

ARTÍCULOS / ARTICLES

THE RECEPTION OF PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS'S NEGATIVE THEOLOGY IN ALAN OF LILLE

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Resumen

El artículo investiga la recepción de la teología negativa del Pseudo Dionisio en los trabajos filosóficos y especulativos de las obras teológicas de Alan de Lille. En la primera parte, el artículo discute cómo Alan de Lille aplicó la teología negativa de Pseudo Dionisio al problema de la *translatio* y los límites del lenguaje teológico. En la segunda parte, el artículo arroja luz sobre las problemáticas referencias textuales y alusiones en la apropiación y observaciones de Alan de Lille sobre Pseudo Dionisio. En la última sección, el artículo argumenta que, a pesar de la falta de acceso de Alan de Lille a la totalidad del *Corpus Areopagiticum*, su interpretación y adopción de la teología negativa es filosóficamente convincente.

Palabras clave

Alan de Lille; Teología filosófica; Teología negativa; recepción medieval de Pseudo Dionisio; lenguaje teológico

Abstract

This article investigates the reception of Pseudo-Dionysius's negative theology in Alan of Lille's philosophical and speculative theological works. In the first part, it discusses how Alan applied Pseudo-Dionysius's negative theology to the problem of *translatio* and the limits of theological language. In the second part, it sheds light on the problematic textual references and allusions in Alan's appropriation of and remarks about Pseudo-Dionysius. In the final part, the article argues that, despite Alan's lack of access to the complete *Corpus Areopagiticum*, his interpretation and adoption of negative theology is philosophically compelling.

Keywords

Alan of Lille; Philosophical Theology; Negative Theology; Pseudo-Dionysius's Medieval Reception; Theological Language

Introduction

The history of the reception of Pseudo-Dionysius in the Latin West during the Early and the Later Middle Ages is well-documented, especially in authors like Eriugena, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, and Nicholas of Cusa. The 12th century, long recognized as a key transitional period in the transmission and understanding of Pseudo-Dionysius in the West, occupies an awkward place in the *Dionysiusforschung*. It is the very liminality of this phase which has caused the career of Pseudo-Dionysius to remain somewhat indistinct: neither explicitly Dionysian as the Carolingian writings of his famous translator Eriugena, nor pervasively dependent on him as the writings of the mid and late 13th-century scholastics.¹ The publication of critical editions of some of the most important 12th-century commentaries on the *Corpus Areopagiticum* and recent textual criticism exploring the status of the Pseudo-Dionysius' texts have advanced our knowledge of the circulation and dissemination of the *Corpus* in 12th-century scholastics and theology tremendously.² However, despite a long tradition of glossing and quoting the Dionysian corpus in 12th-century speculative theology and philosophy, considerably less research has been carried out on its reception and reading practices, and on the fundamental question of the importance of Pseudo-Dionysius in pre-university scholastic circles.³

This article seeks to remedy the gap in the existing literature by exploring the textual and philosophical reception of Pseudo-Dionysius' apophatic theology in Alan of Lille's writings. The work of Alan of Lille's (d. 1202/03) is remarkable in its debt to Pseudo-Dionysius: from speculative theology to anti-heresy polemics, Alan relies on

¹ For the reception of Pseudo-Dionysius in the West, see: Dondaine, O.P., H.-F., *Le Corpus Dionysien de l'Université de Paris au XIII^e siècle*, Rome, Edizioni de Storia e Letteratura, 1953; Koch, J., «Augustinischer und Dionysischer Neuplatonismus und das Mittelalter», *Kantstudien*, 48 (1956-7), pp. 117-133; McGinn, B., «Pseudo-Dionysius and the Early Cistercians», in M.B. Pennington (ed.), *One yet Two: Monastic Tradition East and West. Orthodox-Cistercian Symposium*, Oxford University, 26 August-1 September 1973, Kalamazoo, Cistercian Publications, 1976, pp. 200-241; Gersh, S., *From Iamblichus to Eriugena: An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition*, Leiden, Brill, 1978; O'Rourke, F., *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, Leiden, Brill, 1992; de Andia, Y., *Denys l'aréopagite et sa postérité en Orient et en Occident*, Paris, Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1997; Harrington, L.M., *A Thirteenth-Century Textbook of Mystical Theology at the University of Paris*, Leuven, Peeters, 2004.

² *Comentum in tertiam ierarchiam Dionisii que est de divinis nominibus*, ed. F. Gastaldelli, Florence, Leo S. Olschki, 1983; Jeuneau, É., «Le commentaire de Guillaume de Lucques sur Les Noms Divins», in T. Boiadjev, G. Kapriev, and A. Speer (eds.), *Die Dionysius-Rezeption im Mittelalter*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2000, pp. 177-195; Luscombe, D., «The Commentary of Hugh of Saint-Victor on the Celestial Hierarchy», in T. Boiadjev, G. Kapriev, and A. Speer (eds.), *Die Dionysius-Rezeption im Mittelalter*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2000, pp. 159-175.

