

**THE ORTHODOX CHURCH  
CHURCH OF ALEXANDRIA**

**THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH  
and  
THE DOGMAS**

**2**

# **MAN AND REDEMPTION**

**Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty  
St. George's Coptic Orthodox Church  
Alexandria - Egypt**

Reverend Father Tadros Y. Malaty has kindly permitted that his books be published in the COeRL. He has requested that we convey that any suggestions or amendments regarding their translation are welcome, and should be forwarded to:  
[sydneywebmaster@coptic.org.au](mailto:sydneywebmaster@coptic.org.au)

We acknowledge God as "God of men", for He who is unapproachable, inconceivable and invisible in His infinite love towards men, reveals Himself to them. God who fills heaven and earth is pleased to attribute Himself to men, especially those who love Him as if they are His own beloved children. He called Himself: "God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob" Exod 3:6, 15, 16, 4:5; Matt 22:23 etc ... repeatedly, in the Old Testament, He was called "God of Israel", for God dwells among His people the true believers, as if He were their own. Therefore the Psalmist says: "You are my refuge, my portion ... "

On the other hand, men who are created as free human beings, have the choice to be close to God as their Beloved Father, Lord and Savior, or even to deny Him; they are in fact God's creatures. We can't understand ourselves, our nature, our message and our destiny our relationship with God.

Now, I would like to give an idea about man and his redemption, or in other words " man in his relation to God, His Savior ", especially from the Coptic Orthodox Church point of view.

## MAN IN GOD'S SIGHT

It is very difficult to present a real picture of God's view of His most beloved creature on earth, "man".

The message of the Church is to reveal God's infinite love towards man; this love which can satisfy our inner life, grants us peace and joy and fills us with hope.

Man, in his essence, is an image of God: "Love". He is always hungry and thirsty to love, and desires to be loved by everybody and also to give love to others. Outside "love" man loses his human being. No one can satisfy man's thirst for love like God Himself, for He is the Creator who takes care of His beloved creatures; He is the Origin that attracts the image and He is the eternal "Love" who gives Himself to man.

God in His relationship with man does not look at him as if he is just one of millions of creatures He makes, but He deals with him as His own close friend and beloved one. Before He created man He formed all the world for his sake, and gave him authority on earth, seas, air and even over other stars and over space. He created him in His likeness and image to live as a free being. Man, in his freedom, has the choice even to deny or to resist God Himself.

When contemplating God's supreme view of His beloved creature, i.e., man, and God's close and deep relationship with him, was incited the master of the Alexandrian School in the second century, Origen, to believe that man's soul is much greater than to be attributed to this visible world. Erroneously, he believed that the soul existed before the body to which it was assigned as a penalty for its sin. The Alexandrians rejected this Origenist theory, for it deforms the believers view of the body and also of the world. In fact this body is not a jail where the soul is imprisoned but is a good divine gift, that helps the soul and partakes with it in all human needs, and will partake with it in the heavenly glory.

It is man as a whole - soul and body - for whose sake God was involved in the dispensation of salvation before creating him and until the Last Day. He gave us His Law and His prophets throughout the ages, and at last on man's behalf sent His Eternal Word, incarnated and became man. In fact the incarnation of our Lord is a mystery that reveals two facts: God's view of man and to his daily life, and God's will towards our salvation.

1. The Word of God became man, so that He might live among men as one of them (John 1: 14). The Alexandrian churchmen looked at the incarnation as a sign of God's honorable concept of man. St. Clement of Alexandria says, (He had taken upon Him our flesh ... He scorned not the weakness of human flesh, but having clothed Himself with it, has come into the world for the common salvation of men<sup>1</sup>.) He also said: (O divine mystery! ... O wondrous mystery ! ... The Lord was laid low, and man was raised up !<sup>2</sup>)

2. He became Man to redeem man, granting him true freedom. To the Alexandrians, the Cross was the central purpose of Christ's coming<sup>3</sup>. For through the Cross the doors of heaven are opened and man finds his eternal home, wherein he will live in the bosom of the Father as His child who inherits eternal glory.

We can say that we shall remain in heaven contemplating God's interest in man.

1. Stromata 7: 2: 7, 8.

2. I~lctr II: 3: 3.

3. St Athanasius: DC Incamatione Varbi Dci 20; 9: 1,2 etc.

## **MAN'S FREE - WILL DIVINE GIFT**

Man's freedom is the most important divine gift that God bestows on man. According to St. Cyril of Alexandria, the image of God in which man was created (Gen 1: 26) was his own free - will, and the spoilage of his human nature, that occurred by his disobedience to God, was the loss of his free - will.

According to Athenagoras, the dean of the Alexandrian School in the second century, man has the choice to do good or evil<sup>1</sup>. Man has the freedom to sin or not to sin; otherwise he could not be condemned, rebuked, exhorted, or summoned.

St. Clement of Alexandria interprets the goodness of the first man not as being perfect but as having free - will to be advanced towards perfection. He said that Adam was childlike and innocent; [He was not created perfect in constitution, but suitable for acquiring virtue... For God desires us to be saved by our own efforts<sup>2</sup>].

Therefore the Alexandrians looked at Adam's life in Paradise as if it were a kind of divine life, because of Adam's free - will that grants him the ability to be in close contact with God. In this atmosphere, Adam and Eve received God's commandment not as a restriction that they had to suffer, but on the contrary, as a chance to express their love through obedience to God by their own free - will. In other words, without this commandment our first parents would find no way to accept God's love by practicing love, and had no way to have the experience of free - will.

### **FREE WILL AND ADAM'S SIN**

Now, by our own volition we weakened our will. How ?

1. According to St. Athanasius, the first man, Adam, had a pure mind that was not enslaved to carnal lusts, so he could reflect God with his pure soul<sup>3</sup>. We are free, but because our minds are involved in evil desires and materialism it is very difficult to be lifted up towards God and to have heavenly experience. Now, we are in need of God's grace to make our minds free so that we can enjoy communion with God with pure hearts.

