FOLIA ORIENTALIA
VOL. 48 2011

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VIEWS OF GOD IN THE OLYMPIC ORATION OF DIO CHRYSOSTOM AND IN THE BIBLE

Both contrasts and similarities between the Hellenistic religion and the biblical vision of God may seem banal and well-known at first sight. The Bible refuses polytheism and idolatry, the philosophical Hellenistic religion had important monotheistic elements. On the other hand, there are no obvious direct relations between them, their theologies and theological vocabularies being different.

Such a situation, and perhaps the memory of the exaggerations proper to the *Religionsgeschichtlische Schule*, has contributed to a relatively limited interest in comparing Hellenistic and New Testament theologies.[1] It is indeed difficult, since we have to deal with different religious languages and structures, and to compare general ideas and attitudes, which are not always easy to define. It is not as in the case of the moral teachings of deuterocanonical books and of the New Testament, which were to some extent influenced by Hellenism.

Works of Dio of Prusa, called Chrystostom, although roughly contemporary to the New Testament, do not offer many touching points with Christian writings and such a comparison was rarely proposed. Admittedly, we possess a volume on Dio and the New Testament,[2] but it is unsatisfactory. This book consists of a huge

[1] Luke T. Johnson, *Among the Gentiles: Greco-Roman Religion and Christianity* (Anchor Yale Biblical Reference Library; New Haven – London: YUP, 2009), is an important step in this direction, but it deals not with the theologies, but with the concepts related to the functions of religion; religion could be a participation in divine benefis (Aelius Aristides), moral transformation (Epictetus), transcending the world (*Poimandres*), stabilization of the world (Plutarch); Christianity of the first centuries appropriated these functions. Dio, a heir of the Platonic and Stoic thought, with his interest in the sources of religion and in the nature of God, is virtually absent here.

[2] Gerhard Mussies, *Dio Chrysostom and the New Testament* (Studia ad Corpus Hellenisticum Novi Testamenti 21; Leiden: Brill, 1972).

collection of concordance-type parallels, but mostly of a secondary and purely verbal character. The Olympic Oration is treated on a half-page (p. 19). Accordingly, the Olympic Oration was only exceptionally discussed in relation to the Bible.[3]

In this paper, I shall first present briefly Dio and his twelfth oration, called Olympic (*Or.* 12). It has a key-value for establishing the opinions of Dio on religion.[4] Next I shall discuss the opinions of Dio on the religious knowledge and pass to the comparison of his vision of Zeus with the biblical views on God: only one, creator and merciful.

1. Dio and his Olympic Oration

Dio Chrysostom[5] was born about 40 A.D. in a provincial aristocratic family in Bithynia. Since 70 A.D. he had been active in Rome, Prusa and elsewhere

[3] The basic commentary of Klauck (see below) retained only 8 references from the New Testament. There are some further recent attempts in this direction: Ilaria Ramelli, "Philosophen und Prediger: Dion und Paulus – pagane and christliche weise Männer", in: Heinz-Günther Nesselrath (ed.), *Dion von Prusa. Der Philosoph und sein Bild* (Texte zur Forschung SAPERE 13; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 183-210; Te-Li Lau, *The Politics of Peace: Ephesians, Dio Chrysostom, and the Confucian Four Books* (Supplements to Novum Testamentum 133; Leiden-Boston: Brill 2010), esp. 157-207, 285-287, but concentrated on Ephesians.

Peter S. Perry ("Critiquing the Excess of Empire: A Synkrisis of John of Patmos and Dio of Prusa", *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 29(2009)4, 473-496) has discussed a less important aspect of the twelfth oration. I quote his abstract: "Despite their many differences, John the Seer of Patmos and Dio the rhetor-philosopher of Prusa share a basic critique of the Roman Empire. Limiting the comparison to Rev. 18 and Dio's twelfth Olympic Oration (with an important reference to Dio's thirteenth Oration), this essay concludes that John and Dio critique the violence, exploitation and luxury of Rome, grounding their analysis in divine sovereignty over earthly rulers. This common critique suggests that John's message may have been sympathetically heard by a wider audience than simply a few Christian communities, and that Revelation should be reevaluated in this light".

