APOPHASIS AND PSEUDONYMITY IN DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE

"NO LONGER I"

Charles M. Stang

OXFORD EARLY CHRISTIAN STUDIES

General Editors
Gillian Clark   Andrew Louth

THE OXFORD EARLY CHRISTIAN STUDIES series includes scholarly volumes on the thought and history of the early Christian centuries. Covering a wide range of Greek, Latin, and Oriental sources, the books are of interest to theologians, ancient historians, and specialists in the classical and Jewish worlds.

Apophasis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite

"No Longer I"

CHARLES M. STANG

OXFORD

UNIVERSITY PRESS

Acknowledgments

It was well over ten years ago that I was first introduced to Pseudo-Dionysius in a course at the University of Chicago on negative theology, taught by David Tracy and Jean-Luc Marion. I remember that we were asked to buy several books for that course, but that we really only read and reread the *Corpus Dionysiacum* for the entire quarter. What ten weeks those were—they set the course for the next ten years of my life, and may do so for another ten. I returned to Dionysius when I returned to Harvard, this time for the ThD at Harvard Divinity School. I owe a great deal both to Nicholas Constas, who in my first semester convened a reading group to wrestle with the peculiar Greek prose of the *Divine Names*, and to the other two participants in that reading group, Mary Anderson and John Manoussakis.

Above all others, however, I must thank my advisor, Sarah Coakley, who had sufficient confidence in me and in this project to let me pursue it wherever it led. The other members of my committee were equally supportive and indispensable: Amy Hollywood, Kevin Madigan, and Paul Rorem. Amy Hollywood deserves special thanks—would that everyone had as close, critical, and generous a reader as I have had in her. As does Paul Rorem, who over the years has given generously of his time, expertise, and encouragement. Two other professors here at Harvard also deserve acknowledgement: John Duffy, with whom I had the privilege to read Dionysius in Greek, and Luis Girón Negrón, for whom I wrote my very first paper on Dionysius (and Aechylus' *Eumenides*).

Since I joined the faculty of Harvard Divinity School in 2008, I have had the opportunity to teach Dionysius in a number of courses, including two seminars devoted entirely to the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. I wish to thank my students in these courses for pushing me to refine and revise my readings of the *CD*. I am especially grateful to my three research assistants, who have been invaluable to me at points in this process: Elizabeth (Liza) Anderson, Zachary Guiliano, and J. Gregory Given—Greg deserving special commendation for overseeing my shift from the Luibheid/Rorem to the Parker translation of the *CD*. I am also grateful both to the editors of this series, Gillian Clark and

Andrew Louth, and to the external reviewer for their collective, constructive criticism, which has made this book much better than it otherwise would be.

Along the way, a number of other, dear friends and colleagues have read or discussed parts or the whole of this manuscript, and I wish to thank some of them here: Ryan Coyne, Ben Dunning, Brett Grainger, Sarah Hammerschlag, Tamsin Jones, Mark Jordan, and Rachel Smith. But my most heartfelt thanks are reserved for my wife, Sarabinh, who also happens to be my best friend and my very best editor and conversation partner. Her love and support, buttressed by that of our two daughters Vivian and Saskia, have made this—and all things—possible and worthwhile.

Table of Contents

This page intentionally left blank

Introduction

In early sixth-century Syria there began to circulate a collection of writings allegedly authored by Dionysius the Areopagite, the Athenian judge who, according to Acts 17, converted to Christianity after hearing Paul's speech to the court of the Areopagus. At the climax of the longest of the four treatises, the *Divine Names*, the author says of the apostle: "Paul the Great, when possessed by the Divine Love, and participating in its ecstatic power, says with inspired lips, 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.' As a true lover, and beside himself, as he says, to Almighty God, and not living the life of himself, but the life of the Beloved, as a life excessively esteemed."[1] For ancient readers, for whom these were the authentic words of a first-century Christian convert, Dionysius the Areopagite reveals his teacher Paul to be the exemplary lover of God, whose fervent *erōs* carries him outside himself in ecstasy, and therefore renders him split, doubled, and so open to the indwelling of Christ, as the apostle himself confesses in Gal 2:20. For modern readers, who know that these are

---

[1] *DN* 4.13 712A; *CD* I 159.4–8. Unless otherwise noted, all citations in English are from John Parker's translation, *The Complete Works of Dionysius the Areopagite*. I have chosen Parker's translation because it follows the Greek much more closely than the more recent, and now standard, English translation by Colm Luibheid and Paul Rorem. But I have reserved the right to make slight changes in Parker's translations, mostly having to do with the peculiarities of his late nineteenth-century prose and vocabulary choices. All citations in Greek are from the standard critical edition: Beate Regina Suchla, *Corpus Dionysiacum* I [*De divinis nominibus*]; Günter Heil and Adolf Martin Ritter, *Corpus Dionysiacum* II [*De coelesti hierarchia*, *de ecclesiastica hierarchia*, *de mystica theologia*, *epistulae*]. In what follows, I refer to the entire *Corpus Dionysiacum* as the *CD* and its parts with the followed abbreviations: *DN* = *Divine Names*, *CH* = *Celestial Hierarchy*, *EH* = *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, *MT* = *Mystical Theology*, and *Ep.* = Letters.

the words not of a first-century disciple of Paul but of a sixth-century author writing under the name of the Areopagite, this *Pseudo-*Dionysius is merely clothing his own theological program in apostolic garb.

This book aims to rebut this predominant modern reading by demonstrating that the key to understanding the *Corpus Dionysiacum* [hereafter *CD*] lies in investigating the pseudonym and the corresponding influence of Paul. Why would an early sixth-century author choose to write under the name of a disciple of Paul, and *this* disciple in particular, who was converted from pagan philosophy by the apostle's famous invocation of the "unknown God" (*agnōstos theos*) in Acts 17:23? The *CD* forwards an elaborate hierarchical account of the universe, a complementary regimen of austere negative theology, and a description of deifying union with the "God beyond being" as "unknowing" (*agnōsia*)—what does all *this* have to do with the apostle Paul? The common answer is "very little indeed." Modern scholars have by and large assumed that the pseudonym was a convenient and mercenary means of securing a wider readership and avoiding persecution in an age of anxious orthodoxies and that the pseudonymous framing could be removed without significant interpretive cost. This is certainly the approach taken by the first wave of Dionysian scholars who, in the wake of the revelation in the late nineteenth century that the *CD* could not be the authentic writings of the first-century Dionysius the Areopagite, were eager to document the nature and extent of the author's obvious debt to late Neoplatonism, especially the fifth-century philosopher Proclus.[2] Unfortunately, the second wave of Dionysian scholars, who in reaction to the first were understandably eager to situate the *CD* firmly in the context of late antique Eastern Christianity, have been—with some notable exceptions—equally comfortable with passing over the significance of the pseudonym.

---

[2] The modern question of the "authenticity" of this corpus takes as its point of departure the work of Hugo Koch and Josef Stiglmayr, who in 1895 independently published parallel conclusions: that the *CD* is considerably indebted to Proclus and therefore cannot be the genuine writings of a first-century Athenian judge, however learned. Hugo Koch, "Proklos als Quelle des Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita in der Lehre vom Bösen"; Josef Stiglmayr, "Der Neuplatoniker Proklos als Vorlage des sog. Dionysius Areopagita in der Lehre von Übel".

Over the course of this book, I will demonstrate how Paul in fact animates the entire corpus, that the influence of Paul illuminates such central themes of the *CD* as hierarchy, theurgy, deification, Christology, affirmation and negation, dissimilar similarities, and unknowing. Most importantly, I contend, Paul serves as a fulcrum for the expression of a new theological anthropology, what I am calling (following Bernard McGinn and Denys Turner) the "apophatic anthropology" of Dionysius. Dionysius' entire mystical theology narrates the self's efforts to unite with the "God beyond being" as a perpetual process of affirming (*kataphasis*) and negating (*apophasis*) the divine names, on the conviction that only by contemplating and then "clearing away" (*aphairesis*) all of our concepts and categories can we clear a space for the divine to descend free of idolatrous accretions. What Paul provides Dionysius is the insistence that this ascent to "the unknown God" delivers a self that is, like the divine to which it aspires, cleared away of its own names, unsaid, rendered unknown to itself—in other words, *no longer I*. Thus apophatic theology assumes an apophatic anthropology, and the way of negation becomes a sort of asceticism, an exercise of freeing the self as much as God from the concepts and categories that prevent its deification. Dionysius figures Paul as the premier apostolic witness to this apophatic anthropology, as the ecstatic lover of the divine who confesses to the rupture of his self and the indwelling of the divine in Gal 2:20: "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."

Building on this notion of apophatic anthropology, I offer an explanation for why this sixth-century author chose to write under an apostolic pseudonym. He does not merely sign the name of Dionysius the Areopagite to his writings. He goes much further and literally assumes the identity of this first-century figure. He writes not treatises but letters addressed to other apostles and disciples; he imagines himself into this apostolic community, to the point that he is present at the Dormition of Mary; he counsels John sequestered on Patmos. And yet all the while the author is also somehow in the sixth century: quoting—sometimes at great length—from Proclus' works; treading dangerously close to contemporary Christological controversies; describing the ceremonials of Byzantine churches rather than the home churches of the New Testament. The author seems to be writing as *both* a sixth-century Syrian *and* a first-century Athenian. The fact that his own pseudonymous writing renders him two-in-one suggests that it is much more than a convenient literary conceit, and

that the pseudonymous writing in fact aligns with the mystical anthropology. I argue that the very practice of pseudonymous writing itself serves as an ecstatic devotional exercise whereby the writer becomes split in two and thereby open to the indwelling of the divine. Pseudonymity is thus integral and internal to the aims of the wider mystical enterprise. In short, Dionysius both offers an account of what it is to be properly human in relation to God—namely, as unknown to ourselves as God is—and, *in the very telling*, performs an exercise aiming to render his own self so unknown. The result of such *agnōsia*, however, is no mere "agnosticism" but rather the indwelling of the unknown God (*agnōstos theos*) as Christ, on the model of Paul in Gal 2:20, wherewith the aspirant simultaneously "unknows" God and self. Thus this book aims to question the distinction between "theory" and "practice" by demonstrating that negative theology—often figured as a speculative and rarefied theory regarding the transcendence of God—is in fact best understood as a kind of asceticism, a devotional practice aiming for the total transformation of the Christian subject.

I want to insist, however, that this approach to the *CD* does not preclude or impugn the two dominant trends in Dionysian scholarship; in fact it depends on and hopefully furthers both. As I have said, the first trend has been to assess the nature and extent of the author's debt to late Neoplatonism, often implying (if not stating outright) that the author was only nominally Christian. The second trend, spearheaded by Orthodox theologians, has been to weave the *CD* into the rich tapestry of late antique Eastern Christianity and to downplay the Neoplatonic influence. Both trends continue to this day. At their worst, both trends have retreated into antithetical and mutually exclusive readings of the true identity of the author of the *CD*, as *either* a Christian *or* a Neoplatonist. From this framing of the question of the author's singular identity there followed equally unsatisfactory debates about particular themes in the *CD*, whether this or that element of the whole was *really* Christian or *really* Neoplatonic. Is "hierarchy"—a term Dionysius coins to describe the structure of the created order—a pagan import or his peculiar *translatio* of a Christian notion? Does the *CD* possess a robust Christology or is Christ simply "draperies" adorning an otherwise pagan vision? What of his enthusiasm for "theurgy" or "god-work," a term associated with pagan wonderworkers who dare to use magical means to compel the gods? Perhaps most acutely, whence comes this author's

championing of "negative" or "apophatic" theology in the aim of union with the God "beyond being"? Is this a wholesale import of late Neoplatonism's efforts to solicit union with the ineffable One or a properly Christian strategy of resisting idolatry, of safeguarding the "unknown God" from our domesticating efforts to make that God known? These and other questions have to some degree been held captive by the first framing of the inquiry, whereby one starts with the assumption that the author is one or the other, a Christian or a Neoplatonist.

Thankfully, the renaissance in Dionysian scholarship in the past thirty years—inaugurated by the work of Alexander Golitzin, Andrew Louth, and Paul Rorem—has set readers on a more constructive course than the former binary of either/or. On the one hand, scholars who today explore the relationship between the *CD* and late Neoplatonism are no longer keen, as many of their predecessors were, to fault the author of the *CD* for his obvious debt to "pagan" philosophy.[3] Instead, they are more interested in charting the way in which the author creatively innovates on this philosophical inheritance. On the other hand, scholars who today focus on how the *CD* fits into the landscape of late antique Eastern Christianity are no longer as prone to downplay the influence of Neoplatonism, on the understanding that "pagan" philosophy was always being "baptized" for Christian use.[4] In short, a consensus has emerged that the rhetorically and often doctrinally charged labels of "Christian" *vs.* "Neoplatonist" (or more widely, "pagan") present a false dichotomy, unfaithful to the historical record, and are motivated instead by *contemporary* theological and identity concerns that ultimately obscure our appreciation of the late antique religious landscape.

But the significance of the pseudonym and Paul by no means displaces the influence of late Neoplatonism or of late antique Eastern Christianity—both of which are, to my mind, undeniable. The pseudonym and Paul, I argue, constitute the best interpretive lens for understanding the *CD* not because they push these others influences to the margins, but rather because they help us precisely to organize, appreciate, and bring into better focus these influences. In other

---

[3] Schäfer, *The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite* (2006); Perl, *Theophany* (2007); Klitenic Wear and Dillon, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition* (2007).
[4] Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (1989); Golitzin, *Et introibo ad altare dei* (1994).

words, they allow us to understand better how the author of the *CD* is *both* a Christian *and* a Neoplatonist and that the questions we put to the *CD* need not be governed by this disjunction. Specifically, I argue, attention to the pseudonym and Paul allows us to made headway on the stalled questions mentioned above: hierarchy, Christology, theurgy, *apophasis*, and others. One contribution of this book, then, is to demonstrate how this shift in perspective can allow us to make headway on some central but contested questions in the scholarship on Dionysius.

I also aim to show that this new understanding of the Dionysian corpus raises important questions that go beyond scholarly debates about how best to understand the *CD*, questions that are relevant for the study of Christian mysticism and of religion more generally. First, because for Dionysius a mystical theology assumes a mystical anthropology, it becomes clear that "mysticism" is as much, or more, about exercises for the transformation of the self as it is a description of the mystery of the divine. Thus "mysticism" becomes an important source for understanding theological anthropology and its implementation, that is, normative accounts of human subjectivity and the development of exercises meant to realize these new modes of selfhood. Second, my interpretation of the significance of the pseudonym suggests that we understand the pseudonymous enterprise as an ecstatic spiritual exercise. This opens up the question of whether and how writing serves as a spiritual exercise not only in the case of Dionysius, but also for Christian mysticism and religion more widely.[5]

This book falls into two parts. In the first part, Chapters One and Two, I survey the late antique milieu from which the *CD* emerges and the modern scholarship thereon. My aim in these two chapters is to widen the horizon of our understanding of the sense and significance of the pseudonym and the influence of Paul. In Chapter One I chart the reception of the *CD* in the sixth century, focusing on whether and how early readers understood its authorship. From the sixth century I then jump to the late nineteenth, where modern scholarship on the *CD* begins in earnest with the exposure of the pseudonymous quality of the corpus. I survey the subsequent scholarship on the *CD*, again with an eye to discerning whether and how modern readers understood the sense and significance of the pseudonym and the

---

[5] See Stang, "Scriptio," in Hollywood and Beckman eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*.

influence of Paul. From this survey I highlight three promising leads: Alexander Golitzin, Andrew Louth (along with Christian Schäfer), and Hans Urs von Balthasar.

In Chapter Two, I widen the inquiry and consider the *CD* against three relevant late antique historical backdrops: pseudepigrapha, notions of writing as a devotional practice, and convictions about the porous or collapsible nature of time. From among the vast scholarship on ancient and late ancient pseudepigrapha, I consider the "religious" or "psychological" approach to pseudonymous writing, according to which pseudonymous authors believe that the distance between past and present can be collapsed such that, through their writing, the ancient authorities come to inhabit them and speak in their stead. To buttress this approach, I marshal two bodies of evidence. First, building on the consensus of a generation of scholars, I argue that late antique Christians understand time to be porous or collapsible, and that the apostolic and sub-apostolic past can intrude on the present. Second, again relying on a more recent but mounting body of scholarship, I argue that late antique authors understand writing as a practice that could effect this collapse of time, could summon the past into the present. And in order to deepen an understanding of these peculiar notions of time and writing, I look closely at two case studies: the anonymous *Life and Miracles of Thekla* and John Chrysostom's homilies on Paul.

The first part serves as the foundation for the second (Chapters Three through Five), in which I demonstrate how the figure and writings of Paul animate the whole corpus. In Chapter Three, I examine how Paul animates the Dionysian hierarchies. That this chapter concerns the hierarchies should not be taken to mean that I drive a wedge between the "theology" (as found in *DN* and *MT*) and the "economy" (as found in *CH* and *EH*) of the *CD*, as has often been done in order to devalue the hierarchies.[6] Following more recent scholarship, I insist on the coherence of the *CD*:[7] that the affirmation

---

[6] See Roques, *L'Univers dionysien*. Roques considers the "theology" (*DN* and *MT*) and the "economy" (*CH* and *EH*) in isolation and thereby compromises the coherence of the *CD*. In *Le Mystère de Dieu*, Vanneste divides the *CD* even more sharply than Roques; see also idem, "Is the Mysticism of Ps.-Dionysius genuine?" 286–306. For a brief survey of this tendency to divide the *CD*, see Golitzin, *Et introibo ad altare dei*, 30–1.

[7] Louth, Rorem, and Golitzin all agree that the *DN* and *MT* must be read against the backdrop of the hierarchies (*CH* and *EH*) and that the *CD* is a coherent whole.

and negation of the divine names (*DN*) in the service of "unknowing" the "God beyond being" (*MT*) must be understood within the sacramental life of the church (*EH*), which in turn is a reflection of the celestial orders (*CH*). In this chapter, I address several of the stalled questions in the scholarship on the *CD*, questions to which the influence of Paul, I argue, offers a fresh perspective. Specifically, I suggest that Dionysius' own definition of hierarchy derives from Paul's understanding of the "body of Christ" as a divinely ordained ecclesial order. I show how Dionysius' Christology, so often found wanting, derives from Paul's experience of the luminous Christ on the road to Damascus. And I argue that Dionysius' appeals to Iamblichean "theurgy"—understood as "cooperation" (*sunergeia*) with the work of God that deifies the "co-worker of God" (*sunergos theou*)—are also consistent with Pauline phrases.

Paul is just as relevant for Dionysius' understanding of how we solicit unknown with the unknown God through the perpetual affirmation (*kataphasis*) and negation (*apophasis*) of the divine names. In Chapter Four, I trace Dionysius' appeals to Paul as he heightens the tension between the immanence and transcendence of God in the opening chapters of the *Divine Names*. I argue that his understanding of "unknowing" (*agnōsia*), which marks our union with the unknown God, derives from a creative reading of Paul's famous line from Acts 17, "What therefore you worship as unknown [*agnoountes*], this I proclaim to you." This line from Paul's speech to the Areopagus then prompts a close reading of that entire speech, with an eye to understanding how it serves as a template for Dionysius' understanding of the relationship between pagan wisdom and Christian revelation.

Finally, in Chapter Five, I chart the "apophatic anthropology" of the *CD*, the notion that the self who suffers union with the unknown God must also become unknown. Paul is Dionysius' preeminent witness to this "apophasis of the self." For Dionysius, Paul loves God with such a fervent *erōs* that he comes to stand outside himself, in ecstasy, and thereby opens himself to the indwelling of Christ, and so appears to his sober peers as a lovesick madman. This ecstatic madness, wherein Christ "lives in" Paul, is equivalent to the descent of "unknowing," the condition that befalls us as we suffer union with the divine. Dionysius draws on the Platonic and Philonic taxonomies of madness and ecstasy, but, I argue, complements and corrects this philosophical inheritance by appeal to Paul. Finally, I consider a

challenge to apophatic anthropology, namely Dionysius' lone but important refusal of ecstasy in *DN* 11. In accounting for this refusal, I distinguish between the denial (*arnēsis*) of the self, which Dionysius impugns, and the *apophasis* of the self, which he commends. I conclude the chapter by returning to the definition of hierarchy with which Chapter Three begins and arguing that the second element of that definition—hierarchy as a "state of understanding" (*epistēmē*)—must be understood as a play on words, that through hierarchy we can enjoy an ecstatic *epistēmē*, that is, an *under*-standing predicated precisely on standing-*outside* ourselves.

If Chapters Three through Five address how Paul animates the entire corpus, in the Conclusion I return to the question of the sense and significance of the pseudonym. Gathering threads from the previous chapters, I settle on three interpretations of the pseudonym, each leading to and buttressing the next. First, the pseudonym "Dionysius the Areopagite" signals that the author of the *CD* is attempting, just as Paul is in his speech to the Areopagus, some rapprochement between pagan wisdom and Christian revelation. By writing under the name of this Athenian judge, the author is looking to Paul, and specifically that speech, to provide a template for absorbing and subordinating the riches of pagan wisdom to the revelation of the unknown God in Christ. Second, the pseudonymous writing of the *CD*—the author's journey back in time to the apostolic age—is at root no different from the widespread late antique practice of summoning the apostles into the present age. Thus I argue that the pseudonymous author of the *CD*, like the anonymous author of the *Life and Miracles of Thekla* and John Chrysostom in his homilies on Paul, aims to collapse historical time so as to become a *present* disciple to an apostle, here Paul. Writing becomes the means of achieving intimacy with the apostle and, by extension, with Christ, who "lives in" the apostle (Gal 2:20). The notion that writing might be a devotional practice leads me to my third and final interpretation of the pseudonym. I argue that the practice of pseudonymous writing aims to effect the apophasis of the self, that is, it aims to negate the self by splitting it open so that it might be, as Dionysius says of Moses, "neither [it]self nor other."[8] By helping to breach the integrity of

---

[8] *MT* 1.3 1001A; *CD* II 144.13.

the singular self—the "I"—writing opens the self to the indwelling of Christ. In this way, "form" (pseudonymous writing) and "content" (mystical theology), "theory" (theology), and "practice" (asceticism) are wed, united in their efforts to divide the self, integrated so as to disintegrate the known self that would suffer union with the unknown God.

1

Ancient and Modern Readers of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*

Pseudonymity and Paul

This chapter selectively charts the reception of the *CD* from its first appearance in the sixth century to modern scholarship in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This survey focuses on the manner in which readers—ancient and modern, devotional and scholarly—have (or indeed have not) attended to questions of the authentic authorship of the *CD*, the relationship of its author and his theological enterprise to the life and writings of Paul, and the significance both of pseudonymity in general and of the particular pseudonym Dionysius the Areopagite. My investigation concentrates on the first and last centuries of the vast and winding history of the reception of the *CD* because it is in these two distant periods—the sixth and the twentieth centuries—that these were especially burning questions. In the sixth century, the abrupt appearance of this collection of rarefied theological reflection provoked ancient readers both to suspect and to defend its authenticity as a sub-apostolic document. By the end of the sixth century, the advocates of the *CD* had prevailed over the skeptics, and its place among the tradition was relatively secure—apart from some doubts voiced in the Reformation and Renaissance[1]—until well into the modern period. It would of course be interesting to trace the reception *continuously* from the sixth through the twentieth centuries. But given that the occasional doubts did not significantly challenge the place of the *CD*, I feel justified in the making the great leap from the late antique to the modern

---

[1] See Froehlich, "Pseudo-Dionysius and the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century," in Rorem and Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 33–46.

reception. The modern reception can be said to begin at the very end of the nineteenth century, when the authenticity of the *CD* was again put on trial, this time by two German scholars, Hugo Koch and Josef Stiglmayr, who were finally able to demonstrate that the *CD* was not an authentic first-century document, but a pseudonymous late fifth- or early sixth-century document. Their demonstration inaugurated modern scholarship on the *CD*, which has largely passed over the significance of the pseudonym and the influence of Paul in favor of assessing the nature and extent of the *CD*'s debt to late Neoplatonism, offering far-flung hypotheses as to the true identity of the elusive author, or firmly situating the *CD* in late antique Eastern Christianity. I contend, however, that the pseudonym, Dionysius the Areopagite, and the corresponding influence of Paul is in fact the single most important interpretive lens for understanding the aims and purposes of the *CD* and its author. In what follows, then, I survey two centuries of heated readings of the *CD* precisely in order to discover what sorts of questions regarding pseudonymity and Paul are being asked and, more important, what sorts are not. The first section (I) covers the ancient reception of the *CD*, including: (a) its first citations by Severus of Antioch; (b) its use in the Christological debates of the sixth century; (c) its first scholiast, the Chalcedonian bishop John of Scythopolis; (d) its parallel early reception in the Syriac tradition. The second section (II) leaps forward to the end of the nineteenth century and surveys the history of modern scholarship on Dionysius, giving special attention to how scholars have gauged the relevance of the pseudonym and the influence of Paul to the aims and purposes of the *CD* at large. The third and final section (III) considers three promising leads from four scholars, Alexander Golitzin, Andrew Louth, Christian Schäfer, and Hans Urs von Balthasar, who have attempted to explain the significance of the pseudonym and the relevance of Paul. In subsequent chapters, I will develop some of these leads, especially those of Schäfer and von Balthasar, as I make my own case as to why we must read the *CD* through the lens of the pseudonym and against the backdrop of Paul.

I. THE EARLY RECEPTION

Evidence for the first appearance and the early reception of the *CD* is scant. What evidence we do have, however, suggests that doubts

about the authenticity of the *CD* were raised from the very beginning. By tracing the citations of the *CD* in the sixth century, we can begin to discern how advocates and skeptics handled questions regarding the authenticity of the *CD* and its purported author and the relationship of both to the apostle Paul.

I.A. Severus of Antioch

The date of composition of the *CD* is impossible to pinpoint. A search for the *terminus post quem* has yielded uneven results.[2] The influence of Proclus (d.485), *diadochos* of the Academy in Athens, is certain and vast, putting the composition of the *CD* not before the late fifth century. As for the *terminus ante quem*, it is a Monophysite, Severus of Antioch (d.538), who first cites the *CD*: twice in his polemical works against his errant, fellow Monophysite, Julian of Halicarnassus, and once in his third letter to John the Hegumen.[3] These particular works of Severus, however, are notoriously difficult to date: the first two are dated after 518 but before 528; the third is dated only sometime before 528. Thus there are forty odd years in the late fifth and early sixth centuries in which the *CD* may have been composed. Paul Rorem and John Lamoreaux are inclined to push the composition well into the sixth century, closer to the date of its first citation by Severus, on the assumption that its appearance would not likely have gone unnoticed.[4] Of course the *CD* could have been composed considerably earlier than it was circulated, but this also seems unlikely.

---

[2] Although some have attributed the vague Christological terminology of the *CD* to the spirit of Zeno's *Henoticon* (482), such reluctance to use contemporary Christological language could simply be an effort to "preserve an overall apostolic ambience" (Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 9–10). Furthermore, the fact that the author seems twice to allude to the recitation of the Creed in the liturgy (*EH* 3.2 and 3.3.7) has led some scholars to specify the *terminus post quem* of 476, the year in which Peter the Fuller first mandated the inclusion of the Creed in the liturgy. This has been challenged by Capelle, "L'Introduction du symbole à la messe," 1003–7, and idem, "Alcuin et l'histoire du symbole de la messe," 258–9. Cited in Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 9n2–5.

[3] Rorem and Lamoureaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 11–15. Severus, *Contra additiones Juliani* 41, 154–9 (t), 130–5 (v); Severus, *Adversus apologiam Juliani* 25, 304–5 (t), 267 (v); Severus' *Third Epistle to John the Hegumen* is only partially preserved in the florilegium, *Doctrina patrum de incarnatione Verbi* 41.24–5, 309.15–310.12.

[4] Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 10–11.

Mention of circulation raises the question—to which we have to date no adequate answer—of exactly *how* the *CD* was "discovered" and introduced to readers in the late fifth or, more likely, early sixth century, in such a way that writers began to cite it as an authentic sub-apostolic document. At this point, we may only speculate as to how such a remarkable collection of texts was launched into circulation.

In the first two citations, Severus mentions *DN* 2.9 in support of the claim that the flesh of the Incarnate Word was formed from the blood of the virgin mother.[5] In the third citation, Severus argues that the Dionysian phrase "theandric energy"[6] is fully consonant with the traditional Cyrillian formula, "one incarnate nature of God the Word." These citations have led many scholars to conclude that the *CD* was first put to use by—and indeed may have emerged from—a Monophysite milieu. According to this construal, the *CD* had subsequently to be rescued from its first advocates and rendered sufficiently orthodox—that is to say, Chalcedonian. Closer attention to Severus' texts, however, reveals that his interpretations of the *CD* are clearly rebutting *prior*, presumably dyophysite, interpretations.[7] Thus we join the reception of the *CD in media res*: the conversation is already well under way; or, to choose a more apt image for the controversies of the sixth century, we witness a battle in which Severus' is not the first volley.

I.B. The "Collatio cum Severianis" and beyond

The next volley appears in the context of a sixth-century Christological council. Since the Definition of Chalcedon was established in 451, Byzantine emperors each sought to reconcile the unforeseen and increasingly bitter differences of the various Christological parties. In

---

[5] *DN* 2.9 648A; *CD* I 133.5–9: "the most conspicuous fact of all theology—the God-formation of Jesus amongst us—is both unutterable by every expression and unknown to every mind, even to the very foremost of the most reverend angels. The fact indeed that He took substance as man, we have received as a mystery, but we do not know in what manner, from virginal bloods, by a different law, beyond nature, He was formed [ἀγνοοῦμεν δέ, ὅπως ἐκ παρθενικῶν αἱμάτων ἑτέρῳ παρὰ τὴν φύσιν θεσμῷ διεπλάττετο] . . ."

[6] *Ep.* 4 1072C; *CD* II 161.9.

[7] Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 15. Cf. Joseph Lebon, "Le Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite et Sévère d'Antioche," 880–915.

532, Justinian called a meeting at Constantinople, the "Collatio cum Severianis," to address the deepening divides.[8] In advance of the meeting, the Monophysites, who felt themselves to be on the defensive, sent Justinian a letter in which they cite Dionysius, among others, in support of their stance.[9] When the Collatio proper began, the Chalcedonians named Hypatius of Ephesus as their spokesman. Hypatius targets the Monophysites' proof-texts,[10] especially their citation of Dionysius, "who from the darkness and error of heathendom attained," so the letter reads, "to the supreme light of the knowledge of God through our master Paul."[11] Hypatius begins his interrogation:

> Those testimonies which you say are of the blessed Dionysius, how can you prove that they are authentic, as you claim? For if they are in fact by him, they would not have escaped the notice of the blessed Cyril. Why do I speak of the blessed Cyril, when the blessed Athanasius, if in fact he had thought them to be by Dionysius, would have offered these same testimonies concerning the consubstantial Trinity before all others at the council of Nicaea against Arius' blasphemies of the diverse substance. But if none of the ancients made mention of them, I simply do not know how you can prove that they were written by Dionysius.[12]

---

[8] Rorem and Lamoureaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 15–18. On the Collatio in general, see Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement*, 263–8.

[9] Specifically, the letter cites *DN* 1.4. Relevant parts of this letter are preserved in the *Chronicle* of Pseudo-Zachariah of Mitylene, reprinted in Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement*, 362–6. The Monophysites cite *DN* 1.4 in support of two points: (1) that the union in Christ is a composition (*DN* 1.4 592A; *CD* I 113.9: "in an unspeakable manner the simple Jesus became composite [συνετέθη]"); (2) that the Word joined with a complete human nature (*DN* 1.4 592A; *CD* I 113.7: "[the thearchy] shared completely [ὁλικῶς] in our [things] in one of its hypostases"). The Monophysites concluded from these points that "if God the Word became incarnate by joining to himself ensouled and rational human flesh which he made his own by joining with it in composition, then of necessity one must confess a single nature of God the Word" (Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 16–17).

[10] Hypatius actually suggests that some of their proof-texts were Apollinarian forgeries. When the Monophysites offer to verify their citations against the ancient copies stored in the archives of Alexandria, Hypatius declines on the grounds that the archives in Alexandria have been in the hands of the Monophysites and so are no longer trustworthy textual witnesses. Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 17.

[11] Pseudo-Zachariah of Mitylene, *Chronicle* 9.15. Cited in Rorem and Lamoureaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 16.

[12] *Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum* 4/2: 173, 12–18. Cited in Rorem and Lamoureaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 18.

It seems as if Hypatius is "caught off-guard" by these citations, and so challenges their authenticity rather than their orthodoxy.[13] Indeed, he seems to think that on matters of Trinity, Athanasius himself would have done well to cite Dionysius if he had had his text at hand. Rather surprisingly, Hypatius offers the first and only surviving challenge to the authenticity of the *CD* in the sixth century. Other skeptics abound, no doubt: we can infer their existence from the fact that subsequent advocates of the *CD* address their suspicions.

Fortunately for the survival of the *CD*, however, the majority of Chalcedonians do not share Hypatius' suspicions. Within only a few years, both Monophysites *and* Chalcedonians are citing the *CD* in support of their positions—indeed "[r]epresentatives of just about every major Christological party in the early sixth century at some point appealed to the authority of Dionysius."[14] These citations do not, however, reflect a robust or nuanced encounter with the *CD*. Rather, writers for whom Christological concerns are paramount raid the *CD*—specifically *DN* 1.4 and the Fourth Letter—for polemical purposes.[15] However, a narrow focus on the sixth-century citations of the *CD* might give the false impression that this rather short body of texts "washed over the theological landscape of eastern Christianity and radically changed the way theology was being done."[16] As Rorem and Lamoreaux insist: "Far from it! Apart from John [of Scythopolis'] own work, one must search far and wide for any evidence that the works of Dionysius were being read at all."[17] Although often cited, the *CD* therefore seems not to have played a substantial role in the Christological controversies of the sixth century.

I.C. John of Scythopolis

Within ten or twenty years of its first citation, the *CD* was to receive its first scholia. About the scholiast, John, bishop of Scythopolis, we know unfortunately very little. His episcopacy seems to have run

---

[13] Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 18.
[14] Ibid., 19.
[15] Ibid., 20.
[16] Ibid., 21.
[17] Ibid.

between 536 and *circa* 548.[18] Yet, despite the fact that his theological works are lost and sources for his life and career meager, we have recently come to learn a great deal more about John. The Greek scholia affixed to the *CD* are traditionally attributed to Maximus the Confessor: in the Migne edition they appear as *Scholia sancti Maximi in opera beati Dionysii.*[19] We have long known that this single compilation included the scholia of at least two authors: Maximus and John. Until recently scholars have been unable to distinguish the authorship of the scholia. Beate Suchla, however, has discovered a group of four Greek manuscripts of the *CD* that include only about six hundred scholia, all attributed to John.[20] This Greek manuscript tradition is corroborated by a Syriac translation of the *CD* and its scholia by Phocas bar Sergius in 708.[21] In his preface to his translation, Phocas mentions that he is able to produce a new and better translation because he has had access to the scholia of John, "an orthodox man, of good and glorious memory, by trade a *scholasticus*, who originated from the city of Scythopolis."[22] While Suchla has only produced a definitive examination of the scholia on *DN*, Rorem and Lamoreaux have extended her approach to the *CD* in general and produced a provisional identification of all those scholia authored by John: "roughly six hundred scholia (all or in part) can be assigned to John with certainty."[23] They propose a date of composition somewhere between 537 and 543, that is, in the first half of John's episcopacy.

John's prologue to his scholia falls into three parts. In the first, John rehearses the narrative from Acts 17, in which Paul delivers a speech to the court of the Areopagus and succeeds in winning over one of its

---

[18] On the questions of dating John's episcopacy and the meager evidence for his life and career, see Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 23–36.

[19] *PG* 4:13–28.

[20] Suchla, *Die sogenannten Maximus-Scholien des Corpus Dionysiacum Areopagiticum*; idem, *Die Überlieferung des Prologs des Johannes von Skythopolis zum griechischen Corpus Dionysiacum Areopagiticum*; idem, *Corpus Dionysiacum I*, 38–54.

[21] Cf. von Balthasar, "Das Scholienwerk des Johannes von Skythopolis"; English translation, "The Problem of the Scholia to Pseudo-Dionysius," in *Cosmic Liturgy*, 359–87.

[22] Cited in Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 37.

[23] Based on the *number* of scholia, John's scholia account for around 36% of the whole. But given that John's scholia tend to be longer, based on the *length* of the scholia, John's account for around 70% of the whole (roughly 160 columns of Migne's total of 225 columns). Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 38.

---

esteemed judges, Dionysius the Areopagite. John embellishes this account with some Athenian history and an imaginative reconstruction of events. As for the importance of Paul for this new convert, John insists not only that "Dionysius was perfected in all the doctrines of salvation by the most excellent Paul," but also that he "was seated by the Christ-bearing Paul as bishop of the faithful in Athens, as is recorded in the seventh book of the *Apostolic Constitutions*."[24] In the second part of the prologue, John defends Dionysius' orthodoxy. Although there are "some [who] dare to abuse the divine Dionysius with charges of heresy," John will insist, here and throughout the scholia, that with respect to matters of essential doctrine—the Trinity, the Incarnation, resurrection, and the final judgment—"there is as much distinction between his teachings and those idiocies as there is between true light and darkness."[25]

For our purposes, it is the third part of the prologue that is most interesting, for here John is keen to defend the authenticity of the corpus. John begins his defense by citing those critics who wonder— much as Hypatius did in the "Collatio"—why the works of this Dionysius were never mentioned by either Eusebius or Origen. John insists that even these two great bibliophiles understood that their record of early Christian texts was woefully incomplete. John then turns to the *CD* itself and calls these critics' attention to the fact that "most of [Dionysius'] works" are addressed "to the thrice-blessed Timothy, companion of the apostle Paul."[26] He uses the fact that Timothy was by tradition regarded as the first bishop of Ephesus to help explain why Dionysius' works seem to be responses to Timothy's prior requests: since Timothy "suffered many things {{at the hands of the foremost men of Ionian philosophy at Ephesus}}," he had of necessity to consult the educated, former pagan Dionysius "so that he might become learned in non-Christian philosophy, and thus contend still more."[27] Nor, according to John, does Timothy wish to become learned in "non-Christian philosophy" so as only to rebut

---

[24] *Prol.* 17C; Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 145.

[25] *Prol.* 20A; ibid., 146.

[26] *Prol.* 20D; ibid., 147.

[27] Ibid. Doubled curly brackets—"{{}}"—are used in the translation of the *Prologue* to note passages where the authenticity is problematic. In all the cases cited here, however, Suchla considers even the passages in brackets to be original to John. Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 147–8.

it. On the contrary, "even the god-beloved apostle Paul employed the sayings of the Greeks, {{having by chance heard these from his companions}} who were well-versed in {{Greek}} philosophy."[28] And so it is only with the help of Dionysius, with his dual degrees from Paul and Platonism, that "the bastard teachings of the Greek philosophers have been restored to the truth."[29]

John sees this connection to Paul as ultimately securing the authenticity of the *CD*: "the beneficial epistles of the god-beloved Paul show the authenticity of these writings, and most especially the faultlessness of all these teachings."[30] In other words, the views expressed in the *CD* find corroboration in the letters of Paul. This becomes a guiding interpretive principle throughout the subsequent scholia. For instance, in *CH* 6.2, Dionysius remarks that "the Word of God has designated the whole Heavenly Beings as nine, by appellations, which show their functions. These our Divine Initiator divides into three threefold Orders."[31] It is unclear, however, who this "Divine Initiator" is: Paul or Hierotheus? John insists that Dionysius must be referring to Paul and thus attributing his triadic taxonomy of the celestial orders to some private and privileged communication from the apostle, based on the latter's own ascent to the "third heaven" (2 Cor 12:2): "here I think [Dionysius] is speaking of none other than St Paul, for he alone was taken up into the 'third heaven' and initiated into these things."[32] Just a few scholia later, John explains the fact that Dionysius' angelic ordering differs from Paul's own in Rom 8:38, Col 1:16, and Eph 1:21 by insisting that "the great Dionysius thus shows that the divine apostle Paul passed these things on to the saints in secret."[33] Even when Dionysius differs from Paul, then, the difference betrays neither inauthenticity nor heresy, but rather the transmission of secret teachings. There is thus a tension in John's interpretive strategy: if the *CD* agrees with Paul's letters, it is a sign of its authenticity; but if the *CD* differs from Paul's letters, it is a sign of an esoteric teaching that abrogates the exoteric letters.

---

[28] *Prol.* 21A; Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 148.

[29] *Prol.* 17D; ibid., 146.

[30] *Prol.* 21A; ibid., 148.

[31] *CH* 6.2 200D; *CD* II 26.11–13.

[32] *SchCH* 64.4; Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 158.

[33] *SchCH* 64.10; ibid., 158–9.

Further evidence for the authenticity of the *CD* is the fact that the author "offhandedly mentions the sayings of men who were his contemporaries, and who were also mentioned in the divine Acts of the apostles."[34] John seems to accept at face value these references to first-century figures. "Although such passages are now considered to be an intentional part of the Dionysian pseudonym,"[35] Rorem and Lamoreaux tell us, John cites Dionysius' quotation from Bartholomew[36] or Justus[37] and his mention of Elymas the magician[38] as evidence for the antiquity and authenticity of the *CD*. The *CD*, however, also makes mention of two prominent early Christians: "Clement the philosopher"[39] (presumably Clement, the third bishop of Rome, not Clement of Alexandria) and Ignatius of Antioch.[40] These remarks would seem to be missteps on the part of an author keen to maintain his pseudonymous identity, for in order for the historical Dionysius to have known Clement of Rome (d. *circa* 98) or especially Ignatius of Antioch (d. *circa* 107), he would have had to have lived to a very great age indeed. John, however, passes over these difficulties in silence,[41] and focuses his attention instead on another pair of chronological discrepancies. First, Dionysius, who clearly became a Christian *after* Timothy, refers to his "fellow-elder" as "child."[42] Second, Dionysius lived long enough both to witness the eclipse that accompanied the crucifixion (*Letter 7*) and to write the evangelist John in exile on Patmos (*Letter 10*).[43] Sixty years separate these two events, and John arranges Dionysius' dates accordingly: he must have been a young man, perhaps 25 years old, when Jesus was crucified, and a very old man, perhaps even 90 years old, when John was on Patmos. Throughout the scholia, then, John's faith in the authenticity of the *CD* is so firm that he misses some potentially troubling discrepancies (i.e. Clement and Ignatius) and goes to great lengths to explain away others.

---

[34] *Prol.* 21A; Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 148.

[35] Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 101.

[36] *SchMT* 420.2; ibid., 244.

[37] *SchDN* 393.1; ibid., 240.

[38] *SchDN* 360.7; ibid., 231.

[39] *DN* 5.9 824D; *CD* I 188.11.

[40] *DN* 4.12 709B; *CD* I 157.10.

[41] *SchDN* 264.6–7, 329.1, 332.1.

[42] *SchCH* 48.7; Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 154.

[43] Ibid., 101–2.

To modern readers, the most conspicuous chronological discrepancy is the philosophical terminology of the *CD*. How could ancient readers such as John have accepted the *CD* as an authentically subapostolic first-century document when it seems so obviously infused with the language of late Neoplatonism? John himself is of two minds regarding the Greek philosophical tradition: half of his references to "the Greeks," the "ancients," or "the philosophers" are critical, but half are almost appreciative.[44] And yet he still seems reluctant to acknowledge the philosophical terminology that pervades the *CD*, and when he does, he is keen to indicate that Dionysius is using the language of the Greeks to rebut their errant views.[45] This reluctance, however, cannot be attributed to John's ignorance of Greek philosophy: throughout his scholia he evidences a thorough knowledge of Plotinian metaphysics and draws widely from the *Enneads* to handle such issues as the problem of evil.[46] And yet he never acknowledges that his scholia on the problem of evil in *DN* 4.17–33 are in fact an extended dialogue with Plotinus—why not? Probably because he is attempting to preserve the "primitive simplicity and authenticity with which he is trying to endow the works of the great Dionysius."[47] Keeping with his claim in the *Prologue* that the connection to Paul establishes the authenticity of the *CD* and the truth of its teachings, when Dionysius explains the meaning of the Pauline phrase "the foolishness of God" (1 Cor 1:25) apophatically—as the application of "negative terms to God"[48]—John rushes in to buttress this all too philosophical gloss with appropriately Pauline material on the Incarnation and the Cross.[49] In general, therefore, John handles the challenge of the philosophical idiom of the *CD* (and, by consequence,

---

[44] Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 109, 113.

[45] See, for example, *SchDN* 272.1; ibid., 208: "Since [Dionysius] said that even non-being somehow desires the good and wishes to be in it (which also you will find that he said a few pages earlier)—granted that it is being declared on the basis of Greek doctrines, for he is fighting against the Greeks especially, as well as the Manichaeans who are pre-eminently in bad doctrine—it is necessary to explain in greater detail why it is called non-being and why it is pious and necessary that there be one principle of beings."

[46] See Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 119–37.

[47] Ibid., 137.

[48] *DN* 7.1 865B; *CD* I 193.14–194.1.

[49] *SchDN* 340.5; Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 113.

his own philosophical acumen) by either failing to name it as such or steering the reader back to the Pauline backdrop that guarantees the work as authentic and true.

A quick glance at some of John's successor scholiasts is interesting by way of contrast, as they take less hedging approaches to the conspicuously philosophical character of the *CD*. The Migne edition of the *Prologue* to the *CD*—like the scholia, also attributed to Maximus— contains a later interpolation, probably authored not by Maximus, but by the Byzantine philosopher John Philoponus (d. *circa* 580):[50]

> One must know that some of the non-Christian philosophers, especially Proclus, have often employed certain concepts of the blessed Dionysius . . . It is possible to conjecture from this that the ancient philosophers in Athens usurped his works (as he recounts in the present book) and then hid them, so that they themselves might seem to be the progenitors of his divine oracles. According to the dispensation of God the present work is now made known for the refutation of their vanity and recklessness.[51]

Philoponus was well versed in the works of Proclus and so easily spotted the many similarities between the two authors' vocabularies. He inoculates Dionysius from the possible implications of this similarity by reversing the charge: not only is Dionysius the Areopagite the true author of all that is commendable in Greek philosophy, but the jealous Greeks are to blame for the disappearance of the *CD* for several centuries. This disappearance itself led, according to Philoponus, to the anxiety that "the forger of these works was an abandoned wretch . . . [who] falsely presented himself as a companion of the apostles and as corresponding with men he was never with and never corresponded with."[52] But God has arranged that the *CD*

---

[50] Suchla, *Die Überlieferung des Prologs des Johannes von Skythopolis zum griechischen Corpus Dionysiacum Areopagiticum*, 185–7.

[51] *PG* 4: 21.12–37, 21.38–24.16; cited in Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 106.

[52] Ibid. The passage goes on to read: "Some say that these writings do not belong to the saint, but someone who came later. Such as say this must likewise agree that the forger of these works was an abandoned wretch—and this, because he falsely presented himself as a companion of the apostles and as corresponding with men he was never with and never corresponded with. That he invented a prophecy for the apostle John in exile, to the effect that he will return again to Asia and will teach as was his wont—this is the act of marvel-monger and a prophet hunting madly after glory. There are yet other instances. He said that at the time of the Savior's passion he was with Apollophanes in Heliopolis, theorizing and philosophizing concerning the

make an appearance and so set the crooked record straight—"for the refutation of their vanity and recklessness."

Later, in the eighth century, the East Syrian author Joseph Hazzaya takes an entirely different approach to this same problem.[53] When Hazzaya finds an objectionable claim made in the *CD*—namely that the Seraphim first receive knowledge of future events—he attributes this misstep not to the Athenian saint himself, but to the presumptuous translator, who, in rendering the Greek into Syriac, willfully corrupted the *CD*:

> For scribes, especially those who translate from one language to another, often interpolate the divine books, and the most celebrated interpolator is that writer who translated the book of Mar Dionysius. As wicked as he was wise, he changed the passages in the divine books to his own profit. If I had the time, I myself would translate it and eliminate from it all the errors which this translator there inserted.[54]

Moreover, Hazzaya cannot help but notice the elevated, densely philosophical style of the *CD*. Like Philoponus, then, he recognizes that the style fits ill with the prevailing expectations regarding early Christian literature. While Philoponus offers a revised chronology such that Dionysius becomes the source rather than the derivative of such style, Hazzaya again attributes the elevated style to the presumptuous translator.

I.D. The early Syriac reception

The presumptuous translator whom Hazzaya impugns for importing philosophical terminology into the *CD* is Sergius Reshaina, whose

---

eclipse of the sun, in so far as it had happened at that time neither according to nature nor custom. He said that he was present with the apostles at the conveyance of the divine relics of the holy Theotokos, Mary, and that he proffers the usages of his own teacher, Hierotheus, from his funeral orations on her. He also asserts that his own letters and treatises contain the proclamations of the disciples of the apostles" (Rorem and Lamoureaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 106–7).

[53] See Brock, *Brief Outline of Syriac Literature*, 61–2.

[54] Cited in Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 108n34. Rorem and Lamoreaux have taken this text from two summaries by Scher: "Joseph Hazzaya: écrivain syriaque de VIIIe siècle," 45–63; idem, "Joseph Hazzaya: écrivain syriaque de VIIIe siècle," 300–7.

translation of the *CD* was the first into Syriac.[55] He was a physician, trained in Alexandria, and an accomplished translator from Greek: besides the *CD*, his translations include several of Galen's medical writings, and perhaps—although this is now contested—Porphyry's *Isagogē* and Aristotle's *Categories*.[56] From the *Ecclesiastical History* of Pseudo-Zachariah of Mytilene, we learn that Sergius was an avid Origenist.[57] In this regard he was *au courant*, since Origenism was enjoying a resurgence of interest in early sixth-century Syria and Palestine. Sometime before his death in Constantinople in 536, Sergius translated the whole of the *CD* and affixed to it a long introduction.[58] If Rorem and Lamoreaux are correct in dating the composition of John's scholia to sometime between 537 and 543, then Sergius' translation and introduction antedate the annotated Greek edition that John produced and thereafter circulated in the Greek-speaking world.

---

[55] Sergius' translation is the first of three translations. The second is that of Phocas bar Sargis in the late seventh century, based on John's annotated Greek text. Phocas' translation was republished in 766/7 by Cyriacus bar Shamona in Mosul, in an edition that included, along with Phocas' translation, Sergius' introduction and John's scholia. The third translation is an anonymous rendering of the *Mystical Theology*, based on the Latin text of Ambrogio Traversari. See Perczel, "The Earliest Syriac Reception of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*." See also Sherwood, "Sergius of Reshaina and the Syriac versions of the Pseudo-Denis."

[56] Brock, *A Brief Outline of Syriac Literature*, 43.

[57] See Perczel, "The Earliest Syriac Reception of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*."

[58] Sergius' translation exists in a single manuscript, *Sinai Syriacus* 52, in St. Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai. The beginning and end of the manuscript, however, are missing. At the end Letters 6–10 are missing, although fragments of this end were found in 1975 by Sebastian Brock and edited in his *Catalogue of Syriac Fragments (New Finds) in the Library of the Monastery of Saint Catherine, Mount Sinai*, 101–5. At the beginning, the second half of Sergius' Introduction and the first part of his translation of *Divine Names* 1 is missing. The first half of Sergius' Introduction, that which is included in *Sinai Syriacus* 52, was published by Sherwood along with a French translation: Sherwood, "Mimro de Serge de Rešayna sur la vie spirituelle." Recently two scholars, Quaschning-Kirsch and Perczel, have independently identified a part of a Paris manuscript, *BN Syriacus* 378, as containing the second half of Sergius' Introduction and the beginning of his translation of *DN* 1. Presumably this portion of *Sinai Syriacus* 52 was stolen from St. Catherine's Monastery and found its way to the Bibliothèque Nationale. See Quaschning-Kirsch, "Eine weiterer Textzeuge für die syrische Version des Corpus Dionysiacum Areopagiticum: Paris B.N. Syr. 378," and Perczel, "Sergius of Reshaina's Syriac Translation of the *Dionysian Corpus*: Some Preliminary Remarks." See also Briquel-Chatonnet, *Manuscrits syriaques*, 75. Sergius' translation has not been edited or published, apart from *Mystical Theology* 1 (with Phocas' translation *en face*) in J.-M. Hornus, "Le Corpus dionysien en syriaque."

It is unclear whether Sergius believed that the author of the *CD* was in fact Dionysius the Areopagite. On the one hand, he never explicitly calls the pseudonym into question, and his introduction to his translation of the *CD* is full of quotations from Paul. On the other hand, as Perczel has shown, Sergius' introduction is infused with the "gnoseology" of Evagrius of Pontus, whom these Origenists regarded as providing the authoritative interpretation of Origen. The fact that Sergius interprets the entire Dionysian system in terms of an unmistakably Evagrian framework might lead us to think that he knew all too well that the *CD* was a pseudonymous work—perhaps even who the author was—but that he chose not to expose this fact.[59]

Recently, Perczel has drawn attention to the fact that in his summary of the various works that constitute the *CD*, Sergius mentions several of the "lost" works, and does not differentiate between them and the "extant" works (which he translates).[60] The "lost" works are seven texts that Dionysius mentions in the *CD*, sometimes describing them in detail, but for which we have no record.[61] The standard view is to understand the author's citation of these "lost" works as contributing to the alleged authenticity of the collection: like other early Christian bodies of literature, it has come down to the reader incomplete.[62] Following von Balthasar, Perczel suggests that these works are not fictitious, but were in fact composed.[63] But whereas von Balthasar suggests that they were composed or at least sketched and then lost,

---

[59]   Many scholars have suggested that some of the figures associated with the early reception of the *CD* knew very well who the author in fact was. See Hausherr, "Doutes au sujet de 'divin Denys'"; von Balthasar, "Das Scholienwerk des Johannes von Skythopolis." Saffrey, in "Un lien objectif entre le Pseudo-Denys et Proclus," argues that John of Scythopolis knew very well who the author was; Perczel too. David Evans, in "Leontius of Byzantium and Dionysius the Areopagite," argues that Leontius is criticizing the author of the *CD* and must have known at the very least that he was a pseudepigrapher. Perczel expands on Evans' argument in "Once Again on Dionysius the Areopagite and Leontius of Byzantium." Klitenic Wear and Dillon suggest that Severus of Antioch knew who the author was (*Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition*, 3). Recently, Arthur has attempted to rehabilitate the hypothesis that Sergius himself is the author of the *CD* (*Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist*, 187).

[60]   Sergius, Introduction, Ch. CXVI–CXVII, Sherwood (1961), 148–9; BN Syr. 384, f. 51*v*–52*r*; cited and translated in Perczel, "The Earliest Syriac Reception of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*."

[61]   The "lost" works include: *The Theological Outlines* [or: *Representations*], *On the Properties and Ranks of the Angels, On the Soul, On Righteous and Divine Judgment, The Symbolic Theology, On the Divine Hymns, The Intelligible and the Sensible.*

[62]   See Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, 120.

[63]   Von Balthasar, "Denys," 154. See section III.C below.

Perczel argues that the author of the *CD* published these works under different pseudonyms. According to Perczel, then, Sergius had access to at least some of these "lost" works and, although he did not include them in his translation, draws on them in composing his introduction. Furthermore, Perczel believes that he has identified some of these lost treatises. Years ago, Perczel argued that the bewildering treatise *De Trinitate*—which has been variously attributed to Didymus the Blind and Cyril of Alexandria—is in fact the "lost" treatise mentioned in the *CD* under the name of *The Theological Outlines*.[64] Recently, he has announced his intention to publish similar philological demonstrations that the "lost" works can be identified and that the author published them under different pseudonyms.[65] With these demonstrations will presumably come a new hypothesis as to why the author of the *CD* wrote not only under one pseudonym, Dionysius the Areopagite, but also under other pseudonyms.

While I eagerly await the publication of these demonstrations and the corresponding hypothesis, I have my reservations. If, as Perczel argues, the author of the *CD* published the "lost" works under different pseudonyms, then why in the *CD*, when he is writing under the name of Dionysius, does he refer to those works as his own? Furthermore, if Sergius knew that both the *CD* and the "lost" works were all composed by the same author, why would he draw on the whole body of literature for his introduction but then translate only the *CD*? In fact, as Perczel admits, Sergius' description of the "lost" works in his introduction could just as easily come from the few remarks that Dionysius makes about these works in the *CD*, and so Sergius need not have had these works in hand to compose his introduction.

II. MODERN SCHOLARSHIP ON THE *CD*

II.A. Hugo Koch and Josef Stiglmayr

Modern scholarship on the *CD* begins in earnest in 1895, when two German scholars, Hugo Koch and Josef Stiglmayr, publish independent arguments with the same conclusion. Both demonstrate that the

---

[64] Perczel, "Denys l'Aréopagite: lecteur d'Origène."
[65] Perczel, "The Earliest Syriac Reception of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*."

CD is considerably indebted to the fifth-century philosopher Proclus and therefore cannot be the genuine writings of the first-century Athenian judge, Dionysius the Areopagite.[66] The fulcrum of both arguments is *DN* 4.17–33, wherein Dionysius treats the question of evil under the rubric of the divine name "Good." Koch and Stiglmayr demonstrate that in these chapters Dionysius—now *Pseudo*-Dionysius—quotes extensively (often with little or no cover) from Proclus' *De malorum subsistentia*. In that same year, Stiglmayr published a companion article arguing that the provenance of the *CD* was late fifth-century Syria-Palestine—a conclusion that, with some refinement, still holds sway today.[67] For his part, Koch subsequently published the definitive study of the pagan philosophical backdrop of the *CD*.[68]

These two scholars, then, set the terms for the subsequent study of the *CD* in the twentieth century. Since Dionysius was exposed as *Pseudo*-Dionysius, scholars have consistently dismissed the pseudo-nym. They have argued that it was a ploy on the author's part to win a wider readership in a time of anxious orthodoxies. The preponder-ance of scholars have worked in the wake of Koch, attempting to assess the nature and extent of the author's debt to late Neoplaton-ism.[69] For most of these scholars, the debt to Plato precludes Paul. Müller finds "no trace" in the *CD* of the salvation by the blood of Christ, which he understands to be the essence of Paul's teaching.[70] J.-M. Hornus insists that the *CD* "totally ignores . . . the central

---

[66] Koch, "Proklos als Quelle des Pseudo-Dionysius Arepagita in der Lehre vom Bösen"; Stiglmayr, "Der Neuplatoniker Proklos als Vorlage des sog. Dionysius Areopagita in der Lehre von Übel."

[67] Stiglmayr, "Das Aufkommen der Pseudo-Dionysischen Schriften und ihr Ein-dringen in die christliche Literatur bis zum Lateranconcil 649."

[68] Koch, *Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita in seinen Beziehungen zum Neuplatonismus und Mysterienwesen: eine litterarhistorische Untersuchung*.

[69] Even René Roques, who distinguishes himself among his contemporaries for having a sympathetic approach to the *CD*, still leans heavily toward the Neoplatonic backdrop in his masterwork, *L'Univers dionysien*. Other examples include Müller, *Dionysios, Proclos, Plotinus*; Corsini, *Il Trattato* De divinis nominibus *dello Pseudo-Dionigi e i commenti neoplatonici al Parmenide*; Brons, *Gott und die Seienden*; Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*; Beierwaltes, *Platonismus in Christentum*; most recently, see Schäfer, *The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*; Perl, *Theophany*; Klitenic Wear and Dillon, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition*.

[70] Müller, *Dionysios, Proclos, Plotinus. Ein historischer Beitrag zur Neoplatonischen Philosophie*, 36. Cited in Golitzin, *Et introibo ad altare dei*, 26.

---

affirmation of Pauline faith," again here the atonement through the blood of Christ.[71] For E.R. Dodds, the great scholar of later Greek philosophy, the *CD* is little better than a poor attempt at "dressing [Proclus'] philosophy in Christian draperies and passing it off as the work of a convert of St. Paul."[72] R.A. Arthur laments that while "[Dionysius'] main Christian influence ought to be that of Paul . . . his much vaunted discipleship is simply not convincing."[73] While her overall assessment is that "his own theology owes very little indeed to Paul," she notes one similarity: "both [Paul and Dionysius] more or less ignore the human Jesus."[74] In short, the dominant scholarly stream has consistently neglected to examine the aims and purposes of the pseudonym and the influence of Paul.

Almost as popular has been the hunt to unveil the author of the *CD*, to name the writer who went to such efforts to write under the name of another. In 1969, Ronald Hathaway amassed a list of no less than twenty-two scholarly conjectures as to the author of the *CD*, including: Ammonius Saccas, the mysterious teacher of Plotinus; Severus of Antioch, the Monophysite who first cites the *CD*; John of Scythopolis, who then would have produced scholia on his own pseudonymous corpus; Sergius of Reshaina, who first translates the *CD* into Syriac; and Damascius, the last *diadochus* of the Academy in Athens.[75] The second half of the twentieth century witnessed far fewer conjectures published, as none of these proposals succeeded in winning many supporters beyond their authors. Despite the occasional hypothesis still offered up,[76] I am inclined to agree with Alexander Golitzin that, "[b]arring the discovery of new evidence, any future attempts at identifying our author will doubtless be met with the same failure to convince any save their sponsors as has met all previous efforts."[77]

---

[71] Hornus, "Quelques réflexions à propos de Ps.-Denys l'Aréopagite et la mystique chrétienne en général." Cited in Hathaway, *Hierarchy and the Definition of Order in the Letters of Pseudo-Dionysius*, xvii.

[72] Dodds, *The Elements of Theology*, xxvi–xxvii.

[73] Arthur, *Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist*, 3.

[74] Ibid., 4, 5.

[75] For the full list, see Hathaway, *Hierarchy and the Definition of Order in the Letters of Pseudo-Dionysius*, 31–5.

[76] For two recent hypotheses, see Esbroeck, "Peter the Iberian and Dionysius the Areopagite" and Arthur, *Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist*, 187 (who suggests Sergius of Reshaina as the author of the *CD*).

[77] Golitzin, *Et introibo ad altare dei*, 24–5.

II.B. Endre von Ivánka and Ronald Hathaway

Two notable exceptions to the prevailing trend—which form a convenient diptych—are Endre von Ivánka and Ronald Hathaway. In his *Plato Christianus*, von Ivánka argues that author of the *CD* is a Christian for whom the pseudonym and the consequent and seemingly wholesale import of late Neoplatonic philosophy serves a primarily apologetic end. Drawing on Oswald Spengler's term "pseudo-morphosis" (likely through the lens of Hans Jonas), von Ivánka argues that the pseudonym offers the author a literary pretense with which he can fill the shell of pagan learning with a new and living organism, Christian revelation.[78] Close attention to the *CD*, von Ivánka avers, reveals that the author in fact sabotages late Neoplatonism by clothing Christian theology in Platonic "drapery" (*Gewand*)—precisely the inverse of Dodds' claim. On his construal, the *CD* is the premiere instance of the achievement of Christian Platonism, for it entirely subsumes the *Geist* of the past into the present dispensation: "much of the Platonic Spirit . . . somehow lives on in Dionysius' system, but very little (it has to be added) of the actual Platonic or Neoplatonic philosophy, i.e. of the ontological principles and the structural implications of the system."[79] While von Ivánka may be right about particular Dionysian departures from late Neoplatonism, he clearly misrepresents the undeniable influence of Neoplatonic philosophy on the most central and cherished themes of the *CD*.[80] Unfortunately for those who would like to inoculate Dionysius from the "anxiety of influence," Neoplatonism is no mere vacant shell or petrified outer form of a void system. For our

---

[78] See Schäfer's account of von Ivánka's position: "[Neoplatonism], a historically extinct and inwardly hollow, though structurally surviving, way of thinking, is filled up with historically new contents, leaving the petrified outer form of the void system for a new way of thinking which, only partly accommodating itself to the spiritual legacy of the former tenant, takes its new home inside the old structure, almost like a hermit crab with a vacant shell" (*The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 32).

[79] Von Ivánka, *Plato Christianus*, 285. Cited in Schäfer, *The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 33.

[80] Von Ivánka is wrong to conclude that the hierarchies are merely a functionless appendage retained only to attract the potential convert from late Neoplatonism. See Golitzin, *Et introibo ad altare dei*, 29. On the indispensable function of the hierarchies for the entire Dionysian universe, and the influence of Paul thereon, see Chapter Three.

purposes, von Ivánka is relevant because he provides a rare instance of a scholar who attempts to view the pseudonym as integral to the aims and purposes of the *CD* at large.

