

# Dionysius East and West: Unities, Differentiations, and the Exegesis of Biblical Theophanies<sup>1</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION

Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite has been appropriated in divergent ways in the Eastern and Western theological traditions. Scholars of this fascinating and fertile area of research have devoted their attention mostly to the issue of apophaticism.<sup>2</sup> In what follows, I shall focus on the reception of Dionysius' speculations on divine unities and differentiations, and take as my guides two medieval representatives of the Christian West and East: Thomas Aquinas and Gregory Palamas. I shall argue that the divergence in the interpretation of Dionysius' unities and differentiations is not only a matter of metaphysics, but that it is also determined by the divergent ways in which Dionysius and his later readers East and West of the Adriatic understood biblical theophanies. On this point, the parting of the ways can be traced back to what I call the "Augustine factor": whereas in the Christian West Augustine's interpretation of biblical theophanies had acquired normative status by the time of John Scotus Eriugena, in the East it remained unknown until the fourteenth century, and was then rejected in the wake of the Hesychastic debate.

1. I am grateful for the generous help received from John D. Jones (Marquette University), Eric Perl (Loyola Marymount University) and Michael Harrington (Duquesne University).

2. Among the most recent publications are Thierry-Dominique Humbrecht, *Théologie négative et noms divins chez Saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Vrin, 2006); idem, "Noms divins: les sources de saint Thomas au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Revue Thomiste* 105 (2005): 411–34; 551–94; John D. Jones, "An Absolutely Simple God? Frameworks for Reading Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite," *Thomist* 69 (2005): 371–406; idem, "Reading the Divine Names in John Sarracen's Translation: Misconstruing Dionysius' Language about God?" *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* (forthcoming); Bogdan G. Bucur, "The Theological Reception of Dionysian Apophatism in the Christian East and West: Thomas Aquinas and Gregory Palamas," *The Downside Review* 125 (2007): 131–46.

### 1. DIONYSIUS ON UNITIES AND DIFFERENTIATIONS

Given the author's claim to represent Christian tradition at its best, it would be surprising if the Dionysian corpus would not link the terms "unities" and "differentiation" to the Christian faith in one God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These terms, however, often stand for something other than the paradox of unity and differentiation in God as Trinity.

Dionysius' understanding of the relation between "One" and "Trinity" remains a dividing point among scholars. Bernhard Brons, Jean Vanneste, and John D. Jones (although his position has shifted in recent years) offer differing interpretations that concur in placing the One above the Trinity.<sup>3</sup> Vladimir Lossky and John N. Jones (not to be confused with John D. Jones, who happens to hold the opposite view!), on the contrary, affirm the preeminence of the Trinity over the One.<sup>4</sup> According to Andrew Louth, "the idea of a Godhead beyond the Trinity is at least suggested by Denys's language, even though it is a suggestion he seems not to take up himself,"<sup>5</sup> while Werner Beierwaltes and Alexander Golitzin judge unity and differentiation to be simultaneous.<sup>6</sup>

A fundamental text for any discussion about unity and differentiation in the Dionysian corpus is *DN2*. After establishing that all names are predicated about God in his unity, not about distinct Persons (*DN2.1*), and following a series of general statements about the distinction between τὰ ἑνωμένα and τὰ διακεκριμένα (*DN2.2–3*), the author notes that a more complex discussion

3. Brons, *Gott und die Seienden: Untersuchungen zum Verhältnis von neuplatonischer Metaphysik und christlicher Tradition bei Dionysius Areopagita* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976), 88, 109; Jean Vanneste, *Le Mystère de Dieu* (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1959), 18–19, 28–29, 149–150; John D. Jones, "Introduction," 91–92. Jones' position has shifted in recent years; see n. 5.

4. Lossky, *Vision of God* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1983 [1948]), 101; John N. Jones, "The Status of the Trinity in Dionysian Thought," *Journal of Religion* 80 (2000): 645–57.

5. Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (Guildford: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 91: "Procession is logically inferior to the unity from which it proceeds: Denys himself says that 'in divine matters unions are more important than differentiations' (*DN 2.11*, 652A). Does this mean that the Unity within the Godhead is in some sense prior to, more ultimate than, the Trinity of Persons? ... the idea of a Godhead beyond the Trinity is at least suggested by Denys's language, even though it is a suggestion he seems not to take up himself: the suggestion was certainly taken up by others, for instance, in the late Middle Ages by Meister Eckhart, with his notion of 'God beyond God.'" Jones ("Absolute Simple God?," 396; 397) agrees that "for Dionysius the divine hiddenness is beyond both unity and Trinity" and judges that "it is not inconsistent to read these texts (*DN 5.1*; 13.3) in light of Eckhart's conception of the God beyond God."

6. Beierwaltes, "Unity and Trinity in East and West," in *Eriugena East and West* (ed. Bernard McGinn and Willemien Otten; Notre Dame/London: U of Nore Dame Press, 1994), 209–31, esp. 214–19; Golitzin, *Et introibo ad altare Dei: The Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagita, with Special Reference to its Predecessors in the Eastern Christian Tradition* (Analekta Vlatadon 59; Thessalonica: Patriarchal Institute of Patristic Studies, 1994), 51.

is necessary. Therefore, after reaffirming the fundamental distinction (the ἐνώσεις refer to the divine μονή, the διακρίσεις to the divine πρόδος, *DN* 2.4, 640D), he introduces the following crucial explanation:

καὶ τῆς εἰρημένης ἐνώσεως ἴδια καὶ αὐθις τῆς διακρίσεως εἶναι τινὰς ἰδικὰς καὶ ἐνώσεις καὶ διακρίσεις (*DN* 2.4, 641A).

there are specific unions and differentiations which are peculiar to either the union or differentiation that has been spoken about.

Thus, as Eugenio Corsini and John D. Jones have observed, Dionysius distinguishes not only between ἐνώσεις and διακρίσεις, but also between what is united and what is differentiated within each of these.<sup>7</sup> We obtain four cases:

1. Divine Unity

1.1: “what is united in the divine unity”;

1.2: “what is differentiated in the divine unity”;

2. Divine Differentiation

2.1: “what is united in the divine differentiation,” and, finally,

2.2.: “what is differentiated in the divine differentiation.”

The subdivision between what is united and differentiated within each of the two fundamental categories is secondary: the subcategories (united unity, differentiated unity, and, respectively, united differentiation, differentiated differentiation) do not override the category established by the primary distinction between what is united and what is differentiated. Dionysius makes this very clear when he says, in *DN* 2.2 (640A), that “it is not permissible either to divide what is united or to confound what is differentiated” (καὶ οὔτε τὰ ἠνωμένα διαίρειν θεμιτὸν οὔτε τὰ διακεκριμένα συγχεῖν).

Earlier (*DN* 2.3, 640BC), Dionysius had presented the same scheme differently. There are two unities and two differentiations: the first unity pertains to “whatever ... is of the preeminent denial,” that is, the divine being beyond being; the second unity is “everything pertaining to causality: good, beauty, being,” etc. As for the two differentiations, the first one refers to God as Trinity, the second to “the all-complete and unchanged constitution of our Jesus as well as all that which refers to the essential mystery of his love for humankind.” The scheme would be the following:

7. Corsini, *Il trattato “De divinis nominibus” dello Pseudo-Dionigi e i commenti neoplatonici al Parmenide* (Turin: G. Giappichelli, 1962), 39–42; John D. Jones, “Introduction,” 34.

1. "What is united"
  - 1.1: "what is united in the divine unity";
  - 2.1: "what is united in the divine differentiation,"
2. "What is differentiated"
  - 1.2: "what is differentiated in the divine unity";
  - 2.2.: "what is differentiated in the divine differentiation."

The advantage of this earlier scheme is that it offers some information on the otherwise shadowy "differentiation in the divine differentiation." Dionysius has in mind not only the differentiation of the *proodos* in a variety of gifts: the mystery of Christ's *philanthropy* is very clearly a reference to the Incarnation, and "the constitution of our Jesus" could very well stand for the hypostatic union.<sup>8</sup> In this case, the Incarnation would be seen as part of the grand movement of divine differentiation: as One is to Trinity, so is the divine procession to the Incarnation. This is made clear in *Ep.* 3, 1069B, as Perl explains:

The incarnation, then, is the coming forth of God into manifestness. But this, as we have seen, is what all reality is.... The incarnation is thus seen to be fully consonant with, and indeed the fullest expression of, the Neoplatonic philosophical conception of God.... But this need not mean that the incarnation is merely another procession, additional to and parallel with the universal, creative procession of God to all things and all things from God. Rather, Dionysius' discussions of the incarnation suggest that the whole of being, as theophany, is to be understood in incarnational terms ... Being as symbol, as theophany, and hence as being, is perfectly realized in Christ, in God incarnate, the finite being which is God-made-manifest.<sup>9</sup>

Since we are dealing with an author whose interest is fundamentally that of affirming Christian doctrine, it is also important to note that this view, which relates the Incarnation to God's primordial design, not to the contingency of the Fall, places Dionysius firmly within the theological tradition of Irenaeus, Tertullian, Maximus the Confessor, Isaac of Nineveh, and Nicholas Cabasilas.<sup>10</sup>

### 1.1. "What Is United in God"

*DN*2.4 only discusses the unions (i.e., cases 1.1. and 1.2). "What is united in the divine unity" are all the divine names prefixed with ὕπερ, while "what

8. For a pertinent argumentation of the fundamentally Christian character of φιλανθρωπία, see Golitzin, *Et introibo*, 65–6. See also the list of instances in the *Corpus Dionysiacum* where φιλανθρωπία is used in direct reference to the Incarnation in Golitzin, *Et introibo*, 66 n. 161.