³ A recent example of how this might be changing is Luigi Catalani's work on the Porretans and Pseudo-Dionysius: «La presenza dello Ps.-Dionigi nelle opere dei Porretani», in A. Sannino, P. Arfé and I. Caiazzo (eds.), *Adorare Caelestia, Gubernare Terrena. Atti del Colloquio Internazionale in onore di Paolo Lucentini (Napoli, 6-7 Novembre 2007)*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2011, pp. 205-226.

Pseudo-Dionysius in a creative and highly original way.⁴ The basis of this article, specifically, will be the reception of negative theology in Alan's epistemological remarks on theological language and its limits. Despite the narrowness of this article's subject-matter, Alan's discussion of language illustrates not only the complexities of the reception of Pseudo-Dionysius's ideas in the long 12th century but likewise a concomitant desire to venture outside the field of traditional Patristic authorities and to incorporate notions and arguments from more obscure sources in philosophical theology. The appropriation of Pseudo-Dionysius' apophatic theology, coupled with the contemporary practice of weaving the *logica modernorum* into Trinitarian arguments,⁵ speaks volumes for the renewed attitudes to the authoritative tradition and the development of novel philosophical arguments in Parisian circles so often associated with the historiographical trope of the 12th-century Renaissance.

The article will be divided into three parts. In the first section, I will situate Alan's theological writings within the medieval debate regarding the impropriety of theological language. In the second, I will analyze the reception of negative theology within Alan's *Summa quoniam homines*⁶ and the *Regulae caelestis iuris*,⁷ Alan's most important philosophical works, searching for similarities and differences in the way the concept was employed. In the third part, I will discuss the problematic textual evidence of Pseudo-Dionysius's text in Alan's writings (speculative and non-speculative) before finally reflecting on the nature of the reception of Pseudo-Dionysius's apophatic theology in Alan's work.

⁴ A good survey and assessment of Alan's use of the Pseudo-Dionysian notion of divine hierarchy and its influence in 12th-century authors is David Luscombe, «The Hierarchies in the Writings of Alan of Lille, William of Auvergne and St Bonaventure», in M. Lenz and I. Iribarren (eds.), *Angels in Medieval Philosophical Inquiry. Their Function and Significance*, London, Ashgate, 2008, pp. 15-19.

⁵ On this subject, see: Valente, L., «Arts du discours et sacra pagina dans le De tropis loquendii e Pierre le Chantre», *Histoire, Epistemologie, Langage*, 12 (1990), pp. 69–102; Valente, L., «Fallaciae et theologie dans la seconde moitié du XIIe siècle», in St. Ebbesen and R.L. Friedman (eds.), *Medieval Analyses of Language and Cognition, Acts of the symposium The Copenhagen School of Medieval Philosophy, Copenhagen, January 10-13, 1996*, Copenhagen, The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, 1999, pp. 207–236; Valente, L., «Logique et théologie trinitaire chez Étienne Langton: res, ens, suppositio communis et propositio duplex», in L.-J. Bataillon, N. Bériou, G. Dahan, and R. Quinto (eds.), *Étienne Langton, prédicateur, bibliste, théologien: Études réunies*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2010, pp. 563-585; Valente, L., «Supposition Theory and Porretan Theology: *Summa Zwettlensis* and *Dialogus Ratii et Everardi*», *Vivarium*, 51 (2013), pp. 119–144; de Libera, A., «Logique et théologie dans la *Summa 'Quoniam homines'* d'Alain de Lille», in J. Jolivet et A. de Libera (eds.), *Gilbert de Poitiers et ses contemporains. Aux origines de la logica modernorum*, Naples, Bibliopolis, 1987, pp. 437–469.

⁶ Glorieux, P., «La Somme 'Quoniam Homines' d'Alain de Lille», *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge*, 20 (1953), pp. 113–364.

⁷ Haring, N.M., «Alanus de Insulis. *Regulae Caelestis Iuris*», *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge*, 48 (1981), pp. 97–226.

