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In Defense of the Authenticity of the Dionysian Corpus (II)

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Abstract: Analyzing hitherto neglected passages in Saint Gregory the Theologian and Saint Jerome, we argue that the Areopagitic corpus was known in the late fourth century AD. A close textual comparison of Dionysius with the works of Proclus, including an important comment in the latter's *Commentary on the Parmenides*, reveals that Proclus is dependent on Dionysius and not the other way around. Furthermore, close lexical parallels between Dionysius and the Alexandrian philosophical school, together with a host of internal details, all point to a date of composition before the third century. We conclude by discussing implications of this thesis for the study of early Christianity.

Keywords: Dionysian Corpus, Alexandria, Athenagoras, Apophatic Theology, Monasticism, Philo, Hierarchical Theology, Plotinus

3. The Alexandrian Connection

Gregory, Jerome, and Proclus (all of whom lived or studied in Alexandria for a time) are not the only ones who evince a knowledge of the *CD.* In fact, there are telling allusions in other authors which point to the same city, suggesting that a copy of the *CD* was in circulation there.

Perhaps the first notable connection is not Alexandrian, but Athenian. Saint Aristides' *Apology* is dated to the time of the Emperor Hadrian, which is one generation after the *CD*. Therein, he asserts that God "is indeed unsearchable in His nature", "incomprehensible", and has "no name".[2] Conceptually, these expressions succinctly summarize the apophatic theology of the *DN*. The fact

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[2] Aristides, *Apology*, Chap 1 in ANF 9:263-4. Cf *DN* 1.1.

that Aristides takes this doctrine for granted and has no basis in pagan philosophy for such views[3] suggests that the ideas were derived from Athenian Christianity. The *DN* is a prime candidate. Aristides' teleological argument for the existence of God based on the movement of the heavenly bodies[4] also has precedents in Dionysius' *Letter* 7.2.

A generation or so after Aristides is Saint Athenagoras. Recent scholarship affirms his move to Alexandria where he taught in the Catechetical School.[5] Athenagoras is similar to the *DN* in eschewing secular philosophy and arguing that God is known by revelation alone.[6] He uses the same argument as Dionysius to defend the resurrection of the body, namely that the bodies are companions of the souls in the struggles of this life and it would be unjust for God to reward one and not the other.[7] While Athenagoras may have simply been iterating a common Christian theme—as the same arguments are present in Saint Justin Martyr[8] –

[3] Although Middle Platonism considered the divine to be ineffable, it held that God could ultimately be apprehended through the mind. See Alcinous*, Handbook of Platonism* 10.4: "God is ineffable and graspable only by the intellect" (trans. John Dillon, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Maximus of Tyre, *Dissertation* 11.10: "As [the soul] advances, it hears of God's nature; as it ascends, it sees it" (trans. M.B. Trapp, *Maximus of Tyre: The Philosophical Orations*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, Chap 2, 4: "Such was my stupidity, I expected immediately to look upon God, for this is the end of Plato's philosophy... Plato indeed says that the mind's eye is of such a nature, and has been given for this end, that we may see that very Being when the mind is pure itself." See ANF 1:195-6.

[4] Aristides, *Apology*, Chap 1.

[5] Bernard Prouderon, *D'Athènes à Alexandrie. Études sur Athénagore et les Origines de la Philosophie Chrétienne* (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1997), 1-70; 370-6.

[6] Athenagoras, *Plea for the Christians*, Chap 7 in ANF 2:132: "Poets and philosophers… have applied themselves in the way of conjecture, moved, by reason of their affinity with the afflatus from God, each one by his own soul, to try whether he could find out and apprehend the truth… But we have for witnesses of the things we apprehend and believe, prophets, men who have pronounced concerning God and the things of God, guided by the Spirit of God. Cf. *DN* 1.1: "Let the rule of the Oracles be here also prescribed for us: that we shall establish the truth of the things spoken concerning God, not in the persuasive words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit-moved power of the Theologians… By no means then is it permitted to speak, or even to think, anything, concerning the superessential and hidden Deity, beyond those things divinely revealed to us in the Sacred Oracles.".

[7] See Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection of the Body*, Chap 21 in ANF 2:160-1 and *EH* 7.1.1. For a defense of Athenagoras' authorship of *On the Resurrection*, see Prouderon, *D'Athènes à Alexandrie*, 71-251.

[8] Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, Chap 7 in ANF 1:198: "They [viz. the prophets] did not use demonstration in their treatises, seeing that they were witnesses to the truth above all demonstration, and worthy of belief"; *Ibid.*, *On the Resurrection*, Chap 8 in ANF 1:298: "both [viz. the body and the soul] were washed and both wrought righteousness." See also Origen, *On the Resurrection*, Book 1, Fragment apud Pamphilius, *Apology for Origen*, section 128 (PG 11: 92-4): "For how does it not seem absurd that this body which has endured scars for Christ, and, equally with the soul [*pariter cum anima*], has borne the savage torments of persecutions… that this should

he offers an intriguing link between Athens and Alexandria where a plausible succession of ideas from the *CD* can already be traced at so early a date. At the very least, the parallels with Aristides and Athenagoras prove that the *CD* conceptually fits the period and geographical location it claims to be from.

The first concrete link between Dionysius and Alexandria is Pantaenus (fl. 180), the second dean[9] of the Catechetical school and the teacher of the better-known Clement. In a fragment of his teachings, Pantaenus' "disciples" asserted that he taught that God does not "know sensory things by sensation [*μήτε αἰσθητῶς τὰ αἰσθητά*]", nor "according to existing things [*κατὰ τὰ ὄντα*]", but rather as "His own wills [*ἴδια θελήματα*]"[10]. The *DN* explicitly makes the same points using similar Greek terminology: "For not as learning existing things from existing things [*ἐκ τῶν ὄντων*] does the divine Mind know…The angels also know things on earth, not as knowing them by sensible perceptions [*οὐ κατ' αἰσθήσεις*]… but by a proper power and nature of the Godlike Mind…We affirm that those principles are…divine and good wills [*θεῖα καὶ ἀγαθὰ θελήματα*], which define and produce things existing"[11].

Clement of Alexandria, Pantaenus' successor, also contains numerous parallels to the *CD*.[12] One of the most noteworthy is his comparison of the spiritual life to a man at sea:

> *As, then, those, who at sea are held by an anchor, pull at the anchor, but do not drag it to them, but drag themselves to the anchor; so those who, according to the gnostic life, draw God towards them, imperceptibly bring themselves to God.*[13]

Dionysius provides the exact same metaphor:

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be deprived of the prizes of such great contests [*tantorum certaminum*]? If forsooth, the soul alone, which not alone contended [*non sola certaverit*], should receive the crown, and its vessel the body, which served it with much labour, should attain no recompense… such a fact would undoubtedly argue on the part of God, either a lack of justice or a lack of power" (translation adapted from John Parker).

[9] For Pantaenus' role in the Catechetical school, see Prouderon, *D'Athènes à Alexandrie*, 28-45.

[10] Nicholas Constas, *On the Dificulties of the Church Fathers: Volume I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 107-9. Greek also available in: *Reliquiae Sacrae*, Volume 1, ed. Martin Routh (Oxford: 1846), 379 and *Ambiguum 7 to Thomas* in: *Maximi Confessoris De variis difficilibus locis sanctorum patrum Dionysii et Gregorii*, Volume 1, ed. Frank Oehler (Halle: C.E.M. Pfeffer, 1857), 60, 62.

[11] *DN* 7.2, 5.8.

[12] Clement's understanding of the orders in the Church mirroring the heavenly orders of the angels (*Stromata* 6.13 and 7.1; ANF 2:504-5, 523-4) is similar to *EH* 1.2 and his description of the transcendence of God in *Stromata* 5.12 (ANF 2:642-4) recalls the opening of the *DN* (1.1-2).

[13] Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 4.23 (PG 8: 1361A); ANF 2:437-8.

> *Let us then elevate our very selves by our prayers to the higher ascent of the divine and good rays…as if, after we have embarked on a ship, and are holding on to the cables reaching from some rock, such as are given out, as it were, for us to seize, we do not draw the rock to us, but ourselves, in fact, and the ship, to the rock.*[14]

It is hard to ascribe the presence of the same elaborate metaphor in both writers to chance.[15]

Moving on to the third century, we find many similarities between Origen's *Commentary on the Song of Songs* (as discussed in Part I) and the doctrine of divine love in the *DN* (namely, that vice is a perversion of virtue and that love has a threefold movement). At one point in this work, Origen even cites *the same three* Scriptural and Patristic proofs as Dionysius when discussing the notion of love as *eros*.[16] In *On First Principles*, Origen provides the exact same exegesis of Mark 10:18 as the *DN* (attributing "goodness" commonly to the divine nature, and likewise using the word "blasphemy.")[17] There is also a very striking parallel to Dionysius in Origen's *Scholia on the Song of Songs*.[18] Commenting on verse 1:2-3, "thy breasts are better than wine and the smell of thine ointments is better than spices", Origen writes: "For [God] is wisdom-itself (*αὐτοσοφία*) and justice; but we are wise and just by participation (*κατὰ μέθεξιν*), by choice and capacity (*κατὰ προαίρεσίν τε καὶ δύναμιν*), receiving the fragrance of these things". The

[14] *DN* 3.1.

[15] It is interesting that although the metaphor in both writers matches conceptually, the words they use are different (Dionysius speaks of a "rock" while Clement uses "anchor"). If we assume that Dionysius was plagiarizing earlier writers, we must explain why in some instances his quotations are exact lexical matches while in others they are more of a loose paraphrase. Such a variation in methodology is not to be expected from a forger indiscriminately mining ancient texts. On the other hand, if we assume that Clement was citing Dionysius from memory and adapting him, this would account for the inexactness of the quotation.

[16] Namely, Prov 4:6-9, Wis 8:2, and Ignatius' *Epistle to the Romans*, Chap 7. See PG 13: 68B-C; 70D/Origen, *The Song of Songs*, 31; 35 (ANF 1:105). Cf *DN* 4.11-2.

[17] Origen, *On First Principles*, Book 1.2.13 in ANF 4:251: "It is not to be imagined that there is a kind of blasphemy [*blasphemiae*], as it were, in the words, 'There is none good save one only, God the Father,' as if thereby it may be supposed to be denied that either Christ or the Holy Spirit was good. But, as we have already said, the primal goodness is to be understood as residing in God the Father, from whom both the Son is born and the Holy Spirit proceeds, retaining within them, without any doubt, the nature of that goodness which is in the source whence they are derived." Cf. *DN* 2.1: "Let then the self-existent Goodness be sung from the Oracles as defining and manifesting the whole supremely-Divine-Subsistence… when it affirms that the Godhead Itself, leading the way, says, 'Why dost thou ask me concerning the Good? None is Good except God alone'… And verily as we have mentioned in the Theological Outlines, if any one should say that this is not spoken concerning the whole Deity, he blasphemes [*βλασφημεῖ*], and dares, without right, to cleave asunder the super-unified Unity."

