The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STRUCTURE AND THE CONTENT OF THE TREATISE *ON THE DIVINE NAMES*

BY

CHRISTIAN SCHÄFER

BRILL PHILOSOPHIA ANTIQUA

PHILOSOPHY OF DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE

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CHRISTIAN SCHÄFER

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τὸν μὲν οὖν ποιητὴν καὶ πατέρα τοῦδε τοῦ παντὸς εὑρεῖν τε ἔργον
καὶ εὑρόντα εἰς πάντας ἀδύνατον λέγειν

(Timaeus 28c)

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GLOSSARY

Greek words or expressions are explained and translated when first mentioned in the text. Yet, it might be helpful to have a compilation of them at hand. The following Greek words are used terminologically:

ἀγάπη, *agape*	love
ἅπλωσις, *haplosis*	'simplification' (as the way to the final 'divinisation,' θέωσις)
ἀρχή, *arkhe*	principle, origin, or beginning
ἀσθένεια, *astheneia*	deficiency or weakness
δύναμις, *dunamis*	power
δύνασθαι, *dunasthai*	'potential', 'disposition'
εἰρήνη, *eirene*	peace
ἔλλειψις, *elleipsis*	deficiency
ἕν, *hen*	the One
ἐνέργεια, *energeia*	'energy', being continuously at work intrinsically (which ἐν ἐργῷ εἶναι, and hence 'energy' originally mean)
ἕνωσις, *henosis*	(final) union with the One
ἐπιστροφή, *epistrophe*	(re)turning, reversal
ζωή, *zoe*	life
θέωσις, *theosis*	the 'divinisation' at the end of the epistrophic ascent
καθ᾿ αὑτό(ν), *kath' hauto*(*n*)	in itself, nothing else considered, *per se*
καθ᾿ ἡμᾶς, *kath' hemas*	as to us, *quoad nos*
(αὐτο)κακόν, (*auto*) *kakon*	evil (in itself)
μέσον (plural μέσα), *meson* (*mesa*)	midst or centre
μέτρον, *metron*	measure
μονή, *mone*	'halt', 'abiding', or 'staying in itself'
νοῦς, *nous*	mind, intelligence
οἰκεία φύσις, *oikeia phusis*	a thing's 'proper natural definition'
οἰκείωσις, *oikeiosis*	the act 'to take housing' (οἰκία meaning 'house'), or 'to make oneself at home'

ὄν and μὴ ὄν, *on* and *me on*	being and non-being (hence the adjective 'meontic')
(ὄντως) ὄν, *ontos on*	(real) being
οὐσία, *ousia*	substance
παρὰ τὴν ὑπόστασιν, *para ten hupostasin*	'contrary to substance'
πρόοδος, *prohodos*	procession
σοφία, *sophia*	wisdom
στάσις (synonym of μονή), *stasis*	the 'stand-still'
τάξις, *taxis*	(ontological) order
τελείωσις, *teleiosis*	fulfilment
τελευτή, *teleute*	perfection or fulfilment
τέλος, *telos*	the ultimate destination, goal, or purpose
τὸ εἶναι κατὰ συμβεβηκός, *to einai kata sumbebekos*	accidental being

FOREWORD

by Paul Rorem

Anaximander said it first, in a pre-Socratic way: "The source from which existing things derive their existence is also that to which they return at their destruction, according to necessity." Gerard Manley Hopkins said it more recently, in a poetic and prayerful way: "Thee, God, I come from, to thee, go." Ancient sources popular among Platonists and other theologians framed it variously. For Heraclitus, "the way up and the way down are one and the same;" for Solomon, so the Vulgate ran (Ecclesiastes 1.7), "the rivers will all return to the place whence they came;" for St. Paul in Romans (11.36), it is all about God: "For from him and through him and to him are all things."

"Procession and return" became a master motif, not first of all for comprehensive philosophical or theological systems, but rather for the odyssey of an iconic figure, as in Homer's epic, the Prodigal Son, Augustine's *Confessions*, or the Ambrosian hymn about Christ: "Egressus eius a Patre. Regressus eius ad Patrem. Excursus usque ad inferos. Recursus ad sedem Dei." On the Latin side of the Dionysian legacy, Eriugena's *Periphyseon* amplified the story to a macrocosmic scale, Hugh of St. Victor framed it theologically as God's works of creation and restoration, and Thomas Aquinas unfolded the Pauline verse as the *Summa theologiae*. A diagram amid the works of Henry Suso attempted to depict the "Ausgang und Rückkehr der Kreatur zu Gott," again personalizing the motif. As for the Dionysian corpus, sheer genius integrated the philosophical, biblical, and theological expressions of "procession and return" in numerous texts, on several levels, and in ways still to be appreciated, as Christian Schäfer's work now demonstrates. When the medievals took up this corpus, the very first lines (CH 1, 120B-121A) sounded the theme of the divine procession toward us that returns us back to the gathering Father, complete with the Pauline "from him and to him." Since *The Mystical Theology* summarized certain (prior) works as charting a descending procession, with others emphasizing an ascending or uplifting return, perhaps the whole corpus can be plotted out on this familiar grid, albeit without conclusive proof. Some have asked whether *The Divine Names* could also

be thus internally charted, since the Good in chapter 4 proceeds outward/downward to the next chapters, and the treatise fittingly ends with the final return upward to the One in chapter 13. Yet the middle chapters (8-12) have never been convincingly interpreted as proceeding downward or as returning upward. And where/what is the turning point, the pivot from *exitus* to *reditus*?

At this point, the pivotal question of *The Divine Names*, perhaps the theologians' eagerness to apply "procession and return" to salvation history has left too much philosophy behind. The fuller picture, after all, includes "remaining," whether "remaining, procession, return" as in Proclus, or "procession, return, remaining" as the theologians put it eschatologically.

Yet here is where philosophers and theologians alike must grapple with the supreme conundrum: how to express the eternal in our temporal words, how to present the timeless within time, how to explicate one ineffable reality in a sequence of separate terms. If "remaining, procession, return" describe a single and simultaneous dynamic, is it more helpful to name it as "procession, return, remaining"? Where to start, when the very idea of "starting" destroys the simultaneity? More specifically, for the philosopher "procession" and "return" are not simply sequential, as in the theologian's salvation history, but rather two concurrent aspects of a single reality. The "downward" is the mirror image of the "upward;" but both are finite and temporal expressions for the infinite and eternal. But what of "remaining," the original and/or final eternal? To press the spatial imagery, if the downward procession should be paired with the upward return, should the "remaining" at the top also be paired with a kind of remaining, or dynamic stability, rest, or "peace," at the bottom of the parabola? Hence: procession, remaining, return. Or, as Dionysius himself says, "always proceeding, always remaining, always being restored to itself" (DN 4, 713A). If there is a form of remaining in between procession and return, a dynamic steadying providing stability, rest, and even identity amid the flux, then perhaps the enigmatic interim chapters of *The Divine Names* can be seen anew.

Christian Schäfer's subtitle is too modest. More than an "introduction," this book is a forceful re-thinking of the structure and contents of *The Divine Names.* Again arguing for Dionysius as a creative and coherent thinker, not a *mere* plagiarist of Proclus or simply as a *pseudo*-apostle, Schäfer restores "remaining" ("mone") to its manse or home at the center of the Areopagite's thought, and thus clarifies the cen-

ter of *The Divine Names.* Putting "remaining" in its place, granting it repose and stability to link procession and return, Schäfer weaves together the interpretive insights of Thomas Aquinas, von Balthasar and Ivanka with his own original exegesis of the Dionysian text. The result is a *tour de force* and *The Divine Names* must now be read anew.

Yet a new tour can have too much force. Although the subtitle surely understates, for this book is more than an introduction, the title seems to overstate the case. Even if one could so confidently isolate the philosophy of Dionysius from the theology, can this breakthrough on the structure of one treatise stand for the whole of the Areopagite's thought? Schäfer carefully addresses the general danger of artificially separating the Dionysian philosophy unto itself (§6). And yet. Typically, until the recent interest in theurgy, "Enlightened" interpreters would disregard liturgical theology first and most of all, even if their author had written a major treatise on it. The Dionysian corpus has been bifurcated along these lines often enough, with *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* left to a ritual corner. Even within *The Divine Names*, the passages with sacramental overtones in chapters two and three drop out of the philosopher's sight. For example, Schäfer's insights about procession, stability, and return might apply, albeit with slim textual evidence, to the hierarch's procession into the congregation, representing a "dynamic steadying" in their midst, before returning to his own place. *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, chapter 3, explicitly parallels this censing "procession and return" with the divine circuit itself, yet with little made of "remaining."

As with any new perspective, the proponent needs to avoid "monopolies," as Schäfer puts it. Indeed, if "remaining, procession, return" really are simultaneous, and separable only in a concession to linear exposition, they should not be tied too closely to sequential books, or chapters, in any particular order. If all three aspects are present in all parts of a work, it is possible to emphasize any aspect in any chapter, resulting in any order the reader wants. The first three chapters of *The Divine Names*, for example, should not be forced into any particular sequence, including Schäfer's. His main contribution here is the new way to read chapters 8-12, between the emphasis on a "downward procession" in chapters 4-7 and the final upward movement of chapter 13. Most convincingly, in his presentation of "Peace" as the repose or dynamic steadying bridging procession and return, Schäfer provides a way to see these chapters as part of a philosophical outline, and surely not merely a "biblical potpourri" as I once too casually put it. This may

not be the whole "philosophy of Dionysius," for besides the liturgical side, *The Mystical Theology* presents the previous treatises (including *The Divine Names*) entirely in terms of descent. Yet it does address one of the great puzzles within the Dionysian corpus, namely, the structure of *The Divine Names*, and thereby again testifies to the brilliant insights of medievals like Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas.

Among moderns, and postmoderns, Schäfer's work now offers Pseudo-Dionysian studies a major impetus after some quiet years. If I may be permitted a personal perspective, a generation ago it seemed that Andrew Louth, Alexander Golitzin and I were combining our efforts (despite our differences) to make theological inroads into this elusive author's thought-world. Now, after a pause (and as we theologians pursued some later materials), Dionysian progress has resumed at the capable hands of some new and more philosophically-minded authors: Istvan Perczel, Eric Perl, and especially Christian Schäfer. My 1993 book closed with the hope for new colleagues with new insights into the difficult Dionysian texts. I am glad to see them arriving, including this remarkable new perspective on *The Divine Names*.

PART I

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

§1. THE ‘CHURCHING’ OF PLATONISM AS A PHILOSOPHICAL CHALLENGE

Concerning the long forgotten custom of ‘churching,’ Edwin Radford’s *Encyclopaedia of Superstitions* (New York, 1949) supplies the following information: “A mother who, before she is churched [brought to church] after the birth of a child, enters any house other than her own will bring ill-luck on the house . . . It is believed also that, should a mother venture out from under her roof before churching, and be insulted or injured by neighbours, she had no remedy at law . . . However, in Ireland, the ill-luck of venturing out before churching could be evaded if a piece of thatch or a slate was pulled from the roof and worn on top of a new hat. With such a decoration, the mother could wander where she listed [because] she was still ‘under her own roof’.”

One cannot but wonder, at times, whether some sort of ‘churching’ wasn’t exactly later Platonism’s fate in the eyes of most contemporary interpreters: from the compelling advance of Christian thought from the third and fourth century onward, Platonism seems to have been christianised or — at least — ‘brought to church’ after the birth of its great ideas that shaped almost every philosophical stirrings of the previous centuries. As a matter of fact, wherever Platonism appeared to have not been duly ‘churched’ and its offspring of great ideas ‘brought to church,’ or whenever Platonism ‘ventured out’ without confessing openly its paganism by carrying around an identifying piece of the Ancient heathen roof under which it was at home for so long, it seems that it could have been insulted and attacked, or passed over as unacceptable, by everyone in the new era with its new and different awareness of things. Accordingly, the alternative that Platonic philosophy had to face seemed to be quite obvious: either to remain staunchly pagan within and to carry about the slate of the old homestead like an unseasonable fool (as Proclus and so many others seem to have done as if they were walking anachronisms) or to get ‘churched,’ supposedly as an exterior Sunday gesture without meaning, as an extrinsic attachment. Besides, the forerunner of the *ancilla*-theory and the danger of being exploited by Christian thought appeared to be lurking. Moreover, even this exploitation had its Christian opponents, which

was common knowledge, since a contamination of the undiluted kerygma by non-Christian thinking was a question in the unending dispute forced on the 'hellenising' party of Athenian metics by the spiritual dwellers of Jerusalem. John Chrysostom reportedly maintained that one cannot quote Plato without crucifying Christ for a second time. To render things even more complicated, Platonism was not simply teachings and tenets that one could accept or reject. 'Platonism,' from the third century to the fifth or sixth, was the common medium of expression for what we would call the 'humanities,' the 'sciences,' and practically any uttering in any more or less specialised field of the human spirit. As Heinrich Dörrie has put it in his description of the academic *oikoumene* of these times: "By characterising someone as 'a Platonist,' almost nothing is gained from about 220 AD onward. Platonism almost immediately obtained a far-reaching influence at that time. Platonic technical language became the vehicle of almost any scholarly discussion. . . . It should be difficult to name any prose author (other than historians) of the 3rd, 4th, or 5th century, who does not visibly display an influence of Platonic thought" (Dörrie 1967, 50). When Seneca states that *quae philosophia fuit, facta philologia est,* he is commenting on the beginnings of this development in his ages: "what used to be philosophy has now become philology," that is, it has become an unspecific medium of expression for different disciplines and schools.

Under these premises, could Christian theology have 'escaped' Platonism (if it should have, that is)? Or was Platonism already watered down anyway to a scholarly standard language? Where should have been the battle of different doctrines in this case?

There is another polemic charm to Platonism which seems to be worth mentioning, that tends to be neglected among the many other problems of 'Christian Platonism.' It has to do with what Dörrie states about the Platonic standardisation of Ancient lore in the times in question. When Pyrrho of Elis 'founded' his philosophical School in the third century BC the different *weltanschauungen*, methods, moral systems, and scientific theories of the Ancient Greek world and traditions made him believe that scepticism and the suspense of judgement were the only way to tackle the paradoxical problem of the well-founded plausibility of all the conflicting doctrines and the dazzling multiplicity of truths that they offered. In Sextus Empiricus, the major exponent of Pyrrhonism in the second century AD, this tactical retraction from the pursuit of truth and from any commitment to truth is raised to the level of a fine art. The myriad-minded sceptic knows and acknowl-

edges all 'truths' and teachings of the different philosophical schools, but does not hold any of them to be true, let alone "the truth." The equipollence or 'isostheny' of theories and arguments that eliminate each other mutually teaches the sceptic the impossibility of knowledge. "The more you know, the lesser you know" is the sceptic's creed and seems to be the tale's end of philosophy and the morale of Ancient lore.

Ancient Christendom seems to have had a similar view concerning the contemporary philosophical doctrines with which it was competing. The great achievements of the Hellenic mind had ended up in bankruptcy. By isosthenically contradicting each other, the over-refined teachings of the philosophers had paralysed knowledge of the truth and even abandoned the quest for truth in a frivolous way. In contrast to the fallacies and the impotence of the human mind, Christian faith obviously claimed to propose the truth of the enlightened human spirit and of a knowledge that was not self-built but revealed from above. This salvific knowledge could lead the way out of the paralysing dialectics of man-made truths, annoying sophisms, and philosophical programmes. The author of Acts 17:18ff. seems to play with these fruitless disputes among Hellenic philosophers and shows the Christian way to overcome them: In Athens the Apostle Paul speaks to philosophers of conflicting schools, who bring him to the 'speaker's corner' of the Areopagus, and tells them about the 'unknown God' — a God unknown to Classical lore, that is, but now revealed and manifesting His name and will.

But this is just one side of the story. It is counterbalanced by the Christian admiration for the achievements of Hellenic wisdom. Again, it is the Apostle Paul who can serve as an example when he says in Rom 1:19f. that the wisdom of the Hellenic thinkers could have reached true knowledge of God by 'the Greek way' of reason, which could have understood God's truth symbolically through His manifestations (Rom 1:28 and 1:19). It could have achieved it, had it not gone astray by morally perverting the great possibilities of the human intellect. Other Christian thinkers concurred with this Pauline estimation of and esteem for Greek philosophy in one way or another (and to different extent).[1]

[1] The same thought is found in non-Christian Hellenic philosophy, for example in Plutarchus. In a famous passage of his work on Isis and Osiris, he says that men "use hallowed symbols, some of which are obscure and others clearer, directing the thought towards the divine, though not without danger. For some, erring

But this brings us back to the obstinate problems of the fusion of Platonism and Christian theology all too soon. First another important aspect should be mentioned. As the quote from Dörrie shows, very shortly after Sextus' philosophy of non-commitment to (one) truth in the second century AD, philosophy seems to have redeemed itself from the danger of isosthenic paralysis. It was Platonism that proposed, in a spectacular effort of eliminating, out-arguing, and subsuming its philosophical rivals, a great philosophical synthesis whose astonishing acceptance (as described by Dörrie) shaped and promoted philosophical thinking for the next few centuries. For Christian thinkers, this had at least two consequences.

(1) If they wanted to express themselves in the scientific standard language of their times, they had to recur to Platonism as it provided the standard nomenclature for philosophy and sciences. This might have also been acceptable to Christians because most Platonists (in contrast to many other philosophers) were people who had the highest moral standards, lived a spiritual and sometimes utterly monastic life style, held metaphysics to be of the utmost importance, and were defenders and promoters of a purified monotheism of the highest rigour. In short, Platonism seemed in more than one way to be acceptable as a *praeparatio evangelii.*

(2) On the other hand, Platonism was now to be considered the only remaining and notably strong antagonist of the Christian doctrine. The implementation of Platonism as *the* philosophy in the later Roman Empire deprived Christian apologists of their tactical tool of leading pagan philosophy *ad absurdum* by confronting the main tenets of its many and different schools and of showing their paralysing isostheny of arguments. Even after the Christian faith established its predominance in the fourth century Platonism seems to have persisted as the biggest threat to its doctrinal and moral teachings. Emperor Julian the Apostate is perhaps the most prominent historical example of Platonic reaction to the triumph of Christianity, but by far not the only

completely, have slipped into superstition, and others, shunning it like a marsh, have unwittingly fallen in turn over the precipice of atheism" (*De Iside et Osiride*, 378a: . . . καὶ συμβόλοις χρῶνται καθιερωμένοις οἱ μὲν ἀμυδροῖς οἱ δὲ τρανοτέροις, ἐπὶ τὰ θεῖα τὴν νόησιν ὁδηγοῦντες οὐκ ἀκινδύνως· ἔνιοι γὰρ ἀπο σφαλέντες παντάπασιν εἰς δεισιδαιμονίαν ὤλισθον, οἱ δὲ φεύγοντες ὥσπερ ἕλος τὴν δεισιδαιμονίαν ἔλαθον αὖθις ὥσπερ εἰς κρημνὸν ἐμπεσόντες τὴν ἀθεότητα).

one nor the one to be taken most seriously. Under these premises, too, the big question of how to understand the historical phenomenon of 'Christian Platonism' and of 'which truth' it confesses — Christian or Platonic — calls for critical assessment.

This is how commentators and historians of philosophy have traditionally tackled, and still do tackle, the problem of the surprising historical encounter and coupling of Platonism and Christian thought: the question at all times appeared to be one of substance and accidents, of Platonic core and Christian 'outward limbs and flourishes' or vice versa, of compulsively 'hellenising' Christian faith or 'churching' Platonism by hook or crook. The possibility of marching on an insipid middle way, if one could be found, is despised by all parties alike.

I do not pretend to say that I can offer any new categories different from those listed above, let alone settle the question once and for all. No doubt, the problem is not so simple as to be localised within such parameters as the ones just mentioned. Furthermore, the same problem consistently incurs the danger of being over-intellectualised or over-complicated, mostly due to the ideological bias of commentators, an age-old lack of appropriate historical tools, and whether or not to believe in century-bridging continuities, 'pseudo-morphoses,' and 'changes of paradigms.' In addition, there may be other more or less perplexing explanations for a phenomenon which could prove to be of lasting relevance for our times or irrelevant and duly outlived.

Be that as it may, the coupling of the last offspring of Ancient philosophy with Christian thought is perhaps one of the most fascinating occurrences in the entire history of culture. It may also be responsible for the historiographic chimera of a continuous 'western' culture spanning from the beginnings of Ancient Greece to the present. In turn, the pertinacity of this mistake gives testimony of the compelling success of the historical fusion of Christianity and the last surviving descendant of Classical lore in the first centuries AD.

In the face of all of this, the interpreter has to take his stand, or at least try to assume his stand in the treatment of the problem of Christian Platonism, although this will require some serious '*corragio d'errare.*' The reader will have guessed, ere long, what one my own view of this problem is: I believe that there is another, more adequate metaphor to describe it than 'churching,' namely 'baptising.' As a metaphor or an image for depicting historical processes, baptising regrettably (and undeservably) has acquired a bad reputation of being merely a

meaningless gesture or symbol for the acceptance of the Christian creed forced upon peoples or cultures that would not have embraced it, had they only properly understood it and could they have chosen. In spite of all this, two aspects (at least two aspects!) seem to make 'baptism' an adequate image for the question of Platonism to be discussed here (that is, from the perspective of Platonism, at any rate): the full and complete integration into the Christian community and the more than just 'legal' or willy-nilly acceptance into this community resulting from this integration on the one hand, and the spiritual transformation the sacrament performs on the baptised on the other. Maybe no other image — independently of the interpreter's or the reader's personal belief in the Christian theology of sacraments — comes as close to depicting what definitions fail to elucidate here: a 'sacrament' is an outward sign of something invisible happening, to which the sign bears witness, and, in the case of baptism, this happening is a (spiritual) transformation preserving the 'biographical' identity of the baptised. As a result, the one baptised will be the same person to everyone, as far as his human identity is concerned, yet different — 'transformed' — to the community of believers to which the baptised by baptism belongs. His outer appearance remains the same and there is no difference concerning the more intimate expressions of his 'inner self,' such as biographical facts, his personal identity, his faculties, weaknesses, strong points, etc. But he becomes very different as regards the radical transformation that the community of co-believers sees as having taken effect within him by the annihilation of the old self (spiritually speaking) or the old 'Adam,' and the simultaneous restoration of the same being as the 'new Adam,' Christ. Ideally, that is. And this is where the metaphor applied to historical processes differs painfully from what the real baptism of individuals claims to be: the metaphor, other than the sacrament for which it stands, cannot rely on the effect *ex opere operatum*. The invisible happening, in the case of historical entities, must prove true, and much of the confusion in the definition of 'Christian Platonism' is due to the ongoing dispute of whether it did occur or not, or whether it did just partly, in which case the metaphor is overstrained and has to be completely abandoned. So can we verify the truth of Christian Platonism? And if so, in what way can we do that?

This book on the philosophy of the so-called Dionysius Areopagita undertakes the task of interpreting one prominent piece of Christian Platonism, the Dionysian treatise *On Divine Names* [DN]. It presents

perhaps the most intricate single project ever of merging a systematic Greek philosophical tradition with Christian thought, for the reconciliation and consolidation of the seemingly irreconcilable is one of Dionysius' foremost philosophical concerns (as will be seen in the interpretation of Dionysius' chapter on the theonym 'Peace' in §5) and this makes him a *Christianus simulque vere Platonicus* (Beierwaltes 1998, 84) in the eyes of many of his readers and interpreters. This reconciliation involves not so much a mere 'technical' fusion of two elements that by nature do not belong together, but rather bringing forth an indissoluble union featuring a new quality, thanks to the 'fortes' (so to speak) and truth-value of both its constituent 'ingredients'. Aside from the theological metaphor of 'baptising,' though from the same standpoint, the following pages shall take on this perpetual question from the philosophical side — as far as both aspects can be disassociated. This however is another problem to be tackled, which for now I leave for a later occasion (see §6).

* * *

One technical observation as to the references given in this book: references to the chapters of DN are always given by 'ch.' or 'chapter,' followed by the cardinal number of the chapter. References to the chapters of this book *on* DN are given by '§' followed by the corresponding number. Thus, when Dionysius expounds his doctrine of evil in chapter 4 of DN, and my interpretation of this doctrine can be found in §§ 7 and 8 of the present book, the reference would be: cf. §§ 7 and 8 on ch. 4.

Direct quotes of and references to single passages within DN are followed by the standard citation of Dionysius' works according to the PG. For the Greek text, I consulted the new and very erudite edition by Beate Regina Suchla: *(Pseudo-) Dionysios Areopagites, De divinis nominibus* [*Corpus Dionysiacum I*] (Ed. B.R. Suchla), Berlin/New York 1990. The English translations of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* are taken from Colm Luibheid: *Dionysius, The Complete Works* (translated by C. Luibheid and P. Rorem), New York, 1987.

§2. THE PHANTOM AUTHOR

For more than a hundred years now, books on Dionysius usually begin with questioning the identity of Dionysius. To put it frankly, nobody knows who the author of the strange writings that constitute the *Corpus Dionysiacum Areopagiticum* [CD] was. The writer himself seems to claim to be a 'disciple' of the Apostle Paul, namely the Areopagite called Dionysius, who — according to Acts 17:34 — was converted to the Christian faith by the Apostle's sermon on the 'Unknown God,' given in Athens (Acts 17:22-31). At least, there are sound motives to assume that it is *one* author with which we deal. From the very date of their first appearance, the collection of writings known as the CD seems to have had invariably the shape, contents, and (with only few variations) the same inner arrangement that the modern editions have — it has not been expanded nor enriched by new discoveries ever since, nor does it show traces of having been worked over in the course of time, but displays all the features of a number of writings that from the date of their composition belong together and show no convincing signs of different authorship or of having been written in different eras or contexts. In this consistently maintained form the CD presents itself as an assemblage of ten letters and four treatises: The *Divine Names* (Περὶ θείων ὀνομάτων), being the most extensive of the four [DN], the *Mystical Theology* (Περὶ μυστικῆς θεολογίας) [MT], the *Celestial Hierarchy* (Περὶ οὐρανίας ἱεραρχίας) [CH], and the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* (Περὶ ἐκκλησιαστικῆς ἱεραρχίας) [EH]. Other writings by the same author mentioned and sometimes even quoted within the CD (as the treatises named *Symbolic Theology* and *On the Soul*, etc.) seem to be lost — or to have never existed, as some interpreters assume.

a. *The Man and the Myth*

Tradition, above all, would have it that the author is the Pauline Areopagite. It is somewhat difficult, however, to pin down exactly any compelling textual evidence for that identification or for the claim of Apostolic discipleship in the CD itself. What we have, are the names of the supposed addressees of the letters and treatises, who all seem

to be known from the Epistles of the New Testament and the Acts of the Apostles. In the seventh letter of the CD, the author moreover claims to have witnessed the eclipse at Christ's death (Mt 27:43) in Egypt, and he suggests, very cryptically, in DN 681C-684A to have been present (along with the Apostles James and Peter) at the dormition of the Virgin Mary.[1]

The CD is not quoted or referred to until the 6th century, however, by any author or source of which we know. The first writer to mention it seems to be the patriarch of Antioch, Severus, in about 528 AD.[2] This is the *terminus ante quem* — so enticingly close to the ominous year 529 — for the composition of the CD. Since the Dionysian studies of Josef Stiglmayr and Hugo Koch, which will have to be reviewed in §3, the earliest *terminus post quem* is commonly held to be the public teaching years of Proclus Diadochus in Athens from about 438 to 485 AD. The conjectures as to the author's geographical provenience seem to narrow the place down (for theological and/or liturgical reasons) to the area of Syrian Antioch (broadly considered) or, less probably, to 'Egypt' — culturally regarded as the ambit of the Alexandrine (catechetical) School.[3]

Despite the broad consensus on this time-frame (and, to a lesser extent, on the geographical placement) in contemporary scholarship, the list of candidates for the 'true' identity of the author of the CD is long and variegated — which shows a lasting ignorance when it comes to disclosing the century-old hagionym, and how perplexed interpreters are now as before.

[1] To put matters more explicitly, the four treatises of the CD are addressed to a certain Timothy, and the texts seem to suggest that the addressee of two Pauline epistles and disciple of the Apostle mentioned in Acts 16,1ff. is meant here. The ninth letter is directed to Titus, another addressee of Paul, and the tenth letter is obviously addressed to John the Evangelist. The 'magician Elymas' from Acts 13:8ff and the 'mad Simon', supposedly the one referred to in Acts 8,9ff. are mentioned in DN 893B and DN 857A, respectively.

[2] For the historical sources and the textual evidence regarding the first mentioning of the CD, cf. Suchla 1992, 388.

[3] Perl 2003, 540 writes that Dionysius' "true identity is unknown, but he was probably a Syrian and almost certainly a monk. . . . More recently, it has become clear that Dionysius' thought is no mere superficial, 'Christianization' of Proclus, but draws on and synthesizes several distinct but interrelated traditions, including not only Neoplatonic philosophy but also the Alexandrian school of Philo, Clement, and Origen; the Cappadocian Fathers, especially Gregory of Nyssa; and the spiritual and liturgical traditions of Egyptian and Syrian monasticism."

Most commentators (following Josef Stiglmayr) name the alleged monophysite Severus of Antioch as their candidate for the authorship of the CD, others a former pupil of Proclus and also patriarch of Antioch (before Severus), Peter Fullo. Fewer settle on Dionysius Exiguus, an anonymous disciple of Saint Basil in Egypt, Dionysius Rhinocolura, Petrus Ibericus, Dionysius Scholasticus, Sergius of Reshaina, or John of Scythopolis, whose scholia on the Dionysian writings have accompanied the CD, and even have been a constituent part of the *in-corpore*-tradition of the writings, obviously from the very first instant of its appearance. The author and the interpreter would have been one and the same person, in this case. All these names are those of Christian savants who match the parameters of place and time established by modern Dionysius studies and of whose biographies is little enough known so as to let them be suspected of great theological potential.

The controversy about whether or not the name of the CD's author is an allonym and whether the writings belong to the Apostolic era goes back to the times of the first appearance of the CD. At a synod in Constantinople in 532 AD, Hypatius of Ephesus declared the writings to be a forgery of the monophysite faction at the assembly, and already John of Scythopolis felt compelled to defend the CD against similar insinuations. Sceptical questions concerning the identity of the author and suspicions of forgery have likewise accompanied the writings and their reception throughout the centuries. That the CD remained a matter of discussion for so long is partly due to a hagiographic mistake, as it would seem. In Eusebius' *Church History* (IV 23), the convert Dionysius of Acts 17:34 is named as the first bishop of Corinth. In the 9th century, abbot Hilduin of Saint-Denis identified the Areopagite and former bishop of Corinth with the first (martyr) bishop of Paris, Dionysius, buried in his abbey. This identification appears to have been random. This led to a more intensified activity of translating and commenting the Dionysian writings in the West, commencing with Carolingian France but spreading over Western Europe quickly and lasting for many centuries.

One thing is remarkable, though, in this context. Regardless of the fact that the author's hagionym and alleged Apostolic discipleship have in good part established, confirmed, and fomented the CD's acceptance and importance throughout the centuries (speaking from a historical point of view), it appears to be equally true that it was foremost and above all the philosophical and theological content of the writings that rendered it immune to all criticism concerning its dubious

authorship and origin and that allowed the Dionysian writings become a much read, extensively received, and intensively commented upon source for Western thought in the Christian tradition. A long series of renowned commentators on the Dionysian treatises gives impressive evidence of the Areopagite's importance and impact within this tradition: Maximus the Confessor, John Scotus Eriugena, Hugo of St. Victor, John Saracenus, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Dionysius the Carthusian, among others.[4]

In an almost spectacular turn of events, however, at the end of the 19th century, the reception and the philosophical cultivation of Dionysian thought changed, or rather degenerated, into the 'Dionysian question' and was nearly entirely reduced to a merely inner-academic topic. In order to understand these coming abouts, a review of the present state of affairs in Dionysius scholarship and its roots in 19th century classical philology and critical method in theology will be necessary at this stage.

b. *A Saint Turned Forger (and What to Do About It)*

There is an astonishing consensus in present Dionysius scholarship (astonishing not so much as to its content, but for existing as a broad consensus, which is rare in the discipline, after all). This consensus which has established the common grounds for modern Dionysius studies has determined almost unchallengedly their path from the year 1895 and moulded them ever since. The big question settled by this consensus was — in the face of a lasting uncertainty as to the identity of the CD's author — the one concerning the writings' age and, consequently, the possibility of their place in the history of philosophy.

For serious doubts regarding the 'sub-apostolic authorship' (Perl 2003, 540) of the Biblical Areopagite go back to the very time of the CD's first public appearance. In 532 AD (that is solely four years after the writings' first mentioning by Severus of Antioch), a Constantinoplian

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[4] For a brief summary of Dionysius' reception in the West and in the history of Christian Platonism, cf. Suchla 1992, 390f. A more thorough discussion is to be found in Jeanneau 1997. Cf. also Perl 2003, 540: "Despite their author's pseudonymity, Dionysius' works have continued to be widely studied and valued, not only because of their powerful influence on later thought, but also for their intrinsic philosophical and theological significance."

synod, in a move to reject monophysite tendencies whose promoters seem to have adduced the CD's authority for their cause, refused to accept the Corpus's authenticity and declared it to be pseudo-epigraphic. In Western thought, Peter Abaelard was one prominent thinker who had his doubts about the historicity of the conventional Dionysius-traditions. Lorenzo Valla, Erasmus of Rotterdam, and other humanists challenged the authorship openly (yet quite independently of their relative sympathy for the writings' philosophical and theological content). But it was above all with the rise of Protestant theology that the CD became increasingly discredited and the Apostolicity of its origin definitely called into question.[5]

In contrast, there have scarcely been any doubts throughout the centuries that the CD stands in the tradition of Platonic thought and has a notable affinity in content to Proclus' philosophy. It is in the 6th century and in the first written statement on the doctrine of the CD of which we know that John of Scythopolis felt obliged to defend the Dionysian writings against accusations of being thoroughly Neoplatonic philosophy and of usurping the claim of being Pauline theology. In this defence, though, John never seems to deny the Platonic background of Dionysius' thought. The same appears true for the scholastic commentators, all of whom, nonetheless, accepted Dionysius as Paul's disciple.

What is more, John of Scythopolis, in his scholia to the CD, maintained that the use that Dionysius makes of Greek philosophy proves that his thinking goes back to Paul's preaching, since the Apostle himself employed Greek lore in order to explain and to defend the truths of the Christian faith. Another commentary dating from the 6th century (and attributed to John Philoponus) has an even bolder theory on the conspicuous kinship between Platonism and Dionysian teaching. The commentator, after refusing to acknowledge, not an inner affinity between, but the dependence of Dionysian thinking on Platonic, and especially Proclean, philosophy, suspected that things could very well be the other way round. To his mind, the pagan philosophers of the Apostolic times had somehow obtained possession of the Dionysian writings and erected Neoplatonic philosophy on the foundation of

[5] For a study on the assessments and reassessments of the questions concerning the Dionysian writings during and since the Reformation, cf. Karlfried Froehlich, "Pseudo-Dionysius and the Reformation of the 16th century," in the introduction to Colm Luibheid's translation of the CD, Luibheid 1987, 33-46.

their enlightened doctrine concealing its Christian source. In this fraudulent conspiracy, Proclus had just been the most bare-faced plagiarist. This century-lasting offence against Dionysius' copy-rights had been brought to light now (in the commentator's times, that is) thanks to the disclosure of the CD's existence to the public.[6]

As for later commentators and their thoughts on the issue of Dionysius' philosophical adherence, two examples must suffice:

Thomas Aquinas, who without much ado acknowledges that Dionysius, whom he quotes more often than Aristotle, followed the tenets of the Platonists in many aspects of the ontology that he presented in DN (*Platonici, quos multum in hoc opere Dionysius imitatur,* and similar statements can be found in *In DN* c.v, l.1, 634, and elsewhere). In his commentary on the *Liber de Causis* (which goes back to Proclus' *Elements of Theology*), Aquinas observes that in one passage Dionysius corrects one of Proclus' theses (*In I de causis,* l.3: *hanc positionem* [*Procli*] *corrigit Dionysius*).[7] Generally, it seems to have been Thomas' view that Dionysius repeatedly opposes the notorious errors of Platonic thought; observations like *excludit errorem quorumdam Platonicorum* and similar statements are quite common in his references to Dionysius.

Nicholas of Cusa, a great admirer of Dionysian thought, also seems to be puzzled by the striking similarities in thought and language between Dionysius and the Platonists, especially Proclus, and feels compelled to consider the Areopagite within the Platonic philosophical tradition.[8]

To sum things up: despite the questionable authorship of the CD, "[t]he importance of Dionysius as a source for later medieval philosophy can hardly be overstated. His thought was largely adopted by John Scotus Eriugena and had a powerful influence on Meister Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa. He was also the principal channel by which Neoplatonism — a more authentic and philosophically sophisticated

[6] Texts by John of Scythopolis and John Philoponus (?) can be found in Suchla 1995, 12ff. (especially pages 17 and 19). Cf. also Koch 1895, 439.

[7] Which does not necessarily presuppose that Aquinas thought of Proclus as writing 'before' Dionysius. Historical filiations within philosophy are of little significance (if any) for scholastic commentators, whose interests in the doctrines of their predecessors are of a completely different nature. As for the quotations given here, cf. von Balthasar 1962, 154, and R.J. Henle 1970, 383.

[8] For Cusanus on Dionysius and Platonism, cf. Luscombe 1997 especially 97f. A good overview concerning the influence of Dionysius in Western philosophy and theology in the Middle Ages is Ruh 1987, 50-63 (with abundant bibliography). A list of medieval and early modern interpreters who doubted an authorship of Apostolic times is presented by Hausherr 1936.

Neoplatonism than Augustine's — entered more 'mainstream' medieval philosophy" (Perl 2003, 548).

In 1895, however, everything changed for Dionysius scholarship. In this year, Hugo Koch and Josef Stiglmayr independently from each other published two journal articles — critical studies into the second part of chapter 4 of Dionysius' treatise DN — which led to the philological conclusion that the passage in question was entirely dependent on Proclus' writing on the subsistence of evil, *De malorum subsistentia*, conserved in a Latin translation and in an incomplete Greek version given by Isaac Sebastocrator.[9] Both studies and their arguments were entirely compelling to anybody, being at the height of classical scholarship of the time, and they had an enthusiastic and almost immediate acceptance among scholars worldwide. They even silenced those voices that until then had unswervingly maintained that the author of the CD was the Areopagite Dionysius from the first century.[10]

The theologian Stiglmayr and the classicist Koch drew their conclusions from comparing both the text of Proclus and the chapter in question of Dionysius in a long, exhaustive, and detailed analysis. Due to the terminological coinage of 'parhypostasis' (*subsistentia*) employed for denoting the ontological status of evil in both texts, and from the obvious missing links in the stylistic composition of the passage in Dionysius, it became clear that DN presupposed the Proclean treatise, and not the other way round. There are times when grammatical structures, disruptions in the train of thought, and the use of certain conjunctions like 'but', 'nonetheless,' or 'however' in the text of DN make no sense and reveal the Dionysian piece as an elliptical digestion of the more complete and smoother Proclean text, whose compared reading supplies the missing links, shows how to fill the lacunae, and renders a certain sense to many confusing or disrupted grammatical constructions. Both Stiglmayr and Koch ascertained by philological means that Dionysius' doctrine on evil was an eclectic transcription from Proclus' *De malorum subsistentia* and had therefore to be placed

[9] Cf. Koch 1895 and Stiglmayr 1895. Both seem to have had their scholarly forerunners or idea-givers: cf. Stiglmayr 1895, 254. Isaac Sebastocrator writes after the CD's appearance, though, and has therefore been of secondary interest and reliability for Koch's and Stiglmayr's argumentation, since in theory he could have been influenced by his lecture of DN in writing down his summary of Proclus. Cf. the pertinent remarks in Siassos 1995, 43.

[10] Just to name two examples out of this group: Schneider 1884 and Parker 1894 in his introduction to the CH. The most recent study to defend the view of the author's claim to be the Athenian disciple of Paul seems to be by Bulhak 1938.

in the late 5th century at the earliest. This convincing judgement in the course of time was backed up by theological and liturgical reasons, which showed Dionysius' concern with questions of the 5th century's Council of Chalcedon. It initiated modern Dionysius studies and launched a new and fascinating debate on the importance and meaning of the (now Pseudo-)Areopagite's thinking.

For the scope of this book, however, I shall depart for the most part from this modern consensus on Dionysius' authorship. I do not entertain serious doubts about the thorough and most impressive philological surveys of Koch, Stiglmayr, and their successors in the field of Dionysian studies, nor is it my intention to defend the erstwhile traditional position of Dionysius as a first-century author personally enlightened by the Apostle Paul. I just think (and want to show) that an accomplished explanation of the philosophical system expounded in DN can be given without subordinating it from the beginning to its historical dependence on Proclus. On the contrary, ever since the epoch-making discovery of 1895, there has been a constant danger, much succumbed to, of the 'Pseudo-' eclipsing the 'Dionysius' in the study of the 'Pseudo-'Dionysian writings. This seemingly almost inevitable tendency has its roots in declarations and assessments made by Koch and Stiglmayr themselves, who did not just fix Dionysius' dependence on Proclus but also deduced a normative evaluation from it. To them, Dionysius, once found guilty of being *Pseudo*-Dionysius, was a mere copyist fraudulently hiding behind an allonym, and the verdict on his doctrine of evil as being a "lengthy plagiarism" or a "deficient excerpt from Proclus" has dominated modern Dionysius studies and biased the interpretation, not only of the notorious chapter of DN, but of the *entire* CD ever since.[11] This explains the debasement of Dionysius' philosophy as a 'grotesque' Christian rehashing of Proclean themes as found in E.R. Dodds's introduction to his edition and translation of Proclus' *Elements of Theology* (pp. xxvi-xxviii) and the same author's refusal to accept any assessment other than 'fraud' for the evaluation of Dionysius' philosophical accomplishments. To do justice to contemporary Dionysius studies, it must be said that an increasing number of

[11] There are very few who, falling into the other extreme, maintain the utter incompatibility of Christian and pagan thought and would therefore question the Proclus-Dionysius-thesis altogether. To name just one example, Siassos 1995. For Koch's and Stiglmayr's evaluative statements see: Koch 1895, 453; Stiglmayr 1895, 747f., and Stiglmayr 1933, 82.

recent publications on Dionysius seem to have liberated themselves from the biased perspective of the late 19th and early 20th century. The critical edition of his works by the Göttinger Patristische Kommission might have had an important influence on this development. Consequently, Dionysius has become the object of admirable publications focusing on his theological tenets and on his mystical utterances. The debasement of Dionysius as a philosopher, however, seems to persist. This has partly to do with an interpretation of Dionysius that incorrectly would categorise the philosophical dimension of his writings as an *ancilla* of his theology (a perspective which is not even entirely true if applied to the Christian philosophy of the Latin West) and as hardly more than an underpinning of his more serious theological and mystical concerns. For the most part, however, this debasement is due to the traditional view of Dionysius as a plagiarist of Proclus, which plays a more important role in philosophy than in theology. Dionysius' basic philosophical programme is still a *terra incognita* to most historians of philosophy, whose writings portray his work as a short appendix to the chapter on Proclus. Whereas Proclus is held in great esteem, Dionysius' philosophy is still labelled as a "ruthless usurpation of late Neoplatonic philosophy" by an "unconsidered Christian falsifier" of the Platonic diadoch.[12]

There are compelling reasons, however, to reject these tempting, though also somewhat facile, judgements as to the value derived from the study of historical and philosophical filiations. First and foremost, an interpretation or (much more so) a judgement should obviously avoid bias of any kind, as far as possible. We may call that a valid 'principle of benevolence' (with 'charity' having nothing to do with it). Yet, there is still another aspect to be observed. It will be seen in the subsequent paragraphs of this book that many important ideas of Dionysius' philosophy come to light precisely if the author's pretension to be the converted Areopagite is — at least technically or in theory — admitted or assumed. Rather than looking for hidden clues that could reveal his identity, the author's self-declared intention and wilfully adopted way of looking at things for the purpose of his writings should be the a basis for interpretation. One should rather familiarise oneself with the author's standpoint, fictitious though it may be, instead of being suspicious of it from the very beginning. It has been an odd

[12] Gombocz 1997, 322.

exaggeration of Dionysius scholarship that what should have been a mere *caveat* for a reading of his writings (especially regarding Apostolicity, perhaps) became the dominant dogma of interpretation from which all exegesis of the Dionysian texts starts. As a matter of fact, from 1895 on, Dionysius was scarcely ever considered as a follower of Proclean philosophy; he was almost exclusively considered as a *mere* follower of Proclean philosophy. This strangely biased point of view was a reaction, more probably than not, to the high esteem and even canonical veneration that the assumed author of the writings had enjoyed beforehand, but it is a biased view nonetheless.[13]

However, we may ask if this biased view does any serious harm to the reading of DN and to the understanding of Dionysius' philosophy. This question is what this book is supposed to be about, to some extent; its interpretation of DN as a coherent and self-reliant writing does not deny the Proclean influence. Nevertheless, it can hopefully show that Dionysius' ontology — undisputedly Platonic as it is — displays a cohesive way of thinking and a philosophical programme of its own, whether indebted to Proclus or not. In facing the CD, we stand before a philosophical compound assembled and constructed according to its own integral idea and architecture, with each thought depending on and laying the foundations for another one, thus building up an impressive philosophical system that requires no second thoughts as to its 'real origin,' and no external support for its comprehension and evaluation.[14] This book also tries to show how the author of this system, far from being a mere uninspired copyist in total epigonic debt to Proclus, launches new philosophical concepts (as 'Peace,' cf. §5) and at a peculiar profit substitutes central philosophical patterns with basic Christian ideas, as with his introduction of 'Creation' into his system. He carries through a development of his system where every piece falls into a thought-out overall structure which in (re)turn gives this very piece its sense and place with regard to all others and its function within the entire system. This is the very point where the method cho-

[13] The tendency that Dionysius studies took from Koch-Stiglmayr has therefore been harshly criticised, too. Cf., as a prominent example, von Balthasar 1962, 147ff.

[14] This is a destiny Dionysius shares with many, if not all 'post-Hellenistic' Christian philosophers of the East. As Katerina Ierodiakonou observes, for a long time "Byzantine philosophers, for the most part, have not been studied on their own merit, and their works have hardly been scrutinised as works of philosophy" (Ierodiakonou 2002, 1). There have been serious and promising attempts, however, to reassess the value and importance of these philosophers in recent times.

sen and the interpretation submitted have to prove their strength and resilience when put to the test of reassessing the problem of evil without recurring on Proclus (§9). This is also the very point where the misleading potential of a reading of DN via Proclus will become clearer.

All in all, this method of presenting the philosophy of Dionysius as expounded in DN aspires to restore a less biased and more adequate view of Dionysius by awarding him a 'factual identity' that cannot be severed from the content of the writings, and thereby establishing a 'person-work-unity' which should be able methodically to overcome the interests of historical dependencies, filiations, and imputations.[15]

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[15] A 'factual identity' (sachliche Identität) has in this sense been called for by Beierwaltes 1998, 45. The method of inextricably reading the CD according to a 'person-work-unity' (Person-Werk-Einheit) had been proposed before by von Balthasar 1962, 150f.

§3. THE *STATUS QUAESTIONIS*

The (Pseudo-)Dionysian treatise *On Divine Names*, as the longest and philosophically most informative writing of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, has traditionally been the most commented upon. All the same, and despite two brilliant scholarly exceptions which will be considered shortly, little attention has been paid to its inner structure and to the question whether the composition of the treatise can tell us anything as regards its content and the Dionysian way of thinking.[1]

In the long tradition of interpreting DN, there have been remarks and observations, it is true, on the first three chapters' methodology and Trinitarian speculations, the bipartite arrangement of chapter 4, and the tendency *ad unum* which is displayed in the last chapter by defining the One (ἕν) as the ultimate destination or purpose (τέλος) of everything there is. Moreover, it appears that most interpreters would subscribe to Paul Rorem's summary of the treatise: "[A]s to structure, chapters 1 through 3 present the introduction to his [Dionysius'] interpretive methodology and chapters 4 through 13 the interpretations themselves" (Rorem 1993, 133; cf. 151-155 in the same book).