His twin in this regard is Ronald Hathaway, who delivers the opposite conclusion, namely, that form and content should be reversed: "Ps.-Dionysius combines surface features of a Christian apology with a concealed Neoplatonist metaphysics."[81] Just as for von Ivánka, the aim of this deception is sabotage, but the roles are reversed. Dionysius' true commitments are to Neoplatonism, and so he seeks to smuggle this philosophical "propaganda"[82] into Christianity, thereby "vicariously promoting a ghostly Neoplatonist Succession."[83] And while Hathaway devotes a considerable amount of time to the pseudonym—even insisting that "it is certain that Ps.-Dionysius writes every word in the context of Acts 17"[84]—he attributes the senses of the pseudonym and the influence of Paul to the expedient packaging of Plato. And so while he acknowledges that the *CD* offers a "unique juxtaposition of the wisdom of Athens with the message of St. Paul,"[85] he categorically denies any substantial Pauline influence. In his view, the wisdom of Athens and the message of Paul are fundamentally inconsistent and thus Dionysius' "profession of Pauline humility in the very first line of *On Divine Names* obviously must not be taken with too great literalness."[86] The result of this elaborate pseudonymous deceit is the wholesale import of alien wisdom into the emptied framework of Christian revelation—a wolf in sheep's clothing: "[Dionysius] claims discipleship under St. Paul and . . . transforms *agapē* religion into *erōs* theology (or *erōs* metaphysics, as it turns out)."[87] Here Hathaway reveals his debt to Anders Nygren, who in his widely influential book *Eros und Agape* laments the fact that the primitive Christianity, or *agapē* religion, was subsequently corrupted by the infiltration of Greek philosophy, or *erōs* religion. Nygren singles out Dionysius for introducing this philosophical contaminant with an "exceedingly thin veneer" of Pauline Christianity.[88]

---

[81]   Hathaway, *Hierarchy and the Definition of Order*, xx.
[82]   Ibid., 13.
[83]   Ibid., 27.
[84]   Ibid., 23.
[85]   Ibid.
[86]   Ibid., xvii.
[87]   Ibid., xviii.
[88]   Nygren, *Eros und Agape*, 576.

Von Ivánka and Hathaway are relevant not only as exceptions to the prevailing scholarly trend to dismiss the pseudonym and the influence of Paul. For while they each offer accounts of how the pseudonymous discipleship to Paul is germane to the aims of the *CD* at large—accounts which, it must be said, are wanting—they also each provide clear and instructive instances of the manner in which the scholarship on Dionysius has been overly determined by the question of form and content, substance and rhetoric: was Dionysius *really* a Christian or was he *really* a Neoplatonist? This urge to identify one of these names as essence and the other as accident has led to a certain stalemate in scholarship on Dionysius.[89]

III. THREE PROMISING LEADS

I contend that in order to redress the situation as it stands and move beyond the stalemate—was Dionysius *really* a Christian or *really* a Neoplatonist?—we must focus our attention on the pseudonymous character of the *CD* and the corresponding influence of Paul. The last century of scholarship has largely passed over these questions in favor of appraising the influence of late Neoplatonism. When scholars such as von Ivánka and Hathaway have paused to consider the import of the pseudonym and the influence of Paul, the results have been conditioned by the language of essence and accident. Here I wish to focus on a handful of scholars who have offered interesting and even

---

[89]   To be fair, the principals in the recent scholarly renaissance around Dionysius—Paul Rorem, Andrew Louth, and Alexander Golitzin—also seem unsatisfied with this framing of the question and have taken steps to redress it. I argue here, however, that these steps are as yet incomplete. For instance, while Rorem is credited with exploring the influence of Iamblichus on the author of the *CD* (prior to which attention was focused on Proclus and other members of the fifth-century Athenian School of Neoplatonism), he also attempts to distinguish sharply between Iamblichean (pagan) and Dionysian (Christian) forms of theurgy. Thus while he acknowledges the influence of pagan Neoplatonism on Dionysian Christianity, Rorem seems to want to keep that influence at a safe remove. Likewise with Andrew Louth and Alexander Golitzin: while spearheading efforts to situate the *CD* and its author in the context of the fifth- and sixth-century Christian East, in both its Greek and Syriac milieus, they also acknowledge the significant influence of late Neoplatonism on the *CD*. And yet with these two scholars one also detects a penchant for containing and subordinating this influence. Thus the specter of essence and accident seems difficult to exorcise from scholarship on Dionysius.

compelling explanations for the pseudonymous enterprise in general, the specific pseudonym, Dionysius the Areopagite, and the relevance of Paul for understanding the *CD*. I have ordered the presentation not according to chronology, but in an ascending order of those I find to offer the most productive hypotheses.

III.A. Alexander Golitzin

As has already been rehearsed, scholarship on Dionysius since the groundbreaking studies of Koch and Stiglmayr in 1895 has been largely devoted to assessing the nature and extent of his debt to late Neoplatonism. Some twenty years ago, Alexander Golitzin began to question this approach and sought instead to situate the author of the *CD* in the context of the late antique Christian East.[90] While Golitzin never denied the influence of late Neoplatonism on the *CD*, he endeavored to highlight the many lines of continuity between the *CD* and its Christian forerunners.

More recently, he has extended this approach to hazard an explanation for the author's choice to write under a sub-apostolic pseudonym.[91] The key for understanding the pseudonym, Goltizin contends, is a proper appreciation of the world of Syrian monasticism that forms the backdrop of the *CD*. *Letter 8* chastises a certain monk by the name of Demophilus for presuming to trump the authority of a priest and enter the altar area so as to protect the "holy things," that is, the reserved sacrament. For Dionysius, Demophilus has upset the order (τάξις) of things, and so this troublesome monk must be reminded that the ecclesiastical order and the authority of his superior are part of "our hierarchy,"[92] which is, after all, "an image of the supremely Divine beauty."[93] Golitzin reads this reprimand as responding to a widespread contemporary problem: namely, monks usurping the authority of their ecclesiastical superiors. Such monastic presumption derives from "popular belief, universal throughout the East and especially concentrated in Syria, that the monks were the

---

[90] Golitzin, *Et introibo ad altare dei.*
[91] Golitzin, "Dionysius Areopagita: A Christian Mysticism?"
[92] *EH* 1.1 369A; *CD* II 63.3.
[93] *CH* 3.2 165B; *CD* II 18.11.

successors of the seers and prophets of old."[94] This belief that monks were the *pneumatophoroi*, or "spirit-bearers"—in contrast to the bishops, who were viewed more or less as politicians—finds abundant corroboration, Golitzin argues, in apocryphal literature from Syria, including the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Acts of Judas Thomas*, and the *Ascension of Isaiah*. More specifically still, this presumption also recalls the so-called "Messalians," a Syrian monastic movement whose members allegedly were indifferent to or even contemptuous of the sacraments and the ecclesial authorities on the grounds that access to God was through solitary prayer alone. This movement emerged in the fourth century and, despite a series of episcopal condemnations culminating in the Council of Ephesus in 431, seems to have survived in Syria well into the sixth century.[95]

It is precisely in order to rebut this popular tradition, Golitzin argues, that the author chose to write under a pseudonym. For just as this monastic tradition could look to its own ancient pedigree (based on its own apocrypha), so the author of the *CD* needed "to answer appeals to ancient tradition with a countervailing antiquity."[96] This is, Golitzin concludes, "a very good reason, perhaps even *the* reason, for his adoption of a sub-apostolic pseudonym."[97] As for the specific pseudonym, Dionysius the Areopagite, Golitzin speculates that the author took on the mantle of "the philosopher-disciple of St. Paul" in order both to "invoke the authority of the Apostle" against rebellious monks and to "sustain the legitimacy of deploying the wisdom of the pagans."[98] The specific pagan wisdom that helps the author rebut the monastic presumption is the conviction of the late Neoplatonists Iamblichus and Proclus, *contra* Plotinus and Porphyry, that the human soul is too weak to ascend to the divine of its own and requires the aid of divinely revealed "theurgic" rites. Thus the late Neoplatonic notion that "a traditional and ancient worship" was necessary to "communicate a saving knowledge and communion" helped the author's efforts to have the monks— confident in the efficacy of their own prayer to grant them a vision of

---

[94] Golitzin, "Dionysius Areopagita: A Christian Mysticism?" 177.
[95] See Stewart, *"Working the Earth of the Heart": The Messalian Controversy in History, Texts, and Language to A.D. 431.*
[96] Golitzin, "Dionysius Areopagita: A Christian Mysticism?" 178.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.

the divine—submit to ecclesiastical authority and acknowledge the efficacy of the sacraments.[99]

The first half of Golitzin's explanation—that the author took on a sub-apostolic pseudonym so as to "fight fire with fire"—fails to explain why he took on the *particular* pseudonym he did. If all that the author needed was to contest the monks' appeal to Thomas, then why did he land on this particular figure, a disciple of St. Paul? The second half of Golitzin's explanation attempts to answer this question. Because Dionysius the Areopagite was the "philosopher–disciple" *par excellence*, Golitzin argues, he was perfectly suited to issue the monks a corrective from pagan wisdom. While Golitzin is certainly correct that the pseudonym suggests some important and fruitful interaction between pagan wisdom and Christian revelation, his appeal to this single theme of the weakness of the soul and the consequent need for liturgy, while also suggestive, seems incomplete. Given the extent of the pseudonymous enterprise—the fact that the author literally assumes the identity of Dionysius the Areopagite—I suspect that there is considerably more to his decision to write under this pseudonym than this single corrective to wayward monks.

III.B. Andrew Louth and Christian Schäfer

Along with Golitzin, Andrew Louth is credited with highlighting the Eastern Christian backdrop to the *CD*. Years before Golitzin offered his explanation of the pseudonym, Louth intuited that the pseudonym signaled some significant interaction between pagan wisdom and Christian revelation. Unlike Golitzin, he cuts straight to the specific pseudonym: "Dionysius was the first of Paul's converts in Athens, and Athens means philosophy, and more precisely, Plato."[100] Thus the pseudonym has something to teach us about the content of the *CD*: "Denys the Areopagite, the Athenian convert, stands at the point where Christ and Plato meet. The pseudonym expressed the author's belief that the truths that Plato grasped belong to Christ, and are not abandoned by embracing faith in Christ."[101] According to Louth, then, the pseudonym suggests that Dionysius' obvious debt to

---

[99] Golitzin, "Dionysius Areopagita: A Christian Mysticism?" 179.
[100] Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, 10.
[101] Ibid., 11.

Neoplatonism does not in any way obviate his faith in Christ. To the contrary, the choice to write under this pseudonym signals that, just as the learned pagan Dionysius the Areopagite was converted to faith in Christ by Paul's speech to the Areopagus, so ancient, pagan wisdom can also be baptized into a new life by the revelation in Christ. Although the *CD* often strikes the modern reader as a "strange mongrel," or a servant with two masters, the author understands himself as offering a "pure-bred pedigree," recapitulating the "original specimen of the series," which is surely Paul's own speech to the Areopagus.[102] For the author, Paul is the first to synthesize Greek philosophy and Christian revelation. By assuming the identity of the very disciple who was converted by this synthesis, our author signals that he will also attempt a further synthesis of his own.

More recently, Christian Schäfer has developed Louth's insights and offered the most sustained treatment to date of not only the pseudonym but also the corresponding influence of Paul on the author of the *CD*. Strangely, given that his is an avowedly *philosophical* perspective, Schäfer is the first scholar to state boldly that "[t]he pseudonym of 'Dionysius the Areopagite' is to be taken as a programmatic key for the understanding of his writings," for indeed, "the key to a proper interpretation of the *CD* is the methodical acceptance of the literary fiction of reading an author who—Athenian born and raised in the pagan culture of Christ's times—finds himself faced with early Christian doctrine."[103] Schäfer also asserts, in my view correctly, that if we read the *CD* with the pseudonymous identity foremost in our minds, then "many of the traditional vexed questions and unsolved problems of modern Dionysius studies clear up."[104] Chief among these questions is whether the author was *really* a Christian or a Platonist: "The question at all times [in nineteenth and twentieth century scholarship] appeared to be one of substance and accidents, of Platonic core and Christian 'outward limbs and flourishes' or vice versa, of compulsively 'hellenising' Christian faith or 'churching' Platonism by hook or crook."[105]

[102] Ibid.
[103] Schäfer, *The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 164. See also his more sustained treatment in idem, "The Anonymous Naming of Names: Pseudonymity and Philosophical Program in Dionysius the Areopagite."
[104] Ibid., 166.
[105] Ibid., 7.

Advancing Louth's insights, Schäfer hopes to move beyond this framework of substances and accidents by reading the *CD* against the backdrop of Paul's speech to the Areopagus, which was responsible for the conversion of the Areopagite under whose name he writes. For Schäfer, the author takes up the name of Paul's convert so as to suggest that he is "doing the same thing as the Apostle did":[106] just as Paul appropriated the tradition of pagan wisdom—preeminently the altar "to the unknown god" in Acts 17:23—in order to show the Athenians that they already possessed an incipient faith that needed only the corrective of Christian revelation, so too Dionysius "wants us to understand that Greek philosophy was on the correct path in its understanding of the Divine, but it obviously needed the eye-opening 'superaddition' or 'grace' (if these are the right words) of Christian revelation in order to be released from its ultimate speechlessness and residual insecurity concerning the last Cause."[107] This also squares with Rom 1, where Paul laments the fact that although all of the nations once knew God—"his eternal power and divine nature" (1:20)—all but the Jews fell away from this ancient faith and "became fools" (1:22). The Gentiles "exchanged" (1:23, 25) their ancient faith in "the unknown god" (Acts 17:23) for idolatrous images and human foolishness masquerading as wisdom. Like Paul, then, Dionysius is calling pagan wisdom—the "wisdom of the wise" (1 Cor 1:19)—to return to its once pure origin, the understanding of God's "eternal power and divine nature" (Rom 1:20), the "wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:24), that was subsequently corrupted by human folly.

Thus, according to Schäfer, Dionysius takes on the name of Paul's convert from Athens precisely in order to "baptize" pagan wisdom into a new life in Christ: "he wanted to show that, given the Pauline preaching to the pagans, a Christian adaptation and re-interpretation of pagan lore (and of Greek philosophy in particular) was the necessary and mandatory next step."[108] If we return now to the question of whether Dionysius is *really* a Christian or a Platonist, with Schäfer we can safely answer that he is both. But he is both insofar as the pagan wisdom of Platonism (or Neoplatonism) is the residuum of a divine revelation from ancient times, needing only to return to the fold of the original "wisdom of God." While in Chapter Five I disagree with

---

[106] Schafer, *The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite,* 165.
[107] Ibid., 25.
[108] Ibid., 7, 170–1.

Schäfer's views on the implications of Dionysius' normative ontology for his theological anthropology, here I fully agree with his reading of the significance of the pseudonym and the corresponding influence of Paul. Much of what follows, especially Chapter Four, will corroborate, extend, and deepen Schäfer's conclusions by tracing in great detail the influence of Paul on the *CD* and the many senses of the pseudonym. Furthermore, I will endeavor to extend Schäfer's claim that reading the *CD* against this pseudonymous backdrop clears up many vexing problems in previous scholarship on Dionysius.

III.C. Hans Urs von Balthasar

The most importance influence on my own views, however, is a handful of suggestive remarks by Hans Urs von Balthasar.[109] Apart from these few remarks, I differ from von Balthasar on a number of points. First, he opens his learned and prescient essay "Denys" with a lament that for modern scholarship "all that remains" of the author of the *CD* "is PSEUDO-, written in bold letters, and underlined with many marks of contempt."[110] Von Balthasar distances Dionysius from the pejorative connotations associated with pseudonymity— lest he be esteemed a mere "forger"—by refusing the standard scholarly prefix. However, this refusal of the prefix "pseudo-" acquiesces to these pejorative connotations and so misses an opportunity to reassess the pseudonymous character of the *CD*. Furthermore, in his rush to defend Dionysius from the charge of clever forgery, von Balthasar misses another opportunity when he treats the "lost" works of Dionysius. Von Balthasar insists that he did in fact write, or at least sketch, these seven texts and that they must have subsequently been lost.[111] This seems very unlikely. It is more likely that Dionysius includes mention of works he did not write precisely so as to buttress the aura of authenticity of the *CD*. On this reading, his mention of these works contributes to our impression that what we have in the *CD* is the incomplete transmission of a much larger corpus. Furthermore, while many of the addressees of his treatises and letters and even the persons mentioned therein are familiar to us from the

---

[109] Von Balthasar, "Denys," in idem, *The Glory of the Lord*, 144–210.
[110] Ibid., 144.
[111] Ibid., 154.

traditions of the early church—Timothy, Polycarp, Titus, the apostle John, Elymas the Magician, Carpus—others are completely unknown: most conspicuously Hierotheus, but also Gaius, Dorotheus, and Sosipater. The mention of texts that may not have survived the notorious exigencies of transmission or figures whose names are now lost to memory would impart to a sixth-century reader the sense that what he is reading—the *CD*—is indeed an authentic sub-apostolic collection. The evidence thus leans in the direction of Louth's conclusion that "such a silence in the tradition makes one wonder whether the missing treatises are not fictitious, conjured up to give the impression, perhaps, that the works we have were all that survived to the end of the fifth century of a much larger corpus of writings written at the end of the first."[112] These features of the text should not be dismissed as merely clever, "literary" devices. On the contrary, they testify to his "tendency to telescope the past," to collapse the distance between himself and the apostles.[113] The *CD* is a sophisticated work of literary and theological imagination whose pseudonymous character we should endeavor to appreciate, not disown. We cannot inoculate him against criticism by refusing the scholarly prefix or those "fictions" embedded in the *CD*.

Ironically, then, despite these two missed opportunities, von Balthasar himself provides to my mind the most compelling—if, at times, enigmatic and indirect—treatment of the question of the pseudonymity of the *CD*. For von Balthasar, the author does not so much assume the identity of Dionysius the Areopagite as he does suffer "identification" with Dionysius the Areopagite. Nor is this "identification" an option executed so much as a "necessity" obeyed: "The identification of his task with a situation in space and time immediately next to John and Paul clearly corresponds for him to a necessity which, had he not heeded it, would have meant a rank insincerity and failure to respond to truth."[114] The necessary truth to which our author submits is the fact of a "mystical relationship" between himself and Dionysius the disciple of Paul, much like the disciples of the great prophets who wrote under their masters' names: "so a monk, dying to the world, assumes the name of a saint."[115] No

---

[112] Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, 20.
[113] Ibid., 10. See Chapter Two.
[114] Von Balthasar, "Denys," 149.
[115] Ibid., 151.

imposter, then, the author can only be sincere by heeding this call: "One does not *see* who Denys *is*, if one cannot see this identification as a context for his veracity."[116] The "whole phenomenon"—the "mystical relationship" and the writing it necessitates—exists

> on an utterly different level . . . [on the level], that is, of the specifically Dionysian humility and mysticism which must and will vanish as a person so that it lives purely as a divine task and lets the person be absorbed (as in the Dionysian hierarchies) in *taxis* and function, so that in this way the divine light, though ecclesially transmitted, is received and passed on as immediately (*amesōs*) and transparently as possible[.][117]

Von Balthasar is the first modern scholar who suggests that pseudonymity is somehow integral to the mystical enterprise of the *CD*. For he proposes that it is only by heeding the call of the "mystical relationship" between himself and the Areopagite that our author succeeds in "vanish[ing] as a person" and becoming instead a "divine task" through whom the divine light passes.

This anticipates many of the themes I will explore in the second part of this investigation, Chapters Three through Five and the Conclusion. The only piece that is missing from von Balthasar's suggestive comments is any mention of the relevance of Paul for the entire enterprise. In what follows, then, I will highlight the way in which the author of the *CD* grounds these and associated themes in the life and writings of Paul. First of all, in Chapter Three, I will consider the question of Dionysius' appropriation of the language of pagan "theurgy," principally from Iamblichus' *On the Mysteries*. Rather than attempt to distinguish sharply between Iamblichean (pagan) and Dionysian (Christian) theurgy, I will instead focus on the fact that for both Iamblichus and Dionysius, deification consists in our consenting to have the "work of God" ($\dot{\epsilon}\rho\gamma\dot{o}\nu\ \theta\epsilon o\hat{v}$)—or "theurgy" ($\theta\epsilon o\nu\rho\gamma\acute{\iota}\alpha$)—displace us, so that we become ciphers or conduits of divine activity. Thus to "vanish as a person," as von Balthasar puts it, is necessary to our becoming a "divine task." In Chapter Four, I will argue that Dionysius looks to Paul as the premier mystical theologian and witness to mystical union, and that Dionysius' understanding of "unknowing" ($\dot{\alpha}\gamma\nu\omega\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$) derives from Paul's speech to the Areopagus. In Chapter Five, I will explore how for Dionysius this mystical

---

[116] Ibid., 149.   [117] Ibid., 148–9.

theology requires a corresponding "apophatic anthropology," for which Paul again is the authority. In the Conclusion, I will consider how the very practice of writing pseudonymously—answering what von Balthasar calls the "necessity" of the "mystical relationship" and thereby "vanish[ing] as a person—is integral to this apophatic anthropology. But before we turn to those themes in the second part of this investigation, I want in the next chapter to situate the pseudonymous enterprise of the *CD* in the context of the peculiar understandings of time and writing at play in the late antique Christian East.

2

Pseudonymous Writing in the Late
Antique Christian East

In the previous chapter, I charted the reception of the *CD* in the sixth
and twentieth centuries, focusing on whether and how ancient and
modern readers treated the authenticity of the *CD*, its alleged author-
ship, and the influence of Paul. This chapter attempts to situate the
pseudonymous enterprise of the *CD* in its *Sitz im leben*: broadly late
antique Eastern Christianity; specifically the peculiar notions of time
and writing from this period and place that might inform the author's
practice of pseudonymous writing. As we have seen, scholars have by
and large assumed that the pseudonym was an elaborate ruse on the
part of the unknown author to win a wider readership for his hetero-
dox collection. None of these scholars, however, has thought to
consider the pseudonymous character of the *CD* in light of scholar-
ship on Jewish and Christian pseudepigrapha in this period. To
survey that vast literature and situate the *CD* therein would be an
enormous endeavor—indeed, too enormous for me to undertake
here. However, I suggest that before we pass judgment on the pseu-
donym, we consider the various scholarly theories as to the aims and
purposes of pseudonymous writing. In the first part of this chapter
(I), therefore, I chart various modern accounts of pseudonymity
in the ancient and late ancient worlds. I highlight one approach to
pseudepigrapha, an approach labeled "religious" or "psychological,"
which argues that a pseudonymous author had a special kinship
with the ancient sage or seer under whose name he wrote, and that
pseudonymous writing served to collapse or "telescope" the past and
the present, such that the present author and the past luminary could
achieve a kind of contemporaneity.

This approach to pseudonymous writing echoes an observation made by scholars of the late antique Christian East. According to this view, there is a peculiar understanding of time at work in the Christian East in the fourth through sixth centuries such that the saints of the apostolic and sub-apostolic ages are widely believed to exist in a "timeless communion" with the present age. I suggest that we would do well to read the *CD* against the backdrop of this peculiar understanding of time and the literature it has produced. In the second part of the chapter (II), I survey a number of scholars of the late antique Christian East in order to elicit a consensus view regarding this peculiar understanding of time. The rest of this second section is divided between two case studies that enrich and deepen our appreciation of this understanding of time and the significance of late antique devotion to earlier saints. The first case study concerns the fifth-century *Life and Miracles of Thekla* and its source text, the second-century *Acts of Thekla*. The second case study concerns John Chrysostom's sustained exegetical encounter with Paul in a series of commentaries and homilies. In both case studies, we see how this "timeless communion" between the past and the present manifests such that the saints of old haunt the present as "living dead." We also see how late antique authors understood their own writing—be it miracle collections, commentaries or homilies—as devotional practices aiming to solicit a present discipleship to the saints and thereby to transform their own selves. Finally, we will see how the extraordinary attention these authors devote to Paul—and by extension, Paul's close disciples—rests on a conviction that Paul serves as an especially effective (and often erotic) intermediary between the late antique devotee, on the one hand, and God and Christ, on the other.

I. THEORIES OF PSEUDONYMITY

In the previous chapter I demonstrated how few modern scholars have thought to read the *CD* in light of its pseudonym. Endre von Ivánka and Ronald Hathaway are exceptions to this trend, but their twin interpretations are hamstrung by the fact that they identify Christianity and Platonism as essence and accident (von Ivánka), or vice versa (Hathaway), in their quest to name the singular allegiance and agenda of the author. More promising leads include those offered

by Alexander Golitzin, Andrew Louth, Christian Schäfer, and especially Hans Urs von Balthasar. There is, however, another curious silence in the scholarship on the *CD*. Since the pioneering work of Koch and Stiglmayr in 1895, the *CD* has been known to be a late fifth- or early sixth-century pseudonymous composition, and yet no one has thought either to situate the *CD* in the vast sea of ancient and late ancient pseudepigrapha—pagan, Jewish, or Christian—or to bring the prodigious modern scholarship on pseudepigrapha to bear on our understanding of the *CD*. The former would be an enormous endeavor, although the rewards would no doubt be equally enormous. The limits of space and, more importantly, my own knowledge preclude my pursuing this endeavor here, although I invite someone more competent than I to follow through on this lead. In the first part of this chapter, I will pursue the latter endeavor, that is, I will investigate how modern scholarship on ancient and late ancient pseudepigrapha might bear on our understanding of the *CD*.

I.A. The "problem" of pseudonymity

One scholar has nicely summed up the challenge or "problem" that pseudepigrapha poses: "pseudonymity is an established fact: there has grown up a practice of pseudonymity without a theory of it."[1] Modern scholarship on pseudepigrapha in the ancient and late ancient Mediterranean world has by and large been motivated by the desire to establish clear criteria for authenticity, such that the historian may sort the wheat from the chaff.[2] The problem posed by pseudepigrapha is difficult even to name, as the category includes anonymous writings, misattributions of originally "autonymous" writings, and deliberately pseudonymous writings (often termed "forgeries" or "frauds"). The problem is even more acute in the case of much Jewish and Christian pseudepigrapha, since there is a widespread anxiety that the biblical canon is somehow compromised by the inclusion of pseudepigrapha.[3]

---

[1] Brockington, "The Problem of Pseudonymity," 16.
[2] For helpful background on ancient and late ancient pseudepigrapha, see Gudeman, "Literary Frauds among the Greeks"; Putnam, *Authors and their Public in Ancient Times*; Lehmann, *Pseudo-Antike Literatur des Mittelalters*; Gill and Wiseman, eds., *Lies and Fiction in the Ancient World*.
[3] See Meade, *Pseudonymity and Canon*, 1–4. For examples of recent scholarship motivated by this anxiety, see Baum, *Pseudepigraphie und literarische Fälschung im*

Even cases of extra-canonical pseudepigrapha can elicit anxiety, as scholars with their own theological commitments wrestle with how exactly to square their scholarly suspicion of the authenticity of a given text with whatever authority that text enjoys in their tradition. Accordingly, most of the scholarly interest in Christian pseudepigrapha is focused on the "deutero-Pauline" epistles (although the attribution almost every book of the New Testament has been investigated) and the apostolic and sub-apostolic literature of the first two centuries of Christianity. In what follows, I will be taking a rather broad view of ancient and late ancient pseudepigrapha, reviewing scholarship on pagan, Christian, and Jewish pseudepigrapha in these periods. Having said this, scholarship on Jewish apocalyptic pseudepigrapha provides, for our purposes, the most promising speculation regarding the aims and purposes of pseudonymous writing.

As for the possible motives for writing under a pseudonym, one scholar cites aims as diverse as financial gain, malice, respect for tradition, modesty or diffidence, and the desire to secure a greater credence or wider readership for a certain set of doctrines or claims.[4] Another scholar entertains such possible motives as "the spur of emulation, the aspirations of an unrecognized artist, the artistic delight in deception for its own sake . . . [even] the sheer exhilaration and the spirit of mockery."[5] This same scholar asks us to consider whether "a large number of impostures in any age have been perpetrated without any serious purpose or hope of deceiving the reader."[6] Modern scholars of Dionysius have inclined toward one of these explanations: they consistently argue that the author of the *CD* wrote under the name of Dionysius the Areopagite in order to paint his suspect collection of letters with a sub-apostolic veneer. On this construal, the motive for writing pseudonymously was twofold: to secure a wider readership for the *CD* and to safeguard his own person in an age of anxious orthodoxies.

---

frühen Christentum; Janssen, *Unter Falschem Namen*; Wilder, *Pseudonymity, New Testament, and Deception*. For a recent, comparative treatment of the problem of authorship and canon, see Wyrick, *The Ascension of Authorship*.

[4] Metzger, "Literary Forgeries and Canonical Pseudepigrapha," 3–24.
[5] Von Fritz, ed. *Pseudepigrapha I*, 5.
[6] Ibid., 14.

I.B. The three approaches

I.B.1. The "school" approach

Apart from these lists of motives, some twentieth-century scholars have sought to develop more generous and subtle explanations for this widespread phenomenon in ancient and late ancient literary culture. David G. Meade groups these into three broad categories or approaches.[7] The first approach explains pseudepigrapha by appeal to ancient "schools": according to this theory, disciples of a certain luminary would write in the tradition of that luminary and attribute the literary product not to themselves but to their master. This theory has been marshaled to explain the explosion of writings attributed to Pythagoras during the Neo-Pythagorean revival of the Hellenistic and Early Imperial periods, but has also been applied to the case of the prophets in the Hebrew Bible and John and Paul in the New Testament.[8] On this construal, "deutero-Isaiah" and "deutero-Paul," for example, are not presumptuous forgers but disciples who are authorized by their respective "schools" to write under the name of their master. The most significant problem that faces this theory is a dearth of evidence. While there is evidence that *some* philosophical schools encouraged this sort of pseudonymous writing, there is little to suggest that it spread to Jewish and Christian circles. Tertullian is often cited in support of this theory, specifically his statement in *Adv. Marc.* 6.5 that "it is allowable that that which disciples publish should be regarded as their masters' work."[9] Tertullian, however, is not here offering an account of pseudonymous writing in general, but is merely defending the authentic apostolic witness of the gospels of Mark and Luke, traditionally identified as disciples of Peter and Paul, respectively.[10] Whatever strengths or weaknesses there are with this "school" theory—and it should be noted that enthusiasm for this theory has cooled considerably since its heyday in the 1970s—it is of little use for our appreciation of the pseudonymous *CD*, since there is not, apart the *CD* itself, a tradition of writings attributed to the

---

[7] Meade, *Pseudonymity and Canon*, 4–12. I have changed Meade's ordering so as to present the religious/psychological approach last.
[8] Ibid., 9–10.
[9] Cited in Ibid., 10.
[10] See Guthrie, "Tertullian and Pseudonymity," 341–2.

Areopagite and so no "school" of Dionysius can be said to have ever existed.

I.B.2. The "eclectic" approach

More promising is the second approach, what Meade calls the "eclectic." This approach shuns those theories that purport to offer an overarching explanation of pseudonymous writing and so amounts to a kind of clearinghouse of different models. Meade associates Norbert Brox with this approach: Brox offers three compatible explanations for pseudonymity in early Christian literature.[11] The first is a pervasive "love of antiquity" (*überlegene Vergangenheit*)— not, of course, an exclusively Christian passion, but one that gripped early Christian authors, Brox avers, such that they wrote under ancient names. Second is the "noble falsehood": the notion that the end justifies the means, that writing under a false name is warranted if the result is the communication of the truth. Brox opines that this line of thinking led some early Christian writers to compose "counter-forgeries" to combat heretical writings' claims to antiquity. Alexander Golitzin seems to be following Brox here when he argues, as we saw in Chapter One, that the author of the *CD* writes under the name of Paul's convert in order to "fight fire with fire," that is, to meet the challenge of his opponents' supposedly ancient but certainly hetero-dox texts with an apostolic pedigree of his own.[12] The third explana-tion, according to Brox, is the widespread conviction that the content of a text should trump the question of its authorship. He cites *Apostolic Constitutions* VI.16.1 in support of this conviction: "You ought not to pay attention to the name of the Apostle, but to the character of the contents and to unfalsified teaching."[13] Of course, the *Apostolic Constitutions* is an odd text to cite in support of this view, since it is also, strictly speaking, a fake: a fifth- or sixth-century collection of canons masquerading as an apostolic document. Never-theless, as we will see below in the case of the *Life and Miracles of Thekla*, late antique Christian authors seemed genuinely to believe, in

---

[11] Brox, *Falsche Verfesserangaben*; See also idem., *Pseudepigraphie in der heid-nischen und jüdisch-christlichen Antike.*
[12] Golitzin, "Dionysius Areopagita: A Christian Mysticism?" 177–9.
[13] Brox, *Falsche Verfesserangaben*, 26–36; cited in Meade, *Pseudonymity and Canon*, 12.

the words of Andrew Louth, that "the truth now is the truth affirmed at Nicaea, itself the truth of what had been believed and suffered for during the centuries when the Church had been persecuted."[14] Up against such an estimation of timeless truth, this thinking goes, authorship seemed less important.

I.B.3. The "religious/psychological" approach

The third approach to ancient and late ancient pseudepigrapha is what Meade calls the "religious" or "psychological" approach. This approach has seen its fortunes fall, to some degree: once the most popular explanation, it is now very much on the defensive. The scholar who brought this approach to the English-speaking scholarly community was D.S. Russell, although the background for his approach can be found among a handful of German scholars, including Friedrich Torm,[15] Joseph Sint,[16] and Wolfgang Speyer.[17] All three "feature ecstatic or oracular identification as a primary vehicle of pseudonymity in religious writings."[18]

Speyer is the latest and best representative of this trend. Amidst the cacophony of ancient and late ancient pseudepigrapha—pagan, Jewish, and Christian—Speyer discerns a "genuine, religious pseudepigraphy" (*echte religiöse Pseudepigraphie*), best represented by apocalyptic literature but not limited to any particular genre, period, or culture:

> If the image of being grasped/seized leads further to an identification of the writer with the imagined, inspiring spirit, which can be a god, an angel, or a God-beloved sage of antiquity, the "true religious pseudepigraphy" results. In this case, the human author is completely engulfed by the personal power that inspires him.[19]

---

[14] Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, 10.

[15] Torm, *Die Psychologie der Pseudonymität im Hinblick auf die Literatur des Urchristentums.*

[16] Sint, *Pseudonymität im Alterum, ihre Formen unde ihre Gründe.*

[17] Speyer, *Die Literarische Fälschung im Heidnischen und Christlichen Altertum*; see also Meyer, "Religiöse Pseudepigraphie als ethisch-psychologisches Problem."

[18] Meade, *Pseudonymity and Canon*, 7.

[19] W. Speyer, "Fälschung, Pseudepigraphische freie Erfindung und 'echte religiöse Pseudepigraphie'," in Kurt von Fritz, ed., *Pseudepigrapha I*, 359; quoted in Meade, *Pseudonymity and Canon*, 8: "Führt die Vorstellung der Ergriffenheit weiter zu einer Identifikation von Schriftsteller und vorgestelltem inspirierenden Geist, der ein Gott, ein Engel, ein gottgeliebter Weiser der Vorzeit sein kann, so entsteht die 'echte

Like Speyer, Kurt Aland is keen to distinguish between genuine and ungenuine—or, in his words, authentic and inauthentic, valid and invalid—forms of pseudonymity.[20] Aland argues that the pseudonymous Christian author of the first or second century did not "put himself into a trance while writing" nor did he "piously (or impiously) deceive himself or others."[21] Rather, the pseudonymous author is "possessed by the Spirit" such that "when he spoke with inspired utterance it was not he that was heard but the Lord or the Apostles or the Holy Spirit himself."[22] On this construal, the author is but a "tool" or a "mouthpiece" and so it would be inappropriate (or "irrelevant") to name the tool or mouthpiece when the one who was really speaking through the author was none other than "the authentic witness, the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the apostles."[23] Thus pseudonymous writing was "not a skillful trick of the so-called fakers, in order to guarantee the highest possible reputation and the widest possible circulation for their work, but the logical conclusion of the presupposition that the Spirit himself was the author."[24]

For Aland, then, the Spirit, or Christ, or even one of the apostles speaks *through* the present author, and any writings are understandably attributed to the perceived source. There is a shift, however, at the end of the second century: the age of prophecy comes to an end and the "conviction that the Holy Spirit could choose the instrument himself through which he spoke to the Christian society" fades from the scene.[25] This marks the end of "valid" Christian pseudepigrapha, for hereafter there is a sharp distinction made between the apostolic past and the present. The coincident rise of this "historical awareness" and the emergence of the individual author come at the cost, then, of "authentically pseudonymous" writing.[26] Now that the Spirit, Christ, and the apostles have fallen silent, authors of the third and

---

religiöse Pseudepigraphie'. In diesem Fall versinkt der menschlichen Verfasser ganz in der ihn inspirierenden personalem Macht."

[20] Aland, "The Problem of Anonymity and Pseudonymity in Christian Literature of the First Two Centuries."
[21] Ibid., 44.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., 45.
[25] Ibid., 47.
[26] Ibid., 48.

subsequent centuries who write under these names are simply forgers. And so while Aland succeeds in offering a generous explanation of early Christian pseudepigrapha, he does so at the expense of all subsequent pseudonymous writing. Aland, therefore, would no doubt agree with modern scholars of the *CD* that the author wrote under a pseudonym not out of any "authentic" relationship with the Areopagite, but out of a desire to deceive his readers and pass his writings off as sub-apostolic.

D.S. Russell's work on Jewish, especially apocalyptic, pseudepigrapha brought the "religious" or "psychological" approach to English-speaking audiences.[27] Russell does not deny that ancient Jewish authors might have had many quotidian, even mercenary, motivations to write under a pseudonym. But like Speyer and Aland, he is especially interested in recovering and appreciating a "genuine" art of pseudonymity. At the heart of his account is the notion that pseudonymous writing involves a sense of kinship between the present author and the ancient seer under whose name he writes. Moreover, on the basis of this kinship, the pseudonymous author came to regard the seer's past and his own present as "contemporaneous," such that the pseudonymous writing became a way of "telescoping the past into the present."[28] Strict "contemporaneity" means that the two times are entirely porous, and someone can cross in both directions: not only does the seer collapse time to see and speak in place of the author, but the author collapses time to see and speak in place of the seer.

I.C. Criticisms and conclusion

The "religious" or "psychological" approach to pseudepigrapha—and especially Russell's version thereof—was widely influential in the two decades after its first publication. In his survey "Literary Forgeries

---

[27] Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic*.

[28] Ibid., 136. In support of this view Russell cites the work of Thorleif Boman, who argues that the Hebrew verbal system lends itself to this sort of "peculiar time-consciousness" (Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, 148–9). Russell wisely distances himself from Boman, although some more recent scholars feel that the refutations of Boman's dubious linguistic arguments should extend to Russell's views as well: see Barr, *Biblical Words for Time*, 96, 130–1. Russell seems also to owe much of his view to Brockington, who said that the "timelessness of Hebrew thought [was such that] centuries could be telescoped and generations spanned" (Brockington, "The Problem of Pseudonymity," 20).

and Canonical Pseudepigrapha," Bruce Metzger fully endorses Russell's view—almost verbatim—concluding that "the Hebrews . . . had what is to us a peculiar consciousness of time, so that centuries could be telescoped and generations spanned" and suggesting that pseudonymity "arose from a vivid sense of kinship which the apocalyptist shared with the one in whose name he wrote."[29] More recently, Michael E. Stone, while expressing some doubts as to Russell's arguments for "contemporaneity," also admits that pseudonymity "cannot be explained as the result of adherence to a literary convention or as a convenient literary form,"[30] and that

> it [is] conceivable that, in some cases, behind the visionary experiences which are attributed to the seers lay actual ecstatic practice of the apocalyptic authors. Such experience would then be mediated in a pseudepigraphic form, which phenomenon may be compared with the pseudepigraphic form of the visions in the writings of early Jewish mysticism.[31]

In recent years, however, Russell's account has come under heavy fire, and speculation about ancient and late ancient pseudepigrapha has become much more sober, indeed safe. David Meade, for example, devotes considerable space to dismantling Russell and his predecessors and offers in their place a more modest explanation, namely that early Christian pseudepigrapha conformed to a Jewish pattern, whereby an author or subsequent reader would attribute his writings to an ancient authority "primarily . . . as a statement (or assertion) of authoritative tradition."[32] Pseudonymity, according to Meade, is not some mysterious, ecstatic identification with an ancient visionary made possible by a telescoping of time, but merely a strategy of buttressing the canon of authoritative tradition. Meade would have us abandon the quest for an overarching theory of pseudonymity in the ancient and late ancient worlds—especially the quest for an elusive "genuine" pseudepigraphal writing. He would also have us narrow the scope of our inquiry, cease surveying the whole of ancient and late ancient pseudepigrapha—pagan, Christian, and Jewish—and

---

[29]   Metzger, "Literary Forgeries and Canonical Pseudepigrapha," 20–1.
[30]   Stone, *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period*, 428.
[31]   Ibid., 431.
[32]   Meade, *Pseudonymity and Canon*, 216.

instead focus on discrete literary and theological pseudonymous traditions.

Meade is certainly right that the quest for a single, overarching explanation of ancient and late ancient pseudepigrapha is fruitless: many are the motives, conventions and traditions that empty into the great sea of pseudepigrapha. The scholarly consensus seems to be that Russell's is not a particularly reliable explanation of Jewish apocalyptic pseudepigrapha. And yet I wonder whether Russell's account might help us think more widely and imaginatively about pseudonymous writing in the late antique Christian East, including the *CD*. Recent scholarship on this period has brought to the fore both a tradition of "telescoping time" and a strong sense of kinship between late antique Christian authors and the apostles—both of which features, I argue, are crucial for appreciating the *CD* and its author.

II. TIME AND WRITING IN THE LATE ANTIQUE CHRISTIAN EAST

II.A. A "timeless communion" of the past and present

Apart from his promising comments on the specific senses of the pseudonym, as discussed in Chapter One, Andrew Louth also invites us to interpret the pseudonymous enterprise of the *CD* against the backdrop of a peculiarly late antique understanding of temporality:

> The tendency to telescope the past, so that the truth now is the truth affirmed at Nicaea, itself the truth of what had been believed and suffered for during the centuries when the Church had been persecuted, was something that awakened an echo in the whole Byzantine world in a far more precise way than it would today. And it is this conviction that underlies the pseudonymity adopted by our author.[33]

Dionysius himself confesses his commitment to the canon of timeless truth over against the vicissitudes of historical chronology and paternal propriety in his dispute with the pagan sophist Apollophanes.[34] Lurking behind this private policy, Louth rightfully discerns a wider

---

[33] Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, 10.
[34] *Ep.* 7.1 1077C–1080A; *CD* II 165–6.

cultural *Weltanschaung*, a late antique understanding of temporality that includes a "tendency to telescope the past." Louth is not alone: although he cites the famous Byzantinist Norman Baynes in support of this claim, more recent scholars echo this same view in slightly different terms.[35] In the introduction to his edited volume, *The Byzantines*, Guglielmo Cavallo describes Byzantine literature as having an "atemporal" quality.[36] In the same volume, the preeminent contemporary historian of Byzantium, Cyril Mango, develops this point, claiming that, for the Byzantines,

> [c]hronology was of no consequence: the apostles lived in timeless communion with the victims of the persecutions of the second to fourth centuries, the desert fathers, the bishops of the patristic age, and the heroes of the struggle against Iconoclasm in the eighth and ninth centuries.[37]

Claudia Rapp has characterized the seventh through tenth centuries of Byzantium as exhibiting a self-conscious "antiquarianism," a tendency to collect and edit the endless texts and traditions of early Christianity, the Hellenistic age, and classical antiquity.[38] Most recently, Scott Fitzgerald Johnson has sought to push the origins of that antiquarian tendency further back into late antiquity (the fourth through sixth centuries), and to argue that there is in this period a particularly intense interest in and recovery of the apostolic and sub-apostolic ages.[39] Furthermore, Johnson refuses the traditional view that this antiquarianism is a sign of a stale and sterile culture and instead endeavors to show how creative and constructive this "intense, conscious reception and reworking" in fact was.[40] Perhaps owing to the negative connotations of the term "antiquarianism,"

---

[35] In this regard, Baynes considered the Byzantine era the heir of the Hellenistic age, "that age [that] acquired the habit of looking backwards to a past which in retrospect became only the more wonderful" (Baynes, "The Hellenistic civilization and East Rome," 2). And while Baynes so often endeavors to challenge his contemporaries' low esteem for Byzantium, here he too finds reason for fault: "The Byzantine, like the folk of Alexandria, is overweighted by his literary inheritance. Blessed is the country which is not haunted by the splendors of its own past" (Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, 11).

[36] Cavallo, *The Byzantines*, 8–9.

[37] Mango, "Saints," in Cavallo, *The Byzantines*, 256.

[38] Rapp, "Byzantine Hagiographers as Antiquarians, Seventh to Tenth Centuries," 31.

[39] Johnson, "Apocrypha and the Literary Past in Late Antiquity," 49; see also Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla*, 104–9.

[40] Johnson, "Apocrypha and the Literary Past in Late Antiquity," 49.

elsewhere Johnson diversifies his characterization, preferring to speak of the late antique "revival" of interest in the apostolic and sub-apostolic ages, the "resurgence of devotion" that comes with this "awakening of historical interest."[41] Finally, Andrew Louth has opined that Eastern Christians of the fifth and sixth centuries, exhausted by the endless Christological controversies that followed in the wake of the Council of Chalcedon, were inclined to look back to the early church as a fresh resource for their present faith.[42]

Michael Stuart Williams has recently argued that the development of Christian biography in the fourth and fifth centuries reveals that late antique Christian writers and readers thought that their present could and should be the scene for the "re-enactment" of the past world of scripture.[43] Drawing on such Christian biographies as Eusebius' *Life of Constantine*, Athanasius' *Life of Antony*, and Gregory of Nyssa's funeral oration for his brother Basil (among others), Williams discovers that the "biblicizing" templates evident in all these *vitae* betray a widespread sense that there was "an implied continuity" between the scriptural past and the late antique present.[44] Late antique Christians understood themselves and their leaders as "re-enactments" of biblical characters, their lives as "re-enactments" of scriptural events. This "forced a reconsideration of late-antique life": "It allowed the world of the later Roman empire to be re-imagined as one in which even ordinary Christians had a part to play in the explication of the divine plan."[45] In this regard, Christian biography continued the tradition of typological scriptural interpretation, with one crucial difference: whereas typology tends to be understood as diachronic, with the type finding final fulfillment according to a unidirectional chronology, the continuity implied in these biblicizing Christian biographies suggests that scriptural re-enactment operates in both directions.[46] For example, when Gregory portrays his brother Basil as a new Moses, Basil does not finally *fulfill* the Moses type, but rather post-figures or re-enacts the life of Moses. And if "the effect was to assert an equivalence between the two historical situations,"

---

[41] Johnson, "Reviving the Memory of the Apostles," 1.
[42] Louth, "The Reception of Dionysius up to St. Maximus the Confessor," in Coakley and Stang, eds., *Re-thinking Dionysius the Areopagite*, 37.
[43] Williams, *Authorised Lives in Early Christian Biography*.
[44] Ibid., 227.
[45] Ibid., 26.
[46] Ibid., 15.

then "[n]ot only was Basil identified as a re-enactment of Moses, but Moses himself became a kind of proto-Basil"[47]: "[a]s a result, the apparently biblical world that these figures exemplified was, at the same time, the familiar contemporary world inhabited by their readers . . . [these *vitae*] gave them an opportunity to re-imagine the world in which they already lived."[48] In this newly re-imagined world, the scriptural past and the late antique spoke to each other and formed a sort of double helix of divine providence. The "irruption of Scripture into everyday life" that these biographies performed thereby established communication between the past and the present, and allowed late antique Christians to live their lives in both worlds simultaneously.[49]

These handful of scholars paint, in broad strokes admittedly, an understanding of time in the late antique Christian East against which, following Louth, I suggest that we read the pseudonymous enterprise of the *CD*. The consensus here is that the distance between the historical past and present can be collapsed or "telescoped," such that the apostolic and sub-apostolic ages and the present day can enjoy "contemporaneity." This requires a "resurgence of devotion" to this privileged period, resulting in what may seem from without a sort of stale "antiquarianism," but from within amounts to an intense effort to study the literary remains from that period, on the conviction that these texts and traditions contain within them the means to effect a life-altering encounter with that past.

While each of the scholars mentioned above offers their own evidence for this peculiar understanding of temporality, we would do well to put flesh on the bones of this consensus view by looking closely at two case studies, chronologically and geographically proximate to the presumed provenance of the *CD*. These two studies will prove illustrative not only of this understanding of temporality, but also of the way in which different authors wrote their way across the centuries to achieve a present relationship with figures from the privileged past. The two studies focus on two different literary genres: hagiography and homiletics. The first study has to do with the cult of the saints: the fifth-century *Life and Miracles of Thekla* sheds light not only on a "timeless communion" with the saints, but also on the ways in which late antique authors understood the apostle Paul, the

---

[47] Williams, *Authorised Lives in Early Christian Biography*, 225, 19–20.
[48] Ibid., 232, 233.   [49] Ibid., 225.

relationship of the apostle to his disciples, and how writing serves the author's own devotion to the saints. The second case study has to do with exegesis of the figure and writings of Paul: John Chrysostom's sustained exegetical encounter with Paul will also cast considerable light on the ways in which late antique authors figure Paul and cultivate the practice of writing (in this case, homilies) in order to collapse historical time and to establish an intimate, present discipleship to the apostle. In the conclusion, I will suggest that we consider pseudonymous writing—specifically the *CD*—as a third genre of writing that illustrates and deepens these same points.

II.B. First case study: the *Life and Miracles of Thekla*

II.B.1. *The* Acts of Paul and Thekla (ATh)

The fifth-century *Life and Miracles of Thekla* (*LM*) offers a helpful lens through which to view the late antique revival of interest in and devotion to the apostolic and sub-apostolic ages. And yet to appreciate fully the import of this revival we must examine its source. The *LM* paraphrases and expands on the famous, late second-century apocryphal story called the *Acts of Paul and Thekla* (*ATh*),[50] which narrates how a young and well-born virgin, Thekla, abandons her betrothed and all else in order to follow the wandering apostle Paul. Her daring choice twice brings her face to face with death, but in both cases she escapes and once again is able to pursue Paul. This apocryphal tale presents a striking portrait of Paul and the power he has over his disciples. From the start, Paul combines the sublime and the ridiculous: when he arrives in Iconium, he appears as "a man short in stature, with a bald head, bowed legs, in good condition, eyebrows that meet, a fairly large nose, and full of grace."[51] And yet this workaday fellow with moderate looks is somehow also otherworldly: "at times he seemed human, at other times he looked like an angel."[52]

---

[50] The *ATh* is in fact only a portion of the much longer *Acts of Paul*, although it circulated independently. See Hennecke and Schneemelcher, eds., *New Testament Apocrypha*, 213–70. The English translation used here is Ehrman, in *Lost Scriptures*, 113–21, but I cite the *ATh* by chapter.

[51] *ATh* 3.

[52] *ATh* 3.

But it is not with his looks that Paul wins his disciples. He is soon hosted at a local home, where he leads prayer and worship, and delivers his own version of the beatitudes."[53] His words waft into the neighboring alley, where they find their way into the ear of Thekla, sitting at the window of her house next door. His words of purity, chastity, self-control, renunciation, and fear beguile this young woman who is soon to marry: "Yet when she saw many wives and virgins going in to see Paul, she also wanted to be found worthy to stand in Paul's presence to hear the word of Christ. For she had not yet seen what Paul looked like, but had only heard his word."[54] Her mother takes notice that "she has grown attached to a foreign man" and complains to her fiancé Thamyris that she is "bound to the window like a spider, seized by a new desire and fearful passion through his words."[55] Thamyris goes to her, "fearing that she had gone mad," and asks, "What kind of mad passion has overwhelmed you?"[56] Still entranced, Thekla does not register him or his words. He is convinced that "she is in love with the stranger" and so gathers a crowd to run Paul out of town.[57]

The governor takes notice and, after interviewing Paul, has him thrown in prison. The silencing of Paul prompts Thekla to act: she sneaks away, bribes the prison guards, and visits him in prison: "Sitting at his feet, she heard about the majestic character of God . . . And Thekla's faith increased as she was kissing Paul's bonds."[58] Her absence is soon noted, and soon enough Thamyris "found her, in a manner of speaking, bound together with Paul in affection."[59] As if the kissing and loving embrace were not enough, when the authorities remove Paul for judgment, Thekla is found "rolling around on the place where Paul had been teaching while sitting in the jail."[60] Paul is flogged and banished from the city, but Thekla is condemned, at the insistence of her mother, to burn at the stake.

We should pause at this moment in the narrative to appreciate how remarkable a portrait of Paul this is thus far. Paul plays Socrates to Thekla's Alcibiades: his words fix her in place and drive her mad. Paul is the great lover; that is to say that he, again like Socrates, triggers in others an uncontrollable erotic response. According to Johnson, "the character of Paul . . . could be read, perhaps, . . . as Eros himself."[61]

---

[53] *ATh* 5–6.   [54] *ATh* 7.   [55] *ATh* 8.   [56] *ATh* 10.
[57] *ATh* 13–15.   [58] *ATh* 18.   [59] *ATh* 19.   [60] *ATh* 20.
[61] Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla*, 201.

And just as Eros is, according to Socrates in the *Symposium*, an intermediary between humans and the divine,[62] here Paul as Eros— who "at other times looked like an angel"[63]—infects others with his own love for the divine.

This, we must presume, is how it is supposed to happen, but Thekla seems fixed on Paul as the go-between and less keen on Christ. At least this is the case at her first appointment with death. Facing the flames, Thekla can think of nothing but Paul, who is already on his way to the next city, Daphne:

> But Thekla was like a lamb in the wilderness looking around to see its shepherd—so was she trying to catch a glimpse of Paul. Looking intently into the crowd she saw the Lord sitting there, in the appearance of Paul. And she said, "Since I am unable to endure my fate, Paul has come to watch over me." And she continued to gaze upon him. But he departed into heaven.[64]

The fact that the Lord "in the appearance of Paul" comforts Thekla from the crowd points to an interesting slippage here between the apostle and Christ. Already Paul delivers teaching in the form of his own "beatitudes," in imitation of Jesus' famous sermon.[65] We might think that Paul is not doing enough to direct his young charge's attention away from his own beguiling words to Christ, whose apostle, after all, he is supposed to be. And yet Christ accommodates Thekla's desperate desire, even at the risk of her mistaking Paul for her true savior. When God opens the heavens and drenches the flames so that Thekla might escape death, she tells a child on her way, "I have been saved from the fire and am looking *for Paul*."[66] When she finds Paul, she hears him praying to the "Father of Christ, do not allow the fire to touch Thekla, but be present with her, as she is yours."[67] And yet, although she comes to learn from Paul that it was the "Father, maker of heaven and earth, Father of your beloved child Jesus Christ" who saved her, still she blesses the Father "because you have saved me from the fire, *that I might see Paul*."[68]

Perhaps Paul senses that Thekla's love has found premature rest in his own person rather than in her true savior Christ. This at least would help explain his subsequent behavior in Antioch: when

---

[62] *Symposium* 202E.   [63] *ATh* 3.   [64] *ATh* 21.
[65] Matt 5:3–10; Luke 6:22.   [66] *ATh* 23, my emphasis.
[67] *ATh* 24.   [68] *ATh* 24, my emphasis.

"a certain leader of the Syrians named Alexander...[is] inflamed with passion for [Thekla] and began entreating Paul with money and gifts," Paul pretends not to know her and then deserts her, leaving her to fend for herself.[69] Her strong rebuke of the powerful suitor again lands her in trouble: the local governor condemns her to death at the hands of wild beasts, including a tank of seals. Thekla sees in this an opportunity for finally receiving baptism. She throws herself into the tank, and this time looks not to Paul but to Christ: "In the name of Jesus Christ, on this final day I am baptized."[70] The seals are dispatched by a divine lightning bolt, and the other wild beasts are suitably and variably dispensed with. When the astonished governor calls her over to ask, "Who are you?", she offers a short sermon, which begins, "I am a slave of the living God. As to what there is about me: I have believed in God's Son, in whom he is well pleased. That is why none of the beasts has touched me."[71] How sharp a contrast this is with her first near execution, where she was desperately looking for Paul to save her and Christ came in the likeness of Paul to comfort her. Thekla seems now to appreciate Paul as a liaison between her and her savior.

This is confirmed in their final meeting, but not without some suspense. We read that "Thekla began to long for Paul and was trying to find him, sending around for news of him everywhere."[72] Dressed as a man and surrounded by female servants, she finally finds him, and stands right beside him while he is preaching. When he notices her, he wonders whether she is still in the grip of temptation, that is, whether she is still in love with him rather than with her savior. She quickly assures him, "I have received my cleansing Paul, for the one who has worked with you for the spread of the gospel has worked with me for my own cleansing."[73] After their reunion, Paul consents to Thekla's own apostolic mission to her native Iconium, where openly she teaches "the word of God."

The most obviously relevant feature of this portrait of Paul for our understanding of the *CD* is his role as a lover, as Eros embodied, longing for the divine beloved. Already this is a significant antecedent to Dionysius' naming Paul a "lover."[74] But there is more: the *ATh* also narrates how Paul becomes a sort of conduit for others to long after

---

[69] *ATh* 26.   [70] *ATh* 34.   [71] *ATh* 37.   [72] *ATh* 40.
[73] *ATh* 40.   [74] *DN* 4.13 712A; *CD* I 159.6.

the divine. On the one hand, the tale warns of the dangers of having such intermediaries: for much of the *ATh*, Thekla seems to have misplaced her love, longing not for Christ and God but for Paul. On the other hand, the text also suggests that Paul, at least by the end, has become an effective, erotic intermediary between a disciple and Christ, that despite the dangers along the way, Paul does eventually succeed in reorienting Thekla's fervent desire first from her fiancé, then from himself, and finally to Christ. This too, is relevant for our understanding of the *CD*. For if pseudonymous writing serves the author of the *CD* as an ecstatic devotional practice, a way of collapsing time so as to become a disciple of Paul in a "timeless communion," then this would also be vulnerable to the criticism that it directs attention too much to the person of Paul and not enough to Christ. After all, modern scholars consistently fault Dionysius for shirking the role of Christ, and Dionysius dares to use Christological language to describe Paul. Even so, I would suggest that we read Dionysian devotion to Paul against this backdrop where Paul serves as an erotic intermediary to Christ. And Paul seems uniquely qualified to serve this role, seeing as, by his confession in Gal 2:20, "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."

II.B.2. *The* Life and Miracles of Thekla

Were this second-century apocryphal tale to have suffered neglect in subsequent centuries, we might think that it bears little on our understanding of the early sixth-century *CD*. And yet this tale, together with so many other apocrypha in late antiquity, was enjoying a "revival" of interest and a "resurgence of devotion";[75] all of them "being rewritten, extended, and embroidered with facility and vigor."[76] By tracing the reception of this apocryphal tale, we can see not only how this remarkable portrait of Paul and Thekla was reworked in subsequent centuries, but also how that reworking reveals the late antique conviction regarding the "telescoping of the past," and the way in which late antique authors understood their own writing practices as aiming to achieve a "timeless communion" with the saints of the apostolic age.

---

[75] Johnson, "Reviving the Memory of the Apostles," 1.
[76] Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla*, 104.

The *Life and Miracles of Thekla* is an anonymous Greek text that paraphrases and considerably expands on the narrative of *ATh*.[77] It is ten times as long as *ATh* and is thought to have been completed by 470 CE, nearly three hundred years after its source and nearly coincident with the *terminus post quem* of the composition of the *CD*. The first half of the *LM* is a literary paraphrase of the *ATh*, rendered in a more sophisticated Greek than the original, smoothing over perceived infelicities of style and content. One of the most striking emendations that the *LM* makes concerns Thekla's death: whereas the *ATh* reports that Thekla died in Seleukia at the end of her preaching career, the *LM* insists that "she sunk down while alive (ἔδυ δὲ ζῶσα) and went under the earth (ὑπεισῆλθε τὴν γῆν) . . . [and from her shrine] she dispenses fountains of healings for every suffering and every sickness, her virginal grace pouring out healings there, as if from some rushing stream, upon those who ask and pray for them."[78] This emendation lays the foundation for the second half of the *LM*, the narration of the miracles that Thekla worked—and, more to the point, *continues* to work—in and around the city of Seleukia.

Both halves of the *LM*, then, deepen our understanding of the "timeless communion" between the apostolic past and the late antique present. In his study, Johnson insists that the *LM* is a premier instance of the late antique revival of interest in the apostolic past. He is keen to explore the "modes of reception" that accompany this resurgence of devotion, modes of reception that have been woefully under-studied.[79] Chief among these modes, in the case of the first half of the *LM*, is *paraphrasis*: the faithful refashioning of the source text for a contemporary audience. We will soon turn to the details of this refashioning, but it bears stating at the outset that while literary paraphrase often strikes critics as signaling an unfortunate "nostalgia for the past" or an "antiquarian tendency," Johnson insists that paraphrase also conveys a "sense of recreating a past world," or, in the words of the sociologist Edward Shils, "bringing the past into the present."[80]

---

[77] Dagron, *Vie et miracles de sainte Thècle* [Greek text and French translation]. In what follows, I cite the *Life* and the *Miracles* by chapter and line number from Dagron's edition. Unless otherwise noted, translations are from Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla.*

[78] *Life* 28.7–14; cited in Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla*, 7.

[79] Johnson, "Apocrypha and the Literary Past in Late Antiquity," 48.

[80] Johnson, "Late Antique Narrative Fiction," 194. See Shils, *Tradition*, 77. See also Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla*, 17, 22.

If the apocryphal texts "summon the apostles into the world of the reader and contribute to the formation of imaginary worlds across multiple cultures, languages, and epochs," so too must the creative refashioning of those texts for contemporary audiences.[81]

Only two changes to the narrative of *ATh* need concern us here. The first is the manner in which the *LM* reconfigures the relationship between Paul and Thekla. From the start, Thekla is portrayed not as one among many early protomartyrs, but as "the leader among the women," in second place after Stephen as a champion for Christ.[82] Johnson attributes this primacy to Thekla's close association with Paul, whose historical character was increasingly popular in the late fourth and fifth centuries.[83] Not only does the *LM* foreground the close association between Paul and Thekla, but in those episodes of charged desire from the *ATh*, the *LM* consistently underscores the erotic quality of their relationship. In jail, for instance, Paul remarks that Thekla has been "inflamed" (ἀναφλεχθῆναι) by the "small and indistinct spark (σπινθῆρος) of my words."[84]

It is surprising, then, that whereas in the *ATh* Thekla's "incomparable desire for the apostle himself" seems to cause Paul some concern—hence the dramatic tension that is only resolved at the end of the *ATh*—here in the *LM* all such difficulties are smoothed over. Consider Thekla's first near execution on the pyre. According to the *LM*, Christ again appears to Thekla "in the likeness of Paul," and adds that she "truly thought him to be Paul, and not Christ."[85] And yet the author of the *LM* seems both to recognize the problem raised by the *ATh*—namely, that Thekla misplaces her devotion on Paul rather than Christ—and to address it from the start by inserting the following short speech:

> Behold, Paul watched over me and protects me, lest bending, lacking conviction, and shrinking at the fire I betray the beautiful and blessed confession. But rather, may it not be that I give up Christ evangelized to me by you yourself, Paul, nor the piety, and disgrace your teaching. Only stay a little while, teacher, and call Christ to my aid, so that by the

---

[81] Johnson, "Apocrypha and the Literary Past in Late Antiquity," 65.
[82] *Life* 1.17; cited in Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla*, 21.
[83] Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla*, 22.
[84] *Life* 9.14–15; cited in Johnson, "Late Antique Narrative Fiction," 197.
[85] Ibid., 12.41–2; cited in Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla*, 40.

breeze of the Spirit he may scatter and sprinkle this fire and he may strengthen the weakness of my nature through its help.[86]

Here, in contrast to the *ATh*, Thekla seems to appreciate from the start that Paul is an intermediary between herself and Christ, and that Paul calls on Christ—and indeed also the Spirit—to aid her on the pyre. This emendation is echoed in Thekla's reunion with Paul outside the city, where she offers the following prayer of thanksgiving:

> God, King and Blessed Creator of everything, and Father of your great and only begotten Child, I give you thanks . . . for having seen this Paul, my savior (σωτῆρα) and teacher (διδάσκαλον), who preached to me the might of your kingdom and the greatness of your authority, as well as the unchanging (ἀπαράλλακτον), equal-in-power (ἰσοδύναμον), equal-in-state (ἰσοστάσιον) nature of divinity (θεότητος) within the Trinity (ἐν Τριάδι), the mystery of your only begotten Child's incarnation (ἐνανθρωπήσεως) . . .[87]

Here, although she gives thanks to God for Paul, her "savior" (σωτῆρα), she seems to mean that Paul has saved her through teaching her about God, his "only begotten Child," and his "incarnation." Thus the anxiety that runs through the *ATh* is dispelled and Thekla's devotion to Paul rendered safe, for from the start her devotion is a devotion *to* God and Christ (and even the Spirit) *through* Paul. According to the *LM*, Thekla admits as much in their final meeting, before she begins her own apostolic career: "Teacher, the things that have accrued to me through you and your teaching (διὰ σοῦ καὶ τῆς σῆς διδασκαλίας) are manifold and greater than speech."[88] In fact, this is simply one of no less than sixteen instances in this speech in which Thekla repeats, as if a refrain, "I learnt through you" (ἔγνων διὰ σοῦ).[89] At the end of Thekla's long confession of faith, Paul confirms that he has served as such an intermediary: "Christ chose you through me (δι' ἐμοῦ)."[90] Thus, in summary, while the *LM* stresses the erotic relationship between Paul and Thekla, it also eases the anxiety attendant to Thekla's erotic devotion to Paul by insisting that from the start Paul the lover successfully reorients her love from her earthly

---

86 *Life* 12.43–51; cited in Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla*, 41.
87 Ibid., 13.27–37; cited in Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla*, 43.
88 Ibid., 26.1–2; cited in Johnson, "Late Antique Narrative Fiction," 198.
89 Ibid., 26.8; cited in Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla*, 62.
90 Ibid. 26.64–5; cited in Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla*, 62.

fiancé to the divine bridegroom. What is lost in this emendation, of course, is the drama: in the *ATh*, the reader witnesses the slow and at times pained reorientation of Thekla's desire. What is gained is a template whereby Paul serves unambiguously as an effective, erotic intermediary between a yearning disciple and the divine beloved.

