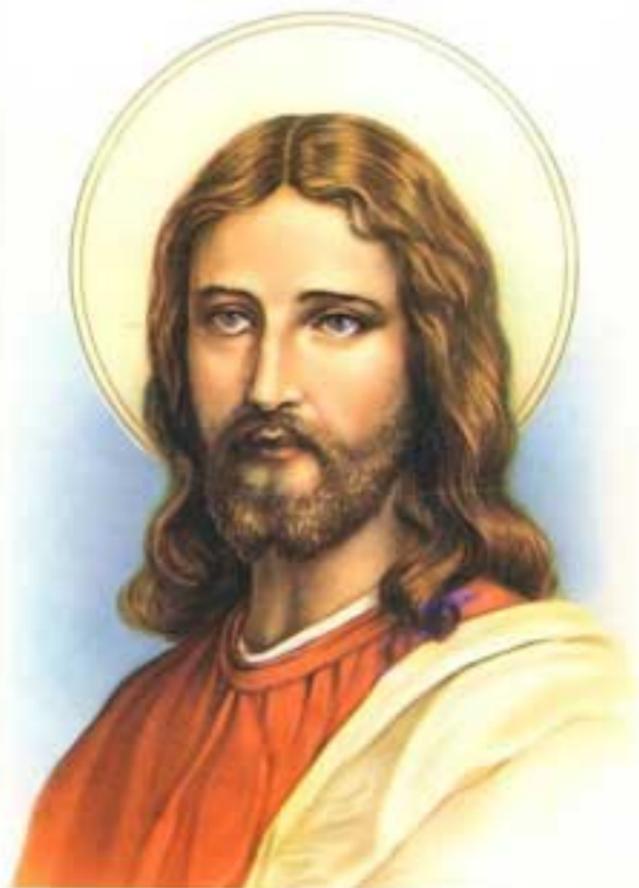


THE DIVINE GRACE



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*THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH
AND DOGMAS*
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THE DIVINE GRACE

The Holy Bible presents God to us as the “Lover” of mankind; for He crowned man with free will as the greatest gift offered to His most beautiful and dearest creature on earth. He granted him authority (Gen. 1:26) over everything; thus man invaded space and other planets. God offered man complete freedom so as to accept God as his Beloved, to ignore Him, or even to resist Him. In all this, God tolerates man with love, not to condemn him but rather to attract him as a friend, raising him up to heavens to partake in His glories without forcing or pressing him.

When the first man fell into transgression and separated himself - by his own will - from God, the “Source of Life,” his nature was corrupted and his will was weakened. Thus he could not tolerate the presence of God or accept His Fatherhood (Gen. 3:10). Although he has natural yearning towards Him, He feels completely helpless towards fulfilling this desire, saying with the Apostle Paul: “For what I will to do, that I do not practice, but what I hate that I do... O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?!” Rom. 7:15,24.

God offered man the Law or the divine commandments, but it was no good for him. It exposed the weakness of man and revealed his sins (Rom. 7:13). Therefore man became in need of the intervention of the Creator Himself to renew his nature and sanctify his will. That man may return to God to find in Him an unique compassionate Fatherhood which encompasses and supports him, granting him hope in eternal life and enjoyment in sharing the everlasting inheritance in the company of the heavenly hosts. This is the divine grace, which in its essence is the enjoyment of sharing the nature of God Himself. The Holy Trinity, acts in us to attain the Fatherhood of the Father, the membership in the Body of Jesus Christ, the dwelling of the Holy Spirit the Giver of sanctification and the partaking in the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4).

Through this abundant grace our will is strengthened in Christ, sanctified by His Holy Spirit and grows active and effective by the living faith.

Through this concept we believe in the grace of God not just as a dogma that suffices our mind, but also as the presence of God in all

aspects of our life, even when we are eating, drinking, sleeping, exercising or traveling about. It touches our worship and our daily life.

1

THE EXPERIENCE OF GRACE AND THE ALEXANDRIAN CHURCH

During the past twenty centuries the Church of Alexandria refrained, to a great extent, from entering into a dispute concerning the understanding of “grace” and its relationship to man's free will. This being so in spite of her giving much attention to many theological problems during the first seven centuries. This may be due to the following reasons:

1. The Alexandrian Church is known for her eschatological attitude not only in her worship but also in all aspects of her life¹. The Copts - clergymen, teachers in the School of Alexandria, celibates and laity - understood eternal life as a life to be practiced here on earth, besides an inside longing for the second coming of Christ. This attitude had its effect on the Alexandrian theology. Thus, the focus of the theology was enjoying the unity with God the Father in His Son Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. In other words, “Grace” in their view was enjoying God Himself, the Holy Trinity, dwelling and acting in men. Therefore, they did not occupy themselves with the concepts of “grace” but rather with having the experience of the unity with God, the Grantor of grace and gifts. Who became a gift for man - to own Him in his depth - thus man is raised to His heavens. This spiritual and biblical understanding led Origen sometimes to use the name of Christ in lieu of His gifts or grace². At other times he used to call Christ “The Kingdom in Person³,” for he who attains the Kingdom of God, enjoys it not as a thing, but as the Divine Word who fulfills all man's needs. In other words, the eschatological attitude did not let the Alexandrian think or enter into a dispute about the conception of grace, but rather they were involved in experiencing “grace” as the enjoyment of the Person of

¹ Fr. T. Malaty: *The Coptic Church as an Ascetic Church*, 1986, p.4.

