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Mašhad, Kitābhāna-i Āsitān-i Quds-i Raḍawī 300, f. 1v; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, grec 1853, f. 186v

Divine Sending and Ontological Models in Late Antiquity

Benedetto Neola

Abstract.

This article addresses the problematic relationship between divine transcendence and divine immanence in late antique thought from a specific perspective. The schema of the ‘divine sending’ to earth of a divine entity entrusted with a soteriological mission towards humankind will be duly analysed in both the Neoplatonic and Christian sources, focusing on pure souls according to Neoplatonic thought, such as Pythagoras and Socrates, and various figures of Christ. Through a study of the works of Iamblichus, Proclus, and Hermias of Alexandria, on the one hand, and of Eusebius of Caesarea and Cyril of Alexandria, on the other, it provides an overview of the varying ontological models that arise from the concept of the divine sending. It will thus be proved that the shared usage of the ‘sending’ pattern unveils both differences and similarities among the underlying stances concerning how to envisage the divine in itself. From this angle, it will be shown that a due qualification of the distinction between the ontic status of the ‘sender’ and of the ‘one being sent’ is of the utmost importance, since it forces to admit or to refute the existence of different, axiologically connotated, degrees of divinity. By using the ‘divine sending’ modus as a tool to explore late antique conceptions of the divine, this article sheds light on the complex relation of interferences between Neoplatonism and Christianity, revealing different and yet cognate theological worldviews.

Introduction

The relationship between divine transcendence and immanence, or, better, the issue of accounting for the immanence of a transcendent divine being, is the core problem of all theology. That the divine does indeed enter the sensible dimension is commonly acknowledged by Neoplatonic philosophers as well as Christian theologians of Late Antiquity. One among the several different frameworks proposed to account for divine presence on earth is that of ‘sending’, in the sense that the transcendent, utmost divine principle sends to earth a divine entity to accomplish a salvific mission toward mankind. Such a schema is easily found in both the Neoplatonic and Christian sources. While, in the case of Christianity, it goes without saying that the ‘sender’ is God the Father and the ‘one being sent’ is God the Word, the Neoplatonists also point to a transcendent divine entity as the ‘sender’ and to some beneficent, pure, and perfect soul as the ‘one being sent’, in this case a figure such as Pythagoras or Socrates.

As a matter of fact, from Iamblichus onwards such saviour figures of the ancient wisdom tradition rise to the role of ‘pure and perfect souls’ sent to earth to lead feeble souls upward to unite with the divine itself. However, the shared usage of the schema of ‘sending’, once analysed in depth, reveals important differences and similarities among the underlying stances concerning how to conceive of the divine in itself. Therefore, the present article aims to bring to the fore to what extent the idea of divine sending has affected the conception of the divine itself, by providing a comparative analysis of the ontological principles regulating

Neoplatonic causality, and the different approaches to Christology that are willing, to a greater or lesser degree, to recognize distinct levels within divinity.

In order to present our arguments in a consistent way, we first outline the Neoplatonic doctrine of pure souls. This analysis ends with a quotation from the patriarch Cyril of Alexandria, which will convey us to the second section of the article, devoted to the different ontological patterns that the very idea of a divine sending may have implied in both the Neoplatonic and Christian mind. We specifically focus on Christological models, through a comparative analysis of selected *loci* from Eusebius of Caesarea and Cyril of Alexandria. Finally, in the conclusions, we sum up our main arguments concerning the role of divine sending in the thought of Late Antiquity.

Neoplatonic Pure Souls

As is well-known, the Neoplatonic philosopher Iamblichus (c. 245-325 AD) marks a watershed in the history of the Platonic tradition, for several reasons. He introduced so many innovations in the various domains of metaphysics, ontology, epistemology, salvation theory, and exegetical practice that he can duly be regarded as the founder of a new trend in the Neoplatonic tradition after Plotinus.¹ Here, we will be concerned with a specific facet of his doctrine of the soul. Indeed, Iamblichus develops a well-rounded doctrine of the soul, delving far into its mereology and taking a decisive stance on the long-standing issue of its being *πολυμερής* or *ἀμερής* *sive* *ὁμοούσιος* and *πολυδύναμος*.² Also, and perhaps above all, he contested Plotinus' doctrine of the so-called 'undescended part' of the soul, and accordingly theorized an innovative component within the soul which goes by the name of 'one of the soul' (τὸ ἐν τῆς ψυχῆς).³ However, more than his conceptions about the soul in itself, what concerns us here is rather his classification among souls, which he came to formulate in a rather coherent and consistent manner. The two main texts wherein he explicitly puts forth his classification or, as will soon become clear, his tripartition among souls, are the treatise *De Anima*, which unfortunately has been handed down to us in fragments, and his masterpiece *De Mysteriis*, wherein, under the guise of the Egyptian priest Abammon, he provides answers and solutions to Porphyry's doubts on theurgy.

In *De Anima*, Iamblichus urges his reader to acknowledge a difference among the possible purposes for the soul's descents into the sensible dimension, denying what had been claimed by the other Platonists, who put all kind of embodiments on the same footing and commonly

¹ On the momentous figure of Iamblichus, cf. B. Dalsgaard Larsen, *Jamblique de Chalcis. Exégète et philosophe*, Universitetsforlaget, Aarhus 1972; J.F. Finamore, *Iamblichus and the Theory of the Vehicle of the Soul*, Scholars Press, Chico 1985 (American Classical Studies 14); H.J. Blumenthal – E.G. Clark (eds.), *The Divine Iamblichus. Philosopher and Man of Gods*, Bristol Classical Press, London 1993; G. Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul. The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus*, Pennsylvania State U.P., Pennsylvania 1995; E. Afonasin – J. Dillon – J.F. Finamore (eds.), *Iamblichus and the Foundations of Late Platonism*, Brill, Leiden – Boston 2012.

² For an overview on the mereology of the soul in Late Antiquity, see E. Eliasson, "L'anima e l'individuo", in R. Chiaradonna (ed.), *Filosofia tardoantica*, Carocci, Roma 2012, pp. 213-31.

³ Cf. C. Steel, *The Changing Self. A Study on the Soul in Later Neoplatonism; Iamblichus, Damascius and Priscianus*, Paleis Der Academiën, Bruxelles 1978; R.M. Van den Berg, "Proclus and the Myth of the Charioteer", *Syllecta Classica* 8 (1997), pp. 149-162; C. D'Ancona, "À propos du *De Anima* de Jamblique", *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 90/4 (2006), pp. 617-40; B. Neola, "L'«uno» e l'«intelletto» dell'anima umana: ricezioni neoplatoniche del Fedro di Platone", *Méthexis* 33/1 (2021), pp. 197-222.

judged them as evil. Rather, he says, the purposes (τέλη) for which the souls descend are different and, hence, the types of souls which descend must differ as well. Therefore, on account of the different purposes of the κάθοδος, we are invited to distinguish among: a soul which descends for the salvation, purification, and perfection of the sensible realm (ἐπὶ σωτηρίᾳ καὶ καθάρσει καὶ τελειότητι τῶν τῆδε); a soul which descends for the exercise and correction of its own character (διὰ γυμνασίαν καὶ ἐπανόρθωσιν τῶν οἰκείων ἡθῶν); and, finally, a soul which comes to earth for punishment and judgment (ἐπὶ δίκῃ καὶ κρίσει).⁴ Such tripartition is echoed in a well-known passage from *De Mysteriis*, wherein Iamblichus distinguishes among ‘the great mass of men’, who are subject to the domination of nature; ‘a certain few individuals’, who employ a supernatural intellectual power, turn towards the separated and unmixed Intellect, and disengage themselves from nature; and ‘some’, who are intermediate between these two groups, conducting themselves in the middle area between nature and pure mind.⁵

We are concerned here with the highest class of souls, which, again in *De Anima*, Iamblichus himself bluntly defines as ‘pure and perfect souls’ (αἱ καθαρὰι ψυχαὶ καὶ τέλειαι).⁶ It is reasonable to assume that Iamblichus, as well as his philosophical inheritors such as Hermias of Alexandria (c. 415-455 AD) and Proclus (c. 412-485 AD), held some ancient wisdom figures like Orpheus, Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato himself to be such pure, perfect, and beneficent souls, as will be documented.⁷ The main characteristics of first-class souls are scattered throughout Iamblichus’ *corpus* and the works of the later Neoplatonists Hermias and Proclus. To give just a brief overview, in addition to being pure and perfect, and endowed with a supernatural intellectual power, first-class souls are completely impassible,⁸ live according to intellect alone,⁹ always remain in contact with their own causes, namely the gods,¹⁰ and, as a result of the salvific purpose of their descent to earth, are beneficent toward humanity, since they help second-class souls come back whence they descended.¹¹ For instance, and this is a crucial point to bear in mind, echoing Iamblichus in saying that first-class souls preserve an uninterrupted bond with the higher realities even while on earth,¹² the Neoplatonist Hermias states that Socrates’ habit of never

⁴ Cf. Iamblichus, *De Anima*, eds. J.F. Finamore – J.M. Dillon, Brill, Leiden – Boston – Köln 2002 (Philosophia antiqua 92), p. 29.

⁵ Cf. Jamblique, *Réponse à Porphyre [= De Mysteriis]*, ed. H.D. Saffrey – A.-Ph. Segonds, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 2013 (CUF Série grecque 496), p. 5.18, pp. 116.18-168.3.

⁶ Iambl., *De An.*, p. 28.10-11 Finamore-Dillon.

⁷ On the possible identifications between ‘pure souls’ and theurgists, cf. the opposing views of J.F. Finamore, “The Rational Soul in Iamblichus’ Philosophy”, *Syllecta Classica* 8 (1997), pp. 163-76, and R.M. Van den Berg, “Proclus and the Myth of the Charioteer” (above, n. 3). For an overview on the pure souls’ doctrine, cf. D.J. O’Meara, *Pythagoras Revived. Mathematics and Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 1989, pp. 37-9; Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul* (above, n. 1), pp. 143-7; Finamore – Dillon, Iamblichus. *De Anima* (above, n. 4), pp. 16-17; pp. 159-63.

⁸ Cf. Iambl., *De An.*, pp. 29-30 Finamore-Dillon.

⁹ Cf. Iambl., *Myst.*, 5, 18, p. 167.19-20 Saffrey-Segonds.

¹⁰ Cf. Hermias Alexandrinus, *In Platonis Phaedrum Scholia*, eds. C.M. Lucarini – C. Moreschini, De Gruyter, Berlin 2013 (Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana), p. 15.19-23.

¹¹ On this particular trait, see *infra*.

¹² Cf. Iamblichus, *In Platonis Phaedonem commentarium*, in Iamblichi Chalcedensis *In Platonis Dialogos commentariorum fragmenta*, ed. J.M. Dillon, Brill, Leiden 1973 (Philosophia antiqua. A Series of Monographs on Ancient Philosophy), fr. 5b.

leaving the city of Athens signifies that “he is always attached to his own origins and causes and to the intelligible gods that are particular to him”.¹³ In virtue of such supernatural traits, these souls are labelled by Proclus as divine,¹⁴ in a qualified sense that we are going to problematize, and thus share some important traits with the superior divine classes, such as a providential care for inferior beings or a noble *habitus*.¹⁵

Against this backdrop, it is relevant to underscore that the divine gifts with which pure souls are endowed depend directly upon the ontic position that such souls occupy within the scale of being. To put it differently, the degree of divinity that later Neoplatonists grant them, and that is mirrored by some specific divine traits, has to be understood in the sense that, although they are not strictly divine, pure souls occupy a privileged ontic position with respect to second- and third-class souls. This condition is articulated by one further trait that makes them stand out, that is, their ‘being sent’. As a matter of fact, in the Neoplatonic literature we witness a salient *variatio* describing the pure soul’s arrival on earth. At times we read that pure souls descend, as all souls do, while at other times that they have been sent. In other words, the pure soul’s embodiment can be qualified both as a descent and as a sending. A thorough analysis of such a *variatio* will help us better understand the degree of divinity to be granted to first-class souls.

