



BISHOP
GROSSETESTE
UNIVERSITY

[BG Research Online](#)

Darley, A.P. (2017). Ritual as erotic anagogy in Pseudo-Dionysius: a Reformed critique. *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology*.

This is an Accepted Manuscript published by Taylor and Francis in its final form on 13 July 2018 at <https://doi.org/10.1080/21692327.2017.1387805>.

This version may differ slightly from the final published version.

Copyright is retained by the author/s and/or other copyright holders.

End users generally may reproduce, display or distribute single copies of content held within BG Research Online, in any format or medium, for personal research & study or for educational or other not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- The full bibliographic details and a hyperlink to (or the URL of) the item's record in BG Research Online are clearly displayed;
- No part of the content or metadata is further copied, reproduced, distributed, displayed or published, in any format or medium;
- The content and/or metadata is not used for commercial purposes;
- The content is not altered or adapted without written permission from the rights owner/s, unless expressly permitted by licence.

For enquiries about BG Research Online email bgro@bishopg.ac.uk.

‘Ritual as erotic anagogy in Pseudo-Dionysius: a Reformed critique’.

Alan Philip Darley, University of Nottingham

Abstract.

Martin Luther famously denounced Pseudo-Dionysius as ‘downright dangerous; he Platonizes more than he Christianizes.’ In this 500th year of the Reformation I critically examine Luther’s judgement firstly by exploring the Neoplatonic background to ritual in Dionysius, secondly by presenting a Reformed critique of this background and finally by arguing for a distinctively Christian Dionysius who survives this critique.

Key terms

Pseudo-Dionysius, ritual, anagogy, agape and eros, Neoplatonism, theurgy, Proclus, sacramental theology, Martin Luther, Reformation, theologia cruxis, monophysitism, Syria

Introduction

In Caravaggio's, *Supper at Emmaus*, the disciples welcome an unknown guest for a meal. Christ is depicted without a beard, so we too do not immediately recognise him, but through the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the wine the disciples experience the Risen Christ and the artist leaves a space for us to join them in the same experience at the table. Caravaggio's masterpiece reflects a traditional Christian belief that the previously unrecognised Christ can be encountered through participation in the eucharist, the foremost 'ritual' of the Christian faith. This paper explores the theme of ritual through the lens of the late fifth/early sixth century writer, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (henceforth abbreviated to 'Dionysius'), himself an unknown and controversial 'guest' at the Christian table. A young Martin Luther could praise the 'Blessed Dionysius' for teaching an 'ascent by way of denials' into 'anagogical darkness,'¹ but after his radical revelation of the meaning of the 'righteousness of God' in July 1519,² he denounces him as 'downright dangerous' because 'he Platonizes more than he Christianizes.'³ In this 500th year of the Reformation I want to reevaluate this judgement by firstly discussing the Neoplatonic background to ritual in Dionysius, secondly by outlining a Reformed critique of this background and finally by presenting an argument for a distinctively Christian Dionysius who nevertheless survives this critique.

1. Neoplatonic ritual in Dionysius.

The unknown author of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* was first exposed by the humanist scholar Lorenzo Valla (1407-57) as a writer not from the first century, as his name suggested and as was almost universally believed during the Middle Ages,⁴ but rather from the late fifth or early sixth centuries. This is evinced by the incontestable dependence of his writings on the Neoplatonist Proclus (412-485), especially the latter's treatment of *eros*⁵ and of evil in *De Subsistentia Malorum*.⁶ Valla's exposé, popularised through Erasmus, made it possible for Martin Luther and subsequent critics to read 'Dionysius' as an anonymous Platonist masquerading as a Christian.⁷ Consequently historical critics, beginning with H.Koch⁸ and Stiglmayer,⁹ sought to locate the ritual practices in the corpus within the milieu of Proclean or Iamblichan 'theurgy (θεουργία),'¹⁰ a form of ritualistic magic which venerated the *Chaldean*

Oracles as its sacred text. *Theourgia* carries the double connotation of both ‘divine work’ or ‘making gods’ i.e. divinisation (*theosis*).¹¹ Certainly, Dionysius adopts the term a number of times through *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*,¹² but both Paul Rorem and Andrew Louth have highlighted the fact that in Dionysius, ‘theurgy’ always refers to God’s work, supremely the work of God in the Incarnation¹³ and not to a technique for manipulating gods *via* ritual (*erga*) or symbol.¹⁴ Whilst acknowledging Rorem and Louth’s judgment, Sarah Klitenic Wear and John Dillon reply that the concept of theurgy persists in the Dionysian corpus under the synonymous term ‘*hierourgia*’ (ἱερούργια) i.e. the ritual enactment of divine works.¹⁵ Their point is strengthened by the fact that Dionysius deploys other technical terms specific to the discourse of theurgy such as the divine ‘ray’,¹⁶ ‘sympathy’¹⁷ (in reference to ‘Hierotheus,’ possibly a codename for Proclus),¹⁸ and most significantly ‘anagogy’¹⁹ (ἀναγωγή). The term ‘anagogy’ has both a literal meaning and a mystical meaning.²⁰ In the *Chaldean Oracles* ἀναγωγή had acquired a specific reference to the ‘sacrament of immortality,’ a ritual for liberating the soul from its mortal body,²¹ described perjoratively as the ‘dung of matter.’²²

For Dionysius, however, anagogy is tied more closely with the Proclean motif of *eros* in which the ‘elevative’ cause (*anagogou*) ‘draws the reverting existence upwards to what is more divine.’²³ A striking example is the rite of anointing, the true meaning of which is hidden from all but those ‘Divine artists’ and ‘lovers of beauty,’ who, like the heavenly charioteers in Plato’s *Phaedrus*,²⁴ ‘gaze solely on conceptual originals. [They] refuse to be dragged down’²⁵ toward the realm of ‘counterfeits’.²⁶ Here the material world, while not quite *Chaldean* ‘dung’ is to some extent ‘less real’ than the realm of Concepts.²⁷ In Plato’s myth the fall of the charioteer caused imprisonment for the soul in the ‘living tomb’ of the body, like an oyster in a shell,²⁸ but Dionysius chooses to draw out the positive value of the material world from Proclus’ anagogical schema. Here Universal Beauty is recollected in the earthly particulars and beautiful sights and fragrances become theophanies of invisible Beauty and holiness.²⁹ Dionysius reveals his poetic genius when he writes: ‘Matter, after all, owes its subsistence to absolute beauty and keeps throughout its earthly ranks, some echo of intelligible beauty.’³⁰ Anagogy is thus for Dionysius an erotic longing to return from the ‘fallen’ embodiment of history and culture to an original state of perfection.

For it is quite impossible that we humans should, in any immaterial way, rise up to imitate and to contemplate the heavenly hierarchies without the aid of those material means capable of guiding us as our nature requires. (*The Celestial Hierarchy* 1)³¹

This general principle, summed up in the title of the putative book, *The Conceptual and the Perceptible*,³² has two particular applications. Firstly, it can be applied to the spiritual meaning of Scripture, which depends on its corporeal or 'literal' sense³³, as a stepping stone to the higher truths.³⁴ The Transcendent One has thought it fitting to clothe itself with things, 'derived from the realm of the senses'³⁵ as 'sacred veils,'³⁶ in order to accommodate itself to human nature³⁷ and initiate the divine return. Secondly, it is true of the visible words of the sacraments.³⁸ Dionysius comments that 'even if it had no other and more sacred meaning,' the rite of baptism communicates physical cleansing and therefore purification from all evil.³⁹ In this process it is the hierarch (i.e. the Bishop) who takes the role of a mediator when he 'lifts into view'⁴⁰ the things praised through the sacredly clothed symbols' of the eucharist, the divine symbol *par excellence*, which, like the *Chaldean Oracles* connects anagogy with ritual.⁴¹ It is no accident that Dionysius prefers the term *synaxis* for the eucharist since it denotes a gathering back to unity from the plurality of the material symbols.⁴² Consequently, the twin movements of Divine work (*theourgia*) and human re-enactment (*hierourgia*) in Dionysius are not in competition. Both ideas harmonise with the Neoplatonic schema of *monos*, *proodos* and *epistrophe*: that is to say, all things begin in God, move out from him and then return to him.⁴³ It is through the Christian sacraments that Pseudo-Dionysius can 'baptise' Neoplatonic metaphysics into the Christian faith.

