

The Works of Dionysius.

Extant Fragments.



Part I.—Containing Various Sections of the Works.

I.—From the Two Books on the Promises.⁶¹²

1. But as they produce a certain composition by Nepos,⁶¹³ on which they insist very strongly, as if it demonstrated incontestably that there will be a (temporal) reign of Christ upon the earth, I have to say, that in many other respects I accept the opinion of Nepos, and love him at once for his faith, and his laboriousness, and his patient study in the Scriptures, as also for his great efforts in psalmody,⁶¹⁴ by which even now many of the brethren are

612 In opposition to Noëtus, a bishop in Egypt. Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, vii. 24 and 25. Eusebius introduces this extract in the following terms: “There are also two books of his on the subject of the promises. The occasion of writing these was furnished by a certain Nepos, a bishop in Egypt, who taught that the promises which were given to holy men in the sacred Scriptures were to be understood according to the Jewish sense of the same; and affirmed that there would be some kind of a millennial period, plenished with corporeal delights, upon this earth. And as he thought that he could establish this opinion of his by the Revelation of John, he had composed a book on this question, entitled *Refutation of the Allegorists*. This, therefore, is sharply attacked by Dionysius in his books on the Promises. And in the first of these books he states his own opinion on the subject; while in the second he gives us a discussion on the Revelation of John, in the introduction to which he makes mention of Nepos.” [Of this Noëtus, see the *Philosophumena*, vol. v., this series.]

613 As it is clear from this passage that this work by Dionysius was written against Nepos, it is strange that, in his preface to the eighteenth book of his Commentaries on Isaiah, Jerome should affirm it to have been composed against Irenæus of Lyons. Irenæus was certainly of the number of those who held millennial views, and who had been persuaded to embrace such by Papias, as Jerome himself tells us in the *Catalogus* and as Eusebius explains towards the close of the third book of his *History*. But that this book by Dionysius was written not against Irenæus but against Nepos, is evident, not only from this passage in Eusebius, but also from Jerome himself, in his work *On Ecclesiastical Writers*, where he speaks of Dionysius.—Vales. [Compare (this series, *infra*) the comments of Victorinus of Petau for a Western view of the millennial subject.]

614 τῆς πολλῆς ψαλμωδίας. Christophorusonus interprets this of psalms and hymns composed by Nepos. It was certainly the practice among the ancient Christians to compose psalms and hymns in honour of Christ.

delighted. I hold the man, too, in deep respect still more, inasmuch as⁶¹⁵ he has gone to his rest before us. Nevertheless the truth is to be prized and revered above all things else. And while it is indeed proper to praise and approve ungrudgingly anything that is said aright, it is no less proper to examine and correct anything which may appear to have been written unsoundly. If he had been present then himself, and had been stating his opinions orally, it would have been sufficient to discuss the question together without the use of writing, and to endeavour to convince the opponents, and carry them along by interrogation and reply. But the work is published, and is, as it seems to some, of a very persuasive character; and there are unquestionably some teachers, who hold that the law and the prophets are of no importance, and who decline to follow the Gospels, and who depreciate the epistles of the apostles, and who have also made large promises⁶¹⁶ regarding the doctrine of this composition, as though it were some great and hidden mystery, and who, at the same time, do not allow that our simpler brethren have any sublime and elevated conceptions either of our Lord's appearing in His glory and His true divinity, or of our own resurrection from the dead, and of our being gathered together to Him, and assimilated to Him, but, on the contrary, endeavour to lead them to hope⁶¹⁷ for things which are trivial and corruptible, and only such as what we find at present in the kingdom of God. And since this is the case, it becomes necessary for us to discuss this subject with our brother Nepos just as if he were present.

Eusebius bears witness to this in the end of the fifth book of his *History*. Mention is made of these psalms in the Epistle of the Council of Antioch against Paul of Samosata, and in the penultimate canon of the Council of Laodicea, where there is a clear prohibition of the use of ψαλμοὶ ἰδιωτικοί in the church, i.e., of psalms composed by private individuals. For this custom had obtained great prevalence, so that many persons composed psalms in honour of Christ, and got them sung in the church. It is psalms of this kind, consequently, that the Fathers of the Council of Laodicea forbid to be sung thereafter in the church, designating them ἰδιωτικοί, i.e., composed by unskilled men, and not dictated by the Holy Spirit. Thus is the matter explained by Agobardus in his book *De ritu canendi psalmos in Ecclesia*.—Vales. [See vol. v., quotation from Pliny.]

