

Aquinas, Pseudo-Denys, Proclus and Isaiah VI. 6

Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge, 64 (1997), 59-93.

“Volavit ad me unus de seraphim”: “Then flew one of the seraphims unto me having a live coal in his hand, ... And he laid it upon my mouth and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.”¹ The vision of Isaiah “in the year that King Uzziah died” could not be more plain. In response to his terrified confession of his unclean lips, a confession compelled by the awful vision, one of the two seraphs who stood in the presence of the “Lord of hosts” flew to the Prophet and purged his sin by means of the burning coal.² Yet, from his first theological work, the *Expositio super Isaiam ad Litteram*, his literal exposition of the book of Isaiah, through his first massive systematic theology, the commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard,³ and the last system, his *Summa Theologiae*, where the questions and their order were his own, to his late exposition of St. Paul’s epistles, St. Thomas Aquinas denied what Isaiah said he saw.⁴ It was impossible that one from among the superior orders of angels, and the seraphim were in fact the highest order, could minister immediately and directly to a creature below the angelic hierarchy. No seraph flew to Isaiah.

In this denial Aquinas explicitly followed Denys the pseudo-Areopagite. Denys had devoted chapter thirteen of *The Celestial Hierarchy* to showing “Why the prophet Isaiah is said to have been purified by the seraphim” despite the contradiction between this dictum and the fundamental principles of spiritual hierarchy exposed earlier in his treatise.⁵ As Salvatore Lilla has shown, these principles are primarily Procline.⁶ There are many lines of mediation between Aquinas and Proclus, some of them very crooked indeed.⁷ But, the form which Aquinas gives

¹ Isaiah VI. 6-7: Vulgate and Authorized Version.

² *Ibid.*, 1-6.

³ “**Secundum dionysium dicendum quod superiores angeli nunquam immediate circa ministerium habent**”.

THOMAS AQUINAS, *In Quatuor Libros Sententiarum*, vol. 1, *Opera Omnia*, ed. R. BUSA (Stuttgart - Bad Cannstatt: frommann - holtzboog, 1980), pt. 2, ds. 10, qu. 1, art. 2, corpus, p. 152. See n. 56 below.

⁴ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Expositio super Isaiam ad Litteram*, vol. 28, *Opera Omnia iussu Leonis XIII P.M. edita* (Rome: Editori di San Tommaso, 1974), 26*: “Composé dès 1252-1253 se présente donc comme le premier ouvrage théologique de saint Thomas.” On the relation between the structure of the *In Quatuor Libros Sententiarum* and the *Summa Theologiae*, see W.J. HANKEY, *God In Himself: Aquinas’ Doctrine of God as Expounded in the Summa Theologiae*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 19-35. In the *Summa* the consideration is at pt. I, qu. 112; in the *Expositio super Isaiam*, it is at capitulum VI, 6-8, p. 51.

⁵ DENYS L’ARÉOPAGITE, *La Hiérarchie Céleste*, 2nd ed., intro. R. ROQUES, étude et texte critiques, G. HEIL, trad. et notes M. DE GANDILLAC, Sources Chrétienne 58 bis (Paris: Cerf, 1970).

⁶ Salvatore LILLA, “Introduzione allo studio dello Ps. Dionigi l’Areopagita,” *Augustinianum* 22/3 (1982), 554-556: section 6, “Le legge che regolano la gerarchia angelica e di riflesso anche quelle ecclesiastica.” For the laws in question Lilla gives Clement’s *Stromata* and Enoch but, above all, PROCLUS, and crucially, *The Elements of Theology*, prop. 148. The law of mediation itself is Iamblichan and associated with his theurgy, see PROCLUS, *The Elements of Theology*, ed. E.R. DODDS, 2nd. Ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), xxii and Gregory SHAW, “Theurgy as Demiurgy: Iamblichus’ Solution to the Problem of Embodiment,” *Dionysius* 12 (1988), 37-59.

⁷ On the Dionysian and Procline law of hierarchical mediation in Aquinas, see David E. LUSCOMBE, “The *Lex divinitatis* in the Bull *Unam Sanctam* of Pope Boniface VIII,” in *Church and State in the Middle Ages: essays presented to C. R. Cheney on his 70th birthday*, ed. C. N. L. BROOKE, D. E. LUSCOMBE, G. H. MARTIN, and Dorothy OWEN, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 205-221; id., “Thomas Aquinas and Conceptions of Hierarchy in the Thirteenth Century,” in *Thomas von Aquin. Werk un Wirkung im Licht Neuerer Forschungen*, ed. Albert ZIMMERMAN, *Miscellanea Mediaevalia* 19 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1988), 261-277; for the intermediation of Hugh of St. Victor in its reception by Aquinas, see W.J. HANKEY, “‘Dionysius dixit, Lex divinitatis est ultima per media reducere’: Aquinas, hierocracy and the ‘augustinisme politique’,” *Medioevo* [Padova], XVIII (1992), *Festschrift Antonio Tognolo*, 126-147. On lines connecting St. Thomas and Proclus, there is a connected series of comments, as follows: W.J. HANKEY, “The *De Trinitate* of St. Boethius and the Structure of St. Thomas’ *Summa Theologiae*,” in *Atti del Congresso Internazionale di Studi Boeziani*, ed. L. Obertello, (Rome: Herder, 1981), 367-375; Paul ROREM, *Pseudo-Dionysius. A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to their*

his principles of spiritual hierarchy can be traced to Proclus, and they accord with what Thomas learned from his other major source of Procline Neoplatonism, the *Liber de causis*.⁸ So he concluded that, on this matter, the highest vision of the apostolic community, the common knowledge of the primitive church, and the conclusions of pagan philosophy were one:

*tum quia dionysius hoc tradit, qui discipulus pauli fuit, et dicitur eius visiones scripsisse; unde eum frequenter in auctorem inducit, et praecipue in divisione hierarchiarum, et sicut in 13 cap. caelest. hier. innuit, haec positio vulgata erat tempore primitivae ecclesiae: tum etiam quia dictis philosophorum magis consonat, ut ab eis ea quae contra fidem non sunt accipiamus, aliis resecatis.*⁹

The highest vision granted to those *in via*, the primitive church, and philosophy were in accord according to St. Thomas. Remarkably, they agreed not on the order of nature which could be overruled by the higher order of grace. Rather, what St. Paul, the early church, and philosophy understood in common was the higher order, the order of grace, which admits of no exceptions:

*Quia ordo angelicus attenditur secundum dona gratiarum. Ordo autem gratiae non habet alium superiorem ordinem, propter quem praetermitti debeat, sicut praeter mittuntur ordo naturae propter ordinem gratiae.*¹⁰

In allowing Proclus, mediated by Denys and others, to determine the order of grace against the text of Isaiah VI, Aquinas was not following a generally accepted tradition. The problem of the opposition between Isaiah and Denys had been before the Latin church since Gregory the Great, the first western author who gives evidence of knowing the Dionysian teaching. In his sermon on the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin, Pope Gregory states

Influence, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 169-174; id., "'Procession and Return' in Thomas Aquinas and His Predecessors," *The Princeton Seminary Review* 13, #2 (1992), 147-163. But the "chronological impossibility" attributed to me in the last (at 161), I, in fact, explicitly denied at 9 and 150 of Hankey, *God in Himself* and elsewhere.

⁸ AQUINAS draws both on Dionysius and the *Elements* of Proclus, just translated from the Greek, in his late (after 1268) *Super Librum de Causis Expositio*, ed. H.-D. SAFFREY, *Textus Philosophici Friburgenes* 4/5 (Fribourg: Société Philosophique, Louvain: Éditions E. Nauwelaerts, 1954), see HANKEY, *God In Himself*, 46-47. The *Liber de causis* is not only Procline but Plotinian in its Neoplatonism and the mediation of these through Arabic Islam has effects comparable to those of the Christianity of Dionysius: see C. D'ANCONA-COSTA, *Recherches sur le Liber de causis*, *Études de philosophie médiévale* 72 (Paris: Vrin, 1995); id., "La doctrine de la création 'mediante intelligentia' dans le *Liber de Causis* et dans ses sources," *RSPT*. 76, #2 (1992), 209-233; id., "Saint Thomas lecteur du 'Liber de causis'," *Revue thomiste* XCII (1992), 785-817; id., *Tommaso d'Aquino Commento al 'Libro della Cause'*, (Milan: Rusconi, 1986); R.C. TAYLOR, "The Kalim fi mahd al'khair (*Liber de causis*) in the Islamic Philosophical Milieu," in J. KRAYE, W.F. RYAN AND C.B. SCHMITT, *Pseudo-Aristotle in the Latin Middle Ages. The "Theology" and other texts*, Warburg Institute Surveys and Texts XI (London: Warburg Society, 1986), 37-52 and E. BOOTH, *Aristotelian Aporetic Ontology in Islamic and Christian Thinkers*, Cambridge Studies in medieval life and thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) together with the important review by Bernard MCGINN, *Journal of Religion* 67, #1 (1987), 95-97. A. DE LIBERA claims for Aquinas an quasi-historical sense for the differences between his philosophical sources: "Albert le Grand et le platonisme. de la doctrine de idées à la théorie des trois états de l'universel," in E.P. BOS and P.A. MEIJER, eds., *On Proclus and his Influence in Medieval Philosophy*, *Philosophia Antiqua* 53 (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 89-90 and "Albert le Grand et Thomas d'Aquin interprètes du *Liber de Causis*," *RSPT* 74 (1990), 347-78.

⁹ *In Sententiarum*, pt. 2, ds. 10, qu. 1, ar.2, corpus, p. 152.

¹⁰ *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 15, ed. M.J. CHARLESWORTH, (London & New York: Blackfriars, 1970), pt. 1, qu. 112, ar. 2, resp. There is a similar problem with respect to the *Summa* as a whole. What is for Aquinas the proper order of sacred doctrine, as opposed to that of philosophical theology, is in fact the order of systematized Neoplatonism, see HANKEY, *God In Himself*, 148-151.

that he has not enough evidence to follow Denys completely. In consequence, the problem of a contradiction between a text of the Bible and a quasi-biblical author puzzled theologians who had not read the pseudo-Areopagite themselves.¹¹ Generally, as we shall see, they tried to avoid the Dionysian conclusion. But in the twelfth century Denys overran the schools.¹² The arguments on this matter shifted in his direction. In the end, none among the schoolmen was a clearer, more definite, and more principled Dionysian on the questions involved than the Angelic doctor himself.

How are we to explain this? How are we to explain why this Aristotelian, whose peripatetic principles led him, as Beryl Smalley taught us, to give a new primacy and weight to the literal interpretation of the Bible, treated Scripture thus?¹³ Her discovery is summarized by Richard Southern:

she found [in the thirteenth century] a new respect for the literal meaning of the text. And, in the finding the fact, she suggested the explanation: the metaphysical and scientific works of Aristotle, with their doctrine that the hidden substance of things would be known only from their manifestation to the senses, drove out the more exaggerated forms of allegorical interpretation and directed attention to the letter, to the matter of fact in the Bible.

How, then, can we explain that in his literal commentary on Isaiah, when he was still a “biblical bachelor” writing a cursory biblical commentary, not systematic theology, as well as in his later more philosophical works, Aquinas follows the most abstract principles of refined Neoplatonism against the *ipsissima verba* of Isaiah?¹⁴

The last half century of medieval scholarship has taught us that the presuppositions of these questions are false. Certainly, the inquiry as to why Aquinas, or any other Christian theologian, rejects the plain sense of a biblical text remains important. And to that question we shall finally turn. But, before answering it, we must correct our questions by assimilating three

¹¹ GREGORY, *XL Homiliarum in Evangelia*, Liber 2, “Homilia XXXIV,” pts. 12 and 13, *PL* 76, 1254B-1255B: “utrum per se haec faciant, an per subjecta agmina agantur, quae, sicut dicitur, in eo quod a majoribus veniunt majorum vocabula sortiuntur, nos affirmare nolumus quod apertis testimoniis non approbamus.” (1254D). There is a useful translation with very limited but accurate references to the subsequent history of the homily: GREGORY THE GREAT, *Forty Gospel Homilies*, trans. David HURST, (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1990).

¹² On the influence of Dionysius in the medieval west, Paul ROREM, *Pseudo-Dionysius. A Commentary*, is indispensable. On the growing acceptance of the pseudo-Areopagite, there are David LUSCOMBE, “Conceptions of Hierarchy before the Thirteenth Century,” in *Sociale Ordnungen im Selbstverstandis des Mittelalters*, ed. Albert ZIMMERMAN, *Miscellanea Mediaevalia* 12/1 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1979), 1-19; id., “Denis the Pseudo-Areopagite in the Middle Ages from Hilduin to Lorenzo Valla,” in *Kongressdaten und Festvortrage Literatur und Falschung*, vol. 1 of *Falschungen im Mittelalter. Internationaler Kongress der Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Munchen, 16-19. September 1986*, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica Schriften* 33, i (Hannover: Hahnsche, 1988), 133-152.

¹³ Beryl SMALLEY, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 3d ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), vii-xvi explains how and why she arrived at her original interpretation of Thomas’ role in the history of exegesis; Richard SOUTHERN, “Beryl Smalley and the Bible,” in K. WALSH and P. WOOD, eds., *The Bible in the Medieval World. Essays in Memory of Beryl Smalley*, *Studies in Church History, subsidia* 4 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 12.

