Proclus and the Theurgic Liturgy of Pseudo-Dionysius

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INTRODUCTION: PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS, IAMBLICHUS, PROCLUS

The influence of the great Neoplatonist Proclus on Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, a central figure in the history of Western mysticism, is well-known.[1] Proclus' brand of Late Neoplatonism is often defined, however, not by its innovations upon earlier Neoplatonic metaphysics, but its inclusion of ritual practice into the Neoplatonic life.[2] These rites were called "theurgy" (θεουργία—literally, "god-work") and the Late Neoplatonists cherished it even more than philosophy. The word "theurgy" was used by them to denote all manner of rites, including purification, hymns, prayers, the animation of statues, possession, the conjuration of spirits, and mystical

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1. Recent studies include H.D. Saffrey, "Un lien objectif entre le Pseudo-Denys et Proclus," in idem, *Recherches sur le Néoplatonisme après Plotin* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1990); *idem*, "New Objective Links between the Pseudo-Dionysius and Proclus," in *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, ed. D.J. O'Meara (Albany: State U of New York P, 1982); Saffrey, "Le lien le plus objectif entre le Pseudo-Denys et Proclus," in *Roma, magistra mundi. Itineraria culturae medievalis, Mélanges offerts au Père L.E. Boyle à l'occasion de son 75e anniversaire*, éd. J. Harnesse (Louvain-la-Neuve: Fédèration Internationale des Instituts d'Études Médiévales: Textes et Études du Moyen Âge, 1998) esp. 795–97; Stephen Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978); and the more general analysis of Werner Beierwaltes, "Dionysius Areopagites: ein christlicher Proklos?" in *Platon in der abendländischen Geistesgeschichte. Neue Forschungen zum Platonismus*, ed. Th. Kobusch and B. Mojsisch (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1997). The clearest explanation of the most important evidence (Denys' well-known use of Proclus' *On the Existence of Evils in The Divine Names*) is Carlos Steel's "Proclus et Denys: de l'existence du mal," in *Denys l'Aréopagite et sa postérité en Orient eet en Occident*, *Actes du Colloque International Paris, 21–24 septembre 1994*, éd. Ysabel de Andia, Collection des Études Augustiniennes, Série Antiquité 151 (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1997) 89–108; see also the brief account of Jan Opsomer and Carlos Steel, "Introduction," to Proclus, *On the Existence of Evils*, ed. and trans. Jan Opsomer and Carlos Steel (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2003) 4–7.

2. See the famous remark of Damascius (sixth century CE) in *The Greek Commentaries on Plato's Phaedo, Volume II. Damascius*, ed. L.G. Westerink, Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen (Amsterdam: North Holland Publishing Company, 1977) 105. For the superiority of the rites to intellective activity, see Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, ed. and trans. Emma C. Clarke, John M. Dillon, and Jackson P. Hershbell (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003) II.11.96, 9–II.11.98, 11.

contemplation. Iamblichus, a Syrian of the early fourth century CE, was the first Neoplatonic theurgist; he wrote a systematic description and defense of the theurgic rites, *On the Mysteries* (*de Mysteriis*).[3] The practices persisted after him, with seemingly little deviation from his model, through Proclus in the mid fifth century to the end of the school itself in the sixth.

Recent scholarship has observed that Pseudo-Dionysius uses the word "theurgy" very often in his own writings, raising the question of whether Neoplatonic influence on him was cultic as well as metaphysical. The question has already been answered in the affirmative, yet almost exclusively in the context of Iamblichus' writings, despite the fact that the Neoplatonism of Proclus' fifth-century Athenian school seems to have been Pseudo-Dionysius' primary source for Neoplatonic doctrine.[4]

As Gregory Shaw and Paul Rorem have shown, it does seem that some aspects of Iamblichean theurgy are replicated by Pseudo-Dionysius. Their evidence can be distilled into three arguments. First, symbols are the primary theurgic, anagogic tools of both Pseudo-Dionysius and Iamblichus.[5] Second, Pseudo-Dionysius and Iamblichus both argued that theurgic practices utilizing material objects preceded practices concerned with the incorporeal.[6] Third, both theurgists use Neoplatonic triads and mean terms to articulate their cosmologies, and both thought there were three kinds of participants in rituals: those who have gone beyond material theurgy to immaterial theurgy; those who have not; and those who partake in both.[7] All of these comparisons are valid and it is historically sound to postulate a possible Iamblichean influence on Pseudo-Dionysius' theurgy. Yet, as Rorem himself admits, "these similarities do not necessarily mean that the Areopagite read *De Mysteriis*. But it is probable that he was at least aware of the theurgical side of Neoplatonism, perhaps through Proclus, who, however, contributed nothing new in this field."[8]

3. For more on the Iamblichean innovation of theurgy see E.R. Dodds, "Theurgy and its Relationship to Neoplatonism," in *Journal of Roman Studies* vol. 37, parts 1 and 2 (1947): 55–69. John Finamore, *Iamblichus and the Theory of the Vehicle of the Soul* (Chicago: Scholars' Press, 1985), and Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park: Pennsylvania UP, 1995).

4. Recent evidence includes that offered by Saffrey ("New Objective Links" 67–69, 71) and István Perczel, "Pseudo-Dionysius and the Platonic Theology," in *Proclus et la Théologie Platonicienne. Actes du Colloque International de Louvain (13–16 mai 1998) en l'honneur de H.D. Saffrey et L.G. Westerink*, éd. A. Ph. Segonds et C. Steel, Ancient and Medieval Philosophy De Wulf-Mansion Centre Series I, XXVI (Leuven/Paris: Leuven UP/Les Belles Lettres, 2000) 528–30.

5. Paul Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984) 107–10; Gregory Shaw, "Neoplatonic Theurgy and Dionysius the Areopagite," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7:4 (1995): 579–80, 583–85.

6. Rorem, *Liturgical Symbols* 108–09; Shaw, "Neoplatonic Theurgy" 585.

7. Rorem, *Liturgical Symbols* 107; Shaw, "Neoplatonic Theurgy" 582.

8. Rorem, *Liturgical Symbols* 109.

However, the evidence offered by Shaw and Rorem which points to an Iamblichean influence also points to Proclus, of course because Iamblichus influenced Proclus so heavily. While it is generally accepted that Proclus' theurgic practice probably did not differ significantly from Iamblichus',[9] an investigation of Dionysian theurgy based from Proclus' writings remains worthwhile. Yet the question of whether Proclus' theurgic practice influenced Pseudo-Dionysius has hitherto received very little attention.[10]

In the following I will provide a brief introduction to Proclus' theurgic practice. I will then discuss Pseudo-Dionysius' own theory of theurgy. I will focus on its Christology and Dionysius' explanation of how the liturgy—the Eucharist in particular—is a theurgic rite. I hope to show that the terms Dionysius uses to explain how theurgy works are the same as those Proclus uses, demonstrating a clear influence of Proclus on Dionysius' theory of theurgy. To conclude, I will point out several important differences between Proclus' and Dionysius' theurgic practices. To explain these differences I will consider Proclus' *weltanschauung* as a theurgic pedagogue, contrasting it with Dionysius' own project. It is only by examining Proclus' practice beyond his treatises, in their sociohistorical context, that Pseudo-Dionysius' reasons for changing the Iamblicho-Proclean theurgic model become clear.

Proclus' Theurgic Practice and Ascent

In the following I will give a brief analysis of some of the basic tenets of Proclus' metaphysics as laid out in his *Elements of Theology*, the most cogent metaphysical tract of Neoplatonism. Certain key terms of the *Elements*, articulating the very structure of Proclean metaphysics, provide a blueprint for the theurgic employment of symbols for elevation to heaven and self-deification. These terms were systematized and most forcefully articulated by the thoroughly scholastic school of Syrianus, Hermias, and Proclus, who lived in Athens during the fifth century.

