

The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy¹

1. This treatise is also translated and copiously annotated in Thomas L. Campbell's 1955 doctoral dissertation at the Catholic University of America under Dr. Johannes Quasten. It was published without change in 1981 (see bibliography). Although Campbell's notes do not reflect the intervening work of, for example, R. Roques, they should be consulted regarding the complex patristic precedents for the rites here discussed.

CHAPTER ONE

169

*Dionysius the Elder to Timothy the Fellow-Elder: What is the tradition of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and what is its purpose?*²

1 2A

1. Most sacred of sacred sons: Our hierarchy consists of an inspired, divine, and divinely worked understanding, activity, and perfection. With the aid of the transcendent and most sacred scriptures, I must demonstrate this to those who have been initiated in the sacrament of the sacred mystagogy by our hierarchy's mysteries and traditions.³

But see to it that you do not betray the holy of holies. Let your respect for the things of the hidden God be shown in knowledge that comes from the intellect and is unseen. Keep these things of God unshared and undefiled by the uninitiated. Let your sharing of the sacred befit the sacred things: Let it be by way of sacred enlightenment for sacred men only.⁴ Indeed the Word of God teaches those of us who are its disciples that in this fashion—though more clearly and more intellectually—Jesus enlightens our blessed superiors,⁵ Jesus who is transcendent mind, utterly divine mind, who is the source and the

2. The authenticity of the titles and subtitles in this treatise, and in most of the corpus, is extremely doubtful. See DN 1, note 2, on the terms "elder" and "fellow-elder," and on the general literature. Even the term "ecclesiastical" in this title and subtitle is inconsistent with the rest of the treatise where the human hierarchy is always called "our hierarchy" (EH 1 369 10, EH 1 377A 3f., EH 6 536D 45f.). In the body of the text, the term "ecclesiastical" refers not to the whole range of rites and offices but only to the assembly gathered at worship (EH 3 425B 27f.; see the nominal form "ecclesia" in EH 2 393C 35, 396A 11, EH 3 425C 39, and 445A 1). B. Brons, *Gott und die Seienden*, p. 65.

3. In the Dionysian vocabulary the word "mystagogy" is to be understood almost literally as guidance into something mysterious or secretly revealed, such as the meaning of baptism's triple immersion (EH 2 404BC 22–28). See the other uses, verbal and nominal, in CH 4 181B 16, CH 5 200C 13, CH 13 305A 13, EH 3 440C 32, MT 1 1000A 9, and Ep. 9 1105D 52f.

The term "mystery" has several shades of meaning in the corpus: ineffable conceptions regarding divine things in general (MT 1 997A 12, Ep. 9 1104B 16) and the incarnation in particular (CH 4 181B 13 and 21, DN 2 640C 34, Ep. 3 1069B 19), certain sacred ceremonies (EH 3 429C 27, EH 5 505B 17, Ep. 8 1097B 24, Ep. 9 1108A 1), and the eucharistic elements themselves (EH 3 445A 1–3, EH 6 533C 29 and 536C 33). The use of the singular form as the name of a specific rite is found in the subtitles only: baptism (EH 2 393A 1), the synaxis (EH 3 425B 20), the ointment or "myron" (EH 4 473A 1), ordination (EH 5 509A 8), tonsure (EH 6 533A 11), and funerals (EH 7 556B 25). This pattern may also suggest an editor's hand (see note 2 above). The body of the text never classifies these six rites together but identifies only the first three as the triad of sacraments (see EH 4, note 138, on the term "sacrament").

4. An admonition to secrecy is also found at the end of the chapter (377AB 12–21), CH 2 145C and MT 1 1000A 4–8. See note 15 below for secrecy as one of the two stated reasons for using symbols in the Bible and in the liturgy.

5. The author does not mean human superiors but rather the celestial beings of the angelic hierarchy (see note 7 below).

being underlying all hierarchy, all sanctification, all the workings of God, who is the ultimate in divine power. He assimilates them, as much as they are able, to his own light. As for us, with that yearning for beauty which raises us upward (and which is raised up) to him, he pulls together all our many differences. He makes our life, disposition, and activity something one and divine, and he bestows on us the power appropriate to a sacred priesthood.

Approaching therefore the holy activity of the sacred office we come closer to those beings who are superior to us. We imitate as much as we can their abiding, unwavering, and sacred constancy, and we thereby come to look up to the blessed and ultimately divine ray of Jesus himself. Then, having sacredly beheld whatever can be seen, enlightened by the knowledge of what we have seen, we shall then be able to be consecrated and consecrators of this mysterious understanding. Formed of light, initiates in God's work,⁶ we shall be perfected and bring about perfection.

2. You will find that I have already written about the hierarchy of angels, archangels, and transcendent principalities, of authorities, powers, and dominions, and of divine thrones and those beings named cherubim and seraphim in Hebrew, who are of equal order with the thrones and of whom the Word of God says that they are always and forever near God and with God. I wrote about the holy order and divisions of their ranks and of their hierarchies. I wrote praising this heavenly hierarchy, not as they deserve, but to the extent that was possible and as the Word of God in the most sacred writings led the way.⁷

Nevertheless, it is still necessary to discuss how that hierarchy and every hierarchy, including the one being praised by us now, has one and the same power throughout all its hierarchical endeavor, namely the hierarch himself, and how its being and proportion and order are in him divinely perfected and deified, and are then imparted to those below him according to their merit, whereas the sacred deification occurs in him directly from God.⁸ Subordinates, in turn, are to pursue their superiors and they also promote the advance of those below them, while these too, as they go forward, are led by others.

6. For "theurgy" as "God's work," especially in the incarnation, see DN 1, note 11.

7. This reference to *The Celestial Hierarchy* is part of the transition from that treatise to the current work. Further comparisons of the human and the angelic hierarchies follow in 373AB 7–20 and 376BC (note 13); see also CH 7 208BCD and EH 5 501A–D.

8. Cf. EH 5 505AB 10–22.

And so it happens that because of this inspired, hierarchical harmony each one is able to have as great as possible a share in him who is truly beautiful, wise, and good.

Of course, as I have said already, those beings and those orders which are superior to us are also incorporeal. Their hierarchy belongs to the domain of the conceptual and is something out of this world. We see our human hierarchy, on the other hand, as our nature allows, pluralized in a great variety of perceptible symbols lifting us upward hierarchically until we are brought as far as we can be into the unity of divinization. The heavenly beings, because of their intelligence, have their own permitted conceptions of God. For us, on the other hand, it is by way of the perceptible images that we are uplifted as far as we can be to the contemplation of what is divine.⁹ Actually, it is the same one whom all one-like beings desire, but they do not participate in the same way in this one and the same being. Rather, the share of the divine is apportioned to each in accordance with merit.

This, however, is something which I dealt with more clearly when I was discussing *The Conceptual and the Perceptible*.¹⁰ For the present, therefore, I will only seek to describe our own hierarchy, to discuss its source and its being, and to do so having first called upon Jesus, the source and the perfection of every hierarchy.

3. We have a venerable sacred tradition which asserts that every hierarchy is the complete expression of the sacred elements comprised within it. It is the perfect total of all its sacred constituents. Our own hierarchy is therefore said to embrace every one of its sacred constituents. Thanks to this, the divine hierarch, following upon his consecration, will attend to all his most sacred activities. Indeed this is why he is called a "hierarch." Indeed, if you talk of "hierarchy" you are referring in effect to the arrangement of all the sacred realities. Talk of "hierarch" and one is referring to a holy and inspired man, someone who understands all sacred knowledge, someone in whom an entire hierarchy is completely perfected and known.¹¹

9. For other summary statements on the role of perceptible symbols (biblical and liturgical) in the uplifting or "anagogical" movement, see DN 4 705B 19–21, CH 1 124A 12f., EH 1 377A 4f., and EH 5 501D 44–46.

10. This treatise is either lost or completely fictitious. See EH 2 397C 31, Ep. 9 1108C 32–37, and the previous note for other references to the subject indicated by this title.

11. Although the term "hierarch" had a prehistory designating a cultic leader, the derivation "hierarchy" was new with Dionysius, at least in the sense that he and subsequent

THE ECCLESIASTICAL HIERARCHY

373D The source of this hierarchy is the font of life,¹² the being of goodness, the one cause of everything, namely, the Trinity which in goodness bestows being and well-being on everything. Now this blessed Deity which transcends everything and which is one and also triune has resolved, for reasons unclear to us but obvious to itself, to ensure the salvation of rational beings, both ourselves and those beings who are our superiors. This can only happen with the divinization of the saved. And divinization consists of being as much as possible like and in union with God.

376A The common goal of every hierarchy consists of the continuous love of God and of things divine, a love which is sacredly worked out in an inspired and unique way, and, before this, the complete and unswerving avoidance of everything contrary to it. It consists of a knowledge of beings as they really are. It consists of both the seeing and the understanding of sacred truth. It consists of an inspired participation in the one-like perfection and in the one itself, as far as possible. It consists of a feast upon that sacred vision which nourishes the intellect and which divinizes everything rising up to it.

376B 4. What we must say is this. The blessed Deity which of itself is God, is the source of all divinization. Out of its divine generosity it grants to the divinized the fact of this divinization. It has bestowed hierarchy as a gift to ensure the salvation and divinization of every being endowed with reason and intelligence. It has given it in a more immaterial and intellectual fashion to those who are blessedly above this world. (For it is not from without that God stirs them toward the divine. Rather he does so via the intellect and from within and he willingly enlightens them with a ray that is pure and immaterial.) As for us, this gift which the heavenly beings have received uniquely and unitedly has been passed on to us by the divinely transmitted scriptures in a way suited to us, that is, by means of the variety and abundance of composite symbols. Hence, the being of our hierarchy is laid down by the divinely transmitted scriptures. Furthermore, we say that these writings are to be honored, whatever our inspired sacred

generations used it (J. Stiglmayr, "Über die Termini Hierarch und Hierarchie" *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie* 22 [1898]: 180–87). The general definition of "hierarchy" is also discussed in CH 3, especially 164D 4–7 and 165BC 17–32 and in EH 5 500D to 504A 3. See also G. I. Dragulin, *Ecceologia tratatelor Areopagitice si importante ei pentru ecumenismul contemporan* (Bucharest, 1979) for a thorough study of the Areopagite's ecclesiological "hierarchy" and its contrasting legacy in the East and the West, according to Fr. John Meyendorff's review in *St. Vladimir Theological Quarterly* 24 (1980): 272.

12. Jer 2:13, 17:13; Ps 36:9; cf. Ep. 9 1105A 4f.

THE ECCLESIASTICAL HIERARCHY

initiators set down for us in the holy tablets of written scripture. Furthermore, whatever was given by these sacred men in a more immaterial initiation, as already given to our neighbors in the heavenly hierarchy, from mind to mind, this too our leaders have revealed, through the means of verbal expression and thus corporeal, but at the same time more immaterial since it is free from writing. But the inspired hierarchs have transmitted these things not in the common part of the sacred act in undisguised conceptions, but in the sacred symbols.¹³ For not everyone is holy and, as scripture affirms, knowledge is not for everyone.¹⁴

376D 5. The first leaders of our hierarchy received their fill of the sacred gift from the transcendent Deity. Then divine goodness sent them to lead others to this same gift. Like gods, they had a burning and generous urge to secure uplifting and divinization for their subordinates. And so, using images derived from the senses they spoke of the transcendent. They passed on something united in a variegation and plurality. Of necessity they made human what was divine. They put material on what was immaterial. In their written and unwritten initiations, they brought the transcendent down to our level. As they had been commanded to do they did this for us, not simply because of the profane from whom the symbols were to be kept out of reach, but because, as I have already stated, our own hierarchy is itself symbolical and adapted to what we are. In a divine fashion it needs perceptible things to lift us up into the domain of conceptions.¹⁵

37 A Now the reasons for such symbolism were revealed to the divine sacred-initiators and it would have been wrong of them to explain them fully to those still on the road to initiation. They understood quite well that those empowered by God to lay down sacred norms went about organizing the hierarchy into fixed and unconfused orders, giving each, as was due, its appropriate allotment.

I am giving you this gift of God, together with other things pertaining to the hierarchs. I do so because of the solemn promises you made, of which I am now reminding you, promises never to pass to

13. The true subject of *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* is this unwritten, "more immaterial initiation" regarding the symbols of the liturgy, especially after the "common part" of the rites and the dismissal.

14. 1 Cor 8:7; cf. CH 2 140B 18–20.

15. This double rationale for the biblical and liturgical use of symbolism, i.e., secrecy and accommodation, is also presented in CH 2 140AB 7–18, 145A 8–10, Ep. 9 1105C 36–45 and 1108AB 7–20.

THE ECCLESIASTICAL HIERARCHY

377B anyone except sacred-initiators of your own order the hierarch's superior sacred words. And I am satisfied that, following the hierarchic ordinance, you will exact a promise to deal in purity with what is pure and to share the divine operations only with men of God, to share perfection only with those who actually are perfected, to share the holy only with the most holy.¹⁶

CHAPTER TWO

I *The rite of the illumination.*¹⁷

392A I have said in solemn fashion that our greatest likeness to and union with God is the goal of our hierarchy.¹⁸ But divine scripture teaches us that we will only obtain this through the most loving observance of the august commandments and by the doing of sacred acts. "He who loves me will keep my word and my father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him."¹⁹ What, then, is the starting point for the sacred enactment of the most revered commandments? It is this, to dispose our souls to hear the sacred words as receptively as possible, to be open to the divine workings of God, to clear an uplifting path toward that inheritance which awaits us in heaven, and to accept our most divine and sacred regeneration.

392B In the realm of intellect, as our famous teacher has said,²⁰ it is love of God which first of all moves us toward the divine; indeed the very first procession of this love toward the sacred enactment of the divine commands brings about in unspeakable fashion our divine ex-

16. On this concluding warning regarding secrecy, see note 4 above.

17. For fuller treatments of baptism in Pseudo-Dionysius, see Campbell's notes and R. Roques, "Le sens du baptême selon le Pseudo-Denys," *Irenikon* 31 (1958): 427-49 (reprinted in *Structures*, pp. 180-97). On the title "illumination," see note 21 below. From here on, each chapter in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* has an identical structure: an introduction, a narrative account of the rite in question, and the interpretation or "contemplation" of that rite. This pattern parallels some exegetical documents of the early Church. In Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses*, for example, an introduction (PG 44 297B to 304C) is followed by a sequential narrative (304C to 325C) and then a fuller interpretive section entitled, in fact, "contemplation" or "theoria." Still another pattern suggests itself. In each chapter, the second section simply lists the multiple features of the rite as they are apparent to initial sense perception, not unlike the Neoplatonic "procession" into plurality. The third section (contemplation) presents a meaning that ascends from sense perception to the higher realm of the mind, not unlike part of the Neoplatonic "return." See CH 1, note 4.

18. CH 3 165A 1f., EH 1 376A 1f.

19. Jn 14:23.

20. Namely, Hierotheus; see DN 3 681A, note 128.

THE ECCLESIASTICAL HIERARCHY

392Cistence. And divinization is to have a divine birth. No one could understand, let alone put into practice, the truths received from God if he did not have a divine beginning. Is it not the case that at the human level we must first begin to exist and then do what is appropriate to us? The nonexistent neither moves nor even begins to exist, whereas that which has some mode of being produces or experiences only that which is natural to it. This, it seems to me, is quite clear. So, therefore, let us behold the divine symbols which have to do with the divine birth and let no one who is uninitiated approach this spectacle.²¹ For no one with weak eyes can safely look upon the rays of the sun and there is risk for us when we handle what is above us. The hierarchy in the days of the Law was right in rejecting Uziah because he handled the sacred things, Korah for exceeding his proper functions, and Nadab for the profane performance of his duties.²²

393A

II *The Mystery of Illumination.*

1. The hierarch, who "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth"²³ by taking on a likeness to God, proclaims the good news to all that God out of his own natural goodness is merciful to the inhabitants of earth, that because of his love for humanity he has deigned to come down to us and that, like a fire, he has made one with himself all those capable of being divinized. "For to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh but of God."²⁴

2. Someone fired by love of transcendent reality and longing for a sacred share of it comes first to an initiate, asks to be brought to the hierarch, and promises complete obedience to whatever is laid upon him. He asks him to take charge of his training and of everything con-

21. "Divine birth" is the author's consistent name for the sacrament of baptism. See EH 2 397A 6f., 404C 25, EH 3 425A 9, 432C 26, and EH 4 484C 29. The term "illumination" appears in the two subtitles (EH 2 392A 1 and 393A 1) and in the etymology provided in EH 3 425A 12. See note 43 below on the term "baptism."

22. Uziah: 2 Chr 26:16-21 (see Ep. 8 1089B 29 and 1089C 39); Korah: Nm 16; Nadab: Lv 10:1f. The variant reading "Nadab and Abihu" is based on Lv 10:1f. and Nm 3:4, but is rejected by the critical edition forthcoming from Göttingen. The "legal hierarchy" is discussed in EH 5 501BC (note 145).

23. 1 Tm 2:4. The hierarch imitates God's generous invitation to all, as interpreted below in 397D 36-400B 24.

24. Jn 1:12f.

nected with his future life. The other is moved by the desire for the man's salvation but when he compares the human situation with the heights confronting the enterprise, fright and uncertainty lay hold of him. But his goodwill eventually overcomes him and he agrees to do what is asked of him and he takes him to the one to whom the hierarchical title is given.²⁵

393C 3. The hierarch is delighted with the two men. It is like the case of the lost sheep carried on the shoulders.²⁶ He gives thanks and praise. With thankful mind and prostrate body he venerates that one kindly source by whom the called are called²⁷ and the saved are saved.

