

Now allow me to return to the text which Fr. Georges singled out as particularly problematical and used to summarize the inadequacy of Dionysius' Christology, the third "Epistle" of the *corpus* addressed to the monk, Gaius. I shall cite the Epistle in full and ask the reader to keep in mind both the "suddenly" I referred to just above, and the repetitions of "hidden" we saw in the second passage from "Macarius":

"Suddenly" means that which is brought out of the hitherto invisible and beyond hope into the manifest. And I think that here the theology [scripture] is suggesting the philanthropy of Christ. The super-essential has proceeded out of its hiddenness [*kryphiotes*] to become manifest to us by becoming a human being. But he is also hidden [*kryphios*], both after the manifestation and, to speak more divinely, even within it. For this is the hidden [*kryphion*] of Jesus, and neither by reason nor by intellect can His mystery [*mysterion*] be brought forth, but instead even when spoken it remains ineffable [*arreton*] and when conceived, unknowable [*agnoston*].⁵⁹

In reflecting upon this text, and in answer to Fr. Georges, we might first turn to a very similar "vagueness" and reluctance to define the mystery of Christ in the very greatest of fourth century Syriac writers, Ephrem Syrus. The latter is altogether allergic to exact, philosophically based definitions of Christ and Trinity.⁶⁰ Interestingly enough, Ephrem was later criticized for his lack of precision by an exact contemporary of the *Areopagitica*,

in degree, if not in kind, from His presence in the other symbols of scripture and liturgy. See also A. Louth, "Pagan Theurgy and Christian Sacramentalism," *Journal of Theological Studies* 37 (1986) 432-438, as well as my discussion in "Liturgy and Mysticism: The Experience of God in Orthodox Christianity," *Pro Ecclesia* Spring (1999) 52-57.

59 *Epistle* 3 1069B (Heil/Ritter 159).

60 See S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye* (Cistercian Studies 124) (Kalamazoo, rev. ed., 1992), 26-27 and 43. In more detail, see E. Beck, *Die Theologie des hl. Ephraem* (Rome, 1949), 62-80.

Philoxenus of Mabboug, who complained that the great Syrian poet's ambiguities had led to his being put into the service of Nestorians and Chalcedonians, as well as the bishop of Mabboug's own non-Chalcedonian, "monophysite" party.⁶¹ Something very similar appears to have at work in the earliest reception and debate over Dionysius: all the christological parties claim him, or else see in him their opponents' "heresies."⁶² In any case, some of Ephrem's

- 61 See Philoxenus, *Lettre aux moines de Senoun*, ed. and trans. A de Halleux, *CSCO* 232/Scrp.Syr.99, 40ff, esp.42:7ff and 45:14ff, and *CSCO* 231/Scrp.Syr.98, 51:6ff and 55:5ff for the Syriac. Philoxenus' contemporary, Jacob of Serug (d.521), was also relatively uninterested in the christological debates. See Brock, *Spirituality in the Syriac Tradition*, 26. It is also perhaps of note that both Jacob and Philoxenus share certain other points of contact with Dionysius. Jacob's hymn on the *myron* betrays evidence of Dionysius' *EH* IV, thus W. Strothmann's *Das Sakrament der Myron-Weihe* (Wiesbaden, 1978), esp. xxiii-lvii, seeks to explain the Dionysian pseudonym as an effort to "apostolize" the Syrian preoccupation with the *myron* and its consecration. Philoxenus, on the other hand, is on record as rebuking Stephen bar Sudaili, the probable author of the strange *Book of the Holy Hierotheos* which, allowing for an admittedly debatable text, seems to attempt a weird, pantheistic marriage between Evagrius and the *Corpus Areopagiticum*. For this work, see F.S. Marsh, *The Book which is called the Book of the Holy Hierotheos* (London, 1927), and for Philoxenus' changing attitude toward Evagrius, Paul Harb, "L'attitude de Philoxène de Mabboug a l'égard de la spiritualité savante d'Évagre le pontique," in *In Memoriam Gabriel Koury-Sarkis (Parole d'Orient 1969)*, 135-155. More interesting still, Philoxenus criticizes Evagrius in much the same way that I would read Dionysius as doing. He concentrates particularly on Evagrius' eschatology (the role of the body) and his use of *kinesis* (motion, change)—see Harb, 149 and 155.
- 62 John's references to contemporary heresies are many. Among those whom he reads Dionysius as confuting "by anticipation" are: the "Akephaloi" (57C, 72A, 149A, 196D, 197C, 209D, 224A, 229C, 397A), Apollinaris (85C, 144D, 149A, 152A, 157B, 176C, 196D, 216B, 536BC), Arius (192C, 209D, 372D, 536B), Eunomius (192C, 209B, 372D), Eutyches (72AB, 149A, 216B), Evagrius (76D-77A, 172A [in reference to the Resurrection of the body], 252A, 372A), Manicheans (149A, 176A, 181C, 272D, 285B, 288C, 349A, 397C, 545C, 557B), Messalians (169D-172A, 557B), Nestorius (57C, 72AB, 126B, 132B, 149A, 181C, 196D, 197C, 209D, 216B, 224A, 225D, 229C, 536BC), and Origen (20CD, 65D [on the Resurrection], 172BC [again on the Resurrection], 173CD, 176A, 545C [on defamation of the body], 549B). The many references to figures and ideas involved in the christological controversies of the time are understandable. John (and the other scholiasts—I have not attempted to distinguish them here) are concerned to defend Dionysius against charges that he is in error on this score (20AB), and to claim him for the Chalcedonian side. But the frequent references to Origen, Evagrius,