The central problem of Proclean metaphysics is the differentiation of the phenomenal world of multiplicity from its source: divine, transcendent Unity, the Platonic Good. In *Elements of Theology* proposition 1, Proclus ar-

9. As J.M. Rist ("Pseudo-Dionysius, Neoplatonism and the Weakness of the Soul," in *From Athens to Chartres: Neoplatonism and Medieval Thought. Studies in Honor of Edouard Jeauneau*, ed. Haijo Jan Westra [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992] 141–44, esp. 146) has argued, this is the primary reason Iamblichus and not Proclus has been the usual object of comparison to Pseudo-Dionysius in theurgic matters.

10. Beierwaltes ("Dionysius Areopagites" n. 2) raises the question of Proclus' cultic influence only to dismiss it. Texts which have begun preliminary investigations include Ysabel de Andia, *L'Union Á Dieu chez Denys L'Aréopagite* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996); Perczel, "Pseudo-Dionysius"; and Saffrey, "New Objective Links."

gues that Unity and multiplicity are bridged by henads, "unities."[11] Alongside
the henads, Proclus also inserts the principles of infinity, finity, and mixture
between the transcendent and being.[12] While the relationship between the
henads and this triad is unclear, Proclus obviously is responding to Plotinus'
own somewhat problematic theory of causality from the One.[13] From the
henads emanate the gradations of reality,[14] beginning with the world of the
mind ("intelligible" and "intellectual"), which gives way to the level of soul
("psychic"), and collapsing in the physical, phenomenal universe ("natural").
As the multitude of particulars emanating from the henads grow ever more
diffuse, they are grouped in different classes. A particular's membership in
its class is defined by its sharing of a particular x with all other members of
the class; its rank, by degree of participation in that x.[15]

Proclus calls the production of terms within a class "procession." This
progression would continue indefinitely if the proceeded particulars did not
necessarily regress upon their causes:

> For should it proceed yet not return to the cause of this procession, it must be without
> appetition of that cause, since all that has appetition is turned towards the object of
> its appetite. But all things desire the Good, and each attains it through the media-
> tion of its own proximate cause: therefore each has appetition of its own cause also.
> Through that which gives it being it attains its well-being; the source of its well-being
> is the primary object of its appetite; and the primary object of its appetite is that to
> which it returns.[16]

The lower particular may return to its cause by means of a shared par-
ticipation in the x which defines their class (τάξις). This relationship of the
proceeded particular to its higher counterpart is expressed in terms of sym-

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11. Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, ed. and trans. E.R. Dodds (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963)
prop. 2, 3, 6. In this paper I have employed available translations of Proclus into English,
especially those of Dodds and Morrow/Dillon.

12. *Ibid.* prop. 90; see also Stephen Gersh, *Kinesis Akinetos: A Study of Spiritual Motion in
the Philosophy of Proclus* (Leiden: Brill, 1973) 18–21; A.C. Lloyd, "Procession and Division in
Proclus," in *Soul and the Structure of Being in Late Neoplatonism: Syrianus, Proclus, and Simplicius*, eds.
Henry Blumenthal and A.C. Lloyd (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1982) 19, 23; Lucas Siorvanes,
Proclus: Neo-Platonic Philosophy and Science (New Haven: Yale UP, 1996) 124.

13. See the discussion of Cristina d'Ancona Costa: "Plotinus and Later Platonic Philoso-
phers on the Causality of the First Principle," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. Lloyd
P. Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) 375–79.

14. Proclus, *Elements* prop. 137.

15. *Ibid.* prop. 7, 18, 19, 21.

16. *Ibid.* prop. 31. In place of Dodds' "revert" I have translated ἐπιστρέφειν as "return."
Of course, Proclus is here only describing the way in which individual particulars relate to their
causes; most things are composites of a number of particular qualities. This is addressed in
proposition 37: composites, having multiple causes, will then return to each of them in their own
way, participating in multiple circular motions at once. See *ibid.* prop. 119, 122, and Lloyd, 34.

pathy (συμπάθεια): "as derivative principles are in their very being cognate and sympathetic with their causes … it is plain that products are more united to their producing causes than they are distinguished by them."[17] Sympathy expresses how lower particulars, while different than their higher causes within the same class, nonetheless have a relationship of "distinguished unity" (ἥνοται καὶ διακέκριται) with them.[18] As I will show in the next section, Pseudo-Dionysius also uses the terms τάξις, συμπάθεια, and διακρίναι to describe how his own theurgic symbolism operates.

This "sympathy," then, links the entirety of Proclus' cosmos together. It is important not to read Proclus as simply describing a dry metaphysical principle; for him, the sympathy between particular objects holds soteriological worth. He vigorously argued that the soul had fallen from intellectual heaven into a bodily existence of falsehood and change, and that it could only be saved by fully engaging the world of ideas, its home.[19] One way to do this was the practice of philosophy, of finding the true sympathetic relationships between particular ideas—forming syllogisms. But Proclus also believed that certain material objects in the natural world also held useful sympathetic relationships with higher principles.

In his treatise *On the Hieratic Art*, Proclus argues that these objects are symbols which elevate lower particulars in a certain class to the level of their higher counterparts. One example he uses is that of the solar class, objects which have a relationship to the sun. Proclus discusses how the sympathy which binds all things together can be observed in the relationship between the sun and a solar symbol, the lotus:[20] "the lotus also exhibits sympathy, gently disclosing it through the way that it has shut itself off to the solar rays before the sun manifests its first light, and then by unfolding, stretching itself out as the sun reaches its zenith, and folding itself back up come

17. Proclus, *Elements* prop. 29.

18. *Ibid.*

19. The fallen soul is described by Proclus in Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum Commentarii*, 3 vols, ed. E. Diehl (Leipzig: Teubner, 1903–1906) III.297.330C, III.325.338F–339A. The Platonic curse of amnesia is discussed in Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's Alcibiades I*, ed. and trans. William O'Neil and Leendeert Gerrik Westerink (The Hague: Martinus Nifjhoff, 1965) 281; *idem*, πρόκλου ἐκ τῆς αὐτῆς χαλδαικῆς φιλοσοφίας, ed. Albertus Janius (Bruxelles: Impression Anastaltique, 1891), henceforth referred to as *de Chald.*, my translation, V; see also Hans Lewy's indispensable discussion in his *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy*, ed. and trans. Michel Tardieu (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1978) esp. 190.

20. Proclus, περὶ τῆς καθ᾽ Ἕλλενας ἱερατικης τέχνης, in *Catalogue des Manuscrits Alchemiques Grecs* vol. VI, ed. J. Bidéz (Bruxelles, 1928), henceforth referred to as *Hier. Tekh.*, my translation. At 150, 12–27 Proclus describes how the symbol of the cock, a solar animal, is more powerful than the symbol of the lion (solar as well) because he has observed lions recoiling in fear of roosters, despite the bird's diminution.

sunset."[21] The sympathetic relationship a symbol has to its corresponding higher particular or monad elevates the theurgist who uses the symbol. "And in this way," Proclus writes, "all things are full of gods, the things in earth of the heavenly gods, the things in heaven of the gods beyond heaven, and each thing advances until it is joined to the very last of the multitude of members of its class."[22] Proclus' theurgy may, then, be provisionally defined as an elevating mediation between particulars, a way that natural objects of the everyday world form a path to the heaven of Platonic ideas.

