



**SOFIA UNIVERSITY “ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI”**

**FACULTY OF THEOLOGY**

**DEPARTMENT: SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY**

---

Professional direction “2.4. Religion and Theology”

**Dimitar Bozhidarov Bogdanov**

**Metaphysics of Light in the Corpus Areopagiticum**

**ABSTRACT of the DISSERTATION**

for awarding the educational and scientific degree of *doctor*

Scientific supervisor: prof. Dr. Ivan Vasilev Christov

Sofia, 2024

## CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b> .....	3
1. General characteristic of the dissertation research .....	3
2. Relevance of the topic for science .....	3
3. Purpose of the study .....	4
4. Tasks of the research .....	5
5. Object and subject of the research .....	6
6. Hypothesis (main idea of the dissertation) .....	6
7. Research methods .....	9
8. State of research on the topic .....	10
9. Introductory information on Pseudo-Dionysius and the Corpus Areopagiticum	15
<b>Chapter I.</b> Neoplatonic philosophical premises for the Christian theology of light in the treatises of the Corpus Areopagiticum .....	19
<b>Chapter II.</b> The Christian theology of light in the Corpus Areopagiticum. Metaphysics of light and descent of God .....	22
<b>Chapter III.</b> The Areopagite mystical theology of light. Mysticism of light and ascent to God .....	30
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	33
<b>Self-assessment of scientific contributions</b> .....	35
<b>Dissertation-related publications</b> .....	36

## Introduction

### General characteristic of the dissertation research

Structurally, the dissertation consists of the following parts: table of contents, preface, list of abbreviations, introduction, three chapters, conclusion, and bibliography. The volume of the dissertation is **329 standard computer pages** and is distributed among its parts as follows: table of contents: 2 pages, preface: 1 page, list of abbreviations: 2 pages, introduction: 38 pages (12%), chapter I: 75 pages (23%), chapter II: 120 pages (36%), chapter III: 71 pages (22%), conclusion: 4 pages (1%), declaration of authenticity of the text: 1 page, bibliography: 14 pages (4 % of the total volume of the document). From the given data, it is clear that I did not comply with the requirement that the main structural units in the scientific work – the three chapters, should have evenly distributed proportions (weight coefficients) among themselves, due to the greater meaningful weight of the Christian metaphysics of light than the Neoplatonic one and mysticism of the light. In the bibliography, I have used and attached **162 titles** (62 sources and 100 studies). There are **1088 footnotes** in the dissertation, of which 976 are quotations and borrowed ideas or terms from the sources indicated in the bibliography, and 112 are author's explanatory notes. I have attached 1 table in the introduction. There are no other applications.

### Relevance of the topic for science

The topicality of the dissertation research characterizes the current state of research on the topic, the subject of the dissertation, and the need to consider the topical issue. The problem I mentioned is scientific and relevant both for the Faculty of Theology and for Sofia University as a whole, as it has not been researched. The theological character of the subject consists in revealing the meaning of light (τὸ φῶς): (1) where it comes from and how it proceeds from the Deity, which will show its metaphysical aspect; and (2) what is its spiritual aspect as 1) purifying, 2) enlightening, shining, and 3) perfecting, adoring grace of God. These are actually the three degrees of the ascent of the soul to God under Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. Today's topicality of the subject arises from the fact that there are deified men in all ages and centuries of human history, as well as in all latitudes of the globe, but it is especially important to note that the deification of man, his becoming a god by grace is a joint action (synergy) of God's grace (light) and human active and free volitional expression, and does not happen in substance,

as it is in philosophical mysticism throughout Antiquity, and even in Western theology to this day (equating God's essence, energy and will and denying the difference between them<sup>1</sup>), but in energy – man by nature always remains a man, he cannot and does not accept the divine nature in himself, but lives in God's energy (light, love and grace). Areopagite desubstantiated this process.

**The purpose of the research** is to illuminate the following questions:

1) To reveal how the transition of the One into the multiplicity evolved from the pagan philosophical aspect to the Christian theological aspect and how the transition itself takes place: in essence or in energy, that is, does the procession of light from the One represent an emanation of only energy or both energy and essence? According to the Areopagite, the procession of the Good in the multiplicity of the world takes place by will and energy, and not by substance and energy (as in Neoplatonism) – this has to do with the ancient philosophical non-distinction between created and uncreated (denial of creation) and with the Christian retention of this essential difference, and hence the rejection of the pantheism of the pagan Hellenic philosophy; and in accordance with the fact that the union of man with God takes place only in energy – in the light of God, and not in substance and energy, as in Neoplatonism.

2) To show how Pseudo-Dionysius performs a synthesis between the Christian world-view and Neoplatonic metaphysics. Areopagite uses philosophical expressions from his contemporary philosophy – Neoplatonism, therefore he borrows elements from Proclus' philosophy, but does not confirm it, but only uses his language, his schemes of thinking, terms of the mystery cult, but not his concepts; Proclus was, to say the least, a staunch opponent of Christianity. In the Hellenistic philosophical formulations, Pseudo-Dionysius put a new Christian content and a new mystical experience<sup>2</sup>, because “Christianity is not a school of philosophy that dwells on abstract concepts, but above all is communion with the living God”<sup>3</sup>. That is why he assimilated Neoplatonism terminologically, but not conceptually, as he meaningfully transformed it into a Christian one, and in this transformation completely removed its meaningful side; and from a pagan philosophical system he built it into his Christian theological system, effecting

---

<sup>1</sup> Риболов, С. Възвръщане към мистичния опит на отците. Учението за нетварните божествени енергии в гръцкото богословие на XX век. София: Синодално издателство, 2014, с. 38, 41–45; Целенгидис, Д. Онтологията на обожавашата благодат. В: Риболов, С. Възвръщане към мистичния опит на отците. Учението за нетварните божествени енергии в гръцкото богословие на XX век. София, 2014, с. 97, 99 (бел. 61)

<sup>2</sup> Флоровски, Г. Източните отци от V до VIII век. София: Тавор, 1992, с. 137

<sup>3</sup> Лоски, В. Очерк върху мистическото богословие на Източната Църква. София: Омофор, 2013, с. 38

a synthesis between the two. In this way he Christianized the dominant philosophy of late Antiquity in its most elaborate and developed form by Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Syrianus, Proclus and Damascius, and transmitted it already “converted” to the Christian thinkers who followed him both in the East and in West. This makes him a true Christian philosopher who carried out a very thorough transformation of paganism.<sup>4</sup> Starting from the Christian perspective, the Areopagite questions and rejects a whole series of basic Neoplatonic positions, affirming the difference between the unknowable essence of God and the energies manifesting it and the thoughtful actions from which the divine names derive. This distinction is key to Orthodox theology, and its doctrine of the procession is consistent with both the Trinitarian doctrine and the Christian belief in the creation of the world,<sup>5</sup> thus rejecting the philosophical pantheism of Antiquity.

### **Tasks of the research**

The tasks of the dissertation research are to explore, exhaust and illuminate the subject of the study in its three aspects of unfoldment, embodied in the three **main metaphors**: a) divine (metaphysical) light, b) light of truth and knowledge (cognitive, existential), c) light of mind and soul (spiritual – purifying, enlightening and perfecting). And although the aspects and metaphors are three, we speak of the same light – the divine, in its unified action, but perceived by the creature according to its ability to undertake this action, which, given its finitude, is always partial. Hence the deeds of God are necessarily seen from different points of view on the side that perceives them:

1) In a **metaphysical** aspect – how the One proceeds in the multiplicity of reality in Plotinus and Proclus – it is an emanation of light, transformed and desubstantiated by Pseudo-Dionysius, who reveals to us how the one divine ray proceeds from the Triune Godhead to the members in the hierarchy of creation. This is the subject of the Areopagite cataphatic theology presented in the treatise *On the Divine Names*<sup>6</sup> (*DN*), which examines the procession (outflow, action) of providential ideas from God's Providence.

---

<sup>4</sup> Gersh, S. *From Iamblichus to Eriugena. An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978, Introduction, p. 1

<sup>5</sup> Хайнцман, Р. *Философия на Средновековието*. София: ЛИК, 2002, с. 154; Лоски, В. *Боговидение*. София: Храм „Св. София“, 2010, 42–43, 130, 133, 134

<sup>6</sup> *Text or word in italics* – name of a treatise or dialogue, of an article or studies; quote from the Bible; but also a word that is valid both literally and metaphorically in the context of the sentence.

2) In a **cognitive** aspect – how light delineates the boundaries (meaning) of things so that the mind can see them and so can distinguish them from other things in order to know them as truth. Knowledge and truth are connected with the metaphor of the light that comes from God: His grace is the source of all knowledge and of all truth-light – the man receives an insight in his mind about the creation and the logos embedded in it; enlightened by it, he knows himself, the world and the Creator. Here truth is light as knowledge and being.

3) In a **spiritual** aspect – how God's light (grace, love) purifies, enlightens and perfects the human soul on its way to union with God. This occurs consistently in the symbolic theology presented in the treatises *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy (EH)*, *On the Celestial Hierarchy (CH)* and *Letter IX*, and in the mystical theology, the subject of the treatise *Mystical Theology (MT)*, in which the soul rises above all rational knowledge, concept and thought – into speechlessness, enters into ecstasy, self-exaltation – leaves its energies to receive God's ones – this is no longer knowledge, but over-knowledge in a personal spiritual experience of man with the God Who can be only experienced.

### **Object and subject of the research**

The **object** in my topic is two-faceted: it connects, but also distinguishes, on the one hand, the field of Neoplatonic pagan philosophy (mostly the metaphysics of light of Plotinus and Proclus and the triadic metaphysical system again of Plotinus and Proclus), and on the other, Christian theology of the light and its procession and reversal in the treatises, letters and scholia of the Corpus Areopagiticum. For this reason, the **object** is not placed only in the Dionysian writings, because the necessary parallels and distinctions must be made with the metaphysical implications of Neoplatonism, from which the author of the Areopagitics borrowed a terminological apparatus. The **subject** examines light in its metaphysical, spiritual and cognitive aspect, as the tasks of the research are set, with which it is specifically formulated, since it does not investigate the entire scientific sphere of metaphysics, of light or of the Corpus Areopagiticum, but a specific problem and intersection point in them.

