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VOLUME I

GOD

The Cambridge Edition of Early Christian Writings provides the definitive anthology of early Christian texts from ca. 100 CE to ca. 650 CE. Its six volumes reflect the cultural, intellectual, and linguistic diversity of early Christianity, and are organized thematically on the topics of God, Practice, Christ, Community, Reading, and Creation. The series expands the pool of source material to include not only Greek and Latin writings, but also Syriac and Coptic texts. Additionally, the series rejects a theologically normative view by juxtaposing texts that were important in antiquity but later deemed "heretical" with orthodox texts. The translations are accompanied by introductions, notes, suggestions for further reading, and scriptural indices. The first volume focuses on early Christian writings about God's nature and unity, and the meaning of faith. It will be an invaluable resource for students and academic researchers in early Christian studies, history of Christianity, theology and religious studies, and late antique Roman history.

ANDREW RADDE-GALLWITZ is Assistant Professor in the Program of Liberal Studies at the University of Notre Dame. His publications include *Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, as well as collaborative translations of works by Athanasius of Alexandria, Didymus the Blind, and Basil of Caesarea.

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SERIES EDITORS

Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *University of Notre Dame*
Mark DelCogliano, *University of St. Thomas*
Ellen Muehlberger, *University of Michigan*
Bradley K. Storin, *Louisiana State University*

The Cambridge Edition of Early Christian Writings offers new translations of a wide range of materials from ca. 100 CE to ca. 650 CE, including many writings that have not previously been accessible in English. The volumes will focus on selected themes and will include translations of works originally written in Greek, Latin, Syriac, and Coptic, together with introductions, notes, bibliographies, and scriptural indices to aid the reader. Taken together they should greatly expand the range of texts available to scholars, students, and all who are interested in this period of Christian thought.

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Andrew Radde-Gallwitz

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Notes on Contributors

Anthony Briggman is Assistant Professor of the History of Early Christianity at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University. He translated the selections of Irenaeus of Lyons's *Against Heresies*.

Matthew Crawford is Research Fellow in the Institute for Religion and Critical Inquiry at the Australian Catholic University. He translated the selection of Ephrem's *Commentary on the Gospel* and that of Cyril of Alexandria's *Five Tomes against Nestorius*.

Mark DelCogliano is Assistant Professor of Theology at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota. He translated the selections of Tertullian's *Against Marcion*, Arius's *Letters*, the Creed of the Council of Nicaea (325), the selections of Eusebius of Caesarea's *On Ecclesiastical Theology*, of Hilary of Poitiers's *On the Trinity*, and of Basil of Caesarea's *Letters*, Ambrose of Milan's *On the Faith* 1, the Creed of the Council of Constantinople (381), Eunomius of Cyzicus's *The Confession of Faith*, and Augustine of Hippo's *Sermon 52*.

Ellen Muehlberger is Associate Professor of Christianity in Late Antiquity in Near Eastern Studies and History at the University of Michigan. She translated *The Gospel of Truth*, Ephrem's *Hymns on the Faith* 40 and 73–75, and John Philoponus's *Fragments on the Trinity*.

Andrew Radde-Gallwitz is Assistant Professor of Liberal Studies at the University of Notre Dame. He translated the selections from Hippolytus's *Against Noetus*, Athanasius's *On the Synods at Ariminum and Seleucia*, Gregory of Nyssa's *On the Holy Spirit against the Macedonian Spirit-Fighters*, Pseudo-Dionysius's *On the Mystical Theology*, and Boethius's *On the Holy Trinity*.

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Msgr. Jeffrey Steenson is Priest Scholar in Residence at the St. Paul Seminary School of Divinity, University of St. Thomas. He translated Basil of Ancyra's *Synodal Letter*.

Bradley K. Storin is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Louisiana State University. He translated Ptolemy's *Letter to Flora*, the selections of Origen's *On First Principles*, and the selections of Gregory of Nazianzus's *Poems*.

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Note on the Texts and Translations

Our translations have been produced in consultation with published editions and, in some cases, with manuscripts. Bibliographical information for the editions used can be found in the Introduction to each translated text. The numeration of each work follows that of the editions from which we have translated. Numbers in the text with no surrounding brackets indicate chapter or paragraph divisions. In the case of texts with subdivisions or multiple numbering systems, the major chapter division is indicated in bold, followed by the subdivision in regular type with a full stop. Where bracketed numbers in bold appear, these indicate page numbers in a printed edition or folio numbers in a manuscript codex.

