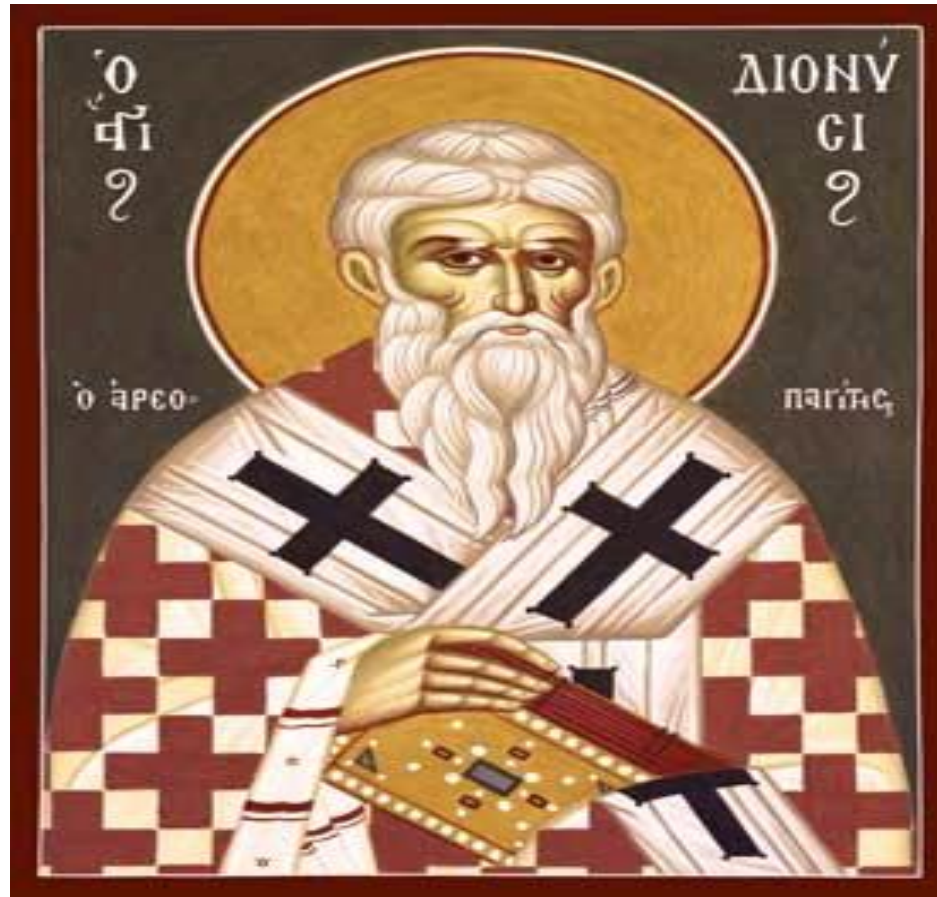


# Mystical Theology

## Dionysius

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Dionysius the Aeropagite

# Dionysius

- Dionysius the Aeropagite is mentioned in Acts (17:34). He was a judge converted by Paul. He became the first bishop of Athens.
- Ca 500 AD a series of literate Greek writings by a Syrian author were attributed to Dionysius and have heavily influenced the Church since. They are thought to be those of Severus, the so-called Monophysite Patriarch of Antioch who is also thought to be the author (with the Emperor Justinian) of the credal hymn, “O monogenes...”

- (Pseudo) Dionysius relates the angelic hierarchy with the hierarchy of the Church.
- “The goal of a hierarchy...is to enable beings to be as like as possible to God and to be at one with Him. A hierarchy has God as its leader of all understanding and action. It is forever looking directly at...God. A hierarchy bears in itself the mark of God. Hierarchy causes its members to be images of God in all respects...It ensures that when its members have received this full and divine splendor they can then pass on this light generously and in accordance with God’s will to (other orders less illumined).”

- “God has appeared to pious men in ways which were in keeping with His divinity...the recipients of such visions are lifted up to the divine. They are granted divine enlightenment and are...initiated in the divine things themselves.”
- The Law was given to us by angels so that God’s ordinances might show us how it is that lesser beings are uplifted. The mystery of Jesus’ love for humanity was first revealed to the angels and that the gift of this knowledge was granted to us by the angels.

- “It would be quite wrong...ever to do anything or even to exist against the sacred orderings of Him who is after all the source of all perfection.”
- “Indeed for every member of the hierarchy, perfection consists in...that it is uplifted to imitate God as far as possible and, more wonderful still, that it becomes...a ‘fellow workman of God’ and a reflection of the workings of God.”
- Divine grace descends “in due measure and order” from the highest angels around God through the lower orders to the Christian bishop and his clergy, and then from them in turn to the assembled faithful. This is a reflection of Heaven.

- The thought is explained in four works (Divine Names, Celestial Hierarchy, Ecclesiastical Hierarchy, and Mystical Theology) and various letters.
- The Church is theophany.
- Pseudo-Dionysius, not surprisingly, was rejected by the Reformation and by the Enlightenment.

