

[THE DIFFICULT ISSUE]

[*Quaestio Difficilis*]

[1] In order to display the truth of those hidden and mystical things that have been spoken of, I pose a difficult question. By means of this question the truth of this wisdom shines forth quite clearly to anyone who has understanding. In particular, I ask whether the soul, with respect to its affections, can be moved unto God [merely] by yearning and desiring, apart from any preceding or accompanying reflection on the part of the intellect.

[2] It seems that it is always necessary to reflect before the affections are moved unto God by means of an expansion of love.

[PRO]

[3] First, [this point is proved] in the following way by [appeal to] authorities. For example, in the Psalms there is said: “During my meditation a fire will be kindledⁿ¹ [within me].”¹ Therefore, *the mind must first of all reflectively meditate*, before the affections are inwardly kindled and before through the affections the mind rises upwards, by the fire of love, unto its Beloved.

[4] Likewise, Augustine [says]: “We can love things unseen but cannot at all love things unknown.”² Therefore, it is necessary first of all to *know* by reasoning or by reflecting intellectually, before anything is loved with the affection of love. Therefore, necessarily, *reflecting precedes the affection of love*.

[5] This same point is proven by rational considerations—first of all, by means of the following consideration taken with respect to God. For in *The Divine Names* VII the soul that through desirous love actually extends itself unto God, whom it loves, is called deified. For through the expanding of love the soul is conformed—according as it is possible for a creature—to the most super-excellent Trinity. However, in the Trinity the case is such that in the order of nature there first comes the Father, who is the Supreme Power; secondly, there comes the Son, who is the Father’s Knowledge or Supreme Wisdom. Thirdly, there comes the Holy Spirit, who is the True Love that unites, by means of His procession, the Father and the Son. Nevertheless, there is not in the Trinity any *earlier* or *later* according to time. For all three persons exist equally from eternity. Rather, [there is *earlier*

and *later*] only according to nature (as was said) and according to our understanding. Therefore, the begetting of the Son, who is true and supreme Wisdom or Knowledge, naturally precedes the procession of the Holy Spirit, who is True Love. Therefore, in the case of the soul, which endeavors—through an expanding of love, as far as is possible according to the measure of its smallness—to imitate the most blessed Trinity: the situation will likewise be such that first of all there will be *there* a certain reflective or apprehending knowledge (of Him unto whom the soul tends) before the soul can yearningly rise upwards unto God by means of desirous love. Hence, *reflective knowing always precedes the affection of love.*

[6] Furthermore, according to that which Blessed Dionysius says, the church militant imitates, insofar as possible, the church triumphant. Therefore, the believing soul that wills to rise-upwards through love rises upwards by stages, according to the gradations present in the orders of angels; and the soul especially imitates the loving [angelic] minds of the ultimate hierarchy, in which there are three orders: viz., Thrones, Cherubims, and Seraphims. Therefore, in the case of the soul, it is necessary to rise upwards while actually willing—a phenomenon that imitates the three properties or functions of the three angelic orders. First of all, [it is necessary] that the soul be a ‘Throne,’ i.e., that it leave behind, completely, all other things (e.g.,ⁿ² worldly honors, carnal affections, earthly delights), so that God alone reside in it, a seat for Him having now been prepared. Secondly, [it is necessary] that the soul be a ‘Cherubim.’ Cherubim symbolizes fullness of knowledge; and this state comes about by means of light that is divinely infused. By means of this light the mind, in reflecting super-intellectually, knows divine things, and apprehends celestial things, above human understanding. Lastly, it is necessary that the soul be a ‘Seraphim,’ the Seraphim being the highest order. In other words, it is necessary that the affections, desiring God alone and nothing else, be subsequently kindled unto Him whom the cherubic mind already knows—kindled through fiery emotions. And thereupon [the soul] is a ‘Seraphim,’ which symbolizes the fervent. For since the Cherubim, to which is ascribed reflective knowledge, precedes hierarchically the Seraphim, which is understood to be the fervor of love: in the soul, which endeavors to imitate this threefold angelic office, the case will be such that knowing through reflective thinking will precede actually being ablaze through love. Thus, *the affection of love does not at all rise upwards without preliminary reflection.*

