

# FROM ATHENS TO CHARTRES

*Neoplatonism and Medieval Thought*

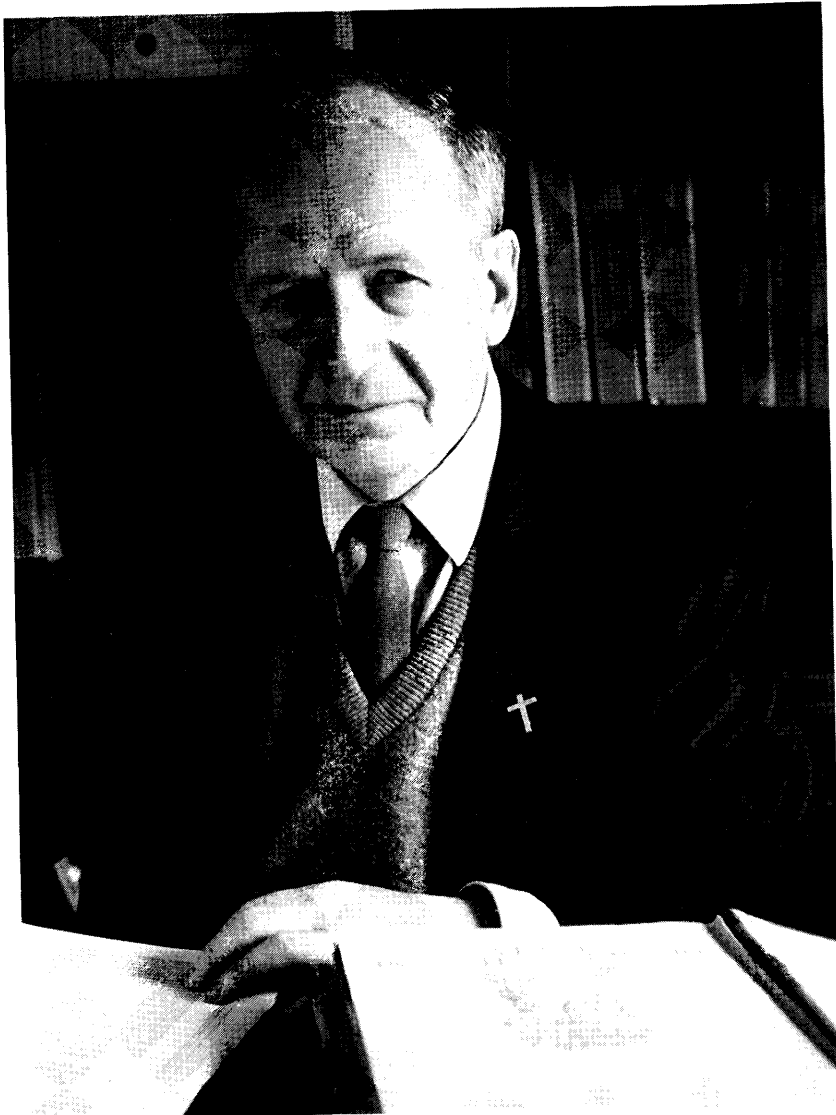
STUDIES IN HONOUR OF EDOUARD JEAUNEAU

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Biblioteca n° 18.302



Edouard Jeauneau

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LEIDEN • NEW YORK • KÖLN  
1992

propre au philosophe que de sa dette inévitable à l'endroit du platonisme scolaire ou du moyen platonisme; il pourrait y avoir là une indication du milieu culturel où chercher l'inspirateur immédiat d'Augustin. Païen ou chrétien? On ne peut en décider. Aussi bien la qualité chrétienne de la question 46, vide de toute référence scripturaire, ne saute-t-elle pas non plus aux yeux. Il s'est glissé, dans le recueil augustinien des *Quatre-vingt-trois questions*, une *quaestio* 12 qui n'est pas d'Augustin, mais d'un certain Fonteius de Carthage, mort chrétien baptisé, mais auteur, alors qu'il était encore païen, d'un texte intitulé *De mente mundanda ad uidentum deum*, "Purifier son intellect pour voir Dieu";<sup>60</sup> les quelques lignes de la question 12 en sont probablement extraites; or voici sur quoi elles s'achèvent: "Dieu, qui nulle part ne fait défaut, est en vain présent aux âmes souillées, lui que l'aveuglement de l'intellect ne peut voir".<sup>61</sup> Dans ce thème, d'ailleurs conforme au titre de l'oeuvre, on reconnaît l'un des leitmotifs du *De ideis*; or les opuscules de ce genre, aux confins du platonisme et du christianisme, ne furent probablement pas rares bien que, on voit bien pourquoi, ils n'aient pas survécu; il n'est pas invraisemblable que l'un d'eux ait servi de modèle à Augustin.

## PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS, NEOPLATONISM AND THE WEAKNESS OF THE SOUL

### *Suspicious, Charges and Interpretations*

Edouard Jauneau has done much to enrich our awareness of the influence of the mysterious author of the writings of "Dionysius the Areopagite" on subsequent "spiritual" texts. But it is by no means clear that what we call "Dionysian spirituality", as perceived by many mediaeval Latin Christians and their Reformation successors, is a faithful representation of the concerns of the author of the Dionysian writings himself. In my present discussion of these concerns I shall assume that the *corpus dionysiacum* was composed some time between the *Henoticon* of the Emperor Zeno (A.D. 482) and the conference in 532 between the orthodox Chalcedonians and the moderate "monophysites" of the party of Severus of Antioch. Within this period the latter years seem more plausible than the earlier, but let that pass. I shall return to questions relating to milieu and even to more precise dating later,<sup>1</sup> but I shall simply refer to our author as Dionysius. It would be amusing if that were his real name.

Over the centuries a number of features of Dionysius' theologizing have been found disturbing. In a brief essay I cannot hope to discuss all of these, or even do justice to those major ones on which I shall concentrate, but I want to consider several "charges" against Dionysius—not counting forgery—which have arisen in distinct historical circumstances, but which I believe to be interrelated. I shall argue that recognition of such interrelationship will help us understand what Dionysius sees as his major philosophical (and practical) aims.

The first charge against Dionysius is that he is a monophysite, that is, that he is to a greater or less degree dissatisfied with the Council of Chalcedon when it proclaimed that after the Incarnation Christ existed as one hypostasis *in* (not *from*) two natures. Now whatever the intellectual credentials of this dogma, its basic intent is clear. The "Fathers" of Chalcedon, or at least those who not only knew what they were doing but were not merely intimidated or pursuing non-spiritual goals,<sup>2</sup> wished to emphasize that Christ was truly God and truly man. In particular they wished to emphasize his humanity, against those who drew their inspiration from what they took to be the views of Cyril of Alexandria and who were later to form first an anti-Chalcedonian party and eventually a breakaway "monophysite" church.

<sup>1</sup> For general discussion of such matters see (for example) R.F. Hathaway, *Hierarchy and the Definition of Order in the Letters of Pseudo-Dionysius* (The Hague, 1969) esp. 31-36.

<sup>2</sup> For a more or less accurate account of these proceedings see recently W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Church* (Cambridge, 1972) 35-49. For caution in the use of Frend see L.R. Wickham, in *JTS* 24 (1973) 591-599. The theological mood of the times can be grasped from the following contemporary quotations (indicating Dionysius' need for caution): "The Christ-hater to the gallows", "Down with the Judophile", "Let Ibas burn", "Cut in pieces the man who divides the Christ".

<sup>60</sup> Augustin, *Retract.* I 26, 31-33, 75.

<sup>61</sup> *De diuersis quaest. LXXXIII* 12, 18-19, 19.

One of the fears of the anti-Chalcedonians was that any talk of two natures in Christ Jesus might suggest a diminishing of the divinity of the victim of Calvary and hence an apparent weakening of his salvific power. For only God, as Cyril at least wanted to emphasize,<sup>3</sup> could overcome death—which includes our death. The Chalcedonians, on the other hand, saw matters differently. One at least of their basic concerns was that unless Christ in Jesus is wholly man, and man in his soul and body entirely, then whatever of man is not in Christ cannot itself be “saved”. Hence the possibility of human salvation is removed if Christ’s humanity is underplayed.

Accusations that Dionysius is some kind of monophysite are heard as early as 533. At the conference between Severians and orthodox to which I have already referred, Hypatius, bishop of Ephesus, accused Dionysius of being a fraudulent partisan of the condemned views of Apollinarius,<sup>4</sup> who claimed that Christ either had no human soul at all, or at least only a “rational” one. “Apollinarian” at that time had both a genuinely historical reference and was also a “code word” for anti-Chalcedonian, or monophysite; and the suspicions of Hypatius on this issue, though in a less extreme form, have been echoed by many modern scholars who have repeatedly attempted to identify Dionysius as one or other of the “monophysite” leaders of the period: he is Severus of Antioch, according to Stiglmayr (this is by far the most interesting such claim),<sup>5</sup> Peter the Iberian (of the monastery of Maiuma, the port of Gaza) according to Honigmann,<sup>6</sup> Peter the Fuller (patriarch of Antioch) according to Riedinger.<sup>7</sup> Without assuming the results of our forthcoming discussion of the notorious “Christological” passage of the fourth letter, we may note that the cautious and learned Roques, attempting to defend Dionysius as orthodox, will only conclude that if we go by the “letter” of what Dionysius says (as distinct perhaps from the spirit) we cannot impugn his

<sup>3</sup> On Cyril’s concern with the overcoming of death see K.P. Wesche, “Christological Doctrine and Liturgical Interpretation in Ps-Dionysius”, *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 33 (1989) 69, n. 51. I have profited much from this article, though, as will appear below, I cannot accept Wesche’s conclusion that for Dionysius “the liturgy primarily is a ‘show’ ” (73).

<sup>4</sup> Lorenzo Valla later voiced similar suspicions (*Omn. Op.* 1, ed. Garin, 852B).

<sup>5</sup> “Der sogenannte Dionysius und Severus von Antiochien”, *Scholastik* 3 (1928) 1-27, 161-189; *contra* J. Lebon, “Le Ps.-Denys et Sévère d’Antioche”, *RHE* 26 (1930) 880-915 and 28 (1932) 296-313.

<sup>6</sup> E. Honigmann, “Pierre l’Ibérien et les écrits du Ps-Denys l’Aréopagite”, *Mém. de l’Acad. Roy. de Belgique (Classe des Lettres)* 47 (Brussels, 1952). *Contra* I. Hausherr, “Le Ps-Denys est-il Pierre l’Ibérien?”, *Orient. Christ. Period.* 19 (1953) 247-260; R. Roques, “Pierre l’Ibérien et le ‘Corpus dionysiacaum’”, *Rev. de l’Hist. des Rel.* 145 (1954) 69-98.

