

## The Odyssey of Dionysian Spirituality

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It would be a challenging project, but a fascinating one, to write the history of Western Christian spirituality in the late patristic and medieval periods primarily or even exclusively on the basis of those neglected writings that are identified in successive volumes of J. P. Migne's *Patrologia Latina* and *Patrologia Graeca* as "spurious" or as "dubious," together with those purportedly authentic writings that in fact belong in the same categories. Bertrand Russell once said, in a celebrated *bon mot*, that he had difficulty telling the difference between a paradox that veils a profound truth and one that is simply nonsense. Similarly, it would seem to be more difficult than current conventional wisdom among theologians suggests to tell the difference between the "pious fraud" of pseudonymity and just plain forgery.

In any event, the pseudonymous works bearing the names of the Greek and Latin church fathers have played an interesting and important role in Western spirituality and in Western theology, sometimes a more important role than the authentic works of the same fathers on the same subjects. For example, during much of the medieval debate over predestination, the *Hypomnesticon* (sometimes called *Hypognosticon*) ascribed to Augustine,<sup>1</sup> with its sharp distinction between divine foreknowledge and divine predestination, was used to correct the potential danger to a responsible spirituality that seemed to proceed from a reading of the authentically Augustinian *On the Predestination of the Saints*, *On the Gift of Perseverance*, and other late works

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<sup>1</sup>For the first scholarly edition of this text and a discussion of alternative theories of its authorship, see John Edward Chisholm, ed., *The Pseudo-Augustinian "Hypomnesticon" against the Pelagians and Celestians* (Freiburg, Switzerland, 1980).

that he had directed against Pelagianism.<sup>2</sup> Again, the treatise *You Compel Me* [*Cogitis me*], composed by the ninth-century Benedictine of Corbie, Paschasius Radbertus, under the name of Saint Jerome,<sup>3</sup> made a far more substantial contribution to the history of Marian spirituality and devotion than any of the genuine works of Jerome,<sup>4</sup> or for that matter than the other principal work of Paschasius Radbertus himself on the subject of the Blessed Virgin Mary, *On the Parturition of Saint Mary* [*De partu Mariae*].<sup>5</sup> It would surely not be difficult for most medievalists to prolong this list, but it would be very difficult indeed to think of a more impressive example in the entire history of medieval spirituality and theology than the body of writings attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite, which for spirituality must stand alongside the *Donation of Constantine* and the pseudo-Isidorian *Decretals* for canon law in any catalog of this puzzling and fascinating genre of Christian literature.

From the introduction and notes that accompany the present definitive English translation of the *Corpus Areopagiticum*, the twentieth-century English reader can learn the present state of the scholarly speculation about the true identity of the Pseudo-Dionysius.<sup>6</sup> That speculation has been going on, as the accompanying essay "Pseudo-Dionysius and the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century" makes clear, ever since the "subapostolic" dating of these writings came under suspicion—for a mixture of scholarly and polemical reasons, though in by no means as simple a way as the textbooks sometimes say<sup>7</sup>—and the end is not yet.<sup>8</sup> Thus perhaps the most provocative hypothesis about the authorship is one that the weight of the arguments set forth by the great scholar of Syriac theology, Joseph Lebon, demonstrated to be untenable.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, it remains tantalizing to

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<sup>2</sup>See Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago, 1971-), vol. 3, pp. 80-95.

<sup>3</sup>Albert Ripberger, ed., *Der Pseudo-Hieronymus-Brief IX "Cogitis me." Ein erster marianischer Traktat des Mittelalters von Paschasius Radbert* (Freiburg, Switzerland, 1962).

<sup>4</sup>Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, pp. 68-74.

<sup>5</sup>J. M. Canal, "La virginidad de Maria según Ratramno y Radberto, monjes de Corbie. Nueva edición de los textos," *Marianum* 30 (1968): 53-160, to be superseded by the critical edition of E. Ann Matter in the *Corpus Christianorum: Continuatio Mediaevalis*.

<sup>6</sup>See the front matter of the reference in fn. 5.

