

Affective Excess: Ontology and Knowledge in the Thought of Thomas Gallus

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For in such profound depths we can write about less than we can speak about, speak about less than we can think upon, think upon or understand less than we can experience, experience less—even through that union which is above the mind—than what actually is. (Thomas Gallus, *Explanatio in librum De ecclesiastica hierarchia*)¹

I. A QUESTION BOTH MEDIEVAL AND POSTMODERN

In the Preface to his *Explanatio* of the *Divine Names* of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, Thomas Gallus poses some questions that are as concise as they are profound. Addressing God, he starts by saying: *Quid entis nomine communius?* “What is more common than the name of being?” While all things participate to greater or lesser degrees in the attributes and properties of the universe, surely they are all united in the blunt fact that they exist? Emphasising the point Gallus writes: *Nonne ens de omnibus dicitur?* “Is being not said of all things?” Surely there is no exception to the fact that all things share in being, otherwise they could not be spoken of at all? Having wondered about the ubiquitous commonality of being, Gallus proceeds to ask a question, or raise an aporia perhaps, that immediately arises in his mind in response to the previous questions: *Quomodo ergo tibi est proprium quod omnibus fecisti commune?* “How then is what you have made common

1. Thomas Gallus, *Explanatio in librum De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, fol. 86rb: “In talibus enim profunditatibus minus possumus scribere quam loqui, minus loqui quam cogitare, minus cogitare vel intelligere quam experiri, minus experiri—etiam per unionem supermentalem—quam sit.” I have prepared an (unpublished) edition of the *Explanatio* which has never been edited before (except for the section on the *Mystical Theology* and the *Letters*). The folio numbers are given according to Vatican, Bibliotheca Apostolica, Archivio del Capitolo di San Pietro, MS D181. Sometimes I have corrected the text in the light of Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS 695 and Oxford, Merton College, MS 69. These critical changes, however, have in general not been noted in this article. I use the following abbreviations for the works of Ps.-Dionysius: *EH*=*Ecclesiastica Hierarchia*; *AH*=*Angelica* (or *Caelestis*) *Hierarchia*; *DN*=*Divina Nomina*; *MT*=*Mystica Theologia*.

to all things [viz. being] *proper* to you?” If God is the source of the common being of all things, then how can being be proper and unique to God? How can a property like being be common to both God and beings, without at that same time compromising God’s transcendence and otherness? If God’s especial name is being, as Thomas Aquinas articulates in Question 13 of his *Summa Theologiae* (Prima Pars), then how does God differ from beings who thus seem to have in common with God his own very essence, namely being? Might it not be better to conceive a God without being, so as to preserve his supereminence? But then, how could he have any traffic with beings if he is beyond being, or how can he be the source of that (being) which he does not have?

Gallus concludes his musings with another question: *Aut quomodo ‘Qui Est’ vel ‘Ens’ diceris, qui omne ens prevenis et superexcedis?* “How can you be called ‘He Who Is’ or ‘Being,’ you who come before all being and are in excess above all being?” To my mind, this is a stunning question. Gallus here is tentatively wondering about the validity of a name (the tetragrammaton *YHWH*) used by God of himself in Exodus 3, 14. This scriptural and theological authority was given its most well-known metaphysical foundation by Thomas Aquinas, for example in the question in the *Summa* just alluded to. By referring to the *Qui Est*, ‘He Who Is,’ Gallus is asking a question not just of sacred Scripture, but of the philosophical denomination of God as *ipsum esse subsistens*, as subsistent Being itself. Gallus’s reasoning behind this question is that the one who comes before all being (as its author/creator) and the one who exceeds all being (by his power/eminence/conservation of existence) must in some way be differentiated from beings. So how can God be called Being or the one who just is?

The question is remarkable in that it seems to span the centuries, linking up with the concerns of contemporary postmodern philosophers who appear to be asking, albeit in a much different way, the same question. When Jean-Luc Marion writes a book called *God Without Being*,² or Richard Kearney a book entitled *The God Who May Be*,³ or Don Cupitt a book like *After God*,⁴ they are all calling into question the equivalence between God and being asserted, for instance, by Thomas Aquinas. These postmoderns are writing as philosophers outside the domain of metaphysics, which as a ‘science’ (in the Aristotelian sense) seeks to locate all phenomena in their causes and therefore to ascribe them a place within being, reality or what is. Accepting the ‘death of God’ as

2. Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being. Hors-texte*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

3. Richard Kearney, *The God Who May Be*, Indianapolis Series in the Philosophy of Religion (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001).

4. Don Cupitt, *After God: The Future of Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

announced by Nietzsche and the critique of all metaphysics as onto-theology by Heidegger, these philosophers seek a place for God beyond being in the good, possibility, or a God-less ethics. Can the questions of Thomas Gallus presented here be seen as similar to the postmodern rejection of being as the location for God-talk and the God-question? Does this question—posed and not yet answered—in the Preface to Gallus's *Explanatio* of the *Divine Names* echo from a cloister in the high Middle Ages and find a resonance in the heart of postmodernity?

II. THOMAS GALLUS, ABBOT OF VERCELLI (?–1246)

Gallus does not immediately answer the question so tantalisingly raised in the Preface. His response, I would suggest, is in fact his entire *Explanatio*. This is especially the case with the section *De divinis nominibus* which seeks to examine the 'names' used of God, and therefore examines the 'name' of being and its various complements (or alternatives?). But first, I shall offer a more personal introduction to this little known writer who has captivated our attention.

Thomas Gallus seems to have been originally from France as this surname suggests, though no information survives as to his place or date of birth. The early part of his life was spent in Paris as a Canon Regular in the Abbey of St Victor. The Victorine house was founded by William of Champeaux in the second half of the eleventh century in the wake of the Gregorian reform that was leading to a greater emphasis on adopting a simpler and more evangelical life in opposition to some of the excesses of the larger monasteries. The Victorines followed the Rule of St Augustine and indeed an Augustinian spirit pervaded the thought of the whole school. In his *Explanatio*, Gallus frequently quotes Augustine, as well as two of the other most notable Victorines, Hugh (who also wrote a commentary on Dionysius's *Celestial Hierarchy*) and Richard.

In 1219 Thomas left Paris along with two companions and went to Vercelli in the north of Italy to help establish a new monastery there. It is in connection with Vercelli that Thomas is best known—indeed, the manuscripts frequently introduce his works under the name of 'Thomas Abbas Vercellensis.' This monastery was set up under the initiative of Cardinal Guala Bicchieri, who was a papal legate to England and France, and indeed a native of Vercelli, who wished to establish by his own munificence a monastery and hospital in his home town, in both of which projects he was successful. Bicchieri was particularly attracted by the sanctity and erudition of the Parisian Victorines, and hence he desired that the monastery in Vercelli be staffed by the Victorines. By the end of 1225 or the start of 1226, Thomas was appointed abbot of the new monastery—*Abbas Vercellensis*.

As abbot, Thomas succeeded in enjoying both the protection of the emperor, Frederick II and, at the same time, of the popes. Such a precarious situation could not be expected to last, however, in view of the tensions between Church and empire at the time, especially when war broke out between the Guelphs of Vercelli and the Ghibellines of Ivrea, a neighbouring town. Unable to maintain neutrality (the Bicchieri family itself was involved with the Ghibelline faction in Ivrea), Gallus was forced to flee Vercelli and take refuge in Ivrea after many serious accusations were lodged against him by the papal supporters. It seems however he did manage to return to Vercelli before his death in 1246.⁵

III. THOMAS GALLUS, COMMENTATOR ON DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE

In the abbey church of Sant'Andrea in Vercelli there can be seen a funerary monument dedicated to Thomas Gallus. At the base of the monument, Thomas is seen kneeling before the Blessed Virgin Mary. To the right of the Virgin can be seen two other figures: St Catherine, patroness of philosophers, and St Denys, or Dionysius. Though identified as the first bishop of Paris and the national saint of France, it is more for the intellectual output of Dionysius that his presence on Thomas Gallus's monument is to be explained. For what stands out among all of Gallus's writings, and what most interests the philosopher, is his commentaries on the corpus of this very Dionysius.⁶

The Pseudo-Dionysian corpus contains five works: *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, *Celestial* (or *Angelic*) *Hierarchy*, *Divine Names*, *Mystical Theology* and the *Letters*. These writings are now believed to date from the late fifth or early sixth centuries; but this was not known before they could exert an almost apostolic authority on the development of medieval theology and philosophy.

5. For further information on the life and works of Thomas Gallus see the following: G. Théry, "Thomas Gallus: Aperçu biographique," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 12 (1939): 141–208; M. Capellino, *Tommaso di San Vittore: Abate Vercellese* (Vercelli: Società Storica Vercellese, 1978); J. Barbet, "Thomas Gallus," *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique*, ed. M. Viller and C. Baumgartner (Paris: Beauchesne, 1991), vol. 15, cols. 800–16; K. Ruh, *Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik*, vol. 3: *Die Mystik des deutschen Predigerordens und ihre Grundlegung durch die Hochscholastik* (Munich: Beck, 1996), 59–81; and B. McGinn, "Thomas Gallus and the New Dionysianism," in *Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, vol. 3: *The Flowering of Mysticism. Men and Women in the New Mysticism (1200–1350)* (New York: Crossroads, 1998), 78–87.

6. Thomas did compose other scriptural commentaries, particularly three commentaries on the Canticle of Canticles. Among his other shorter works, see my edition and study of a surviving sermon by Thomas: Declan Lawell, "Qualiter vita prelatorum conformari debet vite angelice. A Sermon (1244–1246?) Attributed to Thomas Gallus," *Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévales*, 75.2 (2008): forthcoming.

Gallus's commentaries on the Dionysian corpus comprise a set of *Glosses* on the *Celestial Hierarchy* and another set on the *Mystical Theology*, the *Extractio* and finally the *Explanatio*.⁷ The *Extractio* is almost a re-writing (yet not a translation) of the Dionysian works which closely follows the text of Dionysius, but in a much more readable and accessible form. Gallus was working from the translation of John Sarrazen (what Gallus himself calls the "nova translatio")⁸ which was intended to remedy some of the obscurities of the translation of John Scottus Eriugena ("antiqua" or "vetus translatio"). Yet even Sarrazen's Latin seems recondite and impenetrable to the student coming new to Dionysius. Hence, the *Extractio* seeks to distil the essence of the thought of Dionysius in a comprehensible manner. This work was completed in 1238. Gallus describes the *Extractio* as a work which, "because of the difficult nature of the text, briefly expresses the very meaning of the text in an accessible style" ("propter littere difficultatem, sensum ipsum littere stilo communi breviter exprimit").⁹ While the *Glosses* and the *Explanatio* follow the text closely, the *Extractio* is freer in that it seeks to extract or 'take out' the general sense and meaning of the text, rather than closely follow the letter of the text. Again Gallus describes this work as being "iuxta tenorem textus",¹⁰ "in accordance with the tenor of the text". The *Extractio* was such a success that it circulated as part of a thirteenth-century source-book on the *Corpus Dionysiacum* in the University of Paris.¹¹

With the *Glosses* and the *Extractio*, Gallus undoubtedly gained a great insight into the mind and text of Dionysius. His work however was not yet complete, for in 1244 (in exile in Ivrea) he completed his great commentary on the entire Dionysian corpus, the *Explanatio*.¹² This work sought 'to level

7. For a fuller description of the *Extractio* and the *Explanatio*, see G. Théry, "Les œuvres dionysiennes de Thomas Gallus," *La vie spirituelle* 31 (1932): 147–67 and 32 (1932): 22–43 (for the *Extractio*); 33 (1932): 129–54 (for the *Explanatio*, particularly of the *Mystical Theology*).