As a curiosity we may mention Arthur F. Hallam, *Concurrences between Dio Chrysostom's First Discourse and the New Testament* (North Canton, Ohio: Capitalist Press, 1985), stating that Dio was the final editor of the New Testament! (p. 23).

[4] I do not include his other discourses, less relevant for the present paper. Mythical hymn described in *Or.* 36.39-55 presents a Stoic allegory of the world order (cf. *Or.* 40.35-41). More in: Heinz-Günther Nesselrath et al., *Dion von Prusa. Menschliche Gemeinschaft und Göttliche Ordnung: Die Borysthenes-Rede* (Texte zur Forschung SAPERE 6; Darmstadt: Mohr Siebeck, 2003). Cf. also *Or.* 1-4 on the good ruler compared to Zeus.

[5] Basic historical work on Dio: Hans von Arnim, *Leben und Werke des Dio von Prusa. Sophistik, Rhetorik, Philosophie in ihrem Kampf um die Jugendbildung* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1898; reprint 2010); cf. Christopher P. Jones, *The Roman World of Dio Chrysostom* (Loeb Classical Monographs; Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard UP, 1978); Simon Swain (ed.), *Dio Chrysostom. Politics, Letters, and Philosophy*, (Oxford-New York; OUP, 2000). Vocabulary of Dio: Richard Koolmeister, Theodor Tallmeister, ed. Jan F. Kindstrand, *An Index to Dio Chrysostomos*, Uppsala 1981. State of research: B.F. Harris, *Dio of Prusa: a Survey of Recent Work,* Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt II.33.5 [1991], 3853-3881; further two general articles on Dio by

as a rhetorician. In disgrace under Domitian, in favor under Trajan, he finally gained a wide recognition, but he created no school. He died after 112 A.D. Being interested mainly in rhetoric and literature, he was not a systematic philosopher, although he made appeal to many current philosophical ideas. His philosophy can be described as simplified Stoicism with Platonic elements in his theology and Cynic elements in his moral counsels. He was an intelligent, educated, and honest representative of the main current of the intellectual life of his times. Therefore, his ideas can be taken as a good sample of the worldview of the first century Greco-Roman world. The intended comparison has some general value.

Among his eighty preserved discourses, the Olympic Oration belongs to the longest and the most important ones.[6] It was relatively often discussed.[7] Its genre is epideictic, but with many other elements. Its Greek title, *The Olympic discourse on*

Paolo Desideri, 3882-3959; cf. Paolo Desideri, *Dione di Prusa, un intellettuale greco nell'Impero Romano*, Messina-Firenze 1978. In Polish: Marian Szarmach, *Dion z Prusy. Monografia historyczno-literacka* (Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika. Rozprawy; Toruń: Wydawnictwo UMK, 1979), esp. 60-68.

