I. Dionysius Areopagites, Gregory Palama: Scholarly Controversy and «Christological Correctives»

The works of Dionysius Areopagites have been controversial ever since Martin Luther’s dismissal of him as plus platonizans quam christianizans, and particularly since the scholarly labors of Joseph Stiglmayr and Hugo Koch at the close of the 19th century demonstrated his incontestable fondness for the thought of Iamblichus of Chalcis and, especially, Proclus Diadochus.1 The degree of that fondness and its compatibility or, more often, perceived incompatibility with Christian faith and the patristic tradition have been the primary focus of scholarly literature for the past hundred years.2

1 H. Koch, Proclus als Quelle des Pseudo-Dionysius in der Lehre vom Bösen // Philologus 54 (1895) 438–454; J. Stiglmayr, Der Neuplatoniker Proklos als Vorlage des sog. Dionysius Areopagita in der Lehre vom Übel // HJ 16 (1895) 253–273 and 721–748. See also the latter’s Das Aufkommen der Pseudo-Dionysischen Schriften und ihr Eindringen in die christliche Literatur bis zum Laterancouncil 649. Ein zweiter Beitrag zur Dionysius Frage // IV Jahresbericht des öffentlichen Privatgymnasiums an der Stelle matutina zu Feldkirch (Feldkirch, 1895), which set the ad quem (486) and a quo (532) of Dionysius, together with its setting in Christian Syria, which have held the scholarly field to the present day. Koch’s later monograph, Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita in seinen Beziehungen zum Neuplatonismus und Mysterienwesen (Mainz, 1900), set out the lexical and notional parallels between Dionysius and later Neoplatonist writers which, again, established the lines of scholarly research for the following century. In my quotations from the text of the Corpus Dionysiacum, I shall be citing the chapter and paragraph of his different works, followed by the column number in volume III of Migne’s Patrologia Graeca, then in parenthesis the page and line numbers from the critical text: Corpus Dionysiacum I: De Divinibus Nominibus / Ed. B. M. Suchla (Berlin—New York, 1990), and Corpus Dionysiacum II / Ed. G. Heil, A. M. Ritter (Berlin—New York, 1991) Vols. 33 and 36, respectively, of the Berlin corpus, PTS.

2 The literature here is vast, so a few examples must do. For Dionysius as a poorly disguised pagan, see the following chiefly by Protestant scholars: H. F. Müller, Dio-
Some few scholars, notably Vladimir Lossky, Fr. John Romanides, and Andrew Louth, read Dionysius instead as fundamentally faithful to prior currents of patristic thought and a significant contributor to those who came after him, such as SS Maximus Confessor, Symeon New Theologian, Nicetas Stethatos, and Gregory Palamas. My own conversion to this reading of the Areopagite came through exposure to the life of an Athonite monastery, Simonos Petras, and especially through the example and teaching of its abbot and elder, the Archimandrite Aemilianos. Thus the purpose of this essay: I propose to argue for both SS Dionysius and Gregory as within the ascetico-mystical tradition of Eastern Christianity.

The question of Dionysius’ specific relationship to the thought of St. Gregory marks another arena of scholarly contention. That there was a relationship is undeniable. Significant sections of, particularly, St. Gregory’s Triads are devoted to his debate with Barlaam the Calabrian over the proper interpretation of the Corpus Areopagiticum.4 What is at issue in the contemporary debate, however, are two closely related questions: first, was St. Gregory a faithful and accurate interpreter of Dionysius; and, second, what does the answer to that question say about either Dionysius, or Gregory, or both? For several Western scholars, Palamas was indeed a faithful disciple of the Areopagitica, but this is then held up as proof that the Doctor of Hesychasm was himself in thrall to the same lightly Christianized version of pagan Neoplatonism as typified his master.5 For others, again Western, St. Gregory, in contrast to — say — St. Thomas Aquinas, clumsily distorted Dionysius’ delicate adjustment of pagan discourse to Christian revelation in order to arrive at the lamentable and hitherto unheard of distinction between the divine essence and energies.6 In the eyes of still a third group, it is Dionysius who is the anomaly, a «lonely meteorite» in the night sky of patristic thought,7 yet whose authority, based on the apostolic pseudonym and specifically invoked by Barlaam, compelled St. Gregory to assault and alter the Areopagite’s system under the guise of interpreting it. My own beloved teacher and patron, Fr. John Meyendorff of blessed memory, was the origin of this third


6 This is the impression I receive from, perhaps most notably, E. von Ivanka, Plato Christianus (Einsiedeln, 1964) 228–289.

current. His thesis of a Palamite «Christological corrective» applied to the Areopagite has since been picked up and disseminated widely in the scholarly literature, including most recently Professor Adolf Ritter’s contribution to the collection of essays on Dionysius edited and published recently by Ysa-bel de Andia of the Sorbonne.

Professor Ritter’s article will serve as a springboard and foil for the remainder of this essay. As is to be expected from so accomplished a scholar, a co-editor of the critical text of the Corpus Areopagiticum, it is an admirably compact and elegant defense of Meyendorff’s thesis. So much so, in fact, that Ritter by the end of his presentation believes he has demonstrated that the «Christological corrective» is «thoroughly incontestable» (völlig unbestreitbar). I wish to register, first, my view that the «corrective» is not only not «incontestable», but that it is an illusion, a scholarly invention. The origins of this theological phantom lie, second, in a widespread, indeed practically universal misapprehension of the meaning and function of the Dionysian hierarchies as the unfortunate result of dependence on late pagan Neoplatonism.

8 See again Study of Gregory Palamas, loc. cit., and the thought is repeated continuously in Meyendorff’s many other publications wherever the subject of Dionysius and Gregory (or Maximus) come up. Romanides, Notes… 250–257, pinpoints this expression in Meyendorff’s Study in order to argue against it. Among the more important supporters of Meyendorff’s hypothesis, I would include Sinkiewicz’ The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God… (see above, n. 4). Thus, at the beginning, middle, and end of his otherwise illuminating article, he refers to Dionysius as, respectively, Barlaam’s principle source (p. 189), the «ground» of Barlaam’s theological approach (215), and, again, the source of the Calabrian’s «platonizing anthropology» (239). This may be true so far as Barlaam understood Dionysius, but I would argue — as did Palamas — that the latter’s opponent had misread his primary source. Here I might point out that, while Sinkiewicz dutifully notes each of Barlaam’s many citations of and allusions to Dionysius (see, e.g., pp. 191, 193, 195, 203, 205, 210, 212, 213, 214, 216, 218, etc.), he does not so consistently offer the same service to Gregory, whose remarks, reported in pp. 226–228 of the article, are packed with allusions to Dionysius that Sinkiewicz mostly overlooks — perhaps most notably Palamas’ insistence on apophathe theology as denoting or presupposing the experience of God, for which he alludes to Divine Names 2.9: ou monon mathôn, alla kai pathôn ta theia, thus Gregory: ou mé gnontes, alla kai pathontes ta theia (quoted in full by Sinkiewicz on p. 228, n. 218, but without the Dionysian reference). Overall, Sinkiewicz appears to operate — wrongly, in my view — throughout with the presupposition (shared with Meyendorff) that Barlaam’s is the more correct reading of the Areopagite.