- “God cannot be grasped by mind or nature (as) He is not a particular being...We cannot know God in His nature, since this is unknowable and is beyond the reach of mind or of reason. But we know Him from the arrangement of everything, because everything is, in a sense, projected out from Him and this order possesses certain...semblances of His divine paradigms. We therefore approach that which is beyond all as far as our capacities allow us and we pass by way of the denial and the transcendence of all things and by way of the cause of all things. God is... known in all things and as distinct from all things. He is known through knowledge and through unknowing...



- Of Him there is conception...on the other hand, He cannot be understood, words cannot contain Him, and no name can lay hold of Him. He is not one of the things that are and He cannot be known in any of them. He is all things in all things and He is not thing among things. He is known to all from all things and He is known to no one from anything...The most divine knowledge of God...comes through unknowing, is achieved in a union far beyond mind...being then and there enlightened by the inscrutable depths of Wisdom.”

- “Jesus who is transcendent mind, utterly divine mind, who is the source and the being underlying all hierarchy, all sanctification, all the workings of God, who is the ultimate in divine power. He assimilates them, as much as they are able, to His own light. As for us...He pulls together all our many differences. He makes our life, disposition, and activity something one and divine, and He bestows on us the power appropriate to a sacred priesthood. Approaching...the holy activity of the sacred office we come closer to those beings who are superior to us. We imitate as much as we can their abiding, unwavering, and sacred constancy, and we...come to look up to...Jesus Himself.

- Then, having sacredly beheld whatever can be seen, enlightened by the knowledge of what we have seen, we shall then be able to be consecrated and consecrators of this mysterious understanding. Formed of light, initiates in God's work, we shall be perfected and bring about perfection.”
- “We have a venerable sacred tradition which asserts that every hierarchy is the complete expression of the sacred elements comprised within it. It is the perfect total of all its sacred constituents...”
- Talk of a hierarch and one is referring to a holy and inspired man, someone who understands all sacred knowledge, someone in whom an entire hierarchy is completely perfected and known.”

- “In their written and unwritten initiations, they brought down the transcendent to our level...empowered by God to...(organize) the hierarchy into fixed and unconfused orders, giving each, as was due, its appropriate allotment.”
- Holy things are shared only with the holy. (Jo 14:23). That is why symbols are used in the Bible and in the liturgy. Not all Tradition is written.
- Uzziah was rejected because he handled the sacred things (2 Chr 26:16-21), Korah for exceeding his proper functions (Num 16), and Nadab for the profane performance of his duties. (Lev 10:1ff)”

- “Sacred psalmody is a part of the hierarchic mysteries and should certainly accompany the most hierarchic of all (the Divine Liturgy). The sacred (Scriptures) have a lesson for those capable of being divinized, being rooted in the sacred and godlike upliftings of the sacraments. They teach that God Himself thus gives substance and arrangement to everything which exists...They lay down...distribution (and) sharing...with God’s people. They teach the lore of (those) who live in God...from them come wise guidelines for living...and the transcendent Word of God (that is) Jesus.”

- The right ordering of the sanctified soul is mirrored in the divinely established articulation of the Church.
- The ecclesiastical structure has been arranged in such a way as to bring the soul into communion with the heavenly reality the earthly church also reflects.
- The experience of God is liturgical. The whole of human life is (sacramental) encompassed by the Church.
- “Our most divine altar is Jesus...in whom we, according to Scripture, once having been consecrated and mystically consumed, have access (to God).”
- The mystical ascent and union with God occurs in the “darkness of unknowing.”

- “It would be impossible for the human intellect to be ordered with that immaterial imitation of the heavenly hierarchies unless it were to use the material guide that is proper to it (liturgy) reckoning the visible beauties as reflections of the invisible splendor, the perceptible fragrances as impressions of the intelligible distribution, the material lights as icon of the immaterial gift of light, the sacred and extensive the teaching (of Scripture as reflection) of the mind’s intelligible fulfillment, the exterior ranks of the clergy (a type) of the harmonious and ordered habit (of the intellect) that is set in order for divine things, and (our partaking) of the most divine Eucharist (an icon) of our participation in Jesus.”

- “The divine Moses is bidden first of all to purify himself...and, after all purification, he hears the many-voiced trumpets, he beholds many lights lighting with pure and many streaming rays. Then, when he has separated from the many and from the chosen priests, he attains the summit of divine ascents. And yet in these he still meets not God, for he sees not Him...but the place where he dwells...and then...he enters into the truly secret darkness of unknowing...united by the cessation of all knowledge to Him who is wholly unknowable.”



- Moses is a type of the Christian bishop; Sinai as a whole (purified people at the base, priests part way up, Moses at the summit) is a type of the Church.
- Moses' ascent of Sinai corresponds to each believer's climb up the "mountain of the heart" (or entry into the inner temple of the intellect) in order to stand before the presence of God and be "mystically consumed" on the altar that is Christ.
- The holocaust and the access which in Jesus is opened to God corresponds to Moses' surrender of active knowing and his entry into the divine darkness.