2. A Reformed Critique of Dionysius

Taking his cue from Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation*,⁴⁴ Anders Nygren in his classic work, *Agape and Eros*, contrasts the soteriology of this anagogical *eros* motif based on the 'Good seeking good for the sake of the Good,'⁴⁵ with the New Testament soteriology of *agape* which, he argues, is based entirely on the 'spontaneous and unmotivated' initiative of the Lover and not on any quality intrinsic to the beloved.⁴⁶ As Luther puts it:

Rather than seeking its own good, the love of God flows forth and bestows good. Therefore sinners are attractive because they are loved; they are not loved because they are attractive.⁴⁷

On the Reformed view, human beings in their fallen state are 'by nature children of wrath' (*Ephesians* 2:9), rather than gods with amnesia. God's *agape* is demonstrated in that 'while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.' (*Romans* 5:8). The problem of the human condition is thus not an ontological one, nor even an epistemological one, but primarily a moral one.⁴⁸ It cannot therefore be remedied by *theurgic* rites since salvation is οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων (*Titus* 3:5).⁴⁹ It is founded instead on the 'righteousness of God by faith' (*Philippians* 3:9) understood as an unmerited gift.⁵⁰ If *eros* spirituality is *anagogic*, *agape* spirituality is *katagogic*. It reveals a kenotic descent to live with sinners. 'No one has ascended to Heaven, but he that came down from Heaven, even the Son of man who is in Heaven.' (*John* 3:13).⁵¹ Reflecting on this insight Luther writes in a letter to George Spenlein:

Beware, my brother, at aiming at a purity which rebels against being classed with sinners. For Christ only dwells among sinners. For this he came from heaven, where he dwelt among saints, so that he might also sojourn with the sinful. Strive after such love, and thou wilt experience his sweetest consolation.⁵²

It might be countered that there is a 'katagogic' element also in Neoplatonic 'love for humanity',⁵³ but this appears to be largely the result of cross-fertilisation with Christianity⁵⁴ and Nygren insists that its character remains essentially *appetitive*. As Plotinus puts it on his death bed, 'I was waiting for you, that you might help to bring the Divine in me to the Divine in all.'⁵⁵ *Eros* yearns for the divine in man, making it essentially self-love in comparison with *agape*. This explains why *anagogy* is for Plotinus a self-reflexive process. He speaks of 'ascending to *himself*.'⁵⁶ By contrast the Reformed understanding of the Gospel safeguards the Creator/creature distinction, which as Aquinas observed is also a logical necessity.⁵⁷

However, Nygren's thesis that *agape* is entirely unmotivated can be criticised as a half truth characteristic of voluntarism. If God chose to act in a loving way out of an arbitrary will how could we be sure that he might not choose differently tomorrow?⁵⁸ John gives us more confidence when he explains that God *is* love (*1 John* 4:16), i.e. God does not love sinners out of naked will, a 'liberty of indifference', but rather his

will is grounded in his Nature, as Wesley poetically hymned it: 'Thy nature and thy name is Love.'⁵⁹ Indeed it is telling that Nygren criticises the Johannine writings for not measuring up to his schema,⁶⁰ conceding that Johannine Christianity, 'creates a spiritual environment in which there would be some points of contact for the otherwise alien Eros motif.'⁶¹ The use of bridal imagery in Scripture for the relationship between God and his people suggests another such 'point of contact,'⁶² especially in *Song of Songs* which to the mainstream Biblical commentator portrays an *analogous* relationship between human *eros* and divine *agape* which is absent from the grace/nature dualism of Nygren's thesis.⁶³ Even Paul at times uses *agape* in the context of 'longing' in *Philippians* 4:1 where he twins ἀγαπετοι with επιποθητοι (beloved and longed for) and *2 Timothy* 4:8 where he speaks of believers 'loving (ἀγαπηκός) his appearing or conversely of Demas who deserted Paul, 'having loved (ἀγαπήσας) this present age.' Although human beings are 'children of wrath' (*Ephesians* 2:9) from a *fallen* perspective, it remains true that the *gift* of the *imago dei* (not meritorious) is not annihilated by the Fall.⁶⁴

The Christian Dionysius

In this final section then I hope to disclose a Christian 'Dionysius' who still shines through his Neoplatonic vestures.

Dionysius had appeared on the scene in Syria in 533 when Severus of Antioch (465-538) on behalf of the monophysites cited his work (in particular *Epistula* 4 regarding 'one theandric nature') as an authority in their favour.⁶⁵ There is a cumulative case for the author of the Dionysian corpus being a Syrian bishop,⁶⁶ probably from Edessa,⁶⁷ which was a centre of monophysitism⁶⁸ owing to his ambiguous Christology and his specific knowledge of ceremonies from the Syrian tradition,⁶⁹ including the singing of the 'hymn of universal faith' during eucharist.⁷⁰ Rosemary Arthur opines that *Epistle* 10 reflects a background of persecution of the monophysites characteristic of 521-531AD.⁷¹

But however one may judge the Christology of the monophysites and even if Dionysius is to be located amongst their number, he clearly belongs to an ostensibly *Christian* community and not to a pagan one.⁷² Dionysius presupposes and

specifically refers to the historical Jesus as God incarnate in a number of passages of *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*,⁷³ *Celestial Hierarchy*⁷⁴ and the *Divine Names*.⁷⁵ *Epistles* 3 and 4 reference the Incarnation, the Virgin birth and the miracle of walking on water. *Epistle 7* relates the eclipse at the time of the crucifixion.⁷⁶ *Epistle 8* describes Jesus' gracious parable of the Prodigal Son, his grace towards the Samaritans and his words from the Cross which he calls 'the expiation for our sins.'⁷⁷ *Celestial Hierarchy* refers to the nativity narrative and the passion of Gethemene.⁷⁸ *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* references his bodily resurrection as a basis for rejecting the doctrine that bodily existence will be dissolved,⁷⁹ which stands in stark discontinuity with the *Chaldean Oracles* doctrine of the body as 'dung'.⁸⁰

Martin Luther is surely wrong then to pronounce that 'nowhere does he (Dionysius) have a single word about faith or any useful instruction from the Holy Scriptures.'⁸¹ The entire *Corpus Dionysiacum* is saturated with Biblical citations and allusions from at least 54 of the canonical books.⁸² Rather than someone who merely quotes a few strategic 'proof texts' to give an illusion of orthodoxy, Dionysius strikes us as someone genuinely committed to its authority. *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* situates his theology in the context of a community which, after the pattern of the Jewish synagogue,⁸³ gives public readings from 'the sacred tablets' (ἡ τῶν ἀγιγραφῶν δελτῶν ἀναγνώσις).⁸⁴ The sacred scriptures are 'enlightening beams,'⁸⁵ moulding those being illuminated for Divine worship,⁸⁶ beginning with the catechumens who are 'incubated' by the 'paternal scriptures.'⁸⁷ It is by means of the Scriptures that we are kept in salvation since 'in thus preserving the Scriptures we also are preserved.'⁸⁸ Reading and singing the Scriptures wards off the powers of evil and delivers those who are possessed.⁸⁹

Dionysius' great treatise on *The Divine Names* commences with an appeal to holy Scripture, explaining that natural reason is inadequate to reach that Transcendent One who 'alone could give an authoritative account of what it really is.'⁹⁰ Since Dionysius has just referenced Paul's letter to the Corinthians in the opening words of this treatise,⁹¹ it is likely that in these words he is echoing Paul again who cites what seems to be an apostolic axiom just two chapters later:

μάθητε τὸ μὴ ὑπὲρ ἃ γέγραπται φρονεῖν⁹²

Indeed this revelation is not only a logical requirement for the knowability of God, but something which has graciously happened in reality, since the Source ‘has told us about itself in the words of Scripture.’⁹³ In order for their writings to become ‘the Word of God,’⁹⁴ the Scripture writers needed to operate by a ‘power granted by the Spirit.’⁹⁵ Consequently, in theological disputes about the nature of the Trinity, God’s omniscience,⁹⁶ or the believer’s identification with Christ in baptism,⁹⁷ it is to the Scriptures that Dionysius appeals as ‘the standard, rule and light’ for leading one to the truth.⁹⁸ These texts demonstrate that Dionysius’ commitment to the Christian revelation has surpassed the ‘rational’ theology of Plato which initially had no concept of special revelation⁹⁹ and also the later Iamblichean and Proclean Platonism, which, perhaps to compete with the Church, substituted the putative ‘revelations’ of the *Chaldean Oracles* and the writings of Plato for the Christian Scriptures.¹⁰⁰

Dionysius therefore defends himself against critics, such as one ‘Apollophanes’, who accused him of ‘making unholy use of things Greek to attack the Greeks.’¹⁰¹ Dionysius responds that the *sense* of Scripture is more important than the letter or sounds used and that a dynamic equivalent, even if it is borrowed from the glossary of Greek philosophy should be used if it conveys the sense more effectively.¹⁰² For example, the Greek term *eros* is not ‘counter to Scripture’ since:

In my opinion, it would be unreasonable and silly to look at words rather than at the power of their meanings. ...for this is the procedure followed by those who do not allow empty sounds to pass beyond their ears, who shut them out because they do not wish to know what a particular phrase means or not to convey its sense through equivalent but more effective phrases. People like this are concerned with meaningless letters and lines, with syllables and phrases which they do not understand, which do not get as far as the thinking part of their souls, and which make empty sounds on their lips and in their hearing. It is as if it were quite wrong to explain “four” by “twice two,” “a straight line” by “a direct line,” “the motherland” by “the fatherland,” or to make any sort of interchange among words which mean exactly the same thing..¹⁰³

This apologetic accounts for Dionysius’ transformation of pagan terms such as ‘theurgy’ into a vehicle for expressing the incarnation,¹⁰⁴ the divine ‘ray’ to describe

Jesus,¹⁰⁵ or ‘anagogy’ for the spiritual journey into invisible truths foreshadowed in the sacraments.¹⁰⁶ Dionysius is defending a principle which Mark Edwards has called the ‘*translatibility* of revelation,’¹⁰⁷ which is hardly surprising for one, who (like Origen), preferred the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Scriptures.¹⁰⁸ This was just as well, since his own writings were to be translated from Greek, first into Syriac and later into the Latin of Hilduin, Eriugena and Saracen in their passage into the West.¹⁰⁹ Nor was Dionysius the first Christian to express his faith using Platonic categories. This had already become the mainstream tradition of the early fathers from Justin Martyr onwards whose aim was not so much ‘synthesis’¹¹⁰ as contextualisation of the gospel. Even in the time of the Biblical writers themselves, St Paul commends the same strategy of ‘becoming all things to all people.’¹¹¹ He recontextualises, for instance, the Greek verb *ερωουργεω* (literally ‘to perform sacred rites’) to convey the ministry the gospel¹¹² and the writer to the Hebrews appropriates the Platonic language of shadows and ideas to speak not of two worlds but of two covenants or dispensations.¹¹³ Kierkegaard might have called this a ‘non-identical repetition’; Origen called it ‘spoiling the Egyptians’¹¹⁴ i.e. exploiting pagan terms for Christian ends.¹¹⁵ Origen goes on to give the example of the philosophical term *asomaton* (incorporeal) as a synonym for the Biblical term ‘invisible’ (*Colossian*. 1:15-16.). He is also the source of Dionysius’ contention that the Greek terms *eros* and *agape* can be used interchangeably.¹¹⁶ But it remains a moot point whether these different phonemes have an identical or similar sense to each other, or whether they imply conflicting worldviews, since there is always a danger that things are not only lost in translation, but also added.

Luther’s condemnation of Dionysius centres on his *Mystical Theology*: ‘I exhort you to detest as a veritable plague this Mystical Theology of Dionysius and similar books.’¹¹⁷ Similarly, the ‘Mystical Theology of Dionysius is pure fables and lies.’¹¹⁸ This is chiefly because, according to Luther’s post-conversion view, the mystical theologians presumed to know the Uncreated Word in contemplation before they had been purified by the sufferings of the Incarnate Word’.¹¹⁹ They sought a ‘theology of glory’ rather than a ‘theology of the Cross.’¹²⁰ In line with the writer to the Hebrews, the Book must be sprinkled with the Blood.¹²¹ Therefore, ‘let us rather hear Paul, that we may learn Jesus Christ and him crucified,’¹²² These are warnings which would be well taken against the dangers of mysticism, but in targeting his

condemnation on the *Mystical Theology*, Luther by-passes important sections of the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* (even though he was aware of this work¹²³) such as the following passage in which Dionysius affirms the *katagogy* of the incarnation and the Cross:

Similarly, in my view, one may explain that rite at the purifying baptistery when the hierarch pours the ointment in drops to form a cross. He thereby shows to those able to contemplate it that Jesus in a most glorious and divine descent willingly died on the cross for the sake of our divine birth, that he generously snatches from the old swallowing pit of ruinous death anyone who, as scripture mysteriously expresses it, has been baptised “into his death”, and renews them in an inspired and eternal existence.¹²⁴

Although placed in the context of ritual, this explanation reveals that underpinning the ritual is a profound Christology of the believer’s identification with Christ in his death (recalling *Romans* 6:4). The significance of the ‘triple’ immersion is further disclosed in *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 2 as representing the three days and nights in which Christ was in the tomb, portrayed by the baptismal font.¹²⁵

The Christian foundation of the rituals is also revealed in the creed-like text of *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 3, (440C-441B), introduced as an invocation of ‘what the hierarchs, those men of God, praise and celebrate, following the Scriptures,¹²⁶ and therefore probably derived from the liturgy of the Syrian community of which the author belonged.¹²⁷ This, we might say, is the ‘Gospel according to Dionysius,’ a presentation of salvation history which denounces the destructive effects of sin in uncharacteristically strident language:¹²⁸

From the beginning human nature has stupidly glided away from those good things bestowed on it by God. It turned away to the life of the most varied desires and came at the end to the catastrophe of death. There followed the destructive rejection of what was really good, a trampling over the sacred Law laid down in paradise for man. Having evaded the yoke which gave him life, man rebelled against the blessings of God and was left to his own devices, to the temptation and the evil assaults of the devil. And in exchange for eternity he pitiably opted for mortality. Born of corruption it was only right that he should leave the world as he entered it. He freely turned away from the divine and uplifting life and was dragged instead as far

as possible in the opposite direction and was plunged into the utter mess of passion. Wandering far from the right path, ensnared by destructive and evil crowds, the human race turned away from the true God and witlessly served neither gods nor friends but its enemies who, out of their innate lack of pity, took the cruellest advantage of its weakness and dragged it down to the deplorable peril of destruction and dissolution of being.¹²⁹

In contrast to the merely epistemic gap between Creator and creature located in pagan philosophy, this text at least emphasises the *moral* nature of the Fall and consequently the undeserved nature of God's 'love for humanity' (φιλανθρωπια).¹³⁰ which he goes on to declare made it possible for us 'to escape from the dominion of the rebellious, and it did this not through overwhelming force, but, as scripture mysteriously tells us, by an act of judgment and also in all righteousness. Beneficently it wrought a complete change in our nature.'¹³¹