8. For further information on Iohannes Sarrazenus (or John Sarrazen), see G. Théry, "Jean Sarrazin, 'traducteur' de Scot Erigène," in *Studia mediaevalia in honorem R.J. Martin* (Bruges: De Tempel, 1948), 359–81. As well as his translation of the writings of Dionysius, Sarrazen also composed a commentary on the *Celestial Hierarchy* which as yet remains unedited—see G. Théry, "Existe-t-il un commentaire sur la 'Hiérarchie Céleste' du Pseudo-Denys?," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 11 (1922): 72–82.

9. *Explanatio EH*, fol. 88vb. I have retained some of the medieval orthography for the gob-bets taken from Gallus's texts, especially the medieval use of –e for –ae. All translations from the Latin are my own.

10. *Explanatio EH*, fol. 43vb.

11. See H.F. Dondaine, *Le corpus dionysien de l'université de Paris au XIII^e siècle* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1953), especially 31–32.

12. Gallus's *Explanatio* comments on the *Celestial* and *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, *Divine Names* and *Mystical Theology*, as well as the first five of the *Letters*. The existence of the commentary on the *Letters* was first discovered by D. Callus on the basis of some fragments in Oxford, Magdalen College, MS C, and published as D. Callus, "An Unknown Commentary of Thomas Gallus on

out' the knotty difficulties in Dionysius¹³ by a detailed commentary on the corpus. He proceeds by writing out a gobbet of Dionysius, or sometimes just a single word, and then explaining in depth what the word or phrase means.¹⁴ Often the word-order of the gobbet is changed in order to render the meaning more transparent. This attention to detail greatly distinguishes this commentary from its predecessors. Yet Gallus was not just restricted to explaining the text, for the reader often finds him embarking on some original thinking and speculation, such as for example what Dionysius means in the *Divine Names* by "non-existents" ("non existentia"). All of this is complemented by lavish quotation from Scripture, in order to add further explanation to the text, as well as abundant cross-referencing to the other parts of the Dionysian corpus. Gallus clearly knew both sacred Scripture and the works of Dionysius intimately, his knowledge being aided by the biblical concordances he produced, as well as by his own alphabetical division of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. Neither the divisions nor the concordances are extant. The works of Dionysius are obscure and difficult to understand, not just because of their doctrinal and philosophical difficulty, but also because of their terse, enigmatic style, as Gallus candidly admits in his Prologue to the *Extractio* of *Celestial Hierarchy*: "Since I encountered a double difficulty in the books of the great Dionysius the Areopagite, the first concerning his style, the second concerning his meaning..."¹⁵ It is to the efforts of Thomas

the Pseudo-Dionysian Letters," *Dominican Studies* 1 (1948): 58–73. The discovery of the full text of the commentary on the *Letters* was announced by A. Dondaine with the discovery of the Vatican MS, Archivio del Capitolo di San Pietro, D181, in A. Dondaine, "Un manuscrit de l'*Expositio* de Thomas Gallus sur les cinq premières lettres du Pseudo-Denys," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 17 (1950): 311–15. The full commentary on the Letters has been published in J. Walsh, "The 'Expositions' of Thomas Gallus on the Pseudo-Dionysian Letters," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 30 (1963): 199–220. In view of the fact that the commentary on the letters must be dated to after 1241 (see D. Callus, *An Unknown Commentary*, 41) and also because the Vatican MS views the commentary on the *Letters* as part of the *Explanatio* (it is placed after the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* and before the *Divine Names*), it is better to avoid the use of the word *Expositio* in regard to this commentary on the *Letters* which must rather be viewed as a part of the *Explanatio* in view of its date and position in the Vatican MS.

13. Cf. Thomas's description of his aims in writing: "as if providing explanation [of the text] by unfolding its layers" ("tamquam involuta evolvendo explanantes..."), *Explanatio DN*, fol. 156ra.

14. The *Explanatio* could thus be called a commentary by way of 'id est' and 'scilicet' due to the frequency with which these linking words are used to introduce the glosses to the gob-bets.

15. I refer to the text as printed in Pedro Hispano, *Exposição sobre os livros do Beato Dionísio Areopagita (Expositio librorum Beati Dionysii)*, ed. Manuel Alonso SJ (Lisbon: Instituto de Alta Cultura, 1957), 509: "Cum in libris magni Dionysii Areopagitae geminam experirem difficultatem, unam styli, alteram sententiae..."

Gallus¹⁶ in shedding light on these difficult texts that the reader can be grateful for a clearer understanding of the stream of Greek Neoplatonic thought that entered into Latin philosophy and theology in the thirteenth century.¹⁷

IV. AFFECTIVE EXCESS ACCORDING TO THOMAS GALLUS

This article began by examining how Gallus suggested something of a tension between the type of metaphysical thought that ascribes being to God and the conviction that God is beyond being by a great excess. It remains to see how the *Explanatio* may offer a resolution of this tension (or at least give a better understanding of what this question means), and to see whether the excessive gap between Being and beings can in any way be crossed. To do this it is necessary to let Gallus himself speak, by examining his texts without any tendentious interference arising from the concerns of postmodernity.

For Gallus, the whole of the universe can be viewed on three primary levels: the sensible, the intelligible, and the superintelligible. The human task is to ascend from sense knowledge to intelligible understanding, and then to cross over to the superintelligible by an affective excess of the mind. This pithy summary can be better understood by examining the respective roles of intellectual knowing and affective love. Also, the reasoning for allowing an excess to the affections and not to the intellect will need to be outlined, and this can only be achieved through understanding what Gallus means by being, and how there can be any passing over from beings to their origin.

A remarkable statement of this ascent from the sensible upwards is outlined as follows:

When the contemplative soul (once it has suspended the bodily senses, imagination and reason) extends its *synderesis*¹⁸ towards the eternal spectacles, the pinnacle of intelligence

16. Cf. “with what night-watches! with what effort!” (“quibus vigiliis, quo labore ...”), *Extractio AH*, Prologue (Alonso (ed.), *Expositio*, p. 509).

17. For further information on this Second Latin Reception of Greek Neoplatonic thought and the role Gallus played in it, see J. McEvoy, “Thomas Gallus, *Abbas Vercellensis* and the Commentary on the *De Mystica Theologia* ascribed to Iohannes Scottus Eriugena. With a concluding note on the Second Latin Reception of the Pseudo-Dionysius (1230–1250),” in *Traditions of Platonism: Essays in Honour of John Dillon*, ed. John J. Cleary (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 389–405, and J. McEvoy, “The Latinisation of Greek Mystical Thought,” *Milltown Studies* (Dublin, Autumn 2003): 154–81.

18. The word *synderesis* (or *scintilla synderesis*, “spark of *synderesis*”) has a technical meaning for Gallus. Originally used (e.g. by Jerome) to designate a human faculty capable of grasping basic moral truths, Gallus seems to have been the first to use the word in a mystical sense to designate the faculty of the human soul capable of (affective) union with God. Since for Gallus the nature of divine union is beyond intellect and mind, I prefer to leave the term untranslated, since every translation (e.g. “focus of consciousness”) seems to compromise the unique and superintellectual nature of union and its corresponding faculty of *synderesis*. At the least it can be said that for Gallus *synderesis* is intimately associated with love.

and the principal affection (or faculty of union) are borne upwards in equal manner. They provide mutual assistance to each other on the way to the divine as they both ascend in equal manner, the former through speculation, the latter through desire.¹⁹

The overall dynamic of this movement is marked by the “*sursum feruntur*” (“are borne upwards”). This is the *reditus* or return to the One that is so familiar to Neoplatonic thought, in which the Many are gathered back after their *exitus* from the original unity of the One. More frequently, Gallus will refer to this dynamic as a *sursumactio* or *sursumagi*. The subject of the dynamic is the contemplative soul—not primarily contemplative in any religious sense, for the ascent is above all an intellectual ascent through the various grades of knowing which represent the content of the dynamic ascent. The first of these grades is the sensible. The soul has to abandon all corporeal senses (touch, taste, sight etc.). Even the imagination, which combines and divides the phantasms or images that are presented by the senses, has to be left behind or suspended (*suspendium* being another central part of Gallus’s vocabulary) if the soul is truly to encounter God. Secondly, intellect and reason (*ratione*), that is, the domain of the intelligible, have to be passed over in order to reach the third (superintelligible) level of the divine (*divina*) by extending (*extendit*) the synderesis towards the eternal ideas or *spectacula*, Gallus’s term here for the Christianised Platonic Ideas in which all sensible and intelligible things participate. It is noteworthy²⁰ that Gallus ascribes a complementarity to intellect (*apex intelligentie*) and the affections (*principalis affectio*) in this ascent, a hint perhaps that there is a great degree of cooperation (*pariter*) between speculative knowledge (*speculando*) and desire (*desiderando*) on the journey of exceeding being in the ascent to Being.

Union (*unitio*) with the divine things is the goal of this ‘anagogical’ ascent. Gallus provides another example of the goal of union:

... for just as the practice of unaided reason suspends and shuts out the imagination, and the practice of intelligence shuts out reason, so the practice of affective union shuts out the intelligence.²¹

19. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 96rb: “Quando animus contemplativus, sensibus corporeis, imaginatione et ratione suspensus, synderesim in spectacula eterna extendit, apex intelligentie et principalis affectio sive unitio pariter sursum feruntur, mutuo se promoventes in divina et pariter ascendentes, illa speculando, ista desiderando.”

20. Especially in view of the fact that Gallus is often presented as an anti-intellectualist. Cf. for example G. Théry, “Thomas Gallus et Égide d’Assise. Le traité *De Septem Gradibus Contemplationis*,” *Revue Néoscholastique de Philosophie* 36 (1934): 180–90, 185: “Le *De septem gradibus* témoigne de le même tendance anti-intellectuelle que nous avons signalée à maintes reprises dans les écrits de Thomas Gallus.”

21. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 99rb: “sicut enim exercitium pure rationis suspendit et excludit imaginationem, intelligentie rationem, sic affectualis unionis intelligentiam.”

Here, it is emphasised that this union is brought about by the affections (*affectualis unio*). Imagination, reason, intelligence, and affective union: these represent some of the stages on an ever-rising journey towards simplicity and unity, each one exceeding and suspending its predecessor. This union is described by Gallus a little before this passage as happening through “[mental] sendings or receptions, since minds which head in ecstasy towards God are united to the more-than-resplendent rays.”²² This reminds the reader that an ecstasy or excess is being dealt with here, a passage beyond being (which is apprehended through the senses and imagination, reason and intellect), in which the soul tends via desire to the rays that are not just resplendent, but super-resplendent (*supersplendentibus*) because they are beyond all sensible and intelligible being. Gallus emphasises that this excess (*excedendo*) is effected by an affective union.