4. Then he summons the whole sacred rank into the sacred precincts to join in celebrating this man's salvation and to offer thanks for the divine goodness. For a start he joins with all the others of the assembly to sing a hymn drawn from sacred scripture. After this he kisses the sacred table and he comes toward the man standing in waiting and he asks him why he has come.

393D 5. He, filled with love of God, replies in accordance with the instructions given him by his sponsor.²⁸ He repudiates his ungodliness, 396A his lack of knowledge of the truly beautiful, the absence within himself of a God-possessed life. He asks [the hierarch's] sacred mediation in obtaining an encounter with God and with things divine. The hierarch tells him that if he is to approach the all-perfect and blameless God he must give himself totally. He teaches him the God-possessed life and asks him if he wishes to live in this way. When the postulant says "yes" he places his hand upon his head and marks him with the sign of the cross. He then instructs the priests to enroll the man and his sponsor.²⁹

396B 6. When they have been enrolled, he offers up a sacred prayer. All those of the assembly join him. He unties [the man's sandals] and has the deacons remove his garments. Then he puts him facing westward with his hands outstretched in a gesture of abhorrence. Three times he bids him breathe his rejection of Satan and his abjuration of

25. This longing and humble approach through a sponsor are interpreted in 400BC 25–40. Regarding the sponsors of infant candidates for baptism, see EH 7 568BC.

26. Lk 15:5.

27. Mt 22:3.

28. Does this "instruction" suggest catechetical training before the sponsor leads the candidate to the hierarch? There seems to be no such interval between the enrollment and the baptism itself. Yet a distinct group of "catechumens" is identified elsewhere (EH 3 432BC and EH 6 532A).

29. The sign of the cross and the enrollment are interpreted in 400C 41 to 401A 3.

him. Three times he speaks the words and the other repeats them. Then he turns him eastward with eyes raised and hands lifted to heaven and he commands him to submit to Christ and to all divinely granted sacred lore.³⁰

396C 7. This done, he calls upon him three times to make his profession of faith and when the other has done this he prays for him, blesses him, and places his hands upon him. The deacons divest him completely and the priests bring the holy oil for unction. The hierarch begins the process of unction with a threefold sign of the cross, leaves it to the priests to cover the body of the man completely with the oil,³¹ and goes himself toward that mother of all divine adoption. With sacred invocations he consecrates the water, completing this by pouring the most holy ointment three times into it, each pouring being made in the form of the sign of the cross.³² With every pouring of the ointment he sings that sacred song which God inspired in the prophets.³³ He orders the man to be brought to him. One of the priests loudly calls out his name from the rolls, together with the name of his sponsor. Then the priests guide the man to the water and there he is 196D handed over to the hierarch who, standing on a more elevated spot, immerses three times the initiate whose name is called out across the water by the priests to the hierarch with each immersion. Each time the initiate is plunged into the water and emerges, the hierarch invokes the three persons of the divine blessedness.³⁴ The priests then bring the man back to his sponsor, to the one who had brought him for introduction, and together with him they reclothe the man and bring him back once more to the hierarch.³⁵ Using the most potently divine ointment he makes the sign of the cross on him and proclaims him ready to participate in the sacredly initiating Eucharist.³⁶

30. This part of the rite, especially the rejection of evil, is considered in 401ABC 4–34. According to EH 5 508A, it is the deacons who face the candidate west and east, etc. See also CH 13 305C 40–44.

31. On this anointing, see 401C 35 to 404A 11. A related anointing occurs in the funeral rite (EH 7 556D 46f.), as interpreted in EH 7 565A.

32. This "ointment" or "myron" is the subject of EH 4, where its use on the baptismal water is discussed (484A 18–27).

33. Namely, the "alleluia"; cf. EH 4 473A 10 and 485AB 15–18.

34. The actual process of immersion is interpreted in 404BC 12–28. This trinitarian epiclesis is identical to the invocation at the moment of tonsure in EH 6 533B 25f., and similar to the language of DN 1 592A 1 and CH 7 212C 37.

35. See 404C 29–33 and EH 6 536B 13–16 regarding the change of clothing.

36. The anointing with the myron or ointment as the completion of baptism, later called confirmation in the West, is considered in 404CD 33–40 and EH 4 484C 28–35. The

THE ECCLESIASTICAL HIERARCHY

397A 8. All this having been duly completed, the hierarch rises once more to the contemplation of primary things after having proceeded to what was secondary, and he does so in order that on no occasion and in no way can he be side-tracked by anything foreign to his task, that he may never cease to travel from one divine reality to another and that he may remain ever under the guidance of the divine spirit.³⁷

III Contemplation.

397B 1. This sacrament symbolizing the sacred divine birth has nothing unfitting or profane in its perceptible images. Rather, it reflects the enigmas of a contemplative process worthy of God, and it does so by way of natural reflections suited to the human intellect.³⁸ Leaving aside the more truly divine reason for these rites, in what way could this appear mistaken when with holy instruction it teaches the initiate a saintly mode of life, when with the physical cleansing by water it teaches him in a bodily fashion to purify himself from all evil as he lives a life that is virtuous and dedicated to God? Even if it had no other and more sacred meaning, this tradition of things performed symbolically would, in my opinion, have nothing profane about it, for what it teaches is a holy way of life and in the cleansing of the whole body by water it proposes a complete purification of an evil way of life.

397C 2. Let this be the introductory guidance for the uninitiated!³⁹ For it differentiates, as indeed it should, what belongs to the common crowd from the things that bind and unify a hierarchy, and it appor-tions to each order its due and fitting measure of uplifting. But we, who have reverently lifted our eyes up to the sources of these rites and have been sacredly initiated in them, we shall recognize the stamps of which these things are impressions and the invisible things of which they are images. I have already clearly shown in my book—*The Con-*

invitation to the Eucharist is mentioned again in 404D 40–43 and by contrast to the superior participation of the monks and clerics, in EH 6 536BC 20–37.

37. The hierarch's activity in general is described in terms of a downward procession and an upward return in EH 3 429AB 15–25.

38. 1 Cor 13:12?

39. An introductory lesson, perhaps also for those not yet initiated, also precedes the fuller and more exclusive contemplation of the synaxis (EH 3 428B, note 66) and the sacrament of the ointment (EH 4 473B, note 115).

THE ECCLESIASTICAL HIERARCHY

*ceptual and the Perceptible*⁴⁰—that sacred symbols are actually the perceptible tokens of the conceptual things. They show the way to them and lead to them, and the conceptual things are the source and the understanding underlying the perceptible manifestations of hierarchy.

397D 3. We say, then, that the goodness of the divine blessedness, while forever remaining similar to and like itself, nevertheless generously grants the beneficent rays of its own light to whoever views it with the eyes of the intelligence. But it can happen that intelligent beings, because of their free will, can fall away from the light of the mind and can so desire what is evil that they close off that vision, with its natural capacity for illumination. They remove themselves from this light which is ceaselessly proffered to them and which, far from abandoning them, shines on their unseeing eyes. With typical goodness that light hastens to follow them even when they turn away from it.

400A It can happen too that these beings push beyond the reasonable limits set to their vision and that they have the gall to imagine that they can actually gaze upon those beams which transcend their power of sight. Here, light will not go against its own nature as light. Rather, the soul, imperfectly offering itself to absolute Perfection, will not only fail to arrive at those realities foreign to it but in its evil arrogance will even be deprived of what is available to it. Still, as I have already said, the divine Light, out of generosity, never ceases to offer itself to the eyes of the mind, eyes which should seize upon it for it is always there, always divinely ready with the gift of itself. And it is on this that the divine hierarch models himself when he generously pours out on everyone the shining beams of his inspired teaching, when in imitation of God he remains ever ready to give light to whoever approaches, and when he displays neither a grudge nor profane anger over previous apostasy and transgressions. In godlike and hierarchical fashion he gives to all who approach his guiding light and does so in harmonious and orderly fashion and in proportion to the disposition of each one toward the sacred.

4. But since God is the source of this sacred arrangement in accordance with which the intelligence of sacred beings acquires self-

40. See EH 1 373B 21f., notes 9 and 10. Both books on the hierarchies and Letter 9 concern the way in which perceptible symbols are used in the uplifting to the conceptual or intelligible realm. *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* concentrates on liturgical movements and gestures, rather than words, objects, colors, shapes, designs, or architecture.

THE ECCLESIASTICAL HIERARCHY

400C awareness, anyone proceeding to examine his own nature will at the start discover his own identity and he will acquire this first sacred gift as a consequence of his looking up toward the light. Having duly examined with unbiased gaze what he himself is he will avoid the dark pits of ignorance. He will not yet be sufficiently initiated into complete union with and participation in God nor will his longing for this come from within himself. Only gradually will he [the catechumen] be uplifted to a higher state and this because of the mediation of people more advanced than he. Helped on by those at a higher level, helped on as far as the very first ranks, following the sacred rules of order he will be uplifted to the summit where the Deity is.

400D An image of this harmonious and sacred order is the reverence of the postulant, his self-awareness, the path he takes, with the help of his sponsor, toward the hierarchy. The divine blessedness grants a share of itself to someone uplifted thus, marks him with its light as a certain sign,⁴¹ receives him into the company of those who have earned divinization and who form a sacred assembly. The sacred symbol of these things is the sign made on the postulant by the hierarchy and the enrollment made by the priests who thereby include the initiate among the saved and inscribe his name, together with that of his sponsor, in the holy register. For the one truly yearns for the life-giving journey toward the truth, and follows his divine leader; and the other unerringly guides his follower along the ways handed down by God.

401B 5. One cannot participate in contradictory realities at one and the same time, and whoever enters into communion with the One cannot proceed to live a divided life, especially if he hopes for a real participation in the One. He must be firmly opposed to whatever may sunder this communion. All this is sacredly suggested by the symbolic tradition which strips the postulant of his former life, deprives him of the very last attractions of this world, stands him naked and barefoot to face westward and renounce with outstretched hands all dealings with the darkness of evil, and everything in his past which signifies difference, and makes him exhale, as it were, and renounce utterly whatever is opposed to conformity to God. Strengthened thus and made free he is turned to face eastward and he is told that having abandoned evil he may in perfect purity endure and look up to the divine

Light. With these, his sacred vows of a complete inclination toward the One, the tradition receives him who has become one-like out of a love for the truth.

401C Now I think it is quite evident to those with an understanding of hierarchies that in all sustained effort to reach the One, by the complete death and dissolution of being of what is opposite, intelligent beings are granted the immutable capacity to mold themselves completely on the form of the divine. It is not enough merely to withdraw from all wrongdoing. Rather, one must be bravely resolute. One must fearlessly confront any disastrous backsliding. There must never be any decline in the sacred love of truth. Indeed one must ceaselessly and prayerfully be raised up as much as one can toward it and strive always to be uplifted in a sacred fashion toward the ultimate perfection of the Deity.

401D 6. You can see that the hierarchic rites are the precise images of these realities. The godlike hierarch begins the sacred anointing but it is the priests who actually perform the sacred act of the unction and who thereby summon the initiate to the sacred contests⁴² which, with Christ as his trainer, he must undertake. For it is Christ who, as God, arranges the match, as sage lays down the rules, as beauty is the worthy prize for the victors, and, more divinely, as goodness is present with the athletes, defending their freedom and guaranteeing their victory over the forces of death and destruction. And so the initiate will quite gladly hurl himself into what he knows to be divine contests and he will follow and scrupulously observe the wise rules of the game. His firm hope will be to earn the fine reward of a place in the order commanded by the good lord and leader of the contest. He will follow the divine tracks established by the goodness of the first of athletes. In trials that imitate the divine he will do battle with every activity and with every being which stand in the way of his divinization. By dying to sin in baptism one could say mystically that he shares in the death of Christ himself.⁴³

404A 7. Join me in observing how appropriately the symbols convey the sacred. To us death is not, as others imagine, a complete disso-

42. On this athletic imagery, see EH 7 565A and the biblical antecedents in 1 Cor 9:24; 2 Tm 2:5; and Heb 12:1.

43. Rom 6:3f.; Col 2:12; 2 Tm 2:11. The word "baptism," indicating not the entire rite but the actual immersion, occurs only twice in the corpus, here and at EH 7 565A 6. For the verbal forms, see EH 2 396D 42, 404B 22, EH 4 484B 24 (Rom 6:3) and EH 5 512D 39f. (Acts 1.4f.).

41. Campbell points out the slight resemblance to the Septuagint version of Psalm 4:6. The immediate reference is to the sign of the cross (396A 8).

lution of being.⁴⁴ It is, rather, the separation of two parts which had been linked together. It brings the soul into what for us is an invisible realm where it, in the loss of the body, becomes formless. And the body is hidden in earth and undergoes a change from its corporeal shape and is withdrawn from its human appearance. Now because of this it is quite appropriate to hide the initiate completely in the water as an image of this death and this burial where form is dissolved.

404C This symbolic lesson therefore sacredly leads the one who is baptized into the mystery that by his triple immersion and emersion he imitates, as far as the imitation of God is possible to men, the divine death of one who was three days and nights in the tomb,⁴⁵ the life-giving Jesus, in whom, according to the mysterious and hidden tradition of scripture, the ruler of this world found nothing.⁴⁶

8. Next they put bright clothes on the initiate. His courage and his likeness to God, his firm thrust toward the One, make him indifferent to all contrary things. Order descends upon disorder within him. Form takes over from formlessness. Light shines through all his life.⁴⁷

404D The unction with ointment gives a sweet odor to the one who has been initiated, for the perfect divine birth joins the initiates together with the Spirit of the Deity. This outpouring is not something describable for it is in the domain of mind that it does its work of sweetening and of making perfect. How to recognize this intelligently is something which I leave to those who have earned the right to commune, in a sacred and divinely worked fashion and at the level of mind, with the Spirit of God.⁴⁸ When all is done, the hierarch calls the one who has been initiated to the most sacred Eucharist and he imparts to him communion in the mysteries which will perfect him.⁴⁹

44. The immersion symbolizes death. These "others" may be mentioned in Wisd of Sol 2:2. The discussion continues in EH 7 553B 23f.

45. Mt 12:40, from Jn 1:17. See EH 4 484B 25 (note 133).

46. Jn 12:31, 14:30, 16:11. Dionysius may also mean that Pilate found no guilt in him (Jn 18:38, 19:4-6).

47. The new baptismal clothing is interpreted again at EH 6 536B 13-16.

48. The baptismal use of the ointment is also discussed in EH 4 484C 28-35.

49. Communion in the mysteries, i.e., in the bread and wine (see EH 3 445A 1-3, note 105) is also imparted to infants, whose baptism is discussed in EH 7 565D to 568C.

CHAPTER THREE

I *The rite of the synaxis.*⁵⁰

Now of course since I have referred to [communion] it would be wrong to move past it and to speak in praise of some other function of the hierarchy. For, as my celebrated teacher has declared, this is indeed the sacrament of sacraments, and, by making use of the sacred lore of scripture and of hierarchical understanding, I must discuss the divinely inspired accounts of it and, guided by the inspiration of the spirit of the Deity, I must be uplifted to the sacred contemplation of it.

424D For a start, let us reverently behold what is above all characteristic of this, though also of the other hierarchic sacraments, namely, that which is especially referred to as "Communion" and "gathering" [synaxis]. Every sacredly initiating operation draws our fragmented lives together into a one-like divinization.⁵¹ It forges a divine unity out of the divisions within us. It grants us communion and union with the One. But I submit that the perfection of the other hierarchical symbols is only achieved by way of the divine and perfecting gifts of Communion. For scarcely any of the hierarchic sacraments can be performed without the divine Eucharist as the high point of each rite,⁵² divinely bringing about a spiritual gathering to the One for him who receives the sacrament, granting him as a gift from God its mysterious perfecting capacities, perfecting in fact his communion with God. Each of the hierarchic sacraments is incomplete to the extent that it does not perfect our communion and "gathering" to the One, and by being thus incomplete it cannot work our full perfection. And the objective, the prime purpose of each sacrament is to impart the mysteries of the Deity to the one being initiated. Thus hierarchical

425A

50. Besides Campbell's notes (EH 1, note 1) see E. Boularand, "L'Eucharistie d'après le pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite," *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique* 58 (1957): 193-217, 59 (1958): 129-69; I. P. Sheldon-Williams, "The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy of Pseudo-Dionysius," *Downside Review* 82 (1964): 293-302, 83 (1965): 20-31; and P. Scheppens, "La liturgie de Denys le Pseudo-Aréopagite," *Ephemerides liturgicae* 63 (1949): 357-75.

51. Yet another Dionysian word play: "to draw together" translates the verbal form of the rite's technical name, "synaxis" or "gathering." The word play reoccurs throughout this paragraph and in 429A 13. The rite can also be called the "Eucharist" (EH 2 396D 50, 404D 41, EH 3 424D 22 and EH 6 536C 32) and, as in the passage here annotated, "Communion" (see also EH 3 425A 3, EH 4 472D 7, EH 5 505B 26).

52. The synaxis climaxes the rites of baptism (EH 2 396D 48-50 and 404D 40-43), the clerical ordinations (EH 6 536C 28-37), and the monastic profession (EH 6 533B 28f. and 536B 20-28).

lore has quite truly forged a name to signify the essential feature of what is being achieved.

It is the same with regard to that sacred sacrament of the divine birth. It first introduces the light and is the source of all divine illumination. And because this is so we praise it, giving it the designation of what it achieves, that is, illumination.⁵³ It is true of course that all the hierarchic operations have this in common, to pass the light of God on to the initiates, but nevertheless it was this one which first gave me the gift of sight. The light coming first from this led me toward the vision of the other sacred things.