Yet, there is more to this treatise's arrangement and methodology than just these few outward limbs and flourishes, or so I want to argue. For the inner structure of DN displays the entire ontological development around which the philosophy of the Areopagite revolves. In the following, I shall try to reconstruct and to expose the lay-out of DN and compare it to this theo-philosophical development of the ontological flow, identifying 'halt,' and final back-flow that constitutes the

[1] Just to name one example, Louth 1989, 92f. has hardly more than one page to say on the structure of DN and refers almost exclusively to von Ivánka's analysis. That the treatise *On Divine Names* must be considered the most important of the CD is not only due to its length in comparison to the other Dionysian treatises or to its enormous reception throughout the history of philosophy. As a matter of fact, MT might have had the more noteworthy — if perhaps subliminal — influence on subsequent philosophy and theology. Rather, Sheldon-Williams 1966, 115 is right to point out that "the other Dionysian treatises expound the doctrine of the *Divine Names*" and in many aspects depend on this largest treatise. It will be seen in the devolution of this book that MT, for instance, starts off from and completes a perspective opened on the concluding pages of DN.

central thought of the entire Dionysian system. In this, I want to follow Swiss theologian Hans-Urs von Balthasar's outline of the structure of DN, at least in part.[2] The starting point for my analysis, however, is an acute observation made by Hungarian-born Patristic scholar Endre von Ivánka[3] on the double triptych of Divine Names at the very core of DN, leaving an assessment of von Balthasar's interpretation of the treatise for comparison to and the final review of my own (cf. §3, and §6 pp. 126ff.).

a. *Naming the Names*

For a thorough understanding of the problem and of its possible solution, it will be helpful to briefly review the awkward list of Divine Names found in the treatise. At first sight, the theonyms of DN seem to lack any inner order, and it would be difficult to admit that they obey any obvious pattern or arrangement. Listed strictly in the order of appearance, the thirteen chapters of DN display the following Names of God:

ch. 1: One, Creator
ch. 2: Manifold, Rally/Gathering
ch. 3: [ch.3 is a prayer]
ch. 4: Good, Light, Beautiful, Love, Ecstasy, Zeal, [and the problem of evil]
ch. 5: Being
ch. 6: Life
ch. 7: Wisdom, Mind, Word, Truth, Faith
ch. 8: Power, Justice/Righteousness, Salvation, Redemption
ch. 9: Greatness, Smallness, Sameness, Difference, Similarity, Dissimilarity, Rest, Motion

[2] Von Balthasar 1962, 192ff. Von Balthasar's theory concerning the treatise is thoroughly theological, whereas I shall try to reassess his outline of DN from a philosophical point of view (cf. below, pp. 35-42). I shall also have to readjust and, if possible, to correct von Balthasar's plan of chapters 7-11. Both the philosophical reassessment and the adapted theory of chapters 7-11 should be taken as simply a supplement, rather than a critique, of von Balthasar's stunning interpretation.

[3] Cf. von Ivánka 1964, 230-241. I do not believe that von Ivánka's point of view is accurate down to the last detail, though, but I think, as the following pages hopefully show, that his *formal* analysis certainly points to the right direction and is a sound basis for an analysis of the treatise's inner structure.

ch. 10.: Omnipotent, Ancient of Days, Youth(ful)/New
ch. 11: Peace
ch. 12: Holy of Holies, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, God of Gods
ch. 13: Perfect, One[4]

All these are, in fact, Biblical 'denominations' of God, though some of them are very strange indeed for modern understanding.[5] Their Biblical background is, as will be discussed further on, the protreptic motive for why Dionysius chose them for the purposes of his work. Yet, there is another 'outer' aspect to it, which the reader should bear in mind from the very beginning. The author of DN claims to be the Areopagite converted by Paul's preaching in Athens, and this is more than just the bold usurpation of a Biblical allonym in the 5th century in order to add some weight to one's own doctrine, by presenting it as 'Apostolic.' In naming God with Biblical theonyms, the author of DN does exactly the same thing that Paul's preaching claimed to do: reveal the Name(s) of the 'unknown God.' Scriptural revelation confers theonyms to the anonymous Divinity of Classical thought. Put simply, Dionysius wants us to understand that Greek philosophy was on the correct path in its understanding of the Divine, but it obviously needed the eye-opening 'superaddition' or 'grace' (if these are the right words) of Christian revelation in order to be released from its ultimate speechlessness and residual insecurity concerning the last Cause (which is a notion traced back, *mutatis mutandis*, to the Apostle Paul as well: cf. Rom 1:19ff.).

All in all, DN seems to present the reader with a rather inordinate agglomeration of Names without any inner connection apart from their common feature of being taken from Scripture, and this has been the view of most interpreters, too. This is not surprising, since in many scholars' opinion, Dionysius is far from being a systematic thinker. Though he is held to be hardly more than a Christian plagiarist of

[4] In the translation of the Names by Luibheid 1987. There is good cause, it seems to me, to correct or to adjust Luibheid's overall well accomplished and very legible translation in certain cases. I shall point out and try to justify any deviation from his translation where I have to undertake it.

[5] 'Smallness' Dionysius derives from 1 Kings 19:12, 'dissimilarity' from 1 Cor 15:28, etc. There is a thoroughly worked out list of the Names and their Scriptural origins found in the apparatus of Luibheid's translation of DN: see Luibheid 1987, 54ff. Louth 1989, 81-84 gives a good account of the Platonic teaching on Divine Names and of how Dionysius couples (and even fuses) it with the Biblical theonyms.

Proclus Diadochus, who was perhaps the most systematic of all Platonists, the Areopagite also has the fame of being a detached mystic, standing aloof from all systematic trains of thoughts and arguments. The Names of God expounded here could well be, as many critics would suspect, unsystematically glued to one another and held together by the north and south pole of the 'Oneness' theonym of the first chapter and of the last. Presumably, it would be very characteristic of Dionysius to pick out intuitively a certain number of Biblical (yet Platonically compatible) Names of God and arbitrarily use them for an allegedly inspired, but nothing less than stringent, Neoplatonic exercise about the nature of the Divine. Needless to say, there is a lot of unjustified historical prejudice found in all this. The reasons are many, but none of them are of concern for us in view of what follows, for there have been convincing attempts to discover the architecture of DN and the inner consistency in the arrangement of the theonyms presented. One of them that can serve as an initial proof against the theory of Dionysius' intuitive arbitrariness in composing DN has been elaborated by Endre von Ivánka.

b. *Von Ivánka's Analysis*

In von Ivánka's interpretation, chapters 5-11 of the treatise present two sets of three Divine Names each: in chapters 5-7 the triad Being (ὄντως ὄν) — Life ([αὐτο]ζωή) — Wisdom (σοφία); and in chapters 7-9 the triad Wisdom (σοφία) — Power (δύναμις) — Peace (εἰρήνη), with Wisdom being the unifying link that belongs to each triad as an element. All the other Names additionally appearing and discussed in the same chapters, such as Justice, Salvation, Light, Love, Almighty, etc. are, as von Ivánka is eager to show, but variations or explications of the six, or rather five, decisive elements of these two triads.[6] The first triad is borrowed, according to von Ivánka, from Proclus' Neoplatonic teaching on the One in the *Elements of Theology*, prop. 101, where the three terms are called 'Intelligence' or 'Mind' (νοῦς), 'Life' (ζωή), and 'Being' (ὄν).[7] The second triad can be traced back to the theology of

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[6] Von Ivánka 1964, 325: "An die [. . .] Begriffe sind jeweils andere angeschlossen, die in einem gewissen inneren Zusammenhang damit gebracht werden können."

[7] Cf. von Ivánka 1964, 323f. (the references to Proclus' *Theology* are ibid. conveniently quoted in footnotes). Louth 1989, 82 claims that the 'time'-theonyms in chapter 10 of DN are of Proclean background (if not origin), too.

Gregory of Nyssa, who presents them as a triad of Christological 'Hoheitstitel' (cf. Gregory's *De perfecta christiani forma*: PG 46, 251ff.), and, surprisingly enough, to Constantine the Great's church-building programme for his new capital. According to this programme, Byzantium's three main churches were to be the basilicas of the Hagia Sophia (Sacred Wisdom), Hagia Dynamis (Sacred Power), and Hagia Eirene (Sacred Peace), thus displaying a theologically programmatic Trinity of Names.[8] Moreover a set of 'minor' Divine Names found in chapter 9 of DN can be traced back to the Neoplatonists' centuries long fascination with Plato's intriguing dialogue *Parmenides* and its puzzling discussion of the one and the many, change and rest and movement, etc.: Great/Small, Same/Different, Similar/Dissimilar, Rest/Motion.[9] Von Ivánka seems inclined to regard these as hardly more than a thematic parenthesis to the second triad.[10]

An attempt to schematise von Ivánka's theory would most likely render the diagram seen on the following page.[11]

As it is easy to see, von Ivánka's exegesis of DN focuses on a predominantly formal discussion of literary motifs and of theological (let alone architectonic) sources for the most important 'Names' presented and developed in chapters 5-11. I shall make this interpretation the backbone of my own, which, however, tries to explain the layout of the entire treatise, shifting the interest and scope of the explanation to the philosophical content of the Divine Names as presented in DN. This allows for the full integration of the parenthesis and the supposed misfits, 'Parmenidean' or other, with which von Ivánka's interpretation uneasily had to accommodate. I shall return to von Ivánka's analysis later on in order to re-evaluate it in light of my own interpretation.

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[8] Cf. von Ivánka 1964, 238-240. Again, references and helpful textual documentation can be found ibid. in the footnotes.

[9] Cf. von Ivánka 1964, 234f.

[10] Von Ivánka 1964, 235: "Es ist ja überhaupt die Anwendung dieser Begriffe auf Gott bei Dionysius mehr eine äußerliche Akkommodation an das Schema des *Parmenides* als eine wirkliche Übertragung der dort durchgeführten Dialektik ins Christliche;" and: "Nach der Ausscheidung dieser Einlage bleiben die Kapitel 7, 8 und 9 übrig — *Sophia, Dynamis, Eirene.*"

[11] The diagram being a refined and more explicit version of von Ivánka's own terse five-point list in von Ivánka 1964, 241.

chapter	*subject/theonym*	*von Ivánka's interpretation*	
1-3	thematic outline and prayer	[methodology and introduction]	
4	Good, Light, Beautiful, Love, Ecstasy, Zeal	the outflow/extroversion of God	
5	*Being*	First Triad (from Proclus): Being, Life, Wisdom (and its cognates)	
6	*Life*		
7	*Wisdom*, Mind, Word, Truth, Faith		Second Triad (from Gregory of Nyssa, also corresponding to the names of Constantino-politan basilicas): Wisdom, Power, Peace (and cognates)
8	*Power*, Righteousness, Salvation, Redemption		
9	Greatness/Smallness, Sameness/Difference, Similarity/Dissimilarity Rest/Motion	[Parenthesis 1]	
10	Omnipotent, Ancient of Days, Ancient/New	[Parenthesis 2]	
11	*Peace*		
12	Holy of Holies, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, God of Gods		
13	Perfect, One		

c. *Aquinas' Layout of DN*

This book was almost finished when my reading and constant re-reading of portions of scholastic commentaries on DN was rewarded with a few encouraging lines from Thomas Aquinas, where the Angelic Doctor presents and explains his own interpretation of the grouping of theonyms in Dionysius' treatise and his view of the guiding idea that they follow.[12] Somewhat unexpectedly, the brief outline is not found

[12] On Dionysius' triadic ontology as rendered in Aquinas' commentary on DN, cf. O'Rourke 1992, 215-224.

at the beginning of Aquinas' writing but in an inconspicuous passage in chapter 4 (*In DN* c. iv, l.1, 262-265), which from another point of view is perhaps not so unexpected or inconspicuous. For by the end of chapter 3, after having finished the introductory chapters dedicated to the impossible understanding of the Divine, Aquinas quite naturally feels the need to envisage the further arrangement of DN, which, as Thomas must have correctly sensed, is less obvious to penetrate than the meaning of the first three chapters and the caesura between the introduction and the main part of the treatise.

The clear structure of DN as Thomas Aquinas sees it presupposes the shift from a view *ex parte primae causae influentis*, from vainly adopting the impossible view from God's perspective, to the approach from Creation as conceived by man's mind and understanding, *ex parte rerum recipientium.* On these grounds, three main parts in the development of DN are identified in Aquinas' commentary. In the portioning, they coincide, I am relieved to say, substantially with the ones proposed in my own interpretation:[13]

1. The (theological) introduction: chapters 1-3.
2. The processions (*processiones*): chapters 4-11.
3. The disposition towards the ultimate goal (*ordinatio in finem*): chapters 12 and 13.

Within the 'processions,' Thomas distinguishes three parts:

Foremost Goodness as the paradigm of God's procession (*bonitas*): chapter 4.

Thereafter the 'attributes' of Goodness as displayed and experienced in Creation (*attributa*) in two parts:

– first, the ontologically ascendant sequence of
  being (*esse*),
  life (*vivere*),
  wisdom or intellect (*cognoscere*), and finally
  justice as the sum of virtues, and therefore as the positive apex of intelligent life (*iustum/virtuosum esse*): chapters 5-8;

[13] Comparative diagrams of Aquinas', von Ivánka's, and von Balthasar's interpretations of the structure of DN can be found in the appendix of this book (pages 177-180).

– second, the mutual confrontations of the attributes (*ad invicem comparatio*):
  one of the inner-cosmic parameters (*intrinseca*: ch. 9),
  one of the enclosing parameters presented in timely terms (*extrinseca*: ch. 10), and
  the result of the peaceful order of Creation (*tranquilitas ordinis*: ch. 11).

As for his interpretation of the *ordinatio in finem*, Aquinas sees a difference between

God's active reversion of everything towards its final aim (*providentia ordinans in finem*: ch. 12),
and
the praises of the final aim itself in the concluding chapter 13 of the treatise (*ipse finis*).

I beg the reader not to take offence at my pride: the interpretation of the structure of DN as given by Aquinas can be easily recognised as parallel to mine as worked out in §5 of this book, with the one, though much telling, exception of chapter 8 (on Power, Justice, and its cognates). This discrepancy is easily explicable, but astonishing nonetheless. The Angelic Doctor is determined to follow the methodical shift that DN performs from God to Creation. As in the Apostle Paul, Creation for Dionysius means above all rational creatures, and Aquinas emphasises such by adducing the virtuous life (as expressed by Power, i.e. inner strength and will, and Justice as the king of virtues) as the summit of the ensemble that establishes, one upon the other, the different qualitative levels of the creaturely world in the procession of God's extroversion. Thus, the set of processional theonyms is enriched by Thomas' ethical or anthropological focus by the addition of chapter 8 (Power, Justice, Salvation, and Redemption as the soteriologic correlative of the virtuous life). The stage of the ontological steadying (μονή) is the same, in context and interpretation, as Aquinas' *ad invicem comparatio*, and the return-'stage' (ἐπιστροφή) in my interpretation is, of course, the *ordinatio ad finem* which Thomas recognises in the two final chapters of DN. The cause for my own inclusion of chapter 8 in the set of theonyms that express the abiding and steadying rather than the unfolding of the procession from God (a cause strong enough to be maintained against the authority of Thomas Aquinas), is found in

the unity of the Proclean triad of Being, Life, and Wisdom, which obviously delineates and thoroughly defines the processional set depending on the 'Good,' and in the equally obvious dependence of the divine names referring to ontological steadying on the pivotal discussion (or 'praise') of 'Power,' 'Justice,' and its cognates.

Most of this will become clearer at different stages of the interpretation of DN in §§ 4 to 6.

d. *Defence of the Interpretive Pattern*

Interpretation in some cases might be hardly more than an attempt to clarify the conditions and requirements for an adequate reading of some text. Whether this is true in all cases or not, interpretation in the case of this book does not pretend to go any further than that. The starting point of the following interpretation of the structure of DN will consist in admitting, as duly noted, von Ivánka's formal analysis of the treatise in two sets of theonymic triads and in adopting Thomas Aquinas' shift from a view *ex parte primae causae* to an interpretation as conceived by human understanding, *ex parte creaturae* or *quoad nos*. In the same manner, I want to point out my debt to von Balthasar's flow/back-flow interpretation of the treatise's theo-teleological purpose. It is my intention to present a new and alternative interpretation of the arrangement of the theonyms in DN by remoulding, connecting, and expanding the interpretations of von Ivánka and von Balthasar in the light of Aquinas' layout of the structure of DN.

What follows is an attempt to compare my exegetical effort to von Ivánka's and to von Balthasar's, and to try to highlight the similarities and dissimilarities between my own interpretation and theirs. If possible, I should like to show at the same time how and in what respect my interpretation can be considered, not as a pedantic correction, but rather as a rectification (in certain aspects), complement, or humble improvement of their interpretations.

e. *Von Ivánka's Interpretation — Merits and Problems*

The merits of von Ivánka's thesis undisputedly lie in its recognising, by formal analysis, two sets of Names (Being-Life-Wisdom and Wisdom-Power-Peace) that delineate two thematic blocks within DN. I follow

his analysis in accepting these two blocks of triadic Names and identifying them, in a second step, as referring to two different stages of the ontological dynamics discussed and expounded in the treatise (and, with advised caution, proposing a third possible triad of Peace-Perfection-Oneness to describe the epistrophic regress). Von Ivánka, however, does not proceed to verify and to discuss the subjacent patterns and the main reasons behind his two triads, namely the close-to-homonymous Platonic triad of Being-Life-Wisdom, for example in Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, and the equally homonymous Christological triad of Wisdom-Power-Peace in Gregory of Nyssa's *De perfecta christiani forma.* Certainly, a formal analysis of underlying motifs employed by Dionysius and of how he manages to insert and to fuse them for his own theological teaching purposes was von Ivánka's main preoccupation in his structural analysis of DN. Moreover, for von Ivánka's lifelong scholarly goal of uncovering the reasons for the outstanding success of the historical coupling of Platonism and Christian theology, the analysis of this formal arrangement provided a sufficiently good basis. His analysis showed how Platonic and Christian theology, each presented by its specific triad of denominations of the Divine (one 'henological,' the other christological) are connected in DN by the double-employment of Wisdom, thus melting into one ambitious theological project. For von Ivánka's Plato-Christianus interpretation of Dionysius, this — though rather formal — proof was the predominantly important part.

But maybe the 'fusion' of Platonism and Christianity in Dionysian theology is the wrong way to describe von Ivánka's point of view. For von Ivánka, the mutual penetration and osmotic exchange of Christian and Platonic thought are, in more than one way, rather accidental than substantial. As a matter of fact, his interpretation of Christian thought as taking the form (to his mind, the outer form) of Platonic theology seems to be rather a 'pseudo-morphosis' in the sense that Hans Jonas and Oswald Spengler propose for some of the significant changes in the history of ideas. Namely, that a historically extinct and inwardly hollow, though structurally surviving, way of thinking is filled up with historically new contents, leaving the petrified outer form of the void system for a new way of thinking which, only partly accommodating itself to the spiritual legacy of the former tenant, takes its new home inside the old structure, almost like a hermit crab with a vacant shell. Von Ivánka presents Dionysius' Platonic language, images, and motifs as an 'external accommodation' or as the 'drapery' ('Gewand') in which Christian theology presents itself at the time, adding, "that much

of the Platonic Spirit . . . somehow lives on in Dionysius's system, but very little (it has to be added) of the actual Platonic or Neoplatonic philosophy, i.e. of the ontological principles and the structural implicates of the system."[14]

What perhaps might have escaped von Ivánka's perspective, or at least did not fit in with his primordial interest of analysing DN,[15] is that his formally correctly perceived and established triadic sets each have a well-defined philosophical subject which deserves attention. Whereas the first one deals with the gradual ontological procession and the diffusion of the Good understood as the Creator's theophany or self-revealing activity, the second one treats of the abiding of the procession as the constitutional act of a new entity, an entity depending on the procession but displaying a powerful reality of its own though never separated from its Origin. Von Ivánka could have grasped this material content of the theonym-sets, as he obviously was on the brink of doing,[16] by taking the reference-points of the fathering triads in DN's chapters 5-7 and 7-10, respectively, a little more seriously. Proclus' theological triad is concerned with the One as the sole Cause of everything. Dionysius employs it, accordingly, for his theonymic interpretation of the ontological procession. Gregory of Nyssa's (or Emperor Constantine's) theological triad is concerned with Christ as the Son, Who is begotten by the Father and Who asymmetrically 'depends' on this non-creational and engendered (DN 641D) 'procession' from the Father, and is consubstantially God.[17] What can be learned in this perspective of von Ivánka's interpretation is that the tripartite structure

[14] Von Ivánka 1964, 285: "[E]ine äußerliche Akkommodation;" and "daß daher sehr viel von platonischem *Geiste* — der Tendenz zu einer solchen Gesamtschau — im System des Dionysius weiterlebt, aber wenig (das muß man hinzusetzen) von der eigentlichen platonischen und neuplatonischen *Philosophie*, d.h. den ontologischen Prinzipien und den Strukturzusammenhängen des *Systems*" (von Ivánka's italics). For von Ivánka's further views on Dionysius' Christian ontology and its being sheltered by Platonic 'spirit,' cf. the whole chapter 'Das Gewand und der wahre Inhalt' in von Ivánka 1964, 285-288.

[15] Von Ivánka 1964, 229ff. himself avows the limited scope of his discussion of DN.

[16] Cf. von Ivánka 1964, 233, where he acknowledges the ontologically processional character of the first triad in DN: "[A]ls die erste begriffliche Aufspaltung des Guten, der ersten und wesenhaften Manifestation der unaussprechlichen Monas, als den ersten Schritt auf dem Wege vom 'Einen' zum 'Vielen'."

[17] What, then, is the creature's role within this theological perspective? It is simply to yearn to assimilate itself to the perfect image of Christ, "the first-born of the

of DN developed in §5 of this book under a predominantly philosophical point of view also refers to the Holy Trinity and Its inner dynamics.[18] Von Ivánka's study of DN reminds us of (at least) two things. First, perhaps, we should add the theological triad of Father/Creator, Son/Redeemer, Holy Spirit/Paraclete to the interpretation, paralleling it with the ontological display of creative procession, defining 'halt,' and apocatastic homecoming.[19] It is true that Dionysius also informs the reader that all of the Names apply to God in His 'entirety' and never only to one Person (DN 636C-637D); the intricate synopsis of unity and differentiation as exposed in the prolegomena of chapter 2 is to be applied here. Second, we should bear in mind that it is a serious mistake to lose sight of the theological tenor of DN that cannot be entirely subsumed under the ontological perspective. (Then again, this was never my intention.)

Von Ivánka's interpretation lacks, above all, a satisfactory explanation for the insertion, function, and sense of the sets of Names displayed in chapters 9 and 10 of DN. From his perspective of formal analysis, von Ivánka has to interpret them, although somewhat unfittingly, as parentheses of heterogeneous origin (Plato's *Parmenides* in chapter 9, less tangibly in chapter 10) or as intellectually challenging insertions at best within a framework of Christological Names which they unnecessarily interrupt. He therefore has to characterise these chapters as insertions one has to eliminate or to miss out in order to detect the second triad, which only becomes structurally clear afterwards.[20] What

new Creation" (as Gregory of Nyssa says in PG 46, 254C) in order to be worthy of the return and uplifting to God. This assimilation of man to Christ, so that he may be lifted up to God through Christ, the God, is Gregory of Nyssa's starting-point in the mentioned treatise (PG 46, 252A ff.). Cf. von Ivánka 1964, 238.

[18] This is also one of the few points where I must reluctantly disagree with von Balthasar, who rejects the idea of an image of the Trinity in Creation and sees Dionysius as a sworn adversary of this conception (von Balthasar 1962, 118: "Damit ist strikt jede Theologie einer imago trinitatis im Geschöpf abgelehnt . . . Und diese Ablehnung bei einem Schüler des Proklus, für den die ganze Struktur des Seins und der Welt triadisch aufgebaut ist!"). Yet, Dionysius refers to some excellent creatures as being ἐν θειοτέρα μίμεσει than others, etc. Therefore, he obviously presupposes a mimesis of God by creatures. Cf. also Suchla 2002, 104 on the motif of θεομιμεσία in Dionysius.

[19] The step from oneness to plurality in the ontological development as theologically prepared in the presentation or 'praise' of the inner dynamics of the triune God is a thought that can be found expressed as early as DN 592AB: cf. the *apparatus criticus* of the Spanish translation of DN by Martin-Lunas 1995, 272, who enumerates some parallels of the motif in MT, too.

[20] Von Ivánka 1964, 235: "[N]ach Ausscheidung dieser Einlage." For this reason,

seems to be an annoying flaw in the perspective of the formal motif-interpretation, however, can be emended and even profitably explained if the viewpoint of an intended ontological project in DN is assumed for interpretation. The necessary isostheny of dynamics and beings, or the ontological balance in which the theophanic stream of being disembogues on different levels is represented and exercised by the confrontation of seemingly irreconcilable Names. Within the 'abiding' framework of theonyms corresponding to the ontological 'halt,' the awkward Divine denominations of chapters 9 and 10, which at first seem like an obstructive nuisance to a compact and satisfying interpretation of von Ivánka's second triad, become perfectly reasonable, well placed, and fitting to the purpose of the ontological system that DN attempts to work out and to expound.

f. *Von Balthasar's Interpretation. What It Tries to Accomplish and Where It is Found Wanting*

What has been said about von Ivánka's good reasons for insisting on the primordial scope and profound elaborations concerning the science of God in DN equally, and perhaps in an even more impressive way, applies to von Balthasar's interpretation of DN (cf. diagram 2 on page 178). If von Ivánka's structural analysis deserves praise for its discovery of the double triptych at the core of the treatise, von Balthasar's interpretation deserves it for its emphasis on the flow and back-flow dynamics that underlie and internally determine the structure of DN. According to von Balthasar, the turning point of the treatise is the Name 'Wisdom' in chapter 7, which serves as a link between two well-defined sets of theonyms. In von Balthasar's eyes, the complete series of Divine Names, beginning with 'Wisdom' in chapter 7 and concluding with the 'One' in chapter 13 at the very end of the entire treatise, seems to belong to the continuous and goal-directed description of the return and uplifting to the Divine, the ἐπιστροφή (von Balthasar 1962, 193). Accordingly, von Balthasar ascribes the total set of 'halt' Names to Dionysius' reversion- or theo-ontological back-flow teaching.

Louth, following the pertinent studies of Corsini 1962, qualifies von Ivánka's interpretations as "quite hypothetical" and sees "reasons for being sceptical about them" (Louth 1989, 92).

Creation 'flows out' of God and 'flows back' to Him. What von Balthasar gains with that is, quantitatively considered, a better symmetry between the lengthy chapters dedicated to the procession and the notably shorter chapters of the other theonyms.[21] Von Balthasar's interpretation consists of a series of Names dedicated to the creational procession (chapters 4-7) that precede another series of Names dedicated to the homecoming of all beings through God's providential guidance (chapters 7-11). Both of them are sandwiched between two sets of Names that, as the introduction and the conclusion of the writing and each in its peculiar way and from its own perspective, are concerned with the unnameable transcendence of the triune One. Procession and reversion, therefore, approach one another to some extent and mirror the symmetry of apophatic and cataphatic theology (emanation and remanation) in the Platonic tradition. An account of this seems to be presumed of the enigmatic Hierotheus' teaching of ascent and descent in DN 713D.[22]

There are very good, though perhaps not compelling *material* reasons, too, for von Balthasar's outline of a directional diptych of Names at the core of DN. Actually, many of the Names enumerated in chapters 8-11 (which I identify as describing the 'halt' of the ontological procession, the μονή) have an undeniable inwardly connection with the vocabulary, inner arrangement, and motifs of chapters 12 and 13, which are devoted to the ascension.[23] Such is the case of theonyms like 'Salvation,' 'Redemption' (chapter 8), 'Motion' (chapter 9), 'Peace'

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[21] For von Balthasar, and this might have influenced his interpretation, the structure of DN anticipates (and perhaps is the inspirational pattern of) the structure of procession and return found in Aquinas' *Summa theologiae* (von Balthasar 1964, 151).

[22] "Come, let us gather all these once more together into a unity and let us say that there is a simple self-moving power directing all things to mingle as one, that it starts out from the Good, reaches down to the lowliest creation, returns then in due order through all the stages back to the Good, and thus turns from itself and through itself and upon itself in an everlasting circle (ἁπλῆ δύναμις ἡ αὐτοκινητικὴ πρὸς ἑνωτικήν τινα κρᾶσιν ἐκ τἀγαθοῦ μέχρι τοῦ τῶν ὄντων ἐσχάτου καὶ ἀπ᾽ ἐκείνου πάλιν ἑξῆς διὰ πάντων εἰς τἀγαθὸν ἐξ ἑαυτῆς καὶ δι᾽ ἑαυτῆς καὶ ἐφ᾽ ἑαυτῆς ἑαυτὴν ἀνακυκλοῦσα καὶ εἰς ἑαυτὴν ἀεὶ ταὐτῶς ἀνελιττομένη)" (DN 713D). Concerning the identity of Hierotheus, described by Dionysius as "my teacher and friend . . . who, next to the divine Paul, has been my elementary instructor" (DN 681A), different interpretations have been given. For a summary, cf. Schäfer 2002, 415f.

[23] Von Balthasar 1962, 189ff. clearly declares that the hierarchy of things is equivalent to the way of return to God.

(namely with God, chapter 11), as well as of the connection between the 'Parmenidean' theonyms of chapter 9 and the A-and-Ω-set of Names in chapter 12. For von Balthasar and his theological reading of DN, which is influenced by his understanding of salvation history, the 'halt' of the procession and the return to God are one and the same thing. God's providence, the epistrophic re-orientation, and the order of the cosmos form one and the same aspect in the development of DN. Once again, the reference on this point seems to be to the Areopagite's alleged philosophical teacher Hierotheus, who according to Dionysius speaks of the return "in due order through all the stages back to the Good (ἐκείνου πάλιν ἑξῆς διὰ πάντων εἰς τἀγαθὸν)" (DN 713D). This is all the more true because the return to God is considered by Dionysius as an activity that (as well as the repose of the procession) is entirely on God's side and rather almost a re-absorption than an active return.[24] From a certain point of view, von Balthasar is perfectly right to include chapters 8-11 in the epistrophic set of Divine denominations.[25] Still, from another angle, his interpretation should be enriched by refinement, namely by the differentiation that can be traced, as will be shown on pages 89-111, to one set of theonyms dedicated to the repose and another one dedicated to the return, the first one explaining the hierarchical levels of the procession (as chapters 5-7 demand) and at the same time serving as the basis of the second one. Both differ in accentuation and content (as will be shown) yet are not disconnected from one another (as von Balthasar's concern with them shows).

What favours such a further differentiation of von Balthasar's draft is:

[1] The appearance of the 'Parmenidean' Names expressing the isosthenic balance of the repose of all things created. It is true that this display of reconciled antonyms (Movement-Rest, Sameness-Difference, and the like) alludes to the coincidence of opposites in God (a thought so very dear to Platonism of all times) and therefore also to the epistrophic eschatology of the return of all created things, different

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[24] Cf. von Balthasar 1962, 166f. The diagram preceding these remarks on p. 165 shows how von Balthasar succeeds in inserting DN in the spanning architecture of the entire CD.

[25] He might be following Aquinas in this. Cf. Rorem 1993, 164f., and, above all, Rorem's perspicuous treatment of the descent-ascent-pattern in Aquinas' *Summae* in Rorem 1993,169ff. On the similar architecture of Aquinas' *Summa theologiae*, the modern *locus classicus* is, of course, Chenu 1939.

and irreconcilable as they may seem, to God, the One. This might integrate (though in an awkward context and somewhat prematurely, perhaps) chapter 10 into von Balthasar's scheme of DN. Still, this dialectic of "identicalness and differences," of "similarities and dissimilarities," and last, but not least, of the "sharing of opposites" due to an "innate togetherness of everything" (all quotes from DN 704BC) is unmistakably attributed by Dionysius to the "unceasing emergence of things" (DN 704B) in Creation: in short, to the identifying 'halt' or the act of "establishing each being" (ἐνιδρύον ἑκάστον: DN 704C) out of the flowing dynamics of the ontological procession. Thus, DN 704C speaks clearly of the "remainings and establishings," μοναὶ καὶ ἱδρύσεις (mark the plural, which indicates that it is not God's singular μονή which is meant here), of all beings on different levels, i.e. of the "remaining and foundation" of every creature in the dynamic ontological procession. DN 704B-708B is, in this sense, a concise outline of the entire Dionysian ontology. That these short pages were thought to be such an outline of the whole treatise can be deduced from the words which sum up the whole passage in DN 708AB: God, Dionysius concludes his brief presentation of Goodness, 'makes all things' (procession), brings all things to their own perfection and holds them together (repose), and reverts all things to Himself (return). This concise summary appears in chapter 4, the longest of DN, and is certainly conceived by Dionysius as a prelude to what follows his discussion of Goodness. Being the Name par excellence for God's extroversion, the Good appears to be the appropriate place for this forestalled blueprint of the entire ontological development presented in the treatise. One interesting passage of the text runs like this:

> Even what is not still there exists transcendentally in the Beautiful and the Good. Here is the source of all which transcends every source, here is an ending which transcends completion. 'For from Him and through Him and in Him and to Him are all things' [Rom 11:36] says holy scripture. And so it is that all things must desire, must yearn for, must love, the Beautiful and the Good. . . . And we may be so bold as to claim also that the Cause of all things loves all things in the superabundance of his goodness, that because of this goodness he makes all things, brings all things to perfection, holds all things together, returns all things (ὁ πάντων αἴτιος δι᾽ ἀγαθότητος ὑπερβολὴν πάντων ἐρᾷ, πάντα ποιεῖ, πάντα τελειοῖ, πάντα συνέχει, πάντα ἐπιστρέφει, καὶ ἔστι καὶ ὁ θεῖος ἔρως ἀγαθὸς ἀγαθοῦ διὰ τὸ ἀγαθόν: DN 708AB).[26]

[26] I had long conversation about this passage with Paul Rorem. This discussion

Within the short ontological outline of DN 704A-708B, the discussion of 'identicalness and differences,' of 'the togetherness' of opposites, etc., appears clearly attributed to the 'holding together of all things' or the ontologically identifying 'halt,' μονή. No doubt, therefore, the 'Parmenidean' discussion of antonyms in chapter 10 of DN is to be considered a philosophical exercise meant to explain the 'stand-still,' the ontological abiding, and the coming to their own perfection of creatures by means of the balance of Justice and the isosthenic completion of all aspects of reality. This does not contradict von Balthasar's assertion that the Parmenidean Names can and should be related to the ontological ascent. The final principle of togetherness underlying all differences and opposites is God, the One, Who brings all things together, returning them to Himself in an epistrophic convergence of all opposites towards Himself as their final Cause. The same holds true of the creative procession and its efficient Cause. The ontological 'halt' does not only make us look ahead and remind us of the One as the final aim of the reconciliation of opposites, but it also makes us glance backwards, to remind us of the first and definite unity in which everything has its origin. It is clearly the 'halt' that makes us understand that the regress and the progress of all beings in relation to the One are the same. In the words of Heraclitus (who was one of Plotinus' and other Platonists' favourite Presocratic authors), "the way up and the way down are one and the same."[27] The unity of the opposites is grounded on the unity of the One from which everything stems and is ontologically derived. Dionysius explains what that means in this same significant passage of chapter 4 when he addresses the opposites 'Rest' and 'Movement,' two of the 'Parmenidean Names' that reappear

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and Paul's valuable remarks made it clear to me that Dionysius is thinking of the sequence πρόοδος (makes all things), μονή (brings them to perfection and holds them together), ἐπιστροφή (returns all things), though it may *prima facie* appear that he is referring to a descent-ascent structure (makes all things — perfects all things) and repeats it (holds all things — returns all things). But perfection actually means the *perfectio in genere suo* here, the ontological definition of all things at their best, that is. This is also what we find in the scholastic commentaries on DN, where πρόοδος, μονή, and ἐπιστροφή are rendered as *exitus*, *perfectio*, and *reductio* (cf. once more Anzulewicz 2000, 285).

[27] DK 22 B60: ὁδὸς ἄνω κάτω μία καὶ ὡυτή. This double direction of the simultaneous descending and ascending movement has already been noted above with the theonym 'Ecstasy,' which denotes God's stepping out of Himself ('way down') as well as the uplifting ecstasy of the mystic ('way up') to reconciliation or reunification with God.

in chapter 10. Again, it is in the context of the repose and the (self-) identifying definition of things, that all this is explained:

> There is rest for everything and movement for everything, and these come from that which, transcending rest and movement, establishes each being according to an appropriate principle (DN 704C).

This is a statement which, of course, refers to the One as the inseparable identity, the coincidence of opposites, etc. Yet, in the context in which it is stated, it refers as well to the abiding of Creation in the form of different yet inseparably connected beings, which come to be what they mimetically partake, to the best of their abilities, in the One, their (in the procession) efficient, (in the regress) final, and (in the identity-establishing repose) formal cause. This is clearly an exercise concerning the stand-stills (μοναί) of all entities, their abidings, and their differently levelled ontological 'halts,' not merely their epistrophic regress. All the same, the regress is hierarchically graded and the μονή, the identifying 'halt' of beings, is always according to this gradation. By offering the One as the final Cause of the gradual ascension, the regress is somehow present in Dionysius' description of the 'stand-still' that it presupposes. Still, regress and 'halt' are two clearly distinguishable aspects or 'phases' of Dionysius' ontology.

[2] Another point is the specific use that Dionysius makes of the Names 'Salvation' and 'Redemption' in chapter 8. As 'Justice,' these Names seem to point to the final Judgement and to the reconciliation with God, and therefore appear to belong entirely to the return that God provides for all things. This implication made von Balthasar decide to count these Names under the category of epistrophic movement. Yet (as will be expounded in the discussion of the chapters in question), Justice/Righteousness, Salvation, and Redemption, within the specific elaboration of DN, are terms that describe the repose and ontological definition of things rather than their reversal to God (which is only hinted at at the end of the series in a doxological amendment, as will be shown in the introductory lines of the interpretation of the theonym 'Peace' in §5, p. 100f.). Once again, the discussion of the μονή as the defining identity of created things anticipates what must follow and what must be discovered subsequently, namely, the return to the One thanks to God's salvific and redeeming power. But what Dionysius explains here is the thoroughly just and balanced order of God's Creation, whose Creator "is also praised as the Salvation of the world, since he ensures that each being is preserved and maintained in its

proper being and order (οὐσίαν καὶ τάξιν)" (DN 896D), and as "Redemption, because he does not permit the truly real to fall to nothingness" (DN 897B). It is the ontological abiding that "brings all things to perfection and holds them all together" (DN 708B) that is experienced and described here, not (yet) the phase of return of all things, as intimately as this return might remit to the hierarchical levels of the repose, and vice versa.

[3] To sum it all up, and just to mention two final examples (there are more, but these should suffice), all the Names given in chapters 8-11 are adduced and discussed because of their explanatory value for the ontologically defining 'halt' that the theophanic Creation-process comes to on different levels. The two opening Names of this set of chapters, Power and Justice, trace the guidelines for the inner structure and dynamics of this 'halt,' its functioning and sense within the whole of the ontological system that DN presents. It is the isosthenic balance that holds all things within their defining ontological boundaries and circumscribes the whole of Creation, presenting it as the differently levelled abiding and self-identifying 'halt' of the procession of God's extroversion. It is true that this balanced system which we call reality is, at its best, and as far as its final perspective is concerned, to be conceived as the firm and necessary basis for the return to God. The last two chapters of the set, concerned with the theonyms of the Pantocrator and of Peace as well as the final reconciliation of all things with God, clearly show this inner link between 'abiding' and return. Yet, the emphasis and the primary concern of these chapters are the steadying in itself and the ontological foundation of what we call reality or theologically speaking, God's firm and lasting *quoad nos*. This can be rather safely deduced from what Dionysius has to say about the Pantocrator, which is another case of a theonym that one would not expect to fit into an ontological perspective but rather to be part of a thoroughly theological eschatology concerning the almighty Judge of Doomsday. It should suffice as a conclusive example for a licit ontological reading of DN (and as a prelude to the following considerations) that Dionysius understands this Name in another sense *quoad nos*, that is insofar as our reality and its coming-to-be, actual being, and foundation are concerned. In an almost brazen manner, he converts this Name, which unmistakably pertains to Biblical eschatology, into an exercise of his philosophy, and uses it to explain the processional generation, the securing and holding together in the dynamic 'halt,'

and the epistrophic return of all beings. God is named the 'Pantocrator' or 'Almighty'

> because as the omnipotent foundation of everything he preserves and embraces all the world. He founds it. He makes it secure. He holds it together. He binds the whole world totally to himself (ἕδραν συνέχουσαν καὶ περιέχουσαν τὰ ὅλα καὶ ἐνιδρύουσαν καὶ θεμελιοῦσαν καὶ περισφίγγουσαν καὶ ἀῤῥαγὲς ἐν ἑαυτῇ τὸ πᾶν ἀποτελοῦσαν). He generates everything from out of himself as from some omnipotent root and he returns all things back to himself as though to some omnipotent storehouse. . . . He is so called too because he is goal of all yearning, etc. (DN 936D-937A).

My interpretation of DN focuses on an ontological exegesis of the theological Names because it unveils the treatise's inner structure and philosophical contents. It is not the only one possible, but it is a defendable one that gives a new perspective on Dionysius' philosophy. The following pages will deal with this defence as well as with the alternatives. We should consider the possible alternatives first, leaving the defence for §6.

g. *Abolishing Monopolies*

Among the various modern interpretations of DN (I shall disregard the broad stream of Patristic and Medieval discussions and diverse receptions of the treatise, as well as its seemingly enormous influence throughout the centuries), those of von Balthasar and von Ivánka were named and commented upon in order to show their advantages as well as their differences from a more philosophical reading of DN as proposed and (hopefully) accomplished in this book.

There are very few other such attempts of interpreting the structure and inner arrangement of DN in recent times, and they can nearly always be regarded as by-products of other interpretive intentions. In the following, I should like to mention just two more of them, not so much for the sake of numerical completeness (which cannot be this small book's purpose anyway), but rather in order to show the startling depth and variety in the readings of the treatise. Startling all the more, as they all contribute to a better understanding of certain portions of DN from their own perspective.

Paul Rorem's view of the question (in Rorem 1993) has been mentioned already. He seems to take the chapters following 'Wisdom' as an impossible mental exercise designed ultimately to demonstrate the

futility of all human wisdom in theological matters. There is no 'gain' for the human mind in this treatise, according to Rorem, but rather a 'benefit' to the soul that in last consequence surrenders to the ineffability of the One. This is great achievement, on the other hand, because it releases the mind of all 'data content' and prepares the emptied spirit for the 'uplifting' to God. The *tabula rasa* of the void mental 'state' is one of the pre-conditions for the mystical union, according to tradition.

In a way, Rorem follows a line of interpreting Dionysius which suspects that he was much more interested in the impossibility of knowing God and in the paradox of His (at least 'meontic') non-being so dear to the mystical tradition than in the comprehension of revelation, let alone an ontology of the creaturely world.[28] From this point of view both comprehension and non-comprehension are ultimately the same, with a methodical primacy conceded to non-comprehension, which is a negative methodology frequently found in Platonists. One may consider Plotinus as an example:

> But if the One . . . was to be taken positively it would be less clear than if we did not give it a name at all: for perhaps this name . . . was given it in order that the seeker, beginning from this which is completely indicative of simplicity, may finally negate this as well (*Enn.* V.5[32].6,29-33).

Other than Rorem, Inglis P. Sheldon-Williams (in Sheldon-Williams 1966) seems to follow von Ivánka in his tripartite system of interpreting DN in the outer arrangement. In content, it appears that Sheldon-Williams applies Eriugena to the Dionysian system, proposing a philosophical reading of DN that in some aspects coincides with the one given in this book but in others differs considerably from it. Sheldon-Williams sees a tripartite arrangement at the bottom of DN, which is very similar to the one that I propose in §5, dividing the treatise from chapter 5 onward into the sections: Being-Life-Intelligence, Wisdom-Power-Peace (the double triptych taken from von Ivánka), and the theonyms of chapter 12. This is where Eriugena comes in: Sheldon-Williams, obviously following the philosophy of Eriugena's *Periphyseon*, at least to a certain extent, proposes that Dionysius displays a system in which God's diffusive extroversion as the Good extends itself to the

[28] An example of which is Kroner 1959, 132.

different stages of receptiveness in the universe: as being, life, and intelligence to the understanding ('the intelligible triad'); as wisdom, power, and peace to the soul ('the psychic triad'); and as the most Holy of all holies, the greatest Lord of all lords, the King of kings, and the God of gods in the physical cosmos, since, according to Sheldon-Williams, this "last group of names . . . denotes God's relation to man on earth, and as such is particularly associated with the body."

The Platonic top-down arrangement of reality is implemented with extraordinary consequence in this interpretation. The disadvantages of this reading of the treatise once more lie in the fact that the Parmenidean Names of DN's chapter 9 are considered as a vexatious interlude again, which unduly interrupts the second triad. Accordingly, they are not satisfactorily explained by Sheldon-Williams, which shows how and why an adequate structural arrangement of the treatise is needed in order to grasp the inner development of the argument. There is another problem; it is quite difficult to believe that Dionysius would have conceived such a treatise without arranging a top-down-*top* (or centric-excentric-*concentric*) movement, particularly in the light of the many passages of DN where a clear tripartite movement of procession, 'halt,' *and return* is stressed over and over again. Regrettably, none or very few of this is found in Sheldon-Williams.[29]

[29] Sheldon-Williams 1966, 108-117 (a short appraisal of this thesis can be found in Louth 1989, 93f.). On p. 112, Sheldon-Williams purges the Divine Names of the 'Parmenidean' (and kindred) theonyms, qualifying them as of lesser or even negligible importance (a mistake probably inherited from von Ivánka): "[T]he most important [names] are: the One, the Good, Being, Life, Wisdom, Power, Peace, Holy of Holies, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, God of Gods." As to the identification of the second triad as 'psychic,' he adduces that "a psychic triad, though not of these terms, formed part of the system of Iamblichus" (p. 113), which is a fact dimly known from Proclus' *In Timaeum* II 240, 4-6. Still, this piece of information seems too feeble to buttress such an interpretation of the 'second triad' of DN.

h. *The Way of the Mystic*

> He [Averroes] asked me this question: 'What manner of solution have you found through divine illumination and inspiration? Is it identical with what we obtain from speculative reason?' I replied: 'Yes and no. Between the yes and the no, spirits take their flight from their matter, and heads are separated from their bodies'. . . . Averroes was a great master of reflection and philosophical meditation. He gave thanks to God, I was told later, for having allowed him to live at such a time and permitted him to see a man who had gone into spiritual retirement and emerged as I had emerged. 'I myself', he declared, 'had said that such a thing was possible, but never met anyone who had actually experienced it.'[30]

As Sheldon-Williams's interpretation, Rorem's interpretation shows an aspect which has not been touched on so far, but which is important insofar as it duly points out that there are no monopolies in interpreting the polyfacetic treatise in question. It should be abundantly clear by now that from a contemporary point of view (and from a perspective somewhat alien to the one of Dionysius' times) there is a predominantly philosophical reading as well as a predominantly theological reading of DN. This will become even clearer in the subsequent §6 that deals with the 'philosophical perspective' on DN and its justification. Yet, both Sheldon-Williams and Rorem rightfully advert a further layer of comprehensibility found in the text when alluding to the receptiveness of mind and soul and the mind's eventual inaptitude, respectively; namely, the layer pertaining to a semantic as well as a symbolic 'reproduction' (however inadequate the term may be) of the mystical experience within the development of DN.

Mysticism is an awkward and often painful topic of philosophical thinking, and it certainly ever withdraws from any attempt of an academic description of the problem (which this book tries to give), especially in a communicable demonstration. In philosophy, a tradition of

[30] From Ibn 'Arabi's *Futuhat*, I 153, quoted after Corbin 1969, 42.

mystical thinking can be identified that from Plato's *Symposium* 210e-212a[31] has been a distinguishing feature of certain veins of Platonism and as such plays a significant part in Dionysius' writings. In theology, mysticism has occasionally been coupled with the religious experience and has brought forth great mystical thinkers in the history of religion. For Dionysius himself, the obscure passage of Paul's 'journey to the beyond' as hinted at in 2 Cor 12:2ff. might have been a welcome corroborating complement of the Platonic tradition of mystical experience.

But mysticism is not an entirely religious or theological phenomenon, and in many cases men of religion have looked at it in a hostile manner because they knew that mysticism is more often a non-religious (and sometimes plainly atheistic) rival on the same field of competence than a worthwhile complement of true and sound religious experience.[32] As an interpreter, one can only stand perplexed and not always too happy vis-à-vis the mystical experiences alluded to in philosophical texts like Dionysius' DN or MT and at times even openly suspicious of them since their incommunicable singularity and inexpressible inti-

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[31] The core of the passage is the description of the 'ascent': "When a man has been thus far tutored in the lore of love, passing from view to view of beautiful things, in the right and regular ascent, suddenly he will have revealed to him, as he draws close of his dealings in love, a wonderous vision, beautiful in its nature; and this, Socrates, is the final object of all those previous toils. . . . Beginning from obvious beauties he must for the sake of that highest beauty be ever climbing aloft, as on the rungs of a ladder, from one to two, and from two to all beautiful bodies; from personal beauty he proceeds to beautiful observances, from observance to beautiful learning, and from learning at last to that particular study which is concerned with the beautiful itself and that alone; so that in the end he comes to know the very essence of beauty" (in W.R.M. Lamb's translation).

