

Negation as Infinite Affirmation: The Apophatic Theology of Saint Dionysius the Areopagite

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to identify the meaning of negation in Dionysius the Areopagite's apophatism: how and towards which reality does it orient contemplation and what does it actually say about God who reveals Himself? My fundamental thesis is that, in fact, apophatic negation in Dionysius the Areopagite's teachings, as well as in those of other Eastern fathers conceals a super-affirmation, it indicates an infinite affirmation, beyond any determination. The meaning of the apophatic negation can be grasped at the confluence of three specific supra-intelligible terms: the alterity, the transcendence and the excess (the infinity).

Keywords: apophatic theology, Dionysius the Areopagite, Eastern Orthodox Tradition, alterity, transcendence, infinity

ACCORDING TO A CLASSICAL (AND DEFINING) statement for the apophatic thinking of most Eastern Fathers, beginning with the Cappadocian theologians, we know that God Is¹, but what He Is, in His essence, that

¹ I have decided to use capital letters both for God's Being and for the divine "Is" in order to emphasize the "ontological difference" between the Being of God and the being of the world. The homonymy of being is richer than the way Heidegger presented it and the fundamental ontological difference is between the Being of God and the being of the world, not between being and beings. Heidegger believes that God is a being, although a supreme one, still simply a being, and theology is a positive ontic science, as it deals with the historical event of "christicity". Heidegger implicitly denies the divine, eternal and uncircumscribed nature of Christ. This would be his crypto-arianism. Also the heideggerian criticism of the western onto-theology was then adopted by all the contemporary postmodern, deconstructionist and nihilists trends, and, unfortunately, without sufficient criticism even by some western Christian philosophers (such as Jean-Luc Marion in *Dieu sans l'être*) and Eastern theologians (Christos Yannaras in Heidegger and the *Areopagite*), who found too many common points (not necessarily legitimate, in my opinion) between

we cannot know.² I think this statement becomes even stronger and more significant if we reverse it: we don't know what God Is, but we do know that He Is. Thus, the negation of all possible determinations and analogies represents a background against which the affirmation that God Is shines with overwhelming light, at the border between the intelligible and the supra-intelligible, since the certainty that He is can only spring from the luminous gift of faith, which is a fixed supra-intelligible affirmation. In his notes to Dionysius the Areopagite's *Mystical Theology*, Dumitru Stăniloae writes: „above all negation is the affirmation that God is Who He is.”³ The same approach is obvious in John Chrysostom's liturgical anaphora: *For Thou art God ineffable, unknowable, invisible, incomprehensible, Thou art eternal, Thou art unchanging, Thou, and Thine Only-begotten Son, and Thy Holy Spirit*. Apophatism does not in fact discuss the fact that “God is eternal and is unchanging.”⁴ In his work *On the Holy Spirit*, when referring to the first sentence of the Gospel of John, “In the beginning was the Word” (John 1, 1), Saint Basil the Great notes that “no matter how we stretch our intellect, we cannot go beyond the word *was*”⁵, while for Saint Gregory Nazianzus “God is that which may not be doubted”⁶. As Yaroslav Pelikan points out, apophatic theology becomes, beginning with the Cappadocian Fathers, “a theory of language”⁷, a method to signify the transcendence of God.⁸

Heidegger's thinking and *Dionysius the Areopagite's* apophatism, which was unfortunately interpreted in a neo-platonic key, by accepting the separation of the One from the Being, a hypothesis rejected by Plato in Parmenides. Heidegger is also the main figure responsible for introducing Nietzsche's nihilist view into the postmodern philosophical thinking.

² John D. Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, edited by Douglas Knight (2008, repr., London: T&T Clark, 2010), 54-57.

³ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Notes to the Mystical Theology in Saint Dionysius the Areopagites. Complete works and the Scholia of Saint Maximus the Confessor* [in Romanian], trans. Dumitru Stăniloae (Bucharest: Paideia, 1996), 256, note 271.