This much having been said, let us now lift up our eyes and let us look in hierarchic sequence upon the detailed sacred act and contemplation⁵⁴ of this most holy sacrament.

II *Mystery of the "synaxis" or Communion.*

The hierarch, having said a sacred prayer at the divine altar, begins the censuring there and then he makes the round of the entire sacred place.⁵⁵ Returning to the divine altar, he begins the sacred singing of the psalms and the entire assembly joins him in this. Then the deacons begin the reading of the holy tablets,⁵⁶ after which the catechumens leave the sacred precincts, followed by the possessed and the penitents, so that only those remain who are entitled to the vision and communion of the divine things.⁵⁷ Some of the deacons stand on guard in the sacred place to ensure that the doors are kept closed.⁵⁸ Others per-

53. On the names for the sacrament of baptism, see EH 2, note 21.

54. This terse phrase, "the sacred act and contemplation," is an outline of the rest of the chapter; Part 2 concerns the specific acts of the rite, and Part 3 concerns the interpretation or contemplation of them. See also EH 4 472D 9–12. On the structure of each chapter, see EH 2, note 17.

55. The censuring procession is interpreted (428D–429B) in terms of procession and return. See also EH 4 476D.

56. The chanting of the psalms and the readings of the scriptures are interpreted in 428B 13–16, 429C 26 to 432C 32, EH 4 477A, EH 6 532AB, and, in the case of funerals, EH 7 557B 21–26.

57. The dismissal is discussed in 428B 21–26, 432C 32–436B 20, EH 4 477B 18–24, and EH 7 557C 27 to 560A 5. These groups, constituting the lowest lay order, are themselves the subject of EH 6 532A.

58. The author gives only rare allusions to the actual architecture presupposed in his descriptions of the sacred events. In addition to the doors here associated with the dismissal, there seem to be some inner doors within the worship space (Ep. 8 1088D 49; see also 428C 27f., note 67 below, and EH 7 556C 26–32).

form tasks appropriate to their order. The chosen deacons, along with the priests, put on the divine altar the sacred bread and the cup of blessing.⁵⁹ And all this is preceded by the singing by the entire gathering of the hymn of universal faith.⁶⁰ Then the divine hierarch says a sacred prayer and bids holy peace to all. All the others exchange the ritual kiss⁶¹ and the mystical reading of the sacred volumes is concluded.⁶² After the hierarch and the priests wash their hands in water, the hierarch sits at the center of the divine altar surrounded by certain of the deacons, together with the priests.⁶³ The hierarch speaks in praise of the sacred works of God, sets about the performance of the most divine acts, and lifts into view the things praised through the sacredly displayed symbols.⁶⁴ Having thus revealed the kindly gifts of the works of God, he himself comes into communion with them and exhorts the others to follow him. After receiving and then distributing the divine Communion he concludes with the sacred thanksgiving.⁶⁵ And while the general crowd is satisfied to look at the divine symbols he, on the other hand, is continuously uplifted by the divine Spirit toward the most holy source of the sacramental rite and he does so in blessed and conceptual contemplations, in that purity which marks his life as it conforms to God.

III *Contemplation.*

1. And now, my fine young man, following this imagery which in orderly and sacred fashion conforms to the truth of its divine original, I must go on to offer spiritual guidance to those yet being initiated.

The variegated and sacred composition of the symbols is not unprofitable to them, even though it presents only their external fea-

59. 1 Cor 10:16; see also 437A 1–3 and 437C 32–38. Distinctions within the diaconal rank, such as these "chosen" deacons or the "leader of the deacons" in EH 7 556C 37f., are never explained.

60. On this hymn (or creed), see 436CD 31–51 and note 88.

61. On the kiss of peace, see 437A 3–16. Those newly ordained are also kissed, according to EH 5 509BC 25–28, 509C 34, and 513B 12–25. The deceased also receive a final kiss (EH 7 556D 44–46, 560A 7–9, 565A 3–5).

62. Namely, the reading of the names inscribed on the "diptychs," as interpreted in 437BC 17–38 (see also EH 7 556C 38–40 and 557D 47 to 560A 5).

63. The ceremonial cleansing is discussed in 437D 39 to 440B 26.

64. This praise is for the whole history of God's saving acts, as paraphrased in 440B 26 to 444A 4. The elevation is interpreted in 444A 4 to 444D 44.

65. The distribution itself and the concluding thanksgiving are mentioned again in 444D 45 to 445C 34.

428B tures. The sacred chanting of the scriptures and the readings teach the rules of virtuous living. Above all, it teaches the need for the total purification of the self from destructive evil. The shared, peaceful, and most divine distribution of the one bread and of the one cup lays down as a norm that having been nourished by the same food their lives must be joined in full sharing of inspired food. It also sacredly reminds them of the most divine Supper, which is the original symbol of all the rites. The author himself of all these symbols very rightly excluded from that sacred feast the one not devoted to himself.⁶⁶ Thus it teaches in a pure and divine fashion that as one becomes fit to approach these divine things one is given the grace of assimilation with them and of communion with them.

428C 2. But let us leave behind as adequate for those uninitiated regarding contemplation these signs which, as I have said, are splendidly depicted on the entrances to the inner sanctuary.⁶⁷ We, however, when we think of the sacred synaxis must move in from effects to causes and in the light which Jesus will give us, we will be able to glimpse the contemplation of the conceptual things clearly reflecting a blessed original beauty. And you, O most divine and sacred sacrament: Lift up the symbolic garments of enigmas which surround you. Show yourself clearly to our gaze. Fill the eyes of our mind with a unifying and unveiled light.

428D 3. I think we must now go inside the sacred things and reveal the meaning of the first of the images. We must look attentively upon the beauty which gives it so divine a form and we must turn a reverent glance to the double movement of the hierarch when he goes first from the divine altar to the far edges of the sacred place spreading the fragrance and then returns to the altar. For the blessed divinity, which transcends all being, while proceeding gradually outward because of goodness to commune with those who partake of him, never actually departs from his essential stability and immobility. Enlightening anyone conforming as much as possible to God, the Deity nevertheless maintains utterly and unshakably its inherent identity. Similarly the

66. Judas was separated from the others during the Last Supper (Jn 13:21–30). This entire paragraph concerns the rite's introductory and superficial meaning, as also given for baptism (EH 2 397B, note 39) and for the sacrament of the ointment (EH 4 473B).

67. An inner sanctuary is mentioned in Ep. 8 1088B 27 and 1088D 49. Perhaps there actually were some visual depictions in this area, even an iconostasis, as a visual aid for the uninitiated. See Campbell, n. 123, plus DN 4 696B 25, 724B 25, and Plotinus, *Enneads* VI, 9, 11.

198B divine sacrament of the synaxis remains what it is, unique, simple, and indivisible and yet, out of love for humanity, it is pluralized in a sacred variegation of symbols. It extends itself so as to include all the hierarchical imagery. Then it draws all these varied symbols together into a unity, returns to its own inherent oneness, and confers unity on all those sacredly uplifted to it. And it is the same with the divine hierarch. He generously hands down to his inferiors that unique hierarchic understanding which is especially his own. He resorts to a multitude of sacred enigmas. Then, freely and untrammelled by anything beneath him, he returns to his own starting point without having any loss. In his mind he journeys toward the One. With a clear eye he looks upon the basic unity of those realities underlying the sacred rites. He makes the divine return to the primary things the goal of his procession toward secondary things, which he had undertaken out of love for humanity.⁶⁸

4. The sacred psalmody is a part of the hierarchic mysteries and should certainly accompany the most hierarchic of them all.⁶⁹ The sacred scriptural tablets have a lesson for those capable of being divinized, being rooted in the sacred and godlike upliftings of the sacraments. They teach that God himself thus gives substance and arrangement to everything which exists, including the legal hierarchy and society.⁷⁰ They lay down the divisions by lot, the distribution and the sharing that have to do with God's people.⁷¹ They teach the lore of holy judges, of wise kings and of priests who live in God.⁷² They express the powerful and unshakable point of view which enabled our forefathers to endure various and numerous misfortunes.⁷³ From them come wise guidelines for living,⁷⁴ the songs which gloriously depict the love of God,⁷⁵ the prophecies regarding the future,⁷⁶ the divine

68. In this paragraph (428D to 429B) the Neoplatonic framework of a downward "procession" and an upward "return" (see CH 1, note 4) helps interpret the censuring procession, God's own "movement," the entire synaxis, and the hierarch's activity in general.

69. The psalms are discussed in 429D 45 to 432B 12, and are mentioned in 432C 31 EH 4 473A 5, and EH 7 556C 37.

70. These references to Genesis, Exodus, and Leviticus begin the roughly sequential allusions to Old and New Testament books. Only once in the entire corpus is a biblical book mentioned by name: Genesis in Ep. 9 1105B 22. See also the "Songs" in Ep. 9 1105B 28.

71. Nm (and Dt?).

72. Jgs; 1–2 Sm; 1–2 Kgs; 1–2 Chr; Ezr; and Neh.

73. Jb.

74. Prv, and perhaps other wisdom literature.

75. Sg.

76. Unspecified prophets.

works of Jesus the man,⁷⁷ the god-given and god-imitating communities⁷⁸ and sacred teachings of his disciples.⁷⁹ Here is the hidden and mystical vision of that inspired man who was the most beloved of the disciples,⁸⁰ and the transcendent Word of God concerning Jesus.⁸¹ Furthermore, the divine songs praise all the words and all the works of God and laud everything divinely said and everything divinely accomplished by men of God. They are a poetic narrative of all divine things and they enable everyone who participates in a godly spirit always to receive and to pass on the sacrament of the hierarchy.

5. When these sacred hymns, with their summaries of holy truth, have prepared our spirits to be at one with what we shall shortly celebrate, when they have attuned us to the divine harmony and have brought us into accord not only with divine realities but with our individual selves and with others in such a way that we make up one homogeneous choir of sacred men, then whatever resumé and whatever opaque outline is offered by the sacred chanting of the psalmody is expanded by the more numerous, more understandable images and proclamations in the sacred readings of the holy texts. If one considers these texts with a reverent eye one will see something that both brings about unity and manifests a single empathy, of which the source is the spirit of the Deity. This is why it is right that in succession to the older tradition one proclaims to the world the New Testament. It seems to me that this sequence, coming as it does from God and prescribed as it is by hierarchical order, demonstrates how the one forecast the divine works of Jesus, while the other described how he actually achieved them. The one wrote truth by way of images, while the other described things as they happened. The truth of what was forecast by the one was confirmed by the events described by the other. The divine works are the consummation of the divine words.⁸²

77. The (synoptic?) gospels.

78. Acts.

79. Unspecified epistles.

80. The Revelation to John.

81. Perhaps the Gospel of John, although one would expect the self-styled Athenian convert to make special reference to Saint Paul.

82. Literally, "the theurgies are the consummation of the theologies," meaning that the divine acts recounted in the New Testament are the consummation of the divine predictions of the Old. On "theurgy" as God's act, see DN 1, note 11; on "theology" as God's Word, see MT 1, note 1. This entire paragraph (432B) concerns the relationship between the two testaments.

6. Those who are stone deaf to what the sacred sacraments teach also have no eye for the imagery. Shamelessly they have rejected the saving initiation which brings about the divine birth, and ruinously they have echoed the scriptural text, "I do not wish to know your ways."⁸³ On the other hand, the catechumens, the possessed, and the penitents should follow the instructions of the holy hierarchy and should listen to the singing of the psalms and to the reading of the divinely inspired writings. They may not join in the ensuing sacred acts and in the contemplation reserved for the perfected sight of the perfect. For there is an abundance of sacred righteousness about the hierarchy, with its conformity to God. The hierarchy gives to each as he deserves and grants an appropriate share of the divine things to all for their salvation. It deals out its sacred gifts at the right time and in harmonious and fitting measure. Thus, the catechumens hold the lowest order. They have not yet been initiated and have, therefore, no participation in any of the hierarchic rites. They have not received an inspired existence in the divine birth, but are yet being incubated by the paternal scriptures.⁸⁴ They are being shaped by those life-giving depictions toward the first life and first light and the blessed introduction of the divine birth. It is just as when children of the flesh arrive before their proper incubation. They are unready and unshaped like still-born fetuses. They fall to earth unborn, without life, without light, and it would be silly to go by appearances and to say of them that just because they had emerged from the darkness of the mother's womb they have been brought to the light. Anyway, medical practice which knows more than any other about the human body would show that for light to work there have to be organs capable of receiving it.

But it is the all-wise understanding of sacred things which first acts to incubate the catechumens. It gives them the introductory food of scripture which shapes them and brings them toward life. Later, when their being has been brought to fullness and to the divine birth it acts for their salvation and, following the rules of order, it allows them to enter into communion with that which will illuminate them and which will bring them to perfection. But while their perfection is

83. Jb 21:14 (LXX).

84. Since the scripture readings lead the catechumen toward spiritual birth in baptism, the language of incubation can be applied to them (see also 433B 19, EH 4 476D 46f., EH 5 508B 18-20, and EH 6 532A 3f.).

as yet incomplete, it withholds the perfect things from them since it wishes both to safeguard the harmony of these sacred things and to watch over the incubation and life of the catechumens, and it does so in accordance with the divine order laid down by the hierarchy.

7. The mass of possessed is itself profane, but is next in place above the catechumens who are lowest. In my view there is no equality of status between someone who has received no initiation nor taken part in the divine sacraments and someone who has taken part in some of the sacred rites but is now held fast by opposing charms or by confusion. Such people are quite rightly forbidden to see the most sacred things and to enter into communion with them. The man who is indeed divine, who has the right to commune with the divine realities, who, to the greatest possible extent, has been lifted up into conformity with God through complete and perfecting divinization, such a man if he is truly indifferent to the realities of the flesh (apart from the necessities of nature over which he will not delay) will have arrived at the highest possible measure of divinization and will be both the temple⁸⁵ and the companion of the Spirit of the Deity. Like him of whom he has become an image, not only will he never be possessed by the illusions or the terrors of the adversary but he will actually laugh at them. He will rebuff them and chase them away if they come on the scene. He will be more active than passive. Having adopted impassibility and endurance as the guiding norm of his state he will be seen, like a doctor, helping others who are possessed by these things.

Hence, I believe—or, rather, I know for a fact—that the members of the hierarchy, being very wise in their judgment, understand that the possessed, that is, those who have turned away from a life conforming to divine example and have adopted instead the ideas and character of abominable demons, are exposed to the very worst power. In their extreme folly, so destructive to themselves, they turn away from the truly real, from immortal possessions and from everlasting bliss. They long for and work for the change and for the multiple passions characteristic of matter, for pleasures which die and corrupt, for the instability of things and for the appearance of happiness. The deacon charged with dividing the peo-

85. 1 Cor 3:16, 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16.

ple separates them first and foremost,⁸⁶ for it is wrong for them to be present at any part of the rite other than that scriptural teaching aimed at their return to better things. The sacred act, after all, is not of this world. It even keeps out the penitents who, previously, were present. It grants entry only to the sacred. In its perfect purity it says: "I am invisible to and I do not commune with those prevented by an imperfection of some kind from reaching the high-point of conformity with God." This utterly pure voice rejects everyone failing to be of one mind with those entitled to participate in the most divine things. Hence all the more reason to consider the mass of the possessed, involved as they are with passion, to be profane and estranged from every vision and communion of sacred things.

First to be barred from the nave and from those rites which are beyond them are those who are uninitiated and incomplete regarding the sacraments. Then come those who have abandoned a sacred way of life. After them come those who cravenly submit to opposing fears and fantasies, who, unable to be firm and unyielding, have failed to arrive at that conformity with things divine which would have truly given them enduring and lasting divinization. Following these are the people who have abandoned the opposing life but who are not yet purified of empty imaginings because they have not yet acquired as something permanent the undiluted yearning for God. Lastly, there are those who are not yet altogether one-like but who, in the words of the Law, are neither completely unblemished⁸⁷ nor completely unstained.

The most sacred celebrants of the sacred things and those fond of visions reverently behold the most holy of the sacraments and they sing that most universal song of praise in honor of that source who is the worker and the dispenser of good, who has established for us those saving sacraments by means of which the participants are divinized. This hymn is sometimes called a confession of praise, sometimes a symbol of adoration, sometimes—and here I think one is closer to

86. This is not the exorcism of demons from the possessed (*contra* Gandillac, *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 272) but the removal or dismissal of the possessed from the worship service.

87. E.g., Ex 29:1; Lv 1:3, 3:1; Nm 6:14; Ps 119:1. This paragraph seems to delineate more than three subdivisions (catechumens, possessed, penitents) within the lowest lay order (those "being purified"). Slightly different enumerations of five such subcategories are found in EH 4 476D 45 to 477A 13 and EH 6 532A 1–13.

things divine—a hierarchic thanksgiving, for this hymn is a summary of all the blessed gifts which come to us from God. To me it seems that this song is a celebration of all the work of God on our behalf.⁸⁸ It reminds us that we owe to God's goodness our being and our life, that, using the everlasting model of beauty, God has made us in his image and that he has given us a share of the divine condition and uplifting. Then it reminds us that when we had lost the divine gifts because of our own folly, God took the trouble to recall us to our original condition through adventitious gifts, that he gave us a most perfect share of his nature by completely taking on our own, and that in this way he made it possible for us to enter into communion with himself and with divine reality.

