



Experiencing the Word: Dionysian Mystical Theology in the Commentaries of Thomas Gallus (d.1246)

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**Experiencing the Word: Dionysian Mystical Theology
in the Commentaries of Thomas Gallus (d.1246)**

A dissertation presented

by

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Abstract

The mystical theology of Thomas Gallus, “the last great Victorine,” was inseparable from his theology of sacred literature. This dissertation analyzes Gallus’s major works: his commentaries on the Song of Songs and the *Corpus Dionysiacum* (*CD*). I argue that Gallus’s mystical theology emerges from his analysis of constitutive theological tensions in the *CD* about God, language, and mystical perfection. That is, in navigating the *CD*’s conceptual apertures, Gallus is even more thoroughly Dionysian than has been previously estimated. At the same time, Gallus’s mystical theology is an original creation—distinctively Augustinian and Victorine, and informed by his complementary interpretation of the Song as depicting the union between the soul and the Word. Thus, this dissertation contributes to our understanding of both the inherent interpretive possibilities and the varieties of medieval reception of the *CD*.

This dissertation makes a second contribution to the field by articulating how Gallus’s role as a commentator is key to understanding his mystical theology. The practice of commentary writing played a significant role in Gallus’s affective Dionysianism, which saw the contemplative soul in an unending pursuit of loving, experiential knowledge of the Word of God. In Gallus’s commentaries, we find a coherently performed, if incompletely realized theory and practice of Christian wisdom. I argue that to understand Gallus’s practice of commentary writing (beyond as a pedagogical practicality), we should look to the account of Christian perfection articulated in the commentaries themselves.

Finally, Gallus's commentaries were attempts to experience (*experientia*) and explain (*explanatio*) the eternal Word of God, and this dissertation also calls attention to the rhetoric of experience within Gallus's commentaries. In conversation with debates about religious experience within the study of mysticism, this dissertation argues that, not only is Gallus's use of *experientia* central to his theological and mystical program, but understanding its use in his context can help to reconsider what conceptual reservoirs contemporary scholars of medieval mysticism are to draw from. Gallus's rhetoric of experience is rich enough to contain a number of tensions within Christian mysticism that remain salient today (such as immanence and transcendence, talkativeness and ineffability, intellect and affect).

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Introduction

In a series of sermon notes entitled *How the Life of Prelates Should be Conformed to the Angelic Life*, prepared by the Augustinian canon Thomas Gallus (d.1246), the preacher sketches out an ambitious agenda for his audience of ecclesiastics.¹ Church leaders should strive to live like each of the angelic orders described by “blessed Dionysius the Areopagite.” The notes outline the nine orders of angels, and relate how prelates should take inspiration from each. At the end of the notes, Gallus comes at last to the ninth and highest order, the Seraphim. He explains the word’s etymology:

[T]he translation (*interpretatio*) of [‘Seraphim’] is ‘burning and blazing ones,’ because there are no other angels between them and God, and therefore insofar as they cleave to him especially closely, they are inflamed by the brilliance of the divine light, boiling over beyond themselves (*supra se*) and into him by the motion of steadfast love, leading back into him the minds of those set below them.²

Those prelates who imitate the Seraphim, Gallus continues, will “froth and pant by a love boiling over in contemplation” and will be “fed only by the love of eternity.” In turn, they will “heat up and kindle others by speaking (*loquendo*) and make those whom their words touch (*verba tangunt*) hot and blazing in the love of God.”³ That is, the prelate is one who should actively minister through preaching and teaching, but remain in contemplation like the Seraphim.

¹ *Qualiter vita prelatorum conformari debet vite angelice*, 334.

² Ibid.: “Seraphyn, cuius interpretatio est incendentes vel ardentis eo quod inter eos et Deum nulli alii angeli consistant et ideo quanto vicinius ei adherent, tanto magis claritate divini luminis inflammantur, stabili amoris mocione supra se in ipsum ebullientes, suppositorum mentes in eundem reducentes.”

³ Ibid.: “Horum igitur similitudinem gerunt prelati qui superfervido amore in contemplacione accensi in solo conditoris sui desiderio estuant et anhelant, nihil in hoc mundo cupiunt, solo eternitatis amore pascuntur, quin eciam terrena queque abiciunt, ardent amando aliosque calefaciunt et accendunt loquendo et quos verba tangunt calere et ardere in Dei amore protinus faciunt.”

Gallus repeats the notion of contemplation characterized by fiery affection throughout his works, the majority of which are commentaries on sacred literature. Gallus is best known for his commentaries on two works in Latin translation: the Hebrew Bible's Song of Songs (an erotic love poem in the form of a dialogue between a bride and bridegroom) and the corpus of Pseudo-Dionysius (whose Greek writings produced a strain of Christian mysticism influenced by Neoplatonic ideas). Dionysius the Areopagite, as he was known to Gallus, was the author of the short treatise *On Mystical Theology*, which described a mystical union with "the God beyond being" through "unknowing." A number of ideas central to Dionysius's theology appear in the passage above from Gallus's sermon to the prelates. First, Dionysius was the foremost medieval authority on angelology, responsible for popularizing the term "hierarchy," a theological principle that came to affect nearly every aspect of religious and secular life in medieval Western Europe.⁴ Gallus carefully expounded Dionysius's views on the angelic and ecclesiastical hierarchies, and here he argues that the latter is (or at least ought to be) a reflection of the former. Second, Dionysius described the goal of mystical theology with a fiery rhetoric of ascent, ecstasy, and boiling heat. When Gallus preaches that the Seraphim boil over beyond their very selves (*supra se*) he is reflecting a Dionysian insight: mystical perfection is a matter of excess or ecstasy, intimacy with or knowledge of the transcendence or "beyond-being-ness" of God.⁵ To be 'seraphic' would mean to be the

⁴ On the centrality of "hierarchy" to medieval philosophy, see Marenbon and Luscombe, "Two Medieval Ideas: Eternity and Hierarchy," 51-72, which argues that the two provide "the temporal and ontological coordinates of medieval thought," 51.

⁵ Throughout this study, I use the admittedly awkward term "beyond-being-ness" to highlight the distinctive understanding of transcendence at play in the Neoplatonic thought of Dionysius and Gallus. Using the term 'transcendence' to translate the Greek term *ὑπερουσιότης* and the Latin terms *superessentialitas* and *supersubstantialitas* risks

kind of being that is consistently drawn beyond one's self.⁶ Finally, the passage reveals Gallus's concern with speaking and teaching (that is, the use of words) to pass on the wisdom one receives from mystical union. That is, mystical experience issues in excessive wordiness (*garrulitas*), even as it is ineffable and irrational.⁷ Gallus's sermon, then, relies entirely on his comprehensive appropriation of Dionysian mystical theology. Gallus was, as Csaba Németh has recently put it and as the sermon notes affirm, "primarily an Areopagitic theologian."⁸

While Thomas Gallus was steeped in Dionysian mystical theology (scholars have cautiously come to admit just how thoroughly), this study argues that one best understands his theological writings through attention not only to the comprehensive Dionysian theory they lay out, but to the form, practice, and context in which they do so. If his extant writings are any indication, while Gallus was an accomplished mystical

the associations of capriciousness and volatility that drove early modern figures like Martin Luther, trained in philosophical nominalism, to marvel in terror at such a removed divinity. The Neoplatonic doctrine of 'beyond-being-ness' (as explained in Chapter 2) emphasizes the exact opposite. There is a necessary logic to causality first articulated by Plato himself and subsequently rehearsed by Neoplatonists all the way to Gallus. God's beyond-being-ness is a way of describing the very necessary precondition for causality (everything existing must have a good cause beyond itself).

⁶ We are told by Bonaventure (among others) that Francis of Assisi himself had an ecstatic vision and received his stigmata upon the sight of a Seraphim. *The Life of Francis*, 303-14. Gallus's close connections with early Franciscans will be treated in Ch. 1.

⁷ On *garrulitas*, see Ch. 5, 280.

⁸ Németh, "The Victorines and the Areopagite," 383. Németh rightly states that Gallus is the first Victorine to thoroughly imbibe Dionysianism. The Dionysian influence on the Victorines in the 12th century was only occasional and recent research by Németh (as well as Dale Coulter, *Per Visibilia ad Invisibilia*) is right to correct the overestimation of Dionysius's influence on the 12th-century school. However, Németh's second conclusion, that Gallus was not so much a Victorine theologian, is one I will press on in this study.

theologian, he was also a commentator.⁹ The commentarial context of his labors is so obvious as to be easily overlooked. Of the 1000+ pages of his corpus edited and published to date, Gallus is engaged in formal commentary or paraphrase in all but a few. Indeed, of all the roles Gallus took on—preacher, abbot, mystic, Victorine, friend of the Franciscans—the one that most adequately describes his way of life is that of commentator.¹⁰

This is not surprising, given that the first record we have of Gallus is at the Parisian school of St. Victor, renowned even in its own day as a (if not *the*) center for the interpretation of sacred literature. The school produced some of the theologians and

⁹ That is, while Gallus's primary concern is the unintelligible and ineffable mystical experience (*experientia*) of the God beyond being (*superessentialis*) described by Dionysius, his mystical theology never moves far from the rhetoric of intellection and discourse. Terms of the commentator's literary craft often appear: gloss (*glossa*), letters (*litterae*), words (*verba*), praise (*laudatio*), discourse (*sermo*), reason (*ratio*), mind (*mens*), intention (*intentio*), structure (*series*), signification (*designatio*), translation (*interpretatio*), explanation (*explanatio*), and reading (*lectio*). That is, for the Victorine Thomas Gallus to be a mystical theologian is also to be engaged in what we might call today literary theory or criticism of sacred literature.

¹⁰ Regarding commentary, two things should be noted. First, considering its ubiquity in medieval religious culture, the fact that commentaries are so often overlooked as objects of study is regrettable. For example, among the 20+ "Varieties of Medieval Latinity" listed in a commonly used handbook by Mantello and Rigg, *Medieval Latin*, commentary is not represented, while beast epics, debates, travel literature, and encyclopedias each have their own chapter. A commonplace view of commentary holds that it is a pedagogical practicality, rather than a form of literary (much less theological) composition in its own right.

Second, while commentary ought to be taken seriously as a vehicle for literary and theological expression, it is undeniably a pedagogical and often communal endeavor, emerging from the monastic school classroom. (Perhaps this accounts somewhat for the hesitancy in classifying commentary as literature, since it fails to meet standards of individual authorial production.) What come to us in manuscripts and published editions were often initially records of oral teaching, glosses (*glossa*), spoken elaborations of texts performed by masters for their students (and often edited afterwards).

scriptural commentators most widely read well into the late medieval period.¹¹ What we know of Thomas Gallus (his early life is a mystery) is that he was teaching at the school when he was recruited by the papal legate Cardinal Guala Bicchieri—an Augustinian canon like the Victorines—to help found a sister monastery in the cardinal’s hometown of Vercelli (in modern day northern Italy).¹² At the abbey church of Sant’ Andrea in Vercelli Gallus quickly became abbot, and undertook a considerable scholarly agenda, especially in the last decade of his life. Remarkably, as Declan Lawell has noted, much of this work on mystical theology takes place while Gallus was confronting political controversy.¹³ In northern Italy at the time the conflict between cities of Ghibellines (advocates for the papacy) and Guelfs (supporters of the emperor) was raging. While Gallus tried to remain apolitical, securing assurances for the abbey from both the papacy and Frederick II, his lack of allegiance led to his eventual excommunication and exile from the Ghibelline town of Vercelli. He may have returned to Vercelli at the end of his life. Today his tomb can still be found at Sant’ Andrea.¹⁴

¹¹ See Torsten Edstam’s 2014 University of Chicago doctoral dissertation, “From twelfth-century renaissance to fifteenth-century reform: The reception of Hugh of St. Victor in the later Middle Ages.” Also, Grover Zinn’s 2010 article, “*Vestigia victorina: Victorine Influence on Spiritual Life in the Middle Ages with Special Reference to Hugh of Saint-Victor’s De institutione novitiorum.*”

¹² Lawell rehearses Gallus’s biography in his introduction to *Qualiter Vita*, 303-6. A study of how the architecture of Sant’ Andrea reflects its founding Victorine sensibilities can be found in Schilling, “Victorine Liturgy.”

¹³ Lawell, *Qualiter Vita*, 306-7.

¹⁴ Boyd Taylor Coolman describes it vividly in the introduction to his recent study of Gallus’s thought, *Knowledge, Love, and Ecstasy in the Theology of Thomas Gallus*, 8-9. It depicts Gallus kneeling before the Virgin and infant Jesus, alongside a bishop (likely Dionysius) and St. Catherine of Alexandria, patroness of philosophers. While an image of Gallus depicts him teaching his fellow Victorine canons, side panels depict a Franciscan and a Cistercian learning from him as well.

Even in exile, however, Gallus continued commenting on his two favorite examples of sacred literature—the Song of Songs and the Dionysian corpus (*Corpus Dionysiacum*, hereafter *CD*). Gallus alternated in his scholarly labors between the Song and the *CD*. Between composing three commentaries on the Song, he wrote a number of works on the *CD* (including both a paraphrase or *Extractio* of its major treatises, and a monumental sequential commentary on the entire corpus, which he called an *Explanatio*). The sermon notes, then, are the exception in a large corpus made up almost entirely of commentaries. In one sense, the following study is an examination of the relationship between mystical theology and commentarial craft in the early 13th century.

Between the Song and the *CD*, Gallus believed, one could find what had long been the objective concern of his Victorine masters and so many theological authorities before them—Christian wisdom. As we will see, the Victorines, following Hugh of St. Victor, held both that all learning in the liberal arts increases wisdom and reforms the soul, and that a special grace comes in the participation in Christ that completes natural learning and perfects the soul. That is, the study of the liberal arts was the foundation of wisdom, but was not sufficient to attain “the wisdom of Christians.”¹⁵ The question raised by these 12th-century humanists (especially their “venerable teacher master Hugh,” as Gallus refers to him) were theological and literary ones: what was the difference between the pagan wisdom found in so much of secular literature, and the Christian wisdom that was promised in Christ? What was it that made Christian sacred literature superior to pagan? If the general consensus at the school was that Christian letters (*litterae*)

¹⁵ See Ch. 1, 38-41.

transformed the soul morally and experientially, even enabling contemplation of God, how did they do so?

Gallus's commentaries take up these typically Victorine questions regarding what we would now distinguish as theology, literature, history, ethics, and pedagogy. We will see that, perhaps even to a greater extent than the Victorines who came before him, Gallus's mystical theology could not be separated from his theology of sacred letters. That is, Gallus synthesizes the Victorine concern for sacred language and literature with the Dionysian mystical pursuit of union with God, bringing it into the 13th century and constituting a link to what Bernard McGinn has called the "new mysticism" of that period. This study analyzes Gallus's most significant works: his late commentaries on the Song and the *CD*. Building upon previous research on Gallus which has been cautiously moving toward an affirmation of his thorough Dionysianism, I argue that Gallus's mystical theology emerges from his appreciation of central theological tensions in the *CD* about God, language, and mystical perfection. That is, Gallus is even more thoroughly Dionysian than has been previously estimated. At the same time, Gallus's Dionysianism is his own creation—distinctively Victorine and informed by his complementary study as a commentator on the Song of Songs. When we place Gallus's mystical theology in the context of his role as a commentator, we get the fullest vision of his affective Dionysianism, which saw the contemplative soul in an unending pursuit of loving, experiential knowledge of the Word of God. In Gallus's commentaries we find a coherently performed, if incompletely realized theory and practice of Christian wisdom. In effect, Gallus's commentaries were attempts to experience (*experientia*) and explain (*explanatio*) the eternal Word of God.

I. Methodological Considerations

Scholars in the field of mystical theology have engaged in significant methodological reflection in the century since mysticism became a central object of analysis for religious studies. Gallus's Latin writings draw on a number of terms related to mysticism that have been the subject of debate more recently—'experience,' 'ecstasy,' 'affect,' even 'mystical' and 'theology' themselves. A fundamental methodological principle of this study is that there is much to learn from Gallus's own attempts to theorize these terms, and so part of my task will be to illuminate their use by this 13th-century Augustinian canon. This will undoubtedly confirm what we already know—that the field of religious studies itself traffics in (for better or worse) a discursive and symbolic system funded by Christianity (going even as far back as the 13th century). By examining Gallus's writings, scholars of mysticism today can better understand the religious roots of their field and developments in the intervening centuries. Yet, the historical distance may also spark a rethinking of our own critical perspectives by the alterity of these terms in Gallus's context. For this reason, I have tried to allow Gallus's texts to speak for themselves.¹⁶ What I consider my commitment to textuality in this study is born from my encounter with larger methodological concerns in the field. Because it would be impossible to recount every possible way that debates within the academic study of mysticism have come to affect my approach to Gallus's commentaries,

¹⁶ I attempt to avoid applying contemporary uses of cognate terms where possible. For instance, I try not to use the term 'theology' for the systematic formulation and clarification of a set of doctrinal propositions in the modern mode, since for Dionysius and Gallus *theologia* refers instead first to the Word of God itself, and only second to the literary composition of the first 'theologians' (the authors of Scripture).

I will highlight just three major developments in the last quarter century that I recognize as having formed my thinking and guided this study.

A. Mysticism: mystical experience or mystical theology?

Recent scholarship on Gallus in English owes much to his inclusion in Bernard McGinn's magisterial *The Presence of God* series, a field-defining history of Christian mysticism in the West. McGinn introduced Gallus to the English-speaking world by analyzing Gallus's thought, not among the 12th-century Victorines, but among the Franciscans and other "new religious movements" of the 13th century in the third volume of his series, titled *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism—1200-1350*. McGinn's analysis of Gallus will be treated in the next section; however, in the same series he set the methodological agenda for the field of Christian mystical theology. At the time of the release of his first volume a quarter century ago (*The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century*, 1991), McGinn addressed a concept that had a long pedigree in religious studies but was roiling the study of mysticism: religious experience.¹⁷

The study of mysticism, argued McGinn at the time, had suffered from a misunderstanding about the nature of religious experience. McGinn argues for a methodological agnosticism toward the experience of the mystic. Religious experience

¹⁷ A number of scholars of history and philosophy of religion in the 1980s and 1990s touched on the concept: Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 1987; Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," 1991; Scharf, "The Rhetoric of Experience and the Study of Religion," 1998; Bagger, *Religious Experience, Justification and History*, 1999; Lamberth, "Putting 'Experience' to the Test in Theological Reflection," 2000.

was *not* the object of his analysis primarily because it was not available for analysis by the historian. In the opening pages of his first volume, McGinn writes:

Those who define mysticism in terms of a certain type of experience of God often seem to forget that there can be no direct access to experience for the historian. *Experience as such is not a part of the historical record.* The only thing directly available to the historian or historical theologian is the evidence, largely in the form of written records, left to us by the Christians of former ages. Until recent years, overconcentration on the highly ambiguous notion of mystical experience has blocked careful analysis of the special hermeneutics of mystical texts...¹⁸

Since then, scholars of Christian mystical literature have shifted significantly away from the study of “mystical experience” to the study of “mystical theology,” reflecting the concerns McGinn spells out. Mystical theology, according to McGinn’s early volumes, is a variant or branch of “historical theology,” which identifies and analyzes the development of Christian teaching, taking into account the historical, social, and linguistic contexts out of which particular doctrinal systems arise. Mystical texts of whatever genre, it is presumed, are not so different from systematic theological treatises. They provide the coherent conceptual and symbolic apparatuses (the discourse or theological “systems”) of mysticism—but not the mystic’s experience itself. This system of discourse is all the historian of religion or historical theologian has access to, as it is all that is provided by the text.¹⁹

¹⁸ McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, xiv (my emphasis).

¹⁹ To be more specific, McGinn and others argued that one cannot analyze a religious experience apart from the symbolic or ritual context in which it occurs. This is because there is no such thing as a non-linguistic experience, a position put forth by Lindbeck in his influential work, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 1984. The cultural-linguistic or contextualist concerns at the center of these debates are in the background of McGinn’s contribution to the study of mysticism. The proper object of study is the theological system or “language” of a particular mystic in her cultural context, the set of symbols and propositions delimited by the author’s cultural belonging and typically having a rational and affective order to them. Indeed, for many of his readers McGinn opened up mystical theology as an overlooked undercurrent

The salutary effect of McGinn’s methodological reflections—influential for both their theoretical merit and the model provided by their practical realization in his work—was that the study of mysticism or mystical theology could be approached with the disciplinary rigor that was already applied in the more established fields of historical and systematic theology. McGinn’s field—“mystical theology”—shared much in common with these fields. Authors of mystical literature, McGinn revealed, could be as systematic and coherent as other theologians, though they perhaps worked with a different set of theological loci—for example, contemplation and union rather than sin and salvation. In addition, their theological systems could be analyzed in terms of the historical development of doctrines. In effect, McGinn accomplished the monumental task of translating premodern mystical theology into a field approachable by the contemporary theological researcher, rather than just the spiritual director or contemplative seeker. As religious experience waned in theological and religious studies, mystical theology waxed. The agenda set by McGinn, influenced by his Catholic theological training, has been extremely influential.

In so many ways, not least of which is his introduction of Thomas Gallus to the English-speaking world, this study would not be possible without McGinn’s achievements. However, despite the salutary effects of McGinn’s methodological reflections, there are limits to treating mystical theology like a branch of historical or systematic theology. Theology (discourse or reasoning about God), especially mystical theology, is not always systematic or coherent, as McGinn himself often appreciates. As

or tributary (or sometimes central waterway) of historical Christian theology, with its own cultural-linguistic system of theological loci (like union, indwelling, and eschaton).

this study will argue (relying on one of McGinn's own formulations), Dionysian theology depended on a set of "dialectical tensions" that animated Gallus.²⁰ Dionysius was, if a sophisticated and literary thinker, not always a systematic one.²¹ More importantly, applying the model of systematic theology or historical theology to texts of mystical theology can obfuscate the way literary form and spiritual and bodily practice are central to (even indistinguishable from) the theorization of the mystical. In ways not always noticed by the systematic or historical theologian, whose attention is focused on doctrine, mystical theology relied on, or was disciplined by, religious practice.²² This study argues that Gallus's mystical theology can be understood only if due attention is paid to his practice of commentary writing.²³

B. Transformative Language in Mystical Theology

Another of the most significant developments made in the study of mysticism in the last quarter century has been the attention paid to the diverse operations of language in mystical theological texts.²⁴ If the ascendant field of 'mystical theology' redefined the

²⁰ McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 157-82.

²¹ And certainly not one who writes in the mode of modern systematic theology. McGinn's early work, for instance, tends to systematize mystical literature by looking for the theological loci characteristic of modern theology. For example, of Dionysius he writes, "There is little theological anthropology as such in his surviving writings, though one is surely implied." *Foundations of Mysticism*, 161.

²² This insight is especially clear in the work of Amy Hollywood, for instance, "Song, Experience, and the Book in Benedictine Monasticism," where she treats "the transformation of the monk's or nun's experience through his or her engagement with the Psalms and other texts performed—chanted or sung—during the Divine Office," 71.

²³ Attention to practice will even allow us to stress continuities with the Victorines, qualifying Németh's conclusion that Gallus is theologically more of a Dionysian than a Victorine. "The Victorines and the Areopagite," 383.

²⁴ For example, the influential work by Michael Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*. Also, Baggar, *The Uses of Paradox: Religion, Self-Transformation, and the*

traditional study of ‘mysticism’ by adapting the textual methods of systematic and historical theology (this I take to be at least part of McGinn’s legacy), the study of mystical language has focused more on how mystical literature is distinct from other modes of theological writing, especially in its use of form and structure. One of the most striking features of mystical theological literature is the multivalent manner in which it uses language. Analyzing the literary or rhetorical devices used in mystical literature attends to how texts stylize aspects of mysticism that are extra-linguistic or exist at the limits of language. For instance, Pseudo-Dionysius famously advocates for and performs the use of both cataphatic (positive) and apophatic (negative) statements about God. Attending to the use of mystical language, one can ask: What does the application of such a strategy or device accomplish? How is it related to Dionysius’s wider theology? What affect does it have on the reader? One might conclude that the strategy of cataphasis and apophasis inculcates a sense in the reader of God’s transcending abundance and ineffability, aspects of Dionysius’s theology that are not as effectively rendered with simple propositional statements. Simply saying “God is transcendent” does not move one affectively and intellectually in the same way that the sustained use of cataphasis and apophasis does in the mind of the reader.

Yet, mystical language is not simply persuasive. The important thing that distinguishes much critical study of mystical language from rhetorical analysis is that it emphasizes a more diverse range of transformative effects of these literary devices. Mystical language is transformative. Or, to adapt a felicitous expression from the scholar of late ancient philosophy Pierre Hadot, mystical writings not only *inform*, but *form* their

Absurd; Harkaway-Krieger, “Mysticism and Materiality: *Pearl* and the Theology of Metaphor.”

readers (and perhaps their writers).²⁵ That is, if McGinn's contextual approach advocated a scholarly remove from mystical "experience" as an object of analysis—at least insofar as that experience was held to be a first order phenomenon from which doctrines and symbols emerge only secondarily—attention to the performative quality of language has begun to return to experience in a new way. Analyses of performative language consider how special uses of language transform the consciousness, mind, or even (as many Christian mystics might say) the soul of the reader.

One important qualification of this approach has come from feminist scholars or those working with critical gender theory. Patricia Dailey, for instance, has recently shown that the transformation rendered by the language of medieval mystical literature is not only of the soul, but also of the body (Dailey stresses that in Christian mystical literature body and soul are seldom rendered dualistically).²⁶ Dailey traces "the relationship of embodiment to poetics and literary form" in Paul, Augustine, Hadewijch of Brabant, Julian of Norwich, and others, to show how their texts construct Christian bodies as temporally-charged and transformed by the reception of divine grace. If earlier critical approaches to mystical language focused on how the language of mystical literature transforms the mind, soul, or consciousness, Dailey's study argues that it could also have a practical effect on bodies.²⁷

²⁵ See the essays on philosophy as a 'spiritual exercise' in Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*. For an account of writing as spiritual exercise, which engages with McGinn and Hadot, see Stang, "Writing."

²⁶ Dailey, *Promised Bodies: Time, Language, and Corporeality in Medieval Women's Mystical Texts*.

²⁷ It strikes me that some difficult questions arise here. Does the literary or poetic construction of Christian bodies have the kind of transformative effect corporeally or materially that words have intellectually or psychologically? Or does this kind of dualistic thinking cause more problems than it solves? Processes of internalizing

At times McGinn himself takes a critical approach to mystical language, as when he emphasizes the importance of incoherence, paradox, or dialectical tension in inculcating mystical modes of consciousness. This approach mitigates a limit of McGinn's own influential early approach to mystical theology described above. It sees mystical theology, not as a set of propositional doctrines about mystical presence or other theological loci, but as an activity that shapes or forms those engaged in it. This is much more in line with how authors of mystical literature describe their own practice. For Gallus, glossing the sacred writings of Dionysius and Solomon (the traditional author of the Song) is not just a pedagogical practicality making the theological systems of these texts accessible (a common way of describing the genre of commentary), but a spiritual practice meant to transform the soul.

Though methodological differences remain in the study of mysticism, what unites many of the scholars mentioned so far (from McGinn to Dailey) is that they try to allow mystical authors themselves to help theorize their own texts, by considering the value of their own critical terms for describing mystical theory and practice. That is, they see

affection and intellection are discernable in reading and writing that seem to account for how textuality shapes or forms the mind. The relationship between text and body seems more tenuous, socially mediated, and externalized—recognizable in the ways poetic construction determines the cultural habitus in which one's own materiality is experienced, but not as connected to the forms of cogitation and affection that seem the more immediate processes that engage texts.

While this study largely sidesteps these questions, it may provide tools for thinking through them. Gallus's own rhetoric of practice, experience, exercise, and discipline never discriminates between soul and body. For Gallus reading, writing, and contemplation itself—all textual or linguistic activities—exercise (*exercere*), discipline (*disciplinare*), and adapt (*apto*) the mind in the way physical activity disciplines and transforms the body. For accounts of Christian mystical literature that emphasize the continuity between intellectual effort and corporeal practice in the Christian tradition, see the essays in Hollywood, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, especially Hollywood, "Introduction," and "Song, Experience, and the Book."

mystical theology as reasoning or discourse about and/or with God, an activity inscribed linguistically and textually, that should be considered from a number of angles, but presuming the practitioner has something valuable to say about her own practice. One danger of this approach is that one can become lost in this act of translation—losing one’s own critical concerns that drew one to the texts in the first place and lapsing into a valueless antiquarianism. Yet if this danger exists, this study nevertheless presumes such a historiographical practice is worthwhile.²⁸ Here I develop an interpretive apparatus drawn largely from Gallus’s own theology, showcasing the coherence of theory and practice in his writings.

C. Intimacy, relations, and experience

It is for this reason—Gallus’s influence on my methodology—that I must also address what has often been overlooked, even by those who attend carefully to the operations of language in mystical literature. The focus on transformation (whether of consciousness, soul, or body) has sometimes led scholars to interpret mystical theology too much like spiritual formation in a modern, individualist mode. In fact, it is my position that the loss of a critical language of experience in the study of mystical theology has contributed to this state of the field—an impoverishment which Gallus invites us to reconsider. The language used in mystical literature is often taken to form the

²⁸ On these dangers, and some thoughts on why nevertheless to pursue such a historiographical approach, see Hollywood, “Gender, Agency, and the Divine in Religious Historiography,” in *Acute Melancholia*, 117-27.

consciousness, the soul, or the self of the reader (or, perhaps at times the writer), or even their body.²⁹

In a 2011 article in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, titled “Body, Society, and Subjectivity in Religious Studies,” Constance Furey, a scholar of early modern religion, called attention to the way these objects of analysis (consciousness, soul, self, body) fall under what might be characterized as a recent fashionable concern for “subjectivization.” In Furey’s view, the “turn to the body” in religious and theological studies is just the latest example of this scholarly trend toward subjectivization. Subjectivization in religious studies refers to the ways texts and traditions shape, form, or render an individual subject distinct from her social reality. This scholarly tendency is the product of a laudable goal: subjectivization illuminates how religious practitioners have modes of agency that do not demand strict autonomy from religious discourses and rituals. In fact, subjectivization is predicated upon such discourses and rituals. Yet, argues Furey, too much attention to the religious subject (and the practices that form it) obfuscates the way the aims of religion (including religious texts) are often less individual than relational. Furey advocates for what might be an overlooked object of analysis for scholars of religion—social relationships and intimacies.³⁰

²⁹ Just as a representative sample: Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980); Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (1991); Olson, *The Journey to Wisdom: Self-Education in Patristic and Medieval Literature* (1995); Miles, “The Virgin’s One Bare Breast” in *A Complex Delight: The Secularization of the Breast: 1350-1750* (2008); McGinn, “Mystical Consciousness: A Modest Proposal” (2008); Bryan, *Looking Inward: Devotional Reading and the Private Self in Late Medieval England* (2013); Stock, *The Integrated Self: Augustine, the Bible, and Ancient Thought* (2017).

³⁰ “Our scholarly turn to embodiment has undermined simplistic notions of rational choice, along with the assumption that liberty entails autonomy, or that virtue requires solitary self-formation. Still, all too often in our work, the religious subject

What would it look like for scholars of mystical theology to shift their attention slightly from the religious subject to relations and intimacies? One possibility would be to return once again to what was largely rejected as an object of analysis for scholars of mystical literature a few decades ago: intimate and intersubjective experience. Amy Hollywood has recently called attention to the distinct language of experience (*experientia*) and affect (*affectus*) in the mystical writings of Cassian and Bernard of Clairvaux. Experience (*experientia*) as used theoretically by these authors is a malleable “site of affective, intellectual, and spiritual transformation” which occurs in religious life through prayer, song, and sacred reading, ritual and communal acts wherein body, soul, and spirit are transformed for Christian perfection.³¹ Cassian depicts the ‘affect’ or ‘disposition’ (*affectus*) as that aspect of the practitioner which is transformed in prayer. Affect (*affectus*) is a past participle from *afficio* (to do something to someone, to exert an influence on another body or another person, to bring another into a particular state of mind).³² It means, then, literally a “having been done to,” or a “having been affected.” Rituals of prayer, song, and sacred reading (paradigmatically the “work of God” performed in monastic recitation of the psalms) are those practices by which the experience is ‘affected’ by God, those activities in which the Word itself ‘effects’ a spiritual transformation. That is, *affectus* and *experientia* are terms used by Christian

stands alone in a crowd. Yes, we find that subject participating in communal rituals, subject to religious authorities and disciplinary practices, a pious supplicant or abject lover of the divine. But few studies of religion track this subject as a participant in intimate relationships, defined by the problems and pleasures of kinship, friendship, patronage, marriage, and *other relationships less easily named*. In our quest to better understand subjectivity, we have isolated the subject.” Furey, “Body, Society, and Subjectivity in Religious Studies,” 10 (emphasis mine).

³¹ Hollywood, “Song, Experience, and the Book in Benedictine Monasticism,” 10.

³² *Ibid.*, 67.

mystics themselves to theorize the transformed relation between the religious believer-practitioner and God.

For Thomas Gallus no other language is adequate to theorizing such a relation. Experience (*experientia*) and affect (*affectus*), as we will see, have these same monastic connotations, referring to the way another (typically, but not exclusively, the Word) impinges upon one, making them active, that which incites or brings to effect.³³ They conjure models of relational agency and cooperative knowing. In this way, the scholar's analysis of experience rendered in Christian mystical literature tries to get at the relational ideals to which Furey exhorts us to attend. How does medieval Christian mystical literature perform ideal social relations between saints and sinners, humans and angels, hierarchical superiors and inferiors, the soul and the Word of God? That is, how do they perform relations of causality, exemplarity, dependence, love, and/or knowledge (to name a few)? I follow Furey and Hollywood in holding that medieval Christian mystical literature is often better understood with these experiential categories than with the categories of subjectivization (whether they focus on consciousness, self, soul, or body).

While Furey's studies focus on social relations between human beings (found in Puritan marriage poetry, for instance),³⁴ I am applying her insight to a relationship "less easily named."³⁵ Gallus is most concerned with the mystical relationship between the soul and the eternal Word of God. What I am *not* asking is: how do Gallus's commentaries stylize the soul as the subject of a mystical practice, or construct a self as

³³ See Ch. 4, 216-30.

³⁴ Furey, "Relational Virtue: Anne Bradstreet, Edward Taylor, and Puritan Marriage."

³⁵ See quote above, 17n30.

commentator? While Gallus famously proffers a “hierarchical anthropology,” dividing the soul into nine angelic orders each with their particular role in mystical progress,³⁶ his underlying concern is not self-realization in an individualist mode. Rather, the soul’s mental hierarchy, as I will show, is indecipherable apart from his equally complex theory of the eternal Word, which actively engages or affects the soul.³⁷ Instead of focusing on the soul or subjectivization, I ask, how does Gallus’s mystical theology (the theory and practice put forth in his commentaries) render an intimate or intersubjective experience of the soul’s union with the Word? How do Gallus’s theory and practice, mutually informing one another, perform an experience that is best described as happening *between* the soul and the Word?

To put it another way, in this study of Gallus’s commentaries I return to experience as a salient and necessary category for the scholar of mystical theological literature. Here I intend not to study special religious or mystical experiences themselves in the manner to which scholars a quarter century ago rightly objected. Rather, I examine experience (or rather, *experientia*) as a category constructed by and pursued in Christian mystical literature, which can be embraced for its capacity to theorize the relational, excessive, superintellectual, and ineffable aspects of Christian ritual and discourse that are continuous with a larger pedagogical vision of Christian perfection. This vision puts a relation *between* the soul and the Word at the center of Gallus’s efforts.

II. Scholarship on Gallus

³⁶ For a detailed account of Gallus’s “hierarchical anthropology,” see Coolman, *Knowledge, Love, and Ecstasy*, 74-100, 236-44. For very brief review of that work, the only English monograph published so far on Gallus, see below, 24-5.

³⁷ See Ch. 5, 259-60.

Though Gallus is still relatively unknown, even among scholars of medieval studies and theology, it is at last possible to outline some scholarly trajectories, thanks to both McGinn's introduction of Gallus almost twenty years ago and some more recent advances. Where Gallus was unknown in the modern period and a curiosity for much of the 20th century, understudied thanks in large part to the inaccessibility of his texts, recent work editing, publishing, and analyzing Gallus's writings has advanced our understanding of his thought, especially in the context of the medieval reception of Dionysianism. In this section, I rehearse the modern scholarship on Gallus chronologically in order to place this study in context and show how it builds upon the considerable work that has come before.

Though known in the later medieval period for his paraphrase of the *CD* and his commentaries on "the Song of Songs explained hierarchically" (as one manuscript puts it), Gallus's contribution to medieval mystical theology was lost until its rediscovery by a number of French scholars of medieval theology in the early- to mid-20th century. These scholars, to varying degrees, were engaged in the Catholic theological movements of *nouvelle théologie* and *ressourcement*, which are often described as providing the theological impetus for the Second Vatican Council. As Francis Schüssler Fiorenza puts it, Catholic scholars in France, reacting to the "manual" theology of the seminaries that advanced a stolid Neo-Scholasticism, sought to 're-source' theology by reconsidering both the works of Thomas Aquinas and the works of the Church Fathers and medieval masters, who had provided the material for Thomas's synthesis. Fiorenza notes that a central outcome of this work was the retrieval of an Augustinianism that featured the "dynamism of human desire for God" and placed experience above (or at least alongside)

“the rational, cognitive nature of religious belief.”³⁸ That is, Fiorenza concludes, a major innovation of this ‘new theology’ was to be concerned with both affectivity and knowledge.³⁹

This small wave of initial French research on Gallus (an affective Augustinian if there ever was one) can be understood in this context. The retrieval or recovery of Gallus’s works was part of a larger project of identifying and analyzing medieval masters of theological doctrine that could continue to be a source of inspiration and wisdom. Gabriel Théry’s initial studies of Gallus established him as one of these medieval masters.⁴⁰ Once Théry had introduced Gallus, studies by Châtillon, Javelet, and Ruello, began to lay out his doctrine and continued to clarify his texts. These efforts culminated in the publication in 1972 of his two extant commentaries on the Song by Barbet. These scholars noticed fundamental features of Gallus’s thought: the relationship between ontology and knowledge; the two-fold manner of knowing God by intellect and affect; the hierarchization of the soul; the influence of his Victorine education; the intertextual manner in which he interprets; his later influence on the Carthusians and Franciscans.⁴¹

Unfortunately, Gallus remained basically unknown in the English-speaking world in this period, with the exception being the dissertation research of Walsh (who also published in French). Walsh’s primary contribution, which informs this study, was in identifying Gallus’s concern with Christian wisdom as the key to interpreting Gallus’s texts. Gallus’s entire contemplative program, Walsh claimed, was a matter of identifying

³⁸ Fiorenza, “The New Theology and Transcendental Thomism,” 198-9.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 227.

⁴⁰ Declan Lawell’s articles on Gallus convey and engage with Théry’s initial contributions to the study of Gallus.

⁴¹ See their works listed in the Bibliography.

and explaining the contemplative doctrine of “the wisdom of Christians.”⁴² Still, the inaccessibility of Gallus’s manuscripts meant he would remain under the radar until McGinn’s introduction in the 1990s, and even then, the lack of a critical edition of his major works on Dionysius left him unstudied by those who otherwise might have been inspired by McGinn’s introduction.

McGinn himself, working from the manuscripts of the commentaries on Dionysius, synthesized much of the French labor and, by situating Gallus among what he called the “new mysticism” of the 13th century, made significant advances in the interpretation of his corpus. He identified three major aspects of Gallus’s ‘affective’ version of Dionysianism.⁴³ Most importantly, he pointed out that Gallus calls the Song the “practical part” of mystical theology, while he calls Dionysius’s treatise *Mystical Theology* the “speculative part.” Second, he identified the significance of Gallus’s ‘angelization’ or ‘hierarchization’ of the soul, the major innovation of Gallus’s psychology. Finally, he claims that Gallus introduced aspects of Dionysian apophysis into mystical theology in the West. This study is indebted to McGinn’s attention to each of these issues, but it is especially attuned to the way Gallus’s commentaries are wrought intertextually, or as McGinn puts it, “an extended dialogue between the Song text and the Dionysian corpus.”⁴⁴ By emphasizing Gallus’s reception of Dionysian ideas, McGinn hinted at the potential of reading Gallus’s writings through the lens of interpretation and commentary, an instinct this study follows through more fully.

⁴² Walsh, *Sapientia Christianorum: The Doctrine of Thomas Gallus Abbot of Vercelli on Contemplation*, 1957.

⁴³ McGinn, “Thomas Gallus and Dionysian Mysticism.”

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 87.

The slow advancement of scholarship on Gallus has changed thanks largely to the publication of Gallus's major work *Explanatio in Libros Dionysii* and other minor works in the past decade by Declan Lawell, who has also written extensively analyzing and evaluating Gallus as a theologian. Lawell is, as far as I can tell, one of the first to recognize just how thoroughly Dionysian Gallus is, even suggesting that Gallus picks up on Dionysius's 'hyper-ontological' reflection. That is, where McGinn identified some of Gallus's derivations from or innovations upon Dionysianism, Lawell appreciates that Gallus attempts to resolve some Dionysian tensions, or at least take advantage of those tensions in a more comprehensive manner. He concludes that Gallus is for this reason an important conversation partner for contemporary theologians and philosophers engaging in the critique of 'onto-theology.'⁴⁵

The first scholarly monograph on Gallus has recently been published by Boyd Taylor Coolman, who also wrote articles on Gallus as a founder of a tradition of affective Dionysianism and Gallus's doctrine of the spiritual senses. In *Knowledge, Love, and Ecstasy in the Theology of Thomas Gallus*, Coolman makes numerous contributions to the study of Gallus, three of which are of special note. First, Coolman definitively puts to rest the lingering view that Gallusian affectivism can be read as a form of anti-intellectualism. He describes how the relation between love and knowledge, affect and intellect is one that is mutually informing, even as Gallus holds the affect goes "beyond" the intellect at the highest point of mystical union (long after the soul has suspended all its operations, and both intellect and affect have been drawn beyond the mind). Second, Coolman describes the Neoplatonic logic of "hierarchy" as a key to understanding

⁴⁵ Lawell, "Affective Excess: Ontology and Knowledge in the Thought of Thomas Gallus."

Gallus's theology. The "metaphysics of process, return, and remaining" is an operative principle underlying nearly every aspect of Gallus's theology, from the Trinity itself to the "hierarchized" soul. Finally and relatedly, Coolman structures his analysis with a Gallus-inspired twist on the *exitus-reditus* movement that is characteristic of so much 12th- and 13th-century Christian Neoplatonist literature. Beginning with the Trinity as the superabundant source of creation and human nature, the bulk of his analysis rehearses the soul's movements of ascent, descent, and remaining in contemplative effort. This felicitous arrangement allows the reader to appreciate a defining feature of Gallus's mystical theology—the stylization of the soul as constantly at practice, straining to attain an ever-fuller reception of the divine Word by the intellect and affect.⁴⁶

III. Outline

This study is divided into two parts. Part I lays out some historical and literary contexts of Gallus's mystical theology, while Part II deals substantively with his commentaries themselves. In Chapter 1, I describe two contexts in which Gallus's thought can be best appreciated. First, I describe the influence of the 12th-century Victorine school on Gallus, in particular the school's theology of sacred letters (*littera*). I use this expansive term "letters" to describe the Victorines' concern with language and literature—including everything from grammar and syntax to the entirety of secular and sacred writings. I argue that the Victorines provided Gallus with a comprehensive

⁴⁶ A constructive engagement with Gallus occurs in Jeffrey Kosky's recent book, *Arts of Wonder: Enchanting Secularity*, the winner of the American Academy of Religion's 2013 book prize in the Constructive-Reflective category. Kosky looks to Dionysian mysticism as offering modes of discourse that could be useful for theorizing the works of a number of contemporary secular artists concerned with wonder, awe, and mystery.

theology of letters that is the constant counterpoint or complement to his mystical theology. While this introduction to the Victorine theology of letters will help establish a larger argument across this study that Gallus was thoroughly imbued in Victorine thought, I also argue that it is important to recognize the ways changes in religious life in the early 13th century had reshaped the context of his writing. Thus the chapter concludes by describing some of the developments occurring around Gallus in what has been called the “new religious movement” of the 13th century. Though Gallus does not directly address, for instance, the Franciscan movement, his work can be read as articulating renewed visions of Christology and Christian perfection—central points of contention in the new religious movements.

Chapters 2 and 3 describe what is the major literary foundation of Gallus’s commentaries: the Dionysian corpus itself.⁴⁷ That Gallus is a Dionysian has been generally accepted, but the extent to which he appreciates, adopts, and adapts the major theological tensions of the Dionysian corpus has not been.⁴⁸ For this reason Chapter 2

⁴⁷ There is a basic tension in the authorial practice of commentary writing that I have tried to highlight in this study. The commentator is entirely indebted to the mind, intention, or thought of another, and yet what the commentator produces is decidedly *not* what was intended by this authority.

Such a tension is suggested in the word commentary itself. While its Latin etymology traces it to the word *comminiscor*, “to devise/invent by careful thought,” that is, to gather together (*con-*) in mind (*mens*), it also suggests the way this devising or invention relies on another (*con-*). That is, there is a co-mind (*commens*) at play in the act of commentary.

How does one treat “context” in light of this situation, where authorial intention is shared and the text belongs to both (or neither)? The commentary itself is already a context, not a text in a traditional, modern sense that associates texts with authorial intention and ingenuity. Without resolving this tension—I am not certain one could—I have tried to lay out or illuminate the co-texts at play in Gallus’s pursuit of Christian wisdom, and cast his authorial project as relationally, experientially, and interpretively rendered.

⁴⁸ There has been a hesitancy in past studies to admit the extent to which Gallus *could* appropriate Dionysian theology—whether 1) because the Latin translation of the

returns to the Dionysian corpus itself. It identifies what I call three conceptual apertures in the corpus—sites of discursive tension, where Dionysius endeavored to articulate a theological insight without resolving an underlying incoherency or mystery. The chapter shows that in the case of three major moments of Dionysian theology—his take on God, language, and the goal of mystical theology—Dionysius makes the decision to leave the text open or unresolved. Chapter 3 shows the surprising extent to which these tensions had been translated from their Greek original to the Latin text with which Gallus worked. The 12th-century efforts of Gallus’s Victorine *confrère* John Sarracen made the text accessible for Gallus’s interpretation. A mix of pedagogical and theological concerns led Sarracen to produce a Latin text with a high degree of equivalence to its Greek source. Though we should always be cognizant of the ways translation is an act of interpretation, Chapter 3 argues that the efforts of John Sarracen left the Latin West with a translation that effectively carried over Dionysius’s main theological concerns.

It is an analytical decision to lay out these contexts for Gallus’s thought before describing his commentaries themselves. The practice of commentary writing presumes that the author’s intention is at the very least shared with (if not subservient to) that of the authority being commented on. Nevertheless, Gallus’s prodigious efforts in glossing the Song and the *CD* lead to his original explanation of what he calls the theory and practice of Christian wisdom. Chapter 4 returns to the “three conceptual apertures” of the

corpus left him without an adequate representation in the first place (Jones, “The *Divine Names*”); or, 2) because features of Dionysius’s thought did not conform with conciliar orthodoxy in the Latin West; or, 3) because Gallus imported an Augustinian affectivism that was disharmonious with fundamental affirmations of Dionysian theology (Turner, “How to Read Pseudo-Denys”). I attempt to address each of these issues across this study and show that the general scholarly trend toward a more robust affirmation of Gallus’s Dionysianism is well-founded.

Dionysian corpus described in Chapter 2 in order to discern Gallus's theory of Christian wisdom. It rehearses how Gallus treats God, sacred letters, and the goal of mystical theology. Where Chapter 2 rehearses a dialectical tension in the *CD* between God's "beyond-being-ness" and causal presence, Chapter 4 begins by showing that Gallus thoroughly adopts this Neoplatonic dialectic (even as he is unaware of its Neoplatonic provenance). I argue that Gallus innovated less thoroughly on this tension than the other two, and that, despite claims from some scholars that such a thoroughgoing appreciation of Dionysian metaphysics was impossible for those in the Latin West, Gallus nevertheless seems to have navigated the basic moves, drawing on the Latin *CD*'s rhetoric of super-essentiality (*superessentialitas*) and super-substantiality (*supersubstantialitas*) to reproduce Dionysius's Neoplatonism. Next, where Dionysius's theology of language is fundamentally ambiguous, I show that Gallus tries to make sense of Dionysius's theology of language by placing it within the context of an Augustinian theology of the Word and a Victorine theology of sacred letters. Gallus's version of spiritual interpretation of sacred literature relies on the Dionysian view that symbolic language both veils and unveils the God beyond being, and therefore the task of interpreting (or commenting on) the Word is never complete in this life. Finally, the chapter concludes by considering Gallus's modification of the Dionysian view that the goal of mystical theology is an unknowing union beyond the mind. I show how Gallus puts to use the rhetoric of affect and experience to make sense of this central tension in Dionysius's mystical theology. Together Chapters 2-4 make the argument that Gallus is thoroughly Dionysian.

Chapter 5 moves beyond the *CD* (at least as an immediate object of analysis) to describe the practice of Christian wisdom, which Gallus claims is the purview of the Song of Songs. My analysis of Gallus's two extant commentaries on the Song is structured by following the very Victorine movement from the letter (*littera*) to the spirit (*spiritus*) of the text, which Gallus takes up. Though the commentaries are fine examples of Victorine spiritual interpretation, in Victorine thought (as Chapter 1 describes) the letter is the foundation of any spiritual meaning, and Chapter 5 shows that even Gallus carefully exegetes the letter. It then goes on to trace the major outlines of Gallus's spiritual interpretation. The bride and bridegroom of the Song are figures for the soul and the eternal Word of God, respectively. The chapter describes Gallus's theology of the soul and the Word, before it attends to a second aspect of Gallus's spiritual interpretation—the distinction between the rhetoric of experience and the rhetoric of effectivity. Gallus uses both to stylize a mystical union between soul and Word wherein the soul is affected by (and made efficacious by or assimilated to) the Word. That is, it experiences the Word. As I show, the rhetoric of effectivity and experience suddenly, subtly, and significantly shifts at the most intense moments of the Song, where Gallus discerns that the soul itself has become effective, even inciting the Word to experience. Along the way I show how Gallus's critical apparatus for interpreting the Song is entirely Dionysian, as the theory and practice of Christian wisdom are interwoven and inseparable in Gallus's commentaries.

Chapter 1: The Victorines and the New Mysticism

Around 1225, when Gallus was preparing his *Glosses* on Dionysius's *Celestial Hierarchy*, James of Vitry, a fellow Augustinian canon and bishop of Acre in the crusader states, wrote his *Historia Occidentalis* (History of the West). Given the breadth of the topic, it is noteworthy that he singles out an individual, Hugh of St. Victor, the 12th-century canon whose writings on secular and sacred topics ensured the prominence of the school of St. Victor. With effusive praise that would be echoed again and again by Hugh's later medieval readers, James wrote the following:

Digging up many wells of living waters with his published books, which treat faith and habits subtly and sweetly, he unpacked the unclear and hidden things of divine wisdom in many ways, by leaving behind for his posteriors his immortal memory (*immortalem sui memoriam*) as if a carefully composed perfume, the work of a painter, and the sweetness of honey over every part of the mouth, or as if music accompanied by wine and ships bearing fruit.¹

“Master Hugh,” in writing his books, was like a “zither-player of the Lord (*citharista domini*), an instrument of the Holy Spirit (*organum spiritus sancti*),” a true artist.²

James's praise of Hugh in his *Historia* is not surprising. A fellow Augustinian canon, James had studied at the University of Paris. Perhaps he even wandered to the outskirts of the city to visit the school of St. Victor during his time there (the canons sometimes served as confessors for scholars and students). He calls the school “a most tranquil door for scholars, for whom, desiring to empty themselves from the shipwreck of this world, it

¹ *Historia Occidentalis* XXIV.138, my translation: “Multos autem aquarum viuientium puteos effodiens, libris suis, quos de fide et moribus tam subtiliter quam suauius disserendo edidit, incerta et occulta diuine sapientie pluribus aperuit, immortalis sui memoriam uelut compositionem odoris et opus pigmentarii et in omni ore quasi mel dulcoratum, uelut musicam in conuiuio uini et tamquam naues poma ferentes posteris reliquendo.”

² *Ibid.*

opens a way of mercy, and in its bosom it warms and feeds them, as if a holy mother.”³ Even in the early 13th century, then, the school of St. Victor was still a point of pride for Augustinian canons.⁴

Yet what is noteworthy about James’s description of Hugh is how it assumes a traditional Victorine view of Christian perfection, one advanced in Hugh’s own writings, that was losing steam at the time James wrote—or at least, was competing with new forms of life in the religious ecosystem of the early 13th century. James depicts Hugh as having perfected the memory. As we will see in this chapter, Hugh believed that the restoration of God’s image or reformation of the soul was primarily a matter of shaping the memory, especially through reading (*lectio*) and contemplation (*contemplatio*). When James writes of Hugh’s immortal memory as a piece of art, built by careful craftsmanship, he is describing the model of a perfect Victorine, studious and contemplative, with a soul restored to the image of God.

That James writes in this way about Hugh and Christian perfection is interesting because, although James was himself an Augustinian canon, he is known less as a chronicler of his own order than as an observer of the “new religious movements” of the 13th century. These movements, most famously the Franciscans, but also the beguines, penitents, crusaders, hermits, and Humiliati, were, despite their great diversity, largely united by a new view of Christian perfection and Christology (or rather, an older,

³ Ibid.: “...portus tranquillissimus scolarium quibus de huius mundi naufragio euadere cupientibus sinum misericordie aperit et in gremio suo velut pia mater eos fouet et enutrit.”

⁴ For this reason, I question Ferruolo’s negative assessment of the state of the school at this late date in his *The Origins of the University*, 40-4. While the school’s 12th-century luminaries were long gone, canons like Thomas Gallus and James of Vitry continued to participate in the vibrant intellectual and spiritual life of the school.

apostolic view being renewed in the present). As James's own reflections on these movements show, an active life of sacrificing corporeally in imitation of the suffering Christ was becoming the new standard for religious (or sometimes semi-religious) practice.⁵

When McGinn in his history of mystical theology places Gallus not with his Victorine brethren but among these “new religious movements” of the 13th century (with their “new mysticism”) it is for at least two good reasons.⁶ First, Gallus flourished in the early 13th-century. While the school of St. Victor remained long after Gallus, it is typically thought of as a 12th-century institution, thanks to the proliferation of influential works in that century by Hugh, Richard, Andrew, Achard, and Godfrey. Second, and more importantly, Gallus's form of “affective Dionysianism” inaugurated a new strain of mystical thought that would capture the imagination of the new religious. Gallus's direct influence is found in later medieval writings by Bonaventure, Hugh of Balma, and the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, just to name a few. The blossoming of affective

⁵ This is not to say that this early 13th-century development won the day (though in many ways it permanently altered the religious landscape), only that in the early 13th century, religious fervor for the active life was fomenting and that it had significant effects on Christian teaching. The best account is the now classic work of Herbert Grundmann, *Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter*, originally published in 1935 but only translated into English in 1995 as *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*. As Grundmann shows, some of these movements were institutionalized, others were merely tolerated, while others were deemed heretical. The extent to which these movements were entirely new in the 13th century remains an open question, as continuities can be traced with the 12th century. For instance, Carolyn Muessig has shown that the stigmatic spirituality was around long before Francis famously receives his stigmata. “Signs of Salvation: The Evolution of Stigmatic Spirituality Before Francis of Assisi.” However, what *is* novel in the 13th century is the recognition by religious like James of Vitry of a new religious fervor, which is often tied to James's sense of living at the culmination of sacred history.

⁶ McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism—1200-1350*. See McGinn's treatment of Thomas Gallus in the section entitled “Early Franciscan Mysticism,” 78-87.

Dionysianism in the 13th century, attributable to Gallus, contributed to and participated in a broader mystical “flowering” in this period, McGinn argued. Yet, the roots of Gallus’s project remained planted in the program established at the school of St. Victor. Like James, Gallus looked to its most revered representatives, Hugh and Richard, for inspiration and guidance.

An important distinction between the Augustinian canons at St. Victor and these 13th-century movements was the canons’ view of Christian perfection, which centered on reading (*lectio*) and contemplation (*contemplatio*) to restore the soul. Reading was geared towards discerning the presence of the eternal Word in creation and history. The Word of God, as we will see, was everywhere at the school, and far beyond that. Being the principle of the cosmos itself, vestiges of the Word could be found in every nook and cranny of creation, in every moment of history, and in every jot and tittle of (not only sacred, but even secular) literature. That is, for a Victorine, who saw creation, history, and literature as pouring out of the same fecund source, there was no context too far afield to illuminate a sacred text, thanks to the continuity provided by the Word, in which all things participate. St. Victor was a major center of the “12th-century Renaissance,” and, at least since the studies of Beryl Smalley in the mid-20th century, scholars have recognized the contributions the Victorines made not only to scriptural interpretation, but to theology, history, and literary studies in that period.⁷ Some of their greatest contributions were to mystical theology.⁸ These various efforts emerged from a

⁷ Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*; Smalley, *The Bible in Middle Ages*.

⁸ See the forthcoming volume in the *Victorine Texts in Translation* series, *Spiritual Formation and Mystical Symbolism*, ed. Dale Coulter, which includes Hugh’s *Noah’s Ark* and Richard’s *On the Ark of Moses*.

theological consensus that unites the school—the eternal Word of God both was God and was the creative principle ordering the cosmos. Therefore, one should strive to know universally. Hugh sets the tone for a century of Victorine scholarship when he exhorts his readers to “learn everything (*omnia disce*).”⁹ The life of reading and meditating, experiencing and mentally gathering the visible things of the world, was the foundation of contemplation and Christian perfection. Creation and history themselves, as vestiges of the Word, were the spatial and temporal plans or courses by which the memory could initially be molded and the mind re-formed, in order to know the eternal Word itself.

In this and the next two chapters, I take a clue from the Victorines about the continuity of text and context, although I am more modest in ambition. I will prepare the reader to understand Gallus’s commentaries (our text) by examining their historical and theological contexts. Chapters 2 and 3 present the more immediate context, indeed the textual and intellectual foundations, for Gallus’s commentaries—the Greek Dionysian corpus and its Latin translation, respectively. Gallus was thoroughly Dionysian, as we will see. In this chapter, I go further afield, scoping out some historical, cultural, and intellectual contexts that may illuminate the commentaries. To limit my scope, I examine selected writings of both Hugh of St. Victor and James of Vitry, who introduce us to,

⁹ *Didascalicon* VI.3.115 (Trans. by Harkins, 166). It should be noted that insofar as the Victorines advocated a form of encyclopedism, theirs differs from modern quests for universal knowledge because the Victorines assume such comprehensive knowledge is always tentative and ungraspable in this life (at least apart from the Word’s intervention). That is, to “learn everything” does not presume that one can have access to Nature *qua* Nature, such that knowledge could be mastered and manipulated by applying a universal human reason, but that one has a desire for union with the Word which is the source of nature, creation, and history. The context for Hugh’s exhortation in the *Didascalicon* is important. He is discussing how one would study history in order to engage in scriptural interpretation. The full quote is, “Learn everything, and subsequently you will see that nothing is superfluous.” That is, everything one learns can apply to the task of sacred reading.

respectively, the 12th-century school of St. Victor and the 13th-century evolving religious landscape. Though the writings of Hugh and James do not provide the definitive context for Gallus's commentaries, they reveal both theoretical and practical concerns about Christology and Christian perfection that inform Gallus's mystical theology at a time of religious change. Hugh's 12th-century pedagogical masterpiece *Didascalicon* and James's 13th-century occasional writings on his religious milieu provide a glimpse into how Gallus would approach Christian perfection and Christology in terms of the reading (*lectio*), experience (*experientia*), and explanation (*explanatio*) of the Word.

I. Hugh of St. Victor: Reading the Word

Besides "blessed Dionysius the Areopagite," there is no figure upon whom Gallus more often applies an honorific than Hugh of St. Victor, whom he calls "our venerable teacher Master Hugh." James's and Gallus's reverence for Hugh suggests that the years since Hugh's leadership at the school of St. Victor (1133-1141) had only bolstered his authority. Indeed, long after Gallus cited Hugh in the early 1200s, admirers of Hugh would still refer to him as an *alter Augustinus* (another Augustine), both for the thoroughly Augustinian bent of his writings and for the breadth of his theological teaching. Hugh wrote treatises, commentaries, and essays on various topics—from creation to incarnation, from the sacraments to sacred literature. As a number of recent studies have highlighted, however, Hugh's voluminous corpus can best be understood as offering a coherent pedagogy of divine reading (*lectio*) meant to lead to nothing less than

the restoration or reformation of the soul.¹⁰ That is, Hugh's writings provide insight into the educational and contemplative program of the school, and set the agenda for its major representatives throughout the second half of the 12th century. It is a primary claim of this study that Gallus's commentaries mark a continuation, even culmination, of this agenda, rather than a break with it.

In the preface to his *Didascalicon on the Study of Reading*, Hugh previews the treatise (and perhaps his entire corpus), writing the following:

[This book] instructs the reader of secular writings as much as the reader of divine writings. For this reason it is divided into two parts, each of which has three distinctions. In the first part it teaches the reader of the arts (*lectorem artium*), and in the second part the reader of divine things (*lectorem divinum*). It teaches in this way: by showing first what (*quid*) should be read, and next in what order (*quo ordine*), and finally how (*quomodo*) it should be read.¹¹

These three—what to read, in what order to read, and how to read—are the underlying concerns of Hugh's study of reading (*lectio*). Later in the work, Hugh describes how reading itself is the basis for contemplation (*contemplatio*), so the *Didascalicon* is a curriculum for religious life.¹² The passage above shows that Hugh had a succinct answer

¹⁰ This description sums up the major interpretive findings of three monographs on Hugh that came out in 2009-10. Paul Rorem in *Hugh of St. Victor* highlights the pedagogical character of his corpus. Franklin Harkins makes the connection between reading and restoration of the image of God in *Reading and the Work of Restoration: History and Scripture in the Theology of Hugh of St. Victor*. Finally, Boyd Taylor Coolman sees Hugh's writings as generally geared toward a re-formation of the soul in *The Theology of Hugh of St. Victor: An Interpretation*. These works are largely in harmony with one another, but they have brought renewed attention to the place of Hugh's text *Didascalicon on the Study of Reading*. While I provide my own reading of the *Didascalicon* here, I am indebted to these treatments of Hugh.

¹¹ *Didascalicon*, Pref.2 (translation slightly modified from Harkins, 82): "In prima parte docet lectorem artium, in secunda parte diuinum lectorem. Docet autem hoc modo, ostendendo primum quid legendum sit, deinde quo ordine et quomodo legendum sit."

¹² *Ibid.*, V.109: "Quattuor sunt in quibus nunc exercetur uita iustorum et, quasi per quosdam gradus ad futuram perfectionem subleuatur, uidelicet lectio siue doctrina, meditatio, oratio, et operatio. Quinta deinde sequitur, contemplatio, in qua, quasi quodam

to the question of what to read: everything. The Victorine canon should read both secular and sacred literature. Reading however should not be haphazard, rather a careful course of reading can progressively restore or reform the soul from its fallen state, if one knows how to do it.

Because Hugh's pedagogical program has been studied comprehensively elsewhere, in this section I focus on the three concerns articulated in the preface to the *Didascalicon*, which seem to have influenced Gallus as well. First, I describe Hugh's vision of what (*quid*) one should read, focusing on his positive estimation of secular literature. Second, Hugh argues that, though the Victorine canon should study secular literature in preparation for the reading of sacred literature, he should also read the books of Scripture in an order (*ordo*). For this reason, it is tempting to view the vast commentary literature produced by the Victorines—including the culminating instance in Gallus—as a collective project to fulfill Hugh's pedagogical vision. Finally, I rehearse Hugh's theory of scriptural interpretation and the Augustinian sign theory that undergirds it. These teach one how (*quomodo*) to read. Just as secular literature is a necessary preparation for sacred literature, the literal or historical interpretation of a sacred text is the foundation for its spiritual interpretation, because it gives one access to the Word's

precedentium fructu, in hac uita etiam que sit boni operis merces futura pre gustatur... De his quinque gradibus primus gradus, id est lectio, incipientium est, supremus, id est contemplatio, perfectorum.”

(Trans. Harkins, 161): “The life of a just person is trained in four things, which serve as certain stages through which he is raised to future protection: namely, reading or learning, meditation, prayer, and action. Then follows a fifth, contemplation, in which—as if a certain fruit of the preceding stages—the just person enjoys even in this life a foretaste of the future rewards of good work... The first of these five stages, that is, reading, is for beginners; the last, that is, contemplation, is for the perfect.”

“deeds done in time (*res in tempore gesta*).”¹³ Along the way, I suggest how this program illuminates Gallus’s commentaries—their articulation of the value of secular learning, the choice of sacred texts themselves, and the method of spiritual interpretation.

A. What to read (*quid legere debeat*)

While Hugh advocated the reading of secular literature alongside sacred literature, the *Didascalicon* also carefully articulates the relationship between the two. The shape of the work itself suggests complementarity: the first half treats secular literature in three books, while the second half covers sacred literature in three more. Hugh was deeply indebted to and builds upon Augustine’s *On Christian Teaching* in his composition of the *Didascalicon*.¹⁴ Augustine had famously described the place pagan or “gentile” literature played in Christian teaching with an image drawn from the Exodus narrative. It is worth quoting at length:

Any statements by those who are called philosophers, especially the Platonists, which happen to be true and consistent with our faith should not cause alarm, but be claimed for our own use, as it were from owners who have no right to them. Like the treasures of the ancient Egyptians, who possessed not only idols and heavy burdens, which the people of Israel hated and shunned, but also vessels and ornaments of silver and gold, and clothes, which on leaving Egypt the people of Israel, in order to make better use of them surreptitiously claimed for themselves (they did this not on their own authority but at God’s command, and the Egyptians in their ignorance actually gave them the things of which they had made poor use)—similarly all the branches of pagan (*gentilium*) learning... these treasures... must be removed by Christians, as they separate themselves in spirit from the wretched company of pagans (*gentilium*), and applied to their true function, that of preaching the gospel. As for their clothing—which corresponds to human institutions, but those appropriate to human society, which in this life

¹³ *Ibid.*, IV.1.70. (Trans. Harkins, 134).

¹⁴ This is the conclusion of Harkins in *Reading and the Work of Restoration*, who claims that Hugh adopts the Augustinian theory of signification articulated in *On Christian Teaching*. What follows confirms his position by showing that Hugh also elaborates upon the Augustinian vision of the role of pagan (“gentile”) literature for the Christian.

we cannot do without—this may be accepted and kept for conversion to Christian purposes (*in usum convertenda christianum*).¹⁵

This image suggests that for Augustine, the Christian should not take an adversarial relationship to secular literature, but should plunder or convert it, repurposing it and making it subservient to Christian ends. This view, which affirms secular literature (especially of the Platonists) while subordinating it to sacred literature, reflects the polemical context of Augustine’s late ancient milieu.

Hugh, however, takes up and tempers the Augustinian position. The reading of secular literature on the liberal arts, Harkins argues, has for Hugh some salutary effect in and of itself, insofar as it pursues wisdom. This pursuit of wisdom is a remedy for what Harkins characterizes as the main dilemma of Hugh’s theology: the disordering of the image of God in the soul.¹⁶ Boyd Taylor Coolman has pointed to a related image for the

¹⁵ *De Doctrina Christiana*, II.144-5. (trans. R. P. H. Green, 64-5): “philosophi autem qui uocantur si qua forte uera et fidei nostrae accommodata dixerunt, maxime platonici, non solum formidanda non sunt, sed ab eis etiam tamquam ab iniustis possessoribus in usum nostrum uindicanda. sicut enim aegyptii non tantum idola habebant et onera grauia, quae populus israhel detestaretur et fugeret, sed etiam uasa atque ornamenta de auro et argento et uestem, quae ille populus exiens de aegypto sibi potius tamquam ad usum meliorem clanculo uindicauit, non auctoritate propria, sed praecepto dei ipsis aegyptiis nescienter commodantibus ea, quibus non bene utebantur, sic doctrinae omnes gentilium non solum simulata et superstitiosa figmenta graues que sarcinas superuacanei laboris habent, quae unusquisque nostrum duce christo de societate gentilium exiens debet abominari atque uitare, sed etiam liberales disciplinas usui ueritatis aptiores et quaedam morum praecepta utilissima continent de que ipso uno deo colendo nonnulla uera inueniuntur apud eos, quod eorum tamquam aurum et argentum, quod non ipsi instituerunt, sed de quibusdam quasi metallis diuinae prouidentiae, quae ubique infusa est, eruerunt et, quo peruerse atque iniuriose ad obsequia daemonum abutuntur, cum ab eorum misera societate sese animo separat, debet ab eis auferre christianus ad usum iustum praedicandi euangelii. uestem quoque illorum, id est, hominum quidem instituta, sed tamen accommodata humanae societati, qua in hac uita carere non possumus, accipere atque habere licuerit in usum conuertenda christianum.”

