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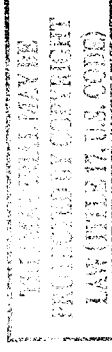
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## NEGATIVE ATTRIBUTES IN THE CHURCH FATHERS AND THE Gnostic BASILIDES \*

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By the time the Fathers of the Church began to offer negation as a solution of the problem of divine attributes, the theory of negative attributes had already been dealt with by Philo, Albinus, and Plotinus. All three of them, starting with the assumption that God is ineffable, found that one way of describing God was by means of negative attributes. In their treatment of this type of attributes, however, there is a difference between Philo on the one hand and Albinus and Plotinus on the other.

In Philo, the use of negative attributes in the description of God, such as describing God as being invisible, incomprehensible, unnamable, ineffable, and the like, is presented only as a way of expressing the scriptural principle of the unlikeness between God and all other beings.<sup>1</sup> In contradistinction to his own treatment of affirmative attributes, which is cast by him in a framework of the Aristotelian theories of logical propositions and predicables,<sup>2</sup> Philo's treatment of negative attributes is free of any logical implications.

In Albinus and Plotinus, however, negative attributes are treated after the manner of Aristotle's logical propositions of the negative quality.<sup>3</sup> To begin with, corresponding to the term "negation" (*ἀπόφασις*) in its technical sense as used by Aristotle in contrast to the term "privation" (*στέρησις*), both Albinus and Plotinus use the term "remotion" (*ἀφαίρεσις*). Then, the contrast between "remotion" (or "negation") and "privation" is conceived of by them, after Aristotle and his commentator Alexander, as a contrast between a proposition in which the opposite

\* This paper was originally written for a special issue of the *Ricerche Religiose* planned to be published in February, 1953, in honor of Professor George LaPiana. The plan for the publication of that issue was subsequently abandoned.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. my *Philo*, II, p. 98 ff., 126 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 130 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. my paper "Albinus and Plotinus on Divine Attributes," *Harvard Theological Review*, 45 (1952), 115-130.

of the predicate negated can under no conceivable circumstances be affirmed of the subject and a proposition in which the opposite of the predicate negated can under certain conceivable circumstances be affirmed of the subject. Accordingly, with reference to God, both Albinus and Plotinus maintain that the negation of any predicate of God does not mean that its opposite can be predicated of Him; it rather means the exclusion of God from the universe of discourse of the predicate in question. In other words, the negative attributes of God are what Aristotle calls technically "negations" and not what he calls technically "privations." Then also, to both Albinus and Plotinus negations can be expressed not only by propositions which are negative in quality, such as "God is not divisible," but also by propositions which are affirmative in quality but in which the predicate is negative in form, such as "God is indivisible." Moreover, to both Albinus and Plotinus, God may be described not only by predicates which are negative in form, such as "indivisible," but also by predicates which, though positive in form, are understood to be negative in meaning, as when, for instance, the term "simple" is understood to mean "indivisible." Then, further, in Plotinus, negation in the sense of being excluded from the universe of discourse of certain predicates may be expressed by saying that God is "before" or "beyond" or "above" those predicates. He thus says that God is "neither what is movable nor what is at rest," because He is "before (*πρό*) motion and before rest,"<sup>4</sup> and also that He "neither knows anything nor is there anything of which He is ignorant,"<sup>5</sup> because He is beyond (*ἐπέκεινα*) thought and knowledge,<sup>6</sup> and similarly that He "has neither the not-good nor the good,"<sup>7</sup> because "He is above good (*ὑπεράγαθον*)."<sup>8</sup> Finally, in Albinus, the method of forming a conception of God as well as describing God by negation is compared to the method of our forming the conception as well as the definition of a mathematical point. "The first method of forming a conception of God," he says, "will be by the remotion (*ἀφαίρεσις*) of these [sensible

<sup>4</sup> *Enn.* VI, 9, 3 (ed. E. Bréhier, ll. 42, 44).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* VI, 9, 6 (48-49).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* V, 6, 6 (31 ff.).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* V, 5, 13 (5).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* VI, 9, 6 (40).

