

RE-THINKING

DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE

EDITED BY
SARAH COAKLEY AND
CHARLES M. STANG

 WILEY-BLACKWELL

Contents

INTRODUCTION—RE-THINKING DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE **SARAH COAKLEY**

*Introduction: Dionysian Studies in
Transition*

Thematic Constellations

NOTES

1 DIONYSIUS, PAUL AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PSEUDONYM **CHARLES M. STANG**

Paul's Speech to the Areopagus

*Paul and the "Apophatic Anthropology" of
the CD21*

*The Significance of the Pseudonym—A
Hypothesis*

NOTES

2 THE EARLIEST SYRIAC RECEPTION OF DIONYSIUS1 **ISTVÁN PERCZEL**

The Earliest Greek Reception

The First Syriac Reception

Sergius' Introduction to the CD

Sergius' Syriac Translation

The Book of the Holy Hierotheus

Conclusions
NOTES

**3 THE RECEPTION OF DIONYSIUS UP
TO MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR**

ANDREW LOUTH

NOTES

**4 THE RECEPTION OF DIONYSIUS IN
THE BYZANTINE WORLD: MAXIMUS TO
PALAMAS**

ANDREW LOUTH

Maximus' Christological Use of Apophatic
and Kataphatic Theology

Maximus' Relation of the Cosmic and the
Ascetic

The Maximian Doctrine of the Logoi

NOTES

**5 THE EARLY LATIN DIONYSIUS:
ERIUGENA AND HUGH OF ST. VICTOR**

PAUL ROREM

Eriugena

Hugh

A Case Study: "Love Above Knowledge"

Conclusion

NOTES

6 THE MEDIEVAL AFFECTIVE DIONYSIAN TRADITION

BOYD TAYLOR COOLMAN

*The Affective Trajectory of Medieval
Dionysianism*

*Dionysius Among the Victorines: From Hugh
to Thomas of St. Victor*

Gallus' Affective Interpretation of Dionysius

*An Affective Reading of The Mystical
Theology*

*The Dionysian Darkness Becomes the
Solomonic Lovesick Night*

The "Angelized" Mind

Ascending

Descending

Circling and Spiraling

Conclusion

NOTES

7 ALBERT, AQUINAS, AND DIONYSIUS

**DAVID BURRELL, C.S.C. and ISABELLE
MOULIN**

Albert the Great and Dionysius

Aquinas and Dionysius

Conclusion

NOTES

8 DIONYSIUS AND SOME LATE MEDIEVAL MYSTICAL THEOLOGIANS

OF NORTHERN EUROPE
DENYS TURNER

*“Intellectualist” and “Affectivist” Readings
of the Mystical Theology*

*Gerson, Ruusbroec and Denys the
Carthusian and the Question of
“Autotheism”*

Gerson’s Critique of The Spiritual Espousals
*Denys the Carthusian’s Defence of
Ruusbroec*

The “Modus Loquendi” of the Platonists
*Dionysius and the Transcendence of
Identity and Distinction*

NOTES

**9 CUSANUS ON DIONYSIUS: THE TURN
TO SPECULATIVE THEOLOGY1**

PETER CASARELLA

Conclusion

NOTES

**10 LUTHER AND DIONYSIUS: BEYOND
MERE NEGATIONS**

PIOTR J. MALYSZ

Luther and Dionysius?

God Who Works All in All

*From Yearning for Being to Sharing (in)
Being*

Conclusion

NOTES

**11 DIONYSIAN THOUGHT IN
SIXTEENTH-CENTURY SPANISH
MYSTICAL THEOLOGY**

LUIS M. GIRÓN-NEGRÓN

I

II

III

IV

V

NOTES

**12 THE RECEPTION OF DIONYSIUS IN
TWENTIETH-CENTURY EASTERN
ORTHODOXY**

PAUL L. GAVRILYUK

Vladimir Solovyov, Sergius Bulgakov, and
Nicolas Berdyaev

Vladimir Lossky and Christos Yannaras

John Meyendorff

Conclusion

NOTES

**13 DIONYSIUS, DERRIDA, AND THE
CRITIQUE OF “ONTOTHEOLOGY”**

MARY-JANE RUBENSTEIN

A Warm(ish) Welcome

How Did We Get Here?

Where Are We Going?

