JOURNAL OF THE STUDY ON RELIGION AND HISTORY
No. 2 (2025): 142-164

Merely *Eros*?

Rethinking Love Discourses in Pseudo-Dionysius

Qita CHEN https://orcid.org/0009-0008-0605-7899

Sun Yat-sen University

chenqt0204@163.com

Abstract: Scholarly work on love in Pseudo-Dionysius has predominantly focused on elucidating *eros* as a divine epithet. Interpreted through a Neoplatonic lens, Greek *eros* thus appears to be the cornerstone of Dionysius's conception of love. However, a closer examination of the Dionysian corpus reveals that two related concepts—notably philanthropy and communion—remain understudied. The two notions are integral to Dionysius's treatment of the triadic structure of love: providential care, mutual love, and the return of love. This article contends that philanthropy and communion are essential for understanding Dionysian *eros*. By situating Christ's philanthropy and the loving communion in the middle term of mutual love, we can better grasp the rich connotations of *eros* within Dionysian theology.

Keywords: Pseudo-Dionysius (Dionysius the Areopagite), love, *eros*, philanthropy, communion

Published by JSRH | DOI: https://doi.org/10.30250/JSRH.202512_(2).0005
Received Date: 11-10-2025; Published Date: 12-29-2025

Introduction

Anders Nygren (1890–1978), in his seminal work *Agape and Eros*, posits a fundamental dichotomy between the Christian concept of agape (divine love) and the Hellenistic concept of eros (human love). He argues that they are "incommensurable" and belong to "two entirely separate spiritual worlds".[1] Tracing the theme of love throughout Christian tradition, Nygren accuses the contamination of Christian agape by pagan eros ("Translator's Preface," in Nygren 1953, pp. xi–xiv). He identifies Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (henceforth Denys, fl. 500) as a primary example of this syncretism, casting him as a crypto-Neoplatonist who adhered so closely to Platonic eros that he diluted Christian agape (Nygren 1953, p. 576). Nygren summarizes Denys's discourses on love in three key points. First, influenced by Plotinus and Proclus, Denys presents eros as a unitary, cosmic force that binds all creation. Second, this eros seizes the soul, inducing an ecstasy that awakens a longing for the Good and transforms the soul into a vessel for receiving and transmitting divinity. Third, Denys deliberately substitutes agape with eros, for he believes the latter carries a clearer meaning and is thus superior than agape (Nygren 1953, pp. 581–3, 592). Based on this reading, Nygren contends that the Areopagite is totally ignorant of the spiritual sense of agape, for "eros is the only reality he knows" (Nygren 1953, p. 589).

Nygren's stark dichotomy is undoubtedly rooted in his Lutheran theology.[2] Although influential, his negative appraisal of Denys has provoked many rebuttals. For instance, John Rist credits Denys with being "the first to combine Neoplatonic ideas about God as *Eros* with the notion of God's 'ecstasy'." (Rist 1996, pp. 239–40) Rist argues that by defining *eros* as a generative power that providentially goes out of itself, Denys synthesizes divine unity with providential care for the creation, thereby overcoming the thorny problem faced by his Christian predecessors who restricted agape to

1 "Introduction," in Anders Nygren, and trans. Philip S. Watson, *Agape and Eros* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press.1953), pp. 30–2. A detailed diagram illustrates that eros features acquisitive desire, an upward movement, man's way to God, egocentric love, will to possess, motivated by quality of the object; in comparison, agape stands as the opposite of eros: it is sacrificial giving, a downward movement, God's way to man, unselfish love, free in giving, motivated regardless of its object, etc. See Nygren 1953, p. 210.

2 Although some argues that Nygren's framework does not fit into Luther's teaching, for Nygren's understanding of agape is merely "one-sided" from God to human beings, while in Luther human love for neighbors and God also counts. See Forsberg 2010, pp. 92–3.

the Trinitarian unity.[1] Apart from this, de Vogel challenges Nygren's interpretation by anchoring Platonic *eros* in the Socratic tradition—specifically, the philosopher's generous care for youths and the effort to liberate those in the cave. This demonstrates that *eros* is not necessarily self-oriented but can be a selfless giving for the sake of the other (De Vogel 1981, pp. 61–2). De Vogel thus contends that Denys's originality lies precisely in making this generous *eros* central to his theology (De Vogel 1981, pp. 70–1).

Most scholarly discussions of Denys's notion of love center on his use of *eros*, particularly its ecstatic and ascending character that draws the soul towards the deity.[2] This emphasis is understandable for several reasons: it serves as a response to Nygren's contentious appraisal of Dionysian *eros*; it reflects the extensive treatment of *eros* in *The Divine Names* (DN 4.10–17); and it acknowledges the erotic tradition shared by Denys's patristic and Platonic predecessors.[3] However, this focus has left two questions unresolved. First, by fitting *eros* into the Neoplatonic framework of descension (procession, πρόοδος) and ascension (return, ἐπιστροφή), scholars often overlook its role in the third element of the triad: "remaining (μόνη)." How is *eros* manifested in this stage of remaining? Second, a re-examination of the Dionysian corpus reveals that two notions related to *eros*, namely philanthropy and communion (friendship), also play a role in Denys's thought.[4] If *eros* is not Denys's sole

1 Rist says that Augustine is puzzled about how to treat God's *amor* or self-love within Trinitarian Persons with God's providence to all, the same also arises for Origen and Gregory of Nyssa. See Rist 1966, p. 240.

2 Apart from Rist and De Vogel, there are some recent studies on Dionysian love. For example, Turner situates Denys in the linage of Christian mystical tradition streaming from the commentary of Solomon's *Song*. See Turner 1995, chapter two and three. An effort to affirm the place of love in Denys's soteriology can be found in Smith 2012, pp. 211–227. A comparison of *eros* in Neoplatonism and Denys is studied in Vasilakis 2020, especially chapter three on Dionysius, pp. 141–183. For a recent review of these discussions, see Corry 2022, pp. 302–320.

3 Denys's erotic exposition is indebted to a list of Fathers: Clement of Alexandria holds that Christian life is led by *eros* towards gnosis and perfection; Origen deems salvation as a process of ascent to the divine realm by *eros*; Gregory of Nyssa sees *eros* as an "intensified agape", the driving force in one's ascent to God by imageries of a heavenly ladder, wings of the soul, ascent of the Mountain, an arrow, a flame and a chain of love. See Nygren 1953, pp. 356–8, 389–91, 435–46.

4 The present article mainly refers to Luibheid's English translation, see Pseudo-Dionysius 1987, with references to the English translation of Jones, see Jones 1980. For the critical Greek edition, see Suchla 1990, and Heil and Ritter 2012. The Dionysian corpus is consisted of *The Divine Names* (Henceforth DN), *The Mystical Theology* (MT), *The Celestial Hierarchy* (CH), *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* (EH) and 10

concept of love, what is its relationship to philanthropy and communion? Has the scholarly debate between *agape* and *eros* caused us to neglect other aspects of Denys's discourse of love?

