

Article

A Negative Way: Dionysian Apophaticism and the Experiential

Maria Exall

Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University, Durham DH1 3LE, UK; maria.exall@durham.ac.uk

Abstract: The experiential bias in modern understandings of spirituality has led to readings of the pre-modern texts of Pseudo-Dionysius as referring to “negative experiences” of faith. Denys Turner, Bernard McGinn, and others have outlined the mistaken “spiritual positivism” of such readings and their contrast with the negative dialectics of the classical apophatic tradition. Indeed, the philosophical parameters of the Christian mysticism of the Dionysian tradition would deny “mystical experience” to be “experience” as such. Nevertheless, several modern theologians have attempted to integrate interpretations of the experiential in Christian mysticism into their theology. These include Sara Coakley in the idea of spiritual sense in her theology of the body, Karl Rahner in the conception of spiritual touch within his theology of grace, and Louis Dupré’s view that there is religious significance in the experience of “emptiness” in modern-day atheism. I shall contrast these attempted integrations with the critique of “mystical experience” within classical understandings of apophaticism.

Keywords: mystical theology; Pseudo-Dionysius; apophaticism; mystical consciousness; experientialism; spiritual touch; spiritual sense; atheism

1. Introduction

The apophatic tradition that originates with the sixth-century texts of Pseudo-Dionysius is a dialectical theism: it is the search for a God who is both knowable and unknowable, both immanent and transcendent.¹ The epistemological claim at the heart of the Dionysian texts is that *all things* both reveal and conceal God and that this “dissimilar similarity”, which constitutes every created manifestation of God, is both a similarity to be affirmed and a dissimilarity to be denied (Rorem 1993, p. 174). This dialectical theism is a radical a-theism, an “unknowing”, and a recognition of the capacity of the mind for “a unity which transcends the nature of the mind through which it is joined to things beyond itself (*Divine Names*, 7. 872A)”.

In the Dionysian tradition, the concept of mystical “experience”, *as such*, is questionable, as is the anachronistic use of the word mysticism (de Certeau 1995; McGinn 1991). There is a concern within Dionysian scholarship that there has been a misreading and subsequent misappropriation of the Dionysian texts because of the experiential bias within modern theology and spiritualities. Nevertheless, there is a range of views within the apophatic tradition, broadly conceived, of the role of the experiential. In this paper, I will explore this broad territory by outlining certain theologians’ views of conceptions of “mystical consciousness”, “spiritual senses”, and “spiritual touch”, as well as the significance of a sacred sense of absence.

I shall start by explaining the problem of “spiritual positivism”, that is when apophaticism is mistaken for positive theology based on the reification of “negative” experiences. I will consider Bernard McGinn’s concept of “mystical consciousness”, Sarah Coakley’s understanding of “spiritual senses”, and Karl Rahner’s concept of “spiritual touch”. I will outline how the shifting boundaries of philosophy, theology, and spirituality in the modern era shaped our understandings of apophaticism and the experiential and will conclude by considering Louis Dupré’s assertion that there is spiritual significance in the loss of transcendent meaning in secularized societies.²



Citation: Exall, Maria. 2024. A Negative Way: Dionysian Apophaticism and the Experiential. *Religions* 15: 1015. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15081015>

Academic Editors: Denise Starkey and Simon Podmore

Received: 29 June 2024

Revised: 2 August 2024

Accepted: 9 August 2024

Published: 20 August 2024



Copyright: © 2024 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

2. Negative “Experience” and Spiritual Positivism

The shifting interactions between faith and reason in the history of ideas, from pre-modern to modern and late/postmodern, influence our reading of the classical texts of apophaticism today and have influenced their reception throughout the modern era.³ Relevant to this is the separation of the apophatic tradition into two streams, the intellectual and the affective, after the Nominalism of the late Mediaeval period. Following the “affective turn”, mystical theologies accommodated the separation of spirituality from theology, of theology from philosophy (Sheldrake 1998), and often led to revisionist positivist appropriations of the Dionysian texts.⁴

In *Darkness of God*, Denys Turner’s assessment of negativity in Mediaeval mysticism, he warns against the consequences of mistaken modern readings of the Dionysian texts. Rather than accepting that the apophatic is actually an “experiential vacuum”, a genuine negative way, modern spiritualities that reference the apophatic tradition often give psychological explanations based on experiences of the negative (Turner 1995, p. 259).

There are two main aspects to Turner’s concern about basing the understanding of Dionysian apophaticism on negative experiences. Firstly, the absence of a dialectical understanding of the epistemological categories of the Dionysian tradition and the consequent lack of acknowledgment of the central place of reason in apophaticism. Secondly, that experiential readings limit the relevance of apophaticism to theology and “ordinary” Christian life because of their emphasis on extraordinary phenomena and experiences. Turner maintains that there are undoubted continuities that unite the *Mystical Theology* of Pseudo-Dionysius with modern-day spiritualities, such as “those metaphors of interiority and ascent, of light and darkness”, which are the “common possession of a Denys, a Therese of Lisieux and of a contemporary pious Christian”. But without the application of the insights of a properly understood, thoroughly rational, dialectical apophaticism to these metaphors, Turner asserts, “the same repertoire of images are evacuated of that dialectic and its corresponding hierarchies and instead, filled with the stuff of supposititious ‘experience’” (Turner 1995, pp. 265–67).⁵

The affective turn within the apophatic tradition has been interpreted as a more “Christianized” (as opposed to Neoplatonic) or Western (as opposed to Eastern) progression from the framework of sixth-century Syrian monasticism. Andrew Louth, however, believes that the significance of the Latinization of the Dionysian tradition had a different focus. He argues that the significant changes that resulted from the adoption of the Dionysian texts by Latin Christianity were a bias not toward the experiential but rather toward *individualized* faith practice (Louth 1989).⁶ In effect, Louth sees the separation of individual believers from their liturgical, communal context as the key element of the “affective turn”. We will discuss further the liturgical context of Dionysian apophaticism in the section on spiritual senses below.

Turner rejects the “Latinizing” of Dionysian apophaticism as the explanation for subsequent experiential interpretations within the Western tradition itself, for:

What the Latin tradition took from Dionysius was his epistemology and his ontology whole and entire and with them his conviction that the negative moment of the theological enterprise was intrinsically and “dialectically” bound up with its affirmative moment, in a rhythm of affirmation, negation and the negation of the negation [...] the rhythm, for the Latinising Dionysians, was, if not as in Dionysius principally liturgical, nonetheless fully replicated within the ordinariness of the individual Christian life (Turner 1995, pp. 268–69).