⁴ In his commentary to John Chrysostom's liturgical anaphora, father Dumitru Stăniloae notes that the apophatism of the Holy Fathers accentuates “the fact that God is uncircumscribed”, but as a lived experience, not simply as a fact we can grasp intellectually. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Spirituality and Communion in the Orthodox Liturgy* [in Romanian] (Craiova: Mitropolia Olteniei, 1986), 263.

⁵ Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, 55.

⁶ Zizioulas, 56. In Zizioulas' opinion, „*apophaticism* does not mean that we have surpassed the concept of being or gone beyond ontology. [...] The verb *to be* is not only permissible in discussion of God, but it applies most directly and uniquely to God, for God is *the One who truly is* (...), so theology is the true ontology. [...] Ontology simply represents our search for stability and permanence” (Zizioulas, 55). „It is therefore not true to say that there is no ontology in the theology and life of the Church [...], *that* God is: we may really know is. It does not represent an absence of knowledge, and we do not require any negative theology to communicate this” (Zizioulas, 56).

⁷ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture. The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1993), 42.

⁸ Pelikan, 200-214.

However, from the very beginning, the Eastern fathers identified the nihilist potential of an „apophatic epistemology”⁹ interpreted in a distorted manner, either by suggesting that there is negation or privation in God (by separating the One from the Being or the Being from the divine energies), or by considering any human attempt to know Him and to interact with Him completely useless¹⁰ (deconstructing the finite intelligible analogies of the isomorphic structures that mediate contemplation) and by hiding the infinitely affirmative meaning of the apophatic negation. Perhaps one of the best known statements in Eastern theology is that God is unknowable in His being, but knowable in His works, in relation with the created beings. On the other hand, it must be emphasized that there cannot be a discontinuity between the Divine Being and His works or His energies, as these cannot subsist in themselves, but only in the Being. Because they subsist in the Being, the divine energies don’t belong to an inferior ontological level of the Being, or, to put it differently, they are not degraded manifestations of God. Through His works, God manifests Himself freely, unconditioned by anything, always in a way that is consistent with Himself, not opposed, not indifferent, not arbitrary, not diminished in relation to who He Is. For Gregory of Nyssa, nothing can remain in existence when separated from the being (Gr. Nyss., Ref. 34-35, Jaeger 2:325-26), as it would be “a violation both of natural theology and of divine revelation, to implicate the divine *ousia* in any nonexistence, either a nonexistence out of which it had come or a nonexistence into which it would pass through corruption and transiency (Gr. Nyss., Eun. 3.7.51, Jaeger, 2:233). For in some ways the most fundamental metaphysical presupposition of all about God was this: God always is that which the God now existing is; God does not become altered by taking something from another source; God always maintains self-identity (Gr. Nyss., Eun. 1.592, Jaeger, 1:196-97)”.¹¹

So, within the framework set by the apophatic thinking of the Cappadocian Fathers, the negative theology of Saint Dionysius the Areopagite culminates – apparently due to a neo-platonic influence – with the long string of negations from the last chapter of his *Mystical Theology*: divinity

is not soul, or mind, or endowed with the faculty of imagination, conjecture, reason [...], and has no power, and is not power or light, and does not live, and is not life; nor is It personal essence, or eternity, or time; nor can It be grasped by the understanding since It is not knowledge or truth; nor is It kingship or wisdom; nor is It one, nor is It unity, nor is It Godhead or Godness; nor is It a Spirit, as we understand the term, since It

⁹ Pelikan, 54-55.

¹⁰ Pelikan, 202.

