The Celestial Hierarchy

Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (c. AD 500)

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DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE

ON THE HEAVENLY HIERARCHY. CAPUT I. To my Fellow Presbyter Timothy. Dionysius the Presbyter. That every divine illumination, whilst going forth lovingly to the objects of its forethought under various forms, remains simplex. Nor is this all. It also unifies the things illuminated. Section I. ”Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of Lights.” Further also, every procession of illuminating light, proceeding from the Father, whilst visiting us as a gift of goodness, restores us again gradually as an unifying power, and turns us to the oneness of our conducting Father, and to a deifying simplicity. For all things are from Him, and to Him, as said the Sacred Word. Section II.

Invoking then Jesus, the Paternal Light, the Real, the True, ”which lighteth every man coming into the world,” ”through Whom we have access to the Father,” Source of Light, let us aspire, as far as is attainable, to the illuminations handed down by our fathers in the most sacred Oracles, and let us gaze, as we may, upon the Hierarchies of the Heavenly Minds manifested by them symbolically for our instruction. And when we have received, with immaterial and unflinching mental eyes, the gift of Light, primal and super-primal, of the supremely Divine Father, which manifests to us the most blessed Hierarchies of the Angels in types and symbols, let us then, from it, be elevated to its simple splendour . For it never loses its own unique inwardness, but multiplied and going forth, as becomes its goodness, for an elevating and unifying blending of the objects of its care, remains firmly and solitarily centred within itself in its unmoved sameness; and raises, according to their capacity, those who lawfully aspire to it, and makes them one, after the example of its own unifying Oneness. For it is not possible that the supremely Divine Ray should otherwise illuminate us, except so far as it is enveloped, for the purpose of instruction, in variegated sacred veils, and arranged naturally and appropriately, for such as we are, by paternal forethought.

Section III. Wherefore, the Divine Institution of sacred Rites, having deemed it worthy of the supermundane imitation of the Heavenly Hierarchies, and having depicted the aforesaid immaterial Hierarchies in material figures and bodily compositions, in order that we might be borne, as far as our capacity permits, from the most sacred pictures to the instruc-

tions and similitudes without symbol and without type, transmitted to us our most Holy Hierarchy. For it is not possible for our mind to be raised to that immaterial representation and contemplation of the Heavenly Hierarchies, without using the material guidance suitable to itself, accounting the visible beauties as reflections of the invisible comeliness; and the sweet odours of the senses as emblems of the spiritual distribution; and the material lights as a likeness of the gift of the immaterial enlightenment; and the detailed sacred instructions , of the feast of contemplation within the mind; and the ranks of the orders here, of the harmonious and regulated habit, with regard to Divine things; and the reception of the most Divine Eucharist, of the partaking of Jesus, and whatever other things were transmitted to Heavenly Beings supermundanely, but to us symbolically.

For the sake, then, of this our proportioned deification, the philanthropic Source of sacred mysteries, by manifesting the Heavenly Hierarchies to us, and constituting our Hierarchy as fellow-ministers with them, through our imitation of their Godlike priestliness , so far as in us lies, described under sensible likeness the supercelestial Minds, in the inspired compositions of the Oracles, in order that It might lead us through the sensible to the intelligible , and from inspired symbols to the simple sublimities of the Heavenly Hierarchies. CAPUT II. That Divine and Heavenly things are appropriately revealed, even through dissimilar symbols. Section I. It is necessary then, as I think, first to set forth what we think is the purpose of every Hierarchy, and what benefit each one confers upon its followers; and next to celebrate the Heavenly Hierarchies according to their revelation in the Oracles; then following these Oracles, to say in what sacred forms the holy writings of the Oracles depict the celestial orders, and to what sort of simplicity we must be carried through the representations; in order that we also may not, like the vulgar, irreverently think that the heavenly and Godlike minds are certain many-footed and many-faced creatures, or moulded to the brutishness of oxen , or the savage form of lions , and fashioned like the hooked beaks of eagles , or the feathery down of birds , and should imagine that there are certain wheels of fire above the heaven, or material thrones upon which the Godhead may recline, or certain many-coloured horses, and spear-bearing leaders of the host , and whatever else was transmitted by the Oracles to us under multifarious symbols of sacred imagery.

And indeed, the Word of God artlessly makes use of poetic representations of sacred things, respecting the shapeless minds, out of regard to our intelligence, so to speak, consulting a mode of education proper and natural to it, and moulding the inspired writings for it. Section II.

But if any one think well to accept the sacred compositions as of things simple and unknown in their own nature, and beyond our contemplation, but thinks the imagery of the holy minds in the Oracles is incongruous, and that all this is, so to speak, a rude scenic representation of the angelic names; and further says that the theologians ought, when they have come to the bodily representation of creatures altogether without body, to represent and display them by appropriate and, as far as possible, cognate figures, taken, at any rate, from our most honoured and immaterial and exalted beings, and ought not to clothe

the heavenly and Godlike simple essences with the many forms of the lowest creatures to be found on the earth (for the one would perhaps be more adapted to our instruction, and would not degrade the celestial explanations to incongruous dissimilitudes; but the other both does violence without authority to the Divine powers, and likewise leads astray our minds, through dwelling upon these irreverent descriptions); and perhaps he will also think that the super-heavenly places are filled with certain herds of lions, and troops of horses, and bellowing songs of praise, and flocks of birds, and other living creatures, and material and less honourable things, and whatever else the similitudes of the Oracles, in every respect dissimilar, describe, for a so-called explanation, but which verge towards the absurd, and pernicious, and impassioned;

now, in my opinion, the investigation of the truth demonstrates the most sacred wisdom of the Oracles, in the descriptions of the Heavenly Minds, taking forethought, as that wisdom does, wholly for each, so as neither, as one may say, to do violence to the Divine Powers, nor at the same time to enthral us in the grovelling passions of the debased imagery. For any one might say that the cause why forms are naturally attributed to the formless, and shapes to the shapeless, is not alone our capacity which is unable immediately to elevate itself to the intelligible contemplations, and that it needs appropriate and cognate instructions which present images, suitable to us, of the formless and supernatural objects of contemplation; but further, that it is most agreeable to the revealing Oracles to conceal, through mystical and sacred enigmas, and to keep the holy and secret truth respecting the supermundane minds inaccessible to the multitude. For it is not every one that is holy, nor, as the Oracles affirm, does knowledge belong to all .

Section III. But if any one should blame the descriptions as being incongruous, by saying that it is shameful to attribute shapes so repugnant to the Godlike and most holy Orders, it is enough to reply that the method of Divine revelation is twofold; one, indeed, as is natural, proceeding through likenesses that are similar, and of a sacred character, but the other, through dissimilar forms, fashioning them into entire unlikeness and incongruity. No doubt, the mystical traditions of the revealing Oracles sometimes extol the august Blessedness of the super-essential Godhead, as Word , and Mind , and Essence , manifesting its God-becoming expression and wisdom, both as really being Origin, and true Cause of the origin of things being, and they describe It as light , and call it life. While such sacred descriptions are more reverent, and seem in a certain way to be superior to the material images, they yet, even thus, in reality fall short of the supremely Divine similitude. For It is above every essence and life. No light, indeed, expresses its character, and every description and mind incomparably fall short of Its similitude.

But at other times its praises are supermundanely sung, by the Oracles themselves, through dissimilar revelations, when they affirm that it is invisible , and infinite , and incomprehensible ; and when there is signified, not what it is, but what it is not. For this, as I think, is more appropriate to It, since, as the secret and sacerdotal tradition taught, we rightly describe its non-relationship to things created, but we do not know its superessen-

tial, and inconceivable, and unutterable indefinability. If, then, the negations respecting things Divine are true, but the affirmations are inharmonious, the revelation as regards things invisible, through dissimilar representations, is more appropriate to the hiddenness of things unutterable. Thus the sacred descriptions of the Oracles honour, and do not expose to shame, the Heavenly Orders, when they make them known by dissimilar pictorial forms, and demonstrate through these their supermundane superiority over all. material things. And I do not suppose that any sensible man will gainsay that the incongruous elevate our mind more than the similitudes; for there is a likelihood, with regard to the more sublime representations of heavenly things, that we should be led astray, so as to think that the Heavenly Beings are certain creatures with the appearance of gold, and certain men with the appearance of light , and glittering like lightning , handsome , clothed in bright shining raiment, shedding forth innocuous flame, and so with regard to all the other shapes and appropriate forms, with which the Word of God has depicted the Heavenly Minds.

In order that men might not suffer from this, by thinking they are nothing more exalted than their beau tiful appearance, the elevating wisdom of the pious theologians reverently conducts to the incongruous dissimilarities, not permitting our earthly part to rest fixed in the base images, but urging the upward tendency of the soul, and goading it by the unseemliness of the phrases (to see) that it belongs neither to lawful nor seeming truth, even for the most earthly conceptions, that the most heavenly and Divine visions are actually like things so base. Further also this must particularly be borne in mind, that not even one of the things existing is altogether deprived of participation in the beautiful, since, as is evident and the truth of the Oracles affirms, all things are very beautiful .

