

THE MYSTICAL THEOLOGY
(to Timothy)

CHAPTER I
THE DIVINE DARK

998 A

1

O Trinity

beyond being,
beyond divinity,
beyond goodness, and
guide of Christians in divine wisdom,
direct us to the mystical summits
more than unknown¹ and beyond light,
There the simple, absolved, and
unchanged mysteries of theology
lie hidden in the darkness beyond light
of the hidden mystical silence,

there, in the greatest darkness,
that beyond all that is most evident²
exceedingly illuminates the sightless
intellects.

B

there, in the wholly imperceptible and invisible,
that beyond all that is most evident
fills to overflowing the sightless intellects
with the glories beyond all beauty.

This is my prayer.

And you, dear Timothy,

in the earnest exercise of
mystical contemplation, abandon
all sensation and all intellectual activities
all that is sensed and intelligible,
all non-beings and all beings;
thus you will unknowingly be elevated,
as far as possible,
to the unity of that beyond being and knowledge.
By the irrepressible and absolving ecstasis

¹ ὑπεράγνοστον.

² τὸ ὑπερφανέστατον.

of yourself and of all,
absolved from all, and
going away from all,
you will be purely raised up
to the rays of the divine darkness
beyond being.

2

Disclose this not to the uninitiated:
not to those, I say, who are
entangled in beings,
imagine nothing to be beyond-beingly
beyond beings,³ and
claim to know by the knowledge in them
"Him who has made the dark
his hiding place."⁴

If the divine mystical initiations are beyond these,
what about those yet more profane, who
characterize the cause which lies beyond all
by the last among beings, and
deny it to be preeminent to
their ungodly phantasies and
diverse formations of it.

B

For while to it,
as cause of all
one must posit and affirm
all the positions of beings,
as beyond be-ing beyond all
one must more properly deny all of these.⁵

Think not that affirmations and denials
are opposed
but rather that, long before, is

³ καὶ οὐδὲν ὑπὲρ τὰ ὄντα ὑπερουσίως εἶναι φανταζομένους.

⁴ Ps. 18:11.

⁵ δέον ἐπ' αὐτῇ καὶ πάσας τὰς τῶν αὐτῶν τιθεῖν καὶ καταφάσκειν θένες, ὡς πάντων αἰτιᾶ, καὶ πάσας αὐτὰς κυριώτερον ἀποφάσκειν, ὡς ὑπὲρ πάντα ὑπερουσίως. I prefer to render θέσις by "position" and τίθημι by "to position." (This is followed in some Latin translations.) I do this because, for Pseudo-Dionysius, the divinity positions beings through subsisting them and letting them take up a position "away" from the divinity as beings.

that—which is itself beyond all position
and denial—
beyond privation.⁶

3

Thus the blessed Barthalomew says
the theology is great and small,
the gospel is broad and long, and yet narrow;
he more than naturally conceives this:
the good cause of all is at once
greatly spoken, briefly spoken, and
without logos;
for it has neither logos nor intellection.
Because it beyond-beingly lies beyond all,⁷
it is truly and undisguisedly manifested
only to those who
step over all that is pure and impure,
scale every ascent of the holy summits,
relinquish every divine light
celestial sounds and logoi, and
enter into the divine darkness
where really is—as the writings say—
that beyond all.

C

It is not to be taken lightly
that the divine Moses was ordered
first to purify himself, and
again to be separated
from those who were not pure;
after every purification
he hears the many sounded trumpets,
he sees the many pure lights which flash forth
and the greatly flowing rays.
Then he is separated from the many and,
with those who are sacred and select,
he overtakes the summits
of the divine ascents.
Yet with these he does not come to be
with God himself;

D

⁶ ἀλλὰ πολὺ πρότερον αὐτὴν ὑπὲρ τὰς στερήσεις εἶναι τὴν ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν καὶ ἀφαίρεσιν καὶ θέσιν.

⁷ διὰ τὸ πάντων αὐτὴν ὑπερουσίως ὑπερκειμένην εἶναι.

he does not see God
 —for God is unseen—
 but the place where God is.
 This signifies to me that
 the most divine and highest
 of what is seen and intelligible
 are hypothetical logoi of what is subordinate
 to that beyond-having all.⁸
 through these is shown forth
 the presence of that which walks
 upon the intelligible summits
 of its most holy places.