[6] Its Greek text: *Dionis Prusaensis quem vocant Chrysostomus quae extant omnia*, ed. Johannes de Arnim [= Hans von Arnim], vol. 1-2, Berlin 1893-96; *Dionis Chrysostomi Orationes*, ed. Guillaume de Budé, t. 1-2 (Berlin: Teubner, 1916-1919); Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses*, vol. 2, ed. J.W. Cohoon, H. Lamar Crosby (Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge Mass./London: Harvard UP, Heinemann, 1951, 4-87 (the source of my English quotations). Cf. Dio Chrysostom, *Orations VIII, XII and XXXVI*, ed. Donald A. Russell (Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics; Cambridge: CUP, 1992), 62-88. In German: Dion Chrysostomos, *Sämtliche Reden*, transl. Winfried Elliger (Zürich/ Stuttgart: Artemis, 1967), 221-250. The most important edition: Dion von Prusa, *ΟΛΥΜΠΙΚΟΣ Η ΠΕΡΙ ΤΕΣ ΠΡΟΤΗΣ ΥΟΨ* [sic!] *ΘΕΟΥ ΕΝΝΟΙΑΣ. Olympische Rede oder über die erste Erkenntnis Gottes*, ed. Hans-Josef Klauck with Balbina Bäbler (Texte zur Forschung: SAPERE 2; Darmstadt: Mohr Siebeck, 2000). It contains the improved Greek text after von Arnim with translation, introduction, notes and bibliography to Dio. Cf. also Dione di Prusa, *Olimpico (Or. XII), introduzio, testo, traduzione e note*, ed. Claudio Naddeo (Salerno: Palladio, 1998). I use my work: Dion z Prusy, *Mowa olimpijska o religii i pięknie*, ed. Michał Wojciechowski (Starożytne Teksty Religijne; Kraków: Nomos, 2006): Polish translation with introduction and notes. In this book, however, I have not compared Dio with the Bible.

[7] Some further works, which are relevant for the present study: Ileana Chirassi, "Il significato religioso del XII discorso di Dione Chrisostomo", *Rivista di Cultura Classica e Medioevale* 5(1963), 266-285; Paolo Desideri, "Religione e politica nell'Olimpico di Dione", *Quaderni Storici* 15(1980), 141-161; B.F. Harris, "The Olympian Oration of Dio Chrysostom", *Journal of Religious History* 2(1962), 85-97; Lars Hartman, "The Human Desire to Converse with the Divine: Dio of Prusa and Philo of Alexandria on Images of God", in: *Being Religious and Living through the Eyes*, Fs. Jan Bergman, ed. P. Schalk (Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Historia religionum 14; Uppsala, 1998), 163-171; Godo Lieberg, "Die 'theologia tripertita' in Forschung und Bezeugung", Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt I.4 (1974), 63-115; Władysław = Ladislas Madyda, *De pulchritudine imaginum quid auctores graeci saec. II p. Ch. n. indicaverunt* (Cracoviae: Academia Polona Litterarum, Gebethner et Wolff, 1939); M. Mortenthaler, *Der Olympikos des Dion von Prusa als literarhistorisches und geistesgeschichtliches Dokument* (diss. Wien 1979); Jean Pépin, « La „théologie tripartite" de Varron. Essai de reconstitution et recherche des sources », *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes* 2(1956), 265-294; Marina Rosso, "Il dio dello

man's first conception of god (*Olympikos e peri tes protes tou theou ennoias*) stems from editors and correctly announces the theological interest of the work.

It is supposed to be recited in Olympia, in front of the temple of Zeus. It is usually associated with crowds gathering for the Olympic games, but the contents indicate a religious occasion; there is no word on sport in it;[8] thus the Olympi***an*** Oration would be more adequate as a title of the work. Therefore, it is not enough evidence to place it in a year of Olympic games. In paragraphs 16-20 Dio described armies he had seen shortly earlier, gathered on the banks of the Danube and ready for attack. It is perhaps a reference to the invasion of Dacia in 105/6 A.D. It indicates the probable date.

2. Dio on religion

The religious doctrine of Dion is based on *theologia tripertita* (*tripartita*) identifying mythology, natural philosophy, and law (society) as the sources of religion. The origin of this theory is not clear, because it is known only from some fragmentary later sources.

Tertullian (*Ad gentes* 2.1-2) and Augustine (*De civitate Dei* 4.27; 6.5-6; cf. 6.12; 8.1) quoted Varro on three kinds of theology: *tria genera theologiae*: viz. *physicon* (*physicum*, *naturalis*), *mythicon* (*mythicum*, *fabulosum*, *poeticum*), *politicen* (sic, *gentile*, *gentiles*). A polemic, but adequate, presentation of this doctrine can be found in Eusebius (*Praeparatio evangelica* 3.17.1-2; 4.1.2-4). Tertullian (*Ad gentes* 2.14) traced this concept back to Dionisios, a teacher of Poseidonios; accordingly, it would stem from the earlier years of the Middle Stoicism. Direct Greek sources date from the first century A.D. Aetios (*Placita* 1.6.2-9 = *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* 2.100) listed nature, myth and law as three sources of the cult. Plutarch (*Moralia* 763BCD) listed myth, law and reason – it means that opinions on gods are formed by poets, lawyers and philosophers. Here we have also Dio, even if with important modifications.