expressions quite recall the mysterious Areopagite, in particular the Syriac writer's emphasis on the Incarnate Word's simultaneous hiddenness and revelation (*kasyuto* and *galyuto*).⁶³ This emphasis comes particularly to the fore in Ephrem's *Rhythms* against the heretics (i.e., the Eunomians) who "pry" into the divine mysteries with the apparatus of Greek philosophy. God's "nature," says Ephrem in *Rhythm* 33, "is hidden, yet revealed, though it is entirely hidden."⁶⁴ In a similar vein he refers, in respect to Christ,

Manichees, and the two to Messalians are suggestive of other concerns. For Dionysius as perhaps involved in the Evagrian controversy, see D.B. Evans, "Leontius of Byzantium and Dionysius the Areopagite," *Byzantine Studies* 7 (1980) 1-34. For a more up to date discussion of John's sources and engagement in controversy, see P. Rorem, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus: Annotating the Areopagite* (Oxford, 1998), 46-98.

63 See Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 26-29. A study on Dionysius' use of *kryphios/kryphiotēs* might prove of interest in further demonstrating the link between him and Ephrem on the issue of the divine names that Brock (147) thinks might be present. The Syrian father is one of the few missing from the impressive list of patristic sources that the Scholiast(s) cites, predominantly, though, the Cappadocians—eighteen (or twenty-four) times at rough count. Basil leads with eight, Nazianzus with six (or twelve if one counts Pachymeres' references), and Nyssa trails with four citations. Irenaeus, interestingly, turns up six times. The breakdown is as follows: Basil in 14A, 40B, 44C [indirect], 108B, 129BC (and 420A), 245D (and 249A), 309C, 413A; Nazianzus in 261B, 404B, 413A, 428D, 533C, 557D; Nyssa in 149B (citing his *Catechesis*), 221A (citing the *Contra Eunomium*), 404B, and 413A. Irenaeus shows up in 176D (his millenarianism), 337D, 377B, 537A, 545C, and 573D. Other patristic authorities, aside from Origen (nine times), include Clement (228A, 380A, 421C, and 573D—the first three citing *Stromateis* V), Hippolytus (337D, 545C, and 556CD—the last to the *Apostolic Tradition*), and Philo (241A and 528A). Weighing in at one reference apiece are the *Apostolic Constitutions* (17C), Athanasius (568A), Chrysostom (340D), Didymus (104A), Dionysius of Alexandria (60C), Ignatius (264B), Justin (185A), Methodius of Olympus (176C—vs. Origen on the Resurrection), Papias (176C), Polycarp (537A), *Shepherd of Hermas* (244C), and Theodore of Mopsuestia (561C). Macarius only appears once, and that not a direct reference, in 353D and maybe 356A, but then there may have been no desire, as we noted above, to bring yet another controversial figure into the arena. This patristic library and its relative distribution of citations might be taken as providing some insight into Dionysius' own thinking (though it is not treated as doing so in Rorem's *Annotating the Areopagite*, above n.62).

