THE STORY OF THE REFORMATION WITHIN EASTERN ORTHODOXY IN THE 20TH CENTURY IN ROMANIA

An analysis of the Eastern Church Theology and Practice

PAUL DAN
CALIFORNIA

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See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

Colossians 2:8
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INTRODUCTION

The Church Fathers like Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, and Maximus the Confessor fought the battles against heresies which attacked core doctrines of the Church, such as the Deity of Christ, Trinity, and the dual nature of Christ. All had solid knowledge of philosophy, especially Platonic, and some were even trained philosophers. They used philosophical categories when they elaborated the Church Creeds. They did a great service to the church back then, and to us today. On the other hand, their philosophical knowledge crept into other areas of theology, church practice, and liturgy, determining the direction of the Eastern Orthodox Church for the two millennia. Since the 5th Century, the Eastern Orthodox Church is frozen in Neoplatonic mysticism, due to the philosophical leanings of the Church Fathers.

The Reformation

God worked a reformation within the Eastern Orthodox Church of Romania through the Orthodox Priest Tudor Popescu. He was born on January 12, 1887, in Dumbrava, a village near Ploiești, a city in southeastern Romania. His encounter with Christ was not influenced by Evangelicals of Romania. Back then, the Evangelical movement was in the beginning stages in that country. Tudor Popescu’s father and grandfather were priests as well. When Tudor was a teenager, his brother Ion died, bringing immense sorrow. They were best friends. That was the first time when he started thinking about the afterlife. He was wondering where his brother was. Tudor went to study theology in Bucharest at the E. Orthodox seminary. He had some expectation to find some answers, but to no avail. He got married and became the priest of an important church in downtown Bucharest. After awhile, his wife died, and that shook him to the core. Unsolved issues about eternity related to his brother came back, being compounded by the loss of his wife. He expected that his priestly position at that important church, as well as his theological education would help him cope with his loss. But it did not. During this time, he received a copy of a new translation of the New Testament done by his friend and classmate, Dumitru Cornilescu. He read it and became interested in returning to God and conversion concepts of the New Testament. His friend Cornilescu was already a believer as a result of translating the New Testament and guided Tudor through some basic issues of salvation. The seminary studies were liturgy, patristics, and Byzantine music. Neither Biblical soteriology nor significant New Testament studies were part of the classes at the E. Orthodox seminary.

One Sunday, Tudor was preaching an apocalyptic message where the wrath of God was coming down with devastation over the sinners, but the crucified Christ was between God and the sinners, being their refuge. Suddenly it dawned on him that Christ died specifically for the sins of the people and not for some great ideals. For the first time, the Apostle’s Creed made sense to him, that Christ died for our sins. Faith in Christ burst in his heart. Then his sermon became evangelistic. People were converted and experienced deliverance from drunkenness,
THEFT, AND OTHER SINS. THEY CAME AND SHARED THEIR DELIVERANCES WITH THEIR PRIEST, AND THAT STRENGTHENED HIS FAITH. THE ATTENDANCE GREW. HE STOPPED MENTIONING MARY AND THE SAINTS IN THE LITURGY.

FELLOW ORTHODOX PRIESTS ENVIED HIM FOR HIS SUCCESS AND REPORTED HIM TO THE PATRIARCHY, THE HIGHEST E. ORTHODOX AUTHORITY, ACCUSING HIM OF CHANGING THE LITURGY. AFTER A LONG PROCESS, HE WAS EXCLUDED FROM THE ORTHODOX CHURCH. HE STARTED HIS OWN MINISTRY WITH THE CONVERTS FROM HIS FORMER PARISH.

A RICH YOUNG LADY BY THE NAME OF MISS GHICA, SUPPORTED MOST OF THE COST FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF A TWO-STORY BUILDING AS A HEADQUARTERS AND AUDITORIUM FOR THE NEW MOVEMENT. TODAY, AT 48 CAROL DAVILA STREET, BUCHAREST, ROMANIA THE BUILDING IS STILL IN PLACE, WITH THE SAME FUNCTION. THE SANCTUARY HOLDS 1,000 PEOPLE ALTHOUGH IN THE BEGINNING THEY HAD ONLY 40 ATTENDEES. THIS REFORMATION WITHIN THE EASTERN ORTHODOXY OF ROMANIA IS IN FULL AGREEMENT WITH THE MOTTO: SOLA SCRIPTURA, SOLA FIDE, SOLA GRATIA.

IT IS WORTHWHILE TO MENTION SOME KEY PEOPLE THAT WERE LEADERS ALONG WITH TUDOR POPESCU AND EVEN SOME THAT WORKED IN THE CHURCH DECADES LATER. HIS CLOSE FRIENDS AND PARTNERS IN MINISTRY WERE EMIL CONSTANTINESCU AND GEORGHE CORNILESCU, BOTH MASTERS OF DIFFERENT CLASSICAL LANGUAGES. HORIA AZIMOARA WAS A DISCIPLE OF TUDOR POPESCU AND BECAME HIS BIOGRAPHER. HE WROTE A MORE DETAILED ACCOUNT OF TUDOR POPESCU’S LIFE AND MINISTRY. THE BOOK IS TITLED FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT, AND CAN BE FOUND AT BELIEVERS BOOKSHELF, PO BOX 261, SUNBURY, PA, 17801, USA, 1-570-672-2134. I REALLY ENCOURAGE E. ORTHODOX BELIEVERS TO BUY IT AND READ IT.


ANOTHER MOVEMENT WHICH TOOK PLACE IN ROMANIA, SIMILAR TO THE ONE OF TUDOR POPESCU IS CALLED THE LORD’S ARMY. TO DO JUSTICE TO IT WOULD REQUIRE A SEPARATE WORK ALL TOGETHER. ITS FOUNDER WAS THE E. ORTHODOX PRIEST IOSIF TRIFA. TRIFA’S WORK TOOK PLACE AT THE SAME TIME WITH POPESCU’S BUT IN A DIFFERENT REGION OF THE COUNTRY. TODAY THE LORD’S ARMY HAS TWO BRANCHES: ONE IS A RENEWAL WITHIN E. ORTHODOXY AND ANOTHER ONE IS A TOTAL REFORMATION.

THE STATE OF THE REFORMED EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCH OF ROMANIA AT THE PRESENT TIME

THE ACTUAL NAME OF THE DENOMINATION WHICH GOD ESTABLISHED THROUGH TUDOR POPESCU IS CALLED THE ROMANIAN EVANGELICAL CHURCH. THIS TITLE WAS NOT NECESSARILY POPESCU’S DESIRE BUT WAS GIVEN BY THE RECENT LEADERSHIP. I USED THE NAME REFORMED IN THE TITLE TO EMPHASIZE THE ACTUAL
theological significance of the movement. It is the fourth largest Evangelical denomination in Romania.

Here are some characteristics of that church today:

- Plurality of leadership
- Conservative
- Predominantly Arminian
- Eschatology: Pre-millennial and Pre-tribulationist
- Infant baptism
- Participation to the Lord’s supper based on verification by the elders
- Lack of formal theological training, although the ministers are abreast with key theological issues, due to the excellent work God did through Bible Education by Extension ministry (from U.S.). BEE² was pioneered in Romania and spread to many Communist Bloc countries
- Strongly evangelistic; also tent evangelism in different areas of the country
- Insufficient systematic doctrinal teaching and pastoral work
- A minor split took place in the 80’s; the departing body of believers entered in fellowship with the exclusive brethren³ from Western Europe
- Recently an emerging church segment, mostly youth, went away to establish their own ministry
THE SOUND MIND VERSUS THE MYSTICAL MIND

Italian political philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli had noted of the 13th-century Christian monastic leaders St. Francis and St. Dominic, they had saved religion but destroyed the church⁴.

The Sound Mind is the Mind of Christ

First Corinthians 2:16 affirms a vital truth; the believer has the mind of Christ. In other words the believer can have Christ’s perspective on everything in this life. For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Corinthians 2:16) The Corinthian church was known for lax morals, appreciation for philosophy, and theological errors. In brief, that church had a worldly mindset. In the context of the first two chapters, the mind of Christ is defined as being different from the philosophical mind (ch.1) and not espousing worldly wisdom (ch. 2). The purpose in the Corinthian epistle is to contrast the mindset of philosophy and the world with the mindset of the believer, which comes from Christ, via the Holy Spirit. As a result the so called wisdom of ancient philosophies including the cryptic practices of mysticism should have no place in the thoughts and life of the believer.

The sound mind rejects the use of mantras as a way of prayer. The sound mind rejects mysticism as a way in relating to God. The Christian mind is not a defective answering machine regurgitating mantras. Christ warns the disciples not to engage in the pagan (mystical) prayer using repetitions and babblings, thinking they will be heard. And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions (battalogo) as the heathen [do]. For they think that they will be heard for their many words (Mat 6:7). Battalogo means the constant repetition of the same phrase, which is a mantra.

The sound mind is a gift from God and the expected condition of every believer. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. 2Tim. 1:7. Consequently the believer will be bold and loving in his witnessing in a hostile environment. Fear in this verse means also cowardness.

The sound mind prays within the limits of reason, engaging in praises, intercession, supplication. Such prayer has a specific objective of glorifying God, interceding in behalf of believers and nonbelievers Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:1-4)

Paul did not say ‘go mystical, do some centering, repeat one word or one sentence’. The apostle was very logical in his exhortation. Prayer should contain specific data about rulers, people, and the social relations of the believers, be it in the 1st century or today, in order that God will listen.
Even when we are perplexed and we don’t know what to say, the Holy Spirit transfers our state of bewilderment to God. Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:26, 27). Notice that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us according to God’s will, meaning God has a concrete objective in our lives. There is no room for mystical speculation.

**The sound mind is directed by the Holy Spirit.** The Holy Spirit teaches us all things, signifying things that are coherent concerning Christ not esoterism and speculation.

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. (John 14:26)

Also, the Holy Spirit guides in all truth revealed from Christ. When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. (John 16:13)

The mystical mind is guided by a different spirit into darkness and the unknown. The Holy Spirit does not do that.

**The sound mind is in continual renewing** – And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:2).

A secular or mystical mind is enslaved in rehearsing the things of this world such as sin, philosophy, or religion. The sound mind is constantly renewed by the Word of God as the context of Romans 12 says. The apostle has in view the previous eleven chapters of doctrine. And be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:23, 24)

Here the apostle urges the believers to dump a pagan mindset (having their understanding darkened v.18), including its practices (have given themselves over to lewdness v.19) and live the new identity - put on the new man with the new mind - from God, walking in rightness and sanctification.

**The sound mind brings a rational service to God.** I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:1,2)

We saw in the previous paragraphs that the sound mind is under constant renewal. Along with that, the apostle advises the believers in Rome and elsewhere to live a holy life as a way of presenting to God a living sacrifice. Living in holiness in the 1st century as well as in the 21st century, implies a lot of pain from the mortification of the flesh. Presenting ourselves as a living sacrifice is the reasonable thing to do after God did everything, to the extent of giving
His Son in our behalf, that we may live eternally. The expression reasonable service could be translated from Greek as rational liturgy (λογικὴν λατρείαν).

When God is worshipped, He expects a reasonable service, not a mystical coma as Teresa of Avila and others like her pretend God wants.

**The sound mind opposes mystical occult strongholds.** For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. (2 Cor. 10:3-5)

**The Mystical Mind**

Throughout Church history, a number of regular church goers and certain theologians tried to blur the distinction between Christian life and Mysticism, claiming they are the same, the difference being Mysticism is the “ultimate Christian experience”.

Genuine Christian life has nothing to do with mysticism. In order to understand that, we have to take a look at the definition of mysticism derived from mystical experiences as well as from a scholarly viewpoint.

Here is an excellent description of the root word which defines mysticism: The Greeks gave us the very word for mysticism. The Greek word MUO means, “to shut the eyes or mouth.” MUO is closely related to the verb MUEO, “to initiate into the mysteries.” The closed eyes and mouth in this context do not signify blindness or muteness, but secrecy and silence, and the order not to reveal the secrets of the initiation and revelation that one had received. These Greek root-words have given us “mystic” and “mysticism,” “mystery” and “mysterious,” as well as “mute”.

Another definition from an E. Orthodox perspective on mysticism is this: It is necessary to renounce both sense and all the workings of reason, everything which may be known by the senses or the understanding, both that which is and all that is not, in order to be able to attain in perfect ignorance to union with Him who transcends all being and all knowledge. (Vladimir Lossky, Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church, p. 27).

A short and precise definition on the same subject comes from Princeton University: a religion based on mystical communion with an ultimate reality; obscure or irrational thought.

Looking at these definitions it is evident that they state the same thing, although they come from different angles: a scholar, an Eastern Orthodox, and a secular university. The mystical mind is a shut down intellect, functioning just at the irrational level where vagueness, darkness, and even the occult are part of the experience. Initiation and secrecy is an integral part of mysticism. Reason is ruled out in experiencing God; obscurantism and irrationality play the role of spirituality. As another example, I will cite the Father of Mysticism for Eastern Orthodoxy and Theosophy, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. ...leave behind the senses and the operations of the intellect through pure and entire self-abnegation, into the superessential
Radiance of the Divine Darkness…and plunges the mystic into the Darkness of Unknowing. (Mystical Theology by Dionysius the Areopagite-emphasis mine)

The mystic pretends to have direct unmediated, by Scriptures or reason, union with God which in reality at best is a self-hypnotic trance, and at worse a demonic experience. In order for the mystic to achieve the state of a mystical mind, he or she will employ purification rites of different sorts, followed by contemplation (empting of the mind included), illumination (occult luminous phenomena), and union with the god of mysticism. Mantras are an essential ingredient in this whole process. The mystics repeat the phrase: “Jesus have mercy on me a sinner” as a mantra hundreds or sometimes thousands times a day hoping for an ecstatic experience. They think Jesus prayer although is used as a mantra will keep safe the “worshiper” from demonic interferences. They deceive themselves. Irrational repetition of the name of Jesus means taking the name of the Lord in vain, and it is a sin.

Here is another helpful definition*: Mysticism (from the Greek μυστικός -musticos , an initiate of a mystery religion, μυστήρια-musteria meaning "initiation") is the quest for communion or union an ultimate reality, the Other, deity, or a god through a direct experience. As we see, mysticism involves initiation, an essential part of the occult Mystery Religions of antiquity and of the esoterism of Eastern Orthodoxy.

The mystical mind sometimes leads to very unholy, blasphemous and abominable mindsets and practice. For instance, Bernard of Clairvaux¹⁰, a Cistercian abbot citing the Song of Songs, argued for a mystical union with Christ and kissing Christ on His mouth. He portrayed the monks as the feminine bride of Christ. A more detailed account of Bernard’s sinful delirium which makes you vomit is presented in the book Mystics¹¹ published by Oxford University Press. Teresa of Avila pushed things even further, claiming her own personal mystical marriage with Christ. As we shall see Symeon the New Theologian exceeds Bernard in his repulsive writings.
THE SUPERNATURAL IS NOT MYSTICAL IN NATURE

Mystics, as well as poorly advised Christians, think that reason is inherently wrong, and that the object of faith is vagueness, fogginess, things that don't make sense. They also infer that reason is man’s own product and not God’s specific purpose to create us in His image. Consequently, they believe the supernatural has to be opposite to reason and has to be something mystic, irrational, and the like. So they equate supernaturalism with mysticism. The question is: what is the nature of the supernatural? Is it something totally different from logic, reason, and order?

As we shall see, supernatural is not mysticism. To avoid speculations, we have to look at what the Bible says about this subject. In the first three chapters of Genesis, we see how God created an orderly and coherent universe, and how He created man in His image. Of course man is an affectionate and relational being- but that’s a different subject Man is a rational, logical being. So if we want to know something about how God is from the first pages of the Bible we just have to look at His creation around us : For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made (Romans 1:20).

Take for instance the human mind and the behavior of the human being, as being rational and coherent- in the same time created in the image of God, the obvious is: God is rational, but His reason is infinite; He is logical, but His logic is perfect. God is consistent in His nature and in His acts. If we move very quickly to the end of the Bible, we see that when God creates a supernatural city [the Heavenly Jerusalem] with matter that will exist for eternity, we notice that the Heavenly Jerusalem has streets, buildings, trees, a river, it is surrounded by a wall; and again we discover order, structure, and design- which is the result of Reason at work.

When God spoke in the Old and New Testament, the message is understandable and direct, showing that God had the intention to make Himself clear and to make His nature known. Of course, in the Old Testament, there are prophetic utterances that we don’t understand because they don’t address us directly; and also there are some heavenly visions described in human terms, that again we don’t understand at this time because of our limitations. In the New Testament there are two occasions where the argument for God as being rational, logical, orderly, is overwhelming. First I choose to go to the book of Revelation ch. 4 where we see a heavenly court, a throne, 24 elders, among other things. Of course those are spiritual realities described in our terms- but those spiritual realities, show order and logic; and furthermore the things discussed up there make sense down here for us. The heavenly disclosure of Revelation 4 and 5 is not something confusing, inconsistent and foggy, the way the mystics would like to see God and the heavenly place.

The second place that talks about God as an infinite, logic, rational Spirit, is the Gospel of John ch. 1:1. In this Gospel, the apostle by Holy Spirit’s guidance, reveals Christ in His pre-incarnate state. His name is The Word. By this simple description, John chose that part of speech which is the most comprehensive in conveying to the reader that He is rational, logical, and that
communication with Him is possible, that there is order and structure in such communication; that He is also wise, and everything He does makes sense. Is the metaphor Word used for Christ just a definition that relates to the Greek/Gentile thought? No! The Jews also knew so well from the pages of the Old Testament how the Word of the Lord came to the prophets and spoke in logical sentences. Therefore, God and His realm of supernatural has nothing to do with mysticism, confusion, murkiness and the like. In 1 Corinthians 13, the apostle Paul says that we know in part, but in the eternal state we will know perfectly. He doesn’t say “now we know in part, but in the future state we will enter the mystical, cloudy, supernatural realm.” One thing has to be specified here: knowing perfectly applies to our condition. It doesn’t mean that we will exhaust knowing the infinite God. Eternity will mean a constant disclosure of who God-in-three-persons is.

Why is it that mysticism is defined by vagueness, irrationality, and confusion? If we look at the works of Satan in the life of the demonic influenced people, or if we look at any piece of occult literature and see how entangled and illogical things are there, then we understand that mysticism is the work of the Devil to attract people in a false spirituality.
THE COLOSSIAN CHURCH AND THE THREAT OF PHILOSOPHY

One of the chief heresies at Colossae was philosophy. Merrill C. Tenney, in his remarkable New Testament Survey proves, based on competent research of 1st century context of the Greco-Roman world, how philosophy became a winner in the competition with other world religions that co-existed together with it. In Colossians 2:8 a literal rendering of the text reads like this: See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. (Colossians 2:8 NASB)

The NIV rendering of verse 8b through hollow and deceptive philosophy, is not reflecting the correct translation from the original Greek. The NASB version is right in this case. The NIV translation allows philosophers and other Bible commentators to say that there are two versions of philosophy; good, and hollow and deceptive. But that’s not the case.

Philosophy can take the minds of the people captive, even the minds of Christian philosophers. The word for taking captive in Greek is Sulaggeo, and means to carry off as booty or as a slave. This peculiar word is used just here in the whole New Testament, so it has a very important significance. It shows how powerful philosophy is; it can deceive unless the believer is absolutely committed to Christ. In what sense? If we look in the context of the chapter, we see that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Him (v.3). The logical conclusion is, outside of Christ there is no wisdom; philosophy cannot offer wisdom in spite of all her claims. Of course it can have an appearance of wisdom, but in reality it is pure speculation. Philosophy also tells us that without it we are incomplete in the area of intellect, wisdom, and the like. Colossians says the contrary, that we are complete in Christ to the level that philosophy cannot add anything to us. Why? As Christ has a complete Godhead in His bodily form, so we are furnished by the complete Christ to a level of absolute fullness of wisdom and knowledge so that we don’t need philosophy or other forms of spirituality. The Apostle Paul uses the most powerful arguments about the Preeminent Christ in the whole New Testament against philosophy, knowing that the whole Greco-Roman world was conquered at the mind level by it.
ALEXANDRIAN APPROACH TO BIBLE INTERPRETATION. A FOUNDATION OF EASTERN ORTHODOXY. THE BYZANTINE MIND

Alexandria, even before the Christian era, was the center of intense religious, philosophical, and cultural activities where Platonism was dominant. Philo of Alexandria, the Jewish philosopher, was one of the very influential thinkers who heavily used metaphorical and allegorical methods of textual interpretation. Later, when Clement of Alexandria came along, he picked up Philo’s method and set the direction how Eastern Orthodoxy will approach the Biblical text and academic work for the two millennia. Thus Platonism, metaphors and allegories were totally relied on. Platonism changed into Neoplatonism. Toward the 5th century, Neoplatonism was finalized through Iamblichus, Proclus, and Pseudo-Denis. These names will come up again with all necessary elucidations, including their philosophical stand. The Eastern Church limited herself to the 5th century Neoplatonist understanding of Christianity. Nevertheless this philosophy which damaged the Church was going to develop in the greatest occult endeavor ever.

When the highly speculative, Platonic thought is combined with metaphors and allegorization, the result is not only vagueness at its height, but also a mystic mindset that can rarely be overcome even by scholars of Eastern Orthodoxy. We can call it the Byzantine mind. Eastern Orthodox scholars, as well as priests and regular people of that denomination reject, and also resent a logical approach to spirituality due to the conditions we saw before. They charge Evangelicals and Roman Catholics with being dependent on Aristotelian logic and philosophy, consciously ignoring the fact that the most philosophically affected church is the Neoplatonic Mystic Eastern Orthodoxy.

If theologians and some priests of E. Orthodoxy are convinced Neoplatonists, the average E. Orthodox believer is just plain mystical. This is where Neoplatonism leads. The mystical mind is the Byzantine mind as we saw, ready to accept contradictory statements in the area of faith but stubbornly refusing a rational dialog. Byzantine mind is a captive intellect impossible to be persuaded, because persuasion requires logic but the mystical mind defies logic. Remember the root word for mysticism is 

μνο meaning closed eyes. The opening of their spiritual eyes belongs to God who works through His servants. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me. (Acts 26:17,18).

For the Eastern Orthodox, salvation is viewed as taking place at the end of their existence; therefore they see themselves engaged in a process of salvation leading to deification. We will have a comprehensive discussion about deification in the Neoplatonic section.
In the Biblical view, salvation is an accomplished fact at the cross by Christ in the past. The Biblical believer is already justified, engaged in the sanctification process, waiting for the return of Christ.

Generally speaking, evangelical missiology professors in contrast to their colleagues are very weak theologically speaking. Among other things Eastern Orthodoxy is unknown to them. As a result, nearly all of the Evangelistic crusades and events are seen by the E. Orthodox as the Latin crusaders coming to take over the East again. The overall American mission enterprise to Eastern Orthodoxy is a failure.

**From Plato to Plotinus and beyond and how their philosophy directed Eastern Orthodox Theology of the Church Fathers and Desert Fathers**

The germ of apostasy is placed by the Evil one in the Church from the start. Take for instance Ananias and Sapphire’s example (Acts 5:1-10). They tried to deceive the apostles but God immediately stuck them down. Church life from this standpoint is a continuous assault on the church from apostates from within. Towards the end of the apostolic era, we see how heretical views intensify their attack, and the apostles responded with adequate writings such as 1 John, Jude, 2 Peter, 1 & 2 Timothy. All these epistles contain a lot of apologetics. The claim that the patristic period of the church, second to the fifth century was a climax of a theological correctness, is false. The only achievement of the Church Fathers was dealing with the Creeds. Other than that, they excelled in wrong hermeneutics, philosophical presuppositions superimposed on the Christian theology, and a liturgy linked to pagan practices. So the patristic time was a time of apostasy, nevertheless not total. God makes sure that the church will survive no matter what.

The charge of Neoplatonism as the foundation of Eastern Orthodoxy comes not only from non-E. Orthodox scholars but from key Eastern Orthodox theologians like John Meyendorff the greatest E. Orthodox theologian and Vladimir Lossky another very important name of the Eastern Church. Along with them most of the E. Orthodox theologians admit the Neoplatonic foundation, but many try to play it down knowing the role of Neoplatonic philosophy play in their theology.

*Platonism and Neoplatonism underscore E. Orthodox theology. Many protestant and sometimes Evangelicals engage E. Orthodox theology ignoring the philosophical underpinnings resulting an improper understanding of the Eastern Church. Often historians and philosophers do a better job since they investigate the philosophical issues involved.*

Before we go into some basic Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy necessary to decipher Eastern Orthodox theology and mysticism, we need to clarify a crucial issue in relation to Dionysius the Areopagite one of the key E. Orthodox church father. He introduced himself to the readership under a false identity as being the apostle Paul’s disciple although he lived 500 A.D.

One of his works is a short Neoplatonic treatise called *Mystical Theology* the foundational book on which the E. Orthodox Church built her theology since the 5th century and on. Sadly, a man
with fraudulent personality is one of the pillars of the Eastern Church. As we shall see later, E. Orthodox hierarchy, liturgies, along with other patristic works are based on Dionysius’ writings such as The Divine Names and Ecclesiastical Hierarchies.

Vladimir Lossky produced a crucial book on Dionysius’ work titled The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church. Lossky’s book, basically reiterate Dionysius’ Mystical Theology for the modern reader. Lossky’s Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church is the best ever work specifically by clarifying to the reader the true nature of E. Orthodoxy, as being Neoplatonic and mystic.

The scholarly community calls Dionysius the Areopagite, Pseudo-Dionysius. Here is the story behind the change from Dionysius the Areopagite to Pseudo-Dionysius.

Hypatius a bishop of Ephesus around 532 A.D. contested that Dionysius was a disciple of the apostle Paul (Acts 17:34). During Renaissance, more scholars questioned Dionysius’ identity like Erasmus and others noticing his Neoplatonic language, and concluded that the author of the Mystical Theology lived much later than the first century. In the 19th century, Roman Catholic scholars researched the issue deeper and came to the same conclusion. Modern scholarship confirms earlier findings. So Dionysius the Areopagite is rightly named Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite by the scholastic community. He is rendered in an abbreviated format as Pseudo-Denys. From now on we will use this form.

