

The Celestial Hierarchies and Dionysius the Areopagite

THE NEW TESTAMENT study of St. Paul's speech before the Athenian judges on Mars' Hill (the Areopagus) is of the utmost importance to Esoteric Christianity (Acts 17:22). At this point we become clearly and completely aware of the Greek influence flowing openly into Christianity as it had already been flowing secretly into Judaism since the time of Alexander the Great. One of the Athenian judges became a convert to Christianity and a leading teacher in the new faith. He is Dionysius the Areopagite. The theosophical system attributed to him became the foundation of Christian theosophy and metaphysics. From the School at Athens, together with that at Alexandria in Egypt, came the angelology which was taken to be peculiarly Christian in centuries to come. This included the Platonic doctrine of Pure Intelligences, disembodied Spirit Ideas, archetypal Powers, and the complicated esotericism of the Pythagorean School, as well as the eschatology of the Stoics. At this early time Greek science, called natural philosophy, was not repudiated in favor of the cosmogony of the Old Testament of the Hebrews; that came later.

Thus the Angels in Christian theosophy—a word which came into being in the schools of Alexandria in the second century—took the place of the gods of the ancient pantheons, all gods being “messengers,” *Angeloi*, of One God, the Divine Father in Heaven. The Logos Doctrine, which demonstrated through reason and logic the Intelligence which animated the entire cosmos, was summarized in Christ, as intimated in the Fourth Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word...”; and Philo Judeus, a

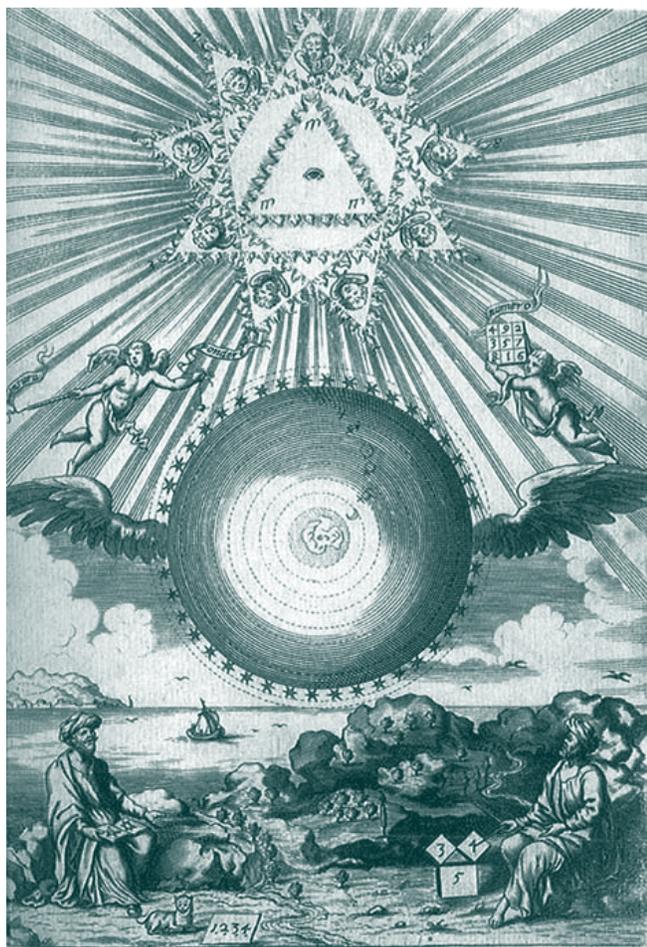


photo: Arno Garrels, Berlin

A. Kircher, *Arithmologia*, Rome, 1665, Stadtbibliothek Mainz

Above the planetary spheres and the zodiac of stars—“Perpetuum Mobile”—is the super-celestial sphere of the enneagram, which represents the 3 x 3 (three triads) divine-hierarchies. According to the terminology of Pseudo-Dionysius (the sixth century descendent of Dionysius the Areopagite), the three orders of angels are called, from highest to lowest, “perfecting,” “illuminating,” and “purifying.”

contemporary of Jesus of Nazareth, spoke of a Logos who was “the Spirit of the Cosmic Process,” the Idea of Ideas.