Iamblichus’ *The Pythagorean Way of Life* is the text from which to start. In chapter two, Iamblichus discusses Pythagoras’ birth. He is adamant that stories recounting how Apollo had intercourse with Pythagoras’ mother, Pythais, something which was apparently held to be true by Epimenides, Eudoxos, and Xenocrates, and celebrated in poems, have to be discarded as absolutely false.¹⁶ Iamblichus rejects the idea of a direct divine filiation, and goes on to explain the reason why such tales sprang up. The oracle of Delphi had predicted to Mnemarchus and to a pregnant Pythais that they were going to give birth to a son surpassing in beauty and wisdom all who ever lived, and who would be of the greatest advantage to the human race (τῷ ἀνθρωπίνῳ γένει μέγιστον ὄφελος). Such revelation overwhelmed Mnemarchus, who perfectly understood that an exceptional privilege (ἐξαιρέτων προτέρημα) was to be bestowed on his son, as a true gift from the god (θεοδώρητος ὡς ἀληθῶς). Therefore, he changed the name of his wife from Parthenis to Pythais and, afterwards, when she gave birth to their son in Sidon, he named him Pythagoras because the child was predicted (προαγορευέσθαι) by Apollo Πυθίος. However, along with his critical remark about an allegedly direct, corporeal filiation from Apollo to Pythagoras, Iamblichus does nonetheless wish to secure a

¹³ Herm., *In Phaedr.*, p. 35.1-4 Lucarini-Moreschini (transl. D. Baltzly – M. Share, *Hermias. On Plato Phaedrus 227A-245E*, Bloomsbury, London 2018), with reference to Plat. *Phaedr.* 230 C-D.

¹⁴ Cf. Proclus Diadochus, *Commentary on the First Alcibiades of Plato*, ed. L.G. Westerink, North Holland Publishing Company, Amsterdam 1954, 79.3-6.

¹⁵ Cf., e.g., Herm., *In Phaedr.*, p. 11.13-15; p. 42.29 Lucarini-Moreschini; Procl., *In Alc. I*, 125.2-4 Westerink.

¹⁶ Iamblichus had already spurned the idea that Ancaeus, founder of Samos and ancestor of Pythagoras, was a descendant of Zeus: cf. Iamblichi *De Vita Pythagorica liber*, ed. U. Klein, Teubner, Leipzig 1975, 2, 3.1-5. On the reception of the figure of Pythagoras in Late Antiquity, cf. G. Staab, *Pythagoras in der Spätantike. Studien zu De Vita Pythagorica des Iamblichos von Chalkis*, K.G. Saur Verlag, München – Leipzig 2002; C. Macris, “Pythagore de Samos”, in R. Goulet (ed.), *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques*, CNRS-Éditions, Tome VII, Paris 2018, pp. 681-850; Id., “La lecture néoplatonicienne de la biographie de Pythagore par Jamblique: quatre exemples tirés de son traité ‘Sur le mode de vie pythagoricien’”, *HAL Open access* 2021, pp. 1-28 (HAL Id: halshs-03051868).

direct connection between Pythagoras' soul and the divine dimension. Let us quote Iamblichus' words at length:

That, however [μέντοι], the soul of Pythagoras has been sent down to mankind [καταπέμφθη εἰς ἀνθρώπους] from the rank of Apollo [ἀπὸ τῆς Ἀπόλλωνος ἡγεμονίας], either being an attendant [συνοπαδόν] on the god, or being co-arranged [συντεταγμένην] with this god in some other more familiar way, no one can doubt, for this may be inferred both from his birth itself, and the manifold wisdom of his soul.¹⁷

Iamblichus works Pythagoras' vicissitudes as a pure soul into the narrative that Socrates, another pure soul, expounds in the well-known divine palinode of the *Phaedrus*. The terminology is enlightening. The 'rank' (ἡγεμονία) of Apollo, and Pythagoras' soul being an 'attendant' (συνοπαδός) on the god, may remind the more lazy Platonist of the divine ranks of gods and demons, and of souls traveling through the heavenly vault to reach the supercelestial place.¹⁸ In his *De Mysteriis*, Iamblichus equates demons and heroes to eternal beings who attend upon (συνοπαδοί) the gods, passing along with them through the same orders and circuits.¹⁹ However, in respect to demons and heroes, which as κρείττονα γένη are divine, pure souls may be considered as divine on account of their privileged connection with the divine in itself. This entails that, although indeed divine, pure souls are undoubtedly placed on an inferior level of being in respect to demons and heroes. Because of their proximity to them, first-class souls share with them some important traits, but they are nonetheless other than them and, hence, divine in a lesser and qualified sense. The co-arrangement (συντεταγμένη) at which Iamblichus hints in the quoted passage refers us to the taxological, or hierarchical, questions which animated late antique ontological thought, concerning whether a given being should be placed at the same layer of existence as (συν-) another. We will go into this latter point in more detail in the second section. That which must concern us here is rather the opening formula τὸ μέντοι ('that, however...') and, accordingly, the verb καταπέμπεσθαι ('has been sent down').

The import of the adversative connection is worth lingering on a little longer. Iamblichus is intent on rejecting any allegation pointing to a direct, carnal filiation to Pythagoras from the god Apollo, something which some philosophers, even the Platonists, were apparently willing to accept. That being said, he is also concerned with preserving what he elsewhere calls 'the uninterrupted bond with the above realities'²⁰ and, hence, with placing Pythagoras within the class of pure and perfect souls. That is why he shifts the focus from Pythagoras' birth through a body to Pythagoras' soul entering a body from above. From this angle, Iamblichus feels at ease in saying that it was reasonably (εἰκότως) asserted that Pythagoras was θεοῦ παῖς.²¹ However, as well as other references to Pythagoras being divine (e.g., ἐξεθειάζειν),²² this should be understood not in the sense that Pythagoras is the actual son of Apollo, but, instead, in that he is a pure and perfect soul and, hence, a divine being in a qualified sense. Pythagoras' soul is granted a privileged ontological position in respect to second- and third-

¹⁷ Iambl., *Vit. Pit.*, 2, 8.1-6 Klein (translation is mine).

¹⁸ See, in particular, Plat., *Phaedr.* 246E - 247A.

¹⁹ Cf. Iambl., *Myst.*, 1, 10, pp. 36.20-37.6 Saffrey-Segonds.

²⁰ Cf. Iambl., *In Phaed.*, fr. 5b Dillon.

²¹ Cf. Iambl., *Vit. Pit.*, 2, 10.4-6 Klein.

²² Cf. Iambl., *Vit. Pit.*, 2, 11.1-2 Klein.

class souls, something which is proved by the divine gifts with which it is endowed, and, at the same time, places itself at a lesser degree of being in respect to higher divine entities, something which is showcased by its being sent to mankind (*καταπεπέμφθαι εἰς ἀνθρώπους*) from the ranks of Apollo. Before duly commenting on this latter point, it is worth citing another brief text where the same verb occurs in the exact same context. Coupling them will make the case that the sending represents a salient facet of the Neoplatonic doctrine of pure souls, and that it is not to be ascribed to some random, meaningless phrasing on Iamblichus' part. This time, it is Hermias' *Commentary on Plato's Phaedrus* which comes to assist us.²³ As a matter of fact, the *Commentary* opens with the following words: "Socrates was sent down into [the realm of] generation as a service to the race of men and the souls of the young".²⁴ The statement is relevant *per se*, but it cannot be denied that its position at the beginning of the *Commentary* renders its import even more pronounced. The pivotal function that pure souls fulfill within the Neoplatonic universe, stemming from their precise ontological position within the scale of being, debars us from discarding as a minor detail the fact that Hermias' *Commentary* opens with the word ὁ Σωκράτης, and immediately appeals to his salvific sending. Therefore, together with his name, Hermias immediately brings to the forefront the function that Socrates is supposed to fulfill. His presence on earth is, thus, presented as a gift to humankind, and particularly to the young. If there was ever any doubt about the coupling of Pythagoras and Socrates both as representatives of pure and perfect souls, the schema of sending and the verb employed to convey it (*καταπέμπεσθαι*) should put that to rest.²⁵

Pythagoras' and Socrates' souls, then, are sent to earth to accomplish a salvific mission. They are appointed to this role because of the exceptional privilege (*ἐξάριετον προτέρημα*) that higher, intelligible gods bestowed upon them. This exceptional privilege consists in their ontological status, utterly *sui generis*, revealing itself in pure souls possessing characteristics

²³ On the true authorship of the *Commentary*, which is alternately claimed for Syrianus, Hermias' master, and for Hermias himself, see the opposing views of C.-P. Manolea, *The Homeric Tradition in Syrianus*, Ant. Stamoulis 2004, and C. Moreschini, "Alla scuola di Siriano: Ermia nella storia del Neoplatonismo", in A. Longo (ed.), *Syrianus et la Métaphysique de l'Antiquité Tardive*, Bibliopolis, Napoli 2009, pp. 515-78. On Hermias' *Commentary*, cf. J.F. Finamore – C.-P. Manolea – S. Klitenic Wear (eds.), *Studies in Hermias' Commentary on Plato's Phaedrus*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2020; B. Neola, *Il Platonismo di Ermia di Alessandria. Uno studio sugli In Platonis Phaedrum Scholia*, Prefazione di C. Moreschini, Loffredo Editore, Napoli 2022.

²⁴ Herm., *In Phaedr.*, p. 1, 5-6 Lucarini-Moreschini: Ὁ Σωκράτης ἐπὶ εὐεργεσίᾳ τοῦ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένους καὶ τῶν ψυχῶν τῶν νέων καταπέμφθη εἰς γένεσιν.

²⁵ Clearly the idea in itself that a soul may be sent does not appear for the first time in Iamblichus. For instance, the Platonist Atticus employs the verb *καταπέμπειν* with reference to Plato himself: see, Atticos, *Fragments de son œuvre avec introduction et notes*, éd. J. Baudry, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 1931, fr. 1 (*apud* Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica*, in *Eusebius. Werke, Band 8: Die Praeparatio evangelica*, ed. K. Mras, Akademie Verlag (Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller), 11, 2, 4.1-5.1; but also Plotini *Opera, Enneades*, eds. P. Henry – H.R. Schwyzer, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1964, IV 8[6], 5.10-16 with reference to the souls' descent, on which see L. Lavaud, "La métaphore de la liberté. Liberté humaine et liberté divine chez Plotin", *Archives de Philosophie* 75/1 (2012), pp. 11-28. However, a significant modification takes place with Iamblichus and subsequent Neoplatonists as they categorize souls, such as those of Pythagoras, Socrates, or Plato, into a distinct class of souls, thus setting them apart from ordinary souls. This represents a shift from a rhetorical use of the concept of sending to one with ontological implications, based on a particular reading of the *Phaedrus*' myth and the *Timaeus* (especially *Tim.* 30B; 41D-E): cf., e.g., Herm., *In Phaedr.*, pp. 165.1-166.3 Lucarini-Moreschini; Procli Diadochi *In Platonis Timaeum commentaria*, 3 vols., ed. E. Diehl, Teubner, Leipzig 1965, 3, pp. 245.27-246.10.

that are proper to the divine realm. Contrary to third-class souls who descend for punishment, and to second-class souls who descend to improve and correct themselves, pure and perfect souls descend or, as we have just seen, are sent down, in order to save, purify, and make perfect those who live on earth, without relinquishing their connection with the divine on account of the descent. Such depiction renders it exceedingly clear that later Neoplatonists draw a strict connection between ontology and functionality, granting pure souls a salvific mission on account of their being divine, although not as divine as their sender is. As a result, exclusively in reference to pure souls, we are witness to a *variatio* concerning their coming to earth, that could alternatively be presented as a descent or a sending. These two aspects consistently colour their embodiment, which is free-willed, and responds to a salvific function. As a matter of fact, these two traits go hand in hand, and it is actually they that allow one to present the embodiment alternatively as a descent or as a sending. Pure and perfect souls do freely descend to accomplish a salvific mission. Yet, since *σωτηρία* is always dependent upon the gods, the pure souls' descent can fairly be described as a sending rather than a descent. From a different perspective, too, since gods, in their benevolence and graciousness, exert a beneficent caring (*κηδεμονία*) toward mankind,²⁶ and since pure and perfect souls are, in a sense, divine beings as well, the salvific function is likewise willed by both the higher gods and the perfect souls. For instance, Socrates is one *who has decided* to exert a providential care toward the other (*ὁ προνοεῖν ἡρημένος*).²⁷ If the stress is to be put on the gods, then, pure souls are sent (*καταπέπεσθαι*). Otherwise – that is, if the focus is rather placed on pure souls themselves, which, as divine beings, embrace that same willingness to save, perfect, and exert providence – they may be said to descend or to come. Either case, the soteriological function remains saliently in the forefront as a result of the ontological position that pure souls occupy within the scale of beings.