predicates from God], in the same way as we form a conception of a point by its abstraction (*ἀφαίρεσις*), from the sensible, namely, by first forming the conception of a surface, then that of a line, and finally that of a point."<sup>9</sup> In this passage, as we have tried to explain elsewhere,<sup>10</sup> Albinus means to show that God is to be described negatively in the same way as a point is defined by Euclid negatively as that "which has no part."<sup>11</sup>

These two methods of dealing with negative attributes, namely, the Philonic method of using negation only as an expression of the scriptural principle of the unlikeness of God with other beings and the Albino-Plotinian method of using negation in the Aristotelian technical sense of negative propositions, are to be found in the Church Fathers. Here we shall give a few representative illustrations of the latter kind of use of negation by the Church Fathers, with which we shall contrast, on one point, the use of negation by Basilides.

In Clement of Alexandria's treatment of the problem of divine attributes we have a typical example of the combination of Philo and Albinus and Aristotle. Reflecting Philo's statements that, on account of the scriptural doctrine of the unlikeness of God, anthropomorphic expressions in Scripture are to be understood as having been introduced "for the instruction of the many (*τῶν πολλῶν*)"<sup>12</sup> and are not to be taken literally but rather figuratively,<sup>13</sup> Clement starts out his discussion of divine attributes by stating that "the most of men (*οἱ πλείστοι τῶν ἀνθρώπων*)" think of God after the analogy of themselves and, in the course of his discussion, he reminds his readers that the anthropomorphic appellations in Scriptures were not taken by "the Hebrews" literally but that "certain of these appellations were used more piously in an allegorical sense."<sup>14</sup> Then, as he goes on, he intimates that besides those appellations which are to be taken allegorically there are others which are to be taken negatively and, paraphrasing Albinus, he tries to show how, by a process

<sup>9</sup> *Didaskalikos*, X, 5 (ed. Fr. Dübner, p. 239, ll. 19-23; ed. P. Lewis, p. 61).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. "Albinus and Plotinus on Divine Attributes," *op. cit.*, pp. 118-119.

<sup>11</sup> *Euclid*, *Elements*, I, Def. 1.

<sup>12</sup> *Immut.* II, 54.

<sup>13</sup> *Sacr.* 30, 101.

<sup>14</sup> *Strom.* V, 11<sup>68</sup> (PG 9, 104 AB).

of abstraction like that by which we arrive at the conceptions of surface and line and point we may also arrive at some conception of God, namely "knowing not what He is but what He is not."<sup>15</sup> But in the course of his discussion, after describing the manner of arriving at the conception of point, which, as we have said, alludes to Euclid's negative definition of point, he adds: "For the point which remains is a unit (*μονάς*), so to speak, having position, from which, if we take away position, there is the conception of unit."<sup>16</sup> This additional statement about a "unit" reflects Aristotle's negative definition of "unit" as that "which is not divisible in any dimension and is without position."<sup>17</sup>

A greater use of the Albino-Plotinian method of treatment of negative attributes is to be found in Gregory of Nyssa. In one passage he says that "we either convey the idea of goodness by the negation (*ἀποφάσεως*) of badness, or *vice versa* by the remotion (*ἀφαιρέσει*) of the good we convey the idea of the bad."<sup>18</sup> Here, like Albinus and Plotinus, he uses the term *aphairesis* as the equivalent of the term *apophasis*. In another passage he indicates that, again like Albinus and Plotinus, he takes propositions which are affirmative in form but in which the predicates are terms with alpha privative to be the equivalent of negative propositions, for he says that the proposition "God is incorruptible" means that "in the incorruptible corruption is not found,"<sup>19</sup> that is to say, it is the equivalent of the proposition "God is not corruptible." In still another passage, after stating that the divine nature is ineffable,<sup>20</sup> he continues as follows: "Wherefore, in order that the superexcellent nature should not seem to have any relationship with these things below, in attempting to describe the divine nature, we have made use of notions and words which separate it from them," such, for instance, as the terms "pretemporal" (*προαιώνιον*), "beginningless" (*ἀναρχον*), "end-

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. V, 11<sup>n</sup> (108 B-109 A). On this analogy between Clement and Albinus, see H. Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum VII*, 42 (1953), p. 429, n. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. (109 A).

