

# Introduction

We have often been shown how Dante followed Aquinas; it would be of interest to have an exhibition of their differences.

Charles Williams<sup>1</sup>

In a more than ordinarily gracious moment of the *Paradiso*, Thomas Aquinas introduces Dante one by one to those most accomplished in the way of Judeo-Christian wisdom, including, among the ancients, King Solomon, and, among the moderns, Albert the Great of Cologne, Dionysius the Areopagite, Gratian, Peter Lombard, Bede, Richard of St Victor ('more than man in contemplation') and his old antagonist Siger of Brabant. But Dante, as yet a stranger in paradise and thus to their now radiant configuration, needs no introduction, for the souls he discovers there and in whose company he now rejoices had long since been his companions as a philosophical and theological spirit. From Albert, he had learnt how it might be possible to reconcile the Platonic and the Peripatetic elements of his spirituality,<sup>2</sup> while from the Areopagite he had come to appreciate something of the graduated character of the cosmos in general (the *De hierarchia*) and of the art of predication in particular (the

<sup>1</sup> Charles Williams, *The Descent of the Dove. A Short History of the Holy Spirit in the Church* (London: Longmans, 1939), p. 123.

<sup>2</sup> B. Nardi, 'Raffronti fra alcuni luoghi di Alberto Magno e di Dante', in *Saggi di filosofia dantesca*, 2nd edn (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1967), pp. 63-72; C. Vasoli, 'L'immagine di Alberto Magno in Bruno Nardi', in *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 32 (1985), 1-2, 45-64 (and in *Otto saggi per Dante* (Florence: Le Lettere, 1995), pp. 117-32); idem, 'Dante, Alberto Magno e la scienza dei peripatetici', in P. Boyde and V. Russo (eds), *Dante e la scienza. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi, Ravenna 28-30 maggio 1995* (Ravenna: Longo, 1995), pp. 55-70; idem, 'Fonti albertiane nel *Convivio* di Dante', in M. J. F. M. Hoenene and A. De Libera (eds), *Albertus Magnus und der Albertismus. Deutsche philosophische kultur des Mittelalters* (Leiden, New York and Cologne: Brill, 1995), pp. 33-49; G. Fioravanti, 'Dante e Alberto Magno', in *Il pensiero filosofico e teologico di Dante Alighieri* (Milan: V&P Università, 2001), pp. 93-102; A. Kablitz, 'Alberto è di Colonia'. *Albertus ist es, aus Köln. Dantes "Göttliche Komödie" und die Scholastik* (Cologne: Fritz-Thyssen-Stiftung, 2002).

*De divinis nominibus*), of affirmation and of negation as means of theological understanding.<sup>3</sup> In Solomon he had contemplated the substance of kingship,<sup>4</sup> while in Richard of St Victor he had pondered the psychology of ecstasis.<sup>5</sup> But the wisdom he gleaned from these figures both severally and in the round pales in relation to what he had discovered and come to admire in Thomas, for here was the archetypal representative of the kind of precision and piety proper to those looking into things human and divine, and for this he could not help but love him, and, in loving him, proposing and celebrating him as spokesman for those in paradise most gifted in things of the mind.

<sup>3</sup> E. Grether, *Geistige Hierarchien. Der Mensch und die übersinnliche Welt in der Darstellung großer Seher des Abendlandes. Dionysus Areopagita, Dante Alighieri, Rud*, 2nd edn (Freiburg: Die Kommenden, 1977); U. Gamba, "Il lume di quel cero ...": Dionigi Areopagita fu l'ispiratore di Dante?, *Studia Patavina* 32 (1985), 1, 101-14; D. Giuliotti, 'San Dionigi e Dante', in M. Baldini (ed.), *Tizzi e fiamme* (Siena: Cantagalli, 1999; originally 1921), pp. 182-89; M. Ariani, "E sì come di lei bevve la gronda / de le palpebre mie" (*Par. XXX. 88*): Dante e lo pseudo Dionigi Areopagita', in L. Battaglia Ricci (ed.), *Leggere Dante* (Ravenna: Longo, 2004), pp. 131-52; D. Sbacchi, *La presenza di Dionigi Areopagita nel Paradiso di Dante* (Florence: Olschki, 2006); idem, 'Il linguaggio superlativo e gerarchico del *Paradiso*', *L'Alighieri*, n.s. 31 (2008), 5-22; S. Prandi, 'Dante e lo Pseudo-Dionigi: una nuova proposta per l'immagine finale della *Commedia*', *Lettere Italiane* 61 (2009), 1, 3-29.