The second emendation in the *LM* that is relevant for our purposes concerns what exactly Thekla learned through Paul. Early in the *LM*, Paul delivers a speech worded in jarringly technical Trinitarian terminology; witness, for instance, the following phrase, hardly in an apostolic idiom: "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Trinity holy and venerable (ἡ ἁγία καὶ προσκυνητὴ Τρίας), divinity uncreated (ἄκτιστος) and consubstantial (ὁμοούσιος)."[91] In fact, the entire speech is rife with post-Nicene terminology, broadly Cappadocian in tone but most characteristic of Gregory of Nazianzus.[92] In her long, concluding confession of faith, Thekla also speaks in this rarefied creedal tongue, affirming "the ineffable (ἄφραστον), inaccessible (ἀποριστόν), unchangeable (ἀναλλοίωτον), incomprehensible (ἀκατάληπτον) nature of the power that is in the Trinity (Τριάδι) . . . the consubstantial (ὁμοούσιον) Trinity."[93] Johnson sees in this theological retrofitting the "limits" of the author's "nostalgia for apostolic times": that is, even Paul can be improved upon.[94] But why not instead consider this retrofitting against the backdrop of Andrew Louth's characterization of late antique temporality: "the tendency to telescope the past, so that the truth now is the truth affirmed at Nicaea, itself the truth of what had been believed and suffered for during the centuries when the Church had been persecuted"?[95] If the author were merely trying to put in the mouth of Paul the orthodoxy of the day so as to rebut heretics, he presumably would have retrofitted fifth-century theological creeds into the *LM*. As it stands, however, it is the architects of the fourth-century conciliar consensus whose words are put on the lips of the apostle; controversial fifth-century terminology—of which there was plenty—is conspicuously absent. The insertion of these technical theological speeches, then, is further evidence for the "atemporal" understanding of time operative

---

[91] Ibid., 7.45–7; cited in Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla*, 33 (translation my own).
[92] See Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla*, 32–5, 222–3.
[93] *Life* 26.8–12, cited in Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla*, 62.
[94] Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla*, 34–5.
[95] Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, 10.

for the author and his late antique peers. For surely the fact that the apostle Paul could preach a "Trinity . . . [of] same substance" ($Τριάς . . . ὁμοούσιος$)—*the* flashpoint theological term of the fourth century—supports Cyril Mango's view that, for the Byzantines, "chronology was of no consequence: the apostles lived in timeless communion with . . . the bishops of the patristic age."[96]

This second emendation in the *LM*, that is, the insertion of late antique theological reflection into the mouths of apostles, is relevant for our appreciation of the *CD* precisely because it too is rife not only with the peculiar nomenclature of late antique Christian theology, but also—notoriously so—with the terminology of late Neoplatonism. Both, but especially the latter, would seem to compromise the first-century pseudonym: how is it that a disciple of Paul sounds so much like Proclus? This would seem to be a problem, unless, of course, the author of the *CD*—and perhaps its reader as well—had a different understanding of temporality in place such that truth is "atemporal," and its expositors exist in a sort of "timeless communion." We know that at least two of the early readers of the *CD*—John Philoponus and Joseph Hazzaya—did not have exactly this understanding of temporality in place, for their attempts to account for the seemingly anachronistic terminology testify to their discomfort with it. And certainly modern readers have fixed upon the terminological anachronisms precisely in order to depreciate the pseudonymous enterprise. But perhaps the silence of the preponderance of the early readers, both advocates and critics, points to the existence of a silent majority, who are, to our minds at least, remarkably at ease with a disciple of Paul who speaks like Proclus.

Certainly the author of the *LM* adheres to such an understanding of temporality, and this is nowhere clearer than in the second half of the *LM*, the collection of miracles wrought by Thekla in and around her native Seleukia. Recall that the *LM* emended Thekla's end from the *ATh*: she did not die but "sunk down while alive ($ἔδυ δὲ ζῶσα$) and went under the earth . . . [and from her shrine] she dispenses fountains of healings for every suffering and every sickness, her virginal grace pouring out healings there, as if from some rushing stream, upon those who ask and pray for them."[97] Cyril Mango remarks that in the *LM* Thekla appears as one of the "living dead,"

---

[96] Mango, "Saints," 256.
[97] *Life* 28.7–14; cited in Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla*, 7.

those saints "who were living in the Lord" in some sort of psychic limbo.[98] Nicholas Constas has recently charted the diverse psychologies with which Byzantine thinkers sought to underwrite—or, in some cases, challenge—the cult of the saints as constituting the "living dead."[99] Those who endorsed this view of the saints, such as the author of the *LM*, seem to have in place a psychology wherein the human person—or at the very least the saint—has what Jan Bremmer calls a "free soul" that survives after the death of the "body soul," and wanders the orders of being—celestial, earthly, or demonic—working good or ill.[100] With Thekla wandering Seleukia as "living dead," working her miracles now as then, we enter what Johnson calls a "new, boundless era"—boundless because the apostolic past appears in the late antique present and promises to do so on into the future: "there is no sense that Thekla will ever stop working miracles, nor is there a sense that there will ever come a time when someone who has been healed or helped by her will not be able to tell of it."[101] Indeed, the author's favorite verb to describe Thekla's miraculous activities is "haunts" (ἐπιφοιτάω).[102]

The author himself is haunted, and by his own solicitation. At the end of the *Life*, Thekla acknowledges to Paul that it is "because of you [Paul]" that she has attained the level of apostle.[103] In the epilogue to the *Miracles*, the author appropriates this acknowledgment, now directed to Thekla herself: "For, as you [Thekla] know, I was confident of the supremacy of that gift of teaching which came because of you (διὰ σέ), and that it is also because of you (διὰ σέ) that applause and acclamation has come to me, as well as having a reputation among the orators, who are as many as they are amazing."[104] Not only does Thekla continue to work miracles in the present, but the author understands his own practice of writing the *LM* and the reception of

---

[98] Cyril Mango, "Saints," 263.
[99] Constas, "'To Sleep, Perchance to Dream': The Middle State of Souls in Patristic and Byzantine Literature"; idem, "An Apology for the Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity: Eustratius the Presbyter of Constantinople, *On the State of Souls after Death* (CPG 7522)."
[100] Constas, "'To Sleep, Perchance to Dream,'" 120–1. See also Bremmer, *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul.*
[101] Johnson, "Late Antique Narrative Fiction," 195.
[102] Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla*, 13, 121–3, 147, 150.
[103] Johnson, "Late Antique Narrative Fiction," 196.
[104] *Miracles* Epilogue, lines 38–41; cited in Johnson, "Late Antique Narrative Fiction," 196.

the work as conditioned on Thekla's approval. And the saint acknowledges this literary devotion. On a number of occasions she encourages the author in his efforts, but in *Miracle* 31, she appears to him in a waking vision (ὄψις), just at the moment when he is trying to write down a miracle.[105] She takes the notebook from his hand and recites back to him what he has written, indicating with a smile and a glance that she is pleased. The visitation from the saint and her intervention in his writing prompt in the author both fear and a renewed desire to write, and he commits himself to the task in which he had been lagging. With her encouragement and the promise of such awesome visitations, the very practice of writing her life and miracles becomes part of the author's devotion to the living saint. And while, according to Johnson, the *textus receptus* (the *ATh*) offers the author a site or locus for playful, but devotional, rewriting, the stakes in this play are very high indeed: nothing less than the "refashioning [of] contemporary identity."[106] In other words, we can plausibly understand the practice of writing the *LM* as a devotional exercise for our author that aims to refashion his own self by becoming a contemporary disciple of a living saint.

This interpretation of writing as a devotional practice finds corroboration in recent scholarship on authorship in the late antique Christian East. Derek Krueger argues that the hagiography and hymnography produced in the eastern Mediterranean between the

---

[105] It is worth quoting Johnson's translation of this remarkable miracle in full: "At the very moment when I was writing about this miracle [Miracle 30]—it is not good to keep silent any longer about what the martyr granted me—the following happened to me. I had been neglectful in collecting and committing these events to writing, I confess, and lazily did I grasp a writing tablet and a stylus, as if I had given up on my inquiry and collection of miracles. It was when I was in this state and in the process of yawning that the martyr appeared to my sight seated at my side, in the place where it was my habit to consult my books, and she took from my hand the notebook, on which I was transcribing this latest story from the writing tablet. And she seemed to me to read and to be pleased and to smile and to indicate to me by her gaze that she was pleased with what I was in the process of writing, and that it is necessary for me to complete this work and not to leave it unfinished—up to the point that I am able to learn from each person what he knows and what is possible [to discover] with accuracy. So, after this vision I was consumed with fear and filled with desire once again to pick up my writing tablet and stylus and to do as much as she will command" (Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla*, 118–19).

[106] Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla*, 76.

fourth and seventh centuries—broadly the provenance of the *CD*—reveal the emergence of a new understanding of the practice of writing, what he calls "a highly ritualized technology of the religious self."[107] This "technology" of writing "is not so much a proprietary claim over literary output as a performative act, a bodily practice" the aim of which is nothing less than the salvation of the writer.[108] Thus "writing itself [was] figured as an extension of the authors' virtuous ascetic practice" and "exemplified emerging Christian practices of asceticism, devotion, pilgrimage, prayer, oblation, liturgy, and sacrifice."[109] Krueger thereby recasts writing as a form of devotion itself, whose aim—as is the case with any *askēsis*—is a "reconstituted self."[110]

Unfortunately, Krueger's discussion of the *LM* is overshadowed by his (not entirely unwarranted) contempt for the author, who often goes to great pains to showcase his literary acumen and shamelessly jockeys with his contemporaries for bookish acclaim. Surprisingly, Krueger does not comment on *Miracle* 31, although it is the clearest instance of the braiding of writing and devotion in the entire *LM*. He seems more interested in how the author secures his authority, that is, how he fashions, through his devotional writing to the saint, an identity as an important writer in his time.[111] Thus Krueger is unimpressed with the "reconstituted self" that emerges from this particular practice of writing. For our purposes, it is less important to establish the relative value of this instance of writing as an *askēsis* reconstituting the self than it is to see that the *LM* fits into a broader trajectory within the late antique Christian East.

---

[107] Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 2. Krueger's debt to Michel Foucault—especially late Foucault—is evidenced especially in his discussion of writing as a "technology of the self."

[108] Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 8, 3.

[109] Ibid., 10, 9.

[110] Ibid., 11.

[111] Hence Krueger's interest in *Miracle* 41: "After I had been judged worthy of admission into the priestly synod and catalogue of preachers and priests, [St. Thekla] remained present with me most of the time. And she appeared at night always handing to me some book or sheet of paper, which always was and appeared to be a sign to me of complete approval. If, on the other hand, while I was preparing to say something, I did not see anything, the result proved to be clearly the opposite" (Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 80).

Given that the *ATh* and *LM* have served here as a pair of case studies meant to illumine our subsequent reading of the *CD*, we would do well to consider the transmission and influence of these texts and traditions on the presumed provenance of the *CD*. How pervasive were these themes and how widely and thickly dispersed were these texts and traditions? As regards this latest theme, the understanding of writing as a devotional practice aiming to deliver a reconstituted self, Krueger has provided such broad and deep evidence—in fact encompassing early sixth-century Syria both in time and in place—that its establishment is secure apart from the transmission and influence of a single text or tradition. So too with the understanding of time: the *ATh* and *LM* are merely instances of what several scholars have noted as a pervasive quality of late antique understanding of temporality. Nevertheless, it is interesting to consider whether such texts as the second-century *ATh* or the fifth-century *LM* could possibly have found their way into the hands of the author of the *CD*. By the fourth and fifth centuries, the cult of St. Thekla was widespread in the Mediterranean world, from Gaul to Palestine.[112] The famous fourth-century pilgrim, Egeria, visited the shrine of St. Thekla near Seleukia in May 384 on her way back from a tour of the Holy Land. She tells us that at the shrine she "read the whole Acts of the holy Thekla," thereby witnessing to the fact that the cult, at least at its center, considered the *ATh* an edifying read worthy of safeguarding.[113] The critical edition of the *CD* does not mention any citation or allusion to the *ATh* of the *LM*. Nor does Alexander Golitzin discern any trace of either text in the *CD*, although his gaze is more securely focused on the "Fathers" and their adversaries than on early Christian apocryphal literature or its late antique retellings.[114] Although he does not mention the *ATh* in particular, François Bovon has shown that the Apocryphal Acts were the object of abundant interest well into the Middle Byzantine period, especially as a hagiographic, liturgical, and homiletic resource.[115] In support of this broad claim, Johnson, in an appendix to his study of the *LM*, considers two other late antique refashionings of the *ATh*. The first, a *Panegyric to*

---

[112] See Davis, *The Cult of Saint Thekla*. Unfortunately for our purposes, Davis focuses on Asia Minor and Egypt, and does not cover the cult of Thekla in Syria in any great detail.

[113] Cited in Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla*, xxiii–xiv, 1–3.

[114] Golitzin, *Et introibo ad altare dei.*

[115] Bovon, "Byzantine Witnesses for the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles."

Thekla in Greek, is falsely attributed to John Chrysostom, but the manuscript evidence suggests that it was written in the fifth or sixth century. The second is a sixth-century sermon by Severus of Antioch, preserved only in Syriac.[116] Recall that Severus of Antioch provides us the *terminus ante quem* for the *CD*, for he is the first to cite the corpus in the early sixth century. Both texts have a connection to Antioch— the latter more securely than the former. Given that the *CD* is generally thought to hail from early sixth-century Syria, and thus that "Dionysius should be considered as one who simply inherited and further elaborated an already local tradition,"[117] it seems likely that the author of the *CD* was familiar with the cult of Thekla and entirely likely that he was familiar with the traditions regarding her life as recorded in the *ATh*. It is less likely, but still entirely possible, that the author was familiar with the *LM*: if indeed it was completed by 470, it could easily have found its way into the hands of our mysterious Syrian author. There is to date no study of the transmission of the *LM*, so the question of its influence on the *CD* must remain conjecture.[118] This caution, however, need not dampen our conclusions: for our purposes, it is less important to demonstrate the direct influence of either of these texts on the *CD* than it is to paint in broad strokes a relevant backdrop to the composition of the *CD*.

In summary, then, what is most important in this backdrop is: (1) an understanding of time whereby the apostolic past and the late antique present exist in a sort of "timeless communion" such that (2) the saints of the apostolic age were understood to be "living dead," working miracles in the present and on into the future, a "boundless era" of blessing; (3) that theological truth is ceded a sort of timelessness, such that a first-century apostle can and should speak in a fourth- or fifth-century idiom; (4) that writing serves as a devotional practice or *askēsis* whereby the late antique devotee solicits a present discipleship to a saint and thereby refashions or reconstitutes his or her self; (5) that the relationship forged between disciple and saint is, following the model of Paul and Thekla, an intensely erotic one; (6) that this eroticism, personified in the figure of Paul, serves as a conduit whereby the love of a disciple is redirected—sometimes awkwardly (*ATh*), sometimes gracefully (*LM*)—from its earthly to its divine beloved.

---

[116] Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla*, Appendix 2, 231–8.
[117] Golitzin, *Et introibo ad altare dei*, 352.
[118] See Dagron, "L'Auteur des 'Actes' et des 'Miracles' de Sointe Thècle."

II.C. Second case study: John Chrysostom and Paul

George of Alexandria, the seventh-century biographer of John Chrysostom, records a miraculous meeting between the apostle and his Antiochene admirer.[119] As the story goes, Chrysostom had a portrait of Paul on the wall of his room in Constantinople and he would speak with the portrait as if it were alive, often putting exegetical questions to the apostle.[120] One night, his secretary Proclus peeked through the door while Chrysostom was hard at work on a homily on one of Paul's letters. He saw a man standing over Chrysostom's shoulder, whispering in his right ear as he wrote. Chrysostom was unaware of the visitor and only later did his secretary realize that the man whom he saw was the same man from the portrait, namely Paul: "the man I saw speaking with you looked just like this man. Indeed, I think it is he!"[121] This legend went on to produce a rich iconographical tradition in Byzantium, perhaps the most stunning of which is an illustrated medieval manuscript where the bodies of Chrysostom, who is seated, and Paul, who is standing over him, form a single letter, kappa, which begins a new sentence.[122] This legend and the images it has inspired encapsulate the significance of this second case study, John Chrysostom's writings on Paul. For according to the legend, Chrysostom was able, through his devotional reading and writing, to summon Paul into the present, such that their authorial voices and even their bodies became so intertwined that it was difficult to differentiate them.

This legend is no mere hagiographical embellishment, but has abundant warrant from Chrysostom's own writings on Paul. His writings are by far and away the most sustained and comprehensive interpretation of the life and letters of the apostle in the early church

---

[119] *Vita Joh. Chrys.* 27, in Halkin, *Douze récits byzantins sur saint Jean Chrysostome*, 142–8; cited in Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 35–6.

[120] "John was in possession of a relief of the same apostle in a portrait. Sometimes he would have to stop for [a] while because of a little bodily weakness (for he went without sleep to a degree that confounded nature). And when he was going through Paul's epistles, he used to fix his gaze on Paul's portrait and was as intent on him *as if he were there alive*, pronouncing blessings on Paul's power of reasoning. John would attune his whole mind to Paul, imagining that he was conversing with him via this vision" (Halkin, *Douze récits*, 142); cited in Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 35n7.

[121] Halkin, *Douze récits*, 147; cited in Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 36.

[122] *British Library Add. Ms. 36636*, f. 179r; Plate 6 in Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 507.

---

or the patristic era. The contributions of eastern exegetes such as Origen and Theodore of Mopsuestia—even if their writings had been better preserved—would pale in comparison to Chrysostom's output. Likewise with the western exegetes: the commentaries of Ambrosiaster, Pelagius, Jerome, and Augustine are dwarfed by his achievement. The bulk of Chrysostom's writings on Paul are exegetical homilies that cover all fourteen of the canonical epistles (including also Hebrews) and the Acts of the Apostles. But his love for Paul spilled over into everything that Chrysostom wrote, and so the apostle appears in contexts as diverse as ascetical writings, catechetical orations, and panegyrics to local martyrs. It should go without saying that Chrysostom's Paul was not the Paul of modern biblical scholarship. Not only did Chrysostom treat *all* the canonical epistles as genuinely Pauline, he also considered Hebrews and the Acts of the Apostles as faithful witnesses to the life and thought of his beloved apostle.[123] Furthermore, he was comfortable weaving into his composite portrait of Paul earlier exegetical, homilectical, and hagiographical traditions—including the *Acts of Paul and Thekla*.[124]

In her recent book, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, Margaret M. Mitchell has sought to use Chrysostom's rich portraits of Paul as a way to open modern scholarship to what Karlfried Froehlich calls the "colorful palette of normative images of Paul" that is recorded in the history of exegesis.[125] In this regard, she sees herself as participating in a larger trend in Pauline scholarship that has, since the mid-twentieth century, been attempting to break the monopoly of the western—that is to say, Augustinian and Lutheran—reading of Paul. One wing of this larger movement has sought to situate Paul and his peculiar concerns in the context of first-century Judaism and thereby to distance him from the very different concerns of fifth-century Roman North Africa or sixteenth-century Catholic Germany. Another wing of this same movement has appealed instead to the various "legacies" of Paul in the early church.[126] While earlier adherents to both wings of this movement held out hope that their inquiry would yield the *authentic* Paul by which other portraits might be judged, other, more recent scholars, including Mitchell, find this criterion "utterly elusive and

---

[123] Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 2.
[124] Ibid., 88, 99.
[125] Cited ibid., xx.
[126] See Wiles, *The Divine Apostle*, and Babcock, ed., *Paul and the Legacies of Paul*.

ultimately useless" and seek instead to highlight the many and different portraits of Paul that emerge not only from the canonical corpus, but also from the history of exegesis.[127] Furthermore, Mitchell aims to expand our standard scholarly understanding of what constitutes exegesis in the early church. On her construal, biblical exegesis must include not only traditional scriptural commentaries, but also other genres of literature that work closely with biblical material, including, in this case, homilies.

Throughout his homilies, Chrysostom gives voice to a phenomenon that should be familiar to us by now, namely how Paul makes himself known—indeed *present*—to contemporaries, first and foremost through reading. In the initial *Argumentum* to a series of homilies on Romans, Chrysostom exclaims: "Continually when I hear the letters of the blessed Paul read . . . I rejoice in the pleasure of that spiritual trumpet, and I am roused to attention and warmed with desire because I recognize the voice I love, and seem to imagine him all but present [μονονουχὶ παρόντα αὐτὸν δοκῶ φαντάζεσθαι] and conversing with me [διαλεγόμενον ὁρᾶν]."[128] Leaving aside for the moment the fact that Paul rouses desire in Chrysostom, we should note that elsewhere Chrysostom holds out to his audience the same promise of contemporaneity with Paul and the other apostles through the practice of reading: "Therefore, if you wish you may have both Paul, Peter, and John, and the whole chorus of the prophets conversing with you continually. For take the books of these blessed ones, and continually read their writings and they will be able to make you like [Prisca] the tent-maker's wife."[129] According to Acts, Prisca and her husband Aquila, both tentmakers, hosted Paul for two years in Corinth. Chrysostom's conviction that Paul can and will make himself present to the devoted reader derives in part from his understanding of how letters are simultaneously witnesses to authorial presence and absence: "The inexperienced reader when taking up a letter will consider it to be papyrus and ink; but the experienced reader will both hear a voice, and converse with the one who is absent";[130] "Thus Paul knew his presence was everywhere a great

---

[127] Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 20.
[128] *hom. in Rom.* Arg. 1 [60.391]; cited in Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 132.
[129] *hom. in Rom.* 30.4 [60.665–6]; cited in Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 46.
[130] *hom. in 1 Cor.* 7.2 [61.56]; cited in Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 48–9.

thing, and always, though absent, he makes himself present."[131] This understanding of epistolary presence and absence and the practice of reading that it endorses is what Mitchell calls a "reading of resuscitation."[132]

If in private the devotional reader can collapse historical time so as to enjoy a present relationship with Paul or any of the apostles, so writing and preaching can render that same "timeless communion" available to a wider audience, a public. Mitchell argues convincingly that Chrysostom's homilies need to be understood in the context of *ekphrasis*, defined by an ancient rhetorical theorist as "a descriptive discourse which visibly brings the object being manifested before one's eyes," or by modern a theorist as "a painting in words."[133] Although *ekphrasis* was primarily a literary technique that sought to render visible an absent work of art, often sculpture, it could also be used to call to mind for an audience a particular individual. According to Mitchell, "[a]n ἔκφρασις of a person, or of an artistic rendering of a person, sought primarily to convey a subject's very soul and character by a recreation of his or her physical appearance."[134] The technique of *ekphrasis* therefore served Chrysostom's ends very well, as he sought in his homilies to recreate for his audience the very presence of Paul he felt in private reading:

> If the goal of an *ekphrasis* is to provoke in an audience the first-hand emotional experience of something from which they are absent—a work of art, a person, or some other artifact—then one can see why it is the perfect vehicle for Chrysostom's task of biographical exegesis, for he seeks in his homilies to effect *a vivid, living encounter* of his congregation with *the person of the apostle, who springs to life for him in the reading of his letters*. John wishes to recreate for others his own profound experience of Pauline presence in the act of reading and interpretation.[135]

Chrysostom sought quite literally to *summon* Paul before his audience—hence Mitchell's apt characterization of his homilectics as an "inherently necromantic art."[136] Of course Paul was not really dead at

---

[131] *hom. in Col.* 1.1 [62.300]; cited in Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 49.
[132] Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 1, 65.
[133] Ibid., 101.
[134] Ibid., 102–3.
[135] Ibid., 132 (my emphasis).
[136] Ibid., xix.

all: Chrysostom goes so far as to say that Paul's decayed limbs in Rome are in fact more alive now than they were when he was on earth.[137] Paul may be absent, but by reading, writing, and preaching we may summon his presence. Echoing the consensus examined above regarding the peculiar understanding of time in the late antique Christian East, Mitchell characterizes Chrysostom's efforts to summon the presence of Paul as a form of "time-travel": "not his own trek back in time but Paul's movement forward . . . creates [Chrysostom's] encounter with the Paul he knows."[138] Chrysostom, like the anonymous author of the *LM*, asks that Paul travel *forward* in time so that he and his audience might bask in his presence. Might the pseudonymous author of the *CD*, however, be traveling *back* in time for precisely the same end? For if there is a widespread conviction that historical time can be collapsed so that past and present might enjoy "contemporaneity," then presumably one could traverse that distance in either direction.

Beyond the desire to share with his audience the presence of Paul he enjoys in private, Chrysostom has a very specific aim in mind for his necromantic preaching. As Mitchell puts it, "the orator-exegete always has a contemporary end in view," namely *imitatio Pauli*. Chrysostom understands Paul as the "archetypal image" of virtue, embodying all the monastic virtues he so esteems. The mandate to imitate Paul comes from the apostle himself, who in several places exhorts his readers to "be imitators of me" (μιμηταί μου γίνεσθε) (1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; cf. Gal 4:12). Paul, however, understands that he only serves as a means to an end—in Mitchell's words a "mimetic intermediary"—for his exhortation to "become imitators of me" is coupled with the reminder, "just as I am of Christ!" (1 Cor 11:1). For Chrysostom, Paul's *mimesis* of Christ is grounded in his confession in Gal 2:20 that "it is no longer I, but Christ who lives in me." This confession has a fascinating parallel in Chrysostom's own teacher Libanius, the pagan rhetor, who says that through *paideia* learned men could in fact "install Demosthenes in their souls."[139] If Paul was, for Chrysostom, "the imitator of Christ" (ὁ τοῦ Χριστοῦ μιμητής), then *imitatio Pauli* was none other than *imitatio Christi*.[140]

---

137   *hom. in Rom.* 32.4 [60.680]; cited in Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 30.
138   Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 393.
139   Ibid., 43.
140   *compunct.* 1.9 [47.407], cited in Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 84.

Why was such an intermediary necessary? Why not imitate Christ directly? Mitchell opines that "Paul as mimetic intermediary becomes increasingly important in the fourth century as Christology soars higher and higher, and the imitation of Christ seems beyond the ken of ordinary human beings, whereas imitation of Paul stands more within reach."[141] While this is an interesting hypothesis, the second century knew no such vertiginous Christology, and yet the *ATh* vividly portrays Paul as an intermediary between Thekla and Christ. The notion that Paul can and should serve us as an intermediary to Christ seems not to be correlated to Christological trends. Chrysostom at least does not view *imitatio Pauli* as especially indirect or in any way a detour from proper *imitatio Christi*. On the contrary, given the witness of Gal 2:20 and other such remarkable Pauline confessions, Chrysostom seems to think that what we are imitating when we are imitating Paul is in fact Christ himself. In other words, the fact that Christ broke into the "I" of Paul guarantees the chain of *imitatio Christi*, guarantees that what we are imitating in Paul is in fact Christ. As Mitchell argues,

> Without the Christ-infusion which Paul claimed to have continually experienced (2 Cor 13:3: ". . . Christ is speaking in me"), the Pauline portraits would themselves have been of no interest. Thus the portraits of Paul in John's eyes are portraits of Christ, portraits of what a human being who has Christ speaking in him looks like. As Chrysostom himself put it: "For where Paul was, there also was Christ."[142]

Thus Chrysostom's devotion to Paul does not seem to "compromise" or in any sense "displace" his devotion to Christ.[143] Chrysostom could compare Paul to angels and heavenly bodies, not because Paul transcended the human condition but because in Paul lived Christ.[144]

Nowhere is this clearer than with respect to the matter of the two voices—Christ's and Paul's. Chrysostom insists that "it is not Paul who spoke, but Christ, who moved Paul's soul. So when you hear him shout and say: 'Behold, I, Paul, tell you' (Gal 5:2), consider that only the shout is Paul's; the thought and the teaching are Christ's, who is

---

[141] Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 51.
[142] Ibid., 396.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid., 399.

speaking to Paul from within his heart."[145] He goes even further, daring to say that "through Paul's mouth Christ spoke great and inexpressible things, and even greater things than he spoke through his own mouth."[146] Despite his own regimen of *imitatio Pauli*, however, Chrysostom never claims to have had Paul and thereby Christ speak through his own mouth. But subsequent readers have, including a near contemporary, Isidore of Pelusium, who remarks that "if the divine Paul had taken up the Attic tongue to interpret himself, he would not have done it differently than this renowned [John] has done."[147] Centuries later a Greek manuscript copyist offered a clearer formulation, adding to the page the following observation:

> The mouth of Christ brought forth the mouth of Paul and the mouth of Paul the mouth of Chrysostom.[148]

Chrysostom explains to his audience that he is often diverted from his own ends by Paul, who "takes possession" of him, either in private or in public:

> But why am I troubled? Summoning great force I must flee, lest again Paul, taking possession [$\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\epsilon\iota\nu$] of me, might lead me away from the text I have set forth to preach on. For you well know how repeatedly at other times, meeting me as I was going about my sermon, he took possession of me and I became diverted right in the middle of my sermon, and he so seized me that I was persuaded by him to wreck the sermon.[149]

In a pair of homilies on Ephesians he confesses that "we cannot bear to resist" ($\dot{\alpha}\nu\tau\iota\pi\epsilon\sigma\epsilon\hat{\iota}\nu$ $o\dot{\upsilon}\chi$ $\dot{\upsilon}\pi o\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu o\mu\epsilon\nu$) such a possession, that he could no better stop speaking about Paul than a drunk could stop drinking.[150] He invites his audience into his own possession: "What is happening to me? I wish to be silent, but I am not able."[151] Once, when in his homily on Genesis he takes a rather long detour to interpret 2 Cor 11:21 f., he apologizes and explains that "my tongue

---

[145] *Jud.* 2.1 [48.858]; cited in Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 77.
[146] *hom. in Rom.* 32.3 [60.679]; cited in Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 125.
[147] Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 31.
[148] Ibid., 33.
[149] *hom. in Is.* 45:7 3 [56.146]; cited in Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 69.
[150] *hom. in Eph.* 9.1 [62.69]; cited in Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 69; *hom. in Eph.* 8.8 [62.66], cited in Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 69n3, 184.
[151] *hom. in Eph.* 8.8 [62.66]; cited in Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 184n267.

was swept away as though by a raging stream of water."[152] Chrysostom suggests that the chain that once bound Paul in prison the apostle now uses to bind us: "Paul's chain has become very long, and held us very tightly fast. For it is indeed long, and more beautiful than any gold cord. This chain pulls those who are bound with it to heaven, as though it were a crane. Just like a secured gold cord, Paul's chain pulls them up to heaven itself."[153] Despite the confusion and the consequent loss of control over his own voice, then, Chrysostom nevertheless views these episodes as anagogical, as Paul enabling his ascent to heaven. Reflecting on Chrysostom's descriptions of these episodes, Mitchell describes a situation that can be fruitfully applied to pseudonymous writing: "In Chrysostom's interpretation of Paul the identities, personalities, and voices of the two men, like their faces in the miniature portrait, become conformed to one another. Thus in Chrysostom's discourse on Paul we have a complex interweaving of the two persons, the two selves, of Paul and Chrysostom."[154] Just as Paul confesses to an interweaving of two selves—himself and Christ—so Chrysostom confesses to a similar interweaving of selves—himself and Paul and, by extension, Christ.

This leads to a final, important point: for Chrysostom, this mimetic chain or serial possession—Chrysostom imitating Paul imitating Christ—relies on the logic of love. In his homily on 2 Cor 11:1, Chrysostom confesses that "I love [φιλῶ] all the saints, but especially the blessed Paul."[155] Elsewhere he says that he suffers from a "love charm" (φίλτρον), cast over him by the apostle.[156] His spellbound love for Paul, however, guarantees that *mimesis* will work: "for what belongs to those who are loved, they who love them know above all others."[157] The same, of course, applies to Paul, whose own *mimesis* of Christ depends on the fact that Paul was, in Chrysostom's words, "the red-hot lover of Christ" (ὁ διάπυρος ἐραστὴς τοῦ Χριστοῦ).[158] This is no isolated indiscretion: Chrysostom's writings are peppered with references to Paul the lover: "the mind burning with desire for

---

[152] *hom. in Gen.* 11.7 [953.97–8]; cited in Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 69n2.
[153] *hom. in Eph.* 8.8 [62.66] cited in Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 184n266.
[154] Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 42.
[155] *hom. in 2 Cor. 11:1* 1 [51.301]; cited in Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 38.
[156] Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 38.
[157] *hom. in Rom.* Arg. 1 [60.391]; cited in Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 39.
[158] *compunct.* 1.7 [47.404]; see also ὁ θερμὸς ἐραστὴς τοῦ Χριστοῦ (*hom. in Gen.* 34.5 [53.319]); both cited in Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 87.

God"; "a God-loving soul"; "a soul on fire"; "the foster-father of love"; "Nothing was . . . more loving [φιλοστοργότερον] than [his] holy soul."[159] Those who would insist on the false dichotomy between *erōs* and *agapē*, therefore, can no longer lay blame for Dionysius' having called Paul a lover (ἐραστής) on his loosely veiled pagan loyalties. For it is to Chrysostom—who seems to think that such an erotic love, properly oriented, was entirely compatible with his campaign to bring asceticism to the laity—that credit (or debit) is due. Attribution aside, the most important point for our purposes is that Chrysostom's "hermeneutics of love lead even to a hermeneutics of conformity," that the mimetic chain or serial possession depends on Chrysostom's burning love for Paul, which candle in turn depends on the torch of Paul's love for Christ.

CONCLUSION

I suggest that we read the *CD* in light of the evidence I have presented here, in the form of two case studies. The *LM* corroborates the consensus view regarding the peculiar understanding of time in the late antique Christian East, whereby the saints of the apostolic and sub-apostolic periods literally "haunt" the late antique present as "living dead." Thekla haunts the fifth century, visiting her hagiographer by night and initiating him into a private cult, centered on his own practice of writing, which is soon made public with the anonymous publication of her life and miracles. The author collapses the distance between the apostolic past and the late antique present by having Thekla speak in the timeless truth of conciliar orthodoxy. The life of Thekla, in both redactions, teaches the author and his readership that we have desperate need of intermediaries or liaisons to reorient our wayward selves to Christ and God. Thekla serves as the intermediary for the author, just as Paul served as that intermediary for Thekla. The life of Thekla, in both redactions, also teaches us that

---

[159]   *hom. in Ac.* 55.3 [60.384], cited in Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 40; *hom. in Gen.* 11.5 [53.96], cited in Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 82; *hom. in Gen.* 34.6 [53.320], cited in Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 82; *laud. Paul.* 3.10 [SC 300.180], cited in Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 87; *comm. in Gal.* 4.2 [61.659], cited in Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 82.

the primary work of this liaison is to return our *erōs* from its wayward to its homeward end. The intermediary achieves this transfer by turning our *erōs* first to him or herself, and only thereafter to its proper target, Christ and God. The return to God is therefore an *erotic* return, but the two redactions differ as to whether this return is pained (*ATh*) or pacific (*LM*).

We find a similar pattern in Chrysostom's homilies on Paul. Through his private writing and public preaching, Chrysostom summons the apostle Paul into the present. According to Chrysostom, the apostle takes possession of him, controls his mouth and his pen such that their voices, their persons, merge. Chrysostom summons Paul precisely so that he and his audience may imitate him and, through him, Christ. Paul is, for Chrysostom, the mimetic intermediary between himself and Christ. And just as he was for Thekla, Paul serves as an effective intermediary because he realigns our *erōs*. Chrysostom can love Paul because the burning coal of his love will be added to the bonfire that is Paul's burning love for Christ and God. Chrysostom can also love Paul because Christ lives in Paul (Gal 2:20), such that what Chrysostom loves is not so much Paul himself as it is Christ *in* Paul.

Where might the author of the *CD* fit here? On the one hand, he is, like the anonymous author of the *LM*, focusing his attention on a disciple of Paul, Dionysius the Areopagite, rather than Paul himself. On the other hand, insofar as he is taking on the identity of this disciple, he is positioning himself much as Chrysostom does, that is, as a direct disciple of Paul. Like the author of the *LM* and Chrysostom, the author of the *CD* seems to have need of an intermediary between himself and Christ, and by writing under the name of Dionysius the Areopagite, he invites Paul to become that intermediary. The most obvious difference between the author of the *LM* and Chrysostom, on the one hand, and the author of the *CD*, on the other, is that the first two summon Paul into the present to serve as an intermediary, that is, they fully expect Paul to travel forward in time; whereas the author of the *CD* transports himself into the past, that is, he asks the apostles and their disciples to receive him into their communion. But this very difference points to the way in which pseudonymous writing should be understood against the backdrop of this shared understanding of time, for if the present and the past are porous and can be collapsed, then both directions of time travel are warranted. The widespread conviction that time was porous or

could be collapsed led to different practices of writing meant to bridge that divide: witness hagiography and homiletics. I argue that the pseudonymous enterprise of the *CD* is another writing practice meant to bridge this same divide, to collapse the centuries so that the late antique writer could achieve contemporaneity with the apostolic past, not by summoning it forward in time, but by traveling back in time, and assuming the identity of one of disciples.

If the author of the *CD* is traveling back in time and assuming the identity of a disciple of Paul, then we would expect that the life, letters, and legacy of Paul would influence the major themes of the *CD*. In the second part of this investigation, Chapters Three through Five, I argue precisely this: that Paul animates the entire *CD*. In the next chapter, Chapter Three, I begin to make this case by charting the influence of Paul on the Dionysian hierarchies, as laid out in the two treatises, the *Celestial Hierarchy* and the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*.

3

———

"I rejoice to see your order"

Paul and the Dionysian Hierarchies

In the first part of this investigation, Chapters One and Two, I surveyed the late antique milieu from which the *CD* emerged and the modern scholarship thereon, most of which has passed over the question of the pseudonym and the influence of Paul but some of which has provided promising leads. In the second part of this investigation, which begins with this chapter, I demonstrate how the figure and writings of Paul animate the whole corpus. In other words, I argue for a modest but novel approach to the *CD*: that we take seriously the many references and allusions to Paul and see how they might help us understand the vision of a man who wrote under the name of his disciple. In this chapter, then, I interpret the Dionysian hierarchies—as described in the *Celestial Hierarchy* and *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*—against a Pauline backdrop. I focus on the introductory chapters to both treatises on the hierarchies (*CH* 1–3, *EH* 1) on the conviction that it is precisely here—where we meet the definition of hierarchy in general and the introductory accounts of the two specific hierarchies[1]—that the influence of Paul is most keenly felt. The *CH* goes on to describe the angelic ranks and the *EH* the orders and sacraments of the church. While Paul is also present in

———

[1] In fact, there is a third hierarchy, the "legal" hierarchy or "hierarchy of the law," which refers to the community organized around the Mosaic law (*EH* 2.1 392C [*CD* II 69.17]; *EH* 3.2.10 440A [*CD* II 89.20]; *EH* 5 501B–C [*CD* II 104.20–105.16]; *Ep*. 8 1089C [*CD* II 178.13]). This third hierarchy is a rather odd fit with the celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies, and seems to be included so as to round out the pair and deliver a "triad" of hierarchies—Dionysius being keen on such triads, even if, as here, forced.

these more detailed treatments of the angels and the sacraments, space precludes full treatment. This chapter investigates Paul's relevance to three broad themes in the *CD*: (I) the definition of hierarchy as order, understanding and activity; (II) Jesus and the hierarchies; and (III) the purpose of hierarchy: deification through cooperation. I want to insist again, as I did in the Introduction, however, that the influence of Paul on the *CD* does not preclude other, undeniable influences, specifically the earlier Eastern Christian tradition (especially the Cappadocians) and later Neoplatonism (especially Proclus). In what follows, I do not mean to suggest that this sixth-century pseudonymous author wove his unique mystical theology from the threads of the Pauline epistles alone, but rather that, steeped in the traditions of Eastern Christianity and Neoplatonism as he surely was, he read and understood Paul as anticipating many of the turns and themes he found so attractive in these later traditions.

I. THE DEFINITION OF HIERARCHY

In the third chapter of the *CH* Dionysius offers a definition of hierarchy: "In my opinion, a hierarchy is a sacred order, an understanding and an activity being approximated as closely as possible to the divine."[2] At least two of the elements of this definition—order (τάξις) and activity (ἐνέργεια)—have important Pauline parallels, especially when taken together. In Chapter Five I will return to the second element of this definition—hierarchy as a "state of understanding" (ἐπιστήμη)—and explain how this "understanding" relates to Paul's own ecstatic love of the divine.

---

[2] *CH* 3.1 164D; *CD* II 17.3–4 (translation my own): Ἔστι μὲν ἱεραρχία κατ᾽ ἐμὲ τάξις ἱερὰ καὶ ἐπιστήμη καὶ ἐνέργεια πρὸς τὸ θεοειδὲς ὡς ἐφικτὸν ἀφομοιουμένη; cf. *CH* 3.2 165B; *CD* II 18.10–13: "He, then, who mentions Hierarchy, denotes a certain altogether Holy Order, an image of the supremely Divine freshness, ministering the mysteries of its own illumination in hierarchical ranks, and sciences, and assimilated to its own proper Head as far as lawful" (Οὐκοῦν ἱεραρχίαν ὁ λέγων ἱεράν τινα καθόλου δηλοῖ διακόσμησιν, εἰκόνα τῆς θεαρχικῆς ὡραιότητος, ἐν τάξεσι καὶ ἐπιστήμαις ἱεραχικαῖς τὰ τῆς οἰκείας ἐλλάμψεως ἱερουργοῦσαν μυστήρια καὶ πρὸς τὴν οἰκείαν ἀρχὴν ὡς θεμιτὸν ἀφομοιουμένην).

I.A. Order (τάξις)

Although Paul uses the word "order" (τάξις) twice in his letters,[3] and appeals to the eschatological "order" once by another name (τάγμα),[4] the important parallel between Dionysius and Paul has less to do with the use of the term τάξις itself or related terms, and more to do with the notion of a divinely sanctioned and ordered arrangement. For this notion Paul prefers the figure of the "body" (σῶμα) and his premier treatment of this figure is 1 Cor 12. Speaking to the Corinthian community in crisis, Paul reminds his charges that "just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one, so it is with Christ."[5] The Corinthian church is "the body of Christ and individually members of it."[6] This body of Christ relies on each of its individual members—the foot, the hand, the eye, the ear—to perform its appointed task, for "God has so arranged the body . . . that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another."[7] The health of the body of Christ, therefore, relies on the harmonious orchestration of difference. On this model, unity requires differentiation. Moving from the figure of the body and its members to the constituency of the Corinthian community, Paul describes how God appointed apostles, prophets, teachers, "deeds of power, gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, [and] various kinds of tongues."[8]

Like the Corinthian church, the Dionysian hierarchies suffer from crises and challenges. Dionysius' *Letter 8* is addressed to a certain monk Demophilus—a "crowd-pleaser"[9]—who deigned to break the order of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. This monk apparently objected to the fact that his superior welcomed a penitent back into

---

[3] 1 Cor 14:40: "All things should be done decently and in order [κατὰ τάξιν]"; Col 2.5: "I rejoice to see your order [τάξιν] and the firmness of your faith in Christ." In addition, however, the various verbs formed from this same root are well attested in his letters, especially 1 Corinthians, attesting to his interest in the maintenance of order: τάσσω: Rom. 13:1; διατάσσω: 1 Cor 7:17, 9:14, 11:34, 16:1; Gal 3:19; Titus 1:5; ἐπιτάσσω: Philem 8.

[4] 1 Cor 15:23: "Each in his own order" (ἕκαστος δὲ ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ τάγματι).

[5] 1 Cor 12:12.

[6] 1 Cor 12:27.

[7] 1 Cor 12:24–5.

[8] 1 Cor 12:28.

[9] See Golitzin, "Dionysius Areopagita: A Christian Mysticism?" 176.

communion and so thrust his way into the inner sanctuary to steal away with the "sacred things."[10] Dionysius chastises this monk and defends the order of the hierarchy, alluding to Paul's advice to the Corinthians: "[E]ach must keep to himself, and not meditate things too high and too deep for him, but contemplate alone things prescribed for him according to order."[11] And later in the same letter, Dionysius alludes to Paul again, this time his advice to Timothy regarding the relationship of the governance of self to the governance of community.[12] Paul, therefore, provides not only a model for the *establishment* of a divinely sanctioned and ordered arrangement, but also advice for the continual *maintenance* of that order.

Between Paul's body of Christ and our author's hierarchy stand two important intermediaries: the author of *1 Clement* and Ignatius of Antioch. Both are writers from the end of the first century who transform Paul's notion of the body of Christ as a divinely sanctioned and ordered arrangement of the community into a more elaborate and rigid celestial and ecclesiastical order. These early intermediaries are not chosen at random: Dionysius himself mentions both figures in the course of the *CD*.[13] Modern scholars have expressed surprise that our sixth-century author, who takes care to maintain his first-century pseudonymous identity, seems to have slipped in mentioning Clement and Ignatius, since an ancient reader with a keen historical sense might have noticed that the Areopagite would have had to live to a very great age in order to have known Clement or to have read Ignatius' letter.[14] It is likely that our sixth-century author did not

---

[10] *Ep*. 8.1 1088B; *CD* II 175.10–13.

[11] *Ep*. 8.1 1092A; *CD* II 180.1–3. This not only recalls 1 Cor 12 generally, but also 1 Cor 7:26 ("it is well for a person to remain as he is") and 1 Tim 4:16 ("Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers).

[12] *Ep*. 8.3 1093B; *CD* II 183.4–6: "Naturally, our blessed Law-giver from God does not deem right that one should preside over the Church of God, who has not already well presided over his own house."; cf. 1 Tim 3:5: "if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church?"

[13] In *DN* 5.9 824D; *CD* I 188.11, Dionysius mentions "Clement, the philosopher." Rorem suggests that Dionysius may have meant Clement the "co-worker" whom Paul mentions in Phil 4:3, not Clement, the third bishop of Rome and purported author of *1 Clement* (Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 102n186); in *DN* 4.12 709B; *CD* I 157.10–11, Dionysius mentions Ignatius and quotes from his *Letter to the Romans* (7:2).

[14] Our earliest scholiast, John of Scythopolis, takes Dionysius to mean Clement the bishop of Rome and does not see the citation as a significant challenge to his authenticity (*SchDN* 329.1, 332.1). John also passes over the mention of Ignatius of

know the precise dating of these figures or their texts and so did not recognize that his mentioning them might compromise his pseud-onymous identity. Quite to the contrary, it seems that he mentions them, as he mentions other first-century figures, in order to flesh out his sub-apostolic community. More to the point, it suggests that he knows the manner in which both authors draw on Paul to develop an elaborate and rigid order, both celestial and ecclesiastical.

I.A.1. Clement

The anonymous letter to the church in Corinth, dated to the very late first century, has long been attributed by tradition to Clement, the third bishop of Rome. The author of this letter—let us hereafter call him Clement—writes to a Corinthian church again in turmoil. The letter refers to a "vile and profane faction,"[15] and goes on to explain that younger members of the community have deposed the elders who, according to Clement, constitute the latest link in the apostolic chain of succession. The letter is an appeal to the Corinthian church to restore order and peace by means of humility and obedience, both to God and to the divinely ordained superiors of the community.

Not surprisingly, Clement arrogates the voice of Paul and thereby seems almost to collapse time: again Paul must lovingly censure the unruly Corinthians. And yet Clement does not simply repeat the words of Paul, but situates his figure of the community as the body of Christ within an even more robust understanding of order. God, the "Creator of the entire world,"[16] has set all things in harmonious order: the heavens, the movements of the sun and moon, the "chorus of stars," plants and beasts, the abyssal depths of the sea, the seasons, the winds—all these things "roll along the tracks that have been appointed to them, in harmony, never crossing their lines, in accor-dance with the arrangement he has made."[17] This harmonious order, of course, extends to the life of the church, which, following Paul in 1 Corinthians, Clement likens to a body:

Antioch without comment (*SchDN* 264.6–7). See Rorem and Lamoureaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 101, 105–6.

[15] *1 Clement* 1.1. All quotations from *1 Clement* and Ignatius of Antioch are from Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers I*.

[16] Ibid., 19.2.

[17] Ibid., 20.3.

> Take our own body. The head is nothing without the feet, just as the feet are nothing without the head. And our body's most insignificant parts are necessary and useful for the whole [1 Cor 12:21–2]. But all parts work together in subjection to a single order, to keep the whole body healthy.[18]

And yet for Clement even the figure of the body seems insufficient to convey the rigid sense of order and obedience. Perhaps surprisingly for a bishop of Rome, where tradition places the martyrdom of Paul at the hands of the imperials, Clement decides on more martial imagery to convey his full meaning:

> And so, brothers, with all eagerness let us do battle as soldiers under his blameless commands. Consider those who soldier under our own leaders, how they accomplish what is demanded of them with such order, habit, and submission. For not all are commanders-in-chief or commanders over a thousand troops, or a hundred, or fifty, and so on. But each one, according to his own rank [1 Cor 15:23], accomplishes what is ordered by the king and the leaders.[19]

 There is, according to this view, a clear chain of command: "Christ came from God and the apostles from Christ . . . And as [the apostles] preached throughout the countryside and in the cities, they appointed the first fruits of their ministries as bishops and deacons of those who were about to believe."[20] The apostolic succession is here mapped onto both God's harmonious creation and the martial order. To contest this apostolic succession—as it seems some in Corinth had done—was to revolt against God and creation and thereby forfeit salvation.[21] Salvation was to be found in communion

---

[18] *1 Clement* 37.5.
[19] Ibid., 37.1–3.
[20] Ibid., 42.1–4. Clement goes on to explain how these first bishops and deacons would inaugurate the succession: "So too our apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that strife would arise over the office of the bishop. For this reason, since they understood perfectly well in advance what would happen, they appointed those we have already mentioned; and afterwards they added a codicil, to the effect that if these should die, other approved men should succeed them in their ministry. Thus we do not think it right to remove from the ministry those who were appointed by them or, afterwards, by other reputable men, with the entire church giving its approval. For they have ministered over the flock of Christ blamelessly and with humility, gently and unselfishly receiving a good witness by all, many times over . . . But we see that you have deposed some from the ministry held blamelessly in honor among them, even though they had been conducting themselves well" (44.1–6).
[21] Ibid., 45.1.

with the apostolic Church: not only humility and obedience were necessary, so too the participation in the sacramental life of the community:

> Since these matters have been clarified for us in advance and we have gazed into the depths of divine knowledge, we should do everything the Master has commanded us to perform in an orderly way and at appointed times. He commanded that the sacrificial offerings and liturgical rites be performed not in a random or haphazard way, but according to set times and hours. In his superior plan he set forth both where and through whom he wishes them to be performed, so that everything done in a holy way and according to his good pleasure might be acceptable to his will. Thus, those who make their sacrificial offerings at the arranged times are acceptable and blessed. And since they follow the ordinances of the Master, they commit no sin. For special liturgical rites have been assigned to the high priest, and a special place has been designated for the regular priests, and special ministries are established for the Levites. The lay person is assigned to matters enjoined on the laity.[22]

None other than "Jesus Christ, the high priest of our offerings," presides over this sacramental life through his ordained representatives. And as we meet him in church, "through this one we gaze into the heights of the heavens; through this one we see the reflection of his perfect and superior countenance; through this one the eyes of our hearts have been opened; through this one our foolish and darkened understanding springs up into the light."[23] We will return below to a number of themes raised here: the notion that Jesus is the deifying light that shines through the hierarchies and ushers us into the work of God through the sacraments, especially baptism. Now we need only note that *1 Clement* is an important stage along the way between the Pauline figure of the Corinthian community as the "body of Christ" and the Dionysian definition of hierarchy as both an order ($\tau\acute{\alpha}\xi\iota\varsigma$) and an activity ($\dot{\epsilon}\nu\acute{\epsilon}\rho\gamma\epsilon\iota\alpha$). In *1 Clement* we see some of the characteristic features of Dionysian hierarchy: the development of a more robust and more rigid understanding of order that runs from the celestial realms down through the ecclesiastical life of the church to the very edges of creation; the emphasis on the maintenance of this

---

[22] Ibid., 40.1–5.   [23] Ibid., 36.1–2.

order and the consequences of unruliness; the insistence that every order has an activity that renders its operations harmonious.

I.A.2. Ignatius of Antioch

Ignatius, a near contemporary of Clement's, wrote seven letters—six to Christian churches and one to Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna—on his way to martyrdom at Rome, sometime during Trajan's rule (98–117 CE). Like Clement, Ignatius takes the epistolary opportunity to enjoin a vision of order on his audience: here, the Christian churches of Asia Minor. And not surprisingly, also like Clement, Ignatius is steeped in the letters of Paul, especially 1 Corinthians, and indeed seems to model his own epistolary corpus on Paul's correspondence. Like Paul and Clement after him, Ignatius sees the "body of Christ" in danger on all sides and from within.[24] Internal strife threatens the body with disintegration. And whereas Clement pleas for order on the basis of an elaborate vision of a cosmos "roll[ing] along the tracks that have been appointed to [it], in harmony," and with it a clear account of apostolic succession, Ignatius insists that we obey the ecclesiastical order—especially the bishop—on the grounds that this ecclesiastical order is a reflection of the divine order:

> You should render [your bishop] all due respect according to the power of God the Father . . . the Father of Jesus Christ, the bishop of all.[25]

> I urge you to hasten to do all things in the harmony of God, with the bishop presiding in the place of God and the presbyters in the place of the council of apostles, and the deacons, who are especially dear to me, entrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ, who was with the Father before the ages and has been manifest at the end.[26]

Thus, for Ignatius, order is guaranteed not so much by the fact of a linear historical development—apostolic succession—as by the timeless reflection by the church of the heavens. The influence of this "mystical nexus between the earthly Church and the sphere of the divine"[27]—this "Church mysticism"[28]—on Dionysius is easy enough

---

[24] *Smyrnaeans* 1.1–2.
[25] *Magnesians* 3.1; cf. *Ephesians* 3.2, 5.3; *Romans* 9.1; *Philadelphians* 1.1; *Polycarp* 6.1.
[26] *Magnesians* 6.1.
[27] Richardson, *Early Church Fathers*, 76.   [28] Ibid., 79.

to see: "Wherefore, the Divine Institution of the sacred Rites, having deemed it worthy of the supermundane imitation of the Heavenly Hierarchies, and having depicted the aforesaid immaterial Hierarchies in material figures and bodily compositions . . . transmitted to us our most Holy Hierarchy."[29] Of course the details of order differ: the Ignatian orders of bishops, presbyters, and deacons and their divine counterparts do not map easily onto the ecclesiastical and celestial hierarchies of Dionysius. And yet the notion that Paul's ordered arrangement of the church, the body of Christ, has become, in the letters of Ignatius, a reflection of a celestial order, is a significant step in tracing the Dionysian hierarchies to their Pauline roots.

We have spoken at length now about order (τάξις): Paul's "body of Christ," Clement's "orderly way" of apostolic succession situated in a smoothly running cosmos, Ignatius' reflection by the church of the heavens. And we have seen how the Dionysian sacred order—hierarchy—can be traced back through Ignatius and Clement to Paul, his purported teacher. It remains for us to say something of energy of activity (ἐνέργεια), the third component of Dionysius' definition of hierarchy.

I.B. Energy (ἐνέργεια)

For Paul, the maintenance of order, the health of the body of Christ, requires "a still more excellent way,"[30] a specific activity or energy. The term Dionysius uses for this activity or energy in his definition of hierarchy, ἐνέργεια, is a term one finds often in the letters of Paul; two especially demand our attention:[31]

---

[29] *CH* 1.3 121C; *CD* II 8.14–16; cf. *CH* 1.3 124A; *CD* II 9.8–11: " . . . the philanthropic Source of sacred mysteries, by manifesting the Heavenly Hierarchies to us, and constituting our Hierarchy as fellow-ministers [συλλειτουργόν] with them, through our imitation of their Godlike priestliness, so far as in us lies . . . " On the importance of the root ἔργον in this term συλλειτουργόν, see section II below.

[30] 1 Cor 12:31.

[31] Others include: Eph 1:19: "the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working [ἐνέργειαν] of his great power"; Eph 3:7: "Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working [ἐνέργειαν] of his power"; Col 1:29: "For this I toil and struggle with all the energy [ἐνέργειαν] that he powerfully inspires within me"; Col 2:12: "And you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working [ἐνεργείας] of God, who raised him from the dead."

> Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly [κατ᾽ ἐνέργειαν], makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love [εἰς οἰκοδομὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ]. (Eph 4:15–16)

> [The Lord Jesus Christ] will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power [κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν] that enables him even to subject all things to himself. (Phil 3:21)

According to both of these passages, then, there is an ἐνέργεια that allows the body to move and grow properly, conforming ever more to the head of Christ and his body of glory. In 1 Cor 13, Paul commends love (ἀγάπη) as the activity—the "still more excellent way"—that will heal the fractured body of the community. All members—eye and ear, apostle and prophet—are brought into order and health by means of love.

If in Paul the activity that ensures the health of the body of Christ is love, then in Clement and Ignatius that activity is significantly narrowed: they both preach humility and above all obedience.[32] And although Dionysius follows Clement and Ignatius in their elaboration of order, he cannot countenance such a narrow construal of activity. For the activity of the hierarchies Dionysius uses several figures, chief among them light (φῶς). By figuring the activity of the hierarchies as light, Dionysius may seem to be, like Clement and Ignatius, departing from Paul and love (ἀγάπη). Not so. For Dionysius, light and love become nearly interchangeable terms for the activity of the hierarchies. Compare these two passages:

> [Hierarchy] perfect[s] its own followers as Divine images, mirrors most luminous and without flaw, receptive of the primal light and the supremely Divine ray, and devoutly filled with the entrusted radiance, and again, spreading this radiance ungrudgingly to those after it, in accordance with the supremely Divine regulations.[33]

> And this is the common goal of every Hierarchy—the clinging love towards God and Divine things divinely and uniformly ministered.[34]

---

[32] *1 Clement* 13–19; *Magnesians* 2.1; *Ephesians* 6.1.
[33] *CH* 3.2 165A; *CD* II 18.2–6: καὶ τοὺς ἑαυτοῦ θιασώτας ἀγάλματα θεῖα τελῶν ἔσοπτρα διειδέστατα καὶ ἀκηλίδωτα, δεκτικὰ τῆς ἀρχιφώτου καὶ θεαρχικῆς ἀκτῖνος καὶ τῆς μὲν ἐνδιδομένης αἴγλης ἱερῶς ἀποπληρούμενα, ταύτην δὲ αὖθις ἀφθόνως εἰς τὰ ἑξῆς ἀναλάμποντα κατὰ τοὺς θεαρχικοὺς θεσμούς.
[34] *EH* 1.3 376A; *CD* II 66.13–15: Ἁπάσῃ δὲ τοῦτο κοινὸν ἱεραρχίᾳ τὸ πέρας. ἡ πρὸς θεόν τε καὶ τὰ θεῖα προσεχὴς ἀγάπησις ἐνθέως τε καὶ ἑνιαίως ἱερουργουμένη . . .

Dionysius uses light and love interchangeably because ultimately what is at work in the hierarchies is none other than Jesus himself, who is, for Dionysius, both light and love.[35] It is important to see that this dual activity in the Dionysian hierarchies is not so much a departure (*cum* Clement and Ignatius) from Paul, as it is a meditation on Paul, to whom Jesus appeared as blinding light[36] and for whom the Incarnation was the "loving kindness of God our savior."[37] Dionysius therefore follows Paul insofar as he characterizes the activity of the hierarchies as love (ἀγάπησις)[38] and refers to the Incarnate Jesus as God's "love for humanity" (φιλανθρωπία) such that the two Greek words for love become nearly interchangeable. But Dionysius goes further and observes that "the theologians seem to me to treat as equivalent the name of Loving-kindness [ἀγάπης] and that of Love [ἔρωτος]."[39] Dionysius, however, seems to think that he is making a rather uncontroversial move, and one already suggested by Paul himself. For while Dionysius may say that Paul was "a true lover [ἀληθὴς ἐραστὴς],"[40] it is Paul himself who confesses to being out of his mind—in ecstasy—for God: "if we are beside ourselves [ἐξέστημεν], it is for God" (2 Cor 5:13).[41]

As a sixth-century author concerned with the articulation and maintenance of the celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies, then, the author of the *CD* finds ample resources not only in Paul himself, but also in some of Paul's immediate interpreters, here the author of *1 Clement* and Ignatius of Antioch. As he writes himself back into the first century through his pseudonymous identity as Dionysius the Areopagite, he joins a conversation already well under way, one in which the Pauline *sōma christou* is evolving into a more rigid and elaborate account of the order of the church and the heavens. The Dionysian hierarchies owe much to these early elaborations of the *sōma christou*, even as the author of the *CD* insists that light and

---

[35] For Jesus as light, see section III. A below.
[36] Acts 9:3–9.
[37] Titus 3:4: ἡ φιλανθρωπία . . . τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν θεου.
[38] *EH* 1.3 376A; *CD* II 66.14.
[39] *DN* 4.12 709B; *CD* I 157.15–16.
[40] *DN* 4.13 712A; *CD* I 159.6.
[41] *DN* 4.13 712A; *CD* I 159.3–8: "Wherefore also, Paul the Great, when possessed by the Divine Love, and participating in its extatic power, says with inspired lips, 'No longer I, but Christ who lives in me.' (Gal 2:20). As a true lover, and beside himself, as he says, to Almighty God [2 Cor 5:13], and not living the life of himself, but the life of the Beloved, as a life excessively esteemed."

love (*agapē = erōs = philia*)—none other than Christ himself—is the energy that pulses through the ranks of this order.

