

(3) The answer to the third point is already clear from what has been said; although there is no common ground between God and other things, such as there is between other things, nevertheless there is some common ground in the sense that things imitate him.

CHAPTER THREE

Cataphatic and apophatic theologies.

In the *Theological Outlines*, then, we celebrate particularly the items belonging to affirmative theology, how the divine and good nature is called "single" and how it is called "threefold," what the Fatherhood is taken in itself and what the Sonship, and what the theology of the Spirit intends to show; how from the immaterial and simple good there sprouted lights of goodness which remain in the heart, and how they have remained inseparable from their stability in it and in themselves and in each other in their coeternal burgeoning; how the supersubstantial Jesus was made substance with the true properties of human nature, and all the other things revealed in the Oracles which are celebrated in the *Theological Outlines*. In the *Divine Names* we celebrate how he is called "good," "being," "life" and "wisdom" and "power" and all the other things which form part of intellectual God-naming. In the *Symbolic Theology* we celebrate the designations of God taken over from the things of the senses and applied to the things of God, what God's "forms" are, and his "shapes" and "parts" and "instruments," his "places" and "ornaments," his "anger," "sadness" and "madness," his "drunkenness" and "carousing," his "oaths" and "curses," his "sleep" and his "waking up," and all the other holy compounded images which are part of symbolic God-shaping.

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In this chapter Dionysius proposes to establish the proper way of treating our subject, as we have already seen from our analysis of

the book as a whole. And since the subject is treated by way of negations, his principal objective is to establish the procedure involved in negative theology. And since the procedure of negative theology is learned from that of affirmative theology, he begins with an account of affirmative theology. This is clear from the title, "Cataphatic and apophatic theologies."

This chapter accordingly falls into two parts, the first dealing with the procedure of affirmative theology, the second with that of negative theology.

The first part falls into two sections. In the first, Dionysius lays down the procedure of affirmative theology; in the second he encourages Timothy to ponder this procedure.

The first section has three subdivisions, in line with the author's three books on theological affirmations; he first mentions those dealt with in the *Theological Outlines*, then those dealt with in the *Divine Names*, and finally those dealt with in the *Symbolic Theology*.

Before we actually look at the text, there is a question about whether these three books cover the ground sufficiently.

(1) The task of theology with regard to affirmations about God does not appear to be sufficiently communicated in these three books. In addition to the proper attributes of the Persons, there are certain attributes which are appropriated to them, and no teaching about this is contained in the three books, so it looks as if they are insufficient.

(2) In none of these books does the author deal with God's will, foreknowledge or predestination, yet all of these belong to the theologian's task and demand particular treatment, as the Master says in the Sentences.¹ So these three books, it seems, are inadequate on their own.

(3) In addition to the eternal processions of the Persons, there are certain temporal processions, and there is nothing about these in any of the three books; so they are, on the face of it, incomplete.

(4) Dionysius wrote other books too, such as the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, in which he teaches us how to approach the things of God by way of symbols, and similarly his book on *Things Visible and In-*

1. Peter Lombard, I *Sent.* d.35 c.1.

visible, and these are not listed here. So his account seems to be incomplete.

In response we must say that the task of theology being described here is not that of manifesting God in any of his effects or gifts, but that of manifesting him in himself, and the affirmative aspect of this task is sufficiently contained in the three books listed, because there are only three ways of talking about God: metaphorically, and this is what the *Symbolic Theology* is about; or literally (a) with reference to the properties which belong to the Persons, and this is what the *Theological Outlines* is about; or (b) with reference to the properties of the divine nature, and this is what the *Divine Names* is about. This analysis of the different ways of designating God comes from Ambrose.²

So we can answer the points raised as follows:

(1) Terms which are appropriated to the Persons are in themselves common and belong to the divine nature; they are terms like "goodness," "wisdom" and "power," and they are discussed in the *Divine Names*.