Turner’s key concern is that experiential interpretations of the Dionysian texts undermine the broader epistemic strategy of apophaticism. He sees the Dionysian tradition as including a critique of desire, with apophaticism emphasizing the role of detachment and interiority as key “shapers” of experience. He discusses, in particular, Meister Eckhart’s conception of detachment: “Detachment and interiority stand not as alternative experiences, worse still as ‘higher’ experiences, worst of all as ‘religious’ experiences, but as form

to content, as shapers to experience shaped. As categories detachment and interiority are, for Eckhart, experientially empty" (Turner 1995, p. 179). But detachment is not abstract in relation to lived experience and instead is about the *transformation* of experience. For Turner, the predominant theme within the Dionysian apophatic tradition is the application of negative dialectics to wider religious observances, i.e., to the life of believers and to the Christian community as a whole.

Turner summarizes the understanding of the "mystical" in Mediaeval apophaticism as "an exoteric dynamic *within* the ordinary, as being the negative dialectics of the ordinary" (Turner 1995, p. 268). To consider mystical "knowing" as a particular, and indeed extraordinary, aspect of human experience, then, is to misread the mysticism of the Dionysian apophatic tradition in an instrumentalist, anachronistic, and elitist way. Turner maintains rather that the apophatic is not *an* optional element in theology but rather *the* "mystical element" in *all* theology (Turner 1995, p. 265).

Turner argues that the development of an instrumentalist approach to spirituality following the "affective turn", as evidenced by a "scientific mysticism", meant mystical *practices* became detached from a theological or institutional Church context. Such practices became far removed from the idea of "wisdom", which recognizes "*mystery already lived and proclaimed in common beliefs*". Though such "wisdom" is rarely called mystical today, Michel de Certeau has suggested that it may be very close to the traditional understanding of apophaticism.⁷

3. Apophaticism and "Mystical Consciousness"

Bernard McGinn agrees with Turner that experiential bias in modern spiritualities can result in misleading readings of the Dionysian texts and a misunderstanding of the tradition. However, he argues for a more complex attitude towards the role of experience, or at least towards the role of consciousness, than Turner allows. Nevertheless, for McGinn (as for Turner), the very category of "mystical experience" is problematic. His historical analysis supplements the work of de Certeau, who showed that the conception of "mysticism" is a product of early modern times (de Certeau 1995).

McGinn points out that the phrase "mystical experience" has only been widely used since the nineteenth century, so readings of mystical theology based on mystical "experience" have to be seen as doubly historically dubious. Indeed, McGinn asserts that in the Dionysian apophatic tradition, there is no such thing as mystical *experience* as we understand it today at all (McGinn 2008).

McGinn's first concern about using the term "mystical experience" is that by doing so, we exaggerate the role of the affective dimension of direct contact with God in spirituality and consequentially downplay the intellectual aspect. This downplaying restricts the mystical element in religion to "the first level of consciousness which is the reception of the gift of God's presence in feeling, or basic inner experience" (McGinn 1991, p. xvii).

McGinn's second concern, which echoes that of Turner, is that an experiential reading of the Dionysian texts misses the wider epistemic strategy of Dionysian apophaticism as concerned with the ordinary experiences of Christian living. He is critical of contemporary readings of mysticism that use inappropriate modern epistemological categories to explain "mystical experience" as a *special* form of feeling or perception rather than the mystical element within Christian spiritual practices and their goal. He reminds us that mystics such as Eckhart, Ignatius of Loyola, and Teresa of Avila "taught that it is possible to attain awareness of the immediate presence of God even in the midst of ordinary acts of internal and external sensation" (McGinn 2008).

McGinn proposes an alternative model to mystical "experience": that of mystical "consciousness". This is based on a classical reading of apophaticism in the Western spiritual tradition and can be differentiated from the understanding of Sarah Coakley of the "spiritual senses" and the idea of "spiritual touch" in the thought of Karl Rahner, which I discuss below.

McGinn's idea of mystical consciousness is experientially empty but is world-affirming, a transcendent awareness within the sensations of ordinary life. McGinn suggests that the phrase "meta-consciousness" or "consciousness-beyond" describes the "consciousness" of Dionysian apophaticism better than any experiential term.

In proposing that we use the phrase "mystical consciousness" in an anti-experiential way, McGinn (2008) is building on the thought of Bernard Lonergan. The consciousness of the goal of spiritual practices, he suggests, adds a third element to the consciousness of intended objects of our actions and the self-consciousness of the agent, that of a consciousness-beyond. This consciousness-beyond can then be described as meta-consciousness.

McGinn elaborates:

Meta-consciousness is the co-presence of God in our inner acts, not as an object to be understood or grasped, but as a transforming Other who, as Augustine put it, is "more intimate to us than we are to ourselves". In other words in mystical consciousness God is present not as an object, but as a goal that is both transcendent and yet immanent. He (She) is active in the human agent as the source, or co-author, of our acts of experiencing, [...] knowing and loving (McGinn 2008).

With this in mind, McGinn has defined mysticism in the Dionysian apophatic tradition as the "inner and hidden realization of spirituality through a transforming consciousness of God's immediate presence". This definition implies a focus on introspection and self-consciousness but eschews a reliance on inner feeling. It also implies a personal appropriation within a collective context rather than an extraordinary experience of an individual alone. Mysticism, for McGinn, is an element in a given religious tradition. Mystics should be seen as practitioners of Christianity shaped by the experiences all other Christians have of scripture and worship.⁸

4. Spiritual Senses

Denys Turner's scepticism of the misplaced integration of experientialism into apophaticism and the nuanced but similar scepticism of Bernard McGinn can be contrasted with the approach of Sarah Coakley and others influenced by the Hesychast tradition in their conception of spiritual senses (Gavrilyuk and Coakley 2011b). Coakley maintains that modern theology has wrongly excluded the tentative connection between physical and spiritual senses present in early Christian tradition, an understanding that there are spiritual senses "analogous to but not reducible to sense perception" (Gavrilyuk and Coakley 2011a). She has considered the possibilities for feminist theology of the tradition of "spiritual senses" in both *Powers and Submissions* and *God, Sexuality and Self* (Coakley 2002, 2013). She has engaged with concerns of feminist theologians and philosophers that the perspective of the embodied self is missing from much theological and philosophical discourse.⁹ Alongside this and her engagement with Eastern theologians in the Hesychast tradition, Coakley has brought apophatic insights to bear on the doctrine of the Trinity (Coakley 2013).

