Denys and Later Platonic traditions
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The Middle Platonisms of thinkers like Cicero, Philo Judaeus, Clement of Alexandria and
Origen formed essential features of the common theology and spirituality of the Patristic
church. These include the understanding of God as perfect, immutable, and incorporeal
being only able to do good, the Divine Word as containing the Platonic forms become His
ideas, union with the *Logos* as source and goal of knowing, the immortality of the human
soul, discipline in respect to sense and appetites and stage by stage development of the
mind's capacities as required for ascent towards God, allegorical interpretation of Scripture
as necessary and giving its highest sense, the insubstantiality of evil, and the unity of
philosophy, kingship, prophecy, and priesthood in Christ and those governing as his vicars.
Two traditions emerging out of the subsequent Neo-Platonism of Plotinus intensifying and
transmuting these features have the deepest possible presence in Catholicism.

I. FROM PLOTINUS TO AUGUSTINE
One tradition via Porphyry, a student of Plotinus who taught in Rome after him, and the
translator of some of their texts, Marius Victorinus, a Christian convert and theologian, had,
as its incalculably influential convert in forming Latin Christianity, Augustine. Plotinian
theology had already been preached to him by Bishop Ambrose of Milan who continued as a
great authority for Latins. As the Latin West and the Byzantine East increasingly divided,
this Platonic way, communicated pre-eminently by these authorities, and by Cassiodorus and
Boethius, so dominated Latin theology until the 12th century as to be almost its exclusive
philosophical foundation. Boethius knew and took up some of the doctrines of the other
major tradition, but his Platonism, though consoling him as a prisoner facing death, was a
religion of the mind, common to the different schools and across the pagan-Christian divide.

Distinguishing this tradition from the one to which Denys belongs, it contributes to
Catholic theology the dominant representation of God within it, namely, as
incomprehensible pure being, in which, because thought and being are one, absolute truth
and goodness are found. The incomprehensible Trinity is conceptualised as being, knowing,
and loving. All else are triadic images or likenesses of the trinitarian God, a view of the
cosmos best worked through by mediaeval Augustinians like Bonaventure. Self-knowledge
and the knowledge of God are mutually implicated and are all Augustine seeks. He
transforms Plotinus by unifying the self in an unbreakable trinitarian self-reflectivity
mirroring God's. Nonetheless, reiterating the Plotinian ascents to union, he shares Plotinus'
enormously influential discovery that when the human touches its ultimate ground, it loses
all knowledge of itself and can only turn what happens into a describable experience by
falling out of the union.

For Augustine the Platonists teach that God as living immortal truth, Mind, or
Word, provides grace sustaining humans and all creation, and draws us to himself. Indeed,
true and certain knowing always depend on our mind's access to the divine immutable
thinking above it. In Augustine's modification of Plotinus, beatitude is by knowledge of
God's essence and in the 13th century this is defined as Roman Catholic dogma. That creates
problems for adherents of the other tradition, who follow Plato and Moses to a conception
of beatitude by union with God above being and knowing. Because, in Plotinus, and in those

Christians following him on beatitude, union with the One-Good non being is solely by its grace and beyond all intellectual effort and self-consciousness, Augustinian theology looks to be intellectualist and too much by human power. When that is countered by placing love above and beyond knowing as the medium of union, problems in distinguishing the divine and the human emerge.

Ascent in the Plotinian-Porphyrian-Augustinian tradition is by purification from the sensible and material. Creatures are a graduated series of participations which are less good to the degree that they are less in being and less true. The inner is superior, the outer inferior. While evil has no substantial being, partly because ascent is a turn against the outer sensual and material, and partly because this tradition has an inadequate account of matter's origin, nature, and role—this is the criticism from the perspective of the Neoplatonic tradition within which Denys stands—, there is a tendency to regard matter as evil even when this is formally denied. The Neoplatonic eternity is out of time, not its endless extension, and is the simultaneous possession of the entire good. The divine mind in its eternal stability exercises a beneficent providence over all things great and small.

II. FROM IAMBLICHUS TO DENYS

The other tradition of new Platonism, developed among pagans from Iamblichus through Proclus and Damascius, the last "Successor" of Plato heading the Academy in Athens, whose members fled East as a result of Christian persecutions, had a propagator of unmatchable authority. The author of the tiny *Dionysian Corpus*, we shall Denys, because he, after accumulating several persona, some of them incompatible—as Peter Abelard discerned already in the 12th century—, became the patron saint of France and, in the Catholic world, the French have remained his most loyal disciples.