Dionysius the Areopagite, according to tradition, was instructed in the Mysteries which were revealed to Paul when he was caught up into the Third Heaven; and this included a knowledge of the entire hierarchical structure of the *Angeloi*, from the lowest cosmic plane to the highest. Dionysius showed these *Angeloi* in nine ranks or

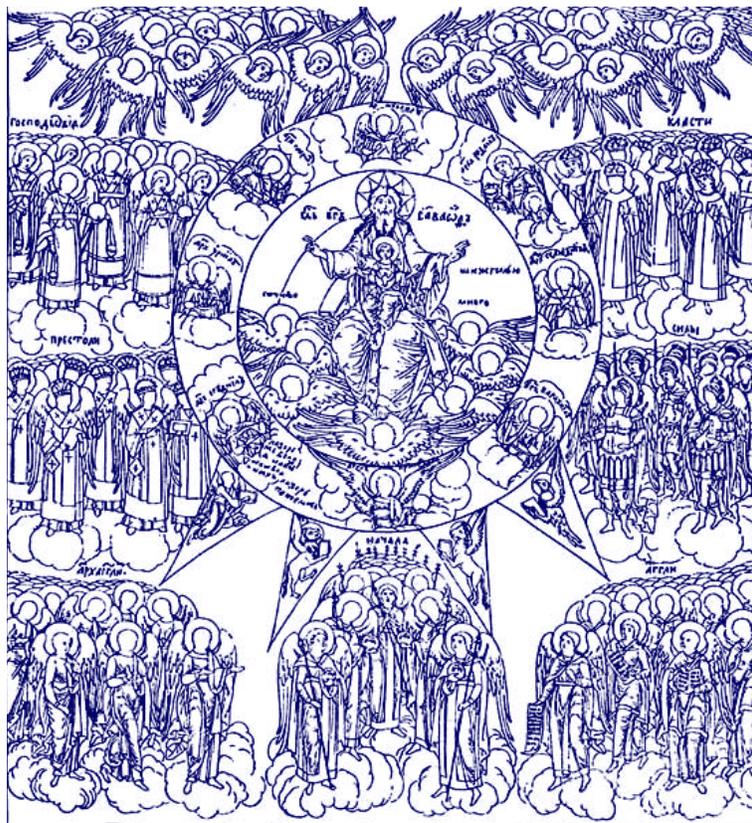
Choirs. In this he followed the esotericism of Egypt, Greece, and Rome, each of whom had a ninefold hierarchy of gods and spirits correlated with the cosmic spheres of the Ptolemaic astronomy. Above these spheres was a Triune Power; below them were mankind and Earth, the foundation stone of the universe, around which the other spheres revolved.

Seven spheres were those in which the planetary bodies revolved—Sun, Moon, and five planets—Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn; the eighth sphere was that of the fixed stars; and the ninth was the Empyrean, which in Christian mysticism is the “abyss of the Trinity” where the soul is plunged into God. From here God rules the world; and in the Greek mythology His providence is symbolized in the three Fates: Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos, who spin, measure, and cut the threads of human life, with each turn of the composite wheel, wheels within wheels.

The nine Choirs are differently tabulated in different places. Some of the Church Fathers destroyed the astronomical correlation in an effort to do away with astrology; still, one can see the basic cosmic structure. The Greco-Roman-Egyptian system was correlated by Christians and Jews with the Old Testament and with the teachings of Jesus. Unlike orthodox believers, the esotericist is convinced that this work of correlating and harmonizing the so-called pagan wisdom with Judaism was done by Christ Jesus Himself, as Hierophant of the new World Mysteries, before Dionysius, and before St. Paul. (Persian and Babylonian influence date from the Exile, and Chaldean influence is as old as Abraham.)

We shall first briefly show how the Dionysian hierarchical system correlates with the list given in the *Cosmo* on page 221; then afterward we shall show the astronomical basis of the Dionysian system as related to the Ptolemaic universe (which is also Aristotelian with a few differences).

On page 221 we see that the Hierarchies which came from Aries and Taurus did a little work in the very dawn of the Saturn Period and then went on



Seventeenth century sketch for a Russian icon of the nine orders of angels enveloping and obedient to the Christian Trinity.

with work elsewhere. Their place has been taken, of course, by other members of those Hierarchies. At the time this happened there was no material universe. Evolution was taking place entirely in the World of Concrete Thought.

The next three Hierarchies, here termed Seraphim, Cherubim, and Lords of Flame (or Thrones, see page 220), are the First Triad of the Dionysian scheme. They are said to have no contact with mankind. The Cosmo says they had gone on to liberation before the dawn of the Earth Period which is all that is dealt with in the Dionysian system. It was they who awakened the germinal threefold Spirit in man, but the Thrones (Lords of Flame) from Leo, in addition to awakening the Divine Spirit, also gave the germ of the dense body.

