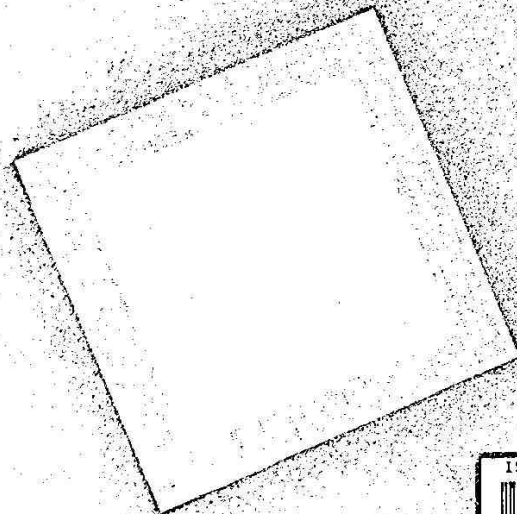


On the Absence and Unknowability of God, one of Christos Yannaras' earliest books, was first published in 1967 and has become a contemporary classic. Yannaras begins by outlining Heidegger's analysis of the fate of western metaphysics, which ends he argues in a nihilistic atheism. Yannaras's response is largely to accept Heidegger's analysis, but to argue that, although it applies to the western tradition of what Heidegger calls 'onto-theology' (which regards God as a being, even if the highest), it does not take account of the Orthodox tradition of apophatic theology, of which Dionysius the Areopagite is a pre-eminent example. A God 'beyond being' escapes the criticism of Heidegger, and provides an alternative to Heidegger's nihilistic conclusion.

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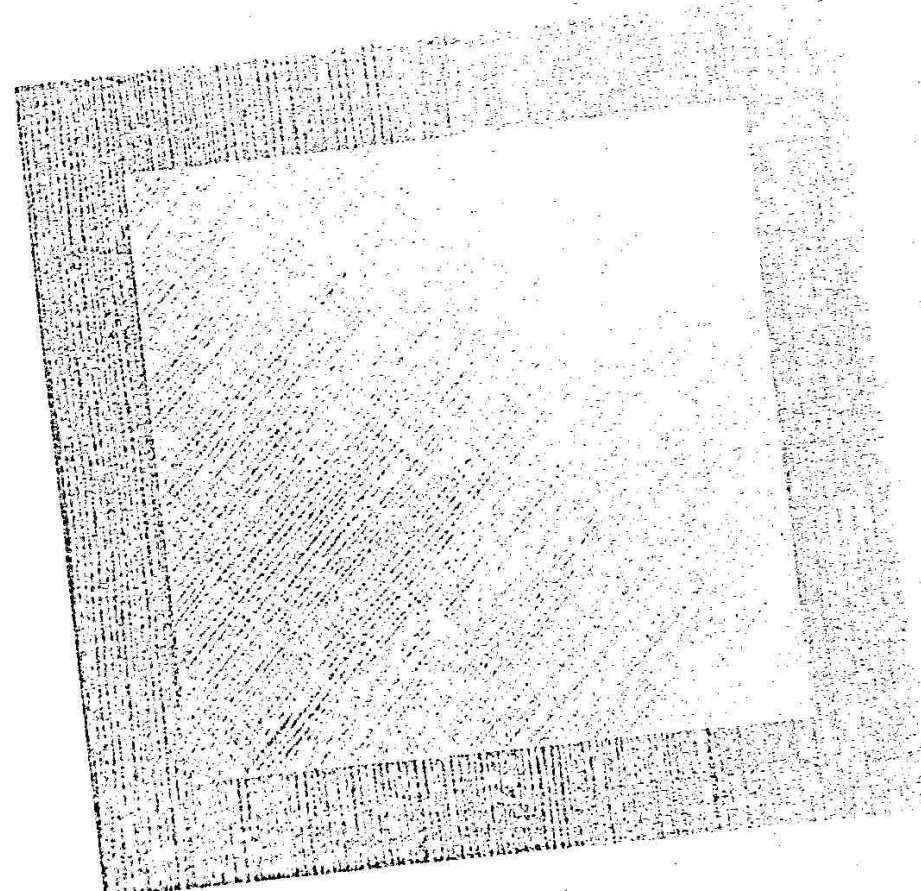


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Heidegger and the Areopagite



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edited and with an Introduction by Andrew Louth
translated by Haralambos Ventis

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Introduction

Christos Yannaras (Χρήστος Γιανναράς, his surname sometimes transliterated 'Giannaras') is without doubt the most important living Greek Orthodox theologian. He is enormously prolific – at the back of one of his recent books thirty-eight of his volumes are listed, and that list is by no means complete. He has pursued his theological insights into areas often neglected by theologians – politics and economics especially, but also philosophy of law, aesthetics – as well as the more traditional philosophical hinterlands of theology – epistemology, ethics. He has also been highly controversial: his appointment to the chair of philosophy at the Panton University in Athens – not the usual place to find someone so committed to theology, and an ecclesial theology at that – was itself extremely contentious. The publication in Greece (in 1970) of his book, *The Freedom of Morality*, 'caused an explosion', according to an English reviewer.¹ As that reviewer put it, 'Some greeted it as an intelligible account of much that is central to Orthodoxy. Others, particularly the moralistic and conservative elements which dominate the Greek Church at present, protested or even denounced it'. Such controversy was nothing new to Yannaras. In his youth he had been involved in the Christian renewal movement called *Zoē* ('Life'), but, inspired by his contact with a remarkable lay Christian thinker, Dimitrios Koutroumbis ('a Christian Socrates') he soon broke with it, along with

some other young thinkers, because of its moralism and pietism. From 1964 to 1967 he edited a remarkable review, *Synoro* ('Frontier'), and more recently has been a regular contributor to some of the better Greek newspapers, such as *To Vima* and *Kathimerini*, reaching a much wider audience than most theologians command. In the 1980s he became a public figure as one of the leading representatives of 'Neo-Orthodoxy' (as it was dubbed by its opponents, especially on the political left), which sought to transcend the split between 'Romaic' and 'Hellene'² and create a sense of Greek identity over against the West (on which see more below) that drew both on the Classical 'Hellenic' past and the spiritual tradition of Greek Orthodoxy, not least as it is manifest in the monastic tradition of Mount Athos.³ He has remained controversial, and the fact that the present Oecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew, holds him in high regard should not be taken as indicating any mellowing as he enters his late sixties (he was born in 1935).

Despite this impressive CV he is almost unknown in the West, except among those circles interested in Orthodox theology. He is much less well known, for instance, than his slightly older contemporary, John Zizioulas, now Metropolitan of Pergamon, who for some years taught in Great Britain, but, more importantly, has become more widely known through his engagement in the ecumenical movement. However, although there are some marked similarities in their thought (both embrace what might be called a personalist existentialism), Yannaras has provided a much more impressive philosophical grounding for his position, and, as already mentioned, has pursued his insights into intellectual territory not usually frequented by theologians. The principal reason for Yannaras' neglect in the West is simply that he writes in Greek, a language little read outside Greece, and few of his works have been translated: six of his works are available in French, five in Italian, but only two in English hitherto (*The Freedom of Morality*, Crestwood NY, 1984, and *Elements of Faith: an Introduction to Orthodox Theology*, Edinburgh, 1991), and just one in German, though that one of his most important – *Person and Eros*.

The book presented here in English translation is his first book, a seminal one, the immediate fruit of his own personal engagement with the intellectual tradition of the West. From 1964 to 1967, he studied in Germany, where he encountered the thought of Martin Heidegger; for the next three years he prepared a doctoral thesis at the Sorbonne on the patristic monastic theologian, St John Climacus, which was published with the title, *The Metaphysics of the Body* (published in Greek in 1971). He also prepared a doctoral thesis presented at the University of Thessaloniki (where he had first studied theology) on 'The Ontological Content of the Theological Concept of the Person' (published in 1970). The seeds of all these interests – and their interconnectedness – can be seen in *On the Absence and Unknowability of God* (first published in 1967 as *The Theology of the Absence and Unknowability of God*). What Yannaras found in Heidegger was an analysis of the development of western philosophy and theology that struck deep chords with his own perception – as one steeped in the patristic tradition of philosophical theology – of the difference between the Greek East and the Latin West; a difference sealed by the Great Schism that separated Latin Christendom under the papacy from the authentic Christianity preserved by the Greek East, and only further confirmed by the divisions in western Christianity itself, as a result of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Heidegger explained why the West had fallen away from an understanding of being and truth that Yannaras found in the Greek East from Herakleitos 'the Dark', the enigmatic pre-Socratic philosopher from Ephesus, through to the hesychasts of the fourteenth century – a tradition that he is anxious to preserve (and to some extent recover) as a living source of wisdom.

Perhaps here is as good a place as any to say something about Yannaras' sharp antipathy to the West, which many in the West will find exaggerated and unfair.⁴ Yannaras enthusiastically endorses Heidegger's comprehensive condemnation of the western philosophical tradition since Plato (though he is ambiguous in his attitude to Plato and Aristotle, accepting Heidegger's condemnation of them only

partially, and attributing much that Heidegger condemns in them to distortion by later western philosophy). There are several strands to Yannaras' opposition to the West. One is his opposition to the amoralism and impersonalism of western consumerist capitalism, which he sees as obliterating authentic human ways of living and being as its influence spreads, seemingly irresistibly, throughout the world; this is something he pursues in his works on politics and economics, notably *The Real and the Imaginary in Political Economy* (first published 1989). In terms of the highly polarized politics of modern Greece, Yannaras is difficult to place, certainly not a figure of the Left, but not exactly trusted by the Right either. Another strand is his resentment against the way in which from the time of the Renaissance and Reformation onwards, through the Enlightenment and Romanticism the West has choked the authentic culture of the Greek East by its cultural dominance. This is, perhaps, first perceptible in theology: from the Union Councils of Lyons (1274) and Florence-Ferrara (1438/9, after which date the Greeks left) onwards, through the subjection of the Greek Orthodox Church (together with the Serbs and the Bulgarians, and also the Romanians) to the Ottomans, Orthodox theology has been distorted by the influence of western theological categories. The political pressure for union with the Latin Church – the only hope the Byzantine Emperors saw of salvation from the Muslim threat – and then the pressure to define Orthodoxy in the context of the divisions caused by the Reformation led to the highly westernized formulations of the so-called 'Symbolic Books' of the early modern period, especially the Confessions of Peter Moghila and the Synod of Jerusalem, which came to dominate the study of Orthodox theology in Greece, Russia and other Orthodox countries from the eighteenth century to the present day – a period Yannaras, following Fr Georges Florovsky,⁵ calls the 'Babylonian Captivity' of the Orthodox Church. This western corruption of Orthodox theology was not just a matter of theological formulations; the traditions of Church music became westernized, and the tradition of icon painting was virtually lost in the nineteenth century,

as it succumbed to a sentimental realism, derived from the West. This process of distortion of authentic eastern patterns of theology, in the broadest sense, has been traced by Yannaras in another major work of his, *Orthodoxy and the West in Modern Greece* (first published 1992), a work which in many ways parallels Fr Georges Florovsky's *Ways of Russian Theology*.⁶ The subjection of the East to western categories, though extensive, was not complete: in various ways, open and hidden, the Greek tradition was preserved – in the economy, in the judicial system, and in popular customs and traditions. The most important 'awakening resistance' (the title of chapter 12 of *Orthodoxy and the West*) was the compilation and publishing of the *Philokalia of the Holy Ascetics* by St Makarios of Corinth and St Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain, which has had enormous influence in the Orthodox world (initially mostly in Russia through St Païssy Velichkovsky's translation into Slavonic) since its publication in Venice in 1782. This anthology of ascetic writings culminates in works from the hesychast controversy of the fourteenth century, especially some works by St Gregory Palamas: it preserves, then, not a tradition of conceptual theology, but a living tradition of prayer and asceticism. It is this tradition that is central to Yannaras' understanding of theology, and his works can be seen as exploring the implications of this tradition for life and existence in the widest sense: it is too important for knowledge of it to be confined to the monastic circles for which the *Philokalia* was originally compiled (more recently, Yannaras has expressed reservations about the *Philokalia* and the tendency it might encourage towards a moralistic pietism).

Yannaras' attitude to the West is, then, much more than the unthinking anti-westernism not uncommon in Greece, but is part of what he sees as a struggle to preserve the insights of the Greek East from the stranglehold of western modes of thought, seen to be increasingly dominant in today's world. In *On the Absence and Unknowability of God*, Yannaras' use of Heidegger focuses on his interpretation of Nietzsche's proclamation of the 'death of God', especially in the famous passage from *The Gay Science*

(§ 125: The madman). Heidegger, like some other interpreters of this passage, notes the passion in the madman's horrified discovery that God is dead, and that he is to be numbered among those who have killed him, and makes the observation that it is not the unbelievers who have killed God – they mock the madman – but rather the devout, the Church itself, that has developed an understanding of God that is incredible and irrelevant. Yannaras retells the story of the development of western theology, arguing that God has been reduced to a kind of ultimate explanation – the 'first cause', the 'highest value' – and in this way simply serves human purposes, 'all-too-human' purposes, manifest in the way in which God formed part of a worldview that justified the repressive social structures that developed in the West in the course of the Middle Ages (social structures of which the 'papal monarchy' formed a crowning part), that have only been dismantled in modern times in terms of an equally destructive 'monism of the individual subject', which ultimately leads to nihilism – the evacuation of any sense of value. For Yannaras, this account of the unfolding of the consequences of the 'onto-theology' of the West (i.e., the reduction of God to a being, even if the highest) is highly convincing. It is to be answered not by rejecting or refuting Heidegger's analysis, but by a more radical move: one that calls into question the faithfulness of the western metaphysical tradition to the original experience of being, manifest in those Greeks, such as Herakleitos, on whom the West has turned its back, and also its faithfulness to the original ecclesial experience of Jesus' disciples, who heard his message and accepted it. Here Yannaras lights on Heidegger's remarks that what Nietzsche means by Christianity is not the authentic Christianity of the Gospels and the Early Church but the historical manifestation of Christianity in the established Church of the West, and that unbelievers reject this Christian God because they have a 'more divine' conception of God than that of the institutional Church.⁷

Yannaras develops his response to Heidegger – as the title of the book suggests – largely by way of an exposition of the

works ascribed to Dionysios the Areopagite. For Dionysios, God is not the first cause or highest being or highest value; he utterly transcends the world that he created and any human conceptions, for he is not 'one of the things that are'. Apophatic theology is not, then, a way of correcting the deliverances of affirmative or cataphatic theology, which Yannaras argues is the understanding of the West, which also regards cataphatic theology, at least from scholasticism onwards if not from Augustine, as based on natural theology, but is an acknowledgement of the experience of the God beyond any human conceptual grasp, whether by assertions or negations of him, for he is beyond being. In terms of being that we can know and measure and argue about, God is not being. Therefore, Yannaras argues, nothingness, which for Heidegger is revealed as the final step of western metaphysics, is not to be construed as the absence of the God of onto-theology – the acknowledgement of which leads to nihilism – but as the unknowability of the God beyond being.

A crucial step in Yannaras' exposition is his analysis of the nature of the personal and his use of the distinction between the 'person' and the 'individual': both themes that have characterized the most creative Orthodox theology of the twentieth century, whether in the Russian émigré Vladimir Lossky, the Romanian theologian Fr Dumitru Stăniloae, or Yannaras' fellow Greek and near contemporary, Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon. Person and individual are not to be confused – this is the characteristic error of western thinking – for whereas an individual is defined in terms of his self-identity and distinction from other individuals, as a kind of irreducible unit or monad, person is defined in terms of relationship; an openness to and acknowledgement of the 'other'. In *Person and Eros* (though not explicitly in *On the Absence and Unknowability of God*) Yannaras points out that the Greek word for person, *prosopon*, can be broken down into the preposition, *pros*, 'to' or 'towards', and the root, *ops*, meaning 'eye' or 'face' (*opsi* in modern Greek means 'appearance', 'countenance', 'face'). *Prosopon*, therefore, means person in the sense of

that which comes face-to-face with me, or that which one can come face-to-face with. It is in a relationship, in coming face-to-face with another (or an other) that I realize what is meant by being a person. In that relationship I discover not what it is to be human in general – what human nature is in abstract terms, as, for instance, a rational being – but the different ways of being human, the different unique ways of being human that are summed up in the notion of being a person. Yannaras' analysis here is in many respects much closer to that of Emmanuel Levinas, than to Heidegger's; it is arguable that Levinas could provide a much better philosophical foundation for the position Yannaras embraces than Heidegger himself.⁸

Yannaras develops his understanding of the notion of the person by making use of a distinction, first introduced by the Greek Fathers to help them to understand the tri-personality of God, between the principle of nature or being (*logos tês physeôs, logos tês ousias*) that defines the general characteristics of a nature and the mode of existence (*tropos tês hyparxeôs*) that characterizes the unique persons. The mode of existence is relational. In the Holy Trinity, the Persons are characterized by their relationships, the Son being begotten by the Father, and the Spirit proceeding from the Father. The same is true of human persons: it is the unique mode of existence that characterizes us as persons, not any general properties that we share in virtue of our nature. Alongside this distinction, Yannaras introduces another, that between essence and activity or energy. This again is a distinction developed by the Greek Fathers in their reflection about the mystery of the Godhead, the crucial significance of which was realized in the hesychast controversy of the fourteenth century by St Gregory Palamas.⁹ The divine essence is unknowable – the unknowability and ineffability of God is affirmed equally by the tradition of Greek, especially Platonic, philosophy and by the Scriptures – but this does not reduce us to agnosticism about God, for God makes himself known through his activities or energies, in creation and in revealing himself to human kind, first of all through the sacred history of the chosen people of Israel,

and then in his assuming a human life, undergoing death and manifesting the life beyond death of the Resurrection in his Incarnation. This is, Yannaras argues, parallel to the way we know human persons: through their creative activity, or through their dealing with other human beings, they reveal, not just what human beings are like in general (in fact, not really that at all), but the uniqueness of each human person. With such personal knowing, we start with the unique disclosure of the person, and perhaps from that build up a picture of the infinitely varied tapestry of what it is to be human, rather than starting from some notion of universal human nature of which the individual is, as it were, the most confined instance.

Such personal knowing requires the revelation of the other – whether God or another human person – and also attention on the part of the one who comes to knowledge. In both cases, it is a matter of free engagement: the other freely discloses himself, and the one who comes to knowledge freely enters into that knowledge. To draw together the various distinctions Yannaras has introduced, one might say that a person's mode of existence is freely revealed through his energies, and revealed in a communion, which is a synergy between the person who is revealed and the person who accepts the disclosure of the other in such a revelation. What is revealed is not the nature of the person, but the mode of existence, and this mode of existence is literally an ecstatic ek-sistence (another notion Yannaras borrows from Heidegger, see Chapter 7, note 16), a 'standing outside' oneself towards the other, in a free act of ecstatic or erotic longing. This free mutual disclosure is, then, always a matter of love, and ultimately so in the case of God, who reveals his love to human kind in the Incarnation and draws human beings into communion with him in an answering movement of love. Such knowledge as disclosure is a matter of participation; it is not a matter of acquiring information. And such knowledge is properly called apophatic, because it is inexhaustible: nothing that we learn will ever amount to complete knowledge, there is no limit to such loving communion. Yannaras speaks of this apophatic knowledge

of God as personal participation and, in a way which is certainly capable of shocking, as erotic communion. This erotic communion with God is not, however, some kind of 'mystical marriage', as in western mysticism (which Yannaras rejects as the soft underbelly of western rationalism), but is something found in the ecclesial experience of the eucharist.

All of these themes were to be developed more fully by Yannaras in his later books. The analysis of the notion of the person as fulfilled and expressed in an erotic and 'ecstatic' relationship with the other, something only authentic if this erotic relationship is ultimately a relationship with God, was to be explored in perhaps his most important work, already referred to, *Τὸ Πρόσωπο καὶ ὁ Ἔρως* (*Person and Eros*, first published in 1970 as *The Ontological Content of the Theological Concept of the Person*), a work that has now gone through four editions. His notion of erotic desire as constituting what it is to be a person is explored in one of the most beautiful of his books, a work in which Yannaras aspires towards poetry, *Σκόλιο στὸ Ἄσμα Ἀσμάτων* (*Commentary on the Song of Songs*, but much better translated – as in the French and Italian translations – as 'Variations on the Song of Songs', as the chapters, commenting on various verses of the Song of Songs, are given various musical terms as titles). The idea that human morality is not a matter of conforming oneself to externally imposed moral codes, but is rather an expression of one's unique mode of existence in freedom, is explored in his work *The Freedom of Morality*, one of the few of Yannaras' books translated into English. Not that this freedom from imposed moral codes is to be understood as espousing any form of libertinism. Yannaras has a place for asceticism as 'the way *par excellence* to theological knowledge, that is to say, participation in the "beauty of the master's person", and indeed, for monasticism as 'the greatest exercise in erotic self-denial'; the point of asceticism is (in Blake's phrase) to 'cleanse the doors of perception' so as to make possible 'the presence of the light of the mind', as Dionysios put it, 'in a single, pure, coherent, and true knowledge'.

Although *On the Absence and Unknowability of God* was

first published thirty-five years ago, it has lost little of its relevance. The 'death of God' is no longer the obsession of theologians that it seemed to be in the 1960s, though the sense of the cultural irrelevance of God that was part of Nietzsche's and Heidegger's point, has scarcely diminished. In some respects, however, some of Yannaras' judgements in *On the Absence and Unknowability of God* may seem dated. Yannaras' assessment of Roman Catholic theology belongs to an age that now seems long past. While he was writing, the Second Vatican Council was in session, and whatever one may think about the changes that council introduced, there is no question that they were dramatic. Yannaras takes for granted that Roman Catholic theology is adequately represented by the kind of scholastic theology that was still being taught in Roman Catholic seminaries before the Vatican Council. The situation is now very different (and indeed was not as uniform then as Yannaras supposed). The dismissive attitude to Heidegger that Yannaras regarded as typical of Roman Catholic theologians is hardly to be found in such Roman Catholic theologians as Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar, both of whom drank deeply of his philosophy, while in the next generation such Catholic philosophers as Jean-Luc Marion and Jean-Yves Lacoste are deeply indebted to Heidegger's achievement.

The point of these remarks, however, is not to give the impression that Yannaras is outdated, but rather to suggest that a dialogue with western theology that Yannaras then seems to have regarded as virtually impossible, the West being wedded to all that Heidegger rightly rejected, is now much more of a fruitful prospect. There are, for instance, some striking analogies between the kind of cultural analysis offered by Yannaras and that given by Urs von Balthasar in many of his books, especially his great trilogy, consisting of *Herrlichkeit*, *Theodramatik*, and *Theo-logik*.¹⁰ Balthasar's account of the development of western theology as moving from a cosmological phase concerned with the truth of the Christian worldview (the Fathers and the Middle Ages), through an anthropological phase, characterizing the early modern period, in which Christianity appeared as an

anthropological possibility, a way of human living, both of which phases Balthasar finds inadequate, has parallels with the admittedly very sketchy analysis Yannaras presents in this book. The way in which Balthasar seeks to restore beauty to its place among the transcendentals of being, truth and goodness, arguing that Christianity has been betrayed by a concern for truth, reduced to mere accuracy (*adaequatio intellectus ad rem*), or a concern for goodness, presented simply as a behavioural pattern or moral code, and can only be restored if it is seen as concerned with the revelation of truth as beauty (the 'glory of the Lord'), which draws out a response of love (an erotic response) that finds expression by determining the whole way in which life is lived: all of this finds many echoes in Yannaras' approach.

Many western theologians will find themselves in agreement with Yannaras in what it is that he deplores in western theology, while at the same time finding much more in the history of western theology that escapes these strictures. And that is even the case with the western theologian most frequently cited by Yannaras, the greatest of the Schoolmen, Thomas Aquinas. The kind of interpretation Yannaras takes for granted – and with some justice, when he was writing – is now regarded as a misinterpretation of Aquinas by the later, lesser minds of a more mechanical 'scholasticism'; it is almost a tenet of faith among the adherents of 'Radical Orthodoxy' that profound metaphysical error – with social and political consequences – is to be found in the generations after Aquinas, in Duns Scotus or Ockham. It is even questioned whether it is just to speak of Aquinas' doctrine of 'analogy', the 'Thomist' doctrine being really that expounded by Cajetan (quoted by Yannaras); if there is a doctrine of analogy in Aquinas it is something much more tentative and subtle than what is usually implied by the notion of *analogia entis*. It is indeed striking that Yannaras sees the doctrine of *analogia entis* as characteristic of western theology, something against which he inveighs. It was, of course, Karl Barth, in the early volumes of his *Church Dogmatics*, who similarly singled out this doctrine as the heart of what was unacceptable about Roman Catholicism. Barth's

development of an *analogia fidei*, which was in fact an *analogia relationis*, bears some comparison with Yannaras' procedure in *On the Absence and Unknowability of God*.¹¹ Similarly, many would find a much more profound apophatic dimension in Aquinas than traditional interpretations have allowed for,¹² not to mention other western theologians.¹³ All these points are raised to indicate the continuing relevance of Yannaras for present-day theological reflection.

An example of the way in which this early book of Yannaras may be seen to anticipate theological and philosophical debate of later decades might be found in the radical nature of Yannaras' interpretation of the Areopagite. In the rejection of great architectonic theological structures characteristic of the last quarter of the twentieth century, the appeal of negative or apophatic theology has come to be felt. The suspicion of worldviews articulated by ruling elites, suspicions fed by Marxist political and economic analysis and Freudian psychological interpretation, have also fostered an appreciation of ways of theological thinking that are exploratory and tentative, to which the notion of the apophatic seems attractive. Structuralism and post-modernism (with which Yannaras has engaged in a recent book entitled *Post-Modern Meta-Physics* – in Greek, *Μετα-Νεωτερική Μετα-φυσική* – published in 1993) have likewise fostered suspicion about what we say, and encouraged ways of not-saying. In his lecture, 'Comment ne pas parler: dénégations',¹⁴ Jacques Derrida has discussed the viability of negative or apophatic theology, especially as espoused by Jean-Luc Marion in his two books, *L'Idole et la distance*, and *Dieu sans l'être* (Paris, 1977 and 1991, the former dedicated to 'Denys', the latter to 'Grégoire'). The heart of Derrida's resistance to a Dionysian apophatic theology appears to be that it is not truly apophatic, as it simply projects God's being into some state of hyperessentiality. This seems to echo Yannaras' criticism of the West's interpretation of Dionysios, which he argues does not take seriously his assertion that God is not a being, simply reading this as an assertion that God is beyond beings as some superior being ('hyperessential'). This again suggests that the quite radical

nature of Yannaras' understanding of apophatic theology means that it can withstand Derrida's objections and is, therefore, of continuing relevance to current debate.

