Apophasis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite

"No Longer I"

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Acknowledgments

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

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Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[3] Schäfer, *The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite* (2006); Perl, *Theophany* (2007); Klitenic Wear and Dillon, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition* (2007).

[4] Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (1989); Golitzin, *Et introibo ad altare dei* (1994).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1

Ancient and Modern Readers of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*

Pseudonymity and Paul

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

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

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

I. THE EARLY RECEPTION

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

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

I.A. Severus of Antioch

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I.C. John of Scythopolis

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

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

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

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

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

[19] *PG* 4:13–28.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[28] *Prol.* 21A; Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 148.
[29] *Prol.* 17D; ibid., 146.
[30] *Prol.* 21A; ibid., 148.
[31] *CH* 6.2 200D; *CD* II 26.11–13.
[32] *SchCH* 64.4; Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 158.
[33] *SchCH* 64.10; ibid., 158–9.

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

[34] *Prol.* 21A; Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 148.
[35] Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 101.
[36] *SchMT* 420.2; ibid., 244.
[37] *SchDN* 393.1; ibid., 240.
[38] *SchDN* 360.7; ibid., 231.
[39] *DN* 5.9 824D; *CD* I 188.11.
[40] *DN* 4.12 709B; *CD* I 157.10.
[41] *SchDN* 264.6–7, 329.1, 332.1.
[42] *SchCH* 48.7; Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 154.
[43] Ibid., 101–2.

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

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

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

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

[47] Ibid., 137.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I.D. The early Syriac reception

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

II. MODERN SCHOLARSHIP ON THE *CD*

II.A. Hugo Koch and Josef Stiglmayr

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[74] Ibid., 4, 5.

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

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

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

II.B. Endre von Ivánka and Ronald Hathaway

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

III. THREE PROMISING LEADS

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

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

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

III.A. Alexander Golitzin

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

III.B. Andrew Louth and Christian Schäfer

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

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

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

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

[102] Ibid.

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

[104] Ibid., 166.

[105] Ibid., 7.

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

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

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

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

III.C. Hans Urs von Balthasar

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[116] Ibid., 149. [117] Ibid., 148–9.

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