The following six creative Hierarchies constitute the Second and Third Triads of the Dionysian scheme. The Second Triad—Dominions, Virtues, and Powers—relate to the Hierarchies of Virgo (the most advanced Hierarchy of the Earth Period

who were given charge of the Divine Spirit); Libra, given charge of the Life Spirit; and Scorpio, given charge of the Human Spirit and three seed atoms of the threefold body. The Virgoans are the most advanced Hierarchy of the Earth Period, and are said to have the Earth Period in their charge (*Cosmo*, p. 220). The Lords of Form are the most active Hierarchy of the Earth Period, since in this Period form and materiality are dominant. The Lords of Form are the “Exusiai” (Powers) of the Dionysian system.

The Third Triad consists of the Lords of Mind, Archangels, and Angels, which correlate to Sagittarius, Capricorn, and Aquarius, respectively. Again, Max Heindel explains that the Lords of Mind are termed Principalities in the Bible, and “powers of darkness” because they come from the dark Saturn Period and are separative in their influence. They gave the germ of mind in the Earth Period. Immediately above them are the Powers, lowest of the Second Triad, associated with Scorpio whose Lords of Form have charge of the Human Spirit in the Earth Period and also the three germs of the threefold body.

At the bottom of the diagram on page 221 is Pisces, our own humanity from the constellation Pisces, the feet of the Grand Man of the cosmos. We are “for a little while” lower than the Angels, yet, as Paul says, “Ye are gods,” and at some future time we, too, shall be known as one of the divine Hierarchies.

There are still Twelve Hierarchies which work together not only in the constellations of space, but also among the Creative Hierarchies during the interim between births, and between revolutions and world periods, where their most important work is done, as Max Heindel tells us; for they are most active between Periods, and between revolutions, and between incarnations.

Note that the term Angel is applied to all celestial Hierarchies in a general way as representatives of God and His Will. The term Angel derives from the Greek *Angelos*, (plural, *Angeloi*); while the Hebrew word is *Malachim*. The Book of Malachi is really the Book of the Messenger who promises the coming of the Messiah: “The Sun of Righteousness shall rise with healing in His wings.”

According to Church tradition the Nine Choirs are divided into three Triads in the following manner”:

FIRST TRIAD

Seraphim: Color, red. Divine Love. They fly continually above the throne of God. Six-winged.

Cherubim: Color, blue. Divine Knowledge, Cosmic Wisdom. Shown as heads only, with one, two, or three pairs of wings. Their eyes are large and beautiful. Shakespeare calls them the young-eyed cherubim. They chant the praises of God. Full of fiery centers.

Thrones: Color, green. Associated with Cherubim. They are called Wheels, with eyes round about the rims. These Wheels with their “eyes” represent the star gods of the Seventh Cosmic Plane. They are also called the Footstool of God. Astronomically, they are the stars which circle ceaselessly around the skies on an axis pointing to the North Star. As cosmic beings they do not come into personal contact with Earth and its life waves.

SECOND TRIAD

Governors: Dominions, Virtues, Powers. They govern the Elements (Fire, Air, Water, Earth), and their correlatives in the zodiac. The zodiac has dominion over the entire Earth, ruling its various parts; and they create the horoscopes of all Earth dwellers, together with the Sun and Moon and the five planets of the Ptolemaic system. This second Triad represents the powers of the horoscope, therefore, which govern everything that happens on Earth, and every aspect of the Earth itself, with each land mass ruled by its own zodiacal sign and having its own planetary significator. Thus every part of the Earth stands under its own star and its own sign. Similarly, the individual horoscope shows how the cosmic forces are focused in the human being at his birth into time and space. Yet important as the horoscopical powers may be in outer space, it is overshadowed by the work they do in the Second Heaven between incarnations and also between World Periods and Revolutions of the Globe itself.

THIRD TRIAD

Ministers: Principalities or Princedoms, Archangels, Angels. They are the ministering hosts

mediating between mankind and Earth and the higher powers, working out the Will of God. They come into direct and intimate personal contact with human beings. The Nine Muses of Greece as distinguished from the Nine Great Gods are among these servitors, who inspire the arts and sciences, and guide and guard their charges throughout the vicissitudes of life and death. All are the servants of man, under God.

Here we note that the Archangels are Race Spirits proper, guardians of the people as a whole; but the Princedoms may inspire leaders of cities and nations, regardless of race. They are dynastic Spirits. Dominions may govern land areas irrespective of races and nations living there, and irrespective of dynasties. The Princedom, however, may also be an Archangel as when in the Book of Daniel we read that Michael is “the Prince of your people” (the Jews). Like Homer’s gods who fought against one another in the war of Greeks and Trojans, so these Archangels seem to contend for their people; but Max Heindel has described how their wings of force ray out through and above contending armies, and how the Archangel of one people may allow the defeat of his charges, if he sees that that will serve a constructive purpose.

