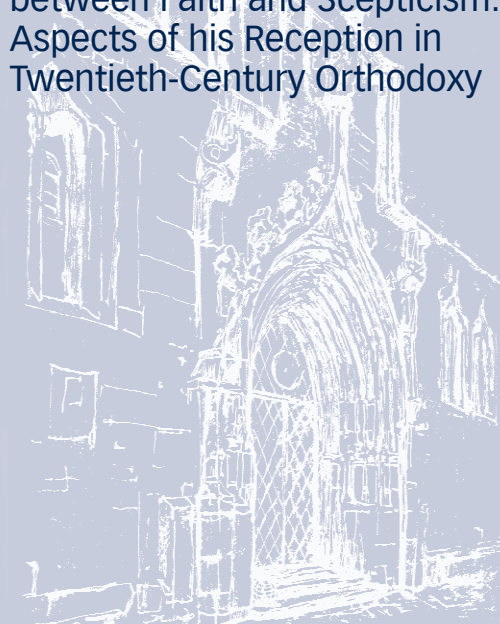


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between Faith and Scepticism:
Aspects of his Reception in
Twentieth-Century Orthodoxy



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Dimitrios A. Vasilakis

Abstract

Dionysius the Areopagite, the pseudonymous author, who lived in the era before and after the advent of 6th century AD, is a Christian author who engaged extensively with ancient Greek philosophy through pagan Neoplatonism, as well as with previous Christian tradition, which in its turn drew on the Hebrew tradition, according to Archbishop Alexander (Golitzin). Dionysius is famous for systematizing and exploiting to its uttermost the twin way leading to God: kataphatic (positive) and apophatic (negative) theology. Faith (πίστις) is a term to be found in Plato (in the “Republic”) regarding the lowest kind of cognition. It is also used by the Neoplatonist Proclus (5th century AD) to describe how we can come into contact with divinity. However, this use of πίστις within a kataphatic context relates also to the apophatic mode: because God transcends us, we may have only πίστις for Him, who – strictly speaking – is unknown to human reason (ἄγνωστος). In other words, if Neoplatonism has synthesized almost all previous Greek philosophical currents, we are to find Scepticism at the system’s top, since one affirms that (s)he cannot know God. After all, not accidentally, Sceptics were Platonists, i.e., members of the Academy founded by Plato in Athens.

Gregory Palamas in fourteenth-century Byzantium developed further the Dionysian theme of the dialectic between kataphatic and apophatic theology employing the distinction between essence and energies, in order to explain how one can have experience of God Himself, while God in His essence transcends creation. Palamas played a pivotal role in the understanding of Dionysius and became hallmark of Russian and Greek philosophers and theologians of the 20th century, who attempted to release the Eastern Christian tradition from its “Babylonian captivity”, as G. Florovsky would term it. However, while Dionysius Areopagite was held in great esteem by the Church Fathers, in both East (e.g., Maximus Confessor, John Damascene, Gregory Palamas) and West (e.g., Thomas Aquinas), upon discovering his pseudonymity, scholars from the Renaissance onwards became critical of him. Such a re-evaluation had an impact upon the later reception of his work and ideas. More specifically in the 20th century, one witnesses such a stance not only among Protestant and Roman Catholic scholars (e.g., Adolf von Harnack and Jan Vanneste), but also among Orthodox ones (e.g., John Meyendorff and Alexander Schmemmann).

Despite this anti-Dionysian milieu and within the process of attempting to rediscover the “genuine” Orthodox Christian identity, there were some notable reappraisals of Dionysius and his ideas, related to a critique of Western Christianity, which had been influenced by modern secularism. More importantly, some Orthodox theologians and thinkers attempted to use Dionysius in order to differentiate between East and West and to provide answers to modern dilemmas triggered by the pervasive secular spirit. Thus, in the context of the Russian Orthodox diaspora in Western Europe, Vladimir Lossky not only re-evaluated Dionysius, but also posed the Areopagitic doctrine of apophaticism as the main criterion for discerning between Orthodoxy and heresy (including the Western secular version of Christianity). Famously, the Greek theologian and philosopher Christos Yannaras followed upon Lossky’s steps and developed such ideas even further in his conceptualisation of the main theological differences between East and West. In his opinion, Dionysian apophaticism is a key for understanding the authentic and often forgotten Eastern Orthodox tradition. Moreover, it provides answers and ways out from the modern challenges of nihilism and atheism, which had such a strong impact upon Western European philosophy (e.g., Martin Heidegger) and theology (e.g., the “God-is-Dead theology” of the 1960s). Here it is about specific Orthodox receptions of Dionysius within an anti-secular framework.

However, Dionysian apophaticism still remains problematic for other contemporary Orthodox figures. Aside from Metropolitan John Zizioulas, who – following Florovsky – remained quasi neutral on this topic, St Sophrony Sakharov considered Dionysian apophaticism as responsible for the anti-hesychastic trends within Western Christianity, which may be also observed mutatis mutandis in the Orthodox East, as well. In this paper, I examine various aspects of this mixed Dionysian reception in the Orthodox world in connection to the issue of secularity and the concomitant East-West differentiation. I also try to synthesize them in view of regaining a more constructive engagement with the challenges that secularity poses to contemporary Christianity and societies in both East and West. Finally, in setting out this complex framework, I expand on examples of Dionysius’ mixed reception, on the basis of understanding the dialectical duo of apophasis and kataphasis, a pair rooted in the dialectic between scepticism and faith, the latter better rendered in this context as trust.

KEYWORDS: *apophaticism, asceticism, East(ern Christianity), faith, hesychasm, hypostasis, kataphatic (theology), love (eros), mysticism, negative (theology), (Neo)Plato(nism), nihilism, paganism, person, (Academic) scepticism, trust, uncreated energies/activities, West(ern Christianity)*

In this paper,* I am going to discuss some consequences of the epistemological pair of faith (πίστις) and scepticism (σκέψις)¹ within the broad framework of a metaphysician of pivotal importance, Dionysius the Areopagite. I will do this along three axes: In the first axis, I am going to note how and in what form faith and scepticism might survive in Dionysius' Christian vision. This will include a regression to Dionysius' Platonic past, esp. Plato, the Hellenistic Academy and Proclus, as well as brief Jewish references, in particular to Philo. The second axis will discuss the history of Dionysius' reception, especially by twentieth-century Orthodox thinkers, namely Vladimir Lossky, Fr. Sophrony (Sakharov), Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) and Christos Yannaras, which proved to be vacillating between faith, i.e., trust, or scepticism toward Dionysius' heritage. The third axis will deal with my own evaluation as to the trust or scepticism we should have toward these interpretations of Dionysius and in which respects.

I

Dionysius the Areopagite (also mentioned as “Denys” for the sake of brevity) is arguably a thinker of great importance for the history of philosophy, as well as

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¹ Despite the widespread spelling of the term “skepticism” with “k” (attested, for example, in Pilgrim 2022, as well as in the majority of relevant entries in the online SEP: *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*), which is also nearer to the Greek, I opt for “scepticism” with “c”, due to its use in the announcements for research programmes, lectures and publications (e.g., Veltri 2018) within the frame of the aforementioned MCAS (<https://www.maimonides-centre.uni-hamburg.de/the-centre.html> – last accessed on 02.06.2023).

one of the greatest Fathers of the Christian Church in both East and West.² He is a major authority not only for Maximus the Confessor (ca. 580-662) and John of Damascus (ca. 675-749), but also for two founding pillars of Western and Eastern Christianity (in both theological and philosophical terms), i.e., Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and Gregory Palamas (ca. 1297-1359) respectively.³ However, this Church Father wrote his relatively small corpus, comprising works on the *Divine Names* (DN), the *Mystical Theology* (MT), the *Celestial and Ecclesiastical Hierarchies* and 10 *Epistles*, under the pseudonym of Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, the convert of apostle Paul, after the latter's famous speech about the Athenians' faith to an "Agnostos Theos" (ἄγνωστος θεός; the unknown – or unknowable – God) in the Areopagus at Athens (according to the explicit New Testament passage of the *Acts of the Apostles*).⁴ Philological, comparative philosophical and theological studies have securely situated the action of our author, probably of Syriac provenance, at the end of 5th and the beginning of 6th century, especially due to the many verbal, as well as conceptual similarities with the work of the pagan Neoplatonic philosopher Proclus (412-485 AD).⁵ The reason I am not adding the prefix "pseudo-" to Dionysius' name is due to a current in Dionysian scholarship, which refuses to denigrate Dionysius' importance, implied by the label "pseudo-", without doubting, of course, the fact of his pseudonymity.⁶

² As an introduction, see Louth 1989, Wehr 2013, Suchla 2008, Pupaza 2015, Mainoldi 2018 (with an English translation in preparation by N. Russell within the series "Theandrites: Studies in Byzantine Philosophy and Christian Platonism, 284-1453"), Ritter 2018 and Riedweg – Horn – Wyrwa 2018, pp. 2220-2249 (written again by A. M. Ritter, with Bibliography on pp. 2305a-2310b). Edwards – Pallis – Steiris 2022a (sections II-IV), Kapriev 2021 and de Andia 1997 attest to Dionysius' enormous "Wirkungsgeschichte".

³ See, e.g., Golitzin 2013, pp. xiii and 52; with special reference to Aquinas' and Palamas' reception of Dionysius, see O'Rourke 1992 and Russell 2019, p. 2, respectively.

⁴ Cf. Acts 17: 34.

⁵ See, for instance, Stiglmayr 1895 and Koch 1900.

⁶ Cf. Edwards-Pallis-Steiris 2022b, esp. p. 6, as well as Carabine-Pallis 2016, p. 66, and Pallis 2022a, p. 608.

Despite the interweaving of Neoplatonism with Christianity,⁷ Dionysius was most admired in the Orthodox East, although this was not always and everywhere the case.⁸ The first attestation of Dionysius' works being referred to are in a Council, which took place in 532 AD between Chalcedonian Christians (i.e., those following the doctrine of Christ's two natures, according to the 4th Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon, in 451 AD) and non-Chalcedonians; in this case, it was the latter group that evoked Dionysius' authority.⁹ However, as Rorem and Lamoreaux have shown, even in those early times Dionysius was not the monopoly of peripheral currents, but also enjoyed the appreciation of mainstream Orthodox Church.¹⁰ Such a mixed reception was repeated in pre-modern Europe up to our times.¹¹ For example, already Luther, in his opposition to the Roman Catholic Church and Scholastic theology, condemned the writings of Dionysius as "more Platonizing than Christian".¹² This is not surprising, if one, for example, recalls that for the Roman Catholic Church the Dionysian notion of "hierarchy" (a word coined by Dionysius)¹³ played such an important role. This kind of story can be retold even within the frame of twentieth-century Orthodox theology, as we shall see (in section II).

Before that, though, I would like to dwell on a signature aspect of Dionysius' philosophical and theological vision, which connects him with his rich intellectual past. This is the combination of the well-known twin methodological approach of "kataphatic" and "apophatic" theology, permeating his whole corpus,¹⁴ but

⁷ See the critical study of Siasos 1984 (for which my friend, Panagiotis Pavlos, has declared that it is a pity it has not been translated into English yet).

⁸ In general, see Tsorbatzoglou 2022.

⁹ Cf. Pelikan 1987, p. 13.

¹⁰ Cf. Rorem-Lamoreaux 1998, p. 11.

¹¹ See, e.g., Leclercq 1987 and Froehlich 1987.

¹² "[P]lus platonizans quam christianizans": see Rorem 1997. As Prof. Knut Alfsvåg has noted to me, this is not say that Luther, especially in his formative years, had nothing to admire in Dionysius (for instance, the preference for apophaticism against scholasticism). On the whole, see Alfsvåg 2011, as well as Dubbelman 2022.

¹³ Cf. Klitenic – Wear – Dillon 2007, pp. 7 and 11.

