

The Love of Neighbor in Dionysius's Hierarchies

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INTRODUCTORY OVERTURES

When Dionysius the Areopagite¹ sets forth the deification of the human person as the goal of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, he identifies the “loving (ἀγαπήσει) observance and sacred enactments of the most venerable commandments (ἐντολῶν)” as the “only” (μόνως) means to achieve this goal.² In discussing the observance of the commandments, he focuses on the love of God and, to that end, quotes the scriptural words of Jesus: “*He who loves (ἀγαπῶν) me will keep my word and my Father will love (ἀγαπήσει) him and we will come to him and make our home with him [Jn 14:23].*”³ The love of God is the beginning,⁴ the middle, and the end⁵ of human life lived in observance of the commandments.

1. The Greek texts of Dionysius the Areopagite's works cited in this article are from: B. R. Suchla, *Corpus Dionysiacum i: Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita. De divinis nominibus (Patristische Texte und Studien 33)*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1990); G. Heil and A. M. Ritter, *Corpus Dionysiacum ii: Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita. De coelesti hierarchia, de ecclesiastica hierarchia, de mystica theologia, epistulae (Patristische Texte und Studien 36)*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1991). The English translations, with slight adjustments towards more literal renditions, are from: *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (Classics of Western Spirituality. Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987). Citations use the following abbreviations: *De divinis nominibus (DN)*, *De coelesti hierarchia (CH)*, *De ecclesiastica hierarchia (EH)*, *De mystica theologia (MT)*. Citations include chapter and section numbers, and column numbers and letters from the Migne edition (PG 3). The Greek biblical citations, extraneous to Dionysius's texts, are from: *Septuaginta*, ed. Alfred Rahlfs and Robert Hanhart (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006); *Novum Testamentum Graece*, ed. Eberhard and Erwin Nestle and Barbara and Kurt Aland (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993).

2. *EH* 2.1, 392A: “... ταῖς τῶν σεβασμιωτάτων ἐντολῶν ἀγαπήσει καὶ ἱερουργίας μόνως τευξόμεθα.”

3. *EH* 2.1, 392A: “«Τηρήσει» γὰρ φησιν «ὁ ἀγαπῶν με τὸν λόγον μου, καὶ ὁ πατήρ μου ἀγαπήσει αὐτόν, καὶ πρὸς αὐτόν ἐλευσόμεθα καὶ μονὴν παρ’ αὐτῷ ποιήσομεν.»”

4. See *EH* 2.1, 392B.

5. See *EH* 1.3, 376A.

So concentrated is Dionysius's focus on the commandment to love God that the commandment to love one's neighbor does not appear to be of much importance or of much concern to him. In fact, it does not seem that the commandment to *love your neighbor as yourself* (ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτὸν) – so often repeated in the Scriptures,⁶ and so closely coupled by Jesus with the first commandment – has any explicit reference or textual echo in the entire Dionysian corpus. This crucial feature of the Christian life, as Christ himself presents it and as recorded in the Scriptures, if entirely absent from the writings of Dionysius, would be rather disconcerting to a reader who would want to appreciate the deeply Christian inspiration and orientation of his views regarding the human person and the process of his deification.

Despite his decoupling of the two greatest commandments, his keeping of the agapic love of God, and his forfeiting of the agapic love of neighbor on the verbal and textual level, it nevertheless seems that Dionysius not only maintains the essential Christian practice of neighborly love, but also even considers it to be a constitutive element and a critical requirement in the process of deification. Dionysius maintains its essence, however, by way of a double reconfiguration. First, on the linguistic level, he translates the scriptural commandment to love one's neighbor into the conceptual language of overflowing (ὑπερχεόμενον) superabundance (περιουσία) and ungrudging (ἀφθονος) beneficence (ἀγαθοεργία). Second, on the realistic and metaphysical level, he transposes it from an ethical norm that, in Scripture, involves a constellation of concrete practical behaviors, into an ontological and hierarchical structuring principle that is sacred orderly, epistemic, and energetic.

As such, Dionysian neighborly love commits the person who is in the process of deification not so much simply to a tablet of ethical prescriptions and proscriptions, but even more radically to a dynamic and orderly structure of all reality whose source, center, and summit is the good and loving God of Jesus Christ. For Dionysius, each person, according to his analogical and volitional capacities, receives every good gift from God through the mediation of his superiors and does not withhold these gifts begrudgingly for his own benefit. Rather, the loving person, having already received so much, is motivated by God to continue the process

6. Lv 19:18; Mt 19:19; Mt 22:39; Mk 12:31; Lk 10:27; Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14; Jas 2:8.

of giving to others and beneficently doing good to his equals and inferiors. Such a descent to those on par and below enables the generous benefactor actually to make an ascent above to become even more like God whose overflowing benevolence and circuitous beneficence always retains its unalterable superiority while condescending to our inferiority. God's apagic and erotic, static and ecstatic love comes to us most sublimely and most profoundly in the philanthropic (φιλανθρωπία) incarnation and passion of Christ.

This article seeks to explore the role of beneficence in the Dionysian hierarchies and to argue that it actually constitutes, under a related but somewhat different nomenclature, the love of neighbor which serves as an integral factor in the hierarchical process of deification. The first section presents the structures and scopes of the hierarchies of Dionysius. From this understanding of Dionysian hierarchy, the second section examines God's goodness and love with a focus on their aspects of superfluity and circularity. From this appreciation of the dynamics of God's goodness and love, the third section investigates the divine philanthropy that incarnates itself in Jesus Christ. From Jesus's archetypal loving beneficence, the fourth and fifth sections search into the participations in this beneficence among the members of the angelic hierarchy and among the members of the human hierarchy, respectively.

1. STRUCTURES AND SCOPES OF DIONYSIAN HIERARCHIES

The notion of hierarchy structures the thought and the world of Dionysius the Areopagite.⁷ In fact, "[t]o describe the relationship of the hierarch to those below him," as Paul Rorem notes, "Dionysius invented the word 'hierarchy.'"⁸ The author of *The Celestial Hierarchy* defines what he considers a hierarchy to be

7. For the transformation of the structures of reality in Neoplatonic thought from pagan Neoplatonists (including Iamblicus, Syrianus, Damascius, and Proclus) to Christian Neoplatonists (including Dionysius, Maximus Confessor, and Eriugena), see Stephen Gersh, *From Iamblicus to Eriugena: An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), esp. 125–190. For the vocabulary and the sources of Dionysius's world as order and cosmos, see René Roques, *L'Univers Dionysien: Structure Hiérarchique du Monde selon le Pseudo-Denys* (Aubier: Montaigne, 1954), 35–67. As Roques remarks on 131: "La hiérarchie n'apparaît pas comme un simple élément de la synthèse dionysienne. Elle est l'univers dionysien lui-même."

8. Paul Rorem, "Foreword," in *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 1.

when he explains, “In my opinion a hierarchy is a sacred order (τάξις ἱερά) and an understanding (ἐπιστήμη) and an activity (ἐνέργεια), approximating as closely as possible to the divine and uplifted to the imitation of God in proportion to the illuminations divinely given to it.”⁹ This triad of its sacred orderly, epistemic, and energetic features serves to characterize those who belong within a particular hierarchical structure and their common intent.¹⁰ Thus, not only each person, in and through belonging to a hierarchy, but also the entire hierarchy altogether becomes more sacred, more understanding, and more active in coming upwardly closer to God.

The author of *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* describes the common end (πέρας) of every hierarchy as the deifying love and participative knowledge of God and the things of God.¹¹ Dionysius understands the intentional aim or the scope (σκοπός) of our hierarchy to be the deification of humanity, a highly, though not exclusively, noetic process whose two basic intents are: (1) assimilation (ἀφομοίωσις) to God, and (2) union (ἔνωσις) with God.¹² These assimilative and unitive intents of the hierarchy are common to both the angelic and human hierarchies. In speaking about the celestial hierarchy of the angels, Dionysius reiterates the triadic features and the double intents of hierarchies:

The scope (Σκοπός) of a hierarchy, then, is to enable beings to be as like (ἀφομοίωσις) as possible to God and to be at one (ἔνωσις) with him. A hierarchy has God as its leader of all sacredness (ἱεράς), understanding (ἐπιστήμης), and activity (ἐνεργείας). It is forever looking directly at the comeliness of God. A hierarchy

9. CH 3.1, 164D: “Ἔστι μὲν ἱεραρχία κατ’ ἐμὲ τάξις ἱερά καὶ ἐπιστήμη καὶ ἐνέργεια πρὸς τὸ θεοειδὲς ὡς ἐφικτὸν ἀφομοιουμένη καὶ πρὸς τὰς ἐνδοιδομένας αὐτῇ θεόθεν ἐλλάμψεις ἀναλόγως ἐπὶ τὸ θεομίμητον ἀναγομένη ...”

10. For a study of these three features of the Dionysian hierarchy, see Roques, *L’Univers Dionysien*, 68–131. For a presentation that nuances Roques’s, see Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 57–59.

11. EH 1.3, 376A: “Ἀπάση δὲ τοῦτο κοινὸν ἱεραρχία τὸ πέρασ· ἡ πρὸς θεὸν τε καὶ τὰ θεία προσεχῆς ἀγάπησις ἐνθέως τε καὶ ἐνιαίως ἱερουργουμένη, καὶ πρό γε τούτου τῶν ἐναντιῶν ἢ παντελῆς καὶ ἀνεπίστροφος ἀποφοίτησις, ἢ γνῶσις τῶν ὄντων ἢ ὄντα ἐστίν, ἢ τῆς ἱεράς ἀληθείας ὄρασις τε καὶ ἐπιστήμη, ἢ τῆς ἐνοειδοῦς τελειώσεως ἐνθεος μέθεξις, αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἐνός ὡς ἐφικτὸν ἢ τῆς ἐποψίας ἐστίασις τρέφουσα νοητῶς καὶ θεοῦσα πάντα τὸν εἰς αὐτὴν ἀνατεινόμενον.”

