

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE GOVERNMENT OF ALL BY GOD

#### I. THE GOVERNMENT OF THE WORLD IN GENERAL

God, being the Lord of all things that He Created, does not restrict Himself to only Preserving them, but also Governs all things, guiding them to their perfect and final Goal, that He had planned before Eternity. Holy Scripture refers to the Government of God not only in general terms but also as affecting even the smallest details of men's lives. The Will of God is fulfilled in this Divine Government, revealed not only as Divine Power but as the Holy and good Will of God. Divine Will is not revealed as the will of a Governor Who governs the Cosmos with arbitrariness and spite but as the Will of an Omniscient, Holy and All-good King Who governs the world according to His perfect and absolute moral Nature. Thus, since everything within the world is Governed by God, then "*fate*," "*blind coincidence*" or the "*arbitrarily acting will*" are excluded. Everything takes place because of the free Will of God Who acts according to the Eternal Order that He planned before all time and which concerns the final Goal of Creation. However our limited understanding is unable to comprehend the manifold expressions of the Governmental Action of God. For this reason every pious soul cries out with faith: "*Oh, the depth of the riches both of the Wisdom and Knowledge of God! How unreachable are His Judgements and His Ways past finding out! For who has known the Mind of the Lord?*"

*Or who has become His counsellor? Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to Him?”<sup>1</sup>*

The acceptance of the Government of God upon all Creation<sup>2</sup> assures us of the possibility of Miracles. It also gives us the assurance that our prayers are not addressed to some deaf governor who does not hear but are heard with favour and goodwill by our Lord Who oversees and supervises all Creation with Compassion and Wisdom.

### **1. Meaning and Definition .**

The Government of God upon all things is the Act of the Divine Will through which God as the Lord and Master of all things Created by Him, Governs and Rules, controlling the entire Universe with Compassion, Wisdom and Holiness.

This control concerns not only the whole world, but every minute element of the Universe. The Goal is to guide everything to its final and perfect end, thus fulfilling the Eternal Plan according to God’s perpetual Will whereby in due time He Created the Cosmos. Thus, everything that occurs in the Universe happens either due to God’s free Action that aims at fulfilling His Eternal Plan or because God consents, allows or tolerates the interference of rational beings so that the fulfillment of His Divine Plan not only is accomplished but also served, even by those who are opposed to it.

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<sup>1</sup> Rom. 11:33-35.

<sup>2</sup> Frangopoulos, *Christian Faith*, pp. 75-76.

## 1. The Teaching of Holy Scripture.

The fact that God, as the Lord of all, governs everything, even the microscopic elements of the Universe and that nothing escapes His attention, has been explained in the previous chapters concerning the Providence and Preservation of the Cosmos. At this point it is appropriate to recall the assertion of the Book of Wisdom of Solomon whereby Divine *“Wisdom reaches from one end to another mightily; and sweetly does she order all things.”*<sup>3</sup> And from the New Testament the assurance of our Lord Who said: *“Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s Will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered...”*<sup>4</sup> and again that *“...the Heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.”*<sup>5</sup> Throughout Holy Scripture we are guaranteed that the Government of God includes even the smallest of details. Through this Government the Will of God never remains unrealised but is always gloriously fulfilled as it is written in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah: *“All My Counsel shall stand, and I Will do all things that I have Planned.”*<sup>6</sup>

When we say that *“..the Will of God is fulfilled...”* we speak not only of His Divine Power that nothing can resist, but also of His Holy Will that is expressed through His Divine and supreme Power that determines the events of the Cosmos. God is neither inactive nor shows any

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<sup>3</sup> Wisdom 8:1.

<sup>4</sup> Matth. 10:29-30.

<sup>5</sup> Matth. 6:32.

<sup>6</sup> Is. 46:10.

indifference. Rather, He governs all things with His Compassion and omniscient Will and also “...works all things according to the Counsel of His Will.”<sup>7</sup> He is the Supreme Master Who extends His Almightyness and interest throughout the Cosmos in general, as well as in particular to each and every thing separately, acting as a Wise, Good and Holy Governor.

God’s Will is not the will of a governor who governs with arbitrariness and spite. On the contrary, God is Omniscient, Holy and All-good, Governing the entire Universe according to His Divine, Perfect and absolutely Moral Nature.

### **3. The Teaching of the Holy Fathers**

Origen exalted the indescribable Technique of Divine Wisdom by means of which everything is led to a common benefit, progress, metamorphosis and correction according to the Teachings of Holy Scripture. Although they are extremely varied, they are called to one Agreement and to one Perfect End. This unique Perfection of God sustains all the differences of the Cosmos and guides their diverse activities to the one Act.<sup>8</sup>

St John Chrysostom, Theophilos of Antioch and Theodoretos of Cyrus used the metaphor of a ship sailing towards a safe port to express how Divine Wisdom and Divine Will leads the entire Cosmos to a final and safe

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<sup>7</sup> Ephes. 1:11.

