ Dionysius does not intend to foolishly 'introduce new ideas,'⁵³⁹ but rather to explicate 'the condensed and singular mental gymnastics of that man's most powerful intellect,'⁵⁴⁰ whose book was 'too lofty'⁵⁴¹ for Dionysius' reader(s). Hierotheus' words receive the ambiguous status of *τινὰ δεύτερα λόγια*.⁵⁴² Does this accolade imply an authority equal to that of the 'divinely anointed scriptures themselves?'⁵⁴³ If so, Aquinas saves Dionysius from the error. In Aquinas' rendition, the writings of 'Hierotheus' have 'a certain *second authority* from the expressions of canonical scripture, *to which no other authority can be equalled*.'⁵⁴⁴ For Aquinas, Hierotheus' teaching has a derived authority, but not one of *equal* veneration, in keeping with our previous conclusions on the hierarchy of tradition.

Who was this mysterious figure of 'Hierotheus'? Arthur has traced a number of alchemists named 'Hierotheus',⁵⁴⁵ but it is probable that 'Dionysius' constructed the name *Hierotheus* (literally 'sanctified by God' or 'priest of God'), just as he coined the term *hierarchy*. More specifically 'Hierotheus' (occurring 15 times in the *CD*) may be a cipher for Proclus, head of the Athenian academy.⁵⁴⁶ If so, Dionysius' non-extant work *τὰς Θεολογικὰς στοιχειώσεις*⁵⁴⁷ would

⁵³³ Dillon, 141-142; Daniélou (2014), c.4, 90-93.

⁵³⁴ Plato, *Theaetetus* (157)

⁵³⁵ Proverbs 1:7; Bruce Ellis Benson, *Graven Ideologies: Nietzsche, Derrida and Marion on Modern Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL:IVP, 2002), 237.

⁵³⁶ Jerome, *Ep.*22.30. 'How can Horace go with the psalter, Virgil with the gospels, Cicero with the apostle?' (*Ep.*22.29).

⁵³⁷ Jerome, *Ep.*66 in Aquinas, *Contra Impugnantes* 11 (1988) 610; c.f. Nyssanus, *DVMIII*.37.

⁵³⁸ *DN2* (648D-649A); *DN3* (681B), 69.

⁵³⁹ *DN3* (684D), 71.

⁵⁴⁰ *DN3* (681B), 69.

⁵⁴¹ *DN3* (681B), 69. See Plato's 'loftiness of thought' in Proclus *In Tim*1.7.26ff.

⁵⁴² *DN3* (681B), 69; Frothingham, 6, 75.

⁵⁴³ *DN3* (681B).

⁵⁴⁴ *IDNIII*:2, 333.

⁵⁴⁵ Arthur, 37-38.

⁵⁴⁶ K. Emery, 'The Commentaries of Denys the Carthusian,' in Boiadjev, Kapriev, Speer (eds.), *Die Dionysius-Rezeption im Mittelalter* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2000), 240, n.59; Hathaway, 15, 26, 28; Ben Schomakers, 'An unknown Elements of Theology?: On Proclus as the model for the Hierotheus in the Dionysian Corpus' in Layne

correspond to Proclus' (almost) homonymous classic στοιχειώσις θεολογική.⁵⁴⁸ Proposition 148 of Proclus' text could thus adumbrate Dionysian angelology, as the author seems to intend.⁵⁴⁹ The *CD*'s triadic order⁵⁵⁰ also concurs with Proclus' sacred text, the *Chaldean Oracles*:

παντί γὰρ ἐν κοσμῷ λάμπει τριάς της μονάς ἀρξεί.⁵⁵¹ Both writers invoke the doctrines of divine return: *monē*, *proodos* and *epistrophe*⁵⁵² and of God 'beyond being.'⁵⁵³ Indeed, as Shomakers concludes, '(i)n almost all cases where a crucial doctrine for Hierotheus is adduced, it is relatively easy to find a Procline text on which it is based.'⁵⁵⁴

This hypothesis is consistent with the literary fiction of 'Dionysius:' a Christian convert from Athenian Platonism, who nevertheless worships the same 'Unknown God.'⁵⁵⁵ Did the author of the *CD* fear persecution through sympathy with Proclus?⁵⁵⁶ Marinus records that Proclus, belonging to the secretive,⁵⁵⁷ Hermaic chain,⁵⁵⁸ 'evaded the notice of the mob' through discretion.⁵⁵⁹ Whatever the case, Proclus' pseudonymous heir was destined, in Dodds words to 'conquer Europe' (and beyond) on his behalf.⁵⁶⁰

It is possible, as Hathaway does, to read the *CD* as a reduction of Christian dogmas to Procline philosophy. The image of 'solid food'⁵⁶¹ from the 'mixing bowl' (κράτηρ) in *EP9* parallels *IP*,⁵⁶² which hymns Eros, springing forth from Intellect, 'to mix the mixing-bowls from the Source.'⁵⁶³ The 'mixing bowl' is the 'cause in which the kinds of beings are mixed.'⁵⁶⁴ Here, Proclus credits Eros with 'mingling' the Forms. Within our reception schema, Eriugena borrows Scriptural grammar to repackage the Procline doctrine of the sensible universe as a 'fall' from the

and Butorac (eds.), *Proclus and His Legacy: II Ps. Dionysius, Byzantium and the Christian Inheritance of Proclus* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 183-197; Porro, TA, 191, n.17.

⁵⁴⁷ *DN2* (648B) and probably *EH2.1*

⁵⁴⁸ The slight variation could indicate both continuity and discontinuity between Proclus and Dionysius. Schomakers, 186-7; 196-7. This hypothesis is more credible than Arthur's (28), that Hierotheus was a Jewish mystic and rabbi. Nyssanus used the term θεολογία to refer to the highest degree of contemplative ascent, *DVMIII.158*. Hence the *Mystical Theology* of Dionysius, *MT1* (997A).

⁵⁴⁹ *ET148*, trans. Dodds, 130-131; *CH13* (305B, 308A); Wayne Hankey, 'Dionysian hierarchy in Thomas Aquinas: Tradition and transformation' in de Andia, 417.

⁵⁵⁰ *CH6* (200D), 160.

⁵⁵¹ Lewy, 106.

⁵⁵² Compare *IP1* (712) with *DN4* (713A). For Aquinas' interpretation of this return see *IDNIX.4* (48-66), 500-501.

⁵⁵³ *IPII* (764-5).

⁵⁵⁴ Shomakers, 186.

⁵⁵⁵ Acts 17:34

⁵⁵⁶ Lang and Macro, Proclus, *De Aeternitate* (2001), 6.

⁵⁵⁷ Proclus, *Alcibiades* 188.2 in Marinus, 110, n.367.

⁵⁵⁸ Marinus, *Proclus* 28 (2000), 102.

⁵⁵⁹ *ibid*, 6

⁵⁶⁰ Dodds, xxviii.

⁵⁶¹ *DN3* (681C); *EP9* (112A); Hebs.5:12; c.f. Origen, *HEzek7* (2010), 107-8; Aquinas, *Sermon* 12 (2010), 160-163.

⁵⁶² *Chaldean Oracles*, fr.42 (2015), 30. See also Marinus, 101, n.6; I.P. Cory, *Ancient Fragments* (London, 1832), 239-280.

⁵⁶³ *IP768.34-769.22*, 135; Wear and Dillon, 37.

⁵⁶⁴ *IPII* (777), 140. See also *ITIII* (3247, 315A); Hathaway, 104-25; Franke, 50.

intelligible one.⁵⁶⁵ Hathaway, therefore, sees the hidden meaning of Dionysius' hermeneutics in the 'intellectual and stable order' of Procline philosophy.⁵⁶⁶ Nygren concurs that, 'the fundamental Neoplatonism is but scantily covered with an exceedingly thin Christian veneer.'⁵⁶⁷ Nevertheless, although the division of reality into 'intelligible' and 'sensible' is a distinctively Procline feature, it is not exclusively so. It is also characteristic both of Cappadocian orthodoxy⁵⁶⁸ and Pauline teaching on worlds seen and *unseen*,⁵⁶⁹ repeated in Origen⁵⁷⁰ and the Nicene Creed. Moreover, the first mention of *κροῦτήρ* in the Septuagint occurs in Exodus 24:6 in connection with Moses, a central figure of the Christian Neoplatonic synthesis amongst church fathers such as Nyssanus. Hence, Hathaway's failure to comment on his significance for Dionysius' faith is a lacuna in his analysis. Consequently, Procline terminology is equally compatible with our thesis that Dionysius is an Origenian Christian: a Christian theologian in some ambiguous sense in dialogue with Proclus. In *EP10*, Dionysius situates himself as continuing the work of John (perhaps the most 'Platonic' of the apostles) for those who 'come after.'⁵⁷¹ Just as Proclus sees no conflict between what the philosophers taught and what the 'theologians' (e.g. Orpheus) taught in the Greek myths,⁵⁷² clearly Dionysius sees no conflict between the canonical scriptures and the Hierothean tradition: 'a tradition at one with Scripture.'⁵⁷³ To the contrary, 'if...someone is entirely at loggerheads with Scripture, he will be far removed also from what is my philosophy.'⁵⁷⁴

The choice of genre of the *CD*, essentially 'worship seeking understanding' reflects the religious or 'theurgic' turn of philosophy after Proclus.⁵⁷⁵ 'Hymning the divine nature'⁵⁷⁶ (ὕμνῳ occurring 105 times throughout the *corpus*),⁵⁷⁷ from which true theology may be distilled, is

⁵⁶⁵ Poole, 57.

⁵⁶⁶ *EP9* (1112A) with *IT1.13.1-3* in Hathaway, 106.

⁵⁶⁷ Nygren, *Agape*, 576. A sentiment echoed by Adolf Harnack, 'the Christian dogmas themselves appear merely as the dress of neo-Platonist ideas,' in Macquarrie, 73. See also Tuomo Lankilla, 'A Crypto-Pagan Reading of the Figure of Hierotheus and the "Dormition" Passage in the *Corpus Areopagiticum*' in Layne and Butorac (2017), 175-182.

⁵⁶⁸ Nyssanus, *CEunomius* 1.270 in Behr 1.xliv. 'It is in this way that Paul, himself a recipient of wisdom, imparted truly solid food.' This text supports Stang's thesis (2012) that Paul is a major and often overlooked influence on the Areopagite.

⁵⁶⁹ Col. 1:16

⁵⁷⁰ *OFPIII.5.4* (2017), lxii-lxiii. See also *OFPII.3.6*; *III.6.4*; (2017), xlv.

⁵⁷¹ *EP10* (1120A), discussed by Hathaway, 64.

⁵⁷² *IPIII* (808), IV (847, 913, 924)

⁵⁷³ *DN1.4* (592B).

⁵⁷⁴ *DN2* (640A), 60; c.f. *ST1.32.1*, *resp.*

⁵⁷⁵ *DN1* (589BC); *MT2* (1025); 3 (1032D-1033B); Knepper, 100; Carabine, 155 ff.; Hadot, c.7; Kharlamov, 110; Franke, 259-64; Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), xii; Johannes Hoff, *The Analogical Turn: Rethinking Modernity with Nicholas of Cusa* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2013), 18

⁵⁷⁶ *IPII* (755), 125.

⁵⁷⁷ A. Van Den Daele, *Indices Pseudo-Dionysii Areopagitae* (University of Louvain, 1941), 136-138, e.g. *DN13* (981A); 1 (598B); 4 (701C); Origen, *On Prayer*, Part 3.7, XXXIII.1.4 trans. Greer in Payne, 169-170.

a chief concern of the *CD*,⁵⁷⁸ emanates from that divine choir of ‘the first ranks of the angels.’⁵⁷⁹ This more experiential form of ‘philosophy’ is strikingly embodied in the life of hymn-writer Hierotheus. As Aquinas observes, he ‘suffered the things of God’ (*patheis-matheis*) and thus transcended a merely intellectual philosophy.⁵⁸⁰ Proclus reputedly composed hymns in his sleep,⁵⁸¹ closely tracking ‘Hierotheus,’ whose *Hymns of Yearning* (τοὺς ἐρωτικὸὺς ὕμνους)⁵⁸² reflect Dionysius’ literary dependence on Proclus’ hymns about *Eros*.⁵⁸³ Proclus joined the ‘divine choir,’ with fellow choristers Plotinus, Amelius, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Theodore of Asine, Plutarch and his own mentor Syrianus.⁵⁸⁴ Dionysius swelled their numbers with Christian apostles and theologians.⁵⁸⁵ But, whereas Proclus’ hymns were pagan (daring to meet Phaedrus’ challenge that no one ‘had the courage to hymn Eros in such terms as he deserves’),⁵⁸⁶ it is noteworthy that Dionysius quotes 48 canonical psalms at least 90 times, evincing his conversion to Christianity.⁵⁸⁷ He references the non-extant, *Divine Hymns* which expounds, ‘the supreme praises sung by those holy intelligences which dwell beyond in heaven.’⁵⁸⁸ As the only poetry acceptable to Plato,⁵⁸⁹ hymns are an effective medium for transmitting teaching, due to their memorable form.⁵⁹⁰ (Indeed, Plato’s *Parmenides* discourse was itself regarded as a ‘theological hymn’ by Proclus).⁵⁹¹ In this way, content determines form, as our chapter 4 will reiterate. Defining a hymn as ‘the praise of God in song; a song is the exultation of the mind dwelling on eternal things, bursting forth in the voice,’⁵⁹² Aquinas will later unite form and content by commenting that the works of God may be sung ‘according to the ancient custom of wise men who wrote down divine and philosophical works in meter.’⁵⁹³

It is noteworthy that *MT* commences with a prayer to the mystic Trinity, just as two of Proclus’ major works: *Platonic Theology* and *In Parmenides*, begin with prayers to the gods, yet this

⁵⁷⁸ *DN*1 (589B); 4 (701C); 13 (981A).

⁵⁷⁹ *CH*7 (212A)

⁵⁸⁰ *DV*26.4.18. See also Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.3.11 (Hadot, 73); Augustine, *Co*GVII, 5.

⁵⁸¹ *Proclus* 29 (2000), 82, 87, 89, 93, 95, 97; *IP*, xiii. In turn Proclus credits the source of his belief in triads to certain ‘theologians in song.’ VI (1090), 438. See also H.D. Saffrey, *Proclus: Hymnes et Prières* (Paris, 1994), 104; R.M. Van Den Berg, *Proclus Hymns: Essays, Translations, Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 90, 2001).

⁵⁸² *DN*4 (713B; 684A)

⁵⁸³ See our Introduction.

⁵⁸⁴ Proclus, *PTI*.1 (7-8); Carabine, 161. Philo relates a ‘holy choir’ comprising Parmenides, Empedocles, Zeno and Cleanthes in *On Providence* II.48; Dillon, 143, n.1.

⁵⁸⁵ Schomakers, 194-5.

⁵⁸⁶ *Symposium* (177B) (own translation).

⁵⁸⁷ See references in Rorem (1987), 296-297.

⁵⁸⁸ *CH*7 (212B)

⁵⁸⁹ *Republic* X; *Phaedrus* 278.

⁵⁹⁰ Deut. 31:19; Ps. 78:1-7; Col. 3:16

⁵⁹¹ Proclus, *IP*7.1191.34-5; Franke, 258.

⁵⁹² *SPsalms*, prol.

⁵⁹³ *LEJob*36.24 (1989), 403.

observation again brings into sharp focus the distinctive Trinitarian monotheism of Dionysius.⁵⁹⁴ Whilst it is true that Proclus had already begun to reinterpret these ‘gods’ in terms of philosophic ‘henads,’ participating in the ‘First God,’⁵⁹⁵ Dionysius teleologically completes the project. Angels replace henads⁵⁹⁶ and their appellation as ‘flowers’ and ‘lights’ is transferred to the Son and Spirit.⁵⁹⁷ However, this opens up a critical question regarding the status of the Trinity for Dionysius. Does the Trinitarian creed rise higher than a symbol for a metatruth of unity in distinction already articulated by Proclus? (just as Hegel reduced Trinitarian Christianity to a *Vorstellung* of his own ‘immanent infinitism.’)⁵⁹⁸ It might be suggested by DN13.3: ‘Here of course I am in agreement with the Scripture writers. But the real truth of these matters is in fact far beyond us.’⁵⁹⁹ Clearly, DN2.5 takes up ET176 to ‘explain’ the Trinity,⁶⁰⁰ appropriating Procline terminology of ‘ineffable unity’ (ἡ ἀφθειγτόν ἐν ἑνωσίῳ)⁶⁰¹ and ‘ground’ (ὑπαρξίς).⁶⁰² This methodology is compatible with Proclus’ allegorisation of Parmenides, Zeno and Socrates, as representations of the three hypostases.⁶⁰³ Jones candidly confesses, ‘(i)t seems to me that there is real ambiguity in Dionysius in terms of the “ultimacy” of the Trinity in God.’⁶⁰⁴ This question will be further analysed in Chapter 2, but suffice it to say for now, there is one important point of departure from Procline metaphysics, when Dionysius transfers the intelligible properties of the second hypostasis back to the One, now transformed as the Christian Trinity, the source of unity and distinction, in line with Cappadocian orthodoxy.⁶⁰⁵ In other words, Dionysius is radically monotheistic and Trinitarian and this is how Aquinas, normatively reads him.⁶⁰⁶ Even *Eros*, so beloved of Proclus is, for Dionysius, one (especially fecund) name of the Trinitarian Cause of all. The Christian pseudonym ‘Dionysius,’ suggests, at once, both a continuity and a discontinuity with Platonic philosophers who commonly adopted

⁵⁹⁴ as Aquinas notes in *IDC3* (1996), 22 and Derrida (2008), 213. Kharlamov, 141-3.

⁵⁹⁵ *PT3.7-8*; Kharlamov, 130; Dodds, 257-260; Bradshaw, 142-148;

⁵⁹⁶ ‘He adds “angelic” because those whom the Platonists call the secondary gods we call angels.’ *IDN11.4*

⁵⁹⁷ *Chaldean Oracles*, fr.1 in Dillon, 393; fr.39 in G.R.S. Mead, *The Chaldean Oracles* (2015), 28; *DN2* (645B); *CH1* (120B-121B); Dodds (2004), xxviii, n.2. Proclus, *De Subsistentia Malorum*, 209.27; Sammon, 168.

⁵⁹⁸ a description coined by William Desmond and cited by Franke, 53. See also W.T. Stace, *The Philosophy of Hegel* (New York: Dover, 1955), 488, 509 ff. Hegel, *The Encyclopedia Logic*, Sects.147R, 260, 265, trans. Geraets, Suchting and Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991); David James, *Hegel: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2007), 107-113. See also Cusanus in Macquarrie, 105, 110.

⁵⁹⁹ *DN13.3* (981A), 130.

⁶⁰⁰ Dodds, 292.

⁶⁰¹ *IPV* (313); *VI.14*; *VI.177*; *PT1.21*.

⁶⁰² Proclus, *In Cratylus*

⁶⁰³ *IP1* (628), 27. See also 768.34-769.22 in Wear and Dillon, 37.

⁶⁰⁴ John D. Jones (2005), 396.

⁶⁰⁵ *DN1.5* (588C), (592A), (593A-B); *DN2* (640B-C); (641A-641B); 13.13 (981); *CH7.4* (212C); *EH2* (396D); *EH6*. (533B); *ST1.45.6*, sc.; Wear and Dillon, c.3 cite parallels in Basil, *DS18*, 45; *Adversus Macarium* 89, 25-90; Nyssanus, *De differentia et hypostaseos* 4; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orationes* 28.1; Lossky (1963), 100-101; Walton, 191; Sammon, 181 (but see below how this is ambiguously played out in an essence/energies dynamic in Chapter 2).

⁶⁰⁶ *IDN11.4*; Porro, TA, 195-6

the names of their philosophical ‘fathers’.⁶⁰⁷ Dionysius thus ‘makes known’ the Unknown God of Proclus (Acts 17:24).

Whittaker notes from Proclus’ biographer, Marinus that he had followers who were ‘hearers’ (*akroatai*) as well as closer ‘disciples’ (*zelotai*) of his philosophy and surmises that Dionysius may have been one of the former.⁶⁰⁸ This to some extent counts against his representation by the figure of ‘Hierotheus,’ in that it diminishes the close relationship suggested in the *CD*. Nonetheless, he evidently felt an intimate connection ‘mind to mind’⁶⁰⁹ in the ‘divine choir’. If ‘Hierotheus’ is a codename for Proclus, it is skilfully concealed within the web of a narrative in which ‘Hierotheus’ witnesses the mortal body of Mary, alongside the apostles.⁶¹⁰ Schomaker’s comparison of the *CD* to a *roman à clef* has merit.⁶¹¹ We have already seen that Dionysius feels the need to supplement the hymns of Proclus with at least 48 hymns from the canonical Psalter,⁶¹² Canticles,⁶¹³ the ‘Hymn of Universal Faith’ (Nicene Creed)⁶¹⁴ and the Trisagion of the angels in Isaiah, Ezekiel and Revelation⁶¹⁵ (liturgically chanted at the close of the Eucharist).⁶¹⁶ Aquinas welcomes Dionysius’ insight that Psalms span the full scope of theology *in nuce*, since they ‘sing of all sacred and divine workings.’⁶¹⁷ This is one of 12 citations of the *CD* in *SPsalmos*.⁶¹⁸ Therefore, if Dionysius sings Procline hymns, they are heard in a different key and a different melody.⁶¹⁹ “[I]n this present work I am lifting a hymn of praise to the Good,’ Dionysius tells us in *DN*.⁶²⁰ We shall see in Chapter 4 how Aquinas joins the choir and composes his own Trinitarian hymns.⁶²¹

⁶⁰⁷ Proclus, *Alcibiades* 24. Marinus, 104; 26, 97-98.

⁶⁰⁸ Thomas Whittaker, *The Neo-Platonists: a Study in the History of Hellenism* (CUP, 1901), 188; Marinus, *Proclus* 38, 114. The same terms are used of Plotinus by Porphyry in *Life of Plotinus*⁷, *ibid*, 14. Corrigan reaches similar conclusions in *Love, Friendship, Beauty and the Good: Plato, Aristotle and the Later Tradition* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2018), 110, n.82.

⁶⁰⁹ *EH1* (376C).

⁶¹⁰ *DN3* (681D), possibly a reference to an experience later known as the ‘dormition’ of Mary.

⁶¹¹ Schomaker, 183-197.

⁶¹² We could compare this with Aquinas’ commentary of 54 psalms in *SPsalmos*.

⁶¹³ *Rorem* (1987), 296-297.

⁶¹⁴ *EH3* (425C); 3 (436C), 211, 218; Louth (1989), c.1; J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (Longman, 1981), 348-349; J.W.C. Wand, *A History of the Early Church to AD 500* (Methuen, 1982), 258f.. Campbell n.103, 146 comments that the Nicene Creed was in general use in the East by 515; Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church* (OUP, 1943), 123-6.

⁶¹⁵ *CH7* (212B) citing Ezek. 1:24; 3:12 and Isa. 6:3, c.f. *CH10* (273B); Rev. 4:8; 14:2; 19:6.

⁶¹⁶ Maximus, *Mystagogia* 19, PG91, 696; Mathews, 162-163; Germanus, *EHMC*, 37

⁶¹⁷ *SPsalmos*, prol., citing *CH3*.

⁶¹⁸ *Index Thomisticum* by Robert Busa.

⁶¹⁹ Having said this, Proclus suggestively exhorts that poets must present their arguments ‘in another framework and under a different arrangement, in order to divert the attacks of the most contentious critics without departing from the truth of the doctrines’. *IP1* (701), 78.

⁶²⁰ *DN4* (736B).

⁶²¹ Robert Anderson and Johann Moser (ed. and trans.), *The Aquinas Prayer Book: The Prayers and Hymns of Thomas Aquinas* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2000).

Assuming the underdetermined thesis that ‘Hierotheus’ is Proclus, it remains clear that Dionysius regards the writings of his mentor as ‘not quite sufficient,’ hence the necessity to address other matters not directly covered by him, as we have already seen in his treatment of creation *ex nihilo*. Bradshaw opines ‘(t)he real significance of Dionysius is not as a Christianised Proclus, but as one who made a selective and guarded use of Procline metaphysics to achieve a newly unified Christian vision.’⁶²² Such an interpretation is consonant with our previous findings regarding the ‘translatability of revelation’ and the mission of the Wisdom tradition to preserve the faith in an alien environment.

6. Origenian hermeneutics

We have encountered a number of clues to point to the most fecund paradigm for framing the historical author of the *CD*, viz. that Dionysius was in some sense an ‘Origenian’ Christian.⁶²³ This has been defended in various forms by Perczel, Meyendorff, Kharlamov, Arthur, Ramelli and Golitzin.⁶²⁴ The neglect of Origen’s influence on the *CD* in other works results in an impoverished understanding of its author, his metaphysics and Aquinas’ contribution.⁶²⁵ Contrariwise, to interpret Dionysian thought in relation to Origen simultaneously accounts for his Neoplatonic influences, ‘eros’ motif, participatory view of creation, status and interpretation of Scripture and his high Christology, which we will treat in the light of Thomas’ reconfiguration.

In Alexandria where Origen held citizenship,⁶²⁶ independent schools were attended by Christian and pagan alike, causing much cross-pollination of ideas.⁶²⁷ Origen’s contemporary was Plotinus,⁶²⁸ a follower of Clement,⁶²⁹ which raises the possibility that Plotinus was familiar with Clement’s *Stromata*.⁶³⁰ Intriguingly, Proclus credits one ‘Origen the Platonist,’ with logical and metaphysical interpretations of *Parmenides*.⁶³¹ Certainly, an Origenian would be much more inclined to Procline metaphysics than less philosophically minded Christians.

⁶²² Bradshaw, 186.

⁶²³ I borrow this term from Ramelli (2013), 167-227.

⁶²⁴ Perczel, ‘The Earliest Syriac Reception of Dionysius’ (2009), 27-41; Meyendorff, 28; Kharlamov, 30; Arthur (2016); Ramelli (2014). ‘I insist that Dionysius’ debt to the Origenist tradition is greater than to the Neoplatonist.’ Golitzin, 172.

⁶²⁵ e.g. in Corrigan (2018).

⁶²⁶ Trigg (1985), 3-8; c.f. Acts 18:24.

⁶²⁷ Lossky (1963), c.3; Blankenhorn (2015), 4.

⁶²⁸ Lossky, 57. He is probably referred to by Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus*. Ramelli (2014), 179.

⁶²⁹ Stuart G. Hall, *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church* (London: SPCK, 1995), cc.10-11.

⁶³⁰ Bradshaw, 127.

⁶³¹ *PTII.4; IP1* (636), n.20, 32; VI (1064. 2ff), 419, n.38; VII, 64, 596, n.125. Proclus describes ‘Origen’s school of thought: ‘the One is not different from Being nor from the One-Being, and that “one” has as many modes of being, and that the One that is beyond Being is a mere name.’ VII.64, 597. This equation of the One with Being itself will also be Thomas’ position.

In a rare autobiographical note, Dionysius echoes Origen's spiritual journey, when he confesses his initial repulsion to the ostensibly 'deformed imagery' of Scripture,⁶³² before venturing his own solution out of his intellectual crisis.⁶³³ For both writers, difficulties in the sacred text are a 'goad'⁶³⁴ towards a more elevated meaning which 'saves' the text.⁶³⁵ Amongst Greek philosophers, the authorial intention of Homeric myths had begun to take a back seat to the 'truth of things'⁶³⁶ expressed through *allegoria*, defined by Tryphon as 'an enunciation which while signifying one thing literally, brings forth the thought of something else.'⁶³⁷ We have seen that Proclus reads Plato as allegorical of his own system,⁶³⁸ so that Atlantis becomes not 'mere history,'⁶³⁹ but symbolic of intelligible realities.⁶⁴⁰ Now as a *grammatikos* in the Greek classics, Origen appropriates allegoresis⁶⁴¹ for reading those Scriptural passages considered too scandalous or 'unfitting' for a 'literal' meaning.⁶⁴² Dionysius will directly claim this exegetical inheritance: 'as I have often said previously, we must interpret the things of God in a way that befits God.'⁶⁴³

'Unfitting' readings of Scripture comprise misunderstandings of anthropomorphic language or putative events or laws judged to be irrational or 'impossible.'⁶⁴⁴ Dionysius thus exposes his Origenian sensibility in seeking a discourse to 'fittingly hymn' the divine.⁶⁴⁵ Since a metaphor is by definition literally false,⁶⁴⁶ Dionysius agrees with Origen that metaphorical aspects of Scripture

⁶³² *CCelsum* 4.48; *OFPIV*.2.1; 2.9; 3.5; Dawson (1998), 35; Mark Sheridan, *Language for God in Patristic Tradition: Wrestling with Biblical Anthropomorphism* (Illinois: IVP, 2015), 18, 37.

⁶³³ *CH2* (145B).

⁶³⁴ *CH2* (141B), 150; Brian Barrett, 'Origen's Spiritual Exegesis as a Defense of the Literal Sense' in Vinzent, 56.

⁶³⁵ Barrett, 51-63

⁶³⁶ Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 1.15.41 in Hadot, 42. Whilst Socrates seemed unimpressed by allegory (Plato, *Phaedrus* 229C), Aristotle interprets the myth of the golden chain by the 'truth' of the Unmoved Mover, *On the Motion of Animals* 4 (699B-700A).

⁶³⁷ *De Tropis* 1.1 in Miyako Demura, 'Origen and the Exegetical Tradition of the Sarah-Hagar Motif in Alexandria' in Vinzent, 78.

⁶³⁸ *IP1* (628), 27; Wear and Dillon, 47

⁶³⁹ Philo, *De Aeternitate Mundi* XXVI, 142; *Strabo* II.160bc; Daniélou (2014), 45.

⁶⁴⁰ *IT1*.24.1172-1174 (1998), 1.162-169; *III*.77.7; Lewy, 499.

⁶⁴¹ First ascribed to Theagenes of Rhegium. M. Edwards, 'Gnostics, Greeks, and Origen: The Interpretation of Interpretation,' *Journal of Theological Studies* 44 (1993), 71-7 in J. Christopher King, *Origen on the Song of Songs as the Spirit of Scripture: The Bridegroom's Perfect Marriage-Song* (OUP, 2005), 38; Sheridan, c.2.

⁶⁴² *OFPIV*.2.2; Grant (1957), 94; Nyssanus, *DVM* 1.91, following Philo, *De Providentia* II.35,39-40,42.

e.g. 'Hera's fellation of Zeus, represented in a painting at Samos, reflected for them the way in which matter receives seminal reasons within itself with a view to the organisation of the world.' Hadot (2006), 42. See also Daniélou (2014), 50. J.C. McLelland, *God the Anonymus: A Study in Alexandrian Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1976), 37-40; Sheridan, cc.1-5. Marinus, 67. This tradition continues into Aquinas via Dionysius e.g. *IDNIX*, 25-27, 500.

⁶⁴³ *DN7* (869A); 9 (916CD).

⁶⁴⁴ Grant (1957), 96ff. Maimonides (See Chapter 2 below) cites the old Talmudic saying: 'the Torah speaks according to the language of men,' to indicate that 'expressions, which can easily be comprehended and understood by all, are applied to the Creator.' This hermeneutic justifies his 'negative way.' *Guide for the Perplexed* XXXV1, trans. Friedländer (New York: Dover, 1956), 35, 81.

⁶⁴⁵ *DN1* (597A); *CH2* (141A).

⁶⁴⁶ *DV* 10.10, resp.6.

are intentionally scandalous (*σκανδαλα*)⁶⁴⁷ and identifies two types of symbols. Firstly are those which are relatively ‘similar’ to their referent, for example ‘Word’, ‘Mind’ or ‘Being’⁶⁴⁸ and secondly, those which are ‘dissimilar,’⁶⁴⁹ for example God as a ‘worm’⁶⁵⁰ or having passions ‘only appropriate for prostitutes.’⁶⁵¹ This has certain parallels with the ‘criterion of surprise’ identified by literary critics in discordant metaphors.⁶⁵² According to Dionysius, the more incongruous a metaphor, the less likely it is to mislead,⁶⁵³ whereas, counter-intuitively, the relatively ‘similar’ ones, including the Divine names, become the most dangerous.⁶⁵⁴ The ascending process of negation must therefore begin by denying the manifestly corporeal language about God (e.g. in *MT4*), but then progressively negate even those intellectual attributes characteristic of ‘affirmative theology’ (e.g. in *MT5*.)⁶⁵⁵

Feminist philosophical theologians have perceived in this *via negativa* a useful strategy for deconstructing patriarchal language⁶⁵⁶ (‘nor is it sonship or fatherhood’).⁶⁵⁷ In practice, however, the subsequent vacuum, has all too often been repopulated with neo-Gnostic ‘goddess’ language.⁶⁵⁸ By sharp contrast, even if Dionysius has Gnostic influences *via* Proclus, he has unmistakably ‘purged’ them of all reference to female deities⁶⁵⁹ in keeping with his own insistence on the non-corporeality of the *hyperousios*. Aquinas will explicitly say the same,⁶⁶⁰ in harmony with Scriptural revelation.⁶⁶¹ Though God may be ‘clothed in feminine ornaments’ and Scripture refers to God’s ‘womb’⁶⁶² and ‘bosom,’⁶⁶³ this language is no more literally true than those images of God being inebriated⁶⁶⁴ or hung over.⁶⁶⁵ Dionysius compares such language to a ‘protective garb’ for what is ‘ineffable and invisible.’⁶⁶⁶ This point is central to the structure of

⁶⁴⁷ *OFPIV.2.9*.

⁶⁴⁸ *CH2* (140C), 149.

⁶⁴⁹ *DN9* (916); *STII-II.163.2*. Paul Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1984), 84-96.

⁶⁵⁰ *CH2* (145A), 152.

⁶⁵¹ *EP9* (1105B), 282. Dionysius, in common with most medievals (Theodore of Mopsuestia is an exception), resists the possibility that Canticles might be a legitimate celebration of the goodness and joy of human sexuality. See *EH3* (429C).

⁶⁵² Fletcher, 74-76.

⁶⁵³ *CH2.3*; *DV10.7.10*.

⁶⁵⁴ Barthes (1975) is one fascinated by the ‘erotic’ nature of unexpected and ‘incongruous apparitions’ in texts, 42.

⁶⁵⁵ *MT3* (1032D). See also parallels in Nyssanus, *Beatitudes, Sermon 3* (1954) 112-113.

⁶⁵⁶ Tripodi (2018), 171-180; Willis, 23-25; Keller (2015); Rose (2014)

⁶⁵⁷ *MT5* (1048A)

⁶⁵⁸ Dorothy Sölle, *Theology for Sceptics* (London: Mowbray, 1995), 21, 31.

⁶⁵⁹ e.g. ‘Barbelo’ and ‘Youel’ in *Allogenes* or ‘Hecate’ in the *Chaldean Oracles*. Karen King (1995), 45; Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (London: Penguin, 1982), 144; Dillon (1977), 394.

⁶⁶⁰ *ST1.2.1.2*.

⁶⁶¹ Deut. 4:15-16.

⁶⁶² *EP9* (1104C); Psalm 110 (LXX); Daniélou (2014), 75.

⁶⁶³ *CJohn1.11.218*; *STIII.10.1*

⁶⁶⁴ *EP9* (1105B), Psalm 78:65; Plato, *Symposium* 203b; Plotinus, *Enneads* VI.7.35.20-28

⁶⁶⁵ *MT3* (1033A); *EP9* (1112B).

⁶⁶⁶ *EP9* (1105C).

Dionysius' negative theology, as will be further discussed in Chapter 2, but it should not be misconstrued, for as Knepper has skilfully argued, the existence of greater or lesser degrees of appropriateness refutes the popular postmodern supposition that all language about God is equally false⁶⁶⁷ Some posthumous appropriations of Dionysius are therefore condemned by his own words.⁶⁶⁸

This point raises the problematic question of the criteria of 'impossibility' and by whose authority such judgment is made. Philo, for instance, distanced himself from those 'extreme Hellenisers'⁶⁶⁹ who allegorised circumcision, Sabbath and unclean food,⁶⁷⁰ but such spiritual meanings were endorsed as orthodox in Christianity *via* Christ himself.⁶⁷¹ Therefore, although Origen might appear to privilege human reason in interpreting Scripture,⁶⁷² an important control retained by Origen is the authoritative interpretive reception of the Scriptures by Christ and the apostolic writers. Indeed, Origen's exegetical method already finds precedent in Paul's epistles and Hebrews, to the extent that an attack on Origen is *ipso facto* an attack on the New Testament.⁶⁷³

Against secular reason, and against those negative theologies which privilege silence over Logos,⁶⁷⁴ Origenian allegoresis reflects a hermeneutic of being in which symbolic text mirrors symbolic cosmos.⁶⁷⁵ Origen affirms that all things were created in the Word and the Wisdom of God.⁶⁷⁶ Neither Origen nor Dionysius use allegory merely as a superficial technique for removing awkward passages.⁶⁷⁷ Rather, as Empson ably notes, '(p)art of the function of an allegory is to make you feel that two levels correspond to each other in detail and indeed that there is some underlying reality, something in the nature of things, which makes this happen.'⁶⁷⁸ Dionysius understands this nature of things to be a δῖατάξις (arrangement) which manifests the unknown God (see our Chapter 2).⁶⁷⁹ Hence, we can know God indirectly or paradigmatically⁶⁸⁰ from those

⁶⁶⁷ Knepper, 94.

⁶⁶⁸ DN2 (640A)

⁶⁶⁹ Cohen, 191.

⁶⁷⁰ Philo, *On The Migration of Abraham* 16.89-93.

⁶⁷¹ Cohen, 34.

⁶⁷² 'When you give yourself such trouble to account for these fables, you thereby admit that reality is quite different from what men believe it to be: what they call gods are natural processes [*rerum naturas*], not figures of the gods.' Cotta, *On the Nature of the Gods* in Hadot, 42. But conversely, this charts how metaphysical naturalism leads to the fall of allegory.

⁶⁷³ OFPIV.2.4; Luke 24:44; John 5:39; Roms. 15:4; 1Cor. 9:9; 10:1-11; Gal. 4:21-31; Thomas P. Scheck, *Origen: Homiles on Ezekiel 1-14* (New York: Newman Press, 2010), 4, citing De Lubac. See also Demura, 78.

⁶⁷⁴ Franke (2014); Bulhof and Ten Kate (2000), xii.

⁶⁷⁵ *CCant.* III.12, 218-219;

⁶⁷⁶ OFPIV.4.5.

⁶⁷⁷ Paul R. Kolbet, 'Rethinking the Rationales for Origen's Use of Allegory' in Vinzent, 41-51.

⁶⁷⁸ William Empson in Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (PUP, 2012), 69.

⁶⁷⁹ DN7 (869D), DN4 (700C); EP9 (1108B), following Roms.1:18-20 and Wisdom 13: 1-9.

⁶⁸⁰ DN5 (821C).

creatures which are ‘in a sense projected out’ of himself.⁶⁸¹ Though God’s nature is incomprehensible, He can be known through his works and energies,⁶⁸² a theme common to the ‘essence/energies’ distinction of Byzantine theology (see Chapter 2). Aquinas imbibes this same atmosphere.

Our present study highlights the *CD*’s characteristically Origenian bimodality of revelation (ὡς διττός ἐστὶ τῆς ἱερᾶς ἐκφραστορίας ὁ τρόπος),⁶⁸³ comprising the ‘bare historical’ sense and ‘one which has to do with life-giving perfection.’⁶⁸⁴ Differently expressed as *historia* and *theoria*,⁶⁸⁵ this division is the stem out of which three-fold⁶⁸⁶ and fourfold ‘senses’ of Scripture will later flourish.⁶⁸⁷ Within the tradition, they provided a ‘safe’ framework for reading difficult passages, whilst avoiding the forbidden zones of Marcionism and Montanism.⁶⁸⁸ Later writers such as Nyssanus, Dionysius, Maximus, Augustine and Cassian all depend on Origen’s groundwork.⁶⁸⁹ Indeed, it would be no hyperbole to conclude, that the history of Scriptural exegesis is a ‘series of footnotes’ to Origen.⁶⁹⁰ Aquinas is part of this tradition and clearly preserves an Origenian hermeneutic, making extensive use of Origen’s commentaries in his own.⁶⁹¹ We could refine our previous comments then, that, in contrast to postmodern mysticism, Dionysian ‘mystical theology’ is primarily a method of *Origenian* Scriptural interpretation. Such is the context of the *EP9* mixing bowl metaphor, which Hathaway falsely restricts to Proclus. Indeed, Origen the exegete derives the same metaphor from Proverbs 9: ‘Wisdom invites to her mixing bowl saying “Come eat my bread, and drink wine which I have mixed for you.”’⁶⁹² Rather than reduce Dionysius’ faith to Procline philosophy then, we conclude that Dionysius stirs Procline ingredients into his Origenian ‘mixing bowl’ to produce an innovative and intoxicating brew.⁶⁹³

⁶⁸¹ *DN7* (896C ff.). Yannaras, 62f.

⁶⁸² *OFPI*.1.5; II.6.1; II.9.1; II.5.2; IV.3.14; IV.4.8.

⁶⁸³ *CH2* (140B)

⁶⁸⁴ *EP9* (1108B-C). See the oscillation between literal and elevated in Origen, *CJohn3* (13), XVII.101 and Nyssanus, *DVM*II.136; 153, 207; *CEunomias* II, 417-419. C.f. Proclus *IP1* (627), (1987), 26.

⁶⁸⁵ *DVM* (1978), 7.

⁶⁸⁶ *OFPIV*.2.4-5, perhaps related to Plato’s three parts of the soul. *Republic* 4 (443C9- 444a2).

⁶⁸⁷ Wood (1998), 29-30; Smalley (1952), 4; Henri de Lubac, *ME*; Dahan, 53.

⁶⁸⁸ *DV*12.9, sc; adc.3. Albert, *Summa Theologiae* 1..5.4.11, in Kennedy, 69.

⁶⁸⁹ Paul Blowers, ‘The Anagogical Imagination : Maximus the Confessor and the Legacy of Origenian Hermeneutics,’ G. Dorival and A. Le Boulluc (eds.), *Origeniana Sexta* (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 639-654; De Lubac, *ME*, II.180. Nyssanus, *HCant.*, prol. PG44. Sheridan, 92.

⁶⁹⁰ ‘To write a history of Origenist influence on the West would be tantamount to writing a history of Western exegesis,’ Smalley (1952), 4; ‘It is Origen’s strange destiny always to be attacked and at the same time to enrich those who are fighting against his thought.’ Lossky (1963), 85; ‘all his successors, even those who reacted against him, as St. Jerome did, owed him almost everything.’ Daniélou (1955), 132.

⁶⁹¹ *CJohn*1.5.130, 135; 1.6.158; 1.11.227; 1.13.241; 246; 252; 1,14,257; 2.3.408, 415, 419; 4.6.670; 4.7.690; 20.2481.

⁶⁹² Origen, *HJer.12* in Trigg, 180-181.

⁶⁹³ Corrigan, esp.110-125. Philoxenus also comments on God ‘mixing’ his wisdom with the created world from *Luke* 2:52. Daley (1991), 176.

Within the ‘positive’ reception stream, this will even gain Eucharistic significance under Germanus.⁶⁹⁴ Aquinas will retrieve and develop this Origenian hermeneutic.

At this point we pause to clarify the relationship between Origen and Origenism *vis-à-vis* Dionysius. Probably the first person to differentiate between Origen and the Origenists was Epiphanius (c.376).⁶⁹⁵ At the time when John of Scythopolis wrote his *Scholion*, disputes over ‘Origenism’ were live.⁶⁹⁶ Hence, a gloss on *EH* reads: ‘Let no disciple of Origen think that this defends his perverse position that there is always falling, decline, and change in the celestial minds.’⁶⁹⁷ Here Dionysius is acquitted from ‘Origenist’ teachings of a pre-cosmic fall.⁶⁹⁸ However, as is well known, the term ‘Origenist,’ is problematic since there is contestation over which teachings condemned in 553⁶⁹⁹ were taught by Origen himself⁷⁰⁰ rather than later thinkers such as Evagrius (345-399).⁷⁰¹ The Achilles’ heel of Origen was allegedly the sin of ‘leaving none of the sacred scriptures uninterpreted.’⁷⁰² Positively, this charge indicates a thirst for truth and independence of thought, suggesting Origenism was more of a sensibility than a strict set of doctrines.⁷⁰³ Its relative intellectual freedom accounts for its diversity. For example, although Origen and many Origenists were not monophysites, others, such as, Stephen Bar Sudheili (c.480-543), Philoxenus of Mabbug (445-523) and Sergius of Reshaina were. The intellectual freedom of Origenism engendered a debate *within* Origenism.⁷⁰⁴ Dionysius shares Origen’s openness to different interpretations which could indicate humility more than pride.⁷⁰⁵ Epiphanius, however blames Origen for opening the door to heresy, ‘Arius took his cue from Origen’.⁷⁰⁶

We shall return to examine one of these heresies in Chapter 4, but for now we should emphasise one prominent feature of ‘Origenism’⁷⁰⁷ (following Origen’s ‘cue’), namely

⁶⁹⁴ *EHMC*, 39.

⁶⁹⁵ Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis*, Bks 2-3, de Fide, trans. Williams (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 138-139.

⁶⁹⁶ John of Scythopolis, *Scholion* 173.8: "And even now some are proceeding from the myths, not teachings, of Origen," in Rorem and Lamoreaux (1993), 474.

⁶⁹⁷ MG4 (173A); Campbell, 200, n.321.

⁶⁹⁸ Behr 1.114-115, nn.72-73.

⁶⁹⁹ The anathemas exist in the manuscript, Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, Historicus gr, 7, fols. 84v-86r. Istvan Perczel, "Pseudo-Dionysius and Palestinian Origenism" in Joseph Patrick (ed.), *The Sabaitic Heritage in the Orthodox Church from the Fifth Century to the Present* (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 260, n.1.

⁷⁰⁰ Hall, 101; Ramelli (2013)

⁷⁰¹ B. Daley, 'What did "Origenism" Mean in the Sixth Century?' in G. Dorival and A. Le Boulluec (eds.), *Origeniana Sexta* (Leuven University Press, Peeters, 1995), 628-629; G. Gould, 'The Influence of Origen on Fourth Century Monasticism Some Further Remarks' in Dorival and Boulluec (1995), 591-598; Golitzin, 309-310; Behr 1.xvi.

⁷⁰² *ibid* (2013), 136.

⁷⁰³ Daley (1995), 628.

⁷⁰⁴ Daley, 630; Golitzin, xxi, n.7.

⁷⁰⁵ Origen, *PP53* (1992), 56, c.f. *CH13* (308A-B). See also *CCant.* (1956), 144.

⁷⁰⁶ Epiphanius, 137, c.f. Origen, *CJohn2.2.17*; Aquinas *ST1.34.1.1*

⁷⁰⁷ Hansbury, 12; Ramelli (2013)

universalism (although again not all ‘Origenists’ agreed).⁷⁰⁸ Origen hoped for universal salvation, following a period of purification and instruction.⁷⁰⁹ Consequently, Origen takes the ‘subjection’ of all things (1Cor. 15:28) as an indication of the *salvation* of all things, ‘that God may be all in all’⁷¹⁰ (cited by Dionysius in *DN1* (596C)). The notion that universal salvation is mediated through angelic instruction appears in the *scholia* on *EH*,⁷¹¹ which weakly supports Dionysius’ approval. This is more strongly implied in his hierarchy of illumination,⁷¹² ‘a gift to ensure the salvation and divinisation of every being endowed with reason and intelligence.’⁷¹³ *CH9* (261A) describes angels revealing the true God to those such as Melchisedek of ‘other nations,’ which Daniélou considers a ‘very fertile doctrine from the missionary point of view.’⁷¹⁴ Perhaps significantly, the *CD* has no reference to eternal torment.⁷¹⁵ Although the hierarchs have the power of ‘admitting the friends of God and keeping away the ungodly,’⁷¹⁶ Dionysius stresses the generosity of the divine Light which ‘never ceases to offer itself.’⁷¹⁷ The hierarch represents God in desiring ‘all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.’⁷¹⁸ Like the Good Shepherd he carries the lost sheep on his shoulders⁷¹⁹ and like the Father of the Prodigal, He comes ‘lovingly to those who have turned away from him,’⁷²⁰ thus embodying the Neoplatonic triad, *monos*, *proodos* and *epistrophe*.⁷²¹ For Dionysius, Goodness alone is supremely real and ‘as unifying and authoritative divinity – returns all to itself and is the source of the binding of all who are sundered.’⁷²² Such passages lead Kharlamov to discern in Dionysius an implicit universalism.⁷²³

Although he is familiar with the passages discussed, Aquinas,⁷²⁴ tightens up those things which must be explicitly believed, against the grain of pluralist receptions. *DAF* condemns

⁷⁰⁸ Philoxenus, *Letter to Abraham and Orestes* in Frothingham, 30.12f.; Daley (1991), 177; (1995), 630; Kitchen (2014)

⁷⁰⁹ *OFPI*.6.3; *II*.3.1; *II*.3.5; *II*.10.4-8; *III*.6.3; Behr 1.157, n.27; *CCelsus*8.72; *HJer*.2.3; *HEzek*10 (2010), 133f; *HLev*.8.4; 14.3; *CMatt*.15.23; *CJohn*2.57.

⁷¹⁰ *OFPI*.6.1, citing Psalm 61:1. See also *I*.2.10; *III*.5.6-8; Behr 1.lxii- lxxxviii; *CJohn*6.295-6; *CMatt*.6.8; *CMatt*.8; *HPsalms*36.2.1; *HLev*.7.2, reiterated by Nyssanus, *DVMII*.82; *oratio catechetica*16; 32 but condemned by Jerome, *Adv Joann* in Frend (1987), 192; Hall, 107.

⁷¹¹ *PG*4.173A. Iterated by Behr 1.114-115.

⁷¹² *CH3* (164D); *EH2* (393A) although in the latter extant text, that ‘all men be saved’ is qualified by the capacity of recipients to be divinised.

⁷¹³ *EH1* (371B)

⁷¹⁴ Daniélou (1956), 17; *CH9* (261D).

⁷¹⁵ *EP10* (1117A) speaks more generally of the unjust drawing down punishment on themselves.

⁷¹⁶ *EH7* (564C).

⁷¹⁷ *EH2* (400A-B), 205.

⁷¹⁸ *EH2* (393A)

⁷¹⁹ *EH2* (393C), c.f. Isidore of Pelusium (d. 450), *Letter* 1.136 (*PG*78); Germanus, *EHMC*, 19.

⁷²⁰ *EP8* (1085C-1088A); c.f. *Apostolic Constitutions* II.5, XL1.

⁷²¹ *DN4* (712C-713A); *CH1* (120B-121B); Sammon, 168; Plotinus, *Enneads* V.1.1; Nygren, 190, n.1.

⁷²² *DN4* (700A), trans. Jones, 136. See *STI-II*.1.8.2.

⁷²³ Kharlamov, 224, 233.

⁷²⁴ *DV*14.11

universalism as heretical.⁷²⁵ Aquinas cites Hebrews 11:6 and Acts 10:20 as normative, though he acknowledges that ‘there is a gradual progress in faith for the whole human race just as there is for individual men.’⁷²⁶ In *CRom* Aquinas restricts universalist passages specifically against Origen’s reading.⁷²⁷ ‘For the distribution is made according to races of individuals and not according to individuals of races.’⁷²⁸ *SCGIV*⁷²⁹ and the incomplete *STIII* detail punishments for the wicked,⁷³⁰ which remain just after death on account of the unchangeable will of the damned.⁷³¹ This could find support in Dionysius’ warning that those ‘filled with stain and sin’ leave this life ‘pitifully and uncertainly’ and ‘because of their culpable lives there is no sacred hope to guide them.’⁷³² Severus of Antioch, whom we argue may be Pseudo-Dionysius, did believe in eternal torment.⁷³³ Like Aquinas, he relativizes the passage that God may be ‘all in all’ to ‘the knowledge, on the part of all creatures equally, that he will be the God of those who are subject to him – of some, because they have already acknowledged him in his perfection and have submitted to him; of others, when finally they recognise him in the endless torment which at that time will burn without giving light.’⁷³⁴ In other words, Severus taught universal subjection, but not universal salvation.

Alternatively, *EH3* suggests a third possibility of neither eternal torment nor universal salvation in Athanasian language of ‘the deplorable peril of destruction and dissolution of being’⁷³⁵ which might imply the annihilationism of Origenist Philoxenus of Mabbug.⁷³⁶ Such a reading would be consistent with Dionysius’ *privatio boni* account of evil,⁷³⁷ but would thereby count against Severan authorship. It is also at least qualified by *EH2* (404B) which denies that death is a ‘complete dissolution of being.’

Both Origen and Dionysius have been accused of neglecting a theology of the cross. In the case of Origen this charge is prompted by his exegesis of 1 Corinthians 2.2, which implies that the message of the Cross is for ‘carnal persons,’ whilst the ‘spiritual’ Gospel is concealed from all but a privileged few.⁷³⁸ If Dionysius is Origenian, this reading potentially provides another

⁷²⁵ *DAF1* (2nd error)

⁷²⁶ *DV14.a.11*

⁷²⁷ *CRom*10.3.849 treats the fate of the unevangelised.

⁷²⁸ *CRom*11.4.932

⁷²⁹ *SCGIV*.89-97.

⁷³⁰ *STIII*.141-145; *LEJob*24.19

⁷³¹ *SCGIV*.93; *CRom*2.2.193.

⁷³² *EH7* (553D-556A).

⁷³³ Severus, *Homily* 53; 62; 80; *Ep*98; 117 in Daley (1991), 186.

⁷³⁴ *Homily* 49 in Daley, 186.

⁷³⁵ *EH3* (440C).

⁷³⁶ God being ‘all in all’ means for Philoxenus the ‘return of the universe to God’ when ‘the universe will be submitted to the Son and the Son to the Father’. Daley, 176-178.

⁷³⁷ *DN4* (716A-736B). Aquinas rejects this option, appealing to Dionysius in support, *DV19.1.13*.

⁷³⁸ Origen, *CJohn*1:40-42 in Trigg, 112-113 and Blanc (1966), 82.

rationale for his pseudonymity.⁷³⁹ Origen's *prima facie* remarks have uncomfortable similarities with the Valentinian heresy that the apostles 'hypocritically' preached a different message to the masses.⁷⁴⁰ They are reinforced in *Peri Pascha* by an obscure point that the Passover sacrifice was a type of Christ, but *not* his passion,⁷⁴¹ which corresponds to a deeper experience of the Christian involving all the spiritual senses.⁷⁴² On the other hand, the experience of 'sacrifice', whatever its precise meaning, is not divorced from the Cross.⁷⁴³ Origen explicitly affirms salvation through the blood of Christ.⁷⁴⁴ The 'house' of one's body must be sprinkled with the blood of the Lamb,⁷⁴⁵ which is to say 'faith in the Gospel of the new covenant,'⁷⁴⁶ in order to escape the destroyer.⁷⁴⁷ The treatise concludes with a battery of Scriptural texts on the Cross⁷⁴⁸ in harmony with *CJobn*, where the Cross becomes the fullest expression of Christ's divinity.⁷⁴⁹

7. Christology

This brings us to the most decisive argument against reducing the *CD* to an *opuscula* of pagan negative philosophy (and *a fortiori* to contemporary post-metaphysical theology and non-cognitive pluralism), namely its Christology. The modern neglect of Christology in the *CD*⁷⁵⁰ is inexcusable given the fact that historically 'Dionysius' appeared on the scene precisely in the context of the monophysite controversy and Christology remained one of the chief concerns of early commentators.⁷⁵¹ Although, as we shall see later, Aquinas adds greater accent to salvation-history than Dionysius (echoing earlier receptions by Maximus, Germanus and Hugh of St. Victor),⁷⁵² the *CD* itself presupposes the historical Jesus⁷⁵³ and specifically affirms his

⁷³⁹ This seems to be partly the case with the 4th century Syrian document, *The Apostolic Constitutions*. Donaldson (ed.), *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* 8.

⁷⁴⁰ Irenaeus, *AH3*.5.1; Grant (1957), 69; Jonas (1963), 91-97; R. Roukema, 'La Predication du Christ Crucifié (*1 Corinthiens* 2.2) Selon Origène' in Dorival and Boulluec (eds.), *Origeniana Sexta* (1995), 523-529.

⁷⁴¹ *1 Cor.* 5.7; *PP32*.33 (1992), 45; *PP13*:1-15; 14.24 (1992), 34.

⁷⁴² *ibid* 18, 37.

⁷⁴³ *PPII*.44.20 (quoting John 1:29), 52; *II*.47.1-5, 54

⁷⁴⁴ *PP41*.15-35, (1992), 50; *II*, 47.5-9, (1992), 54

⁷⁴⁵ *PP25*(1992), 41.

⁷⁴⁶ *PP33*.30, 45.

⁷⁴⁷ *PP33*.34, 45; 42.35-43.5, 51; 14.25-15.10 (1992), 35-36 following Num. 21:8-9; Deut. 21:22-23; John 3:14; Gals.6:14, c.f. Nyssanus, *DVMII*.272-277; *DVMII*.268; *1CCant*. VI (MG44.760 A-B); *CJer*.5:81;

⁷⁴⁸ 1 Peter 3:19ff; 2 Cor. 5:19; Col. 2:14; Matt. 16:21; Mark 8:31; Luke 8:22; John 16.17; John 12:24; Hebs. 2:13-15

⁷⁴⁹ Behr 1.lxix; Hall,109.

⁷⁵⁰ On neglect of Christology in Marion, see Benson, *Graven*, 222-223. On Lossky's reception of Palamite Dionysianism see Loudovikos, *Mystical Theology of Eastern Church*, 127 or Keller's distortion of 'incarnation' into 'intercarnation,' 308, 315. Conversely, see Christological retrievals in Riches (2016); Sammon, 166-171; Arthur, c.4, 101-141; Rebecca Coughlin, 'Spiritual Motion and the Incarnation in the *Divine Names* of Dionysius the Areopagite' in Layne and Butorac, 171-3; Andrew Hoffer, 'Dionysian elements in Thomas Aquinas' Christology: A Case of the Authority and Ambiguity of Pseudo-Dionysius' in *The Thomist* 72 (2008): 409-42

⁷⁵¹ Paul Rorem and John C. Lamoreaux, 'John of Scythopolis on Apollinarian Christology and the Pseudo-Areopagite's True Identity' in *Church History* 62 (CUP, 1993); Kharmalov, 72.

⁷⁵² Meyendorff (1985), 38-39; 42-52.

⁷⁵³ *EH3* (432D); (441A); (444A); 4 (484A-B); 5 (512B-C); *DN1* (592A); *DN2* (640C; 644C; 648A-649A).

incarnation, Virgin birth, nativity, walking on water;⁷⁵⁴ grace towards the Samaritans,⁷⁵⁵ parables,⁷⁵⁶ agony in Gethemene,⁷⁵⁷ events at the Cross⁷⁵⁸ and crucially (against Gnosticism), his bodily resurrection,⁷⁵⁹ as recognised by John of Scythopolis⁷⁶⁰ and Aquinas.⁷⁶¹ This confession is consistent with ‘Dionysius the Areopagite,’ converted through Paul’s resurrection kerygma.⁷⁶²

The first precisely datable reference to the *CD* appears in 528 by Severus, implying it was written shortly before this date.⁷⁶³ At this time, Syria was the home of competing Christologies, including Chalcedonian, Nestorian and ‘one nature’ Christology, later known as monophysite or miaphysite.⁷⁶⁴ Edessa became a centre for the last (which was in the majority).⁷⁶⁵ John of Tella (519-522), for instance, contended that Christ had a single nature which was a composition of divine and human,⁷⁶⁶ but Chalcedonians (including the later Aquinas), condemned this as a form of Eutychianism.⁷⁶⁷ The authenticity of the *CD* was questioned in 533 by the Chalcedonian camp,⁷⁶⁸ yet within 20 years was exploited for its defence by John of Scythopolis⁷⁶⁹ and later by Maximus the Confessor (580-662).⁷⁷⁰ The persecution of anti-Chalcedonian clergy after 519 may be alluded to in *EP10*⁷⁷¹ and provides one rationale for the *CD*’s pseudonymity.⁷⁷² Another important reference occurs in *DN7* (873A): ‘(T)he principal leaders of our divine wisdom die each day for the truth. They bear witness in every word and deed to the single knowledge of the truth possessed by Christians. They prove that truth to be more simple and more divine than every other. Or, rather, what they show is that here is the only true, single, and simple knowledge

⁷⁵⁴ *EP3-4*; *CH4* (181B)

⁷⁵⁵ *EP8*; c.f. Luke 9:52-55

⁷⁵⁶ *CH4* (181B-C); 7 (209B)

⁷⁵⁷ *CH4* (181C).

⁷⁵⁸ *EP7* (1081A); Luke 23:34 commented on in Aquinas, *CJobn15.2054*.

⁷⁵⁹ *EH7* (553A)

⁷⁶⁰ John of Scythopolis, Prol.20.10-12, 16-30, *Corpus Dionysiacum* (Berlin, 1990-1991) in Paul Rorem and John C. Lamoreaux, ‘John of Scythopolis on Apollinarian Christology and the Pseudo-Areopagite’s True Identity’ in *Church History* 62, 1993 (CUP), 476.

⁷⁶¹ *IDNVI.2* (10-26), 455-456; *CT151-184*; *STIII.53-56*; *SCGIV.79*.

⁷⁶² *EH7.1-2*; *DN6.2*.

⁷⁶³ Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus: Annotating the Areopagite* (OUP, 1998), 10; Arthur, 104-109; Kharmalov, 72.

⁷⁶⁴ technical anachronistic terms whose genealogy can be traced to Apollinarius speaking the ‘one incarnate nature’ (μία φύσις σεσαρχομένη) in *ad Jovianum*; *ad Dionysium* A 2. Frend (1972), xiii; Robert A. Kitchen (trans.), *The Discourses of Philoxenos of Mabbug: A New Translation and Introduction* (Collegeville, MI: Liturgical Press, 2014), xiii; Hansbury, 8-9.

⁷⁶⁵ See N.H. Baynes and H. St. L.B. Moss, *Byzantium: An Introduction to East Roman Civilisation* (OUP, 1962), 213-214; Frothingham, 3; Arthur, c.4; Kharlamov, 64f.

⁷⁶⁶ Arthur, 111.

⁷⁶⁷ Weishapl, 167; *CRom1.37*.

⁷⁶⁸ Hypatius, leader of the orthodox camp, challenged the monophysites, led by Severus, to prove the authenticity of the *CD*. *Acta Concilium Oecumenicorum*, ed. E. Schwartz (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1914), IV.2, 173:13-18 in Golitzin, xx, n.3; Wear and Dillon, 2; Frothingham, 3; Campbell, 4-5.

⁷⁶⁹ John of Scythopolis, prologue 20.10-12, 16-30 in Rorem and Lamoreaux (1993), 476.

⁷⁷⁰ Andrew Louth, ‘The Reception of Dionysius up to Maximus the Confessor’ in Coakley and Stang, 43-53; Blowers (1991); Meyendorff, 36; Lossky (1963), 105.

⁷⁷¹ *EP10* (1117A-C); Arthur, 68.

⁷⁷² Arthur, 129, as with *Wisdom*. See Clarke, 5.

of God. (τὴν μόνην ἀληθῆ καὶ μίαν καὶ ἀπλῆν θεογνωσίαν).⁷⁷³ Use of the term *μίαν* in this context could elliptically reference the single nature controversy.

One of over 55 monophysite bishops who fled into exile between 521-531AD⁷⁷³ was Severus (465-538).⁷⁷⁴ Did he pen the *CD* or at least know the person(s) who did? We know that some monophysites were prepared to use forged sources⁷⁷⁵ and Severus' profile corresponds with much of what can be ascertained of 'Dionysius.' Born in Sozopolis, Pisidia, a community which rejected infant baptism,⁷⁷⁶ Severus himself became convinced of its value⁷⁷⁷ and an extant baptismal liturgy is ascribed to him.⁷⁷⁸ He was 20 when Proclus died and thus eligible to be one of his 'hearers.' Frend recounts Severus' 'long flirtation with philosophic paganism,'⁷⁷⁹ but his chief biographer, John, abbot of Beith-Aphthonia, acquits him of being a pagan in disguise.⁷⁸⁰ Certainly, his faith was strongly influenced by philosophy as he describes 'practising the philosophic life in Palestine' in a letter to Peter, bishop of Apamea,⁷⁸¹ but he evidently regarded monasticism as the true philosophic mode of life.⁷⁸² Originally a student of grammar in Alexandria and Law in Berytus,⁷⁸³ Severus was gradually drawn to a monastic vocation and received baptism in 488. Knowledge of Syriac ceremonies described in the rites of ordination for bishops⁷⁸⁴ points to a Syrian author,⁷⁸⁵ compatible with Severus, bishop of Pamphylia,⁷⁸⁶ who later founded his own monastery.⁷⁸⁷ Severus was significantly influenced by Paul, about whom he wrote an encomium⁷⁸⁸ (correlating with Stang's research). He was above all, 'a biblical scholar in the mould of Origen and Basil'⁷⁸⁹ who 'lived in the writings of the Cappadocians.'⁷⁹⁰

⁷⁷³ Arthur, 321; W.C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement* (CUP, 1972), 228-231.

⁷⁷⁴ Kitchen, xi-xiii.

⁷⁷⁵ e.g. Julian of Halicarnasseus. Severus enjoins gentleness on 'Callistus' who is accused of forging a letter in his name. Brooks, 6-23; Arthur, 103-104.

⁷⁷⁶ Brooks, vi.

⁷⁷⁷ c.f. *EH7:11*. Aquinas incorrectly takes this passage as evidence that infant baptism was an early apostolic practice. *DM4.1*

⁷⁷⁸ Kannengiesser, II.924.

⁷⁷⁹ Frend (1972), 201.

⁷⁸⁰ Brooks, v; Frend, 203.

⁷⁸¹ Brooks, 35.

⁷⁸² *Syriac Version of Athanasius of Nisibis* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1903), 57, 104. C.f. *DN2* (640A). Frend (1972), 201, c.f. *EH6* (533D), which references the 'φιλοσοφῶν ἄν of the monks.' Campbell, 198, n.309. Nyssanus also speaks of the ascetic life as the 'greater philosophy' in *DVM1.19*.

⁷⁸³ Brooks, vi., c.f. the interest in law in *EH3* (429C); *CH9.2* (260B); *CH3.2* (165C).

Berytus was famous for law and for magic (Severus' master Leontius was a magician), but it was also a centre of intellectual Christianity. Frend (1972), 204; Herrin, 71-2.

⁷⁸⁴ Ivanovic, 28.

⁷⁸⁵ *EH5* (508C) against Balthasar (1995), 178; *EH7.7*. trans. Campbell (1981), 88; Arthur, 158. Dionysius rebukes a priest in *EP6* and the monk Demophilus in *EP8* (1088C).

⁷⁸⁶ Charles Kannengiesser (ed.), *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: The Bible in Ancient Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), II.924.

⁷⁸⁷ *Epistle 2* in Brooks, 221 and vi.

⁷⁸⁸ *ibid*, vi;

⁷⁸⁹ Frend, 213. See his epistle to Constantine the bishop, Brooks, 3-12.

⁷⁹⁰ *ibid*, 213.

Severus defends ‘one theandric nature’ against Chalcedon,⁷⁹¹ which he dismisses as ‘Nestorian’⁷⁹² and recalls the Apollinarian *μία φύσις σεσαρκωμένη*⁷⁹³ as (unwittingly) reiterated in Cyril’s ‘one incarnate nature’.⁷⁹⁴ Again he writes of ‘one theandric activity (*ἐνέργεια*)’ in *Epistle to Sergium* 1,⁷⁹⁵ which is notably out of step with John of Damascus’ ‘two energies’ formulation.⁷⁹⁶ Severus anathematizes those who ‘divide our one Lord and God Jesus Christ after the union into a duality of natures,’⁷⁹⁷ yet simultaneously preaches against Apollinarius⁷⁹⁸ and Eutyches.⁷⁹⁹ Severus deploys *theandric* of Christ’s will or activity and sought to do justice to the humanity of Christ, including his human ignorance.⁸⁰⁰

Let us not accept the miracles so as to destroy and suppress the flesh, nor the human actions and voluntary poverty to deny and diminish the divinity. Let us return this semi-heritage to those who are man-worshippers or Docetists (Phantasiasts) and who in their malevolence and impiety cause division. As for us, we move along the middle of the road, turning our face away from the tortuous sins on one side or the other, and knowing that he who lives on the heights and dwells by nature in grandeur is worthy of the God who “emptied himself” (Phil. 2:7) to become the author of our salvation.⁸⁰¹

Dionysius shares this nuance in his language of the ‘new *theandric* activity’ of Jesus Christ,⁸⁰² who was born of a virgin and ‘became quite truly a human.’⁸⁰³ It is a hallmark of Dionysian Christology to refer to Christ’s humanity and divinity *in tandem*, recalling Cyril’s pre-Chalcedonian Christology.⁸⁰⁴

⁷⁹¹ *Innocentii Maronitae epistula de collatione cum Severianis habita*. The citation from Severus is different to the reading as it has come down to us, which speaks instead of ‘new theandric activity.’ Riches, 101-6; Wear and Dillon, 2; Frothingham, 3; Louth, 1-2, 14, 60, 64; Sammon, 89; Roques, 311; Campbell, 4-5.

⁷⁹² *Epistle to Sergius* (ed. Lebon, 60-1) in Frend, 209; Kitchen, xiii

⁷⁹³ Apollinarius, *ad Jovianum; ad Dionysium* A 2.

⁷⁹⁴ Aquinas opposes Apollinarius in *SCGIV.32-33*

⁷⁹⁵ *Epistle to Sergius* in Frend, 212, n.3.

⁷⁹⁶ John of Damascus, *DFO3:15*

⁷⁹⁷ *Epistle to Musonius and Alexander* in Brooks, 88.

⁷⁹⁸ Frend, 205-6.

⁷⁹⁹ *ibid*, 216.

⁸⁰⁰ A. Von Roey and P. Allen, *Monophysite Texts of the Sixth Century* (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters en Departement Orientalistiek, 1994), 15.

⁸⁰¹ *Homily* 83 in Frend, 214.

⁸⁰² *EP4* (1072C); c.f. *DN2* (648A; 649A); *EH3* (444A).

⁸⁰³ *EP4* (1072B), 264. This flatly contradicts Bulhof and Ten Kate’s (2000) assertion that Dionysius ‘denies that Christ was human,’ 24.

⁸⁰⁴ *EH3* (429C) speaks of ‘the divine works of Jesus the man.’ See also Riches (2016).

(I)t was not by virtue of being God that he did divine things, not by virtue of being man that he did what was human, but rather, by the fact of being God-made-man he accomplished something new in our midst – the activity of the God-man.⁸⁰⁵

Such a Christology could also be seen as a development *within* Origenism, since Origen first called Jesus ‘the God-Man’ (*theanthropos*).⁸⁰⁶ Dionysius’ ‘simple Jesus’ is composed of an everlasting and a temporal dimension,⁸⁰⁷ even if these are not formulated as Chalcedonian ‘natures.’ Campbell concludes, ‘(o)n the whole, Dionysius’ Christology is vague with regard to the two natures of Christ, perhaps intentionally so,’ surmising that, ‘he belonged to the conciliatory group that followed the *Henoticon* of Emperor Zeno in 482.’⁸⁰⁸ This moderate monophysite camp was closer to Chalcedon than the hardliners and eventually reached some kind of *rapprochement*.⁸⁰⁹ It explains how various camps could ‘own’ Dionysius, including Sergius, his first translator, who converted from miaphysitism to diphysitism.⁸¹⁰ Maximus could welcome Dionysius (‘save’ in Aquinas’ terminology) as a Chalcedonian,⁸¹¹ appropriating the term ἁσυγχύτω⁸¹² in *EH3* (441B), previously used by Proclus – a native of Constantinople, the site of Chalcedon,⁸¹³ yet this language also raises the possibility of textual ‘correction’ by John of Scythopolis, who deploys Dionysius against the Nestorians, Apollinarians and Eutychians.⁸¹⁴ We know that all extant Greek manuscripts of the *CD* derive from John’s ‘official’ edition and *scholia* between 537 and 543,⁸¹⁵ containing over 550 glosses.⁸¹⁶ Consequently, as Rorem and Lamoreaux summarise, ‘subsequent generations did not read the Areopagite; they read the annotated Areopagite.’⁸¹⁷ There is certainly a long history of ‘saving Dionysius.’ Perczel (supported by Arthur⁸¹⁸) believes the early Syriac translation preserves a more authentic text, but we reserve judgement for his published findings.⁸¹⁹

⁸⁰⁵ *EP4* (1072B), 264.

⁸⁰⁶ *OFPII.6.3* (2017), lxvii; *HEzeek3* (2010), 56, n.3.

⁸⁰⁷ *DN1* (592B)

⁸⁰⁸ Campbell, 168; Kharlamov, 65, 67; Bettenson (1943), 123-6.

⁸⁰⁹ Von Roey and Allen, 15.

⁸¹⁰ Kharlamov, 68.

⁸¹¹ Nygren, 599-600.

⁸¹² *ibid*, 45 n.182; 167-168.

⁸¹³ *IPII* (757-758); Coughlin, 171

⁸¹⁴ John of Scythopolis, *In Librum De Divinis Nominibus* 196D; 197C; 209D; 216B; 224A; 225D; 229D in B.R. Suchla, *Corpus Dionysiacum IV.1: Ioannis Scythopolitani Prologus Et Scholia in Dionysii Areopagitae Librum De Divinis Nominibus Cum Additamentis Interpretum Aliorum* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011).

⁸¹⁵ John of Scythopolis, *Scholia* 173.8 in Rorem and Lamoreaux (1993), 474; Paul Rorem, *The Dionysian Mystical Theology: Mapping the Tradition* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 76; Louth, ‘Reception’ in Coakley and Stang, 45.

⁸¹⁶ Rorem (2015), 61.

⁸¹⁷ Rorem and Lamoreaux (1998), 2.

⁸¹⁸ Arthur, 117f.

⁸¹⁹ Perczel, ‘The Earliest Syriac Reception’ in Coakley and Stang, 27-41; Von Roey and Allen, 4-15.

Thomas, like his namesake, the apostle, is a ‘good theologian’ since he confesses both the humanity and the deity of the one Christ.⁸²⁰ Aquinas finds the Dionysian *corpus* invaluable for defending Chalcedonian orthodoxy, which is evidence of its compatibility.⁸²¹ ‘Christ is the head of the angels not only in His divine nature but also in His human nature, because even in His human nature He enlightens them, as Dionysius says.’⁸²² As discussed earlier, for Aquinas, the creeds carry authority second only to the Scriptures themselves and he makes extensive use of them in *De Unione*,⁸²³ notably against the monothelites: ‘We honour two natural operations in the same Lord Jesus Christ true God, without division, change, confusion, or separation, that is a divine operation and a human operation.’⁸²⁴ The theandric, ‘one activity’ language of Dionysius had been used to justify a monophysite and monothelite Christology against the Sixth Council (681).⁸²⁵ But according to Aquinas, Dionysius understood that ‘the humanity of Christ acted by the divine power.’⁸²⁶ Christ’s human nature is not merely an instrument of divine power, but also has its own agency and will.⁸²⁷ The monothelite reading therefore confuses the *ordering* of Christ’s human will to God’s will (which is correct) with the *identity* of his human will with God’s (which is false).⁸²⁸ The example of Christ healing the leper illustrates this point: ‘Dionysius calls the human activity of Christ *theandric*, that is to say ‘divine-human,’ because actions of this sort proceeded from His human nature in such a way that the power of the divinity was operative in them.’⁸²⁹ The ‘oneness’ of Christ in the *CD* is therefore equated for Aquinas with his own (Chalcedonian) accent on the *unio realis*, ‘when the human nature was taken on by the Son of God in unity of *supposit* or person.’⁸³⁰

Conversely, the Dionysian texts could admit a Nestorian reading.⁸³¹ One *objectio* argues: ‘Dionysius says (*DN1*): “Within the limits of our nature He came, Who far surpasses the whole order of nature supersubstantially.”⁸³² Theoretically this could support the position of two hypostases.⁸³³ Whether this was an actual or hypothetical position in the university,⁸³⁴ Thomas

⁸²⁰ *CJohn*20.6.2562.

⁸²¹ *CT*206; *STIII*.45.2; *DV*20.1; *DU*1; 2.5; 2.18; 5.1.

⁸²² *DV*29.4.5.

⁸²³ Nutt, 23-33; Weishapl, 166.

⁸²⁴ *DU*5, sc.; Nutt, 32-33, 139.

⁸²⁵ *DU*5.1.

⁸²⁶ *DU*5.1.; *CRom*4.3.380.

⁸²⁷ *DU*5.4.

⁸²⁸ *DAF*1 (8th error)

⁸²⁹ *CT*212 (1993), 251; *DU*5.2.

⁸³⁰ *Sermon* 1 (2010), 26; c.f. *STIII*.17.1-2. Against monophysitism see *IDN*2.3 (69-84), 314-315.

⁸³¹ popular in Edessa. Bettenson, 123. A modern defender of a Nestorian Dionysius is Istvan Perczel ‘Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and the Pseudo-Dormition of the Holy Virgin,’ *Le Muséon* 125/1-2 (2012): 85.

⁸³² *DN*1 (592A).

