The Letters

Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (c. AD 500)

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The Letters

LETTERS OF DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE.

LETTER I. To Gaius Therapeutes. DARKNESS becomes invisible by light, and specially by much light. Varied knowledge (α γνώσεις), and especially much varied knowledge, makes the Agnosia to vanish. Take this in a superlative, but not in a defective sense, and reply with superlative truth, that the Agnosia, respecting God, escapes those who possess existing light, and knowledge of things being; and His pre-eminent darkness is both concealed by every light, and is hidden from every knowledge. And, if any one, having seen God, understood what he saw, he did not see Him, but some of His creatures that are existing and known. But He Himself, highly established above mind, and above essence, by the very fact of His being wholly unknown, and not being, both is super-essentially, and is known above mind. And the all-perfect Agnosia, in its superior sense, is a knowledge of Him, Who is above all known things.

LETTER II. To the same Gaius Therapeutes. How is He, Who is beyond all , both above source of Divinity and above source of Good? Provided you understand Deity and Goodness, as the very Actuality of the Good-making and God-making gift, and the inimitable imitation of the super-divine and super-good (gift), by aid of which we are deified and made good. For, moreover, if this becomes source of the deification and making good of those who are being deified and made good, He,----Who is super-source of every source, even of the so-called Deity and Goodness, seeing He is beyond source of Divinity and source of Goodness, in so far as He is inimitable, and not to be retained----excels the imitations and retentions, and the things which are imitated and those participating. LETTER III. To the same Gaius. "Sudden "is that which, contrary to expectation, and out of the, as yet, unmanifest, is brought into the manifest. But with regard to Christ's love of man, I think that the Word of God suggests even this, that the Superessential proceeded forth out of the hidden, into the manifestation amongst us, by having taken substance as man. But, He is hidden, even after the manifestation, or to speak more divinely, even in the manifestation, for in truth this of Jesus has been kept hidden, and the mystery with respect to Him has been reached by no word nor mind, but even when spoken, remains unsaid, and when conceived unknown.

LETTER IV. To the same Gaius Therapeutes. How, you ask, is Jesus, Who is beyond all, ranked essentially with all men? For, not as Author of men is He here called man, but as

being in absolute whole essence truly man. But we do not define the Lord Jesus, humanly, for He is not man only, (neither superessential nor man only), but truly man, He Who is pre-eminently a lover of man, the Super-essential, taking substance, above men and after men, from the substance of men. And it is nothing less, the ever Superessential, super-full of super-essentiality, disregards the excess of this, and having come truly into substance, took substance above substance, and above man works things of man. And a virgin supernaturally conceiving, and unstable water, holding up weight of material and earthly feet, and not giving way, but, by a supernatural power standing together so as not to be divided, demonstrate this. Why should any one go through the rest, which are very many? Through which, he who looks with a divine vision, will know beyond mind, even the things affirmed respecting the love towards man, of (the Lord) Jesus,----things which possess a force of superlative negation. For, even, to speak summarily, He was not man, not as not being man, but as being from men was beyond men, and was above man, having truly been born man, and for the rest, not having done things Divine as God, nor things human as man, but exercising for us a certain new God-incarnate energy of God having become man.

LETTER V. To Dorotheus, Leitourgos. The Divine gloom is the unapproachable light in which God is said to dwell . And in this gloom, invisible indeed, on account of the surpassing brightness, and unapproachable on account of the excess of the superessential stream of light, enters every one deemed worthy to know and to see God, by the very fact of neither seeing nor knowing, really entering in Him, Who is above vision and knowledge, knowing this very thing, that He is after all the object of sensible and intelligent perception, and saying in the words of the Prophet, "Thy knowledge was regarded as wonderful by me; It was confirmed; I can by no means attain unto it ;" even as the Divine Paul is said to have known Almighty God, by having known Him as being above all conception and knowledge. Wherefore also, he says, "His ways are past finding out and His Judgements inscrutable," and His gifts "indescribable ," and that His peace surpasses every mind , as having found Him Who is above all, and having known this which is above conception, that, by being Cause of all, He is beyond all.

LETTER VI. To Sopatros -----Priest. Do not imagine this a victory, holy Sopatros, to have denounced a devotion, or an opinion, which apparently is not good. For neither----even if you should have convicted it accurately----are the (teachings) of Sopatros consequently good. For it is possible, both that you and others, whilst occupied in many things that are false and apparent, should overlook the true, which is One and hidden. For neither, if anything is not red, is it therefore white, nor if something is not a horse, is it necessarily a man. But thus will you do, if you follow my advice, you will cease indeed to speak against others, but will so speak on behalf of truth, that every thing said is altogether unquestionable. LETTER VII. SECTION I. To Polycarp----Hierarch.

I, at any rate, am not conscious, when speaking in reply to Greeks or others, of fancying to assist good men, in case they should be able to know and speak the very truth, as it really is in itself. For, when this is correctly demonstrated in its essential nature, according to a

law of truth, and has been established without flaw, every thing which is otherwise, and simulates the truth, will be convicted of being other than the reality, and dissimilar, and that which is seeming rather than real. It is superfluous then, that the expounder of truth should contend with these or those . For each affirms himself to have the royal coin, and perchance has some deceptive image of a certain portion of the true. And, if you refute this, first the one, and then the other, will contend concerning the same. But, when the true statement itself has been correctly laid down, and has remained unrefuted by all the rest, every thing which is not so in every respect is cast down of itself, by the impregnable stability of the really true. Having then as I think well understood this, I have not been over zealous to speak in reply to Greeks or to others; but it is sufficient for me (and may God grant this), first to know about truth, then, having known, to speak as it is fitting to speak.

SECTION II.