¹⁴ A consideration of the organization of study and teaching within which Thomas’ treatment of the Bible occurs is found in M.-D. CHENU, *Toward Understanding St. Thomas*, revised & trans. A.M. LANDRY & D. HUGHES from 1st French edition, Paris, 1950 (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1964), 242-243. His conclusions are summarized in Otto Herman PESCH, “Paul as Professor of Theology. The Image of the Apostle in St. Thomas’ Theology,” *The Thomist* 38 (1974), 587-588. Chenu seems wrong about the date of the commentary on Isaiah: “this commentary would only date from the end of the life of St. Thomas, during his second sojourn in Italy” (243); contrast the Leonine editors (note 4 above). For bibliography on the dating and chronology of Thomas’ scriptural commentaries see Michael ARGES, “New Evidence concerning the Date of Thomas Aquinas’ *Lectura* on Matthew,” *Mediaeval Studies* 49 (1987), 517-523.

developments. First, St. Thomas no longer stands as the true Aristotelian outside the general Neoplatonism of medieval philosophical theology; rather, his is an Aristotelianism Platonized or a Neoplatonism Aristotelianized. Second, Aquinas did nothing startlingly innovative in biblical exegesis as a result of his supposed Aristotelianism. Henri de Lubac has shown that Thomas was conservatively traditional and for him, as for his predecessors, the literal was not the highest sense, but the basis for the higher spiritual senses.¹⁵

Third, and closely related to this last point, the structure of university study and teaching in theology during the thirteenth century, and beyond, entailed that the systematic theologian realized his systematic reflection in biblical exegesis. Systematic theology and exegesis were not, as Beryl Smalley taught, separated. Fortunately, we have an opportunity to examine the consequence of this organization for Thomas' scriptural commentary. We possess his late, or lately revised, exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews. There, at the end of the first chapter, Aquinas encounters one of the major texts in the controversy induced by Denys and Gregory. Within the commentary, he develops three formally organized questions. We shall examine therein his last word on the flight of the seraphim to Isaiah, a word more valuable because, by this time, he knows Proclus directly.

I hope, in consequence of these preliminary considerations, and of our actual investigation of the history of the interpretation of Isaiah VI. 6 from Denys to Aquinas, as well as of our examination of Thomas' treatment of it, to suggest something about Thomas' understanding of Scripture. The Neoplatonized Aristotelian who brings a Neoplatonic sense of system to theology brings that same sense to Scripture.¹⁶ There it encounters an old Judaeo-Christian view of the Bible as containing the whole of reality, and giving, if properly interpreted, a total account of the cosmos.¹⁷ This old view is approximated by some aspects of current post-modern and canonical views of Scripture.¹⁸ I hope then to get beyond the form of the questions

¹⁵ Henri DE LUBAC, *Exégèse médiévale. Les quatre sens de L'Écriture*, 4 vol., Théologie 41, 42 and 59 (Paris: Aubier, 1959-1964), i, 301: "En cela, comme il lui arrive si souvent, saint Thomas est le simple et fidèle écho, jusque dans le détail, d'une longue tradition"; at iii, 12-13 and iv, 293-294, he criticizes Smalley, Chenu and others for looking at Aquinas and the medievals from the perspective of present day approaches to Scripture; at iv, 272-302, de Lubac considers Thomas at length, rejects the claims for his "nouveau" and concludes, quoting Chenu: "C'est une exégèse elle-même doctrinale, qui se développe 'à partir d'une division systématique pratiquée à la mode du temps', et dont les résultats sont destinés à être exploités dans une systématization d'une autre allure."

¹⁶ For system in Aquinas, see W.J. HANKEY, "Theology as System and as Science: Proclus and Thomas Aquinas," *Dionysius* 6 (1982), 83-93; for medieval systematizing, see Erwin PANOFKY, *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism: An Inquiry into the analogy of the arts, philosophy and religion in the Middle Ages*, (New York: New American Library, 1976), 30-32, 64-65; on Thomas' systematization of Scripture, see Otto Hermann PESCH, *Thomas D'Aquin: Limites et grandeur de la théologie médiévale. Une introduction*, trad. J. HOFFMANN, (Paris: Cerf, 1994), 128; id., "Paul," 589-593.

¹⁷ "The book becomes a mythical model of the world: the Torah is said to be identical with the Creation, the Christian Bible becomes the twin of the Book of Nature. And the exploration of these world-books requires interpreters who can study the subtle hidden structures ..." Frank KERMODE, "Canon," in Robert ALTER and Frank KERMODE, eds., *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1987), 605-606, see also 608 and Amos FUNKENSTEIN, "'Scripture speaks the language of Man': the Uses and Abuses of the Medieval Principle of Accommodation," in C. WENIN, ed., *L'Homme et son univers au Moyen Âge. Actes du septième congrès international de philosophie médiévale, (30 août - 4 septembre 1982)*, 2 vols., Philosophes médiévaux 26 (Louvain-la-neuve: Éditions de l'Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, 1986), i, 92-101.

¹⁸ ALTER and KERMODE, "The Literary," 1-8 and 600-610; James A. SANDERS, *From Sacred Story To Sacred Text: Canon as Paradigm*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987); Jared WICKS, "Biblical Criticism Criticized," *Gregorianum* 72, #1 (1992), 117-128; W.J. HANKEY, "The Bible in a Post-Critical Age," in Wm. ODDIE, ed., *After the Deluge. Essays Towards the Desecularization of the Church*, (London: SPCK, 1987), 79-84; George A. LINDBECK, *The Nature of Doctrine. Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), together with the recent series of discussion articles in *The Thomist* of Aquinas as a "post-Liberal theologian": see B. MARSHALL, *The Thomist* 53 (1989), 335-402 and 56 (1992), 499-524, G.A. LINDBECK, *The Thomist* 53 (1989), 403-406, L. ROY, *The Thomist* 56 (1992), 473-480, F.J. CROSSON, *The Thomist* 56 (1992), 481-498.

before us which is suggested by M. de Gandillac in one of his notes to chapter thirteen of the “Sources Chrétiennes” edition of the *Caelestial Hierarchy*.¹⁹

First, M. de Gandillac notes that the mission of the seraph to Isaiah would be “une véritable subversion de l’ordre ... exclue par Denys, comme par Grégoire le Grand et Saint Thomas.” But, in fact, Gregory, having proposed an angelic hierarchy like that of Denys, explicitly denies that he has clear proof on which to decide whether the seraphim and cherubim ever go directly to humans or instead always send the lower angels.

However, like Denys himself, on the basis of Zachariah II, 3-4, Gregory does claim to know that “ad explendum de supernis ministerium alii spiritus alios mittunt.” “To carry out some duty from on high, some spirits send others”. The higher send, the lower are sent. Gregory is strongly aware of Denys’ problem with Isaiah VI. 6, but he is not certain enough to follow his solution.²⁰

Second, in treating St. Thomas, M. de Gandillac complains that, “in spite of the authority of Hebrews I. 14 which defines the angels as ‘ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation’”, Aquinas refuses to allow that any except the last two orders - archangels and angels - are sent to humans.

On a ici un exemple frappant de “vision du monde” (de caractère en partie profane) invoquée par des théologiens pour refuser l’interprétation la plus obvie d’un texte scripturaire.

But a consideration of Denys, of Gregory, or of the scholastics who were troubled by the question these Fathers had raised, requires another formulation. The Bible, which had, for all of them, finally one author - God speaking through the mission of the Holy Spirit - said opposed things. Isaiah VI. 6 and Hebrews I. 14 were opposed by Zachariah II. 3-4 (where one angel sends another) and by Daniel VII. 10 (“Millia millium ministrabant ei, et decies millies centena millia assistebant ei” [Vulgate], “thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him” [A.V.]). Some are immediately in the divine presence, some are sent; some angels command, others go at their will. In addition, there was the fact that Gabriel, whose mission was the greatest granted to ministering spirits, had not the name of one of the higher orders designated by St. Paul, but was only called an angel.²¹

So, if one accepts the unity and authority of the whole of sacred Scripture, as Denys, Gregory and their scholastic followers did, the problem is not a confrontation between a philosophical “vision” or “système du monde”, on the one hand, and “un texte scripturaire”, on the other. The problem is instead that of the *magister in sacra theologia* who is also a *magister in sacra pagina*, namely, how to think Scripture as a whole? How to understand it systematically? There is, for these theologians, no biblical theology in the twentieth century sense apart from the Hellenistic systematizing reflection.²² Our aim, therefore, is to understand something of the unity of Neoplatonic system and Scripture for St. Thomas Aquinas.

¹⁹ DENYS, *La Hiérarchie*, note 7, 148-149. Compare R. ROQUES in *L’Univers dionysien* as quoted by Donald C. DUCLOW, “Isaiah Meets the Seraph: Breaking Ranks in Dionysius and Eriugena?” in *Eriugena: East and West. Papers of the Eighth International Colloquium of the Society for the Promotion of Eriugenian Studies, Chicago and Notre Dame, 18-20 October 1991*, ed. B. MCGINN and W. OTTEN, Notre Dame Conferences in Medieval Studies V (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 246, n.16.

²⁰ GREGORY, PL 76, 1254D.

²¹ Cf. Luke I. 19 & 26 and Colossians I. 16.

²² On the genesis of this division, see Jonathan Z. SMITH, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity*, (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1990), 13, 34, 77. On the continuity between pagan and Christian systematizing reflection, see David DAWSON, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Jean PÉPIN, *La tradition de l’allégorie de Philon d’Alexandrie à Dante*, Études historiques (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1987), 54-56: “l’histoire le montre, et personne n’en doute plus aujourd’hui ce sont les Grecs qui furent sur ce point des initiateurs des chrétiens.” (54); Pierre HADOT, “Théologie, exégèse, révélation,

The appreciation of Thomas' Platonism has required both the advance in Neoplatonic scholarship generally associated with E.R. Dodds' publication of his edition, translation and notes of Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*,²³ and also a liberation of Thomistic studies from the circumstances of the Leonine revival. In respect to the latter, it was necessary to distinguish the thought of St. Thomas both from a neoscholasticism which conceived itself as Aristotelian, and also from various ecclesiastical efforts to conform it to the intellectual, practical and political necessities of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.²⁴ In our time, in respect to Thomistic studies, it has especially meant overcoming the realist and existentialist bias of studies belonging to the first half of the twentieth century. A new openness to the idealism of St. Thomas has enabled us to appreciate the systematic and Platonic aspect of his thought.²⁵ By the end of the "third thomism" with the Second Vatican Council, the shift toward seeing Thomas within the general Neoplatonism of his contemporary medieval philosophical theologians, rather than as an exception to it, was well underway.²⁶

Present scholarship includes the work by C. D'Ancona-Costa, Edward Booth and others on the mixture of Plotinian, Procline and Islamic Neoplatonisms particularly, but by no means exclusively, associated with the *Liber de causis*, and the work of Alain de Libera on the Rhenish-Flemish mystical tradition, which at the very least requires comparison between the ways in

écriture dans la philosophie grecque," and Ilsetraut Hadot, "Les introductions aux commentaires exégétiques chez les auteurs chrétiens," both in Michel TARDIEU, ed., *Les règles de l'interprétation*, Centre d'études des religions du Livre (Paris: Cerf, 1987), 13-34 and 99-122; Proclus. *Lecteur et interprète des anciens. Actes du colloque international du CNRS, Paris (2-4 octobre 1985)*, publiés par Jean PÉPIN et H.-D. SAFFREY, Colloques internationaux du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1987); Robert LAMBERTON, *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition*, The Transformation of the Classical Heritage IX (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

²³ 1st edition, 1933.

²⁴ See Stanislas BRETON, *De Rome à Paris. Itinéraire philosophique*, (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1992), 55ff.; [Mark D. JORDAN, *The Alleged Aristotelianism of Thomas Aquinas, The Etienne Gilson Series 15* \(Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1992\)](#); W.J. HANKEY, "Pope Leo's Purposes and St. Thomas' Platonism" in S. Tommaso nella storia del pensiero, *Atti dell' VIII Congresso Tomistico Internazionale*, 8 vol., ed. A. PIOLANTI, viii, Studi Tomistici 17 (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1982), 39-52; id., "Making Theology Practical: Thomas Aquinas and the Nineteenth Century Religious Revival" *Dionysius* 9 (1985), 85-12; id., "From Metaphysics to History, from Exodus to Neoplatonism, from Scholasticism to Pluralism: the fate of Gilsonian Thomism in English-speaking North America," *Dionysius*, 16 (1998), in press; G. MCCOOL, *Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism: The Search for a Unitary Method*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989) and id., *From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989).

²⁵ On the anti-idealist biases of the Thomist revival, see: Thomas F. O'MEARA, *Romantic Idealism and Roman Catholicism: Schelling and the Theologians*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982); id., *Church and Culture: German Catholic Theology, 1860-1914*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991); Paul POUPARD, *Un essai de philosophie chrétienne au XIXe siècle. L'Abbé Louis Bautain*, Bibliothèque de théologie série IV, Histoire de la Théologie 4 (Paris: Desclée & Cie, 1961). Important for this shift is Claude BRUAIRE, *L'être et l'esprit*, Épiméthée (Paris: PUF, 1983); see Xavier TILLETTE, "La théologie philosophique de Claude Bruaire," *Gregorianum* 74, #4 (1993), 689-709; id., *Le Christ des philosophes. Du Maître de sagesse au divin Témoin*, (Namur: Culture et vérité, 1993), 105-133, 134-148 treating Emilio Brito's work which carries forward that of Bruaire. For example, see Emilio BRITO, *Dieu et l'être d'après Thomas d'Aquin et Hegel*, (Paris: PUF, 1991).