<sup>4</sup> P. Nasti, 'Autorità, topos e modello: Salomone nei commenti trecenteschi alla *Commedia*', *The Italianist* 19 (1999), 5-49; eadem, 'The Wise Poet: Solomon in Dante's Heaven of the Sun', *Reading Medieval Studies* 27 (2001), 103-38; eadem, *Favole d'amore e 'saver profondo'. La tradizione salomonica in Dante* (Ravenna: Longo, 2007); E. Peters, 'The Voyage of Ulysses and the Wisdom of Solomon: Dante and the "vitium curiositatis"', *Majestas* 7 (1999), 75-87; M. Mills Chiarenza, 'Solomon's Song in the *Divine Comedy*', in *Sparks and Seeds. Medieval Literature and its Afterlife. Essays in Honour of John Freccero*, ed. D. E. Stewart and A. Cornish (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), pp. 199-208; R. Herzman, 'From Francis to Solomon: Eschatology in the Sun', in *Dante for the New Millennium*, ed. T. Barolini and H. W. Storey (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), pp. 320-33; P. Williams, 'Dante's Heaven of the Sun and the Wisdom of Solomon', *Italica* 82 (2005), 2, 165-79; A. Rossini, *Il Dante sapienziale. Dionigi e la bellezza di Beatrice* (Pisa and Rome: Fabrizio Serra, 2009) (various essays). More generally, M. Bose, 'From Exegesis to Appropriation: the Medieval Solomon', *Medium Aevum* 65 (1996), 2, 187-210.

<sup>5</sup> B. Nolan, 'The *Vita Nuova* and Richard of St Victor's Phenomenology of Vision', *Dante Studies* 92 (1974), 35-52; P. Amargier, *Saint Bernard, Richard de Saint-Victor, Dante* (Marseille: Robert-Amargier, 1984); M. Colombo, 'L'ineffabilità della "visio mystica": il XXIII canto del *Paradiso* e il *Benjamin major* di Riccardo da San Vittore', *Strumenti critici*, n.s. 1, 51 (1986), 2, 225-39 (subsequently in *Dai mistici a Dante. Il linguaggio dell'ineffabilità* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1987), pp. 61-71); M. Mocan, 'Ulisse, Arnaut, e Riccardo di SanVittore: convergenze figurali e richiami lessicali nella *Commedia*', *Lettere Italiane* 57 (2005), 2, 173-208; S. Distefano, 'La mistica della *Vita Nova* secondo Riccardo di San Vittore', in S. Cristaldi and C. Tramontana (eds), *L'opera di Dante fra Antichità, Medioevo ed epoca moderna* (Catania: Cooperativa Universitaria Editrice catanese di Magistero, 2008), pp. 285-327.

But for all Dante's espousal of Aquinas as among the most cherished of his *auctores* the differences between them are as great as the similarities, one of the great accomplishments of the twentieth century in the area of Dante scholarship being the retrieval of Dante from Thomas, or, more exactly, from Thomism, as decisive for his emergence as a philosopher and theologian. First, then, there was Bruno Nardi with his sense of Dante's combination of radicalism and eclecticism in philosophy and of this as quite other than anything envisaged by Aquinas.<sup>6</sup> Then there was Etienne Gilson with his sense, not so much of his radicalism, as of his enthusiasm, of his discovering in the Philosopher a means of confirming the periodic structure of human understanding and desiring, their susceptibility to contemplation in terms of the soul's progression from one peak of perfection and satisfaction to the next.<sup>7</sup> And then, as impressed by both but with an approach entirely his own, there was Kenelm Foster with his sense of the tension in Dante between the Christian and the Peripatetic aspects of his spirituality, of his 'simultaneous attachment both to Christianity and to paganism'.<sup>8</sup> True, the *Commedia* as it goes on, Kenelm thought, witnesses

<sup>6</sup> B. Nardi, *Note critiche di filosofia dantesca* (Florence: Olschki, 1938); *Nel mondo di Dante* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1944); *Saggi e note di critica dantesca* (Milan: Ricciardi, 1966); *Saggi di filosofia dantesca*, 2nd edn (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1967); *Dante e la cultura medievale*, ed. P. Mazzantini with an introduction by T. Gregory (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1983; originally Bari: Laterza, 1942); *Dal 'Convivio' alla 'Commedia': sei saggi danteschi*, with a preface by O. Capitani (Rome: Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo, 1992; originally 1960). For a general bibliography of Nardi, see his *Saggi sulla cultura veneta del Quattro e Cinquecento*, ed. P. Mazzantini (Padua: Antenore, 1971), pp. ix-xlix (also, idem, 'Gli scritti di Bruno Nardi', in B. Nardi, *Lecturae' e altri studi danteschi*, ed. R. Abardo (Florence: Le Lettere, 1990), pp. 285-312).