[7] Furthermore, the soul, in rising upwards through love, endeavors to be conformed to those blessed minds of the saints who are contemplating God face to face. But *there* [i.e., in the case of those saints] seeing comes before cleaving-through-love; for unless they knew with the intellect that unspeakable Beauty, they would not at all cleave unswervingly to it with inflamed affections. (In the delighting of the affections, beauty is perfected.) Therefore, unless in us knowledge preceded the affection of love, we would no longer be conformed to the minds of the saints in glory. These saints behold the Divine Beauty in such a way that they take delight in it through love—take delight above all understanding and by means of inner affections. *In the case of these saints, then, understanding precedes loving.*

[8] Moreover, in accordance with the soul's being ordered in its powers, it is moved naturally and orderedly in a corresponding way. But I see that from the moment of its creation the soul has three naturally distinct powers: viz., memory, intelligence,³ and will. In us memory is nothing other than the possession of divine likeness. But in us intelligence is that by means of which each soul knows its Creator naturally rather than by investigating or by reasoning. But will is the power by which the soul loves its Creator and naturally tends unto Him. And elicitable from this last consideration is the reason why the human affections cannot be satisfied to the full with earthly riches, delights, orⁿ³ honors; for the affections tend toward God alone, and in Him they find their final rest. Therefore, since the power of intelligence (in which there is reflective thought or knowledge) naturally precedes the power of the will (in which there is fervor or affection-of-love), the movement-of-the-intelligence, which is thinking, precedes the movement-of-the-will, which is loving. Therefore, *it is not the case that any affections can—without preliminary reflection on the part of the intellect—rise upwards by means of the affection of love, no matter how much they are elevated by inflamed emotions that are divinely infused.*

[9] Furthermore, this same point is observed in regard to the sensible power of apprehension and in regard to the sensible motive power. For, first of all, it is necessary that that toward which I am moved be loved imaginatively and that I conceive it beforehand in a perceptible way. Therefore, it is necessary that I apprehend with the outer eye or with some other sense something pleasant before I delight in it or desire to have it. Therefore, by reason of the foregoing considerations the case with regard to the cognitive and the motive pow-

ers will be such that I conceive of God (or some other delightful thing) before I can inwardly yearn for Him through my affections or can to some extent delight in Him. Accordingly, *reflective thinking always precedes rising upwards through love*.

[10] Moreover, according to what Blessed Dionysius says at the outset of *The Mystical Theology*: in the rising-upwards of love one must dispense with all intellect and with all reflection on perceptible creatures—and also with reflection on God and the angels. But to make this affirmation seems very foolish. For what will the mind doⁿ⁴ if it cannot reflect on God or the Trinity or the angels? For the mind seems then to be in a cloud or to be, as it were, at sea, since the intellect's knowledge always directs the love. For otherwise mystical wisdom seems not to be wisdom but to be an abuse and folly.

[11] Furthermore, whatever is apprehended is apprehended under some representation of being—apprehended, viz., either as one or as true or as good. Therefore, God, howsoever He is apprehended, is apprehended under a form of being—either insofar as He is Supreme Oneness or insofar as He is Supreme Truth or, furthermore, insofar as He is Supreme Goodness. Now, He can be apprehended in any one of these modes only through reflective thought. For example, if I apprehend Him as *one*, I must reflect on oneness; if [I apprehend Him] insofar asⁿ⁵ He is *true*, [I must reflect] on truth; if [I apprehend Him] insofar asⁿ⁶ He is *good*, [I must reflect] on goodness. Since [the foregoing is the case], then since love's apprehending apprehends God insofar as He is good, *preliminary reflecting on goodness itself must in that case precede [the apprehending's] being moved by the affections*. Therefore, ..., etc.

[CONTRA]

[12] On the other hand, it seems that without preceding or accompanying reflection the affections, being disposed through love, are freely moved unto God. [This seems true], first of all, on the authority of the great hierarch Dionysius, who at the outset of *The Mystical Theology* speaks as follows to Timothy: “But you, dear Timothy, as concerns mystical visions: with great contrition leave behind the senses and the intellectual operations and all things perceptible and intelligible and all things existing and not-existing; and, as far as possible, rise upwards ignorantly unto a union with Him who is above all substance and cognition,” etc.⁴ Since, then, according to this [text], in love's mystical rising-upwards one must leave behind every intel-

lectual operation or reflection and must rise upwards only in accordance the the uniting-power of affectionate love—a uniting-power that is beyond all understanding and knowledge: *the one who truly loves rises upwards by means of love's affection, apart from any preceding reflection.*