²⁶ See W.J. HANKEY, "Dionysian Hierarchy in Thomas Aquinas: Tradition and Transformation" in *Actes du Colloque international sur Denys l'Aréopagite et sa postérité en Orient et en Occident*, ed. Ysabel DE ANDIA, série Antiquité 151 (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1997), 405-438; id., *God In Himself*, 1-17; id., "Aquinas' First Principle, Being or Unity?" *Dionysius* 4 (1980), 133-172; Patrick QUINN, *Aquinas, Platonism and the Knowledge of God*, (Aldershot: Avebury, 1996); Jan A. AERTSEN, "The Platonic Tendency of Thomism and the Foundations of Aquina's Philosophy," *Medioevo* [Padova], XVIII (1992), 53-70; id., "Ontology and henology in Medieval Philosophy (Thomas Aquinas, Master Eckhart and Berthold of Moosburg)," in BOS and MEIER, *On Proclus and his Influence in Medieval Philosophy*, 121-123; Luis CORTEST, "Was Thomas Aquinas a Platonist?" *The Thomist* 52 (1988), 209-219.

which Albert the Great and St. Thomas used the sources of their Neoplatonism. É.-H. Wéber illumines the way Thomas unites Aristotle and Denys to produce his theological anthropology.²⁷ A study by Vivian Boland has just appeared which assesses the influence of classical, middle Platonic and Neoplatonic Greek philosophical sources on Thomas' doctrine of the divine ideas, drawing together the Augustinian and Dionysian influences.²⁸ Finally, there is extensive work in progress, or recently published, on Boethius and Denys as sources and modifiers of the Neoplatonic tradition as St. Thomas receives it. Here the new book by Rudi Te Velde on participation and substance in Aquinas requires special mention.²⁹

To summarize the result of this work is difficult, especially as it is both incomplete and controverted, but the Platonizing of Aristotle and the Aristotelian correction of Neoplatonism which is occurring in thirteenth century scholasticism affects every aspect of the structure and content of Thomas' philosophical theology. It gives a hierarchical form and content to fundamental ideas like being. Certainly, the beings in his cosmos are arranged in a graduated, participatory hierarchy which is the effective structure for the motion of *exitus* and *reditus* running through reality. The angelic host is particularly suited to this kind of treatment.

The progress in our understanding of St. Thomas' biblical exegesis has been in the same direction as the development in our conception of the character and sources of his philosophical theology generally. The two most important factors have been the work of Henri de Lubac to

²⁷ See note 8 above and Simon TUGWELL, *Albert and Thomas. Selected Writings*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), introductions; E. BOOTH, "Conciliazione ontologiche della Tradizione Platonica e Aristotelica in Sant' Alberto e San Tommaso," in *Sant' Alberto Magno, l'uomo e il pensatore*, Studia Universitatis S. Thomae in Urbe (Milan: Massimo, 1982), 61-81; François-Xavier PUTALLAZ, *Le sens de la réflexion chez Thomas d' Aquin* and *La connaissance de soi au xiiiè siècle. De Matthieu d'Aquasparta a Thierry de Freiberg*, Études de philosophie médiévale lxxvi and lxxvii (Paris: Vrin, 1991); É.-H. WÉBER, *La Personne humaine au xiiiè siècle. L'avènement chez les maîtres parisiens de l'acception moderne de l'homme*, Bibliothèque thomiste 46 (Paris: Vrin, 1991) with Alain DE LIBERA, "Une Anthropologie de la grâce. Sur *La Personne humaine au xiiiè siècle* d'É.-H. Wéber," *RSPT* 77 (1993), 241-254. Historical investigation of the Neoplatonism of St. Thomas and a re-evaluation of modern idealism, are united in my writing, in that of Edward Booth and in the volumes of Putaliez.

²⁸ Vivian BOLAND, *Ideas in God According to St. Thomas Aquinas. Sources and Synthesis*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought LXIX (Leiden: Brill, 1996); see also Mark JOHNSON, "Aquinas's Changing Evaluation of Plato on Creation," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 66 (1992), 81-88; James ROSS, "Aquinas's Exemplarism, Aquinas's Voluntarism," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 64 (1990), 171-198.

²⁹ Rudi A. TE VELDE, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters 46 (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1995); see also M.B. EWBANK, "Doctrinal Precisions in Aquinas' *Super Librum de Causis*," *AHDLM* 61(1994), 7-29; id., "Diverse Orderings of Dionysius' Triplex Via by St. Thomas Aquinas," *Mediaeval Studies* 52 (1990), 82-109; id., "Remarks on Being in St. Thomas Aquinas' *Expositio de divinis nominibus*," *Arch. hist. doct. lit. m. à.* 56 (1989), 123-149; S. -T. BONINO, "Influence du Pseudo-Denys sur la conception thomiste de l'esse," *Bulletin de Litterature Ecclésiastique* XCIV/3 (1993), 269-274; id., "Les voiles sacres: A propos d'une citation de Denys," in *Atti del IX Congresso Tomistico Internazionale*, vol. vi, Studi Tomistici 45 (Vatican City: Pontifical Academy of St. Thomas Aquinas, 1992), 159-171; T. -D. HUMBRECHT, "La théologie négative chez saint Thomas d'Aquin," *Revue thomiste* XCIII (1993), 535-566; Fran O'ROURKE, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters 32 (Leiden: Brill, 1992); and T.C. O'BRIEN, "The Dionysian Corpus," Appendix 3 in St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 14 (London and New York: Blackfriars, 1974), 182-193. The last is essential not only because it indicates what Aquinas took from Dionysius, but also where he left him behind. The general scheme for, and the very existence of, the treatise on the angels depends on Denys. Moreover, Thomas agrees with "the hierarchic principle that a lesser angel never enlightens a greater" and he establishes "the distinction of hierarchies on the basis of the three levels of knowing the *rationes rerum*, this comes very close to the graduated enlightenment central to the Dionysian understanding of hierarchy." In the view of O'Brien, the higher angels confer knowledge but not, as in Dionysius, being, grace, and glory on the lower spirits; moreover, Aquinas and Dionysius understand conversion differently. David LUSCOMBE, "Wyclif and Hierarchy," in Anne HUDSON and Michael WILKS, eds., *From Ockham to Wyclif*, Studies in Church History, subsidia 5 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 240 is also useful on what Aquinas made of Dionysian hierarchy.

which we have already referred and the radical revision of Beryl Smalley's initial conclusions in her great ground-breaking work. It would not be too strong to speak of her repentance!

In the last edition of *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* before her death, Dr. Smalley explained that, because she undertook forty years earlier to write part of "a history of the origins and development of biblical scholarship as it then was", her book is "a period piece. Its main theme is the medieval study of the literal historical sense and the story of how it came into more prominence."

Contemporary biblical scholarship has changed and so also has our view of medieval exegesis. It is a "reworking of traditions", as the Bible itself and patristic exegesis are seen to be. Dr. Smalley acknowledges that de Lubac's criticism of her "for preferring the literal to the spiritual senses" is justified.³⁰ She underrated, she says, the place of these senses in Aquinas:

They inherited in his belief that the Old Testament prefigured the New. He used them in his own scriptural commentaries, including his *Catena Aurea* of patristic excerpts on the Gospels. The two exceptions are his brilliant exposition of Job *ad litteram* and his lecture course on Isaiah, given when he was a bachelor reading the Bible *cursorie* and therefore *ad litteram*.³¹

She concludes that Thomas was "the enlightened conservative on the four senses".³²

In an article published in 1985, Dr. Smalley asks, "Did St. Thomas Aquinas make a break?" and provides some evidence, but does not directly answer her question.³³ However, in her last book, she is definite. She repeats much of what she disclosed in the preface to the third edition of her masterpiece and explains why she was deceived by the character of the commentary on Job:

Thomas gave spiritual senses to his text both in his *Catena Aurea* and in his lectures on Matthew and John. Why then the exposition of Job *ad litteram*? The answer lies in his prologue to Job; I did not take it seriously enough. St. Gregory had given such a thorough exposition of the spiritual senses that nothing more needed to be added.³⁴

She indicates that Thomas may have had reason to increase his emphasis on Christological prophecy as part of "the author's principle intention" and thus part of the literal sense - he had become aware that the Council of Constantinople in 553 had condemned as heretical the denial of certain direct Christological prophecies.³⁵ She also notices that "like Albert he sometimes inverts the spiritual and the literal senses, giving the spiritual first."³⁶

She justly applies to others the criticism she has now made of herself. Others also carry present day enthusiasms in biblical exegesis back into St. Thomas:

It is fashionable now to credit Thomas with a 'sense of history'. He did not think, it is claimed, of a renewal of the apostolic life as a backward-looking return ... reformers went not back to but progress with the New Law.³⁷

³⁰ SMALLEY, *The Bible*, vii-viii.

³¹ *Ibid.*, xiv.

³² *Ibid.*, xvi.

³³ Beryl SMALLEY, "Use of the 'Spiritual Senses' of Scripture in Persuasion and Argument by Scholars in the Middle Ages," *Rech. Théo. anc. med.* 52 (1985), 60.

³⁴ Beryl SMALLEY, *The Gospels in the Schools, c. 1100 - c. 1280*, (London & Ronceverte: Hambledon, 1985), 265.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 267.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 270.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

She refers us to Emilio Panella's "La 'Lex Nova' tra storia ed ermeneutica. Le occasioni dell'esegesi di S. Tommaso d'Aquino." Fr. Panella's work seems to me dependent upon the salvation history perspective of M.-D. Chenu, a perspective rightly criticised by de Lubac as a useful way of understanding Thomistic exegesis.³⁸ She concludes:

Without contesting these statements, I can only note that the texts supporting it hardly ever come from his [Thomas'] exegesis. His lectures on the Gospels lay no special stress on the New Law or on salvation history.³⁹

This is important because salvation history is usually contrasted with and opposed to Dionysian hierarchical and celestial categories as perspectives for looking at the church.

So far as innovation is concerned, Dr. Smalley's final judgment is modest. Aquinas "was aware of the mind of his author". He "nowhere calls the literal sense inferior to the spiritual".⁴⁰

Thomistic scholarship is, however, now developing in such a way that Thomas' traditionalism is understood positively, not negatively. An American academic, who writes both on Thomas' ontology and on his handling of his sources, makes this judgment:

He does **not** say that the literal is the pre-eminent sense; he says that it is the foundation ... the literal sense is the beginning of the supernatural *itinerarium mentis ad Deum* ... The subordination of literal, natural discourse to the analogical discourse of the revealed is the Thomistic understanding of any discursive hierarchy, scriptural or ontological.⁴¹

Moreover, the forthcoming critical edition of the *Catena Aurea* promises to show us new and unexpected things about Thomas' knowledge of and agreement with Greek patristic and byzantine exegesis and theology.⁴² This will draw him closer to Denys on another front.

³⁸ In *Tomismo e Neotomismo. Memorie Dominicane*, n.s. 6 (1975), 11-106 and see Hankey, *God in Himself*, 34-35. Smalley, Chenu and Panella were not the only scholars during this revival to try to find in St. Thomas the origins of what is approved in our time; see note 24 above. Other treatments of his exegesis seek to find a theological reasoning which can provide an explanation for the origins of modern empirical science or be made compatible with it; see FUNKENSTEIN, "'Scripture'", 92-101 and Amos FUNKENSTEIN, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 55-56. These are much like Smalley's early treatment, as are also T.F. TORRANCE, "Scientific Hermeneutics according to St. Thomas Aquinas," *JTS* 13 (1962), 259-289. At 259, Torrance speaks of the effect of the re-entry of Aristotle in terms of "scientific reference to the historical sense of Scripture"; Id., *Reality and Scientific Theology*, Theology and Science at the Frontiers of knowledge 7 (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1985), 10-11. R. BELLEMARE, "La Somme de théologie et la lecture de la Bible," *Église et théologie* 5, #2 (1974), 257-270 finds Thomas inadequate from the perspective of a Rahnerian existential historicism. In the move from biblical *lectio* to systematic theology "la richesse du concret, du vécu, de l'historique est sacrifiée aux exigences d'une pensée essentialiste, désincarnée, murée dans l'intemporel" (262-263). Brevard S. CHILDS, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 40-43 and 619-20 still treats Aquinas exclusively as an Aristotelian philosophically and according to the early views of Dr. Smalley. However, the bibliography at 42-43 is excellent. Given the banality of his treatment of Aquinas one wonders how much of it Professor Childs actually used.

³⁹ SMALLEY, *The Gospels*, 270.

⁴⁰ SMALLEY, *The Gospels*, 270-271.

⁴¹ Mark D. JORDAN, "The Modes of Thomistic Discourse: Questions for Corbin's *Le chemin de la théologie chez Thomas d'Aquin*," *The Thomist* 45 (1981), 96-97. See also id., *Ordering Wisdom. The Hierarchy of Philosophical Discourses in Aquinas*, The University of Notre Dame Publications in Medieval Studies 14 (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1986), 26-31 and, for participationist and Dionysian ontology in Aquinas, id., "The Grammar of Esse," *The Thomist* 44 (1980), 1-26.

⁴² C.G. CONTICELLO, "San Tommaso ed i Padri: La *Catena aurea super Ioannem*," *AHDLMA* 67 (1990), 31-92.

The very existence of the *Catena Aurea* posed a problem for those who imagined that for Thomas literal exegesis was a preliminary to systematic theology. In the *catena*, the mature master had arranged the diverse comments of a vast range of church Fathers, most of whose explanations revealed a spiritual sense, in order to exposit all four gospels. Further, there was nothing to oppose, and everything to support, the obvious view that this rich, artfully connected, and laboriously collected commentary was a choice fruit of Thomas' theological labors.