St. Athanasius states that man's soul is mobile by nature. It is not solid but very active, but when it was entangled by lust it did not lose its mobility nor activity but turned away from what is good and rejected it. Its movement did not cease but, it misused its body and its members by moving in the opposite way. Instead of beholding the creator it became involved in lust<sup>4</sup>.

2. According to St. Clement of Alexandria, the fault of Adam and Eve consisted in the fact that, using their volition wrongly, they indulged in the pleasures of sexual intercourse before God gave them leave<sup>5</sup>. Not that sex was wrong in itself, but the violation of God's ordinance was. As a result, their will and rationality were weakened, and they became a prey to sinful passions. He says: [The first man played in Paradise, at liberty, since he was the child of God. Then he fell, through pleasure ... and was led astray through his desires... How great the power of pleasure! Man was free, in his innocence, and then found himself bound by his sins<sup>6</sup>].

But while St. Clement accepts the historicity of Adam, he also regards him as symbolizing mankind as a whole<sup>7</sup>. All men, he teaches<sup>8</sup>, have a spark of the divine in them and are free to obey or disobey God's Law, but all, except the incarnate Logos, are

sinner 9. They are, as it were sick, blind and gone astray; they enslaved to the elements and the Devil; and their condition can be corrected 10

His teaching 11 seems to be, that through our physical descent from Adam and Eve, we inherit, not indeed their own guilt and curse, but a disordered sensuality which entails the dominance of the irrational element in our nature, and a lack of knowledge, for sin is due to "ignorance ~ 12

J. Pelikan says: [ As a spokesman for the Christian faith, in response to the healthen and the heretics, Clement of Alexandria delivered just such an exhortation: "As far as we can, let us try to sin as little as possible". Only God could avoid sin altogether; but wisemen were able to avoid voluntary transgressions, and those who were properly trained in Christianity could at least see to it that they fell into very few 13 ].

Origen<sup>4</sup> in his defense of man's liberty and God's justice against the Gnostics adopted the theory of the pre-existence of human souls. He states that God - out of His goodness - created rational essences, all of them were equal and alike, and they were granted free - will. They had to be advanced by imitating God or to fall away by neglecting Him, to depart from good being tantamount to settling down to evil.

He says: [Before the ages, they were all pure intelligences, whether demons or souls or angels. One of them, the Devil, since he possessed free - will, chose to resist God and God rejected him. Other powers fell away with him becoming demons. The souls had not sinned so grievously as to become demons, therefore God made the present world, binding the souls to the bodies as a punishment 15].

It is worthy to note that Origen emphasizes on the personal sins of individuals who have followed Adam's example rather than their solidarity with his guilt. He believes that each one of us was banished from Paradise for his personal transgression 16.

Thus men are pure intelligences fallen from their former splendor and united with bodies; not that corporeality is, in his view, intrinsically bad, but he is opposed 17 ~O those who condemn the body as the principal of evil, and ~r~h(~.~ that evil resides in the will alone 18.

## **FREE-WILL & GOD'S PROVIDENCE**

Someone may ask: How can we interpret God's providence through the free-will of men, for it God takes care of everyone, even of the number of his head's hair (Matt. 10: 30) how will we accept the free-will of others who would harm me or even kill me through their free-will?

Our God who in His goodness grants us free-will, through His infinite wisdom uses this human freedom for the edification of His children, for He changes even the evil deeds to the salvation of others. St. Clement of Alexandria gives a biblical example. Jacob's sons sold Joseph as a slave, but God used this evil action for Joseph's glory. Joseph said to his brothers: "But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life ... so now it was not you who sent me here, but God, and He has made me a father of Pharaoh, and lord of all" Gen 45: 5-9; "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for

you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive" Exod. 50: 19, 20.

Judas, the traitor, misused the freedom which was granted to him, and God used even his evil action for realizing the salvation of mankind by the crucifixion of our Lord.

Therefore Origen says, [The universe is cared for by God in accordance with the condition of the free will of each man, and that as far as possible it is always being led on to be better, and ... that the nature of our free - will is to admit various possibilities 19].

[God does not create evil; still, He does not prevent it when it is displayed by others, although He could do so. But He uses evil, and those who exhibit it, for necessary purposes. For by means of those in whom there is evil, He bestows honor and approbation on those who strive for the glory of virtue. Virtue, if unopposed, would not shine out nor become more glorious by probation. Virtue is not virtue if it be untested and unexamined ... If you remove the wickedness of Judas and annul his treachery you take away likewise the cross of Christ and His passion; and if there were no cross, then principalities and powers would have not Been stripped nor triumphed over by the wood of the cross (Col. 2: 15). Had there been no death of Christ, there would certainly have been no resurrection and there would have been no "firstborn from the dead" Col. 1: 8; and then there would have been for us no hope of resurrection. Similarly concerning the devil himself, if we suppose for the sake of argument, that he had been forcibly prevented from sinning, or that the will to do evil had been taken away from him after his sin; then the same time there would have been taken from us the struggle against the wiles of the devil, and there would be no crown of victory in store for him who rightly struggled 201.