¹⁴ Disregarding the fact that the author in his extant works refers to other non-extant writings, which are highly probably fictitious, as is his name.

featuring more vividly in his grand work on *Divine Names* (*DN*), and the much shorter treatise, which actually starts off with a prayer,¹⁵ on *Mystical Theology* (*MT*).¹⁶ “Theology” (θεολογία) is the Word of God; that is, theologian (θεολόγος) in the primary sense is the Logos (Θεὸς Λόγος), i.e., the second person of the Trinity.¹⁷ In a derivative sense, we, as images of God,¹⁸ try to communicate with God, and a part of this is theology, including the Scripture (or λόγια, as Dionysius calls it).¹⁹ This communion can take place in a number of ways, but a prominent pair is that of *kataphasis*, i.e., the positive ascription of characteristics or names to God, as happens especially in the *DN*, and *apophasis*, i.e., the negation of these characteristics or names with regard to God, which is *MT*’s end. For instance, we might say that God is Beautiful (or Beauty Itself, καλλονή), because every beautiful thing owes its existence to God, and hence it can become a bridge so that we may reach Him. Apart from the issue of self-predication, which some interpreters ascribe to Plato and especially to his so-called “middle period”,²⁰ (but which I am not going to deal with here), we see in the divine name “Beautiful” an example of kataphatic theology. However, even here Dionysius is sensitive to note caveats. Actually, it would be better not to speak of a pair of approaches, but rather of a continuum. This starts off at the bottom with not so appropriate kataphatic

¹⁵ Here, I must remedy an error that crept in Vasilakis 2023a, p. 111, n. 6. The prayer-poem that has been attributed not only to Dionysius, but also to Gregory of Nazianzus, as well as Proclus, is not the one at the beginning of *MT*, but an independent one, for which see the detailed study of Macé 2023. She argues convincingly that none of these three authors wrote that hymn. I thank Dimitrios Pallis for having drawn my attention to this negligence of mine.

¹⁶ Corry 2022 gives a very interesting reading of Dionysius that combines the kataphatic approach of the *DN* with the apophatic approach of *MT*. (In the main text of this section, I will come back to this combination. See also *infra*, n. 28.) What is more, Stock 2021, building on prior approaches of similar nature, reads the *DN* from the lens of a long prayer, which praises God (i.e., a hymn).

¹⁷ Cf., e.g., 1 John 5: 7; John 1: 1-4 and 14.

¹⁸ Cf. Genesis 1: 26. It is true, though, that Dionysius is more generous in his application of this passage, extending it so that it covers every creation of God; cf. Zachhuber (forthcoming), nn. 68 and 69, as well as Vasilakis 2021a, p. 171, n. 80. For the second integral part of the formulation of this biblical passage, see *infra*, n. 177.

¹⁹ This term (λόγια, derived from λόγος) is also used by pagan Neoplatonists with reference to their own sacred scriptures, as is the case with Proclus’ references to the *Chaldean Oracles*.

²⁰ See Vlastos 1965 (which is an essay first published in 1954) and the more recent discussion of Apolloni 2011.

ascriptions to God, like “stone”;²¹ it then goes on to more appropriate kataphatic ascriptions, like “good”, while then it stresses the superiority of God with the “*hyper-*” formulas (“super-good”/ὑπεράγαθος), since one cannot compare the Good with any of the other good things. In this sense, we might be more accurate if we negate all previous ascriptions, from the crude ones up until the more sophisticated ones, and here we have entered apophaticism.²² In the end, one may reach the peak of *MT*,²³ which, after the denial of denials, it becomes silence.²⁴ As famously the early Wittgenstein declared in the final seventh proposition of his *Tractatus*,²⁵ “[w]hereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent”.²⁶ Actually, this is not the end of the Areopagite’s story, since one needs to connect this approach with the liturgical (i.e., sacramental) framework of Dionysius’ vision, characterized by a doxological language,²⁷ i.e., a language which praises (as in hymns) the works of God.²⁸

Such a compelling, previously neglected, holistic understanding of Dionysius has been furnished by the most profound, in my view, contemporary interpreter of Dionysius, Alexander Golitzin (b. 1948).²⁹ A particular aspect of Golitzin’s

²¹ A divine name stemming from, among other places, Deut. 32: 4 and Psalm 18 [17]: 31/32.

²² See also Bouteneff 2023, p. 226.

²³ See also *ibid.*, p. 228.

²⁴ This is a rationale as to why apophaticism is not mere (or is something more and deeper than) “negative theology”. On this remark, see Jugrin 2018, pp. 161 and 166. What is more, see *infra*, n. 60 for similar formulations in Proclus.

²⁵ As usually noted, Wittgenstein’s title (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*) reminds us of the Jewish philosopher, Baruch Spinoza’s *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*.

²⁶ Wittgenstein 1922, prop. 7: “Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen.” See also Mitralaxis 2015. The aforementioned proposition is the first out of two motos of the penultimate chapter of Frazer – Simser 2016, p. 221.

²⁷ See, e.g., references in Vasilakis 2019a, p. 187 with notes on p. 195, as well as in the Modern Greek revised version of that article: Vasilakis 2023b, pp. 193-194.

²⁸ Implying here the word «θεουργία» (theurgy), which has pagan Neoplatonic precedents, but also Dionysian novelties in Christological associations. See Pavlos 2019 (as well as the Modern Greek enhanced version: Pavlos 2023); see also *supra* n. 16, as well as Ramelli 2023, p. 564, who notes that “[t]he apophatic mysticism of love, already developed by Origen and Gregory [sc. of Nyssa], is a central element in the mystical theology of Dionysius”. Cf. also *ibid.*, p. 568, although I do not espouse the view that Dionysius was an Origenist author; I do not think, either that speaking instead of an “Origenian” author, as Ramelli does (*ibid.*, p. 571), is of great help.

²⁹ Professor of Patristics at Marquette University till 2012; currently Archbishop in the Orthodox Church in America (OCA).

scholarship³⁰ was that, without downgrading the importance of Neoplatonism, Golitzin emphasized Dionysius' indebtedness to earlier Christian ascetic literature,³¹ which again, as stressed by Golitzin's erudite studies, has many affinities with and is in fact indebted to the Jewish tradition, especially the "Hekhalot literature"³² and Second Temple Judaism (ca. 516 BC–70 AD).³³ Having paid his due to Jewish scholars, such as Gershom Scholem (1897-1982), Golitzin founded "The Theophaneia School", a "Forum on the Jewish Roots of Orthodox Spirituality",³⁴ while the recent *Festschrift* dedicated to him by students of this group is accordingly entitled *Jewish Roots of Eastern Christian Mysticism*.³⁵

Talking of precedents, one is also obliged to examine Dionysius' roots in the Platonic tradition: Plato.³⁶ It is well known that the Neoplatonists, for instance Plotinus (204/5-270 AD), interpreted the famous passage from Book VI of the *Republic*, about the Good as "beyond being",³⁷ as referring to the Highest and First Principle, which is unknowable,³⁸ because, according to the Parmenidean equation of knowledge and being,³⁹ only what is can be known, and the One precedes (qua cause of) being. Thus, apophatic theology is much earlier than Dionysius, Plotinus or even Plato. For instance, we can think of Gen. 32: 23-31: the episode of Jacob's curious battle with a stranger, in the end of which, after having received a new name, Israel (i.e., "the one who fought with God"), Jacob asked the stranger's name, but he received no positive answer. We can witness a

³⁰ As is shown, for instance, in his 1980 Oxford DPhil thesis, which was published as Golitzin 1994 and appeared in 2013 in a revised edition.

³¹ For instance, Saint Ephrem the Syrian (ca. 306-373).

³² Jewish apocalyptic mystical texts; see Davila 2013.

³³ Ritter 2018, pp. 97-122, esp. 106-122, from a rather critical standpoint expresses some reservations for this approach, as usual (*passim*).

³⁴ Cf. Golitzin 2007.

³⁵ Orlov 2020.

³⁶ See also in Louth 2007, as well as Kyriazopoulos 1960, p. 18 apud Begzos 1996, p. 331 and n. 15.

³⁷ «ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας»: Plato, *Republic*, 509b8-9 (Slings).

³⁸ Cf., e.g., Plotinus, *Enneads*, V.1. §8, 7-8 (Henry-Schwyzler/editio minor).

³⁹ See Parmenides B3 DK.

similar concealing tendency in the case of Moses, the archetypal figure featuring prominently in Philo of Alexandria,⁴⁰ Gregory of Nyssa⁴¹ and Dionysius:⁴² when Moses asks God about His name and receives the ambiguous answer «Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν»,⁴³ Philo concludes that “it is not possible to assign truly a proper name to Him who is”,⁴⁴ since “God in His own being is incomprehensible”.⁴⁵

For my present purposes, I would like to dwell a bit more on the Platonic precedent prior to Middle Platonism, since, as is well known, Plato’s Academy evolved into a sceptical school in the Hellenistic era.⁴⁶ It is no wonder how this took place: Plato’s aporetic works span from, say, the *Lysis* to the *Theaetetus*. Frequently, there are different views for one and the same topic across different works, and even if one inspects a “dogmatic” work, like the *Republic*, there are many intricacies that cannot be downplayed.⁴⁷ Anyway, even if the Scepticism of Plato’s Academy might suffer from internal self-refuting problems,⁴⁸ it is rooted in Plato’s Socratic way of doing philosophy,⁴⁹ claiming that one can have the certainty (or should have the consciousness) of knowing nothing.⁵⁰ Whereas this is too maximalist a thesis,⁵¹ surprisingly, strict Scepticism does have a contact

⁴⁰ Cf. also Pallis 2022b, p. 104, as well as Pallis 2023, p. 64.

⁴¹ Both Philo and Gregory wrote works on *The Life of Moses*; see also Pallis 2023, p. 67.

⁴² For the possible interconnection of all three authors, see Pallis 2023, p. 68.

⁴³ In the Septuaginta text of Exod. 3: 14.

⁴⁴ Philo, *De mutatione nominum*, 11, 1-2 (Wendland; Golitzin 1994, p. 255 and n. 5 mistakenly indicates as source of his citation the *De Migratione Abrahami*, 11. I thank very much Katherine Handel for having assisted in pinpointing the right source. Cf. also in Philo’s *Legatio ad Gaium*, 6, 1-3 (Cohn and Reiter).

⁴⁵ Philo, *De posteritate Caini*, 15, 3-16, 1 (Wendland); cf. Golitzin 1994, pp. 255-256 and n. 8 (although his sole reference to *De Abrahamo*, 51 seems out of place). In other words, about God we can know “only *that* he is, not *what* he is”; cf. Golitzin 1994, p. 256, citing from D. Gendle’s unpublished DPhil thesis (with the full reference in n. 9, although “*with special reference to the Alexandrian Tradition*” is missing from the title, while no pagination is provided, and the year would rather be 1973). See now also Mrugalski 2023.

⁴⁶ See, e.g., Tarrant 2020.

⁴⁷ For instance, the relation of the “city of pigs” with “kallipolis”.

⁴⁸ On the other hand, Pyrrhonian Scepticism was designed to escape such kind of problems.

⁴⁹ See also Vasilakis 2014b (with indicative bibliography).

⁵⁰ Cf., e.g., Plato, *Apology*, 21d4-6 (Burnet).

⁵¹ Hence, Sceptics, like Carneades (214/3-129/8 BC), tried to soften it by introducing the concept of the “probable” (πιθανόν: see relevant lemma in the online *SEP*), implying the

with later dogmatic Platonism.⁵² At the top of their system, both pagan Neoplatonism (e.g., Plotinus) and Christianity (e.g., Dionysius) profess that they do not know anything: God is unknowable.⁵³ If Neoplatonism, to which Dionysius owes a lot, is a recapitulation of previous ancient Greek philosophy, then Scepticism, in a specific and more restricted form, crowns the system.⁵⁴

What about faith (πίστις, *pistis*), then? As with apophaticism and kataphaticism, we can conclude that in Dionysius' Platonist precedents, "pistis",⁵⁵ starting as a feature of kataphatic approach, is tightly combined with the apophatic approach, which we have just connected to Scepticism. Let us return to the *Republic* and the famous image of the Line.⁵⁶ Although its interpretation might be complicated, it is clear that *pistis* is one of the lowest epistemological states (third out of four in total) and corresponds to the cognitive content one can gain from things visible, such as living beings and artefacts, i.e., material things for which one can maintain only opinion (δόξα), not secure knowledge (ἐπιστήμη).⁵⁷ Nonetheless, in Proclus we find a surprising reversal of the grades of significance.