12. EH 2.1, 392A: “Ἐἴρηται τοίνυν ἡμῖν ἱερώς, ὡς οὗτός ἐστι τῆς καθ’ ἡμᾶς ἱεραρχίας σκοπός· ἡ πρὸς θεὸν ἡμῶν ὡς ἐφικτὸν ἀφομοίωσις τε καὶ ἔνωσις.” See also EH 1.3, 376A.

bears in itself the mark of God. Hierarchy causes its members to be statues of God in all respects, to be clear and spotless mirrors reflecting the glow of primordial light and indeed of God himself.¹³

Dionysius describes, or at least mentions, five basic types of hierarchical arrangements, all of which are in a relationship of either continuity or containment with the others: (1) the cosmic hierarchical arrangements of angels, souls, animals, plants, and inanimate beings;¹⁴ (2) the celestial hierarchy of the angelic ranks;¹⁵ (3) the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Church;¹⁶ (4) the legal hierarchy of the Mosaic Law;¹⁷ and 5) the personal hierarchy of each intelligent being, whether angelic or human, whose mental constitution consists of primary, middle, and last orders and powers in accordance with which he or she can participate in the purity beyond purity, the light beyond fullness, and the perfection beyond perfection.¹⁸ Each of these hierarchies has its own particular hierarch who not only stands at the summit of the hierarchy as its prime superior and leader, but also serves as its recapitulative consummation (συγκεφαλαίωσις) insofar the hierarch contains, summarizes, and consummates in himself all of the constituent elements which he shares with the individual subordinates of his hierarchy and even the entire hierarchy itself.¹⁹ Dionysius thus describes the human “hierarch” as an “inspired (ἐνθεόν) and godly (θεῖον) man who understands all sacred knowledge, and in whom the entire hierarchy is clearly perfected

13. *CH* 3.2, 165A: “Σκοπὸς οὖν ἱεραρχίας ἐστὶν ἢ πρὸς θεὸν ὡς ἐφικτὸν ἀφομοίωσις τε καὶ ἔνωσις αὐτὸν ἔχουσα πάσης ἱεράς ἐπιστήμης τε καὶ ἐνεργείας καθηγεμόνα καὶ πρὸς τὴν αὐτοῦ θειοτάτην εὐπρέπειαν ἀκλινῶς μὲν ὄραν ὡς δυνατόν δὲ ἀποτυπούμενος καὶ τοὺς ἑαυτοῦ θιασώτας ἀγάλματα θεῖα τελῶν ἔσοπτρα διειδέστατα καὶ ἀκηλίδωτα, δεκτικὰ τῆς ἀρχιφώτου καὶ θεαρχικῆς ἀκτίνοσ ...”

14. See *DN* 4.1–2, 693B–696D.

15. This is the subject of *CH*. For the hierarchical world of the angels, see Roques, *L’Univers Dionysien*, 135–167.

16. This is the subject of *EH*. For the orderly, epistemic, and energetic features of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, see Roques, *L’Univers Dionysien*, 171–302.

17. See *MT* 1.3, 1000C–1001A; *CH* 4.3, 180D–181A; *EH* 3.3.4, 429C; 5.1.2, 501B–C. On an originally similar or even equal level, Dionysius also acknowledges other human hierarchies of the non-Israelite nations that freely defected from God (see *CH* 9.2–4, 260A–261D).

18. See *CH* 10.3, 273C.

19. See *EH* 1.3, 373C.

and known."²⁰ These particular hierarchs are: (2) the seraphim for the celestial hierarchy, (3) the sacrament of ointment, in terms of sacramental agency, or, derivatively, the bishop, in terms of personal agency, for the ecclesiastical hierarchy, (4) the symbols of the Law, in terms of quasi-sacramental agency, or, derivatively, Moses, in terms of personal agency, for the legal hierarchy, and (5) the highest intellectual faculty for the personal hierarchy. Not only does each hierarchy have its own distinctive hierarch, but they also share altogether one and the same common and cosmic hierarch, namely, (1) the Trinity and Jesus Christ who is the initiating source and perfecting scope of every hierarchy.²¹

The structures of the angelic and human hierarchies are essentially dynamic insofar as the energizing agents and their activities, and the energized recipients and their receptivities constitute these structures. These dynamic structures, activities, and receptivities are thoroughly triadic and orderly for Dionysius. He describes the three primary hierarchical activities and receptivities, in order of increasing upgrading, as: (1) purification (καθαίρειν), (2) illumination (φωτίζειν), and (3) perfection (τελεσιουργεῖν).²² These three stages represent graded participations in the deifying understanding of God.²³ The celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies are arranged as triads of triads according to their relative agencies and receptivities. Absolutely speaking, all of the hierarchies, the orders within those hierarchies, the ranks within those orders, and the members within those ranks are recipients of God's activity. In this sense, the very existence of these hierarchies, both in their entireties and in their constituents, is purely a gift of God's own goodness. As Dionysius explains:

20. *EH* 1.3, 373C: "... ἱεράρχην ὁ λέγων δηλοῖ τὸν ἔνθεόν τε καὶ θεῖον ἄνδρα τὸν πάσης ἱεράς ἐπιστήμονα γνώσεως, ἐν ᾧ καὶ καθαρῶς ἢ κατ' αὐτὸν ἱεραρχία πάντα τελεῖται καὶ γινώσκειται."

21. See *EH* 1.1, 372A–B; 1.2, 373B; 1.3, 373C–D; 5.1.5, 505A–B. For Dionysius's Christology and Christ's places and roles in the hierarchies, see Roques, *L'Univers Dionysien*, 305–329.

22. See, for example, *CH* 3.2–3, 165B–168B; *EH* 5.1.3–7, 504A–509A; 6.3.5–6, 536D–537C. For a discussion of these three hierarchical activities, see Roques, *L'Univers Dionysien*, 94–101.

23. See *CH* 7.3, 209C–D.

[T]he blessed Thearchy (ἡ θεαρχικὴ) which of itself is God is the principle (ἀρχή) of deification, from which he gives (ἐδωρήσατο) the fact of being deified to those deified, and from the divine goodness (ἀγαθότητι) the hierarchy (ἱεραρχίαν) for the salvation and deification of all rational and intellectual beings.²⁴

But relatively speaking, Dionysius expresses the orderings between and within the hierarchies, the orders, and the ranks, according to the proportion of each one's capacity (ἀναλογία), in terms of greater or lesser competencies and degrees of qualifications. These relative orderings within each group are triadic: (1) the highest of agency, (2) the middle of mixed agency and receptivity, and (3) the lowest of receptivity. Thus, among the three hierarchies of intelligent and rational beings, 1) the celestial hierarchy is the most conceptual and active, (2) the ecclesiastical hierarchy is a mixture of the conceptual and the symbolical, and a blend of the active and the receptive, and (3) the legal hierarchy is the most symbolical and receptive.²⁵ Within these three hierarchies, still relatively speaking, there are three basic orders: (1) pure agents of deification, (2) mixed agents and recipients of deification, (3) pure recipients of deification. Dionysius also designates these orders, especially of the celestial hierarchy, in terms of: (1) those who remain around God, (2) those who return to God, and (3) those who are returned to God. Furthermore, within these three orders, at least of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, there are three basic ranks characterized by their preeminent activities or receptivities of: (1) perfection, (2) illumination, and (3) purification. The higher orders contain the energies of the lower ones and dynamically communicate these energies to them, even though the various degrees to which the inferiors can receive them is conditioned by their diverse capacities.²⁶

In a dynamic way and in circular fashion, the entire hierarchical structures of reality and all the various series of their triads proceed down in a movement of descent from their Trinitarian beginning and source and recede back up in a movement of ascent to their Trinitarian end and summit. As such, the deifying activities of hierarchical realities, both collectively and individually, manifestly

24. *EH* 1.4, 376B: "... ἡ θεαρχικὴ μακαριότης ἡ φύσει θεότης ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς θεώσεως, ἐξ ἧς τὸ θεοῦσθαι τοῖς θεουμένοις, ἀγαθότητι θεία τὴν ἱεραρχίαν ἐπὶ σωτηρίᾳ καὶ θεώσει πάντων τῶν λογικῶν τε καὶ νοερῶν οὐσιῶν ἐδωρήσατο ..."

25. See *EH* 1.4, 376B–C; 5.1.2, 501A–504A.

26. See Appendix 1 for a basic schema of Dionysius's hierarchical organizations.

reflect and intrinsically participate in the dynamic reality of the superessential God.²⁷ Thus, in order for angels and humans to become assimilated and united to God, in order for them to come to perfect deification, since God himself is active and operative, it belongs for them to act *like* God and to act *with* God. As Dionysius teaches:

[I]ndeed for every member of the hierarchy, perfection consists in this, that it is uplifted to imitate God (τὸ θεομίμητον) according to his proper and proportionate capacity (οἰκείαν ἀναλογίαν) and, certainly more divine (θειότερον) of all, that he becomes what Scripture calls a *coworker of God* («Θεοῦ συνεργὸν») [1Cor 3:9; 1Thes 3:2] and manifests the divine activity in himself (τὴν θείαν ἐνέργειαν ἐν ἑαυτῷ) as the power of illumination.²⁸

The realizations and manifestations of the hierarchies' scopes, then, involve their members in an assimilation to and union with God's activity as imitators, participants, and cooperators who are energized ultimately by God, but nevertheless also with each other and even through each other.²⁹ To see more clearly the contents of this imitation, participation, and cooperation on the part of angels and humans, we can investigate their source and summit in the overflowing and circuitous dynamic of divine goodness.

2. THE SUPERFLUITY AND CIRCULARITY OF GOD'S GOODNESS AND LOVE

God himself has beneficently (ἀγαθοπρεπῶς) revealed through the Scriptures, according to Dionysius's reading, that, although he himself is inaccessibly beyond all comprehension and

27. For Dionysius's understanding of direct and hierarchically mediated participations in God, see Eric Perl, "Hierarchy and Participation in Dionysius the Areopagite and Greek Neoplatonism," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 68.1 (1994): 15–30.

28. CH 3.2, 165B: "... ἔστι γὰρ ἐκάστω τῶν ἱεραρχία κεκληρωμένων ἢ τελείωσις τὸ κατ' οἰκείαν ἀναλογίαν ἐπὶ τὸ θεομίμητον ἀναχθῆναι καὶ τὸ δὴ πάντων θειότερον ὡς τὰ λόγια φησι «Θεοῦ συνεργὸν» γενέσθαι καὶ δεῖξαι τὴν θείαν ἐνέργειαν ἐν ἑαυτῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατὸν ἀναφαινομένην."

