

HUGH OF BALMA ON MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

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HUGH OF BALMA ON MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

A Translation and an Overview
of His De Theologia Mystica

by

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PREFACE

I first became interested in Hugh of Balma through Nicholas of Cusa's exchange of letters with the Abbot and monks of the Benedictine Monastery at Tegernsee, Germany (Bavaria).¹ In this regard I initially appended an English translation of a segment of Hugh's *De Theologia Mystica* to the end of my book *Nicholas of Cusa's Dialectical Mysticism: Text, Translation, and Interpretive Study of De Visione Dei*. During the intervening period I decided to translate into English the whole of Balma's treatise and to do so from Latin Manuscript 1727 of the Nationalbibliothek in Vienna, Austria—a manuscript that I have examined on site. Since a printed version of the text of this manuscript exists,² I have taken the liberty (as an aid to the reader) of referring to the page numbers and the line numbers in that edition. I have also listed a considerable number of corrections to the edition and its quasi-critical apparatus. And (as a further aid to the reader) I have added the italicized sub-headings that appear within the translation but that are not found in the manuscript. Readers who are interested in focusing primarily on Hugh's central claims about mystical theology may want to read only his treatise's last section, which is entitled "*Quaestio Difficilis*."

This present volume contains, in addition to Hugh's work, a segment of Nicholas Kempf's *De Mystica Theologia*,³ translated into English from Latin Manuscript 18.587 of the Bavarian Staatsbibliothek in Munich, Germany. This manuscript, too, I have examined on site.

I would like to thank the University of Minnesota Philosophy Department—and, in particular, its Chairman, Douglas E. Lewis—for providing funds for travel to Vienna and to Munich. I also gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the staff in Wilson Library of the University of Minnesota. Especially helpful in obtaining source-materials were Alice A. Welch, of the Department of Inter-Library Loans, and Richard J. Kelly, Professor and Bibliographer. I express appreciation likewise to Banning Press, which has generously permitted me to make the present translations freely available on my Internet webpage:

<http://www.cla.umn.edu/jhopkins/>

Presently, I am at work translating Nicholas of Cusa's many sermons; and I hope that these renderings will be made available in due time,

thanks to the permission granted by Felix Meiner Verlag of Hamburg,
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INTRODUCTORY ESSENTIALS

1. *Historical considerations.* Uncertainty surrounds the identity of the author of *De Theologia Mystica*, a work also known as *De Triplici Via* and, from its incipit, as *Viae Sion Lugent*. The mainline opinion, following Autore, Dubourg, Sochay, Stoelen, and Ruello,¹ is that this tractate was composed by a Frenchman named Hugh of Balma (Hugues de Balma, Hugo de Balma), sometimes referred to as Hugh of Dorche (Hugues de Dorche, Hugo de Dorchiis)—or even as Hugh of Balma of Dorche (Hugues de Balma de Dorche). That is, Hugh is said to have been of the family of Balma, or Balmey, and from an estate, a castle, named Dorche,² so that he may rightly be referred to in several different ways. He is said to have been prior, from 1289-1304, of the mountainous Carthusian House of Meyriat³ (whose land-holdings were located in what today is an area (in the province of Bresse) about twelve kilometers south of Nantua and belonging to the commune of Vieu d’Izenave, the canton of Brénod, the county (or département) of Ain, in the region named Rhone Alps. This monastic abode (but not the ever-remaining Forest of Meyriat) was uprooted during the French Revolution. The exact dates of Hugh’s priorate—and, indeed, of his birth and death—are not known. Thus, Artaud-M. Sochay, without hazarding to specify the date of his birth, places his death in 1305 (rather than 1304) and gives the dates of his (interrupted) priorate as 1293-1295 and 1303-1305.⁴ Sochay—like Autore, Dubourg, Stoelen, and Ruello—identifies Hugh of Balma with Hugh of Dorche, because, as he states, “Hugh of Dorche ... is the only Carthusian of this period who is able to have been given the name ‘Balma,’ to have been prior of Meyriat, and to have written a mystical work of this importance.”⁵