[32] Beierwaltes 2000, 205 speaks of frequent "misunderstandings and factual damaging inflicted on the concept [of mysticism] toward an irrational tendency" throughout history. This seems painfully true and an additional hindrance for an unbiased understanding of mysticism. On the problem and development of mysticism in theology cf., for example, Bouyer 1966, 485-503; McGinn 1991, 84-130; on the ongoing discussion about the worth, trust-worthiness, and reach of the mystical experience in theology and philosophy, cf. the interesting controversy described in de Groot 1997, especially 146-149. Christian Platonism did not always nor even usually opt for the mystical way of enlightenment. Augustine, for example, seemed more sympathetic to the possibility of a mystical experience in an immediate contemplation of the Divine in his younger years, whereas he grew sceptical of it in his old age, not necessarily of the possibility of a mystical union, but rather as to its value and sense for human life. For the union seems to be instantaneous and not easy to perpetuate in its insights. A good account of which is given by Van Fleteren 1993, especially 352ff., and in Van Fleteren 1977. Yet, in the later Augustine the ascent to the vision of God is possible, although he seems to insist strictly on a cosmological way of ascent: *magnum est et admodum rarum universam creaturam corpoream et incorpoream consideratam compertamque mutabilem intentione mentis excedere atque ad incommutabilem Dei substantiam pervenire et illic discere ex ipso, quod cunctam naturam, quae non est quod ipse, non fecit nisi ipse*, etc. (*De civitate Dei* XI 2).

macy do not allow for an empathic (not to mention a rational) inlet. This is not necessarily grounds for suspicion, of course, but it regrettably detracts from the common grounds of communicability and rational introspection and therefore from interpretation. "I say nothing of those mysterious experiences. You know them well, and they cannot be explained to the multitude (τοῖς πολλοῖς ἄῤῥητα)," Dionysius states in DN 684B.

Yet, Dionysius makes an attempt in the MT to describe and to render objective the mystical experience to the extent of what seems possible to him. As all mystics, he declares the mystical union to be not a merely subjective and purely individual experience suited to each man's personalised history, intimate wishes, and inner life. Rather, the union is claimed always to follow a rigid and well-ordered pattern which distinguishes it from subjective exaltations and lower degree ecstasies of the more common psychological kind, which display an unstable variety and an accentuated openness of types, ways, and kinds. For an interpretation of the structure of DN, the external presentation of the Dionysian 'schedule' for the mystical experience should suffice. Methodically, it is best to give first a brief account of the Dionysian description of the main 'stages' or 'phases' of the mystical experience. In a second step, these 'stages' of the development can be identified with the tripartite ontological development detected in DN.

The schedule of the mystical union given by Dionysius is very complex and has quite a number of different subdivisions and informative aspects. Ysabel de Andia identifies seven different 'phases' of the way of the mystic: 1. abdication, 2. purgation, 3. enlightenment, 4. ascent, 5. survey in the upper world, 6. complete release from the world and from oneself, 7. ingress into the completely unknown (τῷ παντελῶς ἀγνώστῳ).

A densified presentation of these seven steps is presented by Beierwaltes in a tripartite arrangement of well known terms of the mystical tradition (Beierwaltes 1998, 66): κάθαρσις, ἔλλαμψις, and τελείωσις, i.e. purification (of the mind), enlightenment, and perfection. The first describes the necessary wiping off of all mental content and even all mental states; the second means the abandonment to the 'divine ray of light,' as Dionysius repeatedly puts it, which replenishes the voided self of the mystic anew and lifts him up; the third denotes the fulfilment of the union with the One.

Jan Vanneste proposes a different version of this (traditional) triple division of the mystical path, a triple division that identifies it as a hierarchical system. Instead of 'purgation,' 'enlightenment,' and 'perfection,' he presents a specifically modified triad of removal (ἀφαίρεσις),

illumination (ἔλλαμψις or φώτισμα), and unification (ἕνωσις or again τελείωσις) for Dionysius' MT. According to Vanneste, the removal of all content and states of mind until the utter annihilation of psychic life is 'achieved' thereby; this total 'nescience' (ἀγνώσις) and 'darkness' (σκότος) of the mind is, paradoxically, identified as the highest degree of enlightenment and it leads to an inner attainment of the Divine mystery. For Vanneste it is the total 'nescience' of all which allows for the *coincidentia* of the logically irreconcilable and which is the prerequisite for the encounter with the One identified as the *coincidentia oppositorum* (cf. Vanneste 1966). This seems 'consistent' to the point that the ineffable to be attained lies beyond any conceptual grasping and should be met in complete silence rather than in discourse. This thought also appears, among other great Christian Platonists, in Augustine (*De doctrina Christiana* I 6). The reader may infer from these speculations how odd and difficult an academic handling of this vein of thinking is.[33]

In any case, the first prerequisite of the union is an inner regress to the meanest and humblest of existence, a regressive concentration on the last and basic centre of the inner self which is conceived as purification from or removal of the accidental. It is a reduction of the mind to the substantial, but it still remains a mental activity. This comes close to the annihilation of all the definable within oneself, and it is obviously followed by the second step, a 'halting' of the mind where it is totally centred and prepared for the uplifting. This second state of pure receptiveness and of preparation is already the first phase of the ascent, since it presupposes the presence of the principle and goal of the ascent. Third, the ascent is achieved, but not through creature but through an activity and initiative which completely belong to God; it is He Who picks up the creature, not the creature that of its own accord ascends toward Him.[34]

As it is easy to see even from the mere external perspective carefully chosen here, this tripartite arrangement in Dionysius' description of the true mystical experience, if correctly represented, mirrors the

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[33] The best study I know on the reconcilement of the irreconcilable in the Platonic tradition is Halfwassen 1996.

[34] Which is also true for Plotinus, in a way. As Rist 1964, 215 remarks regarding a reading of *Enn.* V5.83ff.: "It will perhaps seem rather shocking to suggest that Plotinus means that some kind of superadded grace is required for the attainment of union, but his language certainly tends in that direction at times." Curiously enough, none of this is found in Proclus, though, as some interpreters have observed with amazement or satisfaction: cf. von Ivánka 1964, 258, and Moutsopoulos 1995.

ontological development of procession, 'halt,' and return on another level and with a different though not incommensurate intention. The world-process is present in the individual (an entirely Neoplatonic thought), and just as the comparison of the ontological development with the mental experience of reflection unveils a lot about the philosophical disclosure of reality in DN, the ontology of DN, once reasonably interpreted, gives abundant information about the procession, the coming to oneself, and the ascent of the individual in the mystical union. Where the ontological procession describes a creative activity levelled on the concentric stages of intelligence, life, and being, the mystical reduction or 'purification,' or even the 'removal,' describes a mental activity (or 'deactivation') of growing concentration *ad fontes*, from intelligence, to life, and finally to mere and emptied being. In Vanneste's radical interpretation, it extends even to the dangerous ultimate border of total darkness and annihilation, which might have its counterpart in the ontological discussion of the ultimate boundary of evil in the development of the descending process in chapter 4 of DN, which I will discuss later in §§ 6-9. Where the ontological repose describes a pacification of the world-creating processional activity as an equilibrium of forces prepared for unification with the One through an ominous yearning for absolute Peace, the 'stage' of the enlightenment of the mystic is due to a complete inner 'shut down,' a calmness, and an imperturbability that wants nothing and is thereby prepared to attain it all. For the emptiness of the spirit is the first step of enlightenment. Finally, the *henosis* or (re)unification with the One is an indubitably common feature to both ways of looking at the problem: both times described as an ascent and both times conceived as an absorption towards oneness rather than as an active accomplishment.[35]

There is at least one passage in the text of DN where Dionysius explicitly underscores this understanding of the treatise's development,

[35] There are many problems associated with the concept of '*henosis*' in Dionysius (which I leave aside for the purposes of this book). A good understanding of the multiple aspects and questions related to it can be found in Vanneste 1959. Vanneste distinguishes (at least) three different senses of the term in Dionysius on p. 194ff. A thorough and considerable work is de Andia 1996. The way that Dionysius presents the *henosis* reveals the dependence of the CD on Proclus in the eyes of many critics who specialise in the question. For *henosis* is seldom in Plotinus, for example, but it is a common concept in the much later Proclus. Like Proclus himself (and unlike Plotinus and many of his followers), Dionysius speaks of a *henosis* '*above*' spirit or intellect, ἡ ὑπὲρ νοῦν ἕνωσις (DN 592C). Cf. the good study in Rist 1964, 216-219.

object, and purpose. The grand ontological picture is reduced here to that which is mirrored within ourselves and which pertains to our own inner self. In this 'gnoseological' passage, he makes the theonyms a starting point for a short description of the 'halt' of our (mental) 'activities,' which leads to the 'transcendence' beyond being. The active process, repose, and uplifting to the beyond implied in the grand ontological system provide 'appropriate symbols' in order to initiate the tripartite process within ourselves. A process which imitates God's activity, His keeping all things stable and in peace, and His reunification of all beings with Himself. It is an analogy which links the individual to the whole:

> But for now, what happens is this: we use whatever appropriate symbols we can for the things of God. With these analogies we are raised upward toward the truth of the mind's vision, a truth which is simple and one. [Then] we leave behind us all our own notions of the divine. We call a halt to the activities of our minds and, to the extent that is proper, we approach the ray which transcends being (ἀποπαύοντες ἡμῶν τὰς νοερὰς ἐνεργείας εἰς τὴν ὑπερού σιον ἀκτῖνα κατὰ τὸ θεμιτὸν ἐπιβάλλομεν: DN 592CD).

As for DN, this view of the mystical imitation of God 'to the extent that is proper' is, therefore, rather a complement, a parallel or a supplement of the ontological reading (which, of course, could never claim to hold an interpretive monopoly for the understanding of the treatise). It describes what is possible 'for now,' i.e. to the individual and its abilities. The view turns away from the big picture to the smaller one that imitates it. Plato's remarks in the *Republic* 500bc about the coinciding of the philosopher's activity with God's are likely preludes to this perspective.[36] Nothing different is said here, but it is expressed, proposed and performed in a different manner.

[36] *Republic* 500bc: "For surely, Adeimantos, the man whose mind is truly fixed on eternal realities has no leisure to turn his eyes downward upon the petty affairs of men, and so engaging in strife with them to be filled with envy and hate, but he fixes his gaze upon the things of the eternal and unchanging order, and seeing that they neither wrong nor are wronged by one another, but all abide in harmony as reason bids, he will endeavour to imitate them and, as far as may be, to fashion himself in their likeness and assimilate himself to them."

i. *Associative Composing*

Before turning to a thorough philosophical interpretation of the structure of DN, a very short remark on a possible, perhaps even probable, model for explaining certain aspects of the formal development of the treatise should be made. It is noteworthy that DN is not a scholastic treatise of the clearly constructed pros-and-cons layout or of the axiomatic sort found in Proclus, for example. This might be one of the reasons, I venture to assume, that the structure of DN has never become entirely clear to scholars. Yet, if Proclus does not provide the paragon that Dionysius follows in this respect, one may ask why so and if there could be another one. Certainly, one might come to think of Plotinus for several though not necessarily compelling reasons, but there is another possibility that should be considered. The letters of the Apostle Paul often display an associative style of composing and of developing thoughts which might be deliberately emulated by Dionysius (to a certain extent, at least) in the treatise on the Divine Names.

The associative combining of themes that only at the end appear well devised and coherently constructed from the beginning, in integrating numerous parentheses and digressions though never losing the thread of the author's primary intention, could well be imitated by Dionysius to an uncertain degree. It must be admitted, though, that DN — *pace* its unlost thread — again and again breaks the associative chain and has to start anew (as is the case in the first lines of chapter 5 after the insertion of the discussion of 'evil' at the end of chapter 4).

The evidence for a Pauline pattern for the Dionysian style can be proposed only as a stylistic device at the service of an intended inner arrangement of the text. For it is a text that, and this should not be forgotten either, initially has the outer appearance of a doctrinal letter addressed to the same Timothy to whom two of the Pauline epistles are addressed. An axiomatic ontology in the fashion of a Proclean treatise on Platonic doctrine could never be expected; the inner development of the doctrine expounded is a subliminal one. Yet, it is there, and the well devised though not always outwardly clarified or manifest structure underlying the text of DN is tangible throughout the entire treatise.

PART II

THE PHILOSOPHY OF DN

§4. A SUMMARY ON THE PHILOSOPHICAL CONCERN OF DN

Dionysius' entire philosophical interest and ambition appears to hinge upon the ultimately unexplainable (though obviously not entirely inexplicable) theophany that we call 'reality.' As complete and all-transcendent Otherness, God as the Cause of all reality is inconceivable and beyond the reach of rationality: cf. DN 588B, 716C; MT 1000C; 1001A, 1025A, etc.[1] The utter otherness of God is, of course, a Biblical topos; the Hebrew for 'holy,' *qadosh*, as especially applied to God and things belonging to Him intimately, etymologically means 'to be different' or 'to be severed.' The 'Holy of holies' theonym in chapter 12 reminds us most emphatically of this concept of holiness preserved in DN. At the same time, 'otherness' is also a Platonic topos that denominates the hiatus that severs the first Principle from all the subsequent ones, which is typical of Dionysius' choice of concepts and language.[2] "The epistemological formula is simple," writes J.C. McLelland, "human knowledge is limited to the intelligibility of being (a precious tautology); God is hyper-being; therefore he is unknowable" (McLelland 1976, 153). A passage by Eric D. Perl (2003, 540f.) makes that even clearer:

> The starting point of Dionysius' philosophy is the doctrine that God is "beyond being" (*hyperousios*), the ground of all beings but not himself any being, and so also absolutely unknowable and ineffable. . . . Dionysius himself offers no philosophical justification for this position, but it is grounded in Neoplatonic arguments which must be understood if we are to grasp Dionysius' philosophy. The Neoplatonic doctrine that the One or the Good, the first principle of reality, is beyond being and knowledge, is a direct consequence of the

[1] Two text samples: "Indeed the inscrutable One is out of the reach of every rational process (πάσαις διανοίαις ἀδιανόητόν ἐστι τὸ ὑπὲρ διάνοιαν ἕν). Nor can any words come up to the inexpressible Good, this One, this Source of all unity," etc. (DN 588B); "It has neither word nor act of understanding, since it is on a plane above all this, and it is made manifest only to those who travel through foul and fair, who pass beyond the summit of every holy ascent, who leave behind them every divine light," etc. (MT 1000C).

[2] A good study of this Platonic concept of otherness and its different implications and applications is Rist 1971.

> fundamental law that to be is to be intelligible. This law goes back at least to Parmenides, and it is central to the thought of Plato and to all Neoplatonism. It affirms that whatever is, is able to be thought, to be apprehended by the mind. It would be incoherent to postulate a being which cannot be thought, for to do so would already be to think of such a being. Intelligibility, therefore, is co-extensive with being, or indeed is its very meaning: that which is, is that which can be apprehended by the mind. From this it follows that to be is to be determinate, or finite, for only a definite, finite "this" can be grasped by the intellect. Further, any being *is* in virtue of determination, the totality of features or attributes, whereby it is what it is, and thus is intellectually graspable. Every being, therefore, is both finite and derivative, dependent for its existence on its determination.

The doctrine of God the All-transcendent as 'beyond being' has its origin in Plato's *Republic* 509b, and Plotinus praised it (*Enn.* V.5[32].6,11ff.) as the 'least inappropriate' statement about the One. In the preceding lines where he treats the paradox of how the Cause of all that is does not belong to the realm of all that is (*Enn.* V.5[32].6,6,8-11), Plotinus says:

> But if all things are in that which is generated [from the One], which of the things in it are you going to say that the One is? Since it is none of them, it can only be said to be beyond them. But these things are beings, and being: so it is 'beyond being.'[3]

Dionysius must have thought similarly, since the doctrine of the All-transcendent as 'beyond being' is frequently repeated and alluded to throughout the CD: DN 588AB, 716C; MT 1000C, 1001A, 1025A, etc.[4]

[3] "Consequently, the first principle of reality cannot be any being. If it were, it would be finite and hence not first but dependent on its determination. It would, moreover, share an attribute, namely being itself, with all other beings. It would be one member within the totality of all things rather than the source of that totality, and the shared attribute would be anterior to both the supposed first principle and all other things. Consequently Neoplatonism maintains that the source of all things is not any being, any object of thought, but is rather 'beyond being' and beyond the grasp of intellect. This Plotinian argument, although not presented in Dionysius' works, underlies the whole of his thought and furnishes the starting point whose implications he unfolds. . . . This is no mere 'mystical' effusion, but a rigorous philosophical deduction from the intelligibility of being. A 'God' who either is or is not anything at all, who could be grasped by the mind whether positively or negatively, would not be God but a finite and therefore created being" (Perl 2003, 541).

[4] "[T]hat hidden divinity which transcends being" (DN 588A); "Cause of all existence, and therefore transcending existence" (DN 588B); "Good itself transcends being" (DN 716C); "he who is beyond every being" (MT 1001A), etc. Suchla, 2002 91f. counts 22 passages where 'beyond being' is employed for the characterisation of the One in the CD. For a helpful discussion of the concept of 'beyond being' in Platonism, cf. Perl 1997, note 19 on 305.

Insofar as the All-transcendent is Love (ἀγάπη: 1 John 4:8 and 4:16), He can be perceived as the Good or the positive personal principle of the well-arranged hierarchy of the world. The world itself is basically to be identified with His emerging out of Himself or with His giving away Himself, as His processional πρόοδος,[5] which is the Neoplatonic *terminus technicus* that Dionysius employs for God's self-delivery. According to the Areopagite, we are able to experience God's self-surrendering πρόοδος (though Dionysius does not emphasise it) as *vestigia Dei* in our inner self and even in the physical world 'surrounding' us: "God is therefore known in all things and as distinct from all things (ἐν πᾶσιν ὁ θεὸς γινώσκεται καὶ χωρὶς πάντων)" (DN 872A). Eric D. Perl explains this symbolic (and at the same time much more than symbolic) nature of all things as follows:

> A symbol, in that it expresses God but is not God himself, at once presents and leaves him behind, and thus makes God known without objectifying him as a being. Only in a symbol can he be encountered without his inaccessibility being violated, and hence only in a symbol can true divinity be encountered at all. Dionysius expresses this twofold

[5] The long theological controversy on Dionysius' concept of Creation originates in his definition of the Creator: "the Cause of all things is himself overflowing (ὑπερπλήρης) with them in one transcendent excess of all" (DN 972A). The problem here is, of course, how to interpret the 'overflow' without incurring the danger of pantheism. Some text passages of DN that seem to border on a pantheistic understanding of the 'procession' are adduced by Suchla 1988, note 88 on 114. An interesting discussion of the problem can also be found, for example, in Carroll 1983; of equal interest is Carroll 1981. I think that Rorem 1993, 141 is on the right track when he (not explicitly, but certainly implicitly) distinguishes emanation from the Dionysian concept of Creation by distinguishing God's activity from God's accomplished acts. Josef Ratzinger's article on 'Emanation', in: *RAC* (1227) underscores God's omnipresence in all things as being direct and undiluted in Dionysius as opposed to the presence of the One as a decreasing and multiplying mediated echo in Neoplatonic emanation: "Von den Neuplatonikern bleibt aber Dionys dadurch abgehoben, daß den Mittelwesen keine seinshervorbringende Kraft zugesprochen wird," etc. On the other hand, to do justice to pagan Neoplatonic thought, the proposal of an 'emanation' in the strict sense was never intended in the philosophy of the One and of its participations; Plotinus himself seems to reject the notion of an 'outflow' altogether in *Enn.* V.1[10].3. Yet, his choice of words in metaphors and images may suggest such an outflow as he speaks of 'overflow', 'outpour', and 'spilling' (ὑπερρεῖν, ἐκρεῖν, ἐκχύειν). As in Dionysius, these clearly metaphorical expressions in Plotinus should be taken and understood simply as such, i.e. as *images* applied to a reality that otherwise escapes our conceptual possibilities. On the other hand, the concept of 'emanation' has its advantages as well; the way 'down' or 'from God' and the way 'back' or 'to God' could more easily be expressed by the contrast of 'emanation' and 'remanation', etc. Cf. Suchla 1988, note 20 on 106. According to von Balthasar 1962, note 145 on 192, "the acceptance of genuine creation in Dionysius is no problem at all."

> nature of symbolism, at once revealing and concealing, in his use of the word *probeblesthai*, which means both 'present' and 'shield.' Created symbols are *probeblēmena*, presentations/shields of God (. . .), and the entire order of being, the whole of creation, is set forth (*probebletai*) as a symbol of God, a presentation which shields and a shield which presents (Perl 2003, 547).

In other words, Dionysius can turn towards an interpretation of the world and still be a theologian precisely because the entire universe (as ontological creation, κτίσμα) is a 'sacrament' and as such an outward sign of God's invisible activity (namely, active creation, κτίσις), to which the sign bears witness. For Dionysius, interpreting the world using adequate philosophical terminology and naming God denotes one and the same intellectual activity.

Armstrong (1967b, 237f.) points out a similar treatment of the 'names' for the Highest in Plotinus. As a rule, Plotinus attempts to refrain from naming it at all. If he does, he chooses to call it the 'One' in order to separate it from the multiplicity of contingent beings. Armstrong continues:

> But he [*scil.* Plotinus] has another preferred name for it, the Good (which he also admits to be inadequate). This name, consecrated by Plato's use of it, has the purpose of reminding us that the undetermined, unlimited first principle is not a mere negation, but something supremely positive, so positive that it is both the cause of the existence of the whole universe of formed being and the goal to which things aspire.

In consequence, Dionysius concentrates on this notion of the Good, of the Divine *quoad nos*, of God *qua* agent: "[T]hey call [the Divine Trinity the] cause of beings since in its goodness it employed its creative power to summon all things to being" (DN 592A).[6] Eric D. Perl (2003, 544) puts it this way: God's "being 'in himself' consists in being 'out of himself' and 'in all things'." The Good as God's ontological extroversion is conveniently illustrated by the image of the sun. DN 697B-700C[7] recalls the metaphor of the sun in Plato's *Republic* (508a-

[6] Maybe this is an indication of Dionysius' presupposing the philosophy of Porphyry. As the concise summary by Halfwassen 1996, 57f. shows, it is probably in Porphyry that the inaccessible One was contrasted by the relative accessibility of its outflows for the first time in the history of Platonism: "[F]ür Porphyrios ist zwar das Absolute *an sich* bestimmungslos, in seiner Beziehung auf die prinzipiierte Wirklichkeit aber enthält es in sich die in der Sphäre der Vielheit getrennten Bestimmungen auf absolut einige Weise vorweg."

[7] Cf. Palamiotou 1995, 68: "La lumière fonctionne comme agent de la substance

509b;[8] cf. 517ab); just like the sun's activity evokes everything out of the dark (which is also a parallel to Gen 1:3), God's self-irradiation calls everything from nothingness to existence. Just like the sunlight's intensity decreases gradually with growing distance from the sun, being's intensity decreases according to its distance from its ontological origin, though this ontological source stays undiluted with beings down to the meanest and least significant ones. Just like the sun draws everything back to itself by a unifying magnetism,[9] God is not only the efficient but also the final cause of all reality.

It is a distinguishing feature of this ontology, one probably inherited from Proclus,[10] that Dionysius sees a triad of procession (πρόοδος), 'halt' or 'staying in itself' (μονή), and (re)turning (ἐπιστροφή) in the coming-to-be of all things — or so I want to argue in the following. The basic thought runs like this: the ontological flux proceeds from God (its efficient cause), comes to a self-identifying 'halt' or peace (εἰρένη) which constitutes a new level of ontic reality (distinguished, yet not unlinked from God),[11] and (re)turns back to God (its final

divine, étant donné que Dieu lui-même révoque toutes choses des ténèbres à la lumière et que chaque chose éclairée par l'archétype acquiert l'existence en tant que forme exprimée du divin. . . . La lumière est fondée, quant à sa signification, de manière parallèle au Bien."

[8] See especially the concluding remarks at *Republic* 509b: "The sun, I presume you will say, not only furnishes to visibles the power of visibility but it also provides for their generation and growth and nurture though it is not itself generation. — Of course not. — In like manner, then, you are to say that the objects of knowledge not only receive from the presence of the good their being known, but their very being is derived to them from it, though the good itself is not being but still transcends being in dignity and surpassing power."

[9] According to Dionysius' Platonic etymology: ἥλιος, ὅτι πάντα ἀολλῆ ποιεῖ, or, in Paul Rorem's (1993, 149) English imitation of the Greek pun, "[I]t is called sun (*helios*), because it makes all a sum (*aollē*)" (DN 700B; cf. also 701B). The (perhaps deliberately 'false') etymology stems from Plato, *Cratylus* 409a. The metaphor of the sun is of common use in Platonic philosophy throughout the centuries, a good account of which is given by Rorem 1993, 148f. For Dionysius' purposes, the picture of calling all things out of chaotic darkness by light in Gen 1:3 is also crucial and an additional example of his virtuosity in coupling Platonic and Christian thought. The special Dionysian interest in the motif is treated by Palamiotou 1995, 68-70.

[10] Though it can be found in Plotinus and other Platonists, too: cf. the thoroughgoing treatment of the problem in O'Brien 1999. I consider O'Brien's interpretation of *Enn.* V.1[10].7,4-6 on 48f. and of *Enn.* V.2[11].1,7-11 on 51ff. to be of special interest in this context.

[11] Cf. Dionysius' ninth Letter (1105D): the ineffable (God) is indissolubly interwoven (συμπέπλεκται) with what can be seen and named, i.e. with our own reality.

cause). This tripartite feature, it must be added, is common to Creation in its entirety as well as to every single creature.

There appears to exist a second Platonic tradition that seems to express the same thought in other words, which might play a role here. In *Parmenides* 137d[12] and in *Laws* 715e, Plato proclaims the idea that God, "according to an old saying," holds together the 'origin,' the 'midst,' and the 'perfection' of all beings. This triad of origin or beginning (ἀρχή), midst or central place (μέσον or sometimes in the plural μέσα), and perfection or fulfilment (τελευτή) is also discussed by Proclus in his commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*, whence we know that it was a much commented upon piece of the Platonic tradition throughout the ages.

I shall not treat the problem of the mutual congruency of the two triads named here, concerning their aspectual differences or pivotal coincidences. In the following, where the triad of procession-halt-return is mostly preferred to the triad of beginning-centre-fulfilment, the important point is that Dionysius employs in the development of DN a tripartite arrangement of coming-to-be, identifying beings-in-themselves, and the ultimate return of all things (of Creation as a whole) to their (its) sole Cause.

This procedure results in a triple development which explains the Trinitarian dynamics of the proceeding, the steadfastness, and the identicalness of the triune God and which provides the hermeneutic tools for the explanation of reality in its entirety. For, as God's theophany, reality reflects the dynamics of the threefold One of which it is Its extroversion. Strangely enough, Dionysius inverts this picture completely in his presentation of the Divine Names; God is the unknowable, and whatever we know of Him comes from talking about His Creation, which is not God Himself, but rather His theophany. Yet, Creation is only explainable by turning to God and by combining ontology and theology. It seems as if the Areopagite must do that at the risk of explaining *obscura obscuris.* This method of regarding the world as if 'through God' is palpable in Aquinas, too, to name another prominent example; in the *Quaestio disputata de veritate* II 2, Thomas quotes,

[12] The text has been regarded as one of Plato's core passages on the One by Neoplatonists of all times, though it approaches the problem explicitly from a negative perspective: "And if it has no parts, it [i.e. the One] can have no beginning, or middle, or end, for those would be parts of it? — Quite right. — Beginning and end are, however, the limits of everything. — Of course. — Then the One, if it has neither beginning nor end, is unlimited. — Yes, it is unlimited."

though not entirely accurately, a passage from Gregory the Great, asking whatever should it be that those who see Him who sees everything do not see (*quid est quod non videant qui videntem omnia vident*)? This might seem awkward, but it is a 'procedure' that proved to work in the course of history. At least, there seems to be one specific piece of evidence for it. The philosophical concept of the 'person,' which we employ when speaking about moral agents such as ourselves, for instance, and with which we philosophically deal quite habitually, was originally developed in Trinitarian theology. Philosophy and ordinary language took it from the dogmatic definition of an inextricable mystery which lacks an ultimate explanation. Yet, the concept of person used for the dogmatic formula and defined by it proved useful enough for the task of speaking about, for example, the 'person'-status of man.[13]

As far as Dionysius' 'method' is concerned, aspects change in such an ambitious project of applying theology to a philosophical world-explanation. One of these shifts is the altered sequencing within the triads mentioned. As the Areopagite puts it, the ineffable Godhead is "always proceeding, always remaining, always being restored to itself (καὶ προιὼν ἀεὶ καὶ μένων καὶ ἀποκαθιστάμενος)" (DN 713A). This also occurs in DN 820BC, where the 'remaining in itself' of all things explicitly follows the ontogenetic 'procession,' since all things "firstly come into being, and then remain in it;" "what they have primarily is existence, and this existence ensures for them that they remain". In contrast, Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, prop. 35, puts it the other way round: "[E]very effect remains in its cause, proceeds from it, and returns to it." According to the triadic structure in Dionysius, the three-fold God is also the formal cause of all Creation.[14] Dionysius mostly refrains from using the term 'Creation,' though. Apart from the Biblical theonyms, he tends to prove and to ponder the truths of Christian doctrine rather by the employment of the philosophical language of his times than by Biblical terminology. I shall return to that particular point later on, but it should be clear from the start what the author of DN intends to do here.[15]

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[13] On this development of the philosophical concept of 'person' cf. the very good study by Spaemann 1996, 32-38.

[14] For a comparison of this ontological triad in the constitution of created reality to the inner-Trinitarian procession cf. DN 916B-917A. Concrete and elucidating examples of repeated Trinitarian patterns on different ontological levels can be found in Rorem 1993, 67 (concerning the *Celestial Hierarchy*) and 117 (referring to the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*).

[15] For a helpful discussion of the πρόοδος-concept in Proclus and as used in

But another point has to be clarified at this stage. The reader familiar with Platonic philosophy will advert and perhaps will be tempted to criticise that my interpretation of DN re-arranges the original or 'canonical' sequence of the triple 'Proclean' ontological principles of (in his order of succession) staying-in-itself, procession, and return.[16] As a matter of fact, the self-identifying 'stand-still' in itself (of the Spirit, of the One, and virtually of every being) is logically prior to the 'procession' and the 'return' throughout later Neoplatonism. For my interpretation of Dionysius, however, two factors are decisive and call for a readjustment. First, in contrast to pagan Platonism, God in DN is the one and only creative force. He brings everything forth, and no other 'link' or 'level' of the chain of being does so. Whereas Plotinus and Proclus think of spirit 'emanating' life, and life 'emanating' beings of lesser ontological intensity, and so on, in DN everything different from God is created immediately by God. 'Below' God, vertically speaking, there are no beings that out of their 'stand-still'-identity proceed creatively out of themselves. (Dionysius may think of the Pauline instruction in 1 Tim 2:5 here: "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the Christ Jesus.") The logical priority within the ontological levels of reality changes by introducing the creational aspect; they *all* are created directly by God (through the consubstantial Logos Christ, one might add), and therefore not one of them is a creator itself. They all directly 'respond' to their immediate Creator and therefore do not themselves emanate and bring forth others. They owe themselves to God's extroversion, stay (in) themselves, and return to God. A second point must be mentioned, though it will become clear only in the further development of this outline of Dionysian ontology. By introducing the 'Good' as God's first and most 'accessible' Name in chapter 4 of DN, Dionysius presents a new order of 'phases' in the ontological development to the reader. There is no way of beginning with the μονή or being-itself of the all-transcendent first Cause, whose being-itself is strictly ineffable. Dionysius claims that from the

contrast by Dionysius, cf. Roques 1983, 77-81. Roques's analysis has the additional advantage of linking the notion of Creation in Dionysius intimately to his concept of the hierarchical order of being(s).

[16] I owe a lot to Werner Beierwaltes's in-depth interpretation of this triad in his admirable book on Proclus (Beierwaltes 1979, especially 118-164). His development of the central tenets of Proclus' metaphysics clearly shows how and why Proclus parts from the μονή in order to discuss the procession and the epistrophic return.

new perspective of things as related to God, one has to start off 'genetically' with the procession (for further details, cf. §6). The question of repose and identity can only be discussed when it comes to the 'halt' of beings themselves, i.e. in a second step after the process, but this is already a far-reaching anticipation of problems which still lie ahead.

One feature of Dionysian thought should not be underestimated, though: it will become clear in the subsequent discussion of the different chapters of DN that Dionysius uses the terms 'procession,' 'stand-still,' and 'return' ambiguously. Sometimes (even in the same sentence) they express the dynamics of the three divine persons, and then the μονή, the stand-still or remaining, refers to the unshakable unity of God, and at the same time, but under a different, ontological, aspect, the Trias expresses the dynamics of non-divine reality, of Creation. In the latter case, the μονή is meant to describe the abiding of the ontological procession, and the stand-still that prepares for the return to the origin. An example of this is found in DN 952AB, where the term μένειν ('remain') is used ambiguously on purpose. Another example of this is found in DN 712B:

> [God] is, as it were, beguilded by goodness, by love, and by yearning and is enticed away from his transcendent dwelling place and comes to abide within all things, and he does so by virtue of his supernatural and ecstatic capacity to remain, nevertheless, within himself.

The theonym 'Peace' in chapter 11 of DN denotes God's remaining in Himself, but at the same time this 'Peace' of the ontological origin makes the entire cosmos "remain in its own complete and utter unity." The same in DN 980B: because God, though threefold, preserves His oneness, all things "exist and are co-ordered" (procession), they "remain and hold together" (μονή, abiding) and are "completed and returned" (return).[17] Since Creation 'mirrors' its Creator, the cycle of stand-still, procession, and return, which in God has the self-defining stand-still at its summit, becomes a cycle of procession, stand-still, and return, because what is first and above in its mirrored image becomes last and beneath.[18] Just like in the mirrored image of a person standing by a

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[17] In the Greek original: . . . πάντα ἔστι καὶ συντέτακται καὶ μένει καὶ συνέχεται καὶ ἀποληροῦται καὶ ἐπιστρέφεται.

[18] Similarly (but from another point of view), Perl 2003, 545 sees that "[t]he order of the divine processions is therefore a mirror image of the ranks of creatures:
Goodness
Being
Life

lake the feet of the person and the image seem to touch, but the head of the person as the body's highest point becomes the lowest in the reflection on the water. DN 893A gives another example of the same: the Power that ensures and preserves the order of the universe "establishes the unshakable remaining (μένειν) of the world," which is why Luibheid in DN 704D correctly translates μονή as the "remaining *of all things*" (my italics). Since μονή and στάσις are synonyms denoting the necessary abiding of all things once they come into being (DN 705BC: τῶν ἑκάστου μονῶν καὶ στάσεων), Dionysius reassures the reader that "God remains what he is in Himself" and that therefore "He is the cause of the rest and the stability of everything," i.e. of the ontological στάσις of all created things.

Apart from these theoretical considerations, tradition speaks strongly in favour of the sequence of procession, halt, and return in Dionysius. This arrangement and order of succession is found in commentaries to the CD from the beginning in the sixth century to Late Scholasticism. In Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, just to name two of the most prominent commentators, the Trias is called *exitus*, *perfectio*, and *reductio* (*ad unum*), or *primum causans*, *esse causatum*, *primum ut finis*, etc., but always in such a fashion that the μονή or στάσις, the 'abiding' or 'halt' is sandwiched between the procession and the return as the Trias' middle term. Both philosophers make this sequence the backbone of their commentaries on Dionysius, and many of their modern interpreters have (at least partly) adopted their perspective.[19]

Thus Dionysius' re-arrangement of the Platonic Triad broadens the possibilities for the philosophical explanation of the Christian doctrine. Novel as it may seem,[20] if the interpretation of the στάσις or μονή as the middle-term of the Triad proves to be correct, Dionysius emerges out of the broad stream of late Platonic philosophy as a highly original thinker. He dismembers (if this is not too hard an expression)

Wisdom
cognitive living beings
living beings
mere beings (inanimate objects)
matter."

[19] Cf. Anzulewicz 2000, 169-175 (with abundant textual material from Albert's commentary), O'Rourke 1992, 215-224 (on the Triad in Dionysius) and 224 ff. (on the Dionysian Triad as understood by Thomas).

[20] At least for modern scholarship. As I have noted above, this interpretation corresponds to a standard reading of Christian Platonism in many scholastic writers.

the canonical Triad of established Platonism and reconstructs it in a hitherto unheard of manner. His careful and intelligent re-arrangement of the Triadic terms allows him to give an entirely Platonic account of the Christian doctrine of Creation. Thus, Dionysius' ontology can be considered a radical re-interpretation of the prevailing philosophical way of thinking of his times.

Perhaps a comparison can help to render the basic 'programme' of Dionysius' ontology a little more transparent. In the introduction to his translated edition and commentary of Proclus' *Elemets of Theology*, E.R. Dodds quotes a sentence from Coleridge's *Memorials of Coleorton*: "The most beautiful and orderly development of the philosophy which endeavours to explain all things by an analysis of consciousness, and builds up a world in the mind out of materials furnished by the mind itself, is to be found in the *Platonic Theology* of Proclus."[21] Maybe there is more than one way to make an analysis of consciousness the core and starting-point of an explanation of later Platonic philosophy and of how one is to understand that it "builds up a world in the mind out of materials furnished by the mind itself". For an understanding of DN, the following might be helpful. Dionysius presents his three-phased ontology as if describing the coming-to-be, the essence, and the ultimate sense of all reality according to our experience of mental reflection. In reflecting, we 'bring forth' a thought, we put it before us and examine it as if it were something different from yet entirely belonging to us, and then we re-integrate it to our mind, making it 'ours' in a more intensified, ennobled, and conscious way. God, in creating, does very much the 'same', according to Dionysius; He brings forth Creation, puts it before Himself, and lets it come back to Himself. In this threefold movement, Creation is simultaneously something 'in itself' which stands before God as a thought that He contemplates and something pertaining entirely to God as His thought.

There are specific and revealing differences, though, that remind us of the deficiencies of the comparison. Among others that will hopefully become clear shortly, the following are of immediate interest. In the act of reflection, we, the reflecting agents, gain something. As Creation returns to God in the ἐπιστροφή or ontological reversal, the gain is entirely on Creation's side and a sign of God's all extending

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[21] Samuel T. Coleridge, *Memorials of Coleorton* II, January 1810 (quoted after Dodds 1963, xxxiii).

Love, which concerns DN's chapter 4. In addition, Creation as brought forth by God is much more autonomous than any of our thoughts, whereas at the same time God stays with Creation and even within it in a more intensified and complete manner than we are present in our thoughts.

Despite these restrictions to the comparison's reach and explanatory value, I shall occasionally employ it in the following where applicable to Dionysius' "development of a philosophy which endeavours to explain all things by an analysis of consciousness." It is introspection that allows us to understand, and it is the cosmos in the mind that by parallel reveals the cosmos flowing from God's 'mind.' As a poet says, we only understand what we are able to produce ourselves.[22] In Dionysius, the analysis of consciousness is the way to do that. My main target in the subsequent §§ 5 and 6 will be, then, to prove that Dionysius' ontological project, just like the system of Proclus in Coleridge's enthusiastic account, is an 'orderly development' of such a philosophy. It accomplished this not in the same way as Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, but in its own manner and design. Seeing this, we shall be able to reassess the question of Dionysius' dependence on the Platonic diadoch.

Yet, still another thing should be clear from the beginning and before taking up a closer examination of the 'ingredients' of the doctrine expounded in DN. Dionysius never speaks aseptically in philosophical terminology. The way of thinking found in DN is always a theological-*cum*-philosophical one, and the three-staged ontological movement is meant by Dionysius to thoroughly coincide with the Apostle Paul's statement that "from Him and through Him and to/for Him are all things (Eξ αὐτοῦ καὶ δι᾽ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸ τὰ πάντα)" (Rom 11:36; DN 708A). I shall have to explain later (cf. below §6: 'The philosophical perspective') how this theology-*cum*-ontology should be read and can be adequately understood. For now, I shall try to focus on the philosophical side of the matter as far as this is possible and sound.[23]

The sole *philosophical* subject of the treatise DN, and the central thesis that I want to propose and subsequently to defend, is to describe the entire ontological movement in three 'phases' (a highly inappropriate

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[22] J.W. Goethe, *Italienische Reise*, Sept. 1787 in Rome.

[23] In this, I follow a tradition of reading DN probably initiated by Eriugena in his *Periphyseon*. For his way of interpreting Dionysius, I remit the reader to the valuable remarks by Rorem 1993, 171f.

word that I use only for want of a better one)[24] by way of Divine Names, and with this to characterise reality as God's loving extroversion. It should be clear that Dionysius has good reasons to choose this theo-philosophical approach of theonymical discussions, awkward as it may appear to us today. Dionysius' starting point is that God's essence lies beyond human understanding.[25] God is and remains the simply unknowable (ἀγνώστικον). If, as the Aristotelian adage goes, our understanding of things depends on our understanding of their origin, all philosophy would be impossible or in vain for Dionysius. Nonetheless, there is still the Good, the *quoad nos* of God's extroversion, manifest in the ontological outflow (the 'being-making procession,' οὐσιποιὸς πρόοδος, as Dionysius explicitly calls it in DN 816B), and the Bible has a maintainable way of talking about God by referring to His omnipresent *theophany*[26] in 'revealed Names':

> You will find that what the scripture writers have to say regarding the divine names refers, in revealing praises, to the *beneficient processions* (πρὸς τὰς ἀγαθουργοὺς προόδους) of God (DN 589D, my italics).

In a similar manner, Dionysius refers to the impossibility of understanding God's essence vis-à-vis the alternative way of talking about Him as the Good, the *quoad nos*, or His epiphany to us, in DN 588CD; 589BC, etc.[27]

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[24] The terms 'phase' and 'stage' and the like seem to imply a chronological succession, which cannot be admitted for the ontology of Dionysius. The dependencies, as the one of the return or end from the procession or origin, are strictly logical, but simultaneous, cf. Halfwassen 1992, 131.

[25] Cf. DN 588A: πάσαις διανοίαις ἀδιανόητον. DN 588A: τῆς [θεότητος] γὰρ ὑπὲρ λόγον καὶ νοῦν καὶ οὐσίαν αὐτῆς ὑπερουσιότητος ἀγνοία. DN 593A gives an explanation for it: all human understanding is an understanding of things in the realm of being. God, however, is beyond being: Εἰ γὰρ αἱ γνώσεις πᾶσαι τῶν ὄντων εἰσὶ καὶ εἰς τὰ ὄντα τὸ πέρας ἔχουσιν, ἡ πάσης οὐσίας ἐπέκεινα καὶ πάσης γνώσεώς ἐστιν ἐξῃρημένη.

[26] 'Theophany' is a word that we would assign not so much to Dionysius himself as to his philosophical tradition following Eriugena, for whom it is cardinal. Yet, it quite neatly expresses what is meant here; as the theophany of the One, all reality is anticipated in a 'trans-real' manner within God (DN 821CD, 824B, etc.). Cf. Louth 1989, 85: "We have to find another word [than 'Creation'] for what it is that is central to Denys's understanding of God's relationship to the world: and a good candidate for that would be theophany." I wonder whether Perl, 2003, 542 is right as he confidently observes: "Hence the production of the world, for Dionysius as for the Neoplatonists, is the manifestation in intelligible multiplicity of its principle, not the making of other beings additional to that principle. Thus creation is nothing but theophany, the manifestation of God: the divine Nothing is known in all things as their intelligible perfections." Gombocz 1997, 329, too, is methodically supportive of using the term 'theophany' for Dionysius' philosophy.

[27] "And yet, on the other hand, the good is not absolutely incommunicable to

One must also not forget to consider DN 645A:

> For the truth is that everything divine and even everything revealed to us is known only by way of whatever share of them is granted. Their actual nature, what they are ultimately in their own source and ground, is beyond all intellect and all being and all knowledge.[28]

Since we are unable to state anything about God's essence (God καθ' αὐτόν, 'in' or 'for Himself,' as the Greek more accurately expresses it), He is the Nameless, ἀνώνυμος. Yet, since all reality is His manifold theophany, He is the Polynymous (πολυώνυμος). Paul, whose disciple Dionysius claims to be, says in 1 Cor 15:28 that the Creator is all things in all, τὰ πάντα ἐν πάσι (cf. DN 596A and 596C). He is everything and nothing (πάντα τὰ ὄντα καὶ οὐδέν τῶν ὄντων: 596C). He should be named simultaneously as nameless and polynymous (DN 596D), with a 'nameless name' (a paradox in which Dionysius indulges in DN 596A), or with a 'Name beyond any name' (DN 596A, which is a quote from Phil 2,10). As far as the ontology is concerned we could say that God is hidden beyond being (DN 588A), yet reveals Himself through being, which is also an unmistakable sign of His 'gnoseological' Goodness. The extroversion of God in Goodness extends itself to creatures to the adequate measure of their capacity or incapacity of grasping Him (DN 588CD, 693B, etc.). God's tailoring the modes of His omnipresent epiphany to the limited capacity of creaturely understanding is in stark contrast to the ineffableness of God and is a sign of God's love:[29]

> Of him, there is conception, reason, understanding, touch, perception, opinion, imagination, name, and many other things. On the other hand he cannot be understood, words cannot contain him, and no name can lay hold of him (DN 872A).

This is a differentiated approach which can also be found in Plotinus, and other Platonists since, who states in *Enn.* V.5[32].6,24 that although

everything. By itself it generously reveals a firm, transcendent beam, granting enlightenments proportionate to each being," etc. (DN 588CD); "we learn, for instance, that it is the cause of everything, that it is origin, being, and life. . . . Generously and as far as may be, it gives out a share of what is hidden" (DN 589BC).

[28] Πάντα γὰρ τὰ θεῖα, καὶ ὅσα ἡμῖν ἐκπέφανται, ταῖς μετοχαῖς μόναις γινώσκεται. Αὐτὰ δέ, ὁποῖά ποτε ἔστι κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν ἀρχὴν καὶ ἵδρυσιν, ὑπὲρ νοῦν ἔστι καὶ πᾶσαν οὐσίαν καὶ γνῶσιν.

[29] On the Platonic origin and philosophical history of this doctrine (which was to become the scholastic adage of the *secundum modum recipientis* later on), cf. Wippel 1988. Cf. also Schäfer 2002, 409-412.

the all-transcendent One is ineffable (οὐ ῥητοῦ), we should still be allowed to name it *according to its meaning for us* (ὀνομάζομεν σημαίνειν ἑαυτοῖς) to the best of our ability, or rather inability. There is one keynote to Platonism, beginning with Plotinus, that should not be underestimated: it is not in vain that recent scholarly works increasingly insist on the predominance of the dynamics in Plotinus, on calling his philosophy one of experience rather than a rigid 'system,' on speaking of ontological 'derivation' (i.e. *quoad nos*) rather than 'objectively' of 'emanation.' Recent interpretation shows a strong tendency to more frequently recognise the human subject as the centre of attention in Plotinus' treatises, and to consider the grand world-picture the *Enneads* draw as a reflection of the intellect-gifted subject's inner self.[30] As a consequence, the language used by most Platonists is — almost paraenetically — moulded to fit the human soul's point of view within the 'system,' and to express adequately this emphasis on the inner experience, that is on the objectively subjective. This 'agent-relative' point of view and form of expression (as opposed to an 'agent-neutral' one) is what we find in Dionysius as he speaks of a viewpoint καθ' ἡμᾶς. Anselm of Canterbury — another 'Platonist' — makes this the perspective of his philosophy in the *Proslogion*, too:

> How then are you compassionate and not compassionate, O Lord, unless you are compassionate in terms of our experience (*secundum nos*) and not compassionate in terms of your being (*secundum te*)? Truly, you are so in terms of our experience, but you are not so in terms of your own. For, when you behold us in our wretchedness, we experience the effect of compassion, but you do not experience the feeling (*Proslogion* 8).

The core, the possibility, and the justification of all philosophy, as seen by Platonists of all eras, can be recapitulated by this statement. The differentiated view of this philosophy is often repeated and underscored in later interpretations of Platonic thought, a prominent example of which is Thomas Aquinas, who distinguishes a view *ex parte primae causae influentis* from a view *ex parte rerum recipientium* in the Platonists'

[30] To mention only one example of one of the major exponents of that shift in interpreting Plotinus: Pierre Hadot 1993 (in the same line, the book review of Werner Beierwaltes in Gnomon 72 (2000), 202-207, is highly interesting). O'Meara 1995, throughout his *Plotinus*, makes a strong point in favour of adopting a perspective *ex parte rerum recipientium* (as Thomas Aquinas put it), and correctly so. Consequently, he advocates the use of the term 'derivation' (which describes the procession from a perspective *quoad nos*) in place of the traditional 'emanation'.

method and language. In modern times, Hans-Rudolf Schwyzer's scholarly discussion of Neoplatonic thought proposed a distinction between an 'objective' ('gegenständlich') and an 'actual' approach. For a more recent discussion of Dionysius' philosophy, Ysabel de Andia determines one viewpoint 'à partir des participants' and another 'à partir des participations.'[31]

A perspicuous summary of this differentiating method is given by Immanuel Kant in his *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, §58. It is worthwhile to quote it at length:

> For nothing is considered here but the cause of the form of reason which is perceived everywhere in the world, and reason is attributed to the Supreme Being, so far as it contains the ground of this form of reason in the world, but according to analogy only, that is, so far as this expression shows merely the relation, which the Supreme Cause unknown to us has to the world, in order to determine everything in it conformably to reason in the highest degree. We are thereby kept from using reason as an attribute for the purpose of conceiving God, but instead of conceiving the world in such a manner as is necessary to have the greatest possible use of reason according to principle. We thereby acknowledge that the Supreme Being is quite inscrutable and even unthinkable in any definite way as to what he is in himself. We are thereby kept, on the one hand, from making a transcendent use of the concepts which we have of reason as an efficient cause (by means of the will), in order to determine the Divine Nature by properties, which are only borrowed from human nature, and from losing ourselves in gross and extravagant notions, and on the other hand from deluging the contemplation of the world with hyperphysical modes of explanation according to our notions of human reason, which we transfer to God, and so losing for this contemplation its proper application, according to which it should be a rational study of mere nature, and not a presumptuous derivation of its appearances from a Supreme Reason. The expression suited to our feeble notions is, that we conceive the world as if it came, as to its existence and internal plan, from a Supreme Reason, by which notion we both know the constitution, which belongs to the world itself, yet without

[31] Cf. Aquinas' *In Librum de Causis Expositio*, Prop. 20a, 110,2-4 (in the edition Saffrey 1954); Schwyzer 1944; de Andia 1996, 77 *et passim*. Cf. also Gerson's 1997, 299 helpful comment: "[o]ne can take basically a 'bottom-up' or a 'top-down' approach. According to the first approach, one tries to reduce the *explanandum* to something which is in itself assumed to be understood. The byword of the 'bottom-up' proponent is 'nothing but,' as in 'the mind is nothing but electrical and chemical activities in the brain.' According to a 'top-down' approach, there is not merely an aversion to reductionism, but actually an inversion of it, as in 'the mind can only be understood as an imperfect representation of its paradigm,' or 'time is an image of eternity.'"

