

Revisiting the ‘Sudden’: Epistle III in the *Corpus Dionysiacum*

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I should like to begin my remarks in rather an odd place, a *scholion* of John of Scythopolis on the *Mystical Theology* of Dionysius, chapter I, paragraph 3. John makes the curious and at first blush harmlessly erudite observation that the darkness, γνόφος, into which Moses disappears in the Greek of Exodus 20,21 is translating the Hebrew term, *araphel*, and then adds: ‘The Hebrew says that *araphel* is the name of the firmament into which Moses went, for [the Jews] speak of seven firmaments, which they also call heavens¹’. This is a reference to the ancient tradition that Moses went up at Sinai to the throne of God in the highest heaven, which the rabbis of the Talmudic era called, more accurately but still relatedly, *Arabot*². Moses ascended, in short, to the throne of the divine Glory, to the light of the *Shekinah*. That the latter, ‘the παρουσία [or presence of God] in His most holy places’, to quote from *Mystical Theology* I.3³, signifies for Dionysius both light and Christ, is made

¹ PG 4, 421C, commenting on the γνόφος of *Mystical Theology* I.3, PG 3, 1001A; for the critical text of the latter, see *Corpus Dionysiacum* II, ed. G. Heil and A. M. Ritter (Berlin/NY, 1991) 144:10. I shall henceforth refer to Heil and Ritter’s text, which includes the *Celestial and Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* (CH and EH), the *Mystical Theology* (MT), and the Epistles, simply in parentheses with page and line numbers. The same will hold for my references to B. M. Suchla’s critical text of the *Divine Names* (DN) in *Corpus Dionysiacum* I (Berlin/NY, 1990). For the English of John’s scholion, I am indebted to the translation — with slight amendments — of P. E. Rorem and J. C. Lamoreaux in their very important book, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus: Annotating the Areopagite* (Oxford, 1998) 244-245.

² On the antiquity of Moses’ ascent to heaven, see for example W. A. Meeks, *The Prophet King: Moses Traditions and Johannine Christology* (Leiden, 1967) 122-125 (in Philo), 140-142 (Josephus), 156-159 (OT Pseudepigrapha), 205-211 (rabbinic midrash), and 241-246 (Samaritan tradition). For the provenance of the seven heavens, see A. Y. Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism* (Leiden/NY, 1996) 21-54, and for *arabot* as the name of the highest heaven and locus of the throne of God, see for example *III Enoch* 17:3, tr. P. Alexander, in J. H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (NY:1983), vol. I:269, and Alexander’s note ‘d’ directing the reader as well to the *Babylonian Talmud*, tractate *Hagigah* 12b. See also I. Chernus, *Mysticism in Rabbinic Judaism: Studies in the History of Midrash* (Berlin/NY, 1982) 89 and 94-95.

³ I read the παρουσία of MT I.3, 1000C (144:7-9), as equivalent to the rabbinic *shekinah*. The latter’s radical, קִשָּׁ, signifies dwelling, inhabiting, and the noun is usually translated into English as ‘Presence’. See A. M. Goldberg, *Untersuchungen über die Vorstellung der Shekinah in der frühen rabbinischen Literatur* (Berlin, 1969), esp. 531-538, and for the targums, D.

clear by what immediately follows in his Epistles I through V, especially Epistle III on the 'sudden'.

I submit that the first five epistles of the Dionysian corpus function as a kind of chiasm which helps to complete the thought of the *Mystical Theology*⁴. Epistle I continues the themes of divine darkness and unknowing which preoccupy the latter treatise: God's transcendent darkness (here σκότος) is 'hidden by the light of knowledge', Dionysius says, while 'complete unknowing is the knowledge of Him Who is known to transcend all things'⁵. Very good, but then this is met and countered by the opening line of Epistle V: 'The divine darkness [γνόφος] is the unapproachable light in which God is said to dwell'⁶. God's dwelling place, κατοικητήριον, recalls — and not, I think, accidentally — the thrust and background of John's *scholion* on the *araphel*, the place of the divine throne which, in the ancient traditions of both apocalyptic literature and of later Rabbinic *merkabah* texts, is always characterized