This Introduction has attempted to show how the fundamental intuitions that Yannaras has developed in his later books are to be found in *On the Absence and Unknowability of God*. It is for this reason – and also because of the conciseness with which he expresses himself in this early book – an ideal introduction to Yannaras' thought. The voice of Christos Yannaras is one that deserves to be heard in current theological debate – and beyond that in realms of intellectual analysis, not least the analysis of the crisis of modern western society, where a theological voice needs to be heard.

Andrew Louth

Preface to the Second Edition

This book was first published twenty years ago. It was my first treatise to be published – the first little fruit up to then of a long period of study and research. The research was concerned to clarify the differences between Greek philosophy and tradition and those in the West: differences that are not statically exhausted in the *place* of contemplation, but which determine the *mode* or practice of life, that is to say, that which we call culture.

In writing the pages that follow, I began by studying the differences between the Greek and the western understanding of the *apophaticism* of knowledge. Today – twenty years later – I should reckon even more highly this initial choice: it is, indeed, the crucial theme that determines every other difference between the two traditions or cultures. The difference both on the level of ontology (which I analysed in my book *Person and Eros*, 1976) and on the level of morality (which I analysed in my book, *The Freedom of Morality*, 1979) that I believe emerge – at least according to the logic of my research – from the undermining of the limits of Greek epistemology, that took place in the East, particularly from the ninth century onwards. In my subsequent books – *Outline of an Introduction to Philosophy* (1980/81), *Right Reason and Social Practice* (1984), *Proposals for a Critical Ontology* (1985) – the priority of the epistemological opposition, in relation to ontological and moral

or social political differences, I would like to think was demonstrated more systematically and thoroughly. I know that these books are difficult and wearisome, their general recognition exceptionally limited, and I must confess to a sense of hopeless toil at the many moments in this long-drawn-out period of research.

Sometimes, certainly, there appeared to be encouraging signs of a certain change that seemed to take place with the coming together of many similar hopeless labours. When this book first circulated, twenty years ago, the word *apophaticism* still sounded like a paradox in philosophical circles, and in academic theology of the period provoked the suspicion of agnosticism. 'Apophaticism, defined as denial,' wrote the then University Professor Constantine Mouratidis, 'is unacceptable as the premiss and starting-point of Orthodox theology, which is based, not on incomprehensibility, but on the revelation in Christ, through which what is comprehensible and what is incomprehensible in the revealed truths is made clear, as well as the method of approaching them'.

Such declarations were formulated without 'shame or regret' through a childish ignorance of the fundamental differences between the Greek East and the European West. The 'revelation' objectified in codified ideas makes plain 'what is comprehensible and what is incomprehensible' in each truth, since truth is identified with concepts – with the anachronism of a delay of eight centuries from 'High Scholasticism'. And each deviation from prevailing rationalism is regarded as a turn towards agnosticism.

For this reason, and in even more dramatic tones, P.N. Trembelas wrote to me then – as to a 'beloved disciple' – on the occasion of the publication of the book: 'I am afraid that you will develop into an extreme agnostic... I see you in danger of suffocating in the darkness and ambivalence of agnosticism'. And he went on to ruin the immense literary achievement of his life with the tragically naïve, but fanatical, denunciation of apophaticism in his treatise, *Mysticism–Apophaticism–Cataphatic Theology* (1974/75).

Several years later, with the same logic of the demands of an assertion of knowledge (precisely on the model of

Mouratidis and Trembelas – and not by chance) I had to fight off the charge of 'mysticism', thrust in my face, equally fanatically, and the 'scientific' advance of the orthodox Marxist left.

I think that today this granite-like hardening of westernization and the alienation of the spiritual life of modern Greece has sustained some critical blows. Yet still the moderately formed Greek, with at least some philosophical and theological education, suspects or knows that it is a peculiarity of his culture to be defined in particular by the apophatic interpretation of truth – from the time of Herakleitos to that of Gregory Palamas. That is certainly an advance, so long as you do not 'know' what apophaticism is and mistake it for a method. For apophaticism consists primarily of a *stance* against knowledge and the verification of knowledge. It is the denial of 'conceptual idols', denial of the psychological props of egocentric assurance and the sentimental protection offered by conceptual certainties.

And it would be good if the dynamic of this revelatory denial was served by the reprint of my little book.

Athens, December 1986

Christos Yannaras

PART I

Nihilism as Theology of Absence

The Metaphysical Denial of God's Divinity

In 1882, Nietzsche published his book *The Gay Science* (*Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*), proclaiming in its pages the 'death of God': 'God is dead, God shall remain dead.' Eighty years later, in 1961, Heidegger published his own book on Nietzsche. In its pages, the proclamation of 'the death of God' is interpreted as the prophetic acknowledgement of an already accomplished event, the inevitable climax of a long historical process in European metaphysics. The 'death of God' is the consequence or the 'inner logic' of the metaphysical journey of European man.¹

In Nietzsche's discourse, consequently, we do not come across the articulation of an atheist's views, but encounter rather the penetrating insights of a prophet. 'God is dead' means that the Christian God, the God of western metaphysics, is but a dead fashioning of the mind, hardly more than a mere idea, an abstract concept. At best, 'God' stands for an idolized, conventional value. In reality, God is unrelated to the shaping of the life of European human kind – it is not he who gives meaning to human existence, to the universe or to history. The place of God is empty in the West – God is an absence.

This absence nullifies any truth for life beyond corruption and death. It defines the content of European *nihilism*.²

Nihilism in Nietzsche's case is hardly a theoretical

position that rejects God's existence on the basis of rational arguments. The proclamation of the 'death of God' is a testimony: it indicates a vacuum, an absence. And such testimony is not just a matter of observation, it can also involve consciously taking a stand, namely the historical stance of European man before the problem of God. Such a stance declines to accept as 'ultimate reality' the product of an intellectual process, to accept something beyond logic as a product of logic, or what is beyond the senses as the transcendent cause of what the senses themselves perceive. This position appears to take shape gradually in the West from the fourteenth century onwards,³ culminating finally in Nietzsche's prophetic proclamation. It is a negation that cancels all 'intellectual idols' of God, without offering any truths in their place.

We speak then of an *apophaticism*⁴ destructive of idols, which under the guise of nihilism is manifest as the 'inner crisis' of western metaphysics. And we are indebted to Heidegger for seeing in this crisis the starting point for its historical understanding.⁵

Even as early as the ninth-century Carolingian 'Renaissance', but especially with the radical distortion of Aristotelian epistemology by scholasticism,⁶ European metaphysics has been built upon the presupposition of God's existence, while progressively excluding his presence from the world. God is either identified with the conceptual notion of an impersonal and abstract 'first cause' of the universe (*causa prima*), or of an absolute 'authority' in ethics (*principium auctoritatis*). In both cases the existence of God is a conceptual necessity, secured by demonstrative argument, but unrelated to historical experience and the existential condition of human beings.

Precisely because it offers an absolutized rational affirmation of God, European metaphysics prepares for the possibility of its own rational refutation. The 'death of God' is but the end-result of the historical unfolding of this absolutized and double-edged rationalism, which took place in the nations of Western Europe over the span of approximately a millennium.⁷

Heidegger stresses in particular Nietzsche's acute opposition to Descartes,⁸ who is perhaps the crowning example of the historical western temptation to secure God's existence in terms of rational demonstration. In the famous fourth chapter of the *Discourse on Method* (1637), the existence of God is proved by the exclusive use of intellectual capacity of the subject. From the conceptual viewpoint of my own finite existence and intellect, I deduce the idea of a single perfect existence and intellect – of a single being that comprises all the perfections of existence and intellect. And since intellectual apprehension is the sole means of ascertaining the truth, we demonstrate the existence of God by conceiving the idea of God. With the intellect we conceive of God as a perfect being, consequently his existence is comprised in that idea in the same way as there is comprised in the idea of a triangle the truth that the sum of its angles equals two right angles, if not more evidently. Consequently, the fact that God, who is a perfect being, exists or has being, has the same kind of certainty as a geometrical truth.

In applying this deductive reasoning to establish God's existence, Descartes follows faithfully the scholastic tradition based on Augustine: he follows Campanella, Anselm of Canterbury, Hugh of Saint-Victor, Bonaventura and Thomas Aquinas.⁹ While the total work of each of the above figures differs in many respects from the work of the others, there nevertheless exists among them a common denominator, an underlying assumption shared by all alike, and pushed by Descartes to its ultimate consequences: it is the radical reversal of the Greek understanding of *logos* – the interpretation of *logos* as the means of reference and relation, the means of verifying knowledge through experienced relationship or the common potentiality of relationships (the Herakleitian 'common logos'). The Scholastics and Descartes introduce into human history the interpretation of *logos* as *ratio*, and *ratio* as a self-reliant, subjective capacity, the capacity of individual reasoning (*facultas rationis*), which is competent to define the truth exhaustively, being as it is but a miniature of the divine mind.

The God of the Scholastics and Descartes turns out to be, in the final analysis, the product or result of a cognitive self-sufficiency, guaranteed for the subject by *ratio*, outside or beyond the experience of reality or life, where everything is the experience of relationship. Nietzsche charges Descartes with this blatant, yet unacknowledged contradiction: that logical proofs for the existence of God refute God as an objective, real presence. The logical conclusion of the 'monism of the subject', inflicted on European philosophy by Descartes, is not God, but the absolutized subject itself, the 'superman' (*Übermensch*).¹⁰ Descartes, however, did not dare to push the supremacy of the subject to its final conclusion. He instituted the subject as the absolute determinative source of all knowledge and being, and subjected God to absolutized man, but he failed to see that his position heralded the 'death of God' and the imposition of the 'superman'. On the contrary, he was of the opinion – and expressed this many times – that he had done service to and strengthened the edifice of European metaphysics.

The next major step in the historical development of 'atheistic theism' was certainly made by Spinoza, particularly in his book, *Ethica ordine geometrico demonstrata* (1677). The God of Spinoza is the inner necessity of nature, nature and God being identified (*Deus sive natura*). They are identified with one, single, eternal, and infinite substantial reality (*substantia*), that exists absolutely in itself and is conceived by itself (*quod in se est et per se concipitur*), the cause of its own existence and that existence itself, and distinguished only in creative and created nature (*natura naturans, natura naturata*). Beings and ideas are the two ways in which the same common substance of nature and God exist and are manifest: they exist in this same substance as its necessary consequences and they are made up of certain of its transient manifestations. Such an all-encompassing portrayal of the existent, restrained as it is as much by the limitations of the intellect as by sense-experience, allows no room for any existence, divine or otherwise, beyond the limits of terrestrial reality. Hence, it is only by means of sense-experience of beings and intellectual conception of

ideas that human kind has knowledge of the two properties of the divine being of the cosmos: thought and extension. Human thought is God's self-awareness and the extension of beings is the eternal 'dimension' of God.

The autonomy of the potentialities of thought within the framework of 'natural theology' attains its typical fulfilment in Leibniz. *On Theodicy* (*Essais de théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme et l'origine du mal*, 1710) established Leibniz as the most perfect follower of the tendency of the Scholastics to identify physics and metaphysics.¹¹ Knowledge, as much in metaphysics as in physics, had to obey the austere demands of science, namely the most rigorous standards of proof secured by rationalist *demonstratio*.

In this perspective, Leibniz systematizes the rational proofs for the existence of God, summing them up as four:

First comes the *ontological* argument, which was initially formulated by Anselm:¹² God is conceived by the mind as 'that, than which nothing greater can be conceived' (*aliquid quo nihil majus cogitari possit*). This 'something' cannot not exist; for if it does not exist, its non-existence diminishes its greatness, which in turn means that it is not the same thing that our thought conceived as greater than anything else. In other words: it is logically contradictory to conceive the idea of a non-existent God, for the idea of God includes every perfection, and existence is a perfection, compared with non-existence.

The second proof is the *cosmological* argument, known also from the teachings of the Scholastics,¹³ which Leibniz offers us now in complete form: every being is logically existent, so long as the 'sufficient reason' for its existence is included as cause in another existent reality. For the Scholastics, as for Aristotle, this regressive sequence of cause and effect is found *par excellence* in the fact of motion, and cannot be infinite: it terminates rather in a logically necessary single Being, which constitutes the first cause of motion and the cause of its own existence, and is the ultimate cause of each being – this is none other than God, the 'prime mover'. In Leibniz's view, the universe as a whole must have a sufficient

reason, which is included as cause in an existent reality 'beyond' the universe. The sufficient reason of the universe is God.

Third is the proof of God as *constitutive of the eternal truths*: the truth of our empirical knowledge has its own 'sufficient reason', which is included as cause in the generic premisses or principles that are irrefutable and logically binding because of it. Such propositions are tautologies, everlasting truths. But if our own finite minds, limited as they are by temporality, can grasp the sufficient reasons of empirical knowledge, the sufficient reason of the eternal truths need, by logical necessity, an eternal, divine mind. For the principle or reason (*logos*) of the existent cannot but be itself in existence. God is thus shown to be an existing intellect, constitutive of the eternal truths – metaphysical, mathematical and moral – the arbiter of truth, perfection and justice. Therefore, there cannot be anything logically arbitrary in the divine judgements. The entire universe is organized on the basis of 'pure reason', God being identical with rationality itself.¹⁴

A fourth demonstration of the existence of God is the *teleological* argument. Besides the logical necessity of cause, there is the logical necessity of the purpose (or *end, telos*) of beings. Beings possess within themselves the purpose or 'end' of their existence; each individual entity (unit or 'monad' of being) exists so long as and inasmuch as it corresponds to the 'final' fulfilment of its conception. The predetermination of entities by their teleological content composes a universal harmony, one which in turn presupposes a universal conception and synthesis of all subsidiary purposes (*harmonia praestabilita*), a presupposition established by an infinite and supreme intellect which itself realizes the universal conception and synthesis. The harmony of the created order is inexplicable without the correspondence between the subsidiary 'monads' of being and the overall 'end' that subsists in a necessarily existent divine mind.¹⁵

With the significant, or rather commanding, figures of Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz, the so-called 'natural theology' of medieval scholasticism, that is to say, the trans-

formation of theology into a rationalistically structured *scientia*, reaches its historical conclusion and is completed by the consolidation of rationalism as the exclusive entry to metaphysical knowledge.

The endorsement of rationalism, however, is but the initial phase in the new historical period inaugurated by *intellectus fidei*, a period characterized by the 'monism of the subject'. Within the context of this monism a further step was the change in epistemological priority from intellect to sense-experience, to the knowledge furnished by the subject's own sense-data. 'Nothing is in the mind, that was not formerly in the senses.' This positivist empiricism will find its culmination in Hobbes, Locke and Hume, transferring the source of authority from individual intellect to individual sense-experience – captive to the same scholastic demand that all *auctoritas* be exercised subjectively.¹⁶ The shift from rationalism to empiricism was certainly no innovation of the seventeenth century, since the alternation, or rather struggle, between the priority of intellect and that of the senses had probably already put the two rival perspectives on something of an equal footing, even as early as Roger Bacon in the thirteenth century.

Empiricism will have a crucial impact on the historical process leading towards the 'death of God', both by sanctioning as existing that which is accessible through the senses alone,¹⁷ and by stripping the metaphysics of rationalism of all claim to reality. Furthermore, enlightened knowledge of the empirical always results in practical utility, as opposed to the abstract 'beyond' of rationalism, which for all practical purposes is useless. If there be a metaphysics with some hold on reality, it would be the sum of logical and/or mathematical relations which are discovered 'behind' the phenomena perceived by the senses and which govern them: a metaphysics deciphered by means of empirical observation and experiment.

More and more the term 'metaphysics' acquires a purely theoretical and epistemological meaning, while the God of traditional metaphysics becomes a matter of indifference. The very 'supreme Being' of logical certainty and rational

'proofs' is now separated from the scope of human experience by the barrier that marks off real discovery from mere conjecture, the empirically existent from the empirically non-existent. Science relinquishes exploration of the realm 'beyond' the empirical, for the sake of testing the capacity of the individual mind to grasp the 'mechanism' of nature, and eventually to use it for human purposes.¹⁸

But apart from so-called 'natural theology' (*theologia naturalis*) – the subjection of metaphysics to rationalist demonstration – scholasticism also developed, in the course of the middle ages, a second theoretical arm: *apophatic* or *negative* theology (*theologia negativa*). While apparently contradictory to natural theology, though in historical combination with it, apophaticism appeared in the West to define the limits, that is to say, the relativity of cataphatic assertion. Even such leading figures of rationalism, such as Anselm and Thomas Aquinas, Albert the Great and John Duns Scotus, despite being typical exponents of deductive positivism, nonetheless declared that it was impossible for the human mind to know the reality of God, his essence, or his transcendent being.¹⁹

Scholastic apophaticism does not oppose another kind of knowledge to the rationalist assumption and demonstrative establishment of the notion of God, but only underlines the limited character of rational definitions and analogical ascents from the created to the uncreated. Thus, even if it does not introduce, it greatly facilitates the rise of, *relativism*, *scepticism* and even *agnosticism* in the Western European nations. The apophaticism of the Scholastics is unaware of, or completely ignores, the position with respect to knowledge and truth that characterized the entire Greek philosophical tradition, both pre-Christian and Christian: it is unaware of knowledge as the experienced immediacy of *relatedness*, of the identity of *truthfulness* and *participation* – the confirmation of knowledge within participatory possibility of relatedness. It is rather an apophaticism of divine *being*, insisting upon an *essential* otherness that underlies any analogical correlation of the uncreated God with created beings.

While the problem of the different forms of theological apophaticism will receive more detailed treatment in a later chapter, it is necessary here to emphasize the distinction between an *apophaticism of essence*, as exemplified by western scholasticism, and an *apophaticism of the person*, that characterizes the Christian thought of the Greek East. This distinction reflects not simply a methodological distinction, but an insurmountable contrast on the level of ontology as well as epistemology: apophaticism of essence means that I choose the individual conceptual capacity as the basis for my knowledge of existence; consequently, I come to know what exists as perfect entities, predetermined by the principle of their given *essence*, which I rationally conceive. When this essence, moreover, is taken to be uncreated, transcendent and supernatural, I grant that I may *conceive* the existence of such a being, but I *do not know* its reality. This position I characterize as apophatic.

Apophaticism of the person means that I start from the discovery that my existence and the knowledge that I have (the *way* that I exist and the *way* that I know) are facts of accomplished relationships – and relationship is not exhausted by conceptual analysis, but is a universal existent fact that is divided up into a multitude of faculties of apprehension (the sensory, the critical, the abstractive, the analytic, the imaginative, the emotional, the intuitive, the visionary and probably others). No intellectual definition (whether conceptual or verbal) can ever exhaust the knowledge afforded us by the immediacy of *relationship*, consequently the logical definition of *essence* (as the common principle of examples of the same form) follows and does not precede the otherness of each existent, which I know in immediate relationship with it. Thus, if God exists, he is primarily known as a person (*hypostasis*) in the immediacy of relationship, and not primarily as an essence with its conceptual definition. And given the inadequacy of reason to replace or exhaust the cognitive immediacy of relatedness (particularly as regards the hypostasis of the *person*, where otherness is not simply phenomenological, but the freedom of the subject's self-determination of its mode of existence),

we may speak of the apophatic character of any definition that is given of the personal otherness of God.

The schematic and too concise clarification attempted here²⁰ will be more fully expounded in the chapters that follow. Here it is sufficient to emphasize that the *apophaticism of essence* in the western metaphysical tradition, with its negative definition of God's *essential* otherness, or with its mystical expressions of the *essential* indefinability of the impersonal absolute, not only failed to check the historical advance of relativism and agnosticism (which ended in atheist nihilism), but was organically implicated in their advance.²¹

The *Protestant Reformation* embraced the apophatic position from its outset – along with the extreme rationalism of the first dogmatic disputes with Roman Catholic theology.

The early reformers saw in 'natural theology' the theoretical basis for the dominance inflicted by the papal Church on western societies. The rationalistic-deductive justification of metaphysics subjects conscience to the necessity of accepting 'truths', which have the character of logical 'axioms'. The objective authority of the metaphysical axioms is transferred to the established institution that represents and administers them: it ensures the social dominance and worldly power of the harsh institution of the Roman Church.

Martin Luther (†1546) engages in a devastating critique of scholastic rationalism. The God of Luther is inaccessible to reason, he is a 'God who hides himself' (*Deus absconditus*): 'There is no immediate knowledge of God, the revelation of God is itself a mediated revelation... God as revealed is precisely a hidden God. In order to reveal himself, he conceals himself in the cross and in the passion'.²²

In order to approach the 'hidden God', faith alone is sufficient (*sola fide*); the objective rational justification of metaphysical knowledge, so far as it arms the subject with intellectual certainties, at the same time subjects it to the institutional establishment of objectified knowledge. In contrast, absolutized faith leads to the release of the subject from its subordination to objectivity, to its coming of age.

For the rest, faith is absolutized as a strictly subjective potentiality for 'knowledge' of God and, more particularly, as participation – psychological and emotional – in the mystery of the cross and the passion.

The truth about God is hidden in the death of Christ, that is, in God's ultimate abandonment of his own divinity. Already from Luther onwards, we have the formulation of a 'theology of the cross' (*theologia crucis*), which is but the unanticipated prelude to the theology of the 'death of God'. Western Europeans were familiar with the formulation 'God is dead' (*Gott ist tot*), long before its use by Hegel,²³ and prior to Nietzsche's disclosure of it as fact; it was chanted in the Protestant liturgical hymn for Good Friday: '*O grosse Noth! Gott selbst liegt todt*'.²⁴ From the perspective of the subjective and emotional piety of the early Reformers, God's abandonment of his divinity on the cross signifies the death of the 'abstract God' (*des abstrakten Gottes*), that is to say, it is also the imperative abandonment of any human demand to know with objective proof the transcendent Absolute. And it is only through such an abandonment of metaphysical abstraction that God can be preserved as a particular fact of individual faith.

The great mystics of the Reformation era (Jakob Boehme, Angelus Silesius, etc.) follow along similar lines: the divine realm is only known by means of the human microcosm, through particular lived experiences, and not by means of the abstract conceptual structures of objective proofs.

Love is a magnet, it draws me into God,
And what is yet greater, it pulls God into death.

God himself, if he wants to live in me, must die:
How do you think you can inherit his life without death?²⁵

For all its vigorous denial of rationalism, however, the 'theology of the cross' is still trapped in the initial premiss of rationalism, that is, the 'monism of the subject', in the confinement of any capacity for knowledge within the limits of subjective achievement. And if the syllogistic attainment of the truth of God opens the way to the rationalist

questioning of his existence, the absolutizing of individual faith in God leads directly to his exclusion from 'objective' experience.

The non-speculative position of the Reformation finds its highest expression in the historic phenomenon of *pietism*. Pietism (from the Latin *pietas*, piety or devotion) gives its name to a broad movement at the heart of Protestantism (late seventeenth, early eighteenth centuries) that aspired first of all towards practical piety, in contradistinction to the polemics of dogmatic theology, to which the Reformation had originally given a certain priority. Pietism sets individual religious experience over against the rationalist, objectified conception of God. God reveals himself in religious practice. The knowledge of God presupposes a person's 'rebirth', and this rebirth is determined by moral conformity to the evangelical law. Pietism is a mysticism of practical piety, often assuming the form of a straightforward hostility toward knowledge, sometimes even lapsing into agnosticism, but always cloaked in the mantle of moral expediency. In the guise of various forms or 'movements', it has never ceased to influence Protestantism, to this very day, as well as the spiritual life of other Christian confessions and churches. In conjunction with humanism and the Enlightenment, and with the way of thinking in terms of efficiency and productivity that characterizes modern times, pietism fostered a conception of religion as more 'social', marked by practical benevolent activities, and presented the Christian gospel as more like an ethical code with consequences for society.²⁶

The immediate fruit of the climate of Protestant pietism and the leading theoretical exponent of the Reformation protest was Immanuel Kant (†1804). In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*), he sought to discredit natural theology and rationalist metaphysics, establishing the existence of God on the postulates of empirical-practical reasoning, that is to say, on premisses of moral expediency.

Kant counters the dogmatic, conceptually-governed rationalism of scholastic metaphysics with the *critical* power of pure reason. The categories of knowledge are primarily empirical, yet, while beginning with empirical knowledge,

the mind is led to synthetic judgements, that is, to *a priori* truths, which correspond to experience without arising from experience (such truths as, e.g., the all, the first, space, time, the soul, and God). From such *a priori* principles, the mind never attains to any knowledge independent of experience. For this reason, too, metaphysics cannot be the 'science of the absolute' (as Christian Wolff (†1754) defined it, summarizing Descartes and Leibniz), since the truths that arise from analytic propositions and deductive syllogisms cannot constitute knowledge. The confidence that we have positive knowledge of what is beyond the senses on the basis of syllogistic methods is an illusion. Metaphysics is the knowledge of the limits of human reason. Its realm is limited by empirical data and synthetic *a priori* judgements. We know the objects of our experience only as *phenomena* and not in themselves, just as we know synthetic *a priori* judgements only as logical possibilities (i.e., as *noumena*), and not as realities. Hence, metaphysics is the critical function of *pure* reason, which marks the limits between the phenomena and conceptual truths, and systematizes, within these limits, the correspondence between *a priori* judgements and the data of experience.