⁸³³ *STIII*.2.3.3

⁸³⁴ On the structure of the *disputatio* see Mary C. FitzPatrick, *Aquinas, On Spiritual Creatures* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: MUP, 1949), 3-11.

employs the Damascene to demonstrate how Dionysius must be understood. ‘In our Lord Jesus Christ we acknowledge two natures and one hypostasis.’⁸³⁵ It is untenable that Thomas actually believed Dionysius to be heterodox,⁸³⁶ but simply that some of his teachings could be misconstrued. Hence the ‘pious’ way to understand Dionysius is that ‘Christ is in the human species by reason of the nature assumed, and not by reason of the hypostasis.’⁸³⁷ In this way Aquinas ‘saves’ Dionysius from Macarius, Apollinarius,⁸³⁸ Eutyches,⁸³⁹ and Nestorius⁸⁴⁰ (and by extension, the ‘kenotic’ Christology of Hegelian Radical Theology)⁸⁴¹ through the six ecumenical creeds.⁸⁴²

At first sight, Dionysian Christology challenges the hypothesis that Hierotheus is modelled on Proclus, since ‘the illustrious teacher’ is said to give ‘texts about Jesus’ in *Theological Elements*, which are manifestly not a feature of Proclus’ homonymous work.⁸⁴³ Nevertheless, this theory can still be saved through a more sophisticated ‘Christianisation’ of Proclus, for as Schomakers persuasively argues, the ‘texts about Jesus’ need only be Dionysius’ interpretation of what Hierotheus wrote and not his explicit understanding.⁸⁴⁴

Still, Aquinas’ treatment of the *CD* is exemplary, since the Christological texts he draws attention to (whether Chalcedonian, monophysite or some *tertium quid*) are clear testimony to a *Christian* reflection on an economic trinity and not simply a *Procline* one.⁸⁴⁵ This includes the aforementioned historical references which attest the human nature of the *hypostasis* (treated in *STIII.27-59*). Due regard for the humanity of Jesus will also save Dionysius from a corresponding false anthropology (discussed in Chapter 3). At the same time, Dionysius’ *hyperousios* Jesus reinforces Aquinas’ apophatic Christology, especially his discussion of Christ’s divine nature,⁸⁴⁶ notably at the climax of *CJohn*:

The words and deeds of Christ are also those of God. Thus, if one tried to write and tell of the nature of every one, he could not do so; indeed the entire world could not do this. This is because even an infinite number of human words cannot equal one word of God. From the beginning of the Church, Christ has been written about, but this is still not equal to the subject. Indeed, even if the world lasted a

⁸³⁵ *STIII.2.3 sc.*

⁸³⁶ c.f the condemnation of Nestorius in *DAF1*.

⁸³⁷ *STIII.2.3.3.*

⁸³⁸ *DAF1* (6th error); *CRom1.38*

⁸³⁹ *DAF1* (7th error).

⁸⁴⁰ *CRom1.35*

⁸⁴¹ Thomas J. J. Altizer and William Hamilton, *The Death of God* (London: Pelican, 1968), 102-118

⁸⁴² *SCGIV.36.10*; c.f. Arthur, 95. Rorem and Lamoreaux *Church History* 62 (CUP, 1993): 469-482 argue that John of Scythopolis was trying to refute an objection that the *CD* was an Apollinarian forgery. John of Scythopolis’ Apollinarianism was a modification of Eutychianism. Campbell (1981), 167, n.182.

⁸⁴³ *DN2* (648B). Hierotheus’ *Elements* is described as an exposition of Scripture in *DN3* (684). Balthasar (1995), II.157 n.32.

⁸⁴⁴ Schomakers, 189-191.

⁸⁴⁵ Sammon, 143.

⁸⁴⁶ On Aquinas’ apophatic Christology see *DU5*; *STIII.1.2*; Venard (2020), 105-8 and Hofer (2008), 424

hundred thousand years, and more books were written about Christ, his words and deeds could not be completely revealed: “Of making many books there is no end” (Eccl. 12:12); The works of God “are multiplied above number” (Ps. 50:5).⁸⁴⁷

We shall return to the implications of this insight for a doctrine of Scripture as both ‘human’ and ‘divine.’

To conclude, ‘exemplary’ is a fitting description of Thomas’ reception in a double sense. As well as being a ‘model’ reading, worthy of emulation, Thomas draws attention to the metaphysical truth that ‘noble beings in reality are the exemplars of the less noble.’⁸⁴⁸ For Aquinas, the *CD* underlines that all things were created in the Word,⁸⁴⁹ who is pre-eminently, the ‘Exemplar likeness of all creatures.’⁸⁵⁰ This succinct phrase at once unites a participatory metaphysics with participatory Christology which will reach its *telos* in Thomas’ account of the beatific vision – and perhaps more explicitly in Dionysius’, as we shall argue in the final chapter.

Furthermore, the person of Christ is inseparable from his work on the Cross, another aspect of Dionysian Christianity which has been misrepresented and for which Aquinas may act as a corrective. Luther infamously condemned Dionysius as, ‘downright dangerous,’ who ‘Platonizes more than he Christianizes (*plus platonisans quam Christianisans*)..Let us rather hear Paul, that we may learn Jesus Christ and him crucified.’⁸⁵¹ He goes on to argue that mystical theologians preach a ‘theology of glory’ rather than a ‘theology of the Cross’.⁸⁵² Luther’s guns specifically target the ‘pure fables and lies’⁸⁵³ of *Mystical Theology*.⁸⁵⁴ This is chiefly because, on Luther’s post-conversion view, the mystics presumptuously contemplated the Uncreated Word prior to purification by the sufferings of the Incarnate Word.⁸⁵⁵ Luther’s verdict has cast a long shadow into current Dionysian scholarship.⁸⁵⁶

Unfairly so, since although the references to the life and work of Christ in the *CD* are concise, by artificially sequestering *MT*, Luther by-passes salient passages, many of them Pauline

⁸⁴⁷ *CJohn*21.6 in Porro, TA, 264.

⁸⁴⁸ *DN*5 (824D); *SCG*1.54.3

⁸⁴⁹ *CJohn*1:1.

⁸⁵⁰ *ST*III.8.sc.; *CJohn*1.12.248; Ryan, 81-105.

⁸⁵¹ *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, in Pelikan and Lehman (eds.) (1955-1986), 36:109; *Weimar Auflage* 6 (562), Piotr J. Malysz, ‘Luther and Dionysius: Beyond Mere Negations’ in Coakley and Stang, 150; Nygren, 705; Froehlich, ‘Pseudo-Dionysius and the Reformation’ in Rorem (1987), 44.

⁸⁵² *Babylonian Captivity*, *ibid* 36:109; Malysz (2009),150; Nygren, 705; Froehlich (1987), 44. ‘Paul’s crucified Christ, whose blood redeems us, the Second Adam whose obedience makes up for the disobedience of the first Adam, is absent from Dionysius’ theology’ Arthur, 94.

⁸⁵³ Nygren, 706, n.1.

⁸⁵⁴ ‘I exhort you to detest as a veritable plague this Mystical Theology of Dionysius and similar books.’ Luther in Nygren, 705.

⁸⁵⁵ Pelikan (ed.), *Luther’s Works* 25, *Lectures on Romans* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 287; 54, *Table Talk*, 112.

⁸⁵⁶ Hathaway, 64 ; Arthur, 94; Meyendorff, 28.

influenced, which treat Christology and soteriology.⁸⁵⁷ *EP8*, for instance, specifically affirms the Cross as ‘the expiation (ἱλασμός)⁸⁵⁸ for our sins.’⁸⁵⁹ This truth is sacramentally re-presented in the baptismal rite of *EH*⁸⁶⁰ (a work familiar to Luther),⁸⁶¹ involving ‘triple’ immersion in the font, characteristic of the wider Syrian Church from the 4th century.⁸⁶² This rite embodies a rich theology of identification with Christ in his three day burial and resurrection (recalling Romans 6:4).⁸⁶³ Indeed, Dionysius confides in a rare autobiographical reference, that spiritual enlightenment through baptism was part of his personal experience.⁸⁶⁴ Furthermore, although Luther may raise valid concerns about mysticism in general, Dionysius is at pains, even within *MT*, to dismiss those who assume that ‘by their own intellectual resources they can have a direct knowledge of him who has made the shadows his hiding place.’⁸⁶⁵

In contrast to Luther’s reading (and his modern heirs), Aquinas embraces texts from *EH* for his own teaching. Far from being deaf to Paul, Aquinas confesses that the Pauline epistles are ‘the most frequently used writings of the New Testament’⁸⁶⁶ and ‘this entire teaching is about grace.’⁸⁶⁷ He rightly acknowledges that Christ’s resurrection is ‘the exemplar and cause’ of the believer’s through baptism,⁸⁶⁸ one of the ‘sacraments of grace.’⁸⁶⁹ Aquinas’ road map leads directly to the Cross, where God’s justice is satisfied and to the empty tomb where believers are raised to new life.⁸⁷⁰

Likewise Dionysius defined Baptism by its relation to the other sacraments, saying (*EH* 2) that it is ‘the principle that forms the habits of the soul for the reception of those most holy words and sacraments’; and again by its relation to heavenly glory, which is the universal end of all the sacraments, when he adds, ‘preparing the way for us, whereby we mount to the repose of the

⁸⁵⁷ *EH5* (512B); *EP7* (1081A); *EP8* (1096B-C); Jerome Klotz, ‘What All Things Are: Luther and Dionysius Revisited’ in *Ex Ore Infantium: Mysticism and Metaphysics in the Theology of Martin Luther*, 1-18 (unpublished); Golitzin, 56.

⁸⁵⁸ Chevalier II.1551.

⁸⁵⁹ *EP8* (1096B); c.f. 1John 2:2.

⁸⁶⁰ *EH4* (484B), 231, citing Romans 6:3. See Alan P. Darley, ‘Ritual as Erotic Anagogy in Pseudo-Dionysius: A Reformed Critique’ in *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology*, Simone Kotva, Jacob Sherman, Catherine Pickstock (eds.), *International Journal of Systematic Theology and Philosophy* 79.3 (2018): 261-78.

⁸⁶¹ Pelikan (ed.), *Luther’s Works* 31, *Explanations of the Ninety Five Theses* (1956), 119.

⁸⁶² *EH2* (404C); Meyendorff, 34-5; John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John* 25.2 (PG59,151 NPNF 14, 89.); *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* III.XVII.65.

⁸⁶³ Origen, *CRomV.9.7*; IX.39.2-4; Aquinas, *CRom6.1.44*, reflected in Stang’s thesis of Pauline influence.

⁸⁶⁴ *EH3* (425A); c.f. 2 (396A); Golitzin, xxxv.

⁸⁶⁵ *MT1* (1000A). This finds a counterpart in Lucifer’s sin which was to desire final happiness ‘not according to the proper order, that is not as a thing to be attained by the grace of God.’ *DM16.3*; Porro, TA, 279.

⁸⁶⁶ *CRom. prol.6* (2020), 21.

⁸⁶⁷ *CRom. prol.11* (2020), 23.

⁸⁶⁸ *STIII.54.2*; 56.1.4; Aquinas connects baptism to dying and rising with Christ in *STIII.66.9*; *STIII.66.1.1* (citing John of Damascus, *DFOIV.9*); *STIII.63*, 69; *CRom6.1.473-477*; *CJobn1.14.268*.

⁸⁶⁹ *CRom. prol.11* (2020), 23.

⁸⁷⁰ *STIII.56.1.2-3*; *CRom5.2.403* (2020), 163.

heavenly kingdom'; and again as to the beginning of spiritual life, when he adds, 'the conferring of our most sacred and Godlike regeneration.'⁸⁷¹

The theological basis of the Dionysian rituals is developed within the credal context of *EH3* (440C-441B), prefaced as 'what the hierarchs, those men of God, praise and celebrate, following the Scriptures.'⁸⁷² This text also references the 'universal hymn of faith,'⁸⁷³ 'perpetually renewed' in the *synaxis*,⁸⁷⁴ again demonstrating Dionysius' rootedness in the contemporary Syrian Church.⁸⁷⁵ This Gospel according to Dionysius denounces the destructive effects of sin in atypically robust language.⁸⁷⁶ (Our appendix supplies a full text of this lengthy section.)

Aquinas has also noticed this passage and uses it to defend the morally realistic view that in this life, sensuality cannot be fully cured of corruption.⁸⁷⁷ Dionysius' stress on the moral nature of the Fall is in marked contrast with the wholly epistemic alienation of paganism.⁸⁷⁸ In framing salvation as escape from the 'dissolution of being', it echoes Athanasius.⁸⁷⁹ The rare, but full, recognition of sin further accentuates the unmerited nature of God's *philanthropia*

In the realm of the intellect, as our famous teacher has said, it is love of God which first of all moves us toward the divine; indeed, the first procession of this love toward the sacred enactment of the divine commands brings about in unspeakable fashion our divine existence. And divinisation is to have a divine birth. No one could understand, let alone put into practice, the truths received from God if he did not have a divine beginning.⁸⁸⁰

'Our famous teacher' here is likely not Hierotheus, but Paul,⁸⁸¹ as the reference loosely recalls Romans 5:8,⁸⁸² one of Nygren's proof texts for distinguishing *eros* from *agape*, which therefore weakens his case for condemning the Areopagite. Indeed, here is clearly present the reality of prevenient grace, for although the goal of hierarchy is union with God *via* 'the doing of sacred

⁸⁷¹ *STIII.66.1.1*; *CJohn3.1.443*.

⁸⁷² *EH4* (440C).

⁸⁷³ *EH3* (425C); 3 (436C).

⁸⁷⁴ *EH3.12* trans. Campbell, 46.

⁸⁷⁵ 'the author seems to be paraphrasing the account of salvation history found in his community's anaphora or Eucharistic prayer.' Rorem (1987), 220, n.95; Brightman, *Liturgies 1* (1896), Appendix E, 487-490; Bettenson (1943), 123-6.

⁸⁷⁶ others include *DN1* (589A); 8 (897A) and *EH7* (561D)

⁸⁷⁷ *DV25.7*

⁸⁷⁸ *pace* Kharlamov, 189. Aquinas rejects the Aristotelian view that sin is only a product of ignorance in *ST1-II.58.2*; *DM11.7-8*.

⁸⁷⁹ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 1.4; c.f. *DN1* (589A).

⁸⁸⁰ *EH2* (392B), 200.

⁸⁸¹ against Rorem (1987), 200, n.20.

⁸⁸² Campbell (1981), 117 (following Stiglmayr).

acts,' Dionysius is quite explicit that the 'starting point' for these acts is 'the divine workings of God'⁸⁸³ (*theourgia*, i.e. God's own works) which begins with regeneration.⁸⁸⁴ Aquinas effectively utilises this text to demonstrate that grace precedes virtue and is distinct from it.⁸⁸⁵ Dionysius further situates his theology of the atonement against a rival one based on sheer power.⁸⁸⁶ Although in the unfallen angelic realm, purification is from ignorance alone, this is not the case for humanity.⁸⁸⁷ Aquinas notices that for Dionysius 'salvation is from evil' means the evil of sin.⁸⁸⁸ These texts refute Arthur's claim that Dionysius presents 'a teaching rather than a redemptive role for the Son.'⁸⁸⁹ They are consonant with Thomas' 'Augustinian' representation of Christ as One teaching from the Cross, 'exalted as a *magister* in his seat of instruction.'⁸⁹⁰ In this way, Dionysius is 'saved' by the Cross, just like his Biblical namesake.

The significance of this material from *EH* increases if we reject the Luibheid order for the *corpus* and adopt Golitzin's thesis that *EH* liturgically introduces a 'mystagogy' culminating in the Johannine *EP10*.⁸⁹¹ This is one possibility out of the three orders found in the manuscript tradition,⁸⁹² and is supported by Grosseteste's pedagogical order.⁸⁹³ Luibheid's sequence, by contrast shores up Rorem's thesis that *MT* is a 'methodological prologue,' to the *CD*, a kind of philosophical substrate upon which the specifically ecclesiological or creedal material is superimposed. In this schema *MT* precedes the hierarchy texts. Against Rorem, however, is the strong internal evidence that, at the very least, *CH* preceded *MT*. In fact Dionysius himself discloses that his works *decrease* in length up to *MT*, rather than *increase* from it.⁸⁹⁴ The order in *Patrologia Graecae* follows the unanimous Greek manuscript tradition of *CH. EH. DN. MT. EP*.⁸⁹⁵ Though differing from Rorem, this arrangement remains open to a Kantian interpretation of a progression from the phenomenal aspects of religion to the noumenal, which is similar to Rorem's 'substrate' notion.⁸⁹⁶ As outlined in our introduction, modern pluralists see potential in Kantian 'mystery' for uniting world religions, but we have already found that this paradigm is inadequate to explain the *CD*'s high Christology. Furthermore, we must bear in mind that the

⁸⁸³ *EH2* (392A), 200.

⁸⁸⁴ For Dionysius, this is received in baptism, c.f. Origen, *HEzek6* (2010), 93; John of Damascus, *DFOIV.9*; Zeno's *Henoticon* (482) speaks of baptism as the 'laver of regeneration' in Bettenson, 124; Aquinas, *STIII.66.9*.

⁸⁸⁵ *DV27.2*; *CRom11.4.927-8*

⁸⁸⁶ *DN2* (441B).

⁸⁸⁷ *EH6* (537B-C); *LEJob41.16* (1989), 465; *ST1.106.2.2*; *DV22.9.5*.

⁸⁸⁸ *CJohn4.5.663*.

⁸⁸⁹ Arthur (2016), 15.

⁸⁹⁰ *Sermon* 18, Part 3, 1.3 (2010), 277.

⁸⁹¹ Alexander Golitzin, 'Dionysius Areopagita: A Christian Mysticism?' *Pro Ecclesia*, 12.2 (2003): 170 in Malysz (2009), 161.

⁸⁹² *CH, EH, DN, MT, EP* against *CH, DN, EH, MT, EP* or *DN, CH, EH, MT, EP*. See Golitzin, xxxvi.

⁸⁹³ McEvoy (2003), 56.

⁸⁹⁴ *MT3* and Grosseteste's commentary in McEvoy (2003), 93-105.

⁸⁹⁵ Golitzin, xxxvi.

⁸⁹⁶ *MT2* (1025B); c.f. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977), 338.

Greek manuscript tradition derives from John of Scythopolis, whose order may serve purposes of his own. As a wild card, the Syriac version of Sergius of Reshaina⁸⁹⁷ favours neither Golitzin nor the pluralists in its sequence *DN, CH, MT, EH, EP*.⁸⁹⁸

8. Anagogy

A more precise understanding of Origenian hermeneutics and Aquinas' exemplary transformation requires an examination of the term 'anagogy' (to which we now turn. The noun, occurring 33 times in the *CD*,⁸⁹⁹ derives from ἀνάγω (aor. ἀνήγαγον) signifying 'to lift/lead up' (the antonym of κατάγω 'to go down'). It is the verb used in the LXX for the exodus,⁹⁰⁰ an historical event later understood prophetically and paradigmatically.⁹⁰¹ Although Bonaventure will credit Dionysius with elucidating the anagogical meaning of Scripture,⁹⁰² for Dionysius, the term 'anagogy' does not yet acquire its technical status as one of the four senses of Scripture (discussed later in 1.9).⁹⁰³ It reflects the more general Neoplatonic schema of an uplifting itinerary⁹⁰⁴ through veiled images to higher, invisible realities,⁹⁰⁵ like Proclus' 'elevative' cause (ἀνήγαγος) which 'draws the reverting existence upwards to what is more divine.'⁹⁰⁶ The application to Scriptural hermeneutics derives from Origen, who relates 'laws of ἀνάγωγη'.⁹⁰⁷ Origenian anagogy is evoked in the title of Dionysius' non-extant book, *The Conceptual and the Perceptible*.⁹⁰⁸ The perceptible includes rites and liturgy which connect with Scriptural interpretation as aids for intellection.⁹⁰⁹ The Transcendent One has clothed itself with 'sacred veils'⁹¹⁰ and symbols,⁹¹¹ 'derived from the realm of the senses'⁹¹² in order to accommodate itself to human nature and initiate the divine *epistrophe*.⁹¹³ The exegete ascends from the 'literal' (

⁸⁹⁷ Arthur, 116-121, 137-139, 184-191.

⁸⁹⁸ *ibid*, 153-154.

⁸⁹⁹ *CH1* (121C; 137B; 145B; (2); 180C; 237C; 260BC; 261A; 273C; 304D; 337D; 340A); *EH1* (376D; 377A; 392A; 397C; 401C; 429D; 436C; 441B; 473B; 477B; 501C; 504C; 513D; 536BC (2); 557C; 565C; 568C (2); *DN4* (709C); Van Den Daele, 17.

⁹⁰⁰ e.g. Lev. 11:45

⁹⁰¹ Luke 9:31

⁹⁰² *De reductione artium ad theologiam*, 5 in Hoffer, 414.

⁹⁰³ as it will in Cassian, *Conferences* 14.8.3, although there is already a hint of this in *EP9* (1108B-C)

⁹⁰⁴ *CH1* (121D), 146; *CH15.9* (337D), 190, 188. *CH2* (145B) speaks of 'an uplifting through a precise explanation of these truths', 153.

⁹⁰⁵ *CH4* (177C), 156; c.f. *DV27.4.8*.

⁹⁰⁶ *ET158* (2004), 139 and commentary, 281.

⁹⁰⁷ Grant (1957), 91, continued in Aquinas, *CJobn2.2.415*.

⁹⁰⁸ *EH2* (397C)

⁹⁰⁹ *CH2* (121C-124A); 15 (337D); *EH2* (397C; 401C); 4 (473B)

⁹¹⁰ *EH1* (376D)

⁹¹¹ *EH2* (392A); *EH3* (433C).

⁹¹² *DN1* (592B)

⁹¹³ *CH1* (121C).

ἐπὶ τῇ λέξει) to the ‘elevated’ sense (ἐπὶ τῇ ἀναγωγῇ)⁹¹⁴ from the sensible to the intelligible.⁹¹⁵

This mode of knowledge, that ‘man know spiritual things by means of sensible things’ impresses itself on Aquinas, but with an Aristotelian twist.⁹¹⁶ It confirms the Stagirite’s account of noetics.

The corporeal is a stepping stone to a higher implicate order, again embedding Scriptural hermeneutics within a hermeneutics of being.⁹¹⁷

Dionysian anagogy is thus ‘erotic,’⁹¹⁸ a yearning for the ‘hierarchies of Heaven.’⁹¹⁹ We recall that the trace of Proclus’, *De Subsistentia Malorum*⁹²⁰ in the *CD*’s *eros* motif⁹²¹ was the smoking gun which ultimately exposed the author’s pseudonymity, but it also exposes a shared DNA with Origen, who borrowed the ubiquitous image of the ‘wound of love’ from the myth of Cupid (Eros).⁹²² As noted earlier, *CCant* sources Dionysius’ claim that *eros* and *agape* are interchangeable,⁹²³ a fact borne out by the appeal of both writers to identical passages from the LXX (Proverbs 4:6-8 and Wisdom 8:2)⁹²⁴ as well as to Ignatius.⁹²⁵

Whilst *Synaxis* is the supreme example of anagogic symbols,⁹²⁶ a less obvious, yet significant sacrament is anointing.⁹²⁷ Its truth is revealed only to ‘lovers of beauty,’⁹²⁸ who, unlike Plato’s fallen charioteer,⁹²⁹ ‘gaze solely on conceptual originals [and]..refuse to be dragged down’⁹³⁰ to the realm of ‘counterfeits.’ Earlier we speculated that ‘Dionysius’ is etymologically linked to the wine-loving charioteer-god Dionysus.⁹³¹ Within the Origenian register, this ecstatic inebriation translates into the anagogical growth into likeness with Christ (see Chapter 4).⁹³² Nygren’s Lutheran critique correctly identifies this *eros* motif as soteriological. For Nygren, *Eros* presumes to ascend to God’s level through human effort, rather than faith in God’s gracious descent.⁹³³

⁹¹⁴ *CJohn3* (13), XVII.101, trans. Blanc (1966), 84; *CMatt*10.15.23 in Young (1997), 95; Blowers (1991), 229, n.4. De Lubac lists Nyssanus, Didymus, Jerome and Eucherius as forerunners who deployed this term for an interpretive method. *ME* (2000), II.180; *HJer*.19:14 in Blowers (1991), 229, n.4; *CJohnX.43.nos.299-306*; PG14 (392-393B).

⁹¹⁵ *CCelsus*7.37.

⁹¹⁶ *CJohn3*.1.443; *STIII*.1.1; 60.4; 61.1

⁹¹⁷ *CH1*

⁹¹⁸ *Phaedrus* (249DE); *DN4* (708A)

⁹¹⁹ *CH2*(137B), 148; *CH1* (121C); *EH4* (473B), 225; *CH1* (121C), 146; *CH2* (145B), 153; 15 (337D), 190.

⁹²⁰ *DN4*.18-35; c.f. *IJSS*1.1.2.

⁹²¹ *DN4*.11-18.

⁹²² *CCant*. prol., (1956), 29; *III*.8.195-200; *Homily2*:8.295 which references Plato, *Symposium* 203B-E. The figure of the ‘arrow of *eros*’ is later taken up in Nyssanus, *Homilies* 13 (1048C).

⁹²³ *CCant*. prol.2 (1956), 32; Dawson, 38-43.

⁹²⁴ *DN4*.12 (709A); *CCant*. prol.29 (1956), 198ff, prol.2, 31; *Homily* 2:8, 95; *CMatt*15.14 in Grant (1957), 97.

⁹²⁵ *CCant*. prol.2 (1956), 35; *DN4*.12 (709B); Ignatius, *Epistle to the Romans* 7.2; Nygren, 390.

⁹²⁶ *CH1* (124A); 2 (124A); *EH3*; Meyendorff, 24-5.

⁹²⁷ *EH3* (425A).C.f. Origen, *CCant*.1 in Blowers (1991), 230, n.20; 1, Vol.6 (MG44.781Cff); *II*.9, 159-162; *Homily* 2, 285-286; *PP18* (1992), 37; Nyssanus, *DVM* (1978), xiii; *II*, 258 (1978), 121; Golitzin, xxxv.

⁹²⁸ *EH4*; Plato, *Phaedrus* (249d); Proclus, *Alcibiades*, 202

⁹²⁹ *Phaedrus* (247ff).

⁹³⁰ *EH4* (476A), 226; c.f. Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.4.16; Methodius, *Symposium* 8:2-3.

⁹³¹ *Enneads* 1.6.5; Comte (1994), 74-75.

⁹³² Nyssanus, *DVMII*.191.

⁹³³ Nygren, *III*.1.681-691; *John* 3:13.

The ‘Good seeking good for the sake of the Good,’⁹³⁴ signals a pagan regress from the distinctively Christian katagogy of *agape*.⁹³⁵ Aquinas’ summary of Dionysian *eros* partially and indirectly supports Nygren’s point that Dionysian *eros* is merited since, ‘God distributes his goodness more copiously to things closer to him in grade of dignity.’⁹³⁶ It seems correct therefore to critique the correlation of New Testament *agape* with philosophical *eros* as Dionysius uses it.⁹³⁷

Nevertheless, to interpret Dionysian anagogy wholly as a ‘human achievement,’ is also to inadequately appreciate the role of grace in the *CD*. *CH4* (181B), for example, speaks of the *χάρις* of knowledge. The anagogic ascent is conditioned by Christ’s katagogy descent, in harmony with our previous findings on Dionysius and the Cross.⁹³⁸ Golitzin concludes that the root sense of the Dionysian *ἀναγωγή* is ‘willed submission to increasing knowledge of the real and the action of enlightening grace.’⁹³⁹ Moreover, it is instructive to note, that a katagogy element is not entirely absent, even from pagan *eros*.⁹⁴⁰ Marinus attributes *φιλανθρωπία* to Asclepius, for healing Proclus’ arthritic knees and a severely ill girl.⁹⁴¹ But the framing of this story as an iteration of Mark 5 testifies to the transformation of Plotinianism by Christianity.⁹⁴² Unsurprisingly, references to *φιλανθρωπία* multiply in the Christian *CD*⁹⁴³ which are directly related to the incarnation.⁹⁴⁴ Nonetheless, Nygren is partially correct that neoplatonic *eros* remains appetitive, like Burne-Jones, ‘*King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid*’ (1884), yearning for the divine in lower creatures. For Iamblichus, theurgy is efficacious because the divine ‘seeks vehemently that which is like itself,’⁹⁴⁵ whilst, for Plotinus, anagogy is the self-reflexive process of ‘ascending to himself.’⁹⁴⁶ This Plotinian way resurfaces in Hegel and his successors for whom desire is *self-*

⁹³⁴ *DN4* (708B)

⁹³⁵ Mark 2:17; Roms. 5:8; Eph. 2:3-4; 1John 4:10.

⁹³⁶ *DP3.18*, ad.22 (2012), 98.

⁹³⁷ Nygren (1982), but not the bizarre, false dichotomy between a relational *eros* and a ‘self-enclosed, self-satisfied *agape* better suited to an indifferent One,’ constructed by Keller, 76.

⁹³⁸ e.g. Irenaeus, *AHV.1.1*. See my argument in Darley (2018), as acknowledged by Dimitrios A. Vasilakis, *Eros in Neoplatonism and Its Reception in Christian Philosophy: Exploring Love in Plotinus, Proclus and Dionysius the Areopagite* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc 2021), 9, 192.

⁹³⁹ Golitzin, 182.

⁹⁴⁰ Proclus, *In Alcibiades* 54-56 uses the term *eros pronoetikos*; Corrigan, 105, which refutes Campbell’s assertion that there is ‘an utter absence of love in the Neoplatonic system.’ Campbell, 112-113. In Plato’s *Republic* 7 the released prisoner nevertheless ‘pities’ those still in the cave (516).

⁹⁴¹ Marinus, *Proclus*, 31 (2000), 106.

⁹⁴² Titus 3:5.

⁹⁴³ *CH1* (124A); *CH4* (181B); *CH7* (208C; 209B); *EH2* (393A); *EH3* (429A; 437A; 444A, C); *EH5* (512C); *DN1* (592A); *DN2* (640C; 644C; 648D); *DN6* (856D); *DN9* (953A); *EP3* (1069B); *EP8* (1085C; 1100D). Golitzin (2013), 88, n.161. See also *EH3* (429B); *DN4* (708A). Hoffer (2008).

⁹⁴⁴ *EH3* (440C-441B), 220-221; *CH4* (181B); *EH4* (437A, 441A, 444A-C); *DN1* (592A); 2 (640C; 648D); *EP3* (1069B); 4 (1072AB). Rorem (1987), 158, n.56.

⁹⁴⁵ *DM1.15.42* in Bradshaw, 178.

⁹⁴⁶ *Enneads* I.6.9; IV.7.10.

recognition.⁹⁴⁷ Worse still, in Zizek desire mutates into Freud's death drive,⁹⁴⁸ akin to Eastern *nirvana* – the nihilistic extinguishing of the self altogether as we shall see in Chapter 3.

What contribution does Aquinas' reception bring to the question of *agape* and *eros*? First, Aquinas recognises that *agape* and *eros* are interchangeable for Dionysius,⁹⁴⁹ yet knowing virtually no Greek himself,⁹⁵⁰ his understanding is mediated *via* Saracen's Latin: *caritas*, *dilectio* and *amor*.⁹⁵¹ Nevertheless, we can trace a progression of understanding, since in Thomas' early works desire precedes love,⁹⁵² whereas (as Malloy has noticed), in his more mature works the order is reversed and love is a recognition by the *intellect* of a certain fittingness, to an apprehended good.⁹⁵³ Four kinds of love are distinguished: love, dilection, charity and friendship.

"(F)riendship," according to the Philosopher (*Ethic.* viii, 5), "is like a habit," whereas "love" and "dilection" are expressed by way of act or passion; and "charity" can be taken either way. Moreover... love has a wider signification than the others, since every dilection or charity is love, but not vice versa. Because dilection implies, in addition to love, a choice [*electionem*] made beforehand, as the very word denotes: and therefore, dilection is not in the concupiscible power, but only in the will, and only in the rational nature. Charity denotes, in addition to love, a certain perfection of love, in so far as that which is loved is held to be of great price, as the word itself implies [referring to the Latin "*carus*" (dear)].⁹⁵⁴

The key point is that *amor*, through its fundamental association with 'desire' (corresponding to *eros*) is not, therefore, entirely synonymous with *dilectio*.⁹⁵⁵ On Aquinas' mature view, God's love is more properly identified with *dilectio* than *amor* because of the element of rational choice (hence Christ's penetrating question to Peter post-resurrection).⁹⁵⁶ Thomas harmonises with Dionysius that *eros* is appetitive,⁹⁵⁷ whilst also recognising the apophatic caveat that whereas 'intellect' and 'will' can be spoken properly of God (by analogy), 'appetite' can only be spoken

⁹⁴⁷ Butler (2004), 2, 31, 131-2, 134, 137, 145, 147-150, 235-236, 240-241. See Chapter 3.

⁹⁴⁸ Rose (2014), 239.

⁹⁴⁹ *STI-II.26.3.1*.

⁹⁵⁰ Weisheipl, 163.

⁹⁵¹ *STI-II.26.3.4*; *IDNIV.9*. Nygren, 653. '(A)ccording to Dionysius love (*amor*) is a unifying force.' *Sermon 1* (2010), 26. Hilduin favours the translation *cupiditas* for *eros* in *CH15*; *DN4*; *EP10*. Théry (1932), 34.

⁹⁵² e.g. *DV23.1.8*.

⁹⁵³ *SCG1.91*; *III.26*; *IDNIV.9*; 'nothing is desired except that it is loved.' *IDN4.10* (13-28), 373; *DV26.4*; *STI.20.1*; *STI-II.28.1.1*; *I-II.67.6*; *CRom9.2.763*; Anthony T. Flood, *The Root of Friendship: Self-love and Self-governance in Aquinas* (Washington D.C.: CUAP, 2014), 5.

⁹⁵⁴ *STI-II.26.4*

⁹⁵⁵ Christopher J. Malloy, 'Thomas on the Order of Love and Desire: A Development of Doctrine,' *The Thomist* 71.1 (2007): 65-87.

⁹⁵⁶ *CJohn21.2622*; *STI-II.26.3*, sc.; Flood, 7-8. Aquinas may have in mind the Vulgate of Deut. 4:37 and 7:7-8 where *dilectio* translates the LXX *agape* and is characterised by gracious choice.

⁹⁵⁷ 'love pertains to the appetite.' *IDNIV.10* (14), 373.

metaphorically.⁹⁵⁸ Aquinas thus ‘saves’ Dionysian *eros* by glossing that ‘Dionysius is speaking of love and dilection, in so far as they are in the intellectual appetite; for thus love is the same as dilection.’ Therefore, love is ‘intellectual appetite.’⁹⁵⁹ The problem of appetite for God’s impassibility is thus resolved and a hermenutical possibility arises for God to choose to love for His own reason (since God’s intellectual choice is not conditioned by the creature’s good).⁹⁶⁰ Whilst Dionysian *eros* threatens to obscure the unilateral nature of God’s love,⁹⁶¹ this is mitigated by Aquinas’ Augustinianism.⁹⁶² Most clearly, this is true in Thomas’ treatment of grace which closely tracks Augustine’s critique of Pelagius.⁹⁶³ It can be summarised in Aquinas’ statement, ‘the act of his will is productive of good and not, like ours, caused by good.’⁹⁶⁴ This is so because God’s will is his essence, so that He wills himself.⁹⁶⁵ Moreover, on Aquinas’ view, the sin of the devil consists precisely in presuming to achieve his own perfection independently of God’s grace.⁹⁶⁶ Therefore, although Nygren could be criticised for conflating the present fallen *moral* state of human beings with our *ontological* state as image bearers of the (Good) Creator, Aquinas’ reasoning could potentially ‘save’ Nygren, since God’s decision to love, whilst not based on any intrinsic good in the beloved, is not necessarily *arbitrary*, since still explicable by ‘God is love’ (*Deus caritas est*),⁹⁶⁷ in consonance with God’s simplicity.⁹⁶⁸ Clearly, God does not love the *sin* in the sinner, but for Aquinas and Dionysius God does love the *being* of the sinner, in so far as it continues to reflect His image (albeit in a marred way).⁹⁶⁹ God hates nothing that he has made, but only what the enemy has worked in him.⁹⁷⁰ This doublesided truth is summed up in a *questio* on prayer. ‘There are two ways of looking at sinners, we may think of their human nature or we may think of their guilt which God hates.’⁹⁷¹ However, although Nygren’s concedes that Johannine Christianity, ‘creates a spiritual environment in which there would be some points of contact for the otherwise alien *eros* motif’⁹⁷² (vindicating Dionysius’ unity with John),⁹⁷³ this

⁹⁵⁸ DV23.1.

⁹⁵⁹ ST1-II.26.3.1; Porro, TA, 286-8.

⁹⁶⁰ CRom9.2.763

⁹⁶¹ DP3.18.22 (2012), 98.

⁹⁶² *Sermon 2* (2010), citing John 3:16, 41; CRom2.3.216

⁹⁶³ ST1.105.4; ST1-II.109-114; SCGIII.157; CJohn20.3.1513; CRom9.2.758.

⁹⁶⁴ DV27.1

⁹⁶⁵ SCG1.73; Porro, TA, 146.

⁹⁶⁶ DM16.3

⁹⁶⁷ 1John 5.8; EH3 (429B); Marion (1991), 47.

⁹⁶⁸ SCGIV.20.2.

⁹⁶⁹ Gen. 9:6; 1Cor. 11:7; James 3:9 (although none of these passages are quoted by Dionysius).

⁹⁷⁰ CRom5.2.402 (2020), 162.

⁹⁷¹ STII-II.83.16, trans. Tugwell (1988), 515,

⁹⁷² *ibid*, 159.

⁹⁷³ EP10 (1120A).

causes him to scold the Johannine writings (like Marcion) for not adequately matching his own schema!⁹⁷⁴

The presence of Canticles in the canon strongly reinforces Thomas' resolution,⁹⁷⁵ especially through its direct comparison of unyielding love with 'the flame of Yahweh'⁹⁷⁶ (evoking God's Name at the burning bush).⁹⁷⁷ Thomas may have dictated a commentary as a final gift to the monks at Fossanova, but regrettably only the pseudo-Thomistic commentary by Giles of Rome remains.⁹⁷⁸ Thomas places the author of Canticles amongst the 'amative theologians,' indicating its significance surpasses human love,⁹⁷⁹ but does not exclude it.⁹⁸⁰ Spiritual applications arise in Thomas' sermons,⁹⁸¹ and commentaries,⁹⁸² extending even to the surprising use of *copulatum* as a figure for the soul's union with God and the joining of the two natures in Christ.⁹⁸³ Aquinas learns of the 'unitive' power of love from Dionysius,⁹⁸⁴ from which 'it is proper to love to unite the lover with the beloved so far as possible,' hence bodily union is analogous to the incarnation.⁹⁸⁵ This understanding illuminates the Scriptural imagery of marriage for God's covenant with his people,⁹⁸⁶ pointing to an analogical relationship between *agape* and *eros*,⁹⁸⁷ which Nygren's violent sundering of nature and grace obscures.⁹⁸⁸ One consequence of this elevated understanding, is the 'natural' status of *eros* in its unfallen state, a point we will revisit in Chapter 3.

⁹⁷⁴ Nygren, 146-159.

⁹⁷⁵ *EH3* (429C)

⁹⁷⁶ Cant 8:6. The Hebrew *shalhevetyah* is a *hapex legomena* partly formed from the divine name 'Yah'. Richard Kearney, 'The Shulamite's Song of Divine Eros, Ascending and Descending' in Virginia Burrus and Catherine Keller (eds.), *Toward a Theology of Eros: Transfiguring Passion at the Limits of Discipline* (New York: FUP, 2006), 308. For Thomas' use of this text see *CJohn20.2473*; *LEJob18.5* (1989), 258; *CRom. prol.1*

⁹⁷⁷ Exodus 3:14. Kearney, 308.

⁹⁷⁸ Tugwell (1998), 248; Weisheipl, 326-327. Ignatius T. Eschmann 'A Catalogue of St. Thomas' works: Bibliographical notes' in E. Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Random House, 1956), 395.

⁹⁷⁹ *IDNIV.11* (1994), 378; *CRom prol.*

⁹⁸⁰ e.g. *LEJob18.5* (1989), 258.

⁹⁸¹ *Sermons* 2; 8; 9; 17, 3.2; 18 (2010), 36; 106; 120-121, 257, 277; *Hic Est Liber 2.*

⁹⁸² *CJohn20.2473*; 2477; 21.2582, 2603, 2608; *CRom.prol.*; 6.1.471; 16.1.1211.

⁹⁸³ *Sermon 2* (2010), 36.

⁹⁸⁴ *ST1-II.26.2.2*; *Sermon 1* (2010), 26.

⁹⁸⁵ *SCGIV.54.5*

⁹⁸⁶ Jer. 3; Ezek. 16; Hosea 1-3; Mark 2:19-20; Eph. 5:27; Rev. 19:8-9; 21:2. See also Germanus, *EHMC1.*

⁹⁸⁷ 'The text appears to cross modes of the erotic that have traditionally been considered antithetical – human and divine, finite and infinite, ascending and descending.' Kearney, 306.

⁹⁸⁸ Nygren puts it starkly, 'Luther, however, has taken seriously the fact that Christian love is by nature wholly other than human love.' 726.

9. 'Architectural' hermeneutics

'ab hac etiam inferiori ad illam superiorem anagogico more.'⁹⁸⁹ This inscription on the western doors of the church of St-Denis (one time coincidentally confused with Dionysius the Areopagite) poetically unites architecture with anagogy.⁹⁹⁰ For Abbot Suger (1081-1151), features such as pointed vaulting, twin towers and refraction of light through stained glass elevate and thus educate (*educare*) the mind. '(H)ope points heavenwards,' observes Thomas.⁹⁹¹ My exposition of Thomas' exegetical methodology as 'architectural hermeneutics' finds inspiration, firstly from *Quodl.*1.14, 'teachers of theology are a kind of architect (*architector*),'⁹⁹² because they 'direct the work' and are the 'principal builders' of the 'spiritual edifice.'⁹⁹³ Secondly, from *SCG*, 'as a wise architect, I have laid the foundation,' which frames Thomas' general 'architectonic' stratification of the arts.⁹⁹⁴ Clearly, Aquinas situates himself within the Augustinian tradition, yet also assimilates and reconfigures Origenian hermeneutics *via* Dionysius.

Thomas inherited the architectural metaphor for the famous 'four senses of Scripture'⁹⁹⁵ from Albert, who likened them to levels in a house.⁹⁹⁶ Aquinas then uses Augustine's list of historical, aetiological, analogical, and allegorical to identify each level.⁹⁹⁷ The first point to note regarding this schema is its recognition of multiple true meanings in Scripture. Scripture should not be constrained to a single meaning in such a way as to exclude other true senses, nor should its meaning be restricted to the human author's comprehension. In *DP* this guiding principle is embedded within a treatment of Genesis.⁹⁹⁸ A point of contact can be discerned with continental reception theorists Gadamer,⁹⁹⁹ Barthes¹⁰⁰⁰ or Ricoeur in its recognition of the 'excess' or 'surplus of meaning' in texts.¹⁰⁰¹ For Thomas, however, excess is not the result of infinite

⁹⁸⁹ The dull mind rises to truth through that which is material. And, in seeing this light, is resurrected from its former submersion, trans. Eco (1988), 15.

⁹⁹⁰ Annie Shaver-Crandell, *The Cambridge Introduction to Art in the Middle Ages* (CUP, 1992), 31-37; Venard (2020), 158.

⁹⁹¹ *CEph.* prol., trans. Matthew Lamb, (Albany: New York, 1966), 40.

⁹⁹² *Quodl.*7.2; Tugwell (1988), 614.

⁹⁹³ *ibid.*

⁹⁹⁴ *SCG*III.25; c.f. *LEJob*38.3 (1989), 417; *CRom*15.2.1174

⁹⁹⁵ De Lubac credits Bede in *De Schematibus et Tropis* 2.12 with 'the definitive formula of the four senses' (*ME*1.2, 664).

⁹⁹⁶ 'For this reason, the literal sense is first, and upon it are founded the three other spiritual senses... And these three stand upon the literal sense as though on a foundation.' Albert, *Summa Theologiae* 1.1.4.4, trans. Kennedy, 92, n.86. Earlier, Jerome, *Ep.*129.6; *De Benedictionibus Jacob* in Kennedy, 75, n.30.

⁹⁹⁷ *SSS* Proem.; 1.5; *ST*1.1.10.2.; Augustine *DUC*5. The same four are listed in a different order in *On Genesis: Two Books on Genesis against the Manichees; And, on the Literal Interpretation of Genesis, an Unfinished Book*, c.2 (Washington, DC: CUAP, 1990), 147.

⁹⁹⁸ *DP*4.1.

⁹⁹⁹ 'the horizon of understanding cannot be limited by what the original author had in mind,' in Willis, 153.

¹⁰⁰⁰ 'a text is not a line of words releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash.' (1977), 146.

¹⁰⁰¹ Kearney (2001), 2, 59.

undecidability on the part of the reader(s),¹⁰⁰² but uniquely for Scripture, a consequence of the infinite wisdom of the ‘Chief Author.’¹⁰⁰³ Put differently, multivocity of meaning flows from a theological ontology in which the human authors (and in a certain sense the human readers), participate in the initiatory act of the Divine Author.¹⁰⁰⁴ Nevertheless (unlike secular theory), this ontology entails that multivocity is not endlessly indeterminate but coheres within the unity of truth.

One hand-annotated extant manuscript of *Super Isaiab* provides a remarkable snapshot of Thomas’ methodology. The marginal comments cross-reference parallel Scriptures to disclose multiple layers of meanings beneath the letter.¹⁰⁰⁵ It is reinforced in the Scriptural commentaries, through the recurring phrase *vel aliter* to acknowledge various true meanings *secundum mysterium*.¹⁰⁰⁶ Hahn and Kincaid helpfully compile examples from *CRom* to persuasively demonstrate that even the grammatical sense admits more than one true meaning.¹⁰⁰⁷ Thomas’ method exposes the hidden weakness of dynamic translations, namely their tendency to reduce meaning to a single thought of the translator.¹⁰⁰⁸ Although translations can be adequate, no translation exhaustively conveys meaning because of the infinite excess, hence Jerome’s choice to translate *verbum e verbo* rather than *sensus de sensu*.¹⁰⁰⁹ Literal translations have the advantage of ‘giving the Hebrew some room’ (Luther).¹⁰¹⁰ Unhappily, Luther (and consequently many Protestants),¹⁰¹¹ diminishes this original insight by constricting each text to one literal meaning.¹⁰¹²

Although fluid, the medieval ‘four senses’ always begin with the historical.¹⁰¹³ Hence, Gregory identifies the ‘foundations’ with history, the superstructure with typology (allegory) and the paintwork with moral application.¹⁰¹⁴ This implies that the historical sense is the most solid or reliable sense. For Hugh of St Victor the ‘foundation’ is *historia*, with special regard for ‘thing,

¹⁰⁰² *pace* Jan Mukarovsky, ‘It is not the originator’s attitude toward the work but the perceiver’s which is fundamental, or “unmarked,” for understanding its intrinsic artistic intent.’ Holub (1984), 34; Kearney (2001), 47-49.

¹⁰⁰³ *DP4.1*; *ST1.1.10*; *CGal4.7*; *QuodVII.6.1.1*; 14:3; *Hic Est Liber 2*; Parris, 103.

¹⁰⁰⁴ *DP4.1*; *DGal1.19.38*; *ST1.1.10*, citing Augustine, *Confessions* 12.31.42; See also *EIP113.1*; *OCD3.27.38*. Origen earlier concluded the same, *OFP*, pref. 8, following ancient Jewish understandings, Cohen (2014), 191, 201.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Vat.Lat.9850, 34-50, *SIsaiab*. See Porro, TA, 5-6.

¹⁰⁰⁶ e.g. *CJohn20.2484*, 2487. Consider the multiple meanings of ‘dove’ in *CJohn1.14.273*.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Scott W. Hahn and John A. Kincaid, ‘The Multiple Literal Sense in Thomas Aquinas’ Commentary on *Romans* and Modern Pauline Hermeneutics’ in Levering and Dauphinais (2012), 163-182.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Rosemann (2018), 123.

¹⁰⁰⁹ *ibid*, 123; 129-131 (but see Thomas’ qualification in *CEG* prol.)

¹⁰¹⁰ *ibid*, 127.

¹⁰¹¹ Peter Enns recognises that the NT writers see a multiplicity of meaning in the OT Scriptures, but (unlike Aquinas) lacks any metaphysical grounding for this in the intention of the Divine Author. *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2015), 103-155

¹⁰¹² ‘You must always strive to arrive at one sure and simple meaning of an account.’ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 15-20* in Pelikan (1956), 27

¹⁰¹³ Kennedy, 69.

¹⁰¹⁴ *Moralia 1*; *Homily 40.1* (PL76.1302); Kennedy, 71, n.18; De Lubac, *ME* (2009), III.235.

person, deed, time and place.’ Initiating a widely imitated pedagogy,¹⁰¹⁵ Hugh recommends students immerse themselves first of all in the historical books¹⁰¹⁶ before proceeding to the Prophets and Writings.¹⁰¹⁷ This ‘letter’ is thus indispensable,¹⁰¹⁸ but his sights are always set on the deeper spiritual application as seen in Hugh’s fourfold reading of Noah’s ark,¹⁰¹⁹ Job and Esther. Therefore, the historical is not the most important sense (as it will become for Luther),¹⁰²⁰ but it is the most important place to *begin*.¹⁰²¹ History is the ‘foundation,’ but not the *telos* of hermeneutics.¹⁰²²

One of the exemplary successes of the Dominican order is its utilisation of the architectural model for missional and educational uses. Peter the Cantor treated the lecture as the foundation, disputation as the walls and preaching as the ‘roof.’¹⁰²³ Without the preliminary ‘chewing’ of disputation, preaching loses its edge and thus, Thomas recommends becoming fully grounded in the work of one teacher before itching to ‘pick the flowers’ further afield.¹⁰²⁴ He cautions ordinands to progress slowly from ‘milk’, to ‘angel’s food’ since short-cuts may engender pride, schisms or even spiritual death.¹⁰²⁵

Posthumously, Aquinas’ ‘literal’ exposition on Job has been likened to a cathedral because of its heavenward structure.¹⁰²⁶ The spiritual senses build on the ‘history’ of Job, ‘premised as a foundation for the whole debate’¹⁰²⁷ (against Maimonides’ view that Job is fiction).¹⁰²⁸ Aquinas recognises its foundational status amongst the ‘hagiographical’ books from its historical nature as well as its priority in the canon.¹⁰²⁹ Gregory’s tropological exposition¹⁰³⁰ gives way to Thomas’

¹⁰¹⁵ *Didascalicon* VI.2 (2012), 164, and *De Sac*, prol.4, cited in *ST* I.1.10. The storeys of Noah’s ark reveal a threefold schema. Beth Maynard (trans.) *Praying with Hugh of St. Victor: Meditations on Noah’s Ark* (Malvern Classics, 2013), kl.173-185; G.A. Zinn, ‘*Historia fundamentum est*: the role of history in the contemplative life according to Hugh of St. Victor’, in G.H. Shriver (ed.), *Contemporary Reflections on the Medieval Christian Tradition: Essays in Honor of Ray C. Petry* (DUP, 1974), 135-158.

¹⁰¹⁶ *ibid* VI.3 (2012), 166.

¹⁰¹⁷ *ibid*, VI.2 (2012), 164; De Lubac, *ME*, III.235.

¹⁰¹⁸ Hugh follows Augustine, *Co* II.15, 27.

¹⁰¹⁹ *De Arca Noe Morali* 12-13 in J.M. Hussey (ed.), *Hugh of St. Victor Selected Writings* (Harper and Rowe, 1962), 60-63.

¹⁰²⁰ ‘(W)e did not concern ourselves with allegories but adhered to the historical and strict meaning. Since the majority of the interpreters did not concern themselves with this but attached greater importance to Origen, Dionysius and others than to Moses himself, it is no wonder that they went astray.’ *Luther’s Works* 1 (1956), 237. Lamentably, therefore Luther rejects Lyra’s Christological reading of Psalm 89:26-27 and 2Sam. 7:14, *ibid*, 3 (1956), 27. ‘It would seem to follow that the exegete ought to focus on the literal sense instead of downgrading it as a mere foundation or outer grind of spiritual sweetness...I plead guilty to having drawn this conclusion, which goes too far.’ Smalley (1985), 265.

¹⁰²¹ *Didascalicon* VI.3 (2012), 164, echoed in *Divino Afflante*

¹⁰²² Harkins and Lière, 36.

¹⁰²³ *Verbum abbreviatum* 1 in Weisheipl, 116; Little, 184

¹⁰²⁴ *Sermon* 8 (2010), 101

¹⁰²⁵ *ST* III-II.189.1; *Sermon* 4 (2010), 52-53.

¹⁰²⁶ Malcolm D. Yaffe, ‘Interpretive Essay’ in *LEJob* (1989), 12.

¹⁰²⁷ *LEJob* 1.1 (1989), 71; prol., 69; 32.1 (366). *EP* 8 (1085B) suggests that Dionysius accepted Job as an historical person, following Origen, *HE* *exek* 4 (2010), 71.

¹⁰²⁸ Maimonides III.22 (1956), 296, c.f. Franke, 305.

¹⁰²⁹ *Hic Est Liber* 2; Ryan, 54.

‘literal’ accent, which is reflected in his choice of the *Vulgate*’s basis in the Hebrew text,¹⁰³¹ rather than Dionysius’ LXX. At the same time, as argued earlier, literal translations release the potential of multiple meanings.¹⁰³² Hence, ‘Leviathan,’ literally a large fish or ancient reptile, figuratively signifies the devil¹⁰³³ (also symbolised by the serpent),¹⁰³⁴ an interpretation shared by Origen, Jerome and Gregory.¹⁰³⁵ Other passages in Job prophetically speak of resurrection.¹⁰³⁶

The completion date of Notre Dame’s western front serendipitously coincides with Aquinas’ birth and Perotin’s death. Switching the register from architecture to music, we could say that the bass part of polyphonic music, is the literal whilst the ascending *voices* of tenor, descant and soprano are the spiritual senses.¹⁰³⁷ Thomas’ sermons follow this orchestral score by leaping from the base (bass) line of the historical/grammatical sense towards higher (alto, descant and soprano) spiritual senses for the edification of the listeners.¹⁰³⁸ Within the hierarchy of ascent, the spiritual senses are closer to Heaven, whilst grounded on earth, yet those who limit themselves to the ‘ground’ level forfeit the higher joy of the ‘hidden manna.’¹⁰³⁹ The ‘City of Letters’ remains dry without the upper and lower springs of the spiritual senses.¹⁰⁴⁰

The ‘literal’ sense is no accidental aspect of Aquinas’ thought, but rather a ‘foundational element,’¹⁰⁴¹ i.e. a ‘first principle’ of *scientia divina*. Although Persson exaggerates in asserting that ‘the literal interpretation is...incomparably the most important,’¹⁰⁴² certainly without this foundation the entire edifice would collapse. Aquinas had learned from Hugh that the literal upholds the spiritual meanings, just as the foundation bears the superstructure of a building.¹⁰⁴³ Though not extensively developed, the chief texts *SSS*, Prologue; *Quodl.VII*; *CGal4.1.7*; *DP4.1*; *ST1.1.9-10* are strategically placed. Chronologically, *SSS* is first (c.1252), which Weisheipl reconstructs as part of an inception lecture.¹⁰⁴⁴ Similarly, on Porro’s dating, *Quodl.VII* derives

¹⁰³⁰ *LEJob* (1989), prol. 69; Ryan, 54.

¹⁰³¹ Henry Wansbrough, *The Use and Abuse of the Bible* (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 54-62, but see Ryan, 17-20 on the primarily LXX based text used in *SPsalms*. *LEJob35.2* (1979), 391 acknowledges variant readings.

¹⁰³² See examples from *SPsalms* in Ryan, 17-20.

¹⁰³³ *LEJob3.8*, 41 (1989), 105, 465-468; *DM15.2.6*.

¹⁰³⁴ *LEJob26,13* (1989), 321; *STII-II.165.2*, resp. 4.

¹⁰³⁵ *PP35.20-25* (1992), 46; *OFPI.5.5* (205); *HEzēk6.4.2* (2010), 92; Jerome, *Ep22*; Gregory, *MoraliaXXXII.14*, n.20 (PL648A)

¹⁰³⁶ *LEJob13.9*; 19:25-27.

¹⁰³⁷ c.f. the three part ‘harmony’ of the soul ordered towards wisdom in Plato, *Republic* 4 (443C9- 444a2); 9 (591d). Alain Michel has called Aquinas the ‘Johann Sebastian Bach’ of literature, Oliver-Thomas Venard, *Littérature et Théologie: Une saison en enfer* (Geneva: Ad solem, 2002), 36.

¹⁰³⁸ e.g. *CJohn2*

¹⁰³⁹ *Sermon* 13 (2010), 173; Daniélou (2014), 88.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Judges 1:15

¹⁰⁴¹ Kennedy, 98.

¹⁰⁴² Persson, 55.

¹⁰⁴³ *Didascalicon* VI.4 (2012), 168-169.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Weisheipl, 49-50.

from an inception sermon of 1256¹⁰⁴⁵ which suggests a context against the neo-Montanist hermeneutics¹⁰⁴⁶ of Joachim de Fiore.¹⁰⁴⁷ The republication of Joachim's heretical works in Paris in 1255 had revived their influence,¹⁰⁴⁸ which elucidates Thomas' insistence that the literal sense alone is sufficient to establish matters of doctrine.¹⁰⁴⁹ The threat to orthodoxy from Joachim and also the Cathars ('Manichees' of *DSS*) brought urgency to such a principle. Bringing sharper clarity to Dionysius' axiom that the One 'alone could give an authoritative account of what it really is,'¹⁰⁵⁰ Aquinas grants the literal a kind of juridical function, 'nothing false can underlie the literal sense of Scripture.'¹⁰⁵¹ Augustine had used allegory 'for edification, rather than for proof'¹⁰⁵² and Aquinas adopts his principle: 'there is nothing transmitted obscurely in some place in Sacred Scripture which is not clearly expressed in some other place.'¹⁰⁵³ Smalley suggests that Langton¹⁰⁵⁴ found Augustine inconsistent on this point,¹⁰⁵⁵ but Aquinas absolutises Augustine's 'virtually nothing'¹⁰⁵⁶ (which allowed room for other meanings approved by the Church).¹⁰⁵⁷ Aquinas continues: 'a spiritual exposition should always have support from some literal exposition of Sacred Scripture, and so avoid all occasion of error.'¹⁰⁵⁸ As an unintended consequence, Aquinas' tightening of Augustine's rule adds weight to the cause of later reformers in a relative weakening of Church authority. We might describe this as the normative or regulatory role of the literal sense.¹⁰⁵⁹ Thomas arguably has certain 'blind spots' when applying this principle,¹⁰⁶⁰ but the principle he imperfectly follows remains exemplary (see chapter 4).

We must now clarify what constitutes the literal sense. The first point to note is that Aquinas' conception again follows Augustine in his retrieval of history. The events of salvation-history such as the exodus¹⁰⁶¹ and the life of Christ are the foundation and presupposition of

¹⁰⁴⁵ Porro, TA, 87.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Grant (1957), 73-75.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Edward P. Cheyney, *The Rise of Modern Europe: The Dawn of a New Era 1250-1453* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 202-204; Henry Bett, *Joachim of Flora* (Methuen and Co, 1931), 37; Weisheipl, 84-85

¹⁰⁴⁸ Porro, TA, 56.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Kennedy, 110-112, citing Mandonet and Weishapl. *Quod*VII.6.1.4; *DP*4.1 (2012), 101; *SSS* proem. 5.

¹⁰⁵⁰ *DN*1 (588B); c.f. John of Damascus, *DFO*2.

¹⁰⁵¹ *ST*I.1.10.

¹⁰⁵² Beryl Smalley, 'Stephen Langton and the Four Senses of Scripture,' *Speculum* 6.1 (1931): 76.

¹⁰⁵³ *Quod*VII.14.3, trans. Kennedy, 256; c.f. *ST*I.1.10.

¹⁰⁵⁴ *ibid*, 76

¹⁰⁵⁵ *ibid*, 65-68, 73-76.

¹⁰⁵⁶ *OCD*2.6.8, trans. Green (2008), 33. For examples see 3.26.37-38.

¹⁰⁵⁷ *DDQ*83; 59.4; *DGAL*7.1.1; *Contra epistulam Manichaei*5.6; *Confessions*7.7; *DUC*17.

¹⁰⁵⁸ *Quod*VII.14.3, trans. Kennedy, 256.

¹⁰⁵⁹ The normativity of the literal sense was also a feature of the Antiochene school (392-428). Smalley (1952), 14-15; De Lubac, *Scripture*, 47f.; Vanhoozer, 115; Kennedy, 25-30.

¹⁰⁶⁰ e.g. on the status and veneration of Mary *ST*III.27.1-6; *Sermon* 17 (2010), 242-258; *CJohn*2.1.344; *CT*224-225; *ST*III.28. 2-3; *Sermon* 11 (2010), 155; *ST*II-II.83.9; III.25.5. *Expositio Solutiones Angelicae*; *Sermons* 10;17 (2010), 129, n.2; 242-258 or supremacy of the Bishop of Rome.

¹⁰⁶¹ *LEJob*3:1-3 (1989), 102; *ST*I-II.102.2

consequent theological reflection and mysticism.¹⁰⁶² Thomas is impressed by Augustine's demarcation of the cyclical nature of pagan philosophy from the 'real history' in the Christian Scriptures¹⁰⁶³ (though we will see later a partial retrieval of cyclical recurrence within sacramental typology – history can indeed non-identically repeat itself). Augustine owes a debt to Jewish scholars such as Josephus, who in his polemic against 'unreliable' Greek histories, offered the Jewish *Tanak* as a true 'history of the events of their times.'¹⁰⁶⁴ A prime example is Augustine's treatment of Genesis 2-3. Spiritual senses 'may be lawfully understood' by Paradise, 'provided that the history of the true and local one be as firmly believed.'¹⁰⁶⁵ This principle however is not slavishly followed, as there are cases where he dismisses the 'literal' meaning of passages as untenable.¹⁰⁶⁶

As already intimated, the Augustinian heritage in Hugh of St Victor's *Didascalicon*, was destined to shape future European pedagogy.¹⁰⁶⁷ But now another aspect of the 'literal sense' comes to the fore. Hugh identifies a 'Science of letters' within the 'Logical Arts'¹⁰⁶⁸ and gives a detailed taxonomy of 'grammar'¹⁰⁶⁹ which develops the 'grammatical' sense of the classical period, i.e. a signification *through words or 'letters'*.¹⁰⁷⁰ This semantic association is present in the translation from Greek *grammateus* to Latin *litteratus*.¹⁰⁷¹ Attention to literary and grammatical signification was assisted by the early Dominicans who extended Langton's chapter division of the Bible¹⁰⁷² into verses, labelled a – g¹⁰⁷³ and developed an early concordance.¹⁰⁷⁴ Aquinas' residence, the University of Paris, produced its own distinctive 'Paris Bibles.'¹⁰⁷⁵ The primary focus of *letters* however, remains the narration of events, hence the meaning of the 'literal' is largely coextensive with 'historical.' In *De Sacramentis*, 'History is the narration of events, which is contained in the

¹⁰⁶² 'Aquinas brings the entire economy of salvation into the contemplation that occurs in the dark cloud! To my knowledge, no interpreter of Dionysius before Thomas had ever done that.' Blankenhorn (2016) 1128.

¹⁰⁶³ Augustine, *CoG*12.17; 15.1; 18.8; *Enchiridion*118; *CFaustum*12.8; *DDQ*83.58; Kennedy (1986), 40-41. *SCGIV*.82.11; although Hankey notes that Aquinas may be relying on secondary sources for Augustine, e.g. Lombard's *Sentences*. See 'Reading Augustine through Dionysius: Aquinas' Correction of One Platonism by Another' in Dauphinais, David and Levering (eds.), *Aquinas the Augustinian* (Washington D.C.: CUAP, 2007), 245-246.

¹⁰⁶⁴ *Against Apion* 1.8.38-41.

¹⁰⁶⁵ *CoG*II.13.21,18; c.f. *DGAL*11, 38,51.

¹⁰⁶⁶ *OCD*3.22.32; 3.29.41; *DGAL*2.1.4; *De Spiritu et Littera*6.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Ruben Martello, 'St. Bonaventure as a Disciple of Hugh of St. Victor: The Influence of the *Didascalicon* on the "Reduction of the Arts to Theology"' in *Il Santo* LVIII. 2018: 1-16.

¹⁰⁶⁸ *Didascalicon* II.28 (2012), 114.

¹⁰⁶⁹ *ibid*, II.29 (2012), 114

¹⁰⁷⁰ Law (2003), 101.

¹⁰⁷¹ e.g. in 1Chron 27:32 LXX and Clementine Latin.

¹⁰⁷² Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1964), 224; Mary A. Rouse and Richard H. Rouse in Ryan, 30.

¹⁰⁷³ H.A.G. Houghton, *The Latin New Testament: A Guide to its Early History, Texts and Manuscripts* (OUP, 2018), 108, e.g. *DV*2.7.4. trans. Mulligan, Vol.1 (Indianapolis: Hacket Publishing Company, 1994), n.3, 95, 444.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Houghton, 108; Hoogland, 12, n.18; Ryan, 6; Little, 191.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Houghton, 105-106. A 'pocket' version is displayed in the Wren Library of Lincoln Cathedral. Ref No. MS131, *Biblia Latina; De Nominibus Hebraicis*.

first meaning of the letter.¹⁰⁷⁶ Aquinas' *Summa* echoes Hugh's: 'that first signification whereby words signify things belongs to the first sense, the historical or literal.'¹⁰⁷⁷

Although Hugh of St Victor falls short of the full stature of an *auctoritate*,¹⁰⁷⁸ and Aquinas occasionally disagrees with him,¹⁰⁷⁹ Hugh is respectfully cited 125 times as a *magister*.¹⁰⁸⁰ Hugh's subalternation of the sciences as a handmaid to theology was a major inspiration to Bonaventure and the emerging university.¹⁰⁸¹ With good reason, Harnack credits Hugh as, 'the most influential theologian of the twelfth century.'¹⁰⁸² Hugh's commentary on *CH*,¹⁰⁸³ familiar to Aquinas through Albert¹⁰⁸⁴ uniquely bridges eastern and western Christianity¹⁰⁸⁵ and fuses Dionysian hierarchy with a parallel commitment to history which paves the way for Thomas' reception. Whilst Augustine had treated the creation week as symbolic of created distinctions known to the angels,¹⁰⁸⁶ Hugh insisted on definite time periods, a material tree of life¹⁰⁸⁷ and a geometric Noah's ark.¹⁰⁸⁸ Surprising by modern standards, this commitment to 'bodily' history arises from Hugh's commitment to the restoration of humanity *in time*¹⁰⁸⁹ by the incarnation of the Eternal Word.¹⁰⁹⁰ The framework for this restoration is laid out on eight 'ordered courses' of Trinity, Creation, Fall, Natural Law, Written Law, Incarnation, Sacraments of the New Testament and Resurrection.¹⁰⁹¹ In continuity, Aquinas' *Summa* is structured around the pivotal events of Creation, Law and the life of Christ¹⁰⁹² as seen in the introduction to *STIII*.¹⁰⁹³ We have previously commented on Hugh's influence regarding the canon, but can here add this vital contribution in regard to the literal sense,¹⁰⁹⁴ one neglected in otherwise excellent treatments of the subject.¹⁰⁹⁵

¹⁰⁷⁶ *DeSac* (2007), proL., 2, 4.

¹⁰⁷⁷ *STI*.1.10.

¹⁰⁷⁸ *STII*-II.5.1.1; Chenu (1964), 136-7.

¹⁰⁷⁹ e.g. *STIII*.45.2; 50.4; 65.1.8; 66.1.2; 81.3

¹⁰⁸⁰ Roberto Busa *et al.*, *Index Thomisticus* (129 times in 125 cases).

¹⁰⁸¹ Martello (2018), 1-16.

¹⁰⁸² Hugh, *DeSac* (2007), ix.

¹⁰⁸³ *Commentaria in Hierarchum Coelestem S. Dionysii Areopagitae* (PL175:923-1154); Dominici Poirel, *Hugonis de Sancto Victore Super ierarchiam Dionisii* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015).

¹⁰⁸⁴ Chenu (1964), 230, n.56; *DSC1*, sc, iv; *DV*13.3, sc.6; 22.11.5.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Poirel, *Hugonis*, 22.

¹⁰⁸⁶ *DGALLI*.9; *DP*3.10.6.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Hugh of St. Victor (2013), kl.223.

¹⁰⁸⁸ *De Arca Noe Morali* 12-13 in Hussey (1962), 60-63; Lesleigh Cushing Stahlberg, 'Refuse, Realism, Retelling: Literal and Literary reconstructions of Noah's Ark' in Benedix (2009), 23-44.

¹⁰⁸⁹ *De Scripturis et Scriptoribus Sacris* in Zinn, 155.

¹⁰⁹⁰ *DeSac*, ProL.2 (2007), 3. c.f. *DN1* (589B-C).

¹⁰⁹¹ *Didascalicon* VI.4 (2012), 169.

¹⁰⁹² Harkins and Lière, 57; Te Velde (2009), 9-18; Baglow (2004).

¹⁰⁹³ Ryan discerns further traces of Hugh's pedagogy in the structure of *SPsalmos* 33-36.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Kennedy, 79-85.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Persson, op cit.; Rowan Williams, 'The Literal Sense of Scripture,' *Modern Theology* 7.2: 121-134.

In his famous dispute with Smalley, De Lubac rejected any novelty in Hugh's emphasis on the literal sense since 'one can speak of a historicity permeating the whole "allegorical" tradition.'¹⁰⁹⁶ We agree that Origen explicitly cautions against an anti-historical misconstrual of his position,¹⁰⁹⁷ since, '(t)he passages which are historically true are far more numerous than those interwoven with them which have merely a spiritual sense.'¹⁰⁹⁸ As argued earlier, Origen's chief concern was to avoid the Marcionite error of presuming that since the text has an historical meaning, therefore it is obsolete for Christians today.¹⁰⁹⁹ The sequestering of the literal sense remains a perennial temptation for academia, but as Wright astutely observes: '...the more we look at history, the more we realize that history cannot exist by itself.'¹¹⁰⁰ As Dionysius tells us there is no such thing as a 'bare historical domain.'¹¹⁰¹ Raith therefore compellingly concludes that a participatory ontology is the condition of possibility for any history at all.¹¹⁰² Paradoxically, then, it is Origen's very allegorisation (arising from his metaphysics) which 'saves' the literal sense.¹¹⁰³ Similarly, although the *CD* may display a 'préponderance de l'éternel sur l'historique',¹¹⁰⁴ this can be overstated, for example by Luscombe, 'Denys' vision of hierarchy is virtually a-historical.'¹¹⁰⁵ Historical truth is presupposed and intertwined with the metaphysical as we have seen under Christology.¹¹⁰⁶ The historical dealings of God are referenced in *CH*¹¹⁰⁷ and moral lessons drawn from 'the ἱστορίαι of the Hebrews'¹¹⁰⁸ and supremely, the divine symbol of the eucharist presupposes the historical events of the incarnation, the life, passion and death of Jesus of Nazareth, explicitly acknowledged in *EH*. The events of the New Testament are historical fulfilments of the 'truth by way of images' concealed in the Old.¹¹⁰⁹

Nonetheless, De Lubac's flattening of the differences between Origen and Hugh, obscures the fact that the historical sense had been evacuated from those texts termed 'bodiless'¹¹¹⁰ or

¹⁰⁹⁶ *ibid*, 267, 212f.

¹⁰⁹⁷ *OFPIV.19*; *HEzek1* (2010), 31.

¹⁰⁹⁸ *OFPIV.3.4* in Stevenson (1957), 221 and *HGen.7.2*; Smalley (1952), 3; Young (1997), 82.

¹⁰⁹⁹ *OFPIV.2.2*; *HNum.XXVII.2* in Payne, 248.

¹¹⁰⁰ N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London, SPCK, 1992), 1.81.

¹¹⁰¹ *EP9* (1108C), 284; c.f. *OFPIV.2.2*.

¹¹⁰² Raith, 66-87. See also Graham Stanton, 'Presuppositions in New Testament Criticism' in I.H. Marshall (ed.), *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods* (Carlisle: The Paternoster Press, 1979), 60-71.

¹¹⁰³ Barrett (2013), 51-63.

¹¹⁰⁴ Gandillac in Golitzin, 199, c.f. the 'secondary things' of *EH3*(429B), 213; *EP9* (1108C), 284.

¹¹⁰⁵ 'The Commentary of Hugh of Saint-Victor on the Celestial Hierarchy' in Boiadjiev, Kapriev, Speer (eds.), *Die Dionysius-Rezeption im Mittelalter* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 167; c.f. Balthasar (1995), II.176, n.104.

¹¹⁰⁶ *EH1* (377A), 199.

¹¹⁰⁷ *CH8* (240D-241B).

¹¹⁰⁸ *EP8* (1084B); c.f. *EP9* (1108C), c.f. 'the words of the *history* in allegorical senses' Gregory, *Moralia* 1.1.1.

¹¹⁰⁹ *EH3* (432B), 214.

¹¹¹⁰ 'we must not ignore the fact that there are certain passages in Scripture in which what we have called the body, that is a logically coherent narrative meaning (*historia*) is not always to be found... And there are places where only what we have called the soul and the spirit may be understood.' *OFPIV.2.5* in Payne (1979), 183; *HNum* 11.1; *CCant.* (1956), Prol.4.21, 53.

‘total allegory.’¹¹¹¹ These include Genesis 1-3,¹¹¹² parts of Ezekiel, certain prophecies regarding leaders of nations, e.g. Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 26; 29¹¹¹³ and especially the ‘perfect’ and ‘bodiless’ Canticles (discussed previously in our section on anagogy).¹¹¹⁴ Although Origen categorises Canticles as both ‘drama’ and ‘wedding song’ (*epithalamium*),¹¹¹⁵ which *prima facie* implies an historical foundation, this is misleading, since, for Origen, the song never had a *sitz im leben* in an earthly love affair. Origen concedes an ‘historical sense’ of sorts in the ‘elements in the drama,’¹¹¹⁶ but the real historical setting for the book is the prophetic, rather than the romantic experience of the human author.¹¹¹⁷ This suggests that what Origen means by ‘historical’ is not entirely coterminous with its modern sense, since it encompasses (albeit rarely) events which did not happen in space and time. We can thus distinguish a ‘literal’ meaning from a ‘bodily’ one in Origen.¹¹¹⁸ The Song illustrates Origen’s aforementioned two-tiered spiritual life. The ‘dark’ bride signifies the Gentile church,¹¹¹⁹ lovingly embraced by the ‘kiss’ of Christ’s teachings.¹¹²⁰ ‘Simple’ Christians are unable to receive these deeper teachings because they are naively bound up with ‘sensible exegesis,’¹¹²¹ but those with doves’ eyes understand the true spiritual sense.¹¹²² Later, in his commentary, Origen anticipates Dionysius by cautioning against seduction by ‘an interpretation that has to do with the flesh and the passions.’¹¹²³ Even the love of husbands for wives is ‘dishonourable’ compared to the love of Christ for the Church.¹¹²⁴ Not all believers will have the spiritual maturity to access the text on its ‘elevated’ level.¹¹²⁵ Dionysius will chide the unenlightened for reading Canticles as if it were pornography.¹¹²⁶ Carnal readers will imagine that the Divine Scriptures are ‘urging and egging him on to the fleshly lust!,’¹¹²⁷ yet pure ‘lovers of holiness’ will discover a spiritual eroticism, ‘the beauty hidden within these images.’¹¹²⁸ Dionysius

¹¹¹¹J. Christopher King, 45.

¹¹¹² One of Jerome’s eight points of condemnation of Origen was, ‘he overthrows all that is contained in the history of Paradise by his figurative interpretation.’ *Adv. Ioann. Hier. 7* in Stevenson (1966), 174. *OFPIV.3.1* is the probable reference.

¹¹¹³ *OFPIV.3.9*.

¹¹¹⁴ J. King, 28; *OFPIV.3.4*.

¹¹¹⁵ *CCant.* (1956), *First Homily*, 268. Lawson’s n.12 explains that epithalamia were characteristic of classical poets (361-362).

¹¹¹⁶ *CCantII.4.119*.

¹¹¹⁷ *CCant*, prol.4:3-4, 47; prol.4.21. 53; King (2005), 43.

¹¹¹⁸ Barrett, 53; E. Dively Lauro, *The Soul and Spirit of Scripture within Origen’s Exegesis* (Boston: Brill, 2005), 52-8.

¹¹¹⁹ *CCantII.1*, 96-101.

¹¹²⁰ *ibid.*, 1.1, 58-62; c.f. the ‘sacred marriages’ in Proclus, *IPI* (775), 139.

¹¹²¹ *OFPIV.2.1*

¹¹²² *CCantIII.1* (1956), 170.

¹¹²³ *CCantIII.9* (1956), 200 and prol.2 (1956) 30.

¹¹²⁴ *Homily 2* (1956), 284.

¹¹²⁵ *HEzek11* (2010), 140-1.

¹¹²⁶ *EP9* (1105B), 282.

¹¹²⁷ *CCant.* prol.(1956), 22.

¹¹²⁸ *EP9* (1105C), 282-283. Nyssanus’s homilies on Canticles (e.g. 5 (864C)) deploy the Origenian ἀναγωγή for the soul’s ascent to God. See Nygren, 433, n.6.

is therefore at one with Origen's 'total allegory' in his exclusively prophetic reading of Canticles:¹¹²⁹ As we shall see further in Chapter 4, this asexual emphasis resonates with a monastic context for the *CD*.

For these reasons therefore, De Lubac overstates the case in asserting, 'there is no more "historical" thought than Origen's'.¹¹³⁰ Origen's own words qualify such an assessment: 'the Scripture wove into the historical narrative what did not take place – at some points what cannot take place, and at others what can take place but did not.'¹¹³¹ The upshot is that Scripture takes on more of a poetic intention than a strictly historical one, in that poetry deals with universals and is therefore, in Aristotle's words, 'more philosophic and of graver import than history.'¹¹³² History becomes devalued relative to poetry and philosophy. In defence of Smalley, then, we argue that the Victorines add an important *corrective* to the Origenian tradition, a transformation inherited by Aquinas. On the other hand, we will see in Aquinas that history is already 'poetic' in one sense, through its participation in a metaphysically structured cosmos (see Chapter 4 on *theopoesis*).