A passage from the *Explanatio* of the *Mystica Theologia* also describes this ascent:

The task of wisdom therefore suspends the use and the effects of sensation, imagination, reason and intellect (both the practical and the theoretical intellect), and it shuts out every act of understanding and every object of understanding, and it transcends being and the one. It knows nothing of the mirror and of riddles ... with divine approval it unites the pinnacle of the principal affection to the divine spirit.²³

As well as showing the rise through the usual grades of knowing, Gallus is quite explicit in stating that the task of wisdom takes the soul (in loving excess) beyond being (*transcendit ens*). The leap beyond being to union with the divine is accomplished by the summit (*apex*) of the affections (*affectio principalis*). Just before this passage, Gallus asserts furthermore that just as the soul has a faculty for knowing and reasoning, equally there is a power (*vis*) in the soul capable of this union with the divine. Thus, while others may reckon that the highest cognitive power is the intellect, Gallus attests the existence of another which

... no less exceeds the intellect than the intellect exceeds reason, or than reason exceeds imagination, namely the principal affection, and that is a spark of synderesis which alone is able to be united to the divine spirit ...²⁴

22. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 99ra: “immissiones vel susceptiones, quia mentes que in Deum excedendo tendunt radiis supersplendentibus uniuntur.”

23. *Explanatio MT*, pp. 14-15, in G. Théry, *Thomas Gallus: Grand commentaire sur la Théologie Mystique (vers 1242)* (Paris: Haloua, 1934): “Istud ergo sapientie negotium sensus, imaginationis, rationis, intellectus tam practici quam theorici, usus et efficacia suspendit, et excludit omnem intellectum et omne intelligibile, et ens et unum transcendit, speculum et enigma nescit ... ipsi divino spiritui apicem affectionis principalis divina dignatione unit ...”

24. *Explanatio MT* (Théry, 14): “non minus excedit intellectum quam intellectus rationem

Again, it is to be noted that the “principal affection” stands at the culmination of a process that leads from the senses to a union with God that transcends all knowledge, and indeed all being itself, for the affections yield a “more-than-intellectual and more-than-substantial way of knowing” (“modum cognoscendi ... superintellectualem et supersubstantialem”).²⁵ Love then has a defined place within the soul as a faculty that provides a “way of knowing” superior to knowing itself. The *affectio* is further described as a *scintilla synderesis*, a “spark of synderesis” that alone is capable of uniting the soul to the divine spirit that exceeds knowledge and being. The idea seems to be that this spark in the soul has a reach that exceeds the reach of knowing because of its innate affinity with the divine source of this spark. There is, so to speak, a substantial touch between the spark and the fire, or what Gallus calls elsewhere a *confricatio*²⁶ or a “striking with” that leads to the excess that knowledge falls short of.

While other philosophers like Aquinas and Albert the Great may have emphasised an intellectual interpretation of this unifying ascent, Gallus is clear in emphasising the primary role played by love in this movement. Commenting on Dionysius he writes:

LOVE IS THE FOREMOST MOVEMENT in this life ACCORDING TO THE MIND, that is among the movements of the mind, TOWARDS THE DIVINE, that is through which the mind heads directly for God and extends itself towards union with Him.²⁷

Love then is clearly a motion (*motus*) with its corresponding power (*vis*) which has a direct access to God gained through an experiential union. Intellect, however, has no such direct access, but remains unable to cross the distance that desire traverses so swiftly:

For the highest pinnacle of affection, according to which the mind is able to be united with God and is capable of loving Him, upwardly guides its foremost movement directly and, so to speak, perpendicularly from its own summit, towards God, towards the longed for but intellectually unknown and indeed unattainable infinity of the divine excellence. The other powers of the mind are ignorant about how to reach this place.²⁸

vel ratio imaginationem, scilicet principalis affectio, et ipsa est scintilla synderesis que sola unibilis est spiritui divino.”

25. *Explanatio MT* (Théry, 14).

26. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 107rb.

27. *Explanatio EH*, fol. 49vb: “DILECTIO EST PRIMUS MOTUS hic SECUNDUM MENTEM, id est inter motus mentales, AD DIVINA, id est per quam mens in Deum directe tendit et ad ipsius unionem extenditur.” Text in small capitals represents the lemmata from Dionysius which Gallus quotes.

28. *Explanatio EH*, fol. 49vb: “Summus enim apex affectionis, secundum quam mens est Deo unibilis et ad ipsum diligendum habilis, primum motum in Deum directe et quasi perpendiculariter a sua summitate sursum dirigit in desideratam sed intellectualiter ignotam et inattingibilem divine excellentie infinitatem, quo alie vires mentis pertingere nesciunt.”

The peak of the soul's affections stands on the summit of a promontory from whence it can gaze directly at God himself, all the while that the other faculties of the soul remain in the dark.

This then helps to explain the favourite Dionysian metaphor of God's light as being darkness or a fog (*caligo*) to the mind.²⁹ The affections reach God directly and so can be said to be fully enlightened. At the same time, however, the intellect remains stranded on the nether side of the excess, gazing only obscurely at the mists that ring the mountain peak from which love sees everything in excessively brilliant light. However, the *caligo mystica* or "hidden mist" that Dionysius speaks of is interpreted positively and not negatively by Gallus:

It is not through any lack of light that God is unknown, but through inaccessible excellence and an incomprehensible abundance that cannot be contemplated.³⁰

It is not a deficiency of light that leads Gallus to admit that God is unknown, rather it is the excess of light, streaming from the deity, which so saturates the soul that the knowing faculties are blinded and left in unknowing. Love leads to a knowledge with its own language that the intellect cannot comprehend. Indeed, the love that brings an ontological *excessus* over the divide between Being and beings is often presented as a mental *excessus* (or better, an *extasis*):

The reason love is called ecstatic, or that it produces ecstasy, is because it elevates the pinnacle of affection above all intellectual thought. Those who have been perfected enjoy ecstasy through that love and are said to experience rapture in an ecstasy of mind.³¹

This saturation of the mind through the power of loving union is argued for because, Gallus states, human souls "love more than they are able to understand or inquire into" ("plus diligunt quam intelligere vel investigare sufficiunt").³² Love can bridge excessive differences much more deftly than the efforts of intellect. This ecstasy³³ of the loving soul is contrasted to the sobriety of the speculative intellect which has no power to bridge the excess

29. Gallus also uses the image of a cloud or *nubila* to describe this darkness.

30. *Explanatio MT* (Théry, p. 26): "Non enim ex defectu luminis ignotus est Deus, sed inaccessibili excellentia et incomprehensibili et incontemplabili habundantia."

31. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 121rb: "Unde iste amor dicitur exstaticus vel extasim faciens, quia elevat apicem affectionis super omnem intellectualem cognitionem. Per istum amorem excedunt perfecti et dicuntur rapi in excessum mentis."

32. *Explanatio AH*, fol. 29ra.

33. Cf. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 122vb: "Exstasim pati dicuntur quia aguntur et non agunt" ("They are said to suffer ecstasy because they are acted upon and do not themselves act").

(cf. “the theoretical intellect by means of which the sober mind principally operates...”³⁴). He then uses an example to show how this is the case:

For although any individual thing is not fully inquired about or grasped by our reason or intellect, nevertheless the universe of sensible things is taken in by affection in such a way that it is reckoned as almost nothing.³⁵

While intellect and reason may struggle to understand each individual thing in the universe, nevertheless the entire universe of sensible beings can be subsumed in a single embrace by the affections and reckoned as a mere nothing. Gallus draws out a consequence of this example when applied to God—“What is there in God that is not loved by the affections?” (“Quid est quod per affectum non diligitur in Deo?”). Though the mind may struggle to explain the divine attributes (justice, goodness, omnipotence etc.) and account for their relation to the divine simplicity, nevertheless desire can encompass in one (unknowing) movement of love all that intelligence fails to grasp. By experiencing God in union, God is totally gained, despite the fact that this evidential union cannot be rationally formulated. The experience is irreducible to demonstration or proof, and Gallus never tires of reminding the reader that no one can know this union unless he receives it in loving experience: “No one knows unless he receives” (*Nemo novit nisi qui accipit*—cf. Apoc. 2, 17).

The example of the senses is often given to express this irreducibility: “For that most divine knowledge of God is not speculative [literally: through the mirror], just as the sweetness of honey, and in the same way colour or shape, cannot be known speculatively.”³⁶ Similarly, those who have ‘tasted’ of the divine have a fundamental experience that allows them to converse about the divine, even if they lack clear and distinct ideas to express this taste. Just as the various human senses are irreducible and cannot participate in what is unique to each one, so too the respective properties of intellect and love are to be respected and their boundaries not trespassed. As the body has its traditional five senses, the soul too has corresponding ‘senses’:

34. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 144ra: “theoricum intellectum quo mens sobria precipue exercetur ...”

35. *Explanatio AH*, fol. 29ra: “Cum enim dicta quelibet res a nostra ratione vel intellectu plene non investigetur vel capiatur, sic tamen sensibulum universitas in affectu absorbetur ut quasi pro nihilo reputetur.”

36. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 119vb: “Illa siquidem divinissima Dei cognitio non est per speculum, sicut dulcedo mellis non potest per speculum cognosci, quemadmodum color aut figura.”

In the intellect, the rational mind has an eye, an ear and a word or tongue for speaking; in affection, it has the senses of touch, taste and smell through which it probes the depths of God in an experiential manner.³⁷

The knowledge or data presented by these two groups of senses is to be accepted, without however mixing up what is proper to each. It would, for example, be absurd to say one could hear the taste of wine or smell the sight of roses. Similarly, the respective contributions of intellect and affection are both to be accepted, without however confusing what one provides as the gift of the other. As Gallus also warns: “Each person should note that the eagle cannot experience the sweetness of honey by sight, nor can the dog by hearing; rather it is perceived by a light taste.”³⁸ Honey can only be tasted by taste, not by sight or hearing. Thus, those who wish to taste of divinity must taste with the affections in a loving excess, and not presume to be able to see with the intellect the essence of God. Taste, smell and touch are all immediate and directly in contact with the objects being apprehended. They are thus ideal for comparison to the affections which bring about an immediate union though loving excess “by means of a great surge of love for God and by a powerful extension of the soul towards the eternal spectacles of wisdom.”³⁹ Intellectual knowledge of God, on the other hand, is mediated by the mirror (*speculum*) of the world and therefore sees only enigmatically and analogically. Affective union, however, can transcend being and the *speculum* which the speculative intellect uses.