One of Beryl Smalley's most important and interesting early conclusions had been that the rediscovery of Aristotle in the thirteenth century had three effects. First, there would be a concentration on the literal-historical sense for its own sake. Second, there would be a scientific systematization of theology. Third, these two would be separated. She wrote,

[theology's] method is argumentative, not exegetical. At last theologians felt sufficiently sure of themselves to drop the fiction that all their work was a mere training for the allegorical interpretation. They formally freed theology from exegesis, and hence exegesis from theology.⁴³

Systematic theology with its distinctive *quaestiones* had been initiated by the *discursus*, weighing one authority against another in the course of commenting on the biblical text. These discourses could now be removed and set in their own proper systematic context.

However, these views conform neither to the facts about what we find in Thomas' commentaries - disputed questions debated at length in the midst of literal exegesis, (e.g. our question about the sending of the seraph to Isaiah) as well as rich, extensive allegorical commentary - nor to his practice as a teacher, in which he conformed to the norms of the day. M.-D. Chenu has written about those norms and their result for the character of St. Thomas' work.

The person preparing to teach theology spent two years as a *cursor biblicus*. It was during this part of his education that St. Thomas produced the commentary on Isaiah which interests us. Then, he spent two years as a *Sentences* bachelor, working at the text book of high medieval systematic theology, on which, notice, he **commented!** Finally, he **returned** to the Bible for two more years and there he stayed in the sense that to lecture on the Bible remained part of his professional duty.⁴⁴

The need for another structure for theology than exegesis allowed became apparent because of the extravagant growth of disputed questions in biblical commentaries. Then, systematic theology having developed its own powers and structures, the theologian carried that developed rationality **back** to his lectures on the biblical text! Scriptural commentary received a rich tribute from the heir it helped engender. To quote Father Chenu:

The master who taught was literally speaking, and as his official name indicated, a *magister in sacra pagina* ... It is true that in the history of Thomism the *Summa theologiae* has monopolized everyone's attention and commentaries; but herein precisely lies a grave problem ... In the thirteenth century, the university institution produced disputed questions and *summas* only within the framework of scriptural teaching.⁴⁵

⁴³ SMALLEY, *The Bible*, 293-294.

⁴⁴ CHENU, *Towards*, 242.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 233-234. On the movement by which Scriptural exegesis came to include theological and philosophical questions, see Marcia L. COLISH, "Psalterium Scholasticorum: Peter Lombard and the Emergence of Scholastic Psalms Exegesis," *Speculum* 67, #3 (July, 1992), 531-548: "Gilbert [of Poitiers] is really the first scholastic exegete of Psalms to develop theological *quaestiones* out of the text." (537) Paul ROREM judges that Lombard was more important than Augustine or Dionysius in determining Thomas' view of the use of literal sense for theological argument, see "An Influence of Peter Lombard on the Biblical Hermeneutics of Thomas Aquinas," *Rivista di Storia*

The division to which Dr. Smalley looked will come. The thirteenth century separation of the aspects of theological education and the development of diverse specializations with their attendant techniques shows and creates that future, but it is not yet there in Aquinas. Partly it is not there because the quadruple sense enabled Thomas to systematize Scripture and thus to make it and theology equivalent. Henri de Lubac writes about Thomas' place between past and future thus:

Cependant, l'exemple de saint Thomas, qui fut l'un des ouvriers décisifs de cette transformation, est ici utile à méditer. Ce n'est pas sans raison que saint Thomas conserve au seuil de la *Somme théologique*, la vieille équivalence de "théologie" et d'"Écriture", sous la vocable unique, désormais ambigu, de "doctrina sacra" et qu'il expose sous ce vocable la théorie du quadruple sens ... Sous la discontinuité des techniques la continuité de l'esprit était de la sorte assurée.⁴⁶

But, before we look at what the systematic theologians of the thirteenth century generally, and Thomas particularly, made of our disputed biblical texts, we must look to its earlier post Dionysian historical pilgrimage.

After Gregory the Great, the problems Denys had with Isaiah VI. 6 were encountered by Eriugena. Here we seem to encounter the end of our story near its beginning. Eriugena knew the doctrine of Denys more intimately than did any of our thirteenth century theologians; Eriugena read him in Greek. Moreover, he seems to have absorbed the systematic pattern present in and transmitted by the form and content of Denys' small ordered *corpus*.⁴⁷ For Eriugena produced what may be the first logically complete systematic theology, pagan or Christian, reduced to a single intentionally self-sufficient structure contained in a single writing, the *Periphyseon*.⁴⁸ He also ensured the transmission of the Dionysian doctrine to the west by producing a more intelligible translation of the *corpus* than Hilduin had done. This proved to be its own reward.

e Letteratura Religiosa [Torino], XVI (1980), 429-434. Brevard S. CHILDS, *Biblical Theology*, 40-43 still treats Aquinas according to the early views of which Smalley later repented; but, at 49, he advances the argument when he notes that, while Calvin, like Aquinas, separates exegesis and theology, he does it for the opposite reason: "Thomas Aquinas wrote a *Summa* to encompass the whole of Christian teaching into which structure the Bible provided building blocks. In striking contrast Calvin reversed the process! The role of theology was to aid in interpreting the Bible. His move was in the direction of dogmatics to exegesis." This contrast is enlightening and it sustains the fundamental point about the necessity of dividing the *genres*, but it is equally true that the fruit of philosophical and theological reflection is for Aquinas gathered back into his commentary on Scripture; see Carmelo PANDOLFI, *San Tommaso filosofo nel Commento ai Salmi: Interpretazione dell'essere nel modo "esistenziale" dell'invocazione*, (Bologna: Edizioni Studio Domenicano, 1993).

⁴⁶ Henri DE LUBAC, "Sur un vieux distique. La doctrine du 'quadruple sens'," in *Théologies d'occasion* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1984), 135, see A. PATFOORT, "Théorie de la théologie ou réflexion sur le corpus des Écritures?" *Angelicum* 54 (1977), 459-488.

⁴⁷ On that pattern, see René ROQUES, *L'Univers Dionysien. Structure hiérarchique du monde selon pseudo-Denys*, (Paris: Aubier, 1954) and P. ROEM, "The Place of The Mystical Theology in the Pseudo-Dionysian Corpus," *Dionysius* 4 (1980), 87-98; on its relation to the pattern of Thomas' *Summa Theologiae*, see W.J. HANKEY, "The *De Trinitate* of St. Boethius," 367-375, id., *God In Himself*, chapter 2; ROEM, *Pseudo-Dionysius. A Commentary*, 169-174, id., "'Procession and Return' in Thomas Aquinas," 147-163. On what is common between Dionysius and Eriugena as biblical commentators, see Jean PEPIN, *La tradition de l'allégorie*, 199-250.

⁴⁸ On the relation of this system to some others, see HANKEY, "Theology," 88. Some assert that the distinction of being the first systematic theologian belongs to Origen, see Charles KANNENGIESSER, "Divine Trinity and the Structure of the *Peri Archon*," in *Origen of Alexandria: His World and His Legacy*, ed. C. KANNENGIESSER and W. L. PETERSEN, (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1988); Robert D. CROUSE, "Origen In The Philosophical Tradition of The Latin West: St. Augustine and John Scottus Eriugena," in R. DALEY, ed., *Origeniana Quinta: Papers of the 5th International Origen Congress, Boston College, 14-18 August 1989*, (Louvain: Leuven University Press, 1992), 565-569.

After Eriugena's own theological writings had passed out of currency under his own name because of suspicions of heresy, his thought continued to influence western theology, and even St. Thomas, through his translation of Denys and the accretions which made up the inherited Dionysian corpus. There is some irony, then, when Aquinas, in his exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews, accuses Eriugena of heresy because Eriugena has absorbed the Dionysian negative and hierarchical theology, precisely its Procline character, more completely than Thomas ever will himself. Aquinas accuses Eriugena of denying that all the angels see God "per essentiam". This was a mistake, Aquinas asserts, "de primis studentibus in libris Dionysii, volens salvare et dictum Apostoli et dictum Gregorii." Such was "Ioannes Scotus, qui primo commentus in libros Dionysii. Sed haec opinio haeretica est ..."⁴⁹ Despite such judgments, and those much less well informed and charitable than this, the greatest Irish philosophical theologian went on instructing western Christendom. Not only had Eriugena's conceptions passed into the Dionysian works when he gave them a Latin form, but also fragments of Eriugena's own writings were carried into the thirteenth century with the Dionysian *corpus*. Moreover, his teaching was passed on undercover, so to speak, by enthusiastic disciples like Honorius Augustodunensis.⁵⁰

Evidently, there are important differences in form and content between Thomas' writings and those of Eriugena. Certainly, the multiplication of techniques and the elaboration of forms characteristic of the thirteenth century had not yet occurred, western theology had also to pass through a period of a more exclusive Augustinianism than is found in Eriugena, and to rediscover the actuality of reason and authority outside the Christian faith and the Christian Church. Still his conclusions about the seraphim and the reasons for them are common to him and St. Thomas.⁵¹

The editors of the *Summa Aurea* of William of Auxerre, a figure in the Dionysian revival of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, have placed a complete and well ordered question "Utrum omnes angeli mittantur" in an appendix.⁵² In order to reconcile the opposition between the Apostle Paul and his supposed disciple Denys, the author of the question adopts the solution which was general in the thirteenth century. That is, all the angels are sent (so satisfying Hebrews I. 14), but the higher go interiorly, i.e. within the angelic hierarchy, and just to those angels immediately below them. Only the last rank is sent exteriorly, i.e. outside the angelic hierarchy, and to us. In the course of his argument the author remarks:

*Et sic salvant auctoritatem Apostoli quia dicunt omnes mitti, et salvant auctoritatem Dionysii, quia dicunt non omnes mitti ad nos. Hec fuit opinio Iohannis Scoti, sicut habemus ex verbis ipsius super ierarchiam beati Dionysii.*⁵³

⁴⁹ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Epistolam ad Hebraeos Lectura*, in *Super Epistolas S. Pauli Lectura*, ed. Raphael CAI, VIIIth. ed., 2 vols., ii (Taurin/Rome: Marietti, 1953), 354, sect. 85. On the late date for these commentaries amongst Thomas' writings, see vol. i, p. vi. Significantly, this has recently been confirmed by the discovery of a reference to Proclus in the commentary on Colossians; see TUGWELL, *Albert*, 247, note 472 and *Super Epistolam ad Colossenses Lectura* in the Cai edition, 134, sections 41 and 42.

⁵⁰ See *Dionysiaca*, ed. Ph. CHEVALLIER, 2 vols. (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1937-1949); H.F. DONDAINE, *Le corpus dionysien de l' université de Paris au XIIIe siècle*, Storia e letteratura 44 (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1953); Hankey, "The *De Trinitate* of St. Boethius," 371-372, id., *God In Himself*, 46, note 38, 55, note 74; Simon TUGWELL, *Albert*, 39-95, 116-29 and Francis RUELLO, "Le Commentaire du Divinis Nominibus de Denys par Albert le Grand: Problèmes de method," *Arch. de Phil.* 43 (1980), 589-613.

⁵¹ Donald F. DUCLOW'S, "Isaiah Meets the Seraph," provides a profound analysis of what Eriugena takes from Dionysius on this question and where he departs from him in virtue of his attachment to Augustine. In general, Aquinas is with Eriugena where he differs from his great Greek teacher.

⁵² GUILLELMUS ALTISSIODORENSIS, *Summa Aurea*, ed. J. RIBAILLIER, Spicilegium Bonaventurianum 17 (Paris & Rome: CNRS & Collegium S. Bonaventura, 1982), Liber 2, part 2, Appendix 10, pp. 732-734.

⁵³ "... non omnes mittuntur ad nos, quoniam superiores mittuntur ad medios, medii ad inferiores ad nos ... Propter has rationes, immo propter nunc auctoritatem Apostoli, dicimus quod omnes mittuntur. Ad auctoritatem, Dionysii dicimus quod 'ea que preminent', scilicet seraphim, cherabim, throni, 'nunquam habent usum exterioris officii', sed

Clearly, Eriugena was a source for this doctrine in the thirteenth century. The editor of the *Summa Aurea* refers us to chapters six and seven of the *Expositio in Hierarchiam caelestem*. There, indeed, Denys establishes the laws which require his interpretation of Isaiah VI. 6. In chapter six, Denys writes of the mediatorial structure of the angelic ranks, divided, and hierarchially ordered into highest, middle and lowest triads. Only the highest “is forever around God and is said to be permanently united to him ahead of the others and with no intermediary.”⁵⁴ Chapter seven, which treats this highest triad, says of them:

they are established beyond all the most godlike powers, and firmly adhere to their own order which is eternally self-moved according to an immutable love for God. They know no diminution at all toward inferior things ...⁵⁵

Eriugena certainly understands these good Procline principles and their implications. It is not these places in his commentaries on Denys, however, but to his comments on chapter thirteen of the *Caelestial Hierarchy*, to which we must go in order to see them applied to the question at hand.

In confronting the question of Isaiah VI. 6 as raised by Denys, Eriugena first correctly sets out the fundamental principle involved: the so-called *lex divinitatis*.⁵⁶ The first, or highest, only draws the lowest back to itself through a medium, never directly. Therefore, only the lowest in the mediating hierarchy comes into contact with what is to be raised, or led back. When these principles are applied to the church simultaneously with their application to, and development of, an angelic hierarchy, the result is not only that the church must be hierarchical, but also that only the top of the earthly hierarchy (or hierarchies) can come into contact with the bottom of the celestial order. Eriugena comments that the highest triad looks to the divine and raises up the mediate order:

ad primas essentias medie convertuntur, et per eas, primas, merito digne factas in similitudine divina preoperatrices in deiformitatem possibilem reducuntur, id est sursumducuntur, secunde ⁵⁷ *De ultima autem caelestium ierarchia, deque humana sub intelligendum reliquit.*

semper habent interioris officii usum, quia diligere, scire iudicare sunt officia interiora.” *ibid.*, 733, 32/33-734 58/59, 63/66.