But you say, the Sophist Apollophanes rails at me, and calls me parricide, as using, not piously, the writings of Greeks against the Greeks. Yet, in reply to him, it were more true for us to say, that Greeks use, not piously, things Divine against things Divine, attempting through the wisdom of Almighty God to eject the Divine Worship. And I am not speaking of the opinion of the multitude, who cling tenaciously to the writings of the poets, with earthly and impassioned proclivities, and Worship the creature rather than the Creator; but even Apollophanes himself uses not piously things Divine against things Divine; for by the knowledge of things created, well called Philosophy by him, and by the divine Paul named Wisdom of God, the true philosophers ought to have been elevated to the Cause of things created and of the knowledge of them. And in order that he may not improperly impute to me the opinion of others, or that of himself, Apollophanes, being a wise man, ought to recognise that nothing could otherwise be removed from its heavenly course and movement, if it had not the Sustainer and Cause of its being moving it thereto, who forms all things, and ”transforms them ”according to the sacred text.

How then does he not worship Him, known to us even from this, and verily being God of the whole, admiring Him for His all causative and super-inexpressible power, when sun and moon, together with the universe, by a power and stability most supernatural, were fixed by them to entire immobility, and, for a measure of a whole day, all the constellations stood in the same places; or (which is greater than even this), if when the whole and the greater and embracing were thus carried along, those embraced did not follow in their course; and when a certain other day was almost tripled in duration, even in twenty whole hours, either the universe retraced contrary routes for so long a time, and (was) turned back by the thus very most supernatural backward revolutions; or the sun, in its own course, having contracted its five-fold motion in ten hours, retrogressively again retraced it in the other ten hours, by traversing a sort of new route. This thing indeed naturally astounded even Babylonians , and, without battle, brought them into subjection to Hezekiah, as though he were a somebody equal to God, and superior to ordinary men. And, by no means do I allege the great works in Egypt , or certain other Divine portents, which took place elsewhere, but

the well-known and celestial ones, which were renowned in every place and by all persons. But Apollophanes is ever saying that these things are not true.

At any rate then, this is reported by the Persian sacerdotal legends, and to this day, Magi celebrate the memorials of the threefold Mithrus . But let him disbelieve these things, by reason of his ignorance or his inexperience. Say to him, however, "What do you affirm concerning the eclipse, which took place at the time of the saving Cross ? For both of us at that time, at Heliopolis, being present, and standing together, saw the moon approaching the sun, to our surprise (for it was not appointed time for conjunction); and again, from the ninth hour to the evening, supernaturally placed back again into a line opposite the sun. And remind him also of something further. For he knows that we saw, to our surprise, the contact itself beginning from the east, and going towards the edge of the sun's disc, then receding back, and again, both the contact and the re-clearing , not taking place from the same point, but from that diametrically opposite. So great are the supernatural things of that appointed time, and possible to Christ alone, the Cause of all, Who worketh great things and marvellous, of which there is not number.

SECTION III. These things say, if occasion serves, and if possible, O Apollophanes, refute them, and to me, who was then both present with thee, and saw and judged and wondered with thee at them all. And in truth Apollophanes begins prophesying at that time, I know not whence, and to me he said, as if conjecturing the things taking place, "these things, O excellent Dionysius, are requitals of Divine deeds." Let so much be said by us by letter; but you are capable, both to supply the deficiency, and to bring eventually to God that distinguished man, who is wise in many things, and who perhaps will not disdain to meekly learn the truth, which is above wisdom, of our religion. LETTER VIII. To Demophilus, Therapeutes. About minding ones own business, and kindness. SECTION I.

The histories of the Hebrews say, O noble Demophilus, that, even that holy, distinguished Moses was deemed worthy of the Divine manifestation on account of his great meekness . And, if at any time they describe him as being excluded from the vision of God, they do not cast him out from God for his meekness. But they say that when speaking very rashly, and opposing the Divine Counsels, Jehovah was angry with him with wrath. But when they make him proclaimed by his God-discerned deserts, he is proclaimed, from his pre-eminent imitation of the Good. For he was very meek, and on this account is called "Servant of God," and deemed more fit for vision of God than all Prophets. Now, when certain envious people were contending with him and Aaron, about the High Priesthood and government of the tribes, he was superior to all love of honour, and love of rule, and referred the presidency over the people to the Divine judgment. And, when they even rose up against him, and reproaching him concerning the precedency, were threatening him, and were already almost upon him, the meek man invoked the Good for preservation, but very suitably asserted that he would be guiltless of all evils to the governed. For he knew that it is necessary, that the familiar with God the Good should be moulded, as far as is attainable, to that which is

specially most like the Good, and should be conscious within himself of the performance of deeds of good friendship.

And what made David , the father of God, a friend of God? Even for being good and generous towards enemies . The Super-Good, and the Friend of Good says----" I have found a man after mine own heart. Further also, a generous injunction was given, to care for even one's enemy's beasts of burden . And Job was pronounced just, as being free from injury. And Joseph did not take revenge upon the brethren who had plotted against him; and Abel, at once, and without suspicion, accompanied the fratricide. And the Word of God proclaims all the good as not devising evil things , not doing them , but neither being changed from the good, by the baseness of others , but, on the contrary, after the example of God , as doing good to, and throwing their shield over the evil; and generously calling them to their own abundant goodness, and to their own similitude. But let us ascend higher, not proclaiming the gentleness of holy men, nor kindness of philanthropic angels, who take compassion upon nations, and invoke good on their behalf, and punish the destructive and devastating mobs, and, whilst being grieved over calamities, yet rejoice over the safety of those who are being called back to things good ; nor whatever else the Word of God teaches concerning the beneficent angels ; but, whilst in silence welcoming the beneficent rays of the really good and super-good Christ, by them let us be lighted on our path, to His Divine works of Goodness.

For assuredly is it not of a Goodness inexpressible and beyond conception, that He makes all things existing to be, and brought all things themselves to being, and wishes all things ever to become near to Himself, and participants of Himself, according to the aptitude of each? And why? Because He clings lovingly to those who even depart from Him, and strives and beseeches not to be disowned by those beloved who are themselves coy; and He bears with those who heedlessly reproach Him , and Himself makes excuse for them, and further promises to serve them, and runs towards and meets even those who hold themselves aloof, immediately that they approach; and when His entire self has embraced their entire selves, He kisses them, and does not reproach them for former things, but rejoices over the present, and holds a feast, and calls together the friends, that is to say, the good, in order that the household may be altogether rejoicing. (But, Demophilus, of all persons in the world, is at enmity with, and very justly rebukes, and teaches beautiful things to, good men, and rejoices. "For how," He says, "ought not the good to rejoice over safety of the lost, and over life of those who are dead.