To address these questions, this article is structured as follows. First, it re-examines the Dionysian corpus on love and analyzes the context; next, it relates Denys's language of love to the Neoplatonic triad, specifically exploring the linkage between *eros* and the remaining stage; after that, it situates the philanthropy of Jesus Christ within this intermediate stage, arguing for its theological significance; then, it explores the communal dimension of love as an aspect of remaining love, manifested in both Denys's cosmic and liturgical theologies; finally, it offers concluding remarks on the originality of the Dionysian love discourse and its implications for the broader Christian tradition.

1. *Eros* as A Divine Epithet

The main treatment of *eros* in the Dionysian corpus lies in the fourth chapter of *The Divine Names*. At first glance, this chapter appears to cover a wide range of topics, as its title lists "good," "light," "beautiful," "love/*eros*," "ecstasy," "zeal," and the problem of evil. A more careful reading, however, reveals that the chapter is primarily confined to three divine names: Goodness, the Beautiful, and Love. These three are grouped together at the beginning of DN 4.7, and DN 4.18 provides a summary of them before addressing the problem of evil (DN 4.7 701C, DN 4.18 713D–716A). Obviously, evil is not a divine name, but a theological problem arising from the premise that all things originate from and long for the Good. The name "Light" functions as a simile for divine goodness and might be more appropriately placed in the lost (or unwritten) *The Symbolic Theology* (DN 4.5 700C). Similarly, the discussions of "ecstasy" and "zeal" (DN 4.13) are integral components of Denys's overarching treatment of love from DN 4.10 to 4.17. As Rorem suggests, the chapter's elaborate titles are likely a later editorial addition, rather than reflecting Denys's own design (Pseudo-Dionysius 1987, note 2, p. 49).[1] Therefore, this confusing title should not distract us from the chapter's core arguments.

There is no doubt that love holds a prominent place among God's divine names. Not only is it treated at greater length than Goodness and the Beautiful

letters (Ep.). Accordingly, this article cites the treatise with chapter, section and side code, for example: DN 4.7 701C, EH 3.3.12 444B; when it refers to the Greek text, the critical edition will be cited as: Suchla, 160 line 11.

1 There is no title in the critical edition of Suchla, only some subtitles are preserved in the edition of Heil and Ritter.

in DN, but its position—immediately following these two and preceding other quintessential names like Being, Life and Wisdom (DN 5–7)–signals its foundational priority. The most controversial aspect, however, is Denys's designation of divine love as "*eros*" rather than agape, a move that leads Nygren to accuse his substitution of agape with *eros*. Yet, a closer reading of the text reveals that Denys is explicitly interpreting the usage of *eros* "παρὰ τὰ λόγια" (according to *The Words*, DN 4.11 708B; Suchla, 156, line 1). The "τὰ λόγια" here, as Rorem observes, would have been deliberately ambiguous to Denys's audience, potentially alluding either to *The Chaldean Oracles* for Neoplatonists or to the Scriptures for the Christians (Rorem 1984, pp. 15–6).[1] This indicates that Denys is not substituting agape with *eros*; rather, he is attempting to explicate the existing *eros* language within these sacred texts.[2]

As DN 4.11 states, what matters most is not the exact word, but the spiritual senses it signifies. Denys does not claim that *eros* is intrinsically more divine than agape. Rather, he is discussing the scriptural usage of *eros*, as found in Proverbs 4:6, 8; Wisdom of Solomon 8:2 (LXX); and in the saying attributed to Ignatius.

> Indeed some of our writers on sacred matters have deemed the title "yearning" [*eros*] to be more divine than "love [*agape*]." The divine Ignatius writes: "He for whom I yearn has been crucified." In the introductory scriptures you will note the following said of the divine wisdom: "I yearned for her beauty." So let us not fear this title of "yearning"[*eros*] nor be upset by what anyone has to say about these two names, for, in my opinion, the sacred writers regard "yearning" [*eros*] and "love" [agape] as having one and the same meaning. They added "real" to the use of "yearning" [*eros*] regarding divine things because of the unseemly nature such a word has for men. The title "real yearning [*eros*] "is praised by us and by the scriptures themselves as being appropriate to God. Others, however, tended naturally to think of a partial, physical, and divided yearning [*eros*]. (DN 4.12 709AC)

As Denys emphasizes, the instances of *eros* in the Septuagint correspond in meaning to agape in the New Testament; the two terms therefore share a single meaning. Denys's preference for the language of *eros* arises from the difficulty of interpreting agape in the New Testament. By late antiquity, the meaning of agape may have become obscured, posing challenges for Christian

1 For the use of *eros* in *The Chaldean Oracle* (τὰ λόγια), see Fr. 39, 43, 45, 46, in Majercik 1989, pp. 62–7. *Eros* language can be found in Prv 4:6, 8; 2 Sm 1:26 (LXX).

2 This exegetical feature has been highlighted by Luibheid and Rorem, see Pseudo-Dionysius 1987, n. 150, p. 80.

exegetes. Denys instead argues that agape should be interpreted in continuity with its Septuagintal usage, where its distinctive feature is its ecstatic character. Nevertheless, Denys cautions against naming God "*eros*," since the term is commonly associated with a form of love that is "partial, physical, and divided."[1] This divine *eros* must be distinguished from its vulgar counterpart. On this reading, *eros* and agape are ultimately one and the same: what is at issue is true *eros*—an *eros* that establishes unity and alliance between God and all things.

The divine *eros* operates in three ways: it sustains the beings of the same rank, moves the superior to care for the inferior, and draws the inferior to the superior. Through these manifestations, *eros* initiates all levels of reality into a triad of providence, mutual coherence, and respect. In these unities, the nature of *eros* is revealed as essentially "ecstatic" (DN 4.13 712A).[2] This is best exemplified by Paul the Apostle. Seized by this ecstatic *eros*, Paul no longer lives his own life but is led by Christ living in him.[3] Furthermore, *eros* is the divine force behind God's activities of creating, perfecting, harmonizing and drawing creation back to Himself. Seen in this way, the names of goodness and beauty signify God's essential attributes, while *eros* denotes God's dynamic activity in relation to the created order.

Having established this dynamic feature of *eros*, Denys proceeds to address the dual appellations applied to the deity: God as the one who loves and God as the one who is loved.[4] This dual sense is illustrated by a threefold movement, depicting a circular dance around the Good, as the text describes:

> "Divine yearning [*eros*] shows especially its unbeginning and unending nature traveling in an endless circle through the Good, from the Good, in the Good and to the Good, unerringly turning, ever on the same center, ever in the same direction, always proceeding [προϊὼν], always remaining [μένων], always being restored to [ἀποκαθιστάμενος] itself." (DN 4.14 712D–713A; Suchla, 160 line 11)[5]

1 This reminds us of the distinction between heavenly love and common love made by Pausanias in Plato's *Symposium*, 181bc.