### **Hypothesis (main idea of the dissertation)**

The author of the Corpus Areopagiticum uses metaphors of light in biblical and metaphysical contexts, and behind the metaphysical is a Neoplatonic tradition. One of the central

questions of this topic is whether the teaching of Proclus was used in its original form or was changed by Pseudo-Dionysius, because the connection with the teaching of Proclus is obvious. And more specifically, the question is whether Areopagite uses Proclus' metaphysics directly or modifies it in a Christian way. The author of the Prologue to the edition of the Corpus – St. Maximus the Confessor, claims that Proclus, as an external philosopher, borrowed from the blessed Dionysius, from his very words, wisdom and reflections,<sup>7</sup> but centuries later it became clear that it was the opposite – Areopagite borrowed from Proclus, but not conceptually, but only elements of the philosophical metaphysical language. In fact, the entire tradition from Plato to Plotinus and Proclus is known and used, but as pagan terminology, as a metaphor of light and a categorical apparatus, which are transformed and “converted” by Pseudo-Dionysius. He was the first to express Christian teaching in a triadic dialectical scheme with the aim of passing from theology to a higher state: rising to unity with God in personal spiritual and mystical experience, to deification<sup>8</sup>. Its purpose is entirely spiritual; the purpose of Plotinus and Proclus is similar, but the Areopagite first frees their metaphysical scheme from its substantial foundations in the external procession of the First Cause and places it entirely on a light (energetic, effective) basis – the aforementioned desubstantialization. He limits the discussion of God's substance only to the indwelling of the One in Himself and to the primordial inner divine procession, but in His procession outward, Pseudo-Dionysius speaks of an action of divine light and energy, including the will and excluding the essence of God, which remains inaccessible, unknowable, ineffable and radically cut off from creation. Thus, he defends the Christian dogma of the creation of the world from nothing, denied by Neoplatonism, and uses **emanation** for another purpose: for him, it is the giving of light, revelation, enlightenment and deification by the Creator, and not the outflow of being and essence from Him. Being is also available without hierarchy, because every being is directly created by God<sup>9</sup> without intermediaries and regardless of where it is in the hierarchy of enlightenment. For this reason being, essence, its power and hypostasis are not transmitted by virtue of the said emanation process<sup>10</sup>. Therefore, **my thesis** is that the **Areopagite overcomes** and “**baptizes**” **Plotinus' and Proclus' essentialist metaphysics of light**, transforming it into a Christian one, thereby removing its substantial, and hence its pantheistic character. That is why both the metaphysical ecstasy of the Good in the

---

<sup>7</sup> Максим Исповедник. „Предисловие к Сочинениям Святого Дионисия“. В: Прохоров, Г. М. Дионисий Ареопагит. Сочинения. Максим Исповедник. Толкования. СПб.: Алетейя, 2002, 32–35

<sup>8</sup> Богданов, Д. „Божието осияние в богословско-философските възгледи на Псевдо-Дионисий Ареопагит и св. Максим Исповедник“. В: Архив за средновековна философия и култура, свитък XXVII, София: Изток-Запад, 2021, с. 95

<sup>9</sup> Louth, A. The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition. From Plato to Denys. Oxford, 2007, p. 171

<sup>10</sup> Каприев, Г. Максим Исповедник. Въведение в мисловната му система. София: Изток-Запад, 2010, с. 132

economy of creation and salvation, and the human spiritual and mystical ecstasy back to the All-Good, are the action of the divine will and energy (light, love and grace) in combination with the human will (in deification). Formulated in this way, the hypothesis presents for research **three main counterpoints** between Neoplatonism and Pseudo-Dionysius, which will be removed in the synthesis of the Christian metaphysics of light developed by him:

1) Both Neoplatonism and the Areopagite present the **primordial inner emanation** of the divine energies as an action of the divine nature, but while Plotinus and Proclus present the **emanation of the One into the multiplicity of the world** again by nature, which means by necessity (emanation of light as an essential emanation, outpouring, outflow of abundance from the One)<sup>11</sup>, then Pseudo-Dionysius expresses the procession of light in creation as the emanation not of essence, but of grace and love from the Good, because he clearly distinguishes “the unapproachable and ineffable essence of God from the energies manifesting to the world its gracious action”<sup>12</sup>. Instead of a rule in Orthodox theology, we can make the statement that “the difference between essence and energy applies to both God and created beings”<sup>13</sup>.

2) Both Neoplatonism and the Areopagite work with the **ontological triad** “essence-power-energy”, with the difference that Plotinus and Proclus present the emanation of the One into the multiplicity of the world not only in energy but also in essence, since they in their First Cause coincide (a substantial procession, from which the **pantheism** of ancient pagan philosophy also follows), while Pseudo-Dionysius desubstantializes the process, presenting the action of God in the world created by Him only in will and energy (the mentioned procession of light), but not in essence, distinguishing essence, power and energy not only in creations, but also in the Creator.

3) Thus, since for pagan Neoplatonism the One, the world and humans have the same essence, then man strives to unlock the divine within himself in order to become a **god**<sup>14</sup> **by nature** and with his own powers – substantial deification. Therefore, the ancient philosophical union with God is essentially, in contrast to the Areopagite and Christianity, in which the union with God is only by grace (energy) and not by one's own powers, since man has no natural abilities for this, but in synergy with God's grace (light), which is the only one able to purify,

---

<sup>11</sup> Богданов, Д. Божието осияние. Цит. съч., 95–96

<sup>12</sup> Стефанова, Л. Учението за образа и символа в Ареопагитския корпус. София: Изток-Запад, 2021, с. 35

<sup>13</sup> Танев, С. Ти, Който си навсякъде и всичко изпълваш. Същност и енергия в православното богословие и във физиката. София: УИ „Св. Климент Охридски“, 2013, с. 246

<sup>14</sup> When it comes to pagan gods, the word “god” is written in lower case. When I speak of the Christian God, I capitalize it, including His pronouns. Proper names of hypostases, even pagan ones, such as the One, the Good, the Mind (the Intellect), the Soul, are capitalized.



enlighten and adore him. In this joint process of man with the Giver of Light, the illumination of the wreath of creation on the way to its **deification** is an extraordinary action of light, beneficially flowing from the abundance of Good. This is precisely what the Areopagite “baptism” consists of, which in the course of the exposition we will discover in the unfolded metaphor of light and the metaphysical scheme behind it – the **metaphysical ecstasy** of the Creator is presented not as a transfer of essence and being from God to creation, and **mystical ecstasy** of creation – not as acquiring God's essence. In this path, grace and light will be interchangeable, because the spiritual reality behind them is the same – the Deity and His will and love to share eternal bliss.

At the heart of this triadic dialectical circle is the **Neoplatonic metaphysical composition** detailed in Chapter I: “abiding in itself – procession – reversal”, according to which the **world is an emanation of the supreme hypostasis in three moments**: (1) indivisible unity, abiding in itself of the ineffable supreme cause, its existence as self-contained and self-identical; (2) procession, transition to the multitude, going outside oneself; (3) reversal, return from multiplicity to unity, elevation to the One.<sup>15</sup> **Transferred** into the Areopagite theology, the scheme is **transformed** into the following: 1) In His essence, God is closed in Himself and, always remaining Himself, resides in His immovable identity and His primordial light; 2) but out of an abundance of love and light He unfolds – manifests in creation, which is a kind of revelation from Him to the world, in which He works with His energies, which reveal to us that there is an essence behind them – thus God shows that there is essence by radiating energies (light, love, grace) 3) which turn and return to His essence, thus completing its circular motion. In this cycle there is a turning of the mind, and this is actually the economy of salvation. The circle places the mind between opposites – to go beyond its limits and reach an insight of truth in the light. But with Pseudo-Dionysius it is ecclesiastical-mystical: in and through God's grace in the ecclesiastical liturgy, while with Plato, Plotinus and Proclus it is philosophical-mystical: through the mind and its own natural powers.

**Research methods.** I will use the following methods:

1) **historical-philosophical**, combined with analytical, comparative and synthetic one – I research, analyze and compare the two traditions (pagan and Christian, on the one hand, but also philosophical and theological, on the other), compare them and extract what and how

---

<sup>15</sup> Радев, Р. Антична философия. Стара Загора: Идея, 1994, с. 708

Pseudo-Dionysius changed in the Plotinus and Proclus metaphysics of light to synthesize the Christian systematic understanding of God's beneficent transition in creation. To this method I also add a **linguistic analysis** – I examine key concepts that describe certain philosophical and theological realities, both in the Neoplatonic and in the Areopagite text; clarify the semantic field in which they are used as pagan terminology, metaphor of light and categorical apparatus, and their mentioned “baptism”.

2) **theological** method – I examine how divine light benefits (enlightens and perfects) rational beings to bring them into union with the Source of all light. In this field, I leave the philosophical intellectual mysticism of Neoplatonism, based on mental absorption and contemplation and carried out by one's own human forces, and enter the Orthodox Christian paradigm, where the return to God does not happen by one's own forces, but in synergy with divine grace. The entire hierarchy is permeated by one power and one light – the divine, without which creation cannot do anything by itself, so the paradigm from anthropocentric becomes theocentric. It is also ecclesiological, since the Areopagite mysticism is ecclesiastical, liturgical and sacramental, not philosophical: it takes place in the Church, thanks to the biblical and liturgical symbols that transmit God's light (grace) to the faithful people participating in the sacramental liturgical life (well-being). The paradigm is also Christocentric, since it is based on the fact that the Sender of Light came down to earth, became incarnate and freed us from the slavery of sin and death, but also gave us and showed us the way to turn to God: the Church with its symbols and sacraments. Finally, it is also eschatological, because the eternal light appears here, in life in time and space, but because it is not of this world, this conversion to the Creator represents a transition from the good being in history to the eternal good being in the eschaton, to the eternal youth filled with light and bliss in the age to come – a passage beyond history, a transition from today's seventh day to the eighth non-evening day of the eternal Passover, beyond time and the space, when in the new heavens and earth (2 Pet. 3:13), in the recreated being (Mat. 19:28), in the upper Jerusalem (Gal. 4:26) the Sun of righteousness will shine unceasingly and eternally for the righteous, and a deep and endless night will come for sinners.

### **State of research on the topic**

Beate Regina Suchla is the author of the German text-critical edition of the **complete works** of the Corpus Areopagiticum in **two volumes**. The first one released in 1990 contains the treatise *On the Divine Names* with the written sources cited in alphabetical order, their origin

and place of storage.<sup>16</sup> The second volume from 1991 is edited by Gunter Heil and Adolf M. Ritter, and includes the remaining treatises: *On the Celestial Hierarchy*, *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, and *Mystical Theology*, as well as the letters of Pseudo-Dionysius.<sup>17</sup> The **Bulgarian translations** of the Areopagite writings are also based on these editions: Lidiya Denkova translated *On the Divine Names*, Ivan Christov – *The Two Hierarchies* and seven of the ten letters, and Tsocho Boyadzhiev – *The Mystical Theology*. Therefore, all citations of the Areopagite texts in this work are made according to the pagination of the edition of B. R. Suchla.

