



The Mystical Theology of Hugh of Balma¹

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يتناول البحث مفهوم اللاهوت الصوفي والمنهج التأويلي في لاهوت "هيو بالما". يستخدم "هيو" منهجاً تأويلياً يعرف بـ "التفسير الروحي" وهو تفسير صوفي لكلمة أو نص من الكتاب المقدس أو تراث الآباء، وخاصة التفسير الكتابي الذي يكتشف التلميحات إلى السماء أو الحياة الآخرة. يرجع السبب في اختيار هذا الموضوع الي المنهج الصوفي والمنهج العقلي الذي يجمع فيهما "هيو" بين التجربة الروحية والوحي وبين البرهان الفلسفي الذي ينطلق من المبادئ الروحية للإيمان. يصوغ "هيو" الأساس لفلسفته الدينية انطلاقاً من فكرة المعرفة الإلهية. المعرفة هي التي تقود الإنسان إلي المصدر الاول للكون. لهذا، ومن أجل الوصول للمصدر الاول يتعين علي الإنسان معرفة هذا المصدر من أجل ان يسلك الطريق التي تقودنا اليه. يحدد "هيو" ثلاث مراحل يتبعها الانسان تقودنا الي بداية الطريق للكائن الاعظم. هذه المراحل هي (التطهر - الاستنارة - الاتحاد). وعند تخطي الانسان هذه المراحل يصل الي المرحلة الاعلي التي تضعه امام المصدر الاول للكون. تسمى المراحل التي يضعها "هيو" بالطرق، وهذه الطرق هي التي تقود النفس والروح العارفة إلي معية الخالق، وبالتالي الاتحاد بالمصدر الاول الذي صدرت عنه الموجودات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: (التصوف - اللاهوت - المعرفة - التأويل - الاتحاد)

Abstract

The research discusses the concept of dialectical mysticism, theology and the hermeneutic method in the theology of "Hugh of Balma". Hugh uses a hermeneutic method known as "spiritual interpretation", which is a mystical interpretation of a word, passage, or text from the Bible or the patristic tradition, especially the biblical exegesis that discovers allusions to heaven or the afterlife. The reason for choosing this research is due to the mystical approach and the rational method in which "Hugh" combines spiritual experience and revelation with philosophical evidence that stems from the spiritual principles of faith. Hugh puts the foundation for his religious philosophy based on the idea of divine knowledge. Knowledge is what leads man to the First Source of the universe. Therefore, in order to reach the first source, a person must know this source first in order to take the path that leads us to Him. Hugh identifies three stages for man to follow that lead us to the beginning of the path to the Supreme Being. These stages are (purification - illumination - union). When a person passes these stages, he reaches the highest stage that places him in front of the First Source of the universe. The stages laid down by Hugh are called paths, and it is these paths that lead the soul and the knowing soul to the unity with the Creator and consequently union with the First Source from which all beings originate.

Keywords: (Mysticism - theology - knowledge - interpretation - union with God)



Objectives of my paper:

My present paper discusses the concept of mystical experience in the theology of Hugh of Balma. It also examines, not only the spiritual authorities from whom he derived his mystical concepts, but also the authenticity of his work and how he was able to compile mystical doctrine combining both together soul and mind.

The mystical experience of Hugh is not separated from the knowledge of God; Hugh presents a new model of knowing God by using the mystery of love and its relation to the transcendent. He suggests three ways to the soul that it must pass to reach God. These ways depend on mysticism and rational knowledge in order to get into the pathway to God.

Hugh refers in his treatise “*de Theologia Mystica*” to the role of mind and how it understands the difference and coherence between the three stages of the unity with god. This means that mystical theology of Hugh of Balma is not separated from rational knowledge, but stands as two fold paradigm of the development of philosophical theology in the thirteenth century.

In his mystical theology, Hugh shows his influence by Dionysius the Areopagite, St. Augustine and St. Bonaventure. The mystical experience here brings to us the patristic and medieval tradition regarding knowledge and spirituality together as pathway to God.

Hugh focuses on love as a unique way in our mystical experience and our knowledge with God, so, from the three stages that he presents (purgative, illuminative and unitive), the soul can ascend directly to God.

In this regard, Hugh of Balma introduces a unique concept of the relation between mystical experience and rational understanding which is based on faith and reason together.

The mystical theology of Hugh of Balma

Hugh of Balma is an important theologian and philosopher in the history of medieval philosophy and mysticism in the way which he presented his philosophical and mystical doctrine.

Hugh of Balma, also known as Hugo of Balma or Hugh of Dorche. Was a Carthusian theologian, generally acknowledged to be the author of the work which is generally entitled: *Viae Zion Lugent* (The Roads to Zion Mourn)¹.