<sup>7</sup>See pp. 33-46.

<sup>8</sup>Hieronymus Engberding, "Zur neuesten Identifizierung des Ps.-Dionysius Areopagita," *Philosophisches Jahrbuch der Görres-Gesellschaft* 64 (1956): 218-27.

<sup>9</sup>Joseph Lebon, "Le Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite et Sévère d'Antioche," *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 26 (1930): 880-915.

ponder the brilliant if erroneous suggestion made in 1928 by Joseph Stiglmayr, <sup>10</sup> on the basis of his researches begun a third of a century earlier on the specific kinds of Neoplatonism at work in Dionysius, <sup>11</sup> that Pseudo-Dionysius was in fact the "Monophysite" Patriarch of Antioch, Severus (ca. 465-538), most of whose writings were destroyed by the Orthodox but survive in "Monophysite" Syriac versions. Stiglmayr argued for his hypothesis on the grounds that Severus was the only Christian writer in approximately the time and place of these works whose genius was equal to that of the great unknown author and whose Neoplatonic-Christian spirituality closely paralleled that of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus. Unacceptable though it is, that hypothesis does serve to remind us that the spirituality of this quasi-apostolic author did not originally have unquestionable credentials entitling it to inclusion in the postbiblical canon of orthodox faith and piety. Therefore the odyssey of Dionysian spirituality, first from the heretical East to the Orthodox East and then from the Orthodox East to the Catholic West, through which it eventually acquired such credentials and was given an honored place in that canon, is an important chapter in the history of Western spirituality.

In what is apparently the earliest known reference to the *Corpus Areopagiticum*, both the authenticity of the books and the orthodoxy of their doctrine and spirituality came into question. It occurs in a report, bearing the title "Epistle of Innocent the Maronite concerning a Conference Held with the Severians [*Innocentii Maronitae epistula de collatione cum Severianis habita*]," on a colloquy held in 532 between a group of orthodox followers of the decrees of the Council of Chalcedon of 451, led by Hypatius of Ephesus, and a group of "Severians," usually called "Monophysites." In an effort to find support in patristic tradition for their devotion to "a single nature of the incarnate Logos," the Severians quoted various authorities, including the Orthodox Alexandrian patriarchs Athanasius and Cyril, Gregory Thaumaturgus, and finally "Dionysius the Areopagite, all of whom assert that there is one nature of God the Logos after the union." <sup>12</sup> It is not clear which texts attributed to these various fathers they specifically cited, but the response of Hypatius of Ephesus is noteworthy. After rejecting their

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<sup>10</sup>Joseph Stiglmayr, "Der sogenannte Dionysius Areopagita und Severus von Antiochien," *Scholastik* 3 (1928): 1-27, 161-89.

<sup>11</sup>Joseph Stiglmayr, "Der Neuplatoniker Proclus als Vorlage des sogen. Dionysius Areopagita in der Lehre vom Uebel," *Historisches Jahrbuch* 16 (1895): 253-73, 721-48.

<sup>12</sup>Reprinted in *Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum* (Strasbourg, 1914-), 4-II: 172.

efforts to claim the spirituality of the other fathers as an authority for their Monophysite teaching, he continued: "Finally, we say what should have been said at the outset. Those quotations that you claim to have come from the Blessed Dionysius the Areopagite—how can you prove that they are authentic, as you maintain? For if they do come from him, they could not have been unknown to the Blessed Cyril." <sup>13</sup> One must be careful not to press this statement too far; but since there are, of course, no quotations at all from Dionysius in the writings of Cyril, the charge of inauthenticity raised by Hypatius may extend to the corpus as a whole rather than merely to one or another passage being quoted by the Severians. In any case, however, it is impossible to overlook the circumstance that the spirituality of the Pseudo-Dionysius—or, if the passages in question do not form part of the present *Corpus Areopagiticum*, would it be more appropriate to say "the pseudo-PseudoDionysius," in the way that students of medieval canon law speak of the earliest texts of the *Donation of Constantine* as "authentic forgeries"?—appeared in this debate as a source of Christological heresy. Nor, on the other hand, did the Orthodox defenders of the Council of Chalcedon counter these quotations with others from Dionysius, presumably authentic, in which he could be shown to have favored a spirituality based on their doctrine of two continuing natures in God the Logos after the incarnation.