Chronologically, the researches in this and the last century of the Dionysian corpus began with the **lectures** on patrology of Fr. Georges Florovsky from 1932 (published in Bulgarian in 1992), in which he discusses the authorship of the collection, the mystifications surrounding the mystery of the author, the character and meaning of his works, the metaphorical language of the Areopagite, influenced by late Neoplatonism, as well as his figurative thinking. Florovsky analyzes the paths of knowledge of God, cataphatic and apophatic theology, the names and the trinity of God, the hierarchical structure of angels and men, as well as the sacramental church worship.<sup>18</sup>

After him the Italian scientist Eugenio Corsini comments on the treatise *On the Divine Names* through the prism of the Neoplatonic commentaries on Plato's dialogue *Parmenides* in his **research** *Il Trattato “De Divinis Nominibus” dello Pseudo-Dionigi e i Commenti Neoplatonici al Parmenide* from 1962. Sheldon-Williams' **article** *Pseudo-Dionysius*<sup>19</sup> since 1970 was published at the end of the translation of the treatise *On the Divine Names*. In it, the author introduces us to the pagan means employed by the Areopagite, the doctrine of trinity, triadicity, and communion, the apophatic method in the process of knowing God and the three hierarchical levels. In his **article** *Pseudo-Dionysius* in his blog *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* since 1975<sup>20</sup> John Meyendorff represents the unity of creation with the Creator through the ranks of hierarchies, the classification of angelic entities, the knowledge of God, as well as the transcendence of the super-essential God.

---

<sup>16</sup> DN: Corpus Dionysiacum I. Ed. B. R. Suchla. Patristische Texte und Studien. Berlin, 1990

<sup>17</sup> CH, EH, MT: Corpus Dionysiacum II. Ed. G. Heil, A. M. Ritter. Ibid. Berlin-New York, 1991

<sup>18</sup> Флоровски, Г. Цит. съч., 130–162

<sup>19</sup> Sheldon-Williams, I. P. “The Pseudo-Dionysius”. In: The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy. Ed. A. N. Armstrong. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970, 457–472. Шелдън-Уилямс. „Псевдо-Дионисий“. В: Псевдо-Дионисий Ареопагит. За божествените имена. Писма. София: Гал-Ико, 1999, 207–222

<sup>20</sup> Майендорф, Й. „Псевдо-Дионисий“. В: блог на прот. Йоан Майендорф (Internet resource as of 10.12.2024): <https://johnmeyendorff.wordpress.com/2016/02/14/>; “Pseudo-Dionysius”. In: Meyendorff, J. Christ in Eastern Christian Thought. Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1975, 91–111

One of the main **studies** on the subject is by the Dutch medievalist Stephen Gersh: *From Iamblichus to Eriugena. An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition* from 1978. In the book he presents at length the teachings of the pagan Neoplatonic philosophers and their Christian opponents on the nature, structure, and flow of the emanative process, the triadic formations and the ranks of gods, principles and hypostases, fulfilling the role of mediating links between the One and the Many, metaphors of light. But particularly important is the debate about the revolution that Areopagite carried out in the exegesis of Plato's dialogue *Parmenides*, predicting not only the negative but also the positive definitions of the One God. The **book** *Patrology. Life, writings and teachings of the church fathers, teachers and writers* of Ilia Tsonevsky from 1986 also contains an **article** about Areopagite, in which he presents the works preserved to this day, the problem of the authorship, discovery and distribution of the *Corpus*, the doctrine of the knowledge of God, the negative path, the names of God and the concept of the Church. The American scholar of the medieval theological tradition, Paul Rorem, is a significant author with numerous studies on biblical and liturgical symbolism in the Areopagite writings. In his **work** *Biblical and liturgical symbols within the Pseudo-Dionysian synthesis* from 1984 he immerses the reader in the symbolism of the sacred texts and the liturgy. In his **article** *Moses as the Paradigm for the Liturgical Spirituality of Pseudo-Dionysius* from 1989 he sees the divine darkness as the final stage of the soul's ascent to God.

In the **preface** to the treatise *On the Divine Names*<sup>21</sup> since 1999 Lidiya Denkova (translator of the treatise itself) examines the question of authorship and Neoplatonic influences on the theology of the Areopagite and the symbolism of light, the philosophical language, the trinitarian terminology and the emphasis on the universal harmonious connectedness of all levels of being. The **books** *Christian Philosophy* by Etienne Gilson and Philotheus Boehner from 1994 and *Philosophy of the Middle Ages* by Richard Heinzmann from 2002 present **studies** of personality and authorship, *Corpus* content, vocabulary and philosophical terminology, Neoplatonic influence, knowledge of God, cataphatism and apophaticism, triadicity, divine names, the two hierarchies, the angelic world, church ranks, mysticism, liturgy and sacraments.

In Bulgaria, and more precisely at Sofia University, Ivan Christov has published translations, **articles** and **studies** on topics related to the *Corpus Areopagiticum*. At the beginning of the translation of the two treatises *On the Celestial Hierarchy* and *On the Ecclesiastical*

---

<sup>21</sup> Денкова, Л. Отвъд знанието, отсам тайната: Псевдо-Дионисий Ареопагит. В: Псевдо-Дионисий Ареопагит. За божествените имена. Писма. София: Гал-Ико, 1999, 9–32

*Hierarchy* from 2001 he placed his own **preface**<sup>22</sup>. In it, he discusses the authorship, language, terminology, and Neoplatonic premises of the Christian theology of Pseudo-Dionysius, the triadic thought patterns, the angelology, the dynamic interpretation of symbols, the three main operating principles of the Dionysian hierarchical order, as well as the three parts of the Areopagite theological system, consisting of cataphatic, symbolic and mystical theology. In the **study** *Christian Neoplatonism in the corpus of the Areopagitics* from 2002 Ivan Christov continues with questions about the authorship, discovery and composition of the Dionysian writings, the division of theology into cataphatic, symbolic and mystical, the paths of God-knowledge, and the Neoplatonic metaphysical chain of “abiding in itself – procession – reversal”. He analyzes in detail the pre-eternal intra-divine and external procession of the Divinity. Overall emphasis is given to the over-standing giving of the eidoses and the special determination of the uncreated energies of God. The study ends with a contemplation of the relationship between God and the world, thought apophatically, cataphatically and through the negation of superabundance, that is, it considers the Creator in His transcendence, immanence and both transcendent and immanent in relation to creation.<sup>23</sup>

The **book** of the English patrologist Norman Russell *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* since 2004 traces the development of the doctrine of deification in the Greek patristic tradition from its birth as a metaphor in the 2nd century to its maturity as the central doctrine of the spiritual life of the Byzantine Church, paying attention also to Pseudo-Dionysius. The **study** of Beate Regina Suchla *The Greek Corpus Dionysiacum Areopagiticum and its Reception in the Byzantine Tradition*, published in 2004, contains an extensive survey of the works' authorship, terminology, tradition and composition, their discovery and interpretation, as well as their impact on European culture. The **book** of the English byzantologist Andrew Louth *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition. From Plato to Denys* from 2007 traces the development of mystical theology to the time of Pseudo-Dionysius. In it, he explores the attempts of the fathers of mysticism to understand the relationship of the soul with God.

In his 2004 **article** *Historicity and temporality – basic elements of Byzantine philosophy* Georgi Kapriev emphasizes that dynamics, change, temporality and historicity are a basic element of both Byzantine philosophy and the objective reality of the Dionysian hierarchy. Here he defines the subject of Christian philosophy and speculative theology according to the Roman

---

<sup>22</sup> Христов, И. „Предговор“. В: Св. Дионисий Ареопagit, За небесната йерархия. За църковната йерархия. София: ЛИК, 2001, 7–16

<sup>23</sup> Христов, И. „Християнският неоплатонизъм в корпуса на „Ареопагитиките“. В: Неоплатонизъм и християнство. Част I. Гръцката традиция III–VI в. София: ЛИК, 2002, 129–172

understanding, as well as of theology itself. In his **book** *Byzantine Philosophy. Four fusion centers* since 2011 Kapriev reveals the Platonic influences on the writings of the Areopagite, cataphatic and apophatic theology, the knowability of the creative logosses, the action of the one divine ray, the principle of emanation and of participation, deification of creatures. In his **book** *Maximus the Confessor. An introduction to his thought system* from 2010 Kapriev analyzed the teachings of the reverend father, whose sources were also the *Areopagitics*, from which he was strongly influenced regarding logosses, divine thoughts, apophatism as a method, God's goodness, creative action, deification and the ecstasy of love.

Vladimir Lossky is distinguished by two very important **studies**: *Vision of God*, printed in 2010 and *Essay on the Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* from 2013. In the first **book**, there is a chapter dedicated to Pseudo-Dionysius, in which the author interprets the Platonism of the Christian Areopagite, but also the dogmatic foundations of his teaching. In the second **book** he continues with an analysis of the oneness and trinity of the Trinitarian God, the absolute unknowability of the divine nature and the knowability of its energies. Ivan Christov published the **articles** *The Two-Level Emanation of the Divine and the Plurality in Mystical Vision*<sup>24</sup> in 2011 and *Pronoia and Sophia in the Energy Discourse of the Greek Scholia to the Corpus Areopagiticum*<sup>25</sup> in 2019. In the **first**, he distinguishes the essence of God from His energies, emanating in the initial stage of their primordial procession, which ontologically precedes the act of creation. In the **second article**, Christov affirms the orthodoxy of the doctrine of the simultaneous difference and inseparability of the divine essence and energy, but also emphasizes the dual aspect of energy flowing internally and externally of the essence, which is, as an eternal activity, on the one hand, and as a creative action, on the other hand.

Extremely important for distinguishing God's energies from God's essence was Stoyan Tanev's **paper** *The Theology of God's Energies in the Orthodox Thought of the 20th Century*, defended as a dissertation at the Faculty of Theology in 2012 and published in 2013. In it he emphasizes the differences between created and uncreated and between essence, energy and hypostasis. Next papers are also essential in this direction: the **books** of Ivan Christov *Byzantine theology in the XIV century. The Divine Energies Discourse* from 2016 and Svetoslav Ribolov's

---

<sup>24</sup> Christov, I. The Two-Level Emanation of the Divine and the Plurality in Mystical Vision. Nomina Divina. Colloquium Dionysiacum Pragense (Prag, den 30.–31. Oktober 2009), Lenka Karfikova / Matyas Havrda (Hrsg.) unter Mitwirkung von Ladislav Chvatal, Paulus-Verlag, Fribourg 2011, 42–49

<sup>25</sup> Christov, I. „Pronoia and Sophia in the Energy Discourse of the Greek Scholia to the Corpus Areopagiticum“. In: Pronoia. The Providence of God in East and West. (Wiener patristische Tagungen VIII). Tyrolia Verlag, 2019, pp. 303–313

*Return to the Mystical Experience of the Fathers. The Doctrine of Uncreated Divine Energies in Twentieth Century Greek Theology* as of 2014.

On May 28, 2020 at the Faculty of Theology, Lubomira Stefanova's **dissertation** was successfully defended on the topic: *The Doctrine of Image and Symbol in the Corpus Areopagiticum*, published in 2021. In it, she carefully reconsiders the special content of the concepts “image” and “symbol” in the light of the Dionysian hierarchical order, inextricably connected with the sensible presence of divine energy in the world and mediating between the earthly and heavenly worlds. In the 2022 **collection** of 40 **essays** *The Oxford Handbook of Dionysius the Areopagite* authors, including Mark Edwards, Dimitrios Pallis and Georgios Steiris, discuss the genesis of the *Corpus*, wrongly attributed in their view to St. Dionysius the Areopagite, and study its reception in the Syrian and Greek circles, as well as in the medieval Western tradition and its influence. Isidoros Katsos' **dissertation** published in 2023, *The Metaphysics of Light in the Hexaemeral Literature: From Philo of Alexandria to Gregory of Nyssa*, examines mainly the physics (visibility) and partly the metaphysics of light in the commentaries on the Six Days of the late antique and early Christian authors.