8. The love of the Deity for humanity having been thus reverently celebrated, the covered divine bread is brought forward, together with the cup of blessing. The divine kiss of peace is exchanged. Then there is the proclamation, mystical and transcendent, of the holy volumes. For it is not possible to be gathered together toward the One and to partake of peaceful union with the One while divided among ourselves.⁸⁹ If, however, we are enlightened by the contemplation of and knowledge of the One we are enabled to be unified, to achieve a truly divine oneness and it will never happen that we succumb to that fragmentation of desire which is the source of corporeal and impassioned hostility between equals. This, it seems to me, is the united and undivided life prescribed for us by the kiss of peace as it joins like to like and turns the fragmented away from the divine and unique visions.

9. Following on the peace there is the proclamation of the sacred volumes and here the names are announced of those who have lived holy lives and whose consistent efforts earned for them the perfection of a virtuous life. In this way we are enticed and encouraged to follow their example and to adopt a mode of living which will guarantee us both greater happiness and that happiness which comes of conformity to God. For this proclamation announces them as alive, as those who have not died but, as the Word of God teaches us, who have passed

88. This probably refers to the Creed, which was not introduced into the liturgy until the late fifth century (476 by Peter Fuller). See Campbell's note 103 for the various interpretations of this "hymn." For "theurgy" as God's work, see DN 1, note 11.

89. Another word play on "gathering" and "synaxis"; see note 51 above, 445B 20, and Mt 5:23f.

from death to a more perfectly divine life.⁹⁰ Of course you should note that even though these names are found in blessed commemorative lists, this is not because godly reminders, unlike reminders to ourselves, have need of commemorative imagery. The intention, rather, is somehow to convey in a fitting manner that God honors and knows forever those whose perfection has been achieved through conformity to him. As scripture says, "He knows those who are his"⁹¹ and "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his pious ones."⁹² (Here, what death of the pious ones means is the perfection of their piety.) Reverently take note of the following also. It is while there are placed on the divine altar the reverend symbols by which Christ is signaled and partaken that one immediately reads out the names of the saints. It is made clear in this way that they are unshakably bound to him in a sacred and transcendent union.

10. When these rites have been performed in the manner described, the hierarch stands before the holy symbols. He washes his hands in water, as does the august order of priests. And, as scripture says, the one who has already bathed needs only to wash his head and extremities.⁹³ With his extremities thus purified he preserves the utter purity of his conformity to God and he will then be able to turn benevolently to secondary tasks while yet remaining free and unsullied. For being completely at one, he can immediately turn back to the One to whom he remains so bound by a pure and untarnished return that the fullness and the constancy of his conformity to God is maintained.

I have already mentioned that sacred washing was a feature of the hierarchy of the Law and this is what underlies the cleansing of the hands of the hierarch and the priests.⁹⁴ Those who approach this most holy sacred act are obliged to be purified even from whatever last fantasies there are in their souls. They must themselves virtually match the purity of the rites they perform and in this way they will be illuminated by ever more divine visions, for those transcendent rays prefer to give off the fullness of their splendor more purely and more luminously in mirrors made in their image.

90. 1 Jn 3:14; Jn 5:24.

91. 2 Tm 2:19, from Nm 16:5.

92. Ps 116:15.

93. Jn 13:10.

94. Ex 30:19–21; see MT 1 1000C. The hierarchy of the Law is discussed below in EH 5 501BC.

When the hierarch and the priests wash as far as their extremities or the tips of their fingers in the presence of the most holy symbols this is to show that Christ knows all our thoughts, even the most secret of them, and that it is he himself who in his pervasive gaze, in his perfectly just and complete judgments, has prescribed this washing of the extremities. In this way the hierarch is at one with divine reality, and having sung the praises of God's sacred work he sacredly performs the most divine acts and lifts the praised things into view.

440C 11. I must now try as best I can to describe those divine workings of which we are the objective. I am incapable of speaking in praise of them all or even to know them thoroughly and to lead others into their mystery. But if I invoke the inspired assistance of the hierarchy I can at least mention what the hierarchs, those men of God, praise and celebrate, following the scriptures.⁹⁵

440D From the very beginning human nature has stupidly glided away from those good things bestowed on it by God. It turned to the life of the most varied desires and came at the end to the catastrophe of death. There followed the destructive rejection of what was really good, a trampling over the sacred Law laid down in paradise for man. Having evaded the yoke which gave him life, man rebelled against the blessings of God and was left to his own devices, to the temptation and the evil assaults of the devil. And in exchange for eternity he pitifully opted for mortality. Born of corruption it was only right that he should leave the world as he entered it. He freely turned away from the divine and uplifting life and was dragged instead as far as possible in the opposite direction and was plunged into the utter mess of passion. Wandering far from the right path,⁹⁶ ensnared by destructive and evil crowds, the human race turned away from the true God and witlessly served neither gods nor friends but its enemies who, out of their innate lack of pity, took the cruelest advantage of its weakness and dragged it down to the deplorable peril of destruction and dissolution of being.

441A Yet the goodness of the Deity has endless love for humanity and never ceased from benignly pouring out on us its providential gifts.⁹⁷ It took upon itself in a most authentic way all the characteristics of our nature, except sin. It became one with us in our lowliness, losing nothing

95. In 440C 35 to 444A 4 the author seems to be paraphrasing the account of salvation history found in his community's anaphora or eucharistic prayer.

96. Ti 3:3.

97. Ti 3:4.

441B ing of its own real condition, suffering no change or loss. It allowed us, as those of equal birth, to enter into communion with it and to acquire a share of its own true beauty. Thus, as our hidden tradition teaches, it made it possible for us to escape from the domain of the rebellious, and it did this not through overwhelming force, but, as scripture mysteriously tells us, by an act of judgment and also in all righteousness.⁹⁸ Beneficently it wrought a complete change in our nature. It filled our shadowed and unshaped minds with a kindly, divine light and adorned them with a loveliness suitable to their divinized state. It saved our nature from almost complete wreckage and delivered the dwelling place of our soul from the most accursed passion and from destructive defilement. Finally, it showed us a supramundane uplifting and an inspired way of life in shaping ourself to it as fully as lay in our power.

441C 12. This imitation of God, how else are we to achieve it if not by endlessly reminding ourselves of God's sacred works and doing so by way of the sacred hymns and the sacred acts established by the hierarchy? We do this, as the scriptures say, in remembrance of him.⁹⁹ This is why the hierarch, the man of God, stands before the divine altar. He praises the divine works which I have mentioned, those sacred works wrought gloriously by Jesus, exercising here his most divine providence for the salvation of the human race. This he does, as scripture tells us, for the good pleasure of the most holy Father and the holy Spirit.¹⁰⁰ And the hierarch sings the praises of all this venerable work and beholds with the eyes of the mind this spectacle for conceptual contemplation. He proceeds to the task of the symbolic sacred act. He does this in accordance with the rules laid down by God himself, which is the reason why, at the same time, having sung the sacred praises of the divine works, he apologizes, as befits a hierarch, for being the one to undertake a sacred task so far beyond him. Reverently he cries out: "It is you who said 'Do this in remembrance of me.'"¹⁰¹

444A He prays, then, to be made more worthy to do this holy task in imitation of God. He prays that, like Christ himself, he might perform the divine things. He prays too that he might impart wisely and that all those taking part may do so without irreverence. Then he performs

98. Is 42:1-4.

99. 1 Cor 11:24f.; Lk 22:19.

100. Mt 3:17; Mk 1:11; Lk 3:22.

101. 1 Cor 11:24f.; Lk 22:19.

the most divine acts and lifts into view the things praised through the sacredly clothed symbols.¹⁰² The bread which had been covered and undivided is now uncovered and divided into many parts. Similarly, he shares the one cup with all, symbolically multiplying and distributing the One in symbolic fashion. With these things he completes the most holy sacred act. For because of his goodness and his love for humanity the simple, hidden oneness of Jesus, the most divine Word, has taken the route of incarnation for us and, without undergoing any change, has become a reality that is composite and visible.¹⁰³ He has

B beneficently accomplished for us a unifying communion with himself. He has united our humility with his own supreme divinity. But we in our turn have to cling to him like the members of one body¹⁰⁴ and we do so by the conformity that comes with a divine life of sinlessness. We cannot yield to the death wrought by corrupting passion, or become unable to fit ourselves in with the members of the perfect, whole divine body, unable to be at one with them and live together with them in the one committed life. If our longing is for communion with him, then we must give our full attention to his divine life in the flesh. His sacred sinlessness must be our model so that we may aspire to a godlike and unblemished condition. This is how, in a way that suits us, he will grant us communion with his likeness.

C 13. This, then, is what the hierarch reveals in the sacred rites, when he uncovers the veiled gifts, when he makes a multiplicity of what had originally been one, when the distributed sacrament and those receiving it are made perfectly one, when a perfect communion of all the participants is achieved. By resorting to the perceptible, to imagery, he makes clear that which gives life to our minds. He offers Jesus Christ to our view. He shows how out of love for humanity Christ emerged from the hiddenness of his divinity to take on human shape, to be utterly incarnate among us while yet remaining unmixed. He shows how he came down to us from his own natural unity to our own fragmented level, yet without change. He shows how, inspired by love for us, his kindly activities called the human race to enter par-

102. This sentence seems formulaic, as repeated in 425D 47f., and 440B 27. The most divine acts are the uncovering and pluralization (fraction) of the bread and the distribution of the one cup, as symbolic of the incarnation.

103. This entire section (444ABC) concerns the incarnation as the revelation and pluralization of what was hidden and single, as symbolized by what happens to the bread and the cup. For further passages on the incarnation, see DN 1 592AB 8–17 and Ep. 4 1072ABC, and Roques, *L'Univers*, pp. 305–29.

104. Eph 5:30; see also Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 12:27.

444D participation with himself and to have a share in his own goodness, if we would make ourselves one with his divine life and imitate it as far as we can, so that we may achieve perfection and truly enter into communion with God and with the divine things.

445A 14. Having himself partaken of and imparted the divine communion, the hierarch concludes the ceremony with a sacred thanksgiving together with the entire sacred assembly. For it is right to partake before imparting; reception of the mysteries always comes before their mystical distribution.¹⁰⁵ This is the universal order and the harmonious arrangement appropriate to the divine realities. The sacred leader first of all participates in the abundance of the holy gifts which God has commanded him to give to others and in this way he goes on to impart them to others.

445B The same applies to the rules governing a truly divine mode of life. Whoever wrongfully dares to teach holiness to others before he has regularly practiced it himself is unholy and is a stranger to sacred norms. Just as the finest and the most luminous of beings are the first to be filled with the sun's rays and then pass on the superabundant light to others after them, so if God's inspiration and choice have not summoned one to the task of leadership, if one has not yet received perfect and lasting divinization, one must avoid the arrogance of guiding others.

15. So, then, after the entire sacred rank has come together in hierarchic fashion and after they have all joined in communing with the most divine things, they end the ceremony with a sacred thanksgiving. They declare openly and praise appropriately the gifts of the divine activity. Those who do not participate in and know the divine things do not join in the thanksgiving, even though the infinite gifts of God are worthy in themselves of appropriate thanksgiving. However, as I have said already, those inclined to evil pay no heed to the gifts of God. Their unholiness has turned them into ingrates when it comes to those unending acts of thanksgiving which are owed to the works of God. "Taste and see" says scripture.¹⁰⁶ After their sacred introduction to the gifts of God, the initiates will recognize the great gifts they have received. Through their reception of these gifts they will behold how sublimely splendid they are. Only when they have

105. Here the "mysteries" are the elements of bread and wine; see also EH 6 533C 29 and 536C 33. See EH 1, note 3, on "mystery."

106. Ps 34:8.

received them will they see how lofty, how infinitely broad is their magnificence. Then they will be able to praise and give thanks for those divine gifts of the Deity as they come down from beyond the heavens.¹⁰⁷

CHAPTER FOUR

472C 1 *The rite of the ointment, and what is perfected by it.*¹⁰⁸

472D 1. Of such a kind, then, is the most holy synaxis. Such are the beautiful visions of the mind which, as I have often said, sacredly and hierarchically effect our communion and gathering¹⁰⁹ with the One. There is, however, another rite of perfection belonging to the same order. Our teachers have named it the sacrament of ointment. After we have examined in detail the sacred imagery its parts present, we shall thus be uplifted in hierarchical contemplations through its parts to the One.¹¹⁰

473A II *Mystery of the sacrament of ointment.*

As happens with the synaxis, the imperfect orders have to be excluded as soon as the hierarch has spread the fragrance around the whole sacred space, and all have reverently completed the singing of the psalms and the readings of the most divine scriptures.¹¹¹ Then the hierarch takes the ointment, covered by a dozen sacred folds, and places it on

107. Infant communion is mentioned in EH 7 568C.

108. For specific studies on this sacrament of the “myron,” see W. Strothmann, *Das Sakrament der Myron-Weibe in der Schrift De ecclesiastica hierarchia des Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1977–1978; *Göttinger Orientforschungen*, Reihe I, Bd. 15); Jacob Thekeparampil, “Weihrauchsymbolik in den syrischen Gebeten des Mittelalters und bei Pseudo-Dionysios,” in *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und ihren Parallelen in Mittelalter*, ed. Margot Schmidt (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1981), pp. 131–45 (*Eichstättener Beiträge*, 4).

109. On the name “gathering” or “synaxis” for the Eucharist, see EH 3, note 51.

110. This sentence summarizes the structure of the chapter: Part two itemizes the parts of the rite, part three provides the uplifting contemplation. See EH 2, note 17, on the overall structure of these chapters, EH 3 425B 17–19 for a similar statement regarding the chapter on the synaxis, and CH 177C 5–8 for a parallel statement of biblical exegesis.

111. On these three items (the censuring procession, the Psalms and readings, the dismissal) see EH 3, notes 55–57. In this chapter the censuring procession is considered in 476D, the Psalms and readings in 477A, and the dismissal in 477B.

the divine altar.¹¹² Everyone joins in that sacred song which God inspired in the prophets.¹¹³ A consecrating prayer is offered over the ointment and this is then used in the holy sacraments of sanctification for almost all of the hierarchy’s rites of consecration.¹¹⁴

III *Contemplation.*

473B 1. It seems to me that this rite of consecration has an introductory, uplifting lesson in the way the divine ointment is sacredly handled.¹¹⁵ It is to show us that divine men cover in secret the fragrance of that sanctity within their minds.¹¹⁶ For God himself has forbidden that sacred men, in some wish for glory, should vainly scatter abroad the beauty and the fragrance of their virtuous striving for resemblance to the hidden God. These divine beauties are concealed. Their fragrance is something beyond any effort of the understanding and they effectively keep clear of all profanation. They reveal themselves solely to minds capable of grasping them. They shine within our souls only by way of appropriate images, images which, like themselves, have the virtue of being incorruptible. Hence virtuous conformity to God can only appear as an authentic image of its object when it rivets its attention on that conceptual and fragrant beauty. On this condition—and only on this condition—can the soul impress upon itself and reproduce within itself an imitation of loveliness.

73C In the domain of perceptible images, the artist¹¹⁷ keeps an eye constantly on the original and never allows himself to be sidetracked or to have his attention divided by any other visible object. If he does this, then one may presume to say that whatever the object which he

112. The twelve folds or wings symbolize the two six-winged seraphim, according to 480B 20 to 481D 37.

113. This is the Areopagite’s oblique way of indicating the “alleluia,” as interpreted in 485AB 15–23. See also EH 2 396C 33f.

114. See 484B 16 to 485A 15.

115. Even a superficial observation of the beginning of the rite offers the neophytes an introductory lesson (473B to 476A). Then the interpretation moves past externals to the inner meaning (476B). For this same pattern in the interpretation of baptism and the synaxis, see EH 2 397B (note 39) and EH 3 428B (note 66), respectively. On the use of the term “anagogy” to mean an interpretation, see CH 15, note 179.

116. 2 Cor 2:15?

117. W. Strothmann sees in the use of “artist” (grapheus) a pun on “gnapheus,” namely, an allusion to Peter the Fuller (*Das Sakrament der Myron-Weibe*, p. 1vi; see note 108 above).

wishes to depict he will, so to speak, produce a second one, so that one entity can be taken for the other, though in essence they are actually different.

It is thus with those artists who love beauty in the mind. They make an image of it within their minds. The concentration and the persistence of their contemplation of this fragrant, secret beauty enables them to produce an exact likeness of God. And so these divine artists never cease to shape the power of their minds along the lines of a loveliness which is conceptual, transcendent, and fragrant, and if they practice the virtues called for by imitation of God it is not "to be seen by men,"¹¹⁸ as scripture puts it. Rather, they sacredly behold those infinitely sacred things of the Church disguised in the [rite of the] ointment, as in an image. That is why they too sacredly disguise whatever is sacred and virtuously godlike in their mind, imitating and depicting God. They gaze solely on conceptual originals. Not only do they not look at dissimilar things, but they refuse to be dragged down toward the sight of them. And as one would expect of such people, they yearn only for what is truly beautiful and right and not for empty appearances. They do not gaze after that glory so stupidly praised by the mob. Imitating God, as they do, they can tell the difference between real beauty and real evil. They are the truly divine images of that infinitely divine fragrance. Because this is the truly fragrant, they have no time to return to the counterfeits which beguile the mob, and it truly impresses only those souls which are true images of itself.

2. Let us continue. Having looked on the fine exterior appearance of this splendid and sacred ceremony, let us now gaze into its more divine beauty. Let us see it for what it is, stripped of its veils, shiningly available in its blessed splendor, filling us abundantly with that fragrance which is apparent only to people of intelligence.¹¹⁹ The visible consecration of the ointment is not uncommunicated or unseen by those around the hierarch. Indeed this sacrament is there for them to behold because they can contemplate something which is beyond the ken of the crowd. Actually they have the sacred obligation to hide this spectacle from the common people and to separate it from them, as hierarchic law commands them. For the ray of the most holy sacred things enlightens the men of God, as kin of the Light, purely and di-

¹¹⁸ Mt 23:5; cf. Mt 6:1-5.