«πίστις» (for which see *infra* in my main text: next paragraph onwards), one can have for the external world.

⁵² As will immediately be seen, I do not mean the relation between Scepticism and Neoplatonism in the way it is treated by Opsomer (unpublished), (i.e., in the sense of Plotinus' employing sceptical arguments – drawn from Sextus Empiricus, who lived between the 2nd and 3rd century AD – in order to denigrate sense-perception and extoll the mode of Nous' intellection). Actually, this aspect has been treated by the first part of O'Meara 2000. What I am going to argue is akin to what O'Meara 2000 proposes (in the context of Plotinus' Neoplatonism) in the second part of his paper. (See also *infra* nn. 53 and 54.)

⁵³ Cf. also Monrad 1888, p. 186.

⁵⁴ Cf. Vasilakis 2021a, p. 65, n. 216, as well as already Vasilakis 2015, p. 136; some remarks of Monrad 1888, p. 166 (cf. also pp. 185, 187 and 188) are in this direction, as is the footnote (but within a different context) of Gersh 2006/2021, p. 110 and 116-117, n. 26, noting Isidore of Seville's (ca. 560-636 AD) connection of scepticism with apophaticism. See also *supra* n. 52.

⁵⁵ For a thorough study of the notion of "pistis" in pagan (Platonic) and (early) Christian framework (i.e., until Plotinus and Augustine, respectively), although my main two interlocutors in this subsection (i.e., Proclus and Dionysius) are not mentioned, see Heidl 2020.

⁵⁶ In the finale of Book VI: 509d1-511e5. This image mediates between the Sun-simile and the Cave-simile (opening Book VII).

⁵⁷ See, e.g., *Rep.* 510a5-10 and 511d6-e4. Within the second and lower subsection of the line, πίστις stands higher than εἰκασία which corresponds to images (of images), such as shadows, mirroring, and so on.

This is not so surprising, if we count that one of Proclus' major divergences from Plotinus concerns the issue of matter. For Plotinus matter is somehow connected to evil, while for Proclus' more elaborate system (as well as for Dionysius), this cannot be the case, since matter is directly dependent upon the First Principle's Infinity.⁵⁸ So, this time apparently diverging from Plato's *Republic*, Proclus hypostasizes "Faith" and pairs it with none other entity than the Good itself, in an analogous way that Eros (qua entity) is the pair of the Beautiful (although this pair is inferior in the ontological scale than Faith and the Good).⁵⁹ If, then, the Good transcends the capacity of humans to grasp it, and if for this reason from Iamblichus (ca. 245-325) onwards pagan Neoplatonists opted for the theurgic way of communicating with higher deities, this scheme suggests that our own faith is the dim image of Faith qua entity, and that this entails a kataphatic reassurance that the First Principle, although "agnoston" (ἄγνωστον), is there. Of course, as pointed out, kataphasis leads to apophasis; hence, Proclus in his *Platonic Theology* concludes that "initiation [...] in the ineffable and unknowable (ἀρρήτῳ καὶ ἀγνώστῳ) <genus> of the gods [...] does not [take place] through intellection [...], but by the silence (σιγῆς), which is better than any cognitive activity and which is bestowed by faith (πίστις)".⁶⁰ In Dionysius' akin, but at the same time Christian idiom, God qua Logos "is the simple and real truth [...] [T]his truth is the object of divine faith",⁶¹ which is said to have "perfected" Dionysius'

⁵⁸ See Opsomer 2001.

⁵⁹ For a presentation of this scheme and the relevant Proclean references, see Vasilakis 2021a, p. 93 (as well as pp. 82-83) with the corresponding notes.

⁶⁰ Proclus, *Theologia Platonica*, IV.31, 12-16 (Saffrey-Westerink; my translation); out of various similar Proclean passages specifically proclaiming the transcendence of the One, to which silence is more apt than speech on our behalf, see *ibid.*, 2. 65,5-15, as well as *In Platonis Parmenidem*, 7. 1171, 5-8 (Steel). See also Jugrin 2019, as well as Steel 1999 and Abbate 2020 (who also treats the last Head of Plato's Academy, Damascius, 458-550 AD; compare, though, *infra*, n. 64, too).

⁶¹ *DN VII.4. 199, 3-5 (Suchla)/872C (PG)*; trans. by Lilla and Moreschini 2018. Here, we can find an analogy with the place of faith in the Cappadocian Gregory of Nyssa's apophaticism: see Laird 2004, e.g., p. 105; cf. also Bradshaw 2007, p. 214. For a comparison between Proclus and Dionysius on the basis of "faith", see Abbate 2007.

supposed teacher,⁶² so that he and everyone else ascending to this state may be led “to the highest peak of mystic scriptures, where the simple [...] and unchangeable mysteries of the Word of God (θεολογίας) have been veiled within the most luminous cloud of hidden and mystical silence”.⁶³ In other words, paradoxically, the closer one attempts to come to God, the greater the divine mystery becomes.⁶⁴

Still, in the Byzantine tradition, this dialectic between kataphasis and apophasis⁶⁵ was developed further by Gregory Palamas,⁶⁶ who employed the distinction between essence and energies in order to explain how one can have experience of God Himself, although God in His essence transcends creation and, hence, evades any chance of our re-cognizing Him; that is, via God’s *uncreated* divine energies.⁶⁷ Of course, trying to pin down what exactly these energies (or activities: ἐνέργειαι)⁶⁸ are is not a simple task;⁶⁹ however, they respond and correspond to the Dionysian dialectical duo,⁷⁰ through an optimism which starts from an apophasis of God (i.e., the assertion that we cannot know God in His

⁶² Cf. *DN* II.9. 134, 3-4/648B, i.e., Hierotheus, whom scholars connect with Proclus or Gregory of Nyssa or even Origen, according to Ramelli 2022, p. 95 (as well as Ramelli 2023, e.g., pp. 573 and 576, although see *supra*, n.28).

⁶³ According to *MT*’s opening prayer: *MT* 141, 4-142, 2 (Heil and Ritter)/997A-B (*PG*) (my translation). See also Jugrin 2016, as well as Abbate 2022, *passim*.

⁶⁴ See also Frazer-Simser 2016, pp. 172-220, as well as Haecker 2023, e.g., pp. 34-35, employing a beautiful language, and Bouteneff 2023, pp. 221-222 with 229. In fact, Abbate, in a draft of a talk he is to give in a conference in Bucharest (organized by Marilena Vlad for October 10th, 2024 on the theme of “Order and Hierarchy in Late Antique and Byzantine Thought”) and which he has kindly shared with me (entitled “From the Proclean ‘triads’ to the concepts of ‘trinity’ and ‘hierarchy’ in the Corpus Areopagiticum”), suggests that such kind of paradox or “antinomy” (to hint at a notion used in the interpretation of Dionysius’ *MT* by V.I. Lossky, who is to be treated *infra*, in section II), forms a conscious choice of Dionysius, who surpasses, thus, the remaining limitations of Proclean apophaticism.

⁶⁵ With regard to a particular focus on the Cappadocian Fathers (i.e., Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, as well as Gregory of Nazianzus, in relation to their anti-Eunomian polemic), see also Stępień-Kochańczyk-Bonińska 2018, with a good bibliographical survey in the Preface (esp. pp. 9-11).

⁶⁶ For Palamas as a creative reader of the Areopagite, see the excellent study of Panagopoulos, 2020, e.g., pp. 85-95, esp. pp. 93 and 102.

⁶⁷ See also Begzos 1996, pp. 339 and 340, as well as Xexakis 2017, pp. 154, 156-157.

⁶⁸ In fact, Adamson 2022, p.124 prefers the rendering “activities”.

⁶⁹ See now Pino 2023, as well as Bradshaw 2023.

⁷⁰ Cf. also Kapriev 2000, p. 131 in combination with p. 146.

essence), in order to conclude with a kataphasis of God – yet, in a non-intellectual way,⁷¹ where one experiences God (via His energies) in a personal way⁷² (e.g., through prayer). In this context, we had better render “πίστις” to God as “trust”,⁷³ so as to emphasize this interpersonal relation.

II

I now move to the second axis of this paper. Although Palamas became a hallmark for subsequent thinkers of the Eastern tradition, the kind of story I sketched before – regarding the attitude till and including the Reformation toward Dionysius as vacillating between faith or trust to his vision and scepticism about his Christianity – applies also to the twentieth-century Orthodox Christian world.⁷⁴ In order to grasp its specific milieu, one needs to consider Fr. John Meyendorff (1926-1992), an eminent Orthodox theologian of the Russian diaspora.⁷⁵ He was a pioneer in the study of Gregory Palamas,⁷⁶ having taught (until 1959), among else, in a then major centre for Orthodox Studies in Western Europe: the Orthodox Theological Institute of Saint Sergius in Paris.⁷⁷ Meyendorff’s distaste for Dionysius is to be explained via his uncritical acceptance of some Protestant and Roman Catholic readings of Dionysius, especially those of Adolf von Harnack

⁷¹ Hence, it is in this sense that Kapriev 2000, pp. 143 and 155 (as well as in the title of his paper), speaks “von einer ‘antiapophatischen Deutung des Dionysius’ bei Palamas”.

⁷² Cf. also Begzos 1996, p. 344.

⁷³ For a variety of renderings of πίστις (another one of which is “belief”), already in the context of ancient Greek philosophy, see Moss (unpublished) (e.g., p. 1); I thank very much Prof. Jessica Moss for allowing me to read and use her manuscript (MS) for my present purpose. See also the detailed study of van Kooten 2012, in the more specific context of the Middle Platonist Plutarch’s oeuvre (with comparisons with Christian literature, esp. with Paul, and recording the meaning of “trust” in pp. 217, 227 and 232).

⁷⁴ For an introduction to Orthodox theology (with extensive reference to twentieth-century theologians), see Nichols 1995, Cunningham – Theokritoff 2008, Louth 2015, Ladouceur 2019, as well as Louth 2022. Williams 2005 focuses on the Russian Orthodox tradition, while the scope of Russell 2006 is modern Greek theology.

⁷⁵ See Hopko 1996.

⁷⁶ See also in Kalaitzidis 2013.

⁷⁷ The Institute is still alive; for its history, see its website: <https://saint-serge.net/linstitut/les-origines/> (last accessed on 10.03.2021).

(1851-1930)⁷⁸ and the Jesuit Fr. Jean Vanneste (1921-2015).⁷⁹ Hence, although Meyendorff was one of the first and greatest proponents of Gregory Palamas, contrary to Palamas he disliked Dionysius and the Dionysian hierarchical view of cosmos, as well as of society⁸⁰ (pretty much like Martin Luther had done earlier).⁸¹ Consequently, his attitude had an important impact on the Orthodox world. We trace, for instance, a similar picture of Dionysius in the work on Orthodox Liturgy of an older colleague and friend of Meyendorff, Fr. Alexander Schmemmann (1921-1983).⁸² What is more, Fr. Georges Florovsky (1893-1979),⁸³ also a leading Orthodox theologian of the Russian⁸⁴ diaspora and ecumenical figure, although much milder than Meyendorff, was not any particular admirer of Dionysius, either. His quasi-neutral attitude is important for my story, because he maintained correspondence with Fr. Sophrony Sakharov⁸⁵ and was a teacher of John Zizioulas, both of whom will be examined in what follows. In some cases, twentieth-century Orthodox discourse evolved as a vindication of the “authentic” (even “anti-Western”) Dionysius and the ecclesiastical spirit this Church Father expressed. In other cases, Meyendorff’s or Florovsky’s stance were simply reproduced.