⁵⁴ *Pseudo-Dionysius. The Complete Works*, trans. Colm LUIBHEID, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 160 (PG 3, 200D).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 163 (PG 3, 208B).

⁵⁶ In the Sentences commentary AQUINAS gives the law and explains it thus: “Sed contra, secundum dionysium, ‘haec est lex divinitatis inviolabiliter stabilita; quod a primis ultima per media perficiantur’. Sed inter nos et primos angelos sunt medii inferiores. Ergo primorum actio immediate non pervenit ad nos, sed est per medios secundos.” *In Sententiarum*, pt. 2, ds. 10, qu. 1, art. 2, s.c. 1, p. 152. See also *In Sententiarum*, pt. 2, ds. 10, qu. 1, art. 3, ag. 6 and ra. 3, p. 153. The law is a principle cited by him and determinative for him in his major works of systematic theology. Though he attributes it to Dionysius (correctly), I have not been able to find the formula in the words used by Albert the Great, Bonaventure, Aquinas, John of Paris, Aegidius Romanus, Boniface VIII and François de Meyronnes in the various medieval texts of Dionysius given in Chevallier’s *Dionysiaca*. There is reason to think that HUGH OF ST. VICTOR is a common source for their understanding of Dionysian hierarchy. But, though I have found the doctrine in Hugh’s *Commentariarum in Hierarchiam Coelestem S. Dionysii Areopagite*, PL 175, 924-1154, I have not found these formulae there. For references, see HANKEY, “Dionysius dixit,” 143-146 and LUSCOMBE as in note 7 above.

⁵⁷ IOHANNES SCOTUS ERIUGENA, *Expositiones in Ierarchiam Coelestem*, ed. J. BARBET, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis 31 (Turnholt: Brepols, 1975), c. 13, 3, p. 175, lines 326-333. See c. 4, 3, pp. 77-79, lines 504-556; c. 7, 3, p. 108, lines 641-654; c. 8, 2, pp. 122-124, lines 165-246. DUCLOW, “Isaiah Meets the Seraph,” 236ff., shows that Eriugena represents Dionysius, doctrine on this matter differently in the *Periphyseon* than in the *Expositiones*. The differences are very important but do not affect my argument.

So the powers descend through the hierarchy “gradatim quidem, non tamen equaliter”.⁵⁸

Eriugena grasps this principle of gradual and unequal descent (for the sake of raising up) so completely that he goes on to say that he prefers the second of Denys’ proposed explanations of Isaiah VI. 6. The first explanation would ascribe to the angels of the ultimate order - those who purified Isaiah by touching his lips with fire in the vision - the denomination of seraph, because purifying is one of the general functions of the whole hierarchy. What belongs to all but which is preeminently seen in the fiery seraphim, ignited by the divine love, is attributed to the lowest ones also because of their function in this instance.⁵⁹ But, this solution is not in Eriugena’s eyes, and he discerns rightly, as hierarchical as the second. In Denys’ second explanation, God is the cause of Isaiah’s purification. (As, indeed, he must be not only because he is cause of all, but because the forgiveness of sins is proper to him.) However, the “prime worker” of the mission of the particular angel who enlightened Isaiah was the seraph who initiated the descent of the illumination through the grades of the hierarchy until it dispatched that ultimate spirit to the prophet.⁶⁰ Eriugena comments on this second proposal:

*Aut, quod mihi probabilius videtur, qui excelissimorum intellectuum propriam appellationem propriasque virtutes ultimis angelis nobisque presedentibus nullo modo convenire disserui, propterea angelus, qui purgavit prophetam, Seraphim vocabulo nominatus est a theologia, quoniam ipse suam propriam operationem qua purgavit prophetam, cuius labia mystico tetigit calculo, non in seipsum retulit, sed in ipsum Deum qui totius purgationis causa est et principium, et in ipsum quasi summum sacerdotem Seraphim, per quem visus est prophetica labia mundare.*⁶¹

It must not be thought that the proper power for this mission resided in the angel of the lowest order, even if he possessed it only because of his generic membership in the hierarchy to which these operations belong. Both he and Isaiah must look above in two ways: first to God, and then to the seraphim.⁶²

Three centuries pass before western theologians turn again with enthusiasm to the philosophical theology of Denys. And even while that revival is occurring, some confront the question of ‘what really happened’ to Isaiah only because, unhappily, Gregory the Great had bequeathed them the question. They neither consult Denys directly nor show any desire to discover his fundamental logic so as to follow his reasoning.

Among the clearest examples of this mentality is Peter Abelard. In his *Sic et Non*, he simply summarizes Gregory, including the great Father’s agnostic passage and his certainty, based on Zachariah, that one angel sends another.⁶³ There is only one addition, and it comes at the end. It is from Haymo of Auxerre quoting Didymus the Greek (a fourth century successor to Origen in Alexandria) to the effect that “some angels are sent from every order”.⁶⁴ This is a distinctly anti-Dionysian conclusion. Haymo himself uses the same argument one finds in Gregory to show that angels can be present and sent at the same time. This point dissolves the arguments against sending, which are based on Daniel VII. 10, a text seeming to distinguish two

⁵⁸ Ibid., c. 13, 3, p. 175, line 335. See DUCLOW, “Isaiah Meets the Seraph,” 236.

⁵⁹ *Pseudo-Dionysius. Complete*, 177 (PG 3, 300B-C).

⁶⁰ Ibid., 178 (PG3, 301C).

⁶¹ ERIUGENA, *Expositions*, c. 13, 4, p. 184, lines 650-658.

⁶² DUCLOW, “Isaiah Meets the Seraph,” 240 ff. demonstrates that in the *Periphyseon* this angelic intermediation is transformed so as to make it consistent with the Augustinian *nulla interposita creatura* in respect to the commerce between God and the human.

⁶³ PETER ABELARD, *Sic et Non. A Critical Edition*, ed. B. BOYER and R. MCKEON, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), qu. 49, 222-224.

⁶⁴ Ibid., lines 62-64: “Haimo in Epistola ad Hebraeos: Ut ait Didymus Graecus in libro de spiritu sancto, ex omnibus angelorum ordinibus aliqui mittuntur.”

multitudes: some assisting in the presence, others being sent. Since “Deus ... est incircumscribitus, omnia implet et ubique totus est”, thus, none, in fact, leaves the divine presence.⁶⁵ In respect to Hebrews I. 14 - these comments come from his exposition of Hebrews - Haymo unites those present and those being sent in another way, namely, in a common will. So “in some way all are present and all are sent.” And that is the will of the “only Son of God” who uses them to effect our salvation.⁶⁶

Peter Lombard will use a similar anti-Dionysian argument, not found in Gregory, when he comments on Hebrews I. 14 that “it ought not to seem unworthy if even the higher angels are sent, since, indeed, he who is the creator of all would descend to this lower world.”⁶⁷

Peter Lombard was, as we say, “all over the place” on the question. Like Peter Abelard, he drew mainly from Gregory the Great and those who reproduced Gregory. This itself was enough to leave the problem unresolved. But, beyond Gregory, he not only produced arguments like the ones above, strongly against the Dionysian position, but also quoted extensively from Hugh of St. Victor. This Canon of St. Victor was one of the principle sources for the hierarchical doctrines of the pseudo-Areopagite, though Hugh profoundly modified what he took.⁶⁸ The editors of the *Sentences* invite us to look to the *Summa Sententiarum* and Hugh’s *De Sacramentis* “quorum fons communis est Gregorius Magnus” and would have us compare Lombard with Peter Abelard’s *Sic et Non*, Robert Pullen’s *Sententiae* and Haymo.⁶⁹ But there is more of Denys in Hugh than Gregory reproduces, namely, a clearer grasp of the fundamental philosophical principles determining the Dionysian position. And, since Lombard concludes the second chapter of this distinction with a strongly Dionysian statement from Hugh, it is no wonder that he left the commentators on the *Sentences* with a major problem.

The *Summa Sententiarum*, as we are referred to it both in *Patrologia Latina* 171 and in volume 176, in fact gives nothing beyond Gregory except the profoundly anti-Dionysian statement that the higher angels ought not to find it unworthy of them to do what the Creator does - descend to the *inferiora*.⁷⁰ Robert Pullen construes Denys to mean that the highest orders go away from the divine presence on external missions “minime”, deputizing the last two ranks to this work.⁷¹ But even this reduced doctrine (Denys would have only the lowest ranks ever sent externally), Pullen finds unacceptable. He points out that in Daniel X. 13 “unus de primis principibus Michael” is clearly on an external mission. Moreover, and doubtless more importantly, he thinks that St. Paul in Hebrews I. 14 makes all angels “ministering spirits” in

⁶⁵ HAYMO OF AUXERRE, *Expositio in Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, PL 117, 831D-832A. The passage in GREGORY is: *Et mittuntur igitur, et assistunt, quia etsi circumscriptus est angelicus spiritus, summas tamen spiritus ipse, qui Deus est, circumscriptus non est. Angeli itaque et missi, et ante ipsum sunt, quia quolibet missi veniant, intra ipsum currunt* (PL 76, 1255A). This is repeated by the Venerable Bede in his commentary on Luke and passes into the tradition very generally. See BEDE, *In Lucae Evangelium Expositio*, ed. D. HURST, *Opera, Pars II, Exegetica 3*, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 120 (Turnholt: Brepols, 1960), 27, lines 322-328.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 832B: *omnes mittuntur, eisdemque dignitatis, sunt qui mittuntur, cuius et qui assistunt, vel certe quia omnes eiusdem voluntatis sunt, et dum illi qui semper assistunt, consentiunt cum eis qui mittuntur, quodammodo in illis omnes assistunt, omnes mittuntur, et est sensus: Quid mirum si unico Filio Dei ministerium suum exhibent angeli, cum etiam nostrae salutis ministros eos constet esse effectos.*

⁶⁷ PETER LOMBARD, *Sententiae in IV Libris Distinctae*, Spicilegium Bonaventurianum 5 (Grottaferrata: Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, 1971), Liber 2, dist. 10, cap. 1 (54), p. 377: *His testimoniis asserunt quidam omnes angelos mitti. Nec debet indignum videri si etiam superiores mittantur, cum et ille qui creator est omnium, ad haec inferiora descenderit.*

⁶⁸ See HANKEY, “Dionysius dixit,” 122-146.

⁶⁹ LOMBARD, *Sententiae*, Liber 2, dist. 10, cap. 1 (54), p. 377, note and see cap. 2, p. 379, note to “Num. 3”.

⁷⁰ “HILDEBERT”, *Tractatus Theologicus*, 22, PL 171, 1115B and “HUGH OF ST. VICTOR”, *Summa Sententiarum*, II, 6, PL 176, 87D-88A. The sentence is exactly the same in these and in LOMBARD as quoted above in note 67.

⁷¹ ROBERT PULLEN, *Sententiarum*, PL 186, Liber 6, c. 43, 287B-C: *Cherubim atque Seraphim, quorum alter ordo ultimus, alter exstat penultimus, ita Deo assistere autumant, ut exteriora ad explenda negotia minime recedunt, minoresque spiritus angelos videlicet et archangelos huiusmodi rebus deputandos ...*

order to exhalt Christ.⁷² Certainly, then, on this side of Peter Lombard, the sources and parallels run against Denys. It is the opposite with Hugh.

Lombard first produces from Hugh the compromise solution rejected by Robert Pullen, one which Aquinas will also reject later, though for the opposite reason. After the section concluding with the example of humility which Christ gives to the highest angels, Lombard notes a divergence among his authorities. Some think all angels are sent, others suppose that generally only those descend who have this particular obligation:

*ex officio iniuncto, qui proprie Angeli et Archangeli nominantur, alios rarius mitti, scilicet maiores, causa extra communem dispensationem oborta, qui cum Angelorum ministerium suscipiunt, etiam nomen assumunt.*⁷³

The highest go only rarely and for great causes, assuming, when on such missions, the name of angel. This doctrine is offered in order to explain Psalm 103. 4: “Qui facit angelos suos spiritus.”

The compromise does not bring out, indeed, it conceals, the principle which determines the matter for Denys and which will determine it again for Aquinas; i.e. hierarchical action is always mediated. The highest of one order never touches a lower order. There must be a diminution of spiritual virtue to a lower level within a hierarchical rank before a higher order of being can come into contact with a lower. Even then the higher touches only the top grade of the lower order. This characteristically Iamblichian and Procline principle, well known to Aquinas, and accepted by him, does appear in the second passage of Hugh quoted by Peter Lombard. That passage is continuous in *De Sacramentis* with the one above, but, discerningly, is separated off by Lombard and appears at the end of the second chapter of the distinction, thus making the general direction of Lombard’s second chapter oppose the tendency of his first.

