

## Denys and Aquinas: Antimodern Cold and Postmodern Hot

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Scholars need to have a greater sense of irony about themselves. This reflection arises out of an examination of the connection between movements in philosophy and theology, on the one hand, and what we make of our history, on the other.<sup>1</sup> Led by the theologians, for more than three centuries, we have been replacing metaphysics with what we call history.<sup>2</sup> Now we need a sense of irony, both to avoid cynicism and self-delusion. For theologians, Biblical studies, Patristics and Church History and, more recently, liturgical scholarship are probably the first places we would look in order to observe characteristically modern interpenetrations of “critical” history and theology. Biblical scholars have advanced far down that road; they have become so self-aware as to have given up more than exploring diverse ways of reading. Worshippers suffer in hope, waiting for the liturgists to do the same. For me, contemplating the valuation of Platonism in general, and the valuation of the thought of the pseudo-Dionysius in particular, among Thomists during the last one hundred thirty years has been instructive.

Those who work where historical, philosophical and theological studies meet are used to twists and turns. But, looking at the judgment of the role and worth of Neoplatonism and Denys from within the perspectives of the nineteenth and twentieth century revival of the thought of Thomas Aquinas, we find complete reversals. No doubt this is partly because of the institutional interest in Thomism, but we cannot simply blame it on the bishops. They are not involved in what I will call the postmodern retrieval of Christian Neoplatonism. Nonetheless, a comparable logic seems at work, a logic imposed by the negative relation to modernity common to both retrievals. But here we have come to a conclusion, prematurely, and must turn to my argument.

### 1. Postmodern relations to the past

I have been attending to philosophical and theological thinkers, mostly French, who find, in ancient and mediaeval Neoplatonism, something of the future for Christians about to cross the border of a millennium. In a very general way, these thinkers are “post modern”, if by that we mean, among other things, those who turn again to the premodern to find what they judge modernity has forgotten. Graham Ward recently described Professor Jean-Luc Marion’s work on Descartes, thus: “It is in grasping the roots of modernity that Marion’s postmodern thinking sees the possibility of returning to the premodern world which de Lubac, Daniélou and Gilson had reintroduced into early twentieth century French Catholicism.”<sup>3</sup> Professor Marion’s kind of

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<sup>1</sup> See W.J. Hankey, “Pope Leo’s Purposes and St. Thomas’ Platonism,” *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, idem, “Making Theology Practical: Thomas Aquinas and the Nineteenth Century Religious Revival,” *Dionysius* 9 (1985), 85-127, idem, “The Bible in a Post-Critical Age,” *After the Deluge, Essays Towards the Desecularization of the Church*, ed. W. Oddie, (London: SPCK, 1987), 41-92, idem, “‘Dionysius dixit, Lex divinitatis est ultima per media reducere’: Aquinas, hierocracy and the ‘augustinisme politique’,” *Tommaso D’Aquino: proposte nuove di lettura. Festschrift Antonio Tognolo*, ed. Ilario Tolomio, *Medioevo. Rivista di Storia della Filosofia Medievale*; 18 (Padova: Editrice Antenore, 1992), 119-150.

<sup>2</sup> For philosophy see F.L. Jackson, “The Revolutionary Origins of Contemporary Philosophy,” *Dionysius* 9 (1985), 155 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Graham Ward, “Introducing Jean-Luc Marion,” *New Blackfriars*, 76, No. 895 (July/August, 1995), “Special Issue on Jean-Luc Marion’s *God without Being*,” 323.

relation to the premodern, as thus described, is an example of the postmodern, so far as my purposes are concerned. However, we shall not examine Professor Marion's Cartesian studies, but rather his writing on the Pseudo-Denys and Thomas Aquinas.

Before that, let us consider, in a preliminary and general way, the problematic I hope to explore. We note the dependence of this movement into the future on what is found in the past, and thus on an understanding of it. Most of the thinkers we call postmodern, in the sense just given, are disciplined students of intellectual history. One thinks immediately of those distinguished contributions to Cartesian scholarship by Jean-Luc Marion as well as of the scholars who recover the texts and thought of ancient and mediaeval Neoplatonism. However, there is another side. Part of what they want to escape in the modern is what they perceive as its objectification of our past, an alienation by which what is human becomes inhuman. The double-mindedness of their position, and of his own relation to himself, is present in their grandfather, the Professor of Classical Philology, Friedrich Nietzsche. We find harsh and angry criticism of scientific history in a work he rightly called *The Genealogy of Morals*,<sup>4</sup> though the work depends on recovering what is prior to the moral opposition of good and evil.

These thinkers have an essential relation to the past, because there one hopes to find what is dimly recollected as forgotten, or experienced as lack. Their deeply ambiguous relation to history is not just due to the objectification belonging to methods of the historical sciences. There is also an endeavour to get free from the necessities imposed by the thinking that generates modern metanarrative and from the particular metanarratives dominating contemporary philosophy. Increasingly critical engagement with Martin Heidegger's account of the history of Being is almost universal. With this double-mindedness in view, I use the story of the relation of Thomas and Denys over the last century in order to consider how much some postmodern thinkers who are engaged in a retrieval of elements of Neoplatonism are likely to find of what they seek in the past.

## 2. Contemporary Evaluations of Platonism. Thomism and Neoplatonism.

### A) French Neoplatonic Scholarship

I discovered the context of the extensive contemporary French interest in Neoplatonism as I was trying to unearth the continuity, if any, between the *summae* of St. Thomas Aquinas and the systems of Greek Neoplatonism especially as they acquire explicit form in Proclus. Undertaking such a study in Oxford, I became aware of a difference between the relation of philosophical work and historical study in England and France. Étienne Gilson noted about philosophy in English speaking America that philosophers' ignorance of the history of their discipline was intentional, regarded as necessary to creativity.<sup>5</sup> My arrival at Oxford had been immediately preceded by the folding up of the Readership in Medieval Philosophy. Moreover, for centuries, theology's field had been defined there by ignoring a millennium of its history - that between the end of the Patristic period in the 6th century and the Reformation in the 16th.

Happily, I was taken in hand by a wandering French mendicant, the *doyen* of Thomistic studies, Père Louis Bataillon, o.p., of the Leonine Commission. He told me to go to Paris and sit

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<sup>4</sup> See the third essay, sections 24-26, one of his many negative reflections on scientific history.

<sup>5</sup> L.K. Shook, *Étienne Gilson*, The Étienne Gilson Series 6, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), 150, quotes Gilson on what he found at Harvard: "As for the history of philosophy, they don't see any use for it. Perry is quite upset. He thinks that too much studying of the systems of others prevents young people from finding one of their own."

at the door of St. Thomas' old convent, St. Jacques, and beseech the assistance of one of his brothers, Henri-Dominic Saffrey. Père Saffrey had produced - in 1954! - the first strictly correct critical edition of a text of St. Thomas, the circumstances of the Leonine Commission having prevented for 70 years its edition of Aquinas being properly done.<sup>6</sup> He edited the *Commentary on the Liber de causis*, that Arabic mixing of Plotinus with a dominating Proclus.<sup>7</sup> This late, extremely important, commentary involved a comparison by Thomas of the text of this work, until then thought by him to be the theology of Aristotle, with the newly translated *Elements of Theology* of Proclus - which he discerned as one of its sources - and with the *De divinis nominibus* of Denys, on which Thomas had commented at the beginning of his career and which he found to have a doctrine like that of the *Liber*.

Père Saffrey then went to Oxford where he began his now complete (in 1997) edition of the *Platonic Theology* of Proclus<sup>8</sup> as a D.Phil. thesis for E.R. Dodds, whose programme as Regius Professor of Greek remains controversial to this day. Dodds laid an indispensable foundation for the last sixty years of intense Neoplatonic scholarship by his canonical 1933 edition of the *Elements of Theology*.<sup>9</sup> Henri Saffrey's edition of Thomas' commentary on the *Liber de causis* was to have been a beginning of an attempt to map the extent of the Procline influence in Western theology and to indicate the consequences for theology of that discovery, but, mostly, he stayed with ancient Neoplatonism. Nonetheless, by important studies of objective connections between Proclus and the Pseudo-Denys, he further assisted those who undertook to carry forward his initial project.<sup>10</sup>

The Thomist side of our consideration requires mentioning the Parisian scholar of whom Saffrey is heir and of whose memory he is a custodian,<sup>11</sup> A. M. J. Festugière. A Dominican, Père Festugière's most important work was originally moved by the hope of finding in Neoplatonism the medium by which Aristotle could be adapted to Christian purposes. The intended result was

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<sup>6</sup> See L.-J. Bataillon, "Le edizioni di *Opera Omnia* degli scolastici e l'Edizione Leonina," in *Gli studi di filosofia medievale fra Otto e Novecento. Contributo a un bilanico storiografico. Atti del convegno internazionale Roma, 21-23 settembre 1989*, éd. R. Imbach and A. Maierù, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, (Roma, 1991), 141-54, idem, "La Commission Léonine pour l'édition des oeuvres de s. Thomas d'Aquin," *Analecta sacri Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum*, fasc. 1, (Rome, 1983), 72-83, idem, "L'édition léonine des oeuvres de Saint Thomas et les études médiévales," in *Atti dell'VIII Congresso Tomistico Internazionale*, 8 vols, i, Studi tomistici 10 (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1981), 452-64.

<sup>7</sup> Aquinas draws both on the pseudo-Dionysius and the *Elements* of Proclus, just translated from the Greek, in his late (after 1268) *Super Librum de Causis Expositio*, éd. H.-D. Saffrey, o.p., *Textus Philosophici Friburgenes* 4/5 (Fribourg: Société Philosophique, Louvain: Éditions E. Nauwelaerts, 1954), see St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, trans. Vincent A. Guagliardo et al. (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), C. D'Ancona-Costa, *Tommaso D'Aquino: Commento al "Libro delle cause"*, (Milan: Rusconi, 1986), W.J. Hankey, *God In Himself: Aquinas' Doctrine of God as Expounded in the Summa Theologiae*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 46-47 and Edward Booth, o.p., *Aristotelian Aporetic Ontology in Islamic and Christian Thinkers*, Cambridge Studies in medieval life and thought III, 20 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>8</sup> H.-D. Saffrey et L.G. Westerink, *Théologie platonicienne*, 6 vols., (Paris: *Les Belles Lettres*, 1968-1997).

<sup>9</sup> E.R. Dodds, Oxford at the Clarendon Press.

<sup>10</sup> The last of a series of articles is "Nouveau liens objectifs entre le pseudo-Denys et Proclus," *Rev. sc. phil. théo.*, 63 (1979), 3-16, his conclusions about Denys are summarised in "Les débuts de la théologie comme science (IIIe-VIe)," *Rev. sc. phil. théo.*, 80 (1996), 201-220.

<sup>11</sup> See *Memorial Andre-Jean Festugière: antiquité païenne et chrétienne*, éd. E. Lucchesi et H.-D. Saffrey, *Cahiers d'Orientalisme* 10 (Geneva: P. Cramer, 1984) which contains a bibliography. His "Portrait" is reprinted H.D. Saffrey, *Recherches sur le Néoplatonisme après Plotin*, *Histoire des doctrines de l'antiquité classique* 14 (Paris: Vrin, 1990), 297-305.

to have been that the Philosopher, identified by the Fathers as a veritable font of heresy, could become instead one foundation of Aquinas' thought.<sup>12</sup> Instead, Père Festugière preceded Saffrey in publishing primarily about Plato and pagan Neoplatonism after a Thomistic beginning. In 1944, he started publishing an edition of *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*<sup>13</sup> - which came out in the series *Études bibliques!* and which is essential to the Iamblichan - Procline tradition in Neoplatonism.

In 1966, the Jesuit Édouard des Places published an edition and translation of Iamblichus, *Les mystères d'Égypte*.<sup>14</sup> In 1971 and 1989, the same Société d'édition brought out his Greek text and French translation of the *Oracles Chaldaïques* and of the *Protrepticus* of Iamblichus. So, between the Jesuit and the Dominican, the picture of the oracular and theurgic aspects of Neoplatonic spirituality in Late Antiquity was filled out. The Sulpician priest Jean Trouillard had significantly developed Plotinian studies with his *La procession plotinienne*, published in Paris in 1955, and went on to Proclus, e.g. *L'Un et l'Âme selon Proclus* in 1972 and *La mystagogie de Proclus* in 1982.<sup>15</sup>

Of the French scholars mentioned so far, Père Trouillard was the first to harvest the fruit from the Neoplatonic tree in order to undertake a philosophical and theological revolution. He became the advocate of a Neoplatonic henology which he wished to substitute for Aristotelian and Thomistic ontology as the logic of Christian thought. In the 60's he and Henry Duméry developed with the Passionist priest Stanislas Breton and Joseph Combès a "radicalisme néoplatonicien."<sup>16</sup> Père Breton, in an informal intellectual and religious autobiography, *De Rome à Paris. Itinéraire philosophique*, described Jean Trouillard, Henry Duméry, and Joseph Combès as "la triade néo-platonicienne de France, qui n'était pas sans écho à celle de jadis."<sup>17</sup> The significance of this is summed up in the words of Breton:

*Ce qu'ils ont inauguré, sous les apparences d'un retour au passé, c'est bel et bien une manière neuve de voir le monde et d'y intervenir, de pratiquer la philosophie, de comprendre le fait religieux, en sa forme chrétienne comme en son excès mystique; puis, et j'ai hâte de l'ajouter, de relier le vieil occident à son au-delà extrême-oriental.*<sup>18</sup>

His move - and that of French Catholicism - from Rome to Paris corresponded to a move from a Roman "philosophie aristotélico-thomiste" as the basis of theology, to a Neoplatonic thinking and spirituality in a Parisian Athens where he could be open to the thought of his lay compatriots.

<sup>12</sup> David T. Runia, "Festugière Revisited: Aristotle in the Greek Patres," *Vigiliae Christianae*, 43 (1989), 1-2 and 26.

<sup>13</sup> 4 vols., Paris, Lecoffee, 1944-54.

<sup>14</sup> Paris, *Les Belles Lettres*, for an incomplete bibliography of des Places see his festschrift *Études platoniciennes, 1929-1979*, (Leiden: Brill, 1981); for additional bibliography, see *Platonism in Late Antiquity*, edited Stephen Gersh and Charles Kannengiesser, *Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity* 8 (Notre Dame: Notre Dame U.P., 1992), ix-xii.

<sup>15</sup> For an incomplete bibliography, see *Néoplatonisme mélanges offerts à Jean Trouillard*, Les Cahiers de Fontenay, 19-22 (Fontenay-aux-Roses, 1981).

<sup>16</sup> Stanislas Breton, *De Rome à Paris. Itinéraire philosophique*, (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1992), 31; there is a summary of this *itinerarium* in idem, "Sur la difficulté d'être thomiste aujourd'hui," *Le Statut Contemporain de la Philosophie première*, Philosophie 17 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1996), 333-46. For further relevant bibliographical indications to the work of Trouillard, Duméry, Breton and critics like Y. Labbé, see Hankey, *God in Himself*, 13-14.

<sup>17</sup> Breton, *De Rome*, 152-3.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 154, see also, particularly, 164.

He became one of the most creative philosopher theologians working out the implications of this shift, one bound up with the consequences of the Second Vatican Council.

## 2. B) NeoThomism, i) Why anti-Platonic

The French Neoplatonic scholars mentioned so far are mostly Catholic priests, members of religious orders. In the twentieth century circumstances of French Catholic intellectual life, they came to their studies out of a relation to a revived Thomism. Our present, and very recent, appreciation of the importance of Neoplatonism, in general, and of Denys, in particular, for the thought of St. Thomas, is bound up with overcoming the Neothomism of the late nineteenth century Leonine revival, an overcoming largely carried out from within.<sup>19</sup> That Neothomism is a primary form of contemporary anti-modern thought.