Denys identified himself with the Dionysius converted by Paul's sermon on the Athenian Areopagus and with the content and method of the Apostle's preaching (Acts 17:22-34). His writing, and his hidden life manifest only in that writing, also declare "the unknown God"; they do so by using the religious and philosophical culture of the Athenians he and the Apostle addressed. Paul had been converted in a blinding encounter with a heavenly light "beyond the brightness of the sun" (Acts 26.13). When describing the one "caught up into the third heaven" (I Cor. 12.2), he spoke in the third person, because, as he writes in another context, "I live, but not I, Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2.20). Denys explicated this ascent and vision and Paul's passage beyond the opposition of identity and difference by uniting the Pauline writings with what descended to him from Philo Judaeus, on Moses' entrance into the divine darkness, and Plotinus, on union with the One, and from the new Athenian mystical theologians, Proclus and Damascius. His theology is thoroughly mystical, combining affirmation and negation, in order to move beyond affirming and denying. Inspired by Hans Urs von Balthasar, who was under the influence of the 20th-century return to the Platonism of the Greek Fathers in reaction against neo-Scholasticism, Jean-Luc Marion, attempts a retrieval of this feature of Denys by a theological third way. "De-nomination" is beyond affirmation and negation, but, in a manner characteristic of one side of the present retrieval of Denys, Marion denys its Neoplatonic character and origins. Denys' kataphatic *Divine Names* begins from the good beyond thought and being for which Plato's analogy was the sun (*Republic* 509B-C) and the apophatic *Mystical Theology* sums up the system by praying for union with the same in a brilliantly shining darkness and a trumpeting silence, where body, soul, and mind are left behind.

Since the late 19th century, objective philological evidence has accumulated that Denys wrote after Plotinus, whom he quotes on union. The *Divine Names* reproduces parts

of the lost Greek text of Proclus' *On the Subsistence of Evils* so extensively that it is used to reconstruct them. From it Denys transmits Proclus' denial that evil has substance, and his refutation of the notion that matter is evil or its cause; enhanced by his authority, they become normative Catholic doctrine. He was under the tutelage of Damascius, whose method of combining kataphasis and apophasis he uses, thus intensifying the ineffability of the First. This confirms doubts about the character of Denys' identity with the Paul's Athenian convert which accompanied the appearance of the *corpus* in the 6th century and arose periodically afterwards. Nonetheless, both because of the quasi Apostolic authority of the works for those who accepted the author's self-identification, and because of their content and poetic beauty, the influence of his *corpus* is even greater than Augustine's. It reaches not only through the Latin Church and the cultures which arose out of it—where Augustine is paramount—, but also to the East, both Christian and Islamic—for example, there were Syriac translations beginning immediately after its appearance and an Arabic one in the 11th century.

In Catholicism, the *corpus* is important for the doctrine of God, philosophy, angelology, ecclesiology, political and social theory and practice, mysticism and spirituality generally, liturgy, art and architecture, poetry and dogma—on the last, Denys was understood in the Greek and Latin traditions to have claimed to witness the Dormition of the Mother of God. In these, Denys' Christianity and later Platonism combine and lead to each other. The Latin church came to have other sources of later Platonism in this tradition, Islamic, Jewish, Christian, and pagan. They included, beginning with Eriugena, a translation of Gregory of Nyssa's *On the Making of Man*, and, beginning in the 12th century, translations of works of Proclus, of Islamic confections constructed out of Plotinian and Proclean texts, of the commentaries on Aristotle by Simplicius and Ammonius. No others transmitted it with Denys' authority.

Distinguishing this tradition from the one to which Augustine belongs, it contributes to Catholic theology a logic which surpasses transcendent / immanent, matter / spirit, body / soul, sense / reason, evil / good, self/ other dualisms by way of the ineffable infinite Principle. God is beyond thought and being, and, although one and good are higher than being, He both has all names and no name. Providence belongs to God not as mind, but as primal goodness. His absolute transcendence makes him completely immanent; creatures are the divine nothingness as theophany. The First has its being and power in the substance and operation of creatures and is more the cause of any effect than the ones immediately proximate. If the spiritual direction of the other tradition is ascending, this one descends. Jean Trouillard, Catholicism's greatest 20th-century theologian in this tradition, writes that Proclus' universe: "is traversed by a series of vertical lines, which like rays diverge from the same universal center and refer back to it the furthermost and the most diverse appearances. These chains tend to absorb the hierarchical ordering of the levels and to link them all directly to the One….Thus, a stone is itself able to participate in the divine power to purify."[1]