<sup>17</sup> *Metaph.* V, 6, 1016b, 25.

<sup>18</sup> *De Anima et Resurrectione* (PG 46, 40 B).

<sup>19</sup> *Cont. Eunom.* XII (PG 45, 953 BC).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. (1104 B).

less" (*ἀπελεύτητον*), and similar other terms formed with alpha privative.<sup>21</sup> From his inclusion of the term *προαιώνιον* in this list it may be inferred that, like Plotinus, he treated terms with the Greek prefix *pro* as the equivalent of terms with the Greek alpha privative. But evidently being aware that there was some question, as we shall see,<sup>22</sup> whether affirmative propositions in which the predicates are terms with alpha privative are to be considered as privations or as negations, he says, after his enumeration of the above-mentioned examples of such predicates, that all those who are so inclined may coin similar other predicates, "calling them privatives (*στερητικά*) or remotives (*ἀφαιρετικά*) or whatever pleases them."<sup>23</sup> What he means to say is that, whatever others may think of propositions with such predicates, he follows Plotinus in regarding them as negations. Finally, like Albinus and Plotinus, he allows to affirm of God even terms which are positive in form, provided they are taken to have a negative meaning. He thus says: "It amounts to the same whether we speak of God as 'unsusceptible (*ἀνεπίδεκτον*) of evil' or whether we call Him 'good,' whether we confess that 'He is immortal (*ἀθάνατον*)' or whether we say that 'He ever liveth,' for we understand no difference in the sense of these terms, but we signify one and the same thing by both, though one may seem to convey the notion of affirmation (*θέσις*) and the other of negation (*ἀναίρεσις*)."<sup>24</sup>

A similar use of the Albino-Plotinian method of treatment of negative attributes is to be found in pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and, following him, John of Damascus. The direct source of Dionysius, we may assume, was Plotinus.

To begin with, like Plotinus, Dionysius uses the term *aphairesis* in the sense of negation. Thus in a passage, in which he begins with the statement that "it is not possible either to express or to conceive what the One . . . is,"<sup>25</sup> he concludes with the statement that "the godlike minds . . . celebrate Him most ap-

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. (1104 D-1105 A).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. below at nn. 52-57.

<sup>23</sup> *Cont. Eunom.* XII (1105 A).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. (953 D).

<sup>25</sup> *De Divinis Nominibus I*, 5 (PG 3, 593 B).

propriately through the remotion (*ἀφαιρέσεως*) of all things."<sup>26</sup> Such a "remotion," as in Plotinus, is expressed by him in two ways: (1) by negative propositions, such as, for instance, "God is not a body" or that "He is not in place" or that "He is not seen,"<sup>27</sup> and the like, and (2) by affirmative propositions in which the predicate is prefixed by alpha privative, such, for instance, as "God is inconceivable (*ἀδιανόητος*)" or "ineffable (*ἄρρητος*)"<sup>28</sup> or "invisible (*ἀόρατος*)" or "incomprehensible (*ἀπερίληπτος*),"<sup>29</sup> and the like.

In John of Damascus the same view is expressed in the following passage: "In the case of God, however, it is impossible to explain what He is in essence, and it befits us the rather to hold discourse about his remotion (*ἀφαιρέσεως*) from all things."<sup>30</sup> Elsewhere these discourses about God by means of "remotion" are said by him to be discourses "by means of 'negation'" (*ἀποφαντικῶς*).<sup>31</sup> He furthermore indicates that this negation may be expressed either by an affirmative proposition in which the predicate has as its prefix an alpha privative, such as "God is incorruptible," or by a negative proposition such as "God is not corruptible." He thus says: "Further the terms beginningless, incorruptible, unbegotten, as also uncreated, incorporeal, unseeable, and so forth, explain what He is not, that is to say, they tell us that His existence had no beginning, that He is not corruptible, nor created, nor corporeal, nor visible."<sup>32</sup>

Then, again like Plotinus, Dionysius tries to show that by remotion he means here the absolute exclusion of God from the universe of the predicates in question. Thus in a passage, in which he started by saying that it is our duty to negate (*ἀποφάσκειν*) all attributes of the One, he proceeds to say that we are "not to consider the negations (*ἀποφάσεις*) to be in opposition to the affirmations (*καταφάσεις*), but far rather that the One, which is above every remotion (*ἀφαίρεσιν*) and affirmation

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. (593 BC).