It is also known as *De Mystica Theologia*, *De Theologia Mystica* and *De Triplici Via*². It is a comprehensive treatment of the Mystical Theology of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite³.

The work was attributed to Saint Bonaventure in medieval and early modern times, but this attribution was firmly rejected and attributed to Hugh by the editors of the critical edition of Bonaventure's work by the Franciscans of Quarrachi in 1895⁴.

Importance and contribution:

While talking about him, I would refer to some important points related to his doctrine and his theological work:

¹ - Edward Alexander Jones (editor): *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*, Exeter Symposium VIII, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, UK. 2013. P. 117.

² - Guinan, Patricia A. *Carthusian Prayer and Hugh of Balma's Viae Zion Lugent*. San Francisco: Catholic Scholars Press, 1994.

³ - Sarah Coakley, Charles M. Stang (editors): *Re-thinking Dionysius the Areopagite*, Wiley Blackwell and sons, Ltd. publications, UK, 2009, P. 87

⁴ - Simon Tugwell: *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Paulist Press, Inc., New Jersey, USA, 1981, P. 19



Hugh of Balma is an eminent figure of the Carthusian order which belongs to the Carthusian spirituality¹. This spirituality is grounded in a theology of love of god, one's neighbor and the world².

The mystical experience of Hugh has long roots and philosophical back ground return to the early medieval philosophy which was represented first in the writings of Saint Augustine and his searching for the knowledge of God³ and the major influence of the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite⁴.

The importance of my research remains in the combination of famous philosophical doctrines which are found in the doctrine of Hugh of Balma. He brings together Augustine and Dionysius the Are-

¹ - Dennis D. Martin: translator, Carthusian Spirituality, the writings of Hugh of Balma and Guigo de Ponte, Paulist press, New Gersey, USA, 1997. p.69

² - Carthusian Spirituality: The Carthusian Order (Latin: Ordo Cartusiensis), also called the Order of Saint Bruno, is a Catholic religious order of enclosed monastics. The order was founded by Bruno of Cologne in 1084 and includes both monks and nuns. The order has its own Rule, called the Statutes, rather than the Rule of Saint Benedict, and combines eremitical and coenobitic monasticism. The name Carthusian is derived from the Chartreuse Mountains; Saint Bruno built his first hermitage in the valley of these mountains in the French Alps. The word charterhouse, which is the English name for a Carthusian monastery, is derived from the same source. The same mountain range lends its name to the alcoholic cordial Chartreuse produced by the monks since 1737 which itself gives rise to the name of the color. The motto of the Carthusians is "*Stat crux dum volvitur orbis*", Latin for "The Cross is steady while the world is turning. (Martin, Dennis D., translator and introducer. Carthusian Spirituality: the Writings of Hugh of Balma and Guigo de Ponte. New York: Paulist Press, 1997).

³ - Donald X. Burt: "Let Me Know You-- ": Reflections on Augustine's Search for God, liturgical press, Minnesota, USA, 2003, P. 24.

⁴ - Mark Edwards, Dimitrios Pallis, Georgios Steiris: (editors) The Oxford Handbook of Dionysius the Areopagite, Oxford University press, London, 2022, p. 282.

opagite¹, and springs forward to present the mystical theology of Saint Bonaventure and the role of mind in ascending to god², which is the same idea that Hugh presents with a different approach.

Motives of research:

The motives of my research paper are to show the importance of the philosophical and theological doctrine of Hugh of Balma, because he presents a special approach to the mystical discussion combined together with the philosophical arguments³. This means that his mystical theology is based, to some extent, on the rational and religious understanding of the philosophical traditions⁴.

Hugh of Balma presents mystical theology in his theological writings with philosophical approach. In his major work *De Theologia Mystica*; he seems to be influenced by Saint Bonaventure, especially in the way that forms his doctrine⁵. The main sources which I will use here in my research paper are the works of Hugh, *De Theologia Mystica and De Triplici Via*⁶.

Hugh is a problematic theologian regarding his life and writings, no exact dates determine his birth and death, even the date of compos-

¹ - Ibid.

² - Saint Bonaventure: *The Journey of the Mind to God*, translated by: Philotheos Boehner O.F.M, edited with introduction and notes by: Stephen F. Brown, Hackett publishing company, Cambridge, 1990, PP. XVI:XVII

³ - Harald Walach: *Secular Spirituality: The Next Step towards Enlightenment*, Springer international publishing, Switzerland. 2015. pp. 44-45

⁴ - Ibid.