<sup>8</sup> Origen, *About Principles*, II, c. 1, § 1.

Destination. Through this imagery, they made the Divine Government of God more understandable.<sup>9</sup>

#### 4. Nothing is Accidental nor According to “Fate”

Nothing occurs in the Universe without Divine Government. Nothing is unforeseen or unknown to Divine Providence. No one should believe anything happens according to “fate” or coincidence, or even due to “*bad timing*” because these concepts are those of the ignorant and unenlightened. As Christ our Lord clearly stated: “... *not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s Will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered...*”<sup>10</sup> That is the Divine Eye of God Whose attention nothing escapes! “*The Lord looks from Heaven; He sees all the sons of men. From the Place of His dwelling He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth; He fashions their hearts individually; He considers all their works.*”<sup>11</sup>

“Fate” is the perception of irrational forecasts of astrologists, mediums, wizards, sorcerers, magicians, spell-binders and fortune-tellers and therefore has absolutely no place in the lives of True Orthodox Christians. Only those who are not of the True Christian

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<sup>9</sup> St. John Chrysostom, in Migne, *P.G.*, 47, 365. Ibid, *To Statues*, Homily 10, in Migne, *P.G.*, 49, 114. Theophilus of Antioch, *I Autolyucus*, § 5, in *B*, v. 5, p. 15. Theodoretus of Cyrus, *Homily I and Homily II*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 83, 564 and 576.

<sup>10</sup> Matth. 10:29-30.

<sup>11</sup> Psalm 33(34):13-15.

Faith or who are not solidly founded Orthodox Christians believe in such madness and foolishness for they lack True Faith in the One and True God, the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

As our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God clearly stated: "...*the very hairs of your head are all numbered.*"<sup>12</sup> thereby excluding any suggestion of fate, accidental event or coincidence. Divine Providence acts in such a manner that whatever is free acts freely, whatever is necessary is done by necessity and whatever is accidental occurs accidentally. Nevertheless, the meaning of "*accidental*" has no subjective meaning as the limited mind of man is unable to comprehend and perceive the Action of the Divine Government of God as it is extremely complex and mysterious.

## **5. Miracles and Prayers in Relation to Divine Government**

Miracles must be understood as being extraordinary Phenomenons in nature or Spiritual Life that are beyond explanation according to laws of nature or any scientific rationalization or theory. A Miracle is caused by the direct Action of God Who acts extraordinarily within the world to serve a higher Purpose.<sup>13</sup> The laws of nature are set aside for a moment while God's Power Acts. This Miraculous Action of God does not abolish the laws of nature but being Supernatural, it is above them although

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<sup>12</sup> Matth. 10:30.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Damalas, *Catechesis*, pp. 33-35. Frangopoulos, *Christian Faith*, pp. 76-78.

neither abnormal nor against nature. Just as the laws that govern mineral and inanimate nature are not abolished with the appearance of life and the laws that govern living beings, plants and animals, likewise, the Supernatural Action of God intervenes extraordinarily to perform the Miracle, without disrupting the order of nature.

Those who deny the possibility of Divine Miracles are:

1. those who confuse the world with God (Pantheists)
2. those who separate the world from God (Deists), and
3. those who deny the existence of God (Naturalists, Materialists and Atheists)

On the contrary, those who accept and believe in God as the Governor of all, agree that the Intervention of God in the Act of a Miracle is, on the one hand, due to His Omnipotence, whereas on the other hand, it is due to His Goodness and Wisdom. Divine Omnipotence is in agreement with His Miraculous Intervention because God placed the laws of nature as powers not above Him but as totally unchangeable and necessary acting powers that are always subject to Him Who alone can interfere if and when He considers it necessary. The Goodness of God is required because it awakens sinful man to the realization of the Presence of God. In addition to this, the Wisdom of God is not contradictory because His Miraculous Action

may be characterized as being Creative. God never corrects any of His Work, nor does He add anything essential to the whole system of the Universe but He does perform Miracles in order to teach man who disturbed the Work of Creation that “...*was very good.*” and to remind him of God’s Majesty. Finally, the unalterability of God is not affected by Miracles because they have been proclaimed by God from all Eternity and are included in His Eternal Plan of Creation. Thus, those who deny Divine Miracles do not defend the inalterability of God but proclaim thereby that God remains completely unmovable.

Generally speaking, there is no conflict between God’s Action and the laws of nature in Miracles and neither are they abolished for they remain untouched. In Miracles the Actions of God is expressed that are beyond the laws of nature and which are Supernatural and unintelligible. Divine Miracles are the Actions of God’s Love towards His Creation and especially towards mankind.

## **6. Prayer in Relation to the Government of all**

God Who Governs all things does not remain indifferent to the prayers of those who seek His Mercy and Help, otherwise the Communication between man and God would not be alive, but a religious hoax and meaningless.