And now, the problem! The Orthodox Church still calls him Dionysius the Areopagite and not Pseudo-Denys leaving unaffected his position and influence as a Church Father. When I asked different E. Orthodox priests and theologians about this issue I got answers ranging from I don’t know to the one Lossky gives in the next sentence. In his Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church he says that he doesn’t mind who Pseudo-Dionysius was in reality, because as far as he fulfills the job for the church, everything else is all right (p.25). This statement puts the E. Orthodox church in a very difficult position because her theological foundation is made of unreliable sources. As we will progress into this research we will discover many more issues of this nature, but Pseudo-Denys is one the greatest threat to E. Orthodoxy.

Pseudo-Denys went so far with his schemes that he wrote a forged letter in which he was encouraging John the Apostle in his Patmos exile Remember, John was in exile prior to 100 A.D. and Pseudo-Denys lived around 500 A.D.

All these forgeries were done by Pseudo-Denys with the goal of creating credentials with the Christian community. His purpose was to corrupt Christianity with deep occultic Neoplatonic thought. And he fully succeeded until he was caught by the scholastic scrutiny as we saw.

We went directly to Pseudo-Denys because he represents the height of Neoplatonic philosophy which infiltrated the E. Orthodox theology, to the extent that it created an environment for occultism. We will come back later to discuss some specifics of Pseudo-Denys’ writings.

Now let’s go back to Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophical underpinnings of E. Orthodoxy. We shall start with Plato. He was a mystical philosopher. He was initiated in Mystery Religions. Consequently, he rarely if ever defines a concept with precision. We are never told exactly what justice is, or virtue, or the good, and so forth. Invariably the definitions are left
incomplete, open-ended. A short discussion about his main thrust of philosophy is found in the end notes. Plato built his philosophy on the premise that there is a world of ideas which are also called forms beyond the physical universe which represents the true reality. This exploration outside the material universe opened the door for occult spiritual speculations for later developments of his philosophy. Platonic forms/ideas exiting outside the universe become entities in later in Neoplatonism and thus changing in an occult religion. Neoplatonism is the way Platonism evolved during the first centuries of the Christian era.

The founder of Neoplatonism is Plotinus. He picked up the fundamentals of his philosophy form Ammonius Saccas. Plotinus’ name somehow resembles Plato’s and for untrained readers it may be confusing at times. Plato lived at 428 BC - 347 BC, whereas Plotinus lived much later in 204-270 AD.

If Plato was a mystic, Plotinus was a veiled occultist. He developed a system of Neoplatonic theology where “The One” is the god of his esoteric philosophy. The One emanates the intellect/mind and the mind emanates the soul. Plotinus is viewed by philosophers as the great third century thinker and ‘founder’ of Neoplatonism. He is responsible for the grand synthesis of progressive Christian and Gnostic ideas with the traditional Platonic philosophy. But we have to go further to two other significant Neoplatonists who also influenced Pseudo-Denys. They are Iamblichus and Proclus. There is a consensus among scholars that Pseudo-Denys was Proclus’ pupil. They developed a much more elaborated cosmology than Plotinus, the founder of Neoplatonism. They are outright occultists employing Mystery Religions concepts, including theurgy. Neoplatonism incorporates also the best of Aristotle, Pythagoras, and the Stoics, so as to make a synthesis of philosophy of the ancient world. Look at this evaluation of Proclus the mentor of Pseudo-Denis: Proclus was an adept in the invocation rituals of every people in the world, and a great magical figure. With the advance of Byzantinism, he represented the old world of Greek thought, and even those who wrote against him as a heathen show the influence he exercised on their doctrines. Thus Dionysius attempted to accommodate the philosophy of Proclus to Christianity, and greatly admired his asceticism.

In the end notes I attached an excellent synthesis about heavy philosophical influences on the Church Fathers.

The Neoplatonic thought has a relative simple schema of how things function inside that philosophical system. Having a good grasp of it will help the reader to quickly make sense of many issues regarding the Desert and Church Fathers’ Theology including the liturgy of the E. Orthodox Church. Let’s keep in mind that Neoplatonic developments took place when Christianity was well establishes for two hundred years, so Neoplatonists imported Christian concepts and mixed them with Philosophy, Gnosticism, and Mystery Religions and then injected them back into Christian thought of the Church Fathers resulting in a corrupted theology. In order to help the untrained reader in philosophy to take hold of this important concept I will provide a short and log version of the Neoplatonic schema.

The short version of Neoplatonic schema. The Neoplatonic god is called The One. He emanates the intellect which is not just an abstract mind but a spiritual personality. Consecutively the intellect emanates the soul which is the “spirit” that animates all the
physical matter called the world soul. The human soul is separate from the world soul but part of it in the same time. Emanation creates the desire in the intellect and the soul to return to The One, something like longing to go back home. The return of the intellect along with the soul into the One presupposes rituals of purification (solitude, ascetism) followed by contemplation of the One by the intellect and soul, and then union with the One leading to full deification of the intellect and soul. This whole Neoplatonic schema of return and desire for union with God unmediated by Christ or the Word is the foundation of E. Orthodox mysticism of the Church Fathers and Desert Fathers.

The longer version of Neoplatonic schema influencing E. Orthodoxy. Neoplatonism is not just a philosophy but a religion based on Platonic philosophy. Even Platonism itself is not free of mysticism and religious undertones. Plato mentions demons as being “good” and bad; Plotinus and Proclus do the same. In our discussion here we talk about Neoplatonic elements from Plotinus, Proclus, and Pseudo-Denys. Porphyry the disciple and biographer of Plotinus tells how his mentor conjured up his own demon which, in the Platonic philosophy, are called guardian demons. But Plotinus had a god not a demon the author says (to save face for his mentor)25. It was a demon for sure. Plotinus the father of Neoplatonism called the god of his philosophical system The One. Plotinus describes his god as totally transcendent; the words are not appropriate to describe him he claims, and he is beyond Being, a non-Being. Therefore the suitable language in dealing with the One is a language of negation describing what the One is not. In theology, the negative language is called apophatism or via negativa. The importance of the negative language in Eastern Orthodoxy can hardly be overstated. It is the foundation for her mystical theology. Nevertheless they also use positive discourse called kataphatic language, but in a minor key, the negative dominates. The Neoplatonic idea that the One can be apprehended only by negation made its definite way through Pseudo-Denis and G. Palamas into Eastern Orthodoxy. The result is, the God of the Bible becomes totally unknown in His essence for them. Cappadocian Fathers and Maximus the confessor along with Pseudo-Dennis fathered the apophatic theology starting form philosophical premises. That is the reason the Church Fathers hold such an authority in Eastern Orthodoxy; they are seen as the ones who hold the key of how the Bible and God should be understood.

In the Neoplatonic schema of things, the One emanates the intellect or the mind which is not merely of abstract intellect but of the spiritual personality, also called divine mind, or logos. In turn the intellect emanates the soul. As we learned in the previous paragraph the soul is world soul containing the human soul also. The One, the mind, and the soul form a Tirade, a Neoplatonic trinity. Triads are part of many aspects of E. Orthodoxy such as the Church building having three compartments, the E. Orthodox community being composed of three groups and so on (more later in the Theurgy section). Now coming back to what was before, there is another word for emanation which is procession or a downward process (prohodos in Greek) used by Eastern Orthodoxy. But the intellect retains some “divinity” from The One. On the other hand the One has a “human side” in itself. As a result emanation has to be followed by the return of the intellect and the soul back into the One otherwise the One will remain incomplete. Here is the origin of the idea of Universal salvation (apokatastasis), including the heresy that the humans have a spark of divinity in themselves. Most of the Church fathers were
Universalists. All the emanations have to return including the ones like demons and Satan because evil is non-existent as spiritual entity; evil is just the physical matter, says Plotinus. Another word for the return is ascension, like ascending on a ladder. Ascension of the intellect into the One has to solve the problem of the soul, because the soul is an emanation of the intellect. The soul is involved with low life being implicated with the matter (the matter is evil both for Neoplatonists and Gnostics) so the soul has to be purified through ascetic practices. There are three stages in Neoplatonism which describe the return of the intellect and the soul into The One: purification, contemplation, and mystical union (again the Triadic concept). Thus, purification involves ascetic practices, contemplation requires philosophical contemplation of The One, and then the mystical union (henosis) with the One follows. This mystical union (henosis) with the pagan god or gods leads to divinization (apotheosis) of the worshiper and implies trance/ecstasy of the devotee. The three stages of Neoplatonic ascent into the One were part of the theology and practice especially of the Desert Fathers, plus Church Fathers and other monks. Today these teachings are still widely spread, and evangelicals want to catch up with them. The aim of mystical union for E. Orthodox clergy and monks was (and is) theosis\textsuperscript{27} that is divinization, a Christianized form of henosis and apotheosis a Neoplatonic heresy. This is why Eastern Orthodoxy preaches more on theosis than salvation because they want divinization, which is more than what the Bible teaches.

Additional important information on the Neoplatonic schema of things present in Eastern Orthodoxy

Neoplatonic Hierarchies. Later Neoplatonic philosophers, especially Iamblichus, and then Proclus added hundreds of intermediate beings (hierarchies) such as gods, angels and demons, and other beings as mediators between the One and humanity. Pseudo-Denys wrote two works, one on Celestial Hierarchy and the other on Ecclesiastical Hierarchy based on his predecessors Neoplatonic thinking. His work on Hierarchies consolidated exiting non-biblical practices which divided the Church in clergy and laity. It also fostered convictions for the need of the dead saints to intercede for the living. Ecclesiastical Hierarchies are portrayed as the only people qualified to administer Church sacraments for the “salvation” of the people.

Contemplation as a way to reach union with God is a philosophical pagan concept. The Greek word for Contemplation is theoria. Plotinus describes contemplation as musing on the perfection within. The outside world is shut up and all logical distinctions vanish\textsuperscript{28}. When monks do the prayer of the heart using Neoplatonic contemplation, they allegedly bring the mind into the heart “discovering God” right there in the heart, like Plotinus. Yet what they encounter is a mystic god, not the God of the Bible. Biblical contemplation is opposed to the pagan and mystical concept. Reflection on the Word is critical. Employing faith and coherency having in view Christ’s perfection and not perfection within is the Biblical contemplation. Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long. (Ps.119:97). For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form. (Col. 2:9). Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this. Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. (2Tim2:7-9)
Ecstasy and Eros. The word Ecstasy means standing out of oneself; is constantly employed by Neoplatonists and mystics. They asserted that when the One emanated the intellect it came out of itself. Consequently when emanations like the intellect and the soul are returning to the One they experience ecstasy too, coming out of themselves to unite with the One. Neoplatonists use erotic language in many occasions. Mystical ecstasy rules out any usage of logic or propositional discourse. It is considered the height of pagan contemplation. People in a state of mystical ecstasy lose their consciousness for a time; they fall in a trance. In other words they undergo an occult coma. There are stories about monks from among Desert Fathers who went deeper and deeper into desert looking for the transfigured Christ of their sick imagination to become one mystically with him to experience ecstatic trances. These types of occurrences are the height of occultism in monasticism; they are viewed as the marks of true spirituality, when in reality are abominable and blasphemous.

Now coming back to the use of the word eros and erotic language among the Desert and Church Fathers, it is imperative to know how they ended up using such terminology. First of all, the New Testament never uses the term eros. There are two words employed, when love between God/Christ and the believers is described: 1) sacrificial love (agape), and 2) fondness/affection for somebody dear (philia). For husband and wife physical intimacy the New Testament uses different equivalent expressions but never eros. Why? Eros was the celebrated word for all kinds of sexual debaucheries. Eros was also related to homosexual relationships as well. Pederasty was sought after by the Greeks too. Eros was the universal word for sexual intercourse regardless of gender. He was also a Greek deity. In Plato’s Symposium Eros is also presented as a demon. The Symposium is an indirect incitation to homosexuality. Socrates, Plato’s mentor was a homosexual, interested in young guys. The Greek mythology portrays Eros as being born of Chaos and other times as being the son of Aphrodite the Greek goddess of immorality. So Church and Desert Fathers used the word eros due to their allegiance to Platonic Philosophy. They affirmed that The Song of Songs is depicting God’s/Christ’s spiritual love for his people and vice versa. And now the pagan eros comes into picture. Husband and wife physical intimacy being erotic in the Song of Songs, therefore eros describes God’s/Christ’s love for his Church and conversely Church’s love for God in spite of the fact that eros is nowhere in the Bible. The use of the word eros in any reference to God-believers relationships is blasphemous and abominable in spite of the fact that Church and Desert Fathers give all the assurances that everything is at a spiritual level. Here is where allegorization and Platonism leads, as a result of Origen’s thought, and the Alexandrian catechetical school (more on that later).

Origen and Gregory of Nyssa (Church Fathers) are both examples of erotic excess rightly comments Virginia Burrus a feminist, Professor of early church history, at Drew University when she discuses eros and early church in her book Toward a Theology of Eros. She is accompanied in this investigation by Catherine Keller (Drew University) a fervent feminist and coeditor of the same book. Together with other contributors they indict the erotic preoccupations of the Church and Desert Fathers. Along the same lines Dr. Morwenna Ludlow from Exeter University, U.K. competently investigates the questionable erotic theology of Gregory of Nyssa in her book Gregory of Nyssa, Ancient and (Post) Modern.
The book *The Sex Lives of Saints an Erotics of Ancient Hagiography* by Virginia Burrus is another indictment to the Desert Fathers and Mothers who are inexcusable in their misguided abstinence, pathological hatred for the body, and masochist tendencies. The monastics are incriminated with resisting the marital, procreative ethic of sexuality found in other strands of Christian tradition. One of the impeached “saints” in the book is Jerome. The author masterfully dissects him exposing his gullible heretic Christianity. She revenges on Jerome as a feminist because he deserves it. Among other things, Jerome is brought out in the open with his disreputable letter (41 pages long!) written to a virgin young lady, Eustochium. I will comment on short passages of Jerome’s letter shortly, but before I do that I need to express an evaluation on the two books I referred to. Both books are written from a feminist perspective, take as a standard of holiness the heretic practices of monasticism, and then they engage in accusing God as the author of this sinful confusion of the Church and Desert Fathers. These books are not to be read. They come to filthy, blasphemous conclusions but they are objective in exposing the “saints” of the first centuries. Why is it that recent Protestant and Evangelical scholarship remain silent about the grave sins of the first centuries of Christian era, and the job has to be done by feminists like Virginia Burrus? Why the Patristic period is not rendered the way it was as a period of history of the Church shaken by heresies and apostasy? Why is it that the monastics are promoted as examples of great spirituality more and more among evangelicals? Here the following verse is fit for most of the monastics: God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you. (Romans 2:24). On the other hand few monastics have the gift of celibacy, still retreating in total isolation is anti-Biblical.

**Jerome’s letter to Eustochium is a prime example of inappropriate counseling to a young lady.** First we need some background to the story. Jerome was forced to leave his position at Rome after an inquiry by the Roman clergy into allegations that he had improper relations with the widow Paula. In August 385, he returned to Antioch, accompanied by his brother Paulinianus and several friends, and followed a little later by Paula and Eustochium her daughter, who had resolved to end their days in the Holy Land. In the winter of 385, Jerome acted as their spiritual adviser. So Jerome, a single, indulges in a long term “friendly” company of two ladies: a widow and her daughter. Paula the widow directed her wealth to Jerome in order that the “saint” would have a comfortable life while doing his writings, as they all lived in Palestine, away from the scrutiny of their acquaintances in Rome. I don’t accuse Jerome of immorality, but nevertheless he put himself in a very shameful position. His letter to Eustochium is a collection of heresies, out of context Bible interpretation, jumbled Bible verses, and inexcusable advice to a young lady.

**Excerpts from Jerome’s Letter to Eustochium**

**Jerome:** How often, when I was living in the desert, in the vast solitude which gives to hermits a savage dwelling-place, parched by a burning sun, how often did I fancy myself among the pleasures of Rome!

**My Comments:** his testimony is a proof that escaping to the desert will bring aggravation to issues and sins encountered in society. Christ prayed that we will be protected from the evil one while we live in the world: I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but
that You should keep them from the evil one (John 17:15). Christ was referring to the importance of the Christian testimony in society, and not for them to make it too early to heaven, which also by implication rules out monasticism.

**Jerome:** I would begin by urging you and warning you as Christ’s spouse

**My Comments:** this blasphemy, that individuals are Christ’s spouse, is the common heresy among monastics, which sometimes is found among some extremist ladies among Evangelicals. The spiritual spouse of Christ is always the community of the Church as in the example of the Corinthian Church. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. (2Cor. 11:2)

**Jerome:** ... and to eat one’s food cooked is looked upon as self-indulgence...

**My Comments:** this is another scandalous heresy common among monastics. The teaching that cooked food is self-indulgence and people should abstain from it, is the teachings of demons. The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron ... and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. (1 Timothy 4:1-3).

**Jerome:** Now, although in my fear of hell I had consigned myself to this prison, where I had no companions but scorpions and wild beasts, I often found myself amid bevies of girls.

**My Comments:** Jerome, along with many people who see the desert hardships as a way of atoning for their sins and escaping from hell, are insulting the Cross of Christ who paid the penalty for our sins. While running from hell, Jerome ended in a hellish temptation where he had appearances of groups of tempting girls; nevertheless, they were demonic manipulations.

**Jerome:** My face was pale and my frame chilled with fasting; yet my mind was burning with desire, and the fires of lust kept bubbling up before me when my flesh was as good as dead...

**My Comments:** what a proof that punishing the body will not get rid of carnality! The solution is in the cross of Christ applied by the Holy Spirit to man’s condition and not in his performance. Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations—“Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,” which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh. (Colossians 2:20-23). Jerome, and all the monastics who go through burning desires of getting married and yet denying them in the same time, are guilty of expressly transgressing the command of the Lord that it is better to marry than to burn..(1 Corinthians 7:9b). Remember, his lustful confessions are made to a young virgin lady. What sinfulness!

**Jerome:** The terms are chosen for decency’s sake, but the reproductive organs of the two sexes are meant...
My Comments: Jerome had no business getting into such matters that belonged to Eustochium or to Paula, Eustochium’s mother, as a parental adviser to her daughter. While pretending to build holiness into the listener, he is just plain erotic with the young lady. Virginia Burrus is right when she exposes monastics like Jerome indulging in eroticism, under the guise of “holy counseling”.

Jerome: You have at least learned from a case in your own family the troubles of wedded life and the uncertainties of marriage. Your sister, Blæsilla, before you in age but behind you in declining the vow of virginity, has become a widow but seven months after she has taken a husband...

My Comments: here, Jerome is crafty, discouraging Eustochium from getting married by reminding her how her sister became a widow soon after she got married, as if that would be Eustochium’s case as well. Moreover, he implies that once Blæsilla dropped her virginity vows and got married, she kind of committed a sin. The apostle Paul urges virgin men and women in 1 Corinthians 7, to remain the way they are, in the context of the first century church where many believers were slaves and risked to be separated by their owners if they had a spouse and children, by being sold separately to different slave masters.

Jerome: I praise wedlock, I praise marriage, but it is because they give me virgins. I gather the rose from the thorns, the gold from the earth,

My Comments: Here Jerome is laid bare in his sick, sinful mentality. In his delusion he thinks that marriage is the thorns, good just as a way to produce young virgin ladies in order for him to have an audience that will allow him to practice his erotic lectures, under the cover of the good old “holy” monk. It is disgusting where the doctrines of demons led Jerome and countless numbers of monks, and nuns like Teresa of Avila.

A fit conclusion for Desert and Church Fathers involved with erotic language in their theology as well as other modern theologians and feminists who perceived the Bible through erotic lenses, the following verse is suitable: To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled (Titus 1:15).

Neo-platonism the source for all European occultism. Many people underestimate the power of philosophy as a deadly combination of mysticism and demonic inspired human wisdom. Besides Christianity, two other major religions of the world were radically influenced by Neoplatonism. One is Sufi Islam, and the other one is Judaism. Kabbalah as part of Judaism is extremely occultic and contains a principle of spiritual ascension, which is purely Neoplatonic. But Neoplatonism did not stop there. Contemporary forms of Neognosticism, Theosophy, and different aspects of New Age have Neoplatonic influences. For instance, the key Neoplatonic concept of oneness (henosis) is the aim of the new world order of merging of all religions. After they will merge under the Antichrist, the chief Neoplatonic deity, The One, which is described only by negation according to the Neoplatonic philosophy, will be revealed as being Satan himself. The Devil is in total negation of God, trying to destroy and undo everything that is positive and created by God.
Eastern Church Fathers are the norm for every Bible interpretation and Church policies for the eastern Church. It is inferred that they have the same authority with the writers of the New Testament. In the following longer section I will list some Church Fathers and their main errors and heresies due to the Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy. It is very important to see how the things started and how philosophy took over theology in the E. Orthodox Church.

**Clement of Alexandria** (150-211 AD) was the first Christian Platonist. He fused theology and Platonic philosophy. He claimed under the influence of Philo’s works (a Jewish philosopher) that Greek philosophers picked up their best idea from the Old Testament. He was sold out to philosophy. And let it not be this one man alone—Plato; but, O philosophy, hasten to produce many others also, who declare the only true God to be God, through His inspiration... Cleanthes Pisadeus, the Stoic philosopher, who exhibits not a poetic theogony, but a true theology... He also said the way to reach the heathens is by a philosophical presentation of the Bible. He was part of the Catechetical School of Alexandria. That was a school of theology. The force behind it was the centuries old Alexandrian School, a synthesis of the Greek, Jewish, and early Christian culture, philosophy and theology mixed with Gnosticism. Clement was not able to escape Alexandrian influence. Speculative thought, Platonic philosophy, metaphoric and allegorical treatment of the Bible, along with mysticism, became the landmarks of Alexandrian theology. Clement advanced the idea of deification too. In effect, Clement sets the direction of Eastern Orthodoxy for the next two millennia permeating it with Platonism and mysticism.

**Origen of Alexandria** (185-254 A.D) was the pupil of Clement of Alexandria. He also was discipled in pre-Neoplatonism by Ammonius Saccas who also trained Plotinus the father of Neoplatonism. Origen attempted to synthesize the fundamental principles of Greek philosophy, particularly those of Neoplatonism and Stoicism, with the Christianity so as to prove the Christian view of the universe to be compatible with Greek thought. Porphry the pupil of Plotinus charges Origen for borrowing from the Stoics the figurative interpretation, which was also used by the Greek mystery religions. "... He [Origen] used the books of Chaeremon the Stoic and Cornutus, from whom he learned the figurative interpretation, as employed in the Greek mysteries. Allegorization proved to be deadly to the Eastern Church.

Origen is viewed as the first philosopher of Christianity. He is more a Humanist than a theologian. Origen was a big heretic. Origen’s gravest heresy is that of making Christ a lesser Deity, a demiurge generated by the Father. This is a Neoplatonic and Gnostic belief in emanation, of lesser gods from the One, the Neoplatonic god. Here is how Origen describes Christ as demiurge: For Christ is, in a manner, the demiurge, to whom the Father says, Let there be light, and Let there be a firmament. But Christ is demiurge as a beginning (arche), inasmuch as He is wisdom...And therefore we must believe that Wisdom was generated before any
beginning... take care that he be not guilty of impiety against the unbegotten Father Himself, seeing he denies that He had always been a Father, and had generated the Word\textsuperscript{41}.

The Word was not generated. Looking at John 1:1 we see a different grammar structure, totally dissimilar of what Origen unforgivably claims. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (1). He was in the beginning with God(2;) All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being(John 1:1-3) The text says that the Word was with God signifying that He was together with the Father but as a different personality; and the Word was God too, meaning divine. No hint of being generated. Origen reads his Neoplatonism and Gnostic emanation view into the passage. He is doing Isegesis\textsuperscript{42}. Verse two is there just to repeat the fact from verse one, which the Word was forever with God and is God. The repetition is designed to drill into the reader's mind a crucial aspect about Christ's Deity and full equality with the Father. One more thing: the word beginning is not related to God and the Word but to the beginning of creation as verse 3 shows. Origen knew perfect New Testament Greek enabling him for a correct exegesis of the text. An equal grave Origenist heresy is his assertion that Christ had a different nature than the Father which in Greek is heterousia. He is without excuse for that monstrous heresy.

A demiuric heretic view of Christ causes a heretic view of the Trinity. Origen portrays the Holy Spirit as inferior to the Son. He is sent (emanated) by Him. The result is an unequal view of Trinity: Father bigger than the Son, and the Son bigger than Spirit. This is called eternal subordination, a fundamental theory in the Trinitarian view of Eastern Orthodoxy. Origen's emanation of Christ as a demiurge coupled with eternal subordination and gradation between the Divine Persons led to the heresy of Arius who denied the Deity of Christ. Origen applied also Numenius' "second god" concept in his elaboration about Christ\textsuperscript{43}. Numenius of Apamea was a Neopythagorean philosopher (150-176 A.D)

The low view of Christ is seen in his letter to Gregory where he states that is not enough to be one with Christ but to be one with God is the goal, as if being one with Christ does not make someone one with God too. May you also be a partaker, and be ever increasing your inheritance, that you may say not only, We are become partakers of Christ, but also partakers of God\textsuperscript{44}.

Origen's heresies continue with the denial of hell, resulting in salvation for everyone including Satan which is universalism (apokatastasis\textsuperscript{45}), rejection of bodily resurrection, Gnosticism by saying that the body is the tomb of the soul, deification, the pre-existence and transmigration of souls. Transmigration means reincarnation. Origen's view of reincarnation is not that the souls reincarnate in other animals but the souls reincarnate few times as humans in order to learn how to properly repent and get saved. This is grace for Origen.

The denial of bodily resurrection is denial of Christianity: For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. (1Cor.15:16-19).

Origen was anathematized by two Church Councils, one local in Constantinople in 545 AD and then on the Fifth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in 553 AD. The anathema against him
Reformation within Eastern Orthodoxy

If anyone does not anathematize Arius, Eunomius, Macedonius, Apollinaris, Nestorius, Eutyches and Origen, as well as their impious writings, as also all other heretics already condemned and anathematized by the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, and by the aforesaid four Holy Synods and [if anyone does not equally anathematize] all those who have held and hold or who in their impiety persist in holding to the end the same opinion as those heretics just mentioned: let him be anathema.\(^{46}\)

Is the E. Orthodox Church putting herself under the anathema of the Fifth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in 553 AD by holding Origen as a Church Father?

Origen’s work generated many heresies in the centuries following him. Here is an incredible passage from a letter from Epiphanius, where he, as a Bishop of Salamis is complaining to his friend John, Bishop of Jerusalem, about John’s devotion to Origen’s works (around 395 A.D.).