In my opinion, the sources of this theory can be traced further back than to the Middle Stoicism. It seems derived from the popular division of philosophy into logics (on speech), physics (on the nature) and ethics (dealing with human behaviour). This classification, known in the Academy since Xenocrates and accepted by Stoics and Epicureans, could have been quite early reproduced in the field of religion.

Dio modified this concept, postulating as the main source of religion a universal, primary intuition of deity as present in the world (on the Stoic manner). Man is fed and initiated by nature, the world is home and temple. This intuition is inspired by the role of Zeus, father, benefactor and creator of the

scultore: l'orazione XII di Dione Crisostomo", *Quaderni del Dipartimento di filologia A. Rostagni* 1999, 331-346.

[8] Apart of a gloss in § 17.

world (Platonism). Humans feel and see the divine creator in the world. Dio exposed this theory at length (27-35; 39).

From this basic intuition the tripartite theology stems, with philosophy (or teaching), poetry, and law (39-44). Dio is not quite clear whether the primary, innate (*emphytos*) intuition of god is something earlier than these three, which are acquired (39), or is expressed in the natural knowledge, formulated later by philosophy (44). It seems that the former understanding fits better with the course of his thought. The primary intuition constitutes the first level, the rationalizing tripartite theology the second one (47).

Next, Dio added to this theory a possibility of perceiving the deity through an artistic presentation (44-47). He described different artistic techniques and pronounced some important opinions on the arts. He associated perceiving the deity through visual arts with the three ways from the tripartite theology, putting it in parallel with the poetic description. However, the best access to the deity is furnished by philosophy (47-48), whereas the poetic description is earlier (39-41). Philosophy is to be understood as the third, the highest level of knowledge, after the primary intuition and after poetry, art, and law.

The artistic representation of god in sculpture can be compared with the poetry; even if the sculpture lacks some possibilities, it appears finally as superior (55-82). This opinion is formulated in an imaginary speech of Pheidias, preceded by a rhetorical question whether his representation of god was a success (49-54). The discussed example, the statue of Zeus in Olympia made by Pheidias, is interpreted as an adequate image of Zeus and of his divine qualities.

All these matters are not theology in a Christian sense, but rather the philosophy of religion or the beginning of science of religion. Dio reflected on the religion as a human phenomenon of primary importance, looking for its explanation. Gods do exist, it is proven by the created world (cosmological proof); the question is how we get this knowledge. Here he follows a path which is obviously far from the biblical tradition, based on the divine self-revelation, rather than on the human intuition and reason. Perhaps the primary intuition of god can be compared with the access to god the first people had, after the creation and before the sin.

There is also an obvious contrast between the statue of Zeus as an exemplary representation of deity and the biblical condemnation of idols as a completely false form of religion. We may only note that Dio was aware of the possible criticism of his views, defending the artistic and anthropomorphic representation of gods (58-63). Apparently, he considered some unquoted opinions of the ancient authors, whether atheistic, or opposed to the cult of images.[9]

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[9] E.g. Herodotus (*History* 2.172); Aesopic fables 295, 308, 307 cf. 88, 89, 285 (Perry edition); Diagoras story on making firewood of a statue of Heracles (cf. Marek Winiarczyk, "Diagoras von Melos – Wahrheit und Legende", *Eos* 67(1979) 191-213; 68(1980) 51-75); Heraclitus, Sophocles

On the other hand, his opinions illustrate the optimistic judgement of Paul on the possibility of finding God through the created world: *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made* (Rom 1.19-20, RSV; cf. Rom 2.14-15; Wis 13.1-9). To formulate such opinions, Paul had to know about theological efforts of some predecessors of Dio.

