

MICHAEL PSELLUS ON PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

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ABSTRACT. This paper explores the use of the terms *theologia* and *philosophia* in the philosophic opuscula of Michael Psellus, especially those which are dedicated to the Chaldaean Oracles. It begins with a review of previous pagan and Christian usage, the conclusion of which is that Christians rejected the pagan distinction between *theologoi*, as inspired conduits of divine truth, from philosophers who interpreted such revelations under the rubric of *theologia*. For Christians Greek *theologoi* were mere purveyors of myth; *theologia* was not a branch of philosophy but the exposition of truths revealed in scripture. Since the revealers were already theologians, and the interpreters were *theologoi* in their own right, the terms became synonymous when applied to Christian practice. Psellus is on the whole faithful to this tradition, reserving the term *theologia* for Christian teaching in contrast to philosophy, except in one passage that speaks of the "philosophy and theology" of the Chaldaeans. The purpose of this phrase, in which the latter term seems to be epexegetic to the former, is to intimate that even the best theology of the pagans, being ignorant of the biblical revelation, can rise no higher than philosophy.

Keywords: Chaldaean Oracles, Opuscula, philosophy, theology, revelation.

Introduction: a context for our question

What is the relation of Christianity to philosophy? And what, in Christian thought, is the relation between philosophy and theology? There are scholars for whom these are open questions, others for whom they are closed or incoherent, and no consensus, least of all among students of and period of Greek Christian thought, as to whether they are the same question. Historians of mediaeval thought are often vociferous in saying that they work only on philosophy or only on theology. Hard though it might be, on any definition, to winnow one from the other in the first chapters of the *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas himself

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distinguishes truths accessible to reason from those that reason learns from faith. Among both his precursors and his successors were some who held that faith may teach one thing and reason another, in which case reason yields to faith.

Is this what we mean by the difference between theology and philosophy? And if that is so, it is only his method of reasoning that defines the theologian, or the attitude of belief that accompanies this? And should we assume that reasoning with this method or this attitude will always be exchangeable for philosophical reasoning, or are there topics on which the theologian is equipped to speak and philosophy is silent? Certainly one might come to this conclusion after examining the syllabuses in Theology (or as we now say, Theology and Religion) at many British universities, encompassing as they do historical studies (in which providence is fettered by the principles of causality, correlation and analogy), philological studies (in which the Holy Spirit disappears behind a cloud of pseudepigraphy and redaction), studies in the development of doctrine (in which only the worldliest processes of thought can be ascribed to the principal actors) and studies in the nature of religion, for which the tools belong to the secular disciplines of anthropology, sociology and psychology. Oddly enough, it is the handful of scholars who are pursuing the philosophy of religion who are most likely to be men or women of faith, whether we understand by faith a method of reasoning or an attitude of belief.

Our lexical difficulties are illustrated by two contributions to a recent volume on *Eastern Christianity and Late Antique Philosophy*. Resisting this implied dichotomy between Christianity and philosophy, Johannes Zachhuber argues, in both a book and a recent article,² that Christian philosophy in this epoch should be seen as a distinct philosophical school, which stood to the pagan schools, as they stood to each other, in mixed relations of indebtedness, dialogue, enmity and convergence.³ He does not endorse Pierre's Hadot's assertion that for Christians the term 'philosophy' always denoted a way of living rather than a system of thought. This is a claim that Hadot extends (with qualifications) to all philosophical schools of late antiquity,⁴ and it is one that Stoics and

² J. Zachhuber, "Philosophy and Theology in Late Antiquity: Some reflections on Concepts and Terminologies", in E. Anagnostou-Laoutides and K. Parry (eds.), *Eastern Christianity and Late Antique Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill 2020), 52-77; *The Rise of Christian Theology and the End of Ancient Metaphysics: Patristic Philosophy from the Cappadocian Fathers to John of Damascus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2020).

³ Zachhuber, *Rise of Christian Theology*, 2; "Philosophy and Theology", 61, quoting P. Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, trans. M. Chase (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 2004), 240.

⁴ See especially P. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell 1995).

Epicureans made of themselves (in striking contradiction, I would say, to the Peripatetics⁵). While Zachhuber has a strong case against Hadot, he also notes, against his own thesis, that Origen on one occasion seems to differentiate Christianity from philosophy by drawing an analogy between them.⁶ Origen does not equate Christianity with theology in this passage, but Zachhuber himself contrasts theology with philosophy when he says of the latter that it did not ascribe infallibility, as the former did, to the texts that it took as matter for commentary.⁷ He adds that the church as an institution differed from a school in that it made provision for those whose faith was unrefined by knowledge, but this is an observation on the milieu of theology rather than on its character or content as a practice.

Perhaps we could say that for Zachhuber theology (by which he always means in this paper Christian theology) is a species of philosophy which owes its peculiar mental attitudes and demonstrative principles to the extraordinary status of its founder and of the book which recorded his ministry. There is not so much interrogation of the received terminology of scholarship in Dirk Krausmüller's "Theology and Philosophy in the Late Patristic Discourse".⁸ Here the Christian authors who provide his subject-matter are engaged in the distinctively Christian study of Christology, which is clearly a branch of theology whether that term signifies a mental attitude, a demonstrative method or a field of inquiry. The philosophy to which Krausmüller's title alludes is Porphyry's codification of Aristotelian logic, and the object of the paper is to ascertain the 'role' that it 'played' in the exposition of an obscure but mandatory article of belief. Both Zachhuber and Krausmüller have given the foreground to writings and dogmas which are undeniably theological, the only question being whether theology is a rival to philosophy, a branch or mode of philosophy or an enterprise of a different kind altogether. By contrast the protagonist of the present study is a Byzantine author of no repute among historians of theology, who nevertheless has some claim on the interest of historians of philosophy, if only as a witness to the content of ancient philosophical texts which would otherwise be all but lost.

Michael Psellus, born in 1017 or 1018 and probably in Constantinople, combined his monastic orders with both political and academic careers, lecturing with distinction in Greek philosophy while he served his imperial masters as a

⁵ See Philop. in Cat. 5.18-33 Busse, on differing Peripatetic views of the origin of philosophy, and note that the majority of commentaries are on the logical works of Aristotle, while no full commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* survives.

⁶ Zachhuber, "Philosophy and Theology", 69-70, quoting Or. Cels. 3.12.

⁷ Zachhuber, "Philosophy and Theology", 71.