There is further evidence for the appreciation of Dionysius among Severus and both his followers and his opponents in the way Dionysius is used in the Syriac texts, Monophysite as well as Nestorian. Thus we find Timothy I, the ninth-century Nestorian Patriarch of Constantinople, endeavoring to determine whether the Syriac translation of Dionysius by a certain Athanasius or that by a certain Phocas was preferable. <sup>14</sup> The renowned master of Nestorian spirituality, Babai the Great (who died c.628), in an exposition of the suspect but influential devotional manual, the *Centuries* of Evagrius Ponticus, made use of the Dionysian parallel between the ecclesiastical hierarchy of bishops and the celestial hierarchy of angels as well as of the treatise *On the Divine Names*, which he ascribed to "Saint Dionysius, the disciple of Paul." <sup>15</sup> There also exists at least one Nestorian com-

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 4-II: 173.

<sup>14</sup>Timothy I *Epistles* 33, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 75: 106 [74: 156].

<sup>15</sup>Babai, *Exposition of the Book of Centuries by Evagrius Ponticus*, ii. 78, ed. Wilhelm Frankenberg, *Evagrius Ponticus* (Berlin, 1912), p. 183 [182]; ii. 17, p. 143 [142].

mentary on Dionysius, that of Josef Hazzaya.<sup>16</sup> But it is far more the Monophysite and Severian Syriac literature of devotion and theology that we find resonating to the distinctive tones of Dionysian spirituality. The elaboration of the various orders and ranks of the angelic hierarchy<sup>17</sup> appears here, too, for example, in Jacob of Edessa,<sup>18</sup> as it does in the Nestorian and the Orthodox writers. But it is evident from the quotations of Dionysius in the writings of Severus, as these quotations have been carefully analyzed by Lebon in his critique of Stiglmayr, that Dionysian spirituality provided Severus and his followers with formulas and ideas not alone for their general spirituality, but specifically for the spirituality associated with their doctrine of the person of Christ, including the characteristic phrase "composite operation [*energeia synthetos*]," which seems to have been Severus's adaptation of a Dionysian formula.<sup>19</sup> Therefore Theodosius I of Alexandria, a sixth-century apologist for Severus against the Chalcedonians, could claim that "Severus, of blessed memory, was no less assiduous and no less careful in his reading of the books of Saint Dionysius than they."<sup>20</sup> And as Guillaumont has noted, there are some striking parallels between Dionysius and the so-called *Book of Hierotheos* of Stephan Bar Soudaili, a Monophysite whose spirituality and theology stood in the tradition of Origen and Evagrius.<sup>21</sup> All of this served only to corroborate suspicions of the sort voiced by Hypatius of Ephesus in 532.

It would seem, moreover, that these suspicions of the doctrinal rectitude of Dionysian spirituality were by no means an isolated instance. Apparently the first scholar to compose glosses on Dionysius was John of Scythopolis, who was, as both Hans-Georg Beck<sup>22</sup> and

<sup>16</sup> Adolf Rucker, "Aus dem mystischen Schrifttum nestorianischer Mönche des 6.-8. Jahrhunderts," *Orientalische Stimmen zum Erlösungsgedanken*, ed. Franz Gustav Taeschner (Leipzig, 1936), p. 46.

<sup>17</sup> See pp. 143-191 below.

<sup>18</sup> Jacob of Edessa, *Exposition of the Haexaameron*, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 97: 6 (92: 8).

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Lebon, "La christologie du monophysisme syrien," *Das Konzil von Chalkedon: Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Aloys Grillmeier and Heinrich Bacht, 3 vols. (Würzburg, 1951), vol. 1, pp. 558-59.

<sup>20</sup> Theodosius of Alexandria, *Oration 6*, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 103: 52 [17: 75].

