Apophaticism, Mysticism, and Epoptics in Ancient and Patristic Philosophy: Some Important Examples

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Abstract: This article investigates mystic apophaticism in a set of Greek Patristic theologians, profoundly informed by philosophy, especially imperial Platonism: Clement, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Pseudo-Dionysius. Both the terminology and the argumentative structure will be examined in each author and important connections among themselves and with 'pagan' Neoplatonists (including Plotinus, Porphyry, and Proclus) will be drawn. The reciprocal interrelations among epoptics, ἔρως and ἀγάπη, epektasis, and ἐπιστροφή and ἀποκατάστασις will be pointed out. The article will argue for the intended double-reference strategy to both 'pagan' and Christian Platonism, as well as Dionysius' veiled response to Porphyry qua accuser of Origen, and the meaning of the charge, levelled against Dionysius himself, of "making unholy use of Greek things"—which is what 'pagans' had already charged Origen with. Dionysius retorted, "it is the Greeks who make unholy use of godly things to attack God!", and this is again what Origen had responded.

Keywords: patristic philosophy, mystic apophaticism, Clement, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Pseudo-Dionysius, Plotinus, Porphyry, Proclus, epoptics, *mystica*, ἔρως and ἀγάπη, epektasis, ἐπιστροφή and ἀποκατάστασις, simultaneous double-reference strategy, Dionysius' attack on Porphyry, the "parricide" charge

I set out to explore how "epoptics," which designates theology as contemplation or metaphysics in ancient and Patristic thought, ideally culminates in a mystical, apophatic union with God. "Epoptics" belongs to mystery terminology. In late Neoplatonism, μυστικός points to contemplation, unity with the divinity, and meta-cognitive experience of the divine. In Proclus, ἡ μυστική (παράδοσις) indicates the mystical tradition, which goes back to the mystery cults, but interpreted in a philosophical light.[1]

In Neoplatonism, thus, one begins to find the meaning generally attached to "mysticism" and "mystic," implying union with the divinity or the spiritual apprehension

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1   Proclus, *In Parm.* 779f.; cf. Proclus, *In Tim.* 3.12D.

of knowledge inaccessible to the intellect. It is an apophatic approach. In this respect, the connection between mysticism and apophaticism is clear.[2] According to Theon of Smyrna, "epoptics" for Plato coincided with metaphysics, the study of the Forms/Ideas (*Exp.math.* 15, 16–18, Hiller). According to Plutarch, *Is.* 77, 382DE, for Plato and Aristotle epoptics studied "what is first, simple, and immaterial." Aristotle himself treated theology as a synonym of metaphysics, as opposed to physics: "The theoretical branches of philosophy are three: mathematics, physics, and theology [μαθηματική, φυσική, θεολογική]."[3] The equivalence between epoptics and metaphysics was open to the equivalence between "epoptics" and theology, especially in the definition of Plutarch. This applied to Plato and Aristotle according to the Platonist Plutarch, but became a regular correspondence in Patristic Platonism, especially in Origen, as we shall see: epoptics points to the mystery of the divinity and apophatic theology.

The Greek Fathers recurrently used μυστήριον in reference to the Christian mysteries and the allegorical use of Scripture—although they employed it also in reference to "pagan" mystery cults. Clement has 54 occurrences of μυστικός and 92 of μυστήριον; Origen 134 of μυστικός and 333 of μυστήριον. The latter is so frequent in his works because it is related to the mystical sense of Scripture and Biblical allegoresis, of which he probably is the main exponent in Christianity; a parallel meaning is detectable also in "pagan" Neoplatonism, where allegoresis of ancient myths was part and parcel of philosophy as well, and specifically of theology.[4]

The theology–mysteries connection is well attested already in Philo.[5] In *Cher.* 42 he claims to teach as a hierophant "the divine mysteries" (τελετὰς θείας) only to those initiates (μύστας) who are worthy of the most sacred mysteries (τελετῶν τῶν ἱεροτάτων). These are those who practice the true piety (εὐσέβειαν). Here, we see the virtue of piety as central to the knowledge of God: a characteristic of Philo.[6] Philo can present himself as a hierophant who initiates others because he in turn has been initiated into Moses' "great mysteries" (μεγάλα μυστήρια, *Cher.* 49—a terminology that Clement will abundantly deploy), which enabled him to reach "the knowledge of the Cause and of virtue" (*Cher.* 48). In this way, Philo keeps to what I have called "the dialectics of apophatic theology": he speaks of the knowledge of God, the Cause, but at the same time he warns that this knowledge is a mystery.[7]

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[2] See Ramelli, "The Divine as Inaccessible Object," 167–188.

[3] Aristoteles, *Metaph.* 1026a18.

[4] As I argued in Ramelli, "The Philosophical Stance of Allegory," 335–371; further in Ramelli, "Allegorizing and Philosophizing," 331–348.

[5] On Philo's apophaticism see Mrugalski, "The Platonic-Biblical Origins," 499–528 in this same issue; thus, I do not treat it here.

[6] See Sterling, "The Queen of the Virtues," 103–124.

[7] Ramelli, "Philo's Dialectics of Apophatic Theology," 36–92.

Clement of Alexandria

Clement in *Strom.* II 6, 1, mindful of Philo, casts Moses' entrance into the darkness on Mount Sinai as a journey towards the intelligible realities, the Tabernacle containing ('Middle Platonically') the paradigms of the cosmos with all existing beings, to which only Christ-Logos grants access as to "the great mysteries" (*Strom.* II 134, 2). According to Clement, as already to Philo, Abraham sees the place of God from far away (Gen 22:4) because the place of God is difficult to reach.[8] This is what Plato called "the region of Ideas/Forms" (χώρα ἰδεῶν), having learnt from Moses that it is a region because it encompasses the multiplicity and totality of beings (*Strom.* V 11, 73, 3; elsewhere in the *Stromateis*, too, Clement equates the χώρα ἰδεῶν with *nous,* primarily God's Nous, but also the *nous* in every human being. In *Strom.* IV 25, 155, 2 – 157, 2, Clement begins to speak of a God posited by Plato that contemplates the Ideas (τὸν τῶν ἰδεῶν θεωρητικὸν θεόν), like Numenius' θεωρητικός God (F16, 10–12), because it contains the Forms of all, as Christ-Logos-Wisdom would do in Origen. Clement is observing that, according to Plato, the νοῦς, or Intellect, is like a divinity which is able to contemplate the Ideas and the invisible God and inhabits the human beings (155, 2). The νοῦς is the seat of the Ideas, and is itself God, as God is νοῦς (νοῦς δὲ χώρα ἰδεῶν, νοῦς δὲ ὁ θεός). Note the recurrence of the expression χώρα ἰδεῶν. Now, this god who can contemplate the invisible God (τὸν ἀοράτου θεοῦ θεωρητικὸν θεόν) lives within humans and is also human νοῦς; indeed, Socrates called 'god' the Stranger of Elea, because he was most dialectic. The soul depicted by Plato, absorbed in the contemplation of the Ideas and detached from the sense-perceptible world, is assimilated by Clement to an angel who is with Christ, contemplates (is θεωρητικός), and always looks at the will of God (155, 4). Clement, building up the equation, soul : Ideas = angel : Christ, draws a parallel, not only between the soul and an angel, but also between the Ideas and Christ. This becomes clear on the basis of Clement's very notion – surely partially indebted to Philo – of Christ as Logos and, as such, as the seat of the Ideas (again, χώρα ἰδεῶν).[9]

In *Strom.* V 1, 73, 3, Clement is using again Philo's exegesis of Gen 22:4. Concerning divine appellatives, such as One, Good, Nous, Being, or Father, "none of these, taken separately, can designate God, but all of them together indicate (ἐνδεικτικά) the power of the universal Master" (*Strom.* V 12, 82, 1–2). For Clement, as for Philo, no divine name reveals the essence of God; thus, in *Protr.* 11, 114, 1–2, God is inaccessible light. A divine name rather indicates a divine power and activity, which is knowable. The knowledge of God can be only knowledge of God's manifestations in

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8   See the article on Philo by Damian Mrugalski, "The Platonic-Biblical Origins," 499–528 in this same issue. Therefore, I do not treat Philo's apophaticism unless in connection with Clement and very sparingly.
9   Argument in Ramelli, "The Logos/Nous One–Many"; Dillon – Tolan, "The Ideas as Thoughts of God," 34–52.

the world through divine powers-activities such as creation and providence, which do not convey the knowledge of God's essence. Indeed, there can be knowledge of the Divinity itself, but not discursive or intellectual knowledge, namely not dualistic knowledge as a cognitive relation of knower and known—something that Plotinus later will locate at the level of the Nous, but which the superior One transcends: thence, only mystical, non-dualistic knowledge is possible in the case of the One, as Plotinus emphasises[10]—but a mystical knowledge, which is not dichotomous in the knower-known divide, but unitive. Within such a framework, it will not come as a surprise that, like Plutarch and Clement,[11] Philo characterised the instruction in the "Mosaic philosophy" as an initiation into the mysteries.[12] In *Cher.* 42–48 Philo speaks of the knowledge of God in terms of piety and adopts mystery terminology— just as Clement and Origen will do when speaking of theology as "epoptics."[13]

In *Strom.* VII 10, 57, 1–4 Clement describes the soul endowed with "gnosis," which dwells in what is divine and saint, as in a state of "apokatastasis or restitution to the highest place of rest." This will mean to see God "face to face," with a pure heart. In *Strom.* V 71, 2 Clement assimilates "pagan" mystery purification to Christian confession, and in IV 3, 1 he appropriates for the Christians the terminology of initiation to the mysteries and connects mystery to gnosis, in that initiation to mysteries is a high form of knowledge. Origen, as we shall see, will remember this when calling the highest part of Christian philosophy "epoptics"/ἐποπτεία, corresponding to theology.

Clement's terminology of mystery and mysticism revolves around μυστήριον, a term that means both "pagan" mystery cults and Christian mysteries or hidden/ symbolic truths. References to "pagan" mystery religions are found in *Protrepticus,* while in *Stromateis* these are few. What Clement appreciates is the secrecy of these cults: the Egyptians "did not hand their μυστήρια to anybody, nor did they divulge the knowledge of divine things among the profane" (*Strom.* V 41, 1). In *Strom.* V 70, 7 – 71, 1 and VII 27, 6 Clement praises the purification for those initiated to "pagan" mysteries before they could access contemplation (ἐποπτεύειν).[14] He highlights that in Christianity the path was the same: in V 71, 2 he explicitly assimilates "pagan" mystery purification to Christian confession, and in IV 3, 1 he appropriates for the Christians the terminology of initiation to the lesser and greater mysteries.[15]

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10 See Ramelli, "The Divine as Inaccessible Object."
11 For Clement see Ramelli, "The Mysteries of Scripture," 80–110; for Plutarch, see *Is.* 68, 378B: "We must take the *logos* that comes from philosophy as a mystagogue." A comparison between Philo's and Plutarch's theology is offered by Brenk, "Philo and Plutarch," 79–92.
12 See on Philo Cohen, "The Mystery Terminology in Philo," 173–188.
13 Clemens Alexandrinus, *Strom.* I, 176, 3; I, 15, 2; V, 66, 1–4; *Div.* 37. See Ramelli, "Patristic Exegesis," 100–132.
14 See also Clemens Alexandrinus, *Strom.* I 1, 13, 1; 15, 2; IV 1, 3, 1.
15 Clemens Alexandrinus, *Strom.* V 11, 70, 6 – 71, 1; VI 15, 129, 4.Clement elaborates on mystery terminology and Christianises it in many passages, e.g. IV 8, 68, 4.

He also connects mystery to gnosis, because initiation to mysteries is a high form of knowledge, and calls contemplation (ἐποπτεία) "the fourth kind of theology," the highest, which Plato said to belong to the great mysteries and Aristotle called metaphysics (*Strom.* I 28, 176, 2,1). The aforementioned Plutarch already spoke of "the epoptic part of philosophy," ἐποπτικὸν μέρος τῆς φιλοσοφίας, which Plato and Aristotle had as metaphysics (*Is. Os.* 382D).

In *Strom.* V 57, 3 Clement quotes, with an adaptation, a letter by Lysis to Hipparchus, according to which it is not permitted to reveal "the mysteries of the Logos" to the non initiated. Clement transfers the notion of mysteries, veiled truths concerning the divinity, from the Eleusinian mysteries to Christianity. Likewise, instead of the "mysteries of the gods," in *Protr.* 12, 119, 1 he has: "I will show you the Logos and the mysteries of the Logos, by describing them in images that are familiar to you." The Logos, far from being opposed to mystery qua rationality, is here said to have μυστήρια; this indicates that mysticism is not anti-rational (it is supra-rational, not anti-rational). Both the Gospel of John and Origen—who relied on John and Clement—insist on the divine Logos and on mystery together. The knowledge that forms the core of Clement's Christian philosophy is nurtured by mystery. Not accidentally, Clement lies at the roots of Christian mystic apophaticism.[16] This mystical knowledge is what the "heretics" ("gnostics" falsely so called) according to him have been unable to grasp: "since they have not learnt the mysteries [μυστήρια] of the ecclesiastical knowledge [γνῶσις]…they have misunderstood Scriptures" (*Strom.* VII 16, 97,4).