Despite the fact that Gallus separates love and intellect, it does not appear that he wishes to create an antipathetic dichotomy between the two faculties. Love may be superior to knowledge, but this does not lead him to become the anti-intellectualist that he is often portrayed to be. To distinguish is not to divide. For example, when he is providing a description of the “ray of the solar emission from the source of divinity” (“radium thearchice emissionis solaris”), Gallus glosses the word *solaris* by pointing out two of the properties of the sun’s ray, namely that it is:

...*warm* in order to perfect affection with love of the good, and *bright* in order to perfect intellect with knowledge of the truth.⁴⁰

37. *Explanatio AH*, fol. 3ra: “Mens autem rationalis in intellectu habet oculum, aurem et verbum sive linguam ad loquendum; in affectu, tactum, gustum et olfactum per quos experientialiter examinat profunda Dei.”

38. *Explanatio AH*, fol. 3ra: “Sed attendat quisque quod aquila non potest mellis dulcedinem visu experiri, nec canis auditu, sed levi gustu percipitur.”

39. *Explanatio MT* (Théry, p. 17): “multo est dilectionis in Deum et forti extensione animi in eterna spectacula sapientie.”

40. *Explanatio AH*, fol. 40rb: “...*calide* ad perficiendum affectum amore bonitatis et *luminose* ad perficiendum intellectum cognitione veritatis” (italics added).

In other words, the sun's light is both luminous (to aid the intellect) and heat-giving (in order to rouse affection). Love and knowledge are nourished at the same font. He then adduces some scriptural authorities, one of which is described as "embracing both these gifts" ("complectens utrumque donum"), while others give further testimony to this two-fold gift of intellect and love — "concerning this twin gift" ("de gemino dono").⁴¹ Gallus sees these two powers as mutually supportive, as gifts and as ultimately deriving from the one source. If they then return via knowledge of the truth and love of the good to that same origin, they can hardly be said to be at odds. Another of Gallus's favourite Scripture quotations on this theme again emphasises the complementarity of love and knowledge. Glossing a quotation from Hosea he writes:

Hosea 1a: *The sons of Judah and the sons of Israel shall be gathered together*, that is the movements of affect and intellect.⁴²

Thomas clearly longed for an occasion in which the sons of Judah and of Israel, that is, the ways of knowing and loving, would be united.

Gallus then permits two ways of knowing God, though clearly favouring the affective way as approximating closer to God: "one way of knowing God intellectually, speculatively and by means of riddles through [considering] creatures...the other way of knowing God more-than-intellectually and beyond speculative knowledge [literally: the mirror]..."⁴³ At times, however, he acknowledges that there always remains something of the divine that it is totally unknown and even beyond any affective union.

However, the infinity of the divine loftiness is placed in an ineffable way above both those types of knowledge.⁴⁴

41. *Explanatio AH*, fol. 40rb.

42. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 44vb: "Osee 1a: *Congregabuntur filii Iuda et filii Israel pariter*, id est motus affectus et intellectus." For similar instances of this quotation (and sometimes an almost identical gloss) see *Explanatio DN*, fol. 157va–157vb and *Explanatio MT* (Théry, p. 31). The frequency of this and other quotations suggests that Gallus must have gone through the whole of Scripture with, for example, the love/knowledge motif in mind. Such a procedure would have led to the production of his own concordances. These concordances have been in part reconstructed in G. Théry, "Thomas Gallus et les concordances bibliques," in Albert Lang, Joseph Lechner and Michael Schmaus, eds, *Aus der Geisteswelt des Mittelalters. Studien und Texte Martin Grabmann zur Vollendung des 60. Lebensjahres von Freunden und Schülern*, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters, Supplementband III (Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1935), 427–46.

43. *Explanatio AH*, fol. 3va: "unum modum cognoscendi Deum intellectualiter, speculative et enigmaticae per creaturas ... alium modum cognoscendi Deum superintellectualiter super speculum..."

44. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 146ra: "Tamen supra utramque istarum cognitionum ineffabiliter supercollocatur divine sublimitatis infinitas."

This is the conclusion that Gallus reaches in a section where he has just posed the question: “How is it possible for God to be known by us and yet for Him to be unknowable?”⁴⁵ There is a tension in this question between the knowability and unknowability of God that risks ending up in contradiction. Gallus answers his question by resorting to his familiar distinction between intellectual knowledge and superintellectual knowledge (through the affections) which shows that while God’s essence may be rationally unknown, God can nevertheless be ‘known’ through union beyond the intellect. This may be considered a satisfactory resolution, until the above conclusion is appended—namely, that God remains not just superintellectual (beyond intellect) but also, so to speak, super-superintellectual, since there is always some ‘residue’ of the divine nature that not even the affections can embrace. Does this overthrow Gallus’s idea that the chasm can be crossed by an affective excess? Does Gallus’s own philosophy have to end in just silence before the utterly ineffable?

Again, when discussing the fact that the soul reverences God “not through explicit praise, since He is ineffable” (“non expressis laudibus, quia ineffabilis est”), but by certain *reverentie mentis* or “reverences of the mind” (which I interpret as some non-cognitive extension towards the deity, most likely through the affections, though Gallus does not clearly state this here), he nonetheless admits that those mental reverences “are not able to examine God, even though they are more powerful than the intellect in reaching God.”⁴⁶ Furthermore, Gallus often describes God as being “in excess of union itself” (“excedens ipsam unionem”).⁴⁷ The reader is left wondering just how united the soul can be to God in the first place, when God still remains unknown and above that union itself. Even at the end of the soul’s ascent, it seems there must remain an element of unknowing about God, for we can only speak about what we understand, and God is beyond understanding:

It is futile to hold a disputation about what one does not understand, for one must know beforehand what it is that is being spoken of.⁴⁸

45. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 146ra: “Quomodo compossibile sit Deum a nobis cognosci et ipsum esse incognoscibilem?”

46. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 93va: “quamvis sint in Deum potentiores quam intellectus, Deum tamen scrutari non sufficiunt.”

47. Cf. *Extractio DN* 5, line 12 (Alonso, p. 632).

48. *Explanatio AH*, fol. 23ra: “Frustra enim disputatur de eo quod non intelligitur. Prescire enim oportet quid est quod dicitur.”

V. GALLUS'S ACCOUNT OF BEING

The epistemological relationship outlined above between knowledge and love, where knowledge is blinded by the excessive effulgence of the divine light which nevertheless gives itself to be united to the affections, is dependent on how being is understood. For if there is a divide between Being and beings, then that chasm needs to be traversed by, at least according to Gallus, an affective 'excess.' Why is it the case that intellect fails to understand God as the origin of being? Why can love traverse the gap? Is being nevertheless ultimately unknown and beyond each of these two ways of knowing?

A way of approaching Gallus's ontology is by enquiring after the name which Gallus accords to God. The most fitting name for God will reveal something of what is most fundamental within Gallus's thought-system. At times it seems as though Gallus accords a priority to the good as the name most befitting the author of all beings (and hence as the *primum* within all ontology):

The highest and first cause of everything is the divine goodness, or the divine good will.⁴⁹

In our understanding nothing comes before the good, and the good itself, so to speak, causes being itself (*per se essentiam*) because it is a prior idea, and the proper act of the good is to bring non-existents (*non existentia*) into existence (*esse*).⁵⁰

For as far as concerns our knowledge, His first and, as it were, proper name is 'good.'⁵¹

Is this then a way of evading the difficulty of the question posed in the Preface of the *Explanatio* to the *Divine Names* regarding the commonality of being to God and beings? If God is considered as the good, then a way of understanding God is offered that evades the aporia of naming God as being. For if God is responsible for producing being, he must in some way be before and beyond being. The possible pre-eminence of the good is again hinted at tentatively by Gallus when he writes:

49. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 141vb: "Summa enim et prima omnium causa est divina bonitas sive divina bona voluntas."

50. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 138rb: "Bonitatem siquidem nihil preiacet in intellectu nostro, et per se bonitas quasi causat per se essentiam quia anterior est theoria, et bonitatis proprium est deducere non existentia in esse." The role of the *quasi* is to be noted.

51. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 120vb: "Nomen siquidem eius apud nostram notitiam primum et quasi proprium est bonus." Note however that the name is first only as far as *our knowledge* is concerned, and also how Gallus again qualifies the statement with a *quasi*.

For in God, being (*esse*) does not come before being good, but in Him goodness, as if it were a more profound idea, is either simultaneous with or almost prior to being (*esse*).⁵²

Gallus is confident in asserting that the good in God is at least convertible with being; he seems less confident (hence the *quasi*) in saying that the good is actually prior to being. Nevertheless, at least in this passage, he does describe the good as (*tamquam*) a more profound idea within the deity. This description is reinforced by a statement a little before this passage where Gallus describes the good as “the most profound of all the ideas and the foundation, as it were, of the others” (“profundissima omnium theoriarum et quasi aliarum fundamentum”).⁵³ Again, some initial instinct leads Gallus here to ascribe a priority of the good over all the other *spectacula* within God,⁵⁴ but again he qualifies his assertion with a ‘quasi’. The reason for this qualification is offered immediately—“although all invisible things are greatly one in Him [sc. God]” (“quamvis omnia invisibilia in eo [sc. Deo] summe unum sint...”). All of the invisible attributes of God are so intimately united in God that it is false to speak of before and after, first and second. Perhaps then there is no conflict between being and the good as both are unified within the divine simplicity?

Nevertheless the reader does find this conflict resurfacing from time to time. In introducing his commentary on chapter five of the *Explanatio* of the *Divine Names*, Gallus reminds the reader that he has just dealt in the preceding chapter with “the good than which nothing is higher or greater” (“de bono quo nihil altius aut superius”⁵⁵) and now proceeds to deal with existence which is described as “almost the first emanation from goodness” (“quasi prima emanatio a bonitate”). Existence is here seen as dependent on the good for its emergence. The addition of another ‘quasi’ however should alert the reader that Gallus is about to qualify his remarks yet again; and that is indeed what he proceeds to do. He introduces a distinction between being-in-itself and being-in-procession, which he parallels with two scriptural denominations. On the one hand, there is God as “I am who am,” *Ego sum*

52. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 112vb: “Esse enim in Deo non preiacet bonum esse, sed bonitas aut simul aut quasi prius est in eo quam esse tamquam profundior theoria.”

53. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 112va.

54. Cf. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 125rb for an even more explicit statement of the possible priority of the good over being: “THE GOOD which is the most causal cause of all existing things and, in a more-than-substantial way, of all non-existing things” (“BONUM quod est omnium existentium et supersubstantialiter non existentium causa causalissima”).

55. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 136ra. The Anselmian overtones of this phrase are to be noted.

qui sum (Ex. 3, 14),⁵⁶ which is defined as “being turned back upon itself in an almost circular way” (“esse in se revolutum quasi circulariter”).⁵⁷ Like an eternal circle, God enjoys the fullness of being in himself and needs no cause for that being. On the other hand, Gallus notes that Moses came down from the mountain and introduced God’s name as “He who is sent me,” *Qui est misit me*, which Gallus takes as referring to another aspect of God’s being, namely, being as it emerges into appearance under the instigation of the good. This idea prompts a definition of being:

Being (*esse*) is: to proceed from the source of goodness into intelligible knowledge.⁵⁸

The fact then that the good is presented as the author and giver of being as defined by procession, does not derogate for Gallus in any way from the primal being that is self-contained and lacking in nothing, and which is transcendently convertible with the good before any emanation.