And then Moses
 abandons those who see and what is seen
 and enters into the really mystical
 darkness of unknowing;
 in this he shuts out every knowing apprehension
 and comes to be in the wholly
 imperceptible and invisible,
 being entirely of that beyond all—
 of nothing, neither himself nor another,⁹
 united most excellently
 by the completely unknowing inactivity
 of every knowledge, and
 knowing beyond intellect
 by knowing nothing.¹⁰

⁸ ὑποθετικοὺς τινὰς λογοὺς τῶν ὑποβεβλημένων τῷ πάντα ὑπερεχόντι.
⁹ πᾶς ὢν τοῦ πάντων ἐπέκεινα, καὶ οὐδενος οὔτε ἑαυτοῦ οὔτε ἑτέρου.
¹⁰ See St. Thomas, S.T. I.12.13, 13.6, III.92.2, II Sent. 9.12; *De Pot.* 7.5, 9.7;
De Virt. 1.8

CHAPTER II

HOW IT IS NECESSARY TO DEDICATE HYMNS AND BE 1025 A
 UNITED TO THE CAUSE OF ALL AND BEYOND ALL

Into the dark beyond all light
 we pray to come,
 through not seeing and not knowing,
 to see and to know
 that beyond sight and knowledge,
 itself: neither seeing nor knowing.¹¹
 For by the denial of all that is
 one sees, knows, and beyond-beingly hymns¹²
 the beyond being.
 We proceed similarly to those
 who produce a natural statue
 by removing every obstacle which hinders or hides
 the pure spectacle of what is hidden, and
 by manifesting in a single denial and by itself
 the beauty itself which had been hidden.
 I believe that one must celebrate
 the positions and denials in an opposite way;
 for we position these
 by beginning from what is first and
 descend through those in the middle
 down to the last;
 we deny them all
 having made our search for the
 highest principles¹³
 from the last to the very first.
 We do this to know undisguisedly
 the unknowing which is covered round about
 by every knowledge in beings;

¹¹ τὸ ὑπὲρ θεᾶν καὶ γινώσιν αὐτὸ τὸ μὴ ἰδεῖν μηδὲ γινῶναι.

¹² ὑπερουσίως ὑμνῆσαι.

¹³ τὰς ἐπαναβάσεις.

we do this that we may see
the darkness beyond being
which is hidden by all the light in beings.

CHAPTER III

THE AFFIRMATIVE AND NEGATIVE THEOLOGIES 1032 C

In our *Outlines of Theology* we have treated what is of greatest importance in affirmative theology. That is, how the divine and good nature is called both one and three, what fatherhood and sonhood are in it, and what the theology of the spirit is. We have celebrated how the lights which remain in the heart of goodness have flowed forth from the immaterial and invisible good and, in so shooting up, have without wandering remained abiding and co-eternal in the good, in themselves, and in one another. 1033 A D

Further we have celebrated how Jesus, beyond being; took on being among human beings. We have celebrated whatever else is manifested in the writings in our *Outlines of Theology*.

In the *Divine Names* we have celebrated how God is called good, be-ing, life, wisdom, power, and whatever else pertains to the intelligible divine names.

In our *Symbolic Theology* we have discussed the names which are transferred from sensibles to what is divine. Thus we have determined what are the divine forms, figures, parts, organs, places, worlds, curses, pains, sadnesses, indignations, drunks, hangovers,¹⁴ oaths, periods of sleep, periods of wakefulness, and whatever other sacredly molded forms which symbolize the divine form. B

You will have noticed how much more extensive are the last than the former. Necessarily the *Outlines of Theology* and the unfolding of the *Divine Names* are more briefly spoken than the *Symbolic Theology*; for the higher we ascend the more our language becomes restricted by the more synoptic view of what is intelligible. Now, however, that we are to enter the darkness beyond intellect, you will not find a brief discourse but a complete absence of discourse and intelligibility. In affirmative theology the logos descends from what is above down to the last, and increases according to the measure of the descent towards an analogical multitude. But here, as we ascend from the highest to what lies beyond, the logos is drawn inward according to the measure C

¹⁴ αἱ μέθαι καὶ αἱ κραιπάλαι.

of the ascent. After all ascent it will be wholly without sound and wholly united to the unspeakable.

