

ABSTRACT

THE WORSHIP WITHIN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH ACCORDING TO THE WORKS OF DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE TOWARDS AN AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN REALITY?

Our PhD thesis entitled *The Worship Within the Orthodox Church according to the works of Dionysius the Areopagite. Towards an authentic Christian reality?* aims to provide an answer to a dilemma that occurred within specialist literature on establishing the intellectual profile of Dionysius – as a philosopher or father of the Church by relying more on the question of authenticity with the Christian approach and less on the philosophical one proposed by the author of the *Corpus*.

In our attempt to advocate an authentic Christian identity for Dionysius, we considered mostly his approach towards a „special Liturgy” developed within his great works (*The Celestial Hierarchy, The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy, The Divine Names* and *The Mystical Theology*). Thus, our paper follows an itinerary that marks the „cardinal points” of a „comparative horizon” whose core provides essential elements of ecclesiastical history of the Church, Patristics, Dogmatics and elements of special Liturgy.

The first chapter entitled „*The current status of research on the Dionysian Corpus*” captures the space allocated for the Areopagite and his works within the specialist literature.

More, this chapter provides a few details that cover the controversial issues related to the author’s identity and the approximate timing when his works were launched.

Moving on, the second chapter – „*The Ancient philosophy and Christianity*” – deals with philosophical issues, such as *Neoplatonism* – considered the mainstream within the “familiar area” of the Dionysian thinking. Thus, from the content of this chapter we mention a factual analysis on Plotin’s philosophy, best known as Plato’s main follower. The analysis relies on the most important elements of Plotin’s thinking in order to highlight the true Neoplatonic doctrine’s essentials.

In addition, the second chapter includes brief a reference on both the „*late Antiquity: between Neoplatonism and Christianity*” and on the “meeting” between Pseudo-Areopagus and some Neoplatonic writers such as Plotinus, Porphyry and Proclus in terms of influences and differences.

The third chapter is a short presentation of the „*Dionysian treaties*” – as around them revolves the whole approach of this paper. It starts with a briefing on *The Celestial Hierarchy*, *The Divine Names* and ends with *The Mystical theology*. *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* is left for a further approach within the paper.

Starting with the fourth and ending with the ninth chapter, there is a detailed approach towards the Dionysian Liturgy. Our aim is to present its „thread” with maximum fidelity.

Thus, entitled „*The Baptism – Sacrament of Illumination*”, the fourth chapter captures a journey into the corresponding ritual. It analyses the sacramental dimension of Baptism and Chrismation by referring to the dogmatic and biblical aspects of the issue and ends with a brief presentation on the writings of some Holy Fathers of our Church concerned with the sacrament of “birth into Christ”.

This chapter also contains important references on the Baptismal Ritual as presented in the “*Liturgical Canon*” and other important sources such as the *The Didache*, *The Apostles’ Constitutions*, *The Egyptian Euchologion* of Serapion of Thmuis, etc.

It continues with a complete description on the Baptismal ritual according to the Dionysian theology and to the Holy Service Books that render the current practice of “*rebirth*” within the Orthodox Church. The description is completed by the end of the chapter with the canonical requirements of the “*Sacrament of the Holy Baptism*”.

The fifth chapter is a debate upon “*Eucharistia and Synaxa*” by quoting the same “*cardinal points*” emphasized in the previous chapter, namely: “*the dogma*” – that offers us a few sacramental realities related to the Holy Eucharist and the Divine Liturgy; “*the biblical*” – that aims at framing the Holy Eucharist and the Divine Liturgy in the “*Old Testament’s foreshadowing*” and within the accomplishing space of the New Law; “*the Patristic*” – or interpretations on the ritual of the Holy Liturgy in the works of: Justin the Philosopher, Theodore of Mopuestia, Saint Maximus the Confessor, Nicolae Cabasila and others; “*the Liturgy*” – by referring to “*major sources*” (such as *The Didache*, *The Apostles’ Constitutions*, *Our Lord’s Will*, etc) and also the current ordinance – along with “*Dionysius the Areopagite’s Liturgy*”; “*the Canonical*” – main source for canonical regulations on accomplishing and offering the Holy Eucharist.

The next chapter, the sixth, offers the image of an indissoluble link between the Great Holy Myrrh and the Church according to the Areopagite’s description. In this respect, the chapter opens with a briefing on the dogmatic plan that is meant to emphasize the presence of Christ the “*Myrrh*” as “*the founder of the Church*”.

On the same sacramental basis, the itinerary of this chapter continues by presenting, in full fidelity, the ritual of consecration of the Great Holy Myrrh as it was reflected in the Barberini Graecus *Euchologion*, Dionysios’ works up to the contemporary practices. Following the previous chapters’ model, the present one is ended up by a canonical approach towards the Great Holy Myrrh.