You can see that people in the first centuries of Christianity knew how to articulate sound theology. Attempts to excuse or rehabilitate Origen by humanists or liberal theologians have no support. Origen is rightly called the root and parent of all heresies.

For I see that all your indignation has been roused against me simply because I have told you that you ought not to eulogize one who is the spiritual father of Arius, and the root and parent of all heresies. And when I appealed to you not to go astray, and warned you of the consequences, you traversed my words, and reduced me to tears and sadness; and not me only, but many other Catholics who were present.

Can any one, moreover, brook Origen’s assertion that men’s souls were once angels in heaven, and that having sinned in the upper world, they have been cast down into this, and have been confined in bodies as in barrows or tombs, to pay the penalty for their former sins; and that the bodies of believers are not temples of Christ, but prisons of the condemned?

Again, he tampers with the true meaning of the narrative by a false use of allegory, multiplying words without limit; and undermines the faith of the simple by the most varied arguments... Epiphanius (the rest is in the end notes\(^{47}\)).

As Epiphanius observed, Origen multiplies words without limits. When you read his works you see just a rapid succession of Bible verses and short comments without much connection among themselves, like a hemorrhage of words. Origen is a loose humanist with a very bad hermeneutics. He showed himself to be a Stoic, a Neo-Pythagorean, a Platonic, and a Gnostic.\(^{48}\)

Origen’s influence was enormous. Origenism it is an established term describing his malevolent impact over centuries. There were many subsequent church leaders influenced by his heretical writings but he had some opposition too. The following link from a Coptic Orthodox Church offers a comprehensive treatment of the subject. I appreciate their transparency in dealing with certain heretical issues in their own camp. http://www.copticchurch.net/topics/patrolgy/schoolofalex2/chapter04.html Understandably the author sides with features of E. Orthodoxy such as overlooking the fact that Evagrius Ponticus the desert monk being condemned by Fifth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople for Origenism and for declaring that the human mind is divine.
One of the greatest defender of Origenism was Rufinus of Aquileia, a monk and great admirer of Origen’s writings. He translated some of his works in Latin editing them as much as possible in order to make him look non-heretical. So we see how far loyalty to Origen went. People who are attracted by speculations and heresies, show clearly they are non-regenerated. We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us, By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error (1John 4:6).

In the following paragraph I will list some Church Fathers and leading Christians of the first centuries, influenced by Origen or approving of his writings. Evagrius Ponticus, he is responsible for the spread of his teaching among the monks of Egypt. Evagrius took a great interest in the speculative and contemplative aspects of Origen’s thought and adapted them to the needs of the monastic movement which had emerged strongly in the course of the fourth century. Through him Origen’s thoughts were handed on to John Cassian, and so to all Western Christian monasticism. Gregory of Nazianzus referred to Origen as "the whetstone of us all"; Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus collaborated on the Philokalia, a collection of mystic devotions which includes also fragments of Origen's writings. Jerome, who was at first a great devotee of Origen, later turned against him, though in matters related to his exegesis, remained his disciple to the end. The general concept of a final s (salvation of all at the end) is found in Gregory of Nyssa and persists in a modified form in Byzantine theology, notably in Maximus the confessor. Gregory of Nyssa called Origen the prince of Christian learning. Apokatastasis it reoccurs in modern Russian thinkers and heretics such as Solovyov, Bulgakov and Berdiaev.

Rowan A. Greer writes on Origen the following: "His influence upon the Cappadocian Fathers of the fourth century means that he is an important source for the theology that had become the classical articulation of Christian spirituality. Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa preserved Origen's thought for the Church and adapted it to a theological explanation of monasticism understood as the perfect life meant to be lived by all." Origen could be called the father of monasticism from an ideological point of view. He also went to the extreme to have bilateral orchidectomy performed on him.

Nevertheless, some of Origen's Trinitarian formulations (e.g. emanation), as well as his apophatic description of God, made their way into the established creeds and formulas of the Eastern Church.

In closing of this section on Origen, I will cite Schmemann. He was dean at St. Vladimir Orthodox Seminary in the U.S. He had the courage to speak the truth about many taboos inside E. Orthodoxy. However he remained with his Church. I will quote him more extensively later on. In the following paragraph Schmemann makes one of the most important remarks concerning how salvation is viewed in the Eastern Church as contemplation, a pagan concept. “Along with the adoption of much that was valuable in Alexandrian tradition, [Origenism's] danger too might be discerned more and more clearly: it lay in the 'spiritualization' of Christianity, the very subtle and innermost 'de-incarnation' of man. This was a danger from Greek idealism which had not been overcome - the desire to replace 'salvation' by contemplation.”
Athanasius of Alexandria\textsuperscript{53} (ca. 298-373 A.D.) is the most sound of the Church Fathers. He is to be commended by not being too much influenced by the Alexandrian thought, although he was from Alexandria. He is the champion in defending Christ’s deity in the early church. Athanasius was not what would be called a speculative theologian. As he stated in his First Letters to Serapion, he held onto "the tradition, teaching, and faith proclaimed by the apostles and guarded by the fathers". His life was busy with defending the deity of Christ against Arius and his followers called Arians. Arians are not to be confused with Aryans, the indo-European people.

Arius, the greatest heretic stated that Christ was merely a created being: the Son is a creature and a work. Arius’ heresy is the foundation of the cult Jehovah’s Witnesses\textsuperscript{54}. The Seventh Day Adventist sect also held to the Arian heresy in its early stages\textsuperscript{55}. Although they now affirm the Trinitarian doctrine, they never condemned Ellen G. White their prophetess for calling Christ, Michael the archangel. They went so far to make that statement in their own recent Bible translation, called Clear Word Bible "In contrast to these ungodly men is the Lord Jesus Christ, also called Michael the archangel..." Jehovah’s Witnesses are their offshoot. The Adventists are plagued by many other heresies\textsuperscript{56}, but a majority of benevolent Evangelicals in the U.S. call them Christian brothers. The Unification Church share in the same Arian heresy.

Arius died an excruciating death. “Arius was summoned before Constantine and judged suitably compliant, whereupon the emperor directed Alexander of Constantinople to receive Arius back into communion despite his objections. However, the day before he was to be readmitted to communion, Arius is reported to have died suddenly. Socrates Scholasticus, a detractor, describes Arius’ death as follows”:

\begin{quote}
It was then Saturday, and... going out of the imperial palace, attended by a crowd of Eusebian [Eusebius of Nicomedia is meant] partisans like guards, he [Arius] paraded proudly through the midst of the city, attracting the notice of all the people. As he approached the place called Constantine's Forum, where the column of porphyry is erected, a terror arising from the remorse of conscience seized Arius, and with the terror a violent relaxation of the bowels: he therefore enquired whether there was a convenient place near, and being directed to the back of Constantine's Forum, he hastened thither. Soon after a faintness came over him, and together with the evacuations his bowels protruded, followed by a copious hemorrhage, and the descent of the smaller intestines: moreover portions of his spleen and liver were brought off in the effusion of blood, so that he almost immediately died. The scene of this catastrophe still is shown at Constantinople, as I have said, behind the shambles in the colonnade: and by persons going by pointing the finger at the place, there is a perpetual remembrance preserved of this extraordinary kind of death\textsuperscript{57}.
\end{quote}

Athanasius most important works are the following: Against the Heathen” and "The Incarnation of the Word of God". Also his letters include one "Letter Concerning the Decrees of the Council of Nicaea" (De Decretis), which is an account of the proceedings of that Council, and another letter in the year 367 which was the first known listing of the New Testament including all those books now accepted everywhere as the New Testament
Athanasius wrote on *deification* of the believer but he explained what he meant by that. I attached a short and great justification from the Internet about it. *I have taken the space to quote Athanasius at length, to demonstrate that his doctrine, although not specifically defined in any one passage, is described in enough detail to know what Athanasius meant by the term *theopoieː*: through union with Christ via the Holy Spirit, we receive immortality and we escape the corruption of sin. Since these are divine attributes, it is described as *divinization*.*

However, later theologians mixed the concept with mysticism. This causes confusion when historians apply 10th century concepts to Athanasius. Part of the doctrinal change was lexical. Athanasius used the terms *theopoieː* and *theopoïēsis*; most other Eastern theologians used not only *theopoieː* but also *theosis*, and the latter word especially acquired mystical connotations. The Cappadocians seem closest to Athanasius’s concept, although ascetic concepts may have played a more prominent role. Dionysus the Areopagite shifted the concept further into mysticism.*

**Gregory of Nyssa** (335 - 395 AD) - He was a fervent admirer of Origen and applied his allegorization in textual interpretation. Although Gregory did not have formal training like his brother Basil, he was an accomplished Neoplatonist. He was also at home with Aristotelian and Stoic philosophy. Gregory also looked for hidden meanings of the texts. All these three characteristics of Gregory of Nyssa make him a candidate for heretical views. He uses the Neoplatonic Triadic ascension of the soul: ignorance/initiation, illumination, and contemplation, which is complete darkness of reason in relation to knowing God. Gregory was a gnostic too. He takes from Origen the idea that man’s physical nature is the result of the fall. He is also a universalist like Origen, arguing that even Satan himself will eventually be saved [*Great Catechism 26 (68-69)]*.

One of the brightest minds in the ancient philosophy, Harold Fredrik Cherniss*, said that Gregory of Nyssa merely applied Christian names to Plato’s philosophy and called it “Christian theology”. Gregory is totally apophatic and thus becomes a forerunner of Pseudo-Denys. He also makes a distinction between God’s essence and energies, which Gregory Palamas would later develop into a church dogma.

As a devoted Platonist, he takes the forms/entities as self subsistent and transforms them in ideas in the divine mind. Gregory sustained that Christ offered Himself in bondage to Satan to save the whole humanity [*Great Catechism 22-24 (60-65)]*. He is also a proponent of deification, Christ’s human deification is seen as a prototype for those to follow. He applies an Origenist understanding to Song of Songs, saying that ultimately God cannot be understood by external senses, but by mystical awareness internally, through senses like smell, taste, and touch. Now we learn that we can smell, taste, and touch internally. What an abomination and heresy! Gregory of Nyssa’s only good contribution was his refutation of an Aryan heretic, Eunomius. His work is called *Against Eunomius*. It is twelve chapters long, varying in length. His introduction is endless. He uses a very elevated vocabulary.
This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. (1 John 1:5-6)

We treated Pseudo-Denys’ elusive identity in enough detail in the Neoplatonic section of the essay. Here we will discuss his theology. We will start with his Mystical Theology.

Here some excerpts from his work: Supernal Triad, Deity above all essence, knowledge and goodness; Guide of Christians to Divine Wisdom (Theosophy); direct our path to the ultimate summit of your mystical knowledge...mysteries of theology are veiled in the dazzling obscurity of the secret Silence, outshining all brilliance with the intensity of their Darkness...

Let this be my prayer; but do, dear Timothy, in the diligent exercise of mystical contemplation... leave behind the senses and the operations of the intellect through pure and entire self-abnegation, into the superessential Radiance of the Divine Darkness... and plunges the mystic into the Darkness of Unknowing... We pray that we may come unto this Darkness which is beyond light... we may begin to contemplate the superessential Darkness which is hidden by all the light that is in existing things... when plunging into the Darkness that is above the intellect, we pass not merely into brevity of speech, but even into absolute silence of thoughts and of words. (emphasis mine).

Pseudo-Denys’ theology of darkness is singled out by authorities such as Hans Urs von Balthasar: A ray of darkness. This image sums up Pseudo-Denys concept of God. Along with him Vladimir Lossky a great Eastern Orthodox theologian emphasizes the darkness of the theology of Pseudo-Denys in his work The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church. The title of chapter 2 of his book is called The Divine Darkness. I don’t mean that Lossky sees Pseudo-Denys’ work as negative, on the contrary he reaffirms the foundation of the Eastern Church as sitting on the work of Pseudo-Denys. Nevertheless Pseudo-Denys had precursors advocating a theology of darkness such as Gregory of Nyssa in his work The Life of Moses, but Mystical Theology brings to a climax the mysticism and darkness concepts in the theology of the Eastern Church.

As we saw in the opening verse of this section, God and darkness don’t mix at all: in Him there is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5-6). Darkness has always a negative connotation throughout the Bible: But the way of the wicked is like deep darkness (Proverbs 4:19); only distress and darkness and fearful gloom (Isaiah 8:22); the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned (Mat.4:16). In Colossians we are told how the domain of darkness belongs to Satan. Salvation means to be brought out from under the power of darkness... giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in
the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Colossians 1:12-13)

The darkness that surrounded God on top of Mount Sinai, where Moses went to receive the law (Exodus 20:21), is a symbol of restricted access to God. The covenant of law was full of constraints. Also darkness was inside of the Holy of Holies (Exodus 26:33). When God was prepared to strike David's enemies (2 Samuel 22) or when He kept the Jews separate from their pursuers when they left Egypt (Exodus 14:19-21) darkness was present too. All these examples emphasize restriction or war situations but do not define who God is as the Eastern Church says.

From where did Pseudo-Denys pick up his theology of darkness? His primary source was Neoplatonism. The god of that philosophy, the One can be described only by negative terms. A negative language apophatism/negation is an import from philosophy, a non-Biblical concept. Apophatism is the single word that characterizes the Eastern Church. Nonetheless, Pseudo-Denys makes use of positive (Kataphatic) theology, but just to deceive his Christian readers because his aim is the negative theology which leads into darkness. Lossky argues that apophatic or negative theology is the perfect way of knowing God. Then he goes on to say that from negation to negation, the soul ascends to the highest, to the Unknown (this is the way they call God), to a state of apathy (apatheia) in darkness and then in absolute ignorance. This is the “progression” Lossky explains in his work we discuss. The word apatheia is another Neoplatonist term. A elementary logic will tell us that negation will not bring the soul up, but down to such an extent that consciousness is obliterated (absolute ignorance), and the result is a trance equal to demonic invasion or possession of the soul.

This is what Pseudo-Denys does. Under the pretense that he describes the God of the Bible he superimposes a negative Neoplatonic description on God, essentially negating Him: nor can it be expressed or conceived, since it is neither number nor order; nor greatness nor smallness; nor equality nor inequality; nor similarity nor dissimilarity; neither is it standing, nor moving, nor at rest; neither has it power nor is power. Pseudo Denys goes to the most extreme irrational statement, saying that even the negations must be negated concerning the Godhead. Pseudo Denys leads nowhere apparently, but in reality he leads to the god of darkness, to Satan as we shall see in the following paragraphs.

The other source for Pseudo-Denys' theology of darkness is the Mystery Religions. The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy signals Pseudo-Denys’ Mystery Religions language style. In accordance with his Neoplatonic background, Ps-Dionysius adopts the initiation language of the Mystery religions. In such religions, mystery is promoted as the way to seduce the uninitiated into occultism. Mystery Religions attracted people because of all kinds of immoralities and debauchery which were part of their rituals. Pseudo Denys also develops ideas from Proclus, his mentor. Proclus, the last and most accomplished Neoplatonist and occultist was a religious universalist. He brought together all the esoteric concepts of his time.

Professor Arthur Versluis, from Michigan University, an authority in Esoterism connects Pseudo-Denys to early forms of theosophy, which is basically heavy-duty occultism. Some
specialists in mysticism call Pseudo-Denys the Father of Mysticism, which is an euphemism for Father of Occultism. The same name applies to Gregory of Nyssa.

Mystic Theology is initiation in occultism. Pseudo Denys takes the reader into gradual negation, then moves to nihilism, and then is plunging him/her into the abysmal darkness of his writing, as Mystical Theology puts it... plunges the mystic into the Darkness of Unknowing.

Here is a relevant verse about darkness: He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. (Colossians 1:13-14)

The Eastern Orthodox theologians’ attempt to portray the God of the Scripture in the Pseudo-Denys’ manner as transcendent or utterly unknown, in order to save his position as a Church Father, is a failed effort. Authorities in Neoplatonism and Esoterism reveal the real nature of his theology as being occult and yet having an immense influence in Christianity throughout the centuries. We have to add that the influence was among nominal Christians.

Christ warned the Jews that if they reject Him who is the light, they will be overtaken by darkness: Then Jesus told them, "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. (John 12:35). His warning applies to the Church as well. The Patristic age of the Church plunged into a theology of darkness through Pseudo-Denys.

Another work of Pseudo Denys is The Divine Names. The introduction part is one more “masterpiece” of negation/apophatism which doesn’t have anything to do with the God of the Bible... by aid of which we are brought into contact with things unutterable and unknown, in a manner unutterable and unknown, in proportion to the superior union of the reasoning and intuitive faculty and operation within us. By no means then is it permitted to speak, or even to think, anything, concerning the superessential and hidden Deity... He depicts God as a hidden deity to such an extent that we are not even permitted to think about Him. Again we deal with the Neoplatonic deity, which he is describing as unutterable and unknown ... and the One above conception is inconceivable to all conceptions; and the Good above word is unutterable by word—Unit making one every unit, and superessential essence and mind inconceivable, and Word unutterable, speechlessness and inconception, and namelessness—being after the manner of no existing being... What an occult incantation! Pseudo Denys is drunk with esoteric words. In the same time, people who let themselves carried by his hemorrhage of occult ideas, will get abducted by the spirit behind his work. The proof of Pseudo Denys’ notoriety is the reception his work received among unregenerated theologians of historical churches, making his writings almost second to the Bible for them.

Pseudo-Denys quotes Hierotheus’ Erotic hymns in ch.4 of the Divine Names. He uses agape and eros interchangeably in order to pervert the meaning of agape as the divine love.

In chapter VIII paragraph 7, Pseudo-Denys defines righteousness in purely philosophical terms. Again, God is called "Righteousness" because He gives to all things what is right, defining Proportion, Beauty, Order, Arrangement, and all Dispositions of Place and Rank for each, in accordance with that place which is most truly right...
He is at loss with what the righteousness of God is based on the Biblical account. The New Testament states that Christ is God’s standard of righteousness, who became the righteousness of the believer (1 Corinthians 1:30).

The *Ecclesiastical Hierarchies* is another piece of occult philosophy and Mystery Religions initiation practice. The work was meant to strengthen the existing hierarchies within E. Orthodoxy at that time. Today, the Eastern Church's hierarchies rely totally on Pseudo-Denys' writings. In the end notes I attached a selection of statements from the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchies* which are very revealing. He starts out with a very elitist statement calling himself and the rest in the priesthood the most pious of the pious sons. Their superiority is perceived as a result of the initiation into the occult practice. He boastingly details that the hierarchy and the *deifying science* belongs to them, and everything is based on the mysteries of the hierarchy. What deep occultism and blasphemy! He warns that the uninitiated should be kept away from these mysteries (carefully guarding).

Another aspect of the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchies* is about the initiation process of a new priest or monk. The one to be initiated is entirely unclothed by the deacons!! The unclothing practice used by Mystery Religions back then and by Secretive Religions today is done with the purpose of humiliation, de-personalization and breaking down of the will of the aspirant. Then the priests anoint his whole body. *When the Deacons have entirely unclothed him, the Priests bring the holy oil of the anointing. Then he begins the anointing, through the threefold sealing, and for the rest assigns the man to the Priests, for the anointing of his whole body. It is very degrading- a man’s body to be touched all over by other men with oil in a religious ritual!! It makes you shudder. For Pseudo Denys and Eastern Orthodox Church, the mystic rites have the power of salvation. Pseudo Denys is blatantly Neoplatonist by mentioning contemplation, illumination, and the One (the Neoplatonic deity) without any reservation in his *Ecclesiastical Hierarchies.*

He attributes powers to the Hierarchs, meaning that they are endowed with authority. The expression mystic rites occurs fairly often. It could be rendered as occult rites without doing any injustice to the intent of the author, but it will help the contemporary reader to understand the true intent of Pseudo Denys. He affirms again that mystic rites lead to deification: saving mystic Rites were exhibited to us, which divinely work the sacred deification of those being initiated...This is Theurgy which he learned form Proclus his mentor. We will discuss Theurgy later. Pseudo Denys also says the invocations they use are not permitted to be explained in writing because they don’t have to become public. Secrecy is paramount in occultism. Now, as regards the consecrating invocations, it is not permitted to explain them in writing, nor may we bring their mysterious meaning or the powers from God working in them, from secrecy to publicity.

I discovered on *Ora et Labora* blog one of the most fascinating testimony from an E. Orthodox believer who does not live in denial about core issues of E. Orthodoxy. He arrives to the truth conclusion about Pseudo-Denys’ identity and work. He brings to attention what Alexander Schmemann, the former dean of St. Vladimir Eastern Orthodox Seminary commented on Pseudo Denys.
The blogger writes the following: “On Wednesday, March 10, 1982, Fr Alexander Schmemann made the following entry into his diary”: Yesterday I read the Church Hierarchy of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. What can it mean in our contemporary world? What could it have meant in a world where it was written? What does the success of this corpus mean in Byzantium? If one would apply the Gospel's basic principle, "for the tree is known by its fruit" (Matthew 12:33), to the history of the Church, one would see that what happened was the reduction of the Church to a mysterious piety, the dying of its eschatological essence and mission, and, finally, the de-Christianization of this world and its secularization.

Another Orthodox priest, Paul Wesche made the following comments: 'Dionysius' vision finally renders superfluous the Incarnation of Christ. Most certainly, the necessity of the Cross becomes difficult to explain. If gnosis is the chief function and goal of the Church, then why must Jesus become fully man and die on the Cross?' Then, the blogger from Ora et Labora concludes: if this were indeed the case, not only the Orthodoxy but the very Christianity of Dionysius would be up for question (emphasis mine). Yes, Eastern Orthodoxy based on Dionysius is doomed. This historical church has to find again what was from the beginning, but this will be a discussion in the final conclusion of the essay.

**Conclusion:** Pseudo-Denys is the most lethal heretic in the history of Eastern Orthodoxy. In his writings he carefully avoids the cross of Christ. The person of Christ is barely mentioned. Pseudo-Denys is an alter-ego of Proclus, an open enemy of Christianity. He promotes a Neoplatonic salvation/deification. He knew how to make full use of the apophatic tradition of the Eastern Church and then to give a final assault against that Church thorough an unfiltered powerful occult writings. Even John Meyendorff in his book *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, acknowledges that Pseudo-Denys employs Neoplatonic and Mystery Religions terminology and practices (p.110), including ideas from *Corpus Hermeticum*, a profoundly occult writing which made their way into the church liturgy and hierarchy.

Since then the Eastern Orthodox Church never recovered. Two important figures will advance his agenda: Maximus the Confessor and Gregory Palamas.

Pseudo-Denys denies God by all his work under the pretense of presenting a mystical way of knowing God. Pseudo-Denys is a dialectician, employing mostly apophatic theology but also using Kataphatic affirmations and the synthesis of it is an unknowable God.

Mystical knowledge is occult knowledge and leads to the god of darkness, Satan. Pseudo-Denys is best at putting a Christian dress on Neoplatonism and deceiving nominal Christians. His language is incantational and highly manipulative.

**The following comments from the E. Orthodox blog Ora et Labora** are very suitable to be part of the conclusion on Pseudo-Denys: Meyendorff argues that the hierarchies function in two ways: dynamically and concretely. Concretely they function as a "scale of intermediaries, destined above all to incorporate into the system the Neo-Platonist triads." (19) This concrete conception of hierarchies presents salvation and the sacraments in "complete separation from the central mystery of Christianity, the incarnation." (20) "Undoubtedly Dionysius, who probably belonged to the Severian Monophysite party (hence the mono-energetic formula he used once),
mentions the name of Jesus Christ and professes his belief in the incarnation, but the structure of his system is perfectly independent of his profession of faith." The result, on an ecclesiological level, can lead to a "sort of magical clericalism." Only by ascending the steps of the hierarchy by way of initiation does one reach the mystery that remains always essentially hidden. In the absence of an initiation, one possesses only an indirect knowledge through hierarchical intermediaries and symbols. For Dionysius, this was essentially the role of the liturgy and of the sacraments, whose corporate, Christological, and eschatological sense was left obscure. The necessary correctives to Dionysius were fairly rapidly incorporated in the realm of pure theology, but his symbolic and hierarchical conception of the liturgy marked forever Byzantine piety: hence the conception of a symbolic drama that the assembly attend as spectators, the mystery of which can only be penetrated by initiated individuals. With these sweeping words, Fr Meyendorff makes essentially the same claim as Fr Schmemann in the diary entry with which this essay began: Dionysius is responsible for the reduction of the Church to a mysterious piety; the liturgical crises that both men saw is laid largely at the feet of St Dionysius. (emphasis mine)

Maximus the Confessor\textsuperscript{75} (c. 580 –662) the most important Byzantine theologian of the 7th century, whose commentaries on the early 6th-century Christian Neoplatonist Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and on the Greek Church Fathers, especially the Cappadocian fathers, considerably influenced the theology and mysticism of the Middle Ages\textsuperscript{76}. Maximus gave full legitimacy to Pseudo-Dionysius esoteric teachings within the E. Orthodox Church.

Maximus also served as a bridge for introducing Pseudo-Dionysius into Christian mysticism\textsuperscript{77}…or better put it he approved, sealed and developed the esoterism of Pseudo-Dionysius. He espoused several heresies among which are: universalism, a Neoplatonic view of salvation, and the termination of the personhood of the believer in eternity, which is Nirvana Neoplatonic version. As a result Maximus advances the idea of full divinization of the human beings which is another colossal heresy in itself.

Maximus’ only positive contribution to Christianity was his position in favor Council of Chalcedon\textsuperscript{78} which dealt with the two natures of Christ. The Council affirmed that Christ was unique by having a fully divine and a fully human nature in one person. But the things went further and some people stated that Christ did not have a human will (Monothelite-one will), in spite of His two natures. If Christ did not have a human will and just a Divine will He would not be fully human.

Evidence indicates that resulting from the suggestion of Emperor Heraclius (610–641), the Monothelite position was promulgated by Patriarch Sergius I of Constantinople\textsuperscript{79}. So Maximus supported the correct view which affirms the two wills of Christ. As a result he was exiled and then brought to trial and suffered mutilation at the hands of Byzantine power. They cut his tongue and his right hand. He died in exile not long after that. Pope Martin I was also arrested and imprisoned and exiled for the same reason and died too.

Along with Pope Martin I, Maximus was vindicated by the Third Council of Constantinople (the Sixth Ecumenical Council, 680–681), which declared that Christ possessed both a human and a divine will. With this declaration Monothelitism became heresy, and Maximus was posthumously declared innocent of all charges against him.
As a student of Pseudo-Dionysius, Maximus was one of many Christian theologians who preserved and interpreted the earlier Neo-Platonic philosophy, including the thought of such figures as Plotinus and Proclus.