God himself is a synthetic judgement, a primarily logical possibility, a mere concept (*blosser Begriff*) that nevertheless constitutes truth, because it is immediately related to moral experience. The ethical demand of the will of the human subject is the empirical starting-point from which pure reason defines the original source and the ultimate purpose of ethical practice, namely, God. In his work, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (*Die Religion innerhalb der Grenze der blossen Vernunft*, 1793), Kant makes the case for the moral origins of religion, in other words for the understanding of moral principles as divine commandments, on the basis of a philosophical anthropology. He opposes the ethical necessity of religion to supernatural revelation, and interprets the fundamental principles of the Christian faith as requirements of practical morality: 'Christ is the personified idea of the principle of the Good' (*personifizierte Idee des Guten Prinzips*).

With Kant it becomes clear where the theological apophaticism of the Reformation is leading. Luther's 'hidden God' succumbs to the binding principle of the categorical imperative, that is to say, to the human subject itself, the vehicle of the *a priori* judgement of pure reason, which, as a moral requirement, is designated as the determining value of universal experience. The historical succession of this position in German idealism – Fichte, Schelling, Hegel and Schopenhauer – brings to fulfilment the formation of moralistic (anthropocentric) atheism.

Fichte (†1814) takes Kant's critical position (*Kritizismus*) as the starting-point of his own philosophy. The publication which made him famous was his *Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation* (*Versuch einer Kritik aller Offenbarung*, 1792), where he establishes the view that the content of any revealed truth is necessarily derived from the content of the ethical requirements of subjective logic.

But what especially characterizes Fichte's work as a whole is his consistent interpretation of the human subject as the central starting-point or axis of any philosophy, science, or knowledge. Any knowledge is the self-examination of the creative and moral activity of the Ego, since only the Ego exists primarily and absolutely for the sake of the Ego. The method involved in this self-examination is the dialectical pattern of thesis–antithesis–synthesis, instituted by Fichte as the typical hallmark of German Idealism. The *thesis* as foundation and starting-point (and the presupposition of any knowledge) is the self-consciousness of the Ego, the critical self-awareness of the Ego as the only and ultimate source of any experience. The indubitable certainty of the thesis is also grounded on formal logic, in the tautological axiom $A=A$, which finds its absolute fulfilment in $Ego=Ego$, where the Ego is designated the epitome of any truth about mind, will, morality, faith.

The second step is *antithesis*, grounded in the logical proposition that $A \neq \sim A$ (A is not equal to not- A). This concerns the designation of the non-Ego, which for Fichte comprises nature and matter, which is interposed between the inner relationship and any opposing restraint by the will

of the subject. The third step is *synthesis*, the juxtaposition of the Ego and the non-Ego and their mutual restraint, which, nevertheless, does not annul the identity and self-consciousness of the Ego, nor the reality of the non-Ego; it simply allows the absolute reality of the Ego to embrace as well any other reality outside itself.

In other words, the Ego, as the unique starting-point for access to reality, determines reality itself (the existence of the objective world) within the limits of its cognitive potentialities. To be more exact: the world is material to be utilized in human activity, but also the empirical presupposition for the observance of the ethical imperative – as self-awareness of the restraint imposed on the Ego by the non-Ego. But that which is determined by the cognitive potentiality of the Ego is finite, since it is only determined as non-Ego; consequently the God of metaphysics, together with the absolute properties we ascribe to him, is but a contradiction in terms. Fichte denies the existence of a God as an absolute reality in himself, apart from the self-consciousness of the Ego. The Divine is interpreted only within the moral conscience of the subject, as the realization of the duty of morality in the universe, a realization that is completed in the infinite succession of consciences and by means of it. The consciously authentic, and actively moral, order is God.

This brief survey of the historical process (*processus*) leading to the 'death of God' would be incomplete without a concluding reference to Hegel (†1831). The fundamental positions of his philosophical system were expounded in his four major works, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (*Phänomenologie des Geistes*, 1807), *Science of Logic* (*Wissenschaft der Logik*, 1812/16), *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (*Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften*, 1817), and *Philosophy of Right* (*Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, 1821).

Hegel, too, begins with Kant, if only to challenge the role of experience as the unambiguous starting-point for knowledge. He believed rather that experience must be verified by thought before it is fulfilled as knowledge. And here, thought is not simply conceptual testimony and reasoned elaboration of what is given in experience, but is

a *dialectical* function of the spirit, that is to say the dynamic attainment of self-consciousness on the part of mind, which starts from the spirit's opposition to objective reality. The human spirit attains self-consciousness, that is, it exists, only in its dialectical relationship with objective reality. This is so because reality is intelligible, and a thought is made manifest in facts. Thus, in the dialectical relationship, the spirit determines (κατα-voeī) the existence of objective beings and facts, while at the same time it is self-determined as something opposed to them: consequently, the identity of the subject, as well as the object, is disclosed in the cognitive activity of the subject. In this perspective, the very being of beings is dialectical, nature bringing to fulfilment the presupposition of spirit, as 'being other than' (*das Anderssein*) spirit.

In its relationship with the universal dimensions of objective reality, the human spirit is absolutized, human thought becomes the activity and manifestation of the Absolute Spirit, which is identified with God. Hegel's system, as he himself characterized it, is the effort to understand the self-creativity of the Absolute. God objectifies himself in nature, thereby attaining self-consciousness. Nature is the presupposition of God's self-knowledge, the second definition of the Absolute, identical with the Absolute in accordance with the dialectical relationship. Yet, the synthesis of the dialectical opposition of God and the world only takes place in the mode of human self-consciousness. Human self-consciousness represents the only possibility the Absolute Spirit has of achieving consciousness of itself within the finite (in relation to which alone it really exists), but also the only possibility finite nature has of achieving consciousness of itself within the infinite. Apart from the self-consciousness of dialectical thought, God is dead: the philosophy of Hegel proclaims the 'death of God', that is the God of the objective certainties of scholastic rationalism (*Glauben und Wissen*, 1802). But, at the same time, it ensures that it is in the nature of God to die and rise again, to gain the self-awareness by becoming flesh, that is to say, nature and the world. The Absolute passes into the finite, denying

itself in order to realize itself. For this reason, and with the knowledge that we have of God and that we owe to God, God himself recognizes himself in us.

Hegel identifies religion with philosophy: for they have a common object, the definition of the Absolute. The only difference lies in the means: philosophy uses conceptual definitions, religion mythical representation. But the end sought in both cases is the 'knowledge of God', the highest level of human self-consciousness and self-awareness of the Absolute. '*Gott ist es, der im Philosophen philosophiert*' ('It is God who philosophizes in the philosopher') – which means finally that it is the human mind that is raised to the dimensions of the Divine.

The Historical Proclamation of the 'Death of God'

The 'inner crisis' of western metaphysics – the progressive annihilation of God as an existent reality – comes to historical consciousness with Nietzsche's proclamation of the 'death of God'. Nietzsche does not preach a theoretical nihilism, but testifies to the empty space of the absence of God. His proclamation is a challenge to take a conscious stand towards a specific historical responsibility; it is neither a philosophical position, nor an ideological starting-point for a novel philosophical system, but a historical discovery and an interpretation of a fact of definitive significance. Nietzsche's proclamation signifies a terminal point in western metaphysics and reveals the true dimensions of a historical change. In his own words, written in 1886: 'The great new event – that "God is dead", that faith in the Christian God has become incredible – is already beginning to cast its first shadows over Europe'.¹

Word about the 'death of God' had echoed throughout Europe from the pages of Jean Paul's novel *Siebenkäs* (1796–97) for about a century before Nietzsche. Hegel, as we saw earlier, followed along similar lines, with special reference to the 'abstract God' of rationalist metaphysics. Heinrich Heine (†1856) equally wrote about the 'death of God', as did F. H. Jacobi on 'nihilism' (*Jacobi an Fichte*, 1799). To Dostoevsky we owe the most systematic account of human conduct in the empty space of God's absence, as well as the

prophetic anatomizing of Russian nihilism, which was the fruit of the westernization of the cultured classes of Russia (*Demons*, 1871; *Address on Pushkin*, 1880).²

But in Nietzsche's proclamation there seems to exist an unprecedented element of historical originality, and that is the deliberate challenge to the historical self-consciousness of Europe. The consciousness of the European is metaphysical, it presupposes God as a conceptual 'first cause' of cosmology and as the axiomatic 'principle' of categorical morality. Consequently the proclamation of the 'death of God' was a denial of the premisses of European self-consciousness, a conscious challenge to the irrationality of existence, and an undermining of the useful rationality of social life. Nietzsche was conscious that the 'death of God' meant the 'overthrow of all values'.

In the famous passage of the third book of *The Gay Science* (*Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, 1882), the news of the 'death of God' is borne by a madman (§ 125: *Der tolle Mensch*):

Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly: 'I seek God! I seek God!' Since many of those who did not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. Has he got lost? said one. Has he lost his way like a child? said another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? Emigrated? – thus they yelled and laughed one with another. The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. 'Where has God gone?' he cried. 'I will tell you. *We have killed him* – you and I. We are all his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Where is it moving now? Where are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not tumbling continually? Backwards, sideways, forwards, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Are we not breathing the air of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night

continually closing in on us, and ever more night? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? Do we still hear nothing of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we still smell nothing of the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him! How shall we comfort ourselves, most murderous of all murderers? The holiest and mightiest that the world has yet owned: it has bled to death under our knives – who will wipe this blood from us? What water is there for us to cleanse ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed – and whoever is born after us, for the sake of this deed, will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto.' Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; and they, too, were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern on the ground, and it broke into pieces and went out. 'I have come too early,' he said then, 'my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still travelling – it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder need time; the light of the stars needs time; deeds, though done, still need time to be seen and heard. This deed is still more distant from them than the most distant stars – *and yet they have done it themselves.*'³

The word of the 'madman' is not the announcement of a personal rejection of God, that has the character of absurdity, because it is arbitrary. The absurdity is not found in the announcement itself, but in what is announced: in the denial of the basis or foundation rock upon which Europe has built her cultural and metaphysical self-consciousness. Nietzsche announces this denial as an accomplished historical fact, as the decisive inner contradiction of European history. His word forces an historical self-knowledge, which is a scandal to the consciousness of the European. The proclamation of the 'death of God' is for many a senseless blasphemy, even

a folly. They have neither the eyes to see the event, nor the ears to hear it – ‘and yet, they have done it themselves’.

Responsibility for the death of the God of the Western-European metaphysical tradition lies nowhere else than with western Christendom itself. For it is pregnant not only with the metaphysical denial of the divinity of God, but also with the denial of the metaphysical problem itself – the repression of or indifference towards any kind of metaphysical quest, that is to say, the fact, unprecedented in human history, of religious apathy on the part of the masses, that characterizes our own age. Nietzsche knew full well that his proclamation would be the catalyst for gradual change in historical time: ‘What I proclaim is the story of the next two centuries’.⁴ The Christian churches saw in Nietzsche’s proclamation only the blasphemous rage of an atheist,⁵ but he did not intend anything else than to verify what the churches themselves had perpetrated: ‘What else are these churches still, if not the tombs and sepulchres of God?’⁶

Commenting on Nietzsche’s word about the ‘death of God’, Heidegger writes:

The word about the death of God concerns the Christian God. It is no less certain, however, and to be considered in advance, that the names of God and of the Christian God in Nietzsche’s thought are used to designate the transcendental realm in general. God is the name for the realm of ideas and ideals.⁷

This identity between the transcendental realm of intelligible concepts and the names of God and of the Christian God is not an original historical insight on Nietzsche’s part, but has been the basic orientation of western theology for centuries. The rational justification of ecclesial experience has been the historical temptation of the West, an inevitable temptation to set up the Church as an unambiguous authority in the world. The transcendental realm of the first principles and causes, as philosophical metaphysics logically defines it, is identified with the historical revelation of the personal God, the direct and concrete experience of whom is encountered in the Christian Church – an

experience always ridiculed as ‘foolishness’ by metaphysical philosophers.

Western metaphysics – says Heidegger – rests on the primacy of logic...⁸ Alongside and above psychology and cosmology, theology is revealed, not as the interpretation of biblical revelation, but as rationalist (natural) interpretation of biblical teaching about God as the first cause of beings, nature and human kind, of human history and historical events.⁹

That is precisely why, in Nietzsche’s thought, Christian metaphysics is identified, not only in general with the realm of ideas and the ideal, but with Platonism in particular.¹⁰ The western metaphysical tradition, from Augustine to Thomas Aquinas and even Leibniz, has been typically Platonic,¹¹ and it is particularly thanks to its Platonic character that ‘Western metaphysics is theological, even in those cases where it is opposed to ecclesiastical theology’.¹² The Platonic world view is rationally theocentric – and this pattern is followed by western metaphysics: God is the logically necessary first cause of all beings, and both the ontology and epistemology of the West were built on this logical necessity as a starting-point. ‘Logic does not mean: agreement with scholastic logic (Schullogik), but a fundamental trust in reason’.¹³

From Augustine to Leibniz, God is defined as the truly real Being, the infinitely perfect Being (*ens summe perfectum*), the Being conceived by the mind when it realizes an ascent to the Absolute (*regressus in infinitum*) of the conceptual properties of human being. The cause of the existent is determined on the basis of the empirically existent itself. This means that both onto-logy and theo-logy, while etymologically they ‘give a reason (*logos*)’ concerning being and God, in reality are actually *constitutive* of the *logos* (that is, of the cause and meaning) of both Being and God, constitutive, that is, of the logic of *logos*. For this reason, they should more properly be called onto-logic and theo-logic.¹⁴

But even *irrationalism*, the counter-movement to rationalism, begins in the West from the very same confidence in reason, as Heidegger maintains:

Confidence in reason and the subsequent dominating rule of reason is not only found one-sidedly in rationalism. Confidence in reason equally well characterizes irrationalism. The greatest rationalists very soon end up in irrationalism, and vice versa: wherever the world view is determined by irrationalism, there rationalism triumphs.¹⁵

The western apophatic tradition, from the neo-Platonist Eriugena to Anselm, Abelard and Thomas Aquinas – the attempt to reconcile affirmations and negations, the advocacy of knowledge and of unknowing – bears out this discovery. Natural theology is revealed as the logic of affirmative statements, apophatic theology as the logic of negations.

First, Kant consistently denied the primacy of reason to determine the existent. He distinguished thought from existence, and rejected the identification of speculative ideas with beings-in-themselves, thereby putting an end to classical ontology. Nevertheless, the Kantian Revolution occasioned not the slightest blow to the prevailing 'monism of the subject', the foundation stone of rationalist metaphysics. By granting priority to sense-experience, he harmonized intellect with existence, initiating the anthropocentric ontology of modern times; that is to say, he was a precocious phenomenologist.

Hegel made a further step forward through a similar employment of phenomenological categories, determining the intrinsic alienation of the mind from reality. We know beings only as they appear, not in their essence. The only possibility for overcoming this alienation, in Hegel's view, is history. History is a dynamically evolving and developing *praxis* – it is the activity of the spirit, its attempt to realize itself as freedom from any opposition, singularity, or partiality.

Heidegger reaches the obvious conclusion that the Kantian and Hegelian leaps of thought fail to break through the boundaries of the subject: 'Hegelian metaphysics is appropriately designated as metaphysics of the absolute subject'.¹⁶ The primacy of the intellect is removed, to be replaced by

the primacy of experience or historical existence. Ontology remains anthropocentric ('subjectivist'), as does theology. 'Modernity is distinguished by the fact that man becomes the measure and centre of all existence.'¹⁷

The metaphysics of the 'absolutized subject', that is to say, anthropology as metaphysics, brings to completion the identification of metaphysics with assessment of value. The reality of beings is not primarily rational, but primarily empirical or historical. But the empirical or historical confirmation of the existent refers to its utility – utility (whether moral or practical) confirms and gives value to the existent: 'Value and utility become the positivist substitute for the metaphysical'.¹⁸

This ontology of anthropocentric assessments of knowledge is complemented by a theology of practical expediency. God is defined as the highest 'principle' on the ladder of value, the binding principle of each ethical set of values, but also as its end or goal. He is the 'highest Good' on analogy with the good constituted by the empirical category of the moral conscience. Nevertheless, this 'principle', or highest rung on the ladder of value, is finally only an abstract and impersonal necessity for social ethics – the value of the 'sacred', alongside the values of justice, altruism, or honesty. The God that is conceived reductively on the basis of ideals drawn from human moral experience is the same dead God as the God of classical metaphysics who was defined by the logic of determinism.

The last blow against God and against the transcendent world – writes Heidegger – consists in the fact that God, the Being of beings, is degraded to the highest value. Not that God is taken as unknowable, not that God's existence turns out to be unprovable, but that the God who is regarded as real is raised to the highest value. For this blow comes not from the bystanders, not from those who do not believe in God, but precisely from the believers and theologians.¹⁹

The historical development of both natural theology and apophaticism in the West culminates in the proclamation

of the 'death of God'. Heidegger tells us that in Nietzsche's thought it is clear that Christian theology is identified with Platonism, but at the same time that 'Christianity is for Nietzsche the historical, world-political manifestation of the Church and its claim to power within the structures of Western society and modern culture'.²⁰ Just as the God of Christendom was identified with the transcendent world of rationalist metaphysics, so, too, was he identified with the cultural context or purposes of specific social structures.

Nietzsche's proclamation points out, indirectly but quite clearly, the fundamental 'heresy' – the deviation from the original fact of the Church – which constitutes the historical temptation of western Christianity: the quest to impose itself rationally and socially, finally the Church's 'religionization', its transformation into a religion that satisfies individual needs for emotional and intellectual security, while also sustaining the practical moral interests of society.²¹ These divergences in the doctrine, worship, art and structure of the western Church from the undivided Church of the early centuries converge in the fundamental alienation of western ecclesiological self-consciousness and identity. They constitute yielding to the third temptation of Christ in the wilderness, as Dostoevsky pointed out earlier than Nietzsche.²²

Hence, the proclamation of the 'death of God' is revealed as the historical outcome that makes clear the whole theological development of western Christianity. The replacement of ecclesial experience with intellectual certainty prepares for rational argument over this certainty. Rationalism, freed from the metaphysical guarantees provided by scholasticism, assumes the role of the historical preparation for the dominance of an empiricism centred on the individual. And an empiricism centred on the individual is the 'open door' at which nihilism appears. At the same time, the irrationalism of Roman Catholic fideism and Protestant pietism sets the scene for the historical emergence of utilitarianism. And the utilitarian justification of value leads ineluctably, by casting doubt on the traditional hierarchy of values, to scepticism, and finally to amorality – to the 'overthrow of all values'.

Heidegger describes most vividly the outcome of this prolonged historical process:

In the place of the dwindling authority of God and the teaching office of the Church, there steps the authority of the conscience. Against this there emerges the social instinct. The flight of the world to the transcendent is replaced by historical progress. The otherworldly goal of eternal beatitude is changed into the earthly happiness of the majority. The duties of religious worship are dissolved by enthusiasm for the creations of culture or the spread of civilization. Creativity, once the property of the biblical God, becomes a sign of human activity. His creation finally passes over to the creature.²³

Such is the overthrow of values that brings nihilism 'before the gates': it is precisely as Nietzsche foresaw: 'He, more alarming than the visitors, stands outside the door'.²⁴

*Nihilism as a Presupposition
of the Absence and
Unknowability of God*

The way in which Heidegger understands the Nietzschean proclamation of the 'death of God' presupposes a fundamental historical testimony: the differentiation of the religionized Christianity of the Western European tradition from the primordial fact of the experience and witness of the Church.

For Nietzsche – says Heidegger – understands by Christianity not the Christian life, that lasted for a short while during the composition of the Gospels and Paul's missionary propaganda. Christianity is for Nietzsche the historical, world-political manifestation of the Church and its claim to power within the structures of Western society and modern culture.

So evident is this insight to Heidegger that it leads him to make this highly significant remark, from our point of view:

Christianity in this sense and the Christianity of the New Testament faith are not the same.¹

Such an aphorism suggests that nihilism, in the form of the Nietzschean proclamation of the 'death of God', that is, as an historical testimony to the empty space of the absence

of God, cannot be seen as the result of some kind of anti-Christian position or choice. It does not deny the 'good news' of the New Testament experience and witness, for it is ignorant of its specific historical realization. On the contrary, we ought to see the Nietzschean proclamation as testimony to the alienation of Christianity in the West, of the deviation and alienation of the western churches from the Christianity of the New Testament and the first centuries.

According to Heidegger, the historical experience of European humanity bears witness that:

Even a non-Christian life can affirm Christianity and use it as a means to power, just as contrariwise a Christian life does not necessarily need Christianity. Therefore opposition to Christianity in no way inevitably means a struggle against what is Christian, just as little as a critique of theology necessarily constitutes a critique of faith, an interpretation of which theology is meant to be.²

In other words: the nihilism of Nietzsche and of European thought in general do not necessarily testify in any way to the absence of the God of the primordial experience of the Church. The absence of God is a fact with specific historical dimensions in the realm of western Christendom, as a consequence of the 'inner logic' of that Christianity.³

Nietzsche's 'madman', says Heidegger, runs to the market to cry out his news to people who 'do not believe in God'. Yet, the proclamation of the 'death of God' does not derive from them, nor could it ever derive from them. Those who 'do not believe in God' do not have the slightest thought of testifying to his absence. 'For these are not therefore unbelievers, because God has become incredible to them as God, but because they themselves have given up the possibility of faith, insofar as they can no longer seek after God.'⁴

The 'death of God', the testimony to his absence, is a fact only for those who have not given up seeking him: for people who seek God persistently, but who, within the constraints of western rationalist theology – its individualistic fideism

or mysticism, its utilitarian ethics, the authoritarian institutionalism of the Churches – can ascertain nothing else than his absence.

The 'death of God' is a fact for those people who refuse to replace the personal presence with an abstract notion, the immediacy of relatedness with an intellectual certainty. They refuse to identify the reality of God with the necessity of the first cause (as presupposed by a rationalist metaphysics), or with the highest value (as presupposed by utilitarian ethics). And they dare to make this refusal, since 'they have a more divine conception of God'⁵ than that presupposed by the conceptual structures of western metaphysics and ethics.

To this God (of rationalism and utilitarianism) man can neither pray nor offer sacrifice. Before the *causa sui* man cannot fall on his knees in reverence, nor can he hymn or worship such a God. For this reason atheistic thought that denies the God of philosophy, the God as *causa sui*, is perhaps closer to the divine God (*ist dem göttlichen Gott vielleicht näher*).⁶

With this assertion, Heidegger comes to recognizing in Nietzsche's proclamation a more divine conception of God – more divine in comparison with the conceptual idols of theistic metaphysics. And he testifies to a possible safeguard for the divinity of God in the historical event of European nihilism.

Even in the nihilism of Nietzsche Heidegger does not detect an absolutized anthropocentrism – the intention to substitute man for God – despite the opportunities Nietzsche gives for such an interpretation.⁷ 'Those who think like this think indeed too little divinely of God's nature. Neither can man set himself up in the place of God, because human nature cannot attain the realm of God's being'. According to the criteria of metaphysics, the realm of God's being, the 'place of God' (*der Ort Gottes*) is defined by reference to the cause of the creation and preservation of existent beings. With the rejection of metaphysics, the 'place of God will remain empty' – man cannot make a claim to it. Nietzsche's superman presupposes not the conception of the

place of God, but man as the epicentre of Being – it presupposes another foundation of existent beings with a different conception of Being: a conception of Being as subjective event, and the primacy of *subjectivity* lays the foundations for the metaphysics of modern times.⁸

The place of the absence of God, as the content of nihilism, is not then an objective determination of nothingness, that is to say, the identity of the nothing with what metaphysics defines as reality 'beyond' the realm of the senses. Nihilism, according to Heidegger, does not substitute nothingness for God, with the soothing certainty of 'something', nor does it refer to the non-existence of God. Nihilism is the refusal of European thought to link the reality of existent beings with their causal principle by means of conceptual deduction or fideist or mystical acknowledgement. The interpretation of the fact of existence is henceforth exhaustively explained on the basis of the phenomenal appearance of beings to the perceiving subject – for this reason the concept of Being is founded exclusively on subjectivity. Philosophy ceases to embrace ontology, while metaphysics (from Kant onwards) is equated with epistemology. (The more popular and generalized version of this nihilism is not a militant atheism, but a settled religious indifference: European thought dodges, or declines to consider, the question of God and the origins of existence, and is not interested in such a question, preferring to interpret the fact of existence within the boundaries of the autonomous certainties of subjectivity.)

In order to elucidate more clearly the Heideggerian version of Nietzschean nihilism, we must risk a necessary, even if brief and oversimplified, mention of the way in which Heidegger himself ascribes *nothingness* to the very *being* of existents, that is to say, to the *mode of being*, leaving the 'place' of God (as the causal principle of being) empty without denying his existence.

According to Heidegger, the initial question of philosophy cannot be the problem of the *relation* between beings and Being (such as, *what* is Being, or what is it that *makes* beings have *being?*), for an approach of this kind simply establishes for us a causal (and merely conceptual) link between beings

and Being, and thus a conceptual 'ontologization' of Being (and so we accept *a priori* Being as 'something', as a being, even if a higher one).

The starting-point for Heidegger is the question about the *difference* between beings and Being. This difference consists in the fact that beings are for us *phenomena*, they appear, while Being 'likes to hide itself': we know beings only so far as they come true (*ἀληθεύουσι*), that is to say, as they emerge from oblivion (*λήθη*) into disclosure (*ἀλήθεια*, truth) (as they manifest themselves as phenomena).⁹ Yet beings, as phenomena, only manifest themselves, while Being remains outside, it escapes notice, the truth of Being is elusive. We do not know Being-in-itself, we know only the *mode* in which anything that is *is*, and this mode becomes accessible to us as disclosure, emergence from oblivion or self-concealment – that is, out of nothingness.

But if we receive truth (*ἀλήθεια*) as the *mode of being*, we must also receive oblivion, nothingness, as the real presupposition of this mode, and consequently accept that nothingness belongs together with this mode. Beings either come true or they escape notice (without ceasing to be beings, that is to say, participating in Being) – oblivion and truth, phenomenality and nothingness, belong equally to the *mode of being*.