64 *Rhythm* 33,1. *Select Works of St. Ephrem the Syrian*, trans. J.B. Morris (Oxford, 1847), 211. Syriac in *CSCO* 154/Scrp.Syr.73, 110:13-14.

to veils and light in *Rhythm 26*:

Gaze then on him [and see] that it was he, and yet was not he, for the Real One veiled himself with an image: his fullness was found within it. His brightness was covered over with our form.⁶⁵

We find all three themes, veils, light, and hiddenness, combined with a reference to the Transfiguration in *Rhythm 7*:

He came down and veiled his face with a veil of flesh. . . . He gleamed a little on the mountain; trembling, quivering, and aghast were those three whom the Apostle [Paul] accounted pillars. He granted them a sight of his hidden glory commensurate with their strength.⁶⁶

Finally, there is the following refrain from the *Hymns on the Nativity*, number 3: "Blessed is he who made our body a tabernacle for his hiddenness."⁶⁷

"Tabernacle" brings us back to the theme we noted above in connection with the *Macarian Homilies* and elsewhere: the visible church and temple of the heart. I feel that it is exactly this same notion which lies behind the thinking of Dionysius' problematical Epistle 3. The key to the Epistle is the scriptural passage, Mal 3:1, which Dionysius' earliest commentator, John of Scythopolis, tells us that the Areopagite is seeking to explain.⁶⁸ The passage, according to the RSV, says: "And suddenly the Lord whom you seek will come into his temple, and the angel of great counsel, whom you desire." "Temple," I submit, has a greater resonance for Dionysius than purely and simply the "temple" of Christ's body and the historical event of the Incarnation. He also, surely, intends his readers to understand that he is talking about both the manifestation of

65 *Rhythm 26,6*. Morris 189, Syr. 92:9-12.

66 *Rhythm 7,2*. Morris 134, Syr. 32:8-18.

67 *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns*, trans. K. McVey (N.Y., 1989), 84. Syriac in CSCO/Scrp. Syr.

68 PG 532A, and see my article: "The Mysticism of Dionysius Areopagita: Platonist or Christian?" *Mystics Quarterly* XIX,3 (1993) 108-109, as well as *Et introibo*, 222-229.

Christ on the Church's altar behind the sanctuary veils (the latter term occurs with some frequency in the *corpus*⁶⁹), preeminently at the Eucharist, *and* the appearance of the Lord within the "temple" of the believer's *nous* or heart.

Dionysius' use of "suddenly" has occasioned some scholarly literature, notably by W. Beierwaltes and R. Mortley,⁷⁰ who have argued that it represents a continuation of the *corpus*' use of Platonic and Neoplatonic literature, especially the *Parmenides* and its later commentators.⁷¹ I have no fundamental quarrel with their position. Dionysius' use of Plato's *exaiphnes* fits, indeed, rather nicely into what I am trying to argue here, which is that, for the Areopagite, Christ's "manifestation" is a present happening as well as an historical event. The loci for this contemporary theophany are the two "altars" of the (earthly) Church and the inner man. On those two altars the gulf between eternity and time, everlasting repose (*stasis*) and ever-changing motion (*kinesis*), is, as in the *Parmenides*, "suddenly" bridged by, for Dionysius, the presence of Jesus. In response to Beierwaltes and Mortley, though, I think we also ought to note four important uses of *exaiphnes* in the New Testament texts. In Acts 9:3 and 22:6, it is part of the description of Christ's appearance to Paul on the road to Damascus. The

69 On the frequency of *parapetasma* (surely a reference to the *katapetasma* of Hebrews, esp. 10:20, the "veil" of Christ's flesh), see Van den Daehle, *Indices Pseudo-Dionysiani* (Louvain, 1941), 111.

70 W. Beierwaltes, "Exaiphnes, oder die Paradoxie des Augenblicks," *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* LXXIV (1966/67) 271-283, and R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence* vol.II (Bonn, 1986), 236-237.

