3
The Tradition of the Divine Names

The opening titular lines of Dionysius's *On the Divine Names* suggest that not only does the phenomenon of a divine name antedate the treatise, but also that Dionysius intends his treatise to be part of an ongoing tradition.[1] In the remainder of the corpus, however, nothing further is said of this "tradition." Therefore, any attempt to relate this tradition to the Dionysian text for the most part is an exercise in speculation and historical construction.[2] This chapter explores the possible roots and contours of the divine name tradition as it antedates the Dionysian formulation, as well as the nature of a divine name that emerges from Dionysius's own contribution to this mysterious tradition.

For propaedeutic purposes it is important at the outset to clarify that the term "divine name" corresponds to two primary, though interrelated, significations. In a broad sense, it may refer to a *tradition* in which human thought reflects upon the relation between language and divinity. Such traditions can be found both in biblical and Greek thought, though with vastly different textures. The biblical source is found in the *Exodus* account where God gives his name to Moses. In Greek thought, because Plato's *Cratylus* explores the natural and conventional dimensions of language as such, it could be considered a foundational text for divine names. When

1. Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Divine Names* [hereafter *DN*] 1, 1 (585A): ΤΩΙ ΣΥΜΠΡΕΣΒΥΤΕΡΩΙ ΤΙΜΟΘΕΩΙ ΔΙΟΝΥΣΙΟΣ Ο ΠΡΕΣΒΥΤΕΡΟΣ ΠΕΡΙ ΘΕΙΩΝ ΟΝΟΜΑΤΩΝ. τίς ὁ τοῦ λογου σκοπὸς, καὶ τὶς ἡ περὶ θεῖων ὀνομάτων παράδοσις. "To my fellow Presbyter Timothy, Dionysius the Presbyter. What is the purpose of the discourse, and the tradition regarding the divine names." We should note that, unlike the Migne, the de Gruyter edition does not contain this introductory subtitle. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from *On the Divine Names* will be taken from John Parker's edition. For referential purposes, citations will include the text followed by column numbers and letters as found in Migne.

2. The following brief exposition is prescriptive rather than demonstrative or diagrammatic, open to being weighed against further evidence.

one adds those works of Aristotle that treat the theme of naming/language (*Topics*, *On Interpretation*, *Posterior Analytics*) and later Neoplatonic works, such as Proclus's *Commentary on the Cratylus* and his *On the Theology of Plato*, and Porphyry's *On the Divine Names*, it is possible to discern a philosophical tradition that emerges from the Greek approach to naming in general and divine naming more specifically. As Greek reflection develops, certain designations, or "names" become more widespread as references to divinity or divinities. Certainly, given the Neoplatonic coloring of his thought, Dionysius is influenced by this approach. However, as will become clear it is not the primary influence on his approach to naming, but supplements a more biblical substance.

More specific to Dionysius, the term "divine name" refers to a *phenomenon* that identifies the communication of a divine perfection into the created order. This makes it something highly complex as it identifies a reality in between the ineffable divine essence and actual, concrete entities. But more will be said on this later on. What is important to note at the outset is that although the Dionysian treatise *On the Divine Names* employs grammatical and conceptual strategies that are indisputably Neoplatonic, the treatise itself, as well as the unique approach to divine names it embodies, is profoundly biblical. The synthesis that is achieved in the text between the two traditions is remarkable and a testament to the massive influence that the whole Dionysian corpus would have upon posterity. However, it is important to stress that it is a synthesis that employs Neoplatonic grammar and language in the service of the more fundamental biblical substance.

The Biblical Dimension of Divine Names

The origins of the divine name tradition can be located within the continuity between God and creation that is first established in God's covenant with the people of Israel. The third commandment of the Decalogue is evidence of the fact that within the biblical tradition "names" are taken very seriously because it is believed that they harbor an *essential* aspect of that which they identify. Similar to a view of names found among Greek thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, Proclus and others, that of the Bible maintains that names attempt to identify the essence of the named thing.[3] Precisely for this reason, names are powerful utterances. To know a name is to conceptually possess the named thing. At the same time, insofar as the

3. Cf. Adler, "What's in a Name?," 265.

being of the named thing (its essential and existential content) exceeds the utterance of its name, it perpetually eludes possession.

When it comes to naming God, this complexity is only heightened. Human language is incapable of capturing that which transcends all conceptual and linguistic categories, a fact that the ancient Jews keenly perceive. Nevertheless, they continue to believe it possible to utter names of the ineffable God. Unlike the Greek tradition, however, this conclusion does not derive from philosophical reflection. It derives from a profoundly personal relationship between a communicative God and his chosen people. Reflection follows upon and derives from personal and intimate relationship rather than, as is more commonly held in Neoplatonism, theurgically engendering it.

Within the context of this personal relationship a name for God differs significantly from a conception of God, whether that concept is communal or individual. While the concept "god" remains at a categorical distance allowing a variety of phenomena to fall under its purview, a name for God closes this distance in a personal relationship of intimacy. A name breaks through the abstraction of conceptual categorization opening discursive thought to that which transcends discursive thought. A name, in this sense, is not intended to replace the necessity of discursive reasoning. Rather, a name identifies a surplus of intelligible content that inspires and motivates the cognitive process through the attraction of personal intimacy and affection. This cognitive process indicates how a name provokes subsidiary concepts without being reduced to any one of the concepts provoked. Insofar as they are integral to the process of defining, concepts necessarily bring closure to a given phenomenon enabling the process of discursion between concepts. Names, in contrast, enable a named phenomenon to maintain a sense of porosity with the surplus of intelligible content it signifies while simultaneously providing enough conceptual closure for the sake of the cognitive process. Where a concept predominantly appeals to the intricate workings of the head (mind or thought), a name appeals to a latent unity always surrounding both the heart and the head. As the name above all names, then, God's name is unique in this regard. To borrow an image from the Eastern Christian mystical tradition, God's name is the grace that alone can fully unite the head to the heart, and the heart to the head.

Throughout Jewish classical literature and practice, names rather than concepts serve as the primary referential mechanism. Although in Judaism there are a multiplicity and variety of names appropriated to

God,[4] it is the Tetragrammaton, the *Hashem,* often represented as YHWH, which occurs most frequently throughout Scripture.[5] Many names are used throughout the Old Testament to identify God, but only YHWH identifies the personal name of God.[6] But even this name is no simple moniker. As the following demonstrates, it is a name that is revealed alongside several other important features.

God gives this personal name to Moses through a three-part disclosure. First, without using a proper name at all God introduces himself with a reference to Moses' ancestry, "I am the God [*Elohey*] of your father, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" (Exod 3:6). Second, when Moses beseeches a more specified name to present to the people, God replies, "*Ehyeh asher Eyheh*. . . . Thus you shall say to the Israelites, '*Ehyeh* has sent me to you'" (Exod 3:14).[7] Third, God seems to reiterate by saying, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, '*HaShem*, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this is my title for all generations" (Exod 3:15).

There are a few notable dynamics involved in this triadic disclosure. In the first place, there is a nomenclatural sequence wherein a more difficult, even abstractly conceptual, name is provided in between a reference to historical ancestry and a reference to ancestral posterity. The triad itself embodies the three elements of time—past (reference to ancestry), present (*Ehyeh asher Eyheh* as the name to be for presentation), and future ("this will be my title for all generations"). This triadic introduction bears significant correspondence with Exodus 6:2–9, where God again says to Moses:

> I am *HaShem*. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name *HaShem* I did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they resided as aliens. I have also heard the groaning of the Israelites whom the Egyptians are holding as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. Say therefore to the Israelites, "I am *HaShem*, and I will

4. Cf. Leeman, "Names of God," 104.

5. 6828 times to be exact. Cf. Leeman, "Names of God," 104.

6. Gieschen, "Divine Name in Ante-Nicene Christology," 121: "Unlike Elohim and the many other titles or names used to identify God in the OT (*sic*), YHWH was understood to be the personal name of God"; cf. Adler, "What's in a Name," 266.