¹⁶ Harkins, *Reading and the Work of Restoration*, 60-1, 100-12.

soul's dilemma in Hugh's corpus: deformation of the soul.¹⁷ For both readers of Hugh, reading (including secular literature) plays a pivotal role in resolving this dilemma by restoring or reforming the soul. For this reason, Harkins casts Hugh's position on secular literature as preparatory or commencing the process of restoration.¹⁸ The salutary effects of secular reading are "the real beginning of the process whereby the human person is restored to the image of God," even if one needs to fulfill the learning begun in them through the reading of sacred literature.¹⁹ That is, secular reading provides the foundations for sacred reading by ordering one's understanding of creation and history, the outpourings of the eternal Word.

Harkins's description of the preparatory effect of secular literature in Hugh is welcome, especially his identification of the liberal arts' "nascent restorative efficacy."²⁰ As Hugh emphasizes that the soul is in need of restoration or reformation, secular literature plays a critical role in these processes. Harkins's position is even further supported by attention to yet a third way Hugh casts the dilemma faced by the soul—ignorance.²¹ Not only is the soul disordered in affection or deformed, it has also forgotten itself. That is, Hugh not only casts the major problem reading resolves as the disorder or deformation of the soul, but he at times also claims that the soul has simply forgotten its own nature: "For the mind, numbed by bodily passions and seduced outside of itself by sensible forms, has forgotten what it is, and because it has not remembered that it is

¹⁷ Coolman, *Theology of Hugh of St. Victor*, 60-78.

¹⁸ Harkins, *Reading and the Work of Restoration*, 112-36.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁰ Harkins, "Introduction" in *Didascalicon*, 67.

²¹ Harkins, *Reading and the Work of Restoration*, 106-8.

anything different, it thinks that it is nothing beyond what is seen.”²² Secular literature then, by facilitating the mind’s retrieval of an innate wisdom, reminding the soul of what it already is, and restoring the memory to its pre-fall state, is not only preparatory for the work done by sacred reading, but truly has a “nascent restorative efficacy.”

What is significant here for my treatment of Gallus’s commentaries is the way Hugh emphasizes the continuity between learning through secular and sacred literature. Gallus mimics this by claiming that not only is secular literature worthwhile, but the wisdom attainable by “the gentiles” is salutary, even if insufficient for Christian perfection. In the prologue to his third commentary on the Song of Songs, Gallus claims there are two kinds of knowledge.²³ The knowledge (*cognitio*) of gentiles is intellectual (*intellectualis*) and happens through the consideration of created things, gathered into the memory through the senses, imagination, and ratiocination. The knowledge of the Christians, however, is super-intellectual (*superintellectualis*) and gained through affective experience of the Word beyond the mind (*super mentem*). Both are salutary ways to the same Wisdom, but the Christian’s knowledge is of the eternal Word itself, rather than its effects. Gallus derives from Hugh a vision of Christian wisdom as a special kind of knowledge that is, nevertheless, continuous with the wisdom attained through the study of secular literature.

B. In what order (*quo ordine legere debeat*)

²² *Didascalicon*, I.1.6 (Trans. Harkins, 84): “animus enim, corporeis passionibus consopitus et per sensibiles formas extra semetipsum abductus, oblitus est quid fuerit, et, quia nil aliud fuisse se meminit, nil preter quod uidetur esse credit.”

²³ SS3.Prologue, 107.

The restoration or reformation of the soul's memory, like every part of monastic life, occurs through orderly, disciplined practice.²⁴ Reading in Hugh's *Didascalicon* is simply an extension of the discipline (*disciplina*) practiced by the Victorine canon. As the regular canon should eat or drink in moderation, so should they temper their reading. As the day was marked by the regular divine hours, reading should be orderly and intentional. Reading should proceed in an order whether at the level of the disciplines, the books themselves, the narratives, or the exposition of the text.²⁵ We have already seen that secular literature is preparatory for sacred literature, but what about the order of reading (*ordo lectionis*) for sacred literature itself?

The primary division of sacred literature is between the Old and New Testaments, which themselves are broken down into three sections. While Hugh dedicates a fair amount of space to dividing up and describing the two Testaments, a couple things are of special note for this study. First, Hugh retrieves a division of the traditional Solomonic works, around since at least Origen, according to how each advances beyond the other:

In Proverbs Solomon teaches a young boy and instructs him by means of aphorisms concerning his duties... In Ecclesiastes, by contrast, Solomon instructs a mature man not to imagine that anything in this world is lasting, but rather to understand that everything we see is perishable and transient. Finally, in the Song of Songs he joins to the Spouse by nuptial embraces an already perfect man who demonstrated his preparation by trampling this present age under foot.²⁶

²⁴ See Coolman's description of "Practices of Re-formation" in *Theology of Hugh of St. Victor*, 139-224. Coolman draws on the now classic study by Carruthers, *Book of Memory*.

²⁵ *Didascalicon* III.8 (Trans. Harkins, 124-5).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, IV.8.81 (Trans. Harkins, 141): "In Prouerbiis paruulum docet et, quasi de officiis, per sententias erudit, unde et ad filium ei crebro sermo repetitur. In Ecclesiaste uero mature uirum etatis instituit, ne quicquam in mundi rebus putet esse perpetuum, sed caduca et breuia uniuersa que cernimus. Ad extremum iam consummatum uirum et calcato seculo preparatum, in Cantico canticorum Sponsi iungit amplexibus."

That is, Solomon himself had written with the intention of laying out a pedagogy of sorts, the culmination of which was his masterpiece, the Song of Songs, an erotic love poem that Christians had interpreted as a spiritual allegory for the soul and God at least since Origen.²⁷ Hugh is quoting verbatim here from Jerome (a sometimes Origen enthusiast), but notice that the Song is for those already perfected. That is, the Song is not only the culmination of the Solomonic literature, it was also a text that was appropriate for those who through ordered reading had attained contemplation, a “foretaste of future rewards.”²⁸ While Hugh affirms that the Song is for the perfect, it should also be noted that the Victorines recognized that perfection was an elusive goal for those in this life (*in via*).²⁹ The Song therefore, as Gallus’s multiple commentaries witness, was a text whose meaning could never be exhausted in this life. As we will see in Chapter 5, because it depicts the soul’s union with the Word, it should be returned to again and again by the one seeking contemplation and Christian perfection.

The second noteworthy aspect of Hugh’s division and ordering of all of sacred literature is the prominent place he gives to extra-biblical texts. That Hugh should encourage his Victorine readers, whose own rule was written by Augustine, to read the Apostolic and Church Fathers is not surprising. However, Hugh curiously places this literature within the boundaries of the New Testament itself, which “can be called the Gospel even though specifically those four books that set forth the words and deeds of the Savior—namely, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—deserve to be called the

²⁷ See Ch. 5, 250-1.

²⁸ See n12 above.

²⁹ See Hugh’s discussion of perfection (*perfectio*) and the “instability of the present life” below, 51.

Gospel.”³⁰ A short division of the whole of the Scripture, original to Hugh, shows that he saw this literature as continuous with the canonical New Testament:

All of Sacred Scripture is contained in two Testaments, namely in the Old and the New. Each Testament is divided into three collections. The Old Testament contains the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The New Testament contains the Gospels, the Apostles, and the Fathers.³¹

Hugh’s commitment to the idea is confirmed when he later expands upon it. The Gospels are those of the four evangelists, while “the second collection” is made up of four more “volumes”: the Acts of the Apostles, Paul’s letters, the “canonical epistles,” and Revelation. “The Fathers” is made up of the decretals (*decretalia*) or rules (*regulares*), but especially of “the Doctors of the Church: Jerome, Augustine, Gregory, Ambrose, Isidore, Origen, Bede, and many other orthodox writers whose works are so vast that they cannot be counted.”³² Hugh laments that it would be impossible to read them all, again hinting that the practice of sacred reading cannot be completed or perfected in this life.

Readers of Hugh have seldom taken seriously this description of the Fathers as contained within the “New Testament.” Surely Hugh does not mean that these texts, more numerous than he admits he can read, are within the canon of Scripture? While elsewhere Hugh carefully distinguishes between canonical and apocryphal texts, his expansive view of the New Testament and the Gospel had an effect on the school of St. Victor. As we will see below, one important extra-canonical writer was Dionysius the Areopagite, who

³⁰ *Didascalicon*, IV.9.83 (Trans. Harkins, 143): “...generaliter totum Nouum Testamentum euangelium dici potest, sed tamen specialiter quattuor illa uolumina, Matthei scilicet et Marci et Luce atque Ioannis, in quibus facta et dicta Saluatoris plane explicantur, euangelium nuncupari meruerunt.”

³¹ *Ibid.*, IV.2.71 (Trans. Harkins, 134): “Omnis diuina scriptura in duobus testamentis continetur, in ueteri uidelicet et nouo. Utrumque testamentum tribus ordinibus distinguitur. Vetus Testamentum continet legem, prophetas, hagiographos, Nouum autem euangelium, apostolos, patres.”

³² *Ibid.*, IV.2.72 (Trans. Harkins, 135).

was thought by the Victorines to be the Greek convert of the Apostle Paul mentioned in the book of Acts. Though not listed here by Hugh among “the Fathers,” Dionysius would certainly have been included among this group, if not among the apostles themselves, thanks to his proximity to the Apostle Paul.

Gallus’s hefty corpus of commentaries on Dionysius proves the point, but consider also his treatise *Spectacula Contemplationis*, in which he writes of how the various biblical figures are represented by celestial bodies—the sun being the incarnate Word itself; the moon, the Virgin; the morning star, the patriarchs of the Old Testament; the comets, the prophets; and the stars, the illumined apostles. But the north star (*polus*), he writes, signifies “the ones rather close to the Apostle (*propinquoires apostoli*).”³³ Could this refer to Dionysius and the other followers of Paul? In his commentaries, Gallus refers to Dionysius variously as the “treasure box (*gazophylacio*)” or “secretary of apostolic wisdom (*apostolice sapientie secretarius*).” If Gallus imbibed Hugh’s sense of the continuity between the New Testament and the Fathers, Dionysius’s writings offered a special point of contact to the Apostle himself, and held a significant place in the order of reading as a result.

In sum, when it came to divine reading, the two texts on which Gallus repeatedly commented seeking Christian wisdom (the Song and the Dionysian corpus) were not random. Though we can point to other reasons Gallus may have taken them up—the Song had a long history of spiritual interpretation, while the Dionysian corpus had been freshly translated and made truly accessible for the first time in the decades before Gallus—the *Didascalicon* itself, Hugh’s pedagogical program for the Victorine school,

³³ *Spectacula Contemplationis*, III.2.273.

offers clues. According to the program set out by Hugh, these were texts that culminated the order of reading (*ordo lectionis*) undertaken by a Victorine. In the process of restoring and reforming the soul through reading, the Song and the Dionysian corpus were for those being perfected, who sought contemplation or a foretaste of eternal rewards. The harmony of Gallus's project with the pedagogical program laid out in the *Didascalicon* included not only what (*quid*) and in what order (*quo ordine*) to read, however. Gallus also adopts Hugh's take on how (*quomodo*) to read sacred literature.

C. How to read (*quomodo legere debeat*)

While Gallus was undoubtedly influenced by Hugh's discussions of what and in what order to read, as a commentator on the Song of Songs employing the method of spiritual interpretation, he is most indebted to Hugh's discussion of how (*quomodo*) to read. An erotic poem like the Song required careful methods of interpretation. The *Didascalicon* gives insight into how Gallus would have approached the text. As in so many things, Hugh is influenced primarily by Augustine's discussion of scriptural signification and interpretation in *On Christian Teaching*, but Hugh expands upon the ideas put forth by Augustine.

i. *vox, intellectus, res, ratio, veritas*

Hugh's explanation of how to read rests primarily on a theory of signification which he drew from Augustine. In a passage that begins his discussion of the matter, Hugh describes signification through words (*verba*) and things (*res*):

It must also be known that in the divine writings not only do words (*verba*) signify, but so too do things (*res*). This mode of signifying is not ordinarily found

to such a degree in other writings. The philosopher recognizes only the significance of words (*vocum*), but the significance of things is much more excellent than that of words (*vocum*) because custom or common usage (*usus*) has determined the latter, whereas nature (*natura*) established the former. The latter is a human expression (*hominum vox*), whereas the former is the very voice of God (*vox Dei*) speaking to humans. The latter, having been uttered, passes away; the former, having been brought into being, subsists.³⁴

In this passage, Hugh indicates that there is a distinction between the signification through words (*verba*) or expressions (*voces*) and through things (*res*). In a general way recognized by philosophers words or expressions are signs that point the hearer to a particular thing. Hugh says the connection between sign and thing is established by common custom, an implicit agreement between the speaker and hearer. That is, human beings agree that particular words (like “lion”) point to particular things (the large, predator cat with a mane). In this case, meaning is established by social convention, and human beings communicate by using expressions or words agreed upon as signs to point to things.

Yet, Hugh insists, again following Augustine, that in the case of scriptural signification not only words (*verba*) but also the things (*res*) themselves signify. Another passage helps to make clear what Hugh means by this. Hugh calls to mind the “profound” signification in sacred literature, describing how “the reader comes through the word or expression (*vocem*) to a basic concept (*intellectum*), through the concept to a thing (*rem*),

³⁴ *Didascalicon*, V.3.96 (Trans. Harkins, 151): “Sciendum est etiam, quod in diuino eloquio non tantum uerba, sed etiam res significare habent, qui modus non adeo in aliis scripturis inueniri solet. Philosophus solam uocum nouit significationem, sed excellentior ualde est rerum significatio quam uocum, quia hanc usus instituit, illam natura dictauit. Hec hominum uox est, illa uox Dei ad homines. Hec prolata perit, illa creata subsistit.”

through the thing to an idea (*ratio*), and through the idea to the truth (*veritas*).”³⁵ That is, while in general signification occurs through the first three steps—the word (*vox*) guiding the hearer to an understanding of the thing (*res*) itself—in scriptural signification, oftentimes the thing (*res*) itself guides one to a higher, or further truth (*veritas*). How is this so? Returning to the passage above, Hugh explains that the things (*res*) referred to in scripture (which consists largely of narratives of deeds done in time, *res in tempore gesta*) are established by nature itself. That is, scripture points to creation and history themselves, which are the spatial and temporal coordinates laid out by the eternal Word. These things—nature, creation, and history—are expressions of the Word or simply are the voice of God (*vox Dei*). In this way, these things themselves signify, directing one to the eternal truths (*veritates*) from which they come.

ii. Spiritual Interpretation

This theory of scriptural signification underlies Hugh’s more detailed examination of the methods by which scripture should be read and interpreted. Because scripture uses both forms of signification—meaning produced by the use of words (*voces*) to refer to things (*res*), and meaning produced by the use of the things (*res*) themselves to refer to higher truths (*veritas*)—methods should be established to interpret each. Indeed, Hugh lays out carefully the distinction between the “disciplines” of historical-literal and spiritual forms of scriptural interpretation, emphasizing that interpretation of sacred

³⁵ *Ibid.*, V.3.97 (Trans. Harkins, 152): “quam profunda in sacris litteris requirenda sit intelligentia, ubi per uocem ad intellectum, per intellectum ad rem, per rem ad rationem, per rationem peruenitur ad ueritatem.”

literature in terms of the history of deeds done in time should precede any attempts at spiritual interpretation.

Historical methods for interpretation allow the reader to understand the things to which the words of scripture, the letter (*littera*), point. Though not all books are primarily historical, Hugh says that they all can be read historically. “[H]istory is not only the narrative of the things having been done (*res gesta*) but also the first meaning of any narrative that signifies according to the proper nature of words.”³⁶ That is, historical reading is the kind of reading that is done anytime signification occurs by a word pointing to a thing. The historical reading of a text is therefore basically a literal meaning, in the sense of a literary meaning. It asks, What meaning arises when one examines solely the letter of the text itself? This bifold definition of history (*historia*) allows for some ambiguity on Hugh’s part. At times he seems to say that the historical meaning is important for giving the reader access to the actions performed by the Word in causing deeds done in time. Historical reading is thus a way to “read” the Word as creative principle of history. At other times, historical reading is simply the literal (or literary) meaning of a text, which serves as a basis for a higher spiritual interpretation. As we will see, Gallus uses this second understanding of *historia* when he reads the Song. Gallus’s examination of the letter of the Song allows the reader to appreciate the grammar, the basic meaning of foreign terms, and the literary style, all which facilitate the examination of deeper, spiritual meanings.

³⁶ Ibid., VI.3.115 (Trans. Harkins, 166): “...historiam esse dicamus, non tantum rerum gestarum narrationem, sed illam primam significationem cuiuslibet narrationis, que secundum proprietatem uerborum exprimitur.”

While the interpretation of history in scripture gives one knowledge of the creative and restorative activity of the Word (or at least a literal or literary basis for further interpretation), it is with the knowledge of these things (*res*) that one can begin to understand the deeper truths that they convey. Two modes of spiritual interpretation—allegorical and tropological—build upon the foundation laid by historical or literal understanding. With an understanding of the thing (*res*) firmly in place, one can go on to seek more subtle or deeper meanings, which Hugh typically refers to as mysteries, or (from his treatment of signification) simply the truth (*veritas*). To return to our earlier example, the word (*vox*) “lion” signifies the animal itself (the thing, *res*), but this literal understanding is the foundation for a deeper understanding in which the thing (the lion) is itself a sign or symbol of the devil.³⁷ As Hugh depicts it in the *Didascalicon*, spiritual reading culminates the order of reading and should be practiced only by advanced readers, but it is a task that will never be completed, as sacred literature is arranged with more mysteries than one could fully comprehend. As we will see in Chapter 5, Gallus’s commentaries on the Song of Songs draw deeply from Hugh’s vision of how to read, finding in the Song’s bride and bridegroom a spiritual depiction of the soul and the Word itself.

iii. Commentary

A final note should be made about Hugh’s treatment of how (*quomodo*) to read. The strongest material evidence we have that Hugh’s methods were worked out in practice are the volumes of commentaries produced by the Victorines (including Hugh

³⁷ *Ibid.*, V.3.97 (Trans. Harkins, 152).

himself). These commentaries should be seen both as participating in Hugh's pedagogical efforts (giving their own students the tools to read sacred literature for contemplation), and as the practical effects of the Victorines' own practices of reading (*lectio*). That is, each commentary produced by the Victorines is itself a product of a reading of sacred literature, along the lines of the interpretive "disciplines" Hugh lays out. Though the school produced a variety of commentaries, and each Victorine had their own proclivities for how to read (Andrew reading with a historical-literal method; Richard and Thomas Gallus, with spiritual methods), this coherent body of literature fulfills the vision laid out by the school's premier pedagogue in the *Didascalicon*.

Despite this fact, Hugh had reservations about the idea of "commentary" itself. He treats the term among a series of etymologies (drawn from Isidore of Seville) on terms related to reading. Isidore had described two possible origins of the term *commentaria*. It came either from *cum mente* ('with the mind') or *comminiscor* ('to devise by careful thought'). These both suggest, Isidore writes, how *commentaria* are interpretations (*interpretationes*) of sacred literature. Hugh responds, "Some say that the word 'comments' or 'commentary' (*commenta*) should be applied only to the books of the pagans, whereas 'expositions' (*expositores*) should be reserved for divine writings."³⁸ That is, while Hugh was comfortable with the project of writing commentaries, he preferred to give them a name that denoted less forcefully the idea that the commentator 'devised' something in interpreting the text. Indeed, the Victorines generally, Thomas Gallus included, referred to their commentaries as expositions (*expositiones*) and explanations (*explanationes*).

³⁸ Ibid., IV.16.94 (Trans. Harkins, 149).

Despite Hugh's reservation in this regard, he also affirmed that writing expository works on sacred literature was a never ending task requiring effort from the reader. In the same section where he describes how reading (*lectio*) is a necessary step toward meditation, prayer, operation, and finally contemplation (*contemplatio*), he describes the goal of this process in the following way:

You see, then, how perfection (*perfectio*) runs up to meet those who advance upward through these stages, so that the person who remains below cannot be perfect. Our objective, therefore, should always be to ascend, but because the instability of our present life is so great that we cannot remain in one place, we are often compelled to look back at stages that we have completed, and, so that we might not fall from the stage we currently occupy, we from time to time repeat the stages through which we have already advanced.... He who has insufficient confidence in his own judgement consults his reading material. And so it happens that, although it is always our desire to ascend, nevertheless we sometimes need to descend...³⁹

This passage nicely depicts the situation in which Hugh imagines the processes of reading and interpreting sacred literature. It should now be clear that, for Hugh, reading was a means to contemplation and Christian perfection. Christian perfection or the restoration of the soul, however, is an elusive goal, which requires that the reader turn back again and again (to descend) to sacred literature. The task of reading is never complete in this life, as one can never have confidence that they have read the Word in its entirety. As we will see, this instinct to descend from contemplation in order to further

³⁹ Ibid., VI.9.110 (Trans. Harkins, 162): "Vides igitur quomodo per hos gradus ascendentibus perfectio occurrit, ut qui infra remanserit perfectus esse non possit. Propositum ergo nobis debet esse semper ascendere, sed, quoniam tanta est mutabilitas uite nostre, ut in eodem stare non possimus, cogimur sepe ad transacta respicere, et, ne amittamus illud in quo sumus, repetimus quandoque quod transiuimus. Verbi gratia: qui in opere strenuus est, orat ne deficiat; qui precibus insistit, ne orando offendat, meditatur quid orandum sit; et qui aliquando in proprio consilio minus confidit, lectionem consulit. Et sic euenit, ut, cum ascendere semper nobis sit uoluntas, descendere tamen aliquando nos cogat necessitas..."

perfect one's relationship to Christ or the Word will be emphasized to a much greater extent in the religious renewal movements of the 13th century, to which we now turn.

II. James of Vitry: Experiencing the Word

While we can learn much about Gallus's project from the considerable corpus of the "venerable teacher master Hugh" (as Gallus called him), there are two limitations to thinking of Hugh's pedagogical program as the context for Gallus's writings. First, Hugh wrote nearly a century before Gallus composed his commentaries. The intervening period saw profound changes in religious life that were still occurring as Gallus wrote. Scholars have referred to the period from the late 12th to early 13th centuries as a time of a "new religious movement" and a "new mysticism."⁴⁰ If Gallus drew on Hugh, it was as a theological resource to address issues arising in the 13th century. Second and relatedly, Hugh's writings are pedagogical and contemplative, reflecting the understanding of Christian perfection that emerged from the school's 12th-century reforms of both education and religious life. While Gallus's commentaries are likewise texts produced for a classroom and directed toward contemplation, Gallus lived in a world where the understanding of Christian perfection was changing rapidly. Put simply, in the new religious movements of the 13th century, the scene of Christian perfection was gradually shifting outside the schoolroom and the cloister to the street. That is, writing in the early

⁴⁰ Herbert Grundmann advanced the idea of the continuity of continental religious movements in both religious orders and heretical sects in the late 12th and early 13th centuries in his classic *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*. McGinn coins the term "new mysticism," tying it to the "new religious movement," and outlines its features in *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 12-30.

13th century in Vercelli, Gallus would have witnessed a reordering of religious (and semi-religious) life to focus more on action than contemplation.⁴¹

In order to unpack these developments and situate Gallus within the changing religious world of his time, this section looks at some of the writings of James of Vitry. There are a number of reasons James's writings provide critical context to Gallus's commentaries. James (c.1160/70-1240) was a contemporary of Gallus (d.1246), and also an Augustinian canon. He was educated at the University of Paris, and would have been in the city at the same time as Gallus. In Paris, both canons would have learned to think of the careful study of sacred literature as central to Christian perfection. Finally, both eventually left Paris to pursue their ministries, spending considerable time in Italy. There are few other writers who share so much with Gallus.

In other ways, James's writings differ from Gallus's, providing an illuminating, complementary perspective. As this study shows, Gallus has his gaze consistently fixed on sacred literature, and while his commentaries no doubt emerge out of the pedagogical and contemplative needs of his community in Vercelli, his scholarly labor was text-driven.⁴² James would travel much further than Gallus, becoming the bishop of Acre in the crusader states and eventually cardinal outside of Rome. These journeys, along with time spent among the communities of semi-religious lay women in the Low Countries known as the beguines, made him the foremost observer and chronicler of the new

⁴¹ It is best to interpret Gallus as coming down where Richard of St. Victor did in his "On the Four Degrees of Violent Love." The real goal of Christian perfection is contemplation that becomes fruitful in action. See Hollywood, "Love of Neighbor and Love of God," in *Acute Melancholia*, 260.

⁴² This study will argue that for Gallus, to keep one's gaze on sacred literature is to remain fixed on the eternal Word, however, so, while Gallus is not an observer of the religious developments of his day in the manner of James, there is a certain continuity to the self-understandings of their works provided by the Word.

religious fervor. His writings—letters, *vitae*, histories, and sermons—recount his impressions of the religious and semi-religious lives of Humiliati, beguines, penitents, Franciscans, heretics, hermits, prelates, and crusaders, as well as the canons of St. Victor. For this reason, James offers an outward-looking perspective of an Augustinian canon into the religious change of the period. In constructing a context for Gallus's writings, James's cultural commentary—with its account of religious life and practice in the 13th century—adds to and updates the picture of Hugh's intellectual and pedagogical framework.

In this section, I use James's writings as a lens to examine theological developments in two areas related to religious life: Christian perfection and Christology. We will see that while James was open to the new religious enthusiasm for action, he advocated a continued appreciation of many contemplative ideals articulated by Hugh and common to the Augustinian canons. In the eyes of Gallus's contemporary, it was important to discern the work being performed by the Word among these new religious, affirming it but also situating it within a tradition of disciplined study and practice that connected one to creation and history more broadly. What James noticed and embraced in the new religious movements was twofold: 1) an emphasis on action and apostolicity as the key to Christian perfection, and 2) a more radically incarnationist Christology, which placed the suffering and sacrificing Savior at the center of religious endeavor. Appreciating what James experienced and how he reacted to it, helps us to understand Gallus's own accounts of Christology and Christian perfection, resolutely Dionysian and Victorine, but situated within this new milieu.

James's time in Paris instilled in him the view of Christian perfection characteristic also of Hugh: those who take up a religious life should devote themselves to disciplined study or reading (*lectio*) in order to achieve contemplation (*contemplatio*). Though the emerging universities and the monastic schools were undergoing transformations, they shared a common goal—knowing God. That is, though the 12th-century Renaissance and the early 13th-century arrival of a fuller Aristotelian corpus reshaped intellectual life in Paris, James and Gallus both learned there that reading and study were foundational for contemplation. This instinct never left James, even as he began to admire new forms of religious life that downplayed study and contemplation in favor of action. For instance, the following passage, from a sermon to Franciscan brothers, shows that James tried to persuade the new order to incorporate some established, proven discipline:

Some, miserable and senseless, seeking an excuse for their laziness, say that they should not study, but that it is better for them to remain brothers in the humility of their simplicity, because knowledge puffs up and much learning makes them foolish. To them we can respond that the other virtues can also occasionally make one proud. In fact, without charity, none of them are profitable, but for most are an obstacle. For if they disdain to learn and fill themselves with the words of Scripture, how will they be able to so ruminate?⁴³

There is a subtext here that can be discerned about this new order to whom James preached: the rush to action, though admirable, was not without its risks. What had James seen among the Franciscans (and perhaps other new religious movements) that leads him

⁴³ Sermo Primus ad Fratres Minores, 121 (Trans. Armstrong, et al., in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, 587-8): “Quidem transmieri et vecordes, pigritiae suae solatium quaerentes, dicunt, quod non oportet studere, sed securius est quod maneant Fratres in suae simplicitatis humilitate, eo quod scientia inflat, et multae litterae faciunt insanire. Quibus respondemus, quod aliae virtutes occasionaliter aliquando faciunt superbire. Non enim absque caritate prosunt, sed plerumque obstant. Si autem contemnant addiscere et verba Scripturarum glutire, quomodo poterunt ruminare.”

to this exhortation toward the careful and sustained study of Scripture? We can follow the course of James's writings chronologically to get some sense of the changing religious landscape he observed. In the following sub-section, I show that the emphasis in the understanding of Christian perfection was shifting from contemplation and study to action and sacrifice. In the next, I show that these changing models of Christian perfection were related to a rethinking of Christology, with a greater focus on the suffering and sacrificing Savior.

A. Perfection in Action: Beguines and Crusaders

Towards the end of his studies in Paris, James began to hear miraculous stories about holy women (*mulieres sanctae*) in the diocese of Liège. Curious about the tales of their holiness, he travelled there, made friends with Marie d'Oignies, and joined the Augustinian canons in 1211. The *Life of Marie*, which he wrote after her death in 1213, gives us the earliest glimpse into the beguine movement. The women who came to be known as beguines were semi-religious laywomen (without a rule or permanent vows) living in independent communities and were at the forefront of the new religious movement.⁴⁴ James's depictions of Marie and beguine life are remarkable for many reasons, but they are especially important for revealing how innovations upon traditional religious life were occurring before anyone recognized a "new religious movement." In the *Life of Marie* James paints a vivid picture of the movement as experienced by an Augustinian canon. He writes, "we will therefore report in large part what we have seen

⁴⁴ Recent decades have seen a proliferation of literature on the beguines. See, for example, two important studies: Simons, *Cities of Ladies*; and Hollywood, *Soul as Virgin Wife*.

and known from experience.”⁴⁵ James’s *Life of Marie* can be read as a first chapter in his lifelong experience of the Word’s action in the new religious movements.

James’s hagiography of Marie casts the beguines as followers of Christ in suffering and sacrifice. These women from well-to-do families, James relates, “preferred to endure distress and poverty” and were often reproved for it by relatives.⁴⁶ James advises each “handmaid of Christ” to respond to the ridicule by endeavoring “to put aside worldly joy and honor, to approach the persecutions of the Cross with your Christ, the Bridegroom.”⁴⁷ The sacrifice of familial relations among the beguines was for the benefit of favor found with Christ. James describes the women as “wasting away with such an intimate and wondrous state of love in God,” often becoming physically sick thanks to their devotion.⁴⁸ This lovesickness was desired among the beguines, like Marie, who “chastised her body and placed it in servitude... imitating the fortitude of the Lord.”⁴⁹ Throughout the *Life of Marie*, James depicts visceral and corporeal suffering as the chief

⁴⁵ *Life of Marie*, 25: “Nos igitur que vidimus et novimus et ex magna parte per experientiam didicimus.” Hollywood has argued for the necessity of recognizing the distinction between men’s perceptions and prescriptions for women and women’s self-understanding in hagiographical literature written by men about women. See, for instance, “Beatrice of Nazareth and her Hagiographer” in *Acute Melancholia*. Throughout this section, I am trying to reproduce James’s experience, which is as much a prescriptive ideal as record of a perception.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 17: “licet parentes earum multis divitiis habundarent, ipse tamen, obliviscentes populum suum et domum patris sui.”

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 31: “Ne timeas, ancilla Christi, postposito tibi gaudio et honore seculari ad crucis contumelias cum Christo tuo sponte accedere.”

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 20: “Aliquas etiam vidisti mulieres tam speciali et mirabili amoris in deum affectione resolutas, ut pre desiderio languerent nec a lecto per multo sannos nisi raro surgere possent.”

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 88: “Adeo enim corpus castigaverat et in servitatem redegerat, quod ad nutum suum corpus spiritui obediebat, in nullo contradicens, nulla simulatione se excusans, nec contra dominum murmurabat, sed domini sui fortitudinem imitando nunquam ignavia torpebat, nunquam vel raro labore deficiebat.”

means to follow or imitate Christ. Suffering, whether social or physical, was a reliable way to Christian perfection, because it identified one with Christ.

Indeed, James consistently casts Marie as a follower, lover, and imitator of Christ—in effect, an *alter Christus*.⁵⁰ At times, Marie’s desire to know and imitate Christ leads her to spectacular feats. Upon considering the nourishment provided by the “meat” of the Pascal Lamb in the Eucharist, James reports, Marie cut a large piece of her own flesh with a knife and buried it in the ground. “Wounded by charity and invigorated by the wounds of Christ, [she] neglected the wounds of her own body.”⁵¹ Yet Marie’s imitation of the suffering and sacrifice of Christ not only benefitted herself, but it gave her the ability to perform miracles in the service of others. In one anecdote, a suffering and possessed young woman comes to Marie. After Marie fasts and prays for weeks, she is able to drive the spirit out of the woman and even send it back to hell.⁵² That is, James depicts Marie as having so fully taken up the action of Christ, that she shares a number of features of his earthly ministry and suffering.

James repeated the themes of active suffering and sacrifice from the *Life of Marie* in his later writings reflecting on his observations of other religious and semi-religious communities. Upon finishing his studies in Paris, he quickly became a preacher of crusade, first in 1213 against the Albigensians in southern France, later in 1215 for the Fifth Crusade to the Holy Land. In James’s crusading sermons, we also see evidence, not

⁵⁰ In a forthcoming article by Hollywood and Smith on “Christology” in the *Oxford Handbook to Mystical Theology*, the authors show how various figures associated with the new religious movements realized or theorized the imitation of Christ in terms of becoming an *alter Christus*.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 36-7: “...caritate vulnerata et Christi vulneribus vegetata proprii corporis contempsit vulnera.”

⁵² *Ibid.*, 46-7.

surprisingly, of the view that Christian perfection was a matter of sacrifice. Like Marie and the beguines, the sacrifice of the crusaders, those signed with the cross (*crucesignati*), made them followers or imitators of Christ. “They are greatly honored [who] wear the same garments that their king wore and [who] are signed with the same mark.”⁵³ James frequently exhorts these men to “take the cross (*assumere crucem*),” sacrificing themselves as Christ did.⁵⁴

His sermons on crusade appeal to familial imagery and tie Christ’s sacrifice to the crusader’s own sacrifice for their loved ones. He encourages his hearers to “offer oneself (*se offerere*)” for one’s family. Participating in crusade would literally benefit for the eternal repose of one’s loved one, not just oneself.⁵⁵ In one vivid image, James describes how Christ was like a tiger who throws himself upon the hunter’s spear rather than allowing his cub to be harmed.⁵⁶ Just as with the beguines, James emphasizes the suffering and sacrifice performed by Christ, and the expectation that Christian perfection comes through following or imitating the example set by Christ. In fact, James says, Christ’s flesh is like the glass of a lamp. In it one can recognize their own weakness as “in the mirror of the cross (*in crucis speculo*).”⁵⁷ That is, the sermons encourage James’s hearers to mentally compare their lives to Christ’s, to consider whether they might share

⁵³ Sermon 1 in Maier, ed. *Crusade Propaganda and Ideology: Model Sermons for the Preaching of the Cross*, 88-9: “Magnum honorem reputantes, si eisdem vestibus induantur, quibus rex eorum est indutus, et si eodem caractere insignantur.”

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Sermon 2, 104-5, 108-9.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 112-3.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 108-9.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Sermon 1, 84-5.

in the suffering and sacrificing he has done. “For this reason, those who do not feel the wound of the head cannot be called true limbs of Christ.”⁵⁸

James’s crusading sermons show him as not only an observer, but an advocate for the new religious movement’s emphasis on active suffering and sacrifice in imitation of Christ. Much of the impetus for action came from a more critical interrogation of the flesh of Christ, suffering and mortal. Before James’s consecration as bishop, he relates that he went to Rome in 1216, only to find Pope Innocent III had died. Amidst the turmoil surrounding the election of a new pope, he came upon the body in repose. He recounts that in a moment of solitary reflection he realized “how fleeting and empty is the deceitful glory of this world.”⁵⁹ Death, suffering, and weakness were a part of life. The ideal of Christian perfection, James seems to advocate, is in making one’s suffering and death a sacrifice on the model of Christ. Women and men in the new religious movements increasingly saw Christian perfection as a matter of active and engaged participation in the ministry, suffering, and death of Christ, rather than a life of contemplation at a remove from the world.

B. The Franciscans and Christ the Suffering Savior

Perhaps no figure is more representative of the new religious movement’s fervor for imitation of Christ in suffering than Francis of Assisi. James also provides a perspective on Francis and the Franciscans. These are perhaps the most important for us, not only because of Gallus’s geographical proximity to the Franciscans, but because we

⁵⁸ Ibid., 90-1: “Unde vere Christi membra dici nequeunt qui capitis lesionem non sentiunt.”

⁵⁹ Letter 1 (1216) in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, 578.

know that Gallus had close connections to early Franciscans like Anthony of Padua, and that the Franciscans even moved their *studium generale* to Vercelli during Gallus's tenure as abbot at Sant'Andrea. Thus, James's description of and reaction to the Franciscans is likely the closest approximation we can get to Gallus's own experience of the order. Together, James and Gallus represent some of the earliest and closest connections between the Augustinian canons and the first Franciscans, long before the Order's seventh minister general Bonaventure adopts Dionysian hierarchical theology from the works of Gallus. In James we have a perspective likely shared by Gallus as well: the Franciscans were to be admired for their active way of life, but they should be careful to adopt the Augustinian canons' attention to reading and contemplation as well.

In a sermon he preached to the "Lesser Brothers," James playfully offers the images of locusts and lizards (humble species) to depict contemplative and active brothers, respectively, both important in the religious ecosystem (which also included ant-like lay brothers and rabbit-like infirm brothers). Contemplatives, he says, are like locusts in "the leap they make in contemplation and the flight of their sublime way of life."⁶⁰ Through "meditating (*meditando*), reading (*legendo*), and praying (*orando*)," contemplatives are always seeking for higher things, "elevating themselves (*se elevant*)" with two wings, as it were, one of reason and one of understanding.⁶¹ In this playful image, we see an account of regular life in harmony with that laid out by Hugh above. This is the life of a regular canon seeking contemplation through reading and prayer.

⁶⁰ Sermo Primus ad Fratres Minores, 116 (Trans. Armstrong, et al., in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, 587): "Qui locustis comparantur propter saltum contemplationis et volatum sublimis conversationis."

⁶¹ Ibid.

The active brothers remained closer to the ground. They “go out to preach and actively strive through their works for the salvation of their neighbors.”⁶² The Franciscans then are like lizards, who “support themselves by their hands... yet dwell in the house of the heavenly king.” Although they do not make flight through the use of wings, they nevertheless “have their hearts in their heavenly dwellings and yet labor for the reward of eternal life.”⁶³ This is a careful description of the active way of life modelled on Francis’s ministry. Christian perfection was not a matter of contemplative ascent from the world, but of active engagement with the world in imitation of Christ. James’s impressions are largely harmonious with how the early Franciscans saw themselves, although, as we will see, James also wanted them to take some clues from the proven practice of contemplation through study.⁶⁴

James’s *Historia Occidentalis*, written in the early 1220s, is an important source for impressions of the early Franciscans. He records there that, while staying with the crusader armies in Egypt, he met Francis himself when Francis came to preach “the faith

⁶² Ibid.: “Alli vero ad praedicandum exeunt et operibus active proximorum salutem intendunt.”

⁶³ Ibid.: “Hi etsi manibus more *stellionis* nitantur, ipsi tamen in domibus superni regis commorantur, semper in coelestibus mansionibus corda habentes et pro praemio vitae aeternae laborantes.”

⁶⁴ What James does not note about the metaphor of these humble animals is that lizards often eat locusts. There are hints in his writings that the new religious order was attracting converts from among the canons regular. For instance, upon describing Francis’s preaching to the Sultan in Egypt, he states frankly that his group was having trouble holding on to their people because of the Franciscans. Letter 6 (1220) in *Francis of Assisi*, 580-1. In the *Historia Occidentalis* he is more circumspect, attributing the Franciscans’ success to their willingness to take almost any converts, “except those bound to marriage or to another Order. Such men they do not wish to nor should they accept, as is right, without the consent of their wives or religious superiors,” *Francis of Assisi*, 583. If such a movement from order to order was so strictly regulated, would James have written this? James’s critique is consistently couched in praise, but he was not unreservedly enthusiastic about the active life—at least not for these religious.

of Christ” to the Sultan and his followers. James admired these soldiers of Christ who “do not cease to express their divine praises and holy exhortations.”⁶⁵ But the Franciscans were not just preachers like the Augustinian canons, James insists. They represented a new order and new rule. Or, rather, “if we consider the form and condition of the primitive Church, the Lord has not so much added a new way of living as renewed an old one.”⁶⁶

This new order, on the model of the primitive Church, devoted themselves to poverty, humility, and action. “They diligently strive to renew in themselves the way of life of the primitive Church, its poverty and humility... They renounce everything they possess; they deny themselves and take up their cross.”⁶⁷ “This is the religious way of life of the true poor of the Crucified One and the order of preachers whom we call the Lesser Brothers.”⁶⁸ These brothers not only lived humbly, James insists, but they were constantly preaching. “The Lord Pope confirmed their Rule and gave them authority to preach at any church they came to, although out of reverence having first obtained the consent of the local prelates.”⁶⁹ In general, James’s depictions of the Franciscans in *Historia Occidentalis* emphasizes their apostolic way of life and the authority granted to it by the papacy. That is, James’s story situates the Franciscans within the history of the Word’s saving actions.

⁶⁵ *Historia Occidentalis*, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, 585.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 582.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 583.

In his letters, James was franker in his observations and reservations about the order. On the one hand, active movements outside the sphere of the prelates were rejuvenating the Church. He describes the *Humiliati* in Milan the following way in 1216:

I came to the city of Milan, which is a cesspool of heretics. I remained there for some days and preached the Word of God. In the whole city I scarcely found anyone who opposed the heretics, except for certain holy men and religious women... They are called *Humiliati*. They have renounced all their goods and have gathered together in various places, *living by the works of their hands*. They frequently preach the Word of God and gladly listen to it, remaining perfectly founded (*perfecti et stabiles*) in the faith and productive (*efficacies*) in good deeds.⁷⁰

That is, among the *Humiliati*, as among the beguines, crusaders, and Franciscans, James noticed an apostolic fervor and a desire to live a life of preaching, poverty, and suffering on the model of the Gospel narrative. He frequently casts this new fervor as a response to the deficiencies of the prelates. “I believe, however, that the Lord desires to save many souls before the end of our world through such simple and poor men in order to put shame to our prelates, who are like dumb dogs not able to bark.”⁷¹ As we saw in the Introduction, Gallus too took at least one occasion to exhort prelates to a more heavenly lifestyle. James’s concern is with both their way of life and the fact that they fail in their call to preach—they are like dogs who do not bark.

⁷⁰ Epistola 1, 72-3 (Trans. Armstrong et al., in *Francis of Assisi*, 578): “Post hoc vero veni in civitatem quondam, Mediolanensem scilicet, que fovea est hereticorum, ubi per aliquot dies mansi et verbum dei in aliquibus locis predicavi. Vix autem invenitur in tota civitate qui resistat hereticis, exceptis quibusdam sanctis hominibus et religiosis mulieribus... *Humiliati* vocantur; *hii sunt, qui omnia pro Christo reliquentes in locis diversis congregantur, de labore manuum suarum vivunt, verbum dei frequenter predicant et libenter audiunt, in fide perfecti et stabiles, in operibus efficacies.*”

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 76 (Trans. Armstrong et al., in *Francis of Assisi*, 580): “Credo autem quod in opprobrium prelatorum, qui *quasi canes sunt muti non valentes latrare*, dominus per huiusmodi simplices et pauperes homines multas animas ante finem mundi vult salvare.”

However, James's enthusiasm for the new active life is qualified, as is clear especially in his assessment of the Franciscans in a letter written to confidants in 1220.

This Order [of Lesser Brothers] is multiplying rapidly throughout the world, because it expressly imitates the pattern of the primitive Church and the life of the apostles in everything. But to our way of thinking, this Order is quite risky, because it sends out two by two throughout the world, not only formed religious (*perfecti*), but also immature young men (*iuvenes et imperfecti*), who should first be tested and subjected to conventual discipline for a time.⁷²

That is, James saw in the new religious movement an admirable religious zeal, but was concerned about the lack of foundational training. Combined with his description of contemplative locusts and active lizards seen above, we can conclude that James's estimation of the Franciscans was more ambivalent than he sometimes lets on. James advocated for the Franciscans to take up the practice of ordered reading and study leading to contemplation of the Word, the vision of Christian perfection common to educated Augustinian canons.

To conclude, James's writings give us a good picture of the religious ecosystem in the early 13th century, as seen by an Augustinian canon. The new active life, one whose justification was found in the apostolic model, sought to imitate Christ through suffering, sacrifice, and poverty. At least at this early stage, it placed little emphasis on study or reading and contemplation, though James exhibits an early attempt to harmonize these impulses. Inseparable from this new (or rather, renewed) view of Christian perfection was

⁷² Epistola 6, 131-2 (Trans. Armstrong et al., in *Francis of Assisi*, 580-1): "Domnus Reinerus, prior sancti Michaelis, tradidit se religioni Fratrum Minorum, que religio valde multiplicatur per univrsium mundum eo, quod expresse imitantur formam primitive ecclesie et vitam apostolorum. Hec tamen religio valde periculosa nobis videtur eo, quod non solum perfecti, sed etiam iuvenes et imperfecti, qui sub conventuali disciplina aliquanto tempore artari et probari debuissent, per univrsium mundum bini et bini dividuntur."

a more radically incarnationist Christology. Jesus was less the cosmic principle of creation and history than the suffering and sacrificing Savior.

III. Conclusion: “The Last of the Great Victorines”

Thomas Gallus has been called “the last of the great Victorines,” a designation that rightly affirms his theological accomplishments, but also admits that the 12th-century school of St. Victor, a center of religious life and theological education, was subsumed by developments in the 13th century. Even as the writings of the Victorines would remain influential, the pedagogical programs and contemplative doctrines they laid out would be translated and adapted to communities very different from the school itself—both the new universities and the new religious and semi-religious communities, some officially recognized and others not. That is, Gallus is truly the last representative of a particular Victorine brand of pedagogy and contemplation coming from the school itself.

Gallus’s commentaries belong to both the long 12th century and early 13th century. As the rest of this study will show, Gallus was more thoroughly Victorine than is sometimes appreciated, especially when it comes to his instincts toward sacred literature—its proper reading and interpretation. This makes him an atypical figure, a 13th-century Victorine. Unfortunately, we have little evidence of the school after the 12th century, so Gallus stands alone representing it at this late date. His careful study of the Dionysian corpus and the Song of Songs may at first appear removed from the issues raised in the cultural and religious context of the 13th century. He makes no mention of the new religious movements around Vercelli, and, although McGinn situates him among the “new mysticism” and points to his influence on Bonaventure, scholars generally have

not considered him among the earlier stage of the “new religious movement” experienced by James of Vitry.

McGinn was right, however, to place Gallus in the 13th century, and not only to maintain chronological accuracy. As we will see, Gallus adapts traditional Victorine theology (especially its cosmic Christology) to this new context, offering an account of Jesus Christ and Christian perfection that is Dionysian and Victorine, marking a contrast with the developments around him. Before later Franciscans like Bonaventure ever tried to harmonize the radically incarnationist Christology of Francis and his early followers with a traditional cosmic Christology, Gallus was offering a modification of cosmic Christology that could be compelling within his own religious milieu. Rather than focus on the incarnation and human suffering of Jesus, Gallus prefers Christ as a cosmic principle, the Word itself. Yet, unlike his 12th-century masters, Gallus casts the life of reading (*lectio*) and contemplation (*contemplatio*) as a way of experiencing and being assimilated to the Word. This concern to experience union with and be transformed by the Word is continuous with the affective fervor of these new religious movements. That is, Gallus offers a 13th-century version of Victorine Christology and Christian perfection. Rather than describing reading’s effects as restoring the image of God in the soul, Gallus’s commentaries reform and reorder one’s entire experience (*experientia*).

Chapter 2: The *Corpus Dionysiicum*

Thomas Gallus had no easy time interpreting the *Corpus Dionysiicum* (*CD*), because the corpus does not give itself for easy understanding. The bulk of Gallus's scholarly work consisted of interpreting (*explanatio*) and expounding (*expositio*) the *CD*, tasks in which he was engaged for 20 years (he writes, "with such vigilance! with such labor!"¹). Among recent interpreters of the *CD*, estimations of Gallus's "affective" or "experiential" interpretation have been mixed. Does Gallus forcefully impose the frame of the Song of Songs onto the corpus, mucking it up with *affectus*, *amor*, and *experientia*?² The charge assumes that the corpus is conceptually coherent, yet the

¹ Quoted in Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 218.

² The criticism is aptly summed up in Turner's characterization of Gallus's glosses as "affectivist accretion." "How to Read Pseudo-Denys Today?" 431. That is, the charge has been twofold: 1) Gallus's experiential mysticism is anti-intellectual (esteeming affection over intellection); and, 2) his reading of the *CD* fails to expedit its meaning (instead, it is foreign "accretion").

On the first criticism, Turner recognizes that Gallus is not strictly anti-intellectual. However, he posits a historical link between Gallus's affective or experiential reading of the *CD* and the modern critical distinction between, on the one hand, mystical experience and, on the other hand, language and liturgy. Turner argues that Gallus's experientialism incites a late medieval fervor for feelings which *transcend* or leave behind language and liturgy. This is at odds with the Christian Neoplatonism that saw the speculative intuition of the divine as intimately related to language, symbol, and ritual. However, a closer examination shows that Gallusian experientialism might be a tool for integrating, rather than rending the two. *Experientia* (like the best theorizing of "experience" today) does not necessarily betoken autonomous individualism or removal from one's socio-linguistic context, even as it constructs a site where the operations of human effort and divine grace meet. For Gallus, meaning (or "the spirit") is *given to* the individual within the particular situation inscribed by socio-linguistic context and therefore exceeds the symbolic ("the letter"). Boyd Taylor Coolman, in *Knowledge, Love, and Ecstasy in the Theology of Thomas Gallus*, has definitively put to rest the charge that Gallus is "anti-intellectual," showing how Gallus's theology integrates and exalts both affect and intellect in a sophisticated manner.

Yet the second criticism, that Gallus fails to interpret well the basic theological vision of the *CD*, remains. My own reading is closer to that of McGinn, who says, "Gallus's affective Dionysianism is based on a misreading, though one not without foundation in the *corpus dionysiicum*." "Thomas Gallus and Dionysian Mysticism," 88.

broader history of its reception suggests it resists interpretive closure.³ This chapter traces in the *CD* three of what I will call its “conceptual apertures,” untidy features of the corpus that have been at times cleaned up or sutured in contemporary interpretations of it.⁴ I perform a reading of the *CD* that shows just how ambiguous are its claims about three interrelated issues: God, theological language, and the goal of mystical theology. Each issue represents an opening in the corpus, a site of discursive tension that leaves the

It is the burden of this chapter and Chapter 4 to suggest that even McGinn’s qualified characterization of Gallus’s interpretation as a “misreading” is unwarranted. The *CD* begs the kind of reading Gallus gives.

³ At least since John of Scythopolis in the generation after its writing, it has, for the greater part of its history, circulated alongside a commentary of some form. In the West, Gallus’s own *Extractio* on the corpus circulated with John Sarracen’s translation in the standard Parisian version for many years. On the Paris edition, see Dondaine, *Le corpus dionysien de l’université de Paris au XIIIe siècle*, cited in Lawell, “Thomas Gallus’ Method as Dionysian Commentator,” 91. This suggests that from the very beginning, the *CD*, especially the intention of its author, was obscure.

More recent scholarly monographs on the *CD* reveal a range of interpretive approaches, and there is disagreement about the best scholarly frame for the corpus. Just consider the following: Golitzin, *Mystagogy: A Monastic Reading of Dionysius Areopagita*; Knepper, *Negating Negation: Against the Apophatic Abandonment of the Dionysian Corpus*; Perl, *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*; Stang, *Apophysis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite: ‘No Longer I’*. Each of these works compellingly frames the corpus, reading it through the interpretive lenses of, respectively, late ancient liturgical asceticism, participatory metaphysics, Neoplatonism, and the Pauline corpus.

⁴ I admit that the language of “conceptual aperture” is awkward. What I mean to convey is that these ambiguities in the *CD* are dialectically wrought openings in which the text does not cohere, but which invite the reader to see, as it were, through the contradictory formulations to a new insight about God, language, and the goal of mystical theology. In turn, the act of interpreting such a work as the *CD* should make knowable a discursive logic unfamiliar to much contemporary thought. Most importantly, the hasty foreclosing of these tensions makes it impossible to appreciate Gallus’s interpretive moves, especially the reasoning behind the intertextual reference to the Song of Songs.

When we turn to Gallus’s interpretation of the *CD* in later chapters, the applicability of the term will become even more apparent. The Vulgate translation of the Song includes the following, which Gallus takes to be about the eternal Word itself: “behold, he stands behind our wall / looking in through the windows / watching through the lattices / and my beloved speaks to me” (2:9b-10a). Also, about the soul, “my dove in the apertures (*foraminibus*) of the rock / in the hollow of the wall / show me your face” (2:14a). Trans. adapted from Matter, *Voice of My Beloved*.

reader without the possibility of a final rendering of the *CD* with coherent and methodologically manipulatable propositional claims. Thus, my reading of the *CD* suggests that it is more theological literature than theological system.⁵

This reading thus builds upon existing work on the *CD* that highlights its constitutive ambiguities, and is indebted to Bernard McGinn's characterization of Dionysian mysticism as "dialectical."⁶ The very variety of compelling contemporary approaches to these issues reveals just how ambiguous the corpus actually is. Is Dionysius's God known or unknown? Immanent or transcendent? Present or absent? Does theological language (what Dionysius calls "hymning") somehow describe or refer to God, or does all language fail to do so? If it succeeds as reference, how? If not, what *does* it do? Is knowledge of God, if a "knowledge" at all, mediated or immediate? Does Dionysius champion excessive apophaticism or knowledge by participation? It can depend on who you ask. Yet the *CD* itself resists the resolution of any of these questions, bearing them instead as productive and alluring tensions.

⁵ Needless to say, I reject the idea that such a literary conceit as dialectical tension is the kind of thing possible only to contemporary (postmodern) writers. A premodern work like the *CD* can, as I will show, exhibit just as much stylistic care. Given Dionysius's concern with the mechanisms of scriptural and liturgical symbols, including their capacity to occlude as much as to reveal, this should not come as a surprise.

⁶ *The Foundations of Mysticism*, 157-182. See also Ilaria Ramelli's use of the same language, "The Divine as Inaccessible Object of Knowledge in Ancient Platonism: A common Philosophical Pattern Across Religious Traditions," 168. The *CD* proffers a number of tensions, but unlike the terms 'contradictions' or 'paradoxes,' McGinn's "dialectical" description suggests the *productive* character of these tensions. While some have noted the use of particular dialectical tensions in the *CD* (especially between God's transcendence and immanence), recent scholarship seems to be moving towards a thorough consensus on the pervasiveness of this feature across the corpus. For instance, Bernard Blankenhorn: "The Areopagite's quasi-dialectical method prevents a resolution of the paradox between God's immanence and transcendence, affirmations, and negations." *The Mystery of Union with God*, 29.

This chapter describes the *CD*'s theology by exposing three sometimes overlooked features of the corpus: the prominent place that Good and Love take among the Divine Names; the central place of "hymning," "unfolding of symbols," and "anagogy" as the major discursive activities prescribed in the *CD*; and the special relations implied in mystical *union* as an *unknowing knowing*. For Dionysius, theological language (or liturgical symbol, for that matter) is not used to *refer to* the God "beyond being (ὑπερούσιος)," but to "hymn" or "celebrate" the God beyond being who, as providentially present, is best celebrated as Good and Love. Divine language, "theology," passed down by the "theologians" (authors of Scripture), has an *anagogic* (or uplifting) function that cannot be treated as a mode of linguistic reference because of the nature of its object.⁷ Underlying Dionysius's use and treatment of language is an implied goal: a union with God that is an assimilating encounter beyond intellect. We will encounter a few places in the *CD* where this intertwining of metaphysics, language, and mysticism comes into view.

In sum, this chapter introduces the reader to the *CD*, revealing and expounding its most ambiguous claims about God, language, and the goal of mystical theology. The *CD*'s conceptual apertures are themselves the result of Dionysius's engagement with various theological authorities, both Neoplatonic and Christian, and they brim with possibility for the *CD*'s reader. Though not aware of its late ancient, Neoplatonic provenance, Gallus was primarily concerned with the *CD*'s theology. Looking through

⁷ Scriptural and liturgical symbols, not creation itself, are anagogic, thanks to the "theologians'" experience of the God beyond being in creation, which gives them a special kind of insight. Despite its well-recognized debt to Neoplatonism's reasoning about symbols, the *CD* portrays Christian Scripture and liturgy as offering special access to the God beyond being. See below, 114-9.

these conceptual apertures, Gallus interpreted the *CD* intertextually, through the frame of the Song of Songs, Gallus's reading of which is the subject of Chapter 5. In Chapter 4, it will become clear that this is not an imposition on the *CD*, not "affectivist accretion," but a response to the *CD*'s most ambiguous claims—an attempt to maintain and hand down the wisdom received through these conceptual apertures. The primary claim I wish to advance in this chapter is that the way that theological language is imagined to work in the *CD* (or the mechanism of theological "hymning") is ambiguous, because of its divine object and mystical end.

As a preview of what lies ahead, these conceptual apertures can be described in brief. First, the *CD* consistently posits that the God beyond being (ὑπερούσιος) is providentially present to being, though, as God remains beyond being, God is also unintelligible even to rational or intellectual beings. Second, the "theologians" or writers of Scripture use theological language to veil and unveil the God beyond being. While theological symbols (σύμβολα) create the potential for *theophany* (θεοφάνεια), or God-manifestation, they simultaneously ensure that God remains *aphanous* (ἀφανής), or unrevealed. Finally, the goal of Dionysian mysticism, union with God, is both an unknowing (ἀγνωσία) and a knowing beyond intellect (γνώσις ὑπὲρ νοῦν). In what follows, I trace each of these dialectical tensions, noting where it is tempting to resolve them, and making possible an appreciation of the work they perform in the *CD*.

I. God: The Presence of the "Beyond Being"

What does the *CD* teach about God? There are two features of the *CD* that suggest that Dionysius's primary concern is to teach that God is "beyond being"

(ὑπερούσιος). First, in the work that most explicitly treats Dionysius’s doctrine of God, the *Divine Names* (*DN*), Dionysius invokes the “beyond-being-ness” (ὑπερουσιότης) of God at critical junctures in the text.⁸ *DN*’s central problematic is how we are to understand the various names of God handed down in Scripture, given that God is “beyond being” and “ineffable.” At the end of the final chapter, Dionysius has “unfolded” (ἀναπτύσσω) the various names of God given by Scripture. Now attending at last to the scriptural claim that God is both a Unity and a Trinity, he concludes that, in response to this mysterious affirmation, “we name the Deity, which is inexpressible to things that be, the Beyond-Being (τὴν ὑπερούσιον).”⁹ Although, following this *dénouement* of the *DN*, Dionysius claims that the “theologians” give more prestige to negations than affirmations about God, the fact that the “unfolding” of the divine names culminates with a final naming of God as “beyond being” suggests what a central teaching it is.¹⁰ This term is one derived from the exegesis of divine names in Scripture.

While ὑπερουσιότης shows up at critical junctures in the *DN*, the claim that God is “beyond being” is ubiquitous. Based on word count the *CD* is more concerned with this point than any other. The *CD* uses the terms “beyond being” and “beyond-being-ness” more frequently than more famous Dionysian terms like “good” (ἀγαθότης), “light”

⁸ Most importantly, as we will see, in addition to the passage cited just below, it also appears in the first few pages and at the transition from Chapter Four (on the names Good, Beauty, and Love) to Chapter Five (on the name Being).

⁹ DN 13.3. Citations of the *CD* are adapted from John Parker’s translation, *The Complete Works of Dionysius the Areopagite*. (*DN* = *Divine Names*; *MT* = *Mystical Theology*; *CH* = *Celestial Hierarchy*; *EH* = *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*).

¹⁰ Paul Rorem suggests that this final enjoining of negation gestures towards the *Mystical Theology*: “*The Divine Names* now gives way to *The Mystical Theology*... Although that terse essay both summarizes and climaxes the corpus, it would be difficult if not impossible to interpret it without the preparatory fuller exposition of *The Divine Names* and the other treatises...” *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 166.

(φῶς), “hierarchy” (ἱεραρχία), “unsaying” (ἀπόφασις), “knowledge” (γνῶσις), “participate” (μετέχω), “intellect/mind” (νοῦς), “order” (τάξις), “hymn/celebrate” (ὕμνῳ) and “principle” (ἀρχή). Only the terms “God” (θεός) and “power” (δύναμις) appear more often.¹¹ In addition, the *CD* is littered with the prefix ὑπερ- and the preposition ὑπέρ, so that it consistently directs its reader’s attention “beyond.” Given this lexical frequency, these terms deserve careful consideration. As we will see, how one understands these *hyper*-terms will influence their reading of the entire corpus.¹² What does it mean for God to be “beyond being”? And why does Dionysius insist so emphatically upon this claim? This teaching is an attempt to “unfold” scriptural speech about God by using forms of reasoning typical of late ancient Christian Platonism. The mutual imbrication of Christian and Neoplatonic thought in the *CD* makes it difficult to delimit the exact sense of the term.

For at least a century, scholarship on Dionysius has stressed the influence of the Neoplatonisms of Plotinus, Iamblichus, and Proclus on his writings.¹³ From what I can discern the noun “beyond-being-ness” (ὑπερουσιότης) is a neologism of Dionysius,¹⁴ but

¹¹ As will become clear, the chief distinction in Dionysius’s doctrine of God (θεός) is between God’s beyond-being-ness and God’s providential power (προνοητική δύναμις).

¹² This issue has been recently considered by Knepper, *Negating Negation*, 47-55, whose exposition of the ambiguity inherent in the Greek prefix *hyper*- helps to lay bear the *CD* on this issue. It was also noticed by Wolfson, who says that *hyper*-terms may “acquire the logical significance of negation, in the sense of exclusion from a universe of discourse.” “Negative Attributes in the Church Fathers and the Gnostic Basilides,” 138. See my rehearsal of Knepper’s analysis below, 55-57.

¹³ For a recent, brief review of this influence along with some “promising leads” towards understanding Dionysius’s pseudonymous presentation, see Stang, 26-40.

¹⁴ Dionysius was not afraid to coin a term—his most famous neologism is *hierarchy* (ἱεραρχία).

the notion can be traced from Plato, as we will see.¹⁵ Proclus is the first to use the adjective (ὑπερούσιος), but with Dionysius, “beyond-being-ness” has become a central doctrinal concept. According to the *CD*, this teaching is developed from a careful unfolding of Scripture and apostolic tradition, and goes hand-in-hand with the teaching that God is unintelligible. How does this notion develop? What are its chief features in Platonic writings before Dionysius? What features of Jewish and Christian thought foreshadow its use in the *CD*?

In this section, before treating the *CD* on the “beyond-being-ness” of God (and its corollary unintelligibility), I outline the contours of this teaching in Platonic, Jewish, and Christian writings preceding the *CD*.¹⁶ My aim is to sample the discursive milieu out of

¹⁵ It is tempting to treat this doctrine in Platonic, Jewish and Christian thought as equivalent to the claim that God or the First Principle is *transcendent*, a modern term resorted to in contemporary literature on the *CD*, even among those who are most careful to avoid the imposition of modern frames of interpretation upon it. Among others, Stang, *Apophysis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite*, 120-135, and Golitzin, *Mystagogy*, 59-101, appeal to the term *transcendence* to describe Dionysius’s doctrine of God. While Stang presents *transcendence* alongside *immanence*, Golitzin pairs it with the more Platonic term “presence,” mixing modern and late ancient terminology. Indeed, “presence” is implied already in the Platonic passage foundational for this doctrine. See below, 79. Although the necessary act of translating Dionysius’s thought for modern readers leads to these formulations (and I do not altogether avoid them here), I retain the more literal translations “beyond-being-ness” and “presence” as far as possible, in order to recall the *CD*’s Neoplatonic logic behind these terms. As I will show, “beyond-being-ness” was never thought apart from “presence” among Neoplatonists (as perhaps modern transcendence may be thought apart from immanence), even in Plotinus, who seems the most concerned to maintain the metaphysical purity of that Cause beyond being.

¹⁶ As a principle of selection, I have chosen four figures whose writings, 1) treat in some fashion the doctrine that God is beyond being or unintelligible; and, 2) are among those cited or alluded to the most often in the *CD*, as reported by the “Register” in the critical edition, *CD* II, 245-265.

The most curious omission resulting from this principle of selection is Iamblichus (c.240-325), who undoubtedly meets the second criterion, but not the first. It might be argued that Iamblichus was even more influential on the *CD*’s mystagogic theology than any of the figures selected for analysis here. Iamblichus’s arguments in favor of a theurgic ritual for access to the divine clearly influenced Dionysius’s sacramental or

which Dionysius's central and robust notion could arise, not to establish influence or suggest that any singular frame these earlier authors provide should be strictly applied to the *CD*.¹⁷ Rather, I briefly treat four major influences on the *CD* for two reasons. First, to showcase the mutual imbrication of Platonic, Jewish, and Christian religious thought in late antiquity.¹⁸ Second, to reveal how, by Dionysius's time, the doctrine that God was

liturgical thought (and, as we will see, by analogy, his thinking about language and interpretation). Yet Iamblichus's concern to defend theurgy ("divine work"), the means by which one *has* access to the divine, means he does not contribute substantially to the range of discursive formulations of the First Principle's unintelligibility or "beyond-being-ness." Indeed, he was wary of appearing to segregate the First Principle from "entities," writing in his *De Mysteriis*, "In fact, the truly real, and that which is essentially incorporeal, is everywhere that it wishes to be." To think otherwise,

...constitutes the ruination of sacred ritual and theurgical communion of gods with men, by banishing the presence of the higher classes of being outside the confines of the earth. For it amounts to nothing else but saying that the divine is set apart from the earthly realm, and that it does not mingle with divinity, and that this realm is bereft of divinity. (35-6)

Only seldom does Iamblichus appeal to something like beyond-being-ness and divine unintelligibility. Once he uses the stock Platonic terminology, "Good beyond being" (21). It is possible this notion is understated in *De Mysteriis* due to its concern with theurgy, but implicit in Iamblichus's thought. He writes, "Prior to the true beings and to the universal principles there is the one god, prior cause even of the first god and king, remaining unmoved in the singularity of his own unity. For no object of intellection is linked to him, nor anything else" (307). But he offers no development of this notion, which we will see is, for Dionysius, developed conceptually by the four figures here. I will point out the *CD*'s more substantive affinities with Iamblichean theurgical thought in the following two sections. See below, n121, n123. See also Stang, *Apophysis and Pseudonymity*, 105-114.

¹⁷ Besides the fact that this is beyond the scope of this project, the *CD* makes such an effort almost impossible, as it situates itself rhetorically in a historical context removed from what historical-critical scholarship has shown was its objective historical context. When interpreting the *CD*, will the reader privilege its own stylization of its rhetorical frame or the objective historical reality surrounding its construction? Its self-identified biblicalism, or its unacknowledged Neoplatonism? The *CD* leaves us contemporary readers with these dilemmas. I have tried to highlight the discursive precedents (often at odds with one another) that make possible the ambiguous presentation of key issues in the *CD*.

¹⁸ An awareness of this inter-dependence will help to understand the *CD*'s rather unapologetic embrace of both systems of discourse, even as it strives always to present as biblical and orthodox.

“beyond being” has become conceptually reified, a shorthand for a complex of overlapping ideas from Platonic, Jewish, and Christian thought. That is, the piling on of these authoritative discourses in the *CD* is one of the features that makes possible the ambiguity of meaning that occurs in the *CD*’s claim that God is “beyond being,” as Dionysius’s thought drew liberally from many sources. When I go on to treat the doctrine in the *CD*, it will become clear that God’s “beyond-being-ness” is inseparable from both God’s providential power (δύναμις) and its driving force, Love (ἔρως).