In her discussion on the nature of Trinitarian theology, informed by the apophatic tradition, Coakley differentiates the Dionysian understanding of hierarchy as a system of ordered values from a power hierarchy (ibid.). The aim of the Dionysian concept of hierarchy is "the greatest possible assimilation to and union with God" as a knowledge and activity that "participates in the Divine likeness" rather than a justification for power stratification (ibid., p. 319). She makes the case for a paradoxical approach to the Dionysian concept of hierarchy (ibid., p. 322) because spiritual sense sits higher than physical senses, and the whole transcends its parts.¹⁰

Coakley asserts that the concept of spiritual sense in early Christian thought has two significant contexts. The first is the often-noted distaste for the material world amongst certain Patristic thinkers, but the second is altogether more positive. She describes this second context as "a desire to explain the progressive *transformation* of the self's response to the divine through a lifetime of practice, purgation and prayer." Importantly, the development

of a spiritual sense requires moral development before awareness can be achieved (Coakley 2002, p. 136).¹¹

Paul Gavrilyuk, following Coakley in his engagement with Hesychast thought, has focused on “intellectual vision” in the Dionysian tradition. This is a non-discursive mental apprehension of reality, where cognitive powers are “simplified, unified and ultimately transcended” (Gavrilyuk and Coakley 2011a). Gavrilyuk argues that Dionysius synthesized the previous Patristic tradition from Origen onwards with the late Platonism, which incorporated both pagan and Christian ideas of participation in the mysteries, granting a vision of the divine (Gavrilyuk 2011, 2009).¹² Spiritual perception, expressed as “eyes of the mind”, are eyes that look beyond the world and are capable of discerning God in all things (ibid., p. 97).¹³

Key for Gavrilyuk is the understanding of the Dionysian tradition in terms of divine illumination and sacramental theology (ibid., p. 88). This divine illumination is cultivated in the context of the communal liturgical life. Gavrilyuk explains that Baptism in the Eastern tradition was for those preparing to receive illumination and was the starting point for a moral and existential reorientation of life, which creates “a new capacity to discern divine light and the whole world as a symbolic manifestation of the energies of God” (ibid., p. 93). For Dionysius, then, Gavrilyuk says, the sacraments are “the fountainhead of mystical contemplation” (ibid., p. 94).

As we discussed above, Louth suggests that discourse based on communal liturgical practices in the East was exported to the Latin West as individualized faith practices. These included reading of scripture, theology, prayer, and ascetical practice, as well as contributing to the Western liturgy. It is this import that gives the Dionysian texts their proper context. Louth explains, “for it is the liturgy, and the understanding of Scriptures that are read and expounded in the liturgy and in which the language of the liturgy is drenched, that is the fundamental context for Denys.” (Louth 1989, p. 30).

Louis Bouyer goes further in maintaining that the specifically Christian nature of the tradition of scriptural interpretation, the ecclesiastical experience of the liturgy, and its focus on the Eucharist offers proof that the Dionysian apophatic tradition is not, in essence, an import from Neoplatonism. Bouyer does not deny the links between Dionysius thought and the use of Neoplatonist concepts but insists that the “mystical” aspects of Dionysius derive from a Christian tradition of scriptural interpretation and the ecclesiastical experience of the eucharistic liturgy. Bouyer argues that the fact that the Greek word *mustikos*, which he translates as “mystical”, is not present in the *Enneads* is proof that the “mystical” aspect of Dionysian apophatic thought was a development of Patristic liturgical practices, not Neoplatonic thought (Bouyer 1980, p. 52–53). Nevertheless, the absence of the word *mustikos* may not be conclusive proof if we are to accept the view of Sara Rappe, who asserts that mystical practices are assumed in the *Enneads* (Rappe 2000).

Eric Perl makes a different point about the orthodoxy of the Dionysian texts, one that reminds us of their Eastern origins:

Dionysius represents precisely those doctrines which are most typical of Orthodoxy in distinction from the West: creation as theophany; grace as continuous with nature; knowledge as union of knower and known; incarnation and sacrament as fulfilment, not exception or addition; liturgy as the realisation of the cosmos; mysticism as ontological union rather than psychological condition; sin as corruption and loss of being, not legalistic transgression; atonement as physical-ontological assumption, not justification or juridical satisfaction; hierarchy as service and love, not oppression and envy (Perl 1994).

5. Faith and Religious Experience after Luther and Kant

Before I consider the attempt of Karl Rahner to integrate aspects of experientialism and mysticism within a transcendental framing below, I will, in this section, highlight firstly the reception of mysticism post-Reformation and its part in developing what Niklaus Largier has called “mystical tropes” used in modernity; and secondly, the epistemological

significance of Kant's transcendental turn (Largier 2009). This will help the focus in further sections on how "mystical experience" in Rahner's conceptions of spiritual touch and Dupré's assertion of the significance of the dialogue with modern atheism both continue from and break with the epistemology of classical apophaticism.

One of the key thinkers who has influenced the understanding of negative way mysticism in the modern era is the mystical theologian and philosopher Meister Eckhart. Following the publication of new editions of his writings by the literary editor Franz Pfeiffer and the Dominican Heinrich Suso Denifle in the nineteenth century, philosophers in the German idealist tradition welcomed the (re) discovery of Eckhart, with Hegel declaring, "there we have what we were looking for" (Largier 2009, p. 37).

Hegel and others saw Eckhart as a profound speculative dialectical thinker who anticipated modern concepts of subjectivity, as well as being a forerunner of the Protestant reformers. His writings were also an inspiration to thinkers in the wider German Romantic tradition at the time (Moran 2013, p. 670).

Kurt Flasch has described how this rediscovery led to a renaissance of interest in Eckhart in the twentieth century, with Robert Musil, Karl Mannheim, Martin Buber, Martin Heidegger, and Gustav Landauer engaging with his works (Flasch 2015, p. 12). The focus of this renewed interest was chiefly in the field of German literature, philosophy, and sociology rather than within theology. Existentialists, phenomenologists, Marxists, and postmodernist philosophers and contemporary theologians, from schools as diverse as postmodern deconstructionism to creation spirituality, have all engaged with Eckhart's thought (Largier 2009, p. 40).

The story of Eckhart's reception in Germany illustrates how changes in modern philosophy, including the separation of faith from reason, led to a comprehensive reorientation of ideas of mystical experience. Largier sees the Medieval mystical tradition as performing a specific role within modernity, where the application of mystical tropes appeared in natural philosophy, experience of the world, sensation, and emotion (Largier 2009, p. 49). References to mystical traditions then (and now), he says, are often associated with forms of "return" to pre-Enlightenment medieval concepts of immediacy, spontaneity, and spiritual unity (ibid., p. 39).

These mystical tropes were projected into the new epistemological space that developed after Martin Luther's disjunction of the secular and the spiritual in theology. Concepts embedded in medieval discourses were transformed to create a new epistemological model of experience. It was this transformation that allowed Hegel, Leibnez, and others to promote a conception of mysticism that was "before thinking", a new model for the experience of the self and the world (ibid., p. 39–40).