In this perspective, Being ceases to signify the cause or principle of beings (God, or some other principle), nor is it any more the point of reference that allows the mind to be certain of existence, but the *mode* by which that which *is* becomes accessible to us either as truth (reducing oblivion to nothing) or as oblivion (reducing manifestation to nothing). The acceptance of the nothing in the *mode of being* constitutes the presupposition for the understanding of both pre-sence and ab-sence, that is to say, of the two 'forms' in which there becomes accessible to us *being* – *participation in being*. According to Heidegger, the difference between beings and Being is the foundation of a non-rationalist ontology, while at the same time being the conscious or unintentional occasion and starting-point

for any metaphysics.¹⁰ And this, because it reveals, in each case, the transcendent character of Being. 'Being is essentially farther than all beings and is yet nearer to the human being than every being, be it a rock, a beast, a work of art, a machine, be it an angel or God. Being is the nearest. Yet the near remains farthest from the human being.'¹¹ If we subject Being to conceptual fabrications, it may provide us with fictitious certainties, but it cuts us off from any possible access to metaphysics. If, on the contrary, we persevere with the difference between beings and Being, and with the understanding of phenomenality together with nothingness by means of the same *mode of being*, then nothingness will be designated as the presupposition that keeps the question of Being open and free from subordination to rationalism. Nothingness is no longer identified with non-existence, nor does it mark the end of metaphysical inquiry. It is rather placed as a non-restrictive (an unrestricted) limit to thought that continues to raise questions.¹²

The determination of nothingness as an unrestricted limit of questioning thought is manifest as the starting-point of an ontology which presupposes both theism and atheism. And the acceptance of such a presupposition does not mean indifference with regard to the affirmation or denial of God, but respect for the boundaries that have been set for thinking as such.¹³ Consequently, nihilism, as the denial of the equation of Being and God (the denial of their subjection to conceptual fabrications) or as the reference of God to nothing (with the concept of indeterminism or of the emptiness that persists in thought when it defines the *mode of being*) – such a nihilism seems more 'theological' than rationalist metaphysics or utilitarian ethics. As the refutation of exclusively conceptual affirmation of God and of the practical necessity of God, nihilism stands for a radical denial of the 'conceptual idols' of God, and as the unrestricted limit to questioning it offers further possibilities of rescuing the divinity of God.

Given all this, Heidegger goes so far as confidently to affirm that nihilism can have for a consequence both unbelief (as the idea of a falling away from Christian faith)

and Christianity itself.¹⁴ In other words, the two possible consequences of nihilism amount to the acceptance of either the *absence* or the *unknowability* of God. Heidegger comes then to recognize, in his own manner, the apophaticism of – at least – New Testament theology.

It should be clear from the foregoing, that Heideggerian as well as Nietzschean nihilism – which can lead either to unbelief, or Christianity itself – differs essentially from the so-called 'theology of negations' (*theologia negativa*) of the Western European tradition. For there, it is not being that is defined by the possibility of nothingness (of non-manifestation), but nothingness that is defined by being, as the opposite of being, the denial of being, as non-being. There, denial is the reverse of affirmation, that is to say, once again a conceptual determination. Affirmation and denial are forms of critical declaration, they are 'declaratory statements'.¹⁵ Thus nothingness, as a negative concept, the reverse of the concept of being, likewise has a conceptual provenance; it is a creation of 'the most abstract of abstract' thought (*das Abstrakteste des Abstrakten*).¹⁶

To be sure, nothingness is non-being, the non-objective. But there immediately arises the question whether this non-being, to the extent that it 'defines unrestrictedly' the *mode of being*, is a mere notion or really *is* non-being. The question remains open, whether that which neither is, nor will ever become, objectively real, is nothing.

Rationalistic metaphysics gave an easy response to this question, by posing a disjunctive syllogism: either nothingness is absolute nothingness, or it must be a being. But since by definition nothingness is excluded from being a being, it must be nothing. It follows, absolutely and self-evidently, that nothingness is identical with nothing and, as non-existent, cannot be the object of any attention or study. If nothingness is nothing, non-existent by definition, then in no case can being fall into nothingness, and consequently the possibility of nihilism vanishes.¹⁷

But this identification of nothingness with nothing immediately reveals the value-bound nature of western metaphysics. Being, as opposite to non-being, to nothingness,

takes it for granted that the existent is supreme in value over the non-existent. And *cataphatic theology* mistakes the character of being for value, and is reduced to the notion of the highest value or the principle of true Being. The *theology of negations*, in its effort to save God from all ontic attributes, in its denial endorses also the assessment of being in terms of value, in order to develop an assessment of true Being as superior to the assessments of being. Consequently, its difference from cataphatic theology does not consist in the denial either of presuppositions, or of the organ (of thought), or of perspective; it is simply the difference of a parallel method. If Nietzsche describes his nihilism as the 'overthrow of all values', it is precisely to deny the rationalist basis of any system of values, that is to say, the replacement of empirical reality by abstract notions. As long as chains of assessment in terms of value remain, anti-rationalist metaphysics will lead to the extremes of rationalism – and yet anti-metaphysical atheism is more concerned about God than theism itself.¹⁸

PART II

*Apophaticism as Theology
of Unknowability*

Apophasis as Denial and Abandonment

The refusal to ascribe to God all the determinations of being – a refusal to subject the reality of God and the *mode* of *being* to conceptual constructs – had already been proposed within the framework of the ecclesiastical theology of the Greek East, at least fourteen centuries before Nietzsche and Heidegger. Specifically, in the writings of the fifth or sixth century, passed down to us under the name of Dionysios the Areopagite, we may recognize a leading example of the then universally accepted position of theological *apophaticism*.¹

The study of apophaticism, as the epistemological approach or position that characterizes the whole ecclesial tradition of the Greek East, would require a separate and many-sided treatment. And a properly substantiated interpretative approach to the works of the Areopagitical Corpus, the study of which has already produced an enormous bibliography, would equally need a separate monograph. However, our task here – specifically and particularly – is the apophaticism of the Areopagitical Corpus as the context for an attempt at dialogue with contemporary European nihilism. Consequently, so far as the more general apophaticism of the Greek theological tradition and a general interpretation of the question of the Areopagite are concerned, the pages that follow have only a suggestive and allusive character.²

We could draw up a preliminary definition of apophaticism as the abandonment of all claims to an 'objective'

assessment of truth, or the denial that we can exhaust the truth in its formulation. Abandonment or denial does not mean here a rejection or overlooking of the possibilities for knowledge represented by a rational formulation of knowledge. Apophaticism is not to be identified with irrationalism, or indifference to the rules of logic in the formulation of knowledge – for these rules represent the possibility of communicating and sharing in knowledge. Nor may apophaticism be confused with self-centred mysticism, the flight to private emotional certainties. The apophatic way or position presupposes the prior acceptance of the methods of philosophical epistemology – the acceptance, for instance, of both the way of affirmations and the way of denials – as potentialities for attaining knowledge. It is precisely the emphasis on the *possibility* of knowledge that sets apophaticism apart from any *positivism* about knowledge, that is to say, from any form of absolutizing of the rules or presuppositions needed for ascertaining the validity of any formulation of knowledge.

This openness in principle to the methods of philosophical epistemology on the part of the theological apophaticism of the early Christian tradition also indicates the precise point of divergence from that early tradition, which occurred later in the medieval West. The absolutizing of a natural theology (*theologia naturalis*) as the logic of affirmations and of a negative theology (*theologia negativa*) as the logic of negations reveals the crisis of theological apophaticism in the realm of western Christendom, that is to say, the historical development of cognitive possibilities in the efficient methods of access to necessary truths.

It is a mark of their common starting-point that both the Greek East's persistence in early Christian apophaticism, and the western medieval divergence from it, derive the establishment and clarification of their epistemological positions from the same basic text of eastern apophaticism, the Areopagitical Corpus. It is consequently natural that every fresh inquiry into the problem of theological knowledge should make the Corpus its primary source.

Indeed, the most representative amongst the so-called

modern 'systematic' theologians concur in their assertion that western scholastic and neo-scholastic theology relied on the Areopagitical writings to postulate an *analogical* way of knowing God, a threefold way of knowledge (*via triplex*): the way of abstraction or denials (*via negationis*), the way of eminence (*via eminentiae*) and the way of causality or affirmations (*via causalitatis* or *affirmationis*).³

The theoretical antecedent of this threefold epistemology can be traced back to Aristotle's teaching on the *analogy of being* (*analogia entis*). Aristotle used the concept of analogy to define being as the unity or principle of differences:⁴ an analogy is a relationship 'in accordance with a definition' (*κατὰ λόγον*), either ascending or descending, which takes likenesses and differences of being as related to its given known essence. 'There are many senses in which a thing may be said to "be", but they are related to one central point, one definite kind of thing, and are not homonymous.'⁵ Any being, as a unity of differences, is always determined *analogously* by relation to a principle that is determinative of all differences concerning quality, quantity, place, time, and relationship, but also always *analogously* in relation to its given essence – 'in virtue of the definition of the essence'. For example, humans and irrational animals share in common in the essence of living beings, and this participation is determined by likenesses and differences in an analogical relation.

Aristotle, however, never stretched the use of *analogy* so far as to determine the beingness of beings, the relation of beings with Being. The Scholastics were the first to put forward such an extension of the notion, and to use the analogical correlation of beings with Being to determine Being on the basis of beings, and to arrive at a knowledge of the Creator (the true Being) through a knowledge of the creatures.

According to the Scholastics, the cosmos, as a creature, bears an analogous likeness to its Creator, a likeness that presupposes an analogical unlikeness. What we call the 'transcendence' of God is a 'surpassing' of those categories that determine natural reality, but that surpassing

presupposes some kind of analogical unlikeness between God and the cosmos. The fourth Lateran Council (1215) adopted and sanctioned the formulation that between God and his creatures there can be no likeness that does not presuppose an even greater unlikeness (*Quia inter creatorem et creaturam non potest similitudo notari, quin inter eos maior sit dissimilitudo notanda*).⁶ Hence, the principle of analogy permits the Scholastics to determine unlikeness as a quantitative negative difference in relation to analogical similarity, and consequently as an analogically comprehensible magnitude.

Let us now see how the possibility of an analogical knowledge of God is expressed in the Areopagitical Corpus. The crucial passage which is usually cited by the Scholastics to the support of their position, is the following:

If God cannot be grasped by mind or sense-perception, if he is not a particular being, how do we know him? This is something we must inquire into. It might be more accurate to say that we cannot know God in his nature, since this is unknowable and is beyond the reach of mind or of reason. But we know him from the arrangement of everything, because everything is, in a sense, projected out from him, and this order possesses certain images and semblances of his divine paradigms. We therefore ascend on an ordered route to that which is beyond all as far as our capacities allow us, by way of the denial and the transcendence of all things and by way of the cause of all things.⁷

First of all, this passage excludes unequivocally the possibility of any human knowledge of God according to his nature or essence. The nature or essence of God surpasses the apprehension of the human intellect or senses, because it transcends any analogical correlation with any kind of existent being. (There exist no likenesses – starting-points for an analogical correlation between the being of beings and the being of God – that presuppose and constitute analogical unlikenesses. Even privative determinations – uncreated, timeless, unextended – are understood

by humans only as conceptual contradictions of created, temporal, extended, etc., without opening up the possibility of any human apprehension of a form of existence that escapes the presupposition with which human experience understands existence.) Accordingly, it is impossible that we should come to know God in his essence or nature, since we cannot subject the divine (uncreated) essence or nature to the semantics of reason or conceptual intelligibility.

Maximos the Confessor, commenting on the Areopagite, indicates that even the term *nature* (φύσις) is only used loosely with reference to God, since God is beyond anything that we could mean by 'nature' or 'essence'. And it is only because of his incarnation that the Person of the divine Logos participates in nature: 'Look how it says, since also he has come *as far as nature*; understand by that our nature, and also that we cannot properly ascribe what belongs to nature to God. Behold how it says, *he descended as far as nature*, that is, he came to what is less honourable, and to that which he did not possess'.⁸ The reference of 'nature' to God subjects the Godhead to the manner in which we conceive of created entities – the term φύσις or nature (derived, like the Latin *natura*, from a root meaning 'to grow' or 'to be born') has always for human understanding an ontic and created character. The same goes for the term being or essence (οὐσία): 'God transcends every essence, being none of the things that are, but beyond every being and the source of all the beings'.⁹ The only human possibility of knowing God is, according to Maximos, an approach not to the divine nature or essence, but to the effect of the preserving and providential power of God: 'It is in terms of no principle or concept or even reality that the divine has relation and communion with the things that are, but it is completely and in every way transcendent, and only grasped from his preserving and foreseeing everything, as someone has said'.¹⁰

There remains then for human kind, as a way to knowledge of God in principle, the effect of the creative activity of God – which is accessible to the human capacity to understand – 'the arrangement of everything, as projected out from him'.

It is not through beings in themselves (as existent fact), nor through the Being of beings, but only through the manner – the way or mode – in which beings are, that one who *wishes* to advance with deductive judgements to apprehension of the cause of everything can be led to the testimony of God. This possibility refers to a possible choice and a direction of which we are capable ('as far as our capacities allow us') and not to an 'objective' certainty. In the way in which 'every house' bears witness to its having been made 'by someone',¹¹ the care, the good taste, and love of the designer, his intelligence and capability – betraying, that is to say, *personal* attributes of the maker, but nothing of his nature or essence (since the thing made is of another, different essence from the maker) – in the same way, too, the things that are mirror the creator God. There is, consequently, an analogical relationship between God as creator and beings as creatures, yet the relationship itself does not constitute any determination of the divine Being, but is an *iconic* representation¹² of the otherness of the divine personal properties – of the 'divine *paradigms*', as the Areopagite calls them. 'We give the name of "paradigm" to those principles (*logoi*) which pre-exist as a unity in God and which produce the essences of things. Theology calls them predeterminations, divine and good acts of will which determine and create things and in accordance with which the Transcendent One predefined and brought into being everything that is'.¹³

The divine 'paradigms' (or 'predeterminations' or 'principles which pre-exist in God and which produce the essences of things') do not belong to that which we loosely call the *essence* or *nature* of God, but to the active manifestation of the divine existence, that is to say, to what we call the divine activities or *energies*. And the principle or *logos* of beings (the *logos* of the mode of 'the arrangement of everything') is the effect of these divine energies, for which reason they serve as an image or *icon* of the personal otherness of the divine creative word. The principle of cosmic harmony and wisdom is not identical with the divine willing and essence-producing energy, just as the purpose or inspiration of an artist is not identical with his work in which his purpose and

inspiration find expression. Yet by means of the principle or *logos* of the creatures we may know the otherness of the personal energy of the Creator (just as we recognize the particular composer in the otherness of his musical creation, or a particular painter in the otherness of his pictures).

The *logos* of the mode of 'the arrangement of everything', a principle of wisdom and beauty, serves as an *icon*, so that humans are led up to and come to participate 'in that which is beyond all' – to know, and participate in, the otherness of the divine personal energy. But even such an ascent by way of the image must take place 'by an ordered route': it presupposes an analogical transition ('by way of the denial and the transcendence of all things and by way of the cause of all things') from the principle of beings to the principle of divine 'paradigms'. Ana-logical transition is a sort of 'synergy' of the human *logos*, a cooperation expressing the human creature's will to encounter and come to know the *logos* of the divine creative will and energy.

Thus, by the introduction of *images* into the interpretation of analogy, the way of abstraction, of transcendence and causality preserves both the epistemological method of analogical ascent, and the capacity of willing. Capacity means the personal readiness to approach analogical knowledge, that is to say, a factor that cannot be determined by objective necessities, and consequently prevents the autonomous imposition of a method as a way of definitive proof.

At the same time, the use of images, as an ana-logical approach to the otherness-uniqueness of a creative energy (and not as a conceptual comparison of the defining properties of being), excludes interpreting God as an object of reason – that is to say, as an entity subject to the definitions of human knowledge. According to the Areopagitical writings, no existential category, not even the 'most spiritual' among the properties of human nature or being, can be ascribed to God as determining his essence. 'Hence, with regard to the Thearchy's transcendence of being, which is the transcendent existence of the transcendently Good, no lover of the truth which is above all truth will seek to praise it as word or power or mind or life or being.'¹⁴

The categories with which we define the existential fact or the manifestations of that fact (essence, existence, principle, power, goodness, mind, life, movement, appearance, etc.) are insufficient to make up an analogical relation of likenesses and differences with the truth 'above all truth'. The mind can conceive and reason express the existential likenesses or differences among beings, so long as beings come true (emerge into disclosure, ἀ-λήθεια). But the reality which lies beyond all beings, the reality that does not come true, eludes every mental grasp and rational expression – 'neither intelligence nor speech can lay hold of it nor can it at all be contemplated since it surpasses everything and is even beyond unknowing'.¹⁵ Intellect and reason cannot transcend it, they can only bear testimony to this impossibility with the simple argument that the reality beyond beings must be utterly unlike the beings in order to be beyond the beings, and its absolute unlikeness excludes any relative knowledge. 'If all knowledge is of that which is and is limited to the realm of the existent, then whatever transcends being must also transcend knowledge.'¹⁶

Consequently, what is determined by reason is the absolute unlikeness of God to any existent: 'Theology itself asserts that God is unlike and that he is not to be compared with anything, that he is different from everything and, stranger yet, that there is none at all like him.'¹⁷ The determination of unlikeness becomes rationally the 'principle of negation' – in accordance with which 'we say even of non-being that it is non-being' (Aristotle)¹⁸ – but the acknowledgement of unlikeness with respect of being is not at all determinative of the 'being' of non-being. In the case of God we rationally determine his absolute unlikeness to anything existent, but without determining this unlikeness as a simply conceptual opposition to the existent, by taking it to be non-existence or nothing. For that reason, Maximus the Confessor observes – commenting, as always, on the Areopagite – that 'God is said to be both being and non-being, since he is none of the things that are, but transcends unknowably everything; for there is nothing that is known in accordance with the fact that God is nothing'.¹⁹

The iconic use of the analogical method grants us access to knowledge of the reality of God by means of definitions of both being and non-being – that is to say, by means of an abandonment of any claim to subject the knowledge of God simply to conceptual-rational opposition. Conceptual reality, as the Areopagite observes, remains indefinable by the principle of simple opposition to the realm of sense-experience; and the simplicity of simple realities, not subject to patterns, cannot be defined intrinsically by the principle of opposition to concrete entities and shapes, nor the shapeless formlessness of bodiless beings by the principle of opposition to shapes and formed bodies. And yet, with the simultaneous use of assertion and opposition, the reality that transcends affirmative and negative determinations can be depicted in images 'analogically' – and an excellent account of such analogical depiction in images is found in the following passage from the Areopagite:

Just as the senses can neither grasp nor perceive the things of the mind, just as representation and shape cannot take in the simple and shapeless, just as corporeal form cannot lay hold of the intangible and incorporeal, by the same standard of truth beings are surpassed by the infinity beyond being, intelligences by that oneness which is beyond intelligence. Indeed the inscrutable One is out of the reach of every rational process. Nor can any words come up to the inexpressible Good, this One, this Source of all unity, this being beyond existence. Mind beyond mind, word beyond speech, it is gathered up by no discourse, by no intuition, by no name. It is and it is as no other being is. Cause of all existence, it alone could give an authoritative account of what it really is.²⁰

The 'semantic' synthesis that emerges from these opposing determinations – being beyond being, intellect without intelligence, ineffable word – is an image and not a concept. It indicates analogically (in accordance with the principle of *transcendence*) God's transcendence of being (his unlikeness to the being of beings), his wisdom beyond understanding and his manifestation beyond utterance, without being

exhausted in any opposition to being, intellect or reason, or in any affirmation of essence or absence (*ἀπ-ουσία*), of understanding or lack of understanding, of reason or irrationality. The image that emerges from the synthesis of the opposing characteristics is a meaningful outline in accordance with reason, that transcends both affirmation and negation – it defines a way of freedom from any epistemological position or method, an *abandonment* of any syllogistic necessity.

The ascent to the reality beyond beings by means of causality leads to a corresponding abandonment when it serves as reference by means of images, and not as the certitude of conceptual definitions. Causal reasoning may certainly lead us to the intellectual certainty of the existence of a first cause of beings, of a pre-eminent self-caused creator. Yet both the essence or nature, and the mode of existence of this first cause remain inaccessible to causal scrutiny.

And even in the realm of sense experience, the ascent from effects to their causes is not determinative of the essence of causes – causes are shown to be essentially different from the results of their natural energy. We know the mode by which causes are active as principles of causality, but not the mode in which they *are*. For this reason the effects are only possible *images* of their causes, not determinative of the essence of the causes.

In reality there is no exact likeness between caused and cause – the Areopagitical writings maintain – for the caused carry within themselves only such images of their originating sources as are possible for them, whereas the causes themselves are located in a realm transcending the caused, according to the argument regarding their source. Take a familiar example. Joys and woes are said to be the cause in us of joy and woe without themselves being the possessors of such feelings. The fire which warms and burns is never said itself to be burnt or warmed. Similarly, it would be wrong, I think, to say that life itself lives or that light itself is enlightened, unless such words happened to be employed in a different sense to suggest that the

caused things pre-exist more fully and more truly in the causes.²¹

For the rest, the way of causality, as a way to the knowledge of God, only constitutes a depiction in images, that is to say, a meaningful sketch of the existence of the creative cause of beings, without the possibility of defining the essence or nature of the cause itself. The existential cause that has as effect the existent beings is designated (in accordance with the rationale of the causal principle) as beyond the existent beings, for which reason it remains inaccessible to conceptual definitions and to the knowledge that they entail. Because the boundary of the conceptual knowledge of natures or essences is identified with the boundary of beings, beings are not able, as effects, by any kind of ascending reference, to determine the essence of their cause. Our very existential categories cease to be valid outside the sphere of existent beings – Maximus the Confessor, in his comments on the Areopagite, indicates that the definition of existence itself is irrelevant in the case of God (since only with ontological categories, categories of *participation* in existence, can we conceive the reality of the existent): 'It is not [simply] that [the divine] is, that cannot be conceived – do not think like that – but that it is not: for this is knowledge in unknowing'.²²

The consequent theological apophaticism, as an analogical depiction in images, constitutes a transcendence of epistemological methodology – as much of the analogical way of affirmations and negations, as of the way of causality. The theological way of signifying transcends any determination on the grounds of analogy and causality, just as the recognition of its final transcendence does not render useless recourse to epistemological methodology. Apophatic knowledge presupposes and comprises determinations on the grounds of analogy and causality as a preliminary starting-point, yet it is not exhausted in these determinations. It makes use of affirmations and negations and particularly in a 'most sweet conjunction',²³ the 'conjunction' transforming the conceptual opposition into a depiction in images:

But there is a further point to understand. Theological tradition has a dual aspect, the ineffable and mysterious on the one hand, the open and more evident on the other. The one resorts to symbolism and involves initiation. The other is philosophical and employs the method of demonstration. (Further, the inexpressible is bound up with what can be articulated.) The one uses persuasion and imposes the truthfulness of what is asserted. The other acts and, by means of a mystery which cannot be taught, it puts souls firmly in the presence of God.²⁴

The declaration of the Areopagite that 'the inexpressible is bound up with what can be articulated' shows more clearly the purpose served by depiction in images. The synthesis of affirmations and denials is a mutual annulment of defining utterances that excludes their one-sided absolutization, while not ceasing to serve as pointing to an ineffable knowledge, a knowledge that is not exhausted in express formulations. A complete exclusion of affirmative declarations about God would lead ineluctably to the identification of apophaticism and simple denial, that is to say to a theological agnosticism, to an epistemological position opposed to affirmation, completely different from positive affirmative knowledge. Whereas now the use of analogical understanding of opposing concepts leads us to independence both from affirmation and from denial, to a readiness to enlarge our capacities for knowledge, beyond the intellect, into a catholicity of experience:

God is therefore known in all things and apart from all things. He is known through knowledge and through unknowing. Of him there is conception, reason, understanding, touch, perception, opinion, imagination, name, and many other things. On the other hand he cannot be understood, words cannot contain him, and no name can lay hold of him. He is not one of the things that are and he cannot be known in any of them. He is all things in all things, and he is no thing among things. He is known to all from all things and he is known to no one from anything. This is the sort of language we must use about

God, for he is praised from all things according to their analogy to him as their cause.²⁵

From the above, we can only conclude by making the clearest distinction between the apophatic position and what the medieval West called the theology of denials (*theologia negativa*).²⁶ The apophaticism of the Greek East is not confined to negations, it presupposes both affirmative natural knowledge and, at the same time, its denial, that is to say, the *abandonment* of any claim to consolidate and objectify the truth in conceptual definitions. The apophatic position is not just a further method, even the most effective, for acquiring natural knowledge of God, but the use of epistemological methods that refuses to absolutize the effectiveness of their semantics. The semantics of knowledge (the conceptual designations – affirmations, negations and the way of causality) is, for apophaticism, only a dynamic starting-point for realization of an empirical *relationship* with the designated reality. And when we speak of empirical *relationship*, we refer to the special capacity of the human subject to approach the knowledge of reality by means of a general faculty of apprehension, that is to say, a coordination of several factors in the event of knowing (such as sensation, understanding, judgement, imagination, abstraction, reduction, emotion, intuition, insight, etc). In the realization of such a relationship of knowing, there is preserved not only the many-sidedness of the subject's faculty of apprehension, but also the *otherness* of each subjective approach to knowledge, as well as the *freedom* of approach, the exclusion of any predetermination. In other words, the catholicity of the event of knowing through *relationship* preserves the chief elements (otherness and freedom) with which we mark out the *personal* existence of human kind – man or woman as person/personality, with the greater ontological meaning offered by this definition. Apophaticism, then, as an active *abandonment* of the consolidation of knowledge in conceptual categories, is the epistemological position that leads to the dynamics of the ontology of personhood, that is to say, to a conferring of meaning on both the

subject and the reality facing it, independent of any kind of *a priori* necessity.