7. Given the controversy surrounding the translation of this phrase, we employ here the English transliteration following Adler, "What's in a Name?," 265.

> free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession. I am *HaShem*."

As the above passage indicates, the name *HaShem*, or YHWH, is a name not simply given, but one that is given in and as an historical event. The fact that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob do not know this name suggests that without this history, the name is not yet ready to be revealed. Only after God has given the "substance" of the meaning—that is, the events in which personal intimacy is given and received—does he consummate it with a name. The intention of the name, then, is not to provide the Israelites a source of conceptual determinacy to the divine identity, nor to display a sort of divine identity card for their approval. Rather, embedded within the historical context, it is intended to draw the Isrealites into a deeper, more profoundly intimate relationship with YHWH's personal love by alerting them to the meaning of this name along with its living efficacy as it appears in their history of salvation. But perhaps the most significant feature in all this is the distinction, and hence eventual association, between *Ehyeh asher Eyheh* and the *HaShem*, a matter that involves issues regarding the translation of these names.

In the *Exodus* account of the divine introduction, although the *HaShem* is God's "official" name, it is not the first name spoken to Moses. The first name given is *Ehyeh asher Eyheh*, which is translated most frequently as "I am that I am." According to Jewish scholars this translation fails to get at the full sense of the name since it neglects the "future" or "imperfect" sense in the actual verb usage and consequently "binds" God within the limitations of stasis.[8] A better translation, according to these scholars, is

8. Cf. Fields, *Torah commentary for Our Times*, 19; Adler, "What's in a Name," 267–68. Adler, in our view, overstates the matter by claiming that the common (Christian) "grievously mistranslated" phrase "I am that I am" is a "ridiculously oblique phrase, which makes it clear why Christians have had such limited success understanding this name" (267). His explanation, which does draw out subtle and important distinctions, does not justify such an overstated criticism. Moreover, the fact that he proceeds to employ a Hegelian reading of what he considers to be the more accurate understanding ("I will be what I will be") casts suspicion over his claim to a more successful interpretation: "It [i.e., *Ehyeh asher Ehyeh*] is, in other words, the ultimate declaration of transcendent self-determination. . . . The name *Ehyeh asher Ehyeh* informs us that God alone of all things can be said to embody the quintessence of self-determination."

"I will be what I will be," since this conveys the implication of divine unboundedness—that is, "I will be whatever I will be, and not what anyone else wills me to be, but anything at all that I will to be."[9] Reading a modern idiom into the matter, other scholars emphasize an element of consolation in this name. This reading of the name emphasizes the functional presence of YHWH as the god who is with his people in all things, especially suffering. As one such scholar articulates this:

> I think that God is here depicted not as saying what His name is, or what it means, or who He is, but rather as saying to Moses how they can know him: "When the people ask for my name, tell them not to worry. Tell them, as I have been telling you . . . that I am there with them . . . then, and will ever be there with them. . . . They will not need a "true name" with which to call no me, for I will be there, present with them, then and always. Let them know me as the one who will be there. Let them call me "I-will-be-there" to remind them of my dependable presence.[10]

Taken at face value, this observation strips the *Ehyeh* of real name-quality and reduces it to an utterance of functionality. However, if it is taken as drawing out a functional *feature* of the meaning of the divine name it emphasizes the divine name as "being in the mode of promise and presence." In fact, other readings of the issue combine this emphasis with a more traditional perspective, generating the following interpretation:

> God's reply [to Moses] in Hebrew was: 'Eh-yeh 'Asher 'Eh-yeh. Some translations render this as "I AM THAT I AM" (sic). However, it is to be noted that the Hebrew verb ha-yah, from which the word Eh-yeh is drawn, does not simply mean "be." Rather, it means "become" or "prove to be." The reference here is not to God's self-existence but to what he has in mind to become toward others. Therefore the New World Translation properly renders the above Hebrew expression as "I SHALL PROVE TO BE WHAT I SHALL PROVE TO BE" (sic). . . . Perhaps the best word on this momentous occasion is: "What I please," since we

Rather, corresponding to various features of beauty, God as communicated in his Divine Name is better understood from the perspective of a *plenitude of determinate promise* rather than self-determination since the latter implies not only incompletion, but also a relationship of utility with otherness. A plenitude of determinate promise, in contrast, allows otherness to exist for its own sake, as a gift given to the other for the good of the other.

9. Cf. Adler, "What's in a Name," 267.

10. Sobel, *Logic and Theism,* 539.

> know that the Divine resources are infinite, and that God will please to become to His people only what is wisest and best. Thus viewed, the formula becomes a most gracious promise: the Divine capacity of adaptation to any circumstances, any difficulties, any necessities that may arise, becomes a veritable bank of faith to such as love God and keep His commandments. The formula is a promise, the promise is concentrated in a Name. The Name is at once a revelation, a memorial, a pledge. To this Name God will be ever faithful.[11]

From this perspective, the name remains a name, but one that simultaneously binds God's people to him in a personal love relationship and illuminates the divine being as one of promise. One of the primary problematics that shadows this debate concerns how to express the divine name beyond the linguistic limits imposed by finite temporality. This is exemplified in the way that those who subscribe to "process thought" exploit the ambiguities of this name in order to advance the idea that "God is the yet to be perfected 'I.'"[12] In such cases, following a trend within modern and postmodern thinking, the idea of "futurity" is identified as a "space" of utter ontological indeterminacy that even applies to God. In signifying a futurity without separation from past or present, the language of promise moves beyond process thought. This is because where process thought posits a "space" of indeterminacy beyond even God, the language of promise posits the plenitude of divine being as the overfullness of determinacy.[13] God is such that his fullness constitutes the promise of all determinate being.

The other divine name, the *HaShem*, consummates this perspective. If the *Ehyeh* can be construed as "a name which describes something objectively innate in the nature of God . . . the 'existing Being which is existing Being'; that is to say, the Being whose existence is absolute," the *HaShem* is intended more as God's sacred and "official" use-name.[14] The most interesting feature of this name is the fact that it embodies a paradox. "It represents the verb 'to be' in all three tenses simultaneously. If names

11. Navas, *Divine Truth or Human Tradition?,* 540ff.

12. Fields, *Torah Commentary for Our Times*, 19.

13. Metz, *Theology of the World*, 88, interprets the futurity of the Tetragram as follows: "God revealed Himself to Moses more as the power of the future than as a being dwelling beyond all history and experience." One could read Metz's interpretation of "futurity" here from the perspective of promise since it contrasts the "future" as a reserve of divine power against the conception of "future" as an indeterminate dwelling "beyond" history and experience.

14. Adler, "What's in a Name," 266.

are descriptive of the essences of their subject, *HaShem* seems to be telling us numerous things about God: Eternality, paradox, perhaps something related to God's Being the source of being."[15] The *HaShem*, then, is a name that unites past, present and future in a single utterance. The union given by this utterance is intimately connected to the *Ehyeh* as God's excess or plenitude of being, which as such is constituted as infinite promise to become, or "be determined to," whatever is necessary for those in a personal relationship with him.

The biblical divine name tradition, when traced back to the Exodus text, reveals that the divine name has both a "conceptual" dimension and a dimension of personal intimacy, both equally bound up together in God's act of self-communication. The *Ehyeh* identifies God's identity as a plenitude of being, capable of becoming determined to any and every possible situation or event. It is a name that discloses a "concept" of unboundedness, which as such eludes the boundaries of conceptualization. It reveals God as the One whose "being" is beyond all categories, even the category "being" itself. This sort of understanding of the *Ehyeh* certainly would have resonated with aspects of the Neoplatonism available to Dionysius, though to what extent Dionysius read Exodus this way is difficult to determine. Certain hints suggest themselves in his fifth chapter of *On the Divine Names*, especially when he reiterates that the treatise intends to treat the names insofar as they set forth God's providence rather than the divine essence.[16] This detail, which *prima facie* appears rather minor, bespeaks the other dimension of the Exodus account of the divine name, the *HaShem*. It is this name for God, the official, personal name, that gives concrete content to the *Ehyeh*. It is the name that identifies God's loving care for his people as it is experienced in historical events as divine providence. It is this name that communicates the personal, intimate relationship to which God calls Israel, and by extension all people in Christ. Given the anagogical and pedagogical foundation of his treatise, it seems that this dimension of the divine name makes a significant contribution to the overall Dionysian project of naming God.