This text is certainly not incompatible with a Lutheran understanding of the 'righteousness of God', especially as he stresses the need for regeneration through unmerited love, recalling the Pauline text, *Titus* 3:3-5.¹³² Indeed the 'famous teacher' referred to earlier in *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 2 is probably Paul rather than Hierotheus,¹³³ because of the allusion to *Romans* 5:8,¹³⁴ which we recall is one of Nygren's key texts for contrasting *eros* and *agape*. The use of this text in *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* indicates, at the very least, that the distinction between *eros* and *agape* in Dionysius is less pronounced than Nygren claims. Pagan *eros* is appropriated but transformed through its encounter with Christian *agape*. Here we can identify in Dionysius a form of prevenient grace, for although the goal of hierarchy is union with God *via* 'the doing of sacred acts,' it is quite clear that the 'starting point' for these acts is to be open to 'the divine workings of God'¹³⁵ (*theourgia* in the Dionysian sense of God's own works), which begins with divine regeneration, recalling *Titus* 3:5 (παλιγγενεσις):¹³⁶

In the realm of the intellect, as our famous teacher has said, it is love of God which first of all moves us toward the divine; indeed the first procession of this love toward the sacred enactment of the divine commands brings about in unspeakable fashion our divine existence. And divinisation is to have a divine birth. No one could

understand, let alone put into practice, the truths received from God if he did not have a divine beginning..¹³⁷

Though Luther associates Dionysius with extraordinary mystical experiences and visions in contrast to encountering God through the ordinary means of grace in Baptism, the Lord's Supper and the Word of God,¹³⁸ he fails to notice that Dionysius commends all three. *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* treats the 'illumination' (φωτισματι)¹³⁹ of Baptism in chapter 2; chapter 3 treats the 'synaxis' (or eucharist), followed by other rites of chrism, ordination and funeral rites (chapters 4-7) and we have already commented at length on the transformative power of Scripture for Dionysius. Just as Luther treasures the Scriptures as 'the swaddling clothes and manger in which Christ was wrapped and laid,'¹⁴⁰ so too, Dionysius commends the sacred truths of Scripture hidden in the 'sacred veils' of human language and culture.¹⁴¹

Conclusion

To summarise our argument, we have seen that, although from a Reformed perspective there are aspects of ritual as erotic anagogy in Neoplatonism which are contrary to the Gospel, at least as understood within the Reformed tradition, notably salvation as an ascent to forgotten divinity, the manipulation of the divine through theurgic techniques and the downplaying of matter, Dionysius himself begins to break away from these tendencies, deploying and transforming Neoplatonic language to contextualise a distinctively Christian message.

As we return then (in good Neoplatonic fashion!), to Caravaggio's masterpiece, we conclude that, while Dionysius clothes himself in Greek philosophy, Luther was too hasty in dismissing him as 'more of a Platonist than a Christian.' Instead, it is pre-eminently through his portrayal of the sacraments (which Luther also commends as means of grace) and the authentically Christian theology which underlies them, that the language of pagan Neoplatonism is transfigured so that the 'beardless' Christ continues to be recognised in and through the mysterious 'veils' of the pseudonymous Areopagite.

Bibliography.

Aquinas, Thomas,

- *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book 2, translated by Anderson, James F., Indiana, University of Notre Dame, 1956
- *Summa Theologiae*
- *In librum Beati Dionysii De Divinis Nominibus Expositio* 4.11 translated by Marsh, Harry C. 'Cosmic Structure and the knowledge of God: Thomas Aquinas' *In librum Beati Dionysii De Divinis Nominibus Expositio*, Phd Dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1994

Arthur, Rosemary A. *Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist: The development and Purpose of the Angelic Hierarchy in Sixth Century Syria*, London:Routledge, 2008/2016

Asclepius 21-29 (Nag Hammadi codex VI, 8) in Robinson, James M. *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, New York, Harper-Collins, 1990, p.333.

Aydin, Sami. *Sergius of Reshaina: Introduction to Aristotle and his Categories, Addressed to Philotheos, Aristoteles Semitico-Latinus*. Lam Mul: BRILL, 2016.

Balthasar, Hans Urs Von

- *The Glory of the Lord: A theological Aesthetics, Vol 2: Studies in Theological Style: Clerical styles*, ed. Riches, John translated by Andrew Louth, Francis McDonagh and Brian McNeil, T & T Clark, 1995
- Preface to Payne, Richard J., ed., *Origen: an Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer and Selected Works*, Paulist Press, 1979

Baynes N.H. and H. St. L.B. Moss, *Byzantium: An introduction to East Roman Civilisation*, Londond: Oxford University Press, 1962

Boersma, Hans. *Heavenly Participation: the weaving of the sacramental tapestry* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2011

Campbell, Thomas L *Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite: The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, University Press of America, 1981

Coakley, Sarah and Charles M. Stang, eds. *Rethinking Dionysius the Areopagite*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

Dawson, David. "Allegorical reading and the embodiment of the soul in Origen" in Ayres, Lewis and Gareth Jones, eds. *Christian Origin: Theology, Rhetoric and Community*, London: Routledge, 1998

Descartes,

- *Letter 2 to Mersenne*, in *Descartes Philosophical Writings*, translated by Anscombe, E. and P. Geach, Nelson Philosophical Texts, 1963, p 261.
- *Meditations*, translated by John Cottingham, Cambridge University Press; 2nd rev. ed. 1996

Dodds, E.R. "Theurgy" in Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004

Edwards, Mark Julian. *Origen against Plato*, Ashgate, 2004

Emery, K "The Commentaries of Denys the Carthusian" in Boiadjiev, Kapriev, Speer eds, *Die Dionysius-Rezeption im Mittelalter*, Societe Internationale pour l'Etude de la Philosophie Medievale, Recontres de Philosophie Medieval, 9, Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2000.

Eriugena, John Scotus, *Periphyseon (De Divisione Naturae)*, Book 1 (509D), ed. and translated by Sheldon-Williams, I.P. with the collaboration of Ludwig Bieler, Dublin: The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1968

Finnis, John. "Nature, Reason and God in Aquinas" in Sigmund, Paul E. *St. Thomas Aquinas on Politics and Ethics*, W.W. Norton, 1988

Frend, W.H.C. *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement*, Cambridge University Press, 1972

Froehlich, Karlfried. 'Pseudo-Dionysius and the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century' in Rorem, Paul, ed., *Pseudo-Dionysius, the Complete Works*, Paulist Press, 1987

Frothingham, Arthur L. Jr, *Stephen Bar Sudhaili, the Syrian Mystic and The Book of Hierotheus*, Leyden: E.J.Brill, 1886,

Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orations* 40.4. translated by Browne, Charles Gordon and James Edward Swallow, in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol. 7. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1894, revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/310240.htm> accessed 1/7/17

Hathaway, R.F. *Hierarchy and the definition of order in the letters of Pseudo-Dionysius: A study in the Form and meaning of the Pseudo-Dionysian Writings*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969.

Hugh of St. Victor, *De Sacramentis: On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith* translated by Deferrari, Roy J. Eugene, Origen: WIPF & Stock, 2007

Kelly, J.N.D. *Early Christian Creeds*, Longman, 1981

Klitenic Wear, Sarah and John Dillon, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition: Despoiling the Hellenes*, Ashgate, 2007

Koch, H.

- Koch, H. "Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita in seinen Bieziehungeng zum Neuplatonismun und Mysterienwesen, Forschungen zur christlichen Litteratur," in Erhard, V.A und J.P.Kirsch, eds., *Forschungen zur christlichen Litteratur und Dogmengeschichte*, I, 1900, Hefte 2-3.

Lewy, Hans, ed. and revised by Michel Tardieu, *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy: Mysticism, Magic, and Platonism in the Later Roman Empire*, Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1978

Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1872

Linbeck, George. "Scripture, consensus and community" in Neuhaus, R.J.,ed. *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: The Ratzinger conference on Bible and Church*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm.B.Eerdmans, 1989

Louth, Andrew

- *Denys the Aeropagite*, Continuum, 1989
- "Pagan Theurgy and Christian Sacramentalism in Denys the Areopagite" in *Journal of Theological Studies* 37.2 1986, p.434

Luce, A.A. *Monophysitism Past and Present: A Study in Christology*, London, SPCK, 1920

Luscombe, David. "Wyclif and Hierarchy" in Hudson, Anne and Michael Wilks, eds. *From Ockham to Wyclif*, Basil Blackmore, 1987.