A case in point is that which concerns another soul that can safely be enlisted along with the pure and perfect souls of Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, namely that of Proclus' and Hermias' master, the Alexandrian philosopher Syrianus, Diadochus of the Athenian Academy. Indeed, there is scope to think that, at least in the eyes of Proclus, Syrianus' soul has to be counted among the first-class souls. The text of reference here is, of course, Proclus' prologue to his *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*.²⁸ Proclus' prayer to the gods at the beginning of the *Commentary* is quite relevant for the definition of his hierarchical ontology, since, however briefly, he addresses each divine class in turn, and devoutly asks each to bestow on him that gift which is particular to each of them. Therefore, after invoking the intelligible gods, the intellectual gods, the supercelestial gods, the encosmic gods, the angels, the good demons, and the heroes, Proclus finally addresses himself to his beloved master, Syrianus. If Plato is the one who revealed the mysterious theology in the *Parmenides* in the first place, Syrianus is the one who unfolded it through his utmost pure insights. He truly is a Bacchant together with Plato, and is entirely filled with the divine truth, thus becoming for Proclus the guide for his research and an authentic hierophant of the divine *λόγοι*. Proclus' depiction of Syrianus is straightforwardly in tune with how both Iamblichus portrays Pythagoras and how Hermias

²⁶ Cf., e.g., Iambl., *Myst.*, 1, 12, p. 31.9-11; 1, 13, pp. 32.16-33.6 Saffrey-Segonds.

²⁷ Cf. Herm., *In Phaedr.*, p. 15.24-27 Lucarini-Moreschini.

²⁸ Cf. Procli *In Platonis Parmenides commentarium*, in *Procli philosophi platonici opera inedita*, ed. V. Cousin, e typis Caroli Lahure, Paris 1864, coll. 617.1-618.20.

casts Socrates. Starting with textual assessments, Proclus presents Syrianus' presence on earth as a descent, rather than a sending. Perhaps better, the pattern that Proclus draws on is not even 'descent', since he rather describes an actual 'coming', or 'arriving' (ἐλθεῖν). The verb in itself as well as its active diathesis privileges the voluntary and willed aspect of the descent much more than Iamblichus' and Hermias' καταπέμπεσθαι does. Syrianus did not descend, nor has he been sent, but rather he came. However, as mentioned, these differences are not to be overly stressed. They represent different nuances, rather than actual differences, and are thus worth being detected to the extent that they are suitable for colouring in a particular manner a fairly identifiable common pattern. Besides, Iamblichus opts in places to employ verbs other than καταπέμπεσθαι. In *De Mysteriis*, the phrasing that Iamblichus chooses is εἰς τὸ σῶμα παραγίγνεσθαι, which might be rendered as 'arriving in the body',²⁹ whereas with reference to Pythagoras' soul itself he also employs the cognate nexus εἰς τὸ σῶμα εἰσέρχεσθαι.³⁰ Similarly in *De Anima*, he describes pure and perfect souls' descent as εἰσοικίζεσθαι εἰς τὰ σώματα, which might correspond to the English 'coming to dwell in the bodies',³¹ whereas a few lines later he resorts to κατιέναι, that translates into English as 'descending'.³² The form itself ἐλθεῖν εἰς σῶμα, corresponding to Proclus' presentation of Syrianus' soul's descent, is equally applied to all souls in *De An.* 30.1-2 Finamore-Dillon. In one case, Iamblichus resorts to ἤκειν as well, which is broadly tantamount to Proclus' ἐλθεῖν.³³ Also, in *De An.* 30.6-7 Finamore-Dillon, pure souls are said to be 'implanted into bodies' (ἐμφύεσθαι εἰς τὰ σώματα). The array of possibilities here documented to convey the pure soul's descent may indeed be meant to stress some particular aspect of the descent, but ultimately responds to the inescapable dogma according to which all souls, as such, must leave the intelligible realm.³⁴ While the descent puts much stress on the free-willed character of the embodiment, the sending brings to the fore the ontic position of the sent soul, which is at the same time one of privilege and yet of inferiority in respect to the divine cause to which, nonetheless, it remains always attached.

In this context, it may also be interesting to consider the source that we have tentatively come to identify at the root of Iamblichus' and Hermias' καταπέμπεσθαι.³⁵ We hold that behind this formulation of the pure soul's sending lies a passage from Plato's *Apology of Socrates*. At some point in the course of his self-defence, Socrates addresses the Athenians saying that they act like one who has suddenly been awakened by someone else and, angry at him, strikes out at him, before going back to sleep. Similarly, the Athenians are now angry at Socrates for trying to awaken them, and hence they are willing to listen to Anitos' allegations in order to put Socrates to death and, consequently, get back to sleep for the rest of their lives. This, Socrates adds, will indeed happen, "unless the god, in his care for you, sent you someone else".³⁶ This, very brief, sentence contains three elements fundamental to our discussion, which urges us to

²⁹ Cf. Iambl., *Myst.*, 1, 10, p. 26.27 Saffrey-Segonds.

³⁰ Cf. Iambl., *Vit. Pit.*, 28, 134.8-9 Klein.

³¹ Cf. Iambl., *De An.*, 28.11 Finamore-Dillon.

³² Cf. Iambl., *De An.*, 29.19-21 Finamore-Dillon.

³³ Cf. Iambl., *Vit. Pit.*, 19.92 Klein.

³⁴ Cf. Iambl., *In Phaed.*, fr. 5A Dillon.

³⁵ Cf. B. Neola, *Il Platonismo di Ermia di Alessandria* (above, n. 23), pp. 166-7.

³⁶ Plat., *Apol.*, 31a6-7: εἰ μὴ τινα ἄλλον ὁ θεὸς ὑμῖν ἐπιπέμψειεν κηδόμενος ὑμῶν (trans. A. Nehamas – P. Woodruff, *Symposium*, in J.M. Cooper [ed.], *Plato. Complete Works*, Hackett, Indianapolis-Cambridge 1997).

conjecture that Iamblichus could hardly have overlooked it. First, Socrates mentions ὁ θεός as the one responsible for his sending. It is beyond any reasonable doubt that, in the eyes of Iamblichus and Hermias, a god must be responsible for Pythagoras' and Socrates' sending. As for Pythagoras, Iamblichus is adamant in connecting his soul with Apollo, as we have seen. More ambiguously, Hermias leaves the *καταπέμπεσθαι* without the dative which would have identified the sender, but confines himself to saying that Socrates has been sent. However, in Plato, Iamblichus, and Hermias, the reference to Apollo, if not always rendered explicit, is quite a safe assumption. Besides, ancient biographic, or rather hagiographical, tradition loves to indulge in far-fetched stories variably connecting the birth and life of Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato himself with the god of Delphi. Olympiodorus, for instance, relates the tradition according to which a *φάσμα* of Apollo had contact with Perictione, Plato's mother.³⁷ Second, in the cited passage, Socrates describes a god caring for the Athenians (*κηδόμενος*). Caring for human beings is one among the properties that Iamblichus *ex professo* attributes to the gods.³⁸ Mostly, Hermias transposes it to Socrates himself, whom he presents as the *κηδεμών τοῦ νέου* in precisely that passage in which he describes Socrates' activity in terms of a voluntary exercise of providence and anagogic perfection, *inter alia*.³⁹ Finally, and most importantly, Plato's Socrates bluntly, however ironically, states that the god sent him (*ἐπιπέμπειν*). Hence, it seems at least reasonable to assume that *Apol.* 31A played a role in the *querelle* about the *κάθοδος*,⁴⁰ and that Iamblichus drew on it to present the pure souls' descent into the sensible dimension in terms of a divine sending. Although it could appear naïve to modern readers, it should not escape our notice nonetheless that, in the eyes of Iamblichus, the fact that Socrates himself is the one who presents his own descent to earth as a sending could be deeply meaningful. In late Neoplatonic circles, Socrates' irony is decisively downplayed, to leave room for a picture of Socrates as *σεμνός, ὑψηλός, μεγάλόψυχος* in tune with Aristotle's description in the *Nicomachean Ethics*;⁴¹ Pythagoras himself is depicted as *σεμνότατος* by Iamblichus.⁴² Returning to the *Apology*, then, Socrates as pure soul says himself that the god sent him, while in the *Phaedrus* he himself unfolds the theological discourse, that describes the vicissitudes of pure souls such as his own or that of Pythagoras.

This, in turn, brings us back to Proclus, and Syrianus. In addition to saying that he came, Proclus adds the reason why he came to the earth. According to the Diadochus, Syrianus came 'for the benefit of souls here below' (*εἰς ἀνθρώπους ἐλθεῖν ἐπ' εὐεργεσία τῶν τῆδε ψυχῶν*), as the image of philosophy and as 'chief author of salvation for men who now live and for those to come hereafter' (*σωτηρίας ἀρχηγὸν τοῖς γε νῦν οὖσιν ἀνθρώποις καὶ τοῖς εἰσαῦθις γενησομένοις*). Such powerful statements strikingly echo some descriptions from Iamblichus

³⁷ Cf. Olympiodorus, *Commentary on the First Alcibiades of Plato*, ed. L.G. Westerink, Hakkert, Amsterdam 1956, p. 2.21-24. On such traditions, see A. Motta, *Prolegomeni alla filosofia di Platone*, Armando Editore, Roma 2014.

³⁸ See, e.g., Iambl., *Myst.*, 1, 13, p. 32.16-24 Saffrey-Segonds.

³⁹ Cf. Herm., *In Phaedr.*, p. 13.29-30; p. 15.24-25 Lucarini-Moreschini.

⁴⁰ A few lines before, in 31 A2, Socrates also employs *γενέσθαι* to signify the descent.

⁴¹ Cf., e.g., Herm., *In Phaedr.*, p. 11.13-15; p. 17.27; pp. 20.16-21.4 Lucarini-Moreschini. For an overview on the figure of Socrates in Neoplatonism, cf. D. Layne – H. Tarrant (eds.), *The Neoplatonic Socrates*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 2014; N. D'Andrès, *Socrate Néoplatonicien. Une science de l'amour dans le Commentaire de Proclus sur le Premier Alcibiade*, Vrin, Paris 2020; B. Neola, *Il Platonismo di Ermia di Alessandria* (above, n. 23), pp. 155-278.