The problem of theological language in the 12th century

During the second half of the 12th century, one of the most contested theological and philosophical debates was the nature of theological translations (*translatio in divinis*).⁸ In its medieval meaning, theologians discussed the term *translatio* when they wanted to elucidate the reasons and conditions by which certain words or concepts appear to be properly predicated to the created realm, but not to God. The concept of theological *translatio* derives from the Roman rhetorical literature of Cicero and Quintilian. In its original classical Latin framework, the term denotes the rhetorical and grammatical trope of transferring or projecting the meaning of one word or concept to another for the sake of eloquence.⁹ Cicero, for example, defines metaphors as a *modus transferendi verbi* and the late-antique and early medieval rhetorical texts would follow his authority closely.¹⁰ Accordingly, the transferal of meaning from a non-divine entity to another non-divine entity (*translatio in naturalibus*) was believed to be founded upon the existence of a certain natural correspondence (*similitudo*) among the terms.¹¹ In the metaphor «this person is brave as a lion», for instance, the comparison between the lion and the person is warranted in so far as both things (lion and human being) share the same property, in this case, that of bravery.¹²

The concept of *translatio* made its way into medieval theological and philosophical discussions. In the 9th century Eriugena argued, due to perhaps his profound familiarity both with the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius and the Roman rhetorical literature, that the names and attributes predicated of God result from a transferal of meaning from the created realm to the creator (*a creatura ad creatorem*).¹³ However, by the 12th century, Christian thinkers realized that the act of projecting meaning from the created to the uncreated realm conveys philosophical problems. If the possibility of a *translatio* depends upon a certain correspondence among things, concepts, or words, then in theology, where there is no correspondence between our names and concepts and the divine, a solution is needed to avoid theoretical and doctrinal inconsistencies. For example, the expression *Deus est iustus* opens up the question about the appropriateness of the new theological meaning of the concept of *iustitia* and about the specific manner in which the translation was done: can the sense of *iustitia* as it relates to human actions also express the true nature of the divine justice fully? Most 12th-century thinkers argued that the divine names cannot describe the divine completely, and that the transferred names and attributes do not preserve their original meaning in their new

⁸ Chenu, M.-D., *La théologie au douzième siècle*, Paris, J. Vrin, 1976, pp. 100–107; Valente, L., *Logique et théologie: les écoles parisiennes entre 1150 et 1220*, Paris, J. Vrin, 2008.

⁹ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 8, 3, 24. Cicero, *De oratore*, 3, 38, 152.

¹⁰ Cicero, *De oratore*, 3, 38, 155–157.

¹¹ Jolivet, J., *Arts du langage et théologie chez Abélard*, Paris, J. Vrin, 1982, pp. 63–75.

¹² Zemler-Cizewski, W., «From Metaphor to Theology: *Proprium* and *Translatum* in Cicero, Augustinus, Eriugena, and Abélard», *Florilegium*, 13 (1994), pp. 37–52; Constable, G., «Medieval Latin Metaphors», *Aviator*, 38/2 (2007), pp. 1–20.

¹³ Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, ed. É. Jeuneau, Turnhout, Brepols, 1996, I, 732.

theological context. Nevertheless, a theological translation does not amount to the complete abolition of the original sense, but to regarding its new theological connotation as improper. The philosophical challenge, then, lies in finding means to make it less improper. As it was already noted by Boethius in *De trinitate*, explanations of the transferred attributes would often demand a transformation of the grammatical rules applied to theology.¹⁴ Ultimately, 12th-century theologians strived to come up with ways in which their technical theological vocabulary could adequately express the divine nature.

Medieval intellectuals did not conclude that theological discourse was an impossible or irrational activity based on the notion of the improper nature of theological language.¹⁵ Insofar as it was thought to be grounded in the relation of cause and effect, theological language is possible; for example, statements about God's justice and goodness are acceptable by the causal relation because God is the cause of justice or goodness in the world. But, as Alan warns his readers in the prologue of the *Summa*, it is important to avoid the intrusion of heresy into the liberal arts while avoiding methodological mistakes on the issue of theological language.¹⁶ In the first half of the 12th century, with the exception of a few condemnations of heresy against scholastics,¹⁷ unorthodoxy is essentially a non-philosophical matter in the history of medieval religion. The significance of the *translatio* debate for doctrinal issues, however, is explained in the fact that many of the major figures in the broader debate about the impropriety of theological language, e.g., Prevostin of Cremona and Peter the Chanter to name a few, also wrote anti-heretical literature in the form of traditional polemical texts or *summae*. Even Alan of Lille, who is said in some sources to have been in Languedoc sometime before the end of 12th century to fight the heresies of the Cathars and Waldensians, composed a famous anti-heretical text.¹⁸ If so, the *translatio* debate takes place in the wider background wherein the French Catholic Church persecuted heresies with all the available tools, including speculative theology. These comments help us to understand that the question of the right and proper manner of referring to divine things was a sensitive and urgent matter in the new urban schools of the late 12th century.

¹⁴ Boethius, *De trinitate*, in C. Moreschini (ed.), *De consolazione philosophiae. Opuscula theologica*, Bibliotheca Teubneriana, 2nd ed. Leipzig, K. G. Saur, 2005, IV, 1, 5, 21.

¹⁵ For example, Alan argues that we know God through his effects. See *Summa*, op. cit., pp. 140–149.

¹⁶ *Summa*, op. cit., p. 119.