[18] PG 17: 253B

only previous author to call God *αὐτοσοφία* is Dionysius, who does so four times in the *DN*.[19] Dionysius also draws an identical contrast between what God is by nature and what we are by participation (*κατὰ μέθεξιν*).[20]

A contemporary (and possibly a fellow classmate) of Origen, the pagan philosopher Plotinus, asserts that "the mind has both the power for thought [*δύναμιν εἰς τὸ νοεῖν*]" and another faculty by which it knows things "beyond itself [*ἐπέκεινα αὐτοῦ*]", the Greek matching the *DN* word-for-word.[21] Plotinus further believes that God can be apprehended by a process of "abstraction" (*ἀφαίρεσις*).[22] To explain this, he invokes the metaphor of a sculptor chiseling away at a statue "until he has brought out a beautiful face [*καλὸν πρόσωπον*]" from it,[23] the very same metaphor and vocabulary that occurs in the *MT*.[24] Plotinus also says that when one speaks of the One (*περὶ αὐτοῦ λέγομεν*), he does not do so on the basis of what It is – which is incomprehensible – but "from the things which come after It [*ἐκ τῶν ὕστερον*,]"[25] very similar to Dionysius, who says that God is "named [*ὀνομάζεται*]" from "all beings [*ἐκ τῶν ὄντων ἁπάντων*]"[26] and "from all created things [*ἐκ πάντων τῶν αἰτιατῶν*]".[27] At *Enneads* 6.5.3, Plotinus takes issue with the notion that the One is "in many things [*ἐν πολλοῖς*]". Again, this recalls the *DN*, where Dionysius says that the Biblical saying that God is "all in all [*τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσι*]… falls short of [His] infinitude"[28]. There are other similarities between the two thinkers, as well as between Plotinus and Origen.[29] Due to there existing

[19] *DN* 5.5, 7.1, 11.6

[20] *DN* 2.4

[21] Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.7.35. Greek in: *Plotini Opera*, 3 volumes, ed. Paul Henry and Hans-Rudolf Schwyzer (Bruges/Paris: Desclée De Brouwer, 1951-1973). Cf. *DN* 7.1.

[22] *Enneads* 5.3.9.

[23] *Enneads* 1.6.9.

[24] *MT* 2: "For this would be really to see and to know: to praise the Transcendent One in a transcending way, namely through the abstraction [*ἀφαιρέσεως*] of all beings. We would be like sculptors who set out to carve a statue. They remove every obstacle to the pure view of the hidden image, and simply by this act of clearing aside [*ἀφαιρέσει*] they show up the beauty [*κάλλος*] which is hidden."

[25] *Enneads* 5.3.14.

[26] *DN* 1.7.

[27] *DN* 1.5.

[28] 1 Cor 15:28; *DN* 1.7; *DN* 3.1: *ἀπολείπεται τῆς ὑπὲρ πάντα καὶ πάντων περιληπτικῆς ἀπειρίας.*

[29] Both Dionysius and Plotinus conceive of God as being "beyond existence" and "beyond number", further speaking of the soul revolving around God in a circular motion of love. See *Enneads* 6.7.38/*DN* 1.1; *Enneads* 5.5.4/*DN* 13.3; *Enneads* 2.2.2/*DN* 4.8. Ilaria Ramelli has unearthed lexical parallels between Plotinus and Origen relating to the doctrine of apokatastasis: *ἀρχαία φύσις/statum initii* (*Enneads* 6.5.1/*On First Principles* 2.1.1), *ὕλη νοητή/λεπτομερὲς σῶμα* (*Enneads* 3.5.6/Origen apud Procopius, PG 87.1: 221A). See Ramelli, "Some Overlooked Sources", 449, 462; *Ibid.*, "Christian Soteriology and Christian Platonism: Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and the

uncited lexical correspondences between Plotinus and Origen, this substantiates the claim that it is Plotinus who is borrowing from Dionysius. Further, because of Origen and writers before him having parallels with the *CD*, the simplest explanation is that the *CD* predated all of them.

Saint Cyril of Alexandria is said to have quoted the Areopagite in antiquity.[30] Although there is no way of confirming or disproving these claims since the relevant texts are not preserved, there does seem to be a close linguistic parallel with the *CD* in one of Cyril's extant works. In his *Commentary on Habakkuk*, Cyril speaks of God as "the sun of righteousness, the intellectual [*νοητός*] morning star rising in the hearts of believers"[31]. The former part of the passage is a quote of Mal 4:2 juxtaposed with 2 Pet 1:19. However, the term "intellectual" is a novel addition. Interestingly, the *only* previous author to quote these two verses together is Dionysius, who likewise adds the word "intellect": "they [viz. the theologians] extol [the Deity] under exalted imagery as sun of righteousness, as morning star rising divinely in the intellect [*εἰς νοῦν*]"[32]. Cyril uses distinctive Dionysian vocabulary in his other treatises,[33] so all things considered, it is not impossible that he had read the *CD*.

In all of the preceding, it is theoretically possible that the *CD* carefully plagiarized a long list of Alexandrian-educated writers. However, accepting this hypothesis requires forfeiting any claim to dependence upon Proclus, as the lexical and conceptual parallels here are scattered throughout the *CD* instead of being confined to a single chapter – something hard to explain if the *CD* was concocted by a forger callously borrowing from texts, but easy to explain if

Biblical and Philosophical Basis of the Doctrine of Apokatastasis", *Vigiliae Christianae* 61 (2007), 313-56. This suggests that Plotinus had no qualms about borrowing from a Christian writer. Indeed, Plotinus' own teacher, Ammonius Saccas, was likely a Christian. See Digeser, *A Threat to Public Piety*, 23-48. It has also been argued that Plotinus' doctrine of emanation was itself an adaptation of Ammonius' theory of the soul. See Louis-Josèphe Dehaut, *Essai historique sur la vie et la doctrine d'Ammonius-Saccas* (Brussels: M. Hayez, 1836), 141.

[30] The Severians cited *DN* 1.4 (*ὁ ἁπλοῦς Ἰησοῦς συνετέθη*) as proof of Monophysitism at a conference with the Orthodox in Constantinople in 532, saying that they possessed "old manuscripts" in the archives of Alexandria in which Saint Cyril quoted the same. See "Innocentii Maronitae Epistula de Collatione cum Severianis Habita", in: *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, *Vol. 4, Part 2* Edward Schwartz (Trübner: 1914), 172-3. For more context on the conference, see Frederick Hamilton, *Chronicle of Zachariah of Mitylene* (London: Methuen & Co., 1899), 246-53 (Book 9.15).

[31] PG 71: 928A.

[32] *CH* 2.5. For discussion, see J. Gregory Given, "Anchoring the Areopagite: An Intertextual Approach to Pseudo-Dionysius", *Studia Patristica* 68 (2013), 164-5

[33] Cyril employs the learned words *διαπορθμεύω* and *διαλοιδοροῦμαι*, found in the *CD*. It should be noted that Koch argued that Dionysius' use of *διαπορθμεύω* provided linguistic proof of his dependence on Proclus in *Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita in seinen Beziehungen zum Neuplatonismus und Mysterienwesen*, 235.

Proclus alone exhibited this tendency in relation to a singular point of theodicy he found extremely important.

With this in mind, one must take into account a recent linguistic analysis of Dionysius' *MT* and the *Letters* by Nicolo Sassi.[34] It was determined that in both treatises, over half of the theological language is original, i.e. completely unparalleled in extant Greek literature. This includes rare words and neologisms that are found only in the *CD*, such as *εἰρηνόχητος*, *ὑπεράγνωστος*, and *ἀγαθαρχία*. Another quarter or more of the language consists in learned philosophical vocabulary in use by both Christians and the various philosophical schools going back to the second and third centuries, such as the words *ἀνούσιος* or *ἄφθεγκτος*. Finally, about ten percent was found to be exclusively Christian or Scriptural, e.g. the *θεῖος γνόφος* of Ex 20:21 or the term *θεανδρικός*. These findings prove two things: (1) the *CD* is internally consistent, being the product of a single author's style and voice. This undercuts the theory that "Dionysius" was a plagiarist who created a pastiche of earlier writings. (2) The high degree of learned vocabulary (with no sign of anachronism) suggests an author who had been educated in the pagan schools, consistent with Dionysius' historical reputation as one of the Areopagites, who were some of the most prominent members of Athenian society.[35]

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[34] Nicolo Sassi, "Le Fonti del Lessico Teologico del *De Mystica Theologia* dello Pseudo-Dionigi Areopagita", *Textual Cultures* 11/1-2 (2017), 130-71 and *Ibid.*, "Le Fonti del Lessico Teologico delle *Epistole* dello Pseudo-Dionigi Areopagita", *Lexicon Philosophicum* 6 (2018), 69-115.

[35] Research by Jahn (1889) and Corsini (1962) has shown that the *CD* borrows phraseology from Plato's dialogues, particularly from the *Phaedrus*, *Parmenides*, and *Symposium*. See Albert Jahn, *Dionysiaca: sprachliche und sachliche Platonische Blüthenlese aus Dionysius, dem sogenannten Areopagiten* (Altona/Lepzig: Verlag Von A.C. Reher, 1889); Corsini, *Il tratatto De Divinis Nominibus dello Pseudo-Dionigi*. This tendency is consistent with a first-century Greek convert, as Justin Martyr exhibits similar influence. See M.J. Edwards, "On the Platonic Schooling of Justin Martyr", *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 42/1 (1991), 17-34.

Even though the Areopagite may have used contemporary philosophical language, the doctrines he expressed with it were uniquely Christian. "Il en a gardé les *termes* mêmes, mais en leur donnant souvent une signification tout autre, qui ne permet pas de confondre les deux doctrines". Fulbert Cayré, *Patrologie et histoire de la théologie* (Paris/Tournai/Rome: Société de Saint Jean l'Évangéliste, 1945), 2:92, emphasis in original. "On peut dire que ces écrits forment un monde à part qui, en dépit des matériaux qu'il utilise très librement, ne se rattache à rien avec évidence". Louis Bouyer, *La spiritualité du Nouveau Testament et des Pères* (Paris: Aubier, 1960), 437. "Si profilano facilmente delle posizioni di netta antitesi con il neoplatonismo che sono state già considerate dagli studiosi: […] La dottrina emanatistica neo-platonica è stata cancellata da quella cristiana della creazione con conseguenze radicalmente opposte: Dio è sintesi d'immanenza e di trascendenza, di essenza e di energia, l'ente supera il bene: i germi di una teologia cristiana già s'intravvedono. La presenza e l'autorità della Bibbia superano ed in molti casi rovesciano posizioni neoplatoniche. La tenebra luminosa, entro la quale il contemplativo raggiunge la consapevolezza della presenza di Dio, non è tema neoplatonico…La tendenza dell'uomo verso Dio è preceduta dall'amore verso l'uomo da parte di Dio che compie sempre il primo passo". Piero Scazzoso,

It is possible to expand further upon Sassi's findings. Indeed, not only can we say that Dionysius uses learned philosophical vocabulary, but he shows a predilection for specifically *Attic* forms, fitting a first-century Athenian writer: *πληθὺς* instead of *πλῆθος*,[36] *τέλεος* for *τέλειος*,[37] *ἅττα* for *ἅτινα*,[38] *σμικρὸς* for *μικρός*,[39] *ξὺν* for *σύν*,[40] and the third-person reflexive pronouns *σφῶν*[41] and *σφέτερος*.[42] He employs the learned expressions *εἶεν δὴ*,[43] *μάλα γε*,[44] *οἷός τε*,[45] *κατὰ κόρρης διδόναι*[46] (to smite on the cheek), as well as rare grammatical forms like the dual number,[47] which was not commonplace in the fifth or sixth centuries even among educated writers. In his Tenth Letter (to Saint John the Evangelist), he uses an expression unique to Attic prose.[48] Dionysius appears to be well-read in Homer[49] and demonstrates intimate acquaintance with the rhetorical techniques of the Second Sophistic (c. 60-230 AD), particularly those that characterized the

Ricerche sulla struttura del linguaggio dello Pseudo-Dionigi Areopagita (Milan: Società Editrice Vita e Pensiero, 1967), 174-5.