As we will see in our discussion below on the place of the concept of mystical "experience" in the development of new a-theisms and borderline "heresies" in the Christian tradition, social control is one feature of the use of concepts of mystical "experience" in modern epistemological spaces. Accepting "secular" limits on religious freedom, in accordance with the Lutheran separation of the spiritual from the secular, the inner from the outer, led to the suppression of social and revolutionary elements of the Radical Reformation. To be clear, this concept of "secular" in Lutheran thought is different from contemporary ideas of the secular. In this context, as Largier explains, when the "secular" establishes itself as a paradigm of rationality, it is threatened by "inspired" readings of canonical texts (ibid., p. 45).

Indeed, despite one of the main motivations of the Reformation as, ostensibly, the right to read the Bible in the vernacular free from the Church framework of liturgy, monastic practice, and the Catholic contemplative tradition, interpretations of the deeply egalitarian biblical message were suppressed post-Reformation (ibid., p. 42). It mirrors the similar *political* outcome of the English Civil War, where egalitarian readings of the Bible within the New Model Army and amongst the radical sects, including the Diggers and the Levellers, were suppressed in favor of Oliver Cromwell's Commonwealth, and eventually by further ecclesial control after the Restoration

The consequence of reading mystical texts outside of their Medieval liturgical and hermeneutical context and evacuation of political–eschatological meaning has been the dominance of a quietist poetic adaptation of the mystical tropes of unity, love, suffering, sweetness, and pain from the 16th century onwards (Largier 2009, pp. 48–49). The characteristic of such knowledge is attempting to unite the interior and exterior, imagination and perception, and sensuality and spirit, addressing issues of the convertibility and reversibility of Luther’s “inner” and “outer” of the effects of the world on the self and the self on the world in processes of perception and cognition (*ibid.*, p. 51).

Largier describes the “art of living”, which results from the perception shaped by the use of mystical tropes. He suggests that the origins of such an aesthetic, as expressed in the work of the German Romantic poet Novalis, for example, are a result of the reception of mystical ideas such as those of Eckhart into that milieu but, importantly, mediated by the tradition of Pietism (*ibid.*, pp. 51–53). It reflects the limiting of mysticism to what Kant described as the “private use of reason”, whose apex is poetics, and reflects an acceptance of Luther’s secular/spiritual split (*ibid.*, p. 54).

Modern philosophy, with its focus on the epistemological after the development of Immanuel Kant’s transcendental idealism, led to a move away from the traditional metaphysical view of religious truth as originating in the revealed mystery of divine Being (Dupré 1998, p. 27). While a Kantian philosophical framework may be useful to explain the varieties of perception of the transcendental in religion, Terence Penelhum asserts that it does not help us to understand “mystical experience” (Penelhum 1980). Penelhum further insists that the concept of mystical union and the diversity of its occurrence across historical and cultural contexts calls into question the Kantian framework of noumena and phenomena (*ibid.*).

There is a difference, Penelhum proposes, between mystical knowing and other forms of religious experience. In most religious experiences, a distinction and otherness between the human and divine is maintained, but accounts of “mystical experience” deny this distinction. Indeed, it is precisely in the example of religious experience that the duality of subject and noumena does not apply (*ibid.*).

Louis Dupré described post-Kantian epistemology as the result of a “divorce” between transcendent reality and reason (Dupré 2004, p. 17). The consequences of this were two-fold for modern philosophy, he argues, namely a limitation on the aspirations of reason to objective truth and a “subject” that became an empty principle without materiality, detached from the given order (Dupré 1998, p. 27).

Dupré explains how, in order to establish grounds for certainty in human knowledge, modern philosophy post-Kant ceded key areas of human understanding to faith, but at a cost. Kant may have re-established room for faith, but he problematized the idea of reality beyond our experience. Modern concepts of logic, language, and rationality were created alongside an “empty” concept of faith that left no room for mysticism (Dupré 1977).

The assertions of mystics that they have direct, though negative, knowledge of the reality of the divine contradicts Kant’s denial “that the human mind ever attains direct insight into the presence of the real as such” (Dupré 1980, p. 460). For mystics, including Meister Eckhart, Johannes Tauler, and Jan Ruysbroeck, it was assumed that the soul can participate in uncreated life, with both transcendence and immanence belonging to its nature (*ibid.*, p. 461).

Modern philosophy post-Kant denies content to the sub-phenomenal self. This means firstly a “denial of direct, though negative, knowledge of ultimate selfhood”, and secondly, a denial that the self can surpass the boundaries of individual personhood (Dupré 1980). The first feature is the result of Kant’s exorcising of intellectual intuition (where the mind perceives in the same way as the senses) from his epistemology, and the second is the construction of individual agency and autonomy in his ethics.

Dupré describes the development of modern culture after Kant as the “fateful separation” of subjectivity from objectivity, of the relative from the absolute (Dupré 2004).¹⁴ This

separation resulted in a shift in the understanding of religious truth from a conception that originated in some sort of participation in the revealed mystery of divine Being.

Post-Kant, the truth of religious assertions was “extrinsically conveyed” to faith, resulting in a separation of experience from faith. Dupré points out that this was very different from the assumed relationship between faith and the experiential in early centuries, where faith was expected to be “completed” by the experiential. Post-Kant, faith occupied an order of its own with the minimum of experiential content, and “experience became the privilege of a spiritual elite—the so-called mystics” (Dupré 1998, p. 27).

6. Spiritual Touch and the Transcendental

Karl Rahner’s conception of “spiritual touch” is an attempt to integrate the insights of spirituality into theology within the framework of post-Kantian epistemology. Mark McIntosh has explained how Rahner attempted to build upon the insights of the transcendental Thomism of theologians, such as Joseph Marechal, but with a post-Kantian awareness. Rather than speculate on the nature of objects in themselves, he tried to ground his theology of grace in the necessary conditions for the possibility of knowledge.

For Rahner, divine grace can be “experienced” precisely because it is the reality of human experience (Endean 2001).¹⁵ He located mystical experience in the same transcendental consciousness that is the condition for everyone’s experience of reality. However, as McIntosh says, the mystical thus becomes a “kind of acuteness and sensitivity”, though part of religious experience as such is more uncommon and profound (McIntosh 1998, p. 91).¹⁶

McIntosh maintains that despite Rahner’s acceptance of Kant’s limits of human knowing he, like Schleiermacher, “pressed and poked at the borders of human consciousness, questing a way beyond the Kantian critiques” (McIntosh 1998, p. 91). Both Schleiermacher and Rahner suggest a particular form of human consciousness, pre-experience or co-present with experience, as the starting point of theology. Because this “primordial” experience, as Rahner understands it, can never be totally objectified in language or reflective thought, it stands as some sort of authentic experience whose universality is diminished by differentiation and division.

