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An Analysis of Dionysius' Hierarchy
in the *Divine Names* and His Other Works

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Introduction

The Dionysian corpus dates to the turn of the fifth and sixth centuries and it consists of the following four works: the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, the *Celestial Hierarchy*, the *Divine Names* and the *Mystical Theology*.¹ The identity of the author remains an enigma and all we have is his pseudonym. He became known as Pseudo-Dionysius or Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite.²

Bearing in mind the era when he wrote, the author did not choose to be anonymous for no reason. Firstly, it was his Origenist background which made him be afraid of not being heard. Secondly, he did not want any of his other possible activities to be connected with this corpus. And finally, the message of his work was really important and he wanted to make sure that it would be spread and gain attention without prejudice. So, a pseudonym was needed.³

The most significant factor which makes us date the corpus to the turn of the fifth and sixth centuries is the sympathy which is expressed by the author to the philosophy of Proclus.⁴ Besides, the claim that Dionysius comes from Syria is generally accepted, mainly due to the fact that he uses obvious Syriac Christian themes and idioms.⁵

In general, we could say that in the Dionysian Corpus, the desire for Christian life coexists with the combination of desert and world, while there is an evident admiration for the monastic life.⁶ Moreover, Dionysius invented terms like that of hierarchy, which will be discussed in this essay and spread rapidly.⁷

Hierarchy in the *Divine Names*

Hierarchy constitutes a prominent place in the whole work of Dionysius. He mentions it several times and gives the following meaning: “Hierarchy is a sacred order, knowledge and activity, which is being assimilated to likeness with God as much as possible...” And that is the purpose of his hierarchy; the assimilation and union with God.⁸

Hierarchy is supposed to enable beings to be as alike as possible to God and to be at one with him. It makes all members to be images of God in all aspects and make them imitate God, in order to receive purification, light and understanding from those above them in the hierarchy.⁹

In Dionysius’ hierarchy, union with God is fully realized in all stages of the ladder, and this completeness is personal. There is a double movement which dominates hierarchically through the relation of God with creatures. The former reveals his power to all beings and the

¹ Bernard McGinn (ed. and intr.), *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism* (New York, 2006), p. 283.

² Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: a Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to their Influence* (Oxford, 1993), p. 3.

³ Rosemary A. Arthur, *Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist: the Development and Purpose of the Angelic Hierarchy in Sixth Century Syria* (Ashgate, 1988), pp. 187-188.

⁴ Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (London, 2001), p.11.

⁵ Alexander Golitzin, “‘A Contemplative and a Liturgist’: Father Georges Florovsky on the Corpus Dionysiacum”, *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, p. 141.

⁶ Διονύσιου Αρεοπαγίτου, *Συγγράματα*, tr. and intro Χρήστος Αραμπατζής and Ιγνάτιος Μ. Σακαλής (Thessaloniki, 2008), p. 7.

⁷ Alexander Golitzin, *Dionysius Areopagita: A Christian Mysticism?*, *Pro Ecclesia* Vol. XII, No.2, p.164.

⁸ Louth, *Denys*, p. 38.

⁹ Arthur, *Pseudo-Dionysius* p. 64.

latter rise toward deification, by exceeding the manifestations of God in creation.¹⁰ The Godhead remains hidden after this manifestation. As a result, the image of God-man is not the central point in Dionysius' hierarchy. The hierarchical system of Dionysius is sharp and harshly coloured.¹¹

The hierarchies stand as intercessors for the union with God and contribute to deification by their existence. They are demonstrators of the divine glory and a brilliant theophany.¹² Hierarchies are the creation, the cosmos, and intelligent creatures who are granted with free choice.¹³

In the *Divine Names*, Dionysius deals with the fact that God remains unknown, but He made himself known to us with his names which are revealed in the Bible. Although Dionysius uses a Platonic ontology, he presents it in the way of biblical theonyms. 'Procession', 'abiding' and 'return' are the three main principles of the whole work.¹⁴

Dionysius describes the hierarchy of divine activities in the *Divine Names*, based on degrees of inclusion. Thus, being is higher than Life, because it includes all beings and 'extends farther'.¹⁵ On the contrary, Life extends only to living things. Also, Life is superior to Wisdom, since in the latter we have only logical living beings. This could be characterized as uncreated hierarchy, in which all the divine activities are nothing more than specifications of being. In addition this being incorporates all the specific activities in itself.¹⁶ But as we will see in the next paragraphs, the name Good is on the highest level of this scale system.