Section IV.

It is, then, possible to frame in one's mind good contemplations from everything, and to depict, from things material, the aforesaid dissimilar similitudes, both for the intelligible and the intelligent; since the intelligent hold in a different fashion things which are attributed to things sensible differently. For instance, appetite, in the irrational creatures, takes its rise in the passions, and their movement, which takes the form of appetite, is full of all kinds of unreasonableness. But with regard to the intelligent, we must think of the appetite in another fashion, as denoting, according to my judgment, their manly style, and their determined persistence in their Godlike and unchangeable steadfastness. In like manner we say, with regard to the irrational creatures, that lust is a certain uncircumspect and earthly passionate attachment, arising incontinently from an innate movement, or intimacy in things subject to change, and the irrational supremacy of the bodily desire, which drives the whole organism towards the object of sensual inclination. But when we attribute "lust" to spiritual beings, by clothing them with dissimilar similitudes, we must think that it is a Divine love of the immaterial, above expression and thought, and the inflexible and determined longing for the supernally pure and passionless contemplation, and for the really perpetual and intelligible fellowship in that pure and most exalted splendour, and in the abiding and beautifying comeliness.

And 'incontinence' we may take for the persistent and inflexible, which nothing can repulse, on account of the pure and changeless love for the Divine beauty, and the whole tendency towards the really desired. But with regard to the irrational living beings, or soulless matter, we appropriately call their irrationality and want of sensible perception a deprivation of reason and sensible perception. And with regard to the immaterial and intelligent beings, we reverently acknowledge their superiority, as supermundane beings, over our discursive and bodily reason, and the material perception of the senses which is alien to the incorporeal Minds. It is, then, permissible to depict forms, which are not discordant, to the celestial beings, even from portions of matter which are the least honourable, since even it, having had its beginning from the Essentially Beautiful, has throughout the whole range of matter some echoes of the intellectual comeliness; and it is possible through these to be led to the immaterial archetypes----things most similar being taken, as has been said, dissimilarly, and the identities being denned, not in the same way, but harmoniously, and appropriately, as regards the intellectual and sensible beings.

Section V.

We shall find the Mystic Theologians enfolding these things not only around the illustrations of the Heavenly Orders, but also, sometimes, around the supremely Divine Revelations Themselves. At one time, indeed, they extol It under exalted imagery as Sun of Righteousness, as Morning Star rising divinely in the mind, and as Light illuming without veil and for contemplation; and at other times, through things in our midst, as Fire , shedding its innocuous light; as Water , furnishing a fulness of life, and, to speak symbolically, flowing into a belly, and bubbling forth rivers flowing irresistibly; and at other times, from things most remote, as sweet-smelling ointment , as Head Corner-stone . But they also clothe It in forms of wild beasts, and attach to It identity with a Lion , and Panther , and say that it shall be a Leopard , and a rushing Bear . But, I will also add, that which seems to be more dishonourable than all, and the most incongruous, viz. that distinguished theologians have shewn it to us as representing Itself under the form of a worm . Thus do all the godly-wise, and interpreters of the secret inspiration, separate the holy of holies from the uninitiated and the unholy, to keep them undefined, and prefer the dissimilar description of holy things, so that Divine things should neither be easily reached by the profane, nor those who diligently contemplate the Divine imagery rest in the types as though they were true;

and so Divine things should be honoured by the true negations, and by comparisons with the lowest things, which are diverse from their proper resemblance. There is then nothing absurd if they depict even the Heavenly Beings under incongruous dissimilar similitudes, for causes aforesaid. For probably not even we should have come to an investigation, from not seeing our way,----not to say to mystic meaning through an accurate enquiry into Divine things,----unless the deformity of the descriptions representing the Angels had shocked us, not permitting our mind to linger in the discordant representations, but rousing us utterly to reject the earthly proclivities, and accustoming us to elevate ourselves through things that are seen, to their supermundane mystical meanings. Let these things suffice to have

been said on account of the material and incongruous descriptions of the holy Angels in the Holy Oracles. And next, it is necessary to define what we think the Hierarchy is in itself, and what benefit those who possess a Hierarchy derive; from the same. But let Christ lead the discourse----if it be lawful to me to say----He Who is mine,----the Inspiration of all Hierarchical revelation. And thou, my son, after the pious rule of our Hierarchical tradition, do thou religiously listen to things religiously uttered, becoming inspired through instruction in inspired things;

and when thou hast enfolded the Divine things in the secret recesses of thy mind, guard them closely from the profane multitude as being uniform, for it is not lawful, as the Oracles say, to cast to swine the unsullied and bright and beautifying comeliness of the intelligible pearls.

CAPUT III. What is Hierarchy? and what the use of Hierarchy? Section I. Hierarchy is, in my judgment, a sacred order and science and operation, assimilated, as far as attainable, to the likeness of God, and conducted to the illuminations granted to it from God, according to capacity, with a view to the Divine imitation. Now the God-becoming Beauty, as simple, as good, as source of initiation, is altogether free from any dissimilarity, and imparts its own proper light to each according to their fitness, and perfects in most Divine initiation, as becomes the undeviating moulding of those who are being initiated harmoniously to itself. Section II. The purpose, then, of Hierarchy is the assimilation and union, as far as attainable, with God, having Him Leader of all religious science and operation, by looking unflinchingly to His most Divine comeliness, and copying, as far as possible, and by perfecting its own followers as Divine images, mirrors most luminous and without flaw, receptive of the primal light and the supremely Divine ray, and devoutly filled with the entrusted radiance, and again, spreading this radiance ungrudgingly to those after it, in accordance with the supremely Divine regulations. For it is not lawful for the Mystic Rites of sacred things, or for things religiously done, to practise anything whatever beyond the sacred regulations of their own proper function. Nor even must they attempt otherwise, if they desire to attain its deifying splendour, and look to it religiously, and are moulded after the example of each of the holy minds. He, then, who mentions Hierarchy, denotes a certain altogether Holy Order, an image of the supremely Divine freshness, ministering the mysteries of its own illumination in hierarchical ranks, and sciences, and assimilated to its own proper Head as far as lawful.

For each of those who have been called into the Hierarchy, find their perfection in being carried to the Divine imitation in their own proper degree; and, what is more Divine than all, in becoming a fellow-worker with God, as the Oracles say, and in shewing the Divine energy in himself manifested as far as possible. For it is an Hierarchical regu-lation that some are purified and that others purify ; that some are enlightened and others enlighten ; that some are perfected and others perfect; the Divine imitation will fit each one in this fashion. The Divine blessedness, to speak after the manner of men, is indeed unstained by any dissimilarity , and is full of invisible light ----perfect , and needing no perfection;

cleansing, illuminating, and perfecting, yea, rather a holy purification, and illumination, and perfection----above purification, above light, preeminently perfect, self-perfect source and cause of every Hierarchy, and elevated pre-eminently above every holy thing.

Section III. It is necessary then, as I think, that those who are being purified should be entirely perfected, without stain, and be freed from all dissimilar confusion; that those who are being illuminated should be filled with the Divine Light, conducted to the habit and faculty of contemplation in all purity of mind; that those who are being initiated should be separated from the imperfect, and become recipients of that perfecting science of the sacred things contemplated. Further, that those who purify should impart, from their own abundance of purity, their own proper holiness; that those who illuminate, as being more luminous intelligences, whose function it is to- receive and to impart light, and who are joyfully filled with holy gladness, that these should overflow, in proportion to their own overflowing light, towards those who are worthy of enlightenment; and that those who make perfect, as being skilled in the impartation of perfection, should perfect those being perfected, through the holy instruction, in the science of the holy things contemplated. Thus each rank of the Hierarchical Order is led, in its own degree, to the Divine co-operation, by performing, through grace and God-given power, those things which are naturally and supernaturally in the Godhead, and accomplished by It superessentially, and manifested hierarchically, for the attainable imitation of the God-loving Minds .

CAPUT IV. What is meant by the appellation "Angels?" Section I. Now that the Hierarchy itself has been, in mv judgment, sufficiently defined, we must next extol the Angelic Hierarchy, and we must contemplate, with supermundane eyes, its sacred formations, depicted in the Oracles, in order that we may be borne aloft to their Divinely resplendent simplicity, through the mystic representations, and may extol the source of all Hierarchical science with God-becoming reverence and with thanksgivings. First of all, however, let this truth be spoken ----that it was through goodness that the superessential Godhead, having fixed all the essences of things being, brought them into being. For this is the peculiar characteristic of the Cause of all things, and of goodness surpassing all, to call things being to participation of Itself, as each order of things being was determined from its own analogy. For all things being share in a Providence, which bubbles forth from the superessential Deity, Cause of all things. For they would not be, unless they had participated in the Essence and Origin of things being. All things then, without life, participate in It by their being. For the being of all things is the Deity, above being; things living participate in its life-giving power, above all life; things rational and intellectual participate in its self-perfect and preeminently perfect wisdom, above all reason and mind. It is evident, then, that all those Beings are around It, which have participated in It, in many forms.