Munoz-Leon, *Gloria de la Shekinta en los targumim de Penteteuco* (Madrid, 1977), esp. 487-494. Given this background, the passage I have in mind from *MT* I.3 becomes quite interesting. Dionysius is commenting on the LXX version of Ex 24,10: the elders of Israel 'saw the place [τόπος] where He [i.e., the God of Israel] stood'. He goes on: τοῦτο δὲ διμαί σημαίνειν τὸ ... ὑποθετικούς τινὰς εἶναι λόγους ... δι' ὧν ἡ ἐπέρ πᾶσαν ἔννοιαν αὐτῶν παρουσία ... τῶν ἀγιωτάτων αὐτοῦ τόπων ἐπιβατεύουσα. The key to a link with the *Shekinah* seems to me to lie in the tie between παρουσία and the participle, ἐπιβατεύουσα. C. Liubheid translates the latter as 'walking', *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (NY, 1987) 137. I would render it a little differently. The meanings assigned to ἐπιβατεύω in Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* 517, include 'mounting', as on a horse, or carried in the sense of 'being a passenger' (meanings four and five) with 'standing', 'setting foot on', or 'ranging over' as the first meaning. Rather than the last, effectively Liubheid's choice, I would read instead, 'His Presence beyond all conception ... standing upon' — or 'borne' or 'carried by', or even 'mounted upon' — 'His most holy places'. The scriptural echo would then also include Ezk 3:12, the song of the cherubim, 'Blessed is the Glory of God [יהוה כבוד, δόξα τοῦ κυριοῦ] from His place [Hebrew מקום, Greek τόπος]', and we would have thus an allusion to Ezekiel's vision of the chariot throne as well as to the theophany of Ex 24,10. The role these two texts played in both Jewish and Christian mystical traditions is difficult to exaggerate. See, for example, Evagrius Ponticus' use of the τόπος of Ex 24,10 in his chapters and letters, *Evagrius Ponticus*, ed. W. Frankenberg (Berlin, 1912) 425, 427, 441, 449, and esp. 593. For Evagrius' use of traditions shared with the targums, N. Séd, 'La shekinta et ses amis araméens', *Cahiers d'Orientalisme* XX (1988) 233-242. On Ezk 1ff., see the brief but richly suggestive article by G. Quispel, 'Ezekiel 1:26 in Jewish Mysticism', *VC* 34 (1980) 1-13; and J. Fossum, 'Jewish-Christian Christology and Jewish Mysticism', *VC* 37 (1983) 260-287. Dionysius' Moses, in sum, comes before the Presence (*Shekinah*) enthroned, and that the latter is Christ becomes clear in the Epistles following. On 'place', ἡσ, as itself a divine name in Rabbinic tradition and, indeed, as overlapping with *Shekinah*, see R. J. Zwi Werblowsky's 'Prolegomenon' to the reprint of A. Marmorstein, *The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God*, Vol II: *Essays in Anthropomorphism* (Oxford, 1937; rep. NY, 1968) xii-xiv.

⁴ I have made this argument regarding the 'sudden' and the chiasmic structure of Epistles I-V elsewhere, esp. in *Et introibo ad altare dei: The Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagita* (Thessalonica, 1994) 222-229, but not with the same range of supporting texts as here.

⁵ Ep. I, 1065A (156-157).

⁶ Ep. V, 1073A (162:3-4). For the same equation, γνόφος = ἀπρόσιτον φῶς (or Ex. 20,21 = I Tim 6,16), see also *DN* VII.2, 869A (196:11-12).

by overwhelming light or fire. Light is both the Presence Himself, and the stream which proceeds from Him⁷. Thus we find Dionysius continuing:

And if it [i.e., the unapproachable light] is invisible because of its superabundant clarity, and unapproachable because of its transcendent outpouring of light, yet it is here that everyone enters [γίγνεται] who has been made worthy of seeing and knowing God.⁸

He then goes on to cite David and, especially, Paul as examples of this experience. Let me draw attention to two additional points here. First, the 'entering into' the divine presence deploys the same verb, γίγνομαι, as Dionysius uses in Epistle X concerning those holy ascetics who, even in this life, are 'already with God [ἤδη μετὰ τοῦ θεοῦ γιγνομένου]'⁹. Second, another *scholion* will help us in identifying a key theophany to which I believe Dionysius will shortly be alluding in Epistle III. On the 'unapproachable light', the *scholion* makes the seemingly humdrum observation that the experience of the *visio dei* might be compared to trying to stare at the sun's disk at noon, μεσημβρία¹⁰.