Regarding Genesis, Aquinas takes a *via media* between Origen and Hugh. He accepts 'without prejudice to the spiritual sense'¹¹³³ the historicity of creation, Adam, the Fall¹¹³⁴ and the Flood,¹¹³⁵ yet on the other hand (in consonance with Origen and Dionysius), admits a Divine accommodation of language, including the use of corporeal things to convey incorporeal ideas. This excludes the requirement for Hugh's material tree.¹¹³⁶

Where does Dionysius sit in regard to this 'architectural hermeneutics'? We have observed that Aquinas never directly criticises the highly esteemed Dionysius, but rather seeks to frame him 'correctly'.¹¹³⁷ One opportunity for such framing occurs from Dionysius' mini-treatise on interpretation, *Epistle to Titus*. Here, Dionysius distinguishes a 'philosophic' use of scripture for the purposes of 'demonstration' from an 'ineffable and mysterious' use, involving symbols and sacraments.¹¹³⁸ From this distinction Aquinas infers that Dionysius only neglects the literal sense

¹¹²⁹ *CCant.* prol., 22; King, 28ff, 40.

¹¹³⁰ De Lubac, *Scripture* (2000), 170, citing *OFPII.6*. Origen speaks of the *ordo historiae* in *In Num.* h.3, n.3; h5, n1; h9, n.5; *OFPI.4.2*, n.5 and 9.

¹¹³¹ *OFPIV.2.9* in Grant (1957), 95; *CJohn10:5*.

¹¹³² *Poetics* 9 (1451B), trans. Bywater in R.M. Hutchins (ed.), *The Works of Aristotle* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Benton, 1984), 686; Grant (1957), 95-96; Dahan, 56, 64f

¹¹³³ *STII-II.164.2*, resp.5.

¹¹³⁴ *STII-II.164.2*; *CT186-240*; *LEJob10:1*; *CJohn1.7*; *CRom5.3.410* (2020), 166; 5.4.424, 172; *DV10.9*, sc.6 cites *De unione corporis et spiritus* (PL177:292) regarding the loss of intelligence at the Fall. Belief in an historical Adam is reaffirmed in *Humani Generis* 37-39, c.f. Luke 3:38; Tobit 8:8; Job 31.33; Hos 6.7; Jude 14.

¹¹³⁵ *LEJob26.5*; *DV12.9*, sc; *CAPII.12.4* (2007), 142. One of his sources is *Historia de Noe. Sermon* 11 in Hoogland (2010), 139, n.6.

¹¹³⁶ *ST1.66.1.1*, 3; *ST1.68.3*; *ST1.69.2.3*; *ST1.70.2*; *ST1.71.1.3*; *ST1.74.1.2*.

¹¹³⁷ e.g. *ST1.50.3.4*.

¹¹³⁸ *EP9* (1105D-1108A), 283.

because he is not intending to make a demonstrative argument.¹¹³⁹ The ‘foundation’ is already assumed and therefore the architect Dionysius is entitled to build higher in his *corpus*. Thomas’ solution is creditworthy, since there are times, as we have seen, when Dionysius clearly presupposes an historical sense underpinning the spiritual senses¹¹⁴⁰ and implies a demonstrative use of Scripture for proving the doctrine of the Trinity, which is superfluous for his current readers.¹¹⁴¹ Indeed, the more we accept a continuity between Dionysius and Origen, the more force this defence has. It is not special pleading, because the very structure of *IDN* and even *ST* presupposes that Dionysius is writing *sacra doctrina* and not natural theology.¹¹⁴²

A *prima facie* objection to the normativity of the literal sense, however, arises from Dionysius’ ridiculing of those who suppose that ‘the heavens beyond really are filled with bands of lions and horses, that the divine praises are, in effect, great moos, that flocks of birds take wing there or that there are other kinds of creatures all about or even more dishonourable material things.’¹¹⁴³ Just as Severus criticised popular anthropomorphising of angels,¹¹⁴⁴ ‘Dionysius’ (who may plausibly be Severus), provides a more subtle reading of animal descriptions as natures and duties.¹¹⁴⁵

But, a contradiction with Aquinas is merely apparent, because, whereas the modern meaning of ‘literal’ is commonly reserved for the ‘non-figurative,’ Aquinas’ ‘literal’ sense encompasses metaphor and poetry, on the grounds that figurative and non-figurative are united by authorial intention. They both refer to something in the author’s mind¹¹⁴⁶ (again refuting a non-realist reception): ‘When Scripture speaks of the arm of God, the literal sense is not that he has a physical limb, but that he (literally) has what it signifies, namely the power of doing and making.’¹¹⁴⁷ Correctly understood, Aquinas does not need to compromise his regulative literal principle in order to accommodate Dionysius.¹¹⁴⁸ Dionysius’ reading falls under the definition of the ‘literal’ sense as ‘that which is primarily *intended* by the words, whether they are used properly or figuratively.’¹¹⁴⁹ Hence (as we shall see in Chapter 4), Aquinas wholly agrees with Dionysius that corporeal descriptions of angels are a ‘concession to the nature of our mind.’¹¹⁵⁰ He accuses

¹¹³⁹ *Quodl.*XI.6.1.4; *SSS*, proem., 5 and *DV*22.11.8, supported by a reference from Lombard (*III.Sent*11.2). See also *IVCAM*1.1(471); *In 1Cael.* 1.2; Rousselot (1908), 156; Kharlamov, 145.

¹¹⁴⁰ *CH*1 (121C-D), 146.

¹¹⁴¹ *DN*2 (640A)

¹¹⁴² *IDN*, *proem.*; Blankenhorn, 320-323.

¹¹⁴³ *CH*2 (137D).

¹¹⁴⁴ Glenn Peers, *Subtle Bodies: Representing Angels in Byzantium* (Berkeley, LA: University of California Press, 2002), 77-78, citing Severus, *Les Homiliae Cathedrales*, 76-78.

¹¹⁴⁵ *CH*15.8 (336-337B). See also Germanus, *EHMC*, 32, 41

¹¹⁴⁶ *CGal*4.7; *Quod*II.6.2.

¹¹⁴⁷ *ST*1.1.10; *Sermon* 16 in Hoogland, 2.4.3,240.

¹¹⁴⁸ *DV*9.2.2 on Isaiah 6, and Hankey’s discussion in de Andia, 405-436.

¹¹⁴⁹ *LEJob*1.6 (1989), 76.

¹¹⁵⁰ *CH*2 (137B), 48.

‘modern theologians’ of the ancient philosophers’ error that only spatial beings really exist.¹¹⁵¹ Hence Aquinas rejects a corporeal Satan.¹¹⁵² *CH13* interprets Job 1.6¹¹⁵³ so that only angels of the highest rank ‘stand in the presence of God,’ according to the strict laws of hierarchy.¹¹⁵⁴ Therefore, spiritual truths are being expressed under the figure of corporeal things.

Here we can see that Aquinas’ ‘literal’ sense corresponds to Hugh’s ‘grammatical’ sense.¹¹⁵⁵ Hence, the ‘literal’ meaning of Job is the Chief Author’s message that ‘human affairs are ruled by providence.’¹¹⁵⁶ On this definition modern readings of a ‘multiple literal sense’ are justified,¹¹⁵⁷ since the term can refer globally to the entire class of senses, whether historical, metaphorical or allegorical, as in *DP4.1* (resp): ‘it is part of the dignity of Holy Writ that under the one literal sense many others are contained.’ But if we grant this expansive definition of ‘literal’ as authorial intention, could it not be objected that Origen’s ‘total allegories’ are also ‘saved’?¹¹⁵⁸ In fact, we have already granted this point in the case of Canticles, if understood as prophetic intention. Aquinas even uses one of Origen’s examples, namely Ezekiel 1 to illustrate the correlation of the spiritual intention with the ‘literal’ sense.¹¹⁵⁹ It could be fairly objected, therefore, in this case that the term ‘literal’ has mutated from a sub-category of the *sensus plenior* as in *ST1.1.10*, into full identity with the *sensus plenior*. Whilst excluding the arbitrary *eisegesis* of Joachim de Fiore or postmoderns, it nevertheless permits the subcategories of allegorical, moral and eschatological under the super-category of ‘what the author intended,’ if the ‘Chief Author’ is God.¹¹⁶⁰ Indeed, this is why Wyclif (unlike Luther) can appeal to *ST* to justify his position that the one literal sense encompasses various levels of meaning.¹¹⁶¹

This point reinforces our argument that Aquinas’ reception of the *CD* displays an exemplary Christology. Since Christ is the Exemplar of all things, it is fitting that Aquinas’ exegetical method should reflect Christ’s centrality to revelation, ‘the Son of God is deservedly called the subject matter of Holy Scriptures.’¹¹⁶² Indeed, He is at once its Author, Subject and

¹¹⁵¹ *DP3.19* (2012), 98.

¹¹⁵² *LEJob1.6* (1989), 76.

¹¹⁵³ *CH13* in *LEJob1.6* (1989), 77; *ST1.12.2*, sc; a.4.

¹¹⁵⁴ *DV9.2*

¹¹⁵⁵ *De Scripturis* 5 (PL175.14d); *ST1.1.10*, sc; *DP4*, 1 (2012), 101.

¹¹⁵⁶ *LEJob*, prol. 69.

¹¹⁵⁷ Hahn and Kincaid (2012), 163-183.

¹¹⁵⁸ c.f. the convergence with Hamilton (2006), 331-345, who argues that Canticles is *literally* Messianic.

¹¹⁵⁹ *LEJob1.6* (1989), 76.

¹¹⁶⁰ *DP4.1*.

¹¹⁶¹ *De Veritate Sacrae Scripturae*1: ed. Rudolph Beddiesieg (London: Trubner and Co, 1907), c.4, 73 citing *ST1.1.10.3* and *On the Truth of Holy Scripture*, trans. Levy (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 2001), 73, c.f. *DP4.1*; Frassetto, *Heretic Lives: Medieval Heresy from Bogomil and the Cathars to Wyclif and Huss* (Profile Books, 2007), 169. See also 1.4.81, 82; 1.3.48; 63.

¹¹⁶² *CRom1.2.29*.

Interpreter. Christ opens the scrolls and explains (*diabermeneuen*) them.¹¹⁶³ In the light of the Gospel, Aquinas correctly perceives that the Hebrew Scriptures reveal in a concealed way, *what God (the Divine Author) intended*, as the means of salvation.¹¹⁶⁴ In sharp contrast with naturalistic methodology, mainstream patristic/medieval exegesis regards the Christological sense of Scripture as the original Authorial intention.¹¹⁶⁵ Consequently, *ignoratio scripturarum est ignoratio Christi*.¹¹⁶⁶ This principle is revealed in the way NT authors correlate OT figures with their Christological fulfilment. Thomas thus applies John's purpose to the entire Scriptures, 'these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.'¹¹⁶⁷ On this hermeneutic, even the allegorical sense is not arbitrary or nominal (*contra* Joachim de Fiore or postmoderns).¹¹⁶⁸ It is 'saved' through its proper referent, which, is principally Christ and by extension his body, the Church.¹¹⁶⁹

Isaiah chiefly foretells the mystery of the Incarnation, which is why he is read during the time of Advent by the Church, and Jeremiah the mystery of the Passion, hence he is read in Passiontide, and Ezekiel the mystery of the Resurrection, hence his book finishes with the raising of the bones and the repair of the temple.¹¹⁷⁰

Thomas' Christological hermeneutic is especially luminous in his late *SPsalms*. He regards its portrayal of Christ as so vivid that 'it would almost appear to be a gospel, and not a prophecy.'¹¹⁷¹ Therefore (*pace* Judaism), the prophetic sense legitimately falls within the remit of the literal sense, not only through Divine intention, but also because the human authors intended to prophesy (albeit beyond their comprehension), 'all the saints always, from the beginning of the world, longed for and desired the coming of the Saviour.'¹¹⁷² *SPsalms* provides Thomas with a clue when the historical application runs out in respect of earthly kings (Psalms 17, 29 or 71) leaving a prophetic 'surplus' which must 'signify something else beyond history alone.'¹¹⁷³ *SPsalms* become anagogic, psalms *of ascent*. They fall under the canonical category of 'The Prophets.'¹¹⁷⁴

¹¹⁶³ Rev. 5:5; Luke 24:27.

¹¹⁶⁴ Augustine *DUC*3.9; *CFaustum*4.2; *DGAL*5.8.23; *OCD*3.22.32; *EIP*47.1; *CoG*16.2, c.f. 2Cor. 3:14-16.

¹¹⁶⁵ Thomas O'Loughlin, 'Christ and the Scriptures: the chasm between modern and pre-modern exegesis,' *The Month* (1998): 477. On the retrieval of a Christological hermeneutic in Ratzinger, see Ramage (2013), 3-8.

¹¹⁶⁶ Jerome, *In Isaiam*, prol. (PL24), 17A

¹¹⁶⁷ *CJohn*20.6.2568.

¹¹⁶⁸ Weishapl (1975), 106.

¹¹⁶⁹ *SPsalms* 17.1; 27:7; *CRom*15.1.1148; Ryan, 53.

¹¹⁷⁰ *Hic est Liber* 2.

¹¹⁷¹ *SPsalms*, prol.; echoing Jerome's conviction that Isaiah 'seems to produce not prophecy but gospel.' Jerome, *Ep.*53; Weisheipl, 305.

¹¹⁷² *Sermon* 1 (2010), 23, e.g. *SPsalms* 29; c.f. 1Peter 1:10-12

¹¹⁷³ *SPsalms*, prol.; Ryan, 16, 21; Dahan, 54.

¹¹⁷⁴ *CRom*3.2.292 (2020), 120.

Within the Thomistic tradition Ratzinger thus rightly describes their subject as ‘the Real David,’ who is simultaneously their principal Author: ‘He thus appears as the one who leads and inspires the prayer of Israel, who sums up all Israel’s sufferings and hopes, carries them within himself and expresses them in prayer.’¹¹⁷⁵

Ratzinger (and Aquinas) are following Augustine’s cue that, Christ himself speaks in Psalms - either as the Head or as His Body.¹¹⁷⁶ Conservative exegetes could fruitfully benefit from this lesson and thus avoid the self-deception that naturalistic methodology will yield more than naturalistic outcomes.¹¹⁷⁷ We therefore reiterate the need to apply Thomas’ Chalcedonian Christology as a paradigm for Scriptural hermeneutics to elucidate the correct relationship between its human and divine natures.¹¹⁷⁸

To summarise our conclusions on the literal sense, we discern two distinct meaning of the word ‘literal’ in Aquinas. Firstly, there is the ‘literal or historical sense’ found amongst the ‘Four Senses,’ but secondly there is the general authorial intention, including Divine intention.¹¹⁷⁹ However, what unites both senses is revealed in *ST1.1.10*:

The author of Holy Writ is God, in whose power it is to signify His meaning, not by words only (as man also can) the property, that the things signified by the words have themselves also a signification. Therefore, that first signification whereby words signify things belongs to the first sense, the historical or literal. That signification whereby things signified by words have themselves also a signification is called the spiritual sense, which is based on the literal, and presupposes it.

Since Sacred Scripture has a Divine Author, not only the words, but also *the things they describe* carry significance, i.e. natural realities: whether bread, wine, lambs, eagles, fish, or rocks. For example, Aquinas explains from his early *SSS* that in the providence of God fire already

¹¹⁷⁵ *Jesus of Nazareth, Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, trans. Whitmore (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2011), 146.

¹¹⁷⁶ *EIP60*:1-2; 61:4; 85:1, 5; Ratzinger, 146-7.

¹¹⁷⁷ *pace* Richard N. Longenecker, ‘Our commitment as Christians is to the reproduction of the apostolic faith and doctrine, and not necessarily to the specific apostolic exegetical practices..we cannot assume that the explication of their methods as necessarily the norm of our exegesis today,’ in Schleck (2010), 4-7.

¹¹⁷⁸ Mary E. Healy, ‘Behind, In front or...or Through the Text?’ in Bartholomew, Craig et al. (eds.), *Behind the Text : History and Biblical Interpretation IV* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 181-196; Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*. Part 1, *Verbum Dei*, 2010; Ramage, 56-57; Farkasfalvy, 44, 63; Enns, 9-11.

¹¹⁷⁹ *DP4.1* (2012), 101. ‘While embracing current teaching on the senses with heart and mind, he enlarged it to demand a new, and occasional, look at the *mens auctoris*. The evangelist’s intention might amalgamate literal and spiritual meanings. Thomas could perceive the human, inspired writers as having his own individual gifts and purpose. In doing so he crossed over a border within which earlier commentators on the Gospel had been happy to stay.’ Smalley, *The Gospels*, 271

possesses a likeness to charity.¹¹⁸⁰ In other words, there is an ‘authorial intention’ already in the book of nature,¹¹⁸¹ coextensive with its *telos*,¹¹⁸² which Scripture unfolds further.¹¹⁸³ This authorial intention in nature, so furiously denied by secular gender theorists,¹¹⁸⁴ was part of the very oxygen inhaled by medievals. Chenu calls it the *symbolist mentality*,¹¹⁸⁵ We have seen that ‘things themselves’ already carried significance for Hugh,¹¹⁸⁶ following the ‘first’ Augustine’s division of ‘things’ and ‘signs.’¹¹⁸⁷ Importantly, these include historical ‘things,’¹¹⁸⁸ in agreement with Origen,¹¹⁸⁹ a point which belies the notion of allegory as a mere contrivance to eschew embarrassing features of the narrative.¹¹⁹⁰ In turn, this significantly deconstructs any false dualism between allegory *or* history. Exegesis becomes a ‘form of inquiry into the nature of things.’¹¹⁹¹ For example, in the paradigmatic treatment of Abraham’s wives in Galatians 4:22-26, Origen had observed that the remarkable thing about Paul is that he ‘called things “allegorical” which are quite clearly done in the flesh,’¹¹⁹² i.e. in historical persons. It is further manifested in the canonical naming of certain historical books ‘Former Prophets.’ As Ratzinger puts it, ‘the event itself can be word’¹¹⁹³ (in the LXX *logos* frequently conveys both), witnessed in the now unfashionable practice of ‘typology.’¹¹⁹⁴ Cohen traces the typological approach to biblical history within Jewish exegesis, notably in its treatment of the exodus and the destruction of the Temple, which become *exempla*¹¹⁹⁵ differently ‘replayed’ in unfolding history,¹¹⁹⁶ and culturally reenacted in annual festivals such as Passover. Any devotional reading of the Bible must presuppose this repetition to gain any contemporary relevance beyond mere historical curiosity.¹¹⁹⁷ Such an understanding is explicit in Dionysius’ treatment of figures like Melchisedek¹¹⁹⁸ and especially in

¹¹⁸⁰ SSSIV.15.4.4.

¹¹⁸¹ ST1.1.10; DP4.1; SPsalm 19; LEJob38-40; Hamann in Haynes, 75; *Humani Generis* 22.

¹¹⁸² ‘now the end of each thing is that which is intended by its first author or mover.’ SCG1.1.2.

¹¹⁸³ ST1-II.102.6; c.f. Origen, HEzek11 (2010), 141-3.

¹¹⁸⁴ Butler (2004), 1

¹¹⁸⁵ M.D. Chenu, ‘The Symbolist Mentality’ in *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West*, ed. and trans. Taylor and Little (UCP, 1968)

¹¹⁸⁶ *De scripturis et Scripturibus* 3 trans. Kennedy, 81, n.47-48, Eco (2010), 143

¹¹⁸⁷ OCD1.2.4

¹¹⁸⁸ ST1.1.10; CGal4.7, c.f. Augustine OCD1.4; DGAL5.8.23; CFaustum18.4; 22.24, 94; Germanus, *On The Divine Liturgy* 1.

¹¹⁸⁹ ‘[The] witness [of the Scriptures] does not consist only in words of prophecy but in the very acts themselves knowledge is written.’ PPII.40.10 (1992), 49.

¹¹⁹⁰ See R.P.C. Hanson’s criticisms of Origen in *Allegory and Event* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2002), 364

¹¹⁹¹ Kolbet (2013), 45. ‘The philosopher knows only the significance of words, but the significance of things is far more excellent than that of words, because the latter was established by usage, but Nature dictated the former. The latter is the voice of men, the former the voice of God speaking to men.’ *Didascalion* 5.3 in Kennedy, 82, n.49.

¹¹⁹² HGen.7.2; Sheridan, 88-89, who also points to CJohn22.67-74; HGen.6.1; 13.3; CRomans2.13; HJJosh.9.8.

¹¹⁹³ Neuhaus, 20.

¹¹⁹⁴ from τυποει in 1Cor.10:1-11. Auerbach, 52; *QuodVII*.16; Persson, 54-55.

¹¹⁹⁵ 2Pet. 2.6; Jude 1.7

¹¹⁹⁶ Cohen, 205. Seen in Chagal’s *Exodus* (1966).

¹¹⁹⁷ Farkasfalvy, 152.

¹¹⁹⁸ CH9 (261A).

his portrayal of sacramental rites as an *anamnesis* of salvific events.¹¹⁹⁹ Thomas receives this Jewish heritage *via* Dionysius and Hugh.¹²⁰⁰

The Jewish turn is also an Aristotelian turn. In *SPsalmos*, Thomas invokes Aristotle to assist his understanding of natural phenomena, such as fire and clouds.¹²⁰¹ Within Aristotle's reformation of Platonism the world regains stability, redeeming history and natural events, 'Nature is not a series of unconnected episodes, like a bad tragedy.'¹²⁰² Consequently, there is a corresponding emphasis on the 'truth itself' (τῆς ἀληθείας), beckoning or even more strongly, 'compelling', the seeker of truth.¹²⁰³ This intuition undoubtedly attracted Aquinas.¹²⁰⁴

On a participatory hermeneutic, the spiritual senses pre-exist like seeds, *within* the literal sense. In time they flower from it, as it were, as its perfection and *telos*, and not as an arbitrary or nominalist 'add-on'. Daniélou insightfully defines symbolism as,

the effort of mind to extract the intelligible meaning contained within physical reality. This is not something purely subjective; the mind does not project its own pattern upon the world of things, but discovers a real content through the symbolic appearance: that which is revealed is from without.¹²⁰⁵

Such real content is the only adequate basis for true predication about God.¹²⁰⁶ Aquinas' position is thus exemplary as a metacritique of nominalist, secularised hermeneutics by rooting Scriptural exegesis in its natural soil of participatory metaphysics.¹²⁰⁷

This does not presume that God's providence is obvious. If 'Nature hides itself,'¹²⁰⁸ the ways of the Creator elide a simple 'reading off' the surface data.¹²⁰⁹ Dionysius warns against seeing trite 'one to one correspondences.'¹²¹⁰ There is a depth to reality. As with Scripture, the Book of Nature too is allegorical and its apparent 'stumbling blocks' provoke its readers to deeper

¹¹⁹⁹ *EH3* (441C); 1Cor 11:24; Lk 22:19.

¹²⁰⁰ *CRom*.4.3.378; Harkins and Lière, 42; Grant (1965). Herman Hailperin, *Rashi and the Christian Scholars* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1963), 142.

¹²⁰¹ *SPsalmos* 17.6; Ryan, 40.

¹²⁰² *Metaphysics* XIV.3 (1090b18) in Hadot, 360.

¹²⁰³ *Metaphysics* 1.3 (984a-18; 984b10).

¹²⁰⁴ 'The purpose of philosophy is not to know what men have thought, but to know the truth of things.' *In De Caelo* 1.1.22.n.8; *CAM* 1.5.93; *ST* 1.84.2, resp.; Hankey (2019), 37; Porro, TA, 314.

¹²⁰⁵ Jean Daniélou, *The Lord of History: Reflections on the Inner Meaning of History*, trans. Abercrombie (Cleveland, Ohio: Meridian, [1958]1968), 133; Boersma, 172.

¹²⁰⁶ Milbank and Pickstock (2002), 103.

¹²⁰⁷ 'Aquinas's emphasis on the literal sense and the role of virtue for proper interpretation presupposes a participatory ontology in which the world is guided through its participation in God's providential activity in a way often bracketed by modern (and postmodern) approaches to Scripture.' Raith, 68.

¹²⁰⁸ Philo was the first to apply this aphorism of Heraclitus to Scriptural exegesis. Hadot, 45ff.

¹²⁰⁹ Origen, *HE* ζεκ11 (2010), 141-3.

¹²¹⁰ *CH2* (144C)

understanding.¹²¹¹ Dionysius finds symbolism in the ‘wild beasts’ and worms¹²¹² in keeping with Aquinas’ aforementioned interpretation of Leviathan. Thomas adds in this connection that demons may be permitted to assume the shape of certain animals which have a likeness to their nature.¹²¹³ Flies¹²¹⁴ point to the dark reality of the ‘Lord of the Flies’¹²¹⁵ and unclean animals to unclean spirits,¹²¹⁶ even though animals are not literally evil in their own nature.¹²¹⁷ This medieval insight retains fecund insight into the philosophical problem of ‘natural evil,’ oft-represented by Darwin’s *Ichnemonidae*.¹²¹⁸

12. Hiddenness and Clarity

Aquinas alerts us to his intention to bring a new clarity to the ‘obscure style’ of the ‘Blessed Dionysius,’¹²¹⁹ an obscurity which has engendered the diverse receptions debated in our thesis. One hallmark of good teaching is the ability to ‘reveal much through few words’¹²²⁰ and hence ‘the Gospel shortens the words of the law.’¹²²¹ Clarity and brevity are also a stated aim of the *Summa*,¹²²² which may seem surprising for an unfinished *opus* of 512 questions and 2669 articles, especially in contrast with the entire modest *corpus* of Dionysius. Compared with Dionysius’ brief treatises and epistles, Aquinas’ *Summa* is hardly a *summary* (better achieved in *SCG* and *CT*). Though his pseudonym is from Athens, the mysterious Areopagite embodies the Spartan virtue of ‘brevity of speech,’ highly esteemed by Plato.¹²²³ However, brevity and lucidity should not be separated. A good writer should be both σοφός and σαφής (clear) according to Koraes’ alliterative aphorism,¹²²⁴ since brevity alone causes obscurity.¹²²⁵ The project of elucidating the ‘obscure Dionysius’ is thus justified. Thomas remains brief and clear relative to his aim, which, for *ST*, was to compose a systematic theology accessible for his students.¹²²⁶ It develops his early

¹²¹¹ Proverbs 25:2; Grant (1957), 95.

¹²¹² *CH2* (144D-145A); Psalm 22:6, 12, 13, 16.

¹²¹³ *LEJob*40.10 (1989), 448.

¹²¹⁴ Exodus 8:21-29.

¹²¹⁵ Nyssanus, *DVMII*.85.

¹²¹⁶ Origen, *CCels*4.92-3.

¹²¹⁷ *CRom*14.3.1142

¹²¹⁸ Darwin, *Letter to Asa Gray* (1860) in Cornelius G. Hunter, *Darwin’s God: Evolution and the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: 2001), 140 and Umberto Eco, *On Beauty: A History of a Western Idea* (London: Maclehorse Press, 2010), 145 on medieval bestiaries.

¹²¹⁹ *IDN* prooem.

¹²²⁰ Proclus, *IPIV* (927)

¹²²¹ *CRom*.9.5.803 (2020), 310.

¹²²² *ST1*.proem.; c.f. ‘(t)he more perfect a word is the more profound it is and, as a consequence, simpler and briefer.’ *CRom*.9.5.803 (2020), 310.

¹²²³ *Laws* 1 (641e); A. Bayliss, ‘Using Few Words Widely?: “Laconic Swearing” and Spartan Duplicity,’ in S. Hodgkinson (ed.), *Sparta: Comparative Approaches*, Swansea, 231-230.

¹²²⁴ Baynes and Moss, 254.

¹²²⁵ ‘For the fact that matters are expressed briefly usually means that they are rather obscure.’ *IDE1* (120), (2001), 9. ‘Brevis esse laboro, obscuro fio’ (Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 25-26); c.f. *IDC*11; 82.

¹²²⁶ Blankenhorn (2015), 318; Rocca, 255, n.1.

commentary on *Sentences*, whose author aspired to provide ‘synthesised brevity’ for his readers.¹²²⁷ Brevity is thus subject to the constraints of the content *secundum quod materia patietur*.¹²²⁸

Clarity is of less concern for Dionysius, who, alongside his Origenian recognition of a ‘literal’ and an ‘elevated’ sense of Scripture, judges that the latter requires concealment from the ‘many.’¹²²⁹ Hence Dionysius’ ‘Bartholomew’ (a cipher for Origen, according to Perczel),¹²³⁰ ‘says that the Word of God is vast and minuscule, that the Gospel is wide-ranging and yet restricted.’¹²³¹ The gradual contraction of Dionysius’ works from the non-extant *Symbolic Theology*, and *Theological Representations* to the diminutive *Mystical Theology*¹²³² tracks an *itinerarium mentis* whereby words increasingly falter until they finally fail altogether.¹²³³ This suggests one reason why Dionysius’ non-extant works remain unpublished. As Proclus advised: ‘(O)ne should convey mystical truths mystically and not publish secret doctrines about the gods.’¹²³⁴ It coincides with Thomas’ assessment of why Christ did not write any books himself, namely that, ‘the most excellent of teachers’ imprints his teaching directly ‘on the hearts of the hearers.’¹²³⁵ Differently to pluralist receptions, however, Aquinas curtails the role of silence, partly out of his commitment to the epistemic principle of causality to which we will return in Chapter 2.¹²³⁶

Unlike the *magister in sacra pagina*, Dionysius does not claim to be an expositor of Scripture *per se*. Rather, he adverts to the superior authority of the ‘exegetes of the Hebrew’.¹²³⁷ This self-abasement is a tacit compliment to Origen who was known by this accolade. From the outset of *MT*, Dionysius petitions the Supersubstantial Trinity to assist him in penetrating the ‘darkness’ of ‘mystic’ Scripture,¹²³⁸ indicating that he does not expect its meaning to be self-evident. There are echoes of Origen’s prayer ‘to assist us through Christ in the Holy Spirit to open up the mystical sense (μυστικῶν νοῦ), hidden as a treasure (ποτεθησαυρισμένου) in the text.’¹²³⁹ The

¹²²⁷ Weisheipl, 68.

¹²²⁸ *ST1*, prol.

¹²²⁹ *DN7* (872D) c.f. Origen, *CJohnXIII.6.33*; *CCelsusII.2*; *HEzek1* (2010), 40.

¹²³⁰ Golitzin, xxx.

¹²³¹ *MT1* (1000C), 136; c.f. Aquinas, *CJohn2.2.373*.

¹²³² *MT3* (1032D-1033C).

¹²³³ See also Albert’s *CMT* in Tugwell (1988), 184.

¹²³⁴ *IPI* (718); *IV* (928) in Carambine, 166.

¹²³⁵ *STIII.42.4* and the discussion in Venard (2020), 100-102.

¹²³⁶ *IDN1.3*, no.83; ‘(p)raise need not cease altogether, because the noetic bridge established by the principle of causality extends (by an act of judgment) all the way to God’s boundless goodness.’ Blankenhorn (2015), 314 and ‘Aquinas on the Spirit’s Gift of Understanding and Dionysius’s *Mystical Theology*’ in *Nova et vetera* 14.4 (Washington D.C.: CUAP, 2016), 1124.

¹²³⁷ *EH4* (481C).

¹²³⁸ Origen, *HEzek14* (2010), 167-8

¹²³⁹ *CJohn1.XV.89* trans. Trigg (1998), 120. Greek text trans. Blanc (1966), 104; c.f. Nyssanus, ‘This is the treasure...but the wealth is hidden in obscurity.’ *The Beatitudes, Sermon 1* (1954), 86. Basil acknowledges the ‘obscurity’ (ασάφεια) of Scripture in *DS27.66* (1965), 6.

surface meaning of Scripture is like soil (Latin *humus*),¹²⁴⁰ concealing an undertext of inexhaustible treasure.¹²⁴¹ This is developed in Augustine's *sermo humilis*,¹²⁴² signifying 'low lying,' and bearing a pejorative connotation.¹²⁴³ Post-conversion, however, Augustine repents of his former contempt for the lowly Scriptures.¹²⁴⁴ Now he glories in the *humilitas* of Christ's incarnation¹²⁴⁵ and with it a qualified doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture, accessible to all *humans* (which bears the same root).¹²⁴⁶ The Divine condescension of Him who took on flesh, to walk amongst the poor and wash their feet is recapitulated in the lowliness of those called by the Gospel,¹²⁴⁷ *humiliter nati, inbonorati* and *illiterate*¹²⁴⁸ and thus fittingly mirrored in the form of the Scriptures, *res incessu humilis, successu excelsa et velata mysteriis*.¹²⁴⁹ This brings into sharp relief Aquinas' meta-analogy of the human and divine authorship of Scripture found in the two natures of the incarnate Word,¹²⁵⁰ an analogy first articulated by Origen.¹²⁵¹ In this way, Aquinas transmits the profound potential of Origen's hermeneutic to inform contemporary Scriptural debates. *CJohn21* observes that 'Christ is called a fish insofar as his divinity is hidden, for it is characteristic of fish to remain hidden in the water.'¹²⁵² Similarly, although it is true that the Scripture contains mystery, its outward form remains accessible to the humblest person and is disclosed in the Gospel.¹²⁵³ 'Behold, now you speak plainly and do not speak a proverb.'¹²⁵⁴ We have seen that this outward form coincides with Aquinas' literal sense, attested in the commentary prologues which treat the purpose of each scriptural book as something accessible to its readers.¹²⁵⁵ In addressing the *questio*, 'Should Divine Realities be veiled by obscure and novel words?' Thomas considers a Dionysian objection that holy doctrines should be communicated 'only to the godlike teachers of sacred things of the same rank as yourself.' This

¹²⁴⁰ *OFPIV.2.11*; c.f. Preface, 3.

¹²⁴¹ *OFPIV.2.11*; 3, 11; c.f. Nyssanus, *DVMII.173*.

¹²⁴² *CoGX.29* in Erich Auerbach, *Literary Language & Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*, trans. Ralph Manheim (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), 45 f;

¹²⁴³ Auerbach, 39-40.

¹²⁴⁴ *Confessions* 3.5; Auerbach, 45, 48; c.f. Jerome, *Epistle* 22.

¹²⁴⁵ *CoGX.29* in Auerbach, 42.

¹²⁴⁶ *ibid*, 39ff.

¹²⁴⁷ *PLXXXV.111*, 995; *CoGXVIII.49*. Auerbach, 43 cites Matt. 11:25; Luke 10:21; Acts 4:13; Rom. 12:16; 1Cor 1:18-21; James 4:6. C.f. *DN1* (585B-588)

¹²⁴⁸ Auerbach, 43.

¹²⁴⁹ *Confessions* 3.5 in Auerbach, 48.

¹²⁵⁰ *CJohn14:5-6*; *In HebX.1.490*; Baglow (2004), 21, *contra* Farkasfalvy, 2-3; Venard (2020), 46-7.

¹²⁵¹ *HLev.1:1*; *OFPIV.1.1*; 1.7; 2.3.; Dawson, 26-43; J.H. Crehan, 'The Analogy between *Verbum Dei* Incarnatum and *Verbum Dei* Scriptum in the Fathers' in *Journal of Theological Studies* 6 (1955): 87-90; Barrett, 54-5.

¹²⁵² *CJohn21.2599* (2010), 289.

¹²⁵³ *Confessions* 6.5 in Auerbach, 49; c.f. Eckhart, *Sermon* 83 (1981), 250; Augustine, *Epistle* 137:18; Auerbach, 50.

¹²⁵⁴ *John16.29* in *CRom10.3.854*.

¹²⁵⁵ Ryan, 46.

view is tested by *disputatio* against Matthew 10:27¹²⁵⁶ and Romans 1:14¹²⁵⁷ with the conclusion that Dionysius' words should be restricted to Boethius' counsel, that only those matters which would be harmful should be concealed, either from unbelievers who might subject them to ridicule or from the uneducated who might be misled in their ignorance. This qualification of the *CD*'s secrecy trope in Aquinas finds context in the differing orientations of eremitic Syrian monasticism *versus* the missional orientation of the Dominican order. Hence, Thomas stresses the universal accessibility of God's revelation, without which, 'the truth about God such as reason could discover, would only be known by a few, and that after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors.'¹²⁵⁸

Drawing together these insights produces the chiaroscuro of veiled revelation. In *Sermon 12*, the wings of the seraphim serve to fly, but also to cover their heads and feet. Likewise, the 'fiery' apostles at once reveal the Gospel and conceal certain truths (2 Cor. 12:4; Rom. 1:14). The middle section of the angels' body symbolises that which God has revealed *via* his effects, whereas the deity as beginning and end of man remains in obscurity. Aquinas recognises this veiling as 'fitting' for a *human* mode of understanding¹²⁵⁹ and credits Dionysius for teaching the most excellent way of *via remotionis*,¹²⁶⁰ 'The Scriptures are a progressive vision of Truth like the increasing luminosity of Plato's cave, requiring both *educare* and *manuducare*. Hence, it is important to note that within the canon, the Old Testament (divided into Law, Prophets and Holy Writings),¹²⁶¹ is perspicuous only in light of its revelation in the New, for as Paul explains, there is a 'veil' (κάλυμμα) over the Mosaic Law, only removed in Christ.¹²⁶² The relationship between the two testaments is summed up in the Augustinian couplet, *Novum in Vetere latet, Vetus in Novo patet*¹²⁶³ which explains how the meaning of a particular psalm can be made 'manifest' by Paul.¹²⁶⁴ Aquinas integrates the Augustinian and Dionysian heritage in the oft-cited *CH1*: 'It is impossible for the divine radiance to shine on us unless it is shrouded with a variety of sacred veils.'¹²⁶⁵

¹²⁵⁶ This passage is also referenced by Chrysostom in a similar discussion and may have been known to both Aquinas and Dionysius. John Chrysostom, *Homily 23 on Matthew 3*, trans. Prevost, in Schaff (ed.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers X* (Buffalo, NY: CLPC, 1888.)

¹²⁵⁷ *IDT*2.4; c.f. John 18:20.

¹²⁵⁸ *ST*1.1.1. The close parallel of language here with that of Albert, *CMT*1 (1988), 135, indicates its appropriation from the Master. See also *Sermon 14* in Hoogland, 202; *SCG*1.9; Porro, TA, 125; Blankenhorn (2016), 1129-1131

¹²⁵⁹ *ST*1.111.1

¹²⁶⁰ *ST*1.13.2

¹²⁶¹ *Hic Est Liber 2*.

¹²⁶² 2 Cor. 3:13-18; Exodus 34:17; EH5 (501B). See also 1 Cor 13:11; Hebs. 5:11.

¹²⁶³ *CoGX.32* (1945), Vol.1, 310 in De Lubac, *Scripture* (2000), ix.

¹²⁶⁴ *SPsalms* 50.2

¹²⁶⁵ *CH1*; *DV*12.7, sc.2, trans. McGlynn, 141; *DV*12.12.9; *DV*18.5; *DV*19.1.2; *ST*III-II.173. c.f. *2Cor*3:13-16; *OFPIV.2.8*.

In this chapter we have found that Aquinas shares more in common with Dionysius in regard to the Divine inspiration, authority and canon of scripture than do his postmodern readers. He also shares the participatory metaphysics behind Dionysius' Origenian hermeneutics which saves it from postmodern distortion. But if Dionysius is essentially Origenian, Aquinas is Augustinian which is a reformed Origenianism; hence Augustine frequently is credited with 'a better explanation.'¹²⁶⁶ Augustine remains 'Thomas' most directly cited *auctoritate* outside of Scripture itself, outnumbering the citations of Dionysius. The Augustinian influence is also indirectly present through 'Thomas' assimilation of Hugh. Dionysius' Origenian and Christological hermeneutic is reconfigured within the broader framework of the Victorines. This framework provides a more nuanced and defensible understanding of the *literal sense* with its locus in grammar, history and authorial intention as the normative one for doctrine and the pedagogical foundation for the 'cathedral' of spiritual senses.

Although emphasised by the reformers,¹²⁶⁷ and by pre-Vatican II Catholicism alike,¹²⁶⁸ the literal sense has been lost amidst the anti-metaphysical turn of Reader-Response theorists.¹²⁶⁹ Abandoning Aquinas, postmoderns take a cue from Meister Eckhart to plunge deeper into the indeterminate stream.¹²⁷⁰ Ironically, those seeking to restrict 'authorial intention' (*mens auctoris*) to the intention of the *human author*,¹²⁷¹ have become their own gravediggers, as witnessed in the *reductio* known as 'death of the author.'¹²⁷² Foucault, for example, contests the very existence of an 'author' lest this constrict the 'indefinite forms of signification.'¹²⁷³ But absent any means of discrimination, we are left with a cacophony in which no reading is true or false and any meaning (or none) is permitted.¹²⁷⁴ In our culture, if the Author is 'dead,' like the father of *Oedipus*, he is still yearned for,¹²⁷⁵ for the 'death of God' heralds 'the end of his murderer,'¹²⁷⁶ not only the

¹²⁶⁶ e.g. *CJohn*3.5.532; 515.

¹²⁶⁷ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 15-20* in Pelikan (ed.) *Luther's Works* 3 (1956), 28.

¹²⁶⁸ *Humani Generis* 23; *Divino Afflante*, Farkasfalvy, 53.

¹²⁶⁹ 'In precisely this way, literature...by refusing to assign a "secret," an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text), liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases – reason, science, law.' Barthes, (1977), 147.

¹²⁷⁰ Eckhart, *Sermon 2* in *Sermons and Treatises* (1979), 1.15; *Sermon 4* (1979), 1.45; David Jasper, *The Sacred Body* (Baylor University Press, 2009); Caputo (1982); (2006); (2013), 44-47; Rollins, 103-108; Keller, 30; 40-43, 78, 116; Stang, 130, 156-157.

¹²⁷¹ Benedict de Spinoza, *A Theological- Political Treatise* c.7, trans. Elwes (New York: Dover Publications, 1951), 99.

¹²⁷² Barthes (1977); (1975), 27. For Barthes the person is reduced to a grammatical category, a first person conjugation, but not a flesh and blood person outside the text. 'To Write: An Intransitive Verb?' in Macksey and Donato (eds.), *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man* (Baltimore: JHUP, 1972), 140; Faubion, *Essential Works of Foucault* (2006), xv; Fontaine (2013), esp. 35-52.

¹²⁷³ Foucault (1994), 221-222.

¹²⁷⁴ Laura Seymour, *Roland Barthes' The Death of the Author* (London: Macat, 2017), 50-51.

¹²⁷⁵ 'I desire the author,' Barthes (1975), 27; (1977). Barthes' own father died nearly a year after he was born which has sparked Freudian interpretations of his work. Seymour, 16.

¹²⁷⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London: Routledge, 2002), 420.

'death of the Author,' but the Reader also.¹²⁷⁷ This is perhaps why we are witnessing a partial push-back from Queer Theorists,¹²⁷⁸ who show renewed fascination with the historical author, at least with their sexuality.¹²⁷⁹ Irigaray further protests that an elimination of the author's 'body' is itself a form of oppression.¹²⁸⁰ The 'foundational' aspect of authorial intention continues to have purchase for Gumbrecht¹²⁸¹ and more widely in the literary theory of Fish,¹²⁸² and Mitchell.¹²⁸³ The importance of authorial intention is almost impossible to ignore in legal texts which continue to witness to the metaphysical grounding of natural law within eternal law.¹²⁸⁴ Hence, even amongst secular literary theorists, the truth of Aquinas' hermeneutical principle finds partial acknowledgement.¹²⁸⁵

¹²⁷⁷ 'We have no right to ask *who* it is who interprets. It is interpretation itself, a form of the will to power, which exists (not as 'being' but as a process, a becoming) as passion.' Nietzsche in Barthes (1975), 62.

¹²⁷⁸ The term 'Queer Theorists' refers to academics who engage in reading texts and cultural practices that do not conform to what they regard as heterosexual norms.

¹²⁷⁹ Seymour, 62-63. Indeed, sexuality is a subject of interest in Barthes' own biography.

¹²⁸⁰ Seymour, 62.

¹²⁸¹ Holub, 110-111.

¹²⁸² Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: HUP, 1969)

¹²⁸³ Kaye Mitchell, *Intention and Text: Towards an Intentionality of Literary Form* (New York: Continuum, 2011).

¹²⁸⁴ STII-I.93.4:

¹²⁸⁵ Willis, 40.

CHAPTER 2. Saving Language¹²⁸⁶

Chapter 1 introduced my thesis that one of the principal reasons for accepting the normativity of Aquinas' reception of the Dionysian *corpus* is its rich metaphysical account of reality in contrast with anti-metaphysical forms of negative theology. If sound, it will provide not only a more faithful interpretation of Dionysius, but also a superior account of existence. In defence of this 'perennial philosophy',¹²⁸⁷ this chapter explores the relationship between language and being through the prism of Dionysius' predication of God as 'Beyond Being.' Competing interpretations of this mysterious term will be evaluated under the headings of *God Without Being*, in Marion, its attempted deconstruction as concealed form of *Superbeing* by Derrida, as *equivocal being* in the late Byzantine understanding of essence and energies or as *Unlimited Act of Being* in Aquinas.

1. God Without Being

One prime theological strategy for safeguarding God's transcendence is known as the *via negativa*. In the New Testament, this sensibility is conveyed through Greek alpha privative adjectives such as ἀθάνατος (immortal), ἀόρατος (invisible), ἀπεριληπτον (incomprehensible), ἀνεξερεύνητος (unsearchable), and ἀνεξιχνίαστος (untraceable).¹²⁸⁸ After the NT period, negative theology was transformed into a totalising philosophical method through Plotinus' reading of *Parmenides*.¹²⁸⁹ Plotinus introduced the technical term ἀφαίρεσις ('denial' or 'clearing aside') to describe the work of the theologian-sculptor, who shaves off linguistic stone to uncover divine beauty beneath.¹²⁹⁰ Startlingly, Dionysius will radically apply Plotinus' scalpel to the very 'existence' of God. 'He doth not even exist,¹²⁹¹ rather, 'He is completely unknown and non-existent. He exists beyond being.'¹²⁹² Nor can the binary choice between 'existence' and 'nonexistence' escape the apophatic knife, since the supreme Cause of all 'falls neither within the predicate of non-being nor of being.'¹²⁹³ To express this ineffable intuition, Dionysius deploys

¹²⁸⁶ An early version of this chapter was published as 'Hyperousios: God "without being", "Super-being," or "Unlimited Being"?' in *Heythrop Journal* 58.6 (2017): 865-889.

¹²⁸⁷ *Humani Generis* 32

¹²⁸⁸ DN1.2 (588C), citing Rom. 1:20; Col. 1:15-16; 1 Tim. 1:16; Stang (2012), 128.

¹²⁸⁹ Plato, *Parmenides* (137b-144e)

¹²⁹⁰ MT2 (1025B), c.f. *Enneads* VI.7.36; V.13.14; Knepper, 35-68.

¹²⁹¹ DN5.4 (1972), 135.

¹²⁹² EP1 (1065A), 263; DN1.1, trans. Rolt (1972), 53; c.f. Plato, *Parmenides* (141E-142A).

¹²⁹³ MT5 (1048A) in Derrida (2008), 141. Derrida, 73 cites DN4 (697A).

the superlative terms ὑπερούσιος ('beyond being/existence') or ὑπερούσιως ('beyond beingly') 92 times.¹²⁹⁴

At first glance, one is tempted to sympathise with those verificationists who dismissed such locutions as literally *nonsense*.¹²⁹⁵ But, within the context of the 'theological turn' in phenomenology,¹²⁹⁶ Jean-Luc Marion proffers one influential interpretation of ὑπερούσιος as *Dieu sans l'être*, 'God *without* being'.¹²⁹⁷ Marion's primary motivation here is not to use the *CD* to affirm atheism,¹²⁹⁸ but rather to free theology from what he regards as conceptual idolatry, in the same vein as his earlier work, *The Idol and the Distance*.¹²⁹⁹ On its simplest level, Marion's thesis disallows the *concept* of being to God. Intellectual concepts should be replaced with non-determinate *icons*. Thus far, Marion finds common ground with Nyssanus' insight that every concept deriving from some comprehensible image falls foul of the second commandment, since by 'guessing at the divine nature' it 'does not proclaim God.'¹³⁰⁰ Dionysius concurs that the 'uninformed' describe the 'Transcendent Cause of all' 'in terms derived from the lowest orders of beings.'¹³⁰¹

Marion, however, does not acquire his methodology from Dionysius alone. Behind him stands the spectre of Heidegger, who famously condemned Western philosophy for 'forgetting Being' and replacing it with a self-caused Supreme being ('ontotheology').¹³⁰² For Marion, Dionysius anticipates a Heideggerian postmetaphysical turn,¹³⁰³ which privileges a non-conceptual 'Good' over 'Being.'¹³⁰⁴ Marion's reception of Dionysian Neoplatonism has, however, been justifiably criticised by Hankey as 'polemical misrepresentation.'¹³⁰⁵ Whilst reprising the

¹²⁹⁴ Van Den Daele, 140.

¹²⁹⁵ A.J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1983), 46; Antony Flew, 'Theology and Falsification' in MacIntyre and Flew (eds.), *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1955), 96-131.

¹²⁹⁶ Dominique Janicaud, *Phenomenology and the 'Theological Turn': The French Debate* (New York: FUP, 2000).

¹²⁹⁷ Marion, *God Without Being*

¹²⁹⁸ Indeed, negative theology as a methodology provides a critique of atheism too as definitive discourse. Franke, 63, 149-50.

¹²⁹⁹ Marion (2001); Benson, *Graven*.

¹³⁰⁰ *DVMII.165* (1978), 96; c.f. Cusanus, *DDI.25*; Franke, 25.

¹³⁰¹ *MT1* (1000B); Albert, *CMT1*.

¹³⁰² 'La constitution onto-théologique de la métaphysique procède de la puissance de la Différance, qui maintient écartés l'un de l'autre et rapportés l'un à l'autre l'être comme fond (*Sein als Grund*) et l'étant comme fondé (*Seindes als gegründet*) ainsi que comme fondateur (*begründendes*), maintien qu'assure la Conciliation (*Anstrag*).' Jean-Luc Marion, 'Saint Thomas d'Aquin et l'onto-théologie,' *Revue Thomiste* 95.1 (1995), 34, citing M. Heidegger, *Identität und Differenz* (Pfullingen, 1957), 63.

¹³⁰³ Jean-Luc Marion, 'Is the Argument Ontological?' in *Cartesian Questions: Method and Metaphysics* (UCP, 1999), especially 157-158; Marion, 'The Idea of God' in Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers (eds.) *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth Century Philosophy* 1 (CUP, 1998); Thomas A. Carlson, 'Postmetaphysical theology' in Kevin J. Vanhoozer (ed.), *The Cambridge Guide to Postmodern Theology* (CUP, 2003), 58-76; Hankey, 'Misrepresenting Neoplatonism' (2008), 683-703.

¹³⁰⁴ Marion's move may be a re-appropriation of the 'affective' stream of Dionysian interpretation here, c.f. Blankenhorn, 42-46.

¹³⁰⁵ Hankey (2008), 698.

hymnic register of the Dionysian *corpus* discussed in Chapter 1, Marion misconstrues this as liturgy *without* theology, where the cognitive and the doxological are set in competition.¹³⁰⁶ This is a common error amongst postmodern thinkers.¹³⁰⁷ Aquinas' exemplary reception reveals this to be a false dichotomy, since, ' (p)raise, properly speaking, involves making some statement about something,' and 'though God is not to be referred to anything beyond himself, nevertheless he arranges everything directly so that it is referred to him, and in this sense the notion of praise does refer to him.'¹³⁰⁸ On the cognitivity of worship Aquinas is in agreement with Derrida that praise, 'preserves an irreducible relationship to the attribution.'¹³⁰⁹ As Chapter 1 argued, Aquinas' negative theology is not a negation of the propositional. For Marion, to the contrary, theology is *pseudo-referential*, since language does not tell us anything about God, not even that he is 'Good'.¹³¹⁰ Consequently, Marion's 2001 work, *In Excess* advocates a replacement of a 'metaphysics of presence' with a 'pragmatic theology of absence.'¹³¹¹

In dialogue with Marion, Derrida explores parallels between the 'postmodern nihilism' of deconstruction and certain forms of negative theology, 'a divine cause that does not even need to 'be.'¹³¹² Within the fashionable rejection of 'binary choices,' this could be unthought neither as being, nor non-being, but as 'unbeing.'¹³¹³ Foucault similarly seeks a 'thought of the outside' from a negative theology 'born of the mystical thinking that has prowled the confines of Christianity since the texts of Pseudo-Dionysius.'¹³¹⁴ Yet by identifying 'outside' with 'the void,' both fall within the negative reception stream. (Even to speak of *the* void is to imply that it *is something* which exposes the contradiction at the heart of nihilistic discourse.)¹³¹⁵ Nihilism is the identification of being with nothingness, which is to make the logically impossible predication that the Nothing *is*. Marion inadvertently represents 'postmodern nihilism' by proclaiming that in some sense the Without Being *is*.¹³¹⁶

¹³⁰⁶ Marion (1991), 106; 183-6; (1999), 37; (2001), 184; (2001), 150; Benson, *Graven*, 207, 220-1.

¹³⁰⁷ Franke, 268.

¹³⁰⁸ IV.SS15.4.3B.1, trans. Tugwell (1988), 389,393 in common with Roms 12:2; John 4: 22-24; Acts 17:23

¹³⁰⁹ Franke, 268.

¹³¹⁰ again, Marion follows Heidegger, Forward to the German Edition of *Phenomenology and Theology* in James G. Hart and John C. Maraldo (ed. and trans.), *The Piety of Thinking: Essays by Martin Heidegger* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 12, 15. Theology is not a 'science of God' (as for Aquinas), but rather a science of faith, that is, 'the mode of existence of the believer (14).' Caputo concurs that this 'undecidability' and 'instability' of the name of God becomes 'the permanent lesson of mystical theology and of the *docta ignorantia*.' Caputo, *Insistence* (2013), 35; *Truth* (2013), 71.

¹³¹¹ Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess, Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Horner and Beraud (New York: FUP, 2002), 156-158; Jean-Luc Marion, 'In the Name,' trans. Kosky in Caputo and Scanlon (eds.), *God, the Gift and Postmodernism* (Bloomington: IUP, 1999), 37.

¹³¹² Derrida (2008), 146.

¹³¹³ Elliot, R. Wolfson, 'Suffering Eros and Textual Incarnation: A Kristevan Reading of Kabbalistic Poetics' in Burrus and Keller (eds.), *Toward a Theology of Eros* (2006), 353.

¹³¹⁴ Michel Foucault, 'The Thought of the Outside' in Rosemann (2018), 17.

¹³¹⁵ a point well made by Cunningham in reference to *the* abyss in 'Natura Pura' (2010), 244, n.3.

¹³¹⁶ Cunningham (2001), 245.

Although Marion claims a precedent for *Without Being* in Anselm's 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived',¹³¹⁷ Anselm himself clearly precludes a nihilistic interpretation

So then, to assert that this nature (without which no nature could exist) is nothing is as false as the claim that 'whatever is, is nothing' is absurd. Is it through nothing? No, it is not, since, it is completely unintelligible for something to exist through nothing.¹³¹⁸

Furthermore, if it is true that being and intelligibility are coterminous, a presupposition fundamental to Western philosophy since Parmenides,¹³¹⁹ then nihilism is its opposite, *viz.* the rupture of being and intelligibility,¹³²⁰ a 'shattering of all meanings.'¹³²¹ Marion's *meontotheology*¹³²² is unashamedly 'opposed to the identification of being with thought,'¹³²³ not merely the identification of being with *human* thought (a rejection of rationalism), but the identification of being with thought *per se*, which is a rejection of its inherent intelligibility. Rather than tracing a genealogy to Anselm, an arguably more appropriate predecessor for *God Without Being* is Basilides, whose 'non-existent' God made the world from 'non-existents.'¹³²⁴ Basilides' system was, 'perhaps the first example of religious atheism.'¹³²⁵ The identification of God with Nothing is the basis of Gnostic alienation. Man is an 'alien' in the world precisely because he is cut off from the unknowable, alien God.¹³²⁶ This trope will resurface in the early modern period with Boehme (1575-1624). 'God is the Nothing that wants to become everything.'¹³²⁷ It should not surprise us then that there has been a move to rehabilitate Gnostic thought amongst postmodern

¹³¹⁷ Marion, 'Is the Argument Ontological?' (1999).

¹³¹⁸ *Monologion* 4, trans. Harrison in Brian Davies and G.R. Evans (eds.), *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* (OUP, 1998), 17.

¹³¹⁹ ὁ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστὶν τε καὶ εἶναι. Parmenides' *Poem*, fr.3, in Rosemann (1996), 35. 'Now everything, in as far as it has being, so far as it is knowable.' *ST* 1.16.3; Perl (2007), c.1.

¹³²⁰ 'The alternative to the principle that to be is to be intelligible, is the nihilism which afflicts so much contemporary thought and culture. For if being is not what is comprehended by thought, then thought does not apprehend being. This in effect means that there is no being, since whatever we call "being" is not being, but a projection, interpretation, illusion – in short, nothing. If reality is not as thought must apprehend it, then there is no such thing as reality. Conversely, if thought is not the apprehension of being, then all thought, in that it apprehends being, is illusory. Nihilism may indeed be said to consist most fundamentally in the denial of the intelligibility of being.' Perl (2007), 111-112.

¹³²¹ Franke, 32.

¹³²² Cunningham (2001) rightly labels Marion's position *meontological*, *meontotheological* or *oukontotheological*, 249-50.

¹³²³ Marion, 'Is the Argument Ontological?' (1999), especially 158.

¹³²⁴ Hippolytus, *Refutation of all Heresies* VII.22.2; 21:4, in Stevenson (1977), 75-76. Similarly, in Cabalism, the Ensoth is the Nothing from which the ten Sehiroth emerge. See Scholem in Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, VI (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), 125.

¹³²⁵ Carambine, 92. *Apostolic Constitutions* VI.1.1; 2.8 exhorts the bishop to 'avoid...atheistical heresies' before listing Basilides amongst their number. Donaldson (ed.), *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, 90, 93.

¹³²⁶ Fletcher, 95; Jonas (1958), 49-56.

¹³²⁷ Sölle (1995), 50. Nikolai Berdyaev a follower of Boehme speaks of 'an irrational freedom which is grounded in the void' in *Freedom and the Spirit* (London: Geoffrey Best, 1935), 160. This finds an echo in Sartre's grounding of freedom in Nothingness.

‘negative’ theologians.¹³²⁸ A prominent example is Emmanuel Levinas, for whom God is *absolutely Other*.¹³²⁹ Yet, if absolutely Other, God must also be absolutely alien, which means indistinguishable from nothing, for, by the principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles, the absolutely alien *is* nothing.¹³³⁰ This *reductio* undermines Levinas’ otherwise worthy project: to preserve and to encounter the mystery of the Other in the face of one’s neighbour, who must also become nothing. Levinas is not unaware of this *aporía*,¹³³¹ which can only be overcome by re-admitting a ‘trace’ of the invisible (i.e. of forgotten metaphysics).¹³³²

In a telling footnote, Marion cites Bérin, the French translator of Eriugena’s *De Divisione Naturae*, on superlative names of God, to interpret *hyperousios* as a rejection of supereminence,¹³³³ a denial of God’s *être* :

(T)he prefixes *super* or *more than* in no way imply a way of eminence which surreptitiously reintroduces affirmations at the heart of the negations. When one says that God is Superessence, one does not at all suggest that God is an essence situated at the apex of the hierarchy of essences, *but rather that God is essentially void* (my italics).¹³³⁴

In the passage Bérin comments on, Eriugena (who we discuss further in Chapter 3) has been arguing that no predication can be made of God where a corresponding opposite exists. It could reasonably be argued, however, that ‘Void’ does have an opposite, namely ‘being’ and consequently the predication *God is essentially void*, must also be denied. However, Eriugena insists that ‘being is not opposed to not-being’ and therefore ‘(God) is called Essence, but strictly speaking He is not essence...He is ὑπερούσιος, that is superessential (*superessentialis*).’¹³³⁵ Although Eriugena ascribes supereminence to this ‘no thing’, which implies more than a privative state,¹³³⁶ Bérin’s interpretation has force since the *superessentialis* is still ‘fully negative in

¹³²⁸ e.g. Franke, 35-36, who later carefully qualifies this, 54.

¹³²⁹ *Otherwise than Being: or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Duquesne University Press (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1998).

¹³³⁰ Rosemann (1996), 13-22.

¹³³¹ Levinas (1998), 7.

¹³³² *ibid.*, 12. The term ‘trace’ originates in Plotinus, *Enneads* VI.7.21.

¹³³³ Keller follows suit: ‘the *via eminentia* congeals the ontotheology that the *via negativa*, left to itself, had always already undone.’ 73.

¹³³⁴ *DDN*1.216, trans. Bertin, in Marion (2002), 141, n.28.

¹³³⁵ *DDN*1 (459D).

¹³³⁶ *DDN*2 (589B)

meaning¹³³⁷ (though this may be dialectically qualified by the predicate *plus est quam ousia* (hyperousia) which unfortunately is the very term under scrutiny).¹³³⁸

With justification, Eriugena's theophany can be read nihilistically as an appearance of *nothing*.¹³³⁹ We argue that Eriugena falls within the 'negative' stream of Dionysian reception, following Plotinus, in naming the One 'Nothing'. This stream continues its course through Heidegger's *das Nichts*, which seems semantically equivalent to Marion's *Dieu sans l'être*.¹³⁴⁰ Although Heidegger protests that his project is an 'overcoming' of nihilism, he endorses Hegel's maxim: 'Pure Being and Pure Nothing are therefore the same,'¹³⁴¹ which is an apposite re-statement of nihilism.¹³⁴² It is confirmed by his rejection of the Principle of Non-Contradiction, since it allows the possibility for something both 'to be' and 'to be nothing' at the same time and in the same way. Heidegger's rejection of the PNC and the correspondence account of truth are consistent with his belief that the intellect is 'dependent on the nothing.'¹³⁴³ The 'meaning' of human existence (*Dasein*) is to be 'held out into the nothing.'¹³⁴⁴ Cunningham discerns that *Dasein* as a 'being unto death' not only trivially describes its final destination, but *a fortiori*, that *Dasein* is constituted by death, that is by the nothing.¹³⁴⁵ In *Seminar in Le Thor*, Heidegger summarises his thought in the verbless formulation 'Being Nothing Same.'¹³⁴⁶ Heidegger's purported 'overcoming of nihilism' amounts to window dressing – i.e. whether Nothing should be treated negatively (following the traditional Western assessment) or positively welcomed (as in much Eastern philosophy).¹³⁴⁷

In Proclus, by contrast, ὑπερούσιος refers to the transcendence of henads/gods/unities beyond beings which participate them and *a fortiori* to the First Principle (πρῶτον), or the One which transcends all beings.¹³⁴⁸ Carabine identifies Proclus specifically as responsible for the 'systematisation of apophatic discourse' following the theurgic turn in Platonism.¹³⁴⁹ Therefore,

¹³³⁷ 'Qui enim dicit: Superessentialis est, aperte negat quia essentialis est.' *DDN1* (462B), 82.

¹³³⁸ 'Non est ousia quia plus est quam ousia, et tamen dicitur ousia quia omnium ousion id est essentialium creatrix est.' *DDN1* (464B), 86. See also 487B. It is at least *aliquo modo superesse*. *DDN1* (487B); Macquarrie, 89-90.

¹³³⁹ *DDN2* (680D-681A)

¹³⁴⁰ Heidegger (1994), 89-110.

¹³⁴¹ *ibid*, 108.

¹³⁴² Reinhard May discloses the palimpsest of Eastern monism beneath Heidegger's *das Nichts* in *Heidegger's Hidden Sources: East Asian Influences on His Work* trans. Graham Parkes (London; Routledge, 1996), 21-35.

¹³⁴³ Martin Heidegger, 'What is Metaphysics?' in David Farrell Krell (ed.), *Martin Heidegger: Basic writings*, (London: Routledge, 1994), 98.

¹³⁴⁴ *ibid*, 103.

¹³⁴⁵ Cunningham (2001), 137-139.

¹³⁴⁶ May (1996), 21.

¹³⁴⁷ See the 'conversation' with a Japanese colleague in May (1996), 22-28.

¹³⁴⁸ *IPII* (764-5).

¹³⁴⁹ Carabine, 184-185. Kharlamov, 127-8 sees this development as a stronger *via negativa* in which affirmations are the multiplicities which proceed from simple negation. See also Proclus, *IPVI* (1070-76); *VII* (1172); Stepień and Kocharczyk-Bonińska (2018), 12.

given the well established dependence of Dionysius on Proclus in the literature, one would need very strong counter-evidence to abandon this common understanding. As we shall see from Dionysius' sophisticated 'hierarchy' (our Chapter 4), he cannot be rejecting metaphysics *per se*, but only a naïve ontotheological kind.¹³⁵⁰ The application of an analogous *via negativa* to angelic beings in the *CD* rules out an anti-realist interpretation of either.¹³⁵¹ ὑπερούσιος is interchangeable with ἐπέκεινα της ουσίας, 'beyond' not 'without' being. ἐπέκεινα is equivalent to *trans* in Latin, indicating *transcendence*, a superior mode of being,¹³⁵² not nothingness¹³⁵³ (a point on which we agree with Derrida).¹³⁵⁴ Indeed, a parallel 6th century reception of Proclus and the term ὑπερούσια is found in Boethius,¹³⁵⁵ much respected of Aquinas, who has a clearly worked out metaphysical hierarchy presupposed in *Consolation of Philosophy*.¹³⁵⁶ Consequently, *apophasis* is a mode of speaking *within* this hierarchy and not an independent deconstructive rejection of it. Even Plato can on occasions refer to the Good as 'the brightest'¹³⁵⁷ and 'the most blessed part of being.' O'Rourke perceptively concludes that Plato's philosophy, in spite of the priority given to the Good, is still 'first and foremost a philosophy of being' (i.e. some sense of 'Realness'),¹³⁵⁸ whilst lacking the conceptual tools to articulate it.¹³⁵⁹ Therefore ἐπέκεινα της ουσίας in the Platonic tradition is not something non-existent, but the Truly Real.¹³⁶⁰ Fabro concurs in his ground-breaking work on *esse*, 'negation...stands within ontology, not against it.'¹³⁶¹ Finally, if we are correct to frame Dionysian theology as Origenian,¹³⁶² then Origen's commentary on the Lord's Prayer acquires relevance, in that τον ἄρτον ἡμῶν τον ἐπιούσιον is understood as 'higher than *ousia*, supersubstantial.'¹³⁶³ Searching for an appropriate Latin rendering of ἐπιούσιον, Jerome introduced the calque¹³⁶⁴ *supersubstantiale*,¹³⁶⁵ prior to its use in Saracen's *CD*, read by

¹³⁵⁰ Proclus, *ET*115 (2004), 100-101.

¹³⁵¹ *CH*2 (137A, C-D; 141A-B); Knepper, 93.

¹³⁵² Bradshaw, 90.

¹³⁵³ Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.7.1.14-21.

¹³⁵⁴ Derrida (2008), 147.

¹³⁵⁵ Boethius, *De Trinitate* 4.II.9-44. See the introduction by Janice L. Schultz to St. Thomas Aquinas, *An Exposition of the "On the Hebdomads of Boethius"* (Washington D.C.: CUAP, 2001), xli.

¹³⁵⁶ Boethius, *COPV*.4-5.

¹³⁵⁷ τὸ ὄν καὶ τοῦ ὄντος τὸ φανότατον *Republic* (518C), τὸ εὐδαιμονέστατον τοῦ ὄντος *Republic* (526E) in O'Rourke, 'Aquinas and Platonism,' 273

¹³⁵⁸ *Republic* (479D-480A); (505E); (521C).

¹³⁵⁹ O'Rourke, 'Aquinas and Platonism,' 256, citing *Phaedrus* 247C.

¹³⁶⁰ O'Rourke, 272.

¹³⁶¹ Hankey (1988), 148. Fabro's position is continued in Sergio Bonino, 'Le concept d'étant et la connaissance de Dieu après Jean Cabrol' in *Revue Thomiste* 95 (1995).

¹³⁶² Perczel, 'The Earliest Syriac Reception of Dionysius' in Coakley and Stang, 27-41.

¹³⁶³ Edwards (2004), 58. Aquinas is also aware (from Jerome) of the use of '*hyperousion*' in the Greek Lord's Prayer. *Lectures on St. Matthew*, Matthew 6:9-15 in Tugwell (1988), 465.

¹³⁶⁴ i.e. a neologism in which each morphological element corresponds to its equivalent in the Greek.

¹³⁶⁵ Houghton, 159.

Albert¹³⁶⁶ and his student Thomas. It thus carries the mysterious connotation of the apophatic bread from heaven whose quiddity is unknown.¹³⁶⁷

Directly excluding God *without* being, Dionysius informs his readers: '(w)e might say that He is not lacking in being.'¹³⁶⁸ Even allowing for the apophatic qualifier 'we might say,'¹³⁶⁹ Dionysius adds that *apophasis* is 'contrary to the usual sense of deprivation.'¹³⁷⁰ Emonet uses the more *apropos* nomenclature of 'Being without nothingness.'¹³⁷¹ Lest we still misunderstand, *MT4* that most negative of treatises, begins with a qualification that the Cause of all is 'not without substance' (ανοῦσιος),¹³⁷² rather, 'non-being is really an excess of being.'¹³⁷³ (Marion himself draws attention to this as the 'saturated phenomenon').¹³⁷⁴ Both ideas are combined in *EP1*, after contrasting light and darkness, knowledge and unknowing, where Dionysius insists: '(t)ake this in a superlative, but not in a defective sense.'¹³⁷⁵

From Marion's premise that God is essentially Void, there follows the logic of the 'withdrawal' of God as 'the ultimate figure of revelation.'¹³⁷⁶ The silence of the One is a central feature in the negative stream of Dionysian reception,¹³⁷⁷ which 'exposes itself to an infinite equivocation of meaning.'¹³⁷⁸ (What is the difference between infinite equivocation of meaning and meaninglessness)? However we reject Marion's premise, reminiscent of the heresy of Simon Magus¹³⁷⁹ as a distortion of Dionysius.¹³⁸⁰

Marion's nihilistic reading is anticipated by John D. Jones, who also falls under Heidegger's spell:

For unlike affirmative theology, which offers an explanation of and discourse about what it is, negative (mystical) theology requires the abandonment and indifference towards every

¹³⁶⁶ *CMT1* (1988), 143 et al.

¹³⁶⁷ The manna or 'What is it?' of Exodus 16:4

¹³⁶⁸ *DN8.6*, trans. Rolt, 138

¹³⁶⁹ Plotinus, *Enneads* VI, 7, 38.

¹³⁷⁰ *DN7* (865B), 105.

¹³⁷¹ Pierre-Marie Emonet, *God Seen In the Mirror of the World: Introduction to the Philosophy of God*, trans. Barr (New York: Herder and Herder, 2016), 24.

¹³⁷² *MT4* (1040D), trans. Rolt (2017), 29.

¹³⁷³ *DN4.3*; Derrida (2008), 175.

¹³⁷⁴ Marion (2002)

¹³⁷⁵ *EP1* (1065A); Stang (2012), 124, n.23.

¹³⁷⁶ Marion (1977), 114. C.f. Psalm 119 :126.

¹³⁷⁷ 'St Dionysius says the finest thing one can say about God is to be silent from the wisdom of inner riches. So be silent and do not chatter about God, because by chattering about Him you are lying and so committing a sin.'

Eckhart, *Sermon 96* (1981), 332-3.

¹³⁷⁸ Marion (1991), 54.

¹³⁷⁹ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* II.2.52; *Trimorphic Protennoia* XIII.35-36, trans. Turner in Robinson (1990), 513; *Apocryphon of John* II.I in Robinson, 105.

¹³⁸⁰ Marion ignores the revelatory nature of 'the holy words of Scripture' *DN1* (539B).

explanation and discourse. In the cessation of all discourse, this denial makes possible unity with – nothing: (the) non-same and non-other.¹³⁸¹

All *hyper* terms function as absolute negations,¹³⁸² rather than *via eminentia* causation¹³⁸³ and thus the negative pole of Dionysian apophaticism is thought to cancel out the kataphatic one, rendering it ametaphysical.

Here, negative (mystical) theology denies all that is and all reference to beings and by my interpretation, ultimately denies all affirmative theology and hence, metaphysics. Negative (mystical) theology involves the ultimate denial of divine causality and pre-eminence.¹³⁸⁴

Jones thus denies any discourse of intelligibility, a denial we have equated with nihilism.¹³⁸⁵

Nor does the textual evidence support Jones' reading. To the contrary, *CH* makes it clear that 'the Divine Beatitude' is, 'on the one hand the Cause of every sacred series and on the other hand is independent of everything that is sacred.'¹³⁸⁶ Jones concedes that his conclusions are coloured by a Plotinian lens.¹³⁸⁷ But this overlooks how Plotinus has himself been transformed, firstly by Proclus (following Porphyry and the Unknown Commentator on the *Parmenides*)¹³⁸⁸ and then by Dionysius. Blankenhorn, for instance, identifies one significant modification as 'a mingling of the One and the divine mind,' in the *CD*, which for Plotinus is 'a monumental error,' but which is 'precisely what Dionysius does.'¹³⁸⁹ Furthermore, Stang rightly signposts the importance of Paul for understanding Dionysius. In *EP5*, 'unapproachable' (ἀπρόσιτον) and 'inexpressible' (ανεκδήγητος) derive respectively from 1 Timothy 6:16 and 2 Corinthians 9:5. For Paul, the prefix α does not signal that God lacks a particular quality, but that 'God manifests that quality so superabundantly, so transcendently, that there is a sharp *dis*-analogy between the quality as God manifests it and the quality as we understand it.' Likewise, for ὑπερ.

¹³⁸¹ John D. Jones, *Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite: The Divine Names and Mystical Theology* (MUP, 1980), v. But see his later more qualified position in 'An Absolutely Simple God? Reading Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite' (2005), 371-407.

¹³⁸² Jones (1980), 31.

¹³⁸³ *ibid.*, 97.

¹³⁸⁴ *ibid.*, 20, n.20.

¹³⁸⁵ c.f. Knepper, 39, n.7.

¹³⁸⁶ *CH3* (165C) trans. I.P. Sheldon-Williams, 'Henads and Angels: Proclus and the Ps.-Dionysius' in M.F. Wiles and E.J. Yarnold (eds.), *Studia Patristica* (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 67.

¹³⁸⁷ Jones (1980), 21, n.20. This is based on 'the abolition of all difference between oneself and the one (divinity)' in *Enneads* VI.9.8.

¹³⁸⁸ Carabine, 155 ff.; Raoul Mortley, 'The Way of Negation, Christian and Greek' in *From Word to Silence* (Bonn: Hanstein, 1986), II.30-31

¹³⁸⁹ Blankenhorn, 10.

ὑπερούσιος does not suggest that God somehow lacks the quality he graciously gives to creation, but rather that God so superabundantly *is* that one does better to confess that he is *not* and thereby draw nearer to the divine superabundance.¹³⁹⁰

Finally, a belief that God has a privation of being (which Dionysius only ascribes to evil)¹³⁹¹ entails a denial of his omnipotence, for how could causative power be ascribed to Nothing? This contradicts Dionysius' explicit confession of this Divine attribute in *DN8*, and is further evinced by his affirmation of God's power over heavenly bodies,¹³⁹² later deployed by Aquinas in defence of miracles¹³⁹³ (a metacritical resource against anti-miraculous receptions).¹³⁹⁴ Moreover, as we have already seen in Chapter 1, although *creatio ex nihilo* is somewhat *sotto voce* in the *CD*, it nevertheless is strategically affirmed and presupposed amongst his readers.¹³⁹⁵ Aquinas' exemplary reception brings this to the fore. Finally, again drawing together threads from chapter 1, Dionysius' apophaticism is inseparable from his orthodox Christology, as he will finally ascribe *hyperousios* to the historical Jesus, which is clearly not interchangeable with Void.¹³⁹⁶

2. Superbeing

In spite of some initial attraction towards the *CD*, in part from its potential to empower a plurality of voices,¹³⁹⁷ in the end Derrida rejects negative theology as not negative enough. He is suspicious (like Heidegger) that ὑπερούσιος smuggles in a 'Superbeing' behind beings,¹³⁹⁸ so that '(t)he language used to move *beyond* being is reduced to an inflation *of* being.'¹³⁹⁹ God is restored to metaphysics as a 'superior, inconceivable and ineffable mode of being.'¹⁴⁰⁰ Although heavily disguised, Dionysius still represents 'Perfect Being theology.' One upshot is that the language of praise remains predicative in nature, as qualifying and determining the One addressed.¹⁴⁰¹

¹³⁹⁰ Stang (2012), 124.

¹³⁹¹ *DN4* (716D)

¹³⁹² *EP7* (1080C).

¹³⁹³ *STIII.44.2*.

¹³⁹⁴ e.g. Macquarrie, 38-9.

¹³⁹⁵ *pace* Knepper, 3.

¹³⁹⁶ *EH1* (372A); *EP4* (1072A-B); *DN2* (648D-649A).

¹³⁹⁷ Derrida. *Sauf Le Nom* (1995), 35.

¹³⁹⁸ Derrida (2008), 143-196. A transcript of Derrida's debate with Marion is recorded in Caputo and Scanlon (eds.), *God, the Gift and Postmodernism* (Bloomington: IUP, 1999). Caputo (2006), 11 follows suit. See also Mark Taylor in Franke, 307.

¹³⁹⁹ Keller, 45.

¹⁴⁰⁰ 'Différance' in Kearney and Rainwater (ed.), *The Continental Philosophy Reader* (London: Routledge, 2003), 441-465; Benson, 216.

¹⁴⁰¹ Derrida (2008), 177.