Iamblichus sets the sacramental and incarnational direction of this Platonic way. His gods contain and employ matter for the sake of human souls altogether descended into the realm of becoming. He has a sense for the integrity of nature and how it serves justice. Among his followers, e.g. Proclus and Boethius, fate, binding together the natural order, is seen through the dominance of providence and as its instrument in leading souls towards virtue, freedom, and the divine. Matter can neither be evil nor the cause of evil. The theurgic

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[1] Jean Trouillard, Proclus, *Éléments de Théologie*, Bibliothèque philosophique (Paris: Aubier, 1965, 23–25.

or sacramental—God's cooperation with humans in their salvation through material things made holy—and hierarchies of holy helpers, incorporeal and human, are required for our salvation and the providential care of the cosmos. Thus, Denys speaks of a treatise of symbolic theology—either not written or lost—concerning the material theophanies. The human soul must start its ascent from these sensible "veils"; a demand Aquinas loves to repeat with the added authority of its source. Denys' treatises on the celestial and the ecclesiastical hierarchies gave the Catholic church her angelology, elements of her sacramental understanding of salvation, and essentials of what she turned into a hierarchical ecclesiology.

Hierarchical theories of the relation of church and state, with little or no basis in the *Dionysian Corpus*, but derived from it in the Western context, subordinated the secular to the sacred power. From Iamblichus via Denys came the "Divine law" of complete mediation—that there is no passage from the bottom to the top except through the middle terms—governing both nature and grace. Pope Boniface VIII, citing Denys' authority, used it to justify the greatest claims for Papal power. From Porphyry via Iamblichus comes another rule, a thing is known according to the power of the knower. It gives priority to subjectivity and enables the construction of hierarchical systems where the perfection of the higher is not diminished by its care for the lower. Boethius, and later Catholic theologians, e.g. Aquinas, following their pagan predecessors, use it to reconcile divine providence and predestination with human freewill and the efficacy of prayer. The fundamental structure of the systems, one which for Christian theologians unites philosophical and Scriptural patterns, is that formulated most completely by Proclus and communicated most effectively by Denys: all things remain in the First, go out from it into distinct being, and return into it in achieving their appropriate perfections.

For Iamblichus and Proclus, in contrast to Plotinian-Augustinian Platonism, our mind has no direct access to the divine thinking and, before being able to turn inward, must turn outward to sense, symbol and sacrament for elevation. The absence of immediate access to divine knowing is matched by an absence of immediate self-knowledge and self-reflexivity. In the 13th century, when Latin theologians, like Albert Magnus and Aquinas, and gained access to Aristotle's psychology and metaphysics, Denys and the Stagirite were perceived to cohere, lending sacred authority to a philosophical way, which, from the middle of the 14th century, became a required preparation for Catholic theology students. The results of the mixing of Aristotle, Augustine, Proclus and Denys within Catholic theology are diverse.

On one pole of the cosmos, the self immersed in the sensible is embraced and aided, and the ways of sacrament and symbol, art and liturgy, nature and philosophy are affirmed. On the other, lie all the paradoxes of manifest hiddenness and the passage beyond the opposition of identity and difference, affirmation and negation. These will be explored most creatively among Catholics by Eriugena, Bonaventure, Eckhart, Cusanus, Jean Trouillard, and Michel Henry. The problems which emerge for Catholic theology do not come from Denys' following of Proclus, for whom ascent leads to silent awe and the soul moves with the gods without ceasing to be soul. Rather the problems arise out of what he takes from Plotinus on union. When Denys is mixed with Augustine to construct Latin erotic mysticism, especially strong at the end of the Middle Ages and at the beginning of modernity, the difference between self and God seems to disappear. Catholicism turns to Augustine when defining the beatific vision and Denys is interpreted or translated to cohere with his theology of pure being, while those who followed Denys into what became heretical

formulations in the West after 1336, because too negative in respect to intellect, are condemned.

A project of pagan Neoplatonism influenced Catholic theology by diverse means, at various times, and in different ways. Porphyry had endeavoured to reconcile Plato and Aristotle. Proclus undertook it systematically and widened the project to embrace reconciling revelations, including religious practices and myths, to one another and to philosophy, which is regarded as having revelation at its origins. Cusanus, especially in *On the Peace of Faith*, Pico della Mirandola, and his Renaissance contemporaries, are the most well-known Catholic heirs of the *convenientia*, but there are many others including Aquinas. Boethius, along with his pagan contemporary Simplicius, took up the enterprise in the 6th century, and the *Consolation of Philosophy* is one result. Overall, in Antiquity, *convenientia* gave authority to the Hellenic tradition as both inclusive and consistent. One influential result, both with the Islamic philosophers and Latin mediaevals, was the reconciliation of Plato and Aristotle on creation.