⁴² Cf. Iambl., *Vit. Pit.*, 2, 10.1-2; 3, 15.1-2 Klein.

and Hermias with reference, once again, to Pythagoras and Socrates.⁴³ To start with, the heading 28 from the *Index* which opens the *Pythagorean Way of Life* summarizes the content of the chapter in a manner that is quite interesting. There, Iamblichus sets out to document the divine and miraculous acts performed by Pythagoras, which all pertain to his piety, and which, thanks to the benevolence of the gods, provided human beings with the greatest benefit (τὴν μεγίστην εἰς ἀνθρώπους εὐεργεσίαν).⁴⁴ Omitting some other minor references to Pythagoras' εὐεργεσία, we cannot possibly avoid mentioning here *Vit. Pit.* 19, 92. In this meaningful passage, Iamblichus recounts the encounter between Pythagoras and Abaris, the Hyperborean sage and priest of Apollo. As if he himself was truly the god, Pythagoras shows Abaris his golden thigh, and adds that he came to heal and benefit human beings (ἐπὶ θεραπείᾳ καὶ εὐεργεσίᾳ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἦκοι). Then, he asks Abaris to remain with him, and to collaborate with him in order to correct (συνδιορθοῦν) those with whom they might meet. Here, not only do we find once again a reference to the evergetic function of the descent, but we are also reminded, through the mention of the 'correction', of the purpose for which second-class souls descend to earth from *De An.* 29.19-21 Finamore-Dillon. The τέλος for which second-class souls descend, i.e., to correct themselves, meets the τέλος for which first-class souls are sent, i.e., to correct second-class souls. This is easily grounded in the texts themselves, for, if we remind ourselves of *De An.* 29.21-22 Finamore-Dillon, wherein second-class souls are said to come διὰ γυμνασίαν καὶ ἐπανόρθωσιν τῶν οἰκείων ἡθῶν, we cannot fail to acknowledge as a complementary facet *Vit. Pit.* 6, wherein Pythagoras is said to be counted among the gods (μετὰ τῶν θεῶν κατηρίθμουν) that appeared εἰς ὠφέλειαν καὶ ἐπανόρθωσιν τοῦ θνητοῦ βίου.⁴⁵ Furthermore, Proclus defining Syrianus as φιλοσοφίας τύπος and σωτηρίας ἀρχηγός seems to parallel Iamblichus qualifying Pythagoras as ἡγεμῶν after the gods, and notably ἀρχηγός καὶ πατήρ τῆς θείας φιλοσοφίας,⁴⁶ as well as Iamblichus saying that Pythagoras appeared on earth to bestow on the mortal nature the salvific light (σωτήριον ἔναυσμα) of happiness and philosophy, the greatest among the gifts that has ever come, and will ever come, from the gods.⁴⁷ As a last piece of this dossier on pure souls' εὐεργεσία, one may recall the *incipit* from Hermias' *Commentary on Plato's Phaedrus*, where Socrates is said to have been sent into generation for the benefit of the human γένος and the souls of the young (ἐπὶ εὐεργεσίᾳ τοῦ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένους καὶ τῶν ψυχῶν τῶν νέων).

Two points remain to be emphasized in this context, though. First, we briefly mentioned a strict connection between the salvific function of pure souls and their ontological position. Now, we hold that the nexus ἐπὶ εὐεργεσίᾳ plus the verb of the descent can be viewed as the actual translation on the written page of this crucial connection, and all the more so if we add to the εὐεργεσία the actual σωτηρία, and if we privilege καταπέμπεσθαι over ἔκειν, ἐλθεῖν,

⁴³ On the relationship between Proclus' praise of Syrianus and Iamblichus' praise of Pythagoras, see I. Tanaseanu-Döbler, "Ein Lob Platons selbst wie auch derjenigen, die von ihm die Philosophie empfangen". Bemerkungen zur literarischen Inszenierung philosophischer Sukzession bei Proklos", in A.-B. Rengen – M. Witte (eds.), *Sukzession in Religionen. Autorisierung, Legitimierung, Wissenstransfer*, De Gruyter, Berlin-Boston 2017, pp. 393-434. On the various praises of Syrianus within Proclus' works, see A. Longo, "L'elogio di Siriano e i proemi dottrinali procliani", *Ktèma* 35 (2010), pp. 385-92.

⁴⁴ Cf. Iambl., *Vit. Pit.*, *Index* 28 Klein.

⁴⁵ Cf. Iambl., *Vit. Pit.*, 6, 30.18-19 Klein.

⁴⁶ Cf. Iambl., *Vit. Pit.*, 1, 2.10-11 Klein.

⁴⁷ Cf. Iambl., *Vit. Pit.*, 6, 30.20-23 Klein.

and the like. In particular, on the one hand, the preposition ἐπί unveils the finalistic approach to the descent that Iamblichus explicitly thematizes in the treatise *De Anima* when pointing to the different τέλη bringing about differences among the descents. On the other hand, the sending aspect of the descent (καταπέμπεσθαι) unveils in its turn the pure souls' ontological position within the (divine) τάξις, as it bespeaks an axiologically colored relation between a 'sender/cause' and 'one being sent/caused'. The latter is a true god (Apollo, in all likelihood), while the former is the pure soul, attendant upon the gods. Such a dynamic lies behind the seemingly rhetorical nexus ἐπί εὐεργεσία καταπέμπεσθαι. The pure souls' ontological position is signalled by their being sent, which, in its turn, grants the possibility for human salvation. Precisely because they are divine, albeit not wholly, pure souls can save, purify, and make perfect those who live on earth. In other words, ἐπί εὐεργεσία καταπέμπεσθαι describes the relationship between gods and pure souls in terms of a relationship between a cause (αἴτιον) and a caused (αἰτιατόν), effectively encompassing both the ontic and the functional aspects.⁴⁸

So far, then, we have seen to what extent the idea of divine sending impinges on various facets of the characterization of a pure soul. For the unbreakable bond with the higher dimension, the supernatural intellectual power, the purity, and even the salvific function, all follow on from the fact that pure souls have purposely been sent from the ἐκεῖ to the ἐνταῦθα. Now, if we turn our gaze to Christianity, and notably to Cyril (c. 370-444 AD), patriarch of Alexandria when Hermias was teacher of Platonic philosophy in the city, we may stumble on a salient passage pointing to the tremendous import that the 'sending' has in Christological debates as well.⁴⁹ In his *Commentary* on John, Cyril explicitly conceptualizes the sending of Christ and, at the same time, takes great effort in trying to qualify it.

[...] the psalmist addressed God the Father, saying, "Send out your light and your truth." [...] But if the light and the truth of the Father, that is, the Son, is sent to us [εἰ δὲ πέμπεται], how can the Son not be different from him [πῶς οὐχ ἕτερός ἐστι παρ' αὐτόν], as far as his own subsistence is concerned [ὅσον εἰς τὸ ἰδίως ὑπάρχειν], even if he is also one with him as far as the identity of substance is concerned [ὅσον εἰς τὴν τῆς οὐσίας ταυτότητα]? If anyone thinks this is wrong, and the Father and the Son are one and the same, why didn't the Spirit bearer pray differently, crying out, "Come [Ἐλθέ] to us, O light and truth"? But since he says "send," [ἐπειδὴ δὲ τὸ Ἐξαπόστειλον λέγει] the conclusion should be clear that he thinks the sender is different from the one being sent [ἕτερον μὲν τινα τὸν ἀποστέλλοντα εἰδώς, ἕτερον δὲ τὸν ἀποστελλόμενον]. Of course, we should understand the manner of the sending in a way that is fitting to God [ὁ δὲ τῆς ἀποστολῆς τρόπος νοείσθω θεοπρεπῶς].⁵⁰

⁴⁸ It is obvious for a Platonist that a soul is inferior to divinity as a soul. However, the concept of 'sending' and the salvific function it entails suggest that the particular soul in question, even though it is still a soul, should not be regarded as equal to all the others. Therefore, its inferiority to the divine, which would otherwise be self-evident, also requires certain qualifications.

⁴⁹ For a comprehensive overview on the figure of Cyril, cf., e.g., N. Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, Routledge, London – New York 2000 (The Early Church Fathers); S. Wessel, *Cyril of Alexandria and the Nestorian Controversy*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 2004 (Oxford Early Christian Studies); H. von Loon, *The Dyophysite Christology of Cyril of Alexandria*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2009 (Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 96).

⁵⁰ Cyrille d'Alexandrie, *Commentaire sur Jean*, Tome 1, Livre 1, ed. B. Meunier, Éditions du Cerf, Paris 2018 (Sources chrétiennes), 1, 2, p. 29, 18d161-e174 (transl. D. Maxwell, *Commentary on John, Cyril of Alexandria. Volume 1*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove IL 2013).

This passage enriches Cyril's dossier aiming to demonstrate through syllogisms and Scriptural evidence that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have their own hypostasis as well,⁵¹ and thus projects us straightforwardly to another, quite specific, domain, i.e. Trinitarian theology. Or rather, this *locus* from the *Commentary* on John confirms that the topic of the sending represents a privileged gateway to late antique theologies, to the extent that the dialectic between an ἀποστέλλων and an ἀποστελλόμενος cannot but prompt the ontological question: 'what is (τί ἐστι) the ἀποστέλλων?', 'what is (τί ἐστι) the ἀποστελλόμενος?'. Let us then try to delve into the ontological models underlying the dynamic of the sending in Late Antiquity.

Ontological Models

Cyril is adamant that the very fact that we can distinguish between ἀποστέλλων and ἀποστελλόμενος is salient, as it tells us something about a difference existing between them. Otherwise said, the ἀποστολή in itself, in that it implies a relational dynamic, discloses identity and otherness. Thus far, that is, without taking into consideration Cyril's qualifications of the διαφορά, Neoplatonists too would have agreed that one thing is the sender and another thing is the one being sent, as the relationship between the higher divinity, on the one hand, and Pythagoras' or Socrates' souls, on the other, has shown. However, Neoplatonists would have framed the issue by describing it in the ontological terms of αἴτιον-αἰτιατόν, in the sense that 'the one who sends' is the cause (αἴτιον or αἰτία), while 'the one being sent' is the caused (αἰτιατόν). Indeed, we have seen Hermias holding that Socrates is always attached to his principles and causes, which are identified with the gods: ἀεὶ τῶν οἰκειῶν ἀρχῶν καὶ αἰτιῶν καὶ τῶν νοητῶν καὶ οἰκειῶν ἑαυτοῦ θεῶν ἔχουσθαι αὐτόν (we can certainly consider the second καὶ expegetically). This clearly implies an ontic difference between Socrates' soul and the divine being responsible for his sending, this latter placing itself at a higher level of being. Significantly enough, while being keenly aware that the dialectic between a sender and someone who is sent has to mean something, Cyril takes a different path in explaining the ἑτερότης that this pattern implies. He is very careful to impress on his reader that the difference between the Father, as sender, and the Son, as the one being sent, has nothing to do with their essence, which is the same (τῆς οὐσίας ταυτότης), but with their respective particular, individual existence (τὸ ἰδίως ὑπάρχειν). Godhead is the essence of both the Father and the Son. They share in the same οὐσία, though existing in their own ὑπόστασις.⁵²

This distinction between essential identity and hypostatic otherness comes in handy further on to refute Eunomius, and is qualified through the dialectic between 'uniqueness of essential quality' (ἐνότης τῆς οὐσιώδους ποιότητος) and 'property' (τὸ ἴδιον).⁵³ Cyril issues a warning about how to handle the law of consubstantiality in this context. The ὁμοουσιότης should not be taken as a weapon to erase that which is particular and proper to each member of the Holy Trinity, lest we restrain it πρὸς ἐνάδα and thereby efface the extension of the persons (τῶν προσώπων διαστολή).⁵⁴ For Cyril, then, it is crucial to stress that the consubstantial

⁵¹ Cf. Cyril., *In Io.*, 1, 2, p. 25.15D47 ff. Meunier.

⁵² On Cyril's Trinitarian thought, cf. M.-O. Boulnois, *Le paradoxe trinitaire chez Cyrille d'Alexandrie*, Herméneutique, analyses philosophiques et argumentation théologique, Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, Paris 1994; M. Crawford, *Cyril of Alexandria's Trinitarian Theology of Scripture*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 2014.

⁵³ Cf. Cyril., *In Io.*, 1, 4, p. 52, 34d17 – p. 53, 35c246 Meunier.