The nihilism of Heidegger, as respect for the unrestricted limits of questioning thought – as refusal to subject God and Being to conceptual constructs – seems provisionally to fit in with what we have here called, in reliance on the Areopagitical writings, apophatic *abandonment*. It differs crucially from the apophaticism of the Areopagite both in its presuppositions and in its consequences, presuppositions and consequences that make up the *ontology of the person*, the linking of apophaticism to the existential principle of freedom and otherness.

The 'Nihilism' of Theological Apophaticism¹

Theological apophaticism, as the abandonment of every conceptual necessity, defines the annihilation of all conceptual idols of God.² Definitions, positive as well as negative, are only symbols of the divine existential event, unable to define the 'nature' or 'essence' of God. The replacement of God's personal presence with conceptual definitions and deduction from analogical procedures, the absolutization of the language of symbols, is treated in the Areopagitical Corpus as one of the causes of unbelief, as an essential denial of the divinity of God.

That is why so many continue to be unbelieving in the presence of the explanations of the divine mysteries, for we contemplate them solely by way of the perceptible symbols attached to them. What is necessary is to uncover them, to see them in their naked purity.³

Unbelief in the revealed word of God (which is unavoidably a symbolic word, a word of ana-logical sketches in sensible images) is construed in the above passage as doubt or rejection not of the reality of God, but of that account which sees the knowledge of God only in terms of types, myths and symbols. Consequently, we could repeat here the declaration of Heidegger and say that the position of 'many unbelievers' represents 'a more divine conception of God' than that defined by conceptual constructs and analogical symbolism.

Accordingly, the event of faith is shown to be not a problem of the acceptance of syllogistic conclusions and mythical symbols – that is to say, analogical ascents – but a readiness to be freed from any conceptual absolutization, an annihilation of conceptual idols, an acceptance of unknowing as the sole category of ‘knowledge’.

Equally, we should recognize in the above passage from the Areopagite an early formulation of the principle of demythologization (*Entmythologisierung*).⁴ Knowledge of God is only possible when we abandon the objectification of the mythical language of symbols. The position of ‘demythologization’ is defined in the Areopagitical writings as a radical *denial*, that is to say, the abandonment of any ontological category, concept or symbol:

[It is necessary] to praise the Transcendent One in a transcending way, namely through the denial of all things. We would be like sculptors who set out to carve a statue. They remove every obstacle to the pure view of the hidden image, and simply by this act of clearing aside they show up the beauty which is hidden... But now as we climb from the last things up to the most primary we deny all things so that we may unhiddenly know that unknowing which itself is hidden from all those possessed of knowing amid all beings.⁵

This passage has been interpreted as the methodological starting-point for a *theology of denials*, ‘the starting-point of an unending description of the God hidden *in tenebris aeternis*, through worldly categories prefixed by an alpha privative’.⁶ But here, worldly categories are excluded, they are not transformed into negative definitions. The goal of this progressive denial (or ‘demythologization’) is not a mental concept, but *beauty*, a presence of personal otherness, that cannot be objectified in affirmative or negative definitions. The unknowing of abstractive ‘demythologization’ indicates a way out from the limits of natural ontology, disbelief in the God of analogical ascents – unknowing defines the annihilation of God as a being. ‘The distance separating beings from God is the same as, or in every case similar to, that which separates

beings from their total non-existence (from being nothing at all).⁷ Accordingly, God is ‘not being, as transcending every essence’.⁸ ‘There is absolutely no assertion concerning it ... for it is both beyond assertion, being the perfect and unique cause of all things, and, by virtue of its pre-eminently simple and absolute nature, free of every limitation, beyond every limitation; it is also beyond every denial’.⁹ The progressive denial, that is to say, the abandonment of any conceptual category, ontic conception, or symbolic sketch, and the transcendence of any methodological path, takes away the first obstacle to the ‘knowledge of God’, the obstacle which is anthropocentric self-assurance of natural knowledge. Those who seek God and firmly resist subjecting him to definitions of created existences (definitions of space, time, reality, form, analogical correlation) find in apophatic denial the way that corresponds *par excellence* with liberation from conventional and compromising conceptions (which accommodate anthropocentric claims). The cause of existence is something more than, and something different from, what we, by means of experiences of creaturely existence, call existence. It is non-existent (‘nothing at all’) in relation to what we understand by reality.

The annihilation of God as a being does not mean that God is defined as non-existence or as not being – for that would be likewise an analogical (merely syllogistic) consequence excluded by the Areopagitical writings. ‘Again, in the list of contraries,’ says Aristotle, ‘one of the two columns is privative, and all contraries are referred to being and non-being, and to unity and plurality.’¹⁰ Yet, in the case of theological apophaticism, elimination (annihilation-nihilism) does not seek to annul, but to surpass the category of being, and consequently the opposing co-ordinate, namely not being. Likewise, apophaticism transcends the opposition of the *one* and the *many*, by reference to the ecclesial experience of a triune deity – a unique and single (simple) life (‘beyond existence’), to whom we draw near in his revelation as the mutual co-inherence or perichoresis of the will and energies of three Persons (or Hypostases) in absolute personal otherness.

Unavoidably, human language is the only means we have of sharing the ecclesial experience of personal relationship with the personally revealed God. Yet theological apophaticism insists that our linguistic utterance must be transcended, and simply taken as a matter of images, so that our meaning is never exhausted within simply conceptual limits of signification. Apophaticism calls us to deny, with reference to the God of ecclesial experience, even the autonomy of our concepts of divinity, spirit, sonship, fatherhood, word (*logos*), of light, of life:

Again, as we climb higher we say this. It is not soul or mind, nor does it possess imagination, conviction, speech or understanding. Nor is it speech *per se*, understanding *per se*. It cannot be spoken of and it cannot be grasped by understanding. It is not number or order, greatness or smallness, equality or inequality, similarity or dissimilarity. It is not immovable, moving, or at rest. It has no power, it is not power, nor is it light. It does not live, nor is it life. It is not a substance, nor is it eternity or time. It cannot be grasped by the understanding since it is neither knowledge nor truth. It is not kingship. It is not wisdom. It is neither one nor oneness, divinity nor goodness. Nor is it a spirit, in the sense in which we understand that term. It is not sonship or fatherhood and it is nothing known to us or to any other being. It falls within the predicate neither of non-being nor of being. Existing beings do not know it as it actually is and it does not know them as they are. There is no speaking of it, nor name nor knowledge of it. Darkness and light, error and truth – it is none of these. It is beyond assertion and denial. We make assertions and denials of what is next to it, but never of it, for it is both beyond every assertion, being the perfect and unique cause of all things, and, by virtue of its pre-eminently simple and absolute nature, free of every limitation, beyond every limitation, it is also beyond denial.¹¹

This definitive exclusion of the mention of any kind of conceptual knowledge of God, the elimination of God as an

entity that might be understood, seems at first to represent an existential rift or unbridgeable distance between God and existent beings, between God and the world. If no representation or image drawn from the reality of existent things, no analogical correlation, no mental conception, is able to determine the cause from its effects, then must we not speak of an empty chasm, or of the elimination of any faculty of knowledge – of the elimination of God on the basis of human existential experience, but also of an elimination of beings (*qua* beings) on the basis of their distance from the 'true existence' of God?

The distance exists: 'Everything is far from God, not by place, but by nature'.¹² The *natural* separation of beings from God is infinite and indefinable, a breathtaking abyss which no meta-physical concept can bridge. It is a void of non-existence which is *outside* God, out of which beings are called into *being*; except that this *being* of the beings, passing and corruptible, does not constitute true existence. Being, and at the same time non-being, is a matter of an unfathomable and incomprehensible opposition, since never could any reality exist *outside* God, and nevertheless God 'calls' into existence being *outside* his existence.

But the *nothingness* of theological apophaticism, as the last attempt to come to know God and the beings (indefinable and inconceivable to the last degree, since the human mind moves only within the co-ordinates of ontic realities), 'reveals' to us – as 'in a glass darkly'¹³ – the purpose or the goal of the real thirst of men and women for existence and life. No meta-physical notion nor syllogistic construct can provide an answer to this unquenchable thirst – all the arguments of 'natural theology' and apologetics stumble at 'our more divine conception' of God and of existence, that is nourished by the very experience of our thirst for life. Only the unfathomable difference between our creaturely, fleeting and finite existence and God's 'true existence' can provide the measure of our existential desire. We thirst for that fullness which, since it is measured in terms of the difference between being and nothingness, can also do away with it, since it is the 'measure' or the cause of that which

we call existence and of that which we call nothingness. Or, in the words of Maximos, 'He [God] is the cause of nothing, for everything posterior to him is in accordance with the cause of being and not being; for nothingness itself is privation. For he has being, because he is the nothingness of beings, and he is not being because he is and surpasses existence, being everything, as creator, and being nothing, as transcendent, or rather being beyond both transcendence and being'.¹⁴

It is certainly unavoidable that the nothingness of theological apophaticism would lead to agnosticism and the distance between God and the world would remain an enigma, if the experience of the Church did not insist uncompromisingly on the *personal* mode of God's existence. We are absolutely ignorant of *what* God is, yet we know, through the experience of his natural and historical revelation, the *mode* in which he exists. And this *mode* (in accordance with which human beings exist 'in his image') is revealed in the *personal energies* of God. God is active as a *person* (a Trinity of Persons), that is to say, as a *hypostasis* of relative self-consciousness, revealed with absolute otherness in ec-static relationship, that is to say, in the *logos* of his creative, providential, loving energy, active in immediate dialogue.

The Person of God – not to mention any human person – cannot be fixed or known by objective definitions, analogical correlations or conceptual assessments. For every person is a unique, existential reality, unlike any other and unrepeatable, a reality of absolute existential otherness, refractory of any objectivity that could be defined by the utterances of human language. Our existential otherness becomes known and participated in only in the immediacy of *relationship*. Not only the Person of God, but also any kind of human person, is known only as we realize a *relationship* with it. And we realize a relationship through the *energies* of the person – in the case of men and women through their corporal and psychological energies: the expression of their face, their speech, gestures, creative acts, loving relationships, or their manifestations of intention, intellect, judgement, emotion, etc. And in the case of the Godhead,

we speak of a Trinity of Persons, precisely because we realize a *relationship* with each of them through their creative, providential, loving energy, active in immediate dialogue.

In the Areopagitical Corpus, as we saw above, the very essence and hypostasis of beings is understood as the result of God's willing and creative and fashioning energy. It is the 'divine acts of will' that 'determine and create things' and 'in accordance with which the Transcendent One predefined and brought into being everything that is'.¹⁵ Consequently, the *nothingness* of theological apophaticism, the foundation for the things that are *outside* of God (*outside* the only true existent), is precisely the energies of God, that is to say, the possibility that the personal divine existence has to exist, to stand-outside-itself, making active its existence and life *outside* his own existence.

The theology of the undivided Church (the possibility for our approach to the knowledge of God) is founded on the ontological differentiation of the 'essence' of God from the energies of God. The distinction goes back to, and is presupposed in, every aspect of Greek patristic literature (Gregory of Nyssa, Basil the Great, Gregory Nazianzen, Maximos the Confessor, John Damascene, Gregory Palamas) and constitutes the most striking difference between ecclesial theology and the religionized metaphysics of the Western European tradition.¹⁶ It is the divine energies that are also revealed in the Areopagitical Corpus as 'distinctions', 'processions', 'manifestations' of the divine 'essence'. Depending on their results, they are 'being-impacting', 'life-impacting', 'wisdom-impacting'.¹⁷ The energies represent the possibility for the imparticipable and incommunicable divine 'essence' to offer itself as willing personal communion, a willing that does not remain ineffective, but 'calls' and establishes beings, 'determines' them in being, and assembles them as a cosmos of harmony and wisdom.

Thus beings, as results of the divine will that is active *outside* the divine 'essence', do not have any absolute reference to the divine 'essence' itself, and for that reason knowledge of God is impossible on the basis of the 'analogy of being' (*analogia entis*). Furthermore, there is thus excluded any

kind of predetermination of the essence of beings from the pre-existing ideas or causes in the essence of God (as Augustine wanted, in this followed by the whole western theological tradition).¹⁸ Such a predetermination would interpret the created world as a defective reflection of the divine essence, according to the beliefs of Platonism, leaving matter ontologically unexplained and destroying any ontological foundation for the freedom of the creature.

Beings, as the results of the divine will and energy, are each separate and different, each 'delimited' from the divine essence, that is to say, each absolutely new, originating neither from the divine essence nor again from anything other than God. Creation is no 'emanation', 'outflow' or 'projection' from the divine essence, but an existential reality *essentially* different from God, that is yet at the same time also something genuinely realized by God's creative word, always revealing the divine personal otherness. And 'to employ familiar paradigms': a Van Gogh painting is something *essentially* distinct from Van Gogh himself (since the frame, canvas and colours are in essence different from human beings). Yet this same painting is at the same time a genuine realization of Van Gogh's creative and artistic energy. With the immediacy of such experiences, we can conceive how the essence of God is different from the essence of his creatures, while the very meaning (*logos*) of creatures bears witness to and reveals the divine personal otherness.

Thus, from this perspective, the existence of the world and of human kind only emerges from nothingness or nothing, from the void of non-existence, that is *outside* God. Created existence remains *essentially* different from the uncreated existence of God, for which reason, too, it is impossible for us to give within its own limits an exhaustive answer to the question about Being in itself, the causal principle of existence. Furthermore, from this perspective Heidegger appears to be justified, when he interprets existence only as dis-closure (ἀ-λήθεια), as non-oblivion (μη-λήθη), as emergence from nothingness (the 'other side' of ontic disclosure) into the manifestation of temporality. It

is only through the ontology of the Church that *nothingness* itself does not remain the inexplicable, un-disclosed side of Being, but constitutes the possibility of God's activity or energy *outside* God, the possibility that that is experienced in the dynamism of the *mode* of the divine personal existence, and shows God as 'also the cause of nothingness'.

Apophatic Knowledge as Personal Participation

The distinction between *essence* and *energies* is the starting-point and presupposition for the apophatic knowledge of God. We know nothing at all about *what God is* – his essence. However, God's *mode of being* is accessible to us in experience. And we can speak of the mode of existence of God, since we know the divine energies.

In the Areopagitical Corpus, the distinction between essence and energies is expressed in the differentiation between *unions* and *distinctions* in the Godhead. By means of the term *unions* we give a name to those parts of speech 'that are gathering together into one', that allow us to point to that which we do not know, the 'essence' of the Godhead. Thus, by *unions* reference is made to

the supremely individual identity beyond all that is, its oneness beyond the source of oneness, its ineffability, its many names, its unknowability, its wholly belonging to the conceptual realm, the assertion of all things, the denial of all things, that which is beyond every assertion and denial, and finally, if one may put it so, the abiding and foundation of the divine persons who are the source of oneness as a unity which is totally undifferentiated and transcendent.¹

Correspondingly, by the term *distinctions* we designate those parts of speech that allow us to approach knowledge of

'participations' and come to know the *mode* of the divine existence. Thus, with the *distinctions* reference is made to

the acts by which it [the undifferentiated unity] irrepressibly imparts being, life, wisdom and other gifts that the [supreme] things which are participated in, but which do not themselves participate [in anything higher], are praised through the participations and those who participate. Now this is unified and one and common to the whole divinity, that the entire wholeness is participated in by each of those who participate in it; none participates only in a part... Just as there are numerous impressions of the seal and these all have a share in the original prototype; it is the same whole seal in each of the impressions and none participates in only a part.²

The *mode of existence* that we know only 'by participation' – only to the extent that we participate – we call *personal*. God acts in a *personal* manner; he acts as a Person, or rather as a community of Persons, a Trinity of Persons. Our participation and communion in the energies of God acquaints us with the otherness of the three personal Hypostases. The energies are common to all three, as the energies of the unknowable and imparticipable divine 'essence', but, participated in, they reveal to the one who participates, indivisibly and as a whole, the otherness of each divine Hypostasis, and at the same time the whole Godhead, whose Hypostases are made known to us by the energies.

We characterize as *personal* this mode of existence that becomes known to us 'by participation', primarily because it corresponds to the experience we have of human personal existence. We know each human personal hypostasis only by participating in the energies that reveal its existential otherness – in speech, in thought, in imagination, in judgement, in intention, in the capacity to create, to love, to be original, etc. All these energies are common to all human beings, for which reason they make known to us what human beings *are* as a whole, that is to say, the *essence* or nature of humanity. Yet each human being expresses himself, thinks, imagines, judges, wills, creates and loves in a unique

way or mode, distinct and unparalleled. Listening to a piece of music, for example, we come to know one of the creative-poetic capacities or energies of human kind, of the human essence or nature. However, only by listening to the music of Mozart (only by *participating* in his musical creation) can we distinguish his personal expression (his otherness in act) from the music of Bach or Beethoven. We recognize the otherness of the specific human hypostasis of Mozart only by participating in his creative-poetic activity – any objective, linguistic definition is inadequate to make known to us the uniqueness of the music of Mozart in contrast with that of any other kind of music. And we come to know fully (indivisibly) its otherness only as we participate in the sound of his music.

Hence, we characterize God's mode of existence as *personal*, primarily because it corresponds to the experience we have of human personal existence: existence with self-consciousness, with rational relatedness, with ecstatic (active) otherness and freedom from any predetermination. Nevertheless, studying God's mode of being as manifest in his energies, we understand the reality of the divine personal Hypostases as a starting-point for a sound (fuller) knowledge of our own human personal existence as well: we come to understand the person as freedom, too, from ontic individualism presupposed by our usual ways of depicting what we know.

The divine energies reveal to us the *personal* existence and otherness of the living God – they make the Person of God accessible to human experience, without abolishing the inconceivable abyss of the *essential* distance that separates us from God. God is revealed through his active will as personal relationship and loving communion *outside* his existence, a will that 'imparts being' to the human person – calls into *being* human personal relatedness. The energy of the divine will 'imparts being' to the whole *world* of natural reality *outside* God, as a calling to loving relationship and erotic communion. But only the personal existence of human kind constitutes con-science and con-consciousness, that is to say, the existential and rational recapitulation and active relatedness of being a creature, the possibility of an existential response

(of affirmation or denial) to God's calling. There exists no other possibility of *relationship* (existential communion) of creatures with the Creator outside the human person. Only this establishes the *active* consequence of a personal revelation of God taking place *outside* God: the *image* of the divine Persons.

In this ontological perspective and based on it, the apophaticism of ecclesial theology is a long way from being a skilful evasion of agnosticism, a flight into abstract ideologies and emotional vagueness. Apophaticism is, for the ecclesial consciousness, an utterly consistent empiricism, an unyielding adherence to the absolute priority of experience as the way to, and possibility of, knowledge. And in the case of God it is a matter not of an experience of objective assurance, but an experience of personal *relationship*, a relationship constituted by the event of an encounter on the part of a human being's personal activity of knowing (the relatedness of rationality) with the word or *logos* of the personal otherness of the energies of God.

The experience of personal relationship, the experience of *participation* in the *active* manifestation of the otherness of the other, *may be expressed*, but *is never exhausted* in verbal formulation. And this dynamic of always *relational* declarations that refer to the primary possibility of experience, this dynamic of knowledge in the empiricism of relationship, is the apophaticism of the undivided Church, the apophaticism of the Greek East.

The West rejected the distinction between *essence* and *energies* by excluding the empiricism of *relatedness* from both its epistemology and its ontology. For this reason, it identifies apophaticism with the 'theology of negations' or with the mysticism of affective contemplation (*contemplatio*) of the 'absolute'. The West rejected Greek epistemology (ancient and patristic alike), its identification of *being true* with *participation* or *communion*, just as it rejected, too, the ontology of the Church, the distinction between *essence* and *energies*, the priority of the personal over the essence, the priority of freedom and otherness over the *essential* predetermination of the principle of existence.

With this twofold rejection – of epistemology and ontology – there is betrayed not only an error of reasoning or defective understanding, but the 'natural' human opposition to freedom or the hazard of relationship, the need of natural (individual and not personal) men and women for assured certainties that can be privately grasped as definitive concepts. And if persistence in assurances focused on the individual is a 'turn towards death' (alienation of existential relatedness that constitutes and makes up the subject),³ then we can characterize the theology that emerges from such a persistence as a theology of death, a theology of dead surrogates for life, a theology of a dead God or of the death of God.

The empiricism of *relationship* is expressed in the Areopagitical writings with the definition of *participation* in the divine energies as the exclusive way to the knowledge of God. We speak of the 'knowledge of God' in general, since the divine energies, to the extent that they reveal to us the otherness of the Hypostases, offer the possibility of a participation in knowledge of what God *is* universally. And this, because no personal hypostasis (whether divine or human) is a fragment or part of divine or human *being*; on the contrary, each person recapitulates and expresses the whole *mode of being*, complete divinity or humanity. Neither divinity nor humanity exist outside the existent *hypostases*, that is to say, outside the persons. The person *hypostasizes* being, it constitutes being as existent reality.

Thus, the divine energies call to an experience of *participation* with the *imparticipable* Godhead,⁴ and this conceptual contradiction (of participation in the *imparticipable*) constitutes a real (unique) possibility of knowledge with reference to the accessibility of the reality of God. 'For the truth is that everything divine and even everything revealed to us is known only by way of whatever participation in them is granted.'⁵ This declaration in the Areopagitical Corpus does not allow room for any other kind of attempt to approach the knowledge of God. Knowledge is experience of *participation* and participation becomes possible thanks to the divine energies. The knowledge of God through

participation is not exhausted in a simple comprehension of the truth of God, participation is an existential event, it is *union* with what is known. 'In a way surpassing speech and knowledge, we reach a union with the ineffable and unknowable superior to anything available to us by way of our own abilities or activities in the realm of discourse or of intellect.'⁶

Apophaticism refers to this union with God that is 'superior to anything available to us by way of our own abilities or activities in the realm of discourse or of intellect'. That 'superior' does not exclude the 'inferior', for which reason apophaticism does not cease to use our own abilities in the realm of discourse or intellect (to use each epistemological path and method – affirmations, denials, the way of causality, analogical parallels). It simply refuses to exhaust the superior knowledge that is made available by union with God on the inferior level of intellectual conceptions and rational formulations. The worth and usefulness of this inferior level is, precisely, that it *refers* to the superior *union*.

Moreover, even this *reference* is not enclosed in the rational formulation as a self-evident and necessary function of knowing. Very often we human beings have been content with the inferior level of rational formulations, we have accepted intellectual conceptions as real and sufficient knowledge. For the apophatic *reference* to function, we need to accept 'our own abilities in the realm of discourse and intellect', not simply as a starting-point, but also as an active response to the call, addressed to us by God, as he offers to become known in a relationship of personal communion.

The calling of God precedes – it hypostasizes the personal otherness of each one of us, our rational capacity to be related to him and come to know him. Human beings attain the possibility of knowledge of God as they heed the call that God addresses them, that is to say, as persons 'known' by God, as the other end of the *relationship* to which God calls them: 'knowing God, or rather known by God'.⁷

We could say, then, that it is a primary *theological* presupposition of apophatic knowledge, that there is a distinction between the divine essence and the divine energies making

it possible for human beings to participate in the imparticipable God. But there is also an *anthropological* premiss of apophatic knowledge: that the human person is capable of such integrity, such a possibility of relatedness, of conscience and of freedom, thanks to which human kind can accept or reject the call of God to personal relationship and communion.

This latter – the *anthropological* premiss of apophatic knowledge – distinguishes apophaticism radically and definitively from any mysticism that seeks to surpass personal self-consciousness through an ec-stasy of the ego into the boundlessness of an impersonal 'absolute'. The so-called ecstatic states of loss or dissolution of conscious self-awareness (with the aim of the delightful passivity of a sentimental drowning in the 'absolute') has nothing to do with apophaticism, because they do not constitute theological knowledge. And they do not constitute theological knowledge, because they entail the denial of God as the Person who calls and converses with us, and consequently the rejection of *relationship* as the only possibility of knowledge.⁸

Yet we speak of the 'integrity' of the human person, while what is given in experience is the reality of human *alienation*: his fall from the fullness of personal freedom and otherness into the uniformity and sameness imposed by the impersonal requirements of natural conditions. In the language of the Church, this alienation is the primordial *fall* of human kind, depicted in the Bible as the refusal of our first-formed human parents to realize life (forgetfulness of nourishment) as relationship and communion with God.⁹

In the persons of the primordial couple there is hypostasized universal human nature. For this reason their refusal to respond positively to God's call to realize life as loving communion with him, changes the *mode of existence* of universal human nature. Nature becomes autonomous; the natural functions of life become an existential end in themselves, as existence is reckoned as survival, not relationship. But the creature cannot attain on its own the existential self-sufficiency of the uncreated, for which reason, too, the autonomy of the creature ends up ineluctably in death.

Yet the rebellion of human nature does not suspend or limit the 'procession' of the divine energies, the being-imparting and 'life-giving' call of God to each human person. Human kind excludes itself from *participation* in the Godhead, from participation in the true life. The rebellion of human kind reveals the abyss of the 'natural' distance that separates it from God. The human person is altered, but not abolished; the 'granting of being' by the divine will continues through personal relationship with human kind, even if the relationship is realized as rupture and denial on the part of the men and women who receive it. And the denial is not a mental or 'ethical' recalcitrance, but an organic amputation from the *mode* of life. This amputation creates the consciousness of the *outside*, or existential 'estrangement' from any causal or life-bearing principle, the consciousness of the void or nothingness from which existence emerges.

It is with a sort of genius that Heidegger analyses the notion of estrangement (*Entfremdung*) – that consciousness of nothingness (*Nichts*)¹⁰ from which human existence emerges. And the importance for apophatic theology of both Heidegger and more generally the contemporary nihilistic philosophy of existentialism lies precisely in the analysis of the premisses of apophatic knowledge of God, that is to say, in the elucidation of the impossibility of fallen humanity coming to know God – in the courageous denial of any rationally necessary solace, of any relativism in theology, any 'metaphysics' that attempts to blunt the consciousness of the existential void of un-relatedness.

So the position of Heidegger is shown to be more 'revelatory' than any kind of rationalist theology,¹¹ as it leads to a self-awareness of nature as *fallen*, and such self-awareness is the presupposition for an approach to the event of 're-creation' of human beings 'in Christ'.

