

**THE CELESTIAL AND  
ECCLESIASTICAL  
HIERARCHY OF DIONYSIUS  
THE AREOPAGITE**

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The Celestial and Ecclesiastical Hierarchy of Dionysius the Areopagite by John Parker

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**JOHN PARKER**

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*Dionysius Areopagita, Βενεδικτῆς*  
THE CELESTIAL AND ECCLESIASTICAL  
HIERARCHY  
OF  
DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE

NOW FIRST TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH FROM THE  
ORIGINAL GREEK,

BY THE  
REV. JOHN PARKER, M.A.,  
AUTHOR OF "CHRISTIANITY CHRONOLOGICALLY CONFIRMED,"  
"WHY AM I A CHRISTIAN?" ETC.

"Τῶν γὰρ ἐκείνης προσαρρήσεων ἢ κατὰ ταύτην τελειουργία τὴν ἀλήθειαν  
ἐπιστάσατο, καὶ ἴσκι τῆς θεολογίας ἢ θεωρίας ἀνεκφυλάσσεται."

—EC. HIER. c. iii. s. 5.

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FICINUS.  
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*Commentaries.*

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JOHN OF SALISBURY.  
ROBERT OF LINCOLN.  
ST. THOMAS AQUINAS.  
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DIONYSIUS CARTHUSIANUS.

*Scholia.*

DIONYSIUS, BISHOP OF ALEXANDRIA.  
DARA.  
MAXIMUS.  
PACHYMERA.

*General References.*

GALLIA CHRISTIANA. 15 Vols. Paris, 1744.  
ANTWERP EDITION, 1633. 2 Vols.  
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## Introduction.

### SKETCH OF LIFE.

**D**IONYSIUS was born<sup>1</sup> in Athens, A.D. 5, nine years after the birth of Jesus Christ. He was educated first at Athens, then at Heliopolis, in Egypt. There, at the age of twenty-five, he witnessed, with Apollophanes, the miraculous darkness<sup>2</sup> of the sun, which occurred at the time of the Crucifixion, A.D. 30.<sup>3</sup> Returned to Athens, he married a woman of noble birth named Damaris, and was elected one of the nine Archons of Athens. Having filled the office of Archon without reproach, he was elected member of the Areopagus, a court of justice consisting of fifty-one citizens of Athens, distinguished for birth, wealth, intelligence, and character. In A.D. 49,<sup>4</sup> nineteen years after the Crucifixion, and ninth of Claudius, St. Paul was brought before the court of the Areopagus as the setter forth of strange gods, because he was preaching Jesus and the Resurrection. The Court of the Areopagus was the guardian of the religion of Athens, and had condemned Socrates to death, on the ground that, by teaching one God as supreme, he dishonoured the gods of Greece. The Athenians, however, were so much ashamed of their treatment of that great philosopher, that no person afterwards was subjected to the same fate for the same cause. Hence St. Paul escaped. Nor was this all. Dionysius, with other illustrious men, came unto Paul, and embraced the Christian Faith. The moving cause of his conversion was, that he learned from St. Paul that the darkness which he had observed in Egypt was coeval<sup>5</sup> with the Crucifixion. He was baptized 3rd October, A.D. 49, in the forty-fourth year of his age. St. Paul soon after left Athens, attended by Dionysius, who was his companion for three years,<sup>6</sup> during which time he was prepared for the Diaconate, and formed that intimate friendship with Timothy which lasted until death. Dionysius was present with Hierotheus, St. Paul, St. Peter, St. James, St. John, and other Apostles at the funeral rites of the Blessed Virgin, who died at Jerusalem, A.D. 54,<sup>7</sup> twenty-four years after the Ascension, in the seventy-second year of her age. Dionysius was, in due time, ordained Priest. We do not know the date, but we gather the fact from

<sup>1</sup> Ant. Ed. and Vol. p. 252.

<sup>2</sup> p. 256 and 7th letter.

<sup>3</sup> Dionysius the Areopagite, p. 19, Skeff.

<sup>4</sup> Acts xviii. 2. <sup>5</sup> Letter 7 and 11.

<sup>6</sup> p. 281.

<sup>7</sup> p. 293.