The pagan harmonisers draw together the *Timaeus*, and its Demiurge, with Aristotle's *Physics*, and its Unmoved Mover, by making Aristotle's God an efficient cause and by reconciling his eternal universe with that in the *Timaeus*, which is generated and corruptible, though perpetually held in being by the divine will. Their success results in the notion that both Plato and Aristotle taught creation to be *ex nihilo*, i.e. there is only one divine source of all being. Towards the end of his writing, Aquinas ascribed the doctrine to both Plato and Aristotle, learning of their unity on this matter both indirectly from Arabic Islamic philosophical theologians, and directly from pagan Neoplatonic conciliators. Christians like Boethius were uncomfortable with one side of the conciliation, the ascription of eternity to creation. Another 6th-century figure, the Monophysite Christian John Philoponus, educated and arguing within the Neoplatonic school, attacked the demonstrations of both Aristotle and Proclus on the eternity of the world and began the unravelling of the whole project. Translated into Syriac, Arabic, and Latin, he lies at the origin of dialectical theology among Eastern Christians, Islamic and Jewish Arabic theologians. It starts with religious doctrines and makes philosophy into an instrument producing arguments for them. Catholics like Bonaventure use arguments derived from Philoponus, but the conception of philosophy belonging to dialectical theology is generally rejected in Catholicism, for which philosophy is the love of wisdom and thus of God as immortal truth.

III. FROM ERIUGENA TO NIKOLAUS CARDINAL VON KUES

The degree to which Catholic theology lived within the new Platonisms of late Antiquity comes out in the first theological system produced within the Latin West, that by John Scottus Eriugena in the 9th century. Astonishingly, he discovered his Neoplatonic principles almost entirely in Christian theological writings. The condemnation and suppression of his *chef d'oeuvre*, the *Periphyseon*, did not prevent it exhibiting the foundation his combining and reconciling of the two Platonic traditions gives to Catholic theology. Eriugena's system is what Philo called Genesis, a *physiologia*, a term John learned from Gregory of Nyssa. Providing a theological account of the cosmos, the *Periphyseon* continues the Greek and Latin Patristic hexamaeral literature arising out of Philo's unification of Genesis and the *Timaeus*, forwarded in the *Hexamaera* of Basil and Ambrose, and in the several commentaries on the first book of Moses by Augustine. The system unites theology, cosmology, angelology, psychology, aesthetics, anthropology, and eschatology, and its mentality keeps re-surfacing as an ideal for their future unification in Catholic thought. After Boethius, Eriugena was the

first to combine the two Platonic traditions of late Antiquity. However, in his case, the differences were more clearly set out and their reconciliation was more dynamic and creative.

For Eriugena, the Latin Fathers were foundational—pre-eminently Augustine, crucially Boethius, and importantly Ambrose. Eriugena's theology was transformed by the Greek texts he translated: the Dionysian *corpus*, the *Ambigua* and *Scholiae* of Maximus the Confessor, and *On the Making of Man* of Gregory of Nyssa. Eriugena established a Mediaeval and Renaissance pattern; namely, when the Platonism of Augustine met that of Denys, the later determined the systematic structure—in contrast, during the Modern period, Augustine dominates. Eriugena's profoundly authentic retrieval and highly original reworking of doctrines of both traditions would not be created again until we reach Albert the Great's progeny on the Rhine culminating in Nicholas of Cusa, directly or indirectly, under Eriugena's influence. Eriugena, and the host of Catholic theologians who followed him in uniting the Augustinian and the Dionysian Platonisms, undertook what the theologians of the Byzantine East and their offspring did not venture.

Eriugena's radically Neoplatonic doctrines almost always reach beyond what later Catholic theologians will teach. Within Catholic theology, Eckhart, Cusanus and the 20th – century French Catholic Neoplatonists from Trouillard to Stanislas Breton and Michel Henry will think many of them again. They reoccur inevitably, however, because they show both to what theology can be led, and they make more cautious and less consistent positions intelligible.

His *physiologia* is a total system, because, as Plato had taught, genesis embraces what is and what is not, and the divine superessential nothingness, the infinite fullness beyond all things which are and are not, is the principle of his all inclusive theology. This nature is completely divided logically; it goes out from and returns to itself by a divine self-creation, because God is Himself the nothingness from which He creates. Extreme transcendence and immanence are complementary for Eriugena. Because the divine nothingness comes into being and knows itself only in what derives from it, the First is immanent in creatures without compromise either to His own transcendence or to their existence. In the pagan Neoplatonists, soul mediates between supersensible and the sensible. Eriugena followed the Christian Fathers in giving this role to the human. He found the human as the immediate connection of God and the all in Augustine and radicalised it through Gregory of Nyssa. Human nature is that in which all things are created. It is the medium of creation, because, uniquely among beings, it possesses all the forms of knowing and ignorance, and because the human mind shares the divine nothingness and self-ignorance. The Neoplatonic move to make the subject and its perspectives fundamental is pushed to the point where there are no absolute objects. Like Neoplatonic systems generally, *Periphyseon* is an interplay of diverse subjectivities.

