

GERARD OF CENAD ON THE SOTERIOLOGICAL VALUE OF THE INTELLECTUAL PRACTICE AND THE PLURALITY OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATIONS (THREE POSSIBLE REVISIONS OF THE CRITICAL EDITIONS)

ALEXANDER BAUMGARTEN *

Abstract The present paper aims at analysing the modern editions of Gerard of Cenad's work, *Deliberatio super hymnum trium puerorum*, from the perspective of some revisable passages whose palaeographic and doctrinal analysis could lead to their likely original meaning. These passages convey the author's opinion on the value of intellectual practice and on the rules for biblical hermeneutics and for the plurality of interpretations.

Keywords Gerard of Cenad, critical revision of the text, Dionysian influence, medieval writing topics

Gerard of Cenad, bishop of Morisena and founder of the Benedictine tradition in Banat and south Hungary, was an Italian monk whose work, *Deliberation on the hymn of the three youths* (between 1030, the year when he became bishop, and 1046, the year of his death¹) conveys similar issues and a common vocabulary to other European Benedictine authors who were his contemporaries, like Petrus Damianus, Lanfrancus of Padova, or Anselm of Aosta. By commenting on Prophet Daniel's deuterocanonical allegorical episode of the three youths who burned in Nebuchadnezzar's furnace, Gerard discusses problems of biblical hermeneutics and allegorical cosmology, and evokes the dispute between dialecticians and anti-dialecticians.

He is concerned with the place occupied by lay disciplines in the spiritual development, but also with the tense relations between the Hungarian political

* *Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca.* alexbaum7@gmail.com

¹ According to Gabriel Silagi in *Gerardi Moresenae Aecclesiae seu Csanadiensis Episcopi Deliberatio supra hymnum trium puerorum*, ed. Gabriel Silagi (Turnhout: Brepols, 1978), (referred to as "ed. Silagi" in this article), VII.

power and the clergy. The subject itself seems to support the transmission of the Benedictine tradition, if we attribute it to a short commentary on the same biblical passage in Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*.²

It was a single manuscript that conveyed this valuable spiritual testimony to the 11th century Latin tradition; it is preserved as Clm6211 at Bayerische Staatsbibliothek and dates back to the second half of the 11th century.³ Unfortunately, this is not the autograph. Two modern editions are based on this manuscript: Bishop Ignatius Batthyányi's from 1793⁴ and Gabriel Silagi's 1978⁵ edition printed in the prestigious '*Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio Mediaevalis*', followed by a Hungarian translation.⁶ I shall discuss some of the options of the two editors and I shall invoke palaeographic and hermeneutic arguments to suggest either a different punctuation for some fragments or changes in two readings which do not make sense in their edited version. To these I shall add a series of commentaries on the meaning of Gerard' text.

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The first example that only, but importantly, refers to a reconsideration of the punctuation can be found in the Prologue. Here we see an incredibly subtle construction, whose structure is in close analogy to the prologues of all eight books and forms each time a complex syllogism about the anagogical hortation. Here is the text in the common version of the two editors:

Erigendum in optimis ex consuetudine contemplationibus et admodum duris incitationibus circa virium robor, licet nodosum, ad quod conandum, per quod incedendum, amplectendum minime vero, quantum pectoratim reor, quemadmodum potentes in theoricis aiunt: nec vero declinandum, quamlibet circulosum. Sudor enim in hoc omni sopore suavior aestimandus, praesertim cum divinus processus cuncta confidat ad optimum respicientia perficere. Fateor vero me quemquam in hoc, quod examinandum postulasti, minime admississe. Ideo difficillimum sumas, quod ex continuo usu leviter

² Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, III, 18 (cf. Sancti Gregorii Papae Dialogorum libri IV, de vita et miraculis patrum italicorum et de aeternitate animarum, in *Patrologiae cursus completus, series latina*, vol. 77, ed. J. Migne, (Paris, 1849), coll. 150–430).

³ From here on referred to as ms. M.

⁴ Ignatius Batthyani, *Sancti Gerardi Episcopi Chanadiensis Scripta et acta hactenus inedita, cum serie episcoporum Chanasiendium, opera et studio Ignatii comitis de Batthyan, episcopi Transilvaniae* (Albo-Carolinae [Alba Iulia], Typis Episcopalis, 1790), referred to as "ed. Batthyányi".

⁵ Cf. *supra*, footnote 1.