The Platonic influence on Maximus' thought can be seen most clearly in his theological anthropology. Here, Maximus adopted the Platonic model of exitus-reditus (exit/emmanation and return/ascension), teaching that humanity was made in the image of God, and the purpose of salvation is to restore all humankind to unity with God. That is Universalism (apokatastasis). Origen and Gregory of Nyssa held the same view. Unity with God or divinization (theosis) helped secure Maximus' place in Eastern theology, as these concepts have always held an important place in Eastern Christianity. Theosis is originated in the Greek word apotheosis, meaning mythical deification.

Maximus' view of salvation looks like Nirvana in the analysis below

A more pressing danger is implicit in the systematic theology of Maximus himself: the loss of individual personhood through union with God. We have seen how the final goal of salvation, for Maximus, is the transformation of the soul into a receptacle of God involving, as Thunberg summarized, the substitution of the human ego with the divine presence. Indeed, as Maximus clearly states in his Chapters on Knowledge, in salvation “only God shines forth through the body and soul when their natural features are transcended in overwhelming glory” (2.88, tr. Berthold). Such a statement implies that the redeemed soul is stripped of its nature and of any defining characteristics qualifying it as a distinct, autonomous being, a person – or, in the words of Pseudo-Dionysius, “neither oneself nor someone else”. A younger contemporary of Maximus, Anastasius of Sinai, recognized the implications of this conclusion, and regarded it as ultimately fatal to the authentic Christian view of God and humanity as mutual co-operators – a view that Maximus himself seems to espouse in so many parts of his voluminous writings, but clearly contradicts at the highest speculative levels of his thought. Anastasius corrected the Maximian notion, arguing that “theosis is the ascension toward what is better – it is neither a diminution nor an alteration of nature. In other words, by theosis man will not cease being man; he will simply become perfect man.” However, apart from Anastasius’ clarification, the theoretical problem of the loss of personhood in salvation was never adequately addressed by Christian theologians of the Byzantine era... Maximus displays marked affinities with Neoplatonic thinkers, notably Plotinus and Iamblichus. He agrees with the latter in the matter of the soul’s gradual working toward salvation, and with the former in his view that the redeemed soul merges with the godhead and ceases all motion, no longer existing as a distinct person... Maximus ended by articulating a salvation theory that is, perhaps, more Neoplatonic than authentically Christian.”

Edward Moore http://www.quodlibet.net/moore-maximus.shtml

The Eastern theologians Simeon the New Theologian and Gregory Palamas are seen as intellectual heirs to Maximus. Further, a number of Maximus' works are included in the Greek Philokalia - a collection of devotional mysticism.

John of Damascus (c. 676-749 A.D.) He was an Eastern monk who had the bad reputation of being the most vocal supporter the worship of icons in the 8th century. During that time a
controversy broke out, called the iconoclasm controversy, in which the iconoclasts rightly view that icons are plain idolatry, but their opponents, the iconodules, were for the worship of icons. In 726 A.D. Emperor Leo III issued his first edict against icons in the church. John of Damascus took actions against that by writing apologetic treatises against those decrying the holy images. He incited people to revolt against the emperor.

John of Damascus also wrote about Perichoresis of the Trinity, explaining, from his point of view, how the persons of the Trinity interact with each other. He is just plainly speculative in his endeavor. Over the centuries, theologians who wanted to discover “new territories” in theology, wrote on his speculations. His only merit was a short treatise dealing with Islam from a Christian point of view.

**Gregory Palamas the monk who perfected the mystical destiny of the Eastern Orthodox Church**

Gregory Palamas is worshipped in the Orthodox Church on the second Sunday of Great Lent. He receives the same honor as God, which is a blasphemy. Take for example expressions like with one accord we sing thy praises.

O Gregory the Wonderworker, light of Orthodoxy, support and teacher of the Church, glory of monks and invincible protector of theologians, pride of Thessalonica and preacher of grace, pray without ceasing for the salvation of our souls.

Holy and divine instrument of wisdom, joyful trumpet of theology, with one accord we sing thy praises, O Gregory inspired by God. But since thou standest now in mind and spirit before the Original Mind, guide our minds to Him, O father that we may cry to thee: Hail, preacher of grace.

Gregory Palamas was the monk that gave the final impetus to Eastern Orthodox mysticism. He is the expression of the apophatic theology of the Cappadocian Fathers, but also he brings to the center stage Pseudo-Denys the occultist. Another very important church father which Palamas used in “making his case” was Maximus the Confessor, he himself a devotee Pseudo-Denys’ works. So if we are to summarize, Palamas is the product of 1,200 years of Eastern Orthodoxy.

On the other hand, Palamas is the exponent of the elite monastic establishment of the Byzantine Empire of the 14th century. He was a monk from Mt. Athos who became Bishop of Thessalonika. Mt. Athos is a peninsula of Greece, where many monasteries were established. There was a mutual relationship between the monks from Mt. Athos and the Byzantine Emperors as the monks from Athos were at the Emperors disposal to enforce ecclesiastical policies, or to ordain priests from among themselves wherever the Emperors had interest. In return the monks had benefits and special protection, and many times were called as counselors in imperial matters.

Meanwhile, the monastic life reached its heights through the hesychast movement. The term hesychasm comes from the Greek word hesychia — inner quietness. Hesychast monks practice a prayer method called The Prayer of the Heart which is an unvoiced prayer. It combines a
bodily posture with a breathing technique and a mantra. Precursors of prayer of the heart were Symeon the New Theologian (10th c.) promoting a spirituality based on “visions of God”; Nicephorus the Hesychast (late 13th century), combined invocation of Jesus’ name with breathing, leading to a luminous experience; Gregory the Sinaite (14th century) introduced asceticism combined with breathing and Jesus’ prayer, the result being immersion of the contemplative in the “divine light”.

**Symeon the New Theologian champion of blasphemy and abomination.** It is important to briefly pause on a forerunner of Palamas namely Symeon the New Theologian (1025-c. 1092). He talks a lot about seeing the “Divine light” as a condition of being a true Christian. His language and experiences are the same with the Quakers or Eastern Religions. Professor Derek Krueger PhD went beyond conventional approach on the Patristics and inspected some taboo area of Symeon the New Theologian. He exposed the homosexual writings of “saint” Symeon in an essay as part of the book *Toward a Theology of Eros* (pp.99-113). Professor Kruger just analyzes the phenomena he does not evaluate it from a Biblical standpoint. Homosexuality is a top sin but when that is leveled against the person of God as heretic Symeon does it, then the gravity becomes absolute. What Symeon the New Theologian put in writing in his *Tenth Ethical Discourse* is more blasphemous and abominable than any “saint” heretic ever wrote. He stands condemns by this verses: but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work. (Titus 1:15-16). They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever (Jude 12-13).

This desecrated “saint” is credited as being the father of hesychasm. He was also a faithful follower of the apophatism of Pseudo-Denis. If what I shared about Symeon seems unbelievable let’s look briefly at his life. When he was 14 he started to be mentored by Symeon Eulabes, a monk. At 20 he had “visions of light”. At 27 he joined the Studion monastery where his mentor Symeon Eulabes was. Their relation was so intimate that the abbot decided that the two either separate or both leave the monastery. They were suspected of homosexual relationship. Instead to do what was right they choose to leave together and went to St. Mamas monastery in Constantinople. Here, after a short period of time Symeon the New Theologian became the abbot of their new “home”. Symeon Eulabes died after a while. Troubles for the apostate Symeon the New Theologian came back. He was so cruel with the monks that he ended being severely beaten up. He left for the third monastery where he became a recluse. So both biographical facts and textual evidences prove the homosexuality and heresies of the apostate Symeon the New Theologian. The Eastern Church ignores all these data holding him in high esteem.

**The problem of deification within the Eastern Orthodox Church.** As we saw in the Neoplatonic section of the essay divinization of the humans is a heathen concept contrary to the Scripture. The Church Fathers made the pagan apotheosis into theosis in order to Christianize it, although *theosis* is nowhere in the Bible nor are there similar forms of it in relation to man. The quest for human divinization was a satanic idea as old as Garden of Eden.
was (Gen. 3:4-5). One of the greatest advocates of human deification was Gregory Palamas. He committed a big part of his life and energy for defending this heresy. Nonetheless this theory in the Church started with Clement of Alexandria.

Eastern Orthodoxy takes as a premise of deification a portion of the verse from Gen. 1:16 "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness..." and stops here. Then their theory goes on to say that being created in God’s image and likeness resulted in certain degree of deification of Adam and Eve. Then through sin man lost his likeness to divinity, but coming back in direct contact with God as Moses on the Mount Sinai or the disciples on mount Thabor the divinity can be regain.

The problem with this whole speculation is that the text in Genesis does not support deification. If we read further we see that being created in God’s image is having dominion over the animal realm (fish, birds, cattle) and over the whole earth. Being in the image of God also means plurality (man and woman) as God is a plurality of three persons. As the creation of man and woman was done, God declared that everything was very good. Not a hint of deification. Man in the image of God signifies the endowment with reason, affection, and ruler-ship, not divinity. Looking further in chapter 3 we see the man falling into sin. So the divinity that the Eastern Orthodox pretended that man had, did not help any. On the contrary, verse 5 of the same chapter shows that divinization of man was the idea of Satan. Man, through the fall, did not lose his divinity but died spiritually and was expelled from the Garden of Eden, and was barred from a daily fellowship with God (Genesis 2:17; 3:24).

Partakers of God’s essence through His communicable divine attributes, but not divinized. We have to bring into discussion communicable and un-communicable attributes for a better clarification of our subject. The attributes of God are part of His nature or essence. Communicable attributes are those characteristics/attributes which God transferred from Himself onto the intelligent part of creation, like man and angels, in order that communication and progress would be possible. Some of the communicable attributes of God are love, holiness, justice, truthfulness, and rationality. As a result, by the virtue of creation, man and angels are equipped with communicable attributes. Men in general even as sinners have a sense of justice, truthfulness, reason. So we can say man is partaker of God’s communicable essence. But there are un-communicable attributes of God. I will list some: deity, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, infinity, self-existence. Things that pertain to Godhood are part of the un-communicable attributes and are not transferable, so nothing of His creation is divinized.

Here is an example how 2 Peter 1:4 shows that believers are partakers of divine nature but not divinized. This text is used by Eastern Orthodox as one of the main proofs for divinization: His divine power has given to us all things that [pertain] to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption [that is] in the world through lust (2 Peter 3, 4).

The larger context of chapter one deals with practical holiness of the believer contrasted with the sensuality greed and corruption of the false prophets described in chapter two of the
epistle. The knowledge of Christ provides the believer with divine power (v.3), exceedingly great and precious promises (v.4) that will work godliness (v.3) in his life. As a result the believer is made partaker of the divine nature. In what sense? The believer shares in the holiness of God as a communicable attribute. The believer is not deified.

Human or creation divinization is a Hindu/New Age concept. Mormons major in human deification. Divinization of either humans or of the creation results in pantheism and polytheism, both false pagan concepts.

Man and angels can reflect God's glory but that does not follow that they become divine. Take for example the case of Moses, who spent forty days with God on Mount Sinai. When he came back, his face was shining, and he had to cover his face (Ex. 34:35). Angels both in the Old and New Testament are bright with God’s glory and the more powerful the angel is, the more glory he spreads around. Being recipients of God’s glory does not make either angels or man divine. The book of Hebrews is very careful to specify that all angels of God worship the Son who is divine (Heb. 1:6). In the book of Revelation when John wanted to worship his angel guide because he was overwhelmed, he was denied the act, and told to worship God (Rev. 22:8-9).

Key texts used by Eastern Orthodoxy as a proof for deification. After we sorted out important issues about God’s essence in relation to His creation, it would be very important to tackle with certain passages of the Bible which Palamas and the Eastern Orthodox Church advance as examples of deification of man. The text in Matt. 17:1-13, is Palamas’ and the Hesychasts’ main “proof” of deification. The transfiguration account is prefaced by a vital statement made by Christ beforehand in order for the disciples to understand the reason of the transfiguration. He told them that they will see how He will look when He will come in His future Kingdom (Matt 16:28). Then in chapter 17, Jesus took Peter, James, and John up to a high mountain and transfigured Himself to the extent that His face shown like the Sun and his garments became as white as light. The goal was for the disciples to see Christ’s divinity firsthand and not for them to acquire it. God the Father reinforces from a bright cloud that Christ is His Son and they should obey Him. The disciples were very fearful and in awe, but came back from the Mount of Transfiguration with no shining faces, and no divinity claims. The practitioners of Hesychasm, including theologians like Timothy Ware and Vladimir Lossky, assert that contemplating the divine light creates ecstasy to the beholder. If we recall Moses’ experience on Mount Sinai or of the disciples on the mount of transfiguration we see no ecstasy, but reverence, fear, and rational dialog between God and man. Ecstasy is something similar to loss of consciousness combined with pleasure and it is foreign to the Biblical instances.

Towards the end of his life, Peter one of the eyewitnesses of the transfiguration of Christ re-tells the experience in his second epistle (2 Peter 1:16-18). He re-emphasizes that the event was meant for the disciples to become aware of the divinity of Christ, and that they should wholly obey Him. If the Scripture had any intention to bring forth the divinization of man, Peter would have been the first one to say it as a spokesman of the church.

Deification process starts with infant baptism, states the E. Orthodox dogma. What is it to be
**born again?** The Eastern Church emphasis is on deification, not salvation. They explain that the ultimate step in salvation is deification, thus they occupy themselves with it. We previously saw deification is totally unbiblical and blasphemous. Another “text proof” of deification is in John 1:12, 13. Here they assert that being children of God (v.12) and being born of God (v.13) implies deity status. The Eastern Orthodox dogma teaches that the new spiritual birth occurs at the moment of the baptism of the infant. Afterwards the priest makes the sign of the cross with oil on the forehead of the baby which signifies the receiving of the Holy Spirit. At the moment of Christianization, the person enters the deification process, the E. Orthodox claim. As we shall see later in the theurgy section of the essay, these are Neoplatonic practices inherited from Proclus, where physical matter is endowed with spiritual power. The subject of new birth is discussed at large in John 3 of where Christ doesn’t mention anything of infants being baptized in order to be born again, but of adults like Nicodemus being born of the Spirit by faith in Christ. *That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’… For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:6, 7, 16).* So the text in John 1:12 where it talks about becoming children of God, does not deal with infants but with adults who believe in His name (v.12) and are born of God and not by the will of man, such as priest, pastor, family, and godfather (v.13).

**The distinction between God’s essence and His uncreated energies** was a concept that Pseudo-Denys picked up from Proclus, the occult Neoplatonist, and introduced them into the Christian lexicon. The origin of that distinction (energies vs. essence) is very old and goes all the way back to the early Greek philosophers like Heraclitus and Parmenides. What Palamas affirmed, by making the distinction between God’s uncreated energies and His essence, is that God in His essence is totally transcendent and forever unknown, but the uncreated energies like the light of Christ at Mt. Tabor are accessible and bring deification of the beholder. This is one of the greatest heresies Palamas put forth due his commitment to Pseudo-Dionysian Neoplatonism. Palamas came up with this innovation in order to have a theological backup for the Hesychast practice which, they claim they contemplated God, but in His uncreated/divine energies.

The god Palamas portrays is identical with the one of Plotinus (see the Neoplatonic section). Palamas, like Pseudo-Denys is agnostic, then nihilistic, and then occult in his description of god. The result is two gods. One is a god of the uncreated energies who is very elusive, and the other one is a totally unknown nonexistent god.

The scripture is full of verses which show God intentionally revealing Himself to believers in His essence. Take for instance even the verse from 2 Peter 1:4 which the Eastern Orthodox use as a proof of deification, where the Bible plainly states that the believer is made partaker of the divine essence (*koinonoy phuseos*). As we saw, the divine essence is shareable in the area of communicable attributes. So it is not only knowable but also shareable. Another aspect of God’s essence is love. *God is love* (1 John 4:8). If God’s love manifested in the death of His Son on the Cross for our sins, does not represent God essence, then what does?

I will list some verses below about God’s intentional self revelation.
This is what the Sovereign LORD says: On the day I chose Israel, I swore with uplifted hand to the descendants of the house of Jacob and revealed myself to them in Egypt. With uplifted hand I said to them, "I am the LORD your God." (Ezekiel 20:5)

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person (emphasis mine), (Hebrews 1:1-3)

Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald. (Revelation 4:2,3)

For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col 1: 9)

He is the image of the invisible God... (Col 1:15)

When Palamas and others speak about God not being known in His essence, what better proof could there be than Christ Himself revealing who God is in His essence by the life Christ lived and the death Christ died in our behalf. Who could represent best the justice of God (another aspect of His essence) other than Christ; who will come with glory and power to do justice in the universe and on earth other than Him? Palamas did not know the Christ of the Bible. He was just a Neoplatonist monk in a Christian garb. This is why for him and fellow hesychasts God was utterly unknown.

Affirming that we know God’s essence, I am not implying that we know everything about God’s essence and that in eternity we will exhaust knowing it. For example, God’s love is infinite because He is infinite. Heaven will be delighting ourselves in the love of our Heavenly Father. Even in our life here as parents, we don’t stop loving our children. They are in constant need for our love. We will be in constant need for God’s love in heaven too.

**Being transformed in the image of Christ is a reference to His glorified body not to His deity.** The following verses show most clearly that when the Bible speaks about believers being transformed in the image of Christ, it has in view the eternal resurrected body, not the divinity of Christ as the Eastern Orthodox claim. So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being.” The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man. (emphasis mine). (1 Cor 15:42-49). On the other hand, the text in 2 Cor. 3:18, where the believer is transformed from glory to glory in the same image with Christ is a reference to Christ’s character... by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God. (2 Cor. 4:2). Every time the image of Christ in relation to the believer is
analyzed in context, it has nothing to do with the divinization of man, but to our character transformation and future resurrection. God never planned a multiplicity of gods. These verses can be very conclusive: *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.* (Deut. 6:4); *You shall have no other gods before me.* (Ex. 20:3)

One final aspect. They also argue that as the Logos (John 1:1) became flesh (John 1:14) so we too may become divine like Him. The difference would be Christ’s divinity is from Logos and ours is from the Holy Spirit. If one sentence is true, it does not follow that the reciprocal is also true. For instance, God is love, but love is not God. The Logos became like one of us to save us from the power of sin and Satan, and give us eternal life, and an eternal resurrected body, not *deification.* We will become like Him in His glorified humanity.

**The hesychast prayer of the heart a dangerous practice.** The body of the hesychast worshiper becomes “spiritual”. The *Prayer of Heart* was a combination of Evagrius’ *Prayer of the Mind,* and Macarius’ *Prayer of the Heart*—both Desert Fathers. The Hesychasts decided that in order to bring the prayer from the mind into the heart, they had to apply their version of the *Prayer of the Heart,* by using the techniques I described earlier. It is important for a reader unfamiliar with this, to take a closer look at this Hesychast *Prayer of the Heart.* The monks had to bend their head and shoulder forward and press their chin against their chest, to the point of feeling pain. Their eyes had to be fixed on the nose navel, and from there, to look either at their heart or at their stomach because some said that the center of the human being is in his entrails. After they achieved this strenuous position, they started breathing slowly and reciting in their minds the Jesus prayer. The *Jesus prayer* is a one-sentence prayer, constantly repeated with the following content: *Jesus Son of God, have mercy on me the sinner.* When they inhaled, they had to say: “Jesus, Son of God have mercy...” And when they exhaled they had to finish with “on me the sinner”. This process had to take place several hundred times to maybe one thousand times a day or even more, for two or three days, until the monk probably was going to suddenly see a bright light.

The justification for the bright light was the claim that the monks, through the hesychast ritual, see the glory of Christ at the Mount of Transfiguration, which they say was Mt. Tabor. The purpose of the Hesychast *Prayer of the Heart* was the “deification” of the monks. Many monastics at Athos and elsewhere, adopted Hesychasm because it gave them a chance to reach the highest rank of “spirituality” and by that, the ecclesiastical elites (archpriests, bishops), could not claim all the privileges.

The Hesychast prayer, Palamas and others before him said, is a way to pray with the body. Consequently the body becomes “spiritual”, they say. The body participates in prayer as the housing for the soul, but prayer is not uttered from the body and the body doesn’t become spiritual here but at the resurrection. This is another very weak argument in behalf of Hesychasm.

Given the fact that the Hesychast practice has a Neoplatonic heretical theology, and is so contrary to logic and normality, it will result in a very risky undertaking. A dedicated practitioner can encounter demons or can become demon-possessed.
Palamas versus Barlaam dispute over the hesychasm. Another Monk by the name of Barlaam, who was an Eastern Orthodox Greek from Southern Italy but with humanistic training, took a radical position against hesychasts from Mt. Athos. He was functioning in Constantinople as a scholar, teaching Orthodox Theology at the university, but also got acquainted with the hesychasts by visiting the monasteries. He severely criticized the Hesychasts and their practices calling them “navel gazers”. Emperor Andronicus III Palaeologus, used Barlaam to defend the E. Orthodox position against Rome when a delegation from the Pope came to visit Constantinople. Barlaam used the apophatic arguments of Pseudo-Denys, criticizing Thomas Aquinas’ views. However, the way he built up his line of defense was according to the humanist logic of the Renaissance. When Palamas heard that Barlaam defended the E. Orthodox position, but by using humanist logic, a conflict broke out between the two. Palamas wrote Triads in defense of the Holy Hesychasts aimed at Barlaam’s criticism of the movement. Palamas himself was a Hesychast. Three Orthodox synods ruled against Barlaam and in Palamas’ favor- two "Councils of Sophia" in June and August of 1341, and a "Council of Blachernae" in 1351. Thus Palamas became the theologian of hesychasm, consequently making the hesychast practice part of the dogma of the E. Orthodox Church.

The whole tradition of the Prayer of the Mind and Prayer of the Heart, and other mystical devotions of E. Orthodoxy, culminating with the Hesychasm of Palamas, was gathered in the works of Philokalia.

The way Palamas and Hesychasts induced their “spirituality”. Palamas was going for days with no sleep in combination with fasting to get the vision of the “light”. This is an old monastic practice of vigils for “purification”. It is a well-known fact that extended sleep deprivation especially, creates psychological vulnerability and hallucinations. When that is associated with lack of food, one becomes totally exposed for either self hypnosis or demonic take-over. Palamas claimed visitations from Mary the mother of Jesus, from the apostles, and so on. This is a common thread among mystics. One of them is Teresa of Avila, in one account she is depicted like as experiencing a transfiguring coma, the Sleep of God, described by mystics, in which a glimpse of “glory” is received. Mystics like Teresa would pray for days, often unfed, to achieve such visions. Around 1556, various friends suggested that her newfound knowledge was diabolical, not divine. She began to inflict various tortures and mortification of the flesh upon herself. What Hesychasts do is self-torture, both physical and spiritual presented as the highest degree of spirituality. Hesychasm is the practice that brings the religious pride to its height. With rare exceptions, Hesychasts are the most fanatic elements of Eastern Orthodoxy.

Hesychasm is nothing but Messalianism or salvation through prayer. Hesychasm is a radical form of Messalianism. Back in the early centuries of Christianity a sect came into being which practiced unceasing prayer as a way of salvation. Barlaam rightly accused Palamas and the Hesychasts of Messalianism. Even today, gifted Eastern Orthodox theologians are not able to properly defend the charge of Messalianism against Palamas and his followers.

Deification is Neoplatonic “salvation” at the exclusion of faith, justification, and the glorified body. As I have said in the beginning, Palamas is the expected product of 1,200 years of
Platonism and Neoplatonism plaguing Eastern Orthodoxy. The supreme aim of Neoplatonism is apatheosis a pagan deification. Apatheosis as well as theosis does not need faith, but mental, occult contemplation. Justification provided by God, is excluded and resented because the average Eastern Orthodox is engaged in self-justification. Salvation and life with God in a glorified body is too small of a thing for the people who want to be divine.

The Eastern Orthodox Church is kept prisoner of mysticism. What I wrote until now on Eastern Orthodoxy is by no means an attack on people of this type of Christianity. What is to be abhorred is the Neoplatonism and mysticism that kept this church prisoner for almost two millennia. The reformation that God worked in Romania through the priests Tudor Popescu and Joseph Trifa is a proof that God can work His salvation in spite of the occult strongholds in Eastern Orthodoxy.
THE DESERT AS A PROBLEMATIC PLACE IN THE BIBLE

David Brakke, in his book *Demons and the making of the monk: spiritual combat in early Christianity*[^90], does an incredible job in evaluating the demonic encounters of the Desert Fathers. E. Orthodox theologians masterfully argue that the desert is a place for spirituality but the Scripture has it differently. As we shall see, the desert is not intended by God as a dwelling place for His people, but as a place of trial, temptation, temporary refuge. Moses lived 40 years in the wilderness in order to forget about his 40 years of greatness in Egypt. When the Jews left Egypt, they had two routes available. One by the coast, allowing them to make it in 11 days to Canaan and another one through the Sinai Peninsula, one of the worst deserts in the world. God purposely brought them through the desert, with a disciplinary intent in order for them to understand who they were: idolaters, complainers, and so on.

David the king fled to the desert of Judea for prolonged periods of time to escape Saul. Elijah also ran away from Jezebel and was hid by God in the desert. John the Baptist as a forerunner of Christ spent longer periods in the desert to show that Messiah is not welcome to Jerusalem. The prophet should have been at the Temple announcing the arrival of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ spent 40 days in the desert, deprived of food and water and being tempted by the Devil to make it up for Adam who fell into temptation, and for the 40 years Israel failed the test in the wilderness. The apostle Paul spent three years in the desert of Arabia for humiliation and instruction.