⁵ - Saint Bonaventure: *The Journey of the Mind to God*, translated by: Philotheos Boehner O.F.M, edited with introduction and notes by: Stephen F. Brown, Hackett publishing company, Cambridge, 1990, PP. XVI:XVII

⁶ - Autore, Stanislaus. "Hugues de Balma," *Dictionnaire de théologie Catholique*, Vol. 7 (1922), columns 215-220.



ing his work “*de Theologia Mystica*” is not known precisely¹. For a long time this work was attributed to Saint Bonaventure². The name of Hugh also is not known precisely, because in some sources it was written “Hugh of Balma” and in other sources “Hugh of Dorche”³. Sometimes called ‘Hugh of Balma of Dorche’, which means that Balma is the name of his family and Dorche means place where he was born,⁴ also his identity and the place of birth are not determined in a precise way⁵.

Regarding the date of birth, it’s supposed to be from 1289-1304⁶, at the House of Meyriat which is a mountainous place belongs to Carthusian order⁷, (this area which is found today in the province of Bresse, which is 12km to the south of the place (Nantua), it is belonging to the commune of “Vieu d’Izenave”, in the canton of Brénod, at the county of Ain⁸. This region is named Rhone Alps; this monastic

¹ - Dubourg, Pierre. “La Date de la *Theologia mystica*,” *Revue d’ascétique et de mystique*, 8 (1927), 156-161.

² - Autore, Stanislaus. “Hugues de Balma,” *Dictionnaire de théologie Catholique*, Vol. 7

³ - Moustier, Benoit du. “Hugh of Balma,” *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 7 (1967), p. 188

⁴ - Stoelen, Anselme. “Hugues de Balma,” *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique*, Vol. 7:1 (1968), columns 859-873

⁵ - Peter S. Dillard: *Divine audacity, unity and identity in Hugh of Balma, Eckhart, Ruusbroec, and Marguerite Porete*, James Clarke and Co. Cambridge, UK. 2022.

⁶ - Sochay, Artaud-M. “Hugues de Balma,” columns 1028-1030 in Vol. V (1962) of G. Jacquemet, editor, *Catholicisme hier, aujourd’hui, demain*. Paris: Letouzey and Ané.

⁷ - Dubois, Jacques. “Le Domaine de la chartreuse de Meyriat: Histoire d’un désert cartusien,” *Le Moyen Age: Revue d’histoire et de philologie*, 74 (1968), 459-493.

⁸ - Hogg, James. “Gaming,” *Dictionnaire d’histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques*, 20 (1984), columns 987-

abode (but not the ever-remaining Forest of Meyriat) was uprooted during the French Revolution¹.

Influence and sources:

Among the scholars who gave attention to the life and works, also the place of birth and origin of Hugh of Balma was Harald Wallach²; who suggests his conclusion regarding the identity of Hugh. He concludes that Hugh of Balma was not a French man but was an English man, not only this, he presents a new opinion which says that the person Hugh of Balma is not the same person with Hugh of Dorche³, he says also that Hugh of Dorche was not at all Hugh of Balma⁴, but Wallach doesn't deny that Hugh was a Carthusian⁵. Wallach presupposes that Hugh of Balma, the author of *de Theologia Mystica*, received his education from Franciscan scholars at a school which was in oxford under a Franciscan leader who is called Adam Marsh, who was quite certainly residing in Oxford⁶.

It's supposed then that Hugh received his first education in the liberal arts, and since he received his education under Franciscan scholars, then he must have learned the basics of theology there in oxford⁷. But although he had received his education there in oxford un-

¹ - Hopkins, Jasper. *Nicholas of Cusa's Dialectical Mysticism: Text, Translation, and Interpretive Study of De Visione Dei*. Minneapolis: Banning, 1988 (2nd edition).

² - Harald Walach: *Secular Spirituality: The Next Step towards Enlightenment*, Springer international publishing, Switzerland. 2015. pp. 46-48

³ - Ibid.

⁴ - *De Theologia Mystica*, translation and overview by: jasper Hopkins, the Arthur J. Banning Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA, 2002

⁵ - Harald Walach: *Secular Spirituality: The Next Step towards Enlightenment*, Springer international publishing, Switzerland. 2015. pp. 54-55

⁶ - Ibid.

⁷ - *De Theologia Mystica*, translation and overview by: jasper Hopkins, the Arthur J



der English scholars, we can't judge or even state that he was English man, although, of course this might be true¹. According to Wallach, Hugh of Balma was not Carthusian from the beginning, but he became Carthusian later². But something is confusing in the conclusion of Wallach; he says that Hugh of Balma, in his *Theologia Mystica* when he refers to Thomas Gallus, he is referring to Pseudo-Thomas Gallus³, whom Wallach considers him Adam Marsh, who was thought to be the leader scholar at oxford, and Hugh received his education from him⁴.