This symbolic technology seems to have been deployed by Proclus in a variety of ways; the "sprinkling of lustral waters" which begets purgation,[23] the animation of statues adorned with select symbols,[24] and the recitation of hymns and prayers.[25]

The goal of this elevation through symbols was to uplift the theurgist as close to the One as possible by aligning them with higher locations in the Proclean cosmos. One of the most direct and efficacious ways of manifesting this sympathy was through mimetic activity, in this case imitation of the Platonic Demiurge, craftsman of the universe:

> A theurgist who sets up a statue as a likeness of a certain divine order fabricates the tokens of its identity with reference to that order, acting as does the craftsman when he makes a likeness by looking to its proper model.[26]

By building and vivifying a statue (*telestike*), the theurgist imitates the Demiurge. In the logic of Proclean theurgy, this relationship of identity becomes one of sympathy, and thus unites the theurgist with the level of the Demiurge (probably that of "demiurgic Zeus"—the lower third of Intellect [νοῦς] in

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21. *Ibid.* 149, 1–15 is an excellent, more detailed explanation of the mechanics of sympathetic theurgy.

22. *Hier. Tekh.* 149, 28–30.

23. Proclus, *in Alc.* 9; Sarah Iles Johnston, *Hekate Soteira*, American Classical Studies 21 (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1990) 81 n. 14.

24. See for example Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, ed. and trans. Glen Morrow and John M. Dillon (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997) IV.847; *idem*, *Procli Diadochi in Platonis Cratylum Commentaria*, ed. Georgius Pasquali (Lipsiae: Teubner, 1908) LI.22, 12–19; idem, *Hier. Tekh.* 150, 30–151, 5; Dodds, "Theurgy" 62–65.

25. R.M. Van den Berg, in Proclus, *Proclus' Hymns: essays, translation, commentary*, ed. and trans. R.M. Van den Berg (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2001) 66–85, has demonstrated that Proclus' hymns are a type of verbal theurgy. For Proclus' taxonomy of theurgic prayer, see Proclus, in *Tim.* I.212.65C, I.214.66A. See also Beierwaltes' remarks concerning the relationship Proclean prayer and the turn towards the One, "internal theurgy" (Werner Beierwaltes, *Proklos: Grundzüge seiner Metaphysik* [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965] 327).

26. Proclus, in *Parm.* IV.847.

Proclus' Neoplatonic cosmos) [27] through the symbols adorning the statues of the ritual, which form a "likeness of a certain divine order."

However, pure Intellect is not the highest peak in Proclus' transcendental world; mystical unification with the One, or at least the henads bridging the gap between the One and the essence of multiplicity, is the ultimate goal of theurgic ascent. The subject of Proclus' mysticism deserves greater treatment than what can be given here, but in the context of Pseudo-Dionysius' liturgy two aspects of it are worth discussing. First, there is Proclus' statement that symbols can serve as names of the divine, which is the foundation of his immaterial, internal theurgic practices which do not employ symbols from the natural world; and second, there is his characterization of theurgic union in terms of faith (πίστις).

He argues that

> *Episteme* produces each name as if it were a statue of the gods. And as the theurgic art through certain symbols calls forth the exuberant and unenvying goodness of the Gods into the illumination of artificial statues, thus also the intellectual science of divine concerns, by the compositions and divisions of sounds, unfolds the occult essence of the gods.[28]

Sara Rappe has argued convincingly in her *Reading Neoplatonism* that Proclus employed a sort of verbal theurgy in which certain words themselves are symbols of the divine names that lie within the soul. This is a theurgic practice which utilizes not material objects found in nature, as described in *On the Hieratic Art*, but elevates the individual from the base material realm through the ritualized use of words.[29] By extension, the reading of Proclus'

27. Proclus, *Théologie platonicienne*, 6 vol., texte établi et traduit par H.-D. Saffrey et L.G. Westerink, Collection des Universités de France (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1968–1997) V.19, my translation except where noted. I here rely on Van den Berg's analysis of the Demiurge and its relationship to Intellect in the *Platonic Theology* (Van den Berg in Proclus, *Hymns* 50–51; for the background and thrust of Proclus' arguments concerning the Demiurge see John Dillon, "The Role of the Demiurge in the *Platonic Theology*," in Segonds and Steel, *Proclus*). Demiurgic gods are manifest at the encosmic and hyper-encosmic levels as well, and Proclus may have had them in mind instead. For the present analysis, as will become clear below, it is simply necessary to point out that a material Proclean rite, in the most charitable interpretation, does not elevate one past the Intellect.

28. Proclus, *Theo. Plat*. I.29, cited and translated by Sara Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism: Non-Discursive Thinking in the Texts of Plotinus, Proclus, and Damascius* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2000) 179.

29. Rappe's discussion provides evidence to support the various academic distinctions drawn up between "low" (material) and "high" (immaterial) theurgy. Anne Sheppard ("Proclus' Attitude to Theurgy," in *Classical Quarterly* 32 [1982]: 212–24) discusses three types of theurgy; Dodds, two; Bidéz and Festugière, a separate two; Rosán another twofold division; Smith, a revision of Rosán's; and Trouillard offers perhaps the most palatable demarcation. Shaw has rejected the strategy altogether. (Dodds, "Theurgy" 62; Laurence Rosán, *The Philosophy of Proclus: The*

own texts become theurgic invocations.[30]

The movement in theurgic ascent from naming divine things to negating these names is encapsulated in Proclus' concept of faith. In a famous passage Proclus says that faith, or belief, is what characterizes theurgy above all else:

> The gods are possessed of three superior properties, which fill all the ranks of the divine: Goodness, Wisdom, and Beauty. And they have three lesser properties, also extending through all the divine realms, which fill their members and unify them: faith, truth, and love. Through these, all things are saved and unified with the First Causes, whether by the madness of love, or divine philosophy, or the power of theurgy, which is better than all human wisdom and science, encompassing the blessings of divination, the purgative powers of perfecting ritual, and all the fruits of entheastic possession.[31]

Love guides one to the beautiful; philosophy, through truth, to wisdom; theurgy, by means of faith, to goodness itself—the One.[32] What sort of theurgic practice does Proclus refer to here? I suggest that it is another sort of non-material practice, a negative theology conducted by reading Plato's *Parmenides*, expressed as a pure belief in the ineffability of the ultimate divinity.

In his *Parmenides* commentary Proclus argues that the dialogue is an exercise in negative theology. Plato, he says, uses the first five hypotheses to describe the procession of the universe from the One; the second four, to describe the universe's return to it. The former is characterized by affirmations, the later by negations: "Thus Plato copies the circle described by the whole of existence, which not only proceeds from One but also returns to

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Final Phase of Ancient Thought [New York: Cosmos, 1949] 214–16; Gregory Shaw, "Theurgy: Rituals of Unification in the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus," in *Traditio* 41 [1985]: 6, 8–9; Andrew Smith, *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition: A Study in Post-Plotinian Neoplatonism* [the Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974] 113–14, 116; Jean Trouillard, *L'un et l'âme selon Proclos* [Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1982] 214–16) Van den Berg and Bussanich follow Sheppard's analysis (Van den Berg, in Proclus, *Hymns* 79, and John Bussanich, "Mystical Theology and Spiritual Experience in Proclus' Platonic Theology" in Segonds and Steel, *Proclus* 300, n. 18).

30. Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism* 173–81. The συνθήματα of the soul and their relationship to verbal theurgy or theurgic hymns are described in Proclus, *de Chald.* I.148, 16–19 and V.159, 8–11. See also Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism* 173: "to read the text (of the *Platonic Theology*) as an ideal reader is to take part in a theurgic ritual … (Here), Proclus attempts to awaken the soul to its inner world by providing it with an icon of its own reality."