⁵⁴ Cf. Cyril., *In Io.*, 1, 4, p. 54, 36a276-b282 Meunier. It goes without saying that Cyril's concern is here with

nature does not prevent each member of the Holy Trinity from existing in its proper and particular hypostasis.⁵⁵ Drawing possibly on philosophical terminology via Porphyry's *Isagoge*,⁵⁶ Cyril argues that τὸ εἶναι τῆς αὐτῆς οὐσίας does not erase the reciprocal difference distinguishing beings belonging to the same genre or species.⁵⁷ The seeming opposite laws of consubstantiality and proper subsistence actually go together, in the sense that consubstantiality does not erase the particularities and hence independent existences of each person, and proper subsistence does not erase the identity of nature bringing about totally independent and distinct existences.⁵⁸ The harmonious coupling of the two λόγοι boils down to saying that Father and Son are united συναφῶς τε ἅμα καὶ διωρισμένως. Cyril employs a telling verb in this context: the essential identity, that is, the law of consubstantiality, *smooths* (καταλείπειν) the difference, that is, the law of proper existence, thus rendering it somehow impossible to discern (ἀδιαιρέτων) that which is proper and particular to each.⁵⁹ As a matter of fact, the Son distinguishes himself from the Father just in that he is Son and not Father, that is, because he has been generated while the Father is the one who generated.⁶⁰ The qualified principle of ἐτερότης also orients Cyril's careful adaptation of Plotinus' metaphysics. While he endorses the hypostatic ἐτερότης within the Plotinian unfolding of One, Intellect, and Soul, Cyril censures the qualification of that alterity in terms of κατὰ τὴν φύσιν by reiterating instead that Father and Son differ solely in the one's being ungenerated and the other generated (τὸ μὲν γεγέννηκε, τὸ δὲ γεγέννηται).⁶¹ Otherwise said, while explicitly acknowledging that the pattern 'sender-sent' has to imply some kind of ἐτερότης, Cyril would have never accepted that this difference could be explained in terms of αἴτιον-αἰτιατόν, whose import would have been of ontological, rather than mere functional, significance.

Disallowing the αἴτιον-αἰτιατόν ontological model entails an unwillingness to accept the entire gamut of Neoplatonic ontological principles. Despite the often relevant discrepancies between the ontologies of the earlier and later Neoplatonists, one could safely say that the Neoplatonic metaphysical and ontological system is governed by some commonly agreed general principles, set out first by Plotinus but accepted, notwithstanding adaptations, by the later Neoplatonists as well.⁶² First, producing something, i.e., a caused (αἰτιατόν), does not entail that the producer, i.e., the cause (αἴτιον), undergoes any ontological diminution

rejecting Sabellius' so-called 'modalistic monarchianism' as well, which implies a conflation between the persons of the Father and the Son.

⁵⁵ Cf. Cyril., *In Io.*, 1, 4, p. 56, 37c326-329 Meunier.

⁵⁶ Cf., e.g., Porphyrii *Isagoge et in Aristotelis categorias commentarium*, ed. A. Busse, Reimer, Berlin 1887 (CAG IV.1), p. 6.3-6.

⁵⁷ Cf. Cyril., *In Io.*, 1, 4, p. 56, 37d338-340 Meunier.

⁵⁸ Cf. Cyril., *In Io.*, 1, 5, p. 69, 46d134-e143 Meunier.

⁵⁹ Cf. Cyrille d'Alexandrie, *Dialogues sur la Trinité. Tome I. Dialogues I et II*, ed. G.-M. de Durand, Éditions du Cerf, Paris 1976 (Sources chrétiennes), 1, 409b-d.

⁶⁰ Cf., e.g., Cyril., *Dial. de Trin.*, 1, 415a-416d de Durand; Id., *Contre Julien. Tome IV. Livres VIII-IX*, ed. M.-O. Boulnois (GCSNF 21 W. Kinzig – T. Brüggemann), Cerf, Paris 2021 (Sources chrétiennes), 8, 20, 908 a 19-22.

⁶¹ Cf. Cyril., *CJ.*, 8, 31, 920d12-18 Boulnois, on which, see R. Arnou, "La séparation par simple altérité dans la 'Trinité' plotinienne: A propos d'un texte de St. Cyrille d'Alexandrie (*Contra Iulianum*, lib. VIII, MG 76, 920 CD)", *Gregorianum* 11/2 (1930), pp. 181-93.

⁶² On Neoplatonic onto-metaphysics, cf. F. Romano, *Il Neoplatonismo*, Carocci, Roma 1998, pp. 64-91; G. van Riel, "The One, the Henads, and the Principles", in P. d'Hoine – M. Martijn (eds.), *All From One. A Guide to Proclus*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 2017, pp. 73-97.

whatsoever.⁶³ This stems from the fact that production follows on from an entity (though this latter qualification must be handled with kid gloves when referring to the One) which is perfect in itself, and is not the result of a willed act, but of the very same essence (again, caution is demanded in the case of the One) of the cause. Indeed, a willed act would imply a heteronomy of purposes and, hence, introduces the bugbear of multiplicity. This first principle governing Neoplatonic ontology goes hand in hand with a second one: the caused (*ἀιτιατόν*) is ontologically inferior to the cause (*αἴτιον*), so that the more one proceeds downward throughout the scale of being, the more one finds ontologically poorer beings (until reaching sheer matter, at the bottom).⁶⁴ It is pivotal to underline that these two principles, which may fairly be considered as the cornerstone of Neoplatonic ontology, are complementary, even if they could seem in contradiction with each other at first glance. How could something produce something inferior to itself and still remain the same? The way out of the impasse rests on a due qualification of the act of producing. *Παρέργειν* is the act of bringing forth a new, lesser layer of being without tarnishing the perfect completeness of the higher layer responsible for its producing. The perfect completeness is *condicio sine qua non* for the production, and the *παρέργειν* does take place, and hence should be conceived of, in an atemporal and non-spatial manner.⁶⁵ Admittedly, this is not a point easy to swallow, urging, for example, Plotinus to hone his language of production and mould a subtle doctrine such as that of the so-called ‘double activity’ in order to account for his emanationist system.⁶⁶ From this point of view at least, one could see a parallel between Cyril and the Neoplatonists. Their two respective ontological *λόγοι* – laws of consubstantiality and of proper subsistence, on the one hand, laws of production without lessening of the cause and of ontological inferiority of the caused in respect to its cause, on the other – betray their authors’ agenda and their ontological prejudices descending from their respective cultural backgrounds. To put it in other words, instead of – or, better, in addition to – pondering on their ultimate consistency, it would be fair to acknowledge that they first and foremost indicate two irreducible worldviews. Neither ontic structure is flawless, notwithstanding the efforts that their advocates made to ground them. This obviously stems from the human impossibility of talking about that which transcends sensible perception, as Timaeus warned long ago.⁶⁷ After all, in spite of the faith in their system, both the Neoplatonists and the Christians did know about this, and references abound to their own discourses being likely at best and at worst misleading.

However, the laws of production without lessening and of the ontological inferiority of the caused lie at the base of Neoplatonic ontology, and it is from them that stem other important axioms regulating the unfolding of beings. Indeed, this ontological skeleton leads us to a third principle governing Neoplatonic ontology, that is, the axiom according to which the caused is pre-contained in its cause.⁶⁸ For example, the Soul is pre-contained in the Intellect, in the sense that the Intellect has in itself the causative principles of the Soul. However, care must be taken in this case as well not to conceive of the pre-containing in

⁶³ Cf., e.g., Plot., *Enn.* III 8[30], 10.6-7; VI 9[9], 9.3.

⁶⁴ Cf., e.g., Plot., *Enn.*, V 3[49], 16, 4-8; V 1[10], 6.39; V 5[32], 13.37-38.

⁶⁵ Cf., e.g., Plot., *Enn.*, V 1[10], 6, 37-40; V 2[11], 1.7-9.

⁶⁶ Cf., e.g., Plot., *Enn.*, V 1[10], 3, 10-12; V 3[49], 7.21-25; R. Chiaradonna, “Causalité et hiérarchie métaphysique dans le Néoplatonisme: Plotin, Porphyre, Jamblique”, *Chora* 12 (2014), pp. 67-85.

⁶⁷ Cf. Plat., *Tim.*, 29B-D.

⁶⁸ Cf. e.g., Plot., *Enn.*, V 3[49], 15.29-30; VI 8[39], 18.39-40.

temporal and/or spatial terms. The caused does not pre-exist in the cause, and is not in the cause as in a place either. Rather, it is pre-contained within the causative power of its cause.⁶⁹ This principle has great import, not only as far as the *profluxus entium* is concerned, but also, and perhaps above all, with regard to the epistrophic dynamics animating the Neoplatonic cosmos. Being pre-contained in its cause lays the ground for a being to return (ἐπιστροφή) to its pre-containing cause after parting from it (πρόοδος) to appropriate its own existence. Moreover, this principle safeguards the causal priority of the First Principle, as it turns out that the One is the ultimate cause not just of the Intellect, but of all existing beings: it is δύναμις τῶν πάντων.⁷⁰ On the other hand, this ontological dynamic discloses to us another important trait of the Neoplatonic universe, which we may label ‘ontological dependence’. To the extent that it is produced by some higher cause and is pre-contained in it, each being depends on its cause, in the sense that its existence ‘hangs on’ the layer of reality which pre-contains and produces it. The ‘hanging on’ principle (ἀρτᾶσθαι, συναρτᾶσθαι, ἐξαρτᾶσθαι) embedded within each αἰτιατόν also accounts for the continuity and consistency of reality, guaranteeing an ultimately ontic connection between the lower and the higher.⁷¹

In light of this, the import of Cyril’s disallowing the ἐτερότης κατὰ τὴν φύσιν between the sender and the one being sent should become even clearer. The patriarch is unwilling to put Christ within such a subordinationist pattern. It is well-known that Cyril identifies the three Plotinian so-called hypostases with the three persons of the Holy Trinity. However, each time he does so, he adds the usual ‘πλήν caveat’, thereby singling out the fundamental difference between Neoplatonic ontology and his own Trinitarian conceptions. One could read, for example, a telling passage from his *Against Julian*, wherein the patriarch explains that ‘they’ call νοῦς that which is called θεὸς λόγος ‘by us’, since Christians, too, name it σοφία, except that (πλήν) they do not put it ἐν μείοσιν ἢ δευτέροις in any aspect whatsoever in respect to the superiority and glory of the Father.⁷² This qualified identification between Plotinian νοῦς and Christian λόγος allows Cyril to back up his Christological conception via Plotinus’ characterization of the Intellect or, better, allows him to show that sometimes even the Hellenes may grasp a parcel of the Truth. A case in point is the ἄτρεπτον character of the Word, which is proved on the basis of what Plotinus says concerning the immutability of the Intellect in the *Ennead* that Porphyry later entitled ‘On the Three Primary Hypostases’.⁷³ However, Cyril’s primary concern is to ward off the ontic subordinationism potentially implied by the ἀποστέλλων-ἀποστελλόμενος dialectic, which threatens to frame the relationship between Father and Son within the αἴτιον-αἰτιατόν scheme. Yet it is Cyril himself who tells us that some Christians did indeed interpret the relationship between Father and Son in the Neoplatonic ontological terms of αἴτιον-αἰτιατόν.

Christological Models

If we turn our gaze to his *Dialogues on the Holy Trinity*, Cyril tells us that some alleged Christians viewed Christ as a mediator, a μεσίτης. They would have grounded their

⁶⁹ Cf., e.g., Plot., *Enn.*, V 5[32], 9.1-10.

⁷⁰ Cf. Plot., *Enn.*, III 8[30], 10, 1-2.

⁷¹ Cf., e.g., Plot., *Enn.*, I 6[1], 7.7-11; II 2[14], 12.14; V 3[49], 12.17-20.

⁷² Cf. Cyril., *CJ.*, 8, 30, 920a14-17 Boulnois.

⁷³ Cf. Plot., *Enn.*, V 1[10], 4, 12-17, quoted in Cyril., *CJ.*, 8, 39, 929c5-12 Boulnois. On the philological problems of this quotation, see Boulnois, *Cyrille d’Alexandrie* (above, n. 59), pp. 184-6.