[36] *DN* 4.18; *CH* 2.5; *EH* 2.3.2, 3.3.7, 11, 4.3.2, 6.1.1, 6.3.6; *Letter* 8.1.

[37] *DN* 4.20; CH 7.3, 8.2; *EH* 2.3.4-5, 3.3.7, 4.3.3, 5.1.2, 6.1.1, 6.1.3. 6.2, 6.3.2, 6.3.4, 6.3.6, 7.3.9, 7.3.11; *Letter* 7.3.

[38] *DN* 1.8.

[39] *DN* 4.10, 9.3; *CH* 13.3; *MT* 5.

[40] *Letters* 8.5 and 10.

[41] *DN* 4.2, 4.5.

[42] *EH* 7.3.9.

[43] *DN* 4.1.

[44] *EH* 3.3.7.

[45] *DN* 2.2, 3.2, 4.22, 5.9; *CH* 1.2, 3.4, 6.1; *EH* 1.2, 5.1.7; *Letter* 9.1.

[46] *Letter* 8.5.

[47] *ἄμφω, ἀμφοῖν, ἀμφοτέρω, ἀνδροῖν, ποδοῖν, πόδε*, see *DN* 4.30, 9.6, 9.9, 10.2; *EH* 2.2.3, 5.2, 5.3.1, 5.3.7, 6.2, 6.3.1; *Letter* 7.2, 8.6.

[48] *οὐκ ἄν ποτε οὕτω μανείην*. The expression "*μὴ οὕτω μαίνομαι*" and its variants occur in Plato (*Republic* 341C), Xenophon (*Anabasis* 2.5.12), Demosthenes (*On the Crown*, sec. 51; *On the Chersonese*, sec. 25), Chariton (*Callirhoe* 6.5.9), Lucian (*Dialogues of the Gods* 8.3; *The Fisher*, sec. 37; *Toxaris*, sec. 25), and Maximus of Tyre (*Dissertation* 16 [6].3). It was a favorite expression of Chrysostom's (who studied rhetoric under Libanius). It also appears once in Cyril (PG 75: 336D) and once in Leontius of Byzantium, in the context of an archaizing philosophical dialogue (*Against Nestorius and Eutyches*, Book 2, PG 86.1: 1345C).

[49] The metaphor of the "luminous chain" in *DN* 3.1 appears to be inspired by Iliad 8.19-26. Cf. also *DN* 4.5 with Iliad 5.127: τοὺς νοεροὺς αὐτῶν ὀφθαλμοὺς ἀποκαθαίρειν τῆς περικειμένης… ἀχλύος/ἀχλὺν δ' αὖ τοι ἀπ' ὀφθαλμῶν ἕλον ἠ πρὶν ἐπῆεν. The poetic word *κουροτρόφος* appears in *Letter* 9.5.

"Asianic" school: tricolon,[50] paromoiosis,[51] homoioteleuton,[52] and paronomasia (word-play).[53] There are even stylistic similarities between the *CD* and the orations of Aelius Aristides (117-181 AD), who lived only a few decades after Dionysius is supposed to have written.[54]

Another interesting linguistic feature of the *CD* is the absence of the term *σάρκωσις*,[55] suggesting that the author was writing at a time before this technical term had attained general usage. In fact, when discussing the Incarnation, Dionysius prefers to talk of Christ's "mannish life"[56] (*ἀνδρικὴν ζωήν*) or

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[50] Τριὰς ὑπερούσιε καὶ ὑπέρθεε καὶ ὑπεράγαθε… ἴθυνον ἡμᾶς ἐπὶ τὴν τῶν μυστικῶν λογίων ὑπεράγνωστον καὶ ὑπερφαῆ καὶ ἀκροτάτην κορυφήν (*MT* 1). A tetracolon occurs in *Letter* 7.3: ἐξέλεγχε καὶ πρὸς ἐμὲ τὸν τότε καὶ συμπαρόντα σοι καὶ συνεωρακότα καὶ συνανακρίναντα πάντα καὶ συναγάμενον.

[51] Τὸ σκότος ἀφανὲς γίνεται τῷ φωτί, καὶ μᾶλλον τῷ πολλῷ φωτί· τὴν ἀγνωσίαν ἀφανίζουσιν αἱ γνώσεις, καὶ μᾶλλον αἱ πολλαὶ γνώσεις (*Letter* 1); Ταῦτα, εἴ σοι θεμιτόν, εἰπέ, καὶ δυνατόν, Ἀπολλόφανες (*Letter* 7.3).

[52] τούτους δέ φημι τοὺς ἐν τοῖς οὖσιν ἐνισχημένους καὶ οὐδὲν ὑπὲρ τὰ ὄντα ὑπερουσίως εἶναι φανταζομένους, ἀλλ' οἰομένους εἰδέναι (*MT* 1); Ταῦτα ὑπεροχικῶς, ἀλλὰ μὴ κατὰ στέρησιν ἐκλαβὼν, ἀπόφησον ὑπεραληθῶς (*Letter* 1); οὐ μόνον μαθὼν ἀλλὰ καὶ παθὼν τὰ θεῖα (*DN* 2.9).

[53] καθ΄ ἣν τοῖς ἀφθέγκτοις καὶ ἀγνώστοις ἀφθέγκτως καὶ ἀγνώστως συναπτόμεθα (*DN* 1.1); ἀπὸ τῶν ἱερωτάτων πλάσεων ἐπὶ τὰς ἁπλᾶς καὶ ἀτυπώτους ἀναχθῶμεν ἀναγωγὰς (*CH* 1.3); τοὺς δὲ τελειουμένους ἐκ τοῦ ἀτελοῦς μεταταττομένους μετόχους γίνεσθαι (*CH* 3.3); ἱεροῖς δὲ μόνοις τῶν ἱερῶν μεθ΄ ἱερᾶς ἐλλάμψεως ἱεροπρεπῶς κοινωνῶν (*EH* 1.1); Κἀν τούτοις αὐτῷ μὲν οὐ συγγίνεται τῷ θεῷ, θεωρεῖ δὲ οὐκ αὐτόν ἀθέατος (*MT* 1.3).

[54] In his *Oration to Zeus*, Aristides begins with a prayer asking the god to assist him in praising him "to the extent that human speech is able to reach" (*εἰς ὅσον ἀνθρώπου λόγον ἐξικέσθαι δυνατὸν ὡς πλεῖστον*). This recalls the many statements that Dionysius makes regarding the inefficacy of human language vis-à-vis the divine (e.g. *DN* 6.3). In his *Birthday Oration for Apellas*, Aristides opens by referencing the prayers that have already been recited for the occasion, using the rare perfect form *κατηῦκται*, very similar to the *MT*, which opens with a prayer to the Holy Trinity before addressing Timothy with the words, "For these things I pray *[Εμοὶ μὲν οὖν ταῦτα ηὔχθω]*." In his *Speech to Asclepius*, Aristides employs the word *ἀτέλεστος* ("uninitiated"), one of the distinctive Dionysian terms which is often cited as evidence of his 'Neoplatonism.' And yet, here we find it in a 2nd-century writer who uses it in a non-technical, rhetorical sense, suggesting that the word was in common usage outside of strictly ceremonial contexts (Aristides writes that "No one under the sun is uninitiated into the common hearth of humanity" *[τὴν κοινὴν τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἑστίαν, ἧς ἀτέλεστος μὲν οὐδεὶς δή που τῶν ὑφ' ἡλίῳ]*, meaning by this that "No one has failed to receive benefits from Asclepius"). In the same speech, Aristides uses the compound verb *ὑπερποθέω* ("I desire very eagerly"), formed with the prefix *ὑπερ-* of which Dionysius is so fond. The fact that all of these characteristically 'Dionysian' features (limitative formulas, the incorporation of prayers, vocabulary derived from mystery religion, superlatives) can be found in a pagan author who lived barely a generation after the Areopagite leads us to believe that Dionysius was not an outlier but was following a set of established literary tropes in his writings. For the Greek text of Aristides, see *Aristides*, ed. Wilhelm Dindorf (Leipzig: Weidmann, 1829).

[55] The word *ἐνανθρώπησις* appears three times, in *EH* 3.2.12, 13, and 4.3.10.

[56] *EH* 5.3.4

his "human divine-work"[57] (*ἀνθρωπικὴ θεουργία*). He speaks of God being "hominified"[58] (*ἀνδρωθέντος*) and "taking substance humanly"[59] (*ἀνθρωπικῶς οὐσιωθέντα*). The presence of this unusual Christological terminology is hard to explain if Dionysius was writing in the fifth century but it fits nicely within a first-century setting, when the vocabulary of Christian theology was still very fluid.

The ability of a master forger to scour the East's libraries, devise a unique yet historically accurate and consistent internal vocabulary with a purposeful conceptual dependence on only one region's writers—and to do it all in such a natural and unforced manner – is unlike any forgery made before or since. It strains all credibility and only severe anachronisms would justify such a hypothesis.

4. The Chronological Integrity of the CD's Contents

The *CD*'s internal details concerning worship and ecclesiastical workings all accord with pre-Nicene witnesses. The existence of Church buildings,[60] altars,[61] the sign of the cross,[62] godparents,[63] the renunciation of Satan,[64] the baptism of children,[65] chrismation,[66] the exclusion of energumens from the liturgy,[67] and prayers for the dead[68] are well-attested in the extant sources. Dionysius' interest

[57] *DN* 2.6.

[58] *Letter* 4.

[59] *Letter* 3.

[60] Eusebius, *Church History*, 8.1.5 in NPNF 1:323 and Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 7.5 in ANF 2:530. Cf. *EH* 4.2. The oldest surviving church, the house church of Dura Europos in Syria, has been dated to 233 AD.

[61] Heb 13:10 and Ignatius, *Ephesians*, Chap 5 in ANF 1:51. Cf. *Letter 8* and *EH* 3.2.

[62] Tertullian, *De Corona*, Chap 3 in ANF 3:94 speaks of the sign of the cross (*signaculum*) being performed "[a]t every forward step and movement." Cf. *EH*. 4.3.10, 5.2, 5.3.1, 5.3.4, 6.2, 6.3.3.

[63] Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* 20:2 in *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome, Bishop and Martyr*, ed. Gregory Dix (London: Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, 1968), 31. Cf. *EH* 2.2.5.

[64] *Ibid.*, 21:9. Cf. EH, 2.2.6.

[65] Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Thomas P. Schek (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), Book 5.9.11 (PG 14: 1047B); Cyprian, *Epistle* 58.5 (ANF 5:354). Cf. *EH*, 7.3.11.

[66] Theophilus, *To Autolycus*, 1.12 in ANF 2:92; Tertullian, *On Baptism*, section 7; Cyprian *Letter 69*, Par 2 in ANF 5:376. Cf. *EH* 4.1-2.