⁸ D. Krausmüller, "Philosophy and Theology in the Late Patristic Discourse: Pure Existence, Qualified Existence and the Arbor Porphyriana", in Anagnostou-Laoutides and Parry, 150-173.

provincial judge, as secretary to the Chancellory and counsellor on political affairs. The most famous of his works is the *Chronographia*, a history spanning the reigns of fourteen Emperors from 976 to the reign of Michael Dukas (1071-1078). It was not this, however, that earned him the title “Chief of the Philosophers”, but the treatises which Duffy and O’Meara have now edited under the title *Philosophica Minora*.⁹ The natural inclination of modern readers is to say that, for all his protestations of orthodoxy, the author of these treatises was not a theologian but a Christian philosopher or a Christian of philosophical sympathies. The fact that this was not his own opinion, that the works of Proclus and the *Chaldaean Oracles* were for him the vehicles of a *theologia* which could be tested against the authoritative teachings of the church, is sufficient warrant for further investigation of his nomenclature, for which I do not pretend to have either the time or the expertise to offer more than a preliminary draft.

Theologos and theologia in classical Greek

In classical Greek the term *theologos* is not applied to the majority of those who are called philosophers. It is typically used of those whose utterances about the gods were couched in a vatic or bardic idiom which offered no proofs and made no use of rational inquiry.¹⁰ Philosophers might be willing to grant the authority of direct inspiration to a prophet, but that does not make the prophet one of their company, as Diogenes Laertius protests when reviewing the claims of Orpheus in the preface to his *Lives of the Philosophers*.¹¹ Parmenides and Empedocles, who argue in verse for convictions which they profess to have imbibed under inspiration, are more often styled philosophers than *theologoi*. Theirs was the last philosophy to be written in verse, except for the *Chaldaean Oracles*, the putative work of two second-century sages, in which the emergence of finite entities from their ineffable Source was represented as a succession of a triads, each recapitulating – first in the order of being, then in the order of life and then in the order of intellect – the emanation of *dunamis* or power from being to take the determinate form of intellect. This was a more schematic system than that of any *theologos*, yet the *Oracles* had in common with the *theologoi* an obscurity of diction which entails that they could lend

⁹ Michael Psellus, *Philosophica Minora*, vol. 1, ed. M. Duffy and D. J. O’Meara (Leipzig: Teubner 1992); vol. 2, ed. D. J. O’Meara (Leipzig: Teubner 1989).

¹⁰ Arist. Metaph. 1000a9 of Hesiod; see further nn. 12 and 16. *Theologos* is used also in inscriptions of those who presided in the mysteries: C. Marksches, *Christian Theology and its Institutions in the Early Roman Empire* (Waco: Baylor University Press 2015), 8-9.

¹¹ He does not style Orpheus a *theologos* at prologue 5, but says that he does not know whether his tales about the gods entitle him to be called a philosopher.

their authority only to those who had the authority to elucidate them. On the other hand, once Plato had added the noun *theologia* to the vocabulary of philosophers, it was apt to denote a “science” rather than a mere “speaking” of gods¹² – that is, it was used not so often of writings that were attributed to *theologoi* as of the application of philosophical tools such as allegory to their ebullitions.¹³

It is not his subject-matter but his mode of communication that distinguishes the *theologos* from the philosopher. Iamblichus undertakes near the beginning of his treatise *On the Mysteries* to address theological matters theologically, theurgic matters theurgically and philosophical matters philosophically.¹⁴ In his *Commentary on the Parmenides*, the Neoplatonist Proclus sometimes reinforces a “philosophical” argument by a “theological one”,¹⁵ which appears to serve as an instrument of persuasion for those who were either less deft in reasoning or less willing to believe without confirmation from above. The *Chaldaean Oracles* and the *Timaeus* of Plato contained, in his view, all that was required for the understanding of the material and the intelligible cosmos (Marinus, *Life of Proclus*). The dialogues of Plato, however, were texts to be

¹² See Pl. R. 597a-b Slijngs, with W. Jaeger, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1947), 4-13, upheld with modifications by G. Naddaf, “Plato’s *Theologia* Revisited”, *Methexis* 9 (1996), 5-18 in response to V. Goldschmidt, *Questions Platoniciennes* (Paris: Vrin 1970), 141-172. Against Jaeger’s conjecture that Plato invented the noun *theologia* see G. Vlastos, “Philosophy and Theology in early Greek Thought”, *Philosophical Quarterly* 2 (1952), 97-123 at 102, n. 22.

¹³ Jaeger, *Theology*, 194 n. 17 cites Arist., *Metaph.* 1009a9, 1071b27, and 1091a34 as instances of his willingness to ascribe *theologia* to poets and mythographers; in all these cases, however, the word that Aristotle employs is *theologos*. At 983b28 Homer and Hesiod are subjects of the verb *theologeîn*. Only at Arist. *Met.* 353a35 does he speak of person other than philosophers who “have been occupied with theology”. While Jaeger declares (p. 5) that Eudemus of Rhodes would not have included his master Aristotle in his *History of Theology*, the true title of this work would seem to have been τῶν περὶ τὸ θεῖον ἱστορία: see G. Betegh, “On Eudemus Fr. 150 (Wehrli)”, in M. I. Bodnár and W. Fortenbaugh (eds), *Eudemus of Rhodes* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers (2002), 337-357.

¹⁴ Iamb., *Myst.* 1.2 des Places in E. des Places (ed.), Jamblique, *Sur les mystères* (Paris: Belles Lettres 1966), 7.2-6. The adverb *theologikôs* does not stand in contrast to any other term at Iamb. *Comm. Math.* 74.4, but at 55.7-8 *Festa theologia* appears to be a preparatory study to *philosophia*.

¹⁵ See Procl. In Parm.184.2-3 Stallbaum at in G. Stallbaum (ed.), *Platonis Parmenides cum quattuor libris prolegomenorum et commentario perpetuo; accedit Procli in Parmenidem Commentarii nunc emendatius editi* (Leipzig: Lehnhold 1839), 722. Cf. Procl. In R. 2.61.2105 Kroll, where *theologikôs* is contrasted with *physikôs*. Eus. PE 1.57.2 Mras in ed. K. Mras, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Hinrichs 1902), 57.2, uses the term *theologia* of a compendious recitation in prose of Phoenician myths attributed to a multitude of *theologoi* whose medium was verse; at 57.13 he contrasts the “physical allegorizing (*tropologiai*)” of this with the literal reading which he understand to be the intended one. Sallust. 4, states that theological myths are distinguished from physical myths in that they represent the gods as they are, i.e. without bodies.

examined, harmonised and rescued from ignorance and detraction; only once the meaning of these had been ascertained and verified could the *Oracles* bestow divine sanction on philosophical texts by which their own theology was elucidated. His commentary on the Oracles is the subject of a recent monograph by Nicola Spanu¹⁶, but if Psellus made any use of it he chose not to avow his debt.