2 See also the symbolism of God's inebriation or drunkenness in Ep. 9.5, 1112C.

3 Gal 2:20, the mystical elevation to the third heaven is indicated, see 2 Cor. 12:1–10.

4 DN 4.14: "ἔρωτα καὶ «ἀγάπην» αὐτόν φασι, ποτὲ δὲ ἐραστὸν καὶ ἀγαπητόν." Suchla, 160 line 1–2. Here Denys still uses both *eros* and agape to name God's love, which is another refutation of Nygren's critique.

5 See also DN 4.17 713D: "there is a simple self-moving (erotic) power directing all things to mingle as one, that it starts out from the Good, reaches down to the lowliest creation, returns then in due order through all the stages back to the Good, and thus turns from itself and through itself and upon itself and toward itself in an everlasting

Divine *eros* manifests itself as a relentless motion that unfolds the Good to all creation and enfolds creation back into it. This dynamism recalls both the Pauline epistles,[1] and the Neoplatonic triad of rest, procession and reversion. As these triadic movements are manifestations of erotic love, they are essentially of one substance, originating from God's all-embracing, self-diffusive activity.

From the end of DN 4.14 through DN 4.17, Denys substantiates his discourse by citing the erotic hymn of his teacher Hierotheus, whose identity is unknown to us. This hymn is crucial for understanding his conception of *eros*. In the hymn, the triad of rest, procession and return corresponds to three modes of love within the celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchy, as DN 4.15 says:

> "Love, whether we speak of Divine, or Angelic, or intelligent, or psychical, or physical, let us regard as a certain unifying and combining power, moving the superior to forethought [πρόνοιαν] for the inferior, and the equals to a communion fellowship [κοινωνικὴν ἀλληλουχίαν], and lastly, the inferior to return [ἐπιστροφήν] towards the higher and superior." (DN 4.15 713AB; Suchla, 161 line 3–5)[2]

Here, love is not confined to the deity, but is shared by created beings of all levels—angels, intellects, souls and bodies (the latter three seemingly referring to the human composite). This shared capacity for love explains how God can be both the subject and the object of love: God loves the rational creatures and is loved by the latter. Both the angelic and human love function as a response to the divine love. In rational beings, love is manifested in a unifying power that facilitates their interrelationship, structured in a triad: the providential care of superiors for inferiors, the mutual regard among equals, and the return of inferiors to their superiors.

Recognizing the correlation between the providential love-mutual regard-returning love and the cosmic movements of procession-remaining-return raises two questions. First, what are the specific subjects of these triadic movements and the corresponding forms of love? Second, if procession and return denote the descending and ascending vectors of love, is mutual love

---

circle."

1 Eph 4:6: "one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all." See also Rom 11:36; 1 Cor. 8:6, 12:6; Acts 17:28.

2 With my revision. See also DN 4.7 704B, DN 4.10 708A, 4.13 712A, 4.15 713B, these passages maintain an order of providence, mutuality and return; while only in 4.12 709D mutual love comes first, then providence and return.

correlated with "remaining"? If so, what do "remaining" and "mutual love" signify? The following sections will address these questions.

2. *Eros* and Triadic Movements

An examination of the sections on motion (DN 4.7–9) and on God's rest and motion (DN 9.8–9) reveals that the triadic movements are applied to different subjects. In DN 9.9, Denys correlates the threefold motions with God's own activities: He proceeds outward in creation, sustains the created beings through His care, and summons all things into union with Him. These are depicted as straight, spiral and circular movements, respectively (DN 9.9 916CD).[1] For the sensible creatures, their motions are an imitation of God's, as they proceed from God, having their being in Him, and are summoned back to Him (DN 4.10 705D). The same triple pattern operates in angels and souls, though the primacy of the movements differs. Angels, for instance, first revolve circularly as they are united with the Good and Beautiful, then proceed linearly to offer providence to their inferiors, and move spirally as a combination of these two motions (DN 4.8 704D–705A).[2] In a similar way, the soul moves in a circle by collecting its intellectual powers, in a spiral when engaged in logic and reasoning about divine knowledge, and in a straight line from the symbols to pure contemplation (DN 4.9 705AB).[3]

Notably, for God, "remaining" has two distinct senses. The first is the Deity's abiding within Himself (the Immanent Trinity in theological terms), expressed through the names of "rest" and "sitting".[4] This "rest" signifies God's immutability and stability in His own being, which in turn allows His effects in creation to sustain their own identity and goodness. This concept of divine rest, together with God's motion, forms a dialectic of rest and movement. As scholars such as Gersh and Perl have noted, God's remaining in relation to His procession should be understood through the dialectic of

1 We are warned, these depictions are not to be imagined as spatial movements or changes of God in essence, they are a concession to human praise.

2 This passage does not mention whether the spiral movement of angels is upward or downward, it is pretty likely to be downward.

3 Jones' translation is more accurate than Luibheid's, see Jones 1980, p. 141. Charles-André Bernard attempts to correlate the circular, spiral and straight motions of the soul with mystical, "discursive" and symbolical theology (see Pseudo-Dionysius 1987, note 146, p. 78), but the description is too vague here to make any accurate inference. It may relate to the relationship between mind's functioning as intellectual activities and motion stirred by the divine *eros* for the good and beautiful, namely the relationship of knowledge and love in the medieval perception.

4 "Στάσεως" and "καθέδρας", DN 9.8 916B; Suchla, 212 line 16.

sameness and differentiation, a framework on which Denys follows Proclus (DN 3).[1] Within this dialectic, God's twofold status in relation to creation is articulated: His transcendence over beings and His immanence within them. The second sense of remaining denotes God's ongoing activity in sustaining and caring for the creation (the Economic Trinity), expressed in Platonic terminology as God's impartation or participation (μετεχόμενα, DN 2.5 644A; Suchla, 129 line 3). This participation forms one part of the triad of procession-remaining-return, a structure that mirrors the one used by Proclus.

Denys's argument operates within the two senses, which fit into his two frameworks. The first is the model of "unity and differentiation," which Denys develops in DN 2. The second is the Neoplatonic triad of "procession, remaining, and return," which Denys frequently employs to interpret love and cosmic movement. In my view, the coexistence of these two frameworks introduces a certain tension in his thought.