[67] Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* 16:8 in Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome*, 24; Council of Ancyra, Canon 17 (says that the "sufferers" [*χειμαζόμενοι*] are to pray separately from the congregation). Cf. *EH* 3.2, 3.3.6

[68] 2 Tim 1:16-8; Tertullian, *On Monogamy*, Chap 10 in ANF 4:67; Cyprian, *Epistle* 65.2 in ANF 5:367; Arnobius, *Against the Heathen* 4.36. Cf. *EH* 7.3.6-7.

in religious rites is paralleled by the ancient church orders literature,[69] and his explanation of their symbolic significance is anticipated by Philo's lengthy allegorical commentaries on the rituals of the Jewish Temple.[70] Theological terms such as "hypostasis"[71] (in the particular sense pertaining to the Persons of the Holy Trinity), "without confusion [*ἀσυγχύτως*]"[72], and "unchanging [*ἄτρεπτος*]"[73] (in reference to Christ's human and divine essences), likewise have pre-Nicene usage.[74]

Commonly, *EH*'s alleged reference to a "creed" during the liturgy is cited as an anachronism which betrays a sixth-century composition.[75] Not only is this somewhat presumptuous concerning both the existence of second-century creedal statements[76] and the immense liturgical diversity in the early Church, it

[69] Texts like the *Didache* (1st-2nd c.), the *Apostolic Tradition* (2nd-3rd c.), and the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (3rd c.) intimately concern themselves with proper Church rituals and organization. The heavily liturgical character of early Christianity, itself a continuation of Jewish synagogal and Temple worship, is admitted by scholarship. See Alexander Schmemann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology* (London/Portland, ME: The Faith Press Ltd./The American Orthodox Press, 1966), 40-71.

[70] Philo, *On the Special Laws* I and II. See *Ibid.*, *The Works of Philo*, trans. C.D. Yonge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 534-93.

[71] Heb 1:3; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 2.18 in ANF 2:368; Origen, *Commentary on John* 2:6 (PG 14: 128A). Cf. *DN* 1.4, 2.4-5, 2.11; *CH* 7.4; *EH* 2.2.7, 6.2. For the history of the term, see Ilaria Ramelli, "Origen, Greek Philosophy, and the Birth of the Trinitarian Meaning of 'Hypostasis'", *The Harvard Theological Review* 105/3 (2012): 302-50. Ramelli argues that Origen was influenced by the Pauline usage of the word in Hebrews. Philo of Alexandria also uses 'hypostasis' in a sense that means 'individual substance'. See Philo, *De Aeternitate Mundi*, 92: "[Light] has no character [*ὑπόστασιν*] of its own, but is generated from flame, and when this is wholly and completely extinguished in all its parts, it follows of necessity that the light also must be extinguished."

[72] Hippolytus, *Exegetical Fragment on Prov 9:1* in PG 10:628A. Conceptually, Tertullian teaches the same thing, speaking of how "the property of each nature is so wholly preserved… Neither the flesh becomes Spirit, nor the Spirit flesh" in *Against Praxeas*, Chap 27, ANF 3:624. Cf. *DN* 1.4, 2.10; *EH* 3.3.11. Philo uses similar Greek to speak of "unconfused notions" (*ἐπίνοιαι ἀσύγχυτοι*) and "unconfused powers of the soul" (*ἀσύγχυτοι τῆς ψυχῆς δυνάμεις*) in *De opificio mundi* 28 and *De Confusione Linguarum* 195, respectively.

[73] Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, Chap 13 (ANF 1:167); Origen, *Contra Celsum* 4.14 (ANF 4:502). Cf. *DN* 9.4. *ἀμετάβολος* occurs in *DN* 1.4.

[74] Contrary to popular claims, Dionysius never uses the word *ἀδιαίρετος* to refer to the hypostatic union.

[75] Paul L. Gavrilyuk, "Did Pseudo-Dionysius Live in Constantinople?", *Vigilae Christianae* 62/5 (2008), 513.

[76] Irenaeus writes how "those barbarians who believe in Christ do assent, having salvation written in their hearts by the Spirit, without paper or ink, and, carefully preserving the ancient tradition" and then quotes an early creedal statement. This implies it was repeated frequently for it to be memorized among the masses and unwritten. See *Against Heresies*, 3.4.2 in ANF 1:417. Tertullian also cites an early creed which he calls the "rule of faith [*regula fidei*]" which he claims

is linguistically incorrect. In fact, Dionysius' description of the contents of this "creed" – actually a "hymn" (*ὕμνος*) – corresponds closely to the eucharistic anaphora.[77] Dionysius refers to this hymn specifically as the "hierarchical thanksgiving" (*ἱεραρχικὴ εὐχαριστία*) and adds that it is sung by the "all-holy ministers" (*ἱερουργοί*), not the laity.[78] The confusion seems to stem from the fact that in one passage, Dionysius says that the "hymn of praise" is professed by the *πλήρωμα* (lit. "fulness") during the liturgy.[79] While the word *πλήρωμα* usually denotes the "congregation", it is also used in ecclesiastical Greek in an exclusive sense to refer to the clergy.[80] This is consistent with Dionysius' description of it as "hierarchical", a word he reserves for bishops.

There are several other subtle details within the *CD* that likewise attest to its chronological integrity. One is the existence of monastics (*μοναχοί*, lit. "solitary ones"), who are mentioned in both the *EH* and the *Letters.*[81] Some scholars claim that this betrays a later, post-Nicene development specific to Syria – thereby rendering claims to the first century and the Athenian origin of the *CD* impossible. Archbishop Alexander Golitzin specifically asserts that the monasticism in *EH* conceptually parallels the *iḥidaya* of Syria, which "derives from the Syriac for 'one'", evoking "celibacy, oneness, simplicity"[82].

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has come down to him "from the beginning of the Gospel." See *On the Prescription of Heretics*, Chap 13 (PL 2: 26B) and *Against Praxeas*, Chap 2.

[77] At *EH* 3.3.7, Dionysius says that the hymn covered the creation of man, the Fall, the Redemption, and closed with a reference to "a participation in God and divine things". The language and general content closely match the Anaphora of Saint Basil and the prayer of thanksgiving included in the eighth book of the *Apostolic Constitutions*. See Cresswell, *The Liturgy of the Eighth Book of "The Apostolic Constitutions"*, 54-64.

[78] *EH* 3.3.7.

[79] *EH* 3.2.

[80] Saint Basil, *Letter 69* (PG 32: 429B; NPNF 8:165): "Now, from the sacred ranks of your clergy [*τοῦ ἱεροῦ πληρώματος*], you have sent forth the venerable brother Peter, whom I have welcomed with great joy." *Ibid.*, *Letter 240* (PG 32: 897B; NPNF 8:282): "I have written thus… to prevent anyone from being prematurely received into communion, or after receiving the laying on of hands of our enemies, when peace is made, later on, trying to force me to enroll them in the ranks of the sacred ministry [*τῷ ἱερατικῷ πληρώματι*]". Saint John Chrysostom, *Homily 3 on Philippians* (PG 62: 204, section 217F; NPNF 13:197): "For when the whole people stands with uplifted hands, a priestly assembly [*πλήρωμα ἱερατικόν*], and that awful Sacrifice lies displayed, how shall we not prevail with God by our entreaties for them?", Philostorgius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 10.1: "The presbyters, however, of the same city, Asterius and Crispinus, and the rest of the clergy [*τὸ ἄλλο πλήρωμα*], convened a council, at which some of the neighbouring bishops were present, and sent to Eunomius and his party, demanding to be admitted into communion by them". Philostorgius, *Philostorgius Kirchengeschichte*, ed. Joseph Bidez (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1913), 126 (public domain translation by Edward Walford).

[81] *EH* 6:1-3. *Letter* 8.

[82] Golitzin, *Mystagogy*, 331.

In the *CD*, Dionysius connects the religious life to "oneness" on several occasions:

> *Our divine leaders have deemed them worthy of sacred appellations, some, indeed, calling them 'Therapeuts,' and others 'Monks,' from the pure service and fervid devotion to the true God, and from the* ***undivided*** *[ἀμέριστος, i.e. "simple"] and single life, as it were unifying them, in the sacred enfoldings of things divided, into a God-like* ***monad*** *[μονάδα] and God-loving perfection.*[83]

> *Each consecrating function both collects our divided lives into* ***one-like*** *[ἑνοειδῆ] deification, and gives communion and union with* ***the One*** *[πρὸς τὸ ἓν], by the Godlike folding together of our diversities.*[84]

> *Thus, the early leaders of our divine theosophy are dying every day on behalf of the truth, testifying as is natural, both by every word and deed, to the Christians'* ***one knowledge of the truth*** *[τῇ ἑνιαίᾳ ἀληθογνωσίᾳ], that it is of all both* ***more simple*** *[ἁπλουστέραν] and more divine, yea rather, that it is the sole true and* ***one and simple*** *[μίαν καὶ ἁπλῆν] knowledge of God.*[85]

However, Golitzin's thesis is contradicted by the fact that a first-century Jewish source, Philo's *On the Contemplative Life*, uses similar vocabulary that invokes oneness: "They [viz. the Therapeuts] have been instructed by nature and the sacred laws to serve the living God, Who is superior to the good, and *more simple than the one* [*ἑνὸς εἰλικρινέστερον*], and *more ancient than the monad* [*μονάδος ἀρχεγονώτερον*]".[86] The use of the word "Therapeuts" (*θεραπευταί*) to refer to monastics is unique to Philo and Dionysius, although Strabo, another first-century writer, uses the expression *θεραπεύειν τὸ θεῖον* ("to worship the divine") with reference to an ascetic Buddhist sect.[87]

Additionally, Miroshnikov's research has demonstrated that the theology of monasticism and its emphasis on oneness and simplicity has precedents in not just Philo, but also in the Targums,[88] in the early Greek translations of the

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[83] *EH 6*.3.

[84] *EH* 3.1.

[85] *DN* 7.4

[86] Philo, *On the Contemplative Life*, 1:2 in *The Works of Philo*, 698.

[87] See Strabo, *Geography* 15.1.54. The verb *θεραπεύειν* in the sense of "worship" or "reverence" also occurs in Athenagoras of Athens (*Plea for the Christians* 16 in ANF 2:136), Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata* 4.23 in ANF 2:437; *Protrepticus* 11) and Origen (*Contra Celsum* 8.9, 12 in ANF 643-4).

[88] Ivan Miroshnikov, *The Gospel of Thomas and Plato: A Study of the Impact of Platonism on the "Fifth Gospel"* (Boston/Leiden: Brill, 2018), 117. For analysis, see Dmitrij Bumazhnov, "Zur

Bible by Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion,[89] in the *Gospel of Thomas*,[90] and in Clement of Alexandria.[91] Miroshnikov shows from recent scholarship that the term *μοναχός* originates from the Aramaic term *yeḥidi* or *yeḥida'e* which precedes the existence of the Syriac term, the latter only receiving its technical meaning "in the first half of the fourth century."[92] Considering the acceptable range of dating for the Gospel of Thomas being early (between 50-140 AD),[93] this proves that in both Judaism and Christendom, an advanced understanding of monasticism with the same lexicon existed at the time the *CD* was reputedly penned.

In any event, there are marked indications that Dionysius was writing about monasticism before it gained the popularity and form it had from the fourth century onwards. Though incorrectly inferring dependence upon the spirituality of Evagrius and fifth-century Syria, Golitzin cannot help but recognize that Dionysius lacks the concordant concern about asceticism. This was not a conscious repudiation, according to him, but a seeming unawareness of the connection: "The bishop, albeit remaining a charismatic figure, replaces the anchorite, and he does so most emphatically. Here one might recall the bishop's role in another Syrian [sic, this presumes upon Dionysian being a Syrian pseudonym], Ignatius of Antioch"[94] as well as Clement of Alexandria.[95] In other words, Dionysius has a manifestly first-to-second century ethos concerning his view of *hierurgy*[96] that is recognizably anachronistic by the fourth century.