71 *Parmenides* 156de. The term appears on two other notable occasions in Plato's *corpus*. In *Epistle* VII, 341cd (alluded to by Dionysius in *CH* XV,2 329C [Heil/Ritter 52:23-53:1]), the aim of philosophy appears "suddenly" as "light from fire," and in *Symposium* 210c, the "suddenly" marks the peak and goal of the ascent of *eros*, the vision of beauty itself. Plotinus associates it with the "sudden" vision or epiphany of the One in light—see *Enneads* V,3,17; 5,7; and VI,7,36. In view of the New Testament associations I list below, it is surprising Plotinus' texts have not been mentioned more often in the scholarship, though Mortley does touch on them. See also note 48 above for Guillaumont's analysis of the same passages from the *Enneads* in Evagrius.

apostle whom Dionysius claims as his master is blinded by a “sudden” theophany of light. In Luke 2:13, the word is linked with the manifestation of the angels to the shepherds in the field near Bethlehem at the moment of Christ’s birth, and in Mark 13:36, it appears in connection with the *parousia*. “Suddenly,” therefore, has something of the air of a *terminus technicus* in the scriptural texts as well. It is linked, variously, with Christ, light, the angels, and the eschaton.⁷² The latter themes seem to me pretty much to embrace the whole Dionysian cosmos, and all of them, again, find a place in my reading of Epistle 3. The “suddenly,” in short, is a “hook word.” Through a broad spectrum of associations, it pulls together the various themes of the *corpus* and unites them in reference to the unique mystery, the “sacrament” of Jesus.

By way of amplification, let me turn once more to Ephrem. To my knowledge so far (and my own studies of Ephrem have just begun), he uses the Syriac equivalent of *exaiphnes*, *men shel* (or *men shelyah*) twice to bridge the gap between the divine silence or secrecy and God’s manifestation. In Hymn 5, strophe 11 of the *Hymns on Paradise*, the silence in the middle of the garden, there where the *Shenkhinah* dwells hidden, is broken “suddenly” by the angelic liturgy, the “thrice-holy” of Isaiah 6.⁷³ In Hymn 15, strophe 4 of the same collection, “suddenly” is tied specifically to the Eucharist. The subject of the passage is the two disciples’ recognition of the Risen Christ at Emmaus in Luke 24:31. Ephrem writes:

When the disciples’ eyes / were held closed,
Bread, too, was the key / whereby their eyes were
opened

72 I have made these points, together with what follows on Ephrem, in a paper delivered at the North American Patristics Society at Loyola, Chicago, in June 1993, and hope to explore the matter in a future, expanded version for publication.

73 For English, see *Ephrem of Syria: Hymns on Paradise*, trans. S. Brock (Crestwood, N.Y., 1990), 106. Syriac in *CSCO* 174/Scrp.Syr.78, 18:6-11 (*men shelyah* on line 7). For a third use of *men shel* in Ephrem, see his *de nat* 6.7, *CSCO* 186.52 (ET: K. McVey, trans., *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns* [N.Y., 1989], p.112): Christ is the “star of light that shone forth suddenly,” i.e., the Incarnation, and note the theme of light.

To recognize the Omniscient. / Saddened [or dark-
ened] eyes beheld
A vision of joy / and were suddenly filled with happi-
ness.⁷⁴

Ephrem here on the Eucharist brings us back to Dionysius. In the opening section of the latter's chapter on this sacrament in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, he expresses a conviction altogether similar to the great poet's, and I think it certain that we are also listening to the voice of his own experience. After referring to the Eucharist as the "initiation of initiations," Dionysius also goes on to say of Baptism that:

It was this [sacrament] which first gave me to see and,
through its ruling light, to be led up in light to the vision
[*epopteia*] of the other sacred things.⁷⁵

We might recall as well the passage cited above from *EH* IV.3.12: the altar as Christ in Whom we become "holocaust" and thus discover our "access" to God. For both Ephrem and Dionysius the sacraments are the approach and the context of our knowledge of God, the light available to us in this life. They are the key which unlocks the door to the recognition of God's presence in Christ.