² Benjamin Drewery: *Origen and the Doctrine of Grace*, London 1960, p.109.

³ See Josh. hom. 17:3 where the partaking in the “wisdom” and “Knowledge” of God, His “Truth” and His “Word” is summarized as partaking in the divine grace.

Christ Who fills the inner life and acts within us by His Holy Spirit, to lead us to the Father's bosom. Christ Himself, the Grace-Giver, grants Himself as a "grace," in order that we may attain Him in us.

2. The Alexandrian Church gave much attention to gain the philosophers to faith, therefore she did not stand in enmity against philosophy but considered it as a gift from God's providence, by which she attracts the hearts of the philosophers to Christ, that they may enjoy perfection⁴.

At the same time she was careful not to transform the Gospel of salvation into philosophical definitions and theoretical disputes, but rather transfers the philosophers to the faith as a divine gift⁵. She wisely did not attack the philosophers but cared to attract them to meditate in God their Savior as the Source of their inner satisfaction. Moreover to enjoy the new life in Christ that fills their spirits, souls and minds. Therefore, in spite of the many writings of the Alexandrian about "Grace," we do not find one attempt for giving a definition to it. Rather they concentrated on its experience, capabilities, and its effects on the life of the Church and on the individual members of the Church.

3. The Alexandrian were involved in studying the Holy Scriptures, using the allegorical method, attempting to discover the Person of Jesus Christ as a personal Savior, and to acknowledge His mysteries almost in every passage of the Bible. The help of the divine grace cannot realize except this study. The believer who is the Spirit's bride is in need of the Heavenly Groom, Jesus Christ, to embrace Him and enter with Him into the "bride chamber" of the Holy Scriptures.

The Alexandrian concept had its effect on the Alexandrian ' thinking, who were not involved in discussing the philosophical meaning of "grace," but rather to attain grace by being in fellowship with Christ and enjoying the Holy Scriptures in their deepest meaning.

- ❖ *...Nothing good can come apart from God, and this is above all; true understanding of the inspired Scriptures⁶.*
- ❖ *...The Scriptures were written by the Spirit of God, and have meanings, not as they appear at the first sight, but also others, which*

⁴ St. Clement Alex.: Strom 1;5; 28;1.

⁵ Ibid 1:20; 99:1.

⁶ Sel. Ps. 1:2.

escape the notice of most. For those (words) that are written are the forms of certain mysteries, and the images of divine matters. Accordingly, there is one opinion throughout the whole Church, that the whole case is indeed spiritual; however the spiritual meaning, which the law conveys, is not known to all, but to those only on whom the grace of the Holy spirit is bestowed in the word of wisdom and knowledge⁷.

- ❖ *...Let us exhort God to grant that, as the word grows in us, we may receive a rich broad-mindedness in Christ Jesus and so be able to hear the sacred and holy words⁸.*
- ❖ *...And so, if at times we do not understand what is said, we shall not lessen our obedience or subside to easier material, but wait for the grace of God to suggest to us an answer to our question, whether by direct enlightenment or through the agency of another⁹.*
- ❖ *...Many have sought to interpret the divine Scriptures...but not all with success. For rare is he who has the grace for this from God¹⁰.*

Origen

4. The Copts were known for their ascetic life, even before the appearance of monasticism. The priest, the celibate, the married and even the child practice such life, which is full of joy. Its aim is raising the head up to the heavenly bridal chamber, to enjoy the divine mysteries of the Groom, Christ¹¹. It is a life that does not lean on asceticism as bodily exercises, but rather depends on the free grace of God, which alone is capable of realizing this goal without ignoring the role of the believer, his seriousness and his spiritual struggle. Thus believer receives - not by his own merit, but by the free divine grace - infinite measure of spiritual life and the sanctification of his soul, mind and body. Through this divine grace he never aims to enmity with his body to destroy it, but rather he seeks its sanctification together with its senses, motions and energies as well as his soul, in order that man - in his whole nature - enjoys the new life in Jesus Christ in an evangelic life exercised through the grace of God. Here I give some examples from the sayings of the

⁷ *De Principiis, Pref. 8.*

⁸ *In Jer. hom. 6:3.*

⁹ *In Isa. hom. 2:2.*

¹⁰ *Sel. Ps. 119:85.*

¹¹ *Coptic Church Review: Vol. 7, No. 2, 1986, p.39.*

desert of Egypt that speak of the role of the divine grace in their lives:

“Concerning Abba Isaac, it was said that when he was at the point of death, the old men gathered around him saying,”... what shall we do without you?” He said to them, “See how I have walked before you; if you want to follow me and keep the commandments of God, God will send you His grace and will protect this place...¹²”

“He (Poemen), said that Abba Theonas used to say: “Even if a man acquires a virtue, God does not grant him grace for himself alone¹³.”