29. See Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (New York: Continuum, 1989), 41: "[T]o depend on God and his love means to depend on other people. ... The hierarchy is a community that is being saved and mediates salvation. Denys is often accused of a narrow individualism, because he seems concerned to show how the hierarchical arrangements meet the needs of the individual. But it is not so often noted that the hierarchical arrangements themselves are emphatically not impersonal, but are the arrangement of a community, or group of communities, whose members are seeking to draw near to God and draw others near to God." See also 65–67.

contemplation, nevertheless, in the very goodness (ἀγαθότητα) and the Good (τὰγαθόν) that he is, God communicates himself and his divine names by the beneficent processions of the Thearchy (τὰς ἀγαθουργούς τῆς θεαρχίας προόδους).³⁰ The goodness of God is so generous that he gives of himself to all the members of every hierarchy in an overflowing and a circuitous activity. These two characteristics of God's goodness, in which angels and humans come to share through the grace of cooperation,³¹ are critical for understanding how Dionysius rearticulates neighborly love in terms of beneficence or doing good (ἀγαθοεργία).

With respect to divine superfluity and superabundance (περιουσία), Dionysius sees that God's goodness is not only "full (πλήρης) where there is want," but also "overfull (ὑπερπλήρης) where there is plenty."³² As overfull, God's goodness remains "overflowing (ὑπερχέουσα) in shares of whole goodness (τὰς τῶν ὅλων ἀγαθῶν μετουσίας), unified yet distinct."³³ The superabundant divine goodness remains eternally in itself and yet overflows into other beings, from the highest to the lowest, while containing each of them and all of them within God himself.³⁴ God holds all beings in goodness, but he does not withhold his goodness from them. This non-withholding of God functions in the Dionysian construction by way of an ungrudging profusion (ἀφθόνῳ χύσει) that lacks any trace of envy.³⁵ Furthermore, the eruption or gushing over (ὑπέρβλυσις) of God's ungrudging generosity happens gratuitously without coercively demanding anything back in return. In this respect, when Dionysius comments on the divine name of "Life," he writes:

[God] hyperextends though the superabundance (περιουσίαν) of goodness (ἀγαθότητος) even into the demonic life, for the latter does not exist from another cause, but the demon has its existence and life from [the divine life]. But even to humans as composite beings it gives whatever angelic life they are able to accept and it gushes over (ὑπερβλύσει) with philanthropy (φιλανθρωπίας) and turns us back

30. See DN 1.2, 588C–589A; 1.3, 589C; 1.4, 589D.

31. See CH 3.3, 168A–B.

32. DN 2.10, 648C: "... πλήρης ἐν τοῖς ἐνδεέσιν, ὑπερπλήρης ἐν τοῖς πλήρεσιν ..."

33. DN 2.11, 649B: "... ὑπερχέουσα τὰς τῶν ὅλων ἀγαθῶν μετουσίας ἠγνωμένως μὲν διακρίνεται ..."

34. See DN 1.7, 596D.

35. See DN 8.6, 893D; 11.6, 956B.

and calls us back to itself after we have gone astray and certainly more divine that it has promised to transfer us entirely, I mean souls and bodies yoked to them, to absolute life and immortality.³⁶

It is in the context of a discussion about eternal life that Dionysius locates his scriptural warrant to speak about God as absolute goodness. He finds this warrant in Jesus's response to the person who, in the synoptic Gospels,³⁷ asks about what he must do, even what *good* he must *do* (ἀγατὸν ποιήσω; Mt 19:16), to inherit eternal life. Dionysius quotes Jesus's words, "Why do you ask me about what is good? [Mt 19:17] No one is good but God alone [Mk 10:18],"³⁸ and sees in these verses the divine name of the Good.³⁹ In these Gospel passages, Jesus continues the discussion and fleshes out what good must be done in terms of keeping the commandments of the second tablet of the Decalogue that concern the love of neighbor. The Gospel of Matthew's version even ends explicitly with the commandment to *love your neighbor as yourself* (ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν; Mt 19:19). Dionysius, however, incorporates none of these verses in any of his works, either by quotation or even by allusion. It does not seem, however, that he has no notion of the goal of eternal life and the means to that goal. Instead, he understands the former in terms of deification, the assimilation to and union with God, and the latter in terms of the process of increasing participation in the superabundant activity of God's goodness overflowing and gushing forth to others.

In and through the processions of divine goodness, as Dionysius reads Scripture, "[e]very good giving and every perfect gift is from above coming down from the Father of lights [Jas 1:17]"⁴⁰ and from "Jesus, the Light of the Father, the true [Light] enlightening every person

36. DN 6.2, 856C–D: "... ὑπερεκτεινομένη διὰ περιοσίαν ἀγαθότητος καὶ εἰς τὴν δαιμονίαν ζωὴν, οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐκείνη τὸ εἶναι παρ' ἄλλης αἰτίας, ἀλλ' ἐξ αὐτῆς καὶ τὸ εἶναι ζωὴ καὶ τὴν διαμονὴν ἔχει, δωρομένη δὲ καὶ ἀνδράσι τὴν ὡς συμμίκτης ἐνδεχομένην ἀγγελοειδῆ ζωὴν καὶ ὑπερβλῦσει φιλανθρωπίας καὶ ἀποφοιτῶντας ἡμᾶς εἰς ἑαυτὴν ἐπιστρέφουσα καὶ ἀνακαλουμένη καὶ τὸ δὴ θειότερον ὅτι καὶ ὅλους ἡμᾶς, ψυχὰς φημι καὶ τὰ συζυγῆ σώματα, πρὸς παντελεῖ ζωὴν καὶ ἀθανασίαν ἐπήγγελται μεταθήσειν ..."

37. See Mt 19:16–19; Mk 10:17–19; Lk 18:18–20.

38. DN 2.1, 636C: "«Τί με ἐρωτᾷς περὶ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ»; «Οὐδεὶς ἀγαθός, εἰ μὴ μόνος ὁ θεός.»"

39. See DN 1.6, 596C; 3.1, 680C; 4.1–35, 693B–736B.

40. CH 1.1, 120B: "«Πᾶσα δόσις ἀγαθῆ καὶ πᾶν δῶρημα τέλειον ἄνωθεν ἐστὶ καταβαῖνον ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς τῶν φώτων.»"

coming into the world [Jn 1:9], through whom we have access [see Rom 5:2] to the Father, the source of light".⁴¹ Whatever good gift members of the hierarchies have received, including the gift of their own goodness and existence, is given by God and proceeds down from God. God generously (ἀγαθοδότης)⁴² and benignly (ἀγαθοπρεπῶς)⁴³ pours forth his enlightening and energizing goodness, which Dionysius assimilates with God's love in both its erotic (ἔρως)⁴⁴ and agapic (ἀγάπη) aspects. Dionysius attributes not only agapic love to God, but also, as basically synonymous,⁴⁵ the erotic love that ecstatically conducts God outside of himself towards his beloved subordinates in lavishing his love, goodness, and beauty upon them.⁴⁶ Such a descent of divine goodness and love is neither a divine declension nor a divine fall. Since God remains perfectly and completely in his own immobile constancy and does not depart from his own static stability,⁴⁷ his divine condescension and ecstasy towards the multiplicity of beings other and lower than himself does not complicate God in any detrimental lessening or loss of his own goodness. Rather, these providential processions of his loving goodness overflow from God's superabundance and serve to multiply the beneficial gifts and gains for the sake of his subordinates. As Dionysius teaches:

41. CH 1.2, 121A: "... Ἰησοῦν ... τὸ πατρικὸν φῶς, τὸ ὄν «τὸ ἀληθινόν, ὃ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον ἐρχόμενον εἰς τὸν κόσμον», δι' οὗτην πρὸς τὸν ἀρχίφωτον πατέρα προσαγωγὴν ἐσχήκαμεν..."

42. See CH 1.1, 120B.

43. See DN 1.2, 588C.

44. See DN 1.2, 589A.

45. See DN 4.12, 709B.

46. For Dionysius's concept of divine eros and his debts to and departures from both Christian and Neoplatonic traditions, see John M. Rist, "A Note on Eros and Agape in Pseudo-Dionysius," *Vigiliae Christianae* 20 (1966): 235–243; Cornelia J. De Vogel, "Greek Cosmic Love and the Christian Love of God: Boethius, Dionysius the Areopagite, and the Author of the Fourth Gospel," *Vigiliae Christianae* 35.1 (1981): 57–81.

47. See EH 3.3.2, 429A.

One must venture even to say in truth that the very cause of all, in the erotic love (ἔρωτι) for the beauty and the goodness of all, through the excess of erotic goodness (ἔρωτικῆς ἀγαθότητος), comes to be outside of himself and is charmed by such goodness (ἀγαθότητι) and agapic love (ἀγαπήσει) and erotic love (ἔρωτι) into the providential care of all beings and taken out from his transcendence above everything and all things he comes down to abide within all things according to the ecstatic (ἔκστατικῆν), superessential power that does not depart from himself.⁴⁸

As this passage suggests, God, while ever remaining within himself, ventures outside of himself on account of his excessively erotic and providentially ecstatic love for all beautiful and good things. This connection of Origen's concept of God as eros in the prologue to his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, not only with Plotinus's and Proclus's concept of ecstasy, but also with Proclus's concept of providence, as John M. Rist observes, represents a "new synthesis" in theology that goes beyond the contributions of Origen, Plotinus, and Proclus to Dionysius's conception of God.⁴⁹

With an excessive and expansive ecstasy of erotic love, God provides these gifts – including the goodness, the being, the light, and the love of angels and humans – along the way of a downward procession into multiplicity from his superabundant goodness. But he does not leave them down below. In his loving beneficence, God also returns them back along the way of an upward reversion into the unity of God himself. From this perspective, Dionysius appreciates that the entire activity of God's providence consists not only in superfluity, but also in circularity. The loving goodness of God eternally remains within God but also processively descends and revertively ascends in an overflowing and circuitous movement. For Dionysius, the ecstatic

48. DN 4.13, 712A–B: "Τολμητέον δὲ καὶ τοῦτο ὑπὲρ ἀληθείας εἰπεῖν, ὅτι καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ πάντων αἴτιος τῷ καλῷ καὶ ἀγαθῷ τῶν πάντων ἔρωτι δι' ὑπερβολὴν τῆς ἐρωτικῆς ἀγαθότητος ἕξω ἑαυτοῦ γίνεται ταῖς εἰς τὰ ὄντα πάντα προνοίας καὶ οἷον ἀγαθότητι καὶ ἀγαπήσει καὶ ἔρωτι θέλγεται καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ὑπὲρ πάντα καὶ πάντων ἐξηρημένου πρὸς τὸ ἐν πᾶσι κατάγεται κατ' ἔκστατικὴν ὑπερούσιον δύναμιν ἀνεκφοίτητον ἑαυτοῦ."