[13] Furthermore, in Dionysius's *Mystical Theology* there is said, according to the third translation: "Through the uniting-of-love,ⁿ⁷ which is productive of true knowledge, one is united to the intellectually unknown God—united by means of a much nobler form of knowledge than is any intellectual knowledge. For because one leaves behind intellectual knowledge, he knows God above intellect and mind," etc.⁵ Since, then, (as is said there), God cannot be known through intellectual cognizing, He is known most truly through love's contact. Therefore, (as is clearly said there), *it is necessary to leave behind all intellect and to rise upwards unto God only through the affection of love.*

[14] Moreover, in *The Divine Names* VII it is said: "But it is necessary to see that, indeed, our mind has a power-of-understanding, through which it beholds invisible things; but there must also be a uniting that expands the mind's nature—a uniting by means of which the mind is joined to those things that are above it. Therefore,ⁿ⁸ it is necessary to understand divine things in accordance with this [uniting]—to understand them not according to ourselves but according to ourselves as made whole and as deified wholes."⁶ Therefore, although in human matters it is necessary to understand before being affected, nevertheless *in regard to true and experiential knowledge of divine matters it is necessary to sense through love before the one who senses reflects intellectually.* Therefore, it is necessary first to rise up through love, in order that from that state of cognition there be left in the mind true cognition. For that which the affections sense experientially as regards the divine names is also truly understood by the intellect.

[15] Furthermore, in the same chapter on mystical wisdom the following is said: "Excellently praising this irrational, mindless, and foolish wisdom, we say that it is the cause of all mind and reason and of all wisdom and prudence. And in it is all counsel, and from it is knowledge and prudence, and in it are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," etc.⁷ Since, then, Dionysius calls the wisdom irrational, it does not proceed by means of an investigation that makes use of arguments. And since he calls it foolish, it does not proceed as

would another—a scholastic—science. For in proceeding in an ordered fashion, we first of all have knowledge (of whatever it is that we understand). Therefore, if mystical theology proceeded first of all by reflecting or meditating and through the use of arguments, as we see to occur in other procedures, then it would not have been called by Blessed Dionysius foolish and mindless (i.e., without mind). For the affection of love is kindled without any mental reflection or meditation. Therefore, *from the affection of love knowledge is left in the mind, and not vice versa.*

[16] Moreover, the Psalmist [says]: “Taste and see,” etc.⁸ Therefore, since tasting has to do with the affection of love but seeing has to do with the intellect’s reflecting or meditating: *it is necessary to rise upwards by means of the motion of love before intellectually knowing the very hidden God by means of reflecting.* For the general rule in mystical theology is this: that it is necessary to have practical knowledge before having theoretical knowledge; i.e., [it is necessary to have] practical exercise in the heart before having a knowledge of those things that are spoken of.

[17] Furthermore, this same point is evident from the authority of the Commentator of Vercelli,⁹ who comments on *The Mystical Theology* [of Dionysius] as follows: “This employment of wisdom suspends the uses and the functions of the senses, of the imagination, of reason, of both the practical and the theoretical intellect; and it excludes everything understood and everything understandable; and it transcends being and one and [every] mirror and [every] symbolism; and by divine grace it unites to the Divine Spirit the summit of the principal affection,” etc. Therefore, *in mystical affection no reflection or knowledge is required on the part of the intellect.*

[18] Moreover, this same point is proven through a rational consideration adopted with regard to divine matters, because the rational mind is perfected according as it rises upwards unto divine things in an orderly manner, ascending by stages. Now, I see that in the Divinity there are three persons: viz., Father and Son and Holy Spirit. For the Son is Supreme Wisdom, and the Holy Spirit is the Love that unites both. But the Holy Spirit, who is True Love according to nature as well as according to our understanding [of Him], but not according to time, is the last person in God. For first of all comes an understanding of the Father as begetting; secondly, of the Son as begotten, thirdly, of the Holy Spirit as proceeding from the other two. Therefore, the Holy Spirit is last and [of the three] is the closest to

us. Therefore, since the soul, in ascending by stages progresses in an orderly fashion, it is necessary that the soul have love—which is assigned to the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit is closest to us—before it have reflective understanding or even wisdom, which is assigned to the Son. Therefore, *the affection of love precedes knowing*, and not vice versa.