⁶ *Elmékedés. Gellért, A Marosi Egyház püspöke a háromfiú himnuszáról*, ed. and trans. Béla Karácsonyi and László Szegfű (Szeged: Scriptum, 1999).

*sonat, et paene ab omnibus intactum dimissum, quia assiduum, unde totum laboriosissimum. Deus autem meus, in cuius praeconio elementa omnia provocantur, quique angelum suum descendere fecit cum Anania et sociis eius in fornace ad ostendendam potentiam suae deitatis et magnitudinem, adiuvet sic me tuae postulationi satisfacere, quo inimicorum laqueos possim evadere et tibi plenissime ad libitum obviare*⁷.

These first lines of the prologue draw, in my opinion, a courageous juxtaposition between the common literary archetypes of the frequently practiced authorial evasion in medieval literature⁸ and the vocabulary of the spiritual anagogy. The result of this overlap, as we shall see, is the choice of exploiting the spiritual ascent of the intellectual work to interpret Prophet Daniel's passage. The grammar of the text is more difficult than the rest of book 1 and renders the elegance of an *exordium* that contains two levels whose juxtaposition takes the form of a syllogism. The first level that talks about the spiritual ascent (*erigendum...perficere*) is not introduced by any particle indicative of a logical relation. This is the reason why we consider this to be the author's assumption. In relation to the next ones, this first level could be understood as the major premise. The second one that corresponds to the *fateor...admissio* sequence contains an authorial evasion, and the adversative particle *vero* indicates its value as a minor premise of the reasoning. The entire next sequence (*ideo...obviare*) has the function of a conclusion introduced by the conclusive particle *ideo* and which explains why the necessity of the ascent and the problem of the authorial evasion complete each other and explain the *ratio operis*.

The spiritual ascent Gerard is talking about contains four important elements.

The first element refers to the imperative need of the ascent that is given by the passive periphrastic conjugation of the verbs *erigendum* ('we have to ascend'), *conandum* ('we have to try'), *incedendum* ('we have to advance'). The ascent is conditioned by the descending incitations (*incitationibus*), following the rules of mystical ascent that are common in the history of the religious experience in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages.⁹

⁷ Gerard, *Deliberatio*, Prol., ed. Batthyáni, 1–2, ed. Szilagi, p.1, l. 1–21, mss.M, f. 1r.

⁸ For example, Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, III, 38, ed. cit. coll. 316.

⁹ A well-known example of the situation in which the access to the divine is conditioned by the divine itself, despite the illusion of the contrary, is found in Ps. Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the divine names*, III, 1, about the boat that is getting closer or further away from the shore, even though the illusion of the shore that is getting closer or further away from the boat is possible. Cf. Ps. Dionysius the Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus*, ed. P. Chevallier, *Dyonisiaca, Recueil donnant l'ensemble des traductions latines des ouvrages attribués au Denys de l'Aréopage*, I (Paris–Bruges, 1937), 122. For a similar use of *erigenda*, see Fredegisus of Tours, *De nihilo et tenebris*, I, 3.

The second element describes the starting point that hints to an original state of negligence, routine, habit, and unapprised tolerance for the possibility of spiritual ascent equivalent to a state of original inauthenticity. This second element results from the conjunction of two meanings of terms that appear throughout the given fragment and which explain each other. Thus, the ablative *ex consuetudine* is opposed to the verb *erigendum* which shows the abandoned starting point in the ascent: habit. This 'habit' receives the form of 'inducing sleep' (*sopore*) that is opposed to the 'sweat' during the ascent; if both 'sleep' and 'sweat' contain, in Gerard's opinion, sweetness (*suavitas*), then the original sweat-habit bears the appearance of a stable and desirable state, whence the need of pulling away from the ascent is not necessarily an evidence. In the conclusion, Gerard talks about the passage from the Prophet Daniel as being "familiar due to repeated use" and whose meaning evades us *quia assiduum*. It is clear that the meaning of *assiduum* must be established in relation with the previous expression (*ex continuo usu, leviter sonat*); our explanation for these words is that the hymn, whose interpretation will begin after the prologue, is ritually intoned by the monks whom Gerard addresses. Thus, *continuo usu* can represent the intonation in the Gregorian chants with poor differentiated tonalities, which explains the literal meaning of the verb *sonat* and establishes the meaning of the adjective *assiduum*: monotonous. We can understand from these partial synonymies that the starting point of the ascent is an inauthentic original position given by the habit which omits the essential and which applies to the intonation of a text interpreted by a musical theory that explains this position. We can draw a possible parallel between the act of ascending and the act of interpreting, because both support the repudiation of the same *consuetudo/assiduitas*.