When claims were made by Desert Fathers and Mothers that they left everything of this world to follow Christ in the desert, adding to the wilderness hardship often a scarce vegetarian diet, and self imposed abstinence instead of getting married, they just committed a blatant disobedience against the lifestyle designed by God. Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. (1Tim.4:1-5)

One of the greatest negative issues in the life of the monastics is the hidden pride issues. They see themselves as champions of faith, superior to regular people who struggle to raise their families, working and being faithful to God. Whoever will read Evagrius’ longing for his social life previous to the desert isolation, or Jerome’s longings for life in Rome while he was in the desert, will understand that self-imposed humility by seclusion in the wilderness cannot suppress the truth in the minds and the hearts of the monks.
Certainly, there are some people who are anti-social, sometimes tormented by psychological handicaps who, getting religious, find a spiritual justification for their love for solitude and isolationism. But this is neither the norm of the Scripture nor of the society.
Evagrius Pontus (345 – 399)

Evagrius Ponticus was a heretic Origenist. The renowned historian Hans urs von Blathasar spoke for most scholars when he said, "Evagrius was more Origenist than Origen himself". He was also a gnostic. He wrote the Gnostic Chapters (Kephaliāia Gnostica). He also was Neoplatonist holding to the view that the mind of man is divine. Evagrius was condemned by the Fifth Ecumenical Council in A.D.553. John Meyendorff, well known Eastern Orthodox theologian, takes issues with Evagrius’ Neoplatonism. He writes how the monk could go on discussing prayer and not mention at all the name of Christ. Evagrius’ prayer was a pagan endeavor employing contemplation (theoria), union with the divine (henosis), and deification (theosis). He excels in ascetism although his mind was often musing and longing for the normal social life. His prayer of the mind (the mind as the center of prayer and spirituality) concept was very influential over centuries. The hesychast movement will make use of his concept. Today Evagrius is vogue most everybody willfully ignoring his heresies.

Macarius of Egypt (ca. 300-390) and Pseudo Macarius

There are two Macarius. People confuse them attributing their activities to one Macarius. The first Macarius is Macarius of Egypt who lived between 300-390 A.D. He was the founder of monastic colonies of Scete in the Upper Egypt. The other Macarius lived later towards the 4th century in Syria. He was a mystical writer who put a lot of emphasis on the heart as the center of spirituality and prayer, contrary to what Evagrius was teaching. He also put his imprint on the hesychasm. Monastic movement combined the prayer of the mind and the prayer of the heart into the hesychast movement. As we shall see later Gregory Palamas is the climax of this heresy.

Pseudo-Macarius reaffirmed existing heresies among the Desert Fathers, such as, the Church has received the Holy Spirit from God, not necessarily the individual believer; the Holy Spirit is by the altar, and in the water of baptism, securing the new birth of the baptized infants. He also went for contemplation and deification, Neoplatonic style.

Macarius said that a regenerated person had to be conscious of the presence of the Holy Spirit in his heart. Not feeling the presence of the Spirit meant un-regeneration. On the other hand, those possessed by the Spirit, had to feel that presence as a vision of light, or a deep seated warmth in the heart. He also advocated the abandonment of classical monastic lifestyle, which was labor and ascesis, changing it for a wandering lifestyle. He produced two bodies of writings, The Great Letter and The Fifty Spiritual Homilies, which later influenced the mysticism and ascetic practices of Gregory of Nyssa, Simeon the new theologian, and the Hesychasts, in their quest for seeing the “divine light”.

THE DESERT FATHERS AND THEIR NON-BIBLICAL THEOLOGY AND LIFE
John Cassian⁹⁴ (ca. 360 – 435)

...if you examine all the errors of the West, whether in its doctrines or in its moral values, then you will see that they are all rooted in the failure to understand that Christianity is the ascetic feat of gradual human self-perfection⁹⁵(emphasis mine). Metropolitan Antony of Kiev (+1936).

This statement from a prominent E. Orthodox is the best introduction to what monasticism of the Desert Fathers is.

John Cassian was a monk who put in writing one of the earliest rules for the monastic life, after he spent time visiting and collecting information from different monasteries of Egypt. His main work consists in two bodies of writings: the Institutes and the Conferences. His works are the first to introduce the rules of Eastern monasticism into the West. While he was in Rome John Cassian accepted the invitation to found an Egyptian style monastery in southern Gaul, near Marseille.

In the Institutes he deals with organization of the monastic life describing how a monk should look and how liturgy should progress. Cassian claims that the teachings collected in the Institutes from different monks and abbots were received form an angel, a spurious argument. A big part of this work deals with hidden sins of the average monk, common to all of us, such as gluttony, covetousness, anger, slothfulness, vain-glory, and pride. The problem is the way is dealt with those sins. The Biblical content is minimum, and the emphasis falls either on the human effort or on the authority of older monks or of the abbot. In Cassian’s description, the monks underwent extreme psychological and bodily discipline that caused depersonalization: One, then, who seeks to be admitted to the discipline of the monastery is never received before he gives, by lying outside the doors for ten days or even longer... Next, the rule is kept with such strict obedience that, without the knowledge and permission of their superior, the juniors not only do not dare to leave their cell but on their own authority do not venture to satisfy their common and natural needs... but also with anxious minds they examine into those sorts of work which not even the darkness of night can put a stop to, as they hold that they will gain a far deeper insight into subjects of spiritual contemplation ... Even the training of the elite troops does not reach the level of weariness of the monks described: For they are so worn out with fasting and working all day and night that, unless they were helped by some such indulgence, they could not possibly get through this number standing up...

Saying this, I am not at all deriding them, on the contrary I feel pity for them; the lack of the doctrines of grace and in most instances the absence of spiritual regeneration got them to this point. In the endnotes I quoted extensively form the Institutes⁹⁶. Another aspect of the Institutes regards the perfection of the monks... these labours they keep up for two reasons, besides this consideration,--that they believe that when they are diligently exerting themselves they are offering to God a sacrifice of the fruit of their hands. And, if we are aiming at perfection; we also ought to observe this with the same diligence... Perfection then is very rare and granted by God’s gift to but a very few⁹⁷(emphasis mine). Perfection for monks meant their ability to offer to God the result of their manual labor, absolute obedience to the abbot, total denial of any legitimate pleasure, and the aptitude to cope with lack of food and peers wrongdoings. In spite of all that perfection is granted by God to a few Cassian said.
Another heartbreaking story is the verbal and physical abuse an eight years old boy took from the monks as he was admitted with his father into the monastery to stay. The reason of the abuse was to test the father who was aspiring to become a monk if he loved Christ more than his child. Just remember how Christ rebuked his disciples who were preventing children to come to Him, let alone abuse. But Jesus said, "Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." (Mat.19:14)

Conferences the second important of Cassian’s work deals with a lot of subjects important for the monks and abbots. Cassian along with Germanus his traveling companion interviewed many people on those topics in their wanderings to different monasteries. The value of his work consists in first hand information about monastic life and struggles at individual level of the first centuries but as far as spirituality is concerned we mainly deal with works righteousness, human wisdom, and out of context quotation of the Bible verses. The only thing which stands out is part of Conference nr. 3, in which abbot Paphnutius’ elaborations show he understood the grace of God.

What does the Word teach about perfection? I address this issue because this is the main aim of the monastics. There are two aspects involved: spiritual perfection and practical sanctification. Spiritual perfection is once for all work done by God in our behalf at Golgotha. By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all... For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified (Hebrews 10:10,14). Spiritual perfection is part of salvation is not based on our works, but on God’s. Who hath saved us, and called [us] with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace (2Tim 1:9).

Moreover in God’s view we are already glorified. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified (Romans8:30). Spiritual perfection is exemplified by the expression in Christ which was coined by the apostle Paul. It is used often in his epistles. It signifies the fact that God placed us in Christ in a spiritual sense. Spiritual perfection is a positional truth. Blessed {be} the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly {places} in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world (emphasis mine) (Ephesians 1:3,4)

God placed us in Christ because of the perfect cleansing of our sins by His blood. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace (Ephesians 1:7).

Perfection at the spiritual level is the normal condition of every genuine believer. God grants it to all who put their trust in Christ and not limited to a few. This is the essence of grace which most of the monastics miss. Spiritual perfection worked by God will bring us to heaven, not our deeds. Nevertheless a genuine believer will not stay idle either: ... that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works (emphasis mine) (Titus 2:14,15.). Practical sanctification on the other hand is the same with spiritual maturity. It is a lifetime process. Here what the apostle Paul says: Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold
of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:12-14).

Practical sanctification is always the result of the spiritual perfection. The believers conscious of their spiritual perfection in Christ are bold in living out their Christianity and fulfill the good deeds prepared beforehand by God for them. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). The good deeds prepared beforehand by God for the believer to walk in them, is a foundational Biblical concept unknown among most of the people into monasticism.
THEURGY IN THE EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCH

Physical objects seen as having spiritual power

I purposely left this subject at the end of the essay because all the previous information is needed for its understanding. All the physical objects and the symbols on them used in any ritual in the Eastern Orthodox Church are seen as having spiritual power. I will list just some of them: the church building, Chrismation oil, the water for baptism, priestly garments, candles, icons, altars, and incense. This teaching of Eastern Orthodoxy is based on the Neoplatonic theurgy.

The Roman Catholics and Episcopalians are in the same position, but they are not the subject of our study. There are two essential components that brought the Eastern Orthodox Church to such a practice. The first one is their view that salvation is not a once-for-all act of God at the cross through Jesus Christ. Salvation is a process ending in deification. As we saw in the previous sections, deification is the goal of Eastern Orthodoxy. Deification also is a progression which starts with Baptism and Chrismation, and the Orthodox believer is constantly being “saved” and going towards the final aspect of deification through the participation in the life of the church and in the sacraments of the church, such as the Eucharist (Lord’s Supper).

The continual need to administer “salvation” to the Orthodox believer brings into the preeminence the role of the Ecclesiastical Hierarchies, who are sole administrators of the “saving sacraments” of Eastern Orthodoxy. Below I quote Pseudo-Denys which best presents the role of hierarchies as administering the “deifying science”: ...the true and God-transmitted science of all the sacred words and works committed to the Hierarchy... We must, then, most pious of pious sons, demonstrate from the super mundane and most sacred Oracles and traditions, that ours is a Hierarchy of the inspired and Divine and Deifying science, and of operation, and of consecration, for those who have been initiated with the initiation of the sacred revelation derived from the hierarchical mysteries (emphasis mine)...carefully guarding them from the participation and defilement of the uninitiated...

The language and concepts of Pseudo-Denys’ Hierarchies are Neoplatonic but fully adopted in the Eastern Church. By saying this, we come now to the second thing that brought Eastern Orthodoxy into using physical objects and symbols as a way to deliver divine powers. That is theurgical Neoplatonism. When rituals are performed by employing sacred objects for the purpose of salvation and oneness with God, the whole concept is called theurgy.

E. Orthodox Church is a great exemplification of what is theurgy in practicality. As we shall see, the theurgist is convinced that there is a ritualistic correspondence between the divine and matter: The theurgist works ‘like with like’: at the material level with physical symbols, at the spiritual level with magic. Starting with correspondences of the divine in matter, the theurgist eventually reaches the level where the soul's inner divinity unites with God.
How did the Neoplatonic theurgical practices make their way into the Orthodox Church?
They came through key Church Fathers like Gregory of Nyssa, Pseudo-Denis, Maximus the Confessor, who were devoted Neoplatonists. Once the philosophical Neoplatonism became part of the Eastern Church, the practical Neoplatonism which is pagan theurgy, could not be left out. As a reminder, main pagan Neoplatonists employing theurgy were Iamblichus and Proclus.

Eastern Orthodox theologians tried very hard to distance their church from Neoplatonic and pagan implications, but they just couldn’t. Here is what a great scholar says in his essay about the attempt to separate Christian theurgy from pagan theurgy: This essay aims to refute the false distinction between "pagan" and Christian theurgy and to suggest that such distinctions reflect more the apologetic interests of scholars than an accurate reading of the evidence." Shaw Gregory, Neoplatonic Theurgy and Dionysius the Areopagite 1951.

The Eastern Church may list seven main sacraments called Sacred Mysteries, but they don’t limit it to seven: Baptism, Chrismation, Confession, Holy Communion, Marriage, Ordination, and Unction. Notice the word mysteries, a term (although used in the New Testament) here is loaded with Mystery Religions content. The need for administrators of those mysteries, who are called Initiators or priests, becomes paramount. Here is another Neoplatonic, essential element of Eastern Orthodoxy inherited from Pseudo-Denis. It is a triadic schema applied to the Eastern Orthodox community. The priests and their hierarchies are called Initiators, the regular believers are called the initiated, and the non-E. Orthodox are called the uninitiated. On the other hand, the uninitiated could be an aspirant to E. Orthodoxy and is called catechumen, undergoing theological instruction.

Along the same line, here is another triadic Neoplatonic element as part of the way the E. Orthodox church building is composed. Look up a great picture in the end notes 103. The first compartment is only for the Initiators/priests, located where the altar is, and separated by a wall and two doors. The second compartment is for the initiated/believers, and the third compartment is the main hallway at the entrance of the church for the un-initiated/non-Orthodox. Usually the non-Orthodox are not kept from entering the area of the Orthodox, but sometimes the church buildings belonging to monasteries try to enforce the triadic division.

In the next segment we will look at some church sacraments embedded with theurgy. The first one is the Eucharist (Lord’s Supper). The following link provides a view in what takes place inside of the sanctuary where the Eucharistic bread is prepared by the priest: http://www.stseraphimschurc.org/articles/proskomedia-e.html. It is very commendable that the Russian Church of St. Seraphim of Sarov in Sea Cliff, New York provided a detailed account accompanied by pictures, of the Eucharistic preparation called Proskomedia. What is really troubling with the ritual itself is the fact that the priest, among other things, pierces with a liturgical knife also called the sacred spear, one of the Eucharistic breads. I am referring to the practice itself, not to the priest from our example.

The Eastern Church officially recognizes that the Eucharist is a sacrifice in their practice 104. Here is an excerpt illustrating what they call the sacrifice of Christ: “He [the priest] then pierces the right side of the Lamb with the spear, saying the words of the Evangelist, "One of the soldiers
with a spear pierced His side, and forthwith there came out blood and water\textsuperscript{105}…” The idea that the sacrifice of Christ is re-enacted is an abominable concept strongly condemned in the book of Hebrews, demanding that it should never happen again. … they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame (Heb. 6:6). I wonder if the priests are aware of that.

The Eucharistic bread is given in remembrance only for Christ’s death, and not to also honor the Theotokos (Mary), various saints, the living, and the dead.

The New Testament is very specific about the bread being broken, not cut with the knife and not pierced either. “For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said…” (emphasis mine) (1 Cor. 11: 23, 24).

Baptism is another theurgical practice of the Eastern Church. When the priest does the specific liturgy the baptismal water has the “power” to give the new spiritual birth to the baptized baby. The anointing oil\textsuperscript{106} used right after baptism gives the Holy Spirit, the church dogma teaches, to the infant. This oil is called Chrism and in order to become sacred a bishop will bless it. The Bible expressly says that any spiritual transformation including the sealing of the Holy Spirit, is for responsible people who can exercise faith In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, (Ephesians 1:13).

Priestly garments, candles, icons, altars, incense, and all other physical objects are attributed spiritual powers by the teaching of Eastern Orthodoxy based on the Neoplatonic theurgy.
I call the people in this section contemporary because most of them lived not too long ago, and their influence is very much felt today. We will start with two theologians, Vladimir Lossky, and John Meyendorff, part of the Russian émigré in France who were some of the main players in the Renaissance of Palamism. I am referring to the mysticism of Gregory Palamas, the most powerful expression of its kind in the Eastern Church.

Vladimir Lossky is best known by his book *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, in which he enthusiastically revives the mysticism and occultism of Pseudo-Denys. John Meyendorff in his turn uses the same passion in presenting Gregory Palamas the mega-mystic in a book called *St Gregory and Orthodox Spirituality*.

There is a contradiction in Meyendorff’s thought in two of his books: *Christ in the Eastern Christian Thought* and *St Gregory and Orthodox Spirituality*. He proves very scholarly-like how Pseudo-Denys is just a Neoplatonist with doubtful Christianity in the first book, but on the other hand, he eulogizes Palamas in the second book in spite of the fact that Meyendorff knew so well that Palamas was a student of Pseudo-Denys thought.

In any case, the rehabilitation of Pseudo-Denys and Gregory Palamas to the contemporary readership allowed the E. Orthodox church to re-assess its distinctive position within the Christendom and return in part to an acute mysticism.

The move of Lossky/Meyendorff team along with others, and continued by Christos Yannaras, is called by specialists *political hesychasm*[^1]. It was a successful attempt to keep E. Orthodoxy isolated from the Gospel, and away from a reasonable approach in theology. We will come back to Yannaras two paragraphs later.

The Romanian theologian Dumitru Staniloae is known in the Orthodox world as a proponent of hesychasm in the Romanian Orthodox Church. He put a lot of effort in translating the collection of the Church Fathers’ devotional called *Philokalia* from Greek into Romanian. Philokalia means *love for the beautiful*. It contains mainly radical mysticism of E. Orthodoxy starting with the Desert Fathers and ending with the hesychasm of Gregory Palamas.

Staniloae also wrote a systematic theology called *Dogmatic Theology* from a mystical perspective. The bibliography is very deficient. He is a full Palamist and avoids discussing Neoplatonism unlike Meyendorff and Lossky. Still his work is appreciated by people with the same inclinations from around the world. He is dedicated to the apophatic cause, and in spite of the fact that he mimics some change in his theological direction, he remains dedicated to
Pseudo-Denys, Maximus the Confessor, and Gregory Palamas. Through his writings, Dumitru Staniloae strengthened the mysticism within the Romanian Orthodoxy, which is a regression.

At the present time there are many Romanian E. Orthodox theologians who are far superior to Staniloae, but he is promoted because a Byzantine hierarchical procedure which provides that some seniors must have preeminence in spite of their ineffectiveness.

Christos Yannaras is a personality of Greece, known in Europe, especially in Eastern Europe. He has both theological and philosophical education at a doctoral level. He is the most radical philosopher working in behalf of Eastern Orthodoxy. He wants to purify Greece from Western influence through Palamism, which means employing the heavy duty occultic, mystical practices of the prayer of the heart and Palamas’ theology. Mr. Yannaras is a hesychast crusader. His hidden agenda is to prevent a coherent knowledge of the Bible from spreading in Greece and possibly other E. Orthodox countries, by bringing them under Palamas’ obscurantism. His effort failed on the big scale, but he is highly regarded among many E. Orthodox clergy in different countries.

In his resentments against the western culture, specifically logic, he denies philosophy all the way to Socrates in order to secure a justification for his mysticism, although he is a philosopher trained in Germany and France. What is self-contradictory in Yannaras’ struggle against logic, is his use of a logical discourse in order to deny logic itself. This is self-refuting. He knows it, but for a Byzantine mind, contradictions make sense. In his endeavor, Yannaras resorted to the philosophy of Heidegger, who also in his quest for originality contested all the philosophical thought right to Socrates and beyond. Heidegger also was a very immoral person.

Yannaras is accused by one of his fellow E. Orthodox scholar, Dr. Edward Moore of anti-intellectualism. An intellectual approach to the Bible will demand the correct exegesis of the text, allowing the reader to have a clear understanding of the Biblical message, which Yannaras does not want. Tragically, Mr. Yannaras manifests himself as an enemy of the Gospel.

In mid nineties, while I was in Romania I was present in two seminars held for E. Orthodox students by the faculty of the E. Orthodox Seminary, having as a guest professor Mr. Yannaras himself. I was shocked when I heard him saying that the revival of the E. Orthodox Church could be achieved in Greece and elsewhere, if the electrical candles were replaced with wax candles in church services, and icons painted on glass replaced with icons painted on wood! Back then I did not know that he was speaking in Neoplatonic terms where objects have supernatural powers attached to them, technically called “theurgism”.

John Savvas Romanides was another radical Hesychasm promoter like Yannaras. He was professor of Dogmatic Theology at the Holy Cross Theological School, Massachusetts, and did the same work at the University of Thessaloniki, Greece. He rightly emphasized that E. Orthodoxy is mystical contemplation, and not reflection on the Word. That is Neoplatonism. He is also an absolute Palamist, seeing as a solution for E. Orthodoxy, the practice of the occult Hesychasm.
Timothy Ware is the man behind the E. Orthodox mystical crusade in England and the West. Ware is also known as Metropolitan Kalistos. He is another Palamist and great advocate of hard-core mysticism. He wrote a very well crafted book titled *The Orthodox Church* in which he presents a sanitized version of E. Orthodoxy that looks Protestant in order to induce people with a protestant background into the Eastern Church. No mention of Neoplatonism. His work denotes both intellectual dishonesty and scholarly underperformance, besides craftiness. He boasted that the word *justification* is not even present in his book. Why? The doctrine of justification is central to the New Testament, presenting salvation as accomplished in Christ. Alternatively, salvation is open-ended in the Eastern Church, and Ware is committed to that.

Timothy Ware also managed to supervise the doctoral dissertation of Emil Bartos (a gifted Romanian theologian uncommitted to the Bible), and probably others from Eastern Europe. We will discuss Bartos’ case a little bit later, but as for now it is important to know that Ware used his position and influence to bring mysticism among Evangelicals in Eastern Europe.

**The Eastern Orthodox Strategy in England concerning young Romanians seeking PhD in theology.** I think it is a fair game for the E. Orthodox to facilitate grants to the young Romanian students (and others) in order to get a PhD in E. Orthodox studies, because Evangelicals also share their faith with the Eastern Orthodox at large. None of these Christian denominations should be afraid of exposing their convictions to each other. When E. Orthodoxy accuses Evangelicals of proselytism, they just prove theological insecurity. The problem is not with the E. Orthodox assisting Eastern Europeans to study their theology, but with those Eastern European Evangelicals who by studying E. Orthodoxy and become persuaded of the mysticism thereof. These Evangelicals prove that they are either uncommitted to the Bible, or not born again. Another problem with Eastern European students studying E. Orthodoxy abroad is their lack of training in the doctrines of grace, specifically an in-depth analysis of the epistle to the Romans. Still, I personally know several Romanian theologians who earned their PhDs in England on E. Orthodox subjects, and remained perfectly sound. Although I will express critical views on specific theologians in the next paragraphs, I care for them and I pray for them.

**Emil Bartos** as I mentioned was supervised by Timothy Ware in writing his PhD dissertation. His work later became a book known as *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology: an evaluation and critique of the theology of Dumitru Staniloae*. This book fails a scholarly exploration of Staniloae’s theology, because it lacks a competent discussion of its Neoplatonic foundation. An example of how E. Orthodox scholarship should look is John Meyendorff who does not avoid exposing Neoplatonic foundation of the Eastern Church. Bartos’ work developed within E. Orthodox perimeters is not fully academic. Probably was no freedom to work with Timothy Ware as a PhD mentor.

Although Emil Bartos disagrees with different aspects of Eastern Orthodoxy, and respectively with portions of Staniloae’s dogmatic theology, still he adopted concepts from it, and tries to be an integrative theologian of protestant and mystical Eastern Orthodox Theology, which is an impossibility. He renders a indirect service to the mystical cause worldwide. The result is Emil Bartos compromised his Evangelical stand and his Biblical protestant theology. Bartos got
a lot of recognition for his work, but in the same time, he became an Eastern Orthodox at heart and later an ecumenist. In private discussions, he was promoting E. Orthodox theology among Evangelical students, while he was a professor of systematic theology at an Evangelical university.

**Danut Manastireanu** is an astute thinker, but rebellious, restless, ecumenist, and uncommitted to the Bible. He is a Romanian theologian. He is totally pro-Orthodox. His doctoral dissertation is done in England, researching the area of *The Perichoresis of the Trinity*, a highly speculative mystical subject. He considers Dumitru Staniloae as the greatest Romanian theologian. This assessment is untrue unless he puts the word *mystic* before *theologian*, in order for it to make sense. Still, there is no such thing as mystical theology. It is a contradiction in terms. Therefore, Manastireanu’s assessment fails.

Manastireanu offers an opinion that the formation of a good theologian also implies rabbinical studies, like in the case of his tutor William Horbury. One of the latest developments of Manastireanu’s “spiritual journey” is joining the Anglican Church. All these issues prove his gradual departure from a Biblical Christianity and the possibility for him to move to other forms of historical Christianity and even non-Christian religions. As a side note, a prayer by Theresa of Avila is presented on his blog as something commendable, when in reality she excelled in occultism.

**Silviu Rogobete** is another Romanian Evangelical turned pro E. Orthodox and ecumenist. He is paradoxical because in spite of his pro E. Orthodoxy, he still vigorously defends Evangelical rights. Rogobete’s PhD studies also have an Eastern Orthodox subject. No one will debate his good intentions, but with time, his appreciation for the Eastern Church mysticism will grow. That will lead him, and others with the same background to later become supporters of mysticism driven apostasy.

**Conclusion on some Romanian Evangelical Scholars.** The three theologians mentioned in this short analysis are part of a larger group of young, eager Evangelicals who have studied or are studying abroad in order to secure doctoral degrees. God gifted them with great abilities, earning highest honors from Cambridge, Oxford, and the like. The problem is that those who depart from a Biblical commitment, and instead practice a philosophical theology, engage on a pathway that is hard to return from. There is also a clear manifestation of an elitist behavior among them, being disconnected from the life of the church.
For interested Eastern Orthodox seekers of the Truth, I listed some cardinal aspects of salvation in Biblical terms.

**Has a sacrificial aspect** – Christ on the cross was our propitiation, meaning the place where God’s wrath against sinners was changed into mercy. The divine wrath was consumed on His Son, Christ Jesus. Propitiation was a known concept both for Jews and pagans as a way of appeasing divine wrath through blood sacrifice. In the case of pagans, the blood sacrifice was offered to their gods. The Jews offered propitiation to the true God. Ultimately God allowed His only Son to be our propitiation. ... whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith (Romans 3:25). Christ is also our redemption. Redemption was also common to the Jews and pagans because both had slaves or had to pay ransoms to free up their war prisoners. Christ paid the price to God- a ransom- in order for us to walk free from the penalty of sin as eternal damnation... being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 3:24).

**Has a faith/trust aspect** – the way to approach the finished work of Christ on the cross in behalf of the believing sinner is solely by personal trust in what Christ did at Golgotha two thousand years ago...The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” So they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household... Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household. (Acts 16:29-31, 34). God rewards trust, meaning full surrender to Him and not man’s merits, works, or even self-sacrifice... But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Heb.11:6). Nevertheless, genuine faith/trust is accompanied by repentance and a new moral life... as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:14-16).

**Has a finality aspect** – at the cross Christ accomplished everything for the believing sinner to be accepted by God right away at the moment of belief. The thief on the cross is the prime example of the sufficiency and completeness of Christ’s sacrifice in behalf of the believing sinners. Then he said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom. And Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise (Luke 23: 42-43). Faith places the believer into the full benefits of Christ’s sacrifice... For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ (Romans 5:17).