[19] Furthermore, in accordance with the fact that the soul receives an influx from God, the Fount of all happiness, it advances after the fashion of the church triumphant. But according to Dionysius it is evident that the order of Seraphims (Seraphims symbolize the fervent) receives from God an inflow sooner and more abundantly and more perfectly than does the order of the Cherubims (Cherubims symbolize fullness of knowledge). Therefore, the affections, through the fervor-of-love (which corresponds to the Seraphims), are influenced by God and moved unto God principally and antecedently—before the intellect reflectively understands that which the affections desire. (This act of understanding corresponds to the Cherubims.) Accordingly, *the affections are moved unto God antecedently, apart from preliminary reflection on the part of the intellect*; instead, understanding follows after the affections.

[20] Moreover, the rational spirit receives an inflow from God, antecedently and principally, to the extent that it is nearer to Him. But the affections, when disposed especially through love, are supreme in the rational spirit and, as a result, are nearer to the Uncreated Spirit. Therefore, within the [rational] spirit the summit of the affections (as being nearer to God) is touched by God through the infusion of inflamed love—*touched before the intellect* (which is a power much more distant from the Supreme Creator than are the affections) *has [the capability] of apprehending Him*.

[21] Furthermore, since God is distant from each creature by an infinite number of gradations, as it were: in order for Him to be known to some extent in this miserable situation [of ours], the soul must approach Him in such a way that He is somehow or other apprehended by it. Since, then, love alone, through extending itself, makes the soul approach unto God: the more fervently the mind loves, the more closely it approaches the Fount of light. And, as a result, the nearer the mind is, through love, to the Fount of light, the more the intellect is illumined by that Fount through knowledge. Therefore, as regards divine matters, *fervent loving precedes reflective knowing*.

SOLUTION

[22] According to Blessed Dionysius at the beginning of *The Mystical Theology* [the following] must be said: this wisdom is predicated only of Christians. Hence, it presupposes a foundation of love and a knowledge that comes from faith. Hence, no mortal, howsoever philosophical or knowledgeable he is, has been able or will be able to apprehend—by an investigation of rational considerations or by the exercise of intellect—this wisdom, which is present in the mind's supreme affection and which transcends the capability of human nature. Rather, this wisdom is mercifully disclosed by paternal affection only to sons who are expecting consolation only from the Eternal Father. And so, it is called mystical—i.e., concealed or hidden—because it is known by few. [23] Hence, it must be noted that there is a twofold mode of apprehending, in accordance with the twofold natural power of attaining unto God. For each soul has the *power of understanding* (this is the power of the intellect) and the *power of loving* (which is called the affection). By means of these two powers the soul apprehends God, who is Supreme Truth and Supreme Goodness. Hence, we apprehend truth by means of the intellect, and we attain unto goodness by means of the affection. In accordance with these two [powers] there is a twofold way of excellence. The one way is in terms of the intellect. It is called contemplation, and it is befigured by Rachel,¹⁰ who is comely in appearance. [It occurs] when the mind, by a light divinely infused from on high, receives the power to contemplate heavenly things reflectingly or meditatingly. The other way is in terms of the affections and is called the fervor of love. [It occurs] when by the fire-of-the-Holy Spirit sent from on high the soul—with flaming affections, and yearning for God alone—desires only Him, in order that it may be more intimately united unto Him through a closer bond of love. And this is called the perfect part of Mary,¹¹ who was fervent with desire, as is told in [the Gospel of] John.¹²

[24] Hence, just as the New Testament is more excellent than the Old Testament, so the way-of-love (or the way of the perfection that there is in the fervor of love)—a way befigured through Mary—is more noble than is mentalⁿ⁹ meditation, or intellectual contemplation, which is befigured through Rachel. But in order that truth may be seen more perspicaciously, we must note [the following]: that in the intellect contemplation is twofold; likewise, in the affection a twofold fervor of love is acquired. [25] For there is a certain meditation or con-

templation from lower things to higher things; and, conversely, [there is] a certain [contemplation] that descends from higher things to lower things. Concerning the former Richard of St. Victor makes a determination in his *Archa Mystica*, showing through forty-two meditations (or considerations) on created things how it is that the mind, adorned with the light of understanding, is supposed to attain unto knowledge of the Supreme Creator. Thus, just as the Israelites came from Egypt unto the Land of Promise by means of forty-two dwelling places, so through those forty-two considerations, ordered in six grades, the believing soul attains unto a knowledge of the Supreme Truth—a knowledge adaptedⁿ¹⁰ to every rational spirit.