<sup>21</sup> A. Guillaumont, *Les "Kephalai Gnostica" d'Evagre le Pontique et l'histoire de l'origénisme chez les Grecs et chez les Syriens* (Paris, 1962), pp. 302-32.

<sup>22</sup> Hans-Georg Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich* (Munich, 1959), p. 376.

Charles Moeller <sup>23</sup> have said, the first defender of Orthodox spirituality to have been an intellectual and scholarly match for Severus of Antioch. As we now know, those glosses must be disentangled from the authentic glosses on Dionysius by Maximus Confessor, with which they have been conflated in the manuscript tradition. <sup>24</sup> The dominant *Tendenz* of John's glosses was to bring Dionysius into conformity with Orthodox spirituality and dogma. <sup>25</sup> That effort was made necessary not only because the language of Dionysius could easily be misconstrued and needed glossing, but especially because he had come under fire. "There are some," John of Scythopolis (now Pseudo-Maximus the Confessor) writes in his preface, "who have the audacity [*tolmá*] to reproach the divine Dionysius with heresies, but they are utterly ignorant of what the heretics teach." <sup>26</sup> The use of the plural "heresies" suggests that Dionysius was being accused (by unspecified critics) of error on more than one doctrine, more, that is, than the doctrine of the person of Christ. This impression is confirmed when John of Scythopolis goes on to refer not only to the doctrine of the person of Christ, but to the doctrine of the Trinity. For the form that the dispute over Christology was taking at this time had once more involved the doctrine of the Trinity. Significantly, it was from the area of liturgy and spirituality, rather than of dogma and speculation, that the issue arose: Was it permissible to say in the language of prayer and worship, "One of the Trinity was crucified for us"? Now obviously, as Werner Elert points out, "no Monophysite ever had the intention of predicating the crucifixion of the Trinity; they were always referring only to the person of the Son." <sup>27</sup> But it was apparently necessary to vindicate the spirituality of Dionysius by establishing his loyalty to the Council of Nicaea as well as to the Council of Chalcedon.

An interesting example of how John of Scythopolis facilitated the odyssey of Dionysian spirituality from the heretical East to the orthodox East occurs in his comments on a passage in the third book of The

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<sup>23</sup> Charles Moeller, "Le chalcédonisme et le néo-chalcédonisme en Orient de 451 à la fin du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle," in Grillmeier and Bacht, *Chalkedon*, 1: 675, n. 105.

<sup>24</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Das Scholienwerk des Johannes von Skythopolis," *Scholastik* 15 (1940): 16-38.

<sup>25</sup> On the relation of Maximus to Dionysius, see the introductions by George Berthold and by Jaroslav Pelikan in the volume *Maximus Confessor* in this series.

<sup>26</sup> John of Scythopolis, *Prologue to the Works of Saint Dionysius*, *Patrologia Graeca*, 4:20.

<sup>27</sup> Werner Elert, *Der Ausgang der altkirchlichen Christologie* (Berlin, 1957), p. 106.

*Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. <sup>28</sup> Dionysius speaks there of "how out of love for humanity Christ emerged from the hiddenness of his divinity to take on human shape, to be utterly incarnate among us *while yet remaining unmixed*." Although there are other passages in Dionysius that could— and indeed did—connect his spirituality to that of the Monophysites, or any rate to that of Severus, as we shall see at greater length a bit later, this formulation gave his commentator just the handle he needed to dissociate Dionysius from any spirituality that would deny to the incarnate Logos after the union a full and distinct human nature. "He says, 'complete in every respect,' " John explained, "inasmuch as [Christ] assumed both a rational soul and a body. And he very aptly says 'utterly incarnate among us while yet remaining unmixed,' because [Christ] remained God when he appeared as man, preserving the properties of each nature." "And this," he added, "should be taken note of in opposition to the Apollinarians." <sup>29</sup> Both the term "unmixed [*asynchytō*]" and the formula "preserving the properties of each nature" are, of course, echoes of the decree of the Council of Chalcedon in 451, and elsewhere the commentator had to explain how a (presumably) first-century writer could have had the prescience to quote the language of the fifth century; <sup>30</sup> moreover, they represent that pole of Orthodox spirituality that stressed the distinction of the natures against the "Eutychian" tendency to confuse them. As interpreted by his later Orthodox commentator, Dionysius the Areopagite emerges as one whose spirituality was exactly the same as that of the Council of Chalcedon and who, in fact, anticipated the key formulations of Chalcedonian spirituality by four centuries or so.