15. Adler, "What's in a Name," 266.

16. *DN* 5, 2 (816C): "The treatise, then, seeks to celebrate these, the Names of God, which set forth his Providence. For it does not profess to express the very superessential Goodness, and Essence, and Life, and Wisdom, of the very superessential Deity, which is seated above all goodness, and deity, and essence, and wisdom, and life, in hidden places as the oracles affirm."

Dionysian Divine Naming: Biblical or Neoplatonic?

This brief account of the possible origins of the divine name tradition is intended to indicate the way in which "naming God," in its earliest biblical form, is viewed as an existential, concrete and trans-discursive event rather than merely a linguistic or conceptual phenomenon. Its origins are rooted most fundamentally in a community of worship and faith practice, a feature that significantly marks Dionysius's treatment of the divine names. In general, when treating Dionysius's *On the Divine Names* scholars tend to downplay the importance of this biblical origin to the overemphasis of Dionysius's Neoplatonic pedigree.[17] As noted above, there is little doubt that Dionysius is influenced by Neoplatonic categories and structures, among which triads like One, Intellect and Soul, or Being, Life and Mind are certainly fundamental. But when it comes to a divine name, the influence of the biblical divine name tradition may be more dominant than the Greek philosophical tradition.

In ancient Greek thought, a god, a "theos," is most fundamentally a power to be won over, and as Schroeder has rightly observed, "The equation of power with divinity leads naturally to a predicative use of the word 'god'. . . (consequently) the word 'god' appears in Greek as a predicate."[18] Since in this context the act of naming is an act that predicates something of a subject it cannot apply to that which is itself a predicate. Instead of naming "god" as X, Y, or Z the ancient Greeks name X ,Y, and Z "gods." From the biblical perspective, however, God establishes a personal relationship with creation by giving his "name" to his chosen people. In so doing he fills the empty concept of "god" with personal, historically concrete substance trumping the categorical notion of divinity. Powers and perfections are not, in this biblical view, grouped under a more generic category of "divinity" or "god" but are identified as belonging to YHWH himself. It is this latter mode of nomination that more closely resembles Dionysius's approach to the divine names.

Special mention, though, should be made of Proclus's *On the Theology of Plato*, in which he makes occasional reference to the divine names.[19] Dionysius's own conception of a divine name is in many ways similar to

17. See, e.g., Wear and Dillon, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition,* 15ff.; Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius,* ch. 6. Schäfer, *Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite,* makes absolutely no reference to this biblical tradition of the Divine Name.

18. Schroeder, "Self in Ancient Religious Experience," 341. Schroeder cites Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, 17.

19. Proclus, *Pl. Theo.* 1.1, 5, 29; 5.25, 34; 7.38, 51.

the conception that appears throughout this Procline text. For Proclus, a divine name identifies some attribute associated primarily with divinity that becomes intelligible through a certain reasoning process. Explaining the relation between the divine names and the various dialogues of Plato, Proclus writes the following: "For in each of these dialogues, more or less mention is made of divine names, from which it is easy for those who are exercised in divine concerns to discover by a reasoning process the peculiarities of each."[20] Later on he identifies these as the "names of divine natures" that Socrates revealed in Plato's *Cratylus*, and that derive from the second hypothesis of Parmenides.[21] From this, Proclus explicitly states what he takes to be the principle of the divine names: "In short, therefore, it must be admitted that the first, most principal and truly divine names are established in the gods themselves. But it must be said that the second names, which are imitations of the first, and which subsist intellectually, are of a daemonical allotment."[22] Following the Greek tradition, Proclus understands the daemonical element to be a quasi-divinity, something that is god-like but not purely divine. Proclus's approach to divine naming, then, follows from what one would expect to find in a Neoplatonistic system that is mystically and religiously becoming more and more open to the divine realm. While the Neoplatonism informing Proclus cannot be said to be purely philosophical (whatever that may actually mean), it nevertheless is dominated by the impulse of rational inquiry that marks Greek thought. Divine naming derived from this impulse is akin to an artistic act that shapes statues in the form of various divinities. The fashioning of names, Proclus states, "generates every name as if it were a statue of the gods."[23] The act of naming the divine, Proclus continues to explain, is analogous to "theurgic art," by which certain symbols "call forth" the goodness of the gods into linguistic artificial statues, as it were. Despite the fact that this later Neoplatonism of Proclus becomes imbued with the thinking born from spiritual longing, it nevertheless remains indebted to the concept. The emphasis remains on the self's own power and will. The true divine name remains embedded in the One, which as such is unknowable,

20. Proclus, *Pl. Theo.* 1.5: ἐν ἑκάστῳ γὰρ αὐτῶν πλείων ἢ ἐλάττων μνήμη γίνεται τῶν θείων ὀνομάτων ἀφ' ὧν ῥᾴδιον τοῖς περὶ τὰ θεῖα γεγυμνασμένοις τὰς ἰδιότητας αὐτῶν τῷ λογισμῷ περιλαμβάνειν.

21. Proclus, *Pl. Theo.* 1.29.

22. Proclus, *Pl. Theo.* 1.29: Ἵν' οὖν συλλήβδην εἴπωμεν, τὰ μὲν πρώτιστα καὶ κυριώτατα καὶ ὄντως θεῖα τῶν ὀνομάτων ἐν αὐτοῖς ὑποθετέον ἱδρῦσθαι τοῖς θεοῖς· τὰ δὲ δεύτερα καὶ τούτων ὁμοιώματα νοερῶς ὑφεστηκότα τῆς δαιμονίας μοίρας εἶναι λεκτέον.

23. Proclus, *Pl. Theo.* 1.29: ἕκαστον γὰρ ὄνομα καθάπερ ἄγαλμα τῶν θεῶν ἀπογεννᾷ.

unthinkable, and so really un-nameable. The secondary names, deriving as they do from the second Parmenidean hypothesis, are not so much names of gods as mere imitations. They are wrenched forth through the act of *theurgy*, the self-determination of will in its quest to acquire knowledge and understanding of the divine. These names are intended to win for the searching intellect greater knowledge of divine hiddenness. And although, like Dionysius, Proclus uses the word "celebrate" in conjunction with his inquiry,[24] it is difficult to see this as anything but the kind of celebration that accompanies volition-oriented achievement. As Saffrey has rightly observes, this mode of celebration is best characterized as a "religio mentis" wherein "the ideal of the Neoplatonic philosophers thus becomes the celebration of divinity through the creation of a scientific theology. In other words, the celebration of divinity has become an entirely intellectual process."[25] As an entirely intellectual process, it is predominantly if not wholly a celebration of self-determination. It is not celebration intended as a mode of praise or worship for the given as such, which marks a significant albeit subtle difference from Dionysius's approach.

Dionysius is clear that the Scriptures are the final normative criteria for determining the divine names. At no point is there any mention made of normative criteria established by Greek philosophy. To suggest that the name "wisdom" in Dionysius's account is synonymous with Neoplatonic "mind,"[26] or that the names exposited in his treatise are gathered entirely from various texts of Plato,[27] appears not only to overlook Dionysius's own claim to exclusive scriptural authority,[28] but also to neglect the significant difference between biblical and Greek thought. For while clearly Dionysius is borrowing from Neoplatonism, especially as it is found in Proclus, there remains a scriptural priority that sanctions the debt in the first place. The names that Dionysius discovers in the world of Greek thought, at least if Dionysius's own allegiances are to be taken seriously, remain empty conceptual shells without the substance of the names found in Scripture.