Luther, Martin

- *Career of the Reformer IV*, in Pelikan, J ed. *Luther's Works*, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1960, Vol. 34, pp.336-337.
- *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), in Pelikan, J ed. St Louis, MO: Fortress Press, 1955-1986, Vol. 36, p.109.
- *Explanations of the Ninety Five Theses* in Pelikan, J., ed. *Luther's Works*, Vol. 31, Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956
- *First Lectures on the Psalms I: Psalms 1-75* in Pelikan, J., ed. *Luther's Works*, Vol. 10. Saint Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1956.
- *The Heidelberg Disputation* in Rupp, E.G. and Benjamin Drewery, eds. *Martin Luther: Documents of Modern History*, London, Edward Arnold, 1970, p.29.
- *Lectures on Genesis 1-5* in Pelikan, J., ed. *Luther's Works*, Vol. 1, Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956
- *Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 15-20* in Pelikan, J., ed. *Luther's Works*, Vol. 3, Saint Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1956), pp.166-167
- *Lectures on Romans*, in Pelikan, J., ed. *Luther's Works*, Vol. 3, Saint Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1956), Vol. 25
- *Table Talk*, in Pelikan, J., ed. *Luther's Works*, Vol. 3, Saint Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1956, Vol. 54
- *To George Spenlein, Augustinian in Memmingen, 7 April 1516* in E.G.Rupp, E.G. and Benjamin Drewery eds., *Martin Luther: Documents of Modern History*, London: Edward Arnold, 1970

Malysz, P.J. "Luther and Dionysius: Beyond Mere Negations" in Coakley, Sarah and Charles M. Stang, eds. *Rethinking Dionysius the Areopagite*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, p. 150, 161.

Mang, Cyril A. *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453: Sources and Documents*, University of Toronto Press; 2nd revised ed., 1986

Maximus the Confessor, *Scholia* MG 4.136B

McEvoy, James, *Mystical Theology: The Glosses by Thomas Gallus and the Commentary of Robert Grosseteste on 'De Mystica Theologia,'* Paris/Leuven: Peeters, 2003

Nazareth, William H. "Luther's 'Sola Scriptura': traditions of the Gospel for norming Christian righteousness" in Richard John Neuham, ed., *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: The Ratzinger Conference on Bible and Church*, Grand Rapids, MI, William B. Eerdmans, 1999.

Nygren, Anders. *Agape and Eros*, translated by Watson, Philip S., SPCK, 1982

Origen,

- *The Song of Songs Commentary and Homilies*, translated by Lawson, R.P. The Newman Press, 1956.
- *Commentaire Sur Saint Jean*,3 (13), translated by Blanc, Cecile. Sources Chretiennes, Paris : Les editions du Cerf, 1966
- Payne, Richard, J. ed., *Origen: an Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer and Selected Works*, translated by Rowan E. Greer, Paulist Press, 1979
- *Letter to Gregory* in Joseph W. Trigg, *Origen*, Routledge, 1998

Perczel, Istvan "The Earliest Syriac Reception of Dionysius" in Coakley, Sarah and Charles M. Stang, eds., *Rethinking Dionysius the Areopagite*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009

- Perl, Eric D. *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, SUNY, 2007
- Plato, *Works of Plato in 4 Volumes*, translated by Jowett, B., Boston: The Jefferson Press, 1871.
- Porphyry, *Auxiliaries to the Perception of Intelligible Natures*, 32 in Thomas Taylor, *Select Works of Porphyry* Vol. II, The Prometheus Trust, 1994, pp.180-181
- Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, translated by Morrow, Glenn R and John M. Dillon, Princeton University Press, 1987
- Proclus, *De Aeternitate*, (On the Eternity of the World), translated by Helen S. Lang, Helen S and A.D.Macro, University of California Press, 2001
- Proclus, *The Elements of Theology* translated by Dodds, E.R. Clarendon, Press, Oxford, 2004
- Psellus, PG CXXII, 721D
- Pseudo-Dionysius, translated by Colm Luibheid in Rorem, P. ed. *Pseudo-Dionysius, the Complete Works*, Paulist Press, 1987
- *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy (EH)*
 - *Epistles (Ep)*
 - *Divine Names (DN)*
- Reid ,James, *The Catholic Thing*, May 25, 2017.
<https://www.thecatholicthing.org/2017/05/25/the-ascension-of-christ-by-tintoretto/>
- Riches, Aaron. *Ecce Homo: On the Divine Unity of Christ* Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2016, p.103.
- Roques, R. *L'Univers Dionysien: Structure hierarchique du monde selon le Pseudo-Denys*, Montaigne, Aubier Editions, 1954
- Rolt, C.R. *Dionysius the Areopagite, The Divine Names and The Mystical Theology*, SPCK, 1940
- Rorem, Paul, "Iamblichus and the Anagogical Method in Pseudo-Dionysian Liturgical Theology" in Livingstone, E.A., ed., *Studia Patristica XVII*, Oxford: Pergamum Press, 1982
- Rupp, E.G. and Benjamin Drewery, eds. *Martin Luther: Documents of Modern History*, London, Edward Arnold, 1970
- Sammon, Brendan Thomas. *The God Who is Beauty: Beauty as a divine name in Thomas Aquinas and Dionysius the Areopagite*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series, WIPF and Stock, 2013
- Stiglmayr, Joseph. "Der Neuplatoiker Proklus als Vorlage des soggen. Dionysius Areopagita in der Lehre vum Ubel," in *Historische Jahrbuch im Auftrag der Gorresgesellschaft*, XVI, 1895, pp.253-273; 721-748.
- Théry, P.G. *Études Dionysiennes 1: Hilduin , Traducteur de Denys* (Paris, Libraire Philosophique J.Vrin, 1932)
- Trigg, Joseph Wilson. *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third Century Church*, SCM, 1985

Wallis, R.T. *Neoplatonism*, London: Gerald Duckworth. 2nd ed., 1995

Wand, J.W.C. *A History of the early church to AD 500*, Methuen, 1982

Wesley, Charles, 'Wrestling Jacob' in Ruffer, Harrison, Barnard, Giles eds. *Ancient and Modern: hymns and songs for refreshing worship*, Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2013, hymn 616.

Note on the Contributor.

- Alan Darley is a Phd candidate at the University of Nottingham where he is researching the reception of Pseudo-Dionysius in Thomas Aquinas as a contribution to the question of religious language. He currently lectures at Bishop Grosseteste University in Lincoln and is the author of a number of peer reviewed articles including 'Hyperousios: God 'without being,' 'Super-being,' or 'Unlimited Being'?' in *Heythrop Journal*, June, 2017; 'The Epistemological Hope: Aquinas versus other receptions of Pseudo-Dionysius on the Beatific Vision' in *Heythrop Journal*, 12 June, 2016; 'Predication or participation? What is the nature of Aquinas' doctrine of analogy?' *Heythrop Journal*, 27 January, 2016; 'How does eternity affect the law of non-contradiction?' in *Heythrop Journal*, 14 March, 2013; 'We know in part: How the positive apophaticism of Aquinas transforms the negative theology of Pseudo-Dionysius' in *Heythrop Journal*, Sept 2011; 'Does Aquinas' notion of analogy violate the law of non-contradiction?' in *Heythrop Journal*, March 2013, Vol 54, Number 2 and 'Is Radical Orthodoxy Thomistic enough?' in *Theofilos*, Vol. 9, number 1, 2016
-

¹Luther, *Lectures on the Psalms* I, 119.

² Luther, *Career of the Reformer IV*, 336-337.

³ Luther, *Babylonian Captivity* 109. See also Froehlich, 'Pseudo-Dionysius and Reformation' 44; Nygren, *Eros and Agape*, 705.