The 'transcendent outpouring of light' leads us to the matter of God's self-communication, which I take to be the subject of Epistles II and IV. In the former, Dionysius alludes back to the distinction which he had sketched, in *Divine Names* II and XI, between God *in se* and *ad extra*¹¹. God truly gives

⁷ See, for example, I. Chernus, 'Visions of God in Merkabah Mysticism', *Journal for the Study of Judaism* XIII.1-2 (1992) 123-146; idem, *Mysticism in Rabbinic Judaism* 74-87, on the *וְיָהִי הַשְּׁכִינָה* ('splendor of the *Shekinah*'); A. Goshen-Gottstein, 'The Body as Image of God in Rabbinic Literature', *HThR* 87.2 (1994) 171-195, esp. 178-183 on 'the body as light'; and W. F. Smelik, 'On the Mystical Transformation of the Righteous into Light in Judaism', *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 27.2 (1995) 122-144, esp. 131-143. Relatedly, see *CH IX.3*, 201A (38:11-12) for Dionysius' phrase, τὸ ἄπειρόν τε καὶ ἄφθονον πέλαγος τοῦ θεαρχικῆς φωτός, and for its echoes later in Symeon the New Theologian, I. Perzel, 'Denys l'Aréopagite et Syméon le nouveau théologien', in Y. de Andia, ed., *Denys l'Aréopagite et sa postérité en Orient et en Occident* (Paris, 1997) 352, and for its parallels in medieval Cabbalism, A. Green, 'The Song of Songs in Early Jewish Mysticism', *Orim: A Jewish Journal at Yale* (1987), esp. 55-56. For apocalyptic literature and the stream of fire from the divine throne, see *I Enoch* 14:17-22 and 71:2-6 (Charlesworth, *OT Pseudepigrapha* I:21, 49-50); *Daniel* 7:10; *II Enoch* 20:1 and 22:1 (Charlesworth I:134 and 136); *III Enoch* 36 (Charlesworth I:289); and the increasing force and density of the divine light in Isaiah's ascent to the seventh heaven, *Ascension of Isaiah* 8:1-2, 21-26; and 9:6 (Charlesworth II:168-170).

⁸ Ep. V, 1073A (162:4-6).

⁹ Ep. X, 1117B (208:12-13). I feel free to call them ascetics because Dionysius' vocabulary here makes that identification very clear. He refers to them 'withdrawing [ἀναχωροῦσι] from material things' and 'living ... like angels among men', with 'dispassion [ἀπαθεία] and holiness [ἁγιότητι]' (208:8-209:4). The combination of *anachoresis*, angelic life, dispassion, and holiness — with the latter very possibly rendering the Syriac *ܐܢܚܘܪܝܬܐ*, a *terminus technicus* for consecrated celibacy — adds up unmistakably to monks.

¹⁰ *PG* 4, 536B.

¹¹ See *DN* II.11, 649B-D (135:10-136:17); note the reference to θεώσις in 649CD (136:13-17), followed at once by the 'one', 'one', 'one' of the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit in 649D-

Himself, the Areopagite states in Epistle II, and truly deifies, but while He is Himself the deifying gift, θεοποιὸν δῶρον, He yet transcends all the relations He enters into. He gives of His actions, ἐνέργειαι, or powers, δυνάμεις, but not of His essence, οὐσία¹². Epistle IV makes clear the source of this gift of divine energy or power. It is Christ. In Jesus, Dionysius tells us, transcendence and immanence (here ἀπόφασις and κατάφασις, respectively) have met and been joined. Those things, he goes on, 'which are affirmed of Jesus' love for humanity preserve the force of transcendent negation'. Therefore, he concludes,

[Christ] did not do what is divine as God, nor what is human as man, but instead [as] God having become man, He has administered to [or, arranged for] us a certain, new divine-human activity.¹³

I admit that my translation of πεπολιτευμένος here as a deponent participle is questionable. The usual rendering applies the 'theandric activity' entirely to Christ, as in the Paulist Press translation: 'He accomplished something new in our midst — the activity of the God-man'¹⁴. I respond by noting, first, that πολιτεύομαι can carry an object, and mean thus 'arrange for' or 'administer'¹⁵. Second, I think that, whether my translation is strictly acceptable or not, it still serves in either case to convey something which Dionysius believes is fundamentally true about the Incarnation, and that is that the latter affords us a real participation in God's own actions and gifts. Let us recall his definition of hierarchy in *Celestial Hierarchy* III.2, which includes the description of a hierarchy's members as 'spotless mirrors of the primordial light' called to 'show forth the divine ἐνέργεια' in themselves, and, in *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* I, his reference to Jesus Who 'makes our life, disposition, and activity [ἐνέργεια] something divine'¹⁶. I could multiply examples, but these will suffice to make my point: Christ's divine-human activity comes to us, and does so specifically in the divine polity and way of life — the ἔνθεος πολιτεία, as Dionysius puts it elsewhere¹⁷ — of the Church. It is in the latter that we receive the 'deifying gift' mentioned in Epistle II, and it is in and

652A (136:18-137:5); also *DN* XI.6, 953C-956B (222:3-223:3) against the notion of the 'powers', δυνάμεις, which God shares with us as discrete entities, even though they are somehow distinct from the divine being, and cf. *DN* V.2, 816C (181:7-15) for the same assertion. John of Scythopolis thus rightly directs his readers to the second of these passages in his scholion on Ep. II, *PG* 4, 529B-D (ET: *Roem/Lamoreaux* 251).