However, the properly theological question "who is Zeus" was also raised. Dio expressed his authentic piety, presenting a lofty vision of Zeus based on the Greek religious and philosophical traditions.

3. Some individual parallels between the Olympic Oration and the Bible

Before we compare this view of God with the Bible we should check possible individual analogies between some sayings of Dio and the biblical traditions. They are neither many nor very important in themselves, but we should enumerate them to clear the field for the main subject. They result largely from the common roots of Dio and of the New Testament in the culture of the Eastern Mediterranean. Some of them will be useful for the next section.

A) Concerning divine things:

20: *I turned my course hither to you, ever considering that things divine have the greater claim and are more profitable than things human, however important they may be* (cf. Mk 12.17 par.; cf. 8.33).

22: *If perchance we can commemorate both the nature and his power in a brief speech, which will fall short on what it should be* (cf. 2 Cor 3.5 etc.).

25: Natural knowledge of God is fully possible (cf. Rom 1.19-20, quoted above; 2 P 1.4).

27: God's kinship with man; proximity of the first people to god; living in his very centre (cf. Aratos quotation in Acts 17.28; Gen 1-3; Acts 17.27).

32: Humans loving god, with *agapaô*, as in the Bible. Elements of finality in the world, namely the seasons as necessary for the mankind (cf. Acts 14.17).

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and Zeno quoted by Clement of Alexandria (*Protrepticus* 50.4; 74.1; *Stromateis* 5.11 = 5.76.1); Plutarch (*De Iside et Osiride* 76 = *Moralia* 382b) etc. On Zeno also in Epiphanius, *Adversus Haereses* 3.2.9,26; Augustine, *Contra Academicos* 3.17.38 (*Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* 1.146); Philodemus, *De pietatis* 15, attributed a condemnation of anthropomorphic images to Diogenes of Babylon. Acts 17.25,29 consider these concepts known to the Athenian hearers of Paul. These opinions could have influenced later biblical texts, as I proposed in my article: Michał Wojciechowski, "Ancient Criticism of Religion in Dan 14 (Bel and Dragon), Bar 6 (Epistle of Jeremiah), and Wisdom 14", in: *Deuterocanonical Additions of the Old Testament Books,* red. Geza G. Xeravits, József Zsengeller (Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Studies 5; Berlin /New York: de Gruyter 2010), 60-76.

35: Honoring god even by plants and animals recalls the similar motif from the Bible.
58: Similarity of an image to god (Gen 1.26 etc.).
59: Idols in the animal form do not represent god well (Wis 13.10,14; 15.14-19; Rom 1.22-24).
73: *Our god is peaceful and altogether gentle* (cf. on Jesus: Matt 22.29; 21.5; 2 Cor 10.1).
B) Concerning human nature, situation and morals:
8: Clever teacher, the owl, is considered foolish (cf. Mark 3.21; John 10.20).
10: Abandoning family and country as an ideal for life (cf. Mark 10.29 par.; Matt 8.21-22; John 1.39).
11: Virtue brings riches according to Dio, and someone seeking the Kingdom will obtain else (Matt 6.33 par.).
17: Prayer only with mouth (cf. Matt 15.8; 1 John 3.18).
27: Naming things as sign of superiority (Gen 2.19-20).
28: Planting human beings (cf. Zech 10.9; Jer 31.27-28; 4 Esdras 8.41; 1 Hen 62.8; further 1 Cor 3.6; 15.36-38).
30: Primeval abundance (cf. Gen 2.9; Mark 4.28).
59: Body as a vessel (2 Cor 4.7; cf. Rom 9.20-23; 2 Tim 2.21).
C) Opinions current in the ancient world and similar wordings:
15: Ostentatious long hair of philosophers (cf. 1 Cor 11.14).
31: Birth as falling out (Job 3.16).
37: Playing boys as a negative example (Matt 11.16 par.).
55: Talkative Athenians (Acts 17.21).
78: The rain*bow* as symbol of war (Gen 9.12-16).