I reproduce Roy Deferrari’s translation of Hugh:

Some say that the three highest orders, that is the seraphim, and the cherabim and thrones, are turned to divine and interior things alone, and always stand before the Creator, but that the three lower orders are sent to do and announce exterior things, and that the three middle orders not only in dignity or place but also in office are stationed between both; these receive the divine command from the higher orders and transmit it to the lower. For the reason that the highest announce the divine command to the middle, and the middle to the lowest and these to us, all are rightly called angels.⁷⁴

This is a generally correct Dionysian conclusion. It is an easy matter to find it, and the understanding of the logic on which it depends, in Hugh’s *Commentary on the Celestial*

⁷² Ibid.: *Apostolus quoque generalem volens in Christo probare praelationem generalem in angelis debuit ostendere subjectum.*

⁷³ LOMBARD, *Sententiae*, Liber 2, dist. 10, cap. 1, pp. 377-378 and HUGH OF ST. VICTOR, *De Sacramentis*, PL 176, Liber 1, pars 5, cap. 33, 262C. There is a translation: *Hugh of St. Victor, On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith (De Sacramentis)*, English Version by Roy J. DEFERRARI, The Mediaeval Academy of America Publication 58 (Cambridge: The Mediaeval Academy of America, 1951), chapter 36 [sic], 93. This compromise is also the result in the *Sentences* of PETER OF POITIERS whose sources include the *Summa Sententiarum* and the *Sentences* of Lombard, but who seems to have no direct knowledge of Dionysius on the matter. See *Sententiae Petri Pictaviensis*, by D.S. MOORE, J.N. GARVIN, M. DULONG, vol. 2, University of Notre Dame Publications in Medieval Studies 11 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1950), ii, 6, p. 27. He raises also the question of the mission of the Son of God and solves the problem of the distinction between assisting and ministering angels in Daniel VII. 10 by reference to the ubiquity of God.

⁷⁴ DEFERRARI translation 93, LOMBARD, *Sententiae*, 379, HUGH, *De Sacramentis*, 262D. The last sentence, giving the principle, is, in HUGH: *Ac per hoc cum supremi mediis, medii imis atque hi nobis praeceptum divinum nuntiant omnes merito angeli nominantur.*

Hierarchy of Saint Dionysius.⁷⁵ It will have a great future in the thirteenth century, when its philosophical logic is precisely comprehended. Lombard himself, without disclosing the logic which moves him, finally refers us here back to Denys and proposes that we agree with the Areopagite's interpretation of Isaiah VI .6. The conflict with Hebrews I. 14 is resolved because the "omnes", of "all are ministering spirits sent", "does not refer to all of each order, but to all angels of the lower orders".⁷⁶

Before we are fully into the thirteenth century, the second half of the twelfth century brings us the Dionysian Alan of Lille. The question as to whether a seraph was directly sent to Isaiah seems not to formally appear in his writing. Certainly he and Simon of Tournai both take the work of the seraphim to be "to lead men to the love of God". Thus they are "incalescentes". But this is not the work of any one of them personally, says Simon, but "est seraphim nomen ... multitudinis uniformis incalescenti affectione pre ceteris".⁷⁷ Alan explains the Dionysian hierarchical system with its distinction between the highest ranks, who immediately receive the divine illuminations, and the lower ones, who receive their illumination mediately through the higher orders.⁷⁸ He distinguishes sharply between humans who are "facti" and angels who are "creati".⁷⁹ They see face to face, we mediately "per speculum, in enigmate".⁸⁰ The lowest ranks, reveal only "minora" and are guardians to individual humans.⁸¹ Nonetheless, it seems that the exaltation of the seraphim does not prevent their having a mission directly to humans, rather, being themselves immediately and ardently enflamed with love, the seraphim have the distinction of working this in mankind:

Illi ergo angeli qui divino amore incalescunt maxime ad hoc sunt officium deputati specialiter ut homines ad incalescendum amore divino invitent; primum ordinem constituunt.⁸²

It is possible, thus, to be half Dionysian on these questions.

There are, however, no such half measures with the two greatest Franciscan doctors of the thirteenth century, Alexander of Hales and St. Bonaventure. They both arrive at the same solution: all angels are sent, but only the last orders externally, the higher orders are sent internally.⁸³ So the hierarchical principles of gradation and mediation are preserved. Under God,

⁷⁵ HUGH OF ST. VICTOR, *Commentariorum in Hierarchiam Coelestem S. Dionysii Areopagitae secundum interpretationem Joannis Scoti*, PL 175: 1029A, 1033B, 1051B, 1057B, 1078B, 1079, 1114D-1116A, 1122B-1123A, 1123D-1124A, 1126D-1127B, 1129A-B. Pages 1111-1130 are his exposition of Chapter 13 of *The Celestial Hierarchy* which he understands correctly on this point and with which he indicates no disagreement. The operations of grace in the form of illuminations descend mediately through the angelic hierarchy and are mediated to humans by it as a whole.

⁷⁶ LOMBARD, *Sententiae*, Liber 2, dist. 10, cap. 2, p. 379: "Et ob id. forte Apostolus dixit omnes spiritus administratores esse Filii et mitti in ministerium, vel per 'omnes' non singulos ordines, sed de inferioribus ordinibus singulos angelos complexus est."

⁷⁷ SIMON DE TOURNAI, *Sententiae*, in ALAIN DE LILLE, *Expositio de Angelis, Textes inédits*, ed. Marie-Thérèse d'ALVERNY, Études de philosophie médiévale 52 (Paris: Vrin, 1965), 309. See ALAIN DE LILLE, *Expositio prosae de angelis*, in d'ALVERNY, *ibid.*, 198-199; *Hierarchia Alani*, in *ibid.*, 230 and P. GLORIEUX, "La Somme 'Quoniam homines' d'Alain de Lille," *AHDLMA* (1953), Liber 2, tract 1, 283. For references to material on the Platonism of Alan, see HANKEY, *God In Himself*, 47, note 41. For the character of his reception of Dionysius, see LUSCOMBE, "Conceptions of Hierarchy," 11-13.

⁷⁸ 'Quoniam Homines', 281, *Hierarchia*, 230.

⁷⁹ *Expositio*, 199.

⁸⁰ 'Quoniam Homines', 283.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 285, *Hierarchia*, 235.

⁸² *Hierarchia*, 230; 'Quoniam Homines', 283; *Expositio*, 198-199.

⁸³ ALEXANDER OF HALES, *Glossa in quatuor libros Sententiarum Petri Lombardi*, vol. 2, Biblioteca Franciscana Scholastica Medii Aevi 13 (Quarrachi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1952), liber 2, dist. 10, p. 102: "Supremi ordines, scilicet Seraphim, Cherubim, Throni, non dicuntur habere 'usum exterioris officii', [which belongs to

the seraph, in an action interior to the angelic hierarchy, moves the angel who appears to Isaiah, but seraphim do not approach humans directly. There is no difference in principle between the Franciscan solution and that of Aquinas.⁸⁴ However, the two Franciscans differ from one another. Alexander preserves something of Gregory's agnosticism on the subject and his *solutio* allows as a possible alternative that "omnes mittuntur, sive de superioribus sive de mediis sive de inferioribus immediate."⁸⁵ He has discerned that this remains possible also with the Master of the *Sentences*. But Alexander's resolutions of the *ad objecta* operate to support the correctly Dionysian alternative. Bonaventure, like Thomas, has no doubts and leaves no alternative.

Bonaventure's fundamental concern in these questions of his *Sentences Commentary* is with the operations of charity. Alexander is rather occupied with the vexing problems of how separated substances can communicate with one another. In this Alexander and Aquinas, who is working out a system of hierarchically organized subjectivities and descending illuminations, are closer to one another. But Bonaventure puts the essentials together with admirable clarity. It is a question of mediation by means of knowledge:

*Si autem intelligamus de missione interiori, quae est ad Angelos propter nos; sic mitti competit omnibus, quoniam superiores mittuntur ad medios, et medii ad infimos, dum revelando purgant et illuminant ea quae nobis expediunt ...*⁸⁶

Bonaventure's principles of biblical exegesis seem close to those of St. Thomas. He

insists on the importance of literal or historical meaning as the foundation or point of departure, for without the literal there can be no spiritual meaning ... [A]llegory and mystical interpretations need not be sought everywhere.⁸⁷

And he shows a shrewd grasp of what has created this ongoing controversy. Lombard is right, Bonaventure says; diverse opinions come from contrary authorities. "Hence some adhere to

"quidam... ex primaria sui conditione deputati sunt ad denuntiandum exteriora, et illi dicuntur angeli"] sed semper interioris quia diligere, scire, iudicare sunt officia interiora non exteriora." Id., *Summa Theologica*, (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1928), Inq. 2, tract. 3, sect. 2, qu. 2, tit. 3, cap. 3, p. 250: where, though he quotes Gregory's "nos affirmare nolumus" and gives two solutions, the replies to the objections indicate that his preference is the second: "alii vero dicunt quod superiores nuntiant inferioribus, inferiores verso nuntiant hominibus, et illi per se dicuntur mitti." He makes the distinction between exterior and interior missions and says that no Scripture records the sending of the preeminent. BONAVENTURE, *Commentaria in quatuor libros Sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi*, vol. 2, (Ad Claras Aquas [Quaracchi]: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1885), liber 2, dist. 10, art. 1, qu. 1, p. 260: "absque dubio beati Angeli ad nos mittuntur a Deo", qu. 2, p. 262: "Exteriore missione inferiores tantum Angeli ad nos mittuntur, sed interiore missione superiores ad inferiores mittuntur, et quid propter nos."

⁸⁴ This is true in respect to the particular matter we are considering, but not generally. See David LUSCOMBE, "Some Examples of the Use made of the Works of the Pseudo-Dionysius by University Teachers in the Later Middle Ages," in *The Universities in the Late Middle Ages*, eds. Josef Ijsewijn & Jacques Paquet, Mediaevalia Lovaniensia I/VI (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1978), 228-241, id., "François de Meyronnes and Hierarchy," in Diana WOOD, ed. *The Church and Sovereignty c. 590-1918. Essays in Honour of Michael Wilks*, Studies in Church History, Subsidia 9 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 225-232, and as cited in notes 7, 12 and 29 above. There is a good summary of Luscombe's work in ROEM, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 30-36. Janet COLEMAN, "The Dominican Political Theory of John of Paris in its Context," in Diana WOOD, ed. *The Church and Sovereignty c. 590-1918. Essays in Honour of Michael Wilks*, Studies in Church History, Subsidia 9 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 187-224 addresses the character of Dominican and Franciscan differences on hierarchy directly.

⁸⁵ ALEXANDER OF HALES, *Summa*, Tom. 2, inq. 2, tract. 3, sect. 2, qu. 2, tit. 3, cap. 3, p. 250.

⁸⁶ BONAVENTURE, *Commentaria*, liber 2, dist. 10, art. 1, qu. 2, p. 262.

⁸⁷ Thomas REIST, *Saint Bonaventure as a Biblical Commentator. A Translation and Analysis of his Commentary on Luke XVIII,34-XIX,42*, (New York: University Press of America, 1985), 43.

certain of these and understand them literally, explaining the others.”⁸⁸ Evidently, **only a systematic treatment of all the texts** will prevent such sophistry. This is also Thomas’ underlying assumption. An examination of the order of the authorities ranged on both sides of these questions in Bonaventure’s *Commentary* would show that they are ordered from the strongest.⁸⁹ Organization of this kind, implicit or explicit, is essential to systematization.

So at last we come to the great Dominican philosophical theologians of the thirteenth century. Though, before looking at St. Albert the Great, who both taught St. Thomas his Denys and survived him, and whose magnanimous mind passed on many strands of the Procline tradition (and much else) to futures beyond the comparatively safe developments of Aquinas,⁹⁰ we must stop briefly with the great Dominican exegete and the Order’s first cardinal, Hugh of St. Cher. Beryl Smalley’s earlier conclusions about thirteenth century developments in biblical studies owed much to examination of his work and it will indeed provide some contrast with our two Dionysian Platonists, Albert and Aquinas, though not perhaps as much as one might suppose.

Hugh of St. Cher commenting on Isaiah VI. 6 betrays no knowledge of the Dionysian problems with this text, nor are these problems evident in his exegesis of Daniel VII. 10. Zachariah II. 3-4 displays a hierarchical view of the angels: the one who stands is “superior alio” and, when Hugh speaks of how the angels perfect us, he indicates that “many from the minor angels reveal many mysteries through the church”.⁹¹ However, when we arrive at his comment on Luke, we encounter again Pope Gregory’s reflections on the angels in his thirty-fourth homily. These are the remarks by which Denys’ problems with Isaiah VI. 6 entered the western tradition.

The problem of present and sent angels is quickly solved by reference to what Bede passed on of Gregory’s reflection: all are present to the “incircumscriptus” God.⁹² Denys’ name is never, however, introduced either here or in Hugh’s reflections on the first chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews where angelic problems almost overwhelm the textual commentary.

There, considering how the superiority of Christ is demonstrated both by the ministry of angels to him and by their ministry to humans through him, the question of the mission of the seraph to Isaiah recurs. Hugh’s language now becomes thoroughly Dionysian. He calls the seraphim the superiors of the celestial hierarchy and a first epiphany and distribution of the

⁸⁸ BONAVENTURE, *Commentaria*, liber 2, dist. 10, art. 1, qu. 2, p. 262: *sicut dicit Magister in littera, diversae fuerunt opiniones diversas auctoritates, quae videntur in hac materia sibi contrariae. Unde quid adhaerentes quibusdam et intelligentes eas ad litteram, alias vero exponentes, formaverunt sibi opiniones varias.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 261. On one side, are first, Daniel VII. 10, second, Dionysius *The Celestial Hierarchy*, then “ratione videtur” which introduces two reasons derived from speculations about the place of contemplation in the church. On the other side, there are first, Hebrews I. 14, second, Isaiah VI. 6, then a comparison of the angelic and trinitarian missions, followed by three more theological rationalizations.