The question arises of “...*how the path of events, having been predestined by God’s Plan, could be changed through the prayers of rational beings.*” Many prayers beseech God’s prevention of certain events from taking place and call upon Divine Providence to change the natural path of those events, which in many circumstances seem to be unchangeable. The solution to this question is the Foreknowledge of God that Governs the world taking into account the events of free beings, which were known by God before all time.

We must never forget that the possibility of Miracles and the Power of prayer occur despite seemingly insurmountable limited circumstances because, as previously stated, God can do whatever He Wills but it is also possible that He may not want whatever seems at first possible. Some Miracles and prayers are impossible to be realised simply because they contradict the Holy Nature of God or are contrary to His Wise and Perfect Plan.

Miraculous Intervention and the acceptance of man’s prayer by God must always be hoped for on condition that it serves a higher Purpose of the Divine Plan and only if it is in full agreement with the Holy and Good Will of God the Pantocrator. Thus the request “...*let Thy Will be done...*”<sup>14</sup> must be included in all prayers of pious Orthodox Christians.

Orthodox Christians believe in the Power of prayer and the Miracles of God but do not demand them or ask for proof. This is according to the words of our Lord Who

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<sup>14</sup> Matth. 6:10.

said: “*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*”<sup>15</sup>

Miracles may be realised only if people have solid faith in God’s Divine Power. They must place their trust in God’s Will and not allow any doubtful thoughts to enter their hearts, otherwise they put obstacles in the path God’s Power causing the prevention of the Miracle taking place due to their skepticism.

Our Lord exhorted us to “...*have faith in God. For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.*”<sup>16</sup>

## **II. THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD IN RELATION TO MAN’S FREEDOM AND SYNERGY**

The Government of God extends to the world of men who, as rational and free beings, actively interfere in history. Nevertheless within this free world the Will of the Lord rules. This is witnessed by Holy Scripture and Holy Saints who, although they faced many obstacles while serving the Will of God, accomplished His Plan.

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<sup>15</sup> John 20:29.

<sup>16</sup> Mark 11:22-24. Matth. 17:20; 21:21-22; 7:7. Luke 17:6; 11:9-10. John 14:12-14; 15:7; 16:23. 1 John 3:22.

This means that man's role is essential and not eliminated. Man cooperates freely, offering his efforts to fulfill the Divine Will although sometimes he may achieve it unconsciously. Through the Divine Government of God everything is presided over by Him Who allows some events to be achieved by mankind or because His Good Will consents to or concedes or even abandons man either temporarily for correction and pedagogic reasons, or definitely for the realisation of loss.

Natural evil as well as moral evil committed by wicked men, must be understood as follows: due to the good Will of God natural evil is allowed for pedagogic reasons whereas He always despises moral evil, having foreknown it without having predestined it. Thus, the evil of free beings is not prevented and yet the fulfillment of God's Will is fully realised, even unconsciously by those who do evil.

However, the various Actions of the Divine Government of God reveal many problems and present many Mysteries that remain impenetrable. Only through faith can one approach the Mystery of the impenetrable Will of our Great God to a certain point. Man remains amazed before the magnificent Wonders of Divine Providence that are approachable by his intellect, realising at the same time the infinite distance between Divine Wisdom and his poor human mind.

## 1. The Government of God and Man's Role, According to Holy Scripture

What has been previously mentioned with regard to the Government of the world by God is specifically for rational beings. Mankind has a unique position in Creation requiring special treatment, Guidance and Enlightenment by God. He is a being of free intellect in antithesis to the material world that is driven by blind natural laws. It is obvious then, that man who interferes in the Government of the world, needs the Governing Action of God, for “...*man's way is not his own; neither shall a man go, and direct his going...*”<sup>17</sup> but the Counsel of God “...*shall stand...*” and He “...*will do all things.*”<sup>18</sup> And again, even though men use powerful weapons of destruction, God “...*has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings.*”<sup>19</sup> “*He leads counselors away captive, and maddens the judges of the earth. He seats kings upon thrones, and girds their loins with a girdle. He sends away priests into captivity, and overthrows the mighty ones of the earth.*”<sup>20</sup>

In many cases obstacles originated by human activity prevented the career of others who had been chosen by Divine Providence. However, these were incapable of cancelling God's Divine Plan, as in the history of Joseph, Moses, David and so many others. It is true that no one's success throughout history was only due

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<sup>17</sup> Jer. 10:23.

<sup>18</sup> Is. 46:10.

<sup>19</sup> Acts 17:26.