### **Introductory information on Pseudo-Dionysius and the Corpus Areopagiticum**

The corpus of the Areopagite Treatises is one of the most fundamental texts of European writing and culture, exerting a multifaceted and lasting influence on Christian theology and philosophy in the East and the West. Orthodox tradition attributes it to St. Dionysius Areopagite – disciple and companion of St. app. Paul (cf. Acts 17:33–34). According to the testimony of Eusebius of Caesarea, he was the first Christian **bishop** of Athens<sup>26</sup> and a **counselor** in the Areopagus (a member of the Athenian council). In fact, however, the *Corpus* only began to be spoken of at the beginning of the 6th century, in the course of discussions with the Monophysites, when they first cited it as a confirmation of their teachings<sup>27</sup>. “The treatises were first mentioned by Severus of Antioch between 518 and 528 in one of his writings against Julian”<sup>28</sup>. Not long after, the commentaries and interpretations, called **scholia**<sup>29</sup>, of John of Scythopolis

---

<sup>26</sup> Христов, И. Християнският неоплатонизъм. Цит. съч., с. 129; Цоневски, И. Псевдо-Дионисий Ареопагит. В: „Патрология. Живот, съчинения и учение на църковните отци, учители и писатели“. София: Синодално издателство, 1986, с. 433

<sup>27</sup> Христов, И. Християнският неоплатонизъм. Цит. съч., с. 129

<sup>28</sup> Стефанова, Л. Цит. съч., с. 41

<sup>29</sup> The main part of the scholia date from the middle of the 6th century (between 536 and 553) and are the work of John of Scythopolis. Cf. Suchla, B. R. „Eine Redaktion des griechischen Corpus Dionysiacum Areopagiticum“ –

(the first scholiast of the *Corpus*) and George of Scythopolis, of St. Maximus the Confessor as well as the Patriarch Germanus of Constantinople make evident the **orthodox content** of the *Areopagitics*, which establishes them in Orthodox theology and Tradition as revered almost as much as the Holy Scriptures, and excludes the possibility that the author was a heretic-Monophysite<sup>30</sup>. Already in the 6th century, a complete commentary and editing of the text was made in the school of John of Scythopolis<sup>31</sup>. An interesting fact is that for a long time precisely his **scholia** were mistakenly attributed to St. Maximus, although the transcript from the Dionysian corpus that the reverend father reads and interprets is precisely that which is under the interpretive prism of the scholia of John of Scythopolis<sup>32</sup>.

But the problem remains with the late publication of the *Corpus*, which is nowhere cited or mentioned in the patristic literature until the beginning of the 6th century, which in turn excludes the **authorship** of the Athenian bishop St. Dionysius the Areopagite<sup>33</sup>. The lexical features of the late antique Neoplatonic hyperbolic language and its metaphysical scheme, the philosophical ternary terminology and the concepts of the pagan mystery cult, underwent a meaningful Christian **transformation**<sup>34</sup>, the peculiar and very sophisticated theological reflection, the complicated phrase, enriched with unusually expressive linguistic means and saturated with metaphors expressing a rich mystical experience, also exclude his **authorship**. The knowledge and use in the treatises of the trinitarian Christian terminology and the trihypostatic unity, the eucharistic liturgy, the formulations of the creation, the incarnation and the unity of natures, together with those of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and those of the Council of Chalcedon<sup>35</sup> convinces us that their **author** cannot have lived in the 1st century AD, and at least in the 5th century AD, and therefore he cannot be St. Dionysius the Areopagite. According to Beate Regina Suchla, “the current state of research surrounding the **personality** of Pseudo-Dionysius numbers 22 hypotheses. ... And she believes that the author can be associated with the circle of John of Scythopolis (6th century). According to her, around 536–543/553 John of Scythopolis

---

Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, 1. Philologisch-Historische Klasse, 4, Göttingen 1985, 188–189; Cf. Christov, I. *Pronoia and Sophia*. Op. cit., p. 303, note 1

<sup>30</sup> Христов, И. Християнският неоплатонизъм. Цит. съч., с. 129

<sup>31</sup> Каприев, Г. Византийската философия. Четири центъра на синтеза. Второ допълнено издание. София: Изток-Запад, 2011, с. 57

<sup>32</sup> Edwards, M., D. Pallis, G. Steiris. *The Oxford Handbook of Dionysius the Areopagite*. Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press (Oxford Handbooks), 2022, 222–224

<sup>33</sup> Христов, И. Християнският неоплатонизъм. Цит. съч., с. 129; Цоневски, И. Цит. съч., с. 435

<sup>34</sup> Христов, И. Предговор. Цит. съч., 7–9

<sup>35</sup> Cf. СН IV 4, 23, 10–12 (PG 3. 181C); ЕН III 11, 91, 12–13 (PG 3. 441B); 12, 92, 21–93, 1 (PG 3. 444A); 13, 93, 16–17 (PG 3. 444C); ЕН IV 10, 102, 2–3 (PG 3. 481D)



or a circle of his disciples studied the Areopagite texts and added to them a prologue and commentaries to the corpus”<sup>36</sup>. It is unlikely that the exact **author** will ever be established with certainty. But we do know that he transposed, in a wholly original way, the whole of pagan Neoplatonism from Plotinus to Proclus into a distinctively new Christian context<sup>37</sup>, inasmuch as the religious tradition inscribed by him in Neoplatonic philosophical structures is profoundly Christian<sup>38</sup>.

In the work of Pseudo-Dionysius, two streams of thought are clearly distinguished – the first derives from the ancient Greek worldview and brings mostly Neoplatonic conceptual richness; the second originates from the Christian revelation and unfolds the ideological treasury of Greek patristics. Its resonances combine the diachronic structures of time and space in a synchronic way in a theological teaching resulting from the **dialectical synthesis** of the two streams. In the Middle Ages, not many theological texts contained philosophical terminology. Along with the *Six Days* of John the Exarch and the *Philosophical Chapters* in the *Source of Knowledge* of St. John of Damascus, the *Corpus Areopagiticum* is distinguished by the greatest theological depth and is one of the most striking examples of what we call **Christian philosophy** – a high abstract layer of theology that formulates its propositions in the language of philosophy<sup>39</sup> and uses philosophical methods of synthesis, and in the specific case also borrows a three-level metaphysical configuration. Reading the works of Dionysius, we find in front of us an extremely eloquent Christian theologian, who incorporated the philosophical terminological cosmos into an essentially Christian system, “**baptizing**” the Neoplatonic elements he used in order to protect the Christian tradition, and also to make it accessible and acceptable to intellectuals-Neoplatonists. Thus, we fully agree with Stieglmeyer's opinion: “Dionysius has more than once been called a Neoplatonist in Christian clothing. With much more right he may be called a Christian with a Neoplatonic philosophical mantle”<sup>40</sup>.

The **corpus** of the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius in the form in which it has come down to us (*Corpus Areopagiticum*), consists of **four treatises** and **ten letters** addressed to various

---

<sup>36</sup> Стефанова, Л. Цит. съч., с. 38, бел. 84; Cf. Suchla, B. R. The Greek Corpus Dionysiacum Areopagiticum and its Reception in the Byzantine Tradition. В: Неоплатонизъм и християнство. Част II. Византийската традиция. София: ЛИК, 2004, 9–23, 40–56

<sup>37</sup> Corrigan, K., L. M. Harrington. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.). <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2023/entries/pseudo-dionysius-areopagite/> (Internet resource as of 10.12.2024)

<sup>38</sup> Майендорф, Й. Псевдо-Дионисий. Цит. съч., с. 97

<sup>39</sup> Christova, A., I. Christov. Lexical Morphology and Syntactic Formation of Philosophical Terms in the Translation of the Corpus Areopagiticum by the Starets Isaija. MLS LXI, 2013, p. 536

<sup>40</sup> Жилсон, Е., Ф. Бьонер. Християнската философия. София: УИ „Св. Климент Охридски“, 1994, с. 125

companions of St. app. Paul in the form of Greek transcripts. Some of the names of the **treatises**<sup>41</sup> are not authentic, but are the result of a later redaction:

1. *On the Divine Names* – a treatise on the names and attributes of God. This is the so-called **cataphatic** theology – it examines ideas coming into being as a result of the action of God's Providence. Since they are affirmatively predicated of God and represent His names (energies), the theology that considers them is also defined as affirmative (cataphatic)<sup>42</sup>.

2. *On the Celestial hierarchy* – it is a description of the heavenly upper world, of the triadic and hierarchically arranged kingdom of the angelic ranks, thought of as purely intelligible beings<sup>43</sup>. This is the so-called **symbolic** theology, which considers the return to God on the basis of sensible and intelligible symbols, and is the subject of the *Two Hierarchies* and *Letter IX*.

3. *On the Ecclesiastical hierarchy* – represents a description and interpretation of the functions of church services and ranks, of church priesthood<sup>44</sup> and the sacramental life, the liturgy of the Church, which connects us to God through a divinely appointed but human fabric, depicting “the earthly Church as the image of the Celestial hierarchy”<sup>45</sup>. The work is a characteristic example of a Byzantine theology of the liturgy, deeply sensitive to the value of ritual, image and symbol, which presents the interpenetration of the divine and the human in the service of God<sup>46</sup>.

4. *Mystical theology* – reasoning about the ineffability and unknowability of God's being, about the mystical union of the soul with God through detachment from earthly existence and His ecstatic contemplation, as well as about the darkness of the Divinity, which exceeds human knowledge. **Mystical** theology is such a knowledge of God about not knowing God in His self-dwelling, self-repose and self-perfection, being inaccessible to the senses and to the mind<sup>47</sup>, or that is beyond the height of knowledge.

---

<sup>41</sup> In the patrology of Abbot Min (*Patrologia Graeca*) they are issued in the following order: *De coelesti hierarchia*, PG, t. 3, col. 119–369 (CH); *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, PG, t. 3, col. 370–584 (EH); *De divinis nominibus* (DN), PG, t. 3, col. 585–996; *De mystica theologia*, PG, t. 3, col. 997–1064 (MT); *Epistulae*, PG, t. 3, col. 1065–1120 (Ep.). The order of the quoted works follows that of the edition of the Dionysian corpus of Abbot Min (Migne, J.-P., *ΤΟΥ ΕΝ ΑΓΙΟΙΣ ΠΑΤΡΟΣ ΗΜΩΝ ΔΥΟΝΙΣΙΟΙ ΤΟΥ ΑΡΕΙΟΠΑΓΙΤΟΙ ΤΑ ΣΩΖΟΜΕΝΑ ΠΑΝΤΑ* / S. DIONYSII AREOPAGITAE, OPERA OMNIA QUAE EXSTANT, PG 3, Seu Petit-Monsour, 1857).