<sup>7</sup> U. Riedinger, “Ps-Dionysios, ps-Kaisarios und die Akoimeten”, *BZ* 52 (1956) 276-196. *Contra* J.-M. Hornus, “Les rech. dionysiennes de 1955 à 1960”, *Rev. d’Hist. et Phil. Rel.* 41 (1961) 22-81. I myself (in a deservedly buried piece “In Search of the Divine Denis”, in *Seed of Wisdom* [Toronto, 1964] 136-137) drew attention to the fact that Dionysius might have had a career somewhat similar to that of the “monophysite” philosopher and theologian Philoponus (for whose life see now R. Sorabji, “John Philoponus”, in *Philoponus and the Rejection of Aristotelian Science* [London, 1987] 1-40). Hathaway (p. 12, n. 1, above) notes the oddity that Philoponus, who is both monophysite and well versed in the philosophy of Proclus, appears to take Dionysius as a genuinely Apostolic figure. Is this mere philological blindness in Philoponus, or does he know more about Dionysius than he discloses?

orthodoxy,<sup>8</sup> and that he *seems* (on Christology) to be substantially orthodox;<sup>9</sup> while a more recent enquirer suggests that it can be more or less taken for granted that Dionysius is a monophysite working within the hopefully eirenic framework of Zeno’s *Henoticon*:<sup>10</sup> “We can be sure though that his chief inspiration was the Christian faith”.

The second “charge” against Dionysius is that he is a Platonist or, in modern terms, a Neoplatonist follower of Proclus. I use the word “charge” here because the accusation, in its modern formulations, springs in the first instance from Luther,<sup>11</sup> and appears in its sharpest form in Anders Nygren.<sup>12</sup> Since the end of the nineteenth century few serious scholars have denied that Dionysius is partially dependent on Proclus (and probably on other Neoplatonists as well),<sup>13</sup> but Luther had in mind something much more serious than dependence. The essence of his remarks about Dionysius, though he had no philological work with which to back them up, is that Dionysius’ Platonism distorts his Christianity, that Dionysius is nominally a Christian, really a Platonist. More recently such beliefs have been developed by a number of scholars, perhaps especially by Vanneste who thinks of Dionysius’ mystical writings as unrelated to any genuine Christian “experience”, being an echo of Neoplatonic mystical techniques with a rather thin Christian veneer.<sup>14</sup>

It should be observed that to say that Dionysius is a Neoplatonist (which up to a point is now universally agreed) is not necessarily to charge him with being a nominal Christian, or a Christian who does not really know what Christianity is about. In a sense the debate about Dionysius’ Christianity or lack of it is similar to the now more or less defunct debate about whether Augustine was converted to Christianity or to Neoplatonism in 386. It is now often said that the question is ill posed; that in fact Augustine was genuinely converted to what he believed to be Christianity, but to a Christianity which was widely believed to be teachable in

<sup>8</sup> R. Roques, *L’Univers dionysien* (Paris, 1954) 315.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

<sup>10</sup> Wesche (n. 3, above) 54.

<sup>11</sup> *Plus platonizans quam christianizans: from The Babylonian Captivity* (1520), Weimar: Krit. Ausg. 6, 562.

<sup>12</sup> A. Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (Eng. trans. by P.S. Watson [Philadelphia, 1953]) 576-593: “In Pseudo-Dionysius the pure and unadulterated Eros motif assumes the position of the deepest spiritual meaning of Christianity” (577).

<sup>13</sup> The basic and widely accepted work of Koch and Stiglmayr was published in 1895, but much has been done since. See especially the various pieces of hard evidence provided by H.D. Saffrey, “New Objective Links between the Ps-Dionysius and Proclus”, in *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought* (ed. D. O’Meara) (Norfolk, Va. 1982) 64-74.

<sup>14</sup> See J. Vanneste, *Le mystère de Dieu: Essai sur la structure rationnelle de la doctrine mystique du Pseudo-Denys l’Aréopagite* (Brussels, 1959); and in a slightly moderated vein in “Is the Mysticism of Pseudo-Dionysius Genuine?” *Int. Phil. Quart.* 3 (1963) 286-306. See also B. Brons, *Gott und die Seienden: Untersuchungen zum Verhältnis von neuplatonischer Metaphysik und christlichen Tradition bei Dionysius Areopagita* (Göttingen, 1976). The most powerful reply to this kind of reading of Dionysius is an Oxford thesis of A. Golitzin, *Mystagogy: Dionysius the Areopagite and his Christian Predecessors* (Oxford, 1982); but despite Golitzin the influence of Brons will be apparent in my own discussion. See also (against Vanneste), P. Scazzoso, *Ricerche sulla struttura del linguaggio dello Pseudo-Dionigi Areopagita* (Milan, 1967).

Platonic language and to share a number of important beliefs with the Platonists. Thus Dionysius, while certainly being a Neoplatonist, could be a genuine (though possibly misguided) believer in Christianity. Hence there are two questions, not just one, about the quality of Dionysius' Christianity. The first question is *historical*: Did Dionysius genuinely regard himself as a Christian, and as a Christian willing to use Neoplatonic language and theories to help promote Christianity? (If he did so regard himself, his "veneer" of Christianity may be factual enough, but he is not, as some interpreters think, merely out to prolong the life of Neoplatonic beliefs by dressing them up as Christianity.<sup>15</sup>) The second, and *theological*, question would then be: Even if Dionysius regarded himself as a genuine Christian (whether "monophysite" or Chalcedonian would not matter in this case), is his "Christianity" so warped by anti-Christian philosophizing that Luther was basically correct in his assessment of it? Luther, we recall, was not merely accusing Dionysius of being a monophysite heretic; he was accusing him of being a pagan in his most basic beliefs. What Luther meant, of course, was that in Dionysius' mysticism there is no place for the *theologia crucis*, no place for a proper account of grace. We shall have to return to this charge which is, as we have seen, at first sight very different from the matter of anti-Chalcedonianism, later on.

I say "at first sight" deliberately, for it may turn out that there is some relationship between the two charges (of paganism and of monophysitism) after all, whether Luther recognized it or not, if there is anything in either of them. It might seem that there is no immediate similarity at all, for Luther's attack on Dionysius, primarily directed at the *Mystical Theology*, is to be set in the context of his general hostility to "monkish" piety, to the supposedly pagan attempts to climb up the ladder of asceticism to an unlawful mystical communion with God, a communion based on a theology of "works". But such an attack might seem to be powerful not only against a Chalcedonian form of monasticism, but against any anti-Chalcedonian version as well, for even the strong-arm men of both "orthodox" and "monophysite" groups were frequently the adherents of monkish piety. The bands of Egyptian ruffians, in particular, who were prepared to intimidate and to murder in the "interests" of Theophilus and Cyril, as well as those of the "heretical" Dioscorus, were largely drawn from the ranks of the tonsured. From Luther's point of view Dionysian piety, whether claimed for the Chalcedonians or the anti-Chalcedonians, would be monkish. But in fact, as we shall see, although Dionysius' attitude to monks and their asceticism would have seemed bad enough to Luther, our author places monks (whom he often and oddly—perhaps after Philo—calls "servants" [*therapeutae* EH 6.533A; Ep. 8.1093C]) below the clergy in the hierarchy of the church: though above the laity. And the higher up the hierarchy, the more perfect the degree of illumination. It is important that Dionysius'

<sup>15</sup> This seems at times to be the view of Hathaway (n. 1, above), particularly when he suggests that the violently anti-Christian Damascius, or one of his close associates, might in fact be the author of the *corpus dionysiacum* (26-29).

piety is ultimately a piety for bishops rather than for monks. The explanation of this may turn out to be illuminating for his general position.<sup>16</sup>

#### *Dionysius' Christianity*

Whether or not Luther was right about Dionysius not being "really" a Christian, the modern claim that he only pretended to be one is a non-starter. Dionysius thinks he is a Christian, and his writings, especially the hierarchies, are soaked in what he clearly thought of as Christianity. Vanneste has tried to escape this obvious interpretation of the text by wishing to separate the more Christian and the less within the Dionysian corpus: to separate, that is, the *Ecclesiastical* and *Celestial Hierarchy* from the *Mystical Theology* and the *Divine Names*. But there is no justification for such a separation. Although Western Latin readers of Dionysius may have emphasized the *Mystical Theology* more than the *Hierarchies*, that is a matter of the "reading" of Dionysius, not of the intentions of Dionysius himself. It is a particular merit of some of the more recent studies of Dionysius to have emphasized this point.<sup>17</sup> For despite its Neoplatonic appearance, the Trinitarian hymn at the beginning of the *Mystical Theology* and the wealth of Scriptural detail and Scriptural knowledge to be found in the *Divine Names* suggest an author who is not only soaked in the Christian Scriptures, but also convinced that a Neoplatonic reading of them is genuinely Christian. The Neoplatonic hymn at the beginning of the *Mystical Theology* is of the same kind as the "Neoplatonic" hymns of Synesius and Marius Victorinus. Whatever our judgment of the Christian qualities of all these texts, there can be little room for doubt that their authors, for similar reasons, regarded them as Christian productions.

Hence, without further ado, we must assume the *corpus dionysiacum* to be desiderately Christian, while still admitting it to be saturated with the Neoplatonism of Proclus. But if post-Reformation thinkers may suppose that such a combination is a delusion at best and an outright piece of bad faith at worst, can we perhaps reconstruct some of the reasons why Dionysius, whoever he was, may have believed himself to be neither deluded nor insincere? Perhaps we can approach this question by way of considering certain important features of post-Plotinian Neoplatonism which may have encouraged Dionysius to believe that a genuine synthesis was possible. At the end of our enquiry we shall see that, although he was interestingly right about the plausibility of a synthesis, he had to underestimate or ignore a number of features of "orthodox" Christianity. His need to engage in such an enterprise helps explain why his synthesis leaves him open—and must leave him open—both to the charge of "monophysitism" and to the (ultimately related) charge of offering an account of redemption which gives Luther *some* further legitimate ground for theological anxiety. Out of this enquiry, too, may come—inci-

<sup>16</sup> For Dionysius' clericalism see recently Wesche (n. 3, above) 59 and P. Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols Within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis* (Toronto, 1984) 31-39.

<sup>17</sup> See especially Golitzin (n. 14, above) and Rorem (n. 16, above); also A. Louth, "Pagan Theurgy and Christian Sacramentalism in Denys the Areopagite", *JTS* 37 (1986) 432-438.

dentally—some further light on the “political” aim, the spiritual origins and even perhaps the identity of Dionysius himself. Naturally only a sketchy treatment will be possible in the short space available; hence I shall concentrate much of my analysis on the well-trodden territory of the letters, especially letters 4, 7 and 8.

### *A Crisis in Neoplatonic Ethics*

Obviously “Neoplatonism”—a modern term, of course—depends on Plato. But its dependence is not merely that Neoplatonists commented on Plato’s texts, treated them as “scriptures”, appropriated and misappropriated them for their own purposes. Part of their inheritance from Plato was those philosophical issues on which Plato’s own views are unclear, muddled, fallacious, or contradictory. Since the Neoplatonists treated Plato as a systematic thinker, and thus paid little attention either to the dramatic context of the claims of the speakers in Platonic dialogues—including the remarks of Socrates himself—or to the fact that Plato’s thoughts developed and even changed substantially on important philosophical issues, they were liable to be confronted with even more apparent confusion (which they then wished to synthesize away) than is apparent to the modern philosophical reader of the dialogues. Of these “confusions” and “problems” in the Platonic text, the one most relevant to our present discussion is the question of how it is possible to improve one’s moral and spiritual life.