¹⁷ For this issue, see Fichtenau, H., *Heretics and Scholars in the High Middle Ages, 1000-1200*, University Park, Pennsylvania, Penn State University Press, 1998, pp. 215–311.

¹⁸ However, the remaining sources do not provide detailed evidence of the type of persecutorial activities and preaching that he conducted in Southern France. For a more detailed summary, see Wakefield, W., and Patterson Evans, A., *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1969, pp. 214–215. We will discuss Alan's polemical work and its relation to Pseudo-Dionysian in the third section of this article.

Alan's negative theology and the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius

In what follows, I will explore the passages in both speculative works where Pseudo-Dionysius' negative theology plays a significant role in Alan's argumentation, and will investigate the different uses made of his ideas. As we will see, Alan's interpretation of negative theology does not lead him to dwell on the epistemological and methodological character of apophatic theology, but rather to defend its general truth in order to establish the necessity of his proposed theological rules to circumvent the intrinsic impropriety of positive language. Overall, Alan's reception of Pseudo-Dionysian negative theology can be described as a defense of its validity, i.e., that all positive assertions are improper, and a rejection of the thesis of God's radical transcendence above all things.

As Glorieux comments, the *Summa* is Alan's general and personal exposition of all the major theological issues debated in the 12th century, from concerns about the scientific character of theology to the correct form of discourse about the Trinity and the Incarnation.¹⁹ The work consists of three books, whose first deals with the supercelestial apophatic theology, or the nature of God.²⁰ From the very outset of the first book, Alan asserts the Dionysian nature of his investigation by declaring that God is without form, the human intellect is incapable of having any knowledge of him,²¹ and that human beings can only attain knowledge of what God is not (*per remotionem*).²²

Once the general Dionysian character of his treatise has been firmly established, Alan moves to argue that no positive assertion is properly predicated of God.²³ To strengthen the claim, while Alan quotes the respective ancient authorities on the matter, Pseudo-Dionysius' authority plays a great deal in his line of reasoning. Alan relies on two passages from the *Celestial Hierarchy*²⁴ and one from the first book of Eriugena's *Periphyseon* to argue that *negationes in divinis vere, affirmationes vero incompacte*.²⁵ Alan explains that positive theological statements are *incompacte*, i.e.,

¹⁹ *Summa*, op. cit., p. 114.

²⁰ *Summa*, op. cit., p. 121.

²¹ *Summa*, op. cit., p. 123, 139.

²² *Summa*, op. cit., p. 139; *Summa*, op. cit., p. 137.

²³ «*Sicut probatum est deum esse incomprehensibilem, ita evidens est ipsum esse innominabilem. Ullum enim nomen proprie convenit deo*», *Summa*, op. cit., p. 139.

²⁴ Pseudo-Dionysius, *De Coelesti Hierarchia* 1041 B-1041 C, eds. G. Heil and A.M. Ritter, in *Corpus Dionysiacum II (CH, EH, MT, Letters)*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1991. The Latin translation is in Pseudo-Dionysius, *Caelestis ierarchia*, ed. P. Chevallier, in *Dionysiaca: recueil donnant l'ensemble des traductions latines des ouvrages attribués au Denys de l'aréopage*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1937, pp. 758.

²⁵ «Negations in divine matters are true, but affirmations are improper». The phrasing of the axiom about negative theology is found in Eriugena's *Expositiones super Ierarchiam caelestem*: «in divinis significationibus verae sunt negationes, affirmationes vero metaphoricæ, ac veluti extrinsecus acquisitæ, aut omnino incompactæ, hoc est, non propriæ», in «Les 'Expositiones super Ierarchiam caelestem' de Jean Scot Érigène, texte inédit d'après Douai 202», ed. H. Dondaine, *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge*, 18 (1950-1951), pp. 245-302. The

improper, because language refers to created things naturally, and to divine things²⁶ only after a *translatio* has been performed. If we declare, for example, that «the woman is just», we are adding the quality of justice to the subject woman and thus forming a connection among two independent things. As a result of the two ontologically independent things being connected in language through the verb *to be*, the statement exhibits a certain agreement and, to put it in Alan's terminology, it becomes *compacta*.²⁷ But, as we have seen, theological predication operates somewhat differently than natural predication. The statement «God is just» does not add something extra to God because, technically speaking, God's justice is indistinguishable (*idemtitas*) from God itself. This proposition, then, is *incompacta* or improper because the two grammatical objects (God and his justice) are not ontologically independent of each other. In other words, no adding together takes place in theology. In the theological positive statement, language is incapable of exerting its natural function of connecting independent entities.

Thus, by virtue of the uniqueness of God's nature, negative theology is the only correct and true form of theological discourse. If we go back to the same example discussed above, it is worth noting that when the statement about God's justice is qualified as being improper, we ought not to conclude that God is not just.²⁸ Rather, the improperness of theological language means that positive theological statements are misleading because they give the impression that a connection between two separate properties took place. The conclusion is that, on the level of language, every grammatical expression about God is improper, whereas on the level of being, God is the perfect just being.

