

PART THREE

JESUS CHRIST

FOUNDER OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

CHAPTER ONE.

THE MYSTERY OF SALVATION.

Man, who was deceived into sin, did not fall without the possibility of restoration, nor was he condemned to Eternal Death. But, within him, there was hope and he was not abandoned by the Divine Love of his Creator. God, before all time, had foreseen the Fall of man. To cure the mortality that sin enforced upon man and in order to realize the work of Regeneration and Recreation, God sent into the world, according to His Eternal and Mysterious Will, as the Saviour and Deliverer, His own Begotten Son¹.

The Incarnated Son of God was born for us by the Wisdom, Justice, Holiness and Salvation of God, and through His Teachings He enlightened and guided us into the true Knowledge of God. Through His Death and our incorporation and Regeneration within His Body through Holy Baptism, He freed us from all guilt, Justifying us and making us Saints by offering Himself as a “ransom”² for the Salvation of the world.

Through Jesus Christ, our nature became capable of becoming partakers of Divine Nature. Hence the Salvation in Christ is the central Doctrine and main subject of the Holy Gospel. Nevertheless it remains a

¹ St. Symeon, *Euriskomena*, Homily X, pp. 65-67.

² Matth. 19:28.

Mystery, hidden from all generations and even from the Heavenly Hosts being the secret Will of God and existing in the depths of His Wisdom. The Mystery of Salvation has remained incomprehensible to our limited mind.

Salvation, as Regeneration of the fallen and corrupted nature of man, is inseparably connected to the Creation as the Will of God, existing before all time and being inseparable from the plan of Creation.

1. The Fallen Man Susceptible to Salvation.

Fallen man has to his credit the fact that he did not invent evil himself but was deceived by the devil. St. John of Damascus correctly observes, “*he who sins because of another force has the right to more apologies and forgiveness*” than he who sins on “*his own*” such as the devil himself who invented evil. “*For ... the devil remained unrepentant,*” as opposed to man who “*sinned, because of the assaults of the devil,*” but who “*was found in repentance.*”³

The inner disagreement that creates sadness in the heart of the sinner and drives away desirable peace, although on the one hand a disaster and the result of the offence, on the other hand, is a good sign because it incorporates morality, which remains after the offence. This sadness is a witness of the remaining goodness in

³ St. John of Damascus, *Against Manicheans Dialogus*, § 33, in Migne, 94, 1540.

man because, if some good had not remained, he would not feel sad at the loss of goodness.⁴

Man was corrupted because of the offence and did not remain in the natural condition in which he was created. Man was corrupted to the extent that the wickedness, which invaded his nature, did not transform him into complete evil. This is the differentiation between the devil and man. The devil's nature was transformed completely and when he lies, "*he speaks of his own resources.*"⁵ He speaks from the bottom of his corrupted nature, which is completely possessed by deceit and is the primary and inexhaustible source of evil. On the contrary, when man lies, he speaks as an enslaved person influenced by the devil who is the father of deception. The groaning and suffering is hidden in the sinner because of the offence. Man's conscience awakens and becomes the instrument by which God raises him up.

When man fell, he did not fall into the condition of the animals, nor did his nature take on that of the devil. His heart became like a field of thorns and thistles, but it did not change into insensitive granite, unable to receive the Enlightenment of Divine Grace. And surely by man's moral powers, which remained in him, it was impossible for him to be restored to the previous state. He was susceptible to God's attention and Salvation.⁶ It was necessary for man to be Regenerated, but not to be

⁴ Oosterzee, *Dogmatics*, p. 441.

⁵ John 8:44.

⁶ Cf. Frangopoulos, *Christian Faith*, pp. 117-118.

changed, because through the offence evil rushed into him, but it did not become the essence of his spiritual nature.

Hence the sinful man, feeling the pollution of wickedness that infected and alienated him from God, and because of the accusations of his conscience that awakened him, searched for the means to become friends with God and to be free from guilt and unhappiness. He therefore offered sacrifices, suffered punishments of the body, took up spiritual pilgrimages and went through purifications, through which he sought expiation with the Divine or cleanliness from the stain of immoral deeds.

Considering that sin is a power that soils man and alienates him from God, only through an inner Regeneration and the outpouring of a new moral life,⁷ which transforms him from a son of darkness, disobedience and wrath⁸ into a son of Light and Divine Blessedness,⁹ is it possible to achieve restoration and Salvation from the slavery of evil. This desirable Salvation does not consist of a natural transformation of the body, nor is it some kind of lifeless morality that enlightens the mind. It is the rising and moral transfiguration of the inner man that is achieved by his freedom from the slavery of sin¹⁰ and the beginning of a

⁷ John 3:5.

⁸ Ephes. 2:2; 5:6. Col. 3:6.