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Series Introduction

The literary legacy of the early Christians is vast and spans multiple linguistic traditions. Early Christians used the written word in many ways: they sent letters, staged dialogues, reported revelations, gave advice, defended themselves, accused others, preached homilies, wrote histories, sang hymns, hammered out creeds, interpreted texts, and legislated penances – just to list the most common examples. They did these things in Greek, Latin, Syriac, and Coptic; while countless Christians would have used other languages, such as Armenian, these four are the medium of the vast majority of our surviving texts. For each text that has survived, there is a unique story. Some became part of educational curricula for Christians in medieval Byzantium, Basra, and Bologna; some were recited or sung liturgically; some were read in private devotions; some lay at the core of later theological debates such as the European Reformations in the sixteenth century or the Ressourcement movement in twentieth-century Catholicism; some suffered a literary death, being buried in the sands of Egypt only to be discovered again, quite by accident, in the past century. The question of how these works have been received over the centuries is undoubtedly important, but their later interpreters and interpretations ought not to overshadow their original significance and context.

The Cambridge Edition of Early Christian Writings offers a representative sample of this diverse literature in six thematic volumes: *God*, *Practice*, *Christ*, *Creation*, *Community*, and *Reading*. While no series of this kind can be comprehensive, these themes allow the reader to understand early Christianity in its full intellectual, practical, ritual, and communal diversity. The theme and the selection of texts are thoroughly discussed in each volume's respective introduction, but certain principles have guided the construction of all six volumes. Our goal has been neither to narrate the establishment of orthodox or normative Christianity as this has been traditionally understood nor to champion its replacement by another form of Christianity. Instead, we have opted to let each text speak with its own historical voice and authority, while aiming to expand the number and range

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of early Christian texts available to English speakers. Because of this, many of these texts are translated into English here for the first time, while all others have been translated anew. We have combined magisterial works with neglected ones in order to show the diversity and interconnectedness of Christianity in its formative period. We are neither reproducing a canon of classics nor creating a new one. We make no claims that the included works are aesthetically or intellectually superior to other texts we have excluded. Some well-known classics have been omitted for simply that reason: they are readily accessible and widely read. Others are too lengthy and do not bear excerpting well. In some cases, we have judged that attention to a single work by an author has led to an unfortunate neglect of other works of equal or greater value by the same author. In such cases, we are taking the opportunity to cast our spotlight on the latter. In sum, by no means have we felt constrained by previous lists of "must-reads" in our own selections.

We have sought to produce translations that are literal – faithful to the original language's meaning and, when possible, syntax. If a meaningful term appears in the original language, we have aimed to capture it in the translation. At the same time, we have aimed to produce intelligible and attractive English prose. At times the two goals have conflicted and prudential judgments have been made; as part of a team of translators, we are fortunate that we have not had to make such decisions alone. Every translation that appears in our volumes has gone through a rigorous multi-stage editorial process to ensure accuracy as well as readability. We hope that this painstaking collaborative process ensures the reliability and consistency of our translations. As a team, we have come to see the value – and indeed the necessity – of such collaborative work for the academic study of early Christianity's rich library of texts.

Andrew Radde-Gallwitz
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Introduction

What did monotheism mean for early Christians? When Paul tackled the issue of whether followers of Christ could in good conscience eat meat sacrificed to images of pagan gods, he conceded that "there are many gods and many lords." Yet, he immediately pivoted: "But for us there is one God, the Father from whom are all things . . . and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things."[1] "One God," but also "one Lord"; "one God," but also "many gods and many lords." Paul's reasoning ought to signal that belief in a single, unique God was perhaps more complicated than it might seem to us today.

While the affirmation that God is one might appear stark and simple, exploring this conviction led to some of the most beautiful, most influential, and most intellectually exacting writing of the early Christian world. Christians wrestled with the meaning of their faith in various literary forms: creeds, homilies, letters, poems, hymns, and polemical treatises. This volume presents a wide selection of this literature as an aid for those interested in how Christians applied their intellectual and literary talents to the problems centering on God's nature and unity. The documents collected here were written ca. 150–570. The following outline is meant to guide the reader by setting context for the readings presented in this volume and drawing connections among them. Specific introductions are provided for each text at the heading of each translation. What appears here is necessarily condensed; for fuller surveys of the early Christian doctrine of God, see the Suggestions for Further Reading at the end of the volume.