Although Alan has adopted the Dionysian principle of negative theology, a systematic treatment of the concept of negation itself (*remotio/aphairesis*) is lacking, except for one very brief remark on the negation of the property of existence. The explanation for the lack of treatment on this important aspect, as we will see later, might be the lack of access to original Dionysian writings. Alan emphatically denies that statements about God's transcendence can be taken to mean that God does not exist:

Si vero quis sic instet: quelibet res non est Deus; ergo nulla res est Deus; propositionem concedimus, conclusionem negamus. Quia sub hac universalitate 'quelibet res' non comprehenduntur nisi creature... Cum ergo dicitur nulla res Deus, vel nihil est Deus, nimis vehemens est negatio, ubi predicatum removetur tam a creatore quam a creatura.

passage is also found in Hugh's commentary on Pseudo-Dionysius, see Hugh of St Victor, ed. D. Poirel, *Hugo de Sancto Victore Super ierarchiam Dionisii*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2015, p. 469.

²⁶ *Summa*, op. cit., p. 141.

²⁷ *Incompacte* is Eriugena's translation of Pseudo-Dionysius' *anarmostoi*.

²⁸ «Quare Deus inproprie dicitur esse iustus, sed proprie est iustus, quia immutabiliter est iustus», *Summa*, op. cit., p. 141.

Vel etiam quamvis ex virtute significationis non sit ibi negatio nisi creaturarum, tamen ex violentia usus videtur esse abnegatio tam creature quam creatoris.²⁹

The key here is Alan's use of the concept of «the power of meaning» (*ex virtute significationis*), a notion denoting that words and ideas should be used in their everyday and natural sense, instead of in obscure and esoteric ways.³⁰ After having established this hermeneutical criterion, Alan argues that the noun *res* and its accompanying negation should be read in a naturalistic manner: the concept *res* in the statement «nulla res (est) deus» refers exclusively to non-divine things but not to God. Likewise, the negative function of negative theology can only negate (*negatio*), that is deny (*abnegatio*), the existence of created things because this is how the verb *to negate* is employed naturally in Latin. The claim should be understood as meaning that God is not a created entity. Therefore, Alan's solution to the question of the nature of negation itself is his understanding that God's absolute transcendence cannot be concluded from how language is ordinarily used.³¹

So far, we have seen that Alan eagerly embraces the authority of Pseudo-Dionysius in the *Summa* to defend a rather particular version of negative theology – one founded in the scholastic distinction between language and being. At the verbal level, Alan thinks that Pseudo-Dionysius' negative theology represents the correct understanding of the nature of theological discourse, for it stresses the ontological difference between creator and creature. At the level of being, he believes it does not follow that negative theology implies the privation of God's being, nor the absolute exclusion of God from the plane of discourse. The ineffability of God, then, does not lead to God's nothingness.

Composed in axiomatic fashion to determine the rules theology should follow, the *Regulae* shows a less noticeable influence by Pseudo-Dionysius's negative theology than the *Summa*'s: statements about God's utter unnameableness or the intellect's inability to comprehend God are missing altogether. Nevertheless, Alan still considers Pseudo-Dionysius as a relevant authority in discussions and arguments concerning proper and improper theological speech. An example of the importance of Pseudo-Dionysius in the

²⁹ «But if someone insists in this manner: God is not something. Therefore, God is nothing. We accept the premise; we deny the conclusion. This is because creatures are understood to be included under the totality of 'something'... Therefore, when one says that God is not something or God is nothing, the negation is very violent: the predicate is removed both from the creator and the creature. Although it also follows from the *power of meaning* that there is here a negation only of creatures, from *the violence of use*, it seems that both creatures and creator are being negated», *Summa*, op. cit., p. 147. All English translations of primary sources in this article are my own.

³⁰ As Luisa Valente notes, this distinction is found in Gilbert of Poitiers and other Porretan writers («*Virtus significationis, violentia usus. Porretan Views on Theological Hermeneutics*», in A. Maieru and L. Valente, (eds.), *Medieval Theories on Assertive and Non-assertive Language*, Florence, Leo S. Olschki, p. 179).

³¹ «Superessentialis autem dicitur quia super omnem essentiam est», *Summa*, op. cit., p. 282.