Like Dionysius, our next approach is on the sacrament of the Divine Ordination, namely the consecration within the three sacerdotal stages: deacon, priest and bishop.

In full consonance with our Christian teaching, the chapter begins with a series of references related to Priesthood and the Old Testament, ending the “biblical space” with a dogmatic view upon Christ’s triple ministry – as prophet, bishop and emperor. These three qualities of Christ are clearly stated within the texts of the New Testament. Considering this factual evidence our approach aims to emphasize the centrality of His Persona within the sacerdotal service.

It then expounds the Ordination ritual according to the statements included in the *Liturgical Canon*, Areopagites’ work and *the Arhieratikon*. Faithful to the models approached in the previous chapters, we applied the same pattern in dealing here with the Sacrament of Ordination and all its canonical requirements.

The next two chapters (the eight and the ninth) enounce throughout their pages major aspects on the sacrament of consecration in monasticism and on the funeral ritual.

Finally, the tenth chapter is intended to be an “angelic” supplement of *The Celestial Hierarchy*, in the manner envisaged by this approach, which is to outline the entire content of the *Dionysian special Liturgy* within Tradition and the contemporary practices. In this respect, the chapter provides a few references to the Patristic literature on the Angelic Beings but also on their worship within the Orthodox Church.

The Dionysian universe is wholly liturgical¹. Thus, “not only *The Hierarchies* own a liturgical evidence but also the philosophical treaties of the Dionysian *Corpus* are referred to the cult and Holy Liturgy: *The Divine Names* is not an abstract treatise upon the theological preaching as it presents the liturgical names of God as they are invoked throughout the doxology and other

¹ Also in Ioan I.Ică Jr., And yet tradition is right. Notes on analyzing the Dionysian Corpus, in Anderw Louth, *Dionysios the Areopagite. An Introduction*, Ed.Deisis,Sibiu,1997, p.24

prayers by the bishop; more, *The Mystical Theology* refers to the bishop's entrance into the hidden altar from the sanctuary as related to the biblical episode of Moses' ascent on the Mount Sinai and his entrance in the divine cloud – similarly the mystical ecstasy and silence from the sanctuary's darkness symbolises the participation within the ultimate mystery of God's Love revealed in Jesus Christ"².

Considering the Areopagites' liturgical perspective, we notice a double movement – “the first one is from outside to inside or from the Church to the altar and it represents the dynamics of the sacramental initiations that start with the purifying rectilinear movement into the Church by means of Baptism, continues with the illuminating helical movement of the Eucharistic Liturgy and accomplishes with the circular movement of the Holy Myrrh from the altar followed in reverse by a movement from the altar to the Church's door and outside it by starting with the bishop's ordinations, then the illuminated presbyters and purified deacons, continues with the monks' spiritual fulfilment, then it illuminates the Christians and purifies the penitents and the catechumens and ends up with the funeral”³.

As we can see, with Saint Dionysius the whole ritual has a spiritual significance for it anticipates heaven from the mundane existence⁴. The sacramental symbol is here icon and forecast of the eternal life, reason not only for “portraying certain events within the Salvation history but it also proves to be mainly an occurrence, a presence and a penetration of the perceivable into the sensitive, of the uncreated into the created, of the unseen into the mundane”⁵.

Finally, browsing through the Dionysian works, we found an authentic divine environment, by integrating the ritual within Tradition and present

² Diac. Ioan I. Ică jr., *From Dionysius to Simeon of Thessaloniki – Complete liturgical interpretations* Ed. Deisis, Sibiu 2011, p. 149.

³ *Ibidem*, p.156.

⁴ Lect. Dr. Ciprian Streza, *The Holy Liturgy – symbol and icon of the Heaven's Kingdom*, in magazine, “RT”, nr. 3 (2008), p. <http://www.revistateologica.ro/articol.php?r=37&a=3578>.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

practices, especially with the Holy Sacraments, an extent of the Christic mystery⁶.

We leave the joy of browsing through the *Conclusions* to the reader. All in all, we are strongly determined to specify that only by appealing the authentic Christian teachings covered entirely by the five main elements – biblical, dogmatic, patristic, liturgical and canonical – the current approach can be considered thoroughly in relation with the aim of the paper.

⁶ Conf. Dr. Ciprian Streza, *The theology of Baptism according to Saint Marcus the Ascet*, in the “RT” magazine, nr. 3 (2009), p. 127-135, <http://www.revistateologica.ro/articol.php?r=33&a=3510>.