

In librum Dionysii De divinis nominibus exposito

Monday, October 30, 2006

Prologue B

Fixed

It ought to be considered that blessed Dionysius uses an obscure pen in all his books. This however he did not do from ignorance, but from diligence that the sacred and divine doctrine would remain hidden from the mockery of infidels. Also, difficulties arose (fell) in the afore mentioned books from many causes: first, indeed because he very often uses the pen and mode of speaking which the Platonists use, which is unfamiliar to moderns. For the Platonists, wishing to reduce all composites or material things to simple and abstract principles, posited separate species of things, saying what man is is beyond matter, and likewise for a horse, and thus of the other species of natural things. They said therefore, that this singular sensible man is not the itself the thing which is man, but is called man by participation in that separate man. Thence in this sensible man they discover something which does not pertain to the species of man, namely individual matter and other things of this kind. But in the separate man there is nothing except what pertains to the species of man. Thence they names the separate man man *per se*, for the reason that it has nothing except what is of humanity; and principal man, insofar as humanity is derived to sensible men from the separate man, through the mode of participation. Thus also it is able to be said that the separate man is above men and that separate man is the humanity of all sensible men, insofar as human nature fully joins to the separate man, and from this is derived in sensible men. Nor only did the Platonists make such abstractions about the ultimate species of natural things, but also about the maximally common things, which are good, one, and being. Indeed, they posited one first which is itself the essence of good and unity and to be, which we call God, and that all others are called good or one or beings through derivation from that first. Thence they

called that first good itself, or good in itself, or principal good or supergood, or also good of all goods whether good or essence and substance, according to that mode which has been exposted concerning separate man. Therefore the things of the Platonists are not consonant to the order of faith nor to truth, according to that which they contain regarding the separate natural species, but according to that which they say about the first foundation of things, their opinion is most true and consonant to the Christian faith. Thence Dionysius indeed sometimes calls God good itself or supergood or principal good or good of all good things. And likewise he names Him superlife, supersubstance and deity itself thearchian, which is principle deity, because the name of diety is indeed admitted to certain creatures according to a certain participation. The second difficulty arises in his writings because he often uses effective reasons to prove his point and often expounds them with few words or even with just one word. Third he often uses a certain multiplication of words because, although it may seem superfluous, nevertheless with diligent considerations it is found to contain great profundity of thought.

posted by Matthew N. Petersen at 5:29 PM

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Matthew N. Petersen

Idaho, United States

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In librum Dionysii De divinis nominibus exposito

Saturday, November 04, 2006

Chapter 1, Lecture 1, A

Therefore, in this book, which is called *On Divine Names*, he first sets forth, after the manner of those who artfully handed down the sciences, what things are necessary for the following consideration; second, in chapter 3, he begins to follow principle intent, which begins *et primam* etc. Regarding the first, he makes two divisions: in the first, he shown the order of divine names; second, he shows that the names, from which he draws in this book, are common to all the Trinity; and this begins in the second chapter which begins: *thearchicam totam essentiam* etc.

The first of these he further divides in two: first, he continues the preceding book, where writing to blessed Timothy, he says “after the theology of the hypostases”, that is the divine distinctions by which the persons in the Trinity are mutually distinguished, he will go on “to revealing” that is manifesting “the divine names”, according to his power. For it seems to be elevated completely above man. Second, where he says: *esto* etc. he begins to put forth what is necessary for the following work. Moreover, he sets forth two things: indeed first, the mode of proceeding in this work, for this is necessary to know in advance in any teaching. Second, he shows the order of divine names which he intends to prove in this book; this begins *has sequentes* etc. And these two are sufficiently shown in the prologue of this chapter which is written thus: *quae sermonis intentio*, according to the first; and *quae de divinis nominibus traditio*, regarding the second.

posted by Matthew N. Petersen at [6:47 PM](#)

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Matthew N. Petersen

Idaho, United States

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- [Prologue B](#)
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In librum Dionysii De divinis nominibus exposito