Consequently, the law of inclusion and manifestation is the one which organizes the created hierarchies. If there is any element which maintains a more specific activity, it includes all the other activities which are more general. So, every higher level not only exceeds but it also includes all the lower levels; and this makes it superior to any other.¹⁷

This is how Dionysius describes the divine names, in the fifth chapter of his treatise:

'The divine name "Good" tells of all the processions of the universal Cause; it extends to beings and nonbeings and that Cause is superior to being and nonbeings. The name "Being" extends to all beings which are, and it is beyond them. The name of "Life" extends to all living things, and yet is beyond them. The name "Wisdom" reaches out to everything which has to do with understanding, reason, and sense perception, and surpasses them all.'¹⁸

As we can see, Dionysius places hierarchically the above names with the following order: Good, Being, Life and finally Wisdom.¹⁹ This order is of high importance, since the name Good not only deals with the universal providence of God, but it also refers to all processions, beings and nonbeings. As a result, it is treated first.²⁰ The other three names do not apply to different things, but to more general or specific ways. So, the name Good is more inclusive than the second name

¹⁰ Vladimir Lossky, 'Darkness and Light in the Knowledge of God', *In the Image and Likeness of God* (New York, 1974), p. 42.

¹¹ Golitzin, 'A Contemplative and a Liturgist', p. 138.

¹² Louth, *Denys*, p. 106.

¹³ Louth, *Denys*, p. 108.

¹⁴ Chr. Schafer, 'The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite. An Introduction to the Structure and the Content of the Treatise "On the Divine Names"', *Reviews/Vigiliae Christianae* 61 (2007), p. 116.

¹⁵ Eric Justin Perl, 'Symbol, Sacrament, and Hierarchy in Saint Dionysios the Areopagite', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 39/3-4, 1994, p. 348.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 349.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 349.

¹⁸ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, tr. Colm Luibheid and Paul Rorem (New York, 1987) pp. 96-97.

¹⁹ Αρεοπαγίτου, *Συγγράματα*, Αραμπατζής and Σακαλής, p. 340.

²⁰ Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, p. 154.

in the sequence, which is Being, because it incorporates God in a way that the latter does not. Then, Being refers to God's relation with living and nonliving beings, Life refers only to living beings and at last Wisdom applies to everything related to understanding, reason and sense perception.²¹

Yet, the name Good is the one which illuminates the intelligible and intelligent beings,²² as Dionysius explains in the fourth chapter:

They can strive towards angelic. By means of the angels as good leaders, they can be uplifted to the generous Source of all good things and, each according to his measure, they are able to have a share in the illuminations streaming out from that Source.²³

According to Dionysius, the intelligible and intelligent beings owe their existence to the shining of the Good.²⁴ Beyond their illumination, their perfection and purification derive from the Good, in such a way that these beings manifest this source as its angels or messengers. Dionysius describes the qualities of angels, including the triad purification, illumination and perfection,²⁵ which is as we will see in his other works as well, the basic vehicle to speak for hierarchy.

Also, there is a wide range of names which are connected with the name Good by Dionysius. For instance, the Beauty firmly links with the Good, because it concentrates all things together, providing the harmony whose existence is really important to a hierarchical universe.²⁶

After the sequence described above, Dionysius proceeds with less important names and ends up to the biblical combination of Holy of Holies, King of Kings, Lord of Lords and so on.²⁷ Nonetheless, in the end Dionysius returns to a higher level of names, by mentioning the name One, which is presented as the most enduring of them all. This seems to be a progression until the final chapter's return to high.²⁸

It could be said that the name One actually distinguishes the role of God, which is certainly already known. It means that 'God is uniquely all things through the transcendence of one unity and that He is the cause of all without ever departing from that oneness'.²⁹ This implies that God is naturally placed on the top of Dionysius' hierarchical system and such an important name, as the One is, could only characterize him. So, the name One could be seen together with that of Good, as the two most important names that they are attributed to God. They are the two names which describe the nature of God better than any others.