Stated briefly, the difficulty is as follows. If I commit crimes, or more generally act immorally, I develop bad habits. I begin to descend the slippery slope. How do I check my fall and manage to start climbing up again? Plato provides answers, or at least the outlines of answers, in the *Republic*, particularly in his remarks about the true nature of the soul in book 10. One of the explanations of the fact that we can improve is that we are never wholly corrupt, or even wholly damaged. Our inner self, like a pearl in an oyster, or, in Plato’s account, like the sea-god Glaucus who retains his identity though encrusted with refuse and debris, remains intact, or, as some of the Neoplatonists, notably Plotinus, would put it, “undescended” (*Enn.* 4.8.8.1-4; cf. 5.1.10.17ff.). But although this theory helps Plato in his philosophical dilemma, it is not enough to extricate him completely. The existence of a pure core of the self provides us with something of a foundation on which to rebuild our moral character; a necessary but not, however, a sufficient condition for moral improvement. Plato presumably escapes from the net by holding that the pressures of a good (perhaps even a perfect) society will compel us willy nilly towards improvement, and he would perhaps admit that without such pressures the good man, the Socrates, will only be achieved “by divine dispensation” (θεία μοίρα). But what of the man hoping to become wise and good in a wildly imperfect society? Is it just a matter of luck whether he gets the push he needs to rebuild himself? Plotinus, who in general follows the Platonic optimism about our moral future, is only marginally aware of the philosophical problem, but at least he is aware that some of his religious contemporaries thought that external divine help of some kind is necessary to direct our energies successfully to self-improvement. Plotinus, however, thought that this attitude was a mere invitation

to moral laziness: “It is ridiculous for people to do everything else in life according to their own ideas, even if they are not doing it in the way which the gods like, and then be merely saved by the gods without even doing the things by means of which the gods command them to save themselves” (*Enn.* 3.2.8.43ff., trans. Armstrong). Armstrong, probably expounding Plotinus correctly, notes (ad loc.) that this passage is “a general condemnation of the unintelligent and cowardly religiosity of people who expect the gods to intervene to get them out of troubles into which they have got themselves by ignoring the divinely established laws of nature and of human life”. Perhaps, but Plotinus also answers (optimistically and Platonically) that we both ought and can obey such divine commands by our own efforts—a claim which not only Paul of Tarsus, but Iamblichus of Chalcis (and even to some degree Porphyry of Tyre) believed to be impossible. Plotinus in fact continues, with what looks like a clear reference to salvation-religions of all kinds (3.2.9.10ff.): “But it is not lawful for those who have become wicked to demand others to be their saviours and to sacrifice themselves in answer to their prayers, nor furthermore to require gods to direct their affairs in detail, laying aside their own life. . . .”

In this passage Plotinus shows himself still unaware of the seriousness of the problem in Plato’s claims. But he is aware, as we have seen, that if we can pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps, we certainly need to be able to rely on the undescended part of our soul for support. For if that undescended part were to fall, to be even partially corrupted or damaged, we should have nothing within ourselves to cling on to. And Plotinus seems to be aware of the urgency of this doctrine when he tells us in 4.8.8 that he holds it “contrary to other people’s opinion”. But interestingly enough we know that of later Neoplatonists only Theodore of Asine maintained Plotinus’ view; the rest, to some degree, failed to see how any part of the soul could remain undamaged.<sup>18</sup> Among Plotinus’ immediate successors both Porphyry and Iamblichus disagreed with him, but they also disagreed among themselves as to how serious the damage is and how much assistance from the gods man needs to remedy it. As we shall see, however, even Porphyry, who believes the damage to be less serious, finds it necessary to compromise with the “religious”. For apart from the original Platonic problem of how those descending the slippery slope to vice can manage to cling to something within themselves, thus breaking their fall and giving themselves a means of scrambling back, the threat now looms that within ourselves we have nothing strong enough and “sound” enough to cling on to anyway.

### *Theurgy: A Related Problem*

The origins of the word “theurgy” are obscure, but it is believed to be a coinage of Julian “the theurgist” (as distinct from his father Julian “the Chaldaean”)

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Proclus, *In Tim.* III, 334, 6-7 Diehl and *E.T.*, prop. 211. For Iamblichus see *In Tim.* III, 333, 28. Porphyry’s view is obscure but may have been (at least at times) close to that of Plotinus (*De Abst.* 1.39).

at the end of the second century A.D.<sup>19</sup> It has to do with performing “divine acts” of a ritual sort, and Porphyry and Iamblichus disputed as to its importance. For our present purposes many of the Neoplatonic disputes about theurgy may be left aside; but two matters are of supreme importance. Is it the theurgist who performs the divine acts (or even “makes gods”) or is it god who uses the theurgist to perform a divine act? And what good effects can theurgy have on the soul?

As to the second question Porphyry’s view was that theurgy could do two things: purify the astral body and thus by-pass the first stages of the purification of the soul. But it does not take us far, and the philosopher in any case has no need of it; the effects of the rituals of theurgy can be better achieved by more traditionally philosophical means.<sup>20</sup> Iamblichus in fact complains that according to Porphyry “philosophy” (without the help of theurgy) can alone raise the philosophical soul to the One.<sup>21</sup> Thinking by itself, he says (*De Myst.* 11, p. 296 Parthey), cannot unite the philosopher with the gods (τοὺς θεωρητικῶς φιλοσοφοῦντας)—a quite reasonable philosophical point, for, as Aristotle observes in book 1 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, it is not the concern of the moral philosopher as he understands him merely to talk about what is good, but to live the good life. That is precisely Iamblichus’ point:<sup>22</sup> thinking, by itself, could not enable a man to be integrated with the One, any more than it enables him to behave or act rightly. Being integrated and behaving are matters of action, of performance, not just of having ideas. Iamblichus’ attitude then is quite different from that of Porphyry, and much more important from a Dionysian point of view. Theurgy (whatever it is) is necessary for all.

The dispute between Porphyry and Iamblichus here should be connected directly with their views on the fall of the soul.<sup>23</sup> The nature of this fall is to be understood by a consideration of the intellect. It is not that the higher soul can be affected adversely by the emotions; rather it is able to make mistakes, because, at least for Iamblichus, it is of a different rank from the divine mind, and in an unplotinian fashion importantly unlike it. Iamblichus, unlike Plotinus, would not be able to say that we are each an intelligible cosmos (*Enn.* 3.4.3.22; cf. 1.1.8.1-4); if we were, we would “really” be gods. But unlike the gods we make mistakes, even in our best selves, and thus need illumination from outside. The gods, in fact, need to do something “for us”, if we are to ascend. What they give us, or help us ac-

<sup>19</sup> See especially R.T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism* (London, 1972) 107; E. des Places, “La religion de Jamblique”, in *De Jamblique à Proclus* (Geneva, 1975) 78-80, 100; and on Iamblichus’ notion that the etymology is probably θεῖα ἐργάζεσθαι, H. Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy*<sup>2</sup> (Cairo, 1956) 461-464. The most recent discussion is perhaps that of A. Smith, *Porphyry’s Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition* (The Hague, 1974) 81-144.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Porphyry’s *De Regressu* in Augustine, *De civ.* 10.9 and 10.27-28; cf. Porphyry, *Sent.* 29 and Smith (n. 19, above) 130, 134.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Iamb., *De Myst.* 1.2, p. 7, 2ff. Parthey.

<sup>22</sup> Note the Aristotelian language (θεωρία, νόησις etc.) which in the Aristotelian mode Iamblichus thinks is not descriptive of “practical” but only of “theoretical” experience. Cf. also Smith (n. 20, above) 83-84.

<sup>23</sup> Wallis (n. 19, above) 120; Smith (n. 20, above) 110.

quire, is a “theurgic union”, that is an experienced (not merely contemplated) union: a union of which mental grasping, understanding (νόησις), is a necessary part, but only a part.<sup>24</sup>

There is a formal feature of the Iamblichian insistence that both theurgy and thinking (*theoria*) are necessary if the soul is to ascend. The thinking is not about the *meaning* of the rites themselves; indeed, since the gods prefer these rites to be in Egyptian (because it is the oldest language), they will normally be unintelligible to us. But Iamblichus also introduces a set of locutions which deserve special attention. Presumably to emphasize the importance of theurgy, and perhaps to identify his source as the Chaldaean oracles (*De Myst.* 10.6, p. 292, 10 Parthey), he began to use the word “anagogy” (ἀναγωγή) to describe our being “uplifted” by theurgical acts.<sup>25</sup> And in one passage, noted by Rorem (p. 109), he spoke of the intelligible interpretation of the theurgical symbols (τὴν τῶν συμβόλων νοεράν διερμηνεύσιν, *De Myst.* 7.2, p. 250, 13 Parthey).

Iamblichus’ claims about “uplift” are not totally unplotinian. Even Plotinus observes that we have to await the One as the eye waits for the rising of the sun (*Enn.* 5.5.8.4);<sup>26</sup> we cannot make the sun rise, though we are said to be present to the One when we wish. Now the difference between Plotinus’ position and the view of Iamblichus in the *De Mysteriis* is that for Plotinus we can go most of the mystic way on our own; and Plotinus’ more cautious remark in 5.5.8 is of a modesty rarely emphasized in the *Enneads*. But for Porphyry most of us can *hardly* start on our “ascent” without the help of the gods, and for Iamblichus we cannot start at all. Yet before rushing too far in interpreting this, we should attend to a warning given by Wallis:<sup>27</sup> “Neoplatonic ‘sacramentalism’ differs from its Christian counterpart in that it depends solely on the world’s god-given laws, not on a supernatural intervention (like the Incarnation) over and above these laws”. Iamblichus is prepared to talk of the gods’ “will” to illuminate us and to correct our “errors”, but that illuminating is a function of the actual nature of the universe. Theurgy indicates and instantiates god’s normal care for our blindness. Yet it also functions as something of an alternative to the moral struggle which Plato and Plotinus seem to have envisaged, and which the Iamblichian account of the soul deems futile without divine assistance. But is this assistance going to take the form of the *replacement* of moral struggle by theurgic illumination of the “erring”

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Wallis (n. 19, above) 121; Iamb., *De Myst.* 2.11, p. 96, 18ff. Parthey; and Smith (n. 20, above) 86-87.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *De Myst.* 1.5, p. 17, 13f.; 1.19, p. 58, 16, with Lewy (n. 19, above) 60, 240. Rorem (n. 16, above) 109-110 rightly emphasizes the importance of ἀναγωγή, but despite citing Smith seems to me to underestimate its connection in Iamblichus with the theurgical *work* of the gods and the significance of this work. For further references to Iamblichus see Rorem, p. 108, n. 56 and for ἀναγωγή in particular pp. 56, 64, 97. See also Roques (n. 8, above) 204, n. 7, and for some of its history W.A. Bienert, ‘Allegoria’ und ‘Anagoge’ bei Didymus dem Blinden von Alexandria (Berlin, 1972) 58-68.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. J.M. Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality* (Cambridge, 1967) 224-225; A.H. Armstrong, *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Mediaeval Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1967) 261-262.