49. Rist, "A Note on Eros and Agape in Pseudo-Dionysius," 239–240. Regarding Origen's influence on Dionysius, Ilaria L.E. Ramelli, "Origen, Patristic Philosophy, and Christian Platonism: Re-Thinking the Christianisation of Hellenism," *Vigiliae Christianae* 63 (2009): 217–263, remarks on 230: "Indeed, István Perczel argued that the *Corpus Dionysianum* should be ascribed to fifth-century Origenism, with an Evagrius influence, and that Origen is one of its main sources."

and erotic love of God constitutes the confluence and union of: (1) our responsive love for God and neighbor, and (2) God's initiative love for us. With respect to the former, Charles M. Stang explains:

The phrase "Divine Love" (ὁ θεῖος ἔρως) [DN 4.13, 712A], of course, has a double meaning. First it means *our* yearning for God the beloved, a love that carries us outside of ourselves so that we are beholden both to God *and* to others: "They shew this too, the superior by becoming mindful (προνοίας) of the inferior; and the equals by their mutual coherence (συνοχή); and the inferior by a more divine respect (ἐπιστροφῆς) toward things superior." [DN 4.13, 712A; see DN 4.15, 713A–B] Within the hierarchy of creation, *erōs* is the love that compels us, who are firmly fixed in our own rank in the hierarchy, to stretch out in loving concern (προνοίας, συνοχῆς, ἐπιστροφῆς) for our neighbors, be they above or below or equal to us on the great chain of being.⁵⁰

Through an erotic lens, the love of God and the love of neighbor can thus be seen to unfold into multiplicity from the unity of one and the same God who is love and whose name is love. This unfolding revolves back into concentrated enfolding in the Beautiful and the Good because of whom and for whom all things love both God and each other.⁵¹

Such a Dionysian circular procession and reversion of eros in cosmic terms has deep affinities with Neoplatonic thought, especially that of Proclus.⁵² In fact, in addition to the Procline influence on Dionysius's metaphysical concepts, Proclus even shapes the Dionysian erotic vocabulary, as Cornelia J. De Vogel suggests:

Dionysius speaks Proclus' language when distinguishing four kinds of Love, (1) the ἔρως ἐπιστρεπτικός, of lower things for higher ones and ultimately for the absolute and transcendent Good, (2) the ἔρως κοινωνικός, of equal things for one another, (3) the ἔρως προνοητικός,

50. Charles M. Stang, *Apophysis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite: "No Longer I"* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 165–166.

51. See DN 4.10, 708A–B.

52. For a discussion of the circular cosmic process of eros in Proclus, see S. E. Gersh, Κίνησις Ἀκίνητος: *A Study of Spiritual Motion in the Philosophy of Proclus* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 123–127. For a brief synopsis of the Neoplatonic and particularly Procline dialectic of remaining, procession, and reversion, see Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 51–52. For Dionysius's dependence on and transformation of such Procline doctrines as the remaining, procession, and returning of the divine names; the triadic structures of reality; the activity of theurgy; and the nature and status of evil, see John M. Dillon, "Dionysius the Areopagite," in *Interpreting Proclus: From Antiquity to the Renaissance*, ed. Stephen Gersh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 111–124.

of higher beings for lower ones, (4) the ἔρωσ συνεκτικώς, of things for themselves.⁵³

These specifications of erotic loves, however, are not original in and of themselves, but rather represent the multiplicity that always comes forth and descend down from the unity of the divine source in order to revert back and ascend up into the unity of the divine end. Stephen Gersh notes that Dionysius maintains not only the Neoplatonic notion of the reversion of an effect to its cause and of a cause returning its effect to itself, but also the double significance of the former notion along both ontological and ethical lines.⁵⁴ Thus, the return to God as end ultimately confirms the existential being and moral goodness of angels and humans.

With such an understanding of these overflowing and circuitous dynamics, Dionysius sees that it is one and the same love of God which saturates and even supersaturates the entire hierarchically ordered cosmos.⁵⁵ As he describes God's superfluity and circularity:

So [the theologians] call [God] not only the Beloved (ἀγαπητόν) and the Desired (ἐραστόν) since he is beautiful and good, but also, on the other hand, erotic Love (ἔρωτα) and agapic Love (ἀγάπην) since he is the power moving and elevating beings to himself. He alone is the Beautiful and Good through himself and so reveals himself through himself and the good procession of transcendent unity and the movement of erotic love (ἔρωτικῆν), simple, self-moved, self-acting, preexistent in the Good and gushing out (ἐκβλυζομένην) from the Good into beings and returning back again to the Good. In this the divine eros (ἔρωσ) preeminently displays its unending and un-beginning self as an everlasting circle through the Good, from the Good and in the Good and to the Good, with unerring revolution and going around the same center and in the same direction, always proceeding and remaining and returning to itself.⁵⁶

53. De Vogel, "Greek Cosmic Love and the Christian Love of God," 59. De Vogel notes on 71 how Dionysius transformed and corrected Proclus: "[I]n contradistinction to Proclus, Dionysius innovated in two respects: first, in that he attributed divine love to God himself, the Cause of all things; second, in that by this very attribution he gave to divine love a central and important place in his theology."

54. See Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 225–227.

55. See Eric D. Perl, "Hierarchy and Love in St. Dionysius the Areopagite," in *Toward an Ecology of Transfiguration: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature, and Creation*, ed. John Chryssavgis and Bruce V. Foltz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 23–33.

56. DN 4.14, 712C–713A: "Ταύτη δὲ ἀγαπητόν μὲν καὶ ἐραστόν αὐτόν καλοῦσιν ὡς καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθόν, ἔρωτα δὲ αὐθις καὶ ἀγάπην ὡς κινητικὴν ἅμα

The overflowing and circuitous love of God never grows tired of scattering itself downward into the cosmic multiplicity of beings, into the angelic and human hierarchies, and gathering them back up into its own unity.⁵⁷ The approach to becoming assimilated to and united with God involves angels and humans in this same overflowing and circuitous movement of loving beneficence. While this dynamic circle of descending and ascending movement provides the structures and activities of all reality, with respect to both its universal whole and each of its constituent parts, Dionysius sees the clearest illustration of divine condescension and ascension in the incarnation, cross, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

3. THE INCARNATE PHILANTHROPY OF JESUS CHRIST

Dionysius frequently associates God's philanthropic love for humanity with the incarnation of Christ. As the Scriptures, the angels, and the ecclesiastical traditions converge in bearing witness,⁵⁸ God is designated preeminently as loving towards humanity (φιλόανθρωπον) on account of his condescension to us in Christ's incarnation. As Dionysius explains, the Scriptures and theologians designate God with many names:

... but especially loving towards humanity (φιλόανθρωπον), because in one of its persons he has shared truly and completely in that which we are, recalling to himself and lifting up the lowest human condition. In an indescribable way, the simple Jesus became complex, the eternal took on the duration of the temporal, and, with neither change nor confusion of what constitutes him, he came into our human nature, he who superessentially transcends the natural order of the world.⁵⁹

καὶ ὡς ἀναγωγὸν δύναμιν ὄντα ἐφ' ἑαυτόν, τὸ μόνον αὐτὸ δι' ἑαυτὸ καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν καὶ ὡσπερ ἐκφάνσιν ὄντα ἑαυτοῦ δι' ἑαυτοῦ καὶ τῆς ἐξηρημένης ἐνώσεως ἀγαθὴν πρόοδον καὶ ἐρωτικὴν κίνησιν ἀπλήν, αὐτοκίνητον, αὐτενέργητον, προσῶσαν ἐν τάγαθῷ καὶ ἐκ τάγαθοῦ τοῖς οὖσιν ἐκβλυζομένην καὶ αὐτὴς εἰς τάγαθὸν ἐπιστρεφομένην. Ἐν ᾧ καὶ τὸ ἀτελεύτητον ἑαυτοῦ καὶ ἀναρχὸν ὁ θεὸς ἔρωσ ἐνδείκνυται διαφερόντως ὡσπερ τις αἰδῖος κύκλος διὰ τάγαθόν, ἐκ τάγαθοῦ καὶ ἐν τάγαθῷ καὶ εἰς τάγαθόν ἐν ἀπλανεῖ συνελίξει περιπορευόμενος καὶ ἐν ταῦτῳ καὶ κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ προϊὼν αἰεὶ καὶ μένων καὶ ἀποκαθιστάμενος."

57. See *DN* 4.4, 700A–B.

58. See *DN* 1.4, 589D–B; *CH* 4.4, 181B.

59. *DN* 1.4, 592A–B: "... φιλόανθρωπον δὲ διαφερόντως, ὅτι τοῖς καθ' ἡμᾶς πρὸς ἀλήθειαν ὀλικῶς ἐν μιᾷ τῶν αὐτῆς ὑποστάσεων ἐκοινωνήσεν ἀνακαλυμμένη πρὸς ἑαυτὴν καὶ ἀνατιθείσα τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην ἐσχατιάν, ἐξ ἧς ἀρρήτως ὁ ἀπλούς Ἰησοῦς συνετέθη καὶ παράτασιν εἴληφε χρονικὴν ὁ αἰδῖος καὶ εἶσω τῆς καθ' ἡμᾶς

Quite characteristically, Dionysius describes the philanthropic incarnation of the Word in metaphysical terms of the divine descent from simplicity to complexity, from eternity to temporality, so as to recall and return our humanity from humility to sublimity, from inferiority to superiority.⁶⁰ The manifestation of this divine philanthropy in Christ expresses perfectly the benevolent and philanthropic will (τὴν ἀγαθοπρεπῆ καὶ φιλόανθρωπον ὁμοβουλίαν) of the entire Trinity.⁶¹ As God experiences his descent into the multiplicity of beings as neither a decline nor a fall, so the Word of God experiences his condescension into the complexity of humanity as a sinless self-emptying (κενώσεως) in which he remains overfull (ὑπερπλήρης), unchanged (ἀναλλοιώτως), and unconfused (ἀσυγχύτως).⁶² The philanthropy of Jesus provides the archetype for all other activities of loving beneficence towards others. In fact, when Dionysius provides insights into the theoretical and conceptual realities of the sacramental mysteries of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, he often shows how they imitate, participate in, and express the incarnate love of God for humanity in Christ.⁶³ One of the clearest examples of how the incarnate philanthropy of Jesus operates in and through the incarnation and the sacraments, which signify and derive from the incarnation, comes to visibility in Dionysius's exposition of the mystery of the synaxis (i.e., Eucharist). As he describes:

He [i.e., the hierarch] offers Jesus Christ to our view. He shows how out of love for humanity (φιλοανθρώπως) Christ emerged from the hiddenness of his divinity to take on human shape, to be utterly incarnate among us while yet remaining unmixed. He shows how he proceeded down (προϊόντα) to us from his own natural unity to our own fragmented level, yet without change. He shows how, through the beneficence of his love for humanity (διὰ τῆς ἀγαθουργου ταύτης φιλοανθρωπίας), he called the human race to enter participation with himself and to have a share in his own goodness, if we would

ἐγεγόνει φύσεως ὁ πάσης τῆς κατὰ πᾶσαν φύσιν τάξεως ὑπερουσίως ἐκβεβηκώς μετὰ τῆς ἀμεταβόλου καὶ ἀσυγχύτου τῶν οικείων ἰδρύσεως.”

