History and Symbol in Hugh of Saint-Victor

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HISTORY AND SYMBOL

In

Hugh of Saint-Victor

by

Thomas M. McElmeel

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The purpose of this study is to explore the notion of history and symbol as found in the works of Hugh of Saint Victor (1096-1141).

Hugh was primarily an Augustinian. It is safe to say that in his approach to knowledge, and in the erudition which he displayed, Hugh was affected by Augustine more than by any other Christian scholar. During the twelfth century there were probably no men on earth more devoted to universal knowledge than the sons of Saint Augustine. It is not surprising that Hugh constructed a meaningful synthesis of the many aspects of learning. What is surprising is that other gifted scholars of the same century failed to do exactly this. It might well be that the key to Hugh of St. Victor is that his methodology inevitably brought him to the notion of a universal synthesis of knowledge. There is no doubt that, in the mind of Hugh, both method and teleology are significant: the first, gleaned from a disciplined academic activity of order; the second, illuminated by strong eschatological preoccupations in his thoroughly Christian life.

It is safe to say that all the great masters of the Victorine school at Paris were influenced not only by Augustine but also by the doctrine of Dionysius. Dionysius was probably a Syrian monk, whose literary activity took place about the beginning of the sixth century. His identity has often caused confusion since he took the name of Dionysius the Areopagite which was the name of one of Saint Paul's converts. Because of this confusion, he is sometimes known as the Pseudo-
Dionysius, or the Pseudo-Areopagite. He will be known as Dionysius throughout this paper. In the observations which follow, Hugh's commentary on Dionysius' Celestial Hierarchy occupies a central position. Both history and symbol constitute central foci in the Celestial Hierarchy.

Hugh's notion of history is explicitly formulated in the Didascalicon; it is then applied in the De sacramentis. Nevertheless, the reason for giving considerable attention to Hugh's commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy is because the ideas formulated in this work serve as a link between the Didascalicon and the De sacramentis. The correlation between these two works can be seen most easily in an analysis of the nature of symbol, a notion which is highly developed in the commentary. The commentary stresses the fact that we must learn to respect the specific nature of the symbolic world of expressions; more than this, however, it points out how we must learn to think "behind" the symbol as well as "starting from the symbol" in order to understand Hugh.

The timeliness of a study such as this is unquestionable. No area of discourse touches more deeply the heart of contemporary theology than that of history and symbol. If one were to make a bibliography of theological writings during the past decade, one would find that an incredibly high percentage of creative and relevant theological thought is in one way or another dealing with these two central concerns.

No type of knowing is more uniquely characteristic of man than the imaginative dimension of the consciousness. The very possibility of divine revelation to human beings involves, inescapably, the utilization of types of
communications or symbols by which the intelligibility of the divine can somehow be shared with the finite understanding of human beings. The foregoing statement strikes at the core of a very real modern problem, but also a perennial problem, the problem of God. Imagination and symbolism are necessary keys to the divine cryptogram. Through them, the human person may derive a synthesis of new ideas from elements which are experienced separately in the concrete, but which are brought into a magnificent whole by creative and methodological minds which seek a vision of totality.

How, then, does man hope to share in the divine intelligibility? One way is given in the Scriptures which present the scope of salvation history, the quest of God for man since the Scriptures are the matrix of divine religion and divine communication. God incarnate is presented as having bridged the gap. Faith in him and His Pilgrim Church is presented as that which will lead to union with absolute love.

From the prehistoric cave dwellers who deified the earth and the sun to their current progeny who dwell in "high rises" and who tend to divinize what I like to call "ersatz authenticity and fulfillment," man has always counted on a kind of ecological ethics to guide him in his search for the Absolute. The Absolute appears at that which is capable of giving meaning to his life, a source of the completeness, the goodness, the beauty which man is ever seeking but which he knows only too well that he is lacking. Man longs to come to the Absolute, immerse himself in it, put it on like a new suit of clothes, and somehow transform his own limitations into infinity.
For many others the quest continues since the Christian Scriptures seem to hold insufficient power to demand assent. Even for believers, however, the search for intelligibility often continues from within the initial act of a commitment in faith along the road of symbolic representation. It is precisely here that Hugh of St. Victor has left an understanding of the symbolic network that hopes to illuminate the "yellow brick road" to God, and unites the human ascending path to the divine descent of the Incarnation. It would be historically unjust to say that Hugh of St. Victor is an object of interest only for the antiquarian, or that his approach to history and symbolism deserve to be labeled medieval curios. His insights into the nature of symbolism will always strike a resonant chord with scholars precisely because of this vitality and relevance.

What does one say about a giant of the stature of Hugh of St. Victor? By taking a meaningful segment out of his vast writings do we run the risk of over simplification comparable to someone snapping a picture in a Bergsonian world of flux? To attempt a static comment seems like wrapping up his work and hovering over it, treating it like a "museum piece."

History, not metaphysics, was the important science for Hugh, and any attempt to capture his thought in a non-historical, non-existent fashion is bound to be erroneous. It is not speculative reason that could have generated the kind of magnificent synthesis which Hugh achieved. It is always history which shows the way, because revelation has been grafted into history, grafted as original tradition, as the Mosaic law, as the Good News of the Gospel.

According to Christians, Jesus is the center of this revelation and His church is
the guarantor of its continuation through the ages. History presents the factual
elements grafted into the human process. Hence, history and theology will con­
front one another throughout this paper. It is history which shows the Christian
the existence of the mystery of God’s communication to man. According to Hugh,
we are they, who, walking in the footsteps of greatness and presented with ever
more refined educational experiences must continue to add to the kind of synthesis
which Hugh envisioned by utilizing symbols by which the intelligibility of the
divine can somehow be shared with the finite understanding of human beings.

In exploring the notion of history in the works of Hugh of St. Victor, it
will be necessary to introduce more than history in order to put history in its
proper focus. Such was the way of Hugh and it seems reasonable that it ought
to be our way if we are to give a faithful presentation of both his thought and
method.
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THE INFLUENCE OF SAINT AUGUSTINE ON THE THOUGHT OF HUGH

It would be impossible to understand with any degree of depth the method of Hugh without first acquiring some view of the sources that inspired it, especially the *De doctrina christiana* of Saint Augustine.

Saint Augustine offered his readers a double usage of Scripture: the discovery of the truths contained in Scripture and the exposition made to others of this same truth. For example, in the *De doctrina christiana*, one finds both an hermeneutical treatise (Books I, II, III) and also a treatise on sacred rhetoric (Book IV).

According to Augustine, all knowledge is concerned with realities or with symbols which make these realities known. The first book of the *De doctrina christiana* is concerned with realities. Here one finds a careful distinction between realities of which one should merely make use and others which one should both use and enjoy simultaneously. Augustine considers love of God and love of neighbor and the book concludes:

> Of all, then, that has been said since we entered upon the discussion about things,

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this is the sum: that we should clearly understand that the fulfillment and the end of the law, and of all Holy Scripture, is the love of an object which is to be enjoyed [God], and the love of an object [neighbor] which can enjoy that other in fellowship with ourselves.²

Charity is the end and the plenitude of Scripture, a principle from which Augustine makes the following inference: anyone who flatters himself by thinking that he understands Sacred Scripture but who fails to establish in himself the double charity of God and neighbor does not have the least understanding of the Sacred Text. However, in the reading of Scripture, if there is an interpretation which is unquestionably in error but yet helps build the edifice of charity, such an interpretation is neither pernicious nor is it a lie. It is fitting, of course, to correct the error lest it become an eventual source of damage for charity. For the perfect Christian who is strong in faith, hope and charity, ther is no other need for Scripture save to instruct others in it.

Books II and III of the De doctrina christiana³ are devoted to the study of signs which go to make up Scripture. These books present definite rules of interpretation. The rules are meant to resolve the difficulties with which one may be confronted when he encounters either unknown or ambiguous signs. Inasmuch as one distinguishes amongst signs those which specify objects for which they have been made (i.e., for which given signs have been made) and the signs which are

² Ibíd.

³ Ibíd., Book 2 and 3, pp. 636-674.
figures (of something else), Augustine is careful to point out that it is of vital import not to interpret in a "proper" (original) sense what ought to be taken in a figurative sense and vice versa. However, to know in what sense a given passage ought to be taken, it is enough to remember that the purpose of all Scripture is charity. Charity is a recurrent theme. Augustine specifically states that if a reader of Scripture is concerned with figurative utterances, the rule should be that one ought to attend to the sacred text in such a way that the interpretation will always be covered by the law of charity. If one reaches the point of charity directly by means of the proper sense then one would be sure that such a reading need not lend itself to any figurative interpretations. Words or actions which Scripture attribute to God or to people whose holiness is proclaimed by Scripture are in reality figures of mysterious significance which, once they are really known, serve as sustenance for charity. No expression in Scripture really leads one to evil or to crime, but if it seem to order one to do evil or forbid him doing good then it is to be understood figuratively. Inasmuch as the reign of charity is that to which all Scripture tends, then it is charity which ultimately permits one to distinguish properly the figurative sense.⁴

If the Sacred Text remains obscure and upsetting, and if one does not know how to divine it or pronounce its words, the exegete will then have recourse to the rule of faith rooted in Scripture, and supported by the authority of the Church. If there happens to be a lack of certainty between two or several

⁴Ibid., Book 3, chapter 15, pp. 663-664.
equally orthodox interpretations, it will suffice to examine that text which unites the parts into an intelligible whole. When the difficulty cannot be resolved either by the rule of faith nor by the inner continuity of the text, then it is up to the reader to adopt whatever division of terms he prefers. The thing that matters when one confronts different interpretations of the same passage of Scripture is this: the ideal is, without any doubt at all, to discover the real thought of the Sacred writer; if one cannot do this, he should take the explanation which will not imperil but rather which will remain faithful to the faith.  

It is evident that Augustine intends to put exegesis at the service of faith and charity. However, he does not neglect the means which rational insights allow for getting at the exact meaning intended by the author. In order to achieve a healthy exegesis, he counseled the study of liberal arts, the study of "tropes," and the famous rules of Tichonius.  

Finally, Saint Augustine points out a certain number of distinctions to which it is often necessary to have recourse: distinction of time and place without which the reader of Scripture is placed in danger of condemning as a fault an act which

\[\text{\textsuperscript{5}}\text{Ibid., chapter 27, pp. 663-664.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{6}}\text{Ibid., chapters 30-37, pp. 668-674.}\]

In these eight chapters, Saint Augustine discusses each of the seven rules of Tichonius, a Donatist who, Augustine explains, "wrote seven rules, which are, as it were keys to open the secrets of Scripture" (c.30). However, Augustine warns that Tichonius must be read "with caution, not only on account of the errors into which the author falls as a man, but chiefly on account of the heresies which he advances as a Donatist."
is justified by circumstances. He also stresses the distinction between temporary directives and fundamental precepts, between the laws which obliged only certain people and those which fall upon all mankind. Finally, there is the distinction between varying significations of a word because one must, in each case, examine what belongs to the word in context and what to the general acceptance of the word.\footnote{ibid.}

All these rules proposed by Saint Augustine and meant for facilitating insights and understanding of Scripture were to become the traditional patrimony of subsequent generations of Scholars.
THE DIDASCALICON

Up to the time of Hugh of Saint-Victor, the rules of interpretation established by Saint Augustine, and widely used by Cassiodorus and Rhabanus Maurus, underlay the study of Scripture. The rules were neither perfectly worked out, nor organized into a systematic treatise which could be adapted to teaching. It is in this regard that the Didascalicon of Hugh of Saint-Victor enjoys an irrefutable superiority and explains why it enjoyed such great success in the Middle Ages. Hugh's originality rests upon the fact that he utilized all the traditional sources, composing from them a brilliantly structured treatise. His work developed into a true introduction to the study of the Scriptures in which one can see a great care for scientific precision. In addition, Hugh became increasingly aware of deeper spiritual insights, and consequently tried to formulate his thought in a carefully worked out idiom. The double axis along which Hugh offers his method is the "divine reading" and the "methodological order of the reading."