McIntosh critiques the concept of “primordial” experience because it appears to justify an analysis of mystical consciousness as a universal religious sensibility, an appeal to “authenticity and vitality of the supposed golden universal experience”, which, he argues, leads to a mysticism divorced from cultural specifics or religious tradition (McIntosh 1998, p. 97).¹⁷

McIntosh makes the point that in contrast to the transcendental approach of theologians, such as Rahner, apophaticism in the Dionysian tradition manages to *combine* divine namelessness (the hidden) and concrete finite reality (the revealed). He explains further:

This [Rahner’s concept of mysticism] is rather different from the classical Christian idea that the mystical is precisely that which is hidden and yet revealed in the very concrete imagery of the biblical text or the liturgical rite. In this earlier view, the mystery is not the divine namelessness which suppresses all expressibility as Rahner puts it; rather the glory of the mystery is exactly that the infinite should freely choose to *be expressive*, to disclose the ultimate nature of love in the humiliated constraints of finite existence—a body broken on a cross, wine to drink, oil to anoint, a psalm to sing (McIntosh 1998, p. 95).

Like Coakley, Rahner argues for a qualified continuity between the human and the divine, an “uncreated grace, as God’s own self, operative in us through quasi-formal causality” in his understanding of “spiritual touch” (Endean 2001, p. 42). This is a conception that is immediate and inaccessible to reflective awareness.¹⁸ The immediate nature of this experience is qualified by the understanding that it is based on the reality of God’s presence. Our finite minds exist *only* in relationship to external reality. For God to “touch” our minds in a directly immediate way, God’s contact with us must embrace the external realities that constitute us (Endean 2001, p. 56).¹⁹ There is a direct awareness that is not reflective awareness. This faculty of direct awareness is a faculty not gained from any particular

object, but rather, it exists because we are creatures who perceive particular concrete objects (Endean 2001).

In Rahner's understanding of spiritual touch, we see some similarities with the ideas of the French philosopher Henri Bergson, whose conception of intuition, rooted in his conception of *durée* (time), led him to propose that there are two sources of morality and religion (Bergson 1954).²⁰ According to Bergson, there is analysis, whereby we look at something from the "outside", but there is also a second kind of cognition where we "follow the life of the thing in an emphatic identification with it" (Kolakowski 1985). It is only in the second kind of cognition that I can understand the uniqueness of the object, as I see it as a whole (and absolute), not relative to me or split into parts. To access this "interior" knowledge, an unmediated apprehension of an object, I have to use another faculty, and I have to "coincide" with my own time. In his later works, Bergson makes clear that his concept of intuition is part of a universal *élan vital* (life-drive), which permeates the universe and motivates evolution (Bergson 1911).

Phillip Endean identifies the *receptive* character of human *sensibility* as key for Rahner. Endean sees the model of human consciousness proposed by Rahner as meaning that it is only in and through our interaction with others that we have self-presence.²¹ In contrast to McIntosh, he sees Rahner's conception of spiritual touch as less of a post-Kantian questing than a continuation of Bonaventure's conception of a spiritual touch that takes place at the *apex affectus*—a level of self deeper than the separation between intellect and will (Endean 2001).

Endean explains that Rahner's integration of spirituality and theology in this manner situates the academic enterprise of theology within something greater: "God's ongoing self-revelation in human experience". He sees this integration as only possible after the "new and enriched" level of self-awareness following the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, i.e., after the abandonment of naïve realist metaphysics. As a consequence, he says, Christianity had to "move—or move back—to talk of the experience of God from the periphery to the centre of theology" (Endean 2001, p. 67).

Karen Kilbey insists that spirituality is totally integrated into Rahner's theology and has a more sympathetic view of the importance of concrete reality in his understanding of grace than McIntosh. For Rahner, she says, the awareness of God as the ever-present horizon of our lives is accompanied by the "astonishing" fact that "we can *pray* to this mystery, that we can *address* this horizon" (Kilby 2007, p. 66). Rather than the universal experience of grace being a mysticism divorced from cultural or religious specifics, Kilby, along with Endean, sees the universalized mediated immediacy of the "touch of God" as rooted in the classical mystical tradition (ibid., p. 72). Kilby perceives Endean's understanding as a useful check on any tendency to see the spiritual as intellectually secondary to theology (ibid., p. 72). Kilby contrasts Rahner's transcendental method in *Spirit in the World* (Rahner 1994) to Kant's not in terms of epistemological strategy but in terms of orientation, for Rahner's transcendental turn led to the inescapability of knowledge of God, whilst Kant's led to its impossibility (ibid., p. 56).

7. Apophaticism A-Theism and the Contemporary Return of Mysticism

The twentieth century saw increasing interest in mysticism and a thirst to integrate spirituality into mainstream theology. There has been a renewed theological interest in apophaticism specifically since then. This is, in part, as both Coakley and McGinn have both pointed out, a result of the remarkable Dionysian renewal in early/mid-twentieth-century France, stemming from the regeneration of Dionysian studies amongst theologians pursuing *ressourcement*, a "returning to sources", in the *nouvelle théologie* (Coakley 2009, p. 4; Coakley and Stang 2009).

Coakley sees this return to sources as a response to the mandated Neo-Scholasticism of Roman Catholic orthodoxy at this time and also as a result of the engagement of continental philosophers and theologians with Heidegger's critique of "ontotheology" (Coakley 2009; Coakley and Stang 2009).²² In Coakley's view, "the return to Dionysius [. . .] could be seen

both as a rescue from the rigidity of certain forms of neo-scholastic readings of Thomas Aquinas and, simultaneously, as the means of an end-run around Kant's ban on speculative metaphysics" (ibid., p. 4).

However, there is another motivation for the increasing interest and impetus toward the integration of spirituality into theology since the 20th century, identified by Kees Waaijman, namely the decline in the social importance of religion and the increasingly secular social context. Waaijman describes how this return of interest in spirituality is unfolding in "secularized" countries in particular areas—the spheres of education (the education of the whole person), healthcare (wellbeing), management (spirituality of business), and ecology (eco-spirituality), as well as techniques of mindfulness.

The increasing interest in spirituality in these areas has developed outside of institutionalized forms of belief and the traditional schools of organized religious life. Waaijman suggests, similarly to Rahner, as mentioned above, that this is because these areas reflect "primordial processes of life" (Waaijman 2003). He also considers the interlocking lines we find in indigenous and native spiritualities and the Wisdom tradition arising from Judaism, the pre-modern roots of our present ideas of spirituality, and sees them as reflected in the major themes of primordial spirituality.