If Derrida is correct, Dionysius' God exists on the same continuum of being as humans and those celestial beings also described as ὑπερούσιος.¹⁴⁰² Saracen's previously noted translation of ὑπερούσιος οὐσία as *supersubstantiale* or *superessentiale* opens up the possibility of such a reading.¹⁴⁰³ But any hint of ontotheology or univocity of being is strictly refuted by the preface to *DN*, where the Cause of everything is hymned as 'not a thing (αὐτό δὲ οὐδὲν)'¹⁴⁰⁴ precisely because it transcends all things in a manner beyond being.¹⁴⁰⁵ Within the *CD*, οὐσία always refers to 'individual beings' in contrast with the first and highest principle, whose ὑπερούσιος (used 114 times)¹⁴⁰⁶ 'falls neither within the predicate of non-being nor of being.'¹⁴⁰⁷ This leads translator John D. Jones to insist that ὑπερῶ be rendered 'beyond' (or occasionally 'over' or 'supreme') rather than 'super.'¹⁴⁰⁸ This is also an inescapable conclusion from the (partial) pre-history of Dionysian thought in Plotinus, for whom the One is 'all things,'¹⁴⁰⁹ yet at the same time 'not a single one of them.'¹⁴¹⁰ In sum, although Derrida's accusation of a covert 'superbeing' might count against some forms of negative theology, it is a caricature of Dionysian apophaticism. Moreover, as Franke perceptively notices, the fact that it does not account for all forms of negative theology is evinced by Derrida's own method which 'can be read as a manner of saying and doing what he denies he is saying and doing' in other words 'a sort of performance of negative theology.'¹⁴¹¹

3. Unlimited Act of Being (Aquinas)

In turning to Aquinas' reception of the *CD* we find a third way that is far more in touch with the Neoplatonic mindset than either Marion or Derrida, demonstrating that these do not exhaust the range of interpretive options.¹⁴¹² Instead, Thomas both comprehends the author's intent and at the same time subtly clarifies and corrects him in line with Catholic, and more specifically Augustinian, orthodoxy.¹⁴¹³ In this way Aquinas provides robust intellectual resources for a metacritique of ametaphysical readings.

¹⁴⁰² *DN*1.4

¹⁴⁰³ John D. Jones (2005), 392.

¹⁴⁰⁴ Saracen *ipsum autem nihil*.

¹⁴⁰⁵ *DN*1 (593C), c.f. Proclus, *IP* 68k.

¹⁴⁰⁶ Hathaway, xxii-xxiii.

¹⁴⁰⁷ *MT*5 (1048A)

¹⁴⁰⁸ Jones (1980), 13.

¹⁴⁰⁹ *Enneads* V.2.11

¹⁴¹⁰ *Enneads* VI.7.32

¹⁴¹¹ Franke, 279.

¹⁴¹² *pace* Benson, *Graven*, 216.

¹⁴¹³ Bradshaw, 244.

On the one hand, Thomas could agree with Marion on the trivially true point that God transcends human concepts ‘as is clear from Dionysius.’¹⁴¹⁴ That is why, in *ST*1.12.1, Aquinas affirms that God does not exist in the same mode as creatures: ‘God is not something existing; but he is rather super-existence, as Dionysius says (*DN*4).’¹⁴¹⁵ One reason is that, just as it is bad grammar to say that ‘to run, runs’ or that ‘to be exists,’ so it is likewise wrong to declare that God, who is To Be Itself (*Ipsum Esse*), *exists*.¹⁴¹⁶ This ‘non-existence’ of God is not by way of any deficiency of existence (for example in the way that prime matter lacks form), but rather by superexistence, as indicated in Sarracen’s *supersubstantias*.¹⁴¹⁷ This strategic rendition of *via negativa* known as *via eminentia*,¹⁴¹⁸ has an orthodox pedigree, being previously deployed against Arius by Marius Victorinus.¹⁴¹⁹ It is a strategy taken so much for granted that, for Aquinas, the prefix *super* is rarely used because, in effect, tautologous.¹⁴²⁰

On the other hand, it follows from the above that Aquinas gives no occasion for an anti-realist (‘equivocal’)¹⁴²¹ reception. To the contrary, ‘according to the opinion of Dionysius, we should say that such terms signify the divine substance, although defectively.’¹⁴²² It is true that God is not an object in the sense of ‘something that can be represented,’¹⁴²³ nor a subject, as potency is *subject* to act, or accident is *subject* to substance.¹⁴²⁴ Neither is He *subject* to any external authority due to his aseity. Thus far, Aquinas could concur with Marion. Nonetheless, Thomas precludes Marion’s non-cognitive account of theology in the opening *questio* of *ST*. ‘*Respondeo dicendum quod Deus est subiectum huius scientiae*.’¹⁴²⁵ Here, Aquinas uses Aristotelian terminology to define theology as a ‘science,’ but this necessitates a distinct subject, namely God Himself.¹⁴²⁶ Within this science, although Aquinas agrees with Dionysius that God is ‘veiled’ in human names, this does not mean that the names are nullified. Rather they are positive rungs in the ladder towards supersubstantial knowledge.¹⁴²⁷ Thomas learns from *DN* that man is capable of

¹⁴¹⁴ *DV*2.1.9. See also *ST*1.12.4

¹⁴¹⁵ *ST*1.12.1.3, quoting *DN*4 (697A); (716D); (720B). See also *DV*8.1.10; *IDN*1.1

¹⁴¹⁶ *IDH*2.

¹⁴¹⁷ Théry (1932), 34-35.

¹⁴¹⁸ *IDNIV*.3.

¹⁴¹⁹ Stepień and Kochańczyk-Bonińska, 84-87.

¹⁴²⁰ *IDN*, proem.; John D. Jones (2005), 393.

¹⁴²¹ See below on Maimonides and against e.g. Franke, 5

¹⁴²² *DP*7.5 (2012), 206

¹⁴²³ Martin Heidegger, ‘The Theological Discussion of “the Problem of a Non-Objectifying Thinking and Speaking in Today’s Theology” – Some Pointers to Its Major Aspects’, in Hart and Maraldo (eds.), *The Piety of Thinking* (1976), 26-27; Franke, 60.

¹⁴²⁴ *DSC*1.1(1949), 24, following Boethius, ‘If there is any form which is exclusively an act, such as the divine essence, it cannot in any sense be a subject. God is pure Form and not subject to accidents.’ *De Trinitatis* II.85-95, PL64 (1250D), c.f. *SCG*1.26.2

¹⁴²⁵ *ST*1.1.7

¹⁴²⁶ Porro, *TA*, 29.

¹⁴²⁷ *DP*7.5, 9; Blankenhorn, 241.

knowing God in three ways: through casuality, eminence and negation. But all these ways constitute ‘knowledge through the light of reason.’¹⁴²⁸

Marion denies that God is an individual as part of his critique of ontotheology, and certainly God is not an ‘individual’ in the sense of an instantiation of a more general category.¹⁴²⁹ Nevertheless, Thomas reasons that God can properly be called ‘individual’ in the sense of the unique One in whom essence and existence are identical.¹⁴³⁰ His nature is not ‘in’ something else (i.e. participated).¹⁴³¹ The term *individual* thus functions *analogically* to affirm God’s *incommunicability* and avoid any confusion of creature and Creator.¹⁴³² Similarly, the term ‘substance’ (or, as Dionysius would prefer (ὁ παρῴτις)¹⁴³³ truly attests his *self subsistence*. Even though we have no knowledge of his definition,¹⁴³⁴ God’s effects of nature and grace function as a working substitute for a definition within divine *scientia*.¹⁴³⁵ They cognitively refer to an apophatic Cause of these effects.

In *IDNV*, Thomas develops his Dionysian account of the mode of God’s being.

He is not a facet of being. Rather, being is a facet of him. He is not contained in being, but being is contained in him. He does not possess being, but being possesses him. He is the eternity of being, the source and the measure of being.¹⁴³⁶

Dionysius discusses ‘Being’ (ὁ ὦν) in relation to the LXX of Exodus 3:14,¹⁴³⁷ as one of the names by which God can be appropriately ‘hymned’ (though not ‘supremely’ so). The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob thus informs the God the Philosophers by revealing the name ‘Being’ as his ‘eternal name’ (ὄνομα αἰώνιον).¹⁴³⁸ Dionysius emphasises that God is the ‘Measure of All Things,’ including being.¹⁴³⁹ Although this passage recognises the indeterminate mode of God’s ‘being,’ it is clear that it excludes any notion of God *without being*. Rather, being proceeds from God into all beings: ‘its nature unconfined by form is the creator of all form.’¹⁴⁴⁰ In creatures,

¹⁴²⁸ *CRom*1.6.115

¹⁴²⁹ Albert, *CMT*3 (1988), 179.

¹⁴³⁰ *SCG*1.22

¹⁴³¹ *IDC*9 (1996), 64, 72; *SCG*1.25

¹⁴³² *SCG*1.26, esp. par.3; c.f. *ST*1.29.3.4;

¹⁴³³ *DN*1 (593D); 2 (641A, D); 4 (693B; 724A); 5 (871C); *CH*2 (140C); *EH*3 (429C); Knepper, 57.

¹⁴³⁴ See Chapter 3.

¹⁴³⁵ *ST*1.29.3.4

¹⁴³⁶ *DN*5 (824A)

¹⁴³⁷ καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεὸς πρὸς μουσῆν ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν καὶ εἶπεν οὕτως ἐρεῖς τοῖς υἱοῖς ἰσραὴλ ὁ ὢν ἀπέσταλκέν με πρὸς ὑμᾶς ; Daniélou (2014), 75.

¹⁴³⁸ Exodus 3:15.

¹⁴³⁹ *DN*5 (648D). The name ‘Measure of All Things’ is previously found in Plotinus, *Enneads* VI.8.18.3 and *Apostolic Constitutions* VIII.12 (3640).

¹⁴⁴⁰ *DN*4 (697A)

existence is always received in something, but for the Creator existence is unparticipated.¹⁴⁴¹ This is why Luibheid's translation 'being possesses him'¹⁴⁴² is flawed, since it implies that being precedes God (ontotheology), which is the precise opposite of the author's intent. Lilla correctly reverses the order to, 'being does not possess him, but He possesses being,'¹⁴⁴³ which agrees with Carlson (Marion's translator): 'he maintains Being, but Being does not maintain him.'¹⁴⁴⁴ The Greek ἔχει lends itself to Jones' minimalist translation: 'Being has it; it does not have Being'¹⁴⁴⁵ and vindicates Aquinas' understanding:

(C)ommon *esse* is in Godself as contained in a container and conversely God is not in that which is *esse*...in all other existents participate that which is *esse*, but not God; rather created *esse* itself is a certain participation of God and God's similitude; and this is what he says, that common *esse* has God, namely God as participating God's similitude, but God does not have *esse* as if participating *esse* itself.¹⁴⁴⁶

This container motif, which Dionysius uses of the Good,¹⁴⁴⁷ refutes any notion of God as Void, since He is the Container for all being whatsoever. It was previously deployed in the *Shepherd of Hermas*, an ancient text familiar to Origen and likely part of his canon.¹⁴⁴⁸ 'First of all, we believe that there is one God who has created and arranged all things; who, when nothing existed before, caused all things to be and; and who contains all things, but himself is contained by none.'¹⁴⁴⁹ The *Shepherd* background reinforces the utility of our 'Origenian' reading of the *CD*¹⁴⁵⁰ as an interpretive control. Here is one Container impervious to the 'universal acid' of nihilism.¹⁴⁵¹ The Dionysian text is expounded further in *IDC*. 'God is not somehow existent, but he prepossesses (*praecipet*) the whole of being in himself in an absolute and uncircumscribed way.'¹⁴⁵² In this passage, Aquinas is careful to distinguish God as *ipsum esse* from 'common being'

¹⁴⁴¹ *DSC1* (1949), 23; *IDNII.3*; 11.4 and a major theme of *IDH*.

¹⁴⁴² Following Rölt (1972), 139

¹⁴⁴³ Salvatore Lilla, 'Osservazione sul testo del *De Divinis Nominibus* dello Ps. Dionigi l'Areopagita' in Luibheid (1987), 101 n.183.

¹⁴⁴⁴ Marion (1991), 75

¹⁴⁴⁵ και αὐτόν ἔχει τὸ εἶναι οὐκ και οὐκ αὐτός ἔχει τὸ εἶναι. *DN5* (824A), trans. Jones (1980), 169. See also Porro, TA, 198-9. O'Rourke (2005), 341 renders, 'being receives him.'

¹⁴⁴⁶ *IDNV.5*, 54-71; c.f. *ST1.8.1.2*.

¹⁴⁴⁷ *DN4* (700B)

¹⁴⁴⁸ *HEζεε13* (2010), 164; *OFPI.3.5*; 2.1.5; 3.2.4; *HNum8.1*; *CMatt14.21*; *CMatt*, serm.53; *CRom.10.31*. See also Irenaeus, *AH4.20.2* and earlier, Plato, *Parmenides* 138.

¹⁴⁴⁹ Hermas, *Mand.1.1*

¹⁴⁵⁰ *OFPI.3.3* (2017), 69.

¹⁴⁵¹ Daniel C. Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (London: Penguin, 1995), 61-84.

¹⁴⁵² *IDC3*(1996), 22-23.

(*ens commune*), which indicates that God's being is not univocal to common being.¹⁴⁵³ Common being, the proper subject matter of metaphysics,¹⁴⁵⁴ refers to what God's effects have in common, whereas their Cause is *ipsum esse subsistens*.¹⁴⁵⁵ Put differently, there can be no common term or *genus*, including 'existence,' which encompasses God and creatures, lest God and creatures participate in some *tertium quid*.¹⁴⁵⁶ The *per se* nature of God's being must be understood apophatically as a negation of creaturely being.¹⁴⁵⁷ Accordingly, pantheistic,¹⁴⁵⁸ panentheistic,¹⁴⁵⁹ ontotheological¹⁴⁶⁰ and polytheistic readings are precluded.

Although panentheism attempts to 'dehellenise' Christianity, it has nevertheless appropriated some of the worst errors of Greek thought, such as conceiving the world as the 'body of God,'¹⁴⁶¹ i.e. a modification within God. This is fallacious, as it entails both univocity of being and God as compound of form and matter, actuality and potentiality which contradicts the Anselmian God. 'Some have believed God to be a body,' writes Aquinas, precisely because they have failed to understand that 'by this word "God" is signified something than which nothing greater can be thought.'¹⁴⁶² As Proclus recognised, a corporeal being cannot be self-constituting.¹⁴⁶³ Therefore, those who posit basic potency rather than basic actuality must forfeit the Principle of Sufficient Reason. Language of the universe as God's 'body' can only be true metaphorically.¹⁴⁶⁴ Nor could a corporeal god even be truly immanent, since only a transcendent God can be present *in tota* to every moment and to every space.¹⁴⁶⁵ As Pure Act, God's capacities are fully realised at all times.¹⁴⁶⁶ Therefore, it is only because God is *ipsum esse subsistens*, that 'we must..necessarily conclude that God is in all things, in an intimate manner.'¹⁴⁶⁷ The panentheist account, rightly motivated by its quest to do justice to God's transcendence and immanence,

¹⁴⁵³ DV2.11

¹⁴⁵⁴ CAM, prol.

¹⁴⁵⁵ DP3.7; 7.2.6; ST1.3.4; 4.2

¹⁴⁵⁶ DV2.11

¹⁴⁵⁷ SCG1.25.10.

¹⁴⁵⁸ SCG1.26.9.

¹⁴⁵⁹ a term coined by Karl Krause. See Macquarrie, 15 and Keller's god of potency which is consciously in opposition to Aquinas' Pure Actuality, c.3.

¹⁴⁶⁰ Keller, 68 and *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London: Routledge, 2002).

¹⁴⁶¹ ST1.3.8; SCGII.16; Macquarrie, 109-110, 147, a doctrine found in Evagrius. Ilaria L.E. Ramelli in 'Preexistence of Souls?' The ἀρχή and τέλος of Rational Creatures in Origen and Some Origenians,' Markus Vinzent (ed.), *Studia Patristica* 56.4: Rediscovering Origen (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 216.

¹⁴⁶² ST1.2.1.2. (Whilst it is true on Chalcedonian orthodoxy that the Divine (second) *Person* is corporeal, the Divine *nature* is not).

¹⁴⁶³ IPIII (785-786).

¹⁴⁶⁴ ST1.8.1.2; CT135.

¹⁴⁶⁵ ST1.8.1-4; Emonet, 52-4.

¹⁴⁶⁶ Bradshaw, 26.

¹⁴⁶⁷ ST1.8.1 in Conor Cunningham, 'Being Recalled: Life as Anamnesis' in *Divine Transcendence and Immanence in the Work of Thomas Aquinas* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 72; Thomas Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (UNDP, 2000), 134-5.

becomes redundant, since it transpires to be but a cheap imitation of orthodoxy.¹⁴⁶⁸ Although Macquarrie acknowledges the strength of Aquinas on immanence, he persists in a shallow understanding, falling into the same Heideggerian error found in Marion, namely that Thomas is guilty of ontotheology,¹⁴⁶⁹ since a corporeal God must be reduced to one item among many in the universe.¹⁴⁷⁰ But Heidegger was completely wrong to suppose that Aquinas had ‘forgotten being’ or had confused Being with beings. This judgement is based entirely on a misreading of the *proemium* to Aquinas’ *CAM* and while it is a fair criticism of Aristotle, it is obvious from the full scope of Aquinas’ *opus* that he transcends Aristotle on this very point.¹⁴⁷¹ For Aquinas, it is only because common being proceeds from God as its Cause, that it is proper to name God ‘Being’ (*esse*) itself, i.e. analogically and not univocally.¹⁴⁷²

This notion of *esse* in Aquinas requires closer examination, for it is wholly ignored in Heidegger, despite being, as Kerr observes, ‘the fundamental unifying principle of Aquinas’ metaphysics.’¹⁴⁷³ Whereas for nominalists it seems self-evident that ‘existence is not a predicate’, for Thomas, *esse* is ‘the principle by means of which things are not nothing.’¹⁴⁷⁴ If nihilism is the identity of being with nothingness, the principle of *esse* is the fundamental element of a Thomistic metacritique of nihilism. Because it is even more basic than matter or form, which for creatures are still in potency,¹⁴⁷⁵ *esse* is ‘the act of all acts and the perfection of all perfections.’¹⁴⁷⁶

Nevertheless, to borrow Emonet’s felicitous expression, there remains a ‘poverty’ about existence which demands a plenitude in Being Subsistent in Itself.¹⁴⁷⁷ Both *IDN* and *IDC* build on the early work *DE* in specifying the unique identity of essence and *esse* in God.¹⁴⁷⁸ It is this fundamental simplicity of God which accounts for the alterity of his mode of being *vis à vis* creatures and their real distinction. It is also (as Anderreggen points out) the conceptual clarity of

¹⁴⁶⁸ ‘Through his notion of intensive *esse* and the consequent distinction between *esse* and essence in creatures, Thomas not only emphasises the difference between *esse* and being, but he also succeeds in making God’s presence in creatures more active and meaningful than in the panentheistic theories of Dionysius, Avicenna, Eckhart, Cusanus, Spinoza and Hegel. Whereas in these latter theories God as being is the Act as the *Essence of essences*, in Thomas’ view God as *Esse per essentiam* is the principle and actuating cause of *esse per participationem*, which is the proper, actuating act of every real essence.’ C. Fabro, ‘The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy’ trans. Bonansea in *The Review of Metaphysics* 27.3 (Philosophy Education Society, 1974), 484.

¹⁴⁶⁹ Macquarrie, 14, 30-33.

¹⁴⁷⁰ The very thing Macquarrie seeks to avoid, 33, but in which he becomes implicated through Eriugena’s schematising of God under the category of ‘Nature,’ 86-87, 93.

¹⁴⁷¹ Lorenz B. Puntel, *Being and God: A Systematic Approach in Confrontation with Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas and Jean-Luc Marion*, trans. White (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 66-73 for primary references.

¹⁴⁷² *pace* Duns Scotus. Garrigou-Lagrange (1936) II.a.3, c.55, 195-99.

¹⁴⁷³ Kerr, 57.

¹⁴⁷⁴ *ibid*, 59.

¹⁴⁷⁵ *ST*1.4.1.3

¹⁴⁷⁶ *DP*7.2.9; Kerr, 59.

¹⁴⁷⁷ Emonet (2016).

¹⁴⁷⁸ Kerr (2015).

Aristotelian terms here which enables Aquinas to liberate *esse* from the creaturely limitations which it has in the *CD*.¹⁴⁷⁹ For, even celestial creatures share with other creatures the possession of an essence different from their existence. Hence, angels are still in potency to the actuality of *esse* and remain composite beings.¹⁴⁸⁰ This distinction explains Aquinas' reading of the proposition *Cause prime non est yliathim* in *Liber de Causis*:¹⁴⁸¹ 'The Arabic *yliathim* is taken to refer to that which is composed of being and form. The unknown author argues that 'form' can only be adequately spoken of the first Cause if understood as 'infinite being.'¹⁴⁸² This text, however can be deployed by the mature Aquinas to further transcend Aristotle's philosophy, since essence/existence now replaces Aristotelian matter/form as the ultimate division. In sum, what distinguishes creatures from the First Cause is that all creatures are a compound of essence and existence, whereas uniquely, God *is* his own existence; God's 'form' or essence is pure being.¹⁴⁸³ There can be room for only one Being whose essence is existence itself.¹⁴⁸⁴ 'Everything which is something by participation is reduced to what is the same thing by essence, as to the first and highest.'¹⁴⁸⁵ *Esse commune* can thus be distinguished from divine *esse* as follows: *esse commune* is 'that to which nothing is added, yet still *could* be added; whereas divine *esse* is 'that to which both nothing is added nor *can* be added.'¹⁴⁸⁶ Aquinas joins up the dots by noticing the same theological reasoning in Dionysius (which we now know to also be Procline). God is the source of actualisation for all acts and all perfections.¹⁴⁸⁷

For to God, who is at the apex of perfection, none of the things which belong to the character of actual being as a whole is lacking; for He has beforehand in Himself absolutely and in the highest degree all the perfections of things, as Dionysius says [*DN*5.1].¹⁴⁸⁸

As the very essence of subsisting goodness, God is the Cause of all existing things.¹⁴⁸⁹ Aquinas comments on *DN*11:

¹⁴⁷⁹ Andereggen, 449.

¹⁴⁸⁰ *DSC*1 (1949), 23; Porro, TA, 12-23.

¹⁴⁸¹ *IDC*9; *DSC*1.7, following Proclus *ET*12; Porro, TA, 344.

¹⁴⁸² *IDC*9 (1996), 65.

¹⁴⁸³ *IDC*9, 71-72; *DSC*1(1949), 23, 26; Stephen L. Brock, 'On Whether Aquinas' "Ipsum Esse" is "Platonism," *The Review of Metaphysics* 60.2 (2006): 269-303; Edward Feser, *Five Proofs of the Existence of God* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017), 117- 132.

¹⁴⁸⁴ Kerr (2015), 18-30 ; *DN*11 (953D); *ST*1.3.4 ; *DP*3.5; *SCG*II.52 ; *DSC*1

¹⁴⁸⁵ *CJohn* prol.; Porro, TA, 266.

¹⁴⁸⁶ *DP*7.2.6; *SCG*1.26.11.

¹⁴⁸⁷ *DP*7.2.9 (2012), 199.

¹⁴⁸⁸ *DSC*1; 8 (1949), 92. See also *ST*1.12.1.3.

¹⁴⁸⁹ *IDC*9 (1996), 65, citing *DN*1.5

“(O)nly the super-substantial being itself (namely of the highest God) is the principle and substance and cause that all things are by nature” — a principle which is indeed productive, a substance in the manner of an exemplary form and a cause which is final. And he adds: “Nor do we say that there is any other deity that generates life besides the super-divine life which is the cause of all things whatsoever that live, and of life itself in its essence, that life, namely which formally inheres in living things.”¹⁴⁹⁰

It follows, therefore, that God’s *esse* cannot be ‘void’ since it is *productive* of all beings, the exemplary and final cause of all form and life. We are arguing that this attention to the exemplar cause is itself *exemplary* and refutes Derrida’s critique of Dionysian negative theology as concealing a univocal Superbeing,¹⁴⁹¹ but it simultaneously refutes Marion’s *God Without Being*, because although God is ‘not something existing,’ i.e. an existing being, He ‘is’ nevertheless above all things.¹⁴⁹² Indeed, confronted with proof of his error, Marion later retracted his charge of ontotheology against Thomas in the 1982 edition of *Dieu Sans L’Être*,¹⁴⁹³ but by so doing calls his entire project into question.

Our lines of enquiry converge under the common focus of God’s primary name. Dionysius had insisted that God in himself is beyond every name.¹⁴⁹⁴ Within the negative Dionysian stream this is understood as ‘God is nameless, because none can say or understand anything about him,’¹⁴⁹⁵ yet for Aquinas, ‘(t)he reason why God has no name, or is said to be above being named, is because His essence is above all that we understand about God, and signify in word.’¹⁴⁹⁶ In practice, Dionysius interchangeably honours the ‘One’ (Ἐἷς) or ‘Good’ (Ἀγαθός) as ‘the highest name,’¹⁴⁹⁷ deploying the sun imagery from Plato’s ‘Form of the Good.’¹⁴⁹⁸ By contrast, Aquinas, following the normativity of Exodus 3:14,¹⁴⁹⁹ agrees with Augustine¹⁵⁰⁰ in confessing *Qui est*¹⁵⁰¹ as ‘the supremely appropriate name for God’.¹⁵⁰² Aware of a potential conflict with Dionysius, Aquinas displays two strategies for ‘saving Dionysius,’ traceable even

¹⁴⁹⁰ *DSS*18, 93 (1959)

¹⁴⁹¹ *DSC*8

¹⁴⁹² *ST*1.12.1.2; *IDN*IV.13; O’Rourke (2005), 95

¹⁴⁹³ ‘Saint Thomas d’Aquin et l’onto-théologie’ in *Revue Thomiste* (Toulouse: École de Théologie, Jan-Mar 1995), 33; Preface to Marion (1991), xvii-xxv; ‘Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology,’ *Critical Inquiry* 20.4, Chicago, 1994.

¹⁴⁹⁴ *DN*1 (593B); (596A); 13 (981B); c.f. Justin Martyr, *1 Apology* 10.1.6.

¹⁴⁹⁵ Eckhart, *Sermon* 96 (1981), 332

¹⁴⁹⁶ *ST*1.13.1.1.

¹⁴⁹⁷ *IDN*III.1

¹⁴⁹⁸ Plato, *Republic* VI (508C); *DN*3.1; *DV*10.7.10; *DV*12.5.6; *ST*1.19.4.1; 23.4.1; *ST*III.44.2.2; *ST*1.50.3.4.

¹⁴⁹⁹ Porro, TA, 157; supported by Maimonides 1.63 (1956), 94-95.

¹⁵⁰⁰ *CoG*8:6; *De Trinitate* 5.2.3; *EIP*134.4; *Sermon* 7.7; Bradshaw, 225.

¹⁵⁰¹ ‘Dixit Deus ad Moysen: « ego su qui sum. Ait: Sic dices filiis Israel: Qui est, misset me ad vos. »’ (Exodus 3:14, Vulgate).

¹⁵⁰² *ST*1.13.11; *SCG*1.23.2 ; 25.3; II.52; *DP*6.5.

from his early *SSS*.¹⁵⁰³ Firstly, he is able to maintain that ‘Being’ and ‘Good’ are convertible through a scholastic distinction, namely that the ‘Good’ is the (correct) primary name in terms of final *causation* (the ‘cause of causes’).¹⁵⁰⁴ In *IDN*, Aquinas writes: ‘the nomination [of the Good] is perfect in so far as it comprehends all things and is manifestive of all divine processions.’¹⁵⁰⁵

Secondly, Dionysius is glossed as loosely adopting a Platonic ‘mode of speaking’ which is not strictly accurate.¹⁵⁰⁶ Aquinas has elsewhere used this strategy to exculpate other church fathers.¹⁵⁰⁷ The *Platonici* had disallowed the predicate ‘being’ (Latin *ens* or Greek *ὄν*) of the Good or the One.¹⁵⁰⁸ They conceived the Good (and the One) as a more universal name than ‘Being’ because it would encompass not only ‘beings’ but also ‘prime matter’ which was assigned the status of ‘non-being,’ that is to say, a mere potentiality that falls short of ‘existence.’¹⁵⁰⁹ Non-being thus ‘desires’ the Good, as potency ‘desires’ actuality.¹⁵¹⁰ In *DP7.5* Aquinas can agree that God has no *potentiality*, but he denies that this is because God is ‘non-existing.’ Rather, the language of Being is ‘saved’ through the *via eminentia*. On this point again, Aquinas finds support from the unknown author of *Liber de Causis*, who revises Proclus in affirming God as ‘Pure subsistent Being,’¹⁵¹¹ following Porphyry (and Origen) who identified the One with Being Itself.¹⁵¹² Maimonides¹⁵¹³ and Boethius concur.¹⁵¹⁴

‘Beyond Being’ (*epekeina ousias*) is recast by Aquinas to indicate that God transcends all form or limit:¹⁵¹⁵ ‘since God is subsisting being itself, it is clear that the nature of being belongs to God infinitely, without any limitation or contraction’.¹⁵¹⁶ God’s transcendence is ‘identical with, rather than beyond Being itself’ (O’Rourke).¹⁵¹⁷ He is not ‘without being,’ but rather ‘*Being* (esse) *Without Limit*.’¹⁵¹⁸ Thus, Macquarrie misses the point by insisting that Dionysius provides ‘a subtler and more adequate name for God than Aquinas’ famous ‘He who is’ (*Quid Est*).¹⁵¹⁹ Yet,

¹⁵⁰³ *SSS*8.1.1.4; Porro, TA, 49-51.

¹⁵⁰⁴ *ST*1.5.2.2; 13.11.2; *SSS*.34.2.4.

¹⁵⁰⁵ *IDN*III (1994), 329.

¹⁵⁰⁶ *IDN*IV-3, l. 15-23 (1994), 346.

¹⁵⁰⁷ *ST*134.4; *ST*1.93.5.1; *ST*III.4.3.1; Levering and Plested (2001), 8-9.

¹⁵⁰⁸ *IDC*4.28 (1996), 31; Proclus, *ET*138 (2004), 122-123. Here the Neoplatonist followers of Plotinus incorporate ideas of final causation from Aristotle.

¹⁵⁰⁹ *IDN*III.1; 5.1; Proclus, *ET*138 (2004), 122-123; Porro, 199.

¹⁵¹⁰ Thus Aquinas reads the *scholia* on *DN*. *DV*21.2.2.

¹⁵¹¹ *IDC*4.28 (1996), 32; c.f. *ST*1.4.2; *DP*1.2; 7.2.5; *CT*1.11.

¹⁵¹² Wear and Dillon, 47.

¹⁵¹³ Maimonides 1.63 (1956), 94-95.

¹⁵¹⁴ Boethius, *De Trinitate*, 70

¹⁵¹⁵ Plotinus, *Enneads* V.1.7; 5.6; Bradshaw, 91. ‘It is, thus, undoubtedly true that Thomas’ God is not beyond being in the manner of Proclus’ One, and, nevertheless, like the latter, he is above every form, every formal determination.’ Porro, TA, 202.

¹⁵¹⁶ *Quod*III.1.1

¹⁵¹⁷ O’Rourke (2005) 206

¹⁵¹⁸ *DP*7.5 (2012), 207.

¹⁵¹⁹ Macquarrie, 90.

Aquinas owes his understanding of the indeterminate nature of God to Dionysius,¹⁵²⁰ which he expresses through the Damascene's metaphor of 'the Infinite Ocean of Substance.'¹⁵²¹ They differ only in Aquinas' transposition of indeterminate *Substance* into an Aristotelian register of existence *qua* indeterminate 'act' (*esse*).¹⁵²² This move makes more sense in view of Aquinas' initial supposition that Aristotle authored *Liber de Causis*. As Pure Act, God is neither an existing being, nor 'beyond being,' but simply 'To Be' (*esse*).¹⁵²³ In an absolute sense, therefore, *Qui est* is the most appropriate Name because it is the most universal, irreducible and indeterminate.¹⁵²⁴ As Infinite Act, God contains within himself the entire fullness of being, since he is not contracted to a specific or generic nature.¹⁵²⁵ All of God's perfections (goodness, beauty, power, wisdom, life etc.) can be subsumed under this most universal name.

This brings us to a third strategy for reconciling Dionysius with Aquinas, namely through invoking God's simplicity by which the Good is convertible with being. The Good does not 'add' anything to being, since God has no accidents,¹⁵²⁶ nor is it a name 'above' Being. Rather, the 'Good that all things desire'¹⁵²⁷ is identical with the Act of Existence (*esse*) of God Himself. This reading is consistent with Dionysius' theological intuitions in at least two respects: first, it follows consistently from his understanding of evil as *privatio boni*, namely that evil ceases to exist outside of some 'good.'¹⁵²⁸ Even the demons 'are not evil by nature'¹⁵²⁹ and partially desire the goods of 'to be, to live and to understand.'¹⁵³⁰ Second, it does justice to Dionysius' insistence that the 'differentiations' or 'processions' of God are secondary to his unity.¹⁵³¹ Aquinas recognises this in the way certain likenesses in creatures 'participate in manifold ways in that which is one in God.'¹⁵³² However, Dionysius, unlike Aquinas, associates the term 'being' with the diversity which God's unicity is 'beyond'; whereas Aquinas locates it on the *meta* level in line with God's simplicity and universality.

¹⁵²⁰ DN5 (817D); SCG1.28.9; IDNV.1, n.629; ST1.4.2; IDC3, n.74 (1996), 23; Bradshaw, 244.

¹⁵²¹ *pelagus substantiae infinitum*, ST1.13.11, 1SS8.1.4; DP7.5; citing DFO1.12. Previously used by Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 38.7 (PG36 317B-C); Bradshaw, 167. O'Rourke suggests a possible parallel in Plato τὸ πολὺ πέλαγος τετραμμένος τοῦ καλοῦ, *Symposium* (210d). See 'Aquinas and Platonism', 272.

¹⁵²² ST1.13.11. See Schultz in Aquinas, *IDH* (2001), xxxvii-liv.

¹⁵²³ DE4.147-152; Kerr, 57-58; Weinandy, 134-135.

¹⁵²⁴ DP7.5, 207; Bradshaw, 244.

¹⁵²⁵ DSC1 (1949), 23; DP1.2; Rocca (2009), 8.

¹⁵²⁶ DV21.1; SCG1.25.

¹⁵²⁷ IDNV.1, 338; c.f. ST1.16.3

¹⁵²⁸ DN4.19-20 with IDNV and DM1-2. 'evil *qua* evil never produces being or birth.' DN4 (717B). Evil thus has no direct cause. DV28.2.7.

¹⁵²⁹ DM16.2, sc.1.

¹⁵³⁰ DV24.10.17, citing DN4 (725B).

¹⁵³¹ DN1.5; 5.2; c.f. IDNV.2; DSS17; IDC3 (1996), 22; ST1.44.4.4; O'Rourke (2005), 120-5.

¹⁵³² *CRom*1.6.117.

And this truth, Dionysius most expressly teaches in the fifth chapter of *On the Divine Names*, when he says that Sacred Scripture "... does not say that to be good is one thing and to be a being is another and that life or wisdom is something else, nor that there are many causes and lesser productive deities of whom some extended to some things and others to others." In this statement he removes the opinion of the Platonists who posited that the very essence of goodness was the highest God, under Whom there was another god who is being itself.¹⁵³³

In this passage, Thomas uses participation in Being as a central plank of monotheism against the *Platonici*. That is to say, there are no individual separate substantial forms or hypostases independent of each other and of God, but rather, all forms participate in their most universal form in whom all subsequent *processions* are pre-contained, which is Being itself.¹⁵³⁴ This is why God can be named 'Life,' 'Wisdom,' 'Goodness' etc., since He is the Cause of all these processions which bear a similitude to Him who pre-contains them all.¹⁵³⁵ Hence, for Thomas (*pace* Marion), God is without *ens*, but He is not without *esse* (French *être*). "Being," (*ens*)...is...that which finitely participates "to be" (*esse*) and it is this which is proportioned to our intellect, whose object is some "that which is."¹⁵³⁶ Although *ens* is *communissimum*, this term is nevertheless used 'concretely' and in this way *ens* participates *esse*.¹⁵³⁷ This ontology is repeated in *CT* for 'the existence of each thing is a certain participation in the divine essence.'¹⁵³⁸

Doolan however importantly notes that Thomas is reticent to speak of creatures directly participating in God's *esse*, preferring to speak of participation in the *likeness* of God's *esse*,¹⁵³⁹ this qualification preserves the notion of participation from pantheistic interpretations.¹⁵⁴⁰ In *IDC*, Aquinas deploys the author's term *amethectum* to indicate that Self-Subsistent *Esse* cannot be directly known, since there is nothing higher to which He can be referred and understood.¹⁵⁴¹ Clearly, God is not a particular who shares in anything more universal. Strictly speaking 'participation' means 'to share a part in' and that which is simple is not composed of parts.¹⁵⁴² The notion of participation therefore requires careful qualification to avoid heterodoxy.¹⁵⁴³ It can truly be said in regard to God only in the sense of effects 'participating' in their Cause, as

¹⁵³³ *DSS*18, 93(1959); Te Velde (2020), 122-140.

¹⁵³⁴ *IDC*19; *ST*1.14.6; *IDNV*.1.1, n.613; Te Velde (1995), 254-257; O'Rourke (2005), 119-20.

¹⁵³⁵ *IDNV*.1, n.634; Knepper, 19-34.

¹⁵³⁶ *IDC*6.47(1996), 51.

¹⁵³⁷ *IDH*2.90

¹⁵³⁸ *CT*135, trans. Vollert; c.f. *IDNV*.2

¹⁵³⁹ Gregory T. Doolan, 'Aquinas on *Esse Subsistens* and the Third Mode of Participation,' *The Thomist* 82 (2018): 611-42.

¹⁵⁴⁰ Te Velde (2020), 122-140.

¹⁵⁴¹ *IDC*6 (1996), 47; c.f. *IDC*3 (1996), 21 ; Proclus *ET*23, 24, 123; Knepper, 24.

¹⁵⁴² *IDH*2.70; *SCG*1.26

¹⁵⁴³ Clarke (1952), 147-57

‘processions.’¹⁵⁴⁴ The intellect can know beings (*ens*), but it cannot know Being itself (*esse*) in this life except indirectly through beings.¹⁵⁴⁵ Participation of creaturely effects in the likeness of their divine Cause will alone suffice in providing the metaphysical basis for analogy and meaningful theological predication.¹⁵⁴⁶

To what extent then does Aquinas agree with the historical Dionysius? Certainly, Aquinas believes he faithfully relates the essence of Dionysius, but are Dionysius and Aquinas really ‘hymning’ from the same sheet? Pickstock considers Aquinas and Dionysius agreed in all but terminology:¹⁵⁴⁷ Thomas’ *esse commune* equates with the *esse autem ipsum* (τὸ εἶναι αὐτό)¹⁵⁴⁸ of Dionysius and thus God *beyond being* corresponds to Thomas’ *ipsum esse subsistens*, interpreted as beyond ‘common being’ according to *IDNV*.¹⁵⁴⁹ In this respect, Pickstock’s read aligns with that of Williams in harmonising East and West.¹⁵⁵⁰ O’Rourke, too lends support, contending that Plato’s Form of the Good ‘as the transcendent and infinite plenitude’ prefigures Aquinas’ *ipsum esse subsistens*.¹⁵⁵¹ It appears that even Dionysius cannot avoid describing Goodness ‘under the form of Good-Being’ (ὡς οὐσιῶδες ἀγαθόν),¹⁵⁵² from which Aquinas takes his cue that ‘Goodness itself is the divine essence.’¹⁵⁵³ In sharp contrast to those *Platonici* criticised by Aquinas,¹⁵⁵⁴ we have seen that Dionysius explicitly does accept the name, ‘ὁ ὢν,’¹⁵⁵⁵ in keeping with the tradition (summed up in Origen) for ‘him who truly is,’¹⁵⁵⁶ as long as it is not misconstrued ontotheologically: ‘God is not some kind of being’¹⁵⁵⁷; rather He is the One who ‘gives being to everything else’ (τῶν ὄντων ἀπάντων οὐσιοποιὸν).¹⁵⁵⁸ ‘So therefore God as originator of everything through the first of all his gifts is praised as “*He who is.*”’¹⁵⁵⁹ The term ‘gifts’ (δωρεαί)¹⁵⁶⁰ here in *DN*, appears to be synonymous with ‘processions’ (πρόοδοι),¹⁵⁶¹ and

¹⁵⁴⁴ *ST*1.75.5.1; *IDH*2.80;

¹⁵⁴⁵ *IDC*6 (1996), 48.

¹⁵⁴⁶ Alan P. Darley, ‘Predication or Participation? What is the Nature of Aquinas’ Doctrine of Analogy?’, *Heythrop Journal* 57 (2016): 312-324; Porro, TA, 33-40.

¹⁵⁴⁷ e.g. Catherine Pickstock, ‘Duns Scotus’ in Milbank and Oliver (2009).

¹⁵⁴⁸ *DN*5.8 (823); O’Rourke (2005), 140.

¹⁵⁴⁹ O’Rourke (2005), 131-132, 140, 159, 174, 198.

¹⁵⁵⁰ A.N. Williams (1999). See also Loudovikos (2013), 141.

¹⁵⁵¹ O’Rourke, ‘Aquinas and Platonism’, 257.

¹⁵⁵² *DN*4.1 trans. Rolt (1972), 86. This is omitted from Luibheid (1987), 71.

¹⁵⁵³ *IDNIV*.1, 338.

¹⁵⁵⁴ *IDNIII*.1

¹⁵⁵⁵ *DN*1 (596A); 2 (637A); 5 (817C)

¹⁵⁵⁶ Ramelli (2014), 180

¹⁵⁵⁷ *DN*5 (817D)

¹⁵⁵⁸ *DN*5.4

¹⁵⁵⁹ *DN*5 (820B)

¹⁵⁶⁰ *DN*2 (640C; 644A); 3 (680B); 11 (956B)

¹⁵⁶¹ *DN*1 (589D); 2 (640D-644A, 649B, 652A); 3 (690B); 5 (816B-817A); 11 (956B).

‘energies’ (ἐνέργεια).¹⁵⁶² However, if there is an ‘unparticipated’ (ἀμετέκτος) aspect of God (understood in the transitive sense of *Liber de Causis*),¹⁵⁶³ can it be theologically ‘correct’ to speak of the unparticipated ‘giving’ anything?¹⁵⁶⁴ Is the name ‘Being’ used equivocally from its creaturely effect, or truly and intrinsically of its Cause? These questions penetrate to the very heart of what negative theology means. To answer them requires a careful analysis of the relationship between Donor and donation, Source and processions, essence and energies.

4. Equivocal Being?: Essence and Energies

As a friend of wisdom to the point of coming to resemble God as closely as possible, O blessed Dionysius, you mystically explained the divine names. Initiated as you were by union with God in the mysteries that surpass all understanding, you taught them to the ends of the earth.’ (Stichera for Vespers on the feast day of St. Dionysius Areopagite – October 3rd)¹⁵⁶⁵

Clearly, Dionysius is no nominalist.¹⁵⁶⁶ Following the Platonic tradition of *Cratylus*, Dionysius teaches that names are not merely conventional, but refer to real things, even ‘very deep’ things.¹⁵⁶⁷ In Venard’s felicitous elocution, ‘metaphysics constantly celebrates the marriage of words and things.’¹⁵⁶⁸ Names are ‘representation by likeness.’¹⁵⁶⁹ Preeminently this is true of the ‘visible word’ of the sacraments (*teletas*), which are ‘a symbol of participation in Jesus.’¹⁵⁷⁰ Why then should the Divine Names be any different?¹⁵⁷¹ At the same time, *DN5* implies that God is not identical to Being *in se*; Being is rather the first of God’s *created perfections* (albeit the primary perfection in which all others participate).¹⁵⁷² How are these seemingly conflicting ideas to be reconciled?

According to Dionysius, God has bestowed real ‘similarity’ of himself upon creatures according to the cosmological principle of *omne agens agit sibi simile*¹⁵⁷³ and this preserves

¹⁵⁶² *DN13* (977B); *DN2* (644A); Golitzin (2013)

¹⁵⁶³ *DN11* (956B); 12 (972B); c.f. *DSC1*.

¹⁵⁶⁴ Milbank, ‘Christianity and Platonism’ (2013), 163. Hence, Marion prioritises ‘givenness itself’ over the Giver. See Benson, *Graven*, 205-6.

¹⁵⁶⁵ John D. Jones (2005), 372.

¹⁵⁶⁶ N. Janowitz, ‘Theories of Divine Names in Origen and Pseudo-Dionysius,’ *History of Religions* 30 (1990): 93-97

¹⁵⁶⁷ c.f. Origen, *Exhort. Martyrdom* XLVI; *CCelsum* I.24; V.45. Nysannus is one of Dionysius’ sources, ‘We do not say that the nature of things was of human invention but only their names.’ *CEunomium* 2.283 in Young(1977), 141.

Hence ‘the names revealed in scripture have sufficient grounding in reality, perhaps we should say refer sufficiently meaningfully, to form a basis for theological argument.’ (142). Bulhof and Ten Kate (2000), 22 are therefore wrong to accuse Nyssanus of teaching that words are conventional.

¹⁵⁶⁸ Venard (2020), 238.

¹⁵⁶⁹ *Cratylus* (434)

¹⁵⁷⁰ *CH1.3* (124A); *EH3* (437C); c.f. Origen, *PP13.24-32*(1992), 3, 5.

¹⁵⁷¹ Knepper (2014)

¹⁵⁷² *DN5* (816B), c.f. Plotinus, *Enneads* VI,7, 38

¹⁵⁷³ *IDN1.1*; 1.2; II.1; O’Rourke (2005), 41-44; Doolan (2018), 618; Rosemann.

theological naming from pure ‘conjecture’ or ‘constructivism.’¹⁵⁷⁴ It serves to buttress the scriptural emphasis on the goodness of creation ‘since God is the very essence of goodness, it is impossible that anything be similar to him except in being good.’¹⁵⁷⁵ However, this similarity is asymmetrical and incommensurable (preserving Dionysius from pantheism). God does not properly share a ‘similarity’ with creatures, but rather *vice versa*.¹⁵⁷⁶ For Dionysius, it appears that the similitude terminates at ‘the being-making procession,’¹⁵⁷⁷ since ‘we make assertions and denials of what is next to it, but never of it.’¹⁵⁷⁸ This implies that the historic ‘Dionysius’ should be understood through the prism of the Byzantine ‘essence’ (οὐσία) and ‘energies’ (ἐνέργεια) distinction, which we will now further clarify.

The essence/energies distinction has its origins in Cappadocian apophaticism.¹⁵⁷⁹ ‘He is invisible by nature, but becomes visible in his energies,’ writes Gregory of Nyssa.¹⁵⁸⁰ Nyssanus’ brother Basil had condemned Eunomius for presuming knowledge of God’s essence.¹⁵⁸¹ Instead, for the Cappadoceans only the *energies* of God are properly known; the *essence* remains both unknown and unknowable.¹⁵⁸² Energy, according to John of Damascus¹⁵⁸³ refers to ‘the efficient (δραστική) and essential *activity* of nature.’¹⁵⁸⁴ The Byzantine framework elucidates Dionysius’ equation of Divine names with God’s ‘processions’ such as ‘Being’, whilst at the same time maintaining that in his absolute transcendence God is ‘something unknown and wholly unrevealed.’¹⁵⁸⁵ The technical Dionysian terms ‘processions,’¹⁵⁸⁶ ‘differentiations’ (διάκροσεις),¹⁵⁸⁷ ‘projections’ (πρόοδοι),¹⁵⁸⁸ ‘providence’ (πρόνοια),¹⁵⁸⁹ ‘predeterminations’ (προορισμούς),¹⁵⁹⁰ ‘powers’ (δυνάμεις)¹⁵⁹¹ and ‘ray’ (ακτίνα)¹⁵⁹² are synonyms for these Byzantine ‘energies’

¹⁵⁷⁴ e.g. Franke, 212; Psalm 93:9 (Vulgate).

¹⁵⁷⁵ *LEJob*36.5 (1979), 398.

¹⁵⁷⁶ *DN*9 (913C); *DP*7.7, reply to counterobj. 3; *DV*2.11.1; 4, a.4.2; *DV*4.4.2; *DM*16.7.8; *SCG*1.93.786; *ST*1.4.3; 42.1.1; c.f. Proclus *IPII* (757-760).

¹⁵⁷⁷ *IDN*1.3, no.89.

¹⁵⁷⁸ *MT*5 (1048B)

¹⁵⁷⁹ Lossky (1963), 65; Bradshaw, 166ff.

¹⁵⁸⁰ Nyssanus, *Beatitudes, Sermon 6* (1954), 147; *Sermon 7*, 155.

¹⁵⁸¹ Basil, *CEunomium*1.6; Graef (1954), 5; Lossky (1963), 65; Bradshaw, 156-161.

¹⁵⁸² ‘from his activities (*energeia*) we know our God, but his substance itself we do not profess to approach. For his activities descend to us, but his substance remains inaccessible.’ Basil, *Epistle 234* in Stepien and Kochańczyk-Bonińska, 102; Lossky (1963), 65; Maximus, *Ambigua* 7; Bradshaw, 188-207; Blowers (1991), 156-157, n.42.

¹⁵⁸³ John of Damascus, *DFO*1:10; 1.4; 2; Bradshaw, 207-220.

¹⁵⁸⁴ *DFO*3:15, trans. Watson and Pullan in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 9, ed. Schaff and Wace (Buffalo, NY: CLP Co., 1899).

¹⁵⁸⁵ *DN*5 (816B); *DN*1 (640D-641A); (649B-652A).

¹⁵⁸⁶ *DN*1 (591D).

¹⁵⁸⁷ *DN*2 (640D).

¹⁵⁸⁸ *DN*1 (589D); *DN*9 (916C); *DN*11 (641-649; *CH*1 (120B).

¹⁵⁸⁹ *DN*3 (680B); *DN*5 (816D-817A); *DN*12 (969C); Golitzin, 83, nn.130-132.

¹⁵⁹⁰ *DN*5 (824C)

¹⁵⁹¹ *DN*2 (645A); *DN*11 (956A), c.f. Aquinas *DV*4.6.

(ἐνέργεια).¹⁵⁹³ The latter is particularly striking when one considers that Dionysius conceives union, not with God himself, but with the ‘hyper-being ray of divine darkness.’¹⁵⁹⁴

Unsurprisingly, this reading is extensively defended amongst Eastern Orthodox scholars: Golitzin,¹⁵⁹⁵ Lossky,¹⁵⁹⁶ Bradshaw,¹⁵⁹⁷ Yannaras,¹⁵⁹⁸ Jones,¹⁵⁹⁹ Kapriev,¹⁶⁰⁰ Stępień, Kochańczyk-Bonińska,¹⁶⁰¹ Athanasopoulos¹⁶⁰² and Loudovikos.¹⁶⁰³ A Byzantine context for the *CD* is demonstrated by anachronistic references to Syrian church rituals,¹⁶⁰⁴ such as those connected with the Eucharist,¹⁶⁰⁵ lections, dismissals, kiss of peace,¹⁶⁰⁶ and ‘hymn of universal faith,’ likely the Nicene Creed.¹⁶⁰⁷ This horizon opens up an explanation for Dionysius’ transformation of Proclus and saves Dionysius from polytheism¹⁶⁰⁸ (a point well made by Golitzin).¹⁶⁰⁹ It is also consistent with the wider influence of the Cappadocians. In *MT*, Dionysius iterates Nyssanus’ *De Vita Moysis*, that Moses did not see God Himself, but only ‘the place where God is’¹⁶¹⁰ (reprised by the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* ‘what he saw was the place where God was. And that place symbolises man’s highest contemplation of God’).¹⁶¹¹ The lesson drawn is that the most

¹⁵⁹² *MT*1 (1000A, D); *DN*1 (588A,C; 589A, 592CD); 3 (680C, 693B; 697B,D); 4 (701C; 708D); 7 (872B); *CH*1 (121B); 3 (165A); 9 (260D); 13 (301A, C); 15 (337A); *EH*2 (397D); 4 (476B); 5 (504D); 6 (537C); 7 (569A); *Ep*8 (1085C); 10 (1120A); Knepper, 99.

¹⁵⁹³ *DN*9 (912D; *CH*3 (165B); 13 (305C); (308A); 15 (329C); *EH*5 (508C); (509A); *EP*9 (1109D); Golitzin, 82, n.128.

¹⁵⁹⁴ *MT*1 (1000A), trans. Knepper, 98.

¹⁵⁹⁵ Golitzin, 32, 59.

¹⁵⁹⁶ Lossky *The Vision*, 29, 101-105. See also R.Williams, ‘*Via Negativa* and the Foundations of Theology’ in *Wrestling with Angels: Conversations in Modern Theology*’ ed. Mike Higton (London: SCM Press, 2007), 5.

¹⁵⁹⁷ Bradshaw, 181-191.

¹⁵⁹⁸ Yannaras adds a Heideggerian account of Dionysius in which knowledge exists only for *Dasein*. ‘The essence of Being may be inaccessible, but the *Existenz* of *Dasein* is our immediate experience’ c.f. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell 2008), 32.

¹⁵⁹⁹ John D. Jones (2005), 371-407.

¹⁶⁰⁰ G. Kapriev, ‘Bermerkungen uber den Kommnter des Thomas von Aquin zu “De Divinis Nominibus” des Dionysius Areopagita, Liber IV, lectio 1,’ in John D. Jones, 392, n.67.

¹⁶⁰¹ Stępień and Kochańczyk-Bonińska (2018).

¹⁶⁰² Athanasopolous (2013)

¹⁶⁰³ Loudovikos in Athanasopolous, 124.

¹⁶⁰⁴ See extensive examples in Thomas L. Campbell, *Dionysius the Areopagite: The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* (Washington D.C.: CUAP, 1981), notes: 25, 29, 39-49, 51-63, 67, 78-79, 81, 84, 86-87, 89, 91, 93-104, 106-115, 118-119, 124, 131-147, 153, 158-160, 162, 167-169, 175-178, 182, 187, 191, 194-200, 209-212, 223, 235, 227,238,256-258, 260-262, 265-272, 284, 295-296,299, 300-308, 310, 313-314, 318, 343, 347-351, 372, 377, 381-383, 385 (1981), 143. See also F.E. Brightman, *Liturgies Eastern and Western* 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), Appendix E, 487-490.

¹⁶⁰⁵ Mathews, 157, 159.

¹⁶⁰⁶ *EH*7.2; 7.4, c.f. *Apostolic Constitutions* 8.41; Campbell (1981), 82; 208; Mathews, 162.

¹⁶⁰⁷ This creed entered the liturgy post-476. *EH*3 (425C); 3 (436C), 211, 218; Andrew Louth, *Denys the Aeropagite*, (London: Continuum, 1989), c. 1; J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (Longman, 1981), 348-349; J.W.C. Wand, *A History of the Early Church to AD 500* (Methuen, 1982), 258f.; Theodorus Lector, *Hist. Eccl.* in MG86.209. J. Jungmann in Campbell, 146, n.103.

¹⁶⁰⁸ e.g. *ET*113-183.

¹⁶⁰⁹ Golitzin, 77.

¹⁶¹⁰ esp. *MT*1 (1001A), c.f. Nyssanus, *DVM*II.152-170, esp.163 (1978), 95. John 1:18 is also cited to make the same point in *Sermon* 6, ‘Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.’ Graef, 143. Aquinas will treat this text differently in *ST*II-II.8.7.

¹⁶¹¹ *Dionise Hid Divinitate*, trans. Clifton Wolters in *The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Works* (London: Penguin, 1978), 211.

divine and highest of our conceptions of God are so many ‘hypothetical *logoi*’ and ‘subordinate to that beyond-having all.’¹⁶¹² Dionysius agrees with Nyssanus that the ‘energies’ describe what is ‘around’ (περί) God, but not his indescribable essence,¹⁶¹³ a truth visually depicted by angelic ‘powers’ situated ‘around’ the divine nature.¹⁶¹⁴ Moreover, Gregory explicitly correlates ὀνόματα with God’s ‘powers’, listing ‘physician, shepherd, protector, bread, vine, way, door, mansion, rock, spring’¹⁶¹⁵ as distinct from the divine nature or essence itself.¹⁶¹⁶ This background of ‘names’ in Cappadocian thought significantly unlocks what Dionysius means by ‘Divine names’ (*theonumia*).¹⁶¹⁷ The names *are* the processions.¹⁶¹⁸ Indeed, for Gregory even the name “godhead” signifies ‘operation’ (ἐνέργειαν σεμείων) and not ‘nature,’¹⁶¹⁹ a distinction which elucidates those mysterious negations of *MT*, in which the name ‘divinity’ is denied of the transcendent Cause of all.¹⁶²⁰ (Thomas too regards ‘divinity’ as signifying ‘participation’ and not essence).¹⁶²¹ Dionysius will agree with Nysannus and Plato that there is literally ‘no name’ for the One,¹⁶²² yet in tension with this (against postmodern receptions),¹⁶²³ the claim is made in *DN* which predicates Scriptural names to the ‘processions’ of the One, in line with the Byzantine model.¹⁶²⁴ Although it appears that in some (imprecise) sense the processions are ‘revelations’ of the One (which is more consistent with naming in *Cratylus*),¹⁶²⁵ it is simultaneously asserted that the essence cannot be discerned from the energies (in line with Socrates’ insistence that the names of the gods are known only to themselves).¹⁶²⁶

In assessing the Byzantine reading, three things are important, first, whilst Dionysius is clearly indebted to the Cappadocian fathers, he also by-passes their technical ‘essence/energies’ terminology. *Energeia* is used of the illuminating activity of the hierarchy, rather than the

¹⁶¹² *MT*1 (1000D), trans. Jones (1980), 214.

¹⁶¹³ *CH*2.3, an idea which Ramelli (2014), 174, traces back to Plotinus, *Enneads* V.3.13-4. C.f. *DN*3 (680B) – which uses the same term περί. Golitzin, 59.

¹⁶¹⁴ *DVM*II.180. The expression τα περί τὴν θεῶν φύσιν occurs in *CEunomium* II.89; *On Not Three Gods* III.I.43; *On The Holy Spirit* III.I.14 and *Great Catechism* 5. See Bradshaw, 167. It is picked up by Maximus, *Centuries on Charity* 1.100. Bradshaw, 189.

¹⁶¹⁵ *DVM*II.177.

¹⁶¹⁶ *ibid*II.176, c.f. *Sermon* 6, in Graef, 147.

¹⁶¹⁷ Bradshaw, 161.

¹⁶¹⁸ *DN*2 (652A).

¹⁶¹⁹ *Ad Ablabius* in Bradshaw, 163, following Damascene, see *ST*1.13.8.1.

¹⁶²⁰ *DN*13 (981A); *MT*5 (1048A), to be modified into ‘God Beyond God’ by Eckhart, *Sermon* 87 (1987), II.274. According to Bradshaw, 163, Theophilus of Antioch (*Ad Autolyicum* 1.4-5) had derived the etymology of *theos* from God having placed (*tetheikeinai*) all things in stability and (following *Cratylus* (397d)) from being active (*theein*) throughout creation.

¹⁶²¹ *CRom*1.6.117

¹⁶²² *DN*1 (588B) c.f. Plato, *Parmenides* (142^a).

¹⁶²³ Hick and Keller op.cit.

¹⁶²⁴ *DN*1 (589D); Blankenhorn, 306.

¹⁶²⁵ *MT*1 (1001A) ‘through them his unimaginable presence is shown.’

¹⁶²⁶ Gregory, *On the Holy Trinity* in Bradshaw, 163; c.f. *Cratylus* (400).

operations of God *ad extra*, although on closer inspection we can see that this activity is itself an imitation of the divine *energeia* and a vehicle for divinisation.¹⁶²⁷ Furthermore, in view of our earlier discussion on the ‘translatability of revelation,’ a difference in terminology is not decisive against the Byzantine distinction if the meaning is substantially present.

Secondly, this paradigm is especially helpful for making sense of God’s ‘ecstasy.’ In *DN4*, Dionysius audaciously attributes ‘ecstasy’ to the Cause of all who,

is as it were, enchanted by goodness, by love and by yearning and is led away from his transcendent dwelling place and comes to abide within all things, and he does so by virtue of his supernatural and ecstatic capacity to remain, nevertheless, inseparable from himself.¹⁶²⁸

Corrigan perceives a ‘coincidence of opposites’ here in the juxtaposition of Unmoved Mover with passively enchanted lover,¹⁶²⁹ whilst Keller and Macquarrie find an anticipation of Hartshorne’s ‘Most Moved Mover,’ who ‘surpasses’ Himself.¹⁶³⁰ But a process understanding is precluded by *DN9* (916CD) ‘(n)or is this motion to be imagined as occurring in the mind, in the soul, or in respect of the nature of God,’ rather it applies to the ‘unswerving processions of his activities’ (as Aquinas recognised).¹⁶³¹ All three modern writers lack the precision of the essence/energies paradigm for framing the bipolarity of ‘remaining’ and ‘ecstasy’ and therefore unnaturally squeeze it into a modern substitute such as ‘dialectical theism.’¹⁶³² For Dionysius, however, the dyad ultimately resolves itself according to the the Neoplatonic triad of *mone* (remaining), *proodos* (corresponding to the ecstasy) and *epistrophē* (conversion).¹⁶³³

Recognition of this paradigm, thirdly, guards against reductive Plotinian receptions such as Marion’s, who highlights Dionysius’ silence in *DN1.3*,¹⁶³⁴ without noticing the influence of Nyssanus who had ‘honored the silence’ in the context of a homily on Ecclesiastes, where a ‘time to be silent’ relates to God’s essence, and a ‘time to speak’ expresses his revelatory works.¹⁶³⁵ For

¹⁶²⁷ *CH3* (164D-165B); *EH5* (508C-5099A); Bradshaw, 183f.

¹⁶²⁸ *DN4* (712a-b), eulogised by Corrigan as ‘one of the most remarkable passages in the whole of ancient thought’ 112, c.f. *EP9* (1112C); Bradshaw, 181; Golitzin, 84. On Aquinas’ appropriation see *SPsalms*30.1; *STI*.20.2.1; I.20.4.

¹⁶²⁹ Golitzin remarks that no other ancient philosopher speaks of the *ekstasis* as something God himself experiences, 64.

¹⁶³⁰ Keller, 76, 17; John Macquarrie, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought* (London: SCM, 1990), 380 and Macquarrie (1984), 79-80.

¹⁶³¹ e.g. ‘He says therefore first that when the teachers of holy scripture say that God, who is immobile, is moved and proceeds to all things, it must be understood as it befits God.’ *IDNIX*.25-27.500.

¹⁶³² Bradshaw, 181.

¹⁶³³ *DN9* (916D); Proclus, *ET35*; Golitzin, 73-74.

¹⁶³⁴ Marion (1991), 54,

¹⁶³⁵ Nyssanus, *Opera V* in Ramelli (2014), 182.

Dionysius, this equilibrium expresses the corresponding accent on the Inexpressible expressing itself: ‘in the holy words of Scripture’ as argued earlier.¹⁶³⁶

There is thus sufficient evidence to infer an inchoate essence/energies distinction in the *CD*, from which the later bifurcation of ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ receptions emerge. Assertions and denials are made ‘of what comes after it’ and not of the *hyper* cause of all.¹⁶³⁷ This idea may be illustrated in the Plotinian figure of the circle, whose centre is participated by the surrounding radii.¹⁶³⁸ Dionysius conceives Beauty, Being, Mind and Life, in which particular beings participate, as themselves emanating from an unparticipable One.¹⁶³⁹ Aquinas indirectly (and unintentionally) testifies to an essence/energies conception within the *CD* in that apart from *IDN*, Aquinas rarely refers to God as inparticipable,¹⁶⁴⁰ which implies that in those exceptional cases where he does, he reflects Dionysius. For Aquinas, the incommunicability of God’s nature (on account of its simplicity)¹⁶⁴¹ is juxtaposed with the possibility of participation in His likeness.¹⁶⁴² The height of its philosophical development is scaled in the notion of relations being asymmetrically real from the side of creatures but in *ratio* from the side of God.

One major motivation for the development of the Byzantine essence/energies distinction was the need to articulate deification without collapsing into pantheism:¹⁶⁴³ This tension is already felt in *EP2*, which explains deification as a culmination of these ‘gifts’ which the Source itself transcends.¹⁶⁴⁴ God himself is located ‘beyond..all divinisation.’¹⁶⁴⁵ By the 14th century, however, with Palamas (1296-1359) the distance between essence and energies is so pronounced that it lacks any clear relationship between the two.¹⁶⁴⁶ It may well be anachronistic then to read the Palamite position into Dionysius, which is in any case underdetermined.¹⁶⁴⁷ Although the point made by Loudovikos is well taken that Palamas is not a systematic writer and may not always be

¹⁶³⁶ *DN1* (539B).

¹⁶³⁷ *MT5* (1048B).

¹⁶³⁸ *Enneads* 1.7.1; 4.1.1.

¹⁶³⁹ *DN2* (644A), 62; *DN5* (816B-817A); Milbank (2013), 163.

¹⁶⁴⁰ Doolan, 614, e.g. *IDNII.1;2.4;2.5*.

¹⁶⁴¹ *JSSS48.1.1*

¹⁶⁴² Doolan, 617, 640-42; *ST1.13.9.1*; *IDH2*; *CRom1.6.117*.

¹⁶⁴³ Palamas, *Against Acindynus* 3.14.51; *Theophanes*, PG150: 932; Loudovikos (2013), 129; Lossky (1963), c. 9; Jones (2005), 382.

¹⁶⁴⁴ John of Scythopolis highlights this distinction in his Scholia on these verses in PGIV (529 B-D). See Golitzin, 43, n.98.

¹⁶⁴⁵ *DN2* (645C).

¹⁶⁴⁶ *Against Acindynus* II, 19,91; John A. Demetracopoulos, ‘Palamas Transformed: Palamite Interpretations of the Distinction between God’s “essence” and “energies” in Late Byzantium’ in Martin Hinterberger and Chris Schabel (eds.), *Bibliotheca 11: Greeks, Latins, and Intellectual History 1204-1500* (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 272f. For a defence of Palamas, see Loudovikos, 122-149.

¹⁶⁴⁷ Rowan Williams, ‘The Philosophical Structures of Palamism’ in *Eastern Churches Review* 9 (1977): 27-44; Milbank (2013), 205-209; Kharlamov, 186-8..

consistent,¹⁶⁴⁸ Palamas does sometimes appear to regard ‘being’ as equivocal between God and creatures, since ‘being’ is only ‘properly’ predicated of what is produced by God and never of God Himself.¹⁶⁴⁹ If so, a serious problem arises for Palamism, since only the ‘energies’ of God are properly known and therefore the name ‘Trinity’ must refer to the ‘economic’ aspect of God and not to God *in se*, who remains by implication an undifferentiated monad.¹⁶⁵⁰ This anti-realist danger is actualised in Hick¹⁶⁵¹ as well as in Yannaras, for whom God only becomes personal in the ‘event’ of experience.¹⁶⁵² Rhodes extends the critique to Dionysius himself arguing that the doctrine of *hyperousios* is incompatible with the Trinity as three persons in one *ousia*.¹⁶⁵³

(W)e use the names Trinity and Unity for that which is beyond every name, calling it the transcendent being above every being. But no unity or trinity, no number or oneness, no fruitfulness, indeed nothing that is or is known can proclaim that hiddenness beyond every mind and reason of the transcendent Godhead which transcends every being. There is no name for it nor expression.¹⁶⁵⁴

Consequently ‘One’ is the climax of the divine names,¹⁶⁵⁵ in continuity with Plotinian and Procline metaphysics where One is prior to Nous and Soul,¹⁶⁵⁶ or with Evagrius for whom the plurality of Father, Son and Spirit resolved into a distinctionless One.¹⁶⁵⁷ To the contrary, if God is beyond the language of Father, Son and Spirit, drawn from creatures, it must also be true that He is beyond the concept of a distinctionless One. Nevertheless, this implies a hidden reality prior to Trinity, a possibility exploited by postmodern writers.

For Nygren, Hathaway and Copleston the ‘God beyond God’ language reinforces the suspicion that Dionysius’ ‘orthodoxy’ is a masquerade. The verdict is underdetermined, however, as the data remains compatible with Byzantine orthodoxy (explainable in part by the Plotinian

¹⁶⁴⁸ Loudovikos, 132-3. For example, Palamas also says, ‘it is impossible to consider energies as sorts of natures or beings different from the essence.’ (*Against Acindynus* 3, 13, 42) and ‘if you think that, through this energy, it is the very divine essence that expresses itself, even though not thoroughly, you are not out of the terms of piety.’ (*Theophanes* 17), *ibid*, 125. Did he understand this dialectically?

¹⁶⁴⁹ *Capita* 106. Jones (2005), 391.

¹⁶⁵⁰ J. Vanneste, *Le Mystère de Dieu* in Golitzin, 68. Williams (1977), 53 levels the same criticism at Palamas.

¹⁶⁵¹ Hick (2000), 38-39

¹⁶⁵² Yannaras, 85, following Heidegger, *Being and Time* (2008), 33

¹⁶⁵³ M.C. Rhodes, ‘Pseudo-Dionysius’ concept of God’, *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 75:4 (2014): 306-318. In defence of Dionysius, such a view does not give full weight to the analogical nature of terms like *ousia*, for orthodoxy generally and for Dionysius specifically.

¹⁶⁵⁴ DN13.3 (981A), 129. See also DN5 (816C), 97. ‘[E]ven trinity is a title which must ultimately be understood as falling short of the unknowable Godhead – an idea which can still cause tremors of shock in some theological circles.’ Carabine, 289; Rhodes, 311.

¹⁶⁵⁵ DN13.3 (977B); DN2 (652A).

¹⁶⁵⁶ *IPII* (763).

¹⁶⁵⁷ Ramelli, 220-2

influence on that model). It overlooks Golitzin's data, that Dionysius does not limit the term 'differentiations' to God *ad extra*, but also uses it of the persons of the Godhead *in se*.¹⁶⁵⁸ 'One' for Dionysius *is* at the same time Father, Son and Holy Spirit, just as a plurality of lamps produce one light.¹⁶⁵⁹ *Each person is the One.*¹⁶⁶⁰ This disables Rhodes' criticisms. It also vindicates Aquinas' anti-Arian (and realist) interpretation of the *CD*, which teaches the unity of the Trinity in three hypostases.¹⁶⁶¹ The Father is the Source of the Son, but not the Cause or Creator of the Son.¹⁶⁶² One of the persons of the Trinity bears the name 'Logos' not only from his economic activity in history, but preeminently because, as the Divine Logos, He is 'simpler than any simplicity and in its utter transcendence..independent of everything.'¹⁶⁶³ (There is no Plotinian or Proclean separation here of the Logos from the One – nor consequently of intelligibility from reality).¹⁶⁶⁴ Dionysius, who had personally been baptised into the 'three persons of the divine blessedness,'¹⁶⁶⁵ now invokes the Trinity as 'the Source of good and beyond good and which manifests the whole of the supremely good providences of itself.'¹⁶⁶⁶ Furthermore, *DN*2.4, cited by Thomas, explicitly equates *hyperousios* with the Trinity. As Jones acknowledges, the whole treatise of *MT* is addressed as a hymn *to* the hidden Trinity, an *apophatic* immanence,¹⁶⁶⁷ both 'monad and triad,' yet 'neither any monad nor triad of the sort known to us,'¹⁶⁶⁸ beyond human conceptualization,¹⁶⁶⁹ higher than 'being', 'divinity' and 'goodness.'¹⁶⁷⁰ Williams therefore aptly summarises: '(t)he God of the Areopagite, exalted above τὸ ἐν, is clearly and unmistakably the triune God of revelation; Dionysian apophasis never leads to a level of divine existence superior to the three persons.'¹⁶⁷¹ Such a position may yet be internally incoherent, since it is in tension with the previous claim that all names of God refer to *ad extra* processions, including names of Godhead, Fatherhood and Sonship,¹⁶⁷² but it is consistent with the thought of the Cappadocian fathers who were the classic formulators of Trinitarian theology and therefore Dionysius can

¹⁶⁵⁸ *DN*2 (636C; 640C; 641D); Golitzin, 68, 73; Porro, 195. Maximus displays similar ambiguity. Some interpret the *logoi* as both created and uncreated, transcendent and immanent. Blowers (1991), 156-157, n.42.

¹⁶⁵⁹ *DN*2 (641A-B); Golitzin, 68;

¹⁶⁶⁰ *DN*13 (980B). Golitzin, 70; Sammon, 180; Porro, TA, 194.

¹⁶⁶¹ *DN*1 (592A-593B; 641B; 821C); *CH*7 (212C); *EH*2 (396D); *EH*6 (533B); John of Scythopolis, *In Librum De Divinis Nominibus* 373A in Suchla, *Corpus Dionysiacum* IV.1 (2011), 399.

¹⁶⁶² *DP*3.14.5 (2012), 78.

¹⁶⁶³ *DN*7 (827C); *DV*4.5

¹⁶⁶⁴ Porro, TA, 194.

¹⁶⁶⁵ *EH*2 (396D)

¹⁶⁶⁶ *DN*3 (680A), trans. Jones, 129.

¹⁶⁶⁷ *DN*13 (981A-B)

¹⁶⁶⁸ *DN*13 (980D); Golitzin, 70.

¹⁶⁶⁹ *DN*2 (645A).

¹⁶⁷⁰ *MT*1 (997A). John N. Jones, 'The Status of the Trinity in Dionysian Thought' in *The Journal of Religion* 80.4. (UCP, Oct 2001): 645-657; Lossky (1991), 43.

¹⁶⁷¹ Rowan Williams, 'Via Negativa' (2007), 8; Knepper, 38.

¹⁶⁷² *MT*5 (1048A). This could perhaps be resolved in terms of Aquinas' distinction between *res significans* and *modus significandi*.

hold it in good faith.¹⁶⁷³ It concurs with the way Dionysius was in fact understood as Trinitarian by 9th century scholars Gottschalk of Orbais¹⁶⁷⁴ and Eriugena.¹⁶⁷⁵

Our thesis, however, argues that Aquinas significantly ‘perfects’ the clarity of Dionysius’ theology and resolves some of its internal ambiguities and dangers. Aquinas’ treatment of Dionysius is one *auctoritate* which is largely absent from anti-trinitarian and anti-realist readings and is credible as an exemplary reception. In *ST*III.3.4 Thomas treats the question whether all three persons of the Trinity take on flesh in the incarnation: ‘Dionysius says that the mystery of the Incarnation pertains to "discrete theology," i.e. according to which something "distinct" is said of the Divine Persons.’¹⁶⁷⁶ In *DN*2, Dionysius had deployed the figure of a room of distinct lamps sharing one light. If one of the lamps leaves the room, this in no way draws out the light from the lamps still in the room and it is in a sense dependent on the ‘material fire’ (of the incarnation).¹⁶⁷⁷ (This image may also recollect the Byzantine Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified gifts in which the priest with candle declares ‘The Light of Christ illumines all.’)¹⁶⁷⁸ It is true that Dionysius nowhere uses *πρόσωπα* for these distinctions, unlike his Cappadocian predecessors¹⁶⁷⁹ and perhaps for the University of Paris this prompted a need for Dionysius to be ‘saved.’ The first objection to the question, ‘Whether the word "person" (Latin *persona*) should be said of God?’ invokes Dionysius for support.

It would seem that the name "person" should not be said of God. For Dionysius says (*Div. Nom.*): "No one should ever dare to say or think anything of the supersubstantial and hidden Divinity, beyond what has been divinely expressed to us by the oracles." But the name "person" is not expressed to us in the Old or New Testament. Therefore "person" is not to be applied to God.¹⁶⁸⁰

Aquinas’ reply has perennial value for the question of whether theology should be restricted to verbatim words from Scripture and iterates Dionysius’ now familiar methodology of the translatability of revelation.¹⁶⁸¹

¹⁶⁷³ Nyssanus: *Ad Ablabius*. Bradshaw, 180; *Sermon 3* on the Lord’s Prayer in Graef, 54-55. Golitzin, 60, 72; Golitzin, *Et introibo ad altare Dei: The Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagita* (Thessalonica: Patriarchal Institute, 1994), 297-302.

¹⁶⁷⁴ Gottschalk, *De Trina Deitate* III.

¹⁶⁷⁵ *DDN*1 (456A), 68-69.

¹⁶⁷⁶ *ST*III.3.4 *sc*

¹⁶⁷⁷ *DN*2 (641B)

¹⁶⁷⁸ Meyendorff, 35.

¹⁶⁷⁹ Wear and Dillon (2007), 44.

¹⁶⁸⁰ *ST*1.29.3.1.