Apart from the inquiry about his origin, whether was English or French person, and the date of composing his works, it's supposed that he was born between 1289 -1304⁵.

The theology and source of the *Theologia Mystica*

Theologia Mystica was supposed to be composed after Thomas Gallus had completed his work which is titled "*Explanatio Mysticae Theologiae*" which was composed around 1241)⁶. Hugh quotes from this work in his doctrine. It is also evident that this work was composed but before the death of "Guigues du Pont" (Guigo de Ponte)⁷, a

¹ - Ibid.

² - Harald Walach: *Secular Spirituality: The Next Step towards Enlightenment*, Springer international publishing, Switzerland. 2015. p. 48

³ - Barbet, Jeanne. "Thomas Gallus," *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique*. Vol. 15, columns 800-816. Paris: Beauchesne, 1991

⁴ - *De Theologia Mystica*, translation and overview by: Jasper Hopkins, the Arthur J

⁵ - Gordon Mursell: *English Spirituality: From Earliest Times to 1700*, Westminster John Knox press, USA. 2001, P. 261.

⁶ - Gallus, Thomas: *Grand Commentaire sur la Théologie mystique* [a part of Gallus's *Explanatio Mysticae Theologiae*]. Edited by Gabriel Théry. Paris: Haloua, 1934.

⁷ - Guigues du Pont. *Traité sur la contemplation*. Edited, introduced, and translated into French by Philippe Dupont. Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und

Frenchman who is referring to Hugh in his “*De Contemplatione*” which is related to Hugh’s work, mainly, *de Theologia Mystica*¹.

The approximate date of composing the ‘*de Theologia Mystica*’ can be supposed to the second half of the thirteenth century according to Jaspers Hopkins².

For long time the work of Hugh of Balma was attributed to Saint Bonaventure³, especially the content and method of the work is close to saint Bonaventure’s “*de Triplici via*”, which is known also as ‘*de Theologia Mystica*’, this work was included in the Opera Omnia of saint Bonaventure “*opera Bonaventura, 1866*”⁴.

The reason to attribute this work to saint Bonaventure is the similarity between the work of Hugh of Balma and the work of Saint Bonaventure, especially the mystical division of the three stages {purgative, illuminative and unitive}, it looks like an imitation of the work of saint Bonaventure which is called (*triplex via*)⁵.

Also, there is a similarity between the work of Hugh and the work of Dionysius the Areopagite, I mean “*De Divinis Nominibus*” which includes and refers to “*Purgationes, Illumination and Perfec-*

Amerikanistik [University of Salzburg], 1985. (Vol. 72 in the series Analecta Cartusiana, edited by Ames Hogg).

¹ - Ibid

² - *De Theologia Mystica*, translation and overview by: Jasper Hopkins, the Arthur J

³ - Bonnefoy, Jean François. Une Somme bonaventurienne de théologie mystique: le “*De triplici via.*” Paris, 1934

⁴ - Ray C. Petry (EDITOR): *Late Medieval Mysticism*, Philadelphia, the Westminster Press, USA, 1957, p. 128.

⁵ - Saint Bonaventure: *Works of Bonaventure: Journey of the Mind to God - The Triple Way, and other works*, Paterson, New Jersey, 1960.



tiones” and the last one “Perfectiones” refers to the “unitiva”, the last stage of Hugh’s mystical work¹.

Significance of the Mystical theology

The mystical theology of Hugh of Balma is explained in his unique work “*De Theologia Mystica*”²; he presents three stages in three ways which represent the ascension of the soul towards the ultimate truth and the unity with god. These three ways are called purgative way, illuminative way and unitive way (via purgativa, via illuminativa and via unitiva)³.

In order to understand these three ways we had to return to the significance and meaning of every way. Hugh here doesn’t present a rational empirical inference about the unity with god, he presents primarily spiritual willingness in order that the soul can accept and understand these three ways in a mystical process based on rational understanding of every stage⁴.

The solution which Hugh presents here remains in the way which the believer follows to achieve this unity with god. This way starts from affection⁵, in this process from the beginning till the end; the soul feels the divine presence inside, this presence infuses the soul

¹ - Clarence E. Rolt: Dionysius the Areopagite on the divine names and mystical theology, Cosimo Inc. New York, 2007. Ch. 209C.

² - Hugo De Balma: *De Theologia Mystica*, translation and overview by: Jasper Hopkins, the Arthur J. Banning Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA, 2002.