Christological stance mainly on Paul's *First Letter to Timothy*, wherein the apostle states that there is One God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ.⁷⁴ According to those Christians, if Christ is a mediator as Paul attests, then his nature must be different from that of those entities between which he mediates: in other words, Christ would be ontologically different from both God and creation. In particular, Christ would be neither uncreated like the Father nor created like the cosmos, but would be endowed with a nature *sui generis* revealing him to be both inferior to the Godhead itself and superior to the created, sensible dimension. The Johannine ἄνωθεν ἐρχόμενος⁷⁵ would not point to Christ's divine nature *stricto sensu*, but, while being a denial of an earthly human nature, it would hint at some other celestial nature far greater than the human one.⁷⁶ These Christians refute the ὁμοούσιον and thus make Christ's nature descend from the ineffable one, while still preserving a superiority (τεττηρήκασί τι τὸ ἐξείρετον) in respect to creation.⁷⁷ The stress is put on the οὐχ ὁμοούσιος τῷ Θεῷ as much as it is on the οὐχ ὁμοφυῆς τοῖς πεπονημένοις. Christ occupies a μέση χώρα and, as such, he exceeds the domain of nature (φύσεως ἐκβεβηκέναι λόγον).⁷⁸ The interruption of his declension πρὸς τὸ κάτω puts him in an intermediate position enabling him to deliver his salvific mission, leading human beings upward toward the only one, true Godhead of the Father. For those Christians, then, the relationship between Father and Son perfectly falls within the αἴτιον-αἰτιατόν pattern, since they wish to underscore that the cause cannot but pre-exist its caused: καίτοι παντός ἡμᾶς ἀναπειθόντος λογισμοῦ τό τινος αἴτιον προϋπάρχειν ἡγεῖσθαι τοῦ αἰτιατοῦ.⁷⁹ While God the Father is the cause, the Son is the caused and, as such, is inferior to his pre-existing cause while being superior to human beings, who are, in their turn, subject to generation.⁸⁰ Cyril profoundly deplores such a Christological stance, but, more interestingly, comments that he has no idea from where those Christians took their foolish αἴτιον-αἰτιατόν fancy: τὸ αἴτιον τοίνυν καὶ τὸ αἰτιατόν, οὐκ οἶδ' ὅθεν ἡμῖν ἐλόντες τε καὶ ὀνομάζοντες.⁸¹ We cannot but conjecture whether Cyril is truly naïve in his comment, or whether he did indeed know ὅθεν those Christians took inspiration, and purposely passes over that source in silence. Be that as it may, we are witness to a salient interference between Neoplatonic ontological concerns and Christian theorizations about the relationship between Father and Son.

The pre-existence (προϋπάρχειν) indeed plays a pivotal role within Neoplatonic ontology, as it characterizes the cause in respect to the caused. When applied to the so-called hypostases, however, pre-existence is not to be conceived in terms of temporal pre-existence, but, rather, in strictly causative terms. The Intellect pre-exists and pre-contains the Soul, to the extent that it is the causal principle of the Soul. The pre-containing principle is perfectly in tune with the pre-existing one. The fact that the caused is pre-contained in its cause does not

⁷⁴ Cf. 1 Tim. 2, 5.

⁷⁵ Cf. Jn. 3, 31.

⁷⁶ Cf. Cyril., *Dial. de Trin.*, 1, 395e36-40 de Durand.

⁷⁷ Cf. Cyril., *Dial. de Trin.*, 1, 396b17-c20 de Durand.

⁷⁸ Cf. Cyril., *Dial. de Trin.*, 1, 396c22; 409c21 de Durand.

⁷⁹ Cyril., *Dial. de Trin.*, 1, 435a3-4 de Durand: "Yet all reasoning persuades us to think that that which is cause of something pre-exists the caused" (translation is mine).

⁸⁰ Cf. Cyril., *Dial. de Trin.*, 1, 396d27 de Durand.

⁸¹ Cyril., *Dial. de Trin.*, 1, 435e36-37 de Durand.

mean that it exists together with the cause, as having, even before existing, the same kind of existence that it will possess when existing. In other terms, pre-containing does not imply co-existence (συνυπάρχειν). The Soul pre-contained in the Intellect is not the Soul produced by the Intellect appropriating its own existence. Intellect possesses the causative principles of the Soul, so that the Soul is pre-contained in it though not being co-existent with it. A due clarification of the relation among the ontological principles of ἐν ἄλλῳ εἶναι (pre-containing), προϋπάρχειν (pre-existing), and συνυπάρχειν (co-existing) is crucial, because they strongly impinge on Christological and Trinitarian debates, and may help identify the Christian cibles of Cyril's reproaches. In the course of the *νοκτομαχία* of the fourth century,⁸² one among the numerous Christological doctrines put forth held that, although not co-existing with the Father, Christ has always existed in Him in potentiality (ἐν δυνάμει). God has always been Father, but first, before putting forth his Word, in potentiality, and afterwards in actuality. Apparently, such a Christological stance was proposed at the Council of Nicaea by Emperor Constantine himself.⁸³ However, this idea was bound to be rejected later, mainly because it may have implied a change in God, since the passage from δύναμις to ἐνέργεια seems to be proper to γενητά rather than to Godhead. And it is not without reason that Plotinus' description of the One as δύναμις τῶν πάντων also appears problematic, even to the eyes of Plotinus' himself. Still, the dialectic between προϋπάρχειν and συνυπάρχειν is salient in both Neoplatonic ontology and Christian Trinitarian (and Christological) discourse. Cyril does strongly oppose any idea of pre-existence on the part of God the Father in respect to God the Word. As has been seen, to his eyes, προϋπάρχειν belongs to the lexicon of αἴτιον-αἰτιατόν and, as such, it has nothing to do with God and Christ. Only those Christians who are wont to exclude Christ from the true Godhead may draw on such notion to underscore their subordinationist, mediatorial Christology. Cyril never cites his Christian opponents by name in the *Dialogues on the Holy Trinity*. However, there is scope to think that his target here is Eusebius of Caesarea himself.

In his *Letter to Euphraton*, Eusebius is adamant that the Son does not co-exist with the Father, but rather that the Father pre-exists the Son: Οὐ γὰρ συνυπάρχειν φαμέν τὸν υἱὸν τῷ πατρί, προϋπάρχειν δὲ τὸν πατέρα τοῦ υἱοῦ.⁸⁴ Co-existence would have implied sharing all properties, which is not the case in fact. In other words, Cyril's 'πλήν caveat', mentioned above, does not fit the bill for Eusebius. While Cyril maintains that the ἐτερότης underlying the ἀποστέλλων-ἀποστελλόμενος scheme boils down to a difference of ὑπόστασις between

⁸² During the early fourth century, the Christian world was engulfed in controversy regarding the status of the divinity of the Son of God, and the resulting confusion was so great that the event has become famously known as the 'battle at night': see, e.g., Gregorii Nysseni *Contra Eunomium*, in *Gregorii Nysseni opera*, vols. 1.1 & 2.2, ed. W. Jaeger, Brill, Leiden 1960, 2, 1, pp. 492.6-493.1. On fourth-century Christian debate, cf. R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God. The Arian Controversy 318-381*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh 1988; L. Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 2004. D.M. Gwynn, *The Eusebians. The Polemic of Athanasius of Alexandria and the Construction of the 'Arian Controversy'*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 2007 (Oxford Theological Monographs).

⁸³ Cf. Eusebius, *Epistula ad Caesarienses*, in *Athanasius Werke*, vol. 2.1, ed. H.G. Opitz, De Gruyter, Berlin 1940, p. 16.1-6.

⁸⁴ Cf. Eusebius, *Epistula ad Euphratonem*, in *Athanasius Werke*, vol. 3, 1, ed. H.G. Opitz, De Gruyter, Berlin 1934, 1.4-5: "Indeed, we do not say that the Son co-exists with the Father, but rather that the Father pre-exists the Son" (translation is mine).

Father and Son and, hence, to the mere acknowledgment that τὸ μὲν γεγέννηκε, τὸ δὲ γεγέννηται, the bishop of Caesarea insists that, if Father and Son had co-existed, they would have not been ὁ μὲν ἀγέννητος, ὁ δὲ γεννητός. Co-existing beings should be conceived of as being on an equal footing (συνυπάρχοντα as ἰσότημα).⁸⁵ It should come as no surprise, then, if Eusebius wraps up his argument by appealing to God as αἴτιον of the Son, and more precisely as cause τοῦ εἶναι καὶ τοῦ τοιῶσδε εἶναι τῷ δευτέρῳ.⁸⁶ Perhaps even more importantly for the present discussion, Eusebius gives more weight to his arguments by pointing to a Scriptural passage hinting at the sending of the Son from the Father, that is, Jn. 17, 3 (ὁ πατὴρ ὁ πέμψας με μείζων μου ἐστίν),⁸⁷ before mentioning 1 Tim. 2, 5 on Christ as mediator that is at the core of Cyril's critical reaction in his first *Dialogue on the Holy Trinity*.⁸⁸ According to Eusebius, then, Christ is endowed with precisely that μέση φύσις later to be disparaged by Cyril. It is enlightening to read through the following passage from Eusebius' *Against Marcellus* while keeping in mind Cyril's grievances in the *Dialogues on the Holy Trinity*:

For this reason, this mediator does not imply one party, but necessarily operates between two parties, being neither of those between whom he is [οὐδέτερος ὢν ἐκείνων ὢν μέσος τυγχάνει], so that he is thought to be neither “the” God who is over all nor one of the angels, but in between and a mediator between these, when he mediates between the Father and angels. As once again, when he became “mediator between God and men,” being between each rank, he belongs to neither one of those ranks between which he is mediator. Neither is he himself the one and only God, nor is he a man like the rest of men [μέσος ὢν ἐκατέρου τάγματος, οὐδέτερόν ἐστιν, <ὢν> μεσίτης ὑπάρχει· οὐτ' αὐτὸς ὢν ὁ εἷς καὶ μόνος θεὸς οὔθ' ὁμοίως τοῖς λοιποῖς ἀνθρώποις ἄνθρωπος].⁸⁹

Not only the previous αἴτιον, προϋπάρχειν, συνυπάρχειν, but now also the use of τάγμα ('rank') carries clear Neoplatonic overtones. By highlighting this, we do not wish to argue for a direct dependence on Eusebius' part on Neoplatonic sources. This possibility cannot be confirmed, just as it cannot be ruled out, although a certain degree of knowledge on Eusebius' part of the third-century Platonic literature has been clearly proved.⁹⁰ Furthermore, it is possible that the intersections we observe between Eusebius' and Neoplatonic ideas

⁸⁵ Cf. Euseb., *Ep. ad Euphr.*, 1, 5-8 Opitz.

⁸⁶ Cf. Euseb., *Ep. ad Euphr.*, 1, 10 Opitz.

⁸⁷ Cf. Euseb., *Ep. ad Euphr.*, 2, 1-3 Opitz.

⁸⁸ Cf. Euseb., *Ep. ad Euphr.*, 4, 4 – 5, 5 Opitz. On Eusebius' mediatorial Christology, cf. H. Strutwolf, *Die Trinitätstheologie und Christologie des Euseb von Caesarea: Eine dogmengeschichtliche Untersuchung seiner Platonismusrezeption und Wirkungsgeschichte*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1999; J.M. Robertson, *Christ as Mediator. A Study of the Theologies of Eusebius of Caesarea, Marcellus of Ancyra and Athanasius of Alexandria*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 2007, pp. 37-96.

⁸⁹ Eusebius, *Contra Marcellum*, in *Eusebius Werke*, Band 4: *Gegen Marcell. Über die kirchliche Theologie. Die Fragmente Marcellis*, eds. E. Klostermann – G.C. Hansen, Akademie Verlag, Berlin 1972 (Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller), 1, 1, 33.1-34.1 (transl. K. McCarthy Spoerl – M. Vinzent, *Eusebius of Caesarea, Against Marcellus and On Ecclesiastical Theology*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C. 2017).

