

CHAPTER TWO

PREPARATION OF SALVATION BY DIVINE PROVIDENCE

The Will for Salvation is related to the Doctrine of Divine Providence, which foresaw, determined and prepared the proper time according to which it would be realised. Immediately, after the Offence in the Garden of Delight, God gave His first Divine Promise of the re-elevation of mankind to the first-created couple.¹ The Covenants between God and Noah² as well as all the other the Patriarchs³ contained Prophecies of the Salvation of the whole world. However, the admirable “*Economia*” establishing Monotheism in the one family and tribe of Abraham,⁴ clearly manifests the preparation for Salvation by Divine Providence.

Although it seemed that for a while God had abandoned His chosen people in the land of Egypt,⁵ it was instead a paternal pedagogic way by means of which the people of God were freed. The Mosaic Law⁶ that followed, can only be described as the Fruit of the special Intervention of God in man’s history. Through the ritual purifications and sacrifices the need for redemption was

¹ Gen. 3:16.

² Gen. 9:11-17.

³ Gen. 17:2-14; 22:16-18; 26:2-4; 28:10-13; 35:10-11; 34:10-11.
Judges 2:1-2.

⁴ Gen. 12:1-3.

⁵ Ex. 1:10-14.

⁶ Ex. 20:1-17.

made aware and prepared the people of Israel for the coming of the Messiah Whose royalty and Work of Salvation were exalted and prophesied by His forefather according to the flesh, King David, in the Royal and Messianic Psalms. The numerous Prophets followed and presented the image of the Saviour through clear Prophecies, declaring His Work of Salvation as extending beyond the boundaries of Israel. The work of the Prophets was confirmed by the preaching of St John, the Baptist and Forerunner,⁷ the greatest of all Prophets,⁸ who prepared the way for the Messiah.⁹

While Divine Providence was preparing the Israelites, it also prepared the other nations, whom God did not leave without evidence of¹⁰ His Wisdom and Almightyness through the Creation, implanting the unwritten Law within their hearts¹¹ so that the desire of being free from the burden of sin increased amongst all nations.

When the fullness of time came,¹² when morality dropped to its lowest level and the political and social conditions had united the known world, the Message of the Gospel was welcomed as the only Anchor of Hope and Salvation. Thus the entire history of mankind led to the Saviour. And the Doctrine of Salvation appeared as being

⁷ Matth. 3:1-2. Mark 1:4. Luke 3:3.

⁸ Matth. 11:11. Luke 1:15; 7:28.

⁹ Matth. 3:3. Mark 1:2-3. Luke 3:4-6. John 1:23. Is. 40:3-5.

¹⁰ Rom. 1:19-21

¹¹ Rom. 2:15.

¹² Gal. 4:4-5.

central to not only the Christian Faith but also of the whole history of man. God in His All-wisdom and Providence intervened right from the beginning in man's history as an All-wise Steward Who controls His household, founding on earth His Eternal and Heavenly Kingdom.¹³

1. The Work of Divine Providence Until the Time of Moses.

The manifestation of the Mystery of the Divine Will, which looks for the uplifting of fallen man, was not revealed immediately after the Fall of Adam but was gradually revealed according to the preparation of Divine Providence for the coming of the Saviour. A bright radiance of Salvation was promised by God through the "Proto-evangelion" (First Good News), the First Promise, which was given to man whereby through the seed of a woman evil would be crushed.¹⁴ Hence until the medicine of Salvation through the Incarnation of the Word¹⁵ was granted, God gave many different cures to men through the Creation and nature as well as through the Law and Prophets¹⁶.

And until the Flood that came as a punishment of the wickedness of men, there was no other Divine Promise except the "Proto-evangelion" concerning the Mystery that

¹³ Matth. 4:17. Mark 1:14-15.

¹⁴ Gen. 3:16.

¹⁵ John 1:14.

¹⁶ Theodoretus of Cyrus, *Homily 6*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 83, 988.

was hidden in God. God made a Covenant with Noah¹⁷ who was saved as a new forefather of the human race after Adam and in him one can see the three Offices:

1) **The Royal** in that from him came the new human race.¹⁸

2) **The Prophetic**, as being “...a preacher of righteousness...”¹⁹ and

3) **The High Priest**, as building an Altar to the Lord and offering from all the clean birds and beasts “...a whole burnt-offering.”²⁰

Noah, becoming the second forefather of the human race, received a Covenant, an Eternal Covenant, through which God promised that He would not destroy the earth and all living things²¹ and that henceforth the human race would be under His Divine Protection. In order to prevent moral evil, God gave the Laws of Noah, which forbids the killing of men²² and the eating of “...flesh with blood of life.”²³ In addition, God gave the rainbow as a visible Sign of His Covenant.²⁴

¹⁷ Gen. 9:11-17.