31. Proclus, *Theo. Plat.* I.25.

32. The notes of Saffrey and Westerink simply agree with Festugière's reading of the passage as indicating the superiority of theurgy to philosophy or love: "affirmation catégorique de la supériorité de la théurgie sur la connaissance rationelle" (Saffrey-Westerink in Proclus, *Theo. Plat.* I.161). Sheppard has countered that the theurgy in question here is concerned with mystical union and is bereft of physical ritual practices (Sheppard, "Proclus' Attitude" 220).

One. He comes to procession by means of the concept of multiplicity …
and he gets back to the 'One' by way of 'being one'."[33]

This way of "being one" is a reference to the "learning different than
all other kinds of learning" mentioned in Plato's *Seventh Letter*.[34] The object
of this learning is "the most divine thing in us … the One in us, which
Socrates called the illumination of the soul, just as he called the truth itself
light."[35] The way of being one as the way of returning to the One is without
a doubt the practice of negative theology: "through the henad superior to
Intellect, on the other hand, it is joined to the One, and through this unity
it knows the One, knowing Not-Being by means of Not-Being; therefore, it
knows the One through negations." Such knowledge is "a negative type of
knowledge" which comes from the dialectician's "divinely inspired activity
in relation to the One."[36] It is important to distinguish, with Steel, this sort
of Neoplatonic negative theology from that practiced by Denys' Scholastic
readers, such as Thomas Aquinas or Nicholas Cusanus.[37] The latter develop
an apophatic reasoning which describes the otherwise indescribable.[38] For
Proclus, negative dialectic describes nothing. It is a mystical exercise.

Negative theology is theurgic, because *Platonic Theology* I.25 informed us
in clear terms that theurgy, summed up as "faith" or "belief" (πίστις), was
of greater soteriological value than all other activities. Negative theology,
the naming of what the One is not, must be a sort of internal, immaterial
theurgy. Proclus confirms this to be the case in his commentary on the
Second Hypothesis of the *Parmenides*. Plato's paragraph begins, "if one is to
believe an argument like this …." This "believe" is a translation of πιστεύειν.
Proclus' commentary reads:

33. Proclus, in *Parm*. VII.1242.34K.

34. *Ibid*. VII.1241.46K . This learning was a textual, not oral, Neoplatonic tradition; see E.N.
Tigerstedt, *Interpreting Plato* (Upsalla: Almqvist and Wilksell, 1977) esp. 5; Robert Lamberton,
"Secrecy in the History of Platonism," in *Secrecy and Concealment*, ed. Hans G. Kippenberg and Guy
G. Stroumsa (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995) esp. 140–41, 148. For a history of the concept of Plato's
esoteric, oral teaching, see E.N. Tigerstedt, *The Decline and Fall of the Neoplatonic Interpretation of
Plato: an Outline and Some Observations* (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1974).

35. *Ibid*. VII.1241.48K.

36. *Ibid*. VI.1080.

37. Carlos Steel, "Beyond the Principle of Contradiction? Proclus' Parmenides and the
Origin of Negative Theology," in *Die Logik des Transzendentalen. Festschrift für Jan A. Aertsen zum
65. Geburtstag*, ed. Martin Pickavé (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003) esp. 582–85, 597–99. For
more on Proclus' negative theology, see Jean Trouillard, "Théologie négative et psychogonie
chez Proclos," in *Plotino e il Neoplatismo in Oriente in Occidente* (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei
Lincei, 1974) 253–64.

38. This apophatic practice is rooted in Pseudo-Dionysius; see John Jones, "Sculpting God:
the Logic of Dionysian Negative Theology," in *Harvard Theological Review* 89:4 (1996), and, more
generally, Deirdre Carabine, *The Unknown God: Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition: Plato to
Eriugena* (Louvain: Peeters, 1995).

Perhaps "belief" (πίστις) here is not the same as the belief we have spoken of else-
where in connection with sense-perception, but is what the theologians mean when
they speak of the preservation of love, truth, and firm and immutable faith in the first
principles, and say that faith binds and unites us to the One. These words, then, are to
be believed, and to be relied on steadfastly and constantly, not assented to doubtfully
and as a matter of opinion.[39]

It seems as though Proclus' internal theurgy functioned as a loose series
of affirmations and negations, although he didn't systematize the process
or invent neologisms for it like Pseudo-Dionysius. The use of affirmation
has been described in Rappe's analysis of words functioning as theurgic
symbols, as summarized above. It should be noted that in her quote from
Platonic Theology I.29, the naming of divinities was a specifically epistemic,
scientific activity. As *Platonic Theology* I.25 showed, however, Proclus consid-
ered theurgy to transcend syllogistic philosophy and the sciences.[40] In order
to ascend past Intellect, Proclus turned inward from his theurgic interaction
with the material, natural world of lotuses and statues, towards an immaterial,
internal theurgy—a negative theology. This turn from the employment of
symbols for affirmations to negative theology was probably what Proclus
referred to as the ἄνθος νοῦ, the "flower of the mind."[41] By contemplating
negation he identified himself with it, achieved a sympathetic relationship
with it, and could finally abandon it. "These dialectical operations," he writes,
"are preparation for the strain towards the One, but are not themselves the
strain. Or rather, not only must it be eliminated, but the strain as well."[42] "It
is with silence, then, that he (the negative theologian or theurgist) brings to
completion the study of the One."[43]

39. *Ibid.* VI.1241.42K.
40. While Sheppard is correct to argue that the theurgy of *Platonic Theology* I.25 is a kind of
divine philosophy, it is a divine philosophy which goes beyond science and logic in the Aristo-
telian sense. It is knowledge, to be sure, but, as Proclus says, a "negative kind of knowledge"
(Sheppard, "Proclus' Attitude" 219–20).
41. See Proclus, *in Tim.* III.296; *idem, in Crat.* XCVI.15; and especially *idem, de Chald.* IV.153,
20, IV.156, 23, IV.157, 28; Gersh, *Iamblichus* 119–221, n. 200; Christian Guérard, "L'hyparxis
de l'Âme et la Fleur et l'Intellect dans la mystagogie de Proclus," in *Proclus, Lecteur et Interprète
des Anciens*, éd. Jean Pépin and H.D. Saffrey, Actes du Colloque International du CNRS (Paris:
Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1987) 336–40, 344; Perczel, "Pseudo-
Dionysius" 506–10; Rosán, *Final Phase* 215–16; Sheppard, "Proclus' Attitude" 221; and Siorvanes,
197. My argument here accords with that of Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism* 178–80. De Andia
has contributed an excellent comparative analysis of the flower of the mind and the Dionysian
"sparkle of the soul" (De Andia, *L'Union* 211–31).
42. Proclus, *in Parm.* VII.1242.75K. See also Steel, "Proclus' 'Parmenides'" 598; *idem*, "Ne-
gatio Negationis: Proclus in the Final Lemma of the First Hypothesis of the 'Parmenides'," in
Traditions of Platonism: Essays in honour of John Dillon, ed. J.J. Cleary (Aldershot-Brookfield: Ashgate,
1999); Beierwaltes, *Proklos* 364–66; *idem*, "Dionysius Areopagites" 74, 84–85.
43. *Ibid.* VII.1242.76K.

The source of this internal mystical silence is contemplation of the arguments of the *Parmenides* rather than a syllogistic engagement with them, apophatic or kataphatic.[44] Faith is the final theurgic negation of all philosophic and theurgic affirmations and negations, of all proofs and symbols: "And what else than faith is the cause of this secret initiation? For the initiation is not conducted by means of thought nor judgment, but through the unifying silence, superior to all cognitive activity (γνωστκής ἐνέργεια), which also establishes our souls entirely in the secret and unknown nature of the gods."[45]

THE THEURGIC LITURGY OF DIONYSIUS

Like Proclus, Pseudo-Dionysius employs symbols theurgically to render an absolutely unknown, inaccessible deity knowable and accessible. In the following I will try to show that the theurgy of Pseudo-Dionysius is articulated in a variety of Neoplatonic terms especially reminiscent of the technical metaphysics of Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, the same terms which provide a mechanism for the sympathetic theurgy of *On the Hieratic Art* and climax in the negative theology of the *Parmenides* commentary and the *Platonic Theology*.