9. Perl, *Theophany* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007), 109.

10. See in this respect, Bucur, "Foreordained From All Eternity: The Mystery of the Incarnation According to Some Early Christian and Byzantine Writers," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 62 (2008) forthcoming.

is differentiated in the divine unity” are the trinitarian hypostases. The ὑπερ designations (“ground beyond being,” “divinity beyond god,” “goodness beyond good,” etc) “are one with and common to the henarchic Trinity” (τῆ ἑναρχικῆ τριάδι),<sup>11</sup> or, in other words, one with and common to the henarchic hypostases in their perichoretic abiding and foundation (ἡ ἐν ἀλλήλαις ... τῶν ἑναρχικῶν ὑποστάσεων μονὴ καὶ ἴδρισις, *DN* 2.4, 641A).<sup>12</sup>

To understand the relation between One and Trinity in Dionysius, it is useful, at this point, to have recourse to a very important rule that Dionysius has established earlier, in *DN* 2.2, 640A:

καὶ οὔτε τὰ ἡνωμένα διαίρειν θεμιτὸν οὔτε τὰ διακεκριμένα συγχεῖν .

It is not permissible either to divide what is united or to confound what is differentiated.

This is to say that what is united or differentiated within the divine unities or the divine differentiation, respectively, does not alter their fundamental character of being the divine μονή, or the divine πρόοδος, respectively. Thus, “what is differentiated in the divine unity” (the trinitarian hypostases) is no less the divine μονή than “what is united in the divine unity,” namely the One. Likewise, “what is united in the divine differentiation” (the names) is no less and no more the divine πρόοδος than “what is differentiated in the divine differentiation” (the Incarnation).

Indeed, Dionysius himself does not seem to distinguish between what is united and what is differentiated in the divine unity (the One and the Trinity, respectively) when, in *DN* 2.1 (636C–37C) he “follows his declaration that the ἡνωμένα must be predicated indivisibly of the whole Godhead by listing a series of examples, ‘good,’ ‘being,’ ‘life,’ ‘lordship,’ and then goes on to apply these attributes to the divine Persons severally. Again, below (*DN* 2.4, 641A) we find the same repeated.”<sup>13</sup> This interpretation is further strengthened by Dionysius’ illustration of how the “henarchic Trinity” is part of the description of what is differentiated in the unity: similarly to the lights in a house, “united in their differentiation and differentiated in their unity” (*DN* 2.4, 641B), I submit that Dionysius’ “One” and “Trinity”

11. I chose to simply transliterate “henarchic,” given that the usual rendering by “authoritative” “fails to bring out the connection between one (έν) and source (ἀρχή) (John D. Jones, “Introduction,” 37).

12. As Ysabel de Andia observes (“La théologie trinitaire de Denys l’Aréopagite,” *Studia Patristica* 32 [1997]: 278–301, at 295), “Denys ne parle pas de ‘périorèse,’ mais il emploie un vocabulaire philosophique néo-platonicien: la ‘Permanence’ et le ‘Fondement.’ Cependant il parle bien d’une Permanence ou d’un Fondement des hypostases *les unes dans les autres* ... ce qui indique bien l’idée de la périorèse, même si le terme est absent.”

13. Golitzin, *Et introibo*, 52.

are united, but not confused, distinct but not divided,<sup>14</sup> each of the Three being the One, and the One abiding only as Trinity: "... in its naming of the One, theology celebrates the entire thearchy as cause of all. And One (εἷς) is God the Father, and One (εἷς) the Lord Jesus Christ, and One (εἷς) also the same Spirit (*DN* 13.3, 980A)." The subsistence of divine Persons is *hyperousios* (ὑπερούσιος ὑπαρξις, *DN* 2.4, 641A), and the *hyperousios* One is tri-hypostatic.<sup>15</sup> It is significant, as Perl notes, that "Dionysius' thought and his Procline terminology" were absorbed very early in Byzantine hymnography and liturgical worship.<sup>16</sup>

The double division discussed in *DN* 2.4 is undeniably a creatively altered version of Neoplatonic classification, similar in this respect to his hierarchical account of the angelic world.<sup>17</sup> This *how* of Dionysius' theological account does not, however, tell us much about *what* he is trying to convey. If we agree that the Ps.-Areopagite is a Christian author, we may assume that the Neoplatonic classification is part of the conceptual apparatus with which he gives an account of the Christian dogma. And, indeed, Dionysius does not fail to present his reader with the following theological position: biblical designations of God, such as "good," "life," "wise," and so forth, must be ascribed, in an undifferentiated way, to the three Persons of the Trinity (*DN* 2.1). On the other hand, each hypostasis is irreducible to another:

14. Given the theological context of the CD, it is difficult to believe that the undeniable Proclan echoes of this language denoting mixture, distinction, and reciprocal abiding-in-each-other (details in de Andia, "Théologie trinitaire") did not also carry important dogmatic freight. The lights in the house, for instance, are also described as "purely mixed," "wholly unmixed," free of any confusion, etc. (*DN* 2.4, 641BC). Whether Dionysius was "for" or "against" Chalcedon—or maybe emphatically indifferent—must, however, remain a matter of speculation.

15. This is also the conclusion of Beierwaltes ("Unity and Trinity in East and West," 215): "an internally relational tri-une oneness"; "the unity as an internally relational Trinity."

16. Romanos the Melodist, for instance—who shares the same Syriac background with Dionysius, and flourishes at Constantinople under Justinian—starts his famous *kontakion* for the Nativity with "Today the Virgin gives birth to the One beyond-being, ἡ παρθένος σήμερον τὸν ὑπερούσιον τίκτει." Here, as Perl notes, "the Son, not the Father alone, is 'beyond being,' a position typical of Dionysian Neoplatonism: "[f]or Dionysius, God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is beyond intellect, form, and being, in the position of the Neoplatonic One. Thus Dionysius often refers to the Son as *hyperousios* (e.g. *Epist.* III, 1069B; *Epist.* IV, 1072B)." Similarly, the prayer for the Great Blessing of Waters performed on the feast of Theophany, attributed to Sophronius of Jerusalem in the early seventh century, begins by quoting the opening words of Dionysius' *Mystical Theology*: "Trinity beyond being [τριάς ὑπερούσιε], beyond goodness, beyond godhead ..." These remarks are part of an article on Dionysius by Eric Perl, forthcoming in the *Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (ed. Lloyd Gerson; Cambridge: Cambridge U Press). I am grateful to the author for sharing sections of his manuscript with me.

17. Corsini is less deferential to Dionysius' creative alterations, which he considers as "contorsioni e acrobazie concettuali" (*Il tratto*, 42).

Μόνη δὲ πηγὴ τῆς ὑπερουσίου θεότητος ὁ πατὴρ οὐκ ὄντος υἱοῦ τοῦ πατρὸς οὐδὲ πατρὸς τοῦ υἱοῦ, φυλαττόντων δὲ τὰ οἰκεία τῶν ἡμῶν εὐαγῶς ἐκάστη τῶν θεαρχικῶν ὑποστάσεων.

The Father is the abiding source of the divinity ... the Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Father. Thus our celebration religiously guards what is proper to each of the persons of the godhead. (*DN* 2.5, 641D)

There is nothing new in these statements. This is a concise exposition of classic fourth-century Orthodoxy, articulating its so-called “theology of common operations”<sup>18</sup> and doctrine of the irreducible three hypostases. If, then, we attempt to read Dionysius’ further affirmations as a “translation” of the Church’s established Triadology into the Neoplatonic idiom, we obtain the following: “what is united in the divine unity” corresponds to the divine *ousia* (which, as Dionysius correctly translates the Cappadocians’ strictly apophatic divine *ousia*, is *hyper-ousios!*); and “what is differentiated in the divine unity” corresponds to the trinitarian hypostases. A formula such as ἡνωμένα τῇ διακρίσει καὶ τῇ ἐνώσει διακεκριμένα (*DN* 2.4, 641B) offers a satisfactory “translation” of the coexistence of *ousia* and the *hypostases*: *ousia* is to be conceived only as (tri-) hypostasized *ousia*, and the *hypostases* only as *hypostases* of the same *ousia*.