II. JESUS AND THE HIERARCHIES

Having surveyed the Pauline backdrop to Dionysius' definition of hierarchy, we need now consider how we enter or have "access" to the hierarchies. This brings us to the figure of Jesus and the controversial issue of Dionysian Christology. The *CD* made its first appearance in the early sixth century in a period of intense Christological controversy: the persistent disputes over the Council of Chalcedon of 451. In the early 530s, during the reign of Justinian, both Monophysite and Chalcedonian advocates begin to cite the *CD* in support of their own Christological views. And apart from the doubts raised by Hypatius of Ephesus in 532 regarding the authenticity of the *CD*, the debate centered on whether and to what extent the sub-apostolic collection anticipated the current orthodoxy.[42] All sides seemed confident that Dionysius supported their own position—a result, no doubt, of the vague Christological terminology of the *CD*. It is striking to note that amidst all this intense Christological scrutiny of the *CD*, never once does an early reader accuse Dionysius of *lacking* a sufficient Christology. And yet this is precisely what modern scholars have fixed upon: the allegedly insufficient treatment of Christ in the *CD*—this despite the fact that the *CD* mentions Jesus or Christ at least fifty-six times, even calling upon him in prayer. One suspects that this modern complaint grows out of Luther's famous dismissal, "Dionysius Platonizes more than he Christianizes."[43] The unquestioned assumption of most twentieth-century scholarship is that whatever Christology the *CD* exhibits is largely "cosmetic," masking his true Platonic commitments.[44] By reading the *CD* almost exclusively against the

---

[42] See Chapter One, section I.

[43] "Babylonian Captivity" (1520), WA 6, 562; cited in Rorem and Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 44.

[44] Rorem, "The Uplifting Spirituality of Pseudo-Dionysius," 144; see also Vanneste, "Is the Mysticism of Pseudo-Dionysius Genuine?" 297: "the Neoplatonic system of Proclus . . . is presented in the *Areopagitica* in Christian garb"; Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge*, 120: "On the basis of the *Hierarchies*, Dionysius' Christianity seems rather peripheral."

backdrop of Neoplatonism, scholars have obscured the influence of Paul and consequently missed or at least misunderstood Dionysian Christology.[45] For Dionysius the hierarchies communicate light and love. And Paul is in fact the linchpin for understanding Dionysian Christology and its relationship to the hierarchies, as it is Paul who provides Dionysius with an account of Jesus as both light and love and "access" to the hierarchies. For Dionysius, Jesus is the deifying light that is at work in the hierarchies, as witnessed in Paul's blinding experience of the luminous Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3–9; 22:6–11). And for Dionysius, again following Paul, Jesus is also our only "access" (Rom 5:2) to the hierarchies, bestowed, however, not on the lonely road to Damascus but in baptismal rites of the church, wherein we share in his death (Rom 6:3).

II.A. Jesus as deifying light

Contrary to expectation, the first words of the *CD*[46] are those of an apostle, James: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights" (Jas 1:17).[47] The

---

[45] Perhaps the best spokesman for this trend is Hauken, "Incarnation and Hierarchy: The Christ according to Ps.-Dionysius": "[A]ny attempts at reconstructing a Christology from the various references to Christ in [Dionysius'] works is always in danger of arguing from silence and reading into the material views he never held.— His thought is thoroughly God-centered, and he represents a God-mysticism rather than a Christ-mysticism or anything like a 'Jesus-religion'. About this there can be little doubt" (317); "by involving Christ the in the hierarchies Denis seems to remove himself considerably from his supposed master, St. Paul" (319). One prominent exception to this trend is Golitzin, who was roused to give a fuller picture of Dionysian Christology in response to Wesche's contention that "Dionysius' thralldom to Neoplatonism has undercut his understanding of the Christian faith" (for the full exchange, see Wesche, "Christological Doctrine and Liturgical Interpretation in Pseudo-Dionysius," 53–73; Alexander Golitzin, "On the Other Hand," 305–23; Wesche, "A Reply to Hieromonk's Alexander's Reply," 324–7). I will draw on the work of Golitzin as I chart the relationship between Dionysian Christology, the hierarchies and Paul. Two essays will prove especially helpful: Golitzin, "'Suddenly, Christ': The Place of Negative Theology in the Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagites," 8–37; idem, "Dionysius Areopagita: A Christian Mysticism?" 161–212.

[46] If we take the *CH* as the first of the four treatises.

[47] Dionysius' own account of how God both graciously descends from unity into multiplicity *and yet* remains entirely united and at rest reads as if it were further exegesis of Jas 1:17. *CH* 1.2 121B; *CD* II 8.5–10: "For it *never* loses its own unique inwardness, but multiplied and going forth, as becomes its goodness, for an elevating and unifying blending of the objects of its care, remains firmly and solitarily centred within itself in its unmoved sameness."

Areopagite first introduces himself to his readers, then, as an exegete, glossing a single verse from James:

> Further also, every procession of illuminating light, proceeding from the Father, whilst visiting us as a gift of goodness, restores us again gradually as an unifying power, and turns us to the oneness of our conducting Father, and to a deifying simplicity.[48]

Immediately following this gloss, Dionysius offers up a prayer to Jesus:

> Invoking then Jesus, the Paternal Light, the Real, the True, "which lighteth every man coming into the world," [John 1:9] "through Whom we have access to the Father" [Rom 5:2; cf. Eph 2:18, 3:12], Source of Light . . .[49]

For Dionysius, hierarchies communicate light and love, and this light, which proceeds from and returns to its source, the Father, is none other than Jesus. He cites the prologue to John in support of this view, and thereby also rounds out the apostolic community of which he is part.[50] Within only a handful of lines, our pseudonymous author has put himself in the midst of a conversation between James, Paul, and John.[51] Jesus appears again in the opening of the treatise on "our hierarchy," the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*:

> Jesus Himself—the most supremely Divine Mind and superessential, the Source and Essence, and most Supremely Divine Power of every Hierarchy and Sanctification and Divine operation—illuminates the blessed Beings who are superior to us, in a manner more clear, and at the same time more intellectual, and assimilates them to His own Light, as far as possible.[52]

---

[48] *CH* 1.1 120B; *CD* II 7.4–7: Ἀλλὰ καὶ πᾶσα πατροκινήτου φωτοφανείας πρόοδος εἰς ἡμᾶς ἀγαθοδότως φοιτῶσα πάλιν ὡς ἐνοποιὸς δύναμις ἀνατατικῶς ἡμᾶς ἀναπλοῖ καὶ ἐπιστρέφει πρὸς τὴν τοῦ συναγωγοῦ πατρὸς ἑνότητα καὶ θεοποιὸν ἁπλότητα.

[49] *CH* 1.2 121A; *CD* II 7.9–11: Οὐκοῦν Ἰησοῦν ἐπικαλεσάμενοι, τὸ πατρικὸν φῶς, τὸ ὂν τὸ ἀληθινόν, ὅ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον ἐρχόμενον εἰς τὸν κόσμον, δι' οὗ τὴν πρὸς τὸν ἀρχίφωτον πατέρα προσαγωγὴν ἐσχήκαμεν.

[50] John 1:9: "The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world."

[51] The same John, on Patmos, to whom the Tenth Letter is addressed.

[52] *EH* 1.1 372A–B; *CD* II 63.12–64.4: Ἰησοῦς, ὁ θεαρχικώτατος νοῦς καὶ ὑπερούσιος, ἡ πάσης ἱεραρχίας ἁγιαστείας τε και θεουργίας ἀρχὴ καὶ οὐσία καὶ θεαρχικωτάτη δύναμις, ταῖς τε μακαρίαις καὶ ἡμῶν κρείττοσιν οὐσίαις ἐμφανέστερον ἅμα καὶ νοερώτερον ἐλλάμπει καὶ πρὸς τὸ οἰκεῖον αὐτὰς ἀφομοιοῖ κατὰ δύναμιν φῶς.

If "[t]he purpose, then, of Hierarchy is," as Dionysius says in *CH* 3.2, "the assimilation and union, as far as attainable, with God," then it is no wonder that both treatises on the hierarchies begin by appeal to Jesus, for as divine light, he "lighteth every man coming into the world" and "assimilates them to His own Light, as far as possible." Jesus is the deifying light at work in all hierarchies.

Although John is the obvious biblical warrant for Dionysius here, there is also an important Pauline backdrop. Several passages from Paul's letters support Dionysius' understanding of Jesus as light: 2 Cor 4:6 ("For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"); Eph 5:8 ("For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light"); Col 1:12 ("the Father . . . has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light"). From only these three it is clear that Jesus is associated with light and that God the Father is figured as its source.

But of course our author had another resource: the Acts of the Apostles, from which he drew his pseudonym. And it is in Acts that we find the most important backdrop to the notion of Jesus as light: Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus.[53]

> Now as [Saul] journeyed he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him [ἐξαίφνης τε αὐτὸν περιήστραψεν φῶς ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ]. And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting; but rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul arose from the ground; and when his eyes were opened, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. (Acts 9:3–9)

Here Jesus appears to Paul as a blinding light from heaven. True to his pseudonymous identity, our author need not rely on the Gospel of John to understand that Jesus is the Light who ushers us, sometimes

---

[53] There are three versions of Paul's conversion: Acts 9:3–9, in which the story is told by the third-person narrator; Acts 22:6–11, in which Paul gives his own account; and Acts 26:13–18. The three accounts differ as to whether the visitation was invisible but audible (Acts 9), visible but inaudible to Paul's companions (Acts 22), or unspecified (Acts 26).

against our will, into the saving work of the hierarchies. For the man who had become a believer in the wake of Paul's speech to the court of the Areopagus would certainly have heard from Paul's own mouth the testimony of this conversion, as the tribune does in Acts 22:6–11.

The case is strengthened by the presence of a single and unobtrusive adverb in two of the three accounts from Acts: "suddenly" (ἐξαίφνης): "suddenly a light from heaven flashed about [Paul]."[54] In his third letter—which along with the first and second letters is addressed to Gaius, Paul's associate mentioned in Rom 16:23, 1 Cor 1:14, Acts 19:29, 20:4—Dionysius takes up the theme of the "sudden" and its relationship to Jesus. It is the shortest of Dionysius' ten letters and worth quoting in full:

> "Sudden" is that which, contrary to expectation, and out of the, as yet, unmanifest, is brought into the manifest. But with regard to Christ's love of man, I think that the Word of God suggests even this, that the Superessential proceeded forth out of the hidden, into the manifestation amongst us, by having taken substance as man. But, He is hidden, even after the manifestation, or to speak more divinely, even in the manifestation, for in truth this of Jesus has been kept hidden, and the mystery with respect to Him has been reached by no word nor mind, but even when spoken, remains unsaid, and when conceived unknown.[55]

It is a testimony to the prejudices of scholarship that this letter has been read against the backdrop not of Jesus' "sudden" appearance to Paul as blinding light but against the backdrop of the history of the word "suddenly" in Platonism.[56] Thus Ronald Hathaway condescends to tell us that "the author of the *Corpus Areopagiticum* is

---

[54] *Εξαίφνης* appears in Acts 9:3 and 22:6, but not in the version from Acts 26.

[55] *Ep.* 3 1069B; *CD* II 159.3–10: ⟨⟨Ἐξαίφνης⟩⟩ ἐστὶ τὸ παρ' ἐλπίδα καὶ ἐκ τοῦ τέως ἀφανοῦς εἰς τὸ ἐκφανὲς ἐξαγόμενον. Ἐπὶ δὲ τῆς κατὰ Χριστὸν φιλανθρωπίας καὶ τοῦτο οἶμαι τὴν θεολογίαν αἰνίττεσθαι, τὸ ἐκ τοῦ κρυφίου τὸν ὑπερούσιον εἰς τὴν καθ' ἡμᾶς ἐμφάνειαν ἀνθρωπικῶς οὐσιωθέντα προεληλυθέναι. Κρύφιος δὲ ἐστι καὶ μετὰ τὴν ἔκφανσιν ἤ, ἵνα τὸ θειότερον εἴπω, καὶ ἐν τῇ ἐκφάνσει. Καὶ τοῦτο γὰρ Ἰησοῦ κέκρυπται, καὶ οὐδενὶ λόγῳ οὔτε νῷ τὸ κατ' αὐτὸν ἐξῆκται μυστήριον, ἀλλὰ καὶ λεγόμενον ἄρρητον μένει καὶ νοούμενον ἄγνωστον.

[56] The exception here, as in so many other cases, is Golitzin. Golitzin acknowledges, indeed expands, the possible Platonic and Neoplatonic treatments of "suddenly," but also cites four passages from the New Testament (including the two accounts of Paul's conversion from Acts that both mention ἐξαίφνης) and a wealth of passages from late antique Eastern Christian texts which take up the "sudden." See Golitzin, "'Suddenly, Christ': The Place of Negative Theology in the Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagites," 22–3.

---

given to dropping hints" and that "suddenly" is an obvious reference to the Third Hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides*, which deals with "the nature of the moment of simultaneous change ($\tau\grave{o}$ $\dot{\epsilon}\xi\alpha\acute{\iota}\phi\nu\eta\varsigma$)."[57] Rorem cites Hathaway's point in his notes to Luibheid's translation of the *CD*, leaving the average reader with no sense that the Third Letter has anything to do with Paul or his blinding vision of Jesus on the road to Damascus.

Back to the Third Letter: "But with regard to Christ's love of man," Dionysius writes, "I think that the Word of God [$\tau\grave{\eta}\nu$ $\theta\epsilon o\lambda o\gamma\acute{\iota}\alpha\nu$], suggests even this, that the Superessential proceeded forth out of the hidden, into manifestation amongst us, by having taken substance as man." By "the Word of God," Dionysius means scripture.[58] And of the various instances in which scripture uses the word "suddenly,"[59] the account of Paul's conversion from Acts fits best with the theme of this letter: "Christ's love of man" and his "having taken substance as man." However short, the Third Letter is one of Dionysius' most sustained and dense treatments of Christ and the Incarnation.

For Dionysius, the Incarnation or "philanthropy" of Christ, much like the presence of God throughout hierarchical creation, both reveals and conceals, makes manifest and keeps hidden the unsayable and unknowable mystery of Jesus. Thus Jesus the light brings with him a portion of darkness, as Paul experienced all too well on the road to Damascus: "I could not see because of the brightness of that light" (Acts 22:11). If indeed God, in Jesus or in creation, is "hidden . . . even in the manifestation," then Dionysian Christology can be read as a response to Paul's rhetorical question from 2 Cor 6:14: "What fellowship is there between light and darkness?" Promise of a fellowship between light and

---

[57] Hathaway, *Hierarchy and the Definition of Order*, 79, 80. While Hathaway is certainly correct that our author would have been familiar with the *Parmenides* and the Neoplatonic commentaries on its deductions, as a pseudonymous disciple of Paul giving an account of Jesus as the deifying light of the hierarchies, he must certainly have had Acts (9:3 and 22:6) in mind.

Even considering a Platonic provenance of the word "suddenly," the more relevant passage would seem to be Diotima's speech to Socrates in *Symposium* 210e: "You see, the man who has been thus far guided in matters of Love [$\tau\grave{\alpha}$ $\dot{\epsilon}\rho\omega\tau\iota\kappa\grave{\alpha}$], who has beheld beautiful things in the right order and correctly, is coming now to the goal of Loving [$\pi\rho\grave{o}\varsigma$ $\tau\acute{\epsilon}\lambda o\varsigma$ $\check{\eta}\delta\eta$ $\grave{\iota}\grave{\omega}\nu$ $\tau\hat{\omega}\nu$ $\dot{\epsilon}\rho\omega\tau\iota\kappa\hat{\omega}\nu$]: all of a sudden [$\dot{\epsilon}\xi\alpha\acute{\iota}\phi\nu\eta\varsigma$] he will catch sight of something wonderfully beautiful in its nature; that, Socrates, is the reason for all his earlier labors."

[58] Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols*, 11–26.

[59] Mal 3:1; Mark 13:36; Luke 2:13, 9:39; Acts 9:3, 22:6.

---

darkness, vision and blindness, take us deeper into the *CD*, past the treatises on the hierarchies to the *Divine Names* and *Mystical Theology*. But it is important to note that Jesus the deifying light, while ushering us into the continuous stream of divine work, also leaves us—however purified, illumined, and perfected[60]—also without words, without understanding, always at a loss.

II.B.   Jesus and access

In *CH* 1.2 and again in *CH* 2.5, Dionysius calls on Jesus in prayer: "Invoking then Jesus"; "But let Christ lead the discourse—if it be lawful for me to say—He Who is mine—the Inspiration of all Hierarchical revelation." Jesus is also invoked early and often in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*:

> Jesus Himself—the most supremely Divine Mind and superessential, the Source and Essence, and most supremely Divine Power of every Hierarchy and Sanctification and Divine operation—illuminates the blessed Beings who are superior to us, in a manner more clear, and at the same time more intellectual, and assimilates them to His own Light, as far as possible; and by our love of things beautiful elevated to Him, and which elevates us, folds together our many diversities, and after perfecting into a uniform and Divine life and habit and operation, holily bequeaths the power of the Divine Priesthood.[61]

> But now I will attempt to describe our Hierarchy, both its source and essence, as best I can; invoking Jesus, the source and Perfecting of all Hierarchies.[62]

Neither of the two treatises on hierarchies, it seems, can begin without explicit appeal to Jesus. And perhaps this goes well beyond the matter of the text: we cannot enter the hierarchies without Jesus. This is what Dionysius tells us in *CH* 1.2: "Jesus . . . 'through Whom we have access [$\pi\rho o\sigma\alpha\gamma\omega\gamma\grave{\eta}\nu$]' to the Father, the light which is the source of all light." Dionysius is here quoting Rom 5:2—"Through [our Lord Jesus Christ] we have obtained access [$\pi\rho o\sigma\alpha\gamma\omega\gamma\grave{\eta}\nu$] to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the

---

[60] On the triad purification, illumination, perfection, see *CH* 3.
[61] *EH* 1.1 372A–B; *CD* II 63.12–64.7.
[62] *EH* 1.2 373B; *CD* II 65.19–21.

glory of God."[63] If Dionysius' understanding of Jesus as deifying light is based significantly on Paul's experience on the road to Damascus, and if Jesus is our access to the continuous stream of God's work, then we might expect Dionysius to figure access on the model of Paul: as a private, luminous visitation of Jesus by which we are initiated into the deifying work of his Father.

But in fact Dionysius does not understand access as a private luminous visitation on each of our roads to Damascus. We obtain "access" in the sacraments of the liturgy. The Pauline term "access" ($\pi\rho\sigma\alpha\gamma\omega\gamma\dot{\eta}$) and its corresponding verb ($\pi\rho\sigma\dot{\alpha}\gamma\omega$) appear often in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*'s description of the sacraments of baptism (*EH* 2) and ointment or myron (*EH* 4), as well as the orders of the clergy (*EH* 5) and the funerary rites (*EH* 7). What concerns us is the first sacrament, baptism, for which Dionysius prefers two terms: "illumination" ($\phi\dot{\omega}\tau\iota\sigma\mu\alpha$) and "divine birth" ($\theta\epsilon\sigma\gamma\epsilon\nu\epsilon\sigma\dot{\iota}\alpha$).[64] According to Dionysius, "divine birth" is "the source of the religious performance of the most august commandments," the way

> which forms the habits of our souls into an aptitude for the reception of other sacred sayings and doings [$\dot{\iota}\epsilon\rho\sigma\nu\rho\gamma\iota\hat{\omega}\nu$], the transmission of our holy and most divine regeneration.[65]

Not surprisingly, then, baptism is our access to the divine workings of God: it disposes and opens us; it clears an uplifting path. But how does Jesus figure in this? Moved by the love of God and feeling "a religious longing to participate in these truly supermundane gifts," an aspirant approaches someone already initiated and asks him "to undertake the superintendence of his introduction" or "access" ($\tau\hat{\eta}\varsigma$ $\tau\epsilon$ $\pi\rho\sigma\alpha\gamma\omega\gamma\hat{\eta}\varsigma$ $\alpha\dot{\upsilon}\tau\sigma\hat{\upsilon}$).[66] Later this sponsor is described as "guide of

---

[63] See also Eph 2:18: "for through [Christ] we have both have access in one Spirit to the Father"; Eph 3:12: "This was according to the eternal purpose in which [God] has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have obtained boldness and confidence of access through our faith in him."

[64] "Divine birth" is, in fact, our author's preferred term (cf. *EH* 2 397A, 404C; 3 425C; 4 484C); "Illumination" appears in the two subtitles (EH 2 392A, 393A) and in the etymology given in *EH* 3 425A. The word "baptism" appears only twice in the *CD*, and refers not to the entire rite, but to the immersion in water (*EH* 2 404A; 7 565A). See Rorem and Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 200n17; 201n21; 207n43.

[65] *EH* 2.1 392A; *CD* II 68.22–69.3: ἡ πρὸς τὴν τῶν ἄλλων ἱερολογιῶν καὶ ἱερουργιῶν ὑποδοχὴν ἐπιτηδειότατα μορφοῦσα τὰς ψυχικὰς ἡμῶν ἕξεις, ἡ πρὸς τὴν τῆς ὑπερουρανίας λήξεως ἀναγωγὴν ἡμῶν ὁδοποιῆσις; Ἡ τῆς ἱερᾶς καὶ θειοτάτης ἡμῶν ἀναγεννήσεως παράδοσις.

[66] *EH* 2.2.2 393B; *CD* II 70.14.

---

his introduction" or "access" (again, προσαγωγῆς).[67] The sponsor brings the aspirant before the hierarch, who calls together "a full religious assembly ... [in] common rejoicing over the man's salvation."[68] Dionysius then provides a detailed description of the rite of "divine birth," complete with hymns, kisses, professions of faith and repudiations of evil, unction, signs of the cross, and immersion in water.

After the description of the rite, Dionysius offers here, as he does for each sacrament, a "contemplation" (θεωρία) of the hidden meanings of these perceptible gestures and symbols. It is this contemplative account of baptism as "illumination" that clarifies the role of Jesus. The turn from west to east symbolizes not only the aspirant's renunciation of his evil and wayward past, but is also opportunity to turn from occident to orient and thereby "declaring clearly that his position and recovery will be purely in the Divine Light."[69] The hierarch himself becomes luminous, emanating the light that cascades from the benevolent Father through his Son, Jesus the Christ:[70] "[The initiate is] made brilliant by his luminous life"[71] and "thus [he comes to look] upwards to the blessed and supremely Divine self of Jesus."[72] In baptism, therefore, the aspirant suffers the same luminous visitation by Jesus the deifying light as did Paul on the road to Damascus.

But that is not all. Dionysius tells us that the "holy anointing" of the aspirant in fact "summon[s] in type the man initiated to the holy contests, within which he is placed under Christ as Umpire."[73] This athletic imagery is also drawn from Paul: 1 Cor 9:24–7[74] and

---

[67] *EH* 2.2.7 396D; *CD* II 73.3.
[68] *EH* 2.2.4 393C; *CD* II 71.5–6: Εἶτα πᾶσαν ἱερὰν διακόσμησιν ἐπὶ συνεργίᾳ μὲν καὶ συνεορτάσει τῆς τἀνδρὸς σωτηρίας.
[69] *EH* 2.3.5 401B; *CD* II 75.3.
[70] *EH* 2.3.3 400A–B; *CD* II 75.1–8: "[T]he divine Light is always unfolded beneficently to the intellectual visions, and it is possible for them to seize it when present, and always being most ready for the distribution of things appropriate, in a manner becoming God. To this imitation the divine Hierarch is fashioned, unfolding to all, without grudging, the luminous rays of his inspired teaching, and, after the Divine example, being most ready to enlighten the proselyte ... always enlightening by his conducting light those who approach him ..."
[71] *EH* 2.3.8 404C; *CD* II 78.13–14.
[72] *EH* 1.1 372B; *CD* II 64.10–11.
[73] *EH* 2.3.6 401D; *CD* II 77.10–12.
[74] 1 Cor 9:24–7: "Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to

2 Tim 2:5.[75] Besides "illumination," then, baptism is a "divine birth" into a struggle against sin. But this birth is also, of course, simultaneously a death:

> [When] he has overthrown, in his struggles after the Divine example, the energies and impulses opposed to his deification, he dies with Christ—to speak mystically—to sin, in Baptism.[76]

In baptism we not only meet Jesus the deifying light, but also "mystically" share in his death. And of course this interpretation of the baptismal rite also comes directly from Paul: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?"[77] Herein lies Dionysius' account of the cross, which modern scholars have consistently faulted Dionysius for shorting. And yet it precisely here, at the very point of "access" to the saving work of Jesus in the hierarchies, that the initiate must not only stand at the foot of the cross but also die with Jesus, arms outstretched.

It should come as no surprise, then, that Dionysius elsewhere quotes the following famous line from Ignatius' letter to the Romans: "My *erōs* has been crucified" (Ὁ ἐμὸς ἔρως ἐσταύρωται).[78] The pun operates on three levels: (1) Jesus—for whom I yearn, my beloved—has been crucified; (2) Jesus himself is love crucified, figured both as God's "love for humanity" (φιλανθρωπία) and also the ecstatic *erōs* or yearning that once prompted God to create the world and now prompts God, preeminently through the Incarnation, to bid us return; (3) *our* yearning has been crucified, that is, we are called to answer ecstasy with ecstasy by passing through death on the cross.

Contrary to the claims of so many modern scholars, then, there is a robust Dionysian Christology and that Christology is deeply Pauline. Jesus is both our only "access" to the work of God (θεουργία), the loving activity (ἐνέργεια) of the hierarchies, and also simultaneously that very work and activity. He grants us this access in the sacraments,

---

receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Well, I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air; but I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified."

[75] 2 Tim 2:5: "An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules."

[76] *EH* 2.3.6 404A; *CD* II 77.20–2.

[77] Rom 6:3; cf. Col 2:12: "and you were buried with him in baptism"; 2 Tim 2:11: "The saying is sure: if we have died with him, we shall also live with him."

[78] *DN* 4.12 709B; *CD* I 157.10–11; *Romans* 7.2.

---

first and foremost the sacrament of baptism, what Dionysius calls "illumination" and "divine birth." In baptism we have our share in what Paul experienced on the road to Damascus: entry into the streaming and deifying light of Jesus. This "illumination" is both a birth into a new life and a death on the cross to sin. Jesus, the love of God for humanity (φιλανθρωπία), is also love crucified ('Ο ἐμὸς ἔρως ἐσταύρωται). Paul becomes our model of how to respond to this crucified love, for it is Paul, the ecstatic lover (ἐραστὴς),[79] who tells us that with Christ we die to sin and with Christ we live anew: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."[80]

III. THE PURPOSE OF HIERARCHY: DEIFICATION THROUGH COOPERATION

Having been given "access" to the hierarchies and thereby suffering the light and love of Jesus, initiates must finally turn to the end or "purpose" (σκοπός) of hierarchy itself. According to our author's introductory gloss on James, "every procession of illuminating light . . . turns us to the oneness of our conducting Father, and to a deifying [θεοποιόν] simplicity."[81] Later, he explains that "[t]he purpose, then, of Hierarchy is the assimilation and union, as far as attainable, with God."[82] By the time of our author, the notion of deification had made a remarkable journey from the margins to the center of Christian soteriology. Its provenance is Plato's *Thaeatetus*: "Therefore we ought to try to escape from earth to the dwelling of the gods as quickly as we can; and to escape is to become like God, so far as this is possible."[83] From the second through the fourth centuries, one can trace the rise of deification in Christian theology:[84] from its first expression in Irenaeus of

---

[79] *DN* 4.13 712A; *CD* I 159.6: "[Paul was] a true lover [ἐραστὴς]."
[80] Gal 2:20.
[81] *CH* 1.1 120B; *CD* II 7.4–7.
[82] *CH* 3.2 165A; *CD* II 17.10-11: Σκοπὸς οὖν ἱεραρχίας ἐστὶν ἡ πρὸς θεὸν ὡς ἐφικτὸν ἀφομοίωσίς τε καὶ ἕνωσις αὐτὸν. For other discussions of deification and hierarchies, see *EH* 1.1 372A–B, 1.3 373D–376B, 2.1 392A.
[83] Plato, *Thaeatetus* 176B: φυγὴ δὲ ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν.
[84] For a recent and capacious treatment of the rise of the notion of deification, see Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*; more recently, see Kharmalov, *The Beauty of the Unity and the Harmony of the Whole*.

Lyons,[85] to its development in the Alexandrians, Clement[86] and Origen,[87] to its fruition in Athanasius.[88] Although Christian theologians appropriated the notion of deification from Platonism, the New Testament offered ample resources for enriching this philosophical idiom. While 2 Peter 1:4b[89] and Luke 20:36[90] loomed large, John and Paul[91] provided the bulk of these scriptural resources. Bernard McGinn has characterized the development of deification—or "divinization"—thus:

> The root of the Christian doctrine of divinization, developed by the Greek fathers on the basis of a Platonic background . . . is [to be found] in the consonance the fathers saw between the believer's identification with Christ, the God-man, as taught by Paul and John, and the teaching of the best philosophers about the goal of human existence."[92]

---

[85] Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* V: "the only true and steadfast Teacher, the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself" (solum autem verum et firmum magistrum sequens, Verbum Dei, Jesum Christum Dominum nostrum: qui propter immensam suam dilectionem factus est quod sumus nos, uti nos perficeret esse quod est ipse).

[86] Clement, *Protrepticus* 1.8: "the Logos of God became man so that you may learn from man how man may become God" (ναί φημι, ὁ λόγος ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ ἄνθρωπος γενόμενος, ἵνα δὴ καὶ σὺ παρὰ ἀνθρώπου μάθῃς, πῇ ποτε ἄρα ἄνθρωπος γένηται θεός); cited in McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, 107.

[87] Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 13.24: "the intellect which is totally purified and is raised above the material to attend to the contemplation of God with the greatest attention is deified [θεοποιεῖται] by what it contemplates"; cited in McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, 128.

[88] Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 54: "He became man so that we might become god" (αὐτὸς γὰρ ἐνηνθρώπησεν, ἵνα ἡμεῖς θεοποιηθῶμεν).

[89] 2 Pet 1:4b: "that through these things you may become partakers of the divine nature" (ἵνα διὰ τούτων γένεσθε θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως).

[90] Luke 20:36: "they are equal to the angels" (ἰσάγγελοι γάρ εἰσιν).

[91] Including: Rom 5.5 ("God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us"); Rom 8:9 ("you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you"); Rom 8:11 ("If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you"); 1 Cor 6:17 ("But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him"); Gal 2:19–20 ("It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me"); Gal 3:27 ("As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ"); Gal 4:6–7 ("And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying 'Abba, Father!' So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son then also an heir, through God); Phil 1:20 ("Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death").

[92] McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, 107.

Note that insofar as early Christian writers consider deification a properly Christian goal, they consider it entirely apostolic. That our author places such emphasis on deification, therefore, would not compromise but only strengthen (at least among his contemporaries) his pseudonymous identity as a disciple of Paul.

As he expounds on deification as the "goal of hierarchy," Dionysius leans on a specific phrase of Paul's: "fellow workman for God" or "co-worker of God" (θεοῦ συνεργὸν) (1 Cor 3:9; 1 Thess 3:2):[93]

> For each of those who have been called into the Hierarchy, find their perfection in being carried to the Divine imitation in their own proper degree; and, what is more Divine than all, in becoming a fellow-worker with God, as the Oracles say, and in shewing the Divine energy in himself manifested as far as possible.[94]

Why does our author single out and elevate this particular Pauline phrase? Previous generations of scholars would perhaps agree with E.R. Dodds and charge him with merely "dressing up" Platonist themes with the "Christian draperies" of scripture. But in fact Dionysius relies on this particular Pauline phrase, "co-worker of God," for precisely the root ἔργον, "work." The word "work" is subject to a sort of lexical proliferation in the *CD* and serves as one of the threads which binds the whole together. It never appears alone, but always in combinations that can be difficult to track and appreciate in translation: good work (ἀγαθουργία), theurgy (θεουργία), sacred work (ἱερουργία), liturgy (λειτουργία), and cooperation (συνεργία).[95] We have already met one of these combinations: energy (ἐνέργεια), one of the three elements in Dionysius' tripartite definition of hierarchy. Presumably, then, deification understood as cooperation means co-operation (συνεργία) with the energy (ἐνέργεια) of the hierarchies.[96]

---

[93] 1 Cor 3:9: "We are co-workers of God" (θεοῦ γάρ ἐσμεν συνεργοί); 1 Thess 3:2: "And we sent Timothy, our brother and co-worker of God" (συνεργὸν τοῦ θεοῦ).

[94] *CH* 3.2 165B; *CD* II 18.14–17: ἔστι γὰρ ἑκάστῳ τῶν ἱεραρχίᾳ κεκληρωμένων ἡ τελείωσις τὸ κατ' οἰκείαν ἀναλογίαν ἐπὶ τὸ θεομίμητον ἀναχθῆναι καὶ τὸ δὴ πάντων θειότερον ὡς τὰ λόγιά φησι θεοῦ συνεργὸν γενέσθαι καὶ δεῖξαι τὴν θείαν ἐνέργειαν ἐν ἑαυτῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατὸν ἀναφαινομένην.

[95] Besides these abstract substantives there are verbs, adjectives, and agent nouns: ἀγαθουργέω, ἀγαθουργικός, ἀγαθουργός; θεουργικός, θεουργός; ἱερουργέω, ἱερουργικός, ἱερουργός; λειτουργικός, λειτουργός; συνεργέω, συνεργός.

[96] I should note that Proclus also uses συνεργός and its cognates, as well as various combinations based on ἔργον, so Dionysius is not departing from Proclus here, but rather showing how Paul and Proclus agree. On why Proclus should agree with Paul, see Chapter Four.

III.A. Iamblichus and "pagan theurgy"

This wide-ranging vocabulary of "work" (ἔργον) has been subject to a considerable amount of attention, owing to the fact that many scholars are anxious that Dioynsius seems to import wholesale the language and practice of pagan "god-work" or "theurgy" (θεουργία) into his mystical theology. A brief history of theurgy will allow us to appreciate better Dionysius' inheritance and innovation of this tradition.[97]

The tenth-century Byzantine encyclopedia, the *Suda* (nos. 433 and 434), introduces a second-century father and son team who have come to be known as the *Juliani*: Julian *pater*, "the Chaldean," wrote four books about demons; Julian *filius*, "the Theurgist," wrote oracles in verse (λόγια δ' ἐπῶν) as well as "theurgical" and "ritual" treatises (*theourgika* and *telestika*). The *logia* or "oracles" here attributed to Julian *filius* are thought to be none other than *The Chaldean Oracles* that came to be regarded by the later Neoplatonists as authoritative revelation on a par with Plato's *Timaeus*. Franz Cumont famously dubs the *Oracles* the "Bible of the last neo-Platonists."[98] These hexameter verse *Oracles* have unfortunately been largely lost; what remains of them are fragmentary quotes in the works of later admiring Neoplatonists.[99] One such admirer is Proclus, who thrice remarks that the *Oracles* were "handed down by the gods" (θεοπαράδοτος).[100] This has led some scholars to wonder whether the *Oracles* were transmitted through some sort of medium, with *pater* perhaps summoning the soul of Plato to speak through *filius*.[101] In any case, such speculation aside, we cannot be certain of the authorship—who or how—of the *Oracles*.

Although the *Oracles* are regarded as the source for the theory and practice of theurgy, their fragmentary transmission makes it impossible to discern with any precision exactly what the *Juliani* meant by

---

[97] For a longer treatment, see Stang, "La herencia cristiana de la teurgia pagana."
[98] Cumont, *Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism*, 279.
[99] For an *en face* edition, Greek and English, see Majercik, *The Chaldean Oracles: Text, Translation, and Commentary.*
[100] Majercik, Fragments 146, 150, and 169.
[101] See Saffrey, "Les Néoplatociens et les Oracles chaldaïques," 225; Dodds, "Theurgy and its Relationship to Neoplatonism," 56.

θεουργία. As for the *practice* of theurgy, "no systematic presentation of Chaldean theurgic ritual is preserved in any of the relevant sources."[102] What the fragments do suggest about theurgical practice make it hard to distinguish from ancient magical traditions, and indeed scholars often appeal to these traditions to flesh out the practice of theurgy—but at the risk of collapsing any distinction between the two. This resemblance also plagues the question of the *theory* of theurgy, specifically what its practitioners understand as its goal: union with the divine or wonderworking or both.

Much of the interpretive impasse regarding theurgy is reflected in a fundamental ambiguity in the word itself. If "theurgy" (θεουργία) is a conjunction of the phrase, "the work of God" (ἔργον θεοῦ), then there are two obvious interpretations. If θεοῦ is understood as an objective genitive, then theurgy is the work that the theurgist does on the gods, that is, he influences or even compels them to do whatever he wishes. If θεοῦ is understood as a subjective genitive, then theurgy is the work that the gods themselves do, presumably in and through the theurgist, in which case he becomes a sort of vessel for divine action. The problem is that the *Oracles* do not clearly settle the issue. In the absence of a clear answer from the *Oracles* themselves, scholars have looked to adjacent traditions. Those who are suspicious of theurgy tend to assimilate it to overtly manipulative magical traditions and figure it along the objective axis.[103] Those who are more generous to theurgy tend to assimilate it to the later Neoplatonists' theories of theurgy and figure it along the subjective axis. Some prefer to see two threads within the larger theurgic tradition, one focused on magical manipulation and the other on deifying union with the gods. The history of scholarship on theurgy can be plotted along this objective *vs.* subjective genitive spectrum.

One thing, however, is certain: whatever the theory and practice of theurgy was for the *Juliani* and their *Oracles*, the notion of theurgy that Dionysius inherits depends in large part on the Neoplatonists' interpretations of this older tradition. The standard version of the narrative figures Plotinus (205–70) as disinterested in theurgy as in all

---

[102] Dodds, "Theurgy and its Relationship to Neoplatonism," 24.
[103] According to Dodds, then, the practice of theurgy amounts to "the procedures of vulgar magic [applied] primarily to a religious end" (Dodds, "Theurgy and its Relationship to Neoplatonism," 61).

forms of magic, Porphyry as remaining loyal to Plotinus by rebuking theurgy, and Iamblichus bucking the trend and thereby establishing a new one, after which Neoplatonists are all theurgists of one stripe or another. This narrative is, in its broad brush strokes, correct. Porphyry reports a now famous episode in which a friend of Plotinus invites him to join him on his sacrificial rounds at the local temples, to which invitation Plotinus responds, "[The gods] ought to come to me, not I to them."[104] Although even Porphyry admits that he does not know how to understand this line from his teacher—perhaps it was meant in good humor—it has come to represent the prevailing view that Plotinus was at the very least disinterested in, and perhaps even hostile to, cultic practices, magic, and, so it is inferred, theurgy. Plotinus never mentions theurgy as such, but he does acknowledge and give credence to magic, if only as a technique that can influence the lower, irrational self.[105]

Porphyry is widely regarded as the great skeptic of theurgy, who, following Plotinus, figures it as no better or worse than magic. Plotinus insists that the human *nous* is in unbroken, if slumbering, union with the divine *Nous*, the second hypostasis of his so-called "Trinity": *One-Mind-Soul.* As a result of this union, the *nous* is not ultimately conditioned by its embodiment, and can ascend to its divine counterpart through such concentrated internal efforts as Porphyry attributes to Plotinus in his *Vita*. Whereas the standard narrative would put Porphyry clearly on the side of Plotinus, and label the both of them 'rationalists,' Georg Luck argues that the record testifies, on the contrary, that Porphyry equivocates on the matter of theurgy, never rejecting it outright but consistently "wondering whether it is really essential and whether it achieves what its supporters claim."[106] In his *City of God*, Augustine of Hippo calls Porphyry to task for precisely this, "maintaining two contradictory positions, and wavering between a superstition . . . and a philosophical standpoint."[107] While Augustine faults Porphyry's general vacillation on the matter of theurgy, he praises him for his *Letter to Anebo*, where the philosopher exposes theurgy as a means of compelling the gods—who are of course not gods, for Augustine, but merely fallen angels or

---

[104] Porphyry, *Vita Plotini*, 10.
[105] Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.4.43.
[106] Luck, "Theurgy and Forms of Worship in Neoplatonism," 209.
[107] Augustine, *De civitate dei*, X.9.

demons—to accomplish some mercenary end.[108] Unfortunately the *Letter to Anebo* survives only in fragments, but from what remains it is clear that Porphyry does find it astonishing that at least some theurgists feel that they can compel the gods to do their bidding.[109] Apart from this affront to divine impassibility, Porphyry is also disgusted with the fact that certain theurgists put their art to petty purposes, including one theurgist who thwarted a rival's efforts to ply his trade.[110] Porphyry's complaints would seem to give some credence to the notion that theurgy was, at least in the third century, a rather broad tradition, including mercenary and mystical threads.

It is now generally agreed that Dionysius' appeal to theurgy owes much to Iamblichus' spirited defense of its theory and practice against the criticisms of Porphyry. Iamblichus of Chalcis (*circa* 245–325 CE) was a student of Porphyry's in Rome, but differed sharply with him and so refused the chance to become his successor.[111] Instead he returned to his native Syria and established his own philosophical school in the suburbs of Antioch. Porphyry's *Letter to Anebo* roused Iamblichus to pen what is regarded as the masterpiece of theurgical theory, *On the Mysteries*.[112] Iamblichus offers an unabashedly mystical account of theurgy. He is especially keen to rebut Porphyry's charges that theurgists presume to compel the gods in any way:

> For the illumination that comes about as a result of invocations is self-revelatory (αὐτοφανής) and self-willed (αὐτοθελής), and is far removed from being drawn down by force, but rather proceeds to manifestation by reason of its own divine energy and perfection (διὰ τῆς θείας τε ἐνεργείας καὶ τελειότητος), and is as far superior to (human) voluntary

---

[108] Augustine, *De civitate dei*, X.11.
[109] Sodano, ed. and trans., *Porfirio: Letter ad Anebo*.
[110] Augustine, *De civitate dei*, X.11.
[111] The last thirty years have been witness to a resurgence of interest in Iamblichus: Dillon, ed. and trans., *Iamblichi Chalcidensis in Platonis Dialogos Commentariorum Fragmenta*; Lloyd, "The Later Neoplatonists," 269–325; Steel, *The Changing Self*; Smith, *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition*, 81–99; Sheppard, "Proclus' Attitude to Theurgy," 212–24; Shaw, "Rituals of Unification in the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus," 1–28; idem, *Theurgy and the Soul*; idem, "Neoplatonic Theurgy and Dionysius the Areopagite," 573–99; idem, "After Aporia: Theurgy in Later Neoplatonism," 57–82; Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*, 131–41; Finamore, *Iamblichus and the Theory of the Vehicle of the Soul*; Blumenthal and Clark, eds., *The Divine Iamblichus: Philosopher and Man of Gods*.
[112] Clarke, Dillon, and Hershbell, eds. and trans., *Iamblichus: De mysteriis*.

motion as the divine will of the Good is to the life of ordinary deliberation and choice. It is by virtue of such will, then, that the gods in their benevolence and graciousness unstintingly shed their light upon theurgists, summoning up their souls to themselves and orchestrating their union with them, accustoming them, even while still in the body, to detach themselves from their bodies, and to turn themselves towards their eternal and intelligible first principle.[113]

The agency in all the work of theurgy is, according to Iamblichus, always divine. In scholarly terms, then, Iamblichus insists that the *theo-* in "theurgy" be understood as a *subjective* genitive, that the gods are always at work "disposing the human mind to participation in the gods."[114]

Despite the disinterest of Plotinus and the intermittent suspicions of Porphyry, Iamblichus seems to have won the day. After him, Neoplatonists are consistently enthusiastic about theurgy and come to regard *The Chaldean Oracles* as divine revelation—in Cumont's words, a "bible" of sorts. Furthermore, at least in the realm of theurgic theory, Iamblichus' successors follow his lead and regard "god-work" as the channeling of a divine energy always on offer, and not as a means to compel the gods to do our bidding. He is, in short, the great theoretical reformer of theurgy and renders it in such a way that it can be easily adapted to a Christian mystical theology, which of course is exactly what Dionysius does.

III.B. Dionysius and "Christian theurgy"

But scholars have not always been so kind to Iamblichus and his influence on Dionysius. E.R. Dodds, for instance, dismisses Iamblichus' *On the Mysteries* as "a manifesto of irrationalism, an assertion that the road to salvation is found not in reason but in ritual."[115]

---

[113] Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, I.12.
[114] Ibid. No one has argued more eloquently for this reading of Iamblichus than Gregory Shaw, who is understandably astonished that modern scholars are still keen to paint Iamblichean theurgy as manipulative and mercenary magic. I am indebted to Shaw for my earlier discussion of the subjective *vs.* objective genitive framing of theurgy. See Shaw, "Neoplatonic Theurgy and Dionysius the Areopagite." See also idem, *Theurgy and the Soul.*
[115] Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational,* 287; cited by Shaw, "Neoplatonic Theurgy and Dionysius the Areopagite," 577. In his Introduction to Proclus' *The Elements of Theology*, Dodds says of the Proclean synthesis: "it has for the student of

Dodds believes that theurgy—be it pagan or Christian—is best understood along the objective axis, that is, as magic aimed to compel the gods to do our bidding—this despite the fact that Iamblichus insists that we are in the passive role in theurgy, that we do not compel but channel the work of the gods. Taking care to protect Dionysius from such aspersions as Dodds levels against Iamblichus and other theurgists, some scholars have sought to distinguish sharply between pagan (Iamblichus) and Christian (Dionysius) forms of theurgy.[116] One way to distinguish them is to fall back on the difference between the subjective and objective interpretations of the word "theurgy" itself.[117] On this reading, pagan theurgy is best understood along the objective axis, while Christian theurgy is best understood along the subjective axis.

Nowhere in his *On the Mysteries*, however, does Iamblichus use the term theurgy in such a way as to suggest that he understands it to be an objective genitive.[118] This distinction seems motivated largely by "apologetic interests" and the anxiety among Christian scholars that Dionysius is "too Neoplatonic."[119] In fact, theurgy is for *both*

Neoplatonism the same sort of value relatively to the *Enneads* which the study of anatomy has for the zoologist relatively to the examination of the living and breathing animal" (x). Later he makes clear his feelings about post-Plotinian Neoplatonism, both pagan and Christian: "Though Plotinus is commonly treated as the founder of Neoplatonism, in the wider movement we are considering he stands not at the point of origin but at the culminating crest of the wave. Formally, the later Neoplatonic school owes more to him than to any other individual thinker save Plato; yet spiritually he stands alone" (xix).

[116] Although Rorem is credited with first fully acknowledging the scope of Dionysius' debt to Iamblichus (previously attention had been focused on Dionysius' relationship with Proclus), he also introduces this distinction between genitives. See Rorem, "Iamblichus . . ." 456; Luibheid and Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 52n11; Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical*, 14–15; Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary*, 120; see also Shaw, "Neoplatonic Theurgy and Dionysius the Areopagite," 582–3.

[117] Louth takes up Rorem's distinction between genitives so as to guard readers from being "so hasty as to suppose that [Dionysius] means by [theurgy] just what the Neoplatonists did" (*Denys the Areopagite*, 73–4).

[118] Luibheid and Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 52n11; see Rorem, *Biblical*, 14–15; see idem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 120. The passage Rorem cites is *De mysteriis* I.2: "We will provide, in an appropriate manner, explanations proper to each, dealing in a theological mode with theological questions and in theurgical terms with those concerning theurgy, while philosophical issues we will join with you in examining in philosophical terms." Nothing here seems to suggest that "theurgy" is understood as an objective genitive, which leads Shaw to conclude that Rorem simply erred in citing this passage. See Shaw, "Neoplatonic Theurgy and Dionysius the Areopagite," 588.

[119] Shaw, "Neoplatonic Theurgy and Dionysius the Areopagite," 573, 576.

Iamblichus and Dionysius understood along the subjective axis, and thereby names the continuous stream of divine activity pulsing through the hierarchical orders. For Iamblichus, theurgical prayer is "not an address to the gods but a way of entering the power of *their* voice and awakening a corresponding voice in one's soul."[120] Thus theurgical rituals are the divinely revealed *means* of entering the continuous circuit of divine activity always already under way; they are "the gods addressing man, calling us back to divinity through rituals designed by the Demiurge himself in the act of creation."[121] For Iamblichus—and this holds for Dionysius as well—"in theurgy human activity becomes the vehicle for a divine activity."[122] Thus, in a sense, the subjective genitive includes and subsumes the objective genitive—"God's work" includes and subsumes our "works addressed to the gods"—so that "there are not two incompatible meanings of *theourgia*: the actor of the human rite, in his ritual effacement, imitates in his order the communication of the indivisible and the divisible that the divine demiurgy accomplishes at every moment."[123]

"Theurgy" and its cognate "theurgical" appear more than ten times in the *CH*, more than thirty times in the *EH*, five times in the *DN*, and once in *Epistle* 9.[124] Despite these many appeals to the vocabulary of theurgy, there is no evidence of the creep of theurgical practices into the descriptions of the sacraments performed in the Christian liturgy, as recorded in the *EH*. In other words, none of the rites themselves recorded in that treatise would raise any eyebrows among his contemporary Christian readers ("illumination" = baptism; "synaxis" = Eucharist; "myron" = anointment). Having said that, his description of these rites might indeed raise eyebrows, especially if not primarily because of his appeal to the vocabulary of pagan theurgy. But if we inquire further into this vocabulary, we see that it is not the practice but the *theory* of theurgy that has so significantly influenced Dionysius.

[120] Shaw, "Neoplatonic Theurgy and Dionysius the Areopagite," 589.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid., 590.
[123] Annick Charles-Saget, "La Théurgie, la nouvelle figure de l'*ergon* dans la vie philosophique," 113; cited by Shaw, "Neoplatonic Theurgy and Dionysius the Areopagite," 590.
[124] Based on the Index in *CD* II for θεουργία, θεουργικός, and θεουργός. In the four instances in which Dionysius uses the term θεουργός, he uses it as an adjective, following Iamblichus, and not as a noun meaning "theurgist." See LSJ "θεουργός" III.

The first mention of theurgy comes in *CH* 4.4, where Dionysius remarks that John the Baptist was to serve as a prophet of "the human theurgy of Jesus" (τῆς . . . ἀνδρικῆς τοῦ ᾿Ιησοῦ θεουργίας).[125] This phrase makes clear that for Dionysius the preeminent "work of God" is none other than the Incarnation. John of Scythopolis, who wrote the first *scholia* on the *CD* in the middle of the sixth century, appreciates this fact when he comments on this phrase:

> The Incarnation of Christ is a human theurgy, in which God while in the flesh did divine things. Observe how he here speaks of the "human theurgy" of Jesus. Through the word "human" he shows that he became a complete human; and through the word "theurgy", that he is both God and human, the same [person] effecting the divine signs.[126]

While John, a Chalcedonian loyalist if ever there was one, may be inclined to discern an orthodox Christological formulation latent in Dionysius' words, he also confirms that the primary sense of theurgy for Dionysius, the preeminent work of God, is none other than Christ's Incarnation. In *EH* 3.3.4 Dionysius uses the same phrase in the plural, "the human theurgies of Jesus," as a description of the gospels.[127] Several lines later, he says that the purpose of the Psalms or "divine odes" is "to sing all the words and works of God" (τὰς θεολογίας τε καὶ θεουργίας ἁπάσας ὑμνῆσαι).[128] In the next section, speaking of how the New follows on the Old Testament, he writes that "the one [Old Testament] affirmed the theurgies of Jesus, as to come; but the other [New Testament], as accomplished; and as that [OT] described the truth in figures, this [NT] showed it present. For the accomplishment, within this [NT], of the prediction of that [OT], established the truth, and theurgy is the consummation of theology" (καὶ ἔστι τῆς θεολογίας ἡ θεουργία συγκεφαλαίωσις).[129] All this would lead us to conclude that, for Dionysius, theurgy or "the work of God" is Christ Incarnate, the event the Old Testament foretold and the New Testament celebrates as accomplished.

"Theurgy" refers *generally* to God's salvific work in the world, and *specifically* to his preeminent work, the Incarnation; "energy" would

---

[125] *CH* 4.4 181B; *CD* II 23.3 (translation my own).
[126] *SchCH* 57.2, in Paul Rorem and John C. Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus: Annotating the Areopagite*, 156.
[127] *EH* 3.3.4 429C; *CD* II 83.20. Translations in this paragraph are my own.
[128] *EH* 3.3.4 429D; *CD* II 84.2–3.
[129] *EH* 3.3.5 432B; *CD* II 84.17–21.

also seem to refer *generally* to God's work *in* (ἐν-έργεια) the world, that is, in the hierarchies, and *specifically* to the light of Christ that flows through them. In this regard, "theurgy" and "energy" are nearly interchangeable: they both refer to Christ, whom we are called to channel as conduits. We have seen how both of the hierarchical treatises open by soliciting this luminous Christ. In *CH* 1.2, Dionysius exhorts us to call on "Jesus, the paternal light, that which is, 'the truth that enlightens every human coming into the world,' [John 1:9] 'through whom we have access to the Father,' [Rom 5:2; cf. Eph 2:18, 3:12] the source of light."[130] In *EH* 1.1, Dionysius explains how

> Jesus himself, the most supremely divine mind beyond being, the source and essence and most supremely divine power of every hierarchy and sanctification and theurgy [θεουργίας], illuminates the blessed beings who are greater than we are . . . and thus by looking upwards to the blessed and supremely divine ray of Jesus, reverently gazing upon whatever it is permitted us to see, illuminated with the knowledge of the visions, *we will be able to become*, with respect to mystical understanding, purified and purifiers, images of light and *theurgical* [θεουργικοί], perfected and perfecting.[131]

By beholding the light of Christ, the "divine ray of Jesus," we become "theurgical," that is, we become "images" of Christ's light, purified and perfected because Christ-like.

 Nowhere is this clearer than in *CH* 3.2, where, just after he has announced that the goal of hierarchy is the deification of its members, he explains that,

> [f]or each member who has been called into the hierarchy, perfection consists in being uplifted to the imitation of God according to proper analogy and, what is even more divine than all, as the scriptures say, to become "a co-worker with God" (θεοῦ συνεργὸν) and to show the divine energy (τὴν θείαν ἐνέργειαν) in himself as far as is possible.[132]

To return to where we started: Dionysius borrows the phrase "co-worker with God" from Paul because understands the Pauline phrase as a description of Christians who have agreed to channel and show forth "the divine energy," the light of Christ. Although he uses cognates

---

[130] *CH* 1.2 121A; *CD* II 7.9–11.
[131] *EH* 1.1 372A–B; *CD* II 63.12–64.2, 64.10–14 (translation my own, with my emphasis).
[132] *CH* 3.2 165B; *CD* II 18.14–17 (translation my own).

freely, Dionysius refrains from using the title "theurgist" or "god-worker" (θεουργός).[133] This Pauline phrase, however, which could be translated literally "co-god-worker," is very close to "theurgist" indeed.

III.C. Paul the theurgist

Ironically, Iamblichus enables us to appreciate what is so Pauline about the Dionysian understanding of deification and theurgy, for once we lay aside scholarly distinctions we can see how very close Iamblichus and Paul are. For both, the divine is continually at work and bids us join it, calls us to become, in Paul's words, θεοῦ συνεργοί, "fellow workmen for God"—or better, "cooperators with God." Iamblichus does not use the terms συνεργός or συνεργέω for this cooperation, but prefers to speak of the receptive capacity of the soul (ἐπιτηδειότης) and of a soul that experiences sympathy (συμπάθεια) with the divine.[134] And while Paul never of course uses the term θεουργία and while most of his use of the word ἔργον is reserved for the distinction between faith and works, he does refer to the "work of God" (Rom 14:20), the "work of the Lord" (1 Cor 15:58; 16:10) and the "work of Christ" (Phil 2:30).[135] Paul is, in his own way, a theurgist. The preeminent "work of God," for Paul, is of course the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, while for Iamblichus it is the created order and the rites revealed in ancient times. For both, to become a theurgist is to let this divine work wash over you and to speak its saving words back to it. This amounts to prayer. Compare Iamblichus' account of prayer—

---

[133] That is, he uses θεουργός only as an adjective, functionally equivalent to θεουργικός.

[134] Shaw, "Neoplatonic Theurgy and Dionysius the Areopagite," 590; for ἐπιτηδειότης, see *DM* III.11.125.4; III.24.157.13; III.27.165.10; 165.12; IV.8.192.2; V.10.210.2; VI.2.242.11; X.3.288.1; for συμπάθεια, see *DM* III.16.137.15; III.27.164.6; V.7.207.11; V.10.210.12; X.3.288.3–4.

[135] Rom 14:20: "Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God [ἔργον θεοῦ]"; 1 Cor 15:58: "Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord [ἔργῳ τοῦ κυρίου], because you know that in the Lord your labor [κόπος] is not in vain"; 1 Cor 16:10: "If Timothy comes, see that he has nothing to fear among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord [ἔργον κυρίου] just as I am"; Phil 2:30: "[Epaphroditus] came close to death for the work of Christ [τὸ ἔργον Χριστοῦ], risking his life to make up for those services that you could not give me."

If anyone would consider the hieratic prayers, how they are sent down to men from the Gods and are symbols of the Gods, how they are known only to the Gods and possess in a certain way the same power as the Gods, how could anyone rightly believe that this sort of prayer is derived from our empirical sense and is not divine and spiritual? (*DM* 48.5–11)

—with Paul's accounts of how it is the Spirit who prays through us in Gal 4:6 ("And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying 'Abba, Father!'"); Rom 8:16 ("When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are sons of God, and if sons, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ"); Rom 8:26 ("Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words"). Are these verses not an almost perfect match with the description of Iamblichean prayer as "not an address to the gods but a way of entering the power of *their* voice and awakening a corresponding voice in one's soul"? If in Iamblichus there is a "ritual effacement" of the actor in prayer, so too is there in Paul, as if the Spirit effaces the pray-er in much the same way as Christ effaces Paul in Gal 2:20 ("it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me").

To return, then, to our theme of deification as "the goal of every hierarchy": it should be clear by now why Dionysius chooses this particular Pauline phrase, from among the many at his disposal, to flesh out his account of how hierarchies deify: "Indeed for every member of the hierarchy, perfection consists in . . . [becoming] a 'fellow workman for God.'" For Dionysius, deification consists in our becoming "co-workers with God," that is, becoming something through which the work of God ($\theta\epsilon o\upsilon\rho\gamma\iota\alpha$) moves. Such movement presumes space, and so creation, as an ordered "theophany," a series of interlocking hierarchies, is the arrangement of distance that makes possible proximity. The height of proximity is union, which throughout the *CD* is deification's constitutive pair. Despite the prevalent descriptions of ascent, proximity and union are not achieved by our moving closer to the source, ascending the hierarchy, but rather by allowing the source to move more fully through us.[136] Thus Dionysius

---

[136] See Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, 39: "Further, deification means for Denys that the deified creature becomes so united to God that its activity is the divine activity flowing through it"; idem, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, 171: "What

could say, with Paul, "it is well for a man to remain as he is."[137] Insofar as there is ascent, therefore, it is assent—the assent of each order of the hierarchy to the work of God. Each order of the hierarchy becomes in turn "ritually effaced," that is, emptied of its own self as it is filled with another. Creation can be understood, then, as a circuit and the choice facing every order of creation is whether and how well it will conduct the currents that run out from and back to the source.

We need not therefore choose between Iamblichus and Paul, between a safely Christian and a dangerously pagan Dionysius. For as regards their understanding of deification and union as assent to the work of God, this Christian and pagan meet. The "*ritual* efface-ment" of the "actor of the human rite" in Iamblichean θεουργία reminds us that for Dionysius too this assent to become a medium through which the divine moves is given in a ritual context, the liturgy of the church. In short, cooperation (συνεργία) with the work of God (θεουργία) or the divine energy (ἡ θεία ἐνέργεια), which is available only through the liturgy (λειτουργία), renders us co-workers with God (θεοῦ συνεργοί), theurgical (θεουργικοί)—in effect, theurgists. Thus the notions of deification and union, with both their Iambli-chean and Pauline legacies, are in the *CD* woven tightly into a liturgical, sacramental, and ecclesiastical vision.

The liturgical hierarchy presents a way of soliciting deifying union with the unknown God, namely creatures' consent to allow the light and love of Christ to pass through them and rest in them. In this chapter, I have argued that the very definition of hierarchy as order and activity, the understanding of Christ as the luminous and loving energy that flows through the hierarchy, and the fact that the goal of hierarchy is deification through cooperation *all* find inspiration in Paul. When we understand these themes against a Pauline backdrop, I argue, we can make some progress on the debates regarding hier-archy, Christology, and theurgy in the *CD*. In the next chapter, I turn my attention to the complementary, contemplative program laid out in the *CD*, namely the perpetual affirmation and negation of the divine names. For this "apophatic" regimen, I argue, Dionysius also looks to his master, Paul.

---

ascent means—at least in part—is a more perfect union with that divine energy (or will) which establishes one in the hierarchy. So one 'ascends' *into* the hierarchy rather than up it."

[137] 1 Cor 7:26.

4

"To an Unknown God"

Paul and Mystical Union

In the last chapter, we saw that the two treatises on the hierarchies announce that the very goal of all hierarchy is deifying union. This union (ἕνωσις) is bestowed on those who answer the invitation to cooperate (συνεργέω) with the activity (ἐνέργεια) or work of God (θεουργία). But how exactly does one cooperate with the work of God? First and foremost, one participates in the sacramental and liturgical life of the church, wherein Christ gives access to himself, that is, the currents of light and love that process from and return to the divine source. In this chapter, I examine how the next two treatises—the *Divine Names* and the *Mystical Theology*—insist on a further, complementary program: that one affirm (καταφάσκω) and negate (ἀποφάσκω) the divine names (τὰ θεῖα ὀνόματα) in perpetuity in order to solicit union with the divine. In the *Divine Names*, Dionysius gathers these scriptural names and contemplates (θεωρέω) them, much as he does liturgical symbols in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. In the *Mystical Theology*, Dionysius explains that contemplation of these names should follow a strict cyclical order: a progressive affirmation (κατάφασις) of the names most like the divine to those most unlike followed by a regressive negation (ἀπόφασις) of the names most unlike the divine to those most like. At the peak and valley of this cycle, Dionysius offers two further and complementary movements: (1) the negation of negation and (2) the contemplation of "entirely dissimilar names." The aim of this entire contemplative program—in which "saying" and "unsaying" are inextricably bound together—is to heighten the tension between divine immanence and transcendence to such a point that the "unimaginable presence"

of God may break through all affirmations and negations and the "unknowing union" (ἕνωσις ἄγνωστος) with "the unknown God" (ὁ ἄγνωστος θέος) may descend.

This chapter aims to show how this contemplative enterprise draws for inspiration from the figure and writings of Paul. Here again I must make clear that I do not mean to suggest that the author of the *CD* draws exclusively on Paul as a resource for his mystical theology, but rather that, influenced by earlier Eastern Christian traditions and later Neoplatonism, he read Paul as anticipating some of those traditions' most pressing issues, including the dilemma of divine transcendence and immanence. (I.1) Dionysius opens his account of the divine names by appealing to Paul's insistence that one contemplate only those divine names revealed in the scriptures. (I.2) Moreover, Dionysius puzzles through the dilemma of divine transcendence and immanence in the *Divine Names* by constant appeal to Paul's letters, wherein Dionysius finds the apostle already wrestling with questions of how God is both present and absent. (I.3) Although the contemplative cycle in which Dionysius situates the practices of affirmation and negation is of largely Proclean origin, Paul emerges not only as the authoritative witness to the divine operations of procession, return and rest, but as the exemplary case of one who both preaches and himself suffers union with the unknown God. (II.1–2) Furthermore, Dionysius' description of this union with the divine as the descent of "unknowing" derives from Paul's own speech to the court of the Areopagus (Acts 17:23), a speech in which Paul says of "the unknown God": "That which you therefore worship *through unknowing*, this I proclaim to you."[1] Thus the sixth-century author takes on the name of an Athenian judge converted by this speech so as to suggest that his entire mystical enterprise, which aims to worship and eventually to unite with the unknown God, finds inspiration in Paul. (III) Paul's speech to the Areopagus also helps explain how this sixth-century author understood his commitments to Christ in light of his substantial debts to Neoplatonism. The author is a follower of the Paul who preaches to the court of the Areopagus insofar as he seeks to recover the incipient faith of pagan wisdom. The pagan edifice need not compete with Paul's proclamation of an unknown

---

[1] ὁ οὖν ἀγνοοῦντες εὐσεβεῖτε, τοῦτο ἐγὼ καταγγέλλω ὑμῖν. The Revised Standard Version (RSV) mistranslates this sentence: "What you therefore worship *as unknown*, this I proclaim to you."

God and a resurrected Christ but rather complements it, owing to the fact that for Dionysius Greek wisdom contains a residuum of divine revelation.