From the perspective of the Neothomists, Neoplatonism appeared as an ally of modernity, the predecessor and support of its idealisms. The positive present interest in Neoplatonism depends on a reversal of this judgment. In the last third of twentieth century, the dead Neothomism and Neoscholasticism of the nineteenth century revival, appears, instead of Neoplatonism, as having been thoroughly infected with modern objectifying rationalism. At its heart is discerned the ontotheologism identified by Martin Heidegger through which the West has forgotten Being. Most ironically, it may have been Heidegger's own neo-scholastic background which partly caused him to read medieval theology as ontotheology.<sup>20</sup> Neoplatonism, in contrast, especially the Procline and Dionysian variety, and medieval thought so far as it is thus Neoplatonic, is conceived as a way back beyond modernity, become manipulative technocracy. But it was not so in the beginning.

Erected against what it conceived as modern idealisms, like the condemned 'Ontologism', Neothomist anti-modern suspicion extended even to the Neoplatonism of Augustine.<sup>21</sup> No Platonism served its various purposes. No Platonism, neither ancient, nor medieval nor modern, encouraged the separation of philosophy, nature and state from sacred doctrine, grace and church to which Pope Leo would subordinate them.<sup>22</sup> Still less does Neoplatonism reduce theology to a deductive science of concepts, true thought to realism, or nature to empirically comprehended objectivity. It was no kindness to Aristotle that to his logic these characteristics of the Leonine Thomas were attributed.<sup>23</sup> His Aristotelianism was supposed

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<sup>19</sup> See Hankey, "Pope Leo's Purposes," idem, "Making Theology Practical;" G.A. McCool, s.j., *Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism: The Search for a Unitary Method*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989), idem, *From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989). On the anti-idealist biases of the Thomist revival, see: P. 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); T.F. O'Meara, o.p., *Romantic Idealism and Roman Catholicism: Schelling and the Theologians*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), idem, *Church and Culture: German Catholic Theology, 1860-1914*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991).

<sup>20</sup> John Milbank, "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," *New Blackfriars* 76, No. 895 (July/August, 1995), "Special Issue on Jean-Luc Marion's *God without Being*," 331, idem, "Can a Gift be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic," *Modern Theology*, 11 (1995), 140; on the rationalism of Neoscholasticism, see Hankey, "Making Theology Practical;" 91-2.

<sup>21</sup> Hankey, "Dionysius dixit," 131 and Breton, *De Rome*, 78ff., "Idéalisme et thomisme."

<sup>22</sup> Hankey, "Making Theology Practical;" 92 ff.

<sup>23</sup> On the question of Thomas's Aristotelianism, see Mark D. Jordan, *The Alleged Aristotelianism of Thomas Aquinas*, The Etienne Gilson Series 15 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1992), and idem, "Aquinas in Aristotle's *Ethics*," *Ad Litteram. Authoritative Texts and Their Medieval Readers*, ed Mark D. Jordan and Kent Emery, Notre Dame Conferences in Medieval Studies 3 (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press,

to be so total that Leonine Neothomists who exposed the magnitude of Thomas' citation of Denys maintained also that nothing characteristic of his Neoplatonic mentality had penetrated Thomas' mind.<sup>24</sup>

Let us note ironic results of the Leonine revival. It had set out to oppose what it conceived to be the totalitarian rationalism founded in bad philosophy, above all that of Descartes and of his successors, which it supposed underlay the all engulfing advance of the modern secular state. But the Thomism it erected against this enemy acquired, in accord with the iron laws of dialectic, the characteristics of the mentality against which it wrestled. So far as the Leonine Thomism has continuing protagonists among us, they are in some measure the disciples of one or another of the baroque Thomistic schools, and they still advance a doctrinal tradition. Now, however, they have been freed from their former service as institutionally enlisted warriors. The result is astonishing. One of them recently treated Thomas' as if the poles of his thought were Augustine and Denys and maintained in the course of his argument "la doctrine de l'analogie occupe en réalité peu de place dans la pensée de saint Thomas."<sup>25</sup> Nothing was said of Aristotle! Here Thomists and recent historical scholarship can meet. Both are now conscious that Aristotle is not best opposed to these Christian Neoplatonists in the Neoscholastic manner.

An English Dominican Scholar Edward Booth has put this case strongly in the last 15 years.<sup>26</sup> As Father Booth represents it, the reasoning *mens*, through which Augustine flattened the Plotinian hypostases in order to arrive at the trinitarian God, and its human image, recuperates the Aristotelian *νοῦς*. Equally, an Aristotelian sense for the priority of individual material substance is not to be set against a Dionysian idealistic realism. Rather, insofar as Denys understands the act of creation through a Procline logic which sees the similar formlessness of the top and bottom of the cosmos, the One and pure matter, and which also understands the One as the cause of substance at every level of the universe, Denys assists the recovery of the kind of Aristotelian ontology we associate with Aquinas. It is at least as true to say that Thomas interprets Aristotle through Denys as the contrary. Moreover, it is surely the quasi-Apostolic authority of Denys which enabled Aquinas to give so much weight to Aristotle. He did find them mostly in agreement and this was not only because for most of his life he thought Aristotle to be the author of the *Liber de causis*.<sup>27</sup>

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1992), 242-245. On the character of and reasons for this "philosophie aristotélico-thomiste," see Breton, *De Rome*, 55ff., "II. Rome. Apprentissage romain."

<sup>24</sup> M.B. Ewbank, "Remarks on Being in St. Thomas Aquinas' *Expositio de divinis nominibus*," *Arch. hist. doct. lit. m.a.*, 56 (1989), 123.

<sup>25</sup> T.-D. Humbrecht, o.p., "La théologie négative chez saint Thomas d' Aquin," *Revue thomiste*, XCIII (1993), 541 and 542ff.

<sup>26</sup> See E. Booth, o.p., "St Augustine's 'notitia sui' related to Aristotle and the early neo-Platonists," *Augustiniana*, 27 (1977), 70-132 & 364-401, 28 (1978), 183-221, 29 (1979), 97-124; idem, "St. Augustine's *de Trinitate* and Aristotelian and neo-Platonist Noetic," *Studia Patristica*, XVI, pt. II, ed. E.A. Livingstone, (Berlin, 1985), 487-490, idem, *Aristotelian Aporetic*, idem, *Saint Augustine and the Western Tradition of Self-Knowing*, The Saint Augustine Lecture 1986 (Villanova: Augustinian Institute, Villanova University, 1989); also François-Xavier Putallaz, *Le sens de la réflexion chez Thomas d' Aquin*, Études de philosophie médiévale lxxvi (Paris: Vrin, 1991), 11-15.

<sup>27</sup> The early Aquinas thinks that "Dionysius almost always follows Aristotle," *Scriptum super Sententiis*, II, dist. 14, 1, 2, (Moos, p. 350); the most complete consideration of the reason in and for this apparently strange association is Booth, *Aristotelian Aporetic*. On his assimilation of Denys and Aristotle, see also W.J. Hankey, "'Magis... Pro Nostra Sententia': John Wyclif, his mediaeval Predecessors and reformed Successors, and a pseudo-Augustinian Eucharistic Decretal," *Augustiniana*, 45, (1995), 237-39 and idem, "Dionysian Hierarchy in St. Thomas Aquinas: Tradition and Transformation," *Denys l'Aréopagite et sa postérité en Orient et en Occident*, éd. Ysabel de Andia, série Antiquité 151 (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1997), 422 ff.

## 2. B) NeoThomism, ii) Transcendental Thomism.

The Neoscholastic Thomism which Pope Leo revived was gradually replaced by that of the Thomistic philosophical historians and of the Transcendental School. The latter was primarily a Jesuit phenomenon and its first centers were in Belgium and Germany.

The purposes of the Leonine revival distorted the pattern of Thomas' thought just where he was close to Denys. The Transcendental Thomism, though sharing the general distortion, had more sympathy for some of the Dionysian aspects of Thomas' thought than did the historians. This was because the Transcendental school was more open to modernity than were the historians. Because the school was not so dogmatically and narrowly realist in its epistemology, nor so determined to establish being outside the self, the Transcendental Thomists shared something of the Dionysian assumption that the hierarchy of intellectual forms and the hierarchy of being were the same.

Karl Rahner took into the center of his Thomism the equation from the *Liber de causis* between the perfection of being and intellect's complete self-return.<sup>28</sup> We shall see that this Procline idealist and essentialist equation is at the heart of Thomas' treatment of God and enables him to connect the fundamentals of his theology. Gerald McCool, s.j., pressing the Transcendental cause, which he thinks to be Platonic, Thomistic and contemporary all at once, wrote:

Rahner's metaphysics of being's self-expression in its other is much closer to Neo-Platonism than St. Thomas' metaphysics is usually thought to be ... Thomas' metaphysics of *esse*, at least in Gilson's understanding of it, is considered to be distinct from and incompatible with the Neo-Platonic metaphysics of the good.<sup>29</sup>

François-Xavier Putallaz, Ruedi Imbach, Rudi A. te Velde, Swiss and Dutch lay scholars, and the American Jesuits W. Norris Clarke and J.M. McDermott, are among those writing about this at present. Because, like the Neoplatonists, they came to being through the self, and, with the Neoplatonists, unified the cosmos in accord with the structure of the self, the Transcendental Thomists did not deny that the *summae* were systems. Contemplating the compact and tightly

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<sup>28</sup> Hankey, "Making Theology Practical," 101-121 and Putallaz, *Le sens de la réflexion*, 221-226, 291-304, treat Rahner's understanding of the common *reditio* of being and intellect. François-Xavier Putallaz, *La connaissance de soi au xiii<sup>e</sup> siècle. De Matthieu d'Aquasparta à Thierry de Freiberg*, Études de philosophie médiévale LXVII (Paris: Vrin, 1991), 386-403 and Ruedi Imbach, "Prétendue primauté de l'être sur le connaître. Perspectives cavalières sur Thomas d'Aquin et l'école dominicaine allemande," *LECTIONUM VARIETATES, Hommage à Paul Vignaux (1904-1987)*, éd. par J. Jolivet, Z. Kaluza, A. de Libera, Études de philosophie médiévale LXV (Paris: Vrin, 1991), 122, 125-128, É.-H. Wéber, o.p., *La Personne humaine au xiii<sup>e</sup> siècle. L'avènement chez les maîtres parisiens de l'acception moderne de l'homme*, Bibliothèque thomiste 46 (Paris: Vrin, 1991), and A. de Libera, "Une Anthropologie de la grâce. Sur *La Personne humaine au xiii<sup>e</sup> siècle* d'É.-H. Wéber," *Rev. sc. phil. théo.*, 77(1993), 241-254 will provide access to the French scholarship showing the common logic of being and spirit in the mediaeval texts. There are recent treatments by J. M. McDermott, s.j., "The Analogy of Knowing in Karl Rahner," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, XXXVI, 2 (June, 1996), 201-216, idem, "The Analogy of Human Knowing in the *Prima Pars*," *Gregorianum* 77, 2&3, (1996), which at 261-286 & 501-525 is modestly critical of Putallaz (especially 280, n. 19, 512-13, nn. 10-11). It is appreciative of P. Roussetot, s.j. whom a more complete history than the one attempted here would have to include.

<sup>29</sup> "Is St. Thomas' 'Science of God' Still Relevant Today," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 14 (1974), 453. See Luis Cortest, "Was St. Thomas Aquinas a Platonist?" *The Thomist*, 52, #2 (April, 1988), 209-19. See also the references to R.L. Hurd in note 47, below.

ordered Dionysian *corpus*, with its explicit references to the inner connection of its own elements, and meditating upon its hierarchies and concepts also stimulated medieval systematizing in theology. Here, among the Jesuits, antiquity, the Middle Ages, baroque Thomism, nineteenth century idealism and the present met. They saw their Transcendental thought as continuing the interpretation of Thomas by the 16th century Jesuit Suarez. The Thomas who emerges out of such a consideration may be positively compared to Hegel.<sup>30</sup>

The Transcendental thinkers preferred to find the way to God through the structure which the self exposed in its quests rather than through objective conceptual knowledge. This opened them to what in Thomas' assimilation of Denys would most interest the second half of the twentieth century, namely his negative theology. In their opposition to positive conceptual knowledge as appropriate to philosophical theology, we touch the point where the Transcendental Thomists are one with Étienne Gilson.

## 2. B) NeoThomism, iii) The Thomas of the Philosophical Historians. Étienne Gilson

The most important of the Thomist philosophical historians had no sympathy for the Transcendental school, but, in his views that essence was always finite, and that *esse* was not knowable conceptually, we have the place where Gilson's opposition to modern idealism meets the Transcendentalist movement toward the post-modern.<sup>31</sup> This is the point where the turn toward Denys among Thomists is one with their uncritical relation to Heidegger.

The twentieth century Thomism which regarded itself as recuperating for us the historical thought of Thomas as against the initial tendency of the Leonine revival to assimilate his teaching both to a common scholasticism and to the traditions of the baroque Thomistic commentators, was less able to recognize essential features of Thomas' thought than were some of those who approached Thomas with their own philosophical projects more directly in view. This irony helps to show that philosophy and the study of its history are not separable, though it was certainly not the case that Étienne Gilson wished ultimately to separate them. His endeavor to find something metaphysically distinctive in Thomas, combined with his confidence that what made Thomas distinct would best serve the anti-modern aims of the Leonine revival as well as coincide with the postmodern in our own world, was Étienne Gilson's undoing.

Within the French intellectual world Gilson is a transitional figure. Professor Marion, and many others, learned important aspects of their history of philosophy from him, including their suspicion of the Scotistic Thomism of Suarez as corrupting modern thought,<sup>32</sup> as well as a way of thinking which habitually opposes the modern and the premodern. But they have discovered that Gilson's views on Heidegger's relation to Aquinas were false. In consequence, they judged first that his Thomas of *ipsum esse subsistens* was every bit as much a problem as

<sup>30</sup> See McCool, "Is St. Thomas," and McDermott, "The Analogy of Human Knowing," 520, n. 17 with its reference to E. Brito, s.j. on Aquinas and Hegel.

<sup>31</sup> See Hankey, "Making Theology Practical," 93 ff.; in contrast, M.B. Ewbank, "Doctrinal Precisions in Aquinas's *Super Librum de Causis*," *Arch. hist. doct. lit. m. â.*, 61 (1994), 7-29, idem, "Diverse Orderings of Dionysius' *Triplex Via* by St. Thomas Aquinas," *Mediaeval Studies*, 52 (1990), 82-109, and idem, "Remarks on Being," 123-49 look at Gilson's conclusions in the light of the old and new evidence about the influence of Denys and Proclus on Thomas' doctrine of being and endeavour to rehabilitate Gilson's Christian metaphysic of *esse*.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Jean-Luc Marion, *Sur la théologie blanche de Descartes: Analogie création des vérités éternelles et fondement*, édition corrigée et complétée (Paris: Quadrige/ Presses Universitaires de France, 1991) and idem, *Sur le prisme métaphysique de Descartes. Constitution et limites de l' onto-théo-logie dans la pensée cartésienne*, Épiméthée (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1986) and Ward, "Introducing Jean-Luc Marion," 318-21. This analysis is also picked up by Milbank, "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," 330.

Gilson thought it the once and final solution. Now again very lately, they have recovered Thomas for themselves, but only by finding in him that Dionysian Neoplatonism which was for Professor Gilson the worst essentialism.