(2) Predestination and foreknowledge differ from knowledge and wisdom only in being antecedent, which is what the prefix signifies. For this reason they are included in the discussion of God's wisdom in the *Divine Names*. The specific nuance which they add calls for some special conclusions, but these belong more to the discussion of creatures than to the treatment of God in himself. Similarly what needs to be said about God's will is indicated by the discussion of his goodness, which is the disposition of his will.³ As it says at the end of the *Divine Names*, other words which are used to the same effect must be taken in accordance with the same rules of interpretation.⁴

(3) The temporal processions are a manifestation of the eternal processions, and so both are explained together; the temporal processions are contained in the interpretation of the divine names,

2. Ambrose, *De Fide* II Prol. 2 (PL 16 [1845]: 559D–560C), taken up by Lombard, *I Sent.* d.22 c.1, on which see Albert's comment, B 25 pp. 566–7.

3. Albert's contention is that predestination is part of divine foreknowledge (cf. *I Sent.* d.40 a.1, B 26 pp. 304–5), and that foreknowledge is not, in this context, significantly different from knowledge, which Dionysius discusses in *DN* 7.2. The specific nuance added by "fore-" is relevant to a quite different area of theology. Similarly God's will is taken to be sufficiently discussed in Dionysius' treatment of goodness in *DN* 4.

4. Dionysius, *DN* 13.6 (PG 3:981C).

in the guise of effects, where Dionysius talks about the divine processions into creatures.⁵

(4) In these other books God is not revealed in himself, but in some of his effects, such as sacramental grace (in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*) or visible creatures (in the other book).

So Dionysius begins by saying, "In the *Theological Outlines*, then," (the book he wrote about the divine Persons) "we celebrate particularly," or according to the other translation, "we celebrated particularly," "the items belonging to affirmative theology," that is, the affirmations about God which belong properly to the Persons, namely, "how the divine and good nature is called 'single.'"

There are several objections to this:

(1) Hilary says that in God there is neither singleness nor aloneness.⁶

(2) Single individuals are distinguished from others by their accidents,⁷ but in God there are no accidents, therefore he is not single.

(3) Single individuals are individuated by matter,⁸ but God is utterly immaterial, therefore he is not single.

(4) Single individuals presuppose some common nature which is individuated in them,⁹ but God is not an individual member of

5. Cf. Dionysius, *DN* 2.11, with Albert's commentary (Col. XXXVII pp. 96–100).

6. Hilary, *De Trinitate* 7.38 (PL 10:231B), as cited and exploited by Lombard, *I Sent.* d.23 c.5.

7. The doctrine that individuals are distinguished only by their accidents goes back to Boethius, *De Trinitate* 1 (ed. H. F. Stewart and E. K. Rand, Loeb classics [1918], p.6:24–6), who probably got it from Porphyry, *Isagoge*, ed. Busse 7.22–5 (text in *Aristoteles Latinus* I 6–7 [Bruges and Paris, 1966], pp. 13–14). In the later Middle Ages it was defended by William of Champeaux (cf. Abelard, *Hist. Cal.* 2, PL 178:119AB), but it was attacked by Abelard, *Glossae super Porphyrium*, ed. B. Geyer, Beiträge XXI/1 [Münster, 1919], p. 13; later on it was attacked by William of Auvergne, *De Universo* I.II ch.11, ed. cit. I p.819aD, and by Thomas, in *Metaph. Comm.* 1626 (Marietti ed.). Elsewhere Albert seems to concede only that accidents are one way in which individuals differ from one another (*Metaph.* 10.2.9, Col. XVI p.455:78–9). I am indebted to Osmond Lewry, O.P., for the reference to Porphyry.

8. This is the standard medieval Aristotelian doctrine, that matter is the principle of individuation (cf. Averroes, *De Somno et Vigilia*, ed. cit. p.103; Thomas, in *Metaph. Comm.* 1496); whether or not the principle is genuinely Aristotelian is disputed: cf. J. Owens p.244.