10 Ritter, Gregor Palamas als Leser… 579.
Professor Ritter is here fully within the scholarly mainstream. Palamas, however, was not part of that mainstream, but was instead one (and not the only) fourteenth-century instance of a continuous, primarily monastic reading of the Areopagite which correctly understood the latter as himself drawing on prior currents in the ascetico-mystical, liturgical, and theological literature of the Christian East. Dionysius, in short, is properly understood as bracketed by the tradition out of which he came and within which he continued to be read. The Eastern monks have always known this. St. Gregory was no exception. It is here, in this second point, that we find both the truth and the falsehood of Ritter’s assertion early on in his article that Dionysius «influenced, but never dominated» Eastern Christian thought. This statement is true exactly for the reason just stated, and false because it presumes that the Areopagitica represented an anomaly — the «lonely meteorite» — which sought to introduce things novel and foreign to the tradition.

Professor Ritter is, however, correct in noting that St. Gregory does bring something new to the Areopagite, though I will argue, third, that this addition is much less any specifically «Christological corrective» than it is the exploitation of certain possibilities inherent in both Dionysius and in earlier patristic and ascetic writers, and that these possibilities had already been exploited by SS Symeon the New Theologian and Nicetas Stethatos three hundred years before Palamas. To these two Eastern saints, St. Gregory also appears to have added, according to the very recent work of another German scholar, Reinhard Flogaus, the fruits of his reading in Maximus Planudes’ translation into Greek of St. Augustine of Hippo’s De trinitate. The last observation will provide us with some interesting points of comparison between the ways in which two quite different Church Fathers, Dionysius and the great bishop of Hippo Regius, were received by, respectively, the medieval Latin West and the Greek East.

II. St. Gregory and the Dionysian Hierarchies

A. The Angels as Elders

I shall come to my third point a little later, but for now allow me to turn to my first two which bear on the perceived necessity of the «Christological corrective» which St. Gregory is supposed to have supplied in order to counteract what Fr. Georges Florovsky once referred to as the «staircase principle» of the Dionysian hierarchies. Professor Ritter offers two sets of texts

11 See above, n. 2.
as proof of this contention in the concluding section of his article. From Dionysius he selects *Celestial Hierarchy* 4.2–4, on the angelic mediation of revelation, *Divine Names* 1.5, on the ineffability of the angels’ vision of God, and, most especially, *Celestial Hierarchy* 8.2 on the principle of hierarchical mediation. The last in particular is worth quoting in full:

The divine source of all order has established the all-embracing principle that beings of the first rank receive enlightenment from the Godhead through beings of the first rank.15

Against this ostensible assertion of «created intermediaries» (*geschaffene Zwischenglieder*), Ritter points to two texts from St. Gregory. The first comes from *Triads* 2.3 on the vision of the «sacred light» (*phôs hieron*), and in particular 2.3.28–30, where Palamas sets out to explain exactly how the passages Ritter cites are to be understood, in response to Barlaam’s apparent advocacy of a strictly mediated vision of God. Ritter clearly thinks Barlaam’s reading of Dionysius is the correct one, and quotes in opposition St. Gregory’s assertion in *Triads* 2.3.29 that Christ «has made all things new», and that therefore only now, in the New Testament dispensation, are visions of God (*theoptiai*) available to us immediately, i.e., without the created mediation of the angels:

Not... in mediated fashion and through other [beings], but [they are] rather immediate and self-manifest... not coming conveyed by beings of the first rank to those of the second. For the Lord of lords is not subject to the laws of creation...16

Here, the professor declares, we find a «clear contradiction [klarem Widerspruch] to Dionysius’ emphatically repeated [hierarchical] principle», one which is precisely and expressly a corrective based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ.17

This juxtaposition of texts seems to serve Ritter’s point very well, indeed, and is at first glance quite impressive. St. Gregory does appear to be expressly contradicting Dionysius: «not...by beings of the first rank to those of the

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14 *RITTER, Palamas als Leser…* 575–579. Perhaps I should note at this point, since I shall be attacking his analysis of Dionysius in what follows, that most of Professor Ritter’s article displays an extraordinarily warm and genuine appreciation of both Palamas and Orthodox theology. It is almost exclusively in this last section that I have difficulties with him — but then, I have the same problems with many contemporary Orthodox theologians as well.


16 *Triads* 2.2.29, *CHRISTOU, Γρηγορίου τοῦ Παλαμᾶ: Συγγράμματα…* I. 563, ll. 18–20.

17 *RITTER, Palamas als Leser…* 576.
second». Closer inspection of this section of the Triads, however, together with another look at Dionysius himself against the background of earlier ascetical literature, will reveal that Palamas’ contradiction is in fact nothing of the kind. St. Gregory is first of all instead correcting the mis-reading of the Areopagite which Ritter (and Meyendorff) effectively share with Barlaam. As Romanides pointed out some years ago, neither Palamas nor Dionysius believed that the great theophanies of either the past (to the saints of Israel), or of the present (to the saints of the New Covenant) took or take place through angelic mediation, but rather that the angels served both then and now to explain and interpret the visio dei luminis.\(^{18}\) This is exactly the point which St. Gregory is at pains to make in Triads 2.3.28 and 30, which is to say, in the sections immediately preceding and succeeding the passage which Ritter quotes. Gabriel, in Triads 2.3.28, did not cause the Word of God to be incarnate of the Theotokos, nor did the angels cause the the Glory of God to appear to the shepherds near Bethlehem. Rather, the Archangel explained to the Panagia the significance of what was taking place in her, while the angel messenger announced the meaning — i.e., the occasion of the Savior’s birth — of the divine light’s appearance to the shepherds, and the angelic choirs shared with them the Gloria in excelsis.\(^{19}\) It is difficult for me not to think that Gregory had in mind here a related passage in Dionysius’ Celestial Hierarchy 4.4 regarding, first, the Virgin:

The most divine Gabriel...explained [lit., initiated into the mystery: emystagôgei] to Mary how the divine mystery of the God’s taking form would come to pass in her...\(^{20}\)

and then the shepherds:

...another angel brought the good news to the shepherds who, because of their quiet life [lit., silence: hesychia] withdrawn [anachôrései] from the crowd, had somehow been purified. And with him [i.e., the angel] «a multitude of the heavenly host» passed on to those on earth that greatly renowned song of praise.\(^{21}\)

Note here that Dionysius associates the shepherds with specifically ascetical virtues through his use of the terms anachôrésis and hêsychia, turning them thus into hesychasts — effectively into monks, exemplars of «the angelic life» — and visionaries, seers of the divine light and concelebrants of

\(^{18}\) Romanides, Notes... 257.