⁷⁸ On Harnack, see McEnhill-Newlands 2004, pp. 111-113.

⁷⁹ On all this, cf. Konstantinovsky 2010.

⁸⁰ See here also Goltz 1974.

⁸¹ So, as I noted before (supra n. 12) that Luther appreciated some parts of Dionysius (*MT*), so too with Meyendorff: At a conference in Volos (mentioned supra in the first footnote, indicated with an asterisk), Fr. John Jillions (b. 1955), a student of Meyendorff at St Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, communicated to me Meyendorff’s appraisal, as well as use in his classes, of Dionysius’ *DN*. See also the account of Bouteneff 2023, p. 220.

⁸² Cf. Louth 2015, pp. 207-208. In fact, Bouteneff 2023, p. 229, n.4, notes that Schmemmann was fiercer in his criticism of Dionysius than Meyendorff.

⁸³ See Blane 1993 and Gavrilyuk 2013. For Florovsky as a reader of Dionysius (sometimes vacillating between a negative and a positive assessment), see Golitzin 1999.

⁸⁴ With regard to the Slavic reception of the Dionysian corpus (or Corpus Dionysiacum: CD) see Afonasin 2008, Fahl-Fahl 2005, Goltz 1979, Goltz, 1983, Goltz 1987, as well as Dmitriev 2007.

⁸⁵ See Sakharov 2021.

The anti-Dionysian intellectual environment in Paris was countered by yet another member of the Russian Orthodox community, Vladimir Lossky⁸⁶ (1903-1958),⁸⁷ one of the most well-known Orthodox thinkers in the West. He was a faithful proponent of Palamism, and since Palamas was a fervent admirer of Dionysius, so did Lossky (pace his colleague Meyendorff).⁸⁸ Lossky's essay on the *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*⁸⁹ (first published in 1944 in French)⁹⁰ reflects on a Dionysian theme, namely apophaticism.⁹¹ According to Lossky, authentic Dionysian apophaticism leaves room for the experience of God and evades the (mainly Western) mistakes that come out when one tries to impose human notional categories upon God; that is, when one attempts to illuminate the divine darkness and mystery.⁹²

Lossky did not succeed in changing the sceptical attitude against Dionysius among the Orthodox, which also influenced Fr. Sophrony (Sakharov, 1896-1993).⁹³ He was one of the first students at the Saint Sergius Institute (1924-1925) and after spending a part of his life on the Holy Mountain Athos (1925-1947), he returned to Paris (and the Institute, where he was acquainted with Lossky). Subsequently (from 1959 onwards) he went to England, where he

⁸⁶ Son of another thinker and philosopher: Nikolai O. Lossky (1870-1965). The name of Lossky still survives at the St Sergius Institute, via the professorship of Fr. André Lossky (b. 1953).

⁸⁷ For a guide to his work, see the unpublished PhD thesis by Williams 1975, Kotiranta 2016, and the short entry in Prokurat – Golitzin – Peterson 1996, pp. 206-207. Cf. also the relevant bibliographical entries listed supra in n. 74.

⁸⁸ For an example of Lossky's scholarship on Dionysius, see Lossky 1930.

⁸⁹ Lossky 1976.

⁹⁰ See Lossky 1944.

⁹¹ Cf. supra n. 64, as well as Louth 2023b, pp. 48-49. See also the general intellectual milieu in Paris after the Second World War, which would have made Dada again actual. Surprisingly, Hugo Ball (1886-1927), the founder of this current was inspired by Dionysius! Cf. Wynands 2001, e.g., p. 73 and (the German text with a cross-reference) in n. 12 (p. 83a): "»H. Ball, einer der Begründer des Dadaismus [...] erklärte, das von ihm erfundene Wort DADA bedeute, D.A. (Dionysius Areopagita) habe zweimal seine Seele berührt.« „Dionysius, D. Areopagita“, *Brockhaus Enzyklopädie*, 19th edn (1987)."

⁹² For a genealogy of the connection between "mysticism" and "apophaticism" already in Late Antiquity (in pagan, as well as Christian milieu), see Ramelli 2023, esp. pp. 547-548 and 564.

⁹³ See Sakharov 2002, Mantzaridis – Galitis – Tselegidis 2008, as well as the special issue of *Analogia* 2020.

founded the Orthodox Monastery of Saint John the Baptist in Essex.⁹⁴ Almost every time Fr. Sophrony refers to Dionysius, the former accuses the latter of propounding an abstract philosophical ascent to God,⁹⁵ which is in discordance

⁹⁴ For a virtual tour of the Patriarchal Stavropegic Monastery of St John the Baptist (Tolleshunt Knights by Maldon, Essex) see <https://essexmonastery.com/> (last accessed on 05.05.2023).

⁹⁵ The main bulk of my evidence stems from Sophrony 2021; for more and specific references, see *infra* in the next note (n. 96). Here, I must say a few things about this seminal book (for which see also *infra*, n. 174). It first appeared in Russian in 1948 and was subsequently completed and printed for the first time in 1952. It was translated in English (from Russian) by Rosemary Edmonds (1905-1998). The first English translation dates back to 1958 and reappeared in two parts, the first part (St Sophrony's Synaxarion and Teachings of St Silouan) in 1973 and the second part (The Writings of St Silouan) in 1974 respectively. See the Obituary of R. Edmonds published by James Ferguson on 13 August 1998: <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/obituary-rosemary-edmonds-1171487.html>; last accessed on 05.08.2023). In 1991, about four years after the canonization of St Silouan, the book appeared again as a unified volume (with a modified title, comprising the aforementioned two parts) by the publishing house of St John the Baptist Monastery in Essex. In 1999, the book (in its 1991 format) appeared in the US by St Vladimir's Seminary Press (SVS Press). For this paper, I have consulted the following versions of this book: the latest version of SVS Press (from 2021), as well as the 1999 edition (from SVS Press). Alas, I have not been able to inspect the English edition of St John's Monastery in Essex, last reprinted in 2023. From the Monastery's online bookshop, it follows that the total pagination (504 pp. with Arabic numerals) is identical to that of the SVS Press' 1999 edition (with the addition of the viii pages with Roman numerals, therefore I assume that the layout of the text with notes must be identical, too). The total pagination of SVS Press' 2021 edition is different (444 pp. without Roman numerals), because the font used is smaller. In this edition, we find more footnotes than in the others, because, apart from those of the original text and of the translator, an unnamed editor has added short information in the footnotes (e.g., on p. 23, n. 6). It is a great pity, though, that this edition (SVS, 2021) suffers from wrong pagination in the Table of Contents! A further problem characterizing all versions of this book (in English) is that there is no Index, at least of Proper Names, making the book hard to use for research purposes. The situation is different in the modern Greek editions of the book – all published by the Essex Monastery. (Actually, there is a version in katharevousa/purist Greek, for the first time published in 1973, and a version in the demotic language, first published in 1978.) The most definite Modern Greek (demotic) edition up to now was published in ¹⁸2020 and contains Indices of Proper Names, Scriptural Passages and Correspondence between the pagination of the demotic and the katharevousa versions. Although it still remains tacit in the book, Fr. Zacharias (Zacharou), monk in the Essex Monastery and disciple of Fr. Sophrony was responsible for the Modern Greek translation (from Russian), which I feel is more accurate than the English one. Apart from that, unfortunately, there are sections (or phrases) missing in the English editions, the most notable omissions being the chapter on «Ἡ διορατικότητα καὶ τὰ εἶδη (not εἰδῶν written in the Table of Contents of some Modern Greek editions) της» (“Discretion and its kinds” in my translation), and the subchapter on «Ὁ Θεῖος Γνόφος» (“The divine cloud” – my translation): Sophrony 2020, pp. 213-218 and 229-231, respectively. In my references to follow, I will be giving first the pagination from the 2021 SVS Press version and then the pagination from the 1999 SVS Press version.

with an Orthodox ascetic and hesychastic (i.e., Palamite) worldview.⁹⁶ Such a verdict is important, because it comes from a person who is conceived as a contemporary Father of the Orthodox Church,⁹⁷ as well as a saint,⁹⁸ whose canonization by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople took place in 2019.⁹⁹

The Russian community in Paris played an important role in the renaissance of theology in Greece,¹⁰⁰ inaugurated by the so-called “generation of the 1960’s”,¹⁰¹ a pivotal figure of which is the philosopher Christos Yannaras (b. 1935).¹⁰² According to Fr. Andrew Louth, himself a major scholar of Dionysius,¹⁰³ Yannaras is also “the most important living Greek Orthodox theologian”.¹⁰⁴ His oeuvre does not reveal any engagement with Fr. Sophrony. Yannaras’ personalism,¹⁰⁵ his Palamite predilection, as well as his anti-

⁹⁶ See Sophrony 2021, pp. 128, 161 and 164. What is more the name of Dionysius is not mentioned, but is implied on pp. 127, as well as (142-)143, 147 and 156 (due to the conflict between reason and repentance). (The corresponding pagination in the version of the book from 1999/1991, for which see supra, n. 95 is: pp. 139-140, 178 and 181; the name implied on pp. 138, 155-157, 161, 173). Cf. also Aldea 2013, p. 237. A similar attitude is to be found in Sophrony 2016 (passim). It is noteworthy that in the list of Patristic literature given (albeit not by St Silouan or St Sophrony himself) in Sophrony 2021, p. 69 (or p. 72 in the 1999 version), Dionysius is not mentioned. What is more, the reader can find a (or perhaps the only) neutral reference to Dionysius by Fr. Sophrony in the Modern Greek edition: Sophrony 2020, p. 231, which is absent from a section in the English translation (see supra, n. 95). See, though, also *infra*, n. 188.

⁹⁷ Cf. Loudovikos 2020, p. 78.

⁹⁸ Cf. Vlachos 2007.

⁹⁹ See also Vlachos 2020.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Mitralaxis 2020.

¹⁰¹ See Gnau 2005, pp. 21-24, and Kalaitzidis – Papathanasiou – Abatzidis 2009 for a critical engagement with it.

¹⁰² See Petrà 2019 (which is the English translation of the Italian original: Petrà 2015), Grigoropoulou 2008, Russell 2016 and Andreopoulos – Harper 2019.

¹⁰³ See relevant bibliographical items supra in nn. 2 and 36.

¹⁰⁴ Louth 2005, p. 1.

¹⁰⁵ Regarding personalism in Christian Orthodox context (esp. in the 20th century, with its entrance to the 21st century, as well as its roots in the 19th century), see the presentation of Lubardić 2019. It is true, though, that this theological-philosophical current in Orthodoxy has been influenced by other non-Orthodox (i.e., Western) theological, as well as philosophical currents and figures (e.g., German idealism and existentialism) that are not in Lubardić’s focus. The same happens also with some pivotal Orthodox figures, such as N.A. Berdyaev (1874-1948), for whom see among else Bodea 2020, pp. 339-341 (noting on p. 341 and n. 19 the inspiration that N. Nissiotis – see briefly *infra*, in n. 156 – drew from Berdyaev); Bodea 2021

Westernism can be safely traced back to Lossky.¹⁰⁶ Hence, it is no wonder that Yannaras became a great admirer of Dionysius.¹⁰⁷ Even before the completion of his second doctoral study on *The Ontological Content of the Concept of the Person* (1970),¹⁰⁸ he wrote a short book entitled *On the Absence and Unknowability of God: Heidegger and the Areopagite*, which first appeared in Greek in 1967.¹⁰⁹ Yannaras divides this seminal book into two sections. In the first section, he examines Heidegger's nihilism as a natural outcome of Scholastic philosophy and as a fair representative of Western culture *in toto*. Seen exclusively in an intellectualistic way in the West, Dionysius' apophaticism (qua negative theology) started – so Yannaras – by negating names about God, until in modern and post-modern times it matured and came to negate God's very existence.¹¹⁰ In the second section of the book, Yannaras examines his favourite bits from Dionysius, such as the treatment of eros and ecstasy in the *Divine Names* (esp. §4.13)¹¹¹ through Palamite lens.¹¹² In his view, a sound and healthy Dionysian apophaticism, which refuses to grasp God intellectually, allows room for an experiential contact with God (i.e., through the uncreated divine energies) and constitutes both the Eastern counterpart and the remedy to Western atheism and nihilism.¹¹³

However, scholars such as Aristotle Papanikolaou have defied Louth's laudatory verdict about Yannaras having in mind the work of Metropolitan of

(discussing with Heidegger); and Knežević (forthcoming 2024, with a provocative pairing with C.-G. Jung).

