

ANAGOGICIS... EXCESSIBUS:  
A PHILOLOGICAL ADDENDUM ON THE RELIGIOUS  
PHENOMENOLOGY OF FRANS TITELMANS

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**Abstract:** The usage of the term *anagogicis excessibus* in the Low Countries philosopher Frans Titelmans' 1530 compend of natural philosophy *Libri duodecim de consyderatione rerum naturalium* shows a strongly religious underpinning to his scientific thought. It is the purpose of this article to draw attention to the phrase, and to prove the Bonaventuran religious background in scriptural hermeneutics. This detail points to an important aspect of the Franciscan natural philosophical tradition.

**Keywords:** Titelmans, Bonaventure, anagogy, Franciscan, philosophy

One recent narrative has affirmed the originality of Philipp Melanchthon in explicitly setting Aristotelian notions of natural causation within the framework of a notion of divine providence.<sup>1</sup> One might remark that the *Libri duodecim de consyderatione rerum naturalium* (initially published in 1530) of Frans Titelmans, which preceded Melanchthon's *Initia doctrinae physicae* (and which was popular in England), was also, if less coherently, concerned to order the natural world in accordance with divine ordinances in a way which allowed greater intermingling of theological modes of argumentation with philosophical than was current in the late medieval scientific textbook.<sup>2</sup> This

<sup>1</sup>S. Kusukawa: *The Transformation of Natural Philosophy. The Case of Philipp Melanchthon*, Cambridge: CUP, 1995.

<sup>2</sup>See, for the notion of distinct modes of proof, L. Bianchi and E. Randi: *Le verità dissonanti*, Bari: Laterza, 1990, esp. pp. viii and 33–56. Bianchi and Randi nuance the famous

work was originally written in a monastic context, in Louvain, which may explain such intermingling. Titelmans offered an explicitly religiously context for the study of natural philosophy.<sup>3</sup> His immensely popular compendium of Aristotelian natural philosophy, first published in 1530, contains much that is merely basic exposition of the *libri naturales*, leaving out all elements of controversy and all discussions of previous philosophers views. At some places, the context is simply adumbrated by the addition of scriptural proofs for a given point.<sup>4</sup> In other sections, the religious dimension is emphasized by teasing out the implications of a given physical truth for the Christian religion.<sup>5</sup> At others still, it is as if the world is being examined for similari-

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phrase *quasi duplicem veritatem proponentes* by noting that no point of natural philosophy was a truth as evident and real as the Scriptures; natural philosophical truths were only so in virtue of their *probabilitas*. It is noteworthy, however, that none of the works with which I am concerned has any explicit engagement with the logical status of their statements about the world: this version of the undergirding of the double truth may have remained embedded at some level in the minds of these authors, but its notable absence *may* have been a side product of the increasing ‘professionalization’ of the natural philosopher in the sixteenth century: see ‘Early Science and Medicine’, *Fascicle 4* (November 2001): Special Issue *Science and Universities of Early Modern Europe: Teaching, Specialization, Professionalization*, ed. David A. Lines.

<sup>3</sup> *Libri duodecim de consyderatione rerum naturalium, earumque ad suum creatorem reductione*, Antwerp: Simon Cocus, 1530. Titlemans was born in 1502 in Hasselt and matriculated at Louvain in 1518. He entered the Franciscan Order in 1523 and famously entered into a controversy at the Louvain arts faculty over the correct mode of interpreting scripture with Erasmus in the mid 1520s. After graduation and throughout the period of the 1520s he devoted himself to the formal study of theology. After a move to the Capuchin Order, he died in Italy in 1537. For the prodigious printing history and for further biographical and other details, see B. de Troeyer: *Bio-Bibliographia Franciscana Neerlandica saeculi xvi, I, Pars Biographica*, Nieuwkoop, 1969: 93–100 and J. H. Bentley: ‘New Testament Scholarship at Louvain in the Early Sixteenth Century’, *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, II, 1979: 53–79. For a recent work on the theology faculty in which Titlemans taught, see E. M. Ejil & A. Black (eds.): *Facultas S[anctae] Theologiae Lovaniensis 1432–1797*, Louvain: KUL, 1977, which does *not* supersede H. De Jongh: *L’Ancienne faculté de théologie de Louvain au premier siècle de son existence*, Louvain, 1911 (esp. pp. 84–85, where we learn of a very lively Scotist–Thomist feud, something relevant for the highly non-Thomist nature of Titlemans). On the ‘couvent’ or college of the Franciscans and its relation to the university in this period, see E. Reusens: *Documents relatifs à l’histoire de l’université de Louvain*, Louvain, 1893–1903, V: 228–230. One odd feature of Titlemans’ work is that each book is preceded by a psalm (for one of these psalms, see below)

