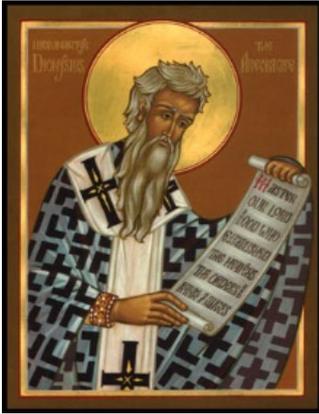


DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE

Patristic Theology

DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE

Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Divine Names and the Mystical Theology* in Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works, trans. Colm Luibheid (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987).



THE SAINT (FEAST OCT 3)

This Saint was from Athens, a learned man, and a member of the famous judicial court of Mars Hill (in Greek Aros Pagos, hence the name Areopagite (see Acts 17:19-34). When Saint Paul preached in Athens, he was one of the first there to believe in Christ, and, according to some, became the first bishop of that city. Others say—and this may be more probable—that he was the second Bishop of Athens, after Saint Hierotheus, whom Dionysios calls his friend and teacher "after Paul" (*On the Divine Names*, 3:2). With Saint Hierotheus he was also present at the Dormition of the most holy Theotokos; the Doxasticon of the Aposticha for the service of the Dormition is partly taken from a passage in Chapter III of *On*

the Divine Names. According to ancient tradition, he received a martyr's end (according to some, in Athens itself) about the year 96. (text from the Greek Orthodox Church of America, <http://goarch.org>, © Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Brookline, MA)

THE LEGEND

Prior to his baptism, Dionysius grew up in a notable family in Athens, attended philosophical school at home and abroad, was married and had several children, and was a member of the highest court in Greece, the Areopagus. After his conversion to the True Faith, St. Paul made him Bishop of Athens. Eventually he left his wife and children for Christ and went with St. Paul in missionary travel. He travelled to Jerusalem specifically to see the Most Holy Theotokos and writes of his encounter in one of his books. He was also present at her Dormition. Seeing St. Paul martyred in Rome, St. Dionysius desired to be a martyr as well. He went to Gaul, along with his presbyter Rusticus and the deacon Eleutherius, to preach the Gospel to the barbarians. There his suffering was equaled only by his success in converting many pagans to Christianity. In the year 96, St. Dionysius was seized and tortured for Christ, along with Rusticus and Eleutherius, and all three were beheaded under the reign of the Emperor Domitian. St. Dionysius' head rolled a rather long way until it came to the feet of Catula, a Christian. She honorably buried it along with his body. (text from http://orthodoxwiki.org/Dionysius_the_Areopagite)

Hilduin, abbot of St. Denis in the ninth century, reports that Dionysius, on being decapitated, picked up his head and walked to where he wished to be buried: the future Abbey of St. Denis, north of Paris. The abbey was said to have been built around his final resting spot. (see Rorem, 15)

APOLYTIKION IN THE FOURTH TONE

Since thou hadst been instructed in uprightness thoroughly and wast vigilant in all things, thou wast clothed with a good conscience as befitteth one holy. Thou didst draw from the Chosen Vessel ineffable mysteries;

and having kept the Faith, thou didst finish a like course, O Hieromartyr Dionysios. Intercede with Christ God that our souls be saved. (text from the Greek Orthodox Church of America, <http://goarch.org>, © Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Brookline, MA)

KONTAKION IN THE PLAGAL OF THE FOURTH TONE

In spirit, thou didst pass through Heaven's gates, instructed by the great Apostle who attained to the third Heaven's heights, and wast made rich in all knowledge of things beyond speech; and then thou, O Dionysios, didst illuminate them that slumbered in the darkness of their ignorance. Hence we all cry out: Rejoice, O universal Father. (text from the Greek Orthodox Church of America, <http://goarch.org>, © Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Brookline, MA)

THE WRITINGS

- The Divine Names (DN)
- The Mystical Theology (MT)
- The Celestial Hierarchy (CH)
- The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy (EH)
- Letters (Ep 1-10)

THE HISTORY OF THE TEXTS

See Waer & Dillon, 2-3

- 520s: Stephen Bar Sudhaili, *Book of the Holy Heirotheus*
- 532: First referred to by monophysites representing Severus of Antioch in a discussion with Chalcedonian representatives.
- 532: Commentaries on the writings are made by John of Scythopolis
 - John defends the writings against charges of monophysitism and also explains why Eusebius did not mention him (Rorem, 14)
 - A later hand adds that Proclus utilized the Dionysian writings, at time copying him word-for-word (Rorem, 14)
- 590s: Maximus the Confessor composes a commentary on the texts
- 838: First Latin translation by Hilduin of St. Denis, who identified the author with St. Denis, the first bishop of Paris
- 862: John Scotus Eriugena published his translation
- 1457: Lorenzo Valla raised doubts about its authenticity
- 1505: Erasmus agreed with Valla's critique
- 1820: Johann G. Engelhardt published *Dissertatio de Dionysio Platonizante* which showed the similarities with Proclus
- 1895: Josef Stiglmayr's "Der Neuplatoniker Proclus als Vorlage des sogen. Dionysius Areopagita in der Lehre von Übel" demonstrated Dionysius's dependence on Proclus in his section on evil (DN 4)
- 1928: Stiglmayr's "Der sogenannte Dionysius Areopagita und Severus von Antiochien" showed the close relationship between Dionysius and Severus