24. E.g., Proclus, *Pl. Theo.* 2.9.

25. Saffrey, "Neoplatonist Spirituality II," 253.

26. Rorem, *Psuedo-Dionysius*, 164.

27. Wear and Dillon, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition*, 15–16.

28. *DN* 1, 1 (372A): Καθόλου τοιγαροῦν οὐ τολμητέον εἰπεῖν οὔτε μὴν ἐννοῆσαί τι περὶ τῆς ὑπερουσίου καὶ κρυφίας θεότητος παρὰ τὰ θειωδῶς ἡμῖν ἐκ τῶν ἱερῶν λογίων ἐκπεφασμένα. "By no means then is it permitted to speak, or even think, anything concerning the hidden and superessential deity, beyond those things divinely revealed to us in the sacred oracles."

As chapter 7 of *On the Divine Names* demonstrates, for Dionysius, "mind" is considered along with reason, faith and truth under the name "wisdom" where it receives a transformation typical of Dionysian originality: it becomes an excess of mind overflowing with all things in its act of divine comprehension.[29] The biblical influence is very much present. The utter transcendence of the divine wisdom (Ps 147:5, etc.) is such that it manifests itself in the world as foolishness. Echoing Paul (1 Cor 1:25), Dionysius declares that divine "foolishness" renders all human intelligence a sort of "error" (ὅτι πᾶσα ἀνθρωπίνη διάνοια πλάνη τίς ἐστι)[30] in comparison. His intention in emphasizing this, as with the whole of his treatise, is primarily *anagogical*, concerned with the faith practices of the worshipping community.[31] Such evidence indicates that Dionysius's doctrine of divine names goes beyond Neoplatonic schematics and structures fully embracing the biblical heritage he espouses.

In extending this biblical community of worship and faith practice, the event of the Incarnation also adds important nuances to the divine name tradition as this name is applied to Jesus of Nazareth. Recent studies into the matter make clear that the many references throughout Christian literature and especially the New Testament to the "name of Jesus" are not references to "Jesus" *qua* name, but rather to the name above all names, the divine name—namely, the *HaShem*, YHWH.[32] It is long held that the relationship between Jesus and the divine name in explanations of the

29. *DN* 7, 2 (868B).

30. *DN* 7, 1 (865B).

31. *DN* 7, 1 (865*CD*), which is an instructional exhortation: Ἀλλ' ὅπερ ἐν ἄλλοις ἔφην, οἰκείως ἡμῖν τὰ ὑπὲρ ἡμᾶς παραλαμβάνοντες καὶ τῷ συντρόφῳ τῶν αἰσθήσεων ἐνιλλόμενοι καὶ τοῖς καθ' ἡμᾶς τὰ θεῖα παραβάλλοντες ἀπατώμεθα κατὰ τὸ φαινόμενον τὸν θεῖον καὶ ἀπόῤῥητον λόγον μεταδιώκοντες. Δέον εἰδέναι τὸν καθ' ἡμᾶς νοῦν τὴν μὲν ἔχειν δύναμιν εἰς τὸ νοεῖν, δι' ἧς τὰ νοητὰ βλέπει, τὴν δὲ ἕνωσιν ὑπεραίρουσαν τὴν νοῦ φύσιν, δι' ἧς συνάπτεται πρὸς τὰ ἐπέκεινα ἑαυτοῦ. Κατὰ ταύτην οὖν τὰ θεῖα νοητέον οὐ καθ' ἡμᾶς, ἀλλ' ὅλους ἑαυτοὺς ὅλων ἑαυτῶν ἐξισταμένους καὶ ὅλους θεοῦ γιγνομένους, κρεῖττον γὰρ εἶναι θεοῦ καὶ μὴ ἑαυτῶν. Οὕτω γὰρ ἔσται τὰ θεῖα δοτὰ τοῖς μετὰ θεοῦ γινομένοις. "But, as I elsewhere said, by taking the things above us, in a sense familiar to ourselves, and by being entangled by what is congenial to sensible perceptions, and by comparing things Divine with our own conditions, we are led astray through following the Divine and mystical reason after a mere appearance. We ought to know that our mind has the power for thought, through which it views things intellectual, but that the union through which it is brought into contact with things beyond itself surpasses the nature of the mind. We must then contemplate things Divine, after this Union, not after ourselves, but by our whole selves, standing out of our whole selves, and becoming wholly of God. For it is better to be of God, and not of ourselves. For thus things Divine will, be given to those who become dear to God."

32. Gieschen, "Divine Name in Ante-Nicene Christology."

Κύριος title reflects an early Jewish identification of Jesus with YHWH.[33] In the mid-twentieth century this becomes challenged, however, on the grounds that the title Κύριος derives from Hellenistic conceptions rather than an identification of Jesus with YHWH, and the Κύριος/YWHW identity in Jesus is cast into doubt.[34] This doubt does not endure as it is soon established that worship of Jesus as Κύριος already occurs among his Aramaic-speaking Palestinian followers.[35] Eventually the theory of the Κύριος dependence on Hellenism is largely discredited by further study of the title Κύριος,[36] and by later studies into Paul's use of Hebrew Scripture YHWH texts.[37] Although this feature of Christology has not received the attention it merits, many scholars have thrown more light on the meaning and importance of appropriating the divine name to Jesus.[38]

A significant consequence of these studies is the awareness that, as Cullman puts it, "Once he (Jesus) was given the 'name which is above every name,' God's own name ('Lord,' *Adonai*, *Kyrios*), then no limitations at all could be set for the transfer of divine attributes to him."[39] Jesus is seen in effect as a personal manifestation of the divine attributes revealed in Scripture. Especially after the relation between Christ's divine and human natures are doctrinally established at the Councils of Ephesus (AD 431) and Chalcedon (AD 451), this personal descent of divine attributes in Jesus opens a symmetrical ascending movement relative to various aspects of predication. In ways that reflect the human/divine harmony in Christ, within this ascent the biblical event of personal, intimate naming and the Greek categorical approach to names begin to coalesce. As a result, attributes that are not as *clearly* identified with God in Scripture, although expressed in Scripture as related to and constitutive of the divine nature, become more confirmed the more they are read in the context of Greek thought. The alliance between Athens and Jerusalem, so lamented by Tertulian, seems almost spontaneous with respect to theological language and the issue of divine names.

33. Ibid., 116–17.

34. Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*. Bousset's argument gained influence when it was endorsed by Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 1:52.

35. Cullman, *Christology of the New Testament*.

36. Fitzmeyer, "Semitic Background of the New Testament Kyrios-Title," 115–42.

37. Capes, *Old Testament Yahweh Texts in Paul's Christology*.

38. Most notably, Gilles Quispel, Jean Daniélou, Richard Longenecker, Alan Segal, Aloys Grillmeier, and Jarl E. Fossum. For a list of references pertaining to these authors, see Gieschen, "Divine Name in Ante-Nicene Christology," 119–20.