Now let us return to the treatise on the *Mystical Theology*, in particular to Moses' ascent up Sinai in I, 3, and to the famous fifth chapter which concludes the document with a series of negations that, in the view of many modern Dionysian interpreters, serve to

74 Brock 183, Syriac 63:3-8 (*men shelyah* on line 8). For purposes of this paper I have altered Brock's "instantly" to "suddenly." The importance of the "sudden" for Ephrem in these passages was brought to my attention in an article by M. Schmidt, "Alttestamentliche Typologien in den Paradieshymnen von Ephraem," in *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie*, ed. M. Schmidt (Regensburg, 1981), esp. 64-65, where Schmidt also draws attention to parallel themes in the ordering of believers—hierarchy, in short—between Ephrem and Dionysius in their respective treatments of the Sinai theophany (see also 78). She comes back to the parallelism between Dionysius and Ephrem in "Die Augensymbolik bei Ephraem und Parallelen in der deutschen Mystik," *Paradeigmata*, ed. F. Link (Berlin, 1989), esp. 72-73. Ephrem's is the same negative theology, she declares, as Dionysius' in the *MT*.

75 *EH* III,1 425AB (Heil/Ritter 80:2-4).

reveal his true colors by burning away the “thin veneer” of his Christianity in order to reveal beneath the Neoplatonic bedrock of “a metaphysics of the first principle.”⁷⁶ What is Dionysius doing here? I suggest that, with Moses’ ascent, he is employing an image intended to depict, simultaneously, the church at worship and the entry of the soul into the sanctuary of the heart. There, before that double altar, one is led to encounter with the one mystery, Christ, who “when spoken remains ineffable, and when conceived, unknowable.” Light and dark, as he declares in his fifth “Epistle,” are one and the same in God.⁷⁷ Dazzling brilliance and divinity beyond comprehension are also, given its New Testament resonances, the very characteristics of the “suddenly.” Words fail; concepts drop away; metaphors explode. As with that series of negations at the end of *Mystical Theology* V, one is left confronting theophany in silence. The latter chapter is also the end of the ascent begun in the treatise on the *Celestial Hierarchy*. The whole *Corpus Dionysiacum*, from the latter treatise through the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* and *Divine Names*, and concluding in the *Mystical Theology*, might therefore be summed up in the phrase, borrowed from the Psalms, which opened the old Latin Mass: *Et introibo ad altare dei*.

If there is truth in my reconstruction of Dionysius here, it follows that some of Fr. Georges’ difficulties with him are alleviated and the case against Nygren strengthened. Given that Syrian connection I stressed above, the Areopagite is the representative of an already extant and established tradition, a way of talking about the relationship between the individual Christian soul and the worshipping community which is over a century old at the time of the *corpus*’ composition. And, just as there has never been a question raised about “Macarius” Christian credentials, and I mean

76 Vanneste, *Mystère*, 182. Suggested again, most recently, by Rorem in *Commentary*, e.g., 171: Dionysius’ commitment “to a timeless and ahistorical motion of procession and return.” See my remarks on the eschatological question in note 44 above.

77 *Epistle* V 1073 A (Heil/Ritter 162).

specifically the fact that Christ is indeed central for him, then I think it fair to say that the pseudonymous Dionysius’ Jesus is also, without quibble, the center and focal point of the *Areopagitica*. He is the altar and presence around whom the *corpus* turns. Neither would I fault Fr. Georges for mis-reading him here, nor really the five generations of scholars since Stiglmayr and Koch. What we find in the Dionysian controversy of the past century is, in effect, something amusingly analogous to the fuss among Greek-speaking bishops that, according to C. Stewart, surrounded the *Macarian Homilies* for nearly a century.⁷⁸ Dionysius