By "Divine Reading", Hugh understands those writings which the Church receives for the affirmation of faith and for reading in the assembly of the faithful. The Scriptures include not only those which the Early Church accepted as

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canonical, but also "a number of other works written at different periods by holy
and learned men who, without being approved by the authority of the Universal
Church, are nevertheless counted within the framework of divine reading be-
cause they are not in disagreement with the Catholic faith and contain useful
teachings."\(^9\) Consequently, Hugh divides the New Testament into three orders:
the first is that of the Evangelists; the second is comprised of the Epistles, the
Acts and the Apocalypse; the third is made up of the decretals, canons of the
councils and the works of the Fathers and Doctors.\(^10\) The rather broad meaning
of the words *sacra scriptura* is not peculiar to Hugh of Saint-Victor. There was
not a clearly defined distinction between Scriptures properly speaking, and the
writings of the Fathers. Abelard is a marked exception.\(^11\) This undifferentiated
comingling of Scripture and the patristic writings has caused later scholars much
difficulty. But for early medieval thinkers, the confusion was a matter of no
great consequence.

The proposals Hugh offers concerning the "senses" of Scripture are central
to his thought. Hugh distinguishes three senses of Scripture; the literal or

9The *Didascalicon* of Hugh of Saint Victor, Book 4, chapter 1, p. 103.

10Ibid., chapter 2, pp. 103-104.

11*Readings in Western Civilization, Hic et Nunc* by Peter Abelard.
pp. 270-271. Edited by George H. Knoles and Richard K. Snyder, J. B.
historical sense, the allegorical sense and the moral or tropological sense (historia, allegoria, tropologia). The three senses of Scripture amount to three levels of understanding which are obtained by three successive ways of explanation. The first sense consists in an analysis of the linguistic order; the second determines the signification of the words; the third constitutes the ideological content of the passage. Yet, no one can look into Scripture and discover these three senses simultaneously all the time. Some passages can be understood only in a spiritual sense, others are interesting for showing customs and practices; others signify history and facts; some do contain history, allegory, and tropology at one and the same time. The reason for this richness of Scripture is that not only do the words have significance, but the realities signified by these words are themselves symbolic.

Hugh asks: "What is the usefulness of the Divine Word?" His answer is simple and incisive: It both instructs us and makes us better. It is thus praiseworthy to be able to draw from Scripture both knowledge and virtue. For anyone who is seeking a rule of life or virtue in Sacred Scripture, the "reading" is only a point of departure. As for those who are seeking knowledge, it is necessary that they know how to shape their thinking by a methodological order, that they know how to adapt diverse techniques for themselves according to the types of books studied whether they be simple narratives or commentaries.

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12 Didascalicon, Book 5, chapter 2, p. 120.
13 Ibid., chapter 3, p. 121.
14 Ibid., chapter 6, p. 127.
The three scriptural senses represent three distinct disciplines which are taught and studied separately, each with its own particular methods. It is reasonable that one apply himself first to history, then to allegory and finally to tropology.

The first consideration, and one which underlies the other two, is history. History has two meanings. Above everything else, it signifies past events. But Hugh says that there is nothing unreasonable in including under history the meaning which first presents itself in the text, namely the literal sense. This is history taken in its fundamental sense; it is the meaning which Hugh considers as the foundation upon which the whole structure of scriptural interpretation ought to be based. He insists that this be taken seriously. In his opinion, one can never acquire any competency in allegorical interpretation except on the condition that he first knows history, and knows it very well. Some of his contemporaries said they wanted to leave "fables" to the pseudo-apostles; they preferred to start their own philosophizing immediately on an allegorical level. Such people Hugh called jackasses and ought to be ranked amongst grammarians who do not even know the alphabet!

Hugh stressed the same point in the De scripturis et scriptoribus sacris.

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15 Ibid., Book 6, chapter 3, pp. 135-139.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
In as much as the understanding of the mystical sense has as its basis what the words give us in the very first place, I am stupefied with the thinking of certain people who pretend to be expert in allegories while they continue to be ignorant of the first meaning or sense of the words. They say: "We READ the Scripture but we do not 'READ' the words. If one disregards the words, what is left of Scripture?" . . . They have an answer: "Of course we READ the words; but we do not read ACCORDING to the words. What we are doing is READING the allegory commenting on the words but we are doing this not according to the literal sense but according to the allegorical sense." . . . "Very well", says Hugh... "But how are you going to comment on the words without first showing what the signification of the word is?" . . . This is how Hugh's adversaries answer: "The word has two meanings, one of which is according to the literal sense and the other according to the allegorical sense."

As an example Hugh refers to some contemporary reasoning on the word "lion."

In the historical sense, "lion" refers to an animal, but, in an allegorical sense, "lion" stands for Christ; and so the word "lion" stands for Christ! To this Hugh replies with great precision that it is not the word "lion" which designates Christ,

18De Scripturis et Scriptoribus Sacris, ed. J.-P. Migne, Patrologia Latina, Volume 175, Col. 13B. Published by Garnier Brothers, Paris, 1879. Hereafter this collection will be referred to as P.L.

Cum igitur mystica intelligentia non nisi ex iis quae primo loco littera proponit colligatur; miror qua fronte quidam allegoriarum se doctores jactitant, qui ipsam adhuc primam litterae significationem ignorant. Nos inquiant, Scripturam legimus, sed non legimus litteram. Non curamus de littera; sed allegoriam docemus. Quomodo ergo Scripturam legimus, et litteram non legitis? Si enim littera tollitur, Scriptura quid est? Nos, inquiant, litteram legimus, sed non secundum litteram. Allegoriam enim legimus, et exponimus litteram non secundum litteram, sed secundum allegoriam. Quid ergo est litteram exponere, nisi id quod significat littera demonstrare? Sed littera, inquiant, aliud significat secundum historiam, aliud secundum allegoriam.
but rather it is the reality which this word stands for which becomes the symbol of Christ.\(^{19}\) The whole discussion is highly significant because Hugh is pointing out a dangerous tendency, namely, to pay less and less attention to the text itself and to yield oneself to allegorical interpretations which are totally arbitrary.

It is in the context of the literal and the doctrinal, in the midst of the danger of ambiguity which might mar any practical allegory, that the insight of Hugh of Saint Victor makes sense and gives new direction. He achieves such a new direction by breaking with a method which in his eyes is worthy of condemnation, namely, premature allegorizing. He reacts categorically in favor of history and its irreparable value. The letter must be taken in a fundamental sense; otherwise one will build absolutely in vain.\(^{20}\) The historical realities of Scripture, that is the res, are not only words, that is the voces, but they possess a proper signification.

\(^{19}\)P.L. 175, Col. 13CD.


\(^{20}\)Didascalicon, Book 6, chapter 3, pp. 135-139.
Allegory is the eminent operation by which these typological realities are transferred to their ante-type of which they are a mysterious prefiguring. But this transference implies that first of all, they must be treated according to their original power, their primary meanings, as historical realities. Therefore, it is essential to follow the current sense of the text itself, in addition to focusing attention on the precise signification of the words.  

In his Didascalicon, Hugh does not present an abstract catalog or list of the laws of methodological allegorization. He denounces the errors to which this method will lead if it is not solidly based on the historical letter; at the same time, however, he reaffirms his position that allegorization must be constantly controlled by references to the principles of faith. According to Paré, Hugh was violently opposed to those usages which could not accommodate constructive allegory to his theory. Scriptural allegorization in fact had been presenting itself in the West in such a way that it fell into a category of works of symbolism which had only a literary or pseudo-scientific base. For example, stones, animals, colors, and numbers were taking on significations which were suggested by their forms, their properties, their functions and their poetic resources. But stones, animals, and all other categories were in fact furnishing the literary clichés of the day.  

21bid.

22bid., chapter 4, pp. 139-144.

23G. Paré, A. Brunet, and P. Tremblay, Les Écoles et L’Enseignement, La Renaissance du XIIe Siècle. Institute of Medieval Studies, Ottawa, Canada. 1933, p. 204.
The next step was simple: when these words appeared in the Bible, no matter what the context happened to be, or no matter what the historical or doctrinal frame of reference in which these literal senses were in fact taking place, these pseudo-literary forms were imposed upon them.\textsuperscript{24} Without a doubt the great typology of the Old Testament continued to live on, but it was submerged by this artificial and heterogeneous super-imposition. The Carolingian Renaissance had furnished this technique, with all the apparatus which was borrowed from the current study of grammar and its treatment of figure and tropes. From Hugh's viewpoint the intention of course was good, but Hugh thought its application was thoroughly out of order. Paré says that this type of exegesis was made in fact by Bede, the great master, but he understood these things within the larger framework of history, taking history in the best possible sense, and Bede saw the Christian value in some of these ways of proceeding. Such a procedure and its results weighed heavily on the following centuries when used indiscriminately by less competent and less perceptive minds.\textsuperscript{25} It was against these conclusions and methodology that Hugh of Saint Victor directed his attacks throughout the whole Didascalicon. Hugh tried to revindicate the categorical primacy of history, not only considering history first in itself, but first as the foundation of all forms of categorizing it. Hugh clearly saw that a sacred doctrine with only the techniques of figures and tropes would be deprived of its proper sense. Allegory resting on

\textsuperscript{24}ibid.

\textsuperscript{25}ibid.
this sort of precarious basis would have no organic relation with the temporal unfolding of the economy. It was precisely the temporal unfolding Hugh was convinced had to be the real basis for any kind of doctrinal edifice. Certainly the events and things do signify certain things, but only in as much as they can be placed in an historical unfolding. But one may not extract them without destroying their original meanings, if he employs only literary or naturalistic devices. The multiple references given to Hugh thus far indicates a high degree of repetitiveness. While the argument seems not to advance, the repetition seems to indicate Hugh's intense commitment to his position.

In order to get historical knowledge which rests precisely on the temporal unfolding one must read those books of both the Old Testament and the New Testament which give us history: Genesis, Exodus, Joshua, Judges, Kings, and Paralipomena in the Old Testament, and the Gospels and Acts in the New Testament. Even collectively, these books do not furnish a methodology adapted to teaching. However, Hugh composed a methodology specifically to help students in the study of history. In the prologue of the De sacramentis, he states that the work was written at the request of his friends. And in compliance with this request he tried to handle some of the disadvantages and difficulties with which students were confronted when they read the historical books of the bible.

26 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
Once the importance and significance of the historical sense is acquired, then it is time to turn one's attention to what Hugh calls the second "sense" of Scripture, namely the "allegorical." Hugh compares the teaching of the Scriptures with the construction of a building, suggesting that history is the foundation, allegory represents the walls and the skeletal framework, while tropology is the crown and decoration. By allegory he means that part of the edifice that one attends to only after he works on the history, but he does not give "allegory" a precise and clear definition. He says that "there is allegory when the very thing which is signified first by the word of Scripture symbolizes, in its turn, another fact which is present to the future."29 It is the spiritual sense in which no longer only the words signify, but which things and facts signify. While Hugh does not define "allegory" precisely in the Didascalicon, for him the allegorical sense always demands conformity to the doctrinal content of the Scriptures.30 Hugh goes to great length to show the difficulty presented by allegorical interpretation. It is not the sort of thing to be laid at the doorsteps of slow and feeble minds. It demands subtlety, prudence, and a precise and clear knowledge of Christian truths, because it must always conform to doctrine and to the truth of the faith.31 Allegory is the construction, the body, of the doctrinal edifice. But this same edifice also demands

29 De Scripturis et Scriptoribus Sacris. P.L. 175, Col. 12AB. Est Autem allegoria, cum per id quod ex littera significatum proponitur, aliud aliq uid sive in praeterito sive in presenti sive in futuro factum significatur.