9. To say that something is "an individual" normally implies that it is "an individual X" (an individual cat, teacup or whatever), which means that there is more to X than is contained in the individual. My favorite beer mug, however splendid, does not exhaust the whole notion of beer mugs. If God were an individual in this sense, he would be only a partial instantiation of what it means to be God.

any class, because otherwise there would be something more primary and more simple than God. Therefore God is not single.

In response we must say that what Hilary was denying in God is that there is only one divine Person, but Dionysius is talking about the singleness of the divine essence; and even that is not strictly "single" in the same way that single individuals are found in lower beings. It is called "single" in the sense that it is not in fact nor could it in principle be multiplied, as individuals generally can be.¹⁰

This makes it clear what the answer is to all the points raised.

So, to return to the text, Dionysius is talking about "how the divine nature is called 'single'" (unique, not multiplied, in the three Persons), "and how it is called 'threefold'" (in the Trinity of Persons), "what the Fatherhood is, taken in itself, and what the Sonship" and how it is revealed in the temporal procession, and "what the theology of the Spirit intends to show", that is, what is meant by talking about "Holy Spirit" in God, and "how lights of goodness" (the Son and the Holy Spirit) "sprouted from the simple and immaterial good" while nevertheless "remaining in the heart," which is clearly contrary to the way lower beings work, because when something sprouts, it does not remain in the source from which it has sprouted.

There are several difficulties about this:

(1) "Good" is a name belonging to the divine essence, and the essence neither generates nor is generated, so it does not look as if there is anything "sprouting" from the good.

(2) What does "heart" mean?

(3) The image of light is inappropriate, because light is not a substance, whereas the Persons are substances existing in their own right, so they are not well signified by "lights."

In response:

10. Normally even unique individuals are not necessarily unique, but God is necessarily unique, the word "God" properly has no plural (*I Sent.* d.2 a.22, B 25 pp.83-4). For a modern discussion of problems about calling God an "individual," see B. Davies, *Thinking about God* (London, 1985), pp.118-28. Albert's argument here becomes much clearer if we emend the text by deleting *sed* at p.469:45; this would yield: "Even that is not strictly 'single' in the same way that single individuals are found in lower beings, because it is not in fact nor could it in principle be multiplied, as individuals can be." The last clause would thus become the explanation of why God is not an individual, rather than of why he is so called in spite of the difficulties. One great advantage of this emendation is that it gives us a text which really does answer points (2)-(4).

(1) "Good" is being used here for the divine nature as it is in the Father, in whom it is the principle of generation, because the Father begets in virtue of the divine nature, even though taken in itself the divine nature is not relative and is not confined to any one of the Persons; but taken with reference to the act of begetting, it is peculiar to the Father and has to be called "relative," just as the power of begetting does.¹¹ So to the objection that "good" is a name belonging to the divine essence, we may say that this is true, but because it signifies the essence concretely in the divine Person, it can be taken over because of this connection to stand for the Person, as the word "God" is in "God from God."¹²

(2) The coming forth of feelings and thoughts from the heart is an immaterial procession, and so, to symbolize the immateriality of the divine begetting, the divine nature is compared to a heart, inasmuch as it is in the Father as the principle from which the Son and the Holy Spirit proceed. And because they proceed from the Father as Persons, yet remain in his essence, they are said to "remain in the heart."

(3) The word "lights" is not being used to display the perfection of the divine Persons, but to show that their procession is a procession of form:¹³ just as light comes from light, so God comes from God.

Dionysius goes on, "and how they have remained inseparable from their stability in it" (the heart), in that they remain in one essence, "and in themselves," in that each Person remains in himself, "and in each other," in that the Son is in the Father and the Father is in the Son, even though one Person proceeds from another "in a

11. The essential point is that, though all three divine Persons are God (and so the divine nature is common to them all), nevertheless it is qua God that the Father begets the Son, so in a sense we have to say that the divine nature is the principle of divine generation (cf. *I Sent.* d.5, B 25 pp.173-91).