Here I agree with Louth, who finds that “[w]hat Denys has to say about the Trinity” is “nothing more than the concepts of the Cappadocian Fathers couched in unfamiliar language”—specifically, “language that draws heavily on the vocabulary of Neoplatonism.”<sup>19</sup> If the equivalence between Dionysian and Cappadocian Triadologies, proposed above, is accepted, then it follows that the “One” cannot be placed above “Trinity.” Conversely, any interpretation that understands Dionysius’ “One” above his “Trinity” is also bound to explain the strange coexistence, in the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, of crucial elements of Cappadocian theology, to which Dionysius declares his allegiance, and of another theological view, which cannot be reconciled with Christian Orthodoxy.

18. For the meaning of “operations,” which is relevant not only for the Cappadocians, but also for my reading of Dionysius, David Bradshaw (*Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom* [Cambridge U Press, 2004], 153) offers the following observation: “... we find *energeia* translated as *operatio* and *energein* as *operari*. Although these renderings are probably the best available, given the Latin vocabulary, they do not possess the same fluidity of meaning as the original. To think of the divine *operationes* as forces or active powers that can be shared in by human activity would not normally occur to a Latin reader, ... *operatio* does not share the association of *energeia* with actuality, much less with the fusion of activity and actuality ...”

19. Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, 89.

The same presupposition—that grasping the *internal* coherence of the CD depends largely on conceiving Dionysius as a coherent part of the Christian theological tradition—leads me to be suspicious of interpretations that would posit the pseudo-areopagitic God beyond both One and Trinity. Consider the following texts:

We ought to say that our purpose in this discourse is not to set forth (ἐκφραίνειν) the beyond-being being as beyond-being (τὴν ὑπερούσιον οὐσίαν ἢ ὑπερούσιος)—for it is ineffable and unknown, and utterly unexplainable, and surpasses unity itself—but to hymn (ὑμῆσαι) the being-producing procession (τὴν οὐσιποιοῦν πρόοδον) ... (*DN* 5.1, 816B);

Therefore, even though hymned (ὑμνουμένη) both as “monad” and as “trinity,” the divinity beyond all is not the “monad” or “trinity” that is discerned (διεγνωσμένη) by us or anyone else among beings.<sup>20</sup> It is rather so that we may truly celebrate (ὑμνήσωμεν) its beyond unity and divine fruitfulness that we name that beyond names by a triadic and unitary divine name ... Neither monad or trinity, nor number, . . . nor anything else among beings or known (συγεγνωσμένων about beings draws out the hiddenness above all—that is, above both logos and intellect ... there is neither name nor logos for it [the hiddenness]; rather it is inaccessiblely exalted (ἐν ἀβάτοις ἐξήρηται). (*DN* 13.3, 980D–981A)

There are definite limits to theological discourse, Dionysius tells us. It is impossible to offer an account about God *qua* beyond being (*DN* 5.1, 816B); such an endeavor is impossible because “[o]ur language like our knowledge is fundamentally directed towards and has its limits in being (οὐσία).”<sup>21</sup> However, one *can* speak about God insofar as he is revealed in the being-producing (wisdom-producing, life-producing etc.) processions. In other words, there *is* a legitimate discourse about God, and it is precisely this discourse that Dionysius is pursuing throughout *DN* 5: a discourse of

20. The Greek of this difficult passage reads: Διὸ καὶ μονὰς ὑμνουμένη καὶ τριάς ἢ ὑπὲρ πάντα θεότης οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδὲ μονάς, οὐδὲ τριάς ἢ πρὸς ἡμῶν ἢ ἄλλου τινὸς τῶν ὄντων διεγνωσμένη. The anonymous scholiast insists that οὐκ ἔστιν should be understood as qualified by διεγνωσμένη (PG 4, col. 412D), and paraphrases this statement as follows: Καὶ τριάς, ἐπάγει, καὶ μονάς ἔστις, ἢ παρ’ ἡμῶν δι’ ἀριθμῶν γυθριζυμένη, ἢ παρ’ ἑτέρου (PG 4, col. 412C). Cf. Perl, *Theophany*, 122 n. 10: “while hymned as monad and triad, the divinity above all things is neither monad nor triad known among us or any other of beings.” Jones (“Absolute Simple God?” 395, 397) translates: “Wherefore, naming the divinity beyond all as monad and trinity, it is neither monad or trinity that is discerned by us or something else among beings,” and judges that the phrase “is meant to add ‘what is found or known among beings’ to what does not bring down the hiddenness beyond being.” Louth (*Denys the Areopagite*, 91): “For the unity that is celebrated, and the Trinity which is beyond all divinity, is not unity or trinity in any of our senses of the words.” What is more, ἢ πρὸς ἡμῶν ἢ ἄλλου τινὸς is printed as ἢ πρὸς ἡμῶν ἢ ἄλλου τινὸς in *Dionysiaca: Recueil donnant l’ensemble des traditions latines des ouvrages attribués au Denys de l’Aréopagite* (ed. P. Chevallier; Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1937–50).

21. John D. Jones, “Introduction,” 30.



“the being-producing procession” (*DN* 5.1, 816B), of “the divine names of the manifesting providence” (*DN* 5.1, 816 C).

John D. Jones has recently offered an excellent analysis of *DN* 5.1 and of its divergent interpretations offered by Albert the Great, Aquinas, and Palamas.<sup>22</sup> What needs to be added, in my opinion, is the distinction of verbs in the Dionysian text: “our purpose is not to set forth (ἐκφάνειν) ... but to hymn (ὕμνησαι).” Indeed, Dionysian apophaticism is coupled in a crucial manner with the “hymnic” character of his theological account. Dionysius is not engaged in theology understood as “science about God and things divine,” but, as he himself says, in a liturgical, hymnic “celebration” of the Godhead. His vocabulary, “represented by such terms as ὑμνεῖν and ὑμνολογία points to Dionysius’s basic concern to maintain what we might call a ‘cultic ambience’ in all his works.”<sup>23</sup> *DN* 13.3 provides a dense statement in this respect: approached by way of “hymning,” God is to us both One and Trinity; if, however, we attempt to grasp God conceptually, any concept we discern (διεγνωσμένη, in Dionysius; γνωριζομένη in the scholiast’s paraphrase)—whether “monad” or “trinity”—falls short of God. It is in this sense that God is said to “surpass unity itself” (*DN* 5.1), or to transcend both “monad” and “trinity” (*DN* 13.3). The crucial point is that the “monad” and “trinity” that we can “discern” are not the “hymned” Trinity; the text does not speak of a “God beyond both Unity the Trinity,” but of God as transcending any concept of “monad” or “trinity.”

What, then, of Dionysius’ statement in *DN* 2.11 (652A), “the unities prevail and have precedence over (ἐπικρατοῦσι καὶ προκατάρχουσι) the differentiations”? I have noted above that several scholars posit a “precedence” of the One over the Trinity. The analysis of *DN* 2.2 (640A) and *DN* 13.3 (980A), presented above, forces me to disagree with such a reading of Dionysius. Read in conjunction with these texts, *DN* 2.11 (652A) does not place the One “a notch higher,” as it were, than the Trinity, but is simply reaffirming the distinction between One and Trinity within the order of unities and differentiations introduced at *DN* 2.4.

22. Jones, “Absolutely Simple God?” 384, 390–91.

23. Golitzin, *Et introibo*, 230. See also Graciela L. Ritacco de G., “Los himnos theárquicos,” *Teología y vida* 43 (2002): 350–376, esp. 352, 354–56, 326–27; Pantéléimon Kalaitzidis, “*Theologia*: Discours sur Dieu et science théologique chez Denys l’Aréopagite et Thomas d’Aquin,” in Y. de Andia (ed.), *Denys l’Aréopagite et sa postérité en orient et en occident: actes du colloque international, Paris 21–24 septembre 1994* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1997), 457–87; John D. Jones, “(Mis?)-Reading the Divine Names as a Science: A Scholastic Framework for Reading the Divine Names of Pseudo-Dionysius,” *Saint Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* (forthcoming).