Clement rejects aspects of mystery cults he deems shameful, but he sees a continuity between classical and Christian symbolism and allegory; before Origen, and after Philo, he is the major Biblical allegorist. He voices the same view as the Stoic allegorists, particularly Cornutus: the creators of myths concealed philosophical truths in them, by means of symbols; these truths must be deciphered through allegoresis (*Strom.* V 58,1), which is the basic principle of philosophical allegoresis, used by the Stoics and by 'pagan' and Christian Platonists.[17] For Cornutus, the ancient creators of myths "were not people of no account, but were able to express philosophical truths by means of symbols and enigmas" (*Compend. Theol. Gr.* 35). Clement, who was familiar with Cornutus and Chaeremon of Alexandria, two Stoic allegorists, as Origen was, asserted the very same: "The founders of the mysteries, being philosophers, have hidden their doctrines under myths, that they might not be manifest to all." Clement appreciated the symbolic expression of ancient myths and mysteries, as Origen would explicitly value the symbolism of Plato's myths.[18] Symbolic decoding is the same method applied in scriptural allegoresis, which Clement relates to

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16   Hägg, *Clement and Apophaticism.*
17   As I argue in Ramelli, "The Philosophical Stance."
18   Demonstration in Ramelli, "The Philosophical Stance"; Ramelli, "Origen's Philosophical Exegesis," 13–58.

the concept of "mystery" in most of the occurrences of μυστήριον in his works, often in connection with Pauline quotations. Origen would also point to the structural parallel between the symbolic/allegorical/noetic decoding of Scriptural myths and that of 'pagan' myths (which he practiced himself).[19]

Clement observes that the Lord "provides an introduction to the 'gnostic' symbol [μυστήριον] of the hebdomad and the ogdoad" (*Strom.* IV 18, 109, 2). Hebdomad and ogdoad belong to "Gnostic" and Hermetic terminology; the former indicates the personal perfection of the believer, the latter the gnostic perfection of a beneficent activity that irradiates onto others. The lexicon of allegory is present in Clement's passage with αἰνίττομαι, "to allude," with reference to a symbol that alludes to veiled truths: "With these words, by abstaining from evil and doing good, he alludes to knowledge, teaching how to be perfect in works and words" (*ibidem* 3).

Μυστήριον means "symbol" in the allegoresis of the sacrifice of Isaac in *Strom.* V 11, 73, 2: the three days of Abraham's travel to the place of the sacrifice are interpreted as "the symbol [μυστήριον] of the baptismal seal, by means of which one believes in the true God." In *Strom.* I 28, 176, 1–3 Clement describes Plato's metaphysics/theology as contemplation of mysteries inspired by the Mosaic philosophy (Clement uses here Philo's expression): "Moses' philosophy is divided into four parts: historical and legislative proper—both pertaining to ethics—third, liturgical—already belonging to the theory of nature—and fourth, superior to all, *theological*: the contemplation, as Plato says, of the venerable *mysteries*, while Aristotle calls this *metaphysics*." Note the equation between Aristotle's *metaphysics* and *theology*, which would include Christian apophatic theology.[20]

Μυστήρια in clement's work can also indicate the Christian mysteries, for which he praises the strategy of concealment that he also lauds—as I pointed out—in "pagan" mysteries. The Lord "has allowed those who can understand to participate in the divine mysteries and their holy light. He did not reveal them to many, because they were not suitable for many, but only for some … The mysteries are transmitted in a mysterious way, that they may remain on the lips of those who speak of them and receive the word" (*Strom.* I 1, 13, 1). The encrypted modality of the transmission of mysteries is an allegorical expression, which justifies allegoresis. Clement legitimises his own recourse to allegoresis by pointing to Jesus' use of parables (Matt 13:3, 13; 1 Cor 2:7). Μυστήριον in Clement indeed includes the meaning, "parable" (*Strom.* V 12, 80, 7), and occurs in association with Jesus's parables, e.g. in *Strom.* VI 15, 124, 5–6; 127, 3 – 128, 1; 126, 2, where Clement hammers home the necessity of

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19   Argument in Ramelli, "Origen to Evagrius."
20   The dependence of Greek philosophy on the Mosaic philosophy also underlies *Strom.* V 14, 90: "the meaning of the prophetic mysteries had not yet been revealed before the coming of the Lord"; this is why the interpretations of Greek philosophers can be imperfect.

expressing the highest truths in a figural, allegorical fashion, that they may be accessible only to those who pursue "gnosis."

Clement's *Stromateis* expound the doctrines of the main philosophical schools, as he himself observes; philosophy is a preparation for the Christian mystery, and he admittedly employs it to win the Greeks over to Christianity: "the preparations for the mysteries are already mysteries, and in these notes I shall not hesitate to take advantage of the best of philosophy and the liberal arts. For, according to the Apostle (1 Cor 9:20–21), it is reasonable not only to become a Jew for the sake of the Jews, but also a Greek for the sake of the Greeks, so as to win over all." (*Strom.* I 1, 15, 2).

Greek philosophy contains good elements (although not all of them are "edible"[21]), because it was inspired by the same Logos who is Christ, God's Logos. The importance of philosophy in the formation of Christians is emphasised in *Strom.* I 5, 31, on the basis of the allegoresis of the story of Abraham, Agar and Sarah, which reveals the symbolic meaning of this episode: "The passages quoted from Scripture can point to other symbolic meanings [μυστήρια]. From all this we can conclude that philosophy has as its specific task the investigation into *truth* and the nature of reality. Now, *truth* is that about which the *Lord* said: 'I am the Truth.'" The Johannine identification of Christ–Logos with Truth laid the foundation for the construction of Christianity as philosophy; Clement and Origen were major protagonists in this move (John 14:6).[22] Clement, like Origen, thinks that "the culture that prepares to the rest in Christ trains the mind and awakens the intelligence, producing sagacity in research by means of the true philosophy. This is the philosophy that those initiated to the mysteries possess: they discovered it, or better received it from the Truth itself," namely Christ. Clement refers once more to the mysteries of the Logos, which—since the Logos is Christ, i.e. Truth—is also "the mystery of Truth" (*Strom.* VI 11, 95). The "divine mysteries" (θεῖα μυστήρια) are learnt by the "gnostic," the perfect Christian, from the Son of God (*Strom.* VII 1, 4, 3). The latter, Christ, the Father's Logos, is described by Clement as "the teacher who educates the 'gnostic' with his mysteries" (*Strom.* VII 2, 6, 1).

Origen of Alexandria

The major Patristic Platonist and one of the major exponents of Patristic apophatic theology, Origen, explicated the division of philosophy into ethics, physics, "epoptics," and (optionally) logic, proposing in fact the Stoic tripartition of philosophy plus

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21 Clemens Alexandrinus, *Strom.* I 1, 7, 2–3; I 1, 8, 2.
22 See Ramelli, "*Ethos* and *Logos*," 123–156, and on Clement's philosophico-theological engagement, Ramelli, "Unity around a Teacher," 191–223.

epoptica. The last branch, epoptics, is the crowning of philosophy. Epoptics is theology, glossed as the science of "divine and heavenly things" (*de divinis et caelestibus*),[23] which Origen deems part and parcel of philosophy, insisting that theology cannot be studied without philosophical bases (*C.Cant.* prol. 3, 1–4). Here, Origen superimposes the three main branches of Greek philosophy to the Biblical books traditionally ascribed to Solomon: Proverbs (ethics), Ecclesiastes (physics), and Canticles (epoptics-theology). Philosophical and scriptural investigation (ζήτησις) form one and the same thing. This is why the typical philosophical formula ζητητέον, within a very large use of ζητέω in Origen's extant oeuvre, partially anticipated only by Clement,[24] occurs also in exegetical contexts, and frequently at that.[25]

Origen also calls epoptics θεολογία—the same domain in which Plato excelled according to the Middle Platonist Celsus: Plato was the "master of things pertaining to theology."[26] Ethics, physics, and theology are identified as the components of philosophy also in *Philoc.* 14, 2. Origen's Greek "epoptics" was translated by Rufinus *inspectiva*: "the inspective part of philosophy." Basil identified epoptics with metaphysics (*H.Ps.* 32, 341A), as Aristotle was believed to have done, as seen.

Plotinus' *Enneads* were also divided by Porphyry into ethics (I), physics (II–III), and epoptics (IV–VI)—without logic. Proclus will deem Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus "the exegetes of the Platonic epoptics" (*Theol. Plat.* I 1). This included also their notion of prayer.[27] Indeed, according to Plotinus, too, philosophy included the investigation of the divine and the divine realm: metaphysics at its highest level. Aristotle himself, as mentioned, treated theology as a synonym of metaphysics.[28] Thus, Plotinus' discourse on the One is both protological (the One = first principle) and theological (the One = supreme deity), but theology can only be attempted, suggestive, and hinted at. Indeed, apophatic theology and the inaccessibility of the highest Principle's essence are common to Clement, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Plotinus, among others, all belonging to Christian or 'pagan' Platonism.[29]

In Origen's *First Principles*, theology is studied on *philosophical* foundations; Origen in Prologue 6 programmatically opens up the issues left unclarified by Scripture and apostolic tradition, to philosophical investigation and in Book IV subsumes Biblical philosophical exegesis under philosophical theology. For the soul must stick to

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[23] See above on Theon and Plutarch on Plato and Aristotle.

[24] Forms of ζητέω occur 247 times in Clement, the only Christian who has some occurrences in the technical philosophical sense before Origen—notably, most of these are in quotations from Plato or references to Greek philosophers.

[25] E.g. Origenes, *H.Luc.* fr. 83, 14 in Greek; *C.Cant.* prol. 4, 15 in Latin: "we can investigate [*requirere*] why Solomon…"

[26] Τῶν θεολογίας πραγμάτων, Origenes, *CC* VII 42.

[27] On Neoplatonic theories of prayer and links to contemplation, see Timotin, *La prière*; Dillon, "Prayer and Contemplation," 7–22, from Plotinus to Proclus.

[28] Aristotle, *Metaph.* 1026a18.

[29] Argument in Ramelli, "The Divine as Inaccessible Object."

reason and faith together, as he also explains in *C.Cant.* II 10, 7). Faith and reason cannot diverge, since Christ is Logos. Reason cannot be alone, without faith, because Origen's philosophy is Christian (Patristic), but faith cannot be left without reason, in that Origen's Christianity is philosophy. Immediately after speaking of epoptics/theology as philosophy's culmination, Origen claims that Greek philosophers drew inspiration from Solomon's wisdom (*C.Cant.* prol. 3, 4). Scripture comes first—and lends to Christian philosophy a further, special kind of demonstration (ἀπόδειξις) besides dialectical demonstration: that from the power of miracles and the truth of prophecies (*CC* I 2)[30]—but its teaching is the same as that of the best of Greek philosophy, namely Plato. In a number of cases, indeed, Origen embraces Plato's theories and presents as true philosophy.

Plato had already theorised the philosophical exegesis that Origen also theorised (in *Princ.* IV and elsewhere) and employed, having related hermeneutics (ἑρμηνευτική) to the royal or divine art on account of its directive power (*Pol.* 260DE) and having characterised Apollo as "ancestral ἐξηγητής" who indicates, signifies, and guides, (*Resp.* IV 42BC). Plato prescribed the institution of exegetes to interpret the Delphic oracles in his *Laws*. In turn, Plotinus regarded Plato's texts as oracles to interpret, exactly as Origen regarded Scripture: this will be further stressed by Origen's follower, Dionysius the Areopagite, who will repeatedly call Scripture "oracles" (λόγια).[31] Remarkably, the very fact that Origen's theory of Biblical exegesis is found in his *philosophico-theological* masterpiece, in Book IV of *De principiis,* rather than in *exegetical* works, further reveals that scriptural hermeneutics was for Origen a *philosophical* task, exactly as it was for Plato, most Stoics, and imperial Platonists.[32]

Epoptics, which unfolds in mystical theology, according to Origen is nourished by love: this emerges especially from his Commentary on Canticles.[33] Love (ἀγάπη) is even the principle that , in his view, guarantees the stability of apokatastasis or universal restoration, based on Paul's tenet: ἡ ἀγάπη οὐδέποτε (ἐκ)πίπτει.[34] Ἀγάπη ensures the eternity of apokatastasis (as opposed to possible new falls), which can happen only after God's love was made known to creatures through Christ's in-humanation and crucifixion, the highest manifestation of God's love (this, according to Isaac of Nineveh as well, as I argued elsewhere). This is why Satan (and Adam) could fall

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30 On this demonstration: Ramelli, "Prophecy in Origen," 17–39; also Hall*, Origen and Prophecy*, ch. 4.

31 I argue this and Dionysius' Origenian legacy in Ramelli, "Origen, Evagrius and Dionysius," 94–108.

32 Argument in Ramelli – Lucchetta, *Allegoria* (for the ancient philosophers) and Ramelli, "Allegorizing and Philosophizing."

33 See Ramelli, "Apokatastasis and Epektasis," 312–339.

34 "Quod sit quod in futuris saeculis *teneat arbitrii libertatem* ne rursum corruat in peccatum, breui nos sermone apostolus docet dicens: 'Caritas numquam cadit' [1 Cor 13:8]… *Caritas omnem creaturam continebit a lapsu,* tunc cum erit Deus omnia in omnibus... caritatis causas prior nobis dederit Deus" (*C.Rom.* V 10, 195–226).

before being aware of God's charity–love.[35] This is also the reason why Origen individuated the cause of the fall itself in the weakening of love for God, due to satiety (κόρος).