> pretending to determine the nature of its cause in itself, and on the other hand, we transfer the ground of this constitution (of the form of reason in the world) upon the relation of the Supreme Cause to the world, without finding the world sufficient by itself for that purpose.

To render things even more complicated, Dionysius has a peculiar way of immediately re-combining these two viewpoints 'from the participating' and 'from the participated' once he distinguishes them methodically. In the following, I shall frequently take the theonym 'Peace' (of DN's chapter 11) as an example for my interpretation of the Divine Names. The chapter on Peace betokens the way that Dionysius parts from human understanding of a concept (in this case, the political, 'cosmic,' or social forms of peaceful conditions) in order to transcend it subsequently. He first recalls the goodness, necessity, and achievements of earthly peace, but *then* methodically corrects this *quoad nos* understanding of peace by reminding us of the many flaws, the temporariness, the unsteadiness, and the unaccomplishedness of any such sort of earthly or everyday peace. These scant and ever flawed kinds of peace cannot be the ultimate goal or the final cause of our lifelong and natural yearning for peace. True and lasting peace, however, can only be found in God, and this teleological perfection reverts our viewpoint from the earthly to the eternal idea of peace as thoroughly accomplished on all levels and in every respect, in ultimate Peace 'as such.' In spite of lacking any possibility of experiencing or understanding God as this absolute and ultimate 'Peace in itself,' we have a deep yearning for it and an imperfect way of grasping it, judging from our 'suboptimal' standards and the experience of incompleteness. This way of grasping the unknown by reflecting on how it affects and concerns us at the very roots of our existence exemplifies Dionysius' method of shifting the discussion of the theonyms from regarding God 'as such' to His communication *ad nos*, and then back again to a preliminary attempt to explain what the theonyms mean 'in themselves.' As a matter of fact, it is precisely at the end of DN's chapter 11 (which is the one on Peace) that Diopnysius gives a clarifying explanation of how to understand the 'x as such'-concepts used throughout the treatise in the discussions of the theonyms.[32]

[32] A similar sort "of metaphysical relationship is frequently employed by Plotinus when he uses the Greek word *hoion*, 'in a way,' to qualify attributions to the One. When he says that the One is *hoion* good, thinking, willing, etc., the primary analogate

However, this underlying methodical distinction of a contingent view 'from below' and an ever impossible absolute view 'from above' or 'in itself' incurs the danger of effacing God's transcendent unity, since it seems to duplicate God in some way. Dionysius is aware of that dangerous fallacy and warns the reader of seeing in the differentiated view anything else than some sort of relief measure for and a concession to our gnoseological helplessness. One of the cautious passages where he does so couples this theory of knowledge with the triadic ontological development of 'procession,' 'collection,' and 'destiny' of all things. It is worthwhile quoting:

> I said in my *Theological Representations* that one can neither discuss nor understand the One, the Superunknowable, the Transcendent, Goodness itself, that is, the Triadic Unity possessing the same divinity and the same goodness . . . Hence, with regard to the supra-essential being of God — transcendent Goodness transcendently there — no lover of the truth which is above all truth will seek to praise it as word or power or mind or life or being. . . . And yet, since it is the underpinning of goodness, and by merely being there is the cause of everything, to praise this divinely beneficent Providence you must turn to all of creation (Ἐπειδὴ δὲ ὡς ἀγαθότητος ὕπαρξις αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι πάντων ἐστὶ τῶν ὄντων αἰτία, τὴν ἀγαθαρχικὴν τῆς θεαρχίας πρόνοιαν ἐκ πάντων τῶν αἰτιατῶν ὑμνητέον). It is there at the center of everything and everything has it for destiny (DN 593B-D).[33]

What is more, anyone who denies that all that is said with respect to God is expressed "indivisibly, absolutely, unreservedly, and totally" of Him "may be said to have blasphemed" (DN 636C-637A). This doctrine is also found in Plotinus and other Neoplatonists, where it is expressed with similar sharpness (cf. *Enn.* II.9.1,1). The unity of God's activity and God's nature is one of the many mysteries of the Divine 'Oneness beyond all reason' (ἡ ὑπέρ νοῦν ἑνότης: DN 588B).

This unity beyond human reason has its adequate medium of expression, however. The Bible has its ways of referring to God by theonyms

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is finite being, but the analogate is not merely metaphorical, for the One is virtually all these things; that is, it is the ultimate cause of all that which has these attributes primarily" (Gerson 1997, 298).

[33] Cf. the same thought in DN 588A-C: "Since the unknowing of what is beyond being is something above and beyond speech, mind, or being itself, one should ascribe to it an understanding beyond being. . . . For, if we may trust the superlative wisdom and truth of scripture, the things of God are revealed to each mind in proportion to its capacities; and the divine goodness is such that, out of concern for our salvation, it deals out the immeasurable and infinite in limited measures," etc.

or Divine Names, which obviously are meant to tell us something about God's relation to Creation and towards mankind. It is for such a reason that the Divine Names display a vocabulary that in terms of our created world describe the importance for us, the *quoad nos* (the καθ' ἡμᾶς, as Dionysius repeatedly says) of God's theophany.[34] Nonetheless, in the Biblical tradition, the different 'Names' of God, far from claiming to define God's essence, or God as God, always intend to tell us something about God's being. For example, this becomes apparent when we may consider such expressions as "hallowed be thy Name" (Mt 6:9), "neither shalt thou profane the Name of thy God" (Ex 20:7, Lev 18:21 etc.), or that baptism is done "in the Name of Christ," (Mt 28:19) which addresses the person to be baptised as a participant in Christ's essential condition as God's child.[35] Thus, the Divine Names give us the means of speaking about and addressing God's S/self-explaining activity (DN 816B). We must not forget, however, that God is the indistinguishable (ἡνωμένως: DN 596D) coincidence of opposites and that He should, if ever, be named paradoxically with a 'nameless name' (DN 596AB).[36] In Dionysius' opinion, God's brusque refusal to answer Jacob's question concerning His name in Gen 32:30 is an indication of the impossibility of defining the Divine.

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[34] As Kélessidou 1995, 33 puts it: "Le nombre est un intermédiaire entre l'Être et les êtres; l'être produit les nombres qui lui servent de règles pour engendrer les êtres." On the metaphysics of naming the transcendent cf. also Jordan 1983. A good case study of the scholastic tradition concerning theonyms is Schoot 2001.

[35] A short list and well elaborated discussion of the problem of the 'name'-concept in the Bible, as far as it concerns Dionysius' philosophical treatment of these Names, can be found in Suchla 1988, 4f. But one thing should be clear, in this context: Dionysius has a different concept of 'name' than most (pagan) Platonists of his time. "He explains that the different divine 'names' or processions are not a multiplicity of quasi-divine entities intermediate between creatures and God, but rather God himself as he is present in different creatures" (Perl 2003, 545). In Neoplatonic theology since the times of Iamblichus, the 'names' were used for theurgical purposes, which is also found in Proclus (cf. van den Berg 2002, 101-106). Dionysius wants to avoid all such theurgical implications in his treatise. Knowing the names of God does not mean that we magically exercise control over God. The Names help us to approach God, but they do not drag God toward us. As Dionysius states in the introductory chapter 3 of DN: "picture ourselves aboard a boat. There are hawsers joining it to some rock. We take hold of them and pull them, and it is as if we were dragging the rock to us when in fact we are hauling ourselves and our boat toward that rock" (DN 680C).

[36] "Realizing all this, the theologians praise it by every name — and as the Nameless One. For they call it nameless when they speak of how the supreme Deity, during a mysterious revelation of the symbolical appearance of God, rebuked the man who asked 'What is your name' . . . And yet on the other hand they give it

In short, our ways of naming God, the absolutely removed, are but expressions of our restricted perceptive and spiritual faculties: "The intelligent and rational long for it by way of knowledge, the lower strata by way of perception, the remainder by way of the stirrings of being alive and in whatever fashion benefits their condition" (DN 593CD). This looks back on a long tradition in Platonism and its finest and foremost exponents. Plotinus himself at the very beginning of the Neoplatonic vein of thought feels compelled to underscore again and again that even if we should speak about the first Cause as 'cause,' we must constantly recall that we do not say anything about the cause itself, but about ourselves as we rightly conceive ourselves as caused (cf. *Enn.* VI.9.3,49ff.). "Therefore, instead of thinking of the One by itself and then asking how it can produce being, we must follow Plotinus' more usual procedure and explain emanation by working up to the One from below, by discovering the dependence, the derivateness, of being" (Perl 1997, 303), which is exactly what we find in Dionysius as well, though from a decidedly Christian point of view.

Earlier I suggested that Dionysius re-interprets the Neoplatonic standard terminology and canonical place of μονή, which is now used for the image of God in creation, the constitution of worldly reality insofar as it is an entity of its own kind, and at the same time the turning-point of the procession. When first mentioned, this shift in Dionysius appeared to be rather ambiguous. But DN also stresses, it can be said now, the analysis of consciousness approach, or the agent-relative perspective one also finds in Plotinus and other Platonists. Maybe DN is not so much ambiguous in this respect after all but rather aims at a description of the same, now 'baptised' halt-procession-return metaphysics, but from a creature's point of view, since creatures can only grasp the μονή in creation as God's image, not in itself. Most of this will become clearer in the discussion of the theonym 'Peace' in §5.

many names, such as 'I am being,' 'life,' 'light,' 'God,' the 'truth'" (DN 596A). Cf. Perl 2003, 547, where the strange consequence of symbolism is explained, namely that referring to the Names of God means at the same time referring to God and not to God at all: "Since, apart from creation, God is not an object for any mode of cognition, and is known only as finitely manifested in beings, he can be known only through created symbols. Any non-symbolic knowledge would necessarily be knowledge of some being, not of God."

§5. STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF DN

καὶ προιὼν ἀεὶ καὶ μένων καὶ ἀποκαθιστάμενος.

DN 713A

Dionysius has different ways of solving his problem of speaking about the unspeakable. Negative theology and the *via eminentiae* are the most prominent ones and are represented, for example, by the abundance of nominal compounds formed with υπερ- ('supra-') or α privativum ('un-') in DN. Both of them are methods belonging to an age-honoured theological tradition and would be worthy of an entire volume each.[1]

However, for the scope of this book I want to leave these aside and return to the question of the treatise's structure. For the order in which the Names of God are presented by Dionysius shows that it is by no means an arbitrary listing. What at first sight might appear to be a merely cumulative enumeration of theonyms turns out to be a well-devised display of the very core of the entire Dionysian philosophy by means of Biblical denominations of the Divine, or so I want to argue in the following. In order to achieve this, I shall present the different chapters of the treatise in their thematic arrangement, trying to explain each theme in accordance with its function in Dionysius' tripartite philosophical system. For that purpose, some buttressing arguments

[1] For a broader treatment of the question and the corresponding grammatical indications found in the text of DN, cf. Suchla 1992, 394f. One of the reasons why I think that I can leave questions of 'negative theology' or 'superpredication' aside without doing major damage to the immediate scope of this book is that they are surprisingly almost absent in the 'Names' listed above. In any case, both negation and superpredication are not the adequate way of naming God, as Dionysius states in MT 1000B (where he says that God is entirely beyond negation and affirmation) and in DN 592D (where God is even beyond ineffability and beyond unknowing). Cf. Perl 2003, 541: "To deny existence, or any attribute, of God, is still to treat him as a conceptual object, defined by the possession or privation of various attributes. To say 'God is unknowable' is in effect to identify him as an unknowable being and to lay claim to some knowledge of him. Hence Dionysius says that God is 'beyond every negation and affirmation' (MT I.2, 1000B; cf. MT V, 1048B). God is not simply ineffable and unknowable, but beyond ineffability and unknowing (*hyperarrêtos*, *hyperagnôston*, DN I.4, 592D)."

and discussions, mariological intercalations, and any conundrum found in the treatise must be left aside so that we never lose sight of the overall architecture of DN. Still, a full picture of the multi-levelled construction of the writing must indulge in an additional hint or explaining parenthesis every now and then.

1. *Chapters 1-3: The Theo-Methodological Basics*

The first three chapters of DN state that the subject of the writing is "an explication of the divine names, as far as possible (ὡς ἐφικτόν)" (DN 585B). They also delineate the Dionysian methodology of the treatise, in reminding the reader of the impossibility of speaking about the unspeakable, of the role of analogies, symbols, and cataphatic speaking, of the Biblical, revealed Names of God, and of their explanatory potential. It is above all in chapter 2 that Dionysius takes pains to explain his earlier mentioned technique of the differentiated approach to the Names, i.e. of explaining them by referring (καθ᾽ ἡμᾶς) to God's theophany without speaking of God's essence (of God καθ᾽ αὐτόν), if it were possible.[2] Chapter 3 is a prayer, in its main parts, and should be taken as a spiritual preparation for the treatment of the Names in the ten following chapters. The ancient motif of θεοπρεπεία (as expressed DN 597C)[3] and the adequacy of referring to God can easily be recognised here: how does one speak about the Divine in human ways and words without offending the incomparable and ineffable Most High? Over and above its status as a traditional invocation of God's help for a difficult (intellectual) task,[4] however, this prayer is in itself a 'method,' in the etymological sense, or a path to follow that prepares, purifies, and strengthens the mind so that it can concentrate on the task ahead. All the more, prayer acts as a guide that helps us shape our utterances

[2] On this technique of naming God, cf. also the considerations on chapter 2 of DN in Rorem 1993, 137-145.

[3] The concept of speaking about God's procession and creation ἀγαθοπρεπῶς is found frequently throughout the text of DN: DN 588C, 637C, 640B, 640D, just to name some examples of the treatise's first two chapters.

[4] Which goes back a long way at least to the times of Homer, who in the *Iliad* (II, 484-492) prays for divine assistance before taking on a difficult intellectual task. On the Christian side, we have the precept of Origen to invoke the aid of God before venturing into an interpretation of sacred texts in *De principiis* IV 3,11. As for the problems concerning the adequacy of naming the divine in antiquity, cf. Dreyer 1970.

about the Divine mystery. Therefore, it is presented as a prayer to the Holy Trinity, the source of all Goodness (of all knowledge, too) and in Itself the principle of theophany, since it includes processions within itself as the procession of the Spirit out of the Father and the Son, as well as the impenetrable mystery of God's essence or 'identity.' The highly refined theological speculations of these first three chapters, the manifold dogmatic implications and explications they offer, and their profound methodological insights make it clear why Nicholas de Cusa called Dionysius the "greatest investigator of the Divine," the *maximus divinorum scrutator* of Christianity.

Apart from these methodological considerations, however, each of these chapters has a certain central theme or subject corresponding with its methodical proposals: chapter 1 invokes God as the One, the inconceivable Beyond, and the sole Creator of all that is; chapter 2 presents God as the Triune Divinity of the Christian creed and insists in His threefold unity;[5] chapter 3 reminds the reader that the self-irradiation of God through His Creation is the 'golden ray' of being that can, through prayer, mystical union, etc., attract man towards God and lift the human being up to the all-subsuming One (DN 680C). Though I should like to concur with the majority of interpreters who hold the introductory chapters of DN to be an advanced methodological outline of immense theological importance, the Name-contents of the chapters may serve yet another function of these three chapters; they can be read as a short prolepsis of the entire philosophical three-'phase'-system that Dionysius proposes in the treatise or as a "pre-design of the world."[6]

Chapter 1 contemplates God as the ineffable One that can only be grasped in a secondary way as 'to our concern,' *quoad nos*, i.e. as the principle of Creation and the Divine procession(s), πρόοδος.

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[5] A lot could be said about the Trinitarian doctrine expounded in these introductory chapters, especially their presentation of ἕνωσις or unity/union, and διακρίσις or differentiation, within the three-fold God. I refrain from these theological questions and controversies, as far as they do not directly belong to this book's main argument and remit the reader to the concise but very instructive remarks by Louth 1989, 88ff. An interesting discussion of the idea of a triune Principle in pagan Platonism, especially in Iamblichus and after, can be found in Halfwassen 1996. If Halfwassen's (and other interpreters') opinion proved to be right, this Dionysian étude of chapter 2 could be another example of how Dionysius employs Platonic philosophy in order to explain Christian doctrine.

[6] Beierwaltes 1985, 213 calls it a "Vorentwurf von Welt."

Chapter 2, while insisting wordily on the Trinitarian and creational dynamics of the Divine (cf. DN 649BC, among others), takes pains to contrast these dynamics by emphasising God's thorough unity, abiding, and undisturbed resting in Himself, His μονή (cf., above all, DN 636C, 637A, 640B). At first sight, this μονή of God (in the philosophical meaning that Dionysius confers upon it) seems to be a motif and a difficult concept to grasp within the whole Trinitarian speculation of chapter 2. Still, it underlies the entire chapter in various pivotal expressions like 'unity,' 'identity,' 'essence,' etc. This is also the way that Georgios Pachymeres in his *Paraphrasis* of DN understands chapter 2, as a definition of the μονὴ καὶ ἵδρυσις (the 'standing in Himself and foundation') of God within the Trinitarian dynamics (PG 3, 666BC). But this lengthy chapter even goes a significant step further and expounds a thought which is most important for the following interpretation of the structure of DN as made visible through Dionysian ontology. For it is precisely within the dialectics of unity and differentiation, of remaining and procession, that the treatise's ontology is introduced. Paul Rorem's concise exegesis of the passage in question is remarkably to the point:

> This material in chapter 2 of *The Divine Names* repays the scholar's every investigation regarding the hidden Dionysian interplay of Christian theology and Neoplatonic philosophy. . . . Dionysius starts by acknowledging that the question of unity and differentiation is compounded by two sets of meanings: remaining and processions, unity and trinity. He writes: 'there are certain specific unities and differentiations within the unity and differentiation, as discussed above' (641A,61). The plural forms of these words refer here to God's remainings and processions (the former is an unusual way to put it; the latter, the usual way) while the singular forms refer to God's oneness and threeness. He then specifies what he means by 'unities and differentiations within unity and differentiation'. The key point to keep in mind in this complicated exposition is that God's processions were earlier specified as embracing both the movement from oneness to threeness and also the creation of this world in its plurality, which reveals God to us, as confirmed here by calling the differentiations processions and revelations (Rorem 1993, 139).

The same can be said about Maximus the Confessor's concern with a proper explanation of chapters 1 and 2 in DN. He insists again and again on how God "multiplies as unity" (πληθύεται ἑνικῶς) and "remains one in many as he brings forth all things" (ἐν τῷ πληθυσμῷ τῆς πάντων παραγωγῆς ἔμεινεν; both quotes from PG 4, 230D).[7]

[7] A good observation by Perl 2003, 548 shows how intimate the relation between

Whereas chapters 1 and 2, according to the diversified theological methodology which they expound, oscillate between presenting God as the stable and the dynamic principle of Creation (disregarding, for the present, the painstaking definitions of the three Divine Persons upon which chapter 2 lingers from DN 644C to the end),[8] chapter 3 is certainly dedicated to the necessary reversion and return, or ἐπιστροφή, of all creatures towards God. The prayer, insofar as it must be interpreted as a trustful abiding of the mind, is, in itself, to be taken as the 'methodological' or 'gnoseological' counterpart and complement of the 'stand-still' and abiding of the procession from God. Already in chapter 2 Dionysius delineates his spiritual methodology of the 'stand-still' of the intellectual powers (ἀποπαύοντες) following the equally necessary motion of the discursive spirit (κίνησις τοῦ νοῦ) and imitating the dynamic procession from God on the level of human thinking. In this interpretational line, it is very rewarding to read the scholia of Maximus the Confessor on chapter 2 of DN (PG 4, 200A). Therefore, the entire third chapter of the treatise can certainly be considered as addressing a reversion and uplifting (DN 680C) in prayer that completes the methodology of DN as the ontological reversion, ἐπιστροφή, and as the returning to and final unification with God that concludes the ontological procession:[9]

> So let us stretch ourselves prayerfully upward to the more lofty elevation of the kindly Rays of God. Imagine a great shining chain hanging downward from the heights of heaven to the world below. We grab hold of it with one hand and then another, and we seem to be pulling it downward to us. Actually it is already there on the heights and down below and instead of pulling it to us we are being lifted upward to a brilliance above, to the dazzling light of those beams.
>
> Or picture ourselves aboard a boat. There are hawsers joining it to some rock. We take hold of them and pull them, and it is as if we were dragging the rock to us when in fact we are hauling ourselves

Dionysius' Christian theology and his Platonic ontology is: "[T]he expression Dionysius repeatedly uses in reference to the Incarnation, 'the beyond-being becomes a being' (*ho hyperousios ousiōmenos, ousiōthe*; Ep. 4, 1072B) could equally, in light of his metaphysics, refer to all creation. Incarnation, God becoming manifest as a being, is therefore the model for all creation, which thus shares in this 'incarnational' nature."

[8] This can be considered a parenthesis in the text, as Rorem 1993, 141ff. shows, but certainly not a superfluous one, since it clarifies a number of possible misunderstandings concerning unity and differentiation in the Trinitarian doctrine that Dionysius is eager to profess.

[9] For a thorough explanation of chapter 3 as a prolepsis of the epistrophic 'phase' in DN's ontology cf. Schäfer 2002, 414-416.

> and our boat toward that rock. And, from another point of view, when someone on the boat pushes away the rock which is on the shore he will have no effect on the rock, which stands immovable, but will make a space between it and itself, and the more he pushes the greater will be the space.
>
> That is why we must begin with a prayer before everything we do, but especially when we are about to talk of God. We will not pull down to ourselves that power which is both everywhere and yet nowhere, but by divine reminders and invocations we may commend ourselves to it and be joined to it (οὐχ ὡς ἐφελκομένους τὴν ἁπανταχῇ παροῦσαν καὶ οὐδαμῇ δύναμιν, ἀλλ' ὡς ταῖς θείαις μνήμαις καὶ ἐπικλήσεσιν ἡμᾶς αὐτοὺς ἐγχειρίζοντας αὐτῇ καὶ ἑνοῦντας); (DN 680CD).

Despite the most interesting theological considerations presented in chapters 1-3 of DN, the present book's weight of argument will be on the macrostructure of chapters 4-13, which expound Dionysius' ontology and to which I now turn.

2. *Chapters 4-7: Levelled Extroversion*

What follows this complicated and at times somewhat intricate overture of the first three chapters is a sequence of chapters devoted to Names that describe the creational procession and extroverted dynamics of the Divine, Its 'emanation,' as it is sometimes called, or, more accordingly perhaps, Dionysius' doctrine of Creation through participation. But the interpretation of these chapters, particularly the ones devoted to the 'abiding' and the 'return,' requires a preliminary *caveat.* Though it is true that in DN we find a sequence of different sets of theonyms that are dedicated *predominantly* to the explanation of the procession, the abiding, or the return, respectively, it is equally true that this does not exclude a simultaneous ontological discussion of the other two triadic terms in the process of explaining the one in question. As in all Platonic writings, in Dionysius the Platonic Triad is present in every feature of the subjacent philosophical structure.

The great project of an ontological outline of reality in DN begins with chapter 4, the largest of the entire treatise.[10] It is dedicated to the

[10] Cf. the diagram-like quantification of the different chapters' length as compared to each other and to the whole in Suchla 1988, 13. As to its contents and wording, the doctrine on the 'Good' expounded by Dionysius is (at least partly) inspired, as many scholars have observed in recent years, by Proclus' *In Alcibiadem* (book II).

'Good' as the "most important name . . . which shows forth all the processions of God" (DN 680B) and "which the sacred writers have pre-eminently set apart for the supra-divine God from all other names" (DN 693B). Not only the sacred writers, but also the Neoplatonists ever since Plotinus' privileged use of the 'Good' as an experience-centred denomination of the 'ineffable One.' Like Dionysius, the earlier writers, edging on pantheism, were eager to show that "the One is nothing prior or apart from its production of being," that the Good and God were the same, and that "there can be no distinction between an inner self and an outward activity" in God, Who "is not like Aquinas's God, *ipsum esse*, but . . . *ipsum dare*" (all quotes from Perl 1997, 311f.). It is by nothing else than the beneficent procession of the Go(o)dhead that everything comes into being, thus partaking, not in the ever transcendent Godhead's being as such, but (aspectually differentiated, at least) in the Good, which is perfectly translucent in every being as God's complete and loving dedication. The 'Good,' it should be noted in this context, is an evaluative term, of course. Since the Good is causative of every being's existence, it is also the cause for every creature's inherent goodness. In the normative ontology that Dionysius presents us, everything that owes itself to the Good is in itself a clear echo of goodness, however faint. The entire Creation is essentially 'good-like' (ἀγαθοειδές: DN 697A), reproducing the identifying 'feature' of the utterly good higher reality in which it ontologically participates. This is another momentous aspect of the previously mentioned intricate coupling of Christian and Platonic thought that renders this teaching on participation, though traditionally Platonic in its roots,[11] a typically and distinctively Dionysian one: "[T]he entire wholeness is participated in by each of those who participate in it; none participates in only a part" (DN 644A). There is no participation in God 'as such,' but only insofar as He can be grasped as giving Himself, as the

[11] For a very good study of participation in Dionysius, cf. de Andia 1996, 77-93. I leave aside for the sake of brevity, any discussion of further problems traditionally related to the idea of participation in ontology, such as Dionysius' (quite Platonic) doctrine of 'mediating substances' that "share partly in eternity and partly in time as somehow midway between things which are and things which are coming-to-be" (DN 940A). The only point to be made here is that these substances do not mediate *in the creational process*, which pertains entirely to God and to nobody else. Another one of these recurrent problems concerning the doctrine of participation involves the question of the so-called 'self-predication' in Platonic thought, a discussion of which can be found in Schäfer 2002, 413.

'Good(head).' This becomes even more articulated in a passage of chapter 11, introduced by Dionysius himself as a parenthesis and a reminder regarding the use of terms like 'Goodness itself' or 'Divinity itself' as opposed to their 'derivatives' (DN 953C). Dionysius' doctrine of participation endeavours to clarify the ontological question as well as the problem of our ever inadequate ways of speaking about the Divine:

> 'Being itself', 'life itself', 'divinity itself', are names signifying source, divinity, and cause, and these are applied to the one transcendent cause and source beyond source of all things. But we use the same terms in a derivative fashion and we apply them to the provident acts of power which come forth from that God in whom nothing at all participates. I am talking here of being itself, of life itself, of divinity itself which shapes things in a way that each creature, according to capacity, has his share of these. From the fact of such sharing come the qualities and the names 'existing', 'living', 'possessed by divinity', and suchlike. Hence the good is called the subsistence of the first beings, then the whole, then the parts, then of those with a complete share in the whole, and then of those with only a partial share (DN 953D-956A).

Thus, the Good, as well as its cognates mentioned and circumstantially explained in chapter 4,[12] designating, for example, the perceivable orderly harmony ('Beautiful') or the seminal yearning for the return ('Zeal' and 'Ecstasy,' with the latter denoting at the same time the 'stepping out' of oneself or 'ek-stasis') within the procession, express the 'divine subsistence' in the world insofar as it can be grasped by its procession and extroversion 'towards us,' or καθ' ἡμᾶς. This motif of the subsistence of the One in all appears throughout the entire treatise, clearly shaping, for instance, the 'Holy of holies' — or 'God of gods' — theonyms in the penultimate chapter. However, it is especially in the 'Good' that we perceive this undiluted subsistence of the One as extending itself towards us. In this context once again, Dionysius hastens to remind us of the undivided unity of God's essence and activity, which is the cornerstone and the punch line of his entire ontology: "[T]his essential Good, *by the very fact of its existence*, extends goodness

[12] Such as 'Light' (DN 697B-701B; "an image of the archetypal Good": 697B), 'Beauty' (DN 701C-708A; "the same as the Good": DN 704B), 'Love' (DN 708A-709B), 'Ecstasy' and 'Zeal' (DN 712A-713D). Each of these Names' intrinsic reference to the Good is explained by Dionysius circumstantially.

into all things" (DN 693B, italics are mine). In this sense of the Good's uncaused causation, the Good is 'Love' (DN 708A-709D). Whereas Stephen Gersh (1978, 54) writes that "the initial cause of separation [of cause and caused beings] remains a mystery, a fact of which Neoplatonists themselves were clearly aware," DN renders this 'mystery' more accessible by comparing it to our experience of giving love and at the same time prevents the reader from misinterpreting the ontological procession as a 'separation.' As created directly by God's Love, Creation, though different from God, is never segregated from God.[13]

Dionysius had previously explained how Creation partakes in God's Goodness through procession in his methodological outline of chapter 2 when he states that God's unity stays perfectly undiminished and intact in spite of His proceeding out of Himself and the processional differentiation:

> On the other hand, if differentiation can be said to apply to the generous procession of the undifferentiated divine unity, itself overflowing with goodness and dispensing itself outward toward multiplicity, then the things united even within this divine differentiation are the acts by which it irrepressively imparts being, life, wisdom and the other gifts of its all-creative goodness (DN 644A).[14]

Another significant aspect of the 'Good' taken from Plato's metaphor of the sun, had its influence on Dionysius. Hence, 'Light' is named as one of Good's cognates in chapter 4. Modern scholarship[15] has repeatedly called attention to the fact that Plato's supreme idea of the Good as the cause for all that exists is not only depicted, according to the

[13] Panofsky 1979, 19 perceives that as well (though in a slightly different context) when he writes: "There is a formidable distance from the highest, purely intelligible sphere of existence to the lowest, almost purely material one (almost, because sheer matter without form could not even be said to exist); but there is no insurmountable chasm between the two. There is a hierarchy but no dichotomy. For even the lowliest of created things partakes somehow of the essence of God — humanly speaking, of the qualities of truth, goodness and beauty. Therefore the process, by which the emanations of the Light Divine flow down until they are nearly drowned in matter and broken up into what looks like a meaningless welter of coarse and material bodies, can always be reversed into a rise from pollution and multiplicity to purity and oneness."

[14] Cf. the pertinent observation by Perl 2003, 542: "The creation of the world, then, the production or emergence of all things from God, is the differentiation, distribution, or impartation whereby God is differently present to all things and thus makes them be. . . . God is not a differentiated being, but the very Differentiation in virtue of which each creature is itself and so is."

[15] Just to name one example, Dixsaut 2000, 126ff.

construction of the metaphor, as a rigid metaphysical pattern for nomenclature, predication, or essential definitions (or whatever else might bubble up in the reader's mind when hearing of 'Platonic ideas'), but rather as an active 'power' (δύναμις) that dynamically calls to life and dialectically combines all that there is in versatile accordance with everything else. In chapter 8, 'Power' therefore makes its appearance as a theonym. The idea that the all-transcendent Cause of all things must be understood as the 'power of all things' is repeated frequently by other Platonists, beginning with Plotinus (for example *Enn.*s III.8[30].10,1; V.1[10].7,10; V.3[49].15,33; V.4[7].1,36 and 2,39; VI.7[38].32,31; etc. Cf. also Perl 1997, 307).

Once more, Paul Rorem's explanation of the Dionysian text is quite accurate and worthy of a direct quote, since it underscores the intrinsic relation of philosophical and theological speculation in DN:

> As a part of the divine procession downward, creation is therefore a form of differentiation in the Neoplatonic sense . . . But there is also a unity here, in the Christian sense first discussed, namely, that the creator is the one whole being of God as opposed to a specific individual among the three Persons (Rorem 1993, 141).

a. *Being, Life, Wisdom (chs. 5, 6, 7)*

Since the 'Good' is the theonym for naming God as the principle of the ontological processions, Dionysius indulges in giving a short sketch of the entire top-down order of Creation, presenting a three-step arrangement subsuming angels, souls, and the physical realm of bodies/matter (DN 696A-696D; this was preluded, as can be seen above, for example in DN 644A).[16] What Dionysius fundamentally employs here in the naming of three common Biblical denominations for God (amongst which 'Being' is perhaps the most prominent one due to the

[16] For the present and for the limited scope of this brief summary of chapter 4 of the treatise, the problem of evil can be left aside. It is thoroughly discussed by Dionysius in DN 713A-736B. I shall return to the problem in another context (cf. infra §§ 7 and 8). For now, I should just like to mention that evil is defined as παρυπόστασις by Dionysius, that is, as 'beneath (substantial) being' (cf. the recurring term ἔξω τῶν ὄντων, 'beneath things,' in the Neoplatonic tradition). Evil is looked upon as the last conceivable (and perverted) consequence of the procession away from God, exactly insofar as it is *away*, not insofar as it is *from God.* Evil should be regarded, in this top-down arrangement's perspective on reality, as that which is one step beyond the order of things and surpassing the threshold of being at its utmost limit.

Greek etymology of Ex 3:14) is the traditional Platonic view of the tripartite arrangement of all reality, ranging from things that merely 'exist,' such as corporal entities (material things, in Dionysius' sketch) and are ontologically 'baser' than animated corporeal beings (body-soul-compounds), to purely intellectual beings (such as angels). This is a top-down arrangement of the three ontological 'levels' (or concentric arrangement of different ontological intensities) which is also found in CH 177C-180A:

> Hence everything in some way partakes of the providence flowing out of this transcendent Deity which is the originator of all that is. Indeed nothing could exist without some share in the being and source of everything. Even the things which have no life participate in this, for it is the transcendent Deity which is the existence of every being. The living, in their turn, have a share in that power which gives life and which surpasses all life. Beings endowed with reason and intelligence have a share in this absolutely perfect, primordially perfect wisdom which surpasses all reason and intelligence.[17]

This has a famous parallel in the scaling of Augustine's *Sermo* 43 3,4: *habemus ipsum esse cum lignis et lapidibus, vivere cum arboribus, sentire cum bestiis, intellegere cum angelis,* "we compart mere being with lumber and stones, life with the trees, sensation with the animals, intellect with the angels." To name one more example, in *De civitate Dei* XI 16, Augustine refines and more thoroughly expounds this triple gradation of beings. The entire tradition upon which Augustine and Dionysius stand with regard to this gradation of beings appears to originate in Plato's *Sophist* (248e-249a) and *Timaeus* (39e), where this scaling is presented for the first time. From an inverted perspective, a tripartite arrangement where Intellect[18] presupposes Life and Life presupposes Existence is often found in Neoplatonic speculation. This is how Proclus would explain it:

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[17] Πάντα μὲν οὖν τὰ ὄντα μετέχει προνοίας ἐκ τῆς ὑπερουσίου καὶ παναιτίου θεότητος ἐκβλυζο μένης· οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἦν, εἰ μὴ τῆς τῶν ὄντων οὐσίας καὶ ἀρχῆς μετειλήφει. Τὰ μὲν οὖν ἄζωα πάντα τῷ εἶναι αὐτῆς μετέχει (τὸ γὰρ εἶναι πάντων ἐστὶν ἡ ὑπὲρ τὸ εἶναι θεότης), τὰ δὲ ζῶντα τῆς αὐτῆς ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν ζωὴν ζωοποιοῦ δυνάμεως, τὰ δὲ λογικὰ καὶ νοερὰ τῆς αὐτῆς ὑπὰρ πάντα καὶ λόγον καὶ νοῦν αὐτοτελοῦς καὶ προτελείου σοφίας. Δῆλον δὲ ὅτι περὶ αὐτὴν ἐκεῖναι τῶν οὐσιῶν εἰσιν ὅσαι πολλαχῶς αὐτῆς μετειλήφασιν.

[18] For the sake of a less difficult presentation of the argument, and in order to employ the least offending English terms for what has to be exposed here, I shall use Intellect, Wisdom, Mind in the following as if they were synonyms; in any case, spiritual activity is meant, which taken in a broader sense might plausibly apply to any of them as an umbrella term. The reader more familiar with the Biblical and

> [A]mong these [principles] Being will stand foremost; for it is present to all things which have life and intelligence (since whatever lives and shares in Intelligence exists) . . .; Life has the second place, . . . the third principle is Intelligence (*Elements of Theology*, prop.101 (Dodds 1963, 91) [my insertion]).

Earlier, Plotinus had proposed very much the same scaling, though more wordily, as, for example, in *Enn.* I.8[51].2,6ff. (following a description of the Good as the cause of all that is): "intellect and real being and soul and life and intellectual activity."

For Dionysius, standing in this tradition, the entire cosmos of existing, living, and intellect-gifted entities is a reality translucent of the triune God, Who as 'Being' rests undisturbed within Himself, proceeds out of Himself as 'Life,' and returns to Himself in 'thinking' (as far as the latter applies semantically to God). As always in Dionysius, ontology remits to theology, and concentric horizontality is immediately translated into vertical arrangement and vice versa. On the existential level, this triple display in its concentricity and verticality is experienced as (basic) 'existence,' (intense) 'living,' and (uplifting) 'possession by the Divine' (DN 956A), thus showing once again the interpenetration of the several levels and intensities of the intricate Dionysian system.

In the same vein of thought, we are finally reminded of the Platonic doctrine of participation once more, since Dionysius emphasises that "God is the essence of being for the things that have being" (DN 817D).[19] God *is* being, all other things *have* being. The same holds for everything alive as partaking in God as Life itself, and everything gifted with spiritual powers as participating from Wisdom itself.

Neoplatonic coinage of words and speculative vocabulary should bear in mind that they are not perfectly interchangeable but display a hierarchical order and a specific realm of application. Thus, Wisdom is most often stated on the part of God, but then again not necessarily or exclusively, whereas Intellect may in most cases imply discursive thinking, and mind connotatively consciousness, etc. (cf. also footnote 24). The reader should also bear in mind that since Wisdom is a theonym, not just any intellectual or spiritual activity is meant here, but the one that has its established and inner relation to God as Wisdom, rendering the wisdom of this world mere 'so-called wisdom' in comparison to His.

[19] The broader context of this passage is also interesting, because it interprets the ontological procession and abiding in terms of 'Being and Time:' καὶ βασιλεὺς λέγεται τῶν αἰώνων ὡς ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ περὶ αὐτὸν παντὸς τοῦ εἶναι καὶ ὄντος καὶ ὑφεστηκότος καὶ οὔτε ἦν οὔτε ἔσται οὔτε ἐγένετο οὔτε γίνεται οὔτε γενήσεται, μᾶλλον δὲ οὔτε ἐστίν. Ἀλλ᾽ αὐτός ἐστι τὸ εἶναι τοῖς οὖσι καὶ οὐ τὰ ὄντα μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ εἶναι τῶν ὄντων ἐκ τοῦ προαιωνίως ὄντος, αὐτὸς γάρ ἐστιν ὁ αἰὼν τῶν αἰώνων, ὁ ὑπάρχων πρὸ τῶν αἰώνων.

This ontological arrangement omnipresent in DN is refined later on in 721C-729B when Dionysius addresses the question of evil in the different entities and levels of being. For this book's limited purposes of delineating the structure of DN, the indication must suffice that within the different ontological 'stages,' further and more diversified hierarchical arrangements can be found (as, for instance, in DN 856B and 857B of the living creatures). It should be mentioned in this context that Dionysius dedicates an entire treatise, the *Celestial Hierarchy*, to the hierarchies within the 'angel-stage' — a treatise which in later times made him the Church's 'doctor hierarchicus.'

It is of the utmost importance to keep in mind this overall top-down ontological arrangement of all reality and the abiding of the Good's outflow on different well-defined levels, in order to understand the significance and the intimate relationship of the theonyms discussed in the chapters following the discussion of the 'Good': 'Being' (chapter 5), 'Life' (chapter 6), and 'Wisdom' (chapter 7). These chapters (the 'Names' of which coincide with von Ivánka's first triad) discuss the 'threefold' ontological hierarchisation, inverting the 'ontological direction' of the pattern given before, beginning at the bottom rather than at the top of the pyramid. For a more helpful illustration, one may think of the 'Russian-doll-principle' where a number of items of different sizes are placed inside one another, beginning with the smallest one first. Being is presented as the foundation of all that 'there is', and Life presupposes Being, just like Wisdom or any intellectual activity[20] presupposes Life. In a 'threefold' hierarchy, these Names present reality as the theophany of the Trinitarian God.[21] Chapter 2 offered a foreshadowing of this thought when explaining the mystery of the

[20] Chapter 7 gives a short list of theonyms that are considered cognates of the 'Wisdom'-theonym: 'Mind,' 'Word,' 'Truth,' and 'Faith.'

[21] In Nardi 1967, 214 I found the following quote taken from Cusanus' *Trialogus de possest* 9,6ff.: *volo dicere quod omnia illa complicite in Deo sunt Deus, sicut explicite in creatura mundi sunt mundus.* As Nardi rightly observes, this thought goes back to Dionysius, where Cusanus found it. Perl 2003, 542 correctly sees that this idea of God as the enfolding of all beings "avoids making God, as cause, into another being beside his creatures. Since all the perfections of all things are differentiated presentations of God, it follows that God pre-contains all things in himself, without distinction (DN I.7, 597A). God is the 'enfolding' of all things, and all things are the 'unfolding' of God. . . . Thus he is at once utterly transcendent and utterly immanent: transcendent in that he is not any being, not included within reality as any member of it; immanent in that he is immediately present to all things as their being and all their perfections."

inner unity of the threefold God's activity.[22] However, for the purposes of this book, there is no compelling need to discuss at full length the possible Trinitarian applications of (for example) Being as God the Father, Life as God the Son, and Wisdom as God the Spirit to the three-step arrangement of the Platonic ontology contemplated here.[23]

b. *A Summary on Procession and Differentiation*

In short, chapters 4-7 of DN advance a systematically unfolding explication of the entire Divine procession conceived as the ontological outflow of all reality from God by referring to Names that the Bible attributes to God.[24] The onto-theological display proposed in these chapters is a splendid example of how uniquely Dionysius masters his self-imposed task of speaking about God's essence by referring to God's *quoad nos*, solely employing Biblical theonyms while unfolding a consistent philosophical doctrine that does not contradict Christian dogma. The building of a "world in the mind out of materials furnished by the mind itself" is performed in Biblical terminology.

This gives a well designed foundation of the Dionysian epistemology. Wisdom as the top of the creational pyramid or scaling that intellectual beings perceive within themselves can be experienced, according

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[22] Cf. Perl 2003, 545: "The lower processions are included within the higher as their specifications, so that nothing can possess a higher perfection without also possessing the lower ones: living things, in possessing life, also have being, and cognitive things, in possessing cognition, also have being and life. In fact, all these processions are higher and lower modes of the same divine presence that constitutes all things. Thinking, for example, is the higher mode of living and being proper to cognitive things, while mere being is the lower mode of living and thinking proper to inanimate objects."

[23] These complicated interrelations are expounded conveniently in a passage by Paul Rorem, which I shall quote at length: "There is a specific way in which the Neoplatonic tradition of interpreting Plato's *Parmenides* may have influenced the Areopagite's organisation of *The Divine Names*. In Neoplatonism the triad of Being, Life, and Mind was a trio of individual principles standing, hierarchically, between the ineffable One and the lower individual beings, living things, and minds. The Areopagite considered the same three names in the same sequence in this treatise: chapter 5 treated Being, chapter 6 considered Life, and chapter 7 subsumed Mind under the overall heading of Wisdom. This triad, coming directly after the first name, Good, is clearly reminiscent of Neoplatonism. But Dionysius ascribed all these names to the 'first principle' (God), which in the Neoplatonic exegesis of Plato could not receive any positive attributes, only negations" (Rorem 1993, 164).

[24] Which is acknowledged outright by Paul Rorem, who is generally more interested in the theological speculation in DN: "[T]his section is both an ontology and a lyrical hymn of praise to the one beyond being" (Rorem 1993, 154).

to this systematic unfolding of the theo-ontological order, as a contingent starting-point of self-superation toward the Wisdom "beyond all reason, all intelligence, and all wisdom" (DN 865B). This reasoning that transcends all contingent reason will help with the difficult discussion of the antonyms in chapters 9 and 10. The unreasonable congruity of opposites treated there "seems absurd and strange, but uplifts to the ineffable truth which is there before all reasoning" (DN 865C), which we attain only by transcending our own ways of reasoning. Thus, our mental efforts constitute an interesting way of simultaneously knowing and not knowing God. Dionysius means here the strange state of mind that reflects the two-fold Platonic 'method' of contemplating the Divine 'as to us,' καθ' ἡμᾶς, and (never) καθ' αὐτό, 'in itself.' As always in the Areopagite, philosophy remits to revealed truth, in this case to Paul's famous quote about the dark mirror, of already knowing and yet not knowing both the One and oneself (as in 1 Cor 13:10ff.). At the same time, this paradoxical situation serves as the stepping-stone for the mystical union:

> This is the sort of language we must use about God, for he is praised from all things according to their participation to him as their Cause. But again, the most divine knowledge of God, that which comes through unknowing, is achieved in a union far beyond the mind, when mind turns away from all things, even from itself, and when it is made one with the dazzling rays, being then and there enlightened by the inscrutable depth of Wisdom (DN 872AB).

As to the 'gnoseology' of DN, these remarks must suffice for the scope given for this book, though I shall come back to some problems of mysticism in §6.

3. *Chapters 8-11: Dynamic Steadying*

The part of DN most difficult to grasp for every interpreter of the treatise appears to be Dionysius' explanation of the ontological 'steadying' or 'repose,' of the identifying 'halt' and the 'abiding' in itself of the flux of Being displayed and discussed in the previous chapters.[25] The

[25] Rorem 1993, 158 groups the entire treatise from chapter 8 on as "a series of brief chapters on miscellaneous Scriptural names for God." A perplexed Andrew Louth (Louth 1989, 92) shrugs off any further examination of the treatise's structure, and states that "after that [i.e. chapter 7] any order seems less clear." With this part of the treatise, my interpretation differs (from a more philosophical than

Greek term for it employed by Dionysius is μονή. It is true that μονή is a two-fold concept in DN. It is not easy to translate, since it expresses, in its Neoplatonic acceptance at least, the paradox of a 'dynamic stand-still' or an unweary resting in oneself, for which reason terms like 'halt' and 'stand-still' are put in gnomic commas throughout this book. The μονή applies, on the one hand, to God's unchangeable unity, unchangeable though God is Creator by self-extroversion and conceived of as a dynamic Trinity. Hans-Urs von Balthasar employs this theological use of the term μονή almost exclusively (cf. von Balthasar 1963 sub-chapter 5 on Dionysius). On the other hand, however, there is a creational μονή, conceived as the στάσις (which is a synonym for it) or the 'stand-still,' which is the creational extroversion of God on different levels and the peace (εἰρένη) that all Creation has according to and thanks to its inner order. As seen before, this also has to do with the shift of perspective from an interpretation *per se* to an agent-relative perspective in DN. Dionysius, before even entering the μονή-set of theonyms, had already alluded to this ontologically defining repose of the procession from God when speaking about the different levels on which the Divine procession can be grasped: In chapter 4 (DN 704C), he talks of the 'identity,' 'unchanged remaining,' 'innate togetherness,' 'persistence,' etc. of all creatures. The three main stages of the movement's 'halt' or abiding are mentioned here as well: minds, souls, bodies (DN 704C). This corresponds, of course, with what could be derived from the interpretation of the 'Names' of DN's 'first triad': Being, Life, Wisdom. Dionysius must do this because within the procession itself different levels of ontological 'solidification' (such as being, life, mind) can be identified and have to be explained. This explanation is put forth now with hindsight, since we already have been introduced to the Dionysian teachings concerning the abiding of the ontological flow. Dionysius earlier describes the process as disentangling gradually, but now he is obliged (and eager) to explain the 'why' and 'how' of this ontological gradation.[26]

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theological view-point) from von Balthasar's, without, however, contradicting it entirely. Von Balthasar 1963, 192ff. prefers to interpret Wisdom in chapter 7 as the end of the ontological procession as well as (at the same time) the starting point of the turning back of Creation towards God. My thesis holds that chapters 8-11 describe the defining 'stand-still' or μονή as the necessary grounds of the reversion, thus introducing the ontological triad of procession, halt, and return that reflects the triadic Being of the Creator Himself.