### 1.2. "What is differentiated in God"

The διακρίσεις are discussed in *DN* 2.5 ff. First, "what is united in the divine differentiation": the gifts of being / life / wisdom, "and all other gifts." In *DN* 2.5, 644A, Dionysius presents these gifts as being granted by "the cause of the goodness of all" (αἱ ἄλλαι δωρεαὶ τῆς πάντων αἰτίας ἀγαθότητος), and functioning as divine names that are ascribed to "the things participated in an unparticipated way" (τὰ ἀμεθέκτως μετεχόμενα) by derivation from the participations (ἐκ τῶν μετοχῶν, i.e., the participation of living beings in the various *proodoi*: being, life, wisdom, etc) and from those that participate (ἐκ ... τῶν μετεχόντων, i.e., the beings). Dionysius has called the source of these gifts "cause." Yet, he will afterwards refer to that which is participated and use the plural: τὰ μετεχόμενα, that is, the various gifts.<sup>24</sup> These gifts, however, cannot be detached from the divine Persons. Dionysius' reference to those things that are "hymned," that is, ascribed the respective divine names, finds an exact counterpart in *DN* 2.1, where, indeed, he goes through a good number of Scripture passages that praise either the Father, or the Son, or the Spirit as "good," "life," "wise," "light," and so forth. The affirmation that "none participate in only a part of it [the godhead]" (*DN* 2.5, 644A) echoes the attribution of the divine names "indivisibly, absolutely, unreservedly, and totally to God in his entirety" (*DN* 2.1, 636C). Moreover, the immediately subsequent image of the seal and its impressions (*DN* 2.5, 644B) argues the same point: each of the many impressions of a seal is an impression of the whole seal, not of a part of it. Dionysius concludes his explanations revolving around the seal-image with another, quite detailed, discussion of the work of the Trinity in the world: thus, while the seal-image had been introduced as an image of the partless *unity* of which living beings are participating, in the final part of the passage, the seal very clearly stands for God as "economic" Trinity.

Evidently, participation in or celebration of God is neither a celebration of the Persons *qua* Persons, nor a participation in an impersonal divine procession. For Dionysius, "what is united in the divine differentiation"—namely the divine *proodoi*, or "gifts" (of being, life, wisdom, etc)—is a manifestation of the Trinity. Perl holds that the distinction among the trinitarian Persons is irrelevant here.<sup>25</sup> However, even though Dionysius is not explicit on the

24. According to John D. Jones ("Introduction," 28), "a living being as such is a participant (τὸ μετέχον) in life itself. It participates in life itself in order to be living. Life itself is what is participated in (τὸ μετεχομένον) by living beings. Further, the life of each living being—its liv-ing—is its participating or participation (μετοχή) in life itself."

25. Perl, *Theophany*, 122 n. 24: "Although trinitarian doctrine is fully present in Dionysius, it does not enter into his philosophical understanding of being as theophany."

trinitarian character of the *proodos*,<sup>26</sup> the second aspect of divine causality (case 2.2: “what is differentiated in the divine differentiation”), which, according to Corsini, refers to the Incarnation, is quite clear: Jesus accomplished the salvation of humankind by the Father’s good pleasure<sup>27</sup> and in the Holy Spirit (*EH* 3.3.12, 441D), and “reconciles us to himself in the Spirit and through himself and in himself to the Father” (*DN* 11.5, 953B). This account of Jesus’ soteriological work retains the traditional *taxis* “in the Spirit, through the Son, to the Father” familiar to earlier authors (Irenaeus, Origen, Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, Cyril of Alexandria). The Incarnation is proper only to the Son; however, the Father and the Holy Spirit shared in it on account of the Trinity’s common will (βουλία, ὁμοβουλία, συμβουλία) and divine working (θεουργία).<sup>28</sup>

After this somewhat lengthy exegesis of *DN* 2, it is necessary to extract the conclusions that are immediately relevant to the present investigation:

Dionysius posits a fundamental distinction between God as “united” and God as “differentiated.” The category of “united” encompasses God as One and Trinity, the category of “differentiated” refers to the processions and the Incarnation. The benevolent procession of God is fundamentally *God himself* in self-giving: “a manifestation of himself [God] through [no less than] himself” (*DN* 4.14, 712C).

The further subdivision between what is united and differentiated within each of the two fundamental categories is secondary: the subcategories (united unity, differentiated unity, and, respectively, united differentiation, differentiated differentiation) do not override the category established by the primary distinction between what is united and what is differentiated.

There is a relation of analogy between the two pairs of subcategories: as One is to Trinity, so is the divine procession to the Incarnation. This not only underscores the cosmic relevance of the Incarnation, but also views creation as intimately linked with the Incarnation. In other words, the Incarnation is related to God’s original movement towards creation, not to the contingency of the Fall. To borrow Maximus the Confessor’s oft-cited text, “the mystery

26. Cf. Cyril of Alexandria, *Comm. on John* 1.7 (PG 73, col. 101C): πάντα γὰρ ἐν πᾶσιν ἐστὶν ὁ Θεὸς καὶ Πατὴρ δι’ Υἱοῦ ἐν Πνεύματι. Palamas also, after stressing that there is one and the same divine energy common to the three Persons, notes that the outpouring of divine energy follows the trinitarian taxis: “the motion of the divine will is unique in its origination from the primary cause in the Father, in its procession through the Son and in its manifestation in the Holy Spirit” (*Chapters*, 112).

27. εὐδοκία τοῦ ... πατρὸς is rendered “for the good pleasure of ... the Father” by Rorem-Luibheid. Yet, if we translate the dative with “by” or “in,” which, from a grammatical point of view, is equally acceptable, the phrase becomes more relevant theologically.

28. *DN* 2.6, 644C.

of the Incarnation of the Word contains in itself . . . the hidden meaning of all sensible and intelligible creation.”<sup>29</sup>

## 2. THOMAS AQUINAS AND GREGORY PALAMAS ON DIONYSIUS’ UNITIES AND DIFFERENTIATIONS

The divergent interpretation that Aquinas and Gregory Palamas have of Dionysius’ unities and differentiations can be traced back to a divergent understanding of the divine procession. Both distinguish the procession from the essence of God. But what is the procession?

In his commentary on the *Divine Names*, Thomas Aquinas first notes the subdivision within the general division between “united” and “differentiated.” He then recognizes that there are two differentiations or processions, one within the unity, the other within the differentiation:

... tam in praedicta unitione communi sunt quaedam propriae unitiones et discretiones, quam etiam in praedicta communi discretione.<sup>30</sup>

Est autem duplex processio: una quidem secundum quod una persona procedit ab alia et per hanc multiplicantur et distinguuntur divinae Personae et quantum ad hoc attenditur discretio propria in communi modo discretionis; alia est processio secundum quam creatura procedit a Deo ...<sup>31</sup>

quod sequitur de unitione et discretione pertinet ad creaturas.<sup>32</sup>

What Aquinas calls “double procession” are the two types of differentiations—one within divine unity, the differentiation properly so called (*discretio propria*), which accounts for the trinitarian distinction in the Godhead; and the second, the divine differentiation, which Aquinas identifies with creation. The difference between the two is clarified as follows: in the procession of divine persons, the divine essence is transmitted, whereas in the procession of creatures, the divine essence is not transmitted.<sup>33</sup> The crucial affirmation is, I think, that this second type of procession *pertinet ad creaturas*: it refers to the processions of creatures from God.<sup>34</sup> As he does in the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas refers to both as “processions,” yet distinguishes clearly between “the procession of the divine persons” (27) and “the procession of creatures” (44).

29. Maximus the Confessor, *Gnostic Centuries* 1.66, PG 90, col. 1108.

30. In *De div. nom.* C II, l ii, 138 (Pera, 46a). The reference is to “caput,” “lectio,” section, page, and column in Ceslaj Pera (ed.), *S. Thomae Aquinatis ‘In librum beati Dionysii De divinis nominibus expositio’* (Rome: Marietti, 1950).

31. In *De Div Nom* C II, l ii, 153, 48a.

32. In *De div. nom.* C II, l ii, 156, 48b.

33. In *De div. nom.* C II, l iii, 158, 51a.

34. See the discussion in Jones, “Absolutely Simple God?” 399–400.

To this distinction corresponds a second one, which is Aquinas' "primary tool ... to interpret the transcendence / immanence dialectic of Dionysius"<sup>35</sup> and "the conceptual mechanism that Thomas employs to understand the relationship between the divine perfections as they are essentially in God and as they are proportionally and participatively in creatures":<sup>36</sup> the notion of "similitude." *Similitudo* occurs many times in C II, I iii, to denote the partiality and likeness that characterize the creatures' participation in God.