30 Didascalicon, Book 6, chapter 4, pp. 139-144.

31 Ibid.
that one know history which constitutes the solid foundations which are, in fact, the rudiments of the faith.

Hugh's primary concern is the construction of a theology based on history. The *Didascalicon* is not a reading guide recalling the laws of exegesis of Scripture according to traditional categories, that is, historical, allegorical, tropological, and analogical. It is, rather, a scientific methodology, adapted to the sacred sciences as well as to the profane sciences. Such a methodology was intended to result in an organized theology, well built and solidly constructed. The image which Hugh presented is that of an architectural construction. Scripture is not only a series of recitations or propositions, or teachings. If the sacred text is to be intelligently read the "structure" ought to appear in the reading.

The edifice of Christian thought built upon Sacred Scripture is constructed by an allegorical method. But what is it? What is allegory? The insights of Louis Bouyer are illuminating in this regard. According to Bouyer, allegory is a particular property which is held by Scripture, namely, the property of possessing a double signification. As a method, it is a device for unearthing meanings according to appropriate laws. The words in every text are meant to be instruments of signification; even more, they are meant to be instruments of things expressed by the words. In sacred history, these things have a signification of considerably higher value, because they are an expression of the way in which God conducts things and events. But things and events are symbols, are types of spiritual

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32 ibid.

33 ibid.
realities which go to make up the economy of salvation. 34

All the foregoing might be considered a classical thesis, formulated more or less precisely from age to age, from the Fathers of the Church up to recent theologians. 35 It is consonant with the notion of the economy of revelation which embraces history and humanity while simultaneously expressing the human writing of the Bible itself. Signification is a category which is essential to biblical insights or knowledge. 36 It is by a narration of history, that is, of creation that the prophet is prophet. Up to this point, Hugh is no more than a witness in the tradition of Scripture study itself. But what is original with him is the place given to the typology of figures in order to construct an organic theology. Symbolism is its instrument and furnishes theology with laws which are as delicate to handle as they are necessary.


36 Ibid. p. 434.
THE SYMBOL IN HUGH OF SAINT VICTOR

In his commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy of Dionysius the Areopagite, Hugh points out that it is along the descending line of procession or illumination that we meet symbolism and theophanism. Symbolism and theophanism witness to the condescending goodness of the Providence of God on the one hand and the infirmity of the created state on the other. God, incomprehensible, invisible, inaccessible in Himself, not only to the senses, but to the reason or created intelligence, comes to the aid of those within whom His light radiates, by manifesting Himself in a manner adapted to their weakness.

In speaking of symbol, one usually has in mind the sensible sign whose function is to refer to the spiritual meaning. Since the symbol has a sensible nature, it is used only by man and cannot be suited to angelic intelligence. Symbolism, which holds such a great place throughout Hugh's commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy, is not an instrument of knowledge used by the Celestial Hierarchy. It is rather sacred pedagogy destined for man which permits him to know, in some manner, God and the angelic world itself. When light is shed in the angelic world, it diffuses itself, diffracts itself, disperses itself. To angels,


38 Ibid. passim.

39 Ibid.
God makes himself known in an appropriate manner other than by sensible symbols, since the angel is totally spiritual. In the angels' world, there is no discursive reasoning since angelic thought is intuitive. There is only a manifestation, a revelation, which is theophanism in line with the nature of the angelic world itself. But divine manifestation or theophany can also have a sensible character.

Symbolism and theophanism can and often do interpenetrate one another. This is the case with man who knows that the human soul, in proportion to its liberation from the sensible order, can be the recipient of still purer revelations, of still higher ascensions and anagogies. 40

To get a clearer notion of symbol in Hugh of Saint-Victor, it is indispensible that we look at the historical sources which influenced him. The two chief scholars are John Scotus Erigena and Dionysius. John incorporates Dionysius' doctrine into his own view of symbol:

He [Dionysius] says that the orders of celestial powers which he calls "hierarchies" are made known to the human mind by examples drawn from sensible things. These come from prophetic visions which the Greeks call "theophanies" or "Divine apparitions." But the examples which are drawn from sensible things are either in terms of similarity or contrast. The sensible examples help us contemplate as much as possible the hierarchies of celestial spirits which are manifested to us symbolically and anagogically, that is to say, by the illuminations of divine words communicated by God to prophetic spirits. It is not the "words" which do the communicating but symbols or signs similar to the sensible things, or in contrast to them. Communication is effected also by anagogy, that is to say by elevating the mind toward divine mysteries. This allows us to contemplate as much as is possible in our frame of reference the dispositions manifested by the celestial spirits. The principle and source of all illuminations of invisible substances, whether it be in the visions of theologians, or in the minds of spiritual men,

40 Ibid.
to whom it has been given to know divine secrets, is the Father of lights from whom all proceeds and to whom all returns.  

By this, John would have us know that Dionysius situates the symbol on the line of the processio, and the anagogy, on that of the conversio; and since processio and conversio are necessarily united, one would then know that the symbols and anagogies must also be united. In the same text, John indicates that by pure divine benevolence the revelation of the light is also its unveiling. Because of the infirmity of our condition, we subsist in multiplicity; we are thrown into dispersion by sin, we need signs which are connatural to our way of grasping revelation.

Because the ray itself from the hierarchical light is incomprehensible, invisible, inaccessible to every creature and surpasses all the senses and every intelligence, it could not be grasped by those in whom it is multiplied, except by signs that are connatural to us. . . . Paternal providence multiplies his simple ray by signs or symbols which are connatural to us, in order to remind us who have been dispersed as a consequence of original sin, or the primitive simplicity of our nature, in which we have been made in the image of the divine unity . . . Divine Providence desired diversity, variety, multiplicity in diverse visions, symbols and allegories, in conformity with our weakness.  

No matter how it may appear, the proportion between the symbol and the thing symbolized is assured. In the present instance, it is the proportion between spiritual realities and the connatural sensible signs by which they are symbolized. Providential goodness is still greater when it is a question of using contrasting


42 P.L. 122, Col. 135B-137AB. "Nisi per quaedam velamina nobis connaturalia Varificavit, hoc est, in diversis visionibus et symbolis et allegoriis multiplicavit, et nostrae infimitati conformavit."
symbols. Symbols are well accommodated to the human state because they are sensible signs. When contrasting symbols are used there is less risk of stopping at the symbol itself and failing to look toward the principle signified by the symbol. This is the misery and grandeur of symbolism: a symbol is so little by itself, but so great in the function it is meant to perform. The danger of every symbol is that it could be taken for that of which it is only a sign and toward which it is pointing. The special value of the contrasting symbol is that no one could possibly confuse it with the reality for which it stands.

This is essentially the position of John, a position which was later to prove so congenial to the mind of Hugh. John wrote: "I do not think that any sage can contradict my opinion that the more contrasting or obscure symbols lead us more than the similar or manifest symbols to the true contemplation of celestial virtues." Further on he says: "By elaborate holy images, that is to say, those which are beautiful and similar to nature one can easily be mistaken." Within the framework of the same source, John's concern is expressed in this example: One might think that celestial substances do have forms of gold; one might think he will find certain men in brilliant vestments or dressed in fine clothes, or in dazzling colors; one might think that other forms similar to human figures inhabit the celestial world. A goodly number of men can be mistaken by

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43 Ibid. 157B. Non arbitror, inquit, ullum eorum, qui sapient, contradicere mihi dicenti, dissimiles vel obscuras similitudines magis quam similes et apertas animum nostrum reducere in veram caelestium virtutum contemplationem.

44 Ibid. 157CD. In pretiosis, inquit, hoc est, pulchris natruaeque similibus sanctic imaginationibus facillime possunt seduci.
such an error. By holding fast to such a procedure, they might refuse to take the true for the false.

John thus makes a vital distinction between similar and contrasting symbol; he thinks things existing in the created world are substitutions, but they are substitutions for things of an entirely different nature. John (and Hugh following him) stresses the question of similar and contrasting symbols for pedagogical purposes. His core concern is to avoid having simple and naive souls deceived by false images even if prophetic visions have been the occasion of them. He would have us know that the spirits of celestial virtues escape spatial limitations, that they are not limited by beautiful golden forms, by physical bodies, by members, by human equipment clothed in elaborate garments. Simple souls run a perennial risk of deceiving themselves by fabricating in their minds abominable idols as remote as possible from spiritual realities. In his Commentary on Dionysius' Hierarchy, John writes:

It is as if the wisdom of Theology, full of solitude for human weakness, descends to the level of contrasting symbols which sometimes lack nobility and which are not in accord with the sublimity of spiritual or heavenly beings. It is as though Sacred Theology was clearly saying: these images characterized by deformity and a lack of nobility, these images which the simplicity of nature rejects and at which the beauty of the celestial spirits scoff, are almost as nothing when confronted by the ineffable and incomprehensible realities which they are trying to convey. In a similar way, however, even the images which we
think are beautiful and which are in keeping with human dignity are all just as remote from pure "subsistence," beyond space, of the same spirits. 45

One must not take the sign for the signified reality. John's conclusion is strong:

"Let all those sacred figures, signs, and symbols be significative and not substantive, the true contemplation of truth proclaims it." 46

John's idea of "resonances" also is essential to understanding Hugh; John wrote:

We must form forms that are not dissonant, but constant with the meaning of celestial essences, even though taken from base aspects of matter. This is not unreasonable, since it is from the sovereign Good, the only one who truly is, that the matter itself holds its reality in all its material orders, and has certain resonances, that is to say certain reflections of intellectual beauty which I call resonances or reflections. 47

45 Ibid. 158 AB. Sapientissima theologia, humanae instpientiae consulsens, estiam ad deformium formarum dissimiles imaginationes, descendit, quas nec natura visibilium rerum recipit, nec invisibilium sublimitas omnino sibi convenire permitit. Ac si aperte ipsa sancta theologia clamaret: quemadmodum tales deformes inhonestaeque imaginationes, quas naturalis simplicitas respuet, et pulchritudo deriden caelestium intellectuum, ineffabili sinceritate et incomprehensibili uniformitate refelluntur, quamvis in figuris eorum tenebrosissimis apparuenter ita, et non aliter, formosissimae imagines illae quae humanae dignitatis putantur congruere, ab eorundem intellectuum purissima incircumscriptaque subsistentia universaliter removentur.

46 Ibid. Has siquidem omnes sacras figuraciones divinae Scripturae significativas esse, non autem substantivas verissima veritatis speculatio acclamat.

47 Ibid. 164 BC. Est itaque, inquit, hoc est oportet, formare formas non dissonas, sed convenientes caelestibus significandis essentiis, etiam ex vilibus partibus terrarum mortalisque materiae; nec sine ratione, quoniam et ipsa materia ex summo bono, quod solum vere est, substantiam possidet in omnibus suis materialibus ordinibus, et habet resonantias quasdam, hoc est, resultationes intellectuali pulchritudinis. Resonantias autem dico vel resultationes.
As a good psychologist John does not limit images to the visual world. He extends the notion of imagery to the auditory world in order to give a precise meaning to the function of resonance.