12. The phrase from the Nicene Creed justifies the claim that we can say that "God begets God," not just that "the Father begets the Son." The divine essence does not subsist on its own, somehow, independently of the divine Persons, and the Father is not some kind of compound of divine essence and Fatherhood. In him the divine nature is the Father and he is the nature.

13. The procession of the Son and the Holy Spirit from the Father is a "formal procession," because it involves the transmission of "form": what comes from God in this way is God. There are obviously other ways in which one thing can come from another, which do not involve any such passing on of form: if I write a book, the book is not human, even if I am.

coeternal burgeoning," because the generation of the Son does not precede the Son, nor does the breathing-out precede the Spirit, because there is no question here of any movement from potency to act,¹⁴ and also "how the supersubstantial Jesus" (supersubstantial with reference to his Godhead) "was made substance," dwelling in "the true properties of human nature," that is, a genuine body and a genuine soul, "and all the other things revealed in the Oracles" (the canonical scriptures) "which are celebrated" by us "in the *Theological Outlines*."

But surely it is not part of the business of that book to explain about the Incarnation of the Word. Conclusions and explanations which rest on different principles belong to different areas of instruction. Even if one and the same conclusion is demonstrated on the basis of different principles, that conclusion belongs to different sciences; thus for instance the sphericity of the earth is demonstrated on different grounds by physicists and by astronomers. But the Incarnation of the Word involves different principles from the distinctions between the Persons; the latter is explained in terms of their eternal relationships, but the Incarnation involves certain temporal deeds performed by God. So they do not belong to the same area of doctrine.

In response we may say that since the Incarnation of the Word belongs exclusively to the Son, it is appropriate to deal with it at the same time as the other features which are proper to the different Persons. The theological explanation of it relies on the same general principles, namely, the eternal relationships which distinguish between the Persons, because it is by one and the same Sonship that the Son is eternally the Son of the Father and that, from a certain point in time, he is the Son of his mother, and it is as the same Person that he is identified both in his Godhead and in his humanity.¹⁵

14. This is Albert's comment on "coeternal": the generation of the Son and the spiration of the Spirit are not processes, which could be measured in time; it makes no sense to think of a time when the Son was *being generated* but was not yet actually generated (and so was only potentially the Son, the Son "in the making").

15. The Son of Mary and the Son of God are one and the same person and one and the same Son. When we read in our papers that Mabel and Ebenezer Twiggins have had a son, we do not infer that there must be two sons, one son of Mabel and one son of Ebenezer; no more are there two sons in Jesus, one son of God and one son of Mary. If there were two distinct filiations involved, there would be two distinct persons in Jesus (which is the Nestorian heresy). Cf. *III Sent.* d.4 a.5 (B 28 p.86).

Even if certain further special principles are brought in to explain the Incarnation, this does not matter, since the same science can perfectly well contain conclusions which have different specific principles.

Dionysius goes on to say that "in the *Divine Names*" he has explained how God is called "good" and "all the other things which form part of intellectual God-naming," that is, names whose meaning does not express anything to do with the senses.

Then he says that "in the *Symbolic Theology*" he has explained the designations of God which are "taken over from the things of the senses and applied" to God, such as "God's 'forms' and 'shapes';" "form" and "shape" refer to the same thing, but from a different point of view, referring respectively inward and outward—form is not here being used in the sense of "substantial form."¹⁶ And so on in the same vein with regard to everything else which is said symbolically about God.