Hierarchy, Teleology, and the Problem of the Political

NOTES

14 DIONYSIUS IN HANS URS VON
BALTHASAR AND JEAN-LUC MARION
TAMSIN JONES

Hans Urs von Balthasar and the patristic revival in France

Balthasar's Influence on Marion

Conclusion

NOTES

Index

Re-thinking Dionysius the Areopagite

Edited by

Sarah Coakley and Charles M. Stang

 WILEY-BLACKWELL

A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication

This edition first published 2009
Originally published as Volume 24, Issue 4 of *Modern
Theology*

Chapters © 2009 The Authors

Book compilation © 2009 Blackwell Publishing Ltd

Blackwell Publishing was acquired by John Wiley & Sons in
February 2007. Blackwell's publishing program has been
merged with Wiley's global Scientific, Technical, and Medical
business to form Wiley-Blackwell.

Registered Office

John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate,
Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, United Kingdom

Editorial Offices

350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA

9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK

The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19
8SQ, UK

For details of our global editorial offices, for customer
services, and for information about how to apply for
permission to reuse the copyright material in this book
please see our website at www.wiley.com/wiley-blackwell.

The right of Sarah Coakley and Charles M. Stang to be
identified as the authors of the editorial material in this work
has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright,
Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be
reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in
any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical,
photocopying, recording or otherwise, except as permitted
by the UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, without
the prior permission of the publisher.

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats. Some content that appears in print may not be available in electronic books.

Designations used by companies to distinguish their products are often claimed as trademarks. All brand names and product names used in this book are trade names, service marks, trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective owners. The publisher is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book. This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold on the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering professional services. If professional advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Re-thinking Dionysius the Areopagite/edited by Sarah Coakley and Charles M. Stang.

p. cm.—(Directions in modern theology)

Originally published as: Modern theology, v. 16, issue 1, 2000. Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4051-8089-4 (pbk.: alk. paper)

1. Pseudo-Dionysius, the Areopagite. I. Coakley, Sarah, 1951-II. Stang, Charles M., 1974-

BR65.D66R4 2009

230'.14092—dc22

2008051437

INTRODUCTION—RE-THINKING DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE

SARAH COAKLEY

Introduction: Dionysian Studies in Transition

The remarkable recent upsurge of interest in the mysterious early sixth-century¹ author, “Dionysius the Areopagite”, has undeniably been a byproduct of the post-modern “apophatic rage” (as one scholar has termed the current post-Heideggerian turn in continental philosophy and theology).² But “rages” are not always tempered by scholarly caution or philosophical precision; and “apophatic” ones are arguably the more dangerous for being, by definition, hard to define. “Loose talk costs lives”—even “apophatic” talk of the intoxicating Derridean variety.³ The immediate spur for the production of this new collection of chapters on Dionysius and his interpreters is thus an urgent contemporary one. It aims first to provide a scholarly, but accessible, account of the reasons for the current Dionysian revival, and at least an attempted analysis thereby of the various ways that the *Corpus Dionysiacum* (henceforth *CD*) is being received today.

But therein of course lies the rub. For since the identity of the mysterious author of the *CD*, who styled himself as Paul’s first convert in Athens (see Acts 17. 22–34), remains unknown, and his original provenance and context contested, there are no straightforward ways to assess the relation of his intentions to his later interpreters. As Paul Rorem has well put it, “The Pseudo-Dionysian style and message may both perplex and enchant. . . . [But] a

perplexed reader is in good company, for the history of Christian doctrine and spirituality teems with commentators and general readers who have found the Areopagite's meaning obscure, and yet his mysterious appeal irresistible".⁴

It is not the undertaking of this volume to provide an introductory account of that "irresistible" *contents* of the CD:⁵ its unique blend of neo-Platonism and Christianity; its ontology of an ecstatic intermingling of divine and human "eros"; its vision of a "hierarchical" cosmos conjoining the angelic as well as the human; its ecclesiastical anchoring in acts of liturgical praise; and its alluring invitation to an unspeakable "union" with the divine by means of "mystical contemplation". That initial allure of the text should be allowed its own impact on the reader; there is no substitute for a close engagement with the primary source. But unfortunately we then have to ask forthwith: which "primary source", and for what community was it intended? For these are the immediate, and next, difficulties for the interpreter. And so the second—and necessary—task of this volume is to give some account of the most recent scholarly hypotheses about the *CD's* origins, intentions, and initial *milieu*. The *CD* as we now have it may not be in its original textual form; and the reasons for the adoption of the Dionysian *persona* by the author also remain debated. The first chapters in this collection are therefore devoted to discussing these intriguing problems. But when we set out (first) from the contemporary post-modern interest in Dionysius, and then return (second) to the riddle of his original context, we find ourselves inexorably drawn into the fascinating cycles of later interpretation which arose in quest of his meaning. It is thus the third, and indeed most substantial, undertaking of this volume to provide the reader with a kind of systematic road-map for negotiating the rich variety of historic receptions of Dionysius, in both Eastern and Western

Christian traditions. If we cannot get at the “historical Dionysius” with any sure confidence, what we can and should do is to provide a discerning account of the different refractions of light shed from his “dark ray”.