Notably, when we examine Proclus's discourse, the relationship between the producer/cause (the One) and the produced/effect follows a strict sequence: remaining at first, procession in the middle, and return at last. This is structured in *The Elements of Theology*:

> Prop. 27: But every producer remains as it is, and its consequent proceeds from it without change in its steadfastness. (Dodds 1992, pp. 30–1)[2]
> Prop. 30: All that is immediately produced by any principle both remains in the producing cause and proceeds from it. (Dodds 1992, pp. 34–5)
> Prop. 35: Every effect remains in its cause, proceeds from it, and reverts upon it. (Dodds 1992, pp. 38–9)[3]

These extracts indicate that for Proclus, the sequence of remaining-procession-return is immutable, even if remaining and procession are sometimes inseparable. In contrast, Denys alters this sequence for God (though not for angels and humankind): He places procession first, followed by remaining and return. This subtle revision reveals Denys's originality in adapting Neoplatonism to a Christian framework. The re-structuring of the

1 See Gersh 1978, p. 51; and Perl 2007, p. 46.

2. Denys refers to a work also named *The Element of Theology*, attributed to his teacher Hierotheus, whose identity is lost to us. See DN 2.9 648AB.

3 There are actually two kinds of remaining in Proclus' theory: the produced remains in the producer, and the producer remain in itself in the act of producing. A detailed discussion can be found in Gersh 1978, p. 51. Heide suggests in Denys the rest and procession combined to convey God as productivity itself, hence for God procession means rest and rest means procession, but Heide does not deal with the order of remain and procession. See Heide 2019, pp. 52–4.

triad has been highlighted by Endre von Ivánka (1902–1974) and von Balthasar (1905–1988), and their studies have been woven into Christian Schäfer's persuasive analysis of DN.[1] However, the present article would incorporate the triad into Denys's love language, especially its correlation to his Christology and church hierarchy.

As previously argued, procession-remaining-return are manifestations of divine love. In Denys's theology, the predominant feature of love is its ecstatic nature. This renders the middle phase of remaining both significant and necessary. If remaining comes first, it implies God's initial state is one of staying within Himself—a form of "self-love" or love contained within the Trinitarian Persons. In such a reading, there is little room for remaining between procession and return, and creation holds no real significance for God. This was the thorny issue faced by Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa, who restricted God's agape to the Trinity. As Rist notes, Denys's concept of ecstatic *eros* evades the difficulty of explaining how God's agape can be bestowed on us (Rist 1966, p. 240). Similarly, in Proclus's system, the absolute self-sufficiency of the One risks making procession or overflowing unnecessary, thereby providing an insufficient rationale for emanation. By re-ordering the triad, Denys implies that God, being ecstatic, is primarily concerned with remaining in all things (in the second economic sense), rather than remaining in His self (in the first, immanent sense). If God were primarily self-contained, there would be little ontological space for creation, or even for love itself. In Perl's words, Denys's God is "intrinsically ecstatic" (Perl 2007, p. 46); He is destined to go out of Himself. Creation and providence are thus modes of His being, not dispensable actions taken to fulfill His need for pleasure or utility.

This concept of an ecstatic remaining implies a mutuality and dynamic relationship between God and creation, affirming that the intermediate rest and the present world are essential to the divine economy. The phase of remaining also highlights two issues concerning erotic love: the love manifested in the incarnation, and the love that exists among created beings. In the following sections, I will argue that philanthropic incarnation and loving communion are virtually two aspects of this remaining love.

3. Love that Remains: Christ's Philanthropy

Before Denys, thinkers like Origen and Gregory of Nyssa had already

1 Schäfer anchors the intermediate stage of halt (remaining) in DN 8-11, see the diagram in Schäfer 2006, p. 179. A summary of Schäfer's study can be found in Paul Rorem's introduction for the book, especially from pages xiv to xvi.

used the term "philanthropy" (love for humanity) to describe Christ's motive for descending in the incarnation.[1] Denys, likewise, consistently portrays Christ's incarnation as an act of His philanthropy.[2] The philanthropic language in Dionysian thought has been noted by several scholars. In an earlier article, Rist has noticed Denys's frequent use of philanthropy to denote God's goodness manifested in the incarnation (Rist 1966, note 11, p. 238). In a later work, Rist further elaborates that *eros* represents a general love for all (a "General Theory of Divinity"), in contrast with philanthropy, which signifies a special love demonstrated in the incarnation (a "Special Theory of Divinity"). Through this contrast, Rist points out that *eros* can be applied to human love, whereas philanthropy cannot (Rist 1999, pp. 379–80). Similarly, Osborne interprets philanthropic incarnation as a "love beyond call of duty"–an extraordinary love that surpasses God's ordinary providence (Osborne 1996, p. 198). Vasilakis characterizes philanthropy as the manic manifestation of God's love, with Christ serving as the bond between God and creation, who incarnated specifically for human beings as the microcosm and bond of the cosmos (Vasilakis 2020, p. 156).

While these interpretations mainly view philanthropy as a manifestation of God's cosmic love, oriented exclusively toward human salvation, this article will anchor Christ's philanthropy between the descending and ascending movements of *eros*, acting as a counterpart to "remaining" between procession and return. Since philanthropy mainly denotes Christ's love for humanity, we must first examine Denys's Christology.

In his writings on Jesus Christ, Denys employs a series of binaries: the divine and the human, affirmation and negation, hiddenness and revelation. The fourth epistle is generally considered central to understanding his conception of Christ:

> "Out of his [Christ's] very great love for humanity [φιλανθρωπία], he became quite truly a human, both superhuman and among humans; and, though himself beyond being, he took upon himself the being of humans… As one considers it [the work of Jesus] all in a divine manner, one will recognize in a transcending way that every affirmation regarding Jesus' love for humanity has the force of a

1 They see Christ's incarnation as a stimulus of human *eros* for their return to God. See Nygren, note 1, p. 374; also p. 435, 445.

2 Philanthropy occurs 18 times in Dionysian corpus. As many as 10 times it is used with Jesus (τῆς Ἰησοῦ φιλανθρωπίας), see DN 1.4 592A; DN 2.3 640C; DN 6.2 856C; CH 4.4 181B; CH 7.3 209B; EH 3.3.12 444A; EH 3.3.13 444C; EH 5.3.5 512C; Ep. 3 1069B; and Ep.4 1072BC. Sometimes it is also used with the Father (πατρικὴ φιλανθρωπία; CH 8.2 240D), thearchy (τῆς θεαρχικῆς φιλανθρωπίας, EH 3.3.8 437A, EH 7.3.7 561D) or the hierarch (EH 4.3.7 561D).