Like the image of the voice which comes to strike the hollow of a rock or some cavity, or the image of a body which a mirror reflects, the image of the intellectual beauty of the celestial powers respond to all terrestrial matter no matter how small they appear in value. Thus it is possible that our minds can be brought by resonances to primary immaterial forms, named by the Greeks archetypes, of which the auditory images are the reflection.\(^48\)

Our minds may do this on the expressed condition "that we take the resemblances themselves in a contrasting fashion in the material realities from which they result and in the immaterial by which they result."\(^49\)

It is not enough to confine ourselves to the words of John's understanding of symbol as found in Dionysius. A direct reading of Hugh's Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy of Dionysius the Areopagite according to the interpretation of John Scotos\(^50\) also reveals the influence of Dionysius. However, Hugh uses

\(^48\)Ibid. 164C. Sicut enim imago vocis in rupe quadam seu aliqua concavitate vel sicut imago corporis ex speculo resultat, ita intellectualis pulchritudinis caelestium virtutum imaginationes ex omni terrena vilissimaque materia respondent. Ideoque possible est, nostrum animum reduci per resonantias ad immateriales primas formas, quas Graeci apxetuttias appellant, quarum resultantes imagines sunt.

\(^49\)Ibid. Ita tamen, ut dissimiliter ipsae similitudines accipientur in materialibus, unde resultant, et in immaterialibus, quibus resultant.

\(^50\)P.L. 175. Col. 943.A.
Dionysian terms translated from Greek to Latin. There is a difference. Hugh substitutes his own terms for John's, focusing special attention on the dichotomy of symbolisms, similar or contrasting. He develops a strongly marked balance between the contrasting aspects of the similar symbol, and the similarity of the contrasting symbol. Still more than this, Hugh seems to be seeking a further insight into the nature of symbol by a treatment of what he calls manuductio materialis. He is influenced more by Dionysius than by John.

Hugh suggests that it is not a question:

"...of material imitation and contemplation but of spiritual and incorporeal, since all that is corporeal comes from matter. Spiritual nature is rightly called immaterial; it does not come from matter; it can not be matter giving rise to another. By "manuductio materialis," we mean corporeal signs which the human mind uses as a guide; signs which take one by the hand as it were in order to lead us from the visible to the imitation and the contemplation of the invisible."

And Hugh immediately inserts under the guise of explanation, the dyad of which he is so fond: "imitation by the exercise of virtue, contemplation by the knowledge of truth."

Hugh then turns his attention to the manuductio and the new similitude introduced by this term.

The human mind is enveloped in the night of ignorance and can not come toward the light of truth unless directed; the

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51 P. L. 175, col. 948A.

Non materialem spiritualem imitationem, vel contemplationem dicit et incorporalem; quoniam omne, quod corporale est, ex materia est. Spiritualis autem natura merito immaterialis dicitur, quoniam, neque ex materia est, ut sit de alio, neque materia esse potest, ut de ipsa sit aliquid. Materialem autem manuductionem corporalia signa intelligit, quorum quasi manuductione mens humana utitur, ut ex visibilibus ad invisibilibus imitationem et contemplationem dirigatur.
human mind is like a blind man whom we guide by holding him by the hand in order to prevent him from taking an unforeseen fall. The manuductions and directions which the mind uses while tending toward the invisible are taken from visible signs and formed according to visible patterns. All this has been disposed and ordained by the all perfect disposition of sacred things, called in Greek "hierothesy"; this means the position of sacred things, for knowing the exalted Trinity by which and according to which all sacred things are disposed and ordained in heaven and on earth. Still another term is used, "teletarchy," that is to say, principle of purification. All sanctification comes from it. It is not simply a principle of purification in order that what is may become good; but more than this, it is a principle of illumination and deification, in order that what is good may become better. 52

When Hugh uses the term "teletarchy", he embraces both meanings, that is, purification and illumination. 53

What one must note especially is that the divine action attains the angelic world by an "invisible formation" and the human world by an "invisible reformation." For Hugh, the whole process of knowing is one by which we are led to the invisible by means of the visible and is a process which is adapted to the kind of minds we possess. God has established and ordained that the angelic

52 P.L. 175, col. 948 BC.

Mens etenim hominis tenebris ignorantiae suae obvoluta ad lumen veritatis exire non potest, nisi dirigatur, et quasi caecus manuductione utens, quo non videt, incedat. Ipsae autem manuductiones et directiones, quibus mens ad invisibilia tendens utitur, a visibilibus sumuntur signis, et demonstrationibus secundum visibilia formatis. Et hoc totum disposuit, et ordinavit perfectissima sacram disposition, quae Graece hierothesia vocatur, hoc est sacramum positio, summa videlicet Trinitas, a qua et secundum quam omnia sacra disponuntur et ordinantur in coelo, et in terra, et alio nomine teletarche, id est principium purgationis dicitur, quoniam ab ipsa omnis emundatio est et principium purgationis non solum ut bona fiant, quae mala sunt; sed et illustrationis et deificationis, ut meliora efficiantur, quae bona fuerint.

53 Ibid. 948CD.
nature be formed in an invisible manner and that the human mind can be brought back to the knowledge or imitation of the invisible only by means of visible "demonstrations." Visible realities, in fact, were made by God in such a way that they are able to manifest in an suitable fashion the invisible realities which they resemble. Led in this manner, our minds can be directed toward the invisible by means of the visible; the mind esteems the former in proportion to the resemblance of the latter as it makes the "demonstration." Hugh seems never to weary on this point. He applies his logic concerning the notion of the visible and invisible not only to truth but also to his speculations about beauty.

The truth of the invisible is "demonstrated" by the visible. Our mind can ascend to the truth of the invisible only when taught by the consideration of the visible; in a similar way, we possess forms which stand for images of invisible beauty. In fact, because the beauty of visible things consists in their forms themselves, it is proper to say that invisible beauty is "demonstrated" by visible forms, since the visible beauty is an image of invisible beauty. However, in visible things both the form and the essence are different. Consequently, all that is visible has a beauty subject to change, precisely because all numerically different things are subject to change. On the other hand, we can not say that the form of invisible realities is different, or that the essence is different: for all that is, is one, simple, and identical in being. They, the invisible forms, are beautiful from the fact that they are in existence; their beauty is not derived from a plurality of elements which are united, as in the case of visible nature. For in the visible world is displayed in space and its essence is derived from the disposition and mutual adaptation of diverse elements. Consequently, the beauty of visible nature is different from that of invisible nature; the latter is simple and uniform, the former is multiple, is made of appropriated proportions. We are no longer to consider the signs of visible beauty which carry us toward the unique invisible beauty from

54Ibid., 949Bc.
which they proceed, but we are to consider the two types of beauty, visible and invisible, which compete in an effort to raise us to their common source. There is, however, some resemblance between visible beauty and invisible beauty. According to the plan of the invisible Artisan, they rival each other. One might say there are different mirrors reflecting a unique image diversely proportioned.\textsuperscript{55}

All the foregoing is necessary to Hugh's ideas on symbolism which will not make sense unless his views on the visible and invisible are grasped. Hugh first scrutinizes the notion of symbol, in noting the difference between the angelic "reduction" and the human "reduction."\textsuperscript{56} He seems delighted to correct a mis-translation made by John regarding the "impure" Hierarchies. Hugh states precisely what the purification of angels can be: it refers neither to the sordidness of evil desires, nor to the lowness of vain thoughts, but only to the growth of an illumination which is necessarily imperfect. Hugh shows a

\textsuperscript{55}Ibid. 949BC. Ideo per visibilia invisibilium veritas demonstrata est; quia non potest noster animus ad invisibilium ipsorum veritatem ascendere, nisi per visibilium considerationem eruditis, ita videlicet, ut arbitretur visibiles formas esse imaginationes invisibilis pulchritudinis. Quia enim in formis rerum visibilium pulchritudo earumden consistit, congrue ex formis visibilibus invisibilem pulchritudinem demonstrari dicit, quoniam visibilis pulchritudo invisibilis pulchritudinis imago est. Quia tamen in rebus visibilibus alius est forma, et alius est essentia, idcirco quaecumque visibilia sunt mutabiliter pulchra sunt, quoniam quaecumque numero diversa sunt, et natura mutabilitia inseparabiliter simil non consistunt. Invisabilia autem quibus alius non est forma, et alius essentia, quia omne quod est, unum est et simplex, et idem esse: pulchra sunt ex eo quod sunt, et non est pulchritudo illorum compacta ex multis concurrentibus in unum, sicut visibilis natura videtur, cujus forma secundum locorum explicatur, et per figuras ex multis coaptatas disponitur. Idcirco alia est pulchritudo visibilis, et alia invisibilis naturae, quoniam illa simplex, et uniformis est; ista autem multiplex et varia proportione conducta. Est tamen aliqua similitudo visibilis pulchritudinis ad invisibilem pulchritudinem, secundum aemulationem, quam invisibilis artifex ad utramque constituit, in qua quasi specularia quaedam diversorum proportionum unam imaginem effingunt.

\textsuperscript{56}Ibid. 1052.
profound Dionysian influence:

Not only must we think that these primary essences are pure, but we must further think that they have illumination and are aware of sensible symbols, as well as of intellectual ones. Sensible symbols are material signs of Creation, of Scripture or of divine sacraments which are meant to "demonstrate" the invisible. By divine illumination, these exalted angelic spirits contemplate mystic meaning and invisible truth. Thanks to the same illumination they behold intellectual symbols or divine manifestations by which there is manifested the invisible and hidden nature of the divinity."

In this, one sees that, according to the example of Dionysius, Hugh extends the notion of symbol beyond the sensible world to include the intellectual world. He states his position is still another way:

We must realize that they, that is to say the celestial essences, are aware of both sensible symbols and intellectual realities, without being limited by the symbols themselves. For on the outside, in the sensible world, where there are material signs, there are symbols. But in the interior, in the intellectual world, where there are not signs, but true reality, there are no symbols. Also in the sensible world we contemplate in these sacred symbols the signs of truth; but in the interior, in the intellectual world, we contemplate the

57 P.L. 175, col. 1053CD.

Non solum existimandum est primas illas essentias purgationem habere et puras esse; sed iterum, hoc est, adhuc existimandum est, illuminationem habere, et contemplativas esse sensibilium symbolorum, et speculativas intellectualium. Sensibilia symbola materia sunt signa, sive in creaturis, sive in Scripturis, sive in sacramentis divinis, ad demonstrationem invisibilium pospita: quorum mysticam significationem et invisibilem veritatem summil illi angelici spiritus per divinam illuminationem contemplando agnoscent. Speculantur etiam per eamden illuminationem intellectualia, subaudi symbola, id est spirituales theophanias, id est divinas manifestationes, per quas eis intus occultae, et invisibilis divinitatis natura manifestatur.
naked truth without the use of symbols. And so we
must think that celestial essences are aware of symbols
and also aware of intellectual realities. 58

Of course, Hugh in no way implies that celestial spirits need diversity which
characterizes the world of symbols in order to have an awareness of Divine
Reality. Men, however, are further removed from God than Celestial spirits
are, alienated, one might say. Men need the diversity and multiplicity of sym-
bols, especially those of Holy Scripture, to bring them back to the source of
Being, to God. 59

Angelic knowledge is not of a symbolic character; it remains theophanic
in character. If it is not discursive, it remains "cursive"; it is made of illumina-
tions which develop the perfection of celestial essences and increase their
spiritual knowledge. And Hugh, in order to show the excellence of this know-
ledge, expresses the dichotomy that we find again in the De sacramentis. 60

The idea that this distinction is valid for human knowledge is also expressed in

58 P.L. 175, Col. 1053D-1054A.

Existimandum est eas, scilicet essentias contemplativas esse sensibilium
symbolorum, et speculativas intellectualium, et non (subaudi) symbolorum. Foris
enim in sensibilibus ubi materia signa sunt, symbola sunt; intus autem in in-
tellectualibus, ubi signa non sunt, sed veritas symbola non sunt. Propterea in
sensibilibus sacris symbolis signis veritatis contemplantur, intus autem in intellec-
tualibus absque signis nudam veritatem speculantur. Propterea existimandum est,
contemplativas esse sensibilium symbolorum, et similiter speculativas intellectualium.