By contrast with the aforementioned scholars, Harald Walach reaches a different conclusion as regards Hugh’s identity. He sees Hugh as possibly not a Frenchman but, rather, an Englishman. Moreover, he says, Hugh of Balma was not the same person as Hugh of Dorche, nor was the former Hugh, initially, a Carthusian. For, as Walach sees it, “Hugh of Balma attended a school run by a Franciscan—most likely by an English Franciscan, perhaps *Adam Marsh*, who was quite certainly [residing] in Oxford. There Hugh probably received his primary education in the liberal arts; he may even have learned some basic theology there. Herefrom we cannot conclude that

he himself was an Englishman, although, of course, such a thought is plausible.”⁶ According to Walach, Hugh became a Carthusian only later; and when, in his *Theologia Mystica* Hugh refers to Thomas Gallus, he is, allegedly, referring to Pseudo-Thomas Gallus, who seems to Walach to be, really, Adam Marsh.⁷ Yet, Walach’s speculations raise as many doubts as they settle, so that the mainline verdict need not necessarily be abandoned.

Regarding the date-of-composition of *De Theologia Mystica* certainty is also lacking. According to the mainline view it was composed subsequently to Thomas Gallus’s *Explanatio Mysticae Theologiae* (ca. 1241?), from which Hugh quotes, but was composed before the death of the Frenchman Guigues du Pont (Guigo de Ponte), who in his *De Contemplatione* alludes to Hugh’s work. (Aside from this one assertion, there is no mainline view as regards the time of writing.) Now, Thomas Gallus’s death has been dated, variously, as 1226, 1230, and 1246. Pierre Dubourg chooses 1225 as the approximate date of the *Explanatio*, so that Hugh’s *De Theologia Mystica* could have been written not long thereafter. At the other end, Dubourg selects a date in advance of Guigo’s death, so that, as he concludes, the composition occurred some time between 1230 and 1290,⁸ Guigo having died in 1297. By contrast, Francis Ruello favors the idea that Hugh began his work only after having entered upon the priorate, so that Ruello gives the time-span as 1289-1297.⁹ In last analysis, whether one holds to the broad range 1230-1297 or to a very narrow range—say, 1289-1290—the fact remains that the precise date or dates are unknown. Accordingly, we may settle, heuristically, for assigning the composition simply to the second half of the thirteenth century.

Past controversy over the authorship of *De Theologia Mystica* is further complicated by that work’s having, at one time, been thought to have been Bonaventure’s—perhaps because (as is true) certain manuscripts name Bonaventure as the author and also because Bonaventure is known to have written a work entitled “*De Triplici Via*,” by which name *De Theologia Mystica* is also known. Hence, Hugh’s work, having been falsely attributed to Bonaventure, was included in Vol. 8 of the 1866 edition of Bonaventure’s *opera* that was edited by Adolphe C. Peltier and published in Paris. Yet, it was also included even earlier in the Strasbourg printed edition of 1495. Nonetheless, it was deliberately excluded from the edition of 1882-1902, published in Quaracchi, Italy—excluded on grounds of dubious attribution to Bonaventure.

Walach is persuaded that Hugh’s tractate was influenced by

Bonaventure's *Breviloquium*, his *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, and his *De Triplici Via*. Accordingly, Walach cites the date of Hugh's tractate as after 1260, the presumed year when Bonaventure's *De Triplici Via* appeared.¹⁰ Walach recognizes that there are, indeed, important similarities between Hugh's ideas and Bonaventure's, even as there are important dissimilarities, which Walach does not fail to mention. The very division of Hugh's tractate into the three ways—viz., purgative, illuminative, and unitive—seems to be a mirroring of Bonaventure's *triplex via*. But if we look historically farther back, we observe that both Hugh and Bonaventure reflect three motifs that appeared already in Pseudo-Dionysius's corpus of works. For example, we find in Dionysius's *De Divinis Nominibus* scattered references to *purgationes*, *illuminationes*, and *perfectiones*¹¹—the last of these referents being associated with *unioniones*. Accordingly, Hugh tells his readers that he is writing in order to expound and explain Dionysius's *Theologia Mystica*.¹²

Besides being influenced by Bonaventure, by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, and by Thomas Gallus, Hugh was also influenced by Augustine and, possibly, by Eriugena and Plotinus—not to mention the influences from Scripture and from Carthusian spirituality. On the other hand, we find no borrowings from figures such as Anselm of Canterbury, Peter Abelard, or Peter Lombard. Hugh himself exercised an influence, in varying degrees, not only on Guigo de Ponte but also on John Gerson, Dionysius the Carthusian, Vincent of Aggsbach,¹³ Nicholas of Cusa, the Carthusian order generally, and, in a negative way, on Nicholas Kempf. Like certain other scholars, too, Benoit du Moustier¹⁴ lists among those affected by Hugh's ideas also Henry of Herp, Bernadino of Loredo, and David Augustine Baker. Walach¹⁵ adds to the list the anonymous author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* and the Spaniard Francisco de Osuna, and still others.