The third element of the first sequence is illustrated by the accent on the difficulty of the path that surpasses the human powers, which cannot be completed, and which makes the refusal easy to understand. Therefore, the divine hortations are harsh (*duris*) compared to the power of our faculties, the periphrastic conjugation *erigendum* opposes the concession *licet nodosum* ('even though it's toilsome'). One cannot complete this path since it doesn't end in the definitive achievement of the object (*amplectendum minime vero*), which reminds us of the spiritual ascent of Anselm in *Proslogion* where, during the ascent, the one who embraces experiments his transformation into the "embraced"¹⁰. From the perspective of our interpretation, the sequence *quemadmodum potentes in theoricis aiunt* is interesting for its punctuation. Both modern editors of Gerard added a colon at the end, as if the following sentence can be attributed to the ones that have power in the objects to be contemplated: *nec vero declinandum, quamlibet*

¹⁰ Anselmus Cantuariensis, *Proslogion*, in *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi Opera omnia*, ed. F. S. Schmitt, vol. 1 (Edinburgh, 1946), cap. 19, p. 115: "*nihil te continet, sed tu contines omnia*".

circulosum. But none of the editors mentions the source of this passage¹¹. It is very probable that this source did not even exist, and the punctuation was defective. A simple full stop after *aiunt* shapes a simpler and more coherent sense and makes the entire sequence refer to the previous words, *i.e.* those who are competent in the spiritual problems would thus be cited by Gerard for the necessity of the ascent which is sinuous, but must not be refused, using the adversative particle *vero*. The scribe actually copied the full stop.

aiunt. Nec vero

The fourth element of this first sequence is the natural refuse to follow this ascent. In the first sentence of his treatise, Gerard recommends an ascent for which he can already foresee the refusal, which he rejects before being formulated: *nec vero declinandum*. But we find another refusal (*minime admissae*) in the next sequence (the minor) that is reduced at the traps of the enemies (*inimiquorum laqueos*). In his commentaries, Szilagi takes this passage as a *modestiae topos*, *haud facile intelligibilis*.¹² A more profound meaning of this passage could be possible. If we suggested a link between the ascent and the act of interpretation, we can continue the analogy and suggest a link between the two refusals. At the end of our analysis, it could reveal the way in which the spiritual ascent transmitted by the tradition becomes, in Gerard's reasoning, an effort of the literary composition.

If the first sequence was a major premise from the authoritative tradition (*potentes...aiunt*), the second one remarks upon the circumstances of the literary composition and is abruptly put: Gerard confesses he had initially refused the intellectual effort necessary to redact this treatise, which was requested by the one to whom he eventually dedicated it (the magister in the liberal arts, Isingrim). This second sequence is the minor premise and restates the naturality of the refusal from the sequence of the ascent in the plan of the literary composition. Regardless of the truth in recounting the fact, the literary historian can identify here a common model of medieval literature that probably comes from Quintilian, *De institutione oratoria*, and which had been reused in different ways in different centuries.¹³ The elements of this scenario belong to a subtle transfer of auctorial responsibility towards those who requested the work and to a competence associated with the preliminary refusal to write the treatise.

¹¹ Szilagi adds a comma after *aiunt*, but the Hungarian translator repeats Batthyani's colon, as if an authoritative citation follows.

¹² Szilagi, p. 1, note to 1. 11–13.

¹³ Cf. Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, with an English translation by H. E. Butler, coll. Loeb (London: Harvard UP, 1920, I, 1), 4: "*Post impetratam studiis meis quietem, quae per viginti annos erudiendis iuvenibus impenderam, cum a me quidam familiariter postulaverunt, ut aliquid de ratione dicendi componerem, diu sum equidem reluctatus.*"