In the last decade or so there have been a number of important new scholarly advances in this task of tracing the Dionysian *Rezeptionsgeschichte*; ⁶ and two recent volumes from continental Europe, in particular, have already blazed the trail in providing collections of learned essays on the interpretation of the *CD* at different times. ⁷ But for the student, or systematic or philosophical theologian, who may not be *au courant* with these specialized historical studies, there seems to be a pressing need for the sort of English-language survey we provide here. Whilst we have regrettably not been able to commission chapters on all the strands of reception that we might have liked to see treated, ⁸ we believe that this collection gives a balanced and judicious taste of the major—and often passionately competing—lines of influence in the reception of the *CD*, both East and West.

It has long been a commonplace to divide the reception of Dionysius (in the West) into the so-called “intellectual” and “affective” readings of the *CD*: in the former, the “unknowing” “beyond the mind” ⁹ of which the *Mystical Theology (MT)* speaks, continues to be construed as relating to the intellect (howsoever conceived); in the latter, the will compensates for the intellect’s incapacity by means of love. One of the major lessons that should emerge from a close reading of this volume, however, is that this binary taxonomy, whilst still not without some remaining heuristic worth, is far too blunt a tool to account for the historic variety of Dionysian influences down the centuries. Not only is it an essentially Western taxonomy (*eros* and *nous* being closely entwined in the Platonic tradition, and in the Eastern

Christian thought following it, in a way different from the Augustinian carving of the mind into *intellectus*, *voluntas/affectus* [and *memorial*]¹⁰; but the subdivisions *within* the so-called “intellectual” and “affective” interpretations of Dionysius in the West, and the capacity of many authors creatively to combine them, are as noteworthy as is the tendency to a disjunction.¹¹ Moreover, at least as important as this binary categorization in terms of a key hermeneutical problem in the *MT*, is the prior issue of how the *MT* is variously read in relation to the rest of the *CD* in the first place. It is a notable feature of a certain phase of the medieval reception in the West—although not the earliest one, as Paul Rorem shows¹²—that the *MT* became a supreme focus of interest, thereby sundering it from its liturgical and ecclesiastical moorings in the *Celestial Hierarchy* (*CH*) and the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* (*EH*). Such a sundering, as this volume will indicate, has rarely, if at all, been the tendency of Eastern interpretations of the *CD*; and indeed, one of the more intriguing, even perplexing, features of the early Syriac reception (insofar as we can accurately reconstruct it) is precisely its *lack* of interest in the *MT*, *tout court*.¹³ As one Orthodox scholar writing on Dionysius has recently and trenchantly argued, then, a theory about the order in which the *CD* was composed, and the importance thereby given to the prioritizing of one text over another, can deliver a vastly different theological impact from some other alternative reading.¹⁴ *Caveat lector*: there are no short cuts in the business of Dionysian reception. Not only must the *CD* as a whole be read,¹⁵ but the varieties of reception here traced cannot be constrained into simple categories of opposition. That is not to say that certain “schools” of interpretation cannot usefully and revealingly be identified, which is what this collection of chapters, taken together, aims to provide.

Thematic Constellations

I should like to take the rest of this short *Introduction* to draw attention to a number of key, constellating, themes which run through the chapters as a whole. While each chapter may profitably be read on its own, there are some significant theses which conjoin the arguments of more than one contributor, and together they might be said to constitute something of the “re-thinking” that this little volume aims to engender. I have chosen here to alert the reader to aspects of the discussion which have potential contemporary *systematic* import, as well as having historical interest *per se*.