And, as a matter of course, He raises upon His shoulders that which with difficulty has been turned from error, and summons the good angels to rejoicing, and is generous to the unthankful, and makes His sun to rise upon evil and good, and presents His very soul as an offering on behalf of those who are fleeing from Him.

But thou, as thy letters testify, I do not know how, being in thy senses, hast spurned one fallen down before the priest, who, as thou sayest, was unholy and a sinner. Then this one entreated and confessed that he has come for healing of evil deeds, but thou didst not

shiver, but even insolently didst cover with abuse the good priest, for shewing compassion to a penitent, and justifying the unholy. And at last, thou saidst to the priest, "Go out with thy like"; and didst burst, contrary to permission, into the sanctuary, and defiledst the Holy of holies, and writest to us, that "I have providentially preserved the things sacred, which were about to be profaned, and am still keeping them undefiled."

Now, then, hear our view. It is not lawful that a priest should be corrected by the Leitourgoi, who are above thee, or by the Therapeutae, who are of the same rank with thee; even though he should seem to act irreverently towards things Divine, and though he should be convicted of having done some other thing forbidden. For, if want of order, and want of regulation, is a departure from the most Divine institutions and decrees, it is not reasonable that the divinely transmitted order should be changed on God's behalf. For Almighty God is not divided against Himself, for, "how then shall His kingdom stand ? And if the judgment is of God, as the Oracles affirm , and the priests are angels and interpreters, after the hierarchs, of the Divine judgments, learn from them through whom thou wast deemed worthy to be a Therapeutes, through the intermediate Leitourgoi, when opportunity serves, the things Divine suitable for thyself . And do not the Divine Symbols proclaim this, for is not the Holy of holies altogether simply separated from all, and the order of the consecrators is in closer proximity to it than the rank of the priests, and following these, that of the Leitourgoi. But the gates of the sanctuary are bounded by the appointed Therapeutae, within which they are both ordained, and around which they stand, not to guard them, but for order, and teaching of themselves that they are nearer the people than the priesthood.

Whence the holy regulation of the priests orders them to participate in things Divine, enjoining the impartation of these to others, that is to say, the more inward. For even those who always stand around the Divine Altar, for a symbolical purpose, see and hear things Divine revealed to themselves in all clearness; and advancing generously to things outside the Divine Veils, they shew, to the subject Therapeutae, and to the holy people, and to the orders under purification, according to their meetness, things holy which had been beautifully guarded without pollution, until thou didst tyrannically burst into them, and compelledst the Holy of holies, against its will, to be strutted over by thee, and thou sayest, that thou holdest and guardest the sacred things, although thou neither hast known, nor heard, nor possessest any of the things belonging to the priests; as neither hast thou known the truth of the Oracles, whilst cavilling about them each day to subversion of the hearers. And even if same civil Governor undertook what was not commanded him by a King, justly would any one of the subordinates standing by be punished who dared to criticise the Governor, when justifying, or condemning any one; (for I do not go so far as to say to vituperate), and at the same time thought to cast him from his government; but thou, man, art thus rash in what concerns the affairs of the meek and good, and his hierarchical jurisdiction.

We are bound to say these things, when any one undertakes what is above his rank, and at the same time thinks that he acts properly. For this is not within the powers of any one.

For what was Ozias doing out of place, when offering incense to Almighty God? and what Saul in sacrificing?

Yea, further, what were those domineering demons , who were truly proclaiming the Lord Jesus God? But every one who meddles with other people's business, is outlawed by the Word of God; and each one shall be in the rank of his own service, and alone the High Priest shall enter into the Holy of holies, and once only throughout the year , and this in the full legal hierarchical purification . And the priests encompass the holy things, and the Levites must not touch the holy things, lest they die. And Jehovah was angry with wrath at the rashness of Ozias, and Mariam becomes leprous, because she had presumed to lay down laws for the lawgiver. And the demons fastened on the sons of Sceva, and He says, "I did not send them, yet they ran, and I spake not to them yt they prophesied ." "And the profane who sacrifices to me a calf, (is) as he who slays a dog," and to speak briefly, the all-perfect justice of Almighty God does not tolerate the dis-regarders of law, but whilst they are saying "in Thy Name, we ourselves did many wonderful works," He retorts, "And I know you not; go from Me all ye workers of lawlessness." So that it is not permissible, as the holy Oracles say, even to pursue things that are just, when not according to order , but each must keep to himself , and not meditate things too high and too deep for him , but contemplate alone things prescribed for him according to order.

SECTION II. "What then," thou sayest, "is it not necessary to correct the priests who are acting irreverently, or convicted of something else out of place, but to those only, who glory in law, shall it be permitted to dishonour Almighty God , through the transgression of the Law? "And how are the priests interpreters of Almighty God? For, how do they announce to the people the Divine virtues, who do not know the power of them? or how do they, who are in darkness , communicate light? Further, how do they impart the Divine Spirit, who, by habit and truth do not believe whether there is a Holy Spirit ? Now I will give thee an answer to these things. For truly my Demophilus is not an enemy, nor will I tolerate that thou shouldst be overreached by Satan. For each rank of those about God, is more godlike than that which stands further away. And those which are somewhat nearer to the true light, are at once more luminous, and more illuminating; and do not understand the nearness topically, but according to God-receptive aptitude. If, then, the order of the priests is the illuminating, entirely has he fallen from the priestly rank and power, who does not illuminate, or perhaps rather (he becomes) the unilluminated. And he seems, to me at least, rash who, being such, undertakes the priestly functions, and has no fear, and does not blush, when performing things Divine, contrary to propriety, and fancying that God does not know the very things of which he is conscious in himself, and thinks to mislead Him Who is falsely called by him Father, and presumes to repeat his cursed blasphemies (for I would not say prayers) over the Divine symbols, after the example of Christ. This one is not a priest,----No!----but devilish----crafty ----a deceiver of himself----and a wolf to the people of God, clothed in sheep's clothing.