<sup>27</sup> De Mystica Theologia IV (PG 3, 1040 D).

<sup>28</sup> De Divin. Nomin. I, 1 (PG 3, 588 B).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. I, 2 (588 C).

<sup>30</sup> De Fide Orthodoxa I, 4 (PG 94, 800 B).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. I, 12 (845 C).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. I, 9 (837 A B).

(*θέσιν*), is above privations (*στερήσεις*)."<sup>33</sup> In this passage, we take it, alluding to Aristotle's distinction between "negation" and "privation" and using the terms *apophasis* and *aphairesis* indiscriminately, Dionysius tries to show that negative attributes in the case of God are to be taken not as the negation of an opposite but rather as the exclusion from the universe of a discourse. In another place he expresses the same view in his terse statement that God is "the affirmation of all, the remotion of all, that which is above all affirmation and remotion."<sup>34</sup> This conception of "negation" or "remotion" in the sense of the exclusion from a universe of discourse is sometimes described by him as a "preëminent remotion" (*ὑπεροχική ἀφαίρεσις*).<sup>35</sup>

In John of Damascus the same view is expressed in his own explanation of what he means by the phrase "His remotion from all things." It means, he says, that God "does not belong to the class of existing things, not that He is as nonexistent, but that He is above all existing things, nay even above existence itself."<sup>36</sup> Similarly, speaking of such divine predicates as "unsubstantial, timeless, beginningless, invisible," he says that all such terms mean "not that God is inferior to anything or lacking in anything . . . but that He preëminently surpasses (*ὑπεροχικῶς . . . ἐξήρηται*) all things, for He is not one of the things that exist, but over all things."<sup>37</sup>

Finally, while negative attributes are those by which, as Dionysius says, God can be celebrated "most appropriately," still, like Philo, as well as Albinus and Plotinus, he believes that God must also be celebrated by certain positive attributes, seeing that we cannot directly negate of God such terms as those which, when used with reference to us, express certain perfections. For, he argues in effect, while it can be said that God "is not a body, nor has shape, or form, or quality, or quantity, or bulk; nor is in a place, nor is seen, nor has sensible contact, nor perceives, nor is perceived by the senses, nor has disorder and confusion, as being vexed by earthly passions, nor is powerless, as being sub-

<sup>33</sup> De Myst. Theol. I, 2 (1000 B).

<sup>34</sup> De Divin. Nomin. II, 4 (641 A).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. II, 3 (640 B).

<sup>36</sup> De Fide Orth. I, 4 (800 B).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. I, 12 (845 C D).

ject to casualties of sense," still it cannot be said that "He is unsubstantial or lifeless or irrational or unintelligent."<sup>38</sup> God must inevitably be described as "substantial," "living," "rational," "intelligent," and the like. But all such affirmative attributes, he explains after Philo<sup>39</sup> and Albinus and Plotinus,<sup>40</sup> are to be taken to express a causal relation between God and the world.<sup>41</sup> But, in addition to this, all these positive attributes, when combined with the prefix *hyper*, may, as in Plotinus, acquire the logical significance of negation, in the sense of exclusion from a universe of discourse. "The names, then, common to the whole Deity," he says, . . . "are the super-good (*ὑπεράγαθον*), the super-God (*ὑπέρθρον*), the super-substantial (*ὑπερούσιον*), the super-living (*ὑπέρζωον*), the super-wise (*ὑπέρσοφον*), and whatever else belongs to the preëminent remotion."<sup>42</sup> Moreover, again as in Plotinus, the prefix *hyper* must not necessarily be actually expressed. Any laudatory terms, though positive in form, may be predicated of God, provided they are understood to be used in a preëminent sense and indirectly in a negative sense. Thus referring to the passage which we have just quoted, Dionysius says: "In the treatise *De Divinis Nominibus* [I have set forth] how He is named good, how He is named being, how He is named life and wisdom and power, and whatever belongs to the intelligible nomenclature of God."<sup>43</sup>