According to the criteria of the Areopagitical writings, natural knowledge – the simply conceptual certainty that is secured by objective formulations – corresponds to the rebellious self-sufficiency of fallen human kind. It presupposes individual verification, and consequently individual

doubt, for which reason it is divisive of both knowledge and nature – dividing 'coherent' knowledge into a multitude of 'notions' and nature into a variety of individual units.

In contrast, the apophatic knowledge of God is the experience of personal communion, that is to say, an attainment that recapitulates the existential possibilities of universal nature. Hence, also, the apophatic knowledge of God, as experience of personal relationship, does not divide, but brings nature and knowledge into harmony in the *hypostatic* event of divine-human (or theanthropic) communion, in which everyone participates who accomplishes a personal (living-ecstatic) self-transcendence of nature. Thus the experience of the relationship of each human person with the Person of God

gathers and unites together those receiving illumination. It perfects them. It returns them towards the truly real. It returns them from their numerous false notions and, filling them with the one unifying light, it gathers their clashing fancies into a single, pure, coherent, and true knowledge.¹²

The possibility of such a 'unifying' and 'coherent' knowledge – which unifies created nature in its personal, relational ec-stasy *outside* its creaturely limits – was restored by Christ. We call Christ the 'second Adam', precisely because in his person the whole human nature is 'recapitulated' – the organic *body* of universal nature acquires Christ as its *head*; humanity is harmonized and summed up in a new *mode of existence*, incarnate in the personal hypostasis of Christ. Furthermore, we speak of the 'second Adam', since the first Adam equally recapitulated in his person universal humanity, being himself the first and unique existential hypostasis of human nature. Hence, the first Adam's refusal to realize life as communion with God dragged down the whole of humanity to existential downfall and death. The first Adam defines the *mode of existence* of human nature, for which reason his descendants are existentially (not legally or morally) bound by the choice of the forefather; they are

born and exist in the *mode* of natural autonomy, that cannot be surpassed simply by personal freedom of will.

With the incarnation of God in the person of Christ there takes place the exact reversal of what took place in the first Adam: a human person *hypostasizes* (brings into existential reality) a new *mode of existence* for human nature; human life takes an *hypostasis* not as existential autonomy, but as existential unity of God and human kind, a union and living communion of the divine and human nature. It is now up to the freedom of each person to be attuned existentially (not legally or morally) with the *mode of existence* of the 'new' theanthropic nature of Christ.

The nature of Christ is 'new', without ceasing to be human. Its 'newness' lies in the *mode of existence*, in the 'complete communion'¹³ of the divine with the human nature – in the fact that human beings exist because they participate in the Godhead. The personal calling of God to human kind (a calling that is 'grace', a gift of the possibility of true life), but also the fullness of the human affirmation to this call, is a specific 'fleshly' historical presence, is a 'way' and mode of existence accessible to each human being, is the theandric person of the Incarnate Word, of Christ. In the words of the Areopagitical writings:

Yet the goodness of the Thearchy has endless love for humanity and never ceased from benignly pouring out on us its providential gifts. It took upon itself in a most authentic way all the characteristics of our nature, except sin. It became one with us in our lowliness, losing nothing of its own real condition, suffering no change or loss. It allowed us, as those of equal birth, to enter into communion with it.¹⁴

The incarnation of the second person of the Trinitarian Godhead restores the possibility of human *participation* in the life of God, that is also the possibility of apophatic knowledge. The dynamic character of the knowledge of God (that presupposes experiential *participation*, without being exhausted in any formulation) is ensured, but also continues to be presupposed in the Incarnation – the insertion of the

Word in history does not abolish the hiddenness, and does not reveal the transcendent essence, of the divine Being.

The hypostasis of the Word of God is disclosed in the historical person of Christ, yet there is disclosed, too, the Word that creates and providentially cares for created beings. But in both cases, the essence of the Godhead remains unknowable and 'hidden'. The created world reflects, and the theandric person of Christ reveals, not the divine essence, but what is personal to God, the *mode* of loving 'mutual coinherence' of the divine Persons. In the event of the incarnation of the Word, there is realized no 'outpouring' or 'emanation' of the divine essence, but an energy common to the Persons of the Trinity. Not that together with the Word there is incarnated in any way the Father or the Spirit. But while the distinction of the divine Hypostases is not done away and only the Hypostasis of the Word assumes human flesh, yet the will and energy of the Trinity remains common even in the Incarnation – the simplicity of God is preserved, the unity of the divine life and energy, but also the 'hiddenness' of the divine essence.

The Arcopagitical Corpus is quite emphatic on the apophatic nature of Christ's revelation:

As for the love of Christ for humanity, the Word of God, I believe, uses this term to hint that the transcendent has put aside its own hiddenness and has revealed itself to us by becoming a human being. But he is hidden even after this revelation, or, if I may speak in a more divine fashion, is hidden even amid the revelation. For this mystery of Jesus remains hidden and can be drawn out by no word or mind. What is to be said of it remains unsayable; what is to be understood of it remains unknowable.¹⁵

And elsewhere:

The most evident idea in theology, namely, the sacred incarnation of Jesus for our sakes, is something which cannot be enclosed in words or grasped by any mind, not even by the leaders among the front ranks of the angels. That he undertook to be a man is, for us, entirely

mysterious. We have no way of understanding how, in a fashion at variance with nature, he was formed from a virgin's blood. We do not understand how with dry feet and with his body's solid weight he walked on the unstable surface of the water. And we do not understand whatever else has to do with the supernatural nature of Jesus.¹⁶

These statements of an apophatic Christology protect the proclamation of the Christian revelation from the danger of assuming a demonstrative and ideological character, of losing the dynamic of experiential *participation* in the proclaimed event. Even after the Incarnation, our knowledge of God remains apophatic, and preserves the character of the personal event of *relationship*. Christ is the revelation of God, not because he makes the divine essence known to us, but because, as a historical person with his own name, he makes possible the immediacy of our relationship with him. This does not mean that we should refuse to profess and demonstrate with the objectivity of reasoned discourse the experience of ecclesial *participation* in the divine revelation – for which reason the historicity of the person of Christ can be ensured by the apologetics of the Church. But Jesus, as the incarnate Word of God, can only be known in the experience of participation in the living communion with him that is found in the Church.

Neither by the objectivity of rational discourse nor by the structures of conceptual categories ('neither by reason nor by intellect') is it possible to interpret the logically contradictory fact of the Incarnation of God, or to subject the Word's becoming human to precise definitions. If the very otherness of the human subject, immediately accessible to the experience of the senses, cannot be defined in objective logical categories, how much more the existential otherness of the theandric person of Christ.

Even if it came to pass objectively in historical time, the revelation of God is offered for knowledge only as an event of personal *relationship*. The human person is called to acquire this knowledge that is offered by means of his readiness for relationship, the 'suitability to receive light', as is strikingly suggested by the Areopagitical writings:

The goodness of the transcendent God ... gives light to everything capable of receiving it ... The great, shining, ever-lighting sun is the apparent image of the divine goodness, a distant echo of the Good. It illuminates everything capable of receiving its light ... and if anything fails to receive it the fault lies not in the weakness or defect of the spreading light but in the unsuitability of whatever is unable to have a share in light.¹⁷

In the tradition expressed in the Areopagitical writings, the way to the knowledge of God is identical with the work of the 'salvation' of human kind 'in Christ': by assuming human nature the Word of God 'refashioned' it, that is to say, he restored the 'suitability for receiving light'. For this reason, too, apophatic knowledge, as the event of *participation* in the 'light' of the fullness of life, is equivalent to participation in the body of the Church that is the historical realization of the *mode of existence* of Christ, of the *mode* of the new human nature.

Within the Church the individual becomes personal existence, that is to say, it realizes existence and life as the immediacy of loving communion. According to the measure of its realization, the Church is the *image* of God, the revelation of the *mode* of the divine existence and life, of the loving mutual coinherence of the divine Persons in the community of the one essence. In other words: the Church constitutes the source of *knowledge* not as teaching and proclamation *about* salvation, but primarily as the *event* of salvation, the event of participation in the life that knows not death. The knowledge of God is a reality of the restoration and reformation of the 'primordial beauty', of the reflection of the Godhead in humanity, and more than this: the unity of the life of the Godhead and of humanity.

So, participation in the Church – participation in the theanthropic unity of life, instituted by the new nature of the incarnate Logos – yields a knowledge, catholic and coherent, not subjective and divisive. The boundaries of this coherent catholicity are identical with the boundaries of the event of the Church, and find their expression and

formulation in the 'sayings', λόγια, as Dionysios calls them, that is to say, in the Scriptures: in what God has said and done, in what the witnesses of these words and deeds have written down. 'In the protection of the sayings',¹⁸ the unifying catholicity of the experience of the Church is guarded and distinguished from subjective-divisive formulations and interpretations.

Why then do these 'sayings' ensure the unifying universality of theological knowledge? Precisely because they are a word of the *Church*, a word of communion of persons that participate in the very experience of life, a word that establishes and 'initiates' in that same experience. The Scriptures of the Church are not texts that are self-contained like demonstrative philosophical texts. They presuppose the personal 'introduction' to their understanding, the personal relationship with those 'parents' who share with us knowledge as participation in the new life, freedom from death. For this reason, too, the approach to understanding of the 'sayings' is equated by the Areopagite with the liturgical event of the eucharist, the event that makes up and manifests the Church. And yet each particular eucharistic gathering is the realization and manifestation of the *Catholic Church* – of the catholic or universal event of salvation – and so the knowledge that is afforded by the 'sayings' is inseparable from the eucharistic event, inseparable from participation in the life of Christ, from communion in his body and blood: 'The most divine, peaceful, and common participation of the one and the same bread and chalice imposes on them a common, divine mode (ὁμοτροπία) as well as common nourishment.'¹⁹

The ecclesial knowledge of God is a *common mode* of life – the knowledge is the act and event of participation in a new *mode* of existence. It is not ideological co-ordination, or moral conformity, but an existential transformation, that is effected by the grace of the Spirit of God within the unrestricted limits of the free, liturgical consent of men and women. 'If one considers these [liturgical] texts with a reverent eye – says Dionysius – one will see something that both brings about unity and manifests a single empathy, of

which the source is the Thearchic spirit.'²⁰ The Church is the objective possibility of the apophatic knowledge of God, and the apophatic knowledge of God is the experience of the life of the eucharistic body, of the life effected by the life-giving Spirit of God, the same Spirit who 'brooded over the face of the waters' on the first day of creation, the author then of physical life, and always the provider of true life.

Apophatic Knowledge as Erotic Communion

Apophatic knowledge, as the experience of personal participation in the ecclesial *mode of existence*, is characterized in the Areopagitical writings in terms of an *erotic* affair, as the achievement and gift of an erotic relationship.

Words such as *eros* or *erotic* must have provoked reserve, or even scandal, among the Christians of the period when the Areopagitical Corpus was written – just as they do even today. For this reason the writer of the Areopagitical works devotes a whole series of paragraphs in the fourth chapter of the *Divine Names*, not simply to ‘legitimizing’ erotic terminology, but to demonstrating the fundamental service performed by erotic terminology in the life of the Church.

First of all, knowledge of God is not learning, it is a passion, in the literal sense of something suffered: ‘not only learning, but also suffering the divine things.’¹ Time and again, however, the name of love (*ἀγάπη*), this ‘divine’ name, turns out to be inadequate to define the event of self-transcendence and personal communion, the ‘passion’ of personal relationship, that is the starting-point for apophatic knowledge. For love is often charged with a ‘minimal’ conceptual content, reduced to the narrow confines of a social virtue, or equated with altruism, benevolence and natural affection – that is to say, with particular patterns of behaviour that preserve and support the egocentric

self-sufficiency of the subject. Hence in the Dionysian Corpus the name of eros (ἔρως) is preferred as 'more divine':

Indeed some of our writers on sacred matters have thought the word 'yearning' (ἔρως) to be more divine than 'love' (ἀγάπη). The divine Ignatios writes: 'my love (ἔρως) is crucified'. In the introductory scriptures you will note the following said about the divine wisdom: 'I became a lover (ἐραστής) of her beauty'. So let us not fear this term 'yearning' nor be upset by what anyone has to say about these two names.²

The anticipation of fear – of misgiving or reserve – about the application of erotic experience to the event of our *relationship* with God is due to a popular 'preconception'³ or prejudice about erotic love, taking it only as subordinate to the rebellious autonomy of natural demand, only as the yearning of egocentric pleasure. But it is not possible that we should equate the 'empty image' or the 'lapse' from *eros* with true *eros*, even if 'the crowd' persist in a one-sided understanding of the erotic event.

The word 'true *eros*' is praised by us and by the scriptures themselves as being appropriate to God. The crowd, however, not able to understand the unifying form of the *eros* as a divine name, tended to think of a partial, physical, and divided *eros*. This is not true *eros* but an empty image or, rather, a lapse from true *eros*.⁴

The specific difference of real *eros* from the corrupted popular conception of *eros* lies in its unifying character, the 'unifying form' of 'true *eros*'. If *eros* constitutes a *divine name*, that is to say, a name that may be given to God, it is precisely because it reveals the 'unifying form' of the divine Trinitarian existence, the loving mutual coinherence of the Persons of the Trinity. The 'sayings' assure us not only that God has love, but that 'God is love':⁵ not that God first of all exists and then in addition his existence is characterized as love, but that God *is* love – the *mode* with which God *is* love. In our human, relative language we say that each divine personal existence has no 'peculiar being', but realizes its

being as an unconditional loving, existential self-offering to the other divine Persons. God exists in love, and because he loves; existence and love, love and freedom are identical in the case of divine Persons. And this ecstatic, existential self-offering is the 'name of God', *eros*, unifying the existence and the life of the Trinitarian God.⁶

There is a 'faint echo' of the divine Trinitarian 'mutual coinherence' in each selfless human act of love in which 'lovers belong not to themselves, but to the beloved'.⁷ Human beings correspond to their creation 'in the image of God' to the extent that they realize their existence as erotic self-transcendence in the *personal* mode of existence. For the person is a category that is primarily erotic, and *eros* is a primarily personal category. And since human nature exists only as the realization of personal hypostases, when persons prove true in their reciprocal erotic self-offering, then their existential 'mutual coinherence' is realized and makes manifest the universal 'unifying form' of nature, the unifying universality of nature.

By contrast, the popular conception of *eros* is the alienation of *eros* (alienation of life, of the mode of existence) as a result of the *fall*. It is a 'fall' of, or lapse from, 'true *eros*', that 'separates', 'divides,' and 'fragments' nature, because it serves the existential self-sufficiency of individual entities, each individual desire for pleasure. Pleasure is the impersonal self-satisfaction of nature, the ephemeral satisfaction of its existential self-sufficiency, that is imposed on the individual as a necessity, as the instinctual drive for the multiplication of nature. Nature, thus multiplied, exists in itself, as an aggregation of mortal individualities, drawing on the dynamic of its own resources, and not on the personal, ec-stasy beyond the existential possibilities of the creature.

With this conception, *eros* becomes 'carnal' after the fall: it does not recapitulate nature in a personal ec-stasy from nature, but is subjected to the perceptible, individual (bodily) independence and existential self-sufficiency of nature, to what we call 'biological necessity', that is to say, to the urge for the self-preservation and physical perpetuation of nature.

Yet, even this 'carnal' *eros* seems to preserve after the fall a clear reflection of the personal mode of existence. For it does not cease to be an urge and drive towards union with the other. Even as a raw egocentric desire for pleasure, it is at the same time an active drive for relationship that remains fruitless, yet without losing the dynamic of reference (to another). The aim of desire is a bodily co-ordination with the other in the service of the creation of life (the othernesses of personal hypostases) and this service can never be individual, but only a physical inter-course that preserves something of the unifying universality of unfallen nature and of true life.

At the same time, *eros* reveals, even in its 'carnal' form, a reflection, too, of the universal *mode* of the divine energy in the world: of the creative and loving energy that constitutes matter, life and personal otherness, but also of the providential energy that holds and harmonizes together everything that exists in a unifying impetus of dynamic togetherness. For

when we talk of *eros*, whether this be in God or an angel, in the mind or in the spirit or in nature, we should think of a unifying and co-mingling power which moves the higher to provide for the weaker, peer to be in communal togetherness with peer, and the last to return to the best and transcendent.⁸

This unifying power of *eros*, in contrast to the impetus of existential self-sufficiency after the fall, is the dynamic of a life that has not declined after the fall, but continues to preserve the image of the Trinitarian prototype of life within the limits of the creature. It is the same impetus that sustains both biological life, and the possibility of human reference to God. Dionysius cites the passage from the Old Testament: 'your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women',⁹ in order to indicate precisely the identity of erotic desire: it is the same loving power and unifying impetus that inspires both human love and love for God.¹⁰ The longing for a person of the opposite sex, so long as it is not a possessive mania, is a longing for the fullness of life

– because this fullness is the promise and in itself the aim of reciprocated erotic desire.

The thirst for life is implanted in our very nature, in each tiny fold of our existence, and is an unquenchable thirst for *relationship*, that is to say for the reciprocity of self-abandonment and self-offering. And if experience assures us that any human love finally leads to the breakdown of access to the fullness of life, it is precisely because our fallen nature cannot share life, cannot exist in the mode of relationship. Yet, for this reason too, any human love, even in its breakdown, ultimately refers to its only perfect end, which is love for the Person of God, participation in the fullness of his life – the true life.

Now, this reference to the divine love does not cease to be more or less apparent in all forms of erotic desire, in each human failure to love in the way our whole existence desires – even in the final collapse and breakdown of love. In the Areopagitical writings, we come across an astonishing passage that dares to detect a 'faint echo of goodness' even in a licentious life, even in the tragic affairs of irrational erotic greed.

One who lives licentiously is deprived of the Good in direct proportion to his irrational urges. To this extent he is lacking in being and his desire is for what has no real existence. Nevertheless he has some share in the Good, since there is in him a faint echo of real love and real unity ... Even the person who desires the lowest form of life still desires life and a life that seems good to him; thus he participates in the Good ...¹¹

Licentiousness is irrational desire, desire that denies or evades reason, that is to say, relationship – desire as a purely egocentric demand. But no expression of life can be exhausted in any limited structure, for which reason, too, irrational desire, even in evading relationship, cannot lose the character of desire, does not cease, that is, to have a relatedness, to preserve some kind of faint echo of the impetus towards *union* with another, towards *friendship* (the inclination towards and longing for union).

The criterion for participation in the Good, that is to say, in life, is the impetus towards union and friendship. And that impetus is preserved in any desire for life, even the worst life, precisely because *desire* always involves reference, and therefore preserves, more or less, the dynamic of personal ec-stasy out of the existential self-sufficiency of nature. Desire is longing and thirst for fullness, and consequently a recognition of insufficiency that cannot be satisfied save by someone or some 'other', outside one's individuality – and towards this fullness, even if it is unattainable, desire 'impels' and urges us.

If we accept this account, then we must conclude that the opposite pole to life – the pole of death – is only the existential self-sufficiency of natural individuality, and only this excludes us from life. Our experience teaches us, however, that it is very difficult, if not impossible, that such a self-sufficiency should characterize the biological functions of individuality, while a false feeling of self-sufficiency all too often accompanies the moral and religious consciousness of the human individual. If then desire is *eros* for life and the way to life, the false feeling of individual self-sufficiency, that is to say, a loveless life, is the way of death – even if the life that is loveless has its origin in a moral or religious individual 'fullness'.

Turning back now to apophatic knowledge, we can understand more fully the insistence of the Areopagitical writings on its *erotic* character: knowledge is experience of relationship – the account of the experience of knowledge serves as a 'sign' and a 'call' to relationship: it points to knowledge as relationship and calls for its realization. This realization has the dynamic of personal attainment; it presupposes ec-stasy and freedom from any objective, natural predetermination, the predetermination of individualism – it is an event of self-transcendence and self-offering, always unique, different and unrepeatable. And the impetus towards ec-static self-transcendence and self-offering, the relationship *par excellence*, is love or *eros*.

Hence, the apophatic knowledge of God, as described in the Areopagitical Corpus and the entire tradition of

the Greek Church, is an 'erotic naming of God', the attribution to God of names, symbols, and designations, as these emerge from the human personal, erotic relationship with him. And it is precisely as *personal* experience, that the erotic knowledge of ecclesial apophaticism is radically distinguished from the Platonic conception of knowledge as *eros*. In Platonic teaching, cognitive experience has some kind of dynamic for erotic participation in what is known, but the dynamic of participation is always reduced to the universality of the 'idea'. The final knowledge, to which the active climbing through the 'erotic ascents' leads, is participation in the impersonal good,¹² which renders *eros* devoid of personal reciprocity.

By contrast, in the tradition of the Church expressed in the Areopagitical Corpus, personal reciprocity makes human love for God into immediate experience of a *relationship* of knowledge – it preserves the 'realism' of the experience of knowledge as an event of *relationship*, and prevents personal erotic ec-stasy from being hemmed in within the limits of any (mystical) capacities of created nature. For the first movement towards this erotic relationship and communion does not come from the human side, but from God. The consummating *eros* of the Trinitarian mutual coinherence of the divine Persons 'did not allow it to remain without issue. It stirred him to use the abundance of his powers in the production of the world'.¹³ Love itself, then, does not simply *call* the human person to a relationship of erotic response, but is also the causal principle of the human person: it establishes and constitutes (hypostasizes) human personal relatedness as a unique existential possibility of an erotic reference that returns the creature to his Creator. 'For *eros* that works for the good moves the divine to providence, to our maintenance,' writes Maximos the Confessor commenting on the Areopagite.¹⁴

The unique identity of Christian revelation – and also of the apophatic theology of the Areopagite – is this experience of God as the 'mad lover' of the whole creation and of each human person. God, not as the abstract idea of the highest Good, not as the concept of the 'first cause' of

existent beings, nor as the intimidating image of implacable justice, but God as Person in a 'transport of erotic goodness' is the 'good news', the gospel, of the Church, the message of its experience.

The very cause of the universe in the beautiful, good superabundance of his benign *eros* for all is carried outside of himself, ... beguiled, as it were, by goodness, by love, and by *eros* and is enticed away from his transcendence of all things and beyond all things and comes to abide within all things, and he does so by virtue of his supernatural and ecstatic capacity to remain, nevertheless, within himself. That is why those possessed of spiritual insight describe him as 'zealous' because his good *eros* for all things is so great and because he stirs in human kind a deep yearning desire for zeal. In this way he proves himself to be zealous because zeal is always felt for what is desired and because he is zealous for the creatures for whom he provides.¹⁵

The experience that confirms God's loving ec-stasy towards nature will remain no more than a bewitching lyricism, if we reject the ontological distinction between the divine essence and the divine energies – the distinction that establishes and makes clear as an existential event the erotic relationship of human kind to God, and thus constitutes the experiential premiss of apophatic knowledge.

Unknowable and unapproachable in his essence, God ('from his transcendence of all things and beyond all things') is revealed as a personal energy of erotic longing for each of his creatures ('comes to abide within all things'), as an active 'extravagance' of erotic goodness and as a zealot for an exclusive personal relationship. God becomes 'outside himself', not only in the event of the Incarnation, but also his own *mode* of ec-static existence and activity ('by virtue of his supernatural and ecstatic capacity to remain within himself') – as an active capacity for personal relationship and communion.

Apophatic knowledge of God, as erotic naming of God, refers to the precisely *ec-static*¹⁶ existence of God, to the

erotic will of the Godhead, unapproachable and imparticipable in his essence, to be offered as an active call to personal relationship, to become approachable and participable according to the *mode* of his existence and his life. And human existence is an *image* and manifestation of God, since it is also this ec-static existence, endowed with the active relatedness of erotic self-transcendence and self-offering.

The ec-static character of human personhood is revealed in the erotic event of individual self-transcendence and self-offering, yet especially ec-static for human kind is divine *eros*, *eros* for the Person of God:

this divine *eros* brings ecstasy so that the lover belongs not to the self but to the beloved ... This is why the great Paul, swept along by his *eros* for God and seized of its ecstatic power, had this inspired word to say: 'It is no longer I who live; but Christ who lives in me'. Paul was truly a lover and, as he says, he was beside himself for God, possessing not his own life but the life of the One for whom he yearned, as exceptionally beloved.¹⁷

Divine *eros*, humanity's positive response to the erotic self-offering of God, is the erotic event *par excellence*, because it transposes life from the existential self-sufficiency of individuality to the dynamic of relationship, not, to be sure, within the limits of created and mortal nature, but outside nature. The divine *eros* leads the created nature into a personal ec-stasy *out of* the limits of the existential self-sufficiency of nature – it refers the possibility of existence to the freedom of its *relationship* with God and not to the necessities imposed by the autonomy of nature.

But the denial of an erotic relationship with God is equally a *personal* existential event, an active reference of the freedom of the person, that yet refers its existence, not to a relationship to the Person of God, but to a non-relationship, to the reality of the void or of the natural distance between God and human kind – *outside* the mode of life. One could declare with Heidegger that human existence, whatever its alienation, remains in some way *ecstatic*.¹⁸ Yet if personal

ecstasy remains without any reference to an answering Person (apart from any 'sign' emerging in the 'place' of the Other, so that *ecstasy* may constitute desire and desire relationship), it ends up being an experience of the existential void, an experience of the absurdity of existence.

The fulfillment of God's ec-static, erotic movement to human kind is the Incarnation of the Word, in which the whole Trinitarian Godhead

in one of its persons accepted a true share of what it is we are, and thereby issued a call to the lowly estate of human kind to rise up to it. In a fashion beyond words, the simplicity of Jesus became something complex, the timeless took on the duration of the temporal, and, with neither change nor confusion of what constitutes him, he came into our human nature, he who totally transcends the natural order of the world.¹⁹

And the result of this consummating movement of God to human kind is the possibility of a consummating human response to the divine erotic ec-stasy, its existential attunement to the *mode* of the incarnate divine *eros* for our created nature – the mode of the divine life. The experience of the Church speaks in this case of the deification (θέωσις) of human kind: men and women exist in the mode of God, they exist as God 'without identity of essence'.