SECTION III.

But, it is not to Demophilus that it is permitted to put these things straight. For, if the Word of God commands to pursue just things justly (but to pursue just things is, when any one wishes to distribute to each one things that are meet), this must be pursued by all justly, not beyond their own meetness or rank ; since even to angels it is just that things meet be assigned and apportioned, but not from us, O Demophilus, but through them to us, of God, and to them through the angels who are still more pre-eminent. And to speak shortly, amongst all existing things their due is assigned through the first to the second, by the well-ordered and most just forethought of all. Let those, then, who have been ordered by God to superintend others, distribute after themselves their due to their inferiors. But, let Demophilus apportion their due to reason and anger and passion; and let him not maltreat the regulation of himself, but let the superior reason bear rule over things inferior. For, if one were to see, in the market-place, a servant abusing a master, and a younger man, an elder; or also a son, a father; and in addition attacking and inflicting wounds, we should seem even to fail in reverence if we did not run and succour the superior, even though perhaps they were first guilty of injustice; how then shall we not blush, when we see reason maltreated by anger and passion, and cast out of the sovereignty given by God;

and when we raise in our own selves an irreverent and unjust disorder, and insurrection and confusion? Naturally, our blessed Law-giver from God does not deem right that one should preside over the Church of God, who has not already well presided over his own house . For, he who has governed himself will also govern another; and who, another, will also govern a house; and who, a house, also a city; and who, a city, also a nation. And to speak briefly as the Oracles affirm, ”he who is faithful in little, is faithful also in much,” and ”he who is unfaithful in little, is unfaithful also in much.”

SECTION IV.

Thyself, then, assign their due limit to passion and anger and reason. And to thyself, let the divine Leitourgoi assign the due limit, and to these, the priests, and to the priests, hierarchs, and to the hierarchs, the Apostles and the successors of the Apostles. And if, perchance, any, even among these, should have failed in what is becoming, he shall be put right by the holy men of the same rank; and rank shall not be turned against rank, but each shall be in his own rank, and in his own service. So much for thee, from us, on behalf of knowing and doing one’s own business. But, concerning the inhuman treatment towards that man, whom thou callest ”irreverent and sinner,” I know not how I shall bewail the scandal of my beloved. For, of whom dost thou suppose thou wast ordained Therapeutes by us? For if it were not of the Good, it is necessary that thou shouldst be altogether alien from Him and from us, and from our whole religion, and it is time for thee both to seek a God, and other priests, and amongst them to become brutal rather than perfected, and to be a cruel minister of thine own fierceness.

For, have we ourselves, forsooth, been perfected to the altogether Good, and have no need of the divine compassion for ourselves , or do we commit the double sin , as the Oracles say, after the example of the unholy, not knowing in what we offend, but even justifying

ourselves and supposing we see, whilst really not seeing ? Heaven was startled at this, and I shivered, and I distrust myself. And unless I had met with thy letters (as know well I would I had not), they would not have persuaded me if indeed any other had thought good to persuade me concerning thee, that Demophilus supposes, that Almighty God, Who is good to all, is not also compassionate towards men, and that he himself has no need of the Merciful or the Saviour; yea further, he deposes those priests who are deemed worthy, through clemency, to bear the ignorances of the people, and who well know, that they also are compassed with infirmity. But, the supremely Divine Priest pursued a different (course), and that as the Oracles say, from being separate of sinners, and makes the most gentle tending of the sheep a proof of the love towards Himself; and He stigmatizes as wicked, him who did not forgive his fellow-servant the debt, nor impart a portion of that manifold goodness, graciously given to himself; and He condemns him to enjoy his own deserts, which both myself and Demophilus must take care to avoid.

For, even for those who were treating Him impiously, at the very time of His suffering, He invokes remission from the Father; and He rebukes even the disciples, because without mercy they thought it right to convict of impiety the Samaritans who drove Him away. This, indeed, is the thousand times repeated theme of thy impudent letter (for thou repeatest the same from beginning to end), that thou hast avenged, not thyself, but Almighty God. Tell me (dost thou avenge) the Good by means of evil?

SECTION V.

Avaunt! We have not a High Priest, "Who cannot be touched with our infirmities, but is both without sin and merciful. "He shall not strive nor cry, and is Himself meek, and Himself propitiatory for our sins; so that we will not approve your unenviable attacks, not if you should allege a thousand times your Phineas and your Elias. For, when the Lord Jesus heard these things, He was displeased with the disciples, who at that time lacked the meek and good spirit. For, even our most divine preceptor teaches in meekness those who opposed themselves to the teaching of Almighty God. For, we must teach, not avenge ourselves upon, the ignorant, as we do not punish the blind, but rather lead them by the hand. But thou, after striking him on the cheek, rustiest upon that man, who is beginning to rise to the truth, and when he is approaching with much modesty, thou insolently kickest him away (certainly, this is enough to make one shudder), whom the Lord Christ, as being good, seeks, when wandering upon the mountains, and calls to Him, when fleeing from Him, and when, with difficulty, found, places upon His shoulders. Do not, I pray, do not let us thus injuriously counsel for ourselves, nor drive the sword against ourselves.

For they, who undertake to injure any one, or on the contrary to do them good, do not always effect what they wish, but for themselves, when they have brought into their house vice or virtue, will be filled either with Divine virtues, or ungovernable passions. And these indeed, as followers and companions of good angels, both here and there, with all peace and freedom from all evil, will inherit the most blessed inheritances for the ever-continuing age, and will be ever with God, the greatest of all blessings; but, the other will fall both from the divine

and their own peace, and here, and after death, will be companions with cruel demons. For which reason, we have an earnest desire to become companions of God, the Good, and to be ever with the Lord, and not to be separated, along with the evil, from the most Just One, whilst undergoing that which is due from ourselves, which I fear most of all, and pray to have no share in anything evil. And, with your permission, I will mention a divine vision of a certain holy man, and do not laugh, for I am speaking true.