Section II. The holy orders, then, of the Heavenly Beings share in the supremely Divine participation, in a higher degree than things which merely exist, or which lead an irrational life, or which are rational like ourselves. For by moulding themselves intelligibly to the Divine imitation, and looking supermundanely to the supremely Divine likeness, and striving

to mould their intellectual appearance, they naturally have more ungrudging communications with It, being near and ever moving upwards, as far as lawful, elevating themselves with the intensity of the Divine unswerving love, and receiving the primal illuminations without earthly stain, and ranging themselves to these, and having their whole life intellectual. These, then, are they who, at first hand, and under many forms, participate in the Divine, and, at first hand, and under many forms, make known the supremely Divine Hiddenness. Wherefore, beyond all, they are deemed pre-eminently worthy of the appellation Angelic, on the ground that the supremely Divine illumination comes to them at first hand, and, through them, there pass to us manifestations above us. Thus, then, the Law, as the Word of God affirms, was given to us through the ministration of Angels ; and Angels led our illustrious fathers before the Law, and after the Law, to the Divine Being, either by leading them to what was to be done, and by converting them from error, and an unholy life, to the straight way of truth , or by making known to them sacred ordinances , or hidden visions, or supermundane mysteries , or certain Divine predictions through the Prophets .

Section III. But if any one should say that Divine manifestations were made directly and immediately to some holy men , let him learn, and that distinctly, from the most Holy Oracles, that no one hath seen, nor ever shall see, the "hidden" τ κρύφιον of Almighty God as it is in itself . Now Divine manifestations were made to the pious as befits revelations of God, that is to say, through certain holy visions analogous to those who see them. Now the all-wise Word of God (Theologia) naturally calls Theophany that particular vision which manifests the Divine similitude depicted in itself as in a shaping of the shapeless, from the elevation of the beholders to the Divine Being, since through it a divine illumination comes to the beholders, and the divine persons themselves are religiously initiated into some mystery. But our illustrious fathers were initiated into these Divine visions, through the mediation of the Heavenly Powers. Does not the tradition of the Oracles describe the holy legislation of the Law, given to Moses, as coming straight from God, in order that it may teach us this truth, that it is an outline of a Divine and holy legislation? But the Word of God, in its Wisdom, teaches this also----that it came to us through Angels, as though the Divine regulation were laying down this rule, that, through the first, the second are brought to the Divine Being. For not only with regard to the superior and inferior minds, but even for those of the same rank, this Law has been established by the superessential supreme ordinance, that, within each Hierarchy, there are first, and middle, and last ranks and powers, and that the more divine are instructors and conductors of the less, to the Divine access, and illumination, and participation.

Section IV.

But I observe that Angels first were initiated in the Divine mystery of the love of Jesus towards man, then, through them, the gift of its knowledge passed to us. Thus, for example, the most divine Gabriel instructed Zachariah, the Hierarch, that the son who was to be born to him, beyond hope, by Divine grace, should be a prophet of the God-incarnate work of the Lord Jesus, to be manifested to the world for its salvation, as becomes the Di-

vine goodness; and he revealed to Mary, how, in her, should be born the supremely Divine mystery of the unutterable God-formation. Yet another Angel instructed Joseph, how, in very truth, should be fulfilled the things Divinely promised to his ancestor David. Another declared glad tidings to the shepherds, as being purified by their separation from the multitude, and their quiet life, and, with him, a multitude of the Heavenly Host announced to those on earth that often-sung doxology. Let us then ascend to the highest manifestations of light contained in the Oracles, for I perceive that even Jesus Himself, the superessential Cause of the super-heavenly Beings, when He had come to our condition, without change, did not overstep the good order which becomes mankind, which Himself arranged and took, but readily subjected Himself to the dispositions of the Father and God, through Angels; and, through their mediation, was announced to Joseph the departure of the Son to Egypt, which had been arranged by the Father, and again the return to Judaea from Egypt.

And through Angels we see Him subjecting Himself to the Father's decrees. For I forbear to speak, as addressing one who knows the teaching of our hierarchical tradition, both concerning the Angel who strengthened the Lord Jesus, or that even Jesus Himself, when He had come to manifest the good work of our beneficent salvation, was called Angel of Great Counsel. For, as He Himself says, after the manner of an Angel, "Whatsoever He heard from the Father, He announced to us."

CAPUT V. For what reason all the Heavenly Beings are called, in common, Angels. This, then, in our judgment, is the reason for the appellation Angelic in the Oracles. We must now, I suppose, enquire for what reason the theologians call all the Heavenly Beings together "Angels;" but when they come to a more accurate description of the supermundane orders, they name exclusively, "angelic rank," that which completes the full tale of the Divine and Heavenly Hosts. Before this, however, they range pre-eminently, the Orders of Archangels, and the Principalities, the Authorities, and Powers, and as many Beings as the revealing traditions of the Oracles recognize as superior to them. Now, we affirm that throughout every sacred ordinance the superior ranks possess the illuminations and powers of their subordinates, but the lowest have not the same powers as those who are above them. The theologians also call the most holy ranks of the highest Beings "Angels," for they "also make known the supremely Divine illumination. But there is no reason to call the lowest rank of the celestial Minds, Principalities, or Thrones, or Seraphim. For it does not possess the highest powers, but, as it conducts our inspired Hierarchs to the splendours of the Godhead known to it; so also, the saintly powers of the Beings above it are conductors, towards the Divine Being, of that Order which completes the Angelic Hierarchies. Except perhaps some one might say this also, that all the angelic appellations are common, as regards the subordinate and superior communication of all the celestial powers towards the Divine likeness, and the gift of light from God. But, in order that the question may be better investigated, let us reverently examine the saintly characteristics set forth respecting each celestial Order in the Oracles.

CAPUT VI. Which is the first Order of the Heavenly Beings? which the middle? and which the last? How many, and of what sort, are the Orders of the supercelestial Beings, and how the Hierarchies are classified amongst themselves, I affirm, the deifying Author of their consecration alone distinctly knows; and further, that they know their own proper powers and illuminations, and their sacred and supermundane regularity. For it is impossible that we should know the mysteries of the supercelestial Minds and their most holy perfections, except, some one might say, so far as the Godhead has revealed to us, through them, as knowing perfectly their own condition. We, then, will utter nothing as from ourselves, but whatever angelic visions have been gazed upon by the holy Prophets of God, we, as initiated in these, will set forth as best we can. The Word of God has designated the whole Heavenly Beings as nine, by appellations, which shew their functions. These our Divine Initiator divides into three threefold Orders. He also says that that which is always around God is first and is declared by tradition to be united closely and immediately, to Him, before all the rest. For he says that the teaching of the Holy Oracles declares, that the most Holy Thrones, and the many-eyed and many-winged hosts, named in the Hebrew tongue Cherubim and Seraphim, are established immediately around God, with a nearness superior to all. This threefold order, then, our illustrious Guide spoke of as one, and of equal rank, and really first Hierarchy, than which there is not another more Godlike or immediately nearer to the earliest illuminations of the Godhead. But he says, that which is composed of the Authorities, and Lordships, and Powers is second; and, as respects the lowest of the Heavenly Hierarchies, the Order of the Angels and Archangels and Principalities is third.

CAPUT VII. Concerning the Seraphim and Cherubim and Thrones, and concerning their first Hierarchy. Section I.

We, whilst admitting this as the arrangement of the holy Hierarchies, affirm, that every appellation of the celestial Minds denotes the Godlike characteristic of each; and those who know Hebrew affirm, that the holy designation of the Seraphim denotes either that they are kindling or burning; and that of Cherubim, a fulness of knowledge or stream of wisdom. Naturally, then, the first (order) of the Heavenly Hierarchies is ministered by the most exalted Beings, holding, as it does, a rank which is higher than all, from the fact, that it is established immediately around God, and that the first-wrought Divine manifestations and perfections pass earlier to it, as being nearest. They are called, then, "Burning," and Thrones, and Stream of Wisdom----by a name which sets forth their Godlike conditions. The appellation of Seraphim plainly teaches their ever moving around things Divine, and constancy, and warmth, and keenness, and the seething of that persistent, indomitable, and inflexible perpetual motion, and the vigorous assimilation and elevation of the subordinate, as giving new life and rekindling them to the same heat; and purifying through fire and burnt-offering, and the light-like and light-shedding characteristic which can never be concealed or consumed, and remains always the same, which destroys and dispels every kind of obscure darkness.

But the appellation of the Cherubim denotes their knowledge and their vision of God, and their readiness to receive the highest gift of light, and their power of contemplating the super-Divine comeliness in its first revealed power, and their being filled anew with the impartation which maketh wise, and their ungrudging communication to those next to them, by the stream of the given wisdom. The appellation of the most exalted and pre-eminent Thrones denotes their manifest exaltation above every grovelling inferiority, and their supermundane tendency towards higher things; and their unswerving separation from all remoteness; and their invariable and firmly-fixed settlement around the veritable Highest, with the whole force of their powers; and their receptivity of the supremely Divine approach, in the absence of all passion and earthly tendency, and their bearing God; and the ardent expansion of themselves for the Divine receptions.