“Abba Pambo said, “By the grace of God, since I left the world I have not said one word of which I repented afterwards¹⁴.”

We know little about the inner life of the Egyptian ascetics, in spite of their renowned fame all over the world at that time. This is because they leaned towards practicing the ascetic life with a joyful evangelic mind, and with the spirit of silence and tranquility. They did not consider writing¹⁵ about asceticism, but preferred the practice of this life. Thus, grace for them was an experience of their daily life in Jesus Christ and not a subject of writing or arguments.

5. The Egyptian Church carried the through the ages. For example, during the Roman era some cities such as Esnah and Akh-mim were entirely martyred within a few days or some hours. To this extent historians consider the survival of the Coptic Church as a divine miracle. The Church experienced and continues to experience God's grace, particularly during the tribulations. Historians attest that the prisons of Egypt were transformed into paradises and the voices of praise did not cease, particularly during the night preceding the executions of martyrs¹⁶. The Church expanded everyday by gaining new members from the pagans who were witnessing the martyrdom arenas. New members were not only from the pagan populace but also from the soldiers, judges, and rulers as Ariana the ruler of Ansena who practiced the most cruel means of persecution¹⁷.

¹² *Benedicta Ward: The Sayings Of The Desert , 1984, p.101.*

¹³ *Ibid 188.*

¹⁴ *Ibid 197.*

¹⁵ *Coptic Church Review: Vol. 7 No. 2, 1986, p. 40-41.*

¹⁶ *The Coptic Orthodox Church and Spirituality, Ottawa 1987, p.35 (in Arabic).*

¹⁷ *Ibid, p.23.*

Such atmosphere in which the Egyptian Church lived made the subject of “grace” an experience that she tasted in the midst of sufferings, when every human element stopped, and Christ transfigured among His martyrs to act in and through them. We hear for example of Origen, the dean of the Alexandrian School, who yearned in his youth to be martyred with his father Leonides, He lived in more than one epoch of martyrdom, declaring that Christ allows the martyr to suffer, and He Himself suffers in His martyrs; He grants the martyr the victory and the crown and He accepts this crown in him¹⁸. This is the experience of God's grace as lived by the Alexandrian, I mean the transfiguration of Christ amongst His suffering Church to carry her sufferings and to crown her by Himself.

6. Pope Athanasius the Apostolic wrote to Dracontius rebuking him kindly but firmly for refusing the bishopric ordination on Hermopolis Parava (Damanhour) because of the tribulation, while many of the pagans were waiting the day of his ordination to be converted and receive baptism (membership of the church)¹⁹. This letter exposes the richness of God's grace, which acts amidst the Church during the tribulations, not only to bear the Lord's joyfully but also to witness to the truth, for attracting lost souls to faith. This is another dimension of God's grace, which the Alexandrians obtained.

7. Many scholars are of the opinion that the Alexandrian theology concentrated on the “deification,” as it is strongly evident in the writings of SS. Athanasius and Cyril. By deification they mean the renewal of the human nature as a whole, to attain the characteristics of our Lord Jesus Christ in place of the corrupt human nature, so that the believer may enjoy “the partaking in the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4), or the new man in the image of His Creator (Col. 3:10). This theological mind drew the heart of the Alexandrians away from the arguments about the term “grace” to concentrate on attaining it as being an enjoyment of Christ Himself Who renewed our nature in Him.

This practical line is clear in the sayings of all the Alexandrian as shown from the following quotations:

❖ *The Word of God became man, that you may learn how man may*

¹⁸ In Ioan, hom. 14;17.

¹⁹ Ep. 49 to Dracontius, Bishop of Hermupolis Prave.

*become god*²⁰.

St. Clement of Alexandria

❖ *The Son in His kindness, generously imparted deification to others...who are transformed through Him into gods, as images of the Prototype... The Word is the Archetype of the many images*²¹.

Origen

❖ *He was made man that we might be made gods...*²²

St. Athanasius

❖ *The human nature has conquered in Jesus Christ and attained victory... He participated in our humanity that He would grant us much of His riches...*²³

St. Cyril of Alexandria

Therefore, the Alexandrian Church was involved in the experience of “grace” and talking about it, not through philosophical expressions but as a new life in Christ, Who is dwelling within us. The believer enjoys it by practicing the undeviating evangelic and ascetic life, joyful and angelic. This is made through understanding the word of God by spiritual studying of the two Testaments, by attainment of heavenly consolations amongst tribulations, by witnessing to the Gospel under all conditions, through the theological understanding of the new nature and participating in worship with an elevated mind. All these things are fulfilled by the grace of God, which we enjoy throughout our daily life.