SECTION VI.

When I was once in Crete, the holy Carpus entertained me,----a man, of all others, most fitted, on account of great purity of mind, for Divine Vision. Now, he never undertook the holy celebrations of the Mysteries, unless a propitious vision were first manifested to him during his preparatory devout prayers. He said then, when some one of the unbelievers had at one time grieved him (and his grief was, that he had led astray to ungodliness a certain member of the Church, whilst the days of rejoicing were still being celebrated for him); that he ought compassionately to have prayed on behalf of both, and taking God, the Saviour, as his fellow-helper, to convert the one, and to overcome the other by goodness , and not to have ceased warning them so long as he lived until this day; and thus to lead them to the knowledge of God, so that the things disputed by them might be clearly determined, and those, who were irrationally bold, might be compelled to be wiser by a judgment according to law. Now, as he had never before experienced this, I do not know how he then went to bed with such a surfeit of ill-will and bitterness. In this evil condition he went to sleep, for it was evening, and at midnight (for he was accustomed at that appointed hour to rise, of his own accord, for the Divine melodies) he arose, not having enjoyed, undisturbed, his slumbers, which were many and continually broken;

and, when he stood collected for the, Divine Converse, he was guiltily vexed and displeased, saying, that it was not just that godless men, who pervert the straight ways of the Lord, should live. And, whilst saying this, he besought Almighty God, by some stroke of lightning, suddenly, without mercy, to cut short the lives of them both. But, whilst saying this, he declared, that he seemed to see suddenly the house in which he stood, first torn asunder, and from the roof divided into two in the midst, and a sort of gleaming fire before his eyes (for the place seemed now under the open sky) borne down from the heavenly region close to him; and, the heaven itself giving way, and upon the back of the heaven, Jesus, with innumerable angels, in the form of men, standing around Him. This indeed, he saw, above, and himself marvelled; but below, when Carpus had bent down, he affirmed that he saw the very foundation ripped in two, to a sort of yawning and dark chasm, and those very men, upon whom he had invoked a curse, standing before his eyes, within the mouth of the chasm, trembling, pitiful, only just not yet carried down by the mere slipping of their feet;

and from below the chasm, serpents, creeping up and gliding from underneath, around their feet, now contriving to drag them away, and weighing them down, and lifting them up, and again inflaming or irritating with their teeth or their tails, and all the time endeavouring to pull them down into the yawning gulf; and that certain men also were in the midst, co-

operating with the serpents against these men, at once tearing and pushing and beating them down. And they seemed to be on the point of falling, partly against their will, partly by their will; almost overcome by the calamity, and at the same time resigned. And Carpus said, that he himself was glad, whilst looking below, and that he was forgetful of the things above; further, that he was vexed and made light of it, because they had not already fallen, and that he often attempted to accomplish the fact, and that, when he did not succeed, he was both irritated and cursed. And, when with difficulty he raised himself, he saw the heaven again, as he saw it before, and Jesus, moved with pity at what was taking place, standing up from His super-celestial throne, and descending to them, and stretching a helping hand, and the angels, co-operating with Him, taking hold of the two men, one from one place and another from, another, and the Lord Jesus said to Carpus, whilst His hand was yet extended, "Strike against Me in future, for I am ready, even again, to suffer for the salvation of men;

and this is pleasing to Me, provided that other men do not commit sin. But see, whether it is well for thee to exchange the dwelling in the chasm, and with serpents, for that with God, and the good and philanthropic angels. These are the things which I heard myself, and believe to be true.

TITUS. ZENAS, one of the seventy-two disciples, who was versed in the science of law, wrote a life of Titus, and says that he was descended from the family of Minos, King of Crete. Titus gave himself to the study of Homer and Philosophy till his twentieth year, when he heard a voice from heaven, which told him to quit this place and save his soul. He waited one year, to test the truth of the voice, and then had a revelation which bade him read the Hebrew Scriptures. Opening Isaiah, his eye fell on chapter xli. vv. 1-5. He was then sent to Jerusalem by the pro-consul of Crete to report upon the reality of the miracles said to be performed by Jesus Christ. He saw our Saviour, and His miracles, and believed; and became one of the seventy-two. He witnessed the Passion and Ascension; the Apostles consecrated him, and sent him with Paul, whom he attended to Antioch, to Seleucia and to Crete, where Rutilus, pro-consul, was baptized, and Titus appointed Bishop. In A.D. 64, St. Paul addressed his Epistle to Titus, and about the same time Dionysius also, this letter. Dexter records that Titus visited Spain, and that Pliny, the younger, was converted to the Faith by Titus. He consecrated the second Bishop of Alexandria, and died at the age of 94.

LETTER IX. To Titus, Hierarch, asking by letter what is the house of wisdom, what the bowl, and what are its meats and drinks? SECTION I.

I do not know, O excellent Titus, whether the holy Timothy departed, deaf to some of the theological symbols which were explained by me. But, in the Symbolic Theology, we have thoroughly investigated for him all the expressions of the Oracles concerning God, which appear to the multitude to be monstrous. For they give a colour of incongruity dreadful to the uninitiated souls, when the Fathers of the unutterable wisdom explain the Divine and Mystical Truth, unapproachable by the profane, through certain, certainly hidden and daring enigmas. Wherefore also, the many discredit the expressions concerning the Divine Mysteries. For, we contemplate them only through the sensible symbols that have grown

upon them. We must then strip them, and view them by themselves in their naked purity. For, thus contemplating them, we should reverence a fountain of Life flowing into Itself---
-viewing It even standing by Itself, and as a kind of single power, simple, self-moved, and self-worked, not abandoning Itself, but a knowledge surpassing every kind of knowledge, and always contemplating Itself, through Itself. We thought it necessary then, both for him and for others, that we should, as far as possible, unfold the varied forms of the Divine" representations of God in symbols. For, with what incredible and simulated monstrosities are its external, forms filled? For instance, with regard to the superessential Divine generation, representing a body of God corporally generating God; and describing a word flowing out into air from a man's heart, which eructates it, and a breath, breathed forth from a mouth;