<sup>20</sup> Job 12:17-19.

to personal characteristics, capabilities, or achievements because it is always mainly due to the synergy with Divine Providence. As it is written in the Book of Psalms: *“Unless the Lord builds the house, they labour in vain who build it; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.”*<sup>21</sup> St James the Adelphotheos, accused those who said: *“... ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit’ ...”* and reminded them: *“... you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord Wills, we shall live and do this or that.’”*<sup>22</sup>

We must not mistakenly believe that the human factor is either removed or forced into passivity. On the contrary, in the Old and New Testament we find examples that witness the synergy between God’s Divine Providence and the human factor. For example, when God provided for Prophet Elias during the time of starvation, He ordered him *“...to go to Sarepta of Sidonian.”* There He used the *“widow-woman”* as the instrument of His Will *“...to maintain...”* him and she, by her own free will, agreed to share the little supply of oil and flour<sup>23</sup> that she had. St Paul was saved as a result of his sister’s son hearing of the ambush that the chief Priests and Elders had planned in order to kill him.<sup>24</sup> Also, when St Paul sailed to Rome the ship faced grave danger from a

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<sup>21</sup> Psalm 127(128):1.

<sup>22</sup> James 4:13-15.

<sup>23</sup> 1 Samuel (1 Kings) 17:8-16.

<sup>24</sup> Acts 23:12-22.

storm. However an Angel revealed that the survival of all those aboard would be due to St Paul who urged everyone to give thanks to the Lord, to eat some bread and to prevent the killing of the slaves and the escape of the sailors.<sup>25</sup>

## 2. The Teaching of the Holy Fathers

The ruling and free Action of Divine Government in the life and actions of men is manifested by all the Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church.

St John Chrysostom praised the ruling of Divine Providence and stressed that “...*it is not our work, but the Providence of God and in what we believe we act. He leads everything; for if He abandons us, without care, without concern, without pain, nothing of such things would ever appear.*”<sup>26</sup>

Clement the Alexandrian stated that those things that one would consider as originating from man’s intellect, have their beginning from God. Consequently, such things as health from medicine, a strong body from gymnastics and wealth from financial success, owe their existence to Divine Providence and in accordance with the synergy of man.<sup>27</sup> The Divine spark that activates the human factor, makes Divine Providence accessible as

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<sup>25</sup> Acts 27:1-44.

<sup>26</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *To Matthew*, Homily 20, § 3, in Migne, *P.G.*, 57, 298.

<sup>27</sup> Clement the Alexandrian, *Stromata*, VI, 17, in *B*, v. 8, p. 338.

when the midwives of Egypt disregarded the decree of the Pharaoh to kill all male Hebrew children at birth. These women became renowned for their courage and were duly rewarded by God. Such events are considered as being the Work of Divine Providence.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore from Holy Scripture evidence of Divine Inspiration by means of which the hearts of men received Salvation or destruction from Above is apparent, It is written in the Book of Job that “...*revealing deep things out of darkness: ... He has brought into Light the shadow of death. Causing the nations to wander and destroying them: overthrowing the nations, and leading them away. Perplexing the minds of the princes of the earth: ... He causes them to wander in a way they have not known, saying: ‘Let them grope in darkness, and let there be no Light, and let them wander as a drunken man.’*”<sup>29</sup> Esther besought the Lord to move the heart of the King against Aman who wished to destroy the Jews <sup>30</sup> while King David “...*blessed the Lord God of Israel...*” Who prevented his wife Abigaia from being harmed because of Nabal “...*as the Lord God of Israel lives, Who hindered me this day from doing you harm, if you had not hastened and come to meet me, then I said, ‘There shall surely not be left to Nabal till the morning one male.’*”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *To Psalm 135(136)*, § 4, in Migne, P.G., 54, 392.

<sup>29</sup> Job 12:22-25.

<sup>30</sup> Esther 4:17.

<sup>31</sup> 1 Samuel (1 Kings) 25:32, 34.

### 3. The Question Concerning Evil

According to the above, if Divine Providence is extended throughout all aspects of human life, everyone is in the Hands of God, whether good or evil, living or dead, in poverty or wealth; and that from God they receive good and bad things. Even the evil people such as Herod the king and Pontius Pilate, performed what God had predestined them to do with nations and the people of Israel. Therefore the following questions arise:

1. How did evil enter the world and who invented it?<sup>32</sup>
2. What are the boundaries that distinguish active Intervention of Divine Providence from the free will of men?
3. Since man is free and abuses his freedom even though conscience of his choices and responsible for his actions, why is he unable to prevent the fulfilment of God's Will that occurs regardless of man's own will and to the accomplishment of which he unconsciously contributes?

The answers to these questions are found in the Teachings of Holy Scripture and the Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church whereby "*...the Providence of God governs everything, and other things He allows to take place for reasons which He alone knows, and others He*

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<sup>32</sup> Frangopoulos, *Christian Faith*, pp. 78-81.