⁹ 1 Thess. 5:5. Heb. 2:10. Rom. 8:14; 9:26. Col. 3:26.

¹⁰ 1 Corinth. 7:22.

new Life,¹¹ which makes him a partaker of the Divine Nature¹² in Jesus Christ.

2. The Restoration of Man through Salvation and Deification in Christ.

The Creation of the world finalized the vertical movement of the Acts of God: from the Father through the Son to the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, the ascent of man, the *Economia* of Salvation, follows the opposite order: from the Holy Spirit through the Son to the Father. In this ascent the Holy Spirit is revealed to be the “*Spirit of Life*” from Whom Love is derived.¹³

It is obvious that this essential change in every sinner is impossible to achieve only by means of man’s powers and struggles. It is vitally necessary for a special intervention of the *Philanthropia* and Love of God Who wants the Salvation of all sinners. This Act has been manifested by God Who sent into the world His Only-begotten Son “*Who became for us Wisdom from God – and Righteousness and Sanctification and Redemption.*”¹⁴ In other words, the Incarnated Son of God through His Teachings “*taught us the Divine Knowledge of God*” “*making us wise by freeing us from the error of the*

¹¹ Rom. 6:4.

¹² 2 Peter 1:4.

¹³ Evdokimov, *Orthodoxia*, p. 150.

¹⁴ 1 Corinth. 1:30. Cf. Mitsopoulos, *Themata*, pp. 208-209.

idols.”¹⁵ He freed us from guilt and made us “*Just and Saints*” by becoming the Head of the human race and being the New Adam.¹⁶ Hence Christ became our true “*freedom ... freeing us from sin*” by giving “*Himself as ransom for the cleansing of the whole world.*”¹⁷ This is the most joyful announcement that makes the Christian message so real and utterly truthful. It is the Holy Gospel.

Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was not our physical forefather as Adam was, from whom all humanity originated. “*God ... by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin ... condemned sin in the flesh.*”¹⁸ But He was the most holy member of the human race, which had fallen into the slavery of sin, and for this reason He surpasses the first Adam. Because of His close relationship with mankind, having assumed flesh and blood¹⁹ and having been “*made like His brethren*”²⁰ in everything of their nature, with the exception of sin, Christ is not ashamed to call them His “*brothers.*”²¹ He became “*the new beginning of the human race,*” “*our Brother for the similarity of our body, but He is also called ‘the Firstborn,’*²² *because all men were lost according to the offence of the first, His Flesh was saved*

¹⁵ Theophilus of Antioch, *To Corinthians 1:30*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 124, 584.

¹⁶ St. John Chrysostom, *To 1 Corinthians Homily 5*, § 3, in Montfaucon, v. 10, p. 42.

¹⁷ St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Homily 30*, § 20, in Migne, *P.G.*, 36, 132.

¹⁸ Rom. 8:3.

¹⁹ Heb. 2:14.

²⁰ Heb. 2:17.

²¹ Heb. 2:11.

²² Rom. 8:29.

and freed as being the Body of the Word.”²³. And because all other brothers of Christ were guilty and “*responsible to death, He presented His own Body and as everyone died through him (Adam), everyone through Him (Christ) became free*” and “*everyone according to the relationship of the flesh was freed*” and “*as one body conjoined in Him for the sameness of the flesh*” “*we are joined to the Word*” and through Him “*to God*”, being deified and “*partakers of the Divine Nature,*” according to the capability of our nature, without being absorbed or wiped out by participating in the Infinite Nature²⁴ (Theosis).

“*Christ became the beginning and the root of our race which is re-created towards immortality through the union with God.*”²⁵ Thus the Word of God Who took on flesh and blood, became the same as us, although as God, He remains perfect “*having the real and true identity of nature with the Father.*” However, because “*He vested Himself with our body,*” “*we all have vested (ourselves with) His.*” Through Him we are united with the Father becoming “*one*” in the Father and the Son “*Whose identity we shall also have,*” similar to the Word Who has this identity with the Father by Nature, whereas we receive it by “*imitation and Grace,*” according to the Spirit Who dwells within us.²⁶ Consequently our Lord and Saviour

²³ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *To John 16:6-7*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 74, 432.

²⁴ St. Athanasius the Great, *Against Arians*, II, §§ 61, 69 and 74, in Migne, *P.G.*, 26, 277, 293 and 305.

²⁵ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *About the in spirit and truth*, Homily IX, in Migne, *P.G.*, 68, 617.