<sup>27</sup> R.T. Wallis (see n. 19, above) 121.

soul—though perhaps the erring is only intellectual and not moral? To anticipate a little, we may notice a comment (admittedly exaggerated) of Sheldon-Williams on Dionysius himself: “The interpretation of *praxis* in theurgic, rather than in moral terms, has left the Ps-Dionysius, like the other late Neoplatonists, with no moral philosophy at all.”<sup>28</sup> In fact this both is and is not exaggerated. Late pagan Neoplatonists do say (when asked) that moral goodness is a prerequisite for ascent, but purely religious acts, like prayer, also come into increased prominence.<sup>29</sup>

But if Iamblichus wishes to argue that in theurgy we obtain the direct help we need, there still seem to be two available explanations. Either the “theurgist” makes the gods act for us—in which case at least some of us can ascend by our own more or less magical acts; or the theurgist is the means by which god himself leads us back. We know, in fact, that the latter explanation is the correct one: Iamblichus talks of the “good will” of the gods;<sup>30</sup> they come “voluntarily” and not under compulsion. Such activity of the gods or by the gods may not be the only Iamblichian sense of the word “theurgy”; but it is certainly an important sense, and the one relevant to our present problems. Indeed Smith is right to see in Iamblichus’ account of the “divine will” the notion of personal intervention by the gods<sup>31</sup>—the very thing Plotinus so fiercely rejected. But the how and why of the intervention of the gods (and any “theology” of intervention) is more or less outside Iamblichus’ purview. He merely claims it can occur at the performance of theurgical acts through god’s “goodness”.

#### *A Universal Way*

Over and above the problem of whether it is possible to return to the noble life once one has begun to degenerate, there is a second and related problem in the Platonic moral tradition from the beginning. In Plato’s *Republic* there are few philosopher-kings. If we translate this into Neoplatonic terms, we are saying that the intellectual demands of Platonic “salvation” are such that few human beings are able to meet them. Thus if salvation involves becoming a Platonic *philosopher* (and not merely leading a moral life), then only a very few will achieve it. Christians were quick to recognize the implications and problems of this. Origen voices the chief objection succinctly (*C. Cels.* 5.43): the Platonists are like doctors who only bother with the cultured few and have no concern with the majority of mankind. That is misleadingly polemical, but such criticisms hit home, concerning Porphyry if not Plotinus. According to Augustine (*De civ.* 10.32), whose testimony is probably more or less reliable, Porphyry was looking for a *via universalis*, by which he thinks Porphyry meant a road to salvation open to all peoples

<sup>28</sup> I.P. Sheldon-Williams, in *Cambridge History* (n. 26, above) 459.

<sup>29</sup> For prayer see Smith (n.19, above) 89; on Plotinus’ more reserved attitude to prayer, and even hostility to ritual in general see Rist (n. 26, above) 203-212; cf. Proclus, *In Tim.* I, 213 Diehl.

<sup>30</sup> *De Myst.* 1.12, p. 41, 3 Parthey; cf. 1.14, p. 44, 14. Note the ὑπερβήλλουσιν ἀγαθότητα of the gods and their care for us (3.17, p. 139, 14-16; cf. 1.13, p. 43, 3 and 9.9, p. 284, 2); and for “causality” in theurgy Smith (n. 19, above) 100.

<sup>31</sup> Smith (n. 19, above) 109-110.

and for the whole human person. (At least Porphyry probably wanted salvation for the whole soul, even if not also the body—as Augustine would have required.) Such talk of a universal way, whether derived from Porphyry or not, or whether derived directly or indirectly, is to be found elsewhere in the fourth century A.D.: Symmachus talks of more than one way to “so great a secret” (*Rel.* 3.10) in his defence of the Senate’s Altar of Victory against Ambrose, and Themistius speaks similarly (*Or.* 5.68D). Augustine too spoke similarly in the *Soliloquies* (1.13.23), and repented later of doing so: it might offend religious ears (by sounding too like Porphyry?) in suggesting more than one way (*Retr.* 1.4.3).

According to Augustine Porphyry sought a *via universalis* and confessed he could not find it. In a sense Iamblichus thought himself to have been more successful. Theurgic rites and reflection on their meaning can serve those not apt for the intellectual demands of Platonic philosophy. At least they are available for all men, provided they are initiated. God has shown us a way, through theurgy, to religious truth. Whether this will involve salvation for the “whole man”, including the body, is another question; but, of course, if the body is not part of the “real man”, the question is beside the point. But granted that it makes sense to follow ritual acts, how do we know which ritual acts we should follow? How can we be sure that Julian the theurgist and his successors got this right. Perhaps Iamblichus thought that the proof of the pudding was in the eating; but, if so, we can understand why latter-day pagans worried about what they called “Hellenism” when confronted by the new-fangled beliefs of the Christian “enemies of the beautiful”. Surely God’s goodness was not supposed to just “die out”.<sup>32</sup> What would a Christian Iamblichus make of the situation? Surely we need a “theurgic” *society*. Porphyry may have thought that the Brahmins in India demonstrated something of the appropriate social context (*De Abst.* 4.17); it is well known that theurgic rites were handed down in families, and the theurgic families themselves were interrelated by marriage (Marinus, *Vita Procli* 28). But again what a restricted and failing society!

#### *Iamblichus, Proclus, Hierotheus, Dionysius*

For good reasons most scholars who have dealt with Dionysius’ Neoplatonic background since Koch and Stiglmayr in 1895 have concentrated on Proclus. There can be no doubt that this is quite proper: both close textual parallels and what have been called “objective links” (such as the echoing by Dionysius of references in Proclus to historical events of which Iamblichus and other earlier Neoplatonists could not have been aware) have been identified. But in our present discussion it is Iamblichus who has assumed the prominent role. We have considered both his (limited) use of the often Christian word “anagogy”, or uplift, and his view of theurgy as an act *of* (that is, caused by) god. Of course modern scholars also know

<sup>32</sup> Later Neoplatonists sometimes seemed hopeful that Christianity was a passing nightmare. For Simplicius see now R. Hoffman, “Simplicius’ Polemics” in Sorabji (see n. 7, above) 57-83. For Proclus see generally H.D. Saffrey, “Allusions antichrétiennes chez Proclus le diadoque platonicien”, *Rev. Sc. Phil. et Théol.* 59 (1975) 553-563.



that in many ways Iamblichus set the tone for the later Athenian school, and that the role of his Athenian successor Syrianus and probably Proclus was to widen and deepen and "scholasticize" much of what the "divine Iamblichus" had already done. As it happens, Iamblichus' account of theurgy may be closer than Proclus' to the views of Dionysius, but that need not surprise us. A mixture of various Neoplatonic positions could be perfectly "orthodox", and indeed normal, and for Dionysius to mix the fifth-century Proclus with the fourth-century Iamblichus should in no way induce us to propose that what looks like "Proclan" material in Dionysius is really and directly Iamblichus. On the other hand just as in using *Christian* sources Dionysius generally avoids the fifth century texts (perhaps to avoid too obviously embroiling himself in Christological controversy) in favour of the fourth-century Cappadocians, so too he could perfectly easily draw on such an acknowledged fourth-century master as Iamblichus without embarrassment. Perhaps we should add further—to quieten a more convinced sceptic—that his dependence (as I assume it to be) on the Cappadocians is normal for his era. Among the avowed masters of Severus of Antioch, to take a prominent example, are Gregory of Nazianzus and Basil.<sup>33</sup>

Very few Iamblichian doctrines were abandoned by Proclus, but there is at least one important exception. And that exception seems to be found also, in muted form, in Dionysius. Iamblichus apparently added a further "ineffable" principle beyond the One, for which "the One" is not an appropriate name. Dionysius contents himself with commenting that God is "more unified than One" (ὑπερηνωμένως, *DN* 2.644A, cf. 11.952B). Of course the idea behind this, that "the One" is an inadequate name, goes back to Neoplatonic readings of Plato's argument in the *Parmenides* (141E), but Iamblichus' extremist treatment of the theme is rare among the later Neoplatonists, being followed only by Damascius, who is also our source of information for the "great" Iamblichus himself.<sup>34</sup>

Let us leave Damascius aside at this stage and consider, with reference to one particular theme of Christian theology (and for space reasons only a limited number of Dionysian texts), how much Dionysius would need to add to his analysis of Iamblichus and Proclus to produce the account of salvation that is to be found in the *corpus dionysiacum*. In this discussion we should recall again that the pagan Neoplatonists themselves, as we have seen, had become aware of what they perceived as a need for help from God, from God's work, if we are to be saved "theurgically", and that in such a process of salvation, one way, one kind of theurgy, of a "universal" nature, is a desideratum. But how can we know that the Chaldaean Oracles are the best approach, let alone the only possible approach? If only God had told us how he had been willing to save us, and by what particular

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Homily 102 in *Patrol. Orient.* 22, 280-281.

<sup>34</sup> Damascius, *De Princ.* 1.86.3ff. Ruelle; and 1.4ff. on Damascius himself. Cf. I.P. Sheldon-Williams, "The pseudo-Dionysius and the holy Hierotheus", *Studia Patristica* 8.2 (1966) 112 (= *Texte und Untersuch.* 93). Of course if Damascius or one of his close followers is claimed to be identical with Dionysius, the doctrine might afford further "evidence" in that direction. But, as I have argued, the attempt of Hathaway to identify Dionysius and Damascius seems misguided. Hathaway (n. 1, above) 25 mentions that God is beyond unity, but neglects the role of Iamblichus.

rituals our salvation could be worked! What above all Dionysius found in Christianity was his belief that God *had* indeed both told us about how he can and will save us, and the liturgical mechanisms and institutions he has provided for this purpose. And in that connection let us note a further piece of Proclus which Dionysius presumably found congenial. Proclus holds that "eros" can be used of a love which descends from the intelligible to the sensible, and is providential.<sup>35</sup> Which means that the downflowing *eros* of God, viewed as the cause of inspiration in men, can be seen as a means of return for men to God. And this is precisely the context in which much of *Dionysius'* "erotic" language (not to mention talk of Christian *agape*) occurs.