Bedeutung der Targume bei der Herausbildung des MONAXOΣ-Konzeptes in den Nag Hammadi-Texten", *Zeitschrift für Antikes Chrisentum* 10 (2006), 252-59. Bumazhov shows that the Targums often refer to holy individuals as being "alone" (יחידאי or יחידי): "Abraham was one, *alone* in the world" (Targum Jonathan of Isaiah 51:2), "Who is like unto Thy people Israel, a people *alone* on earth?" (Targum Ps-Jonathan of Deut 26:18), "Behold, the first Adam whom I created is *alone* in the world, as I am *alone* in the high heavens" (Targum Neofiti of Genesis 3:22). The Targum for Zechariah 12:10 also calls the Messiah "an *only* son" (כר יחידאי) paralleling John 3:16. See K.J. Cathcart and R.P. Gordon, *The Targum of the Minor Prophets: The Aramaic Bible, Volume 14* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1989).

[89] Miroshnikov, *The Gospel of Thomas and Plato,* 121. See Gen 2:18 *σ'* and *οἱ λ'*; 22:2 *α'*; Ps 21/22:21 *α'*; 24/25:16 *α'*; 34/35:17 *α'*; 67/68:7 *σ'* and *θ'*. In *Origenis Hexaplorum Quae Supersunt*, ed. Frederick Field, 2 volumes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1875). Aquila also uses the otherwise unattested verb *μοναχόω* in Ps 85/86:11: "Make my heart one (*μονάχωσον*) so that I fear Thy name".

[90] *Ibid.*, 123-7. See *Gospel of Thomas*, verses 16, 23, 49, 75.

[91] *Ibid.*, 111-3. See Clement of Alexandria *Stromata* 3.10, 4.23, 25 (ANF 2:394, 437-8); *Protrepticus* 9.

[92] *Ibid.*, 120-1.

[93] April D. DeConick, "The Original 'Gospel of Thomas'", *Vigiliae Christianae* 56/2 (2002), 168-77.

[94] Golitzin, *Mystagogy*, 322.

[95] *Ibid.*, 322-3.

[96] The topic of *hierugy* vis-à-vis *theurgy* is covered in the next section.

"Monks" for Dionysius are simply laymen who desired to live above the common life, occupying the rank above the catechumens and the faithful, but below that of the deacons.[97] This recalls the situation reflected in the *Life of Saint Anthony*, which says that in Anthony's youth (late third century) "there were not yet many monasteries in Egypt, and no monk knew anything of the distant desert; but all who wished to give heed to themselves practised asceticism [*ἠσκεῖτο*] in solitude near their own village".[98]

Given Dionysius' theology of "oneness", in which the goal of the religious life is to attain the simplicity of God, it is not surprising that he refers to the holy angels themselves as "icon[s] of God"[99] and "henads" (lit. "unitary ones").[100] Saffrey has claimed that this latter expression betrays a clear dependence on Proclus.[101] Yet there is a profound difference between Dionysius and Proclus' usage of the term: Proclus uses "henad" (*ἑνάς*) to refer to the individual hypostases of the gods[102] whereas Dionysius always uses it to speak of the unity of the divine essence.[103] In this respect, Dionysius' usage aligns with pre-Proclean writers like Didymus of Alexandria, Synesius, and Saint Cyril, all of whom used "henad" in this fashion.[104] There is really no need to invoke Proclus as a source.[105]

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[97] Monks are to the laity what bishops are to the clergy, both corresponding to the rank of the "perfect". See *EH* 6.1-3.

[98] *Life of Anthony* 3; PG 26: 844B.

[99] *DN* 4.22.

[100] *DN* 8.5.

[101] Saffrey, "Nouveaux liens", 15.

[102] Edward P. Butler, "The Gods and Being in Proclus", *Dionysius* 26 (2008), 93-114.

[103] See *DN* 1.1, 1.4, 1.5, 2.1; *CH* 7.4.

[104] See Didymus the Blind, *On the Trinity*, Book 2.8 (PG 39: 620B): "The Holy Spirit is of the same unitary [*ἑνάδος*] or monadic essence"; *Ibid.*, Book 3.17 (PG 39: 877B): "The Life that the Father and Son are said to possess in themselves refers to the unitary [*ἑνάς*] and supersubstantial essence"; Synesius of Cyrene, *Hymn 9 [1]*, line 58 in Lacombrade, *Synésios de Cyrène*, 81 (PG 66: 1589): God is "the pure unity of unities [*ἑνοτήτων ἑνάς ἀγνή*];" Cyril of Alexandria, *Thesaurus of the Holy and Consubstantial Trinity*, Proposition 11 (PG 75: 141C): "Each person [viz. the Father and the Son] is said to subsist in His own particular hypostasis… so there might not be any confusion or mixture of the Father and Son, given that [each] hypostasis relates to a single unity [*ἑνάδα*]".

[105] The doctrine of henads is generally considered to be a late innovation of the Athenian Neoplatonic school, Proclus being its chief representative and theorist. See Svetlana Mesyats, "Iamblichus' Exegesis of Parmenides' Hypotheses and His Doctrine of Divine Henads", in *Iamblichus and the Foundations of Late Platonism*, eds. E. Afonasin, J. Dillon, and F. Finamore (Boston/Leiden: Brill, 2012), 151-75. It is tempting to ascribe Proclus' specific formulation of this doctrine to his knowledge of Dionysius. In fact, Dionysius' description of the relation of the Persons of the Holy Trinity to the Divine Essence is almost identical to the relation between Proclus' henads and the One. *DN* 2.5: "But there is a distinction in the superessential nomenclature of God, not only that which I have mentioned, namely, that each of the One-springing Persons is fixed in the

Another detail which points to an early dating of the *CD* is an intricate critique it contains of Simon Magus, a first-century heretic. The *DN*'s account speaks of how Simon falsely used "the manifest reason [*τῷ προφανεῖ λόγῳ*] of the sensible perception…against the invisible Cause [*ἀφανοῦς αἰτίας*] of all".[106] Interestingly, according to Hippolytus, Simon's Gnostic theology spoke of an external reality associated with sense perception called "the manifest [*τὸ φανερόν*]" and a secret internal reality called "the hidden [*τὸ κρυπτόν*]".[107] Dionysius' insult contains an artfully ironic criticism of Simon Magus, turning his own euphemisms against him. Such a minute attention to detail from a forgery concerning a heretic's long-forgotten doctrine[108] is fantastical. It should be noted that Simonianism is the *only* heresy that is ever referred to in the *CD*. As Stăniloae points out,[109] this lack of concern over later doctrinal controversies is curious for a fifth or sixth-century text, but makes perfect sense with an early date.

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union itself, unmingled and unconfused; but also that the properties of the superessential Divine Production are not convertible in regard to one another…And this is kindred and common and one to the whole Divinity, that it is all entire, participated by each of the Participants, and by none partially". Cf. Proclus' *Commentary on the Parmenides* VI.1048-49: "It is the same to say 'henad' as to say 'first principle'… for all the henads are in each other and are united with each other, and their unity is far greater than the community and sameness among beings… for all the henads are in all, and yet each is distinct" (trans. Dillon). The doctrine expressed by Dionysius here (the consubstantiality of the Persons of the Holy Trinity) was reprised by the Council of Nicaea in 325 and defended vigorously by Saints Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus. Thus, in any event, we can say that the idea preceded Proclus. One should also note that the "flowers and supersubstantial lights" passage occurs only a few lines later in the very same chapter of the *Commentary on the Parmenides*, offering another indication that Proclus was borrowing the expression from the *CD* (and not the Chaldean Oracles).

Proclus' "henads" functionally play an analogous role in his philosophy as the "divine names" do in Dionysius, namely by serving as links between the transcendent One and the world. However, Proclus denies that the henads are "images", something which Dionysius accepts for the divine names: "But neither, Proclus explains, can the henads come about by *proödos*, that is, 'by a change in essence, as in the case of the production of the procession of images from paradigms' for this mode of causation does not even exist among intelligibles, much less supra-essentials." Butler, "The Gods and Being in Proclus", 94, referring to *In Parmenidem* (Steel ed.), 746. Cf. the *CD*, where Dionysius expressly calls the divine names "statues" (*ἀγάλματα*, *DN* 9.1) and the "inimitable imitation of the super-divine and super-good" (*ἀμίμητον μίμημα τοῦ ὑπερθέου καὶ ὑπεραγάθου*, *Letter* 2). Other early Christian writers such as Irenaeus refer to the various manifestations of God as "similitudes of the Lord's glory" (see fn 35 in Part I). As such, to assert that Dionysius copied Proclus simply because he uses the same one word ignores crucial differences between the respective conceptions.

[106] *DN* 6.3.

[107] Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies*, 6.4 in ANF 5:75. Greek in: Miroslav Marcovich, *Refutation of All Heresies* (Berlin/New York: Walter De Gruyter, 1986), 214-5.

[108] Origen recounts that in his day (c. 250 AD), "Simonians [were] found nowhere throughout the world". See Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 6.11 in ANF 4:578.

[109] Stăniloae, *Sfântul Dionisie Areopagitul Opere Complete*, 9.

The theology surrounding God's name in the *CD* is also strongly indicative of a first or second-century origin. As a matter of fact, Dionysius' doctrine of the divine names, rather than betraying some sort of "Neoplatonic" influence (as is commonly asserted),[110] is more or less identical to that of Philo.[111] Like Dionysius, Philo believes that God's essence is "superior… and external to the world"[112], "at a great distance from man"[113], who "cannot touch Him"[114]. Philo uses the exact same metaphor as Dionysius (the divine gloom of Exodus 20:21)[115] to express God's transcendence, and holds that man is able to come to a true knowledge of God through the latter's "appellations" (*προσρήσεις*)[116] or "powers" (*δυνάμεις*),[117] which "[fill] the whole world with Himself".[118] Termini[119] has shown convincingly that Philo's doctrine of "powers" – which closely parallels Dionysius' doctrine of divine "names" – does not have any Platonic antecedents but was specific to Hellenistic Judaism.[120] One should stress that similar ideas are to be found in writers who long predate the Neoplatonists.[121] Additionally, Dionysius lacks

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[110] One example can be found in Eric. D. Perl, *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite* (New York: 2007), 30-1.

[111] The many similarities between Philo and Dionysius have not gone unnoticed in scholarship. See Tikhon Alexander Pino, "An Essence–Energy Distinction in Philo as the Basis for the Language of Deification", *The Journal of Theological Studies*, NS, 68/2 (2017), 551-71; Ysabel Gonzalez de Andia, *Henosis: L'Union à Dieu chez Denys l'Aréopagite* (Boston/Leiden: Brill, 1996), 309- 18; Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 17-34; Anna Marmodoro and Irini-Fotini Viltanioti, eds., *Divine Powers in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2017), 127-39.

[112] *De Posteritate Caini*, 14.

[113] *Ibid.*, 20

[114] *Ibid.*

[115] *Ibid.*, 14

[116] *De Plantatione* 86.

[117] *De opificio mundi*, sec. 20. Cf. *DN* 2.7, where Dionysius calls the divine names "powers" (*δυνάμεις*).

[118] *On the Posterity of Cain*, 14.

[119] Cristina Termini, *Le potenze di Dio: studio su dynamis in Filone di Alessandria* (Rome: Institutum patristicum Augustinianum, 2000). Philo's doctrine is most clearly expressed in *On the Special Laws* 1.45-7 and *De Mutatione* 10-11.

[120] See Sir 43:27-33; Wis 12:16-19; 2 Macc 3:24-30; *Letter of Aristeas* 132; Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.17 (167). Debates concerning the powers of God also occurred in early Rabbinic Judaism. See Alan Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports About Christianity and Gnosticism* (Boston/Leiden: Brill, 2002) and Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 112-47.