³ - Hugo De Balma: *De Theologia Mystica*, Purgativa, 1.

⁴ - Hogg, James. Hugh of Balma and Guigo du Pont, *Analecta Cartusiana*, 113 (1984), 61-88

⁵ - Ruello, Francis. “Statut et rôle de l’Intellectus et de l’Affectus dans la Théologie Mystique de Hugues de Balma,” pp. 1-46 in James Hogg, editor. *Kartäusermystik und -Mystiker*. Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik [University of Salzburg], 1981.

with all divine holiness¹. Hugh explains this presence in a way that god is nearer to the believer, or the soul, than the believer to himself².

The purgative way (*via purgativa*)

This way, is called the way of preparation of the soul to be ready to ascend to god. This ascension is also preparation to the soul to the union with the ultimate divine truth or god, because the scripture sets it as a reward for those who are pure in heart, and those only, who will see god³.

In this *via purgativa*, Hugh puts humility and grief over sins as cleansing of the soul from its sin⁴, he puts also the method of this cleansing in five types or steps:⁵

Step One: Confession of Sins⁶

Step Two: Remembrance of General Divine Benefits⁷

Step Three: Remembrance of Christ's Sufferings⁸

Step Four: Remembrance of Particular Divine Benefits⁹

These four steps are the basis of the purgative way. After these four steps the soul becomes ready to the vision of god. This vision of god is conditioned by the success and passing the illuminative and unitive stage.

¹ - Hogg, James: Hugh of Balma and Guigo du Pont," *Analecta Cartusiana*, 113 (1984), 61-88

² - Hugo De Balma: *De Theologia Mystica, Purgativa*, 1. 2

³ - *Ibid.* 1, 2

⁴ - *Ibid.* 2:3

⁵ - *Ibid.*

⁶ - *Ibid.* 2:3.

⁷ - *Ibid.* 4.

⁸ - *Ibid.* 5.

⁹ - *Ibid.* 6.



The mystical seeing of God, the (*Visio Mystica*)

This vision is called the mystical seeing of god, or *Visio Mystica*, takes place in this present lifetime for some of those who seek it in purity of heart. The *Visio Mystica* is one of the common debates and core discussions in theology in the middle ages, especially mystical theology¹.

Believers are elevated by god without any material or empirical experience, beyond all concepts or understanding, elevated in spirit by god, as a reward for their yearning to be in union with god.

In this process Hugh gives emphasis to the role of god in helping the soul during purgation. God here helps the soul ecstatically just to reach that point of elevated nearness while god affords illumination to it. Not only this, but god infuses into soul a mystical wisdom². Hugh refers to the mystical wisdom as sort of wisdom that the soul can't attain without the aid of the grace of god³. This wisdom exceeds any kind of human wisdom or knowledge, it's based only on divine grant, even the non educated can get this wisdom⁴. This wisdom, as Hugh refers, is different from the scholastic wisdom which can be obtained through the intellectual activity and logical arguments⁵. Besides the wisdom which is infused by god, comes also the understanding which is infused to soul also by god. This understanding has what Hugh says "power of understanding", because it's an actual understanding comes through the infusion that god gives to the soul⁶.

¹ - Walter Melion, Lee Palmer Wandel (editors): *Image and Incarnation: The Early Modern Doctrine of the Pictorial Image*, Brill, Leiden, Boston, Netherland, 2015. P. 203.

² - Hugo De Balma: *De Theologia Mystica, Purgativa*, 6.

³ - *Ibid.* 7

⁴ - *Ibid.*

⁵ - Hopkins, Jasper. *Nicholas of Cusa's Dialectical Mysticism*, op.cit.

⁶ - Hugo De Balma: *De Theologia Mystica, Purgativa*, 7.

The human soul enters the purgative pathway by grieving over and confessing its sins, also imploring the mercy of god¹. In this moment the soul doesn't stop praising god wholeheartedly, and this praising is considered a central and axial part during the purgative way².

The soul then ascends unto the creator and becomes bridegroom; in this way the soul makes mystical interpretations of the scriptural passages, which are in contrast with the literal interpretations³. For example, according to the mystical interpretations, instead of saying; "Give us this day our daily bread,"⁴ this signifies that the soul requests for love, because this means "an increase of love for god; because "bread in this case has the meaning of love"⁵. Here the souls enter the illuminative way, where god also affords her enlightenment which helps here on its farther journey⁶.