No anthology on such a vast topic can cover everything, and the selections here will not satisfy all readers. The aim has been to include a representative sampling of various traditions of thought, broad enough to give the reader a sense of important debates and approaches, yet focused enough that the texts can "talk to" each other. The reader will encounter authors both well known (the towering Augustine of Hippo, for instance)

1 1 Cor 8:5–6.

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and more obscure (the fourth-century Basil of Ancyra, or the sixth-century John Philoponus) in a shared conversation. In one case – Athanasius's *On the Synods* – a text has been chosen both because of its intrinsic theological interest and because it cites many important documents. Some famous texts appear here in excerpted form: Irenaeus's *Against Heresies* and Origen's *On First Principles*. In most cases, however, we have presented texts in their entirety (though instructors using this volume in a classroom will of course make selections in accordance with their needs). In cases where excerpts of a text are presented, the implicit suggestion from the editor is that the entire text is relevant to the volume's topic, even though it was impracticable to present the work in its entirety in this volume. We have not aimed to pick out short sections on our theme from large works on other topics.

The works selected cover over four hundred years. This wide span can be divided into three periods: from ca. 150–300, 300–400, and 400–ca. 570. Here, then, is a selective overview of the three sections of the volume.

PART I: THE EMERGENCE OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY (CA. 150–300)

We hear of "teachers" within Christian communities from the faith's earliest documents. It is often hard to tell what these people taught and what form their instruction took. In the mid-second century, however, there was a sudden explosion of teaching literature. Figures such as Marcion of Sinope, Valentinus, Ptolemy, and Justin Martyr – Greek-speaking Christians in the city of Rome – produced writings that contained speculation about the unity and nature of God. For instance, Marcion, writing probably in the 140s, reasoned that there is a fundamental contradiction between the Creator and Law-Giver of Jewish scripture and God as proclaimed by Jesus Christ. Marcion's ideas produced a strong reaction. His opponents read him as advocating a new God, and anti-Marcionite writings emerged from a diverse range of figures such as Justin and Ptolemy in Rome, Irenaeus in Lyons, and Tertullian in Carthage. Despite important differences among these thinkers, they perceived a problem with contrasting the God of the Law and the God of Jesus Christ.

These anti-Marcionite writings set the tone for subsequent tradition. Biblical interpretation and theological reflection became inextricably linked. Hence Ptolemy's *Letter to Flora*, for instance, begins with a technical division of parts of the Mosaic Law and then proceeds to the topic

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of the divine and human author(s) of these parts, which in turn provokes a discussion of the divine attributes. (It must be admitted that Ptolemy's text does not respond to Marcion by name, even though it reacts against a position that some scholars have identified with Marcion). Ptolemy, Justin, Tertullian, and others share a Graeco-Roman educational culture in which teachers were masters of texts. The influence of classical *paideia* on Christianity can be seen in the rhetorical and philosophical sophistication that marks the texts in this volume.

At the same time as offering a different reading of the scriptures, Marcion's opponents were forced to offer alternative conceptions of the nature and unity of God. It is unclear exactly what Marcion thought on many points – distinguishing his theology from the polemical distortions of his opponents is a difficult task. He is often accused of thinking of the Creator God as stern and jealous, at best just and at worst cruel and wicked. By contrast, the God proclaimed by Jesus, Marcion reasoned, is loving, forgiving, and benevolent. Anti-Marcionite authors developed sophisticated accounts of the unity of God's goodness and justice. They also introduced certain technical and highly influential ideas such as unbegottenness or ingeneracy (which denies that God came into being in any way), immutability (which denies that God changes), simplicity (which denies that God is composed of parts), and eternity (which denies any kind of temporal sequence, even an everlasting one, in God). There were various ways of handling these concepts, but beginning in the second century they become the stock in trade of early Christian writing about God. Again, we must bear in mind that Christians were writing within a broader culture. It is no coincidence that the dominant philosophical school at this time was Platonism, whose teachers also endorsed divine immutability, simplicity, and eternity. Yet, while the influence of Platonism on many of the authors in the volume is unambiguous, Christians used Platonist theology selectively and furtively, adapting it to their own ends with little or no comment on their philosophical sources.