Section II. This, then, is the revelation of their names, so far as we can give it; and we ought to say what we think their Hierarchy is. For I suppose we have sufficiently shewn above, that the purpose of every Hierarchy is an unswerving devotion to the divine imitation of the Divine Likeness, and that every Hierarchical function is set apart for the sacred reception and distribution of an undefiled purification, and Divine Light, and perfecting science. And now I pray that I may speak worthily of the most exalted Minds----how the Hierarchy amongst them is exhibited through the Oracles.

One must consider, then, that the Hierarchy is akin, and in every respect like, to the first Beings, who are established after the Godhead, who gave them Being, and who are marshalled, as it were, in Its very vestibule, who surpass every unseen and seen created power. We must then regard them as pure, not as though they had been freed from unholy stains and blemishes, nor yet as though they were unreceptive of earthly fancies, but as far exalted above every stain of remissness and every inferior holiness, as befits the highest degree of purity----established above the most Godlike powers, and clinging unflinchingly to their own self-moved and same-moved rank in their invariable love of God, conscious in no respect whatever of any declivity to a worse condition, but having the unsullied fixity of their own Godlike identity----never liable to fall, and always unmoved; and again, as "contemplative," not contemplators of intellectual symbols as sensible, nor as being led to the Divine Being by the varied texture of holy representations written for meditation, but as being filled with all kinds of immaterial knowledge of higher light, and satiated, as permissible, with the beautifying and original beauty of super-essential and thrice manifested contemplation, and thus, being deemed worthy of the Communion with Jesus, they do not stamp pictorially the deifying similitude in divinely-formed images, but, as being really near to Him, in first participation of the knowledge of His deifying illuminations;

nay more, that the imitation of God is given to them in the highest possible degree, and they participate, so far as is allowable to them, in His deifying and philanthropic virtues, in the power of a first manifestation; and, likewise as "perfected," not as being illuminated with an analytic science of sacred variety, but as being filled with a first and pre-eminent deification, as beseems the most exalted science of the works of God, possible in Angels. For, not through

other holy Beings, but being ministered from the very Godhead, by the immediate elevation to It, by their power, and rank, surpassing all, they are both established near the All-Holy without any shadow of turning, and are conducted for contemplation to the immaterial and intelligible comeliness, as far as permissible, and are initiated into the scientific methods of the works of God, as being first and around God, being ministered, in the highest degree, from the very source of consecration.

Section III. This, then, the theologians distinctly shew (viz.) that the subordinate Orders of the Heavenly Beings are taught by the superior, in due order, the deifying sciences; and that those who are higher than all are illuminated from Godhead itself, as far as permissible, in revelations of the Divine mysteries. For they introduce some of them as being religiously instructed, by those of a higher rank, that He, Who was raised to Heaven as Man, is Lord of the Heavenly Powers and King of Glory; and others, as questioning Jesus Himself, as desiring to be instructed in the science of His Divine work on our behalf, and Jesus Himself teaching them immediately, and shewing to them, at first hand, His beneficent work out of love to man. For "I," He says, "am speaking of righteousness and judgment of Salvation." Now I am astonished that even the first of the Beings in Heaven, and so far above all, should reverently strive after the supremely Divine illuminations, as intermediate Beings. For they do not ask directly, "Wherefore are Thy garments red? " but they first raise the question among themselves, shewing that they desire to learn, and crave the deifying knowledge, and not anticipating the illumination given after a Divine procedure.

The first Hierarchy, then, of the Heavenly Minds is purified, and enlightened, and perfected, by being ministered from the very Author of initiation, through its elevation to It immediately, being filled, according to its degree, with the altogether most holy purification of the unproachable Light of the pre-perfect source of initiation, unstained indeed by any remissness, and full of primal Light, and perfected by its participation in first-given knowledge and science. But to sum up, I may say this, not inappropriately, that the reception of the supremely Divine Science is, both purification, and enlightenment, and perfecting,----purifying, as it were, from ignorance, by the knowledge of the more perfect revelations imparted to it according to fitness, and enlightening by the self-same Divine knowledge, through which it also purifies, that which did not before contemplate the things which are now made manifest through the higher illumination; and perfecting further, by the self-same Light, through the abiding science of the mysteries made clearly manifest.

Section IV.

This, then, according to my science, is the first rank of the Heavenly Beings which encircle and stand immediately around God; and without symbol, and without interruption, dances round His eternal knowledge in the most exalted ever-moving stability as in Angels; viewing purely many and blessed contemplations, and illuminated with simple and immediate splendours, and filled with Divine nourishment,----many indeed by the first-given profusion, but one by the unvariegated and unifying oneness of the supremely Divine banquet, deemed worthy indeed of much participation and co-operation with God, by their assimila-

tion to Him, as far as attainable, of their excellent habits and energies, and knowing many Divine things pre-eminently, and participating in supremely Divine science and knowledge, as is lawful. Wherefore the Word of God has transmitted its hymns to those on earth, in which are Divinely shewn the excellency of its most exalted illumination. For some of its members, to speak after sensible perception, proclaim as a "voice of many waters," "Blessed is the glory of the Lord from His place" and others cry aloud that frequent and most august hymn of God, " Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Sabaoth, the whole earth is full of His glory.

These most excellent hymnologies of the supercelestial Minds we have already unfolded to the best of our ability in the "Treatise concerning the Divine Hymns," and have spoken sufficiently concerning them in that Treatise, from which, by way of remembrance, it is enough to produce so much as is necessary to the present occasion, namely, "That the first Order, having been illuminated, from this the supremely Divine goodness, as permissible, in theological science, as a Hierarchy reflecting that Goodness transmitted to those next after it," teaching briefly this, "That it is just and right that the august Godhead ---- Itself both above praise, and all-praiseworthy----should be known and extolled by the God-receptive minds, as is attainable; for they as images of God are, as the Oracles say, the Divine places of the supremely Divine repose; and further, that It is Monad and Unit tri-subsistent, sending forth His most kindly forethought to all things being, from the super-heavenly Minds to the lowest of the earth; as super-original Origin and Cause of every essence, and grasping all things super-essentially in a resistless embrace.

CAPUT VIII. Concerning Lordships and Powers and Authorities, and concerning their middle Hierarchy. Section I.

Let us now pass to the middle Order of the Heavenly Minds, gazing, as far as we may, with supermundane eyes upon those Lordships, and the truly terrible visions of the Divine Authorities and Powers. For each appellation of the Beings above us manifests their God-imitating characteristics of the Divine Likeness. I think, then, that the explanatory name of the Holy Lordships denotes a certain unslavish elevation, free from all grovelling subserviency, as becomes the free, not submitting itself in any way whatever to one of the tyrannical dissimilarities, as a cruel Lordship; superior to every kind of cringing slavery, indomitable to every subserviency, and elevated above every dissimilarity, ever aspiring to the true Lordship, and source of Lordship; and moulding, as an image of goodness, itself, and those after it, to its Lordly bearing, as attainable, turning itself wholly to none of the things that vainly seem, but to the Lordly Being, and ever sharing in the Lordly Likeness of God, to its utmost ability;

and the appellation of the Holy Powers denotes a certain courageous and unflinching virility, for all those Godlike energies within them----not feebly weak for the reception of any of the Divine illuminations vouchsafed to it----vigorously conducted to the Divine imitation, not forsaking the Godlike movement through its own unmanliness, but unflinchingly looking to the superessential and powerful-making power, and becoming a powerlike image of this, as far as is attainable, and powerfully turned to this, as Source of Power, and issuing forth

to those next in degree, in gift of Power, and in likeness to God; and that the appellation of the Holy Authorities, of the same rank as the Divine Lordships and Powers, (denotes) the beautiful and unconfused good order, with regard to the Divine receptions, and the discipline of the supermundane and intellectual authority, not using the authoritative powers imperiously for base purposes, but conducted indomitably, with good order, towards Divine things, and conducting those after it benignly, and assimilated, as far as permissible, to the Authoritative Source of authority, and making this visible, as is possible to Angels, in the well-ordered ranks of the authoritative power within it. The middle Order of the Heavenly Minds having these Godlike characteristics, is purified and illuminated and perfected in the manner described, by the Divine illuminations vouchsafed to it at second hand, through the first Hierarchical Order, and passing through this middle as a secondary manifestation.

Section II.