It is not an invariable rule for Proclus that theology is a less rigorous or perspicuous mode of inquiry than philosophy. His own introduction to Platonism, the *Elements of Theology* (which might be more closely rendered *Theological Foundations*), has a title that looks back to the *Theology of Arithmetic* by Nicomachus, and also to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. In the sixth book of this compilation, theology is the most profound of the speculative sciences, whose subject-matter is neither that which is separable but mutable, as in physics, nor that which is immutable but inseparable, as in mathematics, but that which is both inseparable and immutable (*Metaphysics* 1026a5-22). The treatise known as *Metaphysics Lambda*, or Book 12, posits God as the perfect actuality and final cause of all that inhabits the realm of generation and corruption. Even in this text, which many regard as a product of his apprenticeship to Plato, Aristotle shows none of his master's reverence for hereditary wisdom,¹⁷ his terminal echo of Homer (*Metaphysics* 1076a) being as decorative as the comment on the economy of myth which precedes it at 1074b. Homer and Orpheus had no conception of movement, genesis, change and increase as transitions from the potential to the actual, they had not been taught by Plato that it is only a final cause that can explain the action of an efficient cause, and they were consequently unable to see that the order of generation and corruption presupposes a pure actuality, moving all things as the beloved moves the lover. Their writings are at best the raw stuff of philosophy, whereas theology, in the Aristotelian sense, is its coping-stone.

Theologos and theologia in Christianity

Both the inspired *theologos* and the intellectual discipline of *theologia* find a place in early Christian parlance. The ascription of the Book of Revelation to *Iôannês ho theologos*, 'John the Divine', puts the biblical seer on all fours with the poets who received their song from the muses as he received his vision in the Spirit. On the other hand, when the nominal adjective *theologikê* is applied by Evagrius Ponticus to the third and crowning stage of monastic holiness, it does not denote some momentary insufflation of divine knowledge but the

¹⁶ Nicola Spanu, *Proclus on the Chaldaean Oracles* (London: Routledge 2020).

¹⁷ He applies the word *theologos* to Orpheus at Arist. *Metaph* 1071b.

permanent result of a protracted war with the flesh, the first stage of which is *praktikê*, the extinction of selfish appetites and the second *phusikê*, the holistic understanding of the natural order. The science named *theologikê* is not doctrinal erudition but direct and abiding knowledge of God as an object of love,¹⁸ corresponding to *theôrikê* in Origen's division of philosophy into the ethical, the physical and the theoric, also styled in certain manuscripts the epoptic or enoptic.¹⁹ Origen hints that this is a Greek taxonomy, pre-empted by and perhaps derived from Solomon; but in fact there is no obvious precedent, whether or not we add logic as a fourth branch, and it may be that he has conflated the Stoic division of philosophy into ethics, physics and logic with Aristotle's triad of mathematics, physics and theology.²⁰ Although it is only Gregory of Nyssa who expressly derives the word *theos* by metonymy from *theatês*, "observer", Origen's younger contemporary Plotinus had already juxtaposed these words in a passage that suggests the same etymology.²¹ It may be that Evagrius, rather than superimposing Gregory on Origen by substituting theology for theorics, is drawing out explicitly what Origen chose, in a manner not wholly strange to Aristotle, to encode in the language of the mysteries.²²

It is after all in the mysteries, or at least in the philosophic appropriations which are almost all that we know of them, that the inspired *theologos* and the rational theologian become one. Moses, according to Philo, is accredited as a *theologos* by a series of visions, commencing with the burning Bush and culminating in the occluded spectacle of divine glory on Mount Sinai (Philo, *Life of Moses* 2.115). At the same time, Moses is the author of the clearest and most perfect code of laws that has been vouchsafed to any nation, in which any apparent blemishes or obscurities are ciphers of higher truths which are intelligible only to philosophers like himself. It is those who keep this law with the utmost rigour

¹⁸ See *Praktikos* 1 and 84, with the prologue to this work (8), in the online text of ldysinger.com/Evagrius/01_Prak/00a_start.htm. For the three *logoi* (physical, ethical, theological) see also Iamb. Iamblichus, in Nic. 125.20-22 Klein in ed. U. Klein (Leipzig: Teubner 1894).

¹⁹ *Enoptikê* is the Greek term which is translated by Rufinus as *inspective* in the proem to the *Commentary on the Songs of Songs* as edited by W. P. Baehrens, *Origenes: Werke Band VIII: Homilien zu Samuel 1, zum Hohelied und zur Propheten, Kommentar zum Hohelied in Rufins und Hieronymus' Übersetzung* (Leipzig: Hinrichs 1925), 75.8. Both *epoptikê* and *theorikê*, however, appear in the apparatus criticus, and these have the advantage of being known Greek words.

²⁰ Cf Origen, *loc. cit.*, 75.10. On the divisions of philosophy in Greek thought see P. Hadot, "La division des parties de la philosophie dans l'Antiquité", *Museum Helveticum* 36 (1979), 201-223; M. J. Edwards, "Precursors of Origen's Hermeneutic Theory", *Studia Patristica* 29 (1993), 232-237.

²¹ F. Müller (ed.), *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* 3.1 (Leiden: Brill 1958), 44; Plot. 5.1.6 Henry Schwyzer.

²² See M. J. Edwards, *Origen against Plato* (Aldershot: Ashgate 2002), 140. On Aristotle see Synes., *Dion.* 8.

who are best fitted to enter the presence of God in corybantic ecstasy.²³ As Philo clothes his own piety in the imagery of Greek initiation, assuming Moses to have been conversant with the Stoic and Platonic doctrines that inform his own exegesis, so the Neoplatonists strive to bring the rhapsodic and mythological elements of Plato into a system more comprehensive and no less rational than that of Aristotle. In Porphyry the *theologos* is one whose teaching takes the form of discursive exposition yet flows from direct commerce with the ineffable.²⁴ Among Christians it was this fusion of the intuitive and the discursive that caused Gregory Nazianzen to be known habitually as the *theologos*, a higher accolade than the epithet *theios*, which was given to the most illustrious doctors of both the church and the Academy. No doubt the designation of the apostle as a *theologos* has the same force in Origen's *Commentary on the Fourth Gospel*, whether or not he believed that this work and the Book of Revelation had been written by the same John.