[121] Saint Paul says that God dwells in "unapproachable light" (1 Tim 6:16) and that his "power [*δύναμις*]" is made known by the things He has created (Romans 1:20); Josephus says that God is "known to us by His power [*δυνάμει*], yet unknown to us as to His essence [*κατ' οὐσίαν*]" (*Against Apion* 2.17.167). Saint Justin Martyr says that God is nameless (*First Apology*, Chap 61; ANF

the superstitious exaggeration of the doctrine of divine names found in later rabbinical Judaism and in Origen, according to which pronouncing the name of God magically invokes the name's power, and so should be discouraged.[122] This is another clue suggesting that Dionysius wrote before the second century, when such ideas gained currency within Judaism.

Rosemary Arthur has argued for a sixth-century dating of the *CD* on the grounds that its hierarchical theology of angels is of Origenist inspiration, betraying a late Syrian compositional milieu.[123] This is a surprising claim considering the high angelology of early Judaism and Christianity. The specific belief in an angelic hierarchy originated in pre-Christian Judaism. A late first-century BC Jewish text, known as the "Angelic Liturgy of Qumran"[124], makes this clear. The

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1:183) and that all the designations we give to Him, such as "God," "Father", and "Creator", "are not names, but appellations derived from His good deeds and functions" (*Second Apology*, Chap 6; ANF 1:190). Saint Irenaeus says that none of the prophets "saw God" but what they beheld were "similitudes", "figures", "characters", "dispositions" and "dispensations" of His glory. See *Against Heresies* 4.20.11 in ANF 1:491-2 (it should be noted that this chapter of Irenaeus' work is the closest thematic parallel to the *DN* we find in ancient Christian literature: like Dionysius, Irenaeus collects the various names or theophanies of God from Scripture and comments on them). Saint Theophilus of Antioch teaches that God is "ineffable" and "incomprehensible", being perceived "through His providence and works" (*To Autolycus* 1.3, 5 in ANF 2:89-90). Clement of Alexandria writes that God "is not capable of being taught by man" but is "known only by His power [*δυνάμει*]" (*Stromata* 5.11; ANF 2:461). Tertullian says that God is "invisible" like the sun, which cannot be contemplated "in the full amount of its substance" (*Against Praxeas*, Chap 14). All this appears to stem from Judaism, where the angels cannot even look upon God (cf. 1 Enoch 14:22, Is 6:2).

The radical transcendence of God's essence one finds in Christianity and Dionysius is completely foreign to Neoplatonism. One scholar notes: "That the primary beings are themselves 'imparticipably participated' [see *DN* 2.5] represents another revealing oddity. According to the Procline scheme, there is no reason for the middle terms to be described in this way – they are simply participated, while only the first term in the triad is said to be unparticipated. According to Dionysius, however, not only is the transcendent Godhead said to be imparticipable, but even the participated processions are in some sense imparticipable. This points once again to the suppression of mean terms. Insofar as the communications of God *ad extra* simply *are* God, they too are unparticipated; insofar as they represent God in His knowable, immanent aspect they are participated. The paradoxical nature of all of this stems from the rejection of mediating hypostases such that the antinomy of sameness and otherness is confronted head on. God is at once simple and manifold, transcendent and immanent, unknowable and knowable". See Daniel Heide*, The World as Sacrament: The Eucharistic Ontology of Maximos Confessor*, PhD Dissertation (Montreal: McGill University, 2022), 97.

[122] Naomi Janowitz, "Theories of Divine Names in Origen and Pseudo-Dionysius", *History of Religions* 30/4 (1991), 360-5. Cf. Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.25 in ANF 4:406-7.

[123] Arthur, *Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist*, 95-6.

[124] Carol Ann Newsom, "4Q Serek Sirot 'Olat Hassabbat (The Qumran Angelic Liturgy): Edition, Translation, And Commentary", PhD Dissertation (Harvard University: 1982). For an accessible English translation, see Michael Owen Wise, Martin G. Abegg, and Edward M. Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2005), 462-75.

text, a series of prayers meant to be recited over the first thirteen sabbaths of the year, refers to seven angelic orders abiding in "seven lofty holy places."[125] Each order possesses a "chief prince"[126] and a "deputy prince"[127]. Similar to Heb 9:21-5 and the *CD*, the earthly worship of men is understood as a reflection of the worship found in heaven[128]: the Qumranic liturgy speaks of a heavenly "Holy of Holies"[129] fitted with "pillars"[130], "embroidered works"[131], "crafted furnishings"[132] and "likenesses of divine beings… carved on the walls of the vestibules by which the King enters"[133]. The mediating role of the angels is repeatedly stressed: the angelic orders are described as a "sevenfold priesthood"[134] and "ministers of the Presence in [God's] glorious innermost chamber"[135]. Each order takes turns praising the Lord[136], the lower orders recapitulating and echoing the praises of those above it.[137] The mediating function of angels was uncontroversial in pre-Christian Judaism.[138]

Apostolic Christianity inherited this understanding. Saint Paul speaks of "the Law given through angels"[139] and Saint Stephen the Protomartyr uses a similar expression when addressing the Jews in the Book of Acts.[140] Saint Paul refers to a "third heaven"[141], indicating the belief in the existence of a hierarchy, something allegedly made explicit by "the disciples of the Apostles" according

[125] Wise et al., *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 470.

[126] *Ibid.*, 468.

[127] *Ibid.*, 471.

[128] *CH* 1.3; Hebrews 8:5, 9:24. Cf. Hebrews 12:22.

[129] Wise et al., *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 465.

[130] *Ibid.*, 470.

[131] *Ibid.*, 472.

[132] *Ibid.*, 470.

[133] *Ibid.*, 472.

[134] *Ibid.*, 471.

[135] *Ibid.*, 464.

[136] *Ibid.*, 467-9.

[137] *Ibid.*, 471.

[138] This appears to have developed from the understanding that angels prayed on man's behalf. See Tob 2:15, 1 Enoch 15:2. Cf. Rev 8:3-4.

[139] Gal 3:19.

[140] Acts 7:53. Dionysius himself appeals to this testimony at *CH* 4.3.

[141] 2 Cor 12:2.

to Saint Irenaeus.[142] The Revelation of Saint John[143] and Saint Paul[144] both warn against the "worship of angels", suggesting that some Christians were taking contemporary Jewish angelology to henotheistic extremes.

Other early Christian sources invoke the hierarchal angelology of contemporary Judaism. Saint Ignatius alludes to an esoteric doctrine of the angels – referring to their "ranks [*τοποθεσίας*]" and to "the array of principalities [*τὰς συστάσεις τὰς ἀρχοντικάς*]" – but refuses to elaborate, citing the spiritual immaturity of his audience and his own weakness.[145] Another contemporary text, the *Ascension of Isaiah*[146], elaborates further. It describes the ascent of the prophet Isaiah through the seven heavens, with each heaven being incomparably more luminous than the one before it.[147] This is akin to the *CD,* which specifies that "each rank of those about God is more godlike than that which stands further away".[148] It should also be noted that when Dionysius speaks of the angelic hierarchy, he does not engage in abstract speculation. He appeals directly to scriptural verses which show the angels executing orders with hierarchical discipline or transmitting the knowledge of God to other angels and men.[149] He takes it for granted that readers would presume upon a high angelology as something obvious.

In sum, instead of being anachronistic, all the central topics that preoccupied Dionysius (church orders, apophaticism, and angelology) are *precisely* the subjects that one would expect a first-century Christian theologian to have written on. The

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[142] Irenaeus invokes a doctrine transmitted from the time of the Apostles which holds that there is a "gradation" (*ordinationem*) in the saints' participation of the divine in *Against Heresies* 5.36.1-2 (ANF 1:566-7).

[143] Rev 22:8-9.

[144] Col 2:18.

[145] Ignatius, *Trallians*, Chap 5 in: Cyril C. Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers: Volume I* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), 100. The English rendering in ANF 1:68 is too non-literal.

[146] *Ascension* is composed sometime between 70-120 AD. See Jonathan Knight, "The Ascension of Isaiah: A New(er) Interpretation", in *The Ascension of Isaiah*, eds. Jan N. Bremmer, Thomas R. Karmann, and Tobias Nicklas (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 46. A late first-century dating is favored due to similarities between Ascension 3:22-4 and the ecclesiastical realities undergirding 1 Clem, as well as the shared reference to not bowing to angels in Rev 22:8 and *Ascension* 7:21. The situation described in 3 John also seems to match that of *Ascension* 3:27-9, indicating there were at this point deep rifts already within the Church and the prophetic element was seen to be almost entirely absent, but in recent memory. The *Ascension* was likely composed in the Church. Although its "Angel Christology" is heretical (as the *Ascension* clearly asserts the Son and Spirit are created angels), invocations of the same idea in other texts *can* be interpreted in a more orthodox sense if not taken too literally. See Stephen J. Shoemaker, "From Mother of Mysteries to Mother of the Church: The Institutionalization of the Dormition Apocrypha", *Apocrypha* 22 (2011), 22.

[147] *Ascension* 8:21.

[148] *Letter* 8.2.

[149] Particularly, Ezekiel 9:2-5; Zechariah 1:12-15; Isaiah 6:3, 63:1-2.

ability of a late forger to mimic the theological climate of a distant historical period is implausible.

5. Internal Details Favoring the *CD*'s Authenticity

The *CD* contains internal details that do not support forgery. Chief among them is a passing comment that Saint Timothy (to whom the *CD* dedicates all its contents)[150] was "deaf [*ἀνήκοος*] to some of the theological symbols".[151] This detail is profoundly out-of-step with any known Christian forgery, because it both casts blame on a famous Apostle and puts the writer (on the surface) at odds with Apostolic authority. It comes across as a humble admission that can only have been written by someone who knew Saint Timothy personally. A forger would not undermine his entire enterprise by doing this, as a pseudonymous *CD* could only derive its authority from an Apostolic father in good standing with an Apostle. The implication of some sort of friction, something not alien to the real Apostles[152], is usually glossed over in later accounts.

Another detail a forgery would have avoided is placing Dionysius in Heliopolis at the time of the crucifixion in 33 AD[153], but elsewhere making him quote Saint Ignatius of Antioch.[154] Even if the forger was unaware of the exact time of Ignatius' death,[155] this would require the passage of at least six or seven decades, making Dionysius quite elderly. Why the self-references to age unless the writer was aware of his own acuity and simply not concerned, taking his own age for granted?[156] Additionally, even the *CD*'s more fantastic elements, such as Dionysius being witness to the solar eclipse, unnecessarily add to suspicion and

[150] *DN* 1.8; *MT* 1.1; *CH* 1.1; *EH* 1.1.

[151] *Letter* 9.1.

[152] See Gal 2 and Acts 21:17-25.

[153] *Lette*r 7.2.

[154] *DN* 4.12

[155] Eusebius places Saint Ignatius' martyrdom during the persecutions under Trajan, whose reign began in 98 AD (*Church History* 3.34-6 in NPNF 1:165-9). While some have speculated for increasingly later dates for Ignatius' martyrdom, "most scholars opt for a death between 100-117 CE". See Vincent van Altena, "Investigations into the Logistics of Ignatius's Itinerary", *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 21:2 (2021), 52. Unless Ignatian dependence on Ptolemy the Gnostic is to be accepted, there is no reason to dispense with Eusebius' account. For the latter thesis, see Timothy D. Barnes, "The Date of Ignatius", *The Expository Times* 120:3 (2008), 119-30. It should be noted if parallels between Ignatius and Ptolemy do exist, it is far more likely that Ptolemy borrowed from Ignatius.