39. Cullman, *Christology of the New Testament*, 237.

The case of "light" provides an appropriate example. Throughout both testaments of Christian Scripture, light has an enigmatic association with God in ways that parallel beauty's association with the One in Plotinus. At times it appears to be identifiable with the first emanation (similar to *nous*); at other times with God (similar to the One/Good).[40] On the one hand, the Jewish people are concerned to distinguish themselves from their pagan neighbors whose religious practices involved worshipping the various sources of light as divine in themselves. Consequently, light in the Jewish understanding is everywhere subordinated to God as his divine instrument and viewed as God's first creation.[41] On the other hand, light is identified as the first derivation of the creative Word of God (Gen 1:3) that exists independently of the heavenly bodies and all material light. This light is given only by YWHW and imparts not only understanding, but also life and salvation.[42] It is identified with the good (Isa 45:7), an identification that derives from the fact that it is YHWH's dwelling place and thus his attribute.[43] There is then a subtle identification between this light and YHWH's very self (Ps 43:3; Isa 2:5), one that continues in the New Testament (Jas 1:17, 1 Tim 6:15–16). In appropriating the divine name to Jesus, the Christological tradition also identifies him with *light*.[44]

As a divine attribute, beauty follows a course similar to light so much so that by the time Dionysius writes his treatise beauty immediately follows light in the sequence of names. Nevertheless, the development that takes place with respect to beauty in the divine name tradition between the closure of the New Testament and Dionysius's treatise remains unknown. Beauty's eventual inclusion among the ranks of the names for God, however, may be the result of the continual development of the "divine name" tradition both as a Neoplatonic concept in Porphyrian and Procline Neoplatonism,[45] but more so as a biblical mode of praise. In neither tradi-

40. Cf. Achtemeier, "Jesus Christ, the Light of the World," 439–49.

41. Cf. *inter alia*, Gen 1:14–19; Ps 74:16, 121:6, 136:7–9; Jer 31:35; Job 9:7; Isa 38:7–8, 49:10; Josh 10:12–13.

42. Mic 7:8; Isa 9:2, 42:16, 51:4, 58:8, 60:1; Ezra 9:8; Ps 18:21, 36:9, 56:13; Job 33:28–30.

43. Ps 104:2; Hab 3:4; Dan 2:22; Isa 10:17; Exod 13:21–22; Neh 9:12; Ps 78:14.

44. There are a multitude of references among which are the following: John 1:9, 8:12, 9:4–5, 11:9–10, 12:35–36, 46; Acts 26:23; 2 Tim 1:10; 2 Cor 4:6; Rom 13:12.

45. As noted at the beginning of the chapter, Porphyry is said to have written a treatise entitled *On the Divine Names*, noted in, e.g., Arnou, "Platonisme des pères," cols. 2285–87; 2314–16; 2363–67, and van den Berg, *Proclus' Commentary on the Cratylus in Context*, 74. As Berg notes, nothing is known of Porphyry's treatise except its title. Berg, however, has suggested that Porphyry's *Peri Agalmaton* (*On Images*), a

tion is beauty *explicitly* identified with God, though as noted above, both traditions in different ways flirt with the idea. Both traditions also contribute to the way that the early Church fathers contribute to the development of the divine names. Typically among the Church fathers the phenomenon of a divine name is treated in an apologetic or polemical context. For example, in Iraneaus' *Adversus Haereses* book 2, chapter 35, the name of God is invoked as an example of a single identity predicated in a pluralized way in order to refute Basilides's claim that prophetic predication of God occurs under the influence of diverse divinities. Or amidst the Cappadocian polemic against Eunomius of Cyzicus, found chiefly in Basil's *Adversus Eunomium* I 6–7 and Gregory of Nyssa's *Contra Eunomium* bk. VII, the divine names appear in the context of broader discussions concerning various aspects of the Trinity, predication, divine substance, etc. At no time does beauty enter the discussion. Despite the shared Platonic and Neoplatonic context the degree of philosophical and linguistic analysis involved in this debate marks a stark contrast to Dionysius's treatment of the divine names. An exception to the polemical context is Gregory Nazianzen's *Fourth Theological Oration* (Oration 30, *De Filio*) chapters 17–20, which sets out a brief examination of the divine names as they are attributed to the Son. Dividing the names between those that precede the Incarnation and those that follow it, Gregory anticipates many of the names that will appear in the Dionysian text such as Almighty, King of Kings, Wisdom, Life, Light, and Truth. However, there is still no mention of beauty. In any case there remains a marked difference between Dionysius's treatment of the divine names and the Cappadocians'; for the latter the divine names remains only ever a theme, while in Dionysius this theme is extended into a system of praise.[46]

A significant parallel to Dionysius's approach that is worth noting here can be found in the work of St. Ephrem (or Ephraem) the Syrian. Not

work that examines the symbolic attributes given to the gods by sculptors, may throw some light on Porphyry's general approach to language and naming because in the course of his discussion he makes reference to the divine names. From this approach, Porphyry's view, much like the Procline view it influences, is that divine names are like divine statues. However, for Porphyry these are viewed as representations of the divine though from a natural rather than conventional perspective. This approach that connects the etymologies of the names for the gods with the natural realm stands in contrast to both Plato's *Cratylus* and Proclus' *Commentary on the Cratylus*, which both connect them to the metaphysical realm. In any case, the Greek approach in general remains within the realm of a categorical, conceptual framework that seeks to connect a name, e.g., Hera, with the (limited) power it is used to express.

46. Louth, *Dionysius the Areopogite*, 78.

only do they share a possible cultural milieu, and are both part of a theological tradition, which "never made a sharp distinction between mysticism and theology";[47] they also share an interest in the so-called "theology of the divine names."[48] The precise nature of this "theology of the divine names" is difficult to pin down, though it most likely involves basing the possibility of theology on the various perfections that proceed from God. Like Dionysius, Ephrem distinguishes between perfect names and those borrowed from experience,[49] although the parallel is widely believed to be coincidental.[50] Consequently, although it is possible that Ephrem influences Dionysius, and that the philological similarities suggest some correspondence,[51] any strict connection between the two remains somewhat superficial and unsubstantiated.

In light of the preceding, Dionysius' treatise *On the Divine Names* can be read as a point of culmination within the tradition of the divine names since it embodies elements from these various precedents. It appears that the addition of beauty to the list of divine names, as a Judeo-Christian tradition, may be Dionysius' original contribution. Admittedly, it is an originality that appears somewhat overshadowed when cast in the light of Proclus's *On the Theology of Plato*. But, as was explained in chapter 2 above, even Proclus's account does not attribute the same priority nor content that Dionysius does. Indeed, it is this priority that in part accounts for its appearance at the very beginning of his treatise. Unlike Proclus, Dionysius does not begin with the names "the one" and "the good," and from these determine the remaining names. Rather, beginning with the good, a sequence of increasing concretion ensues for which light, beauty, and love provide the substantive content. The originality of Dionysius' addition of beauty derives from the explicit nature of the identification involved. In neither the biblical account nor in the development within Greek philosophy can such an explicit identification be found. However, both the biblical and the Greek accounts testify to the worthiness of beauty within created entities as well as to the beauty that is attributed to the divine. Part of the Dionysian development includes bridging these dimensions by configuring the divine names as perfections processing from the

47. Lossky, *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church,* 8.

48. Taylor, "St. Ephraim's Influence on the Greeks," 15. See also Brock, *Luminous Eye* and *Hymns on Paradise*; Griffith, *"Faith Adoring Mystery."*

49. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 43–48.

50. Cf. Louth, *Dionysius the Areopagite*, 80.

51. Chevallier, *Dionysiaca*, 2:1659, saw in these philological similarities enough evidence to propose the theory that Ephrem himself was actually Dionysius.

one Judeo-Christian God. A closer examination of these perfections in the Dionysian text will complete the foundation for examining how beauty is conceived as a divine name.

One further issue must be examined before proceeding. Given the preceding analysis of the Hebraic understanding of God's name and its Christian development in the name Jesus Christ, the question arises: how much is Dionysius influenced by *the* Divine Name, the Tetragrammaton, YHWH? In a recent study of how a Trinitarian pattern of naming God enables a better understanding of the name Trinity itself, R. Kendal Soulen emphasizes the importance of the Tetragrammaton for such Trinitarian naming.[52] Soulen's thesis is that of the three primary patterns of naming God that have been used throughout the Christian tradition—what he refers to as theological, christological, and pneumatological patterns—"the theological pattern occupies a special place in the economy of the Trinitarian names because it alone orbits a personal proper name, indeed, *the* personal proper name."[53] The theological pattern, as he proceeds to clarify, is closest to the Tetragrammaton and hence serves as a kind of divine fountain for the other patterns. Soulen locates the Dionysian approach to names within the pneumatological pattern but contends, rather unhesitatingly, that "by every indication, Dionysius is simply unaware" of the Tetragrammaton. Soulen admits that Dionysius is "well acquainted" with the "I am who am" (*Ehyeh*) name of God and that this name provides the basis for his consideration of the divine name "Being." He also acknowledges Dionysius's affection for Moses's ascent up Sinai into the cloud of darkness. Despite these details, however, Soulen continues to insist that "Dionysius appears oblivious to the existence of the Tetragrammaton."[54] If Soulen is correct, it could throw into doubt the preceding attempt to characterize Dionysius's approach to names as an approach that reflects the intimate, personal approach of the biblical divine name tradition. However, a few points ought to be considered before drawing such a conclusion.