*Himself realises.*<sup>33</sup> In addition to all this, the Lord “...upholds everything in His Power and He tolerates many things.”<sup>34</sup> Thus “...concerning the Providence, [some] are from the good Will of God, others because He allows [them].” However there are sometimes circumstances that God may abandon either completely or temporarily.<sup>35</sup>

Prophet Isaiah, through the Inspiration of the Holy Spirit, explained how evil came into the world: “*How has Lucifer who rose in the morning, fallen from Heaven! He who sent orders to all the nations is crushed to the earth. But you said in your heart, ‘I will go up to Heaven; I will set my throne above the stars of Heaven: I will sit on a lofty mount, on the lofty mountains towards the north: I will go up above the clouds; I will be like the Most High.*”<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, our Lord stated: “*I saw Satan fall like lightning from Heaven.*”<sup>37</sup>

Everything is governed by the Providence of God. Even natural evil that causes catastrophes in nature, the sorrows and temptations of humanity as well as moral evil, which is sin, are under the absolute control of Divine Providence. However, the relationship between God Who governs all and natural evil, is different to that of moral

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<sup>33</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *To Acts, Homily XXIII*, § 4, in Migne, *P.G.*, 60, 183.

<sup>34</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis*, VIII, § 4, in Migne, *P.G.*, 33, 628.

<sup>35</sup> St. John of Damascus, *Exposition. About providence*, II, 43, in Migne, *P.G.*, 94, 965.

<sup>36</sup> Is. 14:12-14.

<sup>37</sup> Luke 10:18.

evil because God, according to His good Will, allows natural evil to occur as it could become a source or cause of good things. On the contrary, however, God, being the Holy and Just Lord, always despises and disapproves of moral evil and although in His All-wisdom He is able to lead everything to goodness, He never Wills or allows this. He does, however, allow, concede and tolerate moral evil although He despises it and never participates in or cooperates with it.

St Basil the Great, with reference to evil in nature and good things that may result from it, stated: "... (natural evils such as) *the illness of cities and nations, the hot air and the drought of the earth, the difficulties of everyone's life ... are caused by God, whereas true evil...*" which is sin "*... is alien to God. For the sufferings of the body and the difficulties of life are the result of sin.*" "*The main evil is sin.*" This evil is not from God, for "*...He refutes it.*"<sup>38</sup>

St John of Damascus noted that God, according to His good Will, "*...allows...*" "*...many times for the just to face many trials, in order to reveal their hidden virtue to others; He concedes the holy one to suffer, in order that he will not fall from his true conscience or, because of the Gifts which he has received, to fall into pride, as in the case of Paul.*" He permitted the man who was healed by

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<sup>38</sup> St. Basil the Great, *That God is not the cause of evil*, § 5, in Migne, P.G., 31, 337-338.

Christ to be born blind so “...that the Works of God should be revealed.”<sup>39</sup>

We must never think that God created evil, for there is no evil in nature. Sin is the only evil that exists in the world. Everything that man considers evil, such as death, illness and other afflictions similar to these, are referred to as being “evil” simply because they cause suffering, sorrow and grief that we would prefer to avoid. Nonetheless, for God these painful experiences are not evil, but rather have the power of potential goodness.<sup>40</sup>

Thus the evil in nature, no matter how distressing and mournful it might be, is consequently good to such extent that St James the Adelphotheos said: “*My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.*”<sup>41</sup> He also said: “...*blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the Crown of Life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.*”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> John 9:3. St. John of Damascus, *Exposition. About providence*, II, 43, in Migne, *P.G.*, 94, 965.

<sup>40</sup> Mogilas, in Karmeris, *The dogmatics*, p. 606.

<sup>41</sup> James 1:2-3.

<sup>42</sup> James 1:12-15.

Generally, one must realise that if there was no natural evil, things would have been far worse for sinners and the sinful world, for although they have distanced themselves from God, they are prevented from doing worse through suffering caused by natural evil. God provides for all Creation, acknowledging our free will and wishing us no evil. Not everything is done only according to His Will, but also according to our own free will. What is from God is not from us although some circumstances are caused by our free will. Whatever is accomplished without the participation of our free will, is from God. Additionally, whatever is good comes from the synergy of our free will and God. This synergy is Justified because it desires good with an appropriate conscience in accordance to God's Foreknowledge. However, when evil is caused by wicked men, God justly abandons all those who desire to alienate themselves from Him. He grants their abandonment with forbearance, respecting their free will and subsequent choices.<sup>43</sup>

God, Who despises and punishes evil, could have abolished sin once and for all but this would have caused the annihilation of humanity's free will and would have been done by means of force and violence. Consequently, "...whatever is done by force is not rational nor of virtue."<sup>44</sup> In view of the fact that when God created man, He gave him free will, He does not want forceful prevention through His Divine Power of consequences caused by the Fall of His rational beings because this

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<sup>43</sup> St. John of Damascus, *Exposition. About providence*, II, 43, in Migne, P.G., 94, 968.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, *Exposition. About providence*, II, 43, in Migne, P.G., 94, 969.

would be considered equal to the Catastrophe of His own Work.