I. SAYING AND UNSAYING THE DIVINE NAMES

I.A. The "scriptural rule"

Dionysius is acutely interested in specifying the divine names precisely because it is by the contemplation of these divine names that one solicits union with the unknown God. Therefore Dionysius' first task is to establish a "scriptural rule" (ὁ τῶν λογίων θεσμὸς) to limit the names with which to address God: "But, let the rule of the Oracles be here also prescribed for us, viz., that we shall establish the truth of the things spoken concerning God, not in the persuasive words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit-moved power of the Theologians."[2] Just as in the *Celestial Hierarchy*, here also Dionysius introduces himself as a disciple of Paul, quoting this time from his first letter to the Corinthians.[3] Some scholars have preferred to see in this "scriptural rule" a further instance of Dionysius' policy of disingenuous citation, that his "emphatic assurance"[4] is little more than a "superficial formality"[5] masking the Neoplatonism into which he was initiated.

Dionysius follows Paul in insisting that speech about God echo God's speech about God—in other words that worship echo revelation. It is more fitting that God graciously descend to humans than that humans recklessly reach beyond our limits, for insofar

---

[2] *DN* 1.1 585B; *CD* I 107.4–108.3.

[3] 1 Cor 2:4: "My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God."

[4] Sheldon-Williams, "The Pseudo-Dionysius and the Holy Hierotheus," 112: "In spite of the author's emphatic assurance at the beginning of the treatise that he is following the Scriptures, there is nothing peculiarly scriptural in these names, except in the last four. The mysteries into which Hierotheus initiated him are not a revelation of Scripture but of Neoplatonism: a Neoplatonism which is later than Plotinus but could belong to any period from Iamblichus onwards."

[5] Rorem, "The Biblical Allusions and Overlooked Questions in the Pseudo-Dionysian Corpus," 64. Rorem seems to have Sheldon-Williams in mind when he writes that "[Dionysius'] claims have apparently been thought a superficial formality."

as God is the "Cause of being to all, but Itself not being, as beyond every essence, and as It may manifest Itself properly and scientifically concerning Itself."[6] And so God reveals his divine names to the scripture writers by the power of the Spirit.[7] Ten chapters of the *Divine Names* (*DN* 4–13) are devoted to the divine names as revealed in scripture. Each of these ten chapters takes up one or several related names and contemplates their many and hidden meanings. As we would expect, Paul is well represented in these chapters, as the divine names from his letters are submitted to prayerful attention. But Paul does not—nor should he—dominate these chapters, as their aim is to gather all the "conceptual names of God"[8] that have been revealed in scripture, and Paul is only one of the many "theologians" so blessed by the Spirit.[9]

I.B. Transcendence and immanence

Beyond the rule that one limit oneself to scripture, Paul is important for Dionysius in the *Divine Names* not because he crowds out other scriptural sources for the divine names, but because he provides Dionysius with an authoritative witness to a crucial dilemma regarding the divine names: namely, how to name the nameless?

> And yet, if It is superior to every expression and every knowledge, and is altogether placed above mind and essence,—being such as embraces and unites and comprehends and anticipates all things, but Itself is altogether incomprehensible to all, and of It, there is neither perception nor imagination, nor surmise, nor name, nor expression, nor contact, nor science;—in what way can our treatise thoroughly investigate the meaning of the Divine Names, when the superessential Deity is shewn to be without Name, and above Name?[10]

---

[6] *DN* 1.1 588B; *CD* I 109.15–110.1: αἴτιον μὲν τοῦ εἶναι πᾶσιν, αὐτὸ δὲ μὴ ὂν ὡς πάσης οὐσίας ἐπέκεινα καὶ ὡς ἂν αὐτὴ περὶ ἑαυτῆς κυρίως καὶ ἐπιστητῶς ἀποφαίνοιτο.

[7] *DN* 1.1 585B; *CD* I 108.2–3.

[8] In *DN* 1.8 597B (*CD* I 121.1–6), Dionysius explains that he will treat the "sensory names" in a fictitious (or perhaps lost) treatise entitled the *Symbolic Theology*. He presents the *Divine Names*, on the other hand, as the "explication of the *conceptual* names of God."

[9] Paul is particularly relevant to the treatment of light (*DN* 4.4–4.6), love (ἔρως) and ecstasy (*DN* 4.11–4.17), wisdom (*DN* 4.1), and "King of kings" (*DN* 12), but is minimally relevant to, even absent from, the treatments of other names.

[10] *DN* 1.5 593A–B; *CD* I 115.19–116.6.

The dilemma that Dionysius faces here—how the transcendence of God undermines a knowledge of his names—is a species of a more general theological dilemma: namely how to safeguard the transcendence while preserving the immanence of God. This dilemma was also a central concern of late Neoplatonism, whose proponents pondered how the One could both outstrip all categories of language, thought, and being and yet leave traces in the created cosmos. There is not a shadow of a doubt that Dionysius owes much to these late Neoplatonic debates regarding divine immanence and transcendence, especially as they find expression in Proclus.[11] Closer attention to the *CD*, however, reveals that Dionysius finds his purported teacher Paul already to be struggling with this same dilemma.

I.B.1. *Transcendence*

In the two treatises on the hierarchies, Dionysius repeatedly cites Paul as an authority on the transcendence of God.[12] However, this matter appears with more consistency and urgency in the *Divine Names*. In *DN* 1.2, immediately after reiterating the scriptural rule he lifts from Paul, Dionysius offers his first foray into the dilemma:

> For even as Itself has taught (as become its goodness) in the Oracles, the science and contemplation of Itself in Its essential Nature is beyond the reach ($ἄβατος$)[13] of all created things, as towering superessentially above

[11] Sheldon-Williams, "The Pseudo-Dionysius and the Holy Hierotheus," 112.
[12] *CH* 2.3 140D (*CD* II 12.15–17): "[The Oracles] affirm that [God] is invisible, and infinite, and incomprehensible; and when there is signified, not what it is, but what it is not."; cf. Col 1:15: "[The Son] is the image of the invisible God"; cf. 1 Tim 1:17: "To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen"; *CH* 4.3 180C (*CD* II 22.2–4): "[Let it be made learned], and that distinctly, from the most Holy Oracles, that no one hath seen, nor ever shall see, the 'hidden' $τὸ κρύφιον$ of Almighty God as it is in itself."; cf. 1 Tim 6:16: "It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see"; *EH* 7.3.5 560B (*CD* II 125.18–20): "For we must remember that the Logion is true, that 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man to conceive, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.'"; cf. 1 Cor 2:9: "But as it is written, 'What no eye has seen nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him.'"
[13] There may be a pun here, for $βάτος$ also means "thorn bush," more specifically the thorn bush in which Moses is supposed to have seen God (Exod 3:2–4). Thus even in the supreme theophany of the Hebrew Bible, in a thorn-bush or $βάτος$, God remains inaccessible or $ἄβατος$. See Danker, *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 171.

all. And you will find many of the Theologians, who have celebrated It, not only as invisible (ἀόρατον) and incomprehensible (ἀπερίληπτον), but also as inscrutable (ἀνεξερεύνητον) and untraceable (ἀνεξιχνίαστον), since there is no trace of those who have penetrated to Its hidden infinitude (ἐπὶ τὴν κρυφίαν αὐτῆς ἀπειρίαν).[14]

When attempting to treat the transcendence of God, one of Dionysius' characteristic strategies is to resort to the proliferation of alpha-privatives, simple negations of particular qualities: ἀ- (not) + περίληπτον (comprehensible).[15] Although this is a strategy he certainly shares with nearly all his contemporaries (Christian and otherwise), three of the four particular privatives he offers here come from Paul: "invisible" (ἀόρατον),[16] "unsearchable" (ἀνεξερεύνητον),[17] and "inscrutable" (ἀνεξιχνίαστον).[18]

Dionysius not only expands on this list of three Pauline privatives but also instructs the reader as to how best to understand the meaning of the embedded negation. This is clearest in one of Dionysius' most sustained treatments of the transcendence of God, and one in which his debt to Paul is clearest: the Fifth Letter, addressed to the deacon Dorotheus.

> The Divine gloom is the unapproachable light in which God is said to
> dwell. And in this gloom, invisible indeed, on account of the surpassing

---

[14] *DN* 1.2 588C; *CD* I 110.4–10.

[15] Dionysius seems to have made an error with respect to this second alpha-privative, "incomprehensible" [ἀπερίληπτον], for it is not scriptural, as he contends. Gregory of Nyssa, however, uses it of the divine nature (*tres dii* [M.45.129C]), as does Gregory of Nazianzus of the Trinity (*or.* 6.22 [M.35.749C]). See Lampe, *A Greek Patristic Lexicon*, 183.

[16] Rom 1:20; Col 1:15; Col 1:16; 1 Tim 1:17. ἀόρατος appears no less than twenty times in the *CD*; ἀνεξερεύνητος four times; ἀνεξιχνίαστον three times. It is a term which may have been particularly aimed at fifth-century Messalians. The Messalians—whose name comes from the Syriac word for prayer—were a fourth-century movement in Syria that apparently believed that monks could enjoy a physical vision of the Trinity. They were condemned at the end of the fourth century in Antioch and again at the Council of Ephesus in 431, but survived in Syria well into the sixth century. Golitzin is convinced that the *CD* was composed precisely to rebut the views of the Messalians and other deviant forms of Syrian Christianity; see Golitzin, "Dionysius Areopagita: A Christian Mysticism?" 177–8; for an excellent overview of the movement and a helpful translation of key texts, see Stewart, *"Working the Earth of the Heart": The Messalian Controversy in History, Texts, and Language to A.D. 431.*

[17] Rom 11:33.

[18] Rom 11:33; Eph 3:8.

---

brightness, and unapproachable on account of the excess of the super-essential stream of light, enters every one deemed worthy to know and to see God, by the very fact of neither seeing nor knowing, really entering in Him, Who is above vision and knowledge, knowing this very thing, that He is after all the object of sensible and intelligent perception, and saying in the words of the Prophet, "Thy knowledge was regarded as wonderful by me; It was confirmed; I can by no means attain unto it;" even as the Divine Paul is said to have known Almighty God, by having known Him as being above all conception and knowledge. Wherefore also, he says, "His ways are past finding out and His Judgements inscrutable," and His gifts "indescribable," and that His peace surpasses every mind, as having found Him Who is above all, and having known this which is above conception, that, by being Cause of all, He is beyond all.[19]

To the three Pauline privatives cited in *DN* 1.2, Dionysius here adds two more: "unapproachable" (ἀπρόσιτον)—with which Paul describes that light wherein God dwells[20]—and "inexpressible" (ἀνεκδιηγήτος)—with which Paul describes the gift of God's grace.[21] More important, however, Dionysius instructs the reader how best to understand these privatives: not as signifying lack but rather superabundance.[22] This is a point he is at pains to make elsewhere with respect to his favorite prefix, ὑπερ-, often rendered "beyond" or "transcendently," such as in

---

[19] *Ep.* 5. 1073A–1076A; *CD* II 162.1–163.5: Ὁ θεῖος γνόφος ἐστὶ τὸ «ἀπρόσιτον φῶς», ἐν ᾧ κατοικεῖν ὁ θεὸς λέγεται, καὶ ἀοράτῳ γε ὄντι διὰ τὴν ὑπερέχουσαν φανότητα καὶ ἀπροσίτῳ τῷ αὐτῷ δι᾽ ὑπερβολὴν ὑπερουσίου φωτοχυσίας. Ἐν τούτῳ γίγνεται πᾶς ὁ θεὸν γνῶναι καὶ ἰδεῖν ἀξιούμενος, αὐτῷ τῷ μὴ ὁρᾶν μηδὲ γινώσκειν. ἀληθῶς ἐν τῷ ὑπὲρ ὅρασιν καὶ γνῶσιν γιγνόμενος τοῦτο αὐτὸ γιγνώσκων, ὅτι μετὰ πάντα ἐστὶ τὰ αἰσθητὰ καὶ τὰ νοητά, καὶ προφητικῶς ἐρῶν «Ἐθαυμαστώθη ἡ γνῶσίς σου ἀπ᾽ ἐμοῦ, ἐκραταιώθη, οὐ μὴ δύναμαι πρὸς αὐτήν.»
Ὥσπερ οὖν καὶ ὁ θεῖος Παῦλος ἐγνωκέναι τὸν θεὸν λέγεται γνοὺς αὐτὸν ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν ὄντα νόησιν καὶ γνῶσιν, διὸ καὶ ἀνεξιχνιάστους ἔιναι τὰς ὁδοὺς αὐτοῦ φησι καὶ «ἀνεξερεύνητα τὰ κρίματα αὐτοῦ» καὶ ἀνεκδιηγήτους τὰς δωρεὰς αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν εἰρήνην αὐτοῦ ὑπερέχουσαν «πάντα νοῦν», ὡς εὑρηκὼς τὸν ὑπὲρ πάντα καὶ τοῦτο ὑπὲρ νόησιν ἐγνωκώς, ὅτι πάντων ἐστὶν ἐπέκεινα πάντων αἴτιος ὤν.

[20] 1 Tim 6:16: "It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see" (ὁ μόνος ἔχων ἀθανασίαν, φῶς οἰκῶν ἀπρόσιτον, ὃν εἶδεν οὐδεὶς ἀνθρώπων οὐδὲ ἰδεῖν δύναται).

[21] 2 Cor 9:15: "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift" (χάρις τῷ θεῷ ἐπὶ τῇ ἀνεκδιηγήτῳ αὐτοῦ δωρεᾷ).

[22] For an excellent treatment of the fundamental ambiguity in the Dionysian notion of supereminence or ὑπεροχή (lit. "hyper-having"), see Knepper, "Not Not: The Method and Logic of Dionysian Negation."

---

the famous ὑπερούσιος, or "beyond being."[23] Here in the Fifth Letter, Dionysius insists that with respect to God, the two prefixes (ἀ- and ὑπερ-) have the same meaning: namely, they signal not that God lacks the quality in question, but that God manifests that quality so super-abundantly, so transcendently, that there is a sharp *dis*-analogy between the quality as God manifests it and the quality as we understand it. For example, with respect to the quality of being, ὑπερούσιος does not suggest that God somehow lacks the quality he graciously gives to creation, but rather that God so superabundantly *is* that one does better to confess that he is *not* and thereby draw nearer to that divine superabundance.

And according to Dionysius, this very point finds compelling corroboration in the life and writings of Paul. Paul names God "invisible." But he means not that God lacks the ability to show God's self but rather than the sight of God is so overwhelming that it blinds, as Paul himself experienced when the luminous Christ blinded him on the road to Damascus. If that light is "unapproachable," it is so precisely because that light always already approaches his creatures. If God is "unsearchable" and "inscrutable," it is not only because one can never exhaust God's activities—never mind "the depths of his infinity"— but because God always already searches and scrutinizes those ways and judgments. If, as Paul says, "his gifts are inexpressible" (ἀνεκδιήγητος),[24] God is also the "Word unutterable" (λόγος ἄρρητος)[25] who gives floods of words with which to praise those gifts. And if, as Paul says, "his peace passes all understanding" (ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ θεοῦ ἡ ὑπερέχουσα πάντα νοῦν),[26] God is also "mind inconceivable" (νοῦς ἀνόητος)[27] who reveals in scripture those "conceptual names of God" (τῶν νοητῶν θεωνυμιῶν)[28] that one affirms and negates so as to suffer a union "above reason and mind" (ὑπὲρ λόγον

---

[23] *DN* 2.3 640B (*CD* I 125.13–16): "The (Names) then, common to the whole Deity . . . are the Super-Good, the Super-God, the Superessential, the Super-Living, the Super-wise, and whatever else belongs to the superlative abstraction" (τὸ ὑπεράγαθον, τὸ ὑπέρθεον, τὸ ὑπερούσιον, τὸ ὑπέρζωον, τὸ ὑπέρσοφον καὶ ὅσα τῆς ὑπεροχικῆς ἐστιν ἀφαιρέσεως); *Ep.* 1 1065A (*CD* II 156.4–5): "Take this in a superlative, but not in a defective sense, and reply with superlative truth" (Ταῦτα ὑπεροχικῶς, ἀλλὰ μὴ κατὰ στέρησιν ἐκλαβὼν ἀπόφησον ὑπεραληθῶς).

[24] 2 Cor 9:15.

[25] *DN* 1.1 588B; *CD* I 109.14.

[26] Phil 4:7.

[27] *DN* 1.1 588B; *CD* I 109.14.

[28] *DN* 1.8 597B; *CD* I 121.6.

καὶ νοῦν).[29] For Dionysius, Paul's use of the privative must be under-
stood against the backdrop of his simultaneous confession of divine
grace and superfluity. For Dionysius, therefore, Paul is the authorita-
tive apostolic witness to the fact that God's transcendence is excessive.
On the basis of this witness, Paul is championed as the exemplary case
of one gifted with the paradoxical knowledge of God, for Paul "is said
to have known Almighty God, by having known Him as being above
all conception and knowledge. . . . as having found Him Who is above
all, and having known this which is above conception, that, by being
Cause of all, He is beyond all."[30]

I.B.2. Immanence

There is another way, however, in which one may know God, insofar
as God has made God's own self known in the world through revela-
tion. With this we return to the general dilemma with which Diony-
sius wrestles in the opening chapters of the *Divine Names*: the balance
between the transcendence and the immanence of God. Paul looms
large in Dionysius' treatment of the former—but what of the latter?
After safeguarding the transcendence of God in *DN* 1.2, Dionysius
adds:

> The Good indeed is not entirely uncommunicated to any single created
> being, but benignly sheds forth its superessential ray, persistently fixed
> in Itself, by illuminations analogous to each several being, and elevates
> to Its permitted contemplation and communion and likeness, those
> holy minds, who, as far as is lawful and reverent, strive after It.[31]

Many of the themes in this brief affirmation of divine immanence are
familiar from the two previous treatises on the hierarchies: enlight-
enment proceeding from the divine source, proportionate revelation,
anagogical contemplation, and deifying union. In the previous chap-
ter I charted how Paul animates these and other themes from those
two treatises.

But in his second foray into the matter of divine immanence in *DN*
1.5, Dionysius makes his debt to Paul even clearer. After another
dizzying hymn to the transcendence of God, Dionysius writes:

---

[29] *DN* 1.1 588A; *CD* I 108.8.
[30] *Ep*. 5. 1073A–1076A; *CD* II 162.11–163.5.
[31] *DN* 1.2 588C–D; *CD* I 110.11–15.

> But since, as sustaining source of goodness, by the very fact of Its being, It is cause of all things that be, from all created things must we celebrate the benevolent Providence of the Godhead; for all things are both around It and for It, and It is before all things, and all things in It consist. (Col 1:17)[32]

This verse from Paul's letter to the Colossians is a favorite of Dionyius': he quotes it four other times in the *Divine Names*.[33] Although the verse speaks generally in support of God's presence in creation,[34] I suspect that Dionysius' enthusiasm for this verse has to do with two details. First of all, the verse repeats the phrase "all things" ($\pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\omega\nu \ldots \pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\alpha$): God "It is before all things, and all things in It consist." Later, in *DN* 1.7, Dionysius again quotes Paul on the "all": God is "all in all" ($\tau\grave{\alpha}\ \pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\alpha\ \acute{\epsilon}\nu\ \pi\hat{\alpha}\sigma\iota$) (1 Cor 15:28;[35] cf. Col 3:11).[36] Earlier in *DN* 1.5, following Paul's lead, Dionysius sought to safeguard the transcendence of God by insisting again and again that God is beyond all things.[37] Dionysius favors these verses from Paul precisely because they provide the opposite assurance: that God is in all things and that in God all things cohere. That the word "all" appears in his treatments of both divine transcendence and immanence not only satisfies the scriptural rule with which he opened this treatise but also contributes to the coherence of his treatment of the tension between the two, as summed

---

[32] *DN* 1.5 593D; *CD* I 117.11–15.

[33] *DN* 2.2 637B (*CD* I 124.1–2), *DN* 4.4 700B (*CD* I 148.13), *DN* 5.5 820A (*CD* I 183.15–16), *DN* 9.8 916B (*CD* I 213.4–5).

[34] In fact in this verse and in the proceeding verses Paul is describing not God the Father but "the beloved Son." Very often Dionysius will use verses speaking of Jesus, Christ, or the Son to refer to God. This is not sloppy exegesis, but in fact reflects his views on the divine names expressing unity and those expressing differentiation as found in *DN* 2.11: "[E]very beneficent Name of God, to whichever of the supremely Divine Persons it may be applied, is to be understood with reference to the whole Supremely Divine wholeness unreservedly" (*DN* 2.11 652A; *CD* I 137.11–13).

[35] Dionysius also favors this verse: it appears two other times in this work: *DN* 7.3 872A (*CD* I 198.8), 9.5 912D (*CD* I 210.7–8).

[36] *DN* 1.7 596C; *CD* I 119.13–120.1.

[37] *DN* 1.5 593C; *CD* I 116.14–117.4 (my emphasis): "The godlike minds (men) made one by these unions, through imitation of the angels as far as attainable (since it is during *cessation of every mental energy* ($\kappa\alpha\tau\grave{\alpha}\ \pi\acute{\alpha}\sigma\eta\varsigma\ \nuο\epsilon\rho\hat{\alpha}\varsigma\ \acute{\epsilon}\nu\epsilon\rho\gamma\epsilon\acute{\iota}\alpha\varsigma\ \acute{\alpha}\pi\acuteο\pi\alpha\upsilon\sigma\iota\nu$) that such an union as this of the deified minds towards the super-divine light takes place) celebrate it most appropriately through the *removal of all created things* ($\delta\iota\grave{\alpha}\ \tau\hat{\eta}\varsigma\ \pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\omega\nu\ \tau\hat{\omega}\nu\ \check{ο}\nu\tau\omega\nu\ \acute{\alpha}\varphi\alpha\iota\rho\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\epsilon\omega\varsigma$)—enlightened in this matter, truly and supernaturally from the most blessed union towards it—that It is Cause indeed of all things existing, but Itself none of them, as being superessentially *elevated above all* ($\pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\omega\nu \ldots \acute{\epsilon}\xi\eta\rho\eta\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nuο\nu$)."

up in the final line of his Fifth Letter: "by being Cause of all, He is beyond all (πάντων ἐστὶν ἐπέκεινα πάντων αἴτιος ὤν)."[38]

The second feature of this verse that might have caught Dionysius' eye also has to do with the coherence of the *CD*: the verb in the phrase "all things in It consist [or cohere] (συνέστηκεν)." The verb is συνίστημι (to stand together or cohere) and along with ὑφίστημι (to stand under or subsist) provides a counterpoint in the *CD* to such verbs as ὑπερίστημι (to stand over or surpass) and ἐξίστημι (to stand outside or be in ecstasy). Paul, therefore, not only provides support for Dionysius' general affirmation of divine immanence but also contributes to Dionysius' peculiar theological lexicon. As we saw earlier in the case of the word ἔργον, or "work," this lexicon proliferates by adding various prefixes to a small number of common roots, here the verb ἵστημι. Thus the theological lexicon of the *CD* betrays a linguistic coherence that is impossible to convey in translation.

If earlier in the *Divine Names*, while standing in awe of the vertiginous alterity of the God beyond being, Dionyius counsels silence— "honouring . . . things unutterable, with a prudent silence"[39]—here, marveling in turn at God's ubiquity, he commends praise: "The theologians . . . celebrate [the supra-essential being of God], both without Name (ἀνώνυμον) and from every Name (ἐκ παντὸς ὀνόματος)."[40] And not surprisingly, in support of this idea that God can be praised by—yet still surpasses—all names, Dionysius again quotes from Paul: God's is "[the Name] which is above every Name (Phil 2:9) . . . fixed above every name which is named, whether in this age or in that which is to come" (Eph 1:21).[41] Thus Dionysius can no easier negotiate divine immanence without his teacher Paul than he can divine transcendence. And this is clearest at the very end of *DN* 2, where Dionysius explicitly credits his testimony to the tension between transcendence and immanence to Paul: "[This is spoken by] the common conductor of ourselves, and of our leader to the Divine gift of light,—he, who is great in Divine mysteries—the light of the world."[42]

---

[38] *Ep.* 5. 1076A; *CD* II 163.5. See also *DN* 7.3 872A; *CD* I 198.2–3 (emphasis original): "God is known even in all, and *apart* from all."

[39] *DN* 1.3 589B; *CD* I 111.5–6.

[40] *DN* 1.6 596A; *CD* I 118.1–2.

[41] *DN* 1.6 596A; *CD* I 118.8–10.

[42] *DN* 2.11 649D; *CD* I 136.18–137.1: Καὶ τοῦτο ὑπερφυῶς ἐννοήσας ὁ κοινὸς ἡμῶν καὶ τοῦ καθηγεμόνος ἐπὶ τὴν θείαν φωτοδοσίαν χειραγωγός, ὁ πολὺς τὰ θεῖα, «τὸ φῶς

I.C. Transcendence, immanence, union; procession, return, rest

The tension between the immanence and transcendence of God is no more resolved in the *CD* than it is in the letters of Paul. In fact, Dionysius seems to have little interest in relieving the tension. He calls upon his teacher Paul not so much to unravel the knot of divine presence and absence as to bear authoritative witness to it. According to Dionysius, two human activities correspond to the immanence and transcendence of God: affirmation (κατάφασις) and negation (ἀπόφασις): "[It is] our duty both to attribute and affirm all the attributes of things existing to It, as Cause of all, and more properly to deny them all to It, as being above all."[43] Here, in the *Mystical Theology*, Dionysius reveals that the tension that occupied him in the first several chapters of the *Divine Names* is never relieved, that one never ceases saying and unsaying. On the contrary, he wishes to heighten the tension by insisting that while one is bound to affirm and negate the divine names just as God reveals and conceals, still neither affirmations nor even negations are ever adequate and always miss their target.

Not surprisingly for a thinker so interested in τάξις, there should be an order to affirmation and negation: one begins by contemplation of the most fitting divine names and then "descend[s] from the above to the lowest."[44] This contemplative descent from the one to the many mirrors the beneficent procession of the God beyond being into being and creation. Having contemplated all the conceptual and sensory divine names—and rounding the corner perhaps by contemplating God as a worm or a drunk—one then "ascend[s] from below to that which is above," denying in sequence each of the divine names just affirmed.[45] This equally contemplative ascent from the many to the one mirrors creation's yearning to return to its source. One denies

---

τοῦ κόσμου». That Dionysius describes Paul with Christological language ("the light of the world") provides further evidence for the fact that, for Dionysius, Paul is the exemplar of one who consents to be a medium through whom Jesus, as light and love, fully moves.

[43] *MT* 1.2 1000B; *CD* II 143.3–5. If we submit even this passage to the rule with which the *Divine Names* opens, then we must understand Dionysius to mean not that we should affirm and negate whatever we please, but only those "divine names" drawn from all creation and revealed to the scripture writers.

[44] *MT* 3 1033C; *CD* II 147.10–11.

[45] *MT* 3 1033C; *CD* II 147.12.

these names not because God is not, for instance, good, but because God surpasses the good: God is so superabundantly good that the notion of good no longer has full purchase.

Because they free God from such cramped categories, Dionysius says that "it is necessary, as I think, to celebrate the abstractions (τὰς ἀφαιρέσεις) in an opposite way to the definitions (ταῖς θέσεσιν)."[46] Obviously an "apophatic" enterprise presumes a "kataphatic" one—negation presumes affirmation.[47] But according to Dionysius at least, such "negations" are not "in opposition to the affirmations,"[48] that is, they do not themselves cancel out the affirmations and thereby allow for the "inconceivable presence"[49] of God. God will not be held hostage by a negation any more than by an affirmation: "the Cause of all . . . , which is above every abstraction and definition, is above the privation."[50] It is not the negation itself, once uttered, that Dionysius would have the reader hold in such high esteem, for, as one scholar puts it, "a not with which we might rest would not be a proper not."[51] As soon as the negation is made, it is already a new affirmation threatening to keep God confined. Michael Sells has done better than most to put his finger on this quandary:

Any saying (even a negative saying) demands a correcting proposition, an unsaying. But that correcting proposition which unsays the previous proposition is in itself a "saying" that must be "unsaid" in turn. It is in the tension between the two propositions that the discourse becomes meaningful. That tension is momentary. It must be continually re-earned by ever new linguistic acts of unsaying.[52]

[46] *MT* 2 1025B; *CD* II 145.7–8.
[47] Tomasic, "Negative Theology and Subjectivity: An Approach to the Tradition of the Pseudo-Dionysius," 426: "the *via negativa* functions intelligibly only in dialectical polarity with the way of affirmation."
[48] *MT* 1.2 1000B; *CD* II 143.5–6.
[49] *MT* 1.3 1001A; *CD* II 144.7–8: ἡ ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν ἐπίνοιαν αὐτοῦ παρουσία.
[50] *MT* 1.2 1000B *CD* II.143.6–7: ἀλλὰ πολὺ πρότερον αὐτὴν ὑπὲρ τὰς στερήσεις εἶναι τὴν ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν καὶ ἀφαίρεσιν καὶ θέσιν.
[51] Rubenstein, "Unknow Thyself," 387–8.
[52] Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*, 3. See also Sells, "The Pseudo-Woman and the Meister: 'Unsaying' and Essentialism", 115: *apophasis* "yields then to a language of double propositions, each correcting the previous proposition, and meaning is found only in the fleeting tension between the two propositions. Because the language-conditioned mind tends to reify the last proposition as a self-standing utterance, *apophasis* can never achieve closure. There must always be another, new statement." Rubenstein quotes this passage from Sells in support of her claim that

What Dionysius values in the negations or denials is precisely this perpetual motion—what Sells calls "the guiding semantic force, the *dynamis*" that pursues a god who "slips continually back beyond each effort to name it or even to deny its unnameability."[53]

One of the many incontrovertible debts of Dionysius to Proclus regards precisely this insistence that any negation of the transcendent must itself be negated. For Proclus, the negations are also "more proper" than and "superior" to the assertions.[54] Furthermore, Proclus also insists that it is "necessary . . . to exempt [God] from the negations also . . . [for] if no discourse belongs to it, it is evident that neither does negation pertain to it."[55] In order to guard God from even these negations then, Proclus introduces the notion of a transcendent negation, borrowing the term ὑπεραπόφασις from Stoic logic.[56] For Proclus, a "transcendent negation" or "hyper-negation" is not so much a discrete operation as it is a commitment to perpetual negation. As he says in *Platonic Theology* 2.10, "language when conversant with that which is ineffable, being subverted about itself, has no cessation, and opposes itself."[57] And although the term ὑπεραπόφασις never appears in the *CD*, that very commitment to the ceaseless negation of even what is already negated pulses through the *Mystical Theology*: "[W]hen making the assertions and negations of things after It, we neither predicate, nor abstract from It."[58]

"negative theology never rests with either positive or negative negativity, but is marked by *constant motion*." Cited in Rubenstein, "Unknow Thyself," 395.

[53]   Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*, 2.

[54]   Proclus, *Commentary on the Parmenides*, 427, 428.

[55]   Proclus, *Platonic Theology* 2.10.

[56]   Proclus, *Commentary on the Parmenides*, 523: "[Parmenides] shows how the One, while itself the cause of so-called transcendent negations, yet does not participate in any of them, nor is any of them, in order that by means of this removal of all of those attributes he may show the One to be fixed above all the intellectual realms." The editors tell us (523n) that Proclus borrows the term ὑπεραπόφασις from the Stoics (cf. Diog. Laert. VII, 69), for whom it was a double negative that simply equaled a positive: "it is not not day" = "it is night" (¬¬P = P). But for Proclus, application of the double negative to the One signaled its transcendence of both sides of the opposition. For example, "the One is not not at rest" means that it transcends the opposition between rest and movement. Carlos Steel reminds us ("'Negatio Negationis': Proclus on the Final Lemma of the First Hypothesis of the *Parmenides*"), the phrase "the negation of negation" (*negatio negationis*) does not appear in Proclus. The phrase is in fact taken from Meister Eckhart, but has come to stand for the view, expressed by Proclus and others, that the ineffable One transcends even all negations.

[57]   Proclus, *Platonic Theology* 2.10.

[58]   *MT* 5 1048B; *CD* II 150.6–7.

Dionysius follows the Proclean contemplative cycle in which one affirms what is most like the divine, carries on affirming all the way to what is least like the divine, negates everything in opposite order, and then negates those negations in turn. But into this smooth cycle Dionysius introduces something of a twist: "its praises are super-mundanely sung, by the Oracles themselves, through dissimilar revelations."[59] Dionysius treats these dissimilar similarities in *CH* 2, in his attempt to explain the anagogical value of the crass imagery in which scripture describes angels. The most significant difference between the celestial and the ecclesiastical hierarchies consists in the fact that angels are intelligible while humans are sensible. This difference, then, leads Dionysius to ask why it is that the heavenly ranks are revealed in scripture in a sensible fashion entirely at odds with their intelligible nature. Angels do not, in fact, have feet and faces, beaks and wings, "and whatever else was transmitted by the Oracles to us under multifarious symbols of sacred imagery."[60] His answer is twofold: first, such a revelation is a concession to our bodily natures, for we cannot perceive intelligible reality without sensible adornment; second, such a revelation through bodies—and especially grotesque bodies—has an uplifting or "anagogic" value. The anagogic goal is contemplation of the intelligible reality of the heavens, a contemplation that engages our intelligence or *nous*. But our *nous* can only vault into contemplation of the heavens on the shoulders of our bodily senses.

Accordingly, he says, "the method of Divine revelation is twofold," through likeness and unlikeness, similarity and dissimilarity (ὁ μὲν ὡς εἰκὸς διὰ τῶν ὁμοίων . . . ὁ δὲ διὰ τῶν ἀνομοίων).[61] In the case of angels, the way of similarity would reveal them as "certain creatures with the appearance of gold, and certain men with the appearance of light, and glittering like lightning, handsome, clothed in bright shining raiment, shedding forth innocuous flame."[62] The danger inherent in this way of revelation is, of course, that we humans might actually come to think that angels' natures are in fact golden,

---

[59] *CH* 2.3 140D; *CD* II 12.14–15: ποτὲ δὲ ταῖς ἀποφατικαῖς ἐκφαντορίαις ὑπὸ τῶν αὐτῶν λογίων ὑπερκοσμίως ὑμνεῖται. For an insightful treatment of how this section in *CH* fits into (or rather subverts) the cycle as laid out in *DN* and *MT*, see Rubenstein, "Unknow Thyself," 398.

[60] *CH* 2.1 137A; *CD* II 10.7–9.

[61] *CH* 2.2-3 140C; *CD* II 12.1–4.

[62] *CH* 2.3 141B; *CD* II 13.10–12.

---

luminous, or fiery, when of course they are not. In other words, the way of similarity can lull our intelligence or *nous* to sleep, since the sensible is thought to be so *like* the intelligible reality it clothes that it might be mistaken for it. There is no such danger in the way of dissimilarity, since no one is likely to imagine that "the super-heavenly places are filled with certain herds of lions, and troops of horses, and bellowing songs of praise, and flocks of birds, and other living creatures, and material and less honorable things."[63] The fact that these revelations are patently "absurd, pernicious, and impassioned" (ἄτοπον καὶ νόθον καὶ ἐμπαθὲς) serves to shock the *nous* out of its complacency and encourages it to contemplate the intelligible reality beyond the sensible adornment.[64]

This rhetoric of similarity and dissimilarity, however, is not limited to the heavens. Dionysius insists that "the Mystic Theologians"—that is, the authors of the scriptures—"enfold these things not only around the illustrations of the Heavenly Orders, but also, sometimes, around the supremely Divine Revelations Themselves."[65] Thus there is a kind of apophatic angelology that buttresses his apophatic theology. The way of similarity would reveal God as Word, Mind, and Being, since these titles are more "like" God. And yet divine names such as these "in reality fall short of the Divine similitude," no less than names derived from our embodied, sensory existence.[66] However exalted the names Word, Mind, and Being may seem, God "is above every essence and life. No light, indeed, expresses [his] character, and every description and mind incomparably fall short of [his] similitude."[67] That leaves the way of dissimilarity, about which Dionysius writes:

> For this [second way], as I think, is more appropriate to It, since, as the secret and sacerdotal tradition taught, we rightly describe its non-relationship to things created, but we do not know its superessential, and inconceivable, and unutterable indefinability (ἀγνοοῦμεν δὲ τὴν ὑπερούσιον αὐτῆς καὶ ἀνόητον καὶ ἄρρητον ἀοριστίαν).[68]

---

[63] *CH* 2.2 137C-D; *CD* II 11.2–5.
[64] *CH* 2.2 137D; *CD* II 11.5.
[65] *CH* 2.5 144C; *CD* II 15.8–10.
[66] *CH* 2.3 140C; *CD* II 12.11–12.
[67] *CH* 2.3 140C–D; *CD* II 12.12–14.
[68] *CH* 2.3 140D–141A; *CD* II 12.17–20.

This second way of talking, the way of dissimilarity, itself includes two modes. The first mode is what he calls "true negations,"[69] alphaprivative divine names like invisible (ἀόρατον), infinite (ἄπειρον), and ungraspable (ἀχώρητον), by which "there is signified, not what it is, but what it is not."[70] This is a, strictly speaking, *negative* theology: speaking about—or rather *to*—God through negations.

The second mode within the way of dissimilarity, within this second way of talking, is what he calls "dissimilar similarities" proper—also called "incongruous dissimilarities (τὰς ἀπεμφαινούσας ἀνομοιότητας),"[71] "dissimilar revelations (ταῖς ἀνομοίοις ἐκφαντορίαις)," and "comparisons . . . which are diverse from their proper resemblance (ταῖς . . . τῶν οἰκείων ἀπηχημάτων ἑτεροίαις ἀφομοιώσεσιν)."[72] The adjectives with which Dionysius characterizes these divine names are "absurd, pernicious, and impassioned," but also "discordant (ἀπάδω),"[73] "unlike (ἀπεοικός),"[74] "incongruous (ἀπεμφαίνω),"[75] "unseemly (δυσμορφία),"[76] and "base (αἰσχρός)."[77] He has in mind such scriptural images of God as an ointment or a cornerstone, an animal such as a lion, panther, leopard, or bear, and—clearly his favorite—God as a worm.[78] In his Ninth Letter he adds other such scriptural images, such as of God drinking, drunk, even hung-over.[79] We see here Dionysius' keen interest in the very nadir of revelation, those divine names so ostensibly unlike God, even grotesque, as to serve as a stumbling-block to contemplation. But as it turns out, the *nous* needs precisely to stumble in order to find its feet. With these dissimilar similarities "goading [the soul] by the

---

[69] *CH* 2.5 145A; *CD* II 16.4.
[70] *CH* 2.3 140D; *CD* II 12.16–17: τὰ <λοιπὰ> ἐξ ὧν οὐ τί ἐστιν, ἀλλὰ τί οὐκ ἔστιν σημαίνεται.
[71] *CH* 2.3 141B; *CD* II 13.15–16.
[72] *CH* 2.5 145A; *CD* II 16.5.
[73] *CH* 2.5 145B; *CD* II 16.10–11.
[74] *CH* 2.3 140C; *CD* II 12.4.
[75] *CH* 2.2 137B; *CD* II 10.14–15.
[76] *CH* 2.3 141B; *CD* II 13.18.
[77] *CH* 2.3 141B; *CD* II 13.17.
[78] *CH* 2.5 145A; *CD* II 15.20 (Ps 22:6). On dissimilar similarities and Dionysius' appeal to Ps 22:6, see Ruaro, "God and the Worm: The Twofold Otherness in Pseudo-Dionysius' Theory of Dissimilar Images." While standard patristic exegesis understands Christ as the speaker in Psalm 22, calling himself a worm, for Dionysius Christ calling himself a worm is tantamount to God calling himself a worm, and so worm is included in the list of divine names.
[79] Cf. *Ep.* 9.1 1105B; 9.5 1112B–C (cf. S of S 5:1; Pss 44:23; 78:65).

unseemliness of the phrases,"[80] contemplation vaults above the sensory first to the intelligible heavens, and then even beyond the intelligible heavens into the super-intelligible divinity, the "unknown God" of Acts 17, the "God beyond being." In this regard, these "last echoes [of revelation] offer due homage"—due homage to the God whom they simultaneously conceal and reveal.[81]

As with so many other things, Dionysius borrows the notion of "dissimilar similarities" from Proclus. In *Birth of the Symbol*, Peter Struck has made a strong case for a Proclean backdrop to Dionysius' deployment of this peculiar view of the anagogic value of base, bodily revelations—what Proclus prefers to call "symbols." Proclus' ontological framework for symbols depends on an elaborate theory of emanation, according to which the ineffable One radiates rays—what Proclus calls chains (σειραί)—that manifest in different immaterial and material forms as they cascade down the great chain of being. A single chain's transformations can be charted: from its source in the One, the chain emanates first as a god, then in the realm of *Nous* as a kind of Platonic form, then in the realm of the soul as a particular kind of soul, then, as it enters the realm of the material, the chain emanates as actual physical objects, and does so in succession, from more exalted objects to less, until it reaches its nadir in a very quotidian item. What connects all these emanations of the chain is a kind of "sympathy"—which Struck characterizes as "a term of ontological linkage".[82] However difficult it is to pin down the precise nature of this link, it is nevertheless clear that Proclus especially esteems the *eschata* or "edges" of emanation. His account of why he so esteems them constitutes his theory of the symbol, the development of which Struck traces throughout antiquity, from Homer to Proclus and beyond. Much like Dionysius, who in the *CH* tries to explain the grotesque biblical revelations of God and the heavens, Proclus tries to explain Homer's grossly anthropomorphic gods. He does this in his commentary on Plato's *Republic*, where he answers Plato's express worries about such poetic license. Contrary to expectation, Proclus congratulates Homer and the other poets for describing the gods in the basest of terms, for he argues that base

---

[80] *CH* 2.3 141B; *CD* II 13.18.
[81] *CH* 2.5 145A; *CD* II 16.4–5 (Luibheid's translation).
[82] Struck, *Birth of the Symbol*, 232.

matter is not meant to imitate but rather to invoke the divine realm with which it enjoys a peculiar sympathy or "ontological link," to use Struck's term. The lowest element on the chain of being becomes, in Proclus' hands, a symbol, which for him means a base or even grotesque name or object with which the process of cosmic reversion can begin. In other words, according to Struck, what Proclus calls a "symbol," Dionysius calls a "dissimilar similarity."[83]

And so while both affirmations and negations run the danger of idolatry, "[they goad the soul] by the unseemliness of the phrases (to see) that it belongs neither to lawful nor seeming truth, even for the most earthly conceptions, that the most heavenly and Divine visions are actually like things so base."[84] Strictly speaking, these "dissimilar revelations" are names that one must say because they reveal God as much as any other. And yet these names, however affirmative they seem, contain within them the seeds of their own denial. In fact they hover between transcendence and immanence, and resemble, in this regard, the negation of negations. They are "hyper-apophatic." Thus at both the peak and in the valley of this contemplative cycle one comes closest to freeing God from all affirmation and negations: at the peak by negating the negation of the name most like the divine, such as the Good; in the valley by holding in mind the notion of God as a worm. At such moments, language and mind are pushed to such a point that they begin to disintegrate and only then is one able to receive the gift of unknowing union.

If Dionysius' theological enterprise is "apophatic," then, it is so in the Proclean sense that it is "hyper-apophatic," that it commends the continual unraveling of all language. Dionysius prefers the term "mystical" to describe this theology—that is, speech in praise of God—which perpetually affirms and negates those names God has graciously revealed. And if affirmation and negation are perpetual practices, they answer the perpetual divine movements of procession (πρόοδος) into created plurality and return (ἐπιστροφή) to uncreated simplicity.

---

[83] I myself have certain reservations about Struck's treatment of both Proclus and Dionysius, which I intend to publish in the near future.

[84] *CH* 2.3 141B–C; *CD* II 13.18–21: ὑπονύττουσα τῇ δυσμορφίᾳ τῶν συνθημάτων ὡς μήτε θεμιτοῦ μηδὲ ἀληθοῦς δοκοῦντες εἶναι μηδὲ τοῖς ἄγαν προσύλοις, ὅτι τοῖς οὕτως αἰσχροῖς ἐμφερῆ πρὸς ἀλήθειάν ἐστι τὰ ὑπερουράνια καὶ θεῖα θεάματα.

II. UNKNOWING UNION

II.A. Dionysius and unknowing

The goal or σκοπός of perpetual affirmation and negation is to solicit a certain event, namely deifying union with God. This union is the descent of the "unknown God" of Acts 17 and, accordingly, is often described in the *CD* as "unknowing" (ἀγνωσία) or "unknown" or "unknowable" (ἄγνωστος).[85] One of the most famous descriptions of

---

[85] The *CD* is in fact peppered with vocabulary related to "unknowing": ἀγνοέω, to be ignorant or not to know; ἀγνόημα, the object of ignorance or error; ἄγνοια, ignorance; ἀγνωσία, ignorance or unknowing; ἄγνωστος, unknown or unknowable; and ἀγνώστως, unknowingly. The "unknowing" that accompanies the gift of union must be distinguished from mere ignorance. Throughout the *CD*, the word ἄγνοια signifies mere ignorance or lack of knowledge that illumination dispels [*DN* 4.5 700D (*CD* I 149.12), 4.6 701B (*CD* I 150.9), 7.4 872D (*CD* I 199.8); *CH* 7.3 209C (*CD* II 30.24); *EH* 6.3.6 537B (*CD* II 119.26, 120.4); *Ep.* 7.2 1081A (*CD* II 169.1)]. But the word ἀγνωσία has something of a double life in the *CD*. It appears twice in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* as a synonym for ἄγνοια—specifically the ignorance that afflicts the unbaptized. It is therefore correctly translated as "ignorance" or "lack of knowledge" in those instances [*EH* 2.2.5 396A (*CD* II 71.11), 2.3.4 400C (*CD* II 75.15)]. But in the *Divine Names*, the *Mystical Theology*, and the First Letter, ἀγνωσία takes on different meanings that are difficult to explain and is best rendered literally as "unknowing" or "unknowability." Twice in the *Divine Names* Dionysius seems to use ἀγνωσία to signify the "unknowability" of God—in one instance quite generally, in another with regard to the Trinity in particular [*DN* 9.5 913B (*CD* I 211.6), 2.4 641A (*CD* I 127.1)]. In this sense, the word becomes part of his lexicon for treating divine transcendence. Likewise with ἄγνωστος [*DN* 1.1 585B–588A (*CD* I 107–9), 1.4 592C (*CD* I 115.2), 1.5 593B (*CD* I 116.8), 2.9 648A (*CD* I 133.6), 7.3 869C (*CD* I 197.19), 8.2 892A (*CD* I 201.10), 11.1 949B (*CD* I 218.14), 11.2 949C (*CD* I 219.7); *CH* 2.2 137B (*CD* II 10.14), 15.2 329B (*CD* II 52.13); *Ep.* 3 1069B (159.10)]—which can mean "unknowable" just as well as "unknown": "But we will recall to your remembrance this much, that the purpose of our treatise is not to make known the superessential essence—*quā* superessential [τὴν ὑπερούσιον οὐσίαν, ἧ ὑπερούσιος]—(for this is inexpressible, and unknowable [ἄγνωστον], and altogether unrevealed, and surpassing the union itself)" (*DN* 5.1 816B; *CD* I 180.9–12). Sometimes it is God in his nature that is "unknown" or "unknowable," sometimes the hidden meaning of one of the divine names, sometimes the mystery of the Incarnation. But nearly as often both ἀγνωσία and ἄγνωστος are used to describe not only the inaccessible heights of divine transcendence, but also the very union with God for which all our affirmation and negation aims. This correlation between ἀγνωσία and ἕνωσις is made fairly explicit in the opening of the *Divine Names* (*DN* 1.1 585B–588A; cf. *DN* 1.4). Lest the reader miss the fact that our union will be a state of unknowing, Dionysius also introduces a variant on a phrase from the *Celestial Hierarchy* to make the point absolutely clear: δι᾽ ἑνώσεως ἀγνώστου, "through an unknowing union" [*DN* 4.11 708D (*CD* I 156.); cf. *CH* 13.4 305B (*CD* II 48.12)].

---

such a union is found in the first chapter of the *Mystical Theology*, where Dionysius, following Philo and Gregory of Nyssa before him, delivers an allegorical reading of Moses' ascent "into the gloom of the *Agnosia*; a gloom veritably mystic . . . [where he is] wholly of Him Who is beyond all."[86] This description of Moses' own "unknowing union" is framed as a pastoral letter to a friend, Timothy:

> O dear Timothy, by thy persistent commerce with the mystic visions, leave behind both sensible perceptions and intellectual efforts, and all objects of sense and intelligence, and all things not being and being, and be raised aloft unknowingly (ἀγνώστως) to the union, as far as attainable, with Him Who is above every essence and knowledge.[87]

That Dionysius offers Moses as a "paradigm"[88] for the plunge into the "gloom of unknowing" suggests that one can attain unto unknowing, or at least solicit its descent. One is to strive upward toward union with the unknown God, and one is to do so "unknowingly" (ἀγνώστως).[89] Recall that according to the Proclean contemplative cycle, the upward movement is the process of progressive negation, culminating in the negation of negation. When Dionysius counsels Timothy to "leave behind both sensible perceptions and intellectual efforts, and all objects of sense and intelligence, and all things not being and being," he is enjoining on his young charge precisely this

---

[86] *MT* 1.3 1001A; *CD* II 144.10–13: εἰς τὸν γνόφον τῆς ἀγνωσίας . . . τὸν ὄντως μυστικόν . . . πᾶς ὢν τοῦ πάντων ἐπέκεινα καὶ οὐδενός. This phrase τὸν γνόφον τῆς ἀγνωσίας is famous as the title of the anonymous fourteenth-century treatise *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

[87] *MT* 1.1 997B; *CD* II 142.5–9.

[88] See Rorem, "Moses as the Paradigm for the Liturgical Spirituality of Pseudo-Dionysius' Liturgical Theology," 275–9.

[89] If we must learn how to unknow, as it seems we must, then why does Dionysius mostly refrain from using the verb ἀγνοέω in the special sense of "to unknow"? Instead he uses the verb as he does the noun ἄγνοια, to signify ignorance or lack of knowledge [*DN* 2.9 648A (*CH* I 133.8), 7.2 869C (*CH* I 197.12), 7.4 872D (*CH* I 199.9), 8.1 889C (*CH* I 200.8), 13.4 981D (*CH* I 230.18); *EH* 4.3.9 484A (*CD* II 101.19), 6.3.6 537B (*CD* II 119.24), 7.3.11 568A (*CD* II 131.2); *Ep.* 8.2 1092C (*CD* II 181.4), 8.5 1096C (*CD* II 187.1)]. What exceptions there are to this rule hail from the *Celestial Hierarchy*, where in at least on instance the verb ἀγνοέω may mean to "unknow" in the sense of enjoy "unknowing union" with the unknown and unknowable God: "[W]e rightly describe [God's] non-relationship to things created, but we do not know (ἀγνοοῦμεν) its superessential, and inconceivable, and unutterable indefinability" [*CH* 2.3 141A (*CD* II 12.19–20); cf. 15.9 340B (*CD* II 50.10)]. By and large, I think, Dionysius refrains from using the verb in this way precisely because it would suggest that unknowing—and thereby even union—is *something we do* rather than *something that is done to us*.

cycle of affirmation and negation, which echoes divine procession and return, immanence and transcendence. One affirms and negates the divine names precisely in order to be delivered from the impasse of how God is both present and absent. Even if union with the unknown and unknowable God only occurs unknowingly through unknowing, still one must insist that one does not achieve this unknowing. Rather we wait for it at the tense cusp between our affirmations and negations, where the *dynamis* of perpetual apophasis calls out to the God beyond being.

But what does unknowing do to knowledge? Does the descent of unknowing herald the end of knowledge or its fulfillment? In one breath Dionysius can insist both that "by inactivity of all knowledge, [one is] united in his better part to the altogether Unknown" and that "by knowing nothing, [one is] knowing above mind."[90] Is unknowing merely to cease knowing or is it to know precisely nothing? The same dilemma appears just a few lines later: "[We pray that] through not seeing and not knowing, [we will be able] to see and to know that the not to see nor to know is itself the above sight and knowledge. For this is veritably to see and to know."[91] And the goal of all affirmations and negations is that "without veil, we may know that *agnōsia* (γνῶμεν ἐκείνην τὴν ἀγνωσίαν), which is enshrouded under all the known, in all things that be."[92] As is often the case with other themes, the most sustained treatment of "unknowing" is found among the letters, specifically the First Letter, quoted here in full:

> Darkness becomes invisible by light, and especially by much light. Varied knowledge, and especially much varied knowledge, makes the *agnōsia* to vanish (τὴν ἀγνωωσίαν ἀφανίζουσιν αἱ γνώσεις). Take this in a superlative, but not in a defective sense, and reply with superlative truth, that the *agnōsia*, respecting God (ἡ κατὰ θεὸν ἀγνωσία), escapes those who possess existing light, and knowledge of things being; and His pre-eminent darkness is both concealed by every light, and is hidden from every knowledge. And, if any one, having seen God, understood what he saw, he did not see *Him*, but some of His creatures that are

---

[90] *MT* 1.3 1001A; *CD* II 144.13–15: τῷ παντελῶς δὲ ἀγνώστῳ τῇ πάσης γνώσεως ἀνενεργησίᾳ κατὰ τὸ κρεῖττον ἑνούμενος . . . τῷ μηδὲν γινώσκειν ὑπὲρ νοῦν γινώσκων.

[91] *MT* 2 1025A; *CD* II 145.1–3: δι' ἀβλεψίας καὶ ἀγνωσίας ἰδεῖν καὶ γνῶσαι τὸν ὑπὲρ θέαν καὶ γνῶσιν αὐτῷ τῷ μὴ ἰδεῖν μηδὲ γνῶναι—τοῦτο γάρ ἐστι τὸ ὄντως ἰδεῖν καὶ γνῶναι.

[92] *MT* 2 1025B; *CD* II 145.11–13: ἵνα ἀπερικαλύπτως γνῶμεν ἐκείνην τὴν ἀγνωσίαν τὴν ὑπὸ πάντων τῶν γνωστῶν ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς οὖσι περικεκαλυμμένην.

existing and known. But He Himself, highly established above mind, and above essence, by the very fact of His being wholly unknown, and not being, both is superessentially, and is known above mind. And the all-perfect *agnōsia*, in its superior sense, is a knowledge of Him, Who is above all known things.[93]

It would seem that knowing and unknowing were set against each other here, for "varied knowledge makes the *agnōsia* to vanish." This may be true, but strangely the converse is not, for "the all-perfect *agnōsia*, in its superior sense, is a knowledge of Him, Who is above all known things." How are we to understand this tension between, on the one hand, knowing and unknowing as oil and water, and, on the other hand, unknowing as still a sort of knowledge, perhaps even the fulfillment of knowledge? For Dionysius, no other faculty takes over when knowledge is undone, as is the case in the tradition of so-called "*affective* mysticism," where love takes over when intellect fails.[94] That is to say, union may go well beyond "knowledge" ($\gamma \nu \hat{\omega} \sigma \iota \varsigma$) and "mind" ($\nu o \hat{\upsilon} \varsigma$), but it is closer to a knowledge and mind than it is to any other faculty that lays in wait. Finally, as we have seen in the case of other alpha-privatives, Dionysius prefers to use them to express superabundance rather than deprivation. "Unknowing" ($\dot{\alpha} + \gamma \nu \omega \sigma \acute{\iota} \alpha$) is no different: it signals a superabundant knowledge, in which one is unknowingly united to the completely unknown. As best as Dionysius can discern, then, unknowing seems to amount to "another knowledge"[95]—that is, knowledge of the wholly other.

---

[93] *Ep.* 1 1065A–B; *CD* II 156.3–157.5: Τὸ σκότος ἀφανὲς γίνεται τῷ φωτί, καὶ μᾶλλον τῷ πολλῷ φωτὶ τὴν ἀγνωσίαν ἀφανίζουσιν αἱ γνώσεις, καὶ μᾶλλον αἱ πολλαὶ γνώσεις. Ταῦτα ὑπεροχικῶς, ἀλλὰ μὴ κατὰ στέρησιν ἐκλαβὼν ἀπόφησον ὑπεραληθῶς, ὅτι λανθάνει τοὺς ἔχοντας ὂν φῶς καὶ ὄντων γνῶσιν ἡ κατὰ θεὸν ἀγνωσία καὶ τὸ ὑπερκείμενον αὐτοῦ σκότος καὶ καλύπτεται παντὶ φωτὶ καὶ ἀποκρύπτεται πᾶσαν γνῶσιν. Καὶ εἴ τις ἰδὼν θεὸν συνῆκεν, ὃ εἶδεν, οὐκ αὐτὸν ἑώρακεν, ἀλλά τι τῶν αὐτοῦ τῶν ὄντων καὶ γινωσκομένων. αὐτὸς δὲ ὑπὲρ νοῦν καὶ οὐσίαν ὑπεριδρυμένος, αὐτῷ τῷ καθόλου μὴ γινώσκεσθαι μηδὲ εἶναι, καὶ ἔστιν ὑπερουσίως καὶ ὑπὲρ νοῦν γινώσκεται. Καὶ ἡ κατὰ τὸ κριττον παντελὴς ἀγνωσία γνῶσις ἐστι τοῦ ὑπὲρ πάντα τὰ γινωσκόμενα.

[94] This is especially clear in the case of Thomas Gallus and the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* who contend that midway along the mystical itinerary the intellect ceases and loves complete the journey. See Rubenstein, "Unknown Thyself," 395, citing Turner, *The Darkness of God*, 46–7. Rubenstein insists: "the apophatic abandonment of the intellect is at once its destruction *and* its consummation."

[95] Tomasic, "Negative Theology and Subjectivity: An Approach to the Tradition of the Pseudo-Dionysius," 428.

II.B. Paul and unknowing

What of this unknowing then, and its relationship to Paul? First of all, for Dionysius Paul had in his letter to the Romans already given voice to the divine movements of procession and return long before the Neoplatonists fixed the nomenclature.[96] Second, while Paul never uses the terms κατάφασις and ἀπόφασις, he does witness to the tension between the immanence and transcendence of God, to which affirmation and negation correspond. Third, while Paul of course cannot be credited with providing Dionysius a dynamic procedure, as Proclus did, for negating negations, when it comes to the very goal of the entire enterprise—the unknowing union with the God who surpasses all—Paul appears again as the authoritative witness.

Recall the Fifth Letter, where Paul is not only the source of so many alpha-privatives, but also the exemplary case of one who is gifted with the paradoxical knowledge of God: "even as the Divine Paul is said to have known Almighty God, by having known Him as being above all conception and knowledge."[97] Dionysius goes on to say that Paul wrote "as having found (εὑρηκὼς) [God] Who is above all, and having known (ἐγνωκώς) this which is above conception (ὑπὲρ νόησιν), that, by being Cause of all, He is beyond (ἐπέκεινα) all."[98] That Paul is said here to have found God is an allusion to Paul's speech to the Areopagus, where Paul explains to the court that God created the world and "the nations . . . so that they would search (ζητεῖν) for God and perhaps grope (ψηλαφήσειαν) for him and *find* (εὕροιεν) him— though indeed he is not far from us" (Acts 17:26–7). And to find God is to know God, but to know God is to know that God is beyond knowledge (ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν . . . γνῶσιν). Dionysius' Fifth Letter makes clear, then, that Paul is the exemplar of the paradoxical knowledge of God: an unknowing union with the God who surpasses all knowledge.

We might think that Dionysius lays this mantle on Paul without much warrant, for the apostle mentions ἀγνωσία only once in his

---

[96] Rom 11:36: "because from him and through him and to him are all things" (ὅτι ἐξ αὐτοῦ καὶ δι᾽ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν τὰ πάντα).
[97] *Ep.* 5 1073A–B; *CD* II 162.11–163.1: Ὥσπερ οὖν καὶ ὁ θεῖος Παῦλος ἐγνωκέναι τὸν θεὸν λέγεται γνοὺς αὐτὸν ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν ὄντα νόησιν καὶ γνῶσιν.
[98] *Ep.* 5 1076A; *CD* II 163.4–5.

letters, and in a derogatory sense best rendered "ignorance": "Some people have no knowledge (ἀγνωσίαν) of God."[99] So also with the words ἄγνοια[100] and ἀγνοέω[101]—Paul uses both to signify mere ignorance, not the rarefied unknowing of Dionysian ἀγνωσία. Some have argued that the first references to such a rarefied understanding of ἀγνωσία postdate Paul by almost two hundred years.[102] But regardless of exactly where Dionysius first encountered this elevated understanding of ἀγνωσία as unknowing, he no doubt found it reflected in the life of his beloved apostle. For apart from the letters of Paul, Dionysius also had the accounts of Paul's missionary activity from the Acts of the Apostles. The climax of that wandering evangelism is

[99] 1 Cor 15:34: ἀγνωσίαν γὰρ θεοῦ τινες ἔχουσιν.

[100] Eph 4:18: "They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance (ἄγνοιαν) and hardness of heart."

[101] Rom 1:13: "I want you to know (οὐ . . . ἀγνοεῖν), brothers and sisters"; Rom 2:4: "Do you not realize (ἀγνοῶν) that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?"; Rom 6:3: "Do you not know (ἀγνοεῖτε) that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?"; Rom 7:1: "Do you not know (ἀγνοεῖτε), brothers and sisters—for I am speaking to those who know the law— that the law is binding on a a person only during that person's lifetime?"; Rom 10:3: "For, being ignorant (ἀγνοοῦντες) of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted to God's righteousness"; Rom 11:25: "I want you to understand this mystery (οὐ . . . ἀγνοεῖν)"; 1 Cor 10:1: "I do not want you to be unaware (ἀγνοεῖν), brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea"; 1 Cor 12:1: "Now concerning spiritual things, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed (ἀγνοεῖν)"; 1 Cor 14:38: "Anyone who does not recognize (ἀγνοεῖ) this is not to be recognized (ἀγνοεῖται)"; 2 Cor 1:8: "We do not want you to be unaware (ἀγνοεῖν), brothers and sisters, of the affliction we experienced in Asia"; 2 Cor 2:11: "And we do this so that we may not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant (οὐ . . . ἀγνοοῦμεν) of his designs"; 2 Cor 6:9: "We are treated as imposters, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known (ὡς ἀγνοούμενοι καὶ ἐπιγινωσκόμενοι)"; Gal 1:22: "I was still unknown (ἀγνοούμενος) by sight to the churches of Judea that are in Christ"; 1 Thess 4:13: "But we do not want you to be uninformed (ἀγνοεῖν), brothers and sisters, about those who have died"; 1 Tim 1:13: "But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly (ἀγνοῶν) in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus."

[102] Wallis, "The Spiritual Importance of Not Knowing," 470: "Most important are that there [in *Allogenes*] and in Basilides we find the first explicit Western spiritual references to 'unknowing' or 'ignorance . . .'"; Wallis cites a passage from *Allogenes* which illustrates this elevated understanding of "unknowing": "We reach God by turning our energies within and ascending by stages from self-knowledge to the One who is known only by ignorance"; as for the dating of the original Greek composition of *Allogenes*, Karen King puts it in the first quarter of the third century CE; see King, *Revelation of the Unknowable God*, 60. See also Arthur, *Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist*, 71–99.

Paul's speech to the court of the Areopagus in Athens, to whom Paul famously preached: "For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown (ἀγνοοῦντες), this I proclaim to you."[103] This last phrase is in fact quite a poor translation in the RSV, for the circumstantial participle ἀγνοοῦντες refers not to the object of worship, but to the worshippers themselves.[104] A better translation might be: "What therefore you unknowingly worship, this I proclaim to you."[105] But an equally legitimate, if more daring, translation might be: "I proclaim to you that which you therefore worship *through your unknowing*." If we translate the phrase thus, Paul seems to anticipate a central Dionysian theme: specifically the notion that the unknown and unknowable God can only be properly known through unknowing. Paul therefore emerges from this speech as the very first advocate of Dionysian unknowing, the authoritative apostolic witness to the goal of all saying and unsaying. As with the divine movements of procession and return, Dionysius can see in Paul the wellspring of any subsequent elevation of unknowing from mere ignorance to blessed union.[106]

Dionysius never comments directly on this verse in particular or on this speech in general. This is a curious omission, as it is from precisely this passage that the author draws his pseudonym. Despite this silence, the influence of Paul's speech to the Areopagus on the *CD* is evident everywhere. There is the obvious fact that for an author writing under the name of a man converted upon hearing of the "unknown God," any

---

[103] Acts 17:23: διερχόμενος γὰρ καὶ ἀναθεωρῶν τὰ σεβάσματα ὑμῶν εὗρον καὶ βωμὸν ἐν ᾧ ἐπεγέγραπτο, Ἀγνώστῳ Θεῷ. ὃ οὖν ἀγνοοῦντες εὐσεβεῖτε, τοῦτο ἐγὼ καταγγέλλω ὑμῖν.