As is appropriate for an early sixth century man who claimed to be Dionysius of Athens, the convert of St. Paul mentioned in Acts 17.34, the author of the *corpus dionysiacum* claims Paul as his major Christian authority; and certainly he quotes Paul's writings frequently enough. But it is hard to find any particular influence of the Pauline writings on Dionysius' theology, and certainly Luther's reliance on what he took to be Paul's basic beliefs is one of the reasons for his seeing Dionysius as essentially unchristian. But second only to Paul (*DN* 2.681A) Dionysius regards a certain Hierotheus as authoritative, and to this authority he attributes two major works: an *Elements of Theology*—the title reminds many scholars of Proclus, as does the rank of "guide" (καθηγεμών, 2.648A) which is bestowed on Hierotheus<sup>36</sup> and which Syrianus also uses of Proclus in his commentary on the *Parmenides* (p. 640, 20; 944, 17 etc.); and a work called *Erotic Hymns* (*DN* 4.713A, 713B). Since many of the references and all the lengthy citations from this mysterious Christian source, Hierotheus, appear in the *Divine Names* (chapters 2.9.648A to 3.3.684D for the *Elements* and 4.1.693B to 4.18.716A for dependence on the *Erotic Hymns*), it is worth while looking at them in some detail. They may indicate *some* of the material which Dionysius has added to the kind of synthesis of Iamblichus and Proclus we have so far been discussing.

Note first the setting. The two sections of the *Divine Names* dependent on Hierotheus are immediately followed by a passage about evil which provided the primary arguments for Koch and Stiglmayr when they denied Dionysius apostolic authority. For this section, beginning at 716A, depends directly—often very closely indeed—on the text of Proclus' *De malorum subsistentia*. In other words these sections of the *Divine Names* look like a patch-work. Certainly Dionysius has inserted Proclus more or less directly; in the earlier sections he has "inserted"

<sup>35</sup> In *Alc.* 5D, p. 23.10 Westerink. Nygren (n. 12, above) 569 observes this and suggests Christian influence. That is highly implausible (see J.M. Rist, "Some Interpretations of Eros and Agape", in *The Philosophy and Theology of Anders Nygren* (Carbondale, 1970) 168. For more on Proclan *eros* see Hathaway (n. 1, above) 55, but Hathaway's following pages on Dionysius need some revision. See Rist, "A Note on Eros and Agape in Pseudo-Dionysius", *Vig. Chr.* 20 (1966) 235-243 = essay XVI in *Platonism and its Christian Heritage* (London, 1985), and also below. Of course Greek *eros* is always a *daimon* which falls upon us and leads us—somewhere or other; the theme is common in Plato, Sophocles, Theocritus, etc.

<sup>36</sup> H. Koch, *Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita in seinen Beziehungen zum Neuplatonismus und Mysterienwesen* (Mainz, 1900) 49-62. Hierotheus is alluded to vaguely, but not named, at *DN* 7.865B; he occurs at *DN* 10.937, *CH* 6.200D ff., *EH* 2.392A15 and 3.424C.



material from two possibly fictitious treatises of Hierotheus. What he seems to have done, in fact, is to have inserted (his own) pseudo-Hierotheus into "Pseudo-Dionysius", just as he then proceeds to insert Proclus into Pseudo-Dionysius. Brons has claimed that 3.2-3 are inauthentic Dionysius, but that seems an unnecessary hypothesis.<sup>37</sup> They appear to be genuine inventions by Dionysius himself.

Among other topics, it is said, Hierotheus' *Elements* dealt with the divinity of Jesus, "the fulfilling cause of all" (648C). They made much use of Scripture and of reflection on Scriptural and liturgical "experiences".<sup>38</sup> Jesus, out of love for humanity (φιλανθρωπία) has descended and become a being, and the more-than-good (he probably means "more than mind") has taken the name of man (ἀνὴρ ἐρημάτισεν). The word "love for humanity" is very important: Rorem has emphasized Dionysius' constant use of it with reference to the Incarnation. *Philanthropia*, however, is not specially Dionysian, or Neoplatonic; it has a very wide currency among both Christian and pagan writers,<sup>39</sup> though it is used regularly enough in connection with the Incarnation. Clement, Origen and Athanasius, as a glance at Lampe's *Lexicon* will show, are fond of it; so are the Cappadocians.

In the sections of the *Divine Names* that follow, Dionysius refers again to his debts to his teacher, while insisting that his dependence is not slavish (681C), and he now moves beyond the mere use of Hierotheus' writings to comment on a notorious liturgical experience. Hierotheus, Dionysius himself, James the "brother of God", the chief "hierarchy" (i.e. bishop) Peter, and others, had gathered for a "Vision of the body which is the source of life and bearer of God".<sup>40</sup> Whether this refers to the "dormition" of Mary (as is traditionally but perhaps doubtfully supposed), the context of "ecstasy" and "experiencing communion" with the things hymned is eucharistic.<sup>41</sup> Hierotheus not only taught of the "philanthropy" of Jesus; he celebrated the "divine frailty" eucharistically—as 648B puts it, quoting Aristotle's *On Philosophy* (fr. 15 Ross), he "experienced divine things"—teaching us that Jesus' philanthropic Incarnation enables the "hierarchs" at least to transcend themselves and return to their source. Here we have the element of divine help which the Neoplatonists, and Iamblichus in particular, had sought. The liturgical acts are God's divine workings—or what we may call his enlightening theurgy. Of course, these "mystical experiences are not to be conveyed to the multitude" (684B). Hierotheus is again in traditional company. But for him the initiates are, above all, the hierarchs, that is, the bishops.

<sup>37</sup> B. Brons, *Sekundäre Textpartien im Corpus Pseudo-Dionysiacum?* (Göttingen, 1976) 110. I shall return to the question in the Appendix, but it is of only secondary importance.

<sup>38</sup> On Dionysius' apparently apologetic tone about theurgical language in this section see Rorem (n. 16, above) 134.

<sup>39</sup> Nygren (n. 12, above) 430 calls attention to the use of φιλανθρωπία by Gregory of Nyssa in particular. See also Rorem in C. Lübbheid, *Ps-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (New York, 1987) 158, n. 56. Rorem cites *CH* 4.181B, *EH* 3.437A, 441A, 444A, 444C, *DN* 1.592A, 640C, 648D, *Ep.* 3.1069B, *Ep.* 4.1072A9, 1072B21. Note that the word may be used "unhistorically" by Dionysius of the Incarnation; that is, in a metaphysical, not a historical sense.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. the liturgical setting of this passage see Rorem (n. 16, above) 135-137.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. *EH* 3.425D, 440B28, 444A5.

We do not need to linger long over the analysis of Neoplatonic material in the *Erotic Hymns*. But we should notice one important point. In this section of Hierotheus Dionysius does not talk of *philanthropia*: rather his language is of *eros* and *agape*<sup>42</sup>—which perhaps suggests that Hierotheus is a specific historical figure, though the whole discussion is redolent of Plotinus and of Proclus' Commentary on the *Alcibiades*. But at least Dionysius' version of Hierotheus' metaphysics is deeply Christological. Divine *eros* is outgoing (ἐκστατικός), and if much of the inspiration of Hierotheus is standardly Neoplatonic, the idea that the first principle is itself to be identified as overbounding *eros* is original either with Dionysius or, if Hierotheus is a genuine source, with Hierotheus as a Christian writer. Of course Dionysius or Hierotheus is not the first Christian to have called God *eros*; Origen had done so in treating of the *Song of Songs* (*PG* 13, 70D), and perhaps Dionysius is dependent on him, or on the Origenist Evagrius. But whether there is dependence here, or originality, the Christianized Proclus that Hierotheus comes up with is clearly intended to be Christian.

It may be worth observing that it is in this Hierotheus section of the *Divine Names* that Dionysius comes closest to blowing his cover as the putative disciple of St. Paul. In 709B Dionysius (whether or not depending on Hierotheus) refers to Ignatius of Antioch (*ad Rom.* 7.2) who died about 107 A.D., and quotes the text "the object of my *eros* has been crucified". Obviously this text (with others) is useful for Dionysius in his attempt to equate *eros* with *agape*, but his risky use of Ignatius might seem more intelligible and intelligent if he were in fact quoting a genuinely historical source, perhaps, we might allow, the same "holy Hierotheus" who is quoted elsewhere by Stephen bar Sudaili.<sup>43</sup> But we should not make too much of this possibility.

What then have we found in the two Hierotheus sections of the *Divine Names* which inject a genuinely Christianized set of Neoplatonic material into the text of that treatise? Christianity, through one of its "authorized" writers, can add to the Neoplatonic synthesis we discussed in pre-Dionysian texts exactly where additions are needed to make the account of salvation work. We have now a universal way: God has shown his *philanthropia* through the divinity of Jesus. In the *Erotic Hymns* this *philanthropia*, which already bears the stamp of Cappadocian Christianity, can be linked with *eros*-theory and with an account of the "mystical" possibilities which the hierarchy Hierotheus had developed through living a Christian liturgical life and through soaking himself in the Christian Scriptures. Without going into further details about the "Scriptural" and liturgical symbols on which Rorem in particular has shed much light in recent work, we can say that the *Celestial Hierarchy*, and in particular the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, confirm what we have argued. Participation in the divine rites, and in particular in the *sunaxis*, the Eucharist, provides the universal way, the right kind of theurgy for which the Neoplatonists had searched. In this sense, as Dionysius says (*EH* 432B), theurgy

<sup>42</sup> See Rist, "Eros and Agape" (n. 35, above).

<sup>43</sup> On Stephen and Dionysius see especially R. Roques in *RAC* 1076.

(the New Testament) completes theology (the Old); for the New Testament describes the *acts*, the theurgical acts of *philanthropia*<sup>44</sup> and *eros* which the liturgies symbolically continue. It is in the acts of Jesus and the acts of the hierarch (the bishop) that the Iamblichan “uplift” is incarnate. This is the verified form of God’s work, and even the “secret” quality of Neoplatonic philosophical action can be maintained, for the higher up the clerical hierarchy we rise, the higher the degree of initiation into the mysteries and the greater the chance of sharing with other bishops the experiences of Hierotheus, Carpus, and—as suggested in his *Vita* by Gregory of Nyssa—of Moses himself. “Talk of hierarch”, says Dionysius, “and one is referring to a holy and inspired man, someone who understands all sacred knowledge, someone in whom an entire hierarchy is completely perfected and known” (*EH* 373C).

The liturgical acts and scriptural readings are the means God has granted us to an end, and the end is to experience communion with the ineffable, the unknown God of Acts 17, the God of Hierotheus and of the other hierarchs who view the “mortal body”. And appropriately this vision, the vision of the God of Moses, is a vision, in the language of Nyssa, of the Gregorian hero entering the Gregorian darkness which surrounds the Most High. For we should not forget that of the Christians (leaving the Jew Philo aside) only Gregory of Nyssa had written in this way, and in the *Mystical Theology* the Neoplatonic experience is deepened and Christianized as a possibility only available to those who have experienced the God-given rites. The *Mystical Theology* begins with a Trinitarian hymn, appeals to a “sighting of mysterious things” (τὰ μυστικὰ θεάματα, 997BN), warns against disclosing such things to the uninitiated (1000A), and speaks of Moses plunging into the darkness of unknowing (1001A). This, says Dionysius, is what Bartholemew taught (perhaps an allusion to the *Book of the Resurrection*); this is what the hierarch achieves. Perhaps the bishop alone, like St. John in Dionysius’ letter 10, can attain such a state—truly a bizarre claim—but episcopal office, presumably, is a career open to talents; and in any case the Christian experience, a measure of the neoplatonic return to God, can be mediated through the hierarch to the rest of the believers.