¹¹ *Apud* Pelikan, 208-209.

is not Sonship or Fatherhood; nor is It any other thing such as we or any other being can have knowledge of; nor does It belong to the category of non-existence or to that of existence; nor do existent beings know It as it actually is, nor does It know them as they actually are; nor can the reason attain to It to name It or to know It; nor is it darkness, nor is It light, or error, or truth; nor can any affirmation or negation apply to it; for while applying affirmations or negations to those orders of being that come next to It, we apply not unto It either affirmation or negation, inasmuch as It transcends all affirmation by being the perfect and unique Cause of all things, and transcends all negation by the pre-eminence of Its simple and absolute nature-free from every limitation and beyond them all.¹²

In my view, the meaning of the apophatic negation can be grasped at the confluence of three specific supra-intelligible terms¹³: the alterity, the transcendence and the excess (the infinity). In order to correctly understand Saint Dionysius the Areopagite's apophatism, the three terms must be regarded in ontological solidarity. Out of the three terms, the last one – expressing the excess, the maximality, the absolute infinity – is the one that indicates the fact that God's alterity and transcendence are not privative in relation with the creation, on the contrary, any privation, any ontological negation are excluded. If we separate the infinitely affirmative meaning of the excess or the maximality from His alterity and transcendence, the latter remain either negative or suspended (in contemplation) between affirmation and negation, becoming thus impossible to discern the Dionysian apophatism from the neo-platonic one (which separates the One from the Being) or from the Buddhist nirvanic vacuum.

Radical alterity is usually expressed through negative prefixes (nonbeing, inexistent¹⁴, unreachable, incomprehensible), through a negative clause "it is not" or through a negative antinomy: "neither..., nor...". That is why, according to a classical assertion, negative theology shows us not what God is, but what God is not, or rather the fact that He is different from all created things and all human concepts. In the quotation above, Saint Dionysius the

¹² Dionysius the Areopagites, *On the Divine Names* and *The Mystical Theology*, trans. C. E. Rolt, (1920, repr., Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 1997), 200-201. Dionisie Pseudo-Areopagitul, *On the Divine names. The Mystical Theology* [in Romanian], trans. Cicerone Iordăchescu and Theofil Simenschy (Iași: Institutul European, 1993), 154. In most cases, I preferred this translation from ancient Greek as it is more terminologically consistent, more precise conceptually speaking and better articulated from a dogmatic point of view than Dumitru Stăniloae's translation or a more recent one, by Marilena Vlad (Dionisie Areopagitul, *On the Divine Names. The Mystical Theology* [in Romanian], bilingual edition, trans. Marilena Vlad, [Iași: Polirom, 2018]).

¹³ They could also be called *supra-concepts*.

¹⁴ Hilarion Alfeyev, *Le mystère de la foi. Introduction à la théologie dogmatique orthodoxe*, trans. Michel Evdokimov (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2001), 38.

Areopagite points towards this particular meaning of negation, in relation with the idea of alterity, by saying that God is not Godhead or Goodness or Spirit “as we understand the term”, so the negation concerns our limited capacity of understanding, not the reality of God Himself. The negation refers to the terms of the human knowledge and language, “which only fit the descriptions of reality in the created world, but not the descriptions of divine being, consequently, the verbs ‘to be’ and ‘to exist’ that come from them also do not fit descriptions of God’s being and existence.”¹⁵ Similarly, father Dumitru Stăniloae comments:

all are negated, not because they cannot be found in Him, but because they are not the way we think they are. Negations are in fact above all affirmations we can think of. We cannot say God is not all these, we only deny the form or the degree to which we may know them, we negate our own finitude, the limited character of our understanding.¹⁶

It is worth noting that although they have negative prefixes, some of the concepts used to describe God, have in fact an ontologically affirmative meaning. To mention just a few, words such as unbounded, uncircumscribed, infinite are strictly formally speaking negative (infinite is something that is not finite) because, *ab initio*, the intelligible terms of reference for human thinking are built in relation with finite realities. On the other hand, it is important to specify that in terms of content or meaning, language can indicate, can point towards supra-intelligible realities that cannot be otherwise encompassed in any concept.¹⁷

God’s transcendence is referred to by Dionysius the Areopagite either by using the negation with the meaning of “going beyond” (a position we will later find at Saint Maximus the Confessor, Saint John Damascus and Saint Gregory of Palama), or by using the prefix *ὑπέρο* translated in Latin with *supra*, for example *ὑπερούσιος*, above being, super-being. In the first prayer-sentence from chapter I of *The Mystical Theology*, in which he explains what the divine darkness is, Dionysius uses the prefix *ὑπέρο*, ten times. He talks about “that topmost height of mystic lore which exceedeth light and more than exceedeth knowledge, where the simple, absolute, and unchangeable mysteries of heavenly Truth lie hidden in the dazzling

¹⁵ Hilarion Alfeyev, *Orthodox Christianity*, vol. 2, *Doctrine and Teaching of the Orthodox Church*, trans. Andrew Smith (New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2012), 137.