[104] For ἀγνοοῦντες refers to the implicit masculine plural subject of the verb εὐσεβεῖτε, namely "you Athenians (ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι)."

[105] This is in fact very close to Fitzmyer's translation: "Now what you thus worship unknowingly I would proclaim to you" (Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 607). Also Dibelius': "Now, I am going to tell you what you honor even without recognizing it" (Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, 37).

[106] In fact, Reidinger speculates that the late fifth-century Athenian school of Neoplatonism, of which many scholars believe Dionysius to have been a member, found in Paul's speech to the Areopagus a rich resource for thinking about divine transcendence. If this was the case, then Dionysius was not alone among Neoplatonists in looking to Paul as an antecedent to Neoplatonism. See Reidinger, "Der Verfasser der pseudo-dionysischen Schriften," 148; cited in Hathaway, *Hierarchy and the Definition of Order*, 22.

---

one of the many mentions of God as unknown[107] harkens back to this speech. Furthermore, while it may not have been the intention of Paul (or the author of Luke–Acts), Dionysius does find in this speech a nascent account of unknowing. If "it is certain that Ps.-Dionysius writes every word in the context of Acts 17," then perhaps Dionysius' silence regarding this speech is paradoxical testimony to its importance for his project.[108]

III. DIONYSIUS: CHRISTIAN OR NEOPLATONIST?

To this point, I have been walking a rather thin line: acknowledging, where appropriate, Dionysius' clear debts to late Neoplatonism, and yet insisting that scholars have often focused exclusively on these debts and so have been blind to Paul's influence, and how Dionysius understood Paul as anticipating many Neoplatonic themes. I need now explain how Dionysius understands his own allegiances and whether there is a conflict in those allegiances. Following no less an authority than Christ, who teaches that a man cannot serve two masters, many scholars have attempted to fix a label to Dionysius: is he a "Neoplatonist" or he is a "Christian"? The dichotomy is in fact a false one, not least because the labels do not name equal and opposing commitments—two masters, if you will. The disjunction between "Christian" and "Neoplatonist" does not aid in understanding how Christians in late antiquity used Neoplatonic sources in various ways and to various ends.[109] The disjunction is perhaps

---

[107] *DN* 1.1 585B–588A (*CD* I 107–9), 1.4 592C (*CD* I 115.2), 1.5 593B (*CD* I 116.8), 2.9 648A (*CD* I 133.6), 4.11 708B–C (*CD* I 156.1–13), 5.1 816B (*CD* I 180.11), 7.3 869C (*CD* I 197.19), 8.2 892A (*CD* I 201.10), 11.1 949B (*CD* I 218.14), 11.2 949C (*CD* I 219.7); *CH* 13.4 305B (*CD* II 48.12), 15.2 329B (*CD* II 52.13), 15.6 336A (*CD* II 56.5); *MT* 1.1 997B (*CD* II 142.8), 1.3 1001A (*CD* I 144.10); *Ep.* 3 1069B (159.10).

[108] Hathaway, *Hierarchy and the Definition of Order*, 23.

[109] See Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, 24: "The distinction between Christian and pagan in the fifth century was not so much a matter of language or method, as we are tempted to view it when we regard commitment to a philosophy such as Platonism as inimical to real Christianity; rather it was a matter of the convictions expressed through language and by means of whatever methods were to hand. It is the substance of Denys's conviction we need to examine"; for close and careful treatments of the range of use to which Neoplatonism was put by Christians in late antiquity and the Middle Ages, see Mortley, *From Word to Silence*; von Ivánka, *Plato Christianus*; Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*; Beierwaltes, *Platonismus in Christentum*.

especially inappropriate with regard to Dionysius, for in fact he offers, I argue, substantial clues as how best to understand his appeal to Neoplatonism. Chief among these clues is his very pseudonym: Dionysius the Areopagite, member of the esteemed judicial body of Athens to whom Paul delivers his famous speech in Acts 17. In order to understand how Dionysius figures the relationship between Christ and pagan wisdom, we would do well then to look closely again at that speech. We will see that Dionysius follows the model of his master, and opts not to oppose Christ to pagan wisdom, but to enfold that pagan wisdom into a new dispensation, a new order over which reigns an unknown god and a resurrected man.

III.A. Paul's speech to the Areopagus

As soon as Paul arrives in Athens, he is "deeply distressed to see that the city is full of idols" (17:16). He makes straight for the synagogue to argue with Jews and to the marketplace to contend with "Stoic and Epicurean philosophers" (17:17–18). He speaks of Jesus (ὁ Ἰησοῦς) and the resurrection (ἡ ἀνάστασις) and is therefore taken to be "a proclaimer of foreign divinities" (17:18), in this case a divine syzygy.[110] He is ushered from the marketplace to the court of the Areopagus, an esteemed judicial body that was, according to Aeschylus at least, convened to judge contests between gods.[111] Standing before this august body, Paul begins his speech with characteristic irony: "Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in

---

[110] This is what John Chrysostom took the verse to mean (*In Acta apostolorum homiliae* 38.1, *PG* 60.267); cited in Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, 605.

[111] Biblical scholars differ as to whether Paul was led to Mars Hill (for a history of the name of this hill, see Plutarch, *Life of Theseus*), a hill on the west-northwest corner of the Acropolis where speakers often held forth, or to the court of the Areopagus, which was originally convened on the same hill, but which had subsequently been moved and was now charged with important civic affairs. Fitzmyer does not seem to favor either option. But when we consider the legendary establishment of the court of the Areopagus, as reported by Aeschylus, the answer becomes clear. In Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, Orestes flees the Fates, who are pursuing him for matricide, and makes his way to Athens to seek asylum from Athena. Athena establishes the court of the Areopagus to hear the case between the Fates, representing the will of Mother Darkness, and Orestes, representing the will of Zeus. The twelve members of the court split their vote and Athena breaks the tie in favor of Orestes. When the Athenians hear Paul preach "foreign divinities" in opposition to their own gods, the author of Luke–Acts has them take him before the very court that was convened in the Athenian imagination precisely to judge contests between gods.

---

every way" (17:22). He clothes his distress in feigned admiration for their piety. The barb of his comment is more keenly felt in the Greek, since Paul describes them with a word, δεισιδαιμονέστερος, which can mean exceedingly "superstitious" or "bigoted" just as easily as "pious" or "religious."[112] The embedded word δαίμων—which in the New Testament connotes more of an evil spirit than deity or divinity—also serves as a counterpoint to the altar's inscription to an unknown θεός, or "god." Always the brilliant rhetorician, Paul is able to hold the attention of his pagan audience with flattery so that he can deftly shift the ground of their piety. This is reflected in his appropriation of their own altar "to an unknown god": what had been established as a safety measure honoring foreign gods still unknown to the Hellenistic world is now transformed in Paul's hands into the sign of an incipient faith.[113] This squares with Paul's letter to the Romans (1:20–5), where he laments the fact that although all of the nations once knew God—"his eternal power and divine nature"—all but the Jews fell away from this ancient faith and "became fools." They "exchanged" their ancient faith in the unknown god for idolatrous images and human foolishness masquerading as wisdom. The inscription on the altar is for Paul no mere accident or convenient rhetorical hook, but an all-important trace of a former knowledge of God. From the very start of this speech and the mention of the unknown god, Paul looks forward to a resolution to this apparent conflict between divinities and a restoration of the past: Athens, once more, will have something to do with Jerusalem.

The momentum of the speech is maintained as Paul continues to proclaim this unknown god:

> The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals all life and breath and all things. From one

---

[112] LSJ III, 375. See Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 606. See also Moellering, "Deisidaimonia: A Footnote to Acts 17:22," 455–71, cited in Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 606.

[113] Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 607: "As a Jewish Christian, he realizes that pagan Greeks do not worship the 'true' God of Jews and Christians, but he tries to show that the God whom he proclaims is in reality no stranger to the Athenians, if they would only reflect. His starting point is Athenian religious piety, and he tries to raise them from such personal experience to a sound theology. Their piety, in his view, does not go far enough."

ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each of us. For in him, we live and move and have our being; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we too are his offspring." (17:24–8)

As has been amply documented by scholarship, this portion of Paul's speech employs themes and even phrasing familiar to the Greek literary and philosophical tradition. For instance, the phrase "the God who made the world and everything that is in it" recalls phrases from Pythagoras (as reported by Plutarch), Plato, and Epictetus.[114] So too with the phrase "does not live in shrines made by human hands," which recalls phrases from Zeno (as reported by Plutarch) and Euripides.[115] And in case these conciliatory allusions were lost on his pagan audience, he concludes this portion of the speech with a direct quote from one of their own, the Stoic poet Aratus of the third century BCE: "as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring'" (17:28).[116]

Paul develops the Athenians' incipient faith in "an unknown god" by drawing on their own literary, philosophical, and religious lexicon. This is considerably more than mere flattery or rhetorical skill, for it is motivated by the conviction, as expressed in his letter to the Romans, that the Athenians still possess traces of their former faith. The success of Paul's evangelical campaign, however, is witnessed by the audience's rather muted reaction to the mention of the resurrection of the "man whom God has appointed" (17:31). Unlike so much of Paul's speech, the notion of resurrection was foreign to the Athenian mind, even preposterous. Witness these lines from Aeschylus' *The Eumenides*: "But once the dust has drained down all a man's blood, once the man has died, there is no raising of him (ἀνάστασις) up

---

[114]   For Pythagoras' understanding of the ordered world as *kosmos*, see Plutarch, *De placitis philosophorum* 2.1; for Plato's understanding of the Creator and the Father of the Universe, see Plato, *Timaeus* 28C, 76C; for "god" as creator of the universe, see Epictetus, *Arrian's Discourses* 4.7.6. I am indebted to Fitzmyer for these allusions and those that follow. For a more detailed commentary on the many sources for Paul's speech, see Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 607–13.

[115]   Plutarch reports: "It is Zeno's teaching that one should not build temples of the gods" (Plutarch, *Moralia* 1034B); in fragment 968, Euripides writes, "What house fashioned by builders can contain the divine form within enclosing walls?"

[116]   Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 611.

again." And yet the audience is rather more receptive than we might imagine: "When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some scoffed; but others said, 'We will hear from you again about this'" (17:32). Into this proclamation of an unknown god, Paul so successfully folds the traditions of Athens that some among his audience will hear more and at least a few come to believe. A new order is thereby established: the pagan tradition is absorbed into and subordinated to the new dispensation. This new order is set apart from and above the pagan past by calling upon the world to repent in preparation for a day on which a resurrected man will judge in righteousness. Thus the resurrected Christ stands with the unknown god at the zenith of this new order, which absorbs ancient wisdom and baptizes the past into a new life.

Writing sometime in the early sixth century, probably in Syria, the author of the *CD* would not have faced the urgent need to enfold popular pagan piety into a new order. But whereas Athens is for Paul a place "full of idols," it is for this author the seat of Neoplatonism, the Academy and its *diadochoi*—most recently Proclus. Might this author be turning to Paul—especially the Paul who speaks to the Areopagus— to provide a template for absorbing and subordinating pagan wisdom? Might this author, steeped in Neoplatonism as he surely is, be taking on the role of a convert of Paul precisely to make the point that the riches of Neoplatonism do not constitute "foreign divinities" but rather an incipient faith? After all, the Athenians are the same Gentiles who, according to Paul in Romans, once knew the invisible power and nature of God, and then fell to worshipping images.[117] They now betray traces of their ancient faith with an altar to "an unknown god." Furthermore, for Dionysius at least, if Paul had already given voice to divine procession and return, struggled with divine immanence and transcendence, guarded vigilantly against our casting god in the "image formed by art and imagination of mortals" (17:29), and not only commended but suffered himself "unknowing union," then Neoplatonism is like the prodigal son, returning after a long

---

[117] Rom 1:20–3: "Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools; and they exchanged the glory of God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles."

exile—impoverished, sullied, and aching for home. For Dionysius, the seeds of Paul's wisdom were sown on foreign soil and grew to fruition in Neoplatonism, and these are the very fruits he now plucks from the likes of Plotinus, Iamblichus, and Proclus. For Dionysius, Neoplatonism does not compete with Paul; rather, Paul completes Neoplatonism by once again returning this pagan wisdom to the fold and baptizing it again into the life of Christ.

III.B. The Seventh Letter

This speculative foray into the relationship between Christianity and Neoplatonism in the *CD* is buttressed and deepened by *Letter 7*, addressed to none other than Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna. The pretext of the letter is this: a certain sophist by the name of Apollophanes has apparently charged Dionysius with "parricide," for "using, not piously, the writings of Greeks against the Greeks."[118] Dionysius is said to be guilty of betraying his paternal tradition by drawing on but subordinating Greek wisdom to his faith in Christ. The question is not, Dionysius insists, what is Greek and whether one is faithful to it, but rather what is true and whether one is faithful to that. By the standards of truth, he contends, it is the Greeks who are guilty, for "Greeks use, not piously, things Divine against things Divine."[119] God has given the Greeks "wisdom" and "divine reverence" which they have squandered. This ancient wisdom is not the piety of *hoi polloi* who, to quote Paul, "worship the creature rather than the Creator."[120] No: the gift the Greeks squander is none other than the "knowledge of things created" or "Philosophy."[121] Had they remained faithful to the true philosophy revealed to them by God in ancient times, "true philosophers [would] have been elevated to the Cause of things created and of the knowledge of them."[122] Dionysius succeeds then in reading Romans 1 and 1 Corinthians 1 together: while "Greeks desire wisdom,"[123] they stray from the true wisdom revealed by God.

[118]   *Ep*. 7.2 1080A–B; *CD* II 166.7–9.
[119]   *Ep*. 7.2 1080B; *CD* II 166.9–10.
[120]   *Ep*. 7.2 1080B; *CD* II 166.12–13; Rom 1:25.
[121]   *Ep*. 7.2 1080B; *CD* II 166.14–15.
[122]   *Ep*. 7.2 1080B; *CD* II 167.1–2.
[123]   1 Cor 1:22.

Paul proclaims "Christ crucified,"[124] who appears as "God's foolishness"[125] to the vain and empty, wisdom for which the Greeks have exchanged their true inheritance. Paul reminds them of the "wisdom of God,"[126] which, Dionysius claims, is in fact the true philosophy of old and "wiser than human wisdom."[127] For Dionysius, Paul delivers a stern rebuke to the Greeks: return to your roots and you will find there the true philosophy, revealed by God then and now, Christ crucified.

According to this reading, then, Dionysius does not value or scorn Neoplatonism on the grounds of its being Greek, but rather on the grounds of its being true. And like the piety which Paul witnesses in Athens, it bears some of the traces of its ancestor, the true philosophy revealed to the Greeks by God, although obscured by the accretion of human foolishness. Dionysius is therefore called, as Paul was before him, to summon the Greeks back to their true philosophy. His deep appreciation for and debt to Neoplatonism amounts to a deep appreciation for and debt to Paul, who admonished the Greeks to return to their roots and submit their wisdom to the unknown God, and an even deeper appreciation for and debt to that unknown God, who first sowed the seeds of this wisdom. Dionysius' "thralldom" to Neoplatonism is in fact a process of recovery, recognizing the face of the prodigal son beneath the years of filth and labor and welcoming him home. As von Balthasar remarks, "Denys therefore does not want to borrow, but rather to return what has been borrowed to its true owner."[128]

Following von Balthasar, Andrew Louth suggests that by assuming the identity of Paul's famous Athenian convert, the author of the *CD* is signaling some rapprochement between pagan wisdom and the revelation of God in Christ: "Denys the Areopagite, the Athenian convert, stands at the point where Christ and Plato meet. The pseudonym expressed the author's belief that the truths that Plato grasped belong to Christ, and are not abandoned by embracing faith in Christ."[129] Just as the learned pagan judge, Dionysius the Areopagite, was converted by Paul's speech to the Areopagus, so too pagan wisdom can be converted to the revelation of Christ. According to

---

[124] 1 Cor 1:23.   [125] 1 Cor 1:25.
[126] 1 Cor 1:24.   [127] 1 Cor 1:25.
[128] Von Balthasar, "Denys," 208.
[129] Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, 11.

Louth, the author of the *CD* positions himself as a disciple of Paul because Paul's speech to the Areopagus was the inaugural rapprochement between an incipient pagan faith in "the unknown god" and Christian revelation.

Christian Schäfer has developed Louth's insights.[130] Schäfer is the first to read the *CD* against the backdrop of Paul's speech to the Areopagus. He insists that "[t]he pseudonym of 'Dionysius the Areopagite' is to be taken as a programmatic key for the understanding of his writings . . . [and that] the key to a proper interpretation of the *CD* is the methodical acceptance of the literary fiction of reading an author who—Athenian born and raised in the pagan culture of Christ's times—finds himself faced with early Christian doctrine."[131] Schäfer argues that the author's pseudonym suggests that he is "doing the same thing as the Apostle did"[132]: just as Paul appropriated the tradition of pagan wisdom—preeminently the altar "to the unknown god" in Acts 17:23—in order to show the Athenians that they already possessed an incipient faith that needed only the corrective of Christian revelation, so too Dionysius "wants us to understand that Greek philosophy was on the correct path in its understanding of the Divine, but it obviously needed the eye-opening 'superaddition' or 'grace' (if these are the right words) of Christian revelation in order to be released from its ultimate speechlessness and residual insecurity concerning the last Cause."[133] Schäfer also sees that this reading easily squares with Roms 1:20–5, where Paul laments that the Gentiles foreswore their knowledge of God, "exchanging" this ancient revelation for idolatry and human foolishness. Thus, according to Schäfer, Dionysius takes on the name of Paul's convert from Athens precisely in order to "baptize"[134] pagan wisdom once again into a new life in Christ.

If we return now to the question of whether Dionysius is *really* a Christian or *really* a Neoplatonist, we can safely answer that he is both. But he is both insofar as Neoplatonism is the residuum of what Paul calls the "wisdom of God." And just as Paul called attention to that divine residuum and admonished his Athenian audience to

---

[130] First, in remarks scattered throughout his book, *The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*; second, in an article entitled "The Anonymous Naming of Names: Pseudonymity and Philosophical Program in Dionysius the Areopagite."

[131] Schäfer, *The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 164.

[132] Ibid., 165.   [133] Ibid., 25.   [134] Ibid., 7.

repent of their folly in preparation for judgment, so too Dionysius calls attention to the same divine residuum in Neoplatonism and admonishes his antagonist to "learn the truth, which is above [human] wisdom, of our religion."[135]

Apart from von Balthasar, Louth, and Schäfer, scholars have been largely blind to the clues in the *CD* for understanding the relationship between Neoplatonism and Christ, pagan wisdom and Christ cruci-fied. One concluding example will suffice to make our point. In *DN* 5.5, Dionysius writes:

> [T]he being to all beings and to the ages, is from the Pre-existing. And every age and time is from Him. And of every age and time, and of everything, howsoever existing, the Pre-existing is Source and Cause. And all things participate in Him, and from no single existing thing does He stand aloof. And He is before all things, and all things in Him consist.[136]

The penultimate sentence is a quote from Proclus' description of the First Cause,[137] while the ultimate sentence should be familiar from our discussion of immanence above: it is a quote from Colossians 1:17. According to H.D. Saffrey, "In quoting Proclus in this way, Dionysius lets it be seen in which school he was trained, and naturally he has sought to mask this dependence by the quotation from Saint Paul which he couples with that from Proclus."[138] Is this the only lesson to be drawn from such coupling of Proclus and Paul? After all, if Dionysius wants "to mask his dependence," he would do better to paraphrase, rather than quote, Proclus. It would be wiser to disguise the provenance of this sentence. Perhaps he does not want to mask this dependence at all. Perhaps, on the contrary, he wants his reader to notice the coupling of Proclus and Paul. This seems much more likely, not only here but elsewhere in the *CD* where Dionysius quotes freely from the Athenian philosopher. A writer anxious about the influence of Neoplatonism would, we suspect, go to greater lengths to disguise his debt. And yet Dionysius consistently flaunts his

---

[135] *Ep*. 7.3 1081C; *CD* II 170.7–8.
[136] *DN* 5.5 820A; *CD* I 183.12–16.
[137] See Saffrey, "New Objective Links between the Pseudo-Dionysius and Proclus," 65–74, 246–9; see also idem, "Un lien objectif entre le Pseudo-Denys et Proclus," 98–105.
[138] Saffrey, "New Objective Links between the Pseudo-Dionysius and Proclus," 73. See Rorem and Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 99n179.

substantial debts to Neoplatonism—why? The reason is clear enough: we need only look to Paul. God revealed his true philosophy to the Greeks. Paul called their attention to that noble legacy not only in his speech to the Areopagus but also in his many letters. Paul reminded the Greeks that "philosophy" is only "God's wisdom." Dionysius does not follow Proclus with Paul in *DN* 5.5 so as to seal a crack in the edifice of Christian Platonism, or to distract from his split servitude. Rather, he follows Proclus with Paul precisely to show that Proclus heeds Paul's reminder and speaks truth. Like the altar "to the unknown God," Proclus' wisdom is also an incipient faith, a wisdom that not only bears the traces of the ancient and true philosophy revealed by God but also develops some of the specific themes Paul preached in his speeches and letters, including procession and return, immanence and transcendence, and unknowing union. Whatever is true in Proclus Dionysius will credit to God, Christ, and his apostle to the Gentiles; whatever is false he will credit to all-too-human folly. In short, whatever cracks remain in the edifice of pagan Neoplatonism— and there are many, owing to the creep of human into divine wisdom—they are sealed only when folded into the new order ruled over by an unknown God and a man crucified and resurrected.

5

"No Longer I"

The Apophatic Anthropology of Dionysius the Areopagite

In the previous chapter, I examined how Dionysius looks to Paul as the premier mystical theologian and witness to mystical union. In this chapter, I chart the *anthropology* that corresponds to this mystical *theology*, what I am calling the "apophatic anthropology" of the *CD*. This is not merely one theme among many, but the consummation of all the themes I have investigated hitherto. Apophasis—of God *and* self—is what binds together the mystical enterprise of the *CD*. In the first, brief part of this chapter (I), I argue that an apophatic theology necessarily entails an "apophatic anthropology," in other words that apophasis is best understood as a sort of asceticism that delivers a self that is as unknown as the God with whom it seeks to suffer union. I borrow the term "apophatic anthropology" from Bernard McGinn and Denys Turner, who use it to describe the peculiar understanding of the human self that suffers union with the divine in some prominent Dionysian descendents, including John Scottus Eriugena, Meister Eckhart, and John of the Cross. In the second, much longer part of the chapter (II), I trace the apophatic anthropology in the *Mystical Theology* and the *Divine Names*. Although the exemplars of the apophasis of the self differ between the two works—Moses and Paul, respectively—the championing of *erōs*, ecstasy, and madness is consistent. In the third part of the chapter (III), I set the Dionysian logic of *erōs*, ecstasy, and madness against the backdrop of two important ancient templates: the taxonomy of love madness in Plato's *Phaedrus* and the allegorical exegesis of Abra(ha)m's ecstasy in Philo's *Who is the Heir of Divine Things*. I show how Dionysius

both inherits and innovates on these ancient templates, each with their own logic of *erōs*, ecstasy, and madness. The standard by which Dionysius judges these templates is the figure of Paul, who for him is the exemplary lover of the divine beloved, whose *erōs* literally carries him outside of himself in his love for God, whose ecstatic love appears as madness to his peers, and whose apophasis of self—split, doubled, cleft—renders him open to the indwelling of Christ. Finally, in the fourth part of this chapter (IV), I entertain a recent challenge to apophatic anthropology: Christian Schäfer, I argue, misunderstands a lone, but important, repudiation of ecstasy in *DN* 11 in such a way as to obscure how central the apophasis of the self is to the whole of the *CD*. In short, Schäfer fails to distinguish between the *denial* (ἄρνησις) of the self, whereby a creature refuses its assigned nature and place in the hierarchy (which refusal Dionysius repudiates), from the *apophasis* of the self, whereby a creature accepts its assigned nature and place in the hierarchy but consents to have the divine energy—ἐνεργεία, Christ, the "work of God" (ἔργον θεοῦ)—flow through it and so ecstatically displace it (which consent Dionysius champions). I conclude the chapter by returning to the definition of hierarchy with which Chapter Three begins and arguing that the third element of that definition—hierarchy as a "state of understanding" (ἐπιστήμη)—must be understood as a sort of play on words, that through hierarchy the creature can enjoy an ecstatic *epistēmē*, that is, an *under*-standing only by standing-*outside* itself.

I. APOPHATIC THEOLOGY AND APOPHATIC ANTHROPOLOGY

A recent attempt to survey the whole of "apophatic discourses" insists that "for negative theologies, it is possible to say only what God is *not*," and that apophasis amounts to a series of "attempts to devise and, at the same time, to disqualify ways of talking about God."[1] This approach figures the *via negativa* as a solution to a problem: because God outstrips all our categories of thought, language, and even being, we cannot say what God *is*, only what God is *not*. On this construal,

---

[1] Franke, ed., *On What Cannot Be Said*, 1.

apophasis is a linguistic protocol or a special "genre of discourse" that polices our speech about God, lest we misstep and utter the unutterable.[2] This trend, in turn, mirrors a trend in twentieth-century scholarship on ancient philosophy. Under the influence of Anglo-American "analytic" philosophy, according to which the "love of wisdom" amounts to a series of "problems" which beg solution, twentieth-century scholarship on ancient philosophy has by and large sought to discern which problems and solutions were dear to the hearts of the ancient sages.[3] Near the end of the twentieth century, however, Pierre Hadot bucked this trend with a now famous collection of essays, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, which argued vigorously that ancient philosophy is not only a method of solving problems through disciplined inquiry but also and perhaps primarily a program of "spiritual exercises" whose aim is to reconstitute the self.[4] Quite literally, according to Hadot, ancient philosophy is a sort of asceticism (*askesis* = "exercise"), committed to both anthropology and its implementation, that is, both to normative accounts of selfhood and the exercises or practices meant to realize them.

Hadot's corrective can be fruitfully applied to our understanding of apophasis in general and Dionysius in particular. Contrary to the characterization above, for Dionysius at least, our only hope of saying what God is *not* depends entirely on God having already told us, repeatedly and in different idioms, what God *is*. Furthermore, the contemplative program that Dionysius recommends, in which we affirm and negate the divine names in perpetuity, is not offered as a discourse that aims to solve problems that arise when creatures speak of the uncreated. On the contrary, Dionysius draws attention to such insoluble problems precisely so that his readers might make *use* of the problems inherent in language in their efforts to invite the divine to break through language. In fact, Dionysius goads us on in our speech, seeking to order and orient our words so that we can best solicit union with the unknown God. Of course the self who is united to the unknown God must also become unknown, that is, suffer "the resistless and absolute ecstasy in all purity, from thyself and all."[5]

---

[2] Ibid., 1.

[3] See, for instance, Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, or James, *Some Problems of Philosophy*.

[4] Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*; English translation, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*.

[5] *MT* 1.1 1000A; *CD* II 142.9–11.

According to Dionysius, then, making appropriate use of language—specifically the divine names—will change the user. The perpetual affirmation (*kataphasis*) and negation (*apophasis*) of the divine names—along with the negation of negation and the contemplation of entirely dissimilar names—are, in Hadot's words, "spiritual exercises" that Dionysius recommends to the reader to transform him- or herself in pursuit of union with the unknown God. Thus the entire contemplative program of the *CD* much be understood as a sort of asceticism, and as such entails a specific understanding of selfhood and a regimen for achieving—or rather, suffering—this transformation of the self.

A few scholars have discerned the fact that apophatic or mystical theology has a corresponding anthropology.[6] Thomas Tomasic has made the point with respect to Dionysius himself, arguing that mystical theology not only assumes a mystical anthropology—"*theologia* and *anthropologia* enter into a dialectic of mutual disclosure"—but actually brings it about: "[the *via negativa* is] a purgation, an asceticism, indispensable for attaining subjectivity . . . the radical, ontological 'otherness' of subjectivity over against what it is not."[7] The mutual disclosure of God and self as unknown has long been acknowledged to be the case with both Meister Eckhart and his joint heir to the Dionysian fortune, John Scottus Eriugena. Bernard McGinn has written extensively on both figures and has made the connection explicit.[8] For Eriugena, because the human self is the only true *imago dei*, like the God of whom it is an image it does not know *what* it is (that is, it does not know itself as a *what*). Thus "the primacy of negative theology in Eriugena is complemented by his negative anthropology."[9] For Eriugena, negative theology and negative anthropology are grounded in the conviction that divine and human subjectivity are one and the same in essence. One important conclusion of this conviction is that God is the subject in any and all human

---

[6] For Dionysius, *apophasis* presumes *kataphasis*, our negation of the names of God presumes God's revelation of those names. Dionysius' term for this pair is "mystical," but I will follow contemporary convention and use the term "apophatic" as a *synecdoche* for "mystical."

[7] Tomasic, "Negative Theology and Subjectivity: An Approach to the Tradition of the Pseudo-Dionysius," 411, 428.

[8] McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*, 105–6; see also idem, "The Negative Element in the Anthropology of John the Scot"; idem, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*.

[9] McGinn. *The Growth of Mysticism*, 105.

---

knowledge of God—that is, God comes to know God through humans knowing God. Corollary to this conclusion is what McGinn calls the "negative dialectic of the divine nature": "To know humanity in its deepest hidden darkness is to know God."[10] Meister Eckhart follows Eriugena here, insisting that God and soul enjoy a union of indistinction owing to the fact that they share the same ground, or *Grunt*. If the soul is united to God in its ground, then it must be as completely unknown and unknowable as God. Consequently, to know the unknown God one must know the unknown self. For Eckhart too, then, negative theology calls forth what McGinn terms a "negative mystical anthropology"[11] in which is acknowledged "the priority of unknowing in the search for God."[12] McGinn rightly credits this anthropology and the primacy of unknowing in Eriugena and Eckhart to Dionysius.

Despite sharp differences with McGinn over the viability of the category of mysticism, Denys Turner discerns a similar "apophatic anthropology"[13] in such figures as Eckhart, the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and John of the Cross—all of them ardent Dionysians. And like Tomasic and McGinn, Turner deems their anthropology "as radical as their apophatic theology, the one intimately connected with the other."[14] While Turner seems most interested in distinguishing the "experience of negativity"—which for him descends into modern experientialism—from the "negativity of experience"—which he champions for delivering us precisely from the modern binds of self and experience—he is nevertheless a helpful witness to the mounting conviction that mystical theology and anthropology are inseparable.

Although both McGinn and Turner credit Dionysius with a "negative mystical" or "apophatic" anthropology, they seem more interested in tracing the outlines of subsequent Dionysians such as Eriugena, Eckhart, John of the Cross, and the anonymous author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* than in plumbing the *CD* for its own account of the apophasis of the self. In what follows, I borrow their notion of a "negative mystical" or an "apophatic" anthropology to name the peculiar and normative understanding of selfhood that corresponds

---

[10] Ibid., 106.
[11] McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 48.
[12] Ibid., 178.
[13] Turner, *The Darkness of God*, 6.
[14] Ibid.

to Dionysius' mystical theology. Moreover, I borrow Hadot's notion of philosophy as a "spiritual exercise" to argue that Dionysius' mystical theology is best understood as an ascetic regimen meant to solicit union with the unknown God and thereby to render the human self similarly unknown.

II. THE APOPHATIC ANTHROPOLOGY OF DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE

II.A. Apophatic anthropology in the *Mystical Theology*

The most obvious place to turn for Dionysius' "apophatic anthropology" is the *Mystical Theology*. Immediately following the opening prayer addressed to the "Trinity beyond being, being god, beyond good," Dionysius offers Timothy the following advice:

> O dear Timothy, by thy persistent commerce with the mystic visions, leave behind (ἀπόλειπε) both sensible perceptions and intellectual efforts, and all objects of sense and intelligence, and all things not being and being, and be raised aloft unknowingly (ἀγνώστως) to the union, as far as attainable, with Him Who is above every essence and knowledge. For by the resistless and absolute ecstasy (ἐκστάσει) in all purity, from thyself and all, thou wilt be carried on high, to the superessential ray of the Divine darkness, when thou hast cast away all, and become free from all (πάντα ἀφελὼν καὶ ἐκ πάντων ἀπολυθείς).[15]

The effort to solicit union with the unknown God is here figured as a liturgical event: the "commerce with the mystic visions (τὰ μυστικὰ)" being a clear reference to the mysteries of the Eucharist.[16] This liturgical event, however, asks quite a bit from the worshipper, namely that he or she "leave behind" his or her perception and intellection, as well as the distinction between being and non-being—"cast away all, and become free from all." We divest ourselves of our dearest faculties and categories in hopes of being "carried on high, to the superessential ray of the Divine darkness." But this ascent to the luminous, divine darkness also requires that we stand outside ourselves, that we suffer ecstasy (τῇ . . . ἑαυτοῦ . . . ἐκστάσει).

---

15 *MT* 1.1 997B–1000A; *CD* II 142.5–11.
16 See Rorem and Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 70n131.

As if made anxious by his mention of ecstasy, Dionysius immediately insists that

> none of the uninitiated listen to these things—those I mean who are entangled in things being, and fancy there is nothing superessentially above things being, but imagine that they know, by their own knowledge, Him, Who has placed darkness as His hiding-place.[17]

These "uninitiated" provide the foil to his apophatic anthropology: they cling to the efficacy of their own intellectual faculties and their knowledge of beings. Sight, intellect, and knowledge in fact become obstacles to our union with the invisible, unknown God:

> [We pray that] through not seeing and not knowing (δι' ἀβλεψίας καὶ ἀγνωσίας), [we will be able] to see and to know that the not to see nor to know is itself the above sight and knowledge. For this is veritably to see and to know and to celebrate superessentially the Superessential (τὸν ὑπερούσιον ὑπερουσίως ὑμνῆσαι), through the abstraction of all existing things (διὰ τῆς πάντων τῶν ὄντων ἀφαιρέσεως).[18]

To know the "Superessential" or God "beyond being" (ὑπερούσιον) we must deny all the beings that we associate with this God as the cause of beings. The word translated here as "abstraction" is ἀφαίρεσις (from ἀφαιρέω), literally a "taking" or "clearing away." It is a sculptural term, made famous by Plotinus in *Enneads* I.6.9, where he bids us become sculptors of our selves.[19] Dionysius says that in order to see and to know the unknown God—through unseeing and unknowing, of course—we must work "just as those who make a life-like statue,"

---

[17] *MT* 1.2 1000A; *CD* II 142.12–15.
[18] *MT* 2 1025B; *CD* II 145.1–5.
[19] "And if you do no yet see yourself beautiful, then, just as someone making a statue which has to be beautiful cuts away [ἀφαιρεῖ] here and polishes there and makes one part smooth and clears another till he has given his statue a beautiful face, so you too must cut away [ἀφαίρει] excess and straighten the crooked and clear the dark and make it bright, and never stop 'working on your statue' [Plato, *Phaedrus* 252D7] till the divine glory of virtue shines out on you, till you see 'self-mastery enthroned upon its holy seat' [ibid., 254B7]. If you have become this, and see it, and are at home with yourself in purity, with nothing hindering you from becoming is this way one, with no inward mixture of anything else, but wholly yourself, nothing but true light, not measured by dimensions, or bounded by shape into littleness, or expanded to size by unboundedess, but everywhere unmeasured, because greater than all measure and superior to all quantity; when you see that you have become this, then you have become sight; you can trust yourself then; you have already ascended and need no one to show you; concentrate your gaze and see" (Plotinus, *Enneads*, 258–61).

carving away beings so as to discern the God beyond being. But this process is a double one, just as it is for Plotinus: as we cleave through ontological clutter in pursuit of the outline of an unknown God, we also set the chisel to the stone of our own selves, clearing away those faculties that blur that outline in ourselves.[20] We become "just as those who make a life-like statue ... by extracting (ἐξαιροῦντες) all the encumbrances which have been placed upon the clear view of the concealed, and by bringing to light, by the mere cutting away (τῇ ἀφαιρέσει μόνῃ), the genuine beauty concealed in it."[21] The hidden image, the beauty that dwells in the stone, is both the unknown God and the unknown self, who are simultaneously disclosed in the ascetic endeavor of "extraction" (ἐξαιρέω) and "clearing" or "cutting away" (ἀφαιρέω). There is, then, no refuge for the self that would seek union with the unknown God: it must be entirely cleared away along with our most cherished names for the divine.

If not solitary, this liturgical pursuit of union with the unknown God seems at the very least to be profoundly lonely, for

[the Cause of all is] manifested without veil and in truth, to those alone who pass through both all things consecrated and pure, and ascend above every ascent of all holy summits, and leave behind all divine lights and sounds, and heavenly words, and enter into the gloom, where really is, as the Oracles say, He Who is beyond all.[22]

The model for this lonely ascent is none other than "the blessed Moses," who leaves all his impure fellows behind as he scales Sinai. At the summit, alone, Moses

enters into the gloom of the *agnōsia*; a gloom veritably mystic, within which he closes all perceptions of knowledge and enters into the altogether impalpable and unseen, being wholly of Him Who is beyond

---

[20] Klitenic Wear and Dillon miss the fact that for both Plotinus *and* Dionysius, negative theology involves a negative anthropology: "The two passages [*MT* 2 1025B and *Enn.* I.6.9] in so far as Dionysius urges the catechumen to find God by sloughing away the material of creation, whereas Plotinus urges one to find the divine beauty of the Soul by attending to its imperfections, but the overall imagery is very similar" (*Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition*, 125).

[21] *MT* 2 1025B; *CD* II 145.5–7.

[22] *MT* 1.3 1000C; *CD* II 143.13–17: μόνοις ἀπερικαλύπτως καὶ ἀληθῶς ἐκφαινομένην τοῖς καὶ τὰ ἐναγῆ πάντα καὶ τὰ καθαρὰ διαβαίνουσι καὶ πᾶσαν πασῶν ἁγίων ἀκροτήτων ἀνάβασιν ὑπερβαίνουσι καὶ πάντα τὰ θεῖα φῶτα καὶ ἤχους καὶ λόγους οὐρανίους ἀπολιμπάνουσι καὶ «εἰς τὸν γνόφον» εἰσδυομένοις, «οὗ» ὄντως ἐστίν, ὡς τὰ λόγιά φησιν, ὁ πάντων ἐπέκεινα.

all, and of none, neither himself nor other; and by inactivity of all knowledge, united in his better part to the altogether Unknown, and by knowing nothing, knowing above mind.[23]

This description of Moses in the "gloom of the *agnōsia*" repeats the advice Dionysius gave Timothy in the opening of the *MT*. Here, an effort of radical renunciation prompts the self to suffer ecstasy, to stand outside itself: "neither himself nor other." This ecstasy invites someone else, namely "Him Who is beyond all," to take possession of this split self, and to unite itself—"the altogether Unknown"—to this ecstatic self. From the vantage of this self who is no longer itself, union hinges on the "inactivity of all knowledge," or rather, "knowing nothing."

II.B. Apophatic anthropology in the *Divine Names*

In the *Divine Names*, Dionysius offers a much fuller account of apophatic anthropology, and one in which the exemplar is not Moses, but the apostle Paul. The first chapter of the *Mystical Theology* advises Timothy to suffer ecstasy in his pursuit of the unknown God *and* warns him to safeguard this ecstatic pursuit from the "uninitiated." So too the first chapter of the *Divine Names* introduces both caution and abandon. On the one hand, Dionysius will insist that

> [The Good elevates] those holy minds, who, as far as is lawful and reverent, strive after It, and who are neither impotently boastful towards that which is higher than the harmoniously imparted Divine manifesta-tion, nor, in regard to a lower level, lapse downward through their inclining towards the worse, but who elevate themselves determinately and unwaveringly to the ray shining above them.[24]

Note the string of adverbs that counsel measured pursuit of the divine: "as far as is lawful and reverent" ($\dot{\omega}s\ \theta\epsilon\mu\iota\tau\grave{o}\nu\ldots\iota\epsilon\rho\sigma\pi\rho\epsilon\pi\hat{\omega}s$), "determinately" ($\epsilon\dot{v}\sigma\tau\alpha\theta\hat{\omega}s$), "unwaveringly" ($\dot{\alpha}\kappa\lambda\iota\nu\hat{\omega}s$). At first

---

[23] *MT* 1.3 1001A; *CD* II 144.10–15: . . . εἰς τὸν γνόφον τῆς ἀγνωσίας εἰσδύνει τὸν ὄντως μυστικόν, καθ' ὃν ἀπομύει πάσας τὰς γνωστικὰς ἀντιλήψεις, καὶ ἐν τῷ πάμπαν ἀναφεῖ καὶ ἀοράτῳ γίγνεται, πᾶς ὢν τοῦ πάντων ἐπέκεινα καὶ οὐδενός, οὔτε ἑαυτοῦ οὔτε ἑτέρου, τῷ παντελῶς δὲ ἀγνώστῳ τῇ πάσης γνώσεως ἀνενεργησίᾳ κατὰ τὸ κρεῖττον ἑνούμενος καὶ τῷ μηδὲν γινώσκειν ὑπὲρ νοῦν γινώσκων.
[24] *DN* 1.2 588D–589A; *CD* I 110.14–19.

---

glance, we find the same prudence in the following sentence: "and, by their proportioned love of permitted illuminations, are elevated with a holy reverence, prudently and piously (μετ' εὐλαβείας ἱερᾶς σωφρόνως τε καὶ ὁσίως), as on new wings." And yet the "love" that enables us to take flight is none other than ἔρως. *Erōs* is the love that carries us outside ourselves, thereby allowing us to take flight.

All mention of *erōs* and ecstasy, however, is suspended for the remainder of this chapter and the whole of the next. In *DN* 3 Dionysius returns to these themes, when he explains to Timothy that he does not wish to repeat the teachings of his own instructor, Hierotheus, for "[it would be an] injustice to one, both teacher and friend . . . that we, who have been instructed from his discourses, after Paul the Divine, should filch for our own glorification his most illustrious contemplation and elucidation."[25] Dionysius does, however, narrate an event in which he and Hierotheus took part and which tradition has understood as a description of the "dormition" of the Virgin Mary:

> For, amongst our inspired hierarchs (when both we, as you know, and yourself, and many of our holy brethren, were gathered together to the depositing of the Life-springing and God-receptive body, and when there were present also James, the brother of God, and Peter, the foremost and most honoured pinnacle of the Theologians, when it was determined after the depositing, that every one of the hierarchs should celebrate, as each was capable, the Omnipotent Goodness of the supremely Divine Weakness), [Hierotheus], after all the Theologians, surpassed, as you know, all the other divine instructors, being wholly entranced, wholly raised from himself (ὅλος ἐξιστάμενος ἑαυτοῦ), and experiencing the pain of his fellowship with the things celebrated (καὶ τὴν πρὸς τὰ ὑμνούμενα κοινωνίαν πάσχων), and was regarded as an inspired (θεόληπτος) and divine Psalmist by all, by whom he was heard and seen and known, and not known.[26]

Here Dionysius joins ranks with the apostles and the authors of the scriptures to witness the departure of Mary and the ecstasy of his teacher Hierotheus. Just as in the opening chapter of the *MT*, where Moses' ecstatic plunge into the "gloom of the *agnōsia*" is figured as a liturgical event, so here in *DN* 3 Hierotheus suffers ecstasy in the

---

[25] *DN* 3.2 681A–B; *CD* I 140.3–5.
[26] *DN* 3.2 681C–684A; *CD* I 141.4–14.

Eucharistic liturgy that follows Mary's "dormition."[27] To those who witness his ecstasy, he seems "inspired," literally "grasped by God" (θεόληπτος).[28] This again repeats the sequence from the end of the *MT*: ecstasy quite literally splits the self, and renders it open to the grasp of God.

While Dionysius acknowledges Hierotheus as his teacher, he also makes clear that the apostle Paul is the one to whom they both—or three, if you count Timothy—owe their initiation into these mysteries. Earlier in the *DN*, Dionysius describes Paul as "the common conductor of ourselves, and of our leader [Hierotheus] to the Divine gift of light,—he, who is great in Divine mysteries—the light of the world";[29] later he refers to him as "the truly divine man, the common sun of us [Dionysius and Timothy], and of our leader [Hierotheus]."[30] It should come as no surprise, then, that Dionysius attributes both his own views on *erōs* and ecstasy and those of Hierotheus to the apostle Paul.

This happens in the dense center of *DN* 4, which becomes a sort of fugue on *erōs* and ecstasy, both human and divine. In *DN* 4 Dionysius contemplates the premier divine name, "Good" (ἀγαθόν),[31] into which is folded, however, other divine names, such as "beautiful" (καλόν), "Beauty" (κάλλος), "Love" (ἀγάπη), and "beloved" (ἀγαπητόν). The Good brings all beings into being, and as Beauty "call[s] (καλοῦν) all things to Itself (whence also it is called Beauty) (κάλλος)."[32] This play on words—Beauty (κάλλος) bids or calls (καλέω)—goes back to Plato's *Cratylus*,[33] and the etymology underwrites the view that God as Beauty both calls all things into existence and then calls all existing things back to their source:

---

[27] The phrases "commerce with the mystic visions (τὰ μυστικὰ θεάματα)" from *MT* 1 997B (*CD* II 142.5) and "experiencing the pain of his fellowship with the things celebrated (τὴν πρὸς τὰ ὑμνούμενα κοινωνίαν πάσχων)" from *DN* 3 684A (*CD* I 141.12) echo the Eucharistic language of *EH* 3 425D (*CD* II 81.2–9), 440B (*CD* II 90.1–10), and 444A (*CD* I 92.15–93.1). See Rorem and Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 70n131.

[28] λήπτος from λαμβάνω, meaning to "take" or "grasp."

[29] *DN* 2.11 649D; *CD* I 136.18–137.1.

[30] *DN* 7.1 865B; *CD* I 193.10–11.

[31] *DN* 4.1 693B; *CD* I 143.9–10: "Let us come to the appellation 'Good' (ἀγαθωνυμίαν), already mentioned in our discourse, which the Theologians ascribe pre-eminently and exclusively to the super-Divine Deity."

[32] *DN* 4.7 701C–D; *CD* I 151.9–10.

[33] *Cratylus* 416c; see Rorem and Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 76n145.

[A]nd by the Beautiful all things are made one, and the Beautiful is origin of all things, as a creating Cause, both by moving the whole and holding it together by the love (ἔρωτι) of its own peculiar Beauty; and end of all things, and beloved (ἀγαπητὸν), as final cause (for all things exist for the sake of the Beautiful) and exemplary (Cause), because all things are determined according to It.[34]

Here Dionysius is already eliding the difference between *erōs* and *agapē*, which for ease I will generally translate, following Rorem and Luibheid, "yearning" and "love" (although Parker prefers "love" for *erōs* and "loving-kindness" for *agapē*). After citing Paul as a source for how Beauty benevolently proceeds through and returns all creation to its source (Rom 11:36), Dionysius completes the elision between *erōs* and *agape*, in a long passage that deserves to be quoted in full:

By all things, then, the Beautiful and Good is desired (ἐφετὸν) and beloved (ἐραστὸν) and cherished (ἀγαπητόν); and, by reason of It, and for the sake of It, the less love (ἐρῶσι) the greater suppliantly; and those of the same rank, their fellows brotherly; and the greater, the less considerately; and these severally love the things of themselves continuously; and all things by aspiring to the Beautiful and Good, do and wish all things whatever they do and wish. Further, it may be boldly said with truth, that even the very Author of all things, by reason of overflowing Goodness, loves (ἐρᾷ) all, makes all, perfects all, sustains all, attracts all; and even the Divine Love is Good of Good, by reason of the Good (ὁ θεῖος ἔρως ἀγαθὸς ἀγαθοῦ διὰ τὸ ἀγαθόν). For Love itself, the benefactor of all things that be (ὁ ἀγαθοεργὸς τῶν ὄντων ἔρως), pre-existing overflowingly in the Good, did not permit itself to remain unproductive in itself (ἄγονον ἐν ἑαυτῷ μένειν), but moved itself to creation, as befits the overflow which is generative of all.[35]

Dionysius is aware that this elision will raise some eyebrows and so he spends the following two sections of *DN* 4 defending it. He entertains the notion that someone might think that his elision runs "beyond the Oracles," since God is, after all, described only as ἀγάπη, never as ἔρως.[36] He makes a distinction between the mere "empty sounds" of words and "what such a word signifies" which can be rendered "through other words of the same force and more explanatory."[37]

---

[34] *DN* 4.7 704A; *CD* I 152.2–6.
[35] *DN* 4.10 708A–B; *CD* I 155.8–20.
[36] 1 John 4:16: ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν.
[37] *DN* 4.11 708C; *CD* I 156.1–7.

He admonishes his potential critics to awaken their higher faculties: "we use sounds, and syllables, and phrases, and descriptions, and words, on account of the sensible perceptions; since when our soul is moved by the intellectual energies to the things contemplated, the sensible perceptions by aid of sensible objects are superfluous."[38] Just as the "mental part of [our] soul" recognizes that "four" is the same as "twice two," so that same part of our soul, "moved by intellectual energies,"[39] should realize that *erōs* and *agapē* are "equivalent."[40] To bolster his case, Dionysius then cites a handful of scriptural passages and one of "our sacred expounders" as witnesses to this yearning.[41] Although it would seem to jeopardize his pseudonym, Dionysius cites the famous line from Ignatius of Antioch's letter to the Romans: "My own love is crucified ('Ο ἐμὸς ἔρως ἐσταύρωται)". In all of these citations, however, the yearning attested is our own, for God, not God's for us. Perhaps realizing, then, that this textual record does not deliver *erōs* as a divine name, Dionysius concludes his defense by reiterating that "those who have rightly listened to things Divine" should know that "Love" (*erōs*) and "Loving-kindness" (*agapē*) "is placed by the holy theologians in the same category throughout the Divine revelations,"[42] so that 1 John 4:16 could just as well read ὁ θεὸς ἔρως ἐστίν, "God is *erōs*."

DN 4.13 follows and is the climax of this chapter and perhaps even of the entire treatise. It begins with a line which, when unfolded, yields the essential message of both the *MT* and the *DN*: "But Divine Love is ecstatic, not permitting (any) to be lovers of themselves, but of those beloved ('Εστι δὲ καὶ ἐκστατικὸς ὁ θεῖος ἔρως οὐκ ἐῶν ἑαυτῶν εἶναι τοὺς ἐραστάς, ἀλλὰ τῶν ἐρωμένων)."[43] The phrase "Divine Love" (ὁ θεῖος ἔρως), of course, has a double meaning. First, it means *our* yearning for God the beloved, a love that carries us outside of ourselves so that we are beholden both to God *and* to others: "They

[38] *DN* 4.11 708D; *CD* I 156.13–19.
[39] *DN* 4.11 708C–D; *CD* I 156.10–13.
[40] *DN* 4.12 709B; *CD* I 157.15.
[41] *DN* 4.11–12 709A–B; *CD* I 157.4–8. The scriptural passages he cites are the LXX version of Proverbs 4:6 and 8 ["Yearn (ἐράσθητι) for her and she shall keep you; exalt for her and she will extol you; honor her and she will embrace you"]; Wisdom of Solomon 8:2 ["I yearned (ἐραστὴς ἐγενόμην) for her beauty"]; 2 Samuel 1:26 ["Love for you (ἡ ἀγάπησίς σου) came on me like love for women (ἡ ἀγάπησις τῶν γυναικῶν)"], although this is not exactly the wording of the LXX.
[42] *DN* 4.12 709C; *CD* I 157.10–17.
[43] *DN* 4.13 712A; *CD* I 158.19–159.1.

shew this too, the superior by becoming mindful (προνοίας) of the inferior; and the equals by their mutual coherence (συνοχῆς); and the inferior, by a more divine respect (ἐπιστροφῆς) toward things superior."[44] Within the hierarchy of creation, *erōs* is the love that compels us, who are firmly fixed in our own rank in the hierarchy, to stretch out in loving concern (προνοίας, συνοχῆς, ἐπιστροφῆς) for our neighbors, be they above or below or equal to us on the great chain of being. In 1 Cor 12, Paul insists that "love" (ἀγάπη) is what safeguards the health of the body of Christ, that love enables the harmonious orchestration of difference in this sacred order. Since we know from *DN* 4.11–12 that *erōs* and *agapē* are equivalent, it seems clear that this account in 4.13 of how our "divine Love" binds the hierarchy together serves to recall for the reader the definition of hierarchy (from the early chapters of the *CH* and *EH*) and its roots in Paul.

Paul is then immediately elevated as the premier witness to our divine yearning for the divine beloved:

> Wherefore also, Paul the Great, when possessed by the Divine Love, and participating in its ecstatic power, says with inspired lips, "I live no longer, but Christ lives in me." As a true lover, and beside himself, as he says, to Almighty God, and not living the life of himself, but the life of the Beloved, as a life excessively esteemed.[45]

According to Dionysius, Paul so yearned for God that he was carried outside of himself. Paul, of course, never uses the language of *erōs* in his letters. But Dionysius quotes 2 Cor 5:13, where Paul famously asserts: "if we are beside ourselves [ἐξέστημεν]—it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you [Corinthians]." Because *erōs* and *agapē* are equivalent and because *erōs* delivers ecstasy, Dionysius infers that Paul must have been "a true lover (ἐραστής)." Paul emerges then as the model of the ecstatic lover of the divine beloved. And lest we suppose that this single mention of ecstasy was an isolated indiscretion for the apostle, Dionysius also cites Gal 2:20:

---

[44] *DN* 4.13 712A; *CD* I 159.1–3. Cf. *DN* 4.15 713A–B (*CD* I 161.1–5); Rorem and Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 83n160.

[45] *DN* 4.13 712A; *CD* I 159.3–8: Διὸ καὶ Παῦλος ὁ μέγας ἐν κατοχῇ τοῦ θείου γεγονὼς ἔρωτος καὶ τῆς ἐκστατικῆς αὐτοῦ δυνάμεως μετειληφὼς ἐνθέῳ στόματι "Ζῶ ἐγώ," φησίν, "οὐκ ἔτι, ζῇ δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός." Ὡς ἀληθὴς ἐραστὴς καὶ ἐξεστηκώς, ὡς αὐτός φησι, τῷ θεῷ καὶ οὐ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ζῶν, ἀλλὰ τὴν τοῦ ἐραστοῦ ζωὴν ὡς σφόδρα ἀγαπητήν.

"It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."[46] Paul is "possessed" (κατοχῇ . . . γεγονὼς) by his yearning and "participates" (μετειληφὼς) in its ecstatic power, such that he comes to live the life of his beloved. By Paul's own confession, then, he has been ecstatically displaced to the point where, to paraphrase the *MT*, he is "neither [entirely] himself nor [entirely] someone else." For while Paul says "no longer I," he also says "Christ who lives *in me*." Dionysius says that Paul speaks here with "inspired lips," literally "with a mouth in which God resides" (ἐνθέῳ στόματι).[47]

But this "divine Love" of which Paul is our exemplar has another meaning, one that has been mounting throughout *DN* 4. Our yearning for God is in fact a response to God's yearning for us, indeed for all of creation. In other words, we yearn because we have been yearned for:

> One might make bold to say even this, on behalf of truth, that the very Author of all things, by the beautiful and good love (ἔρωτι) of everything, through an overflow of His loving goodness (τῆς ἐρωτικῆς ἀγαθότητος), becomes out of Himself (ἔξω ἑαυτοῦ γίνεται), by His providences for all existing things, and is, as it were, cozened by goodness and affection and love (ἀγαθότητι καὶ ἀγαπήσει καὶ ἔρωτι θέλγεται) and is led down (κατάγεται) from the Eminence above all, and surpassing all, to being in all, as befits an extatic superessential power centered in Himself (κατ' ἐκστατικὴν ὑπερούσιον δύναμιν ἀνεκφοίτητον ἑαυτοῦ).[48]

Earlier, in *DN* 4.10, Dionysius says that it was God's yearning that prevented him from "remain[ing] in [him]self (ἐν ἑαυτῷ μένειν)" and

---

[46] *DN* 4.13 712A; *CD* I 159.5–6.

[47] The adjective ἔνθεος is also used to describe the state of the Pythian oracle: "The Pythia became *entheos, plena deo*: the god entered into her and used her vocal organs as if they were his own . . . that is why Apollo's Delphic utterances are always couched in the first person, never the third" (Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 70–1). Plutarch remarks on this commonplace first person utterance in *Q. Conv.* 1.5.2, 623B: μάλιστα δὲ ὁ ἐνθουσιασμὸς ἐξίστησι καὶ παρατρέπει τό τε σῶμα καὶ τὴν φωνὴν τοῦ συνήθους καὶ καθεστηκότος (Dodds, 73). It is interesting to compare this with the remark Chrysostom makes in *Jud.* 2.1 [48.858]: "it is not Paul who spoke, but Christ, who moved Paul's soul. So when you hear him shout and say: 'Behold, I, Paul, tell you' (Gal 5:2), consider that only the shout is Paul's; the thought and the teaching are Christ's, who is speaking to Paul from within his heart" (Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 77).

[48] *DN* 4.13 712A–B; *CD* I 159.9–14.

moved him instead to create the world.[49] That same yearning is still at work: God cannot remain at rest, content with himself. Instead, God is "cozened" or "beguiled"($\theta\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\gamma\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota$) by the goodness of his own creation, and processes into and returns that creation to its source. This divine ecstasy, then and now, does not compromise his rest; in other words, God leaves one sort of rest—remaining in himself—so as to achieve another kind of rest, the perfect flow of Christ through the circuit of creation, ordered hierarchically precisely to communicate this light and love.

Dionysius associates God's own *erōs* and ecstasy with two other divine names: one conceptual name—"jealous" ($\zeta\eta\lambda\omega\tau\acute{\eta}s$)—and one sensory name—"drunk" ($\mu\epsilon\theta\acute{\upsilon}o\nu\tau\alpha$). What do we learn from a proper contemplation of these divine names? In *DN* 4.13, Dionysius explains that "those skilled in Divine things call Him even Jealous, as (being) that vast good Love towards all beings, and rousing His loving inclination to jealousy."[50] God is named yearning and jealousy not only because God yearns after and is jealous for his creation, but because he stirs in his creation that same yearning and jealousy.

Although Dionysius says that he has taken up the matter of the "sensory" names in another treatise, *The Symbolic Theology*, he gives a sense of how he would submit the sensory names to the same anagogical contemplation as he does the conceptual names in his *Letter 9*. Among the anthropomorphisms that beg interpretation, Dionysius considers the fact that scripture describes God as "drunk" ($\mu\epsilon\theta\acute{\upsilon}o\nu\tau\alpha$). Here he suggests to another disciple of Paul, Titus, how best to understand this startling divine name:

> For, as regards us, in the worse sense, drunkenness ($\acute{\eta}\ \mu\acute{\epsilon}\theta\eta$) is both an immoderate repletion, and being out of mind and wits ($\nu o\hat{\upsilon}\ \kappa\alpha\grave{\iota}\ \phi\rho\epsilon\nu\hat{\omega}\nu$ $\check{\epsilon}\kappa\sigma\tau\alpha\sigma\iota s$); so, in the best sense, respecting God, we ought not to imagine drunkenness as anything else beyond the super-full immeasurableness of all good things pre-existing Him as Cause ($\tau\grave{\eta}\nu\ \acute{\upsilon}\pi\epsilon\rho\pi\lambda\acute{\eta}\rho\eta\ \kappa\alpha\tau'\ \alpha\grave{\iota}\tau\acute{\iota}\alpha\nu$ $\pi\rho oo\hat{\upsilon}\sigma\alpha\nu\ \acute{\epsilon}\nu\ \alpha\grave{\upsilon}\tau\hat{\omega}\ \pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\omega\nu\ \tau\hat{\omega}\nu\ \grave{\alpha}\gamma\alpha\theta\hat{\omega}\nu\ \grave{\alpha}\mu\epsilon\tau\rho\acute{\iota}\alpha\nu$). But, even in respect to being out of wits ($\tau o\hat{\upsilon}\ \phi\rho o\nu\epsilon\hat{\iota}\nu\ \check{\epsilon}\kappa\sigma\tau\alpha\sigma\iota\nu$), which follows upon drunkenness, we must consider the pre-eminence of Almighty God, which is above conception, in which he overtops our conception, as being above conception and above being conceived ($\acute{\upsilon}\pi\grave{\epsilon}\rho\ \tau\grave{o}\ \nu o\epsilon\hat{\iota}\nu\ \grave{\omega}\nu\ \acute{\upsilon}\pi\grave{\epsilon}\rho\ \tau\grave{o}$ $\nu o\epsilon\hat{\iota}\sigma\theta\alpha\iota$), and above being itself; and in short, Almighty God is inebriated with, and outside of ($\acute{\epsilon}\xi\epsilon\sigma\tau\eta\kappa\acute{\omega}s$), all good things whatever, as

---

[49] *DN* 4.10 708B; *CD* I 155.19.   [50] *DN* 4.13 712B; *CD* I 159.14–18.

being at once a super-full hyperbole of every immeasurableness of them all.[51]

The divine name "drunkenness" yields two anagogical interpretations. First, while "drunkenness" signals for creatures an "immoderate repletion," for the creator it signals a "super-full immeasurableness," that is, the endless and overflowing power of the Good, as cause, to bring things into being. Second, "drunkenness" means "being out of mind and wits," which means that God, despite being the cause of all, stands *beyond* the understanding of his creatures. Thus "drunkenness" suggests both the immanence of God as the superabundant cause of all, and the transcendence of God, as always standing apart from, and thereby beyond, any understanding. In both instances, ecstasy (ἔκστασις, ἐξεστηκώς) is assimilated to the Dionysian notion of God's being "beyond" (ὑπέρ-), that is, both bestowing a gift, here being, *and* always eluding the analogy that would allow the recipient to trace that gift back to its giver.

Our ecstatic yearning after God, then, is in response to God's ecstatic yearning after us, and indeed all creation. Enticed by the prospect of yearning for a beloved creation, God stood outside himself to create and now stands outside himself, yearning for creation to return to its source. Proper contemplation of God as the Good yields this interpretation of *erōs* and ecstasy, which interpretation in turn is refracted and deepened through the contemplation other divine names, such as "jealous" and "drunk." Just as scripture teaches us these uplifting facts about God's ecstatic yearning through the divine names, it also teaches us to push past even these names: "[The theologians] have given the preference to the ascent through negations (ἀποφάσεων), as lifting the soul out of things kindred to itself (ἐξιστῶσαν . . . τῶν ἑαυτῇ συμφύλων) . . . and at the furthest extremity attaching it to Him, as far indeed as is possible for us to be attached to that Being."[52] However edifying and anagogical our interpretations of the divine names are, negations are to be preferred precisely because they force us to stand outside ourselves, and our finite natures. The impulse behind perpetual negation, then, is a yearning for God that will accept no proxies—that is to say, no idols. Even our contemplations of the divine names must be sacrificed at the altar to the unknown God. *Erōs* is the engine of apophasis, a yearning that

---

[51] *Ep.* 9.5 1112C; *CD* II 204.11–205.7.   [52] *DN* 13.3 981B; *CD* I 230.1–5.

stretches language to the point that it breaks, stretches the lover to the point that he splits.