A further understanding of being can be reached by approaching being in its relationship to intellect. The reason that an *excessus* towards the divine is accorded to some faculty other than intellect is that, if God is beyond being (*qua* creator/author) then he is beyond intelligence, for human intelligence operates within “the bounds of being”—“our speculative intellect does not exceed the bounds of being.”⁵⁹ A similar phrase is used by Gallus when he writes: “For our intellect and bodily senses operate within the boundaries

56. For a discussion of Gallus’s exegesis of this text, see F. Ruello, “La mystique de l’Exode (Ex. 3, 14 selon Thomas Gallus commentateur dionysien),” in *Dieu et l’être: Exégèses d’Exode 3, 14 et de Coran 20, 11–24* (Paris: Centre d’Études des Religions du Livre, 1978), 213–43. For Ruello, the *Ego sum qui sum* is a mystical, not a metaphysical, name granted only to those united to the divine in the fine point of the soul. Ruello’s depiction of the difference between Gallus and Grosseteste (two authors usually grouped together as sharing an affective Dionysianism) in this regard is noteworthy: “In ne faut pas trop rapprocher la spéculation de Thomas Gallus et celle de Robert Grosseteste. Celui-ci reste au plan de l’intelligible, ou plus précisément au plan du nom intelligible de Dieu. Thomas Gallus, par sa conception originale de l’“union,” dépasse l’ordre de l’intelligible. En substituant, par fidélité au grec, pensait-il, *Ego sum ens* à *Ego sum qui sum* Robert de Lincoln ramenait au plan de l’intelligible ce que Thomas Gallus situait au-delà” (239).

57. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 136ra. Note also Meister Eckhart’s comment on Ex. 3, 14 in *Commentary on Exodus*, 3.16, in Meister Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher*, ed. B. McGinn, with the collaboration of F. Tobin and E. Borgstadt (New York/Mahwah/Toronto: Paulist Press, 1986), 46: “Third, note that the repetition (namely, that it says “I am who am”) indicates the purity of affirmation excluding all negation from God. It also indicates a reflexive turning back of his existence into itself and upon itself and its dwelling and remaining fixed in itself.”

58. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 136ra: “Esse enim est a fontali bonitate in intelligibilem notitiam prodire.”

59. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 127rb: “intellectus speculativus noster metas entis non excedit.”

of creation.”⁶⁰ This reason is also explicated in one of Gallus’s comments on the word “supersubstantialiter”:

SUPERSUBSTANTIALITER and, as a result, in a way that is more-than-intellectual, since our intellect does not go beyond being (*ens*).⁶¹

In saying however that God is beyond being, Gallus by no means implies his non-existence.

He [sc. God] is non-existent (*non existens*) not through a lack but an excess of being (*essentie*).⁶²

Just as intellect fails to comprehend God due to excessive light,⁶³ so too in a way God cannot fall within the category of being because the divine is infinitely more than what can be understood and conceived within the boundaries of being, to which boundaries the human intellect is restricted. In a bold way then God is proclaimed to be non-existent and ‘without’ (or better: ‘beyond’) being. The phrase often used to describe this ‘beyond being’ is *supersubstantialitas*. Gallus explains the adverbial form *supersubstantialiter* as meaning “before and beyond every substance, before and beyond being and one.”⁶⁴ The phrase seems to be intended to protect a notion of God as totally other, transcendent and so non-existent, at least, insofar as existence is grasped by the mind.

The reason for this transcendence or excess beyond being is that God is the *cause* of being, and what is responsible as cause of the effect must in some way be totally other than the effect. Again, Gallus outlines in greater detail what he means here when he explains that the divine loftiness exceeds (*divina celsitudo excedit*) all human, and even angelic, cognition:

60. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 144ra: “Intellectus enim noster et sensus corporeus *intra terminos creature* exercentur” (italics added). See also *Explanatio DN*, fol. 144rb: “intra terminos entis” (“within the boundaries of being”).

61. *Explanatio AH*, fol. 23ra: “SUPERSUBSTANTIALITER et *per consequens* superintellectualiter, quia intellectus noster non excedit ens” (italics added).

62. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 91ra: “Est [sc. Deus] non existens non ex essentie defectu sed excessu.”

63. Cf. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 125ra: “...the divine light is called darkness not through a lack but through an excess of light” (“...lux divina dicitur tenebre non per defectum luminis sed per excessum”), and *Explanatio EH*, fol. 49ra: “[Our eyes] are overwhelmed and grow dim due to the abundance of light” (“Confunduntur enim et hebetantur [sc. pupille] ex habundantia lucis”).

64. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 98ra: “ante et super omnem substantiam, ante et super ens et unum.”

All acts of knowledge are based on being (*ente*) or beings (*entibus*). Being (*ens*) however is limited. What therefore is causally above all being (*ens*), is exceedingly separated from all knowledge...⁶⁵

If being is convertible with knowledge, then what is beyond being cannot be coordinated to what is within the known bounds of being. Knowledge is restricted to the limits or terminus of substantial being—but the cause of substantial being is before and beyond those limits, and hence beyond knowledge. Indeed, ‘supersubstance’ can only be convertible with a form of ‘superintelligence,’ and Gallus locates a superintelligent faculty within the soul’s affections that is able to go at least some of the way in reaching the divine heights.

The Being beyond being, and the kind of being that is accessible to human knowledge, calls for some clear distinction, and in places Gallus seems to offer one:

Being (*ens*) is the first object in our understanding. Being-in-Itself (*entitas*) however is before and above understanding, [but] thereafter it descends into particular names.⁶⁶

Here Gallus makes a clear distinction between *ens* and *entitas*, which can be translated as being and Being. Again, the hallmark of being is that it is susceptible of understanding, indeed is the first thing to strike the intellect.⁶⁷ It is only when Being descends from itself through causal action/creation that it can then be named from intelligible terms derived from being. A similar attempt to introduce two disparate types of being is found in the *Explanatio* of the *Angelica Hierarchia* as follows:

For being (*esse*) is: to flow out from the first cause, which [fact] naturally precedes both actuality and potentiality. Being-in-Itself (*entitas*) however, which is the cause of being (*entis*) and being itself (*ipsius esse*), is planted in itself, beyond and above understanding, never departing from itself, and it is known above the mind only by union.⁶⁸

Again, *entitas* is juxtaposed with some other mode of being (*esse* or *ens*): the former designating the divine being that does not proceed out of his Being,

65. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 98rb: “Cognitiones omnes sunt de ente vel entibus. Ens autem terminatum est. Quod ergo *causaliter* est *super* omne ens, ab omni cognitione segregatur superando...” (italics added).

66. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 100va: “Ens enim primum est in intellectu. Entitas autem est ante et supra intellectum, deinde descendit ad nomina specialia.”

67. Cf. Aquinas, *De potentia*, q. 9, art. 7, ad 15: “Primum enim quod in intellectum cadit est ens.”

68. *Explanatio AH*, fol. 3ra: “Esse siquidem est a prima causa fluere, quod naturaliter precedit et agere et pati. Entitas autem, que est causa entis et ipsius esse, extra et super intellectum in se inegressibiliter figitur, et sola unitione super mentem cognoscitur.”

which consequently remains opaque and unknowable to the intellect; and the latter accounting for being as it flows from the Godhead into knowability.⁶⁹ *Ens* is the realm of flux and change, act and potency (*agerel/pati*), whereas *entitas* is the unchanging (*ingressibiliter figitur*) repose of the divine that lacks nothing since it is always in act. The *entitas/ens* barrier is breached however by that affective union that occurs above mind.

Being is further defined by Gallus when he writes:

He [sc. God] is named true Being (*entitas*) or more-than-being (*superessentialitas*) in accordance with the fact that He exists in His own nature above all knowledge, and is Being (*esse*) turned in on itself and not proceeding out to things.⁷⁰

God's *esse* then has two faces, the one unknown and self-reflexive, the other manifested and in 'procession' (Greek: *proodos*) towards beings. Being (*entitas*) and being (*ens*) mark the excess between what is hidden from every mind "per principium exemplare," as "the exemplary source of being" which is unknown, and what is made accessible to mind by its "being brought into being" or "[per] adductionem ad esse."⁷¹ The two faces of being are brought together in the following statement which represents a succinct synopsis of Gallus's thinking on the topic of being:

For being (*ens*), which is held to be the first and greatest object for intellectual knowledge, is caused by the more-than-intellectual and more-than-substantial Being (*entitate*) which eternally contains all things in itself.⁷²

Being is accessible to intellectual cognition. Yet there is also that Being which is supersubstantial and thus inaccessible to cognition which, as has been noted, is exercised within the bounds of substantial being. Between the two there is a close connection because of the fact that being comes from Being: "For every being (*ens*) comes from the true Being (*esse*), which is the good and which is the cause of being (*causa est essendi*) for every existing thing."⁷³ This

69. Gallus's *entitas/ens* distinction suggests a comparison with Meister Eckhart's *Gottheit/Gott* distinction. Perhaps too Eckhart's *grunt* or *istischeit* can be connected to Gallus's unknowable *entitas*.

70. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 131va: "Dicitur [sc. Deus] vera entitas vel superessentialitas secundum quod est in natura sua super omnem cognitionem et est esse in se reflexum non ad res procedens."

71. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 100ra.

72. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 137rb: "Ens enim quod primum et summum habetur intellectuali cognitione causatur a superintellectuali et supersubstantiali entitate in se ipso eternaliter omnia continendo."

73. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 125vb: "Omne enim ens a vero esse est, quod est bonum et omni existenti causa est essendi."

dependence of being on Being is the ground for analogical discourse. The struggle that awaits Gallus is to show that analogy does not mean a univocal (obfuscating the Being/being *excessus*) or equivocal (impassable Being/being *excessus*) concept of Being.⁷⁴

Despite the fact that commenting on the Neoplatonic text sometimes tends to lead Gallus (always cautiously however) to assert a type of priority to the good, he never loses sight of the fact that being is indispensable for any consideration of the various essences and ideas:

For being (*esse*) naturally precedes life, or knowledge, or the possession of an image or likeness. And without these 'being' (*esse*) can still be thought of, but none of these can be (*esse*) or be thought of without their foundation in being (*essendi fundamentum*).⁷⁵

Being is the foundation on which all other ideas are built. It is unthinkable that the latter could enjoy some state of 'existence' without being.