Origen based mystical theology on apophaticism (like Philo, Nyssen, and Dionysius, respectively treated above and below) and claimed that God's nature is impossible for humans to know, as opposed to God's activities, which are knowable (*Princ.* II 6, 1). God's nature and power are beyond being and intellect[36] and "beyond all" (*CC* VII 45); so, humans cannot "see and observe," "contemplate," or "noetically perceive" them, but just "peer at" them (*C.Io.* XIX 6, 35–38). At the same time, God is the supreme Being (*ibidem*; *Princ.* I 3, 5), Being in the fullest sense;[37] creatures participate in God's Being (*CC* VI 64). Mindful of Exod 3:14, Origen kept Plato's equation between God, the Being, and the Good. God being the Good, God's power (δύναμις) is good and God's operation or activity (ἐνέργεια) manifests itself in the goodness of the divine creation and divine Providence.[38] But Origen, also mindful of Plato himself (*Resp.* 509B), and perhaps even with an eye to Plotinus' One (a theory that was in the making or already fixed when Origen wrote *Contra Celsum* in the late 240s), stated that God is *beyond* Being and Nous, thereby hinting at divine transcendence (*CC* VI 64 etc.). God, being Monad-Henad (*Princ.* I 1, 6), is simple and therefore unknowable, like Plotinus' One, and incomprehensible (*Princ.* I 1, 5). But God's works and self-revelation in Scripture can be known, and God can be experienced in a mystical union.[39]

This union is the focus of Origen's commentary on Canticles, interpreted spiritually as expressing the mystical union of the soul with Christ, and of the church with Christ. For Origen, the mystical union with Christ–God implies a soul's infinite perfecting in knowledge and love.[40] In prol. 3, 16, Origen describes mystical theology (*mystica*, corresponding to epoptics) as the highest part of Christian philosophy after ethics, physics, and dogmatics: the ascent to the contemplation of the God through love: "through pure, spiritual love, one ascends to the mystical level, to

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[35] To the objection that love could not impede Satan's fall, or Adam's, Origen replies exactly that this fall took place *before* the manifestation of Christ's love: *antequam erga beneficia Filii Dei caritatis uinculis stringeretur* (*C.Rom.* V 10, 227–230).

[36] Origenes, *C.Io.* XIX 6, 35–38; *CC* VI 64; VII 38.

[37] Origenes, *C.Io.* XX 18, 159; cf. God as "invisible and incorporeal essence," *CC* VI 71.

[38] Origenes, *Princ.* II 9, 1; III 5, 2; IV 4, 8.

[39] This was postulated by Plotinus as well; see "The Divine as Inaccessible Object." Plotinus also posited love as directed towards Beauty, which in its highest form is the Intellect, and perhaps also the One. Evidence about the One as Beauty in Smith*, Plotinus, Ennead I.6*, 123–124. Plotinus, *Enn.* I 6 presents the theme of ascent from sensible beauty to intelligible Beauty.

[40] Origenes, *C.Cant.* III 6, 9: *innovatur semper agnitio secretorum arcanorumque revelatio per sapientiam Dei, non solum hominibus sed et angelis*, "the learning of secrets and the revelation of hidden things is ever being renewed, by God's Wisdom, not only to humans but also to angels." The identification of *caritas* with the summit of perfection is also in I 6, 8; prol. 2, 43. On the excellence of love see also III 7, 27.

the contemplation of the divinity."[41] The soul's love for Christ is salvific[42] and the "grace of love is preeminent," since, with Paul (as in *C.Rom.* V 10), "love is greater than all, the only one that never falls" (*C.Cant.* III 7, 27), This is because love causes rational creatures to adhere to God entirely.[43] This is why, as seen, Satan could fall before being aware of God's love; this is why is is thanks to love that apokatastasis will never be undone; and this is why Origen considered the end better than the beginning. For in the end rational creatures will adhere to God not as a datum of creation, but voluntarily, after rejecting evil, in endless love striving—which anticipates Gregory's epektasis[44]—that, as seen, will prevent further falls. Ἀγάπη prevented Christ's *logikon* from falling and united it to God so perfectly that Good became its nature (*Princ.* II 6, 5). And ἀγάπη will prevent all creatures from falling out from apokatastasis.

Porphyry, who was aware of both Origen's and Plotinus' apophaticism, in *Abst.* II 34 posited a hierarchy of sacrificial offerings and remarked that the only sacrifice suitable to the supreme God is the silent contemplation of the supreme God by an intellect free from passions, an intellectual offering (νοερὰ θυσία), as opposed to the ὑλικὴ θυσία to be devoted to the evil daemons, but also to the traditional gods of the city, and even different from the rational hymns to be devoted to the intelligible gods. This reminds me of Paul's λογικὴ λατρεία in Rom 12:1.[45] The silence with which we should honour the One, which will return prominently in Gregory of Nyssa's apophatic theology, transcends both the λόγος ἐνδιάθετος and the λόγος προφορικός, which Porphyry develops in *Abst.* III 75. Porphyry seems to have employed this distinction to refute Origen's Christian Logos, specifically his interpretation of the Logos in John 1:1. Porphyry arguably criticises the Johannine representation of Christ as God's Logos by reading it through the lenses of Origen's understanding of

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[41] *Ad mystica atque ad divinitatis contemplationem sincero et spiritali amore conscenditur—amor* corresponding to ἔρως.

[42] *Salutari in eum amore succendi*, prol. 3, 23; *salutare ab ipso vulnus accipiet et beato igne amoris eius ardebit*, prol. 2, 17. Cf. prol. 2, 17: *amore caelesti agitur anima … vulnus amoris acceperit,* "the soul is moved by heavenly love … it has received the wound of love." The soul's, or the church's, salvific love of the Logos is in the focus of the commentary from its opening: Solomon "sang an epithalamium in the person of a bride who is going to marry, and who burns with heavenly love for her bridegroom, who is God's Logos. For the soul, or the church, is in love with him" (prol. 1, 1).

[43] ἡ ἀγάπη κολλᾷ ἡμᾶς τῷ Θεῷ, Origenes, *H.Ier.* 5, 2.

[44] I argued for Origen's influence on Gregory's doctrine of epektasis in Ramelli, "Apokatastasis and Epektasis." Besides Origen, another important source of inspiration for Gregory's notion of epektasis may have been Plotinus.

[45] For a recent analysis and contextualisation of this passage, see Schnabel, "ἡ λογικὴ λατρεία in Romans 12:1," 280–296, who interprets Paul's λογικὴ λατρεία not only as "rational cult" but also as "cults made of words" (rather than on sacrificial offerings); Scott, "Your Reasoning Worship," 500–532, who interprets λογικὴ λατρεία as a 'reasoning' or 'rational cult'. Actions are λογικαί if guided by rational deliberation; Paul's λογικὴ λατρεία is a service performed by the reasoning mind. Paul expected ethical guidance to come primarily from rational deliberation.

the Son having the same οὐσία as the Father but a different ὑπόστασις:[46] "If [the Son] is a logos, it is either expressed [προφορικός] or immanent [ἐνδιάθετος]. But if it is expressed, it is not substantial [οὐσιώδης], because at the same time as it is uttered, it has already gone. If, on the other hand, it is immanent, it will be inseparable from the Father's nature [φύσεως]; in which case, how is it that it has separated and from there has descended to life?" (*ap.* Psell. *Op. theol.* 75, 107–10). Porphyry (like Amelius, I suspect) was reading John 1:1 with Origen's interpretation of Christ-Logos in mind; therefore he argued that, if the Logos is προφορικός, it cannot have an οὐσία, let alone a divine οὐσία, and if it is ἐνδιάθετος, it cannot have any ὑπόστασις of its own, separated from that of the Father. Porphyry's parallel fr. 86 is also telling, in that it shows that he argues that Christ-Logos, being neither προφορικός nor ἐνδιάθετος, cannot be a Logos at all. This conclusion is diametrically opposed to Origen's and, I surmise, is aimed at refuting it, and, more broadly, the whole Christian doctrine of Christ–Logos.[47]

Gregory of Nyssa

Gregory of Nyssa was deeply influenced by Origen in his mystical exegesis of the Song of Songs (*Canticum Canticorum*, abbreviated *CantC*), and in Homily 7 he develops Origen's hermeneutical strategy. Origen, as mentioned, allegorised *CantC* as the love between Christ and the church or the soul.[48] Nyssen mainly interpreted *CantC* as an allegorical expression of the soul's infinite tension (ἐπέκτασις) towards God.

In times close to those of Gregory, Ambrose also shows a dependence on Origen's commentary, although not in a commentary or homilies on *CantC* proper, but in *Isaac De Anima*, which is all about mystical theology, the soul's ascent, and union with the divine. Ambrose depends on Origen here, as well as on Plotinus.[49] In *Isaac De Anima*, Ambrose follows Plato's *Phaedo*, which was emulated by Nyssen in *De Anima*, in insisting programmatically that one should "lift up one's soul and draw it away from the body" (*elevare animam, a corpore abducere*, 1, 1; cf. 4, 11, 4, 13). He even goes so far as to describe the body as a *vestimentum* that does not constitute human identity (2, 3). Ambrose's dependence on Origen's Commentary on *CantC* here in *Isaac De Anima* is especially clear from his allegorisation of Rebecca, Isaac's

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46 The fragment is reported by three Byzantine authors, but only one version was included in Harnack's collection as fr. 86, 132 the two other versions come from Psellus. The most complete and relevant to the present argument is Psellus's first quotation, which I cite.

47 Full argument in Ramelli, "Origen, Greek Philosophy, and Hypostasis," 334–336 and 347. Edition of Porphyry's fragment in Psellus: Goulet, "Fragments du traité de Porphyre 'Contre les Chrétiens,'" 141–44.

48 *Adamavit enim eum* [God's Logos] *sive anima… sive ecclesia* (prol. 1, 1).

49 McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 202–216.

bride, as *vel ecclesia vel anima* (1, 1–2; 3, 8): the double allegorisation applied by Origen to the bride: *sive anima sive ecclesia*. Even Origen's detail of the *vulnus amoris* that wounds the soul (*C.Cant.* prol. 2, 17) appears again in Ambrose as *vulnus caritatis* (*Isaac* 3, 8).

In his homilies on *CantC*, Gregory took this book to describe the soul's mystical union with God. Gregory explicitly refers to Origen's bountiful exegesis and calls Origen "laborious" (φιλόπονος, *H.Cant.* 13, 3), as Athanasius, who called him φιλοπονώτατος. Gregory developed and emphasised the connection, established by Origen, between mysticism and love from his earliest to his latest works: from *De virginitate*, probably from 371/2, through *Vita Moysis*, to the last work, his Homilies on the *CantC*,[50] which make the most of that connection.

In *De virginitate*, the Platonic framework for the nexus between love and mysticism is manifest, and is provided by the 'pagan' Platonists Plato and Plotinus, since this work studies humans' desire for the beautiful against the background of Plato's *Symposium* and Plotinus' *Enn.* I 6 and VI 9. Instead, in Gregory's last work, the Homilies on *CantC*, the model is mainly a *Christian* Platonist—Origen. Gregory knew Plotinus as well, who also attributed Eros to the Good in *Enn.* VI 8, 15. Also, in *C.Eun.* II 91 Gregory insists that it is impossible to approach God without πίστις, which unites human nous to the "incomprehensible nature" of God. Plotinus, as I have pointed out elsewhere,[51] also described the mystical union with the One in terms of πίστις, bestowing on the latter a more positive value than it has in Plato.

The mystical approach to God on the part of the soul is propelled by love in Gregory's Homilies on *CantC*, in the wake of Origen. Gregory dedicated his homilies to Deaconess Olympias, a sympathiser of Origen and his followers. She defended the Origenian monks expelled from Egypt by Theophilus.[52] They were received in Constantinople by her and, on her recommendation, her bishop John Chrysostom.[53] It is no accident that Gregory dedicated to the σεμνοπρεπεστάτη Origenian Olympias his last work, in which he followed Origen's exegesis and theology in many respects, including the role of love (called both ἀγάπη and ἔρως, joined already by Origen and later by Dionysius) in the ascent to God. The dedication to Olympias significantly comes in a Preface that defends Biblical allegoresis in the Origenian tradition, which detects the φιλοσοφία hidden in *CantC*, revealing that it is all about spiritual love, which leads up to God. In his Preface, Gregory programmatically and overtly speaks for Origen's allegoresis. Against "certain churchmen" who attacked Origen, Gregory endorses the investigation into Scripture's αἰνίγματα and ὑπόνοιαι. The terminology itself refers to allegoresis and noetic exegesis and is Origen's—note the absence of

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50 On the dating of these homilies after the *Life of Moses* see Dünzl, "Gregor von Nyssa's Homilien," 371–381.
51 Ramelli, "Mysticism and Mystic Apophaticism."
52 See Ramelli, *Apokatastasis*, 584–591.
53 Socrates, *HE* VI 7–9; Sozomen, *HE* VIII 11–13.