615 ταυτῇ μᾶλλον ἢ προανεπαύσατο: it may mean, perhaps, *for the way in which he has gone to his rest before us*.

616 κατεπαγγελλομένων, i.e., *diu ante promittunt quam tradunt*. The metaphor is taken from the mysteries of the Greeks, who were wont to promise great and marvellous discoveries to the initiated, and then kept them on the rack by daily expectation, in order to confirm their judgment and reverence by such suspense in the conveyance of knowledge, as Tertullian says in his book *Against the Valentinians*.—Vales. [Vol. iii. p. 503.]

617 Reading ἐλπίζειν ἀναπειθόντων for ἐλπιζόμενα πειθόντων, with the Codex Mazarin.

2. *After certain other matters, he adds the following statement:*—Being then in the Arsinoitic⁶¹⁸ prefecture—where, as you are aware, this doctrine was current long ago, and caused such division, that schisms and apostasies took place in whole churches—I called together the presbyters and the teachers among the brethren in the villages, and those of the brethren also who wished to attend were present. I exhorted them to make an investigation into that dogma in public. Accordingly, when they had brought this book before us, as though it were a kind of weapon or impregnable battlement, I sat with them for three days in succession from morning till evening, and attempted to set them right on the subjects propounded in the composition. Then, too, I was greatly gratified by observing the constancy of the brethren, and their love of the truth, and their docility and intelligence, as we proceeded, in an orderly method, and in a spirit of moderation, to deal with questions, and difficulties, and concessions. For we took care not to press, in every way and with jealous urgency, opinions which had once been adopted, even although they might appear to be correct.⁶¹⁹ Neither did we evade objections alleged by others; but we endeavoured as far as possible to keep by the subject in hand, and to establish the positions pertinent to it. Nor, again, were we ashamed to change our opinions, if reason convinced us, and to acknowledge the fact; but rather with a good conscience, and in all sincerity, and with open hearts⁶²⁰ before God, we accepted all that could be established by the demonstrations and teachings of the Holy Scriptures. And at last the author and introducer of this doctrine, whose name was Coracion, in the hearing of all the brethren present, made acknowledgment of his position, and engaged to us that he would no longer hold by his opinion, nor discuss it, nor mention it, nor teach it, as he had been completely convinced by the arguments of those opposed to it. The rest of the brethren, also, who were present, were delighted with the conference, and with the conciliatory spirit and the harmony exhibited by all.

3. *Then, a little further on, he speaks of the Revelation of John as follows:*—Now some before our time have set aside this book, and repudiated it entirely, criticising it chapter by

618 ἐν μὲν οὖν τῷ Ἀρσινοειτίῃ. In the three codices here, as well as in Nicephorus and Ptolemy, we find this scrip-tion, although it is evident that the word should be written Ἀρσινοειτιη, as the district took its name from Queen Arsinoe.—Vales.

619 εἰ καὶ φαίνοντο. There is another reading, εἰ καὶ μὴ φαίνοντο, *although they might not appear to be correct*. Christophorsonus renders it: ne illis quæ fuerant ante ab ipsis decreta, si quidquam in eis veritati repugnare videretur, mordicus adhærent præcavebant.