No doubt, as regards that message, which is said to pass through one angel to another, we may take it as a symbol of a perfecting completed from afar, and obscured by reason of its passage to the second rank. For, as men skilled in our sacred initiations say, the fulness of Divine things manifested directly to ourselves is more perfecting than the Divine contemplations imparted through others. Thus, I think, the immediate participation of the Angelic ranks elevated in first degree to God, is more clear than those perfected through the instrumentality of others. Wherefore by our sacerdotal tradition, the first Minds are named perfecting, and illuminating, and purifying Powers of the subordinate, who are conducted, through them, to the superessential Origin of all things, and participate, as far as is permissible to them, in the consecrating purifications, and illuminations, and perfections. For, this is divinely fixed absolutely by the Divine source of order that, through the first, the second partake of the supremely Divine illuminations. This you will find declared by the theologians in many ways. For, when the Divine and Paternal Love towards man whilst chastening, in a startling manner, His people Israel, for their religious preservation, after delivering them to terrible and savage nations for correction, by various leadings of His guided people to better things, both liberated them from their misery, and mildly led them back, through His compassion, to their former state of comfort;

one of the theologians, Zechariah, sees one of the first Angels, as I think, and near God, (for the Angelic appellation is common, as I said, to them all), learning from God Himself the comforting words, as they are called, concerning this matter; and another Angel, of inferior rank, advancing to meet the first, as for reception and participation of enlightenment: then, by him instructed in the Divine purpose as from a Hierarch, and charged to reveal to the theologian that Jeru-salem should be abundantly occupied by a multitude of people. And another theologian, Ezekiel, says that this was righteously ordained by the glorious Deity Itself, seated above the Cherubim. For Paternal Love towards man, conducting Israel as we have said through chastisement to better things, by a righteousness worthy of God, deemed right to separate the guilty from the guiltless. This is first revealed to one after the Cherubim; him who was bound about the loins with a sapphire, and wore displayed the

robe coming down to the feet, as a Hierarchical symbol. But the Divine Government enjoins the other Angels, who bore the battle-axes, to be instructed from the former, as to the Divine judgment in this matter. For, to one, He said that he should go through the midst of Jerusalem, and place the sign upon the forehead of the innocent men, but to the others; "Go into the city after him and strike, and draw not back your eyes, but to every one upon whom is the sign draw not near."

What would any one say concerning the Angel, who said to Daniel, "The word has gone forth?" or concerning him the first, who took the fire from the midst of the Cherubim, or what is more remarkable than this for shewing the ' good order amongst the Angels, that the Cherubim casts the fire into the hands of him who wears the sacred vestment; or concerning Him Who called the most divine Gabriel, and said to him, "Make this man understand the vision"," or whatever else is recorded by the holy theologians concerning the Godlike order of the Heavenly Hierarchies; by being assimilated to which, as far as possible, the discipline of our Hierarchy will have the Angelic comeliness, as it were, in reflection, moulded through it, and conducted to the superessential Source of order in every Hierarchy. CAPUT IX. Concerning the Principalities, Archangels, and Angels, and concerning their last Hierarchy.

Section I. There remains for our reverent contemplation a Division which completes the Angelic Hierarchies, that divided into the Godlike Principalities, Archangels, and Angels. And I think it necessary, to declare first the meaning of their sacred appellations to the best of my ability. For that of the Heavenly Principalities manifests their princely and leading function, after the Divine example, with order religious and most befitting the Princely, and their being wholly turned to the super-princely Prince, and leading others in princely fashion, and being moulded, as far as possible, to that prince-making Princedom Itself, and to manifest its superessential princely order, by the regularity of the princely powers. Section II.

The (Order) of the Holy Archangels is of the same rank with the heavenly Principalities. For there is one Hierarchy and Division, as I said, of them and the Angels. But since there is not a Hierarchy which does not possess first and middle and last powers, the holy order of Archangels occupies the middle position in the Hierarchy between the extremes, for it belongs alike to the most holy Principalities and to the holy Angels; to the Principalities because it is turned in a princely fashion to the superessential Princedom, and is moulded to It as far as attainable, and unites the Angels after the fashion of its own well-regulated and marshalled and invisible leadings; and it belongs to the Angels, because it is of the messenger Order, receiving hierarchically the Divine illuminations from the first powers, and announcing the same to the Angels in a godly manner, and, through Angels, manifesting to us, in proportion to the religious aptitude of each of the godly persons illuminated. For the Angels, as we have already said, complete the whole series of Heavenly Minds, as being the last Order of the Heavenly Beings who possess the Angelic characteristic; yea, rather, they are more properly named Angels by us than those of higher degree, because their Hierarchy is occupied with the more manifest, and is more particularly concerned with the things of

the world. For the very highest Order, as being placed in the first rank near the Hidden One, we must consider as directing in spiritual things the second, hiddenly;

and that the second, which is composed of the holy Lordships and Powers and Authorities, leads the Hierarchy of the Principalities and Archangels and Angels, more clearly indeed than the first Hierarchy, but more hiddenly than the Order after it, and the revealing order of the Principalities, Archangels, and Angels, presides, through each other, over the Hierarchies amongst men, in order that the elevation, and conversion, and communion, and union with God may be in due order; and, further, also that the procession from God vouchsafed benignly to all the Hierarchies, and passing to all in common, may be also with most sacred regularity. Hence, the Word of God has assigned our Hierarchy to Angels, by naming Michael as Ruler of the Jewish people, and others over other nations. For the Most High established borders of nations according to number of Angels of God.

Section III.

But if any one should say, "How then were the people of the Hebrews alone conducted to the supremely Divine illuminations? we must answer, that we ought not to throw the blame of the other nations wandering after those which are no gods upon the direct guidance of the Angels, but that they themselves, by their own declension, fell away from the direct leading towards the Divine Being, through self-conceit and self-will, and through their irrational veneration for things which appeared to them worthy of God. Even the Hebrew people are said to have suffered the same thing; for He says, "Thou I hast cast away knowledge of God, and hast gone after thine own heart. For neither have we a life governed by necessity, nor on account of the free will of those who are objects of providential care, are the Divine rays of the providential illumination blunted; but the inaptitude of the mental visions makes the overflowing light-gift of the paternal goodness, either altogether unparticipated or inpenetrable to their resistance, or makes the participations of the one fontal ray, diverse, small, or great, obscure, or brilliant, although that ray is one and simple, and always the same and ever overflowing; for even if, over the other nations (from whom we also have emerged to that boundless and bounteous sea of Divine Light, which is readily-expanded for the ready reception of all), certain not-alien gods were wont to preside;

yet there is one Head of all, and to this, the Angels, who religiously direct each nation, conduct those who follow them. Let us consider Melchizedek as being a Hierarch, most dear to God; (not of gods which are not, but of the truly most high God); for the godly-wise did not call Melchizedek simply dear to God, but also Priest, in order that they may clearly shew to the wise, that not only was he himself turned to the true God, but further that he was guide to others, as Hierarch of the elevation to the true and only Godhead.

Section IV.

Let me also recall this to your Hierarchical judgment----that both to Pharaoh, from the Angel who presided over the Egyptians, and to the BabylonianPrince, from his own Angel, the watchful and ruling care of the Providence and Lordship over all, was interpreted in

visions; and for those nations, the worshippers of the true God were appointed leaders, for the interpretation of things shaped by Angelic visions revealed from God through Angels to holy men akin to the Angels, Daniel and Joseph. For there is one Prince and Providence over all. And never must we think that the Godhead is leader of Jews by lot, and that Angels, independently, or as of equal rank, or in opposition, or that certain other gods, preside over the other nations. But that particular phrase of the Divine Word must be accepted according to the following sacred intention; not as though God had divided government amongst men, with other gods, or Angels, and had been elected by lot to the government and leadership of Israel, but in this sense----whilst the one Providence of Highest over all, assigned all mankind, savingly, to the directing conduct of their own Angels, yet Israel, almost alone in comparison with all, turned himself to the Light-gift, and recognition of the true Lord-Hence the Word of God, as shewing that Israel elected himself for the worship of the true God, says this, "He became Lord's portion;" and as indicating that he was assigned equally with the other nations, to one of the holy Angels, for the recognition, through him, of the Head of all, said "That Michael became leader of the (Jewish) people," demonstrating distinctly that there is one Providence of the whole, superessentially established above all the powers, unseen and seen, and that all the Angels who preside over each nation, elevate, as far as possible, those who follow them with a willing mind, to It as their proper Head.

CAPUT X. A Repetition and Summary of the Angelic discipline. Section I. We have concluded, then, that the most reverend Order of the Minds around God, ministered by the perfecting illumination through its immediate elevation to it, is purified, and illuminated, and perfected by a gift of light from the Godhead, more hidden and more manifest----more hidden, indeed, as being more intelligible, and more simplifying-, and more unifying; more manifest, as being a first gift and a first manifestation, and more complete, and more affused to it as transparent. And from this (Order) again, in due degree, the second, and from the second, the third, and from the third, our Hierarchy, is reverently conducted to the super-original Origin and End of all good order, according to the self-same law of well-ordered regularity, in Divine harmony and proportion. Section II. Now all Angels are interpreters of those above them, the most reverend, indeed, of God, Who moves them, and the rest, in due degree, of those who have been moved by God. For, to such an extent has the super-essential harmony of all things provided for the religious order and the regulated conduct of each of the rational and intellectual beings, that each rank of the Hierarchies, has been placed in sacred order, and we observe every Hierarchy distributed into first, and middle, and last Powers. But to speak accurately, He distinguished each Division itself, by the same Divine harmonies; wherefore the theologians say that the most Divine Seraphim cry one to another, indicating distinctly, as I think by this, that the first impart their knowledge of divine things to the second.