his letter to Demophilus, in which he intimates that he had admitted Demophilus to the order of the Therapeutæ. It was the priest's function alone to admit to that order. Dionysius would seem to have been a member of a College<sup>1</sup> of Clergy in Athens, whose duty was to impart instruction to candidates for baptism, to study the higher theology, and to impart<sup>2</sup> such information as was needed by the Church at large. Dionysius of Corinth says that he took the oversight *τῆς ἐκκλησίας*<sup>3</sup> of the Parish of Athens. He also wrote letters to individuals who sought explanations of statements contained in his works in circulation. He would appear to have travelled to other centres. He was absent from Athens when Demophilus was guilty of the act of insubordination, which called forth his instructive letter in rebuke. The same letter alludes to his visit to Crete, where he was the guest of Carpus, who afterwards became Bishop of the Troad, 2 Timothy iv. 13. Dionysius was ordained Bishop of Athens by St. Paul, in succession to Hierotheus, who, most probably, accompanied St. Paul in his first journey to Spain.<sup>4</sup> St. Paul, before his martyrdom, sent for Dionysius to Rome to take charge of the congregations planted by himself in Gaul. Dionysius arrived too late to see the Apostle alive, but Clement confirmed the commission, and Dionysius, with Rusticus, Eleutherius, and others, departed for Gaul. They arrived first at Arles, where Regulus was appointed Bishop, in succession to Trophimus,<sup>5</sup> who had returned to Asia in consequence of sickness. Dionysius, with his two companions, ultimately established themselves in Lutetia Parisiorum, the emporium of trade between Britain and the Mediterranean. There, as a centre of operations, he remained till A.D. 96, when he returned to Athens for the purpose of meeting St. John after his release from Patmos. St. John and Dionysius met at Ephesus to "speak face to face," and it is probable that the last chapter was then added to St. John's Gospel. The tenth letter of Dionysius clearly implies that St. John's Gospel was then in circulation, and already read by Dionysius. The last chapter was added to correct an impression prevalent in the Church that St. John should not die. Dionysius remained in Asia for two years. Before his return to Gaul St. Timothy died in the reign of Nerva, 97-98—as Polycrates, a writer of the second century, and Bishop of Ephesus, affirms. It is probable that Dionysius revised and completed his works during that time. Upon his return to Gaul, Dionysius presented a copy of the "Divine Names" to Eugenius Marcellus, as to a second Timothy in pious memory of the first.<sup>6</sup>

Through his sanctity, learning, and venerable age, Dionysius

<sup>1</sup> Cel. Hier. 13 c. ad finem.    <sup>2</sup> See Letters.    <sup>3</sup> Eusebius Ec. His. c. xxiii.  
<sup>4</sup> A. D. 59—sixth of Nero.    <sup>5</sup> 2 Tim. iv. 20.    <sup>6</sup> Vol. 2, Aut. Ed., p. 431.



acquired a commanding influence in Spain, Germany and Britain (*ἄριστος ἄριστος Ἑσπερίων ἡγεμῶν*). The Druid Priests<sup>2</sup> made desperate efforts to thwart him. His influence became known in Imperial Rome. Nearly the whole of the last years of the Emperor Trajan<sup>3</sup> were spent in the East, for the subjugation of the Parthian and other kingdoms. In A.D. 115, he left Syria for the Parthian expedition. In August, A.D. 117, he died at Selinus in Cilicia, on his return to Rome. Hadrian was proclaimed Emperor at Antioch, 11th August, 117. He at once arranged matters in the East, and arrived at Rome, 118 A.D., where, by concessions to the Senate and gifts to the people, he consolidated his position. In A.D. 119 he began his tour of the provinces, by passing through Gaul, on his way to Britain. He then sent the Prefect of Gaul to allure Dionysius from Christianity to Paganism. In that case, he was to bring him with honour to the Imperial presence. If he failed, he was to cut off his head. Dionysius rejected the Imperial honours, and chose the crown of martyrdom. With his two companions, united in life, and in death not divided, he joyfully sealed his testimony in his own blood, and "migravit ad Christum," 9th October, A.D. 119,<sup>4</sup> in the seventieth year of his Christian course and in the one hundred and fourteenth of his natural life. The hill on which he suffered is hence called Montmartre. In order to terrorize Dionysius and his companions, Lisbius, the first-fruits of Gaul, with his repentant wife, suffered martyrdom a few days previously. Hence the title, "Premier Baron Chretien," borne by the noble house of Montmorency,<sup>5</sup> as his representatives, to this day. It is, perhaps, more than a coincidence, that Monseigneur Darboy, Archbishop of Paris, who had written so nobly and so bravely in defence of the writings of Dionysius, and had translated them into French, suffered, as Archbishop, in the same city, if not on the same mount, on 24th May, 1871.

The East, naturally, commemorates the Baptism of Dionysius on the 3rd of October. The West, as naturally, commemorates his martyrdom on the 9th of the same month.

#### THE WORKS OF DIONYSIUS.

If spurious works, throwing light upon the doctrines and services of the Church in Apostolic times, had been found in an Egyptian tomb, what a stir the discovery would have made! These works

<sup>2</sup> p. 317.

<sup>3</sup> p. 335-9.

<sup>4</sup> Trajan and Hadrian in Smith's Gr. and Roman Biography.

<sup>5</sup> p. 341.