Gilson identified in Aquinas an existential metaphysic which he supposed to be the true Christian philosophy, though Thomas, by Gilson's account, taught this metaphysic in opposition to his contemporaries. Equally, almost all his commentators not only missed the crucial point, but even assimilated his distinctive position to its opposite. For Gilson, and equally for Jacques Maritain, Thomas' existential metaphysic of Exodus rose out of a return to a sense for Being against all the ancient and medieval idealisms. In Gilson's history, Thomas' sense for Being conformed to Heidegger's most profound reflection, enabled authentic Thomistic ontology to escape the Heideggerian criticism of ontotheology, and stood resolutely against the false subjectivism of modernity.<sup>33</sup> This existential Thomism was opposed to all essentialisms, both ancient and modern. Neoplatonism was its ancient foe.

Denys was the main conduit of the Neoplatonism which was essentialism's most pernicious invasion of Christian metaphysics. Clearly, then, according to Gilson, Thomas used Dionysian thought only to transform it completely into its opposite, though Denys' apophatic side could be used to squeeze all conceptualization out of the act of being. Thus Denys' contribution assisted Aquinas to preserve the ontological difference between the Divine Being and beings. Beyond this use within an existential ontology to which Denys was at heart opposed, he contributed nothing to Thomas' metaphysics.<sup>34</sup> It is now clear, in contrast, that Thomas' metaphysic of being is both formed in a positive relation to Neoplatonism and retains fundamental elements of Neoplatonic logic.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> For his view of what is common between Thomas and Heidegger, see, for example: É. Gilson, *Les Tribulations de Sophie*, (Paris: Vrin, 1967), 69-72, idem, "Sur les vicissitudes des principes," *Mélanges offerts à M.-D. Chenu, maître en théologie*, Bibliothèque thomiste 37 (Paris: Vrin, 1967), 281-284. On his relation to Heidegger, see, Shook, *Étienne Gilson*, 227-228, 334-335, 359-360. In North America this optimism was found in J.D. Caputo, "The Problem of Being in Heidegger and the Scholastics," *The Thomist*, 41(1977), 62-91, especially 84 and 88. Caputo's optimism corresponds to that of "Document: M. Heidegger, 'Le retour au fondement de la métaphysique,'" *Rev. sc. phil. théo.*, 43 (1959), 401-433 and Georges Kalinowski, *L' impossible métaphysique. En annexe trois lettres inédites de Étienne Gilson*, Bibliothèque des Archives de philosophie, nouvelle série 33 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1981), 136, 243. The problems are brought out by Hankey, "Making Theology Practical," 94-100; P. Aubenque, J. Beaufret, J.-L. Marion and J.-F. Courtine in *Étienne Gilson et Nous: La philosophie et son histoire*, éd. Monique Couratier, (Paris: Vrin, 1980); J. Beaufret, "ENERGEIA et actus," *Dialogue avec Heidegger, I. Philosophie grecque*, "Arguments" 56 (Paris: Minuit, 1974), especially, 109-112, 130, 141-144, idem, "La philosophie chrétienne," *Dialogue avec Heidegger, 2. Philosophie Moderne*, "Arguments" 58 (Paris: Minuit, 1973), 9-27, 123; G. Prouvost, "Postface," Étienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, *Deux approches de l'être. Correspondance, 1923-1971*, éd. G. Prouvost, (Paris: Vrin, 1991), 292-295. See note 47, below.

<sup>34</sup> On Thomas' positive relation to Denys, see Paul Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis*, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), 149 & 150, idem, *Pseudo-Dionysius. A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to their Influence*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 169-174, idem, "'Procession and Return' in Thomas Aquinas and His Predecessors," *The Princeton Seminary Review*, 13, #2 (1992), 147-163; Fran O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters 32 (Leiden: Brill, 1992), idem, "Virtus Essendi: Intensive Being in Pseudo-Dionysius and Aquinas," *Dionysius*, 15 (1991), 31-80; Hankey, "Dionysius dixit," idem, "Dionysian Hierarchy," idem, "Aquinas, Pseudo-Denys, Proclus and Isaiah VI.6," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge*, 64 (1997), 59-93, in press.

<sup>35</sup> See on Thomas' Neoplatonism: W.J. Hankey, "Aquinas' First Principle, Being or Unity?," *Dionysius* 4 (1980), 133-172, idem, *God in Himself*, 2-13; Eileen C. Sweeney, "Thomas Aquinas' Double Metaphysics of Simplicity and Infinity," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, XXXIII (1993), 297-317; Rudi A. te Velde, *Participation and*

Professor Gilson's Thomism is past, being sustainable neither historically nor philosophically.<sup>36</sup> In France, both the historical study of Greek Neoplatonism and its tradition in Latin Patristic and medieval thought and Heidegger's understanding of how Being was forgotten in Western philosophy were turned against Gilson's own treatments of these matters.<sup>37</sup> His way of representing Thomas historically and philosophically was succeeded for many by the work of Cornelio Fabro.

## 2. B) NeoThomism, iv) The Thomas of the Philosophical Historians. Cornelio Fabro

Cornelio Fabro was one of the first Thomists of the Leonine revival to give positive attention to the role of a Neoplatonic pattern of participation in the thought of St. Thomas. Although he also paid great attention to developing a Thomistic ontology and to working out the exact relation between essence and existence in it, and although he saw this as part of the war against "idealismus",<sup>38</sup> he was critical of Gilson. In general, Fabro was more careful than Gilson

*Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters xlvii (Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1995); Vivian Boland, o.p., *Ideas in God According to Saint Thomas Aquinas. Sources and Synthesis*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought LXIX (Leiden: Brill, 1996) and Patrick Quinn, "Aquinas's Model of Mind," *New Blackfriars*, 77, #904 (May, 1996), 223, idem, *Aquinas, Platonism and the Knowledge of God*, (Aldershot: Avebury, 1996).

<sup>36</sup> There is not place here to detail the criticism of Gilson's understanding of the character and influence of Neoplatonism in mediaeval philosophy, but some of the English language beginnings and its present state can be indicated. W. Norris Clarke, s.j., "The Limitation of Act by Potency: Aristotelianism or Neoplatonism?" *New Scholasticism*, 26 (1952), 167-194 was ground breaking. After showing that "existential Thomism" was the inappropriate standard of judgement in Gilson's *Jean Duns Scot*, George Lindbeck demonstrated that Thomas' philosophy of being was better viewed as participationist than as existential. See his "Participation and Existence in the Interpretation of St. Thomas Aquinas," *Franciscan Studies*, 17(1957), 1-22 and 107-125. From Augustinian Villanova came J.M. Quinn, o.s.a., *The Thomism of Étienne Gilson. A Critical Study*, (Villanova: Villanova University Press, 1971). T.C.O'Brien, o.p., published a series of articles in *The Thomist*, collected, they appeared as *Metaphysics and the Existence of God*, Texts and Studies 1 (Washington: Thomist Press, 1960). At present Lawrence Dewan, o.p., carries the torch against the errors of Gilsonian existential Thomism and the defense of it by Joseph Owen, c.s.b. See, for example, "St. Thomas and the Causality of God's Goodness," *Laval Théologique et Philosophique*, 34 (1978), 291-304, idem, "St. Thomas and the Divine Names," *science et esprit*, 32 (1980), 19-33, idem, "Objectum. Notes on the Invention of a Word," *Arch. hist. doct. lit. m. â.*, 48 (1981), 37-96, idem, "St. Thomas, Metaphysical Procedure, and the Formal Cause," *New Scholasticism* 63 (1989), 173-182, idem, "St. Thomas, Aristotle, and Creation," *Dionysius*, 15 (1991), 81-90 which defends St. Thomas' own understanding of Aristotle against that of Gilson and Owens. M.F. Johnson, "Did St. Thomas Attribute a Doctrine of Creation to Aristotle," *New Scholasticism*, 63 (1989), 129-155 supports Dewan against Gilson.

<sup>37</sup> The French scholarship on the problems with a Gilsonian opposition between Neoplatonism and Thomas' metaphysic of being is now massive and elaborated. These collections will provide indications including references to essential work by P. Hadot and É. Zum Brunn: *Dieu et l'être: exégèses d'Exode 3,13 et de Coran 20,11-24*, éd. Centre d'études des religions du livre, CNRS (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1978) especially the essays by Hadot, Zum Brunn and P. Vignaux; *Étienne Gilson et Nous*, especially the essays by Hadot, P. Aubenque and J.-F. Courtine; Dominique Bourg, "Epilogue. La critique de la 'Métaphysique de l'Exode' par Heidegger et l'exégèse Moderne," *L'être et dieu*, Publication du Centre d'études et de recherches interdisciplinaires en théologie 13 (Paris: Cerf, Cognition fidei, 1986), 215-244, especially 217-224; "Celui qui est." *Interprétations juives et chrétiennes d'Exode 3. 14*, éd. A. de Libera et É. Zum Brunn, Centre d'études des religions du livre, CNRS. (Paris: Cerf, 1986), especially the essays by Vignaux, de Libera, Courtine, and É.-H. Wéber.

<sup>38</sup> On his endeavour in the 1961 preparatory commissions of Vatican II to have "idealismus" condemned see Breton, *De Rome*, 86-93. His *God in Exile: Modern Atheism; A Study of the Internal Dynamic of Modern Atheism, from Its Roots in the Cartesian Cogito to the Present Day*, trans. Arthur Gibson, from *Introduzione all'Ateismo Moderno*, 1964, (Westminster: Newman Press, 1968) displays the reasons for that attempt. Idealism from Neoplatonism through Descartes to Hegel is at the origin of atheism; Aquinas is the best defense against both.

about how the construction of that ontology stood to philosophy both in Thomas' time and in our own. Fabro realized that Heidegger made no exception for Thomas in his history of ontotheology, and that this was not caused by a simple ignorance of Thomas' doctrine. Defending Thomas required a criticism of Heidegger even if there were also convergences between them. Further, he was clear that the genuine engagement with contemporary philosophy, both positively and negatively, which is necessary for the construction and defense of Thomism in our time, required that the result be more than the representation of a past historical position.

What was true for our time was equally the case for the thirteenth century. The philosophic logic Thomas gave the metaphysic of Exodus 3.13 could not come out of Scripture itself. Fabro did not hold with Gilson that Scripture revealed a philosophical metaphysic which was privileged as the true Christian philosophy, and was, therefore, protected against dissolution in the movement of rational reflection. Thomas' ontology was a philosophical construction related to his situation in history. Its particular matrix was Neoplatonic and decisively Dionysian. Because of this recognition, Fabro's Thomism has not been rendered untenable by the historians' discovery that Thomas' ontology does not stand against the so-called 'essentialism' of earlier pagan, Islamic and Christian Neoplatonists, but rather is anticipated by their developments and is dependent on them.

With its more sophisticated relation both to contemporary, and to medieval, philosophy, Fabro's Thomistic ontology is not altogether anti-Platonic, the identity of *esse* and *essentia* in the Divine simplicity is not interpreted, as in Gilson, as if essence had been squeezed out. Nonetheless, his formulation of the hierarchy of being in terms of 'intensity' is intended to meet something of the Heideggerian criticism of ontotheology as well as to avoid idealism.<sup>39</sup> Fr. Fabro's interpretation of Aquinas remains too existential. It still carries too much of the anti-modern (always anti-idealist) mentality of the Leonine revival. His representation of how causal participation is understood by Aquinas has just been criticized strongly and effectively in a recent treatment of the Thomas - Denys connection, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, by Rudi te Velde. Both Fabro and Gilson are shown to have fatally misconstrued the essence - existence relation in Aquinas.<sup>40</sup>

Fr. Fabro does not simply think from within Heidegger's judgments. Decisively, for him, negation, even Denys' negative theology, stands within ontology, not against it.<sup>41</sup> This is crucial because the most recent developments in the discovery of a Dionysian Thomas are by that

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<sup>39</sup> Fabro's position is set out in O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 155-85, idem, "Virtus Essendi." O'Rourke carries over from Fabro the criticism of Gilson.

<sup>40</sup> Velde, *Participation*, 184-6, 221-26, 252.

<sup>41</sup> Works of Fabro which establish his position on Thomas' relation to Denys, Platonism and Heidegger and which take into critical account the views of Gilson include "The Problem of Being and the Destiny of Man," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 1 (1961), 407-436; idem, "The Transcendentality of *Ens-Esse* and the Ground of Metaphysics," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 6 (1966), 389-427, idem, "Platonism, Neoplatonism and Thomism: Convergencies and Divergencies," *New Scholasticism*, 44 (1970), 69-100, idem, "The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy. The Notion of Participation," *Review of Metaphysics*, 27 (1974), 449-491 [as "Platonism, Neoplatonism and Thomism," but more extensive, includes agreement with Lindbeck and works out his strong difference from Transcendental Thomism], idem, "Il nuovo problema dell'essere e la fondazione della metafisica," *St. Thomas Aquinas, 1274-1974: Commemorative Studies*, ed. A.A. Maurer, 2 vols., ii, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974), 423-457; idem, "L'interpretazione dell'atto in S. Tommaso e Heidegger," *Atti del Congresso Internazionale Tommaso d'Aquino nel suo settimo centenario*, ed. A. Piolanti, 9 vols., i, Studi Tomistici 1 (Napoli: Edizioni Domenicane Italiane, 1975), 119-128.

postmodernism whose relation to the history of philosophy remains determined by Heidegger, even if there is a growing freedom from the Heideggerian categories of judgment. For example, John Milbank thinks that Professor Marion's attempt to get beyond Heidegger, by substituting love for being, too much mirrors the logic of what he opposes.

For Cornelio Fabro, the negative way is used to modify the forms of conceptually knowable being. The negative way is not rather, as in the subsequent developments, placed against all philosophical theology. Negation and affirmation are ontological and epistemological means for constructing and moving within a hierarchy. That this is true both for Thomas himself, and for Fabro's construction of Thomism, is, at our moment in philosophy, the central point in determining their relation to Denys.

## 2. B) NeoThomism, vi) The Remains

In France, all that remains of doctrinal, baroque or Neoscholastic Thomism is more or less assimilated to the position of Fabro. These Thomists tend to be associated with the Dominican École de Théologie at Toulouse, or work at the Catholic, but state supported, Faculty of Theology at Strasbourg, or they are French working at the predominantly Dominican University at Fribourg in Switzerland. A few names for a list are S.-T. Bonino, o.p.,<sup>42</sup> Y. Labbé, T.-D. Humbrecht, o.p., and Gilles Emery, o.p.<sup>43</sup> They are sharply to be distinguished from the Dominican scholars at the Couvent St. Jacques in Paris - H.-D. Saffrey's base - where the most theologically active Dominican medieval scholar is É.-H. Wéber.<sup>44</sup> His work in understanding the Neoplatonism of Thomas, Bonaventure, Eckhart, Duns Scotus and others may usefully be compared to that of the secular scholars, Émilie Zum Brunn (who works mostly on Augustine), Olivier Boulnois<sup>45</sup> (who specializes in the study of Duns Scotus) and Alain de Libera (who has produced important studies of Albert the Great and the Rhenish theologians). The latter is about the same age as Jean-Luc Marion and, as the dominating spirit in the study of medieval philosophy and theology at the École pratique des hautes études at the Sorbonne, represents those

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<sup>42</sup> Characteristic of their combination of a sophisticated understanding of the present problems for Thomism in France post Heidegger with an endeavour to save the Thomist tradition and kataphatic theology is the issue of the *Revue Thomiste* devoted to *Saint Thomas et l'onto-théologie*, t. XCV, no 1 (Janvier-Mars 1995) which contains articles by Bonino and Humbrecht. Bonino's "Le concept d'étant et la connaissance de Dieu après Jean Cabrol," admits that the Thomist tradition has amalgamated heterogeneous elements but defends it against Gilson nonetheless (136). See also his "Influence du Pseudo-Denys sur la conception thomiste de l'esse," in *L'Avenir de la métaphysique* in *Bulletin de Littérature Ecclésiastique*, XCIV/3 (1993), 269-274, idem, "Les voiles sacres: A propos d'une citation de Denys," in *Atti del IX Congresso Tomistico Internazionale*, vol. vi, Studi Tomistici 45 (Città del Vaticano: Pontificia Accademia di S. Tommaso Aquinas, 1992), 159-171, Y. Labbé, "La théologie négative dans la théologie trinitaire," in "Voies Négatives," *Rev. sc. rel.*, 67,#4 (octobre, 1993), 69-86S and Humbrecht in "La théologie négative." See notes 16 and 25 above.