Because Quintilian's text was a handbook of rhetoric very well-known throughout the Middle Ages, the scenario of the auctorial evasion could have been preserved and used as a model for a large number of texts that repeated it. We can identify it in Augustine, *De trinitate*, III, 1, where many ask him to write; also, we find it in Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*, where the central idea is not about an act of writing, but Benedict's approval to become an abbot¹⁴. However, this repetition is not a stereotype, but it is rather exploited for a meditation and spiritual strategy ground to convert the mind to God and a ground for Anselm's ontological argument in the 11th century: *Monologion* repeats the scenario where the abbot Anselm talks to the monks of Bec Abbey who ask for an exposition of the divine essence.¹⁵ However, in *Proslogion*, the same elements become the components of an interior scenario where Anselm requests the text, Anselm refuses it, and Anselm concludes that the work will be done explicitly based on the refusal and the auctorial evasion that allows the divine nature to intervene in assuming the responsibility for the argument of his own existence. The examples can be found even after the 11th century. This situation will show up in some medieval philosophical works that begin with a confession about the relation between the text and the author; for example, Peter Lombard's *Sentences* start exactly with the implicit citation from Augustine,¹⁶ which indicates a new level in the history of this figure of speech that now no longer recounts something real, but rather underlines its nature as a *topos* that corresponds to a medieval way of understanding authorship.

Gerard's place in this *topos* is very specific: we saw that many authors use it implicitly (Quintilian, Augustine, Gregory), one uses it as a literary *topos* (Peter Lombard, who takes it from Augustine), while Anselm and Gerard add to its meaning the capacity to communicate a theoretical content of their texts. After writing *Monologion*, Anselm reuses this literary *topos* by re-dimensioning it at the beginning of his *Proslogion*, where the refusal does not address external requests anymore, but his own auctorial intention; his refusal proves to be the momentum of the composition and of the discovery of the ontological argument¹⁷. Gerard also decides to use the literary *taxis* for the content, but in another way that seems to mark the

¹⁴ Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, II, 3: "Non autem longe monasterium fuit, cuius congregationis pater defunctus est, omnisque ex illo congregatio ad eundem venerabilem Benedictum venit, et magnis precibus, ut eis praeesse deberet, petiit. Qui diu negando distulit, suis illorumque fratrum moribus se convenire non posse praedixit, sed victus quandoque precibus ad sensum dedit."

¹⁵ Cf. Anselmus Cantuariensis, *Monologion*, in *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi Opera omnia* I, 7.

¹⁶ Augustine, *De trinitate*, III, 1: "non valentes studiosorum fratrum votis iure resistere, eorum in Christo laudabilibus studiis lingua ac stylo nos servire flagitantium: quas bigas in nobis agitat Christi caritas" (Augustinus Hipponensis, *De trinitate libri XV*, ed. J. W. Mountain and F. Glorie (CC SL), [Turnhout, 1968], 127).

¹⁷ Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogion*, 89–90.

originality of his position: he adds the elements through which he describes the ascent (where the element of refusal plays a central role), thus interpreting the spiritual ascent told in Dionysian terms in order to exploit the status of his literary composition.

Therefore, we have arrived at what we indicated to be the last sequence and which is the conclusion introduced by *ideo*: the hymn of the three youths deserves an analysis because the intellectual effort put into the redaction of a commentary can have the soteriological values of a spiritual ascent. The elements of the ascent are once again found in the conclusion: the divine hortations are here the descent into the furnace together with Anania (*descendere cum Anania*), and the divine help throughout the ascent is here the support in writing the text (*adiuvet sic me tuae postulation satisfacere*). The conclusion is simple: if the terms of anagogy and those of the effort put into the literary composition are analogous, then their functions are assimilable and the redaction of Gerard' *Deliberation...* is taken by the author to be a spiritual ascent. The existence of a soteriological value of the literary culture, complementary to the spiritual contemplation, is evident in this way of thinking. Considering my commentary on the passage, here is a possible translation for it:

We must rise from routine to the best of things through contemplations and through the <aforementioned> incitations, which are very harsh compared to the power of <our> faculties, even though<the end> to which we must struggle <and the path> we must advance on are toilsome, but which we will not grasp enough, as far as I can reckon from my heart, as those who have power regarding the things that can be contemplated say. But <this ascent> must not be refused either, even though it's sinuous, because the sweat <throughout this road> must be deemed sweeter than any slumber, especially when the divine procession strengthens our faith that we will accomplish all our aspirations towards <He who is> the greatest good. But I confess I barely agreed to the fact that you asked to examine <this text>. For this reason, accept that what sounds familiar is very difficult due to the often use and was left untouched by almost all because of the monotony, requiring thus much toil. But my God, in whose praise all elements are summoned, who made his angel descend with Anania and his companions in the furnace, to show the power and the greatness of his divinity, will help me fulfil your request so I can evade the enemies' traps and fully carry out your wish.