¹² Ep. II, 1068A-1069A (158:4-10).

¹³ Ep. IV, 1072BC (161:4-10).

¹⁴ *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* 265.

¹⁵ See H. G. Liddel and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed. H. Stuart Jones (Oxford, 1940) 1434, meanings B.II.2 and VI.b for 'administer' and 'arrange', respectively.

¹⁶ See *CH* III.2, 165AB (18:2-4 and 16-17). So *EH* I.1, 372AB (63:12-64:6), and see above, note 11, for *DN* II.11 and θεώσις.

¹⁷ See *EH* II.2.4, 396A (71:15); III.3.11, 441C (91:23); and Ep. IX, 1113A (206:2).

through the Church that we are led to encounter the mystery of Christ's divinity in a 'transcendent outpouring of light'.

These several points, together indeed with the entire corpus itself, are summed up by the center and punchline of the chiasm, Epistle III:

'Suddenly' means that which comes forth from the hitherto invisible and beyond hope into manifestation. And I think that here the scripture [lit., theology] is suggesting the philanthropy of Christ. The super-essential has proceeded out of its hiddenness to become manifest to us by becoming a human being. But He is also hidden, both after the manifestation and, to speak more divinely, even within it. For this is the hidden of Jesus, and neither by rational discourse nor by intuition can His mystery [μυστήριον] be explained, but instead, even when spoken it remains ineffable [ἄρρητον], and when conceived with the intellect, unknowable [ἄγνωστον]¹⁸.

The first thing we notice is the reprise of the themes of the *Mystical Theology*: divine unknowability and ineffability, together with the tension between transcendent hiddenness and revelation. Secondly, there is surely a sacramental echo in the reference to the μυστήριον of the Incarnation. Christ is *the* sacrament, both at the center and terminus of the divine processions to us and to our world, and, simultaneously, the vehicle and goal of our return, or ascent¹⁹.

The real force and key here to the coalescence of Dionysius' thought, however, lies in the 'suddenly', ἐξαίφνης, which opens the epistle. To use the expression of a colleague of mine, it is a 'hook word', pulling multiple associations up and together at once²⁰. On the one hand, Werner Beierwaltes and Raul Mortley have rightly noted that Dionysius' 'sudden' has an ancestry in the Platonic tradition²¹. Plato himself uses it three times: in the *Parmenides* to indicate the timeless moment of intersection between the eternal, unmoving realm of the Forms and the world of serial time and flux; again in the *Symposium* to signify the end and goal of the ascent of eros to the vision of Beauty, and lastly, in Epistle VII (if by Plato himself), for the 'sudden' conclusion of the philosopher's quest in, perhaps, the vision of divinity. All these are certainly important Dionysian themes — eros, beauty, stasis/motion, eternity/time. Then there is Plotinus' use of the 'sudden' in *Enneads* V.3.17; 5.7;

¹⁸ Ep. III, 1069B (159:3-10).

¹⁹ In other words, the Neoplatonist cycle of πρόοδος—ἐπιστροφή as here summed up in Christ.

²⁰ See Carol Stockhausen, '2 Corinthians and the Principles of Pauline Exegesis', in *Paul and the Scriptures of Israel*, ed. C. A. Evans and J. A. Sanders (Sheffield, 1993) 143-164, here 144.

²¹ W. Beierwaltes, 'Εξαίφνης oder die Paradoxie des Augenblicks', *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* LXXIV (1966/67) 271-282; R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. II: *The Way of Negation* (Bonn, 1986) 236-240. For Beierwaltes the philosophical *aporia* of the 'sudden' in the *Parmenides* becomes in Dionysius an expression for the paradox of the Incarnation. Mortley adds the references to Plotinus, but seems to regard Dionysius' efforts less favorably as an attempt at 'a demythologized account of Christ's epiphany' with Gnostic overtones (239-240).

and VI.7.36 to signal the vision of the One in light²². Here, too, especially in the notes of light and vision, we find an echo in the Areopagite.