60. See DN 2.3, 640C.

61. See DN 2.6, 644C.

62. See DN 2.10, 648D–649D; EH 3.3.11, 441A–C.

63. For the Pauline source (and the Clementine and Ignatian resources) of Dionysius's notion of the hierarchies and their corporate access and cooperative deification in Christ, see Stang, *Apophysis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite*, 81–104, 109–116.

make ourselves one (ένωθῶμεν) with his divine life and become like (ἀφομοιώσει) it as far as we can, so that we may achieve perfection and truly enter into communion with God and with the divine realities.⁶⁴

As this explanation of the synaxis suggests, Dionysius considers the philanthropic love of the incarnate Son of God as the clearest instance of the ecstatic and erotic love of God. In fact, the philanthropy of Jesus and the eros of the Trinity are one and the same love that comes down to us abundantly and beneficently so as to achieve our deification, our assimilation to and union with God. God bestows his benefits upon humanity not only by initiating us into the singularity of his divine life as participants, but also by incorporating us, particularly through the mystery of the synaxis, into his one body as members.⁶⁵ For Dionysius, the fact of the incarnation, insofar as it relates to the humanity of Christ, translates into a twofold dynamic of: (1) reception for us, and then (2) donation to us, especially through the sacraments. Thus, Christ, in his humanity, (1) has once received sanctification of the divine Spirit for us, so as now to (2) give to us the divine Spirit through the postbaptismal anointing.⁶⁶ Similarly, Christ, in his humanity, (1) has once received consecration for us, so as now to (2) give to us the fullness and contents of his own consecration.⁶⁷ Christ receives sanctification and consecration not so much for his own benefit, but rather for ours. Dionysius explains the purification of the baptistery with ointment poured forth in the form of a cross in terms of its Christological significance:

[T]he hierarch thereby shows to those able to see the descent into water (καταδύμενον) with contemplative eyes that Jesus in a most glorious and divine descent (καθόδω) willingly died on the cross for the sake of our divine birth, that he beneficently (ἀγαθοπρεπῶς) draws up

64. *EH* 3.3.13, 444C–D: “Διαγράφει γὰρ ἐν τούτοις αἰσθητῶς ὑπ’ ὄψιν ἄγων Ἰησοῦν τὸν Χριστὸν τὴν νοητὴν ἡμῶν ὡς ἐν εἰκόσι ζωὴν ἐκ τοῦ κατὰ τὸ θεῖον κρυφίου τῆ παντελεῖ καὶ ἀσυγχύτω καθ’ ἡμᾶς ἐνανθρωπήσει φιλανθρωπῶς ἐξ ἡμῶν εἰδοποιούμενον καὶ πρὸς τὸ μεριστὸν ἡμῶν ἀναλλοιώτως ἐκ τοῦ κατὰ φύσιν ἐνὸς προϊόντα καὶ διὰ τῆς ἀγαθουργοῦ ταύτης φιλανθρωπίας εἰς μετουσίαν ἑαυτοῦ καὶ τῶν οἰκείων ἀγαθῶν καλοῦντα τὸ ἀνθρώπειον φύλον, εἴπερ ἐνωθῶμεν αὐτοῦ τῆ θειοτάτῃ ζωῇ τῆ πρὸς αὐτὴν ἡμῶν κατὰ δύναμιν ἀφομοιώσει καὶ ταύτῃ πρὸς ἀλήθειαν κοινωνοὶ θεοῦ καὶ τῶν θείων ἀποτελεσθησόμεθα.”

65. See *EH* 3.3.12, 444A–B.

66. See *EH* 4.3.11, 484C.

67. See *EH* 4.3.12, 485A; 5.3.5, 512C.

(ἀνασπῶντα) from the ancient swallowing pit of ruinous death anyone who, as Scripture mysteriously expresses it, has been baptized into his death [see Rom 6:3], and renews them in an godly and eternal existence.⁶⁸

The descent and submergence of God into our humanity and into human death on the cross is the precondition and the pattern for our descent in the waters of baptism and our ascent into the divine life. It is in Jesus that Dionysius contemplates the philanthropic love of God as not only circular, but also sacrificial. In Christ crucified, the superabundant and ungrudging beneficence of God can be seen most clearly as cruciform in shape. The sign of the cross, then, provides the archetype for humanity's imitation of and participation in the overflowing and circuitous love of God. The lives and activities of those persons who have been initiated into these mysteries are marked by their configuration to and conformity with Christ crucified as the way in and through which they become assimilated to and united with the Trinitarian God.⁶⁹

4. ANGELIC BENEFICENCE

Dionysius recognizes that Jesus is the beginning, the center, and the end of every hierarchy, including that of the celestial hierarchy. However, Christ's hierarchical position does not exclude the particular hierarch of each hierarchy from his proper own place as its particular principal. Jesus and each hierarch, and derivatively each member of that hierarchy, stand in a non-competitive relationship to one another. In fact, their relationship is cooperative. According to Dionysius's understanding of the superabundance of divine beneficence, God pours forth his divine goodness and love downwards throughout the continuous course of all the hierarchies in such an orderly, harmonious, and peaceful way that each member receives God's gifts and then shares them with others.⁷⁰ These beneficent activities on the part

68. *EH* 4.3.10, 484B: "... ὁ ἱεράρχης ὑπ' ὄψιν ἄγει τοῖς θεωρητικοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἄχρις καὶ αὐτοῦ <τοῦ> θανάτου διὰ σταυροῦ τὸν Ἰησοῦν ὑπὲρ τῆς ἡμῶν θεογενεσίας καταδύμενον αὐτῇ τῇ θεΐᾳ καὶ ἀκρατήτῳ καθόδῳ τοὺς εἰς τὸν θάνατον αὐτοῦ κατὰ τὸ κρύφιον λόγιον βαπτιζομένους ἐκ τῆς τοῦ φθοροποιοῦ θανάτου παλαιᾶς καταπόσεως ἀγαθοπρεπῶς ἀνασπῶντα καὶ ἀνακαινίζοντα πρὸς ἔνθεον καὶ αἰώνιον ὑπαρξίν."

69. See *EH* 5.3.4, 512A–B.

70. For a discussion on peace within the triad of procession, halting standstill, and return in Dionysius's structures and contents both of reality and of *The Divine Names*,

of the hierarchical members, however, never depart into some separate realm of autonomy, but also remain in active cooperation with and, in fact, radical dependence on the dynamism of divine goodness. The desire to partake of God's own activities and to share them with others is intrinsic to and constitutive of the very being of angels and humans. As Dionysius explains:

And so it is that all things must desire (ἐφετόν), must erotically love (ἐραστόν), must agapically love (ἀγαπητόν), the Beautiful and the Good. Because of it and for its sake, inferiors erotically love (ἐρώσι) superiors revertively (ἐπιστρεπτικῶς), those of the same rank [erotically love] others of the same rank communally (κοινωνικῶς), superiors [erotically love] their inferiors providentially (προνοητικῶς), each bestirs itself and all are stirred to do and to will whatever it is they do and will because of the yearning for the Beautiful and the Good.⁷¹

In performing such beneficence, according to their particular capacities and proper places, the members of the hierarchies become increasingly assimilated to and united with not only God, but also each other. The erotic love of God circularly unifies and comingles these beings in a triadic fashion: (1) superiors in their providential descent to inferiors, (2) equals in their peer communion with each other, and (3) inferiors in their revertive ascent to superiors.⁷²

When Dionysius explains how divine illumination pours forth in a mediated way throughout the entire course of the angelic hierarchy, he applies this universal concept to the reception and donation of divine light by the angels and implies that their own mediating activities share not only the content, but also the form of God's activity. As imitators and participants of God, they not only receive and impart (μεταδιδούσαι) light, but also do so

see Christian Schäfer, *The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite: An Introduction to the Structure and the Content of the Treatise On the Divine Names* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 100–111. On 103, Schäfer draws a parallel between Dionysius's threefold peace, in DN 11, as "agreement with oneself (reflexively), with others (horizontally), and ultimately with the 'Peace beyond peace' (vertically)," and Augustine's "threefold peace-concept," in *De civitate dei* 19.14 and 19.17, founded "on the precept of loving God, one's neighbour, and oneself."

71. DN 4.10, 708A–B: "Πᾶσιν οὖν ἐστὶ τὸ καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν ἐφετόν καὶ ἐραστόν καὶ ἀγαπητόν, καὶ δι' αὐτὸ καὶ αὐτοῦ ἕνεκα καὶ τὰ ἦττω τῶν κρείττωνων ἐπιστρεπτικῶς ἐρώσι καὶ κοινωνικῶς τὰ ὁμόστοιχα τῶν ὁμοταγῶν καὶ τὰ κρείττω τῶν ἡττόνων προνοητικῶς καὶ αὐτὰ ἑαυτῶν ἕκαστα συνεκτικῶς, καὶ πάντα τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ ἀγαθοῦ ἐφιέμενα ποιεῖ καὶ βούλεται πάντα, ὅσα ποιεῖ καὶ βούλεται."