¹⁶ Dumitru Stăniloae, “Notes to the Mystical Theology”, 256, note 274.

¹⁷ How human language expresses supra-intelligible realities is a different matter which does not constitute the subject of this paper. I will simply state here that the embodied Logos spoke a human language and that the human being expresses himself intentionally and dynamically, not only pointing towards certain realities, but also expressing himself, as a whole, including that which surpasses him and perhaps, that which surpasses him is precisely what defines his humanity at the highest level.

obscurity of the secret Silence, outshining all brilliance with the intensity of their darkness, and surcharging our blinded intellects with the utterly impalpable and invisible fairness of glories which exceed all beauty!"¹⁸) It has been said that there is a certain ambiguity of the prefix *supra* or *super*. For instance, "super-luminous"¹⁹ means both extremely, excessively luminous, and "beyond what is just luminous" and this second meaning is thought to be closer to Dionysius' thinking, in the view of some commentators.²⁰ In my view however, this cannot be accurate. On the contrary, "super-luminous" first means infinite excess of light, and precisely due to this excess, due to the absence of any privation, limits or negation in God, He is entirely different and above everything that is created and limited. At first glance, this suggests an affirmative continuity between God and His creation, which would diminish God, by returning to a cataphatism limited to the human being (in which God is only "more/a maximum" in relation with the world and determined by the world)²¹, but in fact, besides giving reality and consistency to the world and the divine Revelation (by analogy), this affirmative continuity is doubled by a radical discontinuity: the gap between the uncreated and the created, between God (in Whom there is only affirmation and ontological plenitude) and the world (marked by finitude, by limit, by negation, by being created out of nothing). Because there is no negation in God, there remains a gap between Him and His creation that cannot be crossed through any form of potential infinite (temporal) or actual determined infinite (eonic). Created beings cannot cross this gap, only God can through His uncreated energies that raise human beings to see His infinite light. In this sense, when considering the homonymy of the infinite, we can say God is above infinity, if we refer to the created infinite of the eonic angels or to any form of determined infinity or any infinity that the created mind can conceive. In a way, one can even say it is above the uncreated infinity of the divine energies – but only when looking from down up, from the creatures that partake in them, due to the infinite distance the energies have already travelled from the Divine being towards creatures. Still, it would be a nonsense to say that God is above His own absolute, infinite Being and a serious contemplative error to see any ontological discontinuity between the Divine being and the uncreated energies that spring from Him, as the energies do not subsist in themselves, but have their foundation in the Divine Being, from whom they cannot separate as they cross the gap between the uncreated and the created.

¹⁸ Dionysius the Areopagites, *On the Divine Names*, 191.

¹⁹ In the English translation, "super-luminous" (or "supra-luminous") is translated with "exceedeth light", which shows that the author of the translation followed a similar line of interpretation.

²⁰ Ștefan Afloroaei, *Afterword* to Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagites, *On the Divine Names. The Mystical Theology* [in Romanian], trans. Iordăchescu & Simenschy, 171 (footnote).

²¹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Orthodox Asceticism and Mysticism* [in Romanian], vol. 2 (Sibiu: Deisis, 1993), 67.