The first theme may be discerned by reading the last three chapters in this collection together. It involves a question about the causes and contexts of the “Dionysian renewal” in the twentieth century in the West, and it provides the immediate backdrop to the current (post-modern) interest in “apophaticism”. What the chapters by Gavriluk and Jones jointly reveal, first, is that there was already a remarkable Dionysian renewal in the early/mid-twentieth-century in France, a sort of ecumenical “pincer-movement” which produced, on the one hand, a regeneration of Dionysian studies amongst the gifted Jesuits of de Lubac’s *ressourcement* movement (von Balthasar, *par excellence*), and almost simultaneously a polemical reinterpretation of Dionysius by Vladimir Lossky, precisely in aid of an *assault* on Western “scholasticism”. We cannot read this double development, I would suggest, without an understanding both of the Roman Catholic context of the mandated neo-scholasticism of *Aeterni Patris* (and the subsequent revolt of the followers of *la nouvelle théologie*), and of the underlying philosophical travails of post-Kantianism and of Heidegger’s assault on “ontotheology”.¹⁶ The return to Dionysius, in other words, could be seen both as a rescue from the

rigidity of certain forms of neo-scholastic readings of Thomas Aquinas, and simultaneously as the means of an end-run around Kant's ban on speculative metaphysics. That such a context could produce a new East/West *disjunction* (*à la* Lossky), rather than an ecumenical meeting of Dionysian minds, is an irony that will not be lost on readers of this volume. Suffice it to say that a shared commitment to "apophaticism" by no means brings a necessary ecclesiastical accord in its wake.

But it is—indirectly—against this particular philosophical and theological backcloth that the later Derridean project of *différance* was then to emerge in France. As Rubenstein so ably demonstrates in this volume, Derrida is as anxious as Dionysius is about what can, and cannot, be properly "said" theologically; and Derrida's own project is often misread if one fails to see that his later *political* interests have something intrinsic to do with the linguistic issue of "unsaying". But there is an enormous "difference" of another sort between original Dionysianism and the Derridean project, which Rubenstein helps us highlight. The former *assumes* revelatory divine authority; the latter balks at any such. The former enjoins us to "contemplative" practice (ultimately to an *ekstasis* of "union" which courts prior divine activity); the latter resists any such submission, although not without a bold commitment to transgressive political transformation.^{[17](#)} Read through the lens of "Dionysian reception", then, the contrasting figures of Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion are also seen, here in this volume, in a rather new light.^{[18](#)} Whereas Derrida stresses "unsaying" to the point of stammering nescience, Marion seems equally haunted by Kant until he realizes that the Dionysian corrective need not *disallow* authority of a particular sort. Although Marion's early work smuggled back such authority rather artlessly in the person of the bishop,^{[19](#)} and accused even Aquinas of

“ontotheology”, his more recent writing acknowledges that one may read Thomas quite without such danger once his own Dionysian strand is properly understood.^{[20](#)}

This reflection on the profound Dionysian influence on contemporary theological developments leads us back to the second thematic issue that this book addresses cumulatively, through various inputs from its contributors. It is this: what are we to make of the original context of the Dionysian corpus, given that there are some reasons for suspecting that our Greek *textus receptus* had had to be massaged towards “orthodox” acceptability?^{[21](#)} To be sure, this was an “acceptability” in any case right at the edge of what might have been expected as doctrinally normative, even in the late fifth and early sixth century; and Louth’s account of the history of Eastern reception up to the time of Gregory Palamas shows how artfully the *CD* became blended into “orthodoxy” by a variety of creative readings in the Byzantine period, a story which has no exact counterpart in the West. But the *CD*’s particular blend of (Proclean) neo-Platonism and Christianity was doomed to become freshly controversial, and for different reasons, in a modern era of Protestant German historiography bent on dividing the Christian “kernel” from its Hellenistic “husk”;^{[22](#)} and modern scholarship has thus struggled mightily—and still does—in the agonistic debate about whether Platonism or Christianity finally triumphs in the *CD*.^{[23](#)} If there is a lesson that now emerges from our joint reconsideration of these issues in this volume, however, it is that any attempt to *disjoin* “Platonic” and “Christian” influences upon the *CD*, or to adjudicate its “orthodoxy” accordingly, is strangely misled—indeed remarkably fruitless, both intellectually and spiritually. For a start, as Stang argues in his input to this volume, such a disjunctive choice fails to register the extent to which the author of the *CD* immerses himself