Plotinus: The Causal Presence of the One Beyond Being

Dionysius’s doctrine of “beyond being-ness” (ὑπερουσιότης) has its own analogue in Plotinus’s *Enneads* (c.204-270 CE). While a number of Plotinus’s teachings were to influence medieval readers (through Christian Platonists like Augustine and Dionysius), Plotinus’s work itself was a synthesis of eight hundred years of philosophy in the Hellenic period and claimed to be an extended exposition of Plato (c.427-347 BCE). While focusing most on Plato’s mystical, theological, and metaphysical teachings, he makes allusions to Plato in his *Enneads* around nine hundred times.¹⁹ Plotinus’s teaching

¹⁹ Gatti, “Plotinus: The Platonic Tradition and the Foundation of Neoplatonism,” 10. Gatti reminds us that Plotinus’s school celebrated the birthdays of Plato and Socrates, 34n3. Further comparison of Neoplatonic, Jewish, and Christian exegesis of authoritative writings in this period is welcome, but not within the purview of this study. Following Gatti, I privilege Plotinus’s own description of his intellectual work as exegetical, though this is perhaps at odds with some contemporary readings that see it entirely as a speculative endeavour, in contrast to Jewish, Christian, and later Neoplatonic modes of thought, engaged as they were with theological authorities. On 35n20, Gatti references the following from Plotinus, *Enneads* V.1.8:

Plato knew that Intellect comes from the Good and Soul from Intellect. And [it follows] that these statements of ours are not new; they do not belong to the present time, but were made long ago, not explicitly, and what we have said in

repeatedly recalls a couple of passages of Plato that refer to the First Principle as “beyond being” (ἐπέκεινα οὐσίας) and “alone and isolated” (μόνον καὶ ἔρημον).²⁰

Plotinus alludes many times to a short passage from Plato’s *Republic* that could serve as a brief summary of Neoplatonic doctrine of the First Principle. Plato writes:

In like manner, then, you are to say that the objects of knowledge not only receive their being known from the presence of the Good (ὕπὸ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ παρεῖναι), but their very existence and being (τὸ εἶναι τε καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν) is derived from them from it, though the Good itself is not being but still is above (ὑπερέχοντος), beyond being (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας) in dignity and power.”²¹

On Plato’s authority, then, Plotinus claims that all things receive their being from the presence of the Good. More importantly, here Plato seems to affirm the distinction between the Good and being. Although being depends on the Good, because existence and being come to all things from the Good, the Good “is above” (ὑπερέχοντος) or “beyond being” (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας). As we will see below, this first term ὑπερέχω will also play an important role for Dionysius,²² but for Plotinus, “beyond being” (ἐπέκεινα οὐσίας) is the critical phrase for describing the One, and he alludes to it frequently in the *Enneads*.²³ The teaching that the first principle is “beyond being” is described in Plato, Plotinus, Proclus, and Dionysius with the adverb-noun combination ἐπέκεινα οὐσίας (sometimes ἐπέκεινα ὄντος), as well as in Proclus and Dionysius with the adjective

this discussion has been an interpretation (ἐξηγητὰς) of them, relying on Plato’s own writings for evidence that these views are ancient.

All citations of the *Enneads* are adaptations of A. H. Armstrong’s translation.

²⁰ I expand on Armstrong’s recognition of this Platonic debt. He identifies both allusions in the Loeb edition. The claim that the First Principle is “alone and isolated” results from Plotinus mis-remembering the context of Plato’s claims. Plotinus, *Enneads* V.3.10.18n2.

²¹ Plato, *Republic* 509B (Adapted from translation of Paul Shorey).

²² See the discussion of *hyperoche* below, 50-57.

²³ Among the examples not reproduced here, one of note is Plotinus, *Enneads* VI.8.16.

ὑπερούσιος and the adverb ὑπερουσίως, and in Dionysius the noun ὑπερουσιότης.²⁴

Indeed, Plotinus's doctrine of the One is an extended treatment of Plato's claim here that the First Principle must be "beyond being."²⁵

If the One is present to all things, why claim it is "beyond being"? It is because the One is the principle of all things that Plotinus insists it cannot itself be being, but must be "beyond being." The One, he claims,

... is not being (οὐκ οὐσία); for being (τὴν οὐσίαν) must be one particular thing (τόδε τι), something, that is, defined and limited; but it is impossible to apprehend the One as a particular thing (ὡς τόδε): for then it would not be the principle, but only that particular thing which you said it was. ... [So the One] is "beyond being" (ἐπέκεινα ὄντος). This phrase "beyond being" does not mean that it is a particular thing... and it does not say its name, but all it implies is that it is "not this" (ἀλλὰ φέρει μόνον τὸ οὐ τοῦτο).²⁶

Because all multiplicity must come from an originary unity, anything particular or able to be delimited or divided cannot be the One, or the first principle of all things. Being particular and delimitable by intellect are constitutive features of being, so Plotinus insists, the One is not being. Plato had called the Good "beyond being" (ἐπέκεινα ὄντος) not because it was another particular thing outside the boundaries of being, but only to claim that it was not in any way identifiable with being. Plotinus finds in Plato a strong affirmation of the transcendent break between being and the One.

²⁴ It is also implied in Dionysius's frequent use of the prefix ὑπερ- when describing the God beyond being, about which see below, 119-26.

²⁵ While his treatment emphasizes the continuities rather than the developments in Neoplatonic thinking about the First Principle, Perl provides a clear and concise exposition of many of the issues that follow, particularly the inextricable relationship between intelligibility and being, to which I am indebted, in *Theophany*.

²⁶ Plotinus, *Enneads* V.5.6.

Despite this insistence that the One is “not being,” Plotinus also affirms Plato’s claim that all things receive their being from the “presence” of the One. Yet it is this very causal presence that demands that the One is not being.

If it makes each individual thing exist, and it is by the presence of the One (τῆ ἐνὸς παρουσίᾳ) that the multitude of individual things in Intellect, and Intellect itself, is self-sufficient, it is clear that the One, since it is the cause of being and self-sufficiency (ποιητικὸν οὐσίας καὶ αὐταρκείας), is not itself being but beyond it and beyond self-sufficiency (οὐκ ὄν οὐσία, ἀλλ’ ἐπέκεινα ταύτης καὶ ἐπέκεινα αὐταρκείας).²⁷

Here Plotinus teaches that it is *because* the One is the cause and sustaining force of all being that it must be beyond being. Each individual thing must have a cause other than itself. Even Intellect, the second divine hypostasis, must get its self-sufficiency from something other than itself, since it is a unified composite of all intelligibles and any composite must have a higher cause than itself. The same is true of being. The One must be “beyond” (ἐπέκεινα) each.

Plotinus ties the doctrine of the One’s being “beyond being” to its being “beyond Intellect” in another passage that alludes to Plato’s ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας:

That [One] is the productive power (δύναμις) of all things, and its product is already all things. But if this product is all things, that Principle is beyond all things (ἐπέκεινα τῶν πάντων): therefore “beyond being” (ἐπέκεινα ἄρα οὐσίας); and if the product is all things but the One is before all things and not equal to all things, in this way too it must be “beyond being” (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας). That is, also beyond Intellect; there is, then, something beyond Intellect (ἐπέκεινα ἄρα τι νοῦ). For being is not a dead thing, nor is it not life or not thinking; Intellect and being are one and the same thing;²⁸

Again Plotinus posits that the power which causes all things must be beyond all things.

Yet, this time he also suggests that Plato’s doctrine is not simply that the First Principle is beyond being, but that it is also beyond Intellect. Here Plotinus exhibits the “foundational

²⁷ Ibid., V.3.17.10-15.

²⁸ Ibid., V.4.2.38-44.

principle of Neoplatonic thought”: to be is to be intelligible, or to be able to be apprehended by an act of intellect.²⁹ If the Principle is beyond all things, and therefore beyond being, it is beyond all that is intelligible, and therefore beyond Intellect. As a consequence, the One is both “unintelligible” and “ineffable.”

The identity of being and intelligibility for Plotinus is so complete that the One, because it is “beyond being,” is also beyond intelligibility. Even though the One is present to being as cause, there is no possible intellection of the One. Plotinus alludes to Platonic language again when he states that the One remains “isolated and alone.”

Now if you want to grasp (λαβεῖν) the “isolated and alone” (ἔρημον καὶ μόνον), you will not think (οὐ νοήσεις); but Being (τὸ εἶναι) itself is multiple in itself, and if you speak of something else, Being contains it. But if this is so, if anything is the simplest of all, it will not possess thought of itself: for if it is to possess it, it will possess it by being multiple. It is not therefore thought, nor is there any thinking about it.³⁰

Clearly there is no thinking, no noetic apprehension, of the One. Not even the One thinks itself. Intellection has a particular object which demands multiplicity or division. The One is no such object. But if intellection (*noesis*) of the One is out of the picture, are there other ways of knowing? Is there any access to the One?

Though the nature, and even possibility, of knowing or accessing the One is debated in scholarship on Plotinus, he seems to have anticipated this question and responds directly after the above passage.³¹ When inquiring into our speech about the

²⁹ Perl, *Theophany*, 5.

³⁰ Plotinus, *Enneads* V.3.13.32-37.

³¹ My treatment of this dilemma in Plotinus is necessarily brief, but the passage I reproduce here reflects the major tensions within the scholarship. For a helpful review of these positions (including representative passages from Plotinus), see Arp, “Plotinus, Mysticism, and Mediation.” Arp describes the major distinction as being between scholars who think the goal of Plotinian mysticism is either “theistic union” (where some distinction from the One remains) or “monistic identity” (where it does not). Another

One, he claims that neither do we have an intellection, nor even a *gnosis* (or “knowledge”), of it. The distinction between intellection (νοήσις) and knowledge (γνώσις) is not entirely clear, but Plotinus ensures that his hearers recognize the transcendent break between the One and their knowing powers.³² Surprisingly then, he asks, “If we do not have it in knowledge (γνώσει), do we not have it in any way?” Plotinus insists that “we are not prevented from having (ἔχειν) it.” What we have is like the awareness of a poet possessed by a god—the poet has “a certain perception” or “awareness” (αἴσθησιν τινα) that the god is there, but does not know the god. Likewise, when the intellect is purified we can “divine (χρώμενοι)... the giver of being.”³³ This suggests that for Plotinus, the One is indeed present to being, but not objectively or intelligibly. The most one should say is that the One is causally present to being.³⁴ On Plato’s authority, Plotinus teaches that all depends on the presence of that which is unintelligible, alone and isolated beyond being. The doctrine of ἐπέκεινα οὐσίας stresses the transcendent break between being and its truly primary cause. The One is beyond noetic apprehension because it is beyond Intellect and beyond being.

version of the question asks, does Plotinian “possession” retain some cognitive component or is it void of cognitive content?

³² Whether *gnosis* has more general, practical, or even religious connotations than intellection, Plotinus seems to be shoring up a conviction that no form of knowing gives one access to the One. As we will see, the *CD* both continues and breaks with this rejection of *gnosis*. It posits both an “unknowing” and a “knowing beyond intellect.” See below, 132-4.

³³ Plotinus, *Enneads* V.3.14. Plotinus also expresses confidence that one can come to “the end of the journey” to the One, by becoming “beyond being” themselves, in VI.9.11.

³⁴ This is likely too neat a resolution of two perennial questions in the study of Plotinus: Can one have access to the One? And if so, how? The possession passage seems to me to answer the former affirmatively and definitively. The latter is less clear, and we will see that it is so for Dionysius as well.

Proclus: From Logic to Characteristic

Proclus (412-485 CE) echoes the doctrine by using similar Platonic language.³⁵ God, or the Good, is “that which is beyond all things (ἐπέκεινα... πάντα) and to which all things aspire.”³⁶ Also, “if all things which exist desire their good, it is evident that the primal Good is beyond the things which exist (ἐπέκεινά ἐστι τῶν ὄντων).”³⁷ Finally, “immediately beyond Being (τοῦ ὄντος ἐπέκεινα) must stand a not-Being which is One and superior to Being.”³⁸ This use of ἐπέκεινα suggests a continuation of the Plotinian emphasis on the transcendence of the One. Yet, more frequently than these Platonic ἐπέκεινα constructions, Proclus uses the adjective ὑπερούσιος, “beyond being,” indicating by such a shorthand that a level of conceptual concretization has occurred, that the semantic field of “beyond-being” has filled out.³⁹ What was once a logical insight into the relation between the One and being—that there must be a transcendent break between them—now seems almost a characteristic attribute of the divine nature.⁴⁰

Proclus’s theology famously incorporates the Greek gods into Plotinian Neoplatonism, identifying them with the henads or forms of the One beyond being, which share its nature (συνφύεσ).⁴¹ Just as the “First Principle” (τὸ πρῶτον), “monad” or

³⁵ As McGinn notes, Proclus too identifies his work as an extended exegesis on Plato, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, 57. In fact, Proclus uses Plato’s birthday as occasion for addressing his poetics—some evidence for the devotional character of late ancient philosophical exegesis. See Stern-Gillet, “Proclus and the Platonic Muse,” 363.

³⁶ Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, 113.11. All citations of Proclus are adaptations of Dodds’s translation.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.31-2.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 138.19-20.

³⁹ Yet, it is also the case that ὑπερούσιος is more ambiguous than ἐπέκεινα οὐσίας. On the ambiguity of the ὑπερ- prefix, see below, 53-57.

⁴⁰ This is reflected in the shift from adverbial construction to adjective. Both Proclus and Dionysius frequently use the adjective ὑπερούσιος.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 162.1.

“Godhead” (ὁ πρότιστος θεός) is “beyond being” (ὑπερούσιον), so too are the gods or “henads” that resemble it.⁴² Just as for Plotinus, being requires an originary unity as cause, so the One—and its nature-sharing participated forms—must be beyond being. Like the One in Plotinus, because the henads are “beyond being,” they are also beyond Intellect (ὑπὲρ νοῦν).⁴³ Proposition 123 of Proclus’s *Elements of Theology* states succinctly his teaching on the gods and the One beyond being:

All that is divine is itself ineffable (ἄρρητόν) and unknowable (ἄγνωστον) by any secondary being because of its union beyond being (διὰ τὴν ὑπερούσιον ἔνωσιν), but it may be apprehended (ληπτόν) and known (γνωστόν) from the existents which participate it: wherefore the First Principle alone is completely unknowable (διὸ μόνον τὸ πρῶτον παντελῶς ἄγνωστον), as being unparticipated.⁴⁴

Those things within the realm of being that participate in the divine henads are capable of revealing (or giving *gnosis* of) those unknown gods to those with the right ritual practice or training.⁴⁵ Although the gods are beyond being and intellect, they are knowable or able

⁴² Ibid., 115.

⁴³ Ibid., 115 and 129.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 123. See also 162.

⁴⁵ Perhaps this does not mark a complete break with Plotinus, who, as we have seen, also claimed some awareness of the One is possible. Traditional scholarship on Plotinus and Proclus distinguished strictly between Plotinian “contemplation (θεωρία)” and Iamblichean/Proclean “theurgy (θεουργία).” More recently, scholars of Neoplatonism have cast these as matters of emphasis, not strict division, by placing both thinkers in their late ancient religious contexts, where thought and action were not so distinct. Crystal Addey’s recent treatment of “Divination, Rationality and Ritual in Neoplatonism,” draws on recent research and represents a growing consensus:

[W]hile there is a certain difference in attitudes toward the importance of ritual among these philosophers, this represents a difference of emphasis rather than a rigid, dichotomous distinction between ‘rational’ and ‘ritual’ approaches to the divine and the salvation of the soul. In fact, the concepts of ‘rationality’ and ‘ritual’ as envisaged within Neoplatonism are much more subtle, nuanced and complex than their modern equivalents: they were perceived as mutually inclusive rather than mutually exclusive ways to truth and were often conceived as interlinked or connected on a kind of continuum.

to be apprehended through their causal effects. But the First Principle, the One, admits of no possibility of knowledge. The One does not even have knowledge itself, since knowledge requires a distinction between subject and object that is proper only to being. The above passage's use of *μόνον* may be a verbal echo of the Plotinian description of the One with the Platonic phrase "alone and isolated." The One is not even knowable by its effects.

As this suggests, although the gods are beyond Intellect, they seem to be more approachable than the monad. Each henad "imposes its own character upon its participants and displays in being (*οὐσιωδῶς*) in the latter its own beyond-being quality (*τὴν ιδιότητα τὴν ὑπερούσιον*)."⁴⁶ Also the gods may be said to have knowledge (*γνώσις*) beyond being, if not intellection. They have *gnosis*, however, in a godlike way, a way "beyond being." "If there is a divine knowledge, it is secret and unitary."⁴⁷ Proclus introduces an adverbial form for "beyond being" (*ὑπερουσίως*) to express the godlike manner in which gods 'know.' Because the gods are not the One, but participate in the One, they must be capable of some form of knowledge. Yet because the gods are beyond being, this knowledge cannot be an intellection, the kind of knowledge proper to being. Gods may also have attributes like goodness and unity in a way beyond being (*ὑπερουσίως*).⁴⁸ The effect of Proclus's positing of the gods "beyond being" is to make their mode of existence properly predicable by the adverb *ὑπερουσίως*. The gods even

Divination and Theurgy in Neoplatonism, 171-2. Addey appeals to Zeke Mazur's use of the term "inner rituals" to describe the Plotinian activities that have been typically referred to as forms of reasoning, 187.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 137.2-3.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 121.28-9.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 119.

“participate... in a way beyond being (ὑπερουσίως).”⁴⁹ Whatever kind of knowing or participating the gods do, whatever qualities they have, which logically they must be capable of (as being participants themselves), they do and have in a way mysterious to human beings.

The shift from Plotinus to Proclus, from ἐπέκεινα οὐσίας to ὑπερούσιος, is a move from a more semantically negative interpretation of the Platonic doctrine of the Good, to one more properly aporetic.⁵⁰ For Proclus, there are logical conclusions about the gods that we can make, but we cannot say in what manner those conclusions are true. How are the gods good? How do the gods know? In a way beyond being—that is, in a way unintelligible to rational and intellectual beings. Yet to say that the gods are beyond being is different than to say that the One is beyond being. The gods act, although in ways beyond intelligibility. The One does not. In Proclus’s concretization of the doctrine, the conceptual landscape “beyond being” becomes filled with the potential of mystery, even as the One is abstracted of all thought. A break between being and the divine remains, but the gods’ causal actions make possible the positing of divine attributes, even if only in a mysterious way.

In sum, for both Plotinus and Proclus, the Platonic doctrine that the Good, the One, or God is “beyond being” is taken to mean that God is beyond intelligibility, even

⁴⁹ Ibid., 145.

⁵⁰ To say that Plotinus’s system is the more rationally coherent or metaphysically pure of the two is not to say, it should now be clear, that Plotinus’s system is any less exegetical than Proclus’s. While Proclus’s thought is more self-consciously theological (concerned with the gods) both stylize their reflections on these issues as exposition upon received Platonic discourse about a First Principle. I am uncertain how helpful it is to distinguish the two by saying that Plotinus’s mysticism is speculative metaphysics, while Proclus’s is theurgic ritual. In late antiquity, these distinctions, between forms of authoritative reasoning and forms of authoritative ritual, are not so distinct as they are today. See above, 85n45.

while the God “beyond being” remains causally present, and perhaps able to be encountered, though in an unclear fashion. For Plotinus, to say this Cause is beyond being is to emphasize the epistemic break between it and the intellect (even while some non-intellective form of access remains possible). For Proclus, the gods provide an account of the bridge between being and the One, yet because the gods are themselves beyond being, one can never intellectually grasp exactly what kind of link they provide. If for Plotinus, the One is “alone and isolated” beyond being (famously, Plotinus advocates “the flight of the alone to the alone”), for Proclus, it is more crowded beyond being, if still inaccessible by intellect.

Philo: A Scriptural Basis for Unintelligibility and Ineffability

Despite how intimately Dionysius relies on the received teaching of Plotinus and Proclus on “beyond being”—significantly enough to coin the abstract neologism ὑπερουσιότης (“beyond-being-ness”)—the *CD* makes no explicit reference to either of these figures or Plato. At the same time, to many contemporary readers of the *CD* these unnamed authorities seem to demand the bulk of Dionysius’s attention. Is the *CD* Neoplatonist philosophy wrapped in Christian garb? Moses, Jesus, and Paul never used the term ὑπερούσιος, and yet these are the figures who penetrate beyond being in the *CD*, who provide the models and means of unknowing knowing or mystical union. While the author of the *CD* receives ideas about the unintelligibility of the God “beyond being” from the exegesis of Plato in pagan Neoplatonists, he also “looks back,” as it were, to earlier Jewish and Christian scriptural and commentarial writings, which seemed to support the Neoplatonic positions on divine unintelligibility. According to the *CD*’s own

presentation, the doctrine that God is “beyond being” is a working out of the teaching of the authors of the scriptures (the “theologians”) themselves.⁵¹ Given the *CD*’s use of such a Neoplatonic term as ὑπερούσιος, how could it be so?

To ask about Scripture’s doctrine of God is even more fraught with difficulties than asking the same question of the *CD*. We should first ask how those “theologians” and interpreters of Scripture that were most authoritative for Dionysius answered the question. Paul looms the largest, but on the issue of the God beyond being’s unintelligibility the Alexandrian Jewish exegete (and Middle Platonist) Philo (c.25 BCE-50 CE) also deserves an important place. Though written before the Neoplatonists, Philo’s and Paul’s writings both seemed to Dionysius to affirm the Neoplatonic lesson about the incomprehensibility of God, even though their reasoning differed, and even though they had nothing to say about “being” or “beyond-being-ness.” In Philo’s writings, because the Hebrew scriptures claim that God is ineffable, God must also be unintelligible. For Paul—understood here as a literary figure in the New Testament perceived by Dionysius—reservation about the comprehension of God rests on divine invisibility. At the same time, both affirm some form of divine presence.

As Harry Wolfson has shown, Philo claims that God is incomprehensible, ineffable (ἀρρήτος) and unnamable (ἀκατονομάστος), even before the Neoplatonists.⁵² These claims are advanced in exegetical writings on the Pentateuch. For instance, Philo states, “it is impossible that the God who IS should be comprehended at all

⁵¹ As we saw in Dionysius’s use of the term at the end of DN, above, 73-4. Without the knowledge of the *CD*’s Neoplatonic influence, Gallus will thoroughly accept this conceit.

⁵² Wolfson, *Philo*, 111. For Wolfson’s refutation of the view that unintelligibility and ineffability were held in Greek philosophy before Philo, see 113-117. My treatment of Philo here builds on Wolfson’s analysis.

(κατανοηθῆναι) by created things.”⁵³ That is, God is unintelligible, not able to be apprehended by an act of the intellect. Note the root of Philo’s verb κατανοηθῆναι is the same as the Platonist tradition’s νοῦς. Though scholars still debate the influence of Middle Platonism on Philo,⁵⁴ it is telling that Philo presents Scripture as leading him to the same conclusion without claiming that God is beyond being. What other passages support the claim that God is unintelligible?

Philo’s *On the Change of Names* is an extended reflection on Genesis 17:1, “Abraham became ninety-nine years old and the Lord was seen by Abraham and said to him, ‘I am thy God.’” What kind of vision was this that Abraham had? Philo agrees with classical Greek philosophy in saying that God’s incorporeality means this vision cannot be sensible. Abraham did not see God with the “eyes of the body.” But where his classical predecessors may have held that such a vision could be intellectual, that is a vision with the eye of the mind or intellect (*nous*), Philo draws on passages from Exodus to show that not even intellectual vision of God is possible.

Though none of these verses claim that God is “beyond being,” they suggested to Philo that noetic apprehension of God was not possible. Philo recalls that “Moses... as the divine oracles tell us, went into the darkness (γνόφον).”⁵⁵ God had said to Moses,

⁵³ Wolfson, 111; Philo, *On the Posterity of Cain and His Exile*, 48.167-8: ἀμήχανον γὰρ τὸν κατὰ τὸ εἶναι θεὸν ὑπὸ γενέσεως τὸ παράπαν κατανοηθῆναι. All translations of Philo have been adapted from the Loeb editions, unless explicitly attributed to a citation from Wolfson.

⁵⁴ I find Christina Termini’s formulation describing Philo’s context to be most apt: Philo writes within the “pluralistic galaxy that is Middle Judaism,” which borrows “ideas and models that allow for creative interpretation of the Jewish tradition.” “Philo’s Thought within the Context of Middle Judaism,” 96. Thus, the question of whether Philo was a Middle Platonist presumes boundaries of thought and practice unhelpful for expounding Philo’s works.

⁵⁵ Philo, *On the Change of Names*, 2.7. The reference is to Exodus 20:21.

“Thou shalt see what is behind Me (τὰ ὀπίσω μου), but My face though shalt not see.”⁵⁶

These passages strongly suggest that God in Godself does not meet the conditions for sensibility, but Philo also reasons that neither does God meet the conditions for intelligibility. This expansion of the meaning of these two passages to include both insensibility and unintelligibility, Wolfson claims, occurs because Philo establishes first on even stronger scriptural grounds that God is unnamable or ineffable. Exodus 6:3 states, “I was seen of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, being their God, but My name of ‘Lord’ I did not reveal to them.” Wolfson reconstructs Philo’s reasoning:

[T]he incomprehensibility and the unnamability of God are logically implied in one another and [...] both of them rest primarily upon scriptural verses. As for these scriptural verses, it will be noticed, the ones which serve him as a proof-text for the unnamability of God are more explicit than the one which serves him as a proof-text for the incomprehensibility of God, and, consequently, [the scriptural claim that God is unnamable or ineffable] may be considered as the primary basis of his view about the incomprehensibility of God.⁵⁷

Though the literal meaning of these verses does not seem to preclude the possibility of intellectual vision of God—that is, it only seems to preclude sensible vision—Philo interprets them to mean that neither is God comprehensible to the intellect because other scriptures affirm that God is ineffable. “[I]ndeed, if He is ineffable (ἄρρητον), He is also inconceivable (ἀπερινόητον) and incomprehensible (ἀκατάληπτον).”⁵⁸ The claims to God’s ineffability—and by extension, God’s unintelligibility—are bolstered by a number of legal prohibitions of the Pentateuch. These are laws against naming God, taking any

⁵⁶ Ibid. 2.9. Quoted from Exodus 33:23.

⁵⁷ Wolfson, *Philo*, 120.

⁵⁸ Philo, *On the Change of Names*, 3.15. Wolfson quotes this passage at 120.

name for God in vain, and blasphemy.⁵⁹ The Law prescribes the view that God is ineffable, and by extension unintelligible.

In sum, in Philo's own presentation, written before Plotinus or Proclus, the unintelligibility of God is primarily a result of the scriptural teaching that God is ineffable, rather than the Platonic doctrine that God is beyond being.⁶⁰ Wolfson claims Plotinus himself is influenced by Philo's novel use of "ineffable" (ἄρρητος) to describe God.⁶¹ My purpose here is not to establish the genesis of Philo's position (Jewish or Platonic scriptures?). Rather, notice what Dionysius would find. Philo imagines a conceptual space where God is not known because the conditions for knowing are not present in God, not unlike the "beyond being" unintelligibility developed later by Plotinus and Proclus. Philo insists,

And so the words 'The Lord was seen of Abraham' must not be understood in the sense that the Cause of all shone upon him and appeared to him, for what human intellect (νοῦς) could contain the vastness of that vision? Rather we must think of it as the manifestation of one of the Powers (δυνάμεων) which attend him...⁶²

Vision of God in Godself, whether sensible or intellectual, is not possible. The mind is not capable of such an act of noetic apprehension. It ought to be noted, however, that vision of God's *powers* does appear possible. What Abraham sees is the dynamic working of God in the world, not God Godself. Proclus's later distinction between God and the gods (or the monad and henads) looks somewhat similar. Where for Philo the

⁵⁹ Wolfson, *Philo*, 121-3.

⁶⁰ Of course, we have seen that something like this reasoning was implicit in forms of Platonic thought. Whether Wolfson is correct about the genesis of Philo's teaching, it is instructive to note that an ancient or late ancient author could appeal to both scriptural reasoning and Platonic reasoning (working as it did from its own special texts).

⁶¹ Wolfson, 160. See also Wolfson's article, "Albinus and Plotinus on Divine Attributes."

⁶² Philo, *On the Change of Names*. 3.15.

divine “powers” ensure that the transcendent break between God and the intellect is not the final word, for Proclus, the gods help shore up the transcendence of the One even as it is the immanent cause of all being. While Philo’s writing on the matter does not explicitly claim a transcendent break with being, it states what to a Platonist like Dionysius amounts to the same claim—there is an epistemic break between God and the intellect.

Paul: ‘To an Unknown God’

Although clearly the least resonant with Neoplatonic discourse about God’s beyond-being-ness and unintelligibility, the literary figure of Paul provided Dionysius the most authoritative support for an incomprehensible God. On this matter, Paul reinforces the scripturally-established break between God and knowledge treated by Philo. As Charles Stang has shown, Dionysius could find Pauline language that confirmed what he already suspected. Consider Paul’s use of alpha-privative terms for God—especially those that indicate invisibility.⁶³ For instance, from 1 Timothy a pair of passages: “To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible (ἀοράτω), the only God (μόνω θεῶ), be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen” (1:17); “It is he alone who has immortality (ὁ μόνος ἔχων ἀθανασίαν) and dwells in unapproachable (ἀπρόσιτον) light, whom no one has ever seen or can see” (6:16). Elsewhere, Paul uses the terms “invisible” (ἀόρατος), “unsearchable” (ἀνεξερεύνητος), and “inscrutable” (ἀνεξιχνίαστος).⁶⁴ All of these passages might stand

⁶³ Stang, *Apophysis and Pseudonymity*, 121-123.

⁶⁴ Rom. 1:20, Col. 1:15, Col. 1:16, 1 Tim. 1:17, Rom. 11:33, Eph. 3:8. These cited in Stang, *Apophysis and Pseudonymity*, 122n16-18. See Dionysius’s most extended (but still brief) treatment of Paul as knowing God “being above all intellection and knowledge (ὕπερ πᾶσαν ὄντα νόησιν καὶ γνῶσιν),” in Epist. 5.

beside those to which Philo points in the Pentateuch as teaching that God is not able to be seen.

But if Philo's writings presented the invisibility of God as including both sensible vision and intellectual vision, did the Pauline corpus suggest the same? Even to Dionysius, the Pauline corpus would have appeared less definitive on this issue. Yet another passage will look familiar given our treatment of the Platonic terms. In Philippians 4:7, Paul states that "the peace of God is beyond all understanding (ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ θεοῦ ἡ ὑπερέχουσα πάντα νοῦν)." ⁶⁵ That is, to a Neoplatonist like Dionysius, it is unintelligible, not able to be comprehended by an act of intellect (νοῦς).

On its own, this may not be significant evidence that Dionysius discerned a Pauline teaching of a definite break between God and knowledge, but in the book of Acts, a Neoplatonist reader would encounter Paul making an important claim about the unknowability or incomprehensibility of God—this in the same passage where we find Paul converting Dionysius. ⁶⁶ Paul, pausing on his journey in Athens, is enjoined by the Athenians to teach them, their interest piqued by the novelty of his message. Paul agrees and begins by claiming that he knows they are very religious, for he had come upon an altar there with an inscription, "To an unknown god (Ἀγνώστῳ θεῷ)." Paul teaches that the God who made the world does not live in dwellings made by human beings because God is the one who gives them "life and breath and everything." ⁶⁷ He claims to preach this very "unknown god," and his reasoning here, in retrospect, looks similar to the

⁶⁵ Stang, 124.

⁶⁶ Ibid. Of course, the Paul depicted in Acts is a literary construction of Luke's, but given the author of the *CD*'s choice of pseudonym, it is reasonable to think that this "Pauline" passage carried some weight for him.

⁶⁷ Acts 17:22-25.

Platonic reasoning held later by Plotinus. It is because God is the creator of all things that God must *not* dwell in those things, but must be somewhere beyond those things. Indeed, it is only once Paul begins preaching the resurrection of the dead that some Athenians begin to mock him—not before he converts Dionysius, however.⁶⁸ In sum, the Acts passage suggests to Dionysius that Paul taught that God is unknown and unknowable because a creator not able to be seen.

This is not to make any claims that Paul teaches God’s unintelligibility, much less that God is beyond being. But this presentation of the Pauline corpus suggests how Dionysius uses Pauline authority to bolster his claims about the beyond-being-ness of God. In actuality, Paul more often writes about the mediating activity of Jesus Christ in resolving the dilemma of sin and ensuring the imminent presence of God to God’s creation.⁶⁹ Yet, this Pauline material, so prominent in the presentation of the *CD*, reinforces the central place of the notion of beyond-being-ness in the corpus.

What can we say in sum with regard to the *CD*’s most important influences on the unintelligibility and “beyond-being-ness” of God? If in the *CD* God is “beyond being” (ὑπερούσιος), what would this have meant in the authoritative writings that came before? It should be clear now that the prefix ὑπερ- does not refer unequivocally to transcendence.

⁶⁸ Acts 17:32-34.

⁶⁹ Against a persistent view that the *CD* lacks a Christology, Stang argues that Dionysius follows his purported teacher in addressing these concerns, *Apophysis and Pseudonymity*, 125-127. Elsewhere he writes, “Admittedly, his Christology looks to a different thread within the Pauline corpus: it does not center on justification by faith in the crucified Christ but rather on the ecstatic indwelling of the risen, luminous Christ (Galatians 2.20) and the gift of ‘unknowing’ (Acts 17.34) on offer only in the liturgical and sacramental life of the church.” Stang, Review of Rosemary Arthur, *Pseudo-Dionysius the Polemicist*, in *Speculum* 86, n. 2 (2011): 461.

In Plotinus and Proclus, the doctrine that the Cause of being is “beyond being” and therefore “beyond” even intelligibility can be traced to Plato. In Philo and Paul, there are similarly strong scriptural statements that God is unintelligible because ineffable and invisible. Yet, for all these writers, the God “beyond” being is strangely knowable or discernible. That is, in spite of the transcendent break between God and being/intellect, God is also immanent to creation. Plotinus claims Plato’s authority to wed immanence and transcendence: it is the fact that the Good is beyond being (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας) that ensures its very creative presence. For Proclus, God or the monad is beyond being and unknowable, but the gods or henads who are also beyond being are the participatory principles of all things, also unintelligible themselves, yet knowable in their very beyond-being way (ὑπερουσίως). For Philo, God in Godself is incomprehensible, but intellectual vision of God’s powers (δυνάμεις) is possible, as Scripture confirms. At least in Dionysius’s presentation of the Apostle, Paul preaches Jesus Christ as the mediator between “the unknown God” and human beings. In sum, each teaches an uneasy play of transcendence and immanence, or rather of “beyond-being-ness” and presence.

Dionysius: The Mysterious Providence of the God “Beyond Being”

Indeed, just such an uneasy picture can be found in the *CD*’s teaching that God is “beyond being.” “Beyond-being-ness” (ὑπερουσιότητα) describes God’s transcendent break with sensible and intelligible creation, but it also describes the condition for God’s creating and sustaining presence—the activity of God’s Providence (προνοία). In addition, in the *CD*, depictions of the commerce between the God beyond being and being abound. There are biblical models of rational and intellectual creatures who penetrate beyond

being, like Moses, Paul, and angels. There are the powers (δυνάμεις) and providential energies (ἐνεργείαι) that proceed to being from the Source of all being. Most importantly, there is the “God-manifestation” (θεοφάνεια) of the “beyond being” in Jesus, the Light and Love of God, which nevertheless remains unmanifest (ἀφανής). Finally, the scriptures, written by the “theologians” (θεολόγοι), themselves illuminated by the divine Light Jesus, are the “handing down” (παράδοσις) of divine teaching to human beings. Yet, despite all these depictions of God’s intercourse with being, Dionysius emphatically and consistently insists that God remains beyond being. By attending to the conceptual ambiguities that appear in the *CD*’s most extended treatment of the doctrine of God, the *Divine Names (DN)*, it becomes clear that the doctrine of “beyond-being-ness” affirms a certain relation of God to being that is indefinite, and yet praiseworthy. The *DN* affirms God’s “beyond-being-ness” alongside God’s providential presence—a dialectic driven by divine Love.

i. Beyond-being-ness (ὑπερουσιότης)

On the one hand, the *CD* faithfully adopts the reserve about divine intelligibility that we traced across its Platonic, Jewish, and Christian predecessors. The Platonic doctrine of divine “beyond-being-ness” provides the justification for such reserve, even as that doctrine is affirmed by scriptural witness of God’s invisibility, ineffability, and unintelligibility. At the very beginning of the *Divine Names* we see this logic at work. Not only, however, is this divine unintelligibility taught by Scripture itself, it is also the reason why a scriptural rule is needed for speech about God. God is ineffable and unknown:

This is why we must not dare to speak or to think (ἐννοῆσαί) anything concerning the hidden divinity beyond being (τῆς ὑπερουσίου καὶ κρυφίας θεότητος), apart from what the sacred Oracles have divinely revealed. Since unknowing (ἄγνωσία) is of its beyond-being-ness (ὑπερουσιότητος), beyond speech, intellect, and being (ὑπὲρ λόγον καὶ νοῦν καὶ οὐσίαν), let us ascribe to it a technical understanding beyond being (τὴν ὑπερούσιον ἐπιστήμην)... [the divinity] is and is as no other being is. It is cause of all existence, and therefore itself not a being because it is beyond all being (πάσης οὐσίας ἐπέκεινα), and it alone could give an authoritative account of what it really is.⁷⁰

Much of this language and reasoning should be familiar. Because God is the cause of being, God must be “beyond being” (ἐπέκεινα οὐσίας—language, as we have seen, traceable to Plato’s *Republic*). Given that to be is to be intelligible, and that God is beyond being, God must also be beyond speech and intellect (νοῦς). Dionysius mixes the Platonic and Plotinian language with the newer Proclean adjective ὑπερούσιος. Yet he also coins his own term to describe the state or character in which divinity remains—“beyond-being-ness” (ὑπερουσιότης). “Beyond-being-ness” carries the entire range of associations—Platonic, Jewish, and Christian—that go along with the character of God beyond being. God’s “beyond-being-ness” is unintelligible and ineffable. If one could have any understanding of it, it must be an understanding that, as it were, leaves being behind—that is, nothing but an “unknowing” (ἄγνωσία). “For, if all kinds of knowledge (αἱ γνώσεις πᾶσαι) are of things existing, and are limited to things existing, that which is beyond all being (ἢ πάσης οὐσίας ἐπέκεινα), is also elevated above all knowledge (γνώσεώς).”⁷¹ Thus, in this passage, God’s “beyond-being-ness” implies something even stronger than God’s unintelligibility—it implies there is not even any particular kind of *gnosis* possible of the God beyond being. As we will see, this final claim is one that gives

⁷⁰ DN 1.1.

⁷¹ DN 1.4.

way to a restylization of knowledge elsewhere in the corpus.⁷² For now, notice that at the beginning of *Divine Names*, a work that “unfolds” the descriptions of God in Scripture, Dionysius insists that the God beyond being is ineffable, unintelligible, and unknowable.

While the consistent reminder that God is “beyond being” pops up throughout *DN*, the teaching is most prominent in two other places—at the beginning of Chapter Five (on the divine name “Being”) and at the end of the treatise. After three introductory chapters that lay out Dionysius’s method in the treatise, and a fourth chapter where Dionysius exposit scriptural names related to God as the self-diffusive Good and Love (to which I will return), a fifth chapter is related to the name Being. Dionysius reminds his reader of the principle of “beyond-being-ness”:

Let us now pass to the name “Being”—given in the Oracles as truly that of Him, Who truly is. But let us call to mind this much, that the purpose of our treatment is not to reveal the beyond-being being (τὴν ὑπερούσιον οὐσίαν), as it is beyond-being (ἢ ὑπερούσιος)—for this is ineffable (ἄρρητον), and unknowable (ἄγνωστόν), and altogether unrevealed, and surpassing union itself—but to hymn the procession (πρόοδον) of the supremely divine Source of Being, which gives being to all things being.⁷³

Again, Dionysius insists, one cannot make manifest the beyond-being-ness of God (“the beyond-being being *as* beyond being”), because it is ineffable, unintelligible, and unknowable. All one can do is rely on the words of the scriptures, which themselves do not even refer to God as God is beyond being, but instead celebrate or “hymn” God’s providential procession (on which, more below).⁷⁴

⁷² Knowledge (γνώσις) of God beyond being will elsewhere be described both as “unknowing” (ἄγνωσία) and as “knowing above intellect” (γινώσκειν ὑπὲρ νοῦν). See below, 132-4.

⁷³ DN 5.1.

⁷⁴ For Proclus, *gnosis* beyond intellect was possible through initiation to the mysteries by theurgic ritual, but this was knowledge of the henads/gods. For Dionysius, *agnosia* or *gnosis hyper noun* (elided in the *CD*) was possible through Christian ritual,

We have already seen the final occurrence of “beyond being,” from Chapter 13, where God’s “beyond-being-ness” is forcefully proclaimed. In this last chapter, Dionysius is finishing up a discussion of the name “One,” which he says is not in opposition to the Christian mystery that God is both Unity and Trinity. In sum, he says, “we name the Deity, which is inexpressible to things that be, the Beyond-Being.”⁷⁵ That is, before Dionysius concludes the treatise by noting that the authors of scripture teach negations as preferable to affirmations, he makes one final quasi-affirmative statement about God—God is “beyond-being.” This teaching is not a rehearsal of a scriptural name for God, but the outcome of the “unfolding” of Scripture’s conceptual names for God—the end of the *DN*. That is, “beyond-being-ness” is exegetically wrought. Based on our unpacking of the theologians’ hymns about God, Dionysius says, we claim that God, the “One,” is “beyond being.” But notice here that “beyond being” is also a stand-in for the Christian claim that God is Unity and Trinity. Golitzin has shown that Dionysius’s reserve about divine intelligibility is foreshadowed, not only in Neoplatonic doctrine, but in earlier patristic writings on the Trinity.⁷⁶ In fact, Dionysius includes the adjective ὑπερούσιος with nearly every invocation of the Trinity in the *CD*. It is God as Trinity Itself that is ineffable, unintelligible, and unknown.⁷⁷

most importantly here, scriptural exegesis (“unfolding”). This is because Proclean *gnosis* is exclusively of the gods/henads, not the God/monad (who remains “unknown”), while Dionysian *gnosis hyper noun* and *agnosia* (one in the same) are of God. That is, Dionysian mysticism accesses the Trinity (always simplified or unified, never divided, according to Nicaea), while Proclean mysticism strives for a hierarchized divinity (*gnosis* beyond intellect of the henads/gods, and unknowing of the monad/God). On “unknowing” and “knowing beyond mind,” see below, 132-4.

⁷⁵ *DN* 13.3.

⁷⁶ Golitzin, *Mystagogy*, 59.

⁷⁷ Here it is most clear that “beyond-being-ness” cannot be void of semantic content, exhibiting the rational metaphysical purity that some see at the heart of the

If the “Trinity beyond being” is entirely unintelligible, what ought one make of the scriptures that refer to God as Knowledge, Intellect, and Reason? “For how,” Dionysius asks, “will He conceive (νοήσει) any of the objects of intelligence, seeing He has not intellectual operations?”⁷⁸ That is, if God is “beyond being,” not only will God be unintelligible to us, but God will also not know or apprehend through an act of the intellect. As “Cause of all intellect and reason, all wisdom and understanding,” God is “fixed above all reason and intellect and wisdom.”⁷⁹ When Scripture refers to God knowing,

it says, “He, knowing all things, before their birth.” For, not as learning existing things from existing things, does the Divine Intellect know, but from Itself, and in Itself, as Cause, it pre-holds (προέχει) and pre-comprehends the notion and knowledge, and being of all things; not approaching each several thing according to kind, but knowing and containing all things, within one grasp of the Cause.⁸⁰

Thus, “the divine Intellect (νοῦς) comprehends (συνέχει) all things, by its knowledge (γνώσει) surpassing all.”⁸¹ Notice that while Dionysius affirms that Scripture calls God “Intellect,” he does not claim that God apprehends by an act of intellection. Because God is beyond being, the only possible kind of knowledge that God could have would be a kind of knowing that is beyond intellection—perhaps a non-intellective knowledge of Itself as the Source of being. As we will see, such self-referential knowledge would also be knowledge of creation since the God beyond being is providentially present to being.

Plotinian enterprise, because Dionysius affirms the trinitarian life, even if he remains largely (and tellingly) silent about it.

⁷⁸ DN 7.2.

⁷⁹ DN 7.1.

⁸⁰ DN 7.2.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Thus, in *DN*, Dionysius forcefully depicts the distinction between God and both intellection and being. The Trinity beyond being is hidden by a cloud of unknowing,⁸² removed from being and unintelligible. A couple of lines of the *CD*'s first Epistle are confirmation of the *DN*'s most frequent claim: "His pre-eminent (ὑπερκείμενον) darkness... is hidden from every knowledge (γνώσιν)." And yet, notice how the next line, which seems to drive home the point, ends in a curious way: "He himself, highly established above intellect and above being (ὑπὲρ νοῦν καὶ οὐσίαν), by the very fact of His being wholly unknown, and not being, both is in a way beyond being (ὑπερουσίως), and is known beyond intellect (ὑπὲρ νοῦν γινώσκεται)."⁸³ That is, the *CD*'s doctrine of "beyond-being-ness" is not a completely negative doctrine—it does not simply claim that God is "not being" and therefore cannot be known. The adverb ὑπερουσίως affirms that God is in a way beyond being, and that God can be known, though not by the intellect.

ii. Providence (προνοία)

On the other hand, Dionysius's reservation about speech and knowledge seems to moderate in his discussion of God's providential activity.⁸⁴ The constant reminders in *DN* about "beyond-being-ness" qualify the claims made in the treatise's focus on Providence, the more proximate source, as it were, of divine names. As the following passage from *DN*'s introductory chapter shows, the divine names derive from God's providential activity. It appears to suggest that the divine names do not actually hymn the God beyond being.

⁸² MT 1.3.

⁸³ Epist. 1.

⁸⁴ As we will see, this is not a moderation of his claims about divine unintelligibility.

To none, indeed, who are lovers (ἐρασταί) of the Truth beyond all Truth, is it permitted to hymn the supremely-Divine Beyond-being-ness (ὑπερουσιότητα), whatever it is... But since, as sustaining source of goodness, by the very fact of Its being, It is the cause of all things that be (τῶν ὄντων αἰτία), from all created things we must hymn the benevolent Providence (πρόνοιαν) of the Godhead⁸⁵

Here again is the familiar claim that “beyond-being-ness” is ineffable. In contrast to God’s “beyond-being-ness” (ὑπερουσιότης), however, is God’s providence (προνοία). This distinction between “beyond-being-ness” and “providence” is sometimes referred to as the “essence-energies” distinction in the *CD*, a claim that associates “beyond-being-ness” with the ineffable and unintelligible transcendent Trinitarian essence, and “providence” with its effable and intelligible energies.⁸⁶ Is Dionysius saying that God’s essence is ineffable, while God’s energies are effable? Would this not imply a distinction in God and some realm of pure intelligibles akin to the Neoplatonists, at odds with Christian claims to God’s simplicity?

It appears Dionysius thinks not. Dionysius writes that not only does the name “Good” uniquely apply to the whole divinity, but also each of the more general names, while derived from particular providences, nonetheless “are hymned (ὑμνεῖσθαι) upon (ἐπι) the whole and entire and complete and full Divinity,” not only upon individual intelligible realities.⁸⁷ DN only treats those scriptural names derived from God’s

⁸⁵ DN 1.5.

⁸⁶ The essence-energies distinction is used primarily by Orthodox readers of the *CD*, who appeal to the Cappadocians as interpreted by Gregory Palamas (1296-1359). See the treatment of the work of John D. Jones below, 122-4.

⁸⁷ DN 2.1 He goes on to note “that all of them are referred impartitively, absolutely, unreservedly, entirely, to all the Entirety of the entirely complete and every Deity. And truly as we have mentioned in the *Theological Outlines*, if any one should say that this is not spoken concerning the whole Deity, he blasphemes, and dares, without right, to cleave asunder the super-unified Unity.”

Providence, ending with the name “Beyond-Being,” though Dionysius ensures that “beyond-being-ness” is a constant complement to the reader’s encounter with all the scriptural designations of God in *DN*.⁸⁸ Yet, all divine names apply to God, not just the divine energies (ἐνεργείαι) or powers (δυνάμεις) that appear throughout the corpus. These powers *are* God. In the same passage, Dionysius writes that none should “cleave asunder the super-unified Unity.”⁸⁹ Though the names derive from God’s providential activity, they celebrate “the whole Deity.”

One might be forgiven for thinking the *CD* manifests a divine intelligible world akin to Plotinus, or even divine henads like Proclus. Providence “bubbles forth from the Deity beyond being (ὑπερουσίου), Cause of all things.”⁹⁰ God “is present, to all, by the irresistible embrace of all, and by His providential progressions (προνοητικαῖς προόδοις) and energies (ἐνεργείαις) to all existing things.”⁹¹ Elsewhere the *CD* proclaims, “the all holy and most honoured Powers (δυνάμεις) truly being, and established, as it were, in the vestibule of the Triad beyond being.”⁹² This vestibule appears fairly crowded, where we find “those First Beings, who are established after the Godhead, who gave [the angels their] Being, and who are marshalled, as it were in Its very vestibule, who surpass every

It is also worth noting how the construction ἐπί plus the genitive suggests that divine names are put upon or before God. As we will see, veils are an important Dionysian metaphor for scriptural language.

⁸⁸ Perhaps, as Rorem suggests, the *MT* culminates the *DN*, serving as its complementary treatise, responding to its final gesture toward the God beyond being (see 74n10), but it does not examine any new hymned names, instead performing a practice of divine hymning that is not unrelated to the ambiguous hermeneutics we will trace in the next section.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* See above, n86.

⁹⁰ *CH* 4.1.

⁹¹ *DN* 9.9.

⁹² *DN* 5.8.

unseen and seen created power.”⁹³ It is worth noting that, although Dionysius uses multiple terms to describe God’s intercourse with being (chief among them “energy,” “power,” and “providence”), he fairly consistently uses these in the singular to refer to their unity with the Godhead, and the in plural to refer to their diffusion throughout being. As we will see, while these energies, powers, and providential progressions are hymned with divine names, because they are unified with the Godhead, they are not known. That is, they remain beyond being, and therefore unintelligible—an unknown Providence. A final passage drives home this point:

...the supremely Divine Power (δύναμις) in visiting all, advances and penetrates all irresistibly, and yet is invisible (ἀφανής) to all, not only as being elevated above all in a way beyond being (ὑπερουσίως), but as secretly transmitting its providential energies (τὰς προνοητικὰς αὐτῆς ἐνεργείας) to all.⁹⁴

If God’s “beyond-being-ness” describes God as alone and isolated and removed from being, God’s “providence” describes God’s creating and sustaining Power. Yet, providential activity, insists the *CD*, does not finally reveal the God beyond being.⁹⁵ How can such a providential progression of the God beyond being remain unknown? Is it not

⁹³ CH 7.2.

⁹⁴ CH 13.3. Also, this power “is everywhere and nowhere present,” DN 2.1.

⁹⁵ Despite the merits of his work, here I depart from Perl, *Theophany*, who claims in a note that although *theophany* is not frequently employed by Dionysius (it appears more often in Eriugena’s interpretations of the *CD*), it is nonetheless the key to understanding the *CD* and Neoplatonism, 32n25. Yet, for Dionysius, providence does not “reveal” the God beyond being. That God cannot be seen or grasped intellectually, even in God’s causal presence. Perl claims that theophany is the logical consequence of the Neoplatonic principle that to be is to be intelligible. Everything which gets its being from the First Principle, is thus revelatory of that First Principle. Yet, for Dionysius, to claim that God is providentially present in creation is to reveal nothing definitive about who God is (neither anything discursively representable nor anything intellectually graspable), because God remains beyond being, unmanifest (ἀφάνης). Divine presence is dialectically presented alongside divine unintelligibility in the *CD*, so every *theophany* is therefore also an *aphany*, every unveiling is itself a veiling. Perl admits a simultaneous concealment with every revelation (see 17-34), but this gives me pause about *theophany* as an interpretive key to the corpus.

an affirmation of divine intimacy, presence, and intelligibility? That is, what are we to make of the seeming paradox that being is shot through, as it were, with the God beyond being? How can God be *both* “beyond being” and providentially or causally present?

iii. Good (ἀγαθος) and Love (ἔρως)

For Dionysius, Scripture (θεολογία) gives the ideal language for celebrating the God beyond being who is also providentially present, for hymning the providential activity of the God beyond being. The names Dionysius “unfolds” in Chapter Four of *DN*—Good, Light, Beauty, Love, Ecstasy, and Jealousy—are the preeminent names of the “beyond-divine Deity.”⁹⁶ Among these, Good and Love get the most attention. These names are those that hymn the progression of Providence from the Source of Being, rather than the providential powers themselves. (This is a fine distinction, but one that marks the difference between the preeminent divine names in Chapter Four and those beginning with Being in Chapter Five). Thus, they are the names that get closest to properly significant affirmative speech about the God beyond being, as they describe how such a God could become providentially present to being. What do they tell us about the basic relation of being to “beyond-being-ness”?

It is worth pausing here to ask two further questions, one of the *CD*’s structure and one of a lexical curiosity related to the names in Chapter Four. On the structure: why are these the preeminent names, placed before “Being” and the other divine names, and set apart by a major reminder of God’s “beyond-being-ness” at the beginning of Chapter Five? On the *CD*’s lexical decisions: why does the *CD* avoid the consistent negation of

⁹⁶ DN 4.1.

these names, when it so systematically negates the other divine names throughout? That is, names like Being, Intellect, and Life are consistently attached with a negative (α -) or hyperochic ($\acute{\upsilon}\pi\epsilon\rho$ -) prefixes.⁹⁷ Yet God is never called “not-good.” Although God is sparingly called “*hyper*-good,” God is never called “not-love” nor “*hyper*-love”? Both of these questions suggest implicitly what Dionysius says explicitly, that the names in Chapter Four are in some way “preeminent.” In what way are they so? If the theologians use all sort of divine names for God, names that ought not, Dionysius insists, be applied partitively to God, how do these names differ?⁹⁸ All this suggests that the language of love is uniquely suited to hymn the God beyond being who is providentially present to being.

⁹⁷ For example, DN 4.3: “But if the Good is beyond all things being, as indeed it is, and gives form to the formless, even in Itself alone ($\acute{\epsilon}\nu\ \alpha\upsilon\tau\tilde{\omega}\ \mu\acute{\omicron}\nu\omega$), both the Non-Being is a *hyperbole* of being ($\tau\acute{\omicron}\ \acute{\alpha}\nu\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota\omicron\nu\ \omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota\acute{\alpha}\varsigma\ \acute{\upsilon}\pi\epsilon\rho\beta\omicron\lambda\eta$), and the Non-Living *hyper*-has life ($\tau\acute{\omicron}\ \acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega\omicron\nu\ \acute{\upsilon}\pi\epsilon\rho\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omicron\upsilon\sigma\alpha\ \zeta\omega\eta$), and the Non-Intellect is a *hyper*-possessing wisdom ($\tau\acute{\omicron}\ \acute{\alpha}\nu\omicron\upsilon\nu\ \acute{\upsilon}\pi\epsilon\rho\acute{\alpha}\iota\rho\upsilon\sigma\alpha\ \sigma\omicron\phi\iota\acute{\alpha}$).” McGinn points out that Being-Life-Wisdom is a traditional Neoplatonic Triad (*Foundations*, 160). The ambiguity of the prefix *hyper*- is treated below (119-26), but notice that the *CD* uses the negative and hyperochic prefixes to mean the same thing, even if it uses them more frequently of the names after those found in Chapter Four (that is, it negates, as it were, these names more often than Good, Love, etc.). Are the names from Chapter Four preeminent because they are more properly said of the God beyond being who is providentially present, providing some account of how the beyond-being Trinity relates to this more traditional Neoplatonic Triad (of Being-Life-Wisdom), the more proximate, as it were, source of being?

⁹⁸ Plotinus himself calls the One “lovable and love and love of himself, in that he is beautiful only from himself and in himself” without his typical apophatic marker, *hoion*, anywhere in the passage. *Enneads*, VI.8.15.1-2. Plotinus’s habit is to use an “apophatic marker,” which works something like the *CD*’s consistent positing of “beyond-being-ness,” as a reminder of the inadequacy of language for God. For the concept of “apophatic marker,” see Sells, *Mystical Languages*, 16-17. This habit is so consistent in Plotinus that Rist, even in his attempt to esteem the place of Love in the *CD* by noting Neoplatonic precedent, mistakenly claims that Plotinus uses the apophatic marker when calling the One “Love” in VI.8.15. “Love, Knowing and Incarnation in Pseudo-Dionysius,” 376. Dionysius, like Plotinus, shows nothing of his typical reserve when it comes to using the language of love for God.

The *CD*, following the practice of the theologians, does not shy from putting the divine names from Chapter Four to work. “Let then the self-existent Goodness (αὐτοαγαθότης) be sung from the Oracles as defining and manifesting (ἐκφαίνουσα) the whole supremely-Divine Reality, whatever it is (ὅ τι ποτέ ἐστιν).”⁹⁹ Again,

let us examine the all-perfect Name of Goodness, which is revealing (ἐκφαντορικὴν) of the whole progressions (προόδων) of Almighty God, having invoked the supremely good, and beyond-good Triad—the Name revealing (ἐκφαντορικὴν) Its whole best Providences (προνοιῶν).¹⁰⁰

That is, Good is the divine name that evokes the progression of the unintelligible Trinity in providential energies that direct existing things. It directs one to all of God’s providential activities in creating and sustaining all that participates in Being, and even describes Providence as it includes things not existing. That is, in relation to other names, Good is the preeminent term, one that celebrates more than God as Being.

Yet the name Good does not only apply to God as creating and sustaining Cause of being, and therefore exceeding the bounds of being. It also applies to God as the end of all being.

Goodness turns all things to Itself... and it is the Good, as the Oracles say, from Which all things subsisted (ὑπέστη), and are being brought into being by an all-perfect Cause; and in Which all things consisted (συνέστηκεν), as guarded and governed in an all-controlling route; and to Which all things are turned, as to their own proper end; and to Which all aspire (ἐφίεται)...¹⁰¹

That is, when the theologians call God “Good,” they affirm that God creates and sustains all things by his Providence “bubbling forth” and directs all things back to that Source.

Though contemporary scholars recognize a resonance here with the Proclean dynamic of

⁹⁹ DN 2.1.

¹⁰⁰ DN 3.1.

¹⁰¹ DN 4.4.

procession, remaining, and return,¹⁰² the *CD* draws on scriptural language to describe how the Good beyond being both produces being and calls being back to itself. Notice how the end of this passage calls the Good that “to Which all aspire (ἐφίεται).” The *CD* describes the movement of divine desire with the most unreservedly and consistently cataphatic language in the corpus. Love—a further designation of the Good—is the key to the procession of the God beyond being, which nevertheless remains in itself, and which draws all being back to itself in its return.

The theologians, and also Dionysius’s purported superior Hierotheus, use the divine name “Love (ἔρωσ)” to hymn God. Yet, Dionysius is aware that this may seem surprising to his reader. Is it not unfitting or dishonorable to attribute erotic love to God? Surely the more frequent scriptural designation of God as *agape* is more fitting, which does not connote base or carnal relations. Yet, Dionysius insists, the theologians seem to have treated the names *Agape* and *Eros* as equivalent.¹⁰³ Therefore, the *CD* refuses to distinguish between the two terms. This elision of *agape* and *eros* explains how Dionysius can proclaim the apparently Proclus-inspired movement of the God beyond being as procession, remaining, and return. How is this so? Much relies on what Dionysius perceives to be the nature of both Goodness and agapic-erotic Love. They are both productive and attractive. He writes:

Further, it may be boldly said with truth, that even the very Cause of all things, by reason of overflowing Goodness (δι’ ἀγαθότητος ὑπερβολήν), loves (ἐρᾷ) all, makes all, perfects all, sustains all, attracts all; and even the Divine Love is Good

¹⁰² McGinn, *Foundations*, 162; Perl, *Theophany*, 35-52. Both McGinn and Perl emphasize the Proclean dynamic, while also discussing divine Goodness and Love, but neither emphasizes the connection between the two. Dionysius is clearly influenced by Proclus, using the logic of procession, remaining, and return, but he casts this as characteristic of divine Love.

¹⁰³ DN 4.12.

from Good through the Good. For Love (ἔρωζ) itself, the force working good for existing things, pre-existing overflowingly in the Good, did not permit itself to remain unproductive in itself, but moved itself to creation, as befits the overflow which is generative of all.¹⁰⁴

In addition, this productivity is self-diffusive, allowing itself to be drawn:

the very Cause of all things, by the beautiful and good love of everything, through an overflow (ὑπερβολήν) of his loving goodness, becomes out of Himself, by His providences (προνοίαις) for all existing things, and is, as it were, cozened by goodness and affection (ἀγαπήσει) and love, and is led down from the Eminence (ἐξῆρημένου) above all, and surpassing all, to being in all, as befits an ecstatic power beyond being centered in Itself.¹⁰⁵

That is, creation, its sustaining, and its return to God are all understood to be governed by Divine Love. Love leads the Good to create and sustain creation, continually pouring out its providential energies.¹⁰⁶ This is the result of abounding Goodness, but it is also an ecstatic drawing of God *out of* Godself. God abounds with Goodness and so overflows, *and* God is pulled out of Godself by desire for creation. That is, God both grants being its creation and sustenance by pouring Godself out and is drawn to being by love of it (reflecting the elision of the agapic and erotic). Good is by nature overflowing, self-diffusive. Love is by nature productive and ecstasy-inducing. “Divine Love is ecstatic, not permitting any to be lovers of themselves, but of those beloved.”¹⁰⁷ Thus, the force of Love accounts for the continued presence of the God beyond being. In fact, the theologians claim that God is “Jealous” for creation.

¹⁰⁴ DN 4.10.

¹⁰⁵ DN 4.13.

¹⁰⁶ Also, to those who “reproach” and “depart from Him,” he “clings lovingly (ἐρωτικῶς ἔχεται)” and “further promises to serve them, and runs towards and meets [them]... and when His entire self has embraced their entire selves, He kisses them...” Epist. 8.1.

¹⁰⁷ DN 4.13. As the longer quote above makes clear, the “any” here includes both God and creation. Divine Love does not allow God to love Godself alone.

We are left with the impression that the Good beyond being—that which is named in Chapter Four—has a relation to being that can best be described by Love. The name Love, affirmed by the theologians, is a way of unfolding or interpreting the divine name Goodness, which, as for Plato in the *Republic*, must by nature, be “beyond being” (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας). Ultimately, Dionysius never addresses the dialectical tension inherent in the ambiguous claim, repeatedly presented in the *DN*, that the God beyond being is present to being through Providence, yet in an unknown way. This is a dilemma wrought by faithfulness to scriptural witness, and Dionysius does not refer to Love as resolving this tension. In fact, it highlights it. Yet, in following his superiors in hymning Divine Love and unfolding its name, Dionysius begins to engage his reader in a process of discerning the God beyond being.

Conceptual Aperture #1: Beyond-being and Present

For now, it is important to note that we have described our first ambiguity, or conceptual aperture, in the *CD*. The God beyond being and beyond intelligibility is providentially present to creation. God’s “beyond-being-ness” is evoked alongside God’s “providential power.” Is this God present or absent? Transcendent or immanent? For Dionysius, to claim that God is “beyond being” is to paint such contradictions as dialectically productive. As we will see in Chapter 5, for Gallus the love drama of the Song of Songs is revealed through this conceptual aperture—the Song, which depicts the relation between the soul and the Word of God, is the best intertextual reference for faithfully expounding the sense of this ambiguity. For now, it is important to note that the

CD depicts the God beyond being as providentially present, an unresolvable textual tension.

II. Language: Hymning the Ineffable

If the *CD* never resolves this tension, presenting God's beyond-being-ness and providential presence side-by-side, it should be clear that, although all of being serves as a potential site for *theophany* (θεοφάνεια) or God-revelation, God also remains *aphanous* (ἀφανής) or unrevealed.¹⁰⁸ Because God is providentially present, to a "clear-sighted mind" everything can be *theophanous*.¹⁰⁹ Yet, because God remains beyond being (invisible and unintelligible), God remains always unmanifest.¹¹⁰ Thus perfection (τελείωσις) in the *CD* does not entail intellectual vision of the divine nature, which may never be available for intellectual cognition.¹¹¹ What should the reader of the *CD* make of this dilemma? If everything has the potential for being *theophanous* but consistently frustrates the revelation of God, what can overcome this problem? How does the *CD* describe the manifestation of the unmanifest?

¹⁰⁸ Again, a lexical examination confirms what is stated explicitly. The terms *theophany* (θεοφάνεια) and *aphanous* (ἀφανής) each appear a total of 12 times in the *CD*. *CD* II, "Griesches Register," 276, 284.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. CH 15.5. For Dionysius's appeal to the Pauline idea that invisible things are known through the visible, see Epist. 9.2.

¹¹⁰ Perhaps most telling is Dionysius's claim that even Jesus does not finally reveal or unveil the beyond-being-ness of God. "[T]he Word of God (θεολογίαν) suggests even this, that the Beyond-being (τὸν ὑπερούσιον) proceeded forth out of the hidden, into the manifestation (ἐμφάνειαν) amongst us, by having taken substance as man. But, He is hidden, even after the manifestation, or to speak more divinely, has been kept hidden, and the mystery with respect to Him has been reached by no word or intellect (οὐδενὶ λόγῳ οὔτε νῶ), but even when spoken, remains unsaid, and when conceived unknown (ἄγνωστον)." Epist. 3.

¹¹¹ Although we will see that Dionysius allows for visionary experience, especially among the "theologians" (authors of Scripture), this is never an intellectual grasp of an object of vision. See below, 115-7.

Just from perusing the titles of the *CD*'s treatises, we can posit that the *CD*'s primary approach to this problem is a Christian way of life, wherein Scripture and liturgy are administered hierarchically. On the way, as it were, to the God beyond being, the human mind uses the “material guidance suitable to itself (τῆ κατ’ αὐτὸν ὕλαία χειραγωγία)” in order to move from visible things to invisible things.¹¹² This material guidance comes from the liturgical rites interpreted in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* (EH), but it also includes the linguistic or noetic practices described and performed, for example, in the treatises on the *Divine Names*, the *Mystical Theology* (MT), and the first few chapters of the *Celestial Hierarchy* (CH). That is, there is remarkable consonance in the *CD* between hermeneutic and liturgical practice, between language and sacrament—both are geared toward the mystical goal that will be treated in the following section, and both involve forms of “material guidance,” which Dionysius famously associates with the use of symbols (σύμβολα).¹¹³ Yet, as we will see, the *CD*'s treatment of these symbols is just as dialectically rendered as its teaching about God. This section will show that Scripture (θεολογία) uses “symbols” or “veils” to hymn God as both beyond being and providentially present with the result that hymning ought to be interpreted both causally and *hyperochically* (or, “beyond-having-ly”). While the meaning of *hyperoche* is fundamentally ambiguous, suggesting both the adequacy and inadequacy of any symbol for God, recent treatments of the issue have attempted to resolve or downplay this ambiguity. By closing the section with a brief look at two of those treatments, I highlight another conceptual aperture in the *CD*—language veils God in its very unveiling of God.

¹¹² CH 1.3.

¹¹³ As Golitzin says, Dionysius applies that “pattern” of divine worship “to both the Christian assembly at worship, *and* to the Christian soul, and he does so in order to keep both anchored in each other...” *Mystagogy*, 54.

Hymns (ὕμνοι): *Theology* (θεολογία), *Symbols* (σύμβολα), and *Veils* (παραπέτασμα)

Because scholars have recently and rightly resituated Dionysius’s thinking about Scripture and interpretation in this larger liturgical and hierarchical context,¹¹⁴ it is now possible to return to the DN, MT, and the early chapters of CH to reconsider what they say about the use of divine language. If liturgy and scriptural interpretation are the “material guidance” necessary for Christian perfection—for the right mode of relation to the unmanifest manifest in creation—how do they work? More specifically, how can theological language, the language of Scripture, “guide” one when one’s goal is the ineffable God beyond being?

Dionysius acknowledges that this problem will confront the reader of Scripture. Echoing Philo on the relation of scriptural language to divine ineffability, Dionysius asks:

[I]f It is superior to every expression (λόγου) and every knowledge (γνώσεως), and is altogether placed beyond mind (ὑπὲρ νοῦν) and essence (οὐσίαν),... in what way will our treatise thoroughly investigate the meaning of the Divine Names, when the beyond-being Deity is shown to be without Name, and beyond Name?¹¹⁵

That is, how does Scripture use divine names, if God’s “beyond-being-ness” ensures that God is unintelligible and ineffable? The immediate answer that Dionysius gives to this question has led too quickly to a resolution of this tension in his corpus by contemporary readers. As we have seen, he answers that the theologians (the writers of scripture) do not

¹¹⁴ Orthodox readers like Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, and more recently Golitzin, *Mystagogy*, have emphasized the liturgical side of the *CD* and the centrality of the EH, the *CD*’s longest treatise. Attempts to restore the *CD* to its liturgical frame are in reaction to both Western medieval mystical reading and postmodern language theory’s engagement with negative theology that center on the MT. I briefly address the place of the EH and MT below, 129n151.

¹¹⁵ DN 1.5.

use divine names to hymn the “beyond-being-ness” (ὑπερουσιότης) of God, but to hymn God’s Providence (προνοία).¹¹⁶ Therefore, Jones posits that the divine names refer to God’s providential activity, but not to God’s “beyond-being-ness.”¹¹⁷

Yet there are two reasons the distinction between God’s beyond-being-ness and Providence cannot be the final word on theological language. First, as we have already traced above, the distinction is only presented with a consistent qualifier of God’s simplicity.¹¹⁸ God’s beyond-being-ness and God’s providential presence are unified in the dialectical work of divine Love in the *CD*. It is the very God beyond being that is providentially present to all. Theological language will thus continue to conceal God, even as it attempts to reveal God by hymning God’s providential powers.