It is at this point, however, that modern Dionysian scholarship stops short. It thus remains entirely insensitive to the resonances which the 'sudden' has in the scriptures and later Christian literature. I have in mind especially four appearances of ἐξαίφνης in the New Testament, together with certain passages in early ascetic literature and in Ephrem Syrus. The New Testament texts are Acts 9,3; 22,6; Lk 2,13; and Mk 13,36. The first two are functionally identical descriptions of St. Paul's conversion on the Damascus Road. I quote from the second: 'And it happened that as I was travelling ... at around mid-day [μεσημβρία] a great light from heaven flashed suddenly around me'. The overwhelming light, of course, is Christ, Who sends Paul on to his life's work of converting the gentiles²³. I note the associations with Paul, Dionysius' alleged master, with light, with the manifestation of Christ, with the 'midday' we saw above signaled by the *scholion*, and, perhaps not least, with the mission to the 'Greeks' which Dionysius says he is continuing in his Seventh Epistle²⁴. Luke 2,13 links the 'sudden' to the *gloria in excelsis*, the manifestation of the angelic liturgy to the shepherds at the moment of the Incarnation. The fourth text, Mk 13,36, occurs at the end of the eschatological discourse where Christ warns His listeners to be watchful, lest returning 'suddenly', the Master find them asleep. The New Testament thus ties the 'sudden' to Christ, light, the angelic liturgy, the eschaton, and, not least, St. Paul and the mission to the Greeks.

The following appearances of the 'sudden' in later Christian literature are not, I should note, the result of a systematic search, but of purely accidental discovery. Every one of them, however, recalls one or more of the associations I have just underlined, and on occasion adds to them. The earliest comes from

²² Typically, while all these echoes of Plato and Plotinus are correctly noted in the critical apparatus, Heil/Ritter 159, the latter lists nothing in the NT or other Christian literature. Of note: the ἐξαίφνης appears in one other place in Dionysius: *CH XV.2*, 329C (53:1), on the 'sudden' appearance of fire as an illustration of divinity. Also, and quite significantly, in *Ep. VIII.6*, 1100A (190:5 ff), the related term, ἄφνω, opens the description of Bishop Carpus' vision of Christ on the heavenly throne — thus see n.3 above as well as my discussion of the 'sudden' in the *Vita Antonii* and Apocryphal Acts below, together with nn. 26 and 33.

²³ Paul and the mysticism of light as related at once to apocalyptic ascent (cf. 2 Cor 3-4 and 12) and later rabbinic *merkabah* literature have come recently under increasing scholarly attention. See, for example, M. Hengel, "Setze dich zur meiner Rechten!" Die Intronization Christi zur Rechten Gottes und Psalmen 110:1', in *Le trône de Dieu*, ed. M. Philonenko (Tübingen, 1993) 108-194, esp. 165-174, and A. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven, CT, 1990), esp. 9-11, 58-64, and 152-157.

²⁴ *Ep. VII*, 1077B-1081C (165-170), esp. 1080AB (165:12-167:2) and 1081C (169:14-170:8). This would also thus place the ἐξαίφνης and its NT associations in at least partial conformity with the widely held view of the *Areopagitica* as fundamentally an apology for the Christian use of philosophy. I have no difficulty with this view, but I also regard it as dangerously incomplete. See below, n.33.

the third century apocryphon *The Acts of Thomas*. In the 'Hymn of the Pearl', perhaps of independent origin but placed here in the Apostle's mouth, Thomas sings of 'suddenly' encountering the 'robe of glory' woven for him in heaven²⁵. The context makes it clear that the robe is equivalent to the 'luminous image' familiar from Jewish and Jewish-Christian literature, and that the speaker's clothing with it represents a mystical experience²⁶. That experience, moreover (and recalling our observations above on the *araphel* and the ascent of Moses), is one of heavenly ascent: clothed with the robe of light, the Apostle goes up to the 'gate of greeting' where he worships the 'Radiance [φέγγος] of the Father', that is to say, Christ²⁷. In two other works of the same genre from the early and late fourth century, the *Cologne Mani Codex* and the *Acts of Phillip*, respectively, we find the associations of ἐξαιφνης with ascent and rapture — to heaven and the heavenly throne, in the former, and to the manifestation of Christ as light 'shining seven times more brilliantly than the sun', in the latter²⁸. In Athanasius of Alexandria's *Life of Anthony*, the father of monks is rescued from demonic temptation by the 'sudden' beam of light from heaven which comforts him with the voice of Christ²⁹. Finally, in Ephrem Syrus, the 'sudden' occurs at least three times. In his *Hymns on Nature* [6.7], it is Christ Who is the 'star of light Who shone forth suddenly' at the Incarnation³⁰, while in the *Paradise Hymns*, the 'sudden' occurs first [5.11] in reference to the angelic liturgy. The τρισάγιον of the Seraphim 'suddenly' breaks the silence before the Presence in Eden, and, be it noted, the angelic hymn is mentioned here in parallel to a reference to the thunder of the theophany on

²⁵ *Acta Thomae* 112, ed. M. Bonnet, *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha* II.2, 223:7-13.