¹⁰⁶ Cf., e.g., Papanikolaou 2008, pp. 233 (with n. 3 on p. 243) and 236.

¹⁰⁷ See also the dimensions noted in Pallis 2022a, pp. 617-618.

¹⁰⁸ In Modern Greek; this study evolved into Yannaras 2007.

¹⁰⁹ Yannaras 2005. For the pietistic background in mid-twentieth-century Greek theology, which depreciated Dionysius (as well as apophaticism), and which this book tried to fight against, see Kalaitzidis 2016 and more generally Gnau 2005, pp. 31-41.

¹¹⁰ See also Apostolopoulou 1999, pp. 362-363, with reference, though, to another book of Yannaras' voluminous writings.

¹¹¹ See the chapters in *DN IV*: 10-17.

¹¹² See also Tănase 2014a, p. 260.

¹¹³ See also Adamson 2022, pp. 149-150.

Pergamon, John Zizioulas (1931-2023).¹¹⁴ Be that as it may, never did Yannaras alter his above positions. He exercised influence on his contemporary Zizioulas¹¹⁵ (even if afterwards Zizioulas¹¹⁶ influenced Yannaras, too),¹¹⁷ in part by inviting Zizioulas to engage fruitfully with the work of Lossky.¹¹⁸ However, Zizioulas, a major personalist thinker in the Orthodox milieu with important contributions to Ecclesiology,¹¹⁹ does not pay any particular attention to the work of Dionysius.¹²⁰ Having engaged, unlike Yannaras, with the work of Fr. Sophrony,¹²¹ Zizioulas is neither an enthusiast (like Lossky and Yannaras) nor a critic (like Fr. Sophrony) of Dionysius, reproducing thus in a way the abovementioned quasi-neutral stance of his mentor, Florovsky.¹²²

III

I now come to the third and last axis of my paper. It concerns the trust and/or scepticism we should have toward various aspects of the twentieth-century Orthodox reception of Dionysius. In doing this, I will propose some fresh ways of approaching this phenomenon that have not been extensively discussed so far, and I will offer my conclusions.¹²³

¹¹⁴ See Papanikolaou 2007, p. 302. On Zizioulas' work, see Knight 2007, Bortnyk 2014, Stavrou 2015, Kalaitzidis – Asproulis 2016 and Rikheim 2016.

¹¹⁵ Cf., e.g., Papanikolaou 2003, p. 383, n. 85.

¹¹⁶ As an example of yet more recent work on Zizioulas, see Ruston 2021, as well as Chiapetti 2022. Among other papers, Kalaitzidis 2023, Moşoiu 2023 and Skliris 2023 were triggered by Zizioulas' recent repose. As one can attest from the following helpful list (<https://zizioulas.org/reception/bibliographical-list> last accessed on 12.05.2023), it seems that out the four contemporary Orthodox thinkers I am discussing, Zizioulas has accrued the greatest amount of literature focusing on his work, as far as sheer quantity is concerned.

¹¹⁷ Cf. also Gnau 2005, p. 224 (with the bibliographical information on p. 184, n. 521).

¹¹⁸ See Papanikolaou 2006; see also Pallis 2022a, pp. 623-624.

¹¹⁹ Cf., for instance, also in Bodea 2020, p. 343.

¹²⁰ Cf. Pallis 2014, p. 321. For some Dionysian references in Zizioulas, see Zizioulas 1985, pp. 86 and 91 (complemented by the Index on p. 264) and Pallis 2014, n. 73 (on p. 321).

¹²¹ Cf., e.g., Sakharov 2002, p. 235 (with n. 1), as well as Zizioulas 2009, pp. 31, 34-38.

¹²² Cf. *supra*, n. 83. Pallis (2022a, p. 625) speaks of Zizioulas' stance as "ambivalent"; see also the remarks in *ibid.*, p. 626.

¹²³ I hope that at least some of my suggestions might function as another trigger to the scholarly community for further future research.

The aforementioned central notion of apophaticism in Lossky's work was based on his reading of Dionysius, especially the Dionysian treatise on *Mystical Theology*.¹²⁴ Apart from examining whether this is a fair reading of Dionysius, one needs to connect it with Lossky's "anti-Westernism", since a sound Dionysian apophaticism – so Lossky – can help in overcoming distorted Christian positions (having in mind the Latin ones). Paul Gavrilyuk¹²⁵ has criticised this attitude as a distorted and sheer ideological use of Dionysius.¹²⁶ However, there is a peculiarity here. While in Paris, Lossky was also working on completing his PhD (in Sorbonne) on Meister Eckhart (ca. 1260-1328) under the guidance of the renowned Professors Etienne Gilson (1884-1978) and Maurice de Gandillac (1906-2006). Sadly, in the final stage Lossky prematurely died, so the work was published posthumously under the title *Théologie négative et connaissance de Dieu chez Maître Eckhart*.¹²⁷ Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware, 1934-2022)¹²⁸ has noted that anti-Westernism was not Lossky's final or representative position. In Kallistos' view, there are two layers in Lossky's oeuvre.¹²⁹ One (the "thesis") was the project of making the writings of the Eastern Fathers (read through Eastern Orthodox lenses) known in the West. The other (the "antithesis") was Lossky's deep engagement with Eckhart's work, i.e., with a major philosophical and theological figure of Medieval West, in a friendly and sympathetic manner. His aim was an understanding and appreciation of Eckhart's theological output, without comparing it with that of the Eastern Church Fathers. According to

¹²⁴ Since this title has been adopted for Lossky's seminal book, for its variety of meanings see Louth 2023a.

¹²⁵ Professor P.L. Gavrilyuk (Kiev, b. 1972) holds the Aquinas Chair of Theology and Philosophy at Saint Thomas University (Minnesota). He is Founder and President of the International Orthodox Theological Association (IOTA: <https://iota-web.org/>).

¹²⁶ Cf. Gavrilyuk 2008, pp. 715-716, esp. 720. In fact, this paper stems from a talk available in YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D0kEeYQx29c&t=2s> (last accessed on 05.05.2023).

¹²⁷ [*Negative Theology and Knowledge of God in Meister Eckhart*]: Lossky 1960 (edited by M. de Gandillac, along with Lossky's pupil and well-known Orthodox theologian in the West, Olivier-M. Clément, 1921-2009).

¹²⁸ Metropolitan of Diokleia, former Spalding Lecturer in Eastern Orthodox Studies at Oxford and an ecumenical figure; see Kalaitzidis – Asproulis 2018.

¹²⁹ See Ware 2000, p. 41.

Kallistos,¹³⁰ due to his premature death, Lossky did not come to the third phase of his wider project,¹³¹ i.e., a juxtaposition, as well as a dialogue of both Western and Eastern traditions, especially as depicted in the works of Eckhart and Gregory Palamas. In fact, Kallistos gives also an outline of what such a comparison could be.¹³² A major conclusion is that Palamas and Eckhart could trust each other, i.e., could be in agreement on many issues (e.g., panentheism),¹³³ exactly because their basic source is identical, namely the Areopagitic writings. Hence, a further proposal for future research would be: i) to assess Lossky's use of Dionysius in the Losskian interpretation of Eckhart; and ii) to compare the Dionysius, qua forerunner of Eckhart, emerging from this study, with the apophatic Dionysius of the Eastern Church, who, according to Lossky, formed a basis for Palamas' celebrated orthodoxy. This is something that scholars (whether Orthodox or not) have not discussed in any detail yet¹³⁴ and would contribute to a much more balanced image of Lossky¹³⁵ than the ideological accusations that Gavrilyuk hurls against him.¹³⁶

Perhaps Gavrilyuk's criticism fits better Yannaras,¹³⁷ who, despite being a faithful student of Lossky, has not paid any attention to Lossky's PhD thesis, or in general to the possibility of a fruitful dialogue between East and West.¹³⁸ In

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

¹³¹ A quasi-similar project has been said to be the aim of Stelios Ramfos (b. 1939), a nowadays famous public intellectual in Greece, who used to belong to the "Neo-Orthodox" movement (of the 1980's and 1990's, for which see Mitralaxis 2019), although the third phase is for the time being absent (while the current "second" phase has been quite polemical). Cf. Vasilakis 2020, esp. pp. 166b and 167b. (I would add that Eric Perl forms an American scholarly equivalent to Ramfos and his "Kehre" – from his first phase to the second one.)

¹³² See Ware 2000, esp. pp. 44-51.

¹³³ On the meaning of "panentheism" (also in Orthodox contexts), see various bibliographical indications in Vasilakis 2021a, p. 174, n. 111.

¹³⁴ See, though, as an introduction to this theme: Sekulovski 2015.

¹³⁵ For instance, Davis 2023 directly compares Lossky with Eckhart.

¹³⁶ For a different, but sympathetic reading of Lossky, see the comparative article of Coakley 2013. Contrast, however, the biases of Hankey 2008.

¹³⁷ See Gavrilyuk 2008, pp. 713-714 and esp. 720.

¹³⁸ See Yannaras 2006.

short, this is a standard view of Yannaras that is unfortunately oversimplified.¹³⁹ However, it is noteworthy that even in the secondary literature on Yannaras' use of Dionysius, what we basically see is the negative and sceptical side of Yannaras' project (as presented above); namely, that Yannaras unfairly accuses the Latin West for a misinterpretation of Dionysius.¹⁴⁰ Still, the positive side of Yannaras' hermeneutics (i.e., the formation of a Palamite reading of Dionysius in a more developed and systematic form than in Lossky) is neglected. From an Eastern Orthodox point of view, it is not enough to point out that Palamas was an admirer of Dionysius or that their theology has similarities. One needs to show how and why the spiritual meaning (albeit not necessarily the linguistic expressions) of Palamas' and Dionysius' works are akin to each other. If Yannaras' alleged anti-Westernism has contaminated his work, a sober reading of it can still extrapolate the excellent framework of a Palamite reading of Dionysius that Yannaras has enabled,¹⁴¹ in order to bring it into a fruitful dialogue with more nuanced representations of the West,¹⁴² in particular with Western readings of Dionysius.¹⁴³

As various scholars have noted, Yannaras' project, in using an understanding of Dionysius disclosing the problems of Western metaphysics, anticipated that of French philosophers, such as Jean-Luc Marion (b. 1946)¹⁴⁴ – without any

¹³⁹ See Gallaher 2018, who modified his earlier view of Gallaher 2009. See also Pallis 2022a, pp. 606 and esp. 607, as well as 619-620, 622 and 629.

¹⁴⁰ See also Pallis 2017; compare though the dialectics in Pallis 2022a, p. 622.

¹⁴¹ That said, we should also take account some problematic nuances of Yannaras' understanding of Palamas (e.g., an exaggerated connection between person and energies, instead of nature and energies); cf., e.g., Tănase 2014a, pp. 262-263 and Tănase 2014b, pp. 170-171, as well as 181-182 (both last articles share some parts in common).

¹⁴² This is the underlying aim of Demacopoulos – Papanikolaou 2013 and Makrides 2014. See also the perspective in Mitralaxis 2023, on the basis of the work of E. Siecienski, as well as *infra*, n. 193. The presentation of Cvetković 2015 shows that such a nuanced picture can be given also with respect to both St Nicholas Velimirović (1880-1956: pp. 49-50) and St Justin Popović (1894-1979: pp. 38-39, as well as 50-51, recording on p. 51 a disagreement between Popović and Velimirović).