If, as Harry C. Marsh notes, the divine similitude corresponds in Thomas' thought to the "participated" element in the Proclan triad of the unparticipated, participated, and participating,<sup>37</sup> then it would be correct to see in Aquinas' "similitude" an *analogon* to Byzantine theology's "divine energies."<sup>38</sup> However, the difference can hardly be overlooked. Aquinas, whose understanding of divine simplicity precludes him from conceiving anything uncreated apart from the divine essence, "inevitably refers the differentiations or processions of God to created effects" and makes "the source of the processions—the likeness of creatures in God—... identical to the divine essence."<sup>39</sup> This "limits [participation] to [the creatures'] possessing a created *similitudo* of God."<sup>40</sup>

In fourteenth-century Byzantium, Gregory Palamas takes the exegesis of the same Dionysian passages in a different direction. He also notes that [Dionysius] "shows that there is another differentiation alongside that of the hypostases,"<sup>41</sup> and distinguishes differentiation within divine unity—the Trinity—which "does not enter multiplicity," from the outpourings that are "multiple."<sup>42</sup> Unlike Aquinas, Gregory views the Dionysian *proodoi* as

35. Marsh, "Cosmic Structure and Knowledge of God: Thomas Aquinas' *In librum beati Dionysii de divinis nominibus expositio*" (unpublished PhD dissertation at Vanderbilt University, 1994), 105–06.

36. Marsh, "Cosmic Structure and Knowledge of God," 146.

37. Marsh, "Cosmic Structure and Knowledge of God," 145.

38. Cf. Gregory Palamas, *Triads* iii.2.24, "If you take away that which is between the unparticipated and the participating—O, emptiness!—then you separate us from God ... you create an unbreachable gap between God and the becoming and movement of the world."

39. Jones, "Absolutely Simple God?" 400.

40. Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 252.

41. Palamas, *Chapters*, 85. All quotes from the Chapters are taken from Robert Sinkewicz, C.S.B. (ed.), *Saint Gregory Palamas: The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters: A Critical Edition, Translation, and Study* (Toronto: The Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies/Leiden: Brill, 1988).

42. [Dionysius] "shows that there is another differentiation alongside that of the hypostases ... And he says that according to the divine processions and energies God is multiplied and enters multiplicity ...; but at another point, the Divinity does not enter multiplicity—certainly not!—nor as God is he subject to differentiation. For us God is a Trinity but he is not threefold" (*Chapters*, 85).

God's own life: neither created, nor identical to the essence of God, they "are uncreated and they do not come under the categories of substance or hypostasis."<sup>43</sup> Dionysius' "procession," "divinity," "thearchy," "glory," "power," or "light" are understood as "divine energies," and as such are God himself as communicated.<sup>44</sup>

Palamas explicitly rejects the "blasphemy" of his latinophrone adversaries Barlaam and Akindynos that the illuminations would be "either a creature or ... the substance of God,"<sup>45</sup> and warns that "those who posit these processions and energies as created ... drag God's providence down to the level of creature."<sup>46</sup> The realm of creatures is, in fact, for Palamas, "one notch below" that of the processions:

The energy of God is not and is not referred to by orthodox thinkers in terms of God's creations (Perish such a heresy!); it is rather the effects (ἀποτελέσματα) of the divine energy that are creatures.<sup>47</sup>

43. Palamas, *Chapters*, 90.

44. "God .... communicates to us not his nature, but his proper glory and splendor. The light is thus divine, and the saints rightly call it 'divinity' (θεότης), because it deifies (θεοποιεῖ) .... For, on the one hand, it appears to produce a distinction and multiplication within the one God; yet, on the other, it is nonetheless ὁ ἀρχιθεός καὶ ὑπέρθεος καὶ ὑπέραρχιος. Thus, the doctors of the Church, following the great Areopagite Denys, call 'divinity' the deifying gift that proceeds from God" (*Triad* I:iii:23, p. 39–40). For the English text of the *Triads*, I have used the translation by Nicholas Gendle in John Meyendorff's selection from *The Triads* (New York: Paulist, 1983) and indicated the page number in this edition. However, I have modified this translation to better render the Greek text from the critical edition: Meyendorff, *Grégoire Palamas: Défense des saints hésychastes: Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes* (Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense 30; Louvain: 1959).

45. Palamas, *Chapters*, 65.

46. Palamas, *Chapters*, 87. It is tempting to see here Palamas attacking the Western theological position. However, Palamas did not know Aquinas, and his use of Augustine (whose *De Trinitate* was available to him in a recent Greek translation) reveals a tacit utilization of certain Trinitarian speculation in the later books (sometimes even to the point of writing out entire sentences!), coupled with an equally discrete neglect of Augustine's theory of theophanies, especially in *De Trinitate* 2. Palamas is fiercely critical of his adversaries' interpretation of theophanies, and even though their position is precisely what one finds in Augustine, he never mentions the bishop of Hippo. When Palamas writes the *Chapters*, both he and his adversaries have read *De Trinitate* in the Greek translation of Maximus Planudes. See Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas* (London: 1964); John S. Romanides, "Notes on the Palamite Controversy and Related Topics," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 6 (1960/61): 186–205; 9 (1963/64): 225–70; Reinhard Flogaus, "Palamas and Barlaam Revisited: A Reassessment of East And West in the Hesychast Controversy of 14th Century Byzantium," *Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 42 (1998): 1–32; Golitzin, "Dionysius Areopagites in the Works of Saint Gregory Palamas: On the Question of A 'Christological Corrective' and Related Matters," *Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 46 (2002): 163–90.

47. Palamas, *Chapters*, 140. Palamas' reading of Dionysius may raise the concern of pantheism. However, as Gilson observes—and his observation applies both to Dionysius and to Byzantine interpreters of Dionysius, such as Maximus, John of Damascus, or Gregory Palamas

The divergence between Palamas and his adversaries in their interpretation of Dionysian unities and differentiations in God is due, in part, to their different interpretation of Dionysius' use of the term "participations" (μετοχαί, αὐτομετοχαί) for the divine names. The Barlaamites interpret μετοχαί as the created gifts of being, life, etc.<sup>48</sup> Palamas, instead, understands them as realities participated in, rather than realities that participate.<sup>49</sup> For him, the Dionysian μετοχαί are beyond beings (ὑπὲρ τὰ ὄντα); they are principles of beings (ἀρχαί τῶν ὄντων), and do not participate in anything in any way.<sup>50</sup>

Briefly put, the reception of Dionysius' speculation on the unities and differentiations revolves around the interpretation of the πρόοδος. Aquinas views it as a created reality, Palamas instead as uncreated—neither the divine essence, nor created, but the "uncreated energy."<sup>51</sup> I venture to say that Palamas is closer to the intention of Dionysius, who saw the benevolent procession of God as fundamentally *God himself* in self-giving: "a manifestation of himself [God] through [no less than] himself" (DN 4.14, 712C).

### 3. *Divine Differentiations and the Exegesis of Biblical Theophanies*

It is quite evident that the divergent exegesis of Dionysius' statements on the divine procession is part of a larger East-West disagreement situated at the level of metaphysics, where questions such as divine simplicity or the relationship between God and being, are treated quite differently by Aquinas and Palamas. This avenue has already been explored in scholarship.<sup>52</sup> But Dionysius' speculations on the divine procession are not strictly

—"Dionysius has an acute, even desperate feeling for the divine transcendency ... if he was able to maintain that God is the being of all that is, it is precisely because for him God is not being. ... If Denys never has any fears on this score, it is because in his thought there can be no confusion of being between things and God, for the very simple reason that things *are*, while God, since He is the One, *is not*" (Étienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas* [New York: Random House, 1956], 138–39; emphasis mine). However, Gilson notes (*Aquinas*, 139), "if ... we read his doctrine so as to translate it into the language of a theology in which God is essentially being (e.g., Augustine), we make it pantheistic."

48. "... the Barlaamites impiously consider absolute life, goodness and so forth as created because they share the common appellation of beings" (Palamas, *Chapters*, 88).

49. τῶν μετεχομένων ἀλλ' οὐ τῶν μετεχόντων ἐστὶ (Palamas, *Chapters*, 89).

50. Palamas, *Chapters*, 88.

51. Quotes from Palamas' *Chapters* could be easily multiplied, since practically all of chapters 85–150 develop the same topic of the divine energies as distinct from both divine substance and created existence.

52. E.g., Hildegard Schaefer, "Die Christianisierung der Aristotelischen Logik in der byzantinischen Theologie repräsentiert durch Johannes von Damaskus (ca. 750) und Gregor Palamas (ca. 1359)," *Theologia* (1962): 1–21; Jürgen Kuhlmann, *Die Taten des einfachen Gottes: Eine römisch-katholische Stellungnahme zu Palamismus* (Würzburg, 1968); Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 221–62.

a matter of metaphysics. As he says in *Ep.* 9.1 (1105A), God's intelligible providences are defined as his gifts, appearances, powers, attributes, allotments, abodes—in short, all biblical theophanies. The reference here is not to what Perl calls “being as theophany” in Dionysius,<sup>53</sup> but to the biblical texts dealing with appearances of God to the patriarchs and prophets.<sup>54</sup> It is clear that metaphysical speculation on the divine procession is here welded to biblical exegesis—specifically to the exegesis of biblical theophanies—and that serious attention must therefore be given to both.