ἀλληγορία, exactly as in Origen's works addressed to Christians: Origen and Gregory had an aversion to this word, owing to its relation to "pagan" allegoresis of myths. Also, Gregory's characterisation of *CantC* as the Holy of Holies follows Origen's inclusion of *CantC* in the δευτερώσεις as Scripture's culmination. These are endowed with an exclusively spiritual meaning.

Origen's heritage in Gregory's homilies on *CantC* is clear in the main doctrines and exegetical lines, among which the theme of the role of love in the mystical ascent to God is paramount, even to the point of verbal borrowings from Origen's commentary. Gregory's exegesis of 1 Cor 15:28 also takes every passage of its main argument, and many words, from Origen.[54] Gregory never ceased to follow Origen. Gregory's reception of Origen was insightful; he is likely the theologian who best understood Origen's thought.[55] Gregory abundantly used Origen's Commentary on *CantC*, but oriented his interpretation toward the main themes of his own spirituality,[56] primarily soul's tension out of itself towards the knowledge of God, which is a mystical union in an theological apophatic context. Such a tension is a progression without end, since God's nature, infinite as it is, is always beyond creatural reach, and this ascent to God takes place through love. Gregory shared Origen's position that *CantC* is about love, which he, like Origen, calls both ἀγάπη and ἔρως. Gregory immediately declares that in *CantC* God, "who wants all humans to be saved and reach the knowledge of truth" (1 Tim 2:4), reveals "the most perfect way of salvation: through ἀγάπη" (*H.Cant.* 1, GNO 6, 15).

Love is the focus of *CantC*, and love is God according to John: "Call God 'Mother' or 'Love' and you will not be mistaken, for God is Love, as John stated."[57] This is revelation; for Origen and Gregory, God's essence is ungraspable; it can be known by a mystical union with Christ-Logos symbolised by a love union. In Origen's words, "the mind that has been purified and has surpassed all material things, so as to be certain of the contemplation of God, is divinised by the objects it contemplates" (*C.Io*. XXII 27, 338). Origen referred to Plato's *Symposium* when stating that Greek philosophers already explored love's nature in "banquets of discourses" (dialogues), finding correctly that "love's power is none other than that which leads the soul from earth to heaven's lofty heights and the highest beatitude can only be attained under the stimulus of love's desire." Plato in the *Symposium*, through Diotima, spoke of the "philosophical lover" (249A) and identified the *erōs* that raises the beloved to the possession of the Good with the Higher Mysteries (211–212). It moved the beloved up the path of dialectic with a kind of *erōs* that "loves the Good with the aim to make it one's own forever" (206A). Indeed, "Plato is not an intellectualist pure and simple:

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54   See Ramelli, "Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology," 445–478.
55   Ramelli, "Reception of Origen's Thought," 443–467.
56   Placida, "La presenza di Origene," 33–49.
57   GNO 6, 214, 10; cf. 120, 17; 370, 12.

for him, reason is fuelled by desire (*erōs*). In Plato, *erōs* includes all human desires… we also have desire (ἔρως) for truth."[58]

Origen distinguished passionate love (ἔρως) from charity-love (ἀγάπη); Scripture uses most frequently ἀγάπη, and sometimes ἔρως—only when there is no possibility of mistaking it for a passion; with this proviso, ἀγάπη and ἔρως in Scripture can be taken as interchangeable (*C.Cant.* prol. 2, 22–23, 25, 33).[59] Loving Christ-Logos entails attaining likeness to God: "Since God is ἀγάπη, and God's Son is ἀγάπη, He requires in us something like Him, that through this ἀγάπη in Christ Jesus, we may be allied to God-ἀγάπη in a sort of blood kinship through this name of ἀγάπη."[60] Similarly, the God-intellect relation is expressed by Gregory in terms of ἀγάπη, and even ἔρως, already used by Origen in reference to divine love in a Christianisation of Plato's ἔρως. In reference to divine love, Gregory defines ἔρως as "intense ἀγάπη" (ἐπιτεταμένη, *Cant* 13, GNO 6, 383, 9) of the soul's love for God: "Wisdom speaks clearly in Proverbs, describing ἔρως of the divine Beauty. This love is irreproachable, a passion without passion oriented toward incorporeal objects"; "ἔρως for God derives from sentiments opposite to those which produce corporeal desire."[61] Origen pointed out the same distinction in the Prologue to his Commentary on *CantC*.

Love and apokatastasis were closely related in Origen's view and then in Gregory's. After the manifestation of God's love, in the *telos*, perfect love in each *logikon* will prevent new falls, since in Paul's words, as seen, "love never falls (out)," ἡ ἀγάπη οὐδέποτε *(ἐκ)πίπτει*. Now, Gregory echoes Paul through Origen when he declares that "no creature of God will fall out [μηδενὸς ἀποπίπτοντος] of God's Kingdom" (*Tunc et ipse*, GNO 3/2, 13–14). Gregory and Origen saw in apokatastasis perfect, indefectible love. Sin, as a lack of love, caused the initial fall, love produces the opposite movement of restoration: "Sin separated rational creatures from one another, but once *the love of God has joined them again*, they will utter again that hymn of praise" (*Inscr.* 1, 9). Indeed, in *Inst.* 50, 1–4, too, Gregory emphasises the link between eros-desire and ascent, and details that this ascent, triggered by desire, must take place through virtue—the opposite of sin, which produces one's re-ascent to God: "the one who desires to become the bride of Christ must be assimilated to the beauty of Christ through virtue according to his ability" (with an echo of *Theaet.* 176AB).

In his Commentary on *CantC*, followed by Gregory in his Homilies, Origen identified ἀγάπη with perfection.[62] Out of love, some *logika* descend to earth to assist in the process of salvation (*C.Io.* II 31, 187–188; *Princ.* II 9, 7). Liberation from evil

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58 Nightingale, "Plato: Dialogues."
59 Rufinus renders ἀγάπη by *caritas vel dilectio*, and ἔρως by *cupido seu amor* (Origenes, *C.Cant.* prol. 2, 20).
60 See King, *Origen on the Song of Songs*, 234–240.
61 Gregorius Nyssenus, *Cant* 1, GNO 6, 23, 12; 192, 1. One example of Gregory's application of the ἔρως terminology to God and the ascent to God is found in *Cant* I, GNO 6, 27, 8–15.
62 *Summa perfectionis in caritate consistit: caritas nihil iniquitatis admittit* (I 6, 8); *in caritatis perfectione et omne mandatum restaurari dicitur et legis virtus prophetarumque pendere* (prol. 2, 43).

will be the beginning of the infinite process of tension toward God and happiness;[63] from this infinite ascent there will be no movement away, thanks to love's gluing force that Origen described, as seen, and Gregory took over: if the *logika* "reach Christ's incomprehensible, ineffable true being, they will no longer walk or run, but will be, in a way, tied by the bonds of Christ's love, will adhere to it... one spirit with Christ, and in them the saying will be fulfilled, 'As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, and we are One, so may also they be one in Us'" (*C.Cant.* I 4, 9).[64] Still in Homily 15 on *CantC* (GNO 6, 439), as earlier in *De anima*, Gregory states that the soul "must purify itself from anything material, even any material thought, and change into what is intellectual and immaterial, a splendid image of the Archetype's Beauty."

God "transcends every movement of our discursive mind" (διάνοια, *CE* II 1, 397). God's nature is impossible to "touch" and "conceive" and "superior to any grasp provided by reasoning" (*CE* II 158, with the same terminology as in Plotinus). Gregory, inspired by Plotinus, thought that the divinity is impossible to grasp because it is infinite, a tenet anticipated by Origen and already by Clement;[65] this also means that it is eternal, another tenet of Origen (God alone is eternal), while evil, its opposite, is neither infinite nor eternal. Humans are indeed paradoxical finite images of the infinite and eternal.[66] Divine names in Scriptures do not reveal God's "unnamable and ineffable" nature, but describe something of what concerns it (περὶ αὐτήν, as in Plotinus and Origen,[67] with whose ideas Gregory was familiar), yet this something "does not at all indicate what divine nature is in its essence" (*Abl.*, GNO 3/1, 42–43). In Gregory's Homilies on *CantC* 2, God's name is said to be "beyond any other name, inexpressible and incomprehensible to any rational being." Likewise in Homily 6: "How is it possible that the One beyond every name be found by means of the pronunciation of a name?" Indeed, "the divine, from the viewpoint of its nature, is ungraspable/untouchable and incomprehensible ... ineffable and inaccessible to reasoning" (*CE* II 1, 265–266).

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63 *Neque vero putandum est finem esse beatitudinis, si a malis liberemur: initium felicitatis est carere peccato* (Origenes, *H.Ez.* 1, 12).

64 See Ramelli, "Dynamic Unity."

65 On Origen, suggestions in Ramelli, "Apokatastasis and Epektasis." The notion was already present in Clement: "The One [Hen] is indivisible, and therefore infinite [ἄπειρον], not because it is impossible to go through it, but because it is adimensional [ἀδιάστατον] and limitless, and therefore shapeless and without name [ἀνωνόμαστον]" (Clemens Alexandrinus, *Strom.* V 12, 81, 6). Clement, not accidentally, was recognised by Dionysius as "a philosopher" (Dionysius Areopagita, *DN* 5, 9).

66 See Motia, *Imitations of Infinity*, and my invited review in *Journal of Early Christian Studies* forthcoming.

67 Origen used in a similar sense the expression τὰ περί (*CC* VI 65). It was already employed by Clement in a passage dealing precisely with the abstractive process in the human knowledge of God (*Strom.* V 11, 71, 3). Origen elaborated on it in *C.Io.* XIII 21, 124: it is possible to find in Scripture clues to say "something" (τι) "regarding God's nature or essence," περὶ οὐσίας θεοῦ. The same expression is found in Plotinus, *Enn.* V 3, 14: the One is ineffable, because to say "something about [περί] it" is "to say something," τι, but the One is not "some thing," a thing among others. The same idea and phrase will appear in Dionysius (*CH* II 3), who was influenced by Proclus.

Thus, God's existence is knowable to us, but not God's nature (*CE* II 1, 247–248). Gregory's mystical interpretation of Moses' entering the darkness where God is (Exod 20:21)[68] follows Philo and Origen: Gregory distinguishes again between God's essence/nature, unknowable, and God's existence, knowable and known. He draws the same connection as Philo did between Exod 20:21 and Ps 17:12 ("He made darkness his hideaway; around him was his tent, dark water in clouds of air") in reference to the same allegoresis of the unknowability of God's nature. This connection is also in Origen:[69] Gregory, as often, is filtering Philo through Origen.[70] In his allegorical exegesis of Exod 33:20–23,[71] where God says to Moses that he will be unable to see his face, but only his back, Gregory, like Philo, refers this passage to God's hiddenness, but follows Philo through Origen's filter. Gregory observes that this episode has no literal, but only allegorical, meaning, because God's incorporeality was a tenet of Platonism and excluded ideas such as "God's back." Gregory's argument and terminology depend on Origen's aforementioned theory of Biblical allegoresis in *Princ*. IV, where absurdities and impossibilities at the literal level are said to point to the necessity of allegoresis. Divine anthropomorphisms such as "God's back" are exactly the kind of absurdity that Origen adduced.

Gregory, like Origen ,considers *CantC* a mystagogy, which "mystically elevates [μυσταγωγεῖ] the mind into the divine secrets" (*H.Cant*. 1, GNO 6, 22, 16). In Homily 12, Gregory insists that the divinity "always turns out to be beyond any impression that can reveal it," and is "always superior to the indication suggested by the names' meanings." For Gregory, as for Philo, by means of names we can only say "how God is" and not "what God is" (*Abl*., GNO 3/1, 56). The Divinity "is denominated with different appellatives which refer to its manifold activities" (*CE* I 315; cf. *Beat*., GNO 7/2, 141).

Love, ἀγάπη and ἔρως (as a strong form of ἀγάπη) bring about the mystical ascent to God. Gregory also indicated virginity as a factor of the mystical ascent to God: virginity "deifies [θεοποιοῦσαν] those who share in her pure mysteries" (*Virg*. 1). There is no contradiction between love and virginity both producing the mystical ascent to God, since the love Gregory is speaking of is spiritual, and virginity is typical of God, meaning essentially purity and abstention from any evil, so that by imitating it one ascends mystically towards God.

Gregory's apophatic mysticism culminated in restoration and deification (θέωσις), as in Origen, although Gregory in the whole of his work employs θέωσις terminology rarely, only twice θεοποιέω and twice συναποθεόω, a neologism.[72] *H.Cant*. 15, a late work, refers to mystical eschatology often, links it to apokatastasis. The conclusion of

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68   Gregorius Nyssenus, *VM* I 47; II 110.
69   Origenes, *CC* VI 17; *C.Io.* II 172, etc.
70   As I argued in Ramelli, "Philosophical Allegoresis," 55–99.
71   Gregorius Nyssenus, *VM* II 219–255.
72   On Gregory's deification theory see Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 225–232.

this homily is entirely devoted to the description of apokatastasis, after the vanishing of evilness from all and the attainment of mystical communion with God-the Good. First Gregory remarks, in accord with Paul and Origen, that "God receives everyone in his order, giving to each one in proportion to his merits"—the classical definition of justice. God's justice, however, does not contradict God's love, as results from *Or. cat.* 26. Gregory quotes Rom 8:35, 38–39 concerning God's unfailing love: "Nobody will ever be able to separate us from God's love," and continues to highlight the unifying effects of love: "But if, as is written, love will utterly dispel fear [1 John 4:18], and fear, by transforming itself, will become love, then it will be found that what is saved constitutes a *unity* [μονὰς τὸ σωζόμενον], since all will be *unified* with one another [πάντων ἀλλήλοις ἑνωθέντων], in connaturality with the only Good [ἐν τῇ πρὸς τὸ μόνον ἀγαθὸν συμφυΐα], thanks to perfection" (GNO 6, 466–467). This final ἕνωσις is one of the most important traits of mystical eschatology in Gregory, as in Origen, and will involve all rational creatures, as is explained immediately afterwards: "The run for this beatitude is common to *all the souls* of every order…until all look at *the same object of their desire and become one and the same thing* and no evilness [κακία] will any longer remain in anyone. Then God will really be 'all in all.'" (1 Cor 15:28).