²⁰ *Pret. 1.*

²¹ *Comm. in Ioannem 2:2.*

²² *De Incarn. 54:3.*

²³ *In Luc. (concerning the temptation of Jesus Christ).*

2

THE AUGUSTINIAN-PELAGIAN DISPUTE

In the West, a warm dispute concerning the grace of God started through the controversy between St. Augustine and Pelagius at the end of the fourth century and the beginning of the fifth.

St. Augustine²⁴ stated that as a result of our fall in Adam, our free choice has been imprisoned within the narrow confinement of self-seeking, and we have lost that liberty which Adam enjoyed, i.e. of being able to avoid sin and be spiritually good. Henceforth, we are in need of a special internal grace which renews the heart, illuminates the mind, inclines the “will,” produces faith, and enables man to be spiritually good. This grace spiritually is freely distributed according to the sovereign good pleasure of God and not according to any merits in man. It is irresistible, not in the sense that it constrains man against his will, but in the sense that it inevitably renews the heart so that the will voluntarily chooses the right. His words sometimes, suggest that man is deprived of free will, although his doctrines assures clearly man's free will. Yet man cannot enjoy this free will to overcome the temptation of this life without God's grace, or God's help²⁵.

Pelagius, a British monk who was primarily a moralist, defended men of choice. His original writings had been lost. Much of what we know about his doctrines is taken from the arguments of his adversaries against him. He felt that Augustine insulted the Creator²⁶ by assuming that man (God's creature) is unable to take any move to save himself and is wholly dependent on God's grace; thus man seems to be a puppet. In his defense of man's freedom of choice, he rejected that man's will has any intrinsic bias in favor of wrongdoing as a result of the fall. Since each soul is, as he believes, created immediately by God, it cannot come into the world soiled by the original sin transmitted from Adam²⁷. He

²⁴ J. N. D. Kelly: *Early Christian doctrines*, 1978, p. 365. Louis Berkhof: *The History of Christian doctrines*, Michigan 1981, p. 207.

²⁵ Enarr. in ps. 89:4.

²⁶ Ad Demet. 16f. pl 30:30f.

²⁷ J. N.D. Kelly, p.358.

also resisted the suggestion that there can be any special pressure on man's will to choose God, there is no room for any special interior action of God upon the soul. He also admitted that grace is bestowed "to make the fulfillment of God's commands easier²⁸." By Grace, however, he really meant²⁹:

a) A free will by itself, or the possibility of not sinning with which God endowed us at our creation³⁰.

b) The revelation, through reason, of God's law, instructing us what we should do and holding out eternal sanction³¹, and

c) Since this has become obscured through evil customs, the law of Moses and the teaching and example of Christ³²?!!

Thus grace in Pelagius view is simply the external help that God offers to man in the pursuit of salvation³³, it is just a grace of knowledge that facilitates what the will can accomplish by its own internal resources. In other words, grace-according to pelagius - was first of all our own human freedom, our God-given ability to decide between good and evil³⁴. "Man can, if he will, observe God's commandments without sinning³⁵."

Kelly says: [Pelagius teaching is often described as a species of naturalism³⁶.] For Pelagius, God was a mere spectator in the drama of human salvation³⁷. His disciples such as Coelestius, exaggerated this attitude, for the latter pushed the denial of original sin into the foreground teaching that Adam was created mortal and would have died anyhow, whether he sinned or not. Death is not to be considered as a punishment for sin, but merely as the natural loss of mankind, as for animals. He also proclaimed that all humans who die in infancy unquestionably go to heaven without baptism, since they have in no way offended God; they are totally incapable of doing so.

²⁸ Augustine: de grat. chr. et pecc. orig.1:2; 1:8; 1:36.

²⁹ J. N. D. Kelly. p.359.

³⁰ Augustine; de gest. palag.22; ep. 186:1.

³¹ Ad Demet.2 pl 30:16f.

³² Ad Demet.4f, 8; Augustine: de grat. chr. et pecc. orig. 1:45.

³³ Charles R Meyer: A contemporary Theology of Grace, 1970, p.155.

³⁴ Roger Haight: The experience and language of grace, Paulist press 1979, p.36.

³⁵ Augustine: de gest. pelag.16.

³⁶ J. N. D. Kelly, p.360.

³⁷ Meyer, p.156.

Julian of Eclanum, a Pelagian thinker, states that man's free will placed him in a position of complete independence vis-a-vis God.

Prayers for some pelagians were considered as useless, as being of no avail even for saving souls, since man can be saved only through the proper direction of his own will³⁸.