[26] Without referring to the μονή explicitly, Perl 2003, 542, gives a good sum-

For his explanation of this dynamic ontological 'steadying,' Dionysius employs two concepts that dominated Ancient metaphysics:

First, the proper 'shape' (the corresponding inner ἔργον or form to be accomplished) of every being 'constrains' it (ἀναγκάζει) to its own essential parameters and confines it to a well-defined steadiness corresponding to its essence (cf., for instance, the introduction of this doctrine in Plato's *Phaedo* 103e-104b[27]). As Plotinus says, "being must not fluctuate, so to speak, in the indefinite, but must be fixed by limit and stability" (*Enn.* V.1[10].7,24f.).

Second, this steadiness in its proper being — and this is an aspect of the Aristotelian tradition which Neoplatonism absorbed[28] — is not lifeless or static in itself but rather something which is continuously at work intrinsically (an ἐνέργεια). It is precisely these self-edifying dynamics that are the warranty of its continuous steadiness and of its not 'falling apart.' In this sense, the 'steadying' of beings in the μονή-stage

mary of the steadying of the ontological process: "Since to be is to be determinate, any being depends for its existence on its determination, so that its determination is its cause of being. Hence, for Dionysius, God is the creator of all things as their constitutive determination, making each thing to be by making it *what* it is. Thus he is the being (i.e., 'beingness') of all beings, . . . by which they are beings; the life of living things (DN I.3, 589C), by which they are living; and, in short, 'all things in all things' (DN I.7, DN 596C). All the determinations or perfections of all things — and hence the entire content of creation — are God creatively present in them. Thus God can be 'named,' or known, only as he is causally present in all creatures. These causal perfections, which Dionysius variously calls 'powers,' 'participations,' 'processions,' 'manifestations,' or 'names' of God, are God as he is participated in, i.e., is present in all creatures, as their constitutive determinations."

[27] "'The fact is,' said he, 'in some such cases, that not only the abstract idea itself has a right to the same name through all time, but also something else, which is not the idea, but which always, whenever it exists, has the form of the idea. But perhaps I can make my meaning clearer by some examples. In numbers, the odd must always have the name of odd, must it not?' — 'Certainly.' — 'But is this the only thing so called (for this is what I mean to ask), or is there something else, which is notidentical with the odd but nevertheless has a right to the name of odd in addition to its own name, because it is of such a nature that it is never separated from the odd? I mean, for instance, the number three, and there are many other examples. Take the case of three; do you not think it may always be called by its own name and also be called odd, which is not the same as three? Yet the number three and the number five and half of numbers in general are so constituted, that each of them is odd though not identified with the idea of odd. And in the same way two and four and all the other series of numbers are even, each of them, though not identical with evenness'" (*Phaedo* 103e-104b).

[28] As a matter of fact, Gerson 1997, 259f., among others, takes ἐνέργεια to be the standard example of how Aristotelian terms are adopted in the expression of Neoplatonic positions.

of the Dionysian ontology is, one suspects, carefully tailored to fit and to mirror the causative dynamics of the 'Good' as explained above.

As always, textual basis is demanded. The Divine Names that Dionysius adduces for his description of the μονή, στάσις, or εἰρήνη of Creation are many and sometimes confusingly strange. I present a brief synoptic list of them before interpreting them:

ch. 8: Power, Righteousness/Justice (δικαιοσύνη), Salvation, Redemption
ch. 9: Greatness and Smallness, Sameness and Otherness/Difference, Similarity and Dissimilarity, Rest and Motion
ch. 10: Omnipotent/Almighty (παντοκράτωρ), Ancient (of Days) and Young/New
ch. 11: Peace

All these are Names that designate the collecting or reuniting of power(s), the abiding and entering in suspense of the procession, and the allayment and cessation of the flux, or so I want to argue. The Name 'Peace,' which concludes this set of denominations and sums it up is, as has been shown frequently,[29] a Dionysian synonym of the μονή. It designates the achieved pacification, the harmonic calmness and the being at ease with itself of the powerful ontological procession and its creaturely outcomes. 'Power' in chapter 8 reassumes this powerful, yet undifferentiated coming-to-be of things for the gradually differentiating constitution of all beings, bringing the flux to a halt (though not to a definite end) on certain levels: "[I]t guides the [different single] powers which keep each creature in being" (DN 893A [my insertion]). Power, conceived as God's participating "Power in that all power is initially contained" and exceeded (DN 889D), also anticipates the isosthenic theme of the following chapters 9 and 10. In these chapters, the repose of the procession is described as a balance of power(s), ascribing the 'implicates'[30] of the One that we find in Plato's *Parmenides*[31]

[29] Cf., for example, Gombocz 1997, 323ff.

[30] It is quite unsatisfactory, and even misleading, to speak of 'attributes' of the Neoplatonic One which has no add-ons or qualifications other than being itself. Goodness is not an attribute of the One, but Its entire being, as is Omnipotence, Peace, Movement and Standstill, etc. Accordingly, Werner Beierwaltes recommends, in the face of Dionysius' attempts to rid the ineffable God of any (necessarily, in that they are conceptual) contingent attributes (while simultaneously trying to show how it reconciles all these non-attributes), that we speak of 'implicates' rather than 'predicates' of the One. Beierwaltes 1998, 60: "Sein als Prädikat hebt das Über-Sein nicht auf, sondern zeigt sich als dessen Implikat."

[31] *Parmenides* 137c-166c. A very short but very helpful survey of the Neoplatonic tradition of interpreting the *Parmenides* is given in Louth 1989, 82ff.

simultaneously to the Divine (chapter 9).[32] It presents moreover the Omnipotent or Almighty (παντοκράτωρ) as powerfully holding together the beginning and the end, the 'definitions' of Creation (which is reminiscent of Plato's *Laws* 715e[33]). Here as elsewhere, it is in the temporary beings that we grasp God 'as to us,' καθ' ἡμᾶς, and thus the Eternal Being — a theo-ontology in terms of time (as it is an A-and-Ω-scheme: cf. Rev 22:13 as a probable Scriptural basis for Dionysius). It is a rather 'optimistic' and even consoling thought of the Christian-Platonic worldview as drawn by Dionysius that without denying the intransigent disruptions of worldly reality, he proposes to contemplate them against the background of their One Cause that, without eliminating or denying them, has the loving Power of reconciling and unifying them. Here lies the major triumph of Dionysius' method of presenting ontology through the Names of God. He presents God, just to mention two pairs of Parmenidean names attributed to Him in DN, simultaneously as 'Motion,' since He creatively proceeds as Goodness out of Himself, and 'Rest,' since He is the unchangeable causal sustainer of the beings which He creates. He is also 'Sameness' because He is the one Creator

[32] When describing the ontologically identifying 'stand-still' of the creational procession in DN 704BC, the "existence of everything as beings" is attributed to the στάσις in terms of "identicalness and differences," "their similarities and dissimilarities," and their "sharing of opposites." Chapter 9 is an *ex post* explanation of this observation (which seems strange and awkward when first mentioned). The interesting passage DN 704BC is worth while quoting at length: Τολμήσει δὲ καὶ τοῦτο εἰπεῖν ὁ λόγος, ὅτι καὶ τὸ μὴ ὂν μετέχει τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ ἀγαθοῦ, τότε γὰρ καὶ αὐτὸ καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθόν, ὅταν ἐν θεῷ κατὰ τὴν πάντων ἀφαίρεσιν ὑπερουσίως ὑμνεῖται. Τοῦτο τὸ ἓν ἀγαθὸν καὶ καλὸν ἑνικῶς ἐστι πάντων τῶν πολλῶν καλῶν καὶ ἀγαθῶν αἴτιον. Ἐκ τούτου πᾶσαι τῶν ὄντων αἱ οὐσιώδεις ὑπάρξεις, αἱ ἑνώσεις, αἱ διακρίσεις, αἱ ταὐτότητες, αἱ ἑτερότητες, αἱ ὁμοιότητες, αἱ ἀνομοιότητες, αἱ κοινωνίαι τῶν ἐναντίων, αἱ ἀσυμμιξίαι τῶν ἡνωμένων, αἱ πρόνοιαι τῶν ὑπερτέρων, αἱ ἀλληλουχίαι τῶν ὁμοστοίχων, αἱ ἐπιστροφαὶ τῶν καταδεεστέρων, αἱ πάντων ἑαυτῶν φρουρητικαὶ καὶ ἀμετακίνητοι μοναὶ καὶ ἱδρύσεις, καὶ αὖθις αἱ πάντων ἐν πᾶσιν οἰκείως ἑκάστῳ κοινωνίαι καὶ ἐφαρμογαὶ καὶ ἀσύγχυτοι φιλίαι καὶ ἁρμονίαι τοῦ παντός, αἱ ἐν τῷ παντὶ συγκράσεις, αἱ ἀδιάλυτοι συνοχαὶ τῶν ὄντων, αἱ ἀνέκλειπτοι διαδοχαὶ τῶν γινομένων, αἱ στάσεις πᾶσαι καὶ αἱ κινήσεις αἱ τῶν νοῶν, αἱ τῶν ψυχῶν, αἱ τῶν σωμάτων. Στάσις γάρ ἐστι πᾶσι καὶ κίνησις τὸ ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν στάσιν καὶ πᾶσαν κίνησιν ἐνιδρύον ἕκαστον ἐν τῷ ἑαυτοῦ λόγῳ καὶ κινοῦν ἐπὶ τὴν οἰκείαν κίνησιν.

[33] This is an important passage for all Neoplatonists. Many of the concepts named in *Laws* 715e-716a reappear in DN as Divine Names, as for example Justice, which I shall treat shortly: "O men, that God who, as old tradition tells, holds the beginning, the end, and the centre of all things that exist, completes his circuit by nature's ordinance in straight, unswerving course. With him follows Justice, as avenger of them that fall short of the divine law; and she, again, is followed by every man who would fain be happy, cleaving to her with lowly and orderly behaviour," etc.

of all and 'Otherness' because He proceeds out of Himself in multiple ways. Just like us, God is, lives, and thinks, but does so in a completely different way than we do.

Thus, the opposition of contradicting theonyms is reconciled by the pacifying power of the Almighty to its final and peaceful solution (εἰρήνη) in chapter 11. It should be noted that the vocabulary makes transparent the author's intention to show the inner dynamics, the intrinsic forces at work, and the balanced tensions that bring the procession to a well-arranged 'halt.' These movements and motions refute any attempt to think of the 'stand-still' or abiding as some sort of congealment or weak trickling away of the ontological flux. There is no frozen stasis of the once lively procession here, but rather a powerfully unified plurality of beings on a rich scale of ontic levels.

a. *A Question of Justice*

I should like to illustrate this initially obscure set of Names and especially the difficult dialectics of the isosthenic balance of attributes found in chapters 9 and 10 through a more in-depth interpretation of two of these theonyms: δικαιοσύνη, 'Justice' (or 'Righteousness,' in Luibheid's translation[34]), and Peace, εἰρένη, which, as has been mentioned before, functions as a synonym of the ontological 'halt.'

Like Power, Justice links the previous set of processional Names (Good, Being, Life, and cognates) to the following confrontation of the *prima facie* irreconcilable 'Parmenidean' theonyms in chapters 9 and 10. As God's Justice, the μονή is palpable in terms of the ontological order that attributes their specific place and intensity of being to all things. Maximus the Confessor in his commentary on DN identifies the μονή of Creation with this ontological order (τάξις) when he says that things have being only insofar as they "stay/abide within this order" (μένουσι τάξει). It is the Divine Justice that concedes an ontological equilibrium to everything, filling up all entities with being to a just and ontologically defining measure (chapters 2 and 4 had, in this sense, already alluded to the Creator as giving the measure, μέτρον, for all that is). This equilibrium within the world-order is symbolised by the age-old metaphor for Justice: the balance. In DN 589A, Dionysius speaks

[34] I believe 'Justice' to be the more adequate translation. Maybe Luibheid's 'Righteousness' was chosen to mark a difference between δικαιοσύνη and δίκη and to underscore the Biblical use of the concept. Yet, as LSJ and the Bible text itself can easily show, δικαιοσύνη simply means 'Justice.'

of the "archdivine balance" of Creation, which is obviously an image taken from Prov 16:11. It is as if the ontological process wells up, in different amounts and various intensities, and is channelled by a well devised system, into the rinds on different sides of a balance or scale, taking into account their capacities and the different lengths of the balance's arms, counter-balancing and outbalancing to the best symmetry achievable everything that it replenishes. The *analogia entis* or 'analogy of being,' as the scholastic tradition would name it later on, is anticipated here. Everything that exists is 'filled up' with being by the Divine provider of being according to certain measures and proportions ('analogies') and this produces a system of things ontologically ordered to their best and at their best. It is the notion of God as the 'measure of all things' that recurs in Platonic thought over and over again (cf., for example, *Enn.* VI.8[39].18,3).

Therefore, the just distribution of the ontological replenishment of being(s) is described according to the *suum-cuique*-principle of the tradition of distributive justice and Plato's description of justice and harmony as reigning principles of the universe in the *Gorgias*, as for example at 508a.[35] The reader may recall that an Areopagite is a legal councillor or a judge familiar with the (profane) theory of justice. The significant concept that Dionysius employs in this passage is the distribution κατ' ἀξίαν, which means "according to merit(oriousness)," a technical term used also by Aristotle in his famous attempt to define distributive justice (EN 1131 a 25):[36]

[35] *Gorgias* 508a: "gods and men are held together by communion and friendship, by orderliness, temperance, and justice; and that is the reason, my friend, why they call the whole of this world by the name of order (κόσμος), not of disorder or dissoluteness. Now you, as it seems to me, do not give proper attention to this, for all your cleverness, but have failed to observe the great power of geometrical equality amongst both gods and men: you hold that self-advantage is what one ought to practice, because you neglect geometry." This 'geometrical' principle is found in Plato, in Aristotle (Book 5 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*), and in the Stoics. Interestingly, the pseudo-Platonic *Definitions* (411de) give two definitions of justice, one very similar to Plato's in the *Republic* (443d), where he proposes a *suum quisque*-principle rather than a *suum cuique*-precept, followed by a second one of Stoic origin (the *suum cuique*, this time). Cf. Lilla 2002, 17, 37, and the pertinent notes on 47, 48, and 52 (with good bibliographical indications).

[36] The notion of distributive justice (δικαιοσύνη διανεμητική) that Plato's *Laws* and Aristotle's EN describe as functioning according to 'geometrical proportions' had been raised by Plato himself to cosmical importance. "God is always doing geometry" (θεός ἀεὶ γεωμετρεῖ) was believed by Platonists of all times to be Plato's doctrine of God's distributive justice in the act of conferring the 'appropriate' onto all beings (cf. Plutarchus, *De E apud Delphos* 386ef and *Quaestiones convivales* 718bc).

> The title 'Righteousness'/'Justice' is given to God because he assigns what is appropriate to all things; he distributes their due proportion, beauty, rank, arrangement, their proper and fitting place and order, according to a most just and righteous determination (πᾶσι τὰ κατ' ἀξίαν ἀπονέμων ὑμνεῖται καὶ εὐμετρίαν καὶ κάλλος καὶ εὐταξίαν καὶ διακόσμησιν καὶ πάσας διανομὰς καὶ τάξεις ἀφορίζων ἑκάστῳ κατὰ τὸν ὄντως ὄντα δικαιότατον ὅρον). . . . It is the righteousness of God which orders everything, setting boundaries, keeping things distinct and unconfused, giving each thing what it inherently deserved (DN 893D, 896A).

Justice, therefore, establishes the 'creational parameters' of reality (as the terms εὐταξία, διακόσμησις, etc. easily show),[37] giving each thing its οἰκεία φύσις, its 'proper natural definition,' its natural place by conferring being onto it in an appropriate measure:

> The justice of God is truly justice (ἀληθῆ δικαιοσύνη) in that it gives [its] appropriate (τὰ οἰκεία) . . . to everything and that it preserves the nature of each being in its due order and power (ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκείας τάξεως καὶ δυνάμεως) (DN 896B [my emendations]).

The motif of the appropriate 'own nature' to which everything is disposed is reassumed at various times throughout the μονή-set of Divine Names. One example is DN 897C, where Dionysius insists that everything is good and in order (*in genere suo*) as contemplated according to its own species or 'form,' thanks to Divine Justice:

> And even the inequality of things, the difference between all things for the whole, is protected by Righteousness which will not permit confusion and disturbance among things but arranges that all things are kept within the particular forms appropriate to each of them (φυλάττουσα δὲ τὰ ὄντα πάντα κατ' εἶδος ἕκαστον).[38]

This is possible because each thing's essence (οὐσία) and proper being is present in God's mind as a perfect ensemble of ideas, which Dionysius calls the metaphysical 'pre-definitions' (προ-ορισμοί) of all creaturely

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[37] Cf. the discussion of the idea of 'ontological parameters' of Creation as appearing in Christian Platonism in Schäfer 2000a. For a thorough discussion of τάξις, διακόσμησις, etc. in Dionysius' writings, cf. Roques 1983, 35-58.

[38] It has been observed by many interpreters that Dionysius has a "doctrine of forms of individuals," where he combines the Platonic doctrine of Ideas (i.e. universal forms) with the Christian doctrine of the creation of individual beings. In Dionysius, the divine self-distribution confers the beneficent ontogenic energies of God to each thing in 'particular forms' (κατ' εἶδος ἕκαστον): "The increasing specification extends to the determinative principles or *logoi* of particulars, whereby each individual creature is itself and so is. . . . Here Dionysius has, in effect, a doctrine of 'forms of individuals' which are contained in more universal forms as their specifications" (Perl 2003, 546).

entities. Through Divine Justice's definitions, every being is assigned its proper οὐσία.[39]

Among the remarkable concepts in these passages, perhaps the most interesting one is that of the οἰκεῖον, of the 'suitable' or the 'conformable to the nature of something,' as Liddel-Scott-Jones' Greek-English Lexicon (henceforward referred to as LSJ) puts it. As a term with a loaded Epicurean and Stoic history, οἰκείωσις means 'to take housing' (οἰκία meaning 'house') or 'to make oneself at home.' In its philosophical usage it designates the act of conforming oneself to the place and role that nature assigns to it. Plotinus also employs the term οἰκεῖον and its cognates when he speaks of the orderly coming-to-be of things and he does so by explicitly alluding to Plato's well-known interpretation of justice as "to perform one's own function and that alone" (as explained at *Republic* 444ab). In *Enn.* I.2[19].7,5f., Plotinus says that for the self-constitution of a (in this case: spiritual) being it is necessary that it is given the opportunity to find "its own proper activity" or "its own inner form" (τὸ οἰκεῖον ἔργον) by "minding or performing its own business" (ἡ οἰκειοπραγία). Proclus, too, teaches that justice gives everything its due sense and standing within the cosmical order (*In Parmenidem* 855) and that therefore all things have their ontologically well-defined proper place, οἰκεῖος τόπος (*In Rem Publicam* II 146 and 147).[40]

When Dionysius speaks of God's assigning its οἰκεῖον to every being, he wants to illustrate how every single nature has its fitting place within nature in its entirety, a place where it 'feels' at home and has its appropriate meaning and 'stable condition.'[41] It ontologically 'settles down' to become and to remain what it is (the Latin translations of the CD have a tendency to make a pun out of the ontological 'halting' or 'remaining,' *manere*, and the proper place or 'mansion,' *mansio*, which in effect is etymologically correct). The concept of the 'characteristic

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[39] Suchla 2002, 94 gives a good explanation of Dionysius' very short theory of ideas as universals of all particular beings.

[40] Cf. the good explanation of Proclus' statements in Cürsgen 2002b, 230f.

[41] For a better understanding, cf. Cicero's famous definition of the (stoic) οἰκείωσις in *De finibus* III 16: *Placet his, inquit, quorum ratio mihi probatur, simulatque natum sit animal (hinc enim est ordiendum), ipsum sibi conciliari et commendari ad se conservandum et ad suum statum eaque, quae conservantia sint eius status, diligenda, alienari autem ab interitu iisque rebus, quae interitum videantur adferre. id ita esse sic probant, quod ante, quam voluptas aut dolor attigerit, salutaria appetant parvi aspernenturque contraria, quod non fieret, nisi statum suum diligerent, interitum timerent. fieri autem non posset ut appeterent aliquid, nisi sensum haberent sui eoque se diligerent. ex quo intellegi debet principium ductum esse a se diligendo.*

nature' of all things will have some importance for the Dionysian explanation of evil, which is treated at greater length and clarified later (cf. below §§ 8 and 9).

This is the (Divine) foundation of the hierarchical world-order, the *ordo rerum*, as the Latin Christian Tradition calls it.[42] This arrangement or order of all that is can be conceived as being originated and structured by the repose of the procession on different, orderly arranged levels or ontological platforms.[43] 'Hierarchy' is thus a key-word for the entire Dionysian system, and the ontological hierarchies are Dionysius' fundamental contribution to an immense philosophical tradition.[44]

Of course, this entire thought-through-at-its-best arrangement of a world shaped by Justice remits the reader to the earlier Wisdom-chapter of the theonyms (chapter 8). For it is God's Wisdom that arranges the stunning system of reality; this is the reason why Wisdom is named first in this set of Names dedicated to the ontological 'halt.' At the same time, it prepares us for the subsequent exercise of the seemingly irreconcilable Names that stand for the equilibrium of opposites powerfully balanced by God's Justice. This balance of opposites is, of course, to be interpreted as the creational, discursive counterpart of the *coincidentia oppositorum* within the Divine Creator ("[T]hese all are titles applied to the Cause of everything": DN 909B). Thus, the balance mnemotechnically refers to the dialectics that surface in the first chapter. To creatures who await the return to God, it may also serve, Platonically speaking, as an anamnesis of the beyond.

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[42] This is where the concept of Beauty comes in. Dionysius had introduced it in chapter 4 of DN as a synonym of the theonym Good. The hierarchical steadying and definition of all things on different ontological levels corresponding to their characteristic nature is preserved by Beauty and a manifestation of Beauty: "This goodness is also their beauty. For Dionysius, as for Plotinus and Augustine, the beauty of each thing is the form, the determination in it, which is what makes it to be. Thus, just as to be is to be good, so to be is to be beautiful. Each being is by being beautiful in its proper way" (Perl 2003, 543).

[43] Cf. once more Perl 2003, 546: "God is in each thing in the distinct mode proper to and constitutive of that thing. Divine justice consists not in an egalitarian leveling but rather in the hierarchical order whereby each creature is established in its proper place. (See DN VIII.7, 896AB). Hence there is no conflict between the hierarchical ordering of creation and the immediate presence of God to all things. Each creature participates directly in God precisely by filling its proper place in the hierarchy of beings."

[44] Cf. the pioneering essay by Stiglmayr 1898. Since Stiglmayr's article, it is universally accepted that 'hierarchy' as used today originates ultimately with Dionysius, who modified its ancient meaning.

I shall also briefly outline the mutual dependence of the different theonyms appearing in chapter 8 by way of the discussion of Divine 'Justice.' The Names 'Salvation' and 'Redemption' (which immediately follow Wisdom in the preceding chapter) do not seem to fit very well into the μονή-passus of DN and appear to disprove the thesis pursued here. It might seem as if they contradict the idea that Dionysius is giving a 'theo-eidetic' account of reality as God's Creation. Redemption and Salvation, far more than the others, seem to be Names that exclusively concern the Divine and have nothing to do with the outline of an ontological system. They seem to be entirely theological terms denoting God's salvific activity with His people, which have nothing to do with an *ontological* account of reality. However, Dionysius counts them in under the synonyms of 'Justice' (DN 896D) in its broad, though specific, onto-theological sense, since God as

> 'Salvation of the World' ensures that each being is preserved and maintained in its proper being and order . . . I would only add that, basically, Salvation is that which preserves all things in their proper places without change, conflict, or collapse towards evil, that it keeps them all in peaceful and untroubled obedience to their proper laws, that it expels all inequality and interference from the world, and that it gives everything the proportion to avoid turning into its own opposite (DN 896D-897A).

'Salvation' (as well as 'Redemption,' which "brings back order and arrangement where there was disorder and disarrangement": DN 897B) remits to God's preserving Power as well as to His Justice. Both 'Salvation' and 'Redemption' anticipate by their allusion to the peace-chapter the peaceful denouement of the subsequent opposition of conflicting Names in chapter 9 and prepare the way for the last set of theonyms, which is the 'reversal' (ἐπιστροφή) of everything towards God. As a reminder, when we consider the role of Justice, Power, and the foreshadowing of chapter 9 in this passage on Salvation and Redemption, it should be clear by now that the 'Parmenidean' theonyms are far from just awkward insertions or parentheses, as von Ivánka would have it, that make concessions to the Platonic traditions to which Dionysius belongs. I hope to render that even more obvious soon.

As a consequence (and as has been mentioned on one or two occasions already), the order of all things described by such theonyms as Justice, Salvation, or Peace is not meant to be understood merely as a static calmness. Rather, it is conceived of as an energetic harmony where things are 'at work' (which ἐν ἐργῷ εἶναι, and hence 'energy' originally mean), for all things aspire to their ontological οἰκείωσις,

that is, to 'settle down' in their 'proper being.' This yearning or aspiration emerges from the difference between what a being really is and what a being truly is, between what it has already accomplished as contrasted with what it could accomplish by its true powers or nature. Everything yearns for its proper perfection, says Aquinas in his commentary on Dionysius' DN, *unaquaeque res appetit perfectionem suam* (*In DN* c.xi, l.1, 876). Peace in itself, Justice as such or pure Salvation is not to be found in things created, but only in the Divine. Yet, the yearning of all things to be as-suchs, in-themselves, and pure accomplishments of what they truly are makes them powerfully pursue their possibilities and lets them converge towards the ideal or perfect order where all things stand in the best relation to each other, being the most they can be by nature as individuals and as a perfectly harmonious cosmos of things. This is how in Dionysius' conception the Divine orders everything created, acting as an unifying final cause, and this is what permits us to talk about created reality in theonyms. It will be seen in §§ 7 and 8 on the question of evil in chapter 4 that all evil originates, according to Dionysius, when a being strays away from the aspiration for its true nature and fails to recognise and achieve its proper perfection. That there is a yearning and an aspiration nonetheless provides the explanation for the surprising power (and attractiveness) of evil.

b. Opus iustitiae pax

All this can even more manifestly be seen in chapter 11's treatment of the theonym 'Peace' within this Dionysian development of the Names, which is why it must be looked at more extensively in the following sample-exegesis of how the text concerning the theo-ontological doctrine of the procession and the 'halt' should be read and interpreted.

After passing the test of metaphysically reconciling the contingently irreconcilable in the discussion of the Parmenidean and the Biblical Names, chapter 10, according to its naming of God the 'Ancient of days' and the eternally 'Young,' ends in a short doxology that praises God as "beyond time and [as] the source of the variety of time and seasons" (DN 937D), concluding in a final 'Amen' (the wording of the doxology has its parallels in Ps 41:14; 72:19, etc.).

One might think that Dionysius at this point of the treatise pauses for a moment in order to contemplate Creation as established by the procession and abiding in a perfect system (not unlike God Himself

in Gen 1:31, if this is not too grandiose a comparison). The beginning of chapter 12, by contrast, makes a new start, claiming to add a further step in the development of DN after successfully having concluded the task of having said what had to be said in order to resume afresh the praise of the Names of God:[45] "[I]t seems to me that I have now said what was needed in regard to those themes. Now we must all offer up a hymn of praise to the God of infinite Names" (DN 969A), etc.

In between these two utterances, which might as well follow each other immediately, a whole chapter is inserted. It is dedicated exclusively to 'Peace.'[46] Why? I think that this is due precisely to the pausing and beholding of the efforts fulfilled as mentioned above. Procession has come to a 'halt,' to an identifying 'stand-still' in itself, and the grand picture of reality as participating in God and partaking in God has been given to its finishing touch with a set of carefully selected theonyms. Dionysius now steps back for an instant and stops for a careful consideration of the work accomplished before resuming his self-imposed task and deciding the new path of the epistrophic Names. This pausing and stopping at contemplation has its suitable stylistic expression in the parenthesis-like insertion of 'Peace' in chapter 11.

[45] Different stylistic peculiarities show the importance of the discussion of Peace. The conclusive 'Amen' at the end of DN 940A is one of them, and we find another in one of the rare self-references of the author in the entire CD: "Therefore when talking of that peace which transcends all things, let it be spoken of as ineffable and unknowable. But to the extent that it is feasible for men and *for me, the inferior of many good men*, let us examine its conceptual and spoken participations" (DN 949B; my italics).

[46] Or not so exclusively, it may appear at first, since from DN 953B onward, a parenthesis about the sense of X-itself constructions, as 'peace in itself,' 'being itself,' 'divinity itself,' concludes the chapter. This, however, is an addendum or a digression from the original scope of the chapter (as Dionysius himself admits when introducing the problem with a rhetorical 'by the way, since you once asked me about . . .'). It is rather to be taken as a welcome recapitulation of the Names presented in preceding chapters, such as Being, Life, Goodness, Beauty, and the like. At least, such an anamnetic retrospective and short review under a certain perspective of the theonyms named so far would be completely congruent with the thesis that peace concludes a whole set of theonyms and leads over to a new one. Von Balthasar, too, thinks of such an anamnetic resumption of motifs. I believe that he is right in his observation that this conclusion of chapter 11 returns to a question briefly raised and discussed in chapter 5, namely that of the partaking of ontic reality in the ontological source. This would link the first chapter of the levelling and the co-ordination of beings to the last chapter of the accomplished system of levelled and interrelated beings in chapter 11 by addressing the doctrine of participation on both occasions.

In accordance with this method, the reader is presented in this segment with meditations about 'Peace,' which represent a comparatively concise review of the outcome of the steadied procession, the supporting elements, decisive motifs, and key topics of the set of Names that this theonym recapitulates. The chapter on Peace is a key-chapter for the understanding of the treatise.

'Peace' is praised primarily as bringing "all things together. This is what unites everything, begetting and producing the harmonies and the agreement of all things" (DN 948D). As such, peace is the outcome of justice (a phenomenon paralleling experiences of our social reality), and this is coupled with the idea of the just balance of things syntonised to their best and to the best of the whole in the creational system as shown above. Peace is thereby introduced as the inner agreement of all beings, as the internalised correlative of the balanced orderliness that the theonym 'Justice' describes as the manifest ontological system of sytonised entities.

Unlike earthly peace, which for the most part is an external phenomenon, this Peace is rooted in God's absolute Power to convene into a 'total unity' even that which seems hopelessly divided. God as Peace is the same God Who at the beginning of the treatise is characterised as the "unity which unites all unity" (DN 588B). This should help to clarify that peace is not only a 'horizontal' concord of things of the same ontological rank (the negation of 'civil war,' as Dionysius defines this specific acceptation of the word), but a 'vertical' agreement of beings on different levels of the ontological scale, rousing a seminal yearning for reconcilement with the realities above. It converges ultimately in God as 'Peace' and must be understood as the final agreement of all. In *De civitate Dei* XIX 17, Augustine similarly describes peace as the "most orderly and most concordant society of fruition of God and itself in God" and defines earthly peace as true and well accomplished peace only if "referring to celestial peace."[47]

[47] Cf. the end of chapter 17 in book XIX of *De civitate Dei*: "Even the heavenly city, therefore, while in its state of pilgrimage, avails itself of the peace of earth, and, so far as it can without injuring faith and godliness, desires and maintains a common agreement among men regarding the acquisition of the necessaries of life, and makes this earthly peace bear upon the peace of heaven; for this alone can be truly called and esteemed the peace of the reasonable creatures, consisting as it does in the perfectly ordered and harmonious enjoyment of God and of one another in God. When we shall have reached that peace, this mortal life shall give place to one that is eternal, and our body shall be no more this animal body which by its

The pattern is again threefold. Peace is agreement with oneself (reflexively), with others (horizontally), and ultimately with the 'Peace beyond peace' (vertically). This thought is found in almost the same wording, once again, in Augustine (*De civitate Dei* XIX 14[48]), who gives the famous Scriptural basis for it: Mt 22:35ff., which, according to the Church Father's development of the threefold peace-concept, secures the foundations of peace on the precept of loving God, one's neighbour, and oneself. In Dionysius, there is the same linkage of the horizontal with the vertical concept of peace, one pivoting on the inner experience of intellectual beings as interrelated to others of the same rank, yet manifesting an ascending scale of lower and higher ranks within themselves. In his commentary on DN, Aquinas makes this same observation on the 'peace of things;' the *pax rerum* displays a 'triple union,' he says (c.xi, l.1, 888), where creatures live in peace with themselves (*ad seipsas*), with one another (*ad aliam*), and with the sole principle of peace (*ad unum principium pacis*), which is God (*idest ad Deum*).

Typical for Dionysius, the ontology expounded in the Peace-theonym can only be understood as the dimmed radiance of the First Cause whose pure light attracts all things toward it ('dimmed,' it should be noted with regard to the state of our mind and of our conceptual capacities, not with regard to the light that shines; God's activity or extroversion is, in itself, always 'undiluted,' as Dionysius hastens to add). In the Areopagite's words:

> All things therefore long for it, and the manifold and the divided are returned by it into a total unity; every civil war is changed into a unified household. Sharing in the divine peace, the higher gathering powers are drawn to themselves, to each other, and to unity and are at one with the source of peace in all the world. The ranks below them are united to themselves, to one another, and to the one perfect source and Cause of universal peace (DN 948D-949A).[49]

corruption weighs down the soul, but a spiritual body feeling no want, and in all its members subjected to the will. In its pilgrim state the heavenly city possesses this peace by faith; and by this faith it lives righteously when it refers to the attainment of that peace every good action towards God and man; for the life of the city is a social life."

[48] "But as this divine Master inculcates two precepts — the love of God and the love of our neighbour — and as in these precepts a man finds three things he has to love — God, himself, and his neighbour — and that he who loves God loves himself thereby, it follows that he must endeavour to get his neighbour to love God, since he is ordered to love his neighbour as himself."

[49] Διὸ καὶ πάντα αὐτῆς ἐφίεται τὸ μεριστὸν αὐτῶν πλῆθος ἐπιστρεφούσης εἰς τὴν ὅλην ἑνότητα καὶ τὸν ἐμφύλιον τοῦ παντὸς πόλεμον ἑνούσης εἰς ὁμοειδῆ

In this threefold relation where peace is brought forth and experienced, God as Peace is disclosed as the principle of order and the definition of all beings. There is hardly a denomination other than peace that more accurately shows how the procession of being is 'pacified' (an intended *figura etymologica*), that is, how it is brought to a 'halt' and how it abides in itself, and how this 'halt' is channelled into a co-ordinated 'irenic' system. The profound relationship of 'horizontal' steadying or 'halt' on one side and 'vertical' procession on the other is displayed by peace as sustaining existence; every contingent being owes itself ontologically to peace because it co-ordinates every being's vital relation to others and to the Other. The inner ontological sense of the 'standstill' and abiding of the flux is repeated here in terms of peace, namely as bringing all things to their definition in order to make them feel at home in their own nature (understood as a thing's 'essential parameters') as well as in the grand overall system of nature. It thus detains the spreading and all-comprising flux from deliquescing into the undefined and nondescript — into the "bottomless sea of the indefinite," as Plato's *Politicus* 273de describes it. The notion of God acting as the 'definer' (ὁριστής) of things ('being Himself of His own nature indefinite'), is common to all Platonists from the earliest times onward (cf. *Enn.* V.1[10].5,8).

In Dionysius' closing assessment of his ontological construction, it is peace (being incessantly at work in reality) as partaking in Peace (its highest Cause) that brings everything together and founds it on secure and well disposed ontological grounds:

> This Cause reaches out in its unsundered unity to everything, nailing down, as it were, the severed parts, giving to all things their definitions, their limits, and their guarantee, allowing nothing to be pulled apart or scattered in some endlessly disordered chaos away from God's presence, away from their own unity and in some total jumbled confusion (DN 949A).

This peaceful unity of all entities attains the reconcilement of opposites without denying or destroying them. In reassuring the reader of this reconcilement, Dionysius returns to the difficult chapter of the Parmenidean antonyms, which his system subsumed through (or under)

συνοικίαν. Τῇ μετοχῇ τῆς θείας εἰρήνης αἱ γοῦν πρεσβύτεραι τῶν συν αγωγῶν δυνάμεων αὐταί τε πρὸς ἑαυτὰς καὶ πρὸς ἀλλήλας ἑνοῦνται καὶ πρὸς τὴν μίαν τῶν ὅλων εἰρηναρχίαν καὶ τὰ ὑφ᾽ ἑαυτὰς ἑνοῦσιν αὐτά τε πρὸς ἑαυτὰ καὶ πρὸς ἄλληλα καὶ πρὸς τὴν μίαν καὶ παντελῆ τῆς πάντων εἰρήνης ἀρχὴν καὶ αἰτίαν.

God's reconciling Power.[50] It is especially in this paragraph that Dionysius' intention to clarify an extant ontological arrangement and order is rendered manifest, an intention that, without excluding the eschatology of a final and aspectlessly total *coincidentia*, limits itself to the discussion of what the Divine Names tell us about the translucency of the beyond in the world. It can therefore licitly be regarded as a profound ontological statement:

> God is the subsistence of absolute peace, of peace in general, and of instances of peace. He brings everything together into a unity without confusion, into an undivided communion where each thing continues to exhibit its own perfect specific form and is in no way adulterated through association with its opposite, nor is anything of the unifying precision and purity dulled. Let us therefore contemplate the one simple nature of that peaceful unity which joins all things to itself and to each other, preserving them in their distinctiveness and yet linking them together in a universal and unconfused alliance (DN 949C).

As in all the other Divine Names that Dionysius expounds, there is a dialectic of oneness and threeness subjacent to the application of Peace in the ontological system. One simple nature of peace shining through from the supra-categorical beyond ensures the thorough metaphysical unity of the term that we use and apply to our worldly experience within this ontological system. In contrast, although peace is operant and experienced in three categories, these three categories function as one unit. It is precisely this oneness that guarantees the ordered arrangement of even the most divergent things (which evokes the A-and-Ω-scheme presented in chapter 10 as the binding together of the most distant ends in terms of 'chronological' antonyms):

> Hence there is one unshakable bond in all things, a divine harmony, a perfect concord, a oneness of mind and disposition, an alliance in which nothing is confused and all things are held inseparably together (δι' ἣν ἡ μία καὶ ἀδιάλυτος πάντων συμπλοκὴ κατὰ τὴν θείαν αὐτῆς ἁρμονίαν ὑφίσταται καὶ ἐναρμόζεται συμφωνίᾳ παντελεῖ καὶ ὁμονοίᾳ καὶ συμφυίᾳ συναγομένη τε ἀσυγχύτως, ἀδιαιρέτως τε συνεχομένη). Perfect Peace ranges totally through all things with the simple undiluted presence of its unifying power. It unites all things, joining the farthest frontiers with what is in between, binding all with the one homogeneous yoke. It grants the enjoyment of its presence

[50] For the Platonists' fascination with the exercise of the Parmenidean antonyms as presented by Plato in the dialogue *Parmenides* and for the 'standard solution' of the problem in the Neoplatonic tradition, cf. Cürsgen 2002a, 500ff.

> to the outermost reaches of the universe. It grants unity, identity, union, communion, and mutual attraction to things, thereby ensuring their kinship (DN 949D-952A).

Dionysius has one great project in this chapter on Peace: to leave and to confirm everything in its own right while yoking it together with all other things. He resolves the problem as if it were an anticipated discussion of the definition of individuality, which the scholastic tradition defines somewhat pun-like as *indivisum in se et divisum ab aliis*, as undivided in itself yet discerned from others. The one unfolding Peace in Dionysius' system is similarly manifest in the experience of identicalness in co-ordination with diverseness. As peace with oneself and with the other(s), the dialectic of oneness and otherness makes the one intimately dependant upon the other. In this, Peace explains the "interplay between sameness and difference in the configuration of being" to which chapter 9 alludes in the Names of 'Identicalness' and 'Otherness.'[51] It is an old thought, taken from Plato's *Sophist*, that "every sameness is a difference and vice versa: each thing, in being the same as itself, is different from all others." For the Platonists, "the One, therefore, establishes being not only by unifying it but equally by differentiating it, and is the source of being because it is the principle of difference no less than of identity" (all quotes from Perl 1997, 301). The explanation for this rests in the arrangement of everything according to its nature, which gives everything its firm place and sense within the entirety of nature:

> 'How is it that everything wishes for peace?' someone may ask. 'There are many things which take pleasure in being other, different, and distinct, and they would never freely choose to be at rest.' This is true, assuming that what is meant here is that being other and being different refer to the individuality of each thing and to the fact that nothing tries to lose its individuality. Yet, as I will try to show, this situation is itself due to the desire for peace. For everything loves to be at peace with itself, to be at one, and never to move or fall away from its own existence and from what it has. And perfect peace is there as a gift, guarding without confusion the individuality of each, providentially ensuring that all things are quiet and free of confusion within

[51] Perl 2003, 544 expresses a very similar thought using the theonyms 'Different' (DN, chapter 9) and 'Love' (DN, chapter 4): "Since God is not any determinate, self-contained being, but the creative differentiation of all things, his being 'in himself' consists in being 'out of himself' and 'in all things' as their constitutive determinations. Like the name 'Different', the name 'Love' describes God as the distribution which establishes all things."

> themselves and from without, that all things are unshakably what they are and that they have peace and rest (DN 952BC).[52]

There is one more question that I should like to address in this context. I said earlier that peace was quite an accurate, if not fortunate, denomination for naming and describing the ontological abiding. One might ask why this is so. Plotinus, for one, almost never mentions 'peace' in his ontology, and there seems to be only one occurrence of the word in his entire oeuvre. Why should 'harmony,' 'accord,' or 'concordance' which Plotinus and other Neoplatonists use for describing the ontological 'stability' be less appropriate?[53]

It is true that 'peace' appears to be a Christian innovation introduced to Greek ontology. This Christian origin might also explain the preference given to peace over other rivalling concepts in Dionysius[54] because it has deep roots in Christian doctrine. 'Harmony' or 'compliance' and other such concepts might well express the homeostatic, mechanical or organic functioning and undisturbed balance of many or all the parts of the whole, but such a 'functional' harmony becomes relatively overshadowed by peace and its further reaching implications which surpass the concept of mere 'harmony.' I shall give an example. The harmony of nature is the balanced order of the frog killing the fly, the bird killing the frog, the fox killing the bird, etc. Some animals

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[52] Πῶς δέ, φαίη τις, ἐφίεται πάντα εἰρήνης; Πολλὰ γὰρ ἑτερότητι καὶ διακρίσει χαίρει καὶ οὐκ ἄν ποτε ἑκόντα ἠρεμεῖν ἐθελήσοι. Καὶ εἰ μὲν ἑτερότητα καὶ διάκρισιν ὁ ταῦτα λέγων φησὶ τὴν ἑκάστου τῶν ὄντων ἰδιότητα καὶ ὅτι ταύτην οὐδὲ ἓν τῶν ὄντων ὄν, ὅπερ ἔστιν, ἐθέλει ποτὲ ἀπολλύειν, οὐκ ἂν οὐδὲ ἡμεῖς πρὸς τοῦτο ἀντιφήσομεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ταύτην εἰρήνης ἔφεσιν ἀποφανούμεθα. Πάντα γὰρ ἀγαπᾷ πρὸς ἑαυτὰ εἰρηνεύειν τε καὶ ἡνῶσθαι καὶ ἑαυτῶν καὶ τῶν ἑαυτῶν ἀκίνητα καὶ ἄπτωτα εἶναι. Καὶ ἔστι καὶ τῆς καθ᾽ ἕκαστον ἀμιγοῦς ἰδιότητος ἡ παντελὴς εἰρήνη φυλακτικὴ ταῖς εἰρηνοδώροις αὑτῆς προνοίαις τὰ πάντα ἀστασίαστα καὶ ἀσύμφυρτα πρός τε ἑαυτὰ καὶ πρὸς ἄλληλα διασώζουσα καὶ πάντα ἐν σταθερᾷ καὶ ἀκλίτῳ δυνάμει πρὸς τὴν ἑαυτῶν εἰρήνην καὶ ἀκινησίαν ἱστῶσα.

[53] Proclus has different occurrences of 'peace' and cognates, but almost exclusively in the political sense and mostly in his commentary on the *Republic* of Plato. However, Lilla 2002, 28 and note 93 on 86, insists that Dionysius looks back on a long tradition of Platonic discussions of peace as a metaphysical concept, and adduces Plotinus' *Enn.* I.2[19].1 and Proclus' *Platonic Theology* (I.3) as examples. Norden 1924, 51-55 gives examples of religious texts on peace in the 'graeco-aegyptian' tradition which might have influenced both Platonic and Christian philosophy.

[54] Few interpreters have noted this peculiarity and innovation of Christian Platonism. One of the few is Ball 1958, 90: "der Friede als Maßstab der geistigen Welt, die Versöhnung als göttlicher Ruf, diese Gedanken sind christlich, und niemand hat sie vor oder auch nach ihm mit gleicher Bewußtheit zum Mittelpunkt seines Systems erhoben. Urfriede heißt hier das Ziel aller Wesen, der himmlischen wie der irdischen."

run swiftly away from their predators while others hide, which leaves the old and weak to be killed and the young and strong to live on for awhile, etc. This fits the concept of harmony, no doubt, but grand as biological nature's harmony is, it is a harmony of fear, venom, feints, brutish forces, breeding, killing, and supra-individual justice that considerably subdues the existence of the individual. This is in stark contrast to the grand exposé of God's peace, as described in the Bible (as, for example, by the prophet Isaiah 11:6ff.): "[T]he wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them." In this Biblical perspective, too, Peace is the earning of Justice (cf. Isaiah 11:5). One might object that it is entirely utopian. The Christian philosophers would likely reply that the divine paragon shows what peace can be in superceding harmony. The idea of everything attaining its undisturbed proper nature, of an overall justice established by giving every individual its due, of a final cause for all yearnings as depending on the eternal paragon of coexistence is best expressed with 'peace,' which (by the way) is even palpable to a certain extent in Dionysius' style of writing and arguing. His style, in fact, is utterly irenic and noticeably conciliatory, and it abstains from any quarrel or dispute. Whenever Dionysius feels compelled to contradict 'senseless lies' (as in DN 736B), his upbraids seem born out of fervour rather than zeal, indignation, or rage. The entire CD is marked by a noteworthy absence of any mention by name or quotation of rivals, objectors, or adversaries to Dionysius' own standpoint.[55]

In order to remind the reader once more of the participational structure of the relation of peace with Peace, Dionysius appeals in the same chapter to the alleged doctrine of the 'sacred Justus,' who gives an authoritative account of the connection between the conceptually nameable 'peace' with the ineffably more eminent hypernym 'Peace.' It is, at the same time, a noteworthy application of God's μονή within Himself as a pattern for the ontological μονή of things created, which reveals, as if in passing, the synonymity of peace with the μονή:

> Now the sacred Justus gives to that quality of divine peace and tranquillity the name of 'ineffable' and 'unmoving', in terms of any known procession. The name is given to the way in which God is still and tranquil, keeping to himself and with himself in an absolutely tran-

[55] On this peculiarity of Dionysius' argumentation, cf. Suchla 2002, 89f., who adduces further material from the epistles of the CD.

> scendent unity of self, turning in upon himself and multiplying himself without ever leaving his own unity, superabundantly one as he goes forth to all things while yet remaining within himself. With regard to such matters, what right has any creature to devise words or conceptions? How could he possibly do so? Therefore when talking of that peace which transcends all things, let it be spoken of as ineffable and unknowable. But to the extent that it is feasible for men and for me, the inferior of many good men, let us examine its conceptual spoken participations (DN 949AB).[56]

It is easy to understand how the entire ontological process of procession and abiding is depicted here as stemming from God, constituting itself in its own right and yet always remaining within God. A vivid recapitulation of the entire system and philosophical vein, it confers a certain dignity and value to the discussion of peace and presents it as a crucial point of Dionysius' philosophical endeavours.

Incidentally, the otherwise unknown 'sacred Justus' is probably one of the persons mentioned in Acts 1:23 and 18:7, and Col 4:11 ('Justus' being a commonly adopted surname of Jewish proselytes at the time), but nothing there hints at his being the champion of any peace doctrine, let alone the one presented in DN. Why is he adduced and quoted here? I think that this might be a rhetorical device due to the conspicuous Latin signification of his name, 'the just one.' Since peace is the work of justice, the just one is playfully introduced as a qualified teacher of matters of peace in order to explain its intimate mysteries.