So far I have dwelt on the analogies between Christian and pagan uses of the terms *theologos* and *theologia*. Christians, however, were set apart from pagans (in their own minds at least) by a stringent monotheism, and it is not surprising that in certain contexts *theologia* came to signify 'true theology, our theology' in contrast to the more generic practice of philosophy. Talk of God was not merely a variety but the antithesis, of the impious 'talk of gods' which derived its charter from the *theologoi* of classical antiquity; even the *theologia* which purported to be the summit of philosophy was not the Christian discipline, so long as its foundation was, as Origen put it, the practice of analysis, analogy and synthesis, as if God could be discovered without his own consent by perseverance in ratiocination. As the study of the one God in accordance with his own self-disclosure, *theologia* comes to mean the doctrine of the Trinity, of the divine as known by scriptural revelation, in contrast to the economy, the manifestation of God in history and the natural realm. In this acceptation *theologia* is not so much the highest exercise of, but a higher exercise than, philosophy; reason cannot complement revelation as a source of knowledge about the nature of God, and when the question is simply 'what is to be believed' there is no philosophical alternative to the theological method of inquiry.

Philosophy, in its quotidian sense, was of service in the elucidation, not in the proof of dogma. It was not this legitimate use of it that Tertullian meant to exclude when he exclaimed "what has Athens to do with Jerusalem?"²⁵; what he does mean to exclude we can ascertain by contrasting his treatises on the

²³ For passages on ecstasy see H. Lewy, *Sobria Ebrietas* (Giessen: Töpelmann 1929).

²⁴ Porph. abst. 4.16.5 (possibly alluding to Orpheus; Porph. *Antr.* 15 (followed by quotation of Orpheus), 22 and 29. At Porph. *Marc.* 15 *theologia* is once again the highest discipline of philosophy.

²⁵ *Indictment of Heretics* 7.

divinity of Christ with his apologetic defence of monotheism or his treatise in the corporeality of the human soul.²⁶ In the latter work, which fell under the category of physics in ancient divisions of philosophy, he appeals to the Stoics and the medical writers as readily as to scripture, just as he assumes that he can enlist the support of every honest pagan in his satires on idolatry. By contrast, the study of God is its own domain with its own laws of accreditation: we are bound on divine authority to believe what we would not believe without it, even if it teaches us that the God who is one is also three or that the Word can become a human being and yet remain the incorporeal Word.

Psellus on *theologia* and the Neoplatonists²⁷

It would seldom, if ever be safe to infer from his use of *theologia* and its cognates that Psellus allotted different domains to theology and philosophy or that he held theology to be a Christian preserve. He never implies that the true *theologos* owes his knowledge to revelation rather than to his ratiocinative faculties: when expounding the myth of the *Phaedrus*, he assumes that even when he descends to particulars he is speaking for other *theologoi* beside Plato, by whom he appears to mean other interpreters of classic tales about the gods.²⁸ Here Psellus makes it clear that he is reporting, not espousing, a pagan conceit; elsewhere he commends Gregory Nazianzen as “our *theologos*”, who unites reason with *theôria*,²⁹ with no implication either that *theôria* is theology in contradistinction to reason, or that the *Chaldaean Oracles* bear comparison with Gregory when they supplement reason with *hulikai teletai*, ‘material rites’.³⁰ Another passage characterizes the task of the *theologos* as the exposition of God’s providential governance,³¹ and once again Psellus plainly has in mind

²⁶ See J. H. Waszink (ed.), *Tertullian’s De Anima* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff 1947). The dictum *credibile est, quia ineptum est, certum est, quia impossibile* (*De Carne Christi* 5.4) is the conclusion of a rational argument based on God’s ability to transcend contradiction, not a despairing ejaculation of the “will to believe”.

²⁷ Throughout this discussion, pagination will be from *Philosophica Minora*, vol. 2, where the most precise mode of reference is by page and line. Where the footnotes provide ancillary information from vol. 1, reference is by Opusculum and line, as in the index to that volume.

²⁸ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.7.12.22 O’Meara: “Explanation of the Charioteering of Souls and the Army of the Gods in Plato’s *Phaedrus*”.

²⁹ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.38.132.7 O’Meara “Exegesis of the Chaldaean Sayings” on which see further below. Cf Psell. *Phil. Min.* 1.6.65 Duffy for Gregory as *theologos*, with Psell. *Phil. Min.* 1.6.21 and 6.66–67 Duffy on his proficiency in *theologia*.

³⁰ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.132.12 O’Meara.

³¹ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.44.156.6–7 O’Meara. “That Events are not changed by God’s Foreknowledge of them”.

such men as himself, not the ancient rhapsodes. The adjective *theologikê* occurs in the title of Proclus' *Elements of Theology* (*Stoicheiosis Theologikê*) at the end of a short dissertation on the nature of mind, which Psellus professes to draw from this source without any warning that the doctrine is not his own.³² In a preface to another short treatise the scope of *theologia* is coterminous with the doctrine of the Trinity,³³ yet the title is 'On Theology and the Judgment of the Greeks', and the two exponents of this are Proclus and Porphyry, neither of whom is found to be free from error. Less homologous with Christianity as a system, however neatly the two may coincide in certain particulars, is the "theology and philosophy of the Chaldaeans",³⁴ yet the all-but-synonymous usage of these terms suggests that neither is in itself pejorative.

The treatise *On Theology* commences with a disclaimer of any intent to prove what needs no proof, "our theological dogma of the consubstantiality of the Trinity".³⁵ There is none the less, Psellus continues, 'a discourse of the wise among the Greeks which is profitable to the demonstration of theology concurring in no small degree with our discourse on the Son's unity with and distinction from the Father, a unity which does not efface the distinction and a distinction which does not undo the unity'.³⁶ The first specimen of this is the dictum of Proclus that "everything which is caused remains in its cause, proceeding from it and reverting to it."³⁷ Psellus goes on to paraphrase the arguments by which the Athenian Platonist establishes this thesis.³⁸

If the effect remained in the cause without proceeding from it, the difference between the cause and its effect which the very notion of causality implies would not obtain. If it proceeded and did not remain, the two would be utterly severed, and the mutual implication, which is equally intrinsic to the notion of causality, would be lost. If it remained and proceeded but did not return, how are we to account for the thirst of every individuated thing for the One and the Good? If it proceeded and returned but did not remain, we should have to explain why after its procession it should manifest a desire to be one with its cause which had not been present from the beginning. If it remained and returned but did not proceed, the very notion of a return would be nonsensical,

³² Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.10.21.22 O'Meara: "On Intellect".