\(^{19}\) Triads 2.2.28, Chrestou, Γρηγορίου τού Παλαμᾶ: Συγγράμματα... I. 562–563.


the heavenly liturgy. Palamas clearly understand the relevance of this passage to his own enterprise, as evidenced by what I take to be his allusion to it in *Triads* 2.3.28.

In *Triads* 2.3.30, St. Gregory spells out the distinction between mediated *knowledge* and direct *vision*:

> For while in most cases you might find that the grace of knowledge is given by intermediaries, the majority of God’s [biblical] appearances are direct manifestations [i.e., of God himself, without intermediary].

His illustration of this principle is Moses on Sinai. The latter was indeed given the Law «through angels, but not the vision itself [of God], rather the interpretation [lit., «initiation»: *myésin*] of the vision [came through angels]». This is, again, exactly the distinction that Dionysius assumes. In *Celestial Hierarchy* 4.2, he makes the same point of angelic mediation of the Law, as well as of the angels teaching the patriarchs before Moses, but it is the latter who is the express recipient and exemplar of immediate contact with God in the justly famous lines from *Mystical Theology* 1.3, which feature the God-seer’s ascent into the mysterious darkness of «unknowing» atop Sinai — a darkness which, be it noted, Dionysius takes care on two other occasions to identify with the «unapproachable light» (*aprositon phôs*) of I Tim 6:16. St. Gregory, incidentally, picks up on Dionysius’ identification of the two when the former is at pains to make precisely the same point to Barlaam about the supposed darkness of apophatic theology in *Triads* 2.3.50–51.

Elsewhere, in *Celestial Hierarchy* 13, Dionysius devotes an entire, long chapter to the vision of Isaiah 6:1–7. Here once again we find an articulation of the same hierarchical principle which Meyendorff and Ritter believe casts doubt on the Areopagite’s genuinely Christian credentials and so places him in opposition to Palamas:

> Thus, according to the same principle of natural good order, the divine source of all visible and invisible good order manifests the brilliance of its own outpouring of light in blessed streams, appearing first of all to the

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22 As indicated by P. Rorem in his note on this passage: The shepherds’ «withdrawal» seems presented as almost a monastic virtue // Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works... 158, n.60. I myself would omit the «seems» and «almost».

23 *Triads* 2.2.30, Chrestou, Γρηγορίον τοῦ Παλαμᾶ· Συγγράμματα... I. 565, ll. 2–6.


26 Chrestou, Γρηγορίον τοῦ Παλαμᾶ· Συγγράμματα... I. 582–584.
highest beings, while those beings who come after them partake through them of the divine ray.27

Does this mean that he understands the «divine ray» to pass through the highest angels to those below — and so ultimately to us — as through, so to speak, a series of «membranes», as this passage appears to suggest? It does not, and that it does not is made clear a little below. First, Dionysius remarks that the highest angels, after God Himself, direct (or «guide», or «show the way»: hégountai) those below them to all divine knowledge (theognôsia), and to all activity which is in imitation of God (theomimésia).28 This puts quite a different complexion on the preceding passage and squares neatly, I think, with the distinction we saw St. Gregory making above between knowledge and vision. It is borne out, secondly, in Dionysius’ analysis of Isaiah’s vision itself. The prophet was guided by an angel:

...through one of the...angels who are set over us, and by his illumining guidance, [cheiragôgia] [Isaiah] was raised up to that vision, according to which he saw — speaking, as it were, in symbols — the highest beings established under God, and with God, and around God, and [he saw], transcendently established in the midst of the powers subordinate to Him, that summit which ineffably transcends both them [i.e., «the powers»] and all things whatsoever.29

Isaiah, in short, is led and guided by a guardian angel up to the vision of the throne of God, of the angels which surround it, and of the Most High Himself. The vision is direct, both of God and of the angelic liturgy — tés hieras autôn eulabeias30 — which Dionysius discusses in some detail a little below. The angel guide then explains to the prophet what the latter is seeing:

The angel, so far as possible, gave shape to the vision for the theologian [i.e., the prophet] by sharing with him his own sacred knowledge, and he initiated him [or, «instructed him»: emystagôgeito] into that divine and most precious hymnody [a reference, presumably, to the «thrice-holy» of Isa 6:3].31

27 Celestial Hierarchy 13.3, PG 3. 301BC (45:14–18). I think myself that Dionysius’ purpose in elaborating at such length on this particular theophany might have had something to do with the circulation of pseudepigraphical works such as The Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah, whose influence he is — in part — anxious to counteract. For speculation on his own foray into pseudepigraphy as perhaps determined by the influence of works such as The Martyrdom (and many others), see Golitzin, Revisiting the «Sudden»... 489, n. 33, and at greater length in idem, Dionysius Areopagita: A Christian Mysticism? // Pro Ecclesia (forthcoming).

28 PG 3. 304A (46:7–8).


30 Ibid. 305A (47:20) for τῆς ἵερᾶς αὐτῶν εὐλαβείας.

31 Ibid. 305AB (48:1–4).
The pattern of an angel guide leading the seer to a vision of the heavenly throne and liturgy, and then explaining its meaning, is well known to us from the Jewish apocalyptic literature of the late Second Temple era, as, for example, in the canonical book of Daniel 7 ff., as well as in such Old Testament Pseudepigrapha as 1 and 2 Enoch, the Apocalypse of Abraham, and many others. It also appears in specifically Christian writings, in the Revelation of John in the New Testament, or in the early second-century pseudepigraphon, The Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah.32 In every case, the vision is direct and the angel is present in order to aide and instruct. This literature is part of the background of both Dionysius and Palamas, particularly given the fact that it was also of continuous interest to Eastern monks, as signaled by the great number of medieval manuscripts of these ancient documents which have down to us.33 More specifically, however, as the vocabulary which Dionysius deploys for the angels’ mediating function should suggest to us — mystagogues, teachers, guides and directors (hégoumenoi — in short, abbots!) — his own presumption is clearly of a monastic setting. We are reminded in fact, and not accidentally, of the spiritual fathers and elders who appear so prominently in our earliest monastic texts, as in, for example, the Vitae of Anthony and Pachomius, the Gerontikon, the Historia monachorum in Aegypto, the works of Evagrius Ponticus, and others. Indeed, as I have argued elsewhere, the geron or spiritual father is to a striking degree assimilated to the figure and role of the angelus interpres of the ancient apocalypses in both this earliest monastic literature, and thereafter to the present day.34 Dionysius and