So, let us see now if we can find this infinitely affirmative dimension of apophatism in Dionysius' writings. Even in the above quoted text, the affirmative meaning of the prefix ὑπέρ seems evident to me in the sentence: "surcharging (ὑπέρπληροῦντα) our blinded intellects with the utterly impalpable and invisible fairness of glories which exceed all beauty". This "surcharging" cannot have a privative or a negative meaning and cannot indicate a neutral or arbitrary transcendence, but rather an infinite, excessively affirmative meaning. Also, in the 5th letter to Deacon Dorotheus, in which Saint Dionysius talks about the divine darkness, the affirmative meaning of excess of the apophatic negation is possibly even more evident. God is "invisible indeed, on account of the surpassing brightness, and unapproachable on account of the excess of the superessential stream of light".²²

In chapter II of *The Mystical Theology*, Saint Dionysius encourages us to be "as men who, carving a statue out of marble, remove all the impediments that hinder the clear perceptive of the latent image and by this mere removal display the hidden statue itself in its hidden beauty".²³ We notice here the affirmative finality of the apophatic negation, which is ultimately a supra-intelligible affirmation, given not by the works of one's mind in affirming or denying something, but through the presence of the uncreated light in those with a pure heart.

As Saint Dionysius notes in the last paragraph of *The Mystical Theology*,

nor can any affirmation or negation apply to divinity; for while applying affirmations or negations to those orders of being that come next to It, we apply not unto It either affirmation or negation, inasmuch as It transcends all affirmation by being the perfect and unique Cause of all things, and transcends all negation by the pre-eminence of Its simple and absolute nature-free from every limitation and beyond them all.²⁴

²² Dionysius the Areopagites, *The works of Dionysius the Areopagite*, trans. John Parker (Aeterna Press, 2015), 99. Romanian translation: St Dionysius the Areopagites, *Letters* [in Romanian], trans. Vasile Răducă and Gheorghe Drăgulin, (Bucharest: ALL, 1994), 54.

²³ Dionysius the Areopagites, *On the Divine Names*, 195.

²⁴ Dionysius the Areopagites, 201. In Romanian translation, in his introductory study, Cicerone Iordăchescu translates this final phrase in a way that confirms my position: "We neither affirm, nor do we negate the divinity, as One that transcends any affirmation, being the perfect and unique cause of all things and transcends any negation through the sublime character of His simple and absolute nature – without any limitation and above all things" (Dionisie Pseudo-Areopagitul, *On the Divine Names* [in Romanian], trans. Iordăchescu & Simenschy, 19). Marilena Vlad's translation also includes the idea of the supra-affirmative preeminence of the divine foundation: "the unitary and perfect cause of all things is above any attribution, while the pre-eminence of the One Who is detached from all things and beyond all things is above any deletion" (Dionisie Areopagitul, *On the Divine Names* [in Romanian], trans. Marilena Vlad, 261).

A significant thing here is that the string of apophatic negations from the last chapter of *The Mystical Theology* ends with the affirmation that God is the cause of all things.²⁵ The absolute foundation is unquestionable, God as the supra-intelligible cause of all intelligible things cannot be denied. On the contrary, it is more obvious when contrasted by all the analogies and determinations of the finite mind and of the finite world. Moreover, in Dionysius the Areopagite's view, the affirmative understanding of God as the universal cause for everything is determining for the whole contemplative ascent of the transcendence through negation:

we mount upwards (so far as our feet can tread that ordered path), advancing through the Negation and Transcendence of all things and through a conception of an Universal Cause, towards That Which is beyond all things.²⁶

Another paragraph that confirms the affirmative meaning of apophatic negation can be found in chapter II, 10 of the *Divine names*. Divinity is seen as "an Abundance in those Beings that lack, and a Super-Abundance in those that abound"²⁷). In fact, when we encounter the word *abundance* or *super-abundance* in the text, we cannot attach any privative meaning to it, any limit or any negation. Speaking of the embodiment of the Son, in the 4th letter to Gaius, he shows that Christ took

substance, above men and after men, from the substance of men. And it is nothing less, the ever Superessential, super-full of super-essentiality, disregards the excess of this, and having come truly into substance, took substance above substance, and above man works things of man.²⁸

Also, in the 9th letter, paragraph 5 to Titus the Hierarch, talking about the "drunkenness" of God, he explains that it ought to be imagined as

²⁵ In chapter IV and V, as indicated by the titles, Dionysius shows that God, as the cause of all intelligible things cannot be an intelligible thing. In other words, He *Is* in a supra-intelligible way. It is perhaps interesting to note here that Derrida thinks Dionysius' apophatism is not "deconstructionist" enough, as by introducing the idea of cause here, he brings affirmation back into the discourse about God. For a recent theological discussion on apophatism in Derrida and Marion, see Nicolae Turcan, *Apology after the End of Metaphysics: Theology and Phenomenology in Jean-Luc Marion* [in Romanian, with an English Summary] (București: Eikon, 2016), 189-210.