620 ἠπλωμένας ταῖς καρδίαις. Christophorsonus renders it, *puris erga Deum ac simplicibus animis*; Musculus gives, *cordibus ad Deum expansis*; and Rufinus, *patefactis cordibus*. [The picture here given of a primitive synod searching the Scriptures under such a presidency, and exhibiting such tokens of brotherly love, mutual subordination (1 Pet. v. 5), and a prevailing love of the truth, is to me one of the most fascinating of patristic sketches. One cannot but reflect upon the contrast presented in every respect by the late Council of the Vatican.]

chapter, and endeavouring to show it to be without either sense or reason. They have alleged also that its title is false; for they deny that John is the author. Nay, further, they hold that it can be no sort of revelation, because it is covered with so gross and dense a veil of ignorance. They affirm, therefore, that none of the apostles, nor indeed any of the saints, nor any person belonging to the Church, could be its author; but that Cerinthus,⁶²¹ and the heretical sect founded by him, and named after him the Cerinthian sect, being desirous of attaching the authority of a great name to the fiction propounded by him, prefixed that title to the book. For the doctrine inculcated by Cerinthus is this: that there will be an earthly reign of Christ; and as he was himself a man devoted to the pleasures of the body, and altogether carnal in his dispositions, he fancied⁶²² that that kingdom would consist in those kinds of gratifications on which his own heart was set,—to wit, in the delights of the belly, and what comes beneath the belly, that is to say, in eating and drinking, and marrying, and in other things under the guise of which he thought he could indulge his appetites with a better grace,⁶²³ such as festivals, and sacrifices, and the slaying of victims. But I, for my part, could not venture to set this book aside, for there are many brethren who value it highly. Yet, having formed an idea of it as a composition exceeding my capacity of understanding, I regard it as containing a kind of hidden and wonderful intelligence on the several subjects which come under it. For though I cannot comprehend it, I still suspect that there is some deeper sense underlying the words. And I do not measure and judge its expressions by the standard of my own reason, but, making more allowance for faith, I have simply regarded them as too lofty for my comprehension; and I do not forthwith reject what I do not understand, but I am only the more filled with wonder at it, in that I have not been able to discern its import.⁶²⁴

4. *After this, he examines the whole book of the Revelation; and having proved that it cannot possibly be understood according to the bald, literal sense, he proceeds thus:*—When the prophet now has completed, so to speak, the whole prophecy, he pronounces those blessed who should observe it, and names himself, too, in the number of the same: “For

621 This passage is given substantially by Eusebius also in book iii. c. 28.

622 The text gives *ὄνειροπολεῖν*, for which for which *ὄνειροπολεῖ* or *ὄνειροπόλει* is to be read.

623 *δι’ ὧν εὐφημότερον ταῦτα ὤήθη ποριεῖσθαι*. The old reading was *εὐθυμότερον*; but the present reading is given in the mss., Cod. Maz., and Med., as also in Eusebius, iii. 28, and in Nicephorus, iii. 14. So Rufinus renders it: *et ut aliquid sacratius dicere videretur, legales aiebat festiuitates rursum celebrandas*. [These gross views of millennial perfection entailed upon subsequent ages a reactionary neglect of the study of the Second Advent. A Papal aphorism, preserved by Roscoe, embodies all this: “Sub umbilico nulla religio.” It was fully exemplified, even under Leo X.]

624 [The humility which moderates and subdues our author’s pride of intellect in this passage is, to me, most instructive as to the limits prescribed to argument in what Coleridge calls “the faith of reason.”]

blessed,” says he, “is he that keepeth the words of the prophecy of this book; and I John *who* saw and heard these things.”⁶²⁵ That this person was called John, therefore, and that this was the writing of a John, I do not deny. And I admit further, that it was also the work of some holy and inspired man. But I could not so easily admit that this was the apostle, the son of Zebedee, the brother of James, and the same person with him who wrote the Gospel which bears the title *according to John*, and the catholic epistle. But from the character of both, and the forms of expression, and the whole disposition and execution⁶²⁶ of the book, I draw the conclusion that the authorship is not his. For the evangelist nowhere else subjoins his name, and he never proclaims himself either in the Gospel or in the epistle.