How strongly this connection between the two facets of being can be stressed is not clear. Dionysius himself states that God "is being itself for existing things" ("est ipsum esse existentibus")⁷⁶ and Gallus himself acknowledges that everything, even inanimate things, participates in God's being ("just as all inanimate things participate in his being"⁷⁷). How far the analogy can be brought will depend on the meaning of the metaphor of participation. An example of this difficulty regarding analogy is given by Gallus when he writes:

He [sc. Dionysius] provides an example about that analogy taken from lower causes, showing that even there causes greatly differ from things that have been caused, for example: Pleasurable things give us pleasure, sad things make us sad; and yet those things that give pleasure do not enjoy pleasure, nor do things that make us sad experience sadness; and thus those causes greatly differ from their proper effects.⁷⁸

74. In the light of Gallus's distinction between *entitas* and *ens/esse*, questions can be asked of Javelet's confidence in asserting the univocal nature of being in Gallus's thought: "Pour Thomas, l'être est univoque; il n'inclut pas en son sein ce hiatus où l'analogie fait pont. Il n'y a donc pas d'Être suprême," 282 in R. Javelet, "Ontologie et connaissance chez Thomas Gallus," in *Miscellanea Mediaevalia*, Band 2: *Die Metaphysik im Mittelalter* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1963), 282–88.

75. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 138vb: "Prius enim naturaliter est esse quam vivere vel sapere vel imaginem aut similitudinem habere. Et sine hiis potest 'esse' cogitari, sed nihil horum potest esse vel cogitari sine essendi fundamento."

76. Gallus is quoting *DN*, chapter 5 (see P. Chevallier (ed.), *Dionysiaca: Recueil donnant l'ensemble des traductions latines des ouvrages attribués au Denys de l'Aréopage*, 2 vols (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1937–50), 334^a) at *Explanatio DN*, fol. 138va.

77. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 105vb: "sicut et omnia inanimata participant esse eius." Cf. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 116ra: "And this occurs through an abundant sharing of His eternal being with creation" ("Et hoc fit per habundantem communicationem sui eterni esse creature").

78. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 107ra: "Exemplificat [sc. Dionysius] de illa collatione in causis inferioribus,

It would be absurd to think of sadness (cause) being sad (effect): how then can any knowledge derived from the caused lead the mind to know anything true about the cause? Despite any affirmative knowledge gained through causality, and despite the light brought to the soul through affective excess in view of the incapacity of intellect to reach what is beyond being, God always remains unknown and eminently beyond all knowledge.

In delineating a distinction between Being in itself (*entitas*) and being (*ens*) as that which is revealed to intelligence, it is important not to impose upon Gallus's thought the later and much more systematic real distinction between essence and existence as elaborated by Thomas Aquinas. The distinction in Thomas Gallus is there to protect the divine simplicity and transcendence of God which he argues for philosophically, but which is also theologically desirable for the Abbot of Vercelli in the face of the Neoplatonic doctrine of emanation. At times, Gallus glosses *per se esse* in God as being simply the fullness of essence:

AND BEING ITSELF (*ipsum esse*), that is the fullness of more-than-substantial being (*essentie*)...⁷⁹

Now this gloss would suggest that *esse*, even before it is manifested to intelligence through procession, is employed to describe the fullness of essence. In this way, Gallus remains within a formalist framework of idealism and Platonism which does not acknowledge a real distinction of essence from existence. Perhaps, in the light of other statements, it could be argued that Gallus was feeling his way towards a recognition that *esse creatum* is different from *esse divinum* on account of the radical and realist distinction between being and ideas, but it would be wrong to interpret Gallus, who after all was writing before Aquinas, as a Thomist *avant la lettre*. In the light of this discussion, it is worth noting that Gallus once stated that the best name for God was neither being nor the good, but simply "fullness" (*plenitudo*):

But no word, as it seems to me, rises higher to express the meaning of the divine and more-than-unknown infinity than the name 'fullness.'⁸⁰

ostendens quod etiam ibi multum distant cause a causatis, verbi gratia: Delectationes faciunt nos delectari, tristitie faciunt nos tristar; et tamen ille delectationes non delectantur, nec tristitie tristantur; et ita valde distant cause iste a propriis effectibus."

79. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 139vb: "ET IPSUM ESSE, id est plenitudo supersubstantialis essentie." It is more likely that Gallus is using essence interchangeably with being, especially in view of Eriugena's widespread use of *essentia* to translate being.

80. *Explanatio EH*, fol. 71ra: "Nullum autem vocabulum, ut mihi videtur, sublimius ascendit in divine superignote infinitatis significationem quam nomen plenitudinis."

Gallus's chief goal was to protect the divine as supernatural plenitude and fullness, and thus needing no cause for his being and conservation in being.⁸¹ Situating his thought within the domain of being or within the horizon of goodness is an interesting endeavour that can clearly help understand, for example, postmodern debates in this area, but this must be done without forcing a Thomist interpretation onto Gallus. The name *plenitudo* is sufficiently neutral to employ when considering this chief goal in Gallus's thought.⁸²

VI. GALLUS'S ACCOUNT OF NON-BEING

References to non-existence have appeared frequently in this consideration of Gallus's ontology thus far. The notion of non-existence is clearly used in a way that is fraught with paradox and possible contradiction, so it is well to explore further what Gallus intends when he says, for example, that God is non-existent or without being.

When it is stated that God is non-existent, it is to be noted that Gallus is usually prefixing *super* (*hyper*) to the predication of existence. Thus he can comment on Dionysius in the following way:

AND IN HIM ALONE, the supreme good you understand, the EXCESS OF SUBSTANCE and more-than-substance is NON-EXISTENT, because it exists in an excess above all being (*ens*)...⁸³

Never can Gallus be found using the word *sine* ("without") in reference to God's 'lack' of being. Rather, the purpose of the predication of non-existence is to emphasise the hyper-existence of God who is beyond all (created/manifested) being. Gallus always intends to signify the independent fullness of God (that is, his supersubstance and excess of substance) through the paradoxical ascription of non-being to God. In addition, it can be noted that it is not just being that Gallus qualifies as being 'super.' Immediately after the above citation, Dionysius describes God as being "non-living life" ("vita non vivens"). In a paradoxical way, Dionysius is announcing the death of God here by saying that the deity is 'non-living' or dead. A gloss from Gallus however is only to

81. In this regard, note Gallus's explanation (*Explanatio DN*, fol. 140ra) of Dionysius's statement that God does not have being: "HE DOES NOT POSSESS [SC. BEING], that is He *does not participate in being* but contains the whole of being in a more-than-abundant way" ("IPSE NON HABET [SC. ESSE], id est *non participat esse sed continet totum esse et superhabundat*") (italics added).

82. This name is in striking contrast to Jean-Luc Marion's preferred name for God as 'absence' or 'anonymous' (cf. J.-L. Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson, Perspectives in Continental Philosophy, 17 (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), *passim*).

83. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 114va: "ET IN IPSO SOLO, scilicet summo bono, EXCESSUS SUBSTANTIE et supersubstantialitas est NON EXISTENS quia est super omne ens excedens."

be expected: “NON-LIVING since He incomparably exceeds all life and every living thing.”⁸⁴ God is not dead, but rather has a super-life that exceeds all created life and all human capacity to know what this divine life might be. This same reasoning applies to every adjective that can be referred to God. If God is non-existent, non-living, non-powerful, non-knowing, that is only because he enjoys these qualities in a superessential manner.

This is undoubtedly an unusual and at times shocking way of using language. Gallus is aware of as much himself: “It does not escape our notice that these matters appear absurd to many of those who are said to be wise...”⁸⁵ The “many” (*multi*) that Gallus has in mind are explained as being “the foremost pagan philosophers who reckon that being (*ens*) is the first and greatest object of knowledge.”⁸⁶ This comment is worth observing as it reiterates again Gallus’s chief preoccupation, that of protecting the divine fullness and plenitude which is beyond, outside, before (and so ‘without’) being, in that sense of being (*ens*) as created or manifested through procession. The fact that these pagan philosophers do not acknowledge a transcendent and autonomous source for intra-mundane being is the error that Gallus is targeting. For him, there is Being beyond the being that can be grasped in cognition. To avoid the risk that his position might appear absurd, Gallus consequently devotes a lot of reflection to acquiring a deeper understanding of the idea of non-being.

Three examples of non-being are offered in the *Explanatio* of the *Mystica Theologia* which can serve as a starting-point for this reflection on non-being.

In accordance with our usage, ‘existing’ (*existens*) is said of what has proceeded from the furthest reason of the Word into created being (*esse creatum*); ‘non-existing’ is said of what either does not exist in the [divine] reasons like a chimera, or is not yet coming forth like the Antichrist, or has ceased to exist like yesterday.⁸⁷

First of all, existence is defined as what has proceeded from God (here described as the eternal *Logos* or *Verbum*) into creation or manifestation. Being is what is known by the mind; the ideas or *spectacula* which remain

84. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 114va: “NON VIVENS quia incomparabiliter excedit omnem vitam et omne vivens.”

85. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 114va: “Nec nos latet quod ista multis, qui dicuntur sapientes, videntur absurda...”

86. “...precipui gentium philosophi qui putant ens esse primum et summum cognitione.”

87. *Explanatio MT* (Théry, 102): “Secundum usum nostrum, ‘existens’ dicitur quod de extrema ratione Verbi in esse creatum prodiit; ‘non existens’ quod vel non est in rationibus ut chimera, vel in esse nondum producitur ut Antechristus, vel esse desiit ut dies.”

within the Godhead are thus non-existent, not because they do not enjoy there their own proper *entitas*, as Gallus has previously noted, but because they are non-existent *quoad nos*, as far as humans are concerned. A clear emphasis is placed in this definition of being on that which is brought into the view of mental cognition. In similar vein, it is easy to understand why the good can be described as the highest name for God, at least from this *quoad nos* perspective, since it is the divine goodness that is responsible for the emergence and manifestation of (created and manifested) being. The good is thus before being. That this same priority should be transferred to God *quoad se*, as he is in his self-reflexive being, seems to go beyond what this processional definition of ‘existens’ allows.

Three examples of the ‘non existens’ are proffered next. First of all there is non-being as that which is absolutely without being whether mundane or extra-mundane. Gallus gives the example of a chimera. Fire-sprouting monsters with a lion’s head, serpent’s tail and goat’s body just do not exist. Another example of things enjoying no existence whatsoever would be a square circle (even though this is of a different logical status than the example Gallus gives). The characteristic of these examples seems to be that they have no real existence whatsoever, but are just the products of imagination, contradiction or nonsense, and therefore non-being.

The second example pertains to things that could be produced but have not actually been produced yet. Gallus gives the scriptural example of the Antichrist, an eschatological figure which Scripture says will one day appear in the future. Until this figure appears, it remains within the ideas and *rationes* of God, where presumably it has some form of potential existence, even if it has not yet proceeded into that *esse* which can be known. Again, I think this example can be extended to include anything within the whole spectrum of beings that falls under the act/potency distinction. Thus, oak trees are non-existent so long as there are only acorns. The oak has a potential existence within the acorn, but emerges into cognisance only when it gains its actual flowering of existence. Gallus elsewhere gives another example of this type of non-existence:

Non-being (*non ens*) can be said of what has not yet proceeded into being (*esse*), as in springtime the roots bring grass to sprout which [grass] previously did not exist.⁸⁸

The grass in spring emerges from its potential existence into actuality only when roots germinate to produce the grass. Accordingly, there is a parallel here between the non- (i.e. potential-) existence of both the divine ideas and

88. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 114va: “Non ens dici potest quod nondum in esse prodiit, ut in vere radices germinant herbas que numquam fuerunt.”

worldly essences, and their emergence into act as respectively created being or actual worldly things. What makes the non-existence of possibles differ from the chimerical is that the chimera or other impossibles will never enjoy any form of actual existence, because they enjoy no potential existence in the first place, neither in the divine mind nor latently within any earthly thing. Consequently, Gallus is making a distinction between non-existence *tout court* and non-existence as potential existence.