<sup>43</sup> Gilles Emery, o.p., *La Trinité Créatrice, Trinité et création dans les commentaires aux Sentences de Thomas d'Aquin et de ses précurseurs Albert le Grand et Bonaventure*, Bibliothèque Thomiste xlvii (Paris: Vrin, 1995).

<sup>44</sup> For an example of Wéber's historical work as part of this community with its characteristic philosophical and theological questions see *Maître Eckhart à Paris. Une critique médiévale de l'ontothéologie. Les Questions parisiennes no 1 et no 2 d'Eckhart. Études, Textes et Traductions*, par Émilie Zum Brunn, Zénon Kaluza, Alain de Libera, Paul Vignaux, Édouard Wéber, Bibliothèque de L'École des Hautes Études, section des Sciences Religieuses, vol LXXXVI, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1984) and notes 28 and 37 above.

<sup>45</sup> Jean Duns Scot, *Sur la connaissance de Dieu et l'univocité de étant*, introduction, traduction et commentaire par Olivier Boulnois, Épipiméthée (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1988) and "Quand commence l'ontothéologie? Aristote, Thomas d'Aquin et Duns Scot," *Revue Thomiste*, 95 (1995), #1, 85-108.

whose commitment to medieval philosophy is too open to the whole historical and philosophical problematic of contemporary French scholarship to permit assigning them to a school.<sup>46</sup>

## 2. C) Thomism and Neoplatonism, i) the Neoplatonic theology of Père Jean Trouillard

Beyond Fabro's Thomism, two further stages have emerged. There are those who looking, on one side, to the priority of the negative way in Denys, and, on the other, to Heidegger's criticism of ontotheology, demand a radical transformation of our understanding of Thomas' system. These keep something of the form of Thomistic philosophical theology but deny that what is said can be thought. The predications made of God by Thomas have no proper positive significance. They do not intend being conceptually or positively grasped. As in Denys, predicative thought and affirmative knowledge belong to and indeed constitute the realm of creatures. But there is no continuous ontic hierarchy for thought, no ontology, by which we may move from speech about creatures to significant speech about God. This stage in the development of contemporary Thomism<sup>47</sup> roughly corresponds to the Neoplatonic theology of Père Jean Trouillard.

Père Trouillard found in Proclus not only the basis for a henology, an ordering of all things relative to the One, rather than to being, but also the notion of the self-constituted. This enabled breaking the continuity of the chain which, in the old ontological systems, too closely bound heaven and earth. On the Thomist side, since this position leaves Thomas' theology an empty shell, speech not only without significance but properly opposed by thought, it gives way to the second of these last stages. Seen within a more general consideration of the relations of philosophy and theology, theology, in this penultimate position, remains too dependent upon philosophy. Philosophy is still here, to use David Tracy's categories, "correlational", "correlating reason and revelation".<sup>48</sup> Some sophisticated French theologians, imbued with the instincts of a Thomism which, as a system they had largely abandoned, maintained a commitment to philosophy by such a strategy. Père G. Lafont, o.s.b.,<sup>49</sup> is an example. But this unstable compromise was not radical enough for the moving spirits.

## 2. C) Thomism and Neoplatonism

### ii) The Postmoderns, a) Denys against philosophy and against Thomas

Theologians with a more radical freedom perceived that for Westerners to get beyond the spiritual malaise which Heidegger identified, they had to know the power and reality of

<sup>46</sup> For a critical assessment of his position, see David Piché's review article "Penser au Moyen Âge d'Alain de Libera: Une perspective novatrice sur la condamnation parisienne de 1277," *Laval théo. et phil.*, 52,1 (1996), 206.

<sup>47</sup> A fraction of the possible examples are J.D. Jones, "The Ontological Difference for St. Thomas and Pseudo-Dionysius," *Dionysius*, 4 (1980), 133-172, idem, "A Non-Entitative Understanding of Being and Unity: Heidegger and Neoplatonism," *Dionysius*, 6 (1982), 94-110; J.D. Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay in Overcoming Metaphysics*, (New York: Fordham, 1982). There are those who concede the content of metaphysics to the Heideggerian critique and attempt a Transcendental retrieval of theology, e.g. R.L. Hurd, "Heidegger and Aquinas: A Rahnerian Bridge," *Philosophy Today*, 28 (1984), 105-137; idem, "Being is Being-Present-to-Self: Rahner's key to Aquinas' Metaphysics," *The Thomist*, 52 (1988), 63-78. For more and my own judgment on the success of this effort see Hankey, "Making Theology Practical," 100-114. There is also a thoughtful reaction, e.g. O. Blanchette, "Are There Two Questions of Being?" *Review of Metaphysics*, 45 (1992), 259-287. See notes 29 and 33 above.

<sup>48</sup> Foreword to Jean-Luc Marion, *God without being: hors-texte*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), x. Milbank judges one side of Marion's position to be still correlational, see "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," 325.

<sup>49</sup> For references to relevant works see Hankey, *God in Himself*, 14, n.47.

revelation before and independent of philosophy. There must be for us divine revelation which cannot be contained, reduced, entrapped by conceptualizing and objectifying reason. So a position emerges of which the nearest likeness in our century is the neo-orthodoxy of Karl Barth.<sup>50</sup> The French thinker best articulating it is Jean-Luc Marion. As an historian of philosophy, he is, as we noted, a most important student of Descartes. In his creative philosophical writing, he is a contributor to the phenomenological tradition. As a lay theologian, he is the sign of the passing of the old structures of French ecclesiastical life and of the relation between theology and philosophy in them. As theologian, he explicates Denys and has developed a theology *sans être*.<sup>51</sup> In contrast, Professor Gilson maintained theology to be beyond him; he was an historian and a philosopher. Crucially, the authoritative decisions of the Roman Church were decisive for his philosophical judgments. Gilson placed great value on the choice of Thomism as the official Christian philosophy by the Roman *magisterium*; indeed, he spoke as if this choice belonged to its infallible teaching. It was impossible both that the Church of Rome was the true Church and also that it had made an error about the thinker it had chosen to be its 'common doctor.'<sup>52</sup>

In Professor Marion's position, the Dionysian negative theology is taken to be the negation of philosophical or conceptual theology. The Dionysian writings are not the medium of Neoplatonic philosophy, but its overcoming by the Christian religion. Thomas was fatally wrong, not only in making Denys an authority contributing to a system in which Being was God's highest name, a system where God was identified with a form of Being in an ontologically understood cosmic hierarchy, where there were positive proper predications of God, where negation was a means within philosophical theology for constructing the hierarchically ordered modes of being and moving between them, but also, and most fundamentally, Thomas misunderstood and betrayed Denys by treating his writings as contributions to the tradition of philosophical theology. Rather they are directions for religious acts, hymns of praise and guides to union. Denys' statements are not propositions conveying a conceptually graspable philosophical and theological content.

When Denys is understood against Aquinas as theologically negating philosophy, rather than as providing theology with a tool, he is seen as doing in the ancient world what Heidegger attempts in ours. The God of the Hebrews has been freed from fatal entanglement with the philosophy of the Greeks and their fateful ontology.<sup>53</sup> We can and must substitute a theology built on the Good, not as concept, but as divine name, not to be understood, but to be praised. With God we have to do not with being, but, rather, with love.

This development completes a circle. It began with the Neoscholastic Thomism of the Leonine revival. As at that beginning, Thomas and Denys are now again completely opposed to one another, and Thomas is judged to have misconceived what he had in common with his highly revered authority.

## 2. C) Thomism and Neoplatonism, ii) The Postmoderns

<sup>50</sup> See Milbank, "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," 325.

<sup>51</sup> For a sketch see Ward, "Introducing Jean-Luc Marion."

<sup>52</sup> É. Gilson, *Le philosophe et la théologie*, (Paris: Fayard, 1960), 61, 94-95, 142-143, 191 ff. The plurality of Christian philosophies identified by Gilson makes a choice by authority necessary.

<sup>53</sup> J.-L. Marion, *L'idole et la distance. Cinq études*, (Paris; Grasset et Fasquelle, 1977), 177-243, idem, *Dieu sans l'être*, [1st ed. 1982], (Paris: Quadrige & PUF, 1991), 111-122; Louis Bouyer, *Mysterion, Du mystère à la mystique*, (Paris: O.E.I.L., 1986), 230 ff.

## b) Denys and Thomas, Neoplatonists both

This point is, however, a place from which movement may begin again. In March, 1995, I sent to Professor Marion a paper on St. Thomas and Denys which I had delivered at a conference in Paris in September 1994.<sup>54</sup> Professor Marion was to have participated in the conference but could not. The paper described his position in the way just outlined. He replied that I must read his article appearing in the next issue of the *Revue thomiste*. I discovered there a formal retraction.<sup>55</sup> Professor Marion had decided that Thomas' philosophical theology is fundamentally Neoplatonic and is not *onto-théo-logie*, imprisoning God beyond the power of revelation within our conceptualization of being, but rather *théo-onto-logie*, revelation which determines the concept of being. This moves Thomas toward Denys. But now Thomas is evaluated from the perspective of Denys, either Denys against philosophy or Denys the Neoplatonist. This last twist in the relations of Thomas to Denys places us in a position to question our approach to our philosophical and theological past.

The French study of old Greek Neoplatonism, pagan and Christian, is, finally, an attempt to remain with theology, while getting beyond metaphysics, and perhaps philosophy. And that is an attempt to get beyond modernity - or, at least, what has been taken to be central to modernity. For, to quote John Milbank, "... it is arguable that recent researches suggest that 'modernity fulfills metaphysics' should be radicalized as 'modernity invented metaphysics'".<sup>56</sup> In making this judgment, he is drawing on his extensive, deep and critical engagement with Marion's work and that of other French thinkers many of whom we have mentioned. These French scholars have devoted such a quantity of effort to understanding antique Neoplatonism in order to help contemporary thought and life escape, transform or reappropriate modernity. For Marion and Milbank getting beyond secularizing modernity requires reducing or eliminating the autonomy of philosophy. Certainly, it requires that the Cartesian ego not be taken as adequate philosophical foundation.<sup>57</sup> Here, the anti-modern Leonine Thomist and postmodern Christian Dionysian or Neoplatonist meet. At this meeting point the problems arise.

We can articulate the problem in our deeply ambiguous relation to history more clearly. There is a problem with history itself. We need to find, and do find, a radical discontinuity between the modern and the premodern. But, equally, history is governed by a logic which we discern as if from the point of its completed working out. The discernment of this logic brings with it a freedom, which may become arbitrary, at least in the obvious sense of depending on a choosing will.<sup>58</sup> Certainly, the retrieval of elements from the past outside of that logic's dominating necessity requires there to be a choice between elements tied together within the historical actuality and its existent intellectual systems. But, if the choosing will and its choices have no other basis than an opposition to an assumed modernity and a wish to escape it, the

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<sup>54</sup> Hankey, "Dionysian Hierarchy."

<sup>55</sup> "Saint Thomas d'Aquin et l'onto-théo-logie," *Revue thomiste*, 95/1 (1995), 31-66, the *retractio* is at 33 and 65. In it Marion notes that he was already moving in this direction in the 1991 "Preface to the English Edition" of his *Dieu sans être*.

<sup>56</sup> Milbank, "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," 328.

<sup>57</sup> Milbank is trying to overcome an immanentizing reason which might be founded therein rather than the false transcendence Heidegger exposed, and judges Marion both to mistake the problem and to stay with a foundational subjectivity, see "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," 329-41, idem, "Can a Gift be Given?" 132 ff.

<sup>58</sup> As for example with Nietzsche. John Milbank, in *Theology and Social Theory. Beyond Secular Reason*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990) traces "the genesis of the main forms of secular reason, in such a fashion as to unearth the arbitrary moments in the construction of their logic" (3). Milbank's ultimate criticism of Marion in "Can a Gift be Given?" is that his account of will is mistaken - taking love as will.

*liberum arbitrium* will be arbitrary in a more negative sense. The question of this arbitrariness we need to explore further. In my view, it does arise in respect to the particular history to which this paper attends. Here it is a consequence of our misunderstanding of the relations of religion, philosophy and theology in Denys and in the late Neoplatonists whom he follows. This misunderstanding is required by the purposes with which we approach Denys. If we could get beyond these to a freer and more contemplative, a less manipulative, relation to him, the continuities and discontinuities between Denys and Aquinas, and between them and us, would become clearer. We would come at the same time to a different understanding of the logic by which our history is governed and to a different freedom in relation to it.

### 3. Neoplatonism and modernity, the Problem of Philosophical Reason

#### A) Is Denys a Neoplatonist?

During the present revival of enthusiasm for what may be discovered in the Dionysian text, diverse, even opposed things are found there. Despite linguistic, philological and historical learning and extraordinary critical self-awareness, we share this with our predecessors, who likewise found opposed things in those mysterious depths, and often hated one another heartily on that account. There is, however, also something common to the Dionysian *corpus*, to our new Dionysians, to his older readers in East and West, and, indeed, to the late pagan Neoplatonic schools in relation to which his doctrine was developed. What is common is the high value they all place on the religious integration of the diverse features of life.

The whole Dionysian *corpus* is a spiritual anagogy whose goal is the union to which *The Mystical Theology* is dedicated. That this treatise, and the *ἑνωσις* it describes, is the sum and reason for the whole is made clear by its references to the rest of the *corpus*. All Denys' reasoning, both that which is clearly traceable to pagan philosophical sources, and his meditation on and theological reflection about sacred Scripture, as well as the moral purification and prayer necessary for all ascent, are directed to one end. Reason, purification and prayer are integrated with activities, theophanic, angelic and ecclesiastical, which are hierarchical, communal, liturgical, and sacramental. All lead to the soul's union with God. On this there is accord. But, with, and after, that agreement, the trouble starts.

The answers to a fundamental question differ strongly. What is the place of the philosophical reasoning in the anagogy? Since Christians tend to designate what paganism contributes to their theological reasonings as philosophy, the question about the place of philosophy in Denys arises sharply in respect to the character of Denys' relation to pagan Neoplatonism. Why are the place of philosophy, and thus, the relation to Neoplatonism, such big questions for us?

To understand the new enthusiasm for Denys in terms of a religious reaction against the disintegration of the elements of life in contemporary society, is also to see it as part of the contemporary reaction against modern or Enlightenment reason, at least as that reason is now characterized. The autonomy and abstractly self-related subjectivity of that reason are displayed in Descartes' new beginning for philosophy in a rational self-certainty. This new beginning, which Descartes said he found in Augustine,<sup>59</sup> is now, among us, perceived as loss rather than gain. What was forgotten in the apparent clarity of the new beginning, now comes again to remembrance. The deceptions of objective and objectifying reason, are, it seems, more evident

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<sup>59</sup> For what he did and did not find, see Marion, *Sur le prisme métaphysique de Descartes*, 138-41, 147, 231-33; idem, *Sur la théologie blanche de Descartes*, 384.

to us than they were to those in the midst of modernity. For these deceptions lead, by way of the division between intellect and will, itself following on the division of mind and body, to that manipulative relation to the world, animate and inanimate, human and even divine, in which our technocratic freedom seems entrapped.