2. *Mystical theology*. Contrasted with the *philosophical* pathway to God, which proceeds by making inferences about God from an empirical knowledge of the world, the *via mystica* approaches God primarily through the affections, although in its beginning stages some devout meditation, devout reflection, and enhanced mental enlightenment accompanies and intensifies the affections of love (*affectiones amoris*), directed, as they are, toward God. The soul, then, that ascends mystically unto God ascends not by way of erudite learning but by way of divinely potentiated longings for God's presence—by way of an intensified desire that God be nearer to one than one is to himself, so to speak.

Of the three stages (purgative, illuminative, and unitive) the *via purgativa* is the pathway of preparatory cleansing of the soul—preparatory to the soul’s union with God. For as the Scriptures tell us, the pure in heart are the ones who shall see God.¹⁶ The mystical seeing of God, the *visio mystica*, takes place in this present lifetime for some (not all) of those who seek it in purity of heart. They are elevated, in spirit, beyond all images, all conceptualizations, all ordinary understandings—elevated by God Himself in proportion to their affectionate yearning for union with Him. Such elevation occurs, initially, through the soul’s undertaking devotional activities that will lead to (a) its being cleansed by God of its sinful desires and to (b) its being freed from the entangling allurements of the world. The elevation continues as God affords illumination in conjunction with the soul’s reflecting upon, and meditating anagogically upon, the word of God as contained in the Scriptures. Finally, the soul may reach that point of elevated nearness to God where God ecstatically *heightens* its fervent longings-for-union and *infuses* into the soul a mystical wisdom. This wisdom is called mystical because it exceeds any knowledge or insight unto which any human soul could ever attain by the use of its own powers alone, unaided by special grace. Mystical wisdom excels incomparably, says Hugh, every form of creaturely knowledge. Yet, it is a wisdom that even someone who is formally uneducated may receive, for it differs *toto caelo* from scholastic, erudite wisdom, which is reached by the striving intellect rather than being divinely infused beyond all creaturely intellectual power and intellectual striving. Together with divinely infused wisdom comes also an infused understanding, i.e., an infused *power of understanding* along with an *actual understanding*.

A human soul enters upon the purgative pathway by abasing itself, by grieving over and confessing its sins, and by imploring God’s mercy. Thereafter, the progressing soul gratefully recalls the benefits bestowed by God on human beings generally. Then comes that soul’s reflection upon the benefits to mankind of Christ’s redemptive sufferings. Subsequently, the ascending soul reflects upon the God-given benefits bestowed specifically upon itself—benefits for which it will praise God wholeheartedly. This praising is a quintessential part of the *via purgativa*. Being no longer burdened by the weight of its sins, and being now attracted upward through an inflamed desire for its Beloved, the ardor-filled soul ascends importunately unto its merciful Creator and beckoning Bridegroom. In the soul’s ascent its level of rising is boosted through the soul’s meditating upon the teachings of

Scripture. In particular, the soul meditates by giving anagogical interpretations, i.e., mystical interpretations (as contrasted with literal interpretations or allegorical interpretations) of Scriptural passages. For example, according to an anagogical interpretation, the words “Give us this day our daily bread,” in the Lord’s Prayer, signify the soul’s requesting from God an *increase of love for God*; for “bread” now has the anagogic meaning of *love*, as well as retaining its ordinary, literal meaning. At this point the soul has entered upon the illuminative way, whereupon God affords enlightenment that guides the soul on its farther journey, since what is unknown to the soul cannot be loved by the soul.

The *via illuminativa* is a higher stage than is the *via purgativa*. At this higher stage, says Hugh, the mind becomes like a mirror, so that, having been cleansed, it receives and reflects the bright rays of Eternal Wisdom. Illumination comes to the mind through its contemplating the anagogical meanings of Scripture, as was said. Hugh now gives an extended anagogical interpretation of the Lord’s Prayer. This lengthy discussion, he says, will serve as an example of how Scripture as a whole may be interpreted in such a way that its hidden spiritual meanings come to light. Awareness of these deeper meanings—deeper than the literal surface meanings—can elevate the mind and, therefore, also the entire soul. Paradoxically, the soul’s mind becomes elevated by its burrowing deeper (into the Scriptural message). Through reflective meditation the soul comes to treasure its Heavenly Bridegroom all the more preciously, so that in this way it draws ever nearer to the moment of ecstatic union with Him.