[26] But the other [kind of] contemplation proceeds conversely. For the mind, by means of light infused from on high, judges meditatively about lower creatures in accordance with standards of truth and eternal rational principles, which, in accordance with divine illuminations, it perceives within itself. And according as the soul is infused with fuller light by a radiating from on high, so much more highly reliably does the mind examine—much better than by reasoning—the truth in creatures and in all effects, in accordance with those causes and rational principles that are the same thing as God, from whom every exemplified and conceived creature originally went forth. Nevertheless, we must not understand that this contemplating fails to obtain its end in the affection [of love, since] otherwise, it would not be contemplation. But at present [I will say] nothing about these matters. [27] The fervor of love is much more excellent and much more laudable and much easier to obtain [than is reflective meditation]. But there is a twofold mode of attaining unto this fervor of love: one mode is scholastic and common; the other is mystical and hidden.

[28] For the first [mode, viz., the scholastic mode] occurs by way of inquiry and of elevation, and it is originated from lower things, and over a quite prolonged period of time it mounts upward to the Supreme [Being] through practice. For example, this mode of loving God occurs by way of a preceding meditation. For, first of all, the faithful student beholds outerⁿ¹¹ creatures with his outer sense, i.e., with his outer eye. Next, mounting upward a little higher, he preserves, repositing in his imagination, that which he has just seenⁿ¹² with his outer eye. Thereupon, rising still higher: by reasoning and comparing he finds, necessarily, the one Creating Cause of all things. And in this way the philosophers have arrived at a knowledge of God.¹⁴ For through beholding such a magnitude of creatures, so love-

ly an ordering of them, and their very great usefulness, the philosophers and all others know very reliably the one most powerful, most wise, and most excellent Creator. And this [knowing comes] through a power of the soul that is higher than the outer senses and the imaginationⁿ¹³—a power which is called reason. [29] Thereupon, from the foregoing consideration of creatures and by means of the aforesaid [occurrences] a certain lasting disposition [*habitus*] and a certain being is left in the intellect. And in order to contemplate divine things more clearly, the mind is elevated not only through the viewing of creatures but also through radiation and through illumination, infused somehow by God. And this power is called the intellective power, or the intellect; and the intellect engages only in pure meditation. [30] Finally, every meditation or contemplation reaches its goal in a desirable affection. Hence, anyⁿ¹⁴ meditation or contemplation¹³ is of little or no use without subsequent love.ⁿ¹⁵ Accordingly, Augustine says¹⁴ that it is possibleⁿ¹⁶ to reflect meditatively by flitting about but that [only] by loving is it possible to cling [to that upon which one reflects]. Thus, [as concerns the scholastic mode], reflection or meditation always precedes the affectionⁿ¹⁷ of love. Secondly, the believing soul, without [making use of] any other creatures, is aroused affectively by God only by means of the reflective thought that is infused by God.

[31] But the other [i.e., the mystical] mode of ascending unto God is much nobler than all the foregoing [steps] and is also much easier to obtain. And this mode is unitive wisdom, which is present in love's longing when [the soul] yearns [to ascend] higher by means of fiery affections. In *The Divine Names* VII this wisdom is defined by Blessed Dionysius as follows: "Wisdom is a most divine knowledge-of-God that is acquired through ignorance in accordance with a supermental union—acquired when the mind, withdrawing from all other things and subsequently taking leave even of itself, is united to superresplendent rays, once it has been illumined by the inscrutable and profound light of wisdom."¹⁵ [32] Hence, as concerns this wisdom, according to what is said at the beginning of *The Mystical Theology*: the senses and perceptible things are commanded to be left behind,ⁿ¹⁸ [as are also] things understandable and things not-understandable. Thus, this wisdom draws upwards the affections of the lover, [and it does so] without any preceding investigation or meditation. Accordingly, *there* there is no need to reflect either about creatures or about angels or about God or about the Trinity. For this wisdom is capable of yearn-

ingly rising upwards not by means of a preceding meditation but by means of the affections' longing.

[33] But, nevertheless, we must note that this wisdom is understood in one way in the case of those who are progressing and in another way in the case of those who have been perfected. For, necessarily, those who are progressing have to be purged by means of the pathway that has been spoken of. And after a while they must, by reflecting a bit, make contact with God Himself, who inflames [them] from on high. However, [they progress] not by meditating on God or on the angels, as was said, but by rising upwards in accordance with the pathway that immediately succeeds the purgative way¹⁶ in my quite brief exposition of the *Pater noster*. But after the affection has quite diligently elevated itself by exercising itself protractedly or by [the ascending believer's] reflecting in accordance with what is taught there [viz., in my earlier section on the Lord's Prayer], then all reflection or meditation is dismissed, and the mind of the one who is ascending is elevated only through the longing of love—elevated as often as he wills to be, whether during the day or at night, whether indoors or outdoors, as he yearns only for union with his Beloved. And in this case the affection of love precedes reflection. For that which the affection senses, the intellect truly understands.