¹⁶⁸¹ *DN*4 (408C)

Although the word "person" is not found applied to God in Scripture, either in the Old or New Testament, nevertheless what the word signifies is found to be affirmed of God in many places of Scripture; as that He is the supreme self-subsisting being, and the most perfectly intelligent being. If we could speak of God only in the very terms themselves of Scripture, it would follow that no one could speak about God in any but the original language of the Old or New Testament. The urgency of confuting heretics made it necessary to find new words to express the ancient faith about God. Nor is such a kind of novelty to be shunned; since it is by no means profane, for it does not lead us astray from the sense of Scripture.¹⁶⁸²

Dionysius alludes to critics who accuse him of teaching 'confusion' on the subject of the Trinity (which he denies)¹⁶⁸³ and since the etymology of *πρόσωπον* comes from *πχρωσωπεῖον*,¹⁶⁸⁴ a 'mask',¹⁶⁸⁵ it was plausibly avoided to avoid connotations of Sabellianism.¹⁶⁸⁶ Dionysius consistently insists that any term from the realm of beings must be literally denied of the Cause of being, but this does not prevent these terms referring at a *hyper* level in Godself (as Knepper successfully argues).¹⁶⁸⁷

Whereas some recent writers maintain that the Byzantine model is superior,¹⁶⁸⁸ we argue our discussion has revealed a confused and intellectually unsatisfactory account of theological language. This claim is substantiated by the influence on both sides of the debate of the translations of Aquinas' work into Greek by Demetrios and Prochorus Kydones.¹⁶⁸⁹ The position that the energies are not identical with the essence and yet nevertheless *are* God¹⁶⁹⁰ in the mode of his revelatory nature *ad extra* (i.e. a real distinction in God) compromises the doctrine of divine simplicity,¹⁶⁹¹ at least in its strong form, since, given divine simplicity, everything which is not the divine essence must be a creature.¹⁶⁹² This could explain why Dionysius prefers to speak of 'unity' rather than 'simplicity'.¹⁶⁹³ The presence of an *objectio* in *DP7* against strong Divine simplicity, naming Dionysius in support,¹⁶⁹⁴ suggests that Dionysius was being understood by some on EO lines by the 13th century. Thomas' response therefore provides

¹⁶⁸² *ST1.29.3.4.*

¹⁶⁸³ *DN2 (640A).*

¹⁶⁸⁴ Liddell and Scott (1872), 609

¹⁶⁸⁵ Weishapl (1975), 167.

¹⁶⁸⁶ Condemned by Aquinas, *SCGIV.4*

¹⁶⁸⁷ Knepper, 62.

¹⁶⁸⁸ Athanasopoulos, 10; Bradshaw; Loudovikos, 122-149.

¹⁶⁸⁹ Demetracopoulos, 264, 269-71 (and later circulated in the Muslim world by Mehmed II. See Porro, TA, 402).

¹⁶⁹⁰ 'The *proodoi* both *are* God and *manifest* God, who remains beyond them as their source.' Bradshaw, 181; Golitzin, 74; Lossky (1963), 127.

¹⁶⁹¹ *ST1.1.3; DP7.1*; Te Velde (1995), 263-264; Jones (2005), 371-407; Milbank (2013), 166. Bradshaw, 246-250.

¹⁶⁹² *ST1.28.2, sc.*

¹⁶⁹³ Bradshaw, 191, n.13.

¹⁶⁹⁴ *CH2.*

a relevant critique of this reading and possibly a ‘pious’ corrective.¹⁶⁹⁵ Blankenhorn astutely remarks that, “Thomas never clearly signals that he has attained an awareness of the historical Areopagite’s teaching. But Aquinas does mention doctrinal positions that come close to this teaching.”¹⁶⁹⁶ In regard to the truth of things themselves, however (without prejudice to Dionysius’ actual position), Thomas gives the helpful *responsio* that from God’s perspective, his action is simple, whereas from the creature’s point of view, it is plural.¹⁶⁹⁷

We find a similar paradigm for an essence/energies critique in Thomas’ disagreement with Maimonides which treats equivocal versus analogical God-talk. Significantly, Aquinas specifically frames this in an *objectio* concerning Dionysian ‘processions.’¹⁶⁹⁸ Maimonides had argued that divine predication must be either wholly negative or conversely, positive only of *actions emanating from God*.¹⁶⁹⁹ For example, the qualities ‘merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness’ were experienced as God’s ‘ways’ and his ‘anger’ was experienced as natural disaster.¹⁷⁰⁰ For Aquinas, by contrast, if language about God *only* related to actions or negations then all positive terms would be equivocal in regard to God’s substance¹⁷⁰¹ (the actual position of anti-realist agnostics, such as Hick). This would raise the insuperable problem of how God could know creatures through his own essence,¹⁷⁰² since there would be no true *likeness* in creatures, which contravenes the axiom *omne agens agit sibi simile*¹⁷⁰³ (except that the Plotinian One escaped this principle).¹⁷⁰⁴ Knowledge of the Creator through his effects is what distinguishes Dionysius from the ‘alien’ God of Gnosticism, in spite of otherwise striking parallels in the Gnostic text *Allogenes*.¹⁷⁰⁵

It is no accident that Eckhart reads Dionysius through Maimonides (rather than Aquinas) and Cusanus reads Dionysius through Eckhart, which confirms our identification of an agnostic Plotinian stream of reception.¹⁷⁰⁶ In Chapter 3 we will see that there is evidence to suggest that Dionysius himself follows Proclus (rather than Plotinus) in affirming God’s knowledge of

¹⁶⁹⁵ ST1.13.4; Garrigou-Lagrange (1936), II.3, 190-199. There is however a discussion concerning created and uncreated grace in STII-I.110.1. See Milbank, 167.

¹⁶⁹⁶ Blankenhorn, 306.

¹⁶⁹⁷ DP7.1.7 (2012), 194-195; SCGII.10, 13; Demetracopoulos, 269-70.

¹⁶⁹⁸ from DN1 (591D). Blankenhorn, 304-306.

¹⁶⁹⁹ Though even this must be qualified by his affirmation of the positive predication of God as YHWH and as *Ehyeh asher Ehyeh*. See Maimonides 1.61, 63 (1956), 89-90, 94; Luis Cortest, *Philo’s Heirs: Moses Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2017), 40-53.

¹⁷⁰⁰ Maimonides 1.54 (1956), 75-76. Similarly, Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets II* (New York/Evanston: Harper and Row, 1962), Introduction, speaks of God’s ways known to the prophets, but ‘brackets out’ the nature of God in Himself. Philo provides a precedent, *De Mutatione Nominum* 29; *De Abrahamo* 120ff; *De Confusione Linguarum* 137; *Legatio* 6; *De Mundo* (398A); *Allegories of the Laws* III.115. Bradshaw, 162; Dillon (1977), 161-163.

¹⁷⁰¹ ST1.13.2.

¹⁷⁰² DV2.11.122-34 in Rocca (2004), 179.

¹⁷⁰³ SCG1.8.

¹⁷⁰⁴ Jonas (1958), 49-56; Stępień and Kochańczyk-Bonińska, 65.

¹⁷⁰⁵ Karen King (1995), 17, citing *Allogenes* 62:32-36; 63:9-12; Dillon (1977), 156.

¹⁷⁰⁶ Hankey (2008), 691-692

creatures through knowing his own essence. Aquinas rejects Maimonides' agnosticism, partly from a commitment, shared with Dionysius, to a philo-theological principle that all creaturely effects by which we name God imperfectly, pre-exist in their Cause simply and perfectly.¹⁷⁰⁷ *DN* affirms this all-embracing knowledge through causality,¹⁷⁰⁸ citing John 21:17 and Daniel 13:42 (*Susanna* 42) as Scriptural proofs.¹⁷⁰⁹ Knepper convincingly argues that Divine Causality is everywhere presumed in the *CD* and is not itself apophatically denied.¹⁷¹⁰ This is important because it vindicates Aquinas' interpretation of Dionysian divine names as analogical rather than merely nominal or equivocal.¹⁷¹¹ It also refutes misunderstandings of analogy in Aquinas as 'purely epistemological.'¹⁷¹²

In *ST*1.13.2 and its parallel *DP*7.5, Aquinas gives three objections to the view that perfection terms such as 'goodness' are only extrinsic predications (Maimonides).¹⁷¹³ Firstly, this would reduce *all* positive divine predication to metaphor (an error shared by postmodern interpreters).¹⁷¹⁴ Hence, God is wise in the same way that he is angry and in the same way that he is 'fire,' since all of these describe only effects rather than God Himself. Logically, this renders all names of God synonymous and vacuous.¹⁷¹⁵ All language drawn from creatures would be equally true or false. This, Aquinas declares, is contrary to the true faith.¹⁷¹⁶ The saints and fathers have denied that God is a body subject to passions, but they have also affirmed non-corporeal perfection terms such as 'life,' 'wisdom' and 'being.' Not only this, but, if all language about God is equivocal, this destroys natural theology, 'we would know nothing about God except purely empty words, behind which there would be nothing real.'¹⁷¹⁷ Thomas therefore distinguishes between 'figurative' and 'proper' language about God.¹⁷¹⁸ 'Figurative' language names God from material, corporeal or defective creatures,¹⁷¹⁹ which are literally false, whereas 'proper' language truly 'pertains to God in His own nature' such as 'Being,' 'Life' and 'Wisdom.'¹⁷²⁰ The same truth expressed in Scripture by metaphor is elsewhere expressed in plainer speech.¹⁷²¹ Although no language derived from creatures relates univocally to the Creator

¹⁷⁰⁷ *ST*1.13.2; Cortest, 40-53.

¹⁷⁰⁸ *DN*7 (869A-C), c.f. Boethius, *COPV*.

¹⁷⁰⁹ *DN*7 (868D-869A).

¹⁷¹⁰ Knepper, 55-57; *DN*1 (589C); 8 (889D-892A).

¹⁷¹¹ *SSS*8.1.2; Te Velde (2009), 74, 92, n.25.

¹⁷¹² Bulhof and Ten Kate (2000), 23.

¹⁷¹³ *DP*7.5; *ST*1.13.5 and the discussion in Garrigou-Lagrange (1936), II.3, 190-199.

¹⁷¹⁴ Hick (2000), 38-39 in Knepper, 2, n.1.

¹⁷¹⁵ *ST*1.13.4, obj.1-3.

¹⁷¹⁶ *ST*1.13.2,5.

¹⁷¹⁷ *DP*7.7, trans. Regan, 214.

¹⁷¹⁸ *DV*23.3

¹⁷¹⁹ *DV*4.1; Knepper, 5; Venard, 142-3

¹⁷²⁰ *DV*23.3

¹⁷²¹ *ST*1.1.9.2.

and is therefore ‘not proper in the full sense,’ these ‘proper’ names correspond with the Dionysian divine names (*theonumia*) and are probably modelled on them. Dionysius frequently explains that the Cause of all ‘precontains’ the perfections present in the Divine Names in a hyper and more *unified* mode.¹⁷²² Proper names, function as a synecdoche in which the unknown whole is understood by something partial.¹⁷²³ This understanding is already present in Nyssanus, thus adding weight to Thomas’ interpretation.¹⁷²⁴ In his later work, *ST*, Aquinas introduces the helpful term *substantialiter*¹⁷²⁵ to clarify the status of proper names.¹⁷²⁶ Unlike pagan theurgy’s ‘unutterable symbols.. intelligible only to the gods,’¹⁷²⁷ proper names communicate *substantial* truth about God’s nature through the *via eminentia*.¹⁷²⁸ Moreover, *substantialiter* translates the Greek ὑποστατικῆς by which Dionysius speaks the ‘Good.’¹⁷²⁹ In further contrast with postmodern theorists, Aquinas insists that even figurative language is never arbitrary or merely nominal, but is ‘founded on the fact that no creature “is deprived of participation in good” as Dionysius says.’¹⁷³⁰ This is because ‘Similarity’ itself is a cause which creatures participate. All things imitate their cause which is ultimately the unity of the Word.¹⁷³¹ Within Biblical revelation this insight is indicated in John where Jesus describes himself as the ‘true’ Vine and the ‘true’ Bread.¹⁷³² In sum, God is named Goodness and Life, not merely as efficient cause of creaturely goodness and life, but intrinsically through supereminence.

Second, Aquinas says that if, as the catholic faith affirms, the world is not eternal in the past (see Chapter 1), then these effects are not eternal. Consequently, before the world began it would be improper to name God as Word, Life, Being, Goodness etc.. He only ‘became’ these when he started to act temporally (a *reductio ad absurdum*).¹⁷³³

Third, it is inadequate to speak of God only negatively,¹⁷³⁴ since it would be impossible even to deny anything of God unless we could also affirm something of him (a point buttressing Knepper’s thesis regarding the presupposition of causality). Hence, Aquinas appeals to *DN13* to

¹⁷²² *ST*1.13.2.3.

¹⁷²³ Fletcher, 83-84.

¹⁷²⁴ Nyssanus, *Beatitudes, Sermon 4* (1954), 125.

¹⁷²⁵ *ST*1.13. resp., a.6; *DP*7.5; Rocca (2004), 307.

¹⁷²⁶ Significantly and independently Kharlamov already sees evidence of ‘attributive’ and ‘substantial’ predication of God in Dionysius, 187.

¹⁷²⁷ Iamblichus, *DM*2.ii in Dodds (2004), xx.

¹⁷²⁸ Rocca, 31, 312; Blankenhorne, 305. Nyssanus had earlier argued that some names are ‘truly predicable of God’ though ‘with a heightened and more glorious meaning.’ *CEunomius*1.620-633 in Young (1997), 142. Young calls this ‘a special kind of “literalism”’

¹⁷²⁹ *DN*11 (956A); Knepper, 21

¹⁷³⁰ *DV*23.3

¹⁷³¹ *SCG*1.54; Venard (2020), 82.

¹⁷³² John 6:51; *ST*III.74.1; 75.1; John 15:1.

¹⁷³³ *CJohn*5.5.783

¹⁷³⁴ e.g. Maimonides (1956) 81, or Basilides. Trigg (1985), 39.

justify that names such as ‘goodness,’¹⁷³⁵ ‘being’¹⁷³⁶ and ‘life’ are given *truly* (albeit imperfectly) of God.¹⁷³⁷

It must be conceded that these objections would be *ignoratio elenchi* if Dionysius understood ‘processions’ according to the Byzantine position already outlined, i.e. not as created effects, but as God Himself in relation to creatures.¹⁷³⁸ However, Aquinas does understand clearly that an unknowable God Beyond God (which may or may not correctly interpret Dionysius), destroys any real *analogia entis*. It entails what Williams has called ‘two *wholly* distinct orders of reality in God.’¹⁷³⁹ As such, it is also an innovation in the use of the terms with respect to their historical genealogy. Bradshaw has traced *energiae* back to Porphyry¹⁷⁴⁰ where it refers to a quality which flows from the *ousia* or is an offshoot from it.¹⁷⁴¹ This sense continues in Iamblichus and Athanasius.¹⁷⁴² Therefore, although Bradshaw himself defends the Palamite distinction,¹⁷⁴³ he contradicts his own genealogy of the original meaning of *energeia* as a *revelation* of *ousia*. This is supported by its usage in Proclus in which external *energeia* reflects inner *energeia*.¹⁷⁴⁴

Furthermore, Milbank, pushes back on the view that the early Byzantine view of John of Damascus and of Basil posited a distinction *within God himself*. He regards this as a 14th century ‘fall’ akin to and almost parallel with the Scotist ‘fall’ into univocity in the West.¹⁷⁴⁵ For Milbank, Dionysius points to the truth that ‘God is in himself an ecstasy beyond himself,’¹⁷⁴⁶ beyond the constraints of the essence/energies divide. If Milbank is right, then he has ‘saved’ Dionysius from the later Palamite reading. Aquinas’ reception would therefore be more in continuity with the Neoplatonic heritage as seen in the centrality of *omne agens agit sibi simile* for the positive theoretical grounding of true and substantial predication.¹⁷⁴⁷ Hence, Aquinas can argue: ‘(w)e know that this proposition which we form about God when we say "God is," is true; and this we know from His effects.’¹⁷⁴⁸ There are traces of this principle in Plato’s *Timaeus* (29e) and Wisdom

¹⁷³⁵ STIII.20.1

¹⁷³⁶ STIII.13.1.

¹⁷³⁷ DN13 (980C-981A)

¹⁷³⁸ IV.S.S.50.2.4, qcla.3, expos. which seems to contradict DN13 (981A).

¹⁷³⁹ Williams (1977) 38

¹⁷⁴⁰ though the term was first coined by Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IX.8 (1050a22). Bradshaw, xii; 1.

¹⁷⁴¹ Bradshaw, 98, citing Porphyry, *Concerning the Soul Against Boethus*, fr. 242.

¹⁷⁴² *ibid*, 155.

¹⁷⁴³ *ibid*, 263-277; Palamas, *Capita* 106.

¹⁷⁴⁴ *In Alcibiades* 132.11ff; *In Tim.* 111, 25, 11ff; Morrow and Dillon (1987), 146.

¹⁷⁴⁵ Milbank (2013), 158-209. Milbank agrees with similar conclusions by Williams (1977), 27-44. See also Baynes and Moss, 115-6.

¹⁷⁴⁶ Milbank (2013), 174. See DN4 (712A).

¹⁷⁴⁷ ST1.4.2; Proclus, *IPIII* (788), 160.

¹⁷⁴⁸ ST1.3.4.2.

literature (*Sir*.1:9) to which Aquinas is consistently committed, even up to his mature *DSS*.¹⁷⁴⁹ Rosemann elucidates:

(a)lthough all that is actually accessible to us in the present world are the effects of agent forces (and of the Agent Force), and *not* the agent forces themselves, the law of similarity guarantees that these effects are possessed of a real revelatory quality.¹⁷⁵⁰

Aquinas thus deduces from nature that God's works reveal his wisdom: 'All men see Him..through his works.'¹⁷⁵¹ Although the forms of things do not 'preexist' in the divine nature, in the same way, nor in the same measure,¹⁷⁵² nevertheless, following Paul,¹⁷⁵³ the very order and beauty of the universe (the *cosmetic* nature of the *cosmos*) is saturated with the knowledge of the Creator, *via* divine exemplars.¹⁷⁵⁴ Knowledge of God through his effects will later be described in the Thomistic tradition as the *analogia entis* or sacramental ontology.¹⁷⁵⁵ It is a metaphysics of being rather than an 'apophatically entangled becoming' (Keller).¹⁷⁵⁶ God knows creatures through his own nature as their Cause, yet humans can 'know' God remotely through his effects. By rejecting analogy, postmodern apophaticism reverts to its Gnostic predecessors.¹⁷⁵⁷

On this interpretation, therefore, the predication 'Being' as a Divine Name should be understood not equivocally, but analogically¹⁷⁵⁸ as rooted in a doctrine of creation.¹⁷⁵⁹ In this way the sayings of the *Platonici* are saved: 'superior things are in inferior things by participation' and 'inferiors are in superiors by a certain excellence.'¹⁷⁶⁰ Some kind of analogy of being is a prerequisite for a gift to be truly given, since without this, it would not communicate any sign from the giver¹⁷⁶¹ and contradict the 'sharing,' personal nature of the Trinity,¹⁷⁶² assumed by Dionysius in *EH1* (376B) and *DN4* (712A). But, if the effect is in its cause in a more excellent way, the unparticipable can be reconstrued, as Milbank argues, as a 'hyperbolic degree of self-

¹⁷⁴⁹ *DSS*14.72 (1959)

¹⁷⁵⁰ Rosemann (1996), 341.

¹⁷⁵¹ *LEJob*36.24 (1989), 403; c.f. *Sermon* 8 (2010), 102-103; *CRom*1.6.117 (2020), 61

¹⁷⁵² *DP*7.1.8 (2012), 195.

¹⁷⁵³ *Roms.* 1:20

¹⁷⁵⁴ *IDNV*11.4 (1994), Appendix 467.

¹⁷⁵⁵ Drawing on Thomas' teaching in *ST*1.13.5-6.

¹⁷⁵⁶ Keller, 306.

¹⁷⁵⁷ *ibid*, 370-371, n.26 draws on kabbalism.

¹⁷⁵⁸ *ST*1.13.12.

¹⁷⁵⁹ c.f. Proclus, *IPII* (762).

¹⁷⁶⁰ *IDNIV*.6, 359.

¹⁷⁶¹ Milbank (2013), 163.

¹⁷⁶² *ibid*, 166.

sharing.¹⁷⁶³ The Palamite essence/energies *aporia* excludes this possibility by replacing analogy of being with equivocity of being which risks Gnostic alienation. This may explain why Prochorus Kydones, persuaded by Aquinas' arguments, rejected Palamism and paid the price in his subsequent denunciation in the east as a heretic.¹⁷⁶⁴ If the names of the energies do not correspond even analogically to the essence, i.e. *God in Himself*, then 'revelation' obscures rather than manifests God. God would reveal *revelation* but not *Himself*,¹⁷⁶⁵ a vacuous notion which cancels itself out. The divorce of the Word as Revelation of God (John 1:1) from its identity *with* God was precisely the error of Arianism,¹⁷⁶⁶ which may betray a Gnostic root in describing the Son as εἰς οὐκ ὁ ἑαυτοῦ.¹⁷⁶⁷ It finds a modern parallel, and probably a modern offspring, in Kant's noumenal and phenomenal distinction, characteristic of modern agnosticism and the gateway to postmodern relativism.¹⁷⁶⁸ More subtly, modern Calvinism,¹⁷⁶⁹ by positing 'God in Himself' as utterly unknowable, allows the possibility that the hidden God is other than or even contradictory to his revelation. This theology produces the unintended consequence that not even God's promises can be trusted (c.f. Descartes' 'malicious demon'). The parallels with Arianism are even more striking in neo-Calvinist, Clouser who describes the relationship of God's attributes to God Himself, as a form of 'creation.'¹⁷⁷⁰

All of this is in sharp contrast to the profound Trinitarian truth expressed by Augustine, that when God uttered his Word, he could not have fully expressed who He was if that Word was either less than or more than Himself.¹⁷⁷¹ It is only because of the equality of God and his Word that God's 'Yes' means 'Yes' and His 'No' means 'No.'¹⁷⁷² Augustine's point successfully counters the dialectical move of Boehme, for whom God utters an equivocal synthesis of Yes and No.¹⁷⁷³ Played out in Augustinian noetics, human knowing imitates the generation of the Son

¹⁷⁶³ *ibid*, 164. He points out that this would then reconcile those propositions in Proclus where the One is described as participable, e.g. *ET3*, 5, 21.

¹⁷⁶⁴ Herrin, 305.

¹⁷⁶⁵ Milbank (2013), 171, 176 traces a genealogy back from Kant to Plotinus via Avicenna.

¹⁷⁶⁶ *ST1.34.1.1*; *CJohn1.1*; *CRom1.33*

¹⁷⁶⁷ Athanasius, *De Synodis* 15.1.1-2. 'One of the most important consequences of Arius' theology was the view of God who is distinct and remote to all creation. Such discontinuity was something new, especially to Greek thinkers who, while claiming the need for negative theology, at the same time put a stress on continuation which must exist between the First Principle and its effects.' Stępień and Kocharczyk-Bonińska, 69.

¹⁷⁶⁸ Bradshaw, 169. 'To the extent that Foucault fits into the philosophical tradition, it is the *critical* tradition of Kant.' Maurice Florence, 'Foucault' trans. R. Hurley in Rabinow (ed.), *Essential Works of Foucault* (New York: New Press, 1988), II.459 in Rosemann (2018), 14-15

¹⁷⁶⁹ Roy A. Clouser, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality* (UNDP, 2006); 'Pancreation Lost: The Fall of Theology' in Athanasopolous, 68-96.

¹⁷⁷⁰ Clouser (2013), 69-70, using *Proverbs* 8, an Arian proof text, c.f. Athanasius, *Orationes tres adversus Arianos* 2.47; Kharlamov, 39.

¹⁷⁷¹ *De Trinitate* IX.2.16; c.f. Aquinas *ST1.34.1.3*; *ST1.34.2*; *CJohn3.5.534*.

¹⁷⁷² 2Cor. 1:20-21; Matt. 5:37; James 5:12.

¹⁷⁷³ 'All things exist by Yes and by No, whether they are divine, diabolic, terrestrial, or whatever you will. The 'One,' in so far as it is Yes, is power and love, is the truth of God and God in person. But it could not be recognised as

in that the *Verbum* is distinct from, yet equal to the Father who generates it.¹⁷⁷⁴ The spoken word reveals the inner word.¹⁷⁷⁵ Even though this rubs against the grain of Aquinas' Aristotelian intuitions, Aquinas preserves Augustine's insight into the *imago dei*,¹⁷⁷⁶ and, as Porro reveals, becomes more Augustinian the further he reflects on the issues at stake.¹⁷⁷⁷ In the closing part of the *Summa* Aquinas is commenting on the 'fittingness' of the Word's assumption of rational and intellectual human nature which already has a capacity to receive God in its operations of knowledge and love.¹⁷⁷⁸ Only a metaphysics of the self-explanatory Logos in Trinity escapes an infinite regress of explanation, or the absurd primacy of Silence within Plotinian negative theologies.

Whereas Plotinianism, in which the exemplars of all things inhere only at the level of Being but not in the (higher) One (which we have seen has to some extent infiltrated the Eastern essence/energies distinction), Aquinas' Trinitarian epistemology entails that the divine essence in itself is in unity with the divine essence as known. Aquinas achieves this solution without compromising divine simplicity, since what are often termed 'divine ideas' (e.g. in Augustine and Maximus) should be properly understood as the 'relationship of imitability' in creatures to the 'function of the Word' (Porro).¹⁷⁷⁹ Therefore, Aquinas' reception of Dionysius, although a creative re-working of him (and indeed of Augustine), is nevertheless a brilliant theologically justified development and clarification of his system.

1. Concluding remarks

Aquinas' God-talk is neither anti-realist, nor nominalist, rather, it is metaphysically rooted in the revealed ontologies of creation, Trinity and Christology. The distinction of beings and Being does not entail an *absence* of Being nor an *equivocation* of being. Nor does the rejection of these options require a reversion to God as a *Superbeing*. Rather a recovery of the understanding of God as *Unlimited Act of Being* known through his effects (analogically) *via* the principle of similitude (*omne agens agit sibi simile*), preserves the validity of logic, epistemology and meaningful language about God. Though some maintain that the veridicality of theological language is no longer a live option,¹⁷⁸⁰ Aquinas' approach demonstrates why it remains indispensable and its

such without the No, and without the No there would be neither joy nor greatness nor awareness.' Jacob Boehme in *Evil and the Cross*, trans. David G. Preston (Leicester: Apollon, 1994), 67.

¹⁷⁷⁴ SCG1.53-54

¹⁷⁷⁵ *De Magistro* 11.38; *Sermon* 153.

¹⁷⁷⁶ e.g. ST1.34.1.1; ST1.93.7; DV4.4; Venard, 109, 150.

¹⁷⁷⁷ Porro, TA, 142-146.

¹⁷⁷⁸ STIII.4.1.2; Venard, 109.

¹⁷⁷⁹ SCG1.54; Porro, TA, 140-142.

¹⁷⁸⁰ Ian G. Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms* (London: SCM, 1974), 1.

denial absurd.¹⁷⁸¹ Creatures ‘borrow’ their ‘being’ *via* participation in the uncreated Being of God (Acts 17:28). This should not be misconstrued in the panentheist sense of a univocity of being, since God and creatures cannot share a common property, rather existence must be predicated *unius ad alterum*. From one horizon (in terms of ascent from creatures to God), perfections such as ‘life,’ ‘goodness’ and ‘being’ can be viewed from as mental abstractions from empirical experience. But, at the same time (in terms of descent from God to creatures) names of God.¹⁷⁸² Both horizons unite in the two natures of the Word as we have seen. In terms of those Divine names which Aquinas calls ‘perfection’ terms,¹⁷⁸³ ‘being’ is the primary and fundamental perfection from which all other perfections proceed.¹⁷⁸⁴ Hence, analogical language about God is true, not merely grammatically (McInerney¹⁷⁸⁵ or Burrell¹⁷⁸⁶), but with real metaphysical and Christological grounding.¹⁷⁸⁷ A metaphysics of being has gnoseological consequences which we will now investigate.

¹⁷⁸¹ See Venard’s (2020) revealing citation of Gadamer, 112, *pace* Franke, 21

¹⁷⁸² *IDNV*.1, n.634, c.f. *DN*11,6; Te Velde (1995), 262.

¹⁷⁸³ e.g. from *DP*7.5.8.

¹⁷⁸⁴ *ST*1.13.5.1.

¹⁷⁸⁵ Ralph McInerney, *The Logic of Analogy* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961)

¹⁷⁸⁶ ‘properly speaking, nothing can be said of God.’ David B. Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action* (London: Routledge & Kegan, 1979), 25; Te Velde (2009), 73, 96.

¹⁷⁸⁷ Te Velde, 99-102; Milbank and Pickstock (2002), 103.

CHAPTER 3. Saving Knowledge¹⁷⁸⁸

Just as the gleam of gold is found in the darkness of the north, so, too, within the darkness of the ignorance of this life is found some gleam, albeit obscure, of divine knowledge.¹⁷⁸⁹

Whether God is *Without Being*, *SuperBeing*, *Equivocal Being* or *Unlimited Act of Being* has profound implications for the knowability of God and its ultimate fulfilment. This is because everything is knowable only in so far as it has being.¹⁷⁹⁰ At the dawn of Western philosophy, Parmenides expresses this in the enigmatic aphorism: γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστίν τε καὶ εἶναι.¹⁷⁹¹ and Aristotle adds that logic is founded on being.¹⁷⁹² But this raises a problem for, if Dionysius is correct that God is ‘beyond being,’ then surely He is also ‘beyond knowledge,’¹⁷⁹³ and therefore ‘Super-unknowable?’¹⁷⁹⁴ The *prima facie* implications of this reasoning lend themselves to the radically agnostic stream of Dionysian reception,¹⁷⁹⁵ appealing directly to Dionysius’ language of ἀγνωσία.¹⁷⁹⁶ Negative theology is thus construed as an anti-philosophy to ‘the philosophy of Logos.’¹⁷⁹⁷ In this chapter, I argue that Thomas’ reception provides a rationally hopeful alternative to this agnostic stream and in so doing delivers a coherent account of knowledge which promises teleological fulfilment to the human instinct for intelligibility.

To reiterate the argument of Chapter 2, *hyperousios* does not entail, for Aquinas, an absence of being but rather that ‘God exists above all that exists; inasmuch as he is his own existence.’¹⁷⁹⁸ God is Pure Act of Being,¹⁷⁹⁹ in keeping with the revealed Name, *Qui Est*. ‘Hence it does not follow that He cannot be known at all, but that He exceeds every kind of knowledge.’¹⁸⁰⁰ Since being and intelligibility are coterminous, God as Being Itself must also be Intelligibility Itself.¹⁸⁰¹ In fact, uniquely in God, ‘to know’ and ‘to be’ are one.¹⁸⁰² God as *Ipsium Esse Subsistens* is therefore

¹⁷⁸⁸ A previous version of this chapter was published as ‘The Epistemological Hope: Aquinas versus other receptions of Pseudo-Dionysius on the Beatific Vision,’ *Heythrop Journal* 57.4 (2018): 663-688.

¹⁷⁸⁹ *LEJob*37.22 (1989), 412

¹⁷⁹⁰ *ST*1.16.3

¹⁷⁹¹ *Poem*, fr.3, in Rosemann (1996), 35.

¹⁷⁹² *CAMIV*.3, trans. Rowan (Notre Dame, Indiana: Dumb Ox Books, 1995).

¹⁷⁹³ *DN*1 (593A), 53; c.f. *DV*8.1.10.

¹⁷⁹⁴ *DN*1 (593B); C. Schäfer, *The Philosophy of Dionysius: An Introduction to the Structure and Content of the Treatise on the Divine Names* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 55.

¹⁷⁹⁵ e.g. Cusanus, *DDI* and the unknown 14th century author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Meister Eckhart calls it ‘nescience’ in *Sermon 1 of Sermons and Treatises* (1979), 1.11.

¹⁷⁹⁶ *DN*1 (588A)

¹⁷⁹⁷ Franke, 2

¹⁷⁹⁸ *ST*1.12.1.3.

¹⁷⁹⁹ *ST*1.12.1;1; 87.1; *SCG*1.47.4; Bradshaw, 254.

¹⁸⁰⁰ *ST*1.12.1.3.

¹⁸⁰¹ *SCG*1.45.3

¹⁸⁰² *CJohn*1

both an obstacle *to*, but also the basis *for* knowledge of God. God is ‘supremely¹⁸⁰³ and ‘infinitely’ knowable,¹⁸⁰⁴ an infinity limited only on the part of the creaturely receptor,¹⁸⁰⁵ just as the brilliance of the sun is limited by the capacity of the bat’s vision.¹⁸⁰⁶

Conversely, without theology, meaning never truly ‘arrives.’ Derrida famously termed this interminable semantic deferral *différance*.¹⁸⁰⁷ In a secular parody of the Parousia, there is an ‘outside’ of language, which we endlessly ‘wait for.’¹⁸⁰⁸ Language is intentional, but its very intentionality is inane;¹⁸⁰⁹ it is *about* nothing, ‘there is Nothing outside the text.’¹⁸¹⁰ Moreover, there is Nothing *inside* the text,¹⁸¹¹ since ‘there is no sure opposition between outside and inside,’¹⁸¹² rather, ‘the outside is the inside.’¹⁸¹³ As Franke poetically expresses it ‘the word is broken open to let out the nothingness in its midst.’¹⁸¹⁴ However, poems are *noems*,¹⁸¹⁵ and hence secular thought kills not only the Author, but also the possibility of a *text*. Hume’s infamous injunction to ‘cast them to the flames’ acquires new self-destructive force, since secularism burns its own books.

Perl astutely grasps the issue by identifying the fundamental hallmark of modern nihilism as ‘the denial of the intelligibility of being.’¹⁸¹⁶ As noted by a number of commentators, modern nihilism reprises elements of Plotinianism which rejects an ultimate rational foundation for knowledge.¹⁸¹⁷ The potential intellect of our experience does not resolve into the actual and separate intellect which is God, its Creator.¹⁸¹⁸ This brings into relief the metacritical value of Thomas’ account of all knowledge within *scientia divina*. It is only because God is super-intelligible to Himself that anything whatsoever has intelligibility.¹⁸¹⁹ Thomas’ metaphysics resolves the intractable problem raised by naturalism, as Venard explains, ‘(f)or the moderns..language itself is somehow contrary to the real, so that the simple presence of meaning in the world already constitutes a problem: how is it that the human person transcends the order of facts and lives in

¹⁸⁰³ ST1.12.1, *sc*.

¹⁸⁰⁴ ST1.12.1; SCGIII.47. See Albert, *CMT* (1988), 164 and the background in Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Alpha (993B7-11).

¹⁸⁰⁵ ST1.12.7.

¹⁸⁰⁶ ST1.12.1; *IDC6* (1996), 51; Rosemann (1996), 341.

¹⁸⁰⁷ Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge, 1967, 2002), 11.

¹⁸⁰⁸ Foucault (2006), 147-69.

¹⁸⁰⁹ Cunningham (2002), 155ff.

¹⁸¹⁰ Eco, *Semiotics* (1984), 154.

¹⁸¹¹ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. Spivak (Baltimore: JHUP, 1974), 158.

¹⁸¹² Derrida, *Positions*, trans. A. Bass (London: Athlone Press, 1987), 12.

¹⁸¹³ Derrida (1974), 44.

¹⁸¹⁴ Franke, 32.

¹⁸¹⁵ Franke, 40.

¹⁸¹⁶ Perl (2007), 112; c.f. Franke, 33.

¹⁸¹⁷ Franke, 142-5; Stephen Gersh, *Neoplatonism after Derrida: Parallelograms* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), c.4; Arthur Bradley, *Negative Theology and Modern French Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

¹⁸¹⁸ ST1.79.4.

¹⁸¹⁹ ST1.12.1, *sc*; *DSS*14.72 (1959). See also Conor Cunningham, ‘The Difference of Theology and some Philosophies of Nothing’ in *Modern Theology* 17.3 (2001).

a meaningful world?¹⁸²⁰ Aquinas trumps naturalism by grounding the very reason on which it presumes to depend. If we know anything at all ‘in part,’ it follows that there is something infinitely knowable to itself and this is what we call God.¹⁸²¹

1. First Principles of Knowledge¹⁸²²

Let us now develop this claim from a different angle. Since an infinite regress of principles is absurd, for any science (in the Aristotelian sense) to be possible whatsoever, there must exist first principles of knowledge which are ‘the first basis from which a thing is known.’¹⁸²³ By the nature of the case, these principles must be known immediately and through themselves (*per se sunt nota*).¹⁸²⁴ As we adumbrated in Chapter 1, each branch of knowledge has its own set of first principles which in turn are hierarchically ordered or ‘subalternated,’¹⁸²⁵ so that the conclusions of higher sciences become the first principles of the lower ones.¹⁸²⁶ On this point Aquinas agrees with both Aristotle and Boethius.¹⁸²⁷

The ‘most certain’ of all these first principles is laid out by Aristotle in *Metaphysics* IV: ‘the same attribute cannot at the same time belong and not belong to the same subject and in the same respect.’¹⁸²⁸ Lest we misunderstand him, in calling the Principle of Non-Contradiction (hereafter PNC) ‘most certain,’ Aristotle is not suggesting that it is the ‘most certain’ of a class of relatively doubtful principles. To the contrary, Aristotle goes on to assert that the PNC is a ‘necessary’ truth, whose denial is ‘impossible’. Though, of course, it is trivially true that anyone can ‘say’ that the same thing both ‘is’ and ‘is not,’ it is impossible for anyone to say this *truly*.¹⁸²⁹ In other words, the position now called ‘dialetheism’ is impossible. In *CAM* Aquinas concurs with Aristotle: ‘(T)he first indemonstrable principle is that ‘the same thing cannot be affirmed and denied at the same time,’ which is based on the notion of ‘being’ and ‘not-being’: and on this

¹⁸²⁰ Venard (2020), 239.

¹⁸²¹ *IDC*6.

¹⁸²² See also Darley, ‘Hyperousios,’ 865-889; ‘Is Radical Orthodoxy Thomistic?’; ‘How does Eternity affect the Law of Non-contradiction?’ *Heythrop Journal* 63.3, (2022): 378-85; ‘Does Aquinas’ Notion of Analogy Violate the Law of Non-Contradiction?’ *Heythrop Journal* 54.2 (2013): 228-238; ‘Is Radical Orthodoxy Thomistic enough?’ *Theofilus* 8.1 (2016): 4-15.

¹⁸²³ *Metaphysics* IV (1013a14-15). Alfred Tarski has called these principles ‘primitive statements.’ See *Introduction to Logic and to the Methodology of Deductive Sciences* (OUP, 1965), 117

¹⁸²⁴ *SCGIV*.95.2

¹⁸²⁵ *III.SS*24.2.2.3.

¹⁸²⁶ Porro, TA, 40-44.

¹⁸²⁷ *DV*1.1; *IDH*1 (140), trans. J.L. Schultz and Edward A. Syman (Washington D.C.: CUAP, 2001), 10-11; *CAMIV*.1.6, trans. J.P. Rowan (1995), 220; *CAPA* trans. Richard Berquist (Notre Dame, IN: Dumb Ox Books, 2007), 25

¹⁸²⁸ *Metaphysics* IV.3-4 (1006a 18-1007b 18) in *CAMIV*.1.6 (1995), 220; Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* 2.72a7 (1005b-2-34) in *CAPA* (2007), 25

¹⁸²⁹ *Metaphysics* III, trans. Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin, 2004), 88.

principle all others are based.¹⁸³⁰ Nor should we presume that Aquinas is bracketing out his own position here,¹⁸³¹ since it is confirmed in his mature Neoplatonic commentary *IDN* within an important passage treating the nature of discursive knowledge. Aquinas argues that although the soul forms a gnoseological circle from first principles to sense evidence and back again, this circularity does not lead to scepticism precisely because it resolves into first principles ‘in which error does not occur and by which the soul is defended against error.’¹⁸³² In *DSS*, within a discussion on deception, Aquinas iterates: ‘concerning those things which we grasp properly by our intellect as well as concerning the first principles, no one can be deceived.’¹⁸³³ Although discursive thinking is corrigible, the first principles of knowledge themselves are ‘simple,¹⁸³⁴ ‘immoveable,’¹⁸³⁵ ‘immediately known’¹⁸³⁶ and ‘certain,’¹⁸³⁷ like the intellectual knowledge of angels.¹⁸³⁸ They are known ‘by simply seeing them.’¹⁸³⁹ First principles are the intellectual light imprinted by God on the soul.¹⁸⁴⁰ In a subsequent treatment of this subject in *DP*, Aquinas explains that human persons are naturally ordered in their thinking towards first principles, so that it is impossible for them to think outside of these parameters.¹⁸⁴¹ Unsurprisingly then, Heidegger can only suspend first principles by a non-rational ‘leap’.¹⁸⁴² Indeed, the only way to break free from a true acceptance of these principles to a false one would be through a change of nature.¹⁸⁴³

If Aquinas modifies Aristotle’s position it is only to strengthen it. Whereas Aristotle taught that ‘necessary’ truth is in creatures one of ‘natural’ necessity, Aquinas adds that in God it is an ‘absolute’ necessity.¹⁸⁴⁴ Therefore, Augustine is correct that in the created realm, even God cannot change the PNC, or make the past not to have been.¹⁸⁴⁵ This necessity ‘depends on God’s providence and disposition’ and ‘on this principle, as we read in the *Metaphysics*, the necessity of

¹⁸³⁰ *STI-II.94.2*

¹⁸³¹ On the continuity between Aristotle and Aquinas see Emery and Levering (eds.), *Aristotle in Aquinas’ Theology* (2015).

¹⁸³² *IDNIV* (43-56), 367-368; c.f. *DV10.8.10*; *SCGIV.92.7*.

¹⁸³³ *DSS20*, 112 (1959)

¹⁸³⁴ *STI.79.8*

¹⁸³⁵ *Sermon 19* (2010), 285-286; c.f. *STI.17.3*; 85.6; *SCGIII.47.7*.

¹⁸³⁶ *DV1.12*

¹⁸³⁷ *DV12.1*

¹⁸³⁸ *DV9.1.11*.

¹⁸³⁹ *STII-II.180.6.2*, trans. Tugwell (1988), 556; c.f. *STI.79.8*; *DV1.12*.

¹⁸⁴⁰ *DV11.3*.

¹⁸⁴¹ *DP2.3*, (2012), 27.

¹⁸⁴² Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (UCP, 2002), 23-41.

¹⁸⁴³ *SCGIV.95.2*

¹⁸⁴⁴ This distinction is found in *STI.82.1* and is applied to the intellect in a.2. ‘the intellect naturally and of necessity adheres to the first principles’ (resp.).

¹⁸⁴⁵ *DP1.5*; *DV5.2*, obj.7, alluding to Augustine, *CFaustusXXVI*, 5 (PL42:482): ‘This truth cannot be contradicted by God, in whom abides the supreme and unchangeable truth, and whose illumination is the source of all the truth to be found in any mind or understanding’ trans. Richard Stothert in Schaff (ed.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series IV* (Buffalo, NY: CLPC., 1887), *pace* Peter Damien. Porro, TA, 209.

all the other principles is founded.¹⁸⁴⁶ In sum, Aquinas is clear that the all principles ‘reduce’ to the PNC.¹⁸⁴⁷

Nevertheless, following Kant¹⁸⁴⁸ and Hegel,¹⁸⁴⁹ the status of this ‘most certain’ of first principles amongst continental thinkers, has been fiercely contested.¹⁸⁵⁰ *Aporias* such as the infamous ‘Liar Paradox’ are presented as insurmountable challenges to its universal validity.¹⁸⁵¹ A central question in clarifying the parameters of the debate is whether or not the PNC is a metaphysical and ontological principle (applying to ‘things in themselves’) or merely a linguistic one.¹⁸⁵² On one side of the debate are the ‘paraconsistentists’ who restrict the universality of the PNC to a linguistic or mathematical principle of which there are no examples in the ‘real’ world. On the other side are the ‘dialetheists’ who take the stronger position that there also exist true contradictions in the real world.¹⁸⁵³ The latter has been popularised by Priest (a curiously Heideggerian ‘analytic’ philosopher), who also defends a dialethic interpretation of Plato’s *Parmenides*.¹⁸⁵⁴ Priest maintains that there are no good arguments for ruling out dialetheism.¹⁸⁵⁵ Aristotle could quickly retort that this is *ignoratio elenchi*, since first principles are not based on prior ‘good arguments,’ otherwise they would not be ‘first principles’ by definition. To the contrary, they represent the condition of possibility for any knowledge whatsoever. Nor can Priest avoid a substitute first principle of his own, namely ‘simplicity,’ for which he likewise can provide ‘no good arguments.’ Pointedly, even the dialetheist Beall significantly limits its reach by insisting:

nothing in dialetheism requires the existence of *observable* contradictions, true contradictions that have observable consequences. *That*, despite considerations to the contrary is difficult to understand. But one might, as some suggest, restrict dialetheism to the purely semantic fragment of the language. In that case, the charge of ‘irrationality’ or even ‘incredulous stares’ are difficult

¹⁸⁴⁶ DV5.2.7

¹⁸⁴⁷ STII-II.1.7. c.f. IDT6.4

¹⁸⁴⁸ Garrigou-Lagrange tackles Kant’s agnostic antinomies in *God, His Existence and His Nature II* (Manchester, NH: Herder, 1936), aa 2-3.

¹⁸⁴⁹ G.F. Hegel, ‘The Spirit of Christianity’ in *Early Theological Writings*, trans. Knox (UPP, 1971), 256-7.

¹⁸⁵⁰ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, sect.111; Barthes (1975), 3; Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), 5; Richard A. Lee Jr., *The Thought of Matter: Materialism, Conceptuality and the Transcendence of Immanence* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 111-127; Butler (2004), 249; Graham Priest, J.C. Beall and Bradley Armour-Garb (eds.), *The Law of Non-Contradiction: New Philosophical Essays* (OUP, 2004).

¹⁸⁵¹ Foucault (2006), 147-69.

¹⁸⁵² For a robust defence of the metaphysical view see Tuomas E. Tahko, ‘The Law of Non-Contradiction as a Metaphysical Principle,’ *The Australasian Journal of Logic* 7 (2009): 32-47.

¹⁸⁵³ J.C. Beall, ‘At the Intersection of Truth and Falsity’ in Priest (2004), 5-7.

¹⁸⁵⁴ Graham Priest, ‘The Parmenides: a Dialethic Interpretation in Plato,’ *The Electronic Journal of the International Plato Society* 12 (2012): 1-63

¹⁸⁵⁵ Priest, ‘What’s so Bad about Contradictions?’ (2004), 23-41.

to appreciate as the only ‘true contradictions’ are grammatical residue..that carry no observational import.¹⁸⁵⁶

Consequently, if Beall is correct, his argument is redundant, since Aristotle’s position stands unrefuted. As we have seen, for Aristotle, the PNC is an ontological principle,¹⁸⁵⁷ and not merely a linguistic one.¹⁸⁵⁸

Thomas, consistently rejects any inference of dialetheism. Even when Augustine suggests in a discussion on good and evil that contraries might be in the same thing at the same time,¹⁸⁵⁹ Aquinas saves the PNC by explaining that it is not the case that every good is contrary to every evil, but rather that ‘a particular good is contrary to a particular evil’ and ‘in this way, evil is never in the contrary good, nor does the law of logic fail.’¹⁸⁶⁰ Aquinas maintains this stronger position with Aristotle over Plato. Although Plato is the first to formulate the principle that we should ‘never believe’ that ‘the same thing at the same time, in the same part or the same relation, can be or be act or be acted upon in contrary ways,’¹⁸⁶¹ Plato’s principle only reaches the status of a heuristic ‘hypothesis’, necessary for the dialectic but no longer required when one reaches the non-rational First Principle, the Good Beyond Being,¹⁸⁶² who is ‘neither the same nor other in relation to itself.’¹⁸⁶³ Hence first principles are the first rungs of a methodological ladder which may later be disposed of. They are part of a lower degree of cognition. For those in this (negative) mystical tradition, contemplation is an ascent into non-reason.¹⁸⁶⁴ Aquinas’ rejection of this irrational element in Plato is evident in his parallel treatment of Richard of St. Victor, cited in an *objectio*. Richard describes a six-fold ascent of contemplation which culminates in a realm ‘above reason.. when by God’s enlightening we know things which appear to contradict human reason, such as what we learn about the mystery of the Trinity.’¹⁸⁶⁵ Aquinas, however, subtly corrects his wording: ‘In the sixth stage there is a consideration of realities accessible to the intellect, which reason can neither discover nor grasp, realities which involve a high contemplation of the truth of God.’¹⁸⁶⁶ He will not tolerate any suggestion that divine truths are

¹⁸⁵⁶ J.C. Beall (2004), 8-9.

¹⁸⁵⁷ Erich Przywara argues that ‘Aristotle formulates the principle in such a way that the noetic and the ontic forms interpenetrate.’ *Analogia Entis: Metaphysics, Original Structure and Universal Rhythm*, trans. John R. Betz and David Bentley Hart (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans [1962], 2014), 198.

¹⁸⁵⁸ *Metaphysics*, Gamma 3 (2004), 91.

¹⁸⁵⁹ *Enchiridion* 14 (PL40:238).

¹⁸⁶⁰ *DM*11.12.8.

¹⁸⁶¹ *Republic* IV (436-437).

¹⁸⁶² *Republic* VI (511).

¹⁸⁶³ *Parmenides* (139), trans. B. Jowitt.

¹⁸⁶⁴ Isle N. Bulhof and Laurens ten Kate, ‘Echoes of an Embarrassment: Philosophical Perspectives on Negative Theology – An Introduction,’ Bulhof and Kate (2000), 17.

¹⁸⁶⁵ Benjamin Major, 1.6 in *STII-II*.180.4.2, trans. Tugwell (1988), 548.

¹⁸⁶⁶ *STII-II*.180.4.2, trans. Tugwell (1988), 550 and n.10.

irrational in themselves. They are inaccessible to human reason in this life, but not contrary to reason *per se*.

A defender of Plato might respond that if being is named from the first object (*ens*) conceived by the intellect,¹⁸⁶⁷ the PNC can never adequately apply to God in Himself.¹⁸⁶⁸ One might presume this to be Dionysius' point in *DN*: 'the indivisible Trinity holds within a shared undifferentiated unity..the assertion of all things, the denial of all things, that which is beyond every assertion and denial.'¹⁸⁶⁹ Ostensibly, this conflicts with Aristotle's logic that 'affirmation and denial cannot be simultaneously true'¹⁸⁷⁰ (the PNC), or that '(c)ontradiction is an opposition which by its very nature allows no middle ground' (the Law of Excluded Middle).¹⁸⁷¹ Within the Plotinian stream of reception, Cusanus takes a dialethic reading of the *CD*. 'God embraces everything, even contradictions.'¹⁸⁷² He justifies this by an argument from infinity,¹⁸⁷³ which Dionysius possibly anticipates when he describes God as both 'the Boundary of all things' and also '(t)he Unbounded Infinity about them' in a way which 'rises above the contradiction between finite and infinite.'¹⁸⁷⁴ This option is attractive to postmoderns who privilege difference and multiplicity, since, the 'voiceless voice' is one which 'multiplies itself, dividing within itself: it says one thing and its contrary. God that is without being or God that is being.'¹⁸⁷⁵ Cusanus' read thus has been appropriated to bolster both the Hegelian negative theology of Altizer¹⁸⁷⁶ and, more broadly that of Walton,¹⁸⁷⁷ Franke,¹⁸⁷⁸ Turner,¹⁸⁷⁹ Williams¹⁸⁸⁰ and McGinn. The latter pointedly remarks: '(t)he revolution that was to take place in the Christian Neoplatonism of the Pseudo-Dionysius was when both hypotheses were applied to the same Trinitarian God as negative and positive expressions of the single Creative Source.'¹⁸⁸¹ If God is 'beyond being' then

¹⁸⁶⁷ *ST1-II.94.2*

¹⁸⁶⁸ as Marion, *God Without Being* argues.

¹⁸⁶⁹ *DN2* (641A). 61. See also *MT5* (1048B); *MT1* (1000B), 136; and n.6, 131.

¹⁸⁷⁰ *CAPA1.1.5.b*, trans. Berquist (2007), 25; *On Interpretation* 9-14.

¹⁸⁷¹ *Posterior Analytics* 2.72a7 in *CAPA* (2007), 25. This is the argument used by Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, 'Pseudo-Dionysius, the Parmenides, and the Problem of Contradiction,' in John D. Turner and Kevin Corrigan (eds.), *Plato's Parmenides and its Heritage: Reception in Patristic, Gnostic and Christian Neoplatonic Texts II* (Atlanta, Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 253-54.

¹⁸⁷² Cusanus, *DDI1.1*, 22 trans. Macquarrie, 99.

¹⁸⁷³ Macquarrie, 103

¹⁸⁷⁴ *DN5* (825B)

¹⁸⁷⁵ Derrida, *Sauf Le Nom* (1995), 35 in Stang, "'Being Neither Myself Nor Someone Else": The Apophatic Anthropology of Dionysius the Areopagite,' Boesel and Keller (2009), 71.

¹⁸⁷⁶ Altizer and Hamilton (1968), 102-118.

¹⁸⁷⁷ Walton, 54, proposes the 'radical conjunction of the wholly and essentially contradicting cataphatic and apophatic theologies..'

¹⁸⁷⁸ Franke (2014), 57, 175, 232, 252, 279

¹⁸⁷⁹ Turner (1995), 44.

¹⁸⁸⁰ J.N. Williams, 'The Apophatic Theology of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite,' *Downside Review* 117 (1999): 157-72; *Denying Divinity: Apophasis in the Patristic Christian and soto Zen Buddhist Traditions* (OUP, 2000).

¹⁸⁸¹ McGinn (1995), 1.58.

it seems the PNC breaks down, or is at least suspended in respect of the ‘Beyond-Beingly One’.¹⁸⁸² This paradigm has extended its enchantment to RO writers Pickstock and Haecker.¹⁸⁸³

However, as Knepper points out, Dionysius is speaking about a particular class of negations, those categorised by Aristotle as ‘contrary oppositions’ in distinction from ‘contradictory oppositions.’¹⁸⁸⁴ So, for example ‘God is not lifeless’¹⁸⁸⁵ and ‘God is not life’¹⁸⁸⁶ are not contradictions since *both* are false.¹⁸⁸⁷ Indeed, Dionysius is specifically acknowledging these different types of negation when he insists, ‘we should not conclude that the negations are simply the opposites of the affirmations.’¹⁸⁸⁸ We conclude then, that Aquinas presents an exemplary reception, true to the author’s intent, which simultaneously preserves the PNC. This is clear in *DP1* where Aquinas discusses the question of what is possible for God. He agrees that every contradiction includes a simultaneous affirmation and negation of the same subject, which is an impossibility, since it cannot apply to the nature of a being that it both ‘is’ and ‘is not’ at the same time and in the same respect. Even God cannot cause what is impossible in this sense since: ‘he is the greatest actuality and the chief being. And so, his action can only be terminated chiefly in being, and in non-being consequentially. And so, he cannot cause affirmation and negation to be simultaneously true, or any things in which this kind of impossibility is included.’¹⁸⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸² Jens Halwassen, ‘Sur la limitation du principe de contradiction chez Denys,’ *Diotima* 23 (Athens: Ekdosis Hellēnikēs Hetaireias Philosophikōn Meletōn, 1995): 46-50

¹⁸⁸³ Catherine Pickstock, ‘Duns Scotus: his historical and contemporary significance,’ in John Milbank and Simon Oliver (eds.), *The Radical Orthodoxy Reader* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 130, speculates that Proclus allows a Divine realm beyond the PNC on the grounds that if created being participates in the infinite, this must mean that it enters into both identity and non-identity and thus the finite becomes simultaneously finite and infinite. This is resolved in ‘a higher harmony beyond logical opposition.’ Priest (2012) similarly enlists Proclus against the PNC, citing *Elements* 2: ‘Everything which participates of The One, is both one and not one.’ See also Ryan Haecker, ‘Is Thomism Radical Enough? A Response to Alan Darley,’ *Theofilos* 8.1 (2016): 16-28. However, Proclus admits ‘it is impossible that the same thing should be both like and unlike in the same respect.’ And ‘it is impossible for true conclusions to follow from both sides of a contradiction, or for contradictory propositions to be true of the same thing, unless the conclusions are necessarily true of different things in each case.’ *IPVI*.1041 (1987), 401; c.f. *IPII* (727). Aquinas addresses the question in *IDC*, where the author of the *Liber* makes a similar claim that being is ‘composed of the finite and the infinite.’ 29. Aquinas ‘saves’ him by clarifying that only Uncreated Being is *actually* infinite. Created being is *limited by its form*, that is *by its capacity to receive infinity*. This means at best that it is *potentially* infinite. Hence ‘the very being that it receives is finite’ Sect.30, 33. Consequently, participation of the creature in the Creator does not logically threaten the PNC. *ST1*.16.2; *ST1*.14.1; *DV*1.

¹⁸⁸⁴ *Categories* 11b17ff; 11b38ff; 13b12ff; *On Interpretation* 19b20ff; 20a31ff; *Prior Analytics* 51b5ff; Knepper, 44, n.19, *pace* Haecker who conflates the two, 17.

¹⁸⁸⁵ *MT*4 (1040D)

¹⁸⁸⁶ *MT*5 (1048A)

¹⁸⁸⁷ Knepper, 44.

¹⁸⁸⁸ *MT*1 (1000B).

¹⁸⁸⁹ *DP1.3* (2012), 10. ‘(F)or Thomas, as for almost all the medievals, the limit of divine omnipotence is set by the principle of non-contradiction, because what is impossible in itself is not possible for any agent – even the supreme and omnipotent agent.’ Porro, *TA*, 74, 97.

Emphatically Aquinas replies ‘no’ to the question ‘whether God can make contradictories be true together.’¹⁸⁹⁰ Against dialetheism, Aquinas affirms that Truth is One.¹⁸⁹¹ We note here that the PNC assumes a rejection of *God Without Being* and requires the necessary condition that God is Being Itself. Therefore, in our reading of Aquinas, the PNC does not ‘break down’ at its Source, so much as reach its supereminent Exemplar.

As well as reaffirming Aristotle’s formulation of the PNC, Aquinas ‘saves’ the Areopagite from any implication of dialetheism¹⁸⁹² by means of a distinction between the *res significata* and the *modus significandi*, that is to say, the ‘thing signified’ and the ‘way it is expressed.’¹⁸⁹³ Although Bradshaw hastily dismisses Thomas’ move as ‘another startling reversal of Dionysius,’¹⁸⁹⁴ in fact, Dionysius tacitly recognises such a principle in his distinction between ‘name’ (ὄνομα) and ‘thing named’ (κρημα), perhaps reflecting the previously discussed essence/energies background.¹⁸⁹⁵ According to Thomas’ gloss of Dionysius, God is not beyond assertions and denials, but assertions and denials can be made about Him *in different respects*.¹⁸⁹⁶ That is why Thomas favours Eriugena’s translation of *CH2.3* over Sarracen’s. Affirmations about God are *incompactae* ‘incongruous’ (Eriugena), but not *inconvenientes* ‘inappropriate’ (Sarracen).¹⁸⁹⁷ God is affirmed as literally Being as far as the Subject signified is concerned, but the way of expressing it (*modus significandi*) is necessarily defective, since deriving from the realm of beings and therefore must be ‘denied.’¹⁸⁹⁸

For Aquinas, following Albert,¹⁸⁹⁹ a related distinction occurs between the *a quo* and the *ad quod* of language, i.e. the source of a name (in our linguistic experience) *versus* the referent of a name.¹⁹⁰⁰ The *a quo* of language is the *modus significandi*; we speak by means of God’s created effects. Therefore, our language is not directly *ad quod*.¹⁹⁰¹ Aquinas introduces this distinction in response to a specific interpretation of *DN*.¹⁹⁰² It is objected that Dionysius claims that the names of God refer to his ‘processions’ and not to his ‘essence,’ in line with Byzantine theology

¹⁸⁹⁰ *Quodl* XII.2.2. See also *On the Eternity of the World*, trans. R. McInerney in *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings* (London: Penguin, 1998), 712.

¹⁸⁹¹ *SCG*1.9.

¹⁸⁹² For more recent salvations before finally condemning him, see the discussion in Andrew Radde-Gallwitz (2007), 243–54.

¹⁸⁹³ *ST*1.13.3; *DP*7.2.7.

¹⁸⁹⁴ Bradshaw, 245.

¹⁸⁹⁵ *DN*2 (640C), trans. Jones (1980), 119, n.23; *EP*9 (1108B); *DN*6 (857B)

¹⁸⁹⁶ *SCG*1.30.3.

¹⁸⁹⁷ *IDC*6 (1996), 47, n.14.

¹⁸⁹⁸ Compare Chrysostom’s distinction. ‘I mean, as far as the ineffable essence is concerned, the word is improper; but as far as our limitations are concerned, the expression is made appropriately.’ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 18–45, FC82, trans. Robert C. Hill (Washington, DC: CUAP, 1986), 149.

¹⁸⁹⁹ *1Sent*.2.11 ; Blankenhorn, c.3.

¹⁹⁰⁰ *ST*1.13.2.2; Rosemann (1996), 315–316; Blankenhorn, 306.

¹⁹⁰¹ *ST*1.13.2.2.

¹⁹⁰² *ST*1.13.2.2

(in our view the objector is correct regarding Dionysius' actually historical position). The *a quo/ad quod* distinction is one of the strategies Aquinas deploys to 'save' Dionysius from Byzantine error. The *a quo* signification is 'some sensible impression which the thing to be named has made upon the naming subject.'¹⁹⁰³ Aquinas gives the (mistaken) etymology in Latin of *lapis* (stone) as that which hurts the foot (*pedem*) when it is kicked.¹⁹⁰⁴ Here the *ad quod* of the stone is not fully revealed in the *a quo* of its origin of predication. Similarly then Aquinas receives the Dionysian 'processions' (in agreement with our earlier discussion of Maimonides):

these names are not imposed to signify the procession themselves, as if when we say "God lives," the sense were, "life proceeds from Him"; but to signify the principle itself of things, in so far as life pre-exists in Him, although it pre-exists in Him in a more eminent way than can be understood or signified.¹⁹⁰⁵

Aquinas' reception converges with modern scholar Knepper's (independent) conclusions regarding the Divine names.¹⁹⁰⁶ We saw at the beginning of this chapter, how Marion has drawn attention to the negative aspect of the *ad quod*, but neglected the positive signification of the *a quo*.¹⁹⁰⁷ In this respect he correctly interprets the historical Areopagite. Nevertheless, for Aquinas, no essence, not even that of a fly, is known in its full quiddity.¹⁹⁰⁸ We do not directly see the 'thing in itself', but Aquinas recognises that this does not entail agnosticism, since we still truly see the 'thing in itself' indirectly *via* its effects.¹⁹⁰⁹ We cannot know the essence of God as it is in itself (*quod in se est*), nevertheless we can know it insofar as it is revealed in the perfections of creatures (*secundum quod repraesentatur in perfectionibus creaturum*).¹⁹¹⁰

As *ipsum esse subsistens*, God is not 'beyond Being,' in respect of the *ad quod* or *res significata*, because God does not lack any perfection. He is rather *Being Unlimited* and pre-eminently. In this Thomistic account of theological predication, 'Being' becomes a term which has priority (*per prius*) for God in Himself and applies analogically¹⁹¹¹ yet still with sufficient unity to creatures (*contra* Scotus).¹⁹¹² Thus Aquinas preserves true correspondence between the intellect and the intention of the intellect (God), whilst simultaneously acknowledging the limitations of creaturely

¹⁹⁰³ Rosemann (1996), 315.

¹⁹⁰⁴ *ST*1.13.2.2; Rosemann, 315.

¹⁹⁰⁵ *ST*1.13.2.2

¹⁹⁰⁶ Knepper, 30.

¹⁹⁰⁷ Marion, *In Excess* (2002), 156-158.

¹⁹⁰⁸ *In symbolum Apostolorum*, prolog., par 864.

¹⁹⁰⁹ 1 Cor.13:12; Rocca (2004), 64-72.

¹⁹¹⁰ *ST*1.13.2.3. Blankenhorn, 306.

¹⁹¹¹ *ST*1.4.3.

¹⁹¹² Duns Scotus, *Philosophical Writings*, trans. Allan Wolter (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 20; Rosemann (1996), 341. According to Aquinas, even angelic knowledge 'falls short of achieving knowledge' of God. *DV*8.15.3.

language in expressing this correspondence. There is true analogical correspondence, but not univocal correspondence. This solution saves the PNC whilst preserving meaningful predication about God. Thomas' position departs from the 'dialectic' method of Plotinus which has 'no knowledge of propositions.'¹⁹¹³ Furthermore, we can see clear blue water between Thomas and post-Hegelians such as Blondel¹⁹¹⁴ (criticised on precisely these grounds by Garrigou-Lagrange) or post-Heideggerians and Wittgensteinians (the heirs of Plotinus),¹⁹¹⁵ such as Macquarrie, Marion, Yannaras, Caputo or Burrell *et al*, who regard revelation as non-propositional. Recoiling from the horror of his own logic that 'perhaps the darkness goes all the way down. Perhaps we really do not know at all what we mean,'¹⁹¹⁶ Caputo romantically grasps for 'grace' on the other side of the Nothing.¹⁹¹⁷ It is desperately hoped that *theopoetics* will supply a redemptive substitute for the 'scientific' theology of Aquinas,¹⁹¹⁸ that is the metaphysical realism of the Aristotelian tradition. On this account of truth what '*the true* adds to being' is precisely 'the conformity or equation of thing and intellect'.¹⁹¹⁹ In the order of knowing, truth begins first in the human intellect as an abstraction and is applied analogically to other things and to the Divine intellect, but in its primary sense (*ratio propria*) in the order of being, God *is* Truth; the term only refers to the human intellect through participation. God is therefore objective Cause of the truth of statements about him and not *vice versa*.¹⁹²⁰

Intriguingly, as I have argued elsewhere,¹⁹²¹ there is evidence within the *CD* to suggest that Dionysius himself refrained from abandoning the PNC in relation to God. In *DN8*,¹⁹²² 'Elymas' had mischievously cited the Scripture '[God] cannot deny himself' (2 Tim. 2:13) in order to question God's omnipotence. Dionysius' response indicates that he conceives omnipotence in similar terms to Aquinas, i.e. as a description of God's perfection. For God to deny himself

¹⁹¹³ *Enneads* 1.3.5 (1962), 39; Macquarrie, 62. Contrast *DV*14.1

¹⁹¹⁴ 'For, unlike the abstract science of thought which isolates ideas and proceeds by complete inclusion or exclusion, the concrete reality of life perpetually reconciles contraries.' Blondel (1950), 429; 'the most abstract laws of understanding have their full meaning only in relation to the concrete development of life.' 430.

¹⁹¹⁵ Heidegger (1889-1976) rejects the correspondence theory of truth, the understanding that the content of one element corresponds to the content of another (*adaequatio*, from *ad* – *aequare*, literally 'to make equal to'). Truth must instead return to what he considers its 'primordial' meaning of 'unconcealedness' or 'disclosedness.' (Greek *aletheia*). Heidegger, *Being and Time* (2008), 257, 270. For a penetrating critique, see Mario Enrique Sacchi, *The Apocalypse of Being: The Esoteric Gnosis of Martin Heidegger* (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 2002).

¹⁹¹⁶ *Insistence* (2015), 62f.

¹⁹¹⁷ *ibid*, 22

¹⁹¹⁸ *SSS* proem. 3; Porro, TA, 40-44.

¹⁹¹⁹ 'Veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus.' *DV*1.1. He continues: 'As we said, the knowledge of a thing is a consequence of this conformity; therefore, it is an effect of truth, even though the fact that the thing is a being is prior to its truth.' c.f. *ST*1.16, aa.1, 6. On Aristotle's metaphysical realism see Irwin (2002), 5-6; William Wood, 'Thomas Aquinas on the Claim that God is Truth,' *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 51.1 (Baltimore: JHUP, 2013), 21-47.

¹⁹²⁰ *CRom*3.1.255 (2020), 110; c.f. Aristotle, *Categories* 14b11-23.

¹⁹²¹ Darley (2017; 2016)

¹⁹²² *DN8* (893B), 112.

would entail falling from truth, and since, truth ‘is being’ (*on estin*)¹⁹²³ this would also entail falling from being, which is impossible, since ‘God cannot fall from being.’¹⁹²⁴ The Greek text adds *καὶ τὸ μὴ εἶναι οὐκ ἐστὶν*¹⁹²⁵ (and is not not to be),¹⁹²⁶ which in the thematic context of omnipotence, suggests that God cannot be and not be at the same time. Dionysius attributes this to God’s perfect power: He cannot lack anything, including truth, knowledge or being.

This is a surprising text which at first sight seems out of step with his language of God ‘beyond being.’¹⁹²⁷ Therefore, Dionysius must mean that God cannot fall from ‘uncreated Being’ (i.e. Himself). O’Rourke concludes that it is an ‘exception’ in which Dionysius ‘appeals to an evidence to which, on his own terms, he is not entitled.’¹⁹²⁸ Aquinas’ commentary is illuminating on this very point:

And he says that, since God is truth itself, for God to deny Godself is nothing other than for God to fall from the truth. But since the truth is the same as being, it follows that to fall from the truth is the same as to depart from esse. Therefore, to say ‘it is not possible for God to deny Godself - is the same as to say, ‘It is not possible for God to defect from being.’ But to not defect from being is the same as if it were said that God is not non-being, by which is more signified esse itself.¹⁹²⁹

The presence of this apparently anomalous text within the *CD* then is (as Dionysius says of the Scripture), a ‘goad’ to a deeper understanding of him. Dionysius denies the language of being only to reaffirm it at the ‘hyper’ level,¹⁹³⁰ which vindicates Aquinas’ glossing of ‘agnostic’ statements in Dionysius and harmonises with Dionysius’ reaffirmation of logic in *EH2.5*: ‘However, it is not possible to participate in wholly opposed things at one and the same time.’¹⁹³¹ This evinces the clarity and superiority of Aquinas’ reception *vis à vis* (post)modern receptions. *Hyperousios* is not ‘without’ being but *Supereminent* Being. Aquinas has correctly understood Dionysius and even more importantly, on this basis, saves the possibility of first principles and the possibility of knowledge itself.

¹⁹²³ Terms which recall Aristotle. ‘Truth hath Being; and therefore, a declension from the Truth is a declension from Being.’ *Dionysius the Aeropagite, The Divine Names and the Mystical Theology*, trans. Rolt (London: SPCK, 1972), n.1.

¹⁹²⁴ *DN8* (893B), 112.

¹⁹²⁵ *IDNVIII.1*. ed. C. Pera (Taurini: Marietti, 1950), 287.

¹⁹²⁶ ‘God cannot fall from Being since it is not possible for him not to be.’ O’Rourke (2005), 202.

¹⁹²⁷ e.g. *DN2* (641A), 61; *MT1* (1000B), 136; *MT5* (1048A), 141.

¹⁹²⁸ O’Rourke (2005), 202.

¹⁹²⁹ *IDNVIII.3.17-26*, trans. Marsh, 478. See also *QuodIII.1.1*

¹⁹³⁰ This reading also agrees with Knepper’s research esp. 44-45.

¹⁹³¹ *EH 2.5*, trans. Campbell, 30.

Nevertheless, after Aquinas, a more agnostic (and monistic) reading of Dionysius prevailed (in varying degrees) in mystical writers such as Eckhart,¹⁹³² Palamas and especially Cusanus, who interpreted the doctrine of Divine Simplicity as an undifferentiated monad in which all contradictions resolve ('that simplicity where contradictories coincide').¹⁹³³ Non-One must collapse into One.¹⁹³⁴ It is unfortunate that Milbank has taken a Cusanean turn which in our view leads to a nihilistic *cul de sac*.¹⁹³⁵ The deleterious effect of Cusanus' *coincidentia oppositorum* spills over into the Christology of RO writer John Betz who speaks of the hypostatic union in almost Manichean terms as a union of 'opposing natures.'¹⁹³⁶ Although it is correct to say that opposing properties exist within the two natures (e.g. finite and infinite), it is false to say that the natures themselves are opposite, because that would entail no likeness between human and divine natures (specifically affirmed by Aquinas),¹⁹³⁷ thus threatening *analogia entis* the core metaphysical principle of RO theology.

It is significant that Aquinas resisted this Eastern drift in his robust defence of the PNC by insisting that, in spite of God's infinity, all names of God are not ultimately synonymous, but instead predicate him not perfectly, but substantially.¹⁹³⁸ A fully *Trinitarian* interpretation of Divine Simplicity (which gives full weight to eternal distinctions) is arguably underdeveloped, even in Aquinas.¹⁹³⁹ Nevertheless, the first principles receive clearer philo-theological moorings in Aquinas' metaphysics of Being than in the Cusanean tradition. As far as judgments are concerned, the Principle of Non-Contradiction takes precedence over the Principle of Identity,¹⁹⁴⁰ but from the standpoint of being, 'which the intellect first conceives as, in a way, the most evident,'¹⁹⁴¹ and therefore of pure logic, the Principle of Identity takes precedence.¹⁹⁴² It is the creaturely analogue of the *a priori* Tetragrammaton, 'I AM THAT I AM' which Aquinas

¹⁹³² John XXII cites as one of Eckhart's heresies the doctrine that: '24. Every distinction is alien to God, both in his nature and in the persons. The proof: since His nature itself is one (*una*) and this very One (*unum*), and each Person is one and this same One as the nature.' Eckhart (1979), 1.

¹⁹³³ *On Learned Ignorance, Letter of the author to Lord Cardinal Julian*, 264 in *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*, trans. H. Lawrence Bond (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 206.

¹⁹³⁴ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Bk Γ (1007A).

¹⁹³⁵ Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic*, ed. Creston Davis (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), 193; Franke, 232; Darley (2016)

¹⁹³⁶ Betz (2017), 649. Consider: 'Furthermore, it is impossible that there are two mutually opposing sources of beings existing in each other and in everything – and always in conflict.' DN4 (723), 89; c.f. DP3.6. The harmony of the two natures is masterfully expounded in Riches (2016).

¹⁹³⁷ *CRom*4.3.380 (2020), 153.

¹⁹³⁸ *ST*1.13.4.

¹⁹³⁹ Darley (2011), 1-30; Richards (2003), 213-251; Bradshaw, 242-277.

¹⁹⁴⁰ Geisler, 75.

¹⁹⁴¹ *DV*1.1

¹⁹⁴² 'It is proper to the standpoint of *pure logic* (λογιζεσθαι) that it takes the principle of non-contradiction simply as a form of expression of the *principle of identity* ("what is [valid], is [valid]").' Przywara, *Analogia*, 199.

identifies as the primary Name of God, *Qui Est*.¹⁹⁴³ This applies to God properly and to creatures by participation.¹⁹⁴⁴ Identity is part of the givenness of creation which participates in its Cause as seen in Thomas' discussion of the 'Same' in *IDN*.¹⁹⁴⁵ Conversely God, as Necessary Being, cannot *not* be, for 'He cannot deny Himself' (2 Tim.2:13). Therefore, the PNC in creatures must derive from its ultimate Source in God. It expresses being in its negative mode. Avoiding shipwreck from either the Scylla of arbitrary voluntarism (Descartes or Clouser) or the Charybdis of a law independent of Godself (Plato or Process Theology), a clarification of Thomas' thought can elide this Euthyphro-type dilemma by maintaining that the Principle of Identity and the Principle of Non-Contradiction are identical with God's own integrity.¹⁹⁴⁶ As Aquinas succinctly formulates it: 'He is his own norm' (*DV*3.1.8.)¹⁹⁴⁷ This safeguards no final conflict between the truths of faith and the truths of reason.¹⁹⁴⁸

2. Knowledge of God *in patria*

What is the extent and mode of human knowledge after death? Following the method of the *disputatio*, we could address this *quaestio* through a first *objectio* that we can know nothing of God *in patria*, since the introduction to the *Summa* states: '(w)e cannot know what God is, but only what He is not.'¹⁹⁴⁹ Secondly, according to Yannaras, natural theology cannot lead us to 'objective' certainty. At best, it offers a 'choice' or 'direction of which we are capable,' but leaves significant scope for agnosticism.¹⁹⁵⁰ This aligns with Caputo's 'Theology of Perhaps.'¹⁹⁵¹ Thirdly, according to Marion, theology does not even *refer* to God at all, it does not tell us anything *about* God.¹⁹⁵² Theologians must content themselves with a 'pragmatic theology of absence' instead of a 'metaphysics of presence.'¹⁹⁵³

Sed contra. It is important to recognise that the predicate '*what God is*' carries a specific, technical meaning. Following the Aristotelian taxonomy of 'science' (i.e. of certain and evident

¹⁹⁴³ *ST*1.13.11. 'The ontic version of the principle of identity, "what is, is," thus receives an immediacy to the "I am who I am," understood as *the* name of God.' Przywara, *Analogia*, 199.

¹⁹⁴⁴ Acts 17:28

¹⁹⁴⁵ *IDN*IX.79-80 (1994), 494.

¹⁹⁴⁶ *ST*II-I.93.4: "all that is attributed to the divine essence or nature does not fall under the eternal law, in reality they are the eternal law."

¹⁹⁴⁷ Philo on Genesis 22:16-17, 'you mark that God swears not by some other thing, for nothing is higher than He, but by Himself, who is best of all things.' in Sheridan, 68.

¹⁹⁴⁸ *SCG*1.7; 1.8.1; Porro, *TA*, 102-104.

¹⁹⁴⁹ *ST*1.3, intro; c.f. *SCG*1.14; *IDT*1.2; *DP*7.5.14; *DV*8.1.8; c.f. Plotinus, *Enneads* V.3.14.

¹⁹⁵⁰ Yannaras, 64.

¹⁹⁵¹ Caputo (2015), 15

¹⁹⁵² c.f. Martin Heidegger, *Forward to the German Edition of Phenomenology and Theology*, trans. James G. Hart and John C. Maraldo (eds.), *The Piety of Thinking: Essays by Martin Heidegger* (Bloomington: IUP, 1976), 12, 15. Theology is not a science of God but of faith or 'the mode of existence of the believer' (14).