Second, in a passage just below the claim that the theologians attribute the divine names to the work of Providence, the *CD* states that the theologians in addition derive the divine names from “certain occasional divine appearances (θείων φασμάτων)” of “the beyond-bright and beyond-name Goodness (τὴν ὑπερφαῖ καὶ ὑπερώνυμον ἀγαθότητα).”¹¹⁹ That is, the theological language (hymning) of the Prophets and other “theologians” comes from some integration of participation in being, providentially arranged, with special encounter with the Good beyond being. Dionysius prays that he and his reader, too, will become initiated into these *theophanic* contemplations.¹²⁰ This is why Scripture and liturgy, “handed down” (παράδοσις) from the Apostles, are the central

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Jones, “The *Divine Names* in John Sarracen’s Translation.”

¹¹⁸ See discussion and quotations on divine unity on 103-4.

¹¹⁹ DN 1.8. It is important to note that Dionysius describes these as *distinct* from the “universal or particular Providences” mentioned above.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

pieces of the mechanism of perfection.¹²¹ Scripture and liturgy teach one how to proceed given that the God beyond being is unintelligibly present to being. And the especially reliable character of the symbols used in this apostolic hymning comes from the Apostles'

¹²¹ What Dionysius describes here as the special appearances to the theologians, which are likewise the goal of Dionysius and Timothy (and presumably the reader of the *CD*) need not be understood as extra-linguistic and extra-liturgical. They take place in “temples” among the “initiated.” That is, divine φάσματα are wrought through or given in the performance of symbolic ritual *and* go on to engender the positing of certain symbols for God. But it is possible to overemphasize the liturgical, symbolic frame of the *CD* so that one does not recognize the excessive experience at its foundation, which in turn is the basis of prophetic and apostolic authority (and the aspiration of adherents). I have reservations about recent attempts to downplay the role of the MT and mysticism in the corpus, in favor of liturgy and hierarchy (cf. Turner, “How to Read Pseudo-Denys Today?” and Golitzin, *Mystagogy*). Perhaps it is best to risk the Western medieval formulation favored by De Lubac (a close reader of the *CD*), that in these experiences “grace perfects nature,” neither leaving it behind nor reducible to it, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*. That is, theological and liturgical symbols, like those used in the EH, are integral to the very divine act that suddenly draws one superintellectually “beyond” them. But, according to Dionysius, apostolic special experiences are the basis of the Christian liturgico-symbolic system (hymning). They provided the authority for that system, an authority to which the author of the *CD* appeals by adopting the pseudonym.

The confluence of special experiences, religious rituals, and philosophical reflection are hallmarks of late ancient theurgy (see n45 above). The Neoplatonic theurgist Iamblichus had likewise distinguished the variety of welcome divine appearances (φάσματα) from lowly visions (φαντάσματα), the former being “true icons of [the gods] themselves (τὰς ἀληθινὰς ἐαυτῶν εἰκόνας),” the latter cheap and false offerings of magicians (*De Mysteriis*, 111). Thus, an icon is a material or linguistic tool, as it were, that works on the viewer, allowing them to participate in divine work (*theurgy*) and transforming the soul, but not just anything is an icon. Golitzin’s reading of the *CD* likewise stresses the *iconic* character of Dionysian mystagogy (*Mystagogy*). Something of this iconic mechanism at play here is alluded to by Iamblichus: “But if the soul weaves together its intellectual and its divine part with higher powers, then its own visions (φαντάσματα) will be purer” (127). Both Iamblichus and Dionysius make the iconic a prime tool for accessing the divine—participation in rituals of iconic worship lead to more divine visions (φαντάσματα).

Gregory Shaw has pointed to one distinction between the two (“Neoplatonic Theurgy and Dionysius the Areopagite”): Iamblichean theory encapsulated multiple culture-specific theurgic systems, while Dionysian theory restricted theurgic symbols to those of the Christian church. Yet, while Iamblichus’s theory is more pluralistic, it is worth noting that both systems relied on the accounts of (and aspirations for) authoritative experiences of illuminated individuals. That is, while Iamblichean theurgy has been rightly credited as being formative for Christian sacramentalism, both systems draw on special experience.

encounter with the God beyond being.¹²² What should be clear from these two considerations is that any quick identification of divine effability with divine Providence (and divine ineffability with divine beyond-being-ness) is misguided. Theological hymning comes somehow from the experiential discernment of the God beyond being providentially present to being.

If the theologians' "hymning" does not reveal God by referring to God's providential powers or energies, what does it do? A couple of passages help disabuse us of our modern associations of language with reference. Given that God is beyond being, theological language does not refer to God, as the *CD*'s consistent use of "hymning" to describe theological writings suggests. Instead,

We are led by [the scriptures] to the supremely Divine Hymns (τοὺς θεαρχικοὺς ὕμνους), by which we are supermundanely enlightened and moulded (τυπούμενοι) to the sacred hymn-singings (τὰς ἱερὰς ὑμολογίας), so as both to see the supremely Divine illuminations given to us by them, according to our capacities, and to hymn the good-giving Source...¹²³

¹²² In this passage on divine apparition, Dionysius is explicitly referring to the Prophets and those "initiated" (presumably into the hierarchy of the Law). The *CD* does not spend much time treating Christology, but by calling Jesus the manifestation of the unmanifest and the "Hierarch," it suggests the significance of the apostolic encounter with Jesus Christ, who manifests the unmanifest. Further evidence for the centrality of divine encounter with Jesus is found in Epist. 4: "[H]e who sees divinely (ὁ θεῖως ὁρῶν), will know beyond intellect even the things affirmed respecting the love towards man of Jesus—things which possess a force of *hyperochic* negation."

¹²³ DN 1.3. It is perhaps worth noting that here language appears to give way to even more perfect language, which may point vaguely to Dionysius's Christology, since this more perfect language may be something like participation in the Word itself (indistinguishable from Theology and Hymnology). Given the centrality of veil imagery we will see below, we might think of successive folding back and putting on of various hymns.

Here Dionysius seems especially indebted to Iamblichus. On theurgic "invocations (κλήσεις)," Iamblichus writes:

For the illumination that comes about as a result of invocations is self-manifesting (αὐτοφανής) and self-willed, and is far removed from being drawn down by force, but rather proceeds to manifestation (εἰς τὸ ἐμφανές) by reason of its own divine energy and perfection, and is as far superior to (human) voluntary motion as the

That is, scriptural language guides, illumines, and transforms.¹²⁴ It conducts one towards angelic “hymning,” and makes one an imitator of the Apostles, able to see and sing, as it were, as they did. Again,

But now, to the best of our ability, we use symbols (συμβόλοις) appropriate to things Divine, and from these again we elevate ourselves, according to our degree, to the simple and unified truth of the intellectual contemplations (τῶν νοητῶν θεαμάτων)...¹²⁵

Again, the use of theological language is akin to the use of symbols or icons (εἰκόνες) in the liturgy.¹²⁶ Even more tellingly, the *CD* calls theological language “sacred veils (παραπετασμάτων) of the loving-kindness towards humanity (φιλανθρωπίας), made

divine will of the Good is to the life of ordinary deliberation and choice... It is plain, indeed, from the rites themselves, that what we are speaking of just now is a method of salvation for the soul; for in the contemplation of the blessed visions the soul exchanges one life for another and exerts a different activity (ἑτέραν ἐνέργειαν ἐνεργεῖ), and considers itself then to be no longer human—and quite rightly so: for often, having abandoned its own life, it has gained in exchange the most blessed activity of the gods (τῶν θεῶν ἐνέργειαν). (51, 53).

This passage suggests that Iamblichean theurgic prayer and Dionysian hymning use ritual or scriptural language to exchange one’s energy for divine energy—in the case of the *CD*, energy already acquired by the theologians. Invocations or hymns are perhaps the conditions for deifying “self-manifesting illumination.” What they certainly do not do is signify or refer one to an intelligible object.

¹²⁴ Thus, unlike the angels, human beings are “led to the Divine by the varied texture of holy and representational contemplation (τῆς ἱερογραφικῆς θεωρίας).” In contrast, angels are “filled with all kinds of immaterial knowledge of higher light, and satiated, as permissible, with the beautifying and original beauty of superessential and thrice manifested contemplation (ὑπερουσίου καὶ τριφανοῦς θεωρίας)...” CH 7.2. That is, Scripture and liturgy provide the mechanism of perfection necessary for human beings, who need “sensible and intellectual symbols,” unlike the angels, who contemplate the beyond-being Trinity according to their own capacity.

¹²⁵ DN 1.4.

¹²⁶ And hermeneutic practice is akin to liturgical practice. “[T]he many discredit the expressions concerning the Divine Mysteries. For, we contemplate them only through the sensible symbols that have grown upon them. We must then strip them, and view them by themselves in their naked purity. For, thus contemplating them, we should reverence a fountain of Life flowing into Itself... We thought it necessary then... that we should, as far as possible, unfold (ἀναπτυχθῆναι) the varied forms of the Divine symbolic representations (συμβολικῆς ἱεροπλαστίας) of God.” Epist. 9.1.

known in the Oracles and hierarchical traditions (παραδόσεων).” These veils “envelope things intellectual in things sensible, and things beyond being in things that are.”¹²⁷

However, here Dionysius reveals little about how symbolic veils, or “hymning,” works. How does hymning conduct one to the right relation to the God beyond being? More specifically, what relation is there between the God beyond being and the divine names hymned in Scripture? What happens when God is hymned as “Good,” “Being,” or “Life”? “Beyond being” or “Unliving”? As we will see, the answer to this question is tellingly unclear, the *CD* preferring a dialectical presentation of ideas about theological language.

Divine Names: Hymning Causally and Hyperochically (ὑπεροχικῶς)

When the theologians “hymn” God, veiling and unveiling the God beyond being who is providentially present, how are they using language? Plenty of readers of the *CD* (especially the *DN*) have thought they found in it a theory for the predication of divine attributes.¹²⁸ Dionysius is perhaps most famous for the use of both affirmative statements (*cataphasis*) and negative statements (*apophasis*) about God. Though the end of the *DN*

¹²⁷ DN 1.4. Notice, importantly, that veils cover both things intellectual *and* things beyond being.

¹²⁸ In a series of articles from the 1950s Harry Wolfson lays out some of the options. Wolfson describes five major approaches to predication of divine attributes from Plotinus to Thomas Aquinas: negation, causality, eminence (*hyperoche*), equivocation/univocation, and analogy. As we will see, Wolfson is right when he claims that Dionysian predication is both causal and *hyperochic*. Briefly, causal predication uses language to refer to God as the source or origin of human attributes (God is wise=God is the cause of wisdom). *Hyperochic* (literally, “beyond-having”) predication is more complicated. It suggests that the predication of a divine attribute both inculcates the sense that God has the attribute in question, and that the way God has this quality is so excessive that it cannot be understood or even should be denied (God is wise=God is so wise as to create an aporia when we try to understand). See below.

claims that negative statements are the more preferred locutions since God is beyond being and intellect,¹²⁹ the *CD* consistently presents and performs affirmations and negations dialectically. How then ought they be interpreted? We will see that one ought to interpret theological predication (or rather “hymning”) causally and *hyperochically* (“beyond-having-ly”).¹³⁰ However, by exposing the theology of *hyperochic* hymning in the *CD*, we will also see that contemporary readers have gone too far in resolving the fundamental ambiguity in *hyperochic* predication. To interpret a predicate of God *hyperochically* is to interpret it in a negative, though non-privative way.¹³¹ This negative (but non-privative) theology of predication is a second conceptual aperture in the *CD*, since hymned theological symbols repeatedly unveil and veil the God beyond being. This sub-section will present some passages of the *CD* on hymning as both causally and *hyperochically* understood. The next will point out how two recent interpreters of the *CD* have made sense of the *hyperochic* predication of divine attributes in the *CD*. Keeping in

¹²⁹ “Wherefore, even [the theologians] have given the preference to the ascent through negations (διὰ τῶν ἀποφάσεων), as lifting the soul out of things kindred to itself, and conducting it through all the Divine conceptions, above which towers that which is above every name, and every expression and knowledge, and at the furthest extremity attaching it to Him, as far indeed as is possible for us to be attached to that Being.” DN 13.3.

¹³⁰At times the *CD* seems to propose that *hyperochic* predication is the way to understand negative statements, while causal predication is the way to understand affirmative statements. Yet, the dialectical and hymnic presentation of the divine names suggests that the positing of an affirmative name like “Life” (ζωή) of God also *implies* the positing of its negative “unliving” (ἄζωος). Thus we can talk about *hyperochic* and causal predication as two sides of the same coin—or rather like musical counterpoint. When Scripture (θεολογία) sings these two terms together, it affects one’s capacity to discern the God beyond being in some way.

¹³¹ See below, 122-6. Also, “Varied knowledge conceals the Unknowing (τὴν ἀγνώσῃαν ἀφανίζουσι αἱ γνώσεις). Take this in a *hyperochic* (ὑπεροχικῶς), but not in a privative sense (μὴ κατὰ στέρησιν), and reply in a way beyond truth, that the unknowing, respecting God, escapes those who possess existing light, and knowledge of things being...” Epist. 1. Timothy Knepper, *Negating Negation*, has most recently called attention to this important and misunderstood aspect of the *CD*.

mind the *CD*'s consistent use of the language of “hymning” and properly understanding *hyperoche* will help the reader to avoid the temptation to resolve the ambiguity inherent in divine predication in the *CD*.

One lexical curiosity the reader will notice in the *CD* is the consistent use not only of divine names, but of alpha- (ἄ-) and “hyper-” (ὑπερ-) prefixes appended to those same names. That is, the *CD* posits that God is both “Good” (ἄγαθος) and “Beyond-Good” (ὑπεράγαθος), “Life” (ζωή) and “Unliving” (ἄζωος). The theologians use affirmative and negative terms like these to hymn God. The names for the Deity can denote either “whatever belongs to *hyperochic* removal (ὅσα τῆς ὑπεροχικῆς ἐστὶν ἀφαιρέσεως)” or “the Cause (αἰτία) of all good things.”¹³² That is, theological hymning treats God as *hyperochically* (or “beyond-having-ly”) negated and as the Cause of all. This should look familiar. Dionysius is claiming that scriptural hymning takes into account *both* God’s “beyond-being-ness” *and* God’s providential presence. Another passage suggests the same: “For, to those who hymn worthily of God, all these [divine names] signify (σημαίνει) Him by every conception (ἐπίνοιαν) as Beyond-being Being (ὑπερουσίως εἶναι), and Cause in every way of things existing.”¹³³ Theological hymning is a form of signification that takes account of God both as beyond being and as the Cause of all, the kind of predication appropriate to the God beyond being who is causally present.

One final passage makes clear that theological hymning ought to be understood as a mode of dialectical expression of God as cause of being *and* beyond being:

No doubt, the mystical traditions of the revealing Oracles sometimes hymn the august Blessedness of the beyond being Godhead (ὑπερουσίου θεαρχίας), as Word, and Intellect, and Being, manifesting its God-becoming expression and

¹³² DN 2.3.

¹³³ DN 5.8.

wisdom, both as really being Origin, and true Cause of the origin of things in being, and they describe it as Light, and call it Life... [even though these] in reality fall short of the supremely Divine similitude. For it is above every being (ὕπερ πᾶσαν οὐσίαν) and life.¹³⁴

By using positive affirmations and negative terms (prefixed with ἄ- or ὑπερ-) together, the theologians are able to productively hymn the God beyond being whom they have encountered as providentially present Cause of all. As we will see, contemporary readers of the *CD* have been particularly interested in the negative terms and the *CD*'s theory of negative predication, but they have also tended to hastily resolve the basic ambiguity in *hyperochic* negation. What does it mean to predicate something of God *hyperochically* or “beyond-having-ly”?¹³⁵

Two Accounts of Hyperochic Negation

In John D. Jones's assessment, Western readers of the *CD* misunderstand its frequently-used alpha-privatives, which negate some predicate of God. Dionysius refers to God as “inaccessible” (ἄβατος), “unknown” (ἄγνωστος), “unliving” (ἄζωος), “unmovable” (ἀκίνητος), “inimitable” (ἀμίμητος), “unintellectual” (ἄνοος), “invisible” (ἀόρατος), “infinite” (ἄπειρος), “incomprehensible” (ἀπερίληπτος) and “ineffable” (ἄρρητος).¹³⁶ Jones claims the Eastern Orthodox tradition best recognizes a twofold sense of Dionysian negativity. On the one hand, these alpha-privatives do not simply *deny* these

¹³⁴ CH 2.3.

¹³⁵ We might likewise ask what it means to predicate something “causally,” though this has not raised as much attention among scholars as *hyperochic* predication.

¹³⁶ Gathered from *CD* II, “Griechisches Register,” 269-76. Jones's characterization of the Western position relies on Albert and Aquinas. Was Western reception of these terms in the *CD* so unified?

characteristics of God—they do so preeminently.¹³⁷ That is, because God is beyond being and intellection, saying that God is “not such-and-such” means that God exceeds any human understanding of what “such-and-such” could mean for God. If God is “unliving” (ἄζωος), this does not mean that God lacks life, but that God so exceeds or surpasses life preeminently that God must be said to be “not living.” On the other hand, Jones states that while alpha-privatives perform this “preeminent denial” (God does not *lack*), this should take nothing away from what has been called Dionysius’s radical apophaticism or the “silencing” effected by Dionysian negation. For Jones, ἀ- does not refer to a lack in God’s essence, but he stresses that neither does it in turn refer to *something* else. God *in Godself* cannot properly be said to have life, even in a preeminent way. God has no preeminent possession of life. God in Godself is beyond life, and therefore not “living.”

For Jones, this all turns on a “paradoxical/antinomical way” of talking about God among Dionysius’s Eastern Orthodox readers that we have already seen hinted at in our treatment of the *CD*’s doctrine of God. The Greek tradition eventually distinguishes between the *ousia* (“essence”) and *energeiai* (“energies/activities”) of God—both terms, as we have seen, that appear in the *CD*. For Dionysius and his Orthodox readers, says Jones, the “essence” (ουσία) of God can only be spoken of with the semantic qualifiers of “hyper-essential” (ὑπερούσιος) or the phrase “whatever it is” (ὅ τι ποτέ ἐστιν), because God in Godself is unknowable.¹³⁸ On the other hand, divine “energies” (ἐνέργειαι), as the causal principles of the world *are* amenable to signification. This distinction between

¹³⁷ Jones, “The *Divine Names* in John Sarracen’s Translation.” By fortunate coincidence (or judicious editing) Jones’s and Knepper’s articles that address this same issue appear side by side in *ACPQ*.

¹³⁸ Cf. Michael Sells’s description of the Plotinian “apophatic marker” *hoion* (οἷον) that reminds the reader to remove the semantic content from any apparent act of predication of the One, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*, 16-17.

ousia and *energeiai* is what makes possible the use of language for the “ineffable,” but, Jones stresses, the *ousia* of God in itself remains “unknown and incomprehensible to any created being,” who knows and participates in divine *energeiai*, not in the divine *beyond-being being* (ὑπερούσιον οὐσίαν).¹³⁹ That is, all language spoken of God must refer only to God’s activities in relation to creation—what we have summed up under the Dionysian term Providence. There can never be a “seeing” or “knowing” God in Godself because God’s *ousia* (like the Plotinian One) is beyond being, and therefore beyond intellection.

As we have already seen, Jones’s essence-energies distinction cannot hold for the *CD*, which presents the distinction alongside consistent claims to the unified nature of the Godhead, both present to creation and beyond being. The God beyond being remains unintelligible and hidden, even in God’s providential presence. Yet Jones is correct to claim that Dionysian negation is neither privative, nor does it denote preeminent possession. That is, predicating alpha-terms or negating positive terms of God ought not be interpreted to mean there is some *lack* of the predicated quality in God. Yet to Jones no language will be adequate to the divine essence, which is “beyond having.” In his telling, the end of Dionysian mysticism, if it is to reach, as it were, to the divine essence, must be radically apophatic, negating all terms of the God beyond being.

For Timothy Knepper, this construal is just the kind of misleading story that is often told about Dionysian negation, which he characterizes as a tendency towards “apophatic abandonment.” Too often it is assumed that Dionysius negates predicates of God (as when he uses alpha-privatives) “in order to state their literal falsity of God and

¹³⁹ Jones, “The *Divine Names* in John Sarracen’s Translation,” 665.

thereby to show the inapplicability of predication in general with respect to God.”¹⁴⁰

Knepper, like Jones, claims that a different “logic” of negation is at work in the *CD*, and that attention to Dionysius’s other favorite prefix, *hyper-* (ὕπερ-), helps to bear it out.

If negation does not deny the possibility of predication or signification of God, what does it do? Knepper claims that Dionysius consistently qualifies negation (his persistent α- prefixes) with a reminder that ‘denial’ or ‘removal’ (ἀφαίρεσις) of a predicate from God ought to be interpreted “excessively,” or *hyperochically* (ὕπεροχικῶς).¹⁴¹ *Hyperoche* (“hyper-having”) describes the way in which predicates that are negated ought to be thought to belong properly to God. God *has* those qualities, but God has them “excessively.” Alpha-privatives, which seem to deny some predicate of God, actually affirm that predicate in an excessive way. So when Dionysius says that God is “unliving” (ἄζωος), he means God is living excessively or preeminently. Alpha-privatives (and Dionysian negation more generally) must be thought of with this excessive logic. Knepper proffers a formula for this logic: *Not-p* signifies *more-p-than-most-p*.¹⁴² This seemingly counterintuitive formula is Knepper’s key to the *CD*, and he suggests that it fits logically in the *CD*’s participatory metaphysical frame.

Knepper admits that *hyperoche* (and the prefix *hyper-*), like the English translations “excess” or “preeminence,” can cover two semantic domains. The Greek prefix can refer either to an “exceeding beyond” something or to having something in “an

¹⁴⁰ Knepper, Timothy D. “Not Not: The Method and Logic of Dionysian Negation,” 619.

¹⁴¹ See Knepper’s treatment of the logic of negation, including *aphairesis* and *apophasis* in *Negating Negation*, 35-68.

¹⁴² Knepper, “Not Not: The Method and Logic of Dionysian Negation,” 620.

excessive measure.”¹⁴³ That is, *hyperoche* in the first sense marks a transcendent break with that which is predicated of God—*hyper-* is best translated “beyond,” *hyperoche* as “beyond-having.”¹⁴⁴ In the second sense, it suggests a continuation or abundance of that which is predicated—*hyper-* is best translated “hyper,” *hyperoche* as “hyper-having.”¹⁴⁵ So when Dionysius speaks of God’s *hyperousiotes* (ὑπερουσιότης), it is unclear whether he refers to God’s “beyond-being-ness” (a break with being) or God’s “hyper-being-ness” (more-being-than-most-being). Though Knepper helpfully lays out this ambiguity and admits it could be a productive tension for Dionysius, he tends to emphasize this second interpretation in order to avoid the danger of “apophatic abandonment” that he sees in the work of Jones and others. Jones’s radical unknowing is an appropriate mystical goal for a God whose *ousia* is “beyond being,” but, Knepper worries, to interpret in this way is “to risk making God functionally equivalent to absolutely nothing at all.”¹⁴⁶ God’s relationship to being must be understood in terms of participation, not transcendence.¹⁴⁷ In fact, Knepper provides important conceptual tools for avoiding the distinction, but his

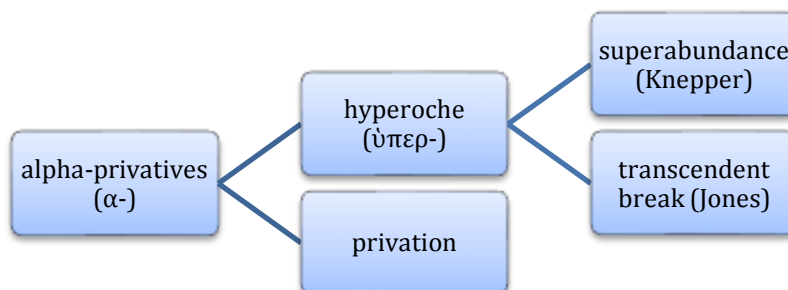
¹⁴³ Knepper, *Negating Negation*, 48-49.

¹⁴⁴ This, he would claim, is the primary way that Jones understands the prefix—as a preeminent *denial*.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁴⁶ Knepper, “Not Not: The Method and Logic of Dionysian Negation,” 637.

¹⁴⁷ The following chart shows the interpretive tendency toward Dionysian negation of the two treatments we have seen. Both prefixes have a possible double meaning—both scholars agree that, according to Dionysius, *hyperoche* is the correct way to interpret alpha-privatives, but they differ on how to interpret *hyperoche*:



polemical purpose (to show that negation must itself be negated to avoid radical apophaticism) at times gets in the way of his helpful clarification of *hyperoche*.

Conceptual Aperture #2: Hymning Unveils and Veils

What this brief treatment of two contemporary takes on *hyperoche* predication shows is that the resolution of the *CD*'s dialectical presentation is tempting, particularly when one loses sight of the language and imagery of "hymning," "veils," and "symbols." Does hymning basically obscure the Divine, suggesting that predication of divine attributes always occurs with the understanding that there is a sharper "dis-analogy" at work? Or do the theologians' hymns reveal or make possible the discernment of the God beyond being (at least as providentially present)? A telling passage from DN first offers a litany of names "received from the holy Oracles" for both "the Divine Causes" and "the beyond-being Hiddenness" (names like "God, or Life, or Being, or Light, or Word"), and then makes the following succinct statement: "but how these things are, it is neither possible to say, nor to conceive (ἐννοῆσαι)."¹⁴⁸ Here is the second conceptual aperture in the *CD*. Its theology of hymning affirms that the symbols that the theologians use both veil and unveil God. Even Dionysian negation is understood *hyperocheally*, as suggesting an "excess" in God that both makes intellectual awareness impossible *and* suggests that some apprehension or encounter is possible. Theology hymns the radical alterity of God alongside God's intimacy with being.¹⁴⁹ What kind of encounter is possible of the God who exceeds intellectual grasping and yet is available to be met?

¹⁴⁸ DN 2.7.

¹⁴⁹ Stang uses the language of "alterity" and "intimacy" rather than "transcendence" and "immanence" in more recent work ("Negative Theology from

III. The Goal of Mystical Theology: Union and (Un)knowing

If God is both beyond being and present to being, and the use of theological symbols both veils and unveils God, is there ever a way to overcome this dilemma? If an intellectual grasp of God is impossible, even through the consideration of God's providential presence, what is the goal of a Christian way of life that includes the liturgical and hermeneutical activities described in EH and DN? Although intellection of the God beyond being is off the table, is it still possible to *know* God in some way? Because intellection (νόησις) of the God beyond being is impossible, the *CD* more frequently casts these questions in terms of knowledge (γνώσις), even using the language of “knowledge beyond intellect (γνώσις ὑπὲρ νοῦν)” to describe the goal of mystical theology or Christian perfection. Yet, the *CD* also frequently describes an “unknowing (ἀγνωσία)” as the goal appropriate to the beyond-being-ness of God.

Perhaps the most famous passage in the *CD* reflects just this tension. Dionysius writes that Moses, having ascended beyond “the divine and highest of the things seen and contemplated (νοουμένων),” which are only “expressions of the things subject to Him who has all things *hyperochically* (ὑπερέχοντι):

...is freed from those things both seen and seeing, and enters into the truly mystical cloud of unknowing (ἀγνωσίας), within which he closes all perceptions of knowledge and enters into the altogether impalpable and unseen, being all, from Him Who is beyond all, and from none, neither from himself nor another; and by inactivity of all knowledge, united (ἐνούμενος) in his better part to the altogether unknown, and by knowing nothing, knowing beyond intellect (ὑπὲρ νοῦν γινώσκων).¹⁵⁰

Gregory of Nyssa to Dionysius the Areopagite”), which I think better reflect the Platonic distinction between “beyond-being-ness” and “presence.”

¹⁵⁰ MT 1.3.

Here in the *CD*'s treatment of the ascent of Moses are its three primary terms for describing its mystical end. Moses leaves behind all objects of sight and contemplation, that is all sensible and intelligible objects. Thus all that is left for Moses is a form of knowing (*gnosis*) that might occur when one has left intellection behind. At the apogee of Moses's ascent, Dionysius describes this as an "unknowing (*ἀγνωσία*)," a "union (*ἕνωσις*)," and a "knowing beyond intellect (*γνώσις ὑπὲρ νοῦν*)." This final section looks at the *CD*'s use of each of these terms in order to describe the goal of mystical theology, or rather the goal of the Christian way of life that participates in the "mysteries." What is "knowing beyond intellect" if it is also an "unknowing" and a "union"?¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Before analyzing these terms I must briefly address a recent scholarly critique of contemporary readings of the *CD*: the proper place of the MT (and mysticism) within the *CD* (See especially Turner, "How to Read Pseudo-Denys Today?" and Golitzin, *Mystagogy*). Since at least the time of Thomas Gallus in the West, readers of the *CD* have claimed that the MT is the interpretive key to the *CD*. Indeed, the depiction of Moses here in its first chapter has, since that time, been seen as paradigmatic for Dionysius's concerns. Scholars since the medieval period have assumed that the central flow of the *CD* goes from the hermeneutical practices that begin in the DN (primarily the "unfolding" of affirmative names of God) to the hymning that ends in negation in the MT. That is, Dionysius has been taken to be fundamentally concerned with the use of language and its limits. As Turner and Golitzin have recently pointed out, this linguo-centric reading (emphasizing language's limits) downplays the role of hierarchy and liturgical rites, also central to Dionysius's concerns. As a result, forms of mediation in the *CD* seem to give way in favor of immediate mystical union.

I take this call to attend to the importance of hierarchy and ecclesiastical rites to be well founded. In fact, the language of "mystery" (*μυστήριον*, *μυστικός*) is found more in the EH than any other treatise. Initiation pertains as much to a set of liturgical rites as hermeneutic practices (*CD* II, "Griechisches Register," 289). Yet it is on the basis of the balance restored to the *CD* by this recent critique that I return to the questions raised by the MT with an appreciation of the *CD*'s dialectical concern with both symbolic mediation (whether language or liturgy) and immediacy. The *CD*, when viewed as a whole, presents the mediating work of liturgical rites alongside that of hermeneutics in its two longest treatises (EH and DN, respectively). Both use symbols (*σύμβολα*) as "material guidance" for the Christian, who has been initiated into the mysteries handed down by the theologians.

Most importantly however these forms of symbolic guidance are not presented in a vacuum. They exist alongside both a consistent qualification of their limits and an

Union (ἔνωσις) and Hierarchy (ἱεραρχία)

Union with the God beyond being is the end of the *CD*. Yet, given what we have seen about the God beyond being, this ought not lead one to believe that the *CD* is ultimately unconcerned with being or creation. As we have seen, being and creation provide the “material guidance” towards the goal of mystical theology. Paradoxically, union is an immediate mystical activity that occurs *through* the material mediation provided by the hierarchies. The *CD*’s well-known definition of “hierarchy” makes this clear:

The purpose, then, of Hierarchy is the assimilation (ἀφομοίωσις) and union (ἔνωσις), as far as attainable, with God... He, then, who mentions Hierarchy, denotes a certain altogether Holy Order, an image (εἰκόνα) of the supremely Divine freshness, administering the mysteries (ἱερουργοῦσαν μυστήρια) of its own illumination in hierarchical orders and understandings, and assimilated to its own proper Principle as far as lawful.¹⁵²

The *CD* uses the same term, union (ἔνωσις), to describe Moses at the height of mystical exercise as it uses here for the goal of hierarchical participation. Moses’ s immediate “union” with God is beyond being, while one participates in hierarchy in order to attain

enjoining towards a mystical goal that occurs at or just beyond those limits, as it were. This qualification and invitation occurs not only in the *MT*, but throughout the *CD*. In fact, the *CD* claims that the dissimilarity of symbols to God reminds one that the symbols themselves are *not* the object toward which one is being guided (CH 2.3).

As we will see, Dionysius explicitly describes union as the purpose of hierarchy. Hierarchical participation, and the hermeneutical and liturgical activities that attend it, give way to forms of union and knowing that go “beyond” them. Such guidance “beyond” both breaks with the symbolic *and* remains attached to it. We have seen some explanation for this. God is already present to those symbols, and one always “knows” the God beyond being as Love, who providentially pours out into the very being that provides symbolic guidance. Love pours out into being (providential presence), and yet remains beyond being (beyond-being-ness). This allows being to become symbol. A further examination of the *CD*’s critical terms for describing its mystical goal will show that on this issue once again the *CD* is ambiguous in a way that is dialectically productive.

¹⁵² CH 3.2.

“union” with God. Hierarchical participation leads to union with God because hierarchies are images or icons (εἰκόνες) of the Trinity. Hierarchical ordering seems to be the primary way that Love manifests the God beyond being in being. Hierarchies allow one to become a “fellow-worker (συνεργὸν) with God, as the Oracles say.”¹⁵³

Yet if union is always mediated through hierarchy, the *CD* also presents union as somehow going beyond hierarchy. For instance,

Thus each rank of the Hierarchical Order is led up (ἀνάγεται), in its own degree, to the Divine co-operation, by performing (τελοῦσα), through grace and God-given power, those things which are naturally and supernaturally in the Godhead, and accomplished by It in a beyond-being way (ὑπερουσίως), and manifested hierarchically (ἐκφαινόμενα ἱεραρχικῶς), for the attainable imitation of the God-loving Minds.¹⁵⁴

That is, hierarchical participation is *anagogic* and assimilating, leading the participant upwards toward co-operation (συνέργεια) with the Trinity, because she participates in the workings of providential powers and energies. Whatever the Trinity does in a beyond-being way (ὑπερουσίως) is performed hierarchically (ἱεραρχικῶς) in being.¹⁵⁵ Whether liturgy or language, “material guidance” leads one upwards towards the God beyond being, or to the “beyond-being Union (ὑπερούσιος ἔνωσις)” itself.¹⁵⁶ Thus “union” is with the God beyond being who is also present to all creation. We have seen how this dialectic is inherent in the concept of divine Love, so it is not a stretch to say that union itself is with divine Love, going beyond being and yet remaining with being. If union goes “beyond” hierarchy to Love itself, what does this union look like? It will be helpful

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ CH 3.3.

¹⁵⁵ Compare this to Proclus’s use of the adverb ὑπερουσίως. Above, we saw that the gods or henads exist in a “beyond being way (ὑπερουσίως),” while those things that participate in them are only in being, 86-7.

¹⁵⁶ DN 2.4.

to consider the forms of relation implied in Dionysius's three terms for the goal of mystical theology.

Unknowing (ἀγνοσία) and *Knowing Beyond Mind* (γνώσις ὑπὲρ νοῦν)

Mystical union is not simple identification with God, as the *CD* simultaneously posits “union” alongside both “unknowing” and “knowing beyond mind”—activities that imply some retained distinction between God and the human being. Notice how these three stated mystical goals balance contradictory implied relations between God and the human being. Relations of union imply a collective subject (“*We* are united”), while knowing suggests a distinct subject and object (“*I* know *you*”).¹⁵⁷ That is, the chief difference between the mystical goals of union (ἔνωσις) on the one hand and knowing (γνώσις) on the other hand may be that one is an activity that stresses cooperation and/or assimilation between two parties while the other retains a significant distinction between two parties (knower and known).¹⁵⁸ In late ancient usage, knowledge (γνώσις) is closely related to intellection (νοήσις), so it suggests this distinction between subject and object that we have seen is a constitutive feature of intellection.¹⁵⁹ It is for this reason that Dionysius insists on both “knowing beyond intellect” and “unknowing,” lest “knowing” seem to retain too much of the distinction implied in noetic activity, a distinction that

¹⁵⁷ The *CD*'s “union,” since it is a form of “knowing,” thus always retains some distinction.

¹⁵⁸ Though we tend to associate this distinction between knower and known with a modern Cartesian tableau, it is also presumed (perhaps in a less explicit form) in Neoplatonic thought, reflected in the Plotinian distinction between the One and the Intellect.

¹⁵⁹ There is a reason that Dionysius appeals to the term *gnosis* (knowledge) as distinct from *noesis* (intellection). It seems that the semantic field it covers is somewhat wider than *noesis*, that it could suggest a unitive form of knowing that is more flexible concerning this strict distinction implied in intellection.

cannot definitively remain since the God beyond being is no object of knowledge. “Unknowing” (*agnosia*), then, is interchangeable with “knowing beyond intellect.”¹⁶⁰ “Unknowing” qualifies the character of this knowledge, just as “beyond intellect” does. This should be no surprise given what we have seen about the interchangeability of alpha- and *hyper*- prefixes in the consideration of hymnic language. “Unknowing” is not simply the absence of knowledge, but a kind of *gnosis* that is somehow different from intellection, just as alpha-prefixes do not imply the absence of an attribute of God, but that this attribute is predicated *hyperochically*. This kind of knowledge does not imply a strict distinction between knower and known, like the activity of intellection, but a form of epistemologically reserved knowing that can occur when the “other” is not available for noetic grasp, yet also in some sense present. Yet, the *CD*’s consistent use of *gnosis* language also suggests that this is not simply a union without distinction. The goal of mystical theology is the kind of encounter one can have with the God beyond being who is unintelligible, but intimately present to being. It is simultaneously a form of union, knowing, and unknowing.

A single passage that treats each of these terms is worth quoting at length. In this extract from *DN*, notice how the character of God as both beyond being and the cause of being necessitates both a union and an unknowing knowing:

[W]e must examine how we know (γινώσκομεν) God, Who is neither an object of intellectual nor of sensible perception (νοητὸν οὐδὲ αἰσθητὸν), nor is absolutely

¹⁶⁰ As some further evidence for the interchangeability of the two terms, consider the following: “But He Himself, established above intellect and being (ὑπὲρ νοῦν καὶ οὐσίαν), by the very fact of His being wholly not known and not being (μὴ γινώσκεισθαι μηδὲ εἶναι), both is in a beyond-being way (ὑπερουσίως), and is known beyond intellect (ὑπὲρ νοῦν γινώσκεται).” *Epist.* 1. Also the alpha- and *hyper*-prefixes are used together in *MT* 1.1, which refers to “the super-unknown (ὑπεράγνωστον)... summit of the mystical Oracles.”

anything of things existing. Never, then, is it true to say that we know God; not from His own nature (for that is unknown, and surpasses all reason and intellect), but, from the ordering of all existing things, as projected (προβεβλημένης) from Himself, and containing some kind of images (εικόνας) and similitudes (ὁμοιώματα) of His Divine plans (παραδειγμάτων), we ascend, in accordance with our power, to that which is beyond all (τὸ ἐπέκεινα πάντων) and [we ascend] in the Cause of all, by method and order in the abstraction (ἀφαιρέσει) and pre-eminence (ὑπεροχῇ) of all. Wherefore, God is known both in all, and apart from all. And through knowledge, God is known, and through unknowing... He is hymned from all existing things, according to the analogy of all things, of which He is Cause. And there is, further, the most divine knowledge (γνώσις) of God, which is known, through not knowing (ἀγνωσία) according to the union above mind (τὴν ὑπὲρ νοῦν ἔνωσιν); when the mind, having stood apart from all existing things, then having dismissed also itself, has been made one with the super-luminous rays, thence and there being illuminated by the unsearchable depth of wisdom. Yet, even from all things, as I said, we may know It, for It is, according to the sacred text, the Cause formative of all, and ever harmonizing all...¹⁶¹

Here we see many now familiar features of the *CD*. Dionysius makes a distinction between the divine nature, itself unintelligible, and the iconic ordering of being, which is a spur towards ascent to the God beyond being. Again providential ordering and hymning are symbolic guidance toward the God beyond being. These symbols are both stripped away (ἀφαιρέσις) and *hyperochically* held (ὑπερόχη), because symbols are veils that both reveal *and* hide God. Unknowing knowing is thus a kind of intimate or unitive knowing in which one is drawn closer to the God beyond being who yet remains not finally grasped by an act of knowing.

Conceptual Aperture #3: An Unknowing Knowing

This final conceptual aperture need not be resolved. It is through the dialectical presentation of these ideas that the *CD*'s reader comes to see that the nature of God, so to speak, is to be the beyond being cause of being. That is, unknowing knowing is of an

¹⁶¹ DN 7.2.

unintelligible God who may, “through grace and God-given power,” be intimately encountered.¹⁶² It is no surprise then that the *CD* calls this a “knowing beyond intellect,” for intellection would demand a final grasping of an intelligible object. Instead, this kind of knowing is an intimate familiarity with the God who remains beyond language (ἄρρητος) and intellection (νοήσις).¹⁶³

This is what the theologians experienced (the prophets through momentary apparition of the beyond being, the apostles through the unmanifest manifestation of Jesus, the Hierarchy of every hierarchy). The *CD* attempts to “hand down” (παράδοσις) this knowledge-by-encounter through the remarkably consistent dialectical presentation of ideas about God, language, and the goal of mystical theology. Scripture and the liturgical rites of the ecclesiastical hierarchy teach that God is beyond being and present, that hymnic symbols veil and unveil God, and that this all gives way ultimately to a non-intellective knowing beyond the mind.

* * *

Thomas Gallus, engaged in a careful reading (*lectio*) of the *CD*, manages to discern and peek through each of these conceptual apertures. In the following chapters, I will argue (against those skeptical of his affective Dionysianism) that Gallus appeals to the Song of Songs precisely in order to faithfully exposit the *CD*. The Song gives Gallus a framework for handing on the wisdom of the *CD* without resolving or stitching up any of its critical conceptual apertures, its constitutive ambiguities.

¹⁶² CH 3.3.

¹⁶³ Thinking about the distinct forms of relation implied in the *CD*'s different terms for its mystical goal, it is perhaps worth comparing the Plotinian picture, which we saw used the metaphor of a kind of awareness that comes from the possession of the poet. See above, 83. The *CD*, filled with evocative imagery in many places, curiously does not give us such an image for (un)knowing union.

But first, Gallus's *CD* was not the critical edition of the Greek text that I have used here, in accordance with most contemporary scholarship on the *CD*. Like most 13th-century scholars in the West, Gallus relied on a Latin translation (or rather, multiple, complementary translations). Because our analysis here has highlighted Dionysius's unique lexicon and literary form, in the following short chapter, I will compare the Latin text from which Gallus worked with the Greek text, primarily through a lexical analysis. As we will see, the robustly literal form of medieval Latin translation of sacred literature works in our favor, as we can rely on the primary text with which Gallus worked to reproduce the major theological tensions treated in this chapter.

Chapter 3: The *Nova Translatio*

Gallus was aware that the *CD* (like many or most sacred writings) was mediated by an act of Latin translation. Although he spent 20 years laboring with Dionysius's writings, like most 13th-century scholars in the West, he appears not to have known Greek. Gallus's encounter with the *CD* was facilitated in part by the translation of his fellow Victorine John Sarracen. Prepared around 1167, Sarracen's translation became, over the next decades, the standard version of the *CD* used in the West, a *nova translatio* (as Gallus refers to it) to complement or surpass the *vetus* or *antiqua translatio* of John Scotus Eriugena, on which Gallus also relied.¹

Though this may appear to be a minor practical consideration, it poses important questions for my theological analysis of Gallus's interpretation of the *CD*. Contemporary translation theorists remind us that an act of translation is inevitably an act of, at best interpretation, at worst corruption.² Did John Sarracen in translating the *CD* from Greek

¹ Sarracen's translation is published (alongside Eriugena's and the other major medieval and modern Latin translations) in two cumbersome volumes of *Dionysiaca*, ed. Chevallier. Seminal studies of the translations by Eriugena and Sarracen were done by Gabriel Théry, O. P. and Francis Ruello. More recently, John D. Jones has treated Sarracen's Latin translations of Greek metaphysical terms. See Bibliography.

² Translation theory has advanced two major paradigms for analysis: *equivalence* and *purpose*. The *equivalence* paradigm considers the use of *formal* (word-for-word), *dynamic* (sense-for-sense), or other methods of translation—that is, how the *source-text* is “carried over” (*trans-latus*) to the *target-text*. In our case, the *equivalence* paradigm would ask, “What method or operation was used in transit from the Greek *CD* to the Latin?” In contrast, the *purpose* paradigm focuses on the aim or audience of the translation, presuming that the goal of the *target-text* will affect the operation (and that equivalence is rarely, if ever, realized). This paradigm would ask, “Why did Sarracen translate? What were his motives theologically, rhetorically, politically, etc.?” Thus the *purpose* paradigm emphasizes the force of the mediating activity of the translator more than the *equivalence* paradigm, and its dominance in recent decades has led to a strong sense of the translator's interpretive activity. This description owes much to Anthony Pym, *Exploring Translation Theories*.

to Latin change it textually or theologically? Is Gallus, by working with a translated text, not working with a mediated, already interpreted, and therefore entirely different text? Most importantly, were the conceptual apertures (the primary features of the *CD*'s theology of hymning treated in the last chapter) even available to be seen and interpreted by Gallus, or had they been resolved or stitched up by the *CD*'s latinization? These questions about the translator's mediating activity should give us pause. Our analysis in Chapter 2 relied heavily on textual claims (how the *CD* itself "hymns," as it were). If Gallus worked with an entirely different (because translated) text, have we not set ourselves up for misunderstanding his interpretation?

In this brief chapter, I will argue that Sarracen's translation is both robustly literal *and* conscientious of clarity, exhibiting a sufficient (and even surprising) amount of fidelity to the original letter and sense of the Greek text, *because of* the very theological aims of its translator. That is, to a remarkable degree it "trans-lates" (literally, "carries over") the *CD* without Sarracen interpreting (getting "between") it.³ After previewing

As we will see, although we should take seriously the *purpose* paradigm's concern for the way the translator's goal may corrupt the purity of equivalence, medieval translation of sacred literature involves strict methods to ensure *equivalence* between *source-text* (Greek) and *target-text* (Latin) because its *purpose* is to reproduce authoritative texts literally, down to the most minute linguistic features, which are divinely imbued with significative possibility (see below). This is not to suggest that the translator always succeeds, but to showcase the unusually high priority of equivalence among medieval Greek-to-Latin translators.

³ The evaluations of Sarracen's translation have not always been so positive. Théry pointed out that Sarracen takes *more* liberties than earlier translators Hilduin and Eriugena, whose stricter word-for-word translations were practically illegible ("Jean Sarrazin, traducteur"). Yet Ruello rightly tempers Théry's position, by suggesting that Sarracen's liberties were more stylistic than theological, and did not fundamentally alter the text ("Les 'nom divins' et leur 'raisons'"). More recently, Jones has gone further than Théry, suggesting that western theological bias caused Sarracen to corrupt the *CD*, a first step in the move to the theology of Thomas Aquinas that purged the *CD* of its Greek negative ontology ("The *Divine Names* in John Sarracen's Translation"). Jones exhibits a

Sarracen’s own stated method of translation (*modus transferendi*), I situate it within a 12th-century literary culture where sacred writings were translated in a rigidly literal fashion, especially in contrast to the paraphrasing translation practice used for less authoritative writings. Sarracen violates this rule of rigid literalism only sparingly and only with careful consideration for the clarity necessary to understand Dionysius, who was “such a learned and well-spoken man (*eruditissimi et disertissimi viri*),” the disciple of Paul, “the most holy and learned of the Apostles (*sanctissimum et ab Apostolis eruditum*).”⁴ Some strong evidence for Sarracen’s method of translating—literal translation with concern for clarity of understanding—is found in his remarkably consistent choice of terms, so I perform a lexical analysis that concludes with an examination of a passage from MT 1, which we saw in Chapter 2 is central to the *CD*. Finally, I conclude that the *nova translatio* of John Sarracen, with which Gallus labored for 20 years (in concert with the *vetus translatio*), provided Gallus a text remarkably consonant with the Greek *CD* in form and content.⁵ That is, Sarracen was successful by

worthy concern about the potential of theological bias to taint translation, but it is possible to overestimate the theological purging of the *CD* in Sarracen’s translation. While Sarracen took liberties to *improve* upon previous translations for a Latin audience, his own way of translating (*modus transferendi*) remained conservative (see below). It was in fact a commitment to textual preservation that led him away from the strict letter of the text (though not very far). Jones’s negative estimation comes from his reading Sarracen’s 12th-century translation as a step towards the Thomistic metaphysics of the late 13th century. Removing this Thomistic *telos* from consideration yields a new appreciation of the text’s robust equivalence to the original (and reminds us there were different trajectories of Dionysianism in the West, some which may have been *more* faithful to the *CD* than Thomas Aquinas).

⁴ Sarracen, “Prologue to CH,” 285; and “Prologue to EH,” 597.

⁵ As will become clear, it can even be argued that Sarracen’s Latin translation is more in line with the letter, and in turn the sense, of the *CD* than the English translations available today, which have been panned for their unwelcome paraphrasing by contemporary scholars. If my analysis in Chapter 2 is correct, even the most basic semantic units of the *CD* (like the morphemes *hyper-* and *a-*) were important

his own standard, improving upon and supplementing the already existing translations, but making the entire spiritually rich corpus more accessible to a Latin audience.

I. *A Method for Translating* (Modus Transferendi)

Medieval literary theorists, like their contemporary counterparts, knew that translation was a complicated enterprise. They were aware of the sometimes fraught relationship between translation and interpretation, believing that neither was easily separable from the other. Hugutio of Pisa writes between 1197 and 1201, “translation (*translatio*) is the exposition of meaning through another language (*expositio sententiae per aliam linguam*),” while John Balbus of Genoa in 1287 quips, “an interpreter (*interpres*) is in between two languages when he translates or expounds one language through another.”⁶ For medieval and contemporary translation theorists alike, the terms are so bound up in one another as to be almost interchangeable.

John Sarracen was aware that translation risks interpretation. The brief prologues to his translation of the *CD* show he carefully considered the act of translation in order to develop his own *modus transferendi*. He informs his reader that Greek style is distinct

theologically. Yet, while modern English translations have rendered them variously and infelicitously, medieval Latin translators were more careful to reproduce them uniformly.

⁶ Both cited in Hanna, et al., “Latin Commentary Tradition and Vernacular Literature,” 363. Thus, Hanna, et al. conclude, it is “abundantly clear that medieval ‘translation’ does not mean merely the production of a replacement text: exposition, exegesis, interpretation (however one wishes to denote hermeneutic process) is involved as well,” 363. If one compares these quotations to the more recent translation theory described above, 137n2, it is clear that modern and medieval translation theorists ask many of the same questions. As Hanna, et al. readily admit however, biblical translation (and I would add, translation of all sacred literature) operated under different rules. Unfortunately studies of medieval translation have fallen along familiar lines of demarcation (secular vs. sacred literature; Latin vs. vernacular translations). More work is welcome on the (dis)continuities between these traditions.

from Latin and oftentimes inimitable. For instance, the Greek article is used to recall persons or things “beautifully,” to connect “many phrases... in a very polished manner, not to mention” how they can be conjoined to participles and infinitives. “These kinds of elegances have not been found among the Latins.”⁷ Aware that this poses a problem for the translator, Sarracen lays out his own principles for translating the *CD*. They are worth quoting at length:

Therefore, when I laid down a suitable translation, I retained (*conservavi*) the order of the words; yet here and there I have changed the order for easier understanding (*intellectum*). But when I have not found equivalent Latin translations (*aequipollentes Latinas*) for Greek words (*Graecas dictiones*), I either have carefully described how the locution differs idiomatically from the locution of the Latins; or I have twisted the Greek words; or I have defined it from the sense of the author, as far as I could, with Latin words. But often when I have placed two or three Latin words for one Greek, I have put them together as one: not because I wanted there to be one word from these, but in order that the meaning (*intellectum*) might more clearly (*planior*) occur, and that it might be clear (*appareret*), however much this treatment might lose its elegance from the poverty of the Latin locution.⁸

Notice Sarracen’s stated ideals for his *translatio*. First, he is committed to textual preservation or conservation (*conservatio*), both in the order of words, and in the choice of equivalent (*aequipollens*) terms. That is, first and foremost, Sarracen says he tries to remain rigidly literal, even mimicking Greek style by making compounds out of Latin

⁷ Sarracen, “Prologue to CH,” 285: “Ad commendationem etiam alicuius personae vel alterius rei, pulchre articuli apud eos repetuntur, et per eosdem articulos multae orationes sibi invicem perpolite connectuntur. Taceo de insigni constructione participiorum et infinitorum articulis coniunctorum. Huiusmodi autem elegantiae apud Latinos nequiverunt inveniri.”

⁸ Sarracen, “Prologue to CH,” 285-6: “Eapropter, ubi congruum duxi, dictionum ordinem conservavi; alicubi vero propter faciliorem intellectum ordinem commutavi. Ubi vero Graecis dictionibus aequipollentes Latinas non reperi, vel locutionem a Latinorum idiomate discrepare comperi: vel Graecas dictiones detorsi; vel de sensu auctoris, quoad potui et ut potui, Latinis dictionibus designavi. Saepe autem ubi duas vel tres dictiones Latinas pro una Graeca posui, eas quasi unam coniunxi: non quod unam dictionem ex his esse vellem, sed ut planior intellectus fieret, et quantum elegantiae ex inopia Latinae locutionis tractatus iste perderet, appareret.”

words, as awkward as this mechanism will be to a Latin reader. Second, it is only when strict textual conservation occludes meaning that Sarracen says he deviates (twisting the Greek words), and not without pointing out Greek terms and delineating their meaning for his reader. Here he has had to rely on the sense of the word, “as far as I could.” Finally, Sarracen describes his method of making new Latin compounds as an act of clarifying reproduction of the Greek locution. That is, the goal of the *nova translatio* is to use a robustly literal method in order to advance clarity of understanding, which involves something closer to textual preservation (of linguistic units from the morphemic to the syntactic) than a breezy and accessible Latin style. All of this constitutes what Sarracen himself refers to as his *modus transferendi* (“method for translating”).⁹

II. “Sacred Writings,” *the Theological Impetus for Literal Translation*

While medieval translators of secular literature (especially from Latin to vernacular languages) would exploit the interplay of translation and interpretation for creative and polemical purposes, translators of sacred literature from Greek into Latin took an opposite approach, producing some painfully awkward literal translations. This can seem like a function of the translator’s ineptitude, but in fact it was a carefully considered strategy for translating that sought the best relation between fidelity to the original form of a sacred writing and accessibility in the common literary language of

⁹ Sarracen, “Prologue to EH,” 597. Although the prologues are brief, consider how far the passage given here fulfills the following description of a translation theory: “A complete theory of translation, then, has three components: specification of function and goal; description and analysis of operations; and critical comment on relationships between goal and operations.” Kelly, *The True Interpreter*, 1. Though Sarracen exhibits an awareness of each of these components, his prologues are too brief to treat each in a robust way. We must fill out his theory by considering his typically 12th-century Victorine theological goals and mode of operation.

Western Europe. Rigid or robust literalism was a way to expose a non-Greek-speaking western audience to the very literary form of Greek texts. But why translate these texts so literally? Could such rigid translation practices actually enable the reader to drink from “the most pure and copious springs of the Greeks”?¹⁰

Medieval translators adopted classical translation theory and adapted it to their own purposes. As Rita Copeland has shown, patristic and medieval translation theorists, like their classical predecessors, eschewed a mechanical word-for-word (*verbum pro verbo*) method in theory, lauding instead a sense-for-sense (*sensum de sensu*) approach. Yet in practice the theological goals of translating sacred writings led to a more rigidly literal mode of operation. On the one hand, medieval translators of Scripture were committed to a spiritual “supra-verbal unity and continuity of meaning” that would remain across the source and target texts, their primary commitment being to the spiritual sense beyond the letter. Yet often translators simply plugged in word-for-word, or phrase-for-phrase, exactly *because* this divine meaning was not fully accessible to the translator. While medieval interpreters of sacred literature advocated “fidelity to the textual signified” (the meaning or spirit more than words themselves), because “the very order of the words in the Bible is a mystery,” and the divine “signified” eluded final intellectual grasp, they kept as close to the form of the text as possible in practice.¹¹ A secular model

¹⁰ Eriugena, not the last grecophile in the Latin West, contrasts these to the traditional study of “western summits,” *Commentary*, 175. See also Berschin, *Greek Letters and the Latin Middle Ages*.

¹¹ Copeland, 52-3. Copeland’s concern with the translators of sacred texts is to show how they pass on classical theory to late medieval translators of secular literature, so she does not treat Greek to Latin translation in practice, but her theological analysis (if cursory) is correct. As we saw in Chapter 2, the providential arrangement of hymnic words in Scripture means even the smallest units of meaning are brimming with more significance than can be exhausted.

of translation—where the translator reads the text in the original language, discerns and grasps the sense fully, then uses their rhetorical training to reproduce the sense with the literary and linguistic tools of another language—could not apply when the “textual signified” was the elusive Spirit Itself.¹²

This theological impetus for literalism is behind the major translations of the *CD* in the Latin West, since the *CD* was included among “sacred writings.”¹³ To the fact that the order of Greek words was divinely arranged, was added the complication that the metaphysical vocabulary of the *CD* was unfamiliar to Latin readers, making difficult the kind of intellectual summation that would serve as a prerequisite for translating according to sense. For these reasons (the text’s difficulty and its sacred status) Latin translators of Dionysius from the beginning produced some of the most widely used, yet robustly literal translations in the West. In a manuscript from as early as the first quarter of the 14th century, the editor of an early translation of the *CD* by Hilduin has added a rubric that states “Dionysius On the Divine Names according to the letter (*Dionysius de divinis nominibus sub litera*).”¹⁴ That is, this editor recognized that Hilduin’s translation operated basically word-for-word, strictly subjected to the letter (*sub litera*). Though

¹² In case Sarracen’s *modus transferendi* seems to betray this principle by stating he necessarily sometimes had to translate from the “sense of the author,” notice that he deferentially adds, “as far as I could.” “Prologue to CH,” 285. I take this to be not just a statement about the difficulty of the text (though medieval writers did find the *CD* difficult to comprehend), but about the very impossibility of final intellectual grasp of the sense of a sacred writing.

¹³ To the Victorines, the writings of the “Doctors of the Church” were simply part of the New Testament itself. “The New Testament contains the Gospels, the Apostles, and the Fathers... For just as after the Law come the Prophets and after the Prophets come the Writings, so too after the Gospels come the Apostles and after the Apostles come the Doctors. So by a certain wonderful plan of divine providence it has happened that, although the truth stands full and perfect in each particular book, not one of them is superfluous.” Hugh, *Didascalicon*, 135-6. See also my Ch. 1.

¹⁴ Described in Thomson, “An Unnoticed MS,” 139.

other medieval translators of the *CD* like Sarracen would thankfully take a slightly more liberal approach than Hilduin, they all operated under a similar theological ideal of textual preservation.

Contrast these theological ideals of textual conservation to those used by translators of “secular writings” not considered to be sacred by the translator. Here paraphrasing abounded, as translators self-consciously innovated to reproduce a meaning already grasped with a wider set of Latin rhetorical tools. In the case of the first and most widespread Latin translation of the Qur’an, completed about the same time as Sarracen’s translation of the *CD*, Robert of Ketton produced a “freewheeling paraphrase,” emended with marginal notes that explain the text polemically.¹⁵ One could multiply examples.¹⁶ Here a general rule is at play—if a text is sacred, translation should remain as literal as possible, allowing the most basic linguistic units of the text to perform their divine significative function, a function that can never be fully discerned by the translator.¹⁷

¹⁵ Burman, “*Tafsir* and Translation,” 707. Burman’s article, and his more recent book, *Reading the Qur’an in Latin Christendom*, argue that such paraphrasing is an act of textual fidelity. But the contrast shows that textual fidelity is understood differently depending on the theological aim of the author. Robert could be confident he grasped the meaning of the Qur’an culturally and theologically, especially in comparison to his contemporaries. No such confidence was permissible for John Sarracen.

¹⁶ See the essays in Campbell and Mills, eds. *Rethinking Medieval Translation*. For example, Ardis Butterfield’s “Rough Translation: Charles d’Orléans, Lydgate and Hoccleve,” shows how the ideal of equivalence was at times designedly absent in Anglo-French translation of secular poetry. Catherine Leglu’s “Translating Lucretia,” suggests that, not only paraphrase, but even images were used to carry over “the sense of a work” (Latin secular histories) into French.

¹⁷ If a text is secular (worldly), translation can follow the model Copeland traces from classical rhetoric, and serve as an act of contestation itself. Copeland, *Rhetoric*, 9-36. Marilynn Desmond’s essay “On Not Knowing Greek” in Campbell and Mills, *Rethinking Medieval Translation*, offers a qualification to our rule, as Leonzio Pilatus produced a word-for-word, Greek-to-Latin interlinear translation of Homer, reproducing the Greek syntax exactly. Perhaps our rule could be slightly amended. Not just sacred texts, but any Greek texts that were frequently interpreted allegorically, tended to need literal

While not every medieval translation of a sacred text was robustly literal, deviations from this norm were carefully marked. When Sarracen’s and Gallus’s fellow Victorine Peter Comestor wrote his *Historia Scholastica* around 1173, he made a point to ensure that the reader knew that he was engaging in an act of paraphrasing, rather than translating, Scripture.¹⁸ Such acts of non-literal “translation” may be appropriate for sacred writings, as long as they serve to supplement the literal versions that fully expose the reader to mysteries contained in even the smallest semantic units—every “jot and tittle,” to borrow a scriptural turn of phrase (Matthew 5:18).¹⁹

III. *A New Translation, a Superior Translation*

As his prologue anticipates, however, John Sarracen did not simply plug in Latin word for Greek word in his *nova translatio*, but carefully discerned where more liberty ought to be taken. Carolingian Latin translations of the *CD* (by Hilduin and Eriugena) had used a more mechanical method.²⁰ Théry suggests that Sarracen’s design may not

translation. Yet, as in our example with Sarracen’s improvement upon Eriugena, rigid first translations were often an initial step in a text’s journey into Latin. Petrarch took liberties in using Pilatus’s rigid translation, paraphrasing it when quoting in his own writings. Desmond’s account suggests that initial rigidly literal translations were for “a utopian community of readers, readers who might use the Latin to read the Greek,” 36. There simply were no such communities capable of such an ideal around Sarracen or Petrarch, but the Greek-illiterate, hungry for Greek works, could start with the hyper-literal translations, and develop complementary less literal versions.

¹⁸ Peter Comestor, “Prologue to *Historica Scholastica*,” 3.

¹⁹ As we saw in Chapter 1, the entire Victorine program of spiritual reading had its foundation (though not its consummation) in the historical-literal reading of the sacred text. Thus Victorine theology required that translation must render the text as literally as possible.

²⁰ This word-for-word method may account to some extent for the lack of interest in the *CD* in the 10th and 11th centuries (all the more strange given Dionysius’s apostolic credentials). The available tools were simply too inaccessible to a Latin reader. Rorem has shown that Eriugena’s rigidly literal method (even retaining many Greek terms in

even have been to produce an entirely “new” translation at all or even fundamentally alter the old, but to clarify the sometimes slavish literalism of Eriugena’s.²¹ At the end of one prologue, Sarracen encourages the reader to compare his effort to “the translation of John Scotus [Eriugena,]” suggesting that he imagined his translation as improving upon or supplementing Eriugena’s.²² In some passages, he makes few to no emendations to Eriugena’s translation, repeating it verbatim. That is, although Sarracen’s aim was to make the text clearer for a wider audience, the basic commitments to textual preservation, rooted in the theology of sacred writings described above, were no less strong. When a translation could congruously use Latin words to rigidly reproduce or replace a Greek locution, Sarracen was quick to follow the practice of earlier translators in their robust literalism.

Judging by the extent to which Sarracen’s text surpassed Eriugena’s in the following century, his *nova translatio* fulfilled its purpose—conserving the letter (down to the most minute linguistic features) of the original Greek *CD* as far as possible, while complementing Eriugena’s overly mechanical translation with one that gave easier access to meaning as well. One might conclude that the increased number of commentaries on the *CD* in the 13th century was partly a result of having a more accessible tool in Sarracen’s *translatio*. Notable commentaries that used the *nova translatio* were made by

transliteration) posed no problem because the translation was included within Eriugena’s commentary, *Eriugena’s Commentary*, 47. Perhaps Eriugena never intended for the translation to be extracted and used independently.

²¹ Théry, “Documents concernant Jean Sarrazin.”

²² Sarracen, “Prologue to CH,” 286. Apparently, they did just that. Thomas Gallus refers hundreds of times to the distinctions between the *nova* and the *altera* or *antiqua translatio*. Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas also used both texts, preferring Sarracen’s, as noted by Jones, “The *Divine Names* in John Sarracen’s Translation,” 671n40.

Sarracen himself, Thomas Gallus, Albert the Great, and Thomas Aquinas. By remaining committed to the rigidly literal ideal of sacred text translation, while reworking Greek locutions that were simply indecipherable in Eriugena's translation, Sarracen produced a superior translation in the eyes of 13th-century scholars.

As a preview of Sarracen's translation, a couple of examples indicate how he imagined himself improving on Eriugena's translation, while remaining as literal as possible.²³ First, Théry has found that Eriugena's metaphysical vocabulary was less precise than later Latin translators.²⁴ For example, Dionysius used the noun *hypostasis* (ὑπόστασις) or the adjective *hypostatic* (ὑποστατική) to refer to a metaphysical reality prior to being, a source or cause of being. Eriugena's translation used the noun "substance" (*substantia*) or the adjective "substantial" (*substantialis*)—a very literal translation, operating not even word-for-word but morpheme-for-morpheme. Sarracen, considering his audience, instead used the adjective "substance-making" (*substantifica*), or the nouns "substance-maker" (*substantificatrix*) or even "person" (*persona*).²⁵ Here Sarracen makes an unfamiliar Greek term more accessible for a Latinate audience, even while reproducing Greek morphemes where he can (*sub-* for ὑπο-). By sometimes translating *hypostasis* as "*persona*" his operation ventures from the morphemic level to make a change at the lexical, but this is to clarify the meaning of the word in light of Eriugena's occluding translation, "*substantia*." The example shows the commitment to

²³ See also the discussion of an extended passage from MT 1 below, 152-5.

²⁴ Théry, "Scot Érigène, Traducteur," 253.

²⁵ Théry, "Scot Érigène, Traducteur," 249. See also Théry's discussion of Sarracen's translation as an adaptation of Eriugena's, making it "legible and intelligible," in "Jean Sarrazin, traducteur de Scot Érigène," 371-2, especially his description of Sarracen's efforts as purging inaccessible Greek figures that Eriugena had enthusiastically held on to, 377.

rigid literalism giving way to clarify meaning. It also suggests the potential of using the two translations in tandem (as Gallus did).

A second example of improvement is found in an infelicitous translation by Eriugena of a typically idiosyncratic Dionysian term, “God-befitting” (θεοπρεπής). The linguistic unit –πρεπής had no obvious Latin equivalent. Eriugena incorrectly translates the word as both “divinely introduced (*divinitus prefata*)” and even “divine.”²⁶ Sarracen cleared up this mistake. His consistent translation of θεοπρεπής as *Deo conveniens* is more faithful both to the letter of the original Greek and to the meaning of the word.²⁷ Both examples exhibit how Sarracen’s was an improved translation, guided by literal operation and a concern for clarity, both appropriate to a sacred text full of meaning difficult to discern.

IV. *A Lexical Comparison, Greek and Latin Veils*

Having constructed an account of 1) Sarracen’s stated *modus transferendi*; 2) the Victorine theology of translation of sacred literature; and 3) the specific aim of Sarracen to improve on Eriugena’s translation while retaining his commitment to a level of literalism; it remains to examine Sarracen’s translation in practice, especially his lexical decisions. Did he faithfully reproduce the basic text of the *CD* described in Chapter 2? Or did Sarracen’s Latin locution transform the corpus into something misshapen and unrecognizable? That is, if the words of sacred literature are like veils, did these Latin

²⁶ As noted by Rorem, *Eriugena’s Commentary*, 67-8.

²⁷ DN 2.1 636C, 637C, 2.2 637D, 2.7 645A, 9.5 913A, CH, 2.3 140C, 3.1 164D; EH 2.3.3 400B. Three times Sarracen uses *Deum decens*: CH 4.1 177C, 8.2 241B, 9.3 260C. Sarracen consistently rendered the related adverb, θεοπρεπῶς, as *ut decet Deum* (“as befits God”): DN 1.1 588A, 1.8 597C, 4.12 709B, 5.8 824A, 7.2 869A, 9.9 916C, 10.2 937B; CH 8.2 240D; EH 3.3.9 437B. Once he uses *ut convenit Deo* EH 3.3.2 428B.

garments hang like the Greek originals?²⁸ The same theological aims that led Sarracen to a robustly literal method (complemented by a concern for clarity) also led him to make lexical decisions that imitate the Greek *CD* in ways modern readers may find awkwardly deferential. Before we examine a larger passage, consider the following three typical operations.