1. Athenagorus Supp. 24:4.
2. Po~r.11: 11; Stromata 2:2:131.
3. Con~. Gentes 2.
4. Ibid 4.
5. JN.D. Kelly: Early Christian Doctrines, 1978, p 179 - 180; Protr. 11:111, Stromata ~ : 17: 103.
6. Protr. 11: 111.
7. Stromata 2: 19: 98; Paed 1: 13: 101; Protr. 11: 111.
8. Protr6:68;Stromata2:15:62;3:9:63.
9. Paed.1:2:4;3:12:93.
10. Prot. 1: 6f; 11: 114; Paed. 1: 9: 63f ;Strom. 1: 11: 53.
11. Kelly, p 180; Stromata 3: 6: 100f; 3: 9: 63 - 5.
12. Strom 3: 16: 100.
13. J Pdikan: The Christian Tradition, Vol. 1, The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100 - 600 ), 1961, p 284; Clem. Ales. Paedag. 1: 2: 4: 1-3.
14. De. Princiipus 2: 9: 2 - 6.
15. Ibid 2: 6: 3 ( See St. Jerome: Ep ad Avitum 124: 6 ).
16. Kelly, p 180f.
17. Cont. Celsus 3: 42; 4: 65f.
18. Kelly, p. 180f.

19. C. Celsus 5: 21.

20. In Num. Hom 14: 2.

## HUMAN NATURE

Then we speak about God's view of man or God's action for man's redemption, what do we mean by the word "man"? Is he merely a human soul?

What is the Alexandrian opinion concerning the body and its senses?

What is the role of the mind also in man's religious life?

1. We mean by "man" this creature who is superior to all other creatures in this world. Truly he consists of a soul, body, mind etc. ... but in a true unity. Man is not a mere soul that is clothed by a body as a superfluous thing added to it, but he is one being; his soul, body, mind etc. represents one creature that has one will, one action ... and will have the same reward. Man, with his own soul and his own body can be redeemed or lost; enjoy the heavenly glory or suffer eternal torments.

Therefore, when the word of God was incarnated He received His body in the womb of St. Mary and had a human soul. He became a true man and accepted human nature as a whole, to sanctify it all. St. Severus of Antioch says: [We confess that while remaining what He was, He united to Himself hypostatically a flesh possessing a rational soul 2]. St. Philoxenos of Mabbogh says: [The complete man was redeemed in God. Since the whole of Adam had come under the curse and been deprived, the whole of him was taken by God and renewed. The Lord who became incarnate gave His body unto death for the sake of everybody, and His soul for the salvation of all souls. In this way the whole of our nature was recreated in Him into a new man 3 ].

2. The early Alexandrian Fathers struggled against the Gnostics who rejected the body with its senses and believed it to be an enemy. St. Athanasius said: [All things made by God are beautiful and pure, for the word of God has made nothing useless or impure. For "we are a sweet savior of Christ in them that are being saved" (2 Cor. 2: 15), as the Apostle says ... and according to the divine Acts of the Apostles (17: 28) "we are God's offspring", we have nothing unclean in ourselves 4].

St. Athanasius considered man's body with its senses as a well - fashioned lyre with its various strings, if it is used in its proper aim by a good soul, it will bring forth a beautiful symphony. He said: [In like manner, the senses being disposed in the body are like a lyre, when the skilled intelligence presides over them, then too the soul distinguishes and knows what it is doing and how it is acting 5].

3. God created man as a rational being on earth, and deals with him as a rational creature. In other words, the mind is essential in our nature, when it is sanctified it helps the soul to rise up towards the heavenly places. By divine grace, the human mind can conceive divine mysteries which surpass its capacity.

St. Athanasius says: [The way of truth will aim at reaching the real and true God. But for its knowledge and accurate comprehension, there is need of none other save ourselves. Neither, as God Himself is above all, is the road to Him far off or outside

ourselves, but it is in us, and it is possible to find it from ourselves, in the first instance, as Moses also taught, when he said, "The word" of faith "is written within your heart" Deut. 30: 14. Which very thing the Savior declared and confirmed, when He said "The Kingdom of God is within you" Luke 17: 12. For having in ourselves faith, and the kingdom of God; we shall be able quickly to see and perceive the King of the Universe, the sdring Word of the Father ... And if one were to ask, what road is this? I say it is the soul of each one of us, and the intelligence which resides there 6].

Now we conclude that man has only one being and can't be separated into parts: soul, body, senses, mind, heart and emotions etc. ... God loves man in his wholeness, saving and sanctifying his soul with its energies, his body with its senses, his mind, his heart and his emotions etc. ... When we accept the new life in our Lord Jesus Christ, we enjoy communion with the Father in His Son by His Holy Spirit to sanctify our inseparable human nature. It is the work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Unity, not only to grant man unity with God, but also to grant him harmony in himself. Therefore the spiritual man feels that his body, senses, and emotions are not evil things, or a burden that the soul bears, but they are righteous tools that act with the soul and mind on behalf of the interior kingdom of God.

We give as examples, those who misused their emotions and energies while they were not "in Christ", and who used the same emotions and energies after their sanctification for the edification of the Church. One of those was St. Moses the black who was a chief-robber and adulterer, but then he became a leader of many monks and attracted many laymen to repentance after his conversion. St. Paul the Apostle, before his conversion violently persecuted the Church of God; and by the same energy the Holy Spirit used Him as a chosen vessel of God (Acts 9: 15), after sanctifying him.

1. Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty: The Terms "Physis & Hypostasis" in the Early Church, 1978, p. 17.
2. Philalethes, p. 187.
3. Ep. to the Monks of Senoun.
4. Ep. ad Amun. 2.
5. Contra Gentes 31.
6. Ibid 30.

## **GOD'S ROLE IN MAN'S SALVATION**

### **NEED OF REDEMPTION**

St. Athanasius states that when the first way, which was through Adam, was lost and in place of Paradise we deviated into death and heard the words: "Dust you are, and unto dust shall you return" Gen. 3: 19, therefore we became in need of someone else to renew the first creation and to preserve the new one which had come to be 1.

"Repentance" alone fails to guard the just claim of God<sup>2</sup>, for man had to suffer death as a natural fruit of his disobedience and leaving God, the Source of life. It also fails to renew his human nature and to grant it the power to conquer sin and death.

