

**Pseudo-Dionysius, *On the Divine Names* and *The Mystical Theology***

We must not then dare to speak, or indeed to form any conception, of the hidden super-essential Godhead, except those things that are revealed to us from the Holy Scriptures. For a super-essential understanding of It is proper to Unknowing, which lieth in the Super-Essence Thereof surpassing Discourse, Intuition and Being; acknowledging which truth let us lift up our eyes towards the steep height, so far as the effluent light of the Divine Scriptures grants its aid, and, as we strive to ascend unto those Supernal Rays, let us gird ourselves for the task with holiness and the reverent fear of God. For, if we may safely trust the wise and infallible Scriptures, Divine things are revealed unto each created spirit in proportion to its powers, and in this measure is perception granted through the workings of the Divine goodness, the which in just care for our preservation divinely tempereth unto finite measure the infinitude of things which pass man's understanding.

Yea, it is an Unity which is the unifying Source of all unity and a Super-Essential Essence, a Mind beyond the reach of mind and a Word beyond utterance, eluding Discourse, Intuition, Name, and every kind of being. It is the Universal Cause of existence while Itself existing not, for It is beyond all Being and such that It alone could give, with proper understanding thereof, a revelation of Itself.

Not that the Good is wholly incommunicable to anything; nay, rather, while dwelling alone by Itself, and having there firmly fixed Its super-essential Ray, It lovingly reveals Itself by illuminations corresponding to each separate creature's powers, and thus draws upwards holy minds into such contemplation, participation and resemblance of Itself as they can attain—even them that holily and duly strive thereafter and do not seek with impotent presumption the Mystery beyond that heavenly revelation which is so granted as to fit their powers, nor yet through their lower propensity slip down the steep descent, but with unwavering constancy press onwards toward the ray that casts its light upon them and, through the love responsive to these gracious illuminations, speed their temperate and holy flight on the wings of a godly reverence.

Yea, in a super-essential manner, above the category of origin, It is the Origin of all origin, and the good and bounteous Communication (so far as such may be) of hidden mysteries; and, in a word, It is the life of all things that live and the Being of all that are, the Origin and Cause of all life and being through Its bounty which both brings them into existence and maintains them.

But if It is greater than all Reason and all knowledge, and hath Its firm abode altogether beyond Mind and Being, and circumscribes, compacts, embraces and anticipates all things while Itself is altogether beyond the grasp of them all, and cannot be reached by any perception, imagination, conjecture, name, discourse, apprehension, or understanding, how then is our Discourse concerning the Divine Names to be accomplished, since we see that the Super-Essential Godhead is unutterable and nameless?

Godlike Minds, angelically entering (according to their powers) unto such states of union and being deified and united, through the ceasing of their natural activities, unto the Light Which surpasseth Deity, can find no more fitting method to celebrate its praises than to deny It every manner of Attribute. For by a true and supernatural illumination from their blessed union

Therewith, they learn that It is the Cause of all things and yet Itself is nothing, because It super-essentially transcends them all. Thus, as for the Super-Essence of the Supreme Godhead (if we would define the Transcendence of its Transcendent Goodness) it is not lawful to any lover of that Truth which is above all truth to celebrate It as Reason or Power or Mind or Life or Being.

And yet since, as the Subsistence of goodness, It, by the very fact of Its existence, is the Cause of all things, in celebrating the bountiful Providence of the Supreme Godhead we must draw upon the whole creation. For It is both the central Force of all things, and also their final Purpose, and *is* Itself before them all, and they all subsist in It; and through the fact of Its existence the world is brought into being and maintained; and It is that which all things desire—those which have intuitive or discursive Reason seeking It through knowledge, the next rank of beings through perception, and the rest through vital movement, or the property of mere existence belonging to their state. Conscious of this, the Sacred Writers celebrate It by every Name while yet they call It Nameless.

Thus, then, the Universal and Transcendent Cause must both be nameless and also possess the names of all things in order that It may truly be an universal Dominion, the Centre of creation on which all things depend, as on their Cause and Origin and Goal; and that, according to the Scriptures, It may be all in all, and may be truly called the Creator of the world, originating and perfecting and maintaining all things; their Defense and Dwelling, and the Attractive Force that draws them: and all this in one single, ceaseless, and transcendent act.

Furthermore, we must ask how it is that we know God when He cannot be perceived by the mind or the senses and is not a particular Being. Perhaps 'tis true to say that we know not God by His Nature (for this is unknowable and beyond the reach of all Reason and Intuition), yet by means of that ordering of all things which (being as it were projected out of Him) possesses certain images and semblances of His Divine Exemplars, we mount upwards (so far as our feet can tread that ordered path), advancing through the Negation and Transcendence of all things and through a conception of an Universal Cause, towards That Which is beyond all things.

The Divinest Knowledge of God, the which is received through Unknowing, is obtained in that communion which transcends the mind, when the mind, turning away from all things and then leaving even itself behind, is united to the Dazzling Rays, being from them and in them, illumined by the unsearchable depth of Wisdom.

For, by the unceasing and absolute renunciation of thyself and all things, thou shalt in pureness cast all things aside, and be released from all, and so shalt be led upwards to the Ray of that divine Darkness which exceeds all existence.

It breaks forth, even from the things that are beheld and from those that behold them, and plunges the true initiate unto the Darkness of Unknowing wherein he renounces all the apprehensions of his understanding and is enwrapped in that which is wholly intangible and invisible, belonging wholly to Him that is beyond all things and to none else (whether himself or another), and being through the passive stillness of all his reasoning powers united by his highest faculty to Him that is wholly Unknowable, of whom thus by a rejection of all knowledge he possesses a knowledge that exceeds his understanding.