¹⁸ Gen. 9:1.

¹⁹ 2 Peter 2:5.

²⁰ Gen. 8:20.

²¹ Gen. 9:11-12.

²² Gen. 9:6.

²³ Gen. 9:4.

²⁴ Gen. 9:12-17.

The Covenant with the promise of Noah clearly referred to the desirable Salvation that was renewed by God with Abraham who was called to leave his country and his relatives in order to settle in the unknown land of Canaan.²⁵ This Covenant was contracted with Abraham and his descendants as well as with infinite forecasts concerning the entire world. It is the final Covenant of God with the entire human race.

Through Moses who was raised as the mediator between God and the people of Israel,²⁶ the Law that was given on Mount Sinai,²⁷ was renewed and confirmed without any new additions. The Promises in this Covenant are those that refer to the Messiah and which have been fulfilled in the New Testament.

In three different cases these Promises are repeated:

1) to Abraham, “...*that in you will be Blessed...*” and “..*in your seed..*” “...*all tribes...*” and “...*all the nations of the earth...*”²⁸ which is renewed 2) to Isaac²⁹ and 3) to Jacob.³⁰ St Paul refers to this Promise being realised on the descendants of Abraham, “...*who by faith...*”³¹ are “...*blessed with the faithful Abraham...*” and referring directly to Christ, since it speaks of “*Abraham’s seed,*” which is Christ. Hence St Peter referred to the

²⁵ Gen. 12:1.

²⁶ Ex. 20:19.

²⁷ Ex. 20:1-17.

²⁸ Gen. 12:3; 17:2-14; 18:18; 22:18.

²⁹ Gen. 26:2-4.

³⁰ Gen. 28:13-14.

³¹ Heb. 11:4-38.

descendants of the Patriarchs as “...*sons of the Prophets, and of the Covenant...*” who were called to believe in Jesus Christ Whom God had “...*sent to bless...*”³² all the nations of the world.

The separation of Abraham from his family and his restriction to living with Isaac and Jacob in isolation consists of an admirable *Economia* [Disensation] of Divine Providence to establish Monotheism in one family and in one generation which under no circumstances would be uprooted, but would remain the heritage of all Israel for all generations. Abraham did not submit to the idolatry of the Canaanites, neither was he tempted when he was told by God to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac.³³ Although Abraham lived in a strange and alien land, he did not lose his trust in God but had his faith and hope in the Promise that from his seed the Messiah would be born,³⁴ “...*who rejoiced to see...*” His day “...*and he saw it and was glad.*”³⁵

And although it seems that for a while Israel in the land of Egypt was deprived of God’s Protection, as was proved through their miraculous freedom, God had not abandoned His people but had used a wise pedagogic means of Divine Providence that purposely separated His elect people from those of the idolatrous world who could endanger them through their alienation from the True God.

³² Acts 3:25, 26.

³³ Gen. 22:2, 10-12. Heb. 11:17.

³⁴ Heb. 11:8-10.

³⁵ John 8:56.

2. The Work of Divine Providence Until the Time of the Messiah.

Mosaic religion is revealed in history as the Fruit of the special Intervention of God Who was made known to Moses, as previously to the Patriarchs, and elevated him as the mediator of the Old Testament. God “...wanted in many ways to bring to reason the miserable man ... But the human nature remained incurable and miserable, so that it was impossible to put on it either oil or bandages. God gives the Law, in order to gather His Church on earth ... And because He predestined His Only Begotten Son ... and needed to prepare a godly generation from which He would be born in order to save the ungodly. When He was born, He was to perform many Wonders and to announce great Mysteries to men. All these had to be proclaimed and prophesied in one generation.”³⁶ As Monotheism was in Israel, likewise the personality of Moses and the Law given by him cannot be understood through rational presuppositions. Only those who believe in Divine Providence could explain these events that prepare the way for the Divine *Economia* in Christ.