72. See DN 4.10, 708A; 4.12–13, 709D–712A; 4.15, 713A–B; EH 1.2, 372C–D.

like God and united to God, in good fashion (ἀγαθοειδῶς) and ungrudgingly (ἀφθόνως). The transfusion of light from one angelic member, rank, and order to another does not in any way remove God from the process. As the ultimate cause, God remains the beginning, the middle, and the end of all illumination for those who are illuminated and for those who illuminate others. But God manifests his beneficence not only by illuminating angels himself, but also by involving angels in this illuminating of other angels. This involvement, for Dionysius, is a constitutive aspect to the angelic deification whereby their ministry of mediation serves in the uplifting not only of others, but also of themselves.⁷³ Dionysius describes the process by which higher angels intensively receive the overflowing (ὑπερχεόμενον) light of God and extensively give of their superabundance (περιουσία) to other and lower angels:

And so it comes about that every order in the hierarchical rank is uplifted (ἀνάγεται) according to its proper capacity to cooperation (συνεργίαν) with God. By grace (χάριτι) and a God-given (θεοσδότω) power, it does things which belong naturally and supernaturally to God, things performed by him transcendentally and revealed in the hierarchy for the permitted imitation of God-loving (φιλοθέων) minds.⁷⁴

On account of their reception of God's gracious light, power, and love for God, the angels have been lifted up into an active cooperation with God by which they share in his beneficent love for other angels and for humans. Accordingly, Dionysius explains that Scripture designates the hierarchs of the angelic hierarchy with the Hebrew name seraphim on account of their fiery superabundance (ὑπερχέοντος) of the divine life that constantly bestirs them and overflows from them.⁷⁵ These seraphic angels, as Scripture declares, *cried out to one another* (Is 6:3), which signifies that they ungrudgingly impart (ἀφθόνως μεταδιδόασιν; see Wis 7:13) to each other the illuminations they have received in contemplating God.⁷⁶ This phrase ἀφθόνως μεταδιδόασιν, which

73. See CH 13.3, 301C–304A.

74. CH 3.3, 168A–B: “Οὐκοῦν εἰκάστη τῆς ἱεραρχικῆς διακοσμῆσεως τάξεις κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν ἀναλογίαν ἀνάγεται πρὸς τὴν θεϊαν συνεργίαν, ἐκεῖνα τελοῦσα χάριτι καὶ θεοσδότῳ δυνάμει τὰ τῆ θεαρχία φυσικῶς καὶ ὑπερφῶς ἐνόντα καὶ πρὸς αὐτῆς ὑπερουσίως δρώμενα καὶ πρὸς τὴν ἐφικτὴν τῶν φιλοθέων νοῶν μίμησιν ἱεραρχικῶς ἐκφαινόμενα.”

75. See CH 7.1, 205B; EH 4.3.9, 481C.

76. See EH 4.3.9, 481C.

Dionysius deploys to describe both the seraphim and, as noted above, all the members of the angelic hierarchy, seems to echo the scriptural language of Wis 7:13 in which the wise king Solomon admits, *Simply I learned about [Wisdom], and ungrudgingly do I impart* (ἀφθόνως τε μεταδίδωμι), *her riches I do not hide away*.⁷⁷ The ungrudging impartation of the treasures of wisdom that one has received ultimately from God renders such a wise benefactor closer to the overfull (ὑπερπλήρης) Wisdom (σοφίας) of God.⁷⁸ Along with the seraphim, Dionysius describes another member of that angelic order which is nearest (ἐγγυτάτην) to God, namely, the cherubim whose name indicates fullness of knowledge (πληθος γνώσεως) and profusion of wisdom (χύσιν σοφίας), names that manifest their likeness to God (θεοειδῶν).⁷⁹

The extent to which one is near God consists in the degree to which one participates in God. As Dionysius teaches, the more one participates in the goodness of God, the more near and neighborly (πλησιάζουσι) one is to God.⁸⁰ As the radii of a circle, which are connected to each other in and through its center point, become more united with their center and with each other the more near and neighborly they become, so also the members of all the hierarchies become more united to God and to each other, the more near and neighborly they become in God their center. This Dionysian vocabulary of nearness and neighborliness (πλησιάζουσι) reflects the scriptural term used in the commandment to love one's "neighbor" (πλησίον).⁸¹ Like God and united to God, all of the angels ungrudgingly impart to their neighbors the overflowing and circuitous beneficence that they not only have, but that they have received and constantly receive from God. The more they become like God and assimilated to God, or in other words, the closer they come to God as *his* neighbors, the more assimilated to and united with others they also become as *their* neighbors. From this perspective, Dionysius seems to locate neighborly love less in the binary relationship between angelic or human persons in and

77. Wis 7:13: "ἀδόλως τε ἔμαθον ἀφθόνως τε μεταδίδωμι, τὸν πλοῦτον αὐτῆς οὐκ ἀποκρύπτωμαι ..."

78. See DN 7.1, 865B.

79. See CH 7.1, 205B–C.

80. See DN 5.3, 817B–C.

81. Lv 19:18; Mt 19:19; Mt 22:39; Mk 12:31; Lk 10:27; Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14; Jas 2:8.

of themselves, and instead more in the center point of God himself, since God is the one in whom and through whom every relationship between neighbors occurs. Furthermore, this center point coincides not only in God, but also in God incarnate. Since Christ is not only the hierarch of both angels and humans according to his supreme divinity, but also lower than the angels and yet above the rest of humans according to his perfect humanity,⁸² he is the nexus of the angelic and human hierarchies. As René Roques explains, “The role of Christ can then be defined as a double mediation which attaches, on the one hand, the human hierarchy to the angelic hierarchy and which, on the other, recapitulates in completing (ἀποπεραιουμένην) all the hierarches in the divine unity.”⁸³

Insofar as the celestial hierarchy functions as a mediator, it is not only near God as his neighbor, but also near the ecclesiastical hierarchy as our neighbor. In its mediation, the celestial hierarchy is also somewhat near the legal hierarchy to the extent that God has given the Law through the angels to Moses⁸⁴ and that God has providentially established the angelic Michael as the ruler of the Jewish people.⁸⁵ When Dionysius explains that the divine gifts of deification, which the human writers of Scripture have received and transmitted, had already been given to the angels, he designates the members of the heavenly hierarchy as our “neighbors” (γείτονί).⁸⁶ Although terminologically not so much associated with the commandment to love one’s “neighbor” (πλησίον), the term that Dionysius uses here for “neighbors” (γείτονί) is the same word that the Gospel of Luke uses to describe the “neighbors” (γείτονας) whom the good shepherd calls together (συγκαλεῖ) to rejoice together (συγχαρήτε) with him

82. See CH 4.4, 181C–D.

83. Roques, *L’Univers Dionysien*, 322: “Le rôle du Christ peut donc être défini comme une double médiation qui rattache, d’une part, la hiérarchie humaine à la hiérarchie angélique et qui, de l’autre, récapitule en les achevant (ἀποπεραιουμένην) toutes les hiérarchies dans l’unité divine.”

84. See CH 4.3, 180D–181A.

85. See CH 9.2–4, 260A–261D. According to Dionysius here, the other human hierarchies and nations, explicitly including Egypt and Babylon, were likewise assigned to the guardianship of angelic rulers, but en masse freely wandered away from the true God into the cults of false gods.

86. EH 1.4, 376C.

when he finds his lost sheep,⁸⁷ and the “neighbors” (γείτονας) whom the woman calls together (συγκαλεῖ) to rejoice together (συγχαρήτε) with her when she finds her lost coin.⁸⁸ This convocation of neighbors together to rejoice together with him over one who had been lost but now has been found constitutes, in Dionysius’s account, the activities of the human hierarch when the catechumen and his sponsor, moved by erotic love (ἐρῶντα) for the other’s salvation,⁸⁹ approach and petition the bishop for the sacrament of divine birth. As Dionysius draws the analogy:

The hierarch is delighted with the two men. It is like the case of the lost sheep carried on the shoulders. He gives thanks and praise. With thankful mind and prostrate body he venerates that one beneficent source (τὴν μίαν ἀγαθοεργέτιν ἀρχὴν) by whom the called are called and the saved are saved. Then he summons the whole sacred rank in working together (συνεργία) to celebrate together (συνεορτάσει) this man’s salvation and to offer thanks for the divine goodness (θείας ἀγαθότητος) in the sacred precincts of gathering together in the beginning (συναγαγὼν ἐν ἀρχῇ) he sings a hymn drawn from the sacred Scripture together with all of those who fill the church.⁹⁰

Such a scene manifests the love of one’s neighbor that gathers people in hierarchical and theological unity when the hierarch, like God and united to God, calls back all the members together to cooperate in rejoicing over each person brought near and in giving thanks to their beneficent God.

5. HUMAN BENEFICENCE

As already intimated above, the divine beneficence condescends in continuous fashion from God through the angelic hierarchy to the human hierarchies. Such interrelated continuity between the hierarchies could help explain why certain discussions of one crop up in Dionysian works devoted mostly to another.

87. See Lk 15:6.

88. See Lk 15:9.

89. See *EH* 2.2.2, 393B.

90. *EH* 2.2.3–4, 393C: “Ὁ δὲ μετ’ εὐφροσύνης ὡς τὸ ἐπ’ ὤμων πρόβατον εἰσδεξάμενος τοῖν ἀνδροῖν ἐσέφηθι μὲν πρῶτα διὰ νοεράς εὐχαριστίας καὶ σωματοειδοῦς προσκυνήσεως τὴν μίαν ἀγαθοεργέτιν ἀρχὴν, ὑφ’ ἧς τὰ καλούμενα καλεῖται καὶ τὰ σωζόμενα σώζεται. Εἶτα πᾶσαν ἱεράν διακόμησιν ἐπὶ συνεργία μὲν καὶ συνεορτάσει τῆς τάνδρός σωτηρίας, εὐχαριστία δὲ τῆς θείας ἀγαθότητος εἰς τὸν ἱερόν χώρον συναγαγὼν ἐν ἀρχῇ μὲν ὕμνον τινὰ τοῖς λογίοις ἐγκείμενον ἅμα πᾶσι τοῖς τῆς ἐκκλησίας πληρώμασιν ἱερολογεῖ ...”