In John of Damascus the same view is expressed in a passage, where, after explaining the significance of negative attributes, he says: "But there are other terms which are predicated of God affirmatively,"<sup>44</sup> such, for instance, as "being," "substance," "cause," "reason," "rational," "life," "living," "power," "powerful,"<sup>45</sup> and the like. Such terms, he explains, mean to express a causal relation between God and the world.<sup>46</sup> He then goes on to say: "But the sweetest names are a combination of both [that

<sup>38</sup> De Myst. Theol. IV (1040 D).

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Philo, II, pp. 133 ff.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. "Albinus and Plotinus on Divine Attributes," op. cit., pp. 121 ff.

<sup>41</sup> De Divin. Nomin. I, 5 (593 C D); De Myst. Theol. I, 2 (1000 B), et passim.

<sup>42</sup> De Divin. Nomin. II, 3 (640 B).

<sup>43</sup> De Myst. Theol. III (1033 A).

<sup>44</sup> De Fide Orth. I, 12 (848 A).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. I, 12 (848 B); cf. I, 9 (836 A).

is, of both affirmation and negation], for example, the super-substantial (*ὑπερούσιος*) substance, the super-divine (*ὑπέρθρον*) Divinity, the super-principial (*ὑπεράρχιος*) principle, and the like. Further, there are some affirmations about God which have the force of a preëminent negation (*ὑπεροχικῆς ἀποφάσεως*), as, for example, darkness, for this does not imply that God is dark and not light, but rather that He is above light."<sup>47</sup>

In all the discussions of attributes, from Philo to John of Damascus, an affirmative proposition, in which the term "God" is the subject and some adjective prefixed by the alpha privative, or by its Latin equivalent the inseparable particle *in*, is the predicate, has the value of a negative proposition in the sense of the exclusion of the subject from the universe of discourse of the predicate. Thus to all of them, one can say not only "God is not effable" but also "God is ineffable," and the meaning of the latter proposition would be the exclusion of God from the universe of discourse of effability.

A view quite the opposite of this is reported by Hippolytus in the name of the Gnostic Basilides. "For, he says," writes Hippolytus, "that which is named [ineffable] is not absolutely ineffable, since we call one thing ineffable and another not even ineffable. For that which is not even ineffable is not named ineffable, but is, he says, above every name that is named."<sup>48</sup>

In this statement, then, Basilides is represented as agreeing with Plotinus and the Fathers on two points but disagreeing with them on a third point. He agrees with them that, whatever term is predicated of God, it must be predicated of Him as a negation in the sense of His exclusion from the universe of discourse of that predicate. Then he also agrees with them that such a negation may be expressed by affirming that God is above some particular predicate. But he disagrees with them as to whether such a negation can be also expressed by an affirmative proposition with a negative predicate, such as "God is ineffable." According to Plotinus and the Fathers, such a negation can be expressed by a proposition of this type. According to Basilides, a proposition like "God is ineffable" does not express such a

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. (848 B); cf. I, 4 (800 C).

<sup>48</sup> Hippolytus, *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium* VII, 20, 3 (ed. P. Wendland).

negation, or, as he puts it, it does not mean "absolutely ineffable." In order to express such a negation, he contends, one would have to say "God is not even ineffable." The point at issue between them, then, is that, according to Plotinus and the Fathers, an affirmative proposition in which the predicate is negative in form is the equivalent of what Aristotle calls a negative proposition, whereas, according to Basilides, it is the equivalent of what Aristotle calls a privative proposition.

We may ask ourselves, what is the cause of this difference?

The cause of this difference, it seems to us, may be found in a difference in the interpretation of Aristotle.