[34] And just as was stated regarding contemplation—viz., that it is twofold, one [type] which ascends, another which descends—such is also the case regarding the affection of love. For according to the scholastic way, [the soul] ascends from lower creatures unto the affection of love; but with regard to mystical wisdom the opposite obtains. For that True Love—which is the Holy Spirit, the third person in God and the person last with respect to the origin of the persons—is nearer to us and is first with respect to our affective rising upwards unto God. Hence, through the fire of love the Holy Spirit touches and kindles the summit of our affective [power] and draws [us] ineffably unto Himself, without any reflection or rational inference. Accordingly, just as a stone is drawn by its own weight and is naturally borne downward toward its center, so the summit of the affections—by its own weight and by the straight path and without deviation—is immediately and without any preceding or accompanying reflection borne upward unto God. [35] Hence, this power—which is the affection [of love] and which is the supreme thing in the human spirit—is immediately uniteable to the Holy Spirit by the bond of love. And this power, insofar as it is what is supreme in the [human] spirit, is un-

recognized by all, as it were, except by those inⁿ¹⁹ whom the summit [of the affections] is touched immediately and moved immediately by the fire of the Holy Spirit.

[36] Hence, Dionysius calls this a power that is immediately moved by the Holy Spirit;ⁿ²⁰ and his entire *Mystical Theology* proceeds in accordance with it. There he says the following: “Even now it is a law predetermined by us that the truth of those-things-said-about-God be asserted by us not in persuasive words of human wisdom but in the exhibiting of the theologians’ power—a power incited by the [Holy] Spirit. In accordance with this power we are ineffably and ignorantly joined to things ineffable and unknown—joined in accordance with a union better than our intellectual power and operation.”¹⁷ And in accordance with this power, which is immediately moved by the Holy Spirit, there is a much greater knowledge of God than comes by investigating through any intellect or any reason. [37] Thus, the summit of the affections is touched first of all. In accordance with the affections we are moved unto God by means of fervor; and from this contact a most true intellectual knowledge is repositied in the mind. For only that which the affection [of love] senses about God does the intellect most truly apprehend. Hence, in *The Mystical Theology* there is said: “Through the union-of-love, which is productive of true knowledge, one is united to the intellectually unknown God—united by means of a much nobler form of knowledge than is any intellectual knowledge.”¹⁸

[38] Moreover, as a result of this union the intelligence wonderfully shines forth for investigating hidden [truths]. As a further result of this union images in the imagination are separated off. Moreover, because of this union the disorder of the outer senses is restrained, as if by an inner rein; and the effect of the fiery affection overwhelms even the sensuality of the flesh and mortifies its noxious corruption. For the more the mind is elevated through yearning, the more the corruption of its evilly inflaming flesh is weakened.

[39] Hereby is evident, in great part, the difference between the scholastic and the mystical teacher. For their arguments proceed in conformity with different understandings.

[REPLIES TO THE PRO-ARGUMENTS]

[40] To the first [argument],¹⁹ then, it must be said that the verse “In my meditation a fire will be kindled”²⁰ is understood with respect

to those who are progressing; for in such [individuals] the fervor of love does not yet abound. Hence, by [the soul's] meditating a little in accordance with that way which was mentioned in my quite short exposition of the Lord's Prayer (not, however, by reflecting upon the angels, supercelestial things, God, or the Trinity), the affections must be aroused more effectively. However, in the third stage—[viz.,] on the pathway of unitive love, once the exercising [of love] has been perfected—guiding reflection is dispensed with. By way of illustration, with regard to bridges: we see that in the initial construction of a bridge wooden beams are used as supports for the stones; once the edifice has been constructed and the stability of the stone layers has become perfected, all the wooden beams are removed, for the structure of the stone layers can remain rigid without the assistance of the wooden supports. Similarly, here too in the case of those who are progressing, reflection in the aforesaid manner is premised. Then follows the affection-of-love, which, once perfectlyⁿ²¹ obtained, the assistance of all guidingⁿ²² or accompanying reflection or meditation is removed, as was said above.