Valentinus and his disciple Ptolemy were perhaps more influential than Marcion himself. The Valentinian school made many notable contributions. They most likely offered the first commentaries on the texts modern Christians know as the New Testament, as well as developing their own accounts of the origin of the world. It used to be that scholars knew these accounts only through hostile witnesses, but, thanks to the discovery of the library at Nag Hammadi in Egypt in 1945, we have access to many primary

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sources, albeit in Coptic translations of Greek originals. One such text is the *Gospel of Truth*, a document of Valentinian origin, which reveals the tragic origins of the material cosmos in a divine error as well as the role of Jesus Christ as revealer of the "Father of the entirety."

Around 180, Irenaeus of Lyons condemned such speculation in a five-volume work *Against Heresies*, inaugurating a long tradition of combative heresiological literature. Irenaeus's literary motif would provide a model for subsequent authors to follow: he first cited or paraphrased his opponents' views, with the aim of exposing what he perceived to be their error to all readers, and then proceeded to refute them, point by point. For Irenaeus, the Valentinians were mystifying what was plain: like Marcion, who had posited a God "beyond" the Creator, the Valentinians were guilty of inventing a whole group of divine beings, the so-called "Pleroma" or "entirety." Hence, in Irenaeus's eyes, they obscured the very thing they wished to promote: the redemptive and revealing work of Jesus Christ.

Irenaeus measured doctrinal claims against what he called the "rule of faith" or "rule of truth" – a short summary of Christian belief meant to function as a norm for doctrinal speculation and the interpretation of scripture. It was not an absolutely fixed document (its precise wording varies even within Irenaeus's *Against Heresies*), but like Paul's "one God, one Lord" formula, it provided a baseline from which further inquiry could proceed. The rule affirmed, most basically, the unity of God, the Creator, and the unity of Jesus Christ, the Son of God who appeared to fulfill the divine economy in his incarnation, death, and resurrection. Subsequent authors such as Tertullian and Origen cite their own versions of the rule of faith in their doctrinal works.

Naturally, simply citing such a standard did not establish doctrinal uniformity. One group known to scholarship as the Monarchians emerged in the late second century, placing the emphasis on the unity of God. To them, the Father and the Son were really just the same – as Jesus proclaimed, "I and the Father, we are one."[2] There could not be a stronger response to the Marcionite and Valentinian tendency to separate Jesus from the Creator, but the idea of *equating* Father and Son went too far for many. Hippolytus, for instance, agreed with the Monarchians that the Son or Word of God is always active in the world, but, Hippolytus argues, the Word of God is messenger and mediator of the Father, not the Father himself. For Hippolytus,

2 Jn 10:30.

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there was a harmony between the two, but it was to him crucial that people see that they are distinct persons (*prosōpa*), or else one must maintain that Jesus prayed to himself or that the Creator died on the cross – which are absurdities for Hippolytus.

In the period before Constantine, no Christian writer was more prolific than Origen, who was active in Alexandria before moving to Caesarea in Palestine as a result of a dispute with his bishop, where he served as a teacher in the church until his death around 255. Among his achievements was to pen *On First Principles*, a point-by-point treatment of the contents of what Origen calls the "ecclesiastical proclamation" – in some ways a fuller version of the rule of faith. Here Origen addresses the incorporeal nature of God as well as the relation of the Son and Spirit to the Father. He addressed such questions by working in detail through scriptural imagery – for instance, of the Son as the "Wisdom" of God or the "image" of the Father. This method of scrutinizing biblical texts for their doctrinal implications would profoundly influence fourth-century theologians of all parties during the controversies that would emerge after Constantine's conversion to Christianity.

PART II: CREEDS AND CONTROVERSIES (300–400)

Circumstances changed greatly for Christians in the fourth century. In the wake of Constantine's conversion, new controversies and forms of writing emerged. Of particular importance is the rise of the creed, a genre that shaped the way Christians expressed their ideas about God. The idea of a creed has an obvious precedent in earlier "rules of faith." New practices emerged that helped to refine this tradition. Beginning in the third century, we see records of ecclesiastical investigation of accused heretics by bishops. It appears that in such contexts, persons accused of teaching false doctrine were asked to assent to a creed put forth by an authoritative figure. Eventually, a practice developed in which the accused produced his own creed for inspection. Thus, around 318, we find Arius, a presbyter in Alexandria, subject to an accusation of heresy by his bishop Alexander, and producing a creed intended to serve as his self-defense. Such creeds were written by many authors of the fourth century, from those such as Arius and Eunomius who have come down in subsequent tradition as heretics to those such as Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa who are remembered as orthodox. All of these were caught up in the accusations of heresy

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that swirled in all directions. Each party was convinced that it represented apostolic truth, and to fit into any such group required defending oneself in its terms.