#### *The Divinity and the Humanity of Christ*

We have tried to identify the sort of material Dionysius thought he needed to make Christianity “work”. That is not a shocking attitude to attribute to him. Augustine too, perhaps as late as 410 A.D., is able to say about Platonic books (not of course, those of Proclus or Iamblichus) that only a few things need to be altered to make their authors Christian (*Ep.* 118.3.21, *CSEL* 34, p. 685, 4-5). But with the change of words was to go a change of attitude, above all the adoption of Christian humility of which Jesus has given us an example. Of course Augustine

<sup>44</sup> For the connection of theurgy with the acts recorded in the NT and their continuation in the sacraments of baptism, the *myron* and especially the eucharist see the large collection of references in Luijheid’s translation (n. 39 above), 52, n. 11. Here the Iamblichan connection is duly noted.

regards such a change of *attitude* as of enormous importance, but what matters in our present discussion is his view that it is the coming of Christ which is needed to supplement Platonism and thus make it into a more or less true religion. If we leave aside Augustine’s very different view of the *significance* and working of the Incarnation, and his insistence (so different from Dionysius) on the virtue of Christian humility as a cure for Neoplatonic pride, the parallels between Augustine and Dionysius are still striking. What then we need to know about Dionysius is what account of the Incarnation *he* needs to satisfy his wish for a completed Neoplatonism. And here at last we come back to the notorious question of Dionysius’ “monophysitism”, for, if the broad outlines of my approach are correct, Dionysius will need Christ to be God, to show us the way home, to enable us to experience “divine things”, but the humanity of Jesus will not be essential. What Dionysius needs is a theory of God on earth, not a theory of God’s assumption of man.

But there is a further complication. To satisfy that partially orthodox requirement, Dionysius would need a *Trinitarian* theory, but not much of a Christological theory—and again note the parallel with one stage of Augustine’s development. Certain pre-baptismal difficulties which Augustine (and his friend Alypius) experienced, as O’Connell has especially emphasized,<sup>45</sup> were concerned with the nature of the “man Christ Jesus”: Christological, that is, not Trinitarian. And as for Dionysius, we have seen how enthusiastically—and sincerely—he placed a Trinitarian hymn at the beginning of his *Mystical Theology*. But in the latter part of the fifth century and the early sixth, the time in which Dionysius is writing, Christological disputes were urgent and violent, and we may regard it as a working hypothesis that Dionysius, while not needing any strong thesis about the humanity of Christ, had also no wish to draw undue attention to himself by the use of overtly anti-Chalcedonian language. Even those scholars who believe him to be “monophysite” in tendency have regularly noticed that he avoids any of the specifically “monophysite” formulas such as can be found, for example, in Severus of Antioch. Indeed whether Dionysius is a monophysite or not, this refusal to use identifiably partisan language is a good reason why he is not to be identified with Severus or any other of the monophysite leaders.<sup>46</sup> If he wished his work to have any kind of universal appeal, the need for non-controversial language would sit well with his “philosophical” unconcern for the substance of the debate about the orthodoxy of Chalcedon itself. For Dionysius’ purposes, as we have discussed them, getting involved in disputes about Christology could only distract his intended audience from taking his specifically Proclan version of Christianity seriously. And yet since the monophysite underemphasis of Jesus’ humanity sits well with what appear to be Dionysius’ “requirements” from Christianity, we should expect that willy nilly his formulations, even when carefully and unpolemically expressed, would tend to look “monophysite”. And indeed to those like Hypatius of Ephesus

<sup>45</sup> R.J. O’Connell, *Augustine’s Early Theory of Man* (Cambridge, Mass. 1968) 258-278.

<sup>46</sup> See recently R.C. Chestnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies* (Oxford, 1976) 9-56.

in 532, that is exactly how they did look; for when Hypatius accused Dionysius of being a follower of Apollinarius, “Apollinarian” must be construed as a code-word for monophysite.

Two of Dionysius’ letters (number 6 to a priest Sosipatros [cf. *Rom.* 16.21] and number 7 to Polycarp [perhaps the historical bishop of Smyrna]) begin with remarks indicating our author’s opposition to attacks on non-orthodox religious or philosophical belief. Letter 7 tells Polycarp that Dionysius cannot recall ever having attacked “Greeks”, “Greeks” being the usual term for non-Christian philosophers, those who regarded themselves as the heirs of the Platonic tradition against Gnostic, Christian or other theosophies (cf. Plot., *Enn.* 2.9.6.6-8; Tatian, *Orat. ad Graecos*, etc.). The truth, Dionysius argues, will speak for itself: perhaps a timely warning since the works of Porphyry (along with “Nestorian works”—Severus was added in 536) had been again in 448 condemned to the avenging flames by Imperial order (*Cod. Iust.* 1.1.3). In view of what is generally agreed to be the great debt of Dionysius to late Neoplatonists, and his likely inclusion of Porphyry himself under this group, there is nothing surprising about this attitude. Neoplatonists of the fifth century had reason to fear, as the murder of Hypatia in 415 had shown earlier, and as the persecution of philosophers after the revolt of Illus was to remind them again later in the century.<sup>47</sup> At some point in the early 490s, the philosopher Damascius records with disgust, the philosopher Ammonius made a deal with Athanasius II, patriarch of Alexandria, which somehow restricted freedom to teach in exchange for a more guaranteed security of life and limb for the teachers. There were even rumours that Ammonius had been baptized. Westerink has drawn our attention to a remark of Philoponus (in *De an.* p. 104, 21-23): “Though the soul may be forced by tyrants to profess an impious doctrine, she can never be forced to inner assent and to belief!”<sup>48</sup> Such a world Dionysius wishes to avoid; he is, in fact, a law-and-order man. Religious matters need to be discussed in a hierarchical, almost hieratic, setting.

Between two of Dionysius’ letters to bishops (7 and 9), there is the fascinating rebuke in letter 8 to the monk Demophilus. The name is suggestive and the letter dependent, as a recent scholar has shown,<sup>49</sup> on Plato’s *Gorgias*. Demophilus is a subverter; he resembles the “democratic” Callicles. “Democratic” is a bad word in Byzantine Greek: it may refer to popular rioting, to power on the streets. Demophilus the monk is to stay in line and be obedient to the established ecclesiastical authorities. But what if the superior has behaved in an unholy fashion? He still should not be corrected: a son or servant should not abuse or beat his father (8.1093A). God knows men’s hearts and the evil priest, the wolf in sheep’s clothing, should be left to the mercy of God (1092C ff.). His behaviour may be reck-

<sup>47</sup> On Christian-pagan hostility (see also n. 32, above) further detail can be gleaned from the comments of Zacharias in his life of Severus (*Corp. Script. Christ. Orient., Scr. Syr.* IV.4, 16, 22, 23, 42ff.) and from those of Damascius in his *Life of Isidore* (ed. Asmus) 26, 34, 67. See also the discussion in J. Combès, *Damascius: Traité des premiers principes* (Paris, 1986) xx.

<sup>48</sup> On the “pact” see also L.G. Westerink, *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy* (Amsterdam, 1962) xi-xii.

<sup>49</sup> Hathaway (see n. 1, above) 93-95.

less; he is not really a priest. Divine retribution may be assumed, but it should not be anticipated at the price of disturbing the hierarchy and good order.

Now it is clear that quite apart from being willing to help Neoplatonic friends and possibly fellow-students from his earlier days, Dionysius might also wish to discourage pagan-hunting for more personal reasons. The orthodoxy of his own views on such key issues of Christian-pagan “dialogue” as the creation of the world *ex nihilo* is decidedly suspect. Many moderns believe that Dionysius has no belief in creation in or with time, but that he holds to the eternal metaphysical dependence on God in a Neoplatonic manner.<sup>50</sup> Surprisingly the only passages where he uses the characteristically Christian term (or its cognates) for “to create” (κτίζειν) are direct quotations from the Bible (*DN* 2.637B; 4.700C; 9.912B; *Ep.* 7.1080B). But if Neoplatonists and Neoplatonic themes are at risk and need protection, it is even more urgent for Dionysius—and especially if he is to induce acceptance of his works as products of the apostolic age—both to avoid suspicion of heresy and to discourage sectarian hostility among the Christians themselves. For the less bother there is about the virtues and vices of the Council of Chalcedon, the more likely that his own restricted Christology (or alternatively his own less restricted Christology) will be able to avoid hostile scrutiny. Hence he tells Sosipatros in letter 6 that there is no credit in persecuting evil cult (θρησκειαν), and he tells bishop Polycarp that he himself has refrained not only from attacking “Greeks” but from polemical behaviour altogether. For, he argues, everyone believes he has genuine coinage, but he may only possess part of the truth. And to Sosipatros he observes that to know that X is not red is not to know that it is white, and to know that Y is not a horse is not to know that it must be a man. In view of our limited knowledge, we may infer, how can we be sure that our Christology is complete, even provided we learn from the Scriptures what Dionysius believes is sufficient truth to licence and promote the return of the soul?

And in fact, as letter 4 shows, Dionysius’ Christology looks minimal (for it only needs to be minimal) from a Chalcedonian point of view. In order to understand it we need first to notice the “cosmic” function of the Incarnation in Dionysius’ account. In language which we should now be able to interpret, we find that Jesus is the “mystery of *philanthropia*” (*DN* 2.640C; cf. *Titus* 3.4); his role for us is to initiate the Eucharist (*EH* 3.441C), to present the divine unity among the plurality of mankind. In the Incarnation, as Dionysius describes it, the simple becomes complex (*DN* 1.592A; *EH* 3.444AB). Jesus (as man) is divinely formed for us (θεοπλαστία καθ’ ἡμᾶς, *DN* 2.648A). Now we have already noticed that Dionysius can be seen to use the names Jesus and Christ as virtual synonyms, and in letter 4 we find that his interest in Jesus is always in his miraculous, that is, divine setting. Dionysius is interested to talk, in the famous phrase, of his “certain novel theandric operation”. Notice that there is no mention of “natures”, either one or two, no mention of either “in” or “from” two natures. Dionysius rather chooses to avoid any of the specific Chalcedonian or anti-Chalcedonian language. But his

<sup>50</sup> So recently Wesche (n. 3, above) Hathaway (n. 1 above) xvi-xvii, and S. Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena* (Leiden, 1978) 21-22.

“monophysitism” seems apparent: it is hard to see that he is speaking of more than one operation, unless, of course, “theandric” means “of both God and man”. But we should notice that the kind of acts of which Dionysius likes to speak are “more than human”: walking on water and “being formed from a virgin’s blood”.