²⁶ Dionysius the Areopagites, *On the Divine Names*, 152.

²⁷ Dionysius the Areopagites, 78. Marilena Vlad's translation is more precise here: ("full, in things that need, superfull in things full") (Dionisie Areopagitul, *On the Divine Names* [in Romanian], trans. Marilena Vlad, 85.)

²⁸ Dionysius the Areopagites, *The works of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 99. In regard to this, Saint Maximus the Confessor uses the expression "The super-Being is super-full of super-existence" (my translation). (St. Maxim the Confessor, *Ambigua* [in Romanian], trans. Dumitru Stăniloae, [Bucharest: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiunea a Bisericii Ortodoxe, 2006], 79, 5a).

“anything else beyond the super-full immeasurableness of all good things pre-existing in Him as Cause”²⁹; He is beyond everything that can be understood, but although transcendent and “dwelling outside and beyond the whole”, He “a super-full hyperbole of every immeasurableness of them all”³⁰).

Perhaps the most significant text can be found in the 4th chapter, 3 from the *Divine Names* where Saint Dionysius talks about the divine good attributed in a transcendent manner to the divine essence: “in It alone Not-Being is an excess of Being, and Lifelessness an excess of Life and Its Mindless state is an excess of Wisdom”³¹). The apophatic negation is perfectly compatible and solidary with the excess of affirmation, it expresses the excess of affirmation.

Also, in another instance, Saint Dionysius insists that

while it possesses all the positive attributes of the universe (being the universal Cause), yet in a stricter sense It does not possess them, since It transcends them all, wherefore there is no contradiction between affirming and denying that It has them inasmuch as It precedes and surpasses all deprivation, being beyond all positive and negative distinctions.³²

Although Dionysius the Areopagite is considered to be the teacher of apophatism par excellence, father Dumitru Stăniloae notices that he often combines the apophatic and the cataphatic knowledge, and he surpasses both of them in the contemplation of the uncircumscribed Light; in this experience of seeing the supra-intelligible One, he uses affirmative and negative intellectual terms in order to express and communicate, without actually reducing it to them³³, but making them transparent.³⁴

Although, on one hand, Dionysius states that negations are more suitable than affirmations when referring to God, on the other hand, he notes that He is to a greater extent above negations than affirmations. This should be interpreted this way: in Himself, God is the most positive reality there is. But His supreme positivity is above all our affirmations. And this is another reason we should not give up speaking about God in affirmative terms.³⁵

²⁹ Dionysius the Areopagites, *The works of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 119.

³⁰ Dionysius the Areopagites, *Letters* [in Romanian], 86.

³¹ Dionysius the Areopagites, *On the Divine Names*, 89. I prefer the translation of the other two terms referring to life and wisdom with “excess of life” and “excess of wisdom” (ὕπερέχουσα and ὑπεραίονσα) as it is more coherent dogmatically that way and the phrase is more symmetrical. In fact, Marilena Vlad prefers to translate ὑπεραίονσα with “excess”.

³² Dionysius the Areopagites, *On the Divine Names*, 193.

³³ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* [in Romanian], vol. 1, 4th ed. (Bucharest: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, 2010), 133-134.

³⁴ Stăniloae, 129.

³⁵ Stăniloae, 137.