III. ERŌS, ECSTASY, AND MADNESS IN PLATO, PHILO, AND PAUL

III.A. *Divine Names* 7: Paul the negative theologian

As we have already seen in *DN* 4, Paul is for Dionysius the exemplary ecstatic lover of the divine, he who yearns for the divine beloved to such an extent that he splits (2 Cor 5:13) and belongs thereafter entirely to that divine beloved (Gal 2:20). But in *DN* 7, Paul also serves as the exemplary negative theologian, where Dionysius credits him with an edifying contemplation of the divine name "Wisdom." The fact that God is "Wisdom's self ($a\vec{v}\tau o\sigma o\phi\acute{\iota}av$)," Dionysius says, means both that is the cause of all wisdom *and* transcends all wisdom.[53] Paul, "the truly divine man," understands that divine wisdom transcends human wisdom, for as he says in 1 Cor 1:25: "the foolishness ($\mu\omega\rho\grave{o}v$) of God is wiser than men."[54] Elsewhere in this same letter Paul plays human and divine wisdom and foolishness off each other, such that while "the foolishness of God is wiser than men," so too "the wisdom of this world is folly with God" (3:19).[55] This jarring

---

[53]   *DN* 7.1 865B; *CD* I 193.6.
[54]   *DN* 7.1 865B; *CD* I 193.10–11.
[55]   1 Cor 1:18–25: "For the wisdom of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart.' Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men"; 2:6–8: "Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification. None of the rulers of the age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory"; 3:18–20: "Let no one deceive himself. If any one among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, 'He

play between wisdom and folly—and specifically the fact that Paul figures the Wisdom of God as human "foolishness"—suggests to Dionysius that Paul is "negating" (ἀποφάσκειν) the divine name: "[the theologians] deny, with respect to God, things of privation (στερήσεως), in an opposite sense . . . [declaring] Him, Who is often sung, and of many names, to be unutterable and without name."[56] Paul's penchant for negations is seen in his use of alpha-privative adjectives: Dionysius mentions only two here, "invisible" (ἀόρατος) and "inscrutable" (ἀνεξιχνίαστος).[57] Dionysius then invites his reader to consider "foolishness" not as a strict denial of wisdom that should signal superabundant wisdom (such as ἄσοφος or ὑπέρσοφος would be), but as an even more potent name, one "which appears unexpected and absurd in it (παράλογον καὶ ἄτοπον), but which leads (ἀναγαγὼν) to the truth which is unutterable and before all reason."[58] According to this line of thinking, "foolishness" is an instance of what Dionysius calls in *CH* 2.3 "dissimilar revelations": "the incongruous dissimilarities . . . goading [the soul] by the unseemliness of the phrases (to see) that it belongs neither to lawful nor seeming truth, even for the most earthly conceptions, that the most heavenly and Divine visions are actually like things so base."[59] The great benefit of these absurd names is that they hover between affirmation and negation, and force us, by their very absurdity, to acknowledge how utterly other the divine in fact is. According to Dionysius, Paul practices apophasis, and understands that the absurd is often a subtler manner of negation than a denial that suggests superfluity. This is because Paul understands that "our mind has the power for thought, through which it views things intellectual, but that the union through which it is brought into contact with things beyond itself surpasses the nature of the mind. We must then contemplate things Divine, after this Union, not after ourselves."[60] Apophasis then is an effort to force us out of ourselves by forcing us out of our words. Echoing Paul in 2 Cor 5:13, Dionysius says that "standing outside (ἐξισταμένους) of our

---

catches the wise in their craftiness,' and again, 'The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile'"; 4:10: "We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ."

[56] *DN* 7.1 865B–C; *CD* I 193.13–194.4.
[57] "Invisible": Col 1:15; 1 Tim 1:17; Heb 11:27; "inscrutable": Rom 11:33.
[58] *DN* 7.1 865C; *CD* I 194.5–6.
[59] *CH* 2.3 141B; *CD* II 13.17–21.
[60] *DN* 7.1 865C–D; *CD* I 194.10–13.

whole selves, [we should become] wholly of God. For it is better to be of God, and not of ourselves."[61]

But what does it look like to suffer ecstasy and belong wholly to God? What does it look like to suffer union with God, in which knower and known belong entirely to one another? Dionysius tells us that:

> For, well does he know, who has been united to the Truth, that it is well with him although the multitude may admonish him as "out of his mind" (ἐξεστηκότα). For it probably escapes them, that he is "out of his mind" (ἐξεστηκώς) from error to truth, through the veritable faith. But, he truly knows himself, not, as they say, mad (μαινόμενον), but as liberated from the unstable and variable course around the manifold variety of error, through the simple, and ever the same, and similar truth.[62]

The crowds (οἱ πολλοὶ) are in fact right: he who suffers union with God is "out of his mind" or "beside himself." But they misunderstand his ecstasy, and fail to see that he is standing outside of error. To them, who persist in error, he appears mad. *Erōs*, ecstasy, and madness, then, are knotted together as features of the self that would solicit union with the divine.

III.B. Plato's *Phaedrus*

Dionysius is here drawing on a long tradition of Greek speculation regarding divine madness and its relation to *erōs* and ecstasy. E.R. Dodds opens his chapter "The Blessings of Madness" with a famous quote from Plato's *Phaedrus*: "Our greatest blessings come to us by way of madness," Socrates says, "provided it is given us as a divine gift" (τὰ μέγιστα τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἡμῖν γίγνεται διὰ μανίας, θείᾳ

---

[61] *DN* 7.1 865D–868A; *CD* I 194.13–15.
[62] *DN* 7.4 872D–873A; *CD* I 199.13–18. Parker translates ἐξεστηκότα and ἐξεστηκώς as "wandering," which fails to convey the ecstatic quality of madness. The passage continues, "Thus then the early leaders of our Divine Theosophy are dying every day, on behalf of truth, testifying as is natural, both by every word and deed, to the knowledge of the truth of the Christians." This passage is interesting for three reasons: first, it is the only mention of martyrs in the *CD*; second, such mention of martyrs presumably bolsters the pseudonymous identity, for the first century saw many Christian martyrs; third, Rorem and Luibheid see the influence of Paul in this passage, specifically Rom 8:36 (Paul quoting Ps 44:22): "As it is written, 'For thy sake we are being killed all the day long.'"

μέντοι δόσει διδομένης).[63] Socrates is arguing that it is better for a young man to accept as his lover an older man who is madly in love with him, than to settle for a measured and distant lover (ὁ μὲν μαίνεται, ὁ δὲ σωφρονεῖ). This bold claim, however, requires that Socrates offer a taxonomy and defense of madness.[64] The four types of madness Socrates discusses are all instances of "divine" madness, as opposed to madness due to natural causes such as disease.[65] He covers the first three is short order: (1) prophetic madness that delivers knowledge of the future, associated with Apollo;[66] (2) "telestic" or ritual madness that provides release to a community in times of crisis, associated with Dionysus;[67] and (3) poetic madness, in which the Muses inspire songs through possession.[68] Although all of these types of divine madness deliver great blessings, Socrates is most concerned to explain and defend a fourth type, the erotic madness that a lover suffers in pursuit of his beloved.

But in order to prove the value of erotic madness, Socrates introduces a long excursus on the nature of the immortal soul and its perennial transmigration. Socrates famously likens the soul to a pair of winged horses with a charioteer. The gods' souls have horses that "are all good and of good descent" and therefore obedient; ours, however, "are mixed"—one noble horse, the other base—and therefore difficult to control.[69] Every ten thousand years, all souls participate in a great parade: at the head of the host are the gods, followed by the other souls arranged in order of likeness to the gods. The gods lead this parade on a great ascent to "the vault of heaven": their horses make the climb easily while ours struggle. The gods and those who persevere in spite of the "toil and struggle . . . reach the top, pass outside and take their place on the outer surface of the heaven (ἔξω πορευθεῖσαι ἔστησαν ἐπὶ τῷ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ νώτῳ), and when they have taken their stand, the revolution carries them round and they behold the things outside of the heaven (αἱ δὲ θεωροῦσι τὰ ἔξω τοῦ

---

[63] *Phaedrus* 244A; Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 64.
[64] On Plato's taxonomy of madness, see Nasrallah, *An Ecstasy of Folly*, 32–6.
[65] The distinction between natural and supernatural madness goes back at least as far as Herodotus and Empedocles. See Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 65.
[66] 244B–D.
[67] 244D–E.
[68] 245A; See Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 64.
[69] 246A–B.

οὐρανοῦ).”[70] At the height of the ascent, the gods suffer a sort of ecstasy: they stand, not outside themselves exactly, but outside their proper place, heaven, and behold “the region above the heaven” (τὸν δὲ ὑπερουράνιον τόπον).[71]

What lies on the other side of heaven, nourishing the souls’ wings for its next ascent and revolution? Nothing less than “the colorless, formless, and intangible truly existing essence” (ἡ γὰρ ἀχρώματός τε καὶ ἀσχημάτιστος καὶ ἀναφὴς οὐσια ὄντως οὖσα):

> In the revolution [the divine intelligence (θεοῦ διάνοια) of every soul] beholds (θεωροῦσα) absolute justice, temperance, and knowledge (καθορᾷ μὲν αὐτὴν δικαιοσύνην, καθορᾷ δὲ σωφροσύνην, καθορᾷ δὲ ἐπιστήμην), not such knowledge as has a beginning and varies as it is associated with one or another of the things we call realities, but that which abides in the real eternal absolute (ἀλλὰ τὴν ἐν τῷ ὅ ἐστιν ὃ ὄντως ἐπιστήμην οὖσαν); and in the same way it beholds and feeds upon the other eternal verities (τἆλλα . . . τὰ ὄντα ὄντως).[72]

In Platonic metaphysical terms, what the gods behold or contemplate (θεωροῦσα), suffering an ecstasy of place, are the “forms,” “the things that really exist” (τἆλλα . . . τὰ ὄντα ὄντως) and from which true knowledge derives.[73]

So much for the gods; those hapless souls struggling behind them might manage to lift their heads outside of heaven and catch a glimpse of these forms, perhaps only seeing one or another, but never the whole. Souls ruthlessly compete for these glimpses, since contemplation of the forms nourishes the wings and permits the souls to remain aloft until the next parade, ten thousand years hence. Most souls, however, battered by the melée, fall to the earth and into bodies commensurate with their contemplation: the noblest embodiment is “a philosopher or lover of beauty (φιλοκάλου), or one of a musical or loving nature (ἐρωτικοῦ)”; the basest human embodiment is a tyrant, just below sophists.[74]

The sensible world into which souls fall is a dim reflection of the intelligible world from which they fall. But even these dim reflections can remind the fallen soul of “those things which [it] once beheld,

---

[70] 247B–C.   [71] 247C.   [72] 247D–E.
[73] The Platonic terms εἶδος and ἰδέα are usually translated “form.” Here Plato refrains from using the technical terms, but the object of the gods’ contemplation is obviously the eternal intelligibles.
[74] 248D–E.

when it journeyed with God and, lifting its vision above the things which we now say exist, rose up into real being."[75] The philosopher or lover of beauty beheld more real being than any of the other embodied souls, and therefore remains "in communion through memory with those things the communion with which causes God to be divine."[76] Only here does the excursus circle back to the theme at hand, the fourth type of madness:

> Now a man who employs such memories rightly is always being initiated into perfect mysteries and he alone becomes truly perfect; but since he separates himself (ἐξιστάμενος) from human interests and turns his attention toward the divine, he is rebuked by the vulgar, who consider him mad (ὡς παρακινῶν) and do not know that he is inspired (ἐνθουσιάζων).[77]

The philosopher, held in rapt attention by the divine, stands apart from everyday human matters, and is regarded as "mad" (literally "moved aside") and "inspired." This philosopher, when he sees instances of sensible beauty, remembers the true, intelligible beauty his soul contemplated prior to its embodiment. He loves the instances of sensible beauty because they remind him of this beauty. Of all the intelligible forms, beauty shines most clearly in the sensible world; of all the senses, "sight is the sharpest."[78] Thus sensible beauty more than any other sensible quality arouses in the soul a memory of its former life, and as a result the soul loves, longs for, yearns after sensible beauty, and through it, intelligible beauty:

> [T]his [fourth kind of madness] is, of all inspirations, the best and of the highest origin to him who has it or shares in it, and . . . he who loves (ὁ ἐρῶν) the beautiful, partaking in this madness (ταύτης μετέχων τῆς μανίας) is called a lover (ἐραστής).[79]

> [W]hen [the philosopher] sees a godlike face or form which is a good image of beauty, he shudders at first, and then something of the old awe comes over him, then, as he gazes (προσορῶν), he reveres the beautiful one as a god, and if he did not fear to be thought stark mad (τὴν τῆς σφόδρα μανίας δόξαν), he would sacrifice to his beloved as to an idol or a god.[80]

Socrates' speech continues for pages, but this suffices to show why Socrates argues that the young man should always look for an older

---

[75] 249C.   [76] 249C.   [77] 249C–D.
[78] 250D–E.   [79] 249E.   [80] 251A.

man who is madly in love with him, for this love madness attests to the degree of contemplation that the older man's soul enjoyed in its prior life and guarantees that his love for the young man is enflamed by his yearning for intelligible reality.

Socrates' discourse on the soul's ascent, ecstatic contemplation of the forms, and love madness in the *Phaedrus* serves as a template for Dionysius in the *Divine Names*. Of course Dionysius innovates on this template. While for Plato, the immortal gods are on this side of the ontological divide between sensible and intelligible, leading our contemplation of the forms, for Dionysius, the angels play the role of Plato's gods, and the hierarchical orders contemplate the proportionate revelations that the unknown God sends over the chasm between creature and creator. And while for Plato, the forms we compete to contemplate are intelligible, for Dionysius what lives on the other side of heaven is beyond any and all intelligibility. Put simply, while Plato here lumps immortal with mortal souls, all seeking a glimpse of the intelligible forms, Dionysius lumps sensible with intelligible revelation, all of which is an accommodation to our creaturely capacities, revealed so as to lead creatures back to their source but insufficient to capture the essence of that source. And the logic of *erōs*, ecstasy, and madness is somewhat different in the two authors. For Plato, all souls compete to be in a position to stand outside heaven and contemplate the forms. Those who do enjoy a glimpse of this ecstatic vision subsequently fall into bodies, but appear to their peers as lovesick madmen, yearning after sensible beauty, but as faint traces of intelligible beauty. For Dionysius, we respond to God's own ecstatic *erōs*, yearning for God just as he yearns for us, to a point that our *erōs* carries us outside ourselves and thereby renders us open to possession by God through Christ. For Dionysius, just as for Plato, this ecstatic lover appears to his peers as a madman.

III.C. Philo: *Who is the Heir of Divine Things*

Between Plato and Dionysius, however, stands another accomplished taxonomist, Philo, who in his *Who is the Heir of Divine Things* parses four types of ecstasy.[81] This treatise is an allegorical reading of

---

[81] Philo, *Who is the Heir of Divine Things* [*Quis rerum divinarum heres*, hereafter *Quis rerum*]. See also Nasrallah, *An Ecstasy of Folly*, 36–44. For a general treatment of

Gen 15: 2–18, where Abram, who is not yet Abraham, laments his lack of an heir, and God promises him that his offspring will be as the stars in heaven. Philo, however, allegorizes Abram's lament such that Abram comes to speak for anyone who wishes to inherit "divine things." Philo answers:

> [O]ne alone is held worthy of these [divine things], the recipient of inspiration from above, of a portion heavenly and divine, the wholly purified mind which disregards (ἀλογῶν) not only the body, but that other section of the soul which is devoid of reason (ἄλογον) and steeped in blood, aflame with seething passions and burning lusts.[82]

The heir must be purified not only of body but also of the baser qualities of the soul. Philo explains: "Who then shall be the heir? Not that way of thinking which abides in the prison of the body of its own free will, but that which, released (λυθεὶς) from its fetters into liberty, has come forth outside (ἔξω . . . προεληλυθὼς) the prison walls, and if, we may so say, has left behind itself (καταλελοιπὼς . . . αὐτὸς ἑαυτόν)."[83] As evidence for this claim, Philo cites Gen 15:4, "he who shall come out of thee shall be thy heir" (LXX: ὃς ἐξελεύσεται ἐκ σοῦ, οὗτος κληρονομήσει σε). The mounting sense is that the soul must suffer ecstasy in order to inherit the divine, a sense that is confirmed in the following speech, made directly to the soul, also basing its claim on an allegorical reading of Genesis:

> Therefore, soul, if some yearning (πόθος) to inherit the good and divine things should enter you, leave (κληρονομῆσαι) not only "the land"—that is, the body—and "kindred"—that is, sense perception (αἴσθησιν)—and "your father's house"—that is, reason (λόγον), but also flee from yourself (σεαυτὴν ἀπόδραθι) and stand outside of yourself (ἔκστηθι σεαυτῆς); as those who are possessed (κατεχόμενοι) and corybants, be inspired with frenzy and be possessed by some prophetic inspiration. For the understanding which is inspired and is no longer in itself (ἐνθουσιώσης γὰρ καὶ οὐκέτ᾽ οὔσης ἐν ἑαυτῇ διανοίας), but has been violently agitated and driven mad by heavenly love (ἀλλ᾽ ἔρωτι οὐρανίῳ σεσοβημένης κἀκμεμηνυίας), and is led by the truly Existent (καὶ ὑπὸ τοῦ ὄντως ὄντος ἠγμένης), and is drawn along upwards toward it (while truth

Philo's mysticism, see Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, 18–35. For a general treatment of the influence of Philo on the *CD*, see Golitzin, *Et introibo ad altare dei*, 255–61.

[82] *Quis rerum* 64.
[83] *Quis rerum* 68.

advances and removes obstacles before the feet) so that the under-
standing may advance down the road as upon a highway—this is the
heir.[84]

This passage begins with an allegorical reading of Gen 12:1, where
God says to Abram, "Go from your land and your kindred and your
father's house to the land that I will show you."[85] Philo reads land,
kindred, and home as body, sense, and reason, and thus God's
command—"leave!"—as an imperative to lead an apophatic and
ecstatic *askēsis*. This spiritual exercise will carry the soul and its
understanding outside of itself, "violently agitated" by its love for
the divine and so "driven mad."

  Much later in the treatise, Philo makes his way to Gen 15:12, "As
the sun was going down, a great ecstasy fell on Abram; lo, and a dread
and great darkness fell upon him."[86] This mention of ecstasy prompts
Philo, following Plato, to distinguish between four types of ecstasy:
(1) "a mad fury" produced by natural causes; (2) an "extreme amaze-
ment" at sudden and unexpected events; (3) a "passivity of mind"
such as it can ever be fully at rest; and, finally, (4) "the best form of all
is the divine possession or frenzy (ἔνθεος κατοκωχή τε καὶ μανία) to
which the prophets as a class are subject."[87] Obviously, Philo is most
interested in the fourth type, but spends several pages describing the
first three types and associating each with discrete episodes from
Genesis and Exodus. Finally, he is able to explain what the setting
of the sun signifies in 15:2:

> For the reasoning faculty in us is equivalent to the sun in the cosmos,
> since both bear light. For what the reasoning faculty is in us, the sun is
> in the world, since both of them are light-bringers, one light sending out
> to all with respect to sense perception, the other illumining us through
> grasping the mental faculties. So therefore while the mind still shines
> and traverses us as at noonday, such a light pouring forth in every soul,
> we are in ourselves, we are not possessed. But when sunset comes, as is
> likely, ecstasy and inspired possession and madness fall. For when the
> divine light shines, the human sets; when the former sets, the human

---

[84] *Quis rerum* 69. The English translation here is that of Nasrallah, not of Colson
and Whitaker. See Nasrallah, *An Ecstasy of Folly*, 38.

[85] LXX: Ἔξελθε ἐκ τῆς γῆς σου καὶ ἐκ τῆς συγγενείας σου καὶ ἐκ τοῦ οἴκου τοῦ πατρὸς
σου εἰς τὴν γῆν ἣν ἄν σοι δείξω.

[86] LXX: περὶ δὲ ἡλίου δυσμὰς ἔκστασις ἐπέπεσεν τῷ Ἀβραμ, καὶ ἰδοὺ φόβος
σκοτεινὸς μέγας ἐπιπίπτει αὐτῷ.

[87] *Quis rerum* 249.

light emerges and rises. This happens often to the prophetic class. Among us the mind is evicted at the arrival of the divine spirit, and it enters again at the spirit's removal. It is not willed that mortal should cohabitate with the immortal. Therefore the setting of the reasoning power and the darkness which surrounds it produce ecstasy and madness which is from divine possession.[88]

The setting of the sun in Gen 15:12 refers to the setting of Abram's rational faculty and the rising of the divine light. The rational faculty (λογισμός) is figured as the sun at noon, when all is illuminated and we are entirely ourselves, in ourselves. When this sun sets, however, "a dread and great darkness" falls. This darkness is in fact the overwhelming light of the divine, which we experience as darkness because we are accustomed to the weaker, derivative light of our own making, namely reason. With this darkness falls "ecstasy, inspired possession, and madness" (ἔκστασις, ἔνθεος κατοκωχή, μανία) and the "divine spirit" (τοῦ θείου πνεύματος) forces the "eviction" (ἐξοικίζεται) not only of reason but also of the mind (ὁ νοῦς). According to Philo, however, these events happen discretely and serially: there is no overlap between human and divine; one swiftly replaces the other. Prophets often suffer this shift, as Abram does here. This fourth type of ecstasy, much like Plato's love madness, will appear to bystanders as precisely what it is, infirmity of reason and mind. But unlike the infirmity of reason and mind that characterizes the first type of ecstasy, this infirmity is paradoxical evidence of communion with—or, to use Philo's term, inheritance of—"divine things."[89]

---

[88] *Quis rerum* 263–5: ὅπερ γὰρ ἐν ἡμῖν λογισμός, τοῦτο ἐν κόσμῳ ἥλιος, ἐπειδὴ φωσφορεῖ ἑκάτερος, ὁ μὲν τῷ παντὶ φέγγος αἰσθητὸν ἐκπέμπων, ὁ δὲ ἡμῖν αὐτοῖς τὰς νοητὰς διὰ τῶν καταλήψεων αὐγάς. ἕως μὲν οὖν ἔτι περιλάμπει καὶ περιπολεῖ ἡμῶν ὁ νοῦς μεσημβρινὸν οἷα φέγγος εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν ψυχὴν ἀναχέων, ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ὄντες οὐ κατεχόμεθα. ἐπειδὰν δὲ πρὸς δυσμὰς γένηται, κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς ἔκστασις καὶ ἡ ἔνθεος ἐπιπίπτει κατοκωχή τε καὶ μανία. ὅταν μὲν γὰρ φῶς τὸ θεῖον ἐπιλάμψῃ, δύεται τὸ ἀνθρώπινον, ὅταν δ᾽ἐκεῖνο δύηται, τοῦτ᾽ ἀνίσχει καὶ ἀνατέλλει. τῷ δὲ προφητικῷ γένει φιλεῖ τοῦτο συμβαίνειν· ἐξοικίζεται μὲν γὰρ ἐν ἡμῖν ὁ νοῦς κατὰ τὴν τοῦ θείου πνεύματος ἄφιξιν, κατὰ δὲ τὴν μετανάστασιν αὐτοῦ πάλιν εἰσοικίζεται· θέμις γὰρ οὐκ ἔστι θνητὸν ἀθανάτῳ συνοικῆσαι. διὰ τοῦτο ἡ δύσις τοῦ λογισμοῦ καὶ τὸ περὶ αὐτὸν σκότος ἔκστασιν καὶ θεοφορητον μανίαν ἐγέννησε. Again, this translation is Nasrallah's (*An Ecstasy of Folly*, 41).

[89] Louth goes to great lengths to argue that this and other mentions of ecstasy have nothing to do with "mystical union." This fourth type of ecstasy, he argues, is "purely concerned with the ecstasy that produces prophecy" (*The Origins of the Christian*

This enthusiasm for ecstasy as divine possession and madness finds an interesting echo in another work of Philo on Abram, now Abraham. In *On the Migration of Abraham*, Philo reflects on his own practice of writing, confessing how he suffers frustrations just as all writers do.[90] But he also confesses that

> [a]t other times, I have come empty and have suddenly become full (ὅτε κενὸς ἐλθὼν πλήρης ἐξαίφνης ἐγενόμην), the ideas descending like snow and invisibly sown, so that under the impact of divine possession I had been filled with corybantic frenzy and become ignorant (ἀγνοεῖν) of everything, place, people present, myself, what was said and what was written.[91]

It is tempting to read this confession against the backdrop of Philo's description of the fourth type of ecstasy in *Who is the Heir of Divine Things*; if we do, then Philo is confessing here to the eviction of his own self in the practice of writing. In line with his earlier account of serial selves—divine following upon human—this confession attests to successive subjectivities, kenotic (κενὸς) and plenary (πλήρης). Philo says that he suffered this swing from empty to full "suddenly"

Mystical Tradition, 33). Louth may be right that Philo associates this sort of ecstasy with prophecy, but Philo also seems to think that prophecy derives precisely from some sort of ecstatic union with the divine. Philo does say of the ecstasy that falls on Abraham in Gen 15:12 that it describes his "inspired and God-possessed experience" (ἐνθουσιῶντος καὶ θεοφορήτου τὸ πάθος) (*Quis rerum* 258).

Louth also discourages us from interpreting Philo's other mentions of ecstasy as having anything to do with mystical union. Elsewhere Philo distinguishes between a soul that is "permeated by fire in giving thanks to God, and is drunk with a sober drunkenness" and one that is "still laboring . . . in exercise and training" (*Leg. All* 84). Louth argues that, "if we look closely," we can see that Philo is drawing on the Stoic distinction between the sage and the seeker, the sage being in full possession of the good: "[The Stoics'] language about the sage was pretty ecstatic, but there was no suggestion that the sage *was* an ecstatic. Far from having gone out of himself, the sage had become wholly himself, at one with himself and the whole cosmos. It is this that Philo is thinking of when he speaks of the one who is drunk with sober drunkenness, not of ecstatic union with God" (*The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, 34–5). Louth's argument suffers from two problems. First, it argues that although Philo describes the soul with ecstatic language, the soul isn't really ecstatic—well, then, why all the ecstatic language? Second, it ignores the fact that in Philo (and Plato before him and Dionysius after him) the self that goes outside of itself is, paradoxically, the self that is most wholly itself.

[90] *On the Migration of Abraham* [*De migratione Abrahami*; hereafter *De migratione*].

[91] *De migratione* 35. English translation is from David Winston, trans., *Philo of Alexandria*, 76; cited in Nasrallah, *An Ecstasy of Folly*, 43.

(ἐξαίφνης)—an adverb that for a Jewish Platonist suggests a variety of connections, biblical and Platonic, all of them associated with the manifestation of God.[92] What is most striking about this passage, however, is not the mention of the sudden shift of subjectivities, but rather Philo's claim that, while writing, he suffers divine possession such that he "becomes ignorant" (ἀγνοεῖν) of his surroundings, including himself. Philo may mean simply that this sudden shift brings with it an unparalleled focus of attention, "sharp-sighted vision, exceedingly distinct clarity of objects, such as might occur through the eyes as the result of the clearest display."[93] But consider how Dionysius might read Philo's confession, literally: "I *unknow* everything: place, people, myself, what was said and what was written."[94] Philo would seem to Dionysius to be confessing to the complete "unknowing" (ἀγνωσία) that marks our union with the unknown God. The fact that Philo seems to have suffered this union through, at least in part, the practice of writing, will prove especially crucial to our understanding of the aim of pseudonymous writing. I will return to this theme in the Conclusion.

Philo's taxonomy of ecstasy and confession to serial subjectivity bear as much on Dionysius understanding of ecstasy and madness as Plato's *Phaedrus* does. First of all, Dionysius, following Philo, finds abundant evidence in the scriptures for the sort of love madness that Plato celebrates. While Philo focuses here on Abram/Abraham, Dionysius devotes his attention to the figure of Moses, in the *Mystical Theology*, and of course Paul, in the *Divine Names*. Second, while Plato elevates intelligible reality above humans and gods, Dionysius will follow Philo's more astringent, apophatic imagination, whereby the soul that would inherit divine things must suffer an ecstasy that carries it entirely out of its reason and understanding, beyond all intelligibility. For both Philo and Dionysius, this ecstasy comes when the divine light enters us, and we appear to our neighbors as mad. Third, Dionysius will follow Philo, who is himself following a long and distinguished tradition of biblical and philosophical reflection, in

---

[92] For a summary of the biblical and philosophical use of the term ἐξαίφνης, see Golitzin, "'Suddenly, Christ': The Place of Negative Theology in the Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagites," 22–3.

[93] Winston, trans., *Philo of Alexandria*, 76; cited in Nasrallah, *An Ecstasy of Folly*, 43.

[94] καὶ πάντα ἀγνοεῖν, τὸν τόπον, τοὺς παρόντας, ἐμαυτόν, τὰ λεγόμενα, τὰ γραφόμενα.

insisting that the ecstatic intrusion of the divine into the incumbent self happens "suddenly." Fourth, Dionysius finds abundant resources in Philo's confession to his own experience of ecstasy in writing. Specifically, Dionysius will find in Philo a witness to the fact that the practice of writing can solicit the sudden shift of selves. Finally, Dionysius will discover that Philo himself offers testimony to the fact that this ecstatic intrusion is accompanied by the unknowing of everything, especially one's own self. Thus while Plato keeps faith in *nous*, Philo becomes for Dionysius an important forerunner in the articulation of an apophatic anthropology and an ascetic practice (which includes writing) meant to realize that apophasis of the self.[95]

III.D. Paul the madman

Dionysius innovates on the Philonic as much as the Platonic template. The best way to track his departure from both Plato and Philo is to appreciate how he understands himself as a disciple of Paul. Paul corrects Plato's faith in intelligible reality by serving as the premier negative theologian, preaching God's transcendence through strict

---

[95] In *De migratione Abrahami*, Philo discusses three stages on the way toward knowledge of God: (1) conversion from idolatry to acknowledgment of one God; (2) self-knowledge; (3) knowledge of God. But on the transition from the second to the third stage, Philo differs from Plato (and from Plotinus after him). Whereas for Plato the soul properly belongs to the realm of intelligibility such that our knowledge of the forms is a process of recovery or remembering, for Philo the soul is a creature, separated from its creator by a chasm. For Philo, God is the "Truly Existent" (τὸ ὄν), in the face of whom the soul is nothing: "This means that self-knowledge is not identified with knowledge of God . . . in self-knowledge the soul comes to realize its own nothingness and is thrown back on God, Him who is . . . This recognition that the soul is a creature also leads to an emphasis on the fact that the soul's capacity to know God is not a natural capacity, but rather something given by God" (Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, 25). And so it is in the transition from the second to the third stages, from self-knowledge to knowledge of God, that we can most clearly see the negative or apophatic anthropology implicit in Philo's framework. And this transition is best described in *Som.* i.60: "Abraham who gained much progress and improvement towards the acquisition of the highest knowledge: for when most he knew himself, then most did he despair of himself, in order that he might attain to an exact knowledge of Him who in reality is. And this is nature's law: he who has thoroughly comprehended himself, thoroughly despairs of himself, having as a step to this ascertained the nothingness in all respects of created being. And the man who has despaired of himself is beginning to know Him that is" (ibid., 25).

negations (alpha-privatives) and absurd pairings (divine wisdom and foolishness). Paul also serves as the exemplary ecstatic lover of the divine, and thereby alters Plato's version of the logic of *erōs*, ecstasy, and madness. Whereas for Plato, mad lovers are souls who still remember their brief tryst with true being and so pine after its faint traces in sensible reality, for Dionysius, mad lovers are those, such as Paul, who heed the call of the first mad lover, God himself, and whose *erōs* stretches them to the breaking point, whereat God descends to inhabit them.

Perhaps the most significant departure Dionysius makes from Philo has to do with precisely the matter of this divine inhabitation. For Philo, selves follow serially. In other words, the human is evicted by the divine, for "it is not willed that mortal should cohabitate with the immortal."[96] For Dionysius, of course, this cannot be so, because Paul is the premier instance of divine inhabitation of the human self. Dionysius understands this to have happened to Paul on the road to Damascus, where Jesus appears to him as "a light from heaven, brighter than the sun" (Acts 26:13). For Dionysius, Jesus is the divine light of which Philo unknowingly speaks. Dionysius also understands Paul's confession in Gal 2:20 that "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me," as a description of the ongoing residence of Christ in Paul. In the first, "sudden" intrusion and in the ongoing residence, there is, for Dionysius, no full eviction of Paul, but rather a double residence. In none of the three versions of this event that appear in Acts does Paul ever lose his own voice; on the contrary, he dialogues with the luminous intruder Christ. Likewise with the ongoing residence: Paul confesses that while "it is no longer I . . . it is Christ who lives *in me*." Unlike Philo's prophets or the Pythian oracles, Paul never speaks as Christ in the first person. Philo figures our rational faculty and the divine as two suns that cannot appear in the sky at once; as one rises, the other sets. Continuing Philo's allegory of heavenly bodies, we might say that Dionysius understands the divine and the human as the sun and the moon, respectively. Generally, the two appear apart: the (divine) sun during the day and the (human) moon at night. The moon is most visible in the dark, but it is visible because it reflects the light of the sun. In those seasons when the sun

---

[96] *Quis rerum* 265.

and moon are both in the sky during the day, the moon is of course dimmer than at night, pale in comparison to the sun, the source of all light. This would be the condition in which the divine has taken up an ongoing residence in the human self; the self is so dimmed by the light of the divine that it confesses, as Paul does, that "it is no longer I, but Christ who lives in me." To carry the allegory even further, the sudden intrusion of the divine into the human self might be likened to a solar eclipse, when the moon can be seen as a ring of light, but only because it is illuminated from behind by the sun. This would be an interesting allegory for the coincidence of the human and the divine, not least because Dionysius claims to have witnessed the solar eclipse that accompanied the death of Christ on the cross.[97] Thus the premier coincidence of human and divine—the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ—are accompanied by a heavenly sign that allegorically instructs us how we too, following the example of Paul, can suffer our own coincidence of human and divine, our own solar eclipses.

While Paul never loses his own voice, he does lose, at least for a time, his sight: "Saul arose from the ground; and when his eyes were opened, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank" (Acts 9:8–9; cf. 22:11). This too would seem to mark a departure from Philo, who says that when he suffered his own ecstasy in writing, he enjoyed an unusual clarity of vision. It also marks, however, a tension within Philo himself, since he elsewhere suggests that ecstasy brings with it darkness, a setting of the sun of our rational faculty. To be fair, this also marks a tension within Paul, who on another occasion describes the same visitation, but does not mention his loss of sight and instead reports that Christ appointed him apostle to the Gentiles in order "to open their eyes, that they might turn from darkness to light" (Acts 26:18). Perhaps the tension in Paul and Philo is resolved by appeal to the same dialectic that would have divine wisdom appear as foolishness, or being drunk on God appear as possession of the soberest truth. Here Paul is blinded by the overwhelming light of Christ and so plunged into darkness. But Paul then sets out to teach the Gentiles to turn to

---

[97] *Ep.* 7 1081A; *CD* II 169.1–2.

this light, and so suffer, just as he did, a blinding encounter with the luminous Christ. Paradoxically, then, blindness in the face of God is the very height of vision, compared to which our sensible vision is as blindness. Likewise with Philo: when describing prophetic ecstasy from a distance, he suggests that the eviction of the rational faculty brings with it darkness. But it is only darkness for the rational faculty that is setting, since what is on the rise is the light of the divine spirit. With this light would seem to come, then, the sort of clarity of vision to which Philo bears personal witness, "such as might occur through the eyes as the result of the clearest display." But if Philo is right that selves follow serially, then how can he maintain that *he* experiences this darkness that descends as the clearest light? For if he sets when the divine rises, as he suggests happens with ecstasy, how is it that he can claim to experience such "sharp-sighted vision"? In other words, how can Philo report on how darkness becomes light when Philo, strictly speaking, is no longer there. Perhaps, then, there is even in Philo some hesitation regarding the notion that selves, or for that matter, light and darkness, follow a strict serial order. Philo not only seems to have survived, somehow, the shift from kenotic to plenary self, but also to give report on the fact that during his divine possession, he simultaneously suffers light and darkness. If Philo wavers on this point, perhaps to safeguard the distance between human and divine, Dionysius follows his master, Paul, and insists that the human and the divine cohabit in the self and that this doubled self also experiences the descent of divine darkness as brilliantly luminous. This is no where clearer than in the opening prayer of the *Mystical Theology*, where Dionysius prays the Trinity to lead us up to the "mysteries of theology" which abide in "super-luminous gloom" (τὸν ὑπέρφωτον . . . γνόφον) and that "in its deepest darkness [the mysteries shine] above the most super-brilliant."[98]

Back to the *Divine Names*: Chapter 7 concludes by suggesting that the one who suffers union with the unknown God will appear as a madman, out of his mind. This prompted our long excursus, an examination of the Platonic and Philonic backdrop to Dionysius' elevation of madness and ecstasy. We have seen how Dionysius innovates on this inheritance, drawing on Paul to correct Jew and

---

[98] *MT* 1.1 997A–B; *CD* II 141.4–142.3.

Greek alike. In fact, for Dionysius, Paul is the exemplary madman as well. How so? Certainly Dionysius can point to 2 Cor 5:13 as evidence of Paul's ecstatic love for the divine, but where can Dionysius find evidence that Paul was mad? In Acts 26, Paul, imprisoned in Caesarea, gives account of himself to King Agrippa and the Roman procurator of Judea, Festus. He goes on to narrate his conversion on the road to Damascus, where Jesus appears to him as "a light from heaven, brighter than the sun" (26:13). Acts 26:24–5 tells us that when Paul concluded his long *apologia*, "Festus said with a loud voice, 'Paul, you are mad (μαίνῃ); your great learning is turning you mad (μανίαν περιτρέπει).' But Paul said, 'I am not mad (οὐ μαίνομαι), most excellent Festus, but I am speaking the sober truth (ἀληθείας καὶ σωφροσύνης ῥήματα ἀποφθέγγομαι).'" For Dionysius, this episode illustrates perfectly the fine line that Paul walks between reason and madness, sobriety and ecstasy. To those who persist in error—here Festus—Paul is indeed a madman, drunk on a drunk God. But for those who suffer union with God, this madness is nothing less than possession of—or possession by—the soberest truth (ἀληθείας . . . σωφροσύνης). Recall that in the beginning of his discourse Socrates distinguishes the mad from the sober lover (ὁ μὲν μαίνεται, ὁ δὲ σωφρονεῖ). And yet it is the mad lover whose soul, in its prior, disembodied life, glimpsed the forms, including "absolute temperance" (καθορᾷ δὲ σωφροσύνην), and now madly yearns after traces of those forms, especially the form of beauty. Thus the sobriety of the distant lover, of Festus, and the crowds whom Dionysius here spurns, is a false sobriety. True sobriety paradoxically consists in having an ecstatic vision of what is real—for Plato, this is contemplation of the forms; for Dionysius, this is union with the unknown God in the "gloom" of unknowing. This chapter thereby concludes by circling back to the its beginning, where it praises Paul as the exemplary negative theologian: just as Paul plays human and divine wisdom and foolishness off one another so as to let the unknown God remain ultimately alien to our human notions of wisdom and foolishness, so Paul's erotic ecstasy plays human and divine madness and sobriety off one another so that the exemplary lover of the divine beloved, Paul, hangs between the balance of reason and madness, sobriety and ecstasy. For Dionysius, the way to possess or be possessed by immutable, stable, sober truth is precisely to give up possession of the immutable, stable, sober self: true immutability requires mutation, stability instability, sobriety insobriety, and possession dispossession.

IV. A CHALLENGE TO APOPHATIC ANTHROPOLOGY?

There is, however, at least one instance in which Dionysius explicitly refuses ecstasy and seemingly, by extension, the apophasis of the self. This refusal comes late in the *Divine Names*, in Chapter 11 on the divine name "Peace," although the relevant background is laid in the long and infamous excursus on evil in *DN* 4. God is called "Peace," Dionysius says, because "the divine Peace, standing of course indivisibly, and showing all in one, and passing through all, and not stepping out of Its own identity (τῆς οἰκείας ταὐτότητος οὐκ ἐξισταμένης)."[99] God as Peace does not suffer ecstasy, then, but "remains (μένει), through excess of union, super-united, entire, to and throughout Its whole self."[100] And if God is Peace, then all creatures should yearn for peace and so likewise refuse ecstasy:

> For all things love to dwell at peace, and to be united amongst themselves, and to be unmoved and unfallen from themselves, and the things of themselves. And the perfect Peace seeks to guard the idiosyncrasy of each unmoved and unconfused, by its peace-giving forethought, preserving everything unmoved and unconfused, both as regards themselves and each other, and establishes all things by a stable and unswerving power, towards their own peace and immobility.[101]

Just as God as Peace does not depart from God's own individuality, so creatures do not, or at least should not, wish to lose their own individuality. On the contrary, they should wish to be at one with themselves, unconfused, "establish[ed] . . . by a stable and unswerving power." This would seem to contradict the apophatic anthropology we have been tracing through the *Mystical Theology* and *Divine Names*. What are we to make of this?

---

[99] *DN* 11.2 952A; *CD* I 219.20–2.
[100] *DN* 11.2 952B; *CD* I 219.23–4.
[101] *DN* 11.3 952B–C; *CD* I 220.5–11: Πάντα γὰρ ἀγαπᾷ πρὸς ἑαυτὰ εἰρηνεύειν τε καὶ ἡνῶσθαι καὶ ἑαυτῶν καὶ τῶν ἑαυτῶν ἀκίνητα καὶ ἄπτωτα εἶναι. Καὶ ἔστι καὶ τῆς καθ᾽ ἕκαστον ἀμιγοῦς ἰδιότητος ἡ παντελὴς εἰρήνη φυλακτικὴ ταῖς εἰρηνοδώροις αὐτῆς προνοίαις τὰ πάντα ἀστασίαστα καὶ ἀσύμφυρτα πρός τε ἑαυτὰ καὶ πρὸς ἄλληλα διασώζουσα καὶ πάντα ἐν σταθερᾷ καὶ ἀκλίτῳ δυνάμει πρὸς τὴν ἑαυτῶν εἰρήνην καὶ ἀκινησίαν ἱστῶσα.

Christian Schäfer provides the most recent, and most helpful, analysis of these baffling concluding chapters of the *Divine Names*. Schäfer situates this discussion of divine Peace in the broader context of Chapters 8 through 11, whose divine names all have to do with what Schäfer calls "dynamic steadying," one of his many translations of the term μονή, usually rendered "rest."[102] According to Schäfer, μονή has two senses in the *Divine Names*: on the one hand, it refers to "God's unchangeable unity, unchangeable though God is Creator by self-extroversion and conceived of as a dynamic Trinity"; on the other hand, it refers to "a creational μονή, conceived as the στάσις (which is a synonym for it) or the 'stand-still,' which is the creational extroversion of God on different levels and the peace (εἰρήνη) that all Creation has according to and thanks to its inner order."[103] Schäfer highlights this second sense of μονή, namely creatures' "rest" in their place in the order of all creation—hence his penchant for translating μονή as the "halt" or "abiding" of divine procession.[104] As God creates through procession, he fixes creatures in their place such that everything comes to "rest" or "abide" in its allotted rank. This μονή is not a "static calmness" but a "dynamic steadying," "an energetic harmony where things are 'at work' (which ἐν ἐργῷ εἶναι, and hence 'energy' originally mean), for all things aspire to their ontological οἰκείωσις, that is, to 'settle down' in their 'proper being.'"[105] Insofar as creatures abide in their place in the hierarchy of creation, this creaturely rest can be understood as peace, that is, "agreement with oneself (reflexively), with others (horizontally), and ultimately with the 'Peace beyond peace' (vertically)."[106]

---

[102]   Schäfer, *The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 89–121.
[103]   Ibid., 90.
[104]   On his penchant for translating μονή as the "halt," see my review of Schäfer, *The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, in *Journal of Early Christian Studies*.
[105]   Schäfer, *The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 99–100; see also, ibid., 91: "For [Dionysius'] explanation of this dynamic ontological 'steadying,' Dionysius employs two concepts that dominated Ancient metaphysics: First, the proper 'shape' (the corresponding inner ἔργον or form to be accomplished) of every being 'constrains' it (ἀναγκάζει) to its own essential parameters and confines it to a well-defined steadiness corresponding to its essence . . . Second, this steadiness in its proper being—and this is an aspect of the Aristotelian tradition which Neoplatonism absorbed—is not lifeless or static in itself but rather something which is continuously at work intrinsically (an ἐνέργεια)."
[106]   Ibid., 103.

Following Schäfer, we would do well to read the startling refusal of human and divine ecstasy in *DN* 11.2–3 against this broader account of God creating through procession and fixing that creation in its place through "rest" or "dynamic steadying." On this construal, God's peace, the fact that God "remains, through excess of union, super-united," establishes creation's peace, the condition "preserving everything unmoved and unconfused, both as regards themselves and each other."[107] But even as Schäffer helps us understand the broader context and importance of this lone refusal of ecstasy, he fails to square this account with the many more endorsements of ecstasy, human and divine, throughout the *Mystical Theology* and the *Divine Names*. Can this account of creation's "abiding" in its place, creatures being "establish[ed] . . . by a stable and unswerving power," in fact be squared with the ecstasy of creation in its yearning for the creator, the very apophatic anthropology we have been so closely following? In order to answer this question, we must back up to *DN* 4 and consider this lone refusal of ecstasy against the backdrop of the long discussion there on the nature and provenance of evil. Here again, we will have Schäfer as a companion, but as we will see, he fails to appreciate the apophatic anthropology of the *CD* and so, I argue, misapprehends how creation is supposed to respond to its creator.

In addition to the fugue on *erōs* and ecstasy, *DN* 4 contains a long and infamous excursus on the nature and provenance of evil. Dionysius turns his attention to evil when an imaginary interlocutor asks: if God—named the Good and the Beautiful—calls all of creation into existence, then what is evil and where does it come from? Dionysius addresses this question in the following eighteen chapters of *DN* 4, now infamous because much of it is lifted from Proclus' treatise *On the Subsistence of Evils*. In fact, it is Dionysius' rather unabashed cribbing of Proclus that enabled scholars to demonstrate that the *CD* was not authored by Dionysius the Areopagite, but rather by someone writing under his name in the wake of Proclus in the fifth century.[108]

Many scholars have been vexed by this excursus: why, in a chapter praising God as the Good, does Dionysius devote so much space to

---

[107] *DN* 11.2 952B (*CD* I 219.23–4); *DN* 11.3 952C (*CD* I 220.8–9).
[108] See Koch, "Der pseudo-epigraphische Character der dionysischen Schriften"; Stiglmayr, "Der Neuplatoniker Proklos als Vorlage des sogen. Dionysius Areopagita in der Lehre von Übel."

the question of evil? First of all, recall that in the first half of *DN* 4 Dionysius lays out an unrelenting normative ontology, wherein what exists is good, because God as the Good and the Beautiful calls all creatures into existence. This normative ontology has a complex genealogy, befitting the author's pseudonymous identity as a Greek convert to Christianity and disciple of Paul. The conviction that what exists must in fact be good finds corroboration not only in Plato—to whom it is often credited[109]—but also in both testaments of the Bible. Paul (or "deutero"-Paul) is certainly echoing Gen 1:31—"and God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good"— when he writes in 1 Tim 4:4, "everything created by God is good." As a descendent of this complex genealogy, Dionysius is committed to what Schäfer calls "the age-old trilemma of monistic theodicies," namely (1) that there is only one omnipotent creator; (2) that the one creator is good; and (3) that nevertheless there is evil in the world.[110] And so, Schäfer argues, *DN* 4 becomes perforce a diptych on good and evil, for "a consistent monistic theory of worldly reality [a normative ontology whereby existence = good] that does not want to be diminished or endangered by the paradox of evil cries out loud for a discussion of the problem, and all the more in a theo-ontology that defines the entire world as being God's translucent Goodness."[111]

Such an unrelenting normative ontology, however, leaves one little room: the only available response to the question of evil is some sort of privation theory, whereby evil, strictly speaking, does not exist, or at least not on its own, but drains existence from creatures. Dionysius borrows the Proclean version of this privation theory, according to which evil is a *parhypostasis* ($\pi\alpha\rho\upsilon\pi\acute{o}\sigma\tau\alpha\sigma\iota\varsigma$), a term difficult to translate: a sort of "by-product" or "by-being," something that falls short of and so preys on beings, that is to say, proper substances or

---

[109]   See *Republic* 379A ff., 391E, 617E; Schäfer highlights *Rep.* 379A–B: "Is not God of course good in reality and always to be spoken of as such?—Certainly.—But further, no good thing is harmful, is it?—I think not.—Can what is not harmful harm?—By no means.—Can that which does no harm do any evil?—Not that either.—But that which does no evil would not be the cause of any evil either?— How could it?—Once more, is the good beneficent?—Yes.—It is the cause, then, of welfare?—Yes.—Then the good is not the cause of all things, but of things that are well it is the cause: of things that are ill it is blameless.—Entirely so." (Schäfer, *The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 133n1).
[110]   Schäfer, *The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 135. For a broader, comparative treatment of this "trilemma," see Schäfer, *Unde Malum*.
[111]   Schäfer, *The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 134.

hypostases. The prefix *par-*, denoting a departure or declension from being or substance (*hypostasis*), places evil at the edges of normative ontology. As such, evil "is not according to nature," and cannot be described from within the system of normative ontology, other than by negations and metaphors, such as accident, parasite, and disease.[112] And lest we think that our inability to name and specify evil mirrors our inability to do the same with respect to the unknown God, Dionysius insists that

> [Evil is not] non-existing, for the absolutely non-existing will be nothing, unless it should be spoken of as in the Good superessentially. The Good, then, will be fixed far above both the absolutely existing and the non-existing; but the Evil is neither in things existing, nor in things non-existing, but, being further distant from the Good than the non-existing itself, it is alien and more unsubstantial.[113]

Evil is to be distinguished from the divine superfluity of being, beyond being, that to us can appear as nonbeing or nothingness.

As God processes and creates the world, God fixes creatures in their place in the hierarchical order and assigns each of them a proper nature (οἰκεία φύσις). Evil targets these creatures, diverting them from proper place and nature, draining them of their being.[114] More specifically, evil plagues those creatures endowed with freedom, namely angels, demons and humans. Part of the proper nature of rational creatures is to have freedom, of will and of desire, and evil insidiously inserts itself into the fissures opened by the gift of freedom, and pulls creatures away from their proper nature and being. Dionysius never explains why certain creatures were given this freedom, but Schäfer argues that we can infer that, for Dionysius, freedom constitutes the perfection of creation, a gift from God that enables us to be like God now, insofar as God is perfectly free, and to accept our

---

[112] *DN* 4.30 732A (*CD* I 175.16–18); cf. *DN* I 4.32 732C–D (*CD* I 177.7–15). See also Schäfer, *The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 139.

[113] *DN* 4.19 716C–D; *CD* I 163.20–164.3: Καὶ εἰ τὰ ὄντα πάντα ἐκ τἀγαθοῦ καὶ τἀγαθὸν ἐπέκεινα τῶν ὄντων, ἔστι μὲν ἐν ἀγαθῷ καὶ τὸ μὴ ὂν ὄν, τὸ δὲ κακὸν οὔτε ὄν ἐστιν, εἰ δὲ μὴ οὐ πάντη κακόν, οὔτε μὴ ὄν, οὐδὲν γὰρ ἔσται τὸ καθόλου μὴ ὄν, εἰ μὴ ἐν τἀγαθῷ κατὰ τὸ ὑπερούσιον λέγοιτο. Τὸ μὲν οὖν ἀγαθὸν ἔσται καὶ τοῦ ἁπλῶς ὄντος καὶ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος πολλῷ πρότερον ὑπεριδρυμένον. Τὸ δὲ κακὸν οὔτε ἐν τοῖς οὖσιν οὔτε ἐν τοῖς μὴ οὖσιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτοῦ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος μᾶλλον ἀλλότριον ἀπέχον τἀγαθοῦ καὶ ἀνουσιώτερον.

[114] Schäfer, *The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 142–6.

assigned place and nature.[115] Unfortunately, perfection has a parasite, namely evil, which turns creatures away from their creator, which for Dionysius amounts to sin.

Schäfer argues that, for Dionysius, this understanding of sin "has its origin in the free denying of one's own being and the craving to be something else, something alien to one's proper nature."[116] While the premier sin, according to Schäfer, is "the excessively egocentric craving to 'be like God' (Gen 3:5)," a sin is really anything that "endangers and mocks the rational autonomy of a human being's characteristic nature," any "betrayal" of its οἰκεία φύσις.[117] Schäfer cites *DN* 8.6 in support of his claim, where Dionysius says, "A denial of oneself is a falling away from truth. Now truth is a being and a falling away from truth is a falling away from being."[118] Schäfer concludes that sin is equivalent to "self-denial" (ἄρνησις ἑαυτοῦ), "an intentional blindness which renders a sound self-acknowledgement impossible."

Schäfer is certainly right to read the refusal of ecstasy in *DN* 11 and the repudiation of self-denial in *DN* 8 against the broader backdrop of God's "fixing" creatures in their places and natures in the hierarchy of creation and the disorder that the disease of evil introduces into that "dynamic steadying" of all creation. The unfortunate result, however, is that Schäfer conveys the sense that Dionysius would like that all creatures remain as they are, in their place, and to refrain from aspiring to become like God. If this were the case, then the *CD* would seem to offer up two contradictory theological anthropologies: one according to which the self respects its own integrity and another according to which the self seeks to breach that integrity. Can the two be squared?

Dionysius only uses the term "denial" (ἄρνησις) twice, and the related verb "to deny" (ἀρνέομαι) once—all in *DN* 8.6. First he defends Paul's insistence in 2 Tim 2:13 that "God cannot deny himself" against Elymas the magician's (from Acts 13:8) objection that this would seem to limit God.[119] He goes on to say that a denial of self (ἄρνησις ἑαυτοῦ) is a falling away from truth and being. Dionysius' repudiation of the term "denial" here follows the overwhelming witness of the scripture writers, for the verb "deny" in the

---

[115] Schäfer, *The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 147.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid., 148.
[118] *DN* 8.6 893B; *CD* I 203.12–13 (translation my own).
[119] 2 Tim 2:13: ἀρνήσασθαι γὰρ ἑαυτὸν οὐ δύναται.

New Testament is almost always used to designate the denial of Christ.[120] In fact, the only endorsement of denial—specifically the denial of self—comes on the lips of Jesus himself, in Luke 9:23: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself."[121] Despite this lone endorsement, Dionysius follows the preponderance of the scripture writers and makes a distinction between the *denial* of self, which is a rebellious sin against one's assigned place in the hierarchy, and the *apophasis* of the self, which is the contemplative practice that complements the apophasis of the divine names. And so while Schäfer is right that Dionysius repudiates the denial of self, he fails to balance that with the overwhelming endorsement of the apophasis of the self, wherein *erōs* stretches the self to the point that it splits and so renders it open to divine possession.

Schäfer also associates the denial of self with the "excessively egocentric craving 'to be like God' (Gen 3:5)."[122] Here too we need to make an important distinction. It cannot be the case that Dionysius considers the aspiration 'to be like God' a grievous sin, since he explicitly states that the very goal of creation is deification: "The purpose, then, of Hierarchy is the assimilation and union, as far as attainable."[123] Rorem and Luibheid here helpfully translate ἀφομοίωσίς not as "assimilation" but "be[ing] as like as possible" to God, which provides a clearer retort to Schäfer. We need to make a distinction, then, between the sort of deification that creatures pursue by refusing their allotted place and nature in the hierarchy and the sort of deification that creatures solicit precisely by accepting their allotted place and nature and consenting to conduct the divine energy that courses through the hierarchy. For convenience's sake, we might call the former *apotheōsis* and the latter *theopoiēsis*, although Dionysius himself makes no such explicit terminological distinction.[124]

---

[120] See Matt 10:33; Luke 12:9; John 13:38; 2 Tim 2:12–13; Titus 1:16; 2 Pet 2:1; 1 John 2:22–3; Jude 1:4.

[121] Εἴ τις θέλει ὀπίσω μου ἔρχεσθαι, ἀρνησάσθω ἑαυτὸν.

[122] Schäfer, *The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 148.

[123] *CH* 3.2 165A; *CD* II 17.10–11: Σκοπὸς οὖν ἱεραρχίας ἐστὶν ἡ πρὸς θεὸν ὡς ἐφικτὸν ἀφομοίωσίς τε και ἕνωσις αὐτὸν. For other discussions of deification and hierarchies, see *EH* 1.1 372A–B (*CD* II 63.7–64.14), 1.3 373D–376B (*CD* II 66.8–67.7), 2.1 392A (*CD* II 68.16–69.4).

[124] See Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, 38, although I do not want to use the distinction between *apotheōsis* and *theopoiēsis* as a means to draw a distinction between "pagan" and "Christian" understandings of deification, as he does.

Finally, Schäfer translates μονή as "dynamic steadying," which he understands as "an energetic harmony where things are 'at work'" (which ἐν ἐργῷ εἶναι, and hence 'energy' originally mean)." What Schäfer overlooks, however, is that this "energy" (ἐνεργεία) is none other than Christ, who courses through creation as light and love, and renders the hierarchy harmonious. Harmony, however, is not automatic, but hinges on creaturely consent—the gift of freedom where evil attempts to burrow in. Creatures consent not only to their assigned place, but to be *dis*placed at precisely their assigned place. What displaces them is Christ himself, who intrudes into the erotic, ecstatic self and thereby deifies it. Of course this "endangers" what Schäfer calls the "rational autonomy" of the self with a hyper-rational *theo*nomy of the self. Schäfer is therefore not wrong, only incomplete. Yes, we are called to remain as we are, where we are, in our place in the great chain of being. And yet we are to remain there because it is there and only there that we can consent to have the divine energy flow over and through us, to displace us. What Schäfer is tracing out—namely the denial of self as rebellious sin—is in fact the backdrop to the fervent endorsement of the apophasis of the self as the ultimate act of deifying submission to the divine.

CONCLUSION

The apophatic anthropology of the *CD* is not simply one feature among many in this difficult, at times baffling, collection. In fact, the twin practices of apophasis—of God and of self—are what bind the *CD* together. As we have seen, God, "beguiled by goodness," created the world, created the world as a hierarchy in order that there would be an order to that creation and sufficient distance between creatures so that the divine energy might move *through* creation. This divine energy is none other than the "work of God" (*theurgy*, θεουργία), Christ himself, who courses through the hierarchy appearing to creatures as light and love. To each creature is given the choice to consent to this light and love, that is, to allow it to pass *through* in two directions, as the energy processes downward and returns upward to the neighboring ranks, and to rest *in* the creature. To all of creation is given this same choice, but humans access this energy through the rites of the church. When we consent to have Christ

pass through us—as we do once at baptism and regularly at the Eucharist—we seek to be what Paul calls "co-workers with God" (συνεργοὶ θεοῦ). This "cooperation" (συνεργία) with the work of God is for Dionysius none other than divinization, the very goal of hierarchy. We cooperate first by consenting to be displaced by Christ, and we thereby look to lead a split existence, remaining in our rank in the hierarchy of creation and yet suffering union with the very source of that creation.

To solicit this union, however, we must do more than consent to Christ in the context of a certain church rite. Or, put another way, truly to consent to Christ requires a very demanding regimen, in which we must sacrifice God and self on the altar. The regimen demands that we perpetually contemplate the divine names, then negate them, and negate those negations in turn. The regimen also demands that we strip ourselves as bare as we strip God, shedding our most cherished faculties and identities. What drives this endless apophasis of God and self is love (ἔρως = ἀγάπη), a yearning for the divine beloved that will accept no intermediaries. This unrelenting love eventually carries us outside ourselves such that we suffer ecstasy, responding to the ecstasy that God continually enjoys in calling creation back to its source. Our ecstasy solicits union with the unknown and ecstatic God, and we come to know this God through unknowing (ἀγνωσία).

The apophasis of the self is therefore woven throughout the *CD*. With this broad picture in place, then, we can finally consider why Dionysius includes in his definition of hierarchy the claim that hierarchy is "a state of understanding" (ἐπιστήμη). In Chapter One, I argued that Dionysius' definition of hierarchy as a "sacred order" (τάξις ἱερὰ) through which courses an "activity" or "energy" (ἐνέργεια) is an elaborate reinterpretation of Paul's notion of the "body of Christ" (σῶμα χριστοῦ) as the divinely sanctioned and ordered arrangement through which "love" (ἀγάπη) should move. But how is hierarchy also a "state of understanding"? First of all, hierarchy permits creatures to suffer a kind of knowledge of the unknown God, a knowledge that is best understood as "unknowing." And we solicit this unknowing when we love God to the point that we split, that we suffer ecstasy. The word Dionysius uses here for "state of understanding," ἐπιστήμη, derives from the verb ἐπίσταμαι, literally

"I stand upon."[125] Likewise ἐκστάσις ("ecstasy") derives from ἐξίστημι, literally "I stand outside." As the wordplay attests, ecstasy (ἐκστάσις) delivers understanding (ἐπιστήμη). God understands hierarchical creation because God once stood outside of himself to create it and now stands outside of himself calling it back. We creatures, established in our place in the hierarchy, are offered the possibility of understanding—the unknowing/knowledge of God—if we stand outside ourselves and heed the call of the creator. The "state of understanding" that Dionysius includes in his definition of hierarchy, then, is the knowledge that creator and creature will have of one another when there is what René Roques calls a "symmetry of ecstasies."[126]

---

[125] Boisacq, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*, 268: "le sens premier fut 'se placer dans l'attitude requise pour' . . . ags. *forstanden* (angl. to understand), 'comprendre.'" Even the "under" in the English "understanding," it seems, refers not to a standing "beneath," but to a standing "among" or "between": "O.E. *understandan* 'comprehend, grasp the idea of,' probably lit. 'stand in the midst of,' from *under* + *standan* 'to stand' (see stand). If this is the meaning, the under is not the usual word meaning 'beneath,' but from O.E. *under*, from PIE **nter-* 'between, among' (cf. Skt. *antar* 'among, between,' L. *inter* 'between, among,' Gk. *entera* 'intestines;' see *inter-*). But the exact notion is unclear. Perhaps the ult. sense is 'be close to,' cf. Gk. *epistamai* 'I know how, I know,' lit. 'I stand upon.' Similar formations are found in O.Fris. (*understonda*), M.Dan. (*understande*), while other Gmc. languages use compounds meaning 'stand before' (cf. Ger. *verstehen*, represented in O.E. by *forstanden*). For this concept, most I.E. languages use fig. extensions of compounds that lit. mean 'put together,' or 'separate,' or 'take, grasp.'" (understand. Dictionary.com. Online Etymology Dictionary. Douglas Harper, Historian). http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/understand (accessed: July 18, 2011).

[126] Roques, "Symbolisme et théologie negative chez le Pseudo-Denys," 112; cited in Golitzin, "'Suddenly, Christ': The Place of Negative Theology in the Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagites," 13, 30n28.

Conclusion

The Pseudonym, Revisited

What remains is to gather the threads of this inquiry into the sense and significance of the pseudonym. I will first review some of the work of the previous chapters and offer again two interpretations of the pseudonym. On the basis of these two interpretations, I will then hazard a final hypothesis regarding the ultimate aim of this author's pseudonymous enterprise.

I.