> negation pointing toward transcendence." (Ep. 4 1072AB; Heil and Ritter, 161 line 4)

Different themes are interwoven into this passage: Jesus's activities are understood through the binary of affirmation and negation, and the assertions about Him are designated to facilitate a shift from the cataphatic to the apophatic. Here, we see that *apophaticism* is not merely a linguistic or logical exercise, but is bound to the soul's ascent, much like Moses' climb up Mount Sinai in *The Mystical Theology* (MT 3 1033C).[1] Viewed this way, the "negation" pertaining to Christ's divine love is intended for human elevation. It is only after assuming human nature that He enables human reversion:

> "The goodness of the Deity has endless love for humanity [philanthropy] and never ceased from benignly pouring out on us its providential gifts… It took upon itself in a most authentic way all the characteristics of our nature, except sin. It became one with us in our lowliness… It saved our nature from almost complete wreckage and delivered the dwelling place of our soul from the most accursed passion and from destructive defilement. Finally, it showed us a supramundane uplifting and an inspired way of life in shaping ourself [sic] to it as fully as lay in our power." (EH 3.3.11 441AC. See also DN 1.4 592A, DN 6.2 856D)

A variety of salvific efforts preceded the incarnation, all of which culminate in Christ's incarnation as the decisive turning point in the divine scheme. As the apophatic nature of the incarnation suggests, Christ's loving work should be understood as a watershed between God's revelation and our salvation–a restoration of our nature from wretchedness to its original goodness. This point is also addressed in the third letter:

> "What comes into view, contrary to hope, from previous obscurity, is described as 'sudden [ἐξαίφνης].' As for the love of Christ for humanity, the Word of God, I believe, uses this term to hint that the transcendent has put aside its own hiddenness and has revealed itself to us by becoming a human being. But he is hidden even after this revelation, or, if I may speak in a more divine fashion, is hidden even amid the revelation." (Ep. 3 1069B)[2]

1 For a discussion of this linkage and its root in Proclus, see Louth 2022, pp. 167–9.

2 A second occurrence of "sudden" likens the divine activity to the activity of fire, see CH 15.2 329C; for a linkage between Christ's fire and our loving return, see EH 2.2.1–2, 393AB.

Interpretations of the word "sudden" vary. A Christian reading would relate this to Paul's sudden seizure on the road of Damascus, a point also mentioned in the fifth letter (Ep. 5 1073A).[1] One may also recall Plato's *Symposium*, where the lover ascends from the love of a beautiful body to intangible beauty, then to the beauty of knowledge, and is finally granted a sudden revelation of "the beautiful in its nature".[2] The crucial difference is that in Platonic vision, this ultimate beauty only appears at the summit of a long philosophical pursuit, whereas in Paul's experience, the unexpected revelation of Christ's light is the decisive, initiating event for his conversion.[3] Denys can be read in both ways. Read Platonically, the word "sudden" relates to Moses' arrival at the peak of Mount Sinai, where he plunges into the divine darkness at God's dwelling. Read in a Pauline way, the suddenness of Christ's self-revelation is the manifestation of Beauty itself, forming the watershed between *exitus* and *reditus*, between God's procession and our return. This latter interpretation is more useful for explaining Denys's Christocentric focus: his concentration on Christ's works rather than His nature, on His short, "sudden" appearance rather than His long hiddenness, and hence for focusing on Jesus' "divine life in the flesh" (EH 3.3.12 444B).

For Denys, Christ's role must be understood in relation to the two hierarchies. Jesus, as Denys puts it, is "the source and the perfection of every hierarchy" (EH 1.2 373B)[4]. The church hierarchy should be conceived as a response to the incarnated philanthropy, with the primary task of providing illumination so that we may attain perfection through assimilation to Him. Chronologically, the church was established by Jesus, passed down by his disciples, and is now led by the hierarchs (bishops) and sacred orders. This is why a hymn is devoted to Christ at the opening of *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. Remarkably, in the angelic hierarchy, Christ is also invoked as the Light of the Father, diffusing radiance through angelic illumination (CH 1.2 121AB).[5] Thus, both hierarchies are carriers of this divine Light, which is ordained for our salvation.

---

1 Cf. Acts 9:3. See Golitzin 2003, p. 23; and Shomaker 2016, p. 132.

2 *Symposium*, 210A–E. Apart from *Symposium*, some suggests it alluding to the third hypothesis in *Parmenides*, concerning the timeless instances between eternity and time. See Hathaway 1969, p. 80; and Golitzin 2003, p. 22.

3 Louth points out that in Platonic mysticism One comes upon the soul, while for Christians grace initiates the soul's quest for a union with God. See Louth 2007, p. 190.

4 See also EH 1.1 372A, EH 5.1.5 505B.

5 The salvific focus has been noticed by de Andia, she notices that among the four treatises, DN and MT start with prayer to the Trinity, while the two treatises on hierarchies begin with prayer to Christ, see de Andia 1996, pp. 439ff.

The relationship between Christ and the angels is especially noteworthy. As the source of angelic power, Christ holds a position of decisive superiority, which can be understood through three facets. First, in the rite of ointment, the oil for the Myron is covered by twelve folds, symbolizing the assembly of seraphim around Jesus. Seraphim receive "spiritual gifts" directly from Jesus and offer ceaseless divine praises.[1] Second, Christ fully assumes human nature, achieving a unique synthesis of the conceptual and the perceptual that remains inaccessible to angels.[2] Third, the entire work of the angels finds its ultimate consummation in Christ's incarnation; their proclamations throughout Scripture anticipated this event, foretelling what was to come to the biblical figures.[3] A notable point, as Louth argues, is that hierarchical movement between different ranks is typically impossible.[4] Yet, Jesus alone possesses the power to traverse the hierarchies: He descended into the human order to establish the church, and upon completing His work, He ascended into the hierarchy of the revealers, designated as the "angel of great counsel"[5]. This demonstrates that Christ not only surpasses the angels within their hierarchy, but also holds the authority to shape the ecclesiastical order. He is the Light itself, revealing Himself directly to humanity, while the angels remain confined to their appointed stations. By superseding the angels, Christ perfectly fulfills the role of intermediary between the divine and human realms.

In assuming humanity, the incarnated One establishes a congruity of our hierarchy and the heavenly ones. "By the fact of being God-made-man he accomplished something new in our midst—the activity of the God-man." (Ep. 4 1072C) For Denys, what is paramount is this perfect mediation–between divinity and humanity, affirmation and negation, concealment and revelation, and indeed, between the heavenly and human hierarchies themselves. These binaries capture the essential "in-betweenness" of the incarnation, which I argue is fundamental to the Dionysian conception of philanthropy.

---

1 "The twelve folds" is mentioned in EH 4.2 473A, which may refer to two six-winged seraphim, see Pseudo-Dionysius 1987, note 112, p. 225; for its contemplation, see EH 4.3.4, 477C; EH 4.3.5 480BC.

2 This is a point highlighted by John of Damascus, he argues that Jesus' assuming of human nature renders human being accessible to the divine nature, which is inaccessible to the angels. See John of Damascus 2003, III. 26, p. 103.