First, as Soulen himself points out, it is not surprising that Dionysius is ignorant of the Tetragrammaton since knowledge of it was uncommon in his day. But Dionysius's ignorance of the name *per se* does not preclude him having some kind of unrefined knowledge of it; the divine name (*HaShem*, YHWH) could be, as Soulen calls it, the "unrecognized host"

52. Soulen, *Divine Name(s) and the Holy Trinity*. Soulen's work is remarkable and illuminating, and a most welcome contribution to a theological topic all too rarely taken up.

53. Ibid., 23.

54. Ibid., 66.

who provides cognitive and spiritual hospitality to the Areopagite's own project of naming God.[55] From this perspective, knowledge of the Tetragrammaton is not limited exclusively to knowledge of its being a name, but includes knowledge of the personal and intimate content intended by the name. Second, following Soulen's examination of the development of the Tetragrammaton in the early Church, especially under Paul, it becomes possible to contend with Soulen himself that "Paul distributes the key theonmys of the Shema—"Lord" and "God"—to Christ and to God respectively in order to express the idea that Christ participates in the dignity of the divine name, and so of the one God."[56] Consequently, as noted above, the content of the divine name is now given to Jesus Christ, in whom the name is manifest in the most personal way possible. So in his letter to the Phillipians (2:10), when Paul writes "so that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow," the "name of Jesus" is the *Hashem*. "Jesus" as a name, in other words, now becomes the eternal and salvific occasion for the divine name *Hashem*. Given Dionysius's Pauline allegiance, it is likely that even though the specific knowledge of the Tetragrammaton with respect to the divine name may not appear in Dionysius's writings, its personal and intimate power is relocated in Christ, about whom Dionysius declares "he who is mine, if it is lawful for me to say, the inspiration of all hierarchical revelation."[57] And although Dionysius does not examine the name Christ or Jesus insofar as it is a divine name, the personal and intimate dimensions of what the name signifies do contribute to his overall examination.[58] In any case, as was noted above, Dionysius's emphasis on the providential aspects of the divine names suggests that both the *Ehyeh* and the *HaShem* contribute to his approach to the divine names.

The point to be made here is that the tradition of divine names that Dionysius refers to need be neither exclusively biblical nor Neoplatonic. Several linguistic and grammatical structures, turns of phrases, ordering and substance of the names, derive directly from Neoplatonism, especially

55. Ibid., 66.

56. Ibid., 40–41.

57. Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Celestial Hierarchy* [hereafter *CH*] 2, 5 (154C): Ἡγήσοιτο δὲ τοῦ λόγου Χριστός, εἴπερ ἐμοὶ θέμις εἰπεῖν, ὁ ἐμός, ἡ πάσης ἱεραρχικῆς ἐκφαντορίας ἐπίπνοια.

58. Most significantly in ch. 11, where Dionysius examines the name "Peace," and in ch. 12, where Dionyius examines the name "Lord of Lords." However, to acquire the complete scope of Dionysius's God as the God of personal love and intimacy, and so the God identified with the Tetragrammaton, one must consider the whole of his corpus.

in its Procline form. However, the structure of the text and the spiritual and anagogical concerns in Dionysius's approach puts him much more in alliance with the biblical tradition than the Neoplatonic. His own declaration of scriptural normativity further solidifies this. In any case, it is not necessary to equivocate between either of the two. The Dionysian genius, the same genius which reappears almost a millennium later in Aquinas, is found in the capacity to bring into harmony seemingly disparate strands of thought. In fact, it may be the case that tilting the balance too much in one direction only serves to distort the Dionysian intention to portray the whole of creation itself as being called into personal, intimate union with the God who fills it with his own divine identity.

Divine Names: The Procession of Divine Perfections

Another way to approach the issue of the "divine name tradition" is to examine what exactly Dionysius means by a "divine name." The matter is far more complex than it may first appear. The complexity, however, may be relieved somewhat by examining the divine names within the biblical context where both the *Ehyeh* and the *HaShem* are held together as the conditions in which the Dionysian account ought to be read. Quite obviously such a reading would include Dionysius's Neoplatonic influence, but this influence would be subordinated under the broader biblical context.

As used by Dionysius, a "divine name" identifies a perfection of God that proceeds from his superessential plenitude into the intelligible order manifesting itself through various existential phenomena. Interestingly, nowhere in the treatise does Dionysius provide an exact definition of a "divine name." Instead, in the first three chapters, which most scholars characterize as a propaedeutic to the actual subject of the text,[59] he articulates the nature of a divine name indirectly both by means of a comparison with other modes of divine attribution as well as by providing a preliminary outline of most of the names that the treatise will treat. This methodology, however, is consistent with his overall goal:

> But now, collecting from the Oracles so much as serves the purpose of our present treatise, and using the things aforesaid as a kind of canon, and keeping our eyes upon them, let us advance to the unfolding Names of God, which fall within the range of our

59. See, *inter alia*, Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 137ff.; Wear and Dillon, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition*, 33ff.; Schäfer, *Philosohpy of Dionysius the Areopagite,* 23–24, 77–80; Putnam, *Beauty in the Pseudo-Denys*, 1.

> understanding, and, what the hierarchical rule always teaches us throughout every phase of theology, let us become initiated (so to speak authoritatively) in the godlike contemplations with a god-enlightened conception. And let us bring religious ears to the unfoldings of the Holy Names of God, implanting the Holy in the Holy, according to the divine tradition.[60]

As can be seen from this excerpt, Dionysius's intention is not to outline the ways that words and concepts can determine the divine nature. His purpose is wholly bound up with "purifying our praise of God"[61] so that, advancing through the various hierarchies that constitute the created order,[62] a greater union with God even to the point of deification might follow.[63] Part of his methodology, then, involves allowing the divine names to remain, in a sense, "determinately open" in their communication of divine perfections in order to allow the reader to progress with the unfolding vision.

This does not mean, as already noted, that the divine names are indeterminate. His indirect articulation of their content results in more substance than can be determined or defined by one overarching concept. Consequently he approaches a divine name in a plurality of ways.

The broadest of these involves highlighting its position in his overall corpus.[64] Throughout the first chapter, the objective and content of *On the*

60. *DN* 1, 8 (597BC): Νῦν δέ, ὅσα τῆς παρούσης ἐστὶ πραγματείας, ἐκ τῶν λογίων συναγαγόντες καὶ ὥσπερ τινὶ κανόνι τοῖς εἰρημένοις χρώμενοι καὶ πρὸς αὐτὰ σκοποῦντες ἐπὶ τὴν ἀνάπτυξιν τῶν νοητῶν θεωνυμιῶν προΐωμεν καί, ὅπερ ἀεὶ κατὰ πᾶσαν ἡμῖν θεολογίαν ὁ ἱεραρχικὸς θεσμὸς ὑφηγεῖται, θεοπτικῇ διανοίᾳ τὰς θεοφανεῖς ἐποπτεύσωμεν, κυρίως εἰπεῖν, θεωρίας καὶ ὦτα ἱερὰ ταῖς τῶν ἱερῶν θεωνυμιῶν ἀναπτύξεσι παραθώμεθα τοῖς ἁγίοις τὰ ἅγια κατὰ τὴν θείαν παράδοσιν ἐνιδρύοντες καὶ τῶν ἀμύστων αὐτὰ γελώτων καὶ ἐμπαιγμῶν ἐξαιρούμενοι.