[41] To the second [argument] it must be said that I well concede the following [claim]: “We can love things that are unseen, but we cannot at all love things that are unknown.”²¹ For mystical wisdom presupposes knowledge by faith. Hence, at the beginning of *The Mystical Theology* mystical wisdom is referred to as the wisdom of Christians.²² Or [the claim must be conceded] for another reason, viz., because knowledge is twofold, and one [form of knowledge] does precede the affection of love. For with regard to the first [kind of] progression in accordance with the scholastic and common pathway, there is a knowledge of God through created things or through the intellect *before* the affection of love is kindled in the one [who ascends]. And Augustine's statement is understood in terms of this [kind of progression]. But according to Dionysius: in mystical progression the affection of love precedes the intellect's knowing, as was said. Now, the Prophet David speaks of both [kinds of knowledge]. Accordingly, as concerns the first [kind] he says: “In my meditation a fire will be kindled.”²³ And about the other [kind he says]: “Come unto Him” (viz., through footsteps of love), “and be illumined”²⁴ (through knowledge of truth). And this latter knowledge is much more certain and much more highly reliable than is the former [kind]. Hence, oftentimes by means of certain features that are observed in something, that thing is known to be delicious to eat. From this knowledge the appetite of

the viewer, in very many instances, is stimulated to partake. After the food has been tasted, there remains a fuller and more certain knowledge from the tasting than was the knowledge that preceded the tasting. Likewise, we understand in the same way [what David says] in regard to these [two forms of knowledge].

[42] To the third [argument]—“...with respect to God ...,” etc.—it must be said that [this argument] is sound as regards the common, [scholastic] mode, if the soul is actually ascending. But as regards mystical progression the opposite²⁵ is the case. Thus, the objection on the other side [i.e., in the *Contra* section] still holds good—[a fact] that is evident in the development of its arguments.

[43] Thereby the other argument [viz., the fourth argument] regarding the Cherubims and the Seraphims is evident. [That argument] is true with respect to [the order of] ascending from lower things to higher things; and, thus, knowledge precedes love, even as the Cherubims precede the Seraphims. But the opposite holds true with respect to [the order of] descending; for the Seraphim primarily and principally receives an infusion from God, *before* the Cherubim does. And so, by comparison: in [the order of] descending, the affections are moved unto God through love before the intellect perceives that which the affections sense. And, thus, the second part of the *Contra* section holds good.ⁿ²³

[44] To the fifth [argument] it must be said that the case is dissimilar regarding the blessed and regarding the pilgrims. For the blessed behold the brightness of the eternal light face to face; and they engage in contemplation, without any component imagery, without any obscuring mist from the corrupt flesh, or without any intermediary. And *there* there is the supreme degree of ordinance, because *there* there is no hindrance; and, thus, the intellect naturally apprehends the Divine Beauty before the affections delight in it by an indissoluble union.

But with regard to pilgrims: while existing in the bodily state they love; nevertheless (as says the Philosopher)²⁶ the human intellect is mingled with the imagination. And so, it apprehends in conjunction with images whatever is intelligible—especially the Supreme Intelligible [Being], viz., God. Butⁿ²⁴ even if through a divinely infused greater illumination the component imagery were separated out of the intellect, nevertheless no matter how much the intellect is illumined from on high, it always apprehends God in a finite and delimited manner, even though He is immense and infinite. And so, every

intellectual act of reflecting is always impure and unclean. And, hence, if there is to be true mystical ascent in the present [lifetime], Dionysius commands that reflection be completely separated out from the affection of love and that [the soul] ascend only through love's fervor. For God is all-desirable, as is said in the Canticles;²⁷ nevertheless, He is not all-comprehensible—neither in the present [lifetime] nor in the future [age]. And the more effectively all intellectual knowledge is removedⁿ²⁵ during this ascent, the sooner the affection of love, as if free-soaring, apprehends what it desires. And we must especially beware of the following: viz., that any intellectual reflection be commingled with the ascent of unitive love.

[45] To the sixth [argument] it must be said that it is refuted in accordance with [the distinction between] the twofold mode of ascending through love—"reflecting neither on the Trinity nor on angels," as was said. Through this same [distinction] the seventh [argument] is also refuted.

[46] To the eighth [argument] it must be said that although the manner of mystical theology's rising upwards seems foolish and irrational to those who are ignorant of this [mystical] wisdom, nevertheless it proceeds most wisely and with a wonderful ordering. 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. If I am asked what, then, I will be reflecting upon (since I ought not to be reflecting upon God or the angels), then it must be said that [my mind] will only *yearn* and that it will not be *reflecting*.