First, following his predecessors, Sarracen simply transliterated many Greek terms. Despite the fact that his aim was to more fully latinize the *CD* than its previous translators (including replacing some of Eriugena's transliterations), Sarracen retained or added his own transliterated words when he could. Words like *hierarchia*, *theologia*, *hymnus*, *mysterium*, and *canon*, transliterated important Greek terms in the *CD*. These terms needed no distinct Latin equivalent since they were either already comprehensible to a Latin reader or too integral to the presentation of the *CD* to be changed. The latter may have been the case with the term *hierarchia*. The Greek could not be replaced with

²⁸ The Dionysian veil imagery is worth considering. If the primary commitment of medieval translators of sacred literature was to the not-fully-discernible spirit beyond the letter, and only in turn to the letter itself (as giving access to the spirit), then veils are a helpful metaphor for translation. A veil covers a not-fully-discernible body, which itself (like the spirit of sacred writings) remains unchanged no matter what veil is placed upon it. Yet two veils of comparable size, shape, color, etc., are more likely to display a body with a similar quality of definition. That is, a body covered first by silk and then by satin will retain a similar appearance more than the same body covered first by silk and then by sackcloth. Thus, ensuring a second veil is as like to the first veil as possible results in maintaining the quality of definition of the body. Because a veil may be designed, chosen, or produced for the best self-presentation of the body, mimicking that self-presentation would require reproducing the same kind of veil.

Likewise, if Greek and Latin letters can be comparably placed upon (as it were) the same spirit, even though the translator has not fully grasped the spirit beyond them, the letters are more likely to retain the form that best reveals the spirit. That is, medieval translators labored to reproduce Greek literary garments as closely as possible with Latin textiles, while not fully knowing the self-representing spirit behind them. This is a distinction from the translator of secular literature, who always advanced by first understanding the sense or spirit, as it were, of the text beyond the letter. No such confidence could be had with sacred literature.

any equivalent Latin term without sacrificing the very neologistic quality that made it stick out in the *CD*.

Second, Sarracen drew on Latin terms that had common etymologies with the Greek originals whenever he could. For instance, *ignotus* and *ignorantia* were Sarracen's consistent terms for translating the Greek *agnostos* (ἄγνωστος) and *agnosia* (ἀγνωσία).²⁹ There are other Latin terms which could render the important term “unknowing,” but these were the terms that remained the closest literally (here at the morphemic level), while being comprehensible to a Latin reader. Transliterating a term like *agnostos* (ἄγνωστος) could lead to confusion for a Latin reader, but appealing to a Latin term with the same etymology allows Sarracen to stay as close to the letter as possible without sacrificing clarity.

Third, Sarracen showed remarkable consistency in his choice of equivalent terms (*aequipollentes*), often using the same Latin words to translate Greek words across the entire corpus. This effected a word-for-word correspondence in many cases. Examples of invariable translations include: *causa* for αἰτία; *providentia* for πρόνοια; *virtus* for δύναμις; *manuductio* for χειραγωγή. This consistency extended to lexical clusters. For instance, Greek words related to ἔκφανσις (*ekphansis*, “manifestation”) were consistently translated by Latin words related to *manifestatio*. So the adjective ἐκφαντορικός became *manifestativus*; the verb ἐκφαίνω became *manifesto*; the adverb ἐκφαντορικῶς became *manifestative*, etc. Sarracen even maintained lexical consistency across different contexts, so that he translated forms of παρουσία with forms of *praesentia*, whether the *CD* was

²⁹ See *ignorantia* for ἀγνωσία at DN 1.1 588A, 2.4 641A, 7.3 872A, 9.5 913B; MT 1.3 1001A, 2.1 1025A; EH 2.2.5 396A, 2.3.4 400C. *Ignorantia* could also translate ἄγνοια as in DN 4.5 700D, 4.6 701B, 7.4 872D.

referring to “the presence of a lesser good” or “the present treatise.”³⁰ Also, Sarracen consistently maintained important lexical pairs and triplets. Ἔρως (*eros*) and ἀγάπη (*agape*) were unswervingly translated as *amor* and *caritas*. *Unitio*, *ignorantia*, and *cognitio super intellectum* (or *mentem*) translated ἔνωσις, ἀγνωσία, and γνώσις ὑπὲρ νοῦν, respectively. Perhaps most importantly, Sarracen consistently translated the prefixes α- and ὑπερ- with *in-* and *super-*, respectively.

One can find the balance of robust literalism and concern for clarity across Sarracen’s translation. Looking at an extended passage, we can see how Sarracen’s Latin veil was a careful reproduction of the Greek, and an improvement upon Eriugena’s, even while both translations stick very close to the Greek source text.

From *Mystical Theology*, Chapter 1

1) *And then he is freed from those things both seen and seeing,*
 Καὶ τότε καὶ αὐτῶν ἀπολύεται τῶν ὁρωμένων καὶ τῶν ὁρώντων
 [Eriugena] Et quod ipsis absolvitur visibilibus et videntibus
 [Sarracen] Tunc et ab ipsis absolvitur visis et videntibus

2) *and enters into the truly mystical cloud of unknowing,*
 καὶ εἰς τὸν γνόφον τῆς ἀγνωσίας εἰσδύνει τὸν ὄντως μυστικόν,
 [E] et in caliginem ignorantiae occidit vere mysticam,
 [S] et ad caliginem ignorantiae intrat, quae caligo vere est mystica,

3) *within which he closes all perceptions of knowledge*
 καθ’ ὃν ἀπομύει πάσας τᾶς γνωστικὰς ἀντιλήψεις,
 [E] per quam docet omnes gnosticas receptiones,
 [S] in qua claudit omnes cognitivas susceptiones,

4) *and enters into the altogether impalpable and unseen,*
 καὶ ἐν τῷ πάμπαν ἀναφεῖ καὶ ἀοράτῳ γίγνεται,
 [E] et in qua omne relucet et invisibili innascitur,
 [S] et in non-palpabili omnino et invisibili fit,

5) *being all, from Him who is beyond all, and from none neither from himself nor another*
 πᾶς ὢν τοῦ πάντων ἐπέκεινα, καὶ οὐδενός οὔτε ἑαυτοῦ οὔτε ἑτέρου,
 [E] omnis qui est in omnium summitate, et a nullo, neque a se ipso, neque ab altero

³⁰ In DN, τῆς παρουσίας πραγματείας becomes *praesentis negotii* (1.8); τὴν παροῦσαν θεολογίαν becomes *praesentem theologiam* (3.2); ἥττονος ἀγαθοῦ παρουσία becomes *minoris boni praesentia* (4.20).

[S] *omnis existens eius qui est super omnia, et nullius, neque sui ipsius, neque alterius,*

6) *and by inactivity of all knowledge, to the unknown*

τῷ παντελῶς δὲ ἀγνώστῳ τῇ πάσης γνώσεως ἀνενεργησία

[E] *omnino autem ignoto, omni scientia in otio,*

[S] *omnino autem ignoto, vacatione omnis cognitionis,*

7) *united in the better part*

κατὰ τὸ κρεῖττον ἐνούμενος

[E] *secundum id quod melius est intellectus,*

[S] *secundum melius unitus,*

8) *and by knowing nothing, knowing beyond intellect.*

καὶ τῷ μηδὲν γινώσκειν ὑπὲρ νοῦν γινώσκων.

[E] *et nihil cognoscendum super animam sic cognoscentium.*

[S] *et eo quod nihil cognoscit super mentem cognoscens.*

Notice first how Sarracen improves on many lexical decisions of Eriugena. Minor improvements include the choice of *tunc* for τότε instead of *quod* (line 1), and *intrat* for εισδύει rather than the less accurate *occidit* (line 2). But he also corrects some significant mistakes. In line 4, Eriugena misreads ἀναφεῖ, translating it *reluet*. Sarracen recognizes this is not a verb, but an adjective, and because it is a word with no directly equivalent term in Latin, he uses a new compound term *non-palpabili*. As his preface mentions, some Greek compounds require inelegant, but clearer Latin translations. Another improvement comes in line 5, with the important phrase πάντων ἐπέκεινα.³¹ Eriugena translates it *summitate omnium* (“the highest part of all things”), while Sarracen follows the Greek text—and the Neoplatonic tradition—more closely by translating it as *super omnia*. Finally, Eriugena’s translation of line 7 had downplayed Moses’s union with God by translating ἐνούμενος with *intellectus*. Sarracen rightly restores the literal sense of the text with *unitus*.

³¹ For an account of the centrality this phrase to Neoplatonic metaphysics, see Chapter 2.

Sarracen's concern for clarity is in evidence across this passage. In line 2, choosing equivalent Latin terms for those in the Greek source-text meant shifting grammatical gender. While the neuter adjective *μυστικόν* unambiguously modifies the noun *τὸν γνώφον* in Greek (and not the feminine *τῆς ἀγνωσίας*), in Latin, because *caligo* and *ignorantia* are both feminine nouns, Eriugena's word-for-word translating results in an ambiguous referent for *mysticam*. Does it refer to *caligo* or *ignorantia*? Sarracen clears this up by using a relative clause that shows that, as in the original Greek, the adjective modifies the noun *caligo*. Here Sarracen departs from original syntax to account for an infelicity that arose from word-for-word translation.

Part of clarifying the text involved latinizing where necessary. In line 3 Sarracen chooses a Latin term *cognitivas* to translate *γνωστικὰς*, rather than Eriugena's transliteration *gnosticas*. While Sarracen at times retains transliterated terms or terms with common etymological origins (for example, *mystica* and *ignorantiae* in line 2), when they will not be understood by a Latin audience, he does not. Notice also that in line 6, Sarracen uses *cognitionis* for *γνώσεως*, showcasing his preference for consistent word choices even across word clusters. While Eriugena transliterated *γνωστικὰς* in line 3, he had chosen an entirely different word, *scientia*, to translate *γνώσεως* in line 6. By using *cognitio*-related words consistently for *γνώσις*-related words, Sarracen ensures his Latin veil reproduces the Greek original more fully than Eriugena's.

Finally, although Sarracen was willing to make improvements for the sake of clarity, even moving beyond a word-for-word translation, when something was ambiguous, he left it that way. In line 7, Sarracen chose to translate Dionysius's phrase "united in the better part" (*κατὰ τὸ κρεῖττον ἐνούμενος*) with the very literal *secundum*

melius unitus. In this case, Sarracen's is more of a word-for-word translation than Eriugena's *secundum id quod melius est intellectus*. Yet this is because this phrase is unclear, even to contemporary readers of the *CD*. Rather than interpreting this phrase in his translation, Sarracen decides to render it as literally as possible. We have seen the reasons why this was so. The *CD*, like all sacred writings, contained many mysteries, so needed to be translated as literally as possible, as long as such literalism did not add obscurity to an already obscure text.

This brief sampling of Sarracen's lexical decisions suggests that his stated aims of textual conservation with attention to clarity were maintained in practice. This goal was, as we have seen, a theological one. Latin readers needed a translation that made accessible the letter of the text, because the significative potential of the original letter could never be so exhausted that a translator could first grasp it and then reproduce it through paraphrasing. Knowledge of the letter (down to the smallest semantic unit) rewarded careful consideration. Latin translation needed to reproduce the Greek letter; it needed to be robustly literal. Yet, Latin readers also needed a text they could comprehend. Thus, Sarracen produced a careful reproduction of the Greek original for an audience who knew no Greek, but were eager to minutely exegete Greek texts. If this was inevitably an act of interpretation, it was a literal one that reproduced as carefully and sensibly as possible the major tensions and ambiguities of the Greek text.

V. *Gallus and the Nova Translatio*

Gallus was thus an inheritor of a literary activity both deeply theological and deeply practical in character. Sarracen's *nova translatio* was approachable, and carried

over a theological vocabulary and a rhetorical form that rewarded careful, sustained attention. In conjunction with Eriugena's *alia translatio*, which Gallus refers to around 250 times, Sarracen's translation permitted Gallus to encounter the *CD*, weighing its features, including its three conceptual apertures, theological tensions constitutive of the corpus itself—the providential presence of the God beyond being, the bifold activity of hymnic language in revealing and concealing, and the possibility of union that was both an unknowing and a knowing beyond intellect. What may appear to a modern reader as an overly literal apparatus for scholarly work, was to Gallus the best tool for a long, 20-year consideration of the *CD*.

Gallus could take the translation for granted because of a theological commitment he shared with Sarracen and the other Victorines. Sacred reading required first a literal understanding of a text. For sacred texts in translation, this meant the necessity of a robustly, if not rigidly, literal method, and sometimes the use of complementary translations in order to make the letter (*littera*) accessible. Gallus enthusiastically took up these translated texts for sacred reading (along with other tools, like his concordances). However, the claim that Sarracen's translation exhibits robust equivalence to the *CD* will not convince us that Gallus understood the primary tensions of the *CD*, or that his use of the Song of Songs as a primary interpretive tool was warranted. The best argument for that lies in his commentaries.

Part II: Gallus's Commentaries on the Practice and Theory of Christian Wisdom

The contexts and foundations covered in Part I of this study—the Victorines and the new religious movement in Chapter 1, the mystical theology of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* (*CD*) in Chapter 2, and its Latin translation in Chapter 3—are critical for understanding the body of texts to which I turn at last, Gallus's *Explanatio* on the *CD* (Chapter 4) and two commentaries on the Song of Songs (Chapter 5). Adopting and adapting the Victorine pedagogy of Chapter 1, Gallus sees both the *CD* and the Song of Songs, the two texts on which he repeatedly commented, as occupying the ultimate place in that sacred curriculum. Both, as we have seen, are supreme examples of sacred writings or “letters” (*sacrae scripturae vel litterae*).¹ Setting Gallus's body of commentaries in the context of the Victorine program of sacred reading raises important questions. If the *CD* and the Song of Songs were, in Gallus's view, the most sublime instances of the eternal Word's accommodation through *litterae*, how did these two sacred writings relate to one another?

Gallus himself offers a brief account of how his scholarly project—an examination of “the wisdom of Christians”—is worked out intertextually, *between* the Song and the *CD*. It appears in the opening of the prologue to his third Song commentary. There he explains that there are two forms of knowledge of God (*cognitio Dei*). The first is “intellectual (*intellectualis*) and based on the consideration of created things.” The second is beyond intellectual (*superintellectualis*), a special experiential knowledge of God. About this second form of knowledge of God, which comes directly from God, Gallus adds the following:

¹ See Ch. 1, 42-6.

From the teaching of the Apostle, the great Dionysius the Areopagite wrote the theoretical part (*theoricam*) of this superintellectual wisdom, to the extent it can be written, in his little book *On Mystical Theology*, which I expounded carefully ten years ago. But in this present book, Solomon hands down the practical part (*practicam*) of the same mystical theology, as is clear throughout the sequence of the entire book.²

This distinction between the ‘theoretical’ work of Dionysius (handed down from the Apostle Paul) and the ‘practical’ treatment of Solomon says explicitly what is at evidence across Gallus’s commentaries on both works: the intertextual relationship between the Song and the *CD* is indispensable for understanding and appropriating, both intellectually and affectively, the program for Christian wisdom, that which Dionysius calls “mystical theology.”

Part II traces this program in Gallus’s thought by analyzing his *CD* commentaries and Song commentaries with an eye toward the theory and practice of Christian wisdom. The “theoretical” *CD* and the “practical” Song are complementary and interdependent representations of mystical theology, or the union and assimilation to the Word, established by the divine Word itself, which influences both the intellect (*intellectus*) and the affect (*affectus*) of the Christian. Gallus’s commentaries attempt to tease out the Word’s intentions by setting the two works side-by-side, illuminating the eternal spirit beyond the letter of each through intertextual reference.³

² SS3.Prologue, 107: “Et, ex doctrina Apostoli, magnus Dionysius Areopagita theoricam huius superintellectualis sapientie scribit, sicut possibile est eam scribere, in libello suo *De Mystica theologia*, quem ante annos decem diligenter exposui. In hoc autem libro, Salomon tradit practicam eiusdem mystice theologie, ut patet per totius libri seriem.” Gallus repeats the idea at SS3.1.F, 128, where he calls the wisdom of Christians “the portion of Mary,” who was traditionally understood to represent the contemplative life, superior to her active sister Martha.

³ Gallus’s scholarly agenda is revealing: over the course of his career, he treated both the Song and the *CD* repeatedly, moving back and forth from text to text. In just the final decade of his life, Gallus wrote: his second commentary on the Song (1237); his

Yet Gallus's depiction of Christian wisdom in the commentaries is not just a effect of textual analysis or reading (*lectio*). It is also a matter of contemplative experience (*experientia*). In a rare instance of self-reference, Gallus hints at his own mystical experience of the Word in the prologue to his third Song commentary. He seems to acknowledge a question that might arise for those who are familiar with his previous work. Why write yet another commentary on the Song? Were the last two attempts insufficient? Gallus replies that he may find new insights and interpretations in glossing the Song this time, but they will not contradict those in his earlier Song commentaries, because in both cases he has followed "the courses of the *theoriae*, as is my custom."⁴ That is, glossing the Song was itself a spiritual exercise born from and perhaps realizing a mystical experience, not just a pedagogical practicality. In writing commentary on sacred literature Gallus explores the spectacles (*theoriae*) of the eternal Word anew. Transforming his soul like the bride in the Song, he experiences "the course of love" effected by the Word.⁵ While Hugh of St. Victor had long before made the connection between reading (*lectio*) and contemplation (*contemplatio*) a principle of Victorine pedagogy, in Gallus's commentaries on the Song we find a culminating example of a century's worth of Victorine practice of spiritual interpretation.

Extractio, a paraphrase of the *CD* (1238); his *Explanatio* on both *MT* (1241) and *DN* (1242); a third commentary on the Song (1243); and the rest of his *Explanatio* on the *CD*—first, on the *Letters* (1243), then *CH* (1243), then *EH* (1244).

⁴ SS3.Prlg.P, 109: "Nunc tertio Cantica in scriptis exponens, nec premissas expositiones per manibus habens, sequor ut soleo theoriarum occursus que intellectibus superfulgent animam extendens ad radium superiorem..." For more on the *theoriae*—the "spectacles" or eternal reasons belonging to the Word—see Ch. 5, 247-50.

⁵ SS3.5.A, 190.

Chapter 4: The Theory of Christian Wisdom in the Commentaries on the *CD*

When he was not commenting on the Song, Gallus devoted his time to elucidating another work of sacred literature, the *Corpus Dionysiacum* (*CD*). To Gallus, the *CD* was a near apostolic text, second only to the scriptures themselves.¹ His scholarly agenda suggests unparalleled dedication to the text over his career. In the final decade of his life alone, Gallus prepared both an *Extractio*, or paraphrase, for each of the four Dionysian treatises, and his monumental *Explanatio in libros Dionysii*, a series of commentaries glossing the entirety of the *CD* sequentially.² This scholarly labor, which relied upon both the ‘new translation’ of John Sarracen and the ‘other translation’ of John Scotus Eriugena, ensured Gallus had an uncommonly thorough appreciation of Dionysian theology.

Chapter 5 will treat what Gallus calls “the practical part (*practica*)” of Christian wisdom. It will argue that Gallus sees the Song as a depiction of the mystical union of the soul and the Word, each experiencing and effected by the other. That experience, in which the soul’s mental hierarchy is progressively dilated and interwoven, as it were, with the Word’s divine *theoriae*, will involve “three principal exercises of the mind” derived from a passage in the *CD*—unveiling of the mind, adaptation of the mind for union, and most chaste prayer. Yet, as this chapter will show, Gallus’s adoption of ideas from the *CD* was not only occasional and idiosyncratic. The *CD*, especially the small treatise on *Mystical Theology*, was “the theoretical part (*theorica*)” of Christian wisdom, and Gallus, glossing the text sequentially, rehearses and re-stylizes its major moves. This

¹ As mentioned in Chapter 1, 44-6, the Fathers were included among the texts of the New Testament for Hugh of St. Victor, so an apostolic text like the *CD* bore the status of scriptural authority.

² The *Extractio* was incorporated into the edition of the *CD* that circulated at the University of Paris, which also contained both Sarracen’s and Eriugena’s Latin translations. McGinn, *Flowering of Mysticism*, 359n37.

chapter continues the work of Chapters 2 and 3, arguing that Gallus's mystical theology adopts and adapts that of the *CD*—both attentive to its major tensions and offering a new way to look at the texts. Scholarship on Gallus in the last century has moved cautiously in the direction of affirming Gallus's thorough Dionysianism (with a leap forward in the last decade), as Gallus's texts have been made more accessible and scholars have become more appreciative of the tensions in Dionysian theology.³

In this chapter, we return to the major conceptual apertures or dialectical tensions constitutive of the *CD*, as seen in Chapter 2. There we saw that Dionysius: 1) treats God as beyond being, though causally and providentially present to all things; 2) understands theological language or “hymning” to function ambiguously to veil and unveil God; and 3) describes the goal of mystical theology as an unknowing knowing or union beyond the mind. Chapter 2 concluded that scholars should avoid the instinct to resolve these tensions in order to appreciate not only the *CD* itself, but also the varieties of its reception.⁴ Instead, we ought to interrogate what these conceptual apertures may have accomplished theologically for Dionysius, and how they might have been understood variously by his readers. Gallus, as we will see, thanks to his extensive study of the *CD*, discerns each of these conceptual apertures, as is clear in his late works, his *Explanations of the CD*, the subject of this chapter.

How Gallus rehearses and reforms each of the *CD*'s three conceptual apertures should cause us to rethink assessments of his theology and the reception of Dionysianism in the Latin West. In the *Explanatio* Gallus, unique among theologians at the time, takes

³ See Introduction, 20-5.

⁴ As noted there, the *CD* circulated with a commentary of some sort almost immediately after its publication and remained so wed to various explanations of its difficult theology over the next many centuries.

up the *CD*'s first textual tension: its 'hyper-ontological' reflection on God's 'beyond-being-ness' and causality. Gallus rehearses and affirms the *CD*'s first conceptual aperture, even discerning its underlying Neoplatonic logic (despite his ignorance of its provenance).⁵ My analysis in the first section suggests Gallus was a Dionysian Neoplatonist in terms of his theology of God, meaning his debt is almost entirely to Dionysius, who he thought had a special "wisdom of Christians" on the matter.⁶ On the other two conceptual apertures, Gallus innovates on the *CD* more boldly. On the second conceptual aperture (the ambiguous use of theological language), the Augustinian canon makes sense of the matter through a sophisticated theology of the Word. In the second section, I show that the Word—eternally with God, but cosmically active—is always lurking below the surface of Gallus's claims about the use of theological language, which he describes as working figuratively, causally, and super-essentially. The use of language in sacred literature is predicated on the experience of the Word, which—like human

⁵ My analysis supports the conclusion of Csaba Németh on the influence of Dionysius on the Victorines. Despite the school's occasional engagement with the *CD* in the 12th century, Gallus is the first Victorine who can truly be called "an Areopagitic theologian," because he is the first to trace his Christian Neoplatonism primarily through Pseudo-Dionysius and the late Neoplatonists (rather than Augustine). Németh, "The Victorines and the Areopagite," 383. However, I do differ with Németh in his claim that Gallus was "not a Victorine" theologian, as this study indicates many of the Victorine continuities in his theology of scriptural interpretation. Gallus exhibits what one would expect—a robust appreciation of Victorine practices, methods, and sensibilities alongside a thoroughgoing command of Dionysian theology.

⁶ This is in contrast to what comes in the following decades and centuries. While the decades after Gallus saw Proclus's *Elements of Theology* translated by William of Moerbeke, and Dionysius's debt to Plato recognized by Thomas Aquinas, Dionysius's pseudonymous presentation and debt to Proclus would not be generally accepted until the Renaissance. For Gallus, then, Dionysius's insights on God's 'beyond-being-ness' were remarkably original—a special knowledge that the pagan philosophers had not realized. This leads him to characterize much of Dionysian theology that was directly indebted to Neoplatonism as known only to Christians and not to pagan philosophy. Gallus was aware, however, of Dionysius's and Augustine's debt to Plato on the idea of the eternal reasons.

speech—remains internally with the speaker (the Father) and is exteriorized in communication (creation and incarnation). Experiencing and communicating the Word were the common goals of the theologian (author of scripture) and canon regular (preacher and commentator on scripture). Gallus casts the third conceptual aperture on mystical union as a matter of “experiential affection,” drawing inspiration from the Song of Songs. In the final section, I show that the rhetoric of experience and affect are not accretions on the *CD*, even if they mark a new way of interpreting it. Rather, they are attempts to make sense of the major tension left by Dionysius’s ambiguous presentation of mystical union. In sum, Gallus is thoroughly Dionysian (even more than it is often admitted a medieval Latin scholar could be), and he makes significant innovations upon the *CD* that try to make sense of the authoritative text’s most alluring tensions. To Gallus, the *CD* offered a comprehensive theory of Christian wisdom or mystical theology that “instructed and inflamed (*instruere et inflammare*)” its readers by treating God, sacred letters, and mystical union.⁷

I. God: *Causa superessentialis et superintellectualis*

Of the three conceptual apertures of the *CD* treated in Chapter 2, Gallus’s slightest modification is to the first: God’s beyond-being-ness (ὑπερουσιότης) and causal presence. Thanks to his careful analysis of the *CD* he understood and rehearsed the Neoplatonic reasoning behind the affirmation of God’s beyond-being-ness.⁸ Though

⁷ Expl DN 2, 155.

⁸ This is not to say that every aspect of Gallus’s Christian Neoplatonism comes from the *CD*. As we will see in Chapter 5, he mentions the Platonic provenance of the idea of the eternal reasons, and he of course could have imbibed aspects of Plotinian Neoplatonism through Augustine. Nevertheless, his rehearsal of the Neoplatonic logic of

Dionysius's theology of God came to Gallus in the new Latin translation of John Sarracen, Gallus embraces the Dionysian dialectical tension formed by affirming that the God beyond being is causally or providentially present to all things existing. In this section I will show how Gallus rehearses the Neoplatonic concept of God's beyond-being-ness (and its corollaries, God's ineffability and unintelligibility), before treating his complementary description of God's causal presence, plenitude, goodness, and love.

While, as we will see, Gallus's innovations on the *CD* are greater when it comes to its second and third conceptual apertures (its theology of language and its mystical goal), it is worthwhile to consider his thorough appropriation of the Dionysian theology of God, uncommon among medieval theologians for its rehearsal not only of the terms, but of the logic of beyond-being-ness. Gallus's embrace of Dionysian 'hyper-ontological' reflection differs from the metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas, which came to predominate in medieval Latin thought decades later.⁹ The result of the dominance of Aquinas's synthesizing work has led at times to the presumption that the Latin West, though indebted to Dionysius's descriptions of hierarchy, angels, divine names, and mystical union, never thoroughly embraced a robustly Dionysian theology of God (even that it never could have, given issues of translating Dionysius's Greek and the obstacle of

beyond-being-ness and causality surely comes from Dionysius. If Gallus was tempted to connect Dionysius to Platonism (Dionysius was after all a Greek Athenian), he nevertheless typically describes 'beyond-being-ness' as a matter of Christian wisdom, which Dionysius inherited from Paul.

⁹ Thomas Aquinas's subsequent predominance in modern Catholic thought (at least a version of Thomas Aquinas) and in turn modern reconstructions of 'medieval theology' made it difficult to appreciate the varieties of medieval metaphysical reflection, a legacy that even now, years after the Catholic *Ressourcement* movement and advances in 'historical theology,' still too often affects the historiography of Christian thought.

conciliar orthodoxy).¹⁰ Yet, Gallus represents a singular figure through whom Dionysian ‘hyper-ontological’ reflection made its way into the Latin West, even as it was transformed by its latinization.¹¹ While scholars have traced distinct ‘intellective’ and ‘affective’ strands of medieval Dionysianism (represented by Albert/Aquinas and Gallus/Bonaventure, respectively), the descriptions of these strands have often distinguished primarily between the ways the goal of mystical theology is depicted (in terms of the primacy of intellect or affect, knowledge or love), rather than the respective representatives’ theologies of God.¹² In this section, I show how Gallus thoroughly embraces aspects of the Dionysian theology of God, not resolving but rehearsing the *CD*’s first conceptual aperture in a new way.

A. Beyond-being-ness: *Supersubstantialitas* and *Superessentialitas*

As I argued in Chapter 2, Dionysius’s teaching about divine beyond-being-ness (ὑπερουσιότης) followed centuries of Neoplatonic developments and was supported by what he took to be compatible scriptural witness. While Gallus did not know of the influence of Philo, Plotinus, or Proclus on Dionysius, his ignorance of the *CD*’s

¹⁰ Jones, “*The Divine Names* in Sarracen’s Translation: Misconstruing Dionysius’ Language about God,” makes the argument that John Sarracen fails to translate Dionysius’s theology of God into the Latin West—partly as a linguistic matter, and partly because of the West’s conception of divine simplicity (Aquinas is the touchstone). See Chapter 3 for my more optimistic view of the translation. Jones too readily allows the Thomistic *telos* of his analysis to determine the meaning of Sarracen’s translation as well.

¹¹ Lawell, “Affective Excess: Ontology and Knowledge in the Thought of Thomas Gallus,” hints at the potential of Gallus’s theology for conversation with contemporary critiques of ‘onto-theology’.

¹² Boyd Taylor Coolman has done the most to analyze competing strands of Dionysianism in terms of their views on theological anthropology and the goal of mystical theology. Coolman, “The Medieval Affective Dionysian Tradition”; and *Knowledge, Love, and Ecstasy*.

Neoplatonic provenance appears only to have heightened his enthusiasm at discovering its remarkable teachings on God. He most likely first encountered the *CD* at the school of St. Victor. It was an almost apostolic text (finally made accessible by a new translation) that built a bridge between Jerusalem and Athens, between Christian scriptures and pagan or ‘gentile’ philosophy. This would have been welcome as the old antipathy between them fit so poorly with the ‘modern’ Victorine attitude toward secular letters.¹³ To Gallus “blessed Dionysius the Areopagite” was an Athenian convert of the Apostle Paul himself.¹⁴ The Victorine John Sarracen’s late 12th-century ‘new’ translation of the *CD* had made possible Gallus’s encounter with the idea of God’s beyond-being-ness (ὑπερουσιότης), though now with a set of Latin terms. Prime among them are vocabulary clusters describing God’s super-essentiality (*superessentialitas*) and super-substantiality

¹³ ‘Gentile’ philosophy was much on Gallus’s mind as (in Paris at least) a debate simmered in the early 13th century over the place ‘the Philosopher’ (Aristotle) should take in the school curriculum. The introduction of a fuller Aristotelian corpus led to some condemnations, though they do not seem to have had great effect. Gallus does not seem especially animated by the curricular debate and has a certain esteem for Aristotle, but more as a figure for what gentile wisdom could attain than as a serious interlocutor. As we saw in Chapter 1, Hugh of St. Victor had relativized secular literature (including pagan philosophy), placing it as a pedagogical prerequisite to Christian literature.

¹⁴ Gallus calls Dionysius both the “secretary of apostolic wisdom (*apostolice sapientie secretario*)” (Expl DN 1, 54) and the “treasury of the Apostle (*apostoli gazophylacio*)” (Expl Epist 717). That Dionysius also writes, as Aquinas will note, in the manner of the Platonists, may not have been lost on Gallus. Whatever he knew of the connection, it must have been thrilling to read the philosophically-minded Dionysius, though Gallus never offers Dionysius as a model of Greek wisdom converted to Christianity. Gallus is generally more interested in the texts than the figures behind them. In typical Victorine form, he distinguishes between pagan and Christian learning, but does not mimic the polemics of some of the Church Fathers and apologists.

(*supersubstantialitas*), the primary terms Sarracen uses to translate beyond-being-ness (ὑπερουσιότης).¹⁵

Though these terms in Sarracen’s Latin *CD* must have appeared as awkward neologisms just as beyond-being-ness (ὑπερουσιότης) did in the Greek, earlier commentators on the corpus, like John Scotus Eriugena and Hugh of St. Victor, had already begun to reckon with them, albeit not to the extent Gallus would. As a consequence, when Gallus encountered the awkward language of God’s beyond-being-ness in the Latin *CD*, he did not explain it away, but studied the reasoning and glossed it in a way Dionysius would have approved of. For instance, when the *CD* states that God “dwells above (*supra*) all things,” Gallus writes that this “means beyond one and oneness, being and being-ness (*super unum et unitatem et ens et entitatem*).”¹⁶ Where Dionysius invokes, “the super-substantial Trinity,” Gallus adds, “incomparably super-exceeding all substance (*substantiam*) and all being (*ens*).”¹⁷ In a more extended discussion, Gallus works out Dionysian beyond-being-ness:

¹⁵ Gallus used Sarracen’s ‘new’ translation in conjunction with Eriugena’s ‘old’ or ‘other’ translation, and both texts laid out a language of ‘beyond-being-ness’ that mimicked the Greek *CD* closely. See Ch. 3.

¹⁶ Expl MT 1, 26.

¹⁷ Expl MT 1, 8. Gallus often lumps together technical terms related to being because he has heard from a Greek speaker that the Greek τὸ ὄν is often incorrectly translated *ens* (as noted by Coolman, *Knowledge, Love, and Ecstasy*, 40n44). As Jones has shown (“*The Divine Names* in Sarracen’s Translation”), Sarracen often used different Latin terms than Eriugena when it came to the philosophical rhetoric of being and beyond-being-ness. Because Gallus consulted both translations, he does not seem to carefully distinguish between terms like *substantia*, *ens*, *entitas*, and *esse*, and it is safe to understand these terms as variously translating Greek terms like οὐσία and τὸ ὄν. For instance, for ‘beyond-being-ness’ (ὑπερουσιότης) Eriugena used *superessentialitas*, while Sarracen used *supersubstantialitas*. I have not been able to work out any careful distinctions between these terms in Gallus’s commentaries. He apparently uses them largely interchangeably when glossing, working with what might be called the rhetoric of being and beyond-being-ness.

God is set apart from substance through an incomparable and infinite departure (*excessum*); **and** nevertheless is **simply super-substantial**... because the deity subsists eternally without any accidental or substantial mode of existence, but not without goodness (*bonitate*).¹⁸

In these glosses are many of the hallmarks of Dionysius's beyond-being-ness that we saw in Chapter 2. God is separated from the regular order of all things existing, including substance and being-ness itself. Just as the prefix ὑπερ- and preposition ὑπέρ pervaded the Greek *CD*, the Latin prefix *super-* and preposition *super* litter Sarracen's translation of the text, ensuring that his rendering of God's beyond-being-ness was just as thorough. Finally, God's separation and super-substantiality is closely related to God's goodness.¹⁹

Gallus expounds on God's beyond-being-ness (*superessentialitas*), especially as he considers the divine name Being (*esse*), as we saw in Chapter 2, the first name Dionysius treats after he has completed his study of the "preeminent" names like Good and Love. Thanks to the pseudonymous conceit of the *CD*, however, Gallus is unaware of the Neoplatonic development of beyond-being-ness and claims that it is a special insight for those advanced in Christian wisdom. The uninitiated, Dionysius says in *Mystical Theology*, think that "nothing exists super-substantially beyond existing things (*super existentia*)."²⁰ Gallus adds that these "philosophers of the world" think that being (*ens*) is

¹⁸ Expl DN 4, 270: "**Et Deus segregatur a substantia** per incomparabilem et infinitum excessum; **et tamen est supersubstantialis simpliciter**... quia ad minus deitas sine omni habitu accidentali et substantiali eternaliter subsistit, sed non sine bonitate."

¹⁹ On which, see below, 177-8. Despite the difference with Thomas Aquinas, Gallus is not the only medieval investigator of Platonism that makes much of the distinction between Good and Being, indicating that in Platonism the Good is beyond Being not only conceptually but really. Berthold of Moosburg, a Dominican like Aquinas, between 1327 and 1361, makes this claim. Aertsen, "Platonism," 81. Berthold had the advantage of knowing Proclus's writings, but Gallus seems to have made the same conclusion that the Good was beyond Being from the order of divine names in Dionysius's treatise as well as his frequent invocation of "beyond-being-ness".

all that exists and is the proper subject of metaphysics (*subjectum metaphysice*).²⁰ However, exhibiting a characteristic appreciation for worldly philosophy's potential (however circumscribed), Gallus argues that there is, in fact, some scriptural witness for their position exalting being to such a privileged place. He asks, "What is 'He who is' if not being?"²¹ That is, Exodus 3:14 ("He who is sent me to you") seemed to provide scriptural warrant for pagan philosophy's exaltation of Being. God may be called 'Being,' as Dionysius also taught in the fifth chapter of *Divine Names*. Nevertheless, Gallus continues in the same gloss, God is ineffable (*ineffabilis*) and unnamable (*innominabilis*), beyond being and understanding (*super ens et intellectum*).²² While God has given himself the name 'He who is,' the divine name of Being, one ought not to think that God is any kind of being or substance. Despite the scriptural justification for using the name 'Being' of God, the philosophers of the world who exalt Being lack the wisdom of Christians, who understand the ambiguous use of such a name given God's beyond-being-ness. If Gallus embraces the Dionysian divine name 'Being' for the God beyond being, we must ask: how does he think about its use?

Though Gallus's position on divine names like 'Being' will be treated fully in the next section, one way to further examine Gallus's views on being and beyond-being-ness is to look at his treatment of the major passages on beyond-being-ness in the *Divine Names* that we treated in Chapter 2. There we noted that God's beyond-being-ness (ὑπερουσιότης), a term coined by Dionysius himself, was invoked at key junctures in the text—most notably in the first chapter, at the beginning of the fifth chapter (which treated

²⁰ Expl MT 1, 19.

²¹ Expl MT 1, 20: "Quid est enim 'Qui est' nisi ens?"

²² Ibid.

the name ‘Being’), and at the end of the treatise. In the first chapter, Dionysius ties “unknowing (*ignorantia*)” to “beyond-being-ness (*supersubstantialitas*),” since God is beyond reason, intellect, and being (*super rationem et intellectum et ipsam substantiam*). Gallus glosses the terms. *Supersubstantialitas* is “the divinity which is unknown and super-eminent with respect to all being (*enti*).”²³ For God to be beyond *substantia* is to be beyond “the very being (*ens*) which is first and highest in understanding, and beyond which intellectual and worldly philosophy seeks or investigates nothing.”²⁴ Here it appears Gallus firmly grasps both the concept of beyond-being-ness and the Neoplatonic principle that ties intelligibility to being.²⁵ God is beyond being and therefore unintelligible.

At the beginning of his fifth chapter, Dionysius reminds his reader of God’s beyond-being-ness, just as he has finished his treatment of the divine names ‘Good’ and

²³ Expl DN 1, 59: “**ignorantie supersubstantialitatis**, id est divinitatis que ignoratur et omni enti supereminet.” Notice that “beyond-being-ness” for Gallus does not refer to the way God “possesses” being preeminently. Though this is a fair characterization of Aquinas’s conclusion about these *super-* terms, Gallus does not seem to have held such a position, and Dionysius is even less clear on the matter, as we saw in Chapter 2. Thus, on this issue I disagree with the characterization of Dionysius by Knepper, *Negating Negation*, and the characterization of Gallus by Coolman, *Knowledge, Love, and Ecstasy*. Both put forth an interpretation of Gallus on this issue that is closer to Aquinas. As we will see, although Coolman is on firmer ground with Gallus thanks to Gallus’s rhetoric of divine plenitude and abundance, I will argue that even this should not be taken to indicate a preeminent possession. That God is Being is only said because God is the cause of being and is beyond being.

Neither, however, do I hold that Gallus reads Dionysius as a thoroughgoing Plotinian, advancing a kind of negative purity of metaphysics where any affirmation of God must be entirely removed. Rather, Gallus’s concern is to keep the attention on the Word, which issues necessarily from God’s good ‘beyond-being-ness’ but, in creating and restoring the world, gives one the language that allows for hymning the God beyond being. Both “preeminent possession” and “negative purity” belie Gallus’s concern with depicting theological language as working equivocally but potently.

²⁴ *Ibid.*: “ipsum ens quod primum est in intellectu et summum et extra quod nihil querit aut investigat philosophia intellectualis et mundane...”

²⁵ See Chapter 2.

‘Love’ and is transitioning to the divine name ‘Being.’ Gallus’s gloss of the passage shows his appreciation of the Neoplatonic logic:

The intention of our discourse, that is, we intend in this treatise **not to manifest**, that is, to lead to intellectual cognition, **the super-substantial substance, according to how it is super-substantial**, that is, the divinity according to how it is in itself above all substance and cognition... **for this is unknown and perfectly not manifested** to all understanding...²⁶

Gallus is aware that even the name ‘Being,’ which is about to be treated, does not give one an intellectual understanding or knowledge of God as beyond being, which can only be unknown. Intellectual cognition is only possible of *substantia*, which the divine far transcends. The language of super-substantiality is connected closely to what the divinity is “in itself (*in se*),” which can be distinguished from what the divinity is “outside itself (*extra se*).”²⁷ The divine name Being, like all divine names (at least from Chapter 5 of *Divine Names* onward), refers either to God as the cause of Being, and/or refers ‘super-essentially’ to God as not Being. That is, Being describes God *extra se*, but not *in se*.

Dionysius’s final invocation of beyond-being-ness at the end of *Divine Names* gave Gallus a chance to consider the relation between God’s beyond-being-ness and ineffability.

But in order that truly in a universal way **we may praise** in some way according to our capacity **the super-union**, that is, the unity exceeding all things, **of it divinity, and the generation of God**, that is, the generation of the Word of God, in which is understood also the breath of the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son. Therefore **we name the super-nameable**, that is, God exceeding every name and every act of naming, **with the naming of God the Trinity and Unity**, by saying that God is one in essence and three in persons, **and**

²⁶ Expl DN 5, 326: “**intentio est sermoni** nostro, id est intendimus in hoc tractatu, **non manifestare**, id est ad cognitionem intellectualem deducere, **substantiam supersubstantialem secundum quod est supersubstantialis**, id est divinitatem secundum quod in se est super omnem substantiam et cognitionem, sicut dicitur *MT* 1b. **Hoc enim ignotum est et perfecte non manifestum** omni intelligentie...”

²⁷ See Coolman, *Knowledge, Love, and Ecstasy*, 56ff.

by existing things, that is, we praise God with names of things existing **as the ‘super-essential.’**²⁸

Here again is a rehearsal of Neoplatonic reasoning. God the Trinity and Unity, Dionysius suggested, is best named as ‘beyond being’ or ‘super-essential.’ God’s ineffability or ‘unnameability’ is closely tied to God’s ‘beyond-being-ness.’

Besides the close association of beyond-being-ness or super-substantiality with unintelligibility and ineffability, Gallus also recognized the causal logic which leads one to affirm beyond-being-ness in the first place. We saw in Chapter 2 that this reasoning could be traced all the way back to Plato and was expounded especially by Plotinus. God, Gallus affirms, is the first cause or principle of being (*esse*). Being (*esse*) is “not properly attributed to the first cause,” but instead ‘to be’ (*esse*) is simply “to flow from the first cause, because it naturally goes forth.”²⁹ Here is the Platonic insight that being itself must *have* a greater cause than itself. This first cause naturally issues in being and so must be beyond being. Gallus, not knowing of this Platonic provenance, thought this was an insight of Christians, who knew that being was not all there was and who experienced the God beyond pagan metaphysics. This God, Dionysius affirmed, was beyond being, or super-essential. However, just as Gallus thoroughly embraces the Dionysian Neoplatonic concept and logic of ‘beyond-being-ness,’ he also has a firm grasp on Dionysian divine

²⁸ Expl DN 13, 465: “**Sed ut vere catholice laudemus** aliquatenus secundum nostrum possibilitatem **superunitum**, id est unitatem omnia excedentem, **ipsius** divinitatis, **et Dei genitum**, id est generationem Verbi Dei, in qua intelligitur et spiratio Spiritus Sancti a Patre et Filio procedentis. Ideo **nominamus supernominabilem**, id est Deum excedentem omne nomen et omnem nominationem, **Dei nominatione Trinitatis et unitatis**, dicendo Deum esse unum in essentia et trinum in personis, **et existentibus**, id est nominibus existentium laudamus Deum **superessentialem**.”

²⁹ Expl CH 1, 485-6: “Verumtamen esse improprie attribuitur prime cause, nec enim vere bonum usque ad esse descendit, nec vere malum, scilicet peccati deformitas, peruenit usque ad esse. Esse siquidem est a prima causa fluere, quod naturaliter precedit et agere et pati.”

presence. Before turning to God's causal presence, however, two of Gallus's qualifications of Dionysian beyond-being-ness should be noted.

First, one way that Gallus does qualify or nuance Dionysius's depiction of God's beyond-being-ness, ineffability, and unintelligibility, is in situating it within the Augustinian concern with signification (*significatio*).³⁰ God's beyond-being-ness makes proper signification impossible. When Dionysius writes that, "we do not know its super-substantial, incomprehensible, and ineffable infinity,"³¹ Gallus responds that there is a breakdown in the process of signification: "It is necessary that the one who signifies and the one to whom it is signified understand the signification of voice or letter to some degree."³² That is, a central premise of Augustinian signification theory is that language can effectively communicate only when the speaker and hearer agree upon a system of reference in which they both have a common understanding of the thing (*res*) referred to and agree that a particular sign (*signum*) customarily points to that thing. God is not something that can be understood or signified in the way existing things can. In turn, Gallus thoroughly embraces the Dionysian preference for negations as a naturally more proper form of signification of God. A negative term, using the *super-* prefix, "suggests to us the knowledge of God (whatever sort it is) less improperly, less defectively, and

³⁰ See Ch. 1, 46-8.

³¹ Dionysius: ἀγνοοῦμεν δὲ τὴν ὑπερούσιον ἀντὶς καὶ ἀνόητον καὶ ἀοριστίαν; Sarracen: *ignoramus infinitatem ipsius supersubstantialem et incomprehensibilem et ineffabilem*.

³² Expl CH 2, 513: "**ignoramus infinitatem ipsius supersubstantialem et incomprehensibilem et ineffabilem.** Quod autem penitus ignoramus nec possumus aliis significare nec potest nobis ab aliis significari. Necesse est enim et significantem et cui significatur aliquatenus intelligere vocis vel littere significationem."

somehow more effectively.”³³ Put in terms of Augustinian signification theory, negative terms are more proper for signifying the God beyond being, because more certain agreement and understanding can be had of what God is not.³⁴

Second, Gallus’s treatment of divine beyond-being-ness is more explicitly tied to his trinitarianism than is typically assumed of Dionysius.³⁵ When beyond-being-ness appears in the *CD*, Gallus tends to associate it with the inner life or dynamic of the Trinity turned in on itself (*in se*), in contrast to the outpouring of Trinitarian activity in being (*esse*).³⁶ God is called “beyond-being-ness (*superessentialitas*) because of the fact that he is in his nature beyond every cognition, and he is being turned back to itself, not proceeding to things.”³⁷ Just as God had told Moses to provide the people a name for him (‘He who is’), God provided the name ‘I am who I am’ to Moses alone, who attained Christian wisdom.³⁸ That is, Gallus casts beyond-being-ness, not only in terms of separation or transcendence, but also in terms of a mode of existence belonging only to God, knowable by the human being only by union and assimilation to God. “For in itself

³³ *Ibid.*: “...minus improprie, minus defective et quodammodo efficacius nobis insinuate qualemcumque Dei notitiam.”

³⁴ Although other strategies of signifying in a purposefully ambiguous way can work. Compare Gallus’s gloss of the Song of Songs’ construction ‘Whom my soul loves,’ which he took to be an attempt to signify the Word experienced and therefore ‘known’ by the bride. Those who have experienced can in a way signify to others with the same experience. Ch 5, 283-5.

³⁵ Though, for one reading of Dionysius that insists on the centrality of earlier Trinitarian thought to his treatment of divine unintelligibility and ineffability, see Golitzin, *Mystagogy*.

³⁶ For an extended discussion of Gallus’s trinitarianism, especially a useful distinction between *ecstasis* and *enstasis* as modes of trinitarian activity, see Coolman, *Knowledge, Love, and Ecstasy*, 31-74.

³⁷ Expl DN 4, 290: “Dicitur enim vera entitas vel superessentialitas secundum quod est in natura sua super omnem cognitionem, et est esse in se reflexum, non ad res procedens.”

³⁸ *Ibid.* Exodus 3:14: “Ego sum qui sum”

it [God's *superessentialitas*] is not known by intellect but by union."³⁹ Again, these elaborations are noteworthy, but do not mark a great departure from Dionysian 'beyond-being-ness.' Just as Gallus embraced beyond-being-ness (and unintelligibility and ineffability), he also rehearsed and explained its Dionysian complement, causal presence.

B. Causality and Presence: *Plenitudo, Habundantia, Bonitas, Amor*

As we saw in Chapter 2, the Dionysian affirmation of divine causality and presence was not antithetical to the affirmation of divine beyond-being-ness, but intimately related to it. Because a cause must be greater than its effect (the Neoplatonic reasoning held), each existing thing, including being itself, must have a cause better than itself that is not itself. Consequently, Plato referred to the First Cause as the Good beyond being. Beyond-being-ness became a shorthand for this insight, as to be beyond being was to be the good source or cause of being. As we have seen, the *CD*'s treatment of the divine name 'Being' consistently drew on this Neoplatonic logic. God was called 'Being' only insofar as God was the beyond being cause of being.

John Sarracen's Latin *CD* conveyed the central elements of this Neoplatonic logic. It affirmed, for instance, that "the divinity which is beyond being (*super esse*) is the being (*esse*) of all things."⁴⁰ Or, as Gallus points out, the 'old' translation put it this way: "the being (*esse*) of all things is the super-substantial (*supersubstantialis*) divinity." The alternate translations did not trip Gallus up. He proves he understands the Dionysian logic: the God beyond being is being "in a causal and super-essential manner (*causaliter*

³⁹ Ibid.: "Secundum se enim non cognoscitur intellective sed unitive..."

⁴⁰ CH 4.1: τὸ γὰρ εἶναι πάντων ἐστὶν ἢ ὑπὲρ τὸ εἶναι θεότης; Sarracen: "etenim esse omnium est que super esse est deitas"; Eriugena: "esse enim omnium est supersubstantialis divinitatis"

et superessentialiter).⁴¹ That is, ‘Being’ is attributed to God only in the sense that God is the cause of being and therefore beyond being. In fact, Gallus affirms, it is God’s “plenitude of super-substantiality itself from which being (*ens*) itself or being (*esse*) in general emanates causally.”⁴² Super-substantiality describes the transcendent condition for God’s causality—an insight Gallus associates not with Neoplatonism or even Plato himself, but with the Christian wisdom of Dionysius, the “Treasury of the Apostle (*apostoli gazophylacio*).”⁴³ Dionysius conveyed the teaching that God is the beyond being cause of being.

Gallus’s glossing of Dionysian super-essential causality as a matter of plenitude is his most significant elaboration or innovation upon the Neoplatonic logic. At first glance, the rhetoric of plenitude appears at odds with the affirmation of beyond-being-ness or transcendence. Is God beyond being or full of being? For Gallus, the terms plenitude (*plenitudo*) and abundance (*habundantia*) point to the causal efficacy of the God beyond being. While God the cause of being should be affirmed to be beyond being, it is this very beyond-being-ness that is greater and better than being, as the cause of being. Plenitude and abundance do not constitute, for Gallus, a christianizing violation of the Neoplatonic (or at least, Plotinian) logic, which posits an original metaphysical purity. Rather, Gallus uses the rhetoric of plenitude to evoke how (the Neoplatonist) Dionysius’s affirmation of beyond-being-ness is a function of or intimately related to divine causality. Even though he was unaware of its Neoplatonic provenance, Gallus recognized an aspect of the Neoplatonic logic often overlooked. God’s ‘beyond-being-ness’ could not be

⁴¹ Expl CH 4, 556.

⁴² Expl DN 5, 334: “...plenitude superessentialitatis, a qua ipsum ens vel esse in generali causaliter emanate...”

⁴³ Expl Epist 717.

abstracted from God's causality. What was caused flowed, as it were, from the Good, which itself could not be known intellectually. As the very condition of divine causality and presence, God's *supersubstantialitas* simply was the ultimate principle or first cause of all being—*ens, esse, substantia*. This is what makes the Neoplatonic term 'beyond-being-ness' differ from the modern term 'transcendence.' 'Beyond-being-ness' is not characteristic of a capricious and removed God, but the very condition of the cosmos's ordered connection to the divine source. This does not mean we can say about God's *supersubstantialitas* that it "possesses" anything in a "preeminent" manner. The most we can say is that it is the source, origin, or principle, from which all forms of God's causal presence come.⁴⁴

Just as we saw in Chapter 2, Dionysian superabundant beyond-being-ness is most closely approximated by the divine names 'Good' and 'Love'. Gallus found the break between the *Divine Names*' fourth chapter on 'Good' and the fifth on 'Being' significant. He writes that, "after [Dionysius] treated in the fourth chapter about the Good, than which nothing higher or better can be thought among the *theoriae* of eternal Wisdom, he continues down to existence (*existentiam*), which is the first emanation from goodness, as it were."⁴⁵ Gallus recognized that 'Good' is more properly attributed to the pre-causality, as it were, of the God beyond being or the Trinity *in se*. The transition from the Trinity *in se* to the Trinity *extra se*, or from God's pre-causality to causality, was a central concern of Gallus's (even if these were perhaps more conceptually than really distinct). We will

⁴⁴ See also Coolman's treatment of divine plenitude, *Knowledge, Love, and Ecstasy*, 38-43.

⁴⁵ Expl DN 5, 325: "Postquam enim in quarto capitulo tractavit de bono, quo nihil anterius aut superius cogitabile est in eterne sapientie theoriis, descendit ad existentiam que est quasi prima emanatio a bonitate..."

see that his preferred metaphor for describing this transition is that of communication. Even the language of procession, so awkward for Christian Neoplatonists whose accounts of creation tended to avoid the emanationist logic of their pagan predecessors, shows up in Gallus's glosses: "God, existing super-essentially and eternally, fixedly and immobile in his own goodness (*bonitate*), processes out through the communication of his own goodness (*bonitatis*)."⁴⁶ God, or 'the Good', is that which pours forth in creating out of its plenitude and as a function of its goodness.

By this point it should be no surprise that Gallus also appropriates the Dionysian logic of divine Love, which was meant to describe this dynamic. "Love is so great in power that not only does it draw the human being out of himself toward God, but, if it is permissible to say, it draws God out of himself toward the human being, as it were, so that it may unite those things that are distant to the infinite."⁴⁷ That is, the Dionysian elision of agapic and erotic love made possible a cumulative vision of divine activity in terms of the dynamic of love. Whether articulated as creation, procession, or communication, the movement from beyond being to being was best accounted for by Love. We saw in Chapter 2 how important Love is to the Dionysian theology of God, and it is not shocking that Gallus found in the Song a model of its effects.

Yet for all this causal activity—the plenitude and abundance, goodness and love—Gallus echoes Dionysius in his constant reminder of the unintelligibility of God, even as cause. "It is necessary to attribute to him (as if the cause of all things) every form,

⁴⁶ Expl DN 4, 247: "...Deus in sua bonitate superessentialiter et eternaliter existens fixe et immobiliter, sine ulla sui mutatione ad existential per sue bonitatis communicationem procedit..."

⁴⁷ Expl MT 1, 6: "Tante autem virtutis est dilectio ut non tantum hominem extra se ad Deum sed, si fas est dicere, quasi Deum extra se trahit ad hominem ut in infinitum distantes uniat."

figure, essence, and creature altogether, but to attribute nothing to him as if he were subjected, but rather to rightly and truly remove all things from him.”⁴⁸ Though God is the Cause, God is so only super-essentially or super-substantially. Even the “presence of God (*presentia Dei*),” Gallus insists, “exceeds every understanding, coming down upon those first essences and manifest to the rest through them.”⁴⁹ We again return to the Dionysian theology of God: the presence of God does not reveal God. Rather, as we will see in the following section, Gallus elaborates on Dionysian creation, manifestation, and presence primarily through invoking an Augustinian theology of the Word communicated by God.

II. Language and Literature: *Litterae*

While Gallus’s qualification of the Dionysian doctrine of God was modest, largely reinforcing its major features and surprisingly appreciative of their Neoplatonic logic, his take on Dionysius’s theology of language or ‘hymning’ was more innovative. As a Victorine (an Augustinian canon), Gallus interpreted theological issues related to sacred letters in terms of an Augustinian theology of the Word, a major piece of which was a presumed analogy between divine and human speech. For Gallus, Dionysian divine causality or presence was best expressed in terms of the divine communication

⁴⁸ Expl MT 1, 22: “...oportet omnem formam vel figuram vel essentiam et omnem omnino creaturam ipsi attribuere tamquam omnium cause, nihil autem ei attribuere tamquam subiecto, sed potius ab eo omnia proprie et ueraciter remouere.”

⁴⁹ Expl MT 1, 27: “Et Dei presentia, que omnem superat intellectum, superueniens illis primis essentiis per eas manifestatur aliis.” Moderating Dionysius’s Neoplatonic view of presence, for Gallus presence is a matter of causal efficacy and is manifested through the eternal reasons. This is the reason for his extensive elaboration of the soul’s hierarchy and the Word’s *theoriae*. Knowing or experiencing God’s presence requires the Word’s mediating activity. On the mental hierarchy and the Word’s *theoriae*, see Ch. 5, 247-50, 255-60.

(*communicatio*) of the Word, which arises, as we have seen, from the superabundance of God's beyond-being-ness. Given that, as we will see in Chapter 5, Gallus conceives of Dionysian union as primarily a matter of the soul's intimacy with this Word, it should be no surprise that the Word (that is, the Song of Songs' bridegroom) pervades Gallus's *Explanation of the CD* as well. Gallus's theology of the Word (*Verbum*) not only provides a coherent account of divine causality and presence; it underlies his theology of sacred letters (*litterae*), which participate in the Word's communicative efforts.

This section uses the Augustinian analogy between the Word's operation and human speech as a lens through which to examine Gallus's views on Jesus, creation, and sacred letters in the *Explanatio*. Moving from the Word eternally spoken by the God beyond being to the incarnate Word as source of sacred literature, it maps a movement akin to the progression from an inner concept (*conceptio cordis*) to an inward word (*verbum intrinsecum*) to an exteriorized word (*verbum exterius*). What emerges is an account of Gallus's Word-centric and 'cosmic' christology, which is related to God's beyond-being-ness and is determinative for much else. Appreciating Gallus's theology of the Word is necessary for understanding his views on sacred language and literature (*sacrae litterae*), which seek to convey that Word as both beyond being and present.

As I showed in Chapter 1, Gallus writes at a historical moment when the radically incarnationist christologies of the new religious movements were reshaping Christian piety and theology, even as he had thoroughly imbibed the Victorine love of sacred letters. This section makes two moves. First, I show that Gallus articulates a Word-centric, cosmic christology informed by Augustine and the 12th-century Victorine masters, harmonizing it with the *CD*, an important contribution to the 13th-century new mysticism.

Moving from the eternal Word to the incarnate Word, it is possible to see how the Word was a prism through which other aspects of Gallus's theology can be understood. Second, Gallus's Word-centric Christology puts sacred literature at the center of Christian practice, as it allows one to experience the Word through means of purposefully ambiguous forms of theological language. After treating the eternal and incarnate Word, I move to his theology of sacred letters, showing how he re-articulates Dionysius's primary concerns.

A. Eternal Word: Inner Concept and Inward Word

Gallus's theology of the Word assumes an analogy put forth by Augustine between the incarnation of the eternal Word and the human act of communication of a mental concept. While "the Word" (*Λόγος-Verbum*) appears in the scriptures primarily in the Johannine and Wisdom literature, the notion of the Word as the principle or reason creating and governing the world had a long Hellenistic provenance. Philo of Alexandria made the Word a distinct divine hypostasis, and early Christian apologists likewise took advantage of the notion's cultural cachet in order to articulate a Christology that could defend and make intelligible their faith. Augustine, however, was the most important avenue for ideas about the Word in the medieval period, having fleshed out a theology of the Word by exploring the implicit analogy between the divine Word and the human production of words. As Luisa Valente has rehearsed, Augustine's treatment of the Word was built on his understanding of how human beings produce an exterior, spoken word

from an inner, anterior word.⁵⁰ This inner word itself begins as a pre-linguistic or trans-linguistic concept before becoming a linguistically-formed but pre-spoken word. That is, on its way to becoming a spoken utterance or vocal expression (*vox*), a word begins first as an inner pre-linguistic concept (*conceptio cordis*), then an inwardly pronounced word (*verbum intrinsecum*), until finally manifesting as an exterior word (*verbum exterius* or *vox*).

Each of these steps in the production of a word had its own analogue in the generation and activity of the divine Word. The generation of an inner, pre-linguistic concept was like the Father's generation of the Son or the eternal Word of God, which conciliar orthodox trinitarian theology had described as a distinct hypostasis or person, while affirming one deity. How the Word was God was unknowable and ineffable, but it was hinted at in the way an intimate concept, pre-rational or pre-linguistic, is indistinguishable from the speaker because it is not yet formed linguistically. Next, just as a pre-linguistic concept manifests an inward linguistically-formed word in the mind, the eternal Word contains the providential plans of creation and incarnation, or the eternal reasons (*rationes aeternae*).⁵¹ The inner word (*verbum intrinsecum*) of the human being refers to both the conceptual and the pre-spoken-but-linguistically-formed moments. In the same way, the eternal Word (*verbum eternum*) describes the Son as both united to the Father and as the principle of creation. Finally, the analogy plays out with the production of the exterior word or voice. In the analogy with the divine Word, this exteriorization of

⁵⁰ Valente, "*Vox mentis—Vox clamantis*," 366-69, 388-91. In this and the paragraph that follows, I am indebted to Valente's treatment.

⁵¹ In this aspect, Augustine's treatment looks both like the traditional Platonic understanding of creation as pre-planned and pre-contained by the Demiurge (a kind of divine craftsman), and like the descriptions of the Word of God as creative power in the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament.

the Word is the incarnation, which Augustine understands to be the Son's taking on human flesh and a rational soul in Christ Jesus, the perfect form of manifestation of the divine Word. Thus the Word incarnate is the voice (*vox*) of God.

In the analogy with the human production of an exterior word, Augustine mostly focuses on the incarnation of the Word in Jesus Christ, but his use of the craftsman analogy (where an inner project is realized in exterior form), shows that he considered creation itself to be potentially another analogue of the exterior word. The Victorines would take this cosmic christological instinct—the Word is manifested in creation and incarnation—and run with it. For them, God's exterior word could be encountered in any visible manifestation of divine invisible providential order.⁵² According to the Augustinian analogy, creation contrasted with Jesus Christ in that it was God's externalized word which is not God. That is, human creatures would even be like the Word incarnate themselves, were it not for the obstacles posed by the deformation of their nature by sin, and the need for reformation or even deification of the soul.⁵³ As we saw in Chapter 1, the primary means of this reformation or deification for the Victorines is sacred literature (what Dionysius called *Theologia* or the Word of God). So, for the Victorines, the Word is manifest broadly, in Jesus, creation, the scriptures, and (importantly for Gallus) special instances of contemplative inspiration. Thus, they, more so than Augustine, emphasized identification with the cosmic Christ, who was the

⁵² A Pauline passage from Romans (1:20) was the central justification of this position. The Victorines' embrace of the passage has been treated extensively by Coulter, *Per Visibilia ad Invisibilia*.

⁵³ Hugh's early work in the *Didascalicon* places forgetfulness alongside deformation as one of his primary descriptors of the consequences of sin and the Fall. Thus, in the definitive curricular statement of the Victorines, while divinely instituted pedagogy was a central concern, the effects of the Fall do not always seem very severe, and the potential for assimilation to the Word is great. See Ch. 1, 40-1.

principle of creation and the reformation of the soul—especially through the interpretation of scripture and special experience of the Word.

Besides generally expanding the imagined scope of the Word’s incarnation to include creation, scripture, and this special experience, Hugh of St. Victor made another modification of Augustine’s thinking about the Word.⁵⁴ The influence of Dionysius may have been the cause of Hugh positing that the inner word remains hidden with God.⁵⁵ Following what we saw with Dionysius in Chapter 2, this must be so even when exteriorized. That is, the exterior, incarnate Word (in Jesus, creation, scripture) remains hidden as it remains the interior, eternal Word of the God beyond being. For Dionysius, even in the providential presence of the God beyond being, God remains hidden. Most surprisingly, as we saw, this was the case even in the perfect instance of divine manifestation in Jesus.⁵⁶ It is worth noting what this subtle theological shift means for the understanding of words and the Word for those like Gallus who draw from both Augustine and Dionysius. If for Augustine an exteriorized word (*verbum*) or utterance (*vox*) is a sign that *points back to* the original interior word or concept, the Dionysius-influenced Hugh may accept that an exteriorized word also continues to *hide* the inner word or concept, since the inner word remains hidden even when exteriorized. Visible things are the media of return to invisible things, but only insofar as those invisible things are able to be apprehended. Hugh’s introduction of Dionysius to the curriculum at the Victorine school ensured there was a hearty dose of skepticism as to the extent to which invisible things or the eternal Word could be so apprehended, at least by the intellect.

⁵⁴ Valente notes this distinction (“*Verbum mentis*,” 379) but does not identify the possible influence of Dionysius as its source.

⁵⁵ Valente, 378.

⁵⁶ See Ch. 2, 112n110.

Gallus's account of the soul (treated in the next section) can be understood as an attempt to think through the mechanism or practice of apprehension of invisible things and the inner or eternal Word given this dilemma.

In his commentaries, Gallus embraced the analogy, highlighting the eternal Word's aspects. First, it simply *is* God in the way an inner concept is indistinguishable from the speaker; and second, it is the source or storeroom, as it were, of the eternal reasons in the way an inward word is a plan of speech.⁵⁷ As for the first aspect, in his *Explanation of Mystical Theology*, Gallus invokes “the eternal Word, which the Father speaks eternally.”⁵⁸ That is, the Word is eternally with the Father. To Dionysius's statement that, “this Theology (*theologia*) is placed beyond all things supersubstantially and is manifested unveiled and truly only to those who pass through pure and impure things,” Gallus adds that “the Word of God (*Verbum Dei*), which truly is theology (*theologia*), incomparably exceeds every created thing and being.”⁵⁹ That is, the eternal Word of God, the true Theology, is itself beyond being, united to God.

Again, these descriptions align with the view that the eternal Word in its first aspect is like an inner concept (*conceptio cordis*) even before it is linguistically-formed,

⁵⁷ In the Song commentaries, Gallus remarks on grammatical number of the term ‘storeroom(s)’ in verses 1:3b (*the king led me into his storerooms*) and 2:4 (*he led me into the wine storeroom*), arguing that they refer, respectively, to the Word's *theoriae* and “the Word containing all *theoriae* (*Verbum continens omnes theorias*).” SS3.2.C, 147. That is, Gallus articulates how the eternal Word, as the divine source of multiplicity, is both singular and multiple.

⁵⁸ Expl MT 1, 12: “Verbi eterni quod Pater eternaliter loquitur...”

⁵⁹ Expl MT 1, 24: “... Verbum Dei, quod vere est theologia, incomparabiliter excedit omne creatum et ens.” Gallus recognized what can be easily overlooked by readers of the Dionysian corpus—‘theology’ (θεολογία) was simply Dionysius's preferred term for the ‘Word of God,’ which the (supposedly) apostolic author used interchangeably to refer to both scripture (which itself was written by the ‘theologians’) and the Neoplatonic principle of the created order. This aspect of Dionysius fit well with the Victorine tendency to wed history and scripture.

intimate to and indistinguishable from the mind in which it exists. Put another way, the Word of God in its first aspect is ‘simple,’ indivisible from and one with God. When Dionysius, in a list of “affirmations” about God, says that the “Lights dwelling in the heart of Goodness sprang forth and remained... without departing from their coeternal abiding,” Gallus glosses that,

The Father is called the heart (*cor*) because, just as our word (*verbum*) and breath proceed from our heart, so also do the Son and the Holy Spirit proceed from the Father, and the same Lights have remained in the Son and in the Holy Spirit from eternity and remain into eternity.⁶⁰

This gloss, which reminds us of how closely Gallus associates the concepts of Goodness and Trinity, also illuminates his thinking on the analogy between the eternal Word and the inner concept. Just as the concept, even when linguistically-formed, remains in the mind of the speaker, so also the eternal Word, even when it multiplies with eternal reasons, remains eternally with the Father.⁶¹

Yet, if the eternal Word remains eternally with the Father like an inner concept, it also contains the eternal reasons (*rationes aeternae*). “[I]n that highest, simple Word all things are written eternally, on high, and simply as if in the first workmanship (*arte*).”⁶² These things written in the simple Word were the eternal reasons.⁶³ This is the eternal

⁶⁰ Expl MT 3, 37: “Cor autem dicitur Pater quia, sicut ex corde nostro et verbum nostrum procedit et flatus, sic ex Patre et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus, et eadem lumina permanserunt ab eterno et permanent in eternum in Filio et Spiritu Sancto.”

⁶¹ For an account of Gallus’s Trinitarian theology, including how it fits in his historical context, see Coolman, *Knowledge, Love, and Ecstasy in the Theology of Thomas Gallus*, 31-55.

⁶² Expl MT 1, 10-11: “...in illo summe simplici Verbo omnia eternaliter et summe simpliciter tamquam in prima arte scripta sunt.”