intentionally in the thought-world of Paul, and in the precise context of Acts 17. The modern quest for Dionysian “authenticity” (Platonism *versus* Christianity) has bracketed the possibility of such a natural convergence of the “unknown God” with Pauline Christianity, even as the New Testament itself quite happily entertains it. Further, Perczel’s chapter on the earliest Syriac reception of the *CD* (speculative as it must necessarily remain), adds the important insight that the *CD* may well have originated in “Origenistic” circles, and thus will have fallen foul, early on, of the suspicion against Platonist—and especially monastic—elitism already abroad by the very end of the fourth century. The smooth alignment of *agape* and *eros* in Origen, and the convergence of desert wisdom and Platonic speculation in the work of his disciple Evagrius, could indeed have supplied a fertile ground for the cultivation of Dionysian ideas, even though this hypothesis about the context of the production of the *CD* must inevitably remain conjectural. It could also, however, account for an early resistance to the Dionysian writings and reasons for a suspicious critique. In neither case—Origenism nor Evagrian monasticism—was Platonism seen as an enemy to Christianity, of course; on the contrary it was its natural ally and philosophical sustainer.

What follows from this second point is an accompanying reflection on how human selfhood might now be reconstrued from a Dionysian perspective, given that—arguably—we need no longer drive the problematic wedge between “Platonic” and “Christian” heritages, nor force a disjunction, “beyond the mind”, between intellect and will. It has been pointed out by a number of recent secondary commentators^{[24](#)} that it might be appropriate to talk of an “apophatic anthropology” in the Dionysian mode, to complement—albeit mysteriously—what is equally “apophatic” about God in his system. This touches on an

issue, however, which was part of Lossky's original "Dionysian" polemic against Western scholasticism. Lossky's claim was that the West posited the "apophatic" merely as a *complement* to the "kataphatic", and thus failed to acknowledge the radicality of the Dionysian move beyond that "dialectic" to a moment of "experiential" union in darkness.²⁵ Rowan Williams has surmised that Lossky himself was probably affected, in the mode of this claim, by a certain Western existentialism regnant at the time of his writing;²⁶ and new swords have been drawn more recently about whether contact with Dionysian "darkness" should be construed in *any* sense as an "experience".²⁷ What the contributors to this current volume add, however, to this already-conflicted and somewhat tortuous debate, is the insight that selfhood in Dionysius is essentially *porous*. If Dionysius's insistence on the Pauline dictate about "No longer I" (Gal. 2. 20) is to be taken seriously, then the old nervousness about "experiences" *versus* "philosophical dialectic" seems rather beside the point, and unnecessarily mired in modernistic presumptions about categories of selfhood that are individualistic. Not for the first time, a post-modern access to pre-modern texts has allowed the reconsideration of a lost, transformative, option in anthropology.

The third, and last, major area in which this collection tracks a somewhat new path is in its consideration of some aspects of the early modern reception of Dionysius in the West. In an intriguing and novel chapter, Malysz probes beneath the overt, and renowned, rejection of Dionysian "mystical" thought by Martin Luther, and enquires whether the influence of the *CD*—mediated doubtless most strongly through the Rhineland mystics—does not actually continue to haunt Luther's whole vision of justification by faith. The *exitus/reditus* scheme is still ontologically infused within it, Malysz suggests, leaving the main point of difference

between Luther and his “mystical” forebear the centrality granted by Luther to a theology of the cross. Yet even there, given a full and close reading of the *CD*, the disjunction is not as extreme as might be supposed:²⁸ the relative absence of christological reference in the *MT* is well compensated for in the other writings (as Golitzin and Perl have also stressed in their recent studies²⁹).

Doubtless Malysz’s thesis will be controversial. But his chapter stands interestingly alongside a new consideration, by Girón-Negrón, of the huge debt to the Dionysian heritage in both of the great sixteenth-century Carmelites, Teresa of Ávila and John of the Cross. Not for the first time are certain ironic parallelisms between John of the Cross and Luther thus revealed: the forms of “darkness” with which they struggle may not be strictly *egal*, but both inherit the tradition of *noetic* darkness from Dionysius and add their own distinctive variations and nuances.³⁰ Moreover, Girón-Negrón’s astute reading of Teresa allows him completely to forestall the old-established adage that Teresa is merely a “female” mystic, unschooled in the “male” intellectual Dionysianism which John of the Cross champions.³¹ Nothing, in a way, could be further from the truth, since Teresa shows in a number of passages in her writings that she is fully cognizant of the main themes of the *MT* as received via such writers as Hugh of Balma, Osuna and Laredo, and mediated to her through her more learned confessors and spiritual advisors. Questions of “mystical theology” and gender are not so easily carved up according to an expected binary as earlier generations of scholarship presumed.