The Areopagitical writings define the event of deification as also the fullness of apophatic knowledge, the fullness of truth and understanding:

deification consists of being as much as possible like and in union with God... It consists of a knowledge of beings as they really are. It consists of both the seeing and the understanding of sacred truth. It consists of an inspired participation in the one-like perfection and in the one itself, as far as possible.²⁰

In these texts of the fifth (or sixth) century we have a definitive account of the Church's experiential certainty that knowledge of God is identical with the event of *salvation* – with the attainment on the part of human kind of being

safe, whole, without the deficiencies of corruption, death or unfulfilled desire. And this knowledge of God is as much apophatic (intractable to objective statements) as is every true erotic union and assimilation, and every immediate apprehension of longed-for beauty.

The apophatic knowledge of divine truths cannot be expressed in the conceptual categories of objective definitions, but only in the indication of erotic desire. What philosophy calls the highest good, the *summum bonum*, is, for the Church, participated beauty:

We call 'beautiful' that which has a share in beauty, and we give the name of 'beauty' to that ingredient which is the cause of beauty in everything. But the 'beautiful' which is beyond being is called 'beauty' because of that beauty bestowed by it on all things, each in accordance with what it is. It is given this name because it is the cause of the harmony and splendour in everything... Beauty 'calls' all things to itself (whence it is called beauty)²¹ and gathers everything into itself.²²

If the Areopagite subjects the category of the noble or the good to beauty, it is because he does not recognize values, independent of experience, accessible only conceptually. Beauty is an experiential category because of its character as 'calling' – as the 'invitation' (κάλεισμα) of erotic desire, of the longing for personal relationship, communion and union. Conceptual judgements of value (whether metaphysical or moral) – 'empty appearances of the beautiful and the right'²³ – are contradistinguished from the 'truly real' that the faithful 'love' – those living realities that call us to union with them and assimilation.

The whole ecclesial life of the Greek East is articulated around this axis and aim of apophatic and erotic knowledge of God. Iconography and hymnology make accessible to the senses this theology of beauty, with the art of referential transition 'to the archetype'²⁴ of personal immediacy with what is celebrated in icons or hymns. Monasticism is revealed as the greatest exercise in erotic self-denial, and asceticism as the way *par excellence* to theological knowledge, that is to

say, participation in 'beauty of the master's person'. The end or aim of asceticism and of any theology is 'the presence of the light of the mind', as Dionysios put it, 'in a single, pure, coherent, and true knowledge'.²⁵ The experiential participation in the uncreated light of the knowledge of God will be later celebrated in the Palamite literature as the unique difference between the experience of the Church and any other epistemological alternatives.

An icon and foreshadowing of personal, erotic participation in knowledge is 'the sacred knowledge characteristic of transcendent beings', whose 'divine *eros* never fails'. The expression and communication of this knowledge – free from any kind of analogical correlation – is only doxological and liturgical.

They cry out and are never silent because, it seems to me, they know and understand divine truth always and unchangeably, and they do so with all earnestness and thanksgiving.²⁶

This eucharistic and doxological theology will remain for the ecclesial consciousness of the Greek East the measure and model for the experiential knowledge of those who are 'not only learning, but also suffering the divine things'.

Translator's Afterword

If anything, the majority of western theologians (including those of an unrepentant realist persuasion) have certainly felt more at home in the present postmodern milieu. Theology seems to have currently gained a new and unprecedented relevance among its various secular sister-disciplines, one strongly reminiscent of the golden days of Continental 'dialectical theology', which stood proudly – if only briefly – on its feet as the true measure of the world. Alas, the world was soon to take decisive revenge on this arrogant, unenlightened, and subjective discourse; the successful wedding of traditional empiricism with modern developments in logic and linguistic philosophy brought the Christian *kerygma* to its knees, pronouncing upon it the ancient charge of foolishness. Religious propositions are literally *nonsensical*, resistant to algorithmic verification, products of emotive thinking and the fruit of pious wishful thinking.

The dominant scientific picture was equally discouraging, until the self-righteous edifice of positivism drew fire on itself from the most disparate quarters. Beginning with Thomas Kuhn, Imre Lakatos and Paul Feyerabend in epistemology, the assault on scientism and essentialism moved on to suggestions of more extreme radicality, by the extension of literary criticism and the liberties thereof to an all-encompassing hermeneutic that undercuts all logical

and scientific normativity. This diverse critique of realism in epistemology featured essentially the rejection of Russellian correspondence theory of language and its cousin positivistic demarcation of propositions into *analytic* and *synthetic* (the crowning achievement of the Vienna Circle, whose origins can be traced back to Kant and his debate with Leibniz). This landmark rejection, already powerfully put into effect by Wittgenstein and Quine, was rendered absolute (in ways that would be awfully at odds with the milder holism of these two) by the French theorists Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. Among others, these theorists gave language a totalizing predominance over 'reality', thereby turning everything into a polyphonic text. The rationale behind this seemingly impossible, but nonetheless trendy, move concerns the liberation of the voice of the 'other' and the concomitant legitimacy of hitherto marginalized discourses, including that of madness.

How is this all related to theology? Die-hard Lutherans and Barthians were quick to notice the proximity of Protestant orthodoxy's assumption of an 'infinite qualitative distance' between God and creation and the cathartic near-frenzy for otherness promulgated by the sages of postmodernism (see, for example, Graham Ward's *Barth, Derrida, and the Language of Theology*, but also the Roman Catholic Jean-Luc Marion's 'postmodern' critique of scholasticism in his *God Without Being*). But more crucial is the twofold convergence in the sphere of language. It should always be kept in mind that postmodernism is basically a *linguistic* revolution, since after all it is the justification of free-play textuality versus the long-term dominance of monophonic spoken word, which salvages the voice of otherness. To give room to everyone, our statements ought to be *apophatic* in nature, namely, to resist all enclosure in fixed meanings, just as traditional negative theology had chosen to speak about God in negative terms, out of respect to his inexhaustible mystery.

To the extent that Christos Yannaras' work uncovers the rich epistemic and existential promises of apophaticism, it may rightfully be classified among the list of postmodern manifestos. And yet, how damagingly misleading this label

would be to Yannaras' book is made evident once we take into account that his embarrassingly *realist* thesis is grounded not in language or textuality, but in the empirical Palamite doctrine of the *essence-energies* distinction. One is in peril of missing the book's entire point by neglecting the definition of apophaticism with which the author operates: apophaticism is herein designated as the assumption that 'the truth is never exhausted in its formulation'. Such an underplay of linguistic isomorphism with the world is, of course, at the heart of current theories of textuality. Where Yannaras parts ways with postmodernism is in his repudiation of isomorphism for the sake of *reality*, not language. Our true measure is God (and by extension the material manifestation of his energies, i.e., the creation, which must be kept equally as inexhaustible as its maker), not an infinite linguistic play; it is *divine* otherness, moreover, that lends support (a true ontology, as Yannaras says) to the otherness possessed by us all. But then language (especially written language) is once more consigned to a secondary role as a mere instrument of communicating our *personal* and *empirical* experiences of the divine and the ordinary.

The importance of this underplay of language cannot be overestimated, since, as Yannaras insists, our empirical partaking of the other (be that God or anyone else among us) should not be allowed to suffer a substitution with any idealistic artefacts, be they concepts, ideologies, or other constructs of the mind. The book is ultimately a critique of *idealism* (religious, philosophical, linguistic, etc); and Yannaras would doubtlessly deem postmodern reductions of reality to textuality a radical version of linguistic idealism, fascinating perhaps but pernicious for the purposes of theology. For as pseudo-Dionysius (and the entire Eastern Patristic tradition, culminating in St Gregory Palamas) postulates, theology strives to witness to human kind's actual and concrete experience and union with God. Derrida would probably see in all this the resurgence of an obsolete 'metaphysics of presence', though I think the critique would be unfair. For as Yannaras argues, eastern apophaticism challenges the very precursor of western positivism, i.e., the

Latin *ratio* which survived the subsequent thrust of Occam's nominalism. French and American deconstruction, on the other hand, may share stronger bonds with the positivism of '*via moderna*' than they would care to admit, bringing as they are modernity's nominalist reduction of signifieds to their signifiers to its logical conclusion by discrediting signifieds of all ontological content. Hence the frequent designation of deconstruction as 'post-structuralism', which is meant to draw attention to the movement's organic continuity with its structuralist matrix. And that is, finally, why Martin Heidegger seems to our author a healthier, at any rate a more appropriate deconstructor of European metaphysics, respectful as his thought is to the materiality and concreteness of the human condition.

The book was translated in the belief that the eastern *essence-energies* distinction deserves a special and renewed attention by theologians, especially in the West, where it has never quite found a niche. The polarizing split between economy and theology and the ensuing on-going contention of privileging God *in se* over God *ad extra* (and vice-versa) as the proper basis for theological claims, may find a peaceful resolution in the empirical relatedness of Palamas' model, which summarizes in its entirety the Greek patristic priority of living experience over reason. Indeed, the key eastern Orthodox confidence in *theosis* is protective of divine otherness and transcendence while concurrently being unwaveringly insistent on his real immanence in the world and the possibility of the Christian's union with him. It may, after all, be what the grandiose (and presently out of vogue) Barthian system needs for balance. For in the last analysis it is not the existence of God as such which interests us, but the degree to which the divine touches the world and the accomplished transformation thereof.

Notes

Introduction (pages 1-14)

1 Malcolm Bradshaw, in *Eastern Churches Review* 5 (1973), p. 205.

2 On the contrast between the 'Romaic', who sees his identity as a 'Roman', i.e. a successor of the Orthodox Byzantine Empire (which thought of itself as the Roman Empire), and the 'Hellene', who sees his identity in terms of the Classical 'Hellenic' past, see Patrick Leigh Fermor, *Roumeli. Travels in Northern Greece* (London, 1966), pp. 106-15, though the contrast is less pronounced now than it was when Fermor was writing.

3 For an account of Neo-Orthodoxy and Yannaras' part in it, see Vassilios N. Makrides, 'Byzantium in contemporary Greece: the Neo-Orthodox current of ideas', in *Byzantium and Modern Greek Identity*, (eds.) David Ricks and Paul Magdalino (Aldershot, 1998), pp. 141-53, especially pp. 146-9.

4 His paper, 'Orthodoxy and the West', published in English in *Eastern Churches Review* 3 (1971), pp. 286-300, which rehearses several of the themes found in *On the Absence and Unknowability of God*, caused a good deal of controversy in the pages of that (now, alas, defunct) journal: see Fr Robert Murray's initial response on pp. 306ff. of that issue, Sir John Lawrence's letter in *ECR* 3 (1971), p. 491, and the articles by Gerald Bonner and (then) Archimandrite Kallistos Ware in *ECR* 5 (1973), pp. 1-15 ('Christianity and the Modern World-View'), and 16-27 ('Scholasticism and Orthodoxy: Theological Method as a Factor in the Schism').

5 Both, of course, inspired by Martin Luther.

6 G. Florovsky, *Puti Russkoga Bogosloviya* (Paris, 1937; 2nd edn., 1981); English Translation: vol. 1, Belmont MA, 1979; vol. 2, Vaduz, 1987 (vols. 5 and 6 of the Collected Works of Fr Georges Florovsky).

7 See Martin Heidegger, *Holzwege* (Frankfurt: Klostermann-Verl., 1963), pp. 202ff., 235.

8 See Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalité et Infini. Essai sur l'extériorité* (The Hague, 1980, first published 1961), especially the section 'Le Visage et l'extériorité' (pp. 161–225) and the analysis of love and *eros* in 'Au delà du Visage' (pp. 229–61), and also *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (The Hague, 1978), where Levinas' criticism of traditional ontology in favour of a recognition of otherness (*altérité*) has some striking parallels with Yannaras' analysis.

9 On this see further Yannaras' article, 'The Distinction between the Essence and Energies and its Importance for Theology', in *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 19 (1975), pp. 232–45.

10 Published in English translation by Ignatius Press, San Francisco as *The Glory of the Lord, Theo-drama*, and (yet to appear) *Theo-logic*. A good outline of Balthasar's programme can be found in his *Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe* (translated as: *Love Alone: the Way of Revelation*).

11 On analogy in western theology, and especially in Barth, see Alan Torrance, *Persons in Communion*, a work that espouses a personalist existentialism not unlike Yannaras', though without, apparently, any consciousness of Yannaras' work.

12 See Josef Pieper, *The Silence of St Thomas* (London, 1957); and, more recently, Herbert McCabe, 'Aquinas on the Trinity', in *Silence and the Word. Negative Theology and the Incarnation*, (eds.) Oliver Davies and Denys Turner (Cambridge, 2002), a symposium on 'apophatic theology' that betrays no awareness of the contribution of Yannaras (McCabe's article is also found in his *God Still Matters*, (ed.) Brian Davies, London, 2002).

13 See, e.g., the reference to Karl Barth in R. C. Walls, 'St Gregory Palamas', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 21 (1968), pp. 435–48, at p. 446.

14 Translated as 'How to avoid speaking: denials', in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, (eds.) Harold Coward and Toby Foshay (Albany NY, 1992), pp. 73–142.

Chapter I: The Metaphysical Denial of God's Divinity (pages 21–37)

1 Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche* (Pfullingen: Neske-Verl., 1961), vol. II: Der europäische Nihilismus, pp. 31–256; idem, *Holzwege* (Frankfurt: Klostermann-Verl., 1963), pp. 193–247 ('Nietzsches Wort „Gott ist tot“').

2 Nihilism: from the Latin *nihil*, nothing. In philosophical terminology it denotes a theory that denies ultimate existence to reality, and hence also any real knowledge or moral values. The historical origins of this position are traced by western scholars to the sophist

Gorgias (Περὶ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος ἢ περὶ φύσεως, 1.2.3, Diels-Kranz, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, II, p. 279). The term *nihilismus* was first used by F.H. Jacobi (*Sendschreiben an Fichte*, 1799), while its broader, popular use was established by Turgenev in his novel *Fathers and Sons* (1862). In the field of philosophy, however, nihilism is associated mainly with Nietzsche. In his book *Der Wille zur Macht – Versuch einer Umwertung aller Werte* (*The Will to Power*, 1887), Nietzsche explains nihilism as the inevitable outcome of the conventional rationalist theory of values, found in western metaphysics: 'what does nihilism mean? That all lofty ideas have gone bankrupt. What is missing is purpose, the response to *what for*.'

3 Cf. P. Kondylis' exceptionally enlightening treatise, 'Ἡ κριτικὴ τῆς μεταφυσικῆς στὴ νεότερη σκέψις' (*The Critique of Metaphysics in Modern Thought*), Athens: Ekdoseis Gnosi, 1983.

4 *Apophaticism*, from the Greek verb ἀπόφασκω: to negate, to deny, its opposite being καταφάσκω: to affirm, to say yes. 'The negation (ἀπόφασις) of being white is not being white' (Aristotle, *Prior Analytics* I. 46, 51b9); 'Affirmation means to say what belongs to something, as, for example, he is noble, negation to say what does not belong to something, for example, he is not noble' (John Damascene, *Dialectica* 41 (58), (ed.) B. Kotter, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1969, p. 125). As an epistemological category used philosophically, ἀπόφασις (negation) means the denial, on the one hand, of the existent in general or, on the other hand, the privation of an existing entity of its properties. Hence, Aristotle draws a distinction between *apophatic* and *privative* negations (cf. *Metaphysics* Γ 1004a 10–16) in order to indicate the possible designation of a being or nature, independently of its subordination to different genera. It is in the latter sense, i.e., of the privative negation, that *apophaticism* has been used as an epistemological standpoint or procedure in philosophy. In the case of the Greek philosophical tradition, from Herakleitos up to Gregory Palamas, we may characterize apophaticism as the denial that we can exhaust truth in any formulation, the recourse, in other words, to the symbolic-iconological manner of expressing the truth, as well as the adoption of the dynamics of *relatedness* (in the sense of Herakleitean κοινωνεῖν, i.e., 'being in communion') as the criterion for the verification of knowledge. For a more systematic and detailed analysis of the topic, see my books: *Ὁρθὸς λόγος καὶ κοινωνικὴ πρακτικὴ* (*Right Reason and Social Practice*), Athens: Domos, 1984, pp. 181 ff.; *Σχεδιάγραμμα Εἰσαγωγῆς στὴ Φιλοσοφία* (*Outline for an Introduction to Philosophy*), Athens: Domos, 1980/81, §§10–18, 27, 30.

5 Cf. *Nietzsche* I, p. 13; *Holzwege*, p. 206.

6 Concerning the distortion of Aristotelian epistemology by scholasticism, see my article, «Ὁ ἀποφατικὸς Ἀριστοτέλης» ('The Apophatic Aristotle'), in the Greek journal *Diabazo*, no. 135

(15.1.1986), p. 14, as well as my books: *Right Reason*, pp. 205 ff., and *Outline*, §§ 18, 25, 28.

7 Cf. Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, II, p. 60; *Holzwege*, pp. 196–7. On the origins of European nihilism and atheism in the bosom of the theological intellectualism of scholasticism, see Kondylis, *Critique of Metaphysics*, which includes a full bibliography. Indirect, but exceptionally illuminating confirmation of this thesis may be found in the following works: M.-D. Chenu, *La théologie au XII^e siècle* (Paris: Vrin, ²1966); idem, *La théologie comme science au XIII^e siècle* (Paris: Vrin, ³1969); E. Gilson, *Le rôle de la pensée médiévale dans la formation du système cartésien* (Paris: Vrin, ⁴1975).

8 Cf. *Nietzsche*, II, 61–2.

9 Cf. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, ¹⁰1963), p. 25 (ET: *Being and Time*, London: Blackwells, 1962, 46): 'Everyone who is acquainted with the middle ages sees that Descartes is 'dependent' upon medieval scholasticism and employs its terminology'.

10 Cf. *Nietzsche*, *Der Wille Zur Macht*, § 484; idem, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, § 16; likewise, Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, II, 62.

11 See Fritz-Joachim Rintelen, 'Leibnizes Beziehungen zur Scholastik', in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 1903, 157 ff., 307 ff.; Martin Grabmann, *Geschichte der scholastischen Methode* (Graz: Akadem. Druck, ²1957), I, 3; Gilson, *La philosophie au moyen-âge* (Paris: Payot, ²1962), 247, 263, 464; Kondylis, *Critique of Metaphysics*, 276ff.

12 On the origins and historical development of the 'proofs' for the existence of God, see D. Schlüter, 'Gottesbeweis', in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, (ed.) J. Ritter, III (Basel/Stuttgart: Schwabe-Verlag, 1974), 818–30; Grabmann, *Geschichte der scholastischen Methode*, I, 321; Gilson, *La philosophie au moyen-âge*, 243; A. Grégoire, *Immanence et transcendance* (Paris, 1939), 138–57; G. Grünwald, *Geschichte der Gottesbeweise im Mittelalter bis zum Ausgang der Hochscholastik* (Münster, 1907).

13 See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia. 2.3; see also Grünwald, *Geschichte der Gottesbeweise*, 87–94.

14 The origin of this line of argumentation also goes back to the Scholastics: see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Ia. 11ae. 71.2; Etienne Gilson, *L'Esprit de la philosophie médiévale* (Paris: Vrin, ²1972), 307–11; idem, *Le Thomisme* (Paris: Vrin, ⁶1972), 327.

15 For the treatment of the teleological proof by the Scholastics, see the suggestive work by Peter Abelard: *Dialogus inter Philosophum Iudaeum et Christianum*, as well as Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia. 2.3, resp. 5; Ia. 15.1f.; Ia. 16.1f.; Ia. 65.2. The 'proofs' of the existence of God are not exhausted in the four mentioned here. In the metaphysical tradition of the West there have also appeared the *axiological* or *utilitarian*, the *ethical-deontological*, the *historical-ethnological* arguments, perhaps even more.

16 Cf. Gilson's pertinent remarks on the relationship between empiricism and the presuppositions of scholastic epistemology in his book, *La Philosophie au moyen-âge*, pp. 718 and 761.

17 Hirschberger's observation is to the point: 'Empiricism relativizes everything, reducing it to the level of the spatial, the temporal, the human, even the all-too-human. The intellectual is overcome by the sensible, the ideal by the useful, the universal by the individual, the eternal by the temporal, duty by desire, the whole by the part, right by might': *Geschichte der Philosophie* (Herder-Verlag, ⁷1965), vol. II, p. 188.

18 For more on the relationship between empiricism and the 'death of the God' of western metaphysics, see especially: Gerald Cragg, *The Church and the Age of Reason* (Penguin Books, 1976), pp. 76 and 168; W. Schluchter, *Die Entwicklung des okzidentalen Rationalismus* (Tübingen: Mohr Verlag, 1979), p. 253; D. F. Norton, *Hume—Common Sense Moralism, Sceptical Metaphysician*, (Princeton NJ, 1982); J. Kemp, *Ethical Naturalism: Hobbes and Hume* (London-New York, 1970).

19 See, especially, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Ia. 12; *In Sent.* II. 22. 2. 1 c; Albertus Magnus, *In libros Metaphys. Aristot.* IV tr 2 c 4; Duns Scotus, *Expositio in Metaphys. Aristot.* IV s l. c 2.

20 For a more systematic analysis of these issues, see my books *Outline for an Introduction to Philosophy*, vol. 2, and *Προτάσεις κριτικής οντολογίας* (*Proposals for a Critical Ontology*), Athens: Domos, 1985.

21 The above conclusion does not exclude that form of mysticism which was cultivated in the West, not so much parallel to, as in emphatic rejection of, rationalism, with, as its characteristic representatives, Bernard of Clairvaux (†1153), William of Saint-Thierry (†1148), Teresa of Avila (†1582), John of the Cross (†1591), François de Sales (†1622), etc. This mystical trend laid special emphasis on an immediate human appeal to the person of Christ and the possibility of an 'erotic' union with him. Yet even this mode of encountering God may hardly be deemed an alternative to the 'apophaticism of essence' of the Scholastics. For, while certainly a relationship with Christ is pursued, and an erotic one at that, everything takes place within the insurmountable limits determined by the priority of the difference of essences. And this means that no personal relationship can function as an existential possibility (i.e., as a *mode of existence*), preceding any essential definitions of existence; it is not even a matter of an actual relationship, but rather a one-sided, psychological appeal on the subject's behalf to a *substantially* inaccessible object of desire – it is a matter of erotic self-hedonism. The 'person-centred' mysticism of the West, precisely because it presupposes the potentialities of life defined by the principle of essence and not by the mode of existence, functions as an extraordinary attainment

of the subject within the hermetically sealed definitions of the essential distance from God, not the attainment of life, but the attainment of the individual sufficiency of consciousness; it functions as an individual ecstatic state of conscious eroticism, as the greatest individual achievement of psychological devotion. And if scholastic rationalism seeks knowledge of God by giving priority to the syllogistic competence of the subject, the erotic mysticism of the West is after the same knowledge, giving priority to the competence of the individual consciousness. In both instances we relate to an unknown, inaccessible 'object' of thought or consciousness, which calls us to individual attainments of intellectual formation, or mystical ecstasies, leaving the possibilities for an authentic life essentially predetermined and thus preclusive of the one genuine relationship, which would allow one to know God as a genuine reality in personal otherness.

22 Cf. Walther von Loewenich, *Luthers Theologia crucis* (München, 1929), pp. 16ff.; Jean Calvin, *L'Institution chrétienne* I. v. 12.

23 Hegel, *Werke* (Suhrkamp-Verlag), vol. 16, p. 419; vol. 17, p. 292.

24 'O great grief! God himself lies dead': the full text of the hymn is to be found in the edition by Johann Porst, *Geistliche und liebliche Lieder* (Berlin, 1796), no. 114. In subsequent editions (such as *Deutsch-Evangelisches Gesangbuch*, 1915) the verse is amended: 'O grosse Not! Gotts Sohn liegt tot'. The hymn is believed to have been written by Johann Rist (1607-1667), and Henri de Lubac is therefore mistaken in attributing it to Luther himself (*Le drame de l'humanisme athée*, Paris 1944, p. 44). De Lubac's attempt to link the 'theology of the cross' with the 'death of God' movement is, however, well documented.

25 See Angelus Silesius (Johann Scheffler), *Der cherubinische Wandersmann*, II, 2; I, 33 (*Sämtliche poetische Werke*, (ed.) G. Ellinger, Berlin: Propyläen-Verlag, 1924, Vol. 1, pp. 63 and 26); W. v. Loewenich, *Luthers Theologia crucis*, p. 22.

26 See the chapter on pietism in my book, *The Freedom of Morality* (English translation: Crestwood NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), pp. 119-36, and the bibliography cited there.

Chapter 2: The Historical Proclamation of the 'Death of God' (pages 39-47)

1 Nietzsche, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* V, § 343.

2 For more detailed historical information on the expression 'Gott ist tot,' see R. Bultmann, 'Der Gottesgedanke und der moderne Mensch', in *Diskussionen zu Bischof Robinsons, Gott ist anders* (München: Kaiser Verl., 1965, pp. 104, 105); Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, II, pp. 31-3; Gabriel Marcel, 'Der Mensch vor dem

vermeintlichen Tod Gottes', in *Wissenschaft und Weltbild* 11 (1958), pp. 1-12; Henri de Lubac, *Le Drame de l'humanisme athée*, pp. 44-6; Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Origins of Russian Communism* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1948, pp. 37-57).

6 Walter Kauffmann's translation (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1974), modified.

4 Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht*, Vorrede, 2.

5 For a brief, but characteristic, illustration of the naïvety and bigotry with which certain Roman Catholic scholars regard Nietzsche, even today, see J. Hirschberger's comments on Nietzsche in his *Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. II, pp. 501-27.

6 Nietzsche, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, end of § 125.

7 Heidegger, *Holzwege*, p. 199.

8 Heidegger, *Nietzsche* I, p. 530.

9 Heidegger, *Nietzsche* II, p. 58.

10 Heidegger, *Holzwege*, p. 200; *Nietzsche* II, p. 274.

11 See Hirschberger, *Geschichte der Philosophie* II, pp. 163 and 188; Werner Beierwaltes (ed.), *Platonismus in der Philosophie des Mittelalters* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftl. Buchgesel, 1969), especially interesting for our topic are the papers by C. Baemker, M.-D. Chenu, and J. Koch; E. Gilson, *L'esprit de la philosophie médiévale* (Paris: Vrin, 1969), pp. 41-8, 181-7. The contrasting predilection of the Greek Orthodox East for Aristotle's empirical realism is striking.