¹⁴³ See a good example in Iacovetti 2017.

¹⁴⁴ See Marion 1982. On Marion's reading of Dionysius, see the comprehensive study of Zachhuber 2011; due to Marion's connection with phenomenology, see de Andia 2020.

acknowledgment on behalf of the latter.¹⁴⁵ However, an interesting comparison that has not been drawn yet is between Yannaras and Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973),¹⁴⁶ a personalist and existentialist philosopher, as well as author of theatrical plays.¹⁴⁷ Marcel shares many characteristics in common with Yannaras (even if the former was Roman Catholic),¹⁴⁸ although, as far as one can say, never does Yannaras make a reference to Marcel's work. On the other hand, from Marcel's works inspected for this reason, never does he refer to Dionysius the Areopagite. A comparison between Yannaras and Marcel would be a theme for another paper, but M. C. Rhodes (a student of Fr. Andrew Louth) in his interesting study of bringing Dionysius' theology in conversation with contemporary philosophy¹⁴⁹ (i.e., both the analytic and continental philosophy of the 20th century) has used Marcel's notion of the "mystery" (or the "meta-problematical" in contradistinction to the "problem")¹⁵⁰ in order to explain Dionysius' apophaticism of God's hyper-being.¹⁵¹ In this way, a specific and much lengthier comparison between Yannaras' Palamite understanding of Dionysian apophaticism and Marcel's notion of the "mystery" can be an interesting one, not the least because it would show a way in which Yannaras' philosophy and in general the Eastern Orthodox tradition (based on a specific understanding of Dionysius) can come into a fruitful and faithful dialogue with Western philosophy (and its Dionysian presuppositions, whether implicit or explicit).

This is a project that several scholars have undertaken more in relation to the work of Zizioulas,¹⁵² although, as already mentioned, Dionysius has no prominent place in his work. Actually, Zizioulas is one of the few theologians of the

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Depraz-Mauriac 2012. Isai 2018 approaches both thinkers together "so that they mutually complement one another" (p. 163).

¹⁴⁶ See esp. Marcel 1951.

¹⁴⁷ As an introduction to Marcel see Bakonikola-Giama 2007.

¹⁴⁸ See, for instance, the brief comparison with Marcel in a wider context by Loudovikos 2014, p. 25, n. 32.

¹⁴⁹ See Rhodes 2012.

¹⁵⁰ See also Hazelton 1958.

¹⁵¹ Cf. also Rhodes 2004, pp. 4 and 179.

¹⁵² See for instance Collins 2001.

“generation of the 1960’s” that is not deemed to be “Neo-Palamite”¹⁵³ (contrary, for example, to Lossky, Meyendorff and Yannaras).¹⁵⁴ My argument here relates to a hitherto unnoticed element, namely, that Palamas plays no important role for Zizioulas,¹⁵⁵ because Zizioulas has underestimated the theological importance of Dionysius. Reversely, the Palamite interpretation of Dionysius by Lossky and Yannaras must have probably alienated Zizioulas from Dionysius.¹⁵⁶ This may explain, on the one hand, the differences found between Zizioulas and Lossky (as well as Yannaras), and on the other hand, Zizioulas’ denigration of apophaticism.¹⁵⁷ Consequently, in Zizioulas’ case, the small presence and relative great absence of Dionysius can give a key as to his innovations against his milieu.

¹⁵³ See also Pallis 2022a, p. 224.

¹⁵⁴ Contrast the grouping in Makrides 2006, p. 131a. Another important Neopalamite theologian (from Romania) was Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae (1903-1993), who was, unsurprisingly, also an admirer of Dionysius; cf. Ene D.-Vasilescu 2021, pp. 75, 77-78, as well as Pallis 2022a, pp. 607-608; see also *infra* in n. 162 (as well as in n. 167).

¹⁵⁵ See, for instance, his attitude in Zizioulas 2006. Cf. also Bathrellos 2007, p. 97a and b, Pallis 2022a, p. 225, as well as Tănase 2014a, p. 262 and Tănase 2014b, pp. 169-170.

¹⁵⁶ One can also proceed to the following analogy: Zizioulas relates to Yannaras in the way Florovsky relates to Lossky. I have already noted the indebtedness of Yannaras to Lossky, both of them championing Gregory Palamas; I have also noted Zizioulas’ apprenticeship under Florovsky, with especially Zizioulas’ praising Maximus the Confessor. After Lossky’s death, Florovsky published a short review of the English translation of Lossky 1944 (i.e., Lossky 1976, first published in 1957). One of Florovsky’s criticisms (aside of his praising both the book and the author) focuses on the book’s deficiencies in terms of exploiting Incarnation, i.e., in that there is a lack of emphasis on the person of Christ. In fact, Florovsky states that “the christological chapter of Lossky’s book [...] is the most controversial” (Florovsky 1958, p. 208a). Since Maximus the Confessor’s system is as Christocentric as it gets, we could see Zizioulas as trying to impose a “Christological corrective” to the work of Yannaras (and Lossky) via Maximus. This is in fact an alleged problem diagnosed by Meyendorff, who thought of Palamas as incurring a “Christological corrective” to the work of Dionysius. See a presentation of this perspective in van Rossum 2006 (and very briefly in Bouteneff 2023, p. 219ff.). As it must have become clear by now, I do not accept Meyendorff’s account; cf., for example, Vasilakis 2021a, p. 158 with the aid of relevant bibliography on p. 180, n. 152. Moreover, this criticism seems to have had various consequences within the intellectual labyrinth I have just presented. Finally, in this regard I also note the synthetic dissertation of Skira 1998, who compares Florovsky, Lossky, Zizioulas and, instead of Yannaras, an important precursor of his, namely Nikos Nissiotis (1924-1986). In any case, all the theological thinkers mentioned in this note can be deemed as proponents of “Neopatristic synthesis”, which is a Florovskian term (mentioned also in Florovsky 1958, p. 207a; see also Gavriilyuk 2014). However, Fr. John Behr would opt for the term (Neopatristic) “symphony”; see Behr 2014, pp. 15-17. More precisely, Behr (*ibid.*, p. 17) speaks of “the symphony of the Fathers (their synchronic and diachronic polyphony)”.

¹⁵⁷ See Papanikolaou’s works referred to *supra*, in nn. 106, 114, 115 and 118.

Indirectly, they also enable a closer inspection of the subtle differentiations between Yannaras and Lossky, due to the partial agreements or disagreements Zizioulas might have with only one figure of the pair Lossky – Yannaras.

For instance, Zizioulas agrees particularly with Yannaras on the distinction, as well as the gap between the pair hypostasis/person-freedom and the pair substance/nature-necessity. This contradistinction, as if nature should be negated in order for the loving person to emerge, has been criticised by several scholars¹⁵⁸ including J.-Cl. Larchet (b. 1949)¹⁵⁹ and Fr. Nikolaos Loudovikos (b. 1959).¹⁶⁰ Here, again, the absence of Dionysius in Zizioulas and the particular ignorance of Dionysius on behalf of Yannaras at this point give one reason as to their idiosyncratic positions. Had they read Dionysius' section on evil carefully (esp. *Divine Names*, §4.26),¹⁶¹ they would have clearly seen that for Dionysius (even if without grounding this), substance and nature are not in themselves bad or far away from God.¹⁶² In fact, nature's mode of being is not solely necessity, but can be freedom, as well. Last, but not least, since Zizioulas is such an admirer of Maximus the Confessor¹⁶³ (who was an admirer of Dionysius),¹⁶⁴ it would be an interesting topic of further research to examine the specific Dionysian elements in Maximus that Zizioulas has maintained, and whether Maximus' originality against Dionysius that Zizioulas' seeks to find¹⁶⁵ is well-grounded.¹⁶⁶

¹⁵⁸ See a critical report of this debate in Lubardić 2019, pp. 177-180.

¹⁵⁹ See Larchet 2011.

¹⁶⁰ See, e.g., Loudovikos 2011.

¹⁶¹ Cf. Vasilakis 2014a, p. 231, n. 82 and Vasilakis 2021a, p. 172, n. 87, also on the theme of ecstasy.

¹⁶² In fact, this is a problem also characteristic of Lossky; Eklund 2023, pp. 134-141 (as well as pp. 143-144) mentions in particular Lossky and Zizioulas in order to show the way that Stăniloae evades from their dichotomy between nature and person (see esp. *ibid.*, p. 138, n. 141). Still, some relevant aspects of Stăniloae's approach (in particular his notion of the human soul as "spirit" and its relation to nature, mentioned by Eklund 2023, e.g., on p. 133) have also received criticism by Loudovikos 2014, pp. 26-30; (the previous part in this paper, pp. 17-25, forms a criticism of Yannaras from a Maximian viewpoint, i.e., through Maximus the Confessor).

¹⁶³ See also Pallis 2022a, p. 625.

¹⁶⁴ See also de Andia 2015.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Zizioulas 1985, pp. 86, 91; cf. also in Pallis 2022a, pp. 627, as well as 629.

¹⁶⁶ For a short critique of Zizioulas in this respect, see Vasilakis 2016, p. 106, n. 20.

I finally come to Fr. Sophrony, although chronologically he should have come after Lossky. There are two reasons for this: The first relates to the systematic chain that exists from Lossky to Zizioulas through Yannaras, as shown above. Because Fr. Sophrony was in direct dialogue with Lossky, too, he can be examined separately. Second, having seen Zizioulas' stance and some aspects thereof, we can now observe a somehow parallel story with Fr. Sophrony, albeit with a different, more negative conclusion. Here, we are in an almost uncharted territory, since, save for two exceptions,¹⁶⁷ I have not been able to identify discussions about Dionysius' place in Fr. Sophrony,¹⁶⁸ a theologian who can be regarded as a Hesychast Father in the line of Gregory Palamas (pace Zizioulas' predilection). Scholarly research has shown that Fr. Sophrony, author of the work *We shall See Him as He is*,¹⁶⁹ was not an admirer of the notion of divine darkness and apophaticism that Lossky had propounded,¹⁷⁰ which was the fruit of Lossky's reading and interpretation of Dionysius.¹⁷¹ Such a clash with Lossky would entail a negative bias against Dionysius on behalf of Fr. Sophrony¹⁷² (pretty much like with Zizioulas' case), along with the aforementioned anti-Dionysian intellectual milieu that prevailed at the Institute of Saint Sergius in Paris in those times.

¹⁶⁷ See the interesting and condensed discussion of Aldea 2013, pp. 233-238, as well as Chircalan 2019, pp. 146-147 and 148-149. Chircalan engages also with Fr. John Romanides (through the work of Metropolitan of Nafpaktos, Hierotheos Vlachos), as well as briefly with Fr. D. Stăniloae, (for whom see supra in n. 154; see also Ioannou 2017. It is true that I could have devoted more attention at least to Romanides, not least because he is deemed to have been a Neo-Palamite theologian, compared with Yannaras by Prevelakis 2012, and with Meyendorff by Kalaitzidis 2013, but limitations of time and space have precluded me from doing so). Although Chircalan's conclusion (specifically in relation to Fr. Sophrony) is similar to mine (to be expounded in the next pages), he has not formulated the problem I have set out to solve (see also infra, n. 188.)

¹⁶⁸ Even in Petros 2016 there is only a passing reference on p. 237.

¹⁶⁹ Sophrony 1988.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Sakharov 2002, pp. 31-32.

¹⁷¹ Cf. also Louth 2015, p. 313, n. 45, without naming Dionysius though. Fr. Andrew Louth named Dionysius in this context in an interchange we had during the Conference on "Philosophy in Byzantium: The Order of Nature and Order of Humankind" (LMU, Munich, 5-6 October 2017, co-organized by Peter Adamson, J. Greig and myself). For his advice, I thank Fr. Andrew very much.