Each clan, tribe, race, city, or nation has its own tutelary deity or Archangel, called a “god”; and each family its presiding Angel, called the “Genius.” The “Genius” of the Emperor, King, or President has a special power over the nation and the people whom he governs.

It is also true that when any two or three people gather in an organized effort, they call into their collective sphere of consciousness an Angel who represents the archetype of their endeavor as it is shown in the Mind of God; for these Angeloi, these Messengers, are truly as intimate as a man’s breath, and their wings beat with every beat of his heart.

The Cherubim described by Ezekiel are called the Spirits of the Wheels which are Thrones; that is, they govern the Wheels. In the Revised Standard King James Bible we read: “In the midst of the living creatures there was something that looked like burning coals of fire, like torches moving to and fro among the living creatures.” Since they rule the Wheels of star gods, they are Time



William Blake (1757-1827), watercolor, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Ezekiel's Vision

Spirits—collectively, the Spirit of the Year. Ezekiel shows that they represent the four fixed signs of the zodiac and the four seasons, “wheels within wheels.” The god Chronos was similarly pictured in certain ancient temples.

Ezekiel describes a rainbow above the Throne of God like the bow that shines after rain; therefore, with at least the three colors red, blue, and green. John mentions a rainbow about the throne of God which is like an emerald stone, and Ezekiel says the Wheels are like chrysolite, which is also green. The emerald aura is therefore the color of the Thrones.

Astronomically the eyes in the rim of the wheels are the circling stars, whose axis of rotation points to the north; but esoterically it is known that the threefold aura of mankind is also “full of eyes” round about and within, as John describes it. These have developed in the Earth Period. There were no sense centers in the desire body in the Moon Period.

The etheric body has many centers, some of which pertain to spiritual development. The



Watercolor, William Blake, Tate Gallery, London

Beatrice and Dante

The poet finds his Ideal (Beauty-Truth) girded by a ring of blue flames permeated with angelic eyes and four haloed heads of the zodiacal archetypes.

Golden Wedding Garment possesses five centers (eyes) which relate to one another as the points of a star. The desire body has seven main centers, situated deep within the aura. The mental sheath is still embryonic but centers are developing in the head area and above it, which sometimes resemble jewels set in a crown of iridescent or golden light, according to certain seers.

As the God powers of the threefold Spirit are unfolding, the Ego is able to permeate its bodies with new creative forces, and to unfold the “blossoms” of the threefold body-sheaths. Then the composite threefold aura becomes “full of eyes,” and when fully unfolded the glory is brighter than many suns, and the rainbow colors of the Triune Godhead encircle the body of the God Man in layers expanding to infinity. Vision and other spiritual powers are not restricted to the “sense centers” in the auras, however. A Greek sage said that God was Mind or Spirit and that “as a whole He sees, as a whole He hears, and as a whole He thinks.” A Hebrew teacher echoes this thought when he salutes God as “Thou Eye that seest, thou Ear that hearest.” So also the God-Being whose vision has opened upon cosmic vistas hears and feels with his whole being. His consciousness has become a “seamless robe” like that of the Christ.

We may point out that according to orthodox

Angelology, which has repudiated the physical and the spiritual concepts of evolution, each human Spirit, and each Angel, is created for one position or function in the universe, and this remains his place forever. Yet the divine Grace fills each being with a consciousness of its worth in the eyes of God, even though its place be a humble one, for all eternity; he is still able, through the inflowing Grace of God, to find supreme bliss in enjoying the good and beauty of those above him. The difference between this viewpoint and that of Max Heindel’s *Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception* is that in the latter the concept of evolution is introduced. Not only does man evolve through lower forms to become man, by way of

rebirth; but also the Angels are evolving, from lower to higher forms, or from one glory to another glory, in the divine economy.

The doctrine of rebirth is a spiritual theory of evolution, and it was well known not only in antiquity, but also in the Middle Ages. We quote in conclusion a poem from the poet of Persia, Jalalu’d-Din Rumi, who lived from 1207 to 1273, to show what kind of thinking was being done in that time:

*I died from the mineral and became a plant;
I died from the plant and reappeared in an
animal;*

*I died from the animal and became a man;
Wherefore then should I fear?*

When did I grow less by dying?

Next time I shall die from the man

That I may grow the wings of angels.

From the angel, too, must I seek advance;

“All things shall perish save His face.”

*Once more shall I wing my way above
the angel;*

*I shall become that which entereth not the
imagination.*

*Then let me grow naught, naught; for the
harp string crieth unto me,*

“Verily, unto Him do we return.” □

—Ann Barkhurst