In presenting his anagogical interpretations, Hugh makes clear that he means by “anagogical interpretation” something different from what certain other of the religious have meant by it. At a later historical period, for instance, Nicholas of Cusa addresses the topic of Scriptural exegesis. He distinguishes between (1) literal interpretation, (2) tropological interpretation, (3) allegorical interpretation, and (4) anagogical interpretation.¹⁷ Let us borrow his example of eucharistic bread. When in this context the New Testament speaks of bread, the literal sense signifies that which is ordinarily designated as bread. The tropological sense of “bread” indicates the transsubstantiated Body of Christ. The allegorical sense indicates truth—in particular, truth that the soul partakes of by faith, given that Christ is the “Bread of life.”¹⁸ The anagogical meaning has reference to the future life, when eternal truth will be possessed in a way that no longer re-

quires faith. Accordingly, for Cusa, anagogical interpretation is interpretation that understands the words and teachings of Scripture in a proleptic way, a way that discloses truths about the redeemed soul's status in Heaven, where exposure to eternal truth and to Truth itself—viz., Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life,¹⁹ who is, indeed, the True Image of the Father²⁰—will be direct. By contrast with Cusa, Hugh, when he exhorts the ascending soul to reflect anagogically upon Scripture, is counseling the soul to seek out spiritual truths that are supposed to guide the soul as it journeys upwards en route to mystical union in this *present* lifetime.

We may take one further example in order to illustrate Hugh's notion of anagogic interpretation and of its enlightening power:

“Thy will be done, as *in Heaven* ...” (i.e., as was previously said, and when interpreting anagogically: with respect to what is constant, continually moving, and adorned with diverse lights) “... so *on earth*” (i.e., among sinners, who not without justification are properly named “earth,” since they are situated far from the region of fire). Through this consuming fire the purged soul is made lighter, so that while existing on earth, but loving and desiring, it may obtain celestial mansions; for where its love is, there it properly [is said to] dwell. For the name “earth” cannot be expounded anagogically with respect to its essence but only with respect to its cause. For just as love is the cause of the mind's obtaining all good things through love, so the absence of love is the cause of all its deficiencies: viz., venial deficiency and mortal deficiency, penal deficiency and culpable deficiency. And this is what is meant [by calling] the sinner “earth”; for he is quite far removed from the lighter-making presence of inflamed love.²¹

The unitive stage is the ultimate stage; on this third pathway the soul proceeds toward union with God, toward being “transformed into God,”²² as Hugh declares. He maintains that mystical wisdom is an immediately infused knowledge of God that is not available except by way of unitive apprehension,²³ which occurs not by means of “the eye of the intellect” but by means of “the eye of the affections.” Unitive apprehension takes place beyond reason, intellect, mind. It takes place where all reflection, all contemplation, all conceptualizing have been left behind and where the soul takes leave even of all consciousness of itself as a self. The unitive pathway begins with a series of industries, i.e., of holy endeavors that bring the soul nearer to its Beloved. During the course of these endeavors there is guiding reflection and devout contemplation. However, at the highest level of unitive elevation all such guiding- and motivating-reflection, all such conceiving and cognizing,

are transcended, so that the soul ascends ignorantly and “mindlessly” to the unknown God. There is no further contemplation of the Lord’s Prayer, of the Lord’s sufferings, of the Holy Trinity, of the angels, or of the saints. Rather, love is divinely infused into the summit of the soul’s affective power (*supremus apex affectivae*)²⁴ as the soul is elevated unreflectingly unto “the brightness of the Divine Incomprehensibility.”²⁵

At some moment amid this empty receptiveness, characterized only as a supremely yearning directedness, the soul mystically and ecstatically encounters God and is spiritually united to Christ in a bond of indescribable love and joy. This is the moment when mystical wisdom is infused, so that the soul knows immediately that which could never be learned through the operation of the senses, the imagination, reason, or the intellect. Now is the timeless-like moment when the loving soul finds its longings satisfied and finds rest from all its strivings. This state of *quietudo* is a foretaste of the unspeakable peace and gladness that will both comfort and delight redeemed souls in the future, Heavenly life.