⁴ For example Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (henceforth *ST*) 3, q. 44, a.2, ad 2 where Aquinas refers to Dionysius as an 'eyewitness' to the eclipse at the time of the crucifixion, following Pseudo-Dionysius, *Epistle* (henceforth *Ep*) 7, (1081A).

⁵ *Divine Names* (henceforth *DN*) 4, 11-18. All translations are from Luibheid in Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius, Complete Works* unless otherwise indicated.

⁶ See *DN* 4, 18-35.

⁷ 'Among the Greek theologians there is Dionysius. They boast that he was a disciple of Paul, but there is no truth to this.' Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 1-5*, 235.

⁸ Koch, "Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita" 1-276.

⁹ Stiglmayr, "Der Neuplatoniker Proklus" 253-273; 721-748. See also Hathaway, *Hierarchy*.

¹⁰ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis*, 1, 9; II, 11; 7:2-6. θεουργος is a term coined by the Chaldeans. It is found as a *hapax legomena* in *Chaldean Oracles*, 'The theurgists are not counted into the herd of mean subject to destiny.' See Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy* 212, 461. The *Chaldean Oracles* were written in the late second century by Julian 'The Chaldean' and his son Julian, surnamed 'The Theurgist.' Ibid, 3-4. Proclus, *Republic*, II, 123, 13.

¹¹ 'Not only is he [man] god, but he also creates gods.' Asclepius 23-4; Psellus, PG CXXII, 721D. See Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, 107.

¹² *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* (henceforth *EH*) 3, (429C); 3, (432B); *EH* 3, (436C); 3, (440B-C); 3, (441C-D); 3, (445B-C); 4, 12, (484C-D).

¹³ 'The latter transformed the very term 'theurgy,' for example, from a Chaldean and Iamblichean objective genitive, i.e. works addressed to the gods, to a subjective genitive suggesting *God's* mighty acts, especially in Christ.' Rorem, "Iamblichus" 456; Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius* 52, n.10. Out of 25 occurrences, nine refer to the Incarnation. Andrew Louth, "Pagan Theurgy", p.434. See *EH* 3, (429C); 3, (432B); 3, (441C).

¹⁴ Proclus, *In Cratylus*, 72A; *In Timaeus*, I, 211; Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis*, 1, 15. See Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy* 57, 192

¹⁵ Klitenic Wear, *Dionysius the Areopagite* 99ff.

¹⁶ *EH* 1, (372B); *DN* 3, (680C). Julian, *Orations* V, 172D refers to a 'seven-rayed god' (ο επτακτις) who causes the soul to ascend. See also Plotinus, *Enneads*, V,1,7; Proclus, *Republic* 1,152,14; 1,178,17; *In Tim*, III, 82, 11. Plato, *Republic*, 533D. See Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy*, 186, 208, 60.

¹⁷ *DN* 2.9, (648B). See Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 65, n. 121 and Dodds, "Theurgy" 292. συμπαθης is used in Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, props. 28; 34;140; 209. Though there is a Biblical precedence for this term in *Hebrews* 4:15.

¹⁸ See Emery, "Commentaries of Denys" 240 n.59. This seems plausible given the coincidence of the well established dependence of Dionysius on Proclus, with a reference to a work allegedly composed by Hierotheus called *Hymns of Yearning* (ερωτικοι υμνοι) in *Divine Names* 4, (713B) and given the identical title of another alleged book by Hierotheus, Στοιχειωσις θεολογικη with the classic text of Proclus. Hierotheus is described as a hymnwriter and a mystic in *DN* 3.2 (684A); which parallels the life of Proclus himself who was a prolific hymnwriter and mystic according to the biography of his student Marinus, 'his hymns were often composed at night, or early in the morning, sometimes as the result of a dream.' See introduction by Morrow to *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, xiii. In turn Proclus credits the source of some of his belief in triads as arising from certain 'theologians..in song.' *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, tr. Morrow, Book 6, 1090, 438. This would then render ironic his claim in *DN* 3.2, 681A that 'it would have been quite an injustice to my teacher and friend if I were to put forward as my own the renowned contemplation and revelation of someone who next to the divine Paul, has been my elementary instructor.' See also Hathaway, *Hierarchy* pp. 15, 26, 28. However, Hans Urs Von Balthasar is unconvinced by this theory on the grounds that Hierotheus' *Elements* is described as an exposition of Scripture (*DN* 3.2, (684)), but this is not clear from the text. See Balthasar, "Glory of the Lord" 157 n 32.

¹⁹ For other technical terms see Klitenic Wear, 99ff.

²⁰ The literal meaning derives from the Greek 'ἀνάγω, (aor. ἀνηγαγον)'to lift/lead up.' Scripture uses this verb literally in *Luke* 2:22 (ἀνηγαγον; *Acts* 9:39 and *Acts* 16:34. It is the antonym of καταγινεω, 'to go down' (*Acts* 9:30).

- ²¹ Proclus, *In Timaeus*, 3, 82, 11; *In Cratylus* 71, 17; Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis*, I, 12,13,16; VIII,6,11; X, 6, 13,17; Julian *Orationes*, V, 172D; Porphyry, *De regressu animae*. See Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy* p.487 and p.12. Neoplatonists probably borrowed their usage from Plato, *Republic*, 521C. See Lewy, 488.
- ²² The *Chaldean Oracles* cited in Lewy, 213.
- ²³ Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, Prop. 158, p.139 and commentary p.281 which points out that Proclus uses this term of the god Helios and the Muses (*Hymn 1.54; Hymn 2.1*).
- ²⁴ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 247ff.
- ²⁵ See also *Wisdom 9:13*; Methodius, *Symposium*, 8:2-3; Dodds, *Elements of Theology*, Appendix II, 318. Porphyry literally believed that the *pneuma* became heavier in its descent into matter and that the weight of this moisture threatened to drag it down to a place of punishment after death. Theurgy helps the *pneuma* to reascend. Porphyry, *Auxiliaries* 180-181.
- ²⁶ *EH 4* (476A)
- ²⁷ See also *EH 1*, (376B-C) where the less corporeal oral tradition is argued to be superior since it is analogous to the level of the celestial hierarchy in which angelic intelligences communicate immaterially ‘from mind to mind.’
- ²⁸ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 250.
- ²⁹ ‘These divine beauties are concealed. Their fragrance is something beyond any effort of the understanding and they effectively keep clear of all profanation. They reveal themselves solely to minds capable of grasping them.’ *EH 4*, (473B). See also *CH 1*, (121D); Sammon, *God Who is Beauty*; Perl, *Theophany*. On spiritual fragrance see Origen, *Song of Songs Commentary*, Book 2.9, pp.159-162 and *Homily 2 in Song of Songs Commentary*, pp.285-286;
- ³⁰ *CH 2*, (121C-D), c.f. Origen’s discussion of matter in *On First Principles*, IV, 4, 5-6.
- ³¹ *CH 1*, (121C-D)
- ³² *EH 2*, (397C).
- ³³ See Origen, *Commentaire Sur Saint Jean*, 3 (13), XVII. 101, 84.
- ³⁴ See discussion of Tintorretto’s *Ascension of Christ*, in Reid, *The Catholic Thing*, May 25, 2017.
- ³⁵ *DN 1.4*, (529B).
- ³⁶ *EH 1*, (376D)
- ³⁷ *CH 1.2*, (121C).
- ³⁸ The Greek term translated ‘sacrament’ in Dionysius is ‘*teletas*’ signifying a ‘means of perfecting’.
- ³⁹ *EH 1*, (397B); *EH 3* (445A).
- ⁴⁰ either the elevation or uncovering of the elements. See Campbell, *Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite*, 154.
- ⁴¹ *CH 1.3*, (124A); *EH 3*, (445A).
- ⁴² *EH 3.3*, (429A); c.f. *DN 1* (640D-641A); (649B-652A).
- ⁴³ *DN 1*, (640-641; 649-652). This is the true significance of the ‘divine return to the primary things’ which is ‘the goal of his procession toward secondary things.’ *EH 3*, (429B). Later, Hugh of St. Victor will say of the sacraments: ‘If, therefore, God creates and the priest sanctifies, man seems to do more than God, which would be altogether absurd and inappropriate, if God did not also do what man does.’ *On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith (De Sacramentis)* Bk. 1, part 9, 159.
- ⁴⁴ Rupp, *Martin Luther: Documents*, 29.
- ⁴⁵ *DN 4*, (708B)
- ⁴⁶ Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, p.75; pp.681-691. *Mark 2:17; Romans 5:8; Ephesians 2:3-4; 1 John 4:10; Deuteronomy 7:7-8*.
- ⁴⁷ Luther, *The Heidelberg Disputation*, 29.
- ⁴⁸ Luther, *Selected Psalms*, 110-111;
- ⁴⁹ ἐκ τῶν ἐργῶν (*Ephesians 2:9*).
- ⁵⁰ Luther, *Career of the Reformer IV*, 336-337.
- ⁵¹ On this text Luther writes: ‘no one arrives at the understanding of divinity but he who has first been humbled and who has come down to an understanding of himself, for there he discovers the understanding of God at the same time.’ Luther, *First Lectures on the Psalms I*, 119. From a Catholic perspective, Balthasar can also find fault with ‘Origenist spirituality’ (from which Dionysian spirituality derives) for what he calls its unrestricted tendency’ to ‘strain “upward.” ‘This has an inevitable effect on the evangelical theme of “descent” – that of God into flesh, even to death on the cross, the descent into hell, the admonition to take the lowest place, the praise not of the clever and the worldly wise but of the humble, to whom God’s secrets shall be revealed – in short, what is implied by the *via crucis* is bound to be somewhat neglected.’ Balthasar, *Origen*, xiv. See also *Ephesians 4:9*.
- ⁵² Luther, *To George Spenlein, Augustinian*, 8