²⁶ St. Athanasius the Great, *Against Arians*, III, §§ 22 and 25, in Migne, *P.G.*, 26, 368 and 376.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as the new and heavenly Adam and the Head of His Mystical Body, “*summed up*”²⁷ the human race and brought it back to the ancient condition from which it had fallen. He became the Leaven that leavens the whole lump²⁸ of the human race, which was incorporated in Him and united to Him. Thus He was able to loosen the curse of mankind.²⁹

St. Irenaeus refers to the “*summing up*” by Christ of the ancient creature to Himself, so that the offence dies, He destroys death and man becomes alive.³⁰

Hence it is understood that the new Revelation, which has been granted to mankind by God in Jesus Christ, is the true Salvation that offers the Life-giving Light concerning the true God, the nature and the destination of man. The centre of this Divine Revelation is Salvation and Deification of our human nature in Christ, in Whom and to Whom we are united. For the purpose of the Holy Gospel is not just to lead us to the Knowledge of the true God, but also to make man perfect in virtue and in the likeness of God, freeing him from the stain of sin and all sinful passions.³¹

²⁷ Rom. 13:9.

²⁸ 1 Corinth. 5:6. Gal. 5:9. Matth. 13:33. Luke 13:21.

²⁹ St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Homily* 30, § 21, in Migne, *P.G.*, 36, 132.

³⁰ St. Irenaeus, *Heresies*, book III, ch. 18, § 1, in Migne, *P.G.*, 7, 936 and 938. Cf. *Ibid*, in Hadjephraimides, p. 239.

³¹ Cf. Frangopoulos, *Christian Faith*, pp. 120-121.

3. Salvation as the New Creation.

If the Revelation casts light upon the rest of the Divine Truths, which consist of an unbroken continuum, it is natural that it will be enlightened also by those Truths. Thus one must not examine these separately, but in conjunction with them and especially with the Doctrines concerning Creation and Divine Providence.

The Revelation is a new Creation, since it derives from the new Creation in Christ. This Creation is more important, because on the one hand it takes place on the moral field, which is higher than the natural field, whereas on the other hand, it aims for the Regeneration of the intellectual Creation. The old Creation must be replaced by a new one. It is also the higher goal of Divine Providence, which watches over the universe and takes an interest in human history, intervening for the benefit of each man's destination. It also aims for the Salvation and Regeneration of the human race and its freedom from the disastrous consequences of the offence and their restoration as children of God.

No matter how close the Doctrine of Salvation is to those of Creation and Providence, one must never forget that Salvation, as a Gift of the free Will of God, which was fulfilled by the Incarnation of the Son of God, consists of *“the Mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations”*³² and which cannot be understood in all its details by the limited human mind. Surely *“God is*

³² Col. 1:26.

Love”³³ and is a free action of God’s goodness, which explains the sending of His Son to save man. *“In Him we have Redemption through His Blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His Grace, which He made to abound toward us in all Wisdom and Prudence, having made known to us the Mystery of His Will, according to His good Pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth – in Him.”*³⁴ This Mystery *“which from the beginning of the ages”* was hidden even from the Angelic Hosts, *“hidden in God Who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold Wisdom of God might be made known by the Church to the Principalities and Powers in the heavenly places.”*³⁵

The *“formation”* of Christ in man - the Christ-making of man - is neither an irritation – an impossible fact – nor a realization in man of the Incarnation, but projection within man of the Incarnation itself, which acts in and continues with the Eucharistic Mystery.³⁶

The Mystery of Christ being beyond any human understanding needs simple and uncorrupted faith.³⁷ Because, if man ignores the union that unites his soul to

³³ 1 John 4:16.

³⁴ Ephes. 1:7-10.

³⁵ Ephes. 3:9-10.

³⁶ Evdokimov, *Orthodoxi*, p. 153.

³⁷ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Against Nestorius*, III, in Migne, *P.G.*, 76, 112.

his body, how much more is it impossible for him to comprehend the Incarnation of the Son and Word of God?³⁸ This event is not a simple enigma, but a Divine Mystery in that the Word of God Who “*is always worshipped, in time took up the nature of that which worships Him*” and “*how He ascended*” at His Ascension, “*He Who even before His ascendance was always raised on high.*”³⁹

The Mystery of the Salvation in Christ requires solid and unshakeable faith as we examine the Incarnation and the extreme humbleness of the Word and Son of God, which is beyond any human conception and interpretation.⁴⁰ It was because of the love expressed by God towards mankind, who alienated themselves from Him, “*that His Only-begotten Son, the Word and Creator of all things, took up the human nature and was Incarnated achieving our Salvation.*”⁴¹

4. The Eternity of the Divine Will Concerning Man’s Salvation.

If Salvation is related inseparably to the Creation, it is obvious that the Will of God concerning Salvation existed before all time inseparably with the plan of Creation. In other words God did not wait for the Fall of

³⁸ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechesis*, II, in Migne, *P.G.*, 45, 44.

³⁹ St. Athanasius the Great, *Against Arians*, I, § 41, in Migne, *P.G.*, 26, 96. Eph. 4:8-10.

⁴⁰ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechesis*, II, in Migne, *P.G.*, 45, 44.