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The second example is found in the fifth book of Gerard's work where the author, after having discussed a number of possible interpretations of the nature of Christ

related to the issue of light, stops at the analogy between Christ and the sun. Despite all these, Gerard's hermeneutics admits that one signifier can have several significations among the Scriptural realities. Actually, his entire work is a long exercise to identify many signified things in the Scripture that hint at the same signifier or many possible signifiers that hint at the same signified thing. Gerard suggests here a link between the sun and the apostolic predication:

*Ergo sol apostolica praedicatio, ut in alio opere demonstratum reliqui, tropologice admittenda per totum mundum specialius eminens et singulariter cuncta transcendens, a quo totus mundus illuminatus est. Sine sole quippe mundus caecus permanet. Sic nimirum nisi praedicatio apostolorum mundum irradiaret, in caecitate ignorantiae perseveraret*¹⁸.

As it can be easily seen, the first sentence that establishes the signification link (*sol* - *praedicatio*), is interrupted by an incidental comparative structure that points to another work (considered today to be lost, unfortunately: *ut* - *reliqui*), and then continues with the predicate *admittenda* <est>, with the adverbial specification *tropologice*. Therefore, the correspondence of signification between the sun and the predication is acceptable in a moral reading of the Bible. The main sentence ends with two *participia coniuncta* that can be bi-functionally interpreted: in a relative sense and in a causal sense. The latter is preferable because it explains why the correspondence of signification is acceptable, *i.e.* because the signifier is *eminens* and *transcendens*. But what is this signifier? If we follow these participles, we cannot determine that because their gender is impossible to decide. If we follow the feminine periphrastic conjugation *admittenda*, we can identify the only possible feminine subject of the phrase: *praedicatio*. Despite these aspects, the phrase ends with a relative clause introduced by the masculine *a quo* that can only refer to *sol*. We are thus faced with a dilemma on which the understanding of Gerard's hermeneutic rule depends, so the text must without a doubt be emended: either the feminine *admittenda*, either the masculine *a quo*, since the two participles must refer both to the sun and to the predication, because otherwise the comparison would be useless. The two following phrases refer to *sol* (the first one), and to *praedicatio* (the second one), and repeat their common functions of irradiation (of lightvs. of knowledge) over the world. The only word that can eliminate the ambiguity is *quippe*. It ascertains a fact ('indeed'), which means that Gerard's process has a starting point in an assertion (the sun illuminates the world) and decides to attribute the characteristics of this illumination to the apostolic predication. Therefore, the features of the predication are based on those belonging to the sun and not vice versa, which means the words *a quo* are correct, but *admittenda* must be emended into *admittendus*.

¹⁸ Gerard, *Deliberatio*, V, ed. Batthyáni, 113–114, ed. Szilagi, 61, l. 198, mss.M, f. 56r.

It is possible that the error belongs to the scribe due to the gender of *praedicatio*. The scribe wrote *admittenda* indeed, but the meaning was clear to who wrote the words *sol comparator praedicatoribus* in a 14th century hand.



As a consequence, *praedicatio* remains a supplementary predicative element for *admittendus*, and a correct translation could be:

Therefore, the sun must be admitted tropologically to be the apostolic predication, as we showed elsewhere, because it shines in a more special way over the entire world, it is eminent, and transcends everything by itself, because the entire world was illuminated through it. Indeed, without the sun the entire world would remain blind. So, if the apostles' predication hadn't spread its ray over the world, it would have persevered in ignorance's blindness.

Such a textual emendation is not marginal, but refers to Gerard's main theory of hermeneutics, which is founded on induction: observing evident characteristics of some objects that are available to experience provides the analogy with different concepts of Scripture, so the plurality of interpretations comes from the possibility to recognise an identical and noticeable feature in experience, in many passages that are seemingly unconnected inside the sacred text.

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The third example we chose from book 6 discusses the passage from the book of Judges, 6, 37-38 about Gideon's divination: he asks God about his political destiny as a ruler of the Jews by laying a sheep's wool on the ground during the night and interpreting the divine answer according to the dew that may or may not form between the wool and the ground. After a long interpretation of this passage through his usual inductive method of enumerating the natural and evident traits of the objects, Gerard detects a piling-up of meanings that could be contradictory, because identical signifiers lead to contrary signified things, or vice versa, contrary signifiers lead to identical signified things. There hermeneutic remarks are very frequent throughout Gerard' *Deliberation...* and could be interpreted to assume the author's meditation on the limits of hermeneutics applicable to Scripture. Such a

meditation could be illustrated by the next phrase, but only if our minimal emendation is admitted:

*Nimirum devenimus ad aram Gedeonis antea inspicientes sacramentum velleris et roris atque ex confluentibus infinita nimisque typorum nubibus involuta ultra virium magnitudine in omnia transcendentis, licet mediocres ingenio, licet imperiti sermone et scientia non magni*¹⁹.