3. *Transformatio in deum*. A number of times in his *De Theologia Mystica* Hugh speaks of the soul’s deification and of its being transformed into God.²⁶ Yet, he never specifies just what the marks of such deification are; rather, he contents himself with associating deification with the soul’s indescribable mystical union with God. He does not go so far as to say, as Meister Eckhart was later accused of saying, that the soul becomes *transsubstantiated* into God.²⁷ In alluding to *deificatio*—which others referred to also as *theosis* and *filiatio*—Hugh was motivated both by Scripture and by Pseudo-Dionysius, as well as by the momentum of the tradition emanating from Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus the Confessor, and (in a peripheral way) Saint Augustine and even Albertus Magnus.

From the New Testament comes the idea that it is possible to be united with God, since as I Corinthians 6:17 declares: “He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit [with Him].” Furthermore, I John 3:2 announces to believers that when they see Christ they shall become like Him; indeed, together with Christ they shall become sons of God, as John 1:12 teaches. Believers shall one day see Christ face to face (I Corinthians 13:12) and shall be transformed into an incorruptible state (I Corinthians 15:52). This being transformed into a likeness with God, into a state of incorruptibility, into adopted sons of God, came to be theologically understood as a form of deification. Accordingly,

Augustine could unhesitatingly write: “The one . . . who made us men wants to make us gods, not gods to be worshiped instead of him, but gods in whom he himself may be worshiped.”²⁸ Augustine cites Psalms 81:6 (82:6): “I have said: You are gods, and all of you the sons of the most High.” Speaking minimally, we may say that “*deificatio*” is the equivalent of “*deiformitas*,” so that becoming deified means becoming like unto God—in holiness, righteousness, purity, perfection. This is the idea emphasized by Albertus Magnus, who states that the believer’s deification consists in his becoming as God-like as is possible for human beings, just as an iron-rod when placed in a flaming fire becomes fiery, becomes like the fire—without, however, becoming the flaming fire itself.²⁹ Speaking maximally, we may say that *deificatio* is equivalent to being absorbed into God in such a way as to lose one’s personal identity. Christian theologians such as Gregory of Nyssa sometimes wrote as if *deificatio* were indeed an *absorptio*: “I must be buried with Christ,” he wrote, “arise with Christ, be joint heir with Christ, become the son of God, yea, God Himself.”³⁰ And Eckhart’s analogy with transsubstantiation echoes Gregory’s idea. Hugh of Balma, however, in aligning himself, as he does, with Pseudo-Dionysius,³¹ seems more in tune with Maximus the Confessor’s expressed verdict that in becoming deified the believer becomes identical with God in all but nature, or essence, for the believer becomes God only by participation.³²

Thus, for Hugh and most other interpreters of Scripture and of Dionysius, a believer becomes one in mystical union with God in a way illustratable by a bride and a bridegroom’s being said to become one flesh in and through marriage; they become one spiritually, not in a way that involves loss of personal identity. Similarly, in the believing soul’s unitive encounter with God, the soul partakes spiritually of the divine nature, without losing its own finite identity. Of course, the soul’s union with God is a unicity indescribably greater than can be effectively illustrated by the marital relationship. Yet, the image of bride and Bridegroom is utilized by Hugh and others, inasmuch as a remote analogy is better than no analogy at all, and inasmuch as the analogy in question corresponds to an anagogical interpretation of the Old Testament’s Cantic of Canticles. When an analogy with more intensity is sought, theological recourse is oftentimes had to the already-mentioned example of the fiery-hot iron rod: the rod is in the fire, and the fire is in the rod, even as (in the mystical union) the soul is present in God and God is present in the soul.

Albertus Magnus finds another illustration equally elucidating: viz., that of food's taking on the likeness of the bodily members that it nourishes.

Corporeal food is assimilated perfectly to the [bodily] members through its receiving the form of flesh and bone. But spiritual food assimilates to itself, in a perfect resolution, the one partaking of it, just as is said in I Corinthians 6:17: "He who is joined to God is one spirit." This is what is meant by "deifying."³³

But even Albertus emphasizes the soul's intimate *participation* in the divine nature, not its being substantively transformed into the divine nature. In a sense, then, his illustration of food is misleading, since ingested and digested food does cease to be what previously it was. Similarly, the mystical tradition's use of the phrase "*transformatio in deum*" is also misleading.³⁴ The important point to be recognized, however, is the mystical tradition's discerning of the fact that the mystical ascent of a yearning Christian believer is subject to the following condition: viz., that the believer's longing for union become so intense that the believer yearn to be fully possessed of God—so fully possessed that he is no longer self-possessed, so to speak. He longs, subjectively and psychologically, for the experience of transformation away from himself and into God, the experience of completely effacing himself in God, even though, metaphysically speaking, he will never lose his self-identity. For, as the Apostle John says, "we shall be *like* Him' (I John 3:2); he does not say "We shall *be* Him" or "We shall be *one substance* with Him." At most, the believer will, for a time, lose consciousness of himself qua self, with the result that, later, he will be inclined to speak of his having been *merged into* God.