In addition to the doctrine of the person of Christ, however, there were other areas of doctrine that might have made the spirituality of Pseudo-Dionysius seem suspect, particularly when it would come to the West. One of these was the status of sacraments administered by priests who were themselves not in a state of grace, the issue in the Donatist controversy that occupied a large part of Augustine's public life. In *Epistle 8*, <sup>31</sup> Dionysius takes up the question of "impious priests or those convicted of some other unseemliness," and asks: "How then

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<sup>28</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 3.13 (p. 222 below).

<sup>29</sup> John of Scythopolis, *Scholia on "The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy" 3.13*, *Patrologia Graeca*, 4: 149-52.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>31</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius *Epistle 8.2* (see pp. 274f. below).

could the priests be the interpreters of God? ... Living in darkness, how could they bring light to others?" To this he answers: "He who does not bestow illumination is thereby excluded from the priestly order and from the power reserved to the priesthood. For he is unilluminated.... This is no priest. He is an enemy, deceitful, selfdeluded, a wolf in sheep's clothing ready to attack the people of God." Now these are the ideas, and in some instances even the very phrases, of the rigoristic and "puritanical" spirituality against which Augustine contended at the beginning of the fifth century. Petilianus, the Donatist bishop of Cirta in Numidia, as quoted by Augustine, used the words of Matthew 7:15-16 about "wolves in sheep's clothing" as a description of the Catholic clergy, <sup>32.</sup> and he stated the stern demands of Donatist spirituality when he declared: "We look to the conscience of the one who administers the sacrament in a state of holiness to cleanse that of the one who receives it." <sup>33.</sup> At least in the passage just quoted from *Epistle 8*, this would also appear to be the position of PseudoDionysius. The controversy over the schism occasioned by Donatist spirituality was almost exclusively Western, chiefly North African, although the emperor Constantine and several of his successors were obliged to deal with Donatism both as schism and as sedition. <sup>34.</sup>

Chiefly it was the spirituality of Augustine in which, through the definition of sacramental character as a gift distinct from the gift of sacramental grace itself, it became possible to root the holiness of the Church in the objective holiness of the sacraments rather than in the subjective holiness of either the minister or the recipient of the sacraments. Yet there are parallels to this in the spirituality of the Greek church fathers. Basil of Caesarea, for example, asserted that "the Church of God would be pure" by virtue of its fidelity to the teaching of the fathers of the Council of Nicaea, <sup>35.</sup> and he made no reference to the state of sanctification of either clergy or members as a condition of this purity. But as one scholar has noted, there is in Dionysius's spirituality as it deals with the Church and the sacraments "only one concept that is emphasized above all: the measure of light imparted is determined by the condition of the subject." <sup>36.</sup> Despite the authorities

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<sup>32.</sup> Augustine, *Answer to the Letters of Petilianus, Bishop of Cirta* ii.16.36.

<sup>33.</sup> Ibid. ii.3.6.

<sup>34.</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* x. 5.18-20.

<sup>35.</sup> Basil of Caesarea, *Epistle* 114.

<sup>36.</sup> Joseph Stiglmayr, "Die Lehre von den Sakramenten und der Kirche nach Ps.-Dionysius," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 22 (1898): 303.

such as Cyprian, with whom Pseudo-Dionysius manifests some affinities,<sup>37</sup> who might be claimed for this concept, such a spirituality does seem to lead, when consistently carried out, closer to the Donatist than to the Augustinian definition of the holiness of the Church.