<sup>42</sup> Христов, И. Христианският неоплатонизъм. Цит. съч., с. 131; Флоровски, Г. Цит. съч., с. 136

<sup>43</sup> Флоровски, Г. Цит. съч., с. 136; Хайнцман, Р. Цит. съч., с. 147

<sup>44</sup> Флоровски, Г. Цит. съч., с. 136; Хайнцман, Р. Цит. съч., с. 148

<sup>45</sup> Цоневски, И. Цит. съч., с. 433

<sup>46</sup> Louth, A. *Op. cit.*, p. 172

<sup>47</sup> Флоровски, Г. Цит. съч., с. 136; Хайнцман, Р. Цит. съч., с. 148; Христов, И. Предговор. Цит. съч., с. 16; Цоневски, И. Цит. съч., с. 433

5. *A collection of 10 letters to various individuals, mostly on dogmatic topics*<sup>48</sup>.

In the Orthodox tradition, the practice of publishing these works always together with the **scholia**<sup>49</sup> of John Bishop of Scythopolis and the comments of Rev. Maximus the Confessor to them. The intention of Pseudo-Dionysius is to give a **systematic exposition** of theology following the conceptual structure underlying pagan Neoplatonism: the **triad** of “abidance – procession – conversion”<sup>50</sup>. This is a scheme of the natural revelation of the Creator in the world – His procession, but also one in which God has indicated the return path to Himself – turning to Him. With the Areopagite the **triad** is reproduced and realized as activity, light, energy, and action, and only its first term has to do with God's essence, for God dwells in His own nature<sup>51</sup>. But in His procession outward from it, the lights of God's Providence set out towards the intelligible and sensible world as expressions of divine providence and manifestations of His all-beneficial will in order to communicate to the hierarchy the wills, enlightenments and unions by means of which its members may return to their Creator. In accordance with this idea, Pseudo-Dionysius builds his **theological system**, consisting of **three successive parts**: cataphatic, symbolic and mystical theology, permeated by the **three forces**: purifying, enlightening (illuminating) and perfecting (uniting), which correspond on the **three stages** of the ascension of the soul<sup>52</sup>.

## **Chapter I. Neoplatonic philosophical premises for the Christian theology of light in the treatises of the Corpus Areopagiticum**

In the first chapter of this work, I study in detail Plotinus' **metaphysical triad** of **higher hypostases**, subordinated to each other in the hierarchy of being, with which I enter the basic principles of **Neoplatonic metaphysics**: 1) Through the **principle of hierarchy**, the general gradation of the basic forms of reality is constructed, which has the following form: One (Good,

---

<sup>48</sup> Флоровски, Г. Цит. съч., с. 136; Цоневски, И. Цит. съч., с. 433

<sup>49</sup> In the patrology of Abbot Min (Patrologia Graeca): Migne, J-P., PATROLOGIÆ GRÆCÆ, CURCUS COMPLETUS, SCHOLIA, SANTI MAXIMI IN OPERA BEATI DIONYSII AREOPAGITAE, OPERA OMNIA QUAE EXSTANT, PG, t. 4, col. 13–577, Seu Petit-Monsour, 1857.

<sup>50</sup> Христов, И. Християнският неоплатонизъм. Цит. съч., с. 130

<sup>51</sup> Herein lies the key difference with Neoplatonism, in which all three terms of the metaphysical triad relate to the essence of God, for the One processes (emanates) in essence (substantially), and hence man's union with him is by nature (again substantially) in uniform pantheistic chain.

<sup>52</sup> Христов, И. Християнският неоплатонизъм. Цит. съч., с. 130, 155, 158; Шелдън-Уилямс. Цит. съч., с. 209, 211–212

First, τὸ ἕν), Nus (Mind, Intelligence, νοῦς), Soul (ψυχή), matter (ὕλη), nature (φύσις). Of these, the basic and defining forms of the intelligible world are: the One, the Mind and the Soul, which are the **three main hypostases**. 2) Proclus also includes a **second dialectical triad** and, accordingly, a **second principle of hierarchy** (subordination). The triad is understood as an internal construction of degrees of reality, each of which is triune – it is essence, power and the return of power to essence, according to the **ontological triad** “essence (οὐσία) – power (δύναμις) – energy (activity, ἐνέργεια)” or its other form “cause (αἰτία) – power (δύναμις) – consequence (αἰτιατόν)”. According to these doctrinal principles, the **world is an emanation** of the supreme hypostasis, which is a “processual movement” in **three moments**: (1) indivisible unity, the indwelling of the supreme cause (μονή); (2) procession (πρόοδος), transition to the multiplicity, going (exit) outside oneself, “moving” forward, emanation of light, metaphysical ecstasy of the Source of superabundant light; (3) reversal (ἐπιστροφή), a return from the multiplicity to the unity, an ascension to the One,<sup>53</sup> mystical ecstasy to the Source of the incoming light.

The detailed analysis of the three metaphysical triads in this chapter is necessary in order for me to make, in the next two chapters, the concrete **demarcations** against them in Areopagite theology with respect to: 1) the **concept** of the **One** of Plotinus and Proclus, **transformed** into the doctrine of the triune consubstantial Thearchy without subordination between the Three Hypostases of God; 2) **desubstantialization** of the **procession** or metaphysical ecstasy of the First Cause; 3) **desubstantialization** of **conversion** or mystical ecstasy back to Her; 4) clearly **distinguishing** the **essence, power and light** (energy, grace, action) of both God and the world created by Him, and thus introducing the **true transcendence** of the One in Pseudo-Dionysius in contrast to Plotinus and Proclus; 5) proving an unconditional **difference** between created beings and the Creator not only hypostatically and ontologically, but also substantially, naturally and logically. For this purpose, I reveal the simultaneous energy-essential and being transition of the Neoplatonic First Principle, in which the **being flows** from it **substantially from hypostasis to hypostasis**, since the first substance (essence), force (will) and light (energy, being) are merged in the One in one indiscernible whole – in him the essence, the power, the energy and the god himself are one<sup>54</sup>. From their **identity** follows the substantial character of

---

<sup>53</sup> Siorvanes, L. Proclus on the elements and the celestial bodies. Physical thought in late Neoplatonism. A Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy to the Dept. of History and Philosophy of Science, Science Faculty, University College London, 1986, 30–31; Богданов, Д. Божието осияние. Цит. съч., 95–96; Брюн, Ж. Неоплатонизмът. Враца: Одри, 2002, 42–43; Радев, Р. Цит. съч., с. 695, 708

<sup>54</sup> Лосев, А. Ф. История античной эстетики. Поздний эллинизм. Москва: Искусство, 1980; Серия „Вершины человеческой мысли“, Москва: Фолио, 2000, 863–865; Plotinus. Enneads. VI. 7, 18, 41–43; VI. 7, 21, 13–17; VI. 7, 31, 1–4; VI. 8, 13; VI. 8, 16; VI. 8, 21

emanation in Plotinus' teaching and the **pantheism** of the deity and all its consequences – it is essentially immanent in the reality that has flowed from it, which takes away its transcendence in relation to the world, something that will be overcome in the Areopagite synthesis. Thus the world for Neoplatonism is an **essential emanation** of the One, not a creation from nothing.

**Light** in the metaphysical speculations of Plotinus and Proclus is **incorporeal** and **emanates** from the supreme One, which neither begets, nor creates, but **radiates**, as light radiates from fire or from the Sun – light is the very **radiation** of its overflowing essence. The emanated natural light mediates between the intelligible principle and the sensible nature, and makes the connection between the supreme One standing above all things and the unity of all these things. In fact, **light is the force par excellence of the One**, through which every **descent** and **ascent** in the structure of reality takes place – **through it the One multiplies into the multiplicity** of reality, and it unites back into the One by the reverse path of the outgoing ray of light. In the triadic action of light, the whole triadic transition of “abidance – procession – conversion” takes place, that is, staying, procession and reversion are the **very triple action of light**. However, this is an involuntary and automatic process, born out of natural necessity, which will be **transformed** into Christian theology of light of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.

For Plotinus and Proclus, the **deification of man** – his main existential goal – is his intellectual-mystical self-absorption in himself through philosophical exercises, self-knowledge and contemplation of the revealed divinity in him, leading to a **merger** with the divine light. It is a process of becoming the contemplated god himself – **becoming a god by nature** or **substantial deification**, as man has the divine essence veiled within him due to the substantial procession of the One. **Pagan deification** is associated with the acquisition or rediscovery of pre-existing divine characteristics from non-divine objects or entities – something quite different from Christian deification. Thus the Neoplatonists present the deification of man by nature, carried out by his own powers, because he is, after all, a **god by nature**. It is seen as the restoration of the divine nature in man, veiled with the entry of the soul into its body, into its prison, from which, after being freed, it will be reunited with God. This presence of the deity not only with the light, but also with its essence in man and the world, represents the ancient philosophical **pantheism** – the gods, men and the world **have the same nature**, since the **world for Neoplatonism is an essential emanation of the One** – its subsequent hypostases do not differ from the nature of their cause, but preserve it in a diminished form, differing from it not sub-

stantially, but only hypostatically and ontologically according to the degree of the leaked perfection of being, which will undergo a **transformation** in the Areopagite theology of light, desubstantiating procession and deification (the two ecstasies).

The Neoplatonic **philosophy of union (conversion)** is intellectual and rational – truth and divinity are already in man, in his nature, although before the unveiling of the initiation he does not have access to them, but after the unveiling the philosopher or sage **merges naturally** with them and **becomes the deity itself** in which the distinction (even hypostatically) between the beholder of the light and the light itself is obliterated, something that will be **overcome** in the Areopagite synthesis in which man and God do not represent the same light or nature, but God accepts man in His light, preserving the natural and hypostatic differences between them.

## **Chapter II. The Christian theology of light in the Corpus Areopagiticum.**

### **Metaphysics of light and descent of God**

In the second chapter of the dissertation, I consider how, “dwelling in itself, the single ray of God's Providence emanates towards the multiplicity of rational beings, who in turn (each in its measure) receive it in order to turn back to God”<sup>55</sup>. **Reasonable beings** in creation are arranged **hierarchically**: closest to God are the angelic natures, arranged in three triad ranks in the Heavenly hierarchy; after them are the people, grouped into two empirically distinct triads and pierced by a third triad of worship and ascent to the Source of light, in the Church hierarchy; and all together are organized tripartitely by the **spiritual triad** “purification – enlightenment – perfection”. **Triadicity is fundamental** to the Dionysian hierarchical structure brought into being by God's love. Rev. Maximus the Confessor “underlines the connection of this structure with the Holy Trinity, revealing that both the heavenly and earthly hierarchies are created in the **image and likeness** of the Triune God”<sup>56</sup>. The intermediate degrees have no perfection of their own, much less any generative power of their own. Everything done by creation in its association with God is an action of God Himself as the **sole source** of both being and well-being. The whole hierarchy is permeated by **one power** and performs **one action**: the same power and the same light (the divine) is distributed in proportion to the ability of the individual

---

<sup>55</sup> Христов, И. Предговор. Цит. съч., с. 14; Христов, И. Християнският неоплатонизъм. Цит. съч., с. 153

<sup>56</sup> Стефанова, Л. Цит. съч., с. 46

members to perceive it in both hierarchies. Thus, the **hierarchy**, being “a sacred order, knowledge and action, which, as far as possible, seeks a likeness to the God-like, and proportionally, through the imitation of God, is elevated to the luminaries bestowed by God”<sup>57</sup>, represents a **transmission of the divine light** (grace) from top to bottom, but also a **way of turning** the creation to God according to the scheme (the **triad**): “dwelling in oneself (μονή) – procession (πρόοδος) – conversion (ἐπιστροφή)”, which the Areopagite posits as the basis of the hierarchical order in which the superior being (rank) transmits the light of God's Providence to that which follows him. **Hierarchy** therefore **mediates involvement** not with being but with enlightenment and perfection,<sup>58</sup> that is, with good-being and eternal-good-being.