Also, by calling God as One, Dionysius refers to the monotheistic character of Christian religion and to the unity of God in relation to the other two persons of the Trinity.³⁰ In general, one could say that Dionysius in the *Divine Names* seeks to interpret the biblical names of God starting from the highest level of our understanding and ideas.³¹

²¹ Ibid., p. 154.

²² Ibid., p. 148.

²³ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, p. 73.

²⁴ Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, p. 148.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 148.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 149.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 164.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 164.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 162.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 162.

³¹ Ibid., p. 137.

It is also worth noting the Dionysian use of the word *τάξις*, when defining the character of hierarchy. The names of God are summed up, recapitulated, in the taxies of the hierarchies.³² Yet, the divine *θεσμός* determines the hierarchic order and the expression of God's dominant love. In the *Divine Names* these two words appear together to illustrate and distribute the kingdom of God.³³

If someone wants to seek the influences and the background of the *Divine Names* should focus on Neoplatonic sources and especially to Proclus.³⁴ As we have seen, Dionysius starts his discussion with the name Good and finishes with that of One. But the triad of the names Being-Life-Wisdom is reminiscent of Proclus' triad Being-Life-Intelligence. Some other names in the *Divine Names* are evidently scriptural and some others combine Neoplatonic and biblical elements.³⁵

Although Dionysius is obviously influenced by a polytheistic tradition, where the divine names refer to the gods of Greek mythology, he manages to distinguish his system very efficiently. First, he modified the notion of procession, by claiming that being derives only from God; and second, he changed the doctrine of divine names, that his predecessor maintained, to a doctrine of divine attributes.³⁶

Hierarchy in the other works of Dionysius

Dionysius deals with the issue of hierarchy in his other works, as well. We shall first see how he deals with it in the *Celestial Hierarchy*. Here, Dionysius describes the heavenly realm which consists of angels. This angelic realm is represented by Dionysius as being closer to God than we are, the human beings, and operates as mediator between God and mankind.³⁷

The angel signifies a messenger who carries messages from God to men. The angels are the invisible company of God and support faithful people. They appear in the life of the early Church, as represented in Acts and hold a central role in the representation of heaven of the Apocalypse.³⁸

In Christianity, there is the sharp distinction between angels and demons. The former refers to good beings and the latter to evil beings. Dionysius keeps this distinction and maintains that angels remain stable in their love of God. In regard with evil beings, he does not expand a lot.³⁹

Dionysius presents hierarchically the angelic beings as three ranks of three orders of beings. The first rank consists of seraphim, cherubim, thrones; the second consists of dominions, powers, and authorities; and finally the third includes principalities, archangels, and angels.⁴⁰

In the *Celestial Hierarchy*, Dionysius presents the claim of hierarchical order at a greater point, compared with the *Divine Names*. Jesus is certainly the 'source and perfection of all hier-

³² Hieromonk Alexander (Golitzin), *Et Introibo ad Altare Dei: the Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagita, with Special Reference to its Predecessors in the Eastern Christian Tradition* (Thessaloniki, 1994), pp. 121-122.

³³ Ibid., p. 125.

³⁴ Louth, *Denys*, p. 81.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 81.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 83, 85.

³⁷ Louth, *Denys*, p. 33.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 34.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 35.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 36.

archies', but it is also clear that during his earthly life and similar to us, he had no direct communion with God.⁴¹

Dionysius explains each rank of his hierarchical system separately. So, the name seraphim means 'a perennial circling around the divine things, penetrating warmth', while cherubim means 'the power to know and see God, to receive the greatest gifts of his light'. Also, thrones imply 'a transcendence over every earthly defect, as shown by their upward-bearing toward the ultimate heights.'⁴²

The background of this rank is the triad purification-illumination-perfection. The thrones as transcendent defects represent purification. The contemplative power of the cherubim represents illumination and finally the seraphim correspond to perfection in their continuous communion with God.⁴³