⁹⁰ On ALBERT as Thomas’ Dionysian initiator, see HANKEY, *God In Himself*, 46 which must now be corrected by Leonard E. BOYLE, “An Autograph of St. Thomas at Salerno,” in *Littera Sensus Sententia. Studi in onore de Prof. Clemente J. Vansteenkiste O.P.*, Studia Universitatis S. Thomae in Urbe 33 (Milan: Universitas S. Thomae in Urbe, 1991), 117-134 showing that “it is difficult to accept on the present evidence that, as is commonly held, the manuscript tradition for Albert’s commentary on the *De caelesti hierarchia* depends on the autograph of Thomas now in Naples.”(128) On Albert and the future of Christian Neoplatonism, see TUGWELL, *Albert*, and A. DE LIBERA, “Albert le Grand et le platonism”; *id.*, “Albert le Grand et Thomas d’Aquin.” For a detailed comparison of Albert and Aquinas in respect to their reception of Neoplatonism and Aristotle, see BOOTH, *Aristotelian Aporetic Ontology*, chapters 5 ff. and *id.*, “Conciliazioni ontologiche.”

⁹¹ *Postilla super Zachariam*, vol. 5, 215: *principibus, et potestatibus in caelestibus per Ecclesiam Dei nota facta est multiformis sapientia Dei, ut dicitur Eph. 3 c. quia multi ex minoribus Angelis multa mysteria per Ecclesiam.* All references are to HUGH OF ST. CHER, *Postilla in Opera Omnia in univsum Vetus et Novum Testamentum*, (Cologne, 1621). For Isaiah VI. 6, see vol. 4, p.17; for Daniel, vol. 5, p. 155.

⁹² *Postilla super Lucam*, in vol. 6, 129 and 222-223. Gregory’s reflections are on man as the tenth element completing the nine orders of angels and on the guardian angels for individual humans.

divine goodness.⁹³ This first distribution is necessary to creation and providence - we are reminded of one of Alexander of Hales' arguments supporting the sending of all the orders: diverse effects require diverse causes.⁹⁴ But, with good sense for biblical modes of expression, Hugh refuses to separate the ministering angels from those who are present to God in Daniel VII. 10: "Ministrando tamen assistunt". And, in an argument which recalls one in Haymo's exposition of this Epistle, Hugh asks us why we marvel because these exalted beings minister to Christ. We ought to consider that, by Christ's mediation, they minister also to us.⁹⁵ The Dominicans' first cardinal clearly exhibits a profound devotion to understanding the Bible, as well as a remarkable sense for its forms of expression. And, despite knowing the language of Denys and accepting much of his cosmic ordering, Hugh was determined not to put a foot on that slippery slope to which Denys' questions about Isaiah VI. 6 provided the broad gate.

Albert's spirit is very different. There is no road down which he seems afraid to walk. He comes to know Denys thoroughly and comes (as does Thomas) to understand Denys' own sources more and more completely. He expounds him faithfully and sympathetically and, as a result, like Thomas, he seems to find the Dionysian logic more and more persuasive.

At the beginning of his theological writing, Albert is acutely aware of the difficulties with Denys' treatment of Isaiah VI. 6. He explicitly recognizes Lombard's problems with the division of the authorities on the matter and sees no decisive reasoning by which everything might be settled. In his *Commentary on the Sentences*, Albert notes that there are three opinions on the matter in Lombard. Only the last, "quod non omnes [angeli] mittantur ad nos: sed quidem ad medias ut superiores, et medii ad inferiores, et inferiores ad nos", has but little reason in its side ("parum habet rationis"), and there are many authorities against. Indeed, it is expressly recorded that virtues, principalities and powers have been sent and that they have duties in respect to us ("expresse missi leguntur, et habent officia circa nos"). Nonetheless, this opinion has many followers. When, a little further on, he treats the question "Utrum omnes Angeli mittantur, vel non?", he brings out the reason for the large following of a position which seems both rationally weak and contrary to biblical authority. The position is the opinion of Denys and, as a result, it has great weight: *Et si credimus quod Dionysius scripsit visionem Pauli, tunc videtur ipse magis sequendus quam alii*.⁹⁶ The matter needs much dispute, Lombard "plainly" hands on three views, but Denys is giving us Paul's vision. Happily for Denys, it would be more than two centuries before there was any substantial doubt about his representation of the source of his teaching.

When we turn to the commentaries of Albert on the book of Isaiah and on the works of Denys, both of which belong to the same decade of his life, the reason in the Dionysian position now seems stronger to him. In his *Postilla super Isaiam*, he poses the question handed on from Denys by Gregory sharply, squarely, almost brutally. He leaves us with the position of Denys, unqualified. The sublime seraphim would not do to Isaiah in reality (*in veritate iste de Seraphim non fuisset*) what was recorded. Nonetheless, because the fiery purifying and illuminating union

⁹³ *Postilla super epistolam Pauli ad Hebraeos*, in vol. 7: *Volavit ad me unus de Seraphim, qui dicuntur ardentes, et sunt superioris ordinis. Unde superior caelestis Hierarchia sive Epiphanium incalescentis affectionis, incendio altioris intellectus fastigio, iudicij libra, resultatio distributa ...* [etc. these virtues correspond to the seraphim, cherubim and thrones which primary distribution and division signifies that] *quidquid boni in angelis est quaedam redundatio, et resultatio infinitae bonitatis Dei ab eo collata et distributa.*

⁹⁴ ALEXANDER OF HALES, *Summa*, Tom. 2, inq. 2, tract. 3, sect. 2, qu. 2, tit. 3, cap. 3, p. 250: *diversi sunt effectus respondententes diversis officiis, cum ergo officio Cherubim et Seraphim respondeant diversi effectus, mittentur non tantum de inferiori ordine, sed et de superiori.*

⁹⁵ HUGH OF ST. CHER, *Postilla super Hebraeos*, 241: *Omnes spiritus caelestes etiam de superiori ordine quid mirum si ministrant Christo, quia et nobis ipso mediante ministrant. Esa. 6 b. Volavit ad me unus de Seraphim, id. est, de superiori ordine. Ministrando tamen assistunt. Unde Daniel, capit. 7 c. ... Tobit capitul. 12 c. Ego sum Raphael unus de septem, quia astamus ante Deum. Luc. 1 b. Ego sum Gabrael qui asto ante Deum.* See HAYMO, *Expositio*, as quoted in note 65 above.

⁹⁶ ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Commentarii in II Sententiarum*, in *Opera Omnia*, ed. S.C.A. Bourgnnet, vol. 27 (Paris: Vivès, 1894), dist. 10, art. 3, p. 214 the divisio textus is at p. 210.

proper to the seraph flowed from him to the lower angel who touched the prophet, the angel took the seraphic name.⁹⁷

In his commentary on the thirteenth chapter of the *Celestial Hierarchy*, Albert has a firm hold on the reasoning of Denys. We are not surprized to find that Thomas' teacher understands what necessitates the angelic hierarchy and how that order serves humanity. Through it, the simple, utterly incomprehensible knowledge of everything, at once universally and particularly, in God is diminished by a gradual particularization so that finally it can, in the lowest angels, illuminate and direct us. The gracious movement of God toward us through this order would be destroyed if the first hierarchy, which always stands in the immediate presence, where there is the first influx of the divine light and all is contemplated in its universal simplicity, were to leave off these intuitions for the sake of the particularized knowledge and particular actions of the lower ranks. The question troubling us arises because of the distinction, apparently made in Daniel, between standing in the divine presence and ministering, i.e. between "virtus assistrix" and "virtus ministrativa".

The systematic solution is to recognize differences in the modes of contemplation, so that all the angels may be said both to behold God immediately (being free from sin and the weight of the body) and yet also to be hierarchically ranked in this knowledge because they see either more or less universally. In consequence, there could be nothing more graciously and providentially designed than that the higher should direct the lower through their more universal contemplations and that the lower, moved by the power and intelligence of the higher, should do what it is given them to see as God's will for us.⁹⁸

Though in his late *Summa Theologiae* Albert follows the distinctions first encountered in Alexander of Hales' commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, the Dionysian principles are fully and determinatively in evidence. Gregory, quoting Denys, confirms "quod omnes mittuntur, scilicet superiores ad medios, medii and inferiores, et inferiores ad nos." Lombard, Praepositivus and William of Auxerre are all alleged to assert that the higher orders fulfill their mission by employing those actually named angels. The higher have an interior action, the lower an exterior. Moreover this disposition conforms to the nature of human offices: "in quibus quamvis nobilior ordinet supra ignobiliorem". And it agrees also with the whole structure of creation: "Et hoc nec discordat a naturali ordine creaturarum universitatis".⁹⁹

After Alexander, Bonaventure, and Albert, there are no surprizes for us in Thomas Aquinas. No marked differences appear between him and them on the substance of the matter. His writing is characterized by its economy (especially as compared to Albert), its certainty and consistency on this subject from the beginning to the end of his career, and by the clear, and ever clearer, reduction of all questions to their logical principles. The most striking matters have been

⁹⁷ ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Postilla super Isaiam*, ed. F. SEIPMANN, in *Opera Omnia*, vol. 19 (Cologne: Aschendorff, 1952), lectio 52, 95, col. 2. For date, see p. xix. For the dates and order of the Dionysian commentaries, see ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Super Dionysium de divinis nominibus*, ed. P. SIMON, *Opera Omnia*, 37(1) (Cologne: Aschendorff, 1972), vi and É.-H. WÉBER, "L'interprétation par Albert le Grand de la Théologie mystique de Denys Ps-Aréopagite" in *Albertus Magnus Doctor Universalis*, ed. Gerbert MEYER and Albert ZIMMERMAN, Walberberger Studien 6 (Mainz: Matthias-Grüenwald, 1980), 409-439. On the late date of the *Summa Theologiae*, see ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Summa Theologiae sive De Mirabilis Scientia Dei, Liber I pars I, Quaestiones 1-50A*, ed. D. SIEDLER, in *Opera Omnia* (Cologne: Aschendorff, 1978), xvi-xvii. For its character, see literature in HANKEY, *God In Himself*, 20.

⁹⁸ ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *De Coelesti Hierarchia*, in *Commentarius in opera beati Dionysii Areopagiteae, Omnia Opera*, ed. A. BOURGNET, vol. 14 (Paris: Vivès, 1892), cap. XIII, 327-330, especially 329: *ita etiam licet omnes Angeli possint illuminari a primo, primi tamen recipiunt prima receptione divinum lumen et in virtute universalis, et secundi secunda, mediocriter, et ultimi ultima particulariter. Et ita inferioribus undecumque illuminentur, sunt illuminationes multiples et determinatae ad diversa negotia, quae in superiores sunt unitae, et universaliter erit inferiorum tantum ministrare, et superiorum dirigere eos in ministeriis, assistendo per summum modum contemplandi.* See also ALBERTUS, *Super Dionysium de divinis nominibus*, cap. 5, 320, lines 19-50 and p. 359.

⁹⁹ ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Summa Theologiae, Secunda Pars (Quaest. I-LXVII)*, in *Opera Omnia*, ed. A. BOURGNET, vol. 32 (Paris: Vivès, 1895), tract. 9, qu. 34, 370-374.

noted at the beginning of this paper: Thomas' identification of the Iamblichan law of hierarchical mediation with the law of grace, and his view that philosophy and the primitive church were united in "haec positio vulgata".

Among the very varied works which occupied the last years of St. Thomas' life, two concern the structure and nature of the realm of separated substances: i.e. his little treatise bearing that title, and the commentary on the *Liber de causis*.¹⁰⁰ These, and other writings from this period, including his exposition of the epistles of St. Paul, reveal that he now has at his disposition and is using William of Moerbeke's translation (1268) of Proclus' *Elements of Theology*. This enabled Aquinas to understand developed Platonism better, to distinguish it from what had been attributed to Aristotle (e.g. the *Liber de causis*) and, on at least one matter, (the principles for the determination of the number of these substances), to choose the *Platonici* against Aristotle. However, long before Thomas possessed the means to identify the Neoplatonic source of the principles by which he understood the celestial hierarchy and its relations to humans, he was stating them with clarity and using them to determine his interpretation of Scripture.

Commenting on Isaiah VI. 6, Thomas is clear that, having raised the question of seraphic and human contact, the great Gregory leaves it "sub dubio". Denys, instead, is explicit and definite because, for Denys, the order of the divine law requires "ut inferiora reducantur per media". There are no leaps or gaps; all transitions are mediated.¹⁰¹ This law is spelled out clearly and made determinative in Thomas' *Commentary on the Sentences*:

this is the invariably established divine law: that the last are perfected by the first through media. But between us and the first angels the inferiors intermediate. Therefore, the action of the first does not come to us immediately, but through a second mediating rank.¹⁰²

This law is given, and its consequence drawn, in the *sed contra*. In the body of the article, St. Thomas (like St. Albert) uses the *lex divinitatis* to develop his conception of the angelic hierarchy as a means by which what is simply and universally known in God is gradually contracted and particularized. Thus it comes to be both something knowable by human intellects and shaped into individual ends. Only thereby can what is contemplated simply in God become the varied subjects of particular actions. In the *Summa Theologiae*, again with St. Albert, Aquinas considers, under the perspective of this law, the structure of the created order and of human society generally, as well as the angelic order in itself and in its relations to humans. Thomas maintains that for the *ordo divinae providentiae non solum in angelis, sed etiam in toto universo, quod inferiora per superiora administrantur*. In this administration, "according to a common law the higher are not sent but only the lower."¹⁰³ These conceptions of the law of divine action, the structure of the created order, and the role of the angelic illuminations in the work of providence also determine the answers Aquinas gives to the questions which the Epistle to the Hebrews raises for him.¹⁰⁴

Aquinas finds this conception of universal order and the cosmic role of separated substances in the *Liber de causis* and he explains that work so as to draw together the author of the *Liber*, Proclus and Denys with respect to it. Commenting on proposition 5, which places higher intelligences between the first cause and the soul in the imprinting of forms, Thomas correctly refers us to propositions 182 and 183 of the *Elements*. In his *Commentary on the Sentences*, Avicenna was brought into the argument on just this point when Thomas moved

¹⁰⁰ See THOMAS AQUINAS, *De Substantiis Separatis*, vol. 60 (pars D-E), *Opera Omnia iussu Leonis XIII P.M. edita* (Rome: Editori di San Tommaso, 1968), p. D6; HANKEY, *God In Himself*, 46-47, and notes 8 and 49 above.