God infinitely Wills goodness and virtue. In addition to this He wants everything to be done freely because if goodness and virtue are forced, they lose their authenticity and incentive. God is not pleased by beings who are unwillingly obligated to do good because the Divine Plan of His Creation aims to establish a spiritual Kingdom in which only rational and moral personalities can participate. Since God has granted this precious Gift of Freedom to His rational beings of being able to choose between good and evil, He tolerates and permits their actions until such time as when His Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, will Judge the world.

#### **4. Foreknowledge, Predestination and Concession**

Although God tolerates and allows natural evil, this does not mean that He is astounded by anything or that He remains inactive. His Foreknowledge of the inclination of the free will towards evil of this or that person, predetermines the boundaries within which such tendencies will take place. Thus the free choice of liberated beings is expressed and the Governing Plan of God is fulfilled without any hindrance.

Divine Foreknowledge is not identical to predestination of events although relatively similar because evil deeds are foreknown by God yet have not

been executed by those who may bring them to fruition in due time. Even though evil deeds are Foreknown by God they are not predestined by Him to be fulfilled because then God would be responsible for them.

St John of Damascus explained that “...we must know that God foreknows everything, but does not predestine everything; He foreknows everything that concerns us...” meaning whatever deeds depend on us and which are committed by us “...and He does not restrict these acts. For ...” although He “...does not want evil to take place, neither...” does He want “... virtue by force.”<sup>45</sup>

Evil deeds have been committed not because they were predicted by God but because they were fulfilled by liberated rational beings as their own free acts of will. God allows this to occur. Nevertheless this concession differs completely from predestination. For example, God anticipated the Fall of angels and of mankind even before He had created them and, whereas they had fallen even though under the control of Divine Providence, at the same time they had fallen due to their own freedom of choice. Consequently, owing to this fact as well as having willingly alienated themselves from God, they are justly held responsible.

According to the forementioned, although Divine Foreknowledge is not identical to predestination of events, it is relatively similar. This Foreknowledge of God

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<sup>45</sup> St. John of Damascus, *Exposition. About foreknowledge and predestination*, II, 44, in Migne, P.G., 94, 972.

predestines the consequences of moral evil and establishes boundaries in which they may occur, so that God's Plan will not be hindered. Neither will evil be corrected, or negatively, become instruments of goodness. Furthermore evil will not be harshly punished until its total destruction on the Day of Judgement.

St Paul presented God as permitting moral evil as a punishment and declared: "*...For the Wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the Truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible Attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His Eternal Power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man – and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonour their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the Truth of God for the lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, Who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the women, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is*

*shameful, and receiving in them the penalty of their error which was due. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the Righteous Judgement of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.”<sup>46</sup>*

Also, in his Letter to the Romans he stated that “... we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His Purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, and these He also glorified.”<sup>47</sup>

In the Old Testament God abandoned the Pharaoh and hardened his heart so that He would “... be glorified upon Pharaoh, and on his entire host, and on his chariots and his horses.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Rom. 1:18-32.

<sup>47</sup> Rom. 8:28-30.

<sup>48</sup> Ex. 14:17.

The Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church distinguish between two types of Divine Abandonment: by “*economy*” or for “*pedagogic*” reasons and complete desperation. Abandonment by “*economy*” or for “*pedagogic*” reasons is used by God for the correction, Salvation and glory of those who suffer. Some are healed more rapidly as a result of their evil deeds and offences because they are easier to cure.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, they may fall repeatedly into the same errors causing them to remain irredeemable and incurable. For this reason God allows longer suffering, in order that the wicked may comprehend the damage caused by their sins and subsequently loathe their evil deeds so willingly committed. In this manner, they may be healed physically and spiritually. In difficult circumstances God may postpone His Divine Therapy, and although it may appear that He is not helping sinners, in reality He is most certainly doing so. Furthermore God permits shameful deeds in order to prevent worse passions. For example, when we are proud of our virtues or achievements, God allows us to fall into some type of error so that we recognise and acknowledge our own weakness, humble ourselves and approach the Lord for forgiveness.

The falls of the two great Apostles, St Peter and St Paul, are relative to the aforementioned. As recorded in the New Testament, St Peter renounced Christ three times because of personal pride and self-preservation. As a result he was in danger of becoming unworthy of the

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<sup>49</sup> Origen, *About prayer*, 29, 13, in *B*, v. 10, p. 297.

Apostolic Work.<sup>50</sup> St Paul had persecuted the Church with excessive zeal<sup>51</sup> but with ignorant conviction. However, afterwards he struggled more than any of the other Apostles to spread the Holy Gospel. The realisation that he had persecuted the Church of Christ was always before him and this constantly humbled him.<sup>52</sup> These are only two examples of the pedagogic Abandonment of God Who always works for the Salvation of men.