To confirm our interpretation of the passage from letter 4 we need to consider two points: the sense in which Dionysius, following an Iamblichian pattern of thought, thinks of the Incarnation as theurgy, that is, as an act of God designed to lead us back to himself (for he has come to be “in our mode” (καθ’ ἡμᾶς); and secondly the interesting uses of the form ἀνδρική (CH 4.181B and EH 3.429C) which will show us what the ἀνδρική in θεανδρική ἐνέργεια is understood to add to the workings of the second person of the Trinity. In CH 181B we meet the phrase ἀνδρικῆς θεουργίας in reference to the “philanthropy” of God in the Incarnation. John the Baptist is revealed as the prophet who will foretell the divine action (singular) in human guise (ἀνδρικῆς). This divine action will bring salvation. Again this looks like taking human form as a means for God’s action. As the passage continues (181C), *Jesus*, “the transcendent cause” without any change came to our condition (πρὸς τὸ καθ’ ἡμᾶς ἀμεταβόλως).

Our second passage is similar (EH 3.429C): it seems to allude to the Synoptic Gospels and their account of the *divine* actions (θεουργίας) of Jesus as man (ἀνδρικός). Again ἀνδρικός agrees with “actions” (if the text is correct) and again it seems as though “in human form” is all that is required to translate it.

Finally notice the parallel between letter 4 and *Divine Names* 2.648A in their treatments of what the *Divine Names* calls Jesus’ supernatural φυσιολογία. Again the reference to one nature is missing—but only physiology? In both passages Dionysius speaks of the virgin birth (“formed from a virgin’s blood” in the *Divine Names*) and of walking on water with his feet on water which is “tensed supernaturally” (Ep. 4), and “incomprehensibly” (DN).<sup>51</sup> These are God’s “theandric operations”, but they are really supernatural. God acts, it seems, in the form of man, but there is only one act, and it is God’s.<sup>52</sup>

As we have seen, Dionysius wants to avoid language which would pin him down as Chalcedonian or anti-Chalcedonian. But theologically he believes he does not need the man Jesus, only the incarnate Christ as God. There are a number of passages of Scripture the interpretation of which tends to separate the Chalcedonians and those tending to “Nestorianism” (or more euphemistically “Antiochean theology”) on the one hand from the “monophysites” on the other. This is not the place for detailed discussion, but we may note that whereas Severus of Antioch (alluding to Luke 2.40-52) speaks of Jesus “*seeming* to grow in wisdom

and grace”,<sup>53</sup> the technically “Antiochean” Theodore of Mopsuestia has no difficulty with genuine growth in age and wisdom and virtue (ed. Swete II, 297-8). (The ambivalent position of Athanasius here may be noted: he is often a source for both Chalcedonians and anti-Chalcedonians. He contents himself with noting Jesus’ “progress of the *body*” [C. Ar. 3.52]). Our present concern, however, is that for the “monophysites”, as for Dionysius, Jesus’ humanity is virtually unnecessary. What is needed is that God is able, through his presence and later through his sacraments, to lead us where, of ourselves, we should be unable to go. As Dionysius puts it, Christ takes on our form (θεοπλαστία καθ’ ἡμᾶς), and this is to be explained as his providing and vivifying the mechanism for theurgical acts. In more theological terms Dionysius does not need (and does not have) a doctrine of the atonement, only a doctrine of salvation by God.

### *The Angelic Life on Earth*

The argument so far has many ramifications, but let us content ourselves with two. First, there is, as Markus has noted, little talk of moral action in Dionysius. Markus’ words, though again slightly hyperbolic, make the point clearly enough: “The interpretation of *praxis* in theurgic, rather than in moral terms, has left the pseudo-Dionysius, like the other late Neoplatonists (Here is the hyperbole!) with no moral philosophy at all”.<sup>54</sup> I should prefer to make the point slightly differently by saying that Dionysius has largely replaced the need for moral excellence with a need to perform ecclesiastically-structured liturgies. These liturgies, however, are not merely *seen*, but experienced or “suffered”. And we have to add that to turn Dionysius into the figure so influential in later Western and Byzantine asceticism, we have to lace him with dollops of Maximus the Confessor, or, for monasticism, John Climacus. Dionysius’ moderate use of contemporary monastic ideology is particularly in evidence if we think of the practice of virginity—which was much emphasized as a source of spiritual experience in Dionysius’ day. Dionysius certainly demanded it; monks are the highest group among the unordained, superior, of course, to ordinary laymen. But for the monk, as well as for his clerical superiors, it is the eucharist, hieratically conceived, which is the way *par excellence* to the experience of the divine. The denial of sexual delights and the attempt to eradicate the disturbing psychological and physiological effects which the monks dreaded in sexual activity, will be at most a preliminary.

And yet Dionysius thinks that his “way” will produce the type of person for whom the ascetics longed. One of the (desiderated) effects of extreme sexual renunciation, one of the marks of the “angelic” life on which the monks often set their hearts, was not merely the control of sexual desires, but the eradication of sexual feelings,<sup>55</sup> and in particular of uninvited sexual reactions (such as the pleasure or

<sup>51</sup> Mt. 14.22; Mk. 6.45-52; Lk. 6.16-21.

<sup>52</sup> The comment that it is Jesus (not just Christ) who *descends* to die on the cross “for the sake of our divine birth” appears in an interesting text at EH 4.484B—one of the very few texts of Dionysius about the specific significance of Jesus’ death. His descent, according to the “mysterious” notion of Scripture, enables us to be baptized “unto his death” (Rom. 6.3). Note, however, the reference to the liturgical act of anointing.

<sup>53</sup> Homily 119 (on the miraculous and other acts at the marriage-feast at Cana) in *Patrol. Orient.* 26, 381, 388.

<sup>54</sup> Markus in *The Cambridge History* (n. 26, above) 459.

<sup>55</sup> Note the advice given to a nun famed for her asceticism by Sarapion (*Lausiac History* 38, 1188A): Take off all your clothes and [like me] walk about the town—if you are really dead to the

erection which might accompany the sight of a naked woman): indeed the eradication of instinctive reactions of all kinds, of fear at a threatening experience as well as of pleasure at what gives worldly attraction. Long before Dionysius, the Stoics had dubbed such “pre-moral” feelings “precursors of passion” (προπόθειαι).<sup>56</sup> In Dionysius’ time insensitivity to such “pleasures and pains” was a mark of higher Christianity; they called it the angelic life. But whereas such lack of feeling is, for many monks, to be attained by asceticism, for Dionysius something like it is the achieved aim of the hierarch. The last of Dionysius’ letters, to St. John, is interesting in this regard. Dionysius tells John, on exile on the island of Patmos, that he is sure that those who try to give him pain are unsuccessful (1117BC): “I should not be so mad as to think that you suffer anything”. (Did Christians—real ones—suffer anything, according to Dionysius?) “I believe that you experience the sufferings of the body only in so far as you identify or discipline them”. John seems to be a man under a local anaesthetic which covers his entire body; he knows what is happening, but it does not hurt him. Such is the “angelic life” among men, with complete absence of feeling: the Cynic, not the Stoic apathy, it would seem. And John is a special favourite of Dionysius, as we can see elsewhere (*EH* 3.429D); he is the beloved disciple who is the *sun* of the Gospel (10.1117C).

#### *Some Modest Conclusions*

I have argued in this paper that Dionysius is a genuine Neoplatonist converted to what he took to be a genuine (the most genuine) form of Christianity. For Dionysius Christianity solves a major problem about the return of the soul which pagan Neoplatonism had failed to resolve, though Iamblichus had tried. And pagan Neoplatonists had, at times, taken a special interest in St. John’s Gospel; it appeared to have something to say about the Logos, the expression of the Unknown God. Augustine, in the *City of God* (10.29), mentions a Platonist who spoke approvingly of this Logos (though his real intent was probably anti-Christian), and a similar interest is attributed to Amelius, the pupil of Plotinus, by Eusebius of Caesarea.<sup>57</sup> If Dionysius knew as much about Amelius as he seems to have known of Iamblichus and Proclus (and perhaps of Porphyry: see Appendix), it might perhaps lessen the unexpectedness of the fact that St. John (with his conveniently and comparatively small concern with the humanity of Jesus, at least when compared with the Synoptic writers) should be Dionysius’ favourite Scriptural

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world and devoid of sensual feeling [ἀπαθήεις]). In the *Pratum* of Moschus John the Baptist grants physiological indifference to a priest faced with the fearful prospect of baptizing a beautiful (naked) girl, the rules forbidding a deaconess to perform the ceremony. John made the sign of the cross over the priest three times below the navel, thus in effect granting him the angelic mentality (*PG* 87.3.2854-2856).

<sup>56</sup> For recent discussion of these risky but not immoral (indeed unavoidable) instinctual reactions see B. Inwood, *The Stoic Theory of Action* (Oxford, 1985) 175-181 and J.M. Rist, “Seneca and Stoic Orthodoxy”, *ANRW* 36.3 (1989) 1999-2003.

<sup>57</sup> *Praep. Ev.* 11.19.1-4. See H. Dörrie, “Une exégèse néoplatonicienne du prologue de l’Évangile de Saint Jean”, in *Epektasis. Mélanges patristiques offerts au cardinal J. Daniélou* (Paris, 1972) 75-87.

guide after Paul. Indeed, as we have seen, although the pretence of Pauline guidance needs to be kept up—since after all Dionysius is, he says, the convert from the Areopagus—the theological influence of Paul is comparatively restricted in the *corpus dionysiacum*.

For the question of Dionysius’ actual use of Paul’s theology, as distinct from his name, brings us back to the special area where I have suggested that Dionysius shows “monophysite” affiliations—of necessity—for the divine nature of Christ, not the human nature of Jesus, was what our converted Neoplatonist found to be the special gift of Christianity to Neoplatonism. Dionysius, I have argued, has little interest in moral theology and moral philosophy. Nor does he show much concern with the Incarnation as an atonement, but rather as a divine act of assistance to weakened humanity. But the nature of human weakness is interesting too. If man only needs to be given the divine assistance, so to speak, to get him out of the mess from which he is too weak to extricate himself, we may wonder what is the nature of that weakness. Or what kind of fall is the fall of the soul? Dionysius has virtually nothing to say about this, and his lack of moral concerns might suggest that he has a fairly optimistic opinion of the degree of damage we have suffered. In this he would resemble his fellow Neoplatonists, despite the much greater awareness of the problem in Iamblichus and his successors as compared to Plotinus. We must recall the basic “Platonic” image once again: there is a pearl in the oyster; the pearl is intact. Although Iamblichus weakens this by urging that we need divine assistance to free the pearl and although the later Neoplatonists often distinguish between divine souls (like us) and gods, yet however fallen the soul may be, it is still divine by its very nature, and god’s task, essentially, is to clean it up, often by freeing it from the body and the bodily. It is interesting to note that such a theory implies that sin is essentially social, the result of being born into a sinful world, the seductions of which we cannot escape, rather than that we were born more positively prone to choose evil of our genuinely own volition. Severus of Antioch, the monophysite Patriarch of Antioch of whom we have already spoken several times, is interesting in this regard too. Preaching on *Romans* 5.12 that through Adam death came into the world,<sup>58</sup> he argues that as a result of death we are caught in the nets of sin. There is little trace of the late Augustinian claim that, like Adam, we are unnaturally (or by a second nature) attracted by the sweet taste of sin; that we may well struggle to commit sins through pride rather than be entangled in them through misfortune. If, as I have at least tried to suggest, “monophysitism” is likely not to need an account of the atonement, and correspondingly an emphasis on Jesus’ humanity—a doctrine that it is precisely by taking on our complete and genuine human nature that Christ “overcomes” it—and if, rather, a monophysite only needs God to intervene almost *ex machina* to get us out of our troubles, then we can readily understand why our Iamblichan Dionysius, who *qua Iamblichus* needs just that kind of Incarnation to solve his problems of the return of the too weak soul, would find the “monophysite” version of Christianity

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<sup>58</sup> Homily 49 (*Patrol. Orient.* 35, 343, 12).

more attractive than the Chalcedonian. But at the same time, of course, as a good “Hellene”, he would fail to see the necessity of bringing pressure on the misguided, whether Chalcedonian or pagan.