78 Stewart, “Working,” 12-69 on the Messalian controversy, esp. 53-69. Perhaps this controversy supplies a certain key to Dionysius’ own motivations. It is clear from Murray’s remarks on the *Liber Graduum*, *Symbols* 263, that the fourth century writer has a slightly embattled air about his account of the church. If Macarius continued to be controversial throughout the fifth century, while we know that the name of Evagrius was not in good odor from the opening years of the century, then Dionysius, as indebted to both of them and an admirer of the later pagan Neoplatonists in addition, may well have wished to cloak his thinking with the mantle of apostolicity. Given in addition the real perils awaiting anyone venturing into the christological quarrels of the period—a supercharged atmosphere where people were simply itching to discover heresies—and given that virtually the only Christian sources showing up in his writings who had everyone’s approval were the Cappadocians (note 63 above—even Irenaeus was problematical), it is difficult for me at least to blame him. Regarding his fondness for Neoplatonist theurgy, and particularly for his fellow Syrian, Iamblichus, see J.R. Rist, “Pseudo-Dionysius, Neoplatonism, and the weakness of the soul,” *Neoplatonism from Athens to Chartres*, ed. H.J. Westra (Leiden, 1992), 135-161. Rist makes the interesting suggestion that Dionysius offers his Neoplatonist brethren a surer and more certain theurgy than that which they can find in the *Chaldean Oracles*: the Christian liturgy, a product of God’s revelation, given in order to shore up the soul that, of itself, is too weak to attain to the good. Dionysius thus replies to the insecurity of Iamblichian theurgy, an insecurity deriving from uncertainty over its divine source. Christianity, on the other hand, has the tradition of a definitive revelation, and its is therefore the divinely willed path of ascent. This is a useful thesis. Rist, however, like virtually all modern commentators of the *Areopagitica*, does not note the importance of a related theme that could in fact serve to strengthen his argument: the soul as microcosm reflecting the macrocosm, a commonplace in Neoplatonism (see S. Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena* [Leiden, 1978], 27-120). Moreover, the idea already had its Christian counterpart in, as argued above, Evagrius, the *Liber Graduum*, and Macarius. The “weakness of the soul” that Rist observes in Iamblichus and his theurgic successors is therefore “braced” by the structures, given in Christ, of the Church’s

is simply expressing a vision of Christianity whose fundamental idiom, that notion of the soul as “little church,” is unfamiliar to his modern readers. As with “Macarius” and much about the Messalian muddle, Dionysius, too, may have been in part the victim of a case of cross-cultural miscommunication. The Areopagite’s undoubted fondness for late Neoplatonism muddied the waters still further, obscuring his basic debt to an image rooted in the ascetical environment of Syriac Christianity. In homage, then, to Fr. Georges’ lifelong emphasis on rigorous intellectual endeavor, perhaps we can say that it was simply more scholarship that was needed in order to solve what earlier efforts could not. In the process, his own case in the volume under consideration, as well as his profound faith in the fundamental truth of the Tradition, have in sum been vindicated. Mere repetition, as I gather he was fond of repeating, does not suffice. One must acquire the “mind of the fathers,” in which category—and here I am echoing the view of a number of my acquaintances on Mt. Athos—we might do well to include Fr. Georges himself.

By way of an afterword, stimulated by my reference just now to mountains and monks, let me turn once more to the question he raises at the beginning of his chapter on Dionysius. How was this man accepted, as he was fairly quickly, with so little fuss, or at least with less than seems to have accompanied even “Macarius”? I think that both the Areopagite and the author of the Homilies were received, and received pretty much “as is” (in spite, in the latter’s case, of some loud complaints from certain bishops), because their central metaphor, the altar of the soul, was immediately perceived and endorsed as such by, in particular, the monastic

worship. These structures reveal the soul’s vocation and hope, as well as its true being: the presence within it and calling of the heavenly liturgy. This is exactly the burden of the *Liber’s* twelfth *Mimra* and Macarius’ *Homily* 52, and Dionysius is thus part of a Christian continuum responding to more or less the same concerns that motivated Iamblichus, and beginning in the same period (fourth century). That all four of these writers also come from the same region, Syria-Palestine, is further suggestive of a generally common background.

community. I have little at present to offer by way of support for this assertion, other than the clear use to which both the *Corpus Dionysiacum* and the *Macarian Homilies* are put by, for example, such monastic writers as Maximus Confessor in the seventh century and Symeon the New Theologian in the eleventh. Symeon's fourteenth *Ethical Discourse* is an extended paraphrase of *Celestial Hierarchy* I, 3, and in just the sense that I have explained the latter text above,⁷⁹ while Maximus' *Mystagogy* is again devoted to the same theme, the Church and soul as images of each other.⁸⁰ Perhaps, though, we might look to an artifact more proximate to Dionysius' own time than either Symeon or Maximus. I have in mind the famous mosaic of the Transfiguration adorning the apse of the basilica which Justinian built for St. Catherine's monastery at Sinai. Both the church and the mosaic date to sometime toward the end of that emperor's reign, with the image perhaps a little later still.⁸¹ What strikes me about the mosaic, the prototype for all subsequent Byzantine iconography of the Transfiguration, is first of all the juxtaposition of several elements, all of which feature importantly in the *Corpus Dionysiacum*: Mt. Sinai itself (the *MT*), the Transfiguration (*DN* I, 4—and also, perhaps, Epistles 3 and 5), light (the subject of the image and of the *corpus*), and the altar

79 See *Traité théologique et éthique* II (ed. J. Darrouzès), *Sources chrétiennes* 129, 422-443, esp. 428:93-432:154 and 434:183-438:223, and my discussion in "Hierarchy versus Anarchy? Dionysius Areopagita, Symeon the New Theologian, Nicetas Stethatos, and their Common Roots in Ascetical Tradition," *SVTQ* 38.2 (1994) 142-165.