Wednesday, November 15, 2006

Chapter 1, Lecture 1 B

Regarding the first division, he says two things: first, he shows from what things ought to be the foundations of this book, because it ought not lean upon human reason, but divine revelation. This fact he learned from the apostle who said in I Corinthians 2 “not with persuasive words of human wisdom (...): but through the teaching of the Spirit, Spiritual things being taught by the Spirit” and this is what he says “*Esto autem et nunc nobis eloquiorum lex praedefinita*” which would be more easily rendered “*Sit autem etiam nunc lex eloquiorum praedeterminata a nobis*” and in English: “Now the law of speaking (by which law he means the things handed down in holy Scripture) ought to be fixed before hand by us” just as it once was by the apostle; and that law is this: “*veritatem nos asserverare dictorum de Deo, non in persuasibilibus humanae sapientiae verbis, sed in demonstratione virtutis theologorum motae a spiritu*” which is more easily rendered as “*nos astruere*” or “*nos manifestare veritatem dictorum de deo, non in persuasibilibus humanae sapientiae verbis, sed in demonstratione virtutis theologorum motae a spiritu*” which in English is “that we strive to write true things of God, not with persuasive words of human wisdom,” that is not leaning upon the medial first principles of human reason which proceed to the proposition to be shown according to natural reason, but “in explanation of the virtue of the theologians” that is of those who wrote sacred scripture, the Apostles and Prophets, “of virtues” I say, “moved by the spirit”, that is the Holy Spirit. For in his doctrine Dionysius is supported by the authority of sacred Scripture, which authority has strength and efficacy because the Apostles and Prophets are moved to speaking by the Holy Spirit revealing to them and speaking through them.

posted by Matthew N. Petersen at 7:52 PM

2 Comments:

 [the filthy augustinian](#) said...

This is good stuff, dude!

I have a question, which is besides the point: I learned in sem that Dionysius was a forgery, i.e. "Pseudo-Dionysius"; yet, "for the most part" he was still right on the money. What do you think of this assessment? It is not original with me....

9:18 PM

 [Matthew N. Petersen](#) said...

First, lets grant he isn't really the Dionysius converted in Acts. St. Maximos the Confessor didn't know St. Paul either. Neither did St. Augustine, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Basil, St. Justin Martyr, etc. That perhaps sets him off as not an Apostolic father, but it doesn't make him not a father.

Second, even if he was cooky, Aquinas was orthodox. So Aquinas' commentary on Dionysius would "baptize" him just as his work with Aristotle "baptized" Aristotle.

11:49 AM

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Matthew N. Petersen

Idaho, United States

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- [Chapter 1, Lecture 1, A](#)
 - [Prologue B](#)
 - [Prologue A](#)
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In librum Dionysii De divinis nominibus exposito

Saturday, November 25, 2006

Chapter 1, Lecture 1, C

Second, he introduces the reason for the aforementioned law, here: *secundum quam* etc. And the virtue of his reason is of such a kind: we are able to begin with principles of human wisdom in those doctrines in which things are argued which are understandable and speakable for men, and are able to be understood and spoken by those who have that doctrine. But regarding doctrines of faith, certain things unknowable and unutterable yet clung to by the faithful are put forth; not through understanding or through explicating with perfect words, although they cling more surely and clinging to things of this sort is higher than any natural understanding. Therefore in doctrines of faith we are not able to begin with principles of human wisdom. And this is what he says: “according to which” namely, that sort of revelation in the Apostles and prophets which proceeds from the Holy Spirit, we ourselves through faith “are united to the ineffable and unknowable, that is to the divine truth which exceeds all human speech and understanding. Neither is faith thus joined to these things that it may make things to be understood by the believing man and thus to be spoken, for this of clear vision, but it joins the “ineffable and unknown:” “for we now see through a mirror” as it is said in I Corinthians 13. And lest anyone contemptuously believe this conjunction is because of the imperfection of his (reason), he is joined “*secundum meliorem unionem nostrae rationalis et intellectualis virtutis et operationis*” which because Dionysius, a Greek has conflated the Ablative and Genitive would be more easily rendered “*supra virtutem et operationem nostrae rationis et intellectus*” “beyond the power and operation of our reasoning and intellection.”

posted by Matthew N. Petersen at 3:38 PM

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Matthew N. Petersen

Idaho, United States

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 - [Prologue B](#)
 - [Prologue A](#)