In these very generally post or anti-modern relations to the premodern, many of our diverse and opposed interpretations of Denys occur. These diverse interpretations have a polemical opposition precisely on account of the negative relation to modernity which they share. The trouble is that Denys, at least as he was appropriated by the West, did not stand outside or against that which has made us what we are.

A consequence of Thomas' submission to the authority of Denys is that he is essential to constructing Latin intellectual and political systems. Doubtless, Denys is transmuted in the systems of intellectual and institutional power he enables. But ironically, this is precisely because the logic he conveys is more inclusively dialectical than those Aristotle or Augustine provided Aquinas. Though he represents the Greek theological tradition, but carries from it a logic of such synthetic power, because of its embedded Iamblichan - Procline Neoplatonism, Denys has been essential to making Latin Christendom the most potent tradition. Whether that power is only the power for the greatest of self-overcomings or has another fate is also profoundly a question of what the Dionysian *corpus* really is about. Above all it is a question of the difference between what Denys said and what Aquinas heard, together with the questions as to whether we are either more profound, or more accurate, listeners than Thomas was. The trouble is that we shall be able to answer none of these pressing and difficult questions about the discontinuities, if we do not recognize the continuities.<sup>60</sup>

When we try to read Denys against ourselves, who are postmodern only because we were and are first modern, we make his thought almost completely incomprehensible to ourselves, *in principle*. When we *begin* by opposition to what our history has made us, we must read Denys against our own inherited traditions of reading, but that is also precisely the work of historical critical scholarship as developed in modern times. Its aim is to distinguish history and tradition.<sup>61</sup> Getting behind the reading of Denys in our western tradition to what is premodern is a work made possible by the critical modern spirit from which we would also escape. Thinking within this paradox unresolved tends to produce arbitrariness in our reading.

### 3. B) Jean-Luc Marion and John Milbank i) John Milbank

Let me give a recent example of choosing made within a postmodern way of thinking, as Graham Ward defined it. So far as this choice involves selecting some elements, united within a Neoplatonic systematic thinking, without showing how what is selected can exist outside that thinking, the choosing is logically arbitrary. Dr John Milbank seeks in "Christian Neoplatonism":

notions ...[which] remain essential for a Christian theological ontology: these are those of transcendence, participation, analogy, hierarchy, teleology (these two in modified forms) and the absolute reality of the 'the Good' in roughly the Platonic sense. The strategy, therefore, which the theologian should adopt, is that of showing that the critique of

<sup>60</sup> See Hankey, "Dionysius dixit," 137-50 and "Dionysian Hierarchy," 435-38.

<sup>61</sup> See Hankey, "The Bible in a Post-Critical Age," 49 ff.

presence, substance, the idea, the subject, causality, thought-before-expression, and realist representation do not necessarily entail the critique of transcendence, participation, analogy, hierarchy, teleology and the Platonic Good, reinterpreted by Christianity as identical with Being.<sup>62</sup>

To be left behind are precisely those notions which would found an autonomous philosophical reason enabling secular reason to “position” theology instead of being “positioned” by it. Dr. Milbank’s choice of elements from Neoplatonic systems is not, however, for the sake of a “restoration of a pre-modern Christian position.”<sup>63</sup> Nor is he uncritical of patristic and mediaeval thought which “was unable to overcome entirely the ontology of substance.”<sup>64</sup> Yet, by a theology which makes such choices, Dr. Milbank hopes to help us get beyond the secular reason central to modernity.

An examination of the actual forms in which patristic and medieval Christian Neoplatonism occurred, will discover not only that the desired and the rejected elements are found bound together, but also that their union and development are more Christian than pagan. The Christians united traditions divided against one another in pagan Neoplatonism and combined extremes beyond those contained within the thought of their pagan predecessors. Partly, Dr. Milbank recognizes this; indeed, it is essential to his criticism of Professor Marion. We may ask whether to select some elements from the historically existent *summae* of Christian Neoplatonism is either to revert to earlier pagan forms or to renounce the logic of theology become systematic for something more arbitrary.

### 3. B) Jean-Luc Marion and John Milbank

#### ii) Jean-Luc Marion, the question of the Dionysian Hierarchy

We return to Jean-Luc Marion for another example of our treatment of Christian Neoplatonism. Professor Marion, has erected Denys as a model for theology. In an early book, *L'idole et la distance. Cinq études*, Professor Marion interprets hierarchy, the term Denys invented, so as to set Denys’ representation of it, against hierarchy, as it actually developed in our historical institutions.<sup>65</sup>

Professor Marion, rightly, sees hierarchy as solving the problem at the heart of the Dionysian theology, the problem of how to reconcile the absolute distinction between creature and creator, on the one hand, with the creation’s reversion to the creator, *ἑνωσις*, on the other. This problem is related to, though not identical with, another problem. How are we to reconcile the hierarchical relation to God which is a mediation, to its goal, mystical union, which is

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<sup>62</sup> Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 296. For a history of Neoplatonic Christianity, see “Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics,” 320-332, which, is not far in its representation from that in Marion, “Saint Thomas d’Aquin et l’onto-théo-logie.”

<sup>63</sup> Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 2.

<sup>64</sup> John Milbank, “Theology without Substance: Christianity, Signs, Origins,” *Journal of Literature & Theology*, 2 (1988), 2.

<sup>65</sup> Marion, *L'idole et la distance*. My account of Marion’s position owes very much to a paper by Michael Harrington for my Seminar on Neoplatonism at Dalhousie University in 1996. Ward, “Introducing Jean-Luc Marion,” 322 and Milbank, “Can a Gift be Given?,” 137-38 treat the relation of Marion’s argument to his dialogue with Heidegger and Levinas.

immediate? This second problem has bedeviled the tradition of Dionysian spirituality at least in the Latin Church from the later Middle Ages.<sup>66</sup>

Professor Marion represents the contrast as follows. In the political model of hierarchy, each superior level possesses something, an ontic content, which gives it authority over its inferiors, and which must be protected for the hierarchy to survive. The First for Marion's Denys, in contrast, renders itself sacred not to hide itself as origin, but because that origin is also to be the goal of every level of the hierarchy. The goal is possible because the creator defines himself, not by a content, but by an ecstasy. So Christ defines himself by giving himself away as gift to the hierarchy. The process, ours in his, is charity and ecstasy all at once. This ecstasy reconciles mediation with immediacy and creates a hierarchy which is not ontological. Since the Principle defines itself as action, rather than as a content, the continued giving of the gift involves immediate communion with the action and, thus, the mediation of a new giver. This mediated immediacy allows the return of creation to its creator in what would destroy the political model of hierarchy, but fulfills the sacred order of Denys.

Here we encounter the gravest problem for Marion's account. In the Procline - Dionysian tradition, and especially in its reception, development and transformation within the Aristotelian Neoplatonism of Aquinas, the fundamental gift of the Creator is the substantial or self-sufficient being of the creature. But, if there is, in fact, real gift and real reception, then each who receives in the hierarchy receives something of its own, indeed receives its own substantial power of existence. So far as John Milbank's criticism of Marion's "extra-ontological gift" shows that the demand is for "another ontology", it involves the same principle.<sup>67</sup>

This comes out when Thomas transforms Denys' hierarchical thinking in following it. At the root of that thinking is the *lex divinitatis*, the Divine ordering law, the law of mediation. Denys derived it through the Platonic tradition from Iamblichus. For Aquinas it is the Dionysian principle that between extremes a mediating third always intervenes.<sup>68</sup> Looking at celestial, ecclesiastical, social and salvific orders through such a logic transmutes them. The influence that Denys has on the mind of Aquinas grows throughout his life, and is strengthened by his late reading of a translation of the *Elements of Theology* of Proclus. The discovered coherence of Denys, the *Liber de causis*, and of Proclus did not unnerve Thomas. Rather it enabled him to give more completeness and subtlety to his choice of mediating hierarchy as his fundamental model of good, indeed, Divine order.

Denys, and the Neoplatonism which derives from Iamblichus, are responsible for the principles governing celestial hierarchy in Aquinas, for the enormous role it plays in his system, for the distinctions of its forms and ranks and for their names. However, Thomas conforms it to his ontology which gives greater weight to creation of substantial being as the work of the First Cause. Thomas insists rigorously on a distinction between the donation of substantial being, which is the creative act, and all other subsequent donations. The higher angels confer knowledge but not, as in Denys, being, grace, and glory on the lower spirits. Moreover, the equality of humans as compared to angels prevents hierarchical communication in the celestial

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<sup>66</sup> See W.J. Hankey, "Augustinian Immediacy and Dionysian Mediation in John Colet, Edmund Spenser, Richard Hooker and the Cardinal Bérulle," for the Kolloquium "Augustinus in der Neuzeit. Von Petrarca zum 18. Jahrhundert," Wolfenbüttel, October, 1996, forthcoming in the Acts of the Kolloquium, edited Kurt Flasch and Dominique De Courcelles, Editions Brepols-Turnhout, 1997.

<sup>67</sup> Milbank, "Can a Gift be Given?," 137, see 152.

<sup>68</sup> On this see Hankey, "Dionysius Dixit," "Aquinas, Pseudo-Denys, Proclus and Isaiah VI.6," and "Dionysian Hierarchy" with the references therein to the work of David E. Luscombe and O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 263 ff.

order being the model for that communication in the church. This modeling is fundamental to Denys' purpose.<sup>69</sup>

There is an analogous difference in respect to the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Evidently, Thomas does not derive its population from Denys. It and the characteristic powers of its members are given in the evolution of ecclesiastical and political institutions. Denys contributes the principle that the more eminent in the hierarchy contains what derives from it and the indispensable necessity of hierarchical mediation for the reception of divine knowledge. Here again Thomas' strong distinction between the substantial creation of creatures, on the one hand, and their operations, on the other, applies.

Because what is given or withheld in the spiritual hierarchy cannot, for Aquinas, totally constitute the being or character of any of its members a fall into spiritual ignorance or pollution does not destroy the underlying sacral character of the members of the hierarchy, nor prevent them from remaining vehicles of grace and exercising the functions of their offices.<sup>70</sup> So, despite the authority of Denys for him, Aquinas contributes to the particular emphasis of western ecclesiology on sacramental character and formal validity.

Hierarchy is understood by Thomas politically. It is the medium of divine government. The celestial hierarchy governs the cosmos; the ecclesiastical governs the Christian republic. In a move Denys did not take, and would not have taken, Aquinas follows a hermeneutic tradition which identifies the principal ecclesiastical hierarch with the Roman Pontiff. This tradition specifically associates the papal mediation between the spiritual and earthly realms with the pope's possession of the highest and most perfect *potestas* in virtue of his possession of both swords. Aquinas, the Aristotelian, absolutizes this *potestas* by making the pope, as head of the Christian republic, heir to the prerogatives of the governor of the *polis*. The hierarchy whose laws derive from Denys has now altogether another character than that in his *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*.<sup>71</sup>

Metaphysically, ecclesiastically and politically, the West has followed the direction in which Aquinas, and his Latin predecessors developed the Iamblichan - Procline tradition largely received through Denys. Substantial being grounds political power in western hierarchies. Each who receives in the hierarchy, receives in virtue of having something of its own, indeed, receives in virtue of having its own substantial power of existence.

### 3. B) Jean-Luc Marion and John Milbank iii) Milbank and Marion, Thomas and Denys

For all their efforts to get around this conclusion, so as to avoid giving any basis to the substantiality of the modern self-related subject, the thinkers at whom we looking cannot manage it. In fact, Dr. Milbank has effectively recognized this in his "Can a Gift be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic" which is based in a critique of Derrida and Marion. Here, from the mutual recognition inherent to giving, Milbank shows the need for

<sup>69</sup> See T.C. O'Brien, "The Dionysian Corpus," Appendix 3, in St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 14 (London and New York: Blackfriars, 1975), 182-193. A doctrine of the *Liber de causis*, like to that of Denys, that the being of intelligent souls is given by God but their intellectual activity by the intelligences (angels) Thomas found most objectionable, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, xxvii and n.65.

<sup>70</sup> On the Donatist like teaching of Dionysius, see Jaroslav Pelikan's introduction to *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, Colm Luibheid and Paul Rorem, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 17-19.

<sup>71</sup> see Hankey, "Dionysius Dixit," 143-50.

“another ontology” which is “another philosophy” and “another metaphysics.”<sup>72</sup> Were he to fully work out the implications, he should bring back substance, as well as being, which he already embraces, as a category within the Christian Neoplatonism he desires. This belongs to St. Thomas’ development of the doctrine of Denys.<sup>73</sup>

This difficulty for Dr. Milbank is parallel to the problem for Professor Marion since his recantation. If Thomas’ identification of God and *ipsum esse* is acceptable, because Thomas is a Neoplatonist, does not Denys also become a philosophical theologian? Thus, Denys will be doing theology as science, like the Neoplatonists to whose thought he gave quasi-Apostolic authority. But this Professor Marion has denied, and continues to deny. Marion has moved Thomas toward Denys, but not Denys toward Thomas.

Does, and can Neoplatonism exist as a School of Spiritual Life apart from philosophical systematizing in the way that Marion represents Denys? If not, must we not move Denys toward Thomas, at the same time as Thomas is moved toward Denys? Does not the Dionysian *corpus*, in its appropriation of philosophy by Christian theology, do, with Proclus, what Augustine had done earlier with Plotinus? Is this Neoplatonic theology as science not essential to Christianity? These are disputed points. They are historical as well as theological and philosophical questions.

H.-D. Saffrey’s inaugural lecture for the Twelfth International Conference on Patristic Studies is relevant. Entitled “Theology as science (3rd-6th centuries),”<sup>74</sup> it represents the pseudo-Denys as the heir of the movement by which Christian theology became philosophically scientific. For Saffrey, this development reached its highest point in the great 13th century *summae*. As against such a view, the perspectives and positions from which Professor Marion and Dr. Milbank make their choices from Neoplatonic theologies seem external. The result is a movement back and forth between what are, in fact, necessarily united aspects of determined wholes. Consider the problem of being in Christian Neoplatonism.

There is a lot in common between the contentless Dionysian Principle, as Professor Marion represents it, and the Neoplatonic One. The One is not, precisely because it is no thing. Being appears in such a view as limitation, a particular content.<sup>75</sup> Professor Marion wants to find a way to a Christian God who is not subject to Heidegger’s critique of ontotheology. For this reason, he wants to separate God and being.

According to Heidegger, Christian philosophical theology confuses Being with beings, and turns God into a super being. God becomes comprehensible within a particular conception of being. From the divine perspective, we have a rational hold on the world. Here, we are also related to being from the side of the Creator’s will. This relation reduces the cosmos to manipulable things.<sup>76</sup> For Marion, the way around this critique is found via Denys’ God, whose first name is not ‘being’ but ‘self-diffusive good’. So, in *Dieu sans l’être. hors texte*, published in 1982, Professor Marion developed the notion of God, not as being, but as love. There also he criticized theologians like Aquinas who spoke of God as *esse*, because his most proper name was being.

<sup>72</sup> John Milbank, “Can a Gift be Given?” 152 and 137 with 132.

<sup>73</sup> See Booth, *Aristotelian Aporetic*, 218: “Thomas’s Aristotelian ontology is a prolongation and development of Pseudo-Dionysius’s Aristotelianisation of Proclus’s ontology ...”, 76-80 and 217-252, Hankey, *God in Himself*, 165-66, O’Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 118 ff., and Velde, *Participation*, 257-65.

<sup>74</sup> Published in French as “Les débuts de la théologie.”

<sup>75</sup> See Milbank, “Can a Gift be Given?” 143 and n. 64.

<sup>76</sup> For an account of the argument and why Heidegger got it wrong, see Milbank, “Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics,” 329-35.