Moses' Law also fails to realize our salvation, for according to St. Pauls, it looks like a mirror that discovers our sins, ignorance, sickness and mortality, but it can't save us from sin (Rom. 6: 13-25), nor grant us true life (Rom. 6: 9) but it prepared the way to the Messiah, the Heavenly Physician, "for Christ is the end of the law of righteousness to everyone who believes" Rom. 10: 4.

Man is in need of One who can redeem him by realizing God's justice and reconciling him with God, granting him the new life that conquers death. This One is the Messiah, about whom the prophets of the old testament foretold and the Evangelists concentrated, and the Apostles preached. He is the incarnate Son of God, the Only-begotten Son, who is one with the Father in the same essence, able to redeem men by sacrificing His life on their behalf.

The Savior can't be other than God Himself, who can realize the following advantages to us:

### **1. TO DECLARE THE CREATOR'S GOODNESS**

To create man, God formed the world for his comfort and then made him of naught, to recreate him, God prepared the way of salvation through many ages and at last sent His incarnate Only-Begotten Son to sacrifice His blood on man's behalf. Jesus Christ says: n For God so loved the world that He gave His Only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. John 3: 16 St. Paul says: "the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Him-self for me" Gal. 2: 20.

**St. Athanasius says:**

[For it were not worthy of God's goodness that the things He had made should waste away, because of the deceit practiced on men by the devil 3]. [He comes in condescension to show loving-kindness upon us and to visit us ... Now in truth this great work was peculiarly suited to God's goodness 4].

**St. Clement of Alexandria says:**

[The Word ... has appeared as our teacher, He by whom the Universe was created The Word who in the beginning gave us life when He fashioned us as Creator, has taught us the good life as our teacher, that He may afterwards, as God, provide us with eternal life. Not that He now has for the first time pitied us for our wandering; He pitied us from old, from the beginning. But now, when we were perishing, He has appeared and has saved us 5].

## **2. TO JOIN US WITH HIMSELF**

Redemption in its essence is the unity with God, the Source of life. No-body can join us with God except the Son of God who became Son of man to raise us to the Father's bosom with His Holy Spirit, offering His saving blood as a price for this unity. Before His betrayal He said to the Father: "I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one" John 17: 23.

St. Athanasius says: [If the Son were a creature, man would have remained mortal as before, not being joined to God, for a creature had not joined creatures to God, as seeking itself one to join it; nor would a portion of the creation have been the creation's salvation as needing salvation itself 6 I.

Origen says: [Christ, the true High priest who by His own blood made God propitious to you and reconciled you to the Father 7 ], [We have peace with God' Rom. 5: 1, but it is through our Lord Jesus Christ who reconciled us to God through the sacrifice of His blood... Christ came that He might destroy the enemies and make peace, and reconcile us to God when we were separated because of the barrier of wickedness which we set up by sinning 8].

## **3. TO ACCOMPLISH GOD'S SENTENCE OF DEATH**

The Messiah, the incarnate Son of God gave His blood for us, and His flesh for our flesh and His soul for our souls. He suffered and died as a Sacrifice on our behalf and thus He accomplished the divine statement of death as a representative of all mankind.

**St. Athanasius says:**

[He sends His own Son, and He becomes Son of Man, by taking created flesh, that, since all were under sentence of death, He being other than them all, might Himself for all offer to death His own body; and that henceforth, as if all had died through Him, the word of that sentence might be accomplished (for "all died" 2 Cor. 5: 14, in Christ), and all through Him might thereupon become free from sin and from the curse which came upon it and might truly abide for ever, risen from the dead and clothed in immortality and incorruption 9].

[He takes to Himself a body capable of death, that it, by partaking of the Word who is above all, might be worthy to die instead of all, and might, because of the Word which was come to dwell in it, remain incorruptible, and that thenceforth corruption might be stayed from all by the grace of resurrection 10].

[For by the sacrifice of His own body, He both put an end to the law which was against us, and made a new beginning of life for us, by the hope of resurrection which He has given us 11].

[Christ offered the sacrifice on behalf of all, delivering His own spirit to death in place of all that He might set all free from the liability of the original transgression 12].

#### **4. TO UNDERGO DEATH**

The Alexandrian Fathers explain in more details what St. Paul declares concerning human nature, for man's problem is not limited in forgiving sins which he ever commits, but extends to the death and corruption that he endures. St. Paul says that "death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam" Rom. 5: 14.

St. Cyril of Alexandria repeatedly declares that the perfect humanity of Jesus Christ was the only method to deliver our earthly ~body from foreign corruption 13].

**St. Clement of Alexandria says:**

[The Lord then wished to release him (man) from his bonds, and clothing Himself with flesh - O divine mystery. - vanquished the serpent, and enslaved the tyrant; and, most marvelous of all, man that had been deceived by pleasure, and bound fast to corruption, had his hands unloosed, and was set free...

He has changed sunset into sunrise, and through the cross turned death into life; and having wrenched man from destruction, He has raised him to heaven, transplanting mortality into immortality and translating earth to heaven 14].

**St. Athanasius says:**

[To give a witness then, and for our sakes to undergo death, to raise man up and destroy the works of the Devil, the Savior came, and this is the reason of His incarnate presence. For resurrection would not have been, unless there was death; and how was there death, unless He had a mortal body? This is the Apostle learning from Him, this he sets forth, "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might bring to nought him that had the power of death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead". I Cor. 15: 21

...

Not for Himself then, but for our salvation, and to abolish death, and to condemn sin, and to give sight to the blind, and to raise up all the dead, has He come 15].

[He the incorruptible Son of God, being conjoined with all by a like nature, naturally clothed all with incorruption, by the promise of resurrection. For the actual corruption in death has no longer held - ground against me, by reason of the Word, which by His one body has come to dwell among us 16].