St Paul being God-inspired, proclaimed that “... before faith came, we were kept under guard by the Law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the Law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.”³⁷ “For Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes...”³⁸

³⁶ Kritopoulos, ch. 3, in Karmeris, *The dogmatics*, v. II, p.517.

³⁷ Gal. 3:23-24.

³⁸ Rom. 10:4.

and “...by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the Law of Moses.”³⁹

The Law prevented man from committing moral sins, awakening in his conscience the feeling of guilt and the need for a Saviour and Redeemer, especially when “...sin, taking opportunity by the Commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the Law, sin was dead. I was alive once without the Law, but when the Commandment came, sin revived and I died. And the Commandment, which was to bring Life, I found to bring death. For sin, taking occasion by the Commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me. Therefore the Law is Holy and the Commandment Holy and just and good.”⁴⁰ The ritual purifications and sacrifices supported the need of redemption from God, particularly on the Day of Sacrifice and Redemption when all the people gathered together and besought Divine Mercy.

When the period of the Judges had passed and that of Kings followed.⁴¹ if God was angry, it was not because the people demanded a King but because they demanded a King “...as the rest of the nations.”⁴² As the royal family came from the tribe of Judah from whom “...a ruler shall not fail ... nor a prince from his loins, until there come the things stored up for him; and He is the expectation of

³⁹ Acts 13:39.

⁴⁰ Rom. 7:8-12.

⁴¹ 1 Samuel (1 Kings) 9:17; 10:1; 15:1.

⁴² 1 Samuel (1 Kings) 10:19.

nations...”⁴³ it supported the hope of the coming of the Messiah. This hope was increased even more when Israel had lost its glory and the following generations looked back, desiring a new King worthy of King David and Who would renew the admirable achievements of His forefather. This opinion was supported also by the Promise given by God to King David through the Prophet Nathan that “...*His Throne shall be set up for ever.*”⁴⁴

Furthermore the poetry of King David not only contributed to the establishment of worship and submission to the One and only True God but also to the specific identity of the Messiah Who was expected. Thus, by means of the Royal Psalms the kingship of the Messiah was exalted,⁴⁵ whereas the Messianic Psalms symbolically and prophetically referred to⁴⁶ Him as the Saviour and Son of God Who would be an invincible and victorious King Who would suffer. Nevertheless, afterwards He would be glorified, establishing His Eternal Kingdom on earth.

The majority of Prophets foresaw, prophesied and prepared for the dawning of the new Day of Salvation. They described the personality and the sufferings of the Messiah as well as the glory of His Kingdom.⁴⁷ At the same time they prepared the transmission from the Old to the New Testament. They combined the protests and criticisms against the errors of their people, stressing the

⁴³ Gen. 49:10.

⁴⁴ 2 Samuel (2 Kings) 7:13, 16.

⁴⁵ Psalms 19(20), 20(21), 71(72).

⁴⁶ Psalms 2, 15(16), 39(40), 21(22), 68(69), 70(71), 109(110).

⁴⁷ Kefalas, *Christology*, pp. 329-330.

magnificence of the Nature of the One and only True God, as well as the spirituality of the Divine Law and Divine Worship. The Prophets also emphasised the assurance of the eternity of God's Covenant with Israel, which would be extended to all nations.

The Prophets proclaimed the Mission and the characteristics of the Messiah as being like that of a Shepherd guarding all nations and⁴⁸ becoming the Light of the nations as well as the Salvation of Israel.⁴⁹ He would offer His Life to redeem all mankind. Through His wounds we would all be healed and through His passions and death the nations would return to God.⁵⁰ The Messiah would appear as the Son of Man and would receive from His Father the Kingdom of the world.⁵¹ Through His Mission He would fill the world with the True Knowledge of God,⁵² peace, justice, Holiness⁵³ and Divine Gifts or *Charismata* by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁴

The crowning achievement of the Prophets was the preaching of St John the Baptist and Forerunner⁵⁵ who was praised by the Messiah, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as the greatest of all Prophets.⁵⁶ To St John, God the Father had given the Mission to

⁴⁸ Jez. 34:11-16, 23, 31.

⁴⁹ Luke 2:32.

⁵⁰ Is. 49-55, 61, 63, 65-66.

⁵¹ Daniel 7:9-14.

⁵² Is. 11:9.

⁵³ Ezek. 37:26.

⁵⁴ Joel 2:28-32. Acts 2:17-21.