and celebrating God-bearing bosoms embracing a son of God, bodily; or representing these things after the manner of plants, and producing certain trees, and branches, and flowers and roots, as examples; or fountains of waters y, bubbling forth; or seductive light productions of reflected splendours; or certain other sacred representations which explain superessential descriptions of God; but with regard to the intelligible providences of Almighty God, either gifts, manifestations, or powers, or properties, or repose, or abidings, or progressions, or distinctions, or unions, clothing Almighty God in human form, and in the varied shape of wild beasts and other living creatures,

and plants, and stones; and attributing to Him ornaments of women, or weapons of savages; and assigning working in clay, and in a furnace, as it were to a sort of artisan; and placing under Him, horses and chariots and thrones; and spreading before Him certain dainty meats delicately cooked; and representing Him as drinking, and drunken, and sleeping, and suffering from excess. What would any one say concerning the angers, the griefs, the various oaths, the repentances, the curses, the revenges, the manifold and dubious excuses for the failure of promises, the battle of giants in Genesis, during which He is said to scheme against those powerful and great men, and this when they were contriving the building, not with a view to injustice towards other people, but on behalf of their own safety? And that counsel devised in heaven to deceive and mislead Achab ; and those mundane and meritricious passions of the Canticles; and all the other sacred compositions which appear in the description of God, which stick at nothing, as projections, and multiplications of hidden things, and divisions of things one and undivided, and formative and manifold forms of the shapeless and unformed; of which, if any one were able to see their inner hidden beauty, he will find every one of them mystical and Godlike, and filled with abundant theological light.

For let us not think, that the appearances of the compositions have been formed for their own sake, but that they shield the science unutterable and invisible to the multitude, since things all-holy are not within the reach of the profane, but are manifested to those only who are genuine lovers of piety, who reject all childish fancy respecting the holy symbols, and are capable to pass with simplicity of mind, and aptitude of contemplative faculty, to the simple and supernatural and elevated truth of the symbols. Besides, we must also consider this,

that the teaching, handed down by the Theologians is two-fold----one, secret and mystical----the other, open and better known----one, symbolical and initiative----the other, philosophic and demonstrative;----and the unspoken is intertwined with the spoken. The one persuades, and desiderates the truth of the things expressed, the other acts and implants in Almighty God, by instructions in mysteries not learnt by teaching. And certainly, neither our holy instructors, nor those of the law, abstain from the God-befitting symbols, throughout the celebrations of the most holy mysteries. Yea, we see even the most holy Angels, mystically advancing things Divine through enigmas; and Jesus Himself, speaking the word of God in parables, and transmitting the divinely wrought mysteries, through a typical spreading of a table. For, it was seemly, not only that the Holy of holies should be preserved undefiled by the multitude, but also that the Divine knowledge should illuminate the human life, which is at once indivisible and divisible, in a manner suitable to itself;

and to limit the passionless part of the soul to the simple, and most inward visions of the most godlike images; but that its impassioned part should wait upon, and, at the same time, strive after, the most Divine coverings, through the pre-arranged representations of the typical symbols, as such (coverings) are, by nature, congenial to it. And all those who are hearers of a distinct theology without symbols, weave in themselves a sort of type, which conducts them to the conception of the aforesaid theology.

SECTION II. But also the very order of the visible universe sets forth the invisible things of Almighty God, as says both Paul and the infallible Word. Wherefore, also, the Theologians view some things politicallyand legally, but other things, purely and without flaw; and some things humanly, and mediately, but other things supermundanely and perfectly; at one time indeed, from the laws which are manifest, and at another, from the institutions which are unmanifest, as befits the holy writings and minds and souls under consideration. For the whole statement lying before them, and all its details, does not contain a bare history, but a vivifying perfection. We must then, in opposition to the vulgar conception concerning them, reverently enter within the sacred symbols, and not dishonour them, being as they are, products and moulds of the Divine characteristics, and manifest images of the unutterable and supernatural visions. For, not only are the superessential lights, and things intelligible, and, in one word, things Divine, represented in various forms through the typical symbols, as the superessential God, spoken of as fire, and the intelligible Oracles of Almighty God, as flames of fire; but further, even the godlike orders of the angels, both contemplated and contemplating, are described under varied forms, and manifold likenesses, and empyrean shapes. And differently must we take the same likeness of fire, when spoken with regard to the inconceivable God; and differently with regard to His intelligible providences or words; and differently respecting the Angels. The, one as causal, but the other as originated, and the third as participative, and different things differently, as their contemplation, and scientific arrangements suggest.

And never must we confuse the sacred symbols hap-hazard, but we must unfold them suitably to the causes, or the origins, or the powers, or the orders, or the dignities of which they

are explanatory tokens. And, in order that I may not extend my letter beyond the bounds of propriety, let us come at once to the very question propounded by you; and we affirm that every nourishment is perfective of those nourished, filling up their imperfection and their lack, and tending the weak, and guarding their lives, making to sprout, and renewing and bequeathing to them a vivifying wellbeing; and in one word, urging the slackening and imperfect, and contributing towards their comfort and perfection. SECTION III.