¹⁰¹ AQUINAS, *Super Isaiam*, 51, lines 363-364.

¹⁰² For latin text, see note 56 above. See also *In Sententiarum*, pt. 2, ds. 10, qu. 1, art. 3, ag. 6 and ra. 3, p. 153.

¹⁰³ AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, pt. 1, qu. 112, art. 2, corpus, the latin reads: "secundum communem legem superiores non mittuntur sed inferiores tantum."

¹⁰⁴ AQUINAS, *Super Hebraeos*, 354-355, sects. 85-87.

toward speaking of the remarkable general accord he had discovered and which we have noted.¹⁰⁵

Proposition 10 of the *Liber de causis* proposes that “all intelligence is full of forms”. The causally higher intellects contain more universal forms, from these derive those intelligences which contain less universal forms.¹⁰⁶ Explaining it, Aquinas first notes his agreement with Proclus that the “superiores habent formas magis universales, inferiores vero minus universales” and then tells us that Denys says the same in the *Celestial Hierarchy: ubi dicit quod cherubim ordo participat sapientia et cognitione altiori, sed inferiores substantiae participant sapientia et scientia particulariori*.¹⁰⁷ Aquinas proceeds to set out his general doctrine on the role of the angelic illuminations in bringing the divine knowledge and purposes to us.

By the point at which he is explaining proposition 19, Thomas can draw together what we have found in propositions 5 and 10 and bring before us a corollary of the *lex divinitatis*. Proposition 19 distinguishes between, and connects in a descending causal chain, “intelligentia divina”, receiving the first good gifts from the first cause, “intelligentia tantum”, which has between it and the first cause a mediating intelligence, “anima intelligibilis”, and “anima tantum”, from which we arrive at “corpora naturalia tantum”. Thomas’ explanation refers us to proposition 106 of the *Elements* (on intermediates between what is wholly eternal and what is in time) and then to the *De Divinis Nominibus* of Denys. There he finds the law that “fines primorum coniunguntur principiis secundorum”. He compares the “divinae intelligentiae” of the *Liber de causis* to the Dionysian “supremi angeli sunt quasi in vestibulis deitatis collocati”. The seraphim are the very highest of these. In making the categories of Proclus, of the *Liber de causis*, and of Denys cohere, he shrewdly places in the rank of mere intellects those angels who intermediate between the highest and ensouled humans: *Inferiores vero intellectus qui non pertingunt ad tam excellentem participationem divinae similitudinis sunt intellectus tantum, non habentes illam divinam dignitatem*.¹⁰⁸

St. Thomas is delivering, or at least revising, in this final period of his labors, his exposition of St. Paul’s epistles and, hence, of the Epistle to the Hebrews. There everything fundamental to what he finds common to the author of the *Liber de causis*, Denys, and Proclus emerges.¹⁰⁹ The *magister in sacra pagina* carries with him the philosophical principles he has learned, and learned to develop, as a systematic theologian, a *magister in sacra theologia*. The form of his exposition of the first chapter, with its three questions arising out of the opposition of authorities, and its logical content, reveal a mind for whom scriptural exposition and theological disputation can only reach resolution if both are activities of one systematic intelligence. The oppositions in the texts with which the one divine author of the Bible presents us, and the conflicts of the other authorities both with one another and with the canonical books, can only be resolved systematically. Isaiah VI. 6 and Hebrews I. 14 appear to contradict the good order which is essential to the system which had historically evolved. But, in fact, that Neoplatonic thinking was the only thinking which explicitly gathered all the elements into one whole and under one principle. Thomas knew no other way of thinking systematically.

The texts of Scripture which appeared to stand against the principles of that system appeared also to stand against the very *lex divinitatis*, against the law and possibility of order. And indeed, order requires mediation. But, because, for Thomas, the Bible is a single book with a single author, and because that author is the author of all, and because that authoritative

¹⁰⁵ AQUINAS, *Super Librum de causis*, 35-36 and *In Sententiarum*, pt. 2, ds. 10, qu. 1, art. 2, corpus, p. 152.

¹⁰⁶ AQUINAS, *Super Librum de causis*, p. 66: *Omnis intelligentia est plena formis; verum tamen ex intelligentiis sunt quae continent formas plus universales, et ex eis sunt quae continent formas minus universales*.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 69, see also, p. 72.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

¹⁰⁹ This must be understood strictly. Thomas has fundamental criticisms of the Platonists. The judgment of Vivian BOLAND is correct: “Dionysius must be interpreted always as a Catholic believer ... In Saint Thomas’ commentary on the *Liber de causis* ‘the faith’ tells against Proclus and against ‘platonic positions’, against the ‘Auctor’, against Aristotle but never against Dionysius who remains for Saint Thomas an authoritative source for what the faith teaches.” *Ideas in God*, 310.

goodness orders all things well, and, finally, because that author is above all revealed in that book, these texts require that the systematic law be made explicit. In the end, they, like all else, serve to reveal the underlying divine intelligible structure.

Mediation is essential to systemization not only because it assists that articulation by which everything is reduced to a schema of “homologous parts and parts of parts”, but also because mediation is essential to the subordination by which the parts are related and connected into a single totality. Proclus showed its power and necessity for that philosophical theology which would manifest how all cohered under one principle. But mediation was developed most enthusiastically by the medieval builders of the *summae*. As Erwin Panofsky wrote, it enabled a reasoning which “elucidated or clarified” faith:

Hence the much derided schematism or formalism of Scholastic writing which reached its climax in the classic *summa* with its three requirements of (1) totality (sufficient enumeration), (2) arrangement according to a system of homologous parts and parts of parts (sufficient articulation), and (3) distinctness and deductive cogency (sufficient interrelation).¹¹⁰

If systematization enabled *manifestatio*, it was equally essential to *concordantia*. The *auctoritates*, in whose *sententiae* the tradition was received, “even passages of Scripture, often conflicted with one another.” They could not be rejected on this account. “There was no other way out than to accept them just the same and to interpret and reinterpret them over and over again until they could be reconciled.”¹¹¹

This interpretation is not just a looking at the text to find the sense of the words. Certainly it is this, but as much, or even more, it is a matter of finding the place for each statement, one might say, each fact, in the system. When its right place is found, its relative truth (“relative” because, of course, this systematizing is a relativizing) will also be manifest. *Concordantia* is an activity of *manifestatio*. Therefore, it must be said, after all, that the seraph was sent to purge Isaiah - but, at the same time it is required that he still maintained his place in the distribution of the divine goodness. On this account, he went by means of the lower angels. Finally, also, it must be said that all the spirits minister under Christ to the salvation of humans - but, each of them serves in its own proper place. And, therefore, some never stray from their encircling of the throne.

Otto Pesch has brought out well what this approach does to the epistles of St. Paul. The text is articulated: “in order to clarify its inner structure, the exact sequence and the connection of the ideas ... God is a god of order, also in his written word.” The “reasons” for everything even the smallest detail are found. “Hence it was not a big leap to the integration of small systematic chapters into the context of the biblical commentary ... In an extreme case we meet within the commentary the structure of an ‘article’.”¹¹²

For Pesch, St. Thomas treats Paul as if he:

sits at his writing table, far from the world, and meditates on the suitable division of a dogmatical monograph about the grace of Christ ... only an unimportant accident diffused this monograph over the whole world in the form of fourteen letters ... The Apostle is for him the greatest systematician of the New Testament, the professor among the Apostles.¹¹³

In fact, if we reflect, are we not required, *mutatis mutandis*, to say more or less the same for the relation of God to the Bible as a whole, so far as Thomas is concerned? History is a medium of the systematic exposition, but history is within the system, not an external condition.

¹¹⁰ PANOFSKY, *Gothic*, 30-32.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 64-65.

¹¹² PESCH, “Paul,” 589-593.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 585.

What is divided and distributed throughout the books and *sententiae* of Scripture is first perfectly known in the eternal Word and willed in the eternal Spirit. Indeed, the word of Scripture is not to be identified with its words.

To enter at this stage of our investigation the complexities of Thomas' understanding of the human and divine words and their relation is impossible. Not only would we need to touch upon fundamentals of divinity, ontology and epistemology, but also to explore his relation to another tradition of Christian Neoplatonism, that of St. Augustine.¹¹⁴ However, if we are to suggest, as we have been attempting to do, how a Neoplatonic systematizing underlies Thomas' understanding of the biblical text, we must be clear that the text as words is subordinate to the word which it expresses. On this account Thomas and his patristic and medieval predecessors and successors can systematically interpret Scripture by means of the quadruple sense and understand the literal sense of texts like Isaiah VI. 6 and Hebrews I. 14 through a intelligible order, a *lex divinitatis*.

T. F. Torrance has summarized the essentials for us:

Aquinas understands the word in holy Scripture, as the creaturely effect or form of that which the prophet has seen in his vision or, to put it the other way round, as the outward creaturely expression produced by God, as "the word of the Word".¹¹⁵

Because, then, the outward words are effects:

they have to be interpreted: (a) through penetration behind to the conception in the mind of God, that is, by intellectual vision, and (b) through inferential reasoning from the effects to their cause. Only metaphorically can we take the words of Scripture to be the word of God.¹¹⁶

For Professor Torrance, this procedure has the advantage of:

directing attention to Christ himself as the one word of God behind all the speech of holy Scripture, but the way in which Aquinas thinks of the relation of Scripture to that word leads into a highly intellectualistic interpretation of it in which the meaning is inevitably schematized to the philosophical thought-forms brought to its understanding.¹¹⁷

This is what we have found. Whether it is a good or a bad thing is not our business to judge. But, surely it will appear differently to the historian of Neoplatonism and to the theologian attempting to draw together the interpretation of Scripture with what he conceives as the world view rising from contemporary science. In any case, St. Thomas is not the first or the last Christian theologian to refuse to identify the words and the word of Scripture. For John Wyclif:

The fifth and last level of Scripture...comprises the codices, the sensible words ... this level of Scripture does not possess the truth but points to it...Thus the codex of Scripture is an image or representation of the real Scripture, the book of life ... Wyclif accordingly does not allow that the Scripture perceived by the sense is

¹¹⁴ One might begin with H. PAISSAC, *Théologie du Verbe. St. Augustine et St. Thomas*, (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1951), B. LONERGAN, *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, ed. D. BURRELL, (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1967), and R.L. RICHARDS, *The Problem of an Apologetical Perspective in the Trinitarian Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Analecta Gregoriana 131 (Rome: Gregorian University, 1963).

¹¹⁵ TORRANCE, "Scientific Hermeneutics," 278.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 280.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 281, On the necessity of this "schematization", see Alasdair MACINTYRE'S review of Romanus CESSARIO, *The Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics*, in *The Thomist* 56 (1992), 339.

actually Scripture... this level of Scripture is only called Scripture metonymically.¹¹⁸

There is assuredly a considerable difference between the extremely realistic Augustinianism of Wyclif and the Dionysian Aristotelianism of St. Thomas, yet they share this point of entry to a philosophical understanding of the content of Scripture.

It was for the sake of the higher truth of the realm of intellectual subsistences, and so as to maintain its order as the first and best revelation of the absolute divinity in which intellect, order, and being were simply one, that Thomas followed Denys in denying that a seraph was sent to Isaiah. He would have that order prevail as the graceful order of grace.*

Wayne John Hankey

Department of Classics
Dalhousie University
Halifax, Canada
B3H 3J5

Telephone 902 494 3468
Fax 902 494 2467

E-mail "hankeywj@is.dal.ca"

Home: Apartment 410
2 Ramsgate Lane, Halifax
Canada, B3P 2R7
Telephone 902 477 6241.

¹¹⁸ Michael TRESKO, "John Wyclif's Metaphysics of Scriptural Integrity in the *De Veritate Sacrae Scripturae*," *Dionysius* 13 (1989), 178-179 and see W.J. HANKEY, "'Magis pro Nostra Sententia': John Wyclif, his mediaeval Predecessors and reformed Successors, and a pseudo-Augustinian Eucharistic Decretal," *Augustiniana* 45, fasc. 3-4 (1995), 213-245; G. LEFF, "The Place of Metaphysics in Wyclif's Theology," and Heather PHILLIPS, "John Wyclif and the Optics of the Eucharist," both in Anne HUDSON and Michael WILKS, eds., *From Ockham to Wyclif*, 224-226, 232 and 249-250 respectively; N. KRETZMANN, "Continua, Indivisibles, and Change in Wyclif's Logic of Scripture," and M. KEEN, "Wyclif, the Bible, and Transubstantiation," both in A. KENNY, ed., *Wyclif in his Times*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

* This essay is affectionately and gratefully dedicated to the Reverend Doctor William H. Ralston Jr., Rector of St. John's Church, Savannah, Georgia, who expounds Scripture angelically. His love of the supernal intelligences makes his hospitable home their dwelling. Their beloved presence makes his church their citadel.