The first important valence of the pseudonym has to do with the fact that the figure of Dionysius the Areopagite was a convert, poised between the pagan wisdom of Athens and the revelation of God in Christ, as delivered to him by Paul. In Chapter One, I commended the promising lead laid down by Andrew Louth and Christian Schäfer, both of whom argue that by assuming the identity of Paul's famous Athenian convert, the author of the *CD* is signaling some rapprochement between pagan wisdom and the revelation of God in Christ. According to Louth, just as the learned pagan judge Dionysius the Areopagite was converted by Paul's speech to the Areopagus, so too pagan wisdom can be converted to the revelation of Christ. The author of the *CD* positions himself as a disciple of Paul because Paul's speech to the Areopagus was the inaugural rapprochement between an incipient pagan faith in "the unknown god" and Christian revelation. More recently, Schäfer has developed Louth's insights. Schäfer insists that "[t]he pseudonym of 'Dionysius the Areopagite'

is to be taken as a programmatic key for the understanding of his writings . . . [and that] the key to a proper interpretation of the *CD* is the methodical acceptance of the literary fiction of reading an author who—Athenian born and raised in the pagan culture of Christ's times—finds himself faced with early Christian doctrine."[1] Schäfer is the first to read the *CD* against the backdrop of Paul's speech to the Areopagus and Rom 1:20–5. He argues that the author's pseudonym suggests that he is "doing the same thing as the Apostle did"[2]: just as Paul appropriated the tradition of pagan wisdom—preeminently the altar "to the unknown god" in Acts 17:23—in order to show the Athenians that they already possessed an incipient faith that needed only the corrective of Christian revelation, so too Dionysius "wants us to understand that Greek philosophy was on the correct path in its understanding of the Divine, but it obviously needed the eye-opening 'superaddition' or 'grace' (if these are the right words) of Christian revelation in order to be released from its ultimate speechlessness and residual insecurity concerning the last Cause."[3] Thus, according to Schäfer, Dionysius takes on the name of Paul's convert from Athens precisely in order to "baptize" pagan wisdom once again into a new life in Christ.[4]

In Chapter Four, I built on the foundations that Louth and Schäfer laid down, offering a close reading of Paul's speech to the Areopagus (Acts 17) with an eye to understanding how the author of the *CD* figures the relationship between pagan wisdom and Christian revelation. Paul appeals to the Athenians' incipient faith in "an unknown God" and develops this incipient faith by drawing on their own philosophical and theological vocabulary, all to make the case that the God whom they already "unknowingly" ($\dot{\alpha}\gamma\nuoo\hat{\upsilon}\nu\tau\epsilon s$) worship is none other than the God of the resurrected Christ, who will soon judge the Athenians' willful ignorance. Paul thereby succeeds in establishing a new order: the incipient faith and pagan wisdom of the Athenians is absorbed into and subordinated to the new dispensation, Christ, the revelation of the unknown God. The author of the *CD*, I argue, finds in this speech a template for absorbing and subordinating the pagan wisdom of fifth-century Athens, namely the riches of late Neoplatonism. This is corroborated in Dionysius' *Letter 7*, where he looks to Paul—specifically Rom 1—to explain how

---

[1] Schäfer, *The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 164.
[2] Ibid., 165.   [3] Ibid., 25.   [4] Ibid., 7.

he sees himself placed between the pagan wisdom of his patrimony and the revelation of Christ delivered by his teacher Paul. Dionysius says that his fellow Greeks have squandered their "knowledge of beings" or "philosophy"—which knowledge would have been sufficient for them to be "uplifted" to the creator. Dionysius insists that it is not he but his fellow Greeks who must answer to God for straying from this ancient revelation, their true patrimony. But some residue of that ancient revelation shines through, despite the accretion of human foolishness masquerading as wisdom. Some of the pagan luminaries—Plotinus, Iamblichus, Proclus—bear uneven witness to the divine philosophy. And so Dionysius can sample deeply and widely from these luminaries, not by name of course, but *very* loosely veiled. These luminaries do not compromise his commitment to Christ; rather the light of Christ corrects and completes their muddied brilliance, struggling to shine through. As von Balthasar remarks, "Denys therefore does not want to borrow, but rather to return what has been borrowed to its true owner."[5] The *CD* is thereby a recapitulation of Paul's speech to the Areopagus, another appeal to the incipient faith of pagan wisdom, a plaintive call: return home from self-imposed exile. In this way, I argue, the allegory best suited to this situation is that of the prodigal son: pagan wisdom is the lost son whom the father welcomes home, despite the disfiguring filth from years of toil in exile.

II.

In Chapter Two I highlighted one approach to pseudepigrapha, an approach labeled "religious" or "psychological," which suggests that an pseudonymous author felt a special kinship with the ancient sage or seer under whose name he wrote, and that pseudonymous writing served to collapse or "telescope" the past and the present, such that the present author and the past luminary could achieve a kind of contemporaneity. In Chapter Two I also showed how the late antique Christian East witnesses an understanding of time that mirrors what the "religious" or "psychological" approach imputes to ancient

---

[5] Von Balthasar, "Denys," 208.

pseudepigraphers. In the imagination of late antique Christians, the apostolic period was not past; the present was always porous with that past. A host of scholars have remarked on this peculiar understanding of time and its manifestations, chiefly the manner in which the apostolic saints are understood to be "living dead" who haunt the present world.[6] The scholarly consensus here is that in the late antique Christian imagination the distance between the historical past and the present can be collapsed or "telescoped," such that apostolic past and the present can be rendered somehow contemporary.

In order to appreciate the further significance of the pseudonym for the author of the *CD*, however, I paired this understanding of time with a particular understanding of writing. In *Writing and Holiness*, Derek Krueger argues that the late antique Christian East witnesses the emergence of a new understanding of the practice of writing: in Krueger's words, writing becomes a sort of "performative act, a bodily practice . . . [that was] figured as an extension of the authors' virtuous ascetic practice . . . [and] . . . exemplified emerging Christian practices of asceticism, devotion, pilgrimage, prayer, oblation, liturgy, and sacrifice."[7] Krueger argues that for these late antique authors writing becomes a form of devotion itself, whose aim—as is the case with any *askesis*—is a "reconstituted self."[8]

Two case studies enabled us to appreciate the relationship between these late antique understandings of time and writing. In the 31st miracle of the *Life and Miracles of Thekla*, Thekla appears to the anonymous author as he is trying to write down another one of her miracles. She reads what he has written and indicates that she is pleased. The saintly visitation and intervention renews the author's desire to write, which had been flagging. The practice of writing her life and collecting her miracles becomes part of the author's devotion

---

[6] See Mango, "Saints," 263; see also Constas, "'To Sleep, Perchance to Dream': The Middle State of Souls in Patristic and Byzantine Literature"; idem, "An Apology for the Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity: Eustratius the Presbyter of Constantinople, *On the State of Souls after Death* (CPG 7522)"; Bremmer, *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul*. For the collapsibility of historical time, see Baynes, "The Hellenistic Civilization and East Rome"; Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, 10; Rapp, "Byzantine Hagiographers as Antiquarians, Seventh to Tenth Centuries"; Johnson, "Apocrypha and the Literary Past in Late Antiquity"; idem, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla*, 104–9; idem, "Wandering with the Apostles: Apocryphal Tradition and Travel Literature in Late Antiquity"; Williams, *Authorised Lives*, 15, 19–20, 225, 227, 232, 233.

[7] Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 10, 9.

[8] Ibid., 11.

to the saint, a devotion that summons her into the present. In other words, the very practice of writing the *LM* is for our author a devotional exercise that aims to refashion his own self by becoming a contemporary disciple of a living saint. We witness much the same with John Chrysostom: by reading, writing, and preaching on the life and letters of Paul, Chrysostom comes to think that the apostle is literally present in his room, privately and publicly. And not just Chrystosom: others claim to have witnessed Paul leaning over John's shoulder as he wrote, whispering in his ear.[9] Chrysostom speaks of how Paul would "take possession" of him as he wrote, such that their voices would merge.[10]

In the conclusion to Chapter Two, I suggested that we interpret the *CD* in light of both the "religious"/ "psychological" approach to pseudonymous writing and the peculiar understanding of time and writing in the late antique Christian East. In other words, we should understand this pseudonymous endeavor as resting on the conviction that historical time can be collapsed such that the apostolic past and the present enjoy "contemporaneity," and that writing is a means by which to collapse that distance, such that the author in the present comes to understand himself as an extension of the personality of the ancient authority. One difference between the two case studies and the *CD* is that both Chrysostom and the author of the *LM* summon their saints into the present, that is, they ask Paul and Thekla to travel forward in time; whereas the author of the *CD*, on the other hand, transports himself into the past, that is, he asks the apostles and their disciples to receive him into their communion. Another difference is that while Chrysostom invites *Paul* to take up residence in himself, the anonymous author of the *LM* and the pseudonymous author of the *CD* invite not Paul but one of his disciples: Thekla and Dionysius the Areopagite respectively. But these differences are by no means insurmountable, for if the present and the past are porous and can be collapsed, then both directions of time travel are warranted. And if Paul has Christ in him (Gal 2:20), and admonishes his disciples to "be imitators of me, just as I am of Christ" (Gal 4:16), then when Chrysostom invites Paul to inhabit his own self, or when the author of the *LM* becomes a disciple of Thekla, or when our author makes of himself an extension of Dionysius the Areopagite, what they

---

[9] *Vita Joh. Chrys.* ch. 27, 142–8. Cited in Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 35.
[10] *hom. in Is.* 45:7 3 [56.146]. Cited in Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 69.

are all ultimately soliciting is the indwelling of Christ himself. In other words, the fact that Christ broke into the "I" of Paul guarantees the chain of *imitatio Christi*, guarantees that what we are imitating in Paul or his disciples is in fact Christ himself.

As I suggested in Chapter One, von Balthasar seems to have anticipated something of my interpretation in a handful of cryptic remarks. For von Balthasar, the author of the *CD* is no forger or impostor, but suffers an "identification" with Paul's disciple, Dionysius the Areopagite: "The identification of his task with a situation in space and time immediately next to John and Paul clearly corresponds for him to a *necessity* which, had he not heeded it, would have meant a rank insincerity and failure to respond to truth."[11] The necessary truth to which our author submits is a "mystical relationship" between himself and Dionysius.[12] Just as apocalyptic pseudepigraphers write under the names of ancient seers, "so a monk, dying to the world, assumes the name of a saint."[13] No impostor, then, the author can only be sincere by heeding the call of that saint: "One does not *see* who Denys *is*, if one cannot see this identification as a context for his veracity."[14] According to von Balthasar, then, the author of the *CD* is truly himself only by being also someone else, is true to himself only by acceding to a higher truth. That higher truth is of course Christ, the Christ who lives in Paul and, by extension, in Dionysius, the saint with whom he has a "mystical relationship," with whom he cannot but suffer "identification."

III.

As we have seen, then, the author of the *CD* literally assumes the identity of the disciple Dionysius. He writes letters addressed to other apostles and disciples; he transports himself into this apostolic community, to the point that he is present at the Dormition of Mary;[15] he counsels John the Evangelist in exile on Patmos.[16] And yet all the while the author is also in the sixth century: quoting—sometimes at great length—from Proclus' works, treading dangerously close to contemporary Christological controversies, describing

---

[11] Von Balthasar, "Denys," 149 (my emphasis).   [12] Ibid., 151.
[13] Ibid.   [14] Ibid., 149.   [15] *DN* 3.2.   [16] *Ep*. 10.

the ceremonials of Byzantine churches rather than the humbler home churches of the New Testament. The author is, in his own words, "neither himself nor someone else," neither the monk from Syria who some scholars believe him to be nor the Athenian judge under whose name he writes.[17] Like the ecstatic God with whom he seeks to suffer union, as a writer he simultaneously remains where he is and stretches outside himself.

Recall that in Chapter Five, I called attention to a passage from *On the Migration of Abraham*, where Philo confesses that sometimes, while writing, he suffers a sudden shift, from empty to full, "so that under the impact of divine possession I had been filled with corybantic frenzy and become ignorant ($\dot{\alpha}\gamma\nu o\epsilon\hat{\imath}\nu$) of everything, place, people present, myself, what was said and what was written."[18] For Dionysius, the crucial phrase from Philo is of course $\dot{\alpha}\gamma\nu o\epsilon\hat{\imath}\nu\ldots\dot{\epsilon}\mu\alpha\nu\tau\dot{o}\nu$, "*I unknow myself.*" Philo offers Dionysius a witness not only to the fact that writing can solicit "divine possession"—wherein the empty self is suddenly made full—but also that this possession is coincident with the descent of "unknowing," including the unknowing of oneself. Pursuing $\dot{\alpha}\gamma\nu\omega\sigma\dot{\iota}\alpha$, of course, is precisely what Dionysius thinks Paul calls the Athenians to do in Acts 17: "What you therefore worship *through unknowing* ($\dot{\alpha}\gamma\nu oo\hat{\nu}\nu\tau\epsilon\varsigma$)"—namely the "unknown God"—"this I proclaim to you."

The *CD* is a single, coherent "mystical theology"—often called "apophatic" as a *synecdoche*—the entire aim of which is "unknowing." To "unknow" the unknown God, one must contravene the Greek sages and "unknow oneself." The *CD* spells out two inseparable paths of unknowing God and self. The stage is set in church, where we assent to be ecstatically displaced by the light and love of Christ, consenting to have that light and love move through us and rest in us—this Dionysius calls "cooperation" ($\sigma\nu\nu\epsilon\rho\gamma\dot{\iota}\alpha$) with God. Within the hierarchy that mediates this light and love, Dionysius offers a further contemplative practice: the perpetual affirmation and negation of the divine names, a prayerful meditation that follows divine procession and return, transcendence and immanence, all with the hope of soliciting the descent of an "unknowing union" with the unknown God. Again, von Balthasar is helpful: he appreciates how

---

[17] The phrase "neither himself nor someone else" is used to describe Moses as he "plunges into the truly mysterious darkness of unknowing" in *MT* 1.3. 1001A; *CD* II 144.13.

[18] *De migratione*, 35.

the aim of this "mysticism" is that the Christian subject "will vanish as a person . . . [live] purely as a divine task, . . . [and] be absorbed . . . in *taxis* and function, so that in this way the divine light, though ecclesially transmitted, is received and passed on as immediately (*amesōs*) and transparently as possible."[19] To conduct the divine light, to become a divine task (that is, a "co-worker with God," a συνεργὸς θεοῦ), to be absorbed into that work (the "work of God" or θεουργία)—this is the path to "unknowing" that the *CH* and *EH* commend. To affirm and negate the divine names, in perpetuity, in order to solicit union with the unknown God—this is the path to "unknowing" that the *DN* and *MT* commend (often called "apophatic" although it is no less "kataphatic"). The two paths form a sort of double helix that together govern our loving movements in pursuit of the God who was first moved by love for us.

I have come then to my final hypothesis regarding the sense and significance of the pseudonym. I suggest that the very practice of writing pseudonymously is itself a third path of unknowing God and self. I submit that for Dionysius the very practice of writing under a pseudonym is no mere ploy for sub-apostolic authority and thereby a wider readership, but is in fact itself an ecstatic devotional practice in the service of the apophasis of the self, and thereby of soliciting deifying union with the unknown God. Pseudonymous writing renders the self "neither [entirely] oneself nor [entirely] someone else," that is to say, somehow both oneself and someone else. In the case of the author of the *CD*, he is both himself, an anonymous writer from the early sixth century, and also someone else, Dionysius the Areopagite. Pseudonymous writing is for our author a practice that stretches the self to the point that it splits, renders the self unsaid, that is, unseated from its knowing center, unknown to itself and so better placed, because displaced, to suffer union with "Him, Who has placed darkness as His hiding-place."[20] But this is no arbitrary doubling; the other with whom the self must now share its space is a disciple of Paul, Dionysius the Areopagite, a disciple who follows Paul's mimetic imperative: "be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1). And Paul, by his own admission in Gal 2:20, is already doubled: he is both Paul *and* Christ. Only through the apophasis, but not the denial, of the single self—what Paul calls the "I"—only

---

[19] Von Balthasar, "Denys," 149.   [20] *MT* 1.2 1000A; *CD* I 142.14–15.

through unknowing oneself, can one clear (ἀφαιρέω) space in the self for the indwelling of the other. In short, our pseudonymous author offers an account of what it is to be properly human in relation to God—namely, no longer an "I," neither yourself nor someone else, because you are now both yourself *and* Christ. And, *in the very telling*, he performs an exercise aiming to render his own self cleft open, split, doubled, and thereby deified.

This page intentionally left blank

Bibliography

Primary Sources

A. Pseudo-Dionysius
1. Greek Text of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*
Suchla, Beate Regina. *Corpus Dionysiacum I.* Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990.
Heil, Günter and Adolf Martin Ritter. *Corpus Dionysiacum II.* Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991.

2. English Translations of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*
Luibheid, Colm and Paul Rorem, trans. *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works.* New York: Paulist Press, 1987.
Parker, John H. trans. *The Complete Works of Dionysius the Areopagite.* London: James Parker & Co., 1897–9; reprint Merrick, NY: Richwood Publishing Co., 1976.

B. Others
Anonymous, *The Acts of Paul and Thekla.*
Ehrman, Bart. *Lost Scriptures.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
Hennecke, E. and W. Schneemelcher, eds. *New Testament Apocrypha*, by R.M. Wilson. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1992.

Anonymous, *The Life and Miracles of Saint Thekla.*
Dagron, Gilbert, ed. and trans. *Vie et miracles de sainte Thècle: texte grec, traduction, et commentaire.* Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1978.

Iamblichus
Clarke, Emma C., John Dillon, and Jackson P. Hershbell, eds. and trans. *Iamblichus: De mysteriis.* Leiden: Brill, 2004.
Dillon, John, ed. and trans. *Iamblichi Chalcidensis in Platonis Dialogos Commentariorum Fragmenta.* Leiden: Brill, 1973.

Ignatius of Antioch
Ehrman, Bart. *Apostolic Fathers I.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003.

John Chrysostom
Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles, translated by J. Walker, T. Sheppard, and H. Browne and revised by G.B. Stevens, 1–328. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 11. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977–86.
Homilies on the Pauline Epistles, translated by J.B. Morris and W.H. Simcox, and revised by G. B. Stevens (Romans); T.W. Chambers (1, 2 Corinthians);

Oxford translation revised by G. Alexander (Galatians, Ephesians), J. Broadus (Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians), Philip Schaff (Timothy, Titus, Philemon). *NPNF* 11:338–13:557.

Homilies on the Epistle to the Hebrews, translated by F. Gardiner. *NPNF* 14:363–522.

De laudibus sancti Pauli 1–7. In Margaret Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet: John Chrysostom and the Art of Pauline Interpretation*, translated by idem, 442–87. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000.

John of Scythopolis

Scholia. In Paul Rorem and John Lamoureaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus: Annotating the Areopagite*, 144–263. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.

Philo of Alexandria

Colson, F.C. and G.H. Whitaker, trans. *Philo: On the Confusion of Tongues, On the Migration of Abraham, Who is the Heir of Divine Things?, On Mating with the Preliminary Studies*. LCL 261. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932.

Winston, David, trans. *Philo of Alexandria*. Classics of Western Spirituality. New York: Paulist Press, 1981.

Plato

Cooper, John M., ed. *Plato: The Complete Works*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997.

Fowler, Harold North, trans. *Plato I: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*. LCL 36. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914.

Plotinus

Armstrong, A.H., trans. *Enneads*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989–.

Porphyry

Sodano, Angelo R., ed. and trans. *Porfirio: Letter ad Anebo*. Naples: L'Arte Tipografica, 1958.

Proclus

Dodds, E.R., ed. and trans. Proclus. *The Elements of Theology*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963, revised 1992.

Lang, Helen S. and A.D. Macro, trans. Proclus. *On the Eternity of the World*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

Morrow, Glenn R. and John Dillon, trans. *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987.

Opsomer, Jan and Carlos Steel, trans. Proclus. *On the Existence of Evils*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993.

Saffrey, H.D. and L.G. Westernik, ed. and trans. Proclus. *Théologie platonicienne*. Paris: Belles lettres, 2003.

Taylor, Thomas, trans. Proclus. *The Platonic Theology*. Kew Gardens, NY: Selene Books, 1985–6.

Pseudo-Clement (*1 Clement*)

Ehrman, Bart. *Apostolic Fathers I*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003.

Sergius of Reshaina

Sherwood, P. "Sergius of Reshaina and the Syriac Versions of the Pseudo-Dionysius." *Sacris Erudiri* (1952): 174–84.

——. "Mimro de Serge de Rešayna sur la vie spirituelle." *L'Orient syrien* 5 (1960): 433–57 and 6 (1961): 95–115, 121–56.

Secondary Sources

Aland, Kurt. "The Problem of Anonymity and Pseudonymity in Christian Literature of the First Two Centuries." *Journal of Theological Studies* 12 (1961): 39–49.

Andia, Ysabel de. *Henosis: l'union à Dieu chez Denys l'Aréopagite*. Leiden: Brill, 1996.

——. *Denys l'Aréopagite et sa postérité en orient et en occident*. Paris: Institute d'études augustiniennes, 1997.

——. *Denys l'Aréopagite: tradition et métamorphoses*. Paris: J. Vrin, 2006.

Armstrong, A.H. *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1967.

——. "Negative Theology, Myth, and Incarnation." In *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, edited by Dominic O'Meara, 213–22, 290–2. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1982.

——. *Plotinian and Christian Studies*. London: Variorum, 1979.

Armstrong, A.H. and Pieter Willem van der Horst, eds. *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality: Egyptian, Greek, Roman*. New York: Crossroad, 1986.

Arthur, Rosemary A. "A Sixth Century Origenist: Stephen bar Sudhaili and his Relationship with Pseudo-Dionysius." *Studia Patristica* 35 (2001): 369–73.

——. *Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008.

Babcock, W.S., ed. *Paul and the Legacies of Paul*. Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1990.

Balthasar, Hans Urs von. "Das Scholienwerk des Johannes von Skythopolis," *Scholastik* 15 (1940): 16–39. English translation: Brian E. Daley. "The Problem of the Scholia to Pseudo-Dionysius." In Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor*, 359–87. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003.

Balthasar, Hans Urs von. "Denys." In idem, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 2, 144–210. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1984.

Barr, James. *Biblical Words for Time*. Naperville: Allenson, 1962.

Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author." In idem, *Image / Music / Text*, edited and translated by Stephen Heath, 142–8. New York: Hill & Wang, 1977.

Baum, Armin Daniel. *Pseudepigraphie und literarische Fälschung im frühen Christentum*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001.

Baynes, Norman. "The Hellenistic Civilization and East Rome." In idem, *Byzantine Studies and other Essays*, 1–23. London: Athlone Press, 1955.

Bebis, George S. "*The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* of Dionysius the Areopagite: A Liturgical Interpretation." *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 19 (1974): 159–75.

Beierwaltes, W. "ἐξαίφνης oder die Paradoxie des Augenblicks." *PJ* LXXIV (1966/67): 271–82.

——. "The Love of Beauty and the Love of God." In *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality: Egyptian, Greek, Roman*, edited by A.H. Armstrong, 293–313. New York: Crossroad, 1986.

——. *Platonismus in Christentum*. Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 1998.

Bernard, C.A. "Les Formes de la théologie chez le pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite." *Gregorianum* 59 (1978). 39–69.

——. "La Doctrine mystique de Denys l'Aréopagite." *Gregorianum* 68 (1987): 523–66.

Beulay, Robert. *La Lumière sans forme: introduction à l'étude de la mystique chrétienne syro-orientale*. Chevetogne: Éditions de Chevetogne, 1980.

Blumenthal, H.J. "529 and its Sequel: What Happened to the Academy?" *Byzantion* 48 (1978): 369–85.

Blumenthal, H.J. and G. Clark, eds. *The Divine Iamblichus: Philosopher and Man of Gods*. London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993.

Boisacq, Émile. *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*. Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1916.

Boman, Thorleif. *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*. London: SCM Press, 1960.

Bouyer, Louis. *The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers*. London: Burns & Oates, 1968.

——. "Mysticism: An Essay on the History of the Word." In *Understanding Mysticism*, edited by Richard Woods, 42–55. Garden City, NJ: Doubleday Image Books, 1980.

——. *Mysterion: du mystère à la mystique*. Paris: O.E.I.L., 1986. English translation: Illtyd Trethowan. *The Christian Mystery: From Pagan Myth to Christian Mysticism*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989.

Bovon, François. *Studies in Early Christianity*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003.

——. "Byzantine Witnesses for the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles." In *The Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, edited by François Bovon, Ann Graham Brock, and Christopher R. Matthews, 87–98. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.

Brakke, David, Michael L. Satlow, and Steven Weitzman, eds. *Religion and the Self in Antiquity*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005.

Bremmer, Jan. *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul*. Princeton: Bollingen, 1983.

Briquel-Chatonnet, Françoise. *Manuscrits syriaques: de la Bibliothèque nationale de France (nos 356–435 entrés depuis 1911), de la Bibliothèque Méjanes d'Aix-en- Provence, de la Bibliothèque municipale de Lyon et de la Bibliothèque nationale et universitaire de Strasbourg: catalogue*. Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1997.

Brock, Sebastian. *A Brief Outline of Syriac Literature*. Kottayam: St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 1997.

——. *Catalogue of Syriac Fragments (New Finds) in the Library of the Monastery of Saint Catherine, Mount Sinai*. Athens: St. Catherine's Monastery-Mount Sinai Foundation, 1995.

Brockington, L.H. "The Problem of Pseudonymity." *Journal of Theological Studies* 4 (1953): 15–22.

Brons, Bernhard. *Gott und die Seienden: Untersuchungen zum Verhältnis von Neuplatonischer Metaphysik und christlicher Tradition bei Dionysius Areopagita*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976.

——. "Pronoia und das Verhältnis von Metaphysik und Geschichte bei Dionysius Areopagita." *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 24 (1977): 165–80.

——. *Sekundäre Textpartien im Corpus Pseudo-Dionysiacum? Literarkritische Beobachtungen zu ausgewählten Textstellen*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975.

Brox, Norbert. *Falsche Verfesserangaben: zur Erklärung der frühchristlichen Pseudepigraphie*. Stuttgart: KBW Verlag, 1975.

——. *Pseudepigraphie in der heidnischen und jüdisch-christlichen Antike*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1977.

Cameron, Averil. "Iamblichus at Athens." *Athenaeum* 45 (1967): 143–53.

——. "The Last Days of the Academy at Athens." *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philosophical Society* 195 (1969): 7–29.

Canart, P. "En marge de la question aréopagite: la letter IX de Denys à Apollophane." *Byzantion* 41 (1971): 18–27.

Capelle, Bernard. "L'Introduction du symbole à la messe." In *Mélanges Joseph de Ghellinck,* vol. ii, 1003–7. Gembloux: J. Duculot, 1951.

Capelle, Bernard. "Alcuin et l'histoire du symbole de la messe." *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 6 (1934): 258–9.

Carabine, Deirdre. "Apophasis East and West." *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 55 (1988): 5–29.

Carrol, William J. "Unity, Participation and Wholes in a Key Text of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite's *Divine Names*." *The New Scholasticism* 57 (1983): 253–62.

——. "Participation and Infinity in Dionysius the Areopagite." *Patristic and Byzantine Review* 2 (1983): 54–64.

Cavallo, Guglielmo, ed. *The Byzantines*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Chevalier, Philippe. *Dionysiaca; recueil donnant l'ensemble des traductions latines des ouvrages attribués au Denys de l'aréopage, et synopse marquant la valeur de citations presque innombrables allant seules depuis trop longtemps*. Paris: Desclée, 1937–49.

——. *Jésus-Christ dans les oeuvres de pseudo-Aréopagite*. Paris: Libr. Plon, 1951.

Cleary, John C., ed. *Traditions of Platonism*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004.

Clift, Evelyn Holst. *Latin Pseudepigrapa: A Study in Literary Attributions*. Baltimore: J.H. Furst Co., 1945.

Coakley, Sarah and Charles M. Stang, eds. *Re-thinking Dionysius the Areopagite*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

Constas, Nicholas. "'To Sleep, Perchance to Dream': The Middle State of Souls in Patristic and Byzantine Literature." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 55 (2001): 91–124.

——. "An Apology for the Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity: Eustratius the Presbyter of Constantinople, *On the State of Souls after Death* (CPG 7522)." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10.2 (2002): 267–85.

Corbin, Michel. "Négation et transcendance dans l'oeuvre de Denys." *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 69 (1985): 41–76.

Corrigan, Kevin. "'Solitary' Mysticism in Plotinus, Proclus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Pseudo-Dionysius." *Journal of Religion* 76 (1996): 28–42.

Cumont, Franz. *Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism*. Chicago: Open Court, 1911.

Dagron, Gilbert. "L'auteur des 'Actes' et des 'Miracles' de Sainte Thècle. *Analecta Bollandiana* 92 (1974): 5–11.

Dassmann, Ernst. *Paulus in frühchristlicher Frömmigkeit und Kunst*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1982.

Davies, Oliver and Denys Turner, eds. *Silence and the Word: Negative Theology and Incarnation* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Davis, Stephen J. *The Cult of Saint Thekla: A Tradition of Women's Piety in Late Antiquity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Dawes, Elizabeth and Norman Baynes, trans. *Three Byzantine Saints: Contemporary Biographies*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996.

Des Places, Édouard. "Denys l'Aréopagite et les Oracles chaldaiques." *Freiburger Zetischrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 24 (1977): 187–90.

——. "La Théologie négative de Pseudo-Denys, ses antécédents platoniciens et son influence au seuil du moyen âge." *Studia Patristica* 17 (1987): 81–92.

De Vogel, C.J. "Amor quo caelum regitur." *Vivarium* 1 (1963): 67–82.

——. "Greek Cosmic Love and the Christian Love of God. Boethius, Dionysius the Areopagite, and the author of the Fourth Gospel." *Vigiliae Christianae* 35 (1981): 57–81.

Debelius, Martin. *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*. New York: Scribner's, 1956.

Di Berardino, Angelo, ed. *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Dillon, John. "The Magical Powers of Names in Origen and Later Neoplatonism." In *Origeniana tertia*, edited by Richard Hanson and Henri Crouzel, 203–16. Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1985.

——. *The Middle Platonists*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996.

Dodds, E.R. "The *Parmenides* of Plato and the Origin of the Neoplatonic One." *Classical Quarterly* 22 (1928): 129–42.

——. "Theurgy and its Relationship to Neoplatonism," *Journal of Roman Studies* 37 (1947): 55–69.

——. *The Greeks and the Irrational*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951.

——. *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965.

Duclow, D.F. "Pseudo-Dionysius, John Scotus Eriugena, Nicholas of Cusa: An Approach to the Hermeneutics of the Divine Names." *International Philosophical Quarterly* 12 (1972): 260–78.

Eliot, T.S. "Tradition and the Individual Talent." In *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, 37–44. London: Faber, 1975.

Esbroeck, M. van. "Peter the Iberian and Dionysius Areopagita: Honigmann's Thesis Revisited." *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 59 (1993): 217–27.

Evans, D.B., "Leontius of Byzantium and Dionysius the Areopagite." *Études byzantines* 7 (1980): 1–34.

Finamore, John. *Iamblichus and the Theory of the Vehicle of the Soul*. Chicago: Scholars Press, 1985.

Finan, Thomas and Vincent Twomey, eds. *The Relationship Between Neoplatonism and Christianity.* Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1992.

Fitzmyer, Joseph A. *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 1998.

Florovsky, Georges. *The Byzantine Ascetic and Spiritual Fathers*. Belmont, MA: Notable & Academic Books, 1987.

Franke, William, ed. *On What Cannot Be Said: Apophatic Discourses in Philosophy, Religion, Literature and the Arts. Vol. 1: Classic Formulations*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.

Frend, W.H.C. *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972.

Fritz, Kurt von, ed. *Pseudepigrapha*. Vandœuvres-Geneva, Fondation Hardt; Dépositaire pour la Suisse: A. Francke, Berne, 1972.

Froehlich, Karlfried. "Pseudo-Dionysius and the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century." In *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 33–46. New York: Paulist Press, 1987.

Gamble, Harry Y. *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.

Gersh, S. *Kinesis Akinetos: A Study of Spiritual Motion in the Philosophy of Proclus*. Leiden: Brill, 1973.

——. *From Iamblichus to Eriugena: An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition*. Leiden: Brill, 1978.

——. "Ideas and Energies in Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite." *Studia Patristica* 15.1 (1984): 297–300.

Gill, Christopher and T.P. Wiseman, eds. *Lies and Fiction in the Ancient World*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1993.

Golitzin, Alexander. "On the Other Hand." *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 34.4 (1990): 305–23.

——. "The Mysticism of Dionysius Areopagita: Platonist or Christian?" *Mystics Quarterly* 3 (1993): 98–114.

——. *Et introibo ad altare dei: The Mystagogy of Dionysius the Areopagite*. Thessalonika: Patriarchikon Idruma Paterikōn Meletōn, 1994.

——. "Hierarchy versus Anarchy? Dionysius Areopagita, Symeon the New Theologian, Nicetas Stethatos, and their Common Roots in Ascetical Tradition." *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 38.2 (1994): 131–79.

——. "Liturgy and Mysticism: The Experience of God in Eastern Orthodox Spirituality." *Pro Ecclesia* VIII.2 (1999): 159–86.

——. "Dionysius Areopagita: A Christian Mysticism?" *Pro Ecclesia* XII.2 (2003): 161–212.

——. "'Suddenly, Christ': The Place of Negative Theology in the Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagites." In *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*, edited by Michael Kessler and Christian Shepherd, 8–37. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003.

——. "Theophaneia: Forum on the Jewish Roots of Orthodox Spirituality." In *The Theophaneia School: Jewish Roots of Eastern Christian Mysticism*, edited by Basil Lourié and Andrei Orlov, xvii–xx. St. Petersburg: Byzantinorossica, 2007.

——. "Christian Mysticism Over Two Millennia." In *The Theophaneia School: Jewish Roots of Eastern Christian Mysticism*, edited by Basil Lourié and Andrei Orlov, xxi–xxxiii. St. Petersburg: Byzantinorossica, 2007.

Gouilard, J. "Hypatius d'Éphèse ou du Pseudo-Denys à Théodore Studite." *Revue des études byzantines* 19 (1961): 63–75.

Gudeman, Alfred. "Literary Frauds among the Greeks." In *Classical Studies in Honour of Henry Disler*. New York: Macmillan, 1894.

Guthrie, David, "Tertullian and Pseudonymity." *Expository Times* 67 (1956): 341–2.

Hadot, Pierre. *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*. Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1981. English translation: Michael Chase. *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995.

Haefner, Alfred E. "A Unique Source for the Study of Ancient Pseudonymity." *Anglican Theological Review* 16 (1934): 8–15.

Hancock, C.L. "Negative Theology in Gnosticism and Neoplatonism." In *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism*, edited by Richard T. Wallis, 167–86. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992.

Hanson, Richard and Henri Crouzel, eds. *Origeniana tertia*. Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1985.

Harrington, L. Michael. "Anastasius the Librarian's Reading of the Greek Scholia on the Pseudo-Dionysian Corpus." *Studia Patristica* 36 (2001): 119–25.

——. *A Thirteenth-Century Textbook of Mystical Theology at the University of Paris*. Paris: Peeters, 2004.

Hathaway, Ronald F. *Hierarchy and the Definition of Order in the Letters of Pseudo-Dionysius*. The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1969.

Hauken, A.I. "Incarnation and Hierarchy: the Christ according to Pseudo-Dionysius." *Studia Patristica* 15.1 (1984): 317–20.

Hausherr, I. "Doutes au sujet de 'divin Denys.'" *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 2 (1936): 484–90.

——. "Le pseudo-Denys est-il Pierre l'Ibérien?" *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 19 (1953): 247–60.

——. "Note sur l'auteur du Corpus Dionysiacum" *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 22 (1956): 383–9.

Hengel, Martin. "Anonymität, Pseudepigraphie und 'Literarische Fälschung' in der jüdisch-hellenistischen Literatur." In *Pseudepigrapha*, edited by Kurt von Fritz. Vandœuvres-Geneva, Fondation Hardt; Dépositaire pour la Suisse: A. Francke, Berne, 1972.

Honigmann, E.A.J. *Pierre l'Ibérien et les écrits du psuedo-Denys l'Aréopagite*. Brussels: Palais des académies, 1952.

Horn, Gabriel. "Amour et extase d'après Denys l'Aréopagite." *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* 6 (1925): 268–79.

Hornus, Jean-Michel. "Quelques réflexions à propos de Ps.-Denys l'Aréopagite et la mystique chrétienne en général." *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 27 (1947): 37–63.

Hornus, Jean-Michel. "Les Recherches dionysiennes sur le pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite." *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 35 (1955): 404–48.

——. "Les Recherches dionysiennes de 1955 á 1960. Bibliographie dionysienne 1954–1959." *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 4 (1961): 22–81.

——. "Le Corpus dionysien en syriaque." *Parole de l'Orient* 1 (1970): 69–93.

Horst, Pieter Willem van der. "The Unknown God (Acts 17:23)." In *Knowledge of God in the Graeco-Roman World*, edited by R. van den Broek, T. Baarda, and J. Mansfeld, 19–42. Leiden: Brill, 1988.

——. "The Altar of the 'Unknown God' in Athens (Acts 17.23) and the Cult of 'Unknown Gods' in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods." In *Principat*, 1426–56. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1989.

Hugueny, E. "Circulaire, rectiligne, helicoïdal, les trois degrees de la contemplation." *Recherches des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 13 (1924): 327–331.

Ivánka, Endre von. "'Teilhaben,' 'Hervorgang,' und 'Hierarchie' bei Pseudo-Dionysius und bei Proklos (Der 'Neuplatonismus' des Pseudo-Dionysius)." *Actes du Xième Congrés Internationale de Philosophie* 12, 153–8. Amsterdam: North-Holland Pub. Co., 1953.

——. *Plato Christianus; Übernahme und Umgestaltung des Platonismus durch die Väter*. Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1964.

Izmirlieva, Valentina. *All the Names of the Lord: Lists, Mysticism, and Magic*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

James, William. *Some Problems of Philosophy: A Beginning of an Introduction to Philosophy*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1968.

Janssen, Martina. *Unter Falschem Namen: eine kritische Forschungsbilanz frühchristlicher Pseudepigraphie*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2003.

Johnson, Scott Fitzgerald. *The Life and Miracles of Thekla: A Literary Study*. Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2006.

——. "Late Antique Narrative Fiction: Apocryphal Acta and the Greek Novel in the Fifth-Century *Life and Miracles of Thekla*." In *Greek Literature in Late Antiquity: Dynamism, Didacticism, Classicism*, edited by idem, 189–208. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006.

——. "Apocrypha and the Literary Past in Late Antiquity." In *From Rome to Constantinople: Studies in Honour of Averil Cameron*, edited by Hagit Amirav and Bas ter Haar Romeny, 47–66. Leuven: Peeters, 2007.

——. "Reviving the Memory of the Apostles: Apocryphal Tradition and Travel Literature in Late Antiquity." In *Revival and Resurgence in Christian History*, edited by Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory, 1–26. Studies in Church History 44. Woodbridge: Ecclesiastical History Society and Boydell Press, 2008.

Jones, J.D. "The Character of the Negative (Mystical) Theology for Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite." *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 51 (1977): 66–74.

Kannengiesser, Charles. *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Kenny, J.P. *Mystical Monotheism: A Study in Ancient Platonic Theology*. Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1991.

——. "The Critical Value of Negative Theology," *Harvard Theological Review* 86 (1993): 439–53.

——. "Ancient Apophaticism." In *Gnosticism and Later Neoplatonism*, edited by John Turner and Ruth Majercik, 258–75. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000.

Kern, C. "La Structure du monde d'après le Pseudo-Denys." *Irénikon* 29 (1956): 205–9.

Kharlamov, Vlamidir. *The Beauty of the Unity and the Harmony of the Whole: The Concept of* Theosis *in the Theology of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009.

King, Karen. *Revelation of the Unknowable God: with Text, Translation and Notes to NHC XI,3 Allogenes*. California Classical Library, 1995.

Knepper, Timothy D. "Not Not: The Method and Logic of Dionysian Negation." *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 82.4 (2008): 619–37.

Koch, Hugo. "Proklos als Quelle des Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita in der Lehre vom Bösen." *Philologus* 54 (1895): 438–54.

——. *Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita in seinen Beziehungen zum Neuplatonismus und Mysterienwesen: eine litterarhistorische Untersuchung*. Mainz: F. Kirchheim, 1900.

Kocijancic, Gorazd. "The Identity of Dionysius Areopagite: A Philosophical Approach." *Sobornost* 29.2 (2007): 73–82.

Kraft, Robert. "Christian Transmission of Greek Jewish Scriptures: A Methodological Probe." In *Paganisme, judaïsme, christianisme: influences et affrontements dans le monde antique*, 207–26. Paris: Éditions E. de Boccard, 1978.

——. "Scripture and Canon in Jewish Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha." In *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, vol. I, edited by Magne Saebo, 199–216. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996.

Krueger, Derek. *Writing and Holiness: The Practice of Authorship in the Early Christian East*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

Lampe, G.W.H. *A Greek Patristic Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961.

Lebon, Joseph. "Le Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite et Sévère d'Antioche.' *Revue d'histoire ecclésiatiques* 26 (1930): 880–915.

Leclercq, Jean. "Influence and Noninfluence of Dionysius in the Western Middle Ages." In *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 25–32. New York: Paulist Press, 1987.

Lehmann, Paul. *Pseudo-Antike Literatur des Mittelalters*. Leipzig: Teubener, 1927.

Lewy, H. *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy: Mysticism, Magic, and Platonism in the Later Roman Empire*. Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1978.

Lilla, Salvatore. "The Notion of Infinitude in Ps.-Dionysius Areopagita," *Journal of Theological Studies* 31 (1980): 93–103.

——. "Dionysius the Areopagite, Pseudo-." In *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, 238–40. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

——. *Dionigi l'Areopagita e il platonismo cristiano*. Brescia: Morcelliana, 2005.

Lloyd, A.C. "The Later Neoplatonists." In *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, edited by A.H. Armstrong, 269–325. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967.

Lossky, V. *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976.

Lourié, Basil and Andrei Orlov, eds. *The Theophaneia School: Jewish Roots of Eastern Christian Mysticism*. St. Petersburg: Byzantinorossica, 2007.

Louth, Andrew. "The Influence of Denys the Areopagite on Eastern and Western Spirituality in the Fourteenth Century." *Sobornost* 4 (1982): 185–200.

——. "Pagan Theurgy and Christian Sacramentalism in Denys the Areopagite." *Journal of Theological Studies* 37 (1986): 432–8.

——. *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition from Plato to Denys*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981.

——. *Denys the Areopagite*. London: G. Chapman, 1989.

——. "Mysticism." In *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, 272–4. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1993.

Luck, Georg. "Theurgy and Forms of Worship in Neoplatonism." In *Religion, Science, and Magic: In Concert and in Conflict*, edited by J. Neusner, E.S. Frerichs, and P. McCracken, 185–225. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Maas, Michael, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Majercik, Ruth. *The Chaldean Oracles: Text, Translation, and Commentary*. Leiden: Brill, 1989.

Mango, Cyril. *Byzantium: The Empire of New Rome*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1980.

——. "Saints." In *The Byzantines*, edited by Guglielmo Cavallo. Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1997.

McEvoy, James. *Mystical Theology: The Glosses by Thomas Gallus and the Commentary of Robert Grosseteste on* De Mystica Theologia. Paris: Peeters, 2003.

McGinn, Bernard. "Love, Knowledge, and Mystical Union in Western Christianity: Twelfth to Sixteenth Centuries." *Church History* 56.1 (1987): 7–24.

——. "The Negative Element in the Anthropology of John the Scot." In *Jean Scot Érigène et l'histoire de la philosophie. Actes du II Colloque international Jean Scot Erigène*, edited by René Roques, 315–25. Paris: Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1977.

——. *The Foundations of Mysticism*. New York: Crossroad, 1991.

——. *The Growth of Mysticism*. New York: Crossroad, 1994.

——. "God as Eros: Metaphysical Foundations of Christian Mysticism." In *New Perspectives on Historical Theology*, edited by Bradley Nassif, 189–209. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996.

——. *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*. New York: Crossroad, 2001.

McGinn, Bernard and Moshe Idel, eds. *Mystical Union and Monotheistic Faith*. New York: Macmillan, 1989.

McGinn, Bernard and John Meyendorff, eds. *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*. New York: Crossroad, 1985.

Meade, David G. *Pseudonymity and Canon: An Investigation into the Relationship of Authorship and Authority in Jewish and Earliest Christian Tradition*. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1986.

Metzger, Bruce M. "Literary Forgeries and Canonical Pseudepigrapha." *Journal of Biblical Literature* (1972): 3–24.

Meyer, Arnold. "Religiöse Pseudepigraphie als ethisch-psychologisches Problem." *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 35 (1936): 262–79.

Minnis, A.J. *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*. London: Scholar Press, 1984.

Mitchell, Margaret M. *The Heavenly Trumpet: John Chrysostom and the Art of Pauline Interpretation*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000.

Mortley, Raoul. *From Word to Silence. Vol. I: The Rise and Fall of Logos. Vol. II: The Way of Negation, Christian and Greek*. Bonn: Hanstein, 1986.

Müller, H. F. *Dionysios, Proclos, Plotinus. Ein historischer Beitrag zur Neoplatonischen Philosophie*. Münster: Aschendorff, 1918.

Nasrallah, Laura. *An Ecstasy of Folly: Prophecy and Authority in Early Christianity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003.

Norden, Eduard. *Agnostos Theos: Untersuchungen zur Formengeschichte religiöser Rede*. Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1913.

Nygren, Anders. *Agape and Eros*. New York: Macmillan, 1937.

O'Meara, Dominic J, ed. *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1982.

Parsons, S.G. "The Hierarch in the Pseudo-Dionysius and its Place in the History of the Christian Priesthood." *Studia Patristica* 18.1 (1985): 187–90.

Pelikan, Jaroslav. "The Odyssey of Dionysian Spirituality." In *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 11–24. New York: Paulist Press, 1987.

Pépin, J. "Univers dionysien et univers augustinien." *Recherche de philosophie II, Aspects de la dialectique* (1956): 179–224.

Pera, C. "Denys le mystique et la θεομαχία," *Revue de sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 25 (1936): 5–75.

Perczel, Istvan. "Une théologie de la lumière: Denys l'Aréopagite et Évagre le Pontique." *Revue des études augustiniennes* 45 (1999): 79–120.

——. "Denys l'Aréopagite: lecteur d'Origène." In *Origeniana Septima*, edited by W.A. Bienert and U. Kühneweg, 674–710 Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1999.

——. "Sergius of Reshaina's Syriac Translation of the *Dionysian Corpus*: Some Preliminary Remarks." In *La Diffusione dell'eredità classica nell'età tardo-antica e medievale. Filologia, storia, dottrina*, edited by C. Baffioni, 79–94. Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2000.

——. "Once Again on Dionysius the Areopagite and Leontius of Byzantium." In *Die Dionysius-Rezeption im Mittelalter*, edited by T. Boiadjiev, G. Kapriev, and A. Speer, 41–85. Turnhout: Brepols, 2000.

——. "Pseudo-Dionysius and the Platonic Theology." In *Proclus et la théologie platonicienne. Actes du colloque international de Louvain (13–16 mai 1998) en l'honneur de H. D. Saffrey et L. G. Westerink*, edited by A. Ph. Segonds and C. Steel, 491–532. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2000.

——. "Pseudo-Dionysius and Palestinian Origenism." In *The Sabaite Heritage in the Orthodox Church from the Fifth Century to the Present*, edited by Joseph Patrich, 261–82. Leuven: Uitgeveij Peeters en Departement Oosterse Studies, 2001.

——. "Dionysius the Areopagite and the Peri Archon of Origen." In *Origeniana Octava*, edited by Lorenzo Perrone, 1193–209. Leuven: Leuven University Press and Uitgeverij Peeters, 2003.

——. "A Philosophical Myth in the Service of Religious Apologetics: Manichees and Origenists in the Sixth Century." In *Religious Apologetics Philosophical Argumentation*, edited by Yosset Schwartz and Volkhard Krech, 205–36. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004.

——. "The Christology of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite: *The Fourth Letter* in its Indirect and Direct Text Traditions." In *Le Muséon* 117.3–4 (2004): 409–46.

——. "The Earliest Syriac Reception of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*." In *Rethinking Dionysius the Areopagite*, edited by Sarah Coakley and Charles M. Stang. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

Perl, Eric. "Symbol, Sacrament, and Hierarchy in St. Dionysios the Areopagite." *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 39 (1994): 311–55.

——. "The Metaphysics of Love in Dionysius the Areopagite." *Journal of Neoplatonic Studies* 6.1 (1997): 45–73.

——. *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007.

Peuch, H.-C. "Libératus de Carthage et la date de l'apparition des écrits dionysiens." *Annuaire 1930–31 de l'École Pratique des Haute Études* (Paris, 1930).

——. "La Ténèbre mystique chez le Pseudo-Denys l'Areopagite et dans la tradition patristique." *Études carmélitaines* 23 (1938): 33–53.

Porter, J. "The Legal Aspects of the Concept of 'Corporate Personality.'" *Vetus Testamentum* 15 (1965): 361–80.

Putnam, C.C. *Beauty in the Pseudo-Denis*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1960.

——. "The Philosopher-Monk according to Denis the Pseudo-Areopagite." In *Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy*, vol. 5, edited by John K. Ryan, 3–17. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1969.

Putnam, G.H. *Authors and their Public in Ancient Times*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1894.

Quaschning-Kirsch, M. "Eine weiterer Textzeuge für die syrische Version des Corpus Dionysiacum Areopagiticum: Paris B.N. Syr. 378." *Le Muséon* 113.1–2 (2000): 115–24.

Rapp, Claudia. "Byzantine Hagiographers as Antiquarians, Seventh to Tenth Centuries." *Byzantinische Forschungen* 31 (1995): 31–44.

Rayez, A. "Influence du pseudo-Denys en Orient." *Dictionnaire de spiritualité, ascétique, et mystique* 3 (1957): 286–313.

Reidinger, U. "Der Verfasser der pseudo-dionysischen Schriften." *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 75 (1964).

Richardson, Cyril C., ed. and trans. *Early Christian Fathers*. New York: Macmillan, 1970.

Riordan, William. *Divine Light: The Theology of Denys the Areopagite*. San Francisco: Ignatius, 2008.

Rist, J.M. "Mysticism and Transcendence in Later Neoplatonism." *Hermes* 92 (1964): 213–25.

——. "In Search of the Divine Denis." In *The Seed of Wisdom: Essays in Honour of T.J. Meek*, edited by W.S. McCullough. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964.

——. "A Note on Eros and Agape in Pseudo-Dionysius." *Vigiliae Christianae* 20 (1966): 235–43.

——. "Pseudo-Dionysius, Neoplatonism, and the Weakness of the Soul." In *From Athens to Chartres: Neoplatonism and Medieval Thought*, edited by H.J. Westra, 135–61. Leiden: Brill, 1992.

——. "Love, Knowing and Incarnation in Pseudo-Dionysius." In *Traditions of Platonism*, edited by John C. Cleary, 375–88. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004.

Robinson, H.W. *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964.

Rogerson, J.W. "The Hebrew Conception of Corporate Personality: A re-examination." In *Journal Theological Studies* 21 (1970): 1–16.

Roques, René. "Note sur la notion de THEOLOGIA chez le Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite." *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* 25 (1949): 200–12.

——. "Contemplation, extase, et ténèbre chez le Pseudo-Denys." *Dictionnaire de spiritualité, ascétique, et mystique* 2 (1952): 1885–911.

——. *L'Univers dionysien: structure hiérarchique du monde selon le Pseudo-Denys*. Paris: Aubier, 1954.

——. "De l'implication des methods théologiques chez le Pseudo-Denys." *Revue d'ascétique et mystique* 30 (1954): 268–74.

——. "Symbolisme et théologie negative chez le Pseudo-Denys." *Bulletin de l'Association de Guillaume Bude* 1 (1957): 97–112.

——. "Denys l'Aréopagite." *Dictionnaire de spiritualité, ascétique, et mystique* 3 (1957): 244–86.

——. "Y propos des sources du Pseudo-Denys." *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 56 (1961): 449–64.

——. *Structures théologiques de la gnose à Richard de Saint-Victor; essais et analyses critiques*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1962.

——. "La Hiérarchie céleste." Introduction to *La Hiérarchie céleste*, SC 58, v–xci. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1970.

Rorem, Paul. "Iamblichus and the Anagogical Method in Pseudo-Dionysius' Liturgical Theology." *Studia Patristica* 18 (1979): 453–60.

——. "The Place of the Mystical Theology in the Pseudo-Dionysian Corpus." *Dionysius* 4 (1980): 87–98.

——. *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis*. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984.

——. "The Uplifting Spirituality of Pseudo-Dionysius." In *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, edited by Bernard McGinn, John Meyendorff, and Jean Leclerq, 132–51. New York: Crossroad, 1985.

——. "Moses as the Paradigm for the Liturgical Spirituality of Pseudo-Dionysius' Liturgical Theology." *Studia Patristica* 18.2 (1989): 275–9.

——. "The Biblical Allusions and Overlooked Quotations in the Pseudo-Dionysian Corpus." *Studia Patristica* 23 (1989): 61–5.

——. "'Procession and Return' in Thomas Aquinas and His Predecessors." *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 13.2 (1992): 147–63.

——. *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to their Influence*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

——. "Martin Luther's Christocentric Critique of Pseudo-Dionysian Spirituality." *Lutheran Quarterly* 11 (1997): 291–307.

——. "Empathy and Evaluation in Medieval Church History and Pastoral Ministry: A Lutheran Reading of Pseudo-Dionysius." *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 19.2 (1998): 99–115.

——. *Eriugena's Commentary on the Dionysian* Celestial Hierarchy. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2005.

Rorem, Paul and J.C. Lamoureaux. "John of Scythopolis on Apollinarian Christology and the Pseudo-Areopagite's True Identity." *Church History* 62 (1993): 469–82.

——. *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus: Annotating the Areopagite*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.

Ruaro, Enrica. "God and the Worm: The Twofold Otherness in Pseudo-Dionysius' Theory of Dissimilar Images." *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 82.4 (2008): 581–92.

Rubenstein, Mary-Jane. "Unknow Thyself: Apophaticism, Deconstruction, and Theology after Ontotheology." *Modern Theology* 19.3 (2003): 387–417.

Russell, Bertrand. *The Problems of Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Russell, D.S. *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic: 200 BC–AD 100*. London: SCM, 1964.

Russell, Norman. *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Rutledge, Denys. *Cosmic Theology: The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy of Pseudo-Denys*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964.

Saffrey, H.D. "Un lien objectif entre le Pseudo-Denys et Proclus." *Studia Patristica* 9 (1966): 98–105.

——. "Les Néoplatociens et les Oracles chaldaïques." *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* XXVI (1981): 209–25.

——. "New Objective Links between the Pseudo-Dionysius and Proclus." In *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, edited by Dominic J. O'Meara, 65–74, 246–9. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982.

——. "Neoplatonist Spirituality II: From Iamblichus to Proclus and Damascius." In *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality: Egyptian, Greek, Roman*, edited by A.H. Armstrong, 250–65. New York: Crossroad, 1986.

Schäfer, Christian. *Unde Malum: Die Frage nach dem Woher des Bösen bei Plotin, Augustinus und Dionysius*. Würzberg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2002.

——. *The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*. Leiden: Brill, 2006.

——. "The Anonymous Naming of Names: Pseudonymity and Philosophical Program in Dionysius the Areopagite." *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 82.4 (2008): 561–80.

Schelkle, Karl Hermann. *Paul: Lehrer der Väter: die altkirchlich Auslegung von Römer 1–11*. Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1956.

Scher, Addai. "Joseph Hazzaya: écrivain syriaque de VIIIe siècle." *Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres, Paris: Comptes rendus des séances* (1909): 300–7.

——. "Joseph Hazzaya: écrivain syriaque de VIIIe siècle." *Rivista degli studi orientali* 3 (1910): 45–63.

Schnepens, B. "La Liturgie de Denys le pseudo-Aréopagite." *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 63 (1949): 357–75.

Schulz, Hans-Joachim. *The Byzantine Liturgy*, trans. M.J. O'Connell. New York: Pueblo, 1986.

Sells, Michael. *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

——. "The Pseudo-Woman and the Meister: 'Unsaying' and Essentialism." In *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics*, edited by Bernard McGinn. New York: Continuum, 1994.

Semmelroth, Otto. "Erlösung und Erlöser im System des Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita." *Scholastik* 20–4 (1949): 367–79.

——. "Gottes überwesentliche Einheit. Zur Gotteslehre des Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita." *Scholastik* 25 (1950): 209–34.

Semmelroth, Otto. "Gottes geeinte Vielheit. Zur Gotteslehre des Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita." *Scholastik* 25 (1950): 389–403.

——. "Die θεολογία σμβολική des Ps.-Dionysius Areopagita." *Scholastik* 27 (1952): 1–52.

——. "Gottes ausstrahlende Licht. Zur Schopfungs- und Offenbarungslehre der Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita." *Scholastik* 28 (1953): 481–503.

——. "Die Lehre des Ps.-Dionysius Areopagita vom Aufstieg der Kreatur zum göttlichen Licht." *Scholastik* 29 (1954): 24–52.

Shaw, Gregory. *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995.

——. "Neoplatonic Theurgy and Dionysius the Areopagite." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7.4 (1999): 573–99.

——. "After Aporia: Theurgy in Later Neoplatonism." In *Gnosticism and Later Neoplatonism*, edited by John D. Turner and Ruth Majercik, 57–82. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000.

Sheldon-Williams, I.P. "The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy of Pseudo-Dionysius." *Downside Review* 82 (1964): 293–302.

——. "The Pseudo-Dionysius and the Holy Hierotheus." *Studia Patristica* 8.2 (1966): 108–17.

——. "The Pseudo-Dionysius." In *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, edited by A.H. Armstrong, 457–72. London: Cambridge University Press, 1967.

——. "Henads and Angels: Proclus and the Ps.-Dionysius." *Studia Patristica* 11 (1972): 65–71.

Sheppard, A. "Proclus' Attitude to Theurgy." *Classical Quarterly* 32 (1982): 212–24.

Sherwood, P. "Sergius of Reshaina and the Syriac Versions of the Pseudo-Dionysius." *Sacris Erudiri* (1952): 174–84.

——. "Influence du Pseudo-Denys en Orient." *Dictionnaire de spiritualité, ascétique, et mystique* 3 (1957): 295–300.

——. "Mimro de Serge de Rešayna sur la vie spirituelle." *L'Orient syrien* 5 (1960): 433–57 and 6 (1961): 95–115, 121–56.

Shils, Edward. *Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.

Sint, Joseph A. *Pseudonymität im Alterum, ihre Formen und ihre Gründe*. Innsbruck: Universitätsverlag, 1969.

Smith, Morton. "Pseudepigraphy in the Israelite Tradition." In *Pseudepigrapha*, edited by Kurt von Fritz. Vandœuvres-Geneva, Fondation Hardt; Dépositaire pour la Suisse: A. Francke, Berne, 1972.

Spearritt, Placid. "The Soul's Participation in God according to Pseudo-Dionysius." *Downside Review* 88 (1970): 378–92.

Speyer, Wolfgang. *Die Literarische Fälschung im Heidnischen und Christlichen Altertum*. Munich: Beck, 1971.

Stang, Charles M. "La herencia cristiana de la teurgia pagana." In *De cara al Más Allá: Conflicto, convivencia y asimilación de modelos paganos en el cristianismo antiquo*, edited by Mercedes López Salvá, 185–201. Saragossa: Libros Portico, 2010.

——. "Dionysius, Paul and the Significance of the Pseudonym." *Modern Theology* 24.4 (2008): 541–55. Reprinted in *Re-thinking Dionysius the Areopagite* edited by Sarah Coakley and Charles M. Stang. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

——. "'Neither Oneself Nor Someone Else': The Apophatic Anthropology of Dionysius the Areopagite." In *Apophatic Bodies: Negative Theology, Incarnation, and Relationality* edited by Catherine Keller and Chris Boesel, 59–75. New York: Fordham University Press, 2009.

——. Review of Christian Schäfer, *The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite* (Leiden: Brill, 2006). In *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16.1 (2008): 118–20.

——. "Scriptio." In *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, edited by Amy Hollywood and Patricia Z. Beckman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming.

Steel, Carlos. "'Negatio Negationis': Proclus on the Final Lemma of the First Hypothesis of the *Parmenides*." In *Traditions of Platonism*, edited by John C. Cleary. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004.

——. *The Changing Self: A Study on the Soul in Later Neoplatonism: Iamblichus, Damascius and Priscianus*. Brussels: Paleis der Academiën, 1978.

Stein, Edith. *Wege der Gotteserkenntnis: Dionysius der Areopagit und seine symbolische Theologie*. Munich: Kaffke, 1979.

Stewart, Columba. *"Working the Earth of the Heart": The Messalian Controversy in History, Texts, and Language to A.D. 431*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1991.

Stiglmayr, Josef. "Das Aufkommen der Pseudo-Dionysischen Schriften und ihr Eindringen in die christliche Literatur bis zum Lateranconcil 649. Ein zweiter Beitrag zur Dionysius Frage." In *IV Jahresbericht des offenlichen Privatgymnasiums an der Stelle matutina zu Feldkirch*. Feldkirch: 1895.

——. "Der Neuplatoniker Proklos als Vorlage des sog. Dionysius Areopagita in der Lehre von Übel." *Historisches Jahrbuch* 16 (1895): 253–73 and 721–48.

——. "Die Engellehre des sog. Dionysius Areopagita." In *Compte rendu du 4ème congrès scientifique des Catholiques*. Fribourg: 1898.

——. "Über die Termini Hierarch und Hierarchia." *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 22 (1898): 180–7.

——. "Die Lehre von den Sakramenten und der Kirche nach Pseudo-Dionysius." *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 22 (1898): 246–303.

——. "Ascese und Mystik des sogenannten Dionysius Areopagita." *Scholastik* 2 (1927): 161–207.

——. "Die Eschatologie des Pseudo-Dionysius." *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 23 (1899): 1–21.

Stone, Michael. "Pseudepigraphy, Inspiration and Esotericism." In *Jewish Writings in the Second Temple Period*, edited by idem, 383–440. Philadelpia: Fortress, 1984.

Struck, Peter. *Birth of the Symbol: Ancient Readers at the Limits of their Texts*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004.

Suchla, Beate Regina. *Die sogenannten Maximus-Scholien des Corpus Dionysiacum Areopagiticum*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980.

——. *Die Überlieferung des Prologs des Johannes von Skythopolis zum griechischen Corpus Dionysiacum Areopagiticum: ein weiterer Beitrag zur Überlieferungsgeschichte des CD*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984.

——. *Eine Redaktion des griechischen Corpus Dionysiacum Areopagiticum im Umkreis des Johannes von Skythopolis, des Verfassers von Prolog und Scholien: ein dritter Beitrag zur Überlieferungsgeschichte des CD*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985.

——. "Die Überlieferung des Prologs des Johannes von Skythopolis zum griechischen Corpus Dionysiacum Areopagiticum." *Studia Patristica* 18.2 (1989): 79–83.

——. *Corpus Dionysiacum I.* Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990.

——. *Verteidigung eines platonischen Denkmodells einer christlichen Welt: die philosophie- und theologiegeschichtliche Bedeutung des Scholienwerks der Johannes von Skythopolis zu den areopagitischen Traktaten.* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995.

Thesleff, H. *An Introduction to the Pythagorean Writings of the Hellenistic Period.* Åbo: Åbo akademi, 1961.

Tomasic, T. "Negative Theology and Subjectivity: An Approach to the Tradition of the Pseudo-Dionysius." *International Philosophical Quarterly* 9 (1969): 406–30.

Torm, Friedrich. *Die Psychologie der Pseudonymität im Hinblick auf die Literatur des Urchristentums.* Gütersloh: Berterlsmann, 1932.

Turner, Denys. *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Turner, John D. and Ruth Majercik, eds. *Gnosticism and Later Neoplatonism.* Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000.

Van den Berg, R.M. *Proclus' Hymns: Essays, Translations, Commentary.* Leiden: Brill, 2001.

Van den Daele, Albertus. *Indices Pseudo-Dionysiani.* Leuven: Bibliothèque de l'Université, 1941.

Vanneste, Jean. *Le Mystère de Dieu.* Brussels: Desclée, De Brouwer, 1959.

——. "La Théologie mystique de Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite." *Studia Patristica* 5 (1962): 401–15.

——. "Is the mysticism of Ps.-Dionysius genuine?" *International Philosophical Quarterly* 3 (1963): 286–306.

——. "La Doctrine des trois voies dans la théologie mystique de Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite." *Studia Patristica* 8 (1966): 462–7.

Vogt, H.J. "Versuch einer Annäherung an Pseudo-Dionuys." *Theologische Quartalschrift* 173 (1993): 113–32.

Völker, Walther. *Kontemplation und Ekstase bei pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita.* Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1958.

Wallis, Richard T. *Neoplatonism.* London: Duckworth, 1972.

——. "The Spiritual Importance of Not Knowing." In *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality: Egyptian, Greek, Roman*, edited by A.H. Armstrong. New York: Crossroad: 1986.

——. ed. *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992.

Wear, Sarah Klitenic and John Dillon. *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition.* Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007.

Wenkher, A. "Influence du Pseudo-Denys en Orient." *Dictionnaire de spiritualité, ascétique, et mystique* 3 (1957): 305–9.

Wesche, K.P. "Christological Doctrine and Liturgical Interpretation in Pseudo-Dionysius." *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 33.1 (1989): 53–73.

——. "A Reply to Hieromonk's Alexander's Reply." *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 34.4 (1990): 324–7.

Wilder, Terry L. *Pseudonymity, New Testament, and Deception.* Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2004.

Wiles, Maurice F. *The Divine Apostle: The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles in the Early Church.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967.

Williams, Michael Stuart. *Authorised Lives in Early Christian Biography: Between Eusebius and Augustine.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Williams, Rowan. *The Wound of Knowledge.* London: Dartman, Longman & Todd, 1979.

Wybrew, Hugh. *The Orthodox Liturgy.* London: SPCK, 1989.

Wyrick, Jed. *The Ascension of Authorship: Attribution and Canon Formation in Jewish, Hellenistic, and Christian Traditions.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.

Index Locorum

General Index