³³ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.35.117.23 O'Meara.

³⁴ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.40.151.14 O'Meara. "Outline Recapitulation of the Ancient Doctrines of the Chaldaeans".

³⁵ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.117.24 O'Meara.

³⁶ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.117.26-118.4 O'Meara.

³⁷ Procl. ET 35, p. 38.9-10 Dodds, cited at 118.4-5. E. R. Dodds, Proclus: The Elements of Theology (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1963), 221 comments: "The triad immanence-procession-reversion had a considerable history. Ps-Dionysius applies it to the Divine Love (Dion. Ar. DN 4.14), Psellus to the Christian Trinity".

³⁸ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.118.5-23 O'Meara.

as there would have been no antecedent differentiation. Thus the conclusion must be that the effect remains in the cause while proceeding from and reverting to it - a teaching strikingly congruent with the church's belief that the 'only-begotten Word proceeds from the Father timelessly and incorporeally, remaining in the Father and reverting to its progenitor, no division of the Godhead being entailed when he proceeds, no separation when he returns, and no confusion of hypostatic determination when he remains'.³⁹

The language, in all its turgidity, is that of Dionysius the Areopagite, whom Psellus has already echoed in his proviso that the distinction of persons is not effaced by their unity nor their unity undone by their distinctness.⁴⁰ He now appeals openly to the Areopagite⁴¹ in support of another cardinal proposition from the *Elements of Theology*, that "whatever exists undergoes reversion either ontically only, or vitally, or gnostically".⁴² He explains that the existent has as its cause "either being alone, or life with being or also a gnostic power from that source",⁴³ and that its ontic, vital or gnostic mode of procession is reflected in its ontic, vital or gnostic mode of reversion.⁴⁴ He does not explain how this proposition elucidates the doctrine of the Trinity, for he does not follow Porphyry's Latin disciple Marius Victorinus in his correlation of being with the Father, life with the Son and intellect with the Spirit.⁴⁵ Nor does he remark that in Proclus the three terms form a descending hierarchy, the scope of intellect being inferior to that of life and the scope of life inferior to that of being.⁴⁶

In Dionysius, the three are neither ranked nor correlated with the Trinity. As in the first citation from Proclus, Psellus also maintains a politic silence with regard to his maxim that in a procession that which is always more perfect

³⁹ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.118.19-23 O'Meara.

⁴⁰ Dion. Ar. CH 120b-121b. At Psell. *Phil. Min.* 1.118.2-4 O'Meara cites Dion Ar. DN 3.4., pp. 126.3-127.12 in the B.R. Suchla (ed.), *Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita. De Divinis Nominibus* (Berlin: De Gruyter 1990).

⁴¹ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.35.119.1 O'Meara cite Dion. Ar. DN 1.5, pp. 117-15-118.1 and 4.4, p. 148.15-17 Suchla.

⁴² Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.35, 118.24-25 O'Meara, citing Procl. ET 39, p. 40.27-28 Dodds. Compare Nic. Methon. In Procl. 64 Voemel, in J. Th. Voemel (Frankfurt: Brünner 1825), 64, who's pronounces the implied equation of being, life and intellect with the first principle to be in accord with Christian teaching, and thus in contradiction to those who subordinate intellect to life, life to being and being to the One.

⁴³ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.118.26-27 O'Meara

⁴⁴ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.118.28-29 O'Meara

⁴⁵ See P. Henry, "The *Adversus Arium* of Marius Victorinus, The First Systematic Exposition of the Doctrine of the Trinity", *Journal of Theological Studies* 1 (1950), 42-55.

⁴⁶ Procl. ET 101, p. 90.17-19 Dodds. For a possible correlation with Origen's doctrine of the Trinity see J. M. Dillon, "Logos and Trinity: Patterns of Platonist Influence on Early Christianity", in G. Vesey (ed.), *The Philosophy of Early Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989), 1-14.

than that which is second.⁴⁷ Had he taken note of this, he would have been bound to confess that in Proclus the aspiration of the effect to union with the cause is always rooted in its need to supply its deficiency, and that *erôs* or love is understood by Platonists as desire arising from lack, with the corollary that the object of love will always be superior to its subject and that love expires when its object is attained. It need hardly be said that no orthodox theology of the Trinity can be based on such assumptions, which, however they may be qualified in other works by Proclus, are ubiquitous in the *Elements of Theology*. For all his legerdemain, it is not the intention of Psellus to demonstrate a perfect congruence between the system of Proclus and that of the church. Commenting on the assertion that whatever participates separably in its cause is united to it by an inseparable *dunamis* or power, he declares that this agrees only in part with “our doctrinal precepts”.⁴⁸

On the one hand, we may agree that the soul is prepared by an eternal illumination for its participation in reason; on the other hand, Christians know nothing of intermediaries between body and soul, of inseparable entelechies, of a plurality of natural hypostases in the body, of opinionative or appetitive lives, or of a discrete hypostases for the irrational soul.⁴⁹ The aim of Psellus is evidently to defend the Christian doctrine of resurrection, with the associated postulate of a temporary divorce of soul and body in the intermediate state. He does not say in detail where he has found the tenets that he rejects, or why he thinks each of them irreconcilable with the truth that the Church proclaims.

Equally inconsistent with the faith, and therefore false, is the Neoplatonic postulation of two antecedent principles, limit and limitlessness or finitude and infinitude, as objects of participation for that which is finite or infinite.⁵⁰ The finite and the infinite we know, retorts Psellus, but not these two abstractions:⁵¹ by this his Byzantine readers would understand that God alone is the infinite being, to whom nothing is anterior, and whose will alone is the cause of all finite being, including its material substrate.

The next comment by Psellus is of particular interest, since it affirms that certain positions that can be taken by philosophers which are not so much

⁴⁷ Procl. ET 36, p. 38.30-32 Dodds.

⁴⁸ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.35, 119.4-7 O'Meara, citing Procl. ET 81, p. 76.12-13 Dodds. Nic. Methon., p. 108 Voemel argues that, rather than fall into the absurdity of saying that the imparticipable is participated in its *dunamis*, we should say that the *dunamis* is participated while the imparticipable remains aloof.