⁵³ *EH* 3, (429B); *DN* 4, (708A).

⁵⁴ 'those who attain to this beatific vision are unwilling to descend to human affairs,' Plato, *Republic* 7, (517) although the released prisoner does 'pity' those still in the cave (516).

⁵⁵ Porphyry, *De Vita Plotini*, 2, cited in Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 194.

⁵⁶ Plotinus, *Enneads*, I, 6, 9; IV, 7, 10, (my emphasis); Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus*, 23. See Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy*, 488.

⁵⁷ 'And from this it is clear that God cannot make God. For it is of the essence of a thing that its own being depends on another cause, and this is contrary to the nature of the being we call God. For the same reason God cannot make a thing equal to Himself; for a thing whose being does not depend on another is superior in being, and in other perfections, to that which depends on something else, such dependence pertaining to the nature of that which is made.' Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Bk. 2, c.25, (17-18). A Christian case for theosis is usually argued from texts such as *2 Peter* 1:4; *John* 17:20-23 and *1 John* 3:2.

⁵⁸ *EH* 3, (429B). In the developed form of voluntarism encountered in Descartes the absolute omnipotence of God which can change laws of logic results in Descartes' problem of the 'malevolent demon' of radical scepticism. Descartes, *Letter 2 to Mersenne*, 261 and *Meditation* 1.

⁵⁹ Wesley (1742), 'Wrestling Jacob', 616.

⁶⁰ Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 146-159.

⁶¹ Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 159.

⁶² *Jeremiah* 3; *Ezekiel* 16; *Hosea* 1-3; *Mark* 2:19-20; *Ephesians* 5:27. *Revelation* 19:8; 21:2 refer to the church as the bride of Christ. The union of Christ and the saints is 'the marriage supper of the Lamb' (*Rev.* 19:9).

⁶³ Nygren puts it starkly, 'Luther, however, has taken seriously the fact that Christian love is by nature wholly other than human love.' See Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 726.

⁶⁴ See *Genesis* 9:6; *1 Corinthians* 11:7; *James* 3:9

⁶⁵ In a report entitled, *Innocentii Maronitae epistula de collatione cum Severianus habita*, cited in Sammon, *God Who is Beauty*, 89. Riches points out that the citation from Severus is different to the reading as it has come down to us, possibly glossed by John of Scythopoli, which speaks instead of 'new theandric activity.' See Riches, *Ecce Homo*, 103. See also Roques, *L'Univers Dionysien*, 311; Klittenic Wear, *Dionysius the Areopagite*, 2; Frothingham, *Stephen Bar Sudhaili*, 3.

⁶⁶ Since Dionysius himself rebukes a priest in *Epistle* 6 and the monk Demophilus in *Epistle* 8, Rosemary Arthur concludes, contrary to widespread opinion, Dionysius could not have been a monk himself at the time of writing as this would be contrary to his own principles. See *EP* 8, (1088C); *EH* 5.7, (508C). See Arthur, *Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist*, p.158.

⁶⁷ The 6th century cathedral at Edessa before it was destroyed in 525AD had nine steps in three groups of three leading to the altar, representing the ninefold order of angels. See Arthur, *Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist*, 13; Mang, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, p.59 and is also found in the pseudonymous *Book of Hierotheus*, also from Edessa in the 5th century which speaks of the nine orders of angels in a triadic descent. See Frothingham, *Stephen Bar Sudhaili*.

⁶⁸ Primary sources include *The Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite* and *The Edessene Chronicle*. See Baynes, *Byzantium*, 213-214. See also Frothingham, *Stephen Bar Sudhaili*, 3.

⁶⁹ *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* describes in detail the rites of illumination (baptism), synaxis (eucharist), anointing with oil, consecration of holy orders and funeral rites. Istvan Perczel has put forward a promising theory that the author was an 'Origenist' See Perczel, "The Earliest Syriac Reception" 27-41.

⁷⁰ *EH* 3. 425C; 3. (436C); Louth, *Denys the Aeropagite*, chapter 1; Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 348-349; Frend, *Rise of the Monophysite Movement*; Wand, *History of the early church*, 258f.. But see Campbell, *Dionysius the Areopagite*, 146.

⁷¹ *EP* 10, (1117C) cited in Arthur, *Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist*, p.68. Severus, along with over 55 monophysite bishops was sent into exile for his beliefs. *Ibid*, 321.

⁷² This is not to deny however that pagan thought, particularly the monism of Neoplatonism may have strongly influenced the peculiar character of this Christian heresy. See A.A. Luce, *Monophysitism*, 17.

⁷³ *EH* 3, (432D); (441A); (444A); *EH* 4.3.10 (484A-B); *EH* 5.4 (512B-C)

⁷⁴ *CH* 4 (181B-C); 7, (209B).

⁷⁵ *DN* 1.1 (592A); *DN* 2.3 (640C); *DN* 2.6 (644C); *DN* 2.9 (648A); *DN* 2.10 (649A).

⁷⁶ *EP* 7, (1081A)

⁷⁷ *EP* 8, (1096B) citing *1 John* 2:2.

⁷⁸ *CH* 4.4 (181B-C)

⁷⁹ EH 7.1 (533A) also condemned in the *Wisdom of Solomon* 2:2-5. The monophysite writer Sergius of Reshaina also wrote a lost work 'On the Incarnation' which supports Rosemary Arthur's thesis that Sergius of Reshaina is the Pseudo-Dionysius. See Aydin, *Sergius of Reshaina*, p.20.

⁸⁰ See note 21 above. The *Chaldean Oracles* cited in Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy*, p.213. In *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 4, (476A) – Dionysius does however follow the *Wisdom of Solomon* 9:13, also a favourite text of Augustine and Origen, in speaking negatively of the body, 'weighing down' the soul. See also Origen, *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, 3, p.42.

⁸¹ *Luther's Works, Lectures on Genesis 1-5*, p.235.

⁸² EH 3 (429C).

⁸³ Campbell, *Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite*, 142.