4. Zeus of Dio and God of the Bible

A. One or many gods

In the Hellenistic religion, we find a tendency to place Zeus above all gods and to treat him as a god *par excellence*, what is called henotheism. The famous hymn of Cleanthes furnishes a good example.[10] On the popular level we may quote some Aesopic fables, showing Zeus as king of the world, superior to other divinities (e.g. nos. 104, 462 [Perry]).[11]

Dio deals only with Zeus, mentioning him by name 11 times. He is usually meant as god, *theos* in singular (about 10 times). Divine actions and qualities

[10] Johan C. Thom, *Cleanthes' Hymn to Zeus* (Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 33, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005). Cf. Arthur B. Cook, *Zeus. A Study in Ancient Religion*, 3 vols., (Cambridge: CUP, 1914-1940), accessible in the web.

[11] I wrote in Polish on the religious content of Aesopic fables: Michał Wojciechowski, „Religia i jej krytyka w greckich bajkach Ezopowych", *Nomos* 2006, fasc. 55/56, 23-47, 165.

are discussed in relation to Zeus. No other god is mentioned by name. However, their presence is clearly acknowledged by mentions of *theoi* in plural (about 20 times), and on *daimonion – daimonia* or *theion – theia*, referring to divinities in general. Some mentions on Zeus and gods are either taken from other authors (Hesiod and Homer) or are stereotype.

The nature of plural divine forces remains unclear. Dio avoids to recognize sun and moon as gods (58) and attributes to barbarians honouring the mountains, trees and stones (61). However, there is no question of monotheism. Surprisingly for the modern reader, the problem of monotheism versus polytheism is not even mentioned. Greeks abstained from counting gods. Their notion of god can be perhaps described as "anumerical",[12] what found a philosophical rationalization in the Stoic pantheism.

Zeus as god is characterized most fully in paragraphs 22 and 75-76. Dio lists titles of Zeus;[13] this method is not far from the biblical idea of divine name(s).

(22) For he is indeed alike of men and gods the king and ruler and lord and father (*basileus, archon, pritanis, pater*), and in addition, the dispenser of peace and of war.

(75) And consider whether you will not find that the statue is in keeping with all the titles by which Zeus is known. For he alone of gods is entitled Father and King, Protector of Cities, God of Friendship and God of Comradeship, and also Protector of Suppliants, and God of Hospitality, Giver of Increase. And has countless other titles, all indicative of goodness: he is addressed as King because of his dominion and power; as Father, I think, on account of his solicitude for us and his kindness; as Protector of Cities in that he upholds the law and the common weal; as Guardian of the Race on account of the tie of kinship which unites gods and men; (76) as God of Friendship and God of Comradeship because he brings all men together, and wills that they be friends of one another and never enemy or foe; as protector of suppliants since he inclines his ear and is gracious to men when they pray; as God of Refuge because he gives refuge from evils; as God of Hospitality because we should not be unmindful even of strangers, nor regard any human being as an alien; as Giver of Wealth and Increase, since he is the cause of all crops and id the giver of wealth and power.

[12] This proposal was formulated by Tadeusz Zieliński, Polish classical scholar (see his *Religion de la Grèce antique*: Paris: Belles Lettres, 1926, written and published first in Russian, Petrograd 1922).

[13] Similarly Pseudo-Aristotle, *De mundo* 401B; cf. Dio, *Or.* 1.39-40. Litanies (*kletikoi*) was a recognized form of presenting gods.