Pseudo-Dionysius

Mystical and apophatic theology, metaphysically based on the ontological transcendence of the divinity—a tenet of the whole Platonic tradition—is typical of Origen, Nyssen, and Dionysius, who was a refined knower of both (and of Plotinus).[73] The divinity, in its essence, is unknowable because of its transcendence. We can know that God is, but not what God is (this tenet, common to Philo and several Christian thinkers, was still expressed by Eriugena, *Periph.* IV 771CD: God is incomprehensible to any intellect;[74] human mind can know that God is, but not what God is). Hence the necessity of mystical, apophatic theology.

The apophatic mysticism of love, already developed by Origen and Gregory, is a central element in the mystical theology of Dionysius. He knew Gregory's definition of God as beauty and beautiful, and repeatedly called God "beautiful and good," as the motivation of all things' desire and love of God (*DN* 4, 10, 708A; 4, 7, 701C; 704AB).[75] Dionysius found the connection between the desire for God-the Good

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73 Argument in Ramelli, "The Divine as Inaccessible Object."
74 No substance or essence, of any visible or invisible creature, is comprehensible to intellect, a fortiori that of God. Eriugena ascribed this tenet to "Gregory the theologian" (441B).
75 Other occurrences of "beautiful and good" are in Dionysius Areopagita, *DN 4,* 7, 704B; 4, 8, 704D; 4, 10, 705C–708A; 4, 18, 713D.

and reversion (ἐπιστροφή), the third Platonic metaphysical movement, in Proclus (*ET* 31: all things desire the Good and revert to it), but also in Origen and Gregory of Nyssa, and applied this connection to apokatastasis.[76] Dionysius takes over, as ever, both traditions ('pagan' and Christian Platonism): "Every being is from the Beautiful and the Good, and in the Beautiful and the Good, and is reverted to the Beautiful and Good" (*DN* 4, 10, 705C) and takes over the very nexus between love/desire and reversion: the Good is what all beings desire, and to which all beings revert (*DN* 4, 4, 700B). The strong link between love, God as Beautiful and Good, and reversion is hammered home in *DN* 4, 12, 709D: "Love is a power that unifies, connects, and distributively combines; it preexists in the Beautiful and the Good, through the Beautiful and the Good, and is given out from the Beautiful and the Good through the beautiful and the Good… it moves the first beings to providence and establishes the reversion of the more needy towards their superiors."

We shall see that sometimes Dionysius explicitly assimilates ἐπιστροφή and ἀποκατάστασις or restoration, using the terminology of both in the same text, and that he, with Origen and Nyssen, refers love as ἔρως to God.

Dionysius built on Origen's and Gregory's theologies of mysticism and love, as well as on those by Plotinus and especially Proclus. Proclus attributed love to the gods and even anticipated Dionysius' link between love and reversion (ἐπιστροφή): the superior gods love the inferior providentially, and the inferior the superior revertively (ἐπιστρεπτικῶς, *In Alc.* 55–56). This theory, in turn, is likely to come from Origen, but I shall not investigate here Origen's influence on Proclus.[77] What is important to note in this connection is that, unlike Proclus, Dionysius (I think qua *Christian* Platonist) ascribes love to the supreme deity, the One, not only to the inferior gods. In this respect, he is again at one with Origen's Christian Platonism and departs from Plotinus' Neoplatonism.

Dionysius is a Christian Neoplatonist who relied heavily on Proclus, especially his *Platonic Theology*.[78] This probably was one of the last works by Proclus, which was not read outside the inner circle of the Athenian Platonic school for a while.[79] This is why Dionysius might have belonged to Proclus' school, or have been closely connected to it, although it is unnecessary to suppose that he was a "pagan."[80] Dionysius was acquainted both with Plotinus' noble *erōs* in *Enn.* VI 9, 9, 35 and with the use of *erōs* in Proclus, who posited both a providential *erōs* of the superior towards the inferior

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[76]   See Ramelli, "The Question of Origen's Conversion," 61–108.

[77]   I pointed to some examples in Ramelli, "Origen to Evagrius," 271–291.

[78]   Some of the chapter headings of the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, lacking in the extant Greek, in the Syriac version of Sergius of Reshaina seem to coincide with the chapter headings of Proclus' *Platonic Theology*: Perczel, "Pseudo-Dionysius and the *Platonic Theology*," 498–499.

[79]   Lankila, "The Corpus Areopagiticum"; Perczel, "Dionysius the Areopagite," 214–215.

[80]   Mainoldi, *Dietro Dionigi l'Areopagita*, 486–503, identifies the main author of the *Corpus*—a collective work—with an Athenian "pagan" Neoplatonist who converted to Christianity.

and an anagogic *erōs* of the inferior towards the superior. Proclus envisaged anagogic *erōs* in master-disciple relationships.[81] The master had to reorient desire (*erōs*) from sensible to intelligible beauty and help the disciple to become like the divinity and attain union with it. Anagogic *erōs* was thus a form of pedagogy. Now, for Origen it was in my view divine pedagogy, as is clear from the Commentary on CantC. The matter is the Logos, who is the divine Lover and Beloved. The *First Alcibiades*, according to Proclus, is concerned with the proper orientation of *erōs*, the gift of love that leads the perfectly loving souls (ἐρωτικαὶ ψυχαί) to union with the real and truly existent beauty and to the avoidance of misguided *erōs* that falls all over the images of what is beautiful, on account of ignorance of true beauty. Socrates' love is providential, related to the form of the Good, and anagogic, as it lifts souls up (ἀναγωγός, *In Alc*. 45, 5). In Proclus' Commentary on *Alcibiades I*, anagogic *erōs* is "the cause of reversion (ἐπιστροφή) to the divine beauty, which…elevates (ἀνάγουσα) all things that come second." Reversion is connected with apokatastasis in Proclus and Dionysius (as anticipated by Origen), and both relate to anagogic love. Proclus calls this dialogue a "science of love" (*In Alc.* 27; 28; 30) because it transforms the recipient into a "lover of the care for the self" (ἐραστὴν ἑαυτοῦ προνοίας, 27, 11). Proclus explains that "by turning Alcibiades towards himself, Socrates guides him up (ἀνάγει) to the contemplation of Socratic knowledge" (ἐπιστήμη, *In Alcib*. 19, 17–18).

Both Proclus' concept of love and especially Origen's and Nyssen's exegesis of *CantC* influenced Dionysius' concept of love within the framework of his mystical theology. As Paul was the model of ecstasy and epektasis for Gregory, so too is he for Dionysius, and that on account of love. Dionysius calls Paul "the great lover," who suffers ecstasy for God (2 Cor 5:13) and withdraws, to make room for Christ (Gal 2:20; *DN* 4, 13). Origen also inspired Dionysius with the core notion of the perfect who "no longer lives, but Christ lives in her" (Gal 2:20), in *C.Io.* IV 23, in his ideal of the perfect who "becomes Christ," so as to be Mary's child (John 19:26).

By referring to "theologians," Dionysius, may mean Origen's tradition, including Nyssen; Hierotheus, his revered teacher,[82] might point to Origen.[83] In *DN* 2, 11, Paul is represented as a "common guide" of both Dionysius and his "instructor" Hierotheus; likewise, in *DN* 3, 2, Hierotheus is Dionysius' inspirer after "the divine Paul." Since Paul was Origen's hero and inspired his doctrine of apokatastasis, that of love, Christology, and much else, this seems to support the hypothesis that Hierotheus may point to Origen (possibly at the same time as it points to Proclus, with the double system of references to both 'pagan' and Christian Platonism typical of Dionysius). Hierotheus, qua pseudonym, is not included in the list of objections to

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81   On which see Markus, "Anagogic Love," 1–39.
82   Dionysius is simply explicating in his own works Hierotheus' "synoptic" teaching directed to initiated (*DN* 3, 2–3, as did Clement with Pantaenus, and Plotinus with Ammonius).
83   As I suggested in Ramelli, *Apokatastasis*, 694–700.

the identification of the author of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* with the Dionysius converted by Paul in sixth-century presbyter Theodore's *The Book of St. Dionysius Is Authentic*.[84] Dionysius' reference to Hierotheus as a contemporary of the apostles fits well within his pseudonymity strategy, which comprises the choice of a name that refers to the Athenian philosopher converted by Paul after his Areopagus speech. Hierotheus appears in the title of Bar Sudhaili's pantheistic *Book of the Holy Hierotheus* and is presented by Dionysius as his own teacher, a contemporary of the apostles. He is described by Dionysius as superior to all other Christian sages after the apostles (*DN* 3, 2). Such a description echoes Didymus' and Jerome's definition of Origen. Hierotheus is a sublime theologian and mystic, παθὼν τὰ θεῖα, whose writings are a "second Scripture": this also suits well Origen's inspired exegesis (and perhaps his Περὶ Ἀρχῶν, which was commented on by Didymus like a second Scripture).

Dionysius quotes two excerpts, from Hierotheus' *Elements of Theology* (Θεολογικαὶ στοιχειώσεις)—a pendant to Dionysius' own *Outlines of Theology* (Θεολογικαὶ ὑποτυπώσεις)—and *Hymns on Love* (*DN* 2, 9–10; 4, 15–17). These Ἐρωτικοὶ ὕμνοι may refer to Origen's Commentary on *CantC*, which Dionysius knew, and the Θεολογικαὶ στοιχειώσεις to Origen's Περὶ Ἀρχῶν or the whole of his theological work, although, with Dionysius' usual double-reference scheme to 'pagan' and Christian Platonism together, the 'pagan' side was represented by Proclus' Στοιχείωσις θεολογική and his *Hymns*. My supposition that the *Hymns on Love* may conceal an allusion to Origen's commentary on *CantC* is supported by the expression κατὰ τοὺς ἐρωτικοὺς ὕμνους (*DN* 4, 14, 713A, suggesting not the Canticles, but a commentary on it) and by the fact that Origen's commentary had become the most authoritative interpretation of Canticles. Jerome in his prologue to his translation of Origen's homilies on CantC confirms this: "Origen in his other works surpassed all other writers, but in the Song of Songs he surpassed himself" with his commentary: "so, it appears that it is in Origen that Scripture was fulfilled, 'The king has led me into his chamber.'"

D*N* 2, 9–10, the first excerpt from Hierotheus, deals with Christ-Logos, who maintains the harmony of parts and whole, being above both, in terms that strongly resemble Clement's and Origen's theology. The second excerpt, 4, 15–17, expounds the gradation of love, whose forms and powers are reduced to unity: the Neoplatonic motif culminates in the Christian principle of God-ἀγάπη. Love is a unifying force that moves all,[85] from the Good to the last being and from this to the Good. This, as we shall see, may conceal a reference to Origen's Commentary on *CantC*.

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84   Photius, *Bibl.* Cod. 1,1a–2a, Bekker. This lost work refuted four objections to the authenticity: both Eusebius and other Fathers never cite the Corpus; the Corpus expounds traditions that have developed progressively inside the Church; the author cites Ignatius who lived after Dionysius.

85   Sassi, "Mystical Union," 771–784.

Dionysius drew on Origen's and Nyssen's apophatic, mystical theology.[86] There are even verbal borrowings from Gregory[87] and Origen, for instance μονὰς καὶ ἑνάς (*DN* 1, 4, from *Princ*. I 1, 6). Dionysius' embrace of apokatastasis,[88] related to ἐπιστροφή, further links him to Origen and Gregory (like the concept of *anastasis* as apokatastasis in *TM* 7, 9, Ritter 130, which is typical of Nyssen and is rooted in Origen[89]). Following in Origen's footsteps, Dionysius assimilated the Neoplatonic movement of ἐπιστροφή, after μονή and πρόοδος, with ἀποκατάστασις, at least in *EH* 82, 17 and 83, 7, even to the point of using, for ἐπιστροφή, the very terminology of apokatastasis.[90] Apokatastasis is the return to the Monad and unification (εἰς τὴν οἰκείαν μονάδα συνάγεται καὶ ἑνοποιεῖ τοὺς ἐπ᾽ αὐτὴν ἱερῶς ἀναγομένους); the application of the terminology of οἰκείωσις to the notion of apokatastasis is a legacy of Origen and Gregory of Nyssa.