⁴¹ Theodoretus of Cyrus, *Homily VI*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 83, 988.

man to take place and then planned his restoration. As the Will of God concerning the creation of the world and man existed eternally, without any change in the simplicity of God, and the plan of the Salvation of man existed as “*the Mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations,*”⁴² - meaning from above and from the beginning, before all Creation and Eternal - He worked out the Salvation as He created.

Analyzing the above, we understand that God decided to save man, since He foresaw his Fall. But in God there is no changing of decisions and actions and thus the Eternal Will of God concerning Salvation coincided directly with His Eternal Will concerning the creation of the world.

Hence, it appears very naturally, that God at the time of Adam’s fall announced the Salvation that would come from woman’s seed - a victory over the devil⁴³ who had deceived her.⁴⁴ Thus, the holy Apostles speak about the Saviour Who “*chose us in Him before the foundation of the world,*”⁴⁵ Who “*indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times*”⁴⁶ and as the “*Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*”⁴⁷

⁴² Col. 1:26.

⁴³ Gen. 3:16.

⁴⁴ Gen. 3:14.

⁴⁵ Ephes. 1:4.

⁴⁶ 1 Peter 1:20.

⁴⁷ Rev. 13:8.

Hence it is assured by the holy Fathers and ecclesiastic Scholars that “*at the Incarnation it was predestined and the Mystery of the Gospel and the electing from on High of those who will believe*”⁴⁸ and “*that before the law and that God before the creation of the world predestined the *Economia**”⁴⁹ and “*from these the antiquity of the Gospel is manifested.*”⁵⁰

St. Athanasius the Great of Alexandria, describing this great Truth, uses the example of the wise architect, who wished to build a house but who wanted at the same time, if it was ever corrupted, to be able to restore it. So he gave the constructor the plan, which foresaw the restoration and as the building took place the regeneration was prepared at the same time. In a similar manner before we were created, our Regeneration and Salvation in Christ was founded, in order that in Him we can be Recreated. And the Will and Intention of our Salvation and Restoration was prepared before this age, whereas the work was fulfilled when it was time and the Saviour came.⁵¹

Irenaeus states that if it was necessary for man to be saved, then it was necessary for the Word of God to

⁴⁸ Zigabinos, *To Ephesians 1:4*.

⁴⁹ Kalogeras, II, 3.

⁵⁰ Theodoretus of Cyrus, *To Colossians 1:26*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 82, 604.

⁵¹ St. Athanasius the Great, *Against Arians*, II, § 77, in Migne, *P.G.*, 26, 309.

become man.⁵² St. Ambrosius asks: “*What is the cause of the Incarnation, if the sinful flesh is not saved?*”⁵³

St. Augustine proclaims that if man was not lost, the Son of Man would not have come.⁵⁴

St. John Chrysostom restricts the cause of the Incarnation to the uplifting of man observing that the Lord “*for no other reason took up our flesh, but for the Salvation of the human race becoming man.*”⁵⁵ Hence, “*because of love towards man He took up our flesh, in order to have Mercy upon us; for there is no other reason of the Economia but only this.*”⁵⁶

St. Athanasius the Great of Alexandria states, “*our cause became His reason to descend and our offence called upon the Word’s Love towards mankind, in order that the Lord comes to us and be revealed amongst men.*”⁵⁷ “*Before He becomes man, it was necessary for men to need Him, otherwise He would not have vested flesh. What was the necessity, for which He became man, our Lord Himself emphasises when He says: ‘I descended from heaven’ in order to do the Will of Him Who has sent*

⁵² St. Irenaeus, *Heresies*, book V, ch. XIV, in Migne, *P.G.*, 7, 1161.

⁵³ St. Ambrosius, *De incarnation*, c. 6, § 56, in migne, *P.L.*, 16, 868.

⁵⁴ St. Augustine, *Sermo* 174, § 2, in migne, *P.L.*, 38, 940; and *Sermo* 175, § 1, in migne, *P.L.*, 38, 945.

⁵⁵ St. John Chrysostom, *To Genesis*, Homily 3, § 4, in Migne, *P.G.*, 53, 36.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, *To Hebrews*, Homily 5, § 1, in Migne, *P.G.*, 63, 47.

⁵⁷ St. Athanasius the Great, *About the incarnation of the Word*, § 4, in Migne, *P.G.*, 25, 104.

*Me, which is, "that whatever He gave Me (is) not to be lost."*⁵⁸

If Adam had not sinned, it would not have been necessary for the Word and Son of God to become man. But one must be very cautious not to enter into hypotheses, which surpass our limited understanding and which concern only God. St. Paul urges us saying: "*Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of Angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind.*"⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Ibid, *Against Arians*, II, § 54, in Migne, *P.G.*, 26, 261.

⁵⁹ Col. 2:18.