⁶³ Although he was unaware of the Neoplatonic provenance of the concept of ‘beyond-being-ness’, Gallus recognized the Platonic origin of these ‘ideas’ or ‘exemplars’, which Augustine had christianized by placing as ‘archetypes’ in the mind of God. Expl MT 1, 27.

Word in its second aspect, which, like the idea or plan of the house in the carpenter's mind, or a linguistically-formed inward word (*verbum intrinsecum*), predetermines what the builder or speaker will produce.

A string of passages from Gallus's final work, *Explanation of the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, speaks of the eternal Word more explicitly, depicting the divine operation in which the simple Word, even prior to its incarnation or externalization, proceeds to a state of predetermining multiplicity. "The Lord speaks this sentence among others *from the whirlwind*, that is, the inscrutable and untemplatable profundity of eternal Wisdom."⁶⁴ That is, the Word is spoken from the beyond-being-ness, as it were. The eternal reasons come from this deep whirlwind, which is an image for "the plenitude of the eternal Word, in which there exist eternally the ideas of universal things, or the exemplars, archetypes, substance-making reasons, predeterminations, or whatever other name is chosen."⁶⁵ The eternal reasons are contained by the eternal Word. As Chapter 5 will show, Gallus calls the eternal reasons *theoriae* or 'spectacles' from the perspective of the soul seeking union with the eternal Word. While they are eternal, they are the multiple rational principles for all that exists, or, to extend the Augustinian metaphor, the inward forms of all the ways in which the Word is exteriorized.

One final passage calls to mind the Augustinian metaphor explicitly and makes clear how the eternal Word is simple and multiple in its two aspects.

But the mental word (*verbum mentis*) forms the spoken words (*verba oris*), because from the abundance of the heart (*habundantia cordis*) the mouth speaks.

⁶⁴ Expl EH Pref., 733: "Hanc sententiam inter ceteras loquitur Dominus *de turbine*, id est inscrutabili et intemplabili profunditate sapientie eterne..."

⁶⁵ Expl EH Pref., 735: "...plenitudinem eterni Verbi in quo sunt eternaliter universorum idee siue exemplaria siue archetypie siue rationes substantifice siue prediffinitiones siue quocumque alio nomine designentur..."

Hence when the discourse (*sermo*) of the intellect fails, so also does the discourse of the mouth. But it must be noted that the Gospel is made of short sayings (*brevium dictionum*) because it is grasped by the very highpoint of the intellect; for this reason the Gospel is expansive when treated by the imagination, senses, or even reason, and it is ineffable in the Word of God, as much to humans as to angels, not only having few words, but only one, and that one, ineffable.⁶⁶

In this passage, Gallus's theology of the Word is explicitly linked to his understanding of sacred letters. The eternal Word, as it is united to God like an inner concept, is ineffable and one. It is simply the one Word, eternally spoken and indistinguishable from the God beyond being. Yet, when expressed to the human intellect or other lower mental faculties, it is multiplied. The eternal Word is both the single principle of every multiplicity, and it contains the eternal reasons that predetermine the forms of multiple things. Together, these two aspects of the eternal Word are akin to an Augustinian inner concept (*conceptio cordis*) and inward word (*verbum intrinsecum*).

It is worth remembering here that in the Song of Songs commentaries, Gallus interprets the bridegroom as the eternal Word, whose union is elusive but whose *theoriae* continually and progressively draw near and renew the soul. Chapter 5 will argue that to “wander” among the *theoriae*, following the “itineraries of eternity,” was an important image of mystical advancement for Gallus. It is only by progressive experience of the *theoriae* of the eternal Word (the aspect of the eternal Word akin to an inward word) that the soul can be transformed for affective union. However, even the soul's encounter with the *theoriae* depends initially on the Word's exteriorization or incarnation.

⁶⁶ Expl MT 1, 23: “Verbum autem mentis format verba oris, quia ex habundantia cordis os loquitur. Unde cum deest sermo intellectui, deest et ori. Nota autem quod euangelium est breuium dictionum secundum quod tractatur in ipso apice intellectuali, quia in tractatu imaginationis vel sensus vel etiam rationis prolixum est; in Verbo Dei tam hominibus quam angelis ineffabile, non solum pauca habens verbab sed unum solum et illud ineffabile.”

B. Incarnate Word: Exterior Word

Completing the Augustinian analogy with human communication, the eternal Word becomes exteriorized (*verbum exterius*) or vocalized (*vox*). In Gallus's commentaries, as in Victorine thought generally, this exteriorization of the Word occurs both narrowly and broadly: narrowly, in the specific or "dominical incarnation (*dominica incarnatio*)" of the Word in the human being Jesus; and broadly, in the creative operation of the Word in all history. In fact, though a 'cosmic christology' that saw all of creation and history as an exterior expression of the eternal Word is characteristic of the Victorines (and perhaps even 12th-century theology in general), Dionysius's descriptions of the Word of God ("Theology") and Jesus reinforced in Gallus the Victorine tendency to broaden the dominical incarnation to include the 'incarnation' of the Word in creation or history.⁶⁷ In Gallus's thought, Jesus Christ the incarnate Word is, as we will see, also the principle of creation. As the Augustinian metaphor suggests, both the particular incarnation in Jesus Christ and the general manifestation of the Word in creation and history are like exteriorizations of the inward word. The resulting elision of the incarnate and the cosmic Word—or, the particular and general exteriorizations of the Word—has implications for Gallus's understanding of sacred letters. Sacred letters (*sacrae litterae*) were themselves like 'explanations' of the Word, attempts to explain, pass on, or interpret the wisdom of Christians, which encompassed a knowledge of both the exterior Word in

⁶⁷ Even Gallus's occasional use of the adjective in the formulation *dominica incarnatio*, suggests he feels the need to qualify *incarnatio* when speaking of the specific incarnation treated in the Gospels. There may also be a broader or more expansive understanding of *incarnatio*, which nevertheless has Jesus as its principle, as we will see.

creation, incarnation, and history and the inward word and inner concept in the eternal Word.

Because Dionysius's christological reflections were occasional and haphazard, Gallus's treatment of the matter is likewise spread across the *Explanations*. One important cluster of glosses, however, appears in the *Explanation of the Letters*, the only place Dionysius treats the incarnation in any depth. The incarnation, Dionysius says, involves the Word of God (*Theologia*) suddenly being made manifest from the non-manifest. Gallus glosses that this is "the work of the dominical incarnation, namely the Lord Jesus himself."⁶⁸ This special exteriorization or revelation of what had been hidden was "**a certain new operation of him as God and human**, that is, with Christ, God and human, performing untried things."⁶⁹ The Word becoming flesh, suddenly and newly, was "Jesus, the mediator of God and human being (*Ihesum mediatorem Dei et hominum*)."⁷⁰

These statements are standard rehearsals of a common medieval theology of incarnation—God or the Word became flesh in Jesus. What Dionysius adds, it should be no surprise, is a description of the incarnation in terms of beyond-being-ness. Gallus glosses:

and he, truly coming to substance (*substantiam*), that is, to being (*esse*), when before he was so beyond being (*esse*) and being (*ens*), or **coming** into the world to receive human substance **was made substance beyond all substance**, with a lone

⁶⁸ Expl Epist 723: "...opus incarnationis dominice, scilicet ipsum Dominum Ihesum..."

⁶⁹ Expl Epist 728: "**quadam operatione nova ipsius Dei et hominis**, id est Christo Deo et homine operante inexperta."

⁷⁰ Expl CH 1, 487.

virtue divine and super-substantial, or only in such a way that he was incomparably pre-eminent over every other pure creature...⁷¹

The incarnation is a special instance of the beyond-being, eternal Word's exteriorization. Though God and the Word spoken eternally are beyond being, when the Word is incarnated it comes to being. It takes on human substance, even as it remains beyond substance.

This typically Dionysian reminder that even in the manifestation of Jesus the Word remains beyond being and hidden, highlights what is significant historically about Gallus's Christology. Though experiments in more radically incarnationist christologies were occurring across the religious landscape at the time Gallus writes (making his own context distinct from that of his 12th-century Victorine masters), Gallus emphasizes a more traditional Neoplatonic, 'cosmic' Christology. The Augustinian metaphor of human communication and Dionysius's own descriptions of Jesus as the principle of every hierarchy helped him to re-articulate 12th-century cosmic Christology and contemplation, while many around him were placing a greater emphasis on the suffering and saving Jesus.⁷²

i. Jesus: The Word as Hierarch

⁷¹ Expl Epist 726: "**Et ipse vere veniens ad substantiam**, id est ad esse, cum prius esset tantum super omne esse et ens, vel **veniens** in mundum ad suscipiendum humanam substantiam, **factus est substantia super omnem substantiam**, id est sola diuina et supersubstantiali virtute, vel ita tantum quod ipse secundum naturam assumptam incomparabiliter preeminent omni alii pure creature..."

⁷² Thanks to his influence on Bonaventure, his geographic location, and his personal acquaintance with Anthony of Padua, Gallus is sometimes thought of more as a proto-Franciscan than a representative of the school of St. Victor. His Word-centric Christology, however, is one area where it is clear that he was not greatly influenced by Francis or his early friars, even if he influenced them in turn. On the 13th century's "new religious movements" and "new mysticism" see Chapter 1.

Indeed, Jesus was for Gallus, as for Dionysius, the principle and end of every hierarchy, or divine operation that deifies and unites to God. When Dionysius invokes “Jesus” in his *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, Gallus glosses, “the principal and universal hierarch, from whose plenitude all hierarchies receive... But the Lord Jesus is one and the same universal hierarch with the triune deity or the divine Trinity.”⁷³ That is, Jesus, one with the Trinity and the source of all goodness, is the single and simple source of all multiple hierarchies. “**Jesus himself**, who is **the most thearchic mind**, that is, divine and principal wisdom... the Lord Jesus himself, as our principal hierarch, **contains**, that is, unites and simplifies... **many differences**, that is, various divisions of thoughts and affections.”⁷⁴ Again, Gallus’s Christology stresses the distinction between the eternal Word as simple and united to God (like a inner concept) and the eternal Word as containing and actuating the multiple eternal reasons (like an inward word and exterior word). In Jesus himself, God and human, these aspects come together, and serve as the source or model for all hierarchic, deifying operations. Jesus is the Hierarch, the principle of history and creation, as it were, the Christ of the cosmos.

Gallus thus describes a narrow and a broad exteriorization of the Word: the former, dominical and human; the latter, cosmic and understood as the principal outpouring of the Trinity’s beyond-being-ness. Gallus invokes “the incarnate Word, in whom alone the fullest universality of beyond-being-ness (*superessentialitas*), of essence, of life, of sensuality, of rationality, of wisdom, and of goodness are united and in

⁷³ Expl EH 5, 916: “**in Ihesu** principali et uniuersali ierarcha... Ihesus est unus et idem ierarcha uniuersalis cum deitate trina siue diuina Trinitate”

⁷⁴ Expl EH 1, 741-2: “**ipse Ihesus**, qui est **thearchissima mens**, id est diuina et principalis sapientia... ipse Dominus Ihesus, tamquam noster ierarcha principalis, **concludit**, id est coadunate et simplicat... **multas alteritates**, id est varias cogitationum et affectionum distractiones...”

agreement.”⁷⁵ Here is a rather frank statement that the incarnate Word, the Word exteriorized, Jesus himself, cannot be separated from the eternal Word, the inward word, the principle of creation. While the Word is externalized, manifested, and incarnated in the “dominical incarnation” of Jesus, Jesus is himself the eternal Word containing the principles of creation. Elsewhere, Gallus states that the “incarnation of the Word (*Verbi incarnationem*)” is simply the “fulfillment of goodness (*bonitatis plenitudinem*),” which, as we have seen, is for Gallus the prime affirmation of the God beyond being.⁷⁶

This cosmic Christology—where Jesus the incarnate Word is understood primarily as the principle of creation and history—should be understood as one of among a growing number of christological options in the early 13th century. Gallus’s embrace of Dionysianism, with its downplaying of the incarnation, allowed him to articulate a Victorine christological sensibility in the context of a growing tendency toward an emphasis on incarnation in Christology. Indeed, a major intellectual concern of one of Gallus’s most famous readers, the Franciscan Bonaventure, is to harmonize the cosmic and hierarchical christological tendencies of Gallus with the new Franciscan emphasis on incarnation.

On this issue, again, keeping in mind the underlying Augustinian metaphor of communication helps to illuminate Gallus’s position. Though Jesus is a special instance of the Word’s exteriorization, because the Word is also the creative and guiding principle of history, Gallus follows Dionysius in downplaying the distinction between the two aspects, as it were, of the Word’s exteriorization. On the one hand, Gallus affirms that

⁷⁵ Expl DN 4, 249: “... Verbi incarnati in quo solo plenissima uniuersalitas superessentialitatis, essentie, vite, sensualitatis, rationalitatis, sapientie et bonitatis personaliter unitur et confederatur.”

⁷⁶ Expl DN 4, 283.

Jesus the Word incarnate, God made flesh, is a special fulfillment of goodness, the knowledge of which (along with God's beyond-being-ness) makes the wisdom of Christians distinct from (and privileged over) gentile wisdom. In the following passage from *Divine Names*, Dionysius has invoked the "harmony" which all things receive from the "wise and beautiful" God. Gallus glosses:

The philosophers of the gentiles investigated this harmony in no middling way, and it was fulfilled in the incarnate Word, where the highest, the lowest, and the middle were joined in one person, who is the fullness of every desirable beauty, namely essence, life, wisdom, goodness, blessedness, etc., and this is the testimony of the highest kindness.⁷⁷

Here Gallus depicts the incarnation as the supreme, special, or singular instance of a more general cosmic harmony that could be known even by those who do not know of the incarnation in Jesus. The dominical incarnation (*dominica incarnatio*) is a perfect and perfecting instance of the exteriorization of the eternal Word. That the new religious movements of the 13th century were exploring the implications of the Word's particular 'enfleshment' in the suffering and saving Jesus may not have been lost on Gallus. Yet, on the other hand, as the above passage suggests, much of Gallus's attention, like that of the Victorines before him and Dionysius himself, was fixed on how the "harmony" of history was a more general form of the Word's incarnation or exteriorization.

ii. Creation and History: The Word Exteriorized

Though Jesus was the perfect exteriorization of the Word, the Augustinian analogy, with its roots in Platonism, suggested that creation and history in general were

⁷⁷ Expl DN 1, 86-7: "Hanc armoniam gentium philosophi non mediocriter inuestigauerunt, et completa est in Verbo incarnate ubi summa, ima et media coniuncta sunt in una persona que est plenitude omnis speciei desiderabilis, scilicet essentie, vite, sapientie, bonitatis, beatitudinis etc., et hoc indicium est summe benignitatis."

also an exteriorization of the Word, the outpouring of the ‘storeroom’ of the eternal reasons. A suggestive Dionysian formulation, occurring in the middle of *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, ties the two ideas together. Dionysius, in a discussion of the Eucharist, refers to “the creator of signs (*creator signorum*),” whom Gallus glosses as, “Christ, who first and principally is the arranger of signs (*ordinator signorum*).”⁷⁸ That is, Jesus Christ is not the only sign (*signum*), exterior word (*verbum exterius*), or voice (*vox*) of the eternal Word, but the Sign of signs, the one who like an inward word plans out or predetermines the exterior expression. With the assurance that Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word, is the arranger of all signs, Gallus can say that everything created by the Word from the eternal reasons is an exteriorization of the Word. “Existing things [are those things] which come forth from the Word into being (*esse*) through creation; those things are called non-existing which only exist in the super-essential Word, and nevertheless can be contemplated in the Word itself.”⁷⁹ Gallus goes on to explain that these ‘non-existing’ things are the *theoriae* or the eternal reasons, but what this passage shows is that the Word is the principle of creation and history, and therefore created things exteriorize, reflect, or convey the Word. If creation and history themselves are also exteriorizations of the inward Word, like the outpouring of a king’s private storeroom, how do they relate to the exteriorization of the Word in Jesus?

Thanks to Dionysius’s discussion of divine signification in *Celestial Hierarchy*, Gallus concludes that created things are themselves capable of signifying celestial and divine things.

⁷⁸ Expl EH 3, 811. Dionysius: ὁ τῶν συμβόλων δημιουργός.

⁷⁹ Expl MT 1, 16: “Existencia que de Verbo in esse per creationem prodierunt, non existential dicuntur que in solo Verbo superessentiali consistent et tamen in ipso Verbo contemplabilia sunt.”

Hence the lowest creatures can, by reason of their participation, rightly signify the plenitude and the very excellent participations in the Good of the kind which are in the celestial substances... Moreover, because everything participates in the Good, it shows the authority of the scriptures, because **the truth of the eloquences speaks**.⁸⁰

Two points can be made from this passage. First, created things simply are God's word exteriorized and can "rightly signify." They are predetermined by the eternal reasons which reside in the eternal Word; thus they communicate God's intention or profound inner concept. Everything, in turn, has the potential to be a sign. Second, Gallus concludes that the signs of the created order are rightly harnessed by the theologians who wrote the scriptures (*eloquia*). Creation and history provide the material for hymning the God beyond being, especially the Word eternally spoken.⁸¹

In rehearsing Dionysius's arguments in *Celestial Hierarchy* about the use of base or material images for the God beyond being, Gallus reinforces a major principle of the school of St. Victor—invisible things (*invisibilia*) are known through visible things (*visibilia*). Paul's statement in Romans 1:20 that "the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made,"

⁸⁰ Expl CH 2, 517: "Unde etiam infime creature ratione sue participatione possunt congrue significare plenitudinem et multo magis precipuas participationes boni quales sunt in celestibus substantiis... Quod autem omnia bono participant, probat auctoritate scripture: quoniam **veritas eloquiorum dicit** etc."

⁸¹ Though, as we will see, scriptural signification must be understood to refer to God in particular ways, and is ordered by the Word itself, whom the theologians experienced. It is not that the authors of scripture compose their works from a general experience of creation and history (though for Gallus, like Hugh of St. Victor, there can be some wonderful achievements made simply from the effortful collation and composition of things in the world—pagan philosophy and literature was to be admired for the wisdom it achieved in this way). Rather, it is the special experience of the Word itself, when the mind is drawn beyond general experience, that ensured how truthfully the eloquences spoke.

provided the spiritual justification for much of the school's focus on the liberal arts.⁸² Knowing visible things was the prerequisite or foundation for knowing invisible, spiritual things.⁸³ The Augustinian analogy with human speech supports this Pauline principle. If creation and history (visible things) are the Word exteriorized, one should follow them back, as it were, to the inward Word and eternal reasons (invisible things) which they represent. Yet, while the principle of *visibilia-invisibilia* was foundational for wisdom, even appreciated to some extent by gentile philosophers, it was not sufficient for the special wisdom of Christians. Gallus characterizes the deficiency of gentile philosophers as their incapacity to consider a knowledge beyond this method: "Such the Apostle calls 'animal men' (I Cor. 2:14), who namely determine that there is no knowledge of the invisible things except that which is gathered from visible things."⁸⁴ The theologians knew the Word *in toto*, as Jesus, the beyond-being principle of creation and history, who is known beyond the mind by those who attain the wisdom of Christians.

C. Sacred Letters: Experiencing and Explaining the Word

The previous extended discussion of Gallus's Word-centric, 'cosmic' christology and its analogy to human speech is necessary for understanding his explanation of Dionysius's theology of sacred letters. As we saw in Chapter 2, Dionysius emphasized, 1)

⁸² For a treatment of the theme among the Victorines, see Coulter, *Per visibilia ad invisibilia: Theological Method in Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173)*.

⁸³ Cf. Ch. 5's account of Gallus's typically Victorine method of spiritual interpretation. Literal interpretation is the foundation of spiritual interpretation, even in the most spiritual of sacred writings. Because it was so critical to understand the letter, which could be drawn from creation or history, Hugh exhorted to "learn everything." Hugh, *Didascalicon*, VI.3.115 (Trans. by Harkins, 166).

⁸⁴ Expl DN 1, 117: "Tales vocat apostolus animales (I Cor. 1f), qui scilicet arbitrantur non esse cognitionem inuisibilium nisi que colligitur ex visibilibus."

the theologians' (the prophets' and apostles') experience of the presence of the God beyond being; 2) the capacity of theological symbols to both veil and unveil God; and 3) the use of theological "hymning" causally and *hyperochically*. Gallus's theology of the Word helps him to navigate each of these issues. The theologians, like the bride in the Song of Songs, experienced the eternal Word in mystical union, while the incarnate Word's causal presence in creation and history (including preeminently but not exclusively in Jesus Christ) provided potential signs for the eternal Word. In turn, these signs are harnessed by the theologians to signify figuratively, causally, and super-essentially, in an ambiguous way appropriate for their experience of the eternal Word.⁸⁵ That is, the theologians, by both considering the Word in creation and history and experiencing the Word in mystical union, in turn explained the Word in sacred writings with language that was more literary than analytical, more poetic than propositional, and more equivocal than properly signifying. Sacred letters (scriptures and theological language) conveyed or performed an experience of the Word, which provided both the immediate object and the mediating context of the experience. Sacred writings could for that reason themselves be called the Word of God and as such needed to be read (*lectio*), experienced (*experientia*), and explained (*explanatio*).

i. The Word Experienced by the Theologians

Gallus notably innovates upon the *CD* by interjecting the language of experience (*experientia*) into its mystical theology. As with much of Gallus's thought, there is some

⁸⁵ Again, Gallus's favorite designation of the Word, drawn from the Song, was "Whom my soul loves," because the eternal Word was ineffable and unintelligible, but not undesirable. See Ch. 5, 283-5. Figural, causal, and super-essential signification are all attempts to put into language the relation between the soul and "Whom my soul loves."

basis for this in the *CD*, as Dionysius describes the “suffering” or “experience” (πάθος) from which the bishop of Athens Hierotheus gains wisdom.⁸⁶ Denys Turner has suggested that the interjection of experience into the Dionysian picture transformed the understanding of Christian mysticism in ways that continue to shape theological and religious studies today.⁸⁷ As I argued in the Introduction, ‘experience’ has been an orienting and much discussed category for the field of religious studies in general and the study of mysticism in particular. Turner identifies a tendency in modern religious studies to equate religious experience and doctrine/symbols as first and second order phenomena, respectively. He connects this to the experiential Dionysianism of the late medieval period. By claiming that theological teaching or symbol-making is a secondary response to a primary experience of the divine, late medieval mysticism mistakenly advanced the notion that experience itself may be pre-linguistic and can be abstracted from cultural conditioning. Turner argues that the explicitly “experiential” mystical turn inaugurated by Gallus was a fundamental alteration of the Neoplatonic mystical theology of Dionysius. Special affective experience, Turner argues, was not a goal or object of Neoplatonic mystical theology, which sought instead a speculative intuition of the One *through* a pre-existing liturgico-symbolic and rational system.⁸⁸ To Turner, the medieval western and subsequent modern focus on the *Mystical Theology* as the key to the *CD* (rather than the liturgically-oriented *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*) downplayed the significance of the linguistic and ritual condition of experience.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ DN 2, 9.

⁸⁷ Turner, “How to Read Pseudo-Denys Today.”

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 430-1.

⁸⁹ Of course, experience *is* dependent on cultural conditioning—Gallus himself does not leave mystical union completely up to the effective Word (even as he attributes

However, Turner's argument itself does not account for Dionysius's treatment of the special experience of the theologians, a feature of Dionysian theology Gallus frequently pointed out. The prophets and the apostles who composed the mysteries of the scriptures themselves experienced the Word of God in apparitions and mystical ascents.⁹⁰ The Augustinian analogy to human speech suggests how their experience was of the Word understood as both inward and exteriorized, eternal and incarnate. The theologians experienced the Word's general exteriorization in creation and history, the Word's particular incarnation in Jesus, and special instances of mystical union with the eternal Word.⁹¹ That is, the authors of scripture come to have and pass down both the gentile wisdom gathered from the created order and the wisdom of Christians known only to those who experience it. The scriptures and liturgy are not just the linguistic and ritual *conditions* for Christian experience; they are the outpouring of the theologians' experience of the Word as both incarnate and eternal. They are commentaries on the theologians' 'reading' of the Word.

Dionysius presented a model of theological experience in Hierotheus, traditionally held to be the first bishop of Athens, and so his direct superior. Dionysius even quotes at length from Hierotheus's (supposed) works, such as his *Hymns of Love* (*Ympni Amativi*). Gallus glosses Dionysius's account of Hierotheus's experience:

[Hierotheus] was taught from a certain more divine inspiration, not only learning divine things, through an intellectual drinking in, of which our intellect is capable through divine and angelic inflowing, but also suffering divine things

it to the Word's effectivity), but recognizes that experience (even experience of aporia and affection) must be disciplined.

⁹⁰ See Ch. 2, 115-7 and 128-9.

⁹¹ For a brief description of Gallus's expansive use of "experience" to refer to everything from everyday consciousness to special instances of divine union, see below 226-31.

through the apex of the affection, namely, a union experiencing divine sweetness, softness, and flame through taste, smell, and touch...⁹²

Here Gallus invokes his major teaching on Dionysian mystical union—that it engages both intellect and affect—in explicating the experience that inspires the writing of Hierotheus’s hymns. Hierotheus not only received Christian wisdom from the theologians themselves, but experienced, intellectually and affectively, a perfecting mystical union. Elsewhere, Gallus calls this Hierotheus’s “most profound and experiential knowledge (*profundissime et experientialis cognitionis*).”⁹³ Hierotheus the bishop of Athens and the more immediate inferior of Paul, provided an example of one who receives apostolic wisdom, experiences mystical union and mystical knowing, and ‘hymns’ in response.

While the next section will treat the nature of mystical experience in more detail, it is important to notice here how Gallus attends to the experience of the theologians. He says that apostolic speech (*sermo*) is:

not from intellectual teachings, which by the exercise of human skill are compounded and founded in the pre-existing cognition of sensible things, but from the super-intellectual unions and experiences of the holy theologians through the departure of the mind toward the Holy Spirit teaching and admonishing them.⁹⁴

⁹² Expl DN 2, 154-5: “**doctus est ea ex quadam diviniore inspiratione, non solum discens divina** per haustam intellectualem, que scilicet intellectus noster capere potest per diuinam et angelicam influentionem, **sed et patiens divina** per apicem affectionis, scilicet unionem experientem diuinam dulcedinem, suavitatem, flammam per gustam, olfactum et tactum...” Dionysius’s felicitous formulation (οὐ μόνον μαθῶν ἀλλὰ καὶ παθῶν) is somewhat lost in translation (*non solum discens sed et patiens*), but Gallus caught the significance, even without the original rhyming contrast. Experience of divine things enhanced or supplemented learning about them.

⁹³ Expl DN 3, 172. Sarracen’s translation carefully conveyed the following terms in this way: ‘knowledge’ (γνῶσις) as *cognitio*; ‘intellect’ (νοῦς) as *intellectus*; ‘understanding’ (νοήσις) as *intelligentia*.

⁹⁴ Expl DN 1, 50: “...non ex intellectualibus doctrinis que exercitio humani ingenii componuntur et in preexistente sensibilibus cognitione fundantur, sed ex superintellectualibus unionibus et experientiis sanctorum theologorum per mentis excessum ad Spiritum Sanctum eos docentem et monentem.”

That is, the forms of theological communication—hymning, praising, preaching, etc.—are not like the kind of teaching done by those with the wisdom of gentiles, which is drawn from common consideration of the created order and history alone, but with the wisdom of Christians, which is drawn, at least in part, from the experience of and union with the Word. “But this union is felt,” Gallus insists, “by an experience of the principal affection beyond the intellect,”⁹⁵ and it “has a super-intellectual experience both in the journey of this life and in the homeland of the next.”⁹⁶ That is, the theologians realized the promise of Christian wisdom or mystical theology. Their hymning or writing of scripture were attempts to convey this experience and thus cooperate and participate in the exteriorization of the Word. If the theologians experienced the Word, it is worth investigating how they explained their experiences.

ii. The Word Explained by the Theologians Figuratively, Causally, and Super-essentially

On the one hand, the theologians’ task of writing or passing on an experience of the Word is impossible. “The super-intellectual experience” of the eternal Word is ineffable. Even for Dionysius’s model of theological “hymning,” Hierotheus, Gallus writes that, “it cannot be stated what sorts of things the mind experiences which no one knows except who receives... because it is beyond the mind. For this reason, neither can it can be spoken by any word of the mind, much less a word of the body.”⁹⁷ Again,

⁹⁵ Expl DN 1, 85: “Hec autem unio experientia principalis affectionis super intellectum sentitur...”

⁹⁶ Expl DN 1, 92: “Habet enim ipsa unio experientiam superintellectualem et in via et in patria.”

⁹⁷ Expl DN 2, 155: “...edici non possit qualia mens talis experitur que nemo scit nisi qui accipit (Apoc. 2e), **perfectus est ad unionem indocibilem**, quia super mentem

“although I may try to express the meaning of these words, nevertheless for certain we hold that the power of the apostolic experience cannot be expressed worthily in writing, in speech, or in thought.”⁹⁸ To put it frankly, “the word of the mind (*verbum mentis*) is not able to express in writing or in words those super-intellectual experiences.”⁹⁹ The most Gallus will say is that “those experienced (*experti*) in such matters can instruct and inflame those who are experiencing (*experientes*)... But he who has never tasted sweetness cannot teach someone about sweetness with words.”¹⁰⁰ How then do the experienced, who cannot “worthily express” their experience, instruct and inflame those who seek to experience?

Gallus appreciated that the theory of theological language in the *CD* drew upon the potential of purposeful ambiguity. Dionysius had explained, particularly in the first few chapters of *Celestial Hierarchy*, why theological language posed a problem, given that the God beyond being was ineffable. Gallus, too, inspired by the Song of Songs, held that the best one could say about the eternal Word was to call it, “Whom my soul loves,” because the experience of mystical union, like the one to Whom the soul is united, is itself ineffable and unintelligible. The theologians must resort to ambiguous or equivocal

est (MT 1b; DN 7b et i). Unde nec verbo mentis multo minus verbo corporis dici potest.” One of Gallus’s favorite citations, quoted six times in the third Song commentary alone, was this verse, Revelation 2:17: “no one knows it except the one who receives (*nemo illud scit nisi qui accipit*).”

⁹⁸ Expl DN 4, 240: “Quamvis autem conemur horum verborum sentitiam exprimere, pro certo tamen habemus quod virtus experientie apostolice nec scripto nec dicto nec cogitatione digne exprimitur.”

⁹⁹ Expl DN 4, 234: “Unde experientias illas superintelleuales non valet verbum mentis scripto vel verbo exprimere...”

¹⁰⁰ Expl DN 2, 155: “Experti tamen experientes possunt instruere et inflammare... Eum vero, qui numquam gustauit dulce, non potest verbis instruere de dulcedine.”

uses of language in the scriptures or “the eloquences.”¹⁰¹ Gallus glosses, “**and** the mystical traditions of the eloquences **reform**, that is, they speak by describing **it** the divine blessedness **as light... and they call it life.**”¹⁰² That is, the authors of scripture engage in an act of literary or rhetorical composition of the divine which they experienced. This is an act of creative reforming or remaking and is accommodating to their readers.

Theology (*theologia*) **attends to our mind**, has compassion, as it were, for our infirmity, thanks to the intention of God and the theologians, **as was said**, above at 1c, **and** through sensible forms **provides it** our mind **an uplifting** for contemplating, investigating, imitating celestial and divine things, **which acquaints** by aligning or joining (*coaptationem*) properties to invisible things.¹⁰³

That is, the theological language of the scriptures uses the properties of sensible or visible things to instruct and inflame the mind, making it possible for it to investigate and contemplate things otherwise inaccessible to the mind. How does theological language do this?

As we saw in Chapter 2, the *CD* describes theological language as working both causally and *hyperochically* (“beyond-having-ly”). This is what distinguishes ‘hymning’ from more common uses of speech or communication that refer to the sensible and visible things of creation and history. Theological hymning takes into account God as both beyond being and cause. That is, when a divine name like ‘Being’, for instance, is used of God, it may refer to how God is the cause of being, or it may refer to the fact that

¹⁰¹ Sarracen translates Dionysius’s preferred term for the scriptures, τὰ λόγια (“oracles, sayings”), with *eloquia* (“eloquences, communications”).

¹⁰² Expl CH 2, 510-11: “**Et** mystice traditiones eloquiorum **reformant**, id est describendo dicunt, **ipsam** divinam beatitudinem **sicut lumen... et vocant ipsam vitam.**”

¹⁰³ Expl CH 2, 505: “Theologia **respiens nostrum mentem**, quasi compatiendo nostre infirmitati, intentione Dei et theologorum, **ut dictum est** supra 1c, **et per formas sensibiles providens ipsi** nostre menti **sursumactionem** ad contemplanda, inuestiganda, imitanda celestia et divina, **familiarem** per proprietatum coaptationem ad invisibilia...”

God is beyond being. As we saw above, Gallus rehearsed both of these modes of theological language, glossing that God was Being “in a causal and a super-essential manner (*causaliter et superessentialiter*).”¹⁰⁴ The following passage also shows Gallus’s concern with the use of varied language for God as cause:

Although I think that there is truly only one perfection of perfectible and rational natures, the super-simple deity... nevertheless it is designated in many ways because of various and multiple efficacies, just as in Romans 1:20 it is said: *the invisible things of God...*, and in DN 7h: “He is all things in all things and nothing in none.”¹⁰⁵

Again, because God is the cause of all “various and multiple efficacies” there are many appropriate uses of language to hymn God as cause. Divine causality in creation and history (the general form of the exteriorization of the Word) is the foundation for the use of various terms.

At the same time, Gallus reckoned with Dionysius’s claim that theological language also works *hyperochically* or, in the Latin translation, *superessentialiter* (‘super-essentially’). We saw in Chapter 2 that even among contemporary readers there is disagreement about what Dionysius means by this as there is a fundamental ambiguity already built into the prefix *hyper-*. How did Gallus understand language to work super-essentially? Despite his use of plenitude and abundance to describe the super-essentiality of God, Gallus does not characterize theological language as depicting how God possesses some quality in a preeminent fashion.¹⁰⁶ Rather, for theological language to

¹⁰⁴ Expl CH 4, 556.

¹⁰⁵ Expl CH 1, 481: “Licet unam solam arbitrer esse vere perfectibilium et rationalium naturarum perfectionem, supersimplicem deitatem... tamen propter varias et multiplices efficacias pluraliter designator, sicut ‘invisibilia Dei’ Rom. 1d, et DN 7h: ‘in omnibus omnia est et in nullo nihil’.”

¹⁰⁶ In this Gallus contrasts with Aquinas’s conclusion that when Dionysius claimed that theological language worked *hyperochically*, he meant that it refers to God

work super-essentially means for it to work negatively or at least ambiguously. For instance,

Moreover this name ‘super-principal’ is actually negative. For it removes principality and ‘passes over’ (*transmittit*) it to a higher thing, as it were, by positing nothing (*nihil ponendo*). It is likewise with similar things, as it is with super-substantial, super-intellectual, super-simple, super-beautiful, super-exalted, super-wise, and all other similar things. For this reason, such words are attributed to God less improperly than others: below 2d: “negations are truly in divine things, etc.”¹⁰⁷

Otherwise put, theological language with the *super-* prefix not only refers to God as the cause of all things, but is used to remind the hearer or reader to “pass over” the signifying sign, to ensure obstacles are removed from their mind. The word ‘principality’ is an obstacle to knowing or experiencing union with the Word beyond the word, but it is an obstacle that should be overcome.¹⁰⁸

While Gallus appreciates how causal and super-essential modes of theological language are used for the God beyond being, he most often comments on a third special use of language: the figural representation drawn from visible things for invisible things. This is thanks to the preponderance of “invisible things” in the *CD* (celestial and divine realities like angels and the eternal reasons/*theoriae*). Even this use of theological

“pre-eminently.” For Aquinas, the predication of divine attributes could be used to refer to God as Cause of that quality, or it could refer to God as having that quality in a superlative way. Put another way, Aquinas consistently sees the *super-* prefix as less negative (or at least less aporetic) than Gallus. See Wolfson, “St. Thomas on Divine Attributes.”

¹⁰⁷ Expl CH 1, 490: “Hoc autem nomen ‘superprincipalis’ realiter est negatiuum. Aufert enim principalem et transmittit quasi ad superius nihil ponendo. Similiter est de similibus, u test supersubstantialis, superintellectualis, supersimplex, superpulcer, superexaltatus, supersapiens et omnia similia. Unde talia vocabula pre ceteris minus improprie attribuuntur Deo: infra 2d: ‘negationes in diuinis sunt vere etc.’” Notice that Gallus’s gloss of the *super-* prefix here emphasizes its transcendent valence, rather than its superlative valence.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. the practice of “unveiling of the mind (*revelatio mentis*)” described in Ch. 5, 263-5, and prescribed by Dionysius.

language, which does not refer directly to God as the beyond being cause, is employed ambiguously. Figurative language for invisible things, drawn from visible things, takes advantage of what Gallus calls an “inward relation (*intrinseca relatio*)” between the visible and the invisible.¹⁰⁹ The following extended passage from Gallus’s early *Gloss on the CH* suggests the extent to which he emphasizes the ambiguity of theological language.

This inward relation between visible and invisible things

...is a difficult question, which rises from the letter (*ex littera*). For I seek with what kind of sameness invisible celestial things, greatly divine, are united to visible things. They are united to them neither in kind, appearance, species, accident, property, nor as a whole. For any divine invisible thing differs more from any visible thing than any visible thing from another, because contrary things are united in kind. Moreover whiteness of body differs more from cleanliness of the mind which it signifies, or the clarity of invisible light which it signifies, than from blackness.

Therefore how does that from which it is entirely different signify? Or what similitude or acquaintance of whatever visible things can be found to their signified invisible things? I think not in any general way (*aliquo universali*), which indeed could settle (*caderet*) into the intellect, but only in an inner natural estimation (*intima naturali estimatione*), which is not anticipated nor rightly grasped by the word of the mind (*verbo mentis*) and the intellect. And in this way, clarity in body is estimatively (*estimative*) a cleanliness in mind or light in eternity.¹¹⁰

There are a number of things to notice here about Gallus’s understanding of the figurative use of visible things for invisible things. First, visible and invisible things are entirely and

¹⁰⁹ Expl CH 2, 518.

¹¹⁰ Gloss CH 2, 20: “Hic mihi videtur difficilis questio ex littera exoriri. Quero enim quo genere identitatis uniantur inuisibilia celestia uisibilibus, maxime diuina, que neque genere neque specie neque differentia neque accidente neque proprio neque uniuerso eis uniantur. Magis enim differt quodlibet diuinum inuisibile a quolibet uisibili quam aliqua uisibilia ab inuicem, quia contraria in genere uniantur; plus autem differt albedo corporalis a munditia mentis quam significat, uel claritate inuisibilis lucis quam significat, quam a nigredine.

Quomodo ergo significat a quo tam uniuersaliter distat? Vel que potest huiusmodi uisibilium ad sua significata inuisibilia similitudo uel notio inueniri? Puto non in aliquo uniuersali, quod quidem caderet in intellectu, sed sola intima naturali estimatione que a uerbo mentis et intellectu non preuenitur nec proprie capitur. Et secundum hoc, claritas in corpore est estimatiue munditia in mente, lux in eternitate.”

categorically different, sharing no common properties or appearances. Gallus's insistence on absolute difference belies the Thomistic notion of preeminent possession. In Gallus's later *Explanation on the CH*, he drives home the point by saying that "it is not because of a union that the sensible things are spoken [for invisible things]..."¹¹¹ That is, nothing unites the visible signs to their invisible counterparts. For this reason, the intellect cannot gather them together in any concrete way that could be effable or intelligible. Rather, the visible and invisible things have what Gallus calls an "inward relation (*intrinseca relatio*)," which issues in the mind's inner evaluation of the two, but which is never linguistically formable or intellectually graspable. In the *Explanation* on the same passage he calls this estimation not only "intimate" but "super-intellectual."¹¹² For Gallus, theological figuration is not simply metaphor, but involves an intellectually ungraspable connection or alignment between the visible signs and the invisible things signified.¹¹³ This *relatio* is ineffable and unintelligible.

Figural representation of invisible things is dependent on super-intellectual knowledge. Though this figurative theological language refers explicitly to celestial and divine things that are not properly God (angels and the eternal reasons of creation), it suggests how ambiguously theological language must work when it refers to the very

¹¹¹ Expl CH 2, 518: "Unde hic breuiter commemoro quod non per unionem sub uno genere vel specie vel differentia aut proprio vel accidente dicantur ea que sunt in sensibilibus aliter vel aliquo modo attribui intellectualibus et maxime diuinis..."

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ This is a reminder that the *theoriae* belong to the eternal Word of the God beyond being, and are not simply knowable through rational speculation. Perhaps 'lower' and 'higher' *theoriae* differ in this, given that Gallus also seems to claim at times that even gentile wisdom (which works only from collection, consideration, and intellection), attains to the eternal reasons. But the relation stylized in these remarks is one of the soul's dependence upon and ecstasy toward the Word, who alone makes effective the figurative language. For more on the *theoriae*, see Ch. 5, 247-50.

God beyond being. If *visibilia* have only a super-intellectual “inward relation” to *invisibilia*, theological language for the beyond being Cause must be even more super-intellectual, as it were. This suggests just how inadequate an interpretation of theological signification as “preeminent” or superlative would be for Gallus. Indeed, in his *Gloss on the CH* Gallus says that even in signifying the Trinity, there is but an “estimation” between sensible sign and transcendent signified:

For the divine operations in the Trinity, which are natural and eternal, are not united at all with angelic or human operations, unless by a natural estimation (but just as is read below at the same chapter, and chapter 4 at the end, they also occur supernaturally and beyond the intellect). This [estimation] is agreeable to the affection and established in advance (*ante radicem*), as it were. For union of predicable things is agreeable to the intellect.¹¹⁴

Here Gallus’s most well-known teaching comes to bear even on theological signification. Just as between visible signs and invisible celestial or divine things there is only a super-intellectual “estimation” that makes possible the process of signification, so also between the Trinity itself and the human operations from which the theologians draw their descriptions, there is but a pre-determined “estimation” that can be appreciated by the affection beyond the intellect, but does not have the kind of union graspable by the intellect. Theological language activates the affect more than the intellect, and this is thanks to the effecting work of the divine Word.

¹¹⁴ Gloss CH 3, 35: “In nullo enim uno uniuntur operationes diuine in Trinitate, que naturales sunt et eterne, cum operationibus angelicis vel humanis, nisi naturali estimatione (sed sicut infra eodem capitulo legitur, et 4 in fine, etiam supernaturaliter et super intellectum fiunt) que est secundum affectionem et quasi ante radicem. Unio enim quinque predicabilium secundum intellectum est.” “Predicables” is drawn from Aristotelian logic. They are the classes to which predicates belong: genus, species, difference, property, and accident. Gallus means to say that the similarity between the Trinity and humanity is not predicable or according to any shared class and therefore not graspable by the intellect.

Unlike Thomas Aquinas (who interpreted *hyperoche* in terms of God's superlative and preeminent possession),¹¹⁵ and more in line with Dionysius's original ambiguous rhetoric, Gallus understands theological language (especially of the God beyond being) to be a mystery, reliant upon a connection established by and continually sustained by the eternal Word itself, whose gracious action alone makes possible the affective knowledge of God. Together figural, causal, and super-essential theological language explain the Word as experienced by the theologians, who knew not only of its communicative work in creation and history, but of its fundamental ineffability. Figurative language directs one to the eternal Word's *theoriae*, while causal and super-essential language accommodates an understanding, as far as possible, of the God beyond being. In general, however, theological language requires the superaddition of a special divine grace and is affective. For Gallus, reading (*lectio*) is not only a pedagogical pre-requisite of contemplation (*contemplatio*), as "the venerable doctor master Hugh" had described, but was itself contemplative, allowing one to experience the Word.

iii. Reading and Glossing the Word

The major difference between Dionysius and Gallus on sacred letters, then, was not necessarily in their theoretical framework for understanding theological language. Though Gallus's glosses reflect Augustinian influences (placing Dionysius's theology of language in the context of sign theory and the analogy between human communication and the divine Word), Gallus largely embraced the Dionysian insights about theological language. The theologians spoke figuratively, causally, or super-essentially of the eternal

¹¹⁵ See Wolfson, "St. Thomas on the Divine Attributes," 506-9.

Word and its eternal reasons or *theoriae*. Rather, the difference between Dionysius and Gallus was a matter of their respective concerns. While Dionysius's theology of sacred letters emphasized a theory of literary or rhetorical composition—the way the theologians took advantage of purposefully ambiguous uses of language to convey divine things—Gallus was, thanks to his training in the Victorine school, much more attuned to the resulting theory of spiritual interpretation and pedagogy—the way readers of sacred literature, moving from letter to spirit, could “follow the courses of the *theoriae*” back to the God beyond being. If the theologians wrote figuratively, causally, and super-essentially, how should one understand the way this language works in turn on the soul? What interpretive practice does Gallus imagine in response?

Given Gallus's training at the Victorine school it should be no surprise that the interpretation of sacred language and literature is at the heart of his moral program for transforming the soul, setting it in the right relation to the Word.¹¹⁶ His writings reflect long-established Victorine sensibilities about sacred literature and spiritual formation: namely, that sacred literature had been divinely arranged so that those with proper training in spiritual interpretation could follow an ordered path from reading (*lectio*) to contemplation (*contemplatio*).¹¹⁷ “[I]nvisible mysteries are taught to us through sensible

¹¹⁶ See Chapter 1's account of the Victorine theology of letters.

¹¹⁷ Gallus appeals directly to Hugh's language from the *Didascalicon*, when he writes how Dionysius's readers “cooperate with the divine light so that they may participate in the true wisdom of Christians. Hence in this text he indicates to us a threefold way of stretching toward that wisdom, namely, contemplative prayer, reading, and meditation with the suspension of the soul.” (“...cooperari diuino lumini ad participandam veram Christianorum sapientiam. Unde in hoc loco triplicem viam nobis innuit tendendi ad hanc sapientiam, scilicet orationem contemplatum, lectionem, meditationem cum animi suspensione.”) Expl MT 1, 14.

Cf. Hugh: “The life of a just person is trained in four things, which serve as certain stages through which he is raised to future perfection: namely, reading (*lectio*),

forms in the sacred scriptures or in the ecclesiastical operations and sacraments.”¹¹⁸

“Therefore spiritual understandings are handed down under signs and figures, in order that they may be concealed from the unworthy and revealed to the faithful, who are zealous for celestial wisdom.”¹¹⁹ Spiritual interpretation of scripture was the culminating activity of the school’s pedagogy established by Hugh of St. Victor. Only those “erring, who cleave firmly to the letter, do not know spiritual understanding.”¹²⁰

While it is a mistake to cling to the letter, when one may know the simple, eternal Word, Gallus exhibits a characteristic Victorine esteem for the letter as well, describing its salutary pedagogical and preparatory benefits, and reflecting once again the relation between the visible and the invisible.

For the multitude, it is necessary to teach by using certain figures or figurative kinds of speech in which, as it were, the purity of the meaning is restrained and tempered. This is the fact that the dough is hidden in the vestment (Ex. 12e), that is, the pure truth from which the souls of the faithful are nourished (Dt. 8b; Matt. 4a; Wis. 16g) in the exterior letter (*in littera exteriori*).¹²¹

The truth is hidden within the exterior letter. While the letter was for the untrained, the spiritually advanced could seek beyond it. Gallus, in a characteristic intertextual reference, associates the vestment of Ex. 12:34 with the veil of the Song of Songs 5:7b

meditation, prayer, and action. Then follows a fifth, contemplation (*contemplatio*)...”
Didascalicon, 161.

¹¹⁸ Expl EH 1, 749: “...in sacris scripturis vel operationibus et sacramentis ecclesiasticis per formas sensibiles nobis insinuantur mysteria inuisibilia...”

¹¹⁹ Expl EH 1, 761: “Ideo ergo sub signis et figuris traduntur spirituales intelligentie ut indignis celentur et fidelibus, qui celesti sapientie student, per ea reuelentur...”

¹²⁰ Expl CH 2, 503: “...errantes arbitrantur, littere pertinaciter inherentes, spiritualem intelligentiam ignorantes...”

¹²¹ Expl MT 1, 11: “Ideo multitudini necessaria est doctrina resolutoria utens quibusdam figuris siue figuratiuis sermonibus in quibus quasi ligatur et temperatur puritas sententie. Hoc est quod farina ligatur in pallis (Ex. 12e), id est pura veritas unde reficiuntur anime fidelium (Deut. 8b; Matth. 4a; Sap. 16g) in littera exteriori.”

(“the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me”). Gallus writes, “the keepers removed it by expounding the scriptures.”¹²² That is, spiritual interpretation of scripture is like the removal of a veil, an image reinforced by Dionysius’s own consistent use of the language of “unfolding” or “unwrapping” (ἀνάπτυξις, *reseratio*) of divine names.¹²³

The expounding, unfolding, or opening of scripture through spiritual interpretation did not involve the use of discursive reason in a way that would allow one to collate, compare, and make propositional deductions from the letter. Rather, the Christian wisdom treated by Dionysius and Solomon was a super-intellectual knowledge (*cognitio*). Gallus invokes and glosses a couple of passages from the *CD* to explain:

DN 2q: “All divine things are known by participations alone,” and for this reason this knowledge (*cognitio*), incommunicable through words and writings, comes to be, and he does not know it *except who receives* (Rev. 2f). Nevertheless, he can be kindled by words or writings in possessing it: *EH 7x*: “I trust that I will kindle sparks of divine fire restored in you through the things spoken.”¹²⁴

Notice that Gallus, after dismissing the idea that super-intellectual knowledge could be communicated through words, nevertheless characterizes theological language as able to kindle the mind of the reader. Gallus embraced the Dionysian metaphor of uplifting or “anagogy” to describe the way the soul is “inflamed” toward God in the practice of spiritual interpretation. The practice of mental movements from visible sign to invisible thing could be understood as “alignments (*transumptiones*) of the terms of sensible things

¹²² Ibid.: “Hoc tulerunt custodies (Cant. 5a) exponendo scripturas...”

¹²³ See Ch. 2, 118n126.

¹²⁴ Expl CH 1, 483: “DN 2q: ‘Omnia diuina solis participationibus cognoscuntur’, et per hoc fit hec cognitio incommunicabilis per verba et scripta, nec eam nouit *nisi qui accipit* (Apoc. 2f). Potest tamen in eam possidente verbis vel scriptis accendi: EI 7x: ‘Confido quod per dicta ego repositas in te diuini ignis accendam scintillas.’”

in order to uplifting-ly (*anagogice*) designate divine invisible things.”¹²⁵ Theological language could not express super-intellectual experience, but it could serve as the medium for the mind’s uplifting or excess, which occurs in affective knowledge effected by the Word.

As we will see in Chapter 5, much of the activity of experiential union occurs thanks to the Word’s gracious effecting of the mind’s mental exercise. Gallus’s theology of language thus ensures that it is the Word that does most of the work. But it is nevertheless possible to participate in the Word’s effective communication, being assimilated to the Word, and so both the apostolic theologian and the modern master use theological language to instruct their readers. The following passage suggests how common it was for Gallus and his brothers to engage in the practice of scriptural interpretation, and reminds us that this practice is geared toward the cognition of the Word.

Figurative teaching can be expounded in many ways, whether morally or mystically, as we experience daily, turned sometimes to one meaning, sometimes to another, and even to an opposite meaning. But the truth is simple just as it is. It exists eternally and invariably, and the sacred teaching of Scripture, which in words and writings is variable ... is invariable in itself.¹²⁶

A loving knowledge of or experiential union with the eternal Word, simple and invariable, is the goal of spiritual interpretation. Gallus reasons that the theologians write figuratively, causally, and super-essentially in order to facilitate this goal. In the next

¹²⁵ Expl MT 3, 38: “...transumptiones vocabulorum rerum sensibilibus ad anagogice designanda divina inuisibilia...”

¹²⁶ Expl MT 1, 12: “...doctrina figuratiua potest multipliciter exponi siue moraliter siue mystice sicut cotidie experimur, et nunc ad hunc sensum, nunc ad illum conuerti, et etiam ad contraria. Sed simplex veritas sicut est, eternaliter et inuariabiliter est, et sacra scripture doctrina, que in verbis et scriptura variabilis est (Hebr. 1a: *Multipharie* etc.), in ipsa inuariabilis est.”

chapter, we will return to the idea that Gallus's own practice of explaining and glossing the sacred literature of the Song and the *CD* is an example of this mode of mystical exercise. First, it remains to examine how Gallus takes up Dionysius's third conceptual aperture (on the goal of mystical theology), and describe Gallus's rhetoric of experience and affectivity in more detail.

III. Mystical Union

So far this chapter has argued that Gallus fully appreciated the *CD*'s theology of God and sacred letters, and that he viewed the reading of sacred literature as a way to experience the Word eternally spoken by the God beyond being. By making the Word the central object of Dionysian mysticism, the reading (*lectio*) and interpretation (*explanatio*) of sacred literature become the foremost practices of mystical theology. While the Song's dialogue between the bride and the bridegroom—"the course of love (*amoris cursus*)" between the soul and the Word—is an excellent depiction of this practice, Gallus's commentaries on the *CD* described his teaching on experiential union with the Word more theoretically or conceptually.

As we saw in Chapter 2, Dionysius ambiguously depicts union (ἔνωσις) in the *Mystical Theology* as both an unknowing (ἀγνοσία) and a knowing beyond the mind (γνώσις ὑπὲρ νοῦν). In the *Celestial Hierarchy*, he claims the purpose of hierarchy itself is union and assimilation (ἀφομοίωσις). Sarracen's Latin translation presented these tensions around mystical union clearly. What kind of union (*unitio*) occurs beyond the mind (*super mentem*) through an unknowing (*ignorantia*) or super-intellectual knowing (*cognitio superintellectualis*)? Gallus made sense of this ambiguity by appeal to the

rhetoric of experience (*experientia*) and affect (*affectus*). In the next chapter, we will see how he uses the rhetoric of experience and effectivity to depict the relation that emerges between soul and Word in mystical union.¹²⁷ In this section, I argue more explicitly that this rhetoric makes sense of the underlying ambiguity in the *CD*'s account of the goal of mystical theology. For Gallus, Dionysius's description of mystical union as an unknowing knowing beyond the mind is best understood as a form of affection and experience.

A. *Affectus*

Gallus's elevation of affect (*affectus*) to a privileged place in mystical union, along with his angelic hierarchization of the mind, is his most significant innovation on Dionysian mystical theology. Scholars have pointed to the influence of Augustine and Hugh on Gallus to account for this move. Augustine granted the Latin West a far more robust vision for the role of affect in relation to God than Dionysius, and Hugh—called by his contemporaries the “other Augustine (*alter Augustinus*)”—had himself posited that one could love God more than one could know God.¹²⁸ These explanations are entirely plausible, but they leave the impression that Gallus's qualifications of the *CD* were attempts to conform it to his preconceived understanding. Appealing to Augustine and Hugh does not make sense of how Gallus could reconcile affectivity with the rhetoric of

¹²⁷ Effect and affect have a common Latin stem from *facio* (“to make” or “to do”). *Efficere* (*ex + facio*) is “to carry out, to do completely,” as the Word “carries out” or “effects” the exercise and experience of the soul in contemplative union. *Afficere* (*ad + facio*) is “to do something (to one), to influence,” as the Word “influences” or “affects” the mind in contemplative union.

¹²⁸ See Coolman, *Knowledge, Love, and Ecstasy*, 17n75.

mystical union in the Dionysian corpus. For Gallus, the *CD* begged for an explanation of mystical union as a matter of affect.

What Gallus's Augustinianism and Victorine sensibilities gave him was a set of conceptual tools for dealing with tensions in the *CD*, but he also appreciates its concerns in a more general sense. For instance, Gallus's account of the soul was far more detailed than Dionysius's. In Chapter 5 we will see that Gallus structured the soul into nine orders (*ordines*) mimicking the angelic hierarchy—an idea sparked by a few lines in the *CD* describing a mental hierarchy to match the celestial, legal, and ecclesiastical.¹²⁹ Gallus divided this angelic hierarchy of the soul into three hierarchies of Nature (the orders of Angels, Archangels, Principalities), Diligent Effort (Powers, Virtues, Dominions), and Grace (Thrones, Cherubim, Seraphim). In Chapter 5 we will see how these hierarchic orders of the mind are sites of encounter between the soul and the Word. This superstructure of angelic orders (static in itself) is populated and animated by a mix of the soul's natural, dynamic powers (*vires*) and the Word's frequent, gracious interventions (*superadventus*). While the angelic hierarchy of the mind is undoubtedly one of Gallus's most significant innovations, his account of the soul's powers is more traditional. Throughout Gallus's commentaries one encounters the traditional Augustinian powers of the soul—sensation, imagination, reason, intellect, and affect. These powers navigate the angelic hierarchy of the mind, performing their particular functions in the mental hierarchies of Nature, Diligent Effort, and Grace. The soul's hierarchic orders are structured according to the extent to which nature or grace was at play in each order, with the order of Angels, for instance, being entirely natural, and the order of Seraphim being

¹²⁹ See Ch. 5, 255n52.

entirely reliant on divine grace. The powers of the soul are also more or less active depending on which mental order was being engaged. In the lowest hierarchy of Nature, all the soul's powers are active, while only intellect (*intellectus*) and affect (*affectus*) proceed into the hierarchy of Grace.

While Gallus distinguishes between two kinds of knowledge (*cognitio*)—one intellectual and characteristic of the wisdom of the philosophers; and one super-intellectual and affective belonging only to the wisdom of Christians—both are founded (at least pedagogically) on the efforts of the various other powers of the mind. As Coolman has put it, Gallus does not distinguish sharply between pagan, intellectual wisdom and Christian, super-intellectual wisdom, but “relativizes” them.¹³⁰ That is, intellectual knowledge (including that gained by collection, consideration, and ratiocination) appears to be a necessary but not sufficient pre-condition for affective knowledge.

Intellectual knowledge, however, is of two sorts, one active and one passive. The first active form of intellection (*intellectio*) is that gained by methodical processes of ratiocination. It is “composed from the consideration of created things... For this reason the Apostle says in Romans 1:19: *what is known of God is manifest to them*. For what can be gathered from the preexisting knowledge of sensible things, is indeed known.”¹³¹ As Gallus describes in more detail in his treatise *The Spectacles of Contemplation*, the powers of sensation, imagination, and reason all take part in this active effort of

¹³⁰ Coolman, *Knowledge, Love, and Ecstasy*, 124-5.

¹³¹ SS3.Prlg.A, 107: “Duplex hic designatur Dei cognitio, una intellectualis que comparatur per considerationem creaturarum... Unde Apostolus *ad Rom.* 1d: *quod notum est Dei manifestum est illis*. Notum siquidem est quod ex preexistente sensibilibus cognition colligi potest.”

collection (*collatio*), drawing together the images of sensible things into the mind, considering the causes of these things, and in turn reasoning even about the soul itself and to some extent its cause.¹³² Generally, as one advances through these steps of contemplation, the baser, active powers of the soul gradually suspend (*suspensio*) themselves, as higher powers take over.¹³³

This first form of intellection, Gallus insisted, was greatly practiced by pagan philosophy. Gallus admired the extent to which pagan philosophy realized the potential of the intellect (*intellectus*) building on the foundation set by sensation, imagination, and reason. Yet he also believed it lacked the superaddition of grace given by the Word. On the one hand, Gallus realized, Plato was the one who had put forth the idea of ‘eternal reasons,’ the archetypes of creation that Gallus held were contained in the eternal Word. Pagan philosophy was not only skillful at the methodical knowledge (*scientia*) that worked from the collation of created things, but also went some way to intellectually intuit these principles of creation, and therefore was able to know God, as Paul affirmed in Romans 1:19. In this way, Gallus could explain the virtuosity of pagan philosophy.¹³⁴ In this, Gallus was traditionally Victorine, as Hugh of St. Victor a century before had explained the great extent to which secular letters achieve wisdom.¹³⁵

¹³² *Spectacula Contemplationis*. The treatise’s editor, Declan Lawell, describes it as largely derivative of Richard’s *De Trinitate*.

¹³³ For instance, sensation is suspended when the imagination is active, the imagination is suspended when ratiocination occurs, etc.

¹³⁴ He does not dwell on Paul’s larger point in the first chapter of Romans that the possibility of this knowledge of God leaves the pagans “without excuse” for their ignorance and idolatrous practice.

¹³⁵ As we saw in Chapter 1, in his *Didascalicon*, Hugh uses two metaphors for the human condition (both of which suggest Hugh’s fairly optimistic vision of the human condition): 1) the *deformation* of the soul, which could be resolved by the disciplined training of the soul’s powers (along with the addition of divine grace); but also, 2) the

Nevertheless, Gallus's treatment of the angelic hierarchy of the mind hints at what he thought was lacking in pagan wisdom: an orientation toward the Word itself, eternally with and spoken by the God beyond being. The powers of the mind—sensation, imagination, reason, intellect, and affect—all work dynamically in the mental hierarchies of Nature and Diligent Effort. However, Gallus stresses, only the intellect and the affect may continue beyond the order of the Dominions (the highest order of Diligent Effort), drawn by the Word beyond the mind into the hierarchy of Grace. This movement from the mind's active effort to the Word's effective action is reflected in Gallus's use of the perfect passive participles *intellectus* and *affectus* for these powers. This knowledge or wisdom gained beyond the mind is received passively, not produced actively through collection, consideration, and ratiocination of sensible things.¹³⁶ For those engaged in Christian wisdom or mystical theology, intellection and affection beyond the mind (as we will see in Chapter 5) are effected by the Word itself. In these forms of intellection and affection of the Word, sensation, imagination, and reason are obstacles that must be left behind.¹³⁷

forgetting of the truth, which learning could remedy. That is, the pedagogical agenda of the Victorine School was to take advantage of the learning of pagan philosophy. Thus Gallus, following Hugh, is ambiguous about what pagan intellection (*intellectio*) achieves, even if he is unambiguous the failure of pagan philosophy to achieve affective or experiential knowledge of God.

¹³⁶ For this reason the first of the orders in the hierarchy of Grace is the Thrones, which receive God.

¹³⁷ Cf. Ch. 5's description of 'unveiling of the mind' (*revelatio mentis*), one of the three principal exercises of the mind. The Song depicted the mind's baser powers as "little foxes," busy in the lower orders of the mind, but obstacles to contemplation needing to be removed. Below, 263-5.

As Coolman has argued, this reasoning qualifies the description sometimes made of Gallus as anti-intellectualist.¹³⁸ Gallus is less anti-intellectualist than super-intellectualist. While Gallus holds that knowledge drawn from created things must be removed from the mind, he also stresses both that this form of knowledge is foundational for Christian wisdom and that certain forms of intellection (*intellectio*) occur passively beyond the mind (*super mentem*). While the mind is suspended (*suspensio*) at the sixth angelic order of the Dominions, the powers of affect and intellect both continue beyond the mind. As we will see in Chapter 5, the Word and its *theoriae* play a significant role in determining the shape of the soul's knowledge (*cognitio*) and affection (*affectio*) at this stage, as the Word draws and transforms the intellect and the affect, and the soul wanders among the *theoriae*. That is, these forms of knowledge and affection do not “belong” properly to the soul, but are rendered relationally, as the soul and the Word meet. Suggesting how distinct medieval and modern theories of the soul and mind can be, knowing and feeling for Gallus are primarily matters of relation.

That said, Gallus affirms that the affect (*affectus*) knows God more intimately, intensely, and completely than the intellect (*intellectus*), for two reasons: first, God is beyond being and therefore beyond intelligibility; second, the affect is simply more receptive of the Word than the intellect. It is more capable or open to receiving divine interventions. The affect alone can be drawn into the ninth and highest order of the Seraphim of the mind, as the intellect (like the other, lower powers) is suspended. What is affect and why can it proceed beyond intellect? The loving or affective union that occurs

¹³⁸ This was not entirely appreciated by Gallus's late medieval readers like the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* either, who insisted more boldly on rejecting the intellect as capable of knowing God. *Knowledge, Love, and Ecstasy*, 14n57.

in the Seraph of the mind is still a kind of knowledge (*cognitio*), though it is super-intellectual, the intellect having been suspended at the order of Cherubim. Gallus draws the idea of the affect as a super-intellectual power from Dionysius:

Behold, he [Dionysius] ascribes a twofold knowledge (*cognitio*) to God: one from the mental collection of created things, which is intellective; the other from the experience of rays of eternal wisdom, which is beyond intellect and all being (*super intellectum et omne ens*). But consider which power of the soul it is by which this super-intellectual wisdom is perceived, from these words in the same [DN] ch. 7: “It is necessary to see that our mind has indeed a power for understanding through which it sees intelligible things, but it also has a union exceeding the nature of the mind through which it is joined to those things which are above itself. It is necessary to understand divine things according to this [union],” that is, to know them. Let us understand ‘union’ to be the principal affect (*affectus*) of the soul by which we are joined to God.¹³⁹

Here Gallus claims the authority of Dionysius himself for describing two separate powers of the mind, one which knows by the intellect, and one which knows by a union or the affect. Again, affective knowing is a matter of union with God, the mind being drawn beyond its own nature.

The super-intellectual knowledge attained by the affect is a superior form of knowledge. This is clear from Gallus’s description of Moses’s final ascent in the *Mystical*

¹³⁹ Expl DN 2, 126: “Ecce duplicem assignat Dei cognitionem: unam ex collatio creaturarum que est intellectiva, aliam ex experientia radiorum eterne sapientie que est super intellectum et omne ens. Secundum vero quam vim anime ista superintellectualis sapientia percipiatur, collige ex ipsius verbis, eodem capitulo 7b: ‘Oportet autem videre mentem nostrum habere quidem virtutem ad intelligendum per quam intelligibilia inspicit, unionem vero excedentem mentis naturam per quam coniunguntur ad ea que sunt supra ipsam. Secundum hanc ergo oportet diuina intelligere’, id est cognoscere. Unionem autem intelligimus principalem affectum anime quo Deo coniungimur...”

As Gallus states, he is referring to a passage in Chapter 7 (Expl DN 7, 370), which he glosses in the following way: “**Moreover** our mind has another power, namely **union**, the knowledge of which experience alone teaches, because it exceeds the speculative intellect more sublimely than the intellect [exceeds] the imagination and sensation.” (“**Aliam autem** mentem habet mens nostra, scilicet **unionem**, cuius notitiam sola docet experientia, quia sublimius excedit intellectum theoreticum quam intellectus imaginationem vel sensum.”)

Theology. As we saw in Chapter 2, in Dionysius's description of Moses's ascent, he used almost all his primary terms for mystical union:

United, I say, **to the entirely unknown**, and this **through familiarity with every knowledge**, that is, through the love which effects a universal knowledge, through which also the union teaches all things (1 John 2g; John 14e: *Whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and show myself to him*), through which union to the divine spirit and Word containing all knowable things, he knows the Word itself and searches out *the profound things of God* (1 Cor. 2e).¹⁴⁰

Affective union, which is beyond the mind and beyond the intellect, nevertheless allows one to know the Word in a way intellection never could. This is because affect knows the Word in its eternal and super-essential simplicity, or, as Gallus puts it in the Song commentaries, knows the bridegroom himself, rather than his multiple gifts.¹⁴¹

Is there a reason Gallus invokes affection and love at the height of mystical union? Although Dionysius makes references to the divine name Love and the “suffering (πάθος)” of Hierotheus (a proof-text Gallus wields adeptly), he does not make affection (*affectio*) or being affected (*affectus*) central to his mystical theology. Most readers of the *CD* conclude that Dionysius is concerned with knowledge (*γνώσις*, *cognitio*), unknowing (*ἄγνωσία*, *ignorantia*), and union (*ἔνωσις*, *unitio*), but not affection. Why then does Gallus import the rhetoric of affectivity? Gallus's use of affect should not be thought of as an imposition on Dionysius's mystical theology. Rather, it makes some sense of the ambiguities inherent in the *CD*'s depiction of mystical union. As should be clear by now, Gallus did not have antipathy toward knowledge, intellection, or even unknowing; indeed,

¹⁴⁰ Expl MT 1, 29: “**Unitus** inquam **omnino ignoto**, et hoc **per notionem omnis cognitionis**, id est per dilectionem effectiuam uniuersalis cognitionis, per quam et unitio docet omnia (I Ioh. 2g; Ioh. 14e: *Qui diligit me* etc. usque *et manifestabo* etc.), per quam unitus spiritui diuino et Verbo scibilia omnia continenti, ipsum Verbum cognoscit et scrutatur *profunda Dei* (I Cor. 2e).”

¹⁴¹ See Ch. 5, 272.

he claimed that affection was a form of knowledge (*cognitio*). Nevertheless, something about the use of the rhetoric of intellection (*intellectio*) to describe the heights of Dionysian union was insufficient for Gallus.