While I have briefly discussed the mystical internal theurgy of Proclus in the above, I will not treat the negative theology and mysticism *per se* of Pseudo-Dionysius in the context of Proclus, as the subject is far too expansive for the scope of this paper.[46] Rather, my subject here is simply material, ritual theurgic practice. At the same time, however, it was important to describe internal Proclean theurgy so that it may later be demonstrated, in the conclusion, that the material theurgic ritual of Pseudo-Dionysius provides access to divine realms that in Proclean theurgy are rendered accessible only by the non-material practice of negative theology.

I also in no way offer an introduction to the general theory of symbolism in the Dionysian corpus, and acknowledge that my treatment of symbolism, hierarchy, and the Eucharist here are brief, given the scope of this paper. Dio-

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44. At *Theo. Plat.* I.8, Proclus warns the readers of the *Platonic Theology* not to read the *Parmenides* as a dry logical exercise but as an interaction with divinity, as holy text. I suggest that he considered it both a philosophical text and an invocation of theurgic mysticism.

45. Proclus, *Theo. Plat.* IV.9.

46. Perczel has initiated a systematic comparison of Proclean and Dionysian mysticism through his engagement with *Theo. Plat.* I.3 and the Areopagite's *Mystical Theology* (Perczel, "Pseudo-Dionysius" 519–25). More generally, see Alexander Golitzin, "Dionysius Areopagita: A Christian Mysticism?" in *Pro Ecclesia* vol. XII, no. 2 (2003): 194–201, and Jones, "Sculpting God."

nysius' biblical hermeneutic is given no treatment at all.[47] Rather, I focus on how Pseudo-Dionysius describes how these symbols operate theurgically.

The most important thing to keep in mind about Pseudo-Dionysius' theurgy is that, as with the theurgy of Proclus, it is defined as a soteriological, anagogic activity. In Proclus' Platonic myth of salvation, the soul, entombed in bodily matter, uses theurgy to overcome forgetfulness of the One by properly aligning itself with the natural, the intelligible, and transcendent worlds. Pseudo-Dionysius changed this story to one in which the Christian Neoplatonic priest aligns himself with the ecclesiastical universe by administering symbols which effectively align his laity with the One. When the Areopagite declares his intention to relate "the theurgies which affect us" (τὰς εἰς ἡμας θεουργίας), he describes the sinful man's rejection of the "divine and anagogic life" (τῆς θείας καὶ ἀναγωγοῦ ζωῆς) and descent into evil; the "procession" of Jesus to mankind; and the hierarch's imitation of Jesus' acts through the display of the "sacredly clothed symbols" (ἱερῶς προκειμένων συμβόλων) and the distribution of the Eucharist to others.[48] When Pseudo-Dionysius attempted to describe his own theurgic practice, he thought the best way to do so was to discuss the proper administration of the Eucharist. In this way Pseudo-Dionysius identifies the sacraments themselves as theurgic rites. When he argues that "theurgy is the consummation of theology," he refers to a system of ritual liturgics in which the priest not only needs to be saved through theurgic symbols, but needs to save others by using them properly, as prescribed.[49]

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47. Biblical interpretation is, of course, at the centre of Pseudo-Dionysius' semiotics (take Pseudo-Dionysius, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 367B or *Divine Names* 589D for a few of many examples), but his stance does not effectively alter that concerning theurgy enough to necessitate an incorporation of treatment of Scripture into the present essay. However, I do not find my analysis of theurgic symbols in Pseudo-Dionysius to conflict at all with the discussion of Dionysius' biblical hermeneutic in Rorem, *Liturgical Symbols* 49–54. For general comments on the symbolism of Pseudo-Dionysius, see *idem, Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to their Influence* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993) 52–53; Carabine, *The Unknown God* 286–93; Golitzin, "Areopagita" 189–91; *idem, Et Introibo ad Altare Dei: The Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagita, with Special Reference to its Predecessors in the Eastern Christian Tradition* (Thessaloniki: Analecta Vlatadon, 1994) 84–88, 154–55; and Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1995) 157–82.

48. Pseudo-Dionysius, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 440C, 441A, 444A. I use Günter Heil and Adolf Martin Ritter's critical edition of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1991) to modify the English translation of Lubheid and Rorem (*Pseudo Dionysius: The Complete Works*, ed. Paul Rorem and trans. Colm Lubheid [New York: Paulist Press, 1987]), although a few of the latter's renditions have gone unaltered, as noted.

49. I stand with Shaw in rejecting the thesis of Rorem, followed by Louth, that Pseudo-Dionysius' "theurgy" simply refers to acts of God in Scripture, a "subjective genitive" of God's as opposed to an Iamblichean "objective genitive" of work addressed to God (Andrew Louth,

However, Dionysius' use of theurgic symbolism must be contextualized in terms of the Dionysian cosmology, which is a series of hierarchies. Hierarchy is succinctly defined by the author in the following way: "hierarchy is a holy order (τάξις ἱερά), a science (ἐπιστήμη), and an activity rendered like the form of the divine as much as possible":[50]

> And so one speaking of hierarchy manifestly does so of a certain holy arrangement through the entire cosmos … illuminating the mysteries of its own ministrations in the orders (τάξεσι) and hierarchical sciences and likening itself with its own cause as much as is proper (ὡς θεμιτον).[51]

"Class and rank," he says, "extending through the cosmos are a sign of the harmony here that has been ordered towards the divine things."[52]

It is helpful to compare this description of hierarchy to Saffrey's description of the Proclean theurgic ascent through sympathetic relationships with the divine: "the gods, placed as they are between the One and us, form classes, series, planes, orders; and we use them as a golden chain stretched out between the One/Good and ourselves, to lift us gradually toward the One/Good."[53] Just as in Proclus' cosmology, the universe consists of various strata, classes, whose very structure facilitates the ascent of others through it. For Dionysius, "class" or "order" has a double meaning: it refers both to the Neoplatonic categorization of terms and the ecclesiastical categorization of Christians.[54] Unlike Proclus, the Areopagite has given the dynamic activity of this structure a name: hierarchy. The active sense of "hierarchy" in the Dionysian corpus is very much like Proclus' descriptions of a dynamic universe traversed by the theurgist, for whom the immanence of the transcendent in all things has been illuminated by the sympathetic relationships flowing through the various classes.[55] As Louth argues, an important difference is that the Dionysian hierarchies impart not divine being, but knowledge of the divine. While the Proclean theophany is ontological, the Dionysian is

"Pagan Theurgy and Christian Sacramentalism," in *Journal of Theological Studies* [1986]: 434–35; Rorem, *Liturgical Symbols* 14–15; Shaw, "Neoplatonic Theurgy" 584).

50. Pseudo-Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchy* 164D.

51. *Ibid.* 165B. See also Golitzin, *Mystagogy* 128–29.

52. *Ibid.* 124A.

53. H.-D. Saffrey, "Neoplatonist Spirituality: II. Iamblichus to Proclus and Damascius," in *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality*, ed. A.H. Armstrong (New York: Crossroad, 1989) 263.

54. For more on Dionysius' deliberate parallel ordering of inner and outer hierarchy and order, and an argument for its background in Syrian Christian literature, see Golitzin, "Areopagita" 176, *ibid.* n. 48.