But why, you will ask, do we begin the divine denial from the last of beings when we positioned the divine positions from the first beings? The reason is this: to position that beyond all position it is necessary to position the hypothetical affirmations from those which are more akin to it; in denying that beyond all denial, it is necessary to deny from those which are farthest away from it. For is it not life and goodness more than air and stones? And is it not drunkenness or not anger more than not spoken or not thought?

D

CHAPTER IV

IN PREEMINENCE, THE CAUSE OF ALL THAT IS SENSIBLE IS NOT ANYTHING SENSIBLE

1040 D

We say this of the cause of all be-ing beyond all:¹⁵

It is

not being-less,
not lifeless,
not without reason, not without intellect.
Not body,
not figure, not form,
not what has quality, quantity, or mass,
not in space,
not visible,
not what has sensible contact,
not what has sensation or what is sensed,
not what has disorder and confusion,
not what is troubled by material passions,
not powerless,
not subjected to what happens to sensibles,
not light in what lacks,
not, and has not, alteration, destruction,
privation, diminution, or anything else
which pertains to what is sensed.

¹⁵ ἡ πάντων αἰτία ὑπὲρ πάντα οὐσα.

CHAPTER V

IN PREEMINENCE, THE CAUSE OF ALL THAT IS
INTELLIGIBLE IS NOT ANYTHING INTELLIGIBLE

1045 D

Ascending higher we say:

It is

not soul, not intellect,
not imagination, opinion, reason and not
understanding,
not logos, not intellection,
not spoken, not thought,
not number, not order,
not greatness, not smallness
not equality, not inequality,
not likeness, not unlikeness,
not having stood, not moved, not at rest,
not powerful, not power,
not light,
not living, not life,
not being,
not eternity, not time.
not intellectual contact with it,
not knowledge, not truth,
not king, not wisdom,
not one, not unity,
not divinity,
not goodness,
not spirit (as we know spirit),
not sonhood, not fatherhood,¹⁶
not something other [than that] which is known
by us or some other beings,

1048 A

¹⁶ οὐδὲ πνεῦμα ἐστὶν ὡς ἡμᾶς εἰδέναι οὔτε υἱότης, οὔτε πατρότης. The phrase ὡς ἡμᾶς εἰδέναι need not be coordinated with οὔτε υἱότης, οὔτε πατρότης especially if we understand πνεῦμα as "the divine stuff" or the divinity itself. This is a common Patristic usage of this term; it is a usage which has no necessary connection with the use of πνεῦμα in "Father, Son, and Spirit." See Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, (pp. 17-21)

not something among what is not,
 not something among what is,
 not known as it is by beings,¹⁷
 not a knower of beings as they are:
 There is neither logos, name, or knowledge
 of it.
 It is not dark nor light,
 not error, and not truth.
 There is universally
 neither position nor denial of it.
 While there are produced positions and denials
 of those after it,
 we neither position nor deny it.
 Since,
 beyond all position is
 the all-complete and single cause of all;
 beyond all negation:
 the preeminence of that
 absolutely absolved from all
 and beyond the whole.¹⁸

¹⁷ οὐδε τὰ οὗτα αὐτὴν γινώσκει ἢ αὐτὴ ἐστίν.

¹⁸ ἀλλὰ τῶν μετ' αὐτὴν τὰς θέσεις καὶ ἀφαιρέσεις ποιῶντες αὐτὴν οὔτε τίθεμεν, οὔτε ἀφαιρούμεν. ἐπεὶ καὶ ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν θέσιν ἐστίν ἡ παντελὴς καὶ ἐνιαία τῶν παντῶν αἰτία, καὶ ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν ἀφαίρεσιν, ἡ ὑπεροχὴ τοῦ πάντων ἀπλῶς ἀπολελφυσμένον καὶ ἐπέκεινα τῶν ὅλων. See Proclus, in *Parm.* VI.215. Here, ὑπεροχή ("preeminence") is more appropriately translated as "beyond-eminence."