Potentially more dangerous than these overt statements of Dionysius, however, is the place that is occupied (and, even more, the place that is *not* occupied) in his spirituality by the cardinal doctrines of the Trinity and the incarnation.<sup>38</sup> In his Trinitarian doctrine, to quote René Roques, Dionysius "appears to be substantially orthodox,"<sup>39</sup> and his Trinitarian language is quite conventional. Elsewhere Roques shows that for Proclus "all the orders of reality are divided into three terms.... All reality is conceived of in a triadic model."<sup>40</sup> In adapting this triadic model to the ecclesiastical and celestial hierarchies, Dionysius elaborated the analogy of the uncreated divine Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit with these created trinities. When Dionysian spirituality emigrated to the West, it could therefore attach itself to Saint Augustine's idea of the "vestiges of the Trinity" in the human mind, producing the interaction that becomes visible, for example, in the spirituality of Bonaventure.<sup>41</sup> But for the understanding of that "emigration" to the West, it is essential to keep in mind the fundamental difference between the Trinitarian spirituality of Pseudo-Dionysius and the Trinitarian spirituality of Augustine in *On the Trinity*. Augustine felt entitled to propose such analogies only after he had expounded, both theologically and exegetically, the Catholic dogma of the Trinity, with its full implications for spirituality and morals. On the other hand, Dionysius manifests relatively little interest in the dogma of the Trinity as such, and his spirituality moves immediately into the analogies.

The most notorious statement—or, as the Yugoslav scholar Jossip Mariü calls it, "the most celebrated formula"<sup>42</sup>—of Dionysian spirituality, and the one with the most momentous consequences for its Westward odyssey, affected the doctrine of the person of Christ rather than the doctrine of the Trinity as such. It occurred in the fourth of

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<sup>37</sup>Cf. René Roques, *L'Univers dionysien* (see p. 5 above), p. 297, n. 5.

<sup>38</sup>See the comments in my "Introduction" to *Maximus Confessor*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>39</sup>Roques, *L'Univers dionysien*, p. 305.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., pp. 73, 75.

<sup>41</sup>See the Introduction to the volume of Bonaventure in this series.

<sup>42</sup>Jossip Mariü, "Pseudo-Dionysii Areopagitae formula christologica celeberrima de Christi activitate thendrica: Secunda quaestio praevia ad Novam Apologiam Honorii I papae," *Bogoslovska smotra* 20 (1932): 105-73.

the *Epistles*: "It was not by virtue of being God that he did divine things, not by virtue of being a man that he did what was human, but rather, by the fact of being God-made-man he accomplished something new in our midst—the activity of the God-man." <sup>43</sup> So, at any rate, the text has been transmitted. In some versions of the transmission, however, the crucial phrase "something new in our midst, the activity of the God-man [*kain•n tina t•n theandrik•n energeian*]" is replaced by "a single activity of the God-man [*mian theandrik•n energeian*]," making Dionysius an even more explicit proponent of the theory that there was in the incarnate Logos a single "operation [*energeia*]." The story of the controversy occasioned by the Dionysian formula has been told several times, <sup>44</sup> but it is pertinent also to this account of the odyssey of Dionysian spirituality. If Dionysius said that there was "a single activity of the God-man," but even if he only said that there was "the activity of the God-man," this is still in the singular; and that is the crucial problem. For the status of Dionysian spirituality in the medieval West, consequently, it is an inescapable question: How did Pseudo-Dionysius manage to escape a condemnation that, in the course of these very controversies over "one operation [*energeia*]" or "two operations [*energeiai*]" and over "one will" or "two wills" in Christ, struck down not only Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople, Bishop of New Rome, but Pope Honorius I, Bishop of Old Rome?

To be sure, modern Western scholarship has not dealt fairly with all of this. Thus it was a manifest distortion when the nineteenth-century Protestant historian of dogma, Ferdinand Christian Baur, charged that Dionysius "substituted something quite different for the factual Incarnation," or when an even more eminent nineteenth-century Protestant historian of dogma, Adolf von Harnack, concluded that for Dionysius "the historical Christ is ... a symbol of the universal cleansing and sanctifying activity" of the Logos and little more. <sup>45</sup> Therefore it is a useful corrective for scholars when Hans Urs von Balthasar points out that "the Monophysitism of the Areopagite, which is often treated as though it were an obvious fact, does not seem

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<sup>43</sup> Dionysius, *Epistle* 4, p. 265 below.