The peace chapter, moreover, serves as a link between the 'halt'-stage of the ontology and the third step of the epistrophic return to the One that concludes the entire treatise. Dionysius explains this return upward to God as the vertically transacted experience of 'horizontal' peace that every being in the cosmos perceives in its purest state as caused from above. The come-back movement of creatures to their Cause is therefore consistent with the movement that bestows peace on creatures themselves and within themselves:

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[56] Περὶ μὲν οὖν αὐτῆς, ὅ τι ποτέ ἐστι, τῆς θείας εἰρήνης καὶ ἡσυχίας, ἣν ὁ ἱερὸς Ἰοῦστος ἀφθεγξίαν καλεῖ καὶ ἐπὶ πᾶσαν γιγνωσκομένην πρόοδον ἀκινησίαν, ὅπως τε ἠρεμεῖ καὶ ἡσυχίαν ἄγει καὶ ὅπως ἐν ἑαυτῇ καὶ εἴσω ἑαυτῆς ἔστι καὶ πρὸς ἑαυτὴν ὅλην ὅλη ὑπερήνωται καὶ οὔτε εἰς ἑαυτὴν εἰσιοῦσα καὶ πολλαπλασιάζουσα ἑαυτὴν ἀπολείπει τὴν ἑαυτῆς ἕνωσιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ πρόεισιν ἐπὶ πάντα ἔνδον ὅλη μένουσα δι᾽ ὑπερβολὴν τῆς πάντα ὑπερεχούσης ἑνώσεως, οὔτε εἰπεῖν οὔτε ἐννοῆσαί τινι τῶν ὄντων οὔτε θεμιτὸν οὔτε ἐφικτόν. Ἀλλ᾽ ὡς ἄφθεγκτον καὶ τοῦτο καὶ ἄγνωστον ἐπ᾽ αὐτὴν ἀναθέντες ὡς πάντων οὖσαν ἐπέκεινα τὰς νοητὰς αὐτῆς καὶ ῥητὰς μετουσίας καὶ τοῦτο ὡς δυνατὸν ἀνδράσι καὶ ἡμῖν πολλῶν ἀνδρῶν ἀγαθῶν ἀπολειπομένοις ἐπισκοπήσωμεν.

> If all moving things wish never to be at rest but aim always for their own appropriate movement, this too is because of a wish for that divine Peace of the universe which keeps everything firmly in its own place and which ensures that the individuality and the stirring life of all moving things are kept safe from removal and destruction. This happens as a result of the inward peace which causes the things in movement to engage in the activity proper to themselves (DN 952CD).

Once again, Thomas Aquinas' commentary on DN has a similar view of the problem. In order to grasp the meaning or notion of peace, the *ratio pacis*, in Dionysius, one must consider two aspects. Using the example of peaceful communities, the first aspect concerns the united order of such communities that gives them an inner structure (as with the order which the 'abiding' establishes ontologically), and the second involves their ordering in such a way as to achieve one common goal (an ἐπιστροφή and τελείωσις, on the ontological level) which rules them and gives ultimate sense to the order within: *In DN* c.xi, l.1, 885.

In light of the evidence, it therefore seems plausible that a third triad in the theonyms of DN is opened by the introduction of Peace as translating the horizontal congruence of all beings into a vertical yearning. That third triad could be identified as consisting of 'Peace' (chapter 11), 'Perfect(ion),' and the 'One' (final chapter 13). There are no obvious formal precursors to this triad, to my knowledge, in Platonic thought or Patristic theology. It is tempting, though, to confer a triadic arrangement to the third 'phase' of the ontological system, the ascent and reunification with God. Peace, in this interpretation, would supply the basis of the turning-point that transforms the togetherness of all beings into an initial longing for absolute togetherness.[57] This longing is perfected in the ascent for which the *teleion* stands in chapter 13, and it is brought to its absolute end in the total reconciliation and unification with the One, whose praise concludes the entire treatise. The Names of chapter 12 with their one-of-many structure ('Lord of lords,' 'Holy of holies') would then serve as a methodical description of the way to God, showing a clear tendency of reducing the multiplicity of beings to one reality which sustains all diversity.[58] Just as Wisdom links together the first triad of the procession with the

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[57] The interrelation of the appropriate 'own nature' of each being and its epistrophic return to God is also addressed by Perl, 2003, 543: "The characteristic activity of each being, its enactment of its own nature, and hence its very existence, is its reversion to God in its proper mode."

[58] Much better than I can, Sheldon-Williams sums up this relation of Oneness to diverseness as follows: "[T]he ultimate nature is unnameable, and is called One

second triad of the ontological 'halt,' pertaining to each of both sets of triadic Names, Peace would then link the triad of the ontological 'halt' and a concluding triad dedicated to the epistrophic return. As I have no evidence of a similar pattern of an epistrophic triad for the ascent in the history of theology or philosophy, I shall posit this last triad as a mere working hypothesis that gains its sense and persuasiveness (if it should have any) from the plausibility of this suggested ontological reading of DN. There will be opportunity enough to put this reading and the propositions drawn from it to the test in the following paragraphs. Explicitly or implicitly, the question of a triadic epistrophical structure in DN will be reassessed in connection with the treatment of the two final chapters of the treatise, and in the final question of the validity and the explanatory status of a predominantly ontological reading of DN or, at least, of a principally philosophical approach to the writing. It can also supply the basis for a sound interpretation of the mystical ascent and ultimate union as treated in MT, but this is beyond the reach and the scope of this book.[59]

4. *Chapters 12 and 13:* e pluribus unum

This so-called ἐπιστροφή, the reversion and subsequent ascension of all Creation towards its first and only cause, also depicted by the Platonists as the homecoming (νόστος)[60] of everything to God, has thus been prepared beforehand by the author of DN. Salvation, Redemption, and Peace are only the most obvious theonyms that allude to this final 'apokatastasis.'[61] It is important to keep in mind that Peace is a two-fold concept. Just as Power and Justice are connected with the

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only because throughout its manifold manifestations it retains its unity (for it is immutable), and can only be envisaged by us as the unity which comprehends and co-ordinates the many, both vertically in the hierarchy of values and horizontally within each order, by the bond of Love" (Sheldon-Williams 1966, 114). A reliable and very instructive source for the presentation of 'Peace' as substantial for the epistrophic uplifting is de Andia 1996, 183ff.

[59] I remit the reader to the corresponding remarks about 'The Way of the Mystic' in §3, pages 44-50.

[60] The return home is a metaphor used, for example, by Plotinus in *Enn.* I.6[1].8,16. It turns up frequently in other Platonic writings, too. A more thorough consideration on the motif of homecoming in the Neoplatonists can be found in Anton 1996, 13f.

[61] 'Apokatastasis' as a theological doctrine is a dogmatic problem. Richard Rohr offers a concise definition: "[T]here were a number of fathers in the early church

set of top-down 'processional' theonyms by the discussion of 'Wisdom,' Peace functions as a link between the 'abiding' of the procession and its reversion, for Peace does not only mean the equilibrium and harmony of things among each other, "nailing down, as it were, the severed parts, giving to all things their definition, their limits, and their guarantee" (DN 949A); it also remits to the form of peace that every creature has to have with God in order to obtain its appropriate ontological placement (DN 949A: "sharing in the divine peace", etc.). The Peace chapter makes quite obvious what must follow this: the absorption and reunification of the processionally severed beings within God's unity. God understood as ontological Peace

> is what unites everything, begetting and producing the harmonies and the agreement of all things. All things therefore long for it, and the manifold and the divided are returned by it to a total unity (DN 948D).

The experience of the worldly, finite unity of beings with one another awakens a yearning for an ultimate and final unity which even desires to bridge the ultimate difference between Creator and Creation and to dissolve in the Oneness of God, just as man's contingent ways of experiencing justice and peace make him long for an everlasting and absolute Justice or Peace, both of which can only be found in God (according to Dionysius). "You stir man to take pleasure in praising You, because You have made us for Yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in You," says Augustine in his famous invocation of God in the *Confessions* (I 1,1).

In order to describe this reunification with(in) the One, Dionysius chooses a two-step explanation and dedicates one chapter to each step. These chapters are rather concise and conspicuously short in comparison to the preceding chapters, due, most probably, to the fact that Dionysius devotes an entire treatise to the 'return,' the ἐπιστροφή, and the final reunion with God, namely, the *Mystical Theology* (MT). There is, at least, a notable cadence in the composition of DN. The procession chapters are given most of the space, chapter 4 being the longest

(the first four centuries) who believed in apocatastasis, which means universal restoration (Acts 3:21). They believed that the real meaning of the resurrection of Christ was that God's love was so perfect and so victorious that in fact it would finally win out in every single person's life" (Rohr 1999). Rohr duly points out the Scriptural origin of this concept. Problems seem to arise, however, when the restoration is too universal to allow for Judgement and definitive damnation, as with Satan, for example. Still, it seems to be true that Dionysius defends the idea of *everything* reverting to God and being finally restored in God: cf. DN 948D, 949A, among others.

one, roughly one third of the treatise,[62] whereas the 'halt'-chapters, though shorter, contain the vast majority of Names. Then follow the two short chapters on the epistrophic return. This might also be due to the caution that Dionysius exerts in chapter 3 of DN when he speaks about the unattainable ineffable, at whose realm these chapters aim.

The first step or 'grade' of unification is described in chapter 12 as a collection or assemblage of all positive powers in order to revert everything toward its positive sole Cause, having God as Creation's last and lasting 'common denominator.' Plotinus, too, calls God — obviously with a similar intention — the 'concentration' of 'all multiplicity' (*Enn.* V.3[49].14f.). Dionysius illustrates this coming-to-one by an all-in-one or multiplicity-in-one set of Names, presenting God as the 'Holy of holies,' the 'King of kings,' the 'Lord of lords,' and finally, but perhaps most importantly, the 'God of gods.'[63] That Dionysius is definitely thinking of such a one-in-all-scheme when using these singular-of-plural-constructions can be deduced precisely from the concluding theonym of the series, 'God of gods,' which is qualified by Dionysius himself as a pun that subsumes θέα, 'seeing' or 'envisaging,' under θεός, 'God,' claiming that the Divinity (θεότης) sees and providentially envisages all things synoptically (πάντα θεομένη) and surrounds everything (πάντα περιέουσα): DN 969C. The multiplicity of 'gods' and 'lords' that pales in the unifying light of the one God and Lord, Who is origin and end to all beings, could have been identified by Dionysius as a Pauline motif as well, as the reduction of many ontic beings to the One in Paul's 1 Cor 8:5f. shows: "indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or earth — as in fact there are many gods and many lords — yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist." The image of the 'paling' of the many in the unifying light of the One, Who is origin and end to all beings and of the world-building Logos that contains

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[62] Once more, cf. Suchla 1988, 13 on the different lengths of the chapters and of the different discussions of the Names as compared to each other.

[63] This seems to be the structural sense of these conceptual constructions. Grammatically seen, they are superlative-forms of the 'Hebrew type' found in the Bible (even in its Greek books), as Suchla 1988, 17 points out ("Superlative des Hebräischen Typs"); cf. the well-known examples of 'Book of books' or the 'Song of songs'. A thorough study of these paronomastically intensified genitive forms can be found in Schäfer 1974. The pagan philosophical tradition might have influenced or supported the choice of this grammatical structure for Dionysius' purposes. One might think of Heraclitus' ἐκ πάντων ἕν καὶ ἐξ ἑνὸς πάντα: "one out of all and all out of one" (DK 22 B10).

everything within itself is nicely expressed in a poem that Jorge Luis Borges claims to have found in Chesterton: "As all stars shrivel in the single sun, // The words are many, but The Word is one." Or rather, as the last line of the poem says: "The words are many, but the word is One."[64]

Moreover, the 'God of gods' theonym points to the θέωσις, the 'divinisation' at the end of the epistrophic ascent. It is also the most momentous point where the systematic and existential claims of Dionysian philosophy, metaphysics and ethics converge and present each other as one and the same. This final 'divinisation' is described once and again by Dionysius as a 'simplification' (ἅπλωσις),[65] and this seems to be exactly the sense of the multiplicity-in-one scheme of the Names expounded in chapter 12. Within this all-in-one reversion of everything to the one and only Cause, an eschatological perspective (which might be already hinted at in an awkward 'Plotinian' application of the term 'God of gods')[66] is opened by introducing the Name 'King who rules for all eternity, to the very end of eternity and beyond' in DN 969A. This outlook on eternity is, of course, a reminder of the A-and-Ω-scheme of chapter 10 that is thus reconciled with and fitted into the all-in-one-scheme of chapter 12. All this displays a well-designed form of the chapter and its intentions, and must be considered far more than just a 'biblical potpourri' of Names.[67] This is also the point where another Dionysian treatise sets in. At its very beginning Dionysius speaks of our return "back to the oneness and deifying simplicity of the Father who gathers us in" (CH 120B) and makes this the starting-point of his explanation of the upward-leading celestial hierarchies.

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[64] Borges 1974, 231. I could not find the quote in Chesterton's works, however.

[65] The θέωσις looks back on a long tradition stemming from Plato (*Theaetetus* 176b). For the 'divinisation'-problem, cf. Rorem 1993, 166, Lilla 2002, note 25 on 49, and Suchla 1988, note 66 on 112, who also quotes parallels from CH and EH; the ἅπλωσις is treated more thoroughly by Kélessidou 1995, 35, who sees it (correctly, I think) as a necessary first step of the θέωσις or as its methodological pattern. Kélessidou has some eye-opening remarks on the ἅπλωσις-motif in Plotinus, too.

[66] In Plotinus, there is a strong motif of 'divinisation' in the epistrophic ascent, which is also made visible by a change in the vocabulary. As J.M. Rist remarks in his interpretation of *Ennead* VI.9.8,8f.: "[T]he souls become θεοί in virtue of a movement towards the One, for all that is joined with the One is θεός." The word 'god' in this Plotinian context (as in Ancient philosophy altogether) tends to have a 'predicative meaning;' everything on its way to God is itself divine. If and only if this notion still survives in Dionysius, via Proclus or anyone else, the 'God of gods' theonym clearly indicates the beginning of the θέωσις in the ascent by its choice of words. Cf. Rist 1962, 169.

[67] Rorem 1993, 164.

The second and conclusive step of Dionysius' description of the return of everything to God is displayed in chapter 13 of DN. An ultimate aim or goal, a τέλος, is given for all Creation by naming God 'the Perfect,' τελείον. Τέλος of course, is the outer aim or goal that one wants to achieve as well as the inner completion or realisation of a thing or action, its 'destination.' As chapter 12 shows, this aim or goal to which everything tends and which everything contemplates within its own nature can only be one, or rather the One, namely God, Who "is uniquely all things through the transcendence of one unity and [Who] is the cause of all without ever departing from that oneness" (DN 977C). In the eschatological perspective it becomes clear how everything is created, stands its test, and finally reconciles itself with God by 'receiving' its being, 'abiding' in itself, and 'turning back' to God. It remains to be seen in one of the subsequent paragraphs of this book (§§ 7 and 8) how the self-identifying 'halt' is conceived as an ultimate ontological test to all Creation, and this is why the problem of evil is given so much attention at the end of the procession chapters. The ontological abiding on different, well defined steps is the test to which everything is put, and only that which fails this test by confining itself to its corresponding ontological step and due definition, slips into the realm of evil, which is negatively 'beyond being' or 'beneath being' (ἔξω τῶν ὄντων).

This homecoming-movement of all is and has to be a 'realised return' (to use an economical pun). The gain is completely for the created beings, it should be added, since God Himself cannot be perfected or completed. His Creation does not 'benefit' Him in any way. He proceeds for the sake of His great love for Creation (as DN 708B and 712AB emphasise[68]) and due to this Love wishes that all creatures' return may be a 'realised' one.[69]

[68] "The divine longing is Good seeking good for the sake of the Good. That yearning which creates all the goodness of the world preexisted superabundantly within the Good and did not allow it to remain without issue. It stirred him to use the abundance of his powers in the production of the world (αὐτὸς γὰρ ὁ ἀγαθοεργὸς τῶν ὄντων ἔρως ἐν τἀγαθῷ καθ' ὑπερβολὴν προϋπάρχων οὐκ εἴασεν αὐτὸν ἄγονον ἐν ἑαυτῷ μένειν, ἐκίνησε δὲ αὐτὸν εἰς τὸ πρακτικεύεσθαι κατὰ τὴν ἁπάντων γενητικὴν ὑπερβολήν)" (DN 708B); "[a]nd, in truth, it must be said too that the very cause of the universe in the beautiful, good superabundance of his benign yearning for all is so carried outside of himself in the loving care he has for everything. He is, as it were, beguilded by goodness, by love, and by yearning and is enticed away from his transcendent dwelling place and comes to abide within all things, and he does so by virtue of his supernatural and ecstatic capacity to remain, nevertheless, within himself" (DN 712AB).

[69] Also Perl 2003, 544 sees an intrinsic correspondence between the epistrophic

It is for this reason that the entire treatise ends with a hymn to the One, the same theonym with which it started in the first chapter, just as if the treatise took the same path that all creatures must take according to Dionysius' ontology and returned enriched by a detailed process to its origin, the One. The hymn reminds the reader of the futility of ever grasping God, though it acknowledges, without understanding, the mystery of Oneness and Threeness (which, according to Rorem 1993, 165f., requires a further step of acknowledging simultaneously His non-Oneness and non-Threeness). This final chapter is therefore the starting point for the mystical theology of the Areopagite, but that is another story.

a. *Subsumption*

To sum up the earnings of the preceding pages, in retrospect, chapters 1-3 offer much more than just an inaugurating methodology. They can be considered as a short prolepsis of the whole treatise, beginning with chapter 1 and its presentation of God as the One (Who is the sole Cause of all Creation and its sole destination or τέλος, which is learned with hindsight in the last chapter). Then, God is introduced as triune activity, though at the same time indivisible in substance. Chapter 2 takes the ontological turn to the great project of the theoeidetic explanation of reality by alluding first to God's unfolding in Creation and then to the unity that He maintains by His μονή. The prayer in chapter 3 abounds in 'epistrophic' images of return and uplifting to God, as in DN 680B: "we should be uplifted to Trinity," or "we invoke [God in prayer] with a suitability for union with God;" and in DN 680C: "let us stretch ourselves prayerfully upward," and "we are being lifted upward to the brilliance above," etc.

Although the imitation of the higher origin by the lesser levels is a recurrent theme in Dionysius,[70] some interpreters have had their doubts

longing of all beings, the theonym 'Love,' which Dionysius had introduced in chapter 4 of DN as a synonym of the processional theonym 'Good,' and the theonym 'Perfect(ion)' at the end of the treatise: "[T]his love of the creature or God, in virtue of which the creature is, is God's attracting it to himself as its perfection. The entire cycle of procession and reversion, involving God's self-distribution to the creature, the creature's emergence from God, the creature's movement towards God, and God's drawing the creature to himself, is participation, the relation of the creature to God as its constitutive determination. This cyclical metaphysical motion, which is the very being of all things, is what Dionysius describes as the 'whirling circle' of divine love."

[70] The most famous example is the imitation of the celestial hierarchies by the

about how the three introductory chapters of DN can be considered a prefiguration of the subsequent triadic ontology of Creation and what this might have to do with the world being "a unity reflecting God" (DN 589D). Yet, in Platonism, ever since the times of Plotinus, every generative power is regarded to have "a double activity, one in itself [ἐν ἑαυτῷ, i.e. the self-identifying activity] and one directed towards something else [εἰς ἄλλο, i.e. the passing on of being to another]" (*Enn.* II.9[33].8,21ff.). The dialectics of a double activity, ἐνέργεια, towards itself and towards what is brought forth, is a recurring thought in Platonic philosophy since Plotinus: every new ontological 'product' has to 'gather itself' at first, so as to constitute its own identity out of the ontological *fluxus* which brought it forth. It is only then that it can turn to its own ontologically generative activity. For in its self-identification, every reality recognises its origin, and in attaining awareness of its first Origin, it recognises itself as a lesser image of this Origin, of Its utter One-ness (in the act of turning to itself, in the ἐνέργεια ἐν ἑαυτῷ) as well as of Its perfect undiminished radiation of being (in turning its activity onto another, in its ἐνέργεια εἰς ἄλλο).[71] In *Enn.* II.4[12].5,32ff., too, Plotinus explicitly lingers over the question of how everything produced by the undifferentiated flow of being obtains its proper definition by reverting towards the O/one it (ultimately) comes from. This is how every ontological level produces an ontologically lesser 'alter ego,' an ἄλλο of itself (cf. *Enn.* V.2[11].1,9f.: αὐτοῦ πεποίηκεν ἄλλο). A similar thing happens *mutatis mutandis* in Dionysius, who, as a Christian philosopher, has to cut down the many generative levels of pagan Platonism in order to get at the unique relationship between the one Creator and His one Creation: God, in a first triadic movement, displays His ἐνέργεια ἐν ἑαυτῷ, and then, in the act of Creation, outpours His ἐνέργεια εἰς ἄλλο, which bears a certain, if remote, resemblance to its Creator. Hence there is a triadic structure of Creation in Dionysius' treatise.

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ecclesiastical hierarchies, which can be easily gathered from the comparison of the two treatises CH and EH. Cf. Lilla 2002, 24 and 25, where the recurrent theme of the imitation of the higher orders of being by the lower orders in Proclus and Clement of Alexandria is also discussed.

[71] O'Brien 1999 has examined this process of self-identification and reversion by interpreting several of the most cogent passages of Plotinus' works, such as *Enn.* V.1[10].7,4-6 and *Enn.* V.2[11].1,7-11. For a handy summary of this article, one sentence taken from the English abstract expresses it well: "The One or Intellect produces an undifferentiated other, which becomes Intellect or soul by itself turning towards and looking towards the prior principle, with no possibility of the One's 'turning towards' or 'seeing' itself."

Bearing all that in mind, the synoptical scheme of the arrangement of theonyms rendered on the next page, of their meaning and their mutual dependence on one another within the entire structure of DN can be inferred. The underlined Names constitute the triads which von Ivánka detects in the architecture of DN as well as the Names which are of capital importance within each chapter with more than one Name. 'Wisdom' and 'Peace' both bridge, as two-fold concepts, the gap between the several sets of Names, linking them together.

This is meant to present the overall outline of the general development and inner architecture of the treatise that the ontological reading of DN strongly advises. It could be repeated and adjusted to a parallel development of beginning (ἀρχή), middle (μέσον), and perfection (τελευτή) of the ontological movement of the cosmos and of each being within it (cf. above p. 60f. in §4).

The different classifications in themselves, as well as the various assignments of the theonyms to the different classifying stages of the development of DN's ontology are never exclusive or exact in detail, however. The clearly composed succession of the Names must not leave aside the mutual combination of their aspects. It rather provokes a mutual enrichment in anticipations, retrospections, and synoptic intensifications with regard to the coherence of the idea proposed. Elements of the 'halt' appear on the level of development classified as 'procession,' 'processional' elements show up in the presentation of the Names of ontological abiding, and epistrophic language can be found throughout the entire treatise at all levels. Sameness and otherness, though only found on the ontic level, are at the same time commemorative of God as being present in all things and yet entirely beyond them. The Peace of God could not be rightly understood if creaturely peace did not yearn for it because of its own positiveness and its shortcomings, whereas creaturely life itself would not be possible without the peace in Creation as a whole which prevents everything from falling apart and drifting into chaos. It could not be expected otherwise. As the complete triple development of Creation is prefigurated by the Divine dynamic (the 'theodramatic' pattern, in imitation of a term coined by von Balthasar), and as every single creature displays in itself the triple movement of all Creation, interpenetrations of the different levels of the ontological development within the different levels themselves are an essential constituent of Dionysius' programmatic depiction of reality, which is theo-ontological as well as onto-theological. It is both a doctrine of the completeness of the macrocosmos and

	Name(s)	functional arrangement	philosophical development
			0. METHOD AND PROLEPSIS
1	One	starting-point and *télos* (relates to final: ch. 13)	
2	Threefold and Triune	unfolding (relates to I) → I; and gathering (relates to II) → II	
3	[Prayer]	turn toward God (relates to III) → III	
4	Good, Light, Love, Beauty, Ecstasy, Zeal	Good (and its cognates) as synonym(s) for God's giving-away Himself — activity	I. PROCESSION (πρόοδος)
5	Being	ontological scale of Creation: existence, ← unfolding	
6	Life	sensation, intellect — cf. Plato, Augustine,	
7	Wisdom, Mind, Word, Truth, Faith	Proclus	
8	Power, Justice, Salvation, Redemption	isosthenic balance	II. ABIDING OR HALT OF PROCESSION (μονή)
9	Greatness/ Smallness Sameness/ Difference Similarity/ Dissimilarity Rest/Motion	isostheny of attributes/ implicates (cf. Plato's *Parmenides*)	
10	Omnipotent, Ancient of Days/New	isosthenic harmony of beginning and end, A and Ω	
11	Peace	peace as synonym of μονή	
12	Holy of holies, King of kings, Lord of lords, God of gods, King forever	all-in-one scheme eschatologically reconciles the all-in-one scheme with the A-and-Ω scheme	III. RETURN (ἐπιστροφή)
13	Perfect (τελείον), One	allusion to the ultimate τέλος ultimate τέλος of all, remits to ch. 1	

the microcosmos of Creation as well as of the existential yearning and incompleteness of created beings.

b. *Some Conclusions to Be Drawn from the Analysis*

If this interpretation of the structure of DN should prove accurate, the sequence of theonyms which the treatise offers is far from being an arbitrary accumulation (or 'merely' a theological discussion) of Names found in and extracted from Holy Scripture. Rather, DN displays the entire and structurally refined Dionysian ontology of egress, repose, and regression by way of carefully chosen Biblical Names that fit the purpose of presenting a thoroughgoing philosophical interpretation of reality without ever abandoning the theological intentions outlined in the first three chapters' propositions and methodology. Dionysius, therefore, succeeds in explaining our worldly reality within a markedly theological framework and methodological outset. It is by speaking about God's ineffable Goodness that Creation is understood. This understanding of the world is opened and made possible by the acknowledgement of the utter impossibleness of grasping God's essence and the introspectively illuminated existential claims of God's loving *quoad nos*, or 'concern-to-us.' This *quoad nos*, once acknowledged as God's concern for every created being, generates an individual understanding of every being's origin, essence, and destiny, and, consequently, a primordial understanding of the entire ontological procession, from and toward God.

This 'method' of unknowingly knowing God by spiritual reflection or introspection and of knowing all Creation through this preceding (though never thorough) knowledge of God places Dionysius among the best of the Platonic tradition. As could not be expected otherwise, the Areopagite once more, as always, endeavours to link this philosophical tradition to Pauline Theology, whose 'gnoseological' exultation, "I shall know as I am known" (1 Cor 13:12) all Dionysian philosophy is surely meant to reflect and to imitate by making God's knowledge of man the basis to man's knowledge of everything in and through God. Thus, Augustine's famous, but more often than not misunderstood, core of gnoseology: *Deum animamque scire cupio, nihil plus,* "God and the soul I desire to know, nothing else" (*Soliloquia* I 2,7), and, in the same vein, the no less famous *noverim me, noverim te* (*Soliloquia* II 1,1) as well as Dionysius' gnoseology in the treatise on the Divine Names mutually explain each other on the point of the knowledge of God,

of oneself, and of the world. Thus, what Coleridge enthusiastically attributes to Proclus' Platonic Theology certainly holds true for Dionysius' Christian theo-ontology of DN as well, in that it indeed presents "the most beautiful and orderly development of the philosophy which endeavours to explain all things by an analysis of consciousness, and builds up a world in the mind out of materials furnished by the mind itself."

§6. THE PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

A short reminder and a summary of the given interpretation of DN may serve for a reassessment of the perspective adopted. It has been the scope of the preceding review of the structure of DN to present the entire set of Divine Names which the treatise discusses or 'praises' (Dionysius calls his portrayal of them ὕμνος or its cognates)[1] under a certain viewpoint that would allow for a coherent interpretation of the whole. This viewpoint holds that from the tripartite ontological procession everything comes from the one God, its efficient cause, and organises itself as the Creation of the threefold God, its formal cause, and ultimately flows back again to the triune God as its final cause. DN 708A hints at this notion of a 'total' and all-subsuming causation.[2] Dionysius does so, however, without postulating any rupture between God and Creation, and describes it as a procession which, stemming from God and returning to Him, never ceases to be His at any time. He conceives of Creation as a "world in the mind out of materials furnished by the mind itself," like a thought born out of my mind, ordered and deepened in a continuous procession of thinking, and returned to me as thoroughly mine, which we could simply call 'reflection.' Thus it is a thought that confronts my mind and at the same time a thought entirely belonging to my mind. Dionysius' ontological procession presents a description and discussion of reality as entirely belonging to God and yet educible as a separate reality. In Dionysius' own words:

> God is still and tranquil, keeping to himself and with himself in an absolutely transcendent unity of self, turning in upon himself and multiplying himself without ever leaving his own unity, superabundantly one as he goes forth to all things while yet remaining within himself (DN 949AB).

The predominantly ontological perspective adopted in order to present the structure and the contents of DN is induced by taking seriously the emphatic shift of the argument that Dionysius methodically introduces in the beginning of chapter 4. What has to be said in the

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[1] The praise of God in hymns is another example of how Dionysius connects Christian and Neoplatonic traditions. For the 'philosophers' hymns' of the Neoplatonic (pagan) tradition see van den Berg 2002, 13-34.

[2] Cf. the discussion in Niarchos 1995, especially 107.

treatise must be said exclusively in reference to the ineffable One's theophany, i.e. His extroverted procession. That this procession is meant to be taken primarily in the ontological sense and not so much in the theological, is frequently repeated by Dionysius. He states this in a striking manner, for instance, in the short outline of the entire treatise's scope in a noteworthy passage of chapter 5. In it, the development of the writing is clearly meant to link the most important Name for God's giving away Himself, the 'Good,' to all other Names that follow:

> But I must point out that the purpose of what I have to say is not to reveal that being [of God] in its transcendence, for this is something beyond words, something unknown and wholly unrevealed, something above unity itself. What I wish to do is to sing a hymn of praise for the being-making procession (οὐσιποιὸν πρόοδον) of the absolute divine Source of being into the total domain of being (DN 816B).[3]

Moreover, in an noteworthy passage from MT, chapter 3 (MT 1033A), Dionysius states that in a treatise named the *Theological Hypotyposes* (or the *Theological Representations*, as Luibheid's translation has it), he had expounded how God is one in three persons and how the inner-Trinitarian dynamics must be understood, whereas (δέ!) the treatise DN explains how it can be understood that God is conceived of as the Good, as Being, Life, Wisdom, and Power.[4] This passage shows that DN is meant to give an account of God's extroversion and of how the power and might of the Creator displays its persisting presence in what is created:

> In my *Theological Representations*, I have praised the notions which are most appropriate to affirmative theology. I have shown the sense in which the divine and good nature is said to be one and then triune, how Fatherhood and Sonship are predicated of it, the meaning of the theology of the Spirit, how these core lights of goodness grew from the incorporeal and indivisible good, and how in this sprouting they have remained inseparable from their co-eternal foundation in it, in themselves, and in each other. . . . In the *Divine Names* I have shown the sense in which God is described as good, existent, life, wisdom, power, and whatever other things pertain to the conceptual names for God (MT 1032D-1033A).[5]

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[3] Τοσοῦτον δὲ ὑπομνήσωμεν, ὅτι τῷ λόγῳ σκοπὸς οὐ τὴν ὑπερούσιον οὐσίαν, ᾗ ὑπερούσιος, ἐκφαίνειν, ἄῤῥητον γὰρ τοῦτο καὶ ἄγνωστόν ἐστι καὶ παντελῶς ἀνέκφαντον καὶ αὐτὴν ὑπεραῖρον τὴν ἕνωσιν, ἀλλὰ τὴν οὐσιοποιὸν εἰς τὰ ὄντα πάντα τῆς θεαρχικῆς οὐσιαρχίας πρόοδον ὑμνῆσαι.

[4] This treatise, as others mentioned or referred to in the CD, is either lost or fictitious. The *Theological Representations* are also mentioned in the first chapter of DN (DN 585B and DN 589D to DN 592B).

[5] As a matter of fact, what is said here about the *Theological Representations* resem-

Therefore (but not only therefore), it is safe to assume that in DN Dionysius is interested primarily in a thorough treatment of the 'domain of being' as the outcome of the ontogenic procession of God, or, in other words, of the ontic world and its determinant ontological substructure. It is our reality and its dependence on an ontologically higher and ineffable reality that is Dionysius' main concern here, i.e. reality insofar as it is from God or God's theophany and therefore theo-eidetic in its structure and arrangement, at least to a certain degree. God as an impossible object of human treatises is beyond reach, but ontic reality is not beyond our reach. Therefore, this reality must be the object and ontology must be the method. It is only then after this self-imposed task is duly accomplished that ontology discloses its meaning and value for theology and for human reflection about God.[6]

Dionysius thereby succeeds in connecting (a task too painful for some of his contemporaries, as well as for many theologians nowadays) Christian theology and Platonic philosophy. His explanation of the world as God's 'reflection' is an explanation of an 'emanation' from the One without betraying the Christian doctrine of Creation and its tenets of the world's own ontological integrity vis-à-vis its undenied dependence on God's causal action.[7]

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bles what is stated in the first three chapters of DN about the question of knowing God *per se*, as One and triune, and His remaining in Himself, whereas what is said about DN refers to the discussion of the 'creational' theonyms which are found in DN chapters 4-13. Therefore, Luibheid might be right to assume that the beginning of DN pretends to summarise the *Theological Representations* (Luibheid 1987, note 13 on 138).

[6] Up to a certain point, Perl 2003, 547f. is right to remark: "It is artificial to abstract the 'philosophical' content of Dionysius' thought from its 'theological' aspects, for Dionysius recognizes no such distinction, but has a single, undifferentiated vision of reality in its relation to God." Such an artificial procedure can be eye-opening, however. What such abstractions can do is to differentiate principles without severing them, as in the cases where we differentiate principles of being (form-matter, substance-accident) without denying that what we meet in reality is never one of these principles alone or *per se*, but always what they together constitute. Yet, these differentiations, artificial as they may be, allow a better understanding of the thing which presupposes such principles. Dionysius in fact "has a single, undifferentiated vision of reality in its relation to God," but it is part of the interpreter's task to differentiate this undifferentiated vision as he tries to explain and to expound it.

[7] It should be pointed out, however, that preluding the historic opposition of creation and emanation, the question of how to speak of the separateness of the One from all other things by simultaneously indicating its lasting ontological presence (παρουσία) in all things is a problem that accompanies Platonism from the very beginning (cf. the interpretation of *Enn.* IV.3.12 in Rist 1964, 214). This seems to be the current common opinion among scholars of Platonism.

In comparison to other interpretations, this predominantly philosophical point of view on the content of DN does not necessarily have to be the only one apt to characterise Dionysius' main interest with the Divine Names. Rather, von Balthasar's and von Ivánka's interpretations of DN show the manifold and fruitful possibilities of how to contemplate Dionysius' thought from an entirely theological angle.[8] Sheldon-Williams and Rorem remind their readers of the psychological interpretation of the treatise. Their interpretation addresses the difficult question of the mystical experience which was so dear to Dionysius. Perhaps it should be conceded that theology is the primary concern of the Areopagite; it would be unwise to deny it, and most certainly it has to be conceded that Dionysius' thoughts to a large extent seem to owe themselves to the mystical union with God, which is the declared aim of his thinking.[9] Therefore, the ontological reading of DN calls for a complementary reinterpretation from a theological and mystagogical perspective which will turn out to be, I am sure, equally valid and fruitful, especially when relying on a prior or concomitant ontological reading. As most Platonic texts, DN calls for a multiple-level reading in order to be thoroughly understood.

What, however, speaks strongly in favour of *approaching* DN from a philosophical perspective is the omnipresent Dionysian concern of methodically reconciling Greek philosophy and Christian theology in order to show their ultimate complementarity in questions of the highest concern. It is as if Christian faith and pagan philosophy were themselves antonyms of the 'Parmenidean' type that Dionysius reconciles and unifies in chapter 9 of DN. Indeed, it seems that the fusion of Platonic thought and Christian doctrine is nowhere as compact and intimate as in DN throughout the history of Christianity. Nor is it as difficult to disentangle, as the necessity of the present apology of the philosophical view on the treatise may show. It seems as though Dionysius' thinking is an exemplary exercise (and a rather accomplished one, I might add) of how, according to the Apostle's preaching in Rom 1:19f., Greek thought could have achieved true knowledge of the true God had it not gone astray. For there is no doubt, according to the claimed authorship of the Areopagite, that the author of DN speaks as though

[8] Far from being exclusive, the influence of DN on most thinkers was predominantly theological; a number of splendid examples taken from the Western and Eastern tradition are enumerated and briefly explained in Rorem 1993, 167ff.

[9] Beierwaltes's 1998, note 55 on page 66 considers the mystical union the main intention (if not the core) of the entire CD.

revealing (the processional essence of) the 'unknown God' of Greek — Platonic — philosophy to cultivated Greeks, just as Paul ventured to do in Athens (Acts 17:18-33) and before "certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoics" (Acts 17:18). The theology of Dionysius, as the highest summit, the final scope, and the core of his writings, is — *pace* the copious Scriptural references, which, however, are employed as illustrations rather than as arguments throughout the treatise — propaedeutically displayed in a language and form of expression and reasoning that are basically philosophical and Platonic in vast parts of the treatise's vocabulary, structure, and methodology.[10] The mystical union, it should be added, is one of the crucial elements named in this context. Dionysius' self-restriction in the employment of the term 'Creation' vis-à-vis his comparatively unheeding usage of the idea of 'participation' is an example of how he chooses to expound the truths of Christian faith the 'hard way,' i.e. by explaining them using philosophical concepts and applying Platonic vocabulary with the noticeable intention of avoiding any *petitio principii* by the implementation of concepts exclusively pertaining to revealed faith. One may think of how Dionysius adopts the terms 'Salvation' and 'Redemption' and uses them in his work; at first sight one would be led to believe that these terms explain some theological truth, the *fides quae*, but a second reading of the respective passages of DN reveals their explanatory value for ontological speculation as philosophical concepts.[11] As Dionysius says (DN 896D-897A):

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[10] And not only Neoplatonic: cf. the discussion of the term διακόσμησις as used by Dionysius and as used in Stoic philosophy in Roques 1983, 57. For a discussion of further Platonic motifs in DN, cf. Schäfer 2002, 396ff.

[11] Perl 2003, 548, consents this programmatically as he states: Dionysius' "uncompromisingly ontological approach to all topics, including love, evil, symbolism, and mystical union, is a needed alternative to the subjective, epistemological, moral, and psychological approaches that characterize so much of modern thought." Even Suchla, who, as a rule, seeks to subsume the philosophical perspective under the theological (cf., for instance, Suchla 1988, 18 and note 11 on 105) admits that 'Redemption' and 'Salvation' are not to be taken in a Christological or soteriological sense, but in the ontological sense (Suchla 1988, note 144 on 120). Another example among many for the methodical re-assessment of terms is the Dionysian usage of the term 'Love.' He opts for the 'pagan' Greek word *eros* with all its parlous philosophical and shady ethical implications, not for the Biblical *agape*. This is a passionately discussed problem among interpreters. Yet it is perfectly understandable when the methodology of a philosophical approach to Christian truth is taken into account. Two sound studies of the problem are brought forward by J.M. Rist: Rist 1970, and Rist 1966. A discussion of the same matter can also be found in Suchla 1988, notes 96-109 on 115ff.

> [I]f one were to praise Salvation as being that saving force which rescues the world from the influence of evil, I would certainly accept this, since in fact Salvation takes many forms. I would only add that, basically, Salvation is that which preserves all things in their proper places without change, conflict, or collapse towards evil, that it keeps them all in a peaceful and untroubled obedience to their proper laws, that it expels all inequality and interference from the world, and that it gives everything the proportion [of essence/being] to avoid turning into its own opposite and to keep free of any kind of change of state [my insertion].

It has often been observed that Dionysius' work is vastly different from Paul's theology, precisely because of the predominance of ontological speculation over salvation history. But from what has been said so far, it should be clear that the author of the CD never claims to be Paul himself. There have been many pseudo-Pauline writings in the fifth and sixth century, but whoever wrote the treatise DN did not claim to speak in Paul's name. He deliberately wanted to be regarded and read as the mouthpiece of Dionysius the Areopagite, i.e. as a learned Greek educated in and highly influenced by Hellenic philosophy, and as someone who received Christian faith from the Apostle Paul.

Dionysius thus applies the inner movement of his Platonic philosophy to his methods, unfolding by philosophical differentiation and explication the revealed Names which remain unaffected and intact throughout the entire intellectual procedure. The unknown God can be named now, and His Names (as revealed in the Bible) call for a new assessment of the philosophy of the One. Therefore, a philosophical reading and interpretation of the arrangement, succession, and coherent meaning of the theonyms of DN are not only licit, but probably very much in accord with the author's intentions. This, at least, follows his proposals of how to approach the subject of the Divine Names for an esodic understanding of the world through and in God. By this proposed philosophical reading, we factor out, at least initially, any second thoughts about Dionysius' ulterior motives for Christian theology and withdraw strategically to phenomenological grounds. We thus read the text as it supposedly should be read: as a philosophical system discovering the truth of Christian doctrine, developing from the revealed Biblical Names of God an explanation of the world that is consistent with the 'better parts' of Hellenic philosophy.

I am very well aware, however, that it is impossible to completely separate Dionysius' philosophy from his basic theological tenets. Above all, if we consider that Dionysius takes 'theology' in its original and much broader sense, which can be seen in the following statement

where he distinguishes a philosophical viewpoint of his writings from a 'symbolic' approach but points out that he employs both for an adequate interpretation:

> But there is a further point to understand. Theological tradition has a dual aspect, the ineffable and mysterious on the one hand, the open and more evident on the other. The one resorts to symbolism and involves imitation. The other is philosophic and employs the method of demonstration. (Further, the inexpressible is bound up with what can be articulated). The one uses persuasion and imposes the truthfulness of what is asserted. The other acts and, by means of a mystery which cannot be thought, it puts souls firmly in the presence of God (Letter IX 1105D).[12]

In the same letter (Letter IX 1108B), Dionysius explains that: the Apostle Paul (in Rom 1:20) and 'true reason' (the ἀληθὴς λόγος) teach us that our insight into the visible structure of the universe (τοῦ φαινομένου παντὸς ἡ κοσμουργία) can grant an insight into the invisible nature of God, and that what we see directly through the use of reason (ἀνθρωπικῶς) can also be seen in a transcendent way (ὑπερκοσμίκως) since we can obtain true knowledge about God parting from our understanding of the constitution of visible reality (ἀπὸ τῶν νόμων τῶν φαινομένων). This is interesting because it shows the high esteem for the rational interpretation of reality which shapes the thought of Dionysius: true reason (the ἀληθὴς λόγος), i.e. reason which is not morally blinded, as the Apostle explains in the pertinent passage of his Epistle to the Romans, can obtain sound knowledge of the transcendent truths. But there is still another implication to the expression ἀληθὴς λόγος insofar as it touches Platonic ontology: Plato himself had called his philosophical cosmology of the *Timaeus* a 'verisimilar myth' (29a-d).[13] Proclus however (*In Timaeum* III 144) maintained that

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[12] Ἄλλως τε καὶ τοῦτο ἐννοῆσαι χρή, τὸ διττὴν εἶναι τὴν τῶν θεολόγων παράδοσιν, τὴν μὲν ἀπόρρητον καὶ μυστικήν, τὴν δὲ ἐμφανῆ καὶ γνωριμωτέραν, καὶ τὴν μὲν συμβολικὴν καὶ τελεστικήν, τὴν δὲ φιλόσοφον καὶ ἀποδεικτικήν· καὶ συμπέπλεκται τῷ ῥητῷ τὸ ἄρρητον. Καὶ τὸ μὲν πείθει καὶ καταδεῖται τῶν λεγομένων τὴν ἀλήθειαν, τὸ δὲ δρᾷ καὶ ἐνιδρύει τῷ θεῷ ταῖς ἀδιδάκτοις μυσταγωγίαις.

[13] *Timaeus* 29cd was of great importance to Neoplatonic speculation, and it is important to Dionysius' ontology too: "if in our treatment of a great host of matters regarding the Gods and the generation of the universe we prove unable to give accounts that are always in all respects self-consistent and perfectly exact, be not surprised; rather we should be content if we can furnish accounts that are inferior to none in likelihood, remembering that both I who speak and you who judge are but human creatures, so that it becomes us to accept the likely account (τὸν εἰκότα μῦθον) of these matters and forbear to search beyond it."

it was an ἀληθὴς λόγος, a truthful rational account.[14] Dionysius, as usual, combines both the Pauline and the Platonic tradition when he states that the ἀληθὴς λόγος is a serviceable tool for an adequate understanding of reality and of God through reality.

Therefore, I think that it is now time to venture an interpretation of Dionysius' philosophy without making it entirely dependant on theological questions. A slight shift of perspective allows for the possibility to look inside Dionysius' 'theo-ontology' from the view-point of the philosophical tradition. For if there is a 'dual aspect' to his writings, as Letter IX states, one may be free to choose one of these two aspects without entirely subsuming it under the other one, and it cannot be wrong to approach these writings from "the open and more evident" aspect, which is the philosophical one. This is rewarding and plausible for several reasons, as I have already tried to explain on the preceding pages of this book. Also: much of Dionysius' theology will be better understood and can be reassessed, to a certain extent, if we take his philosophy more seriously and consider it valuable, in its own right and stance. I also venture to assert that some vexing questions concerning the *structure* of DN can be solved more adequately through the initial philosophical approach rather than by means of an interpretation that privileges from the very start a Biblical, dogmatic, or theological consideration of the text (which on the other hand, perhaps, has its merits in the fuller understanding of the ultimate theological *content* of DN).[15] This is especially true in the case of the pivotal question of evil and its discussion in the treatise, which I will now address.

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[14] Cf. Ritter 1991, note 171 on 138f.

[15] This secondary level of reading, which is necessary for an understanding of the arrangement of the treatise, is also explanatory of the method that Dionysius employs. If it is lost, much of the theological understanding of the text is lost, too. Cf. Rorem 1993 on the last pages of his explanation of DN. Rorem is forced by his own method to give in entirely to the concept of God's utter inscrutability. There is nothing wrong with this theological perspective *per se*, but this perspective is enriched by Dionysius through the contemplation of things and of God in them and in us, as well as the ontological view of God known through beings. The reader, though presented ultimately with the ineffability of the One, will not, as Rorem seems to do, find himself none the wiser at the end of the treatise, having begun with the theological exposition of the One and ended with a hymn to the One. The ontological treatment in DN makes this regress to the One a 'realised return' of a creature that understands itself better and more adequately as a result of the ontological process and a close reading of DN. This 'realised return' is the reward of scrutinising the inscrutable, or a gift of the God καθ' ἡμᾶς, rather than a reward earned; we can learn a lot about ourselves, the world, and God's grace by the beneficient extroversion of God, though never of Him καθ' αὑτόν.

PART III

THE TOUCH-STONE OF DIONYSIAN ONTOLOGY

§7. THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

A vexing problem complicates the interpretation of DN in one of its main parts: how and why should the concept of evil appear in a treatise devoted to the Names of God? Certainly, 'evil' cannot be a theonym. There is nothing evil in God, Who is undivided Goodness in both the Biblical and the Platonic tradition. As undivided Goodness, he cannot even be the source of any evil in what He creates (cf., for the Platonic tradition of this tenet, Plato's crucial statements in *Republic* 379a ff., 391e, 617e).[1] Dionysius himself insists on God's utter Goodness in the first part of chapter 4 of DN. Why is a discussion of evil inserted in the second part of the same chapter? Why is it such a long and thorough one, in that about one sixth of the whole treatise is dedicated to the treatment of evil? Furthermore, unlike the majority of other, almost unexceptionally interconnected, themes of the treatise, the problem of evil is not reassumed seriously throughout the further development of DN (the anticipation in DN 588D ff. being one of the few exceptions). It does not seem to reappear throughout the entire CD at all. Moreover, there is the strange incongruity that the Good-evil antinomy in chapter 4 of DN, unrivalled in length, is the core and centre of the treatise's teaching[2] and, at the same time, apparently the least 'Dionysian' of all themes. It seems copied almost completely from Proclus in such a flagrant manner that it was the very discussion of evil that let nineteenth century scholars retrace an at times strictly literal dependence of Dionysius' tenets on Proclus' treatise *De malorum*

[1] *Republic* 379ab being the most prominent of these passages: "but this very thing, the patterns or norms of right speech about the gods, what would they be? — Something like this, I said. — The true quality of God we must always surely attribute to him whether we compose in epic, melic, or tragic verse. — We must. — And is not God of course good in reality and always to be spoken of as such? — Certainly. — But further, no good thing is harmful, is it? — I think not. — Can what is not harmful harm? — By no means. — Can that which does not harm do any evil? — Not that either. — But that which does no evil would not be cause of any evil either? — How could it? — Once more, is the good beneficent? — Yes. — It is the cause, then, of welfare? — Yes. — Then the good is not the cause of all things, but of things that are well it the cause: of things that are ill it is blameless. — Entirely so," etc.

[2] Cf. Suchla 1992, 389: "Zentraler Gegenstand der Schrift ist aber die Frage nach dem Verhältnis des Guten zum Bösen."

subsistentia, 'On the (mere) subsistence of evils' (as well as the part on the Good in Proclus' commentary on the Platonic *Alcibiades*). Many questions and difficulties arise with the treatment of evil in DN.