It is difficult to find here something unknown to the biblical theology, apart from some differences in wording. E.g. God protects Zion and is our refuge... Zeus of Dio has qualities of God, not of a god. The title of king (ruler, lord) has the key value, because it presupposes the only one (the name of Father, related to creation, will be discussed below). In the oration, we find also some shorter proclamation. Zeus is *foremost and greatest god* (52); he governs the universe (55); he is the greatest among gods (73); he is characterized by power (70; 84). Dio quotes also the invocation of Hesiod's *Works and Days*, calling Zeus great and giving him the highest palace (24).

In Hesiod (*Theogony* 886) Zeus is the king of gods, in Cleanthes' hymn (14) – the highest king. However, this title is not frequent in the Greek tradition. Some indirect influence of Judaism on the Greek religious language could be postulated here. Zeus of Dio appears as a unique ruler of the world. It makes him greatly superior to men and to other beings called gods.

Since the antiquity Christians have considered such a vision of god found in pagan philosophers to be near to the biblical one, interpreting it as preparation for the Gospel. And indeed, this opinion has to be acknowledged. What is said by Dio on Zeus accords in contents with the biblical vision of God. We have here some justification for the surprising statement of the *Letter of Aristeas* (16) that Zeus is a name of the true God.

The difference is that the Greek recognized also gods in plural, even if they were secondary to Zeus, the highest god. But perhaps these *theoi* and *daimonia* are more like *bene elohim* from the Bible? They are gods, supernatural beings, but they are not gods like Zeus. Dio had shown that he had an idea of god which fits only Zeus and not with the crowd of minor divinities. For this reason we can meet in his work some mentions about the difficulty of presenting god (54; 80).

B. Creator and father

Zeus is the one, who fashioned the whole universe (*demiourgounti ton hapanta kosmon*), says Pheidias of Dio at the end of his speech (83). *For he is indeed the first and most perfect artificer* (*demiourgos*), *who has taken as his coadjutor in his art ... the entire material of the entire universe* (82). Accordingly, he is identical with the demiurge of Plato. He is creator of the world in a Greek sense, assuming the eternal existence of an unformed matter. (Christianity has proclaimed *creatio ex nihilo*, but some biblical expressions are not so clear; cf. Gen 1, 1-2.)

The mechanism of creation is not discussed, but rather its consequences. Human race has a conception of god, *innate in every creature endowed with reason, arising in the course of nature without the aid of human teacher ... it rendered manifest God's kinship with man* (27); *... these earlier men were not living dispersed far away from the divine being ... had grown up in the very*

centre of things, or rather had grown up in his company and remained close to him in every way (27).[14]

Having created the world, Zeus is called father, *alike of men and of gods* (22).[15] Hence gods appear as created, e.g. Muses (23-24). For Dio, Zeus is above all father of humans (42; 61; 74; 75; 77; 81); sometimes their ancestor (*propater*, 29).

It implies a family relation between god and mankind: *The feelings of the human race towards their first and immortal parent* (*goneos*), *whom we who have a share in the heritage of Hellas call Ancestral Zeus* (*patroon Dia*), *develop step by step along with those which men have towards their mortal and human parents* (42). The knowledge of god is interpreted also as initiation (28-34). This notion is comparable to the idea of natural revelation, but remains more religious and mystical than intellectual. However, it could be interpreted in a sense close to the Christian notion of revelation: if we are initiated, someone shows the divine truth to us.

Interestingly, there is no trace of the tradition that the creator of men was Prometheus, one among many primeval inferior beings. This popular opinion (e.g. Pausanias 10.4.4; Aesop 100; 240; 259; 266 [Perry]) was associated with a more pessimistic view of human condition; its genial and moving summary can be found in a late remark of Themistius, *Or.* 32: [according to Aesop] *the clay which Prometheus used when he fashioned man was not mixed with water but with tears* (Aesop, 430, transl. L. Gibbs). For Dio, man is greater, dear to god, so great in his beauty and majesty that his body can be a model for the statues of gods (59; cf. Gen 1.26).