*“Complete abandonment takes place when God does everything for man’s Salvation, but he remains unmoved and uncured in his heart; and by his own free will he remains in sin and without repentance, as in the case of Judah...”*<sup>53</sup> as well as Pharaoh, Herod, and so many others.

## **5. The Government of God in Wisdom Restricts Evil.**

Although God tolerates evil with infinite patience, He does not remain inactive but instead restricts it within certain boundaries that Divine Providence demands, or guides it with His Almighty Wisdom to achieve goodness, regardless of the evil intention of the wicked. Thus God *“...tolerates ... Satan, not because God is weak...”* but because He *“...allowed him to exist, in order for two things to take place...”* Firstly *“...that Satan in doing*

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<sup>50</sup> Matth. 26:33-35, 69-75. Mark 14:29-31, 66-72. Luke 22:31-34, 54-65. John 18:16-17, 25-27.

<sup>51</sup> Gal. 1:14.

<sup>52</sup> 1 Corinth. 15:9.

<sup>53</sup> St. John of Damascus, *Exposition. About providence*, II, 43, in Migne, P.G., 94, 968.

*more evil ... will be defeated...*” and secondly, so that men who are tempted by the evil one, might defeat him and, as a consequence, be “*crowned*”<sup>54</sup> and glorified.

God restricts Satan’s power and authority with absolute Justice, as demonstrated in the therapy of the Gadarene demoniac <sup>55</sup>whereby the demons had no authority to enter into the herd of swine until they were permitted to do so by Christ.<sup>56</sup> It is obvious that Satan and his demons hate the human race more than the animals or the entire Universe because they destroyed the herd of swine without the least hesitation.<sup>57</sup> Therefore how much more hatred and destruction would they have brought upon humanity if they had the slightest authority? Satan would have destroyed the whole Universe in a split second but because of “*God’s Guardianship, the power of the demons is restrained.*”<sup>58</sup>

Clement the Alexandrian stated “...*it is the Work of Divine Wisdom and Virtue and Power not only to do good, but to bring to a good end that which others invented evil, as in the case of the trial of Martyrdom.*”<sup>59</sup> This is witnessed by the events concerning the noble Joseph and St Paul. The brothers of Joseph worked towards his

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<sup>54</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis*, 8, § 1 and 2, in Migne, *P.G.*, 33, 628-629.

<sup>55</sup> Luke 8:26-39.

<sup>56</sup> Luke 8:32.

<sup>57</sup> Luke 8:33.

<sup>58</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *To Matthew, Homily* 28, § 3, in Migne, *P.G.*, 57, 354.

<sup>59</sup> Clement the Alexandrian, *Stromata*, book I, ch. 17, in *B*, v. 7, p. 269.

destruction when they sold him to the Ismalite merchants. However, God took "...their hatred towards their brother ..." as the starting point "...of His Economy and allowed their hatred to sell their brother..." into Egyptian slavery where He subsequently guided events in order that "...he will rule." With regard to St Paul, the intolerance of the Jews that led to his arrest in the belief that it would prevent the spread of the Gospel, actually contributed "...to the progress of the Gospel..." and in fact, "...all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the Called according to His Purpose."<sup>60</sup> Consequently, St Paul's chains of imprisonment made his difficult missionary work known to all, as his "...deep concern..." was "...for all the churches..."<sup>61</sup> and his sufferings encouraged other brethren to strive harder and to speak about the Holy Gospel without fear.<sup>62</sup>

The Divine Plan of Salvation, not only for those who love God but even for the predestined before all time, is served not only by positive events through which God Acts, but also through deeds of the inventor of evil and those he uses as wicked instruments in his futile efforts to prevent or cancel God's Plan. In this manner, the Jews, used by Satan as his willing instruments and despite their absolutely evil intentions of destroying the Messiah, worked unconsciously in collaboration with God's Providence to achieve the greatest Event in man's history: the Salvation of the human race by means of the condemnation of the Son of God. In their actions

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<sup>60</sup> Rom. 8:28.

<sup>61</sup> 1 Corinth. 11:23-28.

<sup>62</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis*, 8, § 2, in Migne, *P.G.*, 33, 629.

“...against God’s Anointed One...”<sup>63</sup> “...Herod and Pontius Pilate with the nations and the people of Israel...” performed “...whatever the Hand and Will of God had predestined to take place.”<sup>64</sup> It is essential to remember, that God despises all forms of evil and never predestines man to work any evil at all. Nevertheless, evil occurs because of man’s free will. Thus in order to fulfil God’s Will the actions of those who crucified the Son of God were restricted.

The triumph of God over evil is accomplished without man simply becoming an instrument yet preserving his freedom. In other words the evil intentions of man remain while the prevailing good is the Act of God’s Divine Providence.