61. *DN* 2, 7 (645A); Louth, *Dionysius the Areopagite*, 83.

62. For a development of this, see Roques, *L'Univers Dionysien*.

63. *CH* 3, 1 (164D); Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* [hereafter *EH*] 1, 1 (372B); etc.

64. The order of presentation of the Dionysian corpus has been considered in a few different ways. Jan Vanneste, *Le Mystère de Dieu,* argued that the *DN* and the *Mystical Theology* [hereafter *MT*] exposited the ascent of the individual mind, while the *EH* and the *CH* exposit a mode of "theurgy" (divine work) mediated by hierarchies. In contrast to this splitting of the *CD*, Roques, "Denys l'Areopagite" and *Structures théologiques de la Gnose à Richard de Saint Victor,* suggested a more unified sequence that follows the order *DN*, *MT*, *CH*, and *EH*. Most recently, Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols*, followed Roques but argued that there is a single argument threading its way through all of the treatises, showing "signs of a conscious arrangement which itself reinforces the argument they contain" (127).

Divine Names is compared to two other (non-extant) Dionysian treatises, namely, the *Theological Outlines* and the *Symbolic Theology*. The particular objective and content of *On the Divine Names* is positioned in between the particular objectives and contents of these other two treatises. The *Theological Outlines*[65] "celebrates the principle affirmative expressions respecting God" insofar as it is both one and three. It considers the unions and distinctions as they are in the divine itself, "which is neither possible to say or to conceive" (οὔτε εἰπεῖν οὔτε ἐννοῆσαι δυνατόν). This impossibility of "saying" or "conceiving" these attributes implies the limitations of human effort and the need to rely on prayer and divine disclosure alone.[66] Thus this first treatise concerns a purely biblical doctrine of God. In contrast, the *Symbolic Theology* celebrates God through sensible symbols derived from created entities.[67] In this way, something of God is communicated in the form of various creatures, even one as lowly as a worm,[68] and various material entities like a throne or a wheel. As Dionysius explains, however, these images are "dissimilar similitudes" (ἀνομοίους ὁμοιότητας) because once they communicate something of the divine, their obvious incongruity functions as a negating mechanism that immediately enables the shortcoming of the image to reveal itself.[69]

Situated in between these two modes of divine attribution, a "divine name" is both similar to and distinct from both. Similar to the mode of attribution found in the *Theological Outlines*, a divine name is revealed in Scripture but in a way that is intelligible and thus conceptual and capable of being "spoken." Similar to the mode of attribution found in the *Symbolic Theology*, a divine name can be found among formal qualities in things but without depending on any concrete, material entity. The mode of attribution found in the *Theological Outlines* can itself be distinguished from both the *Divine Names* and the *Symbolic Theology*. The former mode, expressing the divine *unions*, is beyond all conceptualization and thus

65. This work is referenced in *DN* 1, 1 (585B) indicating that in the order of his corpus the *Divine Names* will be treated after the *Theological Outlines*, and again in *DN* 1, 5 (593B) indicating some of the content of what was treated in the *Theological Outlines*. It is given a much fuller explanation in *DN* 2, 7 (645AB) and *MT* 3 (1033A). István Perczel has suggested that this treatise is actually the *De Trinitate* that is attributed (erroneously in his view) to Didymus the Blind. See his "Earliest Syriac Reception of Dionysius," 31–32.

66. *DN* 3, 1 (680A–D), 3, 2 (681AB); Cf. von Balthasar, *GOTL*, II, 157.

67. This lost treatise is explained most fully in *Epistles* [hereafter *Ep*.] 9, 1 (1104BC, 1105A).

68. *CH* 2, 5 (145A). See Rauro, "God and the Worm," 581–92.

69. *CH* 2, 2–4 (137 D–140A–C, 141C, 144A, 145A).

requires the divine speaking communicated in Scripture. In contrast, the latter two, in expressing divine *distinctions*, involve a communicative act that takes some kind of intelligible shape through existential phenomena.[70] But as Dionysius further explains, a divine name is immaterial while a symbolic image involves sensibility, a distinction he seeks to emphasize by treating them in distinct treatises.[71]

A "divine name," then, is a mode of attribution in between the unspeakable, inconceivable, unified essence of God in himself and the conceivable, differentiating, symbolic mode of attribution found in created entities. As such, divine names constitute a degree of porosity between the symbolic and the ineffable, the material and the spiritual. Dionysius hints at this porosity when he refers to the divine names as "God-becoming names of God" (*τὰς θεοπρεπεῖς ἐπωνυμίας*) and when he explains that each diverse name applies to the whole Godhead.[72] A divine name, then, performs a pivotal role in the overall anagogical function of the Dionysian project by mediating the excess of intelligible plenitude within God himself to the limits of human conceptualization. Dionysius explains this feature in chapter 2:

> This then is sufficient on these matters, let us now advance to the purpose of the discourse by unfolding, to the best of our ability, the kindred and common Names of the Divine distinction. And, in order that we may first distinctly define everything in order, we call Divine distinction, as we have said, the goodly processions of the Godhead. For, by being given to all things existing, and pouring forth the whole imparted goods in abundance, It is distinguished uniformly, and multiplied uniquely, and is molded into many from the One, whilst being self-centered.[73]

70. *DN* 2, 4 (640D–641A).

71. *DN* 9, 5 (912D–913AB). It is important to note, with Rauro, that in his explanation of various symbols, Dionysius does not refer to them as "names" but as *τύπος* "representation" *σχῆμα* "form" *μόρφωσις* "embodiment, concrete form" and other like cognates.

72. *DN* 2, 1 (636C–637A): Τοῦτο μὲν οὖν καὶ ἐν ἄλλοις ἐξετασθὲν ἡμῖν ἀποδέδεικται τὸ πάσας ἀεὶ τὰς θεοπρεπεῖς ἐπωνυμίας οὐ μερικῶς, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τῆς ὅλης καὶ παντελοῦς καὶ ὁλοκλήρου καὶ πλήρους θεότητος ὑπὸ τῶν λογίων ὑμνεῖσθαι καὶ πάσας αὐτὰς ἀμερῶς, ἀπολύτως, ἀπαρατηρήτως, ὁλικῶς ἁπάσῃ τῇ ὁλότητι τῆς ὁλοτελοῦς καὶ πάσης θεότητος ἀνατίθεσθαι.

73. *DN* 2, 11 (649B): Τούτων μὲν οὖν ἅλις. Ἐπὶ δὲ τὸν τοῦ λόγου σκοπὸν προΐωμεν τὰ κοινὰ καὶ ἡνωμένα τῆς διακρίσεως τῆς θείας ὀνόματα κατὰ τὸ ἡμῖν ἐφικτὸν ἀνελίττοντες. Καὶ ἵνα σαφῶς περὶ πάντων ἑξῆς προδιορισώμεθα, διάκρισιν θείαν εἶναι φαμέν, ὡς εἴρηται, τὰς ἀγαθοπρεπεῖς τῆς θεαρχίας προόδους. Δωρουμένη γὰρ πᾶσι τοῖς οὖσι καὶ ὑπερχέουσα τὰς τῶν ὅλων ἀγαθῶν μετουσίας ἡνωμένως μὲν διακρίνεται, πληθύεται δὲ ἑνικῶς καὶ

Clearly, contrary to what Soulen contends, a divine name is much more than a reference to "the intelligible structure of the world."[74] Rather, a divine name is a procession from the divine goodness given in abundance to all things that exist, embodying simultaneously divine uniformity and the multiplicity derived from its communication. Or to put it another way, the divine names are God's very presence in the constitution of a created entity.[75] They are, in this sense, *the uncreated in the process of creating* since, as Proclus had shown, anything that is immediately produced by a principle both remains in the principle and proceeds from it in simultaneity.[76] The complexity of this schematic gives rise in Dionysius to a paradoxical grammar and thought-structure that strains to articulate a singular, unified, reality, i.e., God, through a diversity of processions without in any way diminishing the unity of the divine reality. Like beauty, a divine name is both beyond discursive determination even as it proceeds into the discursive, determinate order.