Regulae is Alan's reasoning that only negative statements are true. In rule 18, Alan claims that:

negationes uero de deo dicte proprie et uere, secundum quas remouetur a deo quod ei per inherenciam non conuenit. Vnde Dionisius attendens quid de deo dicatur per causam, potius attendens sensum ex quo fiunt uerba quam sensum quem faciunt uerba, potius considerans quid ex quo dicatur quam quid de quo dicit: Deus est iustus, pius, fortis. Item potius considerans quid deo non conueniat per proprietatem quam quid de deo dicatur per causam dicit: Deus non est pius, fortis, misericors, potius remouens proprietatem dicendi quam ueritatem essendi.³²

In the preceding rules, Alan defended the Aristotelian distinction that language is constructed on the grounds of form and matter: predication about the substance of something is founded on a thing's matter; predication about the quality, on the form. However, since God lacks form and matter,³³ Alan concludes that any speech about God's nature is necessarily improper. Moreover, apophatic theology means nothing more than a methodological procedure by which one removes the qualities that cannot be said to be inherently in God: the intrinsically complex institution of language will permanently fail to grasp God's formless nature. Negative theology, mirroring the insurmountable gap between language and divine being, functions as a technique to get rid of phrasings or expressions failing to reflect the ontological and epistemological - issues not always considered by positive language. The *Regulae* concludes, agreeing with the *Summa's* interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius, that divine names are predicated properly of God only in this particular sense of negation.

The textual evidence of Pseudo-Dionysius in Alan's speculative and non-speculative writings

The lack of in-depth methodological and philosophical considerations on the nature and scope of negative theology, a critical issue in the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius and his translator, Eriugena, prompts the question of Alan's access to the *Dionysiaca*, the Latin translations of Pseudo-Dionysius available during the 12th century. Was Alan able to read the *Dionysiaca* directly? It will be necessary for us to give some consideration to the presence and accuracy of the textual references to Pseudo-

³² «However, negations of God are said properly and truly according to those negative statements which are removed from God because they do not agree with him. Hence, Dionysius, considering what can be said about God as a cause, considers the sense from which words originate rather than the sense created by them; he considers more what it is said from them than that which is spoken of: 'God is just, pious, strong'. Likewise, considering what does not agree with God in property rather than what is said of God as a cause, he adds: 'God is not pious, strong, merciful', removing the property of saying than the truth of being», *Regulae Caelestis Iuris* XVIII, 3, op. cit., p. 137.

³³ *Regulae Caelestis Iuris* I, 5, op. cit., p. 125.

Dionysius' corpus by assessing the influence of Dionysian negative theology. In this section, I will look closely at the quotations from the *corpus* explicitly incorporated in Alan's work and compare them to the available Latin translations. The tentative findings, still very much in need of further work, conclude that the presence of direct Pseudo-Dionysian allusions, despite the widespread allusions to his work, are often mediated by a contemporary tradition of second-hand paraphrases of the Pseudo-Dionysius.

The fragmentary appropriation of Pseudo-Dionysius is demonstrated mostly in the *Summa*. For example, the two *Celestial Hierarchy* references in the *Summa's* *prologus* are imprecise. Alan writes: «et ut magnus testatur Dionisius Areopagita, non sursum ferunt purgans anime, in turpibus imaginibus suum materiale cogentes quiescere». Alan's quotation is not precise, as Eriugena translates «non concedens materiale nostrum in turpibus imaginibus manens requiescere; purgans vero sursum versus animam, et suggerens deformitate compositionum»,³⁴ but it is close enough to be considered a somewhat faithful paraphrase. However, there are other much more problematic textual allusions in Alan's work. The quotes from the *Divine Names* on pages 125 and 131 of the *Summa* are correct. However, Alan misquotes a whole passage from the *Divine Names* on page 328 of the *Summa*. Eriugena's translation of the passage on the nature of evil is transformed from «via vero neque malitiae causa animae corpus, clarum ex hoc, possibile esse, et sine corpore extra subsistere malitiam, sicut et in daemonibus» to «maliciam subsistentiam non habet» in Alan's version. As even more proof of serious textual problems, Alan attributes this last passage incorrectly to *Celestial Hierarchy* – a misquotation which may have originated in the now lost *Iohannes Scottus super Hierarchiam*. Finally, the remaining references, contained on pages 140 and 213 of the *Summa*, cannot be found in the *corpus Areopagiticum* and are Alan's (or someone else's) summaries of Pseudo-Dionysius' writings. Ultimately, the *Summa* contains more erroneous references to Pseudo-Dionysius' texts than correct ones.

Alan's fascination with Pseudo-Dionysius is not limited to negative theology nor his speculative theological writings. In the 12th century, Pseudo-Dionysius' concept of *divine hierarchy* was especially crucial since it offered a conceptual framework to classify being, knowledge, and ecclesiastical institutions. The Dionysian concept of *hierarchy* is essential in Alan's oeuvre when it comes to establishing the place and nature of the science of theology and to disputing some of the Waldensian heretical claims. However, as we will see, Alan's use of hierarchy, as in the case of negative theology, is problematic.