The third example of non-existence given is that of a ‘day’ that has gone by (yesterday) and thus no longer exists (today). It must still however enjoy some existence in memory or recollection. A previous day thus has no potential existence, but has receded into a past (so to speak) existence. The past however is in some sense non-existent, since no longer in act, no longer appearing.

In sum, then, there is non-existence as absolute impossibility, as possibility and as past events. The first is atemporal since impossible; the second is either eternal (the *spectacula* or divine ideas as beyond time and being) or future (the seeds *will* become grass);⁸⁹ and the third is located in the past. (The present encompasses the realm of the existent, in other words, of that which has *now* reached actuality after appearing out of potency).⁹⁰

Gallus’s understanding of non-being is greatly stimulated by his discussion of evil (*malum*). In trying to solve the problem of how evil can exist alongside the good, what does Neoplatonic thought mean by saying that evil is non-existent? Under which of the three categories of non-existence does Gallus claim that evil falls?

According to Gallus, evil is non-existent because it is totally beyond the pale of being, an absolute (ontological) impossibility.

Evil is not just excluded from existence (*ab existente*) but also from non-existence (*a non existente*), in accordance with what was said above (same chapter, section I) that in the good even non-existence (*non existens*) is spoken of in a more-than-substantial way.⁹¹

Gallus immediately goes on to note how Greek philosophers spoke of non-being “per excessum existentium,” that is, by means of the excessive eminence

89. Even the eternal ideas are to some extent future (at least for us, *quoad nos*) since if they ever emerge from the divine being into manifested being, this will happen at a point in time future to us.

90. It is to be noted how postmodern *jeux* play along the parameters of the same terminology that Gallus is explicating: what does Marion mean by a non-existent God without Being? In what sense can Kearney’s possible God, ‘*possesit*’ (a term invented by Nicholas of Cusa) be located within the ideas of potency and possibility that are outlined here?

91. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 125ra: “Non solum excluditur malum ab existente sed et a non existente secundum quod dictum est superius (eodem I) quod in bono etiam non existens supersubstantialiter dicitur.”

that the ideas have over the things that emerge into being. Evil is excluded from existence *qua* actual being because if evil enjoyed some existence, it would be in effect a good, since for things to exist is good and better than non-existence. As evil is the absence of good, it must be non-existent *qua* wholly deprived of any real existence. Neither is evil a potency nor one of the divine ideas: “non-existence [i.e. what is absolutely without being, like evil] can in no way be anything . . . in the way that non-existing things [e.g. divine ideas] are said to exist in the good in a more-than-substantial way.”⁹²

Gallus’s reasoning for placing evil in the category of the absolutely non-existent needs to be explored, because in this way a greater understanding of non-being can be reached through examining the example of evil.

For non-existence (*non existens*) is spoken of through an excess over being (*essentie*), but evil is called non-existent (*non existens*) through a lack of every good and every being (*essentie*), according to the fact that existence and non-existence are respectively affirmation and negation, positing and pure privation. For non-existence, according to the understanding mentioned above, posits what is more-than-being (*super esse*) instead of removing being (*esse*). This usage is unaccustomed among modern writers.⁹³

If this nuanced use of non-existence to designate an abundance rather than a lack of being was unaccustomed (*insuetum*) to those moderns (*apud modernos*) of Gallus’s time, it is no less jarring when used *apud postmodernos*! In contrasting non-existence (the divine ideas) with non-existence (evil), Gallus is contrasting what is beyond intelligible being due to an excess of essence (*per excessum essentie*) and what is beyond intelligible being due to a defect of essence (*per defectum omnis boni et omnis essentie*). At stake too is the contrast between positing an essence and denying it (*positio/negatio*), for in place of taking away (*pre auferendo*) and negating all essence, the non-existing ideas posit and affirm being, not however on the intelligible plane, but on the superintelligible plane (because the ideas are above being—*super esse*). Evil then is non-existent since it is a privation of being. The divine ideas are non-existent because they have too much being, a plenitude of being that is in excess of the human capacity to understand it.

The demesne of God as *super esse* is further described by Gallus as the place where

92. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 125ra: “...non existens nullo modo potest aliquid esse...eo modo quo non existentia dicuntur esse in bono supersubstantialiter.”

93. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 125rb: “Dicitur enim non existens per excessum essentie, malum vero non existens per defectum omnis boni et omnis essentie secundum quod existens et non existens sunt affirmatio et negatio, positio et pura privatio. Non existens enim, secundum intellectum supra dictum, pre auferendo esse ponit super esse, quod apud modernos est insuetum.”

... the Godhead eternally subsists without every accidental and substantial property, but not without goodness.⁹⁴

Quite clearly Gallus is adamant that the Godhead is beyond all the Aristotelian categories, beyond even substance itself. Gallus however is not claiming that the human mind can intelligibly grasp what this supersubstantial nature is, for mind is confined to the bounds of being.

But in fact we unreservedly assert that God exists or subsists (*esse vel subsistere*). However it is not to be thought that any being or substance (*essentiam vel substantiam*) knowable or intelligible to us is being attributed to Him, but we say this so that we do not maintain absolute silence about the ineffable.⁹⁵

Ne de ineffabili penitus taceamus. The category of *superesse* is introduced not as if in a hubristic way Gallus is claiming to gain access to some intelligible attribute of God. Rather, it is his attempt to avoid a pure silence in the face of the unknown. By the supersubstantial, thought tries to think/say the unthinkable/unsayable.

In contrast to the category of the superintellectual (since the divine non-existence is supersubstantial), Gallus also introduces the category of the 'infraintellectual' or the 'extraintellectual' (although the Vatican MS of the *Explanatio* witnesses this as the 'exintellectual'). The passage where this distinction is brought to light is worth quoting in full for the precision it helps bring to understanding the various levels of being and non-being. The passage is situated within the overall discussion of evil which, as stated, has much to teach the reader about Gallus's entire ontology.

No one should be surprised if this treatise about evil seems difficult to understand, since our speculative intellect does not go beyond the bounds of being (*metas entis*), neither in the direction above nor the direction below. Hence, just as it is difficult for us to deal with more-than-substantial objects which go beyond being (*ens*), so too it is difficult to deal with evil which is, so to speak, outside-of-intellect and less-than-intellectual, since it does not emerge into being (*ens*). As a result, it is not really a being (*ens*) but, as it were, a fictitious being (*apparens ens*). The meaning here can become known by attending to the experience of a clear-sighted intelligence suffering failure, as it were, because of the lack of an intelligible object, just as darkness becomes known when the operation of clear-sighted eyes fails. Evil is thus understood in the same way that darkness is seen. Hence, by means of the word darkness in Scripture, good is termed more-than-intellectual and evil less-than-intellectual.⁹⁶

94. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 127ra: "...deitas sine omni habitu accidentali et substantiali eternaliter subsistit, sed non sine bonitate."

95. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 127ra: "Verumtamen omnino Deum dicimus esse vel subsistere; nec tamen est intelligendum aliquam essentiam vel substantiam nobis cognoscibilem aut intelligibilem attribui ei, sed hoc dicimus ne de ineffabili penitus taceamus."

96. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 127rb–128va: "Nec miretur aliquis si tractatus ille de malo difficilis

The superintellectual/infraintellectual distinction hinges on the upward (*superius*) rise of intellect to the divine, and the downward collapse (*inferius*) of intellect before the unintelligible. The direction cannot be pressed too closely, for God can be said to be as much below our understanding as above, and vice versa for evil. The distinction can stand, however, so long as it be understood not in any local sense, but in an intelligible way. What is common to both the superintelligible and the infraintellectual is the lack of an intelligible object. Just as the senses require the presence of some object for sensation to occur, so too the intellect needs an intelligible object for intellection to arise. In both cases here, there is no intelligible object. In both cases, therefore, there is darkness—the darkness of the divine mind and the darkness of evil. There is, however, the crucial difference already met so often, that evil is ‘known’ only through the absence of light, whereas the deity is ‘known’ through an excess of light that blinds the eyes. Thus, evil really is below (*infra*) all intelligence for it is a total absence and privation. God, on the other hand, is over-abundance of light, and can be best reached through the affections.

This infraintellectual-intelligible-superintelligible schema is evident throughout Gallus’s whole discussion, even if the exact terminology is not always reproduced. In the following citation, Gallus ponders how evil can be called anything at all,

...since it [sc. evil] neither falls under being (*sub ente*) nor goes beyond being (*ens*), but is totally deficient of every being (*ente*) and every good, so that evil is called the lack or total privation of any being or good whatsoever.⁹⁷

The ontological terminology is here correlative to the intellectual terms used above: thus there is that which falls under the category of being (*sub ente*—the intelligible); that which is above all being (*ens excedat*—the superintelligible); and that which is deficient of all being, as below being (*pura privatio entis*—the infraintellectual). The ontological correlates are also used when Gallus writes:

videatur intellectui, quia intellectus noster speculativus metas entis non excedit neque superius neque inferius. Unde sicut difficile nobis est tractare superintellectualia que excedunt ens, ita et malum quod est, ut ita dicam, extraintellectuale et infraintellectuale quia non pervenit usque in ens. Unde non est vere ens, sed quasi apparens ens. Hec sententia innotescit per experientiam perspicacis intelligentie quasi deficientis ex defectu obiecti intelligibilis sicut innotescunt tenebre, exercitio perspicuorum oculorum deficiente. Sic ergo intelligitur malum ut videntur tenebre. Unde sepe in scriptura per tenebras designatur bonum superintellectuale, malum infraintellectuale.”

97. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 133rb: “...cum [sc. malum] nec sub ente cadat, nec ens excedat, sed ab omni ente et bono plene deficiens, ut cuiuslibet entis vel boni defectus sive pura privatio malum dicatur.”

“So when one must speak of non-being and the quasi-more-than-substantial and less-than-substantial lack of the good...”⁹⁸ The similarities between the divine superexistence and the infraexistence of evil are so striking that Gallus even dares to call evil the supersubstantial (carefully qualified by the *quasi*), and adding the term ‘infrasubstantial’ as being more appropriate to distinguish evil from the good.

