

LOVING GOD IN THE DARK: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE THEOLOGY OF PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS

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“DENYS THE AREOPOGITE, FIRST APOSTLE TO
THE GAULS” (16TH C.)



WHY LEARN FROM PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS NOW?

- First, a word from the era of the Reformations:
 - “Early reform-minded leaders [of the Reformation era] such as Jean Gerson or Nicholas of Cusa had drawn on Dionysius for their pastoral insistence that Christian learning and spiritual contemplation belong together.”
- Secondly, a word from our time (Jean Leclercq, scholar):
 - “Two recent developments contribute to the relevance of Dionysius for our contemporary world. First is the importance he attributes to symbols in discursive thought and mysticism. Today, an ever greater recognition is given to the role of the imagination and this has caused a number of thinkers to return to what they call “a theology of symbolism.”

WHO IS THIS THEOLOGIAN?

- The author of a highly influential and controversial corpus of theological writings:
 - *The Divine Names*
 - *The Mystical Theology (our text)*
 - *The Celestial Hierarchy*
 - *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*
 - *The Letters*
 - A theologian whose journey of influence shows the history of the churches...
 - Paul's convert on the Areopagus (Acts 17:34)
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A JOURNEY ACROSS THE AGES AND LANDS OF THE CHURCHES

- Theological concerns with orthodoxy
 - “Dionysius is the most pernicious; he platonizes more than he Christianizes.”
–Martin Luther
- “Heretical East” to the Byzantine East to the Catholic West
 - Christological Problems (not our topic)
 - Trinitarian concerns (not our topic)
 - Authorship concerns (a fun topic)
 - Renaissance concerns: who *really* wrote this?
 - Karl’s solution: Santa and Shakespeare

THE MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

- Why this text?
 - It's representative of PD's entire writings.
 - It's short.
- What to look for when you're reading...
 - Causality: Don't think like a scientist.
 - Light and Darkness
 - What we can know as humans / what we cannot know
 - **An argument about what God is that generates an argument about what humans can say**
- What you can ask yourself when you're reading...
 1. How does PD's description of God resonate with your own thoughts and experience?
 2. How are God and humans related in this text? Are they strangers? Friends? Are they on some kind of journey? What kind?