The same dynamic of deification, conceived of as assimilation to and union with God and God's activities, applies not only to angels, but also to humans. Dionysius understands that a universal law governs the proper activities of the members of these hierarchies such that the superiors providentially descend to promote the elevations of their inferiors, equals share with others of the same rank, and inferiors open themselves up to being elevated by their superiors.⁹¹ "But," as Roques remarks, "this *order-arrangement* is also an *order-commandment*, a θεσμός of God. ... The divine laws constitute an excellent order (τῶν θεϊῶν θεσμῶν ἡ ἀρίστη διάταξις) [DN 684C]."⁹² In considering the ecclesiastical hierarchy in particular, Dionysius shows that when the first human superiors bestow gifts they have received from God to their inferiors, they are not only acting in imitation of God, but also in obedience to God's sacred laws. He writes:

Of necessity the first leaders of our hierarchy received their fill (ἀναπλησθέντες) of the sacred gift from the superessential Thearchy. Then the thearchic goodness (ἀγαθότητος) sent (ἀπεσταλμένοι) them to lead others to this same gift. They had an ungrudging erotic love as gods (ἀφθόνως ἐρῶντες ὡς θειοί) to secure uplifting and deification (θεώσεως) of their subordinates. And so, using images derived from the senses they spoke of the transcendent. They passed on something united in a variegation and plurality. Of necessity they made human what was divine. They put material on what was immaterial. In their written and unwritten initiations, they brought the superessential down to our level, according to the sacred (ιερούς) laws (θεσμούς) they imparted this to us.⁹³

These initial leaders of the ecclesiastical hierarchy first receive

91. See DN 4.10, 708A; 4.12–13, 709D–712A; 4.15, 713A–B; EH 1.2, 372C–D.

92. Roques, *L'Univers Dionysien*, 38: "Mais cet *ordre-arrangement* est aussi un *ordre-commandement*, un θεσμός de Dieu.... Les lois divines constituent un ordre excellent (τῶν θεϊῶν θεσμῶν ἡ ἀρίστη διάταξις) [DN 684C]." For further discussions of law and order in Dionysian hierarchies, see Roques, *L'Univers Dionysien*, 82–84; of law and activity, 103–111; of law and knowledge, 118–120.

93. EH 1.5, 376D–377A: "Αναγκαιῶς οὖν οἱ πρόωτοι τῆς καθ' ἡμᾶς ἱεραρχίας καθηγεμόνες ἐκ τῆς ὑπερουσίου θεαρχίας αὐτοὶ τε ἀναπλησθέντες τοῦ ἱεροῦ δώρου καὶ εἰς τὸ ἐξῆς αὐτὸ προαγαγεῖν ὑπὸ τῆς θεαρχικῆς ἀγαθότητος ἀπεσταλμένοι καὶ αὐτοὶ [δέ] ἀφθόνως ἐρῶντες ὡς θειοί τῆς τῶν μετ' αὐτοὺς ἀναγωγῆς καὶ θεώσεως αἰσθηταῖς εἰκόσι τὰ ὑπερουράνια καὶ ποικιλία καὶ πλήθει τὸ συνεπτυγμένον καὶ ἐν ἀνθρωπίνους τε τὰ θεῖα καὶ ἐν ἐνύλοις τὰ αὐλα καὶ τοῖς καθ' ἡμᾶς τὰ ὑπερούσια ταῖς ἐγγράφοις τε αὐτῶν καὶ ἀγράφοις μῆσεσι κατὰ τοὺς ἱερούς ἡμῖν παρέδωσαν θεσμούς ..."

their fill of divine gifts and then are sent forth (*ἀπεσταλμένοι*) as apostles to act ungrudgingly and erotically like God and in obedience to sacred laws (*ιερούς θεσμούςς*) in giving the same gifts, albeit in diverse modes and in different degrees, to their subordinates in consideration of their various capacities (*ἀναλόγως*).⁹⁴ In describing this dynamic sequence of reception for oneself and then distribution to inferiors, inasmuch as it applies to the hierarch's celebration of the synaxis and to his instruction in the practices of the divine life, Dionysius repeats the language of sacred laws (*ιεραῶς θεσμοθεσίας*).⁹⁵ As he notes:

This is the universal order and harmonious arrangement appropriate to the divine realities: the sacred leader first of all participates in the abundance of the holy gifts which God has commanded (*θεόθεν*) him to give to others and in this way he goes on to impart them to others.⁹⁶

This ungrudging and beneficent imparting of divine gifts to inferiors belongs not only to the hierarch, but also to the other ministers of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.⁹⁷ Even in cooperating with his subordinate ministers the hierarch resembles God. In a key passage that employs much of the vocabulary that we've already seen concerning the divine providential goodness, Dionysius expresses how the beneficent ministry of the ecclesiastical hierarch, even towards those who were apostates and sinners, models itself on and participates in the ungrudging beneficence of God who, as shown above, freely extends his light even to the demons. He writes:

We say, then, that the goodness (*ἀγαθότης*) of the divine blessedness, while forever remaining similar to and like itself, nevertheless ungrudgingly (*ἀφθόνως*) grants the beneficent (*ἀγαθοεργέτιδας*) rays of its own light to whomever views it with the eyes of the intelligence. ... Still, as I have already said, the divine light, beneficently (*ἀγαθοεργικῶς*), never ceases to unfold (*ἤπλωται*) itself to the eyes of the mind, eyes which should seize upon it for it is always there, always divinely ready with the gift of itself. And it is on this that the divine hierarch models (*ἀποτυπῶται*) himself when he ungrudgingly (*ἀφθόνως*) pours out on everyone the shining beams of his inspired teaching, when in imitation of God

94. See also *CH* 3.2, 165A.

95. See *EH* 3.3.14, 444D–445B.

96. *EH* 3.3.14, 445A: "Αὕτη γὰρ ἡ καθολικὴ τῶν θείων εὐκοσμία καὶ τάξις· πρῶτον ἐν μετουσίᾳ γενέσθαι καὶ ἀποπληρώσει τὸν ἱερόν καθηγεμόνα τῶν δι' αὐτοῦ θεόθεν ἐτέροις δωρηθησομένων· οὕτω τε καὶ ἄλλοις μεταδοῦναι."

97. See *EH* 5.1.2, 501A–B; 5.3.7, 513C–516A.

(θεομιμήτως) he remains ever ready to give light to whomever approaches, and when he displays neither a grudge (οὐ φθόνῳ) nor profane anger over previous apostasy and transgressions. In godlike and hierarchical fashion he gives to all who approach his guiding light and does so in harmonious and orderly fashion and in proportion to the disposition (ἀναλογία) of each one toward the sacred.⁹⁸

On the basis of God's ungrudging and unfolding beneficence, even to the lowest and the least, even to those beings who have not yet and perhaps may never open themselves to receive his deifying light so as to return back to him, the human hierarch and human ministers likewise display such ungrudging and lavish beneficence, even to those who have committed apostasy and sins. Despite Dionysius's occasional explanations and admonitions that the fullness of illuminating truths and mysteries are to be reserved only for the initiated and not to be betrayed to the uninitiated,⁹⁹ nevertheless there is ultimately nothing, besides human aversion and self-exclusion from the light, that precludes any person from sharing in this light.

From this perspective, Dionysius's translation of the commandment to love one's neighbor into the language of superabundant and ungrudging beneficence seems not so far from Jesus's words in the Gospel of Luke, *But to you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.*¹⁰⁰ Such beneficent and altruistic love of others, even of one's enemies, is what Jesus has ecstatically, erotically, and philanthropically demonstrated in his passion and cross. It is with the cross of Christ in mind that Dionysius presents the erotic and crucified love of God as the

98. *EH* 2.3.3, 397D–400B: “Λέγωμεν τοίνυν, ὡς ἔστιν ἡ τῆς θείας μακαριότητος ἀγαθότης αἰεὶ κατὰ ταῦτὰ καὶ ὡσαύτως ἔχουσα τὰς τοῦ οἰκείου φωτὸς ἀγαθοεργέτιδας ἀκτίνας ἐπὶ πάσας ἀφθόνως ἀπλοῦσα τὰς νοερὰς ὄψεις. ... Πλήν, ὅπερ ἔφην, ἀγαθοεργικῶς αἰεὶ ταῖς νοεραῖς ὄψει τὸ θεῖον ἠπλωται φῶς ἔνεστί τε αὐταῖς ἀντιλαβέσθαι παρόντος αὐτοῦ καὶ αἰεὶ πρὸς θεοπρεπή τῶν οἰκείων μετὰδοσιν ὄντος ἐτοιμοτάτου. Πρὸς ταύτην ὁ θεῖος ἱεράρχης ἀποτυποῦται τὴν μίμησιν τὰς φωτοειδεῖς αὐτοῦ τῆς ἐνθέου διδασκαλίας αὐγὰς ἀφθόνως ἐπὶ πάντας ἀπλῶν καὶ τὸν προσιόντα φωτίσαι θεομιμήτως ἐτοιμοτάτος ὢν οὐ φθόνῳ οὐδὲ ἀνιέρῳ τῆς προτέρας ἀποστασίας ἢ ἀμετρίας μὴνιδι χρώμενος, ἀλλ’ ἐνθέως αἰεὶ τοῖς προσιοῦσι ταῖς αὐτοῦ φωταγωγίαις ἱεραρχικῶς ἐλλάμπων ἐν εὐκοσμίᾳ καὶ τάξει καὶ ἀναλογίᾳ τῆς ἐκάστου πρὸς τὰ ἱερὰ συμμετρίας.”

99. See *DN* 1.8, 597B–C; *MT* 1.2, 1000A–B; *CH* 2.2, 140A–B; *EH* 1.1, 372A; 3.3.6–7, 432C–436B; 4.3.1, 473B; 4.3.2, 476C; 7.3.3, 557C–560A.

100. *Lk* 6:27: “Ἀλλὰ ὑμῖν λέγω τοῖς ἀκούσιν· ἀγαπᾶτε τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ὑμῶν, καλῶς ποιεῖτε τοῖς μισοῦσιν ὑμᾶς ...”

fundamental content and form of such love in humans; thus, “the divine Ignatius writes, ‘My eros (ἔρως) has been crucified.’”¹⁰¹ If Dionysius is here referring to the bishop Ignatius of Antioch who willingly endured his own martyrdom, then the conformity of human eroticism to the erotic love of God in Christ crucified takes on even greater clarity as to its sacrificial and cruciform shape. Similarly, Origen, in the prologue to his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, also cites these words from Ignatius’s *Letter to the Romans*. Origen understands Ignatius to have written these words with respect to Christ and Origen quotes them within the context of a discussion that not only promotes the applicability of the name “amor” (presumably ἔρως), beyond “caritas” and “diligio” (both presumably ἀγάπη), to God – not unlike that of Dionysius in DN 4.10–17 – but also encourages the love of God and the love of neighbor with explicit scriptural quotes (Mt 22:37–40; Mt 19:18–19; Rm 13:9) concerning these two greatest commandments.¹⁰² Besides Ignatius, Dionysius likewise highlights the apostle Paul, who also expended his life in the hierarchical ministry and ended his life in martyrdom, and who expresses such ecstatic and erotic love for both God and his fellow humans when he writes, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me [Gal 2:20].”¹⁰³

Dionysius locates himself and his own corpus within the hierarchical tradition of handing on gifts that have been received from superiors to equals and inferiors. “Denys does not present himself to the world simply as the author of various treatises,” Andrew Louth emphasizes, “he presents himself as a member of

101. DN 4.12, 709B: “Γράφει δὲ καὶ ὁ θεῖος Ἰγνάτιος· «Ὁ ἐμὸς ἔρως ἐσταύρωται.»” This copies exactly what Ignatius of Antioch writes in his *Ρωμαίους Ἰγνάτιος*, in P.T. Camelot, *Ignace d’Antioche. Polycarpe de Smyrne. Lettres. Martyre de Polycarpe, 4th edn.* (Sources chrétiennes 10. Paris: Cerf, 1969), 56–154, 7.2: “Ὁ ἐμὸς ἔρως ἐσταύρωται ...”