Hieromonk Alexander (Golitzin)

Palamas are both representatives of this continuum, a fact which is illustrated with, I think, striking force in a passage from the work of a famous disciple of Evagrius in the early fifth century. In the preferatory letter, addressed to Lau-
sus the Chamberlain, which opens his *Lausiach History*, Palladius of Heliopo-
lis writes approvingly of his correspondent’s desire for instruction:

You desire to be taught the words of true edification. For the God of all
alone is untaught, since He is self-existent and was preceded by no other
being; all others are taught, since they were made and created. The first
order of beings have their learning from the most high Trinity, the second
learns from the first, the third from the second, and so on down to the least.
Those who are higher in knowledge and virtue teach the lower.35

Given this passage, might we not say that the lines which I quoted above
from *Celestial Hierarchy* 13, and which both Professor Ritter and I cited
from *Celestial Hierarchy* 8.2, are no more obviously a paraphrase of the pa-
gan Neoplatonism of, for example, Iamblichus than they are of the Christian
monk and predecessor of Dionysius, Palladius? The passages are so close as
to argue for a match, down to and including an even more explicit expression
of the triadic form, so dear to Dionysius, than we found in the latter’s texts
cited above, together with the language of «firsts» (*prota*), «seconds» (*deu-
tera*), and, here, «thirds» (*trita*). Neither for Dionysius nor for Palladius do
the angels stand «between» us and God, at least not in the sense of their
blocking our direct access to Him and to the experience of His light. The
hierarchical principle has nothing whatsoever to do with the mediated *expe-
rience* of God, but rather with the leading up to, explanation, and testing of
that experience. It is, in short, a fundamentally monastic construct that we
confront in the Dionysian angelology. The angelic hierarchy is nothing so
much for him as it is a series of progressively more illumined holy elders. If
we find the *angelus interpres* in the fourth-century holy man and thereafter,
then, equally, the angels can and do appear here as *gerontes* or *startzi*. Diony-
sius is in any case fully «on the same wavelength» as Palladius before him and
St. Gregory after him. The single aspect in which he differs from the other two
is in his, so to speak, ecclesiastical emphasis, which emerges elsewhere partic-
ularly in his overall — though not entirely consistent — effort to identify the

_thus see STETHATOS’ account of the New Theologian’s heavenly vision of Symeon the
Pious in Un grand mystique byzantin: Vie de Syméon le nouveau théologien / Ed.
I. HAUSHERR (Rome, 1928) Esp. chps. 5 (pp. 8–10) and 90 (124), and cf. *Apoc. Abr*
10:3–16. For a contemporary instance of the angel guide, see the story of Papa Tikhon
the Russian in: The Living Witness of the Holy Mountain: Contemporary Voices from
Mount Athos / Tr. with introd. and notes by A. GOLITZIN (South Canaan, 1996) 142.

35 «To Lausus», in *The Lausiach History* / Ed. C. BUTLER. Vol. II (Cambridge,
1903) 7. ET: *The Lausiach History* / Tr. and annotated by R. T. MEYER (New York,
charismatic holy man with the bishop, or «hierarch». This difference, I might also note, was and continues to be heartily approved by Eastern bishops, beginning with Dionysius’ earliest commentator, John of Scythopolis. On the other hand, Eastern monks, including St. Gregory, have just as uniformly and steadfastly (perhaps we might even say, charitably!) ignored it. 36

B. Hierarchy as the Mirror and Shaper of the Soul

Palladius’ use of taxis just above, together with the importance which that word has for Dionysius and his understanding of hierarchy, leads me to the second set of texts which Professor Ritter adduces in his proof of a Palamite «Christological corrective». These are the One Hundred and Fifty Chapters, written later in Palamas’ life, and in particular Chapters 36–40, where St. Gregory presents the image of God in every human being as the imago trinitatis, composed of intellect, reason, and soul (nous, logos, and psyche). 37 Ritter believes that this section comprises a «silent corrective» (stillschweigende Korrettur) addressed to the Dionysian Zwischenglieder by virtue of its implicit stress on Christ as offering us direct access to divinity. He cites in particular Chapter 40 on the soul as called to love God, neighbor, «and to both know and preserve its own worth, and, as it were, truly to love itself». According to Ritter, this is «an even more powerful “Christological corrective” taken against Dionysius’ teaching on the hierarchies» than what we have seen so far, since it sets the taxis of the human soul above the ranks of angels (citing Chapters 38–39), such that the human being reflects in him- or herself «the image of the immanent Trinity», with the human soul becoming thus a «Mikrokosmos» of the Trinity’s saving processions, or proodoi. 38 Here then, the professor concludes, is the «Christological corrective» as «thoroughly incontestable», proof that vindicates Meyendorff’s thesis over such of its critics as, most notably (and a target of Ritter’s article throughout), John Romanides.

I must acknowledge that this comparison between SS Dionysius and Gregory is correct on two counts. Dionysius nowhere to my knowledge either reckons human beings higher than the angels or voices any explicit affirmation of the soul as the imago trinitatis, and the latter in spite of his obvious affection for triads of practically every other description. In both regards, however, he is scarcely unique among earlier patristic writers. The soul as imago trinitatis was not widely exploited in the fourth century, nor for some

36 For a sketch of this differing reception of Dionysius among Eastern bishops, on the one hand, and monks, on the other, see Golitzin, Et introibo ad altare dei... 401–413.

37 Ritter, Palamas als Leser... 577–578, citing especially Chp 40, in the edition of Sinkiewicz, Gregory Palamas: The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters... 126 and 128 (Greek text).

38 Ritter, Palamas als Leser... 578.
time thereafter. In developing it here, St. Gregory is at once drawing on sources in the Greek tradition which are much closer to him chronologically than Dionysius, and on another source outside of that tradition, of which more anon. I recall one fourth-century writer, the Macarian homilist, who does sound quite like Palamas’ exaltation of the *axia* and *taxis* of the soul, but Macarius makes no effort to establish an analogy between the soul and the Holy Trinity. The only place where I know of Dionysius using these two words, worth (*axia*) and order (*taxis*), in connection with the soul occurs in his *Epistle VIII*, addressed to the monk Demophilus, where the Areopagite instructs his correspondent as follows:

«Assign what is deserving [*ta kat’axian*] to reason [*logos*], and to the incensive faculty [*thymos*] and to appetite [*epithymia*], and see to it that your [interior] order [*taxis*] is not wronged, but let reason which is superior rule over the [faculties] subordinate [to it, i.e., to reason].