A writer as gnomic, intriguing and profound as Dionysius the Areopagite will never lack new interpreters. If this volume helps readers to re-think his historic significance amidst the crowd of contemporary “apophatic” imitators, it

will have served its modest purpose. If in addition it succeeds in drawing readers more deeply into the contemplative *practices* that Dionysius enjoins on his readership, its effect on contemporary discussion will be the more profound.^{[32](#)}

NOTES

^{[1](#)} For the problem of the dating of the *CD* (for which the available evidence suggests either a late fifth- or early sixth-century placing), see Paul Rorem and J.C. Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus: Annotating the Areopagite* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 9–15, and the chapters by Louth and Perczel, below. Perczel's theory about what might be concluded from the earliest Syriac reception causes him to hypothesize a dating closer to the mid-5th century, but this is not the standard scholarly consensus.

^{[2](#)} The phrase is that of Martin Laird, OSA, " 'Whereof we speak': Gregory of Nyssa, Jean-Luc Marion and the Current Apophatic Rage", *Heythrop Journal* 42 (2001), pp. 1–12. Other commentators have suggested a combination of reasons for the contemporary Western "apophatic turn": see the editorial introduction to Oliver Davies and Denys Turner (eds), *Silence and the Word* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), where it is proposed that there are three main reasons for the renewed fascination with pre-modern forms of "apophaticism": 1. a prevalent cultural religious scepticism; 2. a philosophical engagement with radical "difference"; and 3. a new turn to "experience": the "privatisation and internalisation of religion" (*ibid.*, pp. 1–2).

^{[3](#)} If this remark sounds somewhat jaded, it is merely the result of years of grading student essays written in sometimes unconstrained "post-modernese". The

genuineness of the editors' appreciation of Derrida's contribution to contemporary theology will emerge later in this Introduction, as well as in Rubenstein's chapter commissioned for this volume.

[4](#) Colm Luibheid (trans), *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* Classics of Western Spirituality (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1987), p. 3.

[5](#) In the English-language treatments, what we may call the three principals in the recent resurgence of scholarly interest in the *CD* have each produced judicious introductions to the text and context of the corpus: see Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (London: G. Chapman, 1989); Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to their Influence* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); and Alexander Golitzin, *Et introibo ad altare dei: The Mystagogy of Dionysius the Areopagite* (Thessalonika: Patriarchikon Idruma Paterikon Meleton, 1994). Luibheid's translation for the Classics of Western Spirituality series has made the *CD* available to a wide English readership. Finally, the two-volume critical edition of the Greek text has superseded the often-troubled Migne text: Beate Regina Suchla (ed), *Corpus Dionysiacum I* [DN] (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990); Günter Heil and Adolf Martin Ritter (eds), *Corpus Dionysiacum II* [CH, EH, MT, Ep.] (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991).

[6](#) Apart from the useful introductory essays about Dionysian reception in Luibheid (trans), *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (1987), see, since then, Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus: Annotating the Areopagite* (1998); James McEvoy, *Mystical Theology: The Glosses by Thomas Gallus and the Commentary of Robert Grosseteste on De Mystica Theologia* (Paris: Peeters, 2003); L. Michael Harrington, *A Thirteenth-Century Textbook of Mystical Theology at the*

University of Paris (Paris: Peeters, 2004); Paul Rorem, *Eriugena's Commentary on the Dionysian Celestial Hierarchy* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2005); Isabel de Andia, *Denys L'Aréopagite: Tradition et Métamorphoses* (Paris: J. Vrin, 2006).

[7](#) See Isabel de Andia (ed), *Denys l'Aréopagite et sa postérité en orient et en occident* (Paris: Institute d'études augustinienes, 1997); T. Boiadjev, G. Kapriev and A. Speer (eds), *Die Dionysius-Rezeption im Mittelalter* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000).

[8](#) For instance, the Eastern *Rezeptionsgeschichte* includes the Armenian and the Arabic (and thence Islamic) receptions (see the recent work of S. La Porta and A. Treiger, respectively); or the English/Welsh line of reception moves from *The Cloud of Unknowing* to Augustine Baker and Serenus Cressy (see the work of Justin McCann, OSB, Gerard Sitwell, OSB, Placid Spearritt, OSB); or the full—and complex—story of the assimilation of, or repulsion from, Dionysianism as found in the varieties of Western Thomism from *Aeterni Patris* to the present day (see the recent work of Wayne Hankey).

[9](#) MT 1.3 1001A.