<sup>44</sup> With references to previous literature, cf. Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, 2: 6566.

<sup>45</sup> Adolf von Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, 3 vols. (5th ed.; Tübingen, 1931), vol. 2, p. 170.

to have been established" historically. <sup>46.</sup> Whatever the status of his alleged "Monophysitism" may be, however, his "Monenergism" does indeed seem to be an "obvious fact"; and Monenergism was condemned, too. That remains so even after putting as charitable a construction as possible on his words. It has been argued that his interest was in spirituality rather than in the nuances of dogmatics, and that therefore he could not have anticipated the technical debate over whether "operation [*energeia*]" belonged to "nature" or to "person [*hypostasis*]." This allowed him to ascribe it in the singular to the Godman rather than in the plural to each of the natures. But such an exoneration would do no more than to put his statement into the same class with that of Pope Honorius. For Honorius affirmed: "We confess a single will [*unam voluntatem*] of our Lord Jesus Christ, because our nature has truly been assumed by the divinity." <sup>47.</sup> In the simple and literal sense of the words, then, Honorius was clearly a "Monothelete," and Dionysius was a "Monenergist." That is to say, each of them espoused a spirituality that required a singular in such formulas, whereas the official doctrine eventually declared for the dual form and condemned the single. And yet the hapless Pope Honorius was hereticized by the Third Council of Constantinople in 681, with repercussions that could still be heard in the debates over papal infallibility at the First Council of the Vatican in 1870. But Dionysius was rescued and given the position of what we must, somewhat anachronistically, call an "apostolic father." Thomas Aquinas does not seem even to have mentioned the case of Pope Honorius, but he quoted Dionysius about 1,700 times.

One reason for this success is that the pseudonym worked. The brief reference to "Dionysius the Areopagite" in Acts 17:34 was simply too fascinating to be left alone. As the story of Barnabas in the Book of Acts quickly led to the tradition that he was the first bishop of Cyprus or of Milan and that he was the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews or of the epistle that bears his name, so the Athenian convert was to acquire first a diocese and then an authorship (and then a second diocese). If we are to believe Eusebius, <sup>48.</sup> Dionysius of Corinth (about whom we apparently know nothing except what Eusebius re-

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<sup>46.</sup>Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Scholienwerk," p. 17.

<sup>47.</sup>Honorius I, *Epistle 4, Patrologia Latina*, 40: 472.

<sup>48.</sup>Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* iii.4.11.

ports) identified Dionysius the Areopagite as the first bishop of Athens. This citation occurs in a chapter of Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History* devoted to documenting the apostolic succession of various sees. Eusebius, with his penchant for apostolic succession, could be counted on not to miss any references to the continuity between the immediate pupils of the apostles and the episcopal centers of his own time. Significantly, it was this very Eusebian penchant that helped to endear his history, as it was reworked and incorporated into the *Tripartite History* of Cassiodorus, to medieval Western readers as well. <sup>49</sup> In the course of this migration to the West, Dionysius the Areopagite acquired even further prestige, when Hilduin of Saint-Denis, who was responsible for the first translation of the *Corpus Areopagiticum* into Latin, also wrote a hagiographical account of the *Passio sanctissimi Dionysii*, <sup>50</sup> in which the Areopagite was identified with Dionysius, bishop of Paris.

Now anyone who had been converted by a sermon of Saint Paul that has been cited almost from the beginning as the justification for doing apologetics as part of the task of theology could have been expected to describe in writing the nature of his conversion and the meaning of the true relation between Athens and Jerusalem. That he did so in the form of treatises in spirituality, rather than of treatises that were explicitly apologetic in methodology and purpose, only helped to confirm his status in the West, as it had in the East. What is surprising, at least in some ways, is not that some writings were eventually fathered on him, but that it took so long. In a monograph written almost a century ago but still extremely important, Stiglmayr painstakingly assembled practically all of the evidence then available on the almost immediate and almost complete success of the pseudonymity. Even though von Balthasar suggests, a bit coyly, that John of Scythopolis may have known more than he would let on about who the real author of the *Corpus Areopagiticum* was, <sup>51</sup> he does not seem to want us to take this *obiter dictum* very seriously.