Next in the *Celestial Hierarchy*, Dionysius deals with the second rank, in order to speak about mediation; about the 'process of handing on from angel to angel'. In this case, his rank does not have a stable form, since sometimes he juxtaposes dominions and powers and sometimes he juxtaposes powers and authorities.⁴⁴

The final hierarchy, which is that of principalities, archangels and angels, is the one which presides over human hierarchies. Each nation has its own angels. Thus, Michael is the angelic ruler of Israel. Dionysius justifies the choice of Israel, by saying that this nation did not abandon its angelic illumination. As a result, Israel keeps the right to be called God's people.⁴⁵

Also, the *Celestial Hierarchy* could be seen as a methodological argument for the use of symbols in representing angels and God. It mainly focuses on responses that one could have with incongruous symbols. Thus, we should not be critical of the Scriptures, because according to Dionysius, everything presupposes a purpose. This oxymoron prevails in Dionysius' explanations.⁴⁶

The symbols play a double role: to reveal and to keep secret. For faithful people the symbols are guides which help them to read the Bible properly. On the contrary, for these people who cannot understand the symbols of the Bible, they are blocked and cannot proceed to the real meaning of the writings. As a result, they might find these symbols laughable.⁴⁷

We shall now proceed and see how Dionysius deals with hierarchy in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. The *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* could be seen as an effort of Dionysius to speak about the liturgical life of the Church in a mystical manner. He seeks to enlighten early Christians, by making them participate in the Divine Life through worship; such a route directs the faithful to the real meaning of the Church.⁴⁸

This work is identified with our earthly hierarchy, the human hierarchy, and similarly to the *Celestial Hierarchy*, it takes the form of triads. The *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* is a triad of sacraments, ministers and those to whom they minister. Also, each part of this triad consists of another triad; so we have three sacraments, three orders of clergy and three orders of laity.⁴⁹

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 42.

⁴² Ibid., p. 47.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 47.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 49.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 49.

⁴⁶ Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, pp. 53-54.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 54.

⁴⁸ George S. Bebis, "'The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy" of Dionysios the Areopagite: a Liturgical Interpretation', *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 19.2 (Autumn, 1974), pp. 163-164.

⁴⁹ Louth, *Denys*, pp. 52-53.

The obvious difference between the *Celestial Hierarchy* and the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* is the fact that God used for the former immaterial and intellectual means. In contrast, for the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* God gave the God-given words.⁵⁰

Initially, the first triad of sacraments consists of baptism, *synaxis* and *myron*; the second triad of clergy consists of hierarchs, priests and deacons; and finally the last triad incorporates monks, communicants and those being purified (catechumens, penitents and possessed).⁵¹ This hierarchical order is of high importance. It is associated, again, with the triad purification, illumination and perfection. The catechumens, penitents and possessed, who need purification, are being purified. The sacred people should be called contemplative people, since they are being illuminated, while the monks are being perfected.⁵²

Also, the deacons who give instructions in the Scriptures and the faith to catechumens, they are responsible for purifying. The priests' duty is to illuminate and they are mainly linked to the sacred people. The hierarchs' duty is to perfect and their concern should be the monks.⁵³ Nonetheless in the case of sacraments there is a difference. Although baptism purifies, it is named illumination, as well. The Eucharist and the *myron* are both meant to be perfecting.⁵⁴

Proceeding in a more detailed analysis of each triad and firstly with the sacraments, Baptism refers to the immersion in the water and not the whole ceremony. Dionysius considers baptism to be rebirth, according to the Johannine tradition. This rebirth is a kind of divine birth which contributes to deification, and it can only be acquired by God's love. This love of God which gives us the divine rebirth is reminiscent of Hierotheus' teaching.⁵⁵

The Eucharist or *synaxis* as Dionysius calls it, it is the most important sacrament. He refers, again, to Hierotheus and the fact that the latter characterized it 'rite of rites' or 'sacrament of sacraments'. There is no other sacrament which can take place without *synaxis*; they are perfected by it.⁵⁶