Most scholars connect the Dionysian move from the many names to the one God with the development that occurs with respect to the Neoplatonic interpretation of Plato's *Parmenides*.[77] In this dialogue, Parmenides famously distinguishes two hypothetical attributions of the One. The first hypothesis, "the One is not," intends to establish the complete removal of the One from every other thing that is. If the One is in fact the One, then its being must be beyond any relativity whatsoever. The second hypothesis, "the One is," establishes the inevitable relation to being that is implicated in any consideration of the One (indeed in any act of thinking). The distinction between these two hypotheses leads to the distinction between the One in itself, derived from the first hypothesis, and the first emanated principle, the Intellect (*nous*), derived from the second hypothesis. But as the Neoplatonic tradition develops, this distinction, although abiding, becomes less and less clear. Plotinus's efforts to secure the absolute isolation of the One instead creates ambiguities with regard to its relativity—a point that becomes especially poignant in his treatment of beauty. For

πολλαπλασιάζεται ἐκ τοῦ ἑνὸς ἀνεκφοιτήτως.

74. Soulen, *Divine Name(s)*, 63.

75. Perl, *Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 65; O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, 9; Jones, "(Mis?)-Reading the Divine Names as a Science," 157–62.

76. Proclus, *Elements of Theology,* prop. 30.

77. E.g., Louth, *Dionysius the Areopagite*, ch. 5; Wear and Dillon, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition*, ch. 2; Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 164ff.

Proclus, who follows Syrianus,[78] those aspects denied of the One by the first hypothesis correspond to the positive features that are affirmed of the One in the second hypothesis, signaling a step toward a relation beyond the distinction.[79] But more than any other Neoplatonist it is Porphyry who refuses any absolute distinction between the first and second hypothesis, largely providing a foundation for Dionysius's eventual progression.[80]

In Dionysius, rather than identifying two discrete realities—the One and *nous*—the two Parmenidean hypotheses are instead transferred into the divine to identify distinct aspects of the one God.[81] The first hypothesis identifies God as he is in himself, hidden from all knowledge while the second hypothesis identifies God's creative act of self-communication. From this perspective, a divine name identifies the procession of God's self-communication in the creative act that, although revealing something real of God, never compromises divine transcendence and hiddenness. Therefore, in Dionysius a distinction between communication and hiddenness remains, but it is not as hard and fast as the distinction between the One and *nous* in Neoplatonism.

As processions of the divine perfection in itself, the divine names are the various ways in which the divine plenitude of perfection can be encountered in its intelligibility. They have a relation to this plenitude of perfection only insofar as they are considered in a superlative modality, signifying an excess of the named content. "The (Names) then, common to the whole Deity," writes Dionysius, "as we have demonstrated from the Scriptures by many instances in the *Theological Outlines,* are the Super-Good, the Super-God, the Superessential, the Super-Living, the Super-Wise, and whatever else belongs to the superlative abstraction."[82] This superlative configuration denotes the porosity that a divine name harbors in its relation to God; the content that is communicated through a divine

78. See Proclus's commentary on the Parmenides, *In Parm*. 1142, 10–15; cf. Wear and Dillon, *Dionysius and the Neoplatonic Tradition*, 33–34.

79. Cf. Proclus, *On the Theology of Plato*, bk. 2, ch. 10.

80. For a more detailed discussion of the hypotheses in the context of the *Parmenides* and its interpretation among Neoplatonists, see Brisson, *How Philosophers Saved Myths*, 87–106.

81. Corsini, *Il Trattato De Divinis Nominibus*, 144ff. Stephen Gersh maintains that Corsini was the first to recognize this as an original step in Dionysius. See his *From Iamblichus to Erigugena*, 155.

82. *DN* 2, 3 (640B): Τὰ μὲν οὖν ἡνωμένα τῆς ὅλης θεότητός ἐστιν, ὡς ἐν ταῖς Θεολογικαῖς ὑποτυπώσεσι διὰ πλειόνων ἐκ τῶν λογίων ἀπεδείξαμεν, τὸ ὑπεράγαθον, τὸ ὑπέρθεον, τὸ ὑπερούσιον, τὸ ὑπέρζωον, τὸ ὑπέρσοφον καὶ ὅσα τῆς ὑπεροχικῆς ἐστιν ἀφαιρέσεως.

name exists in a superlative, superessential manner in the divine unity where it exists as one with all other superlatively existing names. But as the divine names are communicated, they take a form more akin to causality: "With which also, all those denoting Cause: the Good, the Beautiful, the Being, the Life-Producing, the Wise, and whatever Names are given to the Cause of all Good, from His goodly gifts."[83] In this way the divine names are intelligible and speakable as they enter into the formal constitutions of created entities while remaining immaterial in themselves.

Based upon this consideration of Dionysius's indirect articulation of the nature of a divine name, it seems that the congruity between a divine name and beauty—in that both oscillate between the spiritual and the material, the ineffable and the determinate, the "trans-" or "over-discursive" and the discursive—gives rise to a relationship of mutual enrichment. The schematic of a divine name, deriving from a preceding biblical and Christological tradition in its encounter with Neoplatonic thought, crystallizes in Dionysius as an original development of the One and the Many. At the same time, the Christian appropriation of beauty to the status of a divine name occurs for the first time amidst this Dionysian development. Since the theological synthesis of *On the Divine Names* contains these two original developments, one may speak of a coincidence of originality in Dionysius. This coincidence of originality signifies a primary foundation for all later development of beauty as a divine name.

Conclusion

The lack of abundant textual evidence concerning the nature of a divine name in the Dionysian corpus and the lack of historical evidence concerning the tradition of the divine names to which Dionysius alludes renders the task of examining this aspect of his thought rather difficult. Nevertheless, this chapter has sought to draw out as much as possible textual and historical evidence to throw light on the complexity of the divine name phenomenon. The conclusion that arises from this approach is that when textual and historical evidence is taken into consideration, it is difficult to prioritize either Dionysius's biblical allegiances or his Neoplatonic inheritance. Rather, as this chapter attempted to do, one must view Dionysius from both dimensions of his thought since the concept of a divine

83. *DN* 2, 3 (640BC): μεθ' ὧν καὶ τὰ αἰτιολογικὰ πάντα, τὸ ἀγαθόν, τὸ καλόν, τὸ ὄν, τὸ ζωογόνον, τὸ σοφὸν καὶ ὅσα ἐκ τῶν ἀγαθοπρεπῶν αὐτῆς δωρεῶν ἡ πάντων ἀγαθῶν αἰτία κατονομάζεται.

name emerges uniquely from the Dionsyian synthesis between biblical Judeo-Christianity and Neoplatonism. In this context, as noted already, a coincidence of originality can be detected in Dionysius. On the one hand, there emerges an original synthesis of the two Parmenidean hypotheses concerning the One and *nous* into two dimensions of the One biblical God. With this development, names for God are transfigured within the personal love relationship context that derives from the Hebraic understanding of God as expressed in Genesis, Exodus and other accounts from the Hebrew Scriptures. It is primarily through this Hebraic dimension, and the consequent appropriation of the divine name itself to Jesus Christ, that the divine names of Dionysius come to bear the personal sense that they do. By virtue of this Judeo-Christian configuration, names are no longer derivative concepts that emerge from the various emanations from the One. Therefore, on the other hand, the addition of beauty to the list of divine names may also be seen as original in Dionysius because the ambiguity that shadows beauty's direct association with the highest principle throughout Platonic and Neoplatonic thought is overcome as it now unequivocally identifies God. With this coincidence of originality in place, a more thorough and structured examination of beauty as a divine name in Dionysius becomes possible.