3 Angels proclaimed to Zechariah, Mary, Joseph and the shepherds, see CH 4.4 181B.

4 I agree with Louth's view that one cannot move upward the hierarchy but is more and more assimilated into the hierarchy. See Louth 2007, p. 166.

5 Ἄγγελος μεγάλης βουλῆς, CH 4.4 181CD, Günter and Ritter, 24 line 2. Cf. Is 9:6.

4. Love among the Equals: Communal Dimension

The concept of love embedded within the hierarchy is intrinsically related to Christ's work of philanthropy.[1] For Meyendorff, there seems to be a gap between individual ascent and hierarchical order, and between Denys's Christology and his two hierarchies (Meyendorff 1969, pp. 81–2). While this article has situated Denys's Christology between the cosmic order and ecclesiastic setting, there is no such a gulf between incarnation and hierarchies. Then we must ask: what is the love that remains in the world, especially among human beings?

As argued above, providential care, love among equals, and returning love correlate with procession-remaining-return. When descending and ascending *eros* correspond to procession and return, what is the sense of the middle term, *eros* as remaining? This is not a problem for Proclus, in whose system love flows either from higher to lower or returns in the reverse order. For Denys, however, since he makes room for relationships within the same rank, the love between equals cannot be overlooked.[2] Although this has been noted by some scholars, they differ on how to interpret this mutual love. Rist infers that it refers either to the love between the Trinitarian Persons or between fellow human beings (Rist 1966, p. 241). Heide also notes the ambiguity in Denys's concept of mutual love, suggesting it could apply to the Trinitarian Persons or to equal ranks of angelic beings, though he does not develop the latter option (Heide 2019, pp. 49–51). Kupperman, conversely, argues that love between equals refers to angels and human beings insofar as they are ontologically equal, rather than to the Trinitarian Persons (Kupperman 2013).

Let us examine these inferences in turn. First, consider Rist's suggestion of mutual love among the Trinitarian Persons. In the corpus, mutual love is consistently positioned between the superior's providential love and the inferior's returning love. A trinitarian reading would therefore raise a difficult question: does Denys imply a hierarchy within the Trinity itself? This reading would suggest a certain subordinationism, which runs counter to the teachings of the Nicene Creed and the Cappadocians.[3] Denys's attitude towards the Trinitarian formula is somewhat ambiguous. Denys refers to the Son and Spirit as "divine offshoots" of the Father (DN 2.7 645B), he also asserts that "unities hold a higher place than differentiations" within the divine realms

1 Cf. Mt 22:37-39, Mk. 12:30-31, Lk 10:27.

2 Kupperman suggests that Dionysius' form of love among equals has its origin in Iamblichean theology. See Kupperman 2013.

3 Rhodes contends in Denys there is an incompatibility of the notion of beyond-being (*hyperousios*) with the doctrine of Trinity, see Rhodes 2014, p. 308.

(DN 2.11 652A). As Louth comments, there is a "unity within the Godhead that is more ultimate than the Trinity of Persons" (Louth 1989, pp. 90-91). Denys affirms the Trinitarian unity, and there is no indication of hierarchy among the three Persons of the Trinity. Based on this interpretation, I argue that the love between equals—positioned between providential care and returning love—should be understood as pertaining to the economic level, rather than the Trinitarian level.

Second, we have the suggestions by Heide and Kupperman that mutual love applies to angels. This interpretation is plausible for two reasons. Firstly, when explaining the biblical symbol of chariots in CH 15.9, Denys relates it to "the conjoined communion of those [angels] of the same rank"[1]. Secondly, the angelic hierarchy consists of nine orders grouped into three ranks, within each rank the three orders of angels are of equal status (CH 6.2 201A).[2] The primary task of angels is to transmit the divine light from God through a process of "handing down" (CH 8.2 240C).[3] However, angels of the same rank are described as communicating through "exchanging queries" among themselves (CH 7.3 209BC). The manner in which inferior angels return love to their superiors is not detailed in the extant works, though it may have been discussed in the lost text, *The Properties and Ranks of the Angels* (DN 4.2 696B).

Third, there is Kupperman's inference that the mutual love applies to human beings. While his argument is plausible, he grounds it in the Logos-logoi distinction, a framework prominent in Plotinus and Maximus the Confessor but not explicitly found in Denys. This leads to a critical question: what, precisely, is meant by mutual love among human beings, and in what sense can they be considered equal? The focus on human love, as will be argued below, should be placed within the harmony forged by the cosmic love among all levels of the created beings.

Since Denys renders mutual love among the equals, we should examine the concept of equality first. The divine name "Equality" is briefly addressed in DN 9.10, following a discussion of "inequality" in DN 8.9.[4] For Denys, inequality symbolizes the individualizing of things–their distinction from the

1 CH 15.9 337C: "τὰ δὲ ἅρματα τὴν συζευκτικὴν τῶν ὁμοταγῶν κοινωνίαν." Heil and Ritter, 58 line 11–2.

2 See also CH 8.1 240A.

3 The transmission is also through voices, as they "cry out to one another". See CH 10.2 273A.

4 This treatment also fits into the differentiation between God's immanent Trinity and economic Trinity. Notably, equality comes after the topics of greatness and smallness, sameness and difference, similarity and dissimilarity, and rest and motion in DN 9; while inequality is listed along with the names of power, righteousness, salvation and redemption in DN 8.

whole–which is preserved by divine righteousness. Equality, however, carries a dual sense for the Deity: first, God retains His own indivisibility and self-consistency; and second, God demonstrates equality by impartially proceeding to all, providing subsistence for all, and bestowing gifts upon all (DN 9.10 917A). As a counterpart to this divine equality, there exists an ontological sameness shared by all beings, stemming from their common origin and end:

> "From this [divine] beauty comes the existence of everything, each being exhibiting its own way of beauty. For beauty is the cause of harmony [ἐφαρμογαί], of sympathy [φιλίαι], of community [κοινωνίαι]. Beauty unites all things and is the source of all things. It is the great creating cause which bestirs the world and holds all things in existence by the longing inside them to have beauty." (DN 4.7 704A; Suchla, 152 line 2)

All creation comes from God and shares in God's goodness and beauty, collectively participating in the erotic yearning for return. This shared participation forms the harmony of the created order. Significantly, Denys describes this harmony with three interrelated terms: friendship (φιλία), mutuality (ἀλλῆλος) and community (κοινωνία). [1] These words are interchangeable to depict the internal relations among beings as bearers of goodness and beauty. Their inherent similarities create a congruity that embodies the Greek principle of "like is known by like" (CH 2.3 140C)[2]. Understood in this light, love between equals refers to the fundamental concord of the created cosmos.