²⁶ That is, as placed in the Apostle's mouth, the hymn is made to speak of his experience. On the Thomas tradition, including both the *Acts* and the *Gospel of Thomas*, as embodying a light mysticism of the divine form, see G. Quispel, 'Sein und Gestalt', in *Studies in Religion and Mysticism Presented to Gershom Scholem* (Jerusalem, 1967) 190-195; idem, *Makarios, das Thomas-evangelium, and das Lied von der Perle* (Leiden, 1967), esp. 39-64; and very recently, A. DeConick, *Seek to See Him: Ascent and Vision Mysticism in the Gospel of Thomas* (Leiden, 1996). On the luminous image in Judaism, see again Goshen-Gottstein, 'The Body as Image', 178-183, and on this visionary tradition as a factor in Dionysius' motives for his enterprise, see n.33 below.

²⁷ *Acta Thomae* 112, Bonnet 224, esp. lines 12-13.

²⁸ *The Cologne Mani Codex* (P.Colon.inv.ab 4780): 'Concerning the Origin of his Body', ed. R. Cameron and A. J. Dewey, SBL Texts and Translations 15 (Missoula, MT, 1979) 55:12-57:16, pp. 44 (Greek text) and 42 (translation). *Acta Philippi*, Bonnet 10:26-11:5. For the former as demonstrating linkage between Mani, Second Temple apocalyptic traditions of the ascent to heaven, and related *merkabah* traditions in Judaism and Jewish Christianity, see I. Gruenwald, 'Manicheism and Judaism in Light of the Cologne Mani Codex', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphie* 50 (1983) 29-45; J. M. Baumgarten, 'The Book of Elchesai and Merkabah Mysticism', *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 17.2 (1986) 212-223, and at length in J. C. Reeves, *Heralds of that Good Realm* (Leiden, 1996).

²⁹ *Vita Antonii* 10, PG 26, 860A.

³⁰ *De nat.* 6.7, CSCO 186:52; ET: K. McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns* (NY, 1989) 112.

Sinai³¹. The second appearance of the 'Sudden' in the *Paradise Hymns* adds something new to our set of associations: the liturgy on earth, specifically the Eucharist. Ephrem is speaking about the supper of the risen Christ with the two disciples at Emmaus in Luke 24:

When the disciples' eyes were closed, bread too was the key whereby their eyes were opened to recognize the Omniscient One: darkened eyes beheld a vision of joy and were suddenly filled with happiness³².

It seems to me that, on the basis of just these eleven texts, we have evidence of a certain tradition or at least current in Christian (and, counting Mani, para-Christian) literature which linked the 'sudden' to Christ, to light, to heavenly ascent, and to the liturgies of both the angels and the Church³³. Assuming that Dionysius knew Syriac, there is perhaps an additional play on the 'sudden'³⁴. The Syriac phrase which renders the Greek word is ܡܢ ܫܠܝܐ (*men shelya*). *Men* is simply the preposition 'from', like the Greek ἐκ. *Shelya*, on the other hand, has interesting associations. It contains the meanings 'rest', 'silence',

³¹ *De par.* 5.11, CSCO 174, 18:6-11 (*men shelya* line 7); ET: S. Brock, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Paradise* (Crestwood, NY, 1990) 106 (slightly amended).

³² *De par.* 15.4, 63:3-8 (line 8 for *men shelya*); ET: Brock 183. On the importance of the 'sudden' for Ephrem here, see M. Schmidt, 'Alttestamentliche Typologien in den Paradieshymnen von Ephraem', in *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie*, ed. M. Schmidt (Regensburg, 1981), esp. 64-65 and 78, where Schmidt also notes the parallels between Ephrem and Dionysius in their respective treatments of the Sinai theophany (thus the echo, too, of the MT). See also in this regard Golitzin, *Et introibo* 368-370.

