

is not. Even the terms "the One" and "the Good", of which Plotinus makes much use, are not to be construed as descriptions of God's being, but only as indicative of his relation to creatures, and suggestive of his absolute causality.

Gnosticism makes the difference between God and the creature even greater. Between the highest God and the world it posits an absolute separation. A revelation not of God but of the eons only, was to be found in nature, in Israel, in Christianity. Hence, there could be no natural theology neither innate nor acquired, nor yet a revealed theology. For the creature the highest God was absolutely unknowable and unattainable. He was "unknown depth, ineffable, eternal silence".

This theory of God's incomprehensibility and of the unknowability of his being became the point of departure and basic idea of Christian theology.... Justin Martyr calls God inexpressible, immovable, nameless. The words Father, God, Lord, are not real names "but appellations derived from his good deeds and functions," God cannot appear, cannot go about, cannot be seen, etc. Whenever these things are ascribed to God in the O. T., they refer to the Son, God's ambassador. Among many also Irenaeus presents the false and partly gnostic antithesis between the Father, hidden, invisible, unknowable; and the Son, who revealed him. With Clement of Alexandria God is "the One". Whenever we eliminate from our thought everything pertaining to the creature, that which remains is not what God is but what he is not. It is not proper to ascribe to him form, movement, place, number, attribute, name. etc. If, nevertheless, we call him the One, the Good, Father, Creator, Lord, etc., we do not thereby express his essential being but his power. "He is even exalted above unity." In a word, as says Athanasius," He is exalted above all being and above human thought." With this agree Origen, Eusebius, and many other theologians of the first few centuries A. D.

Augustine and John of Damascus also favor this representation. With Augustine the concept of being is basic to the definition of God. He is the self-existing One, even as his name YHWH indicates. This is his real name, "the name that indicates what he is in himself," all other names are "names which indicate what he is for us."... Hence when we say what he is, we are only stating what in distinction from all finite beings he is not. He is "ineffable". "It is easier for us to say what he is not than what he is."... But we cannot think of him as he really is... He is incomprehensible, and must needs be, "For if you comprehend him, he is not God."... If we wish to say anything about him, we struggle with language, "for God is more truly thought than expressed and exists more truly than he is thought."... "God is known better when not known."... In like manner John of Damascus declares God to be "the ineffable and incomprehensible Divine Being."... The fact that God exists is evident, but "what he is in his essence and nature is entirely incomprehensible and unknowable."...

Pseudodionysius (appealed to by John of Damascus) and Scotus Erigena held views concerning God's being which were even more agnostic. The Areopagite taught that there is no concept, expression, or word, by which God's being can be indicated. Accordingly, whenever we wish to designate God, we use metaphorical language. He is "supersubstantial infinity, supermental unity," etc. We cannot form a conception of that unitary, unknown being, transcendent above all being,