55. For general comments on Dionysius' theory of hierarchy, see *ibid.* 181–82; Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius* 57–59; Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (London: Morehouse-Barlow, 1989) 38–40.

gnoseological.[56] At the same time, Denys distinguishes, per Plotinus, between the faculties of understanding and union.[57]

It has already been demonstrated that, as with Proclus' writings, these classes which organize the universe are proceeding into plurality from a unified divinity.[58] It is significant, however, that Pseudo-Dionysius uses the same term as Proclus to describe this procession—differentiation (from the root verb διακρίνειν). The Areopagite's use of the word is highlighted especially in his catalogue of kataphatic but nonetheless inadequate ("differentiated") names for the Trinity in the *Divine Names*.[59] It should also be remembered that in the *Elements*, as observed above, the term defines the sympathetic relationship between particulars which is the very essence of theurgy: relocating oneself through a mediator which shares a quality with the desired destination.

This ascent, as with Proclus', is facilitated through the employment of symbols in ritual. According to Pseudo-Dionysius, "we use whatever appropriate symbols we can for the things of god. With these analogies we are raised upward toward the truth of the mind's vision …."[60]

> It (symbolic ritual) differentiates, as is appropriate, what belongs to the common crowd from the things that bind and unify a hierarchy, and it apportions to each order its due and fitting measure of uplifting. But we, who have reverently lifted our eyes up to the sources of these rites and been sacredly initiated in them, we shall recognize the stamps of which these things are impressions and the invisible things of which they are images ….[61]

Pseudo-Dionysius has defined hierarchy as the activity of understanding ever-higher reaches of the cosmos; he has defined symbolism as the means by which this anagogic activity occurs. This means is always differentiated in order to be accessible within the different classes. These symbols are experienced fully, for one enters into "communion" with them, and may even be overcome by experiences of rapture, as is Hierotheus, Pseudo-Dionysius' instructor who has such συμπαθείας with the symbols:[62]

56. *Ibid.* 85. See also Gersh, *Iamblichus* 219–21, and Golitzin, *Mystagogy* 164.

57. See the analysis of L. Michael Harrington in *A 13th-century Textbook of the Mystical Theology at the University of Paris*, ed. and trans. L. Michael Harrington (Louvain: Peeters, 2004) 12–15. Plotinus may also have influenced the Areopagite's discussions of the First Principle; see d'Ancona Costa, 366–67, 380.

58. See, for example, *ibid.*, alongside Rorem's commentary in Pseudo-Dionysius, *Complete Works* 58–64 n. 4.

59. *Idem*, *Divine Names* 640A–644D, 681A.

60. *Ibid.* 592C, Lubheid translation.

61. *Idem*, *EH* 397C, Lubheid translation.

62. Hierotheus' "sympathetic" relationship to mystical experience is mentioned at *DN* 648B and *ibid.* 681D–684A. See also Louth, *Denys* 25, 28–29; Rist, "Soul" 148–49; and Rorem,

And again whatever belongs to the Father and to himself he also ascribes to the Spirit of the godhead (τῷ θεαρχικῷ πνεύματι) through the unifying communions (κοινωνικῶς ἡνωμένως), the theurgic works, the worship, the unfailing and inexhaustible Cause, and the dispensation of plentiful gifts.[63]

For both Proclus and Pseudo-Dionysius, symbols elevate the individual when experienced or communed with. They are differentiated into plurality so they can be accessed by individuals in the profane world and yet identify these individuals with unity by means of a sympathetic relationship.

Having established the concurrence of Proclus' and Pseudo-Dionysius' theurgic terminology, it remains to be shown how the Areopagite employs theurgy in the Eucharist. However, it is imperative to first quickly surmise exactly how Jesus, of course the overwhelmingly central Eucharistic symbol, operates in Pseudo-Dionysius' corpus as a specifically theurgic symbol:

And this (Christ's hypostatic union) is the kind of theurgic light into which we have been initiated by the secret transmission (παράδοσις) made manifest to us by our divinely-inspired guides (ἐνθέων καθηγεμονων), a transmission unhindered by scripture. And these things are rendered properly for us through the priestly veils of love for humanity, with which the scriptures and the priestly transmissions veil the noetic, existent, and beyond existent with the sensible.[64]

The ultimate elevating symbol is Christ, who mediates the unmediable boundary between Unity and Plurality.[65] As with Proclus, it seems that all anagogic mediation is theurgic. This makes Jesus the highest theurgic symbol in the Areopagite's writings: "And one differentiation is the benevolent theurgic act towards us through which the beyond-existent Word wholly and truly took on our human substance and suffered, as is eminently appropriate, through his theurgy."[66]

142–47. For συμπάθεια in Dionysius, see Shaw, "Neoplatonic Theurgy" 594–95, and for Dionysian sympathy as specifically theurgic, de Andia, *L'Union* 239 n. 22, 241 n. 28.

63. Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 637C.

64. *Ibid.* 592C.

65. Pseudo-Dionysius' *Fourth Epistle* leaves no doubt concerning this. Reading Jesus as a theurgic symbol by which man and god have a sympathetic relationship agrees with de Andia, *L'Union* 441. See also Golitzin, "Areopagita" 188.

66. Pseudo-Dionysius, *DN* 644C. Theurgy, in the Dionysian corpus, is not always Christological (*contra* Louth, "Pagan Theurgy" 434–35). Of course Jesus is the theurgic symbol which is most important to and efficacious for Pseudo-Dionysius, but he is still one of many elevating symbols in Scripture, even if he is the ultimate destination of them all (Shaw, "Neoplatonic Theurgy" 593). For more on the Dionysian liturgy see Golitzin, "Areopagita" 182, 186–89; Louth, *Denys* 28–30; and Rist, "Soul" 148–50. For a contextualization of Dionysius in fifth- and sixth-century Christological debate, see *ibid.* 151–55, and Golitzin, *Mystagogy* 182–83.

The most natural rite by which to evaluate the external, material theurgic use of Jesus' love by the hierarch is the Eucharist, for as the Areopagite says, "participation in the most divine Eucharist is a symbol of participation in Jesus. And while it is such for all the gifts received transcendently in the heavens, it is also so for us symbolically."[67] It is the most important rite of the liturgy,[68] described as a theurgy directed towards us, his readers.[69]

After purifying himself, the hierarch "hymns the holy theurgies of Jesus, exercising his most divine providence for the salvation of our race and, as according to Scripture, the satisfaction of the most-blessed Father and the Holy Spirit."[70] This verbal theurgic practice is followed by a distribution of the bread and cup:

> Through these holy rites, the hierarch reveals the veiled gifts, when he multiplies what had been one …. He shows how (Jesus Christ) came down to us from his natural unity to our own fragmented level, without change. He shows how Jesus' good works, inspired by his love for man, called the human race to participation in him and his own goodness, if we really would unite and compare ourselves with his divine life itself to the extent of our powers, and perfect ourselves and truly commune with God and the divine things.[71]

Christ's life as recorded in Scripture, the very concept of Christ - these are theurgic symbols which are capable of uniting the individual with the One. The content of these ultimate symbols is Christ's theurgic act of becoming the Man-God. This act is so powerful that a descriptive statement of it has the force of a negation about the boundary between absolute divinity and mankind—thus elevating the describer to the very edge of intelligibility.

The Synaxis of Pseudo-Dionysius is a theurgic liturgy in which the hierarch elevates those around him. The Eucharist is broken into pieces, descending into plurality like all the particulars proceeding from the Proclean One, and, like these particulars, it is gathered back up into absolute Unity—with the laity in tow.[72]

CONCLUSION: THE THEURGIST IN THE ACADEMY AND THE CHURCH
Dionysian theurgy is not a bald replication of Proclean or Iamblichean theurgy. Rather, it has been altered in considerable ways from its pagan

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67. Pseudo-Dionysius, *CH* 124A. See also idem, *Epistle IX* 1108A, and Shaw, "Neoplatonic Theurgy" 584–85.