4. *Nicholas Kempf*. Born in Strasbourg, Nicholas Kempf is known to have died at Gaming, Austria in 1497. He enrolled at the University of Vienna in 1433, a date that allows us to infer his birthdate some seventeen or eighteen years earlier. In Vienna he studied the *artes liberales*, received the degree of *magister artium* in 1437, and taught university subjects in the liberal arts during 1437-1438 and, perhaps, even beyond. He may be presumed to have studied some theology. But by 1440 he had decided to become a Carthusian monk, and he entered the Carthusian House at Gaming.³⁵ In 1447 he received a call to become prior at Gairach, Austria,³⁶ where he remained until 1451, when he returned to Gaming, this time as prior for seven years. Two other priorates followed (1462-1467 at Pletrich,³⁷ 1467-1490 at Gairach again) before his returning to the simple,

non-administrative role of monk and before his later expiring. Kempf is known for his several writings, two of the most important being his *Tractatus de Mystica Theologia* and his *Expositiones Mysticae in Cantica Canticorum*. The former of these works—excerpts of which are contained (in English translation) in Appendix One of the present volume—attempts to reconcile Hugh of Balma’s treatise with the method of the Scholastic philosophers. Hugh himself had emphasized the differences between his approach and theirs; Kempf, however, stresses the harmony. A harmony is possible, he thinks, because Hugh admits that both philosophical knowledge of God and Scriptural knowledge of God can play an initial role in guiding the soul’s ascent unto God. The fact that at the highest level of the unitive stage the soul is no longer contemplating (or even conceiving of) God does not detract from the importance of the initially-guiding knowledge, maintains Kempf. Accordingly, Kempf’s tractate holds considerable significance for our identifying and situating the points of controversy that remained prevalent in the fifteenth century. His tractate must have been written after 1453, since it takes some (but not much) account of Nicholas of Cusa’s *De Visione Dei*, which appeared during October of that year. Dennis Martin estimates that the time of writing was “in the late 1450s or early 1460s . . .,” between, say, 1458 and 1465.³⁸

5. *Translation issues.* The translating of Hugh’s treatise is made difficult by virtue of the fact that his Latin syntax is, at times, so very deplorable (although his vocabulary is rich in a praiseworthy way). Furthermore, a translator must beware of a number of *faux amis*. The word “*infallibilis*,” for example, should be translated as “more highly reliable,” rather than as “more infallible”; and “*infallibilis*” should be translated simply as “highly reliable,” not as “infallible.”³⁹ Oftentimes, translators become misled by the proximity and look-alikeness of these two words in the two different languages. However, whereas the meaning of the word “*infallibilis*” made sense to the Medievals, the phrase “more infallible” makes no sense in English. If someone is infallible, he cannot become still more infallible with respect to the same body of knowledge. Moreover, if two people are both infallible, then the one of them cannot be more infallible than is the other, with respect to the same body of knowledge. The one person could, however, be more infallible than the other in the sense that the range of his inerrant knowledge extended to more objects than did the other’s. Now, when Hugh of Balma uses the word “*infallibilis*” or the word

“*infallibilis*,” he is referring not to a range of knowledge but to a given object (or set of objects) of knowledge. Thus, at *Quaestio Difficilis* 41:16-17 (p. 222) he writes: “Et ista cognitio est multo certior quam prima et infallibilior”: “And this latter knowledge is much more certain and much more highly reliable than is the former [kind].” And at *Quaestio Difficilis* 46:4-8 (pp. 226 and 228) he writes: “Nam solo pondere et discretione amoris, affectus verius et certius et infallibilis in ipsum quem diligit fertur, quam oculus corporalis aliquod sensibile videat vel intellectus per cogitationem possit de deo aliquam apprehendere veritatem”: “For the affection, only by the weight, and the discernment, of its love is borne unto Him whom it loves—[borne] more truly and certainly and more highly reliably than the corporeal eye sees any perceptible object or than the intellect can, through reflection, apprehend any truth about God.”