Beyond this cosmic sense, mutual love also carries a communal dimension, conveyed through the concept of communion (κοινωνία) or philia.[3] As mentioned above, Christ is the source and end of church hierarchy,

1 DN 4.21 724A: "friendship, inherent harmony… kindly to each other" (φίλα τἀγαθὰ καὶ ἐναρμόνια πάντα…προσήγορα ἀλλήλοις, Suchla, 169 line 9–11); DN 4.19 717A: "communion, unity and concord" (κοινωνία καί ἑνότητι καί φιλία, Suchla, 164 line 15); DN 4.20 720C: "real unity and real love" (ἑνώσεως καὶ φιλίας, Suchla, 167 line 5); and DN 8.5 892C: "mutual harmony and communion" (τὴν ἀλλήλων φιλίαν καὶ κοινωνίαν, Suchla, 202 line 8).

2 See Louth 1989, p. 39. *Corpus Hermeticum* XI, 20, in Copenhaver 2000, p. 41. And also Festugiere 1954, p. 136.

3 The word philia occurs 10 times in Denys's writing, and philia only occurs in *Divine Names*. Vasilakis offers a word study of philia in the corpus, see Vasilakis 2020, note 129, p. 178. Louth also offers a lexical analysis of love, see Louth 2022, p. 156. In comparison, expressions of κοινωνέω/κοινωνία/κοινωνίκός/κοινωνός occur more

which means, the salvific work of Christ should be mediated through the church settings, namely its clerical order, liturgical setting, and material elements. This leads to a reading of *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* through the triadic love among the superior, the inferior, and those of equal status. EH contains a rich abundance of communion language. The most focused discussion occurs in the rite of the Eucharist and its contemplation. The Eucharist is called the synaxis (gathering) or communion. As "sacrament of sacraments," it brings unity to our divisions and establishes a "communion with the One" (EH 3.1 424C). It represents the end and perfection of all rites and divine works, wherein all participants are granted a share of divine reality and union with the body of Christ.

The synaxis is divided into two phases, marked by the exclusion of catechumens, penitents and the possessed from the second part. The first phase is open to all people, including the initial prayer, censing around the nave, psalm singing and scripture reading. The second phase is restricted to clergy, monks and laity, and comprises the placing of the bread and cup, singing and praying, the ritual kiss of peace, a second scripture reading, the Eucharist prayer, the uncovering of bread and wine, communion, and the final thanksgiving. This division indicates that while all those present are eligible to witness Christ's love, only the initiated are permitted to receive the Eucharist. Thus, although the rite is structured hierarchically, it preserves an appropriate place for every individual within that hierarchy.

Apart from this Eucharistic communion, the believer is also united to the body of the Church–an assembly of people of "equal birth" (EH 3.3.11 441B). This ecclesial body is composed of saints who are "members of Christ," existing in mutual companionship (EH 7.1 553B).[1] The communion of saints encompasses one's entire life, from baptism to death, as illustrated in the rite of anointing the dead. In one scene, the dying person is surrounded by "his peers, his neighbors with God, those living like him, bless him for having come prayerfully and triumphantly to his goal." (EH 7.1.3 556B) These are the individual's lifelong companions. In another scene, the body of the deceased is placed alongside others of the same rank, as they are "enrolled forever in the company of the saints" (EH 7.3.3 557D–560A), sharing a blessed dwelling in the afterlife. Thus, the communion with Christ is a journey accompanied by fellow saints, extending from this life to the next.

The Eucharist and funeral rites fully reveal the meaning of communion. As an expression of cosmic harmony, the hierarchical structure is not confined

in EH than in DN or CH, see "Griechisches Register", in Ritter and Heil, 287.

1 This communal dimension has been highlighted by Louth, see Louth 2007, pp. 194–6.

to the one-way, downward transmission of divine light. Rather, it aims for a universal concord and resonance across all levels of beings. This is not a static system of overflow but is oriented toward dynamism and reciprocity between ranks, as well as mutuality within the same order. Seen in this way, the Eucharist is not merely about receiving God's gifts and offering thanksgiving to Him; it is a shared divine feast among participants who are equally children of God. In light of this, the ascetic life is not a solitary pursuit. The believer is accompanied by other perfected individuals, even unto death and the afterlife, exemplifying the communion or friendship that binds them together. From this analysis, we can relate the two great commandments to the Dionysian conception of love: our love for God (the first commandment) is a returning love in response to God's providential care in the procession, while love for our neighbors (the second commandment) is the love that remains, the mutual love enacted between God's procession and our return, between God's incarnation and human union with God.

Concluding Remarks

Several remarks emerge from this study. As the above discussion shows, love in Denys possesses a richer constellation of meanings than the Platonic *eros* from which it derives. The intriguing thing is that the corpus primarily engages with *eros* language, with only occasional references to terms such as agape, philanthropy or communion. The reason behind this, this article argues, is not a lack of conceptual precision or a poverty of related ideas, but rather the inherent fecundity *eros* itself. For Denys, *eros* is the singular, unifying power manifest in the movements of procession, remaining and return. It finds expression in Christ's philanthropy and in the cosmic and ecclesiastical communion, as the manifestation of love between procession and return.

The unitary nature of *eros* is fundamental. It indicates that various concepts of love are not different in kind nor incommensurable; they are, in essence, manifestations of a single, multifaceted *eros*. Denys is not an isolated case in this approach. In the New Testament, agape predominates in the commandments and teachings on love. Plato and his followers unanimously understood love as essentially *eros*, the pursuit of goodness and beauty in the beloved. Aristotle devoted two books of the *Nicomachean Ethics* to philia, applying it to relationships between parents and children, lovers and beloved, fellow citizens, rulers and ruled, benefactors and beneficiaries, and friends. Following Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas even extended the scope of friendship to include God, oneself, one's body, angels and demons. The polysemous usage of *eros* can create a trap for readers like Nygren, who, by framing *eros* in stark opposition to agape, inadvertently overlooks the value and integration of other love languages—not only in Denys, but across both pagan and

Christian authors.

Second, Denys makes a decisive move by reordering the triad, placing "remaining" as the second term between procession and return, in contrast to Proclus's sequence of remaining-procession-return. This indicates Denys does not slavishly accept all of his Neoplatonic predecessors but adapts their framework into a Christian narrative. By positioning God's remaining between procession and return, Denys emphasizes His continuous providence within the created order—a providence that culminates in God becoming incarnate and establishing the church hierarchy. Christ's incarnation is the ultimate manifestation of this "remaining" among us, forming the pivotal watershed between descension and ascension, the cataphatic and the apophatic, the divine and the human, the angelic hierarchy and our own. Seen in this way, Jesus Christ is not marginalized in Denys's thought as some critics claim, but stands at the very center of his metaphysics, mysticism and liturgical theology. The Christocentric focus reveals Denys's creativity in Christianizing Platonism and affirms his orthodoxy, demonstrating that he is far from a Platonist in Christian disguise.