⁵⁵ Matth. 3:1-2. Mark 1:4. Luke 3:3.

⁵⁶ Matth. 11:11. Luke 1:15; 7:28.

prepare the way of the Messiah⁵⁷ as it was foretold by the Prophet Isaiah: *“The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough ways smooth..”*⁵⁸ *“..and all the ends of the earth shall see the Salvation that comes from our God.”*⁵⁹

Many believed that St John was the expected Messiah while others believed that he was the Prophet Elias⁶⁰ whose second coming was foretold by the Prophet Malachi: *“And behold, I will send to you Elias the Thesbite, before the great and glorious Day of the Lord comes; who shall turn again the heart of the father to the son, and the heart of a man to his neighbour, lest I come and smite the earth grievously.”*⁶¹ St John attracted the piety and trust of the people and was regarded with great respect. His fiery speech invited everyone to repentance and exhorted his generation to be cleansed through Baptism.

One thing that attracts our attention is the fact that St John the Baptist and Forerunner, who is the greatest of all the Prophets and the holiest of all men, did not perform even one Miracle. This must be seen in the light of his own words when he said to his disciples: *“A man can*

⁵⁷ Matth. 3:3. Mark 1:2-3. Luke 3:4-6. John 1:23. Is. 40:3-5.

⁵⁸ Is. 40:3-5. Mal. 3:1.

⁵⁹ Is. 52:10.

⁶⁰ John 1:21

⁶¹ Mal. 4:5.

receive nothing unless it has been given to him from Heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent before Him' ...He must increase, but I must decrease. He Who comes from Above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth."⁶²

3. The Preparation of the Nations.

The preparation of the nations⁶³ should not be considered as a less important subject although it cannot be regarded on the same level as the preparation of the Old Testament. St Paul speaking of how God prepared the nations, emphasised that "...since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen..."⁶⁴ and that the work of the Law "...is written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness."⁶⁵ With regard to the nations "...although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful..."⁶⁶ "...God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting."⁶⁷ "...But where sin abounded, Grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so Grace might reign through Righteousness to Eternal Life through Jesus Christ our Lord."⁶⁸

⁶² John 3:27-28, 30-31.

⁶³ Kefalas, *Christology*, p. 330.

⁶⁴ Rom. 1:20.

⁶⁵ Rom. 2:15.

⁶⁶ Rom. 1:21.

⁶⁷ Rom. 1:28.

⁶⁸ Rom. 5:20-21.

In the Epistle to Diognetus we read: *“Now as long as He kept it a secret and guarded His wise Design, He seemed to neglect and be unconcerned about us, but when He revealed it through His beloved Child and made known the things prepared from the beginning, He gave us everything at once, both to share in His Benefits and to see and understand things which none of us ever would have expected. So then, having already planned everything in His mind together with His Child, He permitted us during the former time to be carried away by undisciplined impulses as we desired, led astray by pleasures and lusts, not at all because He took delight in our sins, but because He was patient; not because He approved of that former season of unrighteousness, but because He was creating the present season of Righteousness, in order that we who in the former time were convicted by our own deeds as unworthy of Life might now by the goodness of God be made worthy, and, having clearly demonstrated our inability to enter the Kingdom of God on our own, might be enabled to do so by God’s Power. But when our unrighteousness was fulfilled, and it had been made perfectly clear that its wages – punishment and death - were to be expected, then the season arrived during which God had decided to reveal at last His Goodness and Power (oh, the surpassing Kindness and Love of God!). He did not hate us, or reject us, or bear a grudge against us, instead He was patient and forbearing; in His Mercy He took upon Himself our sins; He Himself gave up His own Son as a Ransom for us, the Holy One for the lawless, the Guiltless for the guilty, “...the Just for the unjust...” the Incorruptible for the corruptible, the Immortal for the*

mortal. For what else but His Righteousness could have covered our sins? In whom was it possible for us, the lawless and ungodly, to be Justified, except in the Son of God alone? O the sweet exchange, O the incomprehensible Work of God, O the unexpected Blessings, that the sinfulness of many should be hidden in one Righteous Man, while the Righteousness of One should justify many sinners! Having demonstrated, therefore, in the former time the powerlessness of our nature to obtain Life, and having now revealed the Saviour's Power to Save even the powerless, He Willed that for both these reasons we should believe in His Goodness and regard Him as Nurse, Father, Teacher, Counselor, Healer, Mind, Light, Honour, Glory, Strength, Life, and not be anxious about food and clothing."⁶⁹