80 For the Church, its building and the order of the service, as a series of icons—of God, the world, the human being, and the soul—see *Mystagogy*, PG 91: 664D-688B. Maximus is usually presented as a very different animal from Dionysius, e.g., our note 35 above. I would hold that, to the contrary, he is a much better interpreter of the Areopagite's intentions than the latter's modern commentators.

81 For the dating of the Sinai mosaic to just after Justinian's reign, ca. 566, see V. Benesevic, "Sur la date de la mosaïque de la Transfiguration au Mont Sinai," *Byzantion* 1 (1924) 145-172. For a splendid study along the lines I propose in the following, only with more detail and quite intense focus on the Dionysian background to this image, see Jas Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer* (Cambridge, 1995), 94-125.

(thus the *CH* and *EH*). Secondly, there is the mosaic itself. Christ is pictured robed in brilliant white with rays of the same shooting out from his person and striking the three, stunned disciples. Here I recall the “ray” imagery so important to the *corpus*, to which Fr. Georges draws especial attention.⁸² Immediately around Christ, however, we find a deep blue mandorla which, at its outer edges, is banded in shades of progressively lighter hue as one moves away from the center until the outermost ring is the same shade of white as the rays. I cannot help but think of the “ray of dazzling darkness” of *MT* I, 1, of the darkness impenetrable of divinity stressed in Epistle 1, the gift of light in Epistle 2, and Epistle 3’s blending of both the foregoing: Christ is “manifestation” which is also and at once “ineffable” and “unknowable.”⁸³ The whole image, in short, strikes me as an illustration of the “suddenly,” wherein virtually the whole message of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* is concentrated. Thus here, at Sinai the original mountain of theophany and the longtime haunt of Christian ascetics exploring the mysteries of the heart, one enters the church and discovers above its altar, Tabor, and the unsearchable glory of the Word made flesh who, to quote from Epistle 4 of the Dionysian *corpus*, “has granted us [as a polity] a new, theandric activity.”⁸⁴ The more one progresses into this mystery, as into the increasing darkness of Christ’s mandorla, the more unsearchable, the greater and more profound its depths. The monks who commissioned that image, I believe, understood Dionysius very well, indeed, as did their successors down through Maximus, the

82 *Ascetic and Spiritual Fathers*, 213.

83 For the “dark ray,” see *MT* 1000A (Heil/Ritter 142:10); also *Epistle* 1 1065A (156), 2 1068A-9A (158), and 3 1069B (159).

84 *Epistle* 4 1072C (Heil/Ritter 161:9-10). Aside from all the heat generated by the famous *theandrike energeia*, the key term here seems to me to be the participle, *pepoliteuomenos*, with its suggestion of the *politeia* referred to often in the *Homily* from Macarius quoted above, e.g., Berthold 141:3ff (for *energeia*, see Berthold’s “Wortregister,” 264). As a deponent verb, *politeuomai* can mean “grant” or “administer,” and surely the *politeia* that Dionysius sees Christ granting or administering to us (*hemin*) is the new “city” of the Church, a “divine-human” way of life.

Damascene, Symeon, Gregory of Sinai,⁸⁵ and the fourteenth-century hesychasts led to battle for the true interpretation of the *Areopagitica* by Gregory Palamas.⁸⁶

85 For Gregory of Sinai's echo of Dionysian language, and in a context matching our discussion here, see his *Chapters* 111, 112, and especially 43 in *Philokalia ton neptikon pateron*, vol. IV (Athens, rep.1961), 37 and 51.

86 For Gregory Palamas as an interpreter of the *Areopagitica* and in criticism of J. Meyendorff's reading of Palamas as reinterpreting Dionysius via a “christological corrective,” see J. Romanides, “Notes on the Palamite Controversy and Related Topics,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* IX (1963/64), 225-270, and esp. 250-262.