Eriugena retains Augustine's formulae on the relation of revealed theology and philosophy which will motivate Latin theology until Aquinas starts their generic separation. He asserts the identity of true philosophy and true religion and that "No one enters heaven unless through philosophy, the seed of splendours".[2] Here he seems to have Boethius' image of Lady Philosophy before his mind, a personage with a long pedigree, pagan, Scriptural, and Patristic; she is Augustine's interlocutor in his *Soliloquy*. In the *Consolation*, she opens the door of heaven in virtue of her capacity to be earthy, human, and heavenly, and even to pierce through the heavens. Gone, since Boethius and Denys, are Christian polemics like

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[2] Eriugena, *Annotationes in Marcianum*, ed. C. Lutz (Cambridge, Mass.: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1939), 57.15.

Augustine's against the errors and limits of pagan philosophy. They were replaced by the sense that Christian theology belonged within a continuous tradition reaching back to the inspired Pythagoras, Parmenides, and Plato, and that keeping this priceless heritage alive belonged to the one thing needful. For Eriugena, philosophy is neither pagan, as opposed to Christian, nor mundane, as opposed to theology. Dialectic, allegorical interpretation, and the *itinerarium* towards union with God, all belong to its work which is to give us the mind of Christ. Mediaeval Augustinians like Anselm and Bonaventure maintain this conception.

After Eriugena, the Dionysian direction of Platonism goes underground until the 12th century, being overwhelmed by Augustine, as it would be again from the 16th to the 19th centuries. As already indicated, beginning in the 12th century, several other sources of this theological, spiritual, and cultural way besides Eriugena make it a necessity for up-to-date theologians. Indeed, despite Honorius Augustodunensis' *Clavis physicae*, other covert means of getting his teaching, and the on-going use of his *Exposition of the Celestial Hierarchies of Denys* and his translations, Eriugena will be among its least evident sources. We cannot survey complete theological impact of this Platonic tradition, but three sketches will take us to the cusp of modernity.

A. From the Victorines to Bonaventure

Three Catholic appropriations of Denys emerge from Eriugena *On the Celestial Hierarchies*, though two of them are translations in the negative sense, i.e. also traductions. The first I have mentioned already, what happened to Denys' ecclesiastical hierarch. In the 12th century, Hugh of St. Victor and Honorius turn him into the Roman Pontiff as the single apex of the sacred and secular powers. Hugh *On the Celestial Hierarchy* is a principal source for papalists among whom we may count Aquinas and Bonaventure. Neither Hugh, nor many Latins, ask what Denys own thinking on the relation of political and ecclesiastical power was—certainly not what developed in the West. In a second matter, Hugh and his successors do follow Denys. They agree with him that the Divine Law of hierarchical meditation prevents Isaiah 6:6 from being read literally: no seraph could have left God's presence to descend to a human. Both for Denys and for his Catholic followers, salvation preserves and restores hierarchical order. In this Catholic theology goes against its Augustinian foundations, where the tendency is to join the human and the divine immediately. In the Augustinian 17th century, Bérulle will confront this tension.

Third, for Denys, following Plotinus, union with God is non-intellective.[3] The Augustinian Latins have trouble with this, and, already in Eriugena, Dionysian mystical union is interpreted intellectually. When commenting on Denys, Eriugena provides room for love and affectivity to be taken where understanding cannot go. When Denys and Eriugena are read in the 12th century in the Augustinian Abbey of St Victor in Paris by Richard, Hugh, and Thomas Gallus, love and affectivity as the powers of ascent and union carry the soul both beyond understanding and to intellect's consummation in a way which would be recognizable neither to Denys nor to the pagan Neoplatonists. Here we find the origins of a characteristic of Catholic theology, mysticism, and spirituality, and of its reconstruction of Denys in union with Augustine, paradigmatically modelled in the *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* of the Seraphic Doctor, Bonaventure. The ironies involved are epitomised in fact that Denys did not identify the fire of the Seraphim as the fire of love, though by this love Bonaventure's journey moves, and in it he concludes. The Middle English *Cloud of Unknowing*

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[3] See Michael Harrington, "The Drunken *Epibole* of Plotinus and its Reappearance in the Work of Dionysius the Areopagite," *Dionysius* 23 (2005), 117–38.

is one of many writings which made affective Dionysian mysticism, with its exaltation of love, popular.