Illuminative way is preconditioned stage or path as a necessary to be proceeded by the purgative way. The hierarchical demand her according to Hugh is not only spiritual reasoning, but emerges from the mystical approach in which Hugh will use as evidence of divine presence in the purgative and illuminative way. And by means of the guidance and help of the purgative way, the mind ascends to the illuminative way⁷.

¹ - Ibid. 3:4.

² - Ibid. 10.

³ - Ibid. 9:10

⁴ - Mathew, 6:11

⁵ - Hopkins, Jasper. Nicholas of Cusa's Dialectical Mysticism, op.cit.

⁶ - Ibid.

⁷ - Hugo De Balma: De Theologia Mystica, Illuminativa, 1.



The Illuminative Way (*Via Illuminativa*)

The Illuminative Way (*via illuminativa*) is in a higher stage and level than the (*via purgativa*). The mind in this stage becomes like a mirror, or becomes a mirror, because, after getting cleansings, it becomes able to receive the rays of the eternal wisdom¹. The question here is; how can mind get the illumination? The answer of Hugh reflects his theological mystical explanation, because according to him, mind receives illumination by the process of contemplation of the anagogical meanings of scripture².

The anagogical interpretation according to Hugh plays the important role in understanding the real and hidden spiritual meanings of scripture so it comes to light³. Here Hugh mentions the role of awareness, I mean the rational participation in the mystical theology, he mentions that the awareness, which is rational, of the deep meanings of scripture, not the literal meanings, can elevate not only the mind, but also the entire soul⁴.

Hugh refers to a reflective meditation that is made by the soul by which the soul can treasure its heavenly bridegroom, who is the more precious, and during this process comes the moment of the ecstatic union with God⁵.

In this stage, the (*via illuminativa*), Hugh presents a special kind of interpretation which is closed and identified with the mystical interpretation, it's the anagogical interpretation⁶. It's totally different from the allegorical or literal interpretation, and is not the same as

¹ - Hugo De Balma: De Theologia Mystica, Illuminativa, 1.

² - R. C. Sproul: Knowing Scripture, Intervarsity Press, second edition, USA, 2009, p. 60.

³ - Hugo De Balma: De Theologia Mystica, Illuminativa, 2:3

⁴ - Ibid. 3:4

⁵ - Ibid. 5:6.

⁶ - Ibid, 8

other theologians and philosophers, for example Nicolas Cusanus, Origen and Erasmus, proposed in their theological systems¹.

In this manner, Hugh is in contrast with Nicolas Cusanus who presented four ways of interpretation to the scripture or the religious text². Nicolas proposes four ways of interpretation, literal interpretation, tropological interpretation, anagogical interpretation and allegorical interpretation³.

To understand these methods of interpretation, we find it clearly in the example of the Eucharistic Bread; I mean the Eucharistic presence of Jesus as “*ad-esse*”, as a “being for”⁴. We find that *literal interpretation* refers to the normal and actual bread. The *tropological interpretation* refers to the transubstantiation of the body of Christ, the *allegorical interpretation* refers to the truth which the soul participates by faith, which means that Christ himself is the real bread of life, and the *anagogical interpretation* refers to the future life by obtaining the eternal truth⁵.

The case of Hugh is different from the previous method, especially the anagogical interpretation of the Scripture, because according to him, the anagogical interpretation is a process which is done by the ascending soul while reflecting the scripture, the soul here seeks spiritual truths that guide her to a mystical union with the ultimate truth in this present lifetime⁶.

¹ - Donald K. McKim (editor): Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters, Intervarsity Press, USA. 1998, p. 189.

² - Hopkins, Jasper. Nicholas of Cusa's Dialectical Mysticism, Op.cit.

³ - Ibid.

⁴ - Joseph C. Mudd: Eucharist as Meaning: Critical Metaphysics and Contemporary Sacramental Theology, Liturgical Press, Minnesota, 2010, p. 124

⁵ - Hugh De Balma: De Theologia Mystica, translation and overview by: Jasper Hopkins, the Arthur J. Banning Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA, 2002. P. 7

⁶ - Hugo De Balma: De Theologia Mystica, Illuminativa, 10:11.



The unitive way (*Via Unitiva*)

This is the last and ultimate stage in the journey of the soul while ascending to god. In this stage the soul is ready to be in union with god, or with another expression, “to be transformed into god”, as Hugh sets it¹. Hugh argues that the mystical wisdom, which the soul gets, is infused knowledge of god into the soul, this wisdom can’t be obtained by any other means except through the unitive conception, this conception can’t be happened by the intellect, but by the affection².

In this way, the unitive way, Hugh starts instability regarding the role of intellect³. He refers to the unitive way as something beyond reason and mind, because the soul in this process extricates itself from all kinds of reasoning and contemplation, neither reflection nor conceptualization⁴. It seems to be like a leave which the soul takes from all consciousness, even from itself as a self⁵.