In the third passage from Hierotheus, who might conceal Origen, the metaphysical movement of ἐπιστροφή (εἰς τἀγαθὸν ἐπιστρεφομένην), after that of πρόοδος (ἀγαθὴν πρόοδον), is identified with ἀποκατάστασις (*DN* 4, 14, [Suchla 160, 15]). Indeed, apokatastasis terminology is directly employed for ἐπιστροφή: God's love moves in a circle that proceeds from the Good—for God is "Beauty and Good itself," as in Nyssen[91]—and returns to the Good; it "always proceeds, remains, and returns [ἀποκαθιστάμενος] to the same Good." (This idea will be taken over, in the same image of the eternal circle, by the Christian Platonist Eriugena, another Origenian, who also conflated reversal or *reditus,* the Latin translation of ἐπιστροφή, with apokatastasis: true Goodness diffuses "from itself, into itself, and back to itself," *Periph.* III 632D).[92] Dionysius directly calls ἐπιστροφή apokatastasis, clearly identifying both. Dionysius ascribes this doctrine to Hierotheus (Origen? Perhaps Origen and Proclus at the same time?):

> The only one who is Beauty and Good per se [μόνον αὐτὸ δι᾽ ἑαυτὸ καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθόν][93] is the manifestation, so to say, of itself through itself, the good procession [πρόοδον] of the transcendent unity, and simple movement of love, self-moving, self-operating, proceeding in the Good and gushing out from the Good to the beings and returning again to the Good [αὖθις εἰς τἀγαθὸν ἐπιστρεφομένην]. In this the divine love exceptionally clearly shows *its own lack of an end and a beginning* [τὸ ἀτελεύτητον ἑαυτοῦ καὶ ἄναρχον ὁ θεῖος

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86   Ramelli, "The Divine."
87   E.g. the neologism θεοπλαστία, Dionysius Areopagita, *DN* 2, 9, from Nyssen, θεόπλαστος, *H.Eccl.*, GNO 5, 336.
88   See Ramelli, *Apokatastasis*, 694–721.
89   See Ramelli, "Christian Soteriology," 313–356.
90   As I argued in Ramelli, "Origen, Evagrius, and Dionysius" (also some arguments in Ramelli, *Apokatastasis*).
91   Ramelli, "Good / Beauty"; trans. Ziakas, "Το όμορφο."
92   See Ramelli, "The Question of Origen's Conversion."
93   Note the influence of Gregory of Nyssa about God as Beauty and Good.

ἔρως], *like a kind of infinite*[94] *and absolutely eternal circle for the Good, from the Good, in the Good, and towards the Good* [τις ἀίδιος κύκλος διὰ τἀγαθόν, ἐκ τἀγαθοῦ καὶ ἐν τἀγαθῷ καὶ εἰς τἀγαθὸν], proceeding around in an introversive non-wandering spiral, a*lways proceeding, remaining, and returning* [ἀποκαθιστάμενος, being restored] in the same movement and way [κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ προϊὼν ἀεὶ καὶ μένων καὶ ἀποκαθιστάμενος]. These truths were also explained, in his divinely inspired exegesis [ἐνθέως ὑφηγήσατο], by my illustrious and holy initiator in the / according to the *Hymns on Love* [κατὰ τοὺς ἐρωτικοὺς ὕμνους]. It will be particularly appropriate to quote from these Hymns and thus provide my own discourse on love with a sacred introduction, as it were: "Love [τὸν ἔρωτα], be it divine or angelic or intellectual or psychic or physical, should be understood as a unitive and commingling force that gathers together [ἑνωτικήν τινα καὶ συγκρατικὴν ἐννοήσωμεν δύναμιν] and induces the superior to provide for the inferior, the peer to be in communion with the peer, and the inferior to revert to the superior…"[95]

God's love forms a circle that proceeds from the Good and returns to the Good. The use of apokatastasis terminology, surely on purpose, in place of ἐπιστροφή-reversal terminology, may be intended as a double reference scheme, 'pagan' and Christian, although in the time of Dionysius both terminologies were used in 'pagan' and Christian Platonism together.

The inspired exegete who expounded this theory, Hierotheus, probably points to both Proclus, the author of Hymns (who used the similar expression "circle without beginning or end"),[96] and, on the Christian side, Origen, primarily in his commentary on *CantC*. Indeed, it is clear that Dionysius is paraphrasing the initial sections of this commentary (he paraphrases Origen also elsewhere),[97] and "divinely inspired exegesis" describes well Origen's exegesis, and particularly his Commentary on *CantC*. That this master/initiator is Origen is suggested by the connection between love, unity, and reversion/restoration. The ἐρωτικοὶ ὕμνοι may therefore be Origen's commentary, where Origen used both ἔρως—reworking its Platonic meaning—and ἀγάπη to refer to God's love, and, like Hierotheus, conceived it as a unifying power. For example, in prol. 2, 16 he insisted that besides *carnalis amor/cupido* one should admit of *spiritalis amor* (ἔρως), relevant to the *interior homo*. Dionysius is likely to have had in mind Origen and Nyssen, when noting that "the theologians regarded eros and agape as having the same meaning" and thus treated ἀγάπη and ἔρως as synonyms. This is what Origen and Gregory did. But this real ἔρως, which is appropriate to God, must be carefully distinguished from the divided, physical, and partial

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94   Note again the influence of Gregory of Nyssa about God as infinite.
95   Dionysius Areopagita, *DN* 4, 14, 712C–713AB (Suchla 160, 15).
96   *Inst. theol.* 146 = Dionysius Areopagita, *DN* 4, 14, 712D: the divine love has neither beginning nor end (ἀτελεύτητον καὶ ἄναρχον), like "an eternal [ἀίδιον] circle."
97   At the beginning of *DN* 2, Dionysius paraphrases Origenes, *Princ.* I 2, 13; further examples below, including Ignatius.

ἔρως, which is not true ἔρως, but an empty image therefor (*DN* 4, 12, 709BC). This is the same distinction as Origen had posited.

That Dionysius is referring to Origen, and Gregory, is confirmed when in *DN* 4, 12, 709B he remarks that some of the Christian writers on sacred matters have regarded the title ἔρως as even more divine than ἀγάπη. Gregory claimed that ἔρως is a more intense form of ἀγάπη (*H.Cant.* 13, GNO 6, 383, 9). Not only the application of ἔρως to God, in mystical theology, but also apokatastasis can be ascribed to Origen as "Hierotheus." Origen and Gregory were among the theologians cited as authorities by Dionysius. Indeed, Origen's influence regarding the concept of divine love as ἀγάπη and ἔρως is also evident in Patristic thinkers who followed him, not only Nyssen, but also Methodius.[98]

This is why Dionysius ascribes ἔρως to God in *DN* 4, 10: "the cause of all beings, by excess of goodness, loves [ἐρᾷ] all beings, creates all beings, perfects all beings, sustains all beings, and reverts all beings" (*DN* 4, 10, 708AB). Dionysius links once again love-desire to the movement of reversion-apokatastasis. His insistence on the "ecstatic" excess of God's love as the cause of all beings (*DN* 4, 13, 712AB: "going out of himself," "excess of erotic goodness," etc.) and their ecstatic return comes—with Dionysius' usual double reference, 'pagan' and Christian—from Proclus' idea of excess, περιουσία, as the cause of all beings (*ET* 27), but at the same time echoes Gregory of Nyssa's idea of *epektasis* in the return to God: going out of oneself in search of God.

Also, Dionysius cites Ignatius: ὁ ἔρως μου ἐσταύρωται, "my love has been crucified," in order to justify his own application of ἔρως to divine love in *DN* 4, 12. Now, with this move Dionysius is repeating Origen's one in his commentary on *CantC*: "Non ergo interest utrum amari [ἐρᾶσθαι] dicatur Deus aut diligi [ἀγαπᾶσθαι], nec puto quod culpari possit si quis Deum, sicut Iohannes caritatem [ἀγάπη], ita ipse amorem [ἔρως] nominet. Denique memini aliquem sanctorum dixisse, Ignatium nomine, de Christo: Meus autem amor [ἔρως] crucifixus est" (prol. 2, 36). Origen used ἔρως—reworking its Platonic meaning—besides ἀγάπη to refer to God's love, as mentioned, and conceived it as a unifying force, as Hierotheus did according to Dionysius.[99]

In *Theologia mystica* Dionysius also takes over Origen's mystical exegesis, connecting the darkness with the absence of words and thought (ἀλογία, ἀνοησία) and silence (*TM* 3, 103BC), on which Nyssen already insisted in his apophaticism. For "the one who is above all being, also transcends all knowledge" (*DN* 1, 4, 593A), so "the union" with God can only be "above intellect" (*DN* 7, 3, 872B), therefore mystical, and implies the "cessation of intellectual activities" (*DN* 2, 4, 592D), but God even transcends ineffability and unknowing, being ὑπεράρρητος, ὑπεράγνωστος

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98 Ramelli, "Love."
99 See Ramelli, "Origen and Evagrius" and Tolan, "Ὁ Θεὸς ἔρως ἐστί."

(*DN* 1, 4, 592B). In *TM* 1, 3, 1001A, Dionysius explicitly mentions the "darkness of unknowing." In at least four passages, Dionysius quotes Plotinus (ἄφελε πάντα with a view to the union with the One), who inspired Nyssen as well on this score.[100] Dionysius, like Origen and Nyssen, claimed that God's essence is inaccessible, but humans can know something about God through God's operations, names, and powers. Divine names, explored in a specific work, *De divinis nominibus,* name the nameless, reflecting not the essence, but the creative powers of God.

Dionysius, as seen, quotes two excerpts allegedly from works by Hierotheus, his teacher: *Elements of Theology* and *Hymns on Love*, which may allude to Origen's works, besides those of Proclus, in the usual double reference scheme. Declaredly the disciple of Hierotheus and the Athenian convert of St. Paul, Dionysius, a Christian Neoplatonist, is probably an *Origenian*—not a radically Origenistic—Platonist. Origen and Nyssen influenced him, including in the theory of love and ascent and that of apokatastasis–deification.

Many hints suggest that he supported the theory of apokatastasis in his preserved and his purportedly lost works, which may be lost indeed, or preserved under a different name and author, or which he may have mentioned without ever having written them. In the adhesion to this theory, he followed Clement, Origen, Nyssen, Evagrius, and Neoplatonism, from which he inherited the μονή-πρόοδος-ἐπιστροφή scheme. As argued, he directly used the terminology of apokatastasis for the third Neoplatonic movement. Dionysius also shared with the above thinkers the metaphysical tenet of the ontological non-subsistence of evil: a pillar of the doctrine of restoration. Apokatastasis for Dionysius, just as for Eriugena afterwards (who read Dionysius with the scholia of John of Scythopolis and Maximus the Confessor),[101] but also for Proclus,[102] is related to ἐπιστροφή, the third Neoplatonic movement, the return of all beings to their Cause: "The Cause of All is 'all in all,' according to the saying [τὸ λόγιον],[103] and certainly it must be praised in that it is the Giver of existence to all, the Originator of all beings, *who brings all to perfection* [τελειωτική], holding them together and protecting them; their seat, which *has them all revert to itself* [πρὸς ἑαυτὴν ἐπιστρεπτική], and this in a unified, *irresistible* and absolute [ἀσχέτως], and transcendent way" (*DN* 1, 7, 596c–597a).

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100 Plotinus, *Enn*. V 3 [49] 17, 39; cf. VI 7, 36; VI 8, 21; Ramelli, "Mysticism and Mystic Apophaticism." The verbal form appears in *Theologia Mystica* (1, 1, 1001A: πάντα ἀφελών and 2, 1, 1025B: τὰ πάντα ἀφαιροῦμεν); the nominal form in Dionysius Areopagita, *DN* II 4, 641A: ἡ πάντων ἀφαίρεσις, and I 5, 593C: τῆς πάντων τῶν ὄντων ἀφαιρέσεως.

101 See Ramelli, *Apokatastasis*, the section on Eriugena.

102 As I have argued in Ramelli, "Some Overlooked Sources."

103 On the one side it is a Biblical saying, 1 Cor 15:28, Origen's favourite passage in support of the doctrine of apokatastasis; on the other side, it is a neoplatonic tenet: see Ramelli, "Some Overlooked Sources." Τὸ λόγιον, "sacred utterance," was also used in the sense of an "oracular response/utterance"; by the fifth century, τὰ λόγια came to be used to describe the *Oracula Chaldaica*. Addey, *Divination and Theurgy*, 7.

Again, Dionysius insists that God is "the Cause of the *perfecting* [τελείωσις] *of all beings* […] it has pre-taken in itself *all beings* with the perfect acts of goodness of its *providence*, which is the cause of all." That all beings are brought to perfection by God, that they will all return to God, and that God's goodness and providence are the cause of all, probably also with an allusion to exemplarism (Gd "has pre-taken in itself all beings"), is surely coherent with the theory of apokatastasis. Dionysius also speaks of the eschatological παλιγγενεσία (*EH* 7, 1, 1, 3; 7, 3, 1), using what was originally a Stoic term, which later Christian sources connected with apokatastasis.[104]

Dionysius may have alluded allegorically to the eventual restoration, by deploying the astronomical meaning of ἀποκατάστασις, as Evagrius had done.[105] In *De divinis nominibus*, the astronomical allegory is as follows: the return of heavenly bodies is decided by God, the Good, and the light of the sun is the symbol of the Good, with a reminiscence of Plato, but also of Origen's insistence on Christ–God as the Sun of Justice. In the light of this symbolic interpretation of astronomical apokatastasis, this may well be the symbol of the general restoration, this also provided by God.[106] If the sun represents the Good/God, the heavenly bodies can symbolise the rational creatures who participate in the Good.