102. See Origen, *Commentaire sur le Cantique des Cantiques I*, ed. Luc Brésard, Henri Crouzel, and Marcel Borret (Sources chrétiennes 375. Paris: Cerf, 1991), 116, Pr.2.36: “Non ergo interest utrum amari dicitur Deus aut diligi, nec puto quod culpam possit, si quis Deum, sicut Iohannes caritatem, ita ipse amorem nominet. Denique memini aliquem sanctorum dixisse, Ignatium nomine, de Christo : «Meus autem amor crucifixus est», nec reprehendi eum pro hoc dignum iudico.”

103. DN 2.13, 712A: “«Ζῶ ἐγώ», φησὶν, «οὐκ ἔτι, ζῆ δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός.»” For a discussion of Paul as Dionysius’s “model of the ecstatic lover of the divine beloved” (166) whose “[e]ros is the engine of apophasis” (169), see Stang, *Apophasis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite*, 166–167, 170–172, 182–186.

a society, bound and defined by relationships. ... [His writings] are intended to serve the needs of a Christian community."¹⁰⁴ On occasion Dionysius refers to his famous teacher Hierotheus, who quite probably may be a Neoplatonist such as Proclus,¹⁰⁵ and even names the titles of his teacher's supposed writings (i.e., *Elements of Theology*, *Hymns of Yearning*),¹⁰⁶ of which Dionysius considers his own writings to be an exposition and an elaboration. Beyond Hierotheus, the divine Paul provides Dionysius even more sublime doctrines and theological contents that the latter desires to hand on to others.¹⁰⁷ As such, Dionysius understands his written corpus to be the product of the divine processions and his own theological activity as done in obedience to God's laws. Along these lines, he writes:

[B]ut the divine laws (θείων θεσμών) command (ἐγκελευομένη) us to learn everything allowed and given (δεδώρηται) to us and, closely connected, in good fashion (ἀγαθοειδῶς) to impart (μεταδιδόναι) these things to others. In obedience (πειθόμενοι) to such injunctions, in my determination neither to grow weary nor falter as I seek for whatever is permitted of divine truth, and conscious too that I must not fail those with contemplative capacities no greater than my own, I have decided to put pen to paper. I do not aim foolishly to introduce new ideas. I want only to analyze and with some orderly detail to expand upon the truths so briefly set down by Hierotheus.¹⁰⁸

In concluding *The Divine Names*, Dionysius ends on a note that highlights the charity that exists and is expressed between himself and his addressee, Timothy, his fellow elder¹⁰⁹ and

104. Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, 18.

105. See Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 62–63. For an alternative suggestion of Hierotheus as “a bishop or at least a priest” (28), see Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, 28–29.

106. See DN 2.9–10, 648A–C; 3.2–3, 681A–684D; 4.14–17, 713A–D; 7.1, 865B; CH 6.2, 200D; EH 2.1, 392B. Proclus himself wrote a standard work entitled *Elements of Theology*.

107. See DN 2.11, 649D–652A; 3.2, 681B; 7.1, 865B.

108. DN 3.3, 684C–D: “... ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὴ τῶν θείων θεσμών ... πάντα δέ, ὅσα ἡμῖν ἐφίεται καὶ δεδῶρηται μανθάνειν, προσεχῶς ἐγκελευομένη καὶ ἐτέροις ἀγαθοειδῶς μεταδιδόναι. Τούτοις οὖν καὶ ἡμεῖς πειθόμενοι καὶ πρὸς τὴν ἐφικτὴν τῶν θείων εὗρεσιν μὴ ἀποκαμόντες ἢ ἀποδειλιάσαντες, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς μὴ δυναμένους εἰς τὰ ἡμῶν κρείττονα θεωρεῖν ἀβοηθήτους καταλιπεῖν οὐ καρτεροῦντες ἐπὶ τὸ συγγράφειν ἑαυτοὺς καθήκαμεν καινὸν μὲν οὐδὲν εἰσηγεῖσθαι τολμῶντες, λεπτοτέροις δὲ καὶ ταῖς κατὰ μέρος ἕκαστον ἐξετάσει τὰ συνοπτικῶς εἰρημένα τῷ ὄντως Ἱεροθέῳ διακρίνοντες καὶ ἐκφαίνοντες.”

109. See DN 1.0, 585A.

beloved friend (φίλον).¹¹⁰ Admitting his own imperfections, failures, and inferiority to the great theologians, let alone to the angels, Dionysius implores his friend to be philanthropic (φιλανθρωπίας) in correcting whatever seems ignorant, imperfect, erroneous, unlearned, or weak concerning these divine names, and in providing whatever he has discovered himself or learned from others, insights ultimately given by the Good.¹¹¹ Dionysius underscores the mutual beneficence between friends who are together seeking to contemplate God and endeavoring to impart these contemplations to others, when he writes:

Let not this benefit to a friend (φίλον ἄνδρα εὐεργετῶν) be a burden to you. For you see that I have not kept to myself any of the hierarchical words which were handed down (παραδοθέντων) to me. I have imparted (μεταδεδώκαμέν) them unchanged to you and to other sacred men, and I will continue to impart (μεταδώσομεν) them as long as I have the power of words and you have the power to listen. I do an injustice to the tradition only when the strength to conceive and to utter these truths leaves me. But may what I hold and what I say in some way be beloved (φίλον) to God.¹¹²

The process of bestowing and mutually sharing the gifts they have received from others and coincidentally from God binds Dionysius and his audience together in a deifying activity that renders them beloved to each other and beloved to God. Since such gifts have come forth superabundantly, beneficently, and ungrudgingly from God as their beginning, and are in the process of circuitously returning to God as their end, those who receive and impart them act like God and in union with God by refusing to hold onto them enviously and instead lavish them upon others, especially those in lower and lesser positions. In such a way, Dionysius himself provides an instance of how God's superabundant beneficence and philanthropic love assimilate and unify human persons to his own divine activity of deification as participating coworkers of the Lord.

110. See DN 13.4, 984A.

111. See DN 13.4, 981C–D.

112. DN 13.4, 984A: “Μηδὲ ἀποκάμης φίλον ἄνδρα εὐεργετῶν. Ὁρᾶς γάρ, ὅτι καὶ ἡμεῖς οὐδένα τῶν παραδοθέντων ἡμῖν ἱεραρχικῶν λόγων εἰς ἑαυτοὺς συνεστείλαμεν, ἀλλὰ ἀνοθεύτους αὐτοὺς καὶ ὑμῖν καὶ ἐτέροις ἱεροῖς ἀνδράσι μεταδεδώκαμέν τε καὶ μεταδώσομεν, ὡς ἂν ἡμεῖς τε εἰπεῖν ἱκανοὶ καὶ οἷς λέγεται ἀκούειν κατ’ οὐδὲν τὴν παράδοσιν ἀδικούντες, εἰ μὴ ἄρα πρὸς τὴν νόησιν ἢ τὴν ἔκφρασιν αὐτῶν ἀσθενήσομεν. Ἀλλὰ ταῦτα μὲν, ὅτῳ τῷ θεῷ φίλον, ταῦτη ἐχέτω τε καὶ λεγέσθω ...”

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although, at first glance, Dionysius's writings might seem troublesomely deficient of the vocabulary concerning Christ's commandment to love one's neighbor, investigations into the structures and scopes of his hierarchies reveal that Dionysius transposes such neighborly love into the language of superabundant and ungrudging beneficence and into the metaphysics of the superfluity and circularity of God's deifying goodness and love. As such, angelic and human persons ascend to become more like God and united to God by ecstatically going out of themselves to their beloved neighbors and descending as God does, most clearly in Christ crucified, to those who are lower and less, even to those who are lowest and least. In these ways, all of the hierarchies, their orders, ranks, and members advance together towards perfect assimilation to God and union with God by loving God and loving each other in God, the source, center, and summit of every hierarchy.

APPENDIX 1

	Celestial Hierarchy	Ecclesiastical Hierarchy	Legal Hierarchy*
I. Agent			Symbols of Law
1. Superior	Seraphim	Sacrament of ointment**	
2. Mediator	Cherubim	Sacrament of synaxis	
3. Inferior	Thrones	Sacrament of divine birth	
II. Agent and Recipient			Moses
4. Superior	Dominions***	Bishops	
5. Mediator	Powers	Priests	
6. Inferior	Authorities	Deacons	
III. Recipient			Initiates
7. Superior	Principalities	Monks	
8. Mediator	Archangels	Sacred people	
9. Inferior	Angels	Penitents, possessed, catechumens	

NOTES

* Dionysius provides fewer details about the legal hierarchy in comparison with the celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies.

** Dionysius nevertheless speaks about ointment and synaxis as equal in dignity and efficacy (see EH 4.3.3, 476C–D).

*** The ranking of the intermediate ranks of angels seems rather ambiguous in Dionysius. The schematization adopted here reflects his presentation in CH 8.1, 237B–240B. Alternatively, the descending ranking of (1) powers, (2) dominions, and (3) authorities in CH 6.2, 201A would match the ascending presentations of the angelic ranks of the superior and inferior orders in that section. In any case, the angelic rankings are rather superficial since Dionysius admits that “[t]he holy ‘authorities,’ as their name indicates, have an equal order with the divine dominions and powers” (... τὴν δὲ τῶν ἀγίων ἐξουσιῶν, τὴν ὁμοταγῆ τῶν θεῶν κυριαστικῶν καὶ δυνάμεων ...) (CH 8.1, 240A) which seems to be a specific application of a general principle of the equality of all three angelic ranks within a given order. He likewise applies this principle of equality to the angelic ranks of the first order (see CH 6.2, 201A) and the angelic ranks of the third order (see CH 9.2, 257C).