[156] The same can be said for Dionysius' master "Hierotheus", who is attested nowhere in the New Testament. Why would a forger wishing to associate himself with the Apostles attribute his spiritual formation to the mysterious Hierotheus and not to Saint Paul himself? Inventing such a figure only creates suspicion and detracts from his presumed program.

otherwise play no major role in the *CD*.[157] One would expect that a forger intent on shoring up his credibility would have made these references central to his narrative or else avoided them entirely. Given the obvious genius undergirding the *CD*, why write under a pseudonym, undercut that pseudonym's authority in this way, and build such an elaborate backstory? Why not simply take credit for the work or avoid the problematic details?

The motive for forgery is also impossible to discern from its contents. One cannot claim that the author was motivated by advancing the interests of a specific Christological party, as the *CD* is oblique on these questions. It has been established that the *CD* was received as authentic by just about everyone in the Christian East (Chalcedonians, Monophysites, and Nestorians).[158] If Pseudo-Dionysius was a Monophysite forger trying to put his doctrines in the mouth of an Apostolic father, he certainly did a poor job of convincing people considering his brilliance.

Lastly, the genre of the *CD* (speculative theology) is too unlike other forgeries and ahistorical[159] works. In the pre-Chalcedonian Church, we find, on the one hand, works of a hagiographic nature which are not strictly or properly historical, such as the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* and the *Protoevangelium of James*, which contain artificial glosses of conversations and perhaps events, but are not properly a forgery nor deceptive in intent. The *CD* does not correspond to this genre in either tone or content. On the other hand, there are outright forgeries such as the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Ascension of Isaiah, 2 Esdras,* the *Shepherd of Hermas*, and the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*.[160] These usually contain

[157] In fact, the crucifixion darkness is only mentioned tangentially in Dionysius' letter to Polycarp during a digression on the philosopher Apollophanes. Claims to the supernatural are not the point at issue, as history has no shortage of such claims. Rather, the issue is that of associated details.

[158] "A brief overview of sixth-century appeals to the Dionysian corpus shows clearly that it was being used by just about all parties in the Christian east and that at no point was it the exclusive preserve of the Monophysites." See Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*, 11. See also Stiglmayr, "Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite," q.v. *Catholic Encyclopedia*. Among the Orthodox, one of the earliest to quote the Areopagite was Saint Ephrem of Antioch. See Photius, *Bibliotheca*, no. 229, ed. Immanuel Bekker, vol. 1 (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1824), 255b.

[159] There is a difference between non-historical and ahistorical. The former is a falsification of events with deceptive intent, while the latter contains true historical details but does not demand that every said detail accords with literal historicity.

[160] A later forgery which on the surface is analogous to the *CD*, the *Book of Holy Hierotheos*, is overtly Origenist/Platonizing. It is from fifth or early sixth-century Syria and claims Apostolic pedigree. In other words, just the sort of text that proponents of the Pseudo-Dionysian thesis say the *CD* is. However, contrary to the *CD*, the *Book of Hierotheos* was immediately identified as a forgery by its contemporaries, who attributed it to a heretical monk named Stephen Bar Sudaili. See Arthur Frothingham, *Stephen Bar Sudaili, the Syrian Mystic, and the Book of Hierotheos* (Leiden: Brill, 1886), 10-48. This of course begs several questions. Why is it that Bar Sudaili was so quickly

pseudonyms and all lay claim to divine revelation or origin in order to justify their contents. Yet the *CD* does not appear to hinge its authority on the person of the author. It comfortably quotes authorities other than itself in making its points and otherwise appears to work upon the presupposition that its teachings are an exegesis of the Scriptures. Thus, before the year 380 (approximately when Gregory and Jerome cited the Areopagite), there were dozens of hagiographies and prophetic/Apostolic forgeries, but there is not a single apocryphal work that matches the approach of the *CD*. While the *CD* being a genre unto itself is theoretically possible, this is an unlikely supposition.

6. A Consideration of Possible Difficulties in Ascribing *CD* to Dionysius

Although the preceding evidence convincingly demonstrates that the *CD* preceded Proclus, it does not definitively prove that Dionysius himself was the author of the *CD*. One must consider the possibility, as slight as it is for the aforementioned reasons, of the *CD* being a third or fourth-century forgery. After all, writers such as Jerome appeared reluctant to cite the Areopagite by name – perhaps due to the *CD*'s suspected inauthenticity potentially inferred from a lack of wide circulation. Textually, there are other difficulties.

One detail in the *CD* that may imply inauthenticity is a discussion concerning the "Philosopher Clemens"[161] and lexical parallels to the *Clementine Literature* (herein referred to as *CL*).[162] In tracing the date of the original documents that are now preserved in the *CL*, scholarship has identified some combination of works cited by Saint Epiphanius and Eusebius of Caesarea which make up the literary whole.[163] The contents are interesting as they name relatively obscure, but historically real people from the mid-first century including the philosophers

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unmasked whereas the *CD* was universally accepted in such a short time span? Indeed, how is it that to this day no one has ever been able to identify who the infamous "Pseudo-Dionysius" was? If the *CD* was forged, how did it have the authority to be copied so quickly for the creation of new forgeries in homage to it?

[161] *DN* 5.9. The passage disputes the conclusion given by Clemens regarding "exemplars" (*παραδείγματα*).

[162] In particular, *DN* 5.8 appears to borrow the terms *παραδείγματα*, *σχῆμα*, *μορφή, κάλλος*, *θάλπω*, and the metaphor of the sun from *Clementine Homilies* 17.8 in ANF 8:569 (PG 2: 389-392). Dionysius intentionally inverts the meaning of the passage (insisting that God is *ἄμορφος* and *ἀκαλλής*). Due to Clemens being cited by name immediately after (in *DN* 5.9), the refutation is both cited and intentional.

[163] Donald Carlson, *Jewish-Christian Interpretation of the Pentateuch in the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 2-3.

Anoubion and Apion.[164] While the text is usually dated to 220-230 AD[165], some parts have been dated to as early as 70-135 AD.[166]

Provided the *CL* is dated to 220-230 AD, the *CD*'s quotation from a portion of it implies it is an early forgery. However, this need not be the case due to scholarship permitting a dating for the *CL* contemporaneous with the time the *CD*'s internal dating. One must also consider the fact that in citing Clemens, *DN* refutes the latter's belief that God's essence has a shape/body of sorts.[167] This was an early Jewish and Christian idea that ultimately gave way to the theology of divine simplicity.[168] This theological debate seems to have dissipated by the third century, although it erupted again in the late fourth century.[169] Is the Dionysius of the *CD* concerned with the debate in the former or the latter era? It is of interest that

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[164] Jan Bremmer, "Foolish Egyptians: Apion and Anoubion in the *Pseudo-Clementines*", *The Wisdom of Egypt: Jewish, Early Christian, and Gnostic Essays in Honour of Gerard P. Luttikhuizen* (Boston/Leiden: Brill, 2005), 311-29.

[165] Carlson, *Jewish-Christian Interpretation of the Pentateuch in the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies*, 3-4.

[166] Arnold Stötzel, "Die Darstellung der ältesten Kirchengeschichte nach den Pseudo-Clementinen", *Vigiliae Christianae* 36/1 (1982), 32. Most of the 19th-century textual critics concurred in dating the *Homilies* to the second century. For a comprehensive review of the relevant literature, see F. Stanley Jones, "The Pseudo-Clementines: A History of Research", *Pseudoclementina Elchasaiticaque Inter Judaeochristiana* (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 89ff. There are three pieces of evidence that corroborate an early dating for at least portions of the *Homilies*:
(1) a text known as the *Preachings of Peter* (*Kerygmata Petrou*), one of the putative sources for the *CL*, is quoted by Aristides of Athens before A.D. 138. See Reinhold Seeberg, "Die Apologie des Aristides", *Forschungen zur geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons und der altkirchlichen literatur*, Volume 5 (Erlanger/Leipzig: Georg Böhme, 1893), 216-8; (2) the *Homilies* have close linguistic similarities to the Book of Elchasai, composed under the reign of Trajan (r. 98-117). See F. Stanley Jones, "The *Book of Elchasai* in Its Relevance for Manichaean Institutions with a Supplement: The *Book of Elchasai* Reconstructed and Translated", *Pseudoclementina*, 359-397; (3) the *Homilies*' opposition to Temple worship and its advocacy of vegetarianism and frequent lustrations recall the religious practices of the Essenes.

[167] *Clementine Homilies* 17.7 in ANF 8:319-20.

[168] See the *Shi'ur Qoma* attributed to Rabbi Ishmael (2nd century AD) in "The Measure of the Body," *Work of the Chariot*, 12/20/23 <http://www.workofthechariot.com/TextFiles/Translations-ShirQoma.html> and Charles Mopsik, "La datation du Chi'our Qomah d'après un texte néo-testamentaire", *Revue des sciences religieuses* 68.2 (1994), 131-144; Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, Chap 114; Melito of Sardis, apud Origen, *Selections on Genesis,* PG 12: 93A; Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, Chap. 7 in ANF 3:602. *Clementine Homily* 17.9-10 also claims that God's essence is extended in "six [spatial] directions" and that the number seven serves as His "image". The first idea is found in another early Jewish text, the *Sefer Yetzirah* 1.11. See *Sacred-Texts*, 12/20/23 <https://sacred-texts.com/jud/yetzirah.htm>. The second is attested in Philo, *De Opificio Mundi*, 100. The belief that the material universe is an extension of God's essence ultimately evolved into the mystical Jewish system known as Kabbalah.

[169] See John Cassian, *Conferences* 10.2-5 (open-source translation by Edgar C.S. Gibson); Saint Cyril, *Ad Anthropomorphitas* (PG 76: 1065-1132); Saint Epiphanius, *Panarion*, Book II, Her-

Dionysius, when citing Clemens, singles out the latter's view as disallowing for God's supraessentiality and relation with creation through His wills and energies, a concern shared by another near contemporary, Theophilus of Antioch.[170] Further, the fact that Clemens may be critiquing men like Dionysius himself in framing his opposition as "strangers to the truth who, allying themselves to evil, and on pretext of glorifying God, say that He has no figure"[171], is another proof that the CD is embroiled in a debate that most likely does not go past the early-third century. Indeed, it would have taken an extremely perceptive forger to reconstruct the redactional layers of the *CL* and interact with them in the pointed way that Dionysius does. As for Dionysian authorship, the idea the Areopagite would cite a contemporaneous source is not an overt difficulty. Dionysius presumably would have been interested in any philosophical Jewish or Christian document. Given his philosophical background and spiritual formation, his objections to Clemens' speculations are credible. If anything, they solidify the early date for portions of the *CL* and further imply that these works were originally not ascribed to Saint Pope Clement of Rome, but to a different "Philosopher Clemens".

Another difficulty, as alluded to in the introduction, is posed by the *CD*'s usage of the term *theurgy*. The term is usually attributed to Nicomachus the Pythagorean[172] (active approximately 100 AD)[173] and was later adopted by the Neoplatonists (particularly Iamblichus and Proclus) to refer to certain magical practices that were supposed to unite the soul to the divine realm. The main difference between the Dionysian and Neoplatonic usages of the term is that Dionysius conceives of theurgy as a work of *God* (specifically, of the incarnated Christ) manifesting Himself in the world whereas the Neoplatonists used it exclusively to refer to

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esy 50 [70]. See *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis*, 2 volumes, ed. Frank Williams (Leiden/ Boston: Brill, 2009).