The Areopagite **distinguishes** the **created** visible **physical light** from the **uncreated** invisible **metaphysical** (divine and spiritual) **light**, which is eternal, beginningless and infinite, separated in abundance from the created world.<sup>59</sup> With its power, the Creator creates material light as the energy and life of creation. Therefore the **uncreated light is the prototype of the created**, or the physical is the image of the spiritual. The divine uncreated metaphysical light is absolutely transcendent of creation as essence and standing on the axis “created – uncreated”, but **immanent** as a good action in the world; it is the source and cause of the created physical light and has placed in it the power to illuminate and move material objects and beings. Created light, in turn, is divided into sensible and intelligible according to the basic dichotomy in the world.

The **uncreated light is theology** itself – the **inner divine life** of the Holy Trinity, Her **inner natural energy**. But the metaphysical light is also the **external procession and action** of the essence – the self-expression and self-revelation of Thearchy, and through its power theology passes as the last expression into **economy**. It is important to note that the beginningless **light is not God Himself**, it is **not His essence**, which is inaccessible and transcendent to the created world, but is His primordial natural, providential and **creative energy**, giving origin, expression and environment to God's creative manifestation outside His immovable overstanding residence. With this, it becomes a connection, means and **intermediary between** Creator and creation, which is why the Areopagite does not need intermediate links (hypostases, principles, ideas, gods) connecting the One and the created, as in Platonism and Neoplatonism. The

---

<sup>57</sup> Дионисий Ареопагит. За Небесната йерархия. За Църковната йерархия. София: ЛИК, 2001, 26–27 (СН III 1, 17,3–17,5 (PG 3. 164D))

<sup>58</sup> Христов, И. Предговор. Цит. съч., 12–13; Христов, И. Християнският неоплатонизъм. Цит. съч., 152–153

<sup>59</sup> Христов, И. Византийското богословие през XIV в. Дискурсът за Божествените енергии. София: Изток-Запад, 2016, 95–96

divine light as **energy** beneficially **emanates** from its self-identity and self-dwelling to the multiplicity of creations, giving them the power to convert, but never leaves its self-repose, remaining always transcendent and at the same time immanent to creation, realizing with its procession God's Providence for created being.<sup>60</sup> **Procession is an essence-creating activity**: first of God Himself permeating the world, and then it is an energy of the world that is in harmony with the divine one, so that the world returns to Him.

In this chapter, I trace how Pseudo-Dionysius fundamentally **transforms** the **concept of the One** of Plotinus and Proclus, and with it the Neoplatonic metaphysical composition of “dwelling in oneself – procession – conversion”, **transforming** it into a Christian one, and thus removes its substantial, and hence its pantheistic character. With it he expresses the self-dwelling and natural action of the Deity, His unfolding in the multiplicity of reality and its return back to Unity thanks to the descending light (energy). Here the “**conversion**” of the Plotinus and Proclus metaphysics of light is expressed in the following semantic and meaningful **transformations**:

1) Pseudo-Dionysius clearly **distinguishes** the essence, power and light (energy, grace, action) of God, as well as of the created world, and this is closely related to the emanative triad. Thus he introduces the **true transcendence of the One**, proceeding beyond Himself (to the multiplicity of creation) in and through His single ray of uncreated light, not with His essence, and therefore remaining **essentially uncorrelated** with the world and man, thus avoiding the built-in tendency to pantheism in the cosmological system of pagan Neoplatonism. He meaningfully **transforms** the **procession** into a Christian one: the procession no longer means a transition from a higher to a lower being, it is not a transition from one hypostasis to another, but an abundant outpouring of the energetic light ray of God's revelation, passing (coming out) to the rational creature who seeks to follow it to turn to God.

2) In this way, the Areopagite **desubstantializes** the procession or metaphysical ecstasy of the First Cause, shifting the emphasis from emanation to bringing forth from non-being into being – for him, the **procession** of the One in the created world is only by will and energy (light and grace), unlike Plotinus and Proclus, in which it is by essence, energy and will, mutually coincident – a substantial emanation. Hence, **creation** (bringing into being) **is a single intentional act** of the Creator's will, accomplished **out of nothing and in time**, while Neoplatonic

---

<sup>60</sup> Богданов, Д. „Светлината в богословието на св. Максим Исповедник“. В: Християнство и култура, бр. 10 (157), София: Комунистас, 2020, с. 35; Cf. СН II 3; ЕН III 3; Schol. in ЕН 128, 3–28



emanation is a natural eternal process of emanation from the essence of the One. This is a basic **transformation** of the pagan emanative process into a Christian one – from an involuntary and automatic process (by nature and necessity) of overflowing the supreme Unity into a conscious act of will of the all-good Creator, Who **creates** the essences of created things out of nothing in His procession outward, not gives them from His nature, as in Plotinus and Proclus, who do not distinguish between created and uncreated. In the **essential emanation** of the One, nature, the cosmos, and man **receive from its essence**, and therefore have a **common substance** with it, though in varying degrees of perfection and completeness. Therefore, the transcendence of the First Neoplatonic Principle is not in the true sense transcendence, since the **One is essentially related** to the cosmos, nature and man, unlike the Christian super-essential God, Who is substantially absolutely transcendent to the world, since the world is brought into being not from His essence, and from nothing according to His all-good will.

3) In this “**conversion**” one more moment shines through: we also observe a **transformation of the God-man relationship**: the Plotinian and Proclusian One-Good is impersonal and therefore is spoken in the neuter gender, because it is an impersonal philosophical absolute, without addressing man, left to himself and without divine providence for him. In Dionysian Christian theology, the **approach is already personal**: only God is good, therefore He is the Good, because God is a Person, He is the Person Himself and enters into a personal relationship with man, since He loves every creature created according to God love and care. While the One, despite its overflow, remains irrelevant and indifferent to the fate of everything that flows from it, therefore its emanation is an impersonal natural necessity, then according to the Areopagite, God's procession is a beneficent entry of God out of love into a personal relationship with the person He loves.

4) Thus all created beings **differ from the nature** of their Cause not only hypostatically and **ontologically**, but **substantially, naturally** and **logosically** – God and man, Creator and creation do not represent and do not share the same light (energy) or nature (essence and logos) – the First is uncreated, infinite and eternal, and His work is created, finite and temporary. His creatures are not His essential emanation (as in Neoplatonism) and have no common natural logos with Him.

5) Pseudo-Dionysius also **distinguishes** the natural inner light from the outwardly directed activity of God – the **inner activity of nature** refers to the intra-divine Trinitarian life together with the providential and creative potential of the Creator in His pre-eternal existence, and the **external action of the will** refers to creation, the economy. Hence, light is both the energy

of essence and its procession in creation; **light is the basis of the procession** and, in a broader theological sense, is the procession itself.

6) In his **triadology**, the Areopagite did not accept the Neoplatonic concept of the One, excluding the trinity, therefore he **transformed** it and confirmed the Christian doctrine of the **Tripersonal one God**, whereby the **One is actually Triune** – He is one single and one divine being in essence and in logos in three consubstantial beings by hypostasis and mode of existence. The three Hypostases of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit constitute a **transcendent unity** in which there is a causal order of appearance and being in Their superbeing co-existence, but **no hierarchy or subordination**, as is the case with the three supreme hypostases in Neoplatonic metaphysics – the One, Mind and the Soul. The three Persons of God are co-divine and consubstantial – that is why **God is One and Trinity at the same time**. The Hypostases of God do not derive from each other by separation from the original essence or by falling away from the first perfection, as in Neoplatonism, but **possess one and the same essence** and one and the same perfection of the indivisible and consubstantial Trinity. Therefore the **Three Persons** are one God and one Godhead, **having one nature** (essence, substance), **one will** (power, ability, potency, possibility) and **one light** (being, action, reality, energy, love, grace).

7) What for pagan philosophers is a triad of independent hypostases (principles), in the Corpus Areopagiticum is **transformed into a triad of divine attributes** (names, ideas, energies) of the One God. The “**Proclusian triad**” of Being, Life and Intellect as independent metaphysical terms is already **transformed** into a triad of divine names: Being, Life and Wisdom. Pseudo-Dionysius does not treat God as causally prior to Good, but as Good Himself and equivalent to Him, but considers Him causally prior to and equivalent to Being. In Plotinus and Proclus, Good is an attribute of the First Principle, while Being is an attribute of Mind, which follows from the One as a second principle; in the Areopagite Being is equated with God in **combining the first two hypotheses** of Plato's dialogue *Parmenides*. The Areopagite “**conversion**” here is expressed in the fact that Being is no longer an attribute of the second principle, or even a separate one, but an idea, name and energy of God Himself in His Mind, and proceeds after Good in the order of providential ideas. Thus Pseudo-Dionysius **transfers the triad** of Being, Life and Wisdom to the First Principle Himself, which is equated with the hierarchical reflection of the three terms on all levels of reality.<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> Gersh, S. Op. cit., p. 154, 158–159, 165–166

8) The **nature of the name is** also “**converted**” – it no longer emphasizes the essence, but the energies of the object (subject, hypostasis) and therefore the **divine names relate to the actions and processions** of God, belonging to His Providence, and do not express God's nature. It is the deeds and energies of God behind the name that make possible man's participation<sup>62</sup> in His light, not His essence.

9) Pseudo-Dionysius **revolutionized** the **exegesis** of Plato's dialogue *Parmenides*, being the **first to apply both hypotheses** (negative and positive) to the **Christian God**. In this way, the pagan Neoplatonic picture of the world is preserved when the first hypothesis is applied to the Good, Who transcends all negative characteristics, but this same scheme is **transformed** when the **second hypothesis** is applied to God, Who in the Areopagite theology already possesses all the affirmative predicates – the definitions emanating from the second hypothesis are already predicated to God as a set of divine attributes. He does not stop there, but reveals to us that for God neither affirmation nor denial or removal of a predicate is possible, because He is **above all affirmation and above all negation** – God is an abundance of both at the same time and of everything in Himself. Applying both the first and second hypotheses from *Parmenides* to the One God allows Pseudo-Dionysius to **remove** all traces of pagan emanative **pantheism**.<sup>63</sup>

10) In the Fifth Chapter of the *Mystical Theology* and in the First Chapter of *On the Divine Names* he directly **rules out pantheism**, teaching us that the Creator is perfectly detached from everything and is **beyond the universal whole**, that He is superessentially separate and supremely detached from the whole totality of existence. This is one of the most significant **transformations** of Neoplatonic pantheistic metaphysics.