In a way, however, it is tautological to say that the odyssey of this pseudonymous work was successful: The spirituality of Dionysius was accepted as authoritative also in the West because he was believed to carry authority. It seems to be a valid generalization that

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<sup>49</sup> On the *Tripartite History*, see James J. O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1979), pp. 246-47.

<sup>50</sup> *Patrologia Latina*, 106: 23-50.

<sup>51</sup> Balthasar, "Scholienwerk," p. 38.

pseudonymity usually succeeds only if it manages to set down on paper what everyone—or at least the "right people"—will recognize as commonly received truth. Thus, to advert to the other works mentioned at the beginning, after the debates during the century between the death of Augustine in 430 and the Synod of Orange in 529, "everyone knew" that Augustine had not really taught double predestination after all; and it only remained for the *Hypomn•sticon* to supply pseudonymous documentation of that common consciousness. By the ninth century, the spirituality devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary even in the Latin West had reached the point where a pseudonymous epistle such as *Cogitis me*, proceeding on the basis of the liturgical celebration of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin as "happy [*felix*]" and "blessed [*beata*]," could urge that there was something special about how she received birth, not only about how she gave birth: Pseudonymity here was a way for Marian spirituality about the Immaculate Conception to begin the development that would finally carry it, about a millennium later, to the status of Marian dogma.

As noted earlier, it had been the historic accomplishment of Maximus Confessor to purge Dionysian spirituality of the interpretations that would have connected it to one or another heresy. The special status of Maximus as a saint and hero of the faith for both West and East lent his aura also to the Dionysian writings. The medieval Western use of Dionysius carried this process still further. Thus, to cite one example among literally thousands, Thomas Aquinas, commenting on a passage from *The Divine Names*, quoted the authority of Dionysius for the thesis that "from creatures we arrive at God in three ways, namely, by way of causality, by way of removal, and by way of eminence." <sup>52</sup> As Chenu says, "*de facto*, the entire Dionysian doctrine is thus reversed." <sup>53</sup>

Through his first odyssey, from the heretical East to the Orthodox East, the spirituality of this "Maximized" Dionysius had been purged of any lingering suspicions about his orthodoxy, well before the time of his second odyssey, from the Orthodox East to the Catholic West. Even the association of this spirituality with the mystifying speculations of John the Scot, through his translation of Dionysius, did not manage to deprive it of this standing; and, after all, John the

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<sup>52</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the "Sentences"* i.3.div.

<sup>53</sup> Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, trans. A.-M. Landry and D. Hughes (Chicago, 1964), p. 229.

Scot translated Maximus as well. The massive compilations by Philippe Chevallier have begun to make possible an assessment of the treatment given to the *Corpus* by successive Latin translators, up to and including Ficino; <sup>54.</sup> and it has become a widely accepted view that Dionysian spirituality and speculation may have been more influential in the West than in the East. If that is true, it was not primarily because of any disaffection toward it in the East, but because of the plethora of other works embodying it. In the West, by contrast, there had been no Origen, no Gregory of Nyssa; but there had, of course, been an Augustine. As I mentioned earlier, the most fascinating aspect of the westward odyssey of Dionysian spirituality is the interaction between the Neoplatonism of Dionysius and the Neoplatonism of Augustine (with perhaps the Neoplatonism of Boethius as a third partner). Each had a distinctive metaphysic; but more importantly, each was the fountainhead for a distinctive piety and devotion. And when they came together, as for example in both Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas, the result was a spirituality in which intellectuality and fervor were fused—as indeed they had uniquely been in the writings collected here.

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<sup>54.</sup>Philippe Chevallier, *Dionysiaca. Recueil donnant l'ensemble des traditions latines des ouvrages attribués au Denys de l'Aréopage*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1937-1950).