One more, apart from differences in wording, the Bible says nearly the same. God is creator of the world and of man. For humans, he is a powerful and caring Father. New Testament is aware of the currency of this opinion in the Greek world and approves it. Paul in Acts 14.15-17 says to the pagan hearers: *You should turn from these vain things to a living God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways; yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.*

C. Benevolence

As creator and father Zeus cares from the beginning for his children. *He is the Giver of our material and our physical life and of all our blessings* (74). Indirectly, through the nature, he seems to have given them food and perception (28-31).

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[14] Cf. above, par. 2.

[15] Zeus is father in the Greek tradition since Homer (e.g. *Iliad*, 1.544; 4.225); it suggested that he bore the world and rules it (cf. Plato on the demiurge, *Timaios* 28C; 37C).

Such a nature of Zeus is expressed in his Olympian statue. It presents him as *altogether benevolent and solicitous* (*eunous kai kedomenos*, 85). This saving and benevolent Zeus has a number of adequate names (75, quoted above, cf. 77). These names prove his goodness (*agathe*) and show him as saviour (*soter*), actual helper (74).

Dio contrasts quiet and good Zeus of Pheidias with a violent one of Homer (78). *Our god is peaceful and altogether gentle ... a mild and majestic god in pleasing guise, ... the common Father, Saviour and Guardian* (*phylax*) *of mankind* (74). He cares for the good, the meek, the persecuted: *God of Friends, Suppliants, Strangers, Refugees* – even if he does not lack *majesty and severity* (77).

There are three feelings of man towards gods: envy, fear, admiration, says Plutarch (*Aristides* 6.4). Dio presents a different vision of god and a different response. People love gods instinctively as small children (61). Initiated from the very beginning in the mystery of the universe (27-31), *experiencing all these thing and afterwards taking note of them, men could not help admiring and loving the divinity* (*daimonion*, here about Zeus; 32). From creation to religion. Even animals and plants desire to live according to the ordinances of God, *so very clear and evident is the will and power of yonder god* (35).

Therefore, honouring god through cult is seen as obvious, and frequently mentioned (21; 25; 49; 51; 61 etc.). Contemplating the statue is associated with a deep religious experience: *And of men, whoever is sore distressed in soul, having in the course of life drained the cup of many misfortunes and griefs, nor ever winning sweet sleep – even this man, methinks, if he stood before this image, would forget all the terrors and hardships that fall to our human lot* (51).

As in the Bible, we have the supreme God as caring Father and people as his loving children.

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Concluding: if a reader less versed in the theological language read the descriptions of Zeus in the Olympic Oration, he would experience some difficulty in discerning the opinions of Dio from the biblical and Christian doctrine. In spite of some obvious differences, this vision of divinity is convergent with the New Testament. Zeus appears as the highest god, king, creator, father and benefactor of the world and of men.

Whence this similarity? To some extent it results from the internal evolution of the Greek religion and philosophy, from Platon and Stoicism on. On the other hand, after four centuries of contact with the monotheistic and moral religion of the Bible, some indirect influence from this side is quite possible and likely, even if the Greeks would not willingly admit that they had accepted some

Jewish ideas, avoiding Jewish religious language.[16] Dio is, after all, later than the Bible.

Summary

Works of Dio of Prusa, called Chrystostom, offer some touching points with Christian writings. In his Olympic Oration (after 100 A.D.), Dio presented a theory on the sources of religion, based on *theologia tripertita*, and his own theology of the supreme god, Zeus. Zeus is seen as king, ruler, lord, what presupposes his supremacy and uniqueness, even if gods in plural are mentioned. He is creator and father of the world. He is highly benevolent towards the mankind. These features are similar to the Christian view of God and may be explained by some influence of the biblical tradition on the Greek world.

[16] Our knowledge of ancient Greek Jewish theological language is far from being full. It is sufficient only for Egipt (Septuagint, Philo etc.). We may only guess that 4 Maccabees and Paul represent some traditions from Syria; as for Asia Minor and Greece we are limited to inscriptions. Their language could have been nearer to Dio.