L. Berkhof says: [Pelagius deviated much further from the scriptural representation of the application of redemption than any of the earlier Church . It may even be said that he forsakes the biblical foundation, which was sacred to them, and reasserted the self-sufficient principle of heathen philosophy. His conception of sin and its results led him to deny the absolute necessity of the grace of God in Christ unto salvation, and to consider it quite possible for man to obtain salvation by keeping the law. He did not altogether despise the "help of grace" or the "divine assistance," but even considered this desirable "in order that what is commanded by God may be more easily fulfilled." But the grace of which he speaks is not the "Gratia interna," the regenerating grace of God by which the mind is enlightened and the will is inclined to goodness and holiness. It consists only in:

(a) "the good of nature," that is, man's endowment with a free will, so that he can do either good or evil; and

(b) the preaching of the Gospel and the example of Christ, both of which are directed to the mind of man to teach him the way of salvation. The grace of nature is universal and absolutely essential or necessary, but the grace of the Gospel is neither universal nor necessary, though rendering it easier for men to obtain salvation. It is given only to those who make a proper use of their natural powers.

This grace does not operate "directly" and "immediately" on the "will" of man, but only on his "understanding," which it illuminates, and through this, on man's will. Moreover, it is quite possible for man to resist its operation. Christianity is regarded as a new law and, in comparison with the Old Testament, as an enlarged law. The real Christian is one who knows God, believes that he is accepted by God, obeys the precepts of the Gospel, and imitates the holiness of Christ rather than the sin of Adam³⁹.]

³⁸ Meyer, p.155.

³⁹ Louis Berkhof, p. 205-6.

3
**THE DEFINITION
OF
GRACE (CHARIS)**

GRACE (CHARIS) IN CLASSICAL GREEK⁴⁰

“Charis” is what delights. It may be a state causing or accompanying joy!

It was applied to cover a very wide range and various meanings: grace, charm, elegance, loveliness, attractiveness etc.; whether as a property or as an effect, whether in something or in movement⁴¹. Actual instances are in reference to:

bodily beauty⁴²,
works of arts⁴³,
nice words⁴⁴,
the charm of a song⁴⁵,
the delight of Dionysian vie⁴⁶,
the sweetness of sleep⁴⁷ or life⁴⁸,
the glory of victory⁴⁹, or of a noble death⁵⁰,
the grace of a person⁵¹, and
the grace that is added to virtue⁵² etc.

Kittel says: [Aeschylus uses *charis* for the “favor” of the gods, but *charis* is not a central religious or philosophical term, In Plato it has the meanings “good pleasure,” “goodwill,” “favor,” “pleasure,” “what

⁴⁰ Kittel: The Theological Dict. of the N.T. 1985 (ed. and abridged by G.W. Bromiley), p. 1301.

⁴¹ Thomas F. Torrance: The doctrine of grace in the Apostolic , 1948, p.1ff.

⁴² Hesoid: Works and Days 65; Homer: Humns 3:153-5; Euripides: 1ph. in Taur 1147.

⁴³ Aesch: Ag. 405-6; Homer: 11. 14:181-3; Od. 18:297-8.

⁴⁴ Homer: Od. 8:175.

⁴⁵ Pindar: Ol 1:17-9, 30-2.

⁴⁶ Euripides: Bacch 534-6.

⁴⁷ Eur. Or. 158-9.

⁴⁸ Eur. Med.226-7.

⁴⁹ Pind: Ol. 8:77-80.

⁵⁰ Aeschylus: Ag. 1304.

⁵¹ Aristoph. vesp. 1277-8.

⁵² Pind: Ol. 2:11.

pleases,” and “thanks.” Stoicism stresses the disposition, but the aesthetic aspect persists even in ethics⁵³.]

GRACE IN HELLENISM

Kittel says:

[a. In Hellenism “charis” becomes a fixed term for the “favor shown by rulers, with such nuances a “gracious disposition” or “gracious gift,” charis may also be ascribed to other dignitaries. Philosophy discusses the “grace” and “wrath” of the gods. The Epicureans deny these; the Stoics accept grace but not wrath. In recipients, charis denotes “thanks.”

[b. In a second development Hellenism stresses the power in charis. This power which comes from the world above, appears in the divine man and expresses itself in magic⁵⁴.]

GRACE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

There is no one word for “grace” in the Old Testament as there is in the New Testament. At the same time, the grace of God is declared throughout the Old Testament by revealing that the choice of Israel by God was not because of anything that Israel had or was, but grounded only in God's free and unlimited love, and as creating a community in fellowship with God who bestows Himself upon them as Father and Savior forever (Deut. 7:7f., 9:4f; 10:15; 23:5)⁵⁵.

Grace was expressed by the Hebrew word “hen” and “Hesed.”