³³ Thus, to continue my remarks in nn 24 and 26 above, I see the *Corpus Dionysiicum* as directed especially in reply to monks and ascetics enamored of the ascent tradition dating from apocalyptic literature and with contemporary parallels in Jewish *merkabah* mysticism. Accepting the traditional ordering of the treatises and epistles, note how the *CD* begins its proper work in *CH* II with an analysis of, essentially, Ezk 1ff., and concludes in Ep. X by addressing the author of the Apocalypse. Note, too, the exactly contemporary homily of Jacob of Serug, 'On the Chariot that Ezekiel the Prophet Saw', *Mar Jacobi Sarugensis: Homiliae Selectae*, ed. P. Bedjan (Paris, 1908), Vol. IV:543-610, with, first, its use of technical terms for the divine Glory shared with Judaism, notably ܡܝܪܝܢ (559:13; 571:17; 576:2; 592:5; and 593:13) and — the Aramaic equivalent of *shekinah* — ܫܠܝܐ (569:21; 570:13; and 602:25), in each case identifying the terms with Christ; and, second, its warnings against seeking to ascend to the chariot while ignoring thus the greater presence of Christ at the Eucharistic altar (esp. 605:16-606:6). That the 'sudden' in Ep. III echoes the *Apocryphal Acts*, Mani, and the *Vita Antonii* is therefore not simply fortuitous. Dionysius is, in a sense, forging his own 'NT apocryphon' or 'pseudepigraphon' in order to reply to this current with a countervailing antiquity of his own, the philosopher-disciple of St. Paul. Part of his reply, finally, linking the visible worship of the Church with the liturgy of heaven, on the one hand, and the encounter with Christ within the soul, on the other, is fully in accord with, and indeed mirrors, such earlier Syrian Christian ascetic literature as, for example, the *Macarian Homilies*. For Dionysius' relation to the latter and other, related Syrian Christian literature, see again Golitzin, *Et introibo* 359-392.

³⁴ I think it likely he did, *pace* P. Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to their Influence* (Oxford/NY, 1993) 70. See in contrast S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World of Saint Ephrem the Syrian* (Kalamazoo, MI, 1992) 147 and 180, n.6, on possible Syriac-Greek puns in Dionysius. The 'sudden' here may well be another.

and 'stillness', and is usually connected in Christian Syriac with the hermits, as is ἡσυχία in Christian Greek³⁵. It may also, though, be used, as Dionysius' precise contemporary, Philoxenus of Mabbug, uses it, to signify the divine being or essence³⁶. As a bilingual pun playing off of these different resonances, the 'sudden' fits indeed very well into the several intentions and associations of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, and particularly of the *Mystical Theology*. I am reminded of yet another Syrian, in fact of the one Church Father whom Dionysius felt it safe to quote by name, Ignatius of Antioch, who characterized Christ as the Word who proceeds from the Father's silence (συγή), and who continued, in another epistle, with a further echo of the themes of the *Mystical Theology* and the Dionysian epistles: 'It is better to keep silence and to be, than to talk and not to be ... He that truly possesses the word of Jesus is able to listen to His silence'. The bishop of Antioch's concluding words will lead us directly to our own final paragraph: 'Let us therefore do all things as knowing that He dwells in us, that we may be His temples and He Himself may be in us as our God'³⁷.

We have arrived at the scriptural text which John of Scythopolis tells us Dionysius is actually quoting in Epistle III. It is Malachi 3,1: 'And suddenly the Lord Whom you seek will come into His temple, and the Angel of great counsel whom you desire'³⁸. The historical Incarnation is part of the message here, certainly, but, *pace* Beierwaltes and Mortley, it is not the whole message. I would also point to the coordination between the temple of the liturgical assembly and the temple of the Christian's body and soul which runs throughout the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, and which I have discussed at length elsewhere³⁹. I would then add those echoes of experience, specifically of a

³⁵ J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary* (Oxford, 1903, rep.1990) 580 for *shelya*.

³⁶ See R. Chestnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies* (Oxford, 1976) 63, n.2, and 105 for *shelya* in Philoxenus of Mabbug as, in the first instance, denoting the simplicity of the divine nature and, in the second, as signaling that inner condition of the soul — quiet, silence — necessary for the encounter with the divine energies.

³⁷ *Magnesians* 8 and *Ephesians* 15, *SCh* 10, pp. 86 and 70-72, respectively. For Dionysius' quotation from Ignatius, *Romans* 7, see *DN* IV.12, 709D (157:10-11).

³⁸ *PG* 4, 532AB.