This leads directly to the final point. The intermediate stage of remaining allows for the incorporation of love between equals into the framework. The concept of communion thus applies to the cosmic concord among different beings, exemplified in the internal relationships within the Christian community. This communal vision is easily overlooked if one focuses solely on Denys's most famous treatise, *The Mystical Theology*, which describes the soul's solitary ascent to God and its subsequent plunge into the divine darkness—a journey that appears as isolated as Plotinus's "flight of the alone to the Alone". However, in *The Ecclesiastic Hierarchy*, union with God is not achieved in isolation. The believer lives and worships collectively within the whole hierarchy; it is a corporate elevation to participate in God's activity and attributes, whereby in uniting with Christ, we also unite with one another. This vision is not entirely absent even in MT. When Moses departs from the crowds, he is first "accompanied by chosen priests [as] he pushes ahead to the summit of the divine ascents" (MT 1.3 1000D), before he alone enters the darkness. This detail offers a vital correction to the conceptions of theology–such as those in certain Calvinist or modern Sino-Christian contexts—that frame salvation solely as a scheme between the individual soul and God, thereby neglecting its communal and cosmic dimensions. In Denys, this communal dimension is never lost. Throughout the corpus, he repeatedly employs the first-person plural to depict the deifying vision, as epitomized in this passage:

> "In the time to come, when we are incorruptible and immortal, when we have come at last to the blessed inheritance of being like Christ, then, as scripture says, 'we shall always be with the Lord.'… We shall be united with him and, our understanding carried away, blessedly happy, we shall be struck by his blazing light. Marvelously, our minds will be like those in the heavens above. We shall be 'equal to angels and sons [sic] of God, being sons [sic] of the resurrection.'" (DN 1.4 592BC)

References

Corry, Patrick. 2022. Erōs, Ecstasis and Silence in Dionysius' Mystical Theology. *Pro Ecclesia* 31, no. 3: 302–320.

De Andia, Ysabel. 1996. *Henosis. L'Union à Dieu chez Denys l'Aréopagite*. Leiden: Brill.

De Vogel, Cornelia J. 1981. Greek Cosmic Love and the Christian Love of God: Boethius, Dionysius the Areopagite and the Author of the Fourth Gospel. *Vigiliae Christianae* 35: 57–81.

Dodds, E. R., ed. 1992. *Proclus: The Elements of Theology, A Revised Text*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Festugiere, Andre-Jean. 1954. *Personal Religion Among the Greeks*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Forsberg, Juhani. 2010. Afterword: Finnish Luther Research since 1979. In *Two Kinds of Love: Martin Luther's Religious World*. Tuomo Mannermaa, translated by Kirsi I. Stjerna. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, pp. 89–103.

Gersh, Stephen. 1978. *From Iamblichus to Eriugena: An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition*. Leiden: Brill.

Golitzin, Alexander. 2003. 'Suddenly, Christ': The Place of Negative Theology in the Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagite. In *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*. Edited by Michael Kessler and Christian Sheppard. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 8–37.

Hathaway, Ronald F. 1969. *Hierarchy and the Definition of Order in the Letters of Pseudo-Dionysius*. Martinus Nijhoff: The Hague.

Heide, Daniel. 2019. Divine Eros: The Providential and Perfective Ecstasy of God in Dionysius' *Divine Names* IV. *Dionysius* 37: 44–59.

Heil, Günter and Adolf Martin Ritter, eds. 2012. *Corpus Dionysiacum II: De Coelesti Hierarchia, De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia, De Mystica Theologia, Epistulae*. Berlin: de Gruyter.

John of Damascus. 2003. *St. John of Damascus: Three Treatises on the Divine Image*. Translated by Andrew Louth. New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press.

Jones, John D. 1980. *Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite:* The Divine Names *and* The Mystical Theology. Milwaukee: The Marquette University Press.

Kupperman, J. S. 2013. Eros and Agape in Dionysius the Areopagite. *Journal of the Western Mystery Tradition* 3, no. 25. Website content: http://www.jwmt.org/v3n25/kupperman.html (accessed on 23 Oct. 2024).

Louth, Andrew. 1989. *Denys the Areopagite*. London, New York: Continuum.

———. 2007. *The Origins of The Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*. New York: Oxford University Press.

———. 2022. Divine Love and Platonic Beauty in Dionysius the Areopagite. In *Platonic Love from Antiquity to the Renaissance*. Edited by Carl Séan O'Brien and John Dillon. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 153–170

Majercik, Ruth. 1989. *The Chaldean Oracles: Text, Translation, and Commentary*. Leiden: Brill.

Meyendorff, John. 1969. *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*. Washington: Corpus Books.

Nygren, Anders. 1953. *Agape and Eros*. Translated by Philip S. Watson. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press.

Osborne, Catherine. 1996. *Eros Unveiled: Plato and the God of Love*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Perl, Eric D. 2007. *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Pseudo-Dionysius. 1987. *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*. Translated by Colm Luibheid, note by Paul Rorem. New Jersey: Paulist Press.

Rhodes, Michael Craig. 2014. Pseudo-Dionysius' Concept of God. *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 75, no.4: 306–18.

Rist, John M. 1966. "A Note on Eros and Agape in Pseudo-Dionysius." *Vigiliae Christianae* 20, no. 4: 235–43.

———. 1999. Love, Knowing and Incarnation in Pseudo-Dionysius. In *Traditions of Platonism: Essays in Honour of John Dillon*. Edited by John J. Clearly. Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 375–388.

Schäfer, Christian. 2006. *Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite: An Introduction to the Structure and the Content of the Treatise On the Divine Names*. Leiden, Boston: Brill.

Shomaker, Ben. 2016. An Eternal Incorrigible Metaphysician: Decoding the Christology of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. *Studies in Spirituality* 26: 105–56.

Smith, J. Warren. 2012. Divine Ecstasy and Divine Simplicity: The Eros Motif in Pseudo-Dionysius's Soteriology. *Pro Ecclesia* 21, no. 2: 211–227.

Suchla, Beate Regina, ed. 1990. *Corpus Dionysiacum I: Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, De Divinis Nominibus*. Berlin: de Gruyter.

Trismegistus, Hermes. 2000. *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the*

Latin Asclepius in a New English Translation with Notes and Introduction. Translated by Brian P. Copenhaver. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Turner, Denys. 1995. *Eros and Allegory: Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs*. Massachusetts: Cistercian Publications.

Vasilakis, Dimitrios A. 2020. *Eros in Neoplatonism and Its Reception in Christian Philosophy: Exploring Love in Plotinus, Proclus and Dionysius the Areopagite*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.