59 Ibid., 175, Col. 1054B.

60 P.L. 176, Col. 217.
Hugh's work, *Hierarchiam*. "Higher and more worthy is the light of knowledge which is characterized by an interior infusion or by an invisible inspiration. Such knowledge is higher than that which is acquired exteriorly by the teaching of some kind of doctrine." 61

Hugh is still the good Augustinian and hence cannot forget that the ascent of the mind toward truth and the process of interiorization comes from one and the same source. After all, the human soul is invisible too. While the function of the visible sign is to give us an understanding of the invisible reality, the fact remains that there is an invisible element in the visible sign and it is precisely this which helps the soul grasp the relationship which exists between the visible sign and the invisible beauty which is signified by it. It becomes evident to the discerning reader that the Platonic element in Hugh of Saint Victor is evident in his discussions on beauty. 62

According to the Platonic line of reasoning, the human mind rises from the world of visible beauty to that of invisible beauty "led, as it were, from one thing which is similar to another. The mind grasps in an invisible way the connection which it has with the visible world outside of itself." 63 Even more than

61 P. L. 175, col. 1054C.
Altius quippe et dignius est lumen cognitionis, quod intus per invisibilem aspirationem infunditur, quam quod extrinsecus per doctrinae eruditionem possidetur.


63 P. L. 175, col. 949CD.
Quasi de simili ad similia conducta facile in semetipsa invisibiliter intelligens quae sit eorum, quae foris visibiliter comprehendent, ad invisibilia cognatio.
this can be said: "according to the invisible light which exists within the mind, we lift our eyes toward the invisible and in this lifting, we begin to know that visible forms are images of invisible beauty, that visible forms correspond to the invisible by some sort of loving resemblance." 64

Hugh of Saint Victor then runs the whole gamut of sensible images: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile and the symbolism which springs from them. This leads him to the two books which one must know for a proper interpretation of signs and figures, namely, the book of Creation and the book of Scripture. Throughout all the work of Hugh of Saint Victor, the term "figure" carries a plurality of meanings over and above its obvious grammatical sense. It is this plurality of meanings which allows the term "figure" to play as vitally important a role in the universe of doctrinal allegorism as it plays in Dionysian symbolism.

At the end of chapter one of Hugh's Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy of Dionysius the Areopagite according to the interpretation of John Scotus, 65 Hugh is satisfied to speak of forms and figures which are adapted to human weakness until such time as we attain the level of angelic competency.

64 Ibid., Nam secundum invisibilem lucem insitam sibi noster animus ad invisibilia respicientes, facile arbitratur visibles formas invisibilis pulchritudinis imaginibus esse, illi, quod invisibile intus ipse habet, amica quadam similitudine respondentes.
65 Ibid., 950CD.
All the knowledge which we will acquire from Sacred Writ as we apply ourselves to reading or meditation is nothing but an image of the full and perfect knowledge which we will attain later on by contemplation. This is what the Apostle meant when he said "We see now as a riddle, then it will be face to face" (I Cor 13). All of this is astonishing if these sensible appearances which are from outside are referred to as images of invisible realities. After all, is not our knowledge itself something that we consider spiritual and invisible when compared with these sensible images? Yet, does not even our knowledge take on the nature of an image and of similitude when compared with the realities for which they, in turn, stand?  

While it is "figure" in the hierarchial world which might cause one to forget the "figure" in the typological sense of Scripture, nevertheless it is precisely this latter which is given as a justification for the former. Even though he obviously had difficulties, Hugh did focus his attention on the study of Dionysian symbols. The first Dionysian condition for symbols is analogy. In the De grammatica, Hugh speaks of symbol, but in his commentary on Chapter II, he tries to effect a reconciliation of the "analogy" of theology with the "analogy" proper to grammar. His words here are vital:

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66Ibid. 950CD. Omnis enim illa cognitio, quam modo per sacrum eloquium studio lectionis vel meditationis discimus, quasi imago tantum est illius pleane ac perfectae cognitionis, quam postmodum ex praeenti contemplatione hauriemus. Unde et Apostolus ait: Videmus nunc per speculum in aenigmate; tunc autem facie ad faciem (I Cor 13). Quid ergo mirum est, si ea, quae foris apparent sensibilia, invisibilium imagines esse dicuntur, cum ipsa nostra scientia, quae ad horum comparationem spiritualis et invisibilis creditur, imaginis et similitudinis loca ad illa existimetur?

67Ibid. 973.
Analogy bespeaks a human condition since analogy is the property which several things have in common from the point of view of reason or just seem to be alike. In a similar way, grammarians speak of verbal analogies as is the case when several words resemble each other by possessing some common character. 68

All analogies proper to human nature spring from the power and the knowledge which is proper to the being and powers of man himself. Hugh insists that if we are to grasp things which are above our human condition, if we are to try to penetrate celestial things, it can be only through and with the help of the visible order of reality. What man needs is some kind of mediation within the level of things which conform to his way of thinking. 69 If Scripture is presented by visible signs, it is because of analogy; at the same time, however, it keeps the aspect of divine mystery free from all the elements of disrespect.

In line with the general procedures adopted by both Dionysius and John, Hugh addresses himself to the kind of symbolism which is based on contrast or dissimilarity. This symbolism of "dissimilarity" or contrast throws into relief the superiority of the supramundane realities over those of the material universe. As Hugh puts it:

68 Ibid., 970 A. Analogiam conditionem dicit humanam; quoniam analogia est juxta rationem et convenientiam plurium similium in uno proprietas, quemadmodum et grammatici analogias verborum assignare solent secundum similitudinem plurium sub una proprietate cadentium.

69 Ibid., 969 D. Id est conditionem nostram aliter non valentem ad invisibilium cognitionem pertingere, neque valentem immediate, id est sine medio aliquo extendit per intellectum in invisibles contemplaciones, id est in contemplationes invisibilium. Nostram analogiam dico etiam desiderantem proprias, et connaturales reductiones.
In the process of attributing "dissimilar figures" to these invisible realities, what we seem to say of these realities from the point of view of likeness, does not attain to what they are of and in themselves.\(^70\)

The use of this so-called "dissimilar to contrasting symbol" is more in line with the nature of the soul itself since our soul escapes the material and the corporeal with more ease. The soul would then be in a better condition to avoid the risk of placing its trust in those very symbols which it is supposed to transcend. Every figure points out or demonstrates the truth it is trying to communicate and does so more clearly by "dissimilar similitude." There is less likelihood that our minds will rest in the figure but rather that they will cause us to focus on the truth. Similar figures might cause us to rest with the figure itself. Of course, there is some dissimilarity in every figure which one uses and the reason for this is the absolute transcendency of God. What God is, is above all. Though we seek what He is, we cannot utter it for we cannot even think Him.\(^71\) Granting there is some dissimilarity or contrast in every figure however "similar" or fitting it might seem to be, there is necessarily some similarity in every figure no matter how "dissimilar" it might be. The reason for this lies in the fact that the first is due to the absolute transcendency of God; the reason for the second lies in the fact that everything

\(^{70}\)Bid., 974D. In hoc enim, quod eis dissimiles figuras attribuunt, ostendunt quod et illa quaque, quae et secundum similitudinem de ipsis dici videntur, ad proprietatem illorum non assurgunt.

\(^{71}\)Bid., 975A. Quod Deus est, super omne est; et cum quaeritur quid est, hoc dici non potest, quia cogitari non potest.
in the universe shares in sovereign Goodness.\textsuperscript{72} This insight furnishes us with an example of how Hugh seems to complete the thinking of Dionysius. For Hugh, everything that was made is unequal to the task of becoming a fitting figure for Divine Realities, especially when compared with the excellence of the Creator Himself. The so-called "dissimilarity" or contrast does not spring from the world of created beings because there can never be a total dissimilarity since everything that was made was made by God.\textsuperscript{73} Such observations by Hugh must not be taken purely and simply as an addition to the commentary of Dionysius. This is more than a Dionysian theme discussing the nature of THE ONE. It is rather a theme of Hugh of Saint Victor himself stressing the bountiful goodness of God Who causes the whole creation to share in His perfections.

Hugh put his own mark on the discussion of the nature of the symbol. He asserted rigorously the necessity for what he called "catharsis." In short, there is an endless insistence throughout his work on the distinction between sign and that which is signified, between the idea of dissimilarity to be found in similar signs and the similarity to be found in dissimilar signs.

The basic reason for Hugh's whole discourse and precise distinction is to purify the mind as it comes to grip with its struggle to apprehend divine realities.

\textsuperscript{72}Ibid., 980A. Quae evidenter dissimilia apparent, illa quoque, quae similia videbantur, extra proprietatem esse agnoscantur. Nunc vero demonstrat, quod propter hoc etiam non inconvenienter dissimilitudines assumuntur; quoniam et illa quoque, quae dissimila a divinorum, et spiritualium veritate esse videntur, aliquid habent cum ipsis, in quo similia dici posunt, quoniam nihil in universitate est, quod a summo bono participationem non trahat.

\textsuperscript{73}Ibid.
In every instance, no matter which of the above approaches we take, Hugh wants us to be aware of the symbolic structure of language. Whatever similarities we think we discover between sign and thing signified, we must at once seek the element of dissimilarity. Whatever properties we think we find present in the sign or thing signified (and he is concerned, of course, with Divine Realities always) we must seek to make the predication according to the varying natures of each thing of which that reality or attribute can be predicated. Symbol as symbol cries out for catharsis, but in doing so, it is always turned first toward the reality which it signifies. Yet, in one and the same movement, it is the knowing intelligence which rises toward the invisible. It is precisely this movement of elevation, a kind of ascension, which constitutes what is known as anagogy.

Inasmuch as anagogy lies at the heart of Hugh's speculations, it is indispensable that he address ourselves to this problem. Hugh asserted that there is anagogy for the figures of the typical senses of Scripture. There is anagogy also for the figures of the hierarchical universe. In Hugh's words, anagogy

is the elevation of the mind for the contemplation of celestial things. We experience an "analogical veiling" when we put on a veil in order to give more light: We cover in order to make something still more manifest. The darkening is itself an illumination for our minds. Just as weak eyes can look at the sun when it is darkened by clouds but could not stand its direct dazzling light, so, too, would it be impossible for the Divine Rays to shine into the weak eyes of the mind or spirit unless they are dimmed by

the diverse forms of sacred symbols, symbols which have been prepared by a Divine Providence, symbols which are connatural signs, well suited to our state of being.  

For Hugh, anagogy is first of all an ascension of the Spirit. Hugh distinguished revelations which come from outside and those which are made from within. Hugh wrote about the opposition which exists between symbol and anagogy, which is essentially the distinction between revelations from outside and those made from within.