68. Pseudo-Dionysius, *EH* 424C.

69. *Ibid.* 440C.

70. *Ibid.* 441C–D.

71. *Ibid.* 444C.

72. For interpretations of the Synaxis outside of the theurgic paradigm see Golitzin, *Mystagogy* 194–203; Louth, *Denys* 57, 60–63; and Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius* 102–04.

cousin. First, the theurgy of Pseudo-Dionysius shifts the divine from a cosmos defined by nature to one defined by the Church. Second, Dionysian theurgy is much more powerful on the material plane than Proclean theurgy. Third, it is employed for the soteriological ends of the laity, an activity which at first glance seems to have no parallel in the theurgy of Proclus or Late Neoplatonism in general. However, even a brief reconsideration of Proclus in terms of the many "holy men" of Late Antiquity shows that while Proclean theurgy only elevates the self, it was imperative for him and other Platonists of the period to teach others to do it on their own.

It is well-known that Dionysian theurgy relocates the referents of the naturalistic symbols of the pagan Neoplatonists to a kind of *Kirchewelt*—a world of the Church which, through the mediation of Christ and the hierarchy of the Church, permits the irruption of the Divine into our profane reality.[73] I have here provided further evidence for this thesis by contrasting my above discussion of the symbols of the natural world with the Christian, sacramental symbolism of Pseudo-Dionysius. Pseudo-Dionysius' theurgic symbols do not operate in an unfolding cosmic nature, but the flowering of Christendom. It is not contemplation of the lotus' playful interaction with the sun, but of the man-god on the cross, which renders Pseudo-Dionysius' world divine.

The key to differentiating the Dionysian and Proclean systems of external theurgy is this benevolent love of Christ's mediation. Jesus descends out of his "very great love for humanity." By virtue of his hypostatic union between god and man, "every affirmation regarding Jesus' love for humanity has the force of a negation pointing toward transcendence."[74] Jesus' love is a theurgic symbol whose referent is the highest transcendence attainable.

I have tried to show in the above that the same referent in Proclean mysticism is not construed as divine philanthropy, or love. It is construed as "faith" in the arguments of the *Parmenides*. While it is probable that Proclus' tidy negative theology is echoed in the Dionysian corpus, it is the soaring, relentless negations of the Mystical Theology which comes to mind, not the distribution of the Eucharist.[75]

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73. See A.H. Armstrong, "Man and the Cosmos: A Study of Some Differences Between Pagan Neoplatonism and Christianity," in *Romanitas et Christianitas. Festschrift für J.H. Waszink*, ed. W. den Boer (London: North Holland Publishing Company, 1973) esp. 9–11; Shaw, "Neoplatonic Theurgy" 595–99, R.T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism* (New York: Scribner, 1972) 121; Ruth Meijercik in *The Chaldean Oracles*, ed. and trans. Ruth Meijercik (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989) 24.

74. Pseudo-Dionysius, *Ep.* IV, Lubheid trans.

75. The famous *coup de grace* of the *Mystical Theology*, the negatio negationis through silence of course reminds one of the last line of Proclus' *Parmenides* commentary, already mentioned above. See de Andia, *L'Union* 395.

Pseudo-Dionysius' theurgy also differs from Proclus' insofar as the strength of the Eucharist as a material symbol far outweighs the capabilities of any Proclean material symbol. Proclus does not systematically explain the relative efficacies of different theurgic rituals, but the language he uses to describe most material theurgic practices imply that he usually is talking about ascent into the psychic and low noeric (intellectual) realms, intermediary levels between the mind and the body. As I tried to show above, the mimesis of the Demiurge which characterizes the statue-ritual (*telestike*) could not possibly elevate the theurgist higher than the lowest part of the Mind. On the other hand are the Areopagite's Christological symbols, such as the bread and the wine, which are designed to elevate the laity to absolute Unity within the constraints of a material ritual practice. The bread, signifying Jesus' body, is more powerful than any of the material symbols discussed by Proclus.

Finally, Dionysian theurgy is designed not simply to elevate oneself, but others. There is no need to establish that the hierarch who organizes a theurgic ritual is imitating the love displayed in Christ's descent to mankind.[76] Proclus' descriptions of theurgic rituals, on the other hand, almost universally focus on the elevation of the self. Initiates are mentioned,[77] but Proclus never says or implies in any way that their elevation is the end of theurgic practice. Meanwhile, the hierarchy of Pseudo-Dionysius is a "gift" which ensures "the salvation and divinization of every being endowed with reason and intelligence."[78] To the Areopagite, love, not belief, is what characterizes this divinization. Moreover, it is not *eros* but *philía* that binds the perfected congregation together. Dionysian theurgy has as its object not only an adoption of the Neoplatonic deification of self, but, very seriously, the saving of *other* souls, including those who know nothing of Neoplatonic thought.

I do not mean to imply some polemical generalization of Pagan theurgy as more "selfish" than Christian theurgy. Rather, the theurgic rites of Proclus are designed to uplift the self. The theurgic rites of Pseudo-Dionysius are designed to uplift the self and others. One can call this spade a spade without skipping down the historically obfuscating path of Christian triumphalism, but it calls for a brief digression to recontextualize the situation. I will do that here by considering Proclus in terms of the motif of the "holy man" of Late Antiquity discussed in the research of Peter Brown.[79] It is only by examining the social context of the theurgic pedagogue that we can understand why

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76. Pseudo-Dionysius, *CH* 165B–C; *idem*, *EH* 372B, 373A–B; these are only a few of his many references to the subject.

77. See, for example, Proclus, *in Alc.* 9, cited above.

78. *EH* 376B, Lubheid trans.

79. Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," in Peter Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1989) 148.

Proclus' theurgy worked for who it did; and why, after modifying theurgy so much, Pseudo-Dionysius continued to call it theurgy at all.

The Late Antique Mediterranean basin was scarred with warfare, political chaos, and mass destabilization:[80] hence, "it is one of the most marked features of late Roman society that it needed objective mediators, and that it was prepared to invest a human being with such a position."[81] Such individuals are extremely prevalent in Late Antique religious literature. These "holy men" interceded between the lonely individual and God, rendered distant by centuries of Platonic speculation about his unknowability and the decline of local religious institutions. The holy man reliably provided healing and miracles; he was endowed with the power to adjudicate all sorts of disputes, personal, legal, and spiritual.[82] In these respects, Proclus fits the portrait of the holy man. "Sometimes," writes his pupil, Marinus, "he took a hand in political deliberations, being present at public debates on the city's affairs, offering shrewd advice and conferring with the magistrates about matters of justice, not only exhorting them, but in a manner forcing them by his philosophic frankness to give each his due."[83] Marinus reports that Proclus also healed the sick and even saved Athens from droughts and earthquakes through the use of theurgic rites.[84]

Yet while the students of the great Neoplatonic philosophers report their masters' commitment to public duty, such duty has no soteriological import for these teachers. More than anything they seem to sweetly carry on the Greek tradition of the wealthy, private individual serving the city, and, like Plotinus (third century), demonstrating that the roles of philosopher and citizen are not mutually exclusive.[85] However much Porphyry, Plotinus' student, esteems his master in the *Vita Plotini*, he never describes the great philosopher as a philanthropist as much as a good teacher, great friend, and terrific sage.[86] Marinus, whose portrait of Proclus does actively engage in (superhuman!) philanthropic activity in Athens, cannot be said to have the salvation of all the common citizens in mind. Instead, he engages the *hoi polloi*

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80. Touchstones of Brown's classic treatment of the period in idem, *The World of Late Antiquity* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002).