This tense situation was fostered not solely by local dust-ups but also by regional and imperial meetings of Christian bishops. These synods often met at the behest of Christian emperors who viewed themselves as having a duty to promote the church and intervene in disputes among bishops. In 325 Constantine summoned bishops from the entire empire to the city of Nicaea. There, the bishops secured the condemnation of Arius by drawing up a creed. It followed the typical pattern: a statement of faith in the Father and the Son followed by anathemas – statements that cursed "heretics" and their theological positions and thereby defined the church's confessional boundaries. Of course, Nicaea did not end the controversies; even Arius was readmitted to communion by Constantine just two years later. Over the next decades many councils were held, and we are fortunate to have a catalogue of their creeds from Athanasius, who judged them inferior to Nicaea and indicative of malicious scheming by Arius's partisans. In this camp Athanasius included Constantius, Constantine's son, who summoned various councils between 351 and 361 with the intent of definitively ending the debates and replacing the ambiguous and hotly disputed Nicene Creed.

Bishops staked out various positions during these years. Athanasius promoted the Nicene confession that the Son is "same-in-substance" with the Father. Others, such as Basil of Ancyra, preferred to use the phrase "like-in-substance," which led to their title Homoiousians. Still others, who became known as Homoians, preferred to speak of the Son merely as "like" the Father. Homoian Christianity received imperial support under Constantius and later Valens (364–378). The parties weren't immutably fixed. One reason Athanasius wrote *On the Synods* in 359 was to promote a rapprochement with the Homoiousians – and, in fact, there is evidence for Homoiousians embracing Nicaea in the subsequent decade, whether or not this is to be chalked up to Athanasius's influence or to their perception of a common foe.

Neither Athanasius nor Constantius was able to overcome divisions. Not only were bishops split on old issues; new controversies emerged as well. The creeds produced during the Constantinian dynasty focused almost exclusively on the Son's relationship to the Father. As the debate raged on through the 360s and 370s, attention turned increasingly to the Holy Spirit's divinity and therefore to the Trinity properly speaking. Some

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viewed both the Son and the Holy Spirit as created beings. Others accepted that the Son is uncreated and divine, but rejected the idea that the Spirit shares in the uncreated, divine power. The latter group came to be known as the Pneumatomachians – "those who fight against the Spirit." This group accused Trinitarian Christians such as Gregory of Nyssa of blasphemy for worshiping the Spirit alongside Father and Son. At the Council of Constantinople in 381 the Spirit's divinity was affirmed more explicitly than before – though perhaps not as straightforwardly as Gregory of Nazianzus, who served very briefly as the Council's president, would have liked.

Fourth-century Trinitarian theology appears in a surprising range of genres: Ephrem's hymns and commentaries, Gregory of Nazianzus's poetry, and Basil of Caesarea's letters. Often the literature takes the form of treatises playing the game of forensic rhetoric – theological arguments cast as courtroom debates with accusations, objections, and responses. We see this in the writings of Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose, Eunomius, and, in Part III, Augustine. Such texts often offer a representation of an opponent's thought – either through direct citation or through imagined objections – which the author then refutes. The result is a body of literature that, at its best, goes beyond petty polemic and explores the doctrine of God with subtlety and self-conscious scrutiny.

The quest for precision led authors to expound upon a wide range of technical vocabulary: power, activity, substance, nature, subsistence (*hypostasis*), and person. Eunomius viewed the substances of Father, Son, and Spirit as different. By contrast, the pro-Nicene writers viewed God as one in power and substance, but three in subsistence, simultaneously fighting what they perceived as an "Arian" subordinationism that would view the Son and Spirit as created beings and a "Sabellian" confusion of persons that would collapse them into one. According to all parties in the debates, Christians know who God is through what they believe God has done. So, understanding God's nature is a matter of understanding God's activity and the power it displays. At issue was whether Father, Son, and Spirit share all activities or whether some are merely delegated to Son and Spirit as the Father's servants. Do all three work inseparably in the creation of the world? Were all three active together in the life of Christ? Do all three administer gifts of grace to believers? If God is a perfectly simple unity, does this affirmation imply an indivisible Trinity or a solitary Father, distinguished from Son and Spirit?