Whenoe also is He said ~ bc ~ b~n f~m the dead n Rev. 1: 5,  
~t that He died before us, f~ we bad died first, bul ~e having m~gone

\*ath for us and abdi~ed il. He was d~e f~st to lise, as man, for olrr sal~es, ~g His own Bad~ enoef~b He having ~, we too from Him and bec~se of Him, nse in due co~se ~wn the dead 17 ~.

St. Athanasius rep~es to dle qo~n: As God made man by a word, whyDot ~ him also by a word?, slyng: a Creation out of nolhing is d~fen n~ from reparation of what already existed: [ Por it was not things without being ~at needed salvation, so that a bare command should suffice, but man, already in e~Listence, was going to CQm~ tnn and ruin. It was then natural and nght that the Word should use a human ins~ument and reveal Himself every whither 18].

b. [Secondly, you must know this also, that the colTtuption which had set in was not external to the body, but had become attached to it, and it was required that, instead of corruption, life should cleave to it; just as death has been engendered in it also. Now if death were external to the body, it would be proper for life also to have been engendered e~ternally to iL But if death were wound closely to the body and ruling over it as though united to it, it was required that life also should be wound closely to the body, that so the body, by putting on life in its stead, should cast off corruption ... For this cause, the Savior reasonably put on Him a body, in order that the body, would become close to the Life, should no longer, as a mortal abide in death, but having put on immortality, should thenceforth rise again and remain immortal ... He put on a body, that He might find death in the body, and blot it out 19].

Choosing death through the Cross is a divine mystery, that we already spoke about in another place 20, here I would refer to St. Athanasius' comment on the death of Jesus Christ through the Cross: [So death came to His body, not from Himself, but from hostile counsels, in order that whatever death they offered to the Savior, this He might utterly do away ... He accepted on the Cross, and endured, a death inflicted by others, and above all by His enemies, which they thought dreadful and ignominious and not to be faced; so that this also being destroyed, He Himself might be believed to be the Life, and the power of death be brought utterly to noughL So something surprising and starling has happened; for death, which, was thought to be inflicted as a disgrace was actually a monument of victory against death itself. Whence neither did He suffer the death of John, his head being severed, nor, as Isaiah, was He sawn in sunder; in order that even in death He might still keep His body undivided and in perfect soundness and no pretext be afforded to those that would divide the Church 21].

## **5. TO CONQUER OUR ENEMY, SATAN**

St. Athanasius says:

[For the Word being clothed in the flesh, as has many times been explained, every bite of the serpent began to be utterly staunched from it out, and whatever evil sprung from the motions of the flesh, to be cut away, and with this death also was abolished, the companion of sin, as the Lord Himself says: "The prince of this world comes, and finds nothing in Me". John 14: 30, and "For this end was He manifested", as John has written, "that He might destroy the works of the devil" 1 John 3: 1 22 ].

[Thus also the father of the Arian heresy (Satan) asked ... "If Thou be the Son of God ... " Matt. 4: 3, for he knew that this is the truth and the sovereign principle of our faith, and that, if He were Himself the Son, the tyranny of the devil would have its end; but if He were a creature, He too was one of those descended from that Adam whom he deceived, and he had no cause for anxiety 23].

[For as when Adam had transgressed, his sin reached unto all men, so when the Lord had become man and had overthrown the Serpent, His great strength was extended through to all men so that each one of us may say: "for we are ignorant of his devices" 2 Cor. 2: 11 24].

## **6. TO RAISE US UP TO HEAVEN**

Our Lord Jesus Christ in His speech with Nicodemus concerning the new birth, revealed Himself as the Heavenly One saying: "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven" (John 3: 13). In other words, He is the Heavenly One who came down from heaven to grant us unity with Him that we may ascend to heaven in Him and with Him. St. Paul conceived that he was risen to heaven (Eph. 2:6) when the Head of the Church, Jesus was risen.

- ❖ And being joined to God, no longer do we abide upon earth, but as He Himself has said, where He is, there shall we be also<sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ For in it (the Word's body) the Lord becomes our guide to the Kingdom of Heaven and to His own Father, saying, "I am the Way" John 14:6 and "the door" John 10:9 "through Me all must enter"<sup>2</sup>.
- ❖ Whence also, whereas the flesh is born of Mary the theotokos, He Himself is said to have been born, who furnishes to others an origin of being, in order that He may no longer, as mere earth, return to earth, but as being knit into the Word from heaven, may be carried to heaven by Him<sup>3</sup>.

*St. Athanasius of Alexandria*

- ❖ O wondrous mystery... Man was cast out of Paradise; and now he receives a reward greater than that of obedience, the reward of Heaven<sup>4</sup>.

*St. Clement of Alexandria*

## **7. TO RENEW OUR NATURE**

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, St. Paul clearly explains the difference between the animal sacrifice and Christ's Sacrifice, for the first one was repeated because of its weakness and failure to renew the depth of human nature, but the last One was offered once only for it still has the power to renew our interior man. Origen says that Jesus Christ as a Priest and Victim at the same time did not offer animals blood that consumes but His own Blood that gives life, resurrectiand immortality. He always changes believers from mortality into immortality, redeeming their nature to participate in His life and to bear His likeness.

---

<sup>1</sup> c. Arians 2:69.

<sup>2</sup> c. Arians 2:61.

<sup>3</sup> c. Arians 3:33.

<sup>4</sup> Protr. 11:3

Origen says that the Logos is our Teacher, Law - giver and Model 29, by associating with Him, we lose our deadness and irrationality, becoming "divinely possessed and rational 30. He is" the pattern of the perfect life 31, the exemplar of true virtue into whose likeness Christians are transformed 32, thereby being able to participate in the divine nature 33. He says: [Discoursing in bodily form and giving Himself out as flesh, He summons to Himself those who are flesh, in order that He may first of all transform them into the likeness of the Word who has been made flesh, and after that He was before He became flesh 34], [The Son of His kindness generously imparted deification to others ... who are transformed through Him into gods, as images of the prototype .. the word is the archetype of the many images 35].