¹⁷² Cf. also Aldea 2013, pp. 233 and 234-235, as well as 238.

Consequently, this background explains Fr. Sophrony's distaste for and critical reference to Dionysius.¹⁷³

This is not, nevertheless, the end of the story. There are some teachings in Fr. Sophrony and Saint Silouan the Athonite (Fr. Sophrony's spiritual Father on Holy Mountain Athos, 1866-1938)¹⁷⁴ that are central and characteristic of their ascetic theology: love for the enemies¹⁷⁵ and the God-given precept "Keep thy mind in Hell and despair not".¹⁷⁶ Both points have to do with the so-called "Christ-like humility" in Orthodox discourse: Humans go upwards to God, i.e., they succeed in being assimilated with God (the «ὁμοίωσις» Θεῶ, of Genesis 1: 26, shared by Jews, Platonists and Christians alike),¹⁷⁷ in so far as humans go downwards, i.e., in so far as they imitate Christ's "kenosis" ("self-emptying": a Pauline word used once by Dionysius),¹⁷⁸ qua incarnation and manifestation of God's manic love for every creature, whether disciple or accuser. This personal "kenosis" of each human being implies that for the existing vice in the cosmos the first (and only) to accuse of is one's own self. Only in this way, a human being can make room in his/her heart (cf. kenosis) in order to become a Christ-like person.

The picture just presented exhibits many affinities with the dialogue between Christianity and (pagan) Neoplatonism, especially on the issue of procession (a

¹⁷³ See supra, n. 96. Regarding Fr. Sophrony's theological methodology the following conclusion by Aldea 2013, p. 12 is relevant: "Archim[andrite] Sophrony uses Patristic authors in order to support his theology, but he does not derive his theology from the Church Fathers; they are not the primary source of his theology", which the author notes it is revelatory.

¹⁷⁴ Sophrony 2021 (for which see supra, n. 95), due to its witness, was of paramount importance for the canonization of Saint Silouan on 26 November 1987. See also Zizioulas – Ware – Bianchi – Clément – von Lilienfeld – Tachiaos 2009, a volume that collects (in Greek) some of the papers presented at an international conference dedicated to St Silouan, organized by the Roman Catholic Monastery of Bose in Italy in 1998 (cf. *ibid.*, p. 13).

¹⁷⁵ See Larchet 1996.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Sophrony 2021, pp. 43, 187-191 (e.g., 191) and 407; (in the 1999 version, for which see supra, n. 95: pp. 42, 208-213 [e.g., 212] and 430).

¹⁷⁷ Compare Plato, *Theaetetus*, 176b1-3 (Burnet). For the Patristic understanding of this formula from the Old Testament (without a direct reference to the Areopagite, though), see Jevtić 2021, pp. 65-99. As regards the first part of the formulation of this biblical passage ("in the image"), see supra, n. 18 (see also the perspective in Ramelli 2023, p. 574).

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Paul, Phil. 2: 7, used by Dionysius in *DN*, 2.10; cf. Vasilakis 2014a, p. 243, n. 120 and Vasilakis 2021a, p. 178, n. 130.

process that generates multiplicity and goes outside divinity) and reversion (the corresponding process of gathering multiplicity into unity by coming as close as possible to the divine).¹⁷⁹ Particular readings of Dionysius' Christian adaptation of the Neoplatonic ontological scheme of procession and reversion¹⁸⁰ can actually be identified with the ascetic ideal of Fr. Sophrony, as presented above. This is mainly supported by Dionysius' magnificent 8th *Epistle* (particularly its last section),¹⁸¹ as well as the holistic reading of the Dionysian Corpus, I mentioned in section I, by Archbishop Alexander Golitzin,¹⁸² who, like Fr. Sophrony, spent a period of his life on Mount Athos (near Elder Aimilianos of Simonopetra).¹⁸³ I repeat that, according to this reading, the *Mystical Theology* (and the abstract ascent to God it seems to be suggesting) has no superiority against the rest of the Corpus Dionysiacum (pace Paul Rorem's hermeneutics),¹⁸⁴ but should be read in conjunction with the Corpus' other parts (for instance, the *Epistles*, where we find constant internal allusions and intertextual references).¹⁸⁵

In other words, today we possess all the background we need in order to show that, despite Fr. Sophrony's negative biases, he is actually and unsurprisingly a

¹⁷⁹ See, for instance, Schäfer 2006. Apart from that, we should also remember with Hadot (1995) that ancient Greek philosophy in all its various manifestations always embodied a complete way of life (not to mention the theurgical aspect of late Neoplatonism). See also the connection of Weiss 2023, p. 27 (with n. 1. She follows those who render ἐπιστροφή as "conversion"; what is more, on pp. 41-45 she engages with Dionysius, having discussed in the previous pages pagan Neo-Platonism).

¹⁸⁰ More specifically, we have a triplet here: immanence (μονή) – procession (πρόοδος) – reversion (ἐπιστροφή).

¹⁸¹ See Vasilakis 2021b, pp. 3-4, esp. p. 9, n. 53.

¹⁸² See supra, nn. 30 and 31.

¹⁸³ Cf., e.g., Golitzin 1994, pp. 9-10. Fr. Aimilianos was born in 1934 and reposed in 2019; his detailed vita (a *Synaxarion*) is forthcoming by the Monastery of Simonos Petras. See also Golitzin 2005.

¹⁸⁴ See, e.g., Rorem 2015.

¹⁸⁵ See an excellent example of this hermeneutics applied by/in Golitzin 2001 (e.g., p. 483). This has contributed, among else, to the writing of papers emphasizing the Christological exegesis of theophanies, mainly on the occasion provided by the Old Testament. See, for instance, Bucur 2023 (e.g., pp. 52, 54-55, 64 and engaging with Dionysius on pp. 58-61).

Dionysian figure,¹⁸⁶ because Palamas, admired by Fr. Sophrony,¹⁸⁷ was also attempting to be in line with Dionysius' theology.¹⁸⁸ What is different from the Palamite framework of Dionysius discussed in relation to the other three Orthodox thinkers is that the centre of the discussion is not the essence-energies distinction *in abstracto* (as in Lossky and Yannaras), but the ascetic struggle of every human person¹⁸⁹ (so characteristic of the life of a monk, whether on Mount Athos or elsewhere) to transform himself/herself fundamentally, so that (s)he receives the Grace of God.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁶ My conclusion here is similar and analogous to the one made about Zizioulas' relation to Dionysius by Pallis 2022a, pp. 628, as well as 629.

¹⁸⁷ Aldea 2013 (e.g., pp. 12 and 236-237) repeatedly notes the formative influence that an infamous member of the St Sergius Institute (at least for both Florovsky and Lossky), Fr. Sergius N. Bulgakov (1871-1944, famous proponent of the so-called "sophiology") exercised on Fr. Sophrony. Hence, Aldea (2013, p. 238) writes that Fr. Sophrony's "apophaticism can be seen as organically included in his reception of Gregory Palamas' doctrine of the Uncreated Energy, which is precisely how Fr Sergii interpreted the Areopagite's theology". What is more, Aldea (2013, p. 238) adds in the footnote 451 that "[F]r Sergii's reception of Denys is very close to that of Archim. Sophrony; in the 'Unfading Light', the Areopagite's apophatic writings are applied primarily to the level of terminology, while apophaticism itself is expanded to include even St Gregory Palamas' theology and Fr Sergii's own sophiological vision". I can accept the thesis that Fr. Sophrony's interpretation of Palamas, as well as a possible Palamite reading of Dionysius (which according to Fr. Sophrony must have been alien to Dionysius; cf. supra, n. 156, on the issue of the supposed "Christological corrective", as well as infra, n. 188, and in general supra n. 66) might have been informed by Bulgakov. I am extremely hesitant to accept any intrusion of the admittedly "dark" (i.e., unclear) doctrine about sophiology in the theology of Fr. Sophrony (and hence any supposed intermingling in Fr. Sophrony's vision of Palamite teaching with Bulgakov's speculations on the sophiological tradition, for which see the penetrating study of Panagopoulos 2021, pp. 15-188, i.e., the first two chapters; the third chapter, pp. 189-232, is about Florovsky's healthy criticism of sophiology. This book ends with an "excursus", pp. 233-254, based on Fr. G. Florovsky's correspondence with Fr. Sophrony, for which see supra, n. 85). Cf. also the assessment of Loudovikos 2020, p. 87.

¹⁸⁸ What is more, we can now understand better how Fr. Sophrony, despite his criticism against Dionysius (cf. supra, n. 96), would have been able to write (the otherwise contradictory statement) that "[t]he theological teaching of the Areopagite does not gainsay the results of mental quiet [ἡσυχία], and in this sense approaches and even falls in with hesychasm". Cf. Sophrony 2021, p. 161 (or p. 178 in the 1999 version – for which see supra, n. 95 – the slight change being in the phrase "in the *Areopagita*"), as well as Chircalan 2019, p. 149 and supra, n. 187.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. also Chirilă – Pașca – Tușa 2023, pp. 2 and 3 (as well as 11).

¹⁹⁰ In that sense, we might say that Fr. Sophrony's Palamism is more Christocentric than in Lossky's or Yannaras' case. See also the discussion supra, in n. 156. (What is more, we can add that Fr. Sophrony's Christocentric theology is correctly Palamite in comparison to that of Zizioulas.) In every case, consciously or not (as well as willingly or not!), Dionysius is in the background.

IV

In this paper, I approached Dionysius the Areopagite on the basis of understanding the dialectical duo of apophasis and kataphasis, a pair rooted in the dialectic between faith and scepticism. I employed two perspectives: The first one was a backward perspective and included comparisons and parallels with the Platonic pagan tradition. From the second section onwards, I employed the second, forward perspective, which featured examples of Dionysius' mixed reception. In other words, I have tried to give a representative, but at the same time detailed, theologically- and philosophically-based picture of Dionysius' contemporary Orthodox Christian reception. I hope it has been a contribution to the history of Orthodox theological, as well as philosophical thought and its various trajectories in the 20th century. Since the above picture has proven to be quite versatile,¹⁹¹ I aspired to show how the pros of a thinker's approach (e.g., Yannaras' apophatic and Palamite Dionysius) can balance and rectify the cons of another theologian's stance (e.g., Fr. Sophrony's critical stance against Dionysius).¹⁹² Hence, in the end, a more "unified" picture results, according to which Dionysius can be positively, even if at times latently, present in the thought of all four key Orthodox figures tackled with in this paper. What is more, I attempted to emphasize the need for a constructive interchange with Western theology.¹⁹³ After all, on the one hand, the Christian dialogue with Hellenic culture and philosophy that we observe in Dionysius is a landmark that characterises the development of philosophy and

¹⁹¹ Cf. also Pallis 2022a, p. 614.

¹⁹² With the caveat of n. 141, *supra*, though. See also the very last citation *supra*, in n.156. Such a polyphony can also be detected on the more basic level of Orthodox Christian hermeneutics; see Širka 2018, who engages especially with the work of Yannaras, Fr. John Breck (b. 1939), Pantelis Kalaitzidis (b. 1961) and Assaad Elias Kattan (b. 1967). Finally, we witness the dialectics of such a pluralism in the example of Torrance 2021, who brings into the fore Fr. Sophrony's "ethical cataphaticism" in order to complete (the otherwise one-sided) "ethical apophaticism" of Yannaras and Zizioulas.

¹⁹³ Already with respect to Thomas Aquinas, see Plested 2012 (as well as a case for bringing closer Aquinas and Palamas in Williams 1999, albeit her analyses should be treated with caution); and with regard to Saint Augustine, see Demacopoulos – Papanikolaou 2008, as well as Ioannidis 2013. In general, cf. Makrides 2021, pp. 271-273 and the bibliography *supra*, in n. 142.

the refinement of theology in both East and West.¹⁹⁴ On the other hand, a significant part of the cultivation of Orthodox theology itself in the 20th century (including the Dionysian reception) took and is still taking place in countries under the “Lux Occidentalis”.