⁹⁰ On Eusebius *zwischen Numenius und Plotin*, see H. Strutwolf, *Die Trinitätstheologie und Christologie des Euseb von Caesarea* (above, n. 88), pp. 187-193. On Plotinus' presence in Eusebius' works, see M.-O. Goulet-Cazé, “Deux traités plotiniens chez Eusèbe de Césarée”, in C. D'Ancona (ed.), *The Libraries of the Neoplatonists*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2007 (Philosophia Antiqua 107), pp. 63-98. On Eusebius' library, see A. Carriker, *The Library of Eusebius of Caesarea*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2003 (Vigiliae Christianae, Supplements 67).

were influenced by Origen. This is particularly evident in Origen's teachings on the soul, which bear striking similarities to Neoplatonic concepts, even with regard to the definition of certain exceptional souls (such as Paul's or John's soul) and their role as ministers to God.⁹¹ Hence, what is pivotal to stress is the strong, intellectual *κοινωνία* revealing itself in a common struggle on the ontological battlefield prompted by a shared dynamic such as that of the sending. While it could be true that Eusebius' primary concern, like his Christian contemporaries', is not about ontology as much as about functionality, it is likewise true that, on the one hand, ontology necessarily impinges on functionality and that, on the other, late antique Christian minds often work, however unconsciously, through the lens of Neoplatonic ontological principles, even when rebuking them. This is proved by the fact that the above terms, proper to the Neoplatonic vocabulary of onto-metaphysics, also occur in Cyril, whose Neoplatonic knowledge is certainly inferior to that of Eusebius (and often mediated through Eusebius).⁹² Still, since his opponents did draw on such terminology, in some cases even on purpose, he himself employs and discusses it. This dynamic accounts for the fact that the Neoplatonic ontological principles penetrated the Christological discourse, however filtered, adapted, and rebuked. Eusebius unmistakably posits the *τάγμα* question, which Cyril, regardless of whether Eusebius is his target, exposes as follows: "For that which, according to them, is neither purely God nor an actual created being, which place among the beings will he receive...?"⁹³ Cyril's *ἐν τοῖς οὐσι τόπος* resonates with Eusebius' *τάγμα*, and both correspond to one of the most crucial issues in Neoplatonic ontology and metaphysics, namely, the exact definition and description of a *τάξις* *sive* hierarchy of beings. The entire Neoplatonic exegesis of Plato's *Parmenides* from Iamblichus onward, *in nuce* in Plotinus and Porphyry, is all about identifying the exact position of each class of being within the hierarchy. In other terms, later Neoplatonists are precisely concerned with *ποῦος ἐν τοῖς οὐσι τόπος* to assign to each manifestation of being. The *Parmenides*, which they hold to be the privileged *locus* for this ontological and theological disclosure, thus rises to the role of theological dialogue par excellence.⁹⁴ In this context, then, one cannot help

⁹¹ Cf. Origenes, *De Principiis*, in *Origenes: Werke. De Principiis*, ed. K. Koetschau, De Gruyter, Berlin 1899 (Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte), 3, 4; 3, 8; Origène, *Commentaire sur saint Jean*, ed. C. Blanc, Éditions du Cerf, Paris 1966 (Sources chrétiennes), 1, 17.97-98; 2, 30.180-187. Origen's conception of the soul faced criticism from theologians like Gregory of Nyssa. In chapter 28 of his work *De Opificio hominis*, for instance, Gregory challenged Origen's notion that souls pre-exist in a separate realm and suggested that Origen believed souls remaining in this *πολιτεία* and pursuing good would not be bound to the body, while those failing to do so would be born into a body. Apparently, Gregory saw parallels between Origen's idea and Plato's winged chariot myth from the *Phaedrus*, and based on this similarity, he dismissed the notion of souls living a prior life in a separate realm as a mythical fiction, believing that those who subscribed to it had not fully freed themselves from the metempsychosis of Greek philosophy. On Origen's doctrine of the soul, cf. M. Harl, "La pré-existence des âmes dans l'œuvre d'Origène", in L. Lies (ed.), *Origeniana Quarta*, Innsbruck 1987, pp. 238-58; B.P. Blosser, *Become like the Angels: Origen's Doctrine of the Soul*, Catholic University of America Press, Washington 2012; P.W. Martens, "Embodiment, Heresy, and the Hellenization of Christianity: The Descent of the Soul in Plato and Origen", *The Harvard Theological Review* 108/4 (2015), pp. 594-620.

⁹² On Cyril and his Neoplatonic sources, see M. Schramm, "Platonikerzitate in Kyrill von Alexandrias *Contra Iulianum*", *Museum Helveticum* 74/1 (2017), pp. 66-85.

⁹³ Cyril, *Dial. de Trin.*, 1, 410d29-31 de Durand: "Ὁ γὰρ ἐστὶν, κατ' ἐκείνους, οὔτε Θεὸς καθαρῶς οὔτε ποίημα σαφῶς, ποῦον ἂν ἐκδέξατο παρ' αὐτῶν ἐν τοῖς οὐσι τόπον κτλ.:" (translation is mine).

⁹⁴ On the *Parmenides* as a *summa theologiae*, see chapters 5-10 from Proclus' *Platonic Theology*, on which cf. H.D. Saffrey – L.G. Westerink, Proclus, *Théologie Platonicienne, livre I*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 1968, pp. LXXV-

smile at a comment made by the one who is perhaps the main *auctor* of Cyril, Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 293-373 AD).⁹⁵

In disallowing the stance on Christ as mediator, Athanasius points out that, if the reasoning that his opponents broach was correct, then, we would face the daunting necessity of an ontic *regressus in infinitum*, since there would always be a mediator between two classes of beings. This, in its turn, would bring about an infinite multitude of mediators (πολὺς ὄχλος μεσιτῶν).⁹⁶ From Iamblichus onward, the Neoplatonic hierarchy did indeed become an entangled succession of mediatorial beings meant to guarantee the smoothness, continuity, and regulated declension from the First Principle beyond being to sheer matter. Thus, through Cyril, we can catch a glimpse of the struggle about the ontological position of Christ resonating with Neoplatonic debates on the scale of being. Indeed, there exist other ἀποστελλόμενα. In refuting the subordinationist pattern, Cyril points out, first, that, if Christ is endowed with a nature superior to ours but still inferior to that of God, then he is indistinguishable from those beings that are indeed superior to us and inferior to God, namely Θρόνος τε καὶ Ἐξουσία, καὶ Κυριότης, καὶ αὐτὰ τὰ Σεραφίμ. Yet if Christ is indeed corralled within the limits of such an amphibious nature (τοῖς φυσικοῖς ὁρῶτο μέτροις), then he becomes equal to those rational created beings (λογικὰ κτίσματα) that, as Paul states, are sent (ἀποστελλόμενα) to accomplish a salvific mission.⁹⁷ If Athanasius' sarcastic reference to an unreasonable πολὺς ὄχλος μεσιτῶν resulting from the mediatorial Christology may make one think of the Neoplatonic emanatist system comprising πολλοί mediatorial entities, with reference also to the above ἀποστελλόμενα, Cyril does posit an ἀγία τῶν ἄνω πληθὺς⁹⁸ to be conceived of in a hierarchical, and mediatorial, way: ἀγγέλους εἶτ' οὖν ἔτι τὰ ἀνωτέρω καὶ τὰ διὰ μέσου πάντα διαδραμών, ἐπ' αὐτὰ τις ἴοι τὰ Σεραφίμ κτλ.⁹⁹ It goes without saying that not only does Cyril refrain from developing a well-rounded discourse on that πληθὺς, but he also never even attempts to do so, simply because this was not at all salient for him. From this perspective, it is quite telling how he phrases the 'metaphysical' situation. He mentions the existence of angels, archangels, and εἶ τι τούτων ἐπέκεινα.¹⁰⁰ The vagueness of this latter qualification best typifies his attitude toward possible inquiry into extra-Trinitarian beings. As we will see shortly, Cyril is concerned solely with the Holy Trinity and human beings and, hence, he pivots his Christological criticism exclusively on the dichotomy between uncreated and created. Yet the existence of a 'metaphysical' multitude is taken for granted, and it is broached when it comes to identifying the position that Christ occupies ἐν τοῖς οὐσι.

LXXXIX. On the reception of Plato's *Parmenides*, cf. J. Turner – K. Corrigan (eds.), *Plato's Parmenides and Its Heritage. Volume 1. History and Interpretation from the Old Academy to Later Platonism and Gnosticism*, Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta 2011.

⁹⁵ See, e.g., D.M. Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria Bishop, Theologian, Ascetic, Father*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 2012 (Christian Theology in Context).

⁹⁶ Cf. Athanasius, *Contra Arianos*, in *Athanasius Werke*, Erster Band, Erster Teil, *Die Dogmatischen Schriften*, 2. *Lieferung Oraciones I et II Contra Arianos*, eds. K. Metzler – K. Savvidis, De Gruyter, Berlin 1998, 2, 26, 1.

⁹⁷ Cf. 10-11 Hebr. 1, 14: λειτουργικὰ πνεύματα εἰς διακονίαν ἀποστελλόμενα διὰ τοὺς μέλλοντας κληρονομεῖν σωτηρίαν.

⁹⁸ Cf. Cyril., *Dial. de Trin.*, 6, 608b20-c24 de Durand, with reference to Ps. 102, 20-21.

⁹⁹ Cyril., *Dial. de Trin.*, 1, 411c24-d26 de Durand: "Even if, once angels have been surpassed, and all those who are even higher than these, including all beings that are in between, one were to reach the Seraphim etc." (translation is mine).

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Cyril., *Dial. de Trin.*, 6, 608b14-15 de Durand.

In other words, ‘metaphysical’ concerns may become (fleeting)ly salient exclusively when Christology is the real focus, but never *per se*.

The conceptual skeleton encompassing Christological discourse and Neoplatonic ontology is further reinforced by the consideration of the shared usage of taxological terminology, as has been anticipated. In particular, Cyril’s critical discussion of subordinationist Christologies in the *Dialogues on the Holy Trinity* hinges on the fundamental taxological, and, hence, ontological and axiological, issue of the συναριθμεῖσθαι. The verb can be translated as ‘to be ranked with’ or, more properly, ‘to be counted with’, and from an ontological perspective means ‘to be put on the same ontological level as’. This verb is thus crucial, belonging to the same family as τάγμα, ποῖος ἐν τοῖς οὐσι τόπος, τάξις. As such, it is widely drawn on by Neoplatonists, starting with Plotinus until Simplicius and Damascius; we have also fleetingly mentioned that, according to Iamblichus’ report in *Vit. Pit.*, 6, Pythagoras was ‘counted along with’ the gods (μετὰ τῶν θεῶν κατηγορήθην). The purport of counting an entity with another one is that the two entities in question would, then, share the same essence and, hence, essential properties. As in the case of the ἀποστέλλων–ἀποστελλόμενος dialectic, the συναριθμεῖσθαι issue frames the discussion within a relational dynamic. We are always in the πρὸς τι domain. However, while the ἀποστέλλων–ἀποστελλόμενος modus describes a descending, vertical relationship, and, hence, potentially has subordinationist implications, the συναριθμεῖσθαι portrays the horizontal dimension. Otherwise said, the συναριθμεῖσθαι entails the ὁμοούσιον, whereas the ἀποστέλλων–ἀποστελλόμενος rather signals the ἕτερον κατὰ τὴν φύσιν (or, at least, it may imply it, thus urging Cyril to qualify it so as to render it ontologically harmless). With its cognate forms such as ἐπαριθμεῖσθαι (‘to be counted in addition to’) and ἐναριθμεῖσθαι (‘to be counted within’), συναριθμεῖσθαι is a *leitmotiv* throughout fourth-century Christology. If Christ is ‘counted with’ God the Father, then, he is reinstated to pure Godhead, revealing himself to be ὁμοούσιος with the Father. If, on the contrary, he is ‘counted with’ created beings, then, he is inferior to pure Godhead and cast out from ὁμοουσιότης on a different, lesser level of being. Against this backdrop, Cyril denounces his Christian opponents who count Christ with created beings. He has a quite clear idea about the τόπος that those Christians assign to Christ. In Neoplatonic terms, Christ would be ὁμοταγής with the created order, in the sense that he would occupy the same τάγμα/τάξις of the sensible dimension. However, being ὁμοταγής with the created order implies the ὑποταγή in respect to God.¹⁰¹ This circumstance accounts for the strict conjunction between συναριθμεῖσθαι and συντάττεσθαι, this latter term, which is the one that Iamblichus used in presenting Pythagoras’ soul as συνοπαδός on the god Apollo, being likewise pervasive within Cyril’s *Dialogues on the Holy Trinity*.¹⁰² Beings who are counted together (συναριθμεῖσθαι) share the same ontological level (συντάττεσθαι). This coupling is explicit in Cyril.¹⁰³ Yet, as we have previously seen in passing, Homoiousian Christians do not equal Christ with human, created beings, but allot to him a nature *sui generis* in between (μεσίτης) the uncreated and

¹⁰¹ Cf., e.g., Cyril., *Dial. de Trin.*, 5, 546b10-19 de Durand. In *Dial. de Trin.* 5, 582a ff. de Durand, Cyril discusses Paul’s 1 Corint. 15, 28, which is the *locus par excellence* for grounding Christ’s ὑποταγή to God.