Section III. I might add this not inappropriately, that each heavenly and human mind has within itself its own special first, and middle, and last ranks, and powers, manifested severally in due degree, for the aforesaid particular mystical meanings of the Hierarchical illuminations, according to which, each one participates-, so far as is lawful and attainable

to him, in the most spotless purification, the most copious light, the pre-eminent perfection. For there is nothing that is self-perfect, or absolutely without need of perfecting, except the really Self-perfect and preeminently Perfect. CAPUT XI. For what reason all the Heavenly Beings, in common, are called Heavenly Powers. Section I. Now that we have defined these things, it is worthy of consideration for what reason we are accustomed to call all the Angelic Beings together, Heavenly Powers. For it is not possible to say, as we may of the Angels, that the Order of the holy Powers is last of all. The Orders of the superior Beings share in the saintly illumination. of the last; but the last in no wise of the first; and on this account all the Divine Minds are called Heavenly Powers, but never Seraphim and Thrones and Lordships. For the last do not enjoy the whole characteristics of the highest. For the Angels, and those above the Angels----Archangels, and Principalities, and Authorities,----placed by the Word of God after the Powers, are often in common called by us, in conjunction with the other holy Beings, Heavenly Powers.

Section II. But we affirm that, whilst often using the appellation, Heavenly Powers, for all in common, we do not introduce a sort of. confusion of the characteristics of each Order. But, inasmuch as all the Divine Minds, by the supermundane description given of them, are distributed into three,----into essence, and power, and energy,----when we speak of them all, or some of them, indiscriminately, as Heavenly Beings or Heavenly Powers, we must consider that we manifest those about whom we speak in a general way, from their essence or power severally. For we must not apply the superior characteristic of those holy Powers, whom we have already sufficiently distinguished, to the Beings which are entirely inferior to them, so as to overthrow the unconfused order of the Angelic ranks. For according to the correct account which we have already frequently given, the superior Orders possess abundantly the sacred characteristics of the inferior, but the lowest do not possess the superior completeness of the more reverend, since the first-manifested illuminations are revealed to them, through the first Order, in proportion to their capacity.

CAPUT XII. Why the Hierarchs amongst men are called Angels. Section I. But this is sometimes also asked by diligent contemplators of the intelligible Oracles; Inasmuch as the lowest Orders do not possess the completeness of the superior, for what reason is our Hierarch named by the Oracles, ”Angel of the Sovereign Lord?” Section II. Now the statement, as I think, is not contrary to what has been before defined; for we say that the last lack the complete and pre-eminent Power of the more reverend Divisions; for they participate in the partial and analogous, according to the one harmonious and binding fellowship of all things. For example, the rank of the holy Cherubim participates in higher wisdom and knowledge, but the Divisions of the Beings beneath them, participate, they also, in wisdom and knowledge, but nevertheless partially, as compared with them, and in a lower degree. For the participation of wisdom and knowledge throughout is common to all the minds which bear the image of God; but the being near and first, or second and inferior, is not common, but, as has been determined for each in its own degree. This also one might safely define respecting all the Divine Minds; for, as the first possess abundantly the saintly characteristics of the inferior, so the last possess those of the superior, not indeed in the same degree, but subor-

dinately. There is, then, as I think, nothing absurd, if the Word of God calls our Hierarch, Angel, since he participates, according to his own capacity, in the messenger characteristic of the Angels, and elevates himself, as far as attainable to men, to the likeness of their revealing office.

Section III. But you will find that the Word of God calls gods, both the Heavenly Beings above us, and the most beloved of God, and holy men amongst us, although the Divine Hiddenness is transcendently elevated and established above all, and no created Being can. properly and wholly be said to be like unto It, except those intellectual and rational Beings who are entirely and wholly turned to Its Oneness as far as possible, and who elevate themselves incessantly to Its Divine illuminations, as far as attainable, by their imitation of God, if I may so speak, according to their power, and are deemed worthy of the same divine name. CAPUT XIII. For what reason the Prophet Isaiah is said to have been purified by the Seraphim. Section I. Come, then, let us examine this as best we can, why the Seraphim is said to be sent to one of the Theologians; for some one may object, that not one of the inferior Angels, but he, the enrolled amongst the most reverend Beings, cleanses the Prophet.

Section II. Some, then, affirm that, according to the definition already given of the mutual relation of all the Minds, the Logion does not name one of the highest around God, as having come for the cleansing of the Theologian, but that some one of the Angels, placed over us as a sacred Minister of the Prophet's cleansing, is called by the same name. as the Seraphim, on the ground that the removal of the faults spoken of, and the restoration of him who was cleansed for the Divine mission, was through fire; and they say that the Logion speaks simply of one of the Seraphim, not one of those who are established around God, but one of the Powers set over us for the purpose of cleansing. Section III.

Now another man brought forward to me a by no means foolish defence of the present position. For he said that that great one, whoever he was,----the Angel who formed this vision for the purpose of teaching the theologian Divine things,----referred his own cleansing function to God, and after God, to the first working Hierarchy. And was not this statement certainly true? For he who said this, affirmed that the supremely Divine Power in visiting all, advances and penetrates all irresistibly, and yet is invisible to all, not only as being superessentially elevated above all, but as secretly transmitting its providential energies to all; yea, rather, it is manifested to all the intellectual Beings in due degree, and by conducting Its own gift of Light to the most reverend Beings, through them, as first, It distributes in due order to the subordinate, according to the power of each Division to bear the vision of God; or to speak more strictly, and through familiar illustrations (for if they fall short of the Glory of God, Who is exalted above all, yet they are more illustrating for us), the distribution of the sun's ray passes with easy distribution to first matter, as being more transparent than all, and, through it with greater clearness, lights up its own splendours; but when it strikes more dense materials, its distributed brilliancy becomes more obscure, from the inaptitude of the materials illuminated for transmission of the gift of Light, and from this it is naturally contracted, so as to almost entirely exclude the passage of Light.

Again, the heat of fire transmits itself chiefly to things that are more receptive, and yielding, and conductive to assimilation to itself; but, as regards repellent opposing substances, either it leaves none, or a very light, trace of its fiery energy; and further, when through substances favourable to its proper action, it comes in contact with things not congenial, ---- first, it perchance makes things easily changed to heating hot, and through them heats proportionately either water or something else which is not easily heated. After the same rule, then, of Nature's well-ordered method, the regulation of all good order, both visible and invisible, manifests supernaturally the brightness of its own gift of Light, in first manifestation to the most exalted Beings, in abundant streams, and through these, the Beings after them partake of the Divine ray. For these, as knowing God first, and striving preeminently after Divine virtue, and to become first-workers, are deemed worthy of the power and energy for the imitation of God, as attainable, and these benevolently elevate the beings after them to an equality, as far as possible, by imparting ungrudgingly to them the splendour which rests upon themselves, and these again to the subordinate, and throughout each Order, the first rank imparts its gift to that after it, and the Divine Light thus rests upon all, in due proportion, with providential forethought. There is, then, for all those who are illuminated, a Source of illumination, viz., God, by nature, and really, and properly, as Essence of Light, and Cause of Being, and Vision itself;

but, by ordinance, and for Divine imitation, the relatively superior (is source) for each after it, by the fact, that the Divine rays are poured through it to that. All the remaining Angelic Beings, then, naturally regard the highest Order of the Heavenly Minds as source, after God, of every God-knowledge and God-imitation, since, through them, the supremely Divine illumination is distributed to all, and to us. Wherefore, they refer every holy energy of Divine imitation to God indeed as Cause, but to the first Godlike Minds, as first agents and teachers of things Divine.

The first Order, then, of the holy Angels possesses, more than all, the characteristic of fire, and the streaming distribution of supremely Divine wisdom, and the faculty of knowing the highest science of the Divine illuminations, and the characteristic of Thrones, exhibiting their expansion for the reception of God; and the ranks of the subordinate Beings possess indeed the empyrean, the wise, the knowing, the God-receptive, faculty, but subordinately, and by looking to the first, and through them, as being deemed worthy of the Divine imitation in first operation, are conducted to the attainable likeness of God. The aforesaid holy characteristics, then, which the Beings after them possess, through the first, they attribute to those Beings themselves, after God, as Hierarchs. Section IV.

He who said this, used to affirm, that this vision was shewn to the Theologian, through one of the holy and blessed Angels set over us, and that from his illuminating direction, he was elevated to that intellectual contemplation in which he saw the most exalted Beings seated (to speak symbolically) under God, and with God, and around God, and the super-princely Eminence elevated unspeakably above them and all, seated on high in the midst of the superior Powers. The Theologian then learned, from the things seen, that, as compared with

every super-essential pre-eminence, the Divine Being was seated incomparably above every visible and invisible power, yea, even that It is exalted above all, as the Reality of all things, as Absolute----not even like to the first of created Beings;----further also, that It is source and essentiating Cause, and unalterable Fixity of the undissolved continuance of all things, from, Which is both the being and the well-being of the most exalted Powers themselves. Then he revealed that the Godlike powers of the most holy Seraphim, themselves, whose sacred appellation signifies the Fiery, concerning which we shall shortly speak as best we can, conducted the elevations of the empyrean power to the Divine likeness.