**Has a spiritual aspect** – the Holy Spirit quickens to life, faith and repentance the dead spirit of the sinner But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even
when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:4-6), and also seals the believer in order that he/she will not totally backslide... In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory (Ephesians 1:13).

Has a legal aspect – God granted us His own righteous standard in order to satisfy the righteous requirement of His own law which was condemning us. His righteousness is accessed by faith in Jesus Christ. By this forensic act, God declared, and made us just.

... But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:21-23). Justification is the heart of New Testament salvation... Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ... Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him (Romans 5:1,9).

Has a covenantal aspect – the new covenant is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. It is opposite to the covenant of works-law where God and man have equal parts to fulfill, whereas the covenant of Grace involves God and Christ, Him being as the mediator in our behalf before God... But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promise. (Heb.8:6). And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. (Heb. 9:15).

Has a practical aspect – works naturally flow from the life of the believer. Works cannot help win salvation, but always follow salvation... This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works Titus (Titus 3:8). God prepared beforehand the good works in which the believer should walk... For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10).

Has a family aspect – God adopts in His family those who believe in His Son, and bestows on them the title of children of God, with full rights, privileges, and responsibilities co-inheriting with Christ the Kingdom of God... having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will. (Ephesians 1:5) But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12, 13)... Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him (1John 1:1,2)... giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light (Col.1:12.)
Has a sovereignty aspect – those who believe are those who were predestined before the creation of the world to resemble Christ... No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:44). For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? (Romans 8: 29-32). God looked for us; we weren’t looking for Him. He constrained us in different ways unto salvation. Look at Saul of Tarsus who later became the apostle Paul... Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? And he said, Who are You, Lord? Then the Lord said, I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads. So he, trembling and astonished, said, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” Then the Lord said to him, “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do (Acts 9:4-6).

Has an expectation aspect – true believers anticipate and love the return of our Lord, while they are busy with His Kingdom’s business... For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come (1 Thes. 1:9, 10)... Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing (2Tim.4:8)... And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” (Rev.22:17)

Has a priority aspect – dedicated believers use their financial resources, time, houses, passion and energy including their career, to further God’s kingdom and not theirs... “Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear? For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you (Mat.6:31-33).

Has a security aspect – the ones that are truly saved remain always saved. The problem today is that many who claim salvation show no practical proofs of being saved. Those are the apostates who were never saved in the first place... Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father’s name, they bear witness of Me. But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. I and My Father are one (John 10:25-30).

Has an eternal aspect- Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He
will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” And He said to me, “Write, for these words are true and faithful.” And He said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son (Rev.21:1-7)
FINAL CONCLUSION

Eastern Orthodoxy having as foundation the works of Pseudo-Denys as a climax of mysticism becomes insolvent as Alexander Schmemann former dean of St. Vladimir E. Orthodox Seminary correctly assessed: Yesterday I read the Church Hierarchy of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. What can it mean in our contemporary world? What could it have meant in a world where it was written? What does the success of this corpus mean in Byzantium? If one would apply the Gospel's basic principle, "for the tree is known by its fruit" (Matthew 12:33), to the history of the Church, one would see that what happened was the reduction of the Church to a mysterious piety, the dying of its eschatological essence and mission, and, finally, the de-Christianization of this world and its secularization.

When Schmemann tested Pseudo-Denys against the Scripture, the great mystic proved to be a false teacher. How many E. Orthodox theologians and believers have Mr. Schmemann’ courage to test their theology and practice by the eternal Word of God?

I am so thankful that V. Lossky wrote Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church. He wanted to make a clear presentation of the essence of the Eastern Church but unwillingly he put on the display the occult Pseudo-Denys and the deep mysticism of the Eastern Orthodoxy. Also John Meyendorff rendered a great service to the cause of truth by portions of his book Christ in Eastern Christian Thought where he openly admits Neoplatonist and occult influence in Eastern Orthodoxy through Pseudo-Denys’ writings. As a result, Meyendorff unintentionally dismantled Pseudo-Denys, the greatest enemy of the Eastern Church, and with him the whole mystical tradition of Eastern Orthodox falls. The only remaining chance for any Eastern Orthodox is returning to the Word of God unmediated by the Church Fathers, but mediated by the Holy Spirit. But when the Spirit of truth comes, he will lead you into all truth. (John 16:13)

Pseudo-Denys is not the sole author of heresies in the Eastern Church. He is the synthesis of four hundred years of history of E. Orthodoxy interwoven with philosophy of Platonism and Neoplatonism. Things went wrong starting with Clement of Alexandria, came to a full heresy through Origen of Alexandria, continued to aggravate with the extremism of the Desert Fathers, and came to a sophisticated heresy through the Cappadocian Fathers especially Gregory of Nyssa. Then Pseudo-Denys gave the final blow through his utter occult writings. This is why E. Orthodoxy is frozen since the 5th century. Maximus the Confessor later just reaffirmed and validated all the false doctrines using his position of influence. After six centuries Gregory Palamas found a way to give a “theological justification” to the practice of the occult mystical Hesychasm.

But within E. Orthodoxy, God kept an unknown small remnant. There were always some people who memorized Bible verses they heard during liturgy or read portions of the Scripture they had available and came to the knowledge of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. Still
God showed his incredible power and made a full reformation within E. Orthodoxy after almost two millennia, through the priest Tudor Popescu in Romania.

The sure foundation for any Church including E. Orthodoxy should be only the Word of God. The oldest church is not the Eastern Church as they claim but the Church from the Apostles days. We anchor ourselves in those beginnings affirmed by the Word. That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life — the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us — that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full. This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. (1John 1:1–7)

The theological authorities are the Lord’s apostle and not the Church Fathers. Yes, the Patristics fought crucial battles with heresies but were overcome by philosophical ideologies. Their good does not erase their grave mistakes. Every true believer should have the freedom to reject heresy and apostasy.

I see the Eastern Orthodoxy as being held hostage by philosophy (Col 2:8) and occultism and I pray God will continue to deliver many from those shackles.

*Pastor Paul Dan  patristicsandbible@gmail.com*
BIBLIOGRAPHY & END NOTES


Deification in Staniloae’s theology means participation in God’s communicable and incommunicable attributes; infinity, simplicity, eternity, omnipotence, omniscience, holiness, righteousness, goodness and love. Deification is a process and starts with the individual water-baptism of the infant and goes on in future life. Staniloae is fully Neoplatonist; in his deification concept, process or descent from deity, and ascent or return to deity, is the foundation of this concept. Although Emil Bartos seems to stay objective and critical of Staniloae’s Neoplatonic theology, he finally gives in to Eastern Orthodox thought- admitting the utter transcendence of God, the heresy of the Cappadocian Fathers, Pseudo-Denys and Gregory Palamas. Further, Bartos tries to salvage Staniloae’s distinction between essence and energies of God, which is another heresy of Palamas. Bartos’ analysis of Staniloae’s dogmatic theology, has just a few positive aspects by showing Staniloae’s work as being a collection of fragmented ideas which is not a real dogmatic theology but a mystical work dominated by imprecision, which just confirms Staniloae’s mysticism. The statement that Staniloae’s theology of deification is inspired from Scripture is a false one. Staniloae lines up with the Church Fathers and Neoplatonic thought. Although Dr. Emil Bartos disagrees with different aspects of Eastern Orthodoxy and respectively, Staniloae’s dogmatic theology, still he adopted concepts from it, and tries to be an integrative theologian of protestant and mystical Eastern Orthodox Theology- which is an impossibility. The result is Emil Bartos compromised his Evangelical stand and his Biblical protestant theology.


In his book, Payton sells himself out to the unwarranted theology of Eastern Orthodoxy, eluding its huge Neoplatonist inheritance, trying to present the Cappadocian Fathers as clear of Neoplatonism, still using some Neoplatonist terminology, proving that he doesn’t really understand how deeply Gregory of Nyssa goes in the Neoplatonic thought (p.53). Payton goes further in betraying the Word of God and Biblical theology, embracing sacramentalism, arguing that infant baptism and the unction with the liturgical oil and partaking later into the bread and
wine of the Eucharist, brings deification to the participant (p.149). He goes even further, stating that Salvation is being part of the community of the church not at the individual level (p. 150, 176). The author falls into a horrible idolatry by suggesting that icons are okay and we have to consider them. His hermeneutical methods (p. 185-188), virtually disqualify him from giving any further consideration to his arguments. The last two chapters of the book about tradition, Scripture, and prayer make you wonder why Mr. Payton did not join the ranks of Orthodoxy. He overlooks numerous errors and heresies of the Church Fathers, and the heavy philosophical element in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, and he tops his adulation of the mysticism of Eastern Orthodoxy by arguing for the validity of the dangerous Hesychast Prayer of the Heart. It is hard to understand his zeal for the proven problematic theology of Eastern Orthodoxy, to say the least. It seems to be that Mr. Payton wanted to be the Timothy Ware of America.


Since 1970 a new school of interpretation concerning Luther’s writings has emerged in Finland, as a result of the dialog between the Church of Finland and Russian Orthodox Church. The Finnish Lutherans departed from justification by faith and the forensic interpretation of Biblical passages of justification, including the imputed forgiveness of sins, and adopted the mystical theosis of Eastern Orthodoxy (p. 190). The attempt of Joseph McLelland to compare Calvin with Palamas in deification is skillfully refuted by J. Todd Billings. Calvin interacts with Church Fathers but is able to remain Biblical (p. 206). Wesley, drawing a lot from Clement, Origen, Macarios and Ephrem, argued for perfection in this life- of course he says “by grace, through faith”. Although we see elements of patristic theosis, still, as Michael J. Christensen puts it, theosis for John Wesley was a domesticated version of the ancient doctrine (p. 223). On the other hand, his brother, Charles Wesley uses theosis in full force in patristic terms. As a result, there was a disagreement and back and forth discussion between the two Wesleyan brothers, founders of Methodism. To participate in an anthologically simple God as Palamas and his school understand, it would necessarily entail becoming a divine person (p. 240). For Plato all human beings posses innate divinity, so they should seek freedom from the body by their own efforts because the mind is divine, the soul is tainted by the body, and the body is the tomb for the soul. To reach divinity again the soul has to go through three re-births- all those three lives lived in purity; but the shortcut to this is to be a philosopher- a perfect sage. Ascetics is tied to this religion of metaphysics. Philosophers aspire to the ultimate wisdom belonging to the gods. Plato and Socrates argued that the philosopher is just a lover of wisdom- the true wisdom is only with gods. Socrates claims that he has his own personal demon. Scholars tried to save the dark implication and said that the demon is his conscience. Essentially the scholars attempted to avoid mystical issues in philosophy. Socrates claims that his demon provides access to divinity more than human reason. Plato on his part elaborates a three-partite psychology- mind, bodily spirit, and bodily appetites. Reason is the ruling part of the soul and is god-like. The soul can be disembodied through purification and education in philosophy and proper living (ethics). The reward for disembodied reason is vision akin to theoria. Greek patristic theology, buys into Platonic divinity of the soul, whereas in Western Christianity, immortality is a gift from God (p. 51-54).
For the stoics God is essentially the soul of the world, or the universal reason. For the stoics, the spirit, (pneuma), reason (logos), and God were the same. Cicero picked up a Platonic and stoic notion of humans and gods being akin, by the virtue of participation in reason. Again the religious message of those categories must not be underestimated. Theosis is originated in the Greek word apotheosis, meaning mythical deification.


As Timothy Ware aka Metropolitan Kallistos, correctly puts it in his foreword of Staniloae’s Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, Dumitru Staniloae remained a theologian in the Palamite tradition. He gives continuity to the heretical teaching of distinction between God’s essence and energies. When Staniloae says that we need a concrete theology, a theology of experience, he is referring to the non-Biblical mystical, ascetic purification and the Hesychast Prayer of the Heart. One positive aspect in his theology is approaching some Western theologians, but he remains a mystic.

It is not commendable at all when Staniloae is afraid of Latinization in his doctoral dissertation by avoiding Orthodox like Dositheos or Peter Moghila. His reliance on apophatic Cappadocian Fathers and Pseudo-Denys makes Staniloae an apophatic theologian. Still in spite of all these heavy-duty patristics, he advocates against irrationality, which is almost unknown among eastern Orthodox theologians. He explains how the Son of God, as the Logos contains in Himself the “reasons”. If Staniloae would have followed how Christ articulates a reasonable and supernatural, supra-rational, theology, for sure Staniloae would have ended up on the Protestant side. The vague signals of reasonableness in Staniloae’s work is due to the interaction with Western theologians. Staniloae is heretical by stating that the Father is the ultimate source of being within the Godhead. That implicitly gives total support to the emanation of the Word stated by Origen.

At times, Staniloae is a little bit courageous, correcting Church Fathers here and there, probably for the sake of originality, and sometimes he brings in a bit of Christology into the discussion.


Meyendorff John. The Byzantine Legacy in the Orthodox Church. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1982


Nouwen is pro-homosexual (p. 30), strongly ecumenical and globalist (p. 132).


Henri Nouwen’s “The Way of the Heart” is an ecumenical strategy which brings together Christians of different colors, cultists like The Disciples of Christ, and heretics like the Unitarians, in spite of all the historical, theological, or psychological differences (taken from acknowledgements). Nouwen goes beyond Merton, to the “purest” mysticism of the Desert Fathers (p. 13), and argues for the Desert experience with an out-of-context explanation of Romans 12:2. He explains how Arsenius (Desert Father) finds “salvation” by isolation and prayer in the desert (p.14-15), not by faith (my comments). Merton is quoted again as a mystical referee (p. 20-21). Nouwen misapplies Christ’s desert experience to Christians. Christ said to retrieve in your room, not in the desert (my comments; Matthew 6:6). Chang Tzu the Taoist is highly viewed in connection with Merton’s writings (p. 48-49). The Hesychast Prayer of the Heart, is presented in a sanitized form (p. 76-79). Nouwen urges the readers to “bring your mind into your heart, by quietly repeating a single word” (p. 81).

Merton Thomas. The Seven Storey Mountain. NY: Harcourt, Brace & Co, Inc. 1948


Nouwen credits Merton as one of the most important spiritual writers of our century. And this “spiritual writer” is in fact the student of Aldous Huxley who introduced mysticism to Merton by his book Ends and Means (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aldous_Huxley). Huxley was a rebel, drug user, drug promoter, and a big anarchist. He was very active in promoting Hindu mysticism
among students during the Hippie Revolution. Merton kept a high view of, and close friendship with Huxley all his life. John of the Cross’ ascetical lifestyle was Merton’s model ascetism. He was also influenced by the mystic Therese of Lisieux (p. 21). His prayer life was influenced by Ignatius Loyola’s book Spiritual Exercises, which required the study of the book to be done in a completely dark room with just enough light for reading. That’s a smack of occultism. Merton confessed he did his spiritual exercise sitting cross-legged like Mahatma Gandhi. What a mix of Hindu and Christianity in his life. (p. 22)

He continued to do all kinds of rituals and prayers and bur those prayers made him open to nature not to God (p. 23-24). Merton is honest in his confession about his confusion concerning monasticism. “It is feared that it is driving me into solitude.” (p. 46). Merton is fond of Marxism (p. 52). He is also a rebel social activist (p. 53). Gandhi set him on the path to the East (p. 63). Civil unrests of the 60s pushed him towards the “wise men” from the East. He sought from them a better understanding of the West (p. 70-71). He is also into Chang Tzu and Zen Buddhism. And to understand Merton, you have to understand Chang Tzu which has a bipolar philosophy: “I” and “Not I” dialectic concept (p. 72). Merton’s life was a search for God, says Nouwen in page 76, but he never found Him (my comment). Merton is a Taoist (p. 76-80). Daisetz Suzuki, a Zen Buddhist personality, was very influential in Merton’s life (p. 82). Zen Buddhism, Nouwen argues, can point out to the Christian the possibility of self-emptying, a direct encounter with the transcendent God, and an understanding of God without any verbal formulas or linguistic constructions. In other words, there’s no need for the Bible. He says, “East makes West Christian again.” (p. 85).

Merton finds death in Bangkok, electrocuted by a faulty electrical fan (p. 86). Merton condemns himself for desiring to read something about contemplation and instead of shutting up and emptying his mind. (p. 112). “I don’t have a purely contemplative vocation,” says Merton (p. 113). In his idea, to become a saint means to write books in a Trappist monastery (p. 115). “I am exhausted by fear.” (p. 117). Merton excuses his huge appetite for Hindu and Buddhist mysticism because in his words, Augustine read Plotinus, Aquinas read Aristotle, and Averroes, and both Plotinus and Aristotle are long further from Christianity than Chang Tzu ever was. He also states that Teilhard de Chardin’s indulgence in Marxism makes him less liable for diving into Chinese mysticism (p. 143). Meister Eckhart and TD Suzuki are quoted (p. 146-147). Merton pushes for Christian-Buddhist understanding by practicing Zen Buddhism and dropping the Christian discourse (p. 149).


Merton proves to handle contemplation and apophatic theology well. He is a proof that the apophatic theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Hindu/Buddhist mysticism are the same, having the same occult origin.


This book is an embarrassment. It is an indirect declaration of love with homosexual overtones to another man.


In the introduction, page XVII, we find the following comment on Merton: “His ecumenism was total. And we find him ranging from Tantric Buddhism to Zen, and from Islam and Sufism, to Vedanta.” He studied Zen masters under the encouragement of great Zen authority, the late Dr. D.T. Suzuki (p. XXV-XXVII). Merton is able to articulate total apophatic Hindu theology such as Brahma is formless, beyond personality, which is identical to Eastern Orthodox apophatism (p. 349). He held Dalai Llama in highest esteem and acknowledged a spiritual bond between them. He pressed for a unification of Christianity and Asian religions based on their transcendent aspect, which is beyond mere differences and externalities (p. 343). For Merton, to be Catholic meant to be a Muslim and a Buddhist. In his childhood he read Quaker literature by William Penn, which caused him to pursue heavy ecumenism (my comment) (p. 206).


Merton digs deep into Eastern mysticism, showing his acquaintance with Pseudo-Dionysius and apophatism. He is a thorough mystic.

Palto, Plato’s dialogues-The Seventh Letter, William Benton, Publisher, Encyclopedis Britanica, 1952

Plotinus, The six enneads, William Benton, Publisher, Encyclopedis Britanica, 1952

Iamblichus: Theurgia or On the Mysteries of Egypt-
http://www.esotericarchives.com/oracle/iamblt_th.htm


1 http://www.operationworld.org/country/roma/owtext.html#3-2

2 http://beeworld.org/history.htm

3 http://books.google.com/books?id=sCY4sAjTGIYC&pg=PA247&lpg=PA247&dq=exclusive+brethren+in+dillenburg,+germany&source=bl&ots=BwuwyIrRFQ&sig=jSMXDw_sX4_Jf1w3guDug1qb4qw&hl=en&ei=46fjSYbtGl7ulQfXqqjDg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1

4 ”http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/400861/mysticism

5 In Matthew 6:7 only, ”Use not vain repetitions,” for βατταλογέω (so Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus), a word found nowhere else and spelled variously in the manuscripts, battologeo in Codices K, L,
M; etc., batologeo in Codices F G, blattologeo in Codex Bezae (probably influenced by the Latin blatero, "talk idly"); presumably connected with batterizo, "stammer," and perhaps formed under the influence of the Aramaic beta', "speak carelessly," or baTel, "useless." Whether, however battalogeo means the constant repetition of the same phrase or the mechanical recitation of a long series of obscure or meaningless formulas (if, indeed, a distinction between the acts was thought of) cannot be determined. Either practice is abundantly evidenced as a "heathen" custom of the day, and either can be classed as "much speaking." http://www.searchgodsword.org/enc/lsb/view.cgi?number=T7364


7 http://home.dmv.com/~vincent/indexfiles/HMGS.htm

8 wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn

9 Web definitions on Mystic and mysticism

mystic - mysterious: having an import not apparent to the senses nor obvious to the intelligence; beyond ordinary understanding; "mysterious symbols"; "the mystical style of Blake"; "occult lore"; "the secret learning of the ancients" wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn

The search through various prayers and practices to achieve unity with God in life (theosis) (see hesychasm). www.goarch.org/en/ourfaith/articles/article9152.asp

The belief that knowledge of divine truth or the soul's union with the divine is attainable by spiritual insight or ecstatic contemplation without the medium of the senses or reason www.innvista.com/culture/religion/diction.htm

mystic - One who values inner spiritual experience in preference to external authorities and scriptures. wps.prenhall.com/wps/media/objects/251/257747/Glossary/fisher_m.html

1: the experience of mystical union or direct communion with ultimate reality reported by mystics 2: the belief that direct knowledge of God, spiritual truth, or ultimate reality can be attained through subjective experience (as intuition or insight)3 a: vague speculation : a belief without sound basis b: a theory postulating the possibility of direct and intuitive acquisition of ineffable knowledge or power.


12 Philo Judaeus, (c. 20 bc-ad 50), also known as Philo of Alexandria, Jewish-Hellenistic philosopher. Although considered the greatest Jewish philosopher of his age, Philo appropriated the doctrines of Greek philosophy so completely that he must also be considered a Greek philosopher who combined elements borrowed from various sources into an original unity.

13 The Florentine humanist Lorenzo Valla (d. 1457), in his commentaries on the New Testament, did much to establish that the author of the Corpus Areopagiticum could not have been St. Paul's convert, though he was unable to identify the actual historical author. The fictitious literary persona had long been accepted on face value by all its readers, with a couple of exceptions such as Nicholas of Cusa noted by modern historians, but whose reservations went unheard.

William Grocyn pursued Valla's lines of text criticism, and Valla's critical viewpoint of the authorship of the highly influential Corpus was accepted and publicized by Erasmus from 1504 onward, for which he was criticized by Catholic theologians. In the Leipzig disputation with Martin Luther, 1519, Johann Eck used the Corpus, specifically the Angelic Hierarchy, as argument for the apostolic origin of papal supremacy, pressing the Platonist analogy, "as above, so below".

14 http://www.theosophy-nw.org/theosnw/world/med/me-wtst2.htm

15 <Plato, the idealist and mystic philosopher> 428 BC – 347 BC

Plato is at the main cause for all the philosophical heresies and occult developments in the western world. Nevertheless there are others too, but Plato is at the top of the list. The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato.15 This statement is one of the most brilliant syntheses of Western Philosophy which was made by Alfred North Whitehead, he himself a mathematician and philosopher15. Descartes, Locke, Hume, Kant works are variations or reactions to the Platonic philosophy. We will take a brief look at all of them in order to understand Kant.

Plato like everybody else saw that material world around us is in a continuous change. Instead of seeing the matter as a dynamic environment he chose to say that the material world was unstable. Then he looked for stability in the imaginary world, the world of ideas. What was the reason for that search? He was influenced by the Eleatic philosophers15 who’s one of the main proponent was Parmenides. The Eleatics denied the physical reality, supporting just an imaginary reality. Eleatic comes from the name of an island called Elea (close to Italy) were some of this philosophers were born.
How did Plato build his philosophy of ideas? Plato stated that everything around us has an immaterial expression or counterpart. For instance, the color blue exists here in many shades but the concept of color blue exists outside the physical world. For him the true color blue is the concept of color blue existing outside the physical world. Plato called these immaterial concepts outside the material world, ideas or forms. So the physical world is an expression of the immaterial world of forms or ideas, in Plato’s view. Plato called the world of ideas noumena. For him that was the true reality. On the other hand he called the physical world phenomena. For him phenomena (physical world) was just an appearance not reality.

One of the indirect consequences of Eleatic philosophy is Plato’s view about how we perceive reality. He affirms that the human soul existed in different lives before indwelling the human body. He picked up this concept form Pythagoras through Socrates. There are views that Hindu missionaries influenced the Greeks in antiquity. Then he added his own contribution: The Platonic doctrine of recollection or anamnesis. This Platonic doctrine says the soul is full with memories of everything under the sun from the previous existences. So when the human being in this life sees something, let’s say, a horse -he does not really see a horse. He has a mental recollection of the horses from previous existences, which perfectly overlap for what is out there, giving the human the sensation that he saw, a horse. What is out there anyway? Plato says that out there is not a real horse but a shadow of the horse idea/form. Plato states that we are surrounded by shadows of reality not reality per say. So coming back to our example, according to Plato’s view, we project the memory horse on the shadow horse out there and we see a horse (of course a Platonic one).

The idea that the soul has knowledge about the world around us from previous existences is called a priori knowledge, a concept picked up by Kant but modified a bit. The false concept of a priori knowledge is one of the main features of fallacious Kantian philosophy.

Another very important feature of Platonic philosophy is the distrust of senses as a way of knowing reality. In order to convince the reader that our senses deceive us, he uses a fictional dialog between Socrates, and his own brother, Glaucon. The story is part of Plato’s bigger work, The Republic. In brief, the story goes like this. Imagine that in a cave some people are kept chained since childhood. Their heads also are immobilized to see just the wall before them. On that all before them other people show them shadows of animals and objects projected by the fire behind them. Then one of the cave man is released and sees another man, and then the fire that was behind them, later the sun, and the life outside the cave. There is more content but not relevant to our goal here. One of the conclusions of the story is that the reality
around us is just shadows on the wall of the cave, and Plato’s theory of Forms is the true reality. Another conclusion is that our senses are deceiving us about reality because they read shadows, but Plato’s theory of Forms being the “true” reality, we need just to take in his theory of Forms and discard what our senses tell us.

Plato’s attempt to convince the reader about how bad reality is and that our senses are no good, has two fatal flaws:

1. He uses all the tangible, physical elements of reality in which all the normal humans feel comfortable, to convince us to buy into his fictional theory of Forms which is ghostly, uncomfortable and false.

2. He wants to deny reality using reality; this is self defeating-circular argument.

Kant also, uses heavily the Platonic argument of distrust of senses as a way of knowing reality. Kant says he “purifies” the reason form the “corruption” of the senses which he called it the pure reason. His main work as we know is The Critique of Pure Reason. More on that insanity later.

The philosophy of Plato is not restricted to this short presentation; there is a lot more to it. But for our scope of work, it is enough to see the crucial Plato-Kant connection. Before anything else Kant is a Platonist. Knowing that, it will be easier to decipher the most difficult philosopher ever, Kant.