St. Clement, Origen's teacher, explains the Savior's role in the renewal of our nature, as he said: [For this He came down, for this He assumed human nature, for this He willingly endured the sufferings of man, that by being reduced to the measure of our weakness He might raise us to the measure of His power 36]. He also says: [The Word of God, became man just that you may learn from a man how it may be that man should become god 37].

St. Athanasius in his discourses against the Arians confirms that the Incarnate Son of God hungered, wept and was wearied; He acted as our Mediator, taking on Him what was ours that He might impart to us what was His. In Him we became a new creation.

[As "the Word became flesh" John 1:14, so also man himself received the gifts which came through the Word ... For every one interceding for another, receives the gifts in his own person, not as needing, but on his account for whom he intercedes 38]

[He for our sake became man, so we for His sake are exalted. It is no absurdity then, as for our sake He humbled Himself, so also for our sake He is said to be highly exalted 39].

[He Himself has made us sons of the Father, and defied men by becoming Himself man 40].

[For He has become Man, that He might deify us in Himself and He was born of a woman, and begotten of a Virgin, in order to transfer to Himself our erring generation and that we may become henceforth a holy race and "partakers of the divine nature" as the blessed Peter wrote (2 Pet. 1:4). And what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh Rom. 8:3 41 ].

[He was made Man, straightway all things were set right and perfected. Earth received a blessing instead of a curse, Paradise was opened to the robber, Hades cowered, the tombs were opened and the dead raised, the gates of Heaven were lifted up to await Him that "comes from Edom" (Ps. 24: 7; Isa. 63:1) ... The Word has been made Flesh, and put on it, in order that "in Him" all should be set right. Suffering Himself, He gave us rest, hungering Himself, He nourished us, and going down into Hades He brought us 21 back thence ... At the restoration it was fitting that all things should be "delivered" ( Luke 10:22) to Him, in order that He might be made man, and all things be renewed in Him 42].

## **8. TO REALIZE UNIVERSALISM**

St. Clement of Alexandria 43 states that the Savior is the Lord not of the Jews only but of all men, therefore He came to save everyone that turns to Him; His sacrifice has its effect in all places and at all times.

## **9. TO GRANT US THE TRUE KNOWLEDGE "GNOSIS"**

St. Clement of Alexandria was the first Christian writer who called the spiritual believer "Gnostic", for he believed that "gnosis" (knowledge) is a grace that comes from the Father through the Son 44. One of the principal actions of the Lord is to reveal the divine mysteries to His believers, for He said: "No one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him". Mau 1 :27.

St. Clement says: [The Son is the true Teacher about the Father ... In order that we may come to know the Father, we must believe in the Son, because the Son of God is our Teacher; for the Father brings us from faith to knowledge by means of the Son 45].

Origen says: [The Word of God, coming to those who seek Him, or to those who receive Him when He is manifested, is able to make known the Father and to reveal Him who was not seen before His coming 46].

1. Contra Arians 2:65.
2. De Incarnatione Verbi Dei 7.
3. Ibid 6;5.
4. Ibid 8:10.
5. Proterp. 1:7.
6. c. Arians 2:69.
7. In Leviticum hom. 9:10.
8. Com.inEp.adRom. 4:8.
9. c' Arians 2:69.
10. De Inc verbi Dei 9.
11. Ibid 10.
12. c. Arilms 2:7.
13. De Incar Unigeniti (Source Chretienne, L 97, p. 230).
14. Paedag. II (See Strom. 2:10:47; 4:7:51).
15. c. Arians 2:55.
16. De Incar. 9.
17. c. Arians 2:61.
18. De Incar. 44.
19. Ibid.
20. See Fr. T.Y. Malaty: Church, House of God, ch. 10
21. De Inca n. 24.
22. c. Arians 2:69.
23. Ibid 2:73.
24. Ibid 1:51.

29. Kelly, p. 180f; Princ. 4:1:2; c.Celsus 2:52, 3:7.
30. ~ Ioh 1:37.
31. Contra Celsus 1:68.
32. Ibid 8:17.
33. De Principiis 4:4:4.
34. Contra Celsus 6:68.
35. Comm. ~ Ioan. 2:2.
36. Quis Dives Salvetur 37.
37. Protr. 1:8:4.
38. c. Arians 4:6.
39. Ibid 4:7.
40. Ibid 1: 38.
41. Ep. 60 ad Adelphium.
42. On Luke 10:22.
43. Strom. 6:6:47.
44. Strom. 5:71:5.
45. Ibid 5:1:1.
- 46 c Cel~ fi ù fiR

## **MAN'S ROLE IN HIS SALVATION**

### **GRACE & MAN'S FREE - WILL**

Grace is the heart and center of the Alexandrian theology. For God "first loved us" John 4:19; for He knew us (Rom. 8: 29), chose us, predestined us, called us, justified us and glorified us. He wills, decides and acts for our salvation, even while we were sinners and against Him (Rom. 5:10). Christ's blood is the only method through which salvation can be realized. This evangelic teaching is accepted and explained by the Alexandrian Fathers, without denying the free-will that God grants us, nor rejecting the positive role of the believer in accepting God's saving love and in responding to this divine love by practical love.

Now we can clarify the relation between God's Grace and man's free - will in the following points:

#### **1. PRESESTINATION AND MAN'S FREE WILL:**

St. Paul says: "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before Him, in love" Eph. 1:4. Do these words mean that we - the believers - had to be so for we are chosen as men of God we were made, and the unbelievers have to be ruined for they can't believe as they were not chosen? We can't accept this meaning, for God desires the salvation of all men, as it is said:

"For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God, our Savior, who will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth". 1 Tim. 2:4.