¹¹⁹ See note 115 above.

rectly; it spreads its sweet fragrance into their mental reception openly. But this fragrance does not spread in a similar way to those on a lowlier plane. Furthermore, to avoid all profanation at the hands of those who do not live in conformity to God, the secret beholders of what is conceptual conceal the ointment under enigmatic folds, enigmas which are not without value for the well-disposed members of the lower orders because they lift these members up, as they deserve.

3. As I have said already, the rite of consecration in whose praise I am now speaking is part of the perfecting order and power of the hierarchs. Furthermore, since in dignity and effectiveness it is on a level with the sacred rite of the synaxis, our divine leaders have laid down virtually the same imagery to describe it, together with the same mystical ranks [of clergy] and the same chants.¹²⁰ And so it happens that the hierarch leaves the more divine spot, spreads the lovely fragrance to even the least sacred areas, returns to his starting point and teaches thereby that the gifts of God are shared according to merit by all the sacred people without, however, undergoing either diminution or change and preserving all the time those abundant attributes which are characteristically theirs at the heart of the divine unchangeability.¹²¹

Similarly, the singing and reading of the scriptures incubate the uninitiated toward life-giving sonship. They bring about a sacred return among the impurely possessed. They deliver from the opponents' terrifying curse those who are possessed through a lack of courage, showing each one how to live as best he can in conformity with God. Endowed thus and permanently strengthened, it is these now who will bring fear to the enemy powers and who will take charge of the healing of others. It will not be enough for them simply to maintain in full purity within themselves the virtues which will be theirs as a result of their imitation of God together with the capacity to withstand the terrors coming against them. It will also be up to them to give actively of themselves. Minds turned off inferior things and disposed to holiness will draw from these [readings] the holy power of protection against all relapse into evil. They fully purify anyone needing something to be completely holy. They lead the sacred people to

¹²⁰ Concerning the equal status of the rite of the ointment with the synaxis as part of the highest power, that of perfection, see also 485A 6-14, and EH 5 504C 24f.

¹²¹ The censuring procession is more fully interpreted in EH 3 428D-429B.

477B the divine images with which they can enter into their vision and communion. They nourish the perfect, filling them and unifying their likeness to the One with blessed and conceptual sights.¹²²

477C 4. What else? Is it not the case in this rite of consecration, in the same way as with the synaxis, that those as yet incompletely purified orders which I already described and listed are kept away? Is it not also true that this is put before the sacred only in the form of imagery, that only the truly sacred can directly behold and perform this rite and be uplifted by the hierarchy? I have said all this more than once and so I consider it unnecessary to go back over these arguments¹²³ instead of moving on to look at the hierarch as he takes the divine ointment covered by the six pairs of folds and performs the sacred rite of consecrating it. What we have to say is this. The ointment is made up of a mixture of fragrant substances. It has within itself fragrances of rich quality. Now the participants receive these fragrances, but they do so in proportion to their capacity to have a share of this fragrance. In this way we learn that the transcendent fragrance of the divine Jesus distributes its conceptual gifts over our own intellectual powers, filling these with a divine pleasure. If there is a pleasure to be had from a sensual fragrance, if it provides great pleasure for that sense in us which distinguishes between odors, this happens on condition that this sense is actually healthy and is actually capable of taking in that fragrance which comes its way. One may speak analogously about our intellectual powers. Provided no impulse toward evil comes to corrupt them, provided they keep alive the natural dynamism of our capacity for discernment, then while God works on our behalf and while we respond to his grace by a return to the divine, these powers can draw in the fragrance of the Deity and be filled with a sacred happiness and with God's nourishment.

480A So it is that the composition of the ointment is symbolic, giving a form to what is without form. It shows figuratively that Jesus is the rich source of the divine fragrances.¹²⁴ In a manner appropriate to the divinity he turns to those minds which have achieved the closest con-

122. This entire paragraph concerns the impact of the scripture readings on every category of laity from the catechumens up through the monks. See EH 3, notes 56 and 87.

123. The dismissal was discussed in EH 3 428B 21–26 and 432C to 436B 30. See EH 3, note 57.

124. The ointment is a symbol for Jesus, as expounded in 484A–D. W. Strothmann speculates that this “composition” or mixture symbolizes a Monophysitic Christology (*Das Sakrament der Myron-Weibe*, p. 1vi; see note 108 above).

formity to God and he bestows on them an outpouring of divine fragrances to delight the intelligence, to cause a longing for God's gifts, and to feed on conceptual food. Each intellectual power is granted these fragrant outpourings in proportion to whatever part it has in the divine.

480B 5. Obviously those beings which are above us and which are our superiors in divinity receive, so to speak, a greater flood of fragrant odors since they are closer to the source. Such outpouring is more apparent and more readily received by these beings whose intellectual powers are fully attentive so that this flood spreads over them and generously, mightily, superabundantly enters into them. But with regard to lower and less receptive intelligent beings it conceals the pure sight and share of itself and grants to those attuned to it perfumes in accordance with the harmonious measure appropriate to the divinity.

480C This is why the twelve folds signify the order of seraphim. These have a preeminent place at the head of all those holy beings which transcend us. They stand in assembly around Jesus and they rightly embark upon the most blessed sight of him, and in the infinitely pure receptacle of their souls they receive the fullness of his spiritual gifts and, if one may use the language of sense perception, they sing, with voices that never grow silent, the glorious hymn of the divine praises. For the sacred knowledge characteristic of transcendent beings never falters. Their yearning for God never fails. Their exalted status puts them beyond evil and forgetfulness. They cry out and are never silent because, it seems to me, they know and understand divine truth always and unchangeably, and they do so with all earnestness and thanksgiving.

480D 6. The incorporeal characteristics of the seraphim are described by holy scripture in perceptible imagery which reverently conveys their conceptual nature and I think I have described these sufficiently in my discussion of the ranks of transcendent hierarchies.¹²⁵ I think I made them sufficiently clear to the eyes of your mind. And yet since those sacredly standing around the hierarch present us now with a likeness of this supreme order let us look with unworldly eyes once more upon their most godlike splendor.

125. The seraphim (Is 6) are discussed in CH 7 205BC and CH 13. Here and in CH 6 200D 23f. Dionysius includes the references to multiple faces and feet in Ez 1:6f, and 10:14, and Rv 4:6–8, even though Ezekiel names only cherubim (Ez 10).

7. Their numberless faces and many feet symbolize, I think, their outstanding visual capacity when face to face with the most divine enlightenment. They symbolize an ever moving, ever active conception of the divine goodness. The six wings referred to by scripture do not, I think, indicate a sacred number, as some others believe, but have to do with the intelligent and godlike powers of that supreme order of being around God—primary, middle, and last—which are uplifting, liberating, and transcendent. Hence when the most sacred wisdom of scripture resorts in its sacred description to the imagery of the wings it locates these at the faces, in the middle, and at the feet, thereby indicating that the seraphim have wings everywhere and therefore that they have in the highest degree the power to be lifted up toward true Being.

8. If they hide their faces and feet with their wings, if they fly only with their middle wings, know reverently that this most outstanding order among the transcendent beings looks with caution on whatever is higher and deeper than what its own intelligence can grasp, that it is uplifted by its middle wings to the proportionate sight of God, that it submits its own life to the divine constraints, and that it thereby allows itself in all reverence to be led to a recognition of its own limitations.¹²⁶

9. The scriptural declaration “They cried out to one another”¹²⁷ means, I think, that they ungrudgingly impart¹²⁸ to each other the conceptions resulting from their looking on God. And we should piously remember that in Hebrew the scripture gives the designation of seraphim to the holiest of beings in order to convey that these are fiery-hot and bubbling over forever because of the divine life which does not cease to bestir them.

10. If, as exegetes of the Hebrew assert, the Word of God names the most divine seraphim “those who are on fire” and “those who warm,” terms indicating their essential characteristics, this is because, according to the symbol-laden imagery of the divine ointment, these beings have the stirring capacity to evoke the manifestation and the spread of the active perfumes.¹²⁹

This being whose fragrance transcends all power of understanding likes to be stirred by the most fiery and purifying minds to reveal

126. On the wings mentioned here, from Is 6:2, see also CH 15 332D.

127. Is 6:3.

128. *Wisd of Sol* 7:13? Cf. CH 13 301C 41.

129. On the etymology of “seraphim,” see CH 7 205BC.

itself, and it joyfully distributes its most divine inspiration to those calling upon it in an especially transcendent fashion. Hence the most sacred order of heavenly beings is not unaware of the fact that the most divine Jesus came down among us to make us holy. It understands well that he in his divine and unspeakable goodness became one of us. It sees him sanctified in human form by the Father, by himself, and by the Spirit, and it knows that what he is from the beginning as an active divinity remains essentially unchanged. Hence the tradition of the sacred symbols covers the divine ointment with the seraphim even during the sanctification, and it does so to show and to demonstrate that Christ remains forever unchanged even when fully and truly made one of us.¹³⁰ And, what is even more divine, the divine ointment is used for the consecration of every sacred thing, thereby clearly showing that, as scripture proclaims, he who consecrates the consecrated remains forever the same¹³¹ amid all the workings of his divine goodness. For this reason the most divine consecration with the ointment completes the perfecting gift and grace of the divine birth. Similarly, in my view, one may explain that rite at the purifying baptistery when the hierarch pours the ointment in drops to form a cross.¹³² He thereby shows to those able to contemplate it that Jesus in a most glorious and divine descent willingly died on the cross for the sake of our divine birth, that he generously snatches from the old swallowing pit of ruinous death anyone who, as scripture mysteriously expresses it, has been baptized “into his death,”¹³³ and renews them in an inspired and eternal existence.

11. Furthermore, in being initiated in that sacred sacrament of the divine birth, the perfecting anointing of the ointment gives us a visitation of the divine Spirit.¹³⁴ What this symbolic imagery signifies, I think, is that he who in human form received the sanctification of the divine Spirit for us, while at the same time remaining unchanged in respect of his own divinity, arranges now for the gift to us of the divine Spirit.

130. On the symbolic identification of Christ and the ointment throughout this section (484A–D), see note 124 above.

131. Heb 2:11; Jn 17:19; Heb 13:8. See also 485A 2f. (note 137).

132. This use of the ointment was mentioned in EH 2 396C 29–35.

133. Rom 6:3; Jn 1:17; Mt 12:40 (see EH 2 404B 24, note 45).

134. This perfecting or completing (confirming) of baptism is treated in EH 2 396D 48–50 and 404CD 33–40.

THE ECCLESIASTICAL HIERARCHY

12. Note this too. The rubrics for the most holy sacraments lay down that the divine altar must be consecrated with sacred outpourings of the ointment.¹³⁵ The meaning of all this is to be found beyond heaven and beyond being in that source, that essence, that perfecting power which makes for the workings of all holiness in us. For it is on Jesus himself, our most divine altar, that there is achieved the divine consecration of intelligent beings. In him, as scripture says, "we have access"¹³⁶ to consecration and are mystically offered as a holocaust. So let us behold with transcending eye that divine altar where sanctifying consecrations are performed, itself being consecrated by the most divine ointment. For it is the most holy Jesus who consecrates himself for us.¹³⁷ It is he who grants us the fullness of his own consecration and who arranges to offer generously to us, as children of God, whatever is consecrated on him.

In my opinion the divine leaders of our own hierarchy received from God an understanding of hierarchic symbolism and they gave this solemn liturgical rite of the ointment the title of *TELETES* [perfecter] because of what it perfects.¹³⁸ It is, so to say, the perfecting rite of God which praises in a double sense its divine work of perfection. God, first of all, having become man, was consecrated for us and, secondly, this divine act is the source of all perfection and of all consecration. With regard to the sacred song which God inspired in the prophets, those who know Hebrew translate it as follows: "Praised be God" or "Praise the Lord."¹³⁹ Now every sacred apparition and every sacred work of God can be represented in the hierarchy's array of symbols, and it is appropriate to recall here that hymn revealed by God himself to the prophets, for it teaches us in clear and holy fashion that the generous gifts of the divinity deserve to receive sacred praises.

¹³⁵. The consecration of the altar is mentioned again in EH 5 505C 32 but is never fully presented.

¹³⁶. Rom 5:2; Eph 2:18, 3:1.

¹³⁷. Anointing the altar (Ex 29:36) is here interpreted as Jesus (the ointment) consecrating himself (the altar, Heb 13:10), according to Jn 17:19.

¹³⁸. This is the Greek term translated as "sacrament" throughout the corpus. There are only "three holy sacraments" (EH 5 516A 8f.): baptism (EH 2 397A 8), the synaxis (EH 3 424C 6), and the "sacrament of the ointment" (EH 4 472D 8, 473A 1, 485A 9, EH 5 504C 24). Straining to claim parallels for the three hierarchies, Dionysius also called "sacraments" the heavenly hierarchy's conception of God (EH 5 501A 8f.) and the legal hierarchy's uplifting to worship in spirit (EH 5 501C 30).

¹³⁹. The author avoids the actual word "alleluia"; see EH 2 396C 33f. and EH 4 473A 10.

THE ECCLESIASTICAL HIERARCHY

CHAPTER FIVE

500C 1 Concerning the clerical orders, powers, activities, and consecrations.¹⁴⁰

500D 1. Such then is the most divine rite of the consecration of the ointment. And having discussed these sacred acts it would be opportune to describe the clerical orders and elections,¹⁴¹ their powers, activities, and consecrations, the three orders formed by them, and all this so as to show the arrangement of our own hierarchy and to demonstrate how this hierarchy in its purity has rejected and abandoned everything of disorder, of disharmony, and of confusion. Rather, it has manifested the order, the harmony and the distinction proportionate to the sacred orders within it.

501A Regarding the threefold division of every hierarchy I think I have already said enough about those hierarchies in my previous discussion. There I explained that in our sacred tradition every hierarchy is divided in three. There are the most reverend sacraments. There are those, inspired by God, who understand and purvey them. And there are those who are sacredly initiated by these.¹⁴²

501B 2. Now the most holy hierarchy among the beings of heaven possesses the native sacramental power of a most completely immaterial conception of God and of things divine. It is their lot to be as like God and as imitative of God as is possible. These first beings around God lead others and with their light guide them toward this sacred perfection. To the sacred orders farther down the scale they generously bestow, in proportion to their capacity, the knowledge of the workings of God, knowledge forever made available as a gift to themselves by that divinity which is absolute perfection and which is the source of wisdom for the divinely intelligent beings. The ranks coming in succession to these premier beings are sacredly lifted up by their me-

¹⁴⁰. This chapter on the clerical consecrations or ordinations (literally, "perfections") contains several crucial discussions of the entire hierarchy: 501A, 501D–504C; see also EH 6 536D.

¹⁴¹. Here and at 509A 4f. the text is emended to read "elections," following EH 6 529D 3f. and the general discussion in 512B 16 to 513A 11 concerning the choosing or electing of clerics.

¹⁴². The author discussed the concept of a hierarchy in CH 3 and EH 1 373C, but not in terms of sacraments, initiators, and initiated. Other summary statements of this triad occur in 501D 46–50, 516A 8–11, and EH 6 536D.

diation to enlightenment in the sacred workings of the divinity. They form the orders of initiates and they are named as such.¹⁴³

501C In succession to this heavenly and transcendent hierarchy the divinity extends its most sacred gifts into our domain and, in the words of scripture, it deals with us as though we were "babes."¹⁴⁴ It bestowed on us the hierarchy of the Law. It veiled truth with obscure imagery. It employed the palest copies of originals. It resorted to dense enigmas and to symbolism whose meaning is discerned with the maximum difficulty. To avoid harm it granted only as much light as suited the weak eyes looking up to it. In this hierarchy of the Law the "sacrament" consisted of an uplifting to worship in spirit. The guides were those whom Moses, himself the foremost initiator and leader among the hierarchs of the Law, had initiated into the holy tabernacle. It was Moses who, for the edification of others, depicted in this holy tabernacle the institutions of the hierarchy of law. He described all the sacred actions of the law as images of what was revealed to him on Mount Sinai. And the initiates are those whom these symbols of the Law lift up, as they are able, to a more perfect initiation.¹⁴⁵

501D Now, the Word of God asserts that our hierarchy represents a more perfect initiation in that it is a fulfillment and completion of that hierarchy. It is both celestial and of the Law for it occupies a place half way between two opposites. With the one it shares the contemplations of understanding; with the other it has in common the use of varied symbolism derived from the realm of perception, symbolism by means of which there is a sacred uplifting to the divine.¹⁴⁶ Like

143. The parallel with the angels seems forced since their hierarchy has no sacraments at all, but rather three triads of heavenly beings (CH 6 200D to 201 A). Yet the relationships between the superior and inferior celestial beings do parallel the relationships between clergy and laity (CH 10 272D 11 to 273A 5).

144. 1 Cor 3:1, 13:11; Ps 28:1?; Gal 4:3?

145. Here, too, the proposed parallel with the "legal hierarchy" is unconvincing because of the latter's lack of sacraments. The "hierarchy of the law" is also mentioned in EH 2 392C 33f., EH 3 440A 10, and Ep. 8 1089C 35. For Moses on Mount Sinai, see Ex 25:40 and 26:30, discussed in MT 1.