[10](#) The important work of John M. Rist, on both sides of this East/West divide, should be noted in this regard: see, *inter alia*, his "A Note on Eros and Agape in Pseudo-Dionysius," *Vigiliae Christianae* 20 (1966), pp. 235–243; and *ibid.*, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), esp. chaps. 3–5.

[11](#) Here Bernard McGinn's survey article ("Love, Knowledge, and Mystical Union in Western Christianity: Twelfth to Sixteenth Centuries", *Church History* 56:1 [1987], pp. 7–24) remains a particularly helpful introduction to this issue in Western mystical theology.

[12](#) In his chapter in this volume and, in greater detail, in his book, *Eriugena's Commentary on the Dionysian*

Celestial Hierarchy.

[13](#) See István Perczel's chapter in this volume, especially note 34.

[14](#) See Alexander Golitzin's objections to the order of the Classics of Western Spirituality edition of the *CD* in "Dionysius Areopagita: A Christian Mysticism?" *Pro Ecclesia* XII/2 (2003), pp. 161-212. This may be the point at which also to mention Golitzin's most recent work: a brilliant, collective enterprise by him and some of his former students which endeavours to demonstrate that the *CD*, and indeed the whole of Eastern Christian spirituality, emerges from the "matrix" of Second Temple Judaism. See Basil Lourié and Andrei Orlov (eds), *The Theophaneia School: Jewish Roots of Eastern Christian Mysticism* (Saint-Petersbourg: Byzantinorossica, 2007), especially Golitzin's two introductory essays: "Theophaneia: Forum on the Jewish Roots of Orthodox Spirituality" (pp. xvii-xx) and "Christian Mysticism Over Two Millenia" (pp. xxi-xxxiii). A critical discussion of this hypothesis unfortunately lies outside the remit of this volume.

[15](#) One must also mention the issue: what constitutes the "whole" *CD*? The author alludes to several other works which have not come down to us. While many scholars regard these "lost" works as fictitious, in this volume Perczel offers a different, and daring, explanation of their fate.

[16](#) For the history of this neo-scholasticism, see Gerald A. McCool, *The Neo-Thomists* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1994). The touchpoint text for the critique of "ontotheology" is of course Martin Heidegger's "The Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics", in idem, *Identity and Difference* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 42-74.

[17](#) On these points of comparison see Mary-Jane Rubenstein, "Unknow Thyself: Apophaticism,

Deconstruction, and Theology after Ontotheology”, *Modern Theology* 19/3 (July, 2003), pp. 387–417, in addition to her contribution to this volume.

[18](#) Here compare the contributions of Rubenstein and Jones, below.

[19](#) Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being: hors-texte* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991), esp. 153–154, a passage for which Marion received much criticism.

[20](#) For this recantation see Jean-Luc Marion, “Thomas Aquinas and Onto-theo-logy”, in Michael Kessler and Christian Shepherd (eds), *Mystics: Presence and Aporia* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 2003), pp. 38–74.

[21](#) As Perczel argues in his chapter in this volume.

[22](#) À la Adolf von Harnack.

[23](#) Thankfully, some contemporary scholars are no longer keen, as many of their predecessors were, to fault the author of the *CD* for his obvious debt to late Neoplatonism. For an heroic analysis already along these lines, see Placid Spearritt, OSB, *A Philosophical Enquiry Into Dionysian Mysticism* (PhD thesis: Fribourg, 1968), and more recently: Christian Schäfer, *The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2006); Eric Perl, *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2007); Sarah Klitenic Wear and John Dillon, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition: Despoiling the Hellenes* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

[24](#) See Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism* (New York, NY: Crossroads, 1994), pp. 105–106; see also Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 6.

[25](#) See Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (London: J. Clarke, 1957), pp. 215–216 and 229–230, and Rowan Williams’s critical discussion of this

point in Lossky in *Wrestling with Angels: Conversations in Modern Theology*, edited by Mike Higton (London: S.C.M. Press, 2007), pp. 1–24, esp. p. 12. As Jones discusses in her chapter in this volume, below, von Balthasar also appeals to a “third” moment in Dionysius *beyond* the “kataphatic” and the “apophatic”.

[26](#) See again Williams, in *Wrestling with Angels*, pp. 1–12.

[27](#) The claim that “darkness” states in Western “mystical” texts should *not* be read as “experiences” in any sense has been put forcefully by Turner, in *The Darkness of God*. For an astute critical assessment of this thesis, see Bernard McGinn’s review of *The Darkness of God* in *The Journal of Religion* 77 (1997), pp. 309–311. It should be noted that Dionysius himself speaks just once of “experience”: DN 2.9 (648B).