"I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked but that the wicked turn from his way and live". Ezek. 33:11.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His Only - begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" John 3:16. "And He is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world ". 1 John 2: 2.

Clearly, God asks men to choose the way they desire to enter: "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil ... blessing and cursing, therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live". Deut. 30:15, 19. Our Lord Jesus Christ repeatedly confirms man's free - will in choosing the way, as He says: "if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him". Rev. 3: 32.

Our Lord declares that God's will is the salvation of men, but if man does not will, He leaves him to his own will. He says: "How often I wanted to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing". Matt. 23:37.

God wants to relinquish His statement against sinners if they repent and return from their evil ways by their own will (Jer. :7-10; Ezek. 33:14-16; Jonah 3:10; Mal. 3: 7).

Now, what does St. Paul mean by his words: "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world"? This means that although we believe in Go willingly and live as His children, we have become believers not due to our own merits. He first loved us and offered His saving deeds and acts, even in our hearts, that we will and do according to His own will.

Secondly, as the divine plan of our salvation was eternal, the Father chose us, for He was pleased with us even before we were made, through His beloved Son. He accepted us for we were hidden in His Son, our Mediator, clothing His righteousness. Thirdly, we were chosen, for He knew us before we were created that we would believe in Him. St. Paul clarifies this meaning, saying: "For whom He fore knew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. Moreover, whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified, Rom. 8:29, 30. Origen comments on this Pauline passage, saying: [Such passages as these are seized on by those who do not understand that the man who is foreordained by the foreknowledge of God is really responsible for the happening of what is fore known; and they imagine that God introduces men into the world who are already equipped by nature for salvation ... Let us observe the order of the words... It is not fore ordination that is the start of calling and justification. If this were so, a more convincing case could be put by those who bring in the absurd argument about "salvation by nature". t in fact, foreknowledge precedes fore ordination ... God observed beforehand the sequence of future events, and noticed the inclination of some men towards pieqr, on their responsibility, and their stirring towards piety which followed on this inclination; He sees how they devote themselves to living a virtuous life, and He fore knew them, knowing the present, and fore knowing the future ... His foreknowledge is not the cause of what happens as a result of the responsible actions of each individual. Thus, the freedom bestowed by the Creator enables man to choose what to realize, of various possibilities which arise ].

## **2. FAITH AND GOOD WORKS**

Until the nineteenth century, the struggle between faith and good works in achieving salvation had no room in the Alexandrian theology, because of its evangelic concept on "faith", "Good Works", "Salvation", etc. ...

a One of the essential characteristics of our church is the integration of all aspects of the new life in Jesus Christ. For example, theology - in our concept - can't be separated from preaching, worship, or ascetic life. Theologians are not those who achieve scientific degrees in theology, but those whose theologian knowledge is translated into life through their worship and conduct. Through the ages, the Popes of Alexandria were usually deans of the Alexandrian School, or one of its teachers, or had their theological studies in monasteries, and at the same time they were monks and had their ascetic life. In other words, the Pope is not only a leader in pastoral cares but also in theology and ascetic life.

This attitude has its effect in our concept on "Faith". For faith IS not merely believing in some dogmas or doctrines, but it means achieving the new life in Christ in all its aspects. We have to enjoy this life through the deep knowledge of the Word of God (the Holy Scripture), partaking in the church worship, practicing our family worship, fulfilling God's commandments in our relationship with others etc. ... Faith separated from conduct.

b. We have to distinguish between many kinds of good works:

1. The works of Law which some Christians of Jewish origin desired to practice in their literal meaning like circumcision, observing the Saturdays and Jewish feasts and other rites. ST. Paul struggled against this attitude confirming the need of faith alone without these good works of Law ~ their literal meaning, saying: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast ~ Eph. 2:8, 9. We are freely justified by the grace through faith and not through the righteousness of the Law, i.e., through observing its literal works.

2. Good works that issue from a perverted heart, in Ph~isi~ or Ith~ni~n; when man believes that he can be saved by his own merit . though his own righteousness. We confirm that salvation can't be attained without believing in the redeeming blood of Christ for "without shedding of blood there is no remission". Heb. 9:22.

3. Good works that are issued from the believer's heart, who is united with the Father and His Son by the Holy Spirit These good works are the fruit of God's work in Him, as the Holy Bible clarifies:

"He who abides in Me, and I in Him, bears much fruit, for without Me you can do nothing". John 15:5.

"For it is God Who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure". Phil. 2:13.

"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me". I Cor. 15:10.

Without God's grace "there is none who does good, no, not one". Rom. 3:11, ~ for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God". Rom. 3:23.

H.H. Pope Shenouda III, in his book "Salvation in the Orthodox Concept", presents many indications on the importance of these ~ good Works" to our salvation:

1. Evil deeds lead to eternal perdition (Gal. 5:19 - 21; Eph. 5:5, 6; 1 Cor. 6:9, 10; Heb. 13:4; Col. 3:5, 6; Tit. 1: 16; 2 Pet 2:4-22; 1 Pet. 4:17, 18; Acts 5:9, 1 John 3:15; Jam. 3:1, 2; 5:1, 9).

II. Judgment will occur according to our works (Matt. 16:27; John 5:28, 29; Matt. 25:31-46; 1 Cor. 3:13; 1 Pet 1:17).

m. Works are the fruits of the real faith (Luke 3:8, James 2:14; Matt. 7:19 -21, Luke 13:6-9).

the need of faith ~e without these good wa~ of I~ ù~ ~ li~al ma~ing, sayil~g ~ or bg gmce you have been saved tl~ failh . and tbat not of ~ro~selves; it is the gift of God, wt of warl~s, lesl anyaoe sbould boast ~Eph. 2: 8 . 9. We are fieely j~ified b~r the graoe ~h faith and not thn~ugh the nghteousness of the ~w, ie., tl~ugh obs~ring its literal works.