## **6. The Mystery of the Existence of Unrighteousness in the World (Theodicy).**

Throughout the generations many attempted to justify the Government of God and the existence of unrighteousness in the world. Thus the theory of “*Θεοδικία*” (Theodicy) strives to prove, as far as possible, that although unrighteousness exists in the world, God’s Government is achieved with great Wisdom and Justice.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Psalm 2:1-2.

<sup>64</sup> St. John of Damascus, *Exposition. About providence*, II, 43, in Migne, P.G., 94, 965.

<sup>65</sup> Trempeles, *Dogmatique*, v. I, p. 401.

This struggle is not only legitimate, but originates from deep piety and is in agreement with the Teachings of the Holy Fathers and Holy Scripture. In the Book of Job, in Psalms 37(38), 73(74) and 77(78), as well as in the Letter of St Paul to the Romans (chapters 9-11) the question of “*Is there unrighteousness with God?*”<sup>66</sup> arose which St Paul answered correctly.

But the success of the aforementioned endeavour depends upon our reasoning. If, for example, we base it only on our own personal experiences and intellect, without the Light of Faith, then it is obvious that we will face insurmountable obstacles leading us to deliberate: “*How does God know? And is there Knowledge in the Most High? Behold, these are the ungodly who are always at ease; [and] they increase in riches.*”<sup>67</sup> And only until one enters “...into the Sanctuary of God...” will one be able to “...understand their end.”<sup>68</sup>

Only with the Light of Faith can we understand the “*Economia*” of Divine Providence and uncover the mysterious veil that covers the problem of unrighteousness. Without Faith that assures us of the reality of Life after this existence which is our destiny, the problem of the apparent wellbeing of the ungodly during this life contrary to the sufferings of the Just, will always remain an unsolved Mystery. St Paul encouraged us by

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<sup>66</sup> Rom. 9:14.

<sup>67</sup> Psalm 73(74):11-12.

<sup>68</sup> Psalm 73(74):17.

reminding us: “...*For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.*”<sup>69</sup>

## 7. Explanation of Natural Evil

Faith solves the difficulties of explaining the existence of natural evil. The decay, death and disasters that the earth faces occurred even before the appearance of man. God, foreknowing the Fall of man, predestined the things of Creation in such a way that He would not be caught unawares by moral evil but instead guided everything according to His Divine Will. Only the faithful can fully understand what Holy Scripture states concerning natural evil that prepares the future glory for the Just, which will be revealed as an expression of the special Love of God for His servants who now suffer but who will then be glorified.

St Paul taught us that “... *the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which will be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the Creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the Creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him Who subjected it in hope; because the Creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole Creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly*

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<sup>69</sup> Heb. 13:14.

*waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.”*<sup>70</sup>  
*“... But we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.”*<sup>71</sup>

St James the Adelphotheos urged: *“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.”*<sup>72</sup>

If one examines the sufferings of the just in the world from a fatalistic point of view, one will become completely pessimistic.

We must never forget the length of man’s life and the time of death are determined by God Who “...gives to all Life, breath, and all things...”<sup>73</sup> “...in Whose Hand is...” our “...breath and all...” our “...ways.”<sup>74</sup> He gives a specific number of years to each one’s life<sup>75</sup> so no one dies before the time appointed by God. Those who die due to personal carelessness or an undisciplined way of life or who have committed suicide thereby ending their own lives or who have been murdered by others, depart this life because God has allowed it to happen. Nevertheless questions always arise concerning the length of man’s life which human intellect cannot understand.

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<sup>70</sup> Rom. 8:18-23.

<sup>71</sup> Rom. 8:25.

<sup>72</sup> James 1:2-3.

<sup>73</sup> Acts 17:25.

<sup>74</sup> Daniel 5:23..

<sup>75</sup> Is. 38:5.

Questions arise such as: *“How and why do many die as soon as they are born or as infants or at a young age whereas others live for so many years and fall into so many sins, or are twisted and become criminals? Why did they not also die while in their infancy so that they would not have sinned?” “Why do others, who knew the Truth and throughout their whole life kept it, but at the last moments of their earthly life, betray it?”*

These and many other Mysteries have to be considered when examining the Dispensation of the process of God’s All-wise Government. Nevertheless, the Faithful who are always amazed by the richness of Divine Providence are neither puzzled by nor wonder at them. They consider the infinite distance that separates Divine Wisdom from that of man’s and humbly acknowledge: *“For who has known the Mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counsellor?”*<sup>76</sup>

If the methods of Divine Providence were comprehensible to man’s limited mind, then they would no longer be Supernatural but instead would be completely diminished to the level of material things. Also, we must never forget that in order to examine the Supernatural Work of the Divine Government of God, we must keep in mind the whole Work of Creation and not only a miniscule part of it. Only God has the entire history of Creation in His Sight with every detail and possibility, not only past and present but also the future of each individual creature, either rational or irrational, to the end of the present world as well as afterwards to the Eternal Kingdom.

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<sup>76</sup> Rom. 11:34.