81. *Idem*, "Holy Man" 132.

82. *Ibid*. 143–48.

83. Marinus, *Vita Procli* c. 15, in *Neoplatonic Saints: The Lives of Plotinus and Proclus by their Students*, trans. Mark Edwards (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2000).

84. Marinus, *Vit. Proc.* c. 28–31.

85. Porphyry, *Vita Plotini*, in Edwards, *Neoplatonic Saints* c. 7, 9; see also A.H. Armstrong, "Plotinus" in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. idem (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997) 201–04; Marinus, *Vit. Proc.* c. 15–17.

86. See John Dillon's analysis in "An Ethic for the Late Antique Sage," in Gerson, 331–32.

through miracles; healing, averting earthquakes or summoning rain.[87] Like Iamblichus, Proclus never discusses theurgy as an ever-expanding sect for the masses. Rather, it is transmitted as an esoteric, Platonic mystery-cult.[88]

It is by considering Proclus in his public, cultic and pedagogical roles that we can come to understand why his theurgic practices were not designed to uplift others. The role which clearly mattered most to Proclus himself was his position as the head of the Academy, and the best way to understand him in this vocation is through the eyes of his own students and those in other, similar Platonic circles. As Garth Fowden has shown, the Late Antique "Pagan intellectual milieu" in which Proclus was such a strong presence is characterized by small groups in which highly charismatic teachers intensely engaged a multitude of devoted students. The Platonic circles of Plotinus, Iamblichus, and Proclus all exhibited an "almost hysterical devotion of pupil to teacher," without whom it was "almost inconceivable that anyone might come to philosophy."[89] These teachers lived with their students, ate with their students, prayed with their students. Proclus himself was no exception to this intensely personal pedagogical tradition.[90]

Proclus' students, then, had to be personally *taught* how to read the *Parmenides* as a mystical text, to swing the iynx-wheel, or recognize the sympathetic relationships between the myriad objects of the natural world. Proclus' theurgic rites, then, elevated only the self not because his heart had no room for the soteriological needs of others. Rather, it had no room for doing the work *for* them, who should be instructed how to elevate themselves.

Proclus, then, had less in common with the Syrian holy men of the wilderness described by Brown than the holy man of Classical Antiquity who drew his power from a human institution,[91] in this case the very tangible and pagan Platonic Academy of Athens. It is through his "philosophical frankness" that Proclus adjudicates legal disputes. His devotion to pagan rites provides an example of the pious, pure life,[92] and his worship of Asclepius heals the sick Asclepigenia.[93] If we are to trust Marinus, Proclus met the needs of Late Antiquity with the power of an ancient institution and its cultic affiliation,[94]

87. Marinus, *Vit. Proc.* c. 2–32.

88. See esp. Proclus, *Theo. Plat.* I.2, and Stephen Gersh's "Proclus' Theological Methods" in Segonds and Steel, eds. *Proclus*.

89. Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986) 190–91.

90. He had himself buried next to his own master, Syrianus, even composing a devotional epitaph for the tomb (Marinus c. 36).

91. Brown, "Holy Man" 131–32.

92. Marinus, *Vit. Proc.* c. 18–20.

93. *Ibid.* c. 29.

94. See Brown's beautiful retelling of Marinus, *Vit. Proc.* c. 28 in his *Authority and the Sacred* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995) 79. Proclus, unlike the holy man, did not fulfill the role of one patron appealing to his superior; he came to the gods as one of their own.

and he most certainly saw himself as one of the theurgic successors to the chair of the Academy. This historical situation is a significant difference between him and Iamblichus, who seems to have taught in Syria, the least Hellenized and urbane region in the Late Antique Mediterranean basin.[95] In Iamblichus' time, Platonic philosophy, while decidedly urban and taken very seriously, was not primarily associated with the Academy.[96] Proclus, on the other hand, believed he was spurred to philosophy by Athena, patron goddess of Athens.[97]

How to contrast this theurgic programme with that of Pseudo-Dionysius? Unfortunately, the Christian's sociohistorical milieu remains unknown. While the thesis that Dionysius lived (at least for a time) in Syria-Palestine cannot be ruled out,[98] it cannot be definitively proven. Indeed, it is equally likely that he lived in a pagan environment—such as sixth-century Athens—and used Neoplatonic metaphysics and theurgy to proselytize to the heathen.[99] Just as with the question of his identity or his Christianity, modern treatment (or lack thereof) of his theurgic practice has tended to show more about the personal spiritual proclivities of individual academics than Dionysius' own theurgy.[100] What I have tried to demonstrate in the above is that, regardless of who he was, Pseudo-Dionysius found the Iamblicho-Proclean theurgic system intellectually and practically satisfying and did not hesitate to draw on it (probably from Proclus' writings) extensively when conceptualizing his own theory of Christian liturgics. At the same time, he was not simply a "Christian Iamblichus"[101] or "Proclus baptized." He sharply amplified the

95. See Eunapius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, ed. and trans. Wilmer Cave Wright (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998) 369, 379, and Peter Struck, "Speech Acts and the Stakes of Hellenism in Late Antiquity," in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, ed. Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki (Leiden: Brill, 2002) 399–401.

96. Fowden, 189–190, 192.

97. Proclus is exhorted to take up philosophy by Athena in Marinus, *Vit. Proc.* c. 9. See also *ibid.* c. 30.

98. Golitzin, *Mystagogy* 416–20 and idem, "Areopagita" 163. Golitzin grounds Pseudo-Dionysius in the world of Syrian Christian ascetic monasticism, the Cappadocian Fathers, and Judeo-Christian apocalyptic literature (*idem*, *Mystagogy* 303, 316, 354, 358–91; *idem*, "Areopagita" 171–78, 183–86, 183 n. 68, 191–93, 199, 203), and argues that Denys drew on Neoplatonism to respond to "a (Syrian) tradition of ancient provenance which, in its extreme form, threatened the church of the sacraments and the bishops" (*ibid.* 178; see also 179–81, 210).

99. See for example Perczel's discussion of Pseudo-Dionysius, *Epistle VII* (Perczel, 528–30). Saffrey takes the parsimonious route on the Areopagite's surroundings ("New Objective Links" 65). For a happily brief and skeptical discussion of the myriad of speculations about Denys' identity see *ibid.* n. 3.

100. Frank and critical discussions of the recent scholarship on Pseudo-Dionysius and theurgy from theological circles can be found in Golitzin, "Areopagita" 166–67, 207–08, and Shaw, "Neoplatonic Theurgy" 573–77.

101. *Ibid.* 587.

power of material theurgic symbols, recharacterized contact with the tran-
scendent in terms of love, and expanded the scope of the rites' potency to
include the elevation of those present.

The aim of his theurgy also significantly differs from Proclus'. To Pro-
clus, theurgy was the crown jewel of the Neoplatonic curriculum, a tradi-
tion handed down from master to student at Plato's Academy. If we accept
Marinus' account, the master would emanate from the Academy to lend the
community of Athens a hand with his wisdom and ritual expertise. Yet he
would soon withdraw alone, back to the gates of his school, away from the
"hubbub of the much-wandering race."[102] Meanwhile, Dionysius' hierarchy
descends, *in imitatio Christi*, deep into the masses, and by means of the theurgic
liturgy raises them back up to the first principle. This remarkable and deeply
Christian act should assure Denys' theological readers of his Christianity. At
the same time, its roots in pagan ritual discourse are unmistakable, central,
and crucial to understanding his overall project of formulating a unique
Christian Neoplatonism both in theory and practice.

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102. Proclus, *To the Muses*, in *idem*, *Hymns*.