Because of their different starting points (the theology of the body for Coakley, the transcendental for Rahner), Coakley's work on spiritual sense and the insights of Rahner's conception of spiritual touch in his theology of grace have a different focus to the "classical" apophaticism of the Dionysian tradition, but both open up a dialogue between mystical theology and other intellectual disciplines.

For Coakley and Gavrilyuk, this includes the possibility of contributions to the study of the spiritual senses through engagement with new and growing work on perception in analytic philosophy, the "theological turn" in continental phenomenology, and a "sensual revolution" in cultural anthropology (Gavrilyuk and Coakley 2011a). In the case of Rahner's theology, there is the possibility of further exploration of the relationship between the renewal of interest in spirituality and "the primordial processes of life", which goes beyond existing faith institutions, as Waaijman has highlighted.

The revival of interest in Pseudo-Dionysius in twentieth-century philosophy and theology has focused on "negative theology" in continental philosophy, whose most influential proponent was Jacques Derrida (Derrida 1997, pp. 167–90). But Dupré, arguing from an analysis of the nature of the self in the transcendental tradition of modern philosophy (Dupré 2004), maintains that it is through an appreciation of the self's capacity for transcendence and the "dynamic view of a potentially unlimited mind" that mystical traditions can make a significant contribution to philosophical understandings of the self (Dupré 1980). Indeed, he maintains the possibility of radical self-transcendence, perennially asserted by Christian mystics in the Dionysian apophatic tradition (and indeed, mystics of other religious traditions), has yet to be taken seriously by modern analytical philosophy.

Dupré also highlights the fact that the "atmosphere of doubt and dogmatic scepticism" created by modern secularism provides opportunities to revisit the negative theology of Pseudo-Dionysius (Dupré and Wiseman 2001). In the Introduction to the collection *Silence and the Word*, Davies and Turner highlight—as one of the three key areas of relevance of negative theology for contemporary times—the possibilities of dialogue between negative theology with secularism and atheism, the others being dialogue with negativity in Continental Philosophy and its role in critiquing religious traditions (Davies and Turner 2002).

In our time, issues of the boundaries between existing Church organizations and new expressions of theism bring to the fore matters of authority and orthodoxy. It is instructive to consider how similar changes within the apophatic tradition of the fourteenth century laid bare the relationship between Ecclesial authority and social control. The a-theism of dialectical theology performs a role as an internal critique of positivist theologies then and to this day, but one that is often dismissed as outside of orthodoxy.

Just as in the fourteenth century, when the radical apophaticism of the Beguine Marguerite Porete was condemned, a-theisms of the negative way are seen as borderline

heretical by many contemporary theologies and theological institutions. The challenge of the negative way continues to be seen as a threat by those who have the power to delineate religious orthodoxy.

The burning of Porete for continuing to promote her *Mirror of Simple Souls* writings, which had been declared heretical, can be explained by the realpolitik of Medieval ecclesial control of the Beguines and the suppression of the heresy of the Free Spirit. However, as Turner has described, Marguerite disturbed the early fourteenth-century mind for a more radical reason (Turner 2019, p. 104).

She seemed to pose an ideological threat, for she appeared to be engaged, in a way that the majority of Beguines could not be represented as being engaged, in the revision of the very idea of boundaries: she seemed to challenge, not just the place where the boundaries of belief were conventionally fixed, but the very idea they had fixity (ibid., pp. 104–5).

Turner concludes that Marguerite's *Mirror of Simple Souls* was declared heretical

Not because it was seen as to be heterodox, nor in spite of the fact that it was orthodox, but because its surface orthodoxy was in the contingent junctures of early fourteenth century ecclesiastical politics, more subversive than any straightforward heresy would ever have been (ibid., p. 116).

Turner explains that Marguerite was condemned despite employing traditional apophatic dialectics because her *Mirror* demonstrated that such discourse self-subverts. Her threat to the Church was that she, a lay woman, demanded it keep to its own orthodoxies. In the end, it was safer for the Church to describe her as a heretic than acknowledge the subversive potential of her orthodoxy (ibid., p. 116).

8. Negation and Atheism

Despite the search for continuities in spirituality from the pre-modern to today, we cannot ignore the fact that in complex contemporary societies, the traditional distinction between what is sacred and what is profane, key to sociological understandings of religious phenomena, appears less and less appropriate to our current understanding or awareness of transcendence.

Dupré describes our modern spiritualities as existing at a time of “unprecedented emphasis on the transcendence of God and an equally unprecedented secularization of the world” (Dupré 1976, p. 22). This, he maintains, “drastically decreases *the worldly experience of transcendence*” (ibid., my emphasis). Dupré makes a case for the contemporary relevance of this loss of experiences of worldly transcendence as something that allows absence in itself to have meaning. “Our age,” he says, “has created an emptiness that for the serious God seeker attains a religious significance” (Dupré 1998, p. 139). Echoing Rahner's observation that the Christian of the third millennium will be a mystic or not a Christian at all (Rahner 1971, p. 15), Dupré suggests that the search for a deeper spiritual life on this basis is “more than a passing phenomenon on today's religious scene: it is a movement for survival” (Dupré 1998, p. 143).

Dupré shares the view of Turner and McGinn, as discussed above, in urging caution lest we mistake a spiritual positivism of “negative experiences” for “negative way” mysticism, but he turns this reservation on its head by making a case for the relevance of a spirituality precipitated by “the negative experience” of living in a society deprived of transcendent meaning. However painful it is for those who are believers, Dupré argues, we must acknowledge the loss of transcendence in modern society. Further, we cannot avoid our own atheism, which cannot be covered up by diverse and creative professions of belief or by adhering to or promoting the observation of certain rules of ritual or moral conduct (Dupré 1976). He insists that the search in our times for a deeper spiritual life comes from engagement with both a world and a human community that appears as autonomous; that is, we cannot and should not, as religious believers, separate ourselves from the reality of the modern world as it currently exists (Dupré 1998, p. 143).²³

Dupré believes that the transcendent dimension can open up because of our acknowledgment that the world has lost its divine presence. He suggests we embrace a sacred

“sense of absence”, as discerned by Simone Weil (Dupré 1998, p. 137). When this happens, we move beyond seeing God as an object to God as an absolute demand (ibid., p. 138). This absolute demand is not so much an existential *decision* but rather a result of adopting a fundamental attitude to reality more akin to ideas of *pietas* (obedient attention), or as Weil defined it, “waiting in expectation” (ibid., p. 141). This requires that we leap beyond experience, led from partial insight to total acceptance, requiring us to abandon a “conquering grasping attitude” for a more receptive one (ibid., p. 142).