Symbols resemble visible forms in order to "demonstrate" the invisible. But anagogy is an elevation of the spirit or mind in order to contemplate realities from on high. One ought to discern here that there is a twofold type of divine revelation which has been infused into the minds of theologians and prophets by "visions" and "demonstrations" which the Greeks call theophanies, i.e., divine apparitions. Sometimes, it is by signs which are similar to the sensible order that the invisible is said to be "demonstrated". Sometimes, however, it is by anagogy alone, i.e., by the ascension of the mind towards pure contemplation of the realities which are on high. From these two types of vision, two types of description have been formulated in Holy Writ: one is that by which truth is overshadowed by forms and figures and likenesses of hidden things. The other is that by which truth is expressed in pure nakedness, unadorned. When the hidden mystery is manifested by signs, forms, similitudes, then we have symbolic demonstration. But, when this mystery is

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75 175, col. 946AB. Anagoge enim, sicut dictum est, ascensio mentis, sive elevatio vocatur in contemplationem supernorum. Anagogice igitur circumvelatur, quia ad hoc velatur ut amplius clarescat; ob hoc tegitur ut magis appareat. Ejus igitur obumbratio nostri est illuminatio; et ejus circumvelatio, nostri elevatio. Quemadmodum infirmi oculi solum nube tectum libere conspicient, qui coruscum ejus lumen intueri non possunt: sic et divinum radium lippientibus mentis oculis lucere impossibile est, nisi varietate sacrorum velaminum circumvelatum et praeparatum providentia paterna connaturaliter et proprie iis, quae secundum non sunt.
shown to many by a pure and naked revelation, or when it is taught by a clear account and unegnimatically, then we have anagogical demonstration.76

There is no doubt but that the whole passage is complex in itself and somewhat doubly so since it is an exposition of a complex notion. However, this much can definitely be said: the symbol for Hugh, admits of two aspects. It is a means of revelation for God, but at the same time it is an instrument of knowledge for man. It is to the first of these aspects, namely the symbol as a means of revelation for God, that Hugh devotes his attention in the section given above. He makes explicit mention of the theophany and this seems to be his primary concern. Amazingly enough, however, in this passage Hugh seems to be indifferent to the second aspect of symbol as an instrument of human knowledge. The stress is clearly on the first of the two aspects, namely the anagogy which centers on the symbolic theophany of God. God can reveal Himself in symbols. He can also reveal Himself without symbols, hence the Hughonian dyad of symbol-anagogy. All revelation is made in order to be known, and when Hugh returns to the problem

76 Ibid., 941CD. Symbolum est collatio formarum visibilium ad invisibilium demonstrationem. Anagoge autem ascensio, sive elevatio mentis est ad suprema contemplanda. Notat autem his duplicem modum revelationis divinae, quae theologorum et prophetarum mentibus infusa est per visiones et demonstrationes, quas Graeci theophanias appellant, id est divinas apparitiones. Quoniam aliquando per signa sensibilibus similia invisibilia demonstrata sunt, aliquando per solam anagogen, id est mentis ascensum, in suprema pure contemplata. Ex his vero duobus: generibus visionum, duo quoque descriptionum genera in sacro eloquio sunt formata. Unum, quo formis, et figuris, et similitudinibus rerum occultarum veritas adumbratur. Alterum, quo nude et pure sicut est absque integamento exprimitur. Cum itaque formis, et signis, et similitudinibus manifestatur, quod occultum est, vel quod manifestum est, describitur, symbolica demonstratio est. Cum vero puro pura et nuda revelatione ostenditur, vel plana et aperta narratione docetur, anagogica.
of knowledge, he focuses primarily on the knowledge of God. In this regard, he sidesteps the gnostic ascent in the hierarchical universe but focuses attention on the reading of Scripture.

When we approach the study of the knowledge of God, we can get a better insight into Hugh's position. The knowledge of God is possible only by way of the ascending line of the hierarchical universe. The purpose of procession and symbolisation is precisely the knowledge of God, a knowledge which is itself a kind of deification or union with God. The influence of Erigena on Hugh is unmistakeable here.

Scotus Erigena maintained that everything speaks of God, not only Scripture which contains the theophanies which are revelations of God, but also the whole created world itself is a theophany, a manifestation of God, and moves toward that very goodness from which it came into being. The movement which involves the world is a reductio. But, if there is a reductio it is because there had first been an adductio. In other words, the reductio restores the world where the adductio initially founded it. But simply to say that "GOD IS" is not to know what He is. In the final analysis, to say that one "knows God" is to say what He is not. This must be borne in mind when we discuss "symbols". Erigenian theology is by preference one that is negative, a theology where negativity is first applied to the sensible symbol and then also applied to the intellectual symbol. In Sacred Scripture, the supramundane excellence of the Divinity is shown in a twofold way: Erigena says that Divinity is imagined by using dissimilar forms or by forms or images which just could not be further from the reality being represented. Or else Divinity might be indicated by signs which do not signify the reality but by signs which
signify what it is not, for example by terms like "invisible" or incomprehensible."

When Sacred Scripture refers to the Deity as invisible goodness, infinite, and incomprehensible, obviously it is not the essence of God to be these things; these terms or signs merely indicate what He is not.77

Erigena is not suggesting that there is nothing but a negative theology, because pure negativity would be the death of all knowledge. Movements of negation would destroy themselves. In this regard, Erigena is clearly following the thinking of Dionysius who insisted that one predicates affirmatively when one says that essence, goodness, life, wisdom and truth are fitting indicators of the Divine essence.78

One might think that the problem of predicates about God is settled with Erigena. But this is not so. Erigena and Hugh after him, are influenced by a text of Dionysius which reads: "Hoc enim, ut aestimo, potentius est in ipsa." Erigena comments this text in the following fashion:

I think that this method, the negative one, has more efficacy and more dignity when it comes to signifying the most

77122. col. 154BC. In divinis Scripturis superessentialis Divinitas supra omnen mundum laudatur, duplex est. Aut enim per dissimiles formas et inconvenientes longissimeque ab ipsa, ut parediximus, distantes imaginatur aut per ea, ex quibus non quid est, sed quid non est, significatur, innuitur, dum invisibilis et infinita et incomprehensibilis vocatur. Siquidem dum summam Deitatem et bonitatem invisibilem et infinitam et incomprehensibilem divina vocat Scriptura, non quid ipsa est significat; non enim invisibilitas et infinitas et incomprehensibilitas essentia ipsius est, sed, quid non est, ostendit.

78Ibid., 154B. Aut enim affirmative significatur, verbi gratia, dum de ipsa praedicatur: essentia est, seu bonitas, seu vita, seu sapientia, seu veritas, ceteraque similium vertutum nomina, quae divinae altitudini atque subsistentiae convenientissima esse videntur.
exalted Deity, the object of our cult and adoration. The ineffable truth of God and the Divine existence itself enjoy, in a negative signification a stronger approximation to the reality.^[79]

Erigena wants to stress this vital point: in every instance when we try to say something about the "Divine," we discover that the negative method is superior to the affirmative. The Divine Essence is above all reality; it is not part of that over which it is "superior." By the same token, we cannot really know what is meant by this so-called "super-essentiality" or by its "invisibility" and the like.

A summary view of the positions held by Erigena and Hugh seems to be the following: The method of affirmation and the method of negation are both necessary. Each serves a special purpose. Each is necessary and each is insufficient but their insufficiency must be seen from separate viewpoints: the affirmative point of view actually demands the negative. The negative surely appears as superior since it does not pretend to tell what God is. Obviously, then, it is not equal to the task of giving us an awareness of "HE WHO IS", since God Himself can hardly be any of the negations which the negative stance signifies. Both Erigena and Hugh think that no matter how purified our conceptions of God's transcendence may be, our knowledge of God will never be anything like a facial vision. Hugh focuses attention on the differences between the two generic kinds of symbols, he stresses the superiority of the contrasting symbol. Hugh writes, for example, that:

When God is praised by contrasting forms or symbols which are really foreign to Him, He is praised in a supramundane

[^79]: Ibid., 154CD. Aestimo, inquit, hanc rationem, quae est negativa, potentiorem et convenientiorem in ipsa, hoc est, in ipsius summae deitatis significacione, dum a nobis colitur et adoratur. Validius quippe et propinquius veritas ineffabilis et divina existentia negative, quam affirmative insinuatur.
way: We do not say He is the same as that by which he is praised; nor do we say He can be conformed with that by which he is praised but that He is above everything else. Even the words used in contrasting forms, or symbols are more worthy of God.®

Hugh is forever stressing the element of TRUTH as he analyzes the aspects of negativity in learning about God. He says: "We do not know the infinity of God...what is infinite cannot be judged by human or finite learning. What is ineffable cannot be spoken of. What is invisible cannot be known. What lies above the material cannot be understood." These are cautions to any affirmations of the superiority of the affirmative method. It is noteworthy that so many of the problems of theology today lie in exactly this area. Many try to capture God in a kind of scientific idiom. Sometimes the science is physics or psychology or sociology or even anthropology. Hugh pinpointed the desperate desire to make affirmations about God, but his cautions and regard for "similarity" are largely ignored today.

Scotus Erigena was by preference the Philosopher of THE ONE, while Hugh remains the Philosopher of Being as he speaks of Truth. For Hugh, the whole matter rests on the fact that we will continue to make judgments about God and

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80 P. L. 175, col. 973A. Quando vero per dissimiles et a se alienas formationes laudatur, supermundane laudatur; quoniam, nec idem esse dicitur, nec secundum id, sed supra id totum aliud, per quod laudatur. Propterea ergo supermundane laudatur ab ipsis eloquiis formationibus dissimilibus.

81 Ibid. 973D-974. Ignoramub autem superessentialem ipsius, et invisibilem, et ineffabilem infinalitatem. Quod enim infinitum est ab humana scientia existimari non potest: quod, quia ineffabile est, non dicitur; et quia invisibile est, non cognoscitur; et quia superessentiale est, non comprehenditur. De ipso igitur mens humana aliquid capere potest, ipsum non potest.
it is up to us to determine the manner in which this judgment can be supported.

It seems that there is ample justification in our asserting that for Hugh of Saint Victor, there is a valid negative theology which is limited by an affirmative theology. But there is also a critique of affirmative theology which a valid negative theology always tends to purify. Hugh seems to take delight in treating affirmation and negation in much the same way as he treated similarity and contrast.

Just as there is a kind of dissimilarity or contrast in every similarity, so there is an element of negation to each affirmation and an affirmation in each negation. But much as in the case of similarity, each affirmation holds a greater power to lead one into error. In much the same way, one must be careful to show that God is other than the most similar symbols which are used to portray Him. The conclusion is clear: one must be careful to insist that God is of a very different nature than that which is affirmed of a creature. Hugh is constantly warning us that we must not take for "God" any image that we may contrive of Him for ourselves. God may be "compared" with things we know but He is other than all of them. We may use the word "God," but that is only a matter of a syllable. One may say that one is thinking of the "Creator" and to this Hugh replies "Yes, you are thinking and then saying the word "Creator" but you are not knowing nor thinking "God."\(^{82}\)

\(^{82}\)Ibid. 975CD. Ergo aliud est hoc quod Deus est. Et hoc quid est? Solum hoc dici potest, quod aliud est, et quid est, dici non potest.
This whole critique is ruthless and precise; but one may not conclude from all this that God is unintelligible, but only that He is incomprehensible. Even though He is incomprehensible in Himself, the works which He performs, and all their forms and being can lead us to Him. Hugh's position that it is impossible to demonstrate the invisible except through the visible is clearly and firmly stated in the De sacramentis: "It is impossible to demonstrate the invisible except through the visible." Consequently, all theology must necessarily have recourse to the visible in order to make known the invisible. In the De sacramentis, Hugh focuses his attention on both reason and nature as the instruments which we must use in our knowledge of God. It is the world of nature which reflects God's light, which is resplendent with His beauty, which manifests His being. Nature is truly a theophany in itself. But it is reason which brings us back to the source of this light and beauty. It is reason which almost demands that we see the world of nature as a "demonstration" of the Invisible by means of what it gives us in the visible order. But this same reason shows us that there is something more than the visible world; there is also the invisible nature of the soul itself. It is part of the work of reason and one of the functions of theology to demonstrate - not simply to show but to prove - whether one uses visible creation or the fact of the soul that God not only exists but that He can not-exist. Further than this, if the mystery of God's infinite being is above reason, it is not opposed to reason. In the In hierarchiam, Hugh does not develop these points, but remains content to


specify the principles of the knowledge of God by nature and reason.