THE PSEUDONYM

- He address his letters to figures mentioned in the New Testament
- He makes reference to being present at the Assumption of Mary (DN 3)
- He reports seeing the eclipse at the moment of the Crucifixion (Ep 7)
- He quotes Ignatius of Antioch

THE QUESTION OF AUTHORSHIP

- Severus of Antioch
- John of Scythopolis

THE INFLUENCE OF THE TEXTS

- East and West
- Choirs of angels
- Hierarchical perfection
- Gothic architecture
- Mystical theology
- Via Positiva and Via Negativa in spiritual theology

THE NEOPLATONIC BACKGROUND

- Figures
 - Plotinus
 - Porphyry
 - Iamblicus
 - Syrianus
 - Proclus
- Themes
 - Commentary on the *Parmenides* of Plato
 - The highest principle is the One, which is transcendent to and source of all
 - Mind (Nous) as mediator of the One
 - Soul as mediator of the Mind
 - Matter as the lowest level of being
 - Emanation as the principle of the diversity of being (*bonum est diffusivum sui*)
 - Participation as the existence of beings
 - Procession—remaining—return

NEGATIVE THEOLOGY IN THE TRADITION BEFORE DIONYSIUS

- Justin Martyr
- Irenaeus
- Clement of Alexandria
- Origen
- Gregory of Nazianzus
- Gregory of Nyssa
- Evagrius Ponticus

THE DIVINE NAMES

- Cataphatic theology
By itself [the Good] generously reveals a firm, transcendent beam, granting 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 toward 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 ray which enlightens them. Divine Names 1.2

- God beyond being

Let us hold on to the scriptural rule that when we say anything about God, we should set down the truth "not in the plausible words of human wisdom but in the demonstration of the power granted by the Spirit to the scripture writers", a power by which, in a manner surpassing speech and knowledge, we reach a union superior to anything available to us by way of our own abilities or activities in the realm of discourse or intellect. Divine Names 1.1

God escapes anyone possessing physical light and knowledge of beings: His transcendent darkness remains hidden from all light and concealed from all knowledge. Someone beholding God and understanding what he saw has not actually seen God himself but rather something of his which has being and which is knowable. For he himself solidly transcends mind and being. He is completely unknown and non-existent. He exists beyond being and he is known beyond the mind. And this quite positively complete unknowing is knowledge of him who is above everything that is known. Epistle 1

- No knowledge can reach God
- No concept is adequate to God
- Role of the Scripture
- Reading Scripture
- Negation
- Apophatic Theology

THE MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

- Apophatic theology
- The ascent of Moses
- Entry into the divine darkness
- Passing through revelation
- Passing beyond revelation

CELESTIAL HIERARCHY: THE ANGELS

- Seraphim
- Cherubim
- Thrones

- Dominions
- Powers
- Authorities

- Principalities
- Archangels
- Angels

- Value of creation
- Mediation of the divine presence
- Analogy
- Creation, redemption, perfection

- Union of the intellectual and the bodily ascent
- Mind, will, and body

ECCLESIASTICAL HIERARCHY

- Holy oils
- Eucharist
- Baptism

- Bishops
- Priests
- Deacons

- Monks
- Faithful
- Catechumens, penitents, possessed

- Ecclesial context
- Ministries in the Church
- Liturgical theology

LITURGICAL THEOLOGY

- The path
- Creation
- Fallen state
- Path of redemption; mediation
- Deification

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Crosby, Sumner McKnight, *The Royal Abbey of Saint-Denis from Its Beginnings to the Death of Suger, 475-1151* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987). Cited in Rorem.
- Gersh, Stephen, *From Iamblicus to Eriugena: An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 1978).
- Golitzin, Alexander, *Et Introibo ad Altare Dei: The Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagita, with Special Reference to Its Predecessors in the Eastern Christian Tradition* (Thessalonike: Patriarchikon Idryma Paterikon Meleton, 1994).
- Golitzin, Alexander, "Hierarchy versus Anarchy? Dionysius Areopagita, Symeon the New Theologian, and Nicetas Stethatos", in Bradley Nassif, ed., *New Perspectives in Historical Theology: Essays in Memory of John Meyendorff* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 250-278.
- Kharlamov, Vladimir, *The Beauty of the Unity and the Harmony of the Whole: The Concept of Theosis in the Theology of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009).
- Louth, Andrew, *Denys the Areopagite* (Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow, 1989).
- Perl, Eric D., *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007).
- Roques, René, *L'Univers dionysien: Structure hiérarchique du monde selon le Pseudo-Denys* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1983).
- Rorem, Paul, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
- Riorden, William, *Divine Light: The Theology of Denys the Areopagite* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008).
- Rorem, Paul, "The Uplifting Spirituality of Pseudo-Dionysius", in *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, ed. Bernard McGinn, John Meyendorff, and Jean Leclercq (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 132-151.
- von Balthasar, Hans Urs, *The Glory of the Lord, vol. 2.1: Clerical Styles* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press), ch. 3.