Turner (1995), however, believes that focusing on the consciousness of the absence rather than the presence of God is invalid and just another misplaced use of the experiential to understand mysticism. He maintains that emphasis on the importance of absence is no real alternative to the experiential definitions that support the epistemic status of positive theologies and undermines the key apophatic principle that God cannot be the object of any consciousness whatsoever. But McGinn, responding to Turner’s criticism that his use of “mystical consciousness” is an example of the invalid focus on absence, asserts that even Dionysius, Bonaventure, Eckhart, the author of the Cloud, Denys the Carthusian, and John of the Cross had something to say about experience (McGinn 1997).

In a similar vein, Dupré argues that embracing the sacred sense of absence today has historical precedent within the apophatic tradition, for the negative way tradition of Pseudo-Dionysius, Eckhart, and the Mediaeval mystics actually arose from an intense awareness of a transcendent presence within the “desert”. The religious consciousness of absence, he suggests, has roots in early apophatic traditions, where encounters with God led believers on a journey beyond language and concepts to “venture out into a desert of unlimited and unexplored horizons” for

If the believer, who shares in fact, if not in principle, the practical atheism of his entire culture, is left no choice but to vitalize this negative experience and to confront his feeling of God’s absence, he may find himself on the very road walked by spiritual pilgrims in more propitious times. What was once the arduous route travelled only by a religious elite is now, in many instances, the only one still open to us (Dupré 1998, p. 139).

9. Conclusions

In our comparison of classical apophaticism with the attempts to integrate the experiential into mystical theology, we have seen how philosophical and religious categories are not transhistorical: they originate in specific cultures and develop within them (Dupré 1980). We should be mindful of unhelpful nostalgia, for “no way leads back to the past. A culture can only move forward, though forward must not mean in the same direction” (Dupré 1976, p. 16).

Equally, the epistemological categories of the negative way tradition originating from the Pseudo-Dionysian texts have to be understood in their context in order to discern the meaning and significance of the texts. This is key if we are to see the negative way as contributing to a contemporary living faith tradition, as Dupré has outlined.

Attempts to integrate traditional apophatic spirituality with theology need to acknowledge the experiential bias of modern spiritualities. This is not an argument to go back to a time before the Enlightenment, when faith and experience were not separated, or back to pre-modern times when spirituality, theology, and philosophy mutually informed each other in an organic and living way. It is rather for an integrity of understanding that the rationalism and the dialectical theism of the Dionysian apophatic tradition have a historical and philosophical context.

The negative way of the Dionysian apophatic tradition is only tangentially related to the modern religious experientialisms. The negative way is not an alternative to or superior to common belief, positive theologies, or philosophical reasoning. The dialectical theism of the apophatic tradition is ultimately world-affirming and is a negative dialectic that encompasses all these aspects of ordinary Christian life.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ The Dionysian texts are *Mystical Theology*, *Divine Names*, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, *The Ecclesial Hierarchy*. See also [Luibheid and Rorem \(1987\)](#).
- ² “Secularised” refers here to the declining social significance of religion. This does not preclude sacralisation in modern society. A good summary of the ‘secularisation debate’ is offered by [Demerath \(2007\)](#), pp. 57–80).
- ³ Modern in the philosophical sense, i.e., from Descartes onwards.
- ⁴ This theme is also dealt with in other histories of Christian spiritualities including [Leclercq et al. \(1968\)](#), [McGinn et al. \(1987\)](#), especially chapters 6 and 8, and in chapters 24, 25 and 34 of [Edwards et al. \(2022\)](#). 4
- ⁵ For Turner, such supposititious “experience” would include those negative experiences of a “psychologistic mysticism” ([Turner 1995](#), p. 259).
- ⁶ Louth argues that the discourse based in communal liturgical practices in the East was exported to the Latin West as individualised faith practices—the reading of scripture, theology, prayer, ascetical practice—as well as to the Western liturgy. See also [Bouyer \(1980\)](#), pp. 42–56), where he maintains that the specifically Christian nature of the tradition of scriptural interpretation, ecclesiastical experience of the liturgy and its focus on the Eucharist is the proof that the Dionysian apophatic tradition is not in essence an import from “pagan” Neoplatonism.
- ⁷ Michel de Certeau, “La mystique”, in *Encyclopaedia Universalis de France*, quoted in McGinn, *Foundations*. p. 313. It is De Certeau’s contention that the instrumentalist model of “scientific mysticism” developed during the Enlightenment actually repressed “religious” belief
- ⁸ See Mark McIntosh’s comments on McGinn in [McIntosh \(1998\)](#), p. 31).
- ⁹ See her discussion of Dionysian ideas of hierarchy and feminist principles in [Coakley \(2013\)](#), and *God, Sexuality and the Self*, pp. 319–22; see also her examination of the relationship between feminist philosophy and the philosophy of religion in [Coakley \(2002\)](#).
- ¹⁰ Pseudo-Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchy*, iii 1–2.
- ¹¹ Coakley contrasts Origen’s understanding of spiritual sense, which, while it builds on the impetus to unite the noetic and erotic in the Platonic tradition, uses the doctrine in a mainly figurative way, with that of Gregory of Nyssa, but points out that in neither are the affective/erotic and the noetic seen as disjunctive alternatives, or even as complementary dualities. Gregory, argues Coakley, “allows for some significant point of *continuity* or development from the physical to the spiritual in the spectrum of purgation of the senses [...] the toehold for spiritual perception is precisely *in* the physical.” She also points out that Gregory’s understanding of spiritual “sight” is affected by his apophaticism so that any idea of clarity or hegemony in this perception is limited by the “dark intimacy of the embrace by Christ” (pp. 137–38).
- ¹² Gavrilyuk follows Lossky in this.
- ¹³ “Eyes of the mind” is a phrase used by, but not limited to, Dionysius. Importantly this vision was outward, not an interiority or a self-knowledge but as a self-transcendence.
- ¹⁴ In *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture*, Dupré explains that the change in our understanding of reason since the time of Kant has many phases of reaction and counter-reaction in defence of the rational model of Enlightenment thought, and this has broadened our concept of reason. He claims all these reactions and the movements in response are themselves part of the Enlightenment tradition.
- ¹⁵ This view has important implications for the nature of theology itself (and its relationship with spirituality). According to Endean, for Rahner God’s revelation is the proper focus of Christian theology, but whatever we say about it will also be a statement about the “fickle, changeable creatures who receive that revelation [...] Theology’s referent is then the ongoing self-communication of God.” Christian theology can then be conceived as “the study of God’s self-communication to human beings, permanently referred to ongoing human experience as a single lived reality”, intimately and inevitably related to spirituality ([Endean 2001](#), p. 67).
- ¹⁶ See the discussion on Karl Rahner’s “mystagogy” in [McIntosh \(1998\)](#), pp. 91–101).
- ¹⁷ McIntosh criticises Rahner for giving in to the “quintessential modern longing for a universal human religious sensibility, uniting peoples in such a way as to liberate them from the peculiarities of their own histories, languages or customs,” though he does

qualify this criticism by acknowledging the deep hold of the “incarnational logic of Christianity” which steers Rahner away from the “modernist impulse to greater abstraction” (1998, p. 97).