⁴⁹ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.119.9-12 O'Meara

⁵⁰ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.35, 119.15-16 O'Meara, citing Procl. ET 90, p. 82.7-8 Dodds: “Prior to all that is constituted by limit and limitlessness are the self-existent primary Limit and primary Limitlessness (*apeiria*).”

⁵¹ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.119.16-20 O'Meara.

true or false as incommensurable with the deliverances of faith. The aphorism of Proclus⁵² that “all things are in all, but in each in the way proper to it, so that being is present in life and intellect, life in intellect and being, and intellect in being and life” falls into this category of teachings which received as philosophical concepts.⁵³ We are not told whether this description excludes it from the domain of pagan theology, and we therefore cannot be certain whether Psellus is drawing a contrast between philosophy and theology in general, or rather between philosophy and the theology of the Church. The latter is more probable, for we have already seen (and will have occasion to notice again) that philosophy and theology are coterminous in the *Chaldaean Oracles*. A third interpretation, that Psellus is comparing pagan philosophy to its disadvantage with Christian philosophy, would seem to be untenable for at least three reasons: firstly because it was in his power to say so if that was his meaning, secondly because he never attaches the word “philosophy” or its cognates to Christian authors or their opinions, and thirdly because if there were a Christian philosophy, that of the pagans would not be incommensurable but a mixture of true and false.

Hellenism and Heresy

Error in Psellus is not the result of thinking philosophically but of thinking “Hellenically”.⁵⁴ In Jewish and primitive Christian usage the Greek was an idolaters and a polytheists, but from the third century pagans and Christians alike had agreed to use the term to represent those forms of thought and life that were native to the Greek tradition, in contradistinction to those which boasted of their barbarian ancestry. The Greek thought that Psellus repudiates as a Christian in this treatise is the positing of a universal soul and a universal intellect, of which particular souls and intellects are parts or instantiations.⁵⁵

This is a Neoplatonic position, and it no doubt with design that Psellus proceeds to quote a series of aphorisms derived not from the *Elements of Theology* but from the *Sentences* (or more accurately, *Launching-Points*) of Porphyry, a notorious enemy of the Christian faith who had declared it to be less consonant with the law than the way of the Greeks. The first, which alleges that every effect is inferior to that which generates it,⁵⁶ is pronounced to be at the root of the Arian heresy, according to which the Son is both subordinate and

⁵² Procl. ET p. 92, 13-16 Dodds.

⁵³ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.119.23 O'Meara.

⁵⁴ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.35.120.1 O'Meara.

⁵⁵ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.35.119.26-30 O'Meara, citing Procl. ET 108, p. 96.23-28 Dodds.

⁵⁶ Porph. *Sent.* 13, p. 5.10 Lamberz in Lamberz (Leipzig: Teubner 1975), cited at Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.35, 3-4 O'Meara. As I noted, Psellus could have denounced the same error in Proclus.

posterior to the Father. The association is warranted both by Constantine's denunciation of Arius as a Porphyrian and by Porphyry's animadversions on the doctrine of the Logos which are cited by a number of Byzantine authors.⁵⁷

On the other hand, Psellus applauds the saying that that which is higher than *nous* or intellect cannot be apprehended by *noesis* (intellection), but only in a mode that negates and surpasses intellection, to which Porphyry had given the name *anoêsia*.⁵⁸ Origen had pre-empted Plotinus and Porphyry in declaring the One whom Plato had set above being to be also above the intellect,⁵⁹ but it was Dionysius who had canonised agnosia, the negation and transcendence of thought and knowledge, as the closest approximation to God of which we are capable of revelation.

Finally Psellus endorses the more abstruse proposition that that which is partless and free of multiplicity cannot be participated in its essence, but only in a multiplied and partible aspect, and that when this occurs it communicates to the participant its own partlessness and freedom from multiplicity.⁶⁰ The last citation from Porphyry is his dictum that souls are neither confounded with one another nor set apart by clear boundaries.⁶¹ The first claim is true, comments Psellus, the second false:⁶² his final verdict, therefore, is that while there is a little that may edify a Christian "in the Hellenes", there is much more that is liable to corrupt.⁶³ He asserts in another treatise that they possessed a certain theology, which was frequently unintelligible because it gave a verbal dress to ineffable conceptions⁶⁴. The truths that they conveyed at times in riddles and at times under feigned personae included the unity of the first principle and the history of Adam, Eve and their progeny as far as God's election of the Hebrews⁶⁵; loftier matters, however, they communicated in symbols and obscurely, and they did not comprehend the theology of the trinity or the true destiny of the soul⁶⁶.

⁵⁷ See further M.J. Edwards, "Why did Constantine Label Arius a Porphyrian?", *L'Antiquité Classique* 82 (2013), 239-247.

⁵⁸ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.35.120.5-7 O'Meara, citing Porphyry, *Sententiae* 25, p. 15.1-2 Lamberz.

⁵⁹ Or. Cels. 7.38; see further J. Whittaker, "Epekeina nou kai ousias", *Vigiliae Christianae* 23 (1969), 91-104.

⁶⁰ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.35.120.8-14 O'Meara, with reference to Porph. *Sent.* 33, 34 and 36, pp. 36-41 Lamberz.

⁶¹ Porph., *Sent.* 37, p. 43.4-5 Lamberz, cited at Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.35.120.15-16 O'Meara.

⁶² Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.120.17-19 O'Meara.

⁶³ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.120.19-21 O'Meara Cf. Psell. *Phil. Min.* 1.3.130 Duffy, where the Chaldaean are said to "assert many theological absurdities", or literally to "theologize many absurdities".

⁶⁴ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 1.3.127-129 Duffy.

⁶⁵ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 1.3.171-179 Duffy.

⁶⁶ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 1.3.179-181; 168; 183-185 Duffy. At Psell. *Phil. Min.* 1.3.228 Duffy, *theologia* and *oikonomia* are complementary. Whereas he writes "theology in the Trinity" at Psell. *Phil. Min.* 1.3.168 Duffy, we find "our Trinitarian theology" at Psell. *Phil. Min.* 1.36.64 Duffy.