In the opening lines of the *Summa*, Alan divides the sciences of divine things according to the hierarchical classification of *supercoelestis*, *coelestis*, and *subcoelestis* sciences. The general structure of the *Summa quoniam homines* follows this threefold structure. For example, the science of the divine names and the Trinity belongs to

³⁴ Pseudo-Dionysius, *Caelestis ierarchia*, op. cit., p. 762

the first type of theology. While Alan attributes this hierarchical order to Eriugena and Pseudo-Dionysius, the axiom, despite its recurrence in many of the contemporary Porretani writings,³⁵ is nowhere to be found in the writings of either author.³⁶

Before concluding, we should pay attention to some of Alan's philosophical arguments against heretics and their relation to Pseudo-Dionysius' text. Although this allusion to Pseudo-Dionysius is not found in overtly philosophical or speculative theological contexts, the reference is equally significant as an example of the philosophical use of Pseudo-Dionysius. In book II of *De fide Catholica*, a text composed probably in the last years of the 12th century refuting the heretical movements of Languedoc, Alan disputes an array of heretical claims supposedly held by the Waldensians.³⁷ In particular, chapters two to four of the second book describe and argue against the Waldensians rejection of ecclesiastical hierarchy and power. According to Alan's report, the Waldensians argue that the power to «bind and loose», that is papal authority, pertains only to those who follow the apostolic way of life and teachings. In forming a new church, however, the Waldensians had forcefully rejected the *potestas* of the Roman church. As a result, the followers of Valdes interpret Acts 4, where the Apostles discard the authority of the Temple's priests for that of Jesus, as an admonition that no man should be obeyed. The Waldensian schism from the Papacy, supported by this unorthodox interpretation of the *New Testament*, amounts to a Christian act of devotion equivalent to that of the Apostles when they went against the religious authorities of their time. If the Holy Scriptures are interpreted in this manner, Alan argues, the very notion of ecclesiastical hierarchy is at stake.

Alan's argument to refute such a gratuitous reading of Acts consists in the deployment of Pseudo-Dionysius' notion of divine hierarchy accompanied by the introduction of a fictional quotation from the *Celestial Hierarchy*. In chapter four, Alan argues that the Waldensians must obey the Church because lower-order institutions obeying higher-order ones is as natural as lower angels following higher angels or brute animals like bees having and obeying their king: «Dicit etiam Dionysius in Hierarchia, quod angeli invicem obediunt, minores scilicet maioribus. Bruta quoque animalia sibi invicem obediunt; quod apparet etiam in minimis animalibus, id est apibus; nam et apes regem habent».³⁸ As in the other studies' quotations, this allusion cannot be found in the *Dionysiaca* nor any other Latin translation of the late-antique author. In fact, I have been unable to find any medieval parallel. In spite of the lack of textual faithfulness to

³⁵ *Summa*, op. cit., p. 121.

³⁶ Dondaine, H., « Cinq citations de Jean Scot chez Simon de Tournai », *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale*, 17 (1950), pp. 303–311.

³⁷ Pearson, J., «The Text and Situation of Alan of Lille's *De Fide Catholica*: The Prologue and Book III, 'Contra Iudeos'», Ph.D. Thesis, South Bend, University of Notre Dame, 2001, pp. 52–55.

³⁸ PL 210 0382A.

the *Celestial Hierarchy*, Alan reasons from this quote that God's grace is bestowed upon the world exclusively through the mediation of the Roman Church. With that in mind, he attacks the heretical argument by asserting that the power to «bind and loose» must be necessarily mediated through the institution of the Church: salvation can be achieved only within the Church.³⁹

The highly idiosyncratic use of the Dionysian corpus has led scholars to believe that his knowledge of Pseudo-Dionysius was mediated through 12th-century florilegia or through some of the authors that glossed him.⁴⁰ For example, as Dominique Poirel has shown, Alan had access to the Dionysian corpus through Hugh of Saint Victor's commentary to the *Celestial Hierarchy*⁴¹. From the above summary of textual references, we should add to the list of potential sources Eriugena's *Periphyseon*.⁴² Likewise, the first chapter of the *Summa* shows that Alan accessed Eriugena's *Expositiones in Ierarchiam Coelestem* as well as the apocryphal *Iohannes Scottus super Hierarchiam*,⁴³ a text other late 12th century Porretani used as well.⁴⁴ However, by considering Alan's quotes from Pseudo-Dionysius alongside Eriugena's translation and Hugh's commentary, it's apparent that Alan might have had direct access only to certain unaltered passages

³⁹ «These Waldensians affirm that one should not obey man, but only God. To prove this, they rely on the authority of Peter and John, where it is read in *Acts of the Apostles* (4, 18) that they, speaking to the Pharisees, said: 'you judge whether it is better to obey God's orders or your restrictions'. As if it said: you yourselves err, forbidding what God commands and neither what you have heard. Thus, where the command is superior, and the opposition is inferior, what will be accepted is not inferior. They say that if one must obey a man, one must obey a man on account of God, and not on account of man, and therefore only God must be obeyed. Likewise, if a man obeys a man in those things which should not be obeyed, he will sin, because in this one, he does not obey God. In the same manner, Samuel said to Saul: 'a form of sorcery is not to want to obey man'. A form of sorcery, because in a certain way, it is to deny God by disobedience. However, not wanting to obey a man, that is not a form of sorcery. Then, God must be obeyed, and not man, because when we do not obey a man, we do not do sorceries, but we do when we deny obedience to God», PL 210 0380D-0381B.