<sup>4</sup> Titlemans: *Libri duodecim de consyderatione rerum naturalium*, I.18, sig. Br<sup>v</sup>: ‘Accedit his Sanctarum Scipturarum autoritas sanctorumque partum testimonia.’

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*: III.19, sigs. G<sup>v</sup>: ‘Essentiae autem rerum quae moventur, nullo modo moveri dicendae sunt, neque etiam spiritualia accidentia, quae creaturae rationali secundum rationem insunt. Unde cum homo movetur secundum corpus totum, anima tamen ob hoc moveri non dicitur, neque ipsa eius humanitas neque ullus interior animae actus. Ex quo patet, tametsi in

ties to the ways in which we can consider or talk about God. For example, in his discussion of matter and form, to better explain the nature of matter, Titelmans devotes a separate chapter to the distance of matter from God.<sup>6</sup> In the next chapter, this principle is aligned with the religious one that the world was only enlivened by the word of God.<sup>7</sup>

What is remarkable about the work, however, is its reintegration of the tasks of interpreting the world and interpreting the Word of God. It is the task of this note to trace the lexical history of one moment in this reintegration. In one chapter Titelmans compares, as had others before him, God with form.<sup>8</sup> Even more strongly, and in a way which marks Titelmans out as different from all the other authors considered in this chapter, there is the sense in which nature, or rather the world, is merely a figurative clothing of God. In a later book of the treatise, the previous discussion of the causes functions as a prelude to understanding the nature of the procession of the persons in the Holy Trinity.<sup>9</sup> The comparisons are, he notes, not exact and, crucially, it is as if the world functions as a sort of backdrop for the anagogic hermeneutic activity of the reader. The term he uses for the mind's transports is *anagogicis... excessibus*, detailed *quellenforschung* on which demonstrates its Franciscan and mystical connotations.<sup>10</sup> While Thomas Aquinas would cer-

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omnibus rebus Deus existat, nulla tamen ratione debere illum dici moveri ad motum rerum quibus inest?

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* : I.7, sigs. A5<sup>r</sup>-A6<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* : I.8, sig. A6<sup>r</sup>: 'Tu solus non eges quopiam, ut tibi praeparet in tuo opere materiam. Nihil erat mundus, et solo cum verbo suscitasti?'

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* : I. 15, sigs. B2<sup>v</sup>-B3<sup>v</sup>: 'eam [sc. formam] nimirum esse Deo adsimilem, Deoque vicinam, cum sit etiam ipse forma quaedam perfectissima, & actus purissimus?'

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* : II. 16, sigs. E1<sup>r</sup>: 'Est autem causalitas ita rerum secundum esse, diligenter attendenda, et poenitissime contuenda. Valet enim ad intelligendam eam quae in divinis est personarum processionem, aeternam dico verbi generationem, & spiritus sancti aeternam spirationem seu processionem. Per comparisonem enim eorum quae in creaturis videmus a suis causis semper esse accipere, et semper effici, utcunque innotescere poterit diligenter attendentibus, quemadmodum et in divinis credatur filius a patre semper gigni, a spiritus ab utroque semper procedure atque spirari?'