Another irony had more serious consequences. As I indicated, Denys followed Plotinus into union beyond intellect and self-consciousness, and Damascius taught him a logic of ascent beyond identity and difference, affirmation and negation. By reading Denys with Proclus' *On the Parmenides*, the *On the Not-Other* of Cusanus turns Dionysian formulae into means both of finding God and of generating the cosmos. But other directions were taken in the Catholic world. Denys' mystical theology was intellectualised from the beginning of its appearance in Latin. When it was subsequently turned into erotic affectivity against intellect, late Medieval and early Modern Catholicism detected heretical identifications of self and God. There were condemnations and burnings at the stake.

B. Aquinas

The hierarchies which pervade Aquinas' thought are at root Neoplatonic. Denys, Aristotle understood though the Proclean and Plotinian *Liber de Causis*, together with the Greek and Arabic Neoplatonic commentators, and finally the *Elements of Theology* of Proclus himself provide the configurations. There are, however, strong counterbalances in Augustine and Aristotle. Hierarchy is evident in his ontology of pure being, structured by the tensions between being and unity, affirmation and negation. The Divine Law of mediation and the rule that knowing is according to the mode of the knower interconnect the divine, angelic and human subjectivities, hierarchically. His hermeneutic of Scripture with its assimilation to philosophical theology produces total system, and his understanding of the Church subordinates lower ecclesiastical orders and the secular power to the Pope. His Neoplatonic reconciliation of Platonic reminiscence and Aristotelian abstraction, when treating human intellect indicates more of the Neoplatonic ground we cannot detail, but an amplification of something already mentioned will indicate this direction of his theology.

Aquinas' treatise on angels, his exposition of the *Liber de Causis*, and his questions about the cardinal virtues, were all written after 1270, when he knew a great deal about Neoplatonism. The last work exhibits a hierarchy of natural and theological virtues which exist analogously in God, angels, and humans, which Thomas derived from Plotinus via Porphyry and Simplicius. In *On Separate Substances*, Thomas definitively reversed his earlier judgment of Plato on *creatio ex nihilo*, joining him with Aristotle. Significantly and characteristically, he states the reconciling doctrine in Platonic language. When asserting that, according to Plato and Aristotle, being is given to the whole universe of things by a first being which is its own being, the First is called "the most simple" and the existence of other things is said to be by "participation." Having looked at Plato more and more in Neoplatonic terms, Thomas understood Platonic hierarchy through an absolute subordination and derivation of all else from the One, so that universal causality and providence belong to God.

Contrasts with Bonaventure and Albert are matters of emphasis in respect to the same elements. Bonaventure is both more Dionysian, in the way already indicated, and more Augustinian. His Augustinianism is epistemological, insisting on the minds' immediate access to its own trinitarian self-reflexivity of being, knowing and loving, and to the Divine light by which certain knowledge is alone possible. Nonetheless, he adapts elements of Aristotle's psychology to support a Dionysian symbolic theology. Bonaventure replicates and expands the paradoxical logic of the coincidence of opposites, which Denys learned from Damascius, so authentically that he is the model for Cusa and Renaissance Neoplatonists. When he reiterates the Augustinian identity of philosophy and true religion in the circumstances of the

13th-century retrieval of Aristotle, he obliges philosophy to prove what revelation teaches. Bonaventure led the charge against the Aristotelians in the Parisian Faculty of Arts who are accused of creating an autonomous philosophy. From 1270, the Franciscans, whom he headed pressed for, or, as prelates, enacted, the strongest condemnations of philosophical propositions in the history of the Catholic Church. Some of them would have entrapped Aquinas had he not died first.

Thomas' fellow Dominican and teacher, Albert, is at the other pole. With Siger of Brabant, whom both the Franciscans and Aquinas opposed, and who was caught in the condemnations, Albert continues the old concordist tradition in respect to Plato and Aristotle inherited from late antiquity and adds to it the very Arabs from whom Aquinas increasingly distinguished himself in favour of late Greek philosophic commentators. Albert is so devoted to the unification of Dionysius with Neoplatonic Arabic Aristotelianism that he never acknowledged the Proclean origins of the *Liber de Causis*.