146. More persuasive than the strained parallels of all three hierarchies is the idea of "our" hierarchy as a mean between extremes, sharing perceptible symbols with the lower hierarchy of the law and the power of contemplative understanding with the higher hierarchy of heaven. Iamblichus, the Neoplatonist whose interest in triads and mean terms was formative for his successors, including Proclus, also specified a liturgical mean between the extremes of the crowd mired in material forms and the select few whose cult was purely immaterial. See *de Mysteriis* V, 18, 225.5–8, and P. Rorem, "Iamblichus and the Anagogical Method in Pseudo-Dionysian Liturgical Theology," *Studia Patristica* 18, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1982): 453–60.

every hierarchy it has a threefold division, namely the most holy operations of the sacraments, the godlike dispensers of the sacred things, and those guided by them, according to capacity, toward the sacred. As I have already remarked in relation both to the hierarchy of the Law and to that hierarchy which is more divine than ours, each of the three divisions of our own hierarchy is triply divided into first, middle, and last in power. This has been effected so as to achieve a proportion appropriate to sacred objectives and so as to bring all the elements together in order into a cohesive and harmonious communion.

3. The first godlike power of the most holy work of the sacraments is the sacred purification of the uninitiated. Its middle power is to illuminate and to initiate those whom it has purified. Its final power, embracing all that went before, is to bring about in the initiates a more perfect understanding of that to which they have been initiated.¹⁴⁷

504B The rank of the sacred ministers is divided in the following manner. Their first power consists in purifying the uninitiated by way of the sacraments. Their middle power is to bring illumination to those whom they have purified. Finally, they have the most marvelous power of all, one which embraces all who commune in God's light, the power to perfect these by way of the perfected understanding they have of the contemplated enlightenments.¹⁴⁸

With regard to the initiates, their first power is that of being purified. Their middle power is, after purification, the illumination which makes it possible for them to contemplate certain sacred things. Finally they have the power, more divine than the others, of being enlightened in the perfect understanding of the sacred illuminations which they have been permitted to contemplate.¹⁴⁹

Something has already been said about the triple power connected with the holy work of the sacraments. From scripture it has been shown that the sacred divine birth is a purification and an illuminating enlightenment, that the sacraments of the synaxis and of the myron-ointment provide a perfecting knowledge and understanding

147. These three powers—purification, illumination, and perfection—are applied to the celestial beings in CH 3 165C to 168B, CH 7 208BCD, and EH 6 537ABC.

148. The application of the trio of powers to the triad of clerical orders occurs in 504A 5 to 509A 3.

149. The three powers are further applied to the lay orders in EH 6 532A 1 to 533A 10.

THE ECCLESIASTICAL HIERARCHY

of the divine workings and that it is through this that there is effected both the unifying uplifting toward the divinity and the most blessed communion with it.¹⁵⁰ However, what must now be shown is the manner in which the clerical rank is made up of three harmonious orders—the one which purifies, the one which illuminates, and the one which brings about perfection.

4. It is the all-holy ordinance of the divinity that secondary things should be lifted up to the most divine ray through the mediation of the primary things.¹⁵¹ Do we not see this in the domain of the perceptible where beings of an elementary kind first meet with their kin and proceed then to go through these in bringing their activity to bear on other beings? Therefore the founding source of all invisible and visible order quite properly arranges for the rays of divine activity to be granted first to the more godlike beings, since theirs are the more discerning minds, minds with the native ability to receive and to pass on light, and it is through their mediation that this source transmits enlightenment and reveals itself to inferior beings in proportion to capacity. It is therefore the task of the first ranks of those beholding God to reveal fittingly and without jealousy to those of second rank the sacred sights which they behold. To initiate others into the hierarchy is the task of those who have with perfect understanding learned the divine secret of all that has to do with their hierarchy and to whom the power of sacramental initiation has been granted. It is the function of those who are full and understanding partners in clerical consecration to pass on, as appropriate, all that is sacred.

5. The divine order of hierarchs is therefore the first of those who behold God. It is the first and also the last, for in it the whole arrangement of the human hierarchy is fulfilled and completed. And just as we observe that every hierarchy ends in Jesus, so each individual hierarchy reaches its term in its own inspired hierarch.¹⁵² The power of the order of hierarchs spreads throughout the entire sacred

150. The three sacraments are not related to the three powers in a simple one-to-one correspondence. Both the synaxis and the sacrament of the ointment are perfecting (EH 3 424C 11 to 425A 8, EH 4 484B 16 to 485A 15), yet this third power also includes the first two (504A 7f., 508C 38–40). Baptism, on the other hand, is here called purifying and illuminating; yet its concluding anointing with the ointment gives it a perfecting power as well (EH 2 404C 33–36, EH 4 484C 28–31). Thus all three powers are present in all three sacraments.

151. This “ordinance” is also stated in CH 4 181A 1–4 and CH 10 273A 1–5 (cf. EH 1 376D 46).

152. See EH 1 372CD 42–49.

THE ECCLESIASTICAL HIERARCHY

company and it works the special mysteries of its own hierarchy through all the sacred orders. But it is to this order especially, rather than to the other orders, that divine law has bestowed the more divine workings of the sacred ministry. Their rites are images of the power of the divinity, by which the hierarchs perfect the holiest of symbols and all the sacred ranks. Even if the priests can preside over some of the revered symbols, a priest could not perform the sacred divine birth without the divine ointment, nor could he perform the mystery of Holy Communion without having first placed on the altar the symbols of that Communion. Furthermore, he would not even be a priest if the hierarch had not called him to this at his consecration. For it is the ordinance of God that only the sacramental powers of the God-possessed hierarchs can accomplish the sanctification of the clerical orders, the consecration of the ointment, and the rite of consecrating the holy altar.¹⁵³

6. The order of hierarchs, then, is that which fully possesses the power of consecration. In particular, it completes every hierarchic rite of consecration. It revealingly teaches others to understand, explaining their sacred things, proportionate characteristics, and their holy powers. The light-bearing order of priests guides the initiates to the divine visions of the sacraments. It does so by the authority of the inspired hierarchs in fellowship with whom it exercises the functions of its own ministry. It makes known the works of God by way of the sacred symbols and it prepares the postulants to contemplate and participate in the holy sacraments. But it sends on to the hierarch those longing for a full understanding of the divine rites which are being contemplated.

The order of deacons purifies and discerns those who do not carry God’s likeness within themselves and it does so before they come to the sacred rites performed by the priests. It purifies all who approach by drawing them away from all dalliance with what is evil. It makes them receptive to the ritual vision and communion. That is

153. This passage reveals that even though *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* generally describes these rites as entirely the province of the hierarch, the author does allow for the possibility that a priest might preside alone at a baptism or the Eucharist. Yet baptism, the Eucharist or synaxis, and the priesthood itself all depend, respectively, on the hierarch’s apparently exclusive authority to consecrate the ointment (myron) used in baptism, the altar necessary for the Eucharist, and the priests themselves in their ordination. See EH 4 484B to 485A. The tonsure ceremony that “perfects” the lay order of monks is not part of the hierarch’s power of perfection, but rather, inconsistently, in the priest’s domain (EH 6 533AB).

THE ECCLESIASTICAL HIERARCHY

why during the rite of divine birth it is the deacons who take away the postulant's old clothes. It is they who untie [his sandals]. It is they who turn him west for the abjuration and then to the east, since theirs is the order and theirs the power of purification. It is they who call on him to cast aside the garments of his old life. It is they who show him the darkness in which he has lived hitherto. It is they who teach him to leave the shadows and to turn toward the light.¹⁵⁴

508B So, then, the order of deacons has the task of purification and it uplifts those who have been purified to the clear sacred acts of the priests. It makes clean the imperfect and incubates them by means of the cleansing enlightenments and teachings of scripture. Furthermore, it keeps the priests from contact with the profane. The hierarchical ordinance gives them charge of the sanctuary doors, thereby demonstrating that postulants must submit to total purification before they can be allowed to come into the presence of the sacred.¹⁵⁵ Thus it entrusts their approach to the sacred visions and their communion to the purifying powers, and through these it receives them unblemished.

508C 7. I have now shown that the order of hierarchs has the task of consecration and of perfection, that the illuminative order of priests brings light and that the task of the deacons is to purify and to discern the imperfect. But it is obvious that the order of hierarchs is not solely preoccupied with perfection. It also brings illumination and purification. Similarly, the order of priests has the understanding both to illuminate and to purify. For although inferiors may not boldly and sacrilegiously trespass on the functions of their superiors, the more divine powers have, in addition to their own, the sacred understanding of the inferior ranks as part of their own perfection. Since the differences of clerical function represent symbolically the divine activities and since they bestow enlightenment corresponding to the unconfused and pure order of these activities, their sacred activities and holy orders have been arranged hierarchically in the threefold division of first, middle, and last so as to present, as I have said already, an image of the ordered and harmonious nature of the divine activities.

154. For the deacons' "purifying" role in baptism, see EH 2 396A 10 to 396C 27. See also CH 13 305C 40–44.

155. For the deacons' role in reading the scriptures and guarding the doors during the synaxis, see EH 3 425BC 27–34. Then some "chosen" deacons, with the priests, place the bread and cup upon the altar (EH 3 425C 35). The dismissal of the catechumens at a funeral is administered by the "first" of the deacons (EH 7 556C 37f.).

THE ECCLESIASTICAL HIERARCHY

509A The divinity first purifies those minds which it reaches and then illuminates them. Following on their illumination it perfects them in a perfect conformity to God. This being so, it is clear that the hierarchy, as an image of the divine, is divided into distinctive orders and powers in order to reveal that the activities of the divinity are preeminent for the utter holiness and purity, permanence and distinctiveness of their orders.¹⁵⁶ And since I have thus explained as well as I could the clerical orders, their elections, powers, and activities let us now behold as best we can how they are consecrated.

II *The mystery of clerical consecrations.*

509B At his consecration the hierarch kneels on both knees in front of the altar. On his head he carries God's revealed word, together with the hand of the hierarch who is consecrating him. This latter performs the rite of consecration with most sacred invocations. The priest also kneels on both knees before the divine altar. The hierarch places his right hand on his head and in this way he sanctifies him with the consecrating invocations. The deacon kneels on one knee before the divine altar. The hierarch places his right hand on his head and with invocations suitable to the deaconal functions he consecrates him. The hierarch makes the sign of the cross on everyone whom he consecrates and for each of them makes the announcement and he gives each of them the kiss of consecration. All the clergy present at the ceremony take turns after the hierarch in kissing the one who has been consecrated in one of the above clerical orders.

509C

III *Contemplation.*

1. Common to the clerical consecration of hierarchs, of priests, and of deacons are the presentation at the altar, the genuflection,¹⁵⁷ the

156. God's three powers of purification, illumination, and perfection are also imitated by the celestial beings (CH 3 165BC 27–39, EH 6 536D 38 to 537C 35).

157. In this paragraph the author outlines only what he intends to interpret. The ordaining invocations he passes by in silence, as he does in EH 6 533B 16f. and EH 7 565C 30–34. The presentation at the altar and the genuflection are interpreted in 509D 41–48 and 516A 5–7. The monk does not kneel at all during his tonsure ceremony (EH 6 533B 14f. and 533C 31–37).

imposition of hands by the hierarch,¹⁵⁸ the sign of the cross,¹⁵⁹ the announcement,¹⁶⁰ the concluding kiss.¹⁶¹ The special and distinctive rites for the hierarch are the imposition of the sacred scriptures on his head, which is something not done for the subordinate ranks.¹⁶² Then there is the kneeling on both knees by the priests, something which does not happen during the consecration of deacons, who kneel on only one knee, as I have already said.¹⁶³

2. The presentation and the genuflection at the divine altar teach all those receiving clerical consecration to devote their whole lives to the God who is the source of every consecration. They teach them to offer him minds holy and pure, attuned to his and as worthy as possible of this utterly holy and sacred altar of divinity, this altar which consecrates in holy fashion those minds conforming to God.

3. The imposition of hands by the hierarch demonstrates that those being consecrated receive their attributes and powers, together with their freedom from opposing powers, from the covering who is the source of every consecration. They are like sacred children cared for by their father. The rite also teaches them to do all their clerical work as if they were acting on the orders of God and have him as guide in all their activities.

4. The sign of the cross indicates the renunciation of all the desires of the flesh. It points to a life given over to the imitation of God and unswervingly directed toward the divine life of the incarnate Jesus, who was divinely sinless and yet lowered himself to the cross and to death and who, with the sign of the cross, that image of his own sinlessness, marks all those imitating him.

158. The laying on of the ordaining hierarch's right hand (509B 16 and 21) is discussed in 512A 1–8.

159. The sign of the cross (interpreted in 512AB 9–15) is also made on the candidates for baptism (EH 2 396A 8, 396C 27f. with the holy oil and 396D 48f. with the ointment) and on those who become monks (EH 6 533B 24, 536A 3–5).

160. The announcement of the candidate's name is interpreted at length as symbolic of his election (512B 16 to 513A 11).

161. The kiss is considered in 513B 12–25. The eucharistic kiss of peace is mentioned in EH 3 425C 41f. and interpreted in 437A 3–16. The new monk receives a clerical kiss according to EH 6 533B 27f. and 536B 16–19. The rites of ordination do not end with the kiss, but continue with the Eucharist (EH 6 536C 28–37). A final kiss is given the deceased in EH 7 556D 44–46, 560A 7–9, and 565A 3f.

162. Considered in 513C 26 to 516A 1 and 516BC 20–27.

163. The distinction between kneeling on one or two knees is interpreted in 516AB 1–20; see note 157 above. The monks stand during their rite of tonsure (EH 6 533AB 13–17, 533C).

5. The sacred announcement by the hierarch concerning the rites of consecration and those being consecrated denotes the mystery that the performer of consecration in his love of God is the exponent of the choice of the divinity, that it is not by virtue of any personal worth that he summons those about to be consecrated but rather that it is God himself who inspires him in every hierarchic sanctification. Thus Moses, the consecrator in the hierarchy of the Law, did not confer a clerical consecration on Aaron who was his brother, whom he knew to be a friend of God and worthy of the priesthood, until God himself commanded him to do so, thereby permitting him to bestow, in the name of God who is the source of all consecration, the fullness of a clerical consecration.¹⁶⁴ And yet our own first and divine consecrator—for Jesus in his endless love for us took on this task—“did not exalt himself,”¹⁶⁵ as scripture declares. Rather, the consecrator was the one “who said to him: . . . ‘Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedech.’”¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, when he bestowed sacred consecration on his own disciples, even though as God he was the source of every consecration, still in hierarchic fashion he referred this act of consecration to his most holy Father and to the Divine Spirit. As scripture shows, he told his disciples “not to depart from Jerusalem but to wait for the promise of the Father which ‘you heard from me, . . . you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’”¹⁶⁷ Similarly, when the chief of the disciples gathered around him his peers the ten hierarchs so as to consecrate a twelfth disciple, he wisely left the choice to the divinity, saying “Show whom you have chosen.”¹⁶⁸ He welcomed as a hierarch in the assembly of the twelve the one designated by divine choice. And what of the divine choice which fell on Matthias? There are many explanations of this which I find unsatisfactory and so I will set down here what I myself think of it. It seems to me that what scripture means by “choice” of the divinity is a certain gift revealing to the assembly of hierarchs the one selected by God, since it is not by his own personal activity that a divine hierarch should work sacerdotal consecration. Rather, it is under God’s impulse that he should perform these sacred rites in a way that is hierarchic and heavenly.

164. Ex 28:1–4, 29:4–9.

165. Heb 5:5a; cf. Jn 17:1.

166. Heb 5:6 from Ps 110:4; cf. Gn 14:18–20 and Heb 7:17.

167. Acts 1:4f.

168. Acts 1:24.

513B

6. The kiss at the conclusion of the clerical consecration also has a sacred meaning. For not only do all those belonging to the clerical orders give the kiss to the initiate but so too does the consecrating hierarchy. When a mind has been made sacred by the type of its clerical activity, by its call from God, by the sanctification conferred upon it, when it comes to the rite of clerical consecration, it deserves the love of its peers and of all those who belong to the most sacred orders. It has been lifted up to a beauty which brings it into full conformity with God. It has a love of like minds and enjoys their sacred love in return. So, then, this holy rite of the kiss between fellow clerics is fully appropriate. It denotes the sacred communion formed by like minds and the joyous shared love which ensures for the whole hierarchy the beauty of its conformity to God.

513C

7. These, as I have said, are the rites common to every clerical consecration. But only the hierarchy carries on his head—in a holy manner—the sacred scriptures. Since the perfecting power and understanding of all the clergy were given to the hierarchs, men of God, by that divine goodness which is the source of every consecration, it is only proper that there should be placed on the heads of the hierarchs the scriptures which God himself handed down and which reveal to us all that we can know of God, all his works and words and manifestations, every sacred word and work, everything, in short, which the divinity has so generously wished to pass on to the human hierarchy, every sacred thing done and said by God. The hierarchy who lives in conformity with God and who has a full and complete share of the hierarchy's power is not simply content to enjoy the true and divinely enlightening understanding that comes from all the words and acts of the hierarchic rites. He also hands them on to others in accordance with their place in the hierarchy. Because he is gifted with the most divine knowledge and with the greatest power for uplifting

513D

516A

he performs the most holy consecrations within the hierarchy. Kneeling on both knees is distinctive of the priests, as compared to the rank of deacons who kneel on one knee and are consecrated in this hierarchical position.

8. This kneeling reveals the humility of the one who approaches as it sacredly sets him under God. Now, as often said before, it is through the three holy sacraments and powers that the three ranks of holy initiators preside over the three orders of those being initiated and work out their saving approach under the divine yokes. It is therefore right that the order of deacons, whose function is solely to purify,

516B

should perform the single [-knee] approach of those purified and place itself below the divine altar where minds cleansed of every stain are made holy in a way which is beyond this world. But the priests bend both knees since their function is not confined to the purification of those who approach. Uplifting them by means of the clear rites which they perform, after they have cleansed them of all stains, the priests perfect them in order that they may hold as a firm possession the ability to enter into contemplation. As for the hierarchy, having knelt on both knees he receives on his head the scriptures handed down by God. Those whom the deacons have purified and the priests have illuminated, the hierarchy leads on to an understanding of the sacred things they have beheld, and he does this in accordance with hierarchic law and in proportion to their capacity. Thus he perfects the initiates so that their sanctification may be as complete as is possible for them.