It is also interesting to note that Dionysius' view of the *synaxis* presents common elements with Theodore of Mopsuestia. However, as opposed to Theodore who mainly deals with the liturgical action and draws attention to the life of Jesus historically, Dionysius is more interested in the movement of the liturgical action. Also, Dionysius considers this movement in terms of God's love, which directs us back to Him.⁵⁷

In regard with the sacrament of oil or *myron*, Dionysius deals with its consecration and not its use. For him, the consecration of *myron* is the function of the hierarch which is identified with the bishop.⁵⁸ This ceremony does not appear in Christian Fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries. It only appears in the Syrian Church and here we have an apparent element which associates Dionysius with the Syrian tradition.⁵⁹ *Myron*, which is hidden from the eyes of the profane, symbolizes an inner reality which is approachable only to those who are prepared for it.⁶⁰

⁵⁰ Bebis, "The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy", p. 165.

⁵¹ Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, p. 96.

⁵² Louth, *Denys*, p. 54.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

When Dionysius describes the clergy in the second triad, he mainly attempts to denote that the members who constitute the hierarchy and all the interrelation within the hierarchy are personal relationships. This implies that the relation between the worth of the priest and the dignity of his office is indispensable.⁶¹ Similarly to the heavenly beings that are holy beings of purity and pass into the divine illumination, this is the case for our earthly hierarchy.⁶²

Someone who belongs to the priestly hierarchy responds to God's invitation to the divine beauty. The divine light through the hierarchies is a kind of personal assimilation to God, in such a way that the *theophany* of the order is perfected. So, the order becomes perfect manifestation of God and includes members who not only understand God, but they commonly share his love and manifest it in their lives.⁶³

In the third triad, that of the laity, Dionysius mainly focuses on the monk who is on the highest level. He describes the monastic consecration, which is a ceremony comprising of prayer, a promise for faithfulness from the monk, the marking with the sign of the cross, the cut of his hair and the change of his clothes.⁶⁴

Dionysius considers monk the one who pursues the unity with the One; and this is the target of the monastic life. It is also interesting to note, that he calls monk *monachos* or *therapeutes*. The former is the one which is widely spread and used in Greece, while the latter which appears only in Dionysius and Eusebius, goes back to Philo's tradition.⁶⁵

The next work of Dionysius which alludes to hierarchy is the *Mystical Theology*. Here, Dionysius intends to demonstrate the importance of the prayer to God with an invocation to Trinity and he mainly uses the terms Godhead and *thearchy*. God is the cause of all beings, higher than any existence and provider of good.⁶⁶

The hierarchical thought of Dionysius is evident, when he refers to the journey of Moses on Mount Sinai; a narrative which explains and describes the progress of Moses to union with God. Dionysius considers this progression of Moses an important example for those who intend to abandon the lights and the voices and seek the divine ascents, as Moses did.⁶⁷

Moses is first purified and then, he contemplates where God dwells; this signifies the middle stage of illumination, which becomes apparent through this contemplation. Then, Moses proceeds to his final union with God, which is the stage of perfection. Similarly to the other cases of hierarchies, Moses experiences the triple stage of purification-illumination-perfection. It could be also said that Moses is the general example for hierarch.⁶⁸

These three powers of the sequence are presented by Dionysius as three levels of spiritual comprehension.⁶⁹ As we can see, the process of purification, illumination, perfection, which prevails again here, is identified with hierarchy through Moses' journey.

Finally, it is worth noting the fact that the hierarchy appears also in the letters that Dionysius wrote, and more specifically, the letter number 8. It is presented to have been sent to a fictitious monk, called Demophilus.⁷⁰ In this letter, Dionysius alludes to the arrangement of clerical

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 66.

⁶² Ibid., p. 66.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 67.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 68.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 68-69.