In contrast, Dr Milbank, in 1990, when he published his *Theology and Social Theory. Beyond Secular Reason*, was laying down, as a desirable characteristic of Christian Neoplatonism, “the Platonic Good, reinterpreted by Christianity as identical with Being.”<sup>77</sup> In subsequent articles, Dr Milbank has continued this, developing his description of God as being within a Neoplatonic logic, working out aspects of his position within a critique of Professor Marion. He detects that Marion’s theology of love is too closely dependent on the Heidegger it would answer. But, in fact, their positions increasingly converge as Marion moves toward Aquinas and as Milbank sketches his other ontology.

Their opposition has mostly to do the question of philosophy in theology. Given their common view of its late medieval and modern history, both are suspicious of philosophy with any inherent reason or content underived from revelation. John Milbank carries his opposition to independent or autonomous philosophical reason farther than does Marion. He is able to bring back ontology and the God Who Is, both because his departure from Heidegger is at a different point than is Marion’s and because, negating philosophy in relation to revelation even more completely than Marion does, he is able to restore elements of a traditional metaphysics of being more completely. All of which brings us back to our question as to how to read the Dionysian *corpus*. Its answer depends on how we understand the place of philosophical reason in theology.

### 3. C) Philosophy in Theology

In agreement with Professor Marion, Dr Milbank wishes a reduction of philosophy relative to religion. And although there is little room for philosophy in Professor Marion’s theology, Dr. Milbank finds that Marion’s phenomenology of donation still concedes philosophy too much. So he writes, criticising Marion:

An independent phenomenology must be given up, along with the claim, which would have seemed so bizarre to the Fathers, to be doing philosophy *as well as* theology. Philosophy as spiritual discipline, orientated to (an always in any case implicit) abstract reflection on the ‘context’ of our ascent, can indeed be embraced and consummated in a Christian version by theology. In this sense theology can still have recourse to *theoria* and *logos*, and if the latter constitute ‘metaphysics’, then talk of its overcoming is absurd. But philosophy as autonomous, as ‘about’ anything independently of its creaturely status *is* metaphysics or ontology in the most precisely technical sense. Philosophy in fact *began* as a secularizing immanentism, an attempt to regard a *cosmos* independently of a performed reception of the poetic word. The pre-Socratics forgot both Being and the gift, while (*contra* Heidegger) the later Plato made some attempt to recover the extra-cosmic vatic *logos*. Theology has always resumed this inheritance, along with that of the Bible, and if it wishes to think again God’s love, then it must entirely evacuate philosophy, which is metaphysics, leaving it nothing (outside imaginary worlds, logical implications or the isolation of *aporias*) to either do or see, which is not -- manifestly, I judge -- malicious.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 296.

<sup>78</sup> Milbank, “Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics,” *The Word Made Strange, Theology, Language, Culture*, (Oxford: Blackwells, 1997), 49-50.

Even if we allow for Dr. Milbank's other philosophy, ontology, or metaphysics, Aquinas does not think like this. For Thomas, theology as *sacra doctrina* does not need to evacuate philosophy which is metaphysics. When Professor Marion wanted to make peace with Aquinas, an essential consideration was the question of the subject of theology in Aquinas and the relations between its Scripturally revealed side, on the one hand, and that side of it which Aquinas says is one of the philosophical sciences, on the other. John Milbank identifies this consideration as "the absolute crux of this matter, and the turning point in the destiny of the West."<sup>79</sup> When Marion drew closer to Aquinas, he also reduced the difference in principle between himself and Milbank, but neither can embrace philosophical reason in the way Aquinas does.

By 1991, when *Dieu sans l'être. hors texte* was translated into English, Professor Marion was already reconsidering his view of Aquinas. In his formal "recantation," he discerned that, in Thomas Aquinas, and in Neoplatonic Christian theologians generally, God is not determined according to comprehensible being, from below. The Neoplatonic God is not imprisoned within the horizon of our understanding of being and without power to reveal himself. When, Aquinas, and Neoplatonic Christian theologians generally, do *théo-onto-logie*, revelation determines how we understand God, and God, ecstatically good beyond being, gives being from above even to Himself. It is in this giving that being receives its logic.

Despite the recantation, there is a fundamental continuity as well as a shift in Marion's thought. His recantation is more a revision of his view of the place of Aquinas within his abiding judgments about how being must stand to the divine, than it is a revision of his theological principles. When he allows that Thomas' philosophical theology is fundamentally Neoplatonic, Thomas is moved toward Denys. But, has his view of philosophy shifted? How are religion, theology and philosophy related? These are questions within Neoplatonic philosophy where reason has a positive relation to myth and religion.

Historically, Neoplatonic philosophy's embrace of these allowed a reciprocal Christian embrace of philosophy. Dr. Milbank sets out a good part of such an argument thus:

Yet faith remains possible, as *another* logos, another knowledge and desire, which we should not hesitate to describe as 'another philosophy' (another metaphysics, another ontology) since the Church fathers themselves did not hesitate to do so and Platonic/ Neoplatonic philosophy *already* pressed against any philosophical subordination of *mythos, cultus* and community.<sup>80</sup>

This goes a way toward such reciprocity, but it remains a one-sided representation of the relations between philosophical reason and religion in Platonism and Neoplatonism pagan and Christian. In both, philosophical reason recognises its need for *mythos, cultus* and community, but it does not evacuate its content or surrender its proper autonomy and integrity. Because the continued independent substantiality of philosophical reason even in such religiously oriented systems is not recognised or understood, confusion, and arbitrariness appears. Relative to a diminution of philosophic reason, for one theologian, the key to Christian thought is to identify

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<sup>79</sup> Marion, "Saint Thomas d'Aquin et l'onto-théo-logie," 37 ff.; Milbank, "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," 334.

<sup>80</sup> Milbank, "Can a Gift be Given?" 152, see also his remark on Plato in "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," 341.

the Platonic Good with being, for the other, the opposite. For one theologian, Christian Neoplatonism saves us from autonomous philosophy; for the other, the Neoplatonic beginning beyond being brings with it into theology a systematic science which must still be resisted.

In the end, we are dealing here with two one-sided relations to Denys, and certainly to the Dionysian Aquinas. And we are confronted with the problems inherent to perspectives on Denys and Aquinas which do not share the sense Denys and Aquinas had of the singleness of the enterprise of theology, whether pagan or Christian, its historical continuity, nor their sense of the unity of the divided aspects of life when they are seen religiously. This whole view included for Denys a sense that there was something indispensable to the life of the Christian Church in the Platonic tradition. Why else would he have enwrapped his baptised Procline theology in the mantle of Paul's convert on the Areopagus whom Père Saffrey judges may have been his predecessor as Bishop of Athens? In self-hiding identification with the Areopagite, Denys wrote. Even in this pseudo-anonymous identification, he was likely following examples established in the Neoplatonic schools.<sup>81</sup>

The errors about older forms of Christianity we observe result from projecting our sense of the irreconcilable dividedness of life, including the exclusive division between philosophy and theology, pagan and Christian, backwards on to earlier thinkers for whom division was united in the actual Principle. Overcoming this will require seeing Denys in the light of Thomas' integration of the two aspects of theology, just as it will involve seeing Thomas as a Neoplatonist. Our most immediately demanding question arising within this necessary perspective is as to the relation of revelation, or the theology which comes from above, to philosophy, or the theology which ascends toward God from below, within the total theological system.

#### 4. Aquinas, Boethius and Denys

##### The Relations of Philosophy and Theology in Christian Neoplatonism

In the context of our discussion, Aquinas' treatment of the relations between *sacra doctrina* and *quaedam pars philosophiae dicitur theologiae* -which has as its subject one of the kinds of being<sup>82</sup> - are astonishing. His *Summa Theologiae* begins by assuming philosophy within the power of human reason which treats every form of being. Justifying *sacra doctrina* requires inquiring whether beyond philosophy another knowledge is needed! Its necessity is found in our orientation to an end beyond our natural powers. Another science develops in relation to that necessity which assumes, mirrors, imitates, opposes, judges, stands above, and contains philosophy and especially metaphysics, philosophical theology or first philosophy. There are two total discourses and they do not exclude one another. We cannot elaborate here Thomas' complex arguments on the subject or subjects of theology in its two aspects.<sup>83</sup> But, it is significant that Thomas develops his thinking on this completely and definitively in his commentary on the *De Trinitate* of Boethius. There, as elsewhere, the two sides of theology are primarily distinguished by the direction thought takes in them. It is also crucial that for him the upward moving theology, which he regards as a part of philosophy, meets the downward moving

<sup>81</sup> Saffrey, "Les débuts de la théologie," 218.

<sup>82</sup> *Summa theologiae* I, 1, 1 ad 2.

<sup>83</sup> See W.J. Hankey, "The *De Trinitate* of St. Boethius and the Structure of St. Thomas' *Summa Theologiae*," *Atti del Congresso Internazionale di Studi Boeziani*, ed. L. Obertello, (Roma: Herder, 1981), 367-375, idem, "Theology as System and as Science: Proclus and Aquinas," *Dionysius* 6 (1982), 83-93, idem, *God in Himself*, 24-71.

theology, which proceeds from God's revelation recorded in the canonical books of Sacred Scripture. Aquinas uses, in this context, the old dictum of Heraclitus, the way up is the way down.<sup>84</sup>

When Thomas read *The Consolation of Philosophy* of this philosopher and theologian, who was an explicit disciple of Plato, and probably a near contemporary of Denys, he would have seen Lady Philosophy described by Boethius. She wears a dress whose alphabetical symbols indicate her embrace of the practical and theoretical sciences.<sup>85</sup> Of her Boethius writes:

It was difficult to be sure of her height, for sometimes she was of average human size, while at other times she seemed to touch the very sky with the top of her head, and when she lifted herself even higher, she pierced it and was lost to human sight.<sup>86</sup>

It is revealing about the relations of philosophy and theology for Christian intellectuals when this was written, that Lady Philosophy leads the prisoner, to whom she comes, upward along a saving *itinerarium mentis in deum*. About to be martyred, Boethius, fallen, as he was, from social and political heights, into disgrace and prison on the way to torture and death, wrote about what consoled him. Like the prisoner in Plato's cave, Lady Philosophy's therapeutic art raised him up, turned him around, and gave him the power of motion again.<sup>87</sup> Though the work of this Christian facing death became a Christian devotional classic, it contained not a single explicit reference to the Christian Scriptures.<sup>88</sup> Lady Philosophy prays and for her prayer, she invokes the authority of Plato in the *Timaeus*.<sup>89</sup> In his dialogues, philosophy both needs and uses myth and prayer and criticizes, from the perspective of thought, representation, generally, and many of the particular poetic representations of the gods. Socrates in the *Republic* urges what Boethius does: the expulsion of bad poetry and the writing of philosophically sound verse.<sup>90</sup> The *religio mentis* of *The Consolation of Philosophy* was one aspect of a Platonism common to cultivated pagans and Christians living at the limit of antiquity.<sup>91</sup> Without surrendering her

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<sup>84</sup> "Eadem via ascensus et discensus" *Summa contra Gentiles* IV,1. See my *God in Himself*, chapter 2 and *Super Boetium de trinitate*, cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum, *Opera Omnia* L (Roma & Paris: Leonina & Cerf, 1992), QQ. I, II, VI.

<sup>85</sup> See Henry Chadwick, *Boethius. The Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology, and Philosophy*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 225-29 and Ralph McInerny, *Boethius and Aquinas*, (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1990), 6-8. On the divisions of philosophy, see *Super de trinitate*, V, 1; on how *sacra doctrina* unites the practical and the theoretical, *Summa theologiae* I, 1, 4.

<sup>86</sup> *Consolatio philosophiae*, I, 1.

<sup>87</sup> Compare conversion of the prisoner *Consolatio*, I- III and *Respublica*, 517b6-518d7. See W.J. Hankey, "'Ad intellectum ratiocinatio': Three Procline logics, *The Divine Names* of Pseudo-Dionysius, Eriugena's *Periphyseon* and Boethius' *Consolatio philosophiae*," *Studia Patristica*, XXIX, ed. E.A. Livingstone, (Leuven: Peeters, 1996), 244-51 for this and for my understanding of the *Consolation* generally.

<sup>88</sup> For a list of parallels between the Bible and the *Consolatio*, see Edward A. Synan, "Boethius, Valla and Gibbon," *The Modern Schoolman*, 69 (March/May, 1992), 489-491.

<sup>89</sup> *Consolatio*, III, 8, 99; see John Magee, *Boethius on Signification and Method*, *Philosophia Antiqua* 52 (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 141-149.

<sup>90</sup> *Consolatio*, I; on the philosophical character of the poetry, see G.J.P. O'Daly, *The Poetry of Boethius*, (London: Duckworth, 1991), 60-69, *Respublica*, 376e-403c, 595a-608b. For a discussion of the issues for contemporary theology raised by Plato's use of myth see Lewis Ayres, "Representation, Theology and Faith," *Modern Theology* 11 (1995), 23-46.

<sup>91</sup> O'Daly, *The Poetry*, 25 (accepting the conclusions of H. Chadwick). On the demand for logic and rational certainty, not scriptural authority, the reach of philosophy in Boethius, and on his influence in this regard, see

judicial authority and autonomy, philosophy persuaded and comforted, and would persuade and comfort, Christians, even *in extremis*, for a millennium and a half.

Boethius, like Denys, knew the works of Porphyry, and at least the mentality of the Procline *corpus* where theology is all inclusive system.<sup>92</sup> Viewed within this particular Neoplatonic context, *The Divine Names* of Denys becomes the correlative of *The Consolation of Philosophy* and, thus seen, becomes more intelligible.<sup>93</sup> Together “Eadem via ascensus et discensus”: *The Divine Names* descend from beyond the heavens so as to be the *προοδος* of an anagogy directed to mystical *ἔνωσις*, Lady Philosophy stands at full height to reach through the heavens and draws the fallen soul above. She actually leads an individual soul on a saving *itinerarium mentis* to the simplicity of God which only prayer can reach. Philosophy’s work is the work of religion.

A central puzzle about *The Divine Names* is illuminated if we see it within a Neoplatonic logic where theology includes philosophy, indeed where philosophical and revealed theology have an equality as different directions of mind in regard to the same divine reality. Though Denys makes Biblical revelation the absolutely necessary condition for the activity of naming God, and though he claims that the Bible is the source of the particular names ascribed to the deity, he clearly both derives many names from Proclus, and also orders the whole treatise according to a Neoplatonic logic primarily, though not exclusively, Procline. What is presented as Christian and Biblical is, in logic and content, also a continuation of pagan Neoplatonism. *The Divine Names* is the side of that thinking developed in the *Platonic Theology* of Proclus. That first treatise on the names of the divine has two mutually necessary aspects. The divine manifestations raise the soul to thought toward union, and, the mythic and cultic are rendered conceptual. Denys and Aquinas can imitate Proclus in order to proceed in theology from what is revealed because the pagan gods have been conceptualized.<sup>94</sup> This imitation and assimilation of what belongs to pagan myth and cultus is no less puzzling than the consolation of a Christian martyr in his death cell by Lady Philosophy. But, if we put the two puzzles together, and see them from the earlier perspective of Proclus and the later perspective of Aquinas, we move toward what makes both intelligible.

We will go farther in understanding Denys when we see him in continuity with Thomas, than if we look at him from within an opposition between Christian theology and philosophy. I propose that we look at Denys in continuity with Procline Neoplatonism, on the one hand, and

Aquinas, *Super de trinitate*, prologus, 76, lines 97-114 and q. VI and Boèce, *Courts traités de Théologie. Opuscula sacra*, textes traduits, présentes et annotés par Hèlène Merle, (Paris: Cerf, 1991), 21-22, 87-124, 143, n. 33.