¹⁹⁵³ Marion (2002), 156-158.

knowledge), *that* a subject is (εἰ ἐστίν) differs from *what* a subject is (τι ἐστίν).¹⁹⁵⁴ Within this framework, Thomas specifically denies knowledge of God's *whatness*,¹⁹⁵⁵ whilst simultaneously affirming knowledge of God's *thatness* from his created effects.¹⁹⁵⁶ Here Aquinas' defence of natural theology in the famous 'Five Ways' has abiding strength against postmodern appeals to 'infinite deferral'¹⁹⁵⁷ which is 'clearly false.' The Five Ways lead us to (objective) knowledge of God as First Cause (contrary to Kantians) but not to Who He is in Himself.¹⁹⁵⁸

Furthermore, *responsio*, the negative aspect of Thomas' theology ('what He is not'),¹⁹⁵⁹ does not exclude negative *knowledge*.¹⁹⁶⁰ In other words, this statement affirms that we can *know* what God is not! It is not an agnosticism of all truth claims, as *SCG1* clarifies: '*we are able to have some knowledge of it by knowing what it is not.*'¹⁹⁶¹ Aquinas believes that all negations imply some positive knowledge in order to function as truth claims: '(u)nless the human intellect were to know something affirmatively about God, it could not deny anything about God.'¹⁹⁶² Aquinas' interpretation is wholly justified, since *DN* specifically addresses the question, 'how *do* we know him?'¹⁹⁶³ and replies that although we do not know God's nature, 'we do *know* him' from 'the arrangement of everything...projected out of him,' which 'possesses certain images and semblances of divine paradigms.'¹⁹⁶⁴ Aquinas thus uses Dionysius to demonstrate negative *knowledge* even from his early work, *SSS*, where he references Dionysius' 'three ways' for speaking (truly) of God: viz. causation, remotion and eminence.¹⁹⁶⁵ Later in *SCGIII*, Aquinas explains the value of negations for revealing the specific difference of the subject under examination. The *via negativa* can be usefully applied to knowledge of human beings (*contra* anti-essentialism). Being *not* inanimate distinguishes human beings from rocks; being *not* irrational demarcates them from plants etc.. Theologically, true statements may be predicated of God by such negative terms as

¹⁹⁵⁴ *Posterior Analytics* II.1.89b23.4.

¹⁹⁵⁵ *ST1.1.7* c.f. *CAM1.12*; 6.1. par.1156, trans. Rowan (1995); *CAPA1.33*; 2.1.89b; 2.2;2.7; 7.3-5; Te Velde (2006), 72-73. 'However one must distinguish between seeing *that* God is and seeing *what* God is, just as it is one thing to see *that something is* and another thing to see *what something is*. For to see of something *that it is* is to see the being of that thing or its essence. To see *what something is* is to see the proper definition including all the attributes of that thing.' Albert, *De Resurrectione*, Tr.IV.1.1 in Jeffrey P. Hergen, *St. Albert the Great's Theory of the Beatific Vision* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2002), 37. Stępień and Kochończyk-Bonińska (2018) identify a parallel in Basil, 103.

¹⁹⁵⁶ *DV12.3.13*; *DP9.7*; *STII-II.27.4*; *CJohn1.11.211*.

¹⁹⁵⁷ *ST1.1.2*.

¹⁹⁵⁸ Porro, TA, 131-132; Adam Eitel 'Making Motions in a Language we do not Understand: The Apophaticism of Thomas Aquinas and Victor Preller' in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 65.1:2012, 17-33.

¹⁹⁵⁹ *SCGIII.49.9* (2001), 170.

¹⁹⁶⁰ Marion agrees on this point in *Negative Certainties*, trans. Lewis (UCP, 2015)

¹⁹⁶¹ *SCG1.14.2*; a point conceded by Ludovikos, 135. See also Porro, TA, 138.

¹⁹⁶² *DP7.5*, trans. Regan, 206. This text refutes Franke's (2014) claim that 'we know no negation of God except by affirmations' was an innovation of Duns Scotus, 236.

¹⁹⁶³ *DN7* (869C)

¹⁹⁶⁴ *DN7* (869C-D) ; *MT1* (1000D); O'Rourke (2005), 7-9. This refutes contrary claims by Bulhof and Ten Kate (2000), 23.

¹⁹⁶⁵ *1SSS3.1*; *CRom1.6.115*.

‘infinite’, ‘immutable’, ‘incorporeal,’ ‘not composite’, ‘without genus’ etc. in distinction from creatures.¹⁹⁶⁶ Nor is this an outdated perspective, since Blankenhorn reiterates that specific negations, which he identifies as ‘transcending negations’ (Greek *apheiresis*) do communicate true knowledge about God,¹⁹⁶⁷ in accord with Dionysius’ acknowledgement of ‘true’ apophatic statements.¹⁹⁶⁸

In this way, Dionysius is rescued from non-cognitivist agnosticism in harmony with divine revelation.¹⁹⁶⁹ The *quandam tenebra ignorantiae* of *MT*, is not identical to the *caligine nubis* of postmodern ‘cloud theology,’ within the negative reception torrent.¹⁹⁷⁰ Thomas’ reception is in continuity with this biblical accent of νεφέλη φωτεινή¹⁹⁷¹ (a cloud saturated with brightness) and a great ‘cloud of witnesses’ (νεφός μαρτύρων),¹⁹⁷² including Origen (for whom the darkness surrounding God is temporary and ultimately dispelled by light),¹⁹⁷³ Nyssanus (for whom Christian revelation is ‘luminous darkness’ (φωτεινό σκοτάδι)¹⁹⁷⁴ and Germanus (for whom God ‘is no longer speaking to us as through a cloud and indistinctly),’ since ‘the Holy Spirit who was concealed in a bright cloud, now exclaims through a man; “Attend, listen to Him!””¹⁹⁷⁵ It is, moreover, faithful to the ‘hyper-brilliant darkness’ (ὑπερφωτον γνώφον), of Dionysius,¹⁹⁷⁶ that is, a hiddenness not constituted by absence of light, but by excess, like gazing directly upon the sun.¹⁹⁷⁷

This ‘positive’ stream of apophaticism is mediated to Aquinas *via* Albert, who in his own commentary, restricted the darkness to a lack of comprehensive knowledge.¹⁹⁷⁸ In God “there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5), only ‘our eyes are darkened by the excess of his radiance, because they are powerless to cope with such splendour, and it is by this darkness that the things of God are hidden from us.’¹⁹⁷⁹ Hence, *SSS*, relativises the darkness to the limitations of this life (*quantum ad statum viae pertinent*),¹⁹⁸⁰ where our intellect cannot see Him as He is in Himself.¹⁹⁸¹

¹⁹⁶⁶ *SCG*1.15-25; III.39.1; Porro, TA, 138.

¹⁹⁶⁷ Blankenhorn, 12.

¹⁹⁶⁸ *CH2* (140D-141A, 145A). Knepper, 44, n.20.

¹⁹⁶⁹ *SCG*III.49.9 (2001), 170.

¹⁹⁷⁰ Keller, 166.

¹⁹⁷¹ Matthew 17:5; c.f. 6:22.

¹⁹⁷² Hebs. 12:1.

¹⁹⁷³ *CJohn*II.28.172-174; Stepień and Kochańczyk-Bonińska, 47; Andrew Louth, *The Origins of Christian Mystical Tradition from Plato to Denys* (OUP, 2007), 70-71; c.f. Philo, *De Posteritate*14 in Daniélou (2014), 110.

¹⁹⁷⁴ Nyssanus (1978), 95.

¹⁹⁷⁵ *EHMC*, 31 and 41.

¹⁹⁷⁶ *MT2* (1025A); c.f. 1 (997B).

¹⁹⁷⁷ This is the ‘fitting’ way to speak of the Divine darkness so that it is not understood as a ‘defect’. See *DN7* (869A).

¹⁹⁷⁸ *CMT1* (1988), 147

¹⁹⁷⁹ *ibid*, 145.

¹⁹⁸⁰ *SSS*8.1.4; *IISSS*35.2.2, q1a.2.

¹⁹⁸¹ *ST*1.13.1; *DV*8.1.8, 10,11; *IDT*,1.2.1.

Sermon 12, from the early Parisian period (1252-1256), treats Moses' ascent into thick mist, as one of increasing *knowledge*, from negatively knowing what He is not, to positively seeing God face to face.¹⁹⁸² In similar vein *SCGIII*¹⁹⁸³ (completed c.1263),¹⁹⁸⁴ cites *MT1*: 'We are united with God as the Unknown,' but omits the original qualifier 'completely unknown' (*vacatione omnis cognitiones*).¹⁹⁸⁵ By the time he writes the *secunda pars* of *ST* (1268-72), 'completely unknown' is acknowledged but still restricted to the experience of 'wayfarers.'¹⁹⁸⁶ Again in 1272, when the mature Aquinas writes *IDC*, he supplies the full quotation, but with a different nuance supplied by Sarracen's translation: 'Dionysius says in Chapter 1 of *MT* that man "according to the best"¹⁹⁸⁷ of his knowledge is "united" to God as "altogether unknown, because he knows nothing" about Him, "knowing" Him to be "above" every "mind."¹⁹⁸⁸ He explicates that the First Cause can be properly named 'entirely unknown,' in the same way that creatures lower in the hierarchy of being do not grasp the essence of that which is above them. Dionysius' Procline contemporary, Boethius (480-524), had underscored this when scanning the spectrum of cognition.

1. the sense experience of a mere mollusc,
2. the discursive reasoning of humans
3. the intuition of angels
4. the pure (apophatic) intuition of Divine omniscience.¹⁹⁸⁹

The problem facing those trying to comprehend divine foreknowledge and human free will is symptomatic of the limitations of this inferior level of cognition.¹⁹⁹⁰ In the case of God, 'there is nothing above it that could know it,' or, in Procline terminology, *amethectum*.¹⁹⁹¹

Within this Neoplatonic *milieu*, the famous 'unknowing' ($\alpha\gamma\nu\omega\sigma\iota\alpha$),¹⁹⁹² of Dionysius (*per ignorantiam* in Sarracen), is read by Thomas as 'an inactivity of all knowledge' (*omnino autem ignoto*),¹⁹⁹³ which 'knows beyond the mind by knowing nothing.'¹⁹⁹⁴ However, *per ignorantium* must

¹⁹⁸² *Sermon* 12 (2010), 163. On Moses see also *ST*1.12.11; I-II.98.3.2; II-II.174.5.1.

¹⁹⁸³ *SCGIII*.49.9 (2001), 170 and the early text, 15558.1.4.

¹⁹⁸⁴ Bourke (2001), intro., 17.

¹⁹⁸⁵ Chevalier, 578.

¹⁹⁸⁶ *ST*1-II.3.8.1.

¹⁹⁸⁷ Tugwell points out in his translation of Albert, *CMT* that *secundum melius* in Sarracen's text 'properly qualifies' the cessation of all knowledge' and signifies 'in a good sense.' See also *EP*9.5. *ibid*, 158, n.61.

¹⁹⁸⁸ *IDC* (1996), 46.

¹⁹⁸⁹ c.f. Aquinas *SCGIII*.81.1

¹⁹⁹⁰ Boethius, *COPV*.4-5, trans. Watts (London: Penguin, 1969). Aquinas learns from Boethius. *DV*8.6, sc.1. See also Perl (2007), 83-101.

¹⁹⁹¹ *IDC*6 (1996), 44, 46, 48; c.f. Proclus, *ET*123.

¹⁹⁹² *DN*1 (588A)

¹⁹⁹³ *ibid*, 578. Grossteste renders: 'omnis cognitiones inoperatione.'

¹⁹⁹⁴ 'et eo quod nihil cognoscit super mentem cognoscens.' (Sarracen). *MT*1 (1001A).

be understood positively as a mode by which we *do* ‘know God’ (*cognoscimus Deum*), after death, ‘by a certain union to the divine above the nature of mind.’¹⁹⁹⁵ In other words, according to Aquinas there exists a non-discursive, intuitive mode of knowledge available *post mortem* which is of such a qualitatively different order to knowledge *in via*, that it could appropriately be termed ‘unknowing’. Put differently, Turner coins the phrase ‘darkness of knowledge.’¹⁹⁹⁶ Again, Blankenhorn, reinforces Thomas’ reading of *MT* against modern misreadings, clarifying that the ‘brilliant darkness’ must be a ‘paradoxical expression’ signifying a ‘positive reality’ exceeding our grasp.¹⁹⁹⁷ Unlike postmodern *theopoiesis*¹⁹⁹⁸ where cognitive theology is replaced by an arbitrary hermeneutical act of ‘construction,’ Aquinas’ exemplary reception non-identically repeats Cappadocian apophaticism by retaining both negative knowledge and *hyper*-knowledge *in patria*.¹⁹⁹⁹ What is excluded by Thomas’ axiom, ‘we cannot know what God is, but only what he is not,’ is not knowledge about God (*pace* Marion *et al.*), but rather the quiddity of God in the present life,²⁰⁰⁰ that is to say, the essence or *definition* of God.²⁰⁰¹

3. Eriugena versus Thomas

This lack of definition for God, however, raises the question of how God’s essence could ever be known by humans, even *in patria*. We have already seen one response from Byzantine theology, namely that this is indeed impossible, since God is incircumscribable.²⁰⁰² But a more radically agnostic conclusion was drawn within the negative reception stream of Eriugena. He reasoned that the question ‘What is it?’ presupposes some substance with propensity for definition.²⁰⁰³ But, since the Divine Substance cannot be defined and is not counted amongst the number of existing things, there can be no *quiddity* to be known.²⁰⁰⁴ Consequently, God cannot be defined *even by himself*,²⁰⁰⁵ rendering Him absolutely unknowable.²⁰⁰⁶

¹⁹⁹⁵ *IDNV*11 – 4.

¹⁹⁹⁶ Turner (1995), 17.

¹⁹⁹⁷ Blankenhorn, 25, c.f. *DV*8.1. 8.

¹⁹⁹⁸ Keller, 306-309 and Chapter 4 below.

¹⁹⁹⁹ *SCG*1.30.4 (2001), 141; *ST*1.2.2.1; *SCG*III.49. 9 (2001), 170.

²⁰⁰⁰ *DV*8.1.10; *CJohn*1.211.

²⁰⁰¹ For the translation of quiddity as ‘definition’ see *SCG*III.49.7, 169 (Bourke) and *In De Anima* III.8 in Rocca (2004), 30.

²⁰⁰² Nyssanus, *Ad Ablabius*; See also Damascene, *DF*01.13.

²⁰⁰³ *DDN*II (586D), ed. Sheldon-Williams (1968), 137. Henceforth all page numbers are from this edition.

²⁰⁰⁴ *DDN*II (587C), 138.

²⁰⁰⁵ *DDN*II (587C), 139.

²⁰⁰⁶ *DDN*II (596D), 161.

So God does not know of himself what He is because He is not a ‘what’, being in everything incomprehensible both to Himself and to every intellect....No one of the men of pious learning or of the adepts in the Divine Mysteries, hearing of God that He cannot understand of Himself what He is, ought to think anything else than that God Himself, Who is not a ‘what,’ does not know at all in Himself that which He Himself is not.²⁰⁰⁷

In modern idiom, Eriugena’s position is *anti-essentialist* in regards to the Divine nature. God is not a ‘what,’ hence there is ‘nothing’ for him to know of himself. This, however, entails a serious revision of divine omniscience, since divine knowledge is really divine ignorance.²⁰⁰⁸ As noted in Chapter 2, this coincides with Plotinus’ account of the One, ‘(i)t is no weakness in it not to know itself, since as pure unity, it contains nothing which it needs to explore.’²⁰⁰⁹ We will return to this point.

Prima facie, Dionysius shows ambiguity on the question. On the one hand, *DN* teaches an all embracing causality and knowledge which contains all things,²⁰¹⁰ citing John 21:17 and the name ‘Knower’ from Daniel 13:42 and *Susanna* 42 in support.²⁰¹¹ On the other hand, *MT5* contains the puzzling statement: ‘Existing beings do not know it as it actually is and it does not know them as they are.’²⁰¹² This very ambiguity permits divergent streams of reception.

Within the ‘positive stream’, Grosseteste provided a plausible harmonisation: ‘by knowing himself in a way that is beyond being, he knows all things.’²⁰¹³ Grosseteste’s reading matches *DN7*’s reasoning that any talk of God being ‘without mind’ must be understood by ‘superabundance’ and not by defect.²⁰¹⁴ This is precisely the apophatic thought of *DN8* (discussed in our last chapter), which concludes that God’s inability to know how to lack knowledge actually constitutes the perfection of knowledge.²⁰¹⁵ Knepper’s translation of *EH1* (373D) explicitly agrees, ‘(t)he will of this most thearchic beatitude beyond all..is inscrutable to us but known to itself.’²⁰¹⁶ A further strong supporting argument is its compatibility with Proclus’ *reductio* of Plotinus on this very point: if the Cause of all did not know itself, it would be inferior

²⁰⁰⁷ *DDNII* (589B)

²⁰⁰⁸ *DDNII* (598a), 163.

²⁰⁰⁹ *Enneads* V.6.6

²⁰¹⁰ *DN7*(869A-C); Kharlamov, 190.

²⁰¹¹ *DN7* (868D-9A).

²⁰¹² *MT5* (1048A), 141; c.f. Sarracen: *neque ipsam cognoscunt exsistentia secundum quod ipsa est; neque ipsa cognoscit ea que sunt exsistentia secundum quod exsistentia sunt*. McEvoy, 48; Chevalier 1.600.

²⁰¹³ *non enim habet virtutes aliquas cognoscitivas suscipientes quid a cognitis, sed supercognoscitivam, quia supersubstantialiter cognoscens se, cognoscit*. McEvoy, 119.

²⁰¹⁴ *DN7* (869A).

²⁰¹⁵ *DN8* (893B); *IDNVIII.3.17-26*

²⁰¹⁶ Knepper, 77.

to those beings that do know themselves.²⁰¹⁷ As Dionysius' spiritual mentor, Proclus' views must take precedence over those of Plotinus (which have been wrongly privileged by Eriugena, Eckhart, Cusanus *et al.*). For Proclus the All knows the effect through knowing itself as Cause.²⁰¹⁸

This background makes much better sense of a Dionysian text, oft-cited by Aquinas.

The Divine Wisdom knows all things by knowing itself. The Universal Cause, by knowing itself, can hardly be ignorant of the things which proceed from it and of which it is the Source. This, then, is how God knows all things, not by understanding things, but by understanding Himself.²⁰¹⁹

The relevance of this text increases if we follow Aquinas' reading of omniscience as a transcendent mode of science,²⁰²⁰ rather than Eriugena's mode of nescience. God knows all things, including individuals and privations, because as their Exemplar, all things imitate him.²⁰²¹ Within the 'road map' of interpretation, Aquinas' reading aligns with the great Dionysian scholar Maximus.²⁰²² Aquinas is aware of an agnostic reading,²⁰²³ but rejects it as tantamount to Arianism (which conceives God as distinctionless, unknowable *μονάς*.²⁰²⁴ '(T)he Arians, who separated the Word from God, were foolish, because, if they had been right, God would not have known himself.'²⁰²⁵ A by-product was the voluntarist teaching that God's will in creation is inscrutable.²⁰²⁶ Aquinas rejected Arianism as irrational and contrary to orthodoxy and astutely recognised the related error in Eriugena, that angels cannot see God's essence, which he consequently condemned as heretical.²⁰²⁷ We part company then with Macquarrie's judgement that Eriugena's philosophy 'is little more than a recapitulation of his predecessor'²⁰²⁸ and Anastasius the Librarian's hyperbolic eulogy of the Irish 'barbarian's understanding as 'miraculous'.²⁰²⁹ To the *quaestio*, 'Does God know or understand Himself?' Aquinas repeats this text from *DN* as his authoritative *sed contra* 'Dionysius declares: "By knowing itself, the divine wisdom knows all else.'" Hence God knows Himself especially.²⁰³⁰ Only in this way could God

²⁰¹⁷ *IPIII* (790, 794-5); *VI* (1108); Carabine, 164.

²⁰¹⁸ *IPIII* (799); *IV* (957), *ET124*.

²⁰¹⁹ *DN7* (869B-C), 108. See also *DV2.5*; *LEJob28* (1989), 337-8,

²⁰²⁰ *DV2.4.9*.

²⁰²¹ *SCG1.54*, 3-5, citing *DN5* (824D).

²⁰²² *Ambigua* 7 (1080B; 1084B-C; 1085B); Bradshaw, 206, n.65.

²⁰²³ *DV2.4*, obj.9.

²⁰²⁴ Stepień and Kočańczyk-Bonińska, 54-55.

²⁰²⁵ *Sermon* 12 (2010), 166. See also *ST1.14.2*; 34.2.

²⁰²⁶ Stepień and Kočańczyk-Bonińska, 56..

²⁰²⁷ *SHeb1.6*; *DV8.1*

²⁰²⁸ Macquarrie (1984), 89.

²⁰²⁹ Emery (2000), 209, citing *In Celestial Hierarchy* 1.5.

²⁰³⁰ *DV2.2*, sc.,vol.1, trans. Mulligan, 61.

be the Cause of our knowledge, as Porro succinctly puts it: ‘God can bring about science in us because there is science in him.’²⁰³¹

In an argument which still has force against modern materialists, Aquinas further adds that material things cannot be known by a material mode of knowing. They must first be understood as an idea.²⁰³² Therefore, ‘(s)ince God, being entirely free from all potentiality, is at the extreme of separation from matter, it follows that He is most knowing and most knowable.’²⁰³³ On this point, Aquinas can cancel out Eriugena’s position through an appeal to Avicenna, a counter *auctoritate*, who argues, “He Himself knows and apprehends Himself because His own quiddity, being completely stripped (that is of matter), is of a thing perfectly identified with Himself.”²⁰³⁴

Finally, in his mature work, *DSS*, Aquinas rejects the view that God can know neither himself nor creation. He affirms that God knows particulars in creation²⁰³⁵ because the knowledge of any knowable is included under the universal.²⁰³⁶ Since God’s mode of being is one, simple and eternal substance, it follows that by one simple glance, God has an eternal and fixed knowledge of all knowables.²⁰³⁷ Furthermore, since *esse* is the fullness of Being *per se*, it is also (in agreement with the Neoplatonic tradition) the fullness of intelligibility *per se*.²⁰³⁸ God’s self-knowledge is consequently the basis for the intelligibility of all things.

To answer the *objectio* that God has no ‘definition,’ raised at the beginning of this section, Aquinas agrees that the quiddity of God is not in a genus,²⁰³⁹ however, this is not because God lacks quiddity. Rather, God *is* his own quiddity.²⁰⁴⁰ As we saw in Chapter 2, unlike creatures, for whom essence and existence are separate, it belongs uniquely to God that his nature is the Act of Existence itself.²⁰⁴¹ In this life, however, wayfarers must make do with a working definition from God’s effects to the *thatness* of their Cause.²⁰⁴²

²⁰³¹ Porro, TA, 68.

²⁰³² *SPsalms*13.2

²⁰³³ *SHeb*11:6

²⁰³⁴ *DV*2.2. vol.1, 62.

²⁰³⁵ *DSS*14.70 (1959)

²⁰³⁶ *DSS*14.70 (1959)

²⁰³⁷ *DSS*14.70 (1959)

²⁰³⁸ *ST*1.12.1, sc.; c.f. *DSS*14.72 (1959)

²⁰³⁹ *ST*1.3.5 sc.; *SCG*III.49. 6-7, trans. Bourke (2001), 169.

²⁰⁴⁰ *SCG*III.49.8 (2001), 170; *IDC*6 (1996), 47; 52.

²⁰⁴¹ *ST*1.12.4; c.f. *SCG*III.49.8 (2001), 169; *IDC*6 (1996), 47; 52.

²⁰⁴² Porro, TA, 132-133.

4. Beatific Vision.

Having rejected a knowledge of God's quiddity *tout court*, Eriugena must reformulate what is meant by 'revelation'. In *DDN1* (447A) he appropriates the Dionysian term 'theophany'²⁰⁴³ to describe a mode of revelation by which angels presently see God and by which the righteous will see him, either in the world to come (when 'equal to the angels'), or in the present life through an ecstatic vision.²⁰⁴⁴ Theophany is the joining of God to an intellectual creature for the purpose of manifesting himself²⁰⁴⁵ and equated with the 'mansions' of John 14, which are created forms through which the elect receive knowledge of God, relative to their holiness.²⁰⁴⁶

There is significant textual evidence to support Eriugena's interpretation, which on this point coincides with our account of Byzantine theology. Firstly, *DN7.3* confesses: '(i)t might be more accurate to say that we cannot know God in his nature, since this is unknowable and is beyond the reach of mind or reason.' Though Aquinas has relativised this to an unknowability in this life,²⁰⁴⁷ Yannaras correctly observes that the Dionysian text itself is unqualified.²⁰⁴⁸

Secondly, *CH4.3* criticises those who have claimed to see God directly. Dionysius may have in mind the Messalians, contemporaneously active in Syria, who boldly asserted that the Trinity could be seen physically.²⁰⁴⁹ Against such anthropomorphism, Dionysius retorts: 'Scripture has clearly shown that "no one ever has seen" or ever will see the being of God in all its hiddenness.'²⁰⁵⁰ One text influential for Dionysius, Nyssanus' *De Vita Moysis* cites John 1:18 to prove that 'knowledge of the divine essence is unattainable not only by men but also by every intelligent creature.'²⁰⁵¹ Nyssanus here denies any direct vision of God,²⁰⁵² yet posits a vision for the 'pure in heart' somewhere between the knowledge attained by philosophers and the knowledge of the blessed *post mortem*, who are 'united to him through purity of life.'²⁰⁵³ Dionysius speaks similarly of a 'union' with God beyond knowledge (an 'unknowing') *via* purification.²⁰⁵⁴ Contrary to Thomas' gloss, then, it is safe to infer that Dionysius did believe that God's essence is unknowable not only in this world but also in the age to come: '(s)omeone beholding God and understanding what he saw has not actually seen God himself, but rather something of his which

²⁰⁴³ *DN1.4*; *CH4.3*; c.f. Nyssanus, *DVMII.241*.

²⁰⁴⁴ *DDN1* (447A), 46-47; (448C), 50-51.

²⁰⁴⁵ *DDN1* (450B), 54-55; *DDN1* (448C), 50-51.

²⁰⁴⁶ *DDN1* (448C), 52-53.

²⁰⁴⁷ *DV8.1.10*; *ST1-II.3.8*

²⁰⁴⁸ Yannaras, 63.

²⁰⁴⁹ Lossky (1963), 91; Golitzin, 11.

²⁰⁵⁰ *CH4* (180C); c.f. John 5:37.

²⁰⁵¹ *DVMII.163* (1978), 95 and *Beatitudes, Sermon 1* (1954), 88.

²⁰⁵² *Sermon 6 on The Beatitudes* (1954), 148.

²⁰⁵³ *ibid*, 151.

²⁰⁵⁴ *MT1* (997B).

has being and which is knowable.²⁰⁵⁵ In other words, even in Heaven, there is no unmediated knowledge of God.²⁰⁵⁶

This interpretation impinges on Maximus' treatment of 'deification.'²⁰⁵⁷ The divine essence is *per se incomprehensibilem esse*, yet becomes manifest when joined to an intellectual creature.²⁰⁵⁸ Provoking later charges of heresy, Eriugena reworded this in terms of the Creator becoming the 'created.' Therefore, 'we ought not to understand God and the creature as two things distinct from one another, but as one and the same.'²⁰⁵⁹ Nothing apart from itself exists as an essence and therefore the essence of God is the essence of all things.²⁰⁶⁰ It is at this point that problems of incoherence arise for Eriugena, for if on his modified Dionysianism, the essence of God is unknowable, yet at the same time is the essence of all things, then it follows that God can know neither himself, nor creation essentially. Nor, contrary to the Delphic injunction, can creation know itself, which has fatal consequences for science.

Aquinas' intervention is significant for saving Dionysius from 'the Scot' on a number of points. Firstly, Aquinas rejects that the essence of all things is the essence of God.²⁰⁶¹ Although Eriugena might appeal to CH4 (177D) *esse omnium est superessentialis divinitas*,²⁰⁶² DN5 (817D) *ipse est esse existentibus*,²⁰⁶³ or DN7 (872A), 'He is all things in all things and he is no thing among things',²⁰⁶⁴ Aquinas regards such moves as a 'warped interpretation of authoritative texts' (*quarundam auctoritatum intellectus perversus*).²⁰⁶⁵ Eriugena is guilty of twisting Dionysius' words and ignoring clear statements which prove that 'there is no exact likeness between caused and cause.'²⁰⁶⁶

(I)f the divinity is the formal being of all things, it will not be over all but among all, indeed a part of all. But Dionysius said that the divinity was 'above all things', showing that it was distinct from and superior to all things. Therefore, when he said that the divinity is 'the being of all things', he meant that a certain likeness of the divine being comes from God. Moreover,

²⁰⁵⁵ EP1 (1065A). Aquinas' relativizes this text in STII-II.180.5.1; IDT6.3.1.

²⁰⁵⁶ CH4 (180C). Luther's criticism of the Areopagite is therefore misplaced: 'they (the Platonists) taught that humans can converse and deal with the inscrutable, eternal majesty of God in this mortal, corrupt flesh without mediation. This is their doctrine which is regarded as highest divine wisdom; I also was in that camp for some time, not without great harm to myself. I admonish you to shun like the plague that 'Mystical Theology' of Dionysius and similar books which contain such idle talk.' Froehlich, in Rorem (1987), 44.

²⁰⁵⁷ DDN1 (449B), 52-53.

²⁰⁵⁸ DDN1 (450B), 54-55.

²⁰⁵⁹ DDNIII (678C), 160

²⁰⁶⁰ DDN1(454A), (1968), 65.

²⁰⁶¹ DDN1 (632D)

²⁰⁶² τὸ γὰρ ἐστὶ τὸ εἶναι τοῖς οὐσι.

²⁰⁶³ cited in IJSS8.1.1 obj.1.

²⁰⁶⁴ DN7 (872A), 109, appropriated by Keller for her 'apophatic panentheism,' 75.

²⁰⁶⁵ SCG1.26.10.

²⁰⁶⁶ DN2 (645C).

Dionysius explicitly says elsewhere: “God neither touches nor is in any way mingled with other things, as a point touches a line or the figure of a seal touches wax” [DN2. 5].²⁰⁶⁷

Aquinas therefore helpfully clarifies that God can only be called ‘all things’ *causally and not essentially*.²⁰⁶⁸

At stake for Aquinas is the real distinction between God and the world, formulated at the Fourth Lateran Council:²⁰⁶⁹ ‘God, being one sole, absolutely simple and immutable spiritual substance, is to be declared as really and essentially distinct from the world.’²⁰⁷⁰ The distinction is not just conceptual.²⁰⁷¹ ‘God is distinct from all things... since nothing can be added to him.’²⁰⁷² Real distinction preserves Aquinas from the incoherence of the later Eckhart,²⁰⁷³ modern Hegelians, panentheists and pantheists. Without it, analogy would be unintelligible and collapse into univocity. Eriugena falls foul of the condemnation of the Council²⁰⁷⁴ and of the 1225 Council of Sens.²⁰⁷⁵ Thomas saves Dionysius, however, from any suggestion of monism by reasoning that God cannot be the formal being of all things because of the *reductio* that all things would be absolutely one.²⁰⁷⁶ Indeed, if this were true, we already *are* God and mediation is redundant, making Eriugena’s position is incoherent. Furthermore, on monism, as already demonstrated, the Principle of Non-Contradiction is impossible.²⁰⁷⁷

Next, Aquinas rejects Eriugena’s conclusion that God is essentially unknowable, because of the previously discussed *reductio* that God could not be known even to Himself (Plotinus’

²⁰⁶⁷ SCG1.26.10.

²⁰⁶⁸ IDNV11 – 4, 34-47, Appendix, 468. See also SCG1.26. 8,10; 1SS38.1.2. ‘Through his notion of intensive *esse* and the consequent distinction between *esse* and essence in creatures, Thomas not only emphasises the difference between *esse* and being, but he also succeeds in making God’s presence in creatures more active and meaningful than in the pantheistic theories of Dionysius, Avicenna, Eckhart, Cusanus, Spinoza and Hegel. Whereas in these latter theories God as being is the Act as the *Essence of essences*, in Thomas’ view God as *Esse per essentiam* is the principle and actuating cause of *esse per participationem*, which is the proper, actuating act of every real essence.’ C. Fabro, ‘The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy’ trans. B.M. Bonansea in *The Review of Metaphysics* 27.3 (1974): 484. See also Porro, TA, 50.

²⁰⁶⁹ See Chapter 1 on the role of authoritative tradition.

²⁰⁷⁰ Garrigou-Lagrange (1939), 1.5.

²⁰⁷¹ ‘In creation He is present everywhere, yet is distinct in being from it; ordering, directing, giving life to all, containing all, yet is He Himself the Uncontained.’ Athanasius, *De Incarnatione Verbi dei* 17, trans. religious of C.S.M.V. (London: Mowbray, 1982), 45.

²⁰⁷² DP1.2.7.

²⁰⁷³ Franke, 57

²⁰⁷⁴ Garrigou-Lagrange (1939), 1.6.

²⁰⁷⁵ Sammon; 226, citing Dermot Moran, *Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena: A study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (CUP, 1989), 85-91.

²⁰⁷⁶ SCG1.26.3.

²⁰⁷⁷ ‘We find monists driven to the view that the only true whole, the Absolute, has no parts at all, and that no propositions in regard to it or anything else are quite true – a view which, in the mere statement, unavoidably contradicts itself. And surely an opinion which holds all propositions to be in the end self-contradictory is sufficiently condemned by the fact that, if it be accepted, it also must be self-contradictory.’ Bertrand Russell, *The Principles of Mathematics* (New York: Norton, 1996), § 216.

position), which is ‘clearly false.’²⁰⁷⁸ The position that God’s essence cannot be seen by the created intellect is presented as a foil to Thomas’ position in *ST*1.12.²⁰⁷⁹ We should not, however, infer that Aquinas believed this to be Dionysius’ actual view, since he consistently shows the greatest deference to the Areopagite. Rather, Thomas corrects the presented misinterpretation, not naming Dionysius again in his *responsio*, but instead addressing a generic opinion attributed to him. ‘(S)ome who considered this, held that no created intellect can see the essence of God. This *opinion*, however, is not tenable.’²⁰⁸⁰ The *DN* text is treated in the weak sense of a denial of *comprehensive* knowledge of God (c.f. the later error of ‘absolute knowing’ in Hegel),²⁰⁸¹ but not in the strong sense of a denial of *essential* knowledge. This difference exposes the fault line between Greek and Latin Christianity.²⁰⁸² Aquinas gives Dionysius a ‘pious’ interpretation acceptable for adherents of the Parisian declaration of 1241, which blazes a trail for the later ‘positive’ reception stream.

Thirdly, Aquinas disagreed that it is impossible for God to be known without mediation: ‘the divine essence is not seen through a similitude.’²⁰⁸³ Even the angels have essential (but partial) knowledge of God which exceeds the indirect knowledge of humans *in via*, who see God reflected imperfectly in creation as through a mirror.²⁰⁸⁴ Angels are themselves, then, a kind of mirror of God’s glory. They must see the essence of God, since according to Christ, the angels ‘always see the face of my Father.’²⁰⁸⁵ *A fortiori*, human knowledge of God through grace, can exceed that of the angels.²⁰⁸⁶ In parallel passages from *SCG*,²⁰⁸⁷ *DV* and *ST*, Aquinas marshals a battery of Scriptural proofs²⁰⁸⁸ to defend the positive hope that believers will ultimately share in the essential, quidditative knowledge of God *post mortem*. ‘We shall see him as he is,’ is a common refrain,²⁰⁸⁹ and at the climax of *SCG*III in anticipation²⁰⁹⁰ of his final book, ‘On Salvation’ (*SCG*IV), Aquinas writes: ‘(t)his immediate vision of God is promised us in Scripture: “We see

²⁰⁷⁸ *ST*1.12.4; c.f. *SCG*III.49.8, trans. Bourke, 169.

²⁰⁷⁹ *ST*1.12.1.

²⁰⁸⁰ *ST*1.12.1, sc.

²⁰⁸¹ Franke, 47.

²⁰⁸² *ST*1.12.1.1.

²⁰⁸³ *ST*1.12.2; 88.2, sc; *DSC*2.1a

²⁰⁸⁴ *ST*1.56.3.1.

²⁰⁸⁵ *DV*8.1, sc.1.

²⁰⁸⁶ *IDNV* – 1, Appendix, 431; *ST*1.56.3; ; *Sermon* 12 (2010), 165.

²⁰⁸⁷ For parallel passages see *ST*1.12.1; *DV*13.3.7.

²⁰⁸⁸ Many of these find parallels in Augustine’s treatment in the *CoGXXII*.29 cites 1 Cor. 13:9, 12; Matthew 18:10; 1 John 3:2; Job 19:26; 42:5-6; Matthew 5:8.

²⁰⁸⁹ *ST*1.12.1, sc

²⁰⁹⁰ See Bourke’s introduction to *SCG*III, Part 1 (UNDP, 1975), 15.

now through a glass in a dark manner; but then face to face.” (1 Cor. 13:12).²⁰⁹¹ In Thomas’ ‘cloud theology’ the clouds disperse at death.²⁰⁹²

However, we must acknowledge Aquinas’ reading on this particular point as a transformation of Dionysius in accordance with the ‘truth of things themselves’ rather than the views of the historical author of the *CD*. Since Eudes, chancellor of the University of Paris, and the Masters of Theology 1240-41²⁰⁹³ had condemned Eriugena’s position as heretical, Thomas is obliged to agree.²⁰⁹⁴

Thomas is clear that, since God is incorporeal, the beatific vision cannot be a bodily *facie ad faciem*,²⁰⁹⁵ nor can it refer to the physical ‘face’ of the believer, but rather to his ‘heart or mind.’²⁰⁹⁶ *Facie ad faciem* therefore means an unmediated vision of his essence.²⁰⁹⁷ Augustine had identified the knowledge of God ‘even as also I am known’ (1 Cor. 13:12) with seeing ‘all our knowledge in one simultaneous glance.’²⁰⁹⁸ This ‘positive’ interpretation of the beatific vision became the classic ‘Augustinian’ position of Denys the Carthusian,²⁰⁹⁹ Thomas Gallus and Robert Grosseteste, all of whom simultaneously claim a Dionysian inheritance.²¹⁰⁰ The Augustinian influence on Aquinas’ reception has been a common theme in this thesis as it strengthens his ‘positive’ mode of apophaticism against more pessimistically agnostic ones, past and present.²¹⁰¹ McEvoy traces this transformation of Dionysius’ mediated vision into an Augustinian unmediated one to Hugh and Richard of St Victor.²¹⁰² The identification of ‘seeing’ (*theoria*) with ‘knowing’ (*episteme*) is a common Platonic²¹⁰³ and Neo-Platonic trope²¹⁰⁴ which finds common ground with John 17:3, Matthew 11:27; 1 John 3:2 and Matthew 5:8.²¹⁰⁵ Critics might feel that these canonical texts underdetermine the conclusion of a ‘quidditative’ knowledge,²¹⁰⁶ even if Aquinas denies for the creature the comprehensive, perfect or infinite knowledge such as God

²⁰⁹¹ *SCGIII*, Part 1.51.5.

²⁰⁹² *LEJob*37.20 (1989), 412.

²⁰⁹³ <http://medieval.ucdavis.edu/120B/Errors.html>; Hergen, c.1.

²⁰⁹⁴ Dominic O’Meara, ‘Eriugena and Aquinas on the Beatific Vision’ in Warner Beierwates (ed.), *Eriugena Redivivus* (Heidelberg, 1987), 224-36.

²⁰⁹⁵ but see a different, incarnational interpretation below.

²⁰⁹⁶ *Super II Cor*3.113

²⁰⁹⁷ *SCGIII*, Part 1.51.5 (as perhaps in 2 John 12)

²⁰⁹⁸ *DT XV.4.26*, trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 2005), 418.

²⁰⁹⁹ Emery (2000).

²¹⁰⁰ McEvoy (2003); Rorem, ‘The Early Latin Dionysius: Eriugena and Hugh of St. Victor’ in *The Dionysian Mystical Theology* (2015), 79-101.

²¹⁰¹ This is acknowledged by Golitzin, but in terms of an EO critique, ‘the lense through which they read Christianity itself has been shaped by the Augustinian inheritance,’ 53.

²¹⁰² *CoGXXII.29*; McEvoy (2003), 6, 89-140; 241-257.

²¹⁰³ *Republic VII* (514A-521B)

²¹⁰⁴ Roques, 95.

²¹⁰⁵ Rocca (2004), 34-41.

²¹⁰⁶ See Nyssanus’ alternative reading of Matthew 5:8 in *Sermon 6* on the Beatitudes.

has of Himself.²¹⁰⁷ But Aquinas reasons paradoxically that it is precisely because no created substance would be adequate to see God essentially that the beatific vision must be unmediated.

Significantly, Aquinas appeals not only to the authority of Scripture (presuming his own interpretation),²¹⁰⁸ but also to Aristotle's teaching on final causation to defend his position. Aristotle had observed that nothing in nature acts in vain.²¹⁰⁹ Therefore, if all things in nature are imbued with *telos*, then *a fortiori*, this applies to man himself as rational animal.²¹¹⁰ This *telos* in man is evinced by the insight that 'the soul is in a sense all things,' i.e. it has potentiality to grasp the causes behind things. But, according to Aquinas, if man's reason is to achieve its final goal, it must be able to see God, otherwise its present desire would be inane, or without final causality. Furthermore, if there were no vision of God then the ultimate beatific state would either be unfulfilled²¹¹¹ or else consist in a fulfilment independent of God himself, which is contrary to orthodoxy.²¹¹² Man cannot be perfectly good without God.²¹¹³ In sum, as Porro discerns, 'the [Aristotelian] project of becoming an intelligible world in which the entire order of the universe is described is.. made concretely possible by Christian eschatology.'²¹¹⁴ Only theology completes philosophy and with it all branches of science. Not only this, but as Milbank comments, without this completion, mankind would be in the perverse situation of being *less* fulfilled than inanimate nature, which *is* able to achieve its final purpose.²¹¹⁵ Since the beatific vision is not a replacement of earthly knowledge with an alien mystical knowledge, this suggests that in one sense the beatific vision is 'natural' to mankind, but only at the right stage of development, just as it is natural for a man to have a beard, but not for a baby to have a beard.²¹¹⁶ The question remains, however, what it means for a creature to 'see' God without mediation. We will now examine different answers to this question from both negative and positive streams of reception.

²¹⁰⁷ SCGIII, Part 1.53.9; 55.2; *Sermon 12* (2010), 165; *IDNV*– I, Appendix, 431

²¹⁰⁸ *CJohn*1.212

²¹⁰⁹ *Movement of Animals* 8 (708a10; 711a18); *Generation of Animals* II.4 (739b19); II.5 (741b4); II.6 (744a36); V.8 (788b21); *Parts of Animals* II.13 (658a8); II.1 (661b4); IV.12 (694a15); IV.13 (695b18). Refs. from Hadot, 360, n.4.

²¹¹⁰ *Nicomachean Ethics* X.4 (1174B, 14-16); SCGIII.44

²¹¹¹ *CJohn*1.11.212

²¹¹² SCGIII.48.16; 51.1; 54.7; *ST*1.12.1; *DV*8.1

²¹¹³ *ST*1.12.1, *sc.*

²¹¹⁴ Porro, TA, 69.

²¹¹⁵ *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, MI:Eerdmans, 2005), viii.

²¹¹⁶ *DV*13.1.1; Porro, TA, 164-70.

5. Unmediated Vision a) The Monistic Option

The negative stream begins with Plotinus' account of 'Beauty There',²¹¹⁷ itself a development of Plato's treatment of beauty.²¹¹⁸ This beatific spectacle effects a profound transformation in the spectator²¹¹⁹ to the extent that the very distinction between subject and object collapses.²¹²⁰ The object acquires 'identity with the divine.'²¹²¹ Plotinus purportedly experienced this Unity several times during his life,²¹²² evoking his death bed petition, 'I was waiting for you, that you might help to bring the Divine in me to the Divine in all.'²¹²³ Plotinianism survives modernity *via* Hegel, for whom the *telos* of 'absolute knowing' is also this identity of *noesis* with *noema*.²¹²⁴ Consequently, one option for how God could be seen without mediation would be the monistic one, 'there is a divine element [in humanity] which rediscovers itself, its own nature.'²¹²⁵

On Plotinian ἐπιστροφή: all things emanate from and to God, who is 'all in all.'²¹²⁶ Platonic recollection is conceived in the same terms.²¹²⁷ Iamblichus speaks of being 'converted to ourselves' (πρὸς ἑαυτοῦς ἐπιστροφή).²¹²⁸ Indeed, the fundamental distinction between pagan emanationism and Judaeo-Christian creation *ex nihilo* hinges on this: for paganism what is emanated *is* the One *qua* manifestation in its multiplicity, rather than something really distinct from God by *creatio ex nihilo*.²¹²⁹ Eriugena arrives at the same conclusion *via* Aristotle: the mind knows its object by 'becoming' what it contemplates.²¹³⁰ Therefore, for the contemplatives, 'the whole of their nature shall be changed into Very God.'²¹³¹ Strictly speaking, on monism, the creature does not return to the Creator, so much as become aware of the illusory nature of all distinction.²¹³²

The first extant monistic reception of the *CD* occurs in *The Book of the Holy Hierotheus*, ascribed to Stephen Bar Sudaili. It quickly received condemnation from Philoxenus of Mabbug precisely on the *reductio* grounds that pagan and heretic alike become 'consubstantial with God,

²¹¹⁷ *Enneads* 1.6.8; V.8.10, 431.

²¹¹⁸ *Symposium* (209ff.); *Phaedrus* (250b).

²¹¹⁹ *Enneads* V.8.10, 431.

²¹²⁰ Perl, 85.

²¹²¹ *Enneads* IV.8.1, 357.

²¹²² *Enneads* IV.8.1, 357.

²¹²³ Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 23; Lewy, 488; Nygren, 194.

²¹²⁴ *Phenomenology of Spirit*, #80, trans. Miller (OUP, 1979), 51.

²¹²⁵ Hegel, 'The Spirit of Christianity' (1971), 266; *Enneads* IV.9.1

²¹²⁶ DN4 (713A).

²¹²⁷ Iamblichus, DMIII.9.120; c.f. Plato, *Phaedo* 75e; *Meno* 81C-D; Shaw, 143, 218

²¹²⁸ DMX.1.286.

²¹²⁹ IDNII-3 and our Chapter 1; Te Velde (2020), 122-140

²¹³⁰ DDN1 (450A), 54-55; *De Anima* III.8 (431B26-29). Aristotle however does not mean this literally, since it is only the 'form' of the object which is assimilated to the mind and not the object itself.

²¹³¹ DDN1 (451A), 56-57.

²¹³² *Enneads* VI.5.7, 536.

the Lord of the universe²¹³³ so that the creature-Creator distinction is lost.²¹³⁴ Aquinas, therefore, modifies *epistrophe* to ‘the ordering of creatures to God according to their end.’²¹³⁵ Nevertheless, a monistic reading of Dionysius retains wide purchase today²¹³⁶ and could therefore be fittingly labelled ‘Plotinian Dionysianism.’²¹³⁷

Thomas’ treatise *De unitate intellectus* provides a devastating demolition of the monism of one agent intellect:

Whoever wishes to disagree on this point necessarily says what is absurd. That this individual man understands is manifest, for we would never ask about intellect unless we understand, nor when we ask about intellect are we asking about anything other than that whereby we understand.²¹³⁸

In other words, on monism, the individual human being is not the subject of thought, which is contrary to direct experience and patently false. Thomas’ orthodoxy saves real difference, elusive to postmodern philosophy.²¹³⁹ His treatment of the beatific vision is distinguished from Plotinian Dionysianism in that the creature is never reduced to a mere ‘appearance’ of the One.²¹⁴⁰ The voyage to the Fatherland does not terminate within oneself.²¹⁴¹ Instead, the vision of God’s essence creates the possibility of a perfect love relationship with the Other, ‘by which we live together socially as friends (*convivimus socialiter amici*)’.²¹⁴² The Johannine text, ‘we shall see Him as He is’ (1 John 3:2.) serves a normative function in this debate, as seen by its recurrence in *ST*1.12.1-6.²¹⁴³ *Sermon 20* transposes this as ‘the saints in the heavenly homeland have a perfect similarity with God.’ Both Aquinas and Dionysius recognise the asymmetrical nature of this similarity:²¹⁴⁴ ‘it is fitting to say that all things are similar to God, not according to equality, but through a certain assimilation and imitation from which the notion of an image is taken.’²¹⁴⁵ If

²¹³³ Daley (1991), 177

²¹³⁴ *ibid*, 178.

²¹³⁵ *SCG*1.9.4; IV.1.1-2; In *IIISSS*, Prol.

²¹³⁶ e.g. Perl (2007) and Rolt (1972), 26-31, though he also acknowledges the paradox of all things being ‘fused and yet distinct,’ including the individual soul (28). S. Radhakrishnan speaks of the ‘absolute vacuity’ of the divine, cited in Rhodes (2014), 311.

²¹³⁷ Keller, 75.

²¹³⁸ *De unitate intellectus* 2 trans. Porro, TA, 375

²¹³⁹ Milbank (1997), 113; Franke, 245.

²¹⁴⁰ *Enneads* V.3.4, 405; IV.8.1, 357

²¹⁴¹ *Enneads* 1.6.8 (1930), 63.

²¹⁴² *IIISSS*19.1.5, sol.1, trans. C. Fabro and B.M. Bonansea, ‘The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy,’ *The Review of Metaphysics* 27.3 (1974): 480.

²¹⁴³ *Sermon 20*, Part B (2010), 304.

²¹⁴⁴ *DN*9 (913C); *ST*1.12.1.1; and the recurring refrain in Dionysius ‘as far as possible’ in reference to union with God e.g. *CH*3 (164D;165B); 9 (257C); *EH*5 (501A).

²¹⁴⁵ *IDNIX*.3, 15-37 (1994), 497; *ST*1.12.2, *sc.*

the self were identical to the object of sight this would lead to self-worship which is idolatrous.²¹⁴⁶ The creature's knowledge will never be infinite because (logically) the creature can never become the Creator.²¹⁴⁷ Hence it follows that the creature will never attain omniscience.²¹⁴⁸ Aquinas does not hesitate to condemn a wrong (Plotinian) way to understand the expression 'God is all in all.' Some understand this 'badly'²¹⁴⁹ when they fail to see that when God generates things similar to himself he 'remains in Godself' and 'keeps his proper identity.'²¹⁵⁰

A perplexing enigma for Plotinian Dionysianism is how the many could have ever become separated from the One. Plotinus' attempted explanation lies in the 'addition of non-being.'²¹⁵¹ Particular beings, including the human subject, are in reality *nothing*, since nothing can be added to the One if it is to remain One. It is only by stripping oneself of the 'alien' element of non-Being that the return (or assimilation) to the One can be effected. It becomes obvious that any philosophical trajectory from Plotinus will have serious implications for anthropology.²¹⁵² If God Himself has no essence (as the Plotinian Eriugena has already argued),²¹⁵³ then those in his image reflect non-essence.²¹⁵⁴ Downstream, Meister Eckhart's 'union of indistinction' is *grund* for both human soul and God: 'your "yours" and his "His" should become so completely one 'Mine' that with Him you understand his unbecome Isness and his nameless Nothingness.'²¹⁵⁵ From nothing, nothing comes and monism collapses into nihilism. Sartre inherits this logic:

If man as the existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it.²¹⁵⁶

Claiming its own stake in 'negative theologies' *via* Plotinus, anti-essentialism has been gaining traction both in analytic materialism and postmodern culture to the extent that humanism itself

²¹⁴⁶ Rolt (1972) is unable to resist this trap: 'this Infinite Self seen from afar, is and must be the Object of all worship until at last worship shall be swallowed up in the completeness of Unknowing.' 31.

²¹⁴⁷ *SCGII.25* (17-18).

²¹⁴⁸ *SCGIII*, part 1.55 par.2; 56.

²¹⁴⁹ *IDNIX.2*, 80-103, 494

²¹⁵⁰ *IDNIX.2*, 80-103, 494

²¹⁵¹ *Enneads VI.5.12*, 541.

²¹⁵² The 'cut/castration' trope in Lacan/Zizek differently repeats Plotinus. *Less than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2012), 6-7 in Rose (2014), 239. Cunningham (2002), 157ff.. traces a genealogy of nihilism to Plotinus.

²¹⁵³ following a similar position by Avicenna (Porro, TA, 23).

²¹⁵⁴ 'The trace of the One makes essence, being is only the trace of the One.' Plotinus, *Enneads V.5.5*.

²¹⁵⁵ *Sermon 87* (1987), 274-275; Stang (2012), 157.

²¹⁵⁶ 'Existentialism and Humanism' in Kearney and Rainwater (ed.), *The Continental Philosophy Reader*, London: Routledge (2003), 67-68

is in crisis.²¹⁵⁷ Secular humanism was far too much rooted in the old anthropology of ‘the singular nature or singular essence of the human subject,’²¹⁵⁸ but since this is parasitic on orthodoxy it cannot escape its own nullification.²¹⁵⁹

It is witnessed in the modern decomposition of sexuality. Foucault lucidly deconstructs naïve secularism by drawing attention to the ‘dennatured’ state of sexuality without God.²¹⁶⁰ There can be no masculine or feminine ‘nature’ which precedes culture and power.²¹⁶¹ All that remains is Zizek’s ‘Phallic Symbolic Order’²¹⁶² which is an empty simulacrum. The ‘third wave’ of feminism presupposes this ‘foundational illusion of identity,’²¹⁶³ in which the social or political construction of sex replaces the biological.²¹⁶⁴ This is the abandonment of authorial intention in nature signposted in Chapter 1. Pointedly, however, Foucault remains nostalgic for the old Dionysian paradigm and has justifiably been called an ‘inverted’ Neoplatonist²¹⁶⁵ from the following remarkable confession:

(N)ever did sexuality enjoy as more immediately natural understanding... than in the Christian world of fallen bodies and of sin. The proof is its whole tradition of mysticism and spirituality which was incapable of dividing the continuous forms of desire, of raptures, of penetration, of ecstasy, of that outpouring which leaves us spent: all of these experiences seemed to lead, without interruption or limit, right to the heart of a divine love of which they were both the outpouring and the source returning upon itself.²¹⁶⁶

He understood as profoundly as Nietzsche that, without metaphysics, nature too is dead. According to some new anti-humanist voices, the ‘binary’ opposition of nature and culture is obsolete and should be reframed as a continuum of ‘self-organising’ matter embracing humans, nature, culture and machine.²¹⁶⁷

²¹⁵⁷ Braidotti (2013); Franke, 26.

²¹⁵⁸ Maurice Florence, ‘Foucault’ in Faubion (2006), II.xiii.

²¹⁵⁹ Franke, 169.

²¹⁶⁰ Foucault, ‘A Preface to Transgression’ trans. Donald Bouchard and Sherry Simon in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984* (London: Penguin, 2006)II, 69, 71; Jeffery Kirk Wilson, ‘Foucault as Inverted Neo-Platonist in “A Preface to Transgression,”’ paper delivered at the 2011, conference of the Metaphysical Society of America, 2; Baudrillard, 13.

²¹⁶¹ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality 1: An Introduction*, trans. R. Hurley (London: Routledge, 1979);

Denise Riley, *Am I that Name?: Feminism and the Category of ‘Women’ in History* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), 1-17.

²¹⁶² Slavoj Zizek, *The Indivisible Remainder: On Schelling and Related Matters* (London: Verso, 1996), 160; *In Defense of Lost Causes* (London: Verso, 2008), 66, both cited in Rose (2014).

²¹⁶³ Butler (1990), 43-44 in Keller, 221.

²¹⁶⁴ Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (London: Virago, 1977 [1970]); Butler (2006), 89-97; 107-127; Butler (2004), 2.

²¹⁶⁵ Wilson (2011)

²¹⁶⁶ Foucault (2006), 69.

²¹⁶⁷ Braidotti, 3

But Aquinas had already anticipated and refuted the notion of self-organising matter both in the ‘First Way,’ and in *SCG1.13*, where he demonstrates that motion cannot be both potential and actual at the same time and in the same way and consequently, matter in motion cannot be self-constituting.²¹⁶⁸ This may be put in the following syllogism.

P1. The essence of matter is distinct from its existence.

P2. Nothing whose existence is distinct from its essence can have its existence imparted to itself by itself

C. Therefore, matter must have its existence imparted to it from something distinct from itself.²¹⁶⁹

We can further extrapolate that the monism of anti-essentialism collapses into nihilism from the following argument.

P1. The definition of essence is the ‘whatness’ of a being which distinguishes that being from other beings.

P2. A rejection of essences is also a rejection of any difference between beings.

P3. If there is no difference between beings then all is One.

P4. If all is One then neither is there any difference between existence and non-existence.

P5. The rejection of any difference between existence and non-existence is just what is meant by ‘nihilism’.

C. Therefore anti-essentialism is both monistic and nihilistic.

In spite of its absurdity, anti-essentialism permeates the new theology like Dennett’s ‘universal acid,’ going all the way down. Sexual difference is reduced to ‘metaphor,’ rather than a fundamental aspect of the goodness of creation.²¹⁷⁰ Keller exemplifies this approach, raiding Gregory of Nyssa²¹⁷¹ for a Kabbalistic,²¹⁷² neo-Gnostic reading of Galatians 3:28²¹⁷³ which abolishes sexual difference.²¹⁷⁴

²¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, since everything that moves is moved by desire, the object which causes movement must be an unmoved object of desire. *ST1.2.3*; *SCG1.13*; Porro, 134. Proclus had previously deployed similar arguments. *IPIII* (785).

²¹⁶⁹ Feser (2017), c.4; Porro, TA, 20-21; Kerr (2015)

²¹⁷⁰ Richard Rohr, God As Us! *The Sacred Feminine and the Sacred Masculine*, discs 1-3, 5, 6 (Center for Action and Contemplation: 2011).

²¹⁷¹ *De opificio* 16;

²¹⁷² Keller (2015) affirms Elliot Wolfson, ‘in the one that is beyond the difference of being one or the other, light is dark, black is white, night is day, male is female, Adam is Edom,’ 370-371, n.26.

While unsatisfying to a certain stage of feminist commentary, as we were seeking to firm up a new identity, if not an essence, its neither/nor may be more queerly promising now. In Gregory this gender-negation emulates the boundlessness of divinity and amplifies the apophatic anthropology.²¹⁷⁵

The ‘certain stage of feminist commentary’ indicates the feminism ‘so helpful for a while,’²¹⁷⁶ which took for granted a biologically female nature, but which is now dead, since the ‘female’ is herself dead. Keller seeks justification for her ‘gender-fluid’ theology from the ‘anthropological apophaticism’²¹⁷⁷ of *Contra Eunomium*: ‘we lack essential knowledge of soul, body and universe,’²¹⁷⁸ from which she extrapolates that Gregory ‘undoes in advance a whole history of essentialist reduction.’²¹⁷⁹

It is important not to misconstrue the parameters of the debate, for Aquinas is the first to acknowledge that we do not comprehend the essence of any creature, not even a fly,²¹⁸⁰ but he does not add Keller’s unwarranted leap into *there is no essence*. Keller repeats the verificationist error that only the empirically verifiable really exists. There is a true ‘apophatic anthropology’ since ‘Nature loves to hide’ (φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖν),²¹⁸¹ just as there is a true *theopoiesis*, but Keller’s account traduces its classical sense and becomes eliminative. It is also true that Nyssanus locates the *imago dei* in the intellect rather than the gendered physical body, which he associates with a post-lapsarian degraded body.²¹⁸² Nevertheless, sexual distinction remains *real*, ‘our bodily

²¹⁷³ Gnostics believed that prelapsarian Adam was androgenous and that the eschatological age would return to this primordial state. *Apocryphon of John* 14.21-31; 19:24-31; Hippolytus, *Refutations Against All Heresies* 5.6-11; Bruce (1974). Is this why devotees of Cybele castrated themselves? Athenagorus, *Legatio* 26.2 in PG6 (952A); Lynn E. Roller, *In Search of God the Mother: The Cult of Anatolian Cybele* (Orlando, Florida: University of California Press, 1999), 228–232; Tom Holland, *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind* (London: Abacus, 2020), 64-5, 119-121. Whatever the historicity of Origen’s self-castration, his writings reject such practices. Ronald E. Heine ‘Origen and his Opponents on Matthew 19:12’ in Vinzent, 123-9. Self-castration was forbidden by the Council of Nicaea. Herrin, 162. 157. Androgenous Adam finds artistic expression in Chagall, *Homage to Apollinaire* in Ingo F. Walther and Rainer Metzger, *Marc Chagall 1887-1985: Painting as Poetry* (London, Taschen, 2000), 29. Augustine refuted an androgenous Adam from Gen 1:27 ‘male and female created he THEM.’ *DGAL3:22* in *ST1.93.4.1*.

²¹⁷⁴ Deut 4:15-16; Gen 1:27.

²¹⁷⁵ Keller, 66.

²¹⁷⁶ Keller, 221.

²¹⁷⁷ *ibid*, 64, citing Kathryn Tanner, ‘In the Image of the Invisible’ in Boesel and Keller (2009), 117-137. Stang (2012) traces the term ‘apophatic anthropology’ to McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart* (New York: Crossroad, 2001), 48 and 153-196.

²¹⁷⁸ Keller, 64, citing Nyssanus, *CEunomium* II.74.83.

²¹⁷⁹ *ibid*, 64-65.

²¹⁸⁰ *In Symbolum Apostolorum, silicet “Credo in Deum,”* expositio., prol. 864. Therefore we can largely agree with Tanner’s (2009) article.

²¹⁸¹ Heraclitus, fr.123.

²¹⁸² *De opificio* 16-17; Ramelli, 207-9

form and structure' is 'divided into male and female: for each of these elements is certainly to be found in all that partakes of human life.'²¹⁸³

Aquinas' anthropology has more conceptual precision than Gregory's and consequently has greater critical force against anti-essentialism. According to Aquinas, essence is 'that through which and in which a thing has *esse*.'²¹⁸⁴ In other words, beings are only the kind of things they are on account of their essence or 'whatness.'²¹⁸⁵ In the case of human being the genus is 'animal' and the specific difference is 'rational'.²¹⁸⁶ Aquinas agrees that the *locus* of the *imago Dei* is the mind of human being,²¹⁸⁷ but also insists that the essence of human being is a composite of form and matter.²¹⁸⁸ Body and soul are 'joined in reality' though they can be distinguished intellectually.²¹⁸⁹ This justifies a certain *communicatio idiomatum* analogous to the hypostatic union, since the attributes of the body can be spoken of the soul and *vice versa* in the same person.²¹⁹⁰ Moreover, the matter is in potency to the form so that the material body could not be perfect without the actuality of the soul. Since this actuality also preceded the material body as its efficient cause, this must include biological sexual difference,²¹⁹¹ for the body is 'the matter for the difference in sex.'²¹⁹² This point receives sharper focus in the context of bodily resurrection: 'Of course, just as other bodily members belong to the integrity of the human body, so do those which serve for generation – not only in men but also in women. Therefore in each of the cases members of this sort will rise.'²¹⁹³ What it means to be human is fully realised at the resurrection and this entails the continuity of real sexual difference (as with Christ's human nature) and therefore a continued sexual identity of the human person.²¹⁹⁴ Even though risen people will not occupy themselves with reproduction, just as they will not occupy themselves with nutrition, they will not lack the requisite organs for these activities because they are part of the integrity and beauty of the human body.²¹⁹⁵

²¹⁸³ *De opificio* 16-17.

²¹⁸⁴ *DE*1:51-52.

²¹⁸⁵ *DE*1.7, 11; *SCGIV*.81; Kerr (2015), 37-45.

²¹⁸⁶ Feser (2017), 140-145.

²¹⁸⁷ *ST*1.93.6, sc.

²¹⁸⁸ *STII*-II.165.2; *SCGII*.70; *IV*.81.8, 10. N.B. Thomist essentialism is more parsimonious than Plantinga's, rightly criticised by Kerr (2015), 45-56, for unnecessary complication.

²¹⁸⁹ *SCG*1.54.3.

²¹⁹⁰ Hamann (2007), 213.

²¹⁹¹ *STIII*, suppl..80

²¹⁹² *STII*-II.164.2, trans. Gilby .

²¹⁹³ *SCGIV*.88.1, trans. O'Neill, 328; *STIII*.54.3, *pace* Nyssanus, *HEcc* 1; *De Anima*, 156; Ramelli, 206-9.

²¹⁹⁴ *STIII*, suppl..80.4;

²¹⁹⁵ *CT*157 (1993), 178-179; *SCGIV*.88.2; *ST*1.39.8; *CJohn*20.6.2558; Eco (2010), 88.

By contrast, on Plotinianism, individual identity is absorbed into the One, a lurking danger in Stang's interpretation of *DN4* (712A), 'It is no longer I that live but Christ lives in me.'²¹⁹⁶ According to Stang, the Areopagite's appropriation of Paul²¹⁹⁷ is suggestive of his real motivation for pseudonymity, namely 'an ecstatic devotional practice in the service of the apophysis of the self.'²¹⁹⁸ This interpretation resonates with the aforementioned fascination for the 'Death of the Author.'²¹⁹⁹ However, we suspect that Stang is too hasty in drawing this correlation. Pseudonymity is different from anonymity and whatever the merits of a spiritual motive for pseudonymity, it is doubtful that an absorption/elimination doctrine will provide a correct understanding of Dionysius, since, as Thomas learns from Dionysius, 'grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it.'²²⁰⁰ The *CD* reads, '(p)rovidence does not destroy nature,'²²⁰¹ in the context of the Origenian emphasis on free will²²⁰² and therefore presupposes individual integrity. Nor is Stang's understanding a natural reading of Paul, as Bradshaw notes, '(f)or St. Paul, to be fully possessed by God is not the abandonment of its proper nature, but its fulfilment.'²²⁰³ Aquinas thus persuasively relates *DN4* to the ecstasy of contemplation and love in which one lives not for oneself but for God, just as on the cross, Christ committed his spirit to the Father.²²⁰⁴ We commend the merits of this 'classic' reading over against Stang's.

A second text which underpins Stang's thesis on the pseudonymity of Dionysius is taken from *MT1* (1001A): 'Here, being neither oneself nor someone else, one is supremely united to the completely unknown.'²²⁰⁵ Taken literally, this translation would have Dionysius' ecstatic self as being neither A nor non A (breaking the PNC). However, Luibheid fails to translate και ουδενός. The Greek text reads: παῖς ὡς ἄν τοῦ πάντων ἐπέκεινα και ουδενός οὐ τε ἑαυτοῦ οὐ τε ἑτέρου, τῷ παντελῶς δε ἀγνώστῳ τῇ πάσης γνώσεως.

²¹⁹⁶ Stang (2012), 170 and 'Being Neither Myself Nor Someone Else': The Apophatic Anthropology of Dionysius the Areopagite in Boesel and Keller (eds.), *Apophatic Bodies* (2009), 59-79.

²¹⁹⁷ Gal.2:20

²¹⁹⁸ Stang (2012), 204.

²¹⁹⁹ Barthes (1977), 142-149; (1975), 27; Fontaine (Mute, 2013), esp. 35-52.

²²⁰⁰ *ST1*.1.8.2; *STII*-II.165.1; *DV*5.3, obj.5; *DV*5.4.4. It is related to the Neoplatonic principle that a primary cause does not take away the operation of a secondary cause in *DV*5.8.9.

²²⁰¹ *DN4* (733B).

²²⁰² *OFPI*, pref. 5; *OFPII*.1.2; II.I.7; *On Prayer* 1.B.6.1; 2.XXIX.13; XXX1.2 (1979), 93, 157, 162; Stephen Bagby, 'The "Two Ways" Tradition in Origen's *Commentary on Romans*' in Vinzent, 135-41. Origenianism was mediated *via* Nyssanus, 'probably the most faithful and insightful follower of Origen.' Ramelli, 197. See *DVMII*.3,14, 45, 80, 88; *Sermon4* in Hilda Graef, Gregory of Nyssa, *The Lord's Prayer, The Beatitudes* (New York: Paulist Press, 1954), 61-62. Graef writes '[Gregory] was a speculative theologian and a mystic, whose orthodoxy, though recognised by the Second Council of Nicea (787), was yet slightly suspect owing to a tinge of Origenism, so that he was never admitted to the select circle of the great doctors such as St. Athanasius, St. Basil..St. Chrystostom or St. John of Damascus.' 5. Nyssanus is one of those marginal voices which the theologians from *la nouvelle théologie* sought to bring into wider recognition. See also Golitzin, 208, n.245.

²²⁰³ Bradshaw, 181.

²²⁰⁴ *SPsalms* 30, n.1. See *CGal.* 2.20 and the 'metaphorical' application of *DN4* (712) in *STII*-II.156.2.3.

²²⁰⁵ *MT1* (1001A)

Furthermore, ὧν here is followed here by the possessive genitive τοῦ, indicating ‘belonging to.’ Parker’s translation (which Stang generally follows) brings this out: ‘Being wholly of Him Who is Beyond all, and of none, neither himself nor another.’²²⁰⁶ But ἐαυτοῦ οὐτε ἐτέρου (‘neither himself nor another’), is also genitive, indicating a possessive which refers back to the same subject. In other words, the sense is that the mystical theologian belongs completely to Him Who is Beyond all and thus *belongs* neither to himself nor another (i.e. because he belongs to God alone). Put simply, it is not a statement about who the mystic *is*, but about who he *belongs* to. That this was also Aquinas’ (exemplary) understanding is evinced from the commentary of his teacher, using Sarracen’s translation:²²⁰⁷ ‘belonging totally to him who is above all, and to no one, neither himself nor anyone else, united to him who is utterly unknown by the cessation of all knowledge, for the best, knowing beyond mind by knowing nothing.’²²⁰⁸ Albert’s exegesis confirms this understanding: ‘belonging to no one’ (no one other than God), ‘neither himself nor anyone else’ (because he is turned to nothing except God).’²²⁰⁹

In sum, the evidence from the Greek manuscript, its translation by Sarracen and its reception in Albert and Thomas is internally coherent and refutes Stang’s reading. This in turn significantly weakens his hypothesis regarding the motivation for Dionysius’ pseudonymity. Against a monistic interpretation of Dionysius, internal textual evidence from *DN* indicates that Dionysius intends a relational unity originating from a transcendent (Trinitarian) Cause.²²¹⁰ We conclude, therefore, that Thomas’ reception is more faithful to the Areopagite than that of either Eriugena or Eckhart (and their modern heirs) and in this way the ‘saying of Dionysius is saved’ against the monists. Furthermore, Aquinas’ interpretation preserves an account of what is given to us in direct experience, in persons, form and gender.

²²⁰⁶ *The Works of Dionysius the Areopagite*, trans. Parker (Delhi: India: 2017), 132.

²²⁰⁷ *Omnis existens ejus qui est super omnia et nullius, neque sui ipsius, neque alterius.* Chevalier (1937), 1.577.

²²⁰⁸ Albert, *CMT* (1988), 158.

²²⁰⁹ *ibid*, 160.

²²¹⁰ *DN4* (704C), 77-78.

5b) *Lumen Gloriam*

Having ruled out monism, the second possibility for how the *telos* of human knowing can be fulfilled is *via* Divine assistance,²²¹¹ or ‘elevation.’²²¹² This option is supported by Aquinas’ general epistemology in which, even in the present life, humans do not enjoy that same intuitive and immediate knowledge which angels possess. Bodily faculties must somehow be transformed in order to inform the intellect of what they perceive.²²¹³ This remains the case, *a fortiori* in respect to the Beatific vision. However, unlike monistic Plotinianism this transformative vision terminates at Divine likeness, not Divine identity. The transformation of the intellect required for the beatific vision is an act of grace,²²¹⁴ which Thomas calls *lumen gloriæ*.²²¹⁵ It is an image which echoes those ‘radiant beams of glory’ in *DN1* which accompany the contemplation of Christ in our immortal state.²²¹⁶ Indeed, Thomas specifically comments on this passage in *IDN*, to explicate not only the beatification of souls, but also the assimilation of bodies to the likeness of Christ’s glorified body which liberates humanity from the limitations of the Fall²²¹⁷ and enables the mind to impassibly participate the divine light.²²¹⁸ In order to achieve full participation in the Divine likeness, ‘(t)he divine essence itself must be joined as an intelligible form (species) to the intellect,’²²¹⁹ The *lumen gloriæ* thus replaces the wayfarer’s light of faith which relies on the mediating mirror of nature and Scripture.²²²⁰ Henceforth, the beatific vision is *unmediated*, but not *unaided*. God is both the end of the perfection of the intellect and also the means to the end. Only God reveals God. He himself is that Light which elevates the intellect and makes the vision possible, just as the sun can only be seen through its own light and not through a lesser one. One of Thomas’ favourite texts is Psalm 36:9: ‘(i)n thy light we shall see the light,’ which, he identifies with the light of the Divine substance.²²²¹

By means of the foregoing solution, Thomas can hold to the paradox that *in patria* God is known *essentially* but not *comprehensively*.²²²² It is a distinction which follows logically from God’s simplicity.²²²³ If God is not composed of parts, he cannot be known essentially in parts.

²²¹¹ Romans 6:23 in *SCGIII*.52.7; *CTII*.9 (1948),336.

²²¹² *SCGIII*.57.1

²²¹³ *IDC9* (1996);63, 70.

²²¹⁴ *SCGIII*.53.4; 54.10-11 ; *DV*8.3

²²¹⁵ *SCGIII*.58.3

²²¹⁶ *DN1*.4 trans. Rolt (1972).

²²¹⁷ *SCGIII*. 46.3

²²¹⁸ *IDN1*, 214-225, 287

²²¹⁹ *SCGIII*.52.4; 53.2.This aspect of his teaching is similar to Eriugena’s, except that for Eriugena it does not result in unmediated knowledge. *DDN1* (449B-449C), (1968), 53-55.

²²²⁰ In agreement with Albert’s teaching. Hergen, 19, 22, 29-32.

²²²¹ *SCGIII*.53.7; *DV*8.3

²²²² *IDN1*.1.34; Rocca (2004), 40; *Sermon* 12 (2010), 165; *ST1*.62.2; 56.3.1; *DV*20.5

²²²³ *DV*8.4, but appealing to Dionysius for support (*DN*4.7; 5.2,7).

Therefore, he can only be known *in tota* whilst not *totaliter*.²²²⁴ Put differently, '(i)nfinity as such will be seen, but not infinitely' (Rocca),²²²⁵ since only the Creator has the power of infinite activity.²²²⁶ Even angelic creatures, though not bound by discursive reasoning, do not comprehend God infinitely. Their knowledge increases through the operation of the hierarchy, as Dionysius explains.²²²⁷ In sum, the Beatific Vision, according to Thomas, attains an unmediated, yet finite knowledge of God.²²²⁸ As we have seen in our earlier analysis, this compelling option is not available on the Byzantine model.

According to Aquinas, Scripture suggests that this elevation has already taken place proleptically on two special occasions for Moses and Paul (representing respectively the Old and New Covenants), who became 'witnesses' to the hope of the Beatific vision. These Biblical figures are discussed at length in *DV*.²²²⁹ In Exodus 33:11 God spoke to Moses *facie ad faciem*, which Aquinas understands as seeing 'the very essence of God.'²²³⁰ *Facie et faciem* is another example of how the Vulgate affects Aquinas' transformation of Dionysius, since the LXX uses the less corporeal ἐνώπιος ἐνώπιω (from ἐν ὀψί, literally 'in the sight of'). Of greater significance is the difference between the Vulgate of Numbers 12:8 'plainly and not by riddles and figures doth he [Moses] see the Lord' (*ore enim ad os loquor ei: et palam, et non per aenigmata et figuras Dominum videret*)²²³¹ compared to the LXX, which more guardedly declares that Moses sees 'the *glory* of the Lord' (τὴν δόξαν Κυρίου). We can see that the Greek Scriptures used by Dionysius resonate more with the Byzantine understanding of Divine 'energies' here in line with our earlier findings. In *MT*, Moses 'does *not* meet God himself,' in the dark rays on the mount, but instead encounters first, the place where God dwells, and secondly a union with 'the completely unknown, by an inactivity of all knowledge.'²²³² On the Byzantine model the apparent contradiction has a straightforward explanation.

Dionysius' remarks on Moses' lack of knowledge of God in *MT1* raise a difficulty for the view that there is any graced knowledge of God available *in via* beyond that obtainable by human reason.²²³³ But Aquinas shortcircuits the Byzantine reasoning by deferring to 'the authoritative

²²²⁴ *CJohn*1.11.213; *ST*1.12.7.3; *DV*8.2; *DV*20.5; *SCG*III, cc.55, 58.

²²²⁵ Rocca (2004), 45, following *ST*1.12.7; *DV*20.5.

²²²⁶ 'it does not seem fitting to ascribe an infinite activity to a finite creature.' *DV*20.5

²²²⁷ *EH*7 (568A); *CH*7.3; 10.3; *DV*8.4; *DV*8.7, resp; a.9.5; 8.10, sc.1.

²²²⁸ Following Albert, 'we intellectually attain an initial awareness of the being of Him without a medium, but in no way do we comprehend him.' *De Resurrectione* IV.1.1 in Hergen, 37.

²²²⁹ *DV*13.2.

²²³⁰ *DV*12.14.

²²³¹ *DV*13.2, trans. McGlynn, II.188.