Another passage of the same work describes God's power that proceeds down to all beings, preserves them by leading them to their own good, keeps angels uncontaminated, orders the apokatastasis of heavenly bodies, and offers deification as a gift, providing the relevant capacity to those who will be deified (ἐκθεούμενοι).[107] The link between apokatastasis and θέωσις goes back to Origen. In Dionysius' passage, astronomical apokatastasis can symbolise again the restoration of rational creatures, all the more in that it is mentioned between the idea of the angels, who are preserved uncontaminated, and that of the deification (θέωσις) of rational creatures (see also *EH* 1).

Under the name of "Hierotheus," Dionysius is likely to have attributed to Origen not only the application of ἔρως to God, as seen, but also apokatastasis, and the connection between love and apokatastasis (in *DN* 4, 14, 712C–713AB), which is also

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104 See Ramelli, *Apokatastasis*, introduction. Work on ancient philosophical concepts of apokatastasis is underway.

105 As I argued Ramelli, "Harmony."

106 Τῶν οὐρανίων ἀρχῶν καὶ ἀποπερατώσεων αἰτία τἀγαθόν […] τῆς παμμεγέθους οὐρανοπορίας κινήσεων καὶ τῶν ἀστρῴων τάξεων […] καὶ τῆς τῶν δύο φωστήρων, οὓς τὰ λόγια καλεῖ μεγάλους, ἀπὸ τῶν αὐτῶν εἰς τὰ αὐτὰ περιοδικῆς ἀποκαταστάσεως […] Τί ἄν τις φαίη περὶ αὐτῆς καθ' αὑτὴν τῆς ἡλιακῆς ἀκτῖνος; Ἐκ *τἀγαθοῦ* γὰρ τὸ φῶς καὶ εἰκὼν τῆς ἀγαθότητος (Suchla 146.19).

107 Suchla 202, 14: Πρόεισι δὲ τὰ τῆς ἀνεκλείπτου δυνάμεως καὶ εἰς ἀνθρώπους καὶ ζῷα καὶ φυτὰ καὶ τὴν ὅλην τοῦ παντὸς φύσιν […] καὶ τὰς τοῦ παντὸς τάξεις καὶ εὐθημοσύνας εἰς τὸ οἰκεῖον ἀγαθὸν διασῴζει καὶ τὰς ἀθανάτους τῶν ἀγγελικῶν ἑνάδων ζωὰς ἀλωβήτους διαφυλάττει καὶ τὰς οὐρανίας καὶ φωστηρικὰς καὶ ἀστρῴας οὐσίας καὶ τάξεις ἀναλλοιώτους καὶ τὸν αἰῶνα δύνασθαι εἶναι ποιεῖ καὶ τὰς τοῦ χρόνου περιελίξεις διακρίνει μὲν ταῖς προόδοις, συνάγει δὲ ταῖς ἀποκαταστάσεσι […] καὶ τὴν τοῦ παντὸς ἀδιάλυτον μονὴν ἀσφαλίζεται καὶ τὴν θέωσιν αὐτὴν δωρεῖται δύναμιν εἰς τοῦτο τοῖς ἐκθεουμένοις παρέχουσα. On deification in Dionysius, e.g. De Andia, *Henosis*.

Origen's strategy.[108] Dionysius joins love and apokatastasis in *DN* 4, 10, 708AB. He describes God (Beauty and Good) as ἐραστόν and ἀγαπητόν and declares that "the Cause of all beings loves all beings in the superabundance of its goodness," because of which God creates all, perfects all, keeps all together, and restores all. Divine love is called θεῖος ἔρως and the "endless circle" of ἔρως (*DN* 4, 14–15, 712D–713AB) moves "trough the Good, from the Good, in the Good, and to the Good" in a movement of μονή–πρόοδος–ἐπιστροφή that becomes μονή–πρόοδος–ἀποκατάστασις, through the substitution of ἐπιστροφή with ἀποκατάστασις in this passage: "always proceeding, remaining, and *being restored* [instead of: *reverting*] to itself." Here, Dionysius introduces Hierotheus' definition of love-Eros, as seen. The connection between love, unity, and reversion/restoration further points to the identification of Hierotheus with Origen.

Ἀγάπη towards God is the aim of all hierarchy (*EH* 1, 3, 376A). Dionysius uses many terms related to hierarchy: ἱεραρχία, κυριαρχία (*CH* 8, 1, 240B), ἐναρχία (*DN* 2, 4, 641A etc.), οὐσιαρχία (*DN* 5, 1, 816B etc.), ἐξουσιαρχία, ἀγαθαρχία (*DN* 1, 5, 593C; 3, 1, 680B, etc.), and θεαρχία, Thearchy. Dionysius' neologism, θεαρχία, the divine unity of the three hypostases of the Trinity who are the three ἀρχαί or principles of all, comes, I suspect, from Origen's Περὶ ἀρχῶν, where the ἀρχαί are the three hypostases of the Trinity. Origen even influenced Porphyry's choice of entitling a treatise of Plotinus περὶ τῶν τριῶν ἀρχικῶν ὑποστάσεων, *The Three Principal Hypostases*[109] or the three Hypostases that are the ἀρχαί. God produces "the ἀρχαί of beings," "every being owing its ἀρχή to God" (*DN* 5, 6; 4, 28): these ἀρχαί participate in God (*DN* 5, 5; cf. 4, 4). Dionysius repeatedly calls God θεαρχικὴ ἀγαθότης in *MT* 7, 4: this combines ἀγαθαρχία, "the principle that is Good," and θεαρχία, "the Principle that is God." In Dionysius, indeed, the Trinity is both θεαρχία and θεαρχικὴ ἀγαθότης, expressions that were likely inspired by Origen's God as three ἀρχαί or ἀρχικὴ τριάς and God as supreme ἀγαθότης.[110] The very title Περὶ ἀρχῶν, which referred to God in Origen and had a long philosophical history,[111] was also the title of Damascius' treatise, probably also known to "Dionysius." Dionysius' ὑπεράρχιος ἀρχή (*DN* 1, 3, 589C, *CH* 1, 2, 121B, etc.) may even refer to Damascius' idea of a principle before the principle.

Another characterisation of God, "Monad and Henad" (*DN* 1, 4). derives from Origen (*Princ.* I 1, 6), as suggested, or maybe from both Origen and Proclus, with Dionysius' usual system of "double reference" to 'pagan' and Christian Platonism together. Proclus places Monad and Henad on the same plane only seldom, and never in reference to the First Principle, whereas Origen in *Princ.* I 1, 6 defines God

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108 As I argued in Ramelli, "Mystical Theology in Evagrius."
109 As I argued in Ramelli, "Origen, Greek Philosophy, and Hypostasis," 302–350.
110 Demonstration in Ramelli, "Origen, Greek Philosophy, and Hypostasis."
111 I analyzed it in Ramelli, "Origen, Patristic Philosophy."

precisely as μονάς and ἑνάς; the Greek is preserved by Rufinus in his translation. Origen also designated as Henad the union of the Father and the Son (*Dial. Her.* 4, 4). Dionysius' Origenian passage on God–Monad–Henad develops the doctrine of apokatastasis as restoration to unity and to God's image and likeness, just as Origen and Nyssen had conceived apokatastasis. Dionysius here telescopes Origen's stages of image>likeness>unity:[112]

> You will find, so to say, that the whole *hymnology of the theologians* prepares the *divine names* in a revelatory and hymnic way, according to the beneficent *procession of the principle of the Divinity*. For this reason, virtually *in the whole theological doctrine* we see the principle of the Divinity celebrated as *Monad and Henad* [μονὰς καὶ ἑνάς], because of the simplicity and unity of its supernatural indivisibility, by which *we are unified as by a unifying power*, and by a *supermundane act of reunion of our divisible alterities, we are assembled in a monad that is an image of God* (θεοειδής) *and in a union that is in the likeness of God* (θεομίμητος, *DN* 1, 4).

Note that the Biblical notions of εἰκών and ὁμοίωσις are expressed here by "pagan" synonyms: θεοειδής, θεομίμητος, with Dionysius' usual strategy of double reference to both "pagan" and Christian Platonism.

Dionysius here speaks in the present of God's activities of reunion, unification, and making creatures a monad as image and likeness of God, as he does oftentimes, and not in the future, because God is adiastematic, as Origen and Gregory Nyssen taught, and therefore above time: God is "the eternity of things that are, the time of things that come to be" and "transcends both time and eternity and all things in time and eternity" (*DN* 5, 4, 817C; 5, 10, 825B). God, being eternal, needs the use of the present or imperfect—as in John 1:1. This use of the present can mislead scholars into believing that Dionysius did not support apokatastasis. Dionysius, in fact, stresses that God is the Eternal, from which all times derive, just as God is beyond Being, and the source of all being (as Origen taught); the Godhead is ancient and young not because it is in time, but because it exists from the beginning and never gets old (*DN* 10).

In the block quote from *DN* 1, 4, "divine names" may refer, not only to Porphyry's homonymous work Περὶ θείων ὀνομάτων,[113] but also to Origen's systematic study of Christ's *epinoiai* in his *Commentary on John*, according again to the double reference scheme typical of Dionysius. Indeed, Dionysius declares to have drawn his divine names from Scripture (*DN* 1, 8, 597B). This is what Origen and Gregory did in their study of divine *epinoiai*. Dionysius seems to follow Gregory in identifying not only the Father, but all the three Persons of the Trinity, with the Platonic

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112 See Ramelli, "Harmony," 1–49.
113 This reference is also suggested by Mainoldi, *Dietro Dionigi l'Areopagita*, 424.

One or Good. Therefore, not only the Father, but also the Son is beyond Being (ὑπερούσιος, *MT* 1, 1).

As several points suggest, *DN* 1, 4 follows in Origen's footsteps: especially the notion of "the hymnology of the theologians," God described as "Monad and Henad," and the allusion to apokatastasis as unity. In *Princ.* II 1, 1 Origen calls *unitas–ἑνάς* also the original unity of creation (a notion developed by Evagrius), and in the Dionysian passage the unity of the Henad is applied precisely to the original unity, restored in the eventual apokatastasis, according to the assimilation of ἀρχή and τέλος which is reflected in the circular movement of μονή-πρόοδος-ἐπιστροφή.

Dionysius affirms that he had written extensively, on the basis of numerous biblical quotations, about the universal peace and restoration that were foreseen from eternity and will occur when, thanks to Christ, God will be "all in all" (1 Cor 15:28, but the reference, in the usual double reference system, may also be directed to the Procline "all in all"[114]). Dionysius had treated all this in his lost Θεολογικαὶ ὑποτυπώσεις, which, according to *DN* 1, 1, preceded *De divinis nominibus*: "What could be said of Christ's love for humanity, which gives peace in profusion [εἰρηνοχύτου φιλανθρωπίας]? Jesus operates *all in all* [τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσι ἐνεργοῦντος] and *realises an unspeakable peace* [ποιοῦντος εἰρήνην ἄρρητον] *established from eternity* [ἐξ αἰῶνος προωρισμένην], and *reconciles* us to him [ἀποκαταλλάσσοντος ἡμᾶς ἑαυτῷ] in spirit, and, *through himself and in himself, to the Father* [δι᾿ ἑαυτοῦ καὶ ἐν ἑαυτῷ τῷ πατρί]. Of these wonderful gifts I have abundantly and sufficiently spoken [ἱκανῶς εἴρηται] in the *Theological Outlines*, where to our testimony is joined that of the holy inspiration of Scriptures / of the sages [λογίων]." Here, the link with peace and reconciliation and the reference to both Proclus and 1 Cor 15:28 (Origen's, Gregory of Nyssa's, and Evagrius' favourite passage in support of apokatastasis) intimates that Dionysius in his lost work may have treated the theory of apokatastasis in terms close to those in which it is described in Gregory's *In Illud: Tunc et Ipse Filius*. Like Origen and Gregory, Dionysius supported this doctrine through Scriptural quotations and exegesis. If Dionysius did ever write the Θεολογικαὶ ὑποτυπώσεις, this work might have become lost because of the doctrine it expounded. But even in case his Θεολογικαὶ ὑποτυπώσεις never existed, it would be significant that Dionysius wanted to make it known that he had treated topics related to apokatastasis at length in a whole work. Nine passages in the *Corpus* expressly name the work Θεολογικαὶ ὑποτυπώσεις: six from *De divinis nominibus* and three from *Theologia mystica*. In *DN* 1, 1, as mentioned, Dionysius affirms that he wrote *DN* "shortly after the Θεολογικαὶ ὑποτυπώσεις," and on Suchla 116, 7, he refers to the discussion that in the Θεολογικαὶ ὑποτυπώσεις he devoted to the absolute transcendence and ineffability of God, to

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114 See my "Proclus of Constantinople" and, on the "all in all" principle between 'pagan' and Patristic Platonism, my argument in Ramelli, "Overlooked Sources," 406–476.

whom he applies the term αὐτοαγαθόν, which Origen had already applied to God the Father. Origen followed Numenius on his score, like Plotinus.[115]

1 Cor 15:28, which Dionysius echoes in two more passages (*DN* 7, 3; 1, 7), is Pauline. Paul was Origen's "hero" and main inspirer in numerous, major respects. Dionysius, as mentioned, presents Paul as the common teacher of both himself and Hierotheus, his master, who is likely to conceal a reference to Origen. In the excursus on evil in *DN* 4, 18, 35,[116] in §21 Dionysius insists on two elements from Origen: (1) a strong monism in the sentence, "the principle cannot be any duality" and must be simple (ἁπλή), and (2) evil as a consequence of free choice—the tenet of Origen's theology of freedom, based on theodicy and inherited by Nyssen.[117] The principle that evil is without cause or ἀναίτιον (*DN* 4, 30, 732A; 4, 32, 732D), so as to save God from any responsibility for it (to save theodicy), seems to me to take over Plato's famous definition of God as ἀναίτιος (not responsible for evil) in the myth of Er, which both Origen and Nyssen repeatedly echoed as the most important tenet of theodicy.