11) The notion of the **causal process** in the *Areopagitics* is also **transformed**: in the first place, while the pagan philosophers concentrate on a kind of causality, Pseudo-Dionysius clearly distinguishes between the relation of God to the created world and the relation of created things to each other. Second, he explicitly **distinguishes** between God as a transcendent cause and as an immanent source of being. This is the result of applying the two hypotheses of Plato's *Parmenides* of the Areopagite to the same subject, in which he defines **three different ways of viewing God in relation to the created world**: (1) (negative) God as completely transcendent; (2) (affirmative) God as fully immanent; and (3) (negative and affirmative) God is both transcendent and immanent. Hence Dionysius distinguishes **three modes of causation**: (1) God as

---

<sup>62</sup> Христов, И. Християнският неоплатонизъм. Цит. съч., с. 131

<sup>63</sup> Corsini, E. Il Trattato “De Divinis Nominibus” dello Pseudo-Dionigi e i Commenti Neoplatonici al Parmenide. Torino, 1962, 42–44; Gersh, S. Op. cit., 155–156; Suchla, B. R. The Greek Corpus. Op. cit., p. 27

the transcendent cause of all; (2) God as the immanent cause of created things; and (3) creation as cause.<sup>64</sup>

12) The “**giving of eidos**” also undergoes a transformation in Areopagite theology, since it is already **carried inside God's Providence**, and precisely because of this it is overstanding. Unlike Proclus' metaphysics, in which the laying down of the eidos takes place in the transition from hypostasis to hypostasis, in Pseudo-Dionysius the “**giving of the eidos**” is realized within God's Providence, which is not a separate hypostasis, but God's own power to implement His thought as primordial uncreated natural energy. With this paradoxical superimposed negation, the Areopagite finally **transforms** not only the understanding of Plato's *Parmenides*, but **transforms** the pagan emanative process into a Christian one, placing all negative and positive predicates within the super-essential Godhead.

13) In Plotinus and Proclus, the action of the First Beginning down the line **generates gods** (metaphysical hypostases) in the direction of **weakening** their original substantial unity and hence falling away from original perfection. Pseudo-Dionysius “**baptizes**” this metaphysics by recognizing a **single God to Whom belongs all causal potency** in all its manifestations. By placing all the causality of providential and creative acts in the One God, he precludes the need for **mediating ontological links** between Creator and creation, thus **removing**: a) the falling away from the original perfection and b) the substantial pantheistic unity, which does not exist in Christianity. Consequently, he rejects the possibility of thinking the ideas in God's Providence subordinately as different degrees of being, and thus **assumes no hierarchy, dependence**, or subordination between the **providential lights** Goodness, Being, Life, and Wisdom, but sequence, connectedness, and continuity in the order of the divine light, ideational and volitional manifestation from contemplation and predetermination to unfolding in creativity and bringing into being.<sup>65</sup>

14) The Areopagite **transformed** the pagan philosophical theory of the **relations** between **opposites**, in which the external relations of the sensible world contrasted with the internal relations of the intelligible, uniting the intelligible and the sensible creation into **one category** of underlying being. The **contrast** between these two types of opposition is not fundamental

---

<sup>64</sup> Христов, И. Християнският неоплатонизъм. Цит. съч., 162–163; Gersh, S. Op. cit., 205–206, 217–218

<sup>65</sup> Христов, И. Християнският неоплатонизъм. Цит. съч., с. 137, 146, 164–165, 166–167; Christov, I. The Two-Level Emanation. Op. cit., 46–47

for him, since both characterize the created immanent world as **distinct** from the transcendent divine one. The **main opposition** is now between created and uncreated object.<sup>66</sup>

15) Pseudo-Dionysius **transforms** the dynamic Neoplatonic picture of hierarchically successive principles into a Christian one, because the **intermediate degrees** with him **do not have their own generative power**, which the Creator alone has, Who alone creates and begets being, but the intermediate degrees **only transmit** the **lights** they receive, beneficially passed from the super-essential Thearchic ray, to the existential consequences located after them. Here the Areopagite **limits self-generation to God Himself alone**, and this limitation is one of his most significant **transformations** of pagan doctrine. With him, the **intermediate degrees** have neither their own perfection nor their own generative power, they **possess nothing** and have reality only through their participation in God, Who is the only source of being, enlightenment, and perfection. Another thing, the Omnipotent **remains above** the **whole hierarchy** as its cause, creator, beginning, and end, but **not its member**, unlike the One, which is not only the cause but also the first member of the Neoplatonic hierarchy. The **transformation** continues with the Christian understanding of **hierarchy**, which mediates involvement (participation) no longer with being, as in Plotinus and Proclus, but with purification, enlightenment, and perfection. Being is available without hierarchy, because **creation is an immediate act of God** – creations are created by God directly, without intermediaries.<sup>67</sup>

16) Pseudo-Dionysius further **transforms** the Neoplatonic **hierarchies**, Christianizing the structures of the ancient cosmos occupied by Plotinus and Proclus: (1) the sense world, as the world of things, is recreated in the Lawful hierarchical level; (2) the sensible world, connected by the Soul with the intelligible world, is transformed into the Church hierarchy; and (3) the mental world itself, composed of all intellects, is transposed into the Celestial hierarchy.<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> Gersh, S. Op. cit., 229–230, 233–234

<sup>67</sup> Христов, И. Предговор. Цит. съч., 12–13; Христов, И. Християнският неоплатонизъм. Цит. съч., 152–153; Каприев, Г. Византийската философия. Цит. съч., с. 57; Каприев, Г. Историчността. Цит. съч., с. 39

<sup>68</sup> Corrigan, K., L. M. Harrington. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

### Chapter III. The Areopagite mystical theology of light.

#### Mysticism of light and ascent to God

In the third chapter, I present the Areopagite theology of light, covering the **third term** of the metaphysical triad – “**conversion**” and the **spiritual ascent** to God. Light in this sense is the grace that permeates the hierarchy in its assignment and accompanies people in their process of striving, ascending and **turning** to the triune Source of light. This is accomplished in terms of purification, enlightenment, and perfection – the gradual vestments arranged in the hierarchies of beings to partake of the light. The **truth** and the knowledge of the purpose of existence and of the works of the Creator tear out of the darkness of ignorance the eyeless minds of those who have gone to the palace of the Unknowable. **Love** that illuminated the darkness **is the ecstatic power** that prompted all Love to envelop with Her eros the children She loved and in Her turn loved by them in their mutual **ecstasy** to each other to the rest of the unity beyond; for we are told that “the aim of our hierarchy is to attain the likeness and union with God”<sup>69</sup>, attainable in deification in love alone.

And as a result the “**conversion**” of Plotinus and Proclus metaphysics and mysticism of light continues in the following meaningful **transformations**:

1) The **union** of the soul with God **is energetic** and **only energetic**: in God's love, grace and light, **not substantial** as in Plotinus and Proclus: “in the union with man He is above all vision, above all knowledge, because His super-essential nature remains always inaccessible”<sup>70</sup>. The unity of the created with the uncreated energies is a **vision of the eternal light** – the energy of Divinity<sup>71</sup>. We see that the Areopagite **desubstantials** both divine metaphysical ecstasy and **human mystical ecstasy**. Man does not rediscover the divine nature in himself, but lives the blessed life of the Creator<sup>72</sup>. Therefore, **uncreated deification is only by energy and grace**<sup>73</sup> (by tropos); man by nature (by logos) remains always man, but lives in God's love and light, “possessing by grace all that the Holy Trinity possesses by nature”<sup>74</sup>, except the divine nature itself, remaining in its created nature; it is the participation of created man in the uncreated life

---

<sup>69</sup> Дионисий Ареопагит. За Небесната йерархия. Цит. съч., с. 67 (ЕН II)

<sup>70</sup> Лоски, В. Боговидение. Цит. съч., с. 136

<sup>71</sup> Христов, И. Византийското богословие. Цит. съч., 95–96

<sup>72</sup> Каприев, Г. Максим Исповедник. Цит. съч., с. 252; Каприев, Г. Византийската философия. Цит. съч., с. 151; Богданов, Д. Светлината в богословието. Цит. съч., с. 38

<sup>73</sup> Майендорф, Й. Византийско богословие. София: Гал-Ико, 1995, с. 102

<sup>74</sup> Лоски, В. Очерк. Цит. съч., с. 62, 84

of God<sup>75</sup> – entirely a **gift of God** in His personal self-giving. Participating in God's essence is not given even to the saints – they are **deified through union with God**, but partake only of His divine energy (light, grace, love, life)<sup>76</sup>. **God's nature** is super-essential and completely **transcendent**, standing beyond the created, beyond ours, and no one will ever unite with it, because then he would become God in essence. Energy is essential because it is of the essence and comes from it, not because through it one becomes a partaker of God's essence. In contrast, **divine energy is both transcendent and immanent** to creation – proceeding from essence and acting in the world – hence involvement is with it.

2) One more thing, **deification** refers to the entire fullness of human essence and being, to his image of God in general. The **adoring power** of God **permeates the whole man** – in his essence, power, energy and hypostasis, transforming not only his soul, but also his body, which are **deified** and **he becomes a god by grace**. His nature remains entirely human, but already transformed by the action of grace.<sup>77</sup>

3) In the Dionysian thought of God, when uniting with God, a person must *come out, step out* of himself in the direction of the Uncreated, thereby realizing the **true return** to God. In the **Plotinian ecstasy**, the soul rediscovers the divine nature hidden within it, ascending from hypostasis to hypostasis, reaching and merging with the source of light – the One, and that by its own powers, not by God's grace. Therefore, **Plotinian deification leads to a complete merging with the One** (with its matching essence and light) and is a process of becoming the contemplated god himself – a **becoming god by nature** in which the substantial and hypostatic difference between the beholder of the light and the light itself is obliterated. The **conversion** and **mystical ecstasy** to the Creator is the next fundamental Neoplatonic position, transformed into a Christian one and **desubstantiated** in the Areopagite theology, in which **deification** represents a **synergy of created and uncreated energies** while preserving the natural and hypostatic difference – becoming a **god by grace**. Human beings united with God, and not only their souls, do not identify with Him and do not acquire His nature, but become “entirely God's”<sup>78</sup>, living in His light.