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With the accession of Theodosius in 378, imperial weight swung in favor of the Nicene confession, which was by then widely interpreted as teaching an inseparable Trinity and not merely a Son who is of the same substance as the Father. Theodosius summoned a large council in Constantinople in 381, which issued a creed that expanded on Nicaea, in particular its confession of the Spirit's divinity. Imperial legislation was directed against both heretics and pagans. Two years later Theodosius summoned leaders of the various doctrinal parties to Constantinople. Their task was to defend their doctrine by producing a brief creedal statement. From this "Council of the Heresies" we have Eunomius's *Confession of Faith*, which states his oft-maligned doctrine in plain terms. Although Eunomius was unable to persuade Theodosius of his own orthodoxy, his doctrine continued to attract followers for decades. The major episcopal sees, however, were firmly in control of those sympathetic with the Nicene–Constantinopolitan consensus, and this would remain true throughout late antiquity.

PART III: DOCTRINAL INHERITANCE AND PHILOSOPHICAL EXPLORATION (400–CA. 570)

As the fifth century dawned, new controversies arose over the legacy of Origen, the ascetic theology of Pelagius, and the unity of Christ, but this did not prevent major thinkers from addressing the question of Trinitarian unity. Augustine of Hippo in the West and Cyril of Alexandria in the East both left behind memorable reflections on the inseparable activity of the three persons. In Augustine's case, the matter was prompted by living representatives of an "Arian" creed; in Cyril's case, the Trinitarian issues arose in the midst of polemic against his fellow pro-Nicene Nestorius over the unity of Christ's humanity and divinity. Both Augustine and Cyril were active and creative in their reception of the creeds of the older generation. In *Sermon 52*, Augustine not only defends the doctrine of the inseparable Trinity, but also sketches some of the speculative themes of his *On the Trinity*, a work that would become classic in later Latin Christianity. He movingly exhorted his audience to follow him as he looked for three powers in the human soul that work inseparably – memory, intellect, and will – while reminding them that even with such an analogy, the Trinity remained incomprehensible for humans in this life.

Augustine engages, then, in an examination of what human language *can* do in the investigation of the hidden things of God, while also acknowledging

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its infinite shortcomings. Perhaps the classic statement of the dialectic of affirmation and denial in theology is Pseudo-Dionysius's *On the Mystical Theology*. This work was written sometime in the late fifth or early sixth century by an unknown figure pseudonymously labeling himself as the Dionysius converted by Paul on the Athenian Areopagus (Acts 17:34). As a putative "Athenian," Pseudo-Dionysius unites the pagan Neoplatonic tradition of "negative" or "apophatic" theology with Christian precedents in the Greek fathers, especially Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus, and Syrian monastic traditions. In the foundational text of Christian mystical theology, Pseudo-Dionysius bids "Timothy," his addressee, to pray not for knowledge, but for "union, insofar as it is attainable" with the divine, who resides not in light, but in darkness, not in words, but in silence.

Moving to early sixth-century Italy, we see Boethius, another Christian intellectual with profound links to Neoplatonic tradition, especially with the tradition of commentary on Aristotle's logical works. Most famous for his *Consolation of Philosophy*, Boethius also wrote a series of works on Christian doctrine, including *On the Holy Trinity*, in which he grapples with the issue of how to affirm the Trinity, which he understands in Augustinian terms, without proclaiming three gods. He brings the full panoply of Aristotelian logic to bear on the task. Shortly thereafter, in Alexandria, the Christian Neoplatonist John Philoponus drew on the same tradition, though with quite different conclusions. John rejected the notion of the divine nature as a universal, and was condemned for tritheism. Basil of Caesarea's notion that the divine substance is single, while the three subsistences are distinct, was not congenial to John, and his notion of the three persons as three distinct substances was judged harshly.

The basic affirmations of early Christians were springboards to an amazing array of cultural production. There is both continuity and discontinuity across the more than four hundred years represented in this volume: old questions resurface even as new directions are taken. In the end, we present this volume not as a tale of the making of orthodoxy, but as an invitation to the reader to feel the burden and beauty of early Christian doctrinal literature and the questions that prompted it.

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