The distinction between "privation" and "negation," to which there is a definite allusion in Aristotle,<sup>49</sup> has been illustrated by Alexander of Aphrodisias by two examples. The example for "privation" is an affirmative proposition of which the predicate is a term which is negative only in meaning but not in form, such as the proposition "A is blind." In this case, the subject A must be some one who could naturally possess sight but happens to be blind, as, for instance, man, but it could not be something which could never naturally possess sight, as, for instance, wall. The example for "negation" is a negative proposition, such as the proposition "A is not seeing." In this case, the subject A may be even something which naturally could never have sight, as, for instance, wall.<sup>50</sup> It may be remarked, in passing, that the illustration for "privation" from the term "blind" given by Alexander is based upon a text in Aristotle;<sup>51</sup> the illustration given by him for "negation" is not found in Aristotle. But how about an affirmative proposition in which the predicate is privative both in form and in meaning, such as, for instance, "A is sightless (*ἄδερκτος*)," would that be a "privation" or a "negation"? In Aristotle there are various statements on this point. On the one hand, the proposition "A is toothless (*ὠδός*)" is taken by him to be a "privation."<sup>52</sup> But, on the other hand, such propositions as "a voice is invisible (*ἀόρατος*)"<sup>53</sup> and "a unit . . . is indi-

<sup>49</sup> Metaph. IV, 2, 1004a, 10-16.

<sup>50</sup> Alexander in *Metaphysica*, ed. M. Hayduck, p. 327, ll. 18-20.

<sup>51</sup> Categ. 10, 12a, 27-34.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 10, 12a, 31-34.

<sup>53</sup> Phys. III, 5, 204a, 13-14; V, 2, 206b, 10-11; Metaph. XI, 10, 1066a, 36.

visible (*ἀδιαίπετος*) in quantity"<sup>54</sup> and "is positionless (*ἄθετος*)"<sup>55</sup> are used by him as "negations." From these statements, apparently contradictory, one would be justified to conclude that affirmative propositions with negative predicates had with Aristotle the meaning of both privations and negations. This conclusion is strengthened by the statement, made by Aristotle, that "the immobility (*ἀκίνησία*) of that to which motion belongs [by nature] is rest,"<sup>56</sup> the implication of which is that the immobility of that to which motion does not belong by nature is not rest but rather something which is a negation of both motion and rest. From this statement and its implication one may infer that the term "immobile," when used in a proposition in which the subject is "man," is a privation but, when used in a proposition in which the subject is "God," is a negation. In the history of the interpretation of Aristotle, it may be added in passing, two views may be found. One, that of the Stoics and Boethius, takes such propositions as privations; the other, that of Avicenna and Averroes, takes them as negations.<sup>57</sup>

In the light of this discussion, then, we may assume that when Philo, Albinus, Plotinus, and the Church Fathers allow the use of affirmative propositions with predicates negative in form, it is because they take a proposition of this type to be a "negation" and, as a negation, it has here the meaning of the exclusion of God from the universe of effability. When Basilides, however, does not allow the use of the proposition "God is ineffable," we may assume that it is because he takes a proposition of this type to be a "privation," and, as a "privation," it would imply that God, who by His own nature could be effable, just happens to be ineffable. It would not mean, he says in effect, that God is "absolutely ineffable." He therefore insists upon a proposition that is unmistakably a negation, such as "God is not even ineffable." We may further assume that he would allow also such a proposition as "God is not effable," which in Aristotle is definitely taken as a "negation." The reason why he uses the proposition

<sup>54</sup> Metaph. XIV, 2, 1089b, 35-36.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. V, 6, 1016b, 30.

<sup>56</sup> Phys. III, 2, 202a, 4-5.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. my paper "Infinite and Privative Judgments in Aristotle, Averroes, and Kant," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 8 (1947), 173-187.



"God is not even ineffable" is obviously in order to place himself directly in opposition to those before him who did use the proposition "God is ineffable." As to who were those before him who used the expression "God is ineffable," it depends upon whether Hippolytus' report of the teachings in the name of Basilides is authentic or not. If authentic, then the only one who before Basilides, that is, before the reign of Hadrian (117-138), is known to have used that expression is Philo,<sup>58</sup> and it is Philo, therefore, whom he had in mind in his opposition to the use of the term "ineffable" as a predicate of God.