And a little further on he adds:—John, moreover, nowhere gives us the name, whether as of himself directly (in the first person), or as of another (in the third person). But the writer of the Revelation puts himself forward at once in the very beginning, for he says: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which He gave to him to show to His servants quickly; and He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, who bare record of the Word of God, and of his testimony, and of all things that he saw.”⁶²⁷ And then he writes also an epistle, in which he says: “John to the seven churches which are in Asia, grace be unto you, and peace.” The evangelist, on the other hand, has not prefixed his name even to the catholic epistle; but without any circumlocution, he has commenced at once with the mystery of the divine revelation itself in these terms: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes.”⁶²⁸ And on the ground of such a revelation as that the Lord pronounced Peter blessed, when He said: “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.”⁶²⁹ And again in the second epistle, which is ascribed to John, the apostle, and in the third, though they are indeed brief, John is not set before us by name; but we find simply the anonymous writing, “The elder.” This other author, on the contrary, did not even deem it sufficient to name himself once, and then to proceed with his narrative; but he takes up his name again, and says: “I John, who also am your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos for the Word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.”⁶³⁰ And likewise toward the end he speaks thus: “Blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book; and I John

625 [Rev. xxii. 7, 8.](#)

626 διεξαγωγῆς λεγομένης. Musculus renders it *tractatum libri*; Christophorsonus gives *discursum*; and Valesius takes it as equivalent to οἰκονομίαν, as διεξαγαγεῖν is the same as διοικεῖν.

627 [Rev. i. 1, 2.](#)

628 [1 John i. 1.](#)

629 [Matt. xvi. 17.](#)

630 [Rev. i. 9.](#)

who saw these things and heard them.”⁶³¹ That it is a John, then, that writes these things we must believe, for he himself tells us.

5. What John this is, however, is uncertain. For he has not said, as he often does in the Gospel, that he is the disciple beloved by the Lord, or the one that leaned on His bosom, or the brother of James, or one that was privileged to see and hear the Lord. And surely he would have given us some of these indications if it had been his purpose to make himself clearly known. But of all this he offers us nothing; and he only calls himself our brother and companion, and the witness of Jesus, and one blessed with the seeing and hearing of these revelations. I am also of opinion that there were many persons of the same name with John the apostle, who by their love for him, and their admiration and emulation of him, and their desire to be loved by the Lord as he was loved, were induced to embrace also the same designation, just as we find many of the children of the faithful called by the names of Paul and Peter.⁶³² There is, besides, another John mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, with the surname Mark, whom Barnabas and Paul attached to themselves as companion, and of whom again it is said: “And they had also John to their minister.”⁶³³ But whether this is the one who wrote the Revelation, I could not say. For it is not written that he came with them into Asia. But the writer says: “Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem.”⁶³⁴ I think, therefore, that it was some other one of those who were in Asia. For it is said that there were two monuments in Ephesus, and that each of these bears the name of John.

631 [Rev. xxii. 7, 8.](#)

632 It is worth while to note this passage of Dionysius on the ancient practice of the Christians, in giving their children the names of Peter and Paul, which they did both in order to express the honour and affection in which they held these saints, and to secure that their children might be dear and acceptable to God, just as those saints were. Hence it is that Chrysostom in his first volume, in his oration on St. Meletius, says that the people of Antioch had such love and esteem for Meletius, that the parents called their children by his name, in order that they might have their homes adorned by his presence. And the same Chrysostom, in his twenty-first homily on Genesis, exhorts his hearers not to call their children carelessly by the names of their grandfathers, or great-grandfathers, or men of fame; but rather by the names of saintly men, who have been shining patterns of virtue, in order that the children might be fired with the desire of virtue by their example.—Vales. [A chapter in the history of civilization might here be given on the origin of Christian names and on the motives which should influence Christians in the bestowal of names. The subject is treated, after Plato, by De Maistre.]

633 [Acts xiii. 5.](#)

634 [Acts xiii. 13.](#)