Dionysius in the above-mentioned passage presented the Trinity as a triune Unity (like Nyssen, he ascribed the characteristics of Plotinus' One not only to the Father, but to the whole Trinity): "As we said when we were expounding the Θεολογικαὶ ὑποτυπώσεις, the One, the unknown, who is beyond Being and is the Good itself [αὐτὸ ἀγαθόν], that is, the triune Henad [τριαδικὴ Ἑνάς], which is all divine and good in the same way, is both ineffable and impossible to conceive." Apophatic theology derives again from Origen and Nyssen, with the language of Plato's *Timaeus* on the difficulty to find God and the impossibility to express it. On the same line (Suchla 122.11) Dionysius refers again to his lost work, saying that in it he maintained that the names of God must be ascribed to the three Persons of the Trinity indivisibly, since the Trinity is a Superunited Henad (ἡ ὑπερηνωμένη ἑνάς): again the line of Nyssen. On the same line, Dionysius also informs (*ibidem* 125.14) that in the Θεολογικαὶ ὑποτυπώσεις he described God the Trinity as transcending the Being—as in Origen, ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας—and the Good itself as the cause of Being and of all goods.[118]

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115 See Ramelli, "Origen, Patristic Philosophy." On Numenius's protology see Dillon, "Numenius," 397–402, and on Numenius's influence on Origen see Kritikos, "Platonism and Principles," 403–417.

116 In a passage that, unlike most of the rest, is not a paraphrase of Proclus' *De malorum subsistentia*.

117 On Gregory's indebtedness to Origen's theology of freedom: Ramelli, *Social Justice*, chs. 5–6. On Origen's theology of freedom see also Lekkas, *Liberté et progrès*; Hengstermann, *Freiheitsmetaphysik*; Ramelli, "Origen in Gregory's Theology of Freedom," 363–388.

118 "Therefore, what is unified belongs to the whole divinity, as is argued in the Θεολογικαὶ ὑποτυπώσεις on the basis of very many reasons, drawn from Scriptures / the sages [λογίων]: that it transcends the Good [ὑπεραγαθόν], the divinity [ὑπέρθεον], the essence / being [ὑπερούσιον], life, wisdom, and all that which is characterised by an ascending abstraction [ὑπεροχικῆ ἀφαιρέσεως]; along with these, the causative epithets are also placed, such as the Good, the Beautiful, Being, life-giver, wise, and all those epithets with which the cause of all goods is called, due to all its goods, which fit the Good."

In Θεολογικαὶ ὑποτυπώσεις, Dionysius also explained the reasons for the distinctions and the unity among the Persons of the Trinity, even within the tight limits of human knowledge of the divine.[119] In *TM* 3, 1, Ritter 146, 1–9, he affirms that in his Θεολογικαὶ ὑποτυπώσεις he had discussed the main points of cataphatic theology, on the unity and trinity of God, the three Persons of the Trinity, the generation of the Son, his assumption of human nature, and so on, always basing himself on Scripture.[120] This is what Origen did in *De principiis*. Soon after, Dionysius indicates that in another lost work, his *Theologia Symbolica*, he provided an allegorical exegesis of Biblical anthropomorphisms attributed to God: "in my *Symbolic Theology* the transpositions of sense-perceptible characteristics to the divine (are examined): the meaning of forms ascribed to God, of shapes, parts of the bodies, and organs that are attributed to God, of places and worlds, of episodes of anger, sorrow, rage [...] the way we should interpret curses [...] and all the other forms that have been attributed to God in a symbolic sense." Origen explained Biblical references to God's anger, threats, and destructions, in the same way as Dionysius says he himself did, and reconciled them with the doctrine of restoration.

Dionysius explains next the reasons why the Θεολογικαὶ ὑποτυπώσεις were "more concise" (βραχυλογώτερα) than the *Symbolic Theology*: because they proceeded from on high and the beginning (ἄνω), from God, the first Principle, down to creatures and their existence in time, until "the last things," τὰ ἔσχατα, an expression that, as I suggested, is to be also understood in an eschatological sense.[121] Therefore, Θεολογικαὶ ὑποτυπώσεις began with God as first ἀρχή, as in Origen's *De principiis*, and arrived, like Origen, at the eventual apokatastasis.[122] Moreover, Dionysius treated apokatastasis within the framework of theology and Christology, as in Nyssen's *Tunc et ipse*. The investigation into the nature of God, insofar as possible, and into the "gifts of Christ" allows theologians to envisage what eschatology will look like for God's creatures. Again, even on the hypothesis that the Θεολογικαὶ ὑποτυπώσεις never existed, it would be significant that Dionysius indicates their structure as

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[119] Suchla 130.5: "For all that is divine, even what has been manifested, can be known only by participation, but in itself, how it is according to its principle and constitution, this transcends intellect and every essence and knowledge."

[120] "In the *Theological Outlines* I sang the main points of cataphatic theology, how the divine and good nature is called one, forming a unity [ἑνική], and how it is called triune [τριαδική]; what is paternity in it and what sonship; what theological discourse concerning the Spirit means; how from the immaterial Good, deprived of parts, lights sprang off, from the heart of Goodness, and how these have remained inseparable from the eternal *manentia*, coeternal with the bud, *manentia* of the Father in himself, *manentia* of the Father in himself *and* the Son in himself, and of the Father and the Son reciprocally; how superessential Jesus has substantiated himself with the truth of the human nature, and all the rest that is sung in the *Theological Outlines*, revealed by Scriptures / by the sages [λογίων]."

[121] Κἀκεῖ μὲν ἀπὸ τοῦ ἄνω *πρὸς τὰ ἔσχατα* κατιὼν ὁ λόγος. Argument in my *Apokatastasis*, section on Dionysius.

[122] On the structure of *De principiis*: Ramelli, "Origen, Patristic Philosophy"; Fernández, "Pedagogical Structure," 15–22; Behr, *Origen*, 1, xxx-xxxvi.

similar to the structure of Origen's masterpiece (and likely alluding to the treatment of eschatology).

Without dealing here with the issue of the relation between the Corpus' Greek and Syriac redactions, I only remark that a similar problem is found with two other important Origenian works: Evagrius' *Kephalaia Gnostika*, with its two Syriac redactions, the question of their reciprocal relation, and their connection with the Greek fragments.[123] Dionysius, at least in the Greek edition available to us, emerges as a profoundly Origenian thinker, as I said, more than radically Origenistic.

It is useful "to examine the extant Greek text for traces of Origenist doctrines."[124] I discovered many of these, including the theory of mysticism and love and the doctrine of apokatastasis in the Corpus, not, again, in an Origenistic or radical form, as it is the case in Sudhaili or in post-Evagrian thought, but in an Origenian form, closer to the genuine philosophical theology of Origen (a major presence behind the Corpus) and his follower Nyssen. The Corpus is "not polemical against the doctrinal contents of Origenism"[125] but more against "pagan" philosophy and Manichaeism, such as in the excursus on evil in *DN* 4.

This is why Dionysius, besides regularly conflating Plato and Scripture, as Origen had done throughout the Corpus uses a double-reference scheme to both 'pagan' and Christian Neoplatonism, and was accused of "using the ideas of the Greeks against the Greeks" (τοῖς Ἑλλήνων ἐπὶ τοὺς Ἕλληνας, *Ep*. 7). The scheme of the "double references" to both 'pagan' Platonism and Christian Platonism / Christianity / Scripture, pointed out above, is also clear in Dionysius' references to God as "all in all" (*DN* 1, 7, 596C; 9, 4, 912D), both a quotation from 1 Cor 15:28, continually cited by Origen, especially in support of apokatastasis, and an expression used by later 'pagan' Neoplatonism.[126]

The line denounced in *Ep*. 7 was probably that taken by the Athenian Platonic school against Christian Platonists, probably Dionysius after he became a Christian (if he was a convert, as Panayiotis Tzamalikos, Ernesto Sergio Mainoldi, and others hypothesise),[127] but, I suspect, also against Origen. Origen had used the ideas of

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123 See Ramelli, *Kephalaia Gnostika*; Ramelli, "Evagrius' *Kephalaia Gnostika*," 73–98; I address Casiday's thesis on the relation between the two recensions in Ramelli, "Gregory Nyssen's and Evagrius' Relations."

124 Perczel, "Notes on the Earliest Greco-Syriac Reception of the Dionysian Corpus," 35.

125 Mainoldi, *Dietro Dionigi l'Areopagita*, 485. Only, the label "Origenian-Evagrian intellectualism" (487) is debatable, since Origen's and Evargius' apophaticism and their placing agape at the same level as *nous* correct their intellectualism. See Ramelli, "Evagrius Ponticus, the Origenian Ascetic," 147–205.

126 The potential reciprocal influences will be the object of a specific study.

127 CarloMaria Mazzucchi, Vanneste, Hathaway, Tuomo Lankila, and Brons deem him a (crypto-)'pagan'. Like István Perczel, Paul Rorem, Ysabel de Andia, Alexander Golitzin, Mainoldi, and others, among whom Paul Gavrilyuk, "Did Pseudo-Dionysius Live," Andrew Louth, *The Origins*, sees in Dionysius a Christian, a hypothesis already envisaged by Hausherr and Balthasar, and views the *Caelestis Hierarchia* as a response to the *Book of Hierotheus*.

the Greeks, as Porphyry already noted (*C.Chr.* F39, Harnack),[128] *against the Greeks*, that is, to support Christianity rationally, and applied them and allegoresis, as a philosophical tool, to the interpretation of Scripture: an operation that Porphyry deemed illegitimate (*ibidem*).[129]

Porphyry absorbed much of Christian Platonism, but with an opposite aim. Besides his familiarity with Origen's scriptural allegoresis, his use of Origen's notion of Hypostasis (part of his "epoptics"),[130] and his knowledge of Scripture (as revealed in his anti-Christian polemic), Porphyry's Biblical quotations and echoes even outside direct polemic are remarkable. For instance, he describes Plotinus' love for the divinity in scriptural terms: Plotinus "loved the divine with his entire soul, always striving towards it" (σπεύδων πρὸς τὸ θεῖον, οὗ διὰ πάσης τῆς ψυχῆς ἤρα, *V.Plot.* 23, 6). The commandment of loving God with all of one's soul is scriptural, taken up explicitly by Jesus. The only difference Porphyry introduces is (Platonic) ἔρως terminology instead of (Biblical) ἀγάπη, but this was already a novelty of Origen, especially in Commentary on Canticles, followed, as mentioned, by Nyssen and Dionysius.

On purpose, I suspect, Dionysius countered Porphyry's criticism of Origen's application of Greek allegoresis to Scripture, which he labels "an absurdity" (ἀτοπία, *C.Chr.* F39, Harnack), since Dionysius adopted from Origen the allegorico-symbolic hermeneutics of inspired Scripture. Dionysius denounced that "uninitiated" (ἀτελέσι) deemed Scriptural allegoresis, which clarifies "what the *inspired oracles* [λόγια] say *in riddles* about divine mysteries," an "outstanding absurdity" (ἀτοπίαν δεινήν, *Ep.* 9). Also given the verbal parallel, Dionysius was very likely replying to Porphyry (qua Origen's accuser) here in Letter 9, as well as, in Letter 7, to the whole 'pagan' Platonic charge of using Hellenic ideas against the Hellenes that was levelled against Dionysius and Christian Platonism: Origen and his line.[131]

Dionysius' general principle is indeed the same that animated Origen: both could have been accused of "parricide" towards 'pagan' philosophy, particularly Platonism: as the full passage notes, "the sophist Apollophanes, calling me 'parricide', is accusing me of making unholy use of Greek things… but it is the Greeks who make unholy use of godly things to attack God!" (*Ep.* 7.2). Origen thought the same and proved it, especially in *Contra Celsum.*

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[128]   Analysis in Ramelli, "Origen, Patristic Philosophy" and in further work.

[129]   Demonstration in Ramelli, "The Philosophical Stance," 335–371, further Ramelli, "Allegorising and Philosophising."

[130]   As I argued in Ramelli, "Origen, Greek Philosophy, and Hypostasis."

[131]   Proclus speaks very much of Origen as a Platonist, and admires him although he criticises him, but, if he was speaking of the Christian Origen (possible, although not sure), he never mentions that he was a Christian.

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