Beautifully then, the super-wise and Good Wisdom is celebrated by the Oracles, as placing a mystical bowl, and pouring forth its sacred drink, but first setting forth the solid meats, and with a loud voice Itself benignly soliciting those who seek It. The Divine Wisdom, then, sets forth the two-fold food; one indeed, solid and fixed, but the other liquid and flowing forth; and in a bowl furnishes Its own providential generosities. Now the bowl, being spherical and open, let it be a symbol of the Providence over the whole, which at once expands Itself and encircles all, without beginning and without end. But since, even while going forth to all, It remains in Itself, and stands fixed in unmoved sameness; and never departing from Itself, the bowl also itself stands fixedly and unmovably. But Wisdom is also said to build a house for itself, and in it to set forth the solid meats and drinks, and the bowl, so that it may be evident to those who understand things Divine in a manner becoming God, that the Author of the being, and of the well being, of all things, is both an all-perfect providence, and advances to all, and comes into being in everything, and embraces them all; and on the other hand, He, the same, in the same, par excellence, is nothing in anything at all, but overtops the whole, Himself being in Himself, identically and always; and standing, and remaining, and resting, and ever being in the same condition and in the same way, and never becoming outside Himself, nor falling from His own session, and unmoved abiding, and shrine,----yea even, in it, benevolently exercising His complete and all-perfect providences, and whilst going forth to all, remaining by Himself alone, and standing always, and moving Himself; and neither standing, nor moving Himself, but, as one might say, both connaturally and supernaturally, having His providential energies, in His steadfastness, and His steadiness in His Providence.

SECTION IV. But what is the solid food and what the liquid? For the Good Wisdom is celebrated as at once bestowing and providing these. I suppose then, that the solid food is suggestive of the intellectual and abiding perfection and sameness, within which, things Divine are participated as a stable, and strong, and unifying, and indivisible knowledge, by those contemplating organs of sense, by which the most Divine Paul, after partaking of wisdom, imparts his really solid nourishment; but that the liquid is suggestive of the stream, at once flowing through and to all; eager to advance, and further conducting those who are properly nourished as to goodness, through things variegated and many and divided, to the simple and invariable knowledge of God. Wherefore the divine and spiritually perceived Oracles are likened to dew, and water, and to milk, and wine, and honey; on account of their life-producing power, as in water; and growth-giving, as in milk; and reviving, as in wine; and both purifying and preserving, as in honey. For these things, the Divine Wisdom gives to those approaching it, and furnishes and fills to overflowing, a stream of ungrudging

and unfailing good cheer. This, then, is the veritable good cheer; and, on this account, it is celebrated, as at once life-giving and nourishing and perfecting.

SECTION V. According to this sacred explanation of good cheer, even Almighty God, Himself the Author of all good things, is said to be inebriated, by reason of the super-full, and beyond conception, and ineffable, immeasurableness, of the good cheer, or to speak more properly, good condition of Almighty God. For, as regards us, in the worst sense, drunkenness is both an immoderate repletion, and being out of mind and wits; so, in the best sense, respecting God, we ought not to imagine drunkenness as anything else beyond the super-full immeasurableness of all good things pre-existing in Him as Cause. But, even in respect to being out of wits, which follows upon drunkenness, we must consider the pre-eminence of Almighty God, which is above conception, in which He overtops our conception, as being above conception and above being conceived, and above being itself; and in short, Almighty God is inebriated with, and outside of, all good things whatever, as being at once a super-full hyperbole of every immeasurableness of them all; and again, as dwelling outside and beyond the whole. Starting then from these, we will take in the same fashion even the feasting of the pious, in the Kingdom of Almighty God. For He says, the King Himself will come and make them recline, and will Himself minister to them. Now these things manifest a common and concordant communion of the holy,

upon the good things of God, and a church of the first born, whose names are written in heavens; and spirits of just men made perfect by all good things, and replete with all good things; and the reclining, we imagine, a cessation from their many labours, and a life without pain; and a godly citizenship in light and place of living souls, replete with every holy bliss, and an ungrudging provision of every sort of blessed goods; within which they are filled with every delight; whilst Jesus both makes them recline, and ministers to them, and furnishes this delight; and Himself bequeaths their everlasting rest; and at once distributes and pours forth the fulness of good things. SECTION VI.

But, I well know you will further ask that the propitious sleep of Almighty God, and His awakening, should be explained. And, when we have said, that the superiority of Almighty God, and His incommunicability with the objects of His Providence is a Divine sleep, and that the attention to His Providential cares of those who need His discipline, or His preservation, is an awakening, you will pass to other symbols of the Word of God. Wherefore, thinking it superfluous that by running through the same things to the same. persons, we should seem to say different things, and, at the same time, conscious that you assent to things that are good, we finish this letter at what we have said, having set forth, as I think, more than the things solicited in your letters. Further, we send the whole of our Symbolical Theology, within which you will find, together with the house of wisdom, also the seven pillars investigated, and its solid food divided into sacrifices and breads. And what is the mingling of the wine; and again, What is the sickness arising from the inebriety of Almighty God? and in fact, the things now spoken of are explained in it more explicitly. And it is, in

my judgment, a correct enquiry into all the symbols of the Word of God, and agreeable to the sacred traditions and truths of the Oracles.

LETTER X. To John, Theologos, Apostle and Evangelist, imprisoned in the Isle of Patmos.

I salute thee, the holy soul! O beloved one! and this for me is more appropriate than for most. Hail! O truly beloved! And to the truly Loveable and Desired, very beloved! Why should it be a marvel, if Christ speaks truly, and the unjust banish His disciples from their cities , themselves bringing upon themselves their due, and the accursed severing themselves, and departing from the holy. Truly things seen are manifest images of things unseen. For, neither in the ages which are approaching, will Almighty God be Cause of the just separations from Himself, but they by having separated themselves entirely from Almighty God; even as we observe the others, becoming here already with Almighty God, since being lovers of truth, they depart from the proclivities of things material, and love peace in a complete freedom from all things evil, and a Divine love of all things good; and start their purification, even from the present life, by living, in the midst of mankind, the life which is to come, in a manner suitable to angels, with complete cessation of passion, and deification and goodness, and the other good attributes. As for you then, I would never be so crazy as to imagine that you feel any suffering; but I am persuaded that you ate sensible of the bodily sufferings merely to appraise them.