Finally, all guiding and motivating reflections are transcended, so the soul according to Hugh ascending mindlessly to the unknown god, at the highest level of the unitive elevation⁶. In this stage, no presence of the lord’s prayer, the lord sufferings, of the holy trinity, of the angles or of the saints, but love is infused divinely into the soul⁷, and finally the soul is elevated unreflectively unto the “the brightness of the divine incomprehensibility”⁸.

¹ - Hugo De Balma: De Theologia Mystica, Unitiva, 1.

² - Ibid. 2.

³ - Ibid. 4.

⁴ - Ibid.

⁵ - Ibid. 5.

⁶ - Ibid. 6

⁷ - Ibid. 7

⁸ - Ibid.

Transformation in God:

What is transformation in god (*Transformatio in Deum*)? What about deification of the soul and its transformation into god? Many times Hugh mentions in de *Theologia Mystica*, the process of being in unity with god, but he doesn't specify or explain this process of deification and transformation, he just only refers to this process as indescribable mystical union with god.

In contrast with Meister Eckhart, he does say, that the soul becomes *transubstantiated* into God¹. In this regard Hugh is strongly influenced by the scripture and the Dionysian tradition, also from the far tradition of Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus the confessor, Saint Augustine and Albertus Magnus.

If we look to the idea of unity with god, we will find its roots in the New Testament. We find that the New Testament itself speaks about the possibility of being united with god. And if we read in the "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit 'with Him'"². Also John announces to believers that when they see Christ they shall become like Him³, indeed, together with Christ they shall become sons of God, as John teaches⁴. Believers shall one day see Christ face to face as it is confirmed in the Corinthians⁵, and shall be transformed into an incorruptible state⁶.

These passages from the New Testament show the possibility for soul of being in unity with god, this unity carries similarity and likeness, in a state where there is incorruptibility and becoming adopted

¹ - Kurt Flasch: Meister Eckhart: Philosopher of Christianity, translated by: Anne Schindel, Yale University press, 2015, p. 243.

² - I Corinthians 6:17:

³ - I John 3:2

⁴ - John, 1:12

⁵ - I Corinthians 13:12

⁶ - I Corinthians 15:52



sons of god. This case is described from the theological point according to the anagogical interpretation of Hugh as a form of deification.

Saint Augustine refers to this concept of deification from the Old Testament¹ when he quotes the psalms, he says: “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”. Also, Augustine brings this passage from the psalm which says: “I have said: You are gods and all of you the sons of the most high”².

According to the previous passage and the words of Saint Augustine, it seems that the word “Deificatio”, which means being transformed into god, has the similar meaning with the word “Deiformitas”, which means the form of god, so, the deification can be understood as being similar and having the form of god in holiness, righteousness, purity and perfection³.

The same idea of similarity and likeness was supported by Albertus Magnus while he was explaining the meaning of the word “Deificatio”, Albertus states that the process of deification doesn’t mean becoming a god, but becoming like god, “Godlike”, so it’s possible for human being, the believer, to be Godlike, and this is called “deification”⁴. The example of this process, deification, is the same as the example of the iron and fire, when we put an iron-rod in a fire it becomes fiery, becomes like the fire, but this doesn’t mean that the iron-rod becomes the fire itself. In this way we can understand the terms of Hugh regarding Deificatio and Deiformitas⁵.

¹ - Jared Ortiz: Deification in the Latin Patristic Tradition, the catholic university of America press, Washington, 2014, p. 169.

² - Psalm 81:6

³ - William Edward Jelf: A Commentary on the First Epistle of St. John, Longmans Green and Co, London 1877, P. 40.

⁴ - Hugo De Balma: De Theologia Mystica, Op. Cit.

⁵ - Ibid.

In the texts of Hugh we can also understand the term *Deificatio* as an equal term to the term “*Absorptio*”, this means that the transformation in god means to be absorbed into god, and in this case the one or believer will lose his identity¹.

In the patristic tradition we can find that the term *Deificatio* has the same meaning with the term *Absorptio*. For example, if we examine a text of Gregory of Nyssa we will find this significance: “I must be buried with Christ,” “arise with Christ, be joint heir with Christ, and become the son of God, yea, God Himself”². Also the link between the analogical interpretations of Meister Eckhart regarding transubstantiation sounds the same with Gregory’s ideas, and this is the sort of transformation which Hugh states.