The idea that the mind's affect could know God beyond the intellect addresses an infelicitous (or at least, limiting) conception in Neoplatonic epistemology that it shares with modern epistemology—the tendency to depict knowing on the model of vision. Indeed, there had been before Gallus and would be long after Gallus an Augustinian tradition of thinking about the knowledge of God in terms of a *visio Dei* obtained by the intellect. Neoplatonism at least since Plotinus had held that intellection requires both a knower and an object to be known, the kind of thing that exists and is intelligible.¹⁴² On the model of vision, intellection requires a distinct knower and object known. The collection and consideration of created things that to Gallus was characteristic of pagan philosophy worked on this model. As Gallus described, in the process of producing knowledge by method (*scientia*), the mind surveyed visible things with sensation and then reproduced them in images with the imagination. The picture that is conveyed in his treatise *Spectacula Contemplationis*, which stops short of super-intellectual affection in its account of the steps of contemplation, is of the knowing soul as a distant overseer of the created order, mentally gathering it all together.

Contrast this image with that of the Song commentaries, where Gallus consistently depicts the soul dispossessed and impinged upon suddenly by the Word. This

¹⁴² It is on this basis that Plotinus concludes there is no intellection of the One, and that there must be a secondary divine hypostasis called the Intellect, which accounted for Being itself. While the Plotinian insistence on a divine hypostasis beyond Being made it into Dionysian Neoplatonism, it is not a feature of Augustinian Neoplatonism, which instead stylized the height of mystical contemplation as an intellectual vision.

picture can be understood as encompassing super-intellectual knowing, unknowing, and union. As the soul knows (*cognoscere*) the Word beyond the mind (*super mentem*), it is no surveyor of the Word of God, but dependent on its own ecstasy and the interventions of the Word itself. This kind of knowledge is intimate, not distant. For Gallus, affective knowledge works not on the model of vision, but on the model of taste, touch, and smell, where there is some kind of incorporation or dissolution of the boundaries between the thinker and their object. “Moreover the rational mind has an eye, an ear, and a word or tongue for speaking in the intellect, in the affect [it has] touch, taste, and smell, through which it examines experientially *the profound things of God*... just as taste and smell examine the insides of bodies.”¹⁴³ Just as the food directly affects (or “does something to”) the senses, so does the Word of God in contemplation influence or intervene upon mental processes otherwise seeming to belong to the knower. Though Gallus holds that something like this can occur to an extent with the intellect, he insists that something will be missed about Dionysian mystical union if one models it on intellection, which may be too closely associated with forms of mental collection, consideration, and ratiocination.

Of course, because Dionysius calls mystical union a “knowing beyond the mind,” he does not describe it as a form of intellection either; he frequently advocates for “unknowing” (*ignorantia*). The rhetoric of affect is expansive enough to include unknowing as well. The “being affected” Gallus describes does not imply any kind of grasp upon the one who is intervening in the mind. It is only when the active effort to understand (*intelligere*) the Word ceases that the Word draws the mind out of itself.

¹⁴³ Expl CH 1, 486-7: “Mens autem rationalis in intellectu habet oculum, aurem et verbum siue linguam ad loquendum, in affectu tactum, gustum et olfactum, per quos experientialiter examinat *profunda Dei* (I Cor. 2e, g: DN 7i) sicut gustus et olfactus examinant corporum interioritates.”

Though Gallus insists that the intellect is drawn on this ecstatic journey, he is equally clear that it finally fails where the affect continues. Just as Dionysius advocated for a knowing beyond intellect (γνώσις ὑπὲρ νοῦν), Gallus's rhetoric shifts from understanding (*intelligere*) to knowing (*cognoscere*) as the mind moves ecstatically beyond itself. In this sense, affect “un-knows” as it suspends an understanding (*intelligentia*) that grasps an object of thought.

Finally, Dionysius's language of union itself, along with his considerable treatment of the divine name Love, provided plenty of impetus for Gallus to turn to the rhetoric of affect, especially as it is understood as akin to taste, touch, and smell—the more intimate or interior senses. The rhetoric of union is one of intimacy, and while erotic intimacy is not the only form of intimacy, it is one that obviously conjures union. While the etymological understanding of affect (*affectus*) as a “having been done to” resonated with Gallus, so did the more common association of affection (*affectio*) with love. Love was, as we have seen, the Dionysian dynamic that best described the relation between God and the created order.

B. *Experientia*

Just as the rhetoric of affect seeks to explain tensions within the *CD*, the rhetoric of experience (*experientia*) offers a way to interpret, rather than innovate upon, Dionysius's theology. As this study has highlighted so far, special experiences of apparitions and union were central to Dionysius's conception of the theologian (prophetic or apostolic author of scripture), even as these experiences are not taken to deny the significance of cultural-linguistic (and especially liturgical) formation, with which

Dionysius was entirely concerned. Rather, the rhetoric of experience was, for Gallus, capacious enough to articulate the complicated and sometimes mysterious relation between the soul and the Word that emerges from the soul's double orientation. The soul knows the Word both by its attention to the created order (where the Word is incarnate) and by its attention to its cause (the Word eternal). Experience was a basic theological category for Gallus, not because it referred solely to apparitions and ascents, but because it could describe what was common to the soul's relationship to the natural and the supernatural, the intelligible and the super-intelligible, the God present to being and the God beyond being. Gallus concludes that when intellection fails, experience remains.

Though Gallus's heavy use of the rhetoric of experience in his commentaries on the *CD* may lead one to think that experience is especially associated with the mystical in Gallus's thought, there are plenty of times in his corpus that he describes more quotidian forms of experience. For instance, when fleshing out the divine name of Light, he tells his readers to think about what "we learn from our proven experience of vision (*per certam experientiam visus*)."¹⁴⁴ Elsewhere he talks about common experience: "we know sensible things naturally through the experience of the senses of the body."¹⁴⁵ Gallus even uses the term in discussing evil, which, because Dionysius held a privative view of evil, is "known through the experience of the failure, as it were, of the acuity of the understanding from the lack of an intelligible object, just as darkness is known by the

¹⁴⁴ Expl DN 2, 139.

¹⁴⁵ Expl CH 1, 494: "...per experientiam sensuum corporeorum naturaliter cognoscimus sensibilia."

failing of the exercise of keen eyes.”¹⁴⁶ Finally, common, everyday experience ought to be frequently examined: “[Reasoning powers] rise up through the threefold operation of diligent effort: namely meditation or examination of experience, the resolved circumscription of meaning, and the free and commanding execution of the given meaning.”¹⁴⁷ These examples show that for Gallus experience was continuous and not reserved for mystical discourse any more than intellection. Experience instead encompasses all manner of thought and feeling.

At the same time, there can be no doubt that Gallus was thoroughly engaged in an analysis of a special form of experience in the soul’s union with the Word. The following passage shows how this special experience is a superaddition to a broad range of experiences that are part of mystical practice:

But that stirring (*excitatio*) [of the mind] occurs by the exercise and manifestation of his invisible goods, most highly and universally desirable in human beings, by inspiration, by the lavishing (*largitione*) of manifold goods, by long-suffering expectation, by the exhortation of the scriptures and the doctors, by the consideration of their subtle works, by the contemplation of pure and profound things, and by the experiences of inward affection (*intime affectionis experientis*).... For whatever is laudable and loveable in creatures is a participation of the true good and beautiful which is God.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Expl DN 4, 272: “Hec sententia innotescit per experientiam perspicacis intelligentie quasi deficientis ex defectu obiecti intelligibilis, sicut innotescunt tenebre exercitio perspicuorum oculorum deficiente.”

¹⁴⁷ Expl CH 10, 634: “Hec assurgit per trinam operationem industrie: meditationem scilicet et experientie examen; et certam sententie diffinitionem; et libera et imperiosam date sententie executionem.”

¹⁴⁸ Expl DN 4, 243: “Ista autem excitatio fit exercitatione et manifestatione suorum inuisibilium bonorum summe et uniuersaliter desiderabilium in hominibus, inspiratione, multiplicium bonorum largitione, longanimi expectatione, scripturarum et doctorum exhortatione, operum suorum subtili consideratione, pura et profunda contemplatione, et intime affectionis experientis... Quicquid enim in creaturis laudabile est et amabile, participation est veri boni et pulcri quod est Deus.”

This passage shows the integrated view of experience with which Gallus works. Gallus's theology of the Word ensured that all the soul's processes—from the consideration of created things, to the intellectual contemplation of the *theoriae*, to the intimate affection with the eternal Word itself—were experiences of the Word.

It is necessary to understand this as the context for Gallus's descriptions of mystical experience of the Word, which though special and superior, does not occur outside the context of the Word's cosmic incarnation in creation, history, and sacred letters. The difference between these everyday experiences and the experience of mystical union to the Word is that, in uniting to the Word, one is drawn into an intimacy with the God beyond being and beyond intelligibility. Experience of the Word is a continuation of everyday experience, but in knowing the Word, one knows the beyond being source of all intelligible things, which is unintelligible. "For that union has a super-intellectual experience both in the journey of this life and in the homeland of the next."¹⁴⁹ For Gallus, Dionysian mystical union is with the Word that remains with God, the Word that contains the *theoriae*, and the Word that creates all visible, sensible things. That is, mystical union is with the Word *in toto*, so it necessitates a language for the realization of such a multifaceted intimacy.

Therefore this contemplation (*inspectio*) of holy things is understood as the affectual experience of profound and superintellectual *theoriae*... But this knowledge of divine things is perceived by the Seraph of the mind, and it completes the best portion, which is Mary's (Luke 10g)... For no other method of knowledge (*scientia*) or knowledge (*cognitio*) of God is more perfect, whether *in via* with the status of travelers or *in patria* in the mode of things grasped.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Expl DN 1, 92.

¹⁵⁰ Expl CH 3, 546: "Hec ergo sanctorum inspectio intelligitur profundarum et superintellectualium theoiarum affectualis experientia... Ista autem diuinorum cognitio a Seraph mentis percipitur et perficit portionem optimam que est Marie (Luc. 10g). Unde subditur: **perfective scientie**. Nulla enim perfectior scientia vel Dei cognitio percipitur

In this passage, we see that there are many methods of knowledge or experiences besides the affect's simple knowledge or experience of the Word. Though Gallus's understanding of experience as encompassing the entirety of the Word's actions is undoubtedly a modification or addition to the Dionysian description of mystical union, it is respectful of the three primary ways Dionysius describes the goal of mystical theology: a union, a knowing beyond mind, and an unknowing.

IV. Conclusion: A New Dionysianism

This chapter has shown that recent scholarship on Gallus is heading in the right direction by affirming that he articulates a new Dionysianism.¹⁵¹ Gallus was a thoroughgoing Dionysian, who took not only occasional insights from the *CD*, but adopted and adapted its major theological tensions. First, we saw that Gallus engages with the Dionysian logic of causality—God's super-essentiality or beyond-being-ness (*superessentialitas*) is the super-abundant cause of creation and history. That Gallus did not know the Neoplatonic provenance of this idea did not prohibit him from gleaning it from Dionysius and identifying it as a central affirmation of Christian wisdom. In this, he may even be unique among medieval western theologians for reflecting on Dionysius's 'hyper-ontology,' an aspect of Dionysian theology largely avoided by the *CD*'s later readers like Thomas Aquinas (who were concerned more with synthesizing multiple authorities than explaining the *CD*). Second, Gallus qualifies the Dionysian teaching on theological "hymning" by situating it within a more expansive account of the theologians'

siue in via secundum statum viatorum siue in patria secundum conditionem comprehensorum."

¹⁵¹ McGinn posits a "new Dionysianism" in *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 78-87.

experience of the Word's activities—including the general creation of visible and invisible things, and the special interventions of the divine Word into their minds, including the affect's privileged super-intellectual experience. Sacred language and literature worked in a purposefully ambiguous way because the Word they depicted was incarnate and eternal. Finally, this experience of the Word, which is both intellective and affective, qualifies Dionysius's account of mystical union. The intellect and affect know the Word in the only way the Word can be entirely known—experientially.

Chapter 5: The Practice of Christian Wisdom in the Song Commentaries

*I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine
who feeds among the lilies
you are beautiful my friend, sweet
and fine like Jerusalem
terrible as a battle line drawn up
turn away your eyes from me
for they make me flee*
-Song of Songs 6:2-4a

In the Introduction, I described how my theological analysis of Gallus's commentaries would draw from the attention to language that has become prominent in the study of Christian mysticism. Scholars examining mystical language analyze the ways mystical writings take advantage of the capacity of language to incite certain modes of consciousness or experience beyond simple linguistic reference. For example, as we saw in Chapter 2, Dionysius's use of the dialectical tension *between* cataphatic and apophatic statements was a way to inculcate, exercise, or perform an awareness of 'the God beyond being who is present to being' in a way a simple propositional statement could not. Chapter 2 also appealed to the Dionysian language of "hymning" to describe the *CD*'s understanding of theological language. These approaches to mystical language are closely related to rhetorical analysis in that they emphasize how language functions, though these approaches show that the reading or writing of a mystical text may have a wider range of outcomes than persuasion. To borrow a felicitous distinction from the scholar of ancient Greek philosophical schools, Pierre Hadot, the use of language in Christian mystical literature both *informs* and *forms*.¹ The question remains: What or who is formed? And how?

¹ See the essays on philosophy as a 'spiritual exercise' in Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*.

I also described in the Introduction how some of these approaches to Christian mystical language presume that these mystical uses of language do their work on the autonomous, self-governing mind of the reader. That is, in the example of cataphatic and apophatic language in Dionysius, this kind of analysis might suppose that the dialectical tension creates a new kind of mental consciousness or intellectual intuition in the reader's mind, some transformation of the individual "subject" or "self."² I appealed to Constance Furey's injunction to scholars of religion to attend to the ways religious texts construct not only individual selves, but also (and perhaps primarily) intimacies and relationships, as particularly important for my understanding of Gallus's commentaries. Gallus was undoubtedly concerned with the formation (or rather, reformation) of the mind when he calls the Song the "practical part" of Christian wisdom, but his notion of 'the mind' implies neither an autonomous entity, nor a primarily self-reflexive orientation. In fact, while he undoubtedly develops a complex 'psychology' and 'theological anthropology,' these terms are only useful insofar as we are able to avoid their modern association with autonomous, self-governing mental activities. What I describe in this chapter, is how the Song commentary stylizes a mind (*mens*) that is a locus of both natural and supernatural (graced) activities, a mind made up, as it were, of both intentional acts of the soul, and impinging or influential acts of the divine Word. Thus, while the Song commentary

² The best work attending to mystical language admits that individualist, autonomous notions of the "self" are incompatible with the very recognition that social construction, especially through the practices of reading and writing, somehow "produce" the self. That is, much of this work interprets the "self" broadly, and usually when attempting to make sense of how a religious practitioner is drawing on the notion of the self. Furey ("Body, Society, and Subjectivity") reminds us that not all religious texts are concerned primarily with the dichotomy between the self and society or the body and society. Rather, much religious literature—and here I include Gallus's commentaries—has as its objective the formation of a certain kind of intimacy or relation, not a certain kind of individual.

performs a certain kind of practice of the soul, its critical locus is not on the soul or mind as a discrete entity, but on the mind as a site of the soul's intimacy with the eternal Word.

How can a text like the Song commentary perform intimacy?

A Victorine act of spiritual interpretation must start, as we saw in Chapter 1, with the letter (*littera*) of the text.³ In the first section, I show that Gallus indeed starts here, even though he moves swiftly to a spiritual interpretation of the Song. Gallus's attention to the letter is important, however, because it is the foundation for his two major moves of spiritual interpretation of the Song (described in sections II and III). First, he understands the bride and bridegroom, the primary voices of the Song, as figures for the soul and the Word of God. The back-and-forth beckoning of the two voices spiritually represents the interplay of the soul and the Word in mystical union. Thus, in section II, I

³ See Ch. 1, 48-50. Consider that the term *littera* covers a broad semantic range — from the smallest orthographical marking to the whole of literature. Thus it performs a great amount of work in the Victorine imagination, especially regarding the theory and practice of scriptural interpretation. Thus, when I refer to Gallus's "literal interpretation," I mean to point to his attention to basic grammatical and literary features that must first be understood before one can move to a spiritual understanding.

The following passage from Expl CH, 1, 493-4, supports the view that Gallus presumes the theory of scriptural interpretation that insists on the distinction between the literal and the spiritual:

"For the supremely divine ray... cannot illuminate us, that is, shine on this mortal condition by radiating from above... **unless enveloped**, just as spiritual understanding is veiled by the literal sense, **by a variety of holy veils**, that is, by multiple sensible forms which appropriately designate celestial and divine things, veiled and hidden by unworthy things... **uplifting-ly**, that is, in such a way that the faithful and zealous are led through the consideration of spoken veils to the cognition and contemplation of celestial mysteries..."

"Neque enim possibile est thearchicum radium (ut supra) **supersplendere**, id est desursum radiando splendere (MT 1a: "supersplendentem etc."), **nobis**, in statu huius mortalitatis, **nisi circumvelatum**, sicut intelligentia spiritualis velatur sensu litterali, **varietate sanctorum velaminum**, that is, est multiplicibus formis sensibilibus quibus congruenter designantur celestia et divina indignis quidem velata et abscondita (Matth. 11f: *abscondisti* etc.), **sursumaticive**, id est ita quod per considerationem dictorum velaminum fideles et studiosi deducantur ad celestium mysteriorum cognitionem et contemplationem..."

analyze Gallus's spiritual interpretation of the bride and the bridegroom theologically. Second, Gallus continuously describes how these voices speak in the verses of the Song—either “experientially” (*experientialiter*) or “effectively” (*effective*). This is key to understanding the intimate relationship between the soul and the Word, and section III will tease out the implications of “how the voices speak” for Gallus's mystical theology. While Gallus's emphasis is on the ‘effective,’ grace-bestowing Word as the source of contemplative practice, molding the soul for mystical union, the roles played by the soul and the Word suddenly, subtly, and significantly shift at critical points in the text, where the soul itself becomes increasingly ‘effective,’ and comes to understand the Word as sharing in its ‘experience.’ Rehearsing the movement of Gallus's interpretation—from a thorough understanding of the letter to a discernment of the spiritual significance of the text—shows how Gallus's performance of interpretation is also a performance of the soul's intimacy with the Word. I will return to this last point in the conclusion, after I have rehearsed Gallus's major interpretive moves, both literal and spiritual.⁴

I. Literal Interpretation: “The sequence of the entire book” (*series totius libri*)

The Song posed a particular problem to the ideal Victorine interpretation, in which only with a foundation in the literal should one seek for a more profound spiritual understanding. How could an erotic love poem that made no mention of God or religious practice first be interpreted literally to the benefit of the religious reader? Indeed, Gallus neither spends much time on literal interpretation, nor is there any indication that he

⁴ Thus, while the chapter proceeds from the literal to the spiritual, the greatest part of the analysis will focus on what I argue are two main concerns of the spiritual interpretation: “who are the voices speaking?” and, “how do they speak?”

conceives of the Song as a report of actual events, like the historical books of the Old Testament.⁵ Instead, he consistently interprets the bride and the bridegroom as spiritual figures for the soul and the Word of God (the central feature of his interpretation, which will be examined in the next two sections). While Gallus's ultimate concern is with a spiritual interpretation, he ensures the reader has first grasped the 'letter' of the sacred writing. Before turning to an analysis of Gallus's spiritual interpretation, I will briefly rehearse his treatment of the letter of the Song, confirming that Gallus is indeed participating in the Victorine program of sacred reading.

When performing an initial literal interpretation of the Song, Gallus attends to three considerations: 1) grammar and syntax; 2) the basic meaning of lexical items; and 3) the text's form and structure. In order to perform the movement from word (*verbum* or *vox*) to thing (*res*)—the act of literal interpretation—Gallus frequently pauses to consider both the grammatical function of the word itself, examining the word's case, number, or tense in order to expound its literal meaning. For example, the ablative case (*ablativus*), he writes, "is appropriate for pointing out essence." When the Song states that "flocks of sheep ascend from the washing with twin offspring" it uses the ablative case for "with twin offspring (*gemellis fetibus*)."⁶ Spiritually, this indicates that the essence of the mind's union to the divine Word (the "flocks of sheep") is in both loving and knowing.⁶ One must first identify the ablative case and its use (its *literal* function) in order to most fully appreciate its spiritual significance.⁷

⁵ See Chapter 1, 48-50, for a fuller treatment of the Victorine approach to the historical-literal sense.

⁶ SS3.4.B, 177.

⁷ As for other grammatical considerations, Gallus frequently comments on number with the adverbs *singulariter* ("in the singular") or *pluraliter* ("in the plural"),

Beyond grammar, Gallus uses his liberal arts training to ensure that the Song's unfamiliar words indicating, for example, the flora and fauna of the ancient Near East, are carefully expounded. When he comes across the word *nardus* ("nard") he begins by identifying three of its characteristics: 1) it is a spikey herb; 2) it grows on high mountains; and, 3) it is odorous.⁸ By enumerating these characteristics, which may have been unknown to the average canon regular, who had never been exposed to a plant grown on the eastern regions of the Mediterranean, Gallus both acquaints the reader with an unfamiliar word and expounds its literal meaning, establishing for the reader an understanding of the thing itself. This literal interpretation in turn is a foundation for a spiritual one. While nard itself signifies contemplative knowledge coming from the divine plenitude, its characteristic spikiness signifies how the knowledge of invisible things, coming from the simplicity of the divine essence, is multiple, like thorns from a stem. Its lofty habitat signifies its reception from sublime *theoriae* or "spectacles."⁹ Finally, its odor signifies a spiritual sensation of sweetness.¹⁰ Gallus frequently uses this method of introducing a word with a brief literal exposition of three characteristics before

which he takes to spiritually indicate the Word's simplicity or multiple efficacy, respectively. For example, verse 6:12, "may we behold you," is glossed with "the bridegroom puts himself in the plural because of the multiplicity of his inflowings" (SS3.6.G, 214). For other examples of *pluraliter*, see also: "ointments" and "rays," SS3.1.B, 123; "storerooms," SS3.2.C, 147; "eyes," SS3.7.C, 217. For *singulariter*: "oil" and "ray" SS3.2.C, 147; "aperture," SS3.5.E, 196.

Similarly, Gallus interpreted the past tense (*in praeterito*) in the Song's line "the vineyard was pacifying" to spiritually signify the certainty with which the bride or soul makes herself peaceful in contemplation (SS3.8.E, 229). See also SS3.3.B, 168. Thus, a word's case, number, and tense should be discerned before advancing to its spiritual significance.

⁸ SS3.1.M, 138: "Nardus est herba spicosa, in Alpibus nascitur valdeque est odorifera."

⁹ On the *theoriae*, see below, 247-50.

¹⁰ SS3.1.M, 138.

advancing to the spiritual meaning. The Song was filled with unfamiliar words which had to be expounded first literally.

Gallus's attention to the form and structure of the Song was also significant, though Gallus preferred the term *series* ("sequence") to describe the running order or course of the text—the text's surface, as it were.¹¹ For instance, in the prologue to the third commentary on the Song, Gallus writes that the practice or exercise of mystical theology can be discerned "throughout the sequence of the entire book (*per totius libri seriem*)."¹² Elsewhere, "The entire course of love (*amoris cursus*) consists in a constant

¹¹ If Gallus's careful attention to the words themselves is evidence of a 12th-century Victorine concern for the literal as a foundation, his attention to the form and structure of the Song is more likely evidence of his early 13th-century milieu. As Alastair Minnis (*Medieval Theory of Authorship*) has shown, literary analysis taking place in the schools of western Europe could be quite sophisticated, and was changing thanks to the introduction of the fuller corpus of the works of Aristotle. Minnis's analysis shows that medieval commentators on sacred writings were attuned to the kinds of concerns we would characterize today as form and structure—that is, the basic outline of a text, and the ways its parts hang together or its elements relate to one another. In the prologues of 12th-century commentators, the term used for the text's form was its *modus agendi vel tractandi* ("way of guiding or treating"), while 13th-century commentators preferred to analyze the *divisio textus* ("division of the text"). While Gallus uses the older term *modus tractandi*, either ignorant of or, more likely, avoiding the newer Aristotelian terminology, he nonetheless exhibits concern for how the text is divided up. When glossing the Dionysian corpus, the *modus tractandi*, or textual division, was easier to trace, as Dionysius's "theoretical" treatises could be broken up into distinct units that covered particular topics or notions. *On Divine Names*, for instance, proceeded name-by-name, with Dionysius treating each in turn. Divisions in the text were thus easily discernible, and the assigning of chapters, for instance, followed these topical divisions, at least in part. Thus, when Gallus describes the *CD*'s *modus tractandi* in his prologues to each book of the corpus, he briefly summarizes each chapter. In contrast, dividing up the text of the Song, a poem, was not as simple, but as I argue here, his use of the term *series* suggests sufficient attention was given to what we would call the text's form and structure.

¹² SS3.Prologue.B, 107. Elsewhere, "the bride seizes these paths [of eternity] throughout the entire sequence of this book, with the bridegroom calling, illuminating, helping, supporting, embracing..." ("Hec itinera sibi carpit sponsa per totam seriem huius libri, sponso vocante, illuminante, adiuvente, supportante, amplexante...") SS3.2.H, 155. Gallus also uses *series* to refer to the entire sequence of sacred writings, as in:

and continual summoning of the kind that is clear in the sequence of the book (*in libri serie*).¹³ To Gallus, the Song was clearly and for good reason structured by the back-and-forth beckoning of the voices of the bride and bridegroom. The structure itself performed the “course of love.”

Other terms show up throughout the commentary that confirm Gallus’s attention to the structure of the text. For example, he points to instances of repetition in the sacred poem with terms like *geminatio*, *repetitio*, and *duplicatio*.¹⁴ The text’s repetitiveness has its own spiritual significance—the bride or soul must be continually renewed in the Word, so no purely linear narrative would be appropriate to the Song’s subject matter. Gallus also remarks on the Song’s *interpositiones* (parenthetical insertions or interjections), which signify how the soul is surprised suddenly by the Word.¹⁵ Finally, Gallus’s concern with the *consummatio* (“ending”) of the text is another device in his conceptual toolkit for thinking about its *series* or sequence.¹⁶ In sum, though Gallus does not write a literal commentary on the Song, his spiritual interpretation is performed as a careful elaboration upon an initial analysis of the letter of the text, from the smallest semantic unit, to the entire course of the text as a whole, even to its place within the whole of sacred literature.

“...Solomon’s wisdom of Christians is touched on throughout the entire sequence of the scriptures and the books of the great Dionysius,” (“...per universam seriem scripturarum et librorum magni Dionysii tangantur hec Salomonis sapientia christianorum”) SS3.1.A, 122. Thus, just as *littera* could refer to everything from an orthographical marking to literature itself, *series* could refer to the running order of a sentence, the structure of the entire Song, or even the divinely arranged whole course of sacred literature.

¹³ SS3.5.A, 190: “Totus ergo amoris cursus in assidua et continua huiusmodi invitatione consistit, ut patet in libri serie.”

¹⁴ SS3.3.A, 166; SS3.4.E, 183; SS3.5.G, 200.

¹⁵ SS3.4.D, 180.

¹⁶ SS3.8.E, 230.

I have begun this chapter with a brief look at Gallus's approach to the 'letter' of the Song for two reasons. First, this reinforces my claim that Gallus was thoroughly Victorine in his approach to sacred literature. Though Gallus is unquestionably more interested in contemplation and spiritual interpretation than the school's historical-literalist Andrew of St. Victor, he remained thoroughly engaged with its pedagogical principles. Second, I take Gallus's foundational concern with the letter and "sequence" of the Song as an invitation to interrogate how he thinks about its structure or *modus tractandi*, how he divides the text, as it were. How does Gallus see the Song breaking down? How does a spiritual reading develop out of a thorough understanding of the letter and sequence of the text? What does he notice about its structure, the ways the elements relate to one another? How does the poem's *series* contribute to the practice or performance of the wisdom of Christians?

I identify two primary ways in which Gallus divides the Song. First, and more in line with traditional exegesis, Gallus treats the Song as a dialogue between the voices of different characters, primarily the bride and the bridegroom, whom he understands to be figures for the soul and the Word of God, respectively. While he does not, like some modern readers, explicitly read the Song as a drama, he consistently identifies who is speaking in the text (which contemporary scholars agree has a dialogic, if not a dramatic, form).¹⁷ A second, more unique, mode of division Gallus showcases across the sequence of the text, however, comes from how these voices speak. He repeatedly describes the voices speaking with the adverbs "effectively" (*effective*) and "experientially" (*experientialiter*), as when he glosses, for example, "the bridegroom is speaking

¹⁷ Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary*, 78.

effectively here,” and “this was said experientially by the bride.” More will be said about what Gallus means by these terms. As we will see, these two ways to divide the text—between, 1) the voices themselves, and 2) their mode of utterance—largely overlap. The bride’s voice most often speaks “experientially”; the bridegroom’s, “effectively.”

Yet Gallus’s two ways of analyzing the sequence are not entirely identical, and this is, I take it, is for a particular theological purpose, which comes to light when we think about Gallus’s commentaries in terms of practice. The Song practices, exercises, or performs the unique relationship between the soul and the Word of God as they cooperate in the pursuit of a form of contemplative union, in which the soul is assimilated to the Word, and the Word is understood to be cozened or drawn by the soul. The sudden bouts of role reversal—when the bride’s voice becomes “effective” and the bridegroom shares in her “experience”—are critical in Gallus’s attempt to stylize the intimacy or relationship between the soul and the Word. In the rest of this chapter, I make this argument by treating the two major ways Gallus divides the text, first the distinct voices representing the soul and the Word, then how the voices speak (their modes of utterance), either “effectively” or “experientially.”

II. Spiritual Interpretation: The Voices of the Song

The first way in which Gallus distinguishes the voices or utterances (*voces*) of the text is according to the characters to whom they belong, primarily the bride and bridegroom, or, in Gallus’s spiritual interpretation, the soul and the Word of God. The

Song itself invites attention to the voices in its dialogic form and its multiple evocations of the beloved's voice (*vox*), and Gallus is not the first to break up the text this way.¹⁸

A. Voice of the Bridegroom

One of the two major voices of the Song belongs to the bridegroom, who spiritually signifies the Word of God, as Gallus makes clear early and frequently in the commentaries. Throughout the Song each of the bridegroom's utterances to the bride spiritually signifies the Word's communication to the soul in the highest stages of contemplation. These utterances, as we will see in the next section, because they come from the Word itself, also have direct practical influence upon the soul. In Chapter 4, I described some precedents for Gallus's theology of the Word (*Verbum*) in Augustine and the Victorines. In this sub-section, I further expound a few passages from the commentaries to show how Gallus adopts and adapts Word theology, especially by depicting in detail how the Word contains *theoriae*, the eternal reasons of all things which become "spectacles" to be encountered by the soul. I will then place Gallus's reading of the bridegroom as the Word, rather than other theological and even other christological options, in historical context.

¹⁸ The bride and bridegroom appeal to one another's "voices" in 2:8 ("the voice of my beloved"), 2:12 ("the voice of the turtle dove"), 2:14 ("let your voice sound in my ears / for your voice is sweet"), 5:2 ("the voice of my beloved knocking"). My attention to the centrality of voice in the Song and the Song commentaries surely owes something to the suggestion implied in Ann Matter's title to her definitive work on the Song's interpretation in the Middle Ages, *The Voice of My Beloved*. Though Matter does not explicitly treat the theme of vocality or utterance, it strikes me that the Song's insistence on the reader's (or hearer's) attention to it may have been part of what made it appealing to Gallus.

i. The Word and its *theoriae*

While Gallus does not explicitly rehearse Augustine's or Hugh's distinctions between the inner and exterior Word,¹⁹ his exposition of the union of the soul with the eternal Word in the Song suggests the analogy. If Gallus's ideal of Christian perfection is union with and assimilation to the Word, how does this occur? Placed in the context of Augustinian or Victorine theology of the Word, one can say that Gallus reads the Song as exhibiting the mechanism or practice that moves one from an apprehension of the exterior Word to union with the inner Word, or rather, an apprehension of the Word both incarnate and eternal. As we will see, the movement to union with the eternal Word occurs primarily through the mind's intellectual and affective engagement in the *theoriae*, or divine exemplars contained in the Word.

The commentaries do not explain these issues systematically, but Gallus treats them occasionally as the Word communicates with the soul in the Song. For instance, in one passage, we see the notion of the eternal generation of the Son or Word of God from the Father. When the bridegroom calls the bride "a sealed fountain (*fons signatus*)," Gallus glosses that the contemplative mind receives and gives wisdom from the Word of God. The Word itself is called in scripture a "fountain of life, because it is the original Life and Wisdom." He adds:

'Fountain' in the singular rightly refers to the Word, in which the supremely simple, supremely multiple, and truly original gathering of the waters of saving wisdom exists... the Word from the Father. Therefore, by descending into human

¹⁹ Though consider how the following statement seems to presume an understanding of the idea: "But the mental word forms the spoken words, because from the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." ("Verbum autem mentis format verba oris, quia ex habundantia cordis os loquitur.") Expl MT 1, 23.

and angelic minds from the fullness of both this singular Fountain and the Sea, fountains arise in them...²⁰

Here for Gallus, the Song depicts the bride as a sealed fountain, poured into by the Fountain of the Word, itself sourced by the Sea of the Father.²¹ In this Fountain or Word is gathered all the plans of wisdom, just as the Word contains the eternal reasons for Augustine. By stating that this Fountain contains both “simple” and “multiple” gathered waters, Gallus evokes the distinction between the Word as united to its source (like a pre-linguistic concept united to a person) and the Word as containing the various principles of creation (like an inner word or a plan of an exterior word).

Gallus also advances the Victorine notion of the manifestation of the divine Word in the incarnation, creation, and scripture.²² In his commentary on *Divine Names*, to Dionysius’s statement that “the Word beyond substance completely and truly became a substance,” Gallus adds, “this is the fact that the Word beyond substance became human.”²³ Elsewhere, when Dionysius writes about how created things exhibit divine “harmony,” Gallus adds, “The gentile philosophers have investigated this harmony with no little care, and it has been fulfilled in the incarnate Word, where the highest, lowest,

²⁰ SS2.4.F, 97-8: “Verumtamen singulariter fons recte referetur ad Verbum in quo est summe simplex et summe multiplex et vere originalis congregatio aquarum sapientie salutaris, Gen. 2: *fons egrediebatur*, Dan. 7: *fluvius a facie*, Verbum a Patre. De huius ergo singularis fontis simul et maris plenitudine in mentes humanas et angelicas descendente, in eisdem fontes oriuntur...”

²¹ Evidence that this image was important to the Victorines can be found in Godfrey of St. Victor’s didactic poem “The Fountain of Philosophy.” Translated in Harkins and van Liere, *Interpretation of Scripture*, 389-425.

²² See Ch. 4, 189ff.

²³ Expl DN 2, 148: “Et hoc est: **supersubstantiale Verbum esse totaliter et vere factum substantiam**, id est hoc ipsum quod supersubstantiale Verbum Dei factum est homo.”

and middle have been joined together in one person who is the plenitude of all beauty.”²⁴ Here Gallus describes the incarnate Word as the complete or perfect expression of the eternal Word, while also suggesting its expression in the created order, the knowledge of which even gentile philosophy can attain.

Indeed, Gallus’s cosmic Christology—his focus on all of creation in general and scripture in particular as the manifestation of the Word—means he seldom attends to the Word incarnate in the suffering and saving Jesus Christ, the object of so much attention in mystical theology and devotion in the new religious movements developing at the same time he is writing. Instead, his consistent attention is on the more classically Neoplatonic Christian christological concern with the Word as the principle of creation and the Victorine concern with the Word as the originator of sacred literature. For instance, Gallus interprets a Dionysian reference to the divine art (*ars, techne*) with the gloss, “that is, [...] the Word of God, which is the most simple and most universal art of all things.”²⁵ Elsewhere he refers to the Word as “the principal origin and fountain of all the words of sacred scripture.”²⁶ “The words of God shine from the Word of God.”²⁷ Though Sarracen’s translation rendered λόγος (*logos*) with *verbum*, while transliterating θεολογία with *theologia*, Gallus recognized the connection: “the Word of God (*verbum Dei*)... truly is theology (*theologia*), which incomparably exceeds everything created and

²⁴ Expl DN 1, 86: “Hanc armoniam gentium philosophi non mediocriter investigauerunt, et completa est in Verbo incarnate ubi summa, ima et media coniuncta sunt in una persona que est plenitude omnis speciei desiderabilis...”

²⁵ Expl DN 4, 309: “**in arte**, id est in Verbo Dei quod est simplicissima et uniuersalissima ars omnium...”

²⁶ Expl MT 1, 9: “...ipsi Verbo eterno quod est principalis origo et fons omnium verborum sacre scripture...”

²⁷ Expl DN 1, 75: “Verba quidem Dei splendent a Verbo Dei...”

existing.”²⁸ What these passages suggest is that the Word in Gallus’s commentaries is primarily the principle of creation and sacred writings, the primary media or vehicles of reformation of the soul. Gallus’s modification of the Augustinian and Victorine theology of the Word was thus centered on how one becomes united to the eternal Word through the inflowing of divine grace mediated in creation and scripture to the soul’s intellect and affect.

Following both the influence of the Dionysian corpus and the Song, Gallus’s primary way of describing the goal of the soul’s interaction with the Word is as a form of union and (less frequently) assimilation. Suggesting a desire for the inner or eternal Word, Gallus writes of “a uniting in the unity of the simple Word *in which are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge* hidden, *Col. 2*, and *all cognitive cognitions*, *Myst. Theol. 1*.”²⁹ Again, the invocation of both “simple unity” and multiple “treasures” suggests a union with the Word as both Augustinian pre-linguistic concept (simple) and source of divine plans (multiple). Elsewhere, Gallus describes how the soul’s nature is “united to the Word,” even as the Word’s “supereminence goes past those ascending to divine union.”³⁰ As we will see below, Gallus’s union to the Word respects the balance between what can be intellectually known, what can be affectively known, and what cannot be known of the eternal Word.

²⁸ Expl DN 1, 24: “... Verbum Dei, quod vere est theologia, incomparabiliter excedit omne creatum et ens.”

²⁹ SS3.1.M, 139: “...coadunatio in simplicis Verbi unitate in quo sunt omnes thesauri sapientie et scientie recondite, *Col. 2*, and omnes cognitive cognitiones, *Myst. theol. 1*.”

³⁰ SS3.3.B, 168: “...hanc supereminentiam autem transire oportet ascendentes ad divinam unionem...”

Before treating the implications of Gallus's identification of the bridegroom in the Song with the Word, one more point must be made about Gallus's theology of the Word. By far the most significant aspect of Gallus's treatment of the Word is his exposition of the character and role of divine exemplars, or what he more often calls, from the epistemic or experiential rather than metaphysical point of view, *theoriae*. The best English translation of this word is "spectacles," but even the latinizing Sarracen follows Eriugena in transliterating θεωρίαι as *theoriae* in his translation, which as we have seen he does with Greek terms that are conceptually significant and/or already accessible to a latinate audience (in this case, likely the former more than the latter).³¹ While it is true to say that the dialogic Song depicts the soul and the Word, it is more precise to say that the Song treats how the soul traverses the Word's increasingly more profound *theoriae* in its practice of ever-more-perfect union with the Word. The practice of mystical theology, Gallus reasons, is largely about how one journeys in the *theoriae* in the quest toward more perfect union with the Word. These *theoriae* or exemplars are what we have already seen Augustine refer to as "eternal reasons," and Gallus says that there are many names for them. Besides 'exemplars (*exemplaria*)' and 'eternal reasons (*rationes eternae*),' they can be called 'ideas (*ideae*),' 'archetypes (*archetypiae*),' or 'efficacies (*efficaciae*).'³²

In the *Divine Names* commentary, Gallus emphasizes how *exemplaria* are the causal principles of the world contained in the Word. "The eternal exemplars of all things that fall under the category of existence are in the eternal Word by nature, and all existing

³¹ See Chapter 3, 150.

³² For passages that have Gallus laying out the multiple possible designations for the *theoriae*, see SS3.4.D, 182, and Expl DN 5, 337.

things are known and comprehended causally (*causaliter*) in those exemplars by glorified minds...”³³ Gallus glosses Dionysius’s own treatment of the *exemplaria*:

We call the exemplars in God reasons of the Word, **substance-making**, that is, which make things subsist, exist, and have substance; **and pre-existing** in eternity before the creation of things, and also causally; **singularly**, that is, in the highest simplicity of the eternal Word, although their effects are uncountable.³⁴

That is, Gallus understands the Dionysian corpus to argue that *exemplaria* are the eternal reasons or causal principles contained in the eternal Word.

The *theoriae* show up throughout the commentaries. In one of his few references to himself Gallus says in a prologue that he now writes a third commentary after having followed the “courses of the *theoriae* which superillumine the soul with understandings,” a significant suggestion of the interdependence of scriptural interpretation and mystical union in the commentaries.³⁵ Given that the bridegroom represents the Word in the Song, many of the spaces, body parts, and possessions of the bridegroom figurally represent the *theoriae*. In fact, Gallus interprets almost any dalliance of the bride with multiple objects of some kind as the text’s spiritual signification of the Word’s *theoriae*. When the bride claims at 1:3 that the king has led her “into his storerooms,” Gallus glosses: “In these storerooms, that is, the exemplars of the eternal Word, the bride is led forth in the highest

³³ Expl DN, 4, 185: “in Verbo eterno per naturam sunt eternal exemplaria omnium que sub ente cadunt, et in illis exemplaribus causaliter cognoscuntur et comprehenduntur existentia a mentibus glorificatis...”

³⁴ Expl DN, 5, 352: “**Exemplaria in Deo dicimus rationes Verbi substantificas**, id est faciunt res subsistere et esse et substare; **et preexistentes** in eternitate ante rerum creationem, et etiam causaliter, **singulariter**, id est in summa Verbi eterni simplicitate, quamvis eorum effectus sint innumerabiles;”

³⁵ SS3.Prologue.P, 109: “sequor ut soleo theoriarum occurus que intellectibus superfulgent animam extendens ad radium superiorem...”

hierarchy of her mind upward and deeply through unitive contemplation.”³⁶ When the trope is repeated at 2:4, Gallus writes: “...she says experientially: **he led me** through interior *theoriae* more profound than before, just as *Jer. 3: do not cease to go after me, into the wine storeroom*, that is, the Word containing all *theoriae*.”³⁷ In unitive contemplation, the wayfaring soul gains access to and traverses the eternal reasons contained in the Word.

Examples can be multiplied. Vineyards are “the exemplars of the eternal Word, which are called storerooms above,” Gallus writes, making a characteristic intratextual reference.³⁸ The golden bases, on which the bride says the bridegroom’s legs rest, are “the super-eternally steady archetypes of the super-shining Word.”³⁹ Pomegranates are “the exemplars of the eternal Word smelling sweet beyond the mind.”⁴⁰ Finally, stones are:

...the indissoluble spectacles (*spectacula*) of the eternal Word, from which some special things ought to be chosen according to the experience of the contemplative soul, by which the mind may be exercised and carried up more effectively. [In this passage about stones] the angels invite the bride to attend to the special *theoriae* of the bridegroom.⁴¹

³⁶ SS3.1.E, 127: “In hec cellaria, id est exemplaria Verbi eterni, sponsa in summa mentis hierarchia alte et profunde per unitivam contemplationem introducitur...”

³⁷ SS3.2.C, 147: “Dicit ergo experimentaliter: **introduxit me** per theorias interiores profundiores quam prius, iuxta illud *Ier. 3: post me ingredi non cesses, in cellam vinariam*, id est Verbum continens omnes theorias...”

³⁸ SS3.1.G, 131: “Nomine vinearum intellige Verbi eterni exemplaria, que superius dicuntur cellaria...”

³⁹ SS3.5.I, 203: “...supereternaliter stabiles superfulgidi Verbi archetypias...”

⁴⁰ SS3.4.G, 186: “...eterni Verbi exemplaria super mentem beneolentem...”

⁴¹ SS3.5.G, 199: “Lapides sunt indissolubilia eterni Verbi spectacular de quibus eligenda sunt aliqua specialia, secundum cuiuslibet anime contemplative experientiam, quibus mens efficacius excitetur et sursumferatur; hoc et quod angeli sponsam invitant ut sponsi speciales theorias attendat.”

This last quotation says explicitly what Gallus's identification of the *theoriae* throughout the sequence of the Song suggests: the practice of Christian wisdom is like a journey of the soul pursuing union with the Word by traversing the principles of creation.

One final passage on the *theoriae* of the Word helps to explain how Gallus sees them operating in the Song, and by extension the practice of Christian wisdom.

For the giver of the Spirit and of spiritual charisms pours into the angels themselves all the *theoriae*, which will then be carried into the hierarchy of our [mind] by the angels, and he both collects and prepares the multitude of these *theoriae* in himself with a simple Word like a fountain, just as infinite lines flow from a simple point in the center, *Div. Names 2: in whatever way*.⁴²

The *theoriae* are the eternal reasons which, as contained in the Word, play a crucial role in the soul's union with and assimilation to the Word, both of which are, as we will see, attainable at least in part thanks to the intellect, but especially the affect. By engaging with the *theoriae*, the soul knows the eternal Word itself. Yet it knows it only in the way one person knows the inner word of another. By grasping the meaning of the inner word of another, one knows that person intimately, but not exhaustively.

ii. The bridegroom as the voice of the Word

Having described Gallus's theology of the Word and the important place of the *theoriae*, and before turning to the second primary character of the Song, it remains to treat briefly the historical situation and significance of Gallus's interpretation of the bridegroom as the Word. As Ann Matter has shown, commentaries on the Song in the West made up a distinct sub-genre, the origins of which can be traced primarily to Origen

⁴² SS3.5.H, 202: "Omnes enim theorias, in nostrum hierarchiam per angelos deferendas, ipse sponsus, dator Spiritus et spiritualem charismatum, influit ipsis angelis, et earum theoriarum multitudinem in se simplici Verbo colligit fontaliter et conficit, sicut ex simplici puncto de centro fluunt line infinite, *De div. nom. 2: quemadmodum*."

of Alexandria (185-254).⁴³ By identifying the bridegroom specifically as the Word, Gallus is in harmony with an Origenian spiritual interpretation.

Song interpretation by Christians in the West presumed the multivocality of linguistic reference in spiritual interpretation. Though interpreters sometimes examined in a literal way certain aspects of the Song, as does Gallus, for the most part commentators advanced allegorical, tropological, and anagogical interpretations of the dialogue between the bride and the bridegroom. As figurative characters, the bridegroom stood for the divine (though the exact aspect varied—e.g., God, Christ, Jesus, Word, etc.), while the bride stood for institutions (e.g., the Church) or the human being (e.g., the soul). Origen himself advanced the interpretation of the bridegroom as the Word of God, the primary *epinoia* or “aspect” of the Son, but he interpreted the bride as either the human soul or the Church.

Following Origen on this latter interpretation, early medieval readers saw the Song as primarily a dialogue between a bridegroom Christ and his bride the Church. Gregory the Great and Bede both advance this interpretation. In the 12th century, Honorius Augustodunensis continued this allegorical tradition while augmenting it with awareness of tropological and anagogical alternatives. Among the Cistercians, the tropological reading dominated. For Bernard of Clairvaux, the Song is a drama between the soul and God (or sometimes the Word), while William of St. Thierry identifies the bridegroom with Christ. Increasingly, following some passages in Origen, interpretation of the bridegroom from the 12th century forward identifies him with the Word incarnate in the suffering Christ. A separate tradition of reading the bridegroom and bride as Jesus

⁴³ Matter, *Voice of My Beloved*, 20-48.

and Mary—representative authors include Rupert of Deutz and Alan of Lille—likewise focuses the interpretation on the specific incarnation of the human Christ.⁴⁴

This cursory overview is meant to show that Gallus is fairly unique among Song commentators in identifying the bridegroom so consistently with the *eternal* Word who contains the principles of the created order. In fact, Gallus only twice refers to “Christ the bridegroom (*Christus sponsus*)” in the Song commentaries, and in both instances he is constrained by his use of a passage of scripture that would more naturally be associated with ‘Christ’ than ‘the Word.’⁴⁵ Only once does he mention “the incarnate Word (*Verbum incarnatum*),” and this in a context where the bride likens the bridegroom to a “fruitful tree,” which Gallus associates with Jesus’s claim to be “the bread of life.”⁴⁶ Given how robustly physical and natural is the rhetoric of the Song, suggesting a natural identification between the bridegroom and the human Jesus, this is significant. For Gallus, the bridegroom is the eternal Word poured out or exteriorized in creation, incarnation, scripture, and particular instances of contemplative union.

It is important to remember that, though Gallus’s is a more “cosmic” than “incarnate” christology, the Word’s close association with the bridegroom shows how highly *personal* Gallus understands the Word to be. Though he is clearly influenced by Christian Neoplatonism, the commentaries exhibit no evidence of an impersonal or unrelatable Word—only a sometimes absent, complex, and elusive Word. Thanks to the voice of the bridegroom, the Word is highly personified.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ All of these are treated extensively in Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved*.

⁴⁵ See, for example, SS2.2.A, 78, and SS3.4.C, 178.

⁴⁶ SS3.2.B, 146.

⁴⁷ Here it may be helpful to compare the significant work done in recent decades, especially by feminist scholars, on the personification of Wisdom in the later medieval

B. Voice of the Bride

Of course, the Song is not a treatise on the Word. Rather, as Gallus understands it, it is a practical representation of the intercourse between the Word and the soul in unitive contemplation. As we saw in Chapter 1, the reformation or restoration of the soul was a central concern of the Victorine pedagogy of sacred literature. Consequently, Gallus is thoroughly attentive to the soul, and the way the Word influences the mind. His hierarchization of the soul, for instance, has been treated in most contemporary accounts of his work, and is spelled out fully in his prologue to the third commentary on the Song.⁴⁸ Yet, the aim of the work is not the reformation of a broken soul, needing to be re-hierarchized. Gallus's mental hierarchy is a kind of map or underlying structure of the mind, as it were, not an edifice built by contemplative effort.⁴⁹ Instead, Gallus's goal might best be summed up by the problem indicated in his phrase "infirmity of capacity" (*infirmitas capacitatis*).⁵⁰ That is, the mind, the highest part of the soul, is limited in its capacity to receive direct inpouring of the Word of God, and needs to be exercised in contemplation toward a greater and greater reception. Because this mental hierarchization is well-trodden in scholarship on Gallus, but also critical to understanding the

period. See, for example, Barbara Newman's *God and the Goddesses*, 190-244. Once again, Gallus's work, if not a direct influence, may be something akin to these later trends in what Newman calls "theological imagination."

⁴⁸ Gallus's hierarchized mind is central to the analyses of McGinn, "Thomas Gallus and Dionysian Mysticism"; and Coolman, "The Victorines."

⁴⁹ At least Gallus seems to presume the existence of a hierarchically ordered mind already. There is no indication the hierarchical ordering itself is the result of prior contemplative effort, as one might expect, given Augustine's pleas that God repair "the house" of his soul (*Confessions*, 1.5), or Hugh of St. Victor's instruction to build an ark in the soul in which Christ might dwell, in his masterwork on contemplation, *Noah's Ark*.

⁵⁰ SS2.5.B, 102.

commentaries, in this sub-section I will briefly describe Gallus's terms related to the soul that have some basis in the Augustinian and Victorine accounts, before rehearsing Gallus's hierarchization of the soul. Finally, I will briefly comment on why the soul is so hierarchized.

i. The Soul and the Mind

Gallus follows Augustine and the Victorines with his interest in both the soul (*anima*) and the mind (*mens*), even as he goes beyond them. Augustine had held that the mind was the highest part of the soul, even deiform or trinitarian in structure. While Gallus at times seems to use the terms interchangeably, his preference is to use the term "mind" more frequently, suggesting that he takes the Augustinian understanding for granted. He tends to use "soul" instead of "mind" only when the Song or other sacred writing with which he is engaged has first used the term "soul." That is, the mind, the highest part of the soul, is the primary object of Gallus's attention, but, since the entire sequence of the Song portrays an exercise of the mind which increases the soul's capacity for union with the Word, "soul" and "mind" become largely synonymous. Put another way, the Song commentaries treat the soul primarily in its highest mental activities: those of the intellect (*intellectus*) and the affect (*affectus*).⁵¹

The result is a sophisticated theological account of mental exercise. While the commentaries exhibit a traditional mental vocabulary—imagination (*imaginatio*), image (*fantasia*), reason (*ratio*), knowledge (*cognitio*), and understanding (*intellectio*) all

⁵¹ So not only would it be difficult to tease out the relationship between "soul" and "mind" in Gallus's commentaries (as he is unconcerned with the issue), it is not necessary to understand his theology.

appear—the Song represents a Christian mental exercise that, thanks to divine grace, goes beyond the ordinary exercise of these powers, however diligently they may be exerted. Instead, the voices of the Song perform the drawing of the soul’s affect (*affectus*) and intellect (*intellectus*) by the Word of God. More specifically, the Song’s various encounters, movements, spaces, objects, and exhortations can be mined for spiritual insight into how the mind’s affect and intellect are exercised in order to unite and assimilate the soul to the Word. Thus, Gallus’s attention to the mind, affect, and intellect is due to the particular nature of the exercise discerned in the Song commentaries. It culminates the disciplining of body and soul in the practice of regular life, especially the pedagogy of reading treated in Chapter 1.

ii. The Angelic Hierarchy of the Mind in the Commentaries

Gallus’s major innovation with regard to the soul was inspired by a short, enigmatic statement, largely ignored by other scholars of Dionysius, in the tenth chapter of *Celestial Hierarchy*. In it, Dionysius states: “And I may well add this, that the mind itself, whether celestial or human, has its own first, middle, and last orders and powers agreeing with each of the hierarchic illuminations.”⁵² With Dionysius’s blessing Gallus divides the mind into three hierarchies of three orders each and applies to each order one of the names of the nine orders of angels treated by Dionysius in *Celestial Hierarchy*.

These orders are not faculties of the mind, nor are they checkpoints for an aspiring mind

⁵² SS3.Prologue.C, 107-8: “Angelica hierarchia 10b: addam et hoc non inconvenienter quod secundum seipsam unaqueque et celestis et humana mens speciales habet et primas et medias et ultimas ordinationes et virtutes addictas secundum unamquamque hierarchicarum illuminationum, etc.” Notice how consonant this verse would have been with Gallus’s Augustinian instinct to already see the mind as deific or trinitarian. As we saw in Ch. 2, a hierarchy is that which deifies and unifies to God.

ascending upward. Rather, they provide something like a superstructure or map for the powers and activities of the mind, and especially the affect and intellect. In general, they are arranged on a scale of the extent to which the activity that takes place in each order is attributable to, on the lower end, human effort, or to, on the higher end, divine grace. So for instance, Gallus says the lowest hierarchy of three orders is entirely of nature; the middle, of the cooperation of human effort and grace; and the highest, of grace alone. Again, this model of the mind is one that does not presume the autonomous operation of a self-governing individual, but has room by design for the mind's 'practice' to be 'effected' or 'carried out' by another.

Gallus's description of the mental hierarchy is clearly and prominently depicted in his prologues to both existing Song commentaries.⁵³ Starting with the lowest order of the "Angels," he begins to rehearse the lowest of the three hierarchies, the hierarchy of nature alone. In the angelic order are basic perceptions or observations of the world, without yet any judgment of these observations, which begin to occur in the second order of the "Archangels." This judgment discerns whether what is observed is agreeable or disagreeable. In the highest order of the lowest hierarchy, the "Principalities," the mind either longs for what was judged agreeable or desires to flee from what was judged disagreeable. These are all basic operations which can and should be conducted well, but which do not yet carry out any good.

In the middle hierarchy, where effort and grace cooperate, the fourth order of the "Powers" involves the initial activities of reason, intellect, and affect—mental powers

⁵³ SS2.Prologue, 66-7; SS3.Prologue.C-P, 107-10. The mental hierarchy's prominent display in the prologues, its uniqueness, and the thoroughgoing use to which Gallus puts it, have all ensured it plays a key role in the interpretation of Gallus by nearly every contemporary reader.

that, applied to the judgments of the Principalities, begin to orient the mind toward good and away from evil. In the fifth order, the “Virtues,” natural force and the force of grace are added to the initial movements of intellect and affect in the “Powers.” Finally, the sixth order, the “Dominions,” culminates the mind’s effort and with the command of free will suspends the intellect and affect “in order to receive divine interventions (*ad suscipiendum divinos superadventus*).”⁵⁴ Here, Gallus claims, the mind “is stretched and exercised (*extenditur et exercetur*)... to the highest limits of its nature (*ad summos nature sue terminos*).”⁵⁵ In the Song commentaries Gallus hardly mentions the lowest hierarchy, and his (still seldom) treatment of the middle hierarchy is typically focused on the mind’s act of suspension (*suspensio*) in the Dominions.

Because the Song treats the ‘practice’ of Christian wisdom, which goes beyond what pagan philosophers can know through their own diligent effort, the bride-soul and bridegroom-Word primarily encounter one another in the highest hierarchy of the mind, after the intellect and affect have suspended their own effortful operations and now operate “in excess” (*in excessum*) of the mind, as it were. Here the soul’s “suspension” does not mean the end of its “practice.” Rather, Gallus’s rhetoric becomes even more fervid when discussing the highest hierarchy. The lowest order of this highest hierarchy, the “Thrones,” “receives divine interventions through excess of the mind.”⁵⁶ The name “Thrones” aptly represents the multiple receptive “cavities” or “capacities” of the mind for “the supersubstantial ray” of divine light. Thus, at the “hinge” between the Dominions

⁵⁴ SS3.Prologue.I-K, 108.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ SS3.Prologue.L, 109: “Septimus ordo per mentis excessum susceptivus est superadventus divini...”

and the Thrones, suspension of the mind's greatest powers, intellect and affect, gives way to the reception of divine grace that heightens the activity of intellect and affect.⁵⁷

The "Cherubim" are the penultimate order, which contains the knowledge (*cognitio*) of both intellect and affect as they have been drawn or attracted by divine grace beyond the mind. At this point, Gallus adds, intellect and affect have "walked together up to the final failure of the intellect, which is at the summit of this order."⁵⁸ Though intellect and affect are the two powers of the mind that can be drawn "in excess" beyond the mind itself, the intellect cannot be drawn as far as the affect.⁵⁹

The ninth and final order, the "Seraphim," contains "only the principal affection, which can be united to God (*sola principalis affectio Deo unibilis*)."⁶⁰ This is the site of the mind's experiential or affective union with the Word, whom it "embraces," and in whose "embraces" it "is enveloped." Thus, while the mind's Seraphic order is the site of most intimate encounter between the soul and the Word, the union which occurs there, in excess of the mind, is one Gallus stylizes as a relation modeled primarily on the most heightened moments of bride-bridegroom union in the Song.

As we will see, Gallus sees evidence of the angelic hierarchy of the mind and its operations spiritually signified in every chapter of the Song. In fact, Gallus's expansive description of mental "space" allows for an allegorical reading of the landscapes and bodyscapes, as it were, of the Song. That is, if one of the primary features of allegory

⁵⁷ I am indebted to Boyd Taylor Coolman's exposition of two major "hinges" in the mental hierarchy in Gallus's thought—between the Dominions and Thrones, when the mind is suspended, and between the Cherubim and Seraphim, when the affect proceeds beyond where the intellect can go. Coolman, *Knowledge, Love, and Ecstasy*, 137, 143.

⁵⁸ SS3.Prologue.M, 109: "...quasi coambulant affectus et intellectus usque ad novissimam defectum intellectus qui est in summitate huius ordinis cherubim..."

⁵⁹ I traced the reasons for this in Chapter 4, 216-26.

⁶⁰ SS3.Prologue.N, 109.

distinguishing it from metaphor or other analogous literary terms is that each element in a text has an alternative significance, then Gallus's hierarchization of the mind facilitates the deep and thorough exposition of the significance of each element of the Song.

Yet, Gallus's hierarchization of the soul was, if he is to be believed, something he had worked out early in his career, long before his extensive study of the Song. A more probable explanation for it is that it allows for a more sophisticated account of both human and divine operations and their effects on the mind in contemplation. As we saw in Chapter 1, contemplation was always a primary goal of the Victorine curriculum of sacred reading, and it is possible to read the development of Victorine literature as an ever-more-sophisticated theorization of the highest stages in that curriculum, culminating in Gallus's writings.

C. "The Voice of my Beloved"

As we have seen, the distinct voices of the bride and the bridegroom symbolically represent important aspects of Gallus's theology—the soul and the Word, respectively. As distinct as these two are, they share an important characteristic. In Gallus's interpretation the complex geographical, corporeal, and natural objects and events belonging to both the bride and the bridegroom symbolize how both the soul and the Word invite a complex or multifaceted encounter with one another. The bridegroom's *theoriae*, represented variously in every chapter of the Song, become a complex landscape of visible things contained by the Word, in which the bridal soul can journey, becoming familiar, experienced. The *theoriae* lead the soul to increasingly more intimate encounters with the eternal Word. In turn, the bride's mental hierarchy provides the sites

of divine encounter with the Word, who influences (literally, “pours into,” *in-fluere*) the practice or exercise of the soul at every stage.

The way both the *theoriae* and the mental hierarchy mutually multiply or proliferate the two voices, as it were, has not before been noticed. On the one hand, one might interpret this multiplication or increasing complexity of both the soul and the Word as a practicality of spiritual interpretation. If the Song was to serve as a spiritual allegory for the soul and the Word, some sense must be made of its abounding images of flora and fauna, corporeal members and various utterances, military men and attending virgins. Perhaps Gallus spends so much time multiplying the soul and the Word in order to meet the demands of allegorical interpretation for each image to symbolize something.

Applying Constance Furey’s injunction to attend to intimacy and relation, however, helps us to see what else is going on here. Gallus’s commentaries on the Song do not produce static characters, abstracted from their social environment. Instead, his interpretation of these characters includes their mutual imbrication or interweaving, which he sees as evidence in the Song, that is, the ways the characters’ actions and intentions are attributable not solely to themselves. The *theoriae* and the mental hierarchies allow Gallus to theorize the ways that the mind is drawn and the Word condescends in contemplation—the ways each goes beyond, in excess, or even ecstasy, of itself. If the soul and the Word ought to be thought of in terms of relation, rather than as abstracted from one another, what kind of relation is it that Gallus performs in his interpretation?

III. Spiritual Interpretation: Speaking Effectively and Experientially

While there is a certain symmetry to the voices of the Song, Gallus typically describes these two voices of the text, the bride's and bridegroom's, as operating differently. The bride, he repeats, speaks "experientially" (*experientialiter*); the bridegroom, "effectively" (*effective*). Despite the ubiquity of these terms in the commentaries, this has seldom been commented upon.⁶¹ Yet, an analysis of the rhetoric of effectivity and experience reveals an understanding of practice and exercise that may be unfamiliar to modern readers, because it does not presume the exertion of individual effort. Rather, for Gallus, contemplative exercise is a matter of effected experience, dramatized by the utterance of the bride and bridegroom.

In this section, I begin by examining the rhetoric of *effectivity* in relation to the voice of the bridegroom before moving to describe the *experiential* voice of the bride. What might it mean theologically for Gallus to call some of the Song's utterance "effective" and some "experiential"? In the final section, I show that Gallus's aim to perform the 'practice' of experiential union leads to sudden slippages or shiftings between these typical relations.⁶² The ineffable *unitio experientialis* occurring between

⁶¹ This despite the fact that these terms are used more often than other major terms like 'abundance' (*abundantia*), 'ascent' (*ascensus*), 'joining' (*coniunctio*), 'excess' (*excessus*), 'stretching' (*extensio*), 'prayer' (*oratio*), 'separation' (*separatio*), and 'uplifting' (*sursumactio*). Contemporary readers have largely ignored the adverbs 'experientially' (*experientialiter*) and 'effectively' (*effective*), focusing on nouns like 'affect' (*affectus*), 'angels' (*angeli*), 'contemplation' (*contemplatio*), 'hierarchy' (*hierarchia*), 'intellect' (*intellectus*), 'wisdom' (*sapientia*), 'softness' (*suavitas*), 'spectacles' (*theoriae*), and 'union' (*unitio*), and verbs such as 'embrace' (*amplexari*), 'desire' (*desiderare*), 'stretch' (*extendere*), 'pour in' (*influere*), 'suspend' (*suspendere*), and 'lift up' (*sursumagere*).

⁶² These relations beg an analysis according to gender. Gallus's spiritual interpretation of the bride and bridegroom as the soul and Christ was the continuation of a long tradition, not only in Song commentary, of casting the life of male religious in bridal imagery. When male religious took advantage of female imagery to stylize their own relations to the divine, this could result in the reinforcement of patriarchal gender

the bride and bridegroom both makes the bride's voice itself effective and even entices the bridegroom himself to seek the bride's experience.

A. "For the bridegroom speaks effectively..." (*effective enim loquitur sponsus*)

Over and over Gallus writes that the bridegroom "speaks effectively." Because the bridegroom is spiritually understood to be the divine Word itself, when the bridegroom speaks, his "word is deed (*dictum est factum*)."⁶³ That is, his divine utterance brings about what it says. The speech which comes from the voice of the bridegroom is thus taken to be more effective than the bride's human speech, because it is, in fact, the principle of everything effected. If, as we have seen, the theology of the Word stressed the causal activity of divine utterance in creating and ordering the cosmos, what does the bridegroom's *dictum* effect in the Song? Gallus describes the bridegroom's efficacy primarily in relation to the bride, spiritually understood to be the soul. A careful analysis shows that the transformation of the bride effected in the Song occurs primarily through the bridegroom's effecting (or, making efficacious) three "principal exercises of the mind"—1) *unveiling of the mind*; 2) *adaptation for union*; and, 3) *most chaste prayer*. To say that "the bridegroom speaks effectively" in the Song is to credit the bridegroom with

relations. See Engh, *Gendered Identities*. Beyond the complications of the particularly gendered socio-cultural arrangement of canon life (Augustinian canons' interactions with women were regulated by religious discipline), the identification of the soul with bridal imagery in Gallus's commentaries is even more complicated. Though in many ways Gallus's interpretation of the imagery may have reinforced traditional (binary) social relations, the fact that the Song suggested to Gallus that experiential union disrupts the norms of matrimonial speech (with the bride and bridegroom subtly shifting roles) means his own commentaries may align the goal of mystical theology with a more fluid or ambiguous disciplining of gender. An analysis of Gallus's writings from a gender critical perspective would be welcome.

⁶³ SS2.1.G, 76.

the experiential union of the bride, carried out through this discipline. Examples abound of the bridegroom effecting or making effective (Gallus subtly and significantly suggests both) each of the three “principal exercises of the mind,” which derive from Gallus’s reading of the *CD*.⁶⁴

i. Unveiling of the Mind (*revelatio mentis*)

The unveiling of the mind (*revelatio mentis*) is an exercise in clearing away obstacles to experiential union, in the manner of Dionysian “unknowing.” These obstacles range from lingering desires for worldly things to the very objects of rational speculation that provide the prerequisite steps of contemplation. Ultimately, following the *CD*, they all needed to be mentally removed. At one passage (1:12), wherein the voice of the bride describes an especially intimate contact with the Word, Gallus states how union demands the removal of obstacles:

He will abide between my breasts, that is, as if joined breast to breast, that is, with the Word to the word, himself to me, he will rest so much more lingeringly with me as the stumbling blocks of separation are mortified more effectively (*efficacius*).⁶⁵

Not only did this removal of stumbling blocks lead to greater unification with the bridegroom, it was also carried out by the bridegroom himself. The “hand of the lover excludes effectively (*efficaciter*)... it shuts out adulterous suggestions most effectively

⁶⁴ In DN 3.1, Dionysius invokes what Gallus calls “the three principal exercises,” as the means to the presence of the Good: *castissimae orationes* (πανάγναι εὐχαί), *mens revelata* (ἀνεπιθόλωτος νοῦς), and *aptitudo ad divinam unionem* (ἡ πρὸς θεῖαν ἔνωσιν ἐπιτηδειότης).

⁶⁵ SS2.1.F, 75: “**inter ubera mea commorabitur**, id est quasi pectore ad pectus coniunctus, id est verbo ad verbum, se ad me, tanto morosius mecum requiescat quanto separationis offencicula efficacius mortificantur.”

(*efficacissime*).”⁶⁶ That is, the Word removes or blocks out impetuses toward anything but itself. Again, these “adulterous” impetuses could be toward the active life (if a good to a Victorine like Gallus, still a lesser good), but contemplation demanded they be finally withdrawn. The contemplative life sent the bride “on hard journeys, which, as she is more freely able, the bridegroom says effectively (*sponsus effective dicit*) that the obstacles are small.”⁶⁷ That is, the Word makes small or clears away the impediments to union, the very veils, as it were, that made possible the soul’s earlier advancement.

Though Gallus reads the Song as primarily treating the experiential heights of contemplative fervor, he finds it often alludes to these implied prerequisite steps of contemplation, which need to be left behind.⁶⁸ Gallus emphasizes how the bridegroom’s utterance effects the mental exercise. When the voice of the bridegroom exhorts in 2:15, “Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes / who destroy our vineyards,” Gallus allegorizes the foxes as “the inordinate desires for a stimulant (*fomitis inordinatas concupiscentias*).”⁶⁹ These “foxes” may even “spread crafty treacheries under some appearance of good in rational and intellectual power, so that in some way they may draw the suspended heavenly mind downward.”⁷⁰ That is, it is necessary to leave behind even these good rational and intellectual exercises. When the bridegroom exhorts to catch these desires, “consider that the bridegroom here speaks effectively (*effective loquitur*) in

⁶⁶ SS3.1.K, 136: “...manum adulteri efficaciter excludunt... et efficacissime arcet adulterinas suggestiones;”

⁶⁷ SS3.2.H, 155: “...ad dura itinera, quod, ut ipsa liberius possit, sponsus effective dicit *diminuta esse offendicula, Eccli. 17*”

⁶⁸ Gallus treats these in his short treatise, *Spectacula Contemplationis*.