<sup>92</sup> See Volker Schmidt-Kohl, *Die Neuplatonische Seelenlehre in der Consolatio Philosophiae des Boethius*, Beiträge zur Klassischen Philologie 16 (Meisenheim am Glan, 1965), Luca Obertello, *Severino Boezio*, 2 vols., Accademia Ligure di Scienze e Lettere. Collana di monografie 1 (Genova, 1974), i, quarta parte, esp. 571-576, Chadwick, *Boethius*, 20, Booth, *Aristotelian Aporetic*, 66-75, O’Daly, *The Poetry*, 66, S. Gersh, *Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism: The Latin Tradition*. 2 vol., Notre Dame Studies in medieval studies 23, (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1986), ii, 699-705, is rigorously sceptical on the Procline influence, but allows that Boethius at least knew the *De Providentia*. Merle, *Courts traités*, 33, n.14, compares Proclus and Boethius on the reading of scripture.

<sup>93</sup> On the relation of *The Divine Names* to the rest of the *corpus*, see P. Rorem, “The Place of The Mystical Theology in the Pseudo-Dionysian Corpus,” *Dionysius*, 4 (1980), 87-98, idem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 29, 194-205.

<sup>94</sup> See, on the Scriptural aspect, Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 134-137, on the relation to Proclus who is reaching back to the *Parmenides* of Plato, see Saffrey et Westerink, *Théologie platonicienne*, i, lxxiii, cxci-cxcii, Saffrey, “Les débuts de la théologie,” 215-219, Salvatore Lilla, “Denys l’Aréopagite,” in *Dictionnaire des Philosophes antiques*, éd. R. Goulet, vol. ii (Paris: CNRS, 1994), 735-36, Hankey, *God in Himself*, 7-13.

Aquinas, on the other, in respect to two problems we encounter when interpreting Denys. On one of them we have already touched indirectly, the problem of being as a name of God. The other is implied in the problem of the relation of philosophy and theology (or, better put, the problem of the relation of philosophical and revealed theology). This is the question of the structure of the treatise *de deo*, the question of the relation of the treatise *de deo uno* to the treatise *de deo trino*. But before these considerations, we need to reflect on the place of reason in the Neoplatonic tradition of which Denys and Aquinas are joint heirs.

##### 5. Philosophical Reason in Iamblichan - Procline Neoplatonism: The *Lex Divinitatis*

In the Iamblichan - Procline tradition, the cause of substantial being at every level,<sup>95</sup> the formless henadic fullness, is mirrored in the opposed formless material emptiness at the extreme other end of reality. The divine *eros* connects all, pulling it into a triadic structure by which each thing exists because it remains within, proceeds from, and returns relatively or absolutely with respect to the One.<sup>96</sup> Here, we encounter the *lex divinitatis*, the Divine Law of total mediation to which grace and nature both will be submitted by theologians at least up to the 17th century.<sup>97</sup> All extremes are mediated, there is no movement from bottom to top or from top to bottom except through a middle term. This mediation, to which theurgy belongs, is required to draw back to the simple Good, the soul completely descended into *genesis*.<sup>98</sup>

In this context, for Proclus and Denys, religious oracles and ritual acts become essential to philosophy's way of salvation, its work to restore the soul to union with its principle. The divine moves toward us in speech and act to raise us up. On the other side are Porphyry and Boethius, with their more Plotinian accounts of the place of the soul. For them philosophical reason includes poetry, myth and prayer, in order to reach the simple good. Philosophy herself is able to do, and piously does, the work of religion. The Greek *Divine Names* and the Latin *Consolation*, show these two faces of Neoplatonic philosophical theology when it became Christian at the beginning of the 6th century. They can both be Christian because reason, also pagan, with its own self-certifying necessities, is common to both. It is illuminating that the Iamblichan law of mediation is firstly mathematical, the form of thinking appropriate to the soul intermediate between intellect and matter.

Philosophy with its own norms and certainties continues within Christian Neoplatonism. Half a millennium after Boethius and Denys, Anselm finds that the doctrines of the Christian religion may be deduced by *rationes necessariae*. For Eriugena, true philosophy, by which the highest and first principles are investigated is true religion, and conversely true religion is true

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<sup>95</sup> So, at least, in the Arab and Latin hermeneutic of which Aquinas is heir, see Booth, *Aristotelian Aporetic*, 76-152 and 217-252, Hankey, *God in Himself*, 165-66, Velde, *Participation*, 166-70, 257-79, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, xxx.

<sup>96</sup> Hankey, *God In Himself*, 122, note 18 quoting S. Gersh, *KINHISIS AKINATOS*: "love manifests itself in two forms: (i) as the complete cycle of remaining, procession and reversion ..."

<sup>97</sup> See Hankey, "Aquinas, Pseudo-Denys, Proclus and Isaiah VI.6," idem, "Augustinian Immediacy and Dionysian Mediation."

<sup>98</sup> Gregory Shaw, "Theurgy as Demiurgy: Iamblichus' Solution to the Problem of Embodiment," *Dionysius* 12 (1988), 39-40. See also his, "Theurgy: Rituals of Unification in the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus," *Traditio* 41 (1985), 1-28.

philosophy without which no one enters heaven.<sup>99</sup> In him, Plotinus and Porphyry, imbuing Augustine's mentality, will be juxtaposed to Iamblichus and Proclus carried by Denys,<sup>100</sup> but only because philosophy has her reasons.

According to Aquinas, the highest vision granted to those *in via*, the primitive church, and philosophy were in accord. 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. Its law was the Iamblichan law of mediation, become for Latin Christendom the *lex divinitatis* which prescribes even for God.<sup>101</sup> In this judgment, Aquinas speaks for a tradition which, beginning with Denys, includes at least Eriugena, Hugh of St. Victor, Alexander of Hales, Albert the Great, and Bonaventure up to his own time. It has a future which can be traced at least to the 17th century. So it determines ontology, soteriology, the structure, activities and interconnection of the celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies, and the interpretation of Scripture.

In the interpretation of Scripture, its prescribing strength can be seen. From Denys himself to John Colet and beyond, among those under the influence of the Dionysian teaching, Isaiah VI. 6, asserting that a Seraph flew to Isaiah and touched his lips with a burning coal, will be explained so as not to break the law of mediation.<sup>102</sup> The top of the angelic hierarchy could not and did not leave the immediate divine presence to fly so low. It is impossible, in such a systematic view, that a Seraph should leap abruptly over the eight intermediate angelic ranks to fly on a mission to a human. While earlier medievals tried to avoid agreeing with Denys, the later more thorough builders of systems, like Alexander, Albert, Aquinas and Bonaventure, followed him. In this they were successors of Eriugena. It is a witness to continuity that the tensions between reason and revelation, between philosophy and *mythos*, which may seem to belong to 17th century scientific rationalisms, were present from the beginning.

## 6. Denys within the Neoplatonic tradition

So we locate Denys within the Neoplatonic tradition, and in this tradition, we set him with St. Thomas, not against him. We can make some progress on vexing questions in Thomistic and Dionysian scholarship by using this hermeneutical perspective rather than those resulting from anti-modern stances dividing religion, theology and philosophy. I propose to experiment with the problems of being, unity and trinity in the two theologians. This requires some words about Denys largely borrowed from Werner Beierwaltes in a recent issue of *Hermathena*.

The inseparability of thought from the life of the religious community, which is so appealing in Denys, is a consequence for him of the ordering of life to union. The perfection or completion of everything is union, and we are directed and drawn to union with the divine in

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<sup>99</sup> *De divina predestinatione*, I, *Patrologia Latina* 122, 357-358. On Porphyry see the conclusion of Andrew Smith, *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition. A Study in Post-Plotinian Neoplatonism*, (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1974). On the contrast see Hankey, "Ad intellectum ratiocinatio."

<sup>100</sup> On their "crossing" see W.J. Hankey, "The Place of the Proof for God's Existence in the *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas," *The Thomist*, 46 (1982), 379-382, idem, "Dionysius dixit," 130-34, idem, "Magis Pro Nostra Sententia," 235-39, idem, "Dionysius becomes an Augustinian. Bonaventure's *Itinerarium vi*," *Studia Patristica*, XXIX, ed. E.A. Livingstone, (Leuven: Peeters, 1996), 252-59, idem, "Augustinian Immediacy and Dionysian Mediation" and the pregnant remark of Milbank, "Theology without Substance," 11-12.

<sup>101</sup> *In Quatuor Libros Sententiarum*, vol. 1, *Opera Omnia*, ed. R. Buser (Stuttgart - Bad Cannstatt: frommann - holtzboog, 1980), pt. 2, ds. 10, qu. 1, ar.2, corpus, p. 152, *Summa Theologiae*, I, 112, 2, resp.

<sup>102</sup> See Hankey, "Dionysian Hierarchy," 414-22, idem, "Aquinas, Pseudo-Denys, Proclus and Isaiah VI.6" and "Augustinian Immediacy and Dionysian Mediation."

which we pass beyond rational objectivity. Here we recognize philosophical categories of Neoplatonism, and it is indeed here, at the heart of what attracts us to Denys, that such categories enter.

*Ἐνωσις*, beyond all being and knowing, though sought with the divine *Τριάς*,<sup>103</sup> comes with the domination of the simplicity of the divine unity. Unity as goal is present in the actual *προοδος* of the *corpus*, *The Divine Names*. There is another beginning for the descent from the divine unity. Of this treatise Denys tells us, but we do not have it, perhaps because he never wrote it. Whether he wrote it, or only needed to pretend he had, matters little for our purposes. Evidently, Denys tells us about *The Theological Representations*, which should precede *The Divine Names*, and about *The Symbolic Theology*, which should follow it,<sup>104</sup> in order to show that he has a complete system for the movement from unity to multiplicity, from the intelligible to the sensible. He thus demonstrates his fidelity to *The Elements of Theology*, ascribed to his Christian teacher Hierotheus who is here a mask for the divine Proclus.<sup>105</sup> The demands of Neoplatonic logic clearly occupied him.

*The Divine Names* begins in several ways with unity, just as it ends with Perfect and One:<sup>106</sup>

all these Scriptural utterances celebrate the supreme Deity by describing it as a monad or henad, because of its supernatural simplicity and indivisible unity.<sup>107</sup>

Just as the initial unity is not opposed by Denys' description in *The Mystical Theology* of the goal of the return as Trinity, no more is it contradicted by the next passage in *The Divine Names* which speaks of God as Three, *τριάδα*.

Werner Beierwaltes writes:

Dionysius' concept of the divine one-ness is philosophically determined by the essentially distinct concepts of the absolute *non-being* One and the *Being* -One as developed in Proclus' *Parmenides Commentary*.<sup>108</sup>

Here we recognize a paradoxical unification of the fundamental oppositions, a telescoping which scholarship has taught us to see in Porphyry,<sup>109</sup> who directly, and by way of Victorinus, certainly

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<sup>103</sup> *Mystical Theology* (=MT), I,1, *Patrologia Graeca* 997B, Luibheid translation in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 135.

<sup>104</sup> On these lost or unwritten treatises see *Divine Names* (= DN), I,1; I,4; I,6; II,1; XIII,4 and MT III. On their relations see Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 194-205.

<sup>105</sup> Salvatore Lilla, "Denys l'Aréopagite," 730; for Lilla the description of Hierotheus is an analogue of that of Proclus in the *Vita Proclus* of Marianus.

<sup>106</sup> DN, XIII, PG 977B, Luibheid, 139. Beginnings from unity other than that in DN I are, DN II, which insists on *The Divine Names* as a treatment of what refers "indivisibly, absolutely, unreservedly and totally to God in his entirety," and DN 3, which is of the Good.

<sup>107</sup> DN I,4, PG 589D, Luibheid, 51.

<sup>108</sup> W. Beierwaltes, "Unity and Trinity in Dionysius and Eriugena," *Hermathena* 157 (1994), 5.

<sup>109</sup> On the developments in Porphyrian trinitarian theology see Salvatore Lilla, "Un dubbio di S. Agostino su Porfirio," *Nuovi Annali della Facoltà di Magistero dell'Università di Messina* [Roma: Herder] 5 (1987), 319-331, idem, "Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite, Porphyre et Damascius," in *Actes du Colloque sur Aréopagite et sa postérité en Orient et en Occident*, éd. Ysabel de Andia, série Antiquité 151 (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1997), 117-152; idem, "Neoplatonic Hypostases and the Christian Trinity (from Clement of Alexandria to Pseudo-Dionysius),"

influenced the trinitarian theology of Augustine. In fact, the result in both Christians is like, though not identical. Both understand the First Principle as triadic unity and unified triad, perfectly simple, completely internally distinguished.<sup>110</sup>

The divine unity is “*nonetheless trinitarian*, the Trinity ‘derived’ from the unity, or the unity as an internally relational Trinity”. “Dionysius conceives the absolute unity (the [!] One) also as an internally *relational* tri-une oneness.”<sup>111</sup> Crucially, trinitarian unity is possible because the Dionysian Principle is self-related. I quote more of Werner Beierwaltes:

[The Plotinian] form of immanently relational Thought, thinking Itself and yet reflecting towards its Origin, is the *philosophical* model for the Christian Unity in Tri-Unity: the Trinity.<sup>112</sup>

As Denys puts it:

the differentiations within the Godhead have to do with the benign processions and revelations of God. ... [T]here are certain specific unities and differentiations within the unity and differentiation ... Thus, regarding the divine unity beyond being, they [those fully initiated into our tradition and following sacred scripture] assert that the indivisible Trinity holds within a shared undifferentiated unity its supra-essential subsistence, ... its oneness beyond the source of oneness, its ineffability, its many names, its unknowability, its wholly belonging to the conceptual realm ... and finally, ... the abiding and foundation of the divine persons who are the source of oneness as a unity which is totally undifferentiated and transcendent.<sup>113</sup>

On this Beierwaltes writes, “this formula emphasizes the unity of the three within the trinity: unified through difference and differentiated through unity.”<sup>114</sup> The language of Holy Scripture about the Father, Son and Spirit require this drawing together of the unity and division, negation and affirmation more completely and more paradoxically than in Plotinus:

[I]t entails the attribution of *both* negativity and positivity to *one* and the *same* object. In accordance with the first hypothesis of Plato’s *Parmenides* the eminent (first) One is absolutely *transcendent* ... pure, superessential eternally relationless Simplicity. The *second* form of unity, which arises from the absolute One and in self-knowledge turns back to the One, is ... *differentiated* within itself ... This allows it to receive those relational predicates which are denied the superessential One ... The putting together of

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*Studies in Plato and the Platonic Tradition. Essays Presented to John Whittaker*, ed. M. Joyal, (Aldershot: Avebury, 1997), 127-89; Werner Beierwaltes, “Unity and Trinity in East and West,” *Eriugena: East and West. Papers of the Eighth International Colloquium of the Society for the Promotion of Eriugenic Studies, Chicago and Notre Dame, 18-20 October 1991*, edited B. McGinn and W. Otten, Notre Dame Conferences in Medieval Studies v (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 209-231; idem, “Unity and Trinity in Dionysius and Eriugena,” n. 10 and 13-14. These studies rely upon the earlier work of Pierre Hadot and others.

<sup>110</sup> On the errors involved in opposing the Dionysian and Augustinian approaches to the Trinity see my “The De Trinitate of St. Boethius,” and articles of Beierwaltes cited.

<sup>111</sup> Beierwaltes, “Unity and Trinity in Dionysius and Eriugena,” 6.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>113</sup> DN II, 4, PG 641A, Luibheid, 61.

<sup>114</sup> Beierwaltes, “Unity and Trinity in Dionysius and Eriugena,” 7.

these dimensions must be considered as intending to abolish or lessen the realm of *difference* between both these two forms of unity, insofar as God with *all* his predicates must be thought of as pure unity.<sup>115</sup>

Porphyry's anticipation of this paradoxical unification was judged by pagan Platonists to have moved so much beyond Plotinus as to place him outside the true tradition.