<sup>7</sup> Etienne Gilson, *Dante and Philosophy*, trans. D. Moore (New York, Evanston and London: Harper and Row, 1963; originally *Dante et la philosophie*, Paris: Vrin, 1939, second edn, 1953). Also 'Dante's Notion of a Shade: *Purgatorio* XXV', *Medieval Studies* 29 (1967), 14-42; 'Dante's *Mirabile Visione*', *Cornell Library Journal* 5 (1968), 1-17 (from a lecture delivered in May 1965 at the Italian Cultural Institute in Paris, with an Italian version by V. Cappelletti, Istituto italiano di cultura, quaderni 1); *Dante et Beatrice: études dantesques* (Paris: Vrin, 1974). Fundamental in respect of Aquinas, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. L. K. Shook (New York: Octagon Books, 1983; originally New York: Random House, 1956); *Thomism: the Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, trans. L. K. Shook and A. Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2002; from *Le Thomisme: introduction à la philosophie de Saint Thomas d'Aquin*, 6th edn rev., Paris: Vrin, 1965). For a general bibliography, *Etienne Gilson: a bibliography / une bibliographie* (*The Etienne Gilson Series*, 3), ed. M. McGrath (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1982).

<sup>8</sup> K. Foster, O.P., 'The Two Dantes (I): Limbo and Implicit Faith', in *The Two Dantes and Other Studies* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1977), p. 156 ('Dante was attached, simultaneously, to Christianity and to paganism'). Otherwise, idem, *The Mind in Love*, Aquinas Society of London 25 (London: Blackfriars, 1956); *God's Tree: Essays on Dante*

to a mutual accommodation of these things, but never in such a way or in such a degree as to resolve the problems by which it is beset at the level of root intentionality. The present volume, then, mindful as it is of all these emphases and, above all, of the difficulty everywhere engendered in the area of grace theological consciousness by the need to balance one set of considerations with another, seeks to develop the argument by way of a sense in Dante of the human project as made equal by grace to a species of moral and ontological self-actualization. Needless to say, the proposition requires careful statement, since for Dante too grace subsists both as the *prius* and as the encompassing of all righteousness in man. But at the same time, and on the basis of what amounts to an unusually developed sense of the coalescence of human and divine purposefulness at the core of existence, his was a desire to confirm the power in man to being and becoming *ex seipso*, from out of his connatural power to moral determination, at which point his redistribution of emphases is complete.

The argument proceeds as follows. Chapter 1, entitled 'Morality and Merit', offers an account of the nature and aetiology of righteousness in Thomas and Dante, while Chapter 2, entitled 'Faith and Facticity', considers the implications for a theology of election of the latter's preoccupation with the status of the revelatory instant as a channel of grace in its own right. Chapter 3, entitled 'Desire and Destiny', has to do with Dante's commitment (a) to the co-extensivity of being and of yearning in man, and (b) to a resolving of the question of destiny in terms pre-eminently of the individual's laying hold of what he already has it in himself to be and become, while Chapter 4, entitled 'The Augustinian Dimension: Narratives of Succession and Secession', develops the argument in terms of the nature of Augustine's presence to the Aquinas of the great *summae* and to the Dante of the *Commedia*, his presence to Dante being simultaneously one of everywhere and nowhere, of reception and repudiation. Three appendices address a number of details which, had they been incorporated in the body of the text, would have made for an unnecessarily complicated line of argument.

*and Other Matters* (London: Blackfriars, 1957) (with, at pp. 141-49, an essay entitled 'The Tact of St Thomas'); 'Religion and Philosophy in Dante', in *The Mind of Dante* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), pp. 47-78; 'Tommaso d'Aquino', in the *Enciclopedia dantesca*, 6 vols (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1970-76), vol. 5, pp. 626-49; *Dante e San Tommaso* (Rome: Casa di Dante, 1975; lecture of 17 November 1974 at the Casa di Dante in Rome); 'St Thomas and Dante', in *The Two Dantes and Other Studies*, cit., pp. 56-65). Also (ed. and trans.), *The Life of Saint Thomas Aquinas: Biographical Documents* (London: Longmans, 1959) and, with P. Boyde, *Dante's Lyric Poetry*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).