²²³² *MT*5 (100D-1001A)

²²³³ *ST*1.12.13 obj.1.

statement of Augustine,²²³⁴ namely that what Moses saw was: ‘his very substance as God....insofar as a rational and intellectual creature can grasp that.’²²³⁵ Augustine agrees that this is impossible before death ‘*unless one in some way dies to this life*’, by an out of the body experience or detachment from bodily senses.²²³⁶ Following Augustine (against the Byzantine Dionysius) on 2 Cor.12:2, Aquinas interprets the ‘third heaven’ as the ‘vision of God through his essence.’²²³⁷ (Unusually, Meister Eckhart holds the Dominican line on this point by agreeing that Paul saw God ‘unveiled in his own nature.’)²²³⁸ Thus Moses and Paul are exceptional cases who can witness to the hope of glory only through a suspension of their fallen natural faculties. In a sense they had already ‘died to self’ to enter that Heavenly state.²²³⁹ Aquinas mentions other martyrs who experienced some anticipation of divine glory, e.g. Vincent, who in eagle-like elevation declared: ‘Behold, I am already raised on high, and from above the world I look down on all your distinguished men, O tyrant.’²²⁴⁰

6. Aquinas’ exemplary rapture

There is an intriguing possibility that Aquinas experienced such a proleptic vision. According to early biographies, whilst taking the sacraments on the feast of St. Nicholas, 1273, Thomas experienced a rapture so profound that he exclaimed in comparison: ‘all I have written seems to me so much straw (*palea*)’. When Reginald, his co-friar, urged him to resume writing, Thomas declared, ‘I cannot’ (*non possum*).²²⁴¹

It has become a commonplace to treat this episode as a parable for the triumph of mysticism over rationalism; a morality story to warn intellectuals of the worthlessness of theology.²²⁴² Caputo, for instance, exploits it to legitimise his deconstruction of Aquinas’ written *corpus* and its alleged overcoming in Eckhart.²²⁴³ Thomas’ metaphysical ‘concepts, judgments and

²²³⁴ DV13.3, citing in particular DGALXII, 28, c.f. Robert Grosseteste: ‘If you would ask what moves me to grant that God is form, I say that it is the preeminent authority of the great Augustine.’ cited in Wyclif (2001), 1.2.38, 62, *pace* Balthasar, who wants to elevate Dionysius to equal authority with Augustine. Emery, 208. Balthasar comments on DN1 (592BC): ‘The greater assimilation to the knowledge of the angels likewise need not point to immediacy.’ II.207, n.206.

²²³⁵ DGALXII.27. trans. E. Hill (New York: New City Press, 2002), 495.

²²³⁶ DGAL12.27.55; DV13.3, sc.1; STII-II.180.5

²²³⁷ DV13.3, sc.3.

²²³⁸ *Sermon* 9 (1979), 84.

²²³⁹ DV10.11; 13.3, sc.1; SCGIII.47, par.2; C*Jobn*1.11.213.

²²⁴⁰ DV13.3, obj.9.

²²⁴¹ *The Life of Saint Thomas by Bernard of Gui* 27 in *The Life of Saint Thomas: Biographical documents*, trans. Kenelm Foster, ed. (Longmans, Green and Co, Baltimore Helicon Press, 1959), 46 and 73 n.63. According to Bartholomew of Capua, John of Giudice claimed to have received this from Reginald of Priverno on his deathbed. See also the biography by William of Tocco c.47; Weisheipl, 321.

²²⁴² Walton, 44; Franke, 62

²²⁴³ Caputo (1982), 271-279.

ratiocinations²²⁴⁴ represent only an ‘alienated’ way of expressing mystical experience,²²⁴⁵ which Eckhart replaces with ‘detachment,’²²⁴⁶ a ‘nothingness of the intellect.’²²⁴⁷ The transformation exhorted in *Renovamini Spiritu Mentis Vestrae* exemplifies this surrender to the ‘divine abyss’²²⁴⁸ or ‘divine Nothing.’²²⁴⁹ In his synthesis of Eckhart and Heidegger, Caputo’s alternative gospel preaches receptivity to a contentless ‘event.’²²⁵⁰ For Caputo, Thomas’ experience reduces to Plotinus’ ecstasy,²²⁵¹ a non-rational ‘leap,’²²⁵² with nothing distinctively Christian about it (a boon for pluralists). However, Caputo’s mystical ‘deconstruction’ of Aquinas is weakened by Rubino’s research, which finds that even Eckhart rejects a wholly anti-intellectual reading of Dionysius in order to remain within the Dominican framework of ‘knowledge’ (*bekantnisse*).²²⁵³ As we have seen in Chapter 2, for orthodox Dominicans, God is not ‘beyond being’, but is *esse ipsum subsistens*, which is intrinsically intelligible to itself (echoing Aristotle’s Thought Thinking Itself).²²⁵⁴ Hence the contemplative life consists in ‘contemplation of the divine truth,’²²⁵⁵ so it is fitting that Thomas’ unfinished *SPsalms* concludes on a note of *dispositio ad contemplandum* (*Ecce elongavi fugiens*).²²⁵⁶

It is also important to bear in mind that the sources for Thomas’ ecstatic vision appear in the context of a canonisation enquiry,²²⁵⁷ which is vulnerable to hagiography and the glossing of inconvenient facts.²²⁵⁸ Partly acknowledging this point, Caputo seeks to neutralise its force by arguing that Thomas’ followers ‘were not scandalised that this famous *magister* thought his *Summa* to be like straw.’²²⁵⁹ This is true, but it misses the main point, well made by Boyle, that the literary function of this account is to provide a proof of Thomas’ *humility* (as a sign of saintliness).²²⁶⁰ It is clearly not intended to reflect negatively upon the value of the *Summa*, which has continued to be

²²⁴⁴ *ibid*, 253-254.

²²⁴⁵ *ibid*, 9.

²²⁴⁶ *ibid*, 277.

²²⁴⁷ *Sermon* 1 (1979), 2, which finds approval from Milbank in Zizek and Milbank (2009), 173.

²²⁴⁸ This term carries Gnostic overtones. Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 16 (2000), 28-29; *Allogenes* 53 in Robinson (1998), 494; Hippolytus, *Refutations* V.6ff; Revelation 2:24.

²²⁴⁹ Caputo (1982), 275; Eckhart, *Sermon* 96 (1979), 331-335.

²²⁵⁰ e.g. *The Weakness* (2006).

²²⁵¹ *Enneads* IV.8.1, 357. Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 2 (2000), 4, n.20. See also 16 (2000), 44-45; Rolt (1972), 33; Macquarrie (1984), 70.

²²⁵² *Enneads* V.5.5

²²⁵³ Elisa Rubino, ‘Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and Eckhart’ in Jeremiah M. Hackett (ed), *A Companion to Meister Eckhart* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013), 306. She points out that Eckhart omits from his citation of Sarracen the words *circa mysticas visiones*, c.f. Porro, TA, 166.

²²⁵⁴ I discuss this further in Alan Philip Darley, ‘We Know in Part: How the Positive Apophaticism of Aquinas transforms the Negative Theology of Pseudo-Dionysius,’ *The Heythrop Journal* 63.4, 2022: 583-612

²²⁵⁵ STII.II.180.4

²²⁵⁶ *SPsalms* 54.

²²⁵⁷ Caputo (1982), 254; Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle, ‘Chaff: Thomas Aquinas's Repudiation of His Opera omnia,’ *New Literary History* 28 (1997), 383-399.

²²⁵⁸ Porro, TA, 387-8 notes at least one letter (about predestination) which Thomas dictated after his ecstasy.

²²⁵⁹ Caputo (1982), 255.

²²⁶⁰ Boyle (1997), 383-399.

highly revered and used, not only amongst Dominicans, but throughout the universal Church. Both Thomas' life and his writings are to be regarded as exemplary, as evinced by his canonisation. Other pericopes from Gui's biography confirm the high estimation his followers continued to hold for Thomas' writings (the 'road map' of reception): 'His penetration, too, of the deep things contained in Scripture and in the mysteries of our Faith was such that in all truth it may be said of Thomas that he "searched the depths of the rivers and brought hidden things to light"'²²⁶¹ In fact, Thomas' final revelation was anticipated during the writing of the final part of *ST*. An audible voice reportedly declared: 'You have written well of me, Thomas; what do you desire as a reward of your labours?' To which the Angelic Doctor replied: 'Lord, only yourself.'²²⁶² This is immediately followed by the remarkable tale of Thomas prayerfully labouring over sheets of paper. Jesus appears to him above the manuscripts and declares: 'You have written well, Thomas of the sacrament of my body.'²²⁶³

These accounts lead us to conclude that Thomas' reported final experience was not a 'transgression'²²⁶⁴ of his former theological and philosophical work, but rather a teleological completion of it.²²⁶⁵ Aquinas had followed Dionysius before him in viewing mystical intuition or 'intellect,' not as a hiatus, but as the apex of a 'continuum of cognition,'²²⁶⁶ an 'unshakeable bond,'²²⁶⁷ which embraces discursive reason at the level of human souls *in via*.²²⁶⁸ In this continuum, angelic intelligences 'are at one with the workings and the objects of their intelligences' and earthly souls on the lower level of cognition can still 'bring together their various powers of reasoning and.. concentrate them in one act of pure intelligence.'²²⁶⁹ Drawing specifically from this text, Thomas summarises: 'the investigation of reason would have no fruit unless it led to intelligible truth.'²²⁷⁰ Indeed, Thomas' definition of 'ecstasy' is precisely being 'raised to a higher knowledge...to comprehend things which surpass sense and reason.'²²⁷¹ According to Aquinas, a person is more receptive to such experiences the closer he approaches death, when (citing Gregory), 'the soul...foresees certain future things, by reason of the subtlety of its nature.'²²⁷² But there is no place here for a dualism which pits reason against intuition²²⁷³

²²⁶¹ *The Life of Saint Thomas by Bernard of Gui* c.13 in Foster (1959), 35.

²²⁶² *ibid* c.23, 43.

²²⁶³ *ibid* c.24, 44.

²²⁶⁴ as implied by Rosemann (2018), 4.

²²⁶⁵ In fairness to Caputo (1982), he acknowledges this (256), citing Rousselot (1908), 223: 'In the last days of his life, therefore, he cannot be said to have abandoned his own theories, but rather to have made a practical application of them.'

²²⁶⁶ *STII-II*.180.6; Perl, c.6.

²²⁶⁷ *DN11.1* (949C)

²²⁶⁸ *STI-II*.5.1.1.:

²²⁶⁹ *DN11.1* (949C).

²²⁷⁰ *IDNX1.2*, 519.

²²⁷¹ *STI*.28.3

²²⁷² *STII-II*.172.1.1.

and this account fares better at integrating both than those in the Plotinian stream.²²⁷⁴ To state the obvious, Dionysius does not promote a contentless mystical experience, but a mystical *theology*.²²⁷⁵ This is entirely consistent with Thomas' assimilation of the Dionysian aphorism, 'grace does not destroy nature but perfects it.'²²⁷⁶ Intellectual vision *in patria* is the fulfilment of natural reason *in via*. The contemplative life begins here but is completed in Heaven.²²⁷⁷ Union with God is not the destruction of the self, including one's reason, but its perfection.²²⁷⁸ In the terminology of *DV*,²²⁷⁹ *SCG* and *ST*,²²⁸⁰ Thomas may have experienced a 'rapture' (*raptus*), comparable to that of Moses or of Paul, a gracious foretaste of the Beatific Vision which Thomas had always maintained was the goal and fulfilment of reason.²²⁸¹

Finally, Thomas' final experience does not invalidate his earlier Trinitarian argument which remains decisive against Caputo's account. Given Augustine's analogue of the processions of the persons of the Trinity as Word and Love, the Latin dogma that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son entails that Divine Love proceeds from the Logos (Word or Wisdom) and is not independent of it. Therefore, a necessary requirement of being conformed to the *imago dei* is that mystical experience be not divorced from, nor independent of knowledge. Anything less would not be a true union with the Trinity. Though the *filioque* debate is anachronistic to Dionysius, Aquinas can retrospectively save him from 'the errors of the Greeks' by perfecting his Trinitarian theology.²²⁸² Furthermore, in *DP10.4*, this argument from Catholic dogma is justified by the normative authority of Scripture.²²⁸³ As Paul says, 'I will pray with the spirit and I will also pray with the mind.'²²⁸⁴ This rebuttal also tells against certain affective accounts of mystical union, characteristic of Franciscan spirituality.²²⁸⁵ Thomas did not die a Franciscan by renouncing

²²⁷³ e.g. Mélanie Walton 'the failure of reason' necessitates 'a spiritual exercise in absurdity.' Walton, 171. Against the modern experiential sense of the term 'mysticism', McGinn argues that the medieval mystics offered an 'anti-mysticism', 1.xviii.

²²⁷⁴ e.g. Cusanus, as acknowledged by Macquarrie (1984), 101.

²²⁷⁵ Knepper, 96.

²²⁷⁶ *ST1.1.8.2* ; *DN4* (733). See the commentary on this principle in De Lubac, *Surnaturel: Études Historiques* (Paris, 1946). Milbank cites Aquinas' application of Aristotle: 'For what we do by means of our friends, is done in a sense by ourselves.' *ST1-II.13.4.1*, Milbank (2005), viii.

²²⁷⁷ *CJohn21.2648*; *STII-II.180.5*

²²⁷⁸ Albert, *CMT* (1988), 164.

²²⁷⁹ *DV9*

²²⁸⁰ *STII-II.175.5*

²²⁸¹ Bernard of Gui recounts other alleged raptures which Thomas experienced in his life in cc.23-28, op. cit. 42-47; cf. Murray, 14 n.43.

²²⁸² *SCGIV.25*; *DP10.4.12*; *Sermon 11* (2010), 147-148; *DAF 1*; Weishapl, 164-5

²²⁸³ *DP10.4* cites Rom. 8:9; Gal. 4:6; Acts 16:7; 1 John 4:13; Acts 5:32; Rom. 8:15; John 16:14-15; Rom 15:18; Heb. 9:14.

²²⁸⁴ 1Cor. 14:15 in *STII-II.28.4*, obj.2.

²²⁸⁵ *ST1.93.6-7*. I am closely following Blankenhorn (2015) here, 242-247. See also Rorem, 'The Early Latin Dionysius: Eriugena and Hugh of St. Victor' in *The Dionysian Mystical Theology* (2015), 79-101.

the primacy of knowledge over will.²²⁸⁶ Rather, Aquinas' final revelation fulfils and recapitulates his earlier Dominican teachings.²²⁸⁷

7. Knowledge *in patria* and *in via*.

This understanding of the nature of the beatific vision as the *telos* of human knowledge has implications for the nature of knowledge *in via*. As seen in Chapter 1, in our related discussions on propositional revelation, the incarnation and the accessibility of Scripture, we return finally to the mysterious paradox of 'veiled in flesh the Godhead see.'²²⁸⁸ In our experience, hiddenness is the *condition* of possibility of knowledge. 'The thing itself is deeply veiled' (Kant),²²⁸⁹ but *contra* Kant, this does not entail that it is inaccessible to knowledge. All finite things are circumscribed by limits, hence the indispensability of the *via negativa* for any knowledge whatsoever and not only knowledge of the Ultimate.²²⁹⁰ This truth, known to medievals is confirmed by insights from phenomenology. It is only because things are partially concealed that they are known at all.²²⁹¹ Applied theologically, the recognition of the hiddenness of all essences is a window into the hiddenness of God's essence.²²⁹² Paradoxically, the incomprehensibility of truth points to the knowledge of God.²²⁹³ If even God's effects are incomprehensible, how much more God Himself?²²⁹⁴ Conversely, we could start from the incomprehensibility of God (with Marion in his recent work) and argue to the incomprehensibility of man made in *imago dei*.²²⁹⁵

The positive upshot of this insight is that revelation is necessarily *inexhaustible*.²²⁹⁶ The world is 'underdetermined'²²⁹⁷ by the sense experience which mediates it to us because the object of knowledge always exceeds the sense experience that reveals it.²²⁹⁸ Marion has coined the phrase 'saturated phenomenon,' multiplying examples from experiences of birth, death, love, illness, and

²²⁸⁶ SCGIII.26

²²⁸⁷ STII-II.180.4.2, trans. Tugwell (1988), 550 and n.10 which we discussed in Chapter 2.

²²⁸⁸ Charles Wesley, *Hark the Herald Angels Sing* (traditional). See the insightful discussion in Rosemann (2018), 52f. 'God remains veiled even in the incarnation...Because the veil that God uses in the incarnation is human nature itself, it is possible to mistake Jesus for a mere man. This of course happened, both in Jesus' own time and throughout history.'

²²⁸⁹ *Critique of Pure Reason* in Heidegger (2004), 49.

²²⁹⁰ Tallis (2007), 56.

²²⁹¹ Martin Heidegger, *'Logos' and 'Aletheia' in Early Greek Thinking*, trans. David F. Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984); Raymond Tallis, *The Enduring Significance of Parmenides Unthinkable Thought* (London: Continuum 2007). 56; Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 4; Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Nijhoff/ 1977), 122.

²²⁹² Proclus, *IPV* (985); VII (46,50); Plato *EpVII* (342C). Carambine, 169.

²²⁹³ *CJobn*, prol. Porro, TA, 267.

²²⁹⁴ *LEJob38.3* (1989), 417

²²⁹⁵ Marion (2015), 37-41.

²²⁹⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, xix.

²²⁹⁷ Barry Stroud in Tallis (2007), 165.

²²⁹⁸ Tallis, 165; Franke, 59.

historical events.²²⁹⁹ To draw an analogy with eroticism, it is the *partially* revealed flesh which arouses sexual desire for further uncovering. Cunningham speaks of the *nubility* of beauty (see Chapter 4), which ‘calls’ us higher.²³⁰⁰ The unattainability of the Other is a recurring theme in love poetry in which the beloved eludes all reduction,²³⁰¹ a phenomenological ‘given’ which exposes the poverty of scientism. But, *a fortiori*, God Himself is simultaneously the most knowable in Himself and the least comprehensible to creatures. A growth in the ‘light’ of knowledge is not in contradiction to entering the ‘darkness’ of the cloud.²³⁰² Rather, the juxtaposition articulates the paradox that the more one penetrates what can be known of God in the eternal journey of discovery, the more one experiences the infinity of that which is unknown.²³⁰³ Following the apostle himself, Aquinas admits the inadequacy of his own writings at the close of *CJohn*: ‘From the beginning of the Church, Christ has been written about; but this is not equal to the subject. Indeed, even if the world lasted a hundred thousand years, and books written about Christ, his words and deeds could not be completely revealed.’²³⁰⁴

8. Towards a Christological third way

Our investigation of Dionysian reception in Eriugena, Eastern Orthodoxy and some postmetaphysical readers has highlighted an incompatible difference with Aquinas in respect to the nature of the knowledge of God *in patria*. Aquinas, following Augustine, insisted that God’s essence can be seen in the next life, against the Byzantine reading that even in the next life, God can only be known through the mediation of created likenesses.

This debate impinges on the role of the body in the future state of salvation. Some EO writers have accused Aquinas of neglecting bodily resurrection,²³⁰⁵ but in fact Aquinas specifically treats it in *DV*13. 3, where he insists that bodily senses are only a hindrance to the beatific vision in respect to their fallen, corruptible state, not in their future glorified state. The latter is wholly under the control of the redeemed spirit, so that ‘the properties of glory will overflow from the spirit into the body. This is the meaning of “spiritual bodies”²³⁰⁶ in contrast to those infected by original sin.²³⁰⁷ The glorified state is analogous to the *hypostasis* of Christ in his earthly life who had full power over his soul and body, except that he did not require any ‘overflow’ from one

²²⁹⁹ Benson, 219.

²³⁰⁰ Cunningham, 194; Husserl, 124.

²³⁰¹ John Donne, ‘Negative Love’ in A.J. Smith (ed.), *John Donne: The Complete English Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), 71; Plato, *Phaedrus* in Cunningham (2001), c.9, 222.

²³⁰² *LEJob*37 (1989), 405-6.

²³⁰³ Nyssanus, *DVM* (1978) 1, 5-10; II, 162, 163, 236, 239, 242. Williams, *Via Negativa* (2007), 10; Daniélou (1955), 303-304.

²³⁰⁴ *CJohn*21.6.2660.

²³⁰⁵ e.g. Loudovikos (2013)

²³⁰⁶ *DV*13.3.1,2

²³⁰⁷ *CRom*5.3.416 (2020), 168

part to another, since he permitted each power to do that which was proper as far as it was fitted to our redemption.²³⁰⁸

Nevertheless, once a place for the body is acknowledged in the experience of the beatific vision then, as Williams notes,²³⁰⁹ the meaning of *facie ad faciem* could readmit the possibility of a corporeal vision *via* the body of Jesus Christ.²³¹⁰ Lossky discerns a hint of this understanding in *DN*.²³¹¹

But in time to come, when we are incorruptible and immortal, when we have come at last to the blessed inheritance of being like Christ, then, as scripture says, “we shall ever be with the Lord.” In most holy contemplation we shall ever be filled with the sight of God shining gloriously around us as once it shone for the disciples at the divine transfiguration. [Mt 17:1-8; Mk 9: 2-8]. And there we shall be, our minds away from passion and from earth, and we shall have a conceptual gift of light from him and, somehow, in a way we cannot know, we shall be united with him and, our understanding carried away, blessedly happy, we shall be struck by his blazing light.²³¹²

This passage strongly implies that knowledge of God in Heaven will always be mediated through the flesh of the incarnate Word, the *theophany* of Christ himself, who ‘explains’ God²³¹³ (in line with Thomas’ treasured Psalm 36.5). It is God who mediates God in the hypostatic union.²³¹⁴ This truth is anticipated by Irenaeus’ insight that the ‘summit’ finally reached by Moses was nothing other than a vision of the transfigured Christ.²³¹⁵ In turn this was to become the key paradigm for deification within Byzantine theology,²³¹⁶ which strengthens our argument for the centrality of Christology in the *CD*, now to reach its final climax in the beatific vision. Although Thomas’ reception does not make this connection explicit, the Scriptures Dionysius cites²³¹⁷ agree with *STIII* which (in harmony with Thomas’ method, if not his words) may reveal the real ‘truth of things,’ so important to Thomas’ *intentio*. Luke 22:29-30 invites us to eat at Christ’s

²³⁰⁸ *DV*13.3.3.

²³⁰⁹ Williams (2007), 8.

²³¹⁰ c.f. *Genesis* 32:24-30.

²³¹¹ Lossky, 11.

²³¹² *DN*1 (592C) (1987), 52-53

²³¹³ John 1:18 (NASB).

²³¹⁴ Lossky, 113.

²³¹⁵ *LAHIV*.20.9 in Lossky, 35.

²³¹⁶ Maximus, *Ambigua* 10 (PG91.1125D-1129D); Blowers (1991), 102-106; Bradshaw, 204; J. McGuckin, *The Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition* (Lewiston: Maine, 1986); A.N. Williams (1999), 112, 116-117; A. Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis: The Transfiguration in Byzantine Theology and Iconography* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2005); Kearney (2001), 39-52; Golitzin, 57.

²³¹⁷ John 1:9; Matthew 11:27, Phil. 2:6; Heb. 1:3; John 14:6; 1 Tim. 2:5; Col.1:27 etc.

table, the table of Wisdom (Proverbs 9:5) and the master text ‘we shall see Him as He is’ in context refers to the exalted Christ at his coming (1 John 3:2).²³¹⁸ Thomas’ master Albert recognised that it is only because the Word is the divine essence that He can be the ‘actuation’ of human intellects in the beatific vision.²³¹⁹ Hence, human beings achieve their potentiality for the beatific vision through the humanity of Christ, in whom this beatific knowledge inheres pre-eminently (Hebrews 2:10).²³²⁰

Just as Dionysius’ mystical theology found its fullest medium in song²³²¹ so this *Summum Bonum* inspired Thomas’ beautiful poetics in the Eucharistic hymn *Adoro te devote, Latens Deitas*, perhaps on his deathbed.²³²²

Jesu, quem velatum nunc aspicio,
 Oro, fiat illud quod tam sitio:
 Ut te revelata cernens facie,
 Visu sim beátus tuæ gloriæ. Amen²³²³

Our next and final chapter will return to the importance of poetics for Thomas’ theology.

²³¹⁸ SCGIII.51.6

²³¹⁹ Hergen, 24,124.

²³²⁰ STIII.9.2

²³²¹ DN4 (736B)

²³²² Porro, TA, 388, n.7 citing Gauthier and Wielockx.

²³²³ ‘Jesus, whom now I see enveiled/What I desire when will it be?/Beholding your fair face revealed./Your glory shall I be blessed to see. Amen,’ trans. Anderson and Moser, 71.

CHAPTER 4. Saving Hierarchy

This chapter addresses a possible *objectio* to our thesis that Aquinas' reception of the *CD* is exemplary which may arise from his defence of hierarchy. Aquinas looked to the stability of a cosmic hierarchy together with its celestial²³²⁴ and terrestrial²³²⁵ scale of value²³²⁶ to furnish an 'orderly arrangement of things.'²³²⁷

- Uncreated Trinity,
- higher intellectual creatures (angels),
- lower intellectual creatures (humans),
- lower souls (animals),
- animate beings (plants) and
- inanimate beings (material beings).²³²⁸

But the 'principle of a universe rendered hierarchical' is typically derided by immanentist philosophers and modern receptions of the *CD* because of its political implications.²³²⁹

Since Marx, a top-down ontological hierarchy has been subjected to a critique of suspicion in terms of bottom-up economic conditions or class struggle.²³³⁰ The importance of this master-motif to Dionysius, however, is undeniable. *ἱεραρχία*, a famous neologism of the Pseudo-Areopagite,²³³¹ occurs 94 times, chiefly in *CH*, and a further 77 times with related adjective and adverbs *ἱεραρχικός/ ἱεραρχικώς*.²³³² It refers 'in effect' to 'the arrangement (*τάξις*)²³³³ of all the

²³²⁴ *ST*1.50-64; 106-114; *CT*123-128; *SS*2-11; *IDNV*.5 (1994),12-45; *DP*10.2, counterobj. 3.

²³²⁵ *ST*1.108.1 ff.; *DRR*1.1.9; 2.19; *DSC*8.11.

²³²⁶ *SCG*II.45.3

²³²⁷ *DSC*1 *sc*; (1949), 20; 22; *DSC*5 (1949), 69; *ST*II-II.28.11

²³²⁸ *IDC*19 (1996), 118, citing *DN*7.3 and *CH*7.2; *DV*5.8, citing *CH*4.1 and *CH*12.2; *Sermon* 17 (2010), 253; *ST*1.5.4; 6, aa.1-4; 39.8.3; 65.2; I-II.1.4.1; *SCG*II.45; *DV*5.8; 21.1, obj.4;

²³²⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Expressionism in Philosophy*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, [1968], 2005). Macquarrie despises the 'monarchical' view of God, 50.

²³³⁰ *Marx and Engels, The Communist Manifesto*, 1848 (London: Penguin, 2004), 3; Karl Marx, *The German Ideology* in Christopher Pierson (ed.), *The Marx Reader* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 97; *Capital* (1990), 1.170; 450-451; Maurice Dobb (ed.), *Karl Marx, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. S.W. Ryazanskaya (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 20-21.

²³³¹ de Dunin-Borkowski in Campbell, 103; Liddell, Scott, Jones, *Greek-English Lexicon* (OUP,1940), 870. For a minority view, Arthur conjectures that Bar Sudaili (fl.510-520) coined the term, on the supposition that his writings precede those of Dionysius, but she concedes that Bar Sudhaili would have used the Syriac equivalent *knmrrwt*, 18; Wear and Dillon (2007), 56, n.27. The terms *ἱεραρχης*, meaning 'bishop' and *ἱεραρχηω*, referring to his activity, occurring 19 times precede the *CD*, inverting *ἄρχιερέυς* 'high priest' Hebs. 4:15; Luke 22:2. Van Den Daele, 80; *EP*8 (1096C).

²³³² Van Den Daele, 80; *DN* (696B).

²³³³ Hebs.4.15 of Melchisedek, *CH*9 (261A); *EH*5 (512C).). *τάξις* carries a military connotation in the LXX of Numbers 1:52, c.f.*LE**Job*25.4

sacred realities.²³³⁴ Hierarchy turns the key to Dionysian thought, a ‘harmonious law, the wonderful source of all visible and invisible order.’²³³⁵ The social and political spheres are manifestations of the cosmic ‘hierarchies of heaven,’ albeit imperfect and inferior ones:²³³⁶ ‘God himself thus gives substance and arrangement to everything which exists, including the legal hierarchy and society.’²³³⁷ This chapter aims to redeem this metaphysical framework against contemporary postmetaphysical readings, arguing both for its enduring value and its radical transformation. In turn, this will reveal the exemplary nature of Thomas’ method, since ‘Divine wisdom provides for each thing according to its mode; hence it is written (Wisdom 8:1) that ‘she ordereth all things sweetly.’²³³⁸

‘Nature orders generation in regular gradation’ observes Aristotle.²³³⁹ In the sophisticated system of Plotinus this translates into an overflowing of the One into *Nous*, Soul and Being.²³⁴⁰ In turn, being descends from intellectual beings, to animals, plants, inanimate objects and finally to unformed matter.²³⁴¹ Proclus reworks this ‘divine series’ (ὁ θεῖος ἀριθμὸς)²³⁴² into a ‘single harmonious ordering’ of reality,²³⁴³ constituted by:

1. intelligences which are unmoving in both being and activity,
2. souls which are unmoving in being but not in activity,
3. natural forms (*phusika*) which are invisible but inseparable from visible things.
4. visible forms in sensible objects.²³⁴⁴

Each level of the hierarchy (excluding the unparticipated One) is ‘analogous’²³⁴⁵ to its cause, signifying its participation in its cause in proportion to its capacity to receive it.²³⁴⁶ The highest level is the self-diffusive Good, represented by Plato’s figure of the sun which is ‘in a certain

²³³⁴ *EH1* (373C)

²³³⁵ *CH13* (301C); c.f. *CH4* (181A); *EH5* (504C-505A); Knepper, 82f.

²³³⁶ *CH1* (121C); *EH3* (440C-441C); c.f. Germanus, *EHMC*, 6, 41.

²³³⁷ *EH3* (429C); *CH9* (260B); 3 (165C).

²³³⁸ *STIII.60.4*; *CRom13.1.1024*

²³³⁹ *On the Generation of Animals* II.1 in Hutchins (1984), 273; *Protrepticus* B86; Donald Morrison, ‘The Evidence for Degrees of Being in Aristotle’ *Classical Quarterly* 37 (1987): 382-401; Bradshaw, 5.

²³⁴⁰ *Enneads* V.2.1-2; Lovejoy, 63.

²³⁴¹ Paul E. Sigmund, *Nicholas of Cusa and Medieval Political Thought* (HUP, 1963), 41-42.

²³⁴² *ET113* (2004), 101.

²³⁴³ *IPIII* (790).

²³⁴⁴ *IPIII* (795)

²³⁴⁵ *DN1* (588A).

²³⁴⁶ Proclus, *ET97* (2004), 87.

sense the cause of everything.²³⁴⁷ In this way, the Platonic heritage provides a metaphysical basis for causation itself,²³⁴⁸ epitomised in the axiom *omne agens agit sibi simile*.²³⁴⁹

This Neoplatonic lineage is received, but has already been transformed in the Dionysian definition of hierarchy as ‘a sacred order, knowledge and activity, which is being assimilated to likeness with God as much as possible and, in response to the illuminations that are given it from God.’²³⁵⁰ Its goal is assimilation (*aphomoiosis*) or union (*henosis*) with God.²³⁵¹ Deification does not mean final identity with the Divine, since there remains an infinite ontological distance between creature and Creator. This is why the Deity must first emerge from hiddenness by way of mediation, and hence the triad. The higher illuminates the lower *via* a mediating rank.²³⁵² This is almost entirely ignored by postmodern Dionysians, along with the necessity of the rites which accompany it.²³⁵³ The arrangement of celestial beings according to Dionysius follows

- 1) seraphim, cherubim and thrones²³⁵⁴
- 2) dominions, powers and authorities²³⁵⁵ and
- 3) principalities, archangels and angels.²³⁵⁶

Below the celestial sphere, and lifted up by it,²³⁵⁷ is the corresponding human sphere of bishop (hierarchy),²³⁵⁸ priest²³⁵⁹ and deacon,²³⁶⁰ who respectively engage in the triadic activity of purification, illumination and perfection,²³⁶¹ in increasing intensity according to their rank, by means of the three sacraments of baptism, syntaxis (eucharist) and anointing.²³⁶² This ‘ecclesiastical hierarchy’ (which Dionysius simply calls ‘our hierarchy’), is itself a mean between the ‘hierarchy of the law’²³⁶³ (the Old Testament) and the celestial hierarchy, forming a total of three dispensations.²³⁶⁴ A further triadic structure comprises the sacraments, those who

²³⁴⁷ *Republic* VI (516).

²³⁴⁸ Venard (2020), 178.

²³⁴⁹ Rosemann (1996).

²³⁵⁰ *CH3* (164D), trans. A. Louth (1989), 38; *ST1.108.1.1*.

²³⁵¹ *CH3* (165A); *CH3* (164D); *EH1* (376A); *EH2.1* (392A). See Roques, c.3.

²³⁵² *CH13* (305B); c.f. Proclus, *ET23*; Kharlamov, 169

²³⁵³ Knepper, 71, 77.

²³⁵⁴ *CH6.2*; 7.

²³⁵⁵ *CH8*

²³⁵⁶ *CH9*. See also *ST1.108.1.vc*

²³⁵⁷ *CH5* (190C)

²³⁵⁸ *EH5* (505B, 508C)

²³⁵⁹ *EH5* (505D, 508C)

²³⁶⁰ *EH5* (508A, 508C); Roques, c.3. This level finds a parallel in Clement, ‘the grades here in the Church, of bishops, presbyters, deacons, are imitations of the angelic glory.’ *Stromateis* VI.13.

²³⁶¹ *EH5* in *ST1.108.2.3*.

²³⁶² *EH2- 4*.

²³⁶³ *EH5* (501C)

²³⁶⁴ *EH5* (501D)

administer them and those who are initiated by them.²³⁶⁵ Finally, the laity being illuminated consist of penitents, possessed²³⁶⁶ and catechumens.²³⁶⁷

This is important because Dionysius insists that the purpose of the higher levels of hierarchy is not finally to exclude the unenlightened, but rather to ‘ungrudgingly impart’ illumination, so that ‘in their goodness they raise their inferiors to become, so far as possible, their rivals.’²³⁶⁸ The hierarchic function reveals itself as an act of love to raise those being perfected.²³⁶⁹ ‘Ungrudgingly impart’ alludes to Solomon who shared his wisdom (Wisdom 7:13) and did not ‘hoard it for himself,’²³⁷⁰ which Dionysius applies to angels in *EH4* (481C).²³⁷¹ Indeed, the secret traditions do not ultimately prevent Dionysius from putting ‘pen to paper’,²³⁷² in order to ‘share these treasures generously with others’ and ‘bring as many as possible to our sacred knowledge,’ otherwise the *corpus* itself would not exist.²³⁷³ The content of this wisdom is Scripture itself, which remains graciously accessible even to the excluded with a view to their final deliverance and perfection.²³⁷⁴ This is the lesson of *EP8*, where Demophilus is rebuked for harshly excluding a repentant sinner from communion and ‘standing guard’ over the sacrament.²³⁷⁵ It is tempting to draw a link between Dionysius and Severus, who although his name denotes ‘strictness’, yet exemplified gentleness towards Callistus (perhaps in guilty sympathy?) after he was put on a trial for forging Severus’ signature.²³⁷⁶ Callistus was the ‘Pseudo-Severus’ as it were. The varying levels of capacity then are not in competition with each other for scarce resources, but as Nyssanus explains: ‘(s)piritual wealth....does the same as the sun, which communicates itself to all who seek it and is wholly present to each one of them.’²³⁷⁷

Despite these qualifications, the recurring caveat ‘as far as possible’²³⁷⁸ exposes a ceiling to progression within the hierarchy. Each lower rank of being has its own limitation (both ontological and epistemic) to receive illumination and is unable to comprehend the definition or essence of beings higher than itself.²³⁷⁹ It is apparently impossible for a woman to ascend

²³⁶⁵ *EH5* (501A).

²³⁶⁶ *EH3* (433D), 216.

²³⁶⁷ *EH3* (432C) and reflected in Aquinas ‘beginners, those who have made some progress and the perfect’ *CJohn21.2625; 2.3.420; STII-II.183.4, sc.*

²³⁶⁸ *CH13* (301C)

²³⁶⁹ Ivanovic (2019), 45-50.

²³⁷⁰ Clarke (1973), 50.

²³⁷¹ Origen uses ‘ungrudgingly’ of Christ in *CJohn2:17-18*. See Behr 1.xlxxiv.

²³⁷² echoing Plato in *Letter 7* (341D-E)

²³⁷³ *DN3* (684B-684D). Maimonides laments that relying on the *viva voce* had resulted in certain teachings being lost to the nation in *A Guide for the Perplexed*, Part III, Intro., 251.

²³⁷⁴ *EH3.6; 4.3.*

²³⁷⁵ *EP8* (1088B-C)

²³⁷⁶ *Epistle 2* in Brooks, 16-23; Dionysius *EP8*.

²³⁷⁷ *The Beatitudes, Sermon 1* (1954), 87.

²³⁷⁸ *CH3* (164D); *CH3* (165B); *CH9* (257C); *EH5* (501A); c.f. *DM7.3.12*.

²³⁷⁹ *DN1* (588A,588D); *DV9.1, sc.1*; Eriugena, *DDN1* (484D), (1968), 132-133.

through all the levels. ‘Let it be by way of sacred enlightenment for sacred men only.’²³⁸⁰ This injunction appears to be gendered and not generic, in common with the 4th century Syrian community where women were forbidden from teaching and baptising.²³⁸¹ In *EH*, the consecrated monk is welcomed into an exclusively male community, ‘the holy society of godlike men, who lovingly congratulate one another with a divine joy.’²³⁸² To what extent is hierarchy saved and transformed in Aquinas?

1. The Supremacy of the Good

A compelling feature of Aquinas’ conception of hierarchy is retrieved from Dionysius’ hierarchical metaphor of the Goodness of God generously pouring itself out²³⁸³ (in contrast with evil which ‘draws itself in’).²³⁸⁴ The glory of this goodness is so great that it demands a diversity of creatures to fittingly express it – which accounts for the existence of hierarchy.²³⁸⁵ As we have seen in Chapter 2, being and goodness are so intertwined that ‘a creature does not exist without a relation to God’s goodness.’²³⁸⁶ As Dionysius puts it, the Good ‘extends goodness into all things.’²³⁸⁷ *Via* Dionysius, Aquinas avoids the twin pitfalls of necessitarian emanationism and voluntarism, since God’s goodness is the reason for his will to create: ‘Dionysius says that the divine love did not allow itself to be without seed.’²³⁸⁸ But the causality of this goodness is not only efficient, but also final, since the effects are dependent on their Cause throughout their existence.²³⁸⁹ ‘In this sense all things are said to be in God as in the goodness preserving them.’²³⁹⁰ Against some philosophers ancient and modern, Aquinas insists that teleology is indispensable to a complete understanding of reality,²³⁹¹ since ‘without God’s action all things would be reduced to nothing.’²³⁹² Aquinas’ reception of Dionysius is therefore a way of ‘saving’ hierarchy, since his theological account preserves its value as an expression and guarantor of objective Goodness. God is the ‘goodness of all good.’²³⁹³

²³⁸⁰ *EH1* (372A), 195; c.f. similar language (‘Our parents are the spiritual men’) in Aquinas, but with qualifications we shall later discuss. *Sermon 20*, Part 2 (2010), 296.

²³⁸¹ *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* III.1.6 (59); III.1, 9, 61. On the suppressed history of ‘desert mothers’ see Herrin, 41.

²³⁸² *EH6.3.4* trans. Campbell, 76.

²³⁸³ *DN4.1.4,20*; *CH4* (177C-177D), c.f. Proclus, *ET122*; *Apostolic Constitutions* VIII.12.6; Lovejoy (1965), 85.

²³⁸⁴ *DM4.6.19*

²³⁸⁵ *CRom9.4.792*.

²³⁸⁶ *DV21.1.1*.

²³⁸⁷ *DN4* (693B)

²³⁸⁸ *SCGIV.20.2*, trans. O’Neill, 120.

²³⁸⁹ *DV21.1.4*; c.f. *DN4* (697A).

²³⁹⁰ *CRom11.4.947*

²³⁹¹ *DV5.2*. On its rejection amongst Gender theorists see Butler (2006), 121-124

²³⁹² *ST1.19.2*

²³⁹³ *IDN*, proem.

In spite of the antipathy to hierarchy in a supposedly non-teleological secular world²³⁹⁴ where the human being is ‘without why,’ a ‘being-for nothing,’²³⁹⁵ it is telling that s/he cannot escape constructing some pseudo-*telos*. Zizek declares that the ‘point’ of sexual relationships is to ‘fail’ to achieve completeness.²³⁹⁶ (How would anyone notice incompleteness in a non-teleological world?) Nietzsche astutely observes: ‘Man would sooner have the void *for* his purpose than be void *of* purpose.’²³⁹⁷ Hence, whereas human person’s upright disposition was for Augustine a sign of their intended orientation towards the Creator²³⁹⁸ (echoing Socrates’ etymology of *anthropos* as ‘one who looks up’),²³⁹⁹ for his nemesis Bataille, *homo sapiens* ‘attains a stiffness’²⁴⁰⁰ as *homo erectus*.²⁴⁰¹ The ‘end’ of man for Bataille is not only, homonymously, his final demise, but literally his (rear) end, at once orgasm, excrement and death. Like other animals in the zoo, the choice for Bataille is no longer between happy pig or unhappy Socrates; since Socrates *is* pig, elevation *is* fall, reason *is* libido and the eschatological *is* scatological.²⁴⁰²

Furthermore, it is no accident that environmental crisis has accompanied the loss of teleology associated with a hierarchical cosmos. ‘The meadows mourn for the old hallowing life/Vainly we search the earth for gods bereft.’²⁴⁰³ Even Marx mourned the eclipse of medieval hierarchy,²⁴⁰⁴ since the pseudo-omnipotent and omnipresent Market has recast an arbitrary, functionalist and entirely nominalist hierarchy out of that which it destroyed.²⁴⁰⁵ Capital exploits all animals, including the human variety, as machines²⁴⁰⁶ for surplus value.²⁴⁰⁷ This has only intensified since the era of Marx, be it the copywriting of the genetic code, the intrusion of the ‘smart home’ or the ‘track and trace’ biotechnologies of the COVID era. In attempting to describe this unprecedented situation Zuboff speaks of ‘surveillance capitalism’ as a vampire gorging on all aspects of human life.²⁴⁰⁸ Intrinsic value is entirely subsumed by ‘surplus’ and ‘use’ value, including now ‘behavioural surplus,’ data mined to predict and control.

²³⁹⁴ Caputo, *Insistence* (2013), 13-15.

²³⁹⁵ *ibid*, 23.

²³⁹⁶ Rose (2014).

²³⁹⁷ *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Friedrich Golfing (New York: Anchor Books, 1956), 299.

²³⁹⁸ EIP1.15

²³⁹⁹ *Cratylus* (399)

²⁴⁰⁰ George Bataille, *The Jesuve*, trans. Allan Stoekl, *George Bataille, Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 71. See also *The Pineal Eye*, and *The Lugubrious Game*.

²⁴⁰¹ Stoekl, xii-xiii; 73-91.

²⁴⁰² *The Jesuve* in Stoekl, 71.

²⁴⁰³ cited in Hadot, 81-84.

²⁴⁰⁴ Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 1848 (London: Penguin, 2004), 7.

²⁴⁰⁵ Marx and Engels (2004), 6, 12; Marx, *Capital* (1990), 1:489, 481.

²⁴⁰⁶ Hadot traces the etymology of machine to *mekbane*, ‘trick:’ a manipulation of nature for human ends, 101f, c.f. *Cratylus* (415)

²⁴⁰⁷ *Capital* (1990), 1:512-513. Marx cites Karl Ludwig von Haller (1768-1854) who sought to rehabilitate the medieval paradigm. See also Hadot, c.11.

²⁴⁰⁸ Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (London: Profile, 2019), 9; Rod Dreher, *Live not by lies: A Manual for Christian Dissidents* (New York City: Sentinel, 2020), 75-94.

2. Angels.

Just as there is a hierarchy among men, so is there a hierarchy among angels. This is clear from what Dionysius has written.²⁴⁰⁹

Using Aquinas' reception of the *CD* as a 'probable authority' saves Dionysian metaphysics from contemporary distortions, not least in its reclamation of the angelic. It is fitting that the 'Angelic Doctor' adverts to the authority of Dionysius for an 'excellent treatment' of the truths of the Christian faith regarding the celestial realm,²⁴¹⁰ primarily from *CH*²⁴¹¹ and *DN*.²⁴¹² This is partly because, as we have seen in Chapter 1, Dionysius is considered more compatible with divine revelation than the pagan philosophy of either Plato or Aristotle on 'separate substances.' In agreement with Dionysius, Aquinas reaffirms Christian orthodoxy that all spiritual substances were made by God, which is 'proved by the authority of the canonical scriptures.'²⁴¹³ Celestial creatures thus replace what the *Platonici* call 'secondary gods.'²⁴¹⁴ Thomas accepts Dionysius' ascending tripartite hierarchy consisting of angels which protect individuals, principalities which govern nations and powers which are higher still.²⁴¹⁵ However, Aquinas is more philosophically sophisticated than Dionysius, for example in his inquiry into whether or not angels occupy place,²⁴¹⁶ how they are differentiated,²⁴¹⁷ or how they communicate.²⁴¹⁸

The enduring value of Aquinas' reception is borne out by Golitzin who persuasively proffers the monastic background as an interpretive context for the *CD*. This explains the profound resonance monks have always felt with its liturgical rhythms, in a manner alien to individualistic and deconstructivist readings.²⁴¹⁹ Fascination for angels is one striking feature of monastic literature. Of all members of the Church universal, monks have been considered imitators of angels *par excellence*,²⁴²⁰ since they 'neither marry nor are given in marriage'.²⁴²¹ Severus writes of the monk Epiphanius, that he 'practised a virginity modelled on the angelic and unembodied life.'²⁴²² For monks, as Golitzin notes, the angelic realm carries an important iconic function ('to

²⁴⁰⁹ *DV*9.1, sc.2 (*CH*4.3; 3.2).

²⁴¹⁰ *DSS*18.91 (1959); *ST*1.50.2 sc; a.3 *resp.*; a.4 sc; a.5 sc. *DSC*1 sc (1949), 20; a.2.1.1 (1949), 30, 37; a.2.19 (1949), 33, 40; *DM*111.7; Bonino (2016), 46; 57-58; Porro, TA, 383.

²⁴¹¹ esp. cc.1, 2, 4, 5, 15

²⁴¹² esp. cc. 4-5, 11.

²⁴¹³ *DSS*18.91 (1959). This is a recurring phrase in this work: c.f. cc.18, 93; 20, 104.

²⁴¹⁴ *IDN*XI.4; Porro, TA, 196-7.

²⁴¹⁵ *CRom*.8.6.728.

²⁴¹⁶ *Quod*I.1.3.4-5.

²⁴¹⁷ *Quod*II.2.1; Porro, TA, 308.

²⁴¹⁸ *ST*1.107.1

²⁴¹⁹ Golitzin, 52, following early commentators in the positive stream such as Maximus and Germanus, *EHMC* 19; Meyendorff, 36-8.

²⁴²⁰ *EP*10 (1117B); Bonino, 49; Ramelli, 205, n.126; Ivanovic, 49.

²⁴²¹ *Matt.* 22:30.

²⁴²² *Epistle to Constantine the Bishop* in Brooks 7; c.f. Clement, *Stromateis* VI.13

exemplify the Good’),²⁴²³ by revealing what unfallen creation looks like.²⁴²⁴ It is reflected in Dionysius’ aspiration to ‘imitate angelic beauty as far as possible.’²⁴²⁵ Thus, angelic life is likened to the monk-like life of the shepherds (to whom they appeared) ‘who, because of their quiet life withdrawn from the crowd had somehow been purified.’²⁴²⁶ The term *μοναχός*, which Dionysius received from ‘our blessed leaders’²⁴²⁷ was widespread by the 4th century, perhaps originating from the *Gospel of Thomas*.²⁴²⁸ It is noteworthy that nowhere in the *CD* do we find reference to the key Scriptural texts on marriage.²⁴²⁹ Nor is there any interest in family life generally.²⁴³⁰ To the contrary, as we have seen, *Canticles* is given a wholly mystical interpretation. But beyond celibacy,²⁴³¹ *μοναχός* signifies that ‘singleminded’ orientation possessed by the angels.²⁴³² Aquinas cites the authority of *CH3* (209B) to teach that some celestial beings converse directly with the risen Christ.²⁴³³ They are amongst those honoured to live in the very ‘vestibule’ of the deity²⁴³⁴ and consequently it is fitting that they are the first heralds of his resurrection.²⁴³⁵

Aquinas endorses (‘saves?’) the monastic life as exceptional rather than unnatural, since the nature of holy men like John the Baptist or Saint Anthony is superior and ‘more perfect’ than other human beings.²⁴³⁶ Transcending the monastic ideal, Aquinas, however, gives an exemplary recognition of the social aspect of spirituality, following the ‘mixed life’ model of the Dominican order.²⁴³⁷ From the Order of Preachers, Thomas received the threefold mandate, *legere, disputare, predicare*.²⁴³⁸ This exemplary Dominican rule crystallises lessons learned from the successes and failures of previous movements,²⁴³⁹ leading to its commendation in *ST*,²⁴⁴⁰ the *Sermons*²⁴⁴¹ and

²⁴²³ *DN4* (696)B

²⁴²⁴ Golitzin, 197; *CH8* (240A); *DN4* (724B).

²⁴²⁵ *CH8* (241C).

²⁴²⁶ *CH4* (181B);

²⁴²⁷ *EH6* (552D-553A)

²⁴²⁸ *Gospel of Thomas* 75, in Robinson (1998), 124-126. See also Sayings 16, 23, 30, 49, 76, 77, 114. Golitzin, *Mystagogy* (2013), 7, n.12; Andrew Louth, ‘The Reception of Dionysius in the Byzantine World: Maximus to Palamas’ in Coakley and Stang, 56; Bruce (1974), 110; Vermes (2003), xiii.

²⁴²⁹ Genesis 2:18-24; Matthew 19:1-9; John 2 or Eph. 5:22-33

²⁴³⁰ e.g. Col. 3:18-4:1; Eph. 5:21-6:2; 1 Pet. 2:18-3:7; 1Cor. 7.

²⁴³¹ Nyssanus, *DVMII*.187.

²⁴³² *EH6* (533D) trans. Campbell, 74, 192-194, n.295-297. which translates in Aquinas’ Latin to *singularitas vitae STII-II*.188.2.1.

²⁴³³ *CJohn*16:23 in Tugwell (1988), 441; Now of all creatures, the spiritual substances are nearest to God, as Dionysius makes clear.’ *DSC1*(1949), 22; *CH4*

²⁴³⁴ *IDC19* (1996), 118; *ST1*.108.1; *LEJob*38.7 (1989), 419 citing *CH7*.2.

²⁴³⁵ *STIII*.55.2

²⁴³⁶ *CAP1*.20 (2007), 16; Entrèves, xviii.

²⁴³⁷ Venard (2020), 164, n.56.

²⁴³⁸ Geisler, 43; Hoogland, 4.

²⁴³⁹ Little, cc7-9.

²⁴⁴⁰ *ST1* prol; II-II.182.2.; 186. 6; III.186, 6-7; III.40.1-3.

²⁴⁴¹ *Sermon* 8 (2010), 88-99; 9, part 3, 120. Inspiration is drawn from Christ who ventured forth from his secret dwelling place in the Father to the public realm of the world; *Sermon* 15 (2010), 228.

Vatican II.²⁴⁴² Aquinas shows sensitivity to the dangers of either unbalanced contemplation or action²⁴⁴³ and embodies instead the best practice of a ‘mixed life’²⁴⁴⁴ of contemplation overflowing into the *trudere* of mission to the world, be it through preaching, teaching, writing or acts of charity.²⁴⁴⁵ Here we can discern a significant parallel, even a non-identical repetition of the Dionysian ideal of ‘ungrudging impartation.’ Aquinas borrows from Gregory the Great a beautiful metaphor of the contemplative who, ‘publishes the memory of God’s sweetness’ (from Psalm 144:7).²⁴⁴⁶ It belies modern caricatures of Thomism as a dry, detached intellectualism.²⁴⁴⁷

Aquinas brings to the forefront this social dimension already implicit in the *CD*, firstly in the rite of the *synaxis*: (literally ‘gathering together’),²⁴⁴⁸ when the *μοναχοι* are gathered towards a sacred *μυστήρια*.²⁴⁴⁹ Secondly, the monks’ imitate the angelic order of illumination whereby “(t)he higher angels cleanse the lower angels from ignorance.”²⁴⁵⁰ Christ as principal instructor uses celestial spirits both to teach lower angels²⁴⁵¹ and to teach human beings.²⁴⁵² ‘Thus, the Lord Jesus Christ is ‘the principal instructor of all heavenly spirits and devout souls.’²⁴⁵³ The importance of this ‘unchangeable law’²⁴⁵⁴ is expressed in ‘Thomas’ daily prayer:

Creator ineffabilis,
 qui de thesaurus sapientiae tuae
 tres angelorum hierarchias designasti,
 et eas super caelum empyreum
 miro ordine collocasti,
 atque universas partes
 elegantissime disposuisti.²⁴⁵⁵

From Dionysius, Thomas learns that ‘to give perfection to other creatures is the most noble way of imitating God’²⁴⁵⁶ and so it is the gift of the priest to ‘enlighten.’²⁴⁵⁷ Those who have attained a

²⁴⁴² *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 13 in Tugwell (1988), 630, n.8.

²⁴⁴³ Contemplatives are prone to be ‘docile’ but actives ‘slower to understand’. *CJohn*20.2487; *STII-II*.188.6.

²⁴⁴⁴ *STII-II*.179.2.2; c.f. *Philebus* 61b.

²⁴⁴⁵ *STII-II*.188.6; *CJohn*21.2582, citing *Cant* 7:11; 2618 and comments in Venard (2020), 159-166.

²⁴⁴⁶ *STII-II*.188.6 and Venard (2020), 164.

²⁴⁴⁷ See also Venard, c.4.

²⁴⁴⁸ *EH3* (429A). On gathering together see also *DN1* (640D-641A); (649B-652A); *DN11* (948D-949A); *CH1* (121C-D), 146. C.f. John 6:12; Origen, *Hezek* 9 (2010), 117.

²⁴⁴⁹ *EH6* (533D). Campbell, 198, n.311.

²⁴⁵⁰ *STIII*, Suppl., 92.3, sc.

²⁴⁵¹ *DV11*.4.1.

²⁴⁵² *DV11*.3, sc.1-2; *DV12*.8, sc.2; *LEJob*33.23.

²⁴⁵³ *Sermon 6* (2010), 80, following *CH6*

²⁴⁵⁴ *DV9*.2, sc.1 (*CH5*); *ST1*.106.1, sc.; *IDNIV-1* (1994), 341; *DN4* (696A); *CH3* (165A); 4 (181A); 8 (240C); 10 (273A).

²⁴⁵⁵ Anderson and Moser, 40.

higher measure of happiness have a duty to help others on their journey to perfection by sharing with them.²⁴⁵⁸ It is fitting, then, that Aquinas learned the Dionysian principle that ‘the ends of the first are conjoined to the beginnings of the second’²⁴⁵⁹ at the feet of his own teacher, Albert.²⁴⁶⁰ But this also unveils another way in which hierarchy is saved from modern prejudice, for, as Ivanovic points out, hierarchy is revealed as a demonstration, not of overbearing authoritarianism but of humility and *love*.²⁴⁶¹ Aquinas repeats Dionysius’ injunction from *Wisdom* to ‘ungrudgingly impart’ the fruit of contemplation.²⁴⁶² Hence, Thomas acknowledges Dionysius’ role in ‘perfecting’ his own understanding.

Thomas is largely reliant on Dionysius for defending the view that angels are immaterial,²⁴⁶³ immortal,²⁴⁶⁴ incorruptible²⁴⁶⁵ and intellectual²⁴⁶⁶ (but not omniscient)²⁴⁶⁷ against various contrary opinions, not only of the pagan philosophers and heretics,²⁴⁶⁸ but also of church fathers, Origen, Boethius, John of Damascus and even Augustine.²⁴⁶⁹ The church fathers are thus ‘saved’ through Aquinas’ reception of Dionysius. According to Graef, ‘(t)he authority of Pseudo-Dionysius finally established the perfect immateriality of angels.’²⁴⁷⁰ However, the historical Dionysius probably agrees with Proclus that heavenly beings have a different kind of body,²⁴⁷¹ which Dionysius calls ‘first matter,’²⁴⁷² and Origen ‘ethereal and luminous,’²⁴⁷³ since only the blessed Trinity is incorporeal.²⁴⁷⁴ Nevertheless, Aquinas reads Dionysius as teaching angelic incorporeality.²⁴⁷⁵ Moreover, Thomas transcends Dionysius’ rubric by teaching that each angel must be its own species on the grounds that angels cannot be distinguished by matter.²⁴⁷⁶ On the whole, however, Aquinas seeks a consensus of the fathers.²⁴⁷⁷ This perfectly epitomises how one

²⁴⁵⁶ DV9.2

²⁴⁵⁷ SCGIV.73.8; c.f. EH5 (504B).

²⁴⁵⁸ *Sermon* 19 (2010), 281-282.

²⁴⁵⁹ IDC19 (1996), 118; SCGII.68; DM16.1.4, citing DN7.3.

²⁴⁶⁰ Tugwell (1988), 155

²⁴⁶¹ EH1 (376A); Ivanovic, 45.

²⁴⁶² *Sermon* 8 (2010), 103.

²⁴⁶³ ST1.50.2, sc; DV7.8 (EH1.1; CH1.3); DM16.6, sc 2;

²⁴⁶⁴ IDNIV-2

²⁴⁶⁵ ST1.50.5, sc; ST1.51.1, sc.; IDNIV-2.

²⁴⁶⁶ DV10.1.4; a.5.6; DM16.6, sc.1; ST1.55.1, sc.

²⁴⁶⁷ DM111.7

²⁴⁶⁸ DSS20.105. See also c.17 on the Manichees.

²⁴⁶⁹ DSC1, sc. (1949) 20 (1949), 22; DSC5 sc. (1949), 67; DSS19.100 (1959), based e.g. on CH4; DN7 (868B); ST1.58.3

²⁴⁷⁰ Graef (1954), 189, n.88.

²⁴⁷¹ IPIII (822-823)

²⁴⁷² CH13 (301A-B). Dionysius in turn being influenced by Nyssanus, e.g. *Sermon* 4 in Graef (1954), 61.

²⁴⁷³ CMatt.XVII, 30; *On Prayer* 7; *CJohn* I.17, 98.

²⁴⁷⁴ OFP1.6.4; II.2.2; Ramelli, 173-4.

²⁴⁷⁵ ST1.51.1, sc.; DM16.1.14.

²⁴⁷⁶ SCGII.93; Porro, TA, 159-161

²⁴⁷⁷ e.g. STII-II.172.1.1, citing Augustine, DGALxii.13; STII-II.172.2; DV11.3, sc.1.

reception of Dionysius became ‘classic.’ It is also a useful corrective against modern scepticism regarding the personality of angels.²⁴⁷⁸

If Dionysius is an Origenian thinker, it is useful to examine Thomas’ response to views attributed to Origen to clarify his reception. According to Aquinas, Origen ‘makes many erroneous statements..following the views of the ancient philosophers,²⁴⁷⁹ a prime example being the Valentinian doctrine²⁴⁸⁰ that souls were created at the same time as angels and subsequently fell from the spiritual to the physical realms.²⁴⁸¹ This sin is the origin of hierarchy and diversity.

Origen was wont to say that the whole diversity of bodies was based on the diversity in the disorderliness of the voluntary motion of non-bodily substance, so that those that had turned in a lesser way from God, were bound to nobler bodies, and those that were turned away more, were bound to less noble bodies.²⁴⁸²

In his critical edition of *OFP*, Behr defends Origen using a controversial philosophy of time,²⁴⁸³ contending that, since the final age belongs to the eternal world and since the end of all things is also a restoration of what was lost,²⁴⁸⁴ then the original state must also have been eternal (implied in Ecclesiastes 1:9-10).²⁴⁸⁵ Behr’s next move is to define ‘eternity’ in Boethian terms as a timeless state, in which any literal understanding of a ‘before’ is meaningless²⁴⁸⁶ ruling out any ‘pre-existence’ of souls, who subsequently fell (temporally) into material bodies.²⁴⁸⁷ Origen’s contemporary, Plotinus had previously posited a timeless implicate realm of ‘Intellectual Fire,’ which causes the explicate realm of ‘fire here’.²⁴⁸⁸ Here, ‘preexistence’ should not be understood chronologically, but rather hierarchically of ‘causation’ (which in turn, could support a more sophisticated understanding of preexistence in Origen). However, this reconstruction would not completely save Origen, since, although according to Augustine and Boethius, God is timeless, to extend this property to creatures²⁴⁸⁹ implies univocity of being.²⁴⁹⁰ As we have seen in chapter

²⁴⁷⁸ *Humani Generis* 26

²⁴⁷⁹ *DSC*5.1 (1949), 70-71; *ST*1.51.1.1. See also *DP*6.6.2; *DSS*12.63 (1959)

²⁴⁸⁰ Plotinus, *Enneads* II.9.6; Grant (1957), 99; Stevenson (1957), 84-91; Edwards (2004), 33; Trigg (1985), 38-51.

²⁴⁸¹ *OFPI*2.2.2; 1.7.5 (2017), 155, 129; *CJobn*1.17.97-8; *XX*.22.182; *CRom*9.2.758; *DAF*1, following criticisms by Jerome and Epiphanius *DSS*12.62 (1959); Epiphanius, *Bks* Ii-Iii (2013), 138; Grant (1957), 92. Hegel reprises a ‘fallen’ account of history. Franke, 36.

²⁴⁸² *DSS*12.62 (1959); c.f. *CRom*9.3.767; *DV*10.6, *DP*3.10 and *DP*3.18 (where Aquinas uses Augustine rather than Dionysius to refute Origen).

²⁴⁸³ Behr 1.lxiv-lxix.

²⁴⁸⁴ *OFPI*6.2 (2017), 106-107.

²⁴⁸⁵ *OFPI*4.4.

²⁴⁸⁶ *COPV*.6; Augustine, *CoGX*1.6.

²⁴⁸⁷ Behr 1.lxiv-lxix.

²⁴⁸⁸ *Enneads* 1.6.3; VI.7.6.

²⁴⁸⁹ as Origen does in *OFPIV*4.9.

²⁴⁹⁰ though Augustine speculates that the angels may have existed eternally in *CoGXII*.15.

1, Aquinas uses Dionysius to insist that the world is not eternal because this is ‘contrary to the catholic faith.’²⁴⁹¹

Furthermore, Origen appears to connect the state of ‘vanity’ in Romans 8:20-21 and Ecclesiastes 1:2, 14, with embodiment,²⁴⁹² even though these texts are *prima facie* meditations on the Fall,²⁴⁹³ carrying associations with ‘corruption’ and ‘bondage’ from which ‘redemption’ is required (as Aquinas reads the passage).²⁴⁹⁴ Natural bodies (such as stars) might wish to be dissolved and ‘return,’ but it is necessary for them to remain in this state until ‘the revelation of the sons of God.’²⁴⁹⁵ Therefore, if Origen is not presupposing ‘vanity’ to be a consequence of a fall, this only compounds his problems, since it entails that God *created* the world in a state of vanity/corruption/bondage. It collapses the doctrines of creation and Fall in contradiction to Genesis 1:31 and Aquinas’ criticisms remain valid.²⁴⁹⁶ In *DP3* Thomas uses Genesis to rebut the alleged position of Origen, that the conjunction of souls in bodies is unnatural, i.e. an accident or a result of punishment.²⁴⁹⁷ *A fortiori* the same passage refutes any implication that the original creation falls short of a state of goodness. Aquinas is here faithful to Dionysius’ affirmation of the goodness of creation against Marcionism.²⁴⁹⁸

More convincingly, Ramelli argues that Origen does not teach pre-existence of *souls* but rather pre-existence of *forms* in the mind of God. These are not coeternal with God, but rather were created before the world began.²⁴⁹⁹ Furthermore, whereas Origen’s critics such as Theodoret accused him of teaching that ‘garments of skin’ (χιτῶνες δερμάτινοι) in Genesis 3:21 are physical bodies,²⁵⁰⁰ Ramelli demonstrates that Origen did not regard pre-fallen humans as bodiless, but rather as having unfallen, luminous bodies, later corrupted by the Fall into ‘more denser bodies.’²⁵⁰¹ The ‘skin garments’ are therefore *mortal* bodies, not bodies *per se*. Within the Origenian tradition, this nuanced idea will be developed in Nyssanus,²⁵⁰² and is hinted at in

²⁴⁹¹ *DP3*.17.

²⁴⁹² *OFPI*.7.5 (2017), 129.

²⁴⁹³ recollecting a corresponding ‘fall’ within Platonic myths *Phaedrus* (250); *Republic* (611D); Proclus, *IT3*.298.16ff Diehl.

²⁴⁹⁴ *CRom*8.4

²⁴⁹⁵ *OFPI*.7.5 (2017), 129.

²⁴⁹⁶ *LEJob*35.3 (1979), 393.

²⁴⁹⁷ *DP3*.10.18 and *DV*10.6; *CRom*9.3.767.

²⁴⁹⁸ *CH2* (141C-144C); *DV*5.3; *SCGII*.41.16; *DM*16; Augustine, *CoGX*.13; *De Haeresiae* XXI; XLVI.

²⁴⁹⁹ Ramelli, 167-227 appealing to *OFPII*.9.2; I.4.4-5 and *CJohn*I.19.114-5 in support.

²⁵⁰⁰ Theodoret, *Quaestiones in Genesis* 39 in Graef (1954), 184, n.43, following Valentinus. See Irenaeus, *AH*1.5.5.

²⁵⁰¹ *PG*12.469B. Porphyry believed that the *pneuma* became heavier in its descent into matter. See Dodds, *Elements*, Appendix II, 318; *OFPII*.4.3; 4.5; II.8.3; III.6.4; *HL*ev.6.2; *C1Cor*29; *CCelsus*IV.40; Ramelli, 172.

²⁵⁰² *The Lord’s Prayer, Sermon* 5 (1954), 76-77 and *The Beatitudes, Sermon* 8, where death is compared to circumcision of dead skin (1954), 188. Commenting on *IThess.* 4:17, Gregory muses that the resurrection body will be ‘light and airy.’ We shall be lifted up together with Christ because we will be ‘not drawn down to earth by anything heavy.’ *DVMII*.191; Ramelli, 197-215. Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* (New York: Dutton and Co., 1961), 376-377 relates examples of mystics feeling ‘lighter.’

Dionysius.²⁵⁰³ The decisive proof is *OFPII.2.2* which teaches that only the Trinity is incorporeal and nothing else can at any time have existed without a body.

From the deuteronomical text of Wisdom 9:15 (oft-cited by Augustine,²⁵⁰⁴ Origen²⁵⁰⁵ and Nyssanus),²⁵⁰⁶ Dionysius discusses the perishable body ‘weighing down’ the soul.²⁵⁰⁷ Aquinas also appropriates this text, interpreting ‘weighing down’ not as ‘a consequence of the body’s nature, but of its corruption,’²⁵⁰⁸ that is to say, human beings fell as embodied persons, not as disembodied ones.²⁵⁰⁹ On Ramelli’s account, Origen and Aquinas agree on this point, and also with the original context of Wisdom concerning the weakness of the human body and its consequent need of Divine assistance (see Chapter 3 on the beatific vision).²⁵¹⁰ Aquinas remains emphatic, though, that the resurrection body is not composed of air or wind, a doctrine associated with Eutyches.²⁵¹¹ We find a parallel here with Dionysius’ discourse on evil which resists the Gnostic error of condemning matter itself as evil.²⁵¹² Thomas’ reception of Wisdom further correlates with Dionysius’ in a discussion on prayer: ‘(w)hen our mind turns to temporal things in order to rest in them, then it does remain weighted down in them. But when it turns to them with a view to attaining beatitude, far from being weighed down by them it rather raises them up (or ‘it is rather raised up’ – variant reading).²⁵¹³ To summarise Ramelli’s ‘saving’ of Origen, embodiment *per se* is not fallen, but the nature of that embodiment changes after the Fall.

²⁵⁰³ *EH4* (476A), 226. See our Chapter 1.

²⁵⁰⁴ *CoGXII.15*; *De Trinitate* VIII.2

²⁵⁰⁵ *Exh.Martyrdom* 3; *OFPII.2.2*.

²⁵⁰⁶ *Sermon* 4 on the Lord’s Prayer in Graef (1954), 61; c.f. Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.4.16.

²⁵⁰⁷ *EH4* (476A).

²⁵⁰⁸ *DSC2* (1949), 38; *LEJob*19.25; *CJohn*6.4.505 (2020), 201. Having said this, Aquinas describes the incorruptible bodies of the damned as ‘heavy’ in *SCGIV.89.4*.

²⁵⁰⁹ A qualification is his speculative interpretation of a future punishment of embodiment for fallen angels in *SCGIV.90.4-8*.

²⁵¹⁰ *CJohn*1.11.213 ; Clarke, 10, 63-65.

²⁵¹¹ *CJohn*20.2559; *STIII.54.3*; *DAF1*; *Quodl.*1.10.21.2.

²⁵¹² *DN4* (729B).

²⁵¹³ *STII-II.83.6.3*, trans. Tugwell (1988), 489. See also *STII-II.83.13.2*; 180.7.2. See discussion below.

3. Beauty and *theopoesis*.

Following Chapter 1's discussion on *eros*, beauty has an anagogic function²⁵¹⁴ as that which elicits the ecstasy of *eros*.²⁵¹⁵ This motif will adumbrate the 'affective' strand of later medieval mysticism.²⁵¹⁶ It also adds more precision to our previous comments on the symbolic nature of the cosmos and is a vital corrective to negative connotations of hierarchy. 'He, then, who mentions hierarchy,' as Dionysius conceives it, 'denotes a certain altogether holy order, an image of the supremely divine beauty.'²⁵¹⁷ This aesthetic trope is recognised and developed in *IDN* which reinforces the value of Thomas' reception.²⁵¹⁸ On Dionysius' conception *ἱεραρχία* is synonymous with *κόσμος*, possibly coined by Pythagorus to signify at once the order and beauty of the universe.²⁵¹⁹ This etymology elucidates the 'cosmetic' value of jewellery and clothing as symbols of prestige,²⁵²⁰ since change of attire typically accompanies elevation in status.²⁵²¹ In Byzantine churches *κοσμήτης* referred to a holy decoration of the cross,²⁵²² echoing Solomon's decoration (*ἐκόσμησεν*) of the temple with precious marble.²⁵²³ Dionysius' juxtaposition of hierarchy with beauty²⁵²⁴ disrupts negative connotations of hierarchy. Hierarchy demands the existence of objective degrees of value, perfection and beauty.²⁵²⁵ In his monograph on beauty, Sammon comments, '(h)ierarchy is precisely the cosmic form that divine beauty takes in the act of divine creation.'²⁵²⁶ Just as Augustine had likened the universe to a great song (*magnum carmen*),²⁵²⁷ so Aquinas recapitulates an aesthetic mood, likening the arrangement of the universe to musical harmony.²⁵²⁸ Fittingly, for the hymnwriter Dionysius reality is structured into chord-like triads, as we shall see later.

²⁵¹⁴ Sammon, 37-38.

²⁵¹⁵ *IDNIV*.10 (1-13), 372-373; Ivanovic (2019), 46-48.

²⁵¹⁶ Keller, 77. Hugh of St. Victor's *In De coel. Hier* seems to be a bridge from Dionysius to medieval affective mysticism, c.f. Aquinas, *DV*22.11.5

²⁵¹⁷ *CH3*(165B), trans. Sammon, 179; Kharlamov, 154.

²⁵¹⁸ *IDNIV*.1.5, n.349; Ignatio Andereggen, 'La Originalidad del Comentario de Santo Tomás al *De Divinis Nominibus* de Dionisio Areopagita' in de Andia (1996), 438-453.

²⁵¹⁹ Isidore of Seville *Etymologies* XIII in Eco (2010), 82; Plutarch, *Moralia* II.1 in Fletcher, 110, n.63; Plato, *Timaeus* 29a; Proclus, *IPII* (762).

²⁵²⁰ Luke 21:5; Rev. 21:2; Fletcher, 110; Eco (2010), 105-8. Origen speaks of the 'world and its arrangement' in *OFPII*.1.1. trans. Behr 1.145. He goes on to liken the *kosmos* to an animated body, recollecting Plato's image of the world as an animal in *Timaeus* 30b and Paul's metaphor of the body of Christ in 1 Cor.12. Like Dionysius, Origen sees the Reason of God (Christ) as its unifying principle. *OFPII*.1.3. Behr 1.149, n.9; *CJohn*6.301-5; *CMatt*.13.20; *DN7* (872C); *CH13* (300D).

²⁵²¹ Luke 15:22.

²⁵²² Meyendorff, 63.

²⁵²³ 2 Chron. 3:6, LXX.

²⁵²⁴ *CH3* (164D)

²⁵²⁵ Blocher (1984), 74; O'Rourke (2005), 175.

²⁵²⁶ Sammon, 183.

²⁵²⁷ Hadot, 201.

²⁵²⁸ *IDNIV*.7 (33-50), 365.

By contrast, naturalism's 'brave new world' leaves no place for Beauty *per se*,²⁵²⁹ being superfluous to utilitarian requirements. Hence, naturalism is discordant; it has lost the phenomena.²⁵³⁰ The metaphysical consequence of the 'fall' from nature's symbolic order²⁵³¹ is epitomised by the 1950's 'readymade'.²⁵³² The age which built *Hagia Sophia* in Constantinople, St Mark's in Venice or Notre Dame in Paris is long expired,²⁵³³ yet still lamented.²⁵³⁴ Unsurprisingly some 'post secular' writers, discovering the self-destructive nature of Enlightenment materialism, openly advocate the 'reenchantment of the world',²⁵³⁵ but whom will they invoke to regain it, orthodoxy or paganism? The aesthetic argument is a neglected apologetic for orthodoxy and compensates for the weakness of Paley's 'Watchmaker' apologetic, which inadvertently lent itself to deist and utilitarian logic.²⁵³⁶ At the close of the 19th century, Morris prophetically denounced the 'sordid utilitarianism that cares not and knows not of beauty and history',²⁵³⁷ seeking instead to recapture Dionysius' aesthetic vision within the framework of Christian socialism.²⁵³⁸ This paradigm retains the potential to transform contemporary art and ecology *via* a Dionysian vision of beauty. Our thesis too strategically returns to that overflowing bounty of the Good, which Aquinas discovered in the *CD*,²⁵³⁹ as a force of resistance to contemporary nihilism in which the goodness of Being has been forgotten.²⁵⁴⁰

From planets to butterflies, Northern Lights to newborn babies, nature arrests us as not just beautiful in part, but as *saturated with beauty*.²⁵⁴¹ Phenomenologically, this is undeniable. Nor is beauty restricted to 'visible beauties' as these are in turn 'reflections of invisible comeliness'.²⁵⁴² We experience beauty in music,²⁵⁴³ poems and personalities.²⁵⁴⁴ In fact, for Aquinas beauty is not primarily pleasing to the senses, but to the intellect.²⁵⁴⁵ Hence, 'spiritual beauty consists in a

²⁵²⁹ Balthasar (1982), 1.19

²⁵³⁰ F.R. Tennant, *Philosophical Theology* II. The World, The Soul and God (CUP, 1930), 92.

²⁵³¹ Fletcher, 144-146.

²⁵³² Paul Wood, Francis Frascina, Jonathan Harris and Charles Harrison (eds.), *Modernism in Dispute: Art Since the Forties* (New Haven: YUP, 1993), 241-242.

²⁵³³ William Morris, 'Art under Plutocracy' in A.L. Morton, *Political Writings of William Morris* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1973), 62.

²⁵³⁴ Claire Fontaine, *Human Strike has Already Begun & Other Writings* (Mute, 2013), 35-52.

²⁵³⁵ Macquarrie, 64-5; Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism* (London: Zed Books, 1993); Braidotti, (2013), 70-71.

²⁵³⁶ J.P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City: A Defense of Christianity* (Ada. MI: Baker, 1995), 225, 263; Sammon, 42-45. But see Tennant, 89-93 and its origins in Aristotle, *Metaphysics*: I (984b 11-14) and XII, 7; Plato, *Timaeus* 28a. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (HUP, 2007); Hadot, c.16.

²⁵³⁷ William Morris, *A Dream of John Ball* (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1900), 2.

²⁵³⁸ Morris, 'Art and Socialism' in Morton (1973), 109-133

²⁵³⁹ 'For according to Dionysius, the good involves the notion of diffusing itself.' *CRom*2.1.182 (2020), 83; *STIII*.1.1

²⁵⁴⁰ *CH*4.1

²⁵⁴¹ Tennant, 91

²⁵⁴² *CH*1 (121CD); 'for the beauty of the spirit is other than that of the body.' *IDNIV*.6, 359.

²⁵⁴³ *Enneads* III.5.17. 'The oldest language was music,' Hamann (2007), 211.

²⁵⁴⁴ *Enneads* 1.6.1; 1.6.3.

²⁵⁴⁵ *ST*1.5.4.1; *ST*II-II.27.1.3; c.f. *Phaedrus* (250 B-E)

man's conduct or actions being well proportioned in respect of the spiritual clarity of reason.²⁵⁴⁶ This intellectual or intelligible aspect of beauty is part of the Platonic heritage, for whom it derives from *nous*,²⁵⁴⁷ or is even identified with *nous*.²⁵⁴⁸ But, whereas for Plotinus this is the first emanation from the One,²⁵⁴⁹ for Dionysius and Aquinas it is a name of the Trinitarian One.²⁵⁵⁰ Beauty is universal and penetrates all things: 'the Beauty of the unity and the harmony of the whole.'²⁵⁵¹ On Aquinas' interpretation, whatever unity creatures possess, 'they have from the power of the beautiful.'²⁵⁵² This is where the Areopagite's contribution is felt, since, "Beauty and goodness are beloved by all things."²⁵⁵³ As a result, on the one hand, there is something undeniably subjective about beauty, as that which is perceived by subjects or persons ('those things are called beautiful when they are *seen*'),²⁵⁵⁴ yet, on the other hand, it demands irreducibly *objective* form to evoke that response.²⁵⁵⁵ Beauty is only 'in the eye of the beholder' because it is always already in the form desirable to the eye as its 'good,' for example in proportion, integrity, colour and splendour.²⁵⁵⁶ The latter receives an extensive treatment in Dionysius under the divine name 'Light,' the 'visible image of the Good' and in Thomas' reception:²⁵⁵⁷ 'among all sensible things light is the most spiritual.'²⁵⁵⁸

Beauty can thus be defined as a principle of divine causation, supported by the Scriptural authority of Romans 11²⁵⁵⁹ and expressed *via* three Aristotelian 'causes'.²⁵⁶⁰ Firstly, as formal cause of the Good,²⁵⁶¹ 'Beauty consists in due proportion, for the senses delight in rightly proportioned things...beauty properly involves the notion of formal causes.'²⁵⁶² This is not to say that properties such as symmetry exhaust the meaning of beauty, but they proceed from Beauty as their paradigm,²⁵⁶³ Secondly, Beauty is the efficient cause of beautiful things. 'For since it loves

²⁵⁴⁶ *STII-II.145.2*

²⁵⁴⁷ Cratylus (416), *nous* is 'the principle of beauty.'