There is a second kind of knowledge of God which is proper to divine theology and which is found throughout the In Hierarchiam, namely knowledge of God through Sacred Scripture. It seems to me that for Hugh, Scripture is of greater value than any system of thought. It seems to me that for Hugh, all the divine words received their illumination from the Father for the purpose of enlightening us and helping us contemplate the principal Source of all light. It seems to me that for Hugh Scripture stands in the first rank of importance in the sacramental realization of the great plan of God's love, and while nature may tell us that God exists, Scripture brings us his presence and his action. There is no doubt but that for Hugh the purpose of going to Scripture is not simply to discover texts so we can talk about God, or to prove something about God. We ought to go to Scripture to listen to God, to hear His word, possibly even to hear His silence. The Bible gives us words from the Word. There is no doubt but that Hugh's mystique is intimately tied in with the mystique of the Bible.

This second kind of knowledge of God is inseparable from a third type, namely knowledge which comes by means of contemplation. Some texts have served as invitations to contemplation, for example, the Canticle of Canticles, or those about the disciples of Emmaus or about Mary Magdalen. There is no one text in Hugh which focuses exclusively on this third type of knowledge as it is related to contemplation. A careful reading of the Celestial Hierarchy leads one to the conclusion that Hugh is warmly disposed to a contemplation in which the soul experiences the very action of God Himself. Such an experience is sui generis.
and supposes as much purification in life as in understanding. Such an experience springs from the depths of love, is a kind of triumph over the world of understanding, yet it simultaneously opens upon a world of understanding which has hitherto been unknown. It is full of light and sweetness, it is inexpressible, and is a kind of anticipation of that state of human knowing when reason will finally yield to pure understanding.

In conclusion, one might say that Hugh's view of the world of knowledge, namely knowledge of God through reason and nature, knowledge of God through Scripture and knowledge of God through contemplation are meant for one ultimate end, a face to face vision of God. Hugh's exploration of the whole vision of the knowledge of God is full of tenderness and love, leading to that contemplation which is a kind of prelude to our ultimate state of knowing when understanding by veiled signs, sensible signs, signs of hidden presence will vanish when we are united with Eternal Truth fully manifested in the Beatific Vision.
THE PREEMINENCE OF HISTORY

It is not sufficient for the scholar to restrict himself to the world of knowledge as found in Hugh. It is precisely Hugh's vision of history that stands in strong relief to the vision of the world as found in Dionysius.

The vision of the world which Hugh proposes is the vision of a world where charity has been introduced. Must one say that Dionysian thought is distinct from Hugh's thought in that the first is only of a cosmic character? Probably not. It seems that both scholars have a cosmic vision, but of different types -- static in Dionysius, dynamic in Hugh. In fact, in the universe of Hugh, man is linked to the world where he occupies a specific or determined place, a connecting link between the world of spirits and the world of bodies. Furthermore, the world is linked to man who involves it in his own history -- in the history of his fall and redemption. The line of history is scarcely visible in Dionysius. It stands in relief in the works of Hugh. We see his universe constituted not only vertically as in Dionysius, by hierarchial structures, but also according to a horizontal line by the movement of history.

All of this historical concern in Hugh is of vital importance for incarnational theology. Hugh followed the traditional influence of Dionysius and Erigena but, with his new focus on history, man's place is stressed. Not man, indeed, in a simply created state, but man as fallen and man as redeemed by the God-Man, Christ. History must be listened to and known.

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Acts, and the Epistles of Paul in the New Testament. Attention should be given to memorizing carefully the events, the persons, their time and place. 86

Then the student is ready to pass to allegory. The procedure in allegory is the reverse order, beginning with those books of the New Testament which are richest in doctrine: Matthew, John, the Epistles, especially Paul, and the Apocalypse. Then he may safely pass from the New Testament to its foreshadowing. He may read the Hexameron, the Law, Isaiah, the beginning and end of Ezekiel, Job, the Canticles, and Psalms. 87

Just as the student needs geography and history for the literal sense, so he needs doctrine for the allegorical. Hugh compares systematic doctrinal teaching to the "second foundation" of polished stones, which rises above the first, subterranean foundation of history, to support the wall of allegory. 88

Hugh still adheres to the confused Alexandrian terminology by which history, allegory, and tropology refer both to the subject-matter of Scripture and to the method of its composition. "Allegory," for instance, equals "doctrine," whether it be the teaching of Saint Paul in the Epistles or the commentator's allegorical exposition of the Law. This seems to have been a concession to tradition. Hugh himself, as he shows when he discusses the literal sense, was quite clear as to the difference between content and comment. He says that "history" means either


87 Cf. Ibid., chapter 4. p. 144.

88 Cf. Ibid., pp. 139-142.
historical events or the primary meaning of the words. 89

Hugh effected a differentiation between the three senses of Scripture, which enormously increased the dignity of the historical sense. Instead of contrasting the lowly foundation of the "letter" with the higher spiritual sense, he groups the letter and allegory which pertain to knowledge and contrasts them with tropology. The importance of the letter is constantly stressed. Primarily because of his interest in history, Hugh constructed a Victorine version of the philosophy of history which he learned from Saint Augustine. He thought in terms of human religious history, the history of salvation: "the Word Incarnate is our King...and the King is in the midst of his c..my." 90

For Hugh, the history of salvation coincides with World history, in time, if not in scope:

Those lately converted to the faith...should be advised to consider that the faith is not new in which they themselves are new, since, just as from the beginning of the world at no time were the faithful and the just lacking as members of Christ, so from the beginning never have the sacraments of salvation which preceded for the preparation and for the sign of the redemption...been lacking. 91

The same thought is expressed in Hugh's mystical writings. In the De arca Noe mystica, we read: "Holy Church began to exist in her faithful at the beginning,

89 Cf. Ibid., chapter 3, p. 137.

90 On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith, Prologue, chapter 2, pp. 3-4.

91 Ibid., Book 2, part 6, chapter 8, pp. 295-6.
and shall last to the end. We believe that, from the beginning to the end, no period lacks its faithful to Christ." 92 Again, in the De sacramentis:

The work of restoration is the Incarnation of the Word with all its sacraments, both those which have gone before from the beginning of time, and those which come after, even to the end of the world. For the Incarnate Word is our King, who came into this world to war with the devil; and all the saints who were before His coming are soldiers as it were, going before their King, and those who have come after and will come, even to the end of the world, are soldiers following their King. And the King Himself is in the midst of His army and proceeds protected and surrounded on all sides by His columns. And although in a multitude as vast as this kind of arms differ in the sacraments and observance of the people preceeding and following, yet all are really serving the one king and following the one banner; all are pursuing the one enemy and are being crowned by the one victory. 93

The inspired history of Scripture is the primary source of world history for Hugh; hence the importance of investigating and establishing every detail.

Hugh divides universal history into three epochs. In his own words, these are called the "lex naturalis," the "lex scripta," the "tempus gratiae." 94 This division into three epochs enables us to see the sacramental trend of Hugh's thought, which is closely linked to the historical. Man's history is a history of sacraments. God has ordered the "work of Restoration" through a series of sacraments, the natural, the Mosaic, the Christian.

94 Cf. Ibid., Book 1, part 11, chapter 1, p. 182.
Sacraments were instituted from the beginning for the restoration and guardianship of man, some under the natural law, some under the written law, some under grace...all those sacraments of earlier time, whether under the natural law or under the written, were signs, as it were, and figures of those which now have been set forth under grace. For the passion of the Saviour, which in the first place sanctifies sacraments of grace to effect salvation, through the medium of these sanctified also those sacraments of earlier times so that salvation was the same both for those who by right faith venerated the signs of the future in the earlier sacraments and for those who receive the effect of salvation in these.

...The sacraments of the New Testament are in the first place signs of spiritual grace and were instituted principally to confer grace on those to be sanctified by infusing benediction. But those of the Old Testament were only signs of these of the New Testament and through the medium of these of which they were the signs, lest they should be without salvation who preceded the time of redemption, conferred grace as sustenance.

The "work of Creation" is sacramental too; it is both historical and symbolical. The days of creation are followed by chapters on their mystical sense. The perplexing question, whence did the light issue before the sun was made, is answered mystically. For Hugh, God revealed himself in nature. Consequently, the visible order symbolically signifies the realities of the religious world. For Hugh, nature is more than a field of empirical investigation; it has a meaning. In a sense, nature is the voice of history. It is possible to discover in nature both the benevolence and the lessons of the Divine Author. Men should indeed be engaged in looking fervently for purely physical explanations of nature and history but, better still, to discover lying at the heart of nature and history, a Divine meaning.

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95 Ibid., Book 1, part 11, chapter 1, p. 182.
     Book 1, part 11, chapter 2, p. 183.
     Book 1, part 11, chapter 5, p. 184.

96 Cf. Ibid., Book 1, part 1, chapter 11, p. 16.
For the true substance of all nature is found in the fact that it is a creature and as such it is a revelation, or, if we wish to be more precise, a manifestation of God, a theophanism. This was in great measure the core of his concern as he grappled with Dionysius and Erigena. It illustrates the logical consistency of Hugh who, while commenting on the world of allegory and anagogy, remained faithful to his basic devotion to history. Everything that God works outside Himself makes Him known and is a sort of language. "The heavens declare the glory of God"\textsuperscript{97} by their very existence and motion. When men's eyes are not closed to it, they understand this language of nature which speaks of its Creator. Indeed, in the high middle ages it is a literary commonplace to speak of the "book of creation":

Everything in this creation is to us a book or painting or, indeed a looking glass.\textsuperscript{98}

As St. Bonaventure observed in his Breviloquium: "The world is like a book in which there appears...the Trinity, its Maker."\textsuperscript{99}

The whole ensemble of this sensible world, says Hugh, is like a book written by the finger of God. All things in it are figures which have not been made up by human ingenuity, but have been made by the Divine Will in order to manifest and signify in some way the hidden attributes of the Divinity. Sacred Scripture is created by God as the world is created by God, and as a result the

\textsuperscript{97}Psalm 18.

\textsuperscript{98}P. L. 210-579. Allan of Lille. "Omnis mundi creatura Quasi liber, et pictura Nobis est, et speculum."

world is written by God as a book. For Hugh, observable phenomena compel reason's assent to the mystery of the resurrection because observable phenomena are subject to the laws of recorded history.

For what does the world in the elements imitate daily if not our resurrection? For through daily revolutions the temporal light itself seems to die, when the shades of night come upon it and that which was seen is drawn away, and daily it seems to rise again when the light which was taken away from the eyes with the repression of the night is restored. For through the revolutions of the seasons we perceive that the trees lose the greenness of their leaves and cease from the production of fruits. And behold, suddenly, from a drying log, as it were, as if a kind of resurrection were happening, we see leaves break forth, fruit grow large, and the whole tree becomes clothed with the quickened beauty.

The universe as history proclaims the existence of God:

There are two modes and two ways and two manifestations by which from the beginning God, though hidden, was shown to the human heart and revealed though concealed, in part of course by human reason, in part by divine revelation. And human reason indeed discovered God by a twofold investigation; partly, to be sure, in itself, partly in those things which were outside it.

Nature itself confesses the Trinity:

...the invisible God comes to the knowledge of many by four modes, two within, two without. Within, through reason and aspiration; without, through creation and doctrine.

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101 Ibid., Book 2, part 17, chapter 13, p. 457.
102 Ibid., Book 1, part 3, chapter 3, p. 42.
103 Ibid., Book 1, part 4, chapter 31, pp. 60-61.
...the most high Trinity was found through that which was its image in us...the latter are an image for the former and point out the Trinity. 104

Nature from without bore witness to the Trinity, just as in the case of the oneness of the Godhead Three things appeared without as signs of the Trinity. 105

In conclusion, Hugh stresses the role of history to make sure that his students do not make the mistake of thinking about God in some gnostic fashion. Such might be the case if we restricted ourselves to the position of knowledge as explained in the preceding chapter. History is the radical and undeniable basis on which Hugh's theory of the knowledge of God ultimately rests.