¹⁰² Cf. Cyril., *Dial. de Trin.*, 3, 471c20-21; 3, 477a4; 3, 489b12-13; 3, 489d32; 4, 517b10; 4, 517d31-32; 4, 518d28; 4, 522c8 de Durand. In *CA.* 1, 22, 18-20 Metzler-Savvidis, Athanasius accuses Arius and Eusebius of Nicomedia of being responsible for placing Christ on the same level as created beings.

¹⁰³ Cf. Cyril., *Dial. de Trin.*, 4, 511b9-16 (συντετάξεται...ἐναριθμεῖσθαι); 4, 512c22-25 (ἐναριθμητέον, ἢ...συντετάξεται); 7, 633a7-b10 (συντεταγμένον καὶ συναριθμούμενον) de Durand.

the created. However, ruling out the possibility that such intermediate nature may actually exist, to the extent that, in his view, there is nothing in between the uncreated and the created nature, Cyril demotes the “homoiousian” Christ to the same rank of strictly created being. With this move, the patriarch can carry on dismantling his opponents’ (distorted) view by decrying that Christ should find himself ἐν ἴση τάξει of created beings. Following Athanasius’ footsteps, who bluntly labelled his opponents as Ἀρειανοί, Cyril upholds that they count Christ with creation: κτίσει συναριθμούμενος.¹⁰⁴ Again, the vocabulary is the one proper to purely Neoplatonic ontological discussions: giving a dossier of occurrences Neoplatonic terms would indeed be pointless. Suffice to remind ourselves that Neoplatonists struggled not only, more generally, with the exact position within the τάξις of each being, but also, and more crucially, on the legitimacy of ‘counting’ the One-First Principle ‘along with’ (συναριθμεῖσθαι) the other so-called hypostases, thus ‘putting’ it ‘on the same level’ (συγκατατάττεσθαι) of dignity with them. The passage from Porphyry to which we are alluding here is cited by Cyril, and stands as one among his efforts to show that the Hellenes, too, however imperfectly, knew about God the Word.¹⁰⁵

Reviewing the comparison between Eusebius and Cyril, the points of (critical) contact seem to be quite straightforward. Eusebius holds the view that Christ is *stricto sensu* neither God nor a human being. Instead, Cyril bemoans that some Christians take Christ to be neither ὁμοούσιος τῷ Θεῷ nor ὁμοφυῆς τοῖς πεποιημένοις. While Eusebius describes God the Father as cause of the Son, Cyril critically engages with the notion of cause precisely because it bears subordinationist implications. Indeed, Eusebius draws attention to the sending of Christ, as this modus conveys his inferior position in respect to the sender. On his part, Cyril cannot fail to acknowledge that the dynamic ‘sender–sent’ must imply a difference between the two, but colours this ἑτερότης by appealing to a difference of hypostasis with no implication on the οὐσία level.

Cyril wishes to stress that the μεσίτης qualification does not impinge on Christ’s essence by defining it.¹⁰⁶ It does not hint at ontology, but rather has functional overtones, meaning that it describes the mediatorial function that Christ fulfils after the Incarnation. Prompted by his fellow Hermias’ question about the τρόπος τῆς μεσιτείας, the patriarch specifies that Paul strictly circumscribes Christ’s mediatorial function to the last eras, when he came to earth to save humankind.¹⁰⁷ Through his descent (ἐκπεφοίτηκέ τε καὶ καθίκετο πρὸς ἡμᾶς),

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Cyril., *Dial. de Trin.*, 3, 470b16-c19; 5, 573c17 de Durand; Athanas., *CA*, 3, 44.35-37 (Συναριθμοῦντες γὰρ τοῖς γενητοῖς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ τὸν ἀίδιον λόγον, κατ’ ὀλίγον καὶ αὐτὸν τὸν πατέρα ἐλάττονα τῆς κτίσεως μελετῶσι λέγειν); 3, 55.29 (τῆ κτίσει συναριθμοῦσι) Metzler-Savvidis. In *CA*, 3, 9.6-7 Metzler-Savvidis, Athanasius states that Christ himself counted himself with the Creator (συνηρίθμησεν ἑαυτὸν τῷ κτίσαντι αὐτόν), rather than with the creation.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Porphyrii *Philosophi fragmenta: Fragmenta Arabica*, ed. A. Smith, De Gruyter, Berlin 1993 (Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana), fr. 223F (*apud* Cyrille d’Alexandrie, *Contre Julien. Tome I. Livres I et II*, eds. P. Burguière – P. Éviéux, Éditions du Cerf, Paris 1985 (Sources chrétiennes), 1, 45, 552b10-c27), on which, see S. Strange, “Porphyry and Plotinus’ Metaphysics”, *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies. Supplement* 98 (2007), pp. 17-34.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Cyril., *Dial. de Trin.*, 1, 398d34-e35 de Durand: Ὅταν οὖν λέγηται μεσίτης, οὐχ ὀριστικὸν τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ Μονογενοῦς οἰηθεῖη τις ἂν εἶναι τοῦνομα.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Cyril., *Dial. de Trin.*, 1, 398e41-399b17 de Durand. Since Paul’s 1 Tim. 2, 5, allots the term μεσίτης to ἄνθρωπος Χριστὸς Ἰησοῦς, we should take the mediatorial qualification as referring exclusively to the incarnated Word.

Christ forges a bond between the highest and the lower, mediating between them exclusively ὡς ἄνθρωπος.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, the μεσίτης issue reveals the ποικίλη μυσταγωγία conveyed by the Sacred Scripture, at one time referring to the Only-begotten ἔτι γυμνός, i.e., οὐπω νοούμενος μετὰ σαρκός, and at another referring to it ἐν σαρκί. The double discourse (διττός λόγος) thus reflects how we conceive of him before and after the Incarnation, or rather how he is conceived of by us (νοούμενος).¹⁰⁹ This functional explanation also accounts for the distinction between Μονογενής and Πρωτότοκος.¹¹⁰ However, the οἰκονομία argument is not the sole explanation of Christ' mediatorial function. As a confirmation of the fact that considerations on function cannot possibly be utterly detached from ontological definitions, Cyril also tackles the issue of mediation from a different point of view, which he himself defines as ἀπόρρητός τε καὶ μυστικός. Christ is mediator in that he shows, united within himself, ontological conditions which are completely distinct by nature, having an unmeasurable gap between them: θεότης and ἀνθρωπότης. He manifests them συνενεχθέντα τε καὶ ἡνωμένα in himself, and – since functionality immediately follows on from ontology – connects us through himself to God the Father. At this stage of his career, Cyril can still draw upon συνδρομή to signify the concourse of natures in Christ, although he is already careful to qualify it with the marker εἰς ἐνότητα.¹¹¹

Conclusions

Let us, then, try to sum up the main points that we have been unfolding in the course of the present article. Our chief purpose was to show that a seemingly anodyne schema such as that of the 'sending' and the ways in which to understand it entailed huge consequences for defining onto-metaphysics or, generally speaking, theological conceptions in Late Antiquity. In other words, a due appreciation of what the 'sending' pattern implies brings to the fore an important moment in the history of theology, considered in its perhaps most problematic aspect, i.e., the relationship between divine transcendence and immanence. Καταπέμπεσθαι, in Neoplatonic terms, and ἀποστέλλεσθαι, in Christian terms, hide behind themselves an entire worldview, as they are both employed with reference to some beings whose degree of divinity represented a much-debated issue and whose presence on earth was held to directly affect human salvation. For the Neoplatonists of the fourth and fifth centuries, for sure, and for some fourth-century Christian theologians, at least, the sending cannot but signify both the privileged ontological position within the scale of beings enjoyed by the 'one being sent', which could rightly be qualified as divine, and its ontological inferiority in respect to the 'sender', thus prompting them to frame their reciprocal relationship within the ontological scheme of αἴτιον-αἰτιατόν. A pure soul like Socrates', which has been sent (καταπέμπεσθαι) to earth for the benefit of humanity, is nonetheless always attached to its causes (αἰτίαι), namely the gods *stricto sensu*. As such, it is a divine soul, partaking in several divine properties, but it places itself at a lesser degree of the divine τάξις, and, in virtue of such an ontic position, it can exert its salvific function. On the "homoiousian" Christian side, as sent (ἀποστελλόμενος) and, hence, caused (αἰτιατόν), Christ does not co-exist with

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Cyril., *Dial. de Trin.*, 1, 403e38-404b13 de Durand.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Cyril., *Dial. de Trin.*, 1, 397a2-298d28 de Durand.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Cyril., *Dial. de Trin.*, 4, 519c20-d30 de Durand.

¹¹¹ Cf. Cyril., *Dial. de Trin.*, 1, 404d32-405e45 de Durand.

the Father and, hence, occupies a level of being lesser than that of the Father: in virtue of this ontic position, he mediates between the higher and the lower, and fulfils the function of bringing humanity to salvation. He is neither God by nature nor a being ranked among the creatures. These Christians hold Christ not to be *ὁμοούσιος*, but rather *ὁμοιοούσιος* to the Father, and they accordingly take *μεσσιτεία* to be the noblest and most fitting term for describing him.¹¹² However, we have likewise seen that, in the eyes of a fifth-century theologian like Cyril, the ‘sending’ issue could have been solved otherwise, by appealing to the two Trinitarian laws of consubstantiality and independent existence. The *ἀποστολή* thus certainly entails an *ἑτερότης*, but this latter should be understood in the sense that the ‘sender’ (God the Father) and the ‘one being sent’ (God the Word) have each their proper existence, though sharing in the exact same divine essence and, hence, properties. Therefore, *ἄτιον* and *ἀτιατόν*, with all the consequences that they imply as for pre-existence, co-existence, and co-arrangement, should be ruled out in the case of the relationship between Father and Son. Christ is said to be a mediator for two reasons. First, *δι’ οἰκονομίαν*. Christ’s mediation starts off exclusively with the Incarnation and, thus, with his willed descent among humans. This is the functional reply to the mediation issue. The second explanation calls for ontology as well, although ultimately putting the focus again on functionality. Christ manifests in himself a perfect concourse between divinity and humanity. On account of this, he can be the means of communion between human beings and God the Father. However, it is nonetheless true that Cyril’s reading of the ‘sending’ modus stands as a reaction against those Christians who took on board Neoplatonic ontological schemes in emphasizing the mediation of Christ hinted at in some Scriptural passages, and notably in Paul’s *First Letter to Timothy*. Hence, while the salvific function is taken for granted by both Neoplatonists and Homoiousian and Homoousian Christians, the ontological positioning which should have granted such a salvific function is an actual apple of contention, bearing directly upon how to conceive of the divine in itself. And it is controversial to the point that we witness significant similarities between Neoplatonists and Homoiousians rather than between these latter and Homoousians. From this perspective, it is noteworthy that while the epithet *σωτηρίας ἀρχηγός*, which Proclus uses to describe his teacher Syrianus, as we have seen, is a *hapax* in the Neoplatonic tradition, it is widely used in Christian literature to refer to Christ, on the basis of Hebr. 2, 10.¹¹³ In light of these considerations, then, not only does study of the issue of ‘divine sending’ reveal a fundamental theme in the history of the relationship between divine transcendence and immanence, but it also unearths a complex relation of interferences, influences, and contrasts between Neoplatonism and Christianity, shedding light on their different, however necessarily cognate, theological worldviews.

¹¹² Cf. Cyril, *Dial. de Trin.*, 1, 409b15-19 de Durand.

¹¹³ Cf. Proclus, *Commentaire sur le Parménide de Platon. Tome I : 1ère partie. Introduction générale. Tome II: 2ème partie. Livre I*, ed. C. Luna – A.-Ph. Segonds, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 2007, p. 2; I. Tanaseanu-Döbler, “Ein Lob Platons selbst wie auch derjenigen, die von ihm die Philosophie empfangen” (above, n. 42), p. 419, n. 101.