⁶⁹ SS3.2.N, 163.

⁷⁰ SS2.2.F, 83-4: “...in vi rationali et intellectuali sub aliqua boni specie callidas insidias, ut quolibet modo suspensam in supernam mentem deorsum trahant...” Notice also here the distinction between good rational and intellectual development, and the suspension of the mind (*suspensio mentis*) heavenward.

the plural to the middle hierarchy of the mind to which this office especially pertains.”⁷¹ Recall that Gallus’s “middle hierarchy” (made up of Powers, Virtues, and Dominions) contains initial movements of intellect and affect, deliberation and pursuit of the good and avoidance of evil, and suspension of the mind. By speaking, the bridegroom makes effective these movements of the middle hierarchy (operating by both nature and grace) and ultimately suspends the bride in preparation for her own ecstasy. The Word graciously calms or dampens the effortful movements of the middle hierarchy of the mind, so that it may draw the mind beyond itself.

ii. Adaptation for Union (*aptitudo ad unionem*)

While *revelatio mentis* is an important principal exercise for the “wisdom of Christians,” Gallus most often uses the rhetoric of the bridegroom’s efficacy in relation to the second “principal exercise of the mind” at work in the Song: adaptation for union (*aptitudo ad unionem*). The bridegroom’s voice brings about the bride’s transformation, which Gallus describes in many ways, reflecting the unintelligibility of this union itself. Under this broad category of adaptation for union, Gallus describes moments when the voice of the bridegroom is said to effectively draw, dilate, nourish, beautify, simplify, and of course, unify the bride. Let us look at an example of each way Gallus describes the adaptation for union and his attribution of each to the bridegroom’s effectiveness.

The voice of the bridegroom, says Gallus, effectively attracts the bride, drawing and raising her to union, performing the very action he enjoins of her. Consider the

⁷¹ SS3.2.N, 163: “et attende quod sponsus hic effective loquitur pluraliter ordinibus medie hierarchie mentis ad quorum officium specialiter hoc pertinent...”

following example, where Gallus glosses the bride's voice reporting the bridegroom's summons:

“And by radiating so subtly to me, **my beloved spoke** by means of effect (*per effectum*): **arise**, that is, make me rise by unknowing (*fac me consurgere ignote*) higher than before in fervent affect (*affectu*)...” and behold it signifies that she approaches continually through those ascents to a more familiar presence.⁷²

The bridegroom exhorts the bride to arise, raising her himself (*per effectum*). To drive home the point, when the voice shifts to the bridegroom's with “**arise**,” Gallus's gloss remains in the bride's voice (“make me rise”). When the bridegroom speaks, it affects the bride. When the Word speaks, it affects the soul. Similarly, Gallus describes another imperative of the bridegroom as effective (at 6:12): “The bridegroom, compassionate to the fallen bride, effectively (*effective*) calls back to her, saying, **return**, from the lower hierarchies.”⁷³ These two examples show that the bridegroom's exhortation of the bride signifies that the Word affects and attracts the soul. It carries out its own act of summoning.

The bridegroom, in turn, effectively incites the bride to draw and receive him as well, which Gallus finds in the Song's highly metaphorical language. On 2:1 (“I am the flower of the field”) Gallus glosses, “The bridegroom speaks effectively (*sponsus loquitur effective*): invite me, bride, to the flowery little bed, which indeed is decorated

⁷² SS2.2.D, 81: “Et mihi tam subtiliter irradiante, **dilectus meus locutus est** per effectum: **surge**, id est fac me consurgere ignote superius quam prius ferventi affect... en et ecce significat quod assidue accredit per istos ascensus ad presentiam magis familiarem.”

⁷³ SS3.6.G, 214: “Sponsus sponse delapse compatiens, effective eandem ad se revocat dicens: **revertere** de virtutibus in dominationes, **revertere** de dominationes in thronos, **revertere** de thronis in cherubim, **revertere** de cherubim in seraphim...”

with flowers by me, and I stretch your little bed into the wideness of a field.”⁷⁴ Clearly, this is far from a literal interpretation of this verse. It signifies that the Word incites the affected soul, transforming it by dilating or opening it up. When the bridegroom calls himself “the flower of the field,” he “stretches (*extendere*)” the “flowery little bed” that Gallus had identified before as the “inner part of the mind,” small because simplified, “in order that it might fit” the “immensity of the bridegroom.”⁷⁵ This act of dilation of the mind is again carried out by the bridegroom. Gallus confirms this in *SS2* on the same passage:

But the bridegroom calmly lingering on the same bridal-bed and inflowing the more fertile fervors and splendors of lights, expands (*dilatata*) the bed itself, as it were, into a field and he speaks with the very effect (*ipso effectu loquitur*): **I am the flower of the field**, that is, I, expanding (*dilatans*) plentifully out of myself with your capacity for my magnitude (because the individual “flower” is in the singular), fill you up with the multiplex fragrance of sweetness.⁷⁶

This act of dilation is especially prominent in Gallus’s commentaries on the *CD*. Notice that, while the bride is often engaged in an exercise of stretching herself, here Gallus describes this as a function of the bridegroom’s effective utterance. Just as the Word draws the soul, inciting desire and movement, it also stretches it for reception.

This last passage on the flowering dilation effected by the bridegroom also suggests another way Gallus describes the principal exercise of *aptitudo ad unionem*: the soul is nourished with “the multiplex fragrance of sweetness.”⁷⁷ Similarly, to the

⁷⁴ *SS3.2.A*, 144: “Sponsus loquitur effective: invitas me, o sponsa, ad lectulum floridum, qui quidem me flore ornatur, et tuum lectulum extend in campi latitudinem...”

⁷⁵ *SS3.1.P*, 142.

⁷⁶ *SS2.2.A*, 77: “Sponsus vero in eodem lectulo quietius commorans et uberiores luminum fervores et splendors influens, ipsum lectum dilatata quasi in campum et ipso effectu loquitur: **ego sum flos campi**, id est ego te capacitate mee magnitudinis dilatans copiose ex me, flore personaliter singulari, multiplici odore suavitatis te repleo...”

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

bride's claim, "a grape cluster of cypress is my beloved to me" (1:13), Gallus inserts the adverb, "effectively."⁷⁸ He adds in the voice of the bride, "that is, pouring into me abundantly the sweetness of his substance, beyond a mirror and enigmas, which cease with the intellect and do not have a place in the superintellectual union..."⁷⁹ That is, the dilation of the mind by the Word results in the mind's nourishment, when it receives the sweetnesses of affective contemplation. In another passage (5:1), the bride and bridegroom invite one another to "come into his garden" and eat. When the bridegroom relates what he eats (honeycomb and honey), Gallus adds,

Therefore the sense is as if the bridegroom speaks effectively (*sponsus effective dicat*) to the bride: I incorporate, as it were, certain new and copious supereffluent things of my light, absorbing you entirely to me, I make [you] pass over into me, and I deify [you] with my assimilation and union...⁸⁰

That is, the bridegroom, himself the one who inflows sweetness to the bride, in turn receives her. The soul receives from the Word and, in turn, is assimilated and united to the Word, nourished by incorporation.

These two passages (1:13 and 5:1), interpreted by Gallus, show a mutual eating. The bride eats her "grape cluster of cypress," while the bridegroom eats his honeycomb and honey. Gallus reinforces this mutuality, implying that the bride's nourishment is effected by it. "The bridegroom eating and drinking the bride, as was said, is eaten and drunk more effectively (*efficacius*) by her, *Eccli. 24: whoever eats me still will be hungry*

⁷⁸ "my beloved... he is to me effectively a grape cluster of cypress..." ("dilectus meus... est mihi effective botrus cypri") SS3.1.N, 140.

⁷⁹ Ibid.: "id est, influens mihi ubertim substantie sue dulcedinem, super speculum et enigma, que eum intellectu cessant et in superintellectuali unitione locum non habent..."

⁸⁰ SS3.5.B, 191: "Est ergo sensus ac si sponsus effective dicat sponse: nova quadam et copiosa luminis mei te totam absorbentis supereffluentia mini quasi incorporo, in me transire facio et mei assimilation et unitione deifico..."

and whoever drinks me still will thirst.”⁸¹ Here the Song suggested to Gallus that adaptation for union, a principal exercise of the mind, occurs through an interchange of sweetnesses, as it were, effected by the Word. By receiving from the Word, the soul may be received by the Word. Again however, Gallus’s rhetoric of effectivity emphasizes that this mutual eating is to be attributed to the bridegroom, even if this is one passage where the Song’s reciprocal eroticism seems to press on the irreciprocal participatory relation between the Word and the soul.⁸²

Gallus’s most common use of the rhetoric of effectivity to describe the soul’s adaptation for union occurs with the most frequent refrain of the Song, the bridegroom’s proclamation, “you are beautiful.” For Gallus, the adaptation for union (*aptitudo ad unionem*) is primarily a beautification of the soul. For example in SS2, “**Behold you are beautiful.** Therefore the bride filled with those splendors... is marvelously beautified by the bridegroom, whose word is deed. Therefore he effectively says (*effective dicit*) to her: **behold you are beautiful.**”⁸³ On the same passage in SS3, “**Behold you are beautiful.** The bridegroom, having been made a bundle of myrrh and a grape cluster of cypress for the bride, speaks to her effectively (*effective ei loquitur*).”⁸⁴ Not only does the Word draw,

⁸¹ Ibid, 192: “Sponsus comedens et bibens sponsam, ut dictum est, efficacius ab ea comeditur et bibitur, *Eccli. 24: qui edunt me adhuc esurient et qui bibunt me adhuc sitient.*”

⁸² The Song’s mutual eroticism makes an awkward bedfellow with Neoplatonism, creating tensions throughout Gallus’s commentaries. In this passage, Gallus affirms reciprocal indwelling, while attributing the practice entirely to the Word.

⁸³ SS2.1.G, 76: “**Ecce tu pulchra.** Istis ergo splendoribus sponsa repleta... mirabiliter pulchrificatur a sponso, cuius dictum est factum; unde effective dicit ei: **ecce tu pulchra...**”

⁸⁴ SS3.1.O, 141: “**Ecce tu pulchra es.** Sponsus, factus sponse fasciculus myrrhe et botrus cypri, effective ei loquitur...”

dilate, and fill the soul with contemplative splendors, but it transforms the soul aesthetically, making it beautiful in preparation for union.⁸⁵

Gallus describes this effected beautification in more detail as the bridegroom praises particular comely features of the bride. For instance,

Your cheeks are beautiful. The bridegroom as it were in the first Seraph of the mind, now effectively praises (*effective laudat*) the two inferior orders, nevertheless coordinated with him, namely the Cherubim and the Thrones, which, with the Seraphim mediating, are beautified by the bridegroom; this is what the bridegroom says effectively (*effective loquitur*) to the bride in the seraphic order.⁸⁶

This passage helpfully describes how beautification, or adaptation for union, occurs. The seraphic order of the mind is the site of divine affectation or initial reception of divine nourishment, which is then passed along effectively by the bridegroom, to the lower orders of the bride's mind—here the two lower orders of the highest hierarchy. Not only the affect, but the intellect is beautified by the Word, allowing for greater union with and more copious inflowing from it.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ The beautification of the soul suggests that the Word may in turn be affected or enticed by the soul. Despite Gallus's identification of the bridegroom primarily with the eternal Word (rather than the suffering or incarnate Christ), he allows for the text's presentation of the bridegroom's passions. He is only sometimes anxious to qualify them, stating at times, for instance, that the bride's beauty can refer to the soul finding the Word beautiful.

⁸⁶ SS3.1.K, 136: "**Pulchre sunt gene tue.** Sponsus quasi primo seraphim mentis, nunc effective laudat duos ordines inferiores, eidem tamen coordinatos, scilicet cherubim et thronos, qui, mediante seraphim, a sponso pulchrificantur; hoc est quod sponsus effective loquitur in suo seraphico ordine..."

⁸⁷ Given the strong 12th-century polemics around intellectual and religious life, and the Victorine school's reformist mentality, it is tempting to see Gallus's affectivization of the intellect as a social critique, the result of the growing acceptance of Aristotelian methods, or perhaps methodologizing in general, since it seems he is not antithetical toward "the Philosopher," but concerned with the limits of applying methods (here largely those associated with knowledge derived from the mental collation of sensible creation) without concern for limit and excess. While I am not comfortable judging Gallus's social motivations, since he leaves nothing like the social critique found

The passage 6:3-9, spoken in the voice of the bridegroom, is an encomium tracing the bride's physical features (one that incidentally echoes the bride's acclamation of the bridegroom's at 5:10-16). Gallus reads it as an extended description of the bridegroom's effective beautification of the entire mental hierarchy of the bride. It starts:

For the bridegroom speaks effectively: **Beautiful is my friend** by a beautifying (*pulchrifica*) beauty, *CH 7g: a beautifying and principle beauty* by which you will be effected (*efficieris*)... The bridegroom, having spoken effectively the foresaid things to the same bride, who rises by true unknowing and has been taken to the Thrones, Cherubim, and Seraphim, adds effectively: **Your hair... like a flock of goats...**⁸⁸

Gallus refers the reader to his earlier gloss in his treatment of the bride's encomium (5:11) to remind the reader that hairs, "which are subtle and rise from the highest part of the head, signify the subtle, principal, and first inflowings of *theoriae* in the Seraphim of the bride."⁸⁹ When the bridegroom praises the various beautiful aspects of the bride, it signifies the Word's beautification of the soul: effectively drawing, dilating, and inflowing gifts of graces to it.

The same encomium sums up this effective adaptation for union, when the bridegroom acclaims: "One is my dove, my perfect one." The Song itself seemed to suggest that the perfection of the soul is in being unified with and by the Word. It is no surprise that Gallus adds, "raising her and simplifying by leading up, he speaks

in the letters of Bernard of Clairvaux, for example, the early 13th century saw significant and controversial transformations in intellectual and religious life.

⁸⁸ SS3.6.B, 207-8: "Effective enim loquitur sponsus: **pulchra est amica mea** pulchritudine pulchrifica, *Ang. Hier. 7g: pulchrifice et principalis pulchritudinis* qua efficieris... Sponsus effective locutus predicta, sponse eidem vero surgenti ignote et in thronos, cherubim et seraphim assumpte, effective subiungit: **capilli tui... sicut greges caprarum...**"

⁸⁹ SS3.5.H, 201: "... que subtiles sunt et de summitate capitis oriuntur significant subtiles et principales et primas theoriarum influitiones in seraphim sponse."

effectively.”⁹⁰ This is the summation of the bridegroom’s effective work in transforming or deifying the bride through drawing, dilating, nourishing, and beautifying.

The highest perfection of the mind consists in the union beyond the mind (*unitione super mentem*)... whence, in the hierarchic operations, after purgation and illumination completing perfection occurs... Therefore he says that his bride is perfect because of the union of the principal affection (*propter principalis affectionis unitionem*) by which she is supported and clings truly perfectly to him...⁹¹

The Word is to be attributed with unveiling the mind and preparing it for experiential union, perfecting and uniting the mind to itself. The bridegroom’s utterance effects or carries out these two exercises of the bride in Christian wisdom. Again, in the highest hierarchy of the mind, the soul has suspended itself, but its exercise continues, directed by the divine Word.

iii. Most Chaste Prayer (*castissima oratio*)

Finally, the most frequently mentioned of the “three principal exercises of the mind” in *SS2* and *SS3* is most chaste prayer. “Most chaste prayer,” unlike “chaste prayer” and “more chaste prayer,” begs for the bridegroom himself, rather than his gifts. While it may be clearer how unveiling of the mind and adaptation for union are attributable to the bridegroom, Gallus insists that even most chaste prayer is effected by him. An extended look at how Gallus glosses 2:14b in both commentaries will reveal that even the exercise

⁹⁰ *SS3.6.D*, 210: “resuscitans ergo ipsam et sursumagendo simplicans, effective loquitur...”

⁹¹ *Ibid.*: “Summa mentis perfectio in unitione super mentem consistit... unde, in hierarchicis operationibus, post purgationem et illuminationem fit consummativa perfectio... Perfectam ergo suam dicit sponsam propter principalis affectionis unitionem qua sibi vere perfecte innititur et inheret...”

of most chaste prayer is effected by the Word. First, the passage upon which Gallus comments, spoken by the bridegroom:

Show me your face
Let your voice sound in my ears
For your voice is sweet
And your face is beautiful⁹²

Gallus's progressive gloss on the first couplet divides the two lines. In both commentaries, Gallus claims these lines are effectively spoken by the bridegroom. For instance, on the first line, Gallus writes in *SS2*:

[T]he bridegroom says effectively (*effective dicit*): **Show me your face**; that is, he presents me to himself and makes me present *with most chaste prayers, unveiling of the mind, adaptation for union, Div. Names 3a*; the face, the higher and more eminent and more beautiful part of the human being, signifies the order of Seraphim in which I am presented again to the bridegroom...⁹³

Notice that Gallus clearly attributes each of the three principal exercises derived from the *CD* to the bridegroom. Together, they make the bride present to the bridegroom. The soul is prepared by the Word for union with the Word, presenting the soul in excess of itself.

In *SS3*:

To the mind of the bride, frequently showered with superbeautiful clarities and by this made more receptive of divine lights, the bridegroom radiates to her more clearly than usual, and this is what he says effectively (*effective loquitur*) to her: “**Show me your face**. I having been showered with supersplendent rays, I present your highest hierarchy, the Seraphim, to myself again, and I make it give service to me”; *DN 3a: but then when we invoke it... we are present to him...*⁹⁴

⁹² “Ostende mihi faciem tuam
sonet vox tua in auribus meis
vox enim tua dulcis
et facies tua decora”

⁹³ *SS2.2.F*, 83: “sponse effective dicit: **ostende mihi faciem tuam**; id est me sibi presentat et adesse facit *castissimis orationibus, revelation mentis, aptitudine ad unionem, De div. nom. 3a*; facies, superior et eminentior et speciosior pars hominis, significat ordinem seraphim in quo sponso representor.”

⁹⁴ *SS3.2.M*, 162: “Perfusa frequenter mente sponse superpulchris claritatibus et facta per hoc divinorum luminum capaciore, solito clarius irradiat ei sponsus, et hoc est

The first passage concisely sums up how the bridegroom speaks effectively, by making the bride present through making her “three principal exercises of the mind” efficacious. The performance of these exercises is attractive and anagogic, bringing the soul before the Word. We have seen that the Word removes obstacles and transforms the soul for union, which occurs through the ecstasy of the mind in its highest hierarchy, the Seraphim. But how does the bridegroom effect the bride’s most chaste prayers, the voice of the bride itself?

Gallus’s glosses on the next line of the couplet are again fairly consistent across the two commentaries, and worth quoting at length. From *SS2*:

“**Let your voice sound**, always renewed, rising, and louder. Let your voice sound more audibly and clearly **in my ears** so that I may hear you clearly, and you may progress...” The bridegroom says this entire thing effectively, as if it were very pleasing to him.⁹⁵

And from *SS3*:

Let it sound, that is, let him speak effectively to you; **let your voice sound of most chaste prayers, DN 3a, in my ears**, that is, “it provokes me efficaciously (*efficaciter*) to hearing.” For he, the plenitude of largess and bountifulness, is provoked to hearing effectively, as long as he is asked greater things fittingly; but he is provoked to scorn, as it were, by asking for lesser gifts.⁹⁶

quod ei effective loquitur: **ostende mihi faciam tuam**. Ego perfusus supersplendentibus radiis tuam summam hierarchiam, seraphim mihi represento et assistere facio; *De div. nom.* 3a: *tunc autem quando ipsam invocamus, usque nos ipsi assumus;*”

⁹⁵ *SS2.2.F*, 83: “**Sonet vox tua**, semper innovate et crescens et clamiosior, sonnet valde audibiliter et exaudibiliter **in auribus** ut te exaudiam, et ad assiduous profectus, *David semper proficiscens, 2 Reg. 3a; Eccl. hier. 3c*. Hoc totum loquitur sponsus effective, tamquam sibi valde beneplacita.”

⁹⁶ *SS3.2.M*, 163: “**Sonet**, id est effective tibi loquatur; **sonat vox tua castissimarum orationum, De div. nom. 3a, **in auribus meis**, id est efficaciter me provocat ad exaudiendum. Plenitudo enim largitatis et munificentie tanto efficacius ad exaudiendum provocatur quanto maiora congrue postulatur; postulatione vero minorum munerum quasi ad dedignationem provocateur.”**

Just as with the first line of the couplet, Gallus clearly labels this hortatory line from the bridegroom as itself effective, carrying out that which it says. For the bridegroom to effectively say, “show me your face” and “let your voice sound” is for the Word to draw, beautify, and provoke the soul, making it present to the Word, and supplying it with most chaste prayers, its voiced desire for the Word itself. In effect, the bridegroom gives voice to the bride.

Yet, this passage also suggests that the effected voice of the bride (her most chaste prayers) also has become itself effective, in that, in turn, it provokes the bridegroom to hearing. This dynamic, that the voice of the bride is credited to the bridegroom but in turn has effect upon the bridegroom, echoes Gallus’s emphasis on the effected beautification of the soul by the Word. Being made strikingly beautiful, and being given most chaste prayers, allows the bride to in turn attract and affect, as it were, the bridegroom. There will be more to say about this below. For now, consider the following excerpt, which finishes up Gallus’s gloss of the passage in *SS2*:

Therefore the bridegroom adds, **Your voice is sweet and your face beautiful**, that is, by which you are pleasing to me, and the effective request of your progress (*postulatio profectus tui efficax*), which is a cry (*clamor*), is pleasing to my hearing. That is, on account of my goodness it is pleasing to me, not because of your merit.⁹⁷

This “effective request” (*efficax postulatio*) is never again mentioned in the Song commentaries, curious given the centrality of voice and most chaste prayer, as I have shown here. Yet, this is because the voices of the Song, for Gallus, dramatize the effective utterance of the Word, which assimilates and unites the soul to God. The

⁹⁷ *SS2.2.F*, 83: “Unde subdit: **vox tua dulcis et facies tua decora**, id est secundum quod es mihi placens et postulatio profectus tui efficax, que est clamor, mihi grata est ad exaudiendum; hoc est, propter meam bonitatem est quod mihi places, non propter tua merita.”

utterance of the soul is the cry of one drawn, changed, and effected by the practice of experiential union.

B. "... therefore she speaks experientially" (*dicit ergo experientialiter*)

I have artificially singled out examples of the bridegroom's effective utterance in order to analyze it theologically and rhetorically, and to show how thoroughly the soul's exercise is attributed to the Word when considering the 'wisdom of Christians.' Yet, as we have seen, Gallus divides the Song as a dialogue in a sequence (*in seriem*) with multiple voices responding and beckoning to one another. As often as the bridegroom is said to "speak effectively," the bride is said to respond "experientially." Gallus's use of the rhetoric of experience has multiple semantic valences.⁹⁸ When Gallus frequently glosses that the bride "speaks experientially," the soul (1) has been united to and affected by the Word, and so (2) responds with its own utterance, (3) meant in turn to affect the soul itself and others (even the Word), even as, (4) it admits the inadequacy of its utterance to its divine referent. I will analyze each of these elements of the rhetoric of experience below.⁹⁹

i. "Your name an oil poured out"

Gallus employs the language of experience in describing both the character of the union effected by the bridegroom, and the bride's utterance that is evoked by it. We have already seen that the highest mystical union for Gallus is not intellective, but affective

⁹⁸ I include in the rhetoric of experience words like *experientia*, *experimentalis*, *patior*.

⁹⁹ Most critically, however, speaking experientially here does not denote an act of strong agency, even as it does denote an act of strong (indeed, irrepressible) volition.

and experiential. As we saw in Chapter 4, he justifies this by reference to Dionysius. For instance, “not knowing in a mirror *but suffering (patiens) divine things, On Div. Names 2v*, in an incomparably more sublime and excellent way, [the bride] experiences unitively and contemplates by the best part of Mary.”¹⁰⁰ That is, in Dionysius’s mystical knowing beyond mind (*cognitio super mentem*) the soul (bride) is said by Gallus to experience the Word (bridegroom). How does the soul “experience” the Word?

We have already seen that the three exercises of the mind effected by the Word leave the soul receptive of the Word’s splendors or delights. The verse, “Your name is an oil poured out” (1:2), was especially important to Gallus, because it seemed to suggest the theology of the Word treated in Chapter 4. His gloss on it in both commentaries helps to see how the theology of the Word fit with mystical theology. In *SS3*, Gallus glosses, “This refectio [of oil/Word] does not occur through a mirror, but through the experience (*per experientiam*) of divine sweetness, since that taste and touch are not exercised through a mirror.”¹⁰¹ As the Song suggests, unitive experience with the Word was more akin to tactile or gustatory encounter than visual or audial. Rather than the collection (*collatio*) and consideration (*consideratio*) of distant sights or sounds (characteristic of the non-ecstatic, prerequisite steps of contemplation), it was an intimate and immediate “love” (*dilectio*) that transformed knowledge. In the parallel passage in *SS2*:

“**Your name is an oil poured out**, that is, knowledge of you, which I was able to draw up by experiences (*experientiis*) from your hidden place, is, as it were, an oil poured out—purging, illuminating, and healing my whole hierarchy...” The bride speaks in the Thrones: *your breasts*, receiving wisdom, as it were, from the chest,

¹⁰⁰ *SS3.6.D*, 211: “...speculum nesciens *sed patiens divina, De div. nom. 2v*, incomparabiliter sublimius et excellentius unitive experitur et contemplator peroptimam partem Marie.”

¹⁰¹ *SS3.1.C*, 124: “Hec refectio non fit per speculum, sed per divine dulcedinis experientiam, iuxta quod gustus et tactus non exercetur per speculum...”

just as the Thrones receive the royal visitations from above. She speaks in the Cherubim where she was lifted higher than the Thrones and more fruitful in experience (*experientia fecundior*): *fragrance of the best ointment*. She speaks in the Seraphim: *your name is an oil poured out*. For that seraphic order, which is unknowing, learns of God without mediation.¹⁰²

The Word pours into the soul, flowing into each of the orders of its highest hierarchy, and Gallus suggests that the higher the excessive order, the more experiential is its encounter with the Word, the seraphic order being the order in which the soul meets the Word immediately and intimately, having removed all obstacles and having been prepared for union. Elsewhere Gallus claims, “all the more profound extensions, which are experienced in the practice of the wisdom of Christians, pertain especially to that [seraphic] order.”¹⁰³ As the order of the Seraphim is the highest order in excess of the mind, it is the site of the most supernatural, graced encounter with the Word. If we were to map Gallus’s rhetoric of experience, it is most frequent and most heightened here, even as it also pertains to the other excessive orders, and the middle hierarchy which is characterized by nature and grace.¹⁰⁴

The constant reference to the bride’s *experience* paints a picture of symmetrical contrast with the bridegroom: when the Word acts effectively (especially, as we saw, in the highest hierarchy of the mind), the soul is affected (*affectus*). “Experience” describes the impingement or influence of the Word on the soul that leaves its traces on the soul’s

¹⁰² SS2.1.A, 69: “**Oleum effusum nomen tuum**, id est tui notitia, quam experientiis educere potui de occult tuo, est quasi oleum effusum purgans, illuminans et sanans totam hierarchiam meam, *Ang. Hier.* 1a: *nos adimplet*. In thronis loquitur sponsa: *ubera tua*, suscipiens quasi de pectore sapientiam, sicut superadventus regales; in Cherubim: *fragrantia unguentis optimis*, ubi est ascensus superior thronis et experiential fecundior; in seraphim: *oleum effusum nomen tuum*. Ille enim ordo quod ignotum est Dei per experientiam discit immediate...”

¹⁰³ SS3.2.C, 147: “Omnes autem profundiores extensiones, que in hac practica sapientie christianorum experiuntur, ad istum ordinem specialiter pertinent.”

¹⁰⁴ On the continuity of experience from nature to grace, see Ch. 4, 227-8.

entire cognitive apparatus, as it were. “The bridegroom is said to be **leaping on the mountains and hastening over the hills** because he impresses his vestiges to the receptive orders through unitive joining and experiential knowledge (*experimentalem cognitionem*), the orders which suffer (*patiuntur*) divine things.”¹⁰⁵ When the soul is affected in any of its parts by encounter with the Word, it is said to experience. However, since the primary affection occurs when the apex of the soul’s affection is joined to the person of the Word, not just the Word’s gifts, in the Seraphim of the mind, Gallus calls this experiential union.

ii. “He led me in”: Experiential Utterance

This experience in turn evokes experiential utterance. “The bride, experiencing the secure rest provided for her by the bridegroom, speaks experientially.”¹⁰⁶ Among the many instances where Gallus glosses that the bride is speaking experientially, he seems to suggest that she is speaking *from* or *in response to* the encounter with the bridegroom in the Seraphim of the mind. That is, the soul speaks *out of, through, or as a result of* its union with the Word. This visceral kind of utterance is ambiguous. This is one of the reasons Gallus found the Song’s poetics more appropriate rhetorically for expounding the wisdom of Christians than any other biblical book. Only a poetic, or rather, devotional use of language was appropriate for experiential union.

¹⁰⁵ SS3.2.E, 150: “Dicitur autem sponsus **saliens in montibus et transiliens colles** quia ordinibus accessivis per unitivam coniunctionem et experimentalem cognitionem quasi vestigial imprimit qui divina patiuntur.”

¹⁰⁶ SS3.8.E, 229: “Experiens sponsa provisam sibi a sponso requiem securam experientialiter loquitur...”

While Gallus often remarks on the ineffability of experiential union, as we will treat below, he also suggests that the experience of union with the Word compels the soul to speak, however equivocally. An extended treatment of a repeated motif in the Song shows how Gallus understood experiential utterance to arise from experiential union.¹⁰⁷ The phrase is found first in 1:3b (“The king has led me into his storerooms”), then echoed at 2:4a (“he led me into his wine cellar”).

He led in. The continual variety of *theoriae* and the continual advancements of the bride lead her into experiential babbling (*experimentalem garrulitatem*), as it were. Therefore let it not be understood that she sometimes repeats the things said, but that she experiences (*experiri*) continual renewals, which is entirely familiar to contemplative minds, which have been exercised so forcefully and continually to the superior ray. Therefore she says experientially: **He led me in** through interior *theoriae* more profound than before...¹⁰⁸

Continually traversing the itineraries of the highest *theoriae*, the soul is led into a state of irrepressible talkativeness by its own spiritual exercise. “Babbling” (*garrulitas*) suggests the visceral character of this utterance. It comes as the soul’s irrepressible response to the Word, even as the soul is continually united to the Word to which it seeks to respond.

The participatory character of experiential union helps to explain this dynamic. As the soul experiences further participations in the Word, it passes on what it has received, paradigmatically in utterance. Gallus writes, “Therefore she speaks experientially the

¹⁰⁷ Notice in the following that, for Gallus, concerned with the sequence (*series*) of the Song, the repetition of the bride’s voice has its own significance.

¹⁰⁸ SS3.2.C, 147: “**Introduxit.** Assidua theoriarum varietas et profectus assidui sponse inducunt quasi experimentalem garrulitatem. Non ergo intelligatur aliquando dicta repetere, sed assiduas innovations experiri, quod mentibus contemplativis, et tam fortiter quam assidue ad radium superiorem exercitatis omnino familiare est. Dicit ergo experimentaliter: **introduxit me** per theorias interiores profundiores quam prius...” As recorded by the editor of the critical edition, one manuscript has “*experientialiter*” here for “*experimentaliter*,” perhaps a scribal error, but also showing that these terms could be used basically interchangeably. This supports my decision to lump them together under “the rhetoric of experience” and to translate each as “experience.” See n98.

participations, which she receives from the plenitude of the bridegroom, according to her individual hierarchies and orders.”¹⁰⁹ Again, the *CD* provides the backdrop. These participations “*are not known except insofar as they are participated in, On Div. Names 2q.*”¹¹⁰ Because experiential union describes this participation, the utterance which is evoked from it is said to speak these participations, pouring them out, as it were, just as they have been poured into the receptive soul.

Further examples from *SS2* reinforce Gallus’s consistent teaching that experiential utterance derives from being affected by the bridegroom’s intimate presence. “Grasped by the embraces of the bridegroom and entering the supersplendent darkness, she speaks experientially: **I am black.**”¹¹¹ Also, “the bride adds by experience: **behold he**, more present to me now than usual, **stands**, ready and persevering, **behind**, that is, near, **our wall.**”¹¹² Finally,

Therefore the bride says experientially (*experientialiter*): **I sat**, that is, according to the exhortation of the beckoning bridegroom that I should not be moved, I rest lingeringly **under the shade**, that is, in his incomprehensibility, **which I desire**. For he is unnameable, but also wholly desirable. Therefore, I can only describe him as desirable in my present state.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ SS3.5.H, 200-1: “Experientialiter ergo loquitur eas, quas a plenitudine sponsi percipit, participationes, secundum singulas suas hierarchias et ordines.”

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 200: “que non cognoscitur nisi in quantum participantur, De div. nom. 2q”

¹¹¹ SS2.1.C, 71: “Adstricta sponsi amplexibus et ingrediens supersplendentem caliginem, experientialiter loquitur: **nigra sum...**”

¹¹² SS2.2.D, 80: “Subdit sponsa per experientiam: **en stat**, mihi iam solito presentior, **stat**, paratus et perseverans, **post**, id est iuxta, **parientem nostrum.**”

¹¹³ SS2.2.A, 78: “Dicit ergo sponsa experientialiter: **sedi**, id est iuxta exhortationem sponsi innuentis non debere moveri, morose quiesco **sub umbra**, id est incomprehensibilitate **eius quem desidero**; innominabilis enim est, sed et totus desiderabilis, ideo sola desiderabilitate possum eum designare in statu meo presenti.”

Again, the close association of experience with desire suggests its visceral and responsive resonances. To say that the bride speaks experientially is to signify that the soul, having been affected, responds with, for example, most chaste prayers.

iii. “For Perpetual Instruction”

While Gallus seems to suggest that the bride’s experiential utterance is visceral or irrepressible, he also points to its function. Experiential utterance has its own effect on other contemplatives, on the soul itself, and even on the bridegroom. Though Gallus typically reads the Song as concerned primarily with the soul and the Word, he does indicate that experiential union should have broader social effects. For instance, at 1:5b (“The sons of my mother fought against me”), Gallus glosses, “**The sons of my mother.** These kinds of words of the bride are experiential (*experientialia*) and expressive (*expressiva*) of her state for the perpetual instruction of contemplative minds.”¹¹⁴ That is, among Gallus’s readers, contemplative union engendered a pedagogical project. What one experienced ought to be passed on. As we saw in the Introduction, a surviving collection of sermon notes by Gallus on, “How the Lives of Prelates Ought to be Conformed to the Lives of Angels,” suggests the application of Gallus’s thought to an entire social order that mimicked the angelic (and, in turn, the mental) hierarchy.¹¹⁵

Yet in *SS2* and *SS3*, Gallus far more frequently claims that experiential utterance of the bride in the Seraphim of the mind is meant to transform the lower orders of the mind by passing on the participatory revelations in which the apex of the affection took

¹¹⁴ 3.1.G, 130: “**Fili matris mee.** Hec et huiusmodi verba sponse experientialia sunt et sui status expressive ad mentium contemplativarum perpetuam instructionem.”

¹¹⁵ See *Qualiter Vita Prelatorum Conformati Debet Vite Angelice*.

part most fully. That is, it should affect the soul itself. We have seen this already in the bridegroom's effecting of the transformation of the lower orders, but it is through the experience of the bride that this is effected. For instance, remarking on her reception of the bridegroom, whom she calls her "**bundle of myrrh**," the bride says, "As it were, I distributed to my inferior orders from my plenitude, but nonetheless I firmly cling to the bridegroom to drink more copiously. Therefore, she speaks experientially: **My beloved is a bundle of myrrh to me...**" We have seen some account of what this transformation looks like. Primarily, these orders are affected and dilated for greater reception of divine light and greater attention toward and pursuit of the beloved Word.¹¹⁶

iv. "Whom my soul loves"

This Word, however, is most frequently referred to by the bride as, "him whom my soul loves."¹¹⁷ Gallus reads this peculiar formulation as reflective of the fact that the

¹¹⁶ As Boyd Taylor Coolman describes it, affective cognition "redounds to, that is 'flows down' to and is participated by the lower, intellective cognition." This same dynamic is true all the way down the hierarchic order, as it were. *Knowledge, Love, and Ecstasy*, 24.

¹¹⁷ Besides 1:6, an extended passage (3:1-4, translated in Matter, *Voice of My Beloved*) describes the bride's quest for "whom my soul loves":

On my bed through the nights
I sought him whom my soul loves
I sought him and I did not find
I will arise and go around the city
through the streets and the courtyards
I will seek him whom my soul loves
I have have sought him and I did not find
The watchmen found me who guard the city
have you seen him whom my soul has loved?
When I had hardly passed by them
I found him whom my soul loves
I held him nor will I let go

soul, having been united to the Word experientially, has no appropriate language for or rational understanding of the Word. This reflects the influence of Dionysius's formulation of the "God beyond being."

Whom my soul loves, yet unnameable, incomprehensible, supersubstantial, whom I know by the experience of intimate love alone, inasmuch as I participate, whom *you will know by your participation alone*, *On Div. Names 2*, whom I can make known to no one except to myself loving you.¹¹⁸

That is, the experiential utterance of the bride, which attempts to pass on her knowledge to others, cannot make others know the bridegroom. "Only those who experience (*experiuntur*)" the "apparitions of the divine lights (*divinorum luminum apparitiones*)," which occur when they are united to the unitive ray, can know the Word.¹¹⁹

In the bride's quest, wandering the streets of the city for "whom my soul loves," Gallus interprets the soul as exploring the multiple itineraries of the *theoriae*. "We call 'streets' the unitive superintellectual experiences (*experientias*) which *no one knows except who receives*, *Rev. 2*."¹²⁰ Each of these itineraries leads to the Word, so there is a sense in which Gallus draws upon the multiplicity implied in these experiences to say that talkativeness (*garrulitas*) is appropriate for the union with the Word. United to the Word, one is also united to the multiplicity of experience that comes immediately from the Word. But no single expression will be adequate to the Word itself.

Similarly, the Song uses "beloved" or "beloved one" at 2:10, 2:16, 2:17, 5:1, 5:2, 5:6, 5:8, 5:10, 5:16, 6:1, 6:2, 7:9-11, 7:13.

¹¹⁸ SS3.1.H, 132: "**quem diligit anima mea**, licet autem innominabilis, incomprehensibilis, supersubstantialis, quem sola intime dilectionis experiential cognosco, in quantum participo, qui *sola tui participatione cognosceris*, *De div. nom. 2*, quem nulli nisi mihi te diligenti possum notificare."

¹¹⁹ SS3.2.F, 153.

¹²⁰ SS3.3.A, 167: "Vicos vero dicimus unitivas experientias superintellectuales quas *nemo scit nisi qui accipit*, *Apoc. 2*"

Nor will any expression be adequate to the union itself which the soul experiences. Having sought the bridegroom and come together with him in “the garden,” the bride exclaims, “I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine” (6:2). Yet this English translation does not quite get at the literal form of the passage, which reads, “*Ego dilectio meo et dilectus meus mihi,*” or “I to my beloved and my beloved to me.” With the same grammatical sensitivity he shows with “whom my soul loves,” Gallus finds significance in the lack of a connecting verb. “She does not say ‘I am united,’ or ‘I am joined to’ or express that conjoining with any word, but puts forth an imperfect construction: by that construction, she means, my experiential union, neither did I write, nor speak, nor was able to conceive with intellect.”¹²¹

Given the emphasis placed on divine ineffability in the Dionysian corpus, and the use of language to navigate that particular theological problem, it may not be a surprise to see that Gallus discerns that the voice of the bride struggles with a bridegroom who is ineffable and unintelligible. The soul may never appropriately speak of the Word. Most important to note, however, is how distinct Gallus’s use of the rhetoric of experience is on exactly this point. So far, our description of the rhetoric of experience is not very distinct semantically from the ways the term is used today, even popularly (to describe one’s individual encounter with the world that intimately transforms one and motivates a particular way of speaking). But Gallus ties “experience” to an encounter with that which is not rationally graspable.

¹²¹ SS3.6.A, 206: “Non dicit unior, aut adiungor aut aliquot verbo coniunctionem illam exprimit sed imperfectam dimmit, quasi dicens: illa mea experientialis unitio, nec scribe, nec dici, nec intellectu potest concipi.”

C. “Rejoicing with the grace of the bridegroom” (*congratulans gratie sponsi*)

So far we have seen that Gallus typically describes the bride’s utterance as “experiential,” and the bridegroom’s as “effective.” That is, his division of the sequence (*series*) of the Song is primarily between the two voices—the bride or soul who experiences the Word, and the bridegroom or Word who is attributed with the carrying out of that experience. In the highest stages of contemplative union, the soul’s ‘practice’ is effected by the Word, who removes obstacles, adapts the soul for union, and provides the soul most chaste prayer. As mentioned above, the attribution of efficacy to the Word is pervasive and nearly absolute. The soul, in turn and in the same measure, experiences union and speaks experientially.

Yet the transformation of the soul effected by the Word—the adaptation of the soul for union and the impact of experiential union—also results suddenly, subtly, and significantly in the soul’s utterance becoming effective itself. As we previewed above, the soul’s “effective request” (*efficax postulatio*) was “pleasing” to the Word, though, Gallus qualifies, on account of the Word’s goodness, not because of the soul’s merit.¹²² That is, the bride’s voice itself becomes sweet, inviting, or affecting thanks to its union and assimilation to the bridegroom. On the bridegroom’s exhortation at (2:14), “Let your voice sound in my ears,” Gallus glosses in the bridegroom’s voice, “that is, it arouses me effectively and gets me to listen. For the plenitude of bounty and generosity is aroused to listen effectively, so long as it is asked suitably for greater things.”¹²³ These passages

¹²² SS2.2.F, 83. See above, 275.

¹²³ SS3.2.M, 163: “**Sonat vox tua... in auribus meis**, id est efficaciter me provocat ad exaudiendum. Plenitudo enim largitatis et munificentie tanto efficacius ad exaudiendum provocateur quanta maiora congrue postulator...”

suggest that the ‘most chaste prayer’ of the soul, effected by the Word, in turn, affects the Word.

The assimilation of the soul to the Word, and the soul’s resulting efficacy, is depicted by Gallus’s frequent evocation of the inflowing (*influitio*) of divine light and heat to the soul’s intellect and affect, which occurs in its highest hierarchical orders, and is passed on to its lower orders. In 5:5, the bride says, “I rose to open to my beloved / my hands dripped myrrh.” Gallus glosses,

Therefore the bride, filled with copious lights, and inflowing generously from her plenitude to the inferior orders... speaks effectively and experientially: **my hands**, my hierarchic operations, **dripped**, through the divisions of graces they inflowed to the inferior orders, **myrrh**.¹²⁴

The continual inflowing of divine light, an important Dionysian image, provides a way for depicting the soul’s own efficacy dependent upon the Word’s. The mind passes what it has received on to its lower orders, carrying out their operations.

The soul even seems to effect its own contemplative exercise at times, an awkward but undeniable violation of Gallus’s total attribution of efficacy to the Word. For instance, regarding the exercise of ‘unveiling of the mind’ (*revelatio mentis*), we saw above that, in the third commentary, Gallus interprets the line “catch the little foxes,” to be spoken by the bridegroom and to mean that the Word effectively clears away the soul’s worldly or intellectual cares in preparation for union.¹²⁵ In contrast, in the second commentary, Gallus attributes the same line to the bride, who “speaks effectively,” when she says, “O attendants, **catch**, that is, beat down **the little foxes**, that is, deceitful and

¹²⁴ SS3.5.E, 197: “Sponsa ergo, copiosis luminibus repleta, et de sua plenitudine largiter influens inferioribus ordinibus... effective loquitur et experientialiter: **manus mee**, operationes hierarchice, **distillaverunt**, per divisiones gratiarum influxerunt ordinibus inferioribus, **myrrham**...”

¹²⁵ See above, 264.

secret treacheries.”¹²⁶ Again, the soul effects the exercise of its lower hierarchical orders (“the attendants”). The soul has become effective of its own exercise, thanks to experiential union with the Word.

Examples of the soul’s sudden bouts of efficacy throughout the Song could be multiplied.¹²⁷ What is important to notice is that, though Gallus discerned that the Word spoke with an effective mode of utterance throughout the Song, he also spots moments when the soul itself becomes effective thanks to its union and assimilation to the Word. This means it begins to participate or cooperate in the operations of the Word. It joins the Word in carrying out its own contemplative exercise, and it entices and affects the Word itself toward union.¹²⁸

This second claim, that the soul begins to affect the Word itself, is perhaps the more shocking, and Gallus is indeed less inclined to bear out the implications of the Song’s mutuality at this point. The Song’s violent imagery of the wounding and striking of the bridegroom, though, suggested it. The bridegroom, for instance, is terrified by the bride. She is “terrible as a battle line drawn up from camps / turn away your eyes from me / for they make me flee” (6:3b-4a). Gallus, in a long digression, describes how the soul conquers its foe-lover bit by bit with multiple advances of the cardinal and theological virtues. He ends his reflection with the following: “the bridegroom says to the sober bride: in order that you may seize heaven effectively (*efficaciter*) and violently,

¹²⁶ SS2.2.F, 83: “...et effective loquitur; o paranymphe, **capite**, id est suggillate **vulpeculas parvulas**, id est insidias fallaces et latentes...”

¹²⁷ See, for example, SS3.1.G, 130; SS3.3.A, 166; SS3.3.B, 168; SS3.5.B, 192.

¹²⁸ Mutuality, reciprocity, or mirroring in the Song’s structure occurs with important verbal echoes coming from the bride and bridegroom throughout, most notably Chapters 5 and 6’s respective encomiums on the two lovers.

wound me, be strong against me!”¹²⁹ In another passage, Gallus writes that, “this eye [of superintellectual knowing] wounds the bridegroom with a wondrous sharpness.”¹³⁰

Elsewhere, “the bridegroom shows effectively that the bride has penetrated the depths of God... by rejoicing together (*congaudendo*), he says to her, **you have wounded my heart, my sister**, by chaste love, **my bride**.”¹³¹ The wounding of the Word suggests both that the soul penetrates or becomes familiar with (gains experiential knowledge of) the Word and that the Word is affected itself by the soul.

It is possible that Gallus means that the point of the Word’s apparent affection is not that the Word “experiences,” but rather that the soul comes to believe in the Word’s sympathy with it. For instance, when the bride begs the “daughters of Jerusalem” to lead her to her beloved, Gallus discerns that the soul entreats the angels, “lead me back to him by your upliftings and inflowings, in order that I may know through experience that he knows what I suffer, what I desire, **that I languish with love**.”¹³² Yet, at other places, Gallus is more explicit, appealing to the Dionysian position that God is cozened and drawn ecstatically by love.

This most chaste love is of such power that it arouses God to ecstatic love, according to *Psalms 8* (*I love those who love me*). For this reason, in *Divine Names*, after the forementioned things are added, *we ought to dare to say even this in truth, that even the very Cause of all things, by a beautiful and good love of all*

¹²⁹ SS3.6.B, 207: “sponsus ad sponsam sobriam loquitur: ut efficaciter et violenter celum rapias, me vulneres, contra me fortis esse valeas...”

¹³⁰ SS3.1.O, 141: “unde oculus iste miro acumine sponsum vulnerat.”

¹³¹ SS2.4.D-E, 95: “Hoc loquente sponso, effective ostendit sponsam tam sublimi consensu profunda Dei sublimiter penetrasse... congaudendo ei loquitur: **vulnerasti cor meum, soror mea**, per castam dilectionem, **sponsa**...”

¹³² SS3.5.F, 199: “vestris sursumactionibus et influtionibus me ad ipsum reducite, ut per experientiam sciam ipsum scire quid patior, quid desidero, **quia amore languo**.”

*things, through an abundance of loving goodness, comes to be outside of itself...*¹³³

The rhetoric of wounding and ecstasy surrounding the Word suggest a role reversal symmetrical to that of the soul's becoming effective. Is the Word affected? Does it experience like the soul?

These questions are not taken up by Gallus, but our attention to Gallus's use of mystical language allows the subtlety of Gallus's presentation its due. What we can conclude is that Gallus attributes absolute efficacy to the Word and experience to the soul, even as he performs bouts of role reversal, most often with the soul becoming effective, but also with the Word being enticed, penetrated, and drawn out of itself by the soul. In this way, Gallus has respected the sequence (*series*) of the Song, with its reciprocal mutuality, while drawing on Dionysius's ideas about the goal of mystical theology being union and assimilation.

IV. Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Gallus's Song commentaries perform the soul's intimacy with the divine Word primarily in two ways: 1) by thoroughly rehearsing a movement from the letter (*littera*) of the Song—arranged by the Word and analogous to a word externalized—to a deeper penetration to its spiritual meaning (*spiritus*) or inner word; and, 2) by harnessing the rhetoric of efficacy and experience in order to depict the soul and the Word mystically united beyond the mind. I have shown throughout how Dionysian and Victorine theology undergird this performance. The Song was a practical

¹³³ SS3.2.K, 159: "Iste castissimus amor tante virtutis est quod Deum provocat ad amorem extaticum, iuxta *Prov.* 8: ego *diligentes me diligo*. Unde *De div. nom.*, post predicta subiungitur: *audendum et hoc pro veritate dicere, usque a se ipso inegressibilem.*"

depiction of the Dionysian mystical theology we traced in Chapters 2-4. To draw from the language of the *CD*, the soul's "union beyond mind" is with the divine Word, the key mediator of "the God beyond being," who uses letters (*litterae*) that purposefully equivocate or "hymn." The Song was a perfect literary depiction of the soul's encounter with the eternal Word which becomes exteriorized. Where Dionysius casts Christian perfection as a matter of union and assimilation to God, Gallus interprets this goal as experience of the Word, which transforms the soul, progressively making it effective and assimilating it to the Word.

Conclusion

*Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth
because your breasts are better than wine,
your fragrance better than the best ointments.
Your name is an oil poured out.*

-Song of Songs 1:1-2a¹

The best ointments [of the Word] are the super-intellectual theoriae, which anoint the minds united to them. They abound and refresh with a certain effusion of universal sweetness, beauty, clarity, and every desirable appearance, as if from the fullness of the Word... It must be understood that [the name poured out] is mentioned for the more profound name, which no one can communicate to another because it is neither perceived, nor understood, nor thought, but it is imprinted most secretly on the highest summit of the principal affection, and it does not descend lower.

-Thomas Gallus²

I. Summary

I have argued that Gallus's theology of Christian wisdom developed from his careful, sustained, and intertextual readings of the Dionysian corpus and the Song of Songs. The Dionysian doctrine of God's beyond-being-ness (*supersubstantialitas*) means that knowledge of the eternal Word must be beyond intellect (*superintellectualis*), as that which is beyond being is also beyond intellect. Knowledge (*cognitio*) of the eternal Word occurs when the mind ceases its own operations, and the intellect and the affect are drawn beyond the mind into the realm of the Word's *theoriae* (thus, both the affect and the intellect may be said to be drawn beyond intellect, even as the affect may be drawn

¹ "Osculetur me osculo oris sui
quia melior sunt ubera tua vino,
fragrantia unguentis optimis.
Oleum effusum nomen tuum."

² SS3.1.B, 122-3: "Unguenta optima sunt superintellectuales theorie que unitas sibi mentes diliniunt et universali quadam dulcedinis, pulchritudinis, claritatis, suavitatis et omnimode speciei desiderabilis effusione pollent et reficiunt, tanquam ex ubertate Verbi... Hic autem intelligendum est quod dicitur de nomine profundiora, quod nullus potest alteri communicare quia neque sentitur, neque intelligitur, neque cogitatur, sed summo apici affectionis principalis secretissime imprimitur, nec descendit inferius."

further). However, the knowledge belonging to the intellect is only of the eternal Word insofar as it contains the principles or providential plans of creation. A more intimate, super-intellectual knowledge of the eternal Word beyond the mind is attained at the “highest summit of the principal affection,” where the soul seeks to experience the Word itself (“the more profound name”), rather than its gifts (“poured out”). This is where the soul comes to know the eternal Word of the God beyond being, as the singular, fecund source of all the *theoriae*. As union and assimilation to the Word are never complete in this life, the soul ceaselessly strives to know the eternal Word among the more profound *theoriae*, like the bride wandering the city in search of the bridegroom. This ever more intimate experience of the Word only increases the soul’s desire for the eternal Word and leads to the soul’s wordiness or talkativeness (*garrulitas*). This garrulity occurs in proportion to the degree to which the soul is increasingly assimilated to the Word in its active exteriorization or incarnation, as the soul “rejoices with” the bridegroom.³ In this the soul is like the Seraphim who circle God, simultaneously contemplating and actively administering God’s light and love. The practice of exteriorizing the Word (as one reads, experiences, and comments on sacred literature) is a way to conform one’s life to the angelic way of life. The practice of commentary writing is thus a major vehicle toward Christian perfection, as the soul united to the Word is active in contemplation through the very process of exposition itself.

II. Chapter Review

³ See Ch. 5, 286-90.

The contents and conclusions of each chapter of this study can be stated succinctly. The first chapter introduced two contexts for Gallus's commentaries—the school of St. Victor and the new mysticism of the early 13th century. Gallus, the last great Victorine, is influenced by the school's "venerable teacher master Hugh." By examining the school's definitive pedagogical statement, Hugh's *Didascalicon*, I noted that the reading (*lectio*) of both secular and sacred literature always serves the goal of contemplation (*contemplatio*). Gallus's scriptural commentaries are the culmination of a tradition of Victorine expository literature that understands Christian perfection as the restoration of the soul through the pursuit of contemplation in sacred reading. In addition, a look at the works of an early 13th-century Augustinian canon and admirer of the school—James of Vitry—depicted a new religious milieu in which these ideals are contested. Not only is James aware of this new religious fervor; he is one of its first observers and theorizers. We might think of the role the Augustinian canons played in the early 13th century as cultural critics, prepared to both enable, contest, and define these movements, both affected by and affecting them. Because James's biography overlaps so precisely with Gallus's, I suggest that he gives us a good picture of the changing understandings of Christology and Christian perfection in the "new mysticism" of the 13th century, the context in which Bernard McGinn situated Gallus. James's writings reveal how active participation in the ministry and suffering of the incarnate Word offers an alternative to the Victorine ideal of contemplation of the eternal Word through sacred reading. It should be clearer now that Gallus offers a modified form of the traditional Victorine understanding of cosmic Christology and Christian perfection. It is through practices of sacred reading, commentary writing, and teaching that one may best come to

unite with and be assimilated to the eternal Word, which both remains with the God beyond being, and is exteriorized in creation, history, and sacred literature.

It is within this religious landscape that the so-called second Dionysian renaissance of the Middle Ages blossoms. The role the Latin *CD* plays in the development of the new mysticism of the 13th century cannot be overstated. However, the corpus itself was then (as it is now) the subject of much debate. In order to understand Gallus's contribution, Chapter 2 seeks to clear away some interpretative brush (both medieval and contemporary) from the *CD* and survey its terrain anew. I showed not only that the *CD* is more ambiguous than is typically admitted, but that the ambiguity was constitutive of the corpus. The Neoplatonic dialectic of causality and beyond-being-ness undergirded Dionysius's depiction of God, theological language, and the goal of mystical theology. What look to contemporary readers like thorny textual issues needing to be resolved, I argued, are best seen as conceptual apertures built into the text, ways in which the corpus takes advantage of the capacity of language to incite both its own interpretation and the pursuit of the God beyond being (who is also present to being). Such an open reading of the *CD* is not only philologically sound; it also allows us to appreciate the various medieval and modern interpretive avenues taken and suggests we might privilege those that refuse to stitch up its constitutive ambiguities.

One obstacle to appreciating the varieties of medieval Dionysianism, however, has been the *CD*'s translation into Latin. The field of medieval translation studies in recent decades has emphasized the interference caused by the translator's political and theological aims. Could Latin readers of the *CD* even appreciate its theological tensions in translation? Or had the translator's theological aims significantly altered the text?

Chapter 3 argues against the grain of this scholarly trend in translation studies. While admitting that translation is often (if not always) interpretive, I argue that the Victorine John Sarracen's new translation (*nova translatio*) carefully reproduced the Greek *CD* with Latin garments. Sarracen operates with a robust literalism that gives way only to concern for clarity, and this for theological reasons. A Victorine interpretation of sacred literature always required an initial close examination of the letter of the text. Only with a high degree of equivalence in translation could the *CD* be made accessible to a Latinate audience eager to interpret a sacred text in all its literary minutiae. If Sarracen worked to overcome the inaccessibility of centuries-old, rigidly literal translations, he nevertheless left for Gallus a rendering of the *CD* that carefully reproduced its major features: for example, Sarracen consistently translates the Greek prefix ὑπερ- with the Latin *super-*, carrying over the ambiguity of God's "beyond-being-ness" into Latin.

While Chapter 4 begins Part II of the study, it is also the culmination of the task begun in the previous two chapters—an examination of Gallus's reception of Dionysian doctrine, or the theoretical part of Christian wisdom. Chapter 4 shows how Gallus adopted and adapted the three conceptual apertures in the *CD*. First, although Gallus did not know of the *CD*'s Neoplatonic provenance, his careful study of the corpus led him to adopt the Neoplatonic logic of God's causality and beyond-being-ness. As a result, his theory of theological language mimicked that of the *CD*, even as he filled it out with Augustinian sign theory and theology of the Word. In Gallus's theology of language we found a remarkable harmonizing of Dionysian and Augustinian insights. Finally, Gallus's most innovative adaptation was of the *CD*'s ambiguous presentation of the goal of mystical theology—union as an unknowing knowing beyond the mind. I argued that

Gallus's appeal to affect and experience was a way to render this tension in Dionysian mysticism without resolving it. I concluded that recent scholarship on Gallus has been headed in the right direction in its increasing confidence in his thorough embrace of Dionysianism.

Chapter 5 culminates the study with a close reading of Gallus's two extant commentaries on the Song of Songs, the practical part of Christian wisdom. Tracing Gallus's theology of the soul and the Word, I note that for Gallus spiritual exercise and contemplative practice are not performed through active and intentional efforts of the mind. Rather, Gallus's hierarchization of the mind allows him to theorize it as suspended and drawn beyond itself in mystical union, even as it remains within its own mental hierarchy. Yet even when suspended and drawn, the mind is still exercised. The operations of the eternal Word itself bring to effect the soul's "three principal exercises" drawn from a single passage in the *CD*: unveiling of the mind, adaptation for union, and most chaste prayer. This experience has its own effects on the active and natural parts of the mind, which are made further capable of receiving divine knowledge. As the practice depends on the gracious intervention of the Word, which transforms the soul by healing the weakness of its receptive capacity (*infirmetas capacitatis*), this experience is unending. Like the erotic and echoing literary sequence (*series*) of the Song (what Gallus calls the "course of love [*amoris cursus*]"), the soul finds itself made ever more capable of knowing the Word. To know this Word, however, is to begin to appreciate the Word's own experience of being wounded, cozened, and affected by love (terms drawn, respectively, from the Song, the *CD*, and Gallus's own conceptual reservoir).

III. Experiencing the Word

It remains to return to some of the considerations that inaugurated this study. What final questions emerge from this examination of Gallus's mystical theology? What conceptual apertures are left when the threads of these chapters have been tied together? While a number of important tensions in medieval mystical theology have run through this dissertation—those between the letter and the spirit, contemplation and action, Augustinianism and Dionysianism, theory and practice, intellect and affect—two conclusions of this study invite further examination.

The first regards the theological importance of the rhetoric of experience. As I described in the Introduction, in defining the field of mystical theology, a fair amount of methodological caution has arisen regarding the theological researcher's access to the special experience of the mystic. I suggested this has sometimes led to an undervaluation of the critical role played by the rhetoric of experience within mystical literature itself. This becomes a problem for those studying many of the texts of the 13th-century "new mysticism" (as well as those which anticipate it in the 12th century, like the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux), when *experientia* becomes a central theological category. What to do when mystical literature appeals to experience itself? Gallus hardly mentions instances of his own special religious experience.⁴ Nevertheless, he draws on and develops a tradition of Augustinian and monastic reflection on *affectus* and *experientia* to make sense of central theological tensions in the *CD*, as we have seen.

Experientia as a category of medieval mystical discourse needs to be better understood by removing it, as far as possible, from its associations with modern

⁴ Except, interestingly, when discussing his practice of commentary writing. See Ch. 5, 248.

philosophical problems.⁵ As this study has shown, Gallus uses the term broadly to theorize the soul's relation to both the eternal Word and its vestiges in creation. It refers to the ordinary observation and mental collation of sensible things (on the model of vision or hearing) as well as to the extraordinary impinging of the eternal Word on the mind suspended and drawn beyond itself (on the model of taste, touch, or smell). That is, *experientia* marks the practical and vivifying aspect of one's mental life that cannot be entirely attributed to oneself, but to the others one encounters (whether ordinary or extraordinary). To Gallus, a humble worm, sacred letters, and the eternal Word are all experienced. They each affect the mind. The mind's processes of intellection succeed in capturing an understanding of the worm. They make some progress in understanding sacred letters (especially the letter itself). They might even know the Word itself, since, like human speech, the Word is exteriorized and in this way makes itself intelligible, accommodating the intellect. However, there can be no form of intellection or mental grasp of the Word eternally with the God beyond being. Here one could only be said to experience (*experientia*) or to be affected (*affectus*) by grace. In this way, as we saw in Chapter 4, the rhetoric of experience was used to stylize the ways the soul encounters the Word, including at the limits of intellection and discourse (without question a major concern of the *CD*, given the centrality of divine beyond-being-ness, unintelligibility, and ineffability).

⁵ For the best introduction that draws on Christian authors up until the time of Gallus, see Hollywood, "Song, Experience, and the Book in Benedictine Monasticism." Hollywood also reflects on the fact that *experientia* as used by medieval mystical theologians has regrettably not been a part of genealogical accounts of the concept of experience, 66n19.

What does this use of the rhetoric of experience offer scholars of mystical theology? On the one hand, the critiques of the religious experience of the individual mystic are well taken. There is no special experience available to the historian of religion apart from the discourse which is left to us. I simply cannot know what Gallus's own individual experience with the eternal Word was like (even if it were reported, and even if I could say that he indeed had such an experience). Even Gallus admits the ineffability of the experience of the Word, which "no one knows except who receives it."⁶ What I have access to is the theological discourse that both arises from and continues to shape the experience of a community of practice. I must admit that religious experience emerges within such communities, where the habitual use of particular theological discourses is the condition of and disciplines the shape of experience. Gallus, after all, only once mentions his own experience of wandering among the *theoriae*, and this is as he is describing his practice of commentary writing to his community of readers (or listeners), whose every moment was carefully disciplined. That mystical experience is entirely dependent on (or is even indistinguishable from) repeated theological, literary, and doxological discourses and communal rituals in the classroom and chapter house (especially the use and production of commentaries) is a central finding of this dissertation.

⁶ At the same time, this favorite verse of Gallus (Revelation 2:17) is at odds with other statements where he claims that those experienced may "instruct and inflame" those who are experiencing. Gallus's concern with ineffability is not the contemporary historian's reserve about access to a historical reality beyond the written record, or the contemporary philosopher of religion's insistence that there is no such thing as non-discursive experience. Gallus's conviction arises from the tension that underlies the affirmation that the Word itself is both the communication of God and is God Godself.

On the other hand, mystical literature like Gallus's commentaries shows that communities like the abbey at Sant' Andrea abounded with discourses that stylized the limits of language, symbol, and ritual. The *CD* was a major source of these discourses, as these communities conceptualized a great "cloud of unknowing." To Gallus ritual and discourse were not sufficient to represent the intervention of the Word itself—which was both the source of the entire created order and the hidden, inner concept (*conceptio cordis*) of the God beyond being. Yet, this insight that in mystical union one is assimilated to both the exterior Word (the principle of wordiness) and the eternal Word (exceeding all words) needed a language that could exceed discourse, even as it affirmed it. If scholars of medieval mystical theology are to render Dionysian mysticism (and perhaps religion itself) faithfully, should we privilege immanence over transcendence, language over silence, knowing over unknowing, or vice versa? Or would it be beneficial to follow Gallus in making use of a critical language capacious enough to encompass these various modes of theological discourse? Might a fuller examination of the rhetoric of experience in medieval mysticism yield more nuanced critical tools for reconstructing mental life in all its relational complexity (at least in medieval mysticism)? Might Gallus's insights into the way knowledge is cooperatively and relationally rendered help us to understand the practice of thought itself, or at least the practice of mystical theology?

The second set of questions that emerges from this study also relate to the relationship between theory and practice in medieval mystical theology. While the size of Gallus's commentarial corpus and his almost exclusive attention to the genre of commentary are remarkable, the fact that he wrote commentary is not. Medieval

commentaries on sacred literature were so ubiquitous that commentary might be called *the* genre of medieval theology. Given the sheer volume of manuscripts witnessing their use, it is remarkable how little engagement with the genre of commentary is found among scholars of medieval and theological studies alike. In a commonly used handbook to medieval Latin literature, the genre of commentary is not represented among the “Varieties of Medieval Latinity,” while beast epics, debates, travel literature, and encyclopedias each have their own chapter.⁷ There are a number of possible reasons for this all too common oversight: the privileging of authorial individuality, originality, and ingenuity; the difficulty of studying literature composed in one era about literature from another era; the implicit challenge posed to the social arrangements of the modern academy by the recognition of the relational or commentarial condition of thought (just to name a few). Whatever the reasons, the ubiquity of commentary makes its undervaluation in theological and literary studies all the more unfortunate.

Yet, some promising work is already being done examining medieval commentaries themselves. In theological and religious studies, a more nuanced and variegated history of scriptural interpretation has emerged in recent decades.⁸ This increased attention to the particular hermeneutics of individual commentators has made possible a study like this one. However, what has for the most part remained missing is a critical interrogation of the theology of commentary or commentary as a spiritual practice. More accounts of commentary that see it not just as a pedagogical practicality, but as a

⁷ Mantello and Rigg, *Medieval Latin: An Introduction and Bibliographical Guide*.

⁸ Ocker and Madigan, “After Beryl Smalley: Thirty Years of Exegesis of Medieval Exegesis.”

practice rooted in particular theologies and pedagogies of Christian perfection would be welcome.

One obstacle to a more sophisticated account of the practice of commentary writing is the unreliable (or worse, non-existent) attention medieval commentators pay to articulating their own practice. While the form of the commentarial prologue shifted from the 12th to the 13th centuries, in both cases commentators typically stuck to a customary format.⁹ When medieval writers do reflect on commentary itself, their insights do not seem very helpful or reliable for theorizing the genre. For example, as we saw in Chapter 1, Hugh of St. Victor had reservations about the very idea of commentary, stating that the intention of an expositor of sacred literature should never be individual ingenuity or devising one's own ideas about the text. Exposition should only make clear the meaning of the text—an ideal betrayed by the very tradition of spiritual interpretation which Hugh helped to popularize. That is, when medieval commentators were reflecting directly on their own practice, they do not seem to be the most reliable theorizers of it.

This study has exhibited one way around the problem of theorizing the practice of commentary writing. Rather than focusing on the prologues almost exclusively (those parts of the text that are the most attractive to modern readers because they reflect our desire for authorial independence), why not look to the theological and literary ideals being revealed as the commentator glosses the text? In Gallus's case, the most plausible explanation for his decades long practice of commentary writing is that he was engaged in a spiritual practice that effectuates the soul's union with the eternal Word. Rather than assuming exclusively that Gallus writes commentaries to meet a pedagogical practicality,

⁹ On the differences between the traditional 12th-century prologues and the new 13th-century 'Aristotelian' prologues, see Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*.

why not take a clue from his own integrated understanding of the theory and practice of Christian wisdom? If mystical theology or Christian wisdom has both a theoretical and a practical part, is not commenting on sacred literature also both theoretically and practically rich? It is my hope that the method used in this study, drawn as far as possible from Gallus's own writings, speaks for itself.

This dissertation on the commentaries of Thomas Gallus has only begun to explore these intersecting questions related to mystical experience and commentary writing. It is hoped that further research will clarify the ways the interpretation of the *CD*'s conceptual apertures and the Song's sequence (*series*) informed mystical thought and commentarial practice in the 13th century and beyond. After the last great Victorine, the *CD*'s most influential interpreters would come from outside the school of St. Victor, but the *CD*'s literary and theological representation of the God beyond being would continue to "instruct and inflame" others to experience the Word.

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