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And I think you have recognized how this last is more verbose than the previous two. The *Theological Outlines* and the exposition of the *Divine Names* ought to be less wordy than the *Symbolic Theology*, because the higher we turn our regard, the more our talking about intelligibles contracts in our sight, just as now, as we enter the darkness which

16. Albert's rather cryptic comment on the distinction between "form" and "shape" is elaborated in the commentary on *DN* 1.43 (Col. XXXVII p.25:24-9) and much more fully in *De Praedicamentis* 5.8 (B 1 p.259). "Substantial form" determines what something *is*. "Form" as a kind of quality, which is what Albert supposes Dionysius to be referring to here, is closely connected with substantial form (hence its "inward" orientation): it is shape considered precisely as the shape of a particular kind of thing. Substantial form means that something *is* a tiger. This other sort of form means that it *has the shape of* a tiger, it defines the outer limits of this particular lump of flesh as having the contours proper to a tiger. "Shape" (*figura*) refers to the same phenomenon, but with an "outward" reference: the tiger is shaped in such a way that it is well-adapted to make certain kinds of movements, its claws are not merely the right shape for a tiger's claws, they are also excellent for clawing with. Another way of looking at it is to say that you might be interested in a nose precisely as a human nose, part of a human body (this would be an interest in "form"), or you might be interested in it as a curious geometrical shape (this would be an interest in "shape").

is above mind, we shall find not brevity of speech but complete irrationality and foolishness.¹⁷

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Dionysius next bids Timothy consider how the more lowly names are "more verbose" than the previously mentioned names, because in the *Theological Outlines* and the *Divine Names* he was "less wordy" than in the *Symbolic Theology*. The reason for this is that the higher we extend our reach, "the more our talking about intelligibles contracts" and shortens "in our sight." And so in this teaching, in which we reach out, as far as we can, to the very transcendence of the divine nature, we do not even find few words to affirm about it, but we find there nothing but "complete irrationality and foolishness" because our intellect, seeing nothing identifiable in God's nature, cannot express it in any affirmations, but only in negations, and therefore this science comes to its fulfilment solely with negations.

*

There our speech, descending from the heights to the lowest limits, expanded into multiplicity in proportion to its descent, but now that it is going upward from lower things to the heights, it contracts in proportion to its ascent and, after the end of the whole ascent, it will be totally voiceless and totally united with the ineffable. But why, you ask, when we begin positing our divine affirmations altogether with the most primary, do we start our separation of things from God with the last and lowest? Because when we were

17. Albert has been misled by Sarracenus' translation: he takes *sermones conspectibus intelligibilium contrabuntur* to mean "our talking about intelligibles contracts in our sight," but the Greek shows that it must be intended to mean "our talking contracts because of the synoptic view (we have) of intelligibles" (at a higher level of abstraction more significance is packed into fewer words). Also "irrationality and foolishness" (*irrationabilitatem et imprudentiam*) is infelicitous for ἀλογίαν και ἀνοησίαν ("absence of words, absence of understanding").

affirming what is above all affirmation we had to posit one presiding affirmation¹⁸ on the basis of what is most kin to it, but now that we are negating what is beyond all negation we must begin with things that are most distant from it. Is God not more truly life and goodness than he is air or stone? Is it not more the case that he is not carousing or madness than that he is neither spoken nor understood?

*

Next Dionysius lays down the procedure for negative theology as opposed to affirmative theology. And first he says what the procedure is, then he raises and answers a question.

So first he says that in his treatment of affirmations he began with "the heights" and the more he descended, the more he "expanded his speech," following "the proportions" of reality: the further things are from what is primary, the more numerous they are¹⁹ and their properties are better known to us than those of the first things. But in negative theology, which is our present concern, we go "upward from lower things to the heights," separating everything from God. And so, as we ascend, our "speech contracts" (becomes shorter) because there is little there that we comprehend. And at the end, when we have separated everything from God, our whole speech will be "voiceless" because it will be "united" with him who is "ineffable," namely God. And that is why this science more than any other is called "mystical," because it ends in a darkness, about which, since everything has been taken away, we cannot properly affirm anything.

Then he asks why we have to begin affirmative theology with higher things and do negative theology the other way round. And

18. I presume that this is what Sarracenus meant by *superpositivam affirmationem*; if so, it is not a bad rendering of τὴν ὑποθετικὴν κατάφασιν. But cf. below, note 20.