The same holds true for Dionysius' interpreters. For instance, when John Scotus Eriugena makes a crucial statement about the status of the procession, namely that “not only the divine essence, but also that mode by which God reveals himself to creatures is called ‘God’ in Holy Scripture,” he immediately furnishes a biblical example: Isaiah's vision of the enthroned Lord (Isa 6:1-3).<sup>55</sup> This and other theophanic passages are invoked repeatedly by Palamas as prooftexts for his thesis that the “energetic” procession is no less divine than the hypostatic procession of Son and Holy Spirit.<sup>56</sup> This is not because Palamas needed biblical justification for a “doctrine of God” whose “philosophical structure” relied on the famous “essence-energy distinction.”<sup>57</sup> It is rather that Palamas, a Hesychastic monk, wrote his “Triads in Defense of the Holy Hesychasts” precisely to affirm the monastic claim that such passages reflect real and transformative encounters with God, which remain paradigmatic for the radical life in Christ embodied by his fellow Hesychasts. In any case, just as for Dionysius, for Palamas it is impossible to distinguish speculation on divine differentiations from his exegesis of biblical theophanies.

53. See especially his second chapter, entitled precisely “Being as Theophany” (Perl, *Theophany*, 17–34).

54. Instances of biblical theophanies are God walking in the garden of Eden, conversing with Abraham at Mamre, appearing to Jacob in the dream of the ladder and wrestling with him at Peniel; the anthropomorphic “glory,” “angel,” “fire,” “pillar,” “cloud,” and “glory” on Sinai, which guided the Israelites out of Egypt, and tabernacled in the tent of meeting and, later, in the Temple; the anthropomorphic glory seated on the Ezekiel's chariot-throne and the enthroned “Lord of hosts” in Isaiah; Daniel's “Ancient of days” and “Son of Man”; the God seen “between the two living beings” in the LXX of Habbakuk; the “commander of the army of the Lord” seen by Joshua (Gen 18:1; 28:12–13; 32:24–30; Exod 3:1–15; 13:21–22; 14:19–20; 24:10.17; 34:5–8; Josh 5:13–15; Ezek 1:26–28; Isa 6:1–3; Dan 7:10.13; Hab 3:2 LXX).

55. *Periphyseon* 1, CC 161:9 (O'Meara, 31). The references are to the critical edition and an English translation of Eriugena's *Periphyseon*: Édouard A. Jeuneau, ed., *Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugena Periphyseon* (Corpus Christianorum, 161–65; Turnholt: Brepols, 1996–2003); Eriugena, *Periphyseon* (tr. John O'Meara; Montreal: Bellarmin/Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1987).

56. The examples, especially in the *Triads*, are too numerous to be cited.

57. E.g., Rowan D. Williams, “The Philosophical Structures of Palamism,” *Eastern Churches Review* 9 (1977): 27–44; David Coffey, “The Palamite Doctrine of God: A New Perspective,” *Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 32 (1988): 329–58.



The interpretation of the *proodos* as created can be traced back to John Scotus Eriugena.<sup>58</sup> Eriugena is profoundly familiar with the Dionysian processions, and with whatever other similar notions he finds in the theological writing of “the Greeks”—whether πρωτότυπα, προορίσματα, θεῖα θελήματα, or ἰδεΐαι.<sup>59</sup> For him, these are “primordial causes,” “primary exemplars,” “reasons of all things,” which represent the second division of nature, namely that which *et creatur et creat*, distinct and subordinate to “the Cause of all,” which—significant for his reading of Dionysius—Eriugena identifies explicitly with the Trinity,<sup>60</sup> and which *creat et non creatur*. On the one hand the primordial causes are created by the Father through the Son;<sup>61</sup> on the other hand they serve as means of creating the third level of nature (that which *creatur et non creat*). Vladimir Lossky summarizes the Eriugenian views as follows: “John Scotus Eriugena . . . represents the divine ideas as creatures, the first created principles by means of which God creates the universe (*natura creata creans*). Together with the Easterners, he puts the ideas outside the divine essence, but at the same time he wants to maintain with St. Augustine their substantial character; and so they become their first created essences.”<sup>62</sup> It could be objected that a sharp dividing line between the *uncreated* “Cause beyond causality” and the *created* primordial causes does not exist in Eriugena’s thought. His language of “creation” and “creature” refers not to creation *ex nihilo* but rather to a necessary part of God’s self-intellection,<sup>63</sup> an act of self-manifestation—in short, a theophany.<sup>64</sup> And

58. See the detailed study by Georgi Kapriev, “Eodem sensu utentes? Die Energienlehre der ‘Griechen’ und die causae primordiales Eriugenas,” *Theologische Quartalschrift* 180 (2000): 289–307.

59. *Periphyseon* 2, CC 162:8 (O’Meara, 128–29).

60. *Periphyseon* 2, CC 162:41, 49 (O’Meara, 157, 164).

61. Throughout *Periphyseon* 2 Eriugena insists on reading Gen 1:1 (“In the beginning God made heaven and earth”) as an indication that the Father (“God”) created the primordial causes of the intelligible essences (“heaven”) and the primordial causes of the sensible essences (“earth”) through the Son (“the Beginning”). See *Periphyseon* 2, CC 162:8, 28–29, 30, 38, 39 (O’Meara, 129, 146–47, 148, 155, 156). At *Periphyseon* 3, CC 163:25 (O’Meara, 252–53) he concludes that “concerning the primordial causes of all things it was agreed between us that they were made by the Father in His only-begotten Word.”

62. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1976), 96.

63. *Periphyseon* 3, CC 163:99–100 (O’Meara, 317–18): “The divine nature is seen to be created and to create—for it is created by itself in the primordial causes, and therefore creates itself, that is, allows itself to appear in its theophanies, willing to emerge from the most hidden recesses of its nature in which it is unknown even to itself, that is, it knows itself in nothing because it is infinite and supernatural and supressential and beyond everything that can and cannot be understood; but descending into the principles of things and, as it were, creating itself, it begins to know itself in something.”

64. Joaquín María Alonso, “Teofanía y visión beata en Escoto Eriúgena,” *Revista Española*

yet, Lossky's observation is correct inasmuch as, unlike the divine energies in Byzantine theology, Eriugena's primordial causes are placed one notch below the divine essence.<sup>65</sup> The relation between "Cause beyond causality" and the principal causes is "nothing else but the derivation from a superior essence of the essence that follows [after it]." It is significant that Eriugena calls this "participation" after invoking a false etymology of μετουσία from μετα-ουσία: *post-essentia vel secunda essentia*.<sup>66</sup>

The full import of this distinction between the Cause of all and the primordial causes becomes evident when, following Eriugena's own line of thought in *Periphyseon* 1, one considers it from the perspective of theological epistemology. Needless to say, Eriugena's authority in such matters is the Bible, specifically biblical texts dealing with vision and knowledge of God. He knows well that "not only the divine essence, but also that mode by which God reveals himself to creatures is called 'God' in Holy Scripture."<sup>67</sup> This sounds very much like something Palamas would say; in fact, according to Bernard McGinn, "Eriugena accepted the distinction between God's hidden essence and his manifested energies, or theophanies."<sup>68</sup> This is not surprising, if we assume that the essence-energy distinction was not Palamas' invention, but rather an established way of theologizing since at least the sixth ecumenical council.<sup>69</sup> However, the biblical and patristic affirmations about "seeing God" or "knowing God" mean, for Eriugena, that angels (protologically) and the deified humans (eschatologically) contemplate neither the uncreated divine essence, nor the created primordial causes—since these are also deemed inaccessible and incomprehensible to humans and angels—but rather "images of the reasons," or of "theophanies of these reasons," which he defines, without ambiguity, as "something created," "something made in us by him."<sup>70</sup>

*de Teologia* 10 (1950): 361–89; Tullio Gregory, "Note sulla dottrina delle teofanie in Giovanni Scoto Eriugena," *Studi Medievali* 3 (1963): 75–91; Jean Trouillard, "Erigène et la théophanie créatrice," in *The Mind of Eriugena* (ed., John J. O'Meara and L. Ludwig Bieler; Dublin: Irish U Press, 1973), 98–113; idem, "La notion de théophanie chez Erigène," in *Manifestation et révélation* (ed. Stanislas Breton; Paris: Beauchesne, 1976), 15–39.