Amongst the Greeks, through their philosophers, Divine Providence prepared for the acceptance of the Saviour. Clement the Alexandrian stated that "...from Above was given to men..." to prepare the path for the Royal Teachings of the Truth and "...the Perfection in Christ."⁷⁰

The influence on the pagan world by the Israelites can be seen in the cases of Daniel who was highly respected by many Kings of Babylon, the three Youths in the land of Babylon, Esther, Cyrus, the King of Babylon who issued a Decree in favour of the Israelites and

⁶⁹ *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 8, 10-11; and 9, 1-6, in Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, pp. 301-303.

⁷⁰ Clement the Alexandrian, *Stromata*, book I, ch. 5, 7 and 15, in *B*, v. 7, pp. 245, 249 and 267.

Alexander the Great who showed respect towards Jehovah. The many established Synagogues wherein the Old Testament was read and God was worshipped; as well as the translation by the seventy (O`) (Septuagint - Old Testament Greek) during the third century (280 BC) in Alexandria of Egypt must be considered as the indirect preparation of the nations in Christ.

4. The Fullness of Time

This long period of preparation of mankind by Divine Providence ended in “...*the fullness of time...*”⁷¹ when the idol worshipping religions lost their credibility and instead of respect and piety they suffered the mockery and scorn of intellectuals. Syncretism replaced the old superstitious traditions at a time when the Oracles had almost closed their doors and their predictions had been silenced. Philosophy had declined, whereas Skepticism and Negativism progressed amongst the intellectuals. Hence the level of morality had fallen to its lowest degree. The worship of the flesh and the hardness of heart caused St Paul to correctly stress that “... *it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret.*”⁷²

The pinnacle of this period of preparation was the political condition of the world. The political and ethnical obstacles, which separated the different nations, were dissolved by the conquest of the known world by the Roman Empire. The use of the Greek language from the

⁷¹ Gal. 4:4.

⁷² Ephes. 5:12.

time of Alexander the Great contributed to the study of the Old Testament and the spreading of the new Message. Furthermore, Syncretism also created the proper religious tolerance, which greatly assisted the servants of the Gospel. Parallel to this was the desire for the Coming of the Messiah Who would be the Salvation of Israel, the restoration of the kingdom of David and the Light of all Nations. This was the “*fullness of the time*” when God sent His Son into the world.⁷³

5. The *Economia* in Christ as the Centre of Man’s History

The Salvation in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the most important and central Christian Doctrine. According to this Doctrine, mankind was unable to find the means of Salvation on his own. Therefore, the Divine Love moved, restored and saved mankind. This occurred at the centre of man’s history. Thus the relationship between Divine Providence and Salvation in Christ is obvious. The God of Love in His All-wise Providence intervened right from the beginning in mankind’s history and guides everything towards Salvation in Christ.⁷⁴

This Salvation is called Divine *Economia*. [Dispensation] Thus the Old and New Testament are the one unique Work of the same Divine Providence. The

⁷³ St. John of Damascus, *Exposition. About the divine Economia*, III, 45, in Migne, *P.G.*, 94, 981.

⁷⁴ Cf. Frangopoulos, *Christian Faith*, pp. 121-122.

term “*Economia*” primarily refers to God the Father Who in His admirable Providence made Moses His faithful servant in all His Household, thereby establishing the old *Economia* while the Bearer of the new *Economia*, Jesus Christ, as His Son, sustains the Faithful in His Kingdom, the Church.

Because the Salvation in Christ gathers the Work of Divine Providence, which leads to “*the fullness of time*” when the Lord will manifest Himself, the term *Economia* therefore reveals two things: the Divine Incarnation of the Word, the Son of God, and the Salvation of man.

St Basil the Great observed that “...*the Economia of our God and Saviour is the recalling of man’s Fall and the restoration to God from the alienation which was caused by the Offence.*”⁷⁵

St Athanasius the Great remarked about the Word: “...*because of the Economia and our favour, He became Son of Adam...*” “...*and His Father because of the Economia became His God.*”⁷⁶

⁷⁵ St. Basil the Great, *About the Holy Spirit*, ch. XV, in Migne, P.G., 32, 128.

⁷⁶ St. Athanasius the Great, *About the Economia of the Incarnation*, § 8, in Migne, P.G., 26, 996.