<sup>6</sup> L'Histoire de la Maison de Montmorency par M. Desarnaux, Vol. 1. p. 12. Paris, 1764. Ant. Ed., and Vol. 317.

have been entombed in public libraries the last 150 years—known and read by only a chosen few. They are not spurious, which will detract from their interest with some. Further, they show the New Testament as in circulation and of Divine authority in the first century. That again will destroy their value with those Christian advocates who seek to present the Christian Faith under incredible conditions, and whose logical purpose is to insist at once upon the necessity and the folly of Faith. Others may say they are spurious. We must, however, be faithful to Truth and to glorious “men of old time,” and affirm that they are the genuine works of Dionysius the Areopagite—the convert and faithful disciple of St. Paul. The writings of Dionysius are a collection of letters, written at various intervals, between A.D. 58 and 98. The larger treatises are addressed to Timothy. Dionysius was chief of a college of Preceptors<sup>1</sup> at Athens, whose occupation was the instruction of new converts, and the study of the higher theology. They were taught the deeper mysteries of the Christian Faith by Hierotheus, the first local Bishop<sup>2</sup> of Athens. Hierotheus wrote several abstract treatises, similar in style to Aristotle’s Ethics, which were too deep and too compressed to be understood by ordinary intellects.<sup>3</sup> At the request of Timothy, and by order of Hierotheus, Dionysius wrote the “Divine Names,” in order that he might present the teaching of Hierotheus in a form more easily understood. The letters were begun whilst Dionysius and Timothy were both Presbyters, and the original superscription was retained for the whole treatises. Is not this the case with nearly all the Prophets and with some of St. Paul’s Epistles? When Dionysius writes to St. John, or Polycarp, or Titus, he addresses the former as Theologos—Apostle, Evangelist—the latter as Hierarches, and Gaius as Therapeutes. The appeal to the Episcopal judgment of Timothy, in the ninth chapter of the celestial hierarchy, shows that Timothy had become Bishop when that letter was written. It is worthy of remark that the superscription is not attached to the mystic theology—the last of the works—although it was written to “friend Timothy.” The whole works probably received their finishing touches between 96-98, during the two years that Dionysius spent in Asia, when he met St. John at Ephesus.

<sup>1</sup> Divine Names, c. iii., s. 2.

<sup>2</sup> The Archbishop of Athens gives me the succession at Athens thus—1st Hierotheus, A.D. 52; 2nd, Dionysius; 3rd, Narcissus, one of the seventy; 4th, Publius, from 118-124; 5th, Quadratus, who presented Apology to Emperor Hadrian.

<sup>3</sup> Divine Names, c. iii., s. 2.

## EVIDENCE OF DATE IN WRITINGS.

The works are full of personal allusions. Dionysius affirms that he was converted to the Christian Faith by St. Paul, whose teaching on the holy Angels he transmits. After St. Paul he claims Hierotheus as his chief instructor, whose abstract treatises he tries to make more intelligible, whilst preserving his doctrine with the utmost fidelity. He declares himself to have been present at the funeral rites of the Blessed Virgin, who died in Jerusalem, A.D. 54. He mentions Peter, James, and other Apostles as being present. He reminds Timothy that, after the Apostles, Hierotheus excelled all others in the hymns by which on that occasion he extolled the Divine compassion and condescension as manifested in the Incarnation. He writes to St. John when exiled in Patmos; to Titus when Bishop of Crete; to Polycarp when Bishop of Smyrna. He alludes to Gaius and Carpus, both mentioned in the New Testament. He mentions the philosopher Clemens—either Clemens Atrius, to whom the younger Pliny addressed two of his letters, or Clemens, Bishop of Rome. He writes at a time when the Psalms were yet read in Hebrew whenever a person competent to do so was present. He describes the Chants as sung by the whole Choir. The Antiphonal singing was introduced by St. Ignatius at Antioch, and became universal by the time of Constantine. He writes at a time when the threefold Ministry and Sacrament was the accepted order of the Church, and before the sevenfold view became dominant at the end of the second century. He speaks of persecutions and martyrdoms, and of Apostolic Sees, as already occupied by successors of the Apostles. Apollonides wrote a *letter*<sup>1</sup> abusing Dionysius as a "turncoat," who used the Greek learning against the Greek Philosophy. Dionysius replies that Polycarp should remind Apollonides that he had witnessed with himself the miraculous darkness in Egypt, which he had discovered to be coeval with the Crucifixion. The works are Attic in phraseology, and teem with technical terms of Athenian law. They abound in newly coined words, expressing with marvellous precision in the language of Plato and Aristotle the newly revealed Christian truths. To appropriate the perfect description of Bishop Westcott, "they<sup>2</sup> present the thoughts of one who lived in an age of transition, and strove to save from the wreck of ancient philosophy truths which he seemed to find coherent with the Christian Faith." Whilst gladly acknowledging the truth in Greek philosophy, he

<sup>1</sup> The origin of that letter was no doubt the conversion of Statonice, the wife of Apollonides, on account of which St. Paul was cast into chains at Philippi. The bearers of the letter from the Church at Corinth, complaining of the false teachers, found St. Paul in chains at Philippi. Correspondence of St. Paul, Carrière et S. Berger, page 20. Fischbacher, Paris.

<sup>2</sup> Religious Thought in the West, p. 189.