Towards the end of the chapter in which he has restated the view of Basilides, as quoted by us above, Hippolytus says that "Aristotle, born many generations before Basilides, was the first to discourse, in the Categories, upon the subject of equivocal terms (*δμῶνυμα*), which these men [that is, Basilides and his son Isidore] expound as their own and as a novelty."<sup>59</sup> It is not quite clear what he means by this statement. If he means that, besides negative predications, Basilides and his son allowed also affirmative predications, provided only that the positive terms affirmed of God were taken in an equivocal sense, then Basilides may be considered as being the first to introduce the equivocal interpretation of divine predicates. Apart from this vague statement, Maimonides, as I have shown elsewhere, was the first to state explicitly that all positive terms affirmed of God are to be taken not only as being negative in meaning but as also being equivocal in meaning,<sup>60</sup> and this view of his was made the target of attack, in Latin philosophy, by Thomas Aquinas<sup>61</sup> and, in Hebrew philosophy, by Gersonides.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Philo, II, pp. 110 ff.

<sup>59</sup> Hippolytus, op. cit. VII, 20, 5; cf. Categ. I, 1a, 1-6.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. my papers "Maimonides on Negative Attributes," Louis Ginzberg Jubilee Volume, 1945, pp. 411-446, "Maimonides and Gersonides on Divine Attributes as Ambiguous Terms," Mordecai M. Kaplan Jubilee Volume, 1953, pp. 515-530.

<sup>61</sup> Sum. Theol. I, 13, 2c; cf. Cont. Gent. I, 33.

<sup>62</sup> Milhamot Adonai III, 3.

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### THE MATERIALITY OF GOD IN MILTON'S DE DOCTRINA CHRISTIANA

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DURING RECENT YEARS, scholars have been producing a great deal of important work to clarify and interpret Milton's metaphysical position, but at least one important question appears still unsettled. Does his materialistic monism embrace the whole range of being, uncreated as well as created? It certainly comprehends the whole hierarchy of creatures; does it comprehend God too?

Unfortunately Milton never explicitly says that God is either a material or an immaterial Being, so we have to work by inference from what he does explicitly say in the *De Doctrina Christiana*, chiefly his arguments for creation *ex Deo*.<sup>1</sup> Now these can be plausibly interpreted as implying either a material or an immaterial God, and both interpretations have in fact been more or less definitely proposed by scholars.<sup>2</sup> Certainly the doc-

<sup>1</sup>This paper will be concerned exclusively with the evidence of the *De Doctrina* because that is the work in which Milton makes his explicit, literal statement of what he believes. *Paradise Lost* is his imaginative representation of the Fall of Man and as such, though it incorporates much that he thinks literally true, is amplified with innumerable concrete particulars that we cannot say he would endorse as historical fact supporting his religious faith. The *De Doctrina*, therefore, not *Paradise Lost*, is the proper source for our knowledge of Milton's private, personal creed. As I see it, we can use the *De Doctrina* as a possible means of clarifying ideas that in *Paradise Lost* may seem vague, though even this has to be done cautiously; but we are on shaky ground when we try to piece out what may seem vague in the *De Doctrina* with the possibly more detailed and concrete amplification of *Paradise Lost*.—All quotations from the *De Doctrina* are from Book I and are given, unless otherwise noted, in Sumner's translation as reprinted in *The Works of John Milton*, ed. Frank Allen Patterson et al. (New York, 1931-38); references to volume and page of this edition will be given in parentheses in my text and in the footnotes.

<sup>2</sup>Arthur Sewall, *A Study in Milton's Christian Doctrine* (London, 1939), pp. 127-128, 179-181; Walter Clyde Curry, "Milton's Scale of Nature," *Stanford Studies in Language and Literature*, ed. Hardin Craig (Stanford, 1941), p. 192; C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (London, 1942), pp. 85-88; Denis Saurat,