²⁵⁴⁸ *Enneads* V.8.9; Sammon, 64. For a Biblical suggestion of this idea see Psalm 19:1-3.

²⁵⁴⁹ *Enneads* 1.6.2; Sammon, 9. We have seen earlier how Proclus' distinction is reworked in the Byzantine essence/energies bipolarity.

²⁵⁵⁰ Sammon, 181; Anderregan, 446-7

²⁵⁵¹ *DN7* (872B), inspiring the title of Kharlamov's work.

²⁵⁵² *IDNIV.6* (1994), 362

²⁵⁵³ *STI-II.26.1.4*

²⁵⁵⁴ *STI.5.4.1*

²⁵⁵⁵ 'the doctrine that aesthetic value is constituted by feeling does not imply that the feeling is not objectively evoked, as if we could see beauty when and where we chose.' Tennant, II.89.

²⁵⁵⁶ *IDNIV.1.6*; *STI.39.8*; *STII-II.145.2*; *Enneads* 1.6.1; Eco (2010), 88, 125; Etienne Gilson, *The Arts of the Beautiful* (New York: Charles Scribner's sons, 1965), 28-34.

²⁵⁵⁷ *DN4* (700A-C); *IDNIV.1.5*; *IDCVI*; Anderregan, 446-7, to be developed by Robert Grosseteste into a full blown cosmology of light, *Commentary on the Divine Names* VII. Eco (2010), 126.

²⁵⁵⁸ *LEJob37* (1989), 405; *IVSSS49.4.5* qc3 ad 3.

²⁵⁵⁹ *IDNIV.9* (80-89), 372.

²⁵⁶⁰ *IDNIV.6* (94-104), 362.

²⁵⁶¹ Porro, TA, 204.

²⁵⁶² *STI.5.4.1*, trans. Eco (1988), 56-57.

²⁵⁶³ *IDNIV.6*, 362, c.f. Proclus, *IPIV* (855).

proper beauty, it wants to multiply it as far as possible, namely through communication of its own similitude.²⁵⁶⁴ Thirdly, Beauty as the Final Cause is synonymous with the Good according to its intellectual or cognitive respect,²⁵⁶⁵ for if the Good is ‘that which all things desire’²⁵⁶⁶ as their end, and beauty refers specifically to what is ‘pleasing to the intellect,’ then beauty too shares the status of objective Goodness. According to *IDN*, the Good ‘includes in itself’ light and beauty.²⁵⁶⁷ From *Divine Names*, Aquinas takes up Dionysius’ play on *καλλονή* (beauty) as deriving from *καλέω* (to call),²⁵⁶⁸ felicitously preserved in English. Hence beauty ‘calls’ to the eyes,²⁵⁶⁹ invoking a recognition and return to a higher implicate order,²⁵⁷⁰ as Plato unveils in *Phaedrus*,²⁵⁷¹ *Symposium*²⁵⁷² and *Timaeus*.

In Plotinus’ treatment of Beauty, this anagogic tradition is associated with the ecstatic yearnings of *Dionysus*.²⁵⁷³ The choice of pen name by the author of the *CD* author thus suggests a *double entendre* for someone enraptured by beauty. However, the monotheistic Dionysius directs his ‘hymns of yearning’ to the Trinitarian God Who is Beauty from Whom the kaleidoscope of beauties cascade:

That, beautiful beyond being, is said to be Beauty – for it gives beauty from itself in a manner appropriate to each, it causes the consonance and splendour of all, it flashes upon all, after the manner of light, the beauty producing gifts of its flowering ray, it calls all to itself, when it is called beauty.²⁵⁷⁴

Beauty as a Divine Name appears to be another unique contribution of Dionysius, since it is not so explicitly identified by any previous writer.²⁵⁷⁵ It is a common name of all the Trinitarian persons.²⁵⁷⁶ Aquinas reveals an inestimable debt to Dionysius in acknowledging this insight.²⁵⁷⁷ Nevertheless, both writers defend themselves from novelty by appealing to the Scriptural

²⁵⁶⁴ *IDNIV.6*, 362.

²⁵⁶⁵ *IDNIV.6*, 362; 4.9 (5-12), 369.

²⁵⁶⁶ *SPsalms* 25.5.

²⁵⁶⁷ *IDNIV-1*, 338.

²⁵⁶⁸ *IDNIV.6*, 359; *DN4* (701D) and earlier by Plato, *Cratylus* (416).

²⁵⁶⁹ c.f. I Sam. 16:12

²⁵⁷⁰ *IDNIV.6* (32-44), 359.

²⁵⁷¹ *Phaedrus*, 247ff.

²⁵⁷² *Symposium*, 210a

²⁵⁷³ *Enneads* 1.6.5.

²⁵⁷⁴ *DN2.7* in Eco (1988), 24.

²⁵⁷⁵ *DN4* (701A-705A); Sammon, 7, 120.

²⁵⁷⁶ *DN2* (637B); Ivanovic, 52.

²⁵⁷⁷ *IDNIV.9* (68), 372.

authority of Canticles 1 and Psalm 95 to justify their claim (in consonance with our findings in Chapter 1).²⁵⁷⁸

By means of Aquinas' reception of Dionysius on Beauty, we can redeem the language of *theopoiesis* from its postmodern captivity.²⁵⁷⁹ For Aquinas, the 'call' of beauty is not without a Caller,²⁵⁸⁰ nor does it proceed from an unknowable, indeterminate or nameless cause, as Caputo and other radical theologians would suggest.²⁵⁸¹ Whilst Caputo and Keller herald the reimagining of theology as *theopoetics*,²⁵⁸² they evacuate the term of its metaphysical grounding in the Word, as understood by the Fathers.²⁵⁸³ In them, Origen's assessment of the heretics rings true: they make gods (ποιῶσιν θεούς) from their own imagination.²⁵⁸⁴ Rather, the *poesis* of creation owes its existence to *mimesis* of the Divine Poet, since, to quote Hadot, 'the universe is a kind of poem composed by God.'²⁵⁸⁵ Language is coeval with humans as *homo sapien sapiens*, and as such is a revelation from God;²⁵⁸⁶ it is no mere mechanical tool or 'grunt.'²⁵⁸⁷ Hamann's counter-Enlightenment²⁵⁸⁸ contention that '(p)oetry is the mother tongue of the human race,²⁵⁸⁹ as 'an imitation of nature the beautiful' supports this insight.²⁵⁹⁰ Milbank astutely notes that Hamann anticipates philosophy's 'linguistic turn,' but within the context of a theological ontology.²⁵⁹¹ By denying the participatory dimension of *theopoiesis*, postmodern writers like Caputo and Keller possess only an artificial system of signs: a *pseudo*-theopoiesis, an empty *simulacrum*: empty, because on their premises the difference between the real and the representation no longer exists.²⁵⁹² It is not even the case that the signs dissimulate something; rather, 'they dissimulate that there is nothing.'²⁵⁹³ The distance between material and spiritual cannot be traversed since it

²⁵⁷⁸ IDNIV.6 (4-10), 358.

²⁵⁷⁹ Dahan, 65. 'Theopoetics' in its postmodern idiom can be traced back to Drew University in the 1960s which sought to incorporate Heidegger and Bultmann within theology. These ideas are crystallised in Amos Wilder, *Theopoetic: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), cited by David L. Miller, 'The Body is no Body' in Boesel and Keller (2010), 143-145; Keller, 24-25; 46; 306-16; 369, n.10; Caputo (2013), 15, 20-21; 95, 168, 272 n. 4. See also *Quodl.VII*.

²⁵⁸⁰ *contra* Marion's (1998), 197, 'pure call.' Benson, 208.

²⁵⁸¹ Caputo, *Insistence* (2013), 15; 115-116, 177

²⁵⁸² following Heidegger, 'poetically human beings dwell upon the earth.' Miller, 144.

²⁵⁸³ In Athanasius it is associated with deification. *De Incarnatione* 54.3; c.f. Clement, *Protrepticus* IX.87.2; XI.114.4; Origen, *De Oraciones* 27.13; Nyssanus, *Beatitudes, Sermon 5* (1954), 131; Kharlamov, 41.

²⁵⁸⁴ *HJer*.16.9; Kharlamov, 31.

²⁵⁸⁵ Hadot, 201.

²⁵⁸⁶ Venard (2020), 109-10

²⁵⁸⁷ Hamann, *Metacritique* in Hayes (2007), 211; c.f. Gen. 2:19-20.

²⁵⁸⁸ Betz, 642 argues it is better to call Hamann's philosophy an alternative Enlightenment or a 'true Enlightenment.' Betz.

²⁵⁸⁹ Hamann, *Aesthetica in nuce* (1762) in Haynes (2007), 63.

²⁵⁹⁰ *ibid*, 77.

²⁵⁹¹ Milbank (1997), 112; Franke, 245.

²⁵⁹² Hamann (2007), 210; Milbank (1997), 103.

²⁵⁹³ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (University of Michigan Press, 1994), 6.

is illusory,²⁵⁹⁴ the ‘desert of the real.’²⁵⁹⁵ The deconstructivist theft of *theopoeis* lacks any *imago dei* to account for *homo poeticus*, which consequently becomes an unintelligible brute fact, a ‘play of signifiers,’²⁵⁹⁶ signifying ‘nothing.’

Aquinas offers a metasemiotic alternative, specifically a beautiful discourse concerning objectively beautiful reality: *saving theopoesis*.²⁵⁹⁷ If Dostoevsky’s idiot was right to prophesy, ‘Beauty will save the world’²⁵⁹⁸ (a paradoxical beauty mediated through the sufferings of Christ),²⁵⁹⁹ then, by ‘saving Dionysius,’ Aquinas is part of the answer to lostness for he reaffirms that ‘beauty preserves all things’.²⁶⁰⁰ Aquinas’ normative reading of Dionysius provides a true *theopoesis* which saves the world of appearances. It also saves philosophy by renewing the ‘sense of wonder’ from the matrix whence it was born²⁶⁰¹ and to which Heidegger longed to return.²⁶⁰² Unlike post-Kantian discourse, where beauty is not an object of knowledge (and is therefore ‘nothing’ outside of human experience), and ‘“mind” is a word which leads us astray,’²⁶⁰³ Aquinas insists with Dionysius that beauty is an act of cognition,²⁶⁰⁴ a recognition of truth about the world as it *really* is. He unexpectedly realises Derrida’s dream of ‘the becoming theological of all discourse.’²⁶⁰⁵ ‘God reveals himself,’ writes Tennant ‘in many ways; and some men enter His Temple by the Gate Beautiful.’²⁶⁰⁶ Hierarchy is positively for Dionysius ‘an image of the beauty of God.’²⁶⁰⁷ God has willed the beauty of the cosmos and its perfection,²⁶⁰⁸ as an outworking of his love.²⁶⁰⁹

For Dionysius, beauty is both the content and the form of true theology: ‘(t)heology, in its sacred utterances concerning the formless Intelligences, does indeed use poetic symbolism (*eikonographia*).’²⁶¹⁰ Thomas’ compositions of hymns and prayers, in common with the hymnwriter

²⁵⁹⁴ Venard (2020), 104.

²⁵⁹⁵ Baudrillard (1994), 1.

²⁵⁹⁶ Jacques Derrida, ‘*Différance*’ in Kearney and Rainwater (2003), 455.

²⁵⁹⁷ Alejandro Garcia-Rivera calls *theopoesis*, ‘the art of making theological discourse affecting and beautiful’ in *The Community of the Beautiful: A Theological Aesthetic* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1999) in Sammon, 2. See also Milbank (1997), 32.

²⁵⁹⁸ Prince Myskin in *The Idiot*; c.f. *SPsalms* 44.2; Ryan, 52.

²⁵⁹⁹ As we argued in Chapter 1, the motif of the Cross, in spite of Luther’s critique, is not altogether absent in Dionysius.

²⁶⁰⁰ *IDNIV.6*, 362.

²⁶⁰¹ *ST1.12.1*; Plato, *Theaetetus* (155CD); Aristotle, *Metaphysics*1.2 (982B)

²⁶⁰² Martin Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy: Selected ‘Problems’ of ‘Logic,’* trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Bloomington: IUP, 1994), 140-1.

²⁶⁰³ Caputo, *Insistence* (2013), 115.

²⁶⁰⁴ Cunningham (2002), 74, 90.

²⁶⁰⁵ Derrida (2008), 145.

²⁶⁰⁶ Tennant, 93.

²⁶⁰⁷ *CH3* (165B)

²⁶⁰⁸ *Sermon* 15 (2010), 222.

²⁶⁰⁹ *Sermon* 11 (2010), 141; c.f. *DN4* (708A-B); 4 (712A-B).

²⁶¹⁰ *CH2*.

Dionysius, display how profoundly aesthetics permeate the very *form* of his discourse.²⁶¹¹ But these represent only the tip of the iceberg which include those arguments of ‘fittingness’ (*convenientia*), identified by Rousselot as bearing the marks of artistic or poetic theology.²⁶¹² The corresponding term in Dionysius is the frequently used *εὐπρέπεια* (‘well-fitting’).²⁶¹³ the ‘fitting’ outworking of its Subject, the God Who is Beauty.²⁶¹⁴ Venard examines the *Summa* from its aspect as a work of art²⁶¹⁵ and furnishes an example of a masterful retrieval of this forgotten strand of ‘Thomsonian Poetics.’²⁶¹⁶

4.Hierarchy and politics.

‘Art imitates nature.’²⁶¹⁷ Aristotle’s maxim witnesses to the symbolic nature of the created world. That is why Aquinas is sanguine that cosmological principles apply to the ‘art’ of politics.²⁶¹⁸ From Aristotle, he learns that ‘man is a political animal,’ understood as ‘a social animal’ which requires some form of social structure.²⁶¹⁹ Even in a state of innocence, people of diverse gifts needed directing towards their common good and this direction (understood in terms of counsel rather than subjugation) is the duty of the wise.²⁶²⁰

By extension, Thomas infers a ‘natural’ order to society which favours a single ruler. This parallels the unitary nature of the celestial hierarchy, contrary to the Manichean doctrine of two principles.²⁶²¹ In the political sphere, therefore, hierarchy translates into ‘one principality--that is, one multitude ordered in one way under the rule of a prince.’²⁶²² An acceptance of hierarchy, then tends towards a preference for monarchy as the best form of government (on the assumption that the king is virtuous),²⁶²³ on the ‘probable’ authority of Aristotle,²⁶²⁴ but justified by selective passages of Scripture.²⁶²⁵ As a corollary, Thomas argues that it is lawful to desire anything required for one’s station in life and ‘(a) king needs more than a count.’²⁶²⁶ Aquinas

²⁶¹¹ Anderson and Moser (2000), Murray (2013). See Betz, 649 for parallels in Hamann.

²⁶¹² Rousselot (1908), 159f.

²⁶¹³ *EHA* (473C); Ivanonovic, 70.

²⁶¹⁴ *STIII*.1.1

²⁶¹⁵ Venard (2020), C5.

²⁶¹⁶ O’Regan (2020), 695-707

²⁶¹⁷ *DP*6.3.

²⁶¹⁸ *DRR*1.13.93; 1.15.102, 19 (2012), 58; *DV*9.3; *STI-II*.57.5.3; Aristotle, *Physics* 2

²⁶¹⁹ *Politics*, 1 (1253); *CAP*1.1.21 (2007), 6. Marx echoes Aquinas’ formulation: ‘man, if not as Aristotle thought a political animal, is at all events a social animal.’ *Capital* (1990), 1.444.

²⁶²⁰ *ST*1.92.1.2; *ST*1.96.4

²⁶²¹ *DSS*17. 86; *ST*1.11.3

²⁶²² *ST*1.108.2, *sc*

²⁶²³ *CAP*II.7 (2007), 117-118.

²⁶²⁴ *ST*1.108.1.1; *Metaphysics* 12, *Politics* 3.4. Aquinas erroneously gives a ‘natural’ argument from the ‘king’ bee! *DRR*, trans. Paul E. Sigmund (ed), *St Thomas Aquinas on Politics and Ethics* (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), 17; *CAP*II.7 (2007), 117.

²⁶²⁵ *DRR*1.2.12; 1.3.20.

²⁶²⁶ *The Lectures on St. Matthew*, Matthew 6:5-8, trans. Tugwell (1988), 469.

concedes that kingship was not God's original plan for Israel, but draws back from questioning the institution itself.²⁶²⁷ Instead, he blames its failures on 'the weakness of the Jews,'²⁶²⁸ who Aquinas describes most infamously in his letter to the 'Duchess of Brabant'²⁶²⁹ as 'destined to perpetual slavery' in 'consequence of their sin.'²⁶³⁰

Consequently, Aquinas tolerates much inequality within society,²⁶³¹ reinforcing Plato's threefold class system of nobles, middle class and common people.²⁶³² There is some weight therefore to Archibald's criticism that Aquinas idealises the structure of his own society and sanctifies privilege as such.²⁶³³ Nevertheless, we will proceed to examine four ways in which Aquinas transforms Dionysian hierarchy through important distinctions or limits to absolute power, before giving a final assessment of his greatness and limitations.

4.1 'Kings' by equivocation.

Since, for Dionysius, hierarchy is established on the capacity of each level to receive divine illumination, the possibility of someone holding a rank only nominally is not seriously entertained.²⁶³⁴ Golitzin writes candidly: '...what appears to be his identification of advancement into God as coterminous with priestly rank must, from a Christian perspective, be reckoned one of the gravest defects of his system.'²⁶³⁵ By contrast, Aquinas more clearly grasps that government is truly just only if it is ordered to the common good,²⁶³⁶ since the purpose of government is to lead a thing to its proper end (from *gubernator*, 'pilot').²⁶³⁷ In political society, that end is not to become wealthy, healthy or even wise, but to live 'well' or 'virtuously.'²⁶³⁸ In the empirical world, laws are not always just *de facto*, but *de jure* a true law should follow its *telos* which is virtue.²⁶³⁹ Regimes which do not operate on the basis of natural law nor for the benefit of their subjects are not virtuous and are perversions of the good.²⁶⁴⁰ On this principle, which was inconceivable for Dionysius, it becomes a live possibility now that a tyrant be called 'King' by

²⁶²⁷ *CRom*13.1.1022

²⁶²⁸ *DRR*1.5.34.

²⁶²⁹ Probably to be identified with the Countess of Flanders and dated c.1271. Porro, TA, 353-5.

²⁶³⁰ *De Regimine Judaeorum*, trans. Dawson in A.P. D'Entrèves, *Aquinas: Selected Political Writings* (Oxford: Blackwell), 1965, 85. Disgracefully, Aquinas goes on to endorse the Fourth Lateran Council decree that 'Jews of both sexes in every Christian land should always be distinguished from other people by a special dress.' Sigmund, 75, n.3; Little, 43; D'Entrèves, xxii, 95.

²⁶³¹ *DSS*12.66

²⁶³² *ST*1.108.2, c.f. Plato, *Republic* IVf..

²⁶³³ Katherine Archibald, 'The concept of Social Hierarchy in the Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas' (1949-50) in Sigmund, 142.

²⁶³⁴ *EP*8 (292B); *EH*7 (564B)

²⁶³⁵ Golitzin, 181.

²⁶³⁶ *DRR*1.1. 9; 2.19; *DV*5.3; *ST*1-II.90.4

²⁶³⁷ *DSS*17.89

²⁶³⁸ *DRR*1.15, 103-106 (2012), 58-59; *DV*5.3, following Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.2 (1094b, 8-11).

²⁶³⁹ *CAP*11.13 (2007),146; *ST*1-II.93.1.

²⁶⁴⁰ *ST*1-II.95.2

equivocation.²⁶⁴¹ ‘He is a king if he should be virtuous,’ defined as ‘keeping as his goal the common benefit of his subjects.’²⁶⁴² Again, ‘(a) king is someone who is intent upon the good of the people by his reign,’²⁶⁴³ hence, Christ is the perfect king.²⁶⁴⁴ The distinction between king and tyrant will be further exploited by Wyclif, with the development that sin breaches the hierarchy and abrogates its authority, as in the case of fallen angels.²⁶⁴⁵ A precedent for this distinction already existed in John of Salisbury (d.1180)²⁶⁴⁶ now adopted by Thomas. Tyranny is the ‘worst form of government’ because on such a basis, unjust power is centralised to maximum effect for harm.²⁶⁴⁷ Democracy is, by contrast, the weakest form of government²⁶⁴⁸ (at least in its crude Spartan form)²⁶⁴⁹ and therefore not ideal, yet paradoxically, for that very reason it is also the least harmful of the alternatives to monarchy,²⁶⁵⁰ and ‘the most tolerable’ of unjust governments.²⁶⁵¹ An unjust democracy has at least checks and balances, since the many ‘mutually hinder one another.’²⁶⁵² Similarly, regimes which incorporate elements of monarchy, aristocracy and democracy ‘moderate’ or ‘restrain’ one another and there is less reason for rebellion if all citizens share a stake in the community.²⁶⁵³ This final point, explored in the mature *Summa*, thus qualifies Thomas’ simple endorsement of monarchy as the ‘best’ form of government, since a commitment to different spheres of authority results in a mixed constitution with elements of aristocracy and democracy.²⁶⁵⁴

The best governments are the ones which rule with virtue, so an ‘aristocracy’ is properly so called only if it is the rule of the ‘best’ or most ‘virtuous’ citizens. Therefore, just as the title of ‘king’ is equivocal if he does not serve the common good, similarly if rulers are appointed merely on the basis of wealth or power, this *polis* should be recognised for what it is, namely an ‘oligarchy.’²⁶⁵⁵ Aquinas helpfully categorises ‘virtue’ as belonging to the order of reason and not pure will. The weakness of both tyranny and ‘democracy’ is their appeal to naked will, divorced from reason. Aquinas’ observations have enduring lessons for the current political crisis.

²⁶⁴¹ DRR1.4-7; 11-12; CRom13.1.1039

²⁶⁴² CAPII.7 (2007), 117.

²⁶⁴³ Sermon 19, 2.2.1 (2010), 290. See also STII-II.105.1.2.

²⁶⁴⁴ JCGIII.64.

²⁶⁴⁵ Luscombe in Hudson and Wilks (1987), 234-235.

²⁶⁴⁶ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, c.1 in Poole, 205.

²⁶⁴⁷ DRR1.4.22, since ‘a force operating for evil is more harmful when it is one than when it is divided.’

²⁶⁴⁸ DRR1.2.17. This follows Plato’s *Republic* IX and Aristotle’s, *Politics* V.

²⁶⁴⁹ CAPII (2007), 14

²⁶⁵⁰ DRR1.4.23

²⁶⁵¹ DRR1.4. 25

²⁶⁵² DRR1.4.25

²⁶⁵³ CAPII.7, 14, (2007), 118, 155; DRR1.4.24.

²⁶⁵⁴ STI-II.95.4; D’Entrèves, xxix.

²⁶⁵⁵ CAPII.7,14 (2007), 117.

Western democracies in the 21st century have been wounded by voluntarism, tending towards moral decline, persecution and loss of freedom.²⁶⁵⁶

4.2 Limits on Obedience.

This leads to our second important point concerning Aquinas' reception of hierarchy: the recognition of limits on obedience. Whilst God must be obeyed absolutely, the same is not true of human authorities who possess only relative authority,²⁶⁵⁷ the father relative to the household, the employer relative to employment, the commander relative to matters of war.²⁶⁵⁸ Though this might seem like a mitigation of hierarchy, from Aquinas' standpoint, this limitation is its true interpretation and consequence, for 'the divine order requires that a lower power not be obeyed in opposition to a higher one.'²⁶⁵⁹ As Pabst argues, the metaphysics of hierarchy thus sets objective limits to political rule and resists the flattening out of reality into infinite univocal being (Hegel). It prevents the logic of unrestrained will characteristic of the (modern) doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings or Nietzsche's 'will to power.'²⁶⁶⁰

We have already seen in regards to the angelic hierarchy how Thomas concedes that there is no exact equivalence with the terrestrial, which tacitly acknowledges its imperfection and propensity for evil.²⁶⁶¹ The doctrine of the Fall is more pronounced in Aquinas²⁶⁶² than in Dionysius, for whom the Neoplatonic schema of illumination dominates. However, we have already seen notable exceptions from *EH*.²⁶⁶³ Dionysius admits that "(n)o one is free of filth," citing the LXX of Job 14:4.²⁶⁶⁴ Still, Aquinas goes further, following the *Vulgate* and expounds original sin in Augustinian terms as the 'infection of concupiscence'²⁶⁶⁵ against Pelagius.²⁶⁶⁶ This has consequences for the limits Aquinas places on obedience, since whereas Dionysius had instructed the initiate to promise 'complete obedience to whatever is laid before him,'²⁶⁶⁷ Aquinas erects the normative Scriptural boundary: '(a) prelate is not to be obeyed contrary to a Divine precept: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5: 29).'²⁶⁶⁸ The same Scripture is invoked in *STI-II.96.4* to demonstrate that some laws must never be obeyed, such as laws of

²⁶⁵⁶ Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (Sentinel, 2017), esp. c.2.

²⁶⁵⁷ *CJobn*2.2.354

²⁶⁵⁸ *STII-II.104.5*; *STII-II.161.3.1*.

²⁶⁵⁹ *CRom*13.1.1028.

²⁶⁶⁰ Adrian Pabst, *Metaphysics: The Creation of Hierarchy* (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2012), 447-8.

²⁶⁶¹ *DRR*1.13.94; 15.102-110 (2012), 60-61.

²⁶⁶² *SCGIII.81.6*, citing Eccl. 10:5-6.

²⁶⁶³ *EH3* (440C) and our Chapter 1.

²⁶⁶⁴ *EH7* (561D), 255. Nyssanus cites this text in, *The Lord's Prayer, Sermon 5* (1954), 79.

²⁶⁶⁵ *LEJob*14:3-7(1989), 224; *CRom*5.3.410 (2020), 166.

²⁶⁶⁶ *DAF1*; *DM4-5*; Porro, TA, 271-3.

²⁶⁶⁷ *EH2* (393B).

²⁶⁶⁸ *STII-II.33.7.5*; 104.5, *sc.*; *CRom*13.1.1028.

tyrants inducing idolatry, which are contrary to the Divine good and the Divine law.²⁶⁶⁹ Again, an ‘unjust law’ is strictly speaking a ‘law’ only by equivocation, for as Augustine says, ‘a law that is not just, seems to be no law at all.’²⁶⁷⁰

In the same spirit, *Sermon* 8 advises ‘discretion in being obedient’.²⁶⁷¹ An extreme example is an innocent person defending himself against the death penalty. Here, the rulers are like ‘wolves seizing their prey and shedding blood,’ therefore, ‘it is also permissible in such a case to resist evil rulers.’²⁶⁷² In such cases, disobedience does not negate hierarchical principles, since even in military hierarchy, ‘if the proconsul tells you to do one thing, when the emperor has told you to do something else, is there any doubt that you should ignore the one and serve the other?’²⁶⁷³ Natural science provides another illustration. Whereas fire would normally burn whatever it comes into contact with, this norm can be overruled by a higher power such as water.²⁶⁷⁴ The principle of limits on obedience will later be exploited by Grosseteste in his famous conflict with the Pope.²⁶⁷⁵

4.3 Submitting to one’s inferior

Thirdly, Aquinas acknowledges with critics of Dionysius that it is right in some cases for the superior to submit to the inferior. One example from the commentaries is Christ’s submission to John in baptism.²⁶⁷⁶ Origen had already recognised this truth in regard to Christ’s submission to his parents as a boy:

Let anyone see that often an inferior person is placed in authority over better persons, so that he who is subject is better than he who seems to be placed in authority. When he who is higher in rank understands this, he is not puffed up with pride because of his higher rank, but knows that someone subject to him may be his better, as Jesus was subject to Joseph.²⁶⁷⁷

In spite of Origen’s influence on Dionysius, the latter makes no reference to this passage. In Aquinas’ exposition of Luke 2:51, he argues that it is not necessarily proud to judge oneself

²⁶⁶⁹ *Matt.*15:6 in *ST*1-II.96.4.2 and *Isaiah* 10:1 in *ST*1-II.96.4.3

²⁶⁷⁰ *ST*1-II.96.4

²⁶⁷¹ *Sermon* 8 (2010),107.

²⁶⁷² *ST*III-II.69.4, trans. Sigmund, 73.

²⁶⁷³ *ST*III-II.104.5, trans. Tugwell (1988), citing Lombard’s gloss on *Roms.*13:2. See also *ST*1-II.96.5.

²⁶⁷⁴ *ST*III-II.104.5

²⁶⁷⁵ Robert Grosseteste, *Epistolae* CXXVIII in Luscombe (1987), 238; Lechler, *John Wycliffe and his English Precursors*, trans. Lorimer (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1878), 35-36.

²⁶⁷⁶ *CJohn*1.14.266.

²⁶⁷⁷ *HLuke*19-20 in Trigg (1998), 197.

better in some areas than others are.²⁶⁷⁸ Whilst some will exceed for example in knowledge, others will be closer to God in holiness and ‘on that account superiors may be taught by inferiors’ as Thomas says in the *Summa*.²⁶⁷⁹

But this also entails a true limit in which one should refrain from submission if it would lead to the other’s spiritual detriment.²⁶⁸⁰ As Jesus the Exemplar shows, submission to human authorities is not absolute.²⁶⁸¹ Jesus did not submit in areas which would have led him away from God. Aquinas makes it clear that the secular state is subject to spiritual power in respect of ‘things that regard the salvation of the soul.’²⁶⁸² Moreover, ‘(w)ithin their own sphere of authority, superiors are intermediaries between God and their subjects, but in everything else people are subject to God without intermediaries and he himself instructs them by means of the natural law and the written law.’²⁶⁸³ This is why outside of the *De Regno*, as we have seen, Aquinas favours a ‘mixed’ government over absolute monarchy which qualifies the ‘probable’ authority of Aristotle.²⁶⁸⁴

4.4 Correction of a Superior.

For Aquinas, this principle extends to our fourth point: permission for the inferior to correct the superior. Dionysius had warned that anyone questioning orders from superiors displays ‘audacity’ and ‘arrogance,’ even if their complaint is correct,²⁶⁸⁵ echoing Proclus that ‘prior principles possess certain powers which transcend their inferiors and are incomprehensible to subsequent grades.’²⁶⁸⁶ Consequently, it is unthinkable for Dionysius that a lower rank should correct a ‘higher.’²⁶⁸⁷ If one of the hierarchs should fall into error, only his peers have the right to correct him.²⁶⁸⁸ Deacons should not challenge decisions by priests,²⁶⁸⁹ a transgression committed by the monk Demophilus (literally ‘love of the people/mob,’ perhaps a coded criticism of democracy?).²⁶⁹⁰ Since Dionysius himself rebukes Demophilus in *EP8* and a priest in *EP6*, this strongly suggests that Dionysius (contrary to widespread opinion)²⁶⁹¹ was of higher rank at the

²⁶⁷⁸ *STII-II.33.4.3.*

²⁶⁷⁹ *STI.106.3.1.*

²⁶⁸⁰ *STII-II.161.3*

²⁶⁸¹ *Sermon 8* (2010), 106-107.

²⁶⁸² *IJSS44.2.3*

²⁶⁸³ *STII-II.104.5*, trans. Tugwell (1988), 599.

²⁶⁸⁴ Porro, TA, 237.

²⁶⁸⁵ *EP8* (1089B)). This text is insufficiently acknowledged in Louth’s *apologia* for Dionysian hierarchy, ‘The Reception of Dionysius in the Byzantine World: Maximus to Palamas’ in Coakley and Stang, 65.

²⁶⁸⁶ *ET150* (2004), 133. See also *ET70* (2004), 66 which became the first proposition of the *Liber de causis*.

²⁶⁸⁷ *EH5* (508C); Roques, 177.

²⁶⁸⁸ *EP8* (1093C)

²⁶⁸⁹ *EP8* (1088C); see also *EH5* (508C).

²⁶⁹⁰ *EP8* (1088B- 1092C).

²⁶⁹¹ e.g. Balthasar (1995), II.178,

time of writing, probably that of 'hierarch' (at least in his assumed literary role), as Arthur points out.²⁶⁹² In *EH*, the hierarch retains the priestly title 'angel of the all-powerful Lord God' from *Malachi*,²⁶⁹³ which, Severus repeats in his epistle to Stephen, bishop of Tripolis, adding cumulative evidence for the hypothesis that Severus is 'Dionysius'.²⁶⁹⁴

It is frequently the case that when Aquinas departs from, or qualifies Dionysius, he appeals to Augustine for support and such is the case here. He dismisses the objections to the proposition that a man has a duty to correct his prelate, including one based on *EP8*. To the contrary

Augustine says in his Rule: "Show mercy not only to yourselves, but also to him who, being in the higher position among you, is therefore in greater danger." If fraternal correction is a work of mercy, it follows that even prelates ought to be corrected.²⁶⁹⁵

Fleshed out as a political principle, Aquinas finds common ground with the rule of the Spartan *ephors*: 'it is better that they be subject to some supervision, namely that they could be removed if they should be found lacking.'²⁶⁹⁶ Consequently, it is not inherently sinful to resist nor even to overthrow a tyrannical government, rather the tyrant's own actions are seditious for harming the community under his care.²⁶⁹⁷ But although Aquinas approves Aristotle's opinion that 'the reward of great honours is...given to those who kill tyrants,'²⁶⁹⁸ and testifies to God's providence in the overthrow of tyrants by their people,²⁶⁹⁹ he draws back from advocating revolution on the pragmatic grounds that this may have the unseen consequences of greater anarchy or tyranny (a judgement vindicated by history).²⁷⁰⁰ The early church example of patient endurance under persecution is implored from 1 Peter 2:18-19.²⁷⁰¹ In extreme cases, help could be sought from a neighbouring government to remove the tyrant.²⁷⁰² Aquinas commends the example of Solon for granting the people power to choose its rulers and to correct their mistakes²⁷⁰³ (an example approved by Luther.)²⁷⁰⁴ So, although a subject has no automatic

²⁶⁹² Arthur, 158.

²⁶⁹³ Malachi 2:7 (LXX) in *EH7* (561D).

²⁶⁹⁴ 'It is written: "The lips of a priest shall keep knowledge, and they shall ask for a law from his mouth."' Brooks, 44.

²⁶⁹⁵ *STII-II.33.4*, *sc.* See also *SSIV.19.2.2*, *qc*, 3, *sc.* 'Not age, but rather divine inspiration is the sufficient cause of wisdom.' *LEJob32.1* (1989), 367.

²⁶⁹⁶ *CAPII.14.6* (2007), 156.

²⁶⁹⁷ *STII-II.42.3*.

²⁶⁹⁸ *CAPII.8* (2007), 127 which is an indirect citation of 'it is also more honourable to kill a tyrant than a thief.' (*Politics* 1267a), 122.

²⁶⁹⁹ *LEJob34.20* (1989), 386.

²⁷⁰⁰ *STII-II.42.2.3*; 118.8.5.

²⁷⁰¹ *DRR1.7.45-47*; Poole, 212.

²⁷⁰² *STII-II.40.1*; 42.2.3.

²⁷⁰³ *CAPIII.17*, n.4, (2007), 176.

authority to punish those in authority over him, in the context of the Church at least, a subject does have a duty to correct, since proper correction is *an act of love*.²⁷⁰⁵ It is, of course, taken for granted that the proper attitude for correction is one of gentleness and respect following 1 Timothy 5:1.²⁷⁰⁶ An example of proper correction is seen in the case of Archippus:

But one who is not an equal can reprove privately and respectfully. Hence the Apostle in writing to the Colossians (4:17) tells them to admonish their prelate: "Say to Archippus: Fulfil thy ministry [*Vulgate*]: "Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it."²⁷⁰⁷

It is significant that it is in this context that Aquinas cites *EP8*. On Thomas' reading, Demophilus is not wrong *per se* for correcting a prelate (contrary to *EP8* (1088C)), but only 'for rebuking a priest *with insolence*, by striking and turning him out of the church.'²⁷⁰⁸ In fact, to the contrary, 'if the faith were endangered, a subject *ought* to rebuke his prelate even publicly.' Thus the absolute instruction of Dionysius is diluted by Aquinas, following the permission of Augustine. Perhaps Aquinas' seminal thought created conceptual space for this qualification to be evolve within the later 'positive' stream of reception, for example into John of Paris' doctrine of separation of powers.²⁷⁰⁹ Thomas' normative role of the literal sense plausibly created the conditions for a greater form/freedom balance in the governments of Northern Europe than those which have emerged in those most directly influenced by (unreformed) Dionysian hierarchy.²⁷¹⁰

Following Maximus²⁷¹¹ and Anselm,²⁷¹² however, Thomas adds a new apex to the ecclesiastical hierarchy not present in the *CD*,²⁷¹³ namely the 'successor of St. Peter, the Vicar of Christ.' To the Roman Pontiff, 'all the kings of the Christian People are to be subject as to our

²⁷⁰⁴ Pelikan (ed.), *Luther's Works* 13, *Selected Psalms II* (1956), 210.

²⁷⁰⁵ *STII-II.33.4*; *IVSSS19.2.2*, qc.3, *sc.*, citing Sirach 17:14.

²⁷⁰⁶ See also *CRom12.1.955*.

²⁷⁰⁷ *STII-II.33.4.2*.

²⁷⁰⁸ *STII-II.33.4*

²⁷⁰⁹ *Tractatus de potestate regia et papali* (1302), 10 and 14, trans. Watt, *On Royal and Papal Power* (Toronto: The Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1971).

²⁷¹⁰ Poole, c.9; Luscombe (1987); Sigmund, *Nicholas of Cusa* (1963), c.4; Lechler, cc. 2-4; Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (USA: Createspace, 2012), esp. 57-82.

²⁷¹¹ *CEG36*

²⁷¹² Anselm called the church "une monarchie stricte et absolut" (PL188:1210-1245) with the Pope as the vicar of Christ. M.E. Harris, *The Notion of Papal Monarchy in the Thirteenth Century: The Idea of Paradigm in Church History* (Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2011), 4.

²⁷¹³ John Eck misuses Dionysius to defend papal supremacy against Luther. Froehlich in Rorem (1987), 41, but Dionysius' human hierarchy terminates at 'the godly bishops' *EH7.7*.

Lord Jesus Christ Himself.²⁷¹⁴ In *CEG32*, Aquinas reverses the *prima facie* meaning of Matthew 18 by arguing that Peter, not the ‘little children’ is the greatest in the kingdom – a power inherited by the Bishop of Rome. Although in one sense this makes the hierarchy more absolute, it simultaneously brings a check and balance on secular rulers who are now subject to the sanction of excommunication and by consequence the threat of forfeiting their right to obedience from their subjects.²⁷¹⁵ One example in Thomas’ lifetime was Innocent IV’s encyclical (1246) which enforced the deposition of Frederick II.²⁷¹⁶ The status and function of the Pope reflects Thomas’ belief in the different ends of human and divine government and therefore their separation.²⁷¹⁷ For the Latin Church, the Pope was the Vicar of Christ, whereas the Greeks reserved this title for the emperor.²⁷¹⁸ Consequently, beliefs regarding the status of the Bishop of Rome became a bone of contention between the respective ecclesiologies of Byzantine and Latin Christianity.²⁷¹⁹ Shortly after Thomas’ death there was a brief reconciliation²⁷²⁰ and a letter by Michael Paleologus to Pope Clement suggests that Greeks honoured the Pope as first among all priests as late as 1267.²⁷²¹ Though subjection to the rule of the Pope is necessary for salvation and for the name of ‘Christian,’²⁷²² nevertheless, in agreement with Eastern theologians and later conciliarists, Thomas’ teaching on Peter (the first Bishop of Rome) implies that even the Pope is not above correction.²⁷²³

Paul, who was Peter's subject, rebuked him in public, on account of the imminent danger of scandal concerning faith, and, as the gloss of Augustine says on Galatians 2:11, ‘Peter gave an example to superiors, that if at any time they should happen to stray from the straight path, they should not disdain to be reproved by their subjects’.²⁷²⁴

²⁷¹⁴ DRR1.15.110 (1949); *CEG35*.

²⁷¹⁵ Poole, 211.

²⁷¹⁶ Harris, 46-47.

²⁷¹⁷ DRR1.15.110(2012), 61.

²⁷¹⁸ Harris, 4, 44.

²⁷¹⁹ Harris, 3-12; Obolensky, 84-87.

²⁷²⁰ Herrin, 302

²⁷²¹ Deno J. Geanakopoulous, *Emperor Michael Paleologus and the West 1258-62* in A.N. Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (OUP, 1999) 177, n.3. See also Germanus on Peter in EHMC, 13.

²⁷²² *CEG38*; *CJobn21.2623*.

²⁷²³ Peter of Antioch defended ‘pentarchy’ (the five metropolitan sees of Christendom). Harris, 4-5.

²⁷²⁴ *STII-II.33.4.2*. Note also Peter’s humility in *CJobn21.2627*.

5. The Greatness and Limitations of Aquinas.

In *Greatness and Limitations of Freud's thought*, Erich Fromm famously contends that the measure of a writer's creativity is the extent to which it departs from conventional norms.²⁷²⁵ One weakness of this metric, rightly questioned by critics, is its *a priori* negativity,²⁷²⁶ since 'a work that had only original elements would be doomed to incomprehensibility.'²⁷²⁷ A similar prejudice is displayed by Foucault, who insists that only those discourses which 'transgress' prior conventions should be valorised as 'authors.'²⁷²⁸ As we prefaced in Chapter 1, it is not Thomas' intention to be 'progressive' in the modern sense, let alone 'transgressive.'²⁷²⁹ Counter to modernity's obsession with originality, the ancient and medieval world viewed novelty with suspicion.²⁷³⁰ Nevertheless, Fromm's criterion has partial merit in highlighting the transformative aspect of Aquinas' synthesis of previous *auctoritates*.

Bizarrely, before Dionysius, Proclus had posited a 'form' of Slavery,²⁷³¹ adding force to Marx's critique of Platonism,²⁷³² as 'an idealisation of the Egyptian caste system,'²⁷³³ itself rationalised as retribution for previous lives. A parallel doctrine attributed to Origen was rightly rejected by Aquinas.²⁷³⁴ But Neoplatonic hierarchy already shows signs of deconstruction, first in Dionysius and then in Thomas' Trinitarian theology.²⁷³⁵ We have seen in Chapter 1 that Dionysius' Christology and apophatic Trinity transcends any simple reduction to the Procline triad. The vertical ontological ranking of Being, Life and Intelligence emanating from the One,²⁷³⁶ is replaced by the Father, Son and Spirit eternally coinhering as one God.²⁷³⁷ This is why Beauty requires that 'all things together establish a reciprocal communion.'²⁷³⁸ Whilst Dionysius

²⁷²⁵ *Greatness and Limitations of Freud's Thought: A Revolutionary Study of Genius in Conflict* (Altrincham: Abacus, 1982), 4.

²⁷²⁶ See Jauss's criticism of Adorno in Holub, 72 and T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent,' in Willis, 60-61.

²⁷²⁷ Gian Biagio Conte in Willis, 41. 'The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.' Barthes (1977), 146.

²⁷²⁸ Foucault (1994), 211-212.

²⁷²⁹ Braidotti, 104; Rosemann (2018), 4. Hence Pius XII repudiates 'the reprehensible desire of novelty.' *Humani Generis* 13 and warns against 'transgressing' the limits of Catholic faith and doctrine (43).

²⁷³⁰ Especially after the copyright laws of the 18th century. Foucault (1994), 212; Holub, 63, 72; Francis Young, 'The Pastoral Epistles and the Ethics of Reading' in *JSNT* 14, (1992), 114.

²⁷³¹ *IPIV* (940).

²⁷³² *Republic* II.2. Marx also cites Xenophon *Cyropedia* VIII.2 in *Capital* (1990), 1.488.

²⁷³³ Marx (1990), 489, citing Isocrates, *Busiris*, para.15 as his source. See also Proclus, *In Timaeus* I.152-156 in Lewy (1978), 500.

²⁷³⁴ *DSS* 12.62-63

²⁷³⁵ *CT* 36-67; John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London: Routledge, 2004), c.7, esp. 127-128. On Scripture as a critique of hierarchy, Richard Bauckham, *God and the Crisis of Freedom* (Louisville: Westminster, John Knox Press, 2002), 116-128.

²⁷³⁶ Proclus, *ET* 115 (2004), 101.

²⁷³⁷ It appears that a number of subordinationist heresies had their roots in Neoplatonic hierarchy, including those of Origen, Arius and the Nestorians. J.H. Newman, *The Arians of the Fourth Century* 1.1, Sect. 3.6; 4.1-2; 5.2 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1890) 89-99; 189-195; 203-205; Appendix n.1; Edwards (2004), 108; Stępień and Kočańczyk-Bonińska, 62-67.

²⁷³⁸ *SCGIV*.1

conceives of Jesus submitting ‘in hierarchic fashion..to his most holy Father and to the Holy Spirit,²⁷³⁹ which may suggest a trace of Origenist subordinationism,²⁷⁴⁰ Dionysius’ orthodoxy can be ‘saved’ if he signifies subordinate relations rather than subordinate being or if he signifies the submission of Christ to God according to his human nature. Thus Aquinas understands a parallel reading of Christ being ‘subject to the ordinance of God the Father’ in *CH4*.²⁷⁴¹ ‘(T)here can be in the Godhead no slavery or subjection, although we understand pre-eminence in it only by reason of origin.’²⁷⁴² For Aquinas, the persons of the Trinity simply *are* subsistent relations so that, ‘in God relation and essence do not differ from one another, but are one and the same.’²⁷⁴³ No doubt, Thomas did not fully appreciate the radical implications of this Trinitarian ontology for a political metacritique.²⁷⁴⁴

The chief impediment for Thomas’ vision of justice, however, is not Dionysius, but Aristotle, who, in the face of contemporary humanitarian objections,²⁷⁴⁵ insisted that slavery was ‘natural’ for certain human beings,²⁷⁴⁶ defined as ‘living property.’²⁷⁴⁷ The master has absolute ownership over the slave, just as property belongs absolutely to its owner.²⁷⁴⁸ Aristotle’s social hierarchy places ‘by nature²⁷⁴⁹ master over slave,²⁷⁵⁰ man over woman²⁷⁵¹ and Greek over non-Greek.’²⁷⁵² Aquinas’ criticisms are noticeably muted, especially in *CAP*.²⁷⁵³ Exceptions include the acknowledgment that even the slave is free *in her thoughts*²⁷⁵⁴ which is extended by denying the slave’s moral duty of obedience to their masters in matters concerning ‘nourishment’ or having children.²⁷⁵⁵ Nevertheless, Aquinas rightly recognised from Genesis that slavery is a result of the Fall and not part of ‘nature’ as originally intended, i.e. ‘nature’ as the image of God, since slavery ‘implies of necessity a pain inflicted on the subject.’²⁷⁵⁶ The recognition of fallenness grants the hope of redemption which is already acknowledged eschatologically.²⁷⁵⁷ Aquinas is radical in re-affirming the *imago dei* of Genesis 1:26 upon all without distinction, ‘we are all equal in our

²⁷³⁹ *EH5* (512C)

²⁷⁴⁰ *OFPI.3-5*; *CJohn2.2.17* Aquinas condemns Origen’s Christology as ‘blasphemous’ in *CJohn1.58-59*.

²⁷⁴¹ *STIII.20.1*

²⁷⁴² *DP10.4*, trans. Regan, 290.

²⁷⁴³ *ST1.28.2*; Weinandy (2000), 127.

²⁷⁴⁴ Sigmund (1963), 42.

²⁷⁴⁵ *Politics* 1.3 (1253); 1.6 (1255).

²⁷⁴⁶ *Politics*1.4-5; *STII-II.57.3.2*.

²⁷⁴⁷ *Politics*1 (1254a).

²⁷⁴⁸ *Politics*1 (1254a).

²⁷⁴⁹ *Politics*1.5 (1254).

²⁷⁵⁰ *Politics*1.4-5.

²⁷⁵¹ *Politics*1.5 (1254); *ST1.92.1.1*.

²⁷⁵² *Politics*1.6 (1255a).

²⁷⁵³ *CAP2-5*; *DRR1.1.10*; 1.15 (1949), 106.

²⁷⁵⁴ *STII-II.104.5*

²⁷⁵⁵ *STII-II.104.5*

²⁷⁵⁶ *ST1.96.4*

²⁷⁵⁷ *DSS12.66*

nature,²⁷⁵⁸ unlike Ancient Egypt, was granted this dignity.²⁷⁵⁹ Hence, '(i)f we all have one Father, none of us ought to despise any of our neighbours on the grounds of birth.'²⁷⁶⁰

Prior to Aquinas, this truth fuelled Nyssanus's egalitarianism, 'if God does not enslave what is free, who is he that sets his own power above God's?'²⁷⁶¹ Therefore 'he who is subject to you by custom and law is yet equal to you in dignity of nature.'²⁷⁶² In like spirit, *Apostolic Constitutions* exhorted the purchase of slaves only *in order to free them*: 'purchase a slave and save a soul.'²⁷⁶³ That this was not just hypothetical can be seen in the case of Joseph Hazzaya, a slave freed by his Christian master, who went on to become a monk and prolific writer in Northern Iraq.²⁷⁶⁴ Aquinas mentions the Trinitarian Order (founded 1198), devoted to 'redeeming captives' and in his league table of religious orders ranks them higher than those who ran hostels alone.²⁷⁶⁵

These early examples of Christian emancipation anticipate those later abolitionists who drew inspiration from Paul's plea to Philemon to release Onesimus, owing to his status as 'more than a slave, a beloved brother.'²⁷⁶⁶ Upon conversion, slaves and slave masters alike, become δούλοι of the One, who himself took the nature of a δούλος,²⁷⁶⁷ submitting to an execution reserved for slaves or common criminals.²⁷⁶⁸ The concept is thus transfigured beyond recognition in a manner parallel to how 'kingship' is progressively reconfigured in Scripture into the Kingdom of God.²⁷⁶⁹ It appears that as Christianity prevailed, slavery declined across Europe, beginning with Spain in the 8th century and then most of Europe by the 14th century, apart from the Balkan regions conquered by Slavs (from which the term 'slave' derives), before their conversion to Christianity.²⁷⁷⁰ The modern revival of slavery coincides with its expedience for a new capitalist economy in the Age of Empire.²⁷⁷¹ This history charts a 'classic' reception of

²⁷⁵⁸ STII-II.104.5; STI.93.4.

²⁷⁵⁹ Tutankhamun literally means 'Image of the god Amun'. Blocher (1984), 87.

²⁷⁶⁰ *The Lectures on St. Matthew* 6:5-8, trans. Tugwell (1988), 458.

²⁷⁶¹ Nyssanus, *Homilies on Ecclesiastes: An English Version with Supporting Studies*, ed. Stuart Hall (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993), 74.

²⁷⁶² *The Lord's Prayer, Sermon* 5 (1954), 81, and *Beatitude, Sermon* 5, (1954), 134.

²⁷⁶³ *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* II.7. LXII, 55.

²⁷⁶⁴ Hansbury, 21.

²⁷⁶⁵ STII-II.188.6

²⁷⁶⁶ Philemon 16 (one of the few Biblical books not cited in the CD).

²⁷⁶⁷ Philippians 2:7. Nyssanus, *Beatitudes, Sermon* 1 (1954), 91.

²⁷⁶⁸ Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Cross* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 51; Rosemann (2018), 54.

²⁷⁶⁹ Bauckham (2002). For an analagous transformation of violence within monasticism, see Little (1983), 198.

²⁷⁷⁰ Gerald Bray, *God is Love: A Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2012), 300; Obolensky (2000), 58.

²⁷⁷¹ John Wesley, *Thoughts Upon Slavery* (London: Joseph Crickshank, 1974), 9.

Scripture as a resource of resistance, transformation and emancipation which highlights slave owners' fear of literacy amongst slaves.²⁷⁷²

Aristotle is also the source of Aquinas' chauvenism that woman is an 'imperfect' form of man,²⁷⁷³ defended by a flawed science.²⁷⁷⁴ We have already highlighted that in the Dionysian system (containing Aristotelian elements), inherited by Aquinas, there is a 'ceiling' beyond which a woman cannot rise.²⁷⁷⁵ Nevertheless, the light of Scripture begins to break through these culturally conditioned blindspots. Thomas uses Genesis 2:18²⁷⁷⁶ to refute the position that 'the woman should not have been made in the first production of things,' or that woman is too 'weak,²⁷⁷⁷ to be a sponsor for confirmation. Aquinas removes this barrier with Galatians 3.28, 'In Christ there is neither male nor female.'²⁷⁷⁸ When discussing bodily resurrection, Thomas resists labelling relative bodily 'frailty' in women a 'deficiency,' lest it imply the heretical (Gnostic) conclusion that women would not rise as women in the resurrection.²⁷⁷⁹ He dismisses the objection that a 'woman's beauty is a cause of lust' as if this were an intrinsic evil, by insisting that 'of themselves corruptible creatures do not cause sin.'²⁷⁸⁰ In any case, Eve's sin is compensated by the love of those women faithful to Christ in his passion and whom he rewarded with resurrection appearances. When all the male disciples went home out of fear, Mary of the supposedly 'weaker sex' remained at the tomb with a 'stronger and more burning affection.'²⁷⁸¹ Thomas agrees with Cyril: 'Woman who formerly was the minister of death, is the first to see and proclaim the adorable mystery of the Resurrection: thus womankind has procured absolution from ignominy, and removal of the curse.'²⁷⁸² In this way a woman even

²⁷⁷² See Willis, 13 for references. William B. Allen commends the use of oratory to this end in *Orators and Oratory: An Address by Professor William G. Allen, Before the Dialectic Society of New York Central College, 22 June, 1852*, printed in Frederik Douglass' Paper, 22 October 1852. Hence in 1787, abolitionist Bishop Porteus ordered the catechising of slaves with Church doctrine. William Gibson, *Church, State and Society, 1760-1850* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1994), 47.

²⁷⁷³ DP3.6. (2012), 50; ST1.92.1.1; STIII-II.156.1.1; Aristotle, *Politics* 1.5 (1254); *Sermon* 16 (2010), 234. For feminist theological critiques see Dorothy Sölle, *Christ the Representative. An Essay in Theology after the 'Death of God'* (London: SCM Press, 1967); *Theology for Sceptics* (London: Mowbray, 1995), 26-27.

²⁷⁷⁴ *Generation of Animals* II.1.3, trans. Platt in Hutchins (1984) II.277-278; ST1.92.1.1; DP3.9 (2012), 63.

²⁷⁷⁵ Note his strong language of the inherent weakness of women in *Sermon* 18. 'When good doctors want to show that their medicine works, they first apply it to serious weaknesses, so that they thus become famous. The whole human race was feeble, and as for the woman it seemed that it was completely corrupted.' (2010), 264. See also DV5.3.1.

²⁷⁷⁶ ST1.92.1.1.

²⁷⁷⁷ 'Further, this sacrament is given for spiritual strength, which has more vigor in men than in women, according to Proverbs 31:10: "Who shall find a valiant woman?" Therefore at least a woman should not stand for a man in confirmation.' STIII.72.3.

²⁷⁷⁸ STIII.72.3. See also ST1.93.6.2; III.36.3.

²⁷⁷⁹ SCGIV.88.3 which rejects a gendered interpretation of Eph 4:13.

²⁷⁸⁰ DV5.3.1.

²⁷⁸¹ CJohn20.2.2491

²⁷⁸² STIII.55.1.3

becomes an ‘apostle.’²⁷⁸³ Again *Sermon* 18 radically declares that it is through Jesus’ mother, Mary, the strong, virtuous woman,²⁷⁸⁴ that the Scripture is Christologically fulfilled, ‘The Lord will make something new upon the earth: a woman will encompass a man’ (Jer. 31:22).²⁷⁸⁵

These examples, though tentative and incomplete, disclose a cautionary principle, that, at best, philosophical opinions are only ‘probable’ (and therefore provisional), compared to the truths of faith. Even when (as seen in Chapter 3) the ‘first principles’ are certain, there are always obstacles to their infallible application through human corruption.²⁷⁸⁶ This is obvious in relation to erroneous scientific statements,²⁷⁸⁷ which may impinge, as we have seen, on doctrinal points such as the status of women or ‘ensoulment’²⁷⁸⁸ (and it would be clearly foolish to defend Aquinas’ normativity in these matters),²⁷⁸⁹ but it is also true in the sphere of practical reason, where knowledge of the natural law cannot be fully accessed,²⁷⁹⁰ for example in human laws, which only imperfectly reflect the immutable natural law and where the multiplicity of situations requires, as Porro puts it ‘a certain flexibility.’²⁷⁹¹ Aquinas takes it for granted, therefore, that the views of philosophers can be improved upon and consequently that progress (in the sense of the perfecting of human reason) should be welcomed as new knowledge comes to light.²⁷⁹² This principle is clearly presupposed in the discipline of the *disputatio*, so fundamental to the idea of the university, which Aquinas inherited and developed from the Franciscan and Dominican orders²⁷⁹³ (and now threatened by the hegemony of secularism).²⁷⁹⁴ The disputation embodied an exemplary principle of self-critique through weighing up the best arguments for each position and subjecting them to the bar of reason and revelation.²⁷⁹⁵ This implies that even Thomas’ own *respondeo* is provisional,²⁷⁹⁶ witnessed in those concrete examples where he positively welcomes criticism out of a supreme commitment to truth:

²⁷⁸³ *CJohn*20.3.2519

²⁷⁸⁴ *Sermon* 18 (2010), 260-271.

²⁷⁸⁵ *Sermon* 2 (2010), 34.

²⁷⁸⁶ *ST*1-II.94.4

²⁷⁸⁷ e.g. the circular orbit of the sun and the moon (citing Dionysius), *IDNIV*.3, l.65; ‘the greater a heavy material substance is, the swifter its downward motion’ *DP*3.7 (2012), 56 (disproven by Newton); the earth as the centre of the universe *DV*5.9, sc.4; *Ad magistrum ordinis de 43 articulus*, a.17; sleep caused by the action of vapours *LEJob*33.15.

²⁷⁸⁸ following the pre-scientific embryology of Augustine *CJohn*2.3.409; *SCGII*.89; Porro, TA, 162-4

²⁷⁸⁹ Porro, TA, 164. See *Quodl.*XII.16.27.1 on this principle applied to the Fathers.

²⁷⁹⁰ *ST*1-II.94.6

²⁷⁹¹ TA, 299

²⁷⁹² *ST*1.44.2; I-II.94.5; 95.2; 97.1; Porro, TA, 298; Sigmund (1988), 56.

²⁷⁹³ Chenu (1964), 88-91; Porro, TA, 81-82; Ruben Martello, ‘St. Bonaventure as a Disciple of Hugh of St. Victor: The Influence of the *Didascalicon* on the “Reduction of the Arts to Theology”’ in *Il Santo*LVIII, 2018, 1-16.

²⁷⁹⁴ Chenu (1964), 44.

²⁷⁹⁵ ‘Urban scholars, while retaining their respect for the received tradition and drawing strength from it, sought to expose its weaknesses and contradictions in order to build upon it, in order to reach higher and see further.’ Little (1983), 174.

²⁷⁹⁶ *ibid*, 26-27; *ST*1.1.8.2.

Should anyone desire to send me a reply, his words will be very welcome to me. For the surest way to elucidate truth and to confound error is by confuting the arguments brought against the truth. Solomon says, “Iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.”²⁷⁹⁷

Weishapl elucidates how this was not merely theoretical for Aquinas:

In the odyssey of his thought he progressed from imperfect solutions to more perfect expressions of the truth. He modified earlier opinions and sometimes changed them significantly. He was never satisfied with a simple repetition of a view he expressed earlier, even when he was answering letters from those who sought his expert opinion on various problems, but had to rethink every problem anew. Perhaps this was the secret of his originality and freshness: receiving each problem anew, and presenting newer and more accurate solutions to old problems.²⁷⁹⁸

We have seen in Chapter 3 how, *a fortiori*, Aquinas applies self-critique towards the end of his life. Like Socrates before him, acknowledgment of his own limitations was part of Aquinas’ greatness. Therefore, to be truly ‘Thomist’ means to be a critical friend of Thomas, since, as Thomas himself declares, friendship is not incompatible with disagreement.²⁷⁹⁹

Although Thomas’ social conservatism has been overstated by critics such as Archibald,²⁸⁰⁰ even where his conclusions are plainly wrong and even abhorrent,²⁸⁰¹ we can still honour Thomas’ method and his governing principles. In fact, we can already discern their corrective outworking in the notorious case of Thomas’ anti-Semitic comments, for, in his (probably late) *Commentary on Romans*, Aquinas cancels out any notion of perpetual punishment for the Jewish people by his recognition of the greatness²⁸⁰² and uniqueness²⁸⁰³ of the Jewish people, his sharing in the apostle’s sorrow²⁸⁰⁴ and his eschatological hope that ‘all Israel will be saved’.²⁸⁰⁵ Here we witness the enduring value of Thomas’ commitment to the supremacy of Scripture as a metacritique and a catalyst for reform. In this way the saying of Aquinas is saved.

²⁷⁹⁷ *De perfectionis spiritualis vitae*30 in Porro, TA, 263.

²⁷⁹⁸ Weisheipl, 319-320.

²⁷⁹⁹ *Sermon* 8 (2010), 101; *STII-II*.29.3.2; *CRom*12.3.1005

²⁸⁰⁰ Sigmund (1998), 142.

²⁸⁰¹ glaring examples include the above cited letter to the Duchess of Brabant or his advocacy of violent repression of heretics in *STII-II*.11.3

²⁸⁰² *CRom*9.1.744

²⁸⁰³ *CRom*2.4.225; 3.1

²⁸⁰⁴ *CRom*9.1.738

²⁸⁰⁵ *CRom*11.4.916; 4.3.364; Holly Taylor-Coolman, ‘Romans 9-11: Rereading Aquinas on the Jews’ in Levering and Dauphinais (2012), 101-113. But against this we note that in the same commentary on Chapter 9, Aquinas refers to Jews as *capsarii* (slaves who carried boys satchels to school, *CRom*9.2.761.

Conclusion

We have argued that Aquinas brings an exemplary reception of the *corpus Dionysiacum* in comparison with postmodern receptions, sometimes because Aquinas better understands the *intentio* of the author, mostly because he has a better grasp of the ‘truth of things’ themselves and always in his exemplary method of *disputatio*.

Thomas shares a characteristic with his apostolic namesake whose name signifies ‘abyss:’ a man of depth,²⁸⁰⁶ but Dionysius led Aquinas, not only to the depths but also to the ‘highest summit of mystic Scripture’²⁸⁰⁷ and consequently, ‘Thomas’ reception of the *CD* qualifies as a ‘summit dialogue’ of interpretation. By accompanying Thomas to the peak we breathe purer air and benefit from his elevated vista. If Dionysius is a key *auctoritate* for Aquinas, then reciprocally, Aquinas has the proven status of a ‘probable’ *auctoritate* on Dionysius and represents the apex of ‘positive’ cloud theology. In sum, we identify six distinctive features of Aquinas’ ‘peak’ reception which have metacritical value against rival accounts within the ‘Plotinian’ stream.

Firstly, Aquinas displays a high view of Scripture. Chapter 1 uncovered the Origenian background to the *CD* which accounts simultaneously for Dionysius’ high view of inspiration and his high Christology against much postmodern reception. This is retained and defended in Thomas’ reception which is ‘exemplary,’ not only because it gives rightful emphasis to Christ in the *CD*, but also because it demonstrates how the whole creation imitates Christ the Exemplar.²⁸⁰⁸ Thus, Dionysius enables Aquinas to unite a participatory ontology with a participatory Christology (both absent from postmodern accounts). Aquinas’ hermeneutics is a nuanced synthesis of Dionysius’ anagogical/Origenian reading and the Augustinian/Victorine approach whereby the normative function of the literal sense underscores the propositional and therefore realist nature of revelation. Aquinas’ approach is superior to secular ones by exposing how intelligibility cannot be reduced to brute epiphenomena, but rather that reality is saturated in meaning ‘all the way down’. Nature and history already contain an ‘Authorial intention’, which Scripture discloses in higher resolution. This is the Logos which pervades all things. A return to true Christology is the final defeater of nihilism. The enduring value and challenge of Thomas’ reception lies in the participatory and Christological doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture in which the excess of meaning flows from the plenitude of Authorial intention.

Secondly, Aquinas’ conceptual precision is able to bring a new clarity to the ‘obscure style’ of the ‘Blessed Dionysius.’ The Dionysian *corpus* has generated diverse, even contradictory, readings regarding the nature of God, knowledge, Scripture and hierarchy. Dionysius is ambiguous, but

²⁸⁰⁶ *CJohn*20.5.2546.

²⁸⁰⁷ *MT1* (997A)

²⁸⁰⁸ *DN5* (824D); *SCG1.54.3*

Aquinas resolves this ambiguity ‘in harmony with divine revelation.’ As was customary for ‘commentators’ of his day, Aquinas transcends the context of the original author because of an anagogic desire for the ‘truth of things’ (*ipsa rei*) themselves. Although this might seem naive by modern sensibilities, this is only because the modern ear is not accustomed to the truth commitment shared by both authors, Truth which in a sense ‘beckons’ them. This means that, although Aquinas does not always give the best *historical* account of Dionysius, he regularly gives the best *theological* account. Yet Aquinas achieves this in a way which substantially preserves the integrity of the historic author. Aquinas integrates patristic insights in an original combination to address the needs of his time and in doing so gifts the church with a perennially valuable model. Leo XIII was astute to extol the ‘Angelic Doctor’ for his ‘comprehensive’ inquiry into ‘the reasons and principles of things’ which in its exemplary analysis contained ‘the seeds of almost infinite truths’ and ‘were to be unfolded in good time by later masters and with a goodly yield.’²⁸⁰⁹

Thirdly, Aquinas provides a metaphysics of being which addresses questions of perennial concern in a systematic and authoritative capacity. This extends to a relevance for Reception Theory itself, by grounding it on theological foundations. Chapter 2, in particular, uncovered Aquinas’ transformation of Dionysian language of *hyperousios* into his own predication of God as *Ipsium Esse per se subsistens*. We argued that the inclusion of *esse* within his ontology is one reason why Aquinas’ metaphysics trumps postmodern and secular anti-metaphysics where something other than existence, such as potency, is posited as more basic, which is absurd.²⁸¹⁰ Thomas’ eagle-sharp metacritique soars above modern anti-metaphysics. We further argued in this chapter that the Byzantine essence/energies distinction, almost completely ignored in Western postmodern reception, illuminates the thought of Dionysius and renders some of his mysterious paradoxes more intelligible, but that this distinction is clarified within a more precise Chalcedonian Christology. Effects participate in their Cause, but the Cause of all is the Word in Whom all things consist. Thomas’ resolution brings out in sharper focus that although God is ‘Other,’ He is not ‘alien’ and it is only because this is true that human beings can be summoned to their full *telos* - as already pioneered in the theandric Jesus.

Fourthly, Chapter 3 argued that Aquinas clarifies a superior and more lucid account of knowledge than postmodern and pluralist receptions through his explicit recognition of the necessity of first principles, preeminently the Principle of Non-Contradiction. The final cause of knowledge also receives greater focus through the gnoseological hope of the beatific vision which is to know God in his essence. This chapter brings a climax to our treatment of the two streams of Dionysian reception, one characterised by monism and strong agnosticism, from

²⁸⁰⁹ Leo XIII, *Aeterni Patris* (1879).

²⁸¹⁰ Kerr (2015), 84.

Plotinus' account of the One 'above' Nous and therefore unknowable even to itself and the other following the 'positive' apophaticism of Augustinian orthodoxy which emphasises the Trinitarian Unity of the One and Nous by which the Cause can be known through His effects and through self-revelation. The difference is not incidental but has fundamental consequences for anthropology. We saw that Aquinas himself sees his project as saving Dionysius from *quarundam auctoritatum intellectus perversus*.²⁸¹¹ One obvious strength of Aquinas' reception is that he provides a coherent integration of the relationship between faith and reason which is left unresolved within Plotinian Dionysianism. Aquinas' *modus operandi* is precisely to use Dionysius as a corrective for Proclus and not *vice versa* for Proclus to be his normative guide.²⁸¹² Connected to this point is the fact that the superiority of Aquinas' account of knowledge can be defended through the history of philosophy, as Aquinas himself undertakes in his later works.²⁸¹³ The history of ideas alerts us to potential dangers lurking within Plotinian negative theology for example in Gnosticism and Arianism.²⁸¹⁴ Aquinas helps us navigate our way through these hazards by providing a greater conceptual precision than Dionysius in a multiple ways, not least in his developed Aristotelian essentialism and in his metaphysics of *esse*.

Fifthly, we saw in Chapter 4 how Aquinas transforms and 'saves' hierarchy from negative connotations through recovering its original context of Goodness and love in which the contemplative 'passes on' the fruits of his contemplation to those receiving instruction and specifically through its basis in the metaphysics of primordial Beauty in which all things participate. Forgetting Aquinas, secularists have taken the false turn of assuming that nature does indeed act 'in vain' and as a result have lost philosophy's birthing pool of wonder. As coextensive with both Nous and the Good, Beauty as a Divine Name provides a powerful and coherent counter-ontology to modern nihilism.

Sixthly, and finally, Aquinas' reception provides a mode of resistance to the 'paranthocentrism' of postmodern receptions.²⁸¹⁵ Re-honouring tradition is countercultural to the 'primacy of the new' and the cancelling of the old.²⁸¹⁶ However, Aquinas' unique synthesis of tradition also valorises him in a certain sense as an initiator of a "Thomistic" method (recognised in *Humani Generis*).²⁸¹⁷ We have argued in the final section on the greatness and limitations of Aquinas that even in those rare occasions where his reception is not true to the things in

²⁸¹¹ *SCG*1.26.10.

²⁸¹² *IDC*3 (1996), 22.

²⁸¹³ *ST*1.44.2; Hankey (2019), 32-46; Jan Aaertson, 'Aquinas' Philosophy in its Historical Setting' in Norman Kretzmann and Eleanor Stump (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas* (CUP, 1993), 28-30.

²⁸¹⁴ Stepień and Kochańczyk-Bonińska, 68

²⁸¹⁵ Mieke Bal in Willis, 49.

²⁸¹⁶ Holub, 72.

²⁸¹⁷ *Humani Generis* 31

themselves, his method of *disputatio*, remains exemplary. In his historical specificity, Aquinas belongs to the Order of Preachers who forged a new paradigm for mission out of the successes and the failures of previous movements, not only amongst the poor and uneducated but also amongst the new mission field of the city universities (for whom *disputatio* was a foundational principle) and the battle for ideas.²⁸¹⁸ Through Aquinas this is realised by conceptualising and articulating a *science* of theology. This resists the *zeitgeist* by reaffirming the cognitive status of theology. It is superior to the postmodern reductive reframing of theology as *theopoetics*, since the term itself is parasitic on the philosophical theology which it denies and therefore to which it is not entitled. Without participation in the likeness of the Divine Poet, *poesis* is suspended from nothing, an empty and ‘antimimetic’ simulacra, occupying the Void opened up by the death of God.²⁸¹⁹ This leaves no account of human language itself which as *CJohn* shows, receives sufficient explanation only in participation within the Logos. Only orthodoxy is truly theopoetic and Aquinas saves *theopoesis*.

In sum, we have argued in this study that Aquinas brings a skillful and transformative ‘remix’ of Dionysius, which deserves to be regarded as a ‘classic’ through a combination of imitation and innovation.²⁸²⁰ Thomas’ transformation is a labour of love,²⁸²¹ since, ‘knowledge assimilates things, but love transforms them., as we learn from Dionysius in his work *On the Divine Names*.²⁸²² Aquinas perfects rather than destroys Dionysius. Furthermore, Thomas’ *theopoesis* is *chryso poetic*,²⁸²³ it transmutes Dionysian bronze into spiritual gold. By breathing new life into the *CD*, Aquinas creates ‘an original repetition,²⁸²⁴ new wine in old skins.’²⁸²⁵ Applying Dionysius’ metaphor of Wisdom in *EP9*, ‘[it] prepares a mysterious mixing bowl, and, having first made ready some solid food, it pours a sacred drink into it and then generously, with a great cry, it beckons all who have need of it.’²⁸²⁶ Thomas’ great cry continues to beckon all who thirst for wisdom, which he generously pours out in his writings. Thomas is the *architriclinus* of his own commentary on *John*, i.e. ‘someone skilled in the law’ who, after sampling the new wine ‘give his assent to the faith of Christ.’²⁸²⁷

Unlike the Dionysian tradition transmitted to us by Aquinas, the postmodern reception is a *trading* of Dionysius’ intent. It is not truly Dionysian; but *pseudo* (Pseudo) Dionysian because it

²⁸¹⁸ Little, 168, 173-6.

²⁸¹⁹ Faubion (2006), xiv-xv.

²⁸²⁰ Ryan, 7.

²⁸²¹ ‘we do not read the classics out of duty or respect, but only out of love.’ Calvino, 3.

²⁸²² *DM6*.1.13

²⁸²³ *LEJob28*.1

²⁸²⁴ Steiner, 26

²⁸²⁵ Chenu (1964), 29, 44 (originally of Thomas’ treatment of Aristotle); Emery and Levering (2015), xii.

²⁸²⁶ *EP9* (1109B), 285.

²⁸²⁷ *CJohn2*.1.361.

tries to maintain a *via negativa* of language devoid of the *via eminentia* of metaphysics. This divorces the apophatic not only from hierarchy but also from Scripture, which is an ahistorical reading of the *corpus*. Aquinas' reading of the *CD* is therefore a sharp weapon *against* postmodern and secular thought.²⁸²⁸ Alongside Aquinas, postmoderns and secularists would do well to have their thinking 'perfected' by the blessed Dionysius.²⁸²⁹ We commend therefore Aquinas' exemplary reception as a splendid answer to his own daily petition for 'subtlety to interpret and eloquence in speech.'²⁸³⁰ We agree with Pius XII's judgement that 'Thomas' doctrine is 'most effective' for 'safeguarding the foundation of the faith.'²⁸³¹ Aquinas' 'straw' writings still have power to break the camel's back of secular heterodoxy. As a Christological metacritique, they overcome the anti-metaphysics of the polluted 'negative' stream of Plotinian Dionysianism and by 'saving Dionysius,' Aquinas simultaneously 'saves the phenomena'²⁸³² of persons, goodness, beauty, and truth.

²⁸²⁸ *SPsalms*44.6

²⁸²⁹ *Sermon* 19 (2010), 281-282.

²⁸³⁰ 'Interpretandi subtilitatem/loquendi gratiam copiosum.' Anderson and Moser (2000), 42-43.

²⁸³¹ *Humani Generis* 31

²⁸³² The expression can be traced to the astronomer Eudoxus. Hadot (2006), 163-165.

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Appendix

Text of *EH3 (440C-441B), 220-221.*

From the beginning human nature has stupidly glided away from those good things bestowed on it by God.

(την ἀνθρωπείαν φύσιν ἀρκήθεν ἀπο τῶν θείων αγαθῶν ἀνόητως ἐζολισθήσασαν). It turned away to the life of the most varied desires and came at the end to the catastrophe of death. There followed the destructive rejection of what was really good, a trampling over the sacred Law laid down in paradise for man. Having evaded the yoke which gave him life, man rebelled against the blessings of God and was left to his own devices, to the temptation and the evil assaults of the devil. And in exchange for eternity he pitifully opted for mortality. Born of corruption it was only right that he should leave the world as he entered it. He freely turned away from the divine and uplifting life and was dragged instead as far as possible in the opposite direction and was plunged into the utter mess of passion (την πολυπαθέστατην αλλοίωσιν).²⁸³³ Wandering far from the right path,²⁸³⁴ ensnared by destructive and evil crowds, the human race turned away from the true God and witlessly served neither gods nor friends but its enemies who, out of their innate lack of pity, took the cruellest advantage of its weakness and dragged it down to the deplorable peril of destruction and dissolution of being (εἰς ἀνυπαρξίας οἰκτῶς ἐμπέπτωκει καὶ ἀπώλειαις κίνδυνον).

Yet the goodness of the Deity has endless love for humanity (φιλανθρωπία) and never ceased from benignly pouring out its providential gifts. It took upon itself in a most authentic way all the characteristics of our nature, except sin. It became one with us in lowliness, losing nothing of its own real condition, suffering no change or loss. It allowed us, as those of equal birth, to enter into communion with it and to acquire a share of its own beauty. Thus, as our hidden tradition teaches, it made possible for us to escape from the dominion of the rebellious, and it did this not through overwhelming force, but, as scripture mysteriously tells us, by an act of judgment and also in all righteousness. Beneficently it wrought a complete change in our nature. It filled our shadowed and unshaped minds with a kindly, divine light and adorned them with a loveliness suitable to their divinised state. It saved our nature from almost total wreckage and delivered the dwelling place of our soul from the most accursed passion and from destructive defilement. Finally, it showed us a supramundane uplifting and an inspired way of life in shaping ourself to it as fully as lay in our power.

²⁸³³ Nyssanus, *DVMII.69* speaks of the 'slimy mire' (βόρβορος) of passions.

²⁸³⁴ Titus 3:3