Here the question is not of the soul’s worth or rank, but of the proper ordering of its inner faculties, with reason called to rule over the incensive faculty and appetite. If this seems and is pretty normal stuff, whether for pagan Greeks ever since Plato’s *Phaedrus*, or for Christian writers making use of the Platonic tradition, it is nonetheless significant that Dionysius uses *taxis* here to refer to the *inner ordering* of the soul. In the particular context of *Epistle VIII*, where Demophilus has acted in such a way as «to overturn» the Church’s «God-given order», *tén theoparadoton taxin... anatrepesthai*, by daring to enter the sanctuary and lay hands on the «holy things», the *outer order* (*taxis*) of the Church hierarchy has been upset precisely because this particular monk’s *inner order* (*taxis*) had likewise been disturbed and, indeed, overturned — as Dionysius is at pains to point out at length in his Epistle’s opening praise of the «meekness» of the great Godseers of old, here in sharp contrast to Demophilus’ prideful arrogance.

39 It does of course appear on occasion, almost in passing, e.g., in Gregory of Nyssa’s *Great Catechetical Oration*, or, in the form in which it appears in Palamas (and, earlier, is taken up by Symeon New Theologian and Nicetas, see below n. 53) — λόγος-υούς-πνεύμα (ψυχή), — in Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or. 23.11* (*PG* 23. 1164) and 31.33 (PG 36. 172). I am grateful to J. A. McGuckin, *Perceiving Light from Light in Light* (*Oration* 31.3): The Trinitarian Theology of St. Gregory the Theologian // *GOTR* 39.1 (1994) 7–32, here 23 and n.70, for this reference.


41 *Epistle 8.3* // *PG* 3. 1093A (182:6–8).

42 Ibid. 1088C (176:3).


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I trouble with this seemingly trivial and unrelated episode in the *corpus* because, examined carefully, it reveals something about Dionysius’ understanding of hierarchy which Professor Ritter has overlooked — along, I might add, with practically everyone else in modern times — and this is that, for the Areopagite, the outer ordering of «our hierarchy», *hê kath’ hêmas hierarchia*, by which he means the ranks and orders of clergy and laity as these appear pre-eminently in the Church’s worship, is properly to be reflected in the inner ordering of the soul. Put another way, and borrowing indeed one of Professor Ritter’s own words just above, «hierarchy» in the *Corpus Dionysiacum* is rightly to be understood both macrocosmically, as applying to the Church, and microcosmically, as applying to the soul. The latter, in short, is the microcosm of the Church. I have made this argument both briefly and at considerable length elsewhere, so I shall not dwell on it here save to note that Dionysius himself makes this point expressly when, at the very beginning of his labors in *Celestial Hierarchy* 1.3, he states that the ranks (*diakosmêseis*) of the Church (the different clerical and lay orders), are an *eikôn* or *typos* of the obviously inner, «harmonious and ordered» state or condition (*hexis*) of the soul which is «set in order (*tetagmenê*) for divine things».45

«Our hierarchy» is also something more than a merely passive reflection of the well-ordered soul. It is not inert, but is rather itself a force or power which is — or should be — shaping the soul. As Dionysius puts it in *Celestial Hierarchy* 3.1, «Hierarchy is a certain sacred order [*taxis*] ... which is in process of being likened [*aphomoioumenê*] to the form of God [*theöeides*]».46 If the last is a statement about the «macrocosmic» aspect of hierarchy, that is, the (heavenly and earthly) Church at worship, then a paragraph later he addresses the microcosm, the soul or individual Christian, when he writes of the aim or goal (*skopos*) of hierarchy as:

Moses, «the meekest of men», alone is accorded the vision of the divine form (in the LXX, the divine glory). Dionysius’ passage here is also quite strikingly reminiscent of Evagrius Ponticus, down to the same examples of meekness in Moses, David, Job, and preeminently the Lord Jesus Himself. See G. Bunge on the centrality of meekness for Evagrius, *Geistliche Vaterschaft* 27–30, and esp. 42–44 on meekness — quite like Dionysius addressing Demophilus — as the necessary precondition for the *visio dei*. I take this as yet one more indication that the Areopagite is speaking out of a fundamentally traditional, Eastern Christian ascetical milieu. On the term, *taxis*, as already a *terminus technicus* for the inward ordering of the soul in early monastic literature, see G. Gould, The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community (Oxford, 1993) 151–152.

44 At length, see Golitzin, *Et introibo ad altare dei*... 77–231, and more briefly, idem, Hierarchy versus Anarchy?... 131–179.

45 PG 3. 121D–124A (9:4–5).

46 Ibid. 164D (17:3–4).
...gazing unswervingly at His [God’s] most divine beauty, and, so far as possible, shaping and perfecting its celebrants as divine images [agalmata theia], as most transparent and spotless mirrors, as recipients of the primordial and divine light... who also reflect the latter in turn to those who come after..."[^47]

and, a little below:

Perfection for each of those who have been apportioned [a place in] hierarchy is, according to the measure of each, to be led up to the imitation of God and, what is yet more divine, to become, as the scriptures put it, a «co-worker of God» [theou synergon genesthai] and, so far as possible, to receive in oneself and show forth the divine energy.^[48]

In these statements, it seems to me that we find something very close indeed to what Professor Ritter understands St. Gregory to be talking about in the latter’s Chapters 36–40: the shining forth of God’s saving activity, here energeia, from the sanctified soul in fulfillment of the latter as the divine image or, to use Dionysius’ lexicon from the passage cited above, the divine agalma. Ritter is correct about Palamas, but fails to see that the Doctor of Hesychasm and the Areopagite are here functionally identical. At this point, too, I should note that St. Gregory makes a very similar argument for Dionysius’ hierarchic understanding in Triads 2.3.73–74, where he analyzes Ecclesiastical Hierarchy 1.3.[^49] Against Barlaam, Palamas rightly understands the skopos of the Dionysian hierarchy as assimilation to and union with God, as embracing in fact the experience of God through the keeping of the commandments, most especially the commandment of love. Save the two points I noted at the beginning of this section, there is next to nothing then in Palamas on the imago dei (at least as cited by Ritter) which is not in Dionysius. As Romanides observed forty years ago, St. Gregory is a better and more certain interpreter of Dionysius than the latter’s modern critics.[^50] Nor should this come as a surprise, since Palamas was, after all, the conscious heir to centuries of monastic interpretation of the Areopagita along exactly these lines. His was not a reinvention of Dionysius, but the articulation of a long tradition out of which Dionysius himself had come. «Correctives», Christological or otherwise, were not part of St. Gregory’s agenda. He did not need them. He needed only to understand and read his source correctly, and that is exactly what he did do with wisdom and acumen.