C. From Albert the Great to Pico della Mirandola
The movement from Albert to Cusa involves the increasing knowledge of Proclus, of Aristotle as negative theologian because understood through his assimilation to Proclus by the Arabs,[4] of the growing influence of Eriugena's doctrines, and of the pre-eminence of Denys, as philosopher, theologian, and spiritual guide. Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, *Three Opuscula*, and *Commentary on the Parmenides*, translated by Moerbeke in the 13th century were more used, and Cusa commissioned a translation of the *Platonic Theology*. He used it, as did contemporaries and successors like Cardinal Bessarion, Ficino, and Pico. Indeed, Ficino published his own Christian *Platonic Theology on the Immorality of Souls*. This work and others are full of Denys, two of whose treatises Ficino translated, as he did the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Despite taking up here and elsewhere magical and demonic aspects of Proclus, which mediaeval theologians had eschewed, and which nearly got its author convicted of heresy, it probably played a role in the promulgation of the dogma of the immortality of the soul in 1518, after Ficino's death. Even conservative churchmen could follow him, as John Colet, Dean of St Paul's London just before the Protestant Reformation, showed. Using Ficino, and Pico, he integrated Augustine into a Dionysian framework, which included a cosmology, with its astrological, physico-magical aspects subordinated to the angelic hierarchy and coordinated with the ecclesiastical. All this served, he and his contemporaries judged to explicate St Paul's teaching.

Eckhart put together Aristotle, Proclus, Denys, the *Liber*, Eriugenian doctrines, Avicenna, Averroes, Moses Maimonides, and Aquinas in a mystical and negative theology. Although his Dionysian dialectic of identity and difference got him condemned in 1329, it was taken up again by Michel Henry in the 20th century. Henry subordinates Being and Thought to "Oblivion" and reaffirms Eckhart's statements of identity between the essence of the soul and the operation of God. So he is able to reiterate a modified version of Eriugena's teaching about God creating himself in the human: "God gives birth to me as himself" (Eckhart, German Sermon 6). With other French theologians having a sympathy for Neoplatonism in the Iamblichan tradition, like Stanislas Breton, Henry attempts to overcome body / mind dualism in a material phenomenology.

Cusa's move to the Pope during the Conciliar Movement went with his reading of Denys. Uniting Proclus and Denys as the highest theologians, he credits the identities between their texts to the dependence of both on "the divine Plato". He succeeds in

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[4] See Kurt Flasch, *D'Averroes a Maître Eckhart: les sources arabes de la «mystique" allemand* (Paris, Vrin, 2008).

employing the Dionysian dialectic of identity and difference in the notion of "the not-other", and retrieving Eriugena's Divine self-creation as defining his own nothingness in finite creatures, without getting condemned. He had not succumbed to the affective transmutation of Denys; vision without an object by Augustine's "sharp point of the mind", the Neoplatonic "flower of the intellect", was ultimate. His *On the Peace of Faith*, in response to the fall of Constantinople in 1453, takes a formula he found in the Latin translation of the Koran, "one religion in a variety of rites", and, by a Proclean / Dionysian logic, endeavours religious concord. Religions are human ways to the simple, unknowable, and ineffable God, established by his multiple messengers. Christianity is reduced to rationalised or allegorised essentials, to become the common religion, which philosophy justifies both to Christians and non-Christians. Philosophy argues from the elements of Christianity which the non-Christian religions contain and presuppose. The sensuous and polytheistic elements included in the diverse rites are a Dionysian concession to our immersion in body.

When Pico della Mirandola pushed the conciliating venture further in his *900 Conclusions, Philosophical, Cabalistic and Theological*, some of his theses were condemned and the project stopped by Pope Innocent VIII. His successor, who was open to Hermeticism and philosophical magic, supported Pico; but this did not save Giordano Bruno from the Inquisition's stake, a century after the death of Pico. Pico, too, has a 20th-century French theologian to retrieve him for a renewed Catholicism. Henri de Lubac finds that both Pico and Cusa rejected the doctrine of pure nature, a distortion of Augustine to which de Lubac traced origins of modern atheism. As a leader of the movement which moved Catholic theology out of neo-Scholasticism, he sought a corrective from Greek Patristic Platonism and an understanding of Aquinas which was open to this side of his theology.

IV. PIERRE CARDINAL DE BÉRULLE: A DIONYSIAN HIERARCH IN AN AUGUSTINIAN AGE
Renaissance Neoplatonism provoked both Protestant and Catholic reactions. Most of these were Augustinian, the Protestant ones almost exclusively so, but Denys still played an important role in Catholic theology. Modern Catholicism is theologically Augustinian and neo-Scholastic. To them belong its distortions: the spirituality of pure love, the notion of pure nature, the irresolvable disputes about grace, occasionalism, ontologism, for example.