⁴⁰ Budde, T., *The «Versio Dionysii» of John Scottus Eriugena. A Study of the Manuscript Tradition and Influence of Eriugena's Translation of the Corpus Areopagiticum from the 9th through the 12th Century*, PhD. Thesis, Toronto, University of Toronto, 2012, p. 216; Niederberger, A., «Les écrits Dionysiens et le néoplatonisme d'Alain de Lille», in J.-L. Solère, A. Vasiliu, and A. Galonnier (eds.), *Alain de Lille, Le Docteur Universel*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2005, pp. 10–12.

⁴¹ Poirel, D., «Alain de Lille, Héritier de L'école de Saint-Victor? », in J.-L. Solère, A. Vasiliu, and A. Galonnier (eds.), *Alain de Lille*, op. cit., pp. 68–72.

⁴² Alan attributes the *Periphyseon* to a certain Paul. See *Summa*, op. cit., p. 127; Jeaneau, É., *Tendenda Vela: Excursions littéraires et digressions philosophiques à travers le Moyen Âge*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2007, p. 52.

⁴³ Budde, *The «Versio Dionysii»*, op. cit., p. 216; Niederberger, «Les Écrits Dionysiens et Le Néoplatonisme d'Alain de Lille», op. cit., p. 11.

⁴⁴ d'Alverny, M., *Alain de Lille: textes inédits*, Paris, J. Vrin, 1965, p. 94.

from the *Divine Names* and *Celestial Hierarchy*, but presumably not to the texts themselves.⁴⁵

Conclusions

Perhaps, we should first ask in more general terms how the reception of Pseudo-Dionysius' ideas in Alan's thought is to be measured. Is it by achieving an innovative reading of the late-antique author, regardless of some textual imprecisions in its use; or instead by producing an original interpretation accompanied by a comprehensive, systematic understanding of the sources?

Alan's reception of Pseudo-Dionysius's negative theology is fundamental to his claim about the improper nature of theological language. He builds on the Dionysian idea of *affirmationes incompactae* to develop the convincing argument that theological translations are equivocal, and therefore, that a set of theological rules and linguistic clarifications need to be established in order to avoid doctrinal error. In Alan's account, Pseudo-Dionysius' negative theology is relegated to operating exclusively on the plane of language. The demotion of apophatic theology to a linguistic apparatus allows him to argue that the claim about God's nothingness bears no truth. In that sense, the apophatic theology of Alan is not of the mystical type, but rather the verbal type.⁴⁶ In fact, Alan considers the belief that negative theology is also valid in the realm of being to be ridiculous. In the *Summa*, he protests that the «nomina Dei dicuntur ineffabilia non quia non possint vel non debeant proferri, ut quidam fabulantur, sed quia ineffabile significant».⁴⁷ Does the *fabulantur* reference find fault with Eriugena and authors defending similar positions on apophatic theology? We saw that the majority of the quotations from Eriugena's translation are mistaken, and thus it is likely that Alan did not have direct access to Eriugena's writings but only to florilegia of Eriugena's *Periphyseon*. Although the lack of direct access to the *Corpus Areopagiticum* did not prevent Alan from correctly identifying a historical trend in the interpretation of negative theology, namely the radical transcendence of God, Alan offers no explanation in favor of its falsehood. In any case, the target of Alan's disapproval must remain a mystery for the time being.

For all the textual muddiness of Alan's sources, and his lack of familiarity with the whole *Corpus Areopagiticum*, an impediment preventing him from knowing the full spectrum of Pseudo-Dionysius theoretical reflections on the nature and scope of

⁴⁵ Not every quotation in Alan has a parallel in Hugh. Therefore, the possibility that Hugh was the sole access to the Dionysian corpus must be excluded.

⁴⁶ Against this view, Sweeney, E., *Logic, Theology, and Poetry in Boethius, Abelard, and Alan of Lille*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p. 129.

⁴⁷ «God's names are said ineffable not because they couldn't nor shouldn't be mentioned, as some fable, but because they signify ineffably», *Summa*, op. cit., p., 141.

negative and positive theology, we find an original and convincing account of the Dionysian notion of apophatic theology in Alan's work.

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