1. The Septuagint uses the word “charis” for the Hebrew “hen,” which seems to be derived from the widespread verbal stem “hmn,” found in ancient Babylonian, Akkadian, and Assyrian, and also in Ugartic, Aramaic, Syriac and Arabic⁵⁶. It is used to express as “to find favour” or “to obtain favor,” to have pity on the poor (Prov. 14:31), or the defenseless (Deut. 7:2). More weakly it may simply denote friendly speech (Prov. 26:25). Originally the terms are not theological. In those passages where “hen” is related to the very nature of God as gracious

⁵³ Kittel, p. 1301.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Thomas F. Torrance, p.10,11. Norman H. Smaith: *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament*, 1944, p. 135.

⁵⁶ Kittel, p.1301.

and merciful and full of pity, “charis” is significantly not used at all. Perhaps, because the word “charis” in its classical and Hellenistic usage has a sensuous substratum in its meaning, a semi-physical sense of charm and gracefulness as something aestheticalpleasing, while the Hebrew “hen” never has this sense.

2. It is used more than 25 times in the Psalms as an appeal to God's favour, kindness and benevolence to hear prayers (4:1); to heal (6;2); to redeem (26:11), to set up (41:10), to pardon (51:1), and to strengthen (86:16) in the corresponding needs.

3. It is used in the sense of “to request,” or “to beseech,” directed either to people (Gen. 42:21), (2 kings 1:13), or to God (Deut. 3:23; 1 kings 8:33).

4. It is used also in the sense of “to be merciful,” e.g., that of the conqueror to the conquered (Josh. 11:20), or that of God to His people (Ezr. 9:8).

5. For the physical beauty, the grace of form and person (Ps. 45:2; Prov.1:9; 3:22; 31:30).

6. For finding grace in the eyes of men or of God (Gen.6:8, Exod. 33:12; Gen 32:5; 39:4).

7. The term “hesed” is translated “charis” to express spontaneous goodness or grace in a specific relationship or in ongoing fellowship⁵⁷ (Gen. 19:19; 47:29; 1 Sam. 20:8, 2 Sam. 16:17). This word really means the Self-Giving of God to Israel, God Himself in His good will towards men⁵⁸. The grace of God, is but a personal relationship which God establishes between Himself and men⁵⁹.

8. Grace (hesed) often occurs in the context of forgiveness (Exod.30:7), and along with an expression which refers to the covenant (Deut. 7:9).

GRACE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The word “charis” has become quite a different word in the Greek New Testament, so that we may say that it depended upon

⁵⁷ Ibid. 1302.

⁵⁸ Harold H. Ditmanson: *Grace in Experience and Theology*, Minneapolis1977, p. 45.

⁵⁹ F. Bandraz: *Vocabulary of the Bible*, ed. by J.J. von Allmen, London 1958, p. 157-8.

Christianity to realize its full meaning and to elevate it to its rightful sphere⁶⁰.

By the grace of God, the New Testament means His unmerited love towards man, which is revealed in the Person, words and works of Jesus Christ, that is the self-giving of God to man. It is identical with Lord Jesus in person, word and deed⁶¹.

Our Lord did not utter the word “grace,” but He Himself is the Source of its conception through His teaching as in the “parables of grace” the lost coin (Luke 15:8-10), the lost sheep (Luke 15:1-7), the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), and the laborers in the vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16).

He Himself is identified as the gracious and the decisive movement of God for the redemption of men in His own Person. In Him the grace of God became an event, for He came to seek and forgive sinners not only by His words but also by giving Himself on their behalf, on the Cross. He is the Redeemer who supplied in His own Person, words and deeds the glorious content of the word “grace.” The word “grace” appears in the New Testament 152 times, 101 occur in the Pauline writings.

a. In Luke 4:22, the word “charis” carries us on to the peculiar Christian significance. When Jesus preached His first sermon in the synagogue of Nazareth, it is said that His fellow town men have wondered at the words of grace. The words of Christ were words of grace about grace. St. Luke uses the word “charis” in Acts 14:3 to characterize the good news or the message of salvation.

b. In John 1:14, 16-17, grace denotes the result of the revelation of the Incarnate Logos in antithesis, to the Law in combination with truth and fullness, which help to give its distinctive significance.

c. In Acts 6:8, it depicts the Spirit-filled man. Its overruling may be seen in the church's growth in Acts 11:23⁶².

d. In 1 Peter, suffering is understood as grace (2:19-20). 2 Peter 3:18 relates “charis” to “gnosis” (knowledge).

⁶⁰ Hastings: Dict. of Christ and the Gospels, Vol. 1, p.686.

⁶¹ Torrance, p.21; Ditmenson, p. 45-6.

⁶² Kittel, p. 1305.

e. St. Paul in his writings, declared the Christian Gospel as an economy of grace, and Jesus Christ as the Dispenser of grace. Paul as Pharisee had ought to earn salvation by his zeal for the law, but through the revelation of Jesus Christ to him near the gates of Damascus, he discovered he was persecuting the “Truth,” and in need of God's grace. The commandment, which was unto life, Paul found to be unto death (2 Cor. 12:7-9).