[28](#) Only consider the importance for Dionysius of Gal. 2.20a, just discussed: “I have been *crucified* with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me . . .”

[29](#) See Alexander Golitzin, “ ‘Suddenly, Christ’: The Place of Negative Theology in the Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagites”, in Kessler and Shepherd (eds), *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*, pp. 8–37; Eric Perl, “Symbol, Sacrament, and Hierarchy in St. Dionysios the Areopagite”, *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 39 (1994), pp. 311–355.

[30](#) It may not be inappropriate here to add a final note, in aid of a certain semantic hygiene, about the dangers of too easily conflating “apophaticism” of the Dionysian mode and “negative theology”, with its variety of Western meanings. It is often presumed that these terms are interchangeable; but strictly speaking this is not so. The term *apophasis* (ἀπόφασις) literally means, in Greek, “saying no”, or “saying negatively” (from the verb *apophemi* [ἀπόφημι]), making it ostensibly equivalent to the Latin *via negativa*; but the Greek noun *apophasis* can also convey

the meaning of “revelation” (from the verb *apophaino* [ἀποφαίνω]), thus giving it richer overtones than the Latin. Apart from this initial point of comparison between Eastern and Western terms, we also need to distinguish between extra possible evocations of “negative theology”/“negativity” in the Western tradition beyond that of merely “speaking negatively” (or “unsaying”). Here I propose extending a three-fold typology of the meanings of “negative theology” provided by Bernard McGinn in “Three Forms of Negativity in Christian Mysticism”, in ed John W. Bowker, *Sciences and Religions: Knowing the Unknowable about God and the Universe* (London: I. B. Taurus, forthcoming), thus: (1) *The theological practice of “unsaying” claims about God*, of negating the positive to express God’s uniqueness and transcendence. (This is where “negative theology” intersects with Dionysian “apophasis”, although it should be noted that the relation of the negating and the positive positing may be different in different writers: some see the two as dialectically related and mutually correcting; others—like Dionysius himself—insist that even the negative pole has to be negated as well); (2) *The ascetic practice of detachment of the human will/desire from false goals* (Eckhart is a prime example for McGinn of this type); (3) *The paradoxical theology of divine absence-as-divine-affliction* (Luther’s theology of the cross and John of the Cross’s second “night of spirit” both fit this mould); and (4) (which I add to McGinn’s typology) *The distinctively modern expression of radical divine absence* (Simone Weil, at least in some moods, and R. S. Thomas come to mind: here the “dazzling” nature of Dionysius’s darkness seems suppressed, and modern atheism, as well as Kant’s problematic *noumenal* darkness, hover in the background). It is a disputable question how Derrida’s project of “deferral” fits into the above typology. It seems in continuity with (4), but also to involve a new, post-modern,

reading of (1), (perpetual “unsaying”), but without the attendant ascetical practices of “contemplation”, or the assumption of revelatory ballast, which are found in the pre-modern writings of Dionysius.

[31](#) This well-established binary is unfortunately still imported into some contemporary *feminist* assessments of “mystical” writers: see, e.g., Grace M. Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[32](#) The editors wish to thank Mark Scott for his careful formatting assistance, and Paul Rorem and Andrew Louth for invaluable editorial advice at an early stage in the project.

1

DIONYSIUS, PAUL AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PSEUDONYM

CHARLES M. STANG

This chapter advances a new approach to the *Corpus Dionysiacum*: I suggest that we interpret the *CD* through the lens of the pseudonym, Dionysius the Areopagite, and the corresponding influence of Paul. ¹ We have known since the late nineteenth century, when Hugo Koch and Josef Stiglmayr published their independent demonstrations, that the author of the *CD* was substantially indebted to the writings of the fifth century Neoplatonist Proclus and therefore was no first century disciple of Paul but a late fifth- or early sixth-century pseudepigrapher. ² Since this revelation, however, very few scholars have regarded the pseudonym and the corresponding influence of Paul as at all relevant, never mind crucial, to a proper understanding of this author and his perplexing corpus. ³ On the whole, scholars have tended to explain away the pseudonym as a convenient means either to win a wider readership for the *CD* or to safeguard the author from censorship and persecution in an age of anxious orthodoxies. Scholars have also tended to pass over the influence of Paul and have instead situated the *CD* against the backdrop of late Neoplatonism or late antique Eastern Christianity.