The sentence contains a main clause (*nimirum...transcendentis*) and two final concessions (both introduced by *licet*) whose value – rhetorical or in itself – might depend on the meaning of the main sentence. These concessions are announced by the words *ultra virium magnitudine*. The verb expresses a transition (we call it T1) with a concise arriving point (*devenimus ad...*). This transition can be understood as a hermeneutic exercise to identify signifiers for the elements in the aforementioned passage. But the starting point for T1 is indicated by two plural nominative participles accorded with the assumed subject that refers to the author: *inspicientes* and *transcendentis*, linked by *atque*. Therefore, T1 must be understood in two ways: as a transition from searching the sacrament of the wool and dew (*sacramentum velleris et roris*), but also a transition from the event signified by the participle *transcendentis*. It is here that the first complication arises, because this last participle also expresses a new transition (T2). T2's arriving point is clear: *ad omnia* (even though the absence of its regent makes it unclear as to the 'all' the author refers to), while the starting point should be given in the expression *ex confluentibus*. But this last participle should have a regent and a subordinate (an accusative of direction for the verb *confluere*) to clarify it. This regent does not exist, and everything we can use is the words: *infinita nimisque typorum nubibus involuta*. It is clear that the enclitic conjunction *-que* unites the words *nimis* – *involuta* (rightfully shrouded by the clouds of the symbols). There is one word left, *infinita*, which must now subordinate to and clarify *ex confluentibus*, but, at the same time, it must be linked with *involuta*, due to the enclitic *-que*. The scribe and both editors write this word accordingly:

exconfluentibus infinita

Our suggestion, discrete as to the emendation, is to split the word into *in finita*. Thus, the expression *ex confluentibus* will receive a subordinate (those that are gathered in a finite <number of meanings>), and the plural neutral noun *finita* explains *omnia* by offering a sufficient reason why *omnia* doesn't have a regent. If our suggestion is acceptable, then we might understand what T2 refers to: a

¹⁹ Gerard, *Deliberatio*, VII, ed. Batthyáni, 226, ed. Szilagi, 132, l. 954, mss.M, f. 123r.

transition from a finite number of meanings given to the same text to an infinite number of possible meanings, and thus to the total hermeneutics of the biblical text. Therefore, based on this emendation, we can understand the relation between T1 and T2. The first one determined an inductive procedure: the *inspectio* of the sacred meanings of two natural objects (the wool and the dew) led to the analysis of the meanings of Gideon's altar. The second one determined a formal aspect of the same procedure: from a finite number of meanings given to the wool and dew, these meanings became a whole (*ad omnia*), confusing the author and implicitly provoking a question on the limits of this plural hermeneutics of the sacred text.

The source for the scribe's error can be easily indicated: the symmetry between the ablatives *confluentibus* and *nubibus* (which must not be correlated) and the formal symmetry between *infinita* and *involuta*, which must not be read in a similar way.

In light of this emendation, Gerard's phrase determines an arrival point for his hermeneutics destined to the stupefaction due to the multiple (maybe even infinite, if we read *omnia* as an antonym for *finita*) meanings that are now attributed to the same passage. If so, the two concessions at the end of the phrase cease to be a simple proof of humility from the author and they receive an evident rhetorical connotation, since Gerard takes the responsibility for such an extensive hermeneutics. A possible translation of the passage would be:

We have arrived without doubt at Gideon's altar after searching the sacrament of the wool and dew, and after we passed from those that are gathered in a finite number <of meanings> and <are> rightfully shrouded by the clouds of the symbols, to all <meanings>, beyond the measure of <our> powers, even though our talent is mediocre, even though we are not skilled in discourse and don't possess a great science.

These three fragments could suggest the fact that we are dealing with one of the 14th century authors that profoundly interrogate the soteriological value of the exercise that has an object in the hermeneutics of the sacred text (in the first example), and is concerned with the method (in the second example), and especially with the limits (in the last example) attributed to this exercise.