18 See [Endean \(2001, p. 40\)](#). This “im-mediate” is a technical term in Rahner.

19 Created realities act as mediations too.

20 Bergson’s popularity and influence as a public intellectual in the period between the First and Second World War cannot be underestimated.

21 Perhaps this self-consciousness is more simply expressed as our relation to our own heart. As Endean says, “our access to our own ‘hearts’, our self-presence, comes only in and through our interaction, through our presence to others” ([Endean 2001, p. 260](#)).

22 Coakley also explains how *ressourcement* acted in combination with Vladimir Lossky’s polemical reinterpretation of Dionysius “as a pincer movement” against Western scholasticism.

23 See also his discussion of autonomy in modern ethics in [Dupré \(1977\)](#).

References

- Bergson, Henri. 1911. *Creative Evolution*. Translated by Arthur Mitchell. New York: Henry Holt & Co.
- Bergson, Henri. 1954. *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. Translated by R. Ashley Audra, and Cloudesely Brereton. New York: Doubleday.
- Bouyer, Louis. 1980. Mysticism: An essay on the history of the word. In *Understanding Mysticism*. Edited by Richard Woods. London: Image Books, pp. 42–57.
- Coakley, Sarah. 2002. *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Coakley, Sarah. 2009. Introduction: Re-thinking Dionysius the Areopagite. In *Rethinking Dionysius the Areopagite*. Edited by Sarah Coakley and Charles M. Stang. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, pp. 1–10.
- Coakley, Sarah. 2013. *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay “On the Trinity”*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Coakley, Sarah, and Charles M. Stang, eds. 2009. *Rethinking Dionysius the Areopagite*. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell.
- Davies, Oliver, and Denys Turner, eds. 2002. *Silence and the Word: Negative Theology and Incarnation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- de Certeau, Michel. 1995. *The Mystic Fable: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. Translated by Michael B. Smith. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Demerath, Nicolas J., III. 2007. Secularisation and sacralisation deconstructed and reconstructed. In *The Sage Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*. Edited by James A. Beckford and N. J. Demerath, III. London: Sage, pp. 57–80.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1997. How to Avoid Speaking: Denials’. In *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader*. Edited by Graham Ward. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 167–90.
- Dupré, Louis. 1976. *Transcendent Selfhood: The Loss and Rediscovery of the Inner Life*. New York: Crossroad.
- Dupré, Louis. 1977. *A Dubious Heritage: Studies in the Philosophy of Religion after Kant*. Mahwah: Paulist Press.
- Dupré, Louis. 1980. The mystical experience of the self and its philosophical significance. In *Understanding Mysticism*. Edited by Richard Woods. London: Image Books.
- Dupré, Louis. 1998. *Religious Mystery and Rational Reflection: Excursions in the Phenomenology and Philosophy of Religion*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans.
- Dupré, Louis. 2004. *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Dupré, Louis, and James A. Wiseman. 2001. *Light from Light: An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*, 2nd ed. Mahwah: Paulist Press.
- Edwards, Mark, Dimitrios Pallis, and Georgios Steiris, eds. 2022. *The Oxford Handbook of Dionysius the Areopagite*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Endean, Phillip. 2001. *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Flasch, Kurt. 2015. *Meister Eckhart Philosopher of Christianity*. Translated by Anne Schindel, and Aaron Vanides. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Gavrilyuk, Paul L. 2009. The Reception of Dionysius in Twentieth Century Eastern Orthodoxy. In *Re-Thinking Donysius the Areopagite*. Edited by Sarah Coakley and Charles M. Stang. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.
- Gavrilyuk, Paul L. 2011. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. In *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*. Edited by Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 86–103.
- Gavrilyuk, Paul L., and Sarah Coakley. 2011a. Introduction. In *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*. Edited by Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gavrilyuk, Paul L., and Sarah Coakley, eds. 2011b. *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kilby, Karen. 2007. *Karl Rahner*. SPCK Edition. London: SPCK.
- Kolakowski, Leszek. 1985. *Bergson*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Largier, Niklaus. 2009. Mysticism, Modernity and the invention of Aesthetic experience. *Representations* 105: 37–60. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Leclercq, Jean, François Vandenbroucke, and Louis Bouyer. 1968. *The Spirituality of the Middle Ages*. London: Burns and Oates.
- Louth, Andrew. 1989. *Dionysius the Areopagite*. London: Geoffrey Chapman.
- Luibheid, Colm, and Paul Rorem, eds. 1987. *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*. New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press.

- McGinn, Bernard. 1991. *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century*. New York: Crossroads.
- McGinn, Bernard. 1997. Review of Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism*. *Journal of Religion* 77: 309–17. [[CrossRef](#)]
- McGinn, Bernard. 2008. Mystical consciousness: A modest proposal. *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 8: 44–63. [[CrossRef](#)]
- McGinn, Bernard, John Meyendorff, and Jill Raitt, eds. 1987. *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*. London: Routledge.
- McIntosh, Mark. 1998. *Mystical Theology*. London: Wiley.
- Moran, Dermot. 2013. Meister Eckhart in 20th century Philosophy. In *Companion to Meister Eckhart*. Edited by Jeremiah Hackett. Leiden: Brill, pp. 669–98.
- Penelhum, Terence. 1980. Unity and diversity in the interpretation of mysticism. In *Understanding Mysticism*. Edited by Richard Woods. New York: Doubleday.
- Perl, Eric. 1994. Symbol, Sacrament and Hierarchy in St Dionysius the Areopagite. *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 39: 311–56.
- Rahner, Karl. 1971. Christian Living Formerly and Today. In *Theological Investigations V11*. Translated by David Bourke. Freiburg: Herder & Herder.
- Rahner, Karl. 1994. *Spirit in the World*. London: Continuum Edition.
- Rappe, Sara. 2000. *Reading Neoplatonism: Non-Discursive Thinking in the Texts of Plotinus, Proclus and Damascius*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Roemer, Paul. 1993. *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and a Summary of Their Influence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sheldrake, Philip. 1998. *Spirituality and Theology: Christian Living and the Doctrine of God*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd.
- Turner, Denys. 1995. *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Turner, Denys. 2019. Why was Marguerite Porete Burned? In *God, Mystery and Mystification*. Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press Indiana.
- Waaijman, Kees. 2003. Challenges of spirituality in contemporary times. Paper presented at Spirituality Forum 111, Manila, Philippines, August 6.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.