³⁹ As I have argued elsewhere, at length in *Et introibo*, esp. 167-230, and in brief most recently in 'Liturgy and Mysticism: The Experience of God in Orthodox Christianity', *Pro Ecclesia* 8.2 (1999) 31-58, esp. 52-57. For a quick look at this coordination in the *CD*, see *CH* I.3, 121C-124A (8:14-9:15 — esp. 9:4-5 for the orders or ranks of clergy and people as the image of an inner condition, ξῆτις); III.1-2, 164D-165A (17:10-18:6) for hierarchy as assimilated to the 'form of God', τὸ θεοειδέξ, and its members severally as 'divine images [ἀγάλματα]' and 'spotless mirrors'; VIII.2, 240C-241C (34:3-35:25) on the principle of hierarchic mediation, but to be read together with X.3, 273C (40:23-41:7), where each intellect possesses its own, inner hierarchy; *EH* III.1, 424CD (79:9-12) on the σύναξις as applied to one's inner state, and III.3.8, 437A (88:13-18), where it is used for the public worship of the Eucharist; the opening illustration of the μύρον in IV.3.1, 473B (95:19-96:5), with its invocation of the saints, θεῖοι ἄνδρες;

mystical theophany of the light of Christ, which were hinted at by John's scholion on the *araphel* and which characterize the 'sudden' in the Christian literature we have just finished surveying. Given these associations, we can surely say that the Dionysian 'suddenly' also intends to signify the presence of Christ on the eucharistic altar, His body after all, and His visitation — 'beyond hope', 'ineffable', 'unknowable', to cite our Epistle — within the temple of the soul. This, the sudden flash of the 'unapproachable light' within, is, I submit, the content of the γνόφος into which Moses ascends in *Mystical Theology* 1.3, as well as of the 'consummation' and 'access' of *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 4.3.12, where Christ is both the way and the goal, the altar of our own 'mystical holocaust' and the divine chrism which sanctifies that altar⁴⁰. His third Epistle is thus Dionysius in a nutshell: christological, liturgical, and — yes — mystical. The worship of the heavenly and earthly churches, the experience of the transcendent God, the hope of the Christian, all meet on the altar which is Christ. In Him the several concerns of the Dionysian corpus — angels and human beings, sacraments and mysticism, objective and subjective, hierarchy and personal encounter, clergy and ascetic visionaries, Christian revelation and Platonist tradition, the present life and the eschaton⁴¹ — all meet and join and are one.

the holy man in III.3.7, 473A (86:7-16) as physician and temple, ναός; relatedly IV.3.4, 477B-480A (98:14-99:14) for the 'fragrance of Jesus' within the intellect; to which I would add the holy man and disciple used as Dionysius' preferred illustration of divine fatherhood and sonship in the Trinity, in *DN* II.8, 645C (132:6-13); and finally Ep. VIII.3, 1069A (182:3ff.) for the double use of τάξις as applied both to the outer structures of the Church hierarchy and the inner faculties of the soul. For τάξις as a term in use in ascetical discourse for the inner ordering of the soul, see G. Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community* (Oxford, 1993) 151-152.

⁴⁰ *EH* IV.3.12, 484D (103:4-8): ... ἔστι τὸ θεϊότατον ἡμῶν θυσιαστήριον Ἰησοῦς ... ἐν ᾧ, κατὰ τὸ λόγιον, ἀφιερούμενοι καὶ μυστικῶς δλοκαυτόμενοι τὴν προσαγωγὴν ἔχομεν ... The 'consecration' and 'mystical holocaust' of each Christian at the altar which is Christ, by the *myron* which is also Christ, seems to me to offer a parallel to the ascent of Moses into the darkness and the stripping away of his powers in order to know unknowingly. So see again Golitzin, 'Liturgy and Mysticism' 52-57, and, on the importance of the *myron* generally in Syrian Christianity, together with its use as an illustration of Christ's divinity, W. Strothmann, *Das Sakrament der Myron-Weihe in der Schrift De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia des Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita in syrischen Übersetzungen und Kommentaren* (Wiesbaden, 1978), esp. pp. liii-lx.

⁴¹ Dionysius has been accused of being 'devoid of eschatology'; see P. Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: An Introduction* 120-122. This is simply untrue. Besides *DN* I.4's contrast between the 'now' of symbols and 'then' of the eschaton (cf. also 1 Cor 13,12, and, on the identical νῦν μὲν — τότε δέ constructions in the *Macarian Homilies*, Golitzin, *Et introibo* 375-376), which Rorem acknowledges, there is also the explicit and emphatic affirmation of the general Resurrection, at length in *EH* VII.1.1-2ff., as well as similar affirmations scattered elsewhere throughout the corpus, and, perhaps most notably (though to my knowledge never remarked on in the scholarly literature), the splendid evocation of the messianic banquet in Ep. IX.5, 1112D-1113A (205:8-206:7).