We can summarize St. Paul's conception of grace in the following points:

1. Grace is attributed to Jesus Christ as our Savior, therefore he used to say “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ” in the benediction by which he introduces or concludes his epistles (Rom 1:7; 16:20; 1 Cor. 1:3; 16:23; 2 Cor. 13:14; Gal. 1:3; 6:18, 2 Cor. 1:2 etc.). Even when he attributed it to God the Father he was thinking of Jesus Christ in connection with it, for the Father revealed His redeeming grace in Christ.

“The grace of God was given to you in Christ Jesus” 1 Cor. 1:4.
“Grace reigns through Jesus Christ our Lord” Rom 5:21.

2. The grace of Christ is the redeeming, self-renouncing love and self-sacrifice (Gal. 2:20; Phil. 2:5f; 2 Cor.8:9). Distinctively “grace” in St. Paul's epistles expounds the structure of the salvation event.

We are saved by grace, which is shown to sinners (Rom. 3:23-24), and it is the totality of salvation that all believers have (1 Cor. 1:4)⁶³.

3. The absolute freedom of Christ's grace was another element in the apostle's conception⁶⁴. This brings us to his characteristic antithesis between grace and law. “We are not under law, but under grace (Rom. 6:14). We are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Rom 3:24). The grace that saves us has nothing to do with the laws works (Rom. 11:6), it is the “free gift” of God by “the one man Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:15; Eph. 2:8).

4. The grace of Christ is marked by its sin conquering power (Rom 5:20-21). It rises, superior to the law, showing its power to master sin, which is the transgression of the law (Rom 5:20), for it removes the

⁶³ Ibid. 1304.

⁶⁴ Hastings, p.688.

guilt; and it breaks the dominion of sin over the sinner's heart (Rom 6:14,18).

5. “*Charis*” means “the Gospel” Col 1:6, and the divine favor shown in Christ (Eph. 1:6-7). It is a stream of endless benefaction, flowing from an inexhaustible fountain; the riches of Christ, which are unsearchable (Eph. 1:7; 3:8).

We are called into it (Gal. 1:6), by which we are justified (Rom. 3:24), and sanctified (Rom. 6:14), obtain eternal comfort, good hope (2 Thes. 2:16), strength (1 Tit. 2:1), liberty (2 Cor. 8:1), and happy songs (Col. 3:16).

6. Grace in St. Paul's view has an eschatological character. It is God's presence and action in our actual lives, that help us to attain the pledge of the heavenly life, to assure our hope in eternal life as the true life that we will attain.

7. At last, St. Paul looks to the grace of Jesus Christ as His personal Self-Giving, “For you died and your life is hidden with Christ in God” Col. 3:3. The Christian grace of redemption, righteousness, wisdom, sanctification, and glorification are to be found in Christ Himself (1 Cor. 1:30), Who is dwelling in our hearts (Eph. 3:7), and is always dynamic.

Now we can say that through the grace of the New Testament our ideas about our relation to God, men, heavenly hosts, Moses' law, the world, the body, Satan, sin, even our view of human nature has been totally changed and renewed.

GRACE IN THE WRITINGS OF THE ALEXANDRIAN

The Alexandrian did not give a definition to the “grace of God,” or to any other theological terminology, but they were interested only in practicing the grace of God in their daily life and in their church life.

Benjamin Brewery tried to give a definition of God's grace, through the numerous works of Origen. He says: [we may suggest that if Origen had been required to offer a formal definition of grace, he would have responded somewhat as follows:

[Grace is the power of God freely, but not unconditionally, placed at man's disposal, whereby He appropriates through the Holy Spirit the offer of salvation to a new and ultimate life, revealed and

*enacted in the Scriptures, by the Incarnate Jesus Christ, and made available by Him to the world*⁶⁵.]

Now we can present the dimensions of the definition of God's grace according to the Alexandrian theology which is based on the Holy Bible, in the following points:

1. GOD'S SELF-GIVING

In the previous book, "God's Providence," I concentrated on two integral points: God takes care of us by realizing mutual love between Himself and man, for He grants Himself to us that we may also present ourselves or our hearts to Him; and God's Fatherhood to men. Now, I want to clarify that God's grace in its essence is the power of God freely placed at man's disposal, or more accurately it is God's Self-Giving to man.

It is not strange that Dr. James Dobson in his broad-spread cassette messages and books concerning adolescence starts by dealing with the following problem: [Why do American young people feel inferior?⁶⁶] He gives three elements that many of the teenagers think they lack: physical attractiveness, intelligence and money. He clarifies that in many cases they do lack these elements or some of them, but it is just that feeling which destroys the teenager's life.