2. Good WOIS that issue fr~n a p oud beart, in Pnarisi~ or E~guni~; when man believes tbat he can be saved by his OWQ ment, thmugh his owu nghtewsness. We confnnn that salvatian can't be at~ained widlout belie~ing in the ledeeming blood of Cbri~, for "without shedding of blood there is no remission". Heb. 9:22.

3. Good works that are issued from the believer's heart, WQo is united with the Father in His Son by the Holy Spirit lbese good wor~s a~e the fruit of God's wor} in Him, as the Holy Bible clarifies:

"He who abides in Me, and I in Him, bears much fruit. for without Me you can do nothing". John 15:5.

"For it is God Who works in you both to will and tQ do for His good pleasure. Phil 2:13.

"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I hbored more abundantly that they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me". 1 Cor. 15:10.

Without God's grace ": there is none who does good, no, not one ". Rom. 3:11, ~ for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God". Rom. 3:23.

H H. Pope Shenouda III, in his boo~ "Salva~n in the O~hodo~ Concept ~, presents many indications on the importance of these ~ good Works" to our salvation:

I. Evil deeds lead to eternal perdition ( Gal. 5: 19 - 21; Eph. 5: 5, 6; 1 Cor. 6:9,10; Heb. 13:4; Col. 3:5, 6; ~1L1:16; 2PeL 2:4-22; 1PeL 4:17, 18; ActsS:9, llohn3:15; Jam.3:1, 2; 5:1, 9).

II. Judgment will occur according to our works (Matt 16:27; John 5:28, 29; Matt 25:31-46; lCor. 3:13; lPeL 1:17).

III. Works are the fruits of the real faith (Luke 3:8, James 2:14; Matt 7:19 -21, Luke 13:6-9).

IV. Works are the evidence of the presence of faith (James 2:18; Matt. 7:16, 17).

V. Works are the evidence of being born of God (1 John 2:29, 3:9, 10).

VI. Works make faith perfect (James 2:22; 1:27).

The Alexandrian Fathers explained "good works" as our response to God's love towards us which we have to practice by God's help. St. Clement says: [For each of us He laid down His life ... and He requires in return that we should do the same for each other 2 I But we can not do this without God, because [He is for us the source of all good. From Him we learn the good life and are brought to the eternal life 3].

### **3. GRACE OF GOD AND MAN'S FREE - WILL**

The good believer accepts divine grace to help him and to guide all his life, even in the smallest matters. In other words, through the freedom he receives in His Savior Jesus Christ, by his own volition he denies his own will, not to lose his freedom or to live with a weak personality but to enjoy God's will acting in Him. Through his free - will he can also refuse God's grace at any time and resist God's will. Therefore St. Paul warns us, "Do not quench the Spirit" Thes. 5:19, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" Eph. 4:30.

It is the grace of God that acts within us, but without abolishing man's free - will. Man has to act positively on behalf of his salvation through God's grace. We hear the Apostle saying: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith..." 2 Tim. 4:7, "You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin" Heb. 12:4, "To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily" Col. 1:29.

The bible confirms that we have to work, with our own free - will, with God: "For we are God's fellow workers" Cor. 3:9.

"If we say that we have fellowship with Him ... " 1 John 1:6.

Origen replies to those who say that our salvation is in no way our responsibility, but is a matter of our constitution, for which the Creator is responsible ... saying:

["Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it, Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain" Ps. 126 ( 127 ): 1 This is not meant to deter us from building, or to counsel us not to be vigilant in guarding the city which is in our soul ... We should do right in calling a building a work of God, rather than of the builder, and the preservation of a city from hostile attack we should rightly call an achievement of God rather than of the guard. But in so speaking we assume man's share in the achievement, while in thankfulness we ascribe it to God who brings it to

success. Similarly man's will is not sufficient to attain the end (of salvation) (Rom. 9: 16), nor is the running of the metaphorical athletes competent to attain "the prize of the upward summons of God in Christ Jesus" Phil. 3:14.

This is only accomplished with God's assistance. Thus it is quite true, "it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy Rom. 9:16. Our perfection does not come about by our remaining inactive, yet it is not accomplished by our own activity; God plays the great part in effecting it 4].

#### **4. TRUST IN ENJOYING THE KINGDOM**

"Hope" is one of the three great virtues (I Cor. 13:13), that believers have to attain, and to progress in, trusting in the mighty grace of God and the infinite divine mercies, Without hope the believer loses his salvation, like Cain who in despair said, "My punishment is greater that I can bear" Gen. 4: 13, and Judas who hanged himself (Malt. 27:5).

H.H. Pope Shenouda III states that: [If anyone asks you: Do you trust?, What would you reply? Yes, I trust in Christ's blood beyond limits but I don't trust in myself, in my own free - will which may be inclined into evil, lest after I have begun in the Spirit, I shall be made perfect by the flesh (Gal. 3:3). Therefore, those who lose salvation, lose it because of the deviation of their free - will which may be inclined to evil, lest after I have begun in the Spirit, I shall be made perfect by the flesh (Gal. 3:3). Therefore, those who lose salvation ~ lose it because of the deviation of their free - will to evil, and not because God is unable to save them ... We trust in the blood of Christ and in the sufficiency of His atonement and redemption, but concerning ourselves we confess that we are sinners and conceive how possible it is that we may perish because of our sins ... Be humble, my brother, and hear the words of the Apostle Paul, that warning ... "Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" 1 Cor. 10:12. You are not more strong than those who fell before, you might not have even attained their level before their fall. Read what the Apostle Paul says and consider carefully the qualities which he mentions, "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance" (Heb. 6: 4-6).

1. Comm, in Ep. ad Rom 1 (Philocalia 25:1)
2. Quis Dives Salvature 37.
3. Prot. I :7.
4. De Principiis 3: 1:18.