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* : II.16, sig. E1<sup>r</sup>: 'Priusque tamen comparisonem hanc faciamus, expedit praemittamus quo pacto sit a sensibilibus ad aeterna transeundum. Oportet enim volentes ascendere *anagogicis* huiusmodi *excessibus*, in ipso ascensu, quicquid est corporale, quicquid materiale, quicquid imperfectum separare atque abnegare, sicque intelligamus acumine et fidei limpидitate sensuum crassitiem viriliter superare. Alioqui periculum fuerit, ne crassius id quid de Deo sentiamus, aut in haereses incidamus' (italics mine). Determining the precise meaning of *excessus* in this context is slightly more difficult. The word *excessus* appears regularly coupled with the *mentis* for the Latin West; this *iunctura* was hallowed by such usages as Psalms

tainly see that the natural philosophy of Aristotle shows the consistency and ordered nature of the Lord, and to this extent knowledge of the one assists with knowledge of the other, his works show the importance of keeping the world as a philosophical quarry separate from the activity of the interpretation of texts. By contrast, the world is just another object upon which to exercise Christian hermeneutics. One remembers at this point his attachment, in his dispute with Erasmus, to older modes of scriptural exegesis. We could hardly be further from the experiential underpinning of Crisostomo Javelli or Aquinas, with their greater distance from such mystical phenomenology.

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30.23 'ego autem dixi in excessu mentis meae', 2 Esdras 12.3 'et ego a multo excessu mentis et a magno timore vigilavi', and Acts 11.5 'et vidi in excessu mentis visionem descendens vas quoddam' (see also Acts 10.10). The basic meaning is akin to the English ecstasy, and though one continues to find *excessus* used without *mentis* (in one late fourth-century usage we find the word used to translate the Greek for poetic madness: Servius on Vergil, *Aeneid* 11.724: 'tum cruor et ulsae labuntur ab aethere plumae ecbasis poetica, id est excessus'), the more precise meanings were provided by the theological interrogation of precisely these biblical passages containing the *iunctura* (one assumes that one reason for this was also because of the increasing use of *excessus* simply to mean 'death'). Thomas Aquinas deals with the phrase in his *Summa Theologiae*, II.ii, q. 175, a.2, where he argues against the notion that such ecstasy belongs to the appetitive faculty rather than the rational and cognitive one. A different tradition, which placed less emphasis on ecstasy's connection with the rational soul, can be traced in Bonaventura. The phrasing is slightly different (*excessus mentalis*) but not importantly so. Given the Franciscan orientation of Bonaventura, I have found an appropriate passage with which to contextualize that of the Franciscan Titelmans: Bonaventura: *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, [Sancti Bonaventurae Opuscula theologica, in *Opera*, VI, Rome: Quaracchi, 1993], 4.6: 'De hoc igitur De hoc igitur hierarcha et ecclesiastica hierarcha est tota sacra scriptura, per quam docemur purgari illuminari et perfici, et hoc secundum triplicem legem in ea traditam, scilicet naturae, Scripturae naturae, Scripturae et gratiae; vel potius secundum triplicem partem eius principalem, lege scilicet Moysaica purgentem, revelationem prophetica illustrantem et eruditionem evangelicam perficientem, vel potissimum secundum triplicem eius intelligentiam spiritualem: tropologicam quae purgat ad honestatem vitae, allegoricam, quae illuminat ad claritatem intelligentiae; *anagogicam*, quae perficit per *excessus* mentales et sapientiae perceptiones suavissimas, secundum vitutes praedictas tres theologicas sensus ad spirituales reformatos et excessus tres supradictos et actus mentis hierarchicos, quibus ad interiora regreditur mens nostra, ut ibidem speculetur Deum in splendoribus Sanctorum et in eisdem tanquam in cubilibus dormiat, sponso adiurante, quod non excitetur, donec ex eius voluntate procedat' (emphasis mine). I have not investigated the reception of Bonaventura within early sixteenth-century Louvain, and so my observation is made with a degree of hesitation; however, Bonaventura's own mystical bent makes the point the more suggestive.