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Διονύσιος ο Αρεοπαγίτης μεταξύ πίστεως και σκεπτικισμού:

Πτυχές της πρόσληψής του στην Ορθοδοξία του 20ού αιώνα

Διονύσιος ο Αρεοπαγίτης είναι ένας συγγραφέας, ο οποίος χρησιμοποίησε το όνομα ενός Πατέρα της αποστολικής εποχής, η δε δράση του τοποθετείται κατά την περίοδο περίπου πριν και μετά από την έλευση του 6ου αιώνα μ.Χ. Πρόκειται για έναν χριστιανό Πατέρα που ασχολήθηκε εκτεταμένα αφ’ ενός μεν με την αρχαία ελληνική φιλοσοφία δια μέσου του παγανιστικού Νεοπλατωνισμού, αφ’ ετέρου δε με την πρότερη χριστιανική παράδοση, η οποία με τη σειρά της διατήρησε εκλεκτικές συγγένειες με την εβραϊκή παράδοση (όπως προβάλλουν οι μελέτες του αρχιεπισκόπου Αλεξάνδρου Golitzin). Ο Αρεοπαγίτης είναι γνωστός για τον τρόπο με τον οποίο αξιοποίησε συστηματικά τη δίδυμη οδό για τη γνώση του Θεού: την καταφατική και την αποφατική θεολογία. Η «πίστις» είναι ένας όρος, ο οποίος απαντά στον Πλάτωνα (*Πολιτεία*, Βιβλίο VI) και αναφέρεται σε έναν υποδεέστερο τύπο γνωστικής πρόσληψης. Ωστόσο, χρησιμοποιείται επίσης από τον Νεοπλατωνικό φιλόσοφο Πρόκλο (5ος αι. μ.Χ.), προκειμένου να περιγράψει τον τρόπο με τον οποίο μπορούμε να προσεγγίσουμε το θείον. Σε κάθε περίπτωση, μια τέτοια χρήση του όρου «πίστις» σε καταφατικά συμφραζόμενα σχετίζεται και με την αποφατική οδό. Επειδή ο Θεός υπερβαίνει

¹⁹⁴ Cf. also Vasilakis 2019b, esp. p. 92, n. 21 (referring also to Dionysius) and p. 102, n. 83 (on Florovsky’s concept of “Christian Hellenism”, for which see also Lursmanashvili 2021).

τους ανθρώπους σε απόλυτο βαθμό, παραμένει τελικά «άγνωστος» στην ανθρώπινη διάνοια, ενώ χρειάζεται να προσεγγισθεί μόνο με πίστη. Με άλλα λόγια, δεδομένου ότι ο Νεοπλατωνισμός συνέθεσε σχεδόν όλες τις φιλοσοφικές σχολές της πρότερης ελληνικής φιλοσοφικής παράδοσης, μπορούμε να εντοπίσουμε τον Σκεπτικισμό στην κορυφή του εν λόγω συστήματος, στο οποίο καταφάσκει η αδυναμία του ανθρώπου να γνωρίσει τον Θεό. Άλλωστε, διόλου τυχαία, οι ακαδημεικοί Σκεπτικοί ήταν Πλατωνιστές, δηλ. μέλη της Ακαδημίας που είχε ιδρύσει ο Πλάτων στην Αθήνα.

Ο Γρηγόριος Παλαμάς κατά τον 14ο αιώνα επεξεργάστηκε περαιτέρω το αρεοπαγιτικό θέμα της διαλεκτικής μεταξύ καταφατικής και αποφατικής θεολογίας, αξιοποιώντας τη διάκριση μεταξύ ουσίας και ενεργειών του Θεού, προκειμένου να εξηγήσει το πώς μπορεί ο άνθρωπος να έχει εμπειρία του Θεού, τη στιγμή κατά την οποία ο Θεός – αναφορικά με την ουσία του – υπερβαίνει απόλυτα την κτίση. Ο Παλαμάς διαδραμάτισε σημαίνοντα ρόλο στη μετέπειτα πρόσληψη του Αρεοπαγίτη και αποτέλεσε σημείο αναφοράς για φιλοσόφους και θεολόγους του 20ου αιώνα, τόσο της ελληνικής όσο και της σλαβικής παράδοσης, οι οποίοι επιχείρησαν να απελευθερώσουν την Ορθόδοξη χριστιανική παράδοση από τη «βαβυλώνια αιχμαλωσία» της, όπως θα έλεγε χαρακτηριστικά ο π. Γεώργιος Florovsky. Εν τούτοις, η εν λόγω πρόσληψη του Αρεοπαγίτη δεν ήταν ομοιογενής. Κάποιοι στοχαστές εμπιστεύθηκαν το όραμα του Αρεοπαγίτη και τον θεώρησαν εκπρόσωπο της αυθεντικής Ορθοδοξίας (π.χ. οι Βλαδίμηρος Lossky και Χρήστος Γιανναράς), ενώ άλλοι αποδείχθηκαν είτε σκεπτικιστές ως προς αυτήν τη θέση (λ.χ. ο π. Ιωάννης Meyendorff, ο π. Αλέξανδρος Schmemmann, ακόμη δε και ο άγιος Σωφρόνιος Sakharov), είτε τελικά διατήρησαν εν πολλοίς ουδέτερη στάση απέναντι στο όλο θέμα (όπως ο π. Γ. Florovsky και ο μητροπολίτης Περγάμου Ιωάννης Ζηζιούλας). Στο παρόν μελέτημα παρουσιάζω και αναλύω το ανωτέρω πολυσύνθετο πλαίσιο και προτείνω τρόπους μιας νέας και διαφοροποιημένης προσέγγισης της αρεοπαγιτικής ανάγνωσης στην οποία έχουν προβεί συγκεκριμένα οι Lossky, Γιανναράς, Ζηζιούλας και άγιος

Σωφρόνιος. Πάντως, είτε αποφαιτικά, είτε καταφατικά, η αρεοπαγιτική διαλεκτική, εδραζόμενη και αναγόμενη στο δίδυμο πίστης (ή εμπιστοσύνης) και σκεπτικισμού («σκέψεως») συνιστά εξαιρετική πρό(σ)κληση για περαιτέρω εμβάθυνση και μύηση.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dionysius Areopagita zwischen Glauben und Skeptizismus: Aspekte seiner Rezeption in der Orthodoxie des 20. Jahrhunderts

In diesem Aufsatz soll die vielfältige Rezeption des Dionysius Areopagita zugeschriebenen Schriftkorpus aus dem 6. Jahrhundert durch vier wegweisende Persönlichkeiten der orthodoxen Welt im 20. Jahrhundert untersucht werden: auf russischer Seite (jedoch in Westeuropa lebend), Vladimir Lossky und Altvater Sofronij (Sacharov); und auf griechischer Seite, Christos Yannaras und Metropolit John Zizioulas. Historisch gesehen wurde Dionysius sowohl im Osten als auch im Westen sehr geschätzt, zum Beispiel von Maximus Confessor, Johannes von Damaskus, Thomas von Aquin und Gregor Palamas. Seit der Renaissance jedoch, beginnend mit der Entdeckung seiner Pseudonymität, wurde das westliche Christentum kritischer gegenüber Dionysius, während auch einige einflussreiche orthodoxe Theologen des 20. Jahrhunderts (z.B. John Meyendorff) diese kritische Lesart grundsätzlich übernahmen. Im Gegensatz zu dieser dominanten Richtung betrachtete Lossky die Schlüssellehre von Dionysius, nämlich den Apophatismus, als das grundlegende Unterscheidungsmerkmal des Orthodoxen Christentums vom Lateinischen Westen. Auch Yannaras folgte Lossky und versuchte, Dionysius aus einer spezifischen Perspektive (z.B. hesychastischer) zu betrachten, um seine westliche Fehldeutung aufzuzeigen. Aufgrund seiner Skepsis für Losskys Apophatismus ignoriert zudem Zizioulas

grundsätzlich Dionysius in seinem einflussreichen theologischen Oeuvre. Schließlich hat Altvater Sofronij aus demselben Grund Dionysius keine besondere Aufmerksamkeit geschenkt, obwohl er sich an einigen Stellen kritisch gegenüber seinen Ansichten über einen abstrakten Aufstieg zu Gott äußerte.

Es geht also um eine recht unterschiedliche orthodoxe Dionysius-Rezeption im 20. Jahrhundert, die einige wesentliche Tendenzen innerhalb der orthodoxen Theologie und ihrer Entwicklung in der Moderne offenbart, welche nicht frei von ideologischen Prämissen (z.B. antiwestlichen) und subjektiven Interpretationen sind. Es handelt sich ohnehin um eine Zeit, in der die orthodoxe Theologie versuchte, ihre vermeintlich verlorene „authentische Identität“ abseits verfälschender westlicher Einflüsse wiederzufinden – ein umstrittener Prozess mit gemischten Ergebnissen. Dieser Aufsatz versucht einerseits, die oben genannten Unterschiede in der orthodoxen Bewertung des Dionysius – unter Berücksichtigung ihres jeweiligen Hintergrunds – angemessen zu analysieren und zu erklären. Andererseits unternimmt er, diese orthodoxen Lesarten des Dionysius zu „dekonstruieren“, indem es, erstens, die Kontingenz ihres antiwestlichen Diskurses aufzeigt, da sich in ihnen noch verschiedene westliche Einflüsse nachweisen lassen. Zweitens soll die oftmals willkürliche und fragmentarische Verwendung der orthodoxen Vergangenheit und Tradition durch gegenwärtige Betrachtungsweisen gezeigt werden, die auf idiosynkratischen Kriterien und teilweise arbiträren Perspektiven beruhen. Letztlich zielt die eingehende Analyse der orthodoxen Rezeption von Dionysius darauf ab, die Notwendigkeit einer fruchtbareren Begegnung und eines produktiveren Austausches zwischen Ost und West aufzuzeigen, nicht zuletzt, weil es sich um einen christlichen Schriftsteller handelt, der aus der Zeit der einen, ungeteilten Kirche stammt.

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Dimitrios A. Vasilakis has been assistant professor (tenure track) of philosophy of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages at the Philosophy Department of the University of Ioannina since 2023. He was born in Athens in 1986. He did his undergraduate degree at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (Faculty of Philosophy: 2004-2008) and received his MA (2009-2010) and PhD (2010-2014) from King's College London (KCL, under the primary supervision of Prof. Dr. Peter Adamson). During his studies, he has received scholarships and grants from the University of Athens (Andreadis Prize), the Greek State Foundation for Scholarships (IKY), the Lilian Voudouri Foundation, the Academy of Athens and the A.G. Leventis Foundation. The topic of his doctoral dissertation was Neoplatonic Eros (*Neoplatonic Love: The Metaphysics of Eros in Plotinus, Proclus and the Pseudo-Dionysius*) and was published in a revised form by Bloomsbury Academic in 2021. Apart from the University of Ioannina, he has previously taught ancient Greek philosophy at KCL (as Graduate Tutor), LMU (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich, Germany) and the University of Athens (adjunct lecturer/teaching fellow). He has completed a first post-doc project at LMU titled "Natur in politischen Ordnungsentwürfen" (2016-17), financed by the German Research Foundation (DFG). In April 2020, he was awarded an "Initialization Scholarship" by the University of Erfurt and subsequently became "Wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter" in another DFG-Project on the contemporary Orthodox theological reception of Dionysius the Areopagite. He has also studied music (piano diploma, advanced theory, chorister and active participant in conducting seminars). His research interests relate to ancient Greek philosophy (esp. Neoplatonism) and its reception mainly in the Eastern tradition (Byzantium and Modern Greece).

Selected Publications

2024 (forthcoming): “Towards a Dialectical Relation between Form and Content: Reading Plotinus’ *Enn.* III.5.[50] via the *Phaedrus*?”, *The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition*, 18/1: 64-87.

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