104 Ibid., Book 1, part 3, chapter 30, p. 58.
105 Ibid., Book 1, part 3, chapter 28, p. 56.
THE UNITY OF THE TESTAMENTS

The historical as well as the allegorical accents in Hugh are given added significance by his concern for the unity of the Testaments. Anyone who accepts the Christian message is somehow committed to the interrelatedness of the Testaments. A fundamental belief of Christianity is that the Father of Jesus is the God of the Old Testament. The unity between the Testaments means the articulation of this bond.

Hugh's insights into the spiritual and allegorical significance of the Old Testament events, insights deeply influenced by Dionysius and Erigena, makes him see that Israel's relations with God in the contemporary situation demand a recapitulation in some form of the ancient pattern of God's saving acts of election and redemption. None of these concerns were intelligible for Hugh unless taken initially within the framework of an abiding concern for history. Israel was involved with Christ by way of anticipation in the symbolism of the Old Testament; he was implicitly an object of faith and the principle of justification. Prefiguration means the essential relationship between the elements of the preparatory history (events, institutions, persons) and the eschatological consummation of this history. 106

Hugh sees in Christ the central point which gives meaning and intelligibility to the entire process of God's dealings with man.

All Sacred Scripture is one book, and this one book is Christ, because all Sacred Scripture speaks about Christ, and all Sacred Scripture is realized in Christ.107

According to Hugh, the key to understanding the God-willed correspondences between objects or actions in both Testaments is historical symbolism. It is clear that patristic and medieval theology allowed wise room for the use of the symbol, and the use of symbols taken over from the visible order to signify the realities of the religious world occurs everywhere in the Judaic-Christian tradition. Symbolism consists in discovering the correspondence between the visible and the invisible worlds and in determining their signification. As such it constitutes a source of authentic access to the knowledge of the divine world.

For Hugh, the essential object of the symbol is to render testimony to the historical actions of God. The essential character of biblical symbolism is its historical quality; that is to say, it is a correspondence between different moments of sacred history. This symbolism has its foundation in the unity of the plan of God. It is a divine consistency which manifests itself on the different levels of history. It subtracts nothing from the unique value of the divine events, but communicates to them a proper intelligibility which raises them above the level of pure factuality. Thus it has the value of an argument and takes on the form of prophecy.108

This symbolism has its origin in the Old Testament which, in the past events


of the history of Israel, reveals to us the figure of events to come at the end of time. Accordingly, symbolism is essentially eschatological. The New Testament manifests in Christ the advent of eschatological realities and it is in this way that it confers value upon the figures of the Old Testament. These eschatological events are also contained in the sacraments of the church which fill the interval that exists between the Ascension and the Parousia. And they receive their ultimate manifestation in the Judgment, the Resurrection and the advent of the new heavens.  

In directing the young theologian, Hugh summarizes in the De sacramentis a doctrine which will serve as an introduction to the second teaching, the "secunda eruditio." The De Sacramentis is interlaced, therefore, or goes between a "prima eruditio" which consists in the reading of history, and a second "secunda eruditio" which is built up by means of allegory. The source of the text itself is bound up with the order of recitation, that is with the succession of history and its contingencies, and its impedimenta. In a similar way, the allegorical study, which has been freed from the servitude and which has been guaranteed by the didactic form of mysteries authorizes a doctrinal order of things. Sentences in the text are situated pedagogically and methodologically between the historical study of the bible and its doctrinal study, and this is the supreme work or construction of the theologian. Theology is not only born in scripture but is completed in scripture.

109 Ibid.

A century after Hugh, Saint Bonaventure was to renew the same enterprise. His *Breviloquium* is, as the title indicates, a precise doctrinal summary which will serve as an instrument for the organic orderly reading of the whole of Scripture as well as developing profound insights into scripture. At the very beginning, in a refine prologue, Bonaventure repeats the classical theme of the multiplicity of mystical understandings in which Sacred Scripture will finally unfold its depths. As in the case of Hugh, the letter remains the basis of spiritual understanding, without giving up one iota of its significance. The principle of the letter as the basis of understanding is applicable to both testaments.

By 1250, the effort to make the whole of Sacred Scripture equivalent to theology had been abandoned, and the *summae*, long or abbreviated, had taken on a certain consistency and autonomy. Exegesis had been fixed in a textual course, while the doctrinal construction had been worked out with precision according to an entirely different method. A dialectic of questions now existed which had been definitively detached from all commentaries. What we would today call "biblical theology" had lost its basis in a confusion of dialectical questions.

The primary meaning of the word of Scripture coincides with the spiritual sense, or as Hugh would have it, the allegorical sense of Sacred Scripture. But this mystical sense or spiritual meaning of the word is revealed only to the eyes of faith. Faith is the light which enables one to see the law of the spirit within the law of the letter. It is like a lamp which is lighting up the darkness of night, perceiving or illuminating the nuances of all the biblical sacraments which surround

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it. Allegory, or the mystical sense, represented by the historical symbol is the
doctrinal sense par excellence. The search for intelligibility continues along a
road of symbolic representation. Hugh uses the symbol in the traditional biblical
sense, that is, as the sign which indicates the presence of that which it signifies,
and which directs the attention to the reality signified. In Hugh's usage, the
reality is God's revelation. By symbolic representation the past is linked to the
future, and the historical sense reflects the motives of expectation and of action.
The mystical sense is history understood in a wide sense.

History is the narration of events, which is contained in the
first meaning of the letter; we have allegory when, through
what is said to have been done, something else is signified
as done either in the past or in the present or in the future. 112

Indeed, the symbol links the Christian community of the present with the
historic past and simultaneously foreshadows the life of the future. In its deepest
sense, the time of the symbol is the eternal now, in which time present and time
past merge into the future.

In summary we may say that for Hugh, the exegesis called allegorical, or
the spiritual sense is in no way an avoidance of literal exegesis. The progressive
discovery of a new meaning in the traditional Word is a transposition of the his­
torical into the eternal. It is precisely the transition from the Old Testament to
the New, from the Word which, after having expressed itself little by little and
in different ways by the prophets, is given to us perfectly in the Son. And so

112 On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith, Book 1, Prologue, chapter 4,
p. 5.
Hugh would have us face the undeniable fact that so very often even the best "historical" exegesis is achieved from a theological point of view - that is to say, in the final analysis, from the side of the Christian faith.
CONCLUSION

What, then, is the place of history and symbol in Hugh of Saint Victor? What is their place with regard to general propositions of the Victorine school, and what will be the influence of biblical theology in the school of the twelfth century? First of all, for Hugh, symbolism is the integrating part of Sacred Scripture, and of Sacred Doctrine which flows from it. It is not a literary pursuit of some sort, a pious interpretation, but rather a constructive principle whose value consists in giving us diverse insights into Divine Revelation by penetrating the different senses of Scripture. Essentially, symbolism bears upon the ensemble of the divine economy according to its whole extent, stretching out to include history. Old Testament history gives us figures of what is to come. New Testament history brings to fruition the promises of the Old. In due time, the heavenly kingdom will bring about the fruition of the sacramental symbolism of the terrestrial church of Christ. This is why the conjunction of history and allegory in Hugh is not a casual literary phenomenon but a perfectly coherent operation. This is why the Bible must be read from end to end, since it is true that sensitivity to history manifests itself in the observation of continuity, in the observation of the whole, in sequences, in causality.

However, within this great historical framework, detailed explanations of events began to multiply as men tried to penetrate the immensity and uniqueness of the design of God. These events need to be understood one by one, that is,
brought to the threshold and the laws of configuration. Saint Paul says: "all these things happened to them as a type." 113

Following the custom of the ancients, early medieval thinkers allowed themselves at first to be fully loyal to the letter of this text of the Apostle. Sometimes, however, they broke away from its context. Then, transferences began to multiply. Every event, every gesture, every detail of Old Testament events had its sense. Every detail became a type of a future realization. A kind of super-history began to be developed. The connections of which were no longer unfolded by the earthly concatenation of events or basic historical causality, but rather by symbolic games. 114 A kind of tissue was being formed, homogeneous in its own plan; a kind of spiritual understanding in which the most superficial accommodations to literal historical senses were bordering upon great figurative and prophetic themes concerning the people of God, Covenant, chastisement, etc. Thus, allegories were constituted over and above history. From the beginning to the very end of the text, these allegories were brought together into a symbolic whole. Even more than this, every name, every word, every epithet was seized for the dialectic of a new genre and is treated according to the categories of this plural kind of symbolism. Against this kind of proliferation Hugh took a strong stand, a stand which rested primarily on the basis of sensitivity to historical facts.

The subsequent development of the scientific theology of the thirteenth century, especially as illustrated in the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas,

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113 1 Corinthians 10:11.


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needed the cautions of Hugh of Saint Victor in his insistence that an authentic theology be based on the letter of Sacred Scripture itself. The theology of Thomas was not a symbolic theology in the pejorative sense of the term, the sense against which Hugh cautioned his students.

The literary genre proper to typological, allegorical, and analogical explanations is radically different from the nature of theological explanation. Hugh thought that the theological explanation of the text and the symbolic significations ought to manifest some kind of continuity. Hugh stressed this point so well that he put his students on guard against those symbolic explanations which were often given in abrupt ways, not infrequently totally omitting literal and historical significations. He could not and would not tolerate excesses of symbolic fantasy. But, by the same token, he was totally unwilling to remain a prisoner to the literal limitations of textual presentations. He would not accept those myopic viewpoints which would result in a simplistic acceptance of scripture.

The Thomistic devotion to symbolic theology was within the framework of the more "rational" tone of the great summae. One can find an endless list of examples of "double interpretations" in the works of Aquinas. Each of these is, I submit, a kind of testimonial of the triumph of the influence of Hugh of Saint Victor and his insistence that all symbolism rise from the matrix of historical presentation of Scripture. For Thomas, as for Hugh, every actual text had its historical sense which was immediate and efficacious. Each had its proper figurative sense.

The devotion of Hugh of Saint Victor to history was not in any way an abstraction. He venerated the work of his predecessors, Augustine, Dionysius,
Scotus Erigena. They, too, were sources of insight and of vital import as was Scripture. One might safely say that the works of these two last mentioned were vague, obscure, and cryptic. Hugh knew this; but Hugh also knew that they had much to give by way of insights into allegory and symbolism. If Hugh saw fit to reestablish the allegorical method of these two profound scholars and do it within the framework of a re-stress of history, he did it for the sake of loyalty to Scripture. He returned allegory to the ensemble of biblical typology. Certainly, from the time of the initial dividing of the diverse symbolic values, "allegoria" (the word is Pauline in origin) designated, in addition to moral application (tropologia) and eschatological application (anagogia,) the doctrinal content of the prefigured mysteries. The terms were sources of confusion for centuries. The terms did not take shape until the time that allegorizing would be defined as a precise operation of symbolic theology. The terms were then adapted to the kind of rational overview of a Saint Thomas Aquinas who heeded Hugh's insistence on the historical basis of all interpretation.

Hugh of Saint Victor never doubted that the Spirit of God is at work in History. One might say that this was a kind of religious intuition in his general outlook. Loyalty to this intuition seemed to underlay his lifelong preoccupation with the historical foundation of the Christian economy. The Spirit is in History. All biblical research, all allegorizing, all theologizing took their ultimate meaning from this sole root. For Hugh, Spirit was and remains the common source of History and Symbol.
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