---

<sup>75</sup> Майендорф, Й. Византийско богословие. Цит. съч., с. 233

<sup>76</sup> Христов, И. Византийското богословие. Цит. съч., 136–137; St. Gregory Palamas confirms the Areopagite doctrine of deification: “The deifying gift of God is His energy, which the great Dionysius and all other theologians everywhere call Divinity, while insisting that the title of Divinity belongs to the divine energy and not to the divine substance”. (Capita 150, chapter 69)

<sup>77</sup> Лоски, В. Боговидение. Цит. съч., 144–146; Майендорф, Й. Византийско богословие. Цит. съч., с. 269

<sup>78</sup> Лоски, В. Боговидение. Цит. съч., 130–132

4) From an ontological point of view, the **two rising ecstasies** – the Areopagite and the Plotinian – have a completely **different purpose**. The Neoplatonist seeks to free himself from his multiplicity, so that his soul may become one-unity within itself and **merge in its ecstasy** with the object of its contemplation – become indistinguishable from it in a natural, existential and hypostatic **identity** of an object and subject. This is why Plotinus' ecstasy reduces being to the absolute simplicity of the superbeing of the One – a simplification which, however, leads to its obliteration because **it takes away the hypostasis of the contemplative subject**, who no longer differs in any way from the contemplated object.<sup>79</sup> At that moment the soul should cease to exist, having *dissolved* into God and thus perishing in the longed-for contemplation, since the ontological constitution of its **hypostasis** will be **destroyed in the fusion with the One**, whose goal is the perception (recovery, acquisition) by man of the divine nature instead of his own human nature. This essential replacement will lead to the **destruction of the human hypostasis**, whose logos is immutable and does not allow such action. In contrast to this, **ecstasy** according to the **Areopagite** is an **exit from being** as such, an **exit** from the ultimate created energy, which is insufficient for the knowledge of the Creator and union with Him, not because it is multiple. The Dionysian God is the God of Revelation, not of the philosophers, standing beyond unity and multiplicity and above their opposition. His essential unknowability and inaccessibility marks the boundary between the two concepts and is a prerequisite for the **different existential goals in the two ecstasies**: the Neoplatonist philosophers seek the **ecstatic fusion (merger)** with the divine nature in its simplicity, which stands in one substantial order with them. Not only do they have no understanding of how to **get out (exit)** of creation, but they also do not need it, because they do not recognize the creation of the world from nothing, and hence they do not know the difference between created and uncreated – the gap between creation and the Creator,<sup>80</sup> which is overcome in God's grace by the **Areopagite mystical ecstasy** not in a substantial (essential, natural) or hypostatic sense, but in an energetic and life (existential) plan.

5) Therefore, **ecstasy is never essential** (substantial) – by logos and nature man remains always human in his hypostasis, **but spiritual** – by God's grace, and no one will ever become divine in essence or by hypostasis. And finally, **deification** is not a faculty of human nature, it is not natural to man, but **is supernatural** and comes from the power of God's light.<sup>81</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup> Лоски, В. Очерк. Цит. съч., 25–27

<sup>80</sup> Ibidem, 27–28

<sup>81</sup> Лоски, В. Боговидение. Цит. съч., с. 142; Христов, И. Византийското богословие. Цит. съч., с. 95



## Conclusion

In this dissertation research I have comprehensively presented how, abiding in its transcendent unity and perfection, the **single ray** of God's **light** proceeds to the multiplicity of creations (the **metaphysical ecstasy** of God) who, according to their nearness, suitability and worthiness, receive it to ascend deified to the Light (their **mystical ecstasy**) in infinite bliss. For this purpose, the Creator has organized a **hierarchical order** for the transmission of His gracious light, within which to purify, enlighten and perfect the creatures in their undertaking (pursuing) in the world.

In the course of the study, the **three aspects of unfolding of light** were studied and illuminated: 1) **metaphysical** aspect – how the One emanates in the multiplicity of reality in Plotinus and Proclus, on the one hand, and in Pseudo-Dionysius, on the other; 2) **cognitive** aspect – how light delineates the boundaries and meaning of things so that the mind can see them and, illuminated by it, distinguish them from other things in order to know them as truth; 3) **spiritual** aspect – how God's light, love and grace purifies, enlightens and perfects the human soul on its way to union with the Almighty. These **three aspects** are successively expressed in the cataphatic, symbolic and mystical Areopagite theology, in which the **apophatic method of ascent** to the Source of grace is inscribed in various sections. Therefore, the main areas of philosophy and theology – metaphysics, physics, mysticism, triadology, ontology and dialectics are so intertwined that they flow into each other in the text of the entire dissertation. But this is extremely clear, given the gradual dialectical transition of abidance, procession and conversion, necessary to clarify the nature and action of light in the area of God's and human deeds. The **transition ends in a three-stage ascent** of purification, enlightenment and deification of the devotees to God along the reversionary ray of His light and rest of their energies around the Center of the circle.

In the first chapter of the present work, I revealed in detail the simultaneous energy-essential and being transition of the Neoplatonic First Principle, in which being from hypostasis to hypostasis flows substantially from it, so that I could **prove** my **hypothesis** in the second and third chapters – the **desubstantialization** by Pseudo-Dionysius of the second and third terms of the borrowed composition “abidance – procession – conversion”, by which he **transforms** it from pagan philosophy in Christian theology of light. For this purpose, it was necessary to examine in detail the Plotinian **metaphysical triad** of higher hypostases, subordinated to each

other in the hierarchy of being, and the Proclus **dialectic triad**, determining the internal construction of the degrees of reality: “essence – force – return of force to the essence”, according to the **ontological triad** about the composition of everything that exists: “essence – force – energy” or “cause – force – effect”, according to which the **world is an emanation of the supreme hypostasis in three moments**: “dwelling in itself of the supreme cause – transition to the multiplicity (emanation of light) – return from the multiplicity to the unity”<sup>82</sup>.

In unraveling the elemental and total **transformation** of this entire ennead, I have proved that the Areopagite metaphysics underlying the causal chain of events explaining the manifestation of light in the world is entirely Christian. It borrows Neoplatonic pagan terminology, but conceptually presents the **Christian teaching** about God and His actions ad extra. Thus, I fully subscribe to the position of Gersh, Lossky and Stiegelmeier that Pseudo-Dionysius is a genuine Christian philosopher and **orthodox contemplator** who carries out an extremely **profound transformation** of paganism and conquers the characteristic territory of Neoplatonism, taking advantage of its philosophical vocabulary and technique<sup>83</sup>, and thereby shows us that the metaphysical, ontological, and mystical “intuitions of Christianity can be explicated in the concepts of Neoplatonism”<sup>84</sup>, meaningfully transformed by him. This is how the author of the *Areopagitics* **Christianized** Neoplatonic metaphysics and mysticism, and in this **transformation** completely removed its meaningful side, carrying out his significant **synthesis** between the two systems. In addition, I have developed metaphysical and cosmological speculations that reconcile the modern theory of cosmogenesis with the Christian understanding of the emanation of light.

---

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Siorvanes, L. Op. cit., 30–31; Радев, Р. Цит. съч., с. 695, 708; Брюн, Ж. Цит. съч., 42–43; Богданов, Д. Божието осияние. Цит. съч., 95–96

<sup>83</sup> Gersh, S. Op. cit., p. 1; Лоски, В. Боговидение. Цит. съч., с. 130; Жилсон, Е., Ф. Бьонер. Цит. съч., с. 125

<sup>84</sup> Христов, И. „Християнският неоплатонизъм на Михаил Псел в неговото учение за субстанцията“. В: Архив за средновековна философия и култура, свитък IV, София: ЛИК, 1997, с. 129

## Self-assessment of scientific contributions

(1) The analyzed **desubstantialization** and, in a broader sense, **transformation** of the Neoplatonic doctrine is the **main contribution** and scientific significance of the proposed dissertation, which defines the Areopagite doctrine as entirely Christian in strict dogmatic distinction from Neoplatonism as a pagan, essentialist and pantheistic philosophy. This is precisely what the Areopagite “**baptism**” consists of – the **metaphysical ecstasy** of the Creator is presented not as the transmission of essence and being by God to the creation, and the **mystical ecstasy** of the creature – not as the acquisition of God's essence. In terms of light as the energy of essence, Pseudo-Dionysius was the first to **free** the Plotinian and Proclusian metaphysical scheme from its substantial foundations in the outward procession of the First Cause and the return to It (the two ecstasies) and put it entirely on a light (energetic-active) basis. He limits the discussion of **God's substance** only to the indwelling of the One in Himself and to His pre-eternal intra-divine procession, but in His emanation outward and in the turning of the creature to Him, the Areopagite speaks of the action of divine light and energy, including the will and excluding the **essence of God** (strictly distinguished in Him), which remains invariably inaccessible, unknowable and ineffable.

(2) As a **second contribution**, it can be noted that so far in Bulgaria no comprehensive research has been done on the **transformation** of Neoplatonic metaphysics to a Christian one in the **synthesis** of Pseudo-Dionysius, in which the distinctive theological connotations of the pagan philosophical concepts of “abidance/indwelling/remaining in oneself”, “emanation/procession/proceeding” and “turning/returning/reversal/conversion” were established, but already **transformed** into a dogmatically true light.

(3) As a result of the analyzes and studies carried out, the **Christian aspect** of emanation was emphasized, which manifests itself not as an outflow of being and essence from the Creator, but as a **creative act** and **giving of light**, energy and grace, love and deification,<sup>85</sup> and it was shown how through it the transition of the One in creation and its reverse union with Him is **de-essentialized**.

---

<sup>85</sup> Louth, A. Op. cit., p. 171

### Dissertation-related publications

1. “The light in the theology of St. Maximus the Confessor”<sup>86</sup> in the magazine “*Christianity and culture*” with ISSN 1311-9761, volume 10 (157) / 2020, pp. 34–41. The same article was published by the Internet edition “Doors of Orthodoxy”<sup>87</sup>.

2. “God's radiance in the theological-philosophical views of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and St. Maximus the Confessor” in the scientific edition “*Archive of medieval philosophy and culture*” with ISSN 2603-5189, volume XXVII/2021, pp. 94–108.

3. “Digital educational project “Thesaurus of the Theology of St. Maximus the Confessor” in the scientific edition “*Societal transformations and sustainable development with respect to environment in the post COVID-19 digital era. First annual PhD conference*“. St. Kliment Ohridski University Press, 2023, ISSN 978-954-07-5666-0, pp. 31–40.

4. “Thesaurus of the Theology of St. Maximus the Confessor” in the periodical of the Faculty of Theology at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” “*Forum Theologicum Sardicense. Prius. Theological thought*“, ISSN 1310-7909, n. 1/2022, an. XXVII/2023, pp. 165–181.

---

<sup>86</sup> The topic of the article is closely related to the topic of my dissertation research: “Metaphysics of Light in the Corpus Areopagiticum”, since Rev. Maximus the Confessor is the greatest and most important commentator and interpreter of the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.

<sup>87</sup> Address of the article in the Internet edition “Doors of Orthodoxy” (Internet resource as of 10.12.2024): [https://dveri.bg/component/com\\_content/Itemid,100521/catid,280/id,70391/view.article/](https://dveri.bg/component/com_content/Itemid,100521/catid,280/id,70391/view.article/)