- “It was (the Eucharist) which first gave me to see, and through its ruling light, be led up in light to the vision of the other sacred things.”
- The greater and open vision of Christ in glory awaits the Eschaton.
- The measure of light imparted is determined by the condition of the recipient.
- The sacraments, however, are rooted in objective holiness of the sacraments rather than in the subjective holiness of the minister or recipient.

- God “grants enlightenments proportionate to each being, and thereby draws sacred minds upward to its permitted contemplation, to participation and to the state of becoming like it. What happens to those that rightly and properly make this effort is this: they do not venture towards an impossibly daring sight of God, one beyond what is duly granted them. Nor do they go tumbling downward where their own natural inclinations would take them. No. Instead they are raised firmly and unswervingly upward in the direction of the way which enlightens them. With a love matching the illuminations granted them, they take flight, reverently, wisely, in all holiness.”

- Divinity is not only invisible and incomprehensible, but also unsearchable and inscrutable. God is unknowable, transcendent and surpasses being. God is named by means of his total work. What is affirmed about God, however, must also be denied.
- “Lord, my heart is not proud, nor are my eyes haughty. I do not busy myself with great matters, with things too sublime for me. Rather, I have stilled my soul, hushed it like a weaned child. Like a weaned child on its mother’s lap, so is my soul within me. Israel, hope in the Lord now and forever.”  
(Ps 131)

- “We go up where we are commanded by those divine ordinances...With our minds made prudent and holy, we offer worship to that which lies hidden beyond thought and beyond being. With a wise silence we do honor the inexpressible. We are raised up by the enlightening beams of the sacred scriptures, and with these to illuminate us, with our beings shaped in songs of praise, we behold the divine light, in a manner befitting us, and our praise resounds for that generous source of all holy enlightenment, a source which has told us about itself in the holy words of scripture. We learn, for instance, that it is the cause of everything, that it is origin, being, and life...

- To those who fall away it is the voice calling, ‘Come back!’ and is the power which raises them up again. It refurbishes and restores the image of God corrupted within them. It is the sacred stability which is there for them when the tale of unholiness is tossing them about. It is safety for those who made a stand. It is the guide bringing upward those uplifted to it and is the enlightenment of the illuminated. Source of perfection for those being made perfect, source of divinity for those being deified, principle of simplicity for those turning to simplicity, point of unity for those made one; transcendentally, beyond what is, it is the source of every source. Generously and as far as may be, it gives out a shape of what is hidden.”

- Unity by which unifying power we are led to unity... Transcendent fecundity manifest as Trinity. (cf Eph 3:14-19)
- Cause of being as in its goodness it employed its creative power to summon all things into being.
- Wise and beautiful because beings that keep their nature incorrupted are filled with divine harmony and sacred beauty (cf Lk 20:36).
- Loving toward humanity.
- “We use whatever appropriate symbols we can for the things of God. With these analogies we are raised upward toward the truth of the mind’s vision, a truth which is simple and one. We leave behind usual notions of the divine. We call a halt to the activities of our mind...”

- “We must begin with a prayer before everything we do, but especially when we are about to talk of God. We will not pull down to ourselves that power which is both everywhere and yet nowhere, but by divine reminders and invocations we may commend ourselves to it and be joined to it.
- Light and beauty are the visible images of the good.
- “Your reign is a reign for all ages, your dominion for all generations. The Lord is trustworthy in every word, and faithful in every work.” (Ps 145:13)
- He is truth, wisdom, power, righteousness, salvation, redemption.
- He is the Ancient of Days, King of Kings, Lord of Lords.



- He is a “still small breeze.” (1 Kgs 19:12)
- “We must learn about Wisdom from all things.” (Ps 104:29; Prov 8:30)
- “We cannot as mad people do, profanely visualize these heavenly and godlike intelligences as actually having numerous feet and faces. They are not shaped to resemble the brutishness of oxen or to display the wildness of lions. They do not have the curved beak of the eagle or the wings and feathers of birds. We must not have the pictures of flaming wheels whirling in the skies, of material thrones made ready to provide a reception for the Deity, of multicolored horses, or of spear carrying lieutenants, or any of those shapes handed on to us amid all the variety of revealing symbols of scripture.” It is a concession to our minds.

- “God is therefore known in all things as and as distinct from all things. He is known through knowledge and through unknowing. Of Him there is conception, reason, understanding, touch, perception, opinion, imagination, name, and many other things. On the other hand He cannot be understood, words cannot contain Him, and no name can lay hold of Him. He is not one of the things that are and cannot be known in any of them. He is all things in all things and he is no thing among things. He is known to all from all things and He is known to no one from anything...

- the most divine knowledge of God, that which comes from unknowing, is achieved in a union far beyond mind, when mind turns away from all things, even from itself, and neither it is made one with the dazzling rays, being then and there enlightened by the inscrutable depth of Wisdom.”
  - “Lead me, Lord, in your path,  
and I will enter into your truth.  
Let my heart rejoice  
that it may fear your name.”



Jesus, the High Priest

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