19. This echoes Neoplatonist ontology: from the inconceivable simplicity of the One we descend into ever greater multiplicity the further we go. The compact richness of higher levels of reality can be imaged at lower levels only by the provision of a far greater number of beings carrying various more or less fragmentary and pale representations of the glory that is on high.

he gives the answer as follows. Affirmation rests on appropriateness, so when we want to state something about God, who is "above all affirmation," when we want to "posit one presiding affirmation," since we cannot affirm anything of him as he is in himself, but can only name him with some name taken from what he causes, as the philosopher says,²⁰ and this will be something subordinate to him, we have to begin with those things which are closest to him. But negation rests on separation or unlikeness, and therefore it is "things that are most distant from" him that should first be separated from him. God is "more truly life and goodness than he is air or stone," so it is the former names that should be given to him first. But "it is more the case that he is not carousing and madness than that he is neither spoken nor understood," that is, drunkenness and madness are further removed from him than utterability or intelligibility, which are closer to him; so it is things like drunkenness and madness which are the first to be denied of him.

CHAPTER FOUR

He who is the pre-eminent cause of all that the senses perceive is not anything perceptible by the senses.

So we say that the cause of all which is above all is not without substance or life or reason or mind. Neither is it a body nor is it a shape or form, nor does it possess any quality or size or weight. Neither is it in any place, nor is it seen, nor can it be touched by the senses. It is not per-

20. The reference is probably to the pseudo-Aristotelian *Liber de Causis*, proposition 5(6) (ed. A. Pattin, *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 28 [1966] p.147), which Albert cites in *I Sent.* d.2 a.16 (B 25 p.72). It is possible that Albert intends his comment that names are taken from some effect which is "subordinate" (*supponitur*) to God to explain why Dionysius (Sarracenus) talks of an *affirmatio superpositiva*; if so, this latter phrase could be translated "super-affirmative": God is beyond affirmations, any affirmations we make are based on effects which are "placed (posited) beneath" him, so making them of God we have to make them in a special way, affirming (positing) them "above" that to which they ordinarily refer. But I think it is more likely that the juxtaposition of *superpositiva* and *supponitur* is accidental. *Supponitur* must in any case be taken to mean "placed beneath"; when this verb is used to mean "stand in for," it requires more than a simple dative to accompany it, so we should expect *pro se supponitur*, not *sibi supponitur*, if that were what Albert meant.

ceived or perceivable by the senses, nor does it admit of any disarray or disturbance from being troubled by any of the things which affect matter. Neither is it powerless, nor is it subject to the chances which go with the things of the senses, nor is it in need of light. Neither does it admit of change or corruption or division or deprivation, it has no passibility or flux, it neither possesses nor is anything else that belongs to the realm of the senses.

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Here Dionysius actually begins his treatment of the subject, in which he intends to separate everything from God. It falls into two parts: first he separates the things of the senses from him, then (in chapter five) the things of the mind. This is the analysis suggested by the titles of the chapters.

Another, more technical, analysis is also possible: Dionysius first lays down what God is not without, and then shows what God is not (beginning with "Neither is it a body").

So first of all he says that, since it is in this way that we have to go into the divine darkness, "we say"—or, according to the other translation, "let us say"¹—because he is here beginning his treatment of the subject—that God, who is "the cause of all" and "above all, is not without substance or life or reason or mind," although none of these things can be affirmed of him. He is not without them, since they proceed formally from him.²

Alternatively, if we prefer the first analysis of the text, he is here separating from God various conditions which characterize things of the senses: it is characteristic of accidents to be without substance, and of inanimate beings to be without life, and similar comments can obviously be made about the other items listed.

Next, if we follow the second analysis of the text, Dionysius separates from God all that God is not, beginning with the things of the senses, because they are the furthest from God, and then the

1. The "other translation" is, as usual, that of Eriugena.

2. In the case of "formal procession" (cf. chapter 3, note 13) the source of the form in the recipient has to be (in some sense) the same form in the source. Therefore anything that proceeds "formally" from God must (in some sense) be in God.