The Theology and Philosophy of the Chaldaeans⁶⁷

Psellus is a reporter, not an inventor, and we may be glad that the longest of his philosophic is built around excerpts from an ancient text which is known to us otherwise only through sparse and desultory citations. According to the *Suda*, the Chaldaean *Oracles* were the work of a father and son, Julian the Theurgist and Julian the Chaldaean, who induced some of their contemporaries in the reign of Marcus Aurelius to see them as instruments of the gods.⁶⁸ In fact the earliest datable allusion to the *Oracles* (and one that is still disputed) occurs in the *Enneads* of Plotinus, and it was Porphyry, his pupil, who was the first to base a systematic regimen for the purgation of the soul on their injunctions. In the writings of Iamblichus and Proclus, as in the anonymous *Commentary* on the *Parmenides*, the analysis of the noetic realm as a triad of being, mind and life, is grounded in a pattern of emanation and reversion, constituting a triad of triads, which had been elaborated in the *Oracles* by a fusion of mythological symbolism with the vocabulary of Plato.⁶⁹

Outside the Neoplatonic tradition, antiquity seems to know nothing of the *Oracles*, though Augustine avers in his criticism of Porphyry's treatise *On the Return of the Soul*, that the Chaldaean triad admits of a Christian exegesis which Porphyry had studiously concealed.⁷⁰ The appearance of the triad in Gnostic texts that were known to Porphyry, and again in Marius Victorinus (a Catholic plagiarist from both the Platonists and the Gnostics) suggests that Augustine may not have been wholly wrong.⁷¹ For Psellus, however, the *Oracles* are not a surreptitious revelation of Christian doctrine but a specimen of pagan *theologia* to be sifted for truth by the simple method of testing their doctrines against those of the church. This commentary, like his treatise *On Theology and*

⁶⁷ For a survey of Psellus' writings on the *Oracles* (which does not raise the question addressed in the present paper) see E. Des Places, "Le renouveau platonicien du XI^e siècle: Michel Psellus et les *Oracles Chaldaïques*", *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres* 110.2 (1966), 313-324.

⁶⁸ See the editions of E. Des Places, *Oracles Chaldaïques* (Paris: Belles Lettres 1971); R. Majercik, *The Chaldaean Oracles: Text, Translation and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill 1989). On Julian the Theurgist see further G. Fowden, "Pagan Versions of the Rain-Miracle of A.D. 172", *Historia* 36 (1987), 83-95.

⁶⁹ See further R. Majercik, "The Existence-Life-Intellect Triad in Gnosticism and Neoplatonism", *Classical Quarterly* 42 (1992), 475-488; T. Rasimus, "Porphyry and the Gnostics: Reassessing Pierre Hadot's Thesis in Light of the Second- and Third-Century Sethian Treatises", in J.D. Turner and K. Corrigan (eds), *Plato's Parmenides and its Heritage: Its Reception in Neoplatonic, Jewish and Christian Texts* (2 vols, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature 2010), vol. 1, 81-110.

⁷⁰ See especially City of God 10.23. On the identity of the work cited by Augustine here see J. J. O'Meara, *Porphyry's Philosophy from Oracles in Augustine* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes 1959).

⁷¹ See V. H. Drecoll, "Is Porphyry the Source used by Marius Victorinus?", in Turner and Corrigan, vol. 1, 65-80.

the Judgment of the Greeks, is a catena of annotations to his own excerpts from the pagan text, and this anecdotal structure will be followed here so long as it serves the purpose of our discussion,

O'Meara, p. 126.15: Oracles Fr. 158.2 Des Places. There is also a portion for the shade (eidôlon) in a place surrounded by light. Against the teaching of certain Greeks who assign a sublunar seat to the irrational soul after death, and against that of *Oracles* which grants to this remnant of us a place beyond the moon, Psellus asserts that Gregory of Nyssa speaks for the church when he denies immortality to the irascible and appetitive elements in our nature, which are all that we mean by the term "irrational soul".⁷²

*O'Meara, p. 127. 19: Oracles Fr. 158.1 Des Places. And do not leave the dregs of the soul on the precipice.*⁷³ The Chaldaean exhortation to release the body from its material envelope, in order that it may ascend to an incorporeal, aethereal or celestial sphere is pronounced to be wondrous, sublime and consonant with the biblical accounts of Elijah and Enoch;⁷⁴ Christians understand, however, that this is not a translation to be achieved by willing on our part, but by the divine cremation of our mortal sediment in ineffable fire.

*O'Meara p. 128.18. Drive it not out, lest it take something as it goes out.*⁷⁵ This precept is open to two constructions: either "do not dwell on means of leaving the body, but surrender yourself to divine and angelic powers", or more simply "do not inflict physical death on yourself." This blunt prohibition of suicide, Psellus opines, is more consistent both with the faith and with the teaching of Plato, for even a philosopher belies his vocation when he quits the post assigned to him by providence.⁷⁶ In this unusual case - all the more unusual if O'Meara is right to suggest that Psellus' only source for the oracle is Plotinus⁷⁷ - faith does not so much preclude the acceptance as determine the proper acceptance of this pagan text.

O'Meara, p. 129.17-28: Fr. 107 Des Places. A series of hexameters urging the soul to cultivate piety as the key to paradise, renouncing astronomy and material hecatombs, is carefully expounded but with the caveat that the paradise of the Chaldaeans is not that of Moses, in which the trees stand for virtues, the tree of knowledge for practical discernment of good and evil, and the four rivers for the "generative principles" of the cardinal virtues. This allegory is foreshadowed in an exegesis of Genesis 2 against the Manichaeans by Augustine, who seems

⁷² Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.38.127.19-23 O' Meara, who cites Greg. Nyss, de An. 49b-56a.

⁷³ Psellus appears to have inverted the order of sentences in this excerpt.

⁷⁴ Majercik, *Chaldaean Oracles*, 199-200 notes this as an error by Psellus.

⁷⁵ This appears in Plot. 1.9.1-2 Henry Schwyzer, but not in the edition of *Des Places*.

⁷⁶ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.129.11-16 O'Meara.

⁷⁷ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.128 O'Meara footnote.

no more inclined than Psellus to grant his opponents the right to apply the same trope to their topographic imagery.