And, the holy Theologian, by viewing the description of free and most exalted elevation of the sixfold wings to the Divine Being in first, middle, and last conceptions, and further, their endless feet and many faces, and their extended wings----one under their feet, and the other over their faces, as seen in vision, and the perpetual movement of their middle wings----was brought to the intelligible knowledge of the things seen, since there was manifested to him the power of the most exalted minds for deep penetration and contemplation, and the sacred reverence which they have, supermundanely, for the bold and courageous and unattainable scrutiny into higher and deeper mysteries; and of the incessant and high-flying perpetual movement of their Godlike energies in due proportion. But he was also taught the hidden mysteries of that supremely Divine and much esteemed Hymn of Praise----whilst the Angel who formed the vision imparts, as far as possible, his own sacred knowledge to the Theologian. He also taught him this, that the participation, as far as attainable, in the supremely Divine and radiant purity, is a purification to the pure however pure; and it being accomplished from the very Godhead by most exalted causes, for all the sacred Minds by a superessential hiddenness, is in a manner more clear, and exhibits and distributes itself, in a higher degree, to the highest powers around It;

but with regard to the second, or us, the lowest mental powers, as each is distant from, as regards the Divine likeness, so It contracts its brilliant illumination to the single unknowable of its own hiddenness. And it illuminates the second, severally, through the first; and, if one must speak briefly, it is firstly brought from hiddenness to manifestation through the first powers. This, then, the Theologian was taught by the Angel who was leading him to Light----that purification, and all the supremely Divine operations, illuminating through the first Beings, are distributed to all the rest, according to the relation of each for the deifying participations. Wherefore he reasonably attributed to the Seraphim, after God, the characteristic of purification by fire. There is nothing, then, absurd, if the Seraphim is said to purify the Prophet. For, as God purifies all, by being cause of every purification, yea, rather (for I use a familiar illustration) just as our Hierarch, when purifying or enlightening through his Leitourgoi or Priests, is said himself to purify and enlighten, since the Orders consecrated through him attribute to him their own proper sacred operations; so also the Angel who effected the purification of the Theologian attributes his own purifying science and power to God, indeed, as Cause, but to the Seraphim as first-operating Hierarch;

as any one might say with Angelic reverence, whilst teaching one who was being purified by him, "There is a preeminent Source, and Essence, and Worker, and Cause of the cleansing wrought upon you from me, He Who brings both the first Beings into Being, and holds them together by their fixity around Himself, and keeps them without change and without fall, moving them to the first participations of His own Providential energies (for this, He Who taught me these things used to say, shews the mission of the Seraphim), but as Hierarch and Leader after God, the Marshal of the most exalted Beings, from whom I was taught to purify after the example of God ---- this is he, who cleanses thee through me, through whom the Cause and Creator of all cleansing brought forth His own provident energies from the Hidden even to us. These things, then, he taught me, and I impart them to thee. Let it be a part of thy intellectual and discriminating skill, either, to acquit each of the causes assigned from objection, and to honour this before the other as having likelihood and good reason, and perhaps, the truth; or, to find out from yourself something more allied to the real truth, or to learn from another; (God, of course, giving expression, and Angels supplying it; and to reveal to us, the friends of Angels, a view more luminous if it should be so, and to me specially welcome.

CAPUT XIV. What the traditional number of the Angels signifies. This also is worthy, in my opinion, of intellectual attention, that the tradition of the Oracles concerning the Angels affirms that they are thousand thousands, and myriad myriads, accumulating and multiplying, to themselves, the supreme limits of our numbers, and, through these, shewing clearly, that the ranks of the Heavenly Beings cannot be numbered by us. For many are the blessed hosts of the supermundane minds, surpassing the weak and contracted measurement of our material number, and being definitely known by their own supermundane and heavenly intelligence and science alone, which is given to them in profusion by the supremely Divine and Omniscient Framer of Wisdom, and essentiating Cause and connecting Force, and encompassing Term of all created things together. CAPUT XV. What are the morphic likenesses of the Angelic Powers? what the fiery? what the anthromorphic? what are the eyes? what the nostrils? what the ears? what the mouths? what the touch? what the eyelids? what the eyebrows? what the prime? what the teeth? what the shoulders? what the elbows and the hands? what the heart? what the breasts? what the back? what the feet? what the wings? what the nakedness? what the robe? what the shining raiment? what the sacerdotal? what the girdles? what the rods? what the spears? what the battle - axes? what the measuring lines? what the winds? what the clouds? what the brass? what the electron? what the choirs? what the clapping of hands? what the colours of different stones? what the appearance of the lion? what the appearance of the ox? what the appearance of the eagle? what the horses? what the varieties of coloured horses? what the rivers? what the chariots? what the wheels? what the so-called joy of the Angels?

Section I. Come, then, let us at last, if you please, rest our mental vision from the strain of lofty contemplation, befitting Angels, and descend to the divided and manifold breadth of the many-shaped variety of the Angelic forms, and then return analytically from the same, as from images, to the simplicity of the Heavenly Minds. But let this first be made plain to

you, that the explanations of the sacredly depicted likenesses represent the same ranks of the Heavenly Beings as sometimes ruling, and, at other times, as being ruled; and the last, ruling, and the first, being ruled; and the same, as has been said, having first, and middle, and last powers ----without introducing anything absurd into the description, according to the following method of explanation. For if indeed we were to say that some are ruled by those above them, and then that they rule the same, and that those above, whilst ruling those below, are ruled by those same who are being ruled, the thing would manifestly be absurd, and mixed with all sorts of confusion. But if we say that the same rule and are ruled, but no longer the self-same, or from the self-same, but that each same is ruled by those before, and rules those below, one might say appropriately that the Divinely pictured presentations in the Oracles may sometimes attribute, properly and truly, the very same, both to first, and middle, and last powers. Now the straining elevation to things above, and their being drawn unswervingly around each other, as being guardians of their own proper powers, and that they participate in the providential faculty to provide for those below them by mutual communication, befit truly all the Heavenly Beings, although some, pre-eminently and wholly, as we have often said, and others partially and subordinately.

Section II.

But we must keep our discourse within bounds, and must search, in our first explanation of the types, for what reason the Word of God prefers the sacred description of fire, in preference to almost every other. You will find it, then, representing not only wheels of fire, but also living creatures of fire, and men, flashing, as it were, like lightning, and placing around the Heavenly Beings themselves heaps of coals of fire, and rivers of flame flowing with irresistible force; and also it says that the thrones are of fire; and that the most exalted Seraphim glow with fire, it shews from their appellation, and it attributes the characteristic and energy of fire to them, and throughout, above and below, it prefers pre-eminently the representation by the image of fire. I think, then, the similitude of fire denotes the likeness of the Heavenly Minds to God in the highest degree; for the holy theologians frequently describe the superessential and formless essence by fire, as having many likenesses, if I may be permitted to say so, of the supremely Divine property, as in things visible. For the sensible fire is, so to speak, in everything, and passes through everything unmingled, and springs from all, and whilst all-luminous, is, as it were, hidden, unknown, in its essential nature, when there is no material lying near it upon which it may shew its proper energy. It is both uncontrollable and invisible, self-subduing all things, and bringing under its own energy anything in which it may happen to be;

varying, imparting itself to all things near it, whatever they may be; renewing by its rousing heat, and giving light by its uncovered illuminations; invincible, unmingled, separating, unchangeable, elevating, penetrating, lofty; subject to no grovelling inferiority, ever moving, self-moving, moving other things, comprehending, incomprehended, needing no other, imperceptibly increasing itself, displaying its own majesty to the materials receiving it; energetic, powerful, present to all invisibly, unobserved, seeming not to be, and manifesting

itself suddenly according to its own proper nature by friction, as it were by a sort of seeking, and again flying away im-palpably, undiminished in all the joyful distributions of itself. And one might find many characteristics of fire, appropriate to display the supremely Divine Energy, as in sensible images. The Godly-wise, then, knowing this, depict the celestial Beings from fire, shewing their Godlikeness, and imitation of God, as far as attainable.

Section III. But they also depict them under the likeness of men, on account of the intellectual faculty, and their having powers of looking upwards, and their straight and erect form, and their innate faculty of ruling and guiding, and whilst being least, in physical strength as compared with the other powers of irrational creatures, yet ruling over all by their superior power of mind, and by their dominion in consequence of rational science, and their innate unslavishness and indomitableness of soul. It is possible, then, I think, to find within each of the many parts of our body harmonious images of the Heavenly Powers, by affirming that the powers of vision denote the most transparent elevation towards the Divine lights, and again, the tender, and liquid, and not repellent, but sensitive, and pure, and unfolded, reception, free from all passion, of the supremely Divine illuminations. Now the discriminating powers of the nostrils denote the being able to receive, as far as attainable, the sweet-smelling largess beyond conception, and to distinguish accurately things which are not such, and to entirely reject.