Recently, Daniel Jugrin proved that in the writings of the Areopagite there is a crucial difference – which is validated semantically and contextually in most cases – between ἄγνοια (ignorance or absence of knowledge) and ἀγνωσία (not knowing in the sense of going beyond knowledge), which corresponds to the distinction between σκότος (darkness as lack of light) and γνόφος (darkness as the super-fullness of light).³⁶ A negative concept conceals a positive one, that is the highest form of knowledge³⁷, which culminates in the union (ἔνωσις) with God. When reaching this stage, human language becomes logophatic, springing from the power and inspiration of God the Word Himself³⁸, unifying and, at the same time, exceeding both cataphatic and apophatic knowledge.

Perhaps a similar interpretation can be found in Charles Stang's thorough study, *Apophasis and Pseudonymity in the Dionysius the Areopagite*. Ἀγνωσία involves „a superabundant knowledge”, and not lack of knowledge.³⁹ Also, ὑπερούσιος

does not suggest that God somehow lacks the quality he graciously gives to creation, but rather that God so superabundantly is that one does better to confess that he is *not* (*meaning not in our imperfect, limited way*) and thereby draw nearer to that divine superabundance.⁴⁰

God „is so superabundantly good that the notion of good no longer has full purchase”⁴¹, this of course, without suggesting the presence of anything evil in Him, not even the possibility of evil: negation.

In conclusion, unlike other types of negation, such as logical negation (the analytical negation in a contradiction), ontological negation (which can be found in the limit and the internal constitution of the finite being), the Hegelian negation (the dialectical negation of determinations followed by their speculative preservation and cumulation) or intentional ontic negation (which concerns the annihilation of the being), apophatic negation has an essentially affirmative meaning in Dionysius the Areopagite's teachings, as well as in those of other Eastern fathers.⁴² The affirmative meaning of

³⁶ Daniel Jugrin, “Agnosia: The Apophatic Experience of God in Dionysius the Areopagite”, *Teologia*, no. 2 (2016): 109.

³⁷ Jugrin, 109.

³⁸ Jugrin, 106-107.

³⁹ Charles M. Stang, *Apophasis and Pseudonymity in the Dionysius the Areopagite: „No Longer I”* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 139.

⁴⁰ Stang, 124. Emphasis added.

⁴¹ Stang, 129.

⁴² In short, Saint Maximus the Confessor, continuing this line of thought, affirms the non-determination of God's absolute Infinity, as well as the ontological solidarity between the One and the Infinite. Saint John of Damascus insists on the absence of any privation in God and considers that the positive attributes of the divinity are more appropriate than the negative ones. Also, Saint Gregory Palamas shows that the positive attributes *per-se* may

the apophatic negation becomes most visible at the convergence of three concepts or three supra-intelligible terms that must be understood in an ontological solidarity: the alterity (the difference), the transcendence (going beyond) and the infinity of the divinity in relation with the created being. Out of the three terms, the last one indicates the excess of being, the excess of attributes, maximality, plenitude, super-fullness and overabundance and shows that God's transcendence and alterity in relation with the created being does not involve any privations. On the contrary, it excludes any limit and scarcity, any negation. The uncreated is uncircumscribed and has a purely affirmative character. The apophatic negation does not indicate only going beyond any negative and positive determinations – which are both separately and all together improper to the divine, but also the absence of determination itself, that is the non-determination of the uncircumscribed, the unlimited affirmation, the absolutely infinite Being. Cataphatic knowledge is thus insufficient, not because it's affirmative, but precisely because it's not affirmative enough. It is not the affirmative dimension of knowledge that is improper, but the limited character of the affirmations.

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only rightfully be given to God, and whatever needs to be known apophatically about God is in fact the limited and imperfect reflexion of His attributes in the created minds. Those who cannot see God's infinite Light through their faith fall from the light of the natural knowledge as well, warns Saint Gregory Palamas. According to the interpretations of father Dumitru Staniloae and those of Paul Evdokimov, all the negative attributes of God point towards His overabundant positive reality. Finally, Father Sophrony Sakharov emphasizes the realism of the divine attributes, especially in the sinaite revelation: *I am Who I am*. He points out that apophatism may be understood as a kind of philosophical agnosticism and reminds us of the fact that in the Holy Scripture there are no references to God as darkness, but only to God as light.

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