[^48]: Ibid. 165B (18:14–17).
[^49]: CHRESTOU, Γρηγόριος Τού Παλαμᾶ· Συγγράμματα… I. 605–607.
[^50]: ROMANIDES, Notes… 254–256.
III. Gregory, Dionysius, and Augustine: When East Goes West and West Comes East

A. The Imago Trinitatis: Palamas’ Appropriation of Augustine

The particular note of the soul as *imago trinitatis* is admittedly not in Dionysius, and, equally, St. Gregory does add something here. I would argue, however, that what he adds is nothing alien in form and intent to the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. The shining forth of the single divine *energeia* of the Holy Trinity from the sanctified soul, and in other places the hallowed creature’s reflection of, exactly, the Trinity’s saving *pronoia* and *proodoi* (the latter being a term, incidentally, which Ritter takes from Dionysius and not from Palamas’ *Chapters* 36–40), are already present in the Areopagite, as is the restored and transfigured image. What St. Gregory adds are certain precisions: the round of love within the *imago*, the soul, as reflecting the movement of love within the Holy Trinity, and the analogy of human being’s inner triad of *logos-nous-psyche* with the Three Divine Persons. The first, as Reinhard Flogaus noticed very recently, is more than a little reminiscent of Augustine’s *De trinitate*, just as St. Gregory elsewhere in the *Chapters* displays even closer matches — on occasion word for word — with Planudes’ translation of the Latin Father’s treatise. The second, *logos-nous-psyche*, is not so

51 It is perhaps unseemly for a writer to quote himself, but the terms πρόδοσ and πρόνοια are both applied, frequently, in the Dionysian corpus to angels and to human beings as reflections of the single loving procession of the Trinity. They are «directly the result of the love that moves all sentient beings toward providence with respect to those below, communion with their equals, and attraction toward their superiors. The creature is to become at once the expression and agent of the uncreated procession of God that is “revealed and continuously present... in all the hierarchies”»; GOLITZIN, *Et introibo ad altare dei...* 103–104. The last cites *Celestial Hierarchy* 9.2, 260B (37:11–13). For the application of these two terms to created (if sanctified) beings, see *Divine Names* 4.15, 713A (161:1–5); 4.2, 696B (144:19–145:1); 4.7, 704B (152:14–18); 4.8, 709D (158:13–18); 4.13, 712A (159:1–3); *Celestial Hierarchy* 8.2, 240C (34:11–14); 15.1, 328C (51:18–21); 15.6, 333D (55:20–22); 13.3, 301D (46:1–5); 15.5, 333B (55:10–11); 15.9, 340A (59, 1); *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 2.1, 392B (69:6–7) and 3.3.3, 429B (82:17–83:10). The sense of all these texts is the same, and it is exactly what Professor Ritters seems to think appears only in St. Gregory as a «corrective». To the contrary, Dionysius is no different, and is himself picking up and echoing a theme long known in the ascetic literature. Thus for Evagrius (and relevant texts from the latter) on participation in providence and sharing in the work of the angels, see again GOLITZIN, *Et introibo ad altare dei...* 327–332.

52 FLOGAUS, Palamas and Barlaam Revisited... 16–22, singles out in particular Palamas’ *Chapters* 36–40 and 122–135, finding especially in the second grouping word for word reflections of Planudes’ translation of *De trinitate* — see esp. 18–21, nn. 92–100. The evidence is impressive.
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much Augustinian as, I think, a borrowing from St. Symeon the New Theologian’s deployment of the identical triad as analogy of the Trinity — which the eleventh-century writer borrowed in his turn from St. Gregory Nazianzus. Symeon’s disciple, Nicetas Stethatos, likewise echoes his master’s psychological analogy in his own treatises, Against the Jews 7–9, and On the Soul V.53 I assume that both SS Symeon and Nicetas must have been available to Palamas, who is certainly aware of and mentions the New Theologian elsewhere in his oeuvre. He certainly knew Nazianzus’ work as well, but I choose to mention Symeon and Nicetas here because both of them represent something of an expansion on this theme as it appears in the fourth-century Cappadocian. Palamas seems thus to be carrying on a certain trajectory of thought to which his more proximate predecessors had already contributed.

In choosing to underline Chapters 36–40, Ritter does inadvertently put his finger on something that is very interesting: St. Gregory’s quietly selective appropriation of the great Father of the West’s classic treatise on the central dogma of the Christian faith. As Flogaus has convincingly demonstrated, it is very clear that Palamas quite liked much of what he had read in De trinitate and, moreover, found that those sections which he particularly liked, all of them from the latter part of Augustine’s work, could be easily and naturally engrafted into already existing elements within Greek Christian literature in such a way as to enrich and deepen the whole. In this regard, St. Gregory was a good deal bolder and more confident of the strength of his tradition than are many modern Orthodox theologians. It is equally clear to me, on the other hand, as it was to Romanides before me, that St. Gregory must have positively rejected the polemics of De trinitate I–IV, which sound a great deal like Barlaam on the question of the biblical theophanies, and where Augustine set his face against and broke with prior tradition in order to deny the visio dei both to the saints of Israel and to Christians on this side of the eschaton.54 Palamas did not then accept the whole of Augustine on the


54 Romanides, Notes… 194–198 and esp. 247–249 and 257–262. Flogaus, Palamas and Barlaam Revisited… 14, n. 70, points to passages from St. Basil and St. John Chrysostom which match Augustine on the Old Testament symbols. I would add, however, the clarification that both the works he cites come from those Fathers’ response to Eunomius, and I think in particular to the long-standing (i.e., also pre-Eunomian), homoiōn argument that, as the Son is the object of the theophanies of the OT (an axiom of pre-Nicene Christology), this must mean that the Second Person is less
Trinity, but only that (and it seems to have been quite a lot) which he appears to have felt could be enfolded without rupture or strain into the already existent theological *Gestalt* of the Greek East.