The association of John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila with Denys saved them from the Spanish Inquisition. Denys did not, however, save Pauline crucifixion mysticism in the Rheno-Flemish Dionysian tradition from ascetical practices and a negative theology, transcending all concepts and images, which bypassed the humanity of Jesus. In response, Bérulle combined Denys and Augustine in a self-consciously revolutionary way. He developed a strongly hierarchical spiritual system according to the Latin interpretation of Denys originating with Hugh of St Victor. However, for Bérulle, the priestly sacrifice of Christ offering his humanity to his divinity gives him and every priest hierarchical power. The bishop is hierarch as high priest and the priesthood of all believers enables an everyday mysticism. The Council of Trent decreed the creation of seminaries to effect its reforms. The companies established or inspired by Bérulle—Oratorian, Sulpician, Eudist, for example—undertook working in them with the aim that parish priests should develop a mystical life and be capable of directing souls. A deep theological modification of Denys was required to effect this transformation of church and world. In 1614, Bérulle proclaimed, explicitly invoking Copernicus, a revolution against Denys. Within a Dionysian framework, the hierarchies would be reversed. All the hierarchies of angels will adore Jesus, the God-man. Bérulle's revolution is criticised for substituting Christology for theology, encouraging

clericalism, and for making sacrifice the Christian centre, but it dominated Catholic seminaries, and thus Catholic spirituality, almost to the present.

V. FROM ROMAN NEO-SCHOLASTICISM TO DIONYSIAN PARIS: POSTMODERN RETRIEVALS
The theology of the modern seminary was neo-Scholastic, and the last revival of Denys and the later Platonisms we shall consider is a reaction against that. In speaking of von Balthasar and de Lubac, I have indicated some of the motives the 20th-century return to the Patristic and Mediaeval sources of Catholic theology. Generally, they displayed a more intimate connection between theory and religious life than prevailed in what was called Roman Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy, which looked like a modern rationalism, and they might, as a consequence, provide a way out of the ills of modernity.

In addition to the *ressourcement*, associated with the French Jesuit series *Sources chrétiennes*, during the past century, with the major participation of Catholic clergy, the France of St Denys became the centre of Neoplatonic study. Stansilas Breton wrote of a personal move from Rome to Paris. Because of a French Neoplatonic priestly triad, Trouillard, Henry Duméry, and Joseph Combès which he joined when he returned, the move became a symbol for what was happening in Catholic theology. These four, André-Jean Festugière, Henry-Dominique Saffrey, and others, positively reassessed the much denigrated Iamblichan-Dionysian tradition where philosophy knew its need for revelation, religious cult, theurgy, and mysticism. Studies of Plotinus, Iamblichus, Proclus, Damascius, the Greek Fathers, especially Denys, and Eriugena became the basis of philosophical and theological creativity among Catholics both inside and outside France. I have already named some of theologians; of these Jean-Luc Marion remains active. He, those I have mentioned, Werner Beierwaltes, and many others, have been occupied with the challenges with which a German Catholic, Martin Heidegger, confronted theology. Others sought in later Platonism, Christian and pagan, that for which Cusa aimed, a *rapprochement* with Eastern Orthodoxy, or an opening to Oriental mysticisms and religions, or a way of making Christian theology more incarnational and less caught in dualistic struggles. Some, like Trouillard and the group around him, acknowledge and embrace what they owe to pagan philosophers and theologians; others like Marion deny the debt. This difference is both philosophically and theologically significant. It is a characteristic of Catholic theology not to deny its debt to philosophy and to require its study.

The notion that modernity was past or passing, produced the sense that neo-Scholastic Thomism was inadequate; some thought this required leaving Aquinas out of a renewed Catholic theology. Many, however, wanted him included; this required showing how Augustinian, Dionysian, and Proclean he was. That consideration enables me to conclude with the name of one of the *peritii* of the Second Vatican Council, Marie-Dominique Chenu. Since he, de Lubac, Yves Congar, Duméry, and Jean Daniélou, like Eriugena, and others who brought Denys and Neoplatonism into Catholic theology through the centuries, suffered for doing so, justice demands that we close by remembering them. Hope for the future of Catholic theology requires observing that Neoplatonism and Dionysian spirituality are both vibrantly alive in the Catholic Church and developing new forms.

SUGGESTED READING
American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly 82:4 (2008) devoted to Denys.

Re-thinking Dionysius the Areopagite. Edited Sarah Coakley and Charles M. Strang. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwood, 2009.

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Bérulle and the French School, Selected Writings. Edited and introduced by W.M. Thompson. The Classics of Western Spirituality, New York: Paulist Press, 1989.

Wayne J. Hankey. *One Hundred Years of Neoplatonism in France: A Brief Philosophical History*. Studies in Philosophical Theology, Leuven/Paris/Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2006 (published in a single volume with *Levinas and the Greek Heritage* by Jean-Marc Narbonne).