65. *Periphyseon* 3, CC 163:21 (O'Meara, 249): "So the Divine Goodness and Essence and Life and Wisdom and everything which is in the source of all things first flow down into the primordial causes and make them to be, then through the primordial causes they descend ... through the order of the universe."

66. *Periphyseon* 3, CC 163:21 (O'Meara, 249).

67. *Periphyseon* 1, CC 161:9 (O'Meara, 31).

68. McGinn, "Visions and Visualizations in the Here and Hereafter," *Harvard Theological Review* 98 (2005): 227–46, at 232.

69. Kapriev, *Eodem sensu utentes?* 290; André de Halleux, "Palamisme et Tradition," *Irénikon* 48 (1975): 479–93. For a careful survey of the sources, see Schaefer, *Christianisierung der Aristotelischen Logik*.

70. *Periphyseon* 1, CC 161:8–12 (O'Meara, 30–33).

Eriugena also raises the question of “what” appears in theophanies in his *Commentary on John*: visionaries claim to have seen God—and again Eriugena points to Isa 6:1-3—but God cannot be seen by humans or angels. What, then, did the patriarchs and prophets see? What do the angels see? What will we see in the eschaton?<sup>71</sup> Eriugena’s solution is the following: “God appears in his theophanies, which are visible or invisible creatures (*creaturae visibiles vel invisibiles*) through which or in which God has often appeared, does appear, and will appear.”<sup>72</sup> Guided by this theological presupposition, Eriugena finds it necessary on occasion to “clarify” Dionysius’ expressions. For instance, *Ep.* 1 (1065A) states the following: “If someone sees God and has understood what has been seen, he has not seen God but something of what is and what is known of God (τι τῶν αὐτοῦ τῶν ὄντων καὶ γιγνοσκομένων).” Eriugena’s translation turns “what has been seen” into a created phenomenon: ... *et si quis eum ... uidisse dixerit, non eum uidit, sed aliquid ab eo factum.*<sup>73</sup>

But where does Eriugena get the notion of created theophanies? By his own admission, on this point he follows the insights of *beatus Augustinus*, who teaches clearly that God appeared “in some creature made subservient, in aliqua subiecta creatura.”<sup>74</sup> At this point it is necessary to digress a bit in order to offer some details about Augustine’s interpretation of theophanies.

The use of Old Testament theophanies is very prominent in the development of early Christian theology.<sup>75</sup> Apologists such as Justin Martyr used

71. *Commentary on John* 25 (SC 180: 118; 122): *non immerito investigandum est quod apparuit; quid ergo sanctae animae hominum et sancti intellectus angelorum vident, dum deum vident, si ipsem deum non vident, quem videre perhibentur?; quid, inquam, vident homines et angeli, vel visuri sunt?* The reference is to the critical edition: Édouard Jeuneau, ed. and trans., *Jean Scot: Commentaire sur l'Évangile de Jean* (SC 180; Paris: Cerf, 1999).

72. *Commentary on John* 25 (SC 180: 124).

73. *Commentary on John* 25 (SC 180: 124–26). For a detailed analysis of this passage, see Lambros Siassos, “Des théophanies créées? Anciennes interprétations de la 1<sup>re</sup> Lettre de Denys l’Aréopagite,” in *Denys l’Aréopagite et sa posterité en orient et en occident*, 227–35.

74. *Commentary on John* 25 (SC 180: 120).

75. For a voluminous dossier of passages illustrating the Christological understanding of theophanies in the first five centuries (from Justin to the Cappadocians, in the East, and Leo of Rome, in the West), see Georges Legeay, “L’Ange et les théophanies dans l’Écriture Sainte d’après la doctrine des Pères,” *Revue Thomiste* 10 (1902): 138–58, 405–24; 11 (1903): 46–69, 125–54. Some scholars have found evidence of very similar concerns in the New Testament. See Anthony Tyrrell Hanson, *Jesus Christ in the Old Testament* (London: SPCK, 1965); Jarl E. Fossum, “Kyrios Jesus as the Angel of the Lord in Jude 5–7,” *New Testament Studies* 33 (1987): 226–43; idem, “In the Beginning was the Name: Onomatology as the Key to Johannine Christology,” in *The Image of the Invisible God: Essays on the Influence of Jewish Mysticism on Early Christology* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 109–33; David Capes, *Old Testament Yahweh Texts in Paul’s Christology* (WUNT 2/47; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992); Walther Binni, Bernardo Gianluigi Boschi, *Cristologia primitiva: Dalla teofania del Sinai all’Io sono giovanneo* (Bologna: Dehoniane, 2004); Charles Gieschen, “The Real Presence of the Son

it as a potent argument in disputes with contemporary Judaism; heresiologists such as Irenaeus or Tertullian used it against Gnostic and Marcionite dualism; others invoked theophanies against modalism. The historical background that is immediately relevant to Augustine's reflection on the subject is the polemical engagement between three parties in the second half of the fourth century: Modalists (who denied the hypostatic existence of the Word, claiming that the three hypostases are merely three "modes" of divine manifestation), Homoians (advocates of the thesis that the Son is "similar," *homoios*, to the Father), and the supporters of Nicaea. It is this three-side theological conflict that spurs the intense debate over the theophanies that is echoed in the first two books of *De Trinitate*, which, as Jean-Louis Maier has shown, "represents saint Augustine's definitive response to the problem of theophanies."<sup>76</sup> The Homoians sought to refute the modalist denial of Christ's preexistence by appealing to theophanies. However, the Homoians also extracted a subordinationist doctrine from theophanies: since the Son was manifested in theophanies, he must be visible in a way that the Father is not, and therefore is inferior to and not of the same nature with the Father. Pro-Nicene writers struggled to affirm the reality of the manifestation of the Logos in OT theophanies, while at the same time denying that this sort of visibility entails the Son's inferiority to the Father. Unsatisfied with the solutions of his predecessors (Hilary, Ambrose, Phoebadius), which he probably perceived as incomplete or deficient, Augustine proposes a revolutionary breakthrough: theophanic phenomena are created and evanescent, brought about by angelic manipulation of matter or by other means.<sup>77</sup> According to the threefold (corporeal, spiritual, and intellectual) hierarchy of vision, which Augustine presents in *De Genesi ad litteram* 12, theophanies exemplify either the bodily vision (Isa 6:1–3; Rev. 1:13–20), or the spiritual vision (Exod 19:33).<sup>78</sup> At any rate, theophanies do not grant the higher, "intellectual," vision; they are relegated from the top to the bottom of the ladder leading to the vision of God, and from the center to the periphery of Christian theology.

Before Christ: Revisiting an Old Approach to Old Testament Christology," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 68 (2004): 105–26.

76. Maier, *Les missions divines selon saint Augustin* (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires Fribourg, 1960), 101–21. Credit goes to Basil Studer's fundamental study *Zur Theophanie-Exegese Augustins. Untersuchung zu einem Ambrosius-Zitat in der Schrift 'De Videndo Deo'* (Studia Anselmiana LIX; Rome: Herder, 1971), and Michel René Barnes' articles "Exegesis and Polemic in Augustine's *De Trinitate* I," *Augustinian Studies* 30 (1999): 43–60, and "The Visible Christ and the Invisible Trinity: Mt. 5:8 in Augustine's Trinitarian Theology of 400," *Modern Theology* 19 (2003): 329–56, for a precise identification of the historical parties involved in the conflict.

77. For details, see Bucur, "Theophanies and Vision of God in Augustine's *De Trinitate*: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective," *Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 52 (2008): 67–93.

78. Cf. *De Trinitate* 2.6.11.

It is this Augustinian heritage that determines Eriugena's approach to biblical theophanies, which is inextricable from his understanding of the divine processions.

In Andrew Louth's opinion, the idea of created theophanies was already present in Dionysius, as part of a general fifth-century shift towards this view.<sup>79</sup> Such a shift, however, cannot be documented East of the Adriatic. On the contrary, authors such as Diadochus of Photike, Maximus the Confessor, John Damascene, as well as the Byzantine hymnographic tradition, carry on an understanding of theophanies as Christophanies.<sup>80</sup> *Pace* Louth, the main and radical difference between Augustine's notion of theophanies and that of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* is that, even under the wrappings of a sophisticated philosophical language, Dionysius espouses the traditional understanding of Old Testament theophanies as Christophanies.<sup>81</sup> In this worldview, as Golitzin has shown, angels do not stand 'between' us and God, at least not in the sense of their blocking our direct access to him and the experience of his light; their role is, rather, one of "leading up to, explanation, and testing of that experience."<sup>82</sup>

With regard to theophanies, Eriugena does not belie his reputation of being a peculiar mediator between Eastern and Western theological views. It is noteworthy in this respect that he continues to affirm the transformative, deifying power of theophanies,<sup>83</sup> and, more importantly, that he retains from

79. Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (Wilton, CT: Morehouse, 1989), 37, 51.