The words prefixed by ‘super,’ Gallus insists, are negative terms, even if they do not contain the obvious sign of negation, namely, the word ‘non’:

Accordingly, names such as more-than-substantial, more-than-godly, more-than-good, infinite, incomprehensible, immense (which are all negative not positive terms) are given to Him [sc. God] beyond the boundaries of intelligence, as it were.⁹⁹

The names given under the so-called *via eminentiae* are thus in reality negative terms in that they negate more than they assert (every negation however being in some way parasitic on affirmation¹⁰⁰). As Gallus continues, “the foremost knowledge of Him [sc. God] is in the removal of everything” (“*precipua notitia eius [sc. Dei] est in omni ablatione*”). Must all philosophy then founder before the *excessus* in negativity and silence? It cannot be forgotten that Gallus’s solution to the *excessus* is an affective one. Where affirmation and negation (even through superintelligible terms) go amiss, the aim of loving affection is sure. Gallus describes those who practice the *via amoris* or way of love thus:

Therefore those who are placed on the earth yearn everyday for heaven and with all their strength stretch out the famished and parched bosom of synderesis with continual effort and with the co-operation of grace towards the reception of that ray...¹⁰¹

98. *Explanatio DN*, fol. 133rb: “Ita cum oportet loqui de non ente et quasi supersubstantiali et infrasubstantiali defectu boni...”

99. *Explanatio AH*, fol. 15vb: “Unde quasi super terminos intellectuales dantur ei [sc. Deo] nomina ut supersubstantialis, superdeus, superbonus, infinitus, incomprehensibilis, immensus, que omnia negativa sunt, non positiva.”

100. Cf. Albert the Great in his commentary on the *Mystical Theology*, in *Super Dionysii Mysticam Theologiam et Epistulas*, ed. Paulus Simon, in *Opera Omnia*, vol. 37, part 2 (Aschendorff: Monasterium Westfalorum, 1978): “...quia omnis negatio fundatur supra aliquam affirmationem; unde ubi non est vere affirmatio, neque etiam vere negatio...” (“...since every negation is based upon some affirmation; hence, where there really is no affirmation, neither is there really any negation”), 475.

101. *Explanatio AH*, fol. 29vb: “Qui ergo in terra positi celum cottidie suspirant assidueque conatibus cooperante gratia ad illius radii susceptionem famelicum et sitibundum sinum synderesis totis viribus expandunt...”

They extend the bosom of synderesis¹⁰² towards the ray of light that blinds the intelligence, in order to receive their nourishment. Yet immediately Gallus introduces another *excessus* that it seems not even the affections can bridge. Continuing the quotation Galls adds:

...nor do they need to be taught by reason or by any authority what they thus experience more certainly themselves, namely that they cannot attain or receive that ray by any of their own efforts, even with the co-operation of grace.¹⁰³

At the end of the affective trajectory, the being of God remains as elusive to affection as that same being is shrouded in unknowing for the intellect. As the quotation from the heading of this article seemed to indicate, the vestibules of that Being which ultimately is, can be approached via writing, speech, thought, intelligence and then experience, in ever-increasing proximity—but all of these finally fail to cross the threshold of Being or what is (*minus experiri...quam sit*¹⁰⁴).

VII. OVERVIEW OF GALLUS'S THOUGHT

Below I wish to summarise some of the key features of Thomas Gallus's ontology and theory of knowledge as I have outlined them with especial reference to the *Explanatio*:

1. Clearly, intellectual knowledge and concepts are relegated to a position below affective excess, without however being denigrated. Thomas Gallus, it has been seen, carefully distinguishes intellect and love, without thereby diluting the two. I conclude that Gallus teaches that love and knowledge are a two-fold gift, with love enjoying priority over knowledge. Conceptual knowledge is valid and is a way of knowing that truly reaches a definite philosophical knowledge of God. It is not however the end of the story. Knowledge is overwhelmed by a form of excess (experienced immediately in the affections). I have termed this an *affective excess*. Since concepts offer only a mirror-image of the divine (a true reflection nonetheless), it is the drenching experience of charity that, Gallus teaches, can go further than concepts, since love knows no mirror, but 'sees' face-to-face. Consequently, I can accept the classification of Thomas Gallus (alongside Robert Grosseteste during the thirteenth-century Latin reception of Dionysius, though the dif-

102. "Sinus" as the immaterial fold, receptacle or bosom of the divine outpouring is another key part of Gallus's vocabulary.

103. *Explanatio AH*, fol. 29vb: "nec ratione nec auctoritate egent edoceri quod sic certius experiuntur, scilicet nullis suis conatibus etiam cooperante gratia se radium illum attingere aut accipere."

104. *Explanatio EH*, fol. 86rb.

ferences between Gallus and Grosseteste remain to be studied) as teaching an interpretation of Dionysius that can be branded ‘affective Dionysianism.’ This affective approach to God is the obverse of the apophaticism engendered by the failure of intellect to penetrate the cloud of unknowing—love takes over when knowledge can advance no further. I find however the label ‘anti-intellectual’ inappropriate to what I have discovered in Gallus’s thought. Gallus allows the intellectual path to complement affective excess.

2. It cannot be forgotten, however, that even desire fails to exhaust the plenitude of the divine being. There is always an unknowability and an ‘unlove-ability’ to the divine, because even union fails to experience the divine nature exhaustively. There may then be no interposition of any creature (Augustine’s *nulla interposita creatura*)¹⁰⁵ between God and the soul’s experience of something of God, but this fact can only be considered simultaneously in the light of God’s nature as *superamabilis* (my phrase), “more-than-lovable.” Just as love ontologically fails to totally encompass the divine, so too does the language of love, that is, praise, fail to be commensurate with the intended object of praise.¹⁰⁶ As Gallus states in his *Glose super Angelica Ierarchia*: “He [sc. God] is greater than all praise” (“Maiores est [sc. Deus] omni laude”).¹⁰⁷ Not even the non-constative language of praise (recommended for example by J.-L. Marion in the wake of the overcoming of metaphysics¹⁰⁸) finally exhausts the depths of God’s unknown nature. As Gallus also remarks in his chapter 7 of the same *Glose*, God is as unpraiseworthy as he is praiseworthy: “MORE-THAN-PRASEWORTHY AND TOTALLY PRASEWORTHY, that is exceeding all praise and fully praiseworthy.”¹⁰⁹

105. Cf. Augustine, *De vera religione*, PL 34, 55. 113.

106. As Gallus explains: “Note that contemplation or vision for the intellect is equivalent to praise for the affections” (“Nota autem quod contemplatio vel visio secundum intellectum est laus secundum affectum”) (*Glose super Angelica Ierarchia*, Paris, Bibliothèque Mazarine, MS 715, fol. 416). Gallus completed these *Glosses on the Celestial Hierarchy* in 1224—I have prepared an (unpublished) edition of the *Glose*. For further information, see Declan Lawell, “Thomas Gallus’s Method as Dionysian Commentator: A Study of the *Glose super Angelica Ierarchia* (1224), Including some Considerations on the Authorship of the *Expositio librorum beati Dionysii*,” *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 76 (2009): forthcoming.

107. *Glose super Angelica Ierarchia*, fol. 419.

108. Cf. for example Marion, *The Idol and Distance*, 190, where Marion speaks of the “nonpredicative aim” of praise which evades and overcomes conceptual knowledge.

109. *Glose super Angelica Ierarchia*, fol. 430: “SUPERLAUDABILEM ET OMNINO LAUDABILEM, id est, superantem omnem laudem et plene laudabilem.”

3. Divine Being then has the final word—being as that which is beyond knowledge and beyond affection. The distinction encountered between the self-reflexive Being of God (*entitas*) and the being (*esse/ens*) that is manifested under the stimulus of the good is what safeguards this final divine stratum that is super-substantial and super-good, super-knowable and super-lovable. Yet it has to be stressed that this most intimate essence of the divine being (at least in the context of an interpretation of Thomas Gallus) cannot be decisively portrayed as Being or the Good as these terms are respectively defined by Thomist metaphysics, for example, and postmodern phenomenology (for example in Marion's work). With this in mind, it is best to see that Gallus considers God's Being as plenitude. I thus end with a non-polemical term that does not decide whether Gallus has in mind the fullness of Being or the fullness of the Good.

4. In ending, however, with no tendentious appropriation of Gallus the author to the ranks of either metaphysics or phenomenology, I do not intend to rule out the unique contribution Gallus can make to a discussion on the relation between a metaphysics of being and a phenomenology of love. Postmodern writers like Marion claim to be reclaiming ideas from pre-modernity (e.g. in Dionysius) that, it is alleged, can reinforce the concerns of postmodernity to overturn modernity and its metaphysical idols. My presentation of Thomas Gallus (a pre-modern writer) is intended as a similar reclaiming of these pre-modern ideas, yet from a standpoint very diverse from the world of postmodernity. I have hinted at this diversity in connection with Gallus's explication of the notions of non-existence (as privation) and non-existence (as possibility). What can the principles of Gallus's thought teach us about the postmodern appropriation of these notions? That question can only be hinted at in advance of a proper outline of, for example, Marion's thought. In the meantime, I offer the following schema as a summary of Gallus's thought as I have interpreted it, independently of answering the historical question as to whether Thomas of Vercelli personally remains a Neoplatonist through and through, or whether his thought has more in common with Thomas of Aquino who would later follow him. Philosophical principles have a life of their own independent of personal intention.¹¹⁰ The schema on the following page is offered as a summary that may be of use in discussions about the postmodern reception of Neoplatonism.

110. Cf. É. Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937).

THE GRADES OF BEING ACCORDING TO THOMAS GALLUS ¹¹¹			
LEVEL OF BEING	DESIGNATION AS EXISTENT OR NON-EXISTENT	TYPE OF KNOWLEDGE	EXAMPLES
PLENITUDO/ENTITAS	Non-existent	Unknown/Non-affective	God per se
SUPERESSE	Non-existent	Superintellectual	Union, God reached by affective excess
ESSE	Existent	Intellectual	Ideas, <i>divina spectacula</i> , God reached by knowledge
ESSE	Existent	Sensible	Corporeal Things
NON-ESSE	Non-existent	Infraintellectual	Evil/contradictions ¹¹²

Abstract

The question as to whether Being ought to form the background for any discussion about God is one which features prominently in postmodern or post-metaphysical theology, Jean-Luc Marion being a notable example. This question also preoccupied medieval writers such as Thomas Gallus, Abbot of Vercelli (d. 1246). This article first and foremost seeks to outline the views of Gallus on being and knowledge on the basis of his as yet unpublished *magnum opus*, namely the *Explanatio*, Gallus's large commentary on the writings of the Pseudo-Dionysius. Such an outline, it is suggested, can be used for the purposes of comparing the respectively pre-modern and postmodern views of Gallus and Marion, especially in regard to how the Neoplatonism of the *corpus Dionysiacum* can be interpreted.

111. What is noteworthy in the table is the addition of two new categories in addition to the three main (sensible, intelligible, superintelligible) levels of being in Gallus's thought. These are the infraintelligible, which covers what is absolutely non-existent (and therefore infraintelligible), and that absolute plenitude that evades even the affective excess.

112. J. Derrida's sterile or virginal *kbôra* could certainly be added to the category of the infraintellectual. Is it fitting to add Marion's God (or ~~God~~ written under erasure) to the category of the superintellectual as a saturated and superintellectual phenomenon? Or is Marion's deconstructed, Absent God more suited to the category of the infraintellectual?