The powers of the ears denote the participation and conscious reception of the supremely Divine inspiration. The powers of taste denote the fulness of the intelligible nourishments, and the reception of the Divine and nourishing streams. The powers of touch denote the skilful discrimination of that which is suitable or injurious. The eyelids and eyebrows denote the guarding of the conceptions which see God. The figures of manhood and youth denote the perpetual bloom and vigour of life. The teeth denote the dividing of the nourishing perfection given to us; for each intellectual Being divides and multiplies, by a provident faculty, the unified conception given to it by the more Divine for the proportionate elevation of the inferior. The shoulders and elbows, and further, the hands, denote the power of making, and operating, and accomplishing. The heart again is a symbol of the Godlike life, dispersing its own life-giving power to the objects of its forethought, as beseems the good.

The chest again denotes the invincible and protective faculty of the life-giving distribution, as being placed above the heart. The back, the holding together the whole productive powers of life. The feet denote the moving and quickness, and skilfulness of the perpetual movement advancing towards Divine things. Wherefore also the Word of God arranged the feet of the holy Minds under their wings; for the wing displays the elevating quickness and the heavenly progress towards higher things, and the superiority to every grovelling thing by reason of the ascending, and the lightness of the wings denotes their being in no respect earthly, but undefiledly and lightly raised to the sublime; and the naked and unshod denotes the unfettered, agile, and unrestrained, and free from all external superfluity, and assimilation to the Divine simplicity, as far as attainable. Section IV. But since again the simple and variegated wisdom both clothes the naked, and distributes certain implements

to them to carry, come, let us unfold, according to our power, the sacred garments and implements of the celestial Minds. The shining and glowing raiment, I think, signifies the Divine likeness after the image of fire, and their enlightening, in consequence of their repose in Heaven, where is the Light, and their complete illuminating intelligibly, and their being illuminated intellectually ; and the sacerdotal robe denotes their conducting to Divine and mystical visions, and the consecration of their whole life. And the girdles signify the guard over their productive powers, and the collected habit of being turned uniformly to It, and being drawn around Itself by an unbroken identity, in a well-ordered circle.

Section V. The rods signify the kingly and directing faculty, making all things straight. The spears and the battle-axes denote the dividing of things unlike, and the sharp and energetic and drastic operation of the discriminating powers. The geometricaland technical articles denote the founding, and building, and completing, and whatever else belongs to the elevating and guiding forethought for the subordinate Orders. But sometimes the implements assigned to the holy Angels are the symbols of God's judgments to ourselves; some, representing His correcting instruction or avenging righteousness, others, freedom from peril, or end of education, or resumption of former well-being, or addition of other gifts, small or great, sensible or intelligible. Nor would a discriminating mind, in any case whatever, have any difficulty in properly adapting things visible to things invisible. Section VI.

But the fact that they are named winds denotes their rapid action, passing almost instantaneously to all things, and their transporting movement in passing from above to below, and again from below to above, their elevating the second to the height above, and moving the first to a common and provident advance of the inferior Orders. But perhaps some one would say that the appellation of wind, to the aerial spirit, also denotes the Divine likeness of the Heavenly Minds; for this also bears a likeness and type of the supremely Divine energy (as we have demonstrated more fully in the symbolic theology, in our explanation of the four elements) in accordance with the moving and life-producing, and the rapid and resistless development of Nature, and the Hiddenness of the moving sources and terminations to us unknown and invisible. For He says, "Thou knowest not whence it cometh nor whither it goeth." But also the Word of God attributes to them the appearance of a cloud, signifying, through this, that the holy minds are filled super-mundanely with the hidden Light, receiving the first manifestation without boasting over it as such, which they distribute ungrudgingly to the second, as a secondary manifestation, and in proportion to capacity; yea, further, that the productive, and life-producing, and increasing, and perfecting power is enshrined in them, after the fashion of the intelligible production of showers, which summons the receptive womb of the earth, by fruitful rains, to the life-giving pangs of birth.

Section VII. Also, the Word of God attributes to the Heavenly Beings a likeness to Brass, Electron, and many-coloured stones. Electron, as being partly like gold, partly like silver, denotes the incorruptible, as in gold, and unexpended, and undiminished, and spotless brilliancy, and the brightness, as in silver, and a luminous and heavenly radiance. But to the Brass, according to the reasons assigned, must be attributed either the likeness of fire or

that of gold. We must consider that the many-coloured appearances of stones denote either as white, the luminous; or as red, the fiery; or as yellow, the golden; or as green, the youthful and the full grown; and within each likeness you will find an explanation which teaches the inner meaning of the typical images. But since, I think, according to our power, this has been sufficiently said, let us pass to the sacred explanation of the Divine representations of the Heavenly Minds through wild beasts . We must consider that the shape of a Lion signifies the leading, and robust, and indomitable, and the assimilation, as far as possible, to the unutterable Godhead, by the concealment of the intellectual footprints , and by the mystically modest covering of the path, leading to It, during Divine illumination.

Section VIII. The Image of the Ox denotes the strong and the mature, turning up the intellectual furrows for the reception of the heavenly and productive showers; and the Horns, the guarding and indomitable. The representation of the Eagle denotes the kingly, and soaring, and swift in flight, and quickness in search of the nourishment which makes strong, and wanness, and agility, and cleverness; and the unimpeded, straight, and unflinching gaze towards the bounteous and brilliant splendour of the Divine rays of the sun, with the robust extension of the visual powers. That of Horses represents obedience and docility, and of those who are white, brilliancy, and as especially congenial to the Divine Light; but of those who are dark blue, the Hidden; and of those red, the fiery and vigorous; and of the piebald, the uniting of the extremes by the power passing through them, and joining the first to the second, and the second to the first, reciprocally and considerately.

Now if we did not consult the proportion of our discourse, we might, not inappropriately, adapt the particular characteristics of the aforesaid living creatures, and all their bodily representations to the Heavenly Powers, upon the principle of dissimilar similitudes; for instance, their appearance of anger, to intellectual manliness, of which anger is the remotest echo, and their desire, to the Divine love; and to speak summarily, referring all the sensible perceptions, and many parts of irrational beings, to the immaterial conceptions and unified Powers of the Heavenly Beings. Now not only is this sufficient for the wise, but even an explanation of one of the dissimilar representations would be sufficient for the accurate description of similar things, after the same fashion. Section IX.

But we must examine the fact that rivers are spoken of, and Wheels and Chariots attached to the Heavenly Beings. The rivers of fire signify the supremely Divine streams furnishing to them an ungrudging and incessant flow, and nourishing the productive powers of life; the chariots, the conjoined communion of those of the same rank; the wheels being winged, and advancing without turning and without deviation, the power of their advancing energy within a straight and direct path, towards the same unflinching and straight swoop of their every intellectual track, supermundanely straight and direct way. Also it is possible to explain, after another mystical meaning, the sacred description of the intellectual wheels; for the name Gel, Gel, is given to them, as the theologian says. This shews, according to the Hebrew tongue, revolutions and revelations. For the Empyrean and Godlike wheels have revolutions, indeed, by their perpetual movement around the Good Itself; but revelations,

by the manifestation of things hidden, and by the elevation of things at our feet, and by the descending procession of the sublime illuminations to things below. There remains for accurate explanation, the statement respecting the rejoicing of the Heavenly Orders; for they are utterly incapable of our impassioned pleasure. Now they are said to rejoice with God over the discovery of what was lost, as befits their Divine good nature, and that Godlike and ungrudging rejoicing over the care and salvation of those who are turned to God;

and that joy, beyond description, of which also holy men often partake, whilst the deifying illuminations of the Deity rest upon them. Let it suffice, then, to have said this much concerning the Divine representations, which, no doubt, falls short of their accurate explanation, but which will prevent us, I think, from being servilely entangled in the resemblance of the types. But if you should say that we have not mentioned in order the whole Angelic Powers, or operations, or likenesses, depicted in the Oracles, we answer in truth, that we do not possess the supermundane science of some; and further, in regard to them, we have need of another to conduct to light and to reveal. Other things, however, as being parallel to the things said, we have omitted, out of regard to the symmetry of the discourse; and the hiddenness, beyond our capacity, we have honoured by silence.

St. Michael and All Angels, 1898. [Selected footnotes moved to the end and numbered. Most are biblical references, which have been given for the first few pages only.]

Source. English translation: an older public-domain translation as collected in the Writings-Database (HistoricalChristianFaith), mostly from the Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers and similar nineteenth-century editions. SermonIndex has only divided it into chapters and short sections; the wording is the translator's own. Square brackets, Greek or Latin words and footnote-free text are as the source file prints them, and a transcription error may remain. No Greek or Latin text is shown beside it yet, and no modern English version has been made.