CHAPTER SIX

I *Concerning the orders of those being initiated.*¹⁶⁹

529D

1. These, therefore, are the clerical orders, then elections, their powers, their activities, their consecrations. Something must now be said of the three orders of initiates who are subordinate to them.¹⁷⁰

I say that the orders of those being purified are made up of all those numbers who are dismissed from the sacred acts and rites of consecration, as I have already mentioned.¹⁷¹ There are, first of all, those to whom the deacons are still giving instruction and formation in the scriptures, which incubate them toward real life.¹⁷² Then there are

169. This chapter eventually interprets the rite of monastic profession and tonsure. See R. Roques, "Éléments pour une théologie de l'état monastique selon Denys l'Aréopagite," *Théologie de la vie monastique: études sur la tradition patristique-Théologie* 49 (1961): 283–314, reprinted in *Structures*, pp. 198–225. But it also discusses the other lay orders (532ABC), summarizes the entire human hierarchy (536D), and continues a discussion begun in *The Celestial Hierarchy* on how the concept of purification could apply to heavenly beings (537ABC).

170. The three categories of those initiated (or, in the case of the catechumens, those yet being initiated) were summarized in terms of the triad of purification—illumination-contemplation, and perfection in EH 5 504B 15–20.

171. For the passages interpreting the liturgical dismissal, which here serves to define this entire cluster of lay categories, see EH 3, note 57.

172. The lowest order is that of the catechumens (EH 3 432D 39), still being "incubated" by the scriptures (EH 3, note 84). The name "catechumens" appears only in EH 3

those who are continuing to be taught the good words of scripture in such a way that they will be returned to the sacred manner of living from which they fell away.¹⁷³ There are the weak who are still fearful of the onslaughts of the adversary and whom the power of scripture is still in the process of strengthening.¹⁷⁴ Next there are those who are still being led on the road from sin to sanctity. And then there are those who although attracted to blessed habits and to firmness have not yet acquired a holy constancy in these. Such are the orders of those being purified by the incubating and purifying power of the deacons. Because of the sacred powers of the deacons they are being purified in such a way that they can embark upon the illumined contemplation of and communion with the most lustrous sacramental rites.

2. The intermediate order is made up of those who enter upon the contemplation of certain sacred things and who, because they have been well purified, commune therein to the extent that is possible for them. This group has been given over to the priests for illumination. I believe it to be evident that having been cleansed of every unseemly stain and with minds solidly formed in holiness the members of this group are led to reach the stage of being able to engage regularly in contemplation. They commune so far as they can with the divine symbols, and this contemplation and communion fill them with an entirely blessed joy. To the extent of their abilities and because of their powers of uplifting, they rise up to the divine love of what they understand. This, I say, is the order of the sacred people. It has undergone complete purification and is therefore fit for the sacred vision of and communion with the most illustrious sacraments, as far as permitted.¹⁷⁶

3. But of all the initiates the most exalted order is the sacred rank of the monks which has been purified of all stain and possesses full power and complete holiness in its own activities. To the extent that

(425C 30, 432C 28, 432D 39, 433B 19f.) and EH 7 (556C 38, 557C 29). The fullest discussion of this group is in EH 3 432D 39 to 433B 20.

173. Namely, "those in repentance" (EH 3 425C 31, 432C 29, and 436A 8f.; see also EH 3 436B 21f.). The text is here emended to read "be returned," following the example of EH 3 436A 6f.

174. The "possessed" are thoroughly discussed in EH 3 433B 21 to 436B 30. Note that these groups are all defined by the scripture readings' effects on them before their dismissal (cf. EH 4 476D 45 to 477B 17).

175. In two places the lowest order in the lay triad is itself a triad of "the catechumens, the possessed, and those in repentance" (EH 3 425C 30f. and 432C 28f.). Yet elsewhere, as

is permissible, it has entered upon sacred contemplative activity and has achieved intellectual contemplation and communion. This order is entrusted to the perfecting power of those men of God, the hierarchs, whose enlightening activities and hierarchical traditions have introduced it, according to capacity, to the holy operations of the sacred sacraments it has beheld. Thanks to their sacred understanding it has been uplifted into the most complete perfection proportionate to this order. This is why our blessed leaders considered such men to be worthy of several sacred designations; some gave them the name of "therapeutae," or servants, and sometimes "monks," because of the purity of their duty and service to God and because their lives, far from being scattered, are monopolized by their unifying and sacred recollection which excludes all distraction and enables them to achieve a singular mode of life conforming to God and open to the perfection of God's love. Hence the sacred ordinance has bestowed a perfecting grace on them and has deemed them worthy of a sanctifying invocation which is not the business of the hierarch (he only confers clerical ordination) but of the devout priests who sacredly perform this secondary rite of the hierarchy.¹⁷⁷

II *Mystery of the consecration of a monk.*¹⁷⁸

The priest stands before the divine altar and chants the invocation for a monk. The person being initiated stands behind the priest and does

in the current passage, two more subdivisions seem added (EH 3 436B 26–30, and 477A 10–13).

176. The middle lay order is the "sacred people" (536C 28, 536D 44, EH 7 556C 30, and Ep. 8 1089A 9). They experience illumination and contemplation, although not as fully as the clerics or the monks (536C 25–29, cf. Ep. 8 1096A 8).

177. The monks are discussed here and in Ep. 8, esp. 1088C 30–32 and 1088D 48 to 1089A 2. The name "monk" appears only in this chapter and in EH 7 556C 30. The name "therapeutae" is mentioned here, but is actually used only in the titles to Ep. 1 (1065A 2), Ep. 2 (1068A 2), Ep. 4 (1072A 2), and Ep. 8 (1084A 2), and in the body of Ep. 8 (1088C 32 and 43, 1088D 49, 1089A 9), including the word-play on "servant" in 1093C 37–40. In terms of the triad of powers, the monks are associated with perfection; they are thus entrusted to the "perfecting power" of the hierarchs (532D 40f.). Yet it is not the hierarch who presides at the ceremony by which they become monks, but rather a priest. See EH 5, note 153.

178. Only in this subtitle is the rite of tonsure called a "consecration." The apparent intention is to parallel the title and subtitle of this chapter with those of the chapter on the clerical "consecrations" or ordinations (EH 5 500C 2f. and 509A 8). Like the unusual use of the term "mystery" in the subtitles for six rites of *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* (see EH 1, note 3), such uniformity is neither found in nor suggested by the body of the text, where this ritual receives no formal name.

not kneel on either one or both knees. The divinely granted scriptures are not put on his head. He simply stands while the priest chants the secret invocation over him.¹⁷⁹ When this is finished the priest approaches the initiate. First he asks him if he will not only renounce but even refuse to phantasize anything which could be a distraction to his way of life. He reminds him of the rules governing a fully perfect life and openly asserts that he must surpass the median way of life.¹⁸⁰ After the initiate has devoutly promised to do all this the priest makes the sign of the cross on him.¹⁸¹ He cuts his hair and invokes the three persons of the divine blessedness.¹⁸² He takes away all his clothes and gives him others.¹⁸³ Then, together with all the other sacred men present at the ceremony he gives him the kiss [of peace]¹⁸⁴ and confers on him the right to commune in the divine mysteries.¹⁸⁵

533C

III *Contemplation.*

1. The fact of not kneeling, the fact that the divinely bestowed scriptures are not placed on the head, the fact of standing while the priest speaks the invocation, all this would show that the order of monks does not have the task of leading others, but that it takes its stand in its own solitary and sacred status, that it follows the clerical orders, and as an attendant it is obediently uplifted by them to the divine understanding of the sacred things of their order.

179. This is in contrast to the clerics, who kneel on one or two knees and who, in the case of the hierarchs, have the scriptures placed on their heads (EH 5 509BC, 513C 26 to 516C 27). The monk simply stands, as interpreted in 533C. No liturgical invocations or other texts (except the "alleluia" in EH 4 485AB 15–23, note 139) are ever divulged or interpreted (EH 7 565C 30–34).

180. The renunciation is interpreted in 533D 38 to 536A 2. The "median way of life" that the monk surpasses is that of the "middle" order of lay people (533D 41–45; see also EH 5 504B 17f., EH 6 532B 20f.).

181. The sign of the cross is discussed in 536A 3–5 and elsewhere in the corpus as it appears in the other rites (see EH 5, note 159).

182. The actual tonsure is pursued in 536A 5–10. This trinitarian invocation also occurs at baptism (EH 2 396D 43f.); see also DN 1 592A 1 and CH 7 212C 37.

183. Not the robes themselves as objects but the act of exchanging clothing is interpreted in 536B 11–16, where the similarity to baptism is noted (EH 2 396D 46f., 404C 29–33).

184. The kiss is interpreted in 536B 16–19. Its other liturgical appearances are noted in EH 5, note 161.

185. The service actually continues with the invitation to the Eucharist (536BC 20–37).

533D

2. The renunciation of all activities and of all phantasies which could lead to a distracted living indicates that most completely wise monastic life in which flourishes the understanding of those unifying commandments. I have said already that among initiates they are not the middle order, but rather the most exalted of all. This is why that which is entirely open to those of the middle order is often forbidden to monks, because theirs is a single-minded type of life and they have the duty to be at one only with the One, to be united with the sacred unity, to imitate so far as they may the life of the clerics to whom they are much more akin than are the other ranks of initiates.

536A

3. The sign of the cross proclaims, as I have already said, the death of all fleshly desire. The tonsure is a sign of a pure and unencumbered life, a life adorned by no unworthy appearances forged by the mind but rising freely thanks to beauties which are not manmade but which lift the soul in unity and monastic state up to conformity with God.

536B

4. The removal of the clothing of old and the putting on of something else indicate the switch from the sacred life of the middle order to one of greater perfection. For the rite of divine birth includes the changing of the clothes to signify the uplifting of a purified life toward the higher reaches of contemplation and of illumination.¹⁸⁶

The kiss bestowed by the priest and by the others upon the initiate is a token of that sacred state of communion where all those conforming to God are united by the joyous bonds of shared and loving well-wishing.

536C

5. When all these rites are over the priest invites the initiate to share in the divine communion. What this shows, in sacred fashion, is that the initiate, if he truly attains the monastic and unified state, will not only contemplate the sacred rites revealed to him and share with the middle order a communion with the sacred symbols, but also because of blessedly coming to know the rites in which he participates he will be admitted to divine communion in a manner quite different to what is available to the sacred people. It is for the same reason that following on their own ceremony of consecration and as the crowning point of the rite of their ordination the clerical orders are invited to share the holy Eucharist by the hierarch who consecrated them.¹⁸⁷

186. See note 183 above.

187. EH 5 does not mention this invitation to the newly ordained to Communion (509A 8 to 509C 28).

This is not simply because the reception of the divine mysteries is the high point of all hierarchic participation but also because all the sacred orders, as they are uplifted and are more or less made godlike, have a proportionate share in the divine gift of this communion.

536D We must now sum up.¹⁸⁸ The holy sacraments bring about purification, illumination, and perfection. The deacons form the order which purifies. The priests constitute the order which gives illumination. And the hierarchs, living in conformity with God, make up the order which perfects.

537A As for those who are being purified, so long as they are still at this stage of purification they do not partake of the sacred vision or communion. The sacred people is the contemplative order. The order of those made perfect is that of the monks who live a single-minded life. Thus, our own hierarchy is blessedly and harmoniously divided into orders in accordance with divine revelation and therefore deploys the same sequence as the hierarchies of heaven. It carefully preserves in its own human way the characteristics which enable it to be like God and conform to him.

537B 6. You will say that among the heavenly hierarchies one does not find any sort of orders being purified, for it would not be right or true to say that there is some heavenly rank which is impure. For me, to say that the angels are not totally pure and that they do not possess the plenitude of transcendent purity would be to have lost all sense of the sacred. An angel captured by evil would find himself immediately displaced from the harmony of heaven and from the pure company of the divinely intelligent beings. He would tumble in among the unlighted ranks of the apostate.

And yet one may assert that in the heavenly hierarchy there is something which corresponds with the purification of inferior beings, namely, the enlightenment which blessedly reveals what was hitherto unknown to them. It brings them to a more perfect understanding of divine knowledge. In a sense, it purifies them from their ignorance of truths previously not understood.¹⁸⁹ And, through the mediation of primary and more divine beings, it lifts them up to the highest and the most lustrous of the divine splendors.

188. What follows is not a summary of the current chapter, but rather of the entire correlation of the triadic human hierarchy to the three powers. As such, the statement oversimplifies; see EH 5, notes 150 and 153, and R. Roques, *L'Univers Dionysien*, pp. 171–99.

189. The application of the concept of purification to the realm of knowledge in the case of the celestial beings has been discussed in CH 7 208B and 209CD 33–41.

537C And one may also distinguish within the heavenly hierarchy between those made totally illuminated, totally perfect, and those orders which supply purification, illumination, and perfection. The highest and most divine beings have the task, in proportion to the heavenly hierarchy, of purifying from all ignorance those heavenly ranks inferior to them, of bestowing upon them the fullness of divine enlightenments, and, finally, of perfecting them in the most luminous understanding of divine conceptions. For I have already stated, as discussed in the scriptures, that the ranks of heaven do not possess the exact same enlightened understanding of the sights of God. It is God himself who directly enlightens the primary ranks, through whose mediation he grants indirect enlightenment to the subordinate ranks, in proportion to capacity, and he does so by spreading among them the shining splendors of the divine beam.

CHAPTER SEVEN

I *The rite for the dead.*¹⁹⁰

552D 1. After this discussion I think we should now talk about our sacred rite for the dead. And these are not the same for the holy and the un-
553A holy, whose deaths are different as their lives were different. Those who have lived sacred lives have clung to the true promises of the divinity whose truth has been there for all to see in the resurrection. Such people are filled with a holy joy. Moved by a strong and true hope they travel to the frontier of death, to the conclusion, as it were, of their sacred contest. They know that theirs will be an utter resurrection and that it will come amid complete and unending life and salvation. Sacred souls which in this life can tumble into sin will acquire in their rebirth an unshakable conformity to God. And the purified bodies yoked to and traveling with these sacred souls, appearing in the same list and struggle, will also be rewarded for the sweat poured out in the service of God, and they themselves will enjoy the reward of the resurrection and the same unshakably divine life as that bestowed upon souls. United with the sacred souls whose companions they
553B

190. This chapter on the funeral rites stands outside the triadic format of three sacraments (Chapters 2 through 4), three clerical orders (Chapter 5), and three lay orders (Chapter 6). B. Brons has challenged the authenticity of the chapter, through 565C (*Sekundäre Textparteien*, pp. 4–12). An appendix on infant baptism and communion (565D to 568C) precedes the work's final words to "Timothy" (568D to 569A).

were in this life they have somehow become “members of Christ.”¹⁹¹ They will enjoy immortality and blessedness in an indestructible conformity with God. That is why the saints sleep with a joyous and unshakable hope at the hour when their sacred combat ends.

553C 2. Among the unholy there are some who ridiculously believe that our bodies experience a dissolution of being.¹⁹² Others think that the link of body and soul is broken forever since, as they imagine, it would be inappropriate for souls to be trammelled with a body in the midst of the godlike life and blessedness. Such people, because of their inadequate acquaintance with divine understanding, overlook the fact that Christ has already provided the example of a human life conforming perfectly to God. And there are others who would assign other bodies to the souls, thereby, in my opinion, holding an unfair view of the bodies which have shared in the struggles of divine souls. They wrongly deny them the sacred rewards which they have earned at the end of the divine race. And others, again, slipping in some way into materialist notions, have imagined that the holy calm of perfect beatitude, promised to the saints, is on a level with worldly happiness, and they impiously claim that those who have become equal to the angels enjoy the nourishment typical of mutable life.¹⁹³

553D No sacred men will ever fall into such error, for they know that their whole being will be granted the peace which will make them Christlike. When they come close to the end of their earthly lives they have a clear view of the road to immortality. They praise the gifts of the divinity. Filled with divine pleasure they are no longer afraid of falling into sin for they know well that they have—and will always have—the fair reward which they have earned. As for those filled with stain and sin and who have received some sacred initiation—an introduction which they stupidly rejected so that they could give themselves over to destructive desires—these, at the end of their earthly lives, do not think the divine law of scripture is quite so contemptible. 556A They look now with a quite different regard on the deadly pleasures to which they had become so passionately attached and on the sacred way of life which they so foolishly abandoned and which they now

191. 1 Cor 6:15; cf. Eph 5:30; Rom 12:5. The fate of the body is discussed again in 565B.

192. Wisd of Sol 2:2–5. See EH 2 404B 13–15. The several mistaken viewpoints re-futed in this paragraph have been variously identified; see Campbell’s notes 331–34.

193. Lk 20:36; Mt 22:30; Mk 12:25.

respect. Pitifully and uncertainly they leave this life, and because of their culpable lives there is no sacred hope to guide them.

3. Nothing like this happens when sacred men have to die. At the end of his struggles the just man is filled with a sacred joy and it is with great happiness that he travels the road of sacred rebirth. His peers, his neighbors with God, those living like him, bless him because he has come prayerfully and triumphantly to his goal. They sing songs of thanksgiving to him who brought about this victory and they beg him to grant them also the grace of such peace. Then they take the body of the deceased and as if to assure him of his sacred crown they carry him to the hierarch who joyfully receives him and who, in accordance with the sacred rubrics, performs the blessed rites established to do honor to those who have died in holiness.