It is not my intention to give a thoroughgoing account of Dionysius' tenets on evil here.[3] I shall, however, take on the question why this awkward, exhaustive, and at first sight somewhat malapropos discussion is infixed here and what it can tell us about the structure and the content of DN. The first thing to accept in this context is that evil is not a theonym. The discussion of evil belongs to the world and is to be interpreted ontologically. Only if DN is taken to have shifted from pure theology (in the sense of 'praising God') to the discussion of ontic reality from chapter 4 onward does the question of evil acquire some sense. It remains a serious theological problem, though; for ontic reality, too, is a theophany of the one God, and there is nothing in it that does not proceed completely from God. That is what the first part of chapter 4 concerns. Good, as the Name of God addressing God's extroversion, is the principle of all being, but if the sole principle of *all* being is the Good, then how does evil come about? It is a theory or, at least, a teaching of *ontic reality* that demands this question to be asked. The methodological shift of contemplating 'Good,' 'Being,' 'Dissimilarity,' 'Peace,' 'Oneness,' and the like *ex parte rerum*, from the creatures' part, claims to discuss the problem of evil. In the realm of being to which we belong as earthly beings and which Dionysius accepts to be God's Creation, evil is perceived as a fact. One can praise God in hymns without ever touching on the problem. Nonetheless, a consistent monistic theory of worldly reality that does not want to be diminished or endangered by the paradox of evil cries out loud for a discussion of the problem, and all the more in a theo-ontology that defines the entire world as being God's translucent Goodness. The phenomenon of evil is introduced within DN, therefore, as if its discussion answered a sceptical enquiry by someone else: "now someone may make this observation" (i.e. on the appearance of evil in God's Creation), Dionysius rhetorically interrupts himself at the end of his praise of the 'Good' as the most adequate theonym, and thus makes it abundantly clear that a certain but necessary parenthesis opens at this point.[4] (Dionysius insists on this stylistic device as he repeats it; as if he wanted to remind

[3] I hope that I have succeeded in rendering it in Schäfer 2002, 406-469.

[4] Rorem 1993, 151, as well as Suchla 1988, 19, both insist in the integrative arrangement and the inner logics of this rhetorical development chosen by Dionysius for DN.

the reader of the emergence of evil again and again, he speaks of 'someone amid difficulties,' who might raise such a question, and of his own 'answer' to this fictitious interlocutor: DN 716B, DN 717B, etc.) This unavoidable parenthesis within the well-arranged, at times even meditatively or prayer-like composition of the writing closes at the beginning of chapter 5 ("we must go on now," the text sets in and reassumes the discussion of God's ontogenic procession which the discussion of the 'Good' had opened).

From there the treatise follows its track without further disturbance. Indeed, the problem of evil is disturbing, as Dionysius' choice of words and stylistic introduction of it shows.[5] Its simultaneous philosophically completely natural and yet 'theonymically' out-of-place discussion (the annoying necessity of which is mirrored by Dionysius' indirect stylistic treatment) reacts to the itch of the age-old trilemma of monistic theodicies: how to maintain that (1) there is only one almighty Creator of all (DN 720B), that (2) He is Good (cf. DN 716BC, 720B), and that (3) evil nevertheless cannot be denied (cf. DN 716B).

[5] For more information on the terminology and the stylistic devices used by Dionysius, cf. Schäfer 2002, 418f.

§8. WHAT EVILS ARE, AND WHENCE

At the beginning of his discussion of evil Dionysius makes an important decision entirely congruent with his theo-ontological method, to disavow neither the truth of things (DN 716B) nor the causation of *all* beings through God (DN 720B). This means that neither can evil be denied nor God's Omnipotence or Goodness be defrauded. All the same, Dionysius has an answer to the trilemma. This answer is outlined in DN 720B:

> To put the matter briefly. All beings, to the extent that they exist, are good and come from the Good and they fall short of goodness and being in proportion to their remoteness from the Good (Μᾶλλον δέ, ἵνα συλλαβὼν εἴπω, τὰ ὄντα πάντα, καθ᾽ ὅσον ἔστι, καὶ ἀγαθά ἐστι καὶ ἐκ τἀγαθοῦ, καθ᾽ ὅσον δέ ἐστέρηται τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ).[1]

This short text delineates the main arguments upon which Dionysius' theory of evil rests. On the one hand, he presents a normative ontology where goodness and being are entirely coextensive, freely interchangeable and ultimately the same ('goodness and being'). This is clearly stated in DN 720CD, where the free convertibility of good and being is presupposed. Their proportional convertibility is explained in DN 720D:

> For that which totally lacks a share in the Good has neither being nor a place in existence, whereas that which has a composite nature owes to the Good whatever place it has among beings, and its place among them and the extent of its being are directly proportionate to the share it has of this Good. In other words, all things in being will have more or less of being according as they share more or less in the Good (Τὸ γὰρ πάντη ἄμοιρον τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ οὔτε ὂν οὔτε ἐν τοῖς οὖσι, τὸ δέ μικτὸν διὰ τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἐν τοῖς οὖσι καὶ κατὰ τοῦτο ἐν τοῖς οὖσι καὶ ὄν, καθ᾽ ὅσον τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ μετέχει. Μᾶλλον δὲ τὰ ὄντα πάντα κατὰ τοσοῦτον ἔσται μᾶλλον καὶ ἧττον, καθ᾽ ὅσον τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ μετέχει).

The Platonic teaching of the world as a product of the Good's self-irradiation and the Biblical asseveration that God made everything

[1] The passage has a striking parallel in DN 708A: Ἢ ἵνα συλλαβὼν εἴπω· Πάντα τὰ ὄντα ἐκ τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ ἀγαθοῦ, καὶ πάντα τὰ οὐκ ὄντα ὑπερουσίως ἐν τῷ καλῷ καὶ ἀγαθῷ, καὶ ἔστι πάντων ἀρχὴ καὶ πέρας ὑπεράρχιον καὶ ὑπερτελές, ὅτι Ἐξ αὐτοῦ καὶ δι᾽ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸ τὰ πάντα, ὥς φησιν ὁ ἱερὸς λόγος.

'very good' (Gen 1:31) both blend into this doctrine of the normative ontology.

On the other hand, Dionysius acknowledges evil as a privation of goodness ('a falling short of goodness'). Indeed, the privation theory, common to all Platonists to a various extent, presupposes and subsumes normative ontology, anyway. It affirms that being is good and that what we (rightly) call evil must be taken as some kind of shortfall, weakening, lessening, or depravation of this naturally omnipresent ontological goodness in certain aspects. All that evil can do "is in a limited fashion to debase and to destroy the substance of things," Dionysius states (DN 717B). Evil is nothing in itself but a nocuous and inimical parasite of dubious ontological framing, which strictly presupposes (good) being. Two observations must be made here.

First, evil is not nothing at all nor entirely non-existent, since, as Dionysius observes, it would be futile to beware of or to fight against nothing. Yet, we obviously, and with good reason, obviate, flee, and combat evil (cf. DN 716D-717A).[2] Augustine has a similar argument when he asks in *Confessions* VII 5,7, why one should be afraid and beware of something completely non-existent, or in *Contra Julianum* I 8,38 why we should pray "deliver us from evil," if we assumed that evil is nothing. Rather, evil is not something in itself; it is not a substance, not a being in its own right. One may still ask what that means.

Second, evil, therefore, presupposes substantial being to which it can cling and on which it can nourish like a parasite. For if it is seen as a defect, a lessening, or a depravation of something, it must logically presuppose that positive 'something' upon which it negatively acts. In addition, as soon as evil would entirely destroy the being that it attacks, weakens, or deprives, evil would disappear itself. Like a disease that weakens and depraves a living organism, it necessarily disappears at the moment of that very life's total destruction (DN 720C):

> Abolish the Good and you will abolish being, life, desire, movement, everything. So it is not the power of evil which causes birth to emerge out of destruction. It is the good which is responsible for this, the Good in some measure however small (καὶ εἰ πάντη τἀγαθὸν ἀνέλῃς, οὔτε οὐσία ἔσται οὔτε ζωὴ οὔτε ἔφεσις οὔτε κίνησις οὔτε ἄλλο

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[2] In what is one of the very scarce passages on moral issues in the CD, Dionysius gives this example: "So then someone asks: Where does evil come from? If evil does not have being, then virtue and vice must be exactly the same, both totally and in particular details (εἰ γὰρ μὴ ἔστι τὸ κακόν, ἀρετὴ καὶ κακία ταὐτὸν καὶ ἡ πᾶσα τῇ ὅλῃ καὶ ἡ ἐν μέρει). . . . Hence one must concede that there is something contrary to goodness and that this is evil," etc. (DN 716D-717A).

> οὐδέν. Ὥστε καὶ τὸ γίνεσθαι ἐκ φθορᾶς γένεσιν οὐκ ἔστι κακοῦ δύναμις, ἀλλ᾽ ἥττονος ἀγαθοῦ παρουσία). Disease is a disorder and yet it does not obliterate everything since if this were to happen the disease itself could not exist.

It is this insight that reappears in chapter 8, one of the few passages of DN that reassumes the problem of evil after chapter 4. God as Redemption, Dionysius says in DN 897B referring to his ontological teaching of the impossibility of an entirely deprived substance, "does not permit the truly real to fall to nothingness." Rather, God "raises a thing up from evil condition and sets it firmly where it ought to be."

Consequently, Dionysius excludes any possibility of an evil in itself (αὐτοκακόν) or of an evil substance. Nevertheless, the problem remains how evil, not being 'something,' can deprive being and deprave good (DN 717A). How can evil, which is not a being having its own ontological stance, not a substance (οὐσία), still deteriorate naturally good being, as it seems to be utterly true for evil insofar as we observe it as such (τὸ κακόν ᾗ κακόν: DN 717B)?

All these problems, along with the question of the ontological status of evil as non-being and its effects on being, are approached with one (Proclean) definition that Dionysius presents in DN 720D: evil is a 'parhypostasis,' a bare 'by-being' as one might be tempted to translate, or a non-entity of mere secondary ontological claims, to paraphrase that helplessly untranslatable term that denominates the falling short of being 'a being of and on its own' ('hypostasis').[3] It should be clear what Dionysius means by that; whatever 'is' or 'has being' is good precisely to the extent that it has being. Whatever should be totally deprived of good is deprived of being altogether and has therefore necessarily ceased to exist (DN 720B). There is nothing entirely or strictly evil (DN 721A) since total privation is ontologically impossible, and whatever is or can be ontologically 'addressed,' is good at least to a minimum measure. Evil cannot 'be,' nor be thought of, without presupposing good, and if we 'define' evil as 'parhypostasis,' we do exactly that, namely, we assume a hypostasis or 'being on its own' and 'derogate' or 'lessen' our concept of its wholesomeness by prefixing the par- ('by-', as in 'by-product,' or 'co-' as in co-optation). In doing so, we denote its dependence on a logically prior concept, but it is also, in

[3] Opsomer/Steel 1999, 246 give the following explanation of the same concept in Proclus: "[E]vil is not a principal hypostasis existing on its own and for its own sake, but a *par*hypostasis, that is, it depends for its existence upon the existence of other things."

an old metaphysical usage of the Greek prefix, a violation or transgression with an adversative sense, as the different forms of the prefix's usage enumerated in LSJ show. To sum up the more complex and exhaustive discussion in DN, evil per se does not exist and has no rightful ontological status whatsoever (DN 721B: οὐκ ὂν τὸ κακόν). It 'appears' or 'manifests itself' at the ontic level, however, where it parasitically deprives and/or depraves individual beings in one aspect or another, perhaps even in many, but it always still presupposes good as its host which it debases as a dangerously damaging 'parhypostasis.'

The answer to the question what evil is (DN 716A) can thus be considered to be almost rendered impossible by the hypo-ontic and even out-of-ontological status of evil. Therefore, from DN 721C on, Dionysius takes on a new question of whether evil as 'parhypostasis' can be found as resident in any being's nature. If evil is not a nature in itself and utterly impossible if taken per se, perhaps one still could think of certain natures (which are beings on their own) that are per se evil? (Dionysius might here allude to devils or demons.) Yet, this, too, is impossible (ἀδύνατον) according to Dionysius' own definition and premises. All that is, is caused by the Good, and actually is the Good's self-irradiation. It is "grotesquely out of the question" (ἄτοπον) that evil could be traced back by whatever means to God or the Good (DN 721C). Evil cannot be from God (whose procession Good denotes) in any way, therefore. It is quite plausible that Dionysius, who dedicates his treatise to Timothy, deliberately echoes Paul's first Epistle to Timothy, 1 Tim 4:4, here: "For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused." All beings are good in their own being, and therefore evil "is not in beings" (οὐδε ἐν τοῖς οὖσι). This is exactly what the 'parhypostasis' definition of evil expresses. Evil is extrinsic and even an adversary to being, evil is nothing which 'belongs to' being but rather what is unsociable with it and inimical to it. In a thorough and circumstantial anticipation of the ontological scaling of chapters 5-7 of DN (ranging from pure intelligences to mere lifeless beings), Dionysius revises every ontological level of his system for traces of evil beings.

There is not a trace of evil to be found in angels, of course (DN 724B), but one may wonder about the fallen angels, the devils and demons. They, too, are good in the measure that they are, since every being is from Go(o)d, and it is certainly right to say that they were created as good beings by God (DN 724/25). Only insofar as they turn away from God and harm and debase themselves and others, they can be called evil. This will become clearer later on. The same holds for souls (DN 728BC) and all animated beings, for bodies (DN 728D), for

the whole cosmos, and for matter (DN 729Aff.), which is a special problem concerning Dionysius' opposition to Gnostic beliefs and, perhaps, with a century-long discussion on the possible connection of matter and evil within the Platonic school(s).[4]

There is no evil found in the scale of beings, nor can the grading itself be the cause of evil. One might cleverly think that perhaps the greater ontological 'distance' that human beings have to God as compared to angels could be the cause of evil or 'debasement,' arguing that a lesser amount of goodness (viz. being) is equivalent to a higher amount of evil. It is quite clear that Dionysius will have none of this, even if the reasoning itself were valid, which it is not.[5] For God as the Good, he repeatedly assures us, is undividedly and undiminishedly everywhere (cf. DN 949A).

It is a lengthy discussion within DN, "exhaustive and exhausting," as Paul Rorem (1993, 151) remarks, full of supporting lateral arguments and integrating further aspects and questions into the overall picture so explicitly presented. One of these involves Dionysius' refutation of the 'Leibnizean' argument that evil has its proper and fitting place in making a contrast to the dominant good in the world, just as dark ugly colours help to embellish a beautiful painting.[6] The discussion's result, however, is concise and clear; evil is not a being itself, nor is it found in beings *qua* being(s).

The outcome of Dionysius' ontological discussion of evil is (1) that there is no evil per se, since evil in itself or as such is impossible, nor is evil a substance, i.e. an ontological factor on its own, and (2) that there is no such thing as an evil substance, since substances (to the extent that they are beings) are manifestations of the Good and are therefore by participation good themselves. The Areopagite's summary in DN 733C states that evil is not a being (οὐκ ὄν), nor is it found in

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[4] Stiglmayr 1895, 257 mentions Syrianus and Plotinus as giving, each in a different way, Proclus an occasion and the reason for discussing the problem of whether evil could be identified with matter. I am inclined, however, to follow Michael Erler's observation on Proclus' restrictive interpretation of at least Plotinus' teaching on the problem (Erler 1978, vii); cf. my remarks in Schäfer 2002, 401, 405f, and 430, as well as Schäfer 2004.

[5] It has been repeated over and over again, though, in scholarly discussion. For a thorough treatment of the question and a answer to it, I must once more remit the reader to Schäfer 2002, 186ff.

[6] Cf. Leibniz, *Theodicée* I 12 (and following paragraphs, I 16 included). Some remarks in Augustine's *De civitate Dei* have the same ring to them: for instance XI 22f, XII 4. Cf., in contrast, Dionysius in DN 729B: nothing good whatsoever can ever be derived from evil.

beings (ἐν τοῖς οὖσι).[7] Wherever we face evil, it is not due to some positive force or power (κατὰ δύναμιν), but rather to some weakness (δι᾿ ἀσθένειαν). The important thing here is that evil is not described as a substantial 'something' or 'entity' but as a circumstance or a coming-to-pass (a γένεσθαι) which is co-extensively due not to the positive agency of substances (as are their forces and powers) but on the contrary to some weakness, some deficit or incapacity that they have. Consequently, Dionysius denotes evil as strictly *contra naturam*. The Good is every substance's true nature, and evil is the circumstantial outcome of some mishap which presupposes good substances in a potentially good order. One might immediately think of many such weaknesses, incapacities, deficits or mishaps of all kinds which can lessen or destroy the good order of good substances and harm beings. Dionysius acknowledges such in his sententious remark that good comes from only one and total cause (ἐκ μιᾶς καὶ τῆς ὅλης αἰτίας), whereas evil originates from many partial and multiplied defects (ἐκ πολλῶν καὶ μερικῶν ἐλλείψεων): DN 729C. This becomes an adage in the great thinkers of scholastic philosophy: *bonum ex una et integra causa, malum ex quocumque defectu* (*S.th.* I q.18 a.11 et passim). The original thought is found as early as Plato, however; see *Republic* 379c: whereas the good has its cause in God, the many evils, in contrast, have many different origins.[8]

How is this to be understood? Obviously, the teaching on the one Good and the many evils can be easily illustrated. A river, for example, has one bed that it follows to the sea if it stays within its banks (we may name this path the one good way that it can take); but there is an almost infinite number of mishaps that are liable to prevent the water from taking this due course towards its final destination by making the river dam up, overflow, inundate its surroundings, as excessive rainfall, obstructing landslides, and braking dikes, just to mention a few. In Dionysius' cosmology, the ontological flowing and steadying establish a much more complicated and thoroughly interdependent system even more susceptible to obstructions and interferences than

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7 "So, then, evil has no being nor does it inhere in the things that have being. There is no place for evil as such and its origin is due to a defect rather than to a capacity," the summary of the discussion of evil in DN 733C states (οὐκ ἄρα ὂν τὸ κακόν, οὐδὲ ἐν τοῖς οὖσι τὸ κακόν. Οὐδαμοῦ γὰρ τὸ κακόν, ᾗ κακόν. Καὶ τὸ γίνεσθαι τὸ κακὸν οὐ κατὰ δύναμιν, ἀλλὰ δι᾿ ἀσθένειαν).

8 *Republic* 379c: "for good things are far fewer with us than evil, and for the good we must assume no other cause than God, but the cause of evil we must look for in other things and not in God. — What you say seems to me most true, he replied."

a river. Wherever a substance should fail to accomplish what it by nature should accomplish, it seriously endangers, or at least hurts, the system as a whole, which is why evil is so strictly *contra naturam*.[9] This would be the case of a disease in only one animal species that endangers all other animals of the same food-chain, for example. Yet, foremost this falling short of its nature endangers, weakens, and lessens every single nature considered by itself. This can come to pass in an almost infinite number of ways, as Dionysius is eager (and right) to point out. The lack of a tail-rattle is a serious defect of a rattlesnake's proper nature and almost certainly a severe evil which seriously endangers its existence. To almost any other animal on the planet, however, and above all to those that rely on noiseless swiftness for survival, the lack of such a rattle is an advantage. It is upon the teaching that every substance has its proper natural definition, its οἰκεία φύσις, that Dionysius' concept of evil rests. As soon as anything fails to accomplish its proper definition as established by its nature, we talk of evils.[10]

Dionysius has a criterion for the good in particular substances derived from his ontology of the well-disposed defining levels of the ontological procession's 'halt' or 'abiding,' namely, the measure of a nature's essential parameters. His explanation of evils rests upon the fact that a being can offend its being good *in genere suo* or its being good "in accordance with a single nature's essential nature" (DN 720D). Dionysius puts it like this:

> It is only in the realm of particular [substances] that something is said to be natural or unnatural ['against nature' or 'out of nature', παρὰ φύσιν]. With regard to what is unnatural, it can be so in one respect and not so in another. Evil in the domain of nature is against nature, a deficiency [or: privation] of what should be there in [or: by] nature (στέρησις τῶν τῆς φύσεως). Thus, there is no evil nature,

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[9] Cf. Perl 2003, 544: "Evil, rather, lies in the failure of any being to fulfill its constitutive nature, to perform its proper activities, and thus fully to be."

[10] Drawing heavily on Dionysius, Thomas Aquinas says the same thing in his *Quaestiones disputatae de malo* q.16 a.2, where he ponders the question whether demons are evil by nature or by will: "But that a thing in this way should be in itself naturally evil is impossible. Indeed it involves a contradiction, for a thing is called evil [or bad, *malum*] from this that it is deprived of some perfection proper to it, and a thing is perfect inasmuch as it attains to that which is proper to its nature (*malum enim dicitur unumquodque ex eo quod aliqua perfectione sibi debita privatur, in tantum autem unumquodque perfectum est, in quantum attingit ad id quod competit suae naturae*); and in this way Dionysius proves by many arguments that demons are not naturally evil" (my insertion). The same statement is found in Aquinas' Commentary *In De Divinis Nominibus* c.ii, l.1.

> for this is evil to nature. Rather, evil lies in the inability of things to reach their natural peak of perfection (DN 728C [my insertions]).[11]

Weakness, defect, deficit, or incapacity, when diagnosed of a being's actual being as compared to the normative standards of its proper nature, are called evil(s). This is an old Aristotelian teaching found, for instance, in *Physics* 190a-201b or, to a lesser extent, in *Metaphysics* 1022b-1023a.[12] Aristotle teaches that not just any privation or lessening of just any good is considered as (an) evil. It is only the privation of an essential good, a good belonging to a thing's proper nature, a good that defines a being's proper 'alignment' that can be identified as evil with certainty.

Let us consider just two examples of 'instrumental goodness' and its privation so as to clarify Dionysius' teaching. The privation of good eyesight is an utter catastrophe to the eagle, whereas it does not harm the mole, whose natural parameters do not require it. Equally, a thumb is a good thing to have — as long as it is just one thumb on each hand, whereas we would consider any third or fourth thumb on one same person's hand not a good thing and most probably would try deliberately to deprive the hand of it, to have it surgically removed, for instance. Why? The awkward third thumb infringes our natural parameters because it is not an essential good. Hence, we have the famous definition of evil in Anselm of Canterbury as *privatio boni debiti*, as a privation of a *due* good (cf. *De conceptu virginali* 5; *De casu diaboli* 11 and 16). As in Dionysius' doctrine on evil, Anselm's conception holds that it is the good and due order of things that ontologically defines all reality, whereas evil presupposes the sound inner state of Creation in order to act upon it by lessening, depriving, and depraving what is good and due in its origin and basic structure.

It is by evils such conceived that the good order of Creation, as described in Dionysius' 'praise' of Justice, Peace, Power, etc. in the subsequent chapters of DN, is disturbed and evil introduced to the world. In DN 897B, after the discussion of 'Justice' as the perfect ontological

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[11] Τῇ καθ᾽ ἕκαστον δὲ τὸ μὲν κατὰ φύσιν ἔσται, τὸ δὲ οὐ κατὰ φύσιν. Ἄλλῃ γὰρ ἄλλο παρὰ φύσιν, καὶ τὸ τῇδε κατὰ φύσιν, τῇδε παρὰ φύσιν. Φύσεως δὲ κακία τὸ παρὰ φύσιν, ἡ στέρησις τῶν τῆς φύσεως. Ὥστε οὐκ ἔστι κακὴ φύσις, ἀλλὰ τοῦτο τῇ φύσει κακὸν τὸ ἀδυνατεῖν τὰ τῆς οἰκείας φύσεως ἐκτελεῖν.

[12] An example taken from *Physics* 192a should suffice: "If we were to think of 'existence' (ὄντος) as something divine and good and desirable, we might think of shortage as the evil contradiction of this good," etc. Cf. *Metaphysics* 1022b, where among the many meanings of 'privation' the third one seems to be the one Dionysius is thinking of in his treatment of evil in DN.

balance of all beings that confers its due and appropriate place to every being, Dionysius defines a thing's 'evil condition' as a condition opposed to a thing's standing "firmly where it ought to be," an evil condition which can only be remedied by "bringing back order and arrangement." These multiple and punctual disturbances opposed to the dominant ontological order upon which all reality is founded (in DN 720C, the Areopagite plainly identifies 'evil' and 'disorder') are explained by Dionysius as follows:

> And it is not principles (λόγοι)[13] and powers which produce evil but impotence and weakness and inharmonious commingling of discordances (μίξις ἀσύμμετρος). Evil things are not immobile and eternally unchanging but indeterminate, indefinite, and bearing themselves differently in different things (DN 732B).

For every being, there exists one οἰκεία φύσις, one proper way to be at its best, to be all that it can be *in genere suo*, but there are also many characteristic ways to miss that proper being, due to many possible deficiencies or weaknesses (to an οἰκεὶα ἀσθένεια). Just as Aristotle says of the archer, that there is *one* way to hit the mark but an almost unimaginable number of ways to miss it, Dionysius explains:

> The reason is that evil things are not totally evil in every respect. The evil in demons lies in opposing a mind shaped by goodness, the evil in the soul lies in the activity contrary to reason, and the evil in the body lies in the renunciation of what is natural (DN 733A).[14]

And:

> [Evil] is neither in demons nor in us *qua* evil. What it is actually is a deficiency (ἔλλειψις) and a lack of the perfection of the inherent virtues (ἐρμία τῆς τῶν οἰκείων ἀγαθῶν τελειότητος) (DN 728A).

The difference between positive powers or order and privation or lessening is that the incapacities and weaknesses are not a being's proper nature, nor do they belong to it. A being's proper nature is its best actualisation, to which it by nature aspires. It is thus that Dionysius defines evil as displaying some sort of 'accidental being' (τὸ εἶναι κατὰ συμβεβηκός) due to something other (δι' ἄλλο) than a proper principle

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[13] A 'logos' being any sense-making structure which allows for — and in this case of Dionysius' philosophy definitely calls for — an interpretation of the 'Logos' as the inner (ontological) order of the universe.

[14] The passage is interesting insofar as it identifies what had been defined earlier (DN 728C) as παρὰ φύσιν with what is παρὰ λόγον: Οὐ πάντα πᾶσι καὶ πάντη τὰ αὐτὰ κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ κακά. Δαίμονι κακὸν τὸ παρὰ τὸν ἀγαθοειδῆ νοῦν εἶναι, ψυχῇ τὸ παρὰ λόγον, σώματι τὸ παρὰ φύσιν.

of its own (DN 732C). Therefore, evil is to be considered ontologically 'more akin' to non-being than to being.[15] Other than a thing's essence, evil is always an 'accident' to a being's being, which it weakens, lessens, disturbs, or depraves and allows to go astray from the path of proper perfection. Dionysius explains such with the example of misled good intentions that cause bad consequences:

> We have to assume that evil 'exists' as an accident. It is there by means of something else. Its source does not lie within itself. Hence something we do for the sake of the Good looks right and yet is not really so when we consider to be good what is actually not so. Desire and event are clearly different. Thus, evil is contrary to progress, purpose, nature, cause, source, goal, definition, will, and substance (παρὰ τὴν ὑπόστασιν). . . . It is errant, indefinite, dark, insubstantial, never in itself possessed of any existence (καὶ αὐτὸ μηδαμῶ μηδαμῆ μηδὲν ὄν) (DN 732CD).

The expression here rendered as 'contrary to substance,' παρὰ τὴν ὑπόστασιν, is an interesting one indeed, since it is ambiguous in a much-telling way. It not only denotes the accidental status of evil as 'parhypostasis' but also shows that evil (understood according to Dionysius' ontological teaching) works at the level of hindering and retarding the substances in their quest for realising their essential being. It works παρὰ ὑπόστασιν, "as opposed to a being's being itself."

Evil is no being, then, at least not a substantial being. Evil 'is' not, but evil rather 'comes about' in the form of privations, deficiencies, incongruities, etc., which cause disorder in the good order of reality. One problem remains, though, in how weakness, inabilities, or defects come about. One might expect a good and omnipotent God's Creation (or, in terms of Dionysius' ontology, a reality caused by 'Good,' 'Justice,' and 'Power,' etc.) to be flawless, incorruptible, and immune to defects and lessenings. DN 716D is one example of this shift in the question of evil from 'what' to 'whence' (πόθεν) it is.

A thorough appraisal of Dionysius' answer to this would lead the discussion far beyond the scope of this book, however. In a nutshell, his conclusions concerning the problem of evil can be rendered as follows. The defects and deficiencies that we perceive as evils in the principally presupposed good order of the universe are ultimately due to the last and supreme perfection of the world. At the peak of reality,

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[15] As Aristotle states in *Metaphysics* 1026b (and similarly in *Physics* 191ab), it seems that accidents are close to non-being (τὸ συμβεβηκὸς ἐγγύς τι τοῦ μὴ ὄντος). For a discussion, cf. Opsomer/Steel 1999, 254.

we find rational creatures capable of freely determining their own existence — autonomous creatures set free from the heteronomy of nature by which all other creatures are ruled. This freedom, in its highest degree, includes the possibility of the negation even of the good (conceived here especially as a being's 'proper good'). Free will enables certain creatures by their own account to choose and to accomplish their way of ultimate perfection, while it also enables these same creatures rationally and on their own account to deny the (prospect of) characteristic perfection with which their proper nature provides them. For multiple reasons, but above all by freely preferring seemingly good goals to truly good aims, they fail to accomplish what their nature should be, or rather, what they should be according to their nature. In the last consequence, they aspire to created, partial goods instead of the last and all subsuming, sense-giving Good to which all nature and every nature within it directs itself. One might feel compelled to ask why creatures are given this freedom anyway, if this implies the possibility of evil. The answer is not explicitly stated in DN, but one may easily infer it from Dionysius' ontological system. God, the Perfect, could not, being perfect, create a world less than perfect. This is expressed, among other things, by the uninterrupted chain of ontological levels in DN's exposé of the procession and steadying of the flux of being. To perfect the world and to keep the ontological grading complete and faultless, creatures of the highest degree of creaturely perfection could not be missing. Surely no one would deny that a creature capable of deciding and acting on its own account is more perfect (and its actions morally and qualitatively more worthy) than one that cannot do the same thing freely.

According to Dionysius, the rupture within the natural order has its origin in the free denying of one's own being and the craving to be something else, something alien to one's proper nature, and ultimately to refuse being altogether.[16] The cause for this denial and craving, however, is found in free creatures solely, not in the One that confers this freedom to them. The 'whence' of evil is to be identified in the spontaneity, i.e. in the self-actuating and self-accountable will. Will, and free will above all, is essentially characterised by this spontaneity, which renders it so valuable and is the perhaps most impressive instance, faculty,

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[16] "[I]nsofar as any being desires evil, it is desiring nothing, and to that extent failing to desire and hence to be. . . . Evil, then, consists not in any positive activity, but in a failure to love God and so to act, i.e., to be" (Perl 2003, 545).

and token of rational agents. For human beings, for example, the best, the proper goal, is to accomplish their characteristic nature, i.e. to be human at its very best. This is what will should be directed at. In contrast, the first evil, in Biblical terms of sin, is a free denial of that proper nature, as expressed in the excessively egocentric craving to 'be like God' (Gen 3:5),[17] but also in the desire to surrender oneself completely or exclusively to 'infrahuman' behaviour which endangers and mocks the rational autonomy of a human being's characteristic nature. The seven deadly sins, which significantly are never just single deeds but patterns of behaviour, and therefore vices (*vitia*) rather than sins, might serve as an example for that kind of misleading self-direction in which one fails to accomplish any rational autonomy over one's own life (but then again, ethics or specific moral prescriptions are not Dionysius' main concern here). In both cases, the οἰκεία φύσις of the human being is betrayed; in both cases, the result is a disorder classified as 'evil.' This is what Dionysius means when he qualifies evil as an "activity contrary to sense (παρὰ λόγον)," or as "the renunciation of what is natural" (DN 733A).

Much later, in chapter 8 of DN, Dionysius calls this act of renunciation a 'self-denial' (ἄρνησις ἑαυτοῦ), an intentional blindness which renders a sound self-acknowledgement impossible and must therefore be considered as an apostasy or defection from the truth (DN 893B): "Denial of the true self is a falling away from truth. Now truth is a being and a falling away from truth is a falling away from being."

'Apostasy from the truth' is exactly what Dionysius has in mind when it comes to the first evil that serves as a negative 'template' or 'model' for all other deviations from good ever since. In the 'chronological' terms of the Biblical narrative, this timeless first and radical 'evil of all evils' is depicted in the apostasy of Lucifer's angels, who did not want to be what they were (namely, the highest and most perfect form of creaturely beings), but something else (namely, not creatures at all, but 'like God'), thus wilfully refusing and betraying their proper nature. In this apocalyptic account as in Dionysius' theory of evil, it is an inten-

[17] This wish to be 'like God' is like an identifying idea that guides the 'history of evil' throughout the Bible and defines almost any sort of human baseness and evil by remitting it to this one perverted wish. It begins, of course, with Adam's sin (Gen 3:5), Cain's murderous deed (dominated by the motif of master of life and death in Gen 4:8ff.), metaphorically in the building of the Tower of Babel to 'reach the sky' (Gen 11:6), in the prince of Tyrus, who says 'I am God, I sit in the seat of God' (Eze 28:2), and finally in the Antichrist, who wants to seat himself in the place and temple of God (2 Thess 2:4), etc.

tional error, a freely chosen failure of autonomous Creation that is the cause of *all* evils (κακῶν ἁπάντων αἰτία: DN 716A). As soon as this first evil made its way into Creation, all other evils followed, as Dionysius points out when saying that the betrayal of their true being and their falling from grace from God was the origin of evil not only for the fallen angels, but also for everything else that could be affected by evil (DN 716A; cf. DN 729B). Once again, in the 'Platonic' top-down arrangement of reality, the 'higher' instance affects the 'lower' and every 'subsequent' one in some way,[18] and the 'first falsehood' or πρῶτον ψεῦδος therefore gives the explanation for everything else that we identify as evil (τοῖς ἄλλοις, ὅσα κακύνεσθαι λέγεται: DN 716A).

In summary, every nature has, in the good order of God's Creation a proper nature conferred to it, the accomplishment of which is its proper good. Accordingly, every creature by essence has a corresponding yearning within itself for this good (ἔφεσις τἀγαθοῦ), as long as it has not achieved it, and every being possesses a proper δύναμις, a proper 'power' or 'force', in order to aspire to what it should be by nature. In the case of autonomous creatures, the free denial of the proper nature and the corresponding misdirection of the yearning and powers on one's own premises are possible and have indeed taken place. Dionysius calls it "a going amiss of the true aspiration" (τῆς ὄντως ἐφέσεως ἁμαρτία: DN 733D), indicating the moral implication of the directional failure by calling it — etymologically correct — ἁμαρτία, a word which originally means the 'missing of a mark or aim' and is more often translated as 'sin.'[19]

This freedom or autonomy of the will of which rational creatures dispose is expressed in DN with the term δύνασθαι, 'potential' or 'disposition,' which, in contrasting δύναμις, (instrumental or effective) 'power,' denotes a range of possibilities or the 'can-be' of a creature understood as the option of being anything or not. A trite example might illustrate the difference (and also show that it is not quite the

[18] Again, this interpretation of Dionysius' dense theory is somewhat elliptical and cannot account for every single argument that the Areopagite adduces. For a more thorough study on the question, I remit the reader to my more exhaustive interpretation in Schäfer 2002, 440-452.

[19] Perl 2003, 544 explains this by correctly combining the directional interpretation of evil with the epistrophic constitution of all beings in Dionysius' triadic ontology: "Since the goodness and being of every creature is its reverting to or loving God in its proper way, any creature is evil, i.e. fails to be, insofar as it fails to love God. Dionysius adheres to the Platonic principle that all activity is motivated by desire for some good, and hence ultimately for God, as the Goodness of all good things."

well known scholastic difference between a *potentia activa* and a *potentia passiva* that is to be traced here): "Can you close the window?" someone might ask you. Certainly, you *can* close it. Your physical strength or your knowledge of the closing mechanism suffice, which means that you have the δύναμις, the 'instrumental power' to do it (sometimes, as in Plato's *Gorgias* 447c or 445d, the δύναμις of something is therefore to be translated as the thing's 'efficiency' or expected 'performance'). Now you *can* say no, too, and in that case 'to be able' means your δύνασθαι, your self-commanded freedom to decide whether you want to do so or not, whether you find it sound or not, becoming or not, dangerous or not, healthy or not, etc. to close the window, though your 'power' or 'means' suffice for doing it.[20] Whereas a brute animal exercises strength and 'abilities' of the first kind (namely δύναμις), rational self-commanding creatures possess a 'capability,' a δύνασθαι, of the second kind of 'to be able,' as well. When Dionysius speaks of a 'characteristic weakness' (οἰκεία ἀσθένεια: DN 728A) of creatures who incur evil, this 'weakness' or 'frailty' is to be understood as corresponding to the δύνασθαι-concept, meaning the negative possibilities of free potential and autonomous choice, not to the instrumental weakness as an antonym to 'power' or δύναμις. For δύναμις has no negative implications, as the treatment of 'Power' as a theonym shows. 'Power' is in creatures to a certain extent, more intensely in some, less in others, but always as a positive agent that confers the possibility to pursue one's true and proper aim. Wherever power, δύναμις, should fail and be lacking, a preceding self injury of the being's true being due to a failure of its δύνασθαι is to be presumed.[21]

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[20] LSJ clarifies this: while δύναμις is the active potential to do something as already proposed, δύνασθαι is the possibility to propose, a 'moral possibility' as the dictionary would have it. In fact, δύνασθαι can express the inner freedom to do something or not, or to do it otherwise (as in *Iliad* 1, 393 the expression εἰ δύνασαι: 'if you can do otherwise').

[21] Most commentators fail to see this evident implication of freedom in the recurrent use of the concept of δύνασθαι. Rorem 1993, 153, for one, speaks of an abrupt 'shift' in the development of the question of evil in DN and of an 'evasive argument' that heaps the entire discussion on an unfounded concept of liberty: "The concluding comments [*scil.* of DN's ch. 4], and supporting Scriptural passages, shift the responsibility for evil from God's providence to human freedom. This may seem to preserve God's justice, as the author claims . . . but the evasive argument is not really supported with any discussion of the free will itself" (my insertion). Again, for a thorough discussion of and for a response to such demurs, I must remit the reader to my more in-depth interpretation of the freedom problem in Schäfer 2002, especially 446ff. Additionally, there is a more detailed interpretation of the 'negative freedom' theory (as clarified by adducing portions of Isaiah Berlin's respective theories on liberty) on 311-314 of the same book.

According to Dionysius' identification of 'good' and 'being,' and according to his ontological theory of evil as 'privation' as expounded above, an apostasy from the proper good with which every being is by nature endowed (ἀποπτώσει τῶν προσηκόντων αὐτοῖς ἀγαθῶν) is to be considered as evil insofar as it corresponds to a tendency to non-being. In denying their proper being, creatures become evil to the measure of their failing in being what they are, to the measure of their non-being (καθ' ὃ οὐκ εἰσίν). Evil is identified by Dionysius as this tendency to non-being,[22] which brings about a serious diminution of the perfection determined by the characteristic good of everything by nature (cf. DN 897B). This, by the way, is another concept standing on firm Platonic grounds. In the dialogue *Gorgias*, Socrates insists on this same idea of the self-damage of those who do that which contradicts the 'just' cosmic order of all things. In Dionysius' words:

> If they are declared to be evil, the reason lies in their weakness regarding their natural activity. Their deviation is the evil in them, their move away from what benefits them. It is a privation in them, an imperfection, a powerlessness. It is a weakness, a lapse, an abandonment of the capacity they have to be perfect (DN 725B).[23]

But Dionysius is not merely a Platonist. He is a Christian Platonist. Let us therefore consider his doctrine of evil from yet another, a 'Pauline' angle.

In the treatise DN, Dionysius opens a long parenthesis about the problem of evil. His conclusion is: Creation in its basic design, in its primordial status, is entirely good. Creation would continue to be entirely good, if every creature acknowledged what its Creator conceived it for and acted according to its Creator's plan with it in regard to other creatures and to the whole of Creation.[24] Evil arises whenever

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[22] "What has happened is that they [the fallen angels] have fallen away from the complete goodness granted to them. . . . They are called evil because of the depravation, the abandonment, the rejection of the virtues which are appropriate to them. And they are evil to the extent that they are not, and insofar as they wish for evil they wish for what is not really there (καὶ τῇ στερήσει καὶ ἀποφυγῇ καὶ ἀποπτώσει τῶν προσηκόντων αὐτοῖς ἀγαθῶν λέγονται κακοί. Καὶ εἰσὶ κακοί, καθ' ὃ οὐκ εἰσίν. Καὶ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος ἐφιέμενοι τοῦ κακοῦ ἐφίενται)" (DN 725C).

[23] Κακοὶ δὲ εἶναι λέγονται διὰ τὸ ἀσθενεῖν περὶ τὴν κατὰ φύσιν ἐνέργειαν. Παρατροπὴ οὖν ἐστιν αὐτοῖς τὸ κακὸν καὶ τῶν προσηκόντων αὐτοῖς ἔκβασις καὶ ἀτευξία καὶ ἀτέλεια καὶ ἀδυναμία καὶ τῆς σωζούσης τὴν ἐν αὐτοῖς τελειότητα δυνάμεως ἀσθένεια καὶ ἀποφυγὴ καὶ ἀπόπτωσις.

[24] Compare Plato's example of the (pruning) knife (*Republic* 353ad) once more: a knife is made ('created') so it may serve as an instrument for cutting, stinging or stabbing, as the case may be. To accomplish that is what makes a knife a good knife. We call a knife a bad knife, if it does not accomplish that, because it is blunt etc.

a creature, forgetful of its Creator, does not acknowledge this creature-Creation relationship and falls from God's design of the world. Dionysius epitomises this by pointing out the case of the first evil, namely the fall of Lucifer (after all, Dionysius is not only the *doctor hierarchicus,* but also the *doctor angelorum*): the angel did not want to take the place conferred to him as a creature in the spiritual hierarchy and rather wanted to be like God the Creator (the same happens with the first human evil: Adam and Eve want to be 'like gods': Gen 3:5). Therefore, Lucifer does not accomplish anymore what he is naturally designed to be. Commentators of this passage have always emphasised Dionysius' philosophical dependence on the Neoplatonic doctrine of evil as presented in Proclus. Accordingly, it was this passage that would lead to the discovery of Dionysius' dependence on Proclus in 1895. The Neoplatonists' main tenets on and motifs of the question of evil can be found in Dionysius: the fall of spiritual beings, the privation theory, the idea of an οἰκεία φύσις, a proper nature every being has to live up to, the idea of a hierarchy of beings that ultimately defines goodness etc. Given that the modern standard interpretation of Dionysius sees him as a plagiarist of Proclus' theory of evil, this is where modern interpretation of Dionysius' doctrine of evil normally stops. Once identified its origin and established its poor quality as an abridged copy of Proclus, interest in Dionysius' text usually dies away. It is interesting, however, to compare the following passage from Paul's Epistle to the Romans, where the Apostle talks about how the Greek pagan culture could have attained a true knowledge of the true God:

> [19] For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. [20] Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; [21] for although they knew God they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. [22] Claiming to be wise, they became fools, [23] and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles. [24] Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves, [25] because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen.

Moreover: we speak of a good knife or a bad knife according to a certain context, according to its relation as a cutting tool to other things. A knife's goodness is revealed in its relation to bread, wood, or meat. Whereas even the best of knifes cannot be expected to slice water or diamonds.

In Dionysius' eyes, this passage may have contained a Pauline theory of Christian faith and pagan lore: pagan lore, and the power of thought could have sufficed to obtain, or at least to attain true knowledge of the true God. Philosophy, therefore, can help for an explanation of reality as God's Creation and should be employed for that explanation by Christians who rationally want to understand the world. As to Dionysius' theory of evil, however, this is important: dependent on Proclus as Dionysius may be, he still found the same doctrinal explanation of evil expounded in the Neoplatonists in the Apostle's teachings, too. Because the Hellenic intellectuals Paul is talking about fit the same pattern of evil's coming about that the theory puts forward. They are rational beings, even gifted with stunning rational capacities. As rational human beings, they have a proper place in God's Creation. They could, and should, acknowledge that by means of their natural capacities. But they do not live up to it. They infringe upon the hierarchical arrangement of being that guarantees every creature's goodness and every creature's understanding of what it is meant to accomplish according to what its nature tells it. They refuse to acknowledge the Creator as the architect of this arrangement. Instead, they put themselves (and other creatures: birds, and four footed beasts) in the place of God, and this is where they go astray.

Dionysius found, or believed to find, the main components and basic arguments of the Neoplatonic explanation of evil in Paul's teachings. When he claims to be the Areopagite Dionysius, he wants to tell us: 'whatever I found in the teachings of my Apostolic master, I had also heard from the philosophers of my times.' Still, there were reasons to follow him instead of them, because his teachings supervened what they said in significant aspects.

§9. AFTER 'EVIL': THE STRUCTURE OF DN REASSESSED

Returning to the question of the structure of DN and the inner development of the treatise's (normative) ontology, the preceding discussion of evil can shed some light on the composition of the writing's core and main part, namely chapter 4 on 'Good' and 'evil.' In this light, the structure of DN and the sense of the theonyms' arrangement will become clearer in some regards not taken into consideration so far.

Two aspects are of the utmost interest for finding an answer to the question of evil within a treatise dedicated to the Divine Names.

The first aspect is a predominantly 'architectural' one; that is, it concerns the structural integration of 'evil' into the overall composition of the writing. Having in mind the interpretation of Dionysius' teaching on evil as given above, it should now be easy to see why the problem of evil is inserted at this point of the treatise. After his lengthy discussion of the 'Good' as the first and foremost theonym expressing God's loving extroversion or the 'outpour' of being from the prime Cause, Dionysius has to explain why, if everything is due to the 'Good' (and nothing else), not everything is perceived as good in reality, and why we experience evil(s). It is a theo-*ontology* that DN wants to expound, and therefore the phenomenon of evil, which in a strict sense has nothing to do with God but with the ontological structure and coming about of worldly reality, must be philosophically treated and explained. This gives chapter 4 of DN its diptychal arrangement.

The Areopagite, after his hymnal account of the goodness of all being, has to defend his 'normative ontology' against the objections of the sceptic, who sees it disproved by the factual existence of evils. Dionysius' response is that evils have the ontological 'sub-status' of mere defects, shortcomings, or deficiencies, and are not to be considered as entities in their own right, but solely as disharmonies, paucities, malfunctions, dropouts, etc. of beings as considered in relation to their own ideal self and in relation to others within the good order of the cosmos, which would stay good and flawless if all beings corresponded to their characteristic nature that entirely defines them and

their rapport to others.[1] Evil is seen as an accidental (though painful) flaw parasitically exploiting the great possibilities of the ontological system. Within this system, evil originates exactly where these great possibilities are most distinctive, in the realm of freedom conceded to some creatures so they can autonomously choose their own good (their 'positive liberty'). But this also includes the ('negative') possibility or 'characteristic weakness' to choose freely otherwise and consequently to harm their own natures and, as forming part of a contingent system, their relationship to others.

Many questions, one might argue, are left open here. How exactly does the 'first evil' of the original apostasy cause the many particular natural and physical evils in the world? Where does the 'mythical' account of the demons' fall end and lead over to the beginning of the ontological argument within this teaching of meontic evil? Should not (as one would expect of an accomplished theodicy) the problem of God's Providence vis-à-vis the failure of His creatures be more thoroughly discussed (as it is in Augustine, for example)?[2] From a more theological angle, should not the 'new Adam' Christ and Pauline theology be adduced? Instead Dionysius renders 'Justice,' 'Redemption,' 'Good' and 'evil' into ontological concepts.[3]

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[1] As Korsgaard 1996, 138 says, "[T]o talk about values and meanings is not to talk about entities . . . but to talk in a shorthand way about relations we have with ourselves and one another. The normative demands of meaning and reason are not demands that are made on us by objects, but are demands that we make on ourselves and each other." In an analogous way, one might state about the doctrine of evil in DN that to talk about evil is not to talk about an entity, but to talk in a shorthand way about relations between beings themselves and about their relation to their own nature and Cause. Evil is not an object but an outcome of such miscarried relations.

[2] For example *De Civitate Dei* XII 23 *in fine*: *Manus Dei potentia Dei est, qui etiam visibilia invisibiliter operatur. Sed haec fabulosa potius quam vera esse arbitrantur, qui virtutem ac sapientiam Dei, qua novit et potest etiam sine seminibus ipsa certe facere semina, ex his usitatis et cotidianis metiuntur operibus; ea vero, quae primitus instituta sunt, quoniam non noverunt, infideliter cogitant; quasi non haec ipsa, quae noverunt de humanis conceptibus atque partubus, si inexpertis narrarentur, incredibiliora viderentur; quamvis et ea ipsa plerique magis naturae corporalibus causis quam operibus divinae mentis assignent.* Cf. also *De Civitate Dei* XIV 27; XIII 20; XIII 23, just to name a few examples. In Dionysius, too, the problem of God's Providence appears, but slightly different: Divine 'Redemption' (DN chapter 8) knowing of the weakness of creatures and the dangers that it implies, "does not permit the truly real to fall to nothingness and because it redeems from passions, impotence and deficiency anything which has gone astray toward error and disorder. . . . Redemption is like a loving father making up for what is missing and overlooking any slack" (DN 897B).