⁸⁴ EH 3.2, (425C). Campbell, *Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite*, 142, 39. He cites Maximus (*Scholia* MG 4.136B) that readings were taken from the Old and New Testament. See also Justin, *Apologia* 1.67; *Apostolic Constitutions* 1.57; 5-8; 8.5.11.

⁸⁵ DN 1.3 (589B). Eriugena picks up on this expression which he calls 'superiores claritates' (higher radiancies'). See Eriugena, *Periphyseon* 190-191.

⁸⁶ EH 6.1 (532A)

⁸⁷ EH 3 (432D)

⁸⁸ DN 2, 2 (640) translated by C.R.Rolt, *Dionysius the Areopagite*, 68.

⁸⁹ EH 4.3.2, (477A).

⁹⁰ DN 1, 1 (588B). Interestingly, this text was later to be appropriated by John Wyclif against those papal claims he considered to have no Scriptural warrant. See Luscombe, "Wyclif and Hierarchy"

⁹¹ 1 Cor. 2:4 in DN 1.1 (585B).

⁹² 1 Cor. 4.6.

⁹³ DN 1, 1 (589B)

⁹⁴ CH 4 (180B)

⁹⁵ DN 1, 1 (585B). See also CH 4 (180B); DN 3 (681B).

⁹⁶ DN 7, (868D). At first sight this seems to be contradicted by MT 5, 1048A: 'Existing things do not know it as it actually is and it does not know them as they really are.' Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius, the Complete Works* p.141. Robert Grosseteste instead translates 'neque entia noscunt ipsam, omnium videlicet causam, secundum quod ipsa est, neque ipsa cognoscit entia secundum quod entia sunt, ('exists do not know it (the cause of all) as it itself is, nor does it know existing things as such') and reconciles the problem as follows: 'non enim habet virtutes aliquas cognoscitivas suscipientes quid a cognitis, sed supercognoscitivam, quia supersubstantialiter cognoscens se, cognoscit.' (For he does not have some powers of knowledge receiving something from objects known, but rather he has a power of knowing that is beyond that, since by knowing himself in a way that is beyond being, he knows all things.' See James McEvoy (ed./tr.), *Mystical Theology: The Glosses*, p.119.

⁹⁷ EH 4.484B, citing Romans 6:3.

⁹⁸ DN 2, 2 (640A).

⁹⁹ Plato, *Laws*, IV, 715e, 716d; *Republic* VI, 600b. See Finnis, "Nature, Reason and God" 191.

¹⁰⁰ Proclus, *Platonic Theology* 1.i; *In Timaeus*, III.63.24; *In Cratylus* 101,3. See Dodds, *Elements of Theology* xii. The *Chaldean Oracles* were written in the late second century by Julian surnamed 'The Chaldean' and his son Julian, surnamed 'The Theurgist.' See Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy*, 4-6. 'These Chaldean Oracles claim to contain the doctrines which the gods disclosed to the two Julians. They are revelations which the Theurgists have written down. Accordingly, the Neoplatonists who believed in the legitimate character of the inspiration frequently quoted the Chaldean Oracles as utterances of the gods themselves and did not mention quite so often their Chaldean hypophets who, in their opinion, had only played a secondary part.' Ibid 6.

¹⁰¹ EP 7.2

¹⁰² Aquinas commenting on this passage illuminates it as follows: 'For it is irrational and improper, as I believe, that a person does not keep in mind the power of the intention, i.e. that which someone intends to signify through the name, but only the words themselves.' *In librum Beati Dionysii* 376.

¹⁰³ DN 4.11.(408C)

¹⁰⁴ EH 3, (492C; 432B; 441C).

¹⁰⁵ EH 1, (372B); DN 3, (680C). Julian, *Orationes* V, 172D, refers to a 'seven-rayed god' (ο επτακτις) who causes the soul to ascend. See also Plotinus, *Enneads*, V,1,7; Proclus, *Republic* 1,152,14; 1,178,17; *In Tim*, III, 82, 11. Plato, *Republic*, 533D. See Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy* p.186, 208, 60.

¹⁰⁶ EH 2.3.2 (397C).

¹⁰⁷ Edwards, *Origen against Plato*, 56. See also Linbeck, "Scripture, consensus and community" 86-87. 'The inescapability of this task of putting non-Christian thought to Christian uses needs to be emphasised. Even

theologians who want to be entirely Biblical cannot avoid it. Luther, despite his detestation of Aristotle, continued to employ, often quite consciously, the Ockhamist Aristotelianism in which he had been trained, and there is not a little Platonism in Calvin's thought.'

¹⁰⁸ Trigg, *Origen: The Bible* 5.

¹⁰⁹ See Théry, *Hilduin, Traducteur de Denys*

¹¹⁰ *Contra Boersma, Heavenly Participation* 40ff.

¹¹¹ *1 Corinthians* 9:22.

¹¹² *Romans* 15:16; ἑρουργεῖω in Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon* 327.

¹¹³ *Hebrews* 10:1

¹¹⁴ Origen, *Letter to Gregory* 211.

¹¹⁵ Origen's *First Principles* contains a striking parallel with Dionysius' argument. 'Therefore, everyone who is concerned with truth should be little concerned with names and words (c.f. *1 Tim.* 1:4), because different nations have different customs about words. And he should pay more attention to what is meant than how it is expressed in words.' Origen, *On First Principles*, IV, 3, 15, p.204.

¹¹⁶ After an extended discussion of this question he concludes: 'It makes no difference, therefore, whether the Sacred Scriptures speak of love (*eros*), or of charity (*agape*), or of affection; except that the word 'charity' (*agape*) is so highly exalted that even God Himself is called Charity, as John says..' Origen, *The Song of Songs Commentary and Homilies*, Prologue 2, p.32. See also the discussion in Dawson, "Allegorical reading" 38-43.

¹¹⁷ Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation* in Nygren, *Eros and Agape*, p.705.

¹¹⁸ Nygren, *Eros and Agape*, p.706, n.1.

¹¹⁹ Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, 287; *Table Talk*, 112.

¹²⁰ These terms are coined in Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation* e.g. 20-21.

¹²¹ *Hebrews* 9:19.

¹²² Luther, *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, 109. Rosemary A. Arthur agrees with Luther: 'Paul's crucified Christ, whose blood redeems us, the Second Adam whose obedience makes up for the disobedience of the first Adam, is absent from Dionysius' theology.' See Arthur, *Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist* 94.

¹²³ Luther, *Explanations of the Ninety Five* 119.

¹²⁴ *EH* 3, (484B), citing *Romans* 6:3. Rosemary Arthur overlooks this passage when she asserts that Dionysius assigns, 'a teaching rather than a redemptive role for the Son.' See Arthur, *Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist* 15.

¹²⁵ *EH* 2. 7

¹²⁶ *EH* 4, (440C)

¹²⁷ 'the author seems to be paraphrasing the account of salvation history found in his community's anaphora or Eucharistic prayer.' See Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius* 220, n.95.

¹²⁸ See also *DN* 8, (897A) and *EH* 7, (561D)

¹²⁹ *EH* 3 (440C-441A)

¹³⁰ *EH* 3 (441A)

¹³¹ *EH* 3 (441B)

¹³² *EH* 3 (441A). See Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius* 220, n.96,97.

¹³³ Against Rorem's view that the teacher refers to Hierotheus in Rorem (ed.), *Pseudo-Dionysius, Complete Works* 200, n.20.

¹³⁴ Campbell, *Dionysius the Areopagite* 117 (following Stiglmayr).

¹³⁵ *EH* 2, (392A)

¹³⁶ And Dionysius again: 'Benificently it wrought a complete change in our nature.' *EH* 3, (441B).

¹³⁷ *EH* 2, (392B)

¹³⁸ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 15-20* pp.166-167; Vol. 54, *Table Talk*, p.112.

¹³⁹ See Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orations* 40.4. tr. Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow, in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol. 7. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1894.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight.

<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/310240.htm> accessed 1/7/17.

¹⁴⁰ Nazareth, "Luther's Sola Scriptura" 60.

¹⁴¹ *D N* 1.4, (529B)