O'Meara, p. 131.15-17: Fr. 110 Des Places. Search out the vehicle of the soul ... uniting work with the sacred word. With the coda that this passage contains many precepts that are compatible with the faith and some that that must be anathematized, Psellus turns his attention to a text which enjoins the initiate to "unite work with the sacred word". It is in his comment on this that, as we noted above, he cites Gregory Nazianzen as a *theologos*, drawing a comparison with both Plato and the Chaldaeans which suggests that not every exponent of *theologia* is entitled to this designation:⁷⁸

Our own theologian (*theologos*) Gregory leads the soul to more divine things by speech (*logos*) and contemplation (*theôria*), the speech being of the kind that is most intellectual and powerful on our own plane, while contemplation is an illumination on a plane superior to us. Plato, for his part, holds that the unbegotten essence is apprehensible to us by speech and intellection, while the Chaldaean declares it impossible for us to be led to God unless we fortify the vehicle of the soul with material rites.⁷⁹

Other texts

In most of his subsequent expositions Psellus is content to get at the meaning of the text without passing judgment, though he warns his addressee not to take his decipherment as evidence of assent,⁸⁰ and cannot refrain, after elucidating the attributes of Hecate,⁸¹ from exclaiming that "all this is nonsense".⁸² In the saying that nothing imperfect proceeds from the Father⁸³ he finds a parallel to James 1.17, a text well known in the Byzantine liturgy, which proclaims that every good gift issues from the Father of Lights.⁸⁴

He does not appear to be questioning the theology of the *Oracles* when he writes that "just as the Book of Moses fashions humanity in the image of God, so too the Chaldaean says that the maker and father of the cosmos" - the

⁷⁸ On a possible, and pejorative, allusion to the *Oracles* in Nazianzen see R. Makercik, "A Reminiscence of the 'Chaldaean Oracles' at Gregory of Nazianzus, Or. 2: ΟΙΟΝ ΚΡΑΤΗΡ ΤΙΣ ΥΠΕΠΕΡΡΥΗ", *Vigiliae Christianae* 52 (1998) O'Meara, 286-292.

⁷⁹ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.38.132.12 O'Meara. On the significance of this testimony from Psellus see C. van Liefferinge, *La théurgie des Oracles Chaldaïques à Proclus* (Liège: Kernos supplement, Centre international d'étude de la religion grecque antique 1999), 171.

⁸⁰ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.133.4-6 O'Meara.

⁸¹ Oracle 206 (on the *strophalos*, sacred symbol of Hecate) at Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.38.133.16 O'Meara.

⁸² Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.134.2 O'Meara.

⁸³ Oracle 13 at Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.38.144.3 O'Meara.

⁸⁴ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.144.8-10 O'Meara.

locution in fact is Platonic, not Chaldaean⁸⁵ - "has sown symbolic impressions of his own character in souls".⁸⁶ On the other hand, he reaffirms his conviction that every soul is distinct in form from every other,⁸⁷ and has no tolerance, here or elsewhere, for the notion of a good daemon.⁸⁸ Testing the proclamation that the Father has created the world and entrusted it to the Son against the testimony of Moses,⁸⁹ he retorts that, in the contrary, it was the Son who executed the creation after the idea of it had been imparted to him by the Father.⁹⁰ The biblical authority for this notion would seem 1.3, "Let there be light", which Tatian had construed in the second century as a petition from the First to the Second Person (Origen, *On Prayer* 14). Tatian inferred heretically that the Son is a greater being than the Father, but Psellus invokes (as always) the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity when he urges, against the dictum that the Father has snatched himself away from his creatures,⁹¹ that the Father has been made known to us through his Son, who is rightly characterized in the *Oracles* as his *dunamis* or power.⁹²

Conclusion

We have seen that in classical usage the *theologos* was seldom a theologian, the task of the latter being to give a lucid and philosophical dress to the truths which the former disclosed in a more rugged and cryptic idiom, and generally in verse. It is not surprising to find that this distinction all but vanishes when theology is conceived as the elucidation and application of truths revealed through Moses or the evangelists, for while they, as direct vessels of inspiration they were thought to excel all pagan *theologoi* in truth and eloquence, their medium was not verse but prose,⁹³ and their teachings were more perspicuous than those of the philosophers: it was therefore to be assumed, and indeed became a presupposition of exegesis, that the true (that is, the Christian) interpretation of their own utterances was the one that they had intended and foreseen.

⁸⁵ Pl., *Tim.* 28c Burnet. On Christian knowledge of this text see J. Daniélou, *Message évangélique et culture hellénistique* (Paris: Desclée et Cie 1961), 80-123.

⁸⁶ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.140.11-13 O'Meara.

⁸⁷ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.38.144.25 O'Meara, commenting on Oracle 109 at Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.38.144.14-16 O'Meara.

⁸⁸ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.38.145.9-10 O'Meara, commenting on Oracle 149 at Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.38.144.28-29. Cf. Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.45, On Daemons, Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.45.158-159 O'Meara.

⁸⁹ Oracle 7 at Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.38.139.9-10 O'Meara.

⁹⁰ Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.139.11-17 O'Meara.

⁹¹ Oracle 3 at Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.38.141.13-14 O'Meara.

⁹² Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.141.20-22 O'Meara.

⁹³ So far as I am aware, there was no tendency to grant the word *theologos* to a Christian thinker simply because he wrote verse. Those who use this appellation of Gregory Nazianzen very seldom take one of his poetic lucubrations as a subject for exposition.

Having become coterminous with *theologia*, the appellation *theologos* could be extended to Gregory Nazianzen, as the subtlest and most authoritative of Christian theologians; at the same time, because in the eyes of the church there was only one book with a claim to divine inspiration, *theologia* came for many Christians to signify only that corpus of beliefs about God which God himself had authorised, and in particular the doctrine of the Trinity.⁹⁴ Michael Psellus, a Christian by policy if not by conviction, is willing to employ it in this sense, but also understands by *theologia* that branch of philosophy which had led the best of pagan thinkers to insights not far short of truth, and thereby furnished Christians with tools for the defence and elucidation of the tenets that they already held by faith.

The test of pagan theology was consilience with the teaching of the church, and by this criterion even Proclus and the Chaldaean oracles were found wanting, though it was equally true that Porphyry was found to be not in all respects an enemy of light. The conjunction of the words *theologia* and *philosophia* in a treatise on the *Chaldaean Oracles* may be a hint that they fall short of the scriptures because of their human origin; Psellus was in no sense a despiser of philosophy, but he does not regard the theology of the church as a branch of that discipline and insists that the God whom the church proclaims is superior to intellection. For the Greeks, by contrast *theologia* was a branch of philosophy and hence (in Christian eyes) incapable of grasping the plenitude of that which had been revealed. A corollary of its dependence on philosophy is that questions will sometimes enter such a work as Proclus' *Elements of Theology* which are of no concern to expositors of Christian *theologia*; in such a case, according to Psellus, the church will leave the philosopher to his own judgment, not because it is bound to be false or in its own domain, inconsequential, but because "our theology" offers no criterion by which it can be deemed either false or true.

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⁹⁴ Marksches, *Christian Theology*, 14-17.

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