

Bishop Alexander Golitzin, *Mystagogy: A Monastic Reading of Dionysius Areopagita*, translated by Nectarie Dărăban, Deisis Printing House, Sibiu, 2015, 517 p.

Mystagogy: A Monastic Reading of Dionysius Areopagita comes as a comprehensible interpretation of the mesmerizing and controversial thinking of *Corpus Dionysiacum* in the key note of the ascetic-liturgical tradition of his times. The book proposes a plausible solution in line with its enigmatic author, deeply rooted in the Syrian Christian environment.

The book's foreword deals with Dionysius ecclesial and scholarly reception. If 532 is the *ad quem* of the Areopagitica (first mentioned in *Corpus Dionysiacum*), the *a quo* is set around 487, the death of the Neoplatonist philosopher Proclus Diadochus (as mentioned in *Corpus Dionysiacum*). Even sooner, perhaps contemporaneously with or even short before the colloquium, Sergius of Reshaina would translate Dionysius into Syriac language. A century later, Dionysius enjoyed a special attention from St. Maximus the Confessor. During the Middle Ages, from twelfth and especially thirteenth centuries on, he was widely popular, even sensational. Thomas Aquinas quoted him nearly as often as Scripture, apologists for Papal authority saw in his treatises on the hierarchies a support for the vision of the Church. The late medieval Rhineland and England, the great spiritual writers of Counter-Reformation in Spain (Theresa of Avila, San Juan de la Cruz) were all influenced by Dionysius. Despite this tide of admiration, he was never approached so to speak *in toto* by any of his medieval and post-medieval admirers. Component elements of his thinking were dismantled by his supporters and used as feedstock according to several interests of his different admirers. For those of Reformed or Lutheran background, Dionysius became a failed Christian, if not a pagan wolf in Christian's sheep clothing. In brief, we find towards the end of Western Middle Ages an effectively fractured Dionysius. Modern scholarly research on Dionysius focused mainly on the theological evaluation of his relation with Late Neoplatonism. In the chapters to follow, the author

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finds the reason *Corpus Dionysiacum* faces no challenge in the Christian East: Dionysius is an Eastern Christian writer, and moreover, a monastic one: he wrote to and for monks, and monks in return – Eastern ones – have always recognized that fact. They understood him then, and in generally they still understand him now, because they shared and still share common concerns and common theological, liturgical and spiritual values.

Bishop Alexander Golitzin takes a Cook's tour within the 10 letters from *Dionysian Corpus* in Chapter I entitled: „Christian Mysticism and Monastic Mystagogy” where he describes *the Celestial Hierarchy, the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy, the Divine Names, and the Mystical Theology*.

Bishop Golitzin dedicates Chapter II to Dionysian apophaticism, the teaching about the Holy Trinity and the intensification of the essence-energy distinction, the basics of the *Divine Names* theory analyses (p. 33). *The Divine Names* prove to be a Christian's re-working of pagan philosophy in the light of God's revelation in Christ and of prior Christian tradition, that fundamentally alters, or redirects the thrust of pagan Neoplatonist teaching. The Divine Names are not matter or things, they are windows opened into eternity to feel God's presence through His power and divine energies. The key of *Corpus Dionysiacum* is nature and the all-predominance of “one” divine love. It is God Himself who gives Himself, opens Himself to participation, enables the same in His creatures, and so leads them back to Himself (pp. 149-150).

Alexander Golitzin introspects Chapter III where he makes an in-depth analyses over reason-endowed creatures, angels and humans, as each reflection or icon of the divine energies and their capacity for union with God. Created beings do not exist in emptiness. Angels and humans are both living in the same world where they move towards unity with the Creator of all worlds (p. 215). The mystery of extasy and unification in God lies in a unique drifting power and mystery: the love for God. The divine *Eros* propels the transcendence into imanence and installs the creation. The divine *Eros* works within and through the divine reasons transfered in the plane of creation, enjoying a forever presence and sustaining them in a magnetized movement in its direction. This movement and attraction is possible due to *Eros* likeness seeded in creatures, so they will always lust for their source and meaning in their Creator. This logos-analogia relation inherent dynamics heralds the rupture of *Corpus Dionysiacum* from its pagan predecessors and Dionysius duty towards the patristic thinking (p. 214).

The author dedicates the IVth Chapter to the analyses of the two forms of sacred hierarchies: Celestial Hierarchy and Ecclesiastical Hierarchy. The hierarchy is God's intentional reality mirrored in the two worlds of His creation, the sensible world and the intelligible world, both an expression of His Providence (p. 281). Our hierarchy, fulfilled and revealed within our Christian public community cult, is a true God's icon on earth. The union between created and uncreated finds its climax in Incarnation, wherefrom comes the possibility, the luminous power and the ultimate reality one has to discovered in all the icons or symbols. Our hierarchy brings from Eon into present the virtual reality lodged in the incarnated Christ. Jesus is the "place of encounter" and the face of Providence waiting to be discovered in the silence of the Church: matter, gesture and word. The Glory of Church waits for the ray beyond being drawing the revelation of the Eschaton (pp. 282-283).

Alexander Golitzin takes us to Chapter V where he introspects man's fall into sin, the Incarnation of Christ and Holy Mysteries, the ways of God's communication and revelation. The angelic-human bridge was burned by Adam's fall, when we have been delivered to the devil. The Old Testament's iconomy offers to us only a side reflection of *Celestial Hierarchy*. The *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* is the icon of God's "movement" towards us, having in the Incarnation of Christ our only bridge between Him and the angels. The "theurgies" of Christ brings us in position of celebrants at the Cosmic Liturgy. The same "theurgies" mark their presence in the cult. *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* is the icon of the world to come, the sign and presence of the Eschaton (pp. 361-362).

The final chapter finds Alexander Golitzin speaking about the influence Evagrius and Syriac theology had on St. Dionysius, on how *Corpus Dionysiacum* makes its own path for his voice to be heard in the orthodox theology and spirituality to follow.

The structure, content and chapters' presentation is made clear keeping a good order. The book ends up with a comprehensive bibliography.

Alexander Golitzin proves to be an erudite of exception in his knowledge on *Corpus Dionysiacum* as well as a keen analist in specific theological literature.

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