Suppose, then, that without any reflecting upon God or the angels, the mind becomes prepared to some extent in accordance with the purgative way. And suppose that it knows how to utter no other [prayerful words] but knows only how to arise while praying: "O Lord, when shall I love You? When shall I embrace You with arms of love?" If it were to repeat [this prayer] very frequently, it would by experience know itself to be inflamed—know this sooner than it would if it were to reflect a thousand times upon most hidden heavenly things and upon eternal generation or eternal procession. Accordingly, this [pathway] is the most excellent foolishness of which Blessed Dionysius says the following: "Thus, excellently praising this foolish, irrational, and mindless wisdom, we say that it is the cause of all mind and all reason and of all wisdom and prudence."²⁸

[47] To the ninth [argument the following] must be said: in accordance with the rising upwards of that wisdom God is not apprehended through the mode of being, nor as one, nor as true, nor as good. But when the supreme power of the soul—viz., the summit of the affections—is touched by the fire of love, then because of that motion and that touching, the affections glow brilliantly in yearning for God. And so, Blessed Dionysius refutes all the scholastic and speculative teachers. For they think that they know all things, although they know little or nothing (except perhaps by surmising or conjecturing) about true wisdom, by which the mind is drawn unto God. And in the following words Dionysius writes to Timothy that this true wisdom ought not at all to be disclosed to such [scholastic teachers]: “But see that none of the unlearned hear this [teaching]. I mean the unlearned who are steeped in existing things,” etc.²⁹

And ridiculing such [teachers], Dionysius immediately thereafter makes the following inference: “They esteem themselves to perceive divine things by their intelligence and with fullness of knowledge; but, likewise, I call them unlearned ...,” etc.³⁰ And subsequently: “... believing that they know, by means of that knowledge which accords with them, Him who has made darkness His hiding place.”³¹ And this [mistakenness] occurs because this [mystical] knowledge is completely supramental and is present where every intellect fails, for the intellect apprehends only under the aspect of the one or the true or the good or of being. But mystical theology teaches that through the summit of the affections a student of truth rises upwards by means of love. And what’s more, the mind could never actually rise upwards by means of these movements if while rising upwards it were reflecting upon something; indeed, the affections would [thereby] be forced amazinglyⁿ²⁶ downward from their own elevated height. But, instead, the affections leave behind, on a lower level and as a withdrawn attendant, the intellectual power; and without assistance from the intellectual power, and being elevated more highly away from it (being more distant from it than the midday [sun] is from the [sun at] dawn), the affections rise upwards unto union with their Beloved. And this [ascending] occurs, by active movements upwards, as often as [the soul] wills [for it to]—whether during the daytime or at night, whether one hundred times or one thousand times, provided the body can stand it.

[48] And [as an indication] that the foregoing is the case, I presently employ, as best I can, an example from the physical world. I consider the movement of a stone that is, by nature, moving down-

wards, under its own weight, towards the center. By comparison, the affections, disposed through the weight of love,³² rise upwards unto God apart from all reflection or deliberation—extending themselves as if unto their own Center. And by means of these movements (except in cases where briefly, as in a rapture, the affections are raised beyond themselves—not by nature but by grace—through a divine lifting up), they elevate themselves with continual longing; and they will obtain, in eternal happiness, fulfillment of their longings and satisfaction for their gaze.

[49] But if a speculative teacher or a scholastic studentⁿ²⁷ cannot discern this [teaching], let him learn from the Apostle, who was the principal hierarch of this wisdom, which none of the wise among the Greeks were able to understand, since this wisdom is known only by spiritual examination. Regarding this wisdom [the Apostle] says to the Corinthians: “Our spirit, united unto the Divine Spirit, senses the things of God”;³³ and this is the wisdom that [the Apostle] spoke among those who are perfect.³⁴ Thus, this is the [gift] which the Lord promised to the Apostles, when He said: “Be endued with power from on high.”³⁵ Hence, just as a priest puts on his vestment [commencing] from his head, i.e., from his upper part, so the soul is endued [commencing] from the summit of the affections. Accordingly, the soul is touched by the fire of the Holy Spirit before the advent of any reflection. Therefore, it is quite evident that the soul which truly loves can rise upwards unto God through the affections that have been kindled by the longing of love—rise upwards apart from any guiding reflection. AMEN.