On the other hand, Platonic philosophy led to Neo-Platonism which in turn was connected to Gnosticism or led to Gnosticism, others say15. The most subversive group against Christianity in the first centuries was the Gnostics. Gnostics were heretics, occultic, and practitioners of all kind of perversions. Today we have neo-Gnosticism : Theosophy in various forms – including Anthroposophy, The Wisdom of Martinus, Alice Bailey, Elisabeth Clare Prophet, Ananda Tara Shan (The Rosegarden), Benjamin Creme etc. seems to be the common denominator of most of the New Age groupings. The theosophical paradigm seems to constitute in some way a synthesis of what one could superficially call East-West spirituality or Neo-Gnosticism15.

Porphyry (c. ad 234–c. 305)For Porphyry, however, who believed that the soul must gradually work toward salvation, a knowledge of the operations of the heavenly bodies and their relation to humankind would have been an important tool in gaining ever higher levels of virtue. In fact, Porphyry seems to have held the view that the soul receives certain "powers" from each of the planets – right judgment from Saturn, proper exercise of the will from Jupiter...Iamblichus tells us, by "the perfective operation of unspeakable acts (erga) correctly performed ... acts which are beyond all understanding (huper pasan
noêsin)” and which are "intelligible only to the gods" (On the Mysteries II.11.96-7, in Fowden, p. 132). These ritualistic acts, and the 'logic' underlying them, Iamblichus terms "theurgy" (theourgia). These theurgic acts are necessary, for Iamblichus, because he is convinced that philosophy, which is based solely upon thought (ennoia) – and thought, we must remember, is always an accomplishment of the individual mind, and hence discursive -- is unable to reach that which is beyond thought. The practice of theurgy, then, becomes a way for the soul to experience the presence of the divinity, instead of merely thinking or conceptualizing the godhead...

Proclus (410-485 CE) is, next to Plotinus, the most accomplished and rigorous of the Neoplatonists. Born in Constantinople, he studied philosophy in Athens, and through diligent effort rose to the rank of head teacher or 'scholarch' of that great school. In addition to his accomplishments in philosophy, Proclus was also a religious universalist, who had himself initiated into all the mystery religions being practiced during his time. This was doubtless due to the influence of Iamblichus, whom Proclus held in high esteem (cf. Proclus, Theology of Plato III; in Hegel, p. 432).

http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/464215/Platonism

17 Neoplatonism began with Ammonius Saccas (first half of the 200s AD). He had been brought up as a Christian, studied Plato and developed his own kind of Platonic philosophy. http://oaks.nvg.org/enn1.html

18 Neoplatonism is a type of idealistic monism in which the ultimate reality of the universe is held to be an infinite, unknowable, perfect One. From this One emanates various levels of reality, the highest being nous (pure intelligence). From this nous is derived the world soul, the creative activity of which engenders the lesser souls of human beings. The world soul is conceived as an image of the nous, even as the nous is an image of the One; both the nous and the world soul, despite their differentiation, are thus of the same substance, that is are consubstantial with the One.

The world soul, however, because it is intermediate between the nous and the material world, has the option either of preserving its integrity and imaged perfection or of becoming altogether sensual and corrupt. The same choice is open to each of the lesser souls. When, through ignorance of its true nature and identity, the human soul experiences a false sense of separateness and independence, it becomes arrogantly self-assertive and falls into sensual and depraved habits. Salvation for such a soul is still possible, the Neoplatonist maintains, by virtue of the very freedom of will that enabled it to choose its sinful course. The soul must reverse that course, tracing in the opposite direction the successive steps of its degeneration, until it is again united with the fountainhead of its being. The actual reunion is accomplished through a mystical experience in which the soul knows an all-pervading ecstasy.
Doctrinally, Neoplatonism is characterized by a categorical opposition between the spiritual and the carnal, elaborated from Plato's dualism of idea and matter; by the metaphysical hypothesis of mediating agencies, the nous and the world soul, which transmit the divine power from the One to the many; by an aversion to the world of sense; and by the necessity of liberation from a life of sense through a rigorous ascetic discipline.

19 Neoplatonism is a modern term used to designate the period of Platonic philosophy beginning with the work of Plotinus and ending with the closing of the Platonic Academy by the Emperor Justinian in 529 CE. This brand of Platonism, which is often described as 'mystical' or religious in nature, developed outside the mainstream of Academic Platonism. The origins of Neoplatonism can be traced back to the era of Hellenistic syncretism which spawned such movements and schools of thought as Gnosticism and the Hermetic tradition. A major factor in this syncretism, and one which had an immense influence on the development of Platonic thought, was the introduction of the Jewish Scriptures into Greek intellectual circles via the translation known as the Septuagint. The encounter between the creation narrative of Genesis and the cosmology of Plato's Timaeus set in motion a long tradition of cosmological theorizing that finally culminated in the grand schema of Plotinus' Enneads. Plotinus' two major successors, Porphyry and Iamblichus, each developed, in their own way, certain isolated aspects of Plotinus' thought, but neither of them developed a rigorous philosophy to match that of their master. It was Proclus who, shortly before the closing of the Academy, bequeathed a systematic Platonic philosophy upon the world that in certain ways approached the sophistication of Plotinus. Finally, in the work of the so-called Pseudo-Dionysius, we find a grand synthesis of Platonic philosophy and Christian theology that was to exercise an immense influence on mediaeval mysticism and Renaissance Humanism. http://www.iep.utm.edu/n/neoplaton.htm

20 http://www.iep.utm.edu/n/neoplaton.htm

21 Iamblichus sought "purification, liberation, and salvation of the soul." While Porphyry (philosophy) taught that mental contemplation alone could bring salvation, through ultimate unity with the divine intelligence, Iamblichus held that the transcendent was supra-rational and could not be grasped through reason alone. Embodied souls were dominated by physical necessities, but they were still essentially divine and rational. This created a contradiction which caused the personal soul to lose touch with its deeper, divine nature and become self-alienated. The study of philosophy was important because it led to a rational understanding of the cosmic order, but the embodied soul was to return to divinity by practicing theurgy (god-work), a series of rituals aimed at recovering the transcendent essence by retracing the divine
'signatures' through the layers of being. Since the material world (matter) had been organized by the Demiurge, the Platonic creator-god, according to the eternal Forms, material objects revealed these forms and could be used by the soul as a means of unifying itself with divinity.

A theurgic rite made use of certain symbols (signs, tokens), which god had imprinted with the Forms, and which awakened the human soul to an awareness of its own divine nature. The masses of people were to perform rituals with physical objects corresponding to various aspects of their essential divine nature, while those at a higher level could understand divinity through purely mental contemplation and spiritual practices. The highest form of theurgy was the contemplation of sacred geometric shapes and ratios.

Proclus (410-485 CE) is, next to Plotinus, the most accomplished and rigorous of the Neoplatonists. Born in Constantinople, he studied philosophy in Athens, and through diligent effort rose to the rank of head teacher or 'scholarch' of that great school. In addition to his accomplishments in philosophy, Proclus was also a religious universalist, who had himself initiated into all the mystery religions being practiced during his time. This was doubtless due to the influence of Iamblichus, whom Proclus held in high esteem (cf. Proclus, Theology of Plato III; in Hegel, p. 432). The philosophical expression of Proclus is more precise and logically ordered than that of Plotinus. Indeed, Proclus posits the Intellect (nous) as the culmination of the productive act (paragein) of the One; this is in opposition to Plotinus, who described the Intellect as proceeding directly from the One, thereby placing Mind before Thought, and so making thought the process by which the Intellect becomes alienated from itself, thus requiring the salvific act in order to attain the fulfillment of Being, which is, for Plotinus, the return of Intellect to itself. Proclus understands the movement of existence as a tripartite progression beginning with an abstract unity, passing into a multiplicity that is identified with Life, and returning again to a unity that is no longer merely abstract, but now actualized as an eternal manifestation of the godhead. What constituted, for Plotinus, the salvific drama of human existence is, for Proclus, simply the logical, natural order of things. However, by thus removing the yearning for salvation from human existence, as something to be accomplished, positively, Proclus is ignoring or overly intellectualizing, if you will, an existential aspect of human existence that is as real as it is powerful. Plotinus recognized the importance of the salvific drive for the realization of true philosophy, making philosophy a means to an end; Proclus utilizes philosophy, rather, more in the manner of a useful, descriptive language by which a thinker may describe the essential realities of a merely contingent existence. In this sense, Proclus is more faithful to the 'letter' of Plato's Dialogues; but for this same reason he fails to rise to the 'spirit' of the Platonic philosophy. Proclus' major works include
commentaries on Plato's Timaeus, Republic, Parmenides, Alcibiades I, and the Cratylus. He also wrote treatises on the Theology of Plato, On Providence, and On the Subsistence of Evil. His most important work is undoubtedly the Elements of Theology, which contains the clearest exposition of his ideas. http://www.iep.utm.edu/n/neoplato.htm


24 Origen's ideas, most notably those in the treatise On First Principles, gave rise to a movement in the Christian Church known as Origenism. From the third through the sixth centuries this movement was quite influential, especially among the monastics, and was given articulate - if excessively codified form - by the theologian Evagrius Ponticus (ca. 345-400 A.D.). It is to be noted that the spirit of philosophical inquiry exemplified by Origen was largely absent from the movement bearing his name. A far more creative use of Origen's concepts and themes was made by Gregory of Nyssa (d. ca. 386 A.D.), who adopted Origen's doctrine of apokatastasis or "restoration of all things." Gregory was also responsible for articulating more clearly than did Origen the notion that redeemed souls will remain in a state of dynamic intellectual activity (see Gregory of Nyssa, Catechetical Oration, esp. Chapters 26 and 35). After the posthumous condemnation of Origen (and Origenism) in the fifth century, it became increasingly difficult for mainstream theologians to make use of his work. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (5th or 6th Century A.D.) drew upon Neoplatonic philosophy, especially Proclus (411-485 A.D.) and Iamblichus (ca. 240-325 A.D.), and though he followed in Origen's footsteps in this use of pagan wisdom, he never mentioned his predecessor by name. In the seventh century, Maximus the Confessor (ca. 580-662), who may be called the last great Christian Neoplatonist, set about revising Origen's doctrines in a manner more acceptable to the theological climate of the early Byzantine Church. Maximus changed the historicism of Origen into a more introspective, personal struggle to attain the divine vision through asceticism and prayer, the result being a total subsumption of the person by the godhead. This was Maximus' vision of salvation: the replacement of the ego by the divine presence (see L. Thunberg 1985, p. 89; also Maximus, Chapters on Knowledge 2.88). While there is much that may be called brilliant and even inspiring in Maximus' philosophical theology, this loss of the centrality of the person - as unique, unrepeatable entity - in the cosmic process of salvation led to the loss of a sense of co-operation of humanity and God, and sapped Christianity of the intellectual vigor that it displayed in the period leading up to the establishment of a theocratical Byzantine state. http://www.iep.utm.edu/o/origen.htm

26 apophatism - the religious belief that God cannot be known but is completely `other' and must be described in negative terms (in terms of what God is not) http://www.thefreedictionary.com/apophatism

27 Deification of the soul is a concept shared by the Hellenic pagan philosophical tradition and Orthodox Christianity. In the ancient Greek language, the concept is denoted by two separate terms. For the pagan Neoplatonists, such as Iamblichus, the deification of the human being was described as henôsis, or unity with God. For Christian theologians of the Greek tradition, the term was theôsis, meaning a divine mode of existence. The difference resides in the ontological and metaphysical presuppositions informing these two philosophical and theological approaches.

In the Neoplatonic tradition - both pagan and Christian - the concept of deification was generally traced back to, and lent support by, the following passage from Plato's Theaetetus: "a man should make all haste to escape from earth to heaven; and escape means becoming as like God as possible [homoiôsis theô kata to dunaton]" (176b.1-2)... Whereas Origen and Gregory were only able to conceive of an eskhaton in which human striving must remain forever unfulfilled, and Maximus was only able to conceive of an eskhaton in which the human person loses its existential center... The implication of lamblichean henôsis and Christian theôsis were brought together in the thought of Maximus the Confessor, who simply enshrined human striving in a 'deified' state in which the human nature ceased to function, giving way wholly to the divine. It is the task of an Existential-Personalist eschatology to unite these two differing theoretical approaches to the soul and its final destiny in relation to God. http://www.theandros.com/iamblichus.html

28 http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=contemplates+the+divine+perfection+in+himself+&btnG=Google+Search&aq=f&oq=

29 ...http://www.catholicprimer.org/early_theologians/dionysius_areopagite_divine_names_mystical_theology.pdf

30 a man who sexually abuses a boy

31 Toward a theology of eros: transfiguring passion at the limits of discipline

By Virginia Burrus, Catherine Keller, Published by Fordham Univ. Press, 2006
REFORMATION WITHIN EASTERN ORTHODOXY IN ROMANIA

32 Gregory of Nyssa, Ancient And (Post)Modern, By Morwenna Ludlow, Published by Oxford University Press, 2007


34 the psychological disorder in which somebody needs to be emotionally or physically abused in order to be sexually satisfied

35 Jerome (c. 347 – September 30, 420) (Formerly Heirom) was a Christian priest and Christian apologist best known for translating the Vulgate. He is recognized by the Catholic Church as a canonized saint and Doctor of the Church, and his version of the Bible is still an important text in Catholicism. He is also recognized as a saint by the Eastern Orthodox Church, where he is known as St Jerome of Stridon or Blessed Jerome. He is presumed by some to have been an Illyrian, but this may just be conjecture.

36 http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf206.v.XXII.html

37 The date and place of birth of Clement of Alexandria, born Titus Flavius Clemens, are not known, though it is likely that he was born in the decade 150-160, possibly in Athens. Having studied with religious and philosophical teachers in Greece, southern Italy, and Syria, he settled in the Egyptian city of Alexandria. There he was deeply impressed by the teachings of Pantaenus, who had been converted to Christianity from stoicism and who was at the time head of the Christian catechetical school in Alexandria. Clement, remaining a layman, eventually succeeded Pantaenus in this office and held the post for a number of years, probably not more than a decade. In relation to his activities as a Christian teacher Clement produced his three most important writings: The Exhortation to Conversion, The Tutor, and Miscellanies.

In Alexandria, Clement was at one of the leading intellectual centers of the Hellenistic world. Highly speculative and heretical Gnostic forms of Christian thought had been prominent there for decades among those who professed any form of Christianity. Gnosticism itself represented one way of synthesizing Christian faith with Hellenistic culture. Clement was of the firm conviction that Greek philosophy, particularly Platonic metaphysics and Stoic ethics, represented one of the ways in which God had prepared the world for the coming of Christ. His task, then, was to work toward an orthodox Christian appropriation of Greek thought.

38 He starts with the importance of philosophy for the pursuit of Christian knowledge. Here he is perhaps defending his own scientific labours from local criticism of conservative brethren. He shows how faith is
related to knowledge, and emphasizes the superiority of revelation to philosophy. God's truth is to be found in revelation, another portion of it in philosophy. It is the duty of the Christian to neglect neither. Religious science, drawn from his twofold source, is even an element of perfection, the instructed Christian -- "the true Gnostic" is the perfect Christian. He who has risen to this height is far from the disturbance of passion; he is united to God, and in a mysterious sense is one with Him. Such is the line of thought indicated in the work, which is full of digressions.

http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04045a.htm

39 http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/020806.htm


41 But, as we have already said, the primal goodness is to be understood as residing in God the Father, from whom both the Son is born and the Holy Spirit proceeds, retaining within them, without any doubt, the nature of that goodness which is in the source whence they are derived might go on to say, as is plain, that the Father is the beginning of the Son; and the demiurge the beginning of the works of the demiurge, and that God in a word is the beginning of all that exists. This view is supported by our: In the beginning was the Word. In the Word one may see the Son, and because He is in the Father He may be said to be in the beginning. In the beginning was the Word. It is plain that we may at once dismiss the meaning which connects it with transition or with a road and its length. Nor, it is pretty plain, will the meaning connected with an origin serve our purpose. One might, however, think of the sense in which it points to the author, to that which brings about the effect, if, as we read, God commanded and they were created. For Christ is, in a manner, the demiurge, to whom the Father says, Let there be light, and Let there be a firmament. But Christ is demiurge as a beginning (arche), inasmuch as He is

http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/101501.htm

42 inserting one's own views into the text

43Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans: A Brief History By Charles H. Kahn, Published by Hackett Publishing, 2001, p.124

44http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0415.htm

45 Apocatastasis is a Greek word (αποκαταστασις) meaning either reconstitution or restitution or restoration to the original or primordial condition. Wiki
Another extremely important part of Origen's intellectual heritage is the concept of apokatastasis or "restoration of all things." This term first appears, as a philosophical concept, in the writings of the Stoics, whose materialistic pantheism led them to identify Zeus with the pure, "craftsmenlike" fire pervading and constituting the cosmos. According to the Stoics, this fire expands and contracts according to a fixed cycle. They called the contraction a "conflagration" (ekpurôsis), destroying the cosmos, yet only temporarily. This contraction was described as Zeus returning to his own thoughts, to contemplate the eternal perfection of his mind/cosmos (the material cosmos being the expression of his mind, or Logos). The expansion would occur when Zeus once again expressed his mind in the creation of the material cosmos; this re-creation or reconstitution of the cosmos is what the Stoics called apokatastasis. Some Stoics argued that since Zeus is perfect mind, then every reconstitution of the cosmos will resemble identically the one that preceded it. This Stoic doctrine was to have an immense influence on the development of the so-called esoteric traditions in the Hellenistic era, notably the Hermetic school, Gnosticism, and astrology, with all of which Origen was, in varying degrees, familiar. http://www.iep.utm.edu/o/origen.htm

46 http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf214.xii.vii.html

47 For I see that all your indignation has been roused against me simply because I have told you that you ought not to eulogize one who is the spiritual father of Arius, and the root and parent of all heresies. And when I appealed to you not to go astray, and warned you of the consequences, you traversed my words, and reduced me to tears and sadness; and not me only, but many other Catholics who were present. Can any one, moreover, brook Origen's assertion that men's souls were once angels in heaven, and that having sinned in the upper world, they have been cast down into this, and have been confined in bodies as in barrows or tombs, to pay the penalty for their former sins; and that the bodies of believers are not temples of Christ, but prisons of the condemned? Again, he tampers with the true meaning of the narrative by a false use of allegory, multiplying words without limit; and undermines the faith of the simple by the most varied arguments.

Now he maintains that souls, in Greek the "cool things"... are so called because in coming down from the heavenly places to the lower world they have lost their former heat; and now, that our bodies are called by the Greeks chains... or else (on the analogy of our own Latin word) "things fallen," because our souls have fallen from heaven; and that the other word for body which the abundance of the Greek idiom supplies is by
many taken to mean a funeral monument, because the soul is shut up within it in the same way as the corpses of the dead are shut up in tombs and barrows.

If this doctrine is true what becomes of our faith? Where is the preaching of the resurrection? Where is the teaching of the apostles, which lasts on to this day in the churches of Christ? Where is the blessing to Adam, and to his seed, and to Noah and his sons? "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth." According to Origen, these words must be a curse and not a blessing; for he turns angels into human souls, compelling them to leave the place of highest rank and to come down lower, as though God were unable through the action of His blessing to grant souls to the human race, had the angels not sinned, and as though for every birth on earth there must be a fall in heaven. We are to give up, then, the teaching of the apostles and prophets, of the law, and of our Lord and Savior Himself, in spite of His language which is loud as thunder in the gospel. Origen, on the other hand, commands and urges-not to say binds-his disciples not to pray to ascend into heaven, lest sinning once more worse than they had sinned on earth they should be hurled down into the world again. Such foolish and insane notions he generally confirms by distorting the sense of the Scriptures and making them mean what they do not mean at all. He quotes this passage from the Psalms: "Before you did humble me by reason of my wickedness, I went wrong;" and this, "Return unto your rest, O my soul;" this also, "Bring my soul out of prison;" and this, "I will make confession unto the Lord in the land of the living," although there can be no doubt that the meaning of the divine Scripture is different from the interpretation by which he unfairly wrests it to the support of his own heresy. This way of acting is common to the Manichaens, the Gnostics, the Ebionites, the Marcionites, and the votaries of the other eighty heretics, all of whom draw their proofs from the pure well o

http://www.copticchurch.net/topics/patrology/schoolofalex2/chapter04.html

48 http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/enwiki/140712

49 http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/512349/Tyrannius-Rufinus

50Rowan A. Greer is Professor of Anglican Studies Emeritus at Yale Divinity School. He is the author of numerous books including Origen: An Exhortation to Martyrdom

51 http://orthodoxwiki.org/Alexander_Schmemann

52 http://www.theandros.com/evagrius.html#f[16]
Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 293 – May 2, 373), also known as St Athanasius the Great, Pope Athanasius I of Alexandria, and St Athanasius the Apostolic, (Greek: Ἀθανάσιος, Athanásios) was a theologian, Bishop of Alexandria, Church Father, and a noted Egyptian leader of the fourth century. He is best remembered for his role in the conflict with Arius and Arianism. At the first Council of Nicaea (325), Athanasius argued against Arius and his doctrine that Christ is of a distinct substance from the Father.[1]

Saint Athanasius is revered as a saint by the Oriental Orthodox, Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and the Anglican Churches. He is traditionally regarded as a great leader of the Church by the Lutheran Church and most Protestants in general. He is chronologically the first Doctor of the Church as designated by the Roman Catholic Church, and he is counted as one of the four Great Doctors of the Eastern Church. St Athanasius' feast day is May 2 in Western Christianity, May 15 in the Coptic Orthodox Church, and January 18 in the Eastern Orthodox Churches.


http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://www.macgregorministries.org/seventh_day_adventists/sdahopejesus.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.macgregorministries.org/seventh_day_adventists/sda_hope.html&usg=__gyzgo9in1jcqoPzEJ3UJIYzYS91l84h4w=483&sz=96&hl=en&start=1&sig2=RUgTHILYekC0ImlMyEqIdH_XQ&um=1&tbnid=V4oeoNIQZb23M:&tbnh=141&tbnw=91&ei=ziB6Sf3BMNKwmQfgoMEzM&prev=/images%3Fq=%22Elmer%2BWiebe%26um%3D1%26hl%3Den%26sa%3DN


57 idem


58 idem

Harold Fredrik Cherniss (1904 –1987) was an expert on the philosophy of Ancient Greece. He wrote several books in the field, and edited and translated works by Plutarch. Cherniss was born in St. Joseph, Missouri, and received his doctorate at University of California, Berkeley in 1930. He then taught the Greek language at Cornell University, followed by stints at Johns Hopkins University and the University of California. He worked in military intelligence for the United States Army during World War II, then was a faculty member at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton Township, New Jersey from 1948 until his death in 1987 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harold_F._Cherniss
THE MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

CHAPTER I

What is the Divine Darkness?

Supernal Triad, Deity above all essence, knowledge and goodness; Guide of Christians to Divine Wisdom; direct our path to the ultimate summit of your mystical knowledge, most incomprehensible, most luminous and most exalted, where the pure, absolute and immutable mysteries of theology are veiled in the dazzling obscurity of the secret Silence, outshining all brilliance with the intensity of their Darkness, and surcharging our blinded intellects with the utterly impalpable and invisible fairness of glories surpassing all beauty.

Let this be my prayer; but do, dear Timothy, in the diligent exercise of mystical contemplation, leave behind the senses and the operations of the intellect, and all things sensible and intellectual, and all things in the world of being and nonbeing, that you may arise by unknowing towards the union, as far as is attainable, with it that transcends all being and all knowledge.(1) For by the unceasing and absolute renunciation of yourself and of all things you may be borne on high, through pure and entire self-abnegation, into the superessential Radiance of the Divine Darkness.(2)

But these things are not to be disclosed to the uninitiated, by whom I mean those attached to the objects of human thought, and who

heard many trumpets and saw many lights streaming forth with pure and manifold rays; and that he was thereafter separated from the multitude, with the elect priests, and pressed forward to the summit of the divine ascent. Nevertheless, he did not attain to the Presence of God itself; he saw not it (for it cannot be looked upon) but the Place where it dwells. And this I take to signify that the divinest and highest things seen by the eyes or contemplated by the mind are but the symbolical expressions of those that are immediately beneath it that is above all. Through these, Its incomprehensible Presence is manifested upon those heights of Its Holy Places; that then It breaks forth, even from that which is seen and that which sees, and plunges the mystic into the Darkness of Unknowing, whence all perfection of understanding is excluded, and he is enwrapped in that which is altogether intangible, wholly absorbed in it that is beyond all, and in none else (whether himself or another); and through the inactivity of all his reasoning powers is united by his highest faculty to it that is wholly unknowable; thus by knowing nothing he knows That which is beyond his knowledge. (4)
CHAPTER II

The necessity of being united with and of rendering praise to it that is the Cause of all and above all.

We pray that we may come unto this Darkness which is beyond light, and, without seeing and without knowing, to see and to know that which is above vision and knowledge through the realization that by not-seeing and by unknowing we attain to true vision and knowledge; and thus praise, superessentially, it that is superessential, by the transcendence of all things; even as those who, carving a statue out of marble, abstract or remove all the surrounding material that hinders the vision which the marble conceals and, by that abstraction, bring to light the hidden beauty.(5)

It is necessary to distinguish this negative method of abstraction from the positive method of affirmation, in which we deal with the Divine Attributes. For with these latter we begin with the universal and primary, and pass through the intermediate and secondary to the particular and ultimate attributes; but now we ascend from the particular to the universal conceptions, abstracting all attributes in order that, without veil, we may know that Unknowing which is enshrouded under all that is known and all that can be known, and that we may begin to contemplate the superessential Darkness which is hidden by all the light that is in existing things.

CHAPTER III

What are the affirmations and the negations concerning God?

In the Theological Outlines (6) we have set forth the principal affirmative expressions concerning God, and have shown in what sense God's Holy Nature is One, and in what sense Three; what is within It which is called Paternity, what Filiation, and what is signified by the name Spirit; how from the uncreated and indivisible Good, the blessed and perfect Rays of its Goodness proceed, and yet abide immutably one both within their Origin and within themselves and each other, co-eternal with the act by which they spring from it; how the superessential Jesus enters in essential state in which the truths of human nature meet; and other matters made known by the Oracles are expounded in the same place.

Again, in the treatise on Divine Names, we have considered the meaning, as concerning God, of the titles of Good, of Being, of Life, of Wisdom, of Power, and of such other names as are applied to it; further, in Symbolical Theology we have considered what are the metaphorical titles drawn from the world of sense and applied to the nature of God; what is meant by the material and intellectual images we form of it, or the functions and instruments of activity attributed to it; what are the places where it dwells and the raiment in
which it is adorned; what is meant by God's anger, grief and indignation, or the divine inebriation; what is meant by God's oaths and threats, by Its slumber and waking; and all sacred and symbolical representations. And it will be observed how far more copious and diffused are the last terms than the first, for the theological doctrine and the exposition of the Divine Names are necessarily more brief than the Symbolical Theology.