[170] Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolycus* 1.3-4 in ANF 2:89-90. Cf. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.20.11 in ANF 1:491-2. *Clementine Homilies* 17.7 (in ANF 8:319-20), when acknowledging God is not anthropomorphic, states, "Nor has He ears that He may hear; for He hears, perceives, moves, energizes [*ἐνεργεῖ*], acts on every side". This indicates that "Clemens" was responding to an opposition who justified their view of divine simplicity in light of the energy-essence distinction. It also indicates that the "figure" of God was not construed by Clemens to be literally human. The fourth-century anthropomorphist controversy centered mostly upon a literal interpretation of Genesis 1:27, not on the divine energies.

[171] *Clementine Homilies* 17.9 in ANF 8:321 (translation modified).

[172] Nicomachus uses the word "theurgists" (*θεουργοί*) in fragment 6 of his *Manual of Harmonics*. See Karl Von Jan, *Musici Scriptores Graeci* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1895), 277. Translated as "initiates" in Flora R. Levin, *The Manual of Harmonics of Nicomachus the Pythagorean* (Grand Rapids, MI: Phanes Press, 1994), 194. Julian, the author of the Chaldean Oracles (fl. c. 170 AD), was also known as "the Theurgist". See *Suidae Lexicon: Pars II*, ed. Ada Adler (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1967), 641.

[173] Levin, *The Manual of Harmonics of Nicomachus the Pythagorean*, 22.

the performance of *human* ceremonies.[174] Consequently, what the Neoplatonists call theurgy, Dionysius calls *hierurgy*.[175] According to Pavlos, the difference in usage is bound up with a divergent understanding of *ἐπιτηδειότης* (lit. "fitness" or "aptitude"): Dionysius adheres to an older Aristotelian[176] understanding of the term (attested notably in Philo and Origen)[177], according to which *ἐπιτηδειότης* is

[174] Pavlos, "Theurgy", 158.

[175] *Ibid.*, 163.

[176] *Ibid.*, "Aptitude (Ἐπιτηδειοτης) and the Foundations of Participation in the Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite", in *Studia Patristica XCVI: Papers presented at the Seventeenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 2015*, ed. Markus Vinzent (Leuven/Paris/Bristol, CT: Peeters, 2017), 388-90.

[177] Commenting upon Jacob's wrestling of the angel in Genesis 32:22-23, Philo says that the angel "develops [*ἐγκατασκευάζει*] in [Jacob] an irresistible strength" after "being satisfied of his fitness [*ἐπιτηδειότητα*]" (*De Somnis* 1.129). See *Philo in Ten Volumes: Volume 5*, trans. F.H. Colson and G.H. Whitaker (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard UP/William Heinemann Ltd., 1988). For Philo, the story of Jacob serves as a metaphor for how the "ascetic soul" (*ἀσκητικὴ ψυχή*) is rewarded by God with divine vision after its struggles (*De Mutatione Nominum* 81-2). It should be noted that immediately preceding Neo-Platonism, Christian philosophers followed this approach to "aptitude". In his exegesis of Jeremiah 13:12 ("Every skin shall be filled with wine"), Origen interprets the "skins" as representing human beings and the "wine" as God's wrath or blessings. The wine is poured forth by God into the skins "according to [their] fitness [*ἐπιτηδειότητα*]" and "in proportion [*κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν*] to their works". See *Homily on Jeremiah* 12.2 in *Homilies on Jeremiah and 1 Kings 28*, trans. John Clark Smith (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 113-4; Greek in PG 11: 381A-B. Cf. *On First Principles* 2.9.6. Likewise, Theophilus of Antioch believed that "man had been made in a middle state, neither wholly mortal nor completely immortal, but receptive [*δεκτικός*] of either". See *To Autolycus* 2.24 (PG 6: 1089D). The second-century Gnostic Theodotus held to the same doctrine, though interpreted through a heterodox lens: "the psychic has free-will, and has the capacity [*ἐπιτηδειότητα*] for both faith and incorruptibility, as well as for unbelief and corruption, according to its own choice". See *Excerpta ex Theodoto*, sec. 56 (PG 9: 685C), open-source translation by Robert Pierce. There is no indication that aptitude itself is malleable.

Clement of Alexandria adhered to a different view, possibly anticipating later Neoplatonic developments. He believed that *ἐπιτηδειότης* was something that could be increased by spiritual exercise or prayer: "[Wicked men] pray to possess what they have not, and they ask things which seem, but are not, good things. But the Gnostic will ask the permanence of the things he possesses, adaptation [*ἐπιτηδειότητα*] for what is to take place, and the eternity of those things which he shall receive". *Stromata* 7.7 (PG 9: 464A) in ANF 2:535. Further: "As, then, for those of us who are diseased in body a physician is required, so also those who are diseased in soul require a pedagogue to cure our maladies; and then a teacher, who is to guide the soul, preparing it for a pure receptivity of knowledge [*καθαρὰν πρὸς γνώσεως ἐπιτηδειότητα εὐτρεπίζων*] when it is made able to admit the revelation of the Word." See *Paedagogus* 1.1 (PG 8: 252B) in ANF 2:209, translation modified. In this passage, we see that the teacher first "prepares" the student to acquire "receptivity": potency precedes capacity, whereas in the usual "Aristotelian" scheme, one's capacity precedes potency and hence actualization.

Dionysius follows the approach of the earlier writers as opposed to Clement (or the Neoplatonists). For him, the Good "extends Itself" (*ἐκτείνεται*) to all things "as each is able to participate in It" (*DN* 4.20) and God "comes" (*ἀφικέσθαι*) to the earth to assimilate men "in

an innate capacity for grace that is static and pre-exists within each individual, whereas for the Neoplatonists, a being's *ἐπιτηδειότης* is understood as something malleable that can be increased through magical ceremonies or the presence of initiatory objects.[178] In the first view, theurgy begins with God; in the second, it begins with man, who manipulates his environment to "attract" God to him. The Neoplatonic conception is a philosophical development compared to earlier usage. Dionysius is in line with first-century writers like Philo.

Did Dionysius borrow the term theurgy from Nicomachus or was it common in first-century Greek mystery religion?[179] Did Dionysius coin the word independently on the model of other words like *telesiurgy*, which occurs in Plato? These are questions which, without directly calling into doubt the authenticity of the *CD*, require further elucidation. At the very least, the recent research by Pavlos shows that the standard claim that Dionysius is dependent on Proclus simply because both use the term "theurgy" is flawed and needs to be seriously reconsidered.

7. Conclusions

Weighing the evidence, one can theoretically affirm a late dating of the *CD* sometime in the early third century after the creation of the *CL*, but significantly before the intellectually active period of Saint Gregory the Theologian. If so, this would explain the textual parallels to Pantaenus and Clement of Alexandria in that the presumed forger incorporated them into his work. It would also evidence an Alexandrine point of origin and account for why subsequent authors who spent time in Alexandria appear privy to the *CD,* but also reticent to directly ascribe the work to the Areopagite.

However, due to the burden of proof being on those who deny traditional ascription (and not the other way around), as well as the historical consensus of Orthodox saints and Ecumenical Councils on this question, such an argument from silence is not persuasive. There is no compelling chronological reason to deny authenticity. The *CD* is cited in the fourth and fifth centuries and Alexandrian-

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proportion to their aptitude [*ἐπιτηδειότητα*] for deification" (*EH* 2.2.1). The limitative formulas *κατὰ δύναμιν*, *οἷόν τε*, *ὡς ἐφικτὸν* and their cognates appear very frequently. See Scazzoso, *Ricerche*, 51-9.

[178] Pavlos, "Theurgy", 155-6, citing Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries* III.11: "The divine… illuminates the fountain, and fills it from itself with a prophetic power. For the inspiration which the water affords is not the whole of that which proceeds from the divinity, but the water itself only bestows [*ἐμποιεῖ*] a receptivity [*ἐπιτηδειότητα*] and purification in us, so that we may be able to receive the divinity." (translation adapted from Thomas Taylor).

[179] Given that the word *ἀτέλεστος,* which Dionysius uses, is also found in a near-contemporary source to the *CD* (see fn 54 above), it is not unreasonable to suppose that Dionysius was adapting the conventional vocabulary of Greek mystery religion to express the new Christian faith.

educated writers going back to the second century appear cognizant of the work. All of the linguistic and conceptual elements that are part of the *CD* existed by the time it was reputedly written. Its Attic vocabulary and rhetorical features reminiscent of the Second Sophistic, its use of the rare term "Therapeut" and its theology of "oneness", its refutation of Simonian Gnosticism and the proto-kabbalistic doctrines of the *CL*, its conceptual parallels to second-century Athenian apologists, its specific understanding of the names of God as "powers" and the role of *ἐπιτηδειότης* in religious life, as well as its appreciation for a hierarchical angelology all appear to demand a date before the mid-third century as a matter of default. Additionally, internal details, including the perceived difficulties that the *CD* imposes upon itself, increase the likelihood of authenticity, as a forger would have been expected to omit the latter. All things considered, the dating of the *CD* to the early-third century or before is certain. Barring evidence to the contrary, the traditional ascription of the *CD* to Dionysius appears most likely.

The authenticity of the *CD*, so long in doubt, has far-reaching implications. Just like the authentication of the Ignatian letters in the late 19th century laid the groundwork for a much better understanding of early Christianity, the vindication of the *CD* proposed herein effectively makes available to scholars an unequaled storehouse of information regarding the practices and beliefs of the first-century Church. Dionysius contains the earliest description of the liturgy,[180] witness to the canonicity of the Book of Revelation,[181] and even historical reference to the Dormition of the Virgin Mary.[182] His theology of symbols provides a first-century attestation to the theology underlying iconodulia, corroborating archaeological evidence showing that early Christians used icons.[183] His biographical remarks compliment the historical details in the Book of Acts and provide valuable insights into the establishment of the Christian *ecclesia*. Furthermore, Dionysius'

[180] *EH* 3.2.

[181] *EH* 3.3.4.

[182] *DN* 3.2.

[183] Thomas Matthews and Norman Muller assert that "icons were intimately connected with the origins and growth of Christianity itself". See *The Dawn of Christian Art in Panel Paintings and Icons* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2017), 27. Dionysius corroborates this in asserting that material symbols are not only useful in worship, but necessary in *CH* 1.3.3: "It is not possible for our mind to be raised to that immaterial representation and contemplation of the heavenly hierarchies, without using the material guidance suitable to itself, accounting the visible beauties as reflections of the invisible comeliness". Dionysius' theology of icons in *DN* 2.8 was also cited during the Council of Nicea II: "The resemblance of effects to their causes is not absolutely complete for though the effects have an impress [*εἰκόνας*, lit. 'icons'] corresponding to their causes yet the causes themselves are superior to the effects caused by them and they are more important in proportion to the ratio of their own original". See John Mendham, *The Seventh General Council, the Second of Nicaea, Held A.D. 787, in which the Worship of Images was Established* (London: William Edward Painter, 1850), 347.

demonstrable influence on Proclus (and possibly Plotinus) casts the relationship between Christianity and late pagan philosophy in a whole new light.[184] Instead of viewing ancient philosophy as a one-way street, with Christianity the passive receptor of a fully-formed Platonism, this thesis invites us to reevaluate the early Christians as influential thinkers in their own right who contributed to a complex interchange of ideas between diverse communities that did not operate in silos. Undoubtedly, many more avenues await to be explored.

[184] It has been suggested that the Porphyrians, Iamblichans and Origenists should all be viewed as three "splinters" of a single "Ammonian school". See Digeser, *A Threat to Public Piety,* 8.