**B. The Earlier Western Appropriation of the *Corpus Areopagiticum* and the Genesis of the Dionysian «Problem»**

I spend some time on this matter because we can find a similar process of assimilation underway 150 to 200 years earlier in the Christian West, but in the latter instance it was the *Corpus Dionysiacum* which was the subject of adoption and change. To be sure, Dionysius was welcomed with vast enthusiasm in the twelfth and thirteenth-century West, and was quickly promoted to an authority second only to the scriptures — as, for example, in the Angelic Doctor’s *Summa theologiae*, where the Areopagite is (or at least seems to be) quoted at nearly every turn. The great schema of the *Summa*, the *exitus-reditus* of God in creation and redemption, is another outstanding monument to a pervasive Dionysian influence which extended in Thomas, and in countless other medieval Latins, into questions bearing on mysticism, hierarchical authority (including papal supremacy), angelology, and even architecture, in addition, of course, to speculative philosophical theology.\(^{55}\) Professor Ritter and many others are quite right to point out that there is nothing remotely comparable in the East to this nearly ubiquitous Dionysian presence in the

\[^{55}\text{A. LOUTH synoptically, in The Influence of Denys the Areopagite on Eastern and Western Spirituality in the 14th Century // Sob/ECR 4 (1982) 185–200, and P. Rorem in detail according to themes, in Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary…, provide useful surveys of this process at work. Rorem is particularly helpful on the Western reception.}\]
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medieval West. Where they are wrong is in assuming that this was so because the East had already developed, as it were, antibodies to the Neoplatonist virus which they believe Dionysius to have represented. According to this accounting, the West’s immune system was in contrast less well prepared for this foreign body, and suffered a Dionysian epidemic in consequence. 56

This very widespread picture of Dionysius in West and East is mistaken on a couple of counts. It does, though, explain certain things about major trends in modern scholarship on Dionysius and, perhaps by extension, may shed a modest light on the scholarly treatment of St. Gregory and the Hesychast Controversy. First, the medieval Latin West to which Dionysius came with such éclat already had its own distinctive theological Gestalt, one which had, moreover, been shaped in fundamental ways (particularly after the Carolingians) by St. Augustine. 57 What then occurs when the Areopagite arrives is less the latter’s pervasive influence than precisely the recasting or re-shaping of Dionysius to conform to the already established main lines of Latin theology, spirituality, and ecclesiology. In the process, as scholars such as Andrew Louth and Paul Rorem have pointed out, the unitary quality of Dionysian thought is broken up, fractured in fact, with different pieces of it then incorporated into whatever subject the particular medieval thinker is considering — e.g., the speculative theology of the Summa, the mysticism of Eckhart, the architectural plans of Abbot Suger of St. Denys, or the ecclesiology of the papal apologists and canonists. 58 When therefore a theologian who is passionately devoted to the Augustinian inheritance appears on the Western scene at the end of Middle Ages, and when he rightly notices how these glittering shards of the Areopagitica have been tacked onto (or in some cases — e.g., Aquinas’ — incorporated with magisterial elegance into) the great Bishop of Hippo’s thought, he protests against them as foreign elements and labels them — wrongly — plus platonizans quam christianizans. 59

56 This is the view that suffuses especially ROREM’s account in Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary…

57 I confess that I have only an impressionistic sense of this development, i.e., the near exclusive dominance of Augustine from, particularly, the Carolingian period in the West.


59 Perhaps the most famous and influential twentieth century argument for, as it were, the Dionysian presence in Medieval thought as provoking the Reformation is that of Anders Nygren’s Agape and Eros / English tr. by P. S. Watson (London, 1953). See esp., in the latter edition, pp. 576–593, where Dionysius appears as the climax of a process of betrayl of the Christian Gospel of redeeming love which Luther’s rediscovery of Galatians would be called upon to rectify. Florovsky, Byzantine Ascesitical and Mystical Writers…, devotes his study precisely to a refutation of Nygren.
Thus with Martin Luther’s advent begins the great Western debate about Dionysius, fortified over the past century by Stiglmayr’s and Koch’s demonstration of his undoubted fondness for late Neoplatonism. Yet, in a sense, the debate in the West both then and now is much less over Dionysius himself than it is over how straight one takes one’s Augustine — pure, as in Luther, Calvin, or the Jansenists, or somewhat dilute and modified, as in the great Schoolmen. Put another way, and I confess a little mischievously, perhaps the debate is really over how one takes one’s Neoplatonism: in the strictly Augustinian mode, or the latter as tinctured by the Areopagite.60

It is, secondly, against this larger and strictly Western debate, which is still in progress, that we are to understand the matter of the «Christological correctives» supposedly added to Dionysius by St. Gregory or, earlier, by St. Maximus or, in the most recent scholarship, earlier still by the Scholia of John of Scythopolis.61 As I hope my close examination of a few selected texts from both SS Gregory and Dionysius has helped to show, these «correctives» are an illusion, and what I should like further to suggest is that this mirage is in fact the projection onto both saints of that same internal, Western debate. It is a kind of shimmer, reflecting off of Western hermeneutical spectacles and onto the pages of the Eastern writers. The fault, I hasten to add, does not therefore lie so much in the individual scholars, such as Professor Ritter, who is obviously a man of great learning and of immense good will, as it does in the lense itself through which they read the materials before them.62

Now, it is perfectly natural that people should look at things from the perspective, the standpoint, to which they are not only accustomed, but which in this instance often includes the shape of their fundamental commitment to the Christian faith. Where this becomes dangerously misleading, however, is in the assumption that their own perspective holds good across the entire

For Florovsky’s own analysis of, and difficulties with, Dionysius, see A. Golitzin, «A Contemplative and a Liturgist»: Father Georges Florovsky on the Corpus Dionysiacum // SVTQ 43.2 (1999) 131–161.

60 See again Rorem, Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary… 169–174, for a negative account of this «tincture». There are, on the other hand, obviously countless positive assessments of the Dionysian addition to Augustine’s inheritance among modern advocates of Thomistic philosophy and theology, such as, e.g., W. J. Hankey, Dionysian Hierarchy in Thomas Aquinas: Tradition and Transformation // Denys l’Aréopagite et sa postérité… 405–438.

61 See thus Rorem, Annotating the Areopagite… Esp. 77–82 for Scythopolis as «Christologically correcting» Dionysius.

62 I would read Professor Ritter, just as Rorem and — much more obviously — Nygren, as particularly susceptible to the problem of a distinctive hermeneutical lens, given their common background in the Lutheran Reformation. Rorem, indeed, is quite explicit on this score in his recent article, Martin Luther’s Christocentric Critique of Pseudo-Dionysian Spirituality // LuthQ 11 (1997) 291–307.
field of Christian literature. In the case of Eastern Christianity, it manifestly
does not, and to ignore that fact is inevitably to create confusion and false
alarms or, at the least, to miss essential elements in the writers under consid-
eration. Given also that patristic scholarship in its modern form is a Western
invention, and that it is the West which sets its agenda, it is all too easy for
Orthodox scholars taking part in the conversation — as take part in it I be-
lieve they must — to be fooled by these non-issues. This is clearly what
happened both to my own dear Fr. John Meyendorff and, to a lesser degree,
even to Fr. Georges Florovsky, as well as to many of our contemporaries.