80. See Golitzin, "The Demons Suggest an Illusion of God's Glory in a Form: Controversy over the Divine Body and Vision of Glory in Some Late Fourth, Early Fifth Century Monastic Literature," *Studia Monastica* 44 (2002): 13–43; idem, "The Form of God and Vision of the Glory: Some Thoughts on the Anthropomorphic Controversy of 399 AD," online at [www.marquette.edu/maqom/morphe.html](http://www.marquette.edu/maqom/morphe.html); Ambrosias Giakalis, *Images of the Divine: The Theology of Icons at the Seventh Ecumenical Council* (rev. ed.; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2005), 59 and n. 23; Bucur, "Exegesis of Biblical Theophanies in Byzantine Hymnography: Rewritten Bible?" *Theological Studies* 68 (2007): 92–112.

81. As noted by István Perczel ("Une théologie de la lumière: Denys l'Aréopagite et Evagre le Pontique," *Revue des études augustiniennes* 45 [1999]: 79–120, esp. 82–83), in *CH* 1.2, 121A (Οὐκοῦν Ἰησοῦν ἐπικαλεσάμενοι τὸ πατρικὸν φῶς τὸ ὄν τὸ ἀληθινὸν ὁ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον ἐρχόμενον εἰς τὸν κόσμον), the participle τὸ ὄν can be read either as reinforcing "light" (the fatherly light, the true one), or it can be treated in its own right, which would result in the translation "Jesus, the fatherly light, the 'Existing One' (Exod 3:14)." This second reading is supported by the Syriac manuscript tradition, by stylistic arguments, and by the occurrence of the same construction in *Ep.* 1, 1065A.

82. Golitzin, "Dionysius Arepagites in the Works of Saint Gregory Palamas," 175–76.

83. *Periphyseon* 1, CC 161: 16 (O'Meara, 36): "God, who in himself is incomprehensible, is after a certain mode [i.e., through created manifestations] comprehended in the creature, while the creature itself by an ineffable miracle is changed into God (*in Deo vertatur*)." In the same section of *Periphyseon* 1 (CC 161: 14–16; O'Meara, 35–36) Eriugena uses the traditional imagery of incandescent iron and luminous air to describe the deified creature.

the Greek tradition, including Dionysius, the Christological identification of the object of theophanies.<sup>84</sup> Both the Christological interpretation of theophanies and their transformative power, however, are effectively neutralized by the controlling assumption that theophanies are created manifestations of the divine essence. In Isa 6:1–3, for instance, even though the vision has Christ as its object, what Isaiah saw “is not His [God’s] Essence ... but something created by Him.”<sup>85</sup> To see God means, by analogy with the impressions received from the images of sensible bodies via φαντασίσαι, to receive certain cognitions from the primordial causes via θεοφάνειαι.<sup>86</sup> God (in the strict sense, the divine essence) is never manifested immediately, *per se ipsum*; all is mediated through the bodily, intellectual, or rational theophanies, which are “comprehensible” because they are of like nature with receivers.<sup>87</sup>

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

As mentioned in the introduction, the theological reception of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite in the Christian East and West offers a fascinating and fertile area of research. Like Dionysius’ apophatic theology, his theory on unities and differentiations in the Godhead were received in both the Christian East and West, and played an important role in the theologies of authoritative representatives of the Western and Eastern theological traditions. The Palamite interpretation of the Ps.-Areopagite serves the purpose of affirming the Hesychast paradigm of an experiential theology. Aquinas, on the other hand, exemplifies the scholastic paradigm in which Dionysius (especially the *Divine Names*) is read as foundation for a theological “science.”<sup>88</sup>

The reception of the Dionysian theory of divine unities and differentiations has led to a discussion about how to interpret Dionysius’ πρόοδος.

84. This is true both *in via*—e.g., the visions and raptures of Enoch (Gen 5:23–24), Elijah (4 Kgs 2:11), Job (Job 42:5), Isaiah (Isa 6:1–3), Abraham (Eriugena refers to John 8:56), Moses on Sinai, Peter (Eriugena interprets the confession of Matt 16:16 as the result of a vision), or Paul (2 Cor 12:1–4)—and at the eschaton. See *Periphyseon* 5, CC 165:193–194 (O’Meara, 686). For Isa 6:1–3, see the discussion in Donald Duclow, “Isaiah Meets the Seraph: Breaking Ranks in Dionysius and Eriugena?” in *Eriugena East and West*, 233–52, esp. 237–38.

85. *Periphyseon* 1, CC 161:9 (O’Meara, 31).

86. *Periphyseon* 2, CC 162:69 n. 143 (O’Meara, 181).

87. *Periphyseon* 5, CC 165: 196 (O’Meara, 688): *incomprehensibilem omnique intellectui invisibilem summam ac sanctam trinitatem ... non per se ipsam aspiciunt, sed in theophaniis comprehensibilibus sibi que connaturalibus*. Cf. *Periphyseon* 1, CC 161:15 (O’Meara, 36); *Periphyseon* 2, CC 162:43 (O’Meara, 159).

88. See Rudi te Velde, *Aquinas on God: The ‘Divine Science’ of the Summa Theologiae* (Aldershot–Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), and the above-mentioned studies by John D. Jones, “(Mis?)-Reading the Divine Names as a Science” and “Frameworks for Reading Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite.”

I submit that the divergent interpretations of “procession” in the Christian East and West—as created and, respectively, uncreated, and, in the case of Eriugena, as *natura create creans*—is not only a matter of metaphysics, but also determined by a different understanding of biblical theophanies. More specifically, the divergent interpretation of Dionysius is also a function of “the Augustine factor.”

It seems quite evident that, read through the lens of Augustine’s theology of theophanies—unquestioned in the medieval West but unknown in the East until the fourteenth century—the Dionysian “second procession” could only be understood as pertaining to something created. By the ninth century, the notion of theophanies as created manifestations of the divine essence had become axiomatic truth. Eriugena’s insistence on the eternal need for theophanies, even in the eschatological *visio beatifica*,<sup>89</sup> has not been received either in the East or in the West: it was condemned as a theological error at the University of Paris, in 1241, it was declared heretical by Thomas Aquinas,<sup>90</sup> and it also falls equally short of the Byzantine theology of divine energies because it categorizes theophanies as created.<sup>91</sup> For Eriugena himself, “created” meant of course something rather different from what it had meant to the bishop of Hippo; by the thirteenth century, however, theology in the Latin West has left behind the ambiguity of *natura creata creans*, so that biblical theophanies and Dionysian processions were relegated to the realm of the created, clearly separated from the “uncreated” divine essence.

By contrast, without the Augustinian reading-lens, the Christian East continued to view theophanies as manifestations of God the Word himself. Quite naturally, therefore, Palamas interpreted the Dionysian procession as “a manifestation of himself [God] through [no less than] himself” (*DN* 4.14, 712C) to mean God as ἐνέργεια, no less divine than the οὐσία or the ὑποστάσεις.<sup>92</sup> However, the Palamite view, even though it brings to bear a non-Augustinian understanding of theophanies in its interpretation of Dionysius, is also indebted to Augustine. When writing the *Theological Chapters*, in which he deals extensively with the divine differentiation, Palamas has also read *De Trinitate*. In fact he seems to like some of the so-called psychological analogies, but is obviously dissatisfied with the treatment of theophanies in the earlier books of *De Trinitate*. And so, although Augustine is never referred to by name, the Palamite polemic is targeting not only its direct adversaries, but also their theological source—Augustine.

89. *Periphyseon* 1, CC 161:12 (O’Meara, 33); *Periphyseon* 2, CC 162:43 (O’Meara, 159); *Periphyseon* 5, CC 165: 64–65 n. 2–3 (O’Meara, 577); *Periphyseon* 5, CC 165:95 (O’Meara, 602).

90. Aquinas, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos* cap. 1, lect. 6.

91. This is also the conclusion reached by Kapriev, “Eodem sensu utentes?” 306–07.

92. Palamas, *Chapters*, 75.

Echoing Golitzin, who first suggested this point,<sup>93</sup> I think that the divergent reception of Dionysius in the Christian East and West should be considered in conjunction with the divergent reception of Augustine in Eastern and Western Christianity.

93. Golitzin, "Dionysius Areopagites in the Works of Saint Gregory Palamas," 190: "There may then be the possibility of reading the Hesychast Controversy involved in this exchange, now underway *within* the Orthodox community itself, and dealing—*inter alia*—with the question of how to assimilate Augustine. We would then be confronted with a fascinating analogue to the incorporation of Dionysius within the edifice of Western Christian thought a century and a half earlier."