12 Heidegger, *Nietzsche* II, p. 59.

13 Heidegger, *Nietzsche* I, p. 532.

14 Heidegger, *Identität und Differenz* (Pfullingen: Neske-Verlag, 1957), p. 56.

15 Heidegger, *Nietzsche* I, p. 531.

16 Heidegger, *Nietzsche* II, p. 200.

17 Heidegger, *Nietzsche* II, p. 61.

18 Heidegger, *Holzwege*, p. 210.

19 *Holzwege*, pp. 239-40.

20 *Holzwege*, pp. 202-3.

21 'The critique of Christianity automatically assumed the form (in the West) of a critique of religion. It made clear both the religious roots of (theological) metaphysics, and its connexion with religiously sanctioned structures of social domination. Metaphysics was thus portrayed simply as a philosophical refinement of religious fancies which, although rooted in murky obsessions or in even murkier superstitions, gradually took the form of a system of ideas and perpetuated itself because it fulfilled a certain social function, hallowing the domination of the rulers, and softening with consolations the submission of the faithful': P. Kondylis, *Critique of Metaphysics*, pp. 21-2.

22 In his novel *Brothers Karamazov* (1879/80).

23 Heidegger, *Holzwege*, p. 203.

24 This is the opening phrase of his book *Der Wille zur Macht* – *Versuch einer Umwertung aller Werte*.

Chapter 3: Nihilism as a Presupposition of the Absence and Unknowability of God (pages 49–56)

- 1 Heidegger, *Holzwege*, pp. 202–3.
- 2 Heidegger, *Holzwege*, p. 203.
- 3 See Heidegger, *Nietzsche II*, p. 92.
- 4 *Holzwege*, p. 246.
- 5 *Holzwege*, p. 235. [Ed.: What Heidegger actually says is that those who think like Nietzsche 'think indeed too little divinely of God's nature': *denken allerdings wenig göttlich von Gottes Wesen*.]
- 6 Heidegger, *Identität und Differenz*, pp. 70–1.
- 7 Cf., e.g., *Also sprach Zarathustra*, end of part one: 'All the gods are dead: now we want the superman to live'; *ibid.*, part two (*Auf den glückseligen Inseln*): 'If there are gods, how could I bear not being a god! Therefore, there are no gods.'
- 8 *Holzwege*, pp. 235–6.
- 9 [Ed.: Heidegger, and Yannaras following him, utilize an untranslatable play of words, which I have indicated by giving the relevant Greek words in parentheses.]
- 10 Heidegger, *Nietzsche II*, pp. 209–10.
- 11 Heidegger, *Über den Humanismus* (in *idem*, *Wegmarken*, Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1978, p. 328; ET, *Pathmarks*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 252).
- 12 For characteristic (selective, and only suggestive) expressions of these general points in the Heideggerian corpus: *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1958), pp. 24ff.; *Sein und Zeit*, § 44; *Holzwege*, pp. 244, 310, 311; *Zur Seinsfrage* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1959), p. 33.
- 13 '... out of respect for the boundaries that have been set for thinking as such' (*aus der Achtung der Grenzen, die dem Denken als Denken gesetzt sind*): *Über den Humanismus*, in *Wegmarken*, p. 348 (ET, p. 267).
- 14 Heidegger, *Holzwege*, p. 204.
- 15 Cf. Aristotle, *De Interpretatione* 5 (17a8). [Editor's note]
- 16 Heidegger, *Nietzsche II*, p. 52.
- 17 Nietzsche II, pp. 53–4; *Was ist Metaphysik?* (Klostermann, 1965), p. 27.
- 18 Heidegger, *Nietzsche II*, p. 78.

Chapter 4: Apophasis as Denial and Abandonment (pages 59–72)

1 See chapter 1, n. 4. On the degree to which the Areopagitical Corpus summarizes and expresses the whole preceding Patristic tradition, see Endre v. Ivánka, *Plato Christianus: Übernahme und Umgestaltung des Platonismus durch die Väter* (Einsiedeln: Johannes-Verlag, 1964), pp. 225–89; W. Völker, *Kontemplation und Ekstase bei Pseudo-Dionysios Areopagita* (Wiesbaden, 1958); Gerhard Podskalsky, *Theologie und Philosophie in Byzanz* (Munich: Beck, 1977), where the general reliance of the later patristic writings on the Areopagitical writings is substantiated by the leading position of Dionysios in the theological tradition of the undivided Church.

2 The problem, for example, of the precise possible chronology or the identity of the author of the Areopagitical writings, as well as a systematic analysis of their themes, are not matters we are concerned with in the present study. Regardless of their date and authorship, the Corpus, as we have it today, still summarizes the principles of theological apophaticism of the tradition of the Greek Church. Our interest in this collection lies in its consequences in the formation of the lasting theological consciousness of eastern Christendom, not in the problems of historical or philological criticism of the Areopagitical works. Our aim is to touch upon (if only sketchily and suggestively) those presuppositions that prevented the theological tradition of the East from getting involved in the problems raised – especially in the medieval West – about *ratio fide illustrata* (*intelligentia fidei* or *intellectus fidei*), the *modus ratiocinativus* or *modus argumentativus*, which, with the exacting use of *fides-argumentum*, declares theology to be a *scientia – scientia Dei* or *sacra scientia*. Seen in this perspective, it is not possible to discuss here even the celebrated 'scandal' of the Areopagitical writings, i.e., their use of Neoplatonic terminology and themes – which has preoccupied the majority of western scholars and an equal number of Orthodox – especially in light of the thorough and well-documented responses already given to this issue. Among adequate rejoinders to it, one may cite Vladimir Lossky's *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (ET, London: James Clarke, 1957), pp. 29 ff., and the even further extensive treatise by Hugo Ball, the poet and painter, founder of Dadaism, and later the inspired student of Orthodoxy, author of the superb *Byzantinisches Christentum* (Einsiedeln: Benziger Verlag, 1958), with a special chapter on the Areopagite: pp. 65 ff., 80, 106–8. See, most recently, Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (London: Continuum, 2001). By far the finest, most comprehensive, Orthodox treatment, however, of the Areopagite's relationship with Neoplatonism, and Proclus in particular, is to be found in Lambros Siasos' dissertation, *Ἐραστὲς τῆς ἀληθείας – Ἔρευνα στὶς ἀφετηρίες καὶ σπῆ*

συγκρότηση τῆς θεολογικῆς γνωσιολογίας κατὰ τὸν Πρόκλο καὶ τὸν Διονύσιο Ἀρεοπαγίτη (*Lovers of the Truth: Inquiry into the starting-points and composition of theological epistemology according to Proclus and Dionysios the Areopagite*; Thessaloniki, 1984, printed unfortunately in compliance with the monotonic system of accents, pernicious in its consequences for the Greek language). I think that Siasos' work answers fully the question of Proclus' impact on the Areopagite, and is an example of detailed interpretation, exhaustive analysis, and informed judgement. In the last analysis, the perspective of Orthodox students on Dionysios the Areopagite could find epigrammatic expression in the words of Maximos the Confessor, the earliest commentator on the texts under question: 'That which was reverent in the Greek philosophers is transferred safely to piety... and their making of names brought over to rectitude' (Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 4 388D-392B).

3 Cf. M. Schmaus, *Katholische Dogmatik*, vol. I (Munich, 1960), pp. 306 ff.; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957), p. 347; Christos Androutsos, *Δογματική (Dogmatics)*, Athens, 1907, p. 47 ff.; P.N. Trembelas, *Δογματική* (Athens: Zoe, 1959), pp. 186 ff.

4 For an extensive treatment of this topic, see my book *Τὸ Πρόσωπο καὶ ὁ Ἔρως (Person and Eros)*, III 3: 'On Analogy and Hierarchy', esp. §§ 70β and 70γ.

5 *Metaphysics Γ*: 1003a33; translation taken from *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Jonathan Barnes (ed.) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), Vol. II, p. 1584.

6 Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitionum et Declarationum* (Rome: Herder, 1976), § 806 (p. 262).

7 *On the Divine Names* 7. 3 (Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 3, 869C-872A). English translations of Dionysios (sometimes modified) are taken from *Pseudo-Dionysios: The Complete Works*, tr. Colm Luibheid (Classics of Western Spirituality, New York-Mahwah NJ: The Paulist Press, 1987).

8 *Scholia on the Divine Names* PG 4. 229C. Cited henceforth as: *Scholia*. [Editor's note: in accordance with what he has said already about not entering into irrelevant critical issues, Yannaras takes it for granted that the *scholia* on the Areopagite given in PG 4 are all by St Maximos the Confessor, as Migne indicates. In fact, the earliest *scholia* are by Dionysios' first editor, the fifth-century John of Scythopolis. Maximos knew these *scholia* and doubtless added to them himself, but the question of the ascription of the *scholia* is still a matter for discussion. See Paul Rorem and John C. Lamoureaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus: Annotating the Areopagite*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.]

9 *Scholia* (188A).

10 *Scholia* (321B).

11 Cf. *Hebrews* 3: 4: 'For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God'.

12 The Greek word *icon* (εἰκῶν) has two meanings, one from ancient Greek and the other Biblical, or Judæo-Christian. The former meaning is analogical, with its etymological origin in the root εἶκω, εἰκοῖα ('to be like'), and means likeness, copy, depiction, the analogical reproduction of a form. The latter sense of the word originates with the Seventy translators of the Old Testament (the Septuagint), who rendered as εἰκῶν the Hebrew term *tselen*, meaning manifestation, representation, equivalence or substitute (cf. W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, London: SCM Press, 1967, pp. 122ff.). The patristic writings use the words εἰκῶν, εἰκονισμός in the latter sense, that preserves likewise an analogical relationship between the original form and the reality depicted. Only here, the analogy is not exhausted in the analytical-conceptual or formal correspondence, but in a relation of *logoi*: in the capacity of human reason (*logos*) to encounter and then to make manifest in accordance with the *logos* (i.e., that renders participable) the *logos* of the reality – the *logos* of the personal activity of God, the *logos* 'made real', the *logos* as 'reality'.

13 *On the Divine Names* 5.8 (821 C).

14 *On the Divine Names*, 1.5 (593C).

15 *On the Divine Names*, 1.4 (592 D).

16 *On the Divine Names*, 1.4 (593 A).

17 *On the Divine Names*, 9.7 (916 A).

18 *Metaphysics Γ*: 1003b10; trans. Barnes, p. 1584.

19 *Scholia* (256A).

20 *On the Divine Names*, 1.1 (588B). Cf. Maximos' (in fact, John of Scythopolis') comment: 'In this passage he establishes the incomprehensibility of the knowledge of God. If not even simple and formless things, even though they are beings, are subject to the senses (e.g., angels and souls are not subject to the bodily senses), how much more does not God transcend the senses – God, I say, who is not being, but beyond being; not simple, but beyond simplicity; not mind, but even beyond mind; not henad, but even beyond henad; not circumscribed by a limit, but free from the circumscriptions of things' (Rorem and Lamoureaux's trans., p. 186).

21 *On the Divine Names*, 2.7 (645CD).

22 *Scholia* (245C).

23 The expression is from St John Damascene: 'And there is a most sweet conjunction of both [affirmations and negations], such as being beyond being, divinity beyond divinity, source beyond source, and such-like' (*On the Orthodox Faith* I. 12b: (ed.) Kotter, p. 36).

24 Dionysios the Areopagite, *Epistle* 9 (1105D).

25 *On the Divine Names*, 7.3 (872A).

26 Commenting on the Areopagite, Maximos makes the following clarifications:

Negations [i.e., denials and privations] are not predicated of God in an absolute sense by the theologians. For, as they say, such negations are not thought, but are transcendently contemplated. As for the names 'immortal', 'invisible', 'incorruptible', 'without lack', and 'without sin', no one with a share in wisdom could accept these in the common manner – nor for that matter any other such things which are said of God. Rather, by abandoning the things signified, [Dionysios] lifts his eyes to silent and more divine thoughts ... For the soul abandons all corporeal matters, both of the senses and of the world, for these have acquired affinity with it; thus it reaches the purity of the knowledge of God, so far as this is possible to human nature (*Scholia* [413CD], translation partly by Rorem and Lamoreaux).

Privations in God are beyond being; for neither may I say that privation is a being, such as 'without beginning', 'incorruptible', 'immortal' and such-like; for God is not these things, since he is prior to these things ... Therefore, neither do we know what God is not, or how he is ineffable and incomprehensible (*Scholia* [260D]).

Chapter 5: The 'Nihilism' of Theological Apophaticism (pages 73–81)

1 [Ed.: note that the Greek word μηδενισμός can be translated as both 'nihilism' and 'annihilation'.]

2 Cf. 'the conceptual idolatry of those who make idols in themselves': St Basil the Great (Migne, PG 30: 276 C).

3 Dionysios, *Epistle* 9 (1104B).

4 The principle of demythologization made its appearance in recent, post-World War II biblical theology, its chief and most characteristic representative being the German, Rudolf Bultmann. He had the intention of separating the revealed 'core' of Holy Scripture from its 'mythological' expression. The biblical kerygma, as God's calling of human kind to salvation, needed to be distinguished from its objective, historical clothing, in order to constitute a starting-point for a personal relationship between man and God. 'Mythological thought in a naïve way objectifies the beyond in the here-and-now, while, contrary to its own authentic intention, it imagines the transcendent as something remote in space and quantitatively more powerful than human kind possesses. Demythologization wants, in contrast, to assert the authentic intention of the myth, namely, the intention to speak of authentic human reality' (R. Bultmann, 'Zum Problem

der Entmythologisierung', in *Glauben und Verstehen* IV, Tübingen: Mohr Verlag, 1965, p. 134. See also, idem, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1963, and *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, London: SCM Press, 1960). If the school of demythologization has led western theology into a manifold impasse, it is probably due to the thinness, not to say non-existence, of ecclesiology, especially among Protestants – for it is ecclesiology, as we shall see in connexion with the Areopagitical writings, that provides the basis or presupposition that prevents theological apophaticism from lapsing into relativism or scepticism.

5 *Mystical Theology* 2 (Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 3:1025AB).

6 S. Kyriazopoulos, *Προλεγόμενα εις την ερώτησιν περι Θεου* (*Prolegomena to the Question of God*), Athens, 1960, p. 15.

7 L. Siasos, *Lovers of the Truth*, p. 91.

8 *On the Divine Names* 1.1 (588 B). See also the comment of Maximos the Confessor: 'God is not a being; for if he created beings from that which does not exist, then he is not among the beings, but beyond the beings' (*Scholia* [189C]). Also: 'That God is nothing is understood thus: as being none of the things that are, the cause of all that is is beyond the things that are. Whence God is called God both everywhere and nowhere; since therefore he is nowhere, everything is through him and in him, as not being any of the all; and again everything is in him as being everywhere, but other because through him, because he is nowhere; and he fills everything as being everywhere ... but he is nowhere ... For if he were only everywhere, then he would be everything and in everything spatially; thus therefore he is nothing, as beyond the things that are' (*Scholia* [204D, 205A]). See also Gregory of Nyssa: 'Neither is what is before God God, nor what is after God God; for what is after God is creation, and what is beyond God is nothing; and nothing is not God, or rather what is beyond God is God himself in eternal blessedness, defined in relation to nothing' (*Against Eunomius*, III. 10 (vulgo, bk. 5): (ed.) W. Jaeger, Leiden: Brill, 1960, p. 110)

9 *Mystical Theology* 5 (1048AB).

10 *Metaphysics* Γ: 1004 b27; trans. Barnes, p. 1586.

11 *Mystical Theology* 5 (1045 D–1048B).

12 John Damascene, *On the Orthodox Faith* 13 (ed. Kotter, p. 39).

13 1 Cor. 13: 12.

14 *Scholia* (260D–261A).

15 *On the Divine Names*, 5.8 (824 C).

16 Cf. Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, ch. 4; N. Nissiotis, *Philosophy of Religion and Philosophical Theology* (in Greek: Athens, 1965), pp. 38ff.; Christos Yannaras, *Person and Eros*, ch. 3; idem, *Outline for an Introduction to Philosophy*, §§ 18, 30; idem, *Proposals for a Critical Ontology*.

17 *On the Divine Names*, 2.5 (644A).

18 Lossky, *The Mystical Theology*, pp. 94ff.; J. Romanides, *Τὸ Προπατορικὸν Ἀμάρτημα (Ancestral Sin)*, Athens, 1957, p. 16; C. Yannaras, *Outline for an Introduction to Philosophy*, § 28.

Chapter 6: Apophatic Knowledge as Personal Participation (pages 83–97)

1 *On the Divine Names*, 2.4 (641A).

2 *On the Divine Names*, 2.5 (644A).

3 Cf. *Right Reason and Social Practice* IV, 2.

4 Divinity is *participated in* (becomes participable) in its *mode* of existence – the human being can exist in the *mode* of God (the mode of loving mutual coinherence of the persons), and this event is called by the Church the deification (*theōsis*) of human kind. The Godhead remains imparticipable only in its 'identity of essence'. Cf. Maximos the Confessor: 'God will also completely fulfil the goal of his mystical work of deifying humanity in every respect, of course, short of an identity of essence with God' (*Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 22, (eds.) C. Laga and C. Steel, *Corpus Christianorum, Series Graeca* 7, 1980, p. 139; ET, by R. Wilken and P. Blowers, in St Maximus the Confessor, *The Cosmic Mystery of Christ, Selected Writings*, Crestwood NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003, p. 116).

5 *On the Divine Names*, 2.7 (645A).

6 *On the Divine Names*, 1.1 (585B–588A).

7 Gal. 4: 9. Cf. also N. Nissiotis, *Προλεγόμενα εἰς τὴν θεολογικὴν γνωσιολογίαν (Prolegomena to a Theological Epistemology)*, pp. 146ff.

8 In modern western theological literature, Greek or eastern apophaticism has often been treated with suspicion and reticence on the grounds that it represents a form of recourse to ecstatic states of mysticism, that is to say, to loss of personal self-consciousness (see especially Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II, 1, pp. 193ff.; R. Bultmann, *Glauben und Verstehen* I, pp. 140ff.; II, pp. 135 and 188). Yet it is surprising that biblical scholars confuse knowledge, as experience of personal communion, with mystical, ecstatic states of irrationality and incommunicability. Because it is primarily in the Bible that knowledge is identified with the experience of relationship, and the fullness of knowledge with the fullness of relationship, with erotic intercourse (cf. Gen. 4: 1–4, 17, 25, etc.; Judg. 21: 12; Matt. 1: 25; Luke 1: 34; and the article in Kittel, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum N. T.*, vol. I, 688–719, *s.v. γινώσκω* written by Bultmann himself). The – always, according to the Dionysian Corpus – erotic character of personal knowledge is the subject of the next chapter. Here we simply emphasize the anthropological premiss of apophaticism, the integrity of personal self-awareness.

9 See my *Elements of Faith. An Introduction to Orthodox Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), pp. 75ff. (original Greek title: *Ἀλφαβητάρι τῆς πίστεως*).

10 Estrangement: 'When personal being [Dasein], tranquilized, and "understanding" everything, thus compares itself with everything, it drifts along towards an estrangement in which its ownmost potentiality-for-Being is hidden from it'; 'The Nothing, before which anxiety emerges, unveils nothingness, which personal being determines as its foundation, which itself is as thrownness into death': *Sein und Zeit* §§ 38 (ET, p. 222) and 40.

11 Heidegger saw as the only 'Christian' approach to human kind that fashioned by western metaphysics – an approach that juxtaposed the created and finite human *essence* with the uncreated and absolute *essence* of God (without the slightest reference to the *mode of existence*, which is common to the divine and human persons): 'The Christian sees the humanity of man, the *humanitas* of the *homo*, in contradistinction to *Deitas*. He is the human being of the history of redemption who as a 'child of God' hears and accepts the call of the Father in Christ. The human being is not of this world, since the 'world', thought in terms of Platonic theory, is only a temporary passage to the beyond' (*Über den Humanismus: in Wegmarken*, p. 317; ET, p. 244). Yet such an approach to human kind and the cosmos is defective when compared to the express catholic experience of the undivided Church. First of all, because it is limited to conceptual schematizations of an analogical interpretation of *essences* (God – cosmos – human beings). And second, because it resorts to the equally conceptual scheme of *legal* approach to human kind's *adoption* 'in Christ', as it seeks to bridge the essential distance between God and human kind. Not only does the matter of the cosmos remain ontologically inexplicable, but also the *fall* of human kind, as well as his salvation in Christ, is represented in legal (forensic) categories and not in the realities of existential experience. These huge gaps in the metaphysical ontology of western Christianity led Heidegger to the radical option of a realist ontology, that is nihilistic, because it is only founded on the experience of the *ecstatic* existence (but unrelated to the Person of God) of the human subject (leading to the apophatic *nothing* as the 'essential' reality of God). For this reason, too, Heidegger remains incomprehensible to western theology. Typical of Heidegger's reception is the way he is judged by the Roman Catholic historian of philosophy J. Hirschberger: he ridicules Heideggerian thought, not recognizing it as philosophy, seeing it more as a kind of 'neo-mysticism' and 'neo-romanticism,' belonging rather to poetry and art than to philosophy (Cf. *Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. II, pp. 648–50).

12 *On the Divine Names*, 4.6 (701B).

13 *On the Divine Names*, 1.4 (592A): '... because in one of its

persons it accepted a true and complete share of what it is we are ...'

- 14 *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 3.3.11 (441AB).
- 15 *Letter 3* (106 B).
- 16 *On the Divine Names*, 2.9 (648A).
- 17 *On the Divine Names*, 4.4 (697CD).
- 18 *On the Divine Names*, 2.2 (640B).
- 19 *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 3.3.1 (428B).
- 20 *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 3.3.5 (432B).

Chapter 7: Apophatic Knowledge as Erotic Communion (pages 99–110)

- 1 *On the Divine Names*, 2.9 (648B).
- 2 *On the Divine Names*, 4.12 (709AB).
- 3 '...the unseemly preconception of such men...': *On the Divine Names*, 4.12 (709B).
- 4 *On the Divine Names*, 4.12 (709BC).
- 5 1 John 4: 16.
- 6 St Maximos the Confessor refers the very 'causal principle' of the threefoldness of God to the self-transcendence of love. There does not exist any given principle of being of God, any 'external' necessity, that requires God to be what he is, or to exist as a Trinity of Persons. The principle of existence is no impersonal necessity, but the freedom of one Person, of God the Father, to give free ('lovingly') subsistence in his Being by begetting the Son eternally and making the Holy Spirit proceed: 'God the Father, moved apart from time and out of love, went into the differentiation of hypostases, although beyond union and simplicity remaining without parts and diminution in his own wholeness' (*Scholia* [221A]; trans. Rorem and Lamoreaux, p. 197).
- 7 *On the Divine Names*, 4.13 (712A).
- 8 *On the Divine Names*, 4.15 (713AB).
- 9 2 Kingdoms [= 2 Sam.] 1: 26.
- 10 Cf. John of Sinai, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* 30.13: 'He who truly loves ever keeps in his imagination the face of his beloved, and there embraces it tenderly. Such a man can get no relief from his strong desire even in sleep, even then he holds converse with his loved one. *So it is with our bodily nature; and so it is in spirit*' (my italics. Trans. by Archimandrite Lazarus Moore, London: Faber and Faber, 1959, p. 263).
- 11 *On the Divine Names*, 4.20 (720BC).
- 12 Cf. Plato's *Symposium* 211b7–c9: 'For such as discipline themselves upon this system, or are conducted by another, beginning to ascend through these transitory objects which are beautiful, towards that which is beauty itself, proceeding as on steps from the love of one form to that of two, and from that of

two, to that of all forms which are beautiful; and from beautiful forms to beautiful habits and institutions, and from institutions to beautiful doctrines; until, from the meditation of many doctrines, they arrive at that which is nothing else than the doctrine of supreme beauty itself...' (Shelley's translation). Cf. also A.-J. Festugière, *Contemplation et vie contemplative selon Platon* (Paris: Vrin, 1967), pp. 228 ff.; I. Wipperfurth, 'Eros und Unsterblichkeit in der Diotima-Rede des Symposions', in *Synusia* (Festgabe W. Schadewaldt, 1965), pp. 123–59.

- 13 *On the Divine Names*, 4.10 (708B).
- 14 *Scholia* (261B).
- 15 *On the Divine Names*, 4.13 (712AB).
- 16 Both 'ecstatic' and 'exist'/'existence' derive ultimately ('exist' via the Latin verb *ex(s)istence*) from the Greek verb ἐξίσταμαι, German *ek-sistieren*, to ek-sist, 'stand outside', according to Heidegger's transcription of the term, which ends up in the term *Ek-sistenz*, instead of the standard *Existenz*, as the definition of human existence.
- 17 *On the Divine Names*, 4.13 (712A).
- 18 'The sentence "The human being ek-sists" [Der Mensch ek-sistiert] ... responds to the question concerning the 'essence' of the human being': *Über den Humanismus* (in *Wegmarken*, p. 324, ET p. 249).
- 19 *On the Divine Names*, 1.4 (592A).
- 20 *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, 1.3 (376 A).
- 21 [Editor: In the Greek there is a play of words between καλεῖν, to call, and κάλλος, beauty: a play on words that goes back to Plato (*Cratylus* 416c).]
- 22 *On the Divine Names*, 4.7 (701CD).
- 23 *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, 4.3.1 (476A).
- 24 [Editor: an allusion to the famous dictum of St Basil's, often quoted in defence of the veneration of icons: 'for the honour offered to the image passes to the archetype', *On the Holy Spirit*: 18.45; (ed.) B. Pruche OP, Sources Chrétiennes 17 bis, Paris: Le Cerf, 1968, p. 406.]
- 25 *On the Divine Names*, 4.6 (701 B).
- 26 *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, 4.3.5 (480 C).

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