My third and last point is, I hope, somewhat more positive. I would like to
take this occasion to register the suggestion that we might in future approach
of the matter of St. Gregory’s debate with Barlaam *et alii* with a slightly
different and I hope more fruitful set of questions than have hitherto largely
prevailed. We have seen that Palamas as <corrector> of the Areopagite is a
sterile point of departure. Questions of Dionysian «influence» or «non-influ-
ence» are likewise mostly useless, to the degree at least that they presuppose
fundamental differences between St. Dionysius and the rest of the Eastern
dogmatic and ascetico-mystical tradition. The fact is that there are none. There
do exist, to be sure, different points of emphasis between different sainted
authors over the centuries, and Dionysius is no exception to that rule (thus
the «eclesiastical» emphasis I noted above, which has been treated in such
amusingly different ways by Eastern bishops and monks), but the fundamen-
tal fact is that he is not an anomaly. He is instead part of the same stream
which feeds St. Gregory eight hundred years later. This is, to repeat myself,
the reason why the matter of his «influence» is so markedly more prominent
in the West than in the East. He does not stand out in the latter because,
exactly, he is not a foreign body, nor does it ever occur to Palamas to treat
him as such. The sooner we get over this occidental obsession with Dionysi-
us as the alien, the sooner we shall be able to ask some genuinely interesting
questions.

In the two articles to which I have several times referred over the course
of this essay, Fr. John Romanides led the way in asking the kind of questions
that I am interested in proposing. He noticed and underlined the fact that
Barlaam on occasion sounds very like the first four books of Augustine’s *De
trinitate*, and that the Calabrian then conformed his reading of Dionysius to
something very similar to the Bishop of Hippo’s thesis that the Old Testa-
ment theophanies were mere angelophanies, or even symbolophanies.63 Here,

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63 See above, n. 54. I should add that I am not entirely persuaded by Romanides
that it was actually Augustine himself from whom the Calabrian was drawing direct-
ly. Sinkiewicz’ analysis (above nn. 4 and 8) of Barlaam on the knowledge of God
seems to account adequately for the latter’s rejection of the theophanies as truly di-
vine manifestations.
of course, is also what St. Gregory must have found so profoundly strange about Barlaam’s version of the Areopagite. What Romanides did not notice, however, was what Professor Ritter inadvertently signaled and Flogaus pointed out at length, which is that St. Gregory himself, on picking up Planudes’ translation sometime after the debate with Barlaam, also found things to like in Augustine on the Trinity, and that he felt free to appropriate them. The points I should like to emphasize are, first, if both of these Greek theologians borrowed from the great Western Father; then, second, what they chose to emphasize were different parts of the same treatise. If Romanides is right about Barlaam (though I grant that his assertion of Augustine’s direct influence is debateable), then the Calabrian was attracted to Augustine’s opening polemic against the ancient reading of the theophanies. Palamas, on the other hand, liked and adopted the soul as imago trinitatis. To what degree, I wonder, might we then not see some of the Hesychast Controversy and its aftermath as, in certain respects at least, an episode in the assimilation of the great Father of the West to the theological Gestalt of the Christian East?

I gather, though I am no expert in this period, that the evidence for Greek-Latin contacts in medieval times, and particularly following the Fourth Crusade, is very considerable and steadily increasing. Granted, the trauma of 1204 was scarcely the best way to introduce two different peoples and theological cultures, but it is undeniable that the Latin presence was thereafter virtually ubiquitous throughout the former imperial territories, and with that presence came cultural contact and exchange. Maximus Planudes’ translation of Augustine was a part of that conversation, as were the later translations of Thomas Aquinas by the Kydones brothers. There may then be the possibility of reading the Hesychast Controversy as involved in this exchange, now underway within the Orthodox community itself, and dealing — inter alia — with the question of how to assimilate Augustine. We would then be confronted with a fascinating analogue to the incorporation of Dionysius within the edifice of Western Christian thought a century and a half earlier. As with Dionysius in the West, the appropriation of Augustine in the East was and remains not without controversy. Here Professor Flogaus in particular has done us a great service. Tracing the lines of the assimilation of Augustine, its bumps and its triumphs, seems to me much more promising and fruitful a project than a great deal of what has been written to date about East-West issues with respect to Dionysius, the Hesychast Controversy, etc. Here, too, I think, we find an issue of more than merely academic interest, for such a project strikes me as opening up paths toward a genuine appreciation of the differences obtaining between the two great Christian cultures. Only when these are properly understood and digested, will we then be able to address seriously and realistically the question and hope of their reconciliation.
ABSTRACT

Citations of the Corpus Dionysiacum are exceedingly frequent in the works of Gregory Palamas. Much, indeed, of the latter’s Triads in Defense of the Holy Hesychasts is devoted to interpretation of the Areopagite, most often in counter argument to the reading of Dionysius insisted on by Palamas’ opponent throughout the Triads, Barlaam the Calabrian. In his seminal work on St. Gregory, the late Father John Meyendorff was clearly troubled by this Dionysian ubiquity in the Doctor of Hesychasm, particularly since Meyendorff accepted the prevailing scholarly view of Dionysius as, at best, a dubious Christian. In response to this ‘problem’, Meyendorff insisted that Gregory supplied a ‘Christological corrective’ to the Areopagite, i.e., diluted or even eliminated the latter’s notion of hierarchy as mediated knowledge in favor of the assertion of Christ’s immediate availability to the believer. Palamas thus re-interprets Dionysius, baptizes him, as it were. Throughout his studies, Meyendorff effectively equates the proper reading of the Dionysian corpus with Barlaam’s interpretation. This article argues that, to the contrary, Gregory’s was a much better reading of the Areopagite than that of either Barlaam or of more modern scholars, and that the key to his insight lies in the ascetical and mystical tradition of the Christian East common to both. Certain key passages from the Triads singled out recently by Professor Adolf Ritter as proving Meyendorf’s thesis are taken up in the second section of the article. Read closely, and with an eye on both prior Christian ascetical literature and the latter’s own roots in the ancient apocalypses, the passages in question, and the Dionysian texts on which they are based, reveal a common understanding. The article then turns to a brief analysis of Dionysius himself, particularly to his notion of hierarchy and its relation to ascetical tradition as revealed especially in the eighth epistle of the corpus. The ‘Christological correctives’ emerges in sum as a scholarly construct without serious relation to the texts in question.