II *Mystery regarding those who died sacredly.*

The divine hierarch assembles the sacred gathering. If the deceased belonged to one of the clerical orders, then he is placed at the foot of the divine altar. Then the high priest begins with prayer and thanksgiving to God. If the deceased was one of the holy monks or of the sacred people the hierarch puts him in front of the sanctuary at the holy entrance reserved for the clergy.¹⁹⁴ And then he recites the prayer of thanksgiving to God.¹⁹⁵ The deacons then read out the true scriptural promises concerning our sacred resurrection and sing the psalms which also bear upon the same theme.¹⁹⁶ The leader of the deacons then dismisses the catechumens.¹⁹⁷ He reads out the names of the saints who are already dead and judges the one most recently deceased to be worthy of commemoration along with them.¹⁹⁸ He calls upon everyone to pray for final beatitude in Christ. The divine hierarch

194. The placement of the body, whether at the altar for the clergy or at the (iconostasis) door for the laity, is interpreted in 556D 51 to 557A 15. The author’s references to church architecture are minimal; see EH 3, notes 58 and 67.

195. This prayer is described in 557AB 15–20.

196. The Psalms and readings are mentioned again in 557B 21–26. For other discussions of the scripture readings, see EH 3, note 56.

197. This unique dismissal of the catechumens alone is interpreted in 557C 27 to 560A 5. On the dismissal in the synaxis, see EH 3, note 57. Only in this passage is a leader or “first deacon” identified, although some are called the “chosen deacons” in EH 3 425C 35.

198. This reading of the diptychs is considered in 557D 47 to 560A 5; see EH 3, note 62.

then approaches and offers a most sacred prayer for the dead,¹⁹⁹ at the conclusion of which he kisses the deceased, as do all those with him.²⁰⁰ After everyone has given the kiss the hierarch pours the oil on the deceased,²⁰¹ prays for all, and lays the body in an honored place along with the bodies of others of his order.²⁰²

III *Contemplation.*

557A 1. If the profane were to see or listen to these rites of ours I think they would laugh heartily and pity us for our misguidedness. Now we should not be surprised by this, for as scripture says, "if they do not have faith they will not understand."²⁰³ We, on the other hand, have beheld the meaning of these sacred rites since Jesus has given us the light. So let us affirm that it is not without reason that the hierarch brings in and lays down the deceased in that place reserved for those of his own order. What he is indicating in a sacred manner is that in the regeneration the fate of each one will correspond with the life he led here. The one who lived a life of sacred conformity to God—to the extent that a man may do this—will be in a state of divine blessedness throughout the time to come. If while living a sacred life a man fell below the high point of conformity to God he will have a sacred reward proportionate to his merits. It is in thanksgiving for this divine justice that the hierarch offers up the sacred prayer, singing the praises of the divinity which rescues us all from unjust and tyrannical power and leads us instead to his own most just judgments.

557B 2. The songs and readings of the divine promises tell of that most blessed inheritance which those who are most divinely perfected will enjoy forever. The blessed example of the deceased is affirmed and the living are urged toward the same perfection.

557C 3. Note also that in this ceremony not all those belonging to the orders of the purified are sent away as usual and that only the cate-

199. This prayer is partially divulged in 560AB 6–14 and is interpreted in 560BC 15–28. An apologetic interpretation of the idea of a prayer for the dead is presented in 560C 29 to 564D 47.

200. The kiss is mentioned again in 560A 7–9 and 565A 1–3. For other liturgical greetings with a kiss, see EH 3, note 61, and EH 5, note 161.

201. The final anointing with oil and its relationship to baptism is noted in 565A 3–14.

202. The placement of the body in burial is interpreted in 565B.

203. Is 7:9 (LXX).

chumens are excluded from the sacred precincts. These latter have not yet been initiated into any of the sacraments and it would be quite wrong if they beheld any one of the sacred rites, even if only in small measure, since they have not experienced the first gift of light in the divine birth and they therefore have not yet received the power to contemplate the sacred rites. The rest of the orders of those who are being purified have already been initiated into the sacred tradition.²⁰⁴ True, they continue to be foolishly drawn to sin instead of being uplifted toward a higher perfection, and that is why they are rightly dismissed from the divine visions and communion manifested by the sacred symbols. (If they were to participate unworthily in these blessed ceremonies they would be the first victims of their own folly and would decrease their respect for divine realities and for themselves.) But it is still quite right for them to be admitted to this rite for it clearly teaches our fearlessness concerning death, the rewards promised to the saints by the truths of scripture, and the unending sorrows promised to the unholy. It would therefore be quite useful for them to be present at the deacon's proclamation that he who meets a sacred end is surely enrolled forever in the company of the saints. They may quickly long for a similar fate and they may learn from the deacon's understanding that those who are perfected in Christ are indeed truly blessed.

560A 4. Coming forward then the divine hierarch offers sacred prayer over the deceased, and following on this prayer, he kisses him, as do all the others in turn. The prayer is to the divine goodness, asking pardon for the deceased for all the sins caused by human frailty, begging that he be established "in the light . . . in the land of the living,"²⁰⁵ "in the bosom of Abraham,"²⁰⁶ Isaac, and Jacob, "where pain and grief and lamentation shall flee away."²⁰⁷

560B 5. These, I think, are clearly the most blessed rewards of the saints. For what could compare with immortality free of all pain and filled with light? (And these indeed have to be expressed in words as suitable as possible for our frailty. For these promises exceed all understanding and the words naming them fall far short of the truth they

204. The lay orders that are normally dismissed with the catechumens (namely, the possessed and the penitent; see EH 3, note 57) are discussed in EH 6 532A.

205. Pss 56:13, 116:9.

206. Lk 16:22; cf. Mt 8:11 and Lk 13:28.

207. Is 35:10, 51:11. The prayer here partially divulged, unlike any other liturgical prayer in the corpus (see 565C), is clearly related to that of the *Apostolic Constitutions* VIII.41.3 (Funk, p. 550, lines 15–17).

contain. For one must accept the truth of what scripture says: "Eye has not seen and ear has not heard and it has not come to the heart of man what God has prepared for those who love him."²⁰⁸ The bosom of the blessed patriarchs and of all the other saints signifies, I believe, this divine inheritance and this perfect beatitude where all those who have lived in conformity with God are welcomed into the ever-renewed perfection of unaging blessedness.

6. While agreeing with what I am saying you might nevertheless declare yourself unable to understand why it is that the hierarch beseeches the divine goodness to pardon the sins of the deceased and to grant him the same order and the same lot as those who have lived in conformity with God. If under the workings of divine justice each one receives a return for whatever good or bad he did in this life and if it is the case that the deceased has terminated his lifetime activity, then by what prayer could the hierarch win for the dead person such a change of condition that it would be different from what he had earned during his life here? Now I know well that each one will receive what he deserves, for scripture says that the Lord has shut the door on him²⁰⁹ and "each one will receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body."²¹⁰ And scriptural truth has passed on to us the fact that the prayers of the just are of use only to those who are worthy of them, and only in this life, not after death.²¹¹ Did Saul profit in any way from Samuel?²¹² Were the Hebrew people helped at all by the prayers of the prophet?²¹³ And just as it would be silly for a man whose eyes have been torn out to pretend that he shares in the light which the sun bestows only on those with unharmed eyes, so too would it be foolish to cling to the impossible and empty hope of gaining the intercession of the saints when one has driven aside their naturally sacred activities by one's refusal to accept the gifts of God and by contempt for the most lustrous of God's good commandments.

Nevertheless, following scripture, I say that the prayers of the saints in this life are extremely valuable for the one who has a longing for the sacred gifts, who has made a holy preparation to receive them, and who, knowing his own weakness, has sought out some holy man

208. 1 Cor 2:9 from Is 64:4.

209. Lk 13:25.

210. 2 Cor 5:10.

211. Jas 5:16.

212. 1 Sm 15:35–16:1.

213. Jer 7:16, 11:14.

to beg him to be his helper and to join him in his prayers. Such help can only be of the greatest possible assistance to him, since it will gain for him the most divine gifts which he desires. The divine goodness will accept him because of his well-shaped disposition, because of the respect he shows for the saints, because of the praiseworthy eagerness with which he begs for those longed-for gifts, and because of the life he lives in harmony with this and in conformity to God. For one of the divine judgments has laid down that the gifts of God should be duly given to those worthy to receive them, through the mediation of those who are worthy to impart them. Someone could perhaps show a lack of respect for this divine arrangement and, out of wretched self-regard, could imagine himself capable of disdaining the mediation of the saints and of entering into direct relationship with the divinity. Now if one presents to God unworthy and unholy demands, without at the same time having an overwhelming wish for the gifts of God, then one loses the fruit of even a poor prayer. So, then, regarding this prayer under discussion which the hierarch offers for the deceased, it is to be explained in accordance with what has been handed down to us by those godlike men, our leaders.

7. As scripture says, the divine hierarch makes known the judgment of God, for he is "the angel of the all-powerful Lord God."²¹⁴ From what God has told him in scripture he knows that to those who have lived in a most pious fashion there is given a bright, divine life under the most just guidelines, for in his kindly love for man the divinity closes his eyes to the faults coming from their human weakness. "No one," says scripture, "is free of filth."²¹⁵ The hierarch knows well what the true scriptures have promised and he prays that they be fulfilled and that those who have lived holy lives may receive their blessed reward. In this fashion he models himself on the divine goodness by seeking, as though on his own behalf, the gifts meant for others. He knows that the promises of God will surely be realized and in this way he teaches all those present that the gifts for which he duly pleads will be granted to all those who live a perfect life in God. The hierarch, insofar as he interprets the justice of God, would take care to seek nothing which conflicted at all with God's wishes and with what he has promised to grant. Therefore, he does not offer this prayer for those who have died in a state of unholiness. To do so

214. Mal 2:7 (LXX). An "angel" is a messenger; see CH 12 292C 7.

215. Jb 14:4 (LXX).

would be to depart from his function as interpreter. In this case he would be acting on his own initiative within the hierarchy and not under the guidance of the One who is the source of every rite. Besides, his unrighteous prayer would be rejected and God would answer in the just words of scripture: "You ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly."²¹⁶ Thus the hierarch, being a man of God, asks only for what is suitable to the divine promises, for what pleases God, and for what God will freely give. He thereby demonstrates to God the lover of good that his own conduct is always modeled on the Good and he thereby shows those present what kind of gifts the saints will receive.

Similarly, insofar as he makes known the judgments of God he has also the powers of excommunication. Not indeed that the all-wise divinity gives in to his every unthinking impulse, if I may so speak with all reverence. But the hierarch obeys the Spirit which is the source of every rite and which speaks by way of his words. He excommunicates those unworthy people whom God has already judged. It says: "Receive the holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."²¹⁷ And to the one enlightened by the sacred revelation of the all-holy Father it is said in scripture, "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."²¹⁸ Thus [Peter] himself and all the hierarchs like him have had the judgment of the Father revealed to them, and, being themselves men who provide revelation and explanation, they have the task of admitting the friends of God and of keeping away the ungodly. That sacred acknowledgement of God came to him, as scripture shows, not on his own, not from a flesh-and-blood revelation, but as something from the understanding and under the influence of the God who initiated him into what he knew.²¹⁹ Similarly, God's hierarchs must use their powers of excommunication, as well as all their other hierarchic powers, to the extent that they are moved by the divinity which is the source of every rite. And everyone else must obey the hierarchs when they act as such, for they are inspired by God himself. "He who rejects you," it says, "rejects me."²²⁰

216. Jas 4:3.

217. Jn 20:22f.

218. Mt 16:19.

219. Mt 16:17.

220. Lk 10:16. Everything from 560C 29 to 564D 47, including all the scriptural citations documented in notes 209–19, is an excursus on the very notion of interceding for the

565A 8. But let us now move on to what comes after the prayer under discussion above. When it is done, the hierarch, together with all the others who are in attendance, gives the kiss of peace to the deceased, for someone who has completed a holy life is pleasing to and respected by all those living in conformity with God. After the kiss the hierarch pours the holy oil over the deceased. Now remember that the first participation in this sacred symbol, the oil of anointing, was given to the initiate during the sacred divine birth, before the actual baptism and after he has exchanged his old clothes for the new. Now, by contrast, it is at the end of all things that the holy oil is spread over the deceased. The sacred anointing with oil once called the initiate to sacred combat; now the pouring on of the oil reveals that in this sacred combat the deceased fought his way to victory.²²¹

9. Following on these rites the hierarch lays the body in an honored place alongside the bodies of other saints of the same order. If the deceased lived, body and soul, a life pleasing to God, his body will deserve to have a share of the honors bestowed on the soul which was its companion in the sacred struggle. That is why divine justice links the body with the soul when final judgment is rendered to the soul, for the body also took part in the same journey along the road of holiness or impiety. Hence the blessed ordinances grant divine communion to both the one and the other. They do so for the soul by way of pure contemplation, together with the understanding of the sacred rites. And they do so for the body by way of the imagery of the most divine ointment and through the most sacred symbol of the divine communion. Thus the entire person is made holy, the work of his salvation is all-embracing, and the full rites make known the totality of the resurrection that is to come.

10. As for the consecrating invocations, it would be improper to set down in writing what they signify, nor could one publicly reveal their hidden sense and the power of God which is at work in them. Sacred tradition teaches us that one has to be introduced to them through processes of initiation which are not public.²²² You must be

dead. The author interprets the prayer in question (see above, note 199) as a proclamation of God's justice rather than an intercession.

221. See EH 2 396C 26–29 and 401C 35 to 404A 11, where the baptismal anointing with oil and its athletic imagery are interpreted.

222. Since the "consecrating invocations" are the prayers at ordination (EH 5 509B) and tonsure (EH 6 533B), this paragraph may be an excursus not directly related to the current chapter. The only prayers even indirectly divulged are the anaphora (EH 3 440C

perfected in a more holy and uplifting mode of life by love for God and by sacred activities. And he who is the enlightening source of every rite will uplift you to the supreme understanding of them.

565D 11. You might say, however, that what could really earn the ridicule of the impious is the fact that infants, despite their inability to understand the divine things, are nevertheless admitted to that sacrament of sacred divine-birth and to the sacred symbols of the divine communion.²²³ In effect, the hierarch may be seen to teach divine things to those incapable of understanding them, to pass on the sacred traditions to those unable to grasp them. And a further cause for laughter is the practice whereby others speak the ritual renunciations and the sacred promises on behalf of the infants.

Yours is the understanding of a hierarch and you must not be angry with those who are mistaken. Rather, you must take care to guide them to the light by lovingly refuting their objections and by making clear to them, as sacred law commands, that our knowledge is far from being commensurate with the divine mysteries, many of which remain beyond our grasp and with a meaning outside our power to understand. They are known only to the orders which are superior to our human condition and they have a status quite in keeping with their divine nature. Many elude even the highest beings and are known fully only by that all-wise divinity which is the source of all wisdom.

568B But let me set down what our blessed teachers, in their knowledge of the earliest tradition, have passed down to us. What they say is this, and it is true. Children raised up in accordance with holy precepts will acquire the habits of holiness. They will avoid all the errors and all the temptations of an unholy life. Understanding the truth of this, our divine leaders decided it was a good thing to admit children, though on condition that the parents of the child would entrust him to some good teacher who is himself initiated in the divine things and who could provide religious teaching as the child's spiritual father and as the sponsor of salvation.²²⁴ Anyone thus committed to raise the child up along the way of a holy life is asked by the hierarch to agree

35 to 444A 4, note 95) and the prayer for the dead (see above, note 199). Even the word "alleluia" is never actually used (EH 4 485AB 15–23, note 139).

223. Only in this excursus, i.e., not in the chapters on baptism (EH 2) or the synaxis (EH 3), does the author testify to infant baptism or infant communion.

224. Sponsors for adult candidates are discussed in EH 2 393B, 393D 40f., and 400C 37 to 401A 3.

568C to the ritual renunciations and to speak the words of promise. Those who scoff at this are quite wrong in thinking that the one is initiated into the divine mysteries instead of the other, for he does not say "I am making the renunciations and the promises for the child," but "the child himself is assigned and enrolled." In effect what is said is this: "I promise that when this child can understand sacred truth I shall educate him and shall raise him up by my teaching in such a way that he will renounce all the temptations of the devil, that he will bind himself to the sacred promises and will bring them to fruit."

So I do not think there is anything ridiculous if the child is brought up with a godly upbringing, provided of course that there is a sacred leader and sponsor to form holy habits in him and to guard him against the temptations of the devil. When the hierarch admits the child to a share in the sacred symbols it is so that he may derive nourishment from this, so that he may spend his entire life in the unceasing contemplation of the divine things, may progress in his communion with them, may therefore acquire a holy and enduring way of life, and may be brought up in sanctity by the guidance of a holy sponsor who himself lives in conformity with God.

568D My son, these are the fine and unifying sights presented by our hierarchy. Doubtless more perceptive minds would not be confined to what I have seen. They would contemplate sights more outstanding and also more in conformity with God. And I believe that more stunning and more divine beauties will enlighten you too as you employ my remarks as steps up to a more sublime ray. Dear friend, be generous with me. Bring before my eyes that more perfect and more evident enlightenment which will be yours as you learn of a beauty more lovely and closer to the One. For I feel sure that my words will rekindle the sparks of God's fire which sleep in you.²²⁵

225. The end of the treatise echoes the literary humility concluding *The Divine Names* (DN 13 981C 23 to 984A 12) and *The Celestial Hierarchy* (CH 15 340B).