For the higher we soar in contemplation the more limited become our expressions of that which is purely intelligible; even as now, when plunging into the Darkness that is above the intellect, we pass not merely into brevity of speech, but even into absolute silence of thoughts and of words. Thus, in the former discourse, our contemplations descended from the highest to the lowest, embracing an ever-widening number of conceptions, which increased at each stage of the descent; but in the present discourse we mount upwards from below to that which is the highest, and, according to the degree of transcendence, so our speech is restrained until, the entire ascent being accomplished, we become wholly voiceless, inasmuch as we are absorbed in that which is totally ineffable. But why, you will ask,

'does the affirmative method begin from the highest attributions, and the negative method with the lowest abstractions?' The reason is because, when affirming the subsistence of That which transcends all affirmation, we necessarily start from the attributes most closely related to It and upon which the remaining affirmations depend; but when pursuing the negative method to reach That which is beyond all abstraction, we must begin by applying our negations to things which are most remote from It.

For is it not more true to affirm that God is Life and Goodness than that God is air or stone; and must we not deny to God more emphatically the attributes of inebriation and wrath than the applications of human speech and thought?

CHAPTER IV

That it that is the pre-eminent Cause of all things sensibly perceived is not itself any of those things.

We therefore maintain that the universal and transcendent Cause of all things is neither without being nor without life, nor without reason or intelligence; nor is it a body, nor has it form or shape, quality, quantity or weight; nor has it any localized, visible or tangible existence; it is not sensible or perceptible; nor is it subject to any disorder or inordination nor influenced by any earthly passion; neither is it rendered impotent through the effects of material causes and events; it needs no light; it suffers no change, corruption, division, privation or flux; none of these things can either be identified with or attributed unto it.
CHAPTER V

That it that is the pre-eminent Cause of all things intelligibly perceived is not itself any of those things.

Again, ascending yet higher, we maintain that it is neither soul nor intellect; nor has it imagination, opinion reason or understanding; nor can it be expressed or conceived, since it is neither number nor order; nor greatness nor smallness; nor equality nor inequality; nor similarity nor dissimilarity; neither is it standing, nor moving, nor at rest; neither has it power nor is power, nor is light; neither does it live nor is it life; neither is it essence, nor eternity nor time; nor is it subject to intelligible contact; nor is it science nor truth, nor kingship nor wisdom; neither one nor oneness, nor godhead nor goodness; nor is it spirit according to our understanding, nor filiation, nor paternity; nor anything else known to us or to any other beings of the things that are or the things that are not; neither does anything that is know it as it is; nor does it know existing things according to existing knowledge; neither can the reason attain to it, nor name it, nor know it; neither is it darkness nor light, nor the false nor the true; nor can any affirmation or negation be applied to it, for although we may affirm or deny the things below it, we can neither affirm nor deny it, inasmuch as the all-perfect and unique Cause of all things transcends all affirmation, and the simple pre-eminence of its absolute nature is outside of every negation- free from every limitation and beyond them all.

http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/Volumell/MysticalTheology.html

62 Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor (p.81),By Hans Urs von Balthasar Edition: 3
Published by Ignatius Press, 2003


64 http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pseudo-dionysius-areopagite/#DivNam

65 http://www.iep.utm.edu/p/pseudodi.htm


67 http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/dio/dio04.htm

68 idem
Ecclesiastical Hierarchies

We must, then, most pious of pious sons, demonstrate from the super mundane and most sacred Oracles and traditions, that ours is a Hierarchy of the inspired and Divine and Deifying science, and of operation, and of consecration, for those who have been initiated with the initiation of the sacred revelation derived from the hierarchical mysteries… carefully guarding them from the participation and defilement of the uninitiate...

When the Deacons have entirely unclothed him, the Priests bring the holy oil of the anointing. Then he begins the anointing, through the threefold sealing, and for the rest assigns the man to the Priests, for the anointing of his whole body. by the same number of injections of the all holy Muron,… This initiation, then, of the holy birth in God,… Now the regulation of the holy Hierarchy permits the catechumens, and the possessed, and the penitents, to hear the sacred chanting of the Psalms, and the inspired reading of the all-Holy Scriptures; but it does not invite them to the next religious services and contemplations, but only the eyes of the initiated…. saving mystic Rites were exhibited to us, which divinely work the sacred deification of those being initiated...When the supremely Divine love towards Man has thus been religiously celebrated, the Divine Bread is presented, veiled, and likewise the Cup of Blessing, and the most Divine greeting is devoutly performed, and the mystic and supermundane recital of the holy-written tablets. For it is not possible to be collected to the One, and to partake of the peaceful union with the One, when people are divided amongst themselves. For if, being illuminated by the contemplation and knowledge of the One,… the true and God-transmitted science of all the sacred words and works committed to the Hierarchy...the three Orders of the consecrators, through the three most holy Mystic Rites and powers...those who have been purified by the Leitourgiic power...Now the rank, higher than all the initiated, is the sacred Order of the Monks, which, by reason of an entirely purified purification, through complete power and perfect chastity of its own operations, has attained to intellectual contemplation and communion in every ministration which it is lawful for it to contemplate, and is conducted by the most perfecting powers of the Hierarchs, and taught by their inspired illuminations and hierarchical traditions the ministrations of the Mystic Rites, contemplated,... who pronounces over him the mystical invocation...because all the sacred Orders, according to their capacity, partake of the self-same common and most godly gifts, for their own elevation and perfection in deification. We conclude, then, that the holy
Mystic Rites are, purification, and illumination, and consecration... Now, as regards the consecrating' invocations, it is not permitted to explain them in writing, nor may we bring their mysterious meaning, or the powers from God working in them, from secrecy to publicity; but, as our sacred tradition holds, by learning these, through quiet instructions, and being perfected to a more Godlike condition and elevation, through Divine love and religious exercises, thou wilt be borne by the consecrating enlightenment to their highest science... we affirm the same things which our Godlike initiators conveyed to us, after initiations from the early 56 tradition.

http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/areopagite_14_ecclesiastical_hierarchy.htm#c1

71 Ora et Labora means Pray and work

72 On Wednesday, March 10, 1982, Fr Alexander Schmemann made the following entry into his diary:

Yesterday I read the Church Hierarchy of Psuedo-Dionysius the Areopagite. What can it mean in our contemporary world? What could it have meant in a world where it was written? What does the success of this corpus mean in Byzantium? If one would apply the Gospel's basic principle, "for the tree is known by its fruit" (Matthew 12:33), to the history of the Church, one would see that what happened was the reduction of the Church to a mysterious piety, the dying of its eschatological essence and mission, and, finally, the de-Christianization of this world and its secularization. But, it seems that there is an impulse precisely to return to this very legacy. (1)

This is a very harsh judgment, yet one that is by no means unrepresentative of Dionysius' reception by Orthodox scholars in the twentieth century. The goal of this essay is to analyze the basis for such a reading of the Dionysian corpus. I will attempt to realize this goal by analyzing the work of one of Dionysius' harshest critic's, Fr John Meyendorff, and then reviewing the work of two other Orthodox scholars who have responded to him, the late Fr John Romanides and Hieromonk Alexander (Golitzin). Following a summary consideration of the conversation among these three outstanding scholars, I will offer my own critique of the work of each and conclude with a consideration of the nature of patristic scholarship within the contemporary Orthodox Church and Dionysius' place within it.

Before turning to a review of the works of Meyendorff, Romanides, and Golitizin on Dionysius, I should explain what I mean by the term "problematization" and how this applies to the Corpus Dionysiacum. I submit that at least until modern times the works of St Dionysius the Areopagite – whatever the historical identity of the author – enjoyed full reception within the Orthodox Church. The Dionysian corpus was accepted largely uncritically by Fathers of such unquestionable Orthodoxy as St Maximus the Confessor, St
John of Damascus, St Photius the Great, St Germanus of Constantinople, St Gregory Palamas, and St Symeon of Thessaloniki (though, as we shall see, Meyendorff argues that some applied "correctives" to his theology). His scheme of the angelic hierarchies has become, largely thanks to their use by St John of Damascus, standard Orthodox doctrine. St Dionysius the Areopagite has an annual liturgical commemoration in the Orthodox calendar. (2) In the early and middle half of the twentieth century the two most outstanding theologians of the Russian diaspora, Vladimir Lossky and Fr Georges Florovsky, both endorsed the Orthodoxy of the Dionysian corpus. (3) This traditional reading, however, has been sharply challenged in the Orthodox world by Fr John Meyendorff and those who have followed his reading. Meyendorff's Christ in Eastern Christian Thought, with its highly negative assessment of Dionysius, has found a wide readership and is considered an authoritative treatment of Eastern Christology. Fr Kenneth Paul Wesche, for instance, refers directly to Meyendorff's work when stating that "the center of Dionysius' 'theoria' is not the christological confession of the Church, but 'gnosis' " (4) and, later, that "gnosis, which is the content of salvation and communion, is mediated by Christ through the hierarchies so that the hierarchies stand between God and the individual." (5) Wesche goes so far as to write that 'Dionysius' vision finally renders superfluous the Incarnation of Christ. Most certainly, the necessity of the Cross becomes difficult to explain. If gnosis is the chief function and goal of the Church, then why must Jesus become fully man and die on the Cross?" (6) If this were indeed the case, not only the Orthodoxy but the very Christianity of Dionysius would be up for question. With such criticism in mind, the average educated reader will approach the Dionysian corpus with suspicion, if not outright hostility. Why the pseudonym? Who was the author, really? Was he a Christian impersonating a Neo-Platonist or a Neo-Platonist impersonating a Christian? Was he a Chalcedonian or a non-Chalcedonian? Is he in fact responsible for magical clericalism, rigid hierarchalism, and ultimately the de-Christianization of the world? This problem becomes even more acute with an exposure to the strangeness of the Dionysian writings themselves, which come from a theological landscape vastly different from our own. Approaching the texts with such problems in mind naturally results in a reading quite different from that of previous generations, who accepted the Corpus Dionysiacum as an integral element of the patristic corpus. In short, the works of Dionysius have been "problematized," and it is the intention of this essay to explore why and how this is.

73 Fr. Paul Wesche is priest/pastor of St. Herman’s Orthodox Christian Church in South Minneapolis. He is a graduate of Nazarene Theological Seminary (Masters of Divinity), Kansas City, MO and St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Seminary (Masters of Theology), Crestwood, NY, and Fordham University (Ph.D in Patristics 1986), New York, NY.
Maximus the Confessor (also known as Maximus the Theologian and Maximus of Constantinople) was a Christian monk, theologian, and scholar. In his early life, he was a civil servant, and an aide to the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius. However, he gave up this life in the political sphere to enter into the monastic life.

After moving to Carthage, Maximus studied several Neo-Platonist writers and became a prominent author. When one of his friends began espousing the Christological position known as Monothelitism, Maximus was drawn into the controversy, in which he supported the Chalcedonian position that Jesus had both a human and a divine will.

We confess that one and the same Christ, Lord, and only-begotten Son, is to be acknowledged in two natures without confusion, change, division, or separation (in duabus naturis inconfuse, immutabiliter, indivise, inseparabiliter). The distinction between natures was never abolished by their union, but rather the character proper to each of the two natures was preserved as they came together in one person (prosopon) and one hypostasis.

Troparion, tone eight

Kontakion, tone eight

The Cambridge History of Christianity, edited by Michael Angold, Volume 5, Eastern Christianity,

Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages By Andre Vauchez, Richard Barrie Dobson, Adrian Walford, Michael Lapidge

Translated by Adrian Walford, Published by Routledge, 2000, (pp. 999-1000).

Derek Krueger-Professor and Head of Dept. of Religious Studies, Ph.D., Princeton University
http://books.google.com/books?id=CJWsZxyVzFgC&printsec=frontcover&dq=Toward+a+Theology+of+Eros&ei=a-W_SbKFJoUMtiQrlG#PPA99,M1

86 http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Saint_Symeon_the_New_Theologian
http://www.poetry-chaikhana.com/S/SymeontheNew/


88 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barlaam_of_Calabria#cite_ref-

89
http://books.google.com/books?id=nzTkg_A6CWkC&pg=PA1022&lpg=PA1022&dq=Messalianism&source=bl&ots=NjsIP4vEFn&sig=x98TgBnEcXXBfRF7QrDX-2izPmY&hl=en&ei=32LeSbqjB87elQejwNnxL&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=2#PPA1022,M1


91 http://www.orthodoxcanada.org/philokalia/

92 The Byzantine legacy in the Orthodox Church, By John Meyendorff, Published by St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1982 (p.169)

93 http://www.theandros.com/byzmysticism1.html#_ednref1

94 John Cassian, also called Johannes Eremita or Johannes Massiliensis (360?-433?), early Christian monk and theologian. After spending perhaps 15 years among the ascetics of the Egyptian deserts with his friend Germanus, Cassian studied in Constantinople (present-day Istanbul) with Saint John Chrysostom, by whom he was ordained a deacon. Cassian lived in Rome for several years and became friends with the future pope Leo I. About 415, by now a priest, he settled in Marseille (in what is now southern France), where he founded the monasteries of Saints Peter and Victor, for men, and Saint Savior, for women, and brought Eastern monasticism to the West. Cassian was one of the first of the Semi-Pelagians, who rejected the view of the Latin Father Saint Augustine that humankind generally is damned by the sin of Adam and that some souls are saved purely through the grace of God, which cannot be earned (see Pelagianism). He also opposed the Augustinian concept of moral choice in attaining salvation. Cassian wrote two works on
asceticism as well as a doctrinal treatise on the incarnation of Christ; the latter work was intended to refute the heresy of Nestorianism. http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761576352/John_Cassian.html

95 http://www.orthodoxengland.org.uk/bravenr.htm

96 WHEREUPON the venerable assembly of the Fathers understood that by Divine Providence a general rule had been fixed for the congregations of the brethren through the angel's direction,...For they are so worn out with fasting and working all day and night that, unless they were helped by some such indulgence, they could not possibly get through this number standing up. For they allow no time to pass idly without the performance of some work, because not only do they strive with all earnestness to do with their hands those things which can be done in daylight, but also with anxious minds they examine into those sorts of work which not even the darkness of night can put a stop to, as they hold that they will gain a far deeper insight into subjects of spiritual contemplation with purity of heart, the more earnestly that they devote themselves to work and labour...AND these labours they keep up for two reasons, besides this consideration,—that they believe that when they are diligently exerting themselves they are offering to God a sacrifice of the fruit of their hands. And, if we are aiming at perfection; we also ought to observe this with the same diligence... ONE, then, who seeks to be admitted to the discipline of the monastery is never received before he gives, by lying outside the doors for ten days or even longer, an evidence of his perseverance and desire, as well as of humility and patience. And when, prostrate at the feet of all the brethren that pass by, and of set purpose repelled and scorned by all of them, as if he was wanting to enter the monastery not for the sake of religion but because he was obliged; and when, too, covered with many insults and affronts, he has given a practical proof of his steadfastness, ... WHEREFORE each one on his admission is stripped of all his former possessions, so that he is not allowed any longer to keep even the clothes which he has on his back: but in the council of the brethren he is brought forward into the midst and stripped of his own clothes, and clad by the Abbot's hands in the dress of the monastery, so that by this he may know not only that he has been despoiled of all his old things, but also that he has laid aside all worldly pride, and come down to the want and poverty of Christ... BUT those clothes, which he laid aside, are consigned to the care of the steward and kept until by different sorts of temptations and trials they can recognize the excellence of his progress and life and endurance. And if they see that he can continue therein as time goes on, and remain in that fervour with which he began, they give them away to the poor. But if they find that he has been guilty of any fault of murmuring, or of even the smallest piece of disobedience, then they strip off from him the dress of the monastery in which he had been clad, and reclothe him in his old garments which had been confiscated, and send him away... BY these practices,
then, they hasten to impress and instruct those whom they are training with the alphabet, as it were, and first syllables in the direction of perfection, as they can clearly see by these whether they are grounded in a false and imaginary or in a true humility. And, that they may easily arrive at this, they are next taught not to conceal by a false shame any itching thoughts in their hearts, but, as soon as ever such arise, to lay them bare to the senior, and, in forming a judgment about them, not to trust anything to their own discretion, but to take it on trust that that is good or bad which is considered and pronounced so by the examination of the senior... NEXT, the rule is kept with such strict obedience that, without the knowledge and permission of their superior, the juniors not only do not dare to leave their cell but on their own authority do not venture to satisfy their common and natural needs... IF then any one by accident breaks an earthenware jar (which they call "baucalis"), he can only expiate his carelessness by public penance; and when all the brethren are assembled for service he must lie on the ground and ask for absolution until the service of the prayers is finished; and will obtain it when by the Abbot's command he is bidden to rise from the ground... Go up and take this cruse of oil"[158] (which was the only one in the desert and which furnished a very scanty supply of the rich liquid for their own use and for that of strangers) "and throw it down out of window... SO far let it suffice for me to have told a few things out of many concerning Abbot John: "O God, make speed to save me: O Lord, make haste to help me." We must then ceaselessly and continuously pour forth the prayer of this verse, in adversity that we may be delivered, in prosperity that we may be preserved and not puffed up. Let the thought of this verse, I tell you, be conned over in your breast without ceasing. Whatever work you are doing, or office you are holding, or journey you are going, do not cease to chant this. http://www.osb.org/lectio/cassian/inst/inst2.html BUT this is, i.e., no thorough and altogether complete perfection, but only a partial one. Perfection then is very rare and granted by God's gift to but a very few. For he is truly and not partially perfect who with equal imperturbability can put up with the squalor of the wilderness in the desert, as well as the infirmities of the brethren in the coenobium. And so it is hard to find one who is perfect in both lives, because the anchorite cannot thoroughly acquire i.e., a disregard for and stripping oneself of material things, nor the coenobite purity in contemplation, although we know that Abbot Moses and Paphnutius and the two Macarii[45] were masters of both in perfection(CONFERENCE OF ABBOT JOHN).http://www.osb.org/lectio/cassian/conf/book3/conf19.html#19.9 97 idem

98 now I will relate a memorable deed of Abbot Patermucius. For he, when anxious to renounce the world, remained lying before the doors of the monastery for a long time until by his dogged persistence he induced them--contrary to all the rules of the Coenobia--to receive him together with his little boy who was
about eight years old. And when they were at last admitted they were at once not only committed to the
care of different superiors, but also put to live in separate cells that the father might not be reminded by
the constant sight of the little one that out of all his possessions and carnal treasures, which he had cast off
and renounced, at least his son remained to him; and that as he was already taught that he was no longer a
rich man, so he might also forget the fact that he was a father. And that it might be more thoroughly tested
whether he would make affection and love for his own flesh and blood of more account than
obedience and Christian mortification (which all who renounce the world ought out of love to Christ to
prefer), the child was on purpose neglected and dressed in rags instead of proper clothes; and so covered
and disfigured with dirt that he would rather disgust than delight the eyes of his father whenever he saw
him. And further, he was exposed to blows and slaps from different people, which the father often saw
inflicted without the slightest reason on his innocent child under his very eyes, so that he never saw his
cheeks without their being stained with the dirty marks of tears. And though the child was treated thus day
after day before his eyes, yet still out of love for Christ and the virtue of obedience the father's heart stood
firm and unmoved. For he no longer regarded him as his own son, as he had offered him equally with
himself to Christ; nor was he concerned about his present injuries, but rather rejoiced because he saw that
they were endured, not without profit; thinking little of his son's tears, but anxious about his own humility
and perfection. And when the Superior of the Coenobium saw his steadfastness of mind and immovable
inflexibility, in order thoroughly to prove the constancy of his purpose, one day when he had seen the child
crying, he pretended that he was annoyed with him and told the father to throw him into the river. Then he,
as if this had been commanded him by the Lord, at once snatched up the child as quickly as possible, and
carried him in his arms to the river's bank to throw him in. And straightway in the fervour of his faith and
obedience this would have been carried out in act, had not some of the brethren been purposely set to
watch the banks of the river very carefully, and when the child was thrown in, had somehow snatched him
from the bed of the stream, and prevented the command, which was really fulfilled by the obedience and
devotion of the father

That faith itself must be given us by the Lord.

BUT so thoroughly did the Apostles realize that everything which concerns salvation was given them by the
Lord, that they even asked that faith itself should be granted from the Lord, saying: "Add to us faith"[184]
as they did not imagine that it could be gained by free will, but believed that it would be bestowed by the
free gift of God. Lastly the Author of man's salvation teaches us how feeble and weak and insufficient our
faith would be unless it were strengthened by the aid of the Lord, when He says to Peter "Simon, Simon,
behold Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed to my Father that thy faith fail not."[185] And another finding that this was happening in his own case, and seeing that his faith was being driven by the waves of unbelief on the rocks which would cause a fearful shipwreck, asks of the same Lord an aid to his faith, saying "Lord, help mine unbelief."[186] So thoroughly then did those Apostles and men in the gospel realize that everything which is good is brought to perfection by the aid of the Lord, and not imagine that they could preserve their faith unharmed by their own strength or free will that they prayed that it might be helped or granted to them by the Lord. And if in Peter's case there was need of the Lord's help that it might not fail, who will be so presumptuous and blind as to fancy that he has no need of daily assistance from the Lord in order to preserve it? Especially as the Lord Himself has made this clear in the gospel, saying: "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, so no more can ye, except ye abide in me."[187] And again: "for without me ye can do nothing."[188] How foolish and wicked then it is to attribute any good action to our own diligence and not to God's grace and assistance, is clearly shown by the Lord's saying, which lays down that no one can show forth the fruits of the Spirit without His inspiration and co-operation. For "every good gift and every perfect boon is from above, coming down from the Father of lights."[189] And Zechariah too says, "For whatever is good is His, and what is excellent is from Him."[190] And so the blessed Apostle consistently says: "What hast thou which thou didst not receive? But if thou didst receive it, why boastest thou as if thou hadst not received it?"[191]

100 http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/areopagite_14_ecclesiastical_hierarchy.htm#c1

101 http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/enwiki/31924

The Church building is divided into three main parts: the Narthex (entrance hall), the Nave and the Altar.

Narthex: The Narthex is the connection between the Church and the outside world and for this reason catechumens (pre-baptized Orthodox) and Non-Orthodox stand here (note: the tradition of only allowing confirmed orthodox into the Nave of the church has for the most part fallen into disuse). In monastic churches it is usual for the lay people visiting the monastery to stand in the narthex while the monks or nuns stand in the nave. Separating the narthex from the nave are the "Royal Doors" (from the time of the Byzantine Empire, when the Emperor would enter the main body of Agia Sophia, the Church of holy Wisdom, through these doors and proceed up to the altar to partake of the Eucharist). On either side of this portal are large brass candlestands called menalia which represent the pillars of fire which went before the hebrews into the promised land.

Nave: The Nave is the main body of the Church where the people stand during the services. In most Orthodox Churches there are no pews but rather stacidia (like a high chair with foldup seat - it has arm rests high enough to be used while standing - see the picture of the monks); these were usually found along the
walls, to be used only by the aged and infirm. Traditionally there is no sitting during services with the only exceptions being during the reading of the Psalms, and the priest's sermon. The people stand before God. However because of the influence of Roman Catholic and Protestant practices in western countries it is not uncommon to find pews and kneelers in more modern church structures.

The walls are normally covered from floor to ceiling with icons or wall paintings of saints, their lives, and stories from the Bible. Because the Church is a direct evolution of its jewish roots where men and women stand separately; The Orthodox Church continues this practice of de-emphasizing the "family" with men standing on the right and women on the left. Because of this arrangement it is emphasized that we are all equal before God (Equal distance from the altar), and that the man is not superior to the woman. Once again, because of moder western influence, in many modern churches this traditional practice has been forgotten and families stand together.

Above the Nave in the Dome of the Church is the icon of Christ the Almighty (Pantokratoros = Ruler of the Universe). Directly hanging below the dome (In more traditional churches) is usually a kind of circular chandelier with depictions of the saints and apostles, called the horos which represents the Choir of the saints; during certain significant moments of the service, it is swung to symbolically represent the universal participation of the church on earth and the church in heaven.

Iconostasis: Traditionally called the templon, it is a screen or wall between the Nave and the Altar, which is covered with icons. There will normally be three doors, one in the middle and one on either side. The central one is traditionally called the "Beautiful Gate" and is only used by the clergy. There are times when this gate is closed during the service and a curtain is drawn. The doors on either side are called the "Deacons Doors" or “Angel Doors” as they often have depicted on them the Archangels Michael and Gabriel. These doors are used by Deacons and servers to enter the Altar. To the left of the Beautiful Gate is the Icon of Christ, then the Icon of St John the Baptist; to the right the Icon of the Mother of God (a standard Eastern Orthodox title for Mary), always shown holding Christ; and then the Icon of the Saint to whom the Church is dedicated (i.e., the patron). There are normally many other icons on the iconostasis but these vary from church to church. Above and behind the iconostasis (if the iconostasis doesn't reach the ceiling) is the Panagia (All Holy), the Virgin Mary with Christ blessing all. Oil lamps burn before all the icons.

Altar: The term Altar refers to not just the Altar Table but to the whole area behind the Iconostasis: it is the 'Holy of Holies' of the Church. The church, if at all possible is always aligned with the altar facing East. The
Priest also faces East when before the Holy Table (away from the congregation) offering prayers for the people to God and then coming out through the Beautiful Gate to give God's 'Good News' (Gospel) to the people. To the left of the Altar Table will be the "Prosthesis Table" (Table of Preparation) where the bread and wine are prepared before the Liturgy (Eucharist) begins.

http://wiki.phantis.com/index.php/Eastern_Orthodox_Church

104 http://orthodoxeurope.org/page/11/1/6.aspx

105 http://www.stseraphimschurch.org/articles/proskomedia-e.html

106 Chrismation (sometimes called confirmation) is the mystery by which a person, who has been baptized, is granted the gift of the Holy Spirit through anointing with Holy Chrism. It is normally given immediately after baptism as part of the same service, but is also used to receive lapsed members of the Orthodox Church.

107 https://beardocs.baylor.edu/handle/2104/4847

108 http://www.theandros.com/review-yannaras.html

109 http://danutm.wordpress.com/2008/01/08/exervitii-de-intelegere-xii-despre-dumitru-staniloae-si-ortodoxie/


112 Idem