

THEOPHANY SCHOOL

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Opening speech

The genesis of the “Theophany School” requires a little bit of autobiography so I hope you don't mind if I spend some minutes touching on my scholarly journey. I did my doctorate on Dionysius Areopagitis and I had a horrible time trying to figure him out. So difficult did I find this ancient writer that is, so difficult to put him together, to view him as a whole, to understand his purposes in writing as he did, that it even led to a kind of crisis of faith about two or three years into the project because I was faced with the following problems:

One - the writer was clearly not the Dionysius the Areopagite mentioned in the book of Acts chapter 19 about Saint Paul's rather unsuccessful but missionary adventure on the Areopagus. He's clearly a turn of the sixth-century writer. So we have, first of all, a pseudonym, which means that the writer was a kind of fraud, but then there is the fact that he was received with immense enthusiasm virtually from the first appearance of his writings. He's commented by a Palestinian bishop, John of Scythopolis within twenty years or so of the writings' apparition. He is translated into Syriac within a decade or two. And everywhere he goes in the Christian East, which was where he first appears, whether in Greek-speaking circles, in Syriac-speaking circles, whether in the imperial Church of Constantinople, that is the Chalcedonian circles, whether in non-Chalcedonian circles, whether in so-called Nestorian circles in what's now Iran and Iraq, and then in the Persian empire, everyone thought he was the best thing since sliced bread. When he is later translated into Latin by John Scotus Eriugena he began an extraordinarily successful reception in the Latin-speaking West. So we have the problem of ostensible fraud