But, as for those who are unjustly treating you, and fancying to imprison, not correctly, the sun of the Gospel, whilst fairly blaming them, I pray that by separating themselves from those things which they are bringing upon themselves they may be turned to the good, and may draw you to themselves, and may participate in the light. But for ourselves, the contrary will not deprive us of the all-luminous ray of John, who are even now about to read the record, and the renewal of this, thy true theology: but shortly after (for I will say it, even though it be rash), about to be united to you yourself. For, I am altogether trustworthy, from having learned, and reading the things made foreknown to you by God, that you will both be liberated from your imprisonment in Patmos, and will return to the Asiatic coast, and will perform there imitations of the good God, and will transmit them to those after you.

LETTER XI. Dionysius to Apollophanes, Philosopher.

At length I send a word to thee, O Love of my heart, and recall to thy memory the many anxieties and solicitudes, which I have formerly undergone on thy account. For thou rememberest with what a mild and benevolent disposition I have been accustomed to rebuke thy obstinacy in error, although with scant reason, in order that I might uproot those vain opinions with which thou wast deceived. But now, adoring the supreme toleration of the Divine long-suffering towards thee, I offer thee my congratulations, O part of my soul, now that you are turning your eyes to your soul's health. For, even the very things which formerly you delighted to spurn, you now delight to affirm; and the things that you used to reject with scorn, you now delight to enforce. For, often have I set before you, and that with great

precision, what even Moses committed to writing, that man was first made by God, from mud, and the sins of the world were punished by the. flood, and in process of time, that the same Moses, united in friendship with God, - performed many wonders, both in Egypt and the exodus from Egypt, by the power and action of the same God. Nor Moses only, but other divine prophets subsequently, published similar things, not infrequently, who long before foretold that God should take the nature of man from a Virgin.

To which statement of mine, not once, but often, you replied, that you did not know whether these things were true, and that you were entirely ignorant, even who that Moses was, and whether he was white or black. Further, that you rejected with scorn the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Who is God of all Majesty----which you used to call mine. Further, that Paul, the globe trotter, and a scatterer of words, who was calling people from things terrestrial to things celestial, you were unwilling to receive. Lastly, you reproach me, as a turncoat, who had left the customs of my country's religion, and was leading people to iniquitous sacrilege, and urged me to unlearn the things in which I was placing my trust; or, at least, that I should put away other people's things, and deem it sufficient to keep what was my own, lest I should be found to detract from the honour due to divine deities, and the institutions of my fathers. But, after the supernal light of the paternal glory of His own will sent the rays of His own splendour upon the darkness of your mind, at once He put into my inmost heart, that I should recall to your mind the whole counsel of God.

How, for instance, when we were staying in Heliopolis (I was then about twenty-five, and your age was nearly the same as mine), on a certain sixth day, and about the sixth hour, the sun, to our great surprise, became obscured, through the moon passing over it, not because it is a god, but because a creature of God, when its very true light was setting, could not bear to shine. Then I earnestly asked thee, what thou, O man most wise, thought of it. Thou, then, gave such an answer as remained fixed in my mind, and that no oblivion, not even that of the image of death, ever allowed to escape. For, when the whole orb had been throughout darkened, by a black mist of darkness, and the sun's disk had begun again to be purged and to shine anew, then taking the table of Philip Aridaeus, and contemplating the orbs of heaven, we learned, what was otherwise well known, that an eclipse of the sun could not, at that time, occur. Next, we observed that the moon approached the sun from the east, and intercepted its rays, until it covered the whole; whereas, at other times, it used to approach from the west. Further also, we noted that when it had reached the extreme edge of the sun, and had covered the whole orb, that it then went back towards the east, although that was a time which called neither for the presence of the moon, nor for the conjunction of the sun.

I therefore, O treasury of manifold learning, since I was incapable of understanding so great a mystery, thus addressed thee----"What thinkest thou of this thing, O Apollophanes, mirror of learning? "Of what mysteries do these unaccustomed portents appear to you to be indications? Thou then, with inspired lips, rather than with speech of human voice, "These are, O excellent Dionysius," thou saidst, "changes of things divine. At last, when I had

taken note of the day and year, and had perceived that, that time, by its testifying signs, agreed with that which Paul announced to me, once when I was hanging upon his lips, then I gave my hand to the truth, and extricated my feet from the meshes of error. Which truth, henceforth, I, with admiration, both preach and urge upon thee----which is life and way, and true light,----which lighteth every man coming into this world,----to which even thou at last, as truly wise, hast yielded. For thou yieldedst to life when thou renounced death. And surely thou hast, at length, acted in the best possible manner, if thou shalt adhere henceforth to the same truth, so as to associate with us more closely. For those lips will henceforth be on our side, by the splendour of whose words, as blunting the edge of my mind, thou hast been accustomed by pretexts brought from various quarters, and by a gorgeous glow of eloquence, to vex the innermost recesses of our breast;----yea, even sometimes to probe us sharply by occasional stings of malice.

Wherefore as formerly, as thou thyself used to say, the knowledge of Christian doctrine, although savoury, was not savoury to thee, but when you had brought yourself to it, merely to taste, it shrank from your mental palate, and as it were, disdained to find a resting-place in your stomach; so now, after you have acquired a heart, intelligent and provident, elevate thyself to things supernal, and do not surrender, for things that are not, things which really are. Therefore in future, be so much more obstinate against those who have urged you to the false, as you showed yourself perverse towards us, when we invited you, with all our force, to the truth. For thus, I, in the Lord Jesus, Whose Presence is my being and my life, will henceforth die joyful, since thou also livest in Him.

End of Dionysius the Areopagite. May his prayer be with us! NOTE, p. 147. The ”twenty hours” which made one day almost equal to three are reckoned thus. A degree represents an hour. The Sun went down ten degrees = ten hours. The Sun had then run already a course of ten hours, from 6 A.M. to 4 P.M. In returning there were ten hours more, and in retracing the route ten hours more, which together make thirty hours. The two hours, to complete the day of twelve hours, make thirty-two hours. The thirty-two hours are four hours less than thirty-six, the time of three days of twelve hours each. One day was thus nearly equal to three. Whatever we may think the facts, the Babylonians commemorated the threefold Mythra ----the Sun----in consequence. See Dulac. [Selected footnotes moved to the end and numbered]

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.