But, it may be said, Dionysius’ lack of concern with anything like an “inherited” propensity for weakness or even vice is merely ordinary Eastern Christianity, merely non-Augustinian. That is not quite correct. Although Dionysius’ comparative optimism about human nature is certainly “Eastern”, his lack of attention to ordinary moral behaviour makes him sharply different from Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, John Chrysostom, Maximus Confessor and others. But were not “monophysite” ascetics also concerned with ordinary morality? Of course they were. But here Dionysius’ “ecclesiasticism” comes in. For him the “way” is through bishops and Church orders, and misbehaviour among such, as we have seen, can be left to God. All I am claiming is that as a “convert” from the Neoplatonic world Dionysius only needs a specific minimal dose of Christianity, though that minimal dose is quite a lot; and, as I have also argued, it is quite misleading to think that Dionysius did not regard himself as a genuine and sincere Christian believer. All Dionysius needs to know of Christian *moral* theory is that we need God’s help to “return”, and we get that help, in his view, through ecclesiastical structures. The notion that perhaps the visible Church and its liturgies is not simply identified with the city of God would have been deeply disturbing to him. If sin can be cured and the soul raised by the substitution of Church hierarchy for secular order, then Dionysius has solved the problem his Neoplatonic eyes have seen. Unlike Severus of Antioch he is not a public preacher, so he does not even have to give an *account* of sin. I am arguing, however, that everything he says would be most compatible with the more optimistic account he might have heard Severus give. But he is not optimistic in the manner of moral ascetics like Basil or Chrysostom; his theology of salvation and its roots do not demand that kind of discipline. It is monophysite *Christology*, not whatever ascetic theory monophysites might have, which makes Dionysius sound at time like a monophysite. The “ascetic” and “moral” discipline of the monophysites would seem to be beside the point as much as the ascetic and moral practices of the Chalcedonians. The only reason I have invoked Severus of Antioch in *this* connection is my claim that a less extreme *theory* of human wrongdoing could only be in tune with Dionysius’ main concerns. Dionysius’ primary concern with the evils of human nature seems to be the metaphysical one that they *necessitate* God’s direct intervention if we are to return—and that intervention, providentially, has to be institutionalized through the liturgy.

Jesus, Dionysius thinks, was miraculously formed from the blood of a virgin (*DN* 2.648A), so that he should provide, through the Scriptures and their fulfilment by God’s action and its continuation in the sacraments, especially the eucharist, the way to return to himself. But it is somewhat unfair to Dionysius to suggest that the role of the Incarnation is just to *show* us the way (as Wesche has suggested). It is true that it is Jesus’ miraculous “descent” rather than his specific suffering and atonement which saves us, and Christians may think this defectively Neoplatonic.

But, as I have indicated, we “experience divine things” in the ecstasy of the liturgy, not merely see them. Dionysius says this himself of his master Hierotheus, who not only “learned” but “experienced” the divine things (*DN* 2.648A) and at a vision of “that mortal body, that source of life which bore God” experienced “communion with the things praised” (πρὸς τὰ ὑμνούμενα κοινωνίαν πάσχω, 3.681D ff.). And as Vanneste has shown,<sup>59</sup> this is not the private mystical experience which later Western mystics developed from it; for it is primarily connected with liturgy. But if one wanted to object to the quality of Dionysius’ Christianity, it would not be with Luther in worrying about the solitary monk trying to claw his way to heaven, but in the marked tendency to identify liturgical acts in a Christian basilica as the only and complete way open to those wishing to be servants of God and lovers of his perfection.

If we look back at Dionysius we may indeed say that his Christianity seems to be incomplete, and needs to be (at least) filled out with an enriched account of Christ’s humanity and human morality. But, as I have also suggested, there are some interesting comparisons to be made here with the early (and Neoplatonizing) Augustine. For Augustine’s own Christianity, especially his Christology and his account of fallen human nature bears, in his earlier days, some similar marks of its Neoplatonic background. Similarly, we might add, Origen’s Trinity is inadequate, and it seems that Athanasius and Cyril can easily be read in what came to be the monophysite way, when their ambiguous terminology is pressed for a clear sense and its possibly unorthodox possibilities realized by hindsight. But to say that any of that makes Origen, Athanasius, Cyril, Augustine or Dionysius merely a philosopher with a Christian veneer would be nonsense. Dionysius is a man who finds in Christianity what he realizes or believes to be lacking—and desperately lacking—in his philosophical world. With only a few words and phrases changed, it was said, they (the Platonists) could have been Christians. Those who say that should not be called surface Christians merely for thinking so; at worst they are people who have not understood, or not avowed, the importance of those few words and phrases.

<sup>59</sup> Vanneste (n. 11, above) 206-217; Rorem (see n. 16, above) 137.

## APPENDIX

*Hierotheus and Apollophanes*

In the course of his seventh letter (“to Polycarp, a bishop”) Dionysius claims that he has been told previously by Polycarp that a certain “sophist”, by name Apollophanes, has spoken abusively of him and called him a parricide because he “impiously” uses Greek material against Greeks. Decoded, this would mean that it was held against Dionysius that he is in the Greek philosophical tradition, but that he has put this tradition to work on behalf of Christianity. The charge is similar to one levelled by Porphyry against the Christian Origen: “In his life he lived in an untraditional and Christian fashion, but in his theories in ethics and theology he used Hellenic language, veiling Greek philosophy in alien (i.e. Christian) tales” (Eus. *H.E.* 6.19). Whether Dionysius is deliberately comparing himself with Origen cannot be determined, though it is not impossible. In any case he is replying to what was doubtless a common charge, that he was turning on the Neoplatonic hand that had fed him. Dionysius rebuts the charge: it is Apollophanes who acts impiously against what is divine—a reply of particular force if Porphyry is the target, for Porphyry was the author of the ancient world’s most powerful polemic against Christianity, a work condemned by Constantine and, as we noted, condemned again by the Council of Ephesus. And since we have also noted that much of Dionysius’ Neoplatonism is of the Iamblichan variety—and Iamblichus quarrelled with Porphyry precisely over the role of theurgy—it would be a further piquancy if Porphyry, an “enemy” both to Christians and to Iamblichans, were the target here.

Dionysius drags Apollophanes into the fictitious account of his life. Apollophanes and Dionysius himself witnessed the eclipse that accompanied the crucifixion when they were together at Heliopolis in Syria. (For what it is worth both Porphyry [of Tyre] and Iamblichus [of Chalcis] hailed from that part of the world.) “Apollophanes” apparently just will not accept the evidence of his own eyes and, hopes Dionysius, since he is “a real man”, wise in many ways, perhaps conversation with a real bishop will bring him to God, to the “humility” of realizing that behind “our” religion there is a “very wise truth”.

It all looks like an appeal to contemporary Platonists to follow the Dionysian path. If you look into Christianity, below the surface, you will realize that it is the way to God. Like Augustine again, but more gently, Dionysius suggests that if his Neoplatonic friends are humble, they will see where the future lies.

Now Hathaway has suggested (rightly) that behind the Demophilus of letter 8 lies something of the Callicles of Plato’s *Gorgias*; I have now suggested that perhaps Apollophanes has some resemblances to Porphyry who, in his letter to Anebo, is, like Apollophanes, sceptical of “religious” practices and events. The name “Apollophanes” too may be significant. Apollo is the god of Socrates and its “etymology” (ἀ-πολλα, in the sense of “not many”) is taken by Neoplatonists to be relevant to the unitary One as first principle. Both the names Demophilus

(democrat, demagogue?) and Apollophanes seem to have significance. What of the most important name of all, Hierotheus?

Among identifiable contemporaries of Dionysius, only Stephen bar Sudaili claims to know such a person—and some have identified Stephen, wrongly, with Dionysius.<sup>60</sup> More likely is the theory, mentioned by Roques, that Stephen himself is identical with Hierotheus. Perhaps the name, again, gives the secret away. Dionysius mentions Hierotheus’ writings, as we have seen; they are probably thinly-disguised Neoplatonic texts. Hierotheus then would become the name Dionysius gives to the “author” of these texts now that they are Christianized. “Holy God” is what “Hierotheus” could mean. Probably Dionysius is claiming that God himself is his teacher—but indirectly. To be taught by God (θεοδιδάκτος), in antiquity, can mean to be self-taught, or inspired. Hierotheus represents Dionysius’ divine inspiration in seeing the genuinely Christian nature of Neoplatonic erotic hymns and theological principles. But Dionysius makes Hierotheus a pupil of Paul, like himself; so he can hardly be identified with God. But for an author of Dionysius’ boldness that seems a minor difficulty. It was, as he tells us, Paul (as described in Acts) who led him to Christianity, and hence to see God (Hierotheus) in Neoplatonic texts. What could be simpler? But it was in Hierotheus that Dionysius found the disconcerting reference to Ignatius of Antioch, as we have seen. Now “my love is crucified” had been appropriated by Christian Platonists since Origen (*PG* 13, 70D), and Dionysius (perhaps even, like Severus, associated with Antioch himself) would have been happy to use it. Hierotheus’ *Erotic Hymns* and *Elements of Theology* cannot be *word for word* Neoplatonic texts. Whoever wrote them, they are Christianized, and the inclusion of the quotation from Ignatius of Antioch is an obviously plausible piece of Christianization. Whether Dionysius re-wrote Neoplatonic material as Christian, and then attributed it to Hierotheus (as I think likely), or whether he found it already Christianized by a “real” Hierotheus, there is nothing strange in the Christianizer, be he Dionysius or Hierotheus, including the Ignatian text. It is in the tradition.

<sup>60</sup> For Stephen see n. 43 above, and for Hierotheus (recently) Sheldon-Williams (n. 34, above).