⁶⁶ Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, pp. 185, 187.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 189.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 190.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 192.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 18.

offices and the relationships between each other, while he also deals with the monks and other laity, as well. In addition, he speaks about hierarchy and the transmission of authority, revelation and existence itself.⁷¹

Dionysius presents exactly the same hierarchical order with that of his *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, which consists of the triad of sacraments (*myron*, *synaxis* and baptism), the triad of clergy (hierarchy, priest and deacon) and the triad of laity (monks, communicants and those being purified).⁷² Here again, the liturgical locations reflect the relationship between God, the clergy and the laity. And subsequently, they imply the process of purification, illumination, perfection.⁷³

Demophilus appears to violate the order of the hierarchy, by preserving sacred things from profane priests. Consequently, what we have here is a monk who challenged a clergyman. This cause gives Dionysius the opportunity to maintain, that authority and revelation came down to us from God, through the angelic beings to the hierarchs. Then, it continued through them to the priests, the deacons and the triad of laity in proper hierarchical sequence.⁷⁴ As a result, the proper hierarchical sequence should never be disrupted.

In general, the role of hierarchy is very prominent in Dionysius works. It permeates the whole of his writings and could be easily seen as the basic characteristic of his theology. Every being at every level is in direct communion with God.⁷⁵ His hierarchies operate through the law of inclusion and manifestation. The higher level of each hierarchy exceeds and incorporates all the proper perfections of the lower levels; and this is the element which makes it superior.⁷⁶

However, this is not to say that superiority and inferiority are the direct target of Dionysius' hierarchies. In contrast, hierarchies do not represent superiority and exclusion on one side and inferiority and deficiency on the other side.⁷⁷ What they represent is eminence and inclusion on the first hand and manifestation and possession on the second hand. We have only one activity which appears in all the hierarchies, according to the proper analogy of each.⁷⁸

It could be also said that divine love is the whole meaning of Dionysius' hierarchies. Hierarchies constitute the very essence of the Church as the deified cosmos and the Body of Christ, while the Church is the Temple in which God dwells.⁷⁹ In addition, hierarchies are the understanding of divine providence, of the mysteries of grace, of divine illumination and transmission, which all maintain a central role in the sensible and intelligible worlds.⁸⁰

Conclusions

Dionysius' hierarchy, at each stage, demonstrates the union with God, which is its final goal. His theology was the dogmatic basis for the teaching of God in later theology.⁸¹ His thought influ-

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 19.

⁷² Ibid., pp. 19, 21.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 20.

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 19-20.

⁷⁵ Perl, 'Symbol, Sacrament, and Hierarchy in Saint Dionysios the Areopagite', p. 347.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 349.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 350.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 350.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 354.

⁸⁰ Alexander (Golitzin), *Et Introibo ad Altare Dei*, p. 135.

⁸¹ Lossky, 'Darkness and Light in the Knowledge of God', p. 43.

enced the whole history of Christian theology and mysticism, in the role of the angels, the use of symbols and the nature of union.⁸²

Through his writings, Dionysius intends to denote the truth of the Church in a mystical and philosophical way; the truth that targets the salvation of human beings.⁸³ God's love is the element which prevails in this process and helps us to reach the truth. Nonetheless our correspondence is an essential requirement for fulfilling this goal.⁸⁴

Dionysius represents the means of speaking about the link between the individual Christian with the worshipping community in general.⁸⁵ Although he is the representative of the already existent Syrian tradition, he presents an image of Christianity, in which the notion of the soul is unfamiliar to his contemporary readers.⁸⁶ Dionysius could be characterized as a great thinker of high philosophical education. He is a professor with sound knowledge in combining divine grace and human efforts for the purpose of deification.⁸⁷

Dionysius is a pioneer in Christian theology. Initially, his hierarchy provides us with a system that includes a wide range of symbols and helps us to understand God and the cosmos. In addition, although he creates a strict hierarchical system, he finds some place for an escape, by transcending symbols and realizing the relationship between God and his creatures.⁸⁸

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⁸² McGinn (ed. and intr.), *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, p. 284.

⁸³ Αρεοπαγίτου, *Συγγράματα*, Αραμπατζής and Σακαλής, p. 5.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁸⁵ Golitzin, ‘A Contemplative and a Liturgist’, p. 156.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 156, 158.

⁸⁷ Bebis, “‘The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy’”, pp. 170, 172.

⁸⁸ Louth, *Denys*, p. 134.