6. And from the ideas, and the expressions, and the collocation of the same, it may be very reasonably conjectured that this one is distinct from that.⁶³⁵ For the Gospel and the Epistle agree with each other, and both commence in the same way. For the one opens thus, “In the beginning was the Word;” while the other opens thus, “That which was from the beginning.” The one says: “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us; and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father.”⁶³⁶ The other says the same things, with a slight alteration: “That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life: and the life was manifested.”⁶³⁷ For these things are introduced by way of prelude, and in opposition, as he has shown in the subsequent parts, to those who deny that the Lord is come in the flesh. For which reason he has also been careful to add these words: “And that which we have seen we testify, and show unto you that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us: that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you.”⁶³⁸ Thus he keeps to himself, and does not diverge inconsistently from his subjects, but goes through them all under the same heads and in the same phraseologies, some of which we shall briefly mention. Thus the attentive reader will find the phrases, “the life,” “the light,” occurring often in both; and also such expressions as *fleeing from darkness, holding the truth, grace, joy, the flesh and the blood of the Lord, the judgment, the remission of sins, the love of God toward us, the commandment of love on our side toward each other; as also, that we ought to keep all the commandments, the conviction of the world, of the devil, of Antichrist, the promise of the Holy Spirit, the adoption of God, the faith* required of us in all things, *the Father and the Son*, named as such everywhere. And altogether, through their whole course, it will be evident that the Gospel and the Epistle are distinguished by one and the same character of writing. But the Revelation is totally different, and altogether distinct from this; and I might almost say that it does not even come near it, or border upon it. Neither does



635 This is the second argument by which Dionysius reasoned that the Revelation and the Gospel of John are not by one author. For the first argument he used in proof of this is drawn from the character and usage of the two writers; and this argument Dionysius has prosecuted up to this point. Now, however, he adduces a second argument, drawn from the words and ideas of the two writers, and from the collocation of the expressions. For, with Cicero, I thus interpret the word σύνταξις. See the very elegant book of Dionysius Hal. entitled Περὶ συντάξεως ὀνομάτων—On the Collocation of Names; although in this passage σύνταξις appears to comprehend the disposition of sentences as well as words. Further, from this passage we can see what experience Dionysius had in criticism; for it is the critic’s part to examine the writings of the ancients, and distinguish what is genuine and authentic from what is spurious and counterfeit.—Vales.

636 John i. 14.

637 1 John i. 1, 2.

638 1 John i. 2, 3.

it contain a syllable in common with these other books. Nay more, the Epistle—for I say nothing of the Gospel—does not make any mention or evince any notion of the Revelation and the Revelation, in like manner, gives no note of the Epistle. Whereas Paul gives some indication of his revelations in his epistles; which revelations, however, he has not recorded in writing by themselves.

7. And furthermore, on the ground of difference in diction, it is possible to prove a distinction between the Gospel and the Epistle on the one hand, and the Revelation on the other. For the former are written not only without actual error as regards the Greek language, but also with the greatest elegance, both in their expressions and in their reasonings, and in the whole structure of their style. They are very far indeed from betraying any barbarism or solecism, or any sort of vulgarism, in their diction. For, as might be presumed, the writer possessed the gift of both kinds of discourse,⁶³⁹ the Lord having bestowed both these capacities upon him, viz., that of knowledge and that of expression. That the author of the latter, however, saw a revelation, and received knowledge and prophecy, I do not deny. Only I perceive that his dialect and language are not of the exact Greek type, and that he employs barbarous idioms, and in some places also solecisms. These, however, we are under no necessity of seeking out at present. And I would not have any one suppose that I have said these things in the spirit of ridicule; for I have done so only with the purpose of setting right this matter of the dissimilarity subsisting between these writings.⁶⁴⁰

639 The old reading was, τὸν λόγον, τὴν γνώσιν. Valesius expunges the τὴν γνώσιν, as disturbing the sense, and as absent in various codices. Instead also of the reading, τὸν τε τῆς σοφίας, τὸν τε τῆς γνώσεως, the same editor adopts τὸν τε τῆς γνώσεως, τὸν τε τῆς φράσεως, which is the reading of various manuscripts, and is accepted in the translation. Valesius understands that by the ἐκάτερον λόγον Dionysus means the λόγος ἐνδιάθετος and the λόγος προφορικός, that is, the subjective discourse, or reason in the mind, and the objective discourse, or utterance of the same.

640 [The jealousy with which, while the canon of New Testament Scripture was forming, every claim was sifted, is well illustrated in this remarkable essay. Observe its critical skill and the fidelity with which he exposes the objections based on the style and classicality of the Evangelist. The Alexandrian school was one of bold and original investigation, always subject in spirit, however, to the great canon of Prescription.]