

December 1986

Frontismatter, preface, table of contents.

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Mortley, Raoul, "Frontismatter, preface, table of contents." (1986). *From Word to Silence, 1. The Rise and Fall of Logos*. Paper 1.
http://epublications.bond.edu.au/word_to_silence_I/1

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From Word to Silence
Vol. I

by Raoul Mortley

THEOPHANEIA
BEITRÄGE ZUR RELIGIONS- UND KIRCHENGESCHICHTE
DES ALTERTUMS

Begründet von Franz Joseph Dölger und Theodor Klauser,
in Verbindung mit dem F. J. Dölger-Institut
herausgegeben von Ernst Dassmann

30

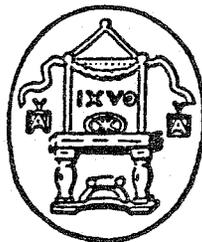
From Word
to Silence

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The rise and fall of logos

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Mortley, Raoul:

From word to silence/by Raoul Mortley. – Bonn;

Frankfurt am Main: Hanstein

(Theophaneia; ...)

Vol. 1. Mortley, Raoul: The rise and fall of logos. – 1986

Mortley, Raoul:

The rise and fall of logos/by Raoul Mortley. – Bonn;

Frankfurt am Main: Hanstein, 1986.

(From word to silence/by Raoul Mortley; Vol. 1)

(Theophaneia; 30)

ISBN 3-7756-1240-8

NE: 2. GT

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Gesamtherstellung: Bercker Graph. Betrieb GmbH, Kvelaer

Printed in West-Germany

ISBN 3-7756-1240-8

Dedicated to dean Marcel Simon, teacher and host

Preface

This book is the result of some years' interest in negative theology and owes much to the stimulus of my friend and colleague, David Dockrill. It has taken a broader perspective than originally planned, and seeks to situate the development of negative theology within the context of the whole Greek concept of thought. The first volume deals with the classical period, with its enormous confidence in logos, the focal point of rationality, and with the gradual undermining of this faith. The sources studied include the major philosophical, but also deal more widely with literature and religion. Gnosticism, Christianity and the works of Philo are treated towards the end of each chapter, because each of these strands is crucial on the formation of Patristic and Medieval philosophy. The second volume treats the same issues, of word, discursive thought, silence and the *via negativa*, in Neoplatonism and in Patristic Philosophy. I have endeavoured here to put forward an analytic history of the ideas involved, rather than an accumulation of erudition about the texts, though I have sought to adduce new evidence and new interpretations throughout. The issue of the limits of thought, a sceptical stance on the efficacy of reason, the power of silence, the impotence of words, the suspicion that true knowledge lies beyond ordinary thinking, and that it may result from a change of state rather than a change of views; all these ideas sound a note which is familiar in the second half of the twentieth century. People now pursue in the mysticism of the East what has long been secreted in the culture of the West, and which may now be re-expressing itself in a typically western form. The notion that there is a realm of silence, to which we must consign that of which we cannot speak, may be found developing among the Greeks and is therefore worthy of investigation. We know the Greeks as rationalists: others have noted their irrationalism; it also seems worthwhile to investigate their developing opposition to reason and language.

A great deal of my academic development has taken place in Strasbourg and Paris. This volume is dedicated to Dean Marcel Simon, who introduced me to the French academic world. He and his wife have been very hospitable over the years, and to them I owe a considerable debt of gratitude. The intellectual qualities of lucidity and sobriety of judgment, amply displayed by the work of Marcel Simon, remain a model to me. To Joan Elder, who typed this manuscript with great accuracy and forbearance, I also express my grateful thanks.

R. J. Mortley

Note

References to books and articles have been abbreviated in the text, but sufficient detail has been given to make it possible to consult the Bibliography for further information. Indications on the primary sources may also be found there.

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