

MAIMONIDES LECTURE ON SCEPTICISM

TUESDAY
31 JANUARY 2023
18:00

Dionysius the Areopagite between Faith and Scepticism: His Reception in the Twentieth Century

Dimitrios A. Vasilakis (Universität Erfurt/University of Ioannina)

The author of the Areopagitic Corpus (ca. sixth century AD) engaged with pagan Neoplatonism and the Christian tradition (which also drew on Hebrew heritage, according to Golitzin). He is famous for systematising the dual path leading to God: kataphatic (positive) and apophatic (negative) theology. Faith (pistis), a Platonic term used by Proclus (fifth century) to describe how we can come into contact with divinity, relates to the apophatic mode: because God transcends us, we may have only pistis for Him, who *stricto sensu* is unknown. Thus, we find scepticism at the top of the system. Gregory Palamas (fourteenth century) developed the Dionysian dialectic of kataphasis-apophasis, employing the distinction between essence and energies. He played a pivotal role in Dionysian hermeneutics, becoming a hallmark of twentieth-century Russian/Greek intellectuals who attempted to release the Eastern Christian tradition from its “Babylonian captivity,” as Florovsky would say. However, Dionysius’s reception was mixed: some thinkers trusted that he was representing genuine orthodoxy (e.g., Lossky and Yannaras), while others were sceptical (Meyendorff, Schmemmann, St Sophrony Sakharov) or neutral (Florovsky and Zizioulas). In his talk, Dimitrios Vasilakis will sketch out this framework, expanding on examples of Dionysius’s reception, on the basis of the kataphasis-apophasis pair.

Dimitrios A. Vasilakis is a research associate in the “Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite’s Reception among Key Thinkers of the 20th Century Orthodox World (Vl. Lossky, Fr. Sophrony, Chr. Yannaras, J. Zizioulas)” DFG project at Universität Erfurt. He has recently been elected and is under appointment as an assistant professor of philosophy of late antiquity and the Middle Ages at the University of Ioannina, Greece.

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