Accordingly, Hugh inter-relates *certius* and *infallibilis*, so that just as (in some instances) one truth can be known more certainly than can another, so also it can be known more reliably than can another. By “*infallibilis*” Hugh does not mean “infallible” in the contemporary sense. Hence, it would be not only misleading but even erroneous to render Hugh’s use of this Latin word by our contemporary cognate word, given the current use of our English word. And, once again, the reason for this incommensurability is that in English it makes sense to speak of degrees of fallibility but not of degrees of infallibility. By contrast, certain of the Medievals were accustomed to speak both of degrees of *fallibilitas* and of degrees of *infallibilitas*. This fact shows that their understanding of *infallibilitas* differs from our understanding of infallibility. Hence, “infallibility” is not the correct translation; rather, we must speak of degrees of reliability whenever they speak of degrees of “*infallibilitas*,” and we must say “more reliable” whenever they say “*infallibilis*.” Or else, in rendering “*infallibilis*” we might plausibly use either the expression “more nearly infallible” or the expression “more assuredly infallible.” Each of these translations leaves room for the idea that one truth can be known reliably, even though another truth can be known still more reliably. Thus, nowadays we hold, epistemologically, that various empirical truths can be known for certain (à la Wittgenstein), even though *a priori* truths, which are necessary truths, are more certain, as we say, since they cannot fail to be true, i.e., since they are infallibly true. But one necessary truth is not more infallibly true, not more reliably true, than is another.

We must keep in mind that Hugh, writing in the tradition of mys-

tical theology and not in the tradition of Scholasticism, is not envisaging technical philosophical distinctions. This fact explains why—at *Via Unitiva* 30:19-20—he can say of himself and certain other believers, “*infallibiliter ... praegustamus*”: “We very reliably foretaste.” For even *praegustatio* can be *infallibilis*.

Certain writers such as Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464) do sometimes use “*infallibilitas*” to indicate “*indeviabilitas*,” i.e., inerrancy. Instances of this use occur in his *De Concordantia Catholica*.⁴⁰ On matters of faith, he says, the Roman Church *numquam errare posse*, can never err. And he encapsulates this thought in the one word “*infallibilis*”: the Roman Church is *infallibilis* in the domain of faith, provided there is agreement within the Church—agreement as instanced by the pope and the council. He goes on to specify that “the judgment-of-faith which is made by the pope and ...[his patriarchal] council is the most certain of all judgments of particular [conciliar] gatherings, although the judgment of a universal council of the whole Church is *infallibilis* and more certain.”⁴¹ Here, where the context is the unlikelihood, or the impossibility, of error, the best translation of the Latin term in question—that is, the translation that best captures Cusa’s thought—would be the rendering “more assuredly infallible.” One might even put the idea as follows: “... although the judgment of a universal council of the whole Church is more certain and more certainly infallible.” This translation both captures Cusa’s point and avoids the unintelligibility of the English expression “is more infallible.”

A second example of a *faux ami*, in the context of Hugh’s *De Theologia Mystica*, is the Latin verb “*aspirare*.” A translator immediately thinks of rendering it by the English infinitive “to aspire.” Yet, the connotations, in English, of *aspiring* are connotations that belie Hugh’s idea with regard to mystical ascent. For, most often, the English word “aspire” is used in a context that suggests traces of ambition, striving, and zeal on the part of the aspirant. Accordingly, we say of someone that he aspires to become a physician or a teacher or a businessman, or whatever. Implicit in the meaning of “aspire,” as it is thus used, is the notion of making a corresponding effort, of maneuvering to create opportunities for oneself, of harboring a certain ambition, etc. Yet, these ideas do not serve best to capture Hugh of Balma’s thought; for ambitious planning, striving, and deliberating do not characterize the highest stage of the unitive way, when *aspiratio* is at its most intense.⁴² So, a faithful rendering of Hugh’s thought requires that where Hugh says “*aspirare ad*” the translator say “to yearn

for”; for Hugh is characterizing the soul-that-mystically-ascends as a soul that deeply yearns for, that intensely longs for, union with Him who is All-Desirable.