[3] Cf. von Ivánka 1964, 236: "Vom Heilsgeschichtlichen kein Wort, obwohl das alles, σοφία, δύναμις (1 Cor 1,24), δικαιοσύνη, ἁγιασμός ἀπωλύτρωσις (1 Cor 1,30)

A few remarks can be devoted at this point to the last complex of questions before a second (and more important) aspect of the structural sense of 'evil' in DN rounds up the discussion here proposed and reassumes the apology of the primordially philosophical interpretation of DN as attempted in this book. Though it is not entirely true that eschatology and the history of salvation have no part whatsoever in Dionysius' ontology (cf. DN 897D, DN 736B, etc., and Rorem 1993, 135, which all disprove such reproaches), history, the Biblical chronology of man's relationship to God, Christ's earthly existence and teachings, etc., do not play a decisive role in DN's main argument. In Dionysius, everything seems 'archetypal,' not singularly unique or nonrecurring. In a certain way, however, this is exactly the 'Pauline' grounds on which the teachings of the Areopagite stand. As the Apostle did in Athens when preaching to heathens, unrevealing the 'unknown God,' and as he did in the Epistle to the Romans when claiming that Greek wisdom could have come to a true knowledge of God by reason contemplating and interrogating Creation, Dionysius, his presumed disciple, names the nameless God of pagan philosophy and shows a way of explaining by (Biblical) theonyms Christian truths to those whose intellectual and existential background is not the history of salvation that Israel experienced as God's people, but Hellenic philosophy.

The second aspect concerning evil's status within DN and the conclusions drawn from it as to its sense within the structure of the treatise as a whole is the more important one. Evil is presented by Dionysius as a 'directional' defect, as a going astray, and as a missing of one's proper definition, and as a tendency to the baser rather than to the better possibilities of one's nature and characteristic perfection. Thus considered, the role of evil at this stage of the treatise's development becomes clear as a movement of (1) exaggeration of a sound process, of a good tendency gone bad for having lost the perspective that rendered it good (the 'good' tendency being defined as a tendency towards 'good') and fatally seeking an impossible good in itself; and (2) as a diffusive defect hindering a substance's concentration on its true self or proper nature. Both of these motifs depend on each other, as could be seen in the interpretation of Dionysius' doctrine on evil. By considering them separately, however, it is easy to show how they thematically contrast and oppose the two main 'directional' aspects of Dionysius'

Schriftausdrücke sind, die auf Christus, den Erlöser, angewendet werden und nicht in einem ganz allgemeinen metaphysischen Sinn."

philosophy. The first one is contrary to the ontological outpour or procession of being, while the second one inverts the sense and direction of the *unio mystica*.

ad (1): the interpretation of the Dionysian doctrine on evil as expounded in §§ 7 and 8 methodically abstains from presenting and from reconstructing it as an infixed and superficially altered (plus 'Christianised') summary of Proclus' treatise *De malorum subsistentia* in the fourth chapter of DN. I do not want stubbornly to neglect or seriously to challenge modern scholarship's consensus on Dionysius' dependence on Proclus, particularly on the question of evil. Yet, there are grounds to believe that the interpretive dogma of DN's explanation of evil as hardly anything other than a more or less out-of-context insertion of Proclean texts obstructs an impartial and pertinent view on Dionysius' teaching. An appropriate interpretation of its content, inner sense, and methodical intentions are only possible if Proclus is set aside instead of considering him as the all-responding guide and key-holder to the understanding of Dionysius on this question. The discussion of evil is a constituent part of DN. Not only is it not a posterior insertion of genuinely Proclean elements into a treatise that in its original version could well do without them (a thesis long abandoned by philologists, if ever seriously maintained). On the contrary, it is in particular the overall thematic guideline, inner architecture, and philosophical context-building of DN that gives the key for an appropriate understanding of the treatment of evil in chapter 4, namely, the development of an interpretation *quoad nos* of reality and its ontological foundations by way of theonyms. This is an interpretive context and integration of the question completely missing in, if not alien to, Proclus' *De malorum subsistentia* (though perhaps not to his philosophy on the whole). For the only possible way that DN expounds for the understanding and correct interpretation of the theonyms by renouncing to consider them as denoting the Most High καθ' αὑτό or 'in itself' is the only possible way to tackle the problem of evil, too. The negative 'parallelism' of good and evil is not only visualised in the stylistic diptych characterising the central chapter 4 of DN, nor merely a response to the pessimist's presumed questioning of the prevailing of the Good at the root of Dionysius' ontology. It is also a demonstration of how the main theme and the unique method of the entire treatise is capable of explaining the entirety of all that we experience, even if this means that the subject of the Divine Names, strictly speaking, has to be abandoned for one moment. The 'normative ontology' and 'actual' inter-

pretation of the 'Good' as the main theonym for denominating God's extroversion in the ontological procession is transferred in the second part of this chapter to the inevitably emerging question of evil. When 'Good' must be interpreted as ontologically indefinable 'beyond being,' exceeding any ontological standards, and understandable only insofar as it affects us, one might as well attempt to explain the 'Good's' inimical counterpart 'evil' within the same methodical parameters by describing it as ontologically indefinable outside being, fallen below every ontological positivity, and understandable not as something considered in itself, but only insofar as it affects us. That is exactly what Dionysius' discussion of evil attempts and accomplishes. By means of the same instruments and basic shifts of view that the Areopagite employs to discuss the theonyms as denominating the essential ontological structures of reality, he succeeds in 'negatively' explaining evil as being 'objectively' inapprehensible, as impossible to grasp as 'in itself' or 'as such', since it is not a substance and has no place where being takes place. Just as God *qua* 'Good' is a positive hyper-ontological standard (as ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας), evil is to be considered as a hypo-ontological negative standard (as ἔξω τῶν ὄντων). Yet, evil can be experienced and explained *quoad nos*, and it is under that viewpoint, methodically introduced by Dionysius in order to interpret the Divine Names, that evil can be adequately or at least close-to-adequately discussed.

This differs considerably from Proclus' intentions in writing *De malorum subsistentia* and from the context in which it is believed to be written. Most modern commentators (following Stiglmayr) suppose that the doctrine of evil in DN is a completely out-of-context insertion of a Proclean piece of doctrine, the inner sense of which could only be deduced from an inner-Platonic debate about and assessment of certain doctrines on evil (put forward by Plotinus and Syrianus) in which Proclus engages.[4] On the contrary, I should like to argue that Dionysius completely re-evaluates and re-assesses the 'parhypostasis' doctrine of evil, explicitly making it his own by entirely integrating it into his own system and into the inner development of his philosophical project. From a philosophical interpreter's point of view (which might differ from the philologist's, at this point) the explanation of evil as given in DN is understood correctly only if read within the context of the

[4] Cf. Stiglmayr 1895, 257ff. As to the problem of Proclus' 'debate' with Plotinus on the doctrine on evil, I stated my disbelief concerning the current scholarly consensus in Schäfer 1999 and in Schäfer 2002, 430f. Cf. also Schäfer 2004.

entire treatise, leaving aside any second thoughts about Proclus' *De malorum subsistentia*, let alone the interpretive dogma of making this secondary thought the predominant one for the discussion. For this doctrine, wherever Dionysius might initially extract it, acquires a new sense and meaning by the profound transformation of the context in which he puts it. It serves as a constituent and well-devised part of a systematic and philosophically self-reliant whole. I should like to claim in conclusion that such holds not only for the much debated doctrine of evil in DN but for Dionysius' ontology altogether. It is much more than just 'churched' Platonism.

There is another aspect to all this, as well, which involves theological problems, more strictly speaking. When describing evil as 'directional,' Dionysius opposes it to the (positively likewise) 'directional' procession of all being through the Good. The going negatively beyond being or falling outside it, the desertion of being that we call evil, is an exaggeration of the procession coming *from* God insofar as it turns it into a process '*away from* God.' Once again, it is the *plus ultra* that characterises evil and makes evil appear to be 'Good's monkey,' just like the devil frequently appears to be 'God's monkey' in the Scriptures when he desperately tries to 'be as God' — or even better. Whenever beings want to go beyond their characteristic well-defined nature, the ontological process is perverted; it oversteps borders, and swashes over, so to speak. The good that brings forth beings different from God is perverted by beings that want to define themselves by this difference and therefore to exaggerate their being different from God. They thus neglect the multiple-levelled abiding of the ontological flux on well-disposed characteristic levels. This concerns yet another important point necessary in order to understand the 'place' of evil within the overall layout of DN. Evil has to be explained after the discussion of good, i.e. of the ontological extroversion of God Himself, but it must seem just as suitable to Dionysius to explain it before the exposition of the different levels and intensities of the procession, and before the ontological steadying, the subsequent discussion of which clarifies how the ontological procession finds its proper levels, stages, and correlations without any harm done or evil arising.

This is understandable only within the preceding chapters of the treatise and, in part, also considering the subsequent parts of DN. None of this is Proclus' concern in writing *De malorum subsistentia*. It is only within DN and in presupposing an integrative layout of the treatise that subsumes the question of evil that the second part of DN's chapter 4 can be rightly understood.

ad (2): the two aspects of a 'directional' interpretation of evil and of its negative agency due to the missing of the characteristic nature or the inner sense of the ontological procession (and abiding) lead over to a second aspect of a perhaps more 'ethical' nature. For in the CD, a remedy or an 'antidote' to evil is frequently named which epitomises the exact inversion of the directional diffusion or the going astray that evil signifies. This remedy is the ἕνωσις or (final) union with the One. This union can be experienced by the mystic, according to Dionysius, in some sort of spiritual anticipation of every creature's return to the One. This experience discloses the union as the exact converse of directionally defined evil. The *unio mystica* is a directional movement, too. Other than the eagerly 'descending' diffusive and essence-denying direction away from the one Cause that characterises evil, the epistrophic way towards the union is one of concentration on one's true self and concomitant self restraint, of finding one's proper nature and (in an 'ontological oikeiosis') of taking shelter in it, and of an inner ascent to one's introspectively perceived own cause. Whereas evil is (in 'directional' terms) to be interpreted as a going astray and getting lost, the union is an effort and experience of finding one's proper path and of homecoming (the motif of the 'return to home,' the νόστος, is a frequent one in Platonic thought: cf. Plotinus' quoting of the Odyssey in *Enn.* I.6[1].8,16).[5] Whereas evil is due to many and completely different defects, privations, deficiencies, and disharmonies, the union has one, and only one, appropriate way and only one destination, namely concentration and reflection, the way to one's true inner self. This consideration of the mystical way as a counterdraft to the interpretive construction of 'directional' evil can hopefully cast some light on the explanation of evil in Dionysius, though it might expound *obscura obscuris.* What might become clear, all the same, is this: rational creature's faculties enclose the powers (at least in one's own being) to remedy the ontological defects that we know as 'evils' and to invert the deficiency-process which the ontological discussion identifies as the common sub-structure of all evils. Although the Areopagite does not expound a casuistic doctrine on moral questions, the — *prima facie* 'merely' ontological — treatment of evil in DN discloses what one could or even should call a self-contained ethics of the CD. Dionysius' ontological system allows for an ethical cure for the

[5] Some valuable observations on this motif of the 'homecoming' in Platonic philosophy are made by Anton 1996, especially 13ff.

cosmic defects, with cosmology — which is always more than and beyond the scope of mere cosmography — or the 'book of Creation' playing a decisive role in a rational creature's ethical behaviour, self-direction, and self-rectification.

CONCLUSION

> Formerly, in all their sacrifices, the Pelasgians called upon gods without giving name or appellation to any (I know this, because I was told at Dodona); for as yet they had not heard of such. They called them gods (θεοί) from the fact that, besides setting (θέντες) everything in order, they maintained all the dispositions.
>
> Herodotus II.52

The key to understanding Dionysius' philosophy is not to interpret him via Proclus, as so many have done for the last hundred years or so and still do. On the contrary, the key to a proper interpretation of the CD is the methodical acceptance of the literary fiction of reading an author who — Athenian born and raised in the pagan culture of Christ's times — finds himself faced with early Christian doctrine. It is precisely the naïve enthusiasm and the immediateness of the first encounter that the literary fiction wants to restore: the encounter, that is, of the highly advanced and venerable pagan wisdom and of the recently emerging and yet unheard of Christian doctrine. The author of the CD attempts to recreate this encounter by jumping back centuries and expounding from the mouth of a Greek first-hour convert an exhaustive and refined intellectual exercise of the sixth century, in order to clarify and to explain the passionately discussed problem of the historical fusion of Greek philosophy and Christian truth.

Dionysius' method in doing this consists of the presentation of a Platonic ontology by way of Biblical theonyms. These never express anything about God Himself, but they help to understand what God wants us to understand about Him *quoad nos*. Perhaps it is not too far fetched to compare (Biblical) theonyms and (the author's) allonym at this point. In DN, the theonyms express whatever God wants us to know about Himself and whatever we can grasp of Him by His self-communication towards us, yet they ultimately cannot reveal Him as He truly is. The allonym 'Dionysius Areopagita' lets us know how the author of DN wants

to be read and perceived by his audience but not who he really is. Like the Creator he speaks about, he wants to be completely detached from his creation as a person, yet completely united to it as its author, "known in all and distinct from all [scil. he created]" (DN 872A).

The *quoad nos* of his writing is thus implicitly revealed by its author; it has to be read and understood as if it were the communication of a Christian author whose objective it is to proclaim the 'unknown God' to philosophically educated Greeks, naming Him with the revealed theonyms of the Bible. For this purpose, however, he employs Platonic thought, a medium of expression and a philosophical doctrine which in his (historical) times proved to be the best way of pondering the Divine mystery. The allonym of the Biblical Areopagite allows Dionysius to confess and to emphasise his claim of pertaining to both sides, which he tries to reconcile in his writings. As an Areopagite, he is a high-ranking representative of Hellenic culture which he, according to Acts 17:34, must have absorbed before his first contact with Christian faith; as a 'follower' of the Apostle Paul, Dionysius claims to be a Christian of the first or second generation who received the Apostolic doctrine directly and without intermediaries. As a converted intellectual, he professes the programmatic task of naming the anonymous God of pagan wisdom, rescuing Him from His namelessness, and crossing the boundary that no philosophical speculation crossed before. At the same time, he is eager to explain the truths of Christian doctrine through Platonic philosophy, following his Apostolic master who writes that whoever does not make the mistake of judging the knowledge of God to be useless can achieve the knowledge of God by 'the Greek way' of reason, which could have understood God's truth through His manifestations (Rom 1:28 and 1:19).

The pseudonym of 'Dionysius the Areopagite' is to be taken as a programmatic key for the understanding of his writings: chapter 17 of the Acts of the Apostles tells us that Paul met a group of Greek philosophers (epitomised by the naming of the Epicureans and Stoics) who wanted to understand ('βουλόμεθα γνῶναι,' etc.) his doctrine. Accordingly, what he did was this: he communicated to them the γνῶσις of the God hitherto unknown to them (ἀγνώστος), explaining that he could name Him, acknowledging Him as the Creator of all (ὁ ποιήσας τὸν κόσμον):

> [18] Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (τινὲς καὶ τῶν Ἐπικουρείων καὶ Στοικῶν φιλόσοφοι) met him. And some said, "What would this babbler say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities" — because he preached Jesus and the resurrection. [19] And they took hold of him and brought him to the Areopagus,

> saying, "May we know what this new teaching (καινὴ διδαχή) is which you present? [20] For you bring some strange things to our ears; we wish to know (βουλόμεθα γνῶναι) therefore what these things mean." [21] Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new. [22] So Paul, standing in the middle of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. [23] For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god (ἀγνώστος θεός).' What therefore you worship as unknown [rather: 'being ignorant,' ἀγνοοῦντες], this I proclaim to you. [24] The God who made the world (ὁ ποιήσας τὸν κόσμον) and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, [25] nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything. . . ." [32] Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked; but others said, "We will hear you again about this." [33] So Paul went out from among them. [34] But some men joined him (κολληθέντες) and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

The author of the CD does no other than that: in his treatise DN, he confers Biblical names (ὄνομα) to the philosophically anonymous principle of all (to the Neoplatonists simply: the One),[1] thus rescuing it from its anonymity and at the same time rescuing those 'worshipping' it from doing it ignorantly (ἀγνοοῦντες). Dionysius wants us to understand that he is doing the same thing the Apostle did.[2] His claims of being Paul's disciple are therefore more doctrinal than historical. The writings of Dionysius are designed in such a fashion as to make us believe that their teachings (their διδαχή) are hardly more than the necessary second step that must have followed Paul's preaching in Athens. In a way, we could say that Dionysius attempts to reconstruct what he thinks a historiographical lacuna in the history of ideas.

As a matter of fact, the (Pseudo-) Dionysius took the passage of the Acts of the Apostles quite seriously, because the vocabulary employed in it strongly suggests a 'philosophical' reading. Not only do the Epicureans and Stoics give the scene or the 'setting' for it, being the only Athenians who take some interest in Paul's teaching, but they also pro-

[1] The naming of the One in the first and in the final chapter of DN could be an additional indication of this: according to the Biblical texts from which Dionysius takes his theonyms, the One of the Platonic tradition can be named as Good, Love, Wisdom, Peace, etc., and all these Biblical names denominate the One of the Platonic tradition, whose naming sandwiches them in the structural outlay of DN.

[2] Or the Apostles. Paul's words on the Areopagus resemble what Jesus says to a pagan (Samaritan) woman in John 4:22: "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews."

vide the term used for those who eventually followed or 'joined' the Apostle (the κολληθένετες) and the term employed to characterise his doctrine (διδαχή). At the time, these two terms were often used in connection with joining a particular school of philosophy.[3] The same passage makes it clear, however, in what respect Paul's preaching was new and as yet unheard of. The first point that is mentioned is that the unknown God is the Creator or the 'Maker' of the universe. It is exactly this point that Dionysius tries to explain in philosophical terms in his treatise DN. Within the framework of Greek philosophy, he wants to propose an explanation of the Christian idea of Creation, opposing it to the dangers of pantheism always lurking in Neoplatonism. — Once we take this seriously, i.e. once we methodically accept that we should read Dionysius, not according to who he historically was or might have been, but who he wants us to think that he is, many of the traditional vexed questions and unsolved problems of modern Dionysius studies clear up.

To both Christians and the Platonists of his times, Dionysius might therefore have appeared as a traitor or even as a 'parricide': to the philosophers because he employs Hellenic wisdom in order to turn it against Hellenic paganism and makes it a weapon for the Christian faith; to many of his fellow Christians because he explains and ponders the doctrine of the Apostle in a remarkably Platonic way and in doing so almost entirely neglects central aspects of Christian faith like salvation history, good stewardship, etc. Dionysius himself is very well aware of all this and foresees that he will be accused of patricide (πατραλοίας) by those who do not properly understand him in a very personal passage of his seventh Letter 1080AB. It is worth while quoting:

> But you[4] say that the sophist Apollophanes reviles me, that he is calling me a parricide, that he charges me with making unholy use of things Greek to attack the Greeks. It would be more correct to say to

[3] The one word suggests a certain inner attachment to the teachings, and the other designates a rule by which one leads one's life or even a military discipline which one acknowledges and lives by when joining an army (cf. the pertinent explanations in LSJ). As a rule, early Christians themselves would rather compare their doctrine to those of philosophical schools than to other religions. Thus, Augustine speaks of the Christian way of life as the 'true philosophy' (in *Contra Julianum* and in *De vera religione*). His work *De doctrina christiana* puts forward the Christian faith as a philosophical doctrine rather than a religion, whereas his *De vera religione* does not present the Christian faith as the 'true religion' as compared to others, but is rather a treatise on what we might call 'true devotion.'

[4] The letter is addressed to a certain Polycarp, a 'hierarch' (perhaps Polycarp of Smyrna? Cf. Luibheid 1987, note 15 on 266).

> him in reply that it is the Greeks who make unholy use of godly things to attack God. They try to banish divine reverence by means of the very wisdom which God has given them. I am not talking here of the beliefs of the *hoi polloi* who in their materialistic and impassioned way cling to the stories of the poets and who 'serve the creature rather than the creator.' No, I am talking of Apollophanes himself who makes unholy use of godly things to attack God. This knowledge of beings, which he rightly calls philosophy and which the divine Paul described as the 'wisdom of God,' should have led true philosophers to be uplifted to him who is the cause not only of all beings but also of the very knowledge which one can have of this beings.[5]

Hellenic wisdom could have understood God's truth through His manifestations or 'energies,' and it could have achieved true theological insight through "the knowledge of beings," that is ontology. In his theo-ontological treatise DN, Dionysius shows how this can be accomplished.

From these considerations, I should like to make a more general point and show how a reassessment of Dionysius' philosophy can be achieved by grounding it on Proclean philosophy *and* the Pauline ways of thinking.

Dionysius discloses his identity to us by presenting himself as a *fictitious* character. This is what modern Dionysius scholarship teaches us when it puts the finger on Dionysius' fall-back on Proclus. Yet, as in his theo-ontology where the Creator is only known through His Creation, "known only by way of whatever share of Himself He extends to us" (ταῖς μετοχαῖς μόναις: DN 645A), Dionysius wants to remain hidden

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[5] Σὺ δὲ φῂς λοιδορεῖσθαί μοι τὸν σοφιστὴν Ἀπολλοφάνη καὶ πα τραλοίαν ἀποκαλεῖν, ὡς τοῖς Ἑλλήνων ἐπὶ τοὺς Ἕλληνας οὐχ ὁσίως χρωμένῳ. Καίτοι πρὸς αὐτὸν ἡμᾶς ἦν ἀληθέστερον εἰπεῖν, ὡς Ἕλληνες τοῖς θείοις οὐχ ὁσίως ἐπὶ τὰ θεῖα χρῶνται διὰ τῆς σοφίας τοῦ θεοῦ τὸ θεῖον ἐκβάλλειν πειρώμενοι σέβας. Καὶ οὐ τὴν τῶν πολλῶν ἔγωγέ φημι δόξαν τοῖς τῶν ποιητῶν προσύλως καὶ ἐμπαθῶς ἐναπομενόντων καὶ τῇ κτίσει παρὰ τὸν κτίσαντα λατρευόντων, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὸς Ἀπολλοφάνης οὐχ ὁσίως τοῖς θείοις ἐπὶ τὰ θεῖα χρῆται· τῇ γὰρ τῶν ὄντων γνώσει, καλῶς λεγομένῃ πρὸς αὐτοῦ φιλοσοφίᾳ καὶ πρὸς τοῦ θείου Παύλου σοφίᾳ 1 θεοῦ κεκλημένῃ, πρὸς τὸν αἴτιον καὶ αὐτῶν τῶν ὄντων καὶ τῆς γνώσεως αὐτῶν ἐχρῆν ἀνάγεσθαι τοὺς ἀληθεῖς φιλοσόφους. The text repeats the Pauline teaching of Rom 1:19ff.: "because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made," etc. (the two literal quotes in Dionysius' text are from Rom 1:25 and 1 Cor 1:21, respectively). It is above all the philosophers' side that Dionysius has in mind in this portion of the seventh letter where he speaks of the parricide. On the other hand, as von Ivánka 1964, 245 points out, the motif of being charged with intellectual patricide comes from the Platonic tradition itself and has its roots in Plato's *Sophist* (241d). The same can be said of the motifs of accusing the "stories of the poets" as false theology (cf. Plato's *Republic* 377d ff.) and of attacking the sophists. Even in his apology against accusations coming from the philosophers, Dionysius remains very Platonic himself in the motifs that he employs, in his choice of words, and in his way of thinking.

behind or 'in' his writings ('his creation'), because the only proper way to understand the Creator is through Creation, through that which comes to us from him (εἰς ἡμᾶς ἐξ αὐτῆς: DN 645A). Actually, as in theology, the method of knowing the creator through creation, and not vice versa, safeguards us from misinterpretations because it makes us more cautious. Our impression of what or who the creator of our perceptions is must not be mistaken for what he or it is *per se.* Dionysius has a nice little metaphor for it:

> Take a familiar example: Joys and woes are said to be the cause of our feelings of joy and woe without themselves being the possessors of such feelings. The fire which warms and burns is never said itself to be burned or warmed (DN 645D).[6]

The gain of a more unbiased method of reading Dionysius can be enormous. First, it sheds some light on the 'Pauline understanding' of the intellectual goings-on of the first Christian centuries and the big question of the coupling of pagan wisdom and Christian thought. The Biblical person the author of the CD claims to be 'followed,' 'joined,' or 'claved unto' Paul right away after only one short sermon at the notorious 'Speaker's corner' of the Ancient World. The alleged Dionysius tries to explain this surprising psychological situation in his Christian, yet entirely Neoplatonic, philosophy: the Areopagite must have immediately sensed that what Paul said was very much the same what the philosophers had convincingly been saying for a long time, but that he could have taken it to another, more 'personal level' by naming the hitherto anonymous First principle of all, etc. The broader context makes this even clearer: in Athens, as elsewhere, Paul had preached first in the synagogue, where he hoped to find some basic understanding he could use as a prepared basis of his doctrine. However, his hopes were frustrated. But something unexpected happens in Acts 17:18-34: Paul preaches to Greeks and finds out that their philosophers had somehow in their own way prepared the way for the Gospel and that there were gentiles who were willing to follow him right away. The passage explains and confirms more or less the statement of Romans 1:19-28 quoted (partly) above.

This also clarifies certain questions as to who Dionysius' intended audience might have been. These were not pagans to be refuted or

[6] This passage might also be influenced by the Neoplatonic solution to the problem of what since Bertrand Russell has been called 'self-predication.' Plotinus initiated a doctrinal view holding that Ideas and causes in general are not themselves what they cause: cf. *Enn.* II.4[12].9,5-16.

convinced of the Christian doctrine, I suspect, but Christians who had to be reassured of the rational grounds of the Christian doctrine. Dionysius tells them that although they do not depart much from what pagan philosophy teaches they now know more and can see more clearly than they could with pure reason. Again, the question of Dionysius' intended readers is pivotal for an understanding of his writings, and it is the methodical acceptance of his fictitious character that allows us to understand who his intended readers were.

Second, it can be shown that Dionysius reinterprets Platonic philosophy in a radical fashion. He takes the scholarly orthodox system of the Platonists and carefully and intelligently reassembles the elements of the former structure in such a way that his own philosophy emerges out of the broad stream of late Neoplatonic scholasticism as a highly original, yet still entirely 'Platonic' account of the Christian doctrine of Creation.[7] It is a radical re-interpretation of a longstanding philosophical way of thinking by a slight shift of perspective, as I have adumbrated above.

Reading Dionysius according to this method and perspective of the 'factual identity' or the 'person-work-unity' helps to understand him as a thinker in his own stance, putting forward a noteworthy piece of self-contained and original philosophy.

This is fundamental for understanding Dionysius, and at the same time, this is what studies of Dionysius as a philosopher in the last one hundred years or so seem to have almost entirely missed, making modern Dionysius scholarship a historical *in vitro* example of how the focus on the historical person of the author and pretended knowledge of his presumed intentions can in fact obstruct an understanding of an author and his work. Sometimes, it seems as if many of the exponents of modern Dionysius scholarship resemble the proverbial fools that would stare at the finger when the finger points at the moon.

In contrast, the more promising attempt to approach the Dionysian writings seems to be this: 1. we leave aside all second thoughts about

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[7] Not that Dionysius ever claimed to be original himself: in DN 681A-684D, he speaks of his teacher, the otherwise unknown Hierotheus, probably another allonym of the Areopagitic fiction, whose (obviously Platonic) book, *Elements of Theology*, Dionysius paraphrases at times but never surpasses it. "Since he, like an elder, has in fact served as our guide in these divine things, laying down a condensed summary of our boundaries and encompassing so much in one statement for us and for all our teachers of newly converted souls, I am therefore encouraged to explicate and to separate the condensed and singular mental gymnastics of that man's most powerful intellect, although of course in an argument proportionate to my own powers" (DN 681B).

who the author 'really' was and about whether he wanted to trick Christians into Neoplatonic philosophy or any other doctrinal tenets by assuming the name of the Areopagite, as those would have it who read him according to the Proclus-*caveat*. 2. We should not read his work as a diluted version of Proclean thought. And we should not assume that by arrogating Apostolic discipleship he wanted to usurp authority and fraudulently add doctrinal weight to what he says, nor should we read his writings as an attempt to gain influence in the course of Christian theology, etc. Casting aside all these secondary perspectives, and the even more pointless questions as to exactly what doctrinal or dogmatic opinions the author might have been trying to put forward by this usurpation, we should rather interpret the Areopagitic writings according to the fictitious, yet openly programmatic claims of their author. These should not be conceived of as a cunning plan for deceiving the reader, but rather as a constituent part of the writings' overall layout. In the Corpus of his writings, 'Dionysius the Areopagite' is not so much the subject that produced them, but one of the topical subjects the writings treat of. The fact is, we simply do not know who the author of the CD might have been historically and we cannot prove that he is the mouthpiece of any fifth or sixth century thinker known to us. In Dionysius' case, the author is so completely absorbed in his fictitious self that it basically forces an acceptance of this fictitious self upon the interpreter.[8]

Is this interpretation too generous with an obvious forgery? Does it unduly obey an exaggerated 'principle of charity'? I willingly admit that at least there is a 'principle of benevolence' involved. But then again, in the case of the Areopagite's writings, this is not just a warm-hearted concession, but is the most reasonable thing to do, for we simply do not know who the 'real' Dionysius was. The only thing we know about him are his writings and the fictitious character of the author is a constituent part of these writings. As the Creator is indissolubly interwoven (συμπέπλεκται) with what he creates and with what "can be grasped" of Him (ninth Letter 1105D), the author of the CD is indissolubly interwoven with his text. The writings suggest that his claimed

[8] There is one thing I should like to clarify at this point: this interpretation of Dionysius has nothing to do with worried concerns that Dionysius' reputation or credibility as an author could be in some way 'tarnished' by acknowledging that he is a post-Proclean Platonist and considering him a falsifier. One would only have these concerns about a person. This interpretation, however, does not focus on the author of the CD as a historical person. It is concerned predominantly with the author as a fictitious character and how this affects the interpretation of the treatise.

discipleship to Paul points in one direction: he wanted to show that, given the Pauline preaching to the pagans, a Christian adaptation and re-interpretation of pagan lore (and of Greek philosophy in particular) was the necessary and mandatory next step to take. Dionysius' philosophy is an attempt to accomplish this in a way that would recreate the situation of the first encounter of faith and philosophy and describe it by means of a language understandable to learned Christians of his times — namely, Platonic terminology.[9] This method does not disregard the broad consensus of modern Dionysius research on his dependence on Proclus. There is an interesting parallel between Dionysius' philosophy and how it has been historically interpreted. In Dionysius' philosophy, everything proceeds from its Creator, becomes something else acquiring its own identity, and than comes back enriched to its Origin. The same thing occurs in the interpretation of Dionysius during the last decades. At some point, it parted from the assumption that the Biblical Areopagite was the author of the CD, and then separated the author from that assumption, but now that the author's own stance in the late Platonic tradition is firmly established, it can return to reconsider the author as the 'Areopagite', as I have tried to do.

The promise of this method is that it tells us more about Dionysius' true identity as an author than any historical identification of him as a person ever could.

With all of this in mind, we might inquire about what the analysis of the structure of DN and the resulting reassessment of its content can teach us concerning the philosophy of the Areopagite. Although there are many possibilities to choose from, I would like to highlight the following aspects of the antecedent study in order to answer this question.

– The arrangement of the apparently incoherently assembled theonyms obeys a well-devised three 'phase' development that follows an introduction which is three chapters long (§5).
– The introduction, in manifesting the impossibility of talking about God, the triune, καθ' αὑτό, completely shifts to an understanding καθ' ἡμᾶς, to a creaturely understanding originating in our own (in-)capacity and in what affects us (§§ 4 and 5).

[9] Cf. Dörrie 1967, 50. What Dörrie observes about the Platonic standard language of the centuries in question might also be true for Dionysius. Yet, the CD's contents show that its author went far beyond a mere terminological employment of a standardised language. The writings prove him to be a true-born Platonist in most, if not all aspects of his thinking.

- From this perspective of understanding the ineffable core of all καθ' ἡμᾶς, the triune God's theonyms are discussed in a 'triadic' ontology of procession (God's extroversion καθ' ἡμᾶς), dynamic steadying (on different levels), and reversal/return towards God. Every single ontological level and 'phase' described by the theonyms has in itself, as a result and as a sign of God's extroversion, a discernible triadic structure and makes transparent its only origin (the Threefold) and ultimate goal (the One).
- In Dionysius' construction of DN, each 'phase' is governed by three *nomina regentia*, which were discovered by Endre von Ivánka in his formal study of the theonyms in DN (§§ 3 and 5).
- The triadic development of DN's ontology in terms of procession, steadying, and return can be interpreted as reflecting the three-step movement of the mystical ascent described by Dionysius in MT in terms of the mental activity of self-purification, cessation of all mental activity, and uplifting to union. This is another corroboration of the Areopagite's constant methodical claim of interpreting the world *quoad nos* (§§ 2 and 3).
- The 'Good', being the theonym epitomising, as it were, God as surrendering Himself to Creation in terms that we can understand, or καθ' ἡμᾶς, forms a diptych with 'evil' in chapter 4. Evil, on its part, is understandable among the treatise's theonyms only if considered as the dynamic and directional Good's counterpart. It has no possibility of any positive ontological determination; it is understandable in a negative way, not in itself, but only καθ' ἡμᾶς.
- Thus explained, evil must be considered as a constituent and meaningful part of the treatise's ontology and philosophical development. Moreover, its organic appearance within the set of theonyms and its discussion show that DN expounds an ontology before the eyes of the reader. After all, 'evil' is not a theonym; the philosophical question of evil must be addressed in order to develop a credible and consistent explication of the world καθ' ἡμᾶς, not to a theological presentation (§§ 7, 8, and 9).
- The correspondence of style and content in DN is visible even with regard to the role that Peace plays in Dionysian ontology, which is of the utmost importance for the irenic presentation of the doctrine expounded. As in his ontology, where all obvious antagonisms, contradictions, and polarities are finally dissolved in an integrating harmony and brought to peace, in his presentation of this ontology, all quarrels, polemic disputes, and debates are calmed by a conciliatory

style (§5): "I do not wish to run against my own beliefs by refuting the opinions of others," Dionysius says in his seventh Letter (1080B), and: "This, I believe, is a sound principle and therefore I have never wished to embark on controversies with Greeks or with any others" (1080A).

- In the same respect, theology and philosophy are reconciled in Dionysius' DN by his presentation of worldly reality as God's extroversion, an ontology that makes transparent its one Origin, and the three-in-one Divinity as remaining present in everything created. Though a philosophical reading of DN is fitting, licit, and even necessary, its legitimacy would suffer irreparable damage, if not complete ruin, should it be cut from its theological dimension, implications, and purposes (§6).
- The thought-through and diligently elaborated layout of the treatise, the seamless and purposive integration of the problem of evil, and the stylistic, symbolic, and architectural peculiarities of DN render obsolete any interpretation of Dionysius' philosophy that makes him completely dependant or highly indebted to Proclean antecedents to the point of having no claim whatsoever to a value of its own (§9).
- A thorough analysis of the structure of DN and of what it tells us about the treatise's content (and vice versa) can show how DN forms part of an overall lay-out for the CD as a whole, as it makes a link, in its concluding passages, with the MT and sets the grounds for the theological discussion of the hierarchies in CH and EH. Such an analysis, however, not only helps to reassess DN's place and function within the CD but also, in a much broader context, within the history of thought (§§ 6 and 9).

APPENDIX ONE

DIAGRAMS: DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS OF THE STRUCTURE OF DN

DIAGRAM 1: VON IVÁNKA 1964, 228-242

chapter	*subject/theonym*		*von Ivánka's interpretation*
1-3	thematic outline and prayer		[methodology and introduction]
4	Good, Light, Beautiful, Love, Ecstasy, Zeal		God's extroversion/outflow
5	<u>Being</u>		First Triad (from Proclus): Being, Life, Wisdom (and itscognates) [chapters 5–7]
6	<u>Life</u>		
7	<u>Wisdom</u>, Mind, Word, Truth, etc.		Second Triad (from Gregory of Nyssa, also corresponding to the names of Constantinopolitan basilicas): Wisdom, Power, Peace (and cognates) [chapters 7–11]
8	<u>Power</u>, Righteousness, Salvation, Redemption		
9	Greatness/Smallness, Sameness/Difference, Similarity/Dissimilarity Rest/Motion	[Parenthesis 1]	
10	Almighty, Ancient of Days, Ancient/New	[Parenthesis 2]	
11	<u>Peace</u>		
12	Holy of Holies, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, God of Gods		
13	Perfect, One		

Parenthesis 1: the order of the cosmos explained by contrasting the Parmenidean 'antonyms'.

Parenthesis 2: the order of the cosmos explained in timely terms.

DIAGRAM 2: VON BALTHASAR 1962, 192f.

chapter	*subject/theonym*	*von Balthasar's interpretation*
		I. Introduction:
1	One	About knowing and naming God
2	Threefold and Triune	Unity and differentiation
3	[Prayer]	The theological method
4	Good (and cognates)	II. Theonyms of Creation (πρόοδος)
5	Being (and idea and participation)	
6	Life (as intensified being)	
7/part 1	Intellect and Wisdom (as highest intensity of being)	
7/part 2	Wisdom	III. Theonyms of providence or return (ἐπιστροφή)
8	Power, Righteousness, Salvation, Redemption	
9	God's Sameness in the dissimilarity of things: the Parmenidean Names	
10	Names of time and space; Almighty	
11	Peace. Concluding remarks on participation.	
12	The 'potentising' Names: Holy of holies, god of gods, Lord of lords, King of kings	IV. Theonyms of Union and Transcencence
13	Concluding theonyms: Perfectness, Unity	

DIAGRAM 3: SCHÄFER (IN THIS BOOK)

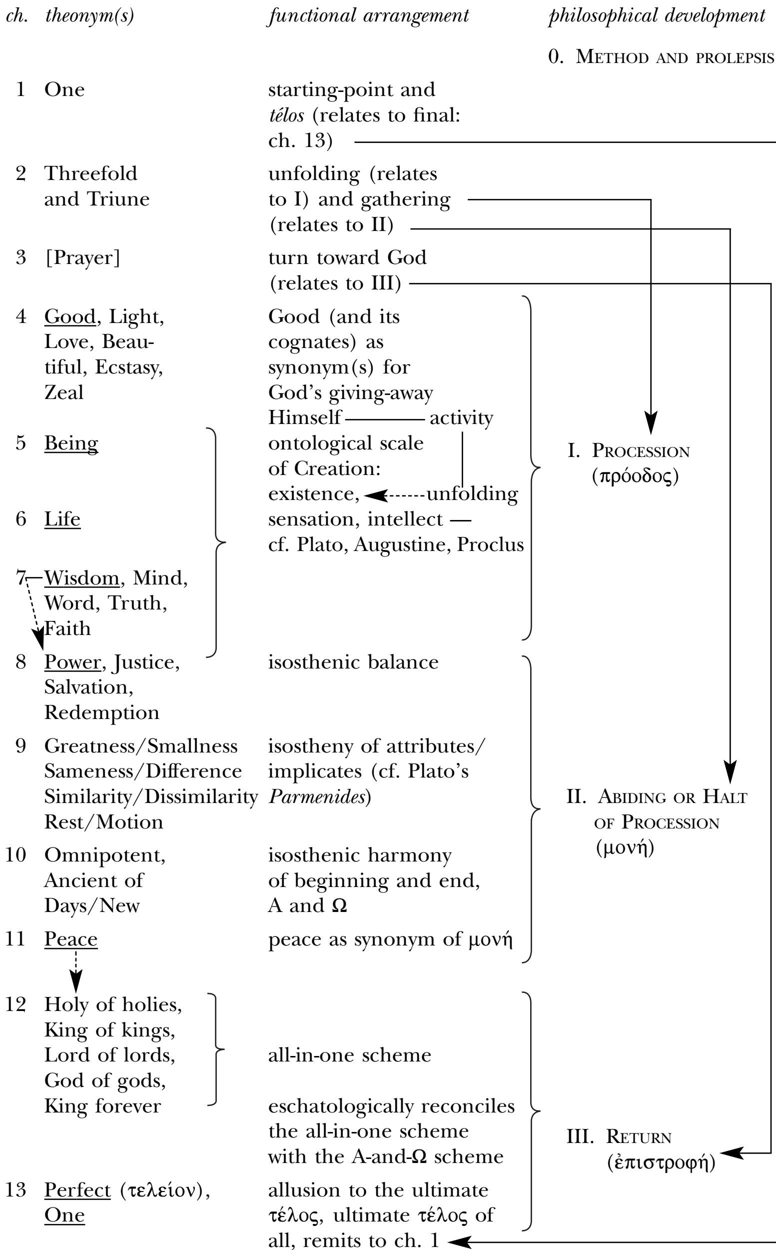

DIAGRAM 4: THOMAS AQUINAS *IN DN* C. IV, L.1, 262-265

chapter	*subject/theonym*		*Aquinas' interpretation*
	I. The (theological) introduction		
1-3	God One and Threefold, knowable and ineffable		
	II. The processions (*processiones*)		
4	Goodness as the paradigm of God's extroversion (*bonitas*)		
5	being (*esse*)	ontological scale (5–7)	'attributes' of Goodness as experienced in Creation (*attributa*) (5–8)
6	life (*vivere*)		
7	wisdom (*cognoscere*)		
8	justice as the sum of virtues, and therefore as the positive apex of intelligent life (*virtuosum esse*)		
9	of the inner-cosmic parameters: the Parmenidean Names (*comparatio intrinseca*)		the mutual confrontations of the attributes (*ad invicem comparatio*) (9–11)
10	of the enclosing parameters presented in timely terms: New, Ancient of Days etc. (*comparatio extrinseca*)		
11	Peace as the result of the stable order of Creation (*tranquilitas ordinis*)		
	III. The disposition of good and ordered Creation towards the ultimate goal		
12	God's active reversion of every creature towards its final aim (*providentia ordinans in finem*): Holy of holies, God of gods, etc.		*ordinatio in finem* (12–13)
13	Praises of the final aim itself in the concluding chapter of the treatise (*ipse finis*): Perfection, One		

APPENDIX TWO

CONCORDANCE

Throughout this book, direct quotes of and references to single passages within Dionysius' treatises and letters are given according to the standard citation of Dionysius' works according to the PG, because it is still the most common form of citation and reference (it is also used in the English translation by C. Luibheid and P. Rorem). However, the Greek text used for this book is the one from the new editions by B.R. Suchla, G. Heil, and A.M. Ritter. The following concordance of passages referred to in this book gives the corresponding pages and lines of the new edition of the Corpus Dionysiacum by the Göttinger Patristische Kommission: DN by B.R. Suchla: *(Pseudo-) Dionysios Areopagites, De divinis nominibus* [*Corpus Dionysiacum I*], Berlin/New York 1990 (Patristische Texte und Studien 33); CH, EH, MT, and Letters by G. Heil and A.M. Ritter: *(Pseudo-) Dionysios Areopagites, De coelesti hierarchia. De ecclesiastica hierarchia. De mystica theologia. Epistulae* [*Corpus Dionysiacum II*], Berlin/New York 1991 (Patristische Texte und Studien 36).

PG:	*Chapter/paragraph*	*Heil/ Ritter/ Suchla*
CH 120B:	I. 1	7, 2-7
CH 177C-180A:	IV. 1-2	20, 13-20
DN 585B:	I. 1	107, 1-2
DN 588AB:	I. 1	108, 6-110, 1
DN 588CD:	I. 2	110, 2-15
DN 589BC:	I. 3	111, 6-112, 6
DN 589D:	I. 4	112, 7-113, 1
DN 589D-592B:	I. 4	112, 7-114, 7
DN 592AB:	I. 4	113, 3-114, 7
DN 592CD:	I. 4	115, 6-16
DN 593A:	I. 4	115, 16-18
DN 593CD:	I. 5	117, 5-118, 1
DN 596A:	I. 6	118, 2-12
DN 596BC:	I. 6-7	119, 5-120, 1
DN 596D:	I. 7	120, 3-5
DN 597C:	I. 8	121, 14-18
DN 636C-637D:	II. 1	122, 1-124, 16
DN 636C:	II. 1	122, 1-5
DN 637A:	II. 1	122, 14-123, 8

DN 637C:	II. 1	124, 6-15
DN 640B:	II. 3	125, 13-18
DN 640D:	II. 4	126, 7-11
DN 641D-644A:	II. 5	128, 8-129, 3
DN 644A:	II. 5	129, 4-11
DN 644C-652A:	II. 6-11	130, 4-137, 13
DN 645A:	II. 7	131, 5-10
DN 645D:	II. 7	132, 17-19
DN 649BC:	II. 11	135, 13-136, 12
DN 680B:	III. 1	138, 1-6
DN 680C:	III. 1	138, 13-139, 6
DN 680CD:	III. 1	138, 13-139, 16
DN 681A-684D:	III. 2-3	139, 17-143, 8
DN 684B:	III. 3	142, 1-6
DN 693B:	IV. 1	143, 9-144, 5
DN 696A-696D:	IV. 2	144, 18-146, 5
DN 697A:	IV. 3	146, 6-12
DN 697B-701B:	IV. 4-6	146, 13-150, 14
DN 701C-708A:	IV. 7-10	150, 15-155, 13
DN 704BC:	IV. 7	152, 10-153, 3
DN 704B-708B:	IV. 7-10	152, 10-155, 20
DN 704D:	IV. 7	152, 14-19
DN 705BC:	IV. 9-10	154, 5-10
DN 708A:	IV. 10	155, 3-7
DN 708A-709D:	IV. 10-12	155, 14-158, 12
DN 708B:	IV. 10	155, 16-20
DN 712AB:	IV. 13	159, 9-14
DN 712A-713D:	IV. 12-17	158, 19-162, 5
DN 716B:	IV. 19	163, 7-11
DN 716C:	IV. 19	163, 11-19
DN 716D-717A:	IV. 19	164, 4-17
DN 717B:	IV. 20	164, 22-165, 2
DN 720B:	IV. 20	166, 9-11
DN 720CD:	IV. 20	167, 11-21
DN 721A:	IV. 20	168, 5-10
DN 721B:	IV. 20	168, 11
DN 721C-729B:	IV. 21-28	168, 12-175, 4
DN 724B:	IV. 22	169, 20-170, 5
DN 725B:	IV. 23	171, 13-16
DN 725C:	IV. 23	172, 2-6

DN 728A:	IV. 24	172, 14-20
DN 728BC:	IV. 25-26	173, 1-16
DN 728D:	IV. 27	173, 17-174, 3
DN 729A ff.:	IV. 28-29	174, 4-175, 9
DN 729C:	IV. 30	175, 10-11
DN 732B:	IV. 31	176, 10-13
DN 732CD:	IV. 32	177, 3-15
DN 733A:	IV. 32	177, 20-178, 2
DN 733C:	IV. 34	178, 18-20
DN 733D:	IV. 34	179, 2-4
DN 736B:	IV. 35	179, 18-22
DN 816B:	V. 1	180, 8-13
DN 817D:	V. 4	183, 8-11
DN 820BC:	V. 5	184, 8-16
DN 821CD:	V. 8	186, 1-8
DN 824B:	V. 8	187, 12-20
DN 856B:	VI. 1	191, 1-8
DN 857A:	VI. 2	192, 8-13
DN 857B:	VI. 3	192, 15-193, 4
DN 865B:	VII. 1	193, 5-9
DN 865C:	VII. 1	194, 4-6
DN 872A:	VII. 3	198, 2-3 (and 4-11)
DN 872AB:	VII. 3	198, 12-15
DN 889D:	VIII. 2	201, 1-5
DN 893A:	VIII. 5	202, 18-23
DN 893B:	VIII. 6	203, 5-16
DN 893D:	VIII. 7	204, 5-7
DN 896A:	VIII. 7	204, 8-11
DN 896B:	VIII. 7	204, 18-21
DN 896D-897A:	VIII. 9	205, 16-206, 7
DN 897B:	VIII. 9	206, 11-19
DN 897C:	VIII. 9	207, 1-5
DN 909B:	IX. 1	207, 6-9
DN 916B-917A:	IX. 8-10	212, 16-214, 8
DN 936D-937A:	X. 1	214, 9-215, 7
DN 937D:	X. 3	216, 11-15
DN 940A:	X. 3	216, 16-20
DN 948D:	XI. 1	217, 5-8
DN 948D-949A:	XI. 1	217, 7-218, 6
DN 949AB:	XI. 1	218, 7-17

DN 949C:	XI. 2	218, 18-219, 2
DN 949D-952A:	XI. 2	219, 11-20
DN 952AB:	XI. 2-3	219, 14-220, 5
DN 952BC:	XI. 3	219, 25-220, 11
DN 952CD:	XI. 4	220, 12-17
DN 953C:	XI. 6	221, 16-222, 2
DN 953D-956A:	XI. 6	222, 13-223, 3
DN 956A:	X. 6	222, 16-223, 3
DN 969A:	XII. 1	224, 1-4
DN 969C:	XII. 2	224, 13-225, 3
DN 972A:	XII. 4	225, 14-16
DN 977C:	XIII. 2	227, 6-7
DN 980B:	XII. 3	228, 12-15
MT 1000B:	I. 2	143, 3-7
MT 1000C:	I. 3	143, 10-19
MT 1001A:	I. 3	144, 9-15
MT 1025A:	II.	145, 1-5
MT 1032D-1033A:	III.	146, 1-11
Letter 7 1080A:	1	166, 3-6
Letter 7 1080AB:	1-2	166, 7-167, 2
Letter 9 1105D:	1	197, 9-14
Letter 9 1108B:	2	198, 15-199, 4

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