Hugh wasn’t only influenced by Dionysius as it seems, but he was influenced also by Maximus the confessor. Hugh goes farther with Maximus when he is explaining the *Deificatio*, that the believer becomes deified by becoming identical with God. This identification can’t be applied of course to nature or essence, here the believer becomes god by participating with god, hence participation is the only solution that can solve this dilemma of deification and transformation, so, the believer becomes god only by participation³.

By this interpretation according to Hugh, the believer becomes in mystical union with god. Thus, based on this analogy, god becomes present in soul and the soul becomes present in god without losing its finite identity.

¹ - Brock Bingaman: *A Luminous Life: A Journey Into Classic Christian Spirituality*, Eugene, Oregon, USA. 2021, P. 32

² - Ann Conway-Jones: *Gregory of Nyssa's Tabernacle Imagery in Its Jewish and Christian Contexts*, Oxford university press, united kingdom, 2014, P. 115

³ - Brock Bingaman, Bradley Nassif (editors): *The Philokalia: A Classic Text of Orthodox Spirituality*, Oxford university press, London, 2012, P. 159



Albertus Magnus gives us an illustration to show how the soul transforms in god¹ by giving the example of food's likeness with the body members saying: "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 it², just as is said: "He who is joined to God is one spirit." This is what is meant by "deifying"³.

By this analogy and participation, and also transformation, the unity of soul with god can be understood. In this way, the deification itself occurs to the soul without being god, also god never lose the divine identity. Although of this transformation, deification, and participation, the soul and god still keep their original identical nature, as the new testament states that: "we shall be like Him"⁴, the apostle does not say "We shall be Him" or "We shall be one substance with Him".

The Praise of God:

Hugh introduces five ways by which we praise god. These ways are not only spiritual efforts that the believers do, but have their justifications inside, I mean that these five reasons are the reasons for why we praise god. Hugh proposes these ways as follows:

The First way concerns with god as source and creator:

We praise Him in accordance with the fact that He is the Origin and Beginning of every creature, both physical and spiritual⁵.

Second way concerns with god as source of contemplation:

¹ - David N. Bell: A Saint in the Sun: Praising Saint Bernard in the France of Louis XIV, Liturgical press, Minnesota, 2017, Pp. 386-387.

² - Hugo De Balma: De Theologia Mystica, Op. Cit.

³ - I Corinthians 6:17

⁴ - (I John 3:2)

⁵ - Hugo De Balma: De Theologia Mystica, 10.

We praise Him according as He stands in relation to those who are contemplating Him in His glory, viz., angelic and human minds¹.

Third way concerns with god as commander in his superiority:

We praise Him according as He stands in relation to all creatures, which, as most High, He commands; and all creatures, both rational and non-rational, obey Him as their Majesty².

Fourth way concerns with god as creator of Man and his worship:

We praise Him in regard to His most noble creature, viz., man. We praise Him principally in regard to men who serve their Creator in love³.

Fifth way concerns with god as forgiver for sinners and wicked:

The last, we praise Him in regard to those sinners who have for a long time existed in sins, however great, and have protracted their wicked deeds⁴.

These five praises are succinctly included in the following five words: “Good” “Beautiful” “Lord” “Sweet” and “Merciful.”⁵

Influence:

Besides being influenced by Bonaventure, by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and by Thomas Gallus⁶, Hugh was also influenced by Augustine’s “*Confession* and *de Trinitate*”, possibly, by Eriugena in his work “*de Divisione Naturae*” and Plotinus.

¹ - Ibid.

² - Ibid

³ - Ibid

⁴ - Ibid

⁵ - Ibid

⁶ - Barbet, Jeanne. “Thomas Gallus,” *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique*. Vol. 15, columns 800-816. Paris: Beauchesne, 1991.



Hugh of Balma however doesn't mention his influence by saint Anselm of Canterbury, although we can notice a similarity between them, especially the works of Anselm "*Cur Dues Homo- Proslogion, Monologion*", and also Peter Abelard in his work "*Historia Clamantium*" and Peter Lombard in his work "*Liber Sententiarum*".

Conclusion:

As a conclusion of the brief attempt about the mystical experience of Hugh of Balma, I can say that the mystical theology which he presented is not something different from the contemplating theology of the patristic tradition. Hugh couldn't escape from the church fathers' theology; he remained an example of the speculative theology which expresses the mystical experience.

The authenticity of Hugh of Balma remains in the anagogical interpretation which he presented in the ways by which the soul ascends to god. The method which Hugh proposed regarding the anagogical interpretation of the scripture, especially the New Testament, was an exceptional one, because he presented a new interpretation and understanding. Not only this, but Hugh was able to combine together the rational method of the anagogical interpretation with the mystical experience of the theological context.

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