Let us take a final example. Hugh oftentimes uses the Latin word “*affectus*” in the singular, as is evident from the accompanying singular verb. Were the verb plural, then “*affectus*” would be plural—given that the same “-us” ending can be either a nominative-singular form or a nominative-plural form (or a genitive singular form). Now, it is tempting to suppose that the English translation *should* (some people say *must*) reflect the singularity of the Latin noun, so that a translator would put down “affection” (or the like) whenever “*affectus*” is a singular noun-form, and he would put down “affections” (or the like) whenever “*affectus*” is a plural noun-form. However, such a prescription fails to take account of two factors. First of all, it does not take account of the fact that many times we say plurally in English that which is said singularly in another language. The Germans, for example, say “*Die Polizei ist ...*,” using a singular verb, whereas we say “The police are ...,” using a plural verb. Similarly, the Medievals used the word “*sensus*” oftentimes in the singular: “*Sensus* [singular] *mundum percipit*,” whereas we say “The senses [plural] perceive the world.” But, secondly, the prescription in question fails to take account of the fact that Hugh himself switches back and forth between “*affectus*” in the singular and “*affectiones*” in the plural. Thus, he writes both “*affectus amoris*” and “*affectiones amoris*,” or “*affectio amoris*,” without intending any distinction. Accordingly, there can be no objection to rendering Hugh’s singular word “*affectus*” by the plural English word “affections,” as illustrated, hypothetically, by our saying “the intellect, reason, the imagination, the affections” for “*intellectus, ratio, imaginatio, affectus*.”

6. *Textual issues.* The present English translation of *De Theologia Mystica* was made from Latin manuscript Vienna 1727, located in the Austrian National Library.⁴³ For purposes of convenience to the reader, however, all references are given to the Latin text edited by Francis Ruello, published by Les Éditions du Cerf [Paris, 1995 (Vol. I) and 1996 (Vol. II)], and referred to hereafter as the Paris edition. My list of corrections for this printed text is found in the endnotes of this present work. These corrections relate principally to the Vienna manuscript (which, purportedly, Ruello was transcribing⁴⁴), although a few other corrections are indicated *en passant*. The French translation

is truly excellent, whereas the critical apparatus that accompanies the Latin text *laisse à désirer*. The major problem (aside from certain textual omissions and misprints) is that the printed edition of the Latin text, while purporting to be following, principally, the Vienna manuscript (=V), frequently deviates from that manuscript without signaling this fact in the notes. But there are numerous other problems, as well. To take a single set of instances: let us examine simply p. 144 of Vol. I (*Via Purgativa* 1) with respect to the five manuscripts that were consulted: viz., *A G M T V*. (See the Abbreviations-page, which precedes the end-notes in the present volume.) We find the discrepancies that follow.

The main title “DE VIA PURGATIVA” is not contained in *V*; yet this fact is not mentioned in the notes. Moreover, the notes indicate that *G* has as a heading “De via purgativa capitulum”, whereas, in fact, *G* has the same heading as does *A*, viz., “Sequitur de via purgativa”. Also not indicated in the notes is that *T* has the same heading as does *M*, viz., “De via purgativa”. Furthermore, for 1:1 there could well be a note that reads: “tua: et caetera *add. A*”. As regards 1:8-10: the notes indicate that in place of the passage that extends from “quia” to “glorificatur”—the passage incorporated into the main text—the four manuscripts *A G M T* have “cum enim dicat beatus Dionysius”. However, the note should indicate clearly that manuscripts *A M T* do have the passage “quia ... glorificatur” and that they *add* the words “cum ... Dionysius” to that passage. By contrast, *G* actually omits “quia ... glorificatur” and adds “cum ... Dionysius”. The Paris edition’s notes further indicate that after the name “Dionysius”, *A G* further add “in ierarchia caelesti”; but, in fact, *A G* further add “in ierarchia angelorum”. Moreover, the notes should indicate that after “glorificatur” even *V* has “cum enim dicat beatus Dionysius”, as well as having “quod in ierarchia angelorum”. (Since the Paris edition claims to be following *V*, principally, one wonders why these words were not incorporated into the main text or why no mention is otherwise made of them in the notes.) Furthermore, the note for line 1:10 (still on p. 144) indicates that in place of the word “quod” manuscripts *A G* have “ut”. However, the line reference should be corrected to read “1:11”. And a new entry should be made for “Quod” in line 10; and this new entry should point out that manuscripts *M T* omit “Quod”.

The foregoing extended example of problems with the critical apparatus of the Paris edition of *De Theologia Mystica* is symptomatic of inadequacies that pervade the entire apparatus—in spite of the fact that the French translation itself is outstanding.

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