In this way God is being for Denys. By the same logic that the gods and separated hypostases of Proclus become predicates and divine names, and to degree that this is actually accomplished, Triadic unity becomes self-related thought and love, and is, therefore, also being. These three elements, unity, the divine hypostases, and being, move inseparably together as they have since Parmenides was modified by Plato. Considering unity and division as these appear in the relation of the treatment of God as one and God as three, we remain with what Thomas' finds in the *Divine Names* and look at the formal structure in which his thinking about the divine being occurs.

#### 7. The relation of the treatise *de deo uno* to the treatise *de deo trino* in theology

The major division of Thomas' treatise *de deo* (*Summa Theologiae* I, qq. 2-43) originates in the Dionysian mediations of Procline Neoplatonism. This is the distinction of the *de deo uno* (qq. 3-26) from the *de deo trino* (qq. 27-43). Thomas is said to be the originator of this fundamental structural determinant of the *de deo* of his *Summa Theologiae*. Further, it is maintained that the Augustinian tradition underlies his division of the treatise between the treatment of the names common to the unity of essence, on the one hand, and those names proper to the distinct persons, on the other, and beginning theology from the unity. In doing so, Thomas is accused of reducing the proper Christian understanding of God to the naturally known Platonic conception of unity.

In truth, Thomas is explicit (and correct) that he finds this distinction, and the reason for beginning from the divine as one and good, in Denys. Denys is explicit that he separates the consideration of the undifferentiated and the differentiated names into distinct treatises. He makes this distinction, and says that he wrote different treatises to embody the distinguished elements, and that he orders the movement outward from unity to division.

*The Divine Names* considers the names common to the divinity. Another treatise is said to have dealt with the names proper to the distinct persons. *The Divine Names* calls 'perfect' and 'one' the names 'most potent' because goodness and unity are the highest designations of God as cause. Thomas recognized that this argument gives goodness a priority. By the same reasoning, Thomas sees that "*unum habet rationem principii.*"<sup>116</sup> So he imitates Denys almost exactly by beginning his own treatment of God's substance with perfection and goodness - which immediately follow simplicity - and ending it with a discussion of God's unity.

The same reasoning determines the priority of the *de deo uno* over the *de deo trino*. This tradition for structuring theology is very fruitful in the Middle Ages. A line connects Denys, Eriugena, Alan of Lille, Honorius Augustodunensis, Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure, Albert the Great, Ulrich of Strasbourg, and perhaps Richard of St. Victor. On the other hand, Augustinians, like Abelard and Peter Lombard, eschew such speculative radicalism and, like their master, treat

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>116</sup> *In librum Beati Dionysii de divinis nominibus*, ed. C. Pera, (Roma: Marrietti, 1950), II, 2, 143.

the one and the three together. As for the propriety of the logic of the One in Christian theology, Thomas thinks his beginning is only possible because of the divine revelation.

It is the privilege of sacred doctrine, because of its foundation in God's self-revelation to faith in Scripture, to begin with God. The other theology which is part of philosophy is, for Thomas, incapable of such a beginning. This is not to reduce God to a comprehensible concept. There can be no adequate representation in creatures of the divine simplicity (or, for that matter, of the divine Trinity). Thomas finds in Denys that neither the unity nor the trinity of God is adequately known from creatures.

Here we meet with the Neoplatonic elevation of the One as an object beyond science. Revelation is, for Denys and Thomas, a self-manifestation by the unknown God whose substance remains unknown. Sacred doctrine does not begin properly in philosophical reasonings. They are necessary to it but they do not provide its appropriate basis or origins. Its foundation is the unknown One, as principle, disclosing itself. No reduction of the full concrete life of God to an abstract category known to natural reason is implied. The opposition set up here is false, for no Neoplatonist, pagan or Christian, thought the principle conceptually knowable. When Christians unite the primal unity and *νοῦς*, in order to think the Trinity, the priority of the simple mysterious beginning does not disappear. In this Professor Marion's *théo-onto-logie* is well founded. But this philosophy understands. The pagan thinkers, along with Boethius, Denys and Thomas, begin from the *occulta*. The common aim of their works is that which Thomas ascribes to the *de Trinitate* of Boethius: *Finis uero huius operis est, ut occulta fidei manifestentur, quantum in uia possibile est.*<sup>117</sup>

Thomas is not, despite this, a Dionysian rather than an Augustinian in his trinitarian theology nor in his treatment of the divine being. Indeed, it is his understanding of how God is *esse* which gives a unified logic to his *de deo* and herein Dr. Milbank shall also have his due.

## 8. Being as a name of God

Professor Beierwaltes writes:

Dionysius increases the absolute otherness of the divine One through the lavish use of the basically negative prefix 'super' ... *At the same time* ... the implications of the 'being-One' are valid for God or the Divine Unity in just the *same* intensity. This is so since He who Is ... as unchangeable *Being himself* .. is abiding identity in himself, and yet also is difference in the sense of constituting being and giving share of his absolute goodness: He is the Cause of All; despite all the difference from thought in the realm of plurality: He is absolute Self-thinking, a thinking which embraces the ideas. The divine ideas constitute an intelligible framework of the world, *before* the world, -unitary and unifying in divine thought.<sup>118</sup>

When this is seen as the development of a possibility within Neoplatonic thinking, one prefigured by Porphyry, the drawing together of Augustine's thought about the God Who Is and

<sup>117</sup> *Super de trinitate*, prologus, 76, lines 114-5. For the argument of this section see Hankey, "The De Trinitate of St. Boethius," idem, *God in Himself*, 12, 129-35, Rorem, "Procession and Return' in Thomas Aquinas," idem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 169-74. McInerney, *Boethius and Aquinas*, 11-14 sets out positively Thomas argument for finding a similar Neoplatonic *exitus-reditus* pattern in the theological treatises of Boethius. Merle, *Courts traités*, outlines the pattern, 26-27.

<sup>118</sup> Beierwaltes, "Unity and Trinity in Dionysius and Eriugena," 6-7.

Denys' more negative theology by Aquinas and other medieval builders of *summas*, so as to name God "*esse*" in the identity of essence and existence, becomes intelligible.<sup>119</sup> For here belongs the logic by which God is called being itself in Denys, while, at the same time, this name is denied of the first. Being is both subordinated to the name Good and God is above being, superbeing.<sup>120</sup> God in Denys is called self-diffusive good, or ecstatic love, before he is named being. In the Dionysian hierarchical thinking, order is everything.

Aquinas understands what is happening to theology in Denys. He writes in his *Exposition of The Divine Names*:<sup>121</sup>

The Platonists whom in this book Denys imitates much ... posited separated realities existing *per se*. ... Indeed, these separated principles they laid down as mutually distinct in respect to the First Principle which they called the *per se* good, and the *per se* one. Denys agrees with them in one way, and disagrees in another. He agrees in that he too posits life existing separately *per se*, and likewise wisdom, and being, and other things of this kind. He dissents from them, however, in this; he does not say that these separated principles are diverse entities [*esse diversa*], but that they are in fact one principle, which is God.

Thereby, Thomas locates Denys midway between himself and the Platonists.

Thomas has a good sense for the Procline developments reaching from Denys, that is from Greek Christianity, on the one hand, and from the *Liber de causis*, that is from Arabic Islam, on the other. His knowledge of these developments became more and more exact as his life went on and the texts available to him increased. He recognizes that these Platonists name God being, not absolutely, but in respect to creation, insofar as the first and most proper effect of God in things is their substantial *esse*. By this, God gives created things a participation in Himself. They imitate God in having an existence of their own.

Aquinas knows that for Denys, God is more properly called good. He also recognizes Denys' reason for this and gives place in his own system for such a view. Albert, Bonaventure and other Latin theologians do the same. He writes:

In causation, then, the good precedes the existent as end precedes form; and for this reason, in any list of names designating divine causality, good will precede existent.<sup>122</sup>

Nonetheless, for Aquinas, God is most properly designated as *ipsum esse subsistens*. He gives the side of division, that is Aristotelian self-knowing *νοῦς*, self-reflexive form, reflexive being,

<sup>119</sup> See Hankey, *God in Himself*, 4-6, idem, "Aquinas' First Principle," 139-43 and Milbank, "Can a Gift be Given?" 143.

<sup>120</sup> For Denys, in contrast to Aquinas, being is properly and affirmatively predicated of creatures not God, see O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 123 and 275 and *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, xxviii, n.61.

<sup>121</sup> *In de divinis nominibus*, V, 1, 634. For discussions see Booth, *Aristotelian Aporetic*, 77 and Milbank, "Can a Gift be Given?", 143 with notes.

<sup>122</sup> *Summa Theologiae* I, 5, 2 ad1. See Hankey, "Aquinas' First Principle," esp. 145-154, idem, *God in Himself*, 72-4, idem, "Dionysius becomes an Augustinian," Milbank, "Can a Gift be Given?" 143. Jan A. Aertsen, "Ontology and henology in Medieval Philosophy (Thomas Aquinas, Master Eckhart and Berthold of Moosburg)," in E.P. Bos and P.A. Meijer, eds., *On Proclus and his Influence in Medieval Philosophy*, Philosophia Antiqua 53 (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 121-123 puts the other side against Hankey.

thought and will, and, ultimately, the Trinity of Persons, more weight in his transforming acceptance of the Neoplatonic amalgam than Denys does in his. This also enables and requires Thomas to join the treatment of the divine being, God's operations, the divine trinity and the act of creation in one continuous step by step argument beginning from the divine simplicity.<sup>123</sup>

In differing from Denys, Aquinas recognised how much he owed him. If Rudi te Velde's treatment of the relations between Thomas and Denys be correct, the key to how Thomas will relate participation and substantiality may well have come to him from Denys.<sup>124</sup>

Aquinas will take the notions of participation which he received and forge of them a tool to explicate how God in one single act creates things 'according to their kinds,' not only presupposing nothing but bestowing the richest diversity through that very ordering act.<sup>125</sup>

This understanding of Thomas' teaching on the creative act differs explicitly from that in the existential Thomism of Gilson and Fabro. John Milbank writes comparably to te Velde:

God's *essential* Being, the *esse ipsum*, or the coincidence of Being with essence in God, is conceived as the full *giving* of Being as an infinitely determined essence, whereby, alone, there is 'to be'.

Milbank judges that such in a view there could be a "a stronger link between the theological account of *esse*, on the one hand, and trinitarian theology on the other." But this is not, as he supposes, "beyond Aquinas."<sup>126</sup>

There is a movement in and from Thomas' *de deo uno* in the *Summa Theologiae*. This logical movement is essential to understanding how God is Creator. The development is from God's substantial names, which are dominated by being, understood through the notion of simplicity or absolute unity, to the names derived from God's activities or operations. The names derived from the operations of knowing, willing and power are dominated by the self-reflexive act of thought, so God is said to know. But this self-relation belongs already to the divine being which has *reditio completa* precisely because its simplicity requires the identity within it of essence and existence. The *reditio completa* of the divine *ipsum esse subsistens* is what unifies the treatises *de deo uno*, *de deo trino* and *de deo create*.

In Thomas' treatment of the divine intelligence, God is called truth. God is named truth because of an act of comparison or self-reflection. God compares the divine ideas with creatures totally existing by a caused imitation of the divine being as idea.<sup>127</sup> God is the truth of things so far as their substantial being in its particular grade and character is a participation in divine being, not absolutely, but as thus imitable and imitated.

When Thomas understands causation in this way, he is both following Denys and pushing the Christian Neoplatonism of the Areopagite further. What distinguishes Christian from pagan Neoplatonism is the willingness of Christians to bring division into God. "the divine essence is the idea of all things, not however as it is in identity with itself (*ut essentia*), but as known (*ut*

<sup>123</sup> This is the overall argument of my *God in Himself*.

<sup>124</sup> Velde, *Participation*, 93 ff. and 254-279.

<sup>125</sup> David Burrell in a review of Velde in *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 37 (1997), 102.

<sup>126</sup> Milbank, "Can a Gift be Given?", 153-54.

<sup>127</sup> Hankey, *God in Himself*, 74-6 and 98-103.

*intellecta*), that is to say, as articulated and differentiated in God's knowledge according to the particular aspects under which this universal essence can be imitated by another being.”<sup>128</sup> In consequence, “the effect proceeds from the cause in virtue of an active self-distinction on the part of the cause. ... So the negation in the effect of the identity of essence and *esse* in God is included in the likeness each creature has of God.”<sup>129</sup>

Underlying is the Iamblichan - Procline notion that, between the unparticipated and the participating, a middle must occur. This becomes, for Denys in this context, the idea that creatures cannot participate the divine being directly, but instead participate its likeness. In Thomas a divine self-reflexive activity is involved to a degree Denys would have found difficult and a pagan Platonist impossible. Thus, Thomas can far more resolutely predicate being of God than Denys or Porphyry can.

These are quantum steps in a continuum. By locating our thinkers on a continuum in a tradition of interpretation and transformation, we shall understand them best. For, there are differences in principle between these systems, and yet, these very differences are best understood as moments in a continuous tradition.

## 9. Conclusion

I have been concerned with the contradictory and changing relations which our anti and post modern purposes and perspectives have imposed on Denys and Aquinas. The anti-modern Leonine revival of Thomism set them against each other for the sake of an Aristotelian Thomas. With better results, postmodern theologians have tended to judge Thomas from the perspective of Denys. I have tried to show that some of the twists and turns in the opposed evaluations stem from a theological antagonism to autonomous philosophy. This arises from antipathy to modernity common to both. Theological antipathy to modernity has the effect of separating us from our premodern past - just as we are also drawn to that past in search of things which all acknowledge modernity has forgotten. The result of this double-minded relation to our history is a grave difficulty in reading premodern texts. Trying to read them against both the content and character of our developed Western way of reading, trying to read them against our own traditions of reading, our interpretations become arbitrary.

I have suggested a solution in respect to Denys and Aquinas. I propose that we try to recuperate them as moments in a continuous Neoplatonic tradition beginning among the pagans. Denys' thinking is a transforming moment in the great change from pagan to Christian. Christianizing that theology requires transformations of it. These Denys begins, Aquinas pushes them further. Apart from looking at Denys within a Neoplatonic continuum, we cannot even understand what he did. Seeing him relative to Aquinas shows what further steps might be taken. These judgments we can make in virtue of some common criteria of understanding.

Aquinas gives the side of division, self-knowing *νοῦς*, self-reflexive form, being which has *reditio completa*<sup>130</sup> and is therefore thought and will, and the distinct being of the Three Persons, more weight in his transforming acceptance of the Neoplatonic amalgam than Denys does in his. As a result, unlike Denys, he is able to draw the *de deo uno*, the *de deo trino*, and the *de deo creante* into one continuous argument and to unite a philosophical ascending logic with

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<sup>128</sup> Velde, *Participation*, 115.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 116. See Burrell, 102-3. This approach is agreeable with that in Hankey, *God in Himself* and in McDermott, “The Analogy of Human Knowing,” at 284-5, and note 26 and in Boland, *Ideas in God*, 297-332.

<sup>130</sup> See Hankey, *God in Himself*, 55, chapter V, and 141-2 and Velde, *Participation*, 278-9.

the descending logic of *sacra doctrina*. Doubtless such a synthesis causes problems which Denys does not have.<sup>131</sup> Equally, Aquinas detects and corrects incoherences in the Dionysian thinking. There is not a final systematic solution. But, we shall follow neither of them if we attempt to separate ourselves from the systematic unification of philosophy and theology and of their elements which is both theirs and their Platonic predecessors.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Hankey, *God in Himself*, 147 ff.

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