In fact it is not the problem of the American young people alone, or young people of other countries, but rather it is the problem of mankind as a whole through all ages. They feel inferior, for they are involved in matters outside their inner life. God, Who alone is able to fill our hearts eternally, declares His desire in dwelling within us, so that we may attain Him as ours, destroying the spoiling feeling of inferiority. This is the grace of God as God's Self-Giving to man.

We can summarize the Alexandrians point of view of grace as God's Self-Giving in the following points:

I. Before the incarnation of the Son of God, men were not yet prepared spiritually and mentally to acknowledge the divine grace as God's Self-Giving in its deep meaning. It was enough that God had revealed His friendship to man, and attributed Himself to His people

⁶⁵ Drewery B. Origen and the doctrine of grace, p. 48.

⁶⁶ Preparing for Adolescence, Growth pak, Cassette 1 [Canyon of inferiority]; a manual to accompany "Preparing for adolescence" Ventura, California 1979, p. 6 ff.

especially to those who were close to Him, who accepted Him as the “Source of life⁶⁷.”

This friendship was revealed through the open dialogue between God and Abraham concerning Sodom’s depravity. God said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing?” Gen. 18:17. God, as the True Friend asked His own people to enter in dialogue with Him saying: “Come now, and let us reason together” Isa. 1:18. Also it is said, “So the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” Exod. 33:11.

God also attributes Himself to His people and to those who are close to Him. He called Himself “God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob” Exod. 3:6, 15, 16, 4:5, Matt 22:32 etc. repeatedly. In the Old Testament, He was called “God of Israel,” for God dwells among His people the true believers, as if He were their own. Therefore the Psalmist says: “You are my refuge, my portion...” Ps. 142:5.

“You shall be My people and I will be your God.” He is not the God of all men but only of those to whom He “graciously” gives Himself, as He did to the patriarch to whom He said “I am your God (Gen. 17:1),... [Origen quotes Mt. 22:32 “not the God of the dead but of the living.”] Who is the “dead”? the sinner, the man who does not possess the One who said “I am the life” (John 11:25), the one whose works are dead (Heb. 6:1). If He is “not the God of the dead ...,” and we know who is the living, the one who guides his life by Christ and remains with Him. Then if ever we desire God to be our God, let us bid farewell to the works of death...”

The Old Testament alludes to God's gracious self-giving by calling Him the Father and the Groom of His people, but does not explain or clarify this divine grace such as the New Testament does.

II. In the New Testament the grace of God is revealed more clearly together with the Trinitarian faith, for these two facts are correlated to each other.

The Father who is love (1 John 4:8), practices His infinite love eternally as He begot His Word, His wisdom, or His Only- Begotten Son, not outside His essence, but as One with Him in the same essence

⁶⁷ See our book: “Man and Redemption” p. 2.

(John 17:21-26). Through this practical eternal love God the Father created man through His Love (John 1:3), and when man fell and his nature was spoiled, God sent His Word to him to give His life up for him and to restore his nature. The Word of God was incarnated and dwelt among men (John 1:14) as their heavenly Friend to redeem them. He united them to Himself as members of His Body, and thus they were prepared to receive the adoption to the Father in Him. The Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of the Father and the Son at the same time dwelt in man, uniting him with the Father in Jesus Christ, preparing him as a bride to the heavenly wedding-feast, and as a son to enjoy his Father's glories.

Thus the redeeming grace of the Holy Trinity is in fact one integral and inseparable action, I mean God's Self-Giving to man. The Father loved us as His own children, granted us Himself as the true Father; the Son granted us His crucified and risen life to enjoy the adoption; and the Holy Spirit granted us His descent into our souls to practice our adoption to God. The message of the Holy Trinity's redeeming action is our attainment of God within our hearts, uniting Himself with us, declaring that He is ours and we are His own. This grace has been declared in the New Testament Books and in the writings of the Alexandrian.

Our Lord Jesus Christ says:

“For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you” Luke 17:21.

“My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him” John 14:23.

St. Paul says:

“And if Christ is in you... if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you...” Rom. 6:10,11.

“He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” Rom 8:32.

“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ...” Rom. 13:14.

“For you did not receive the Spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba Father.”..., and if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ” Rom. 8:15,17.

Here I quote some sayings from the Alexandrian that clarify the grace as God's self-giving to man in many respects:

I. He grants us His own dwelling within us and His own life to enjoy:

❖ *Generous is He who gives for us the greatest of all gifts, His own life!*
⁶⁸

St. Clement of Alexandria

❖ *(As He became Man), we are now able to receive Him; to receive Him so great and of such nature as He was, if we prepare a place in proportion to Him in our soul.*

❖ *Christ, who is all virtue, has come, and speaks, and on account of this, the kingdom of God is within His disciples and not here or there.*

Origen⁶⁹

❖ *When He made His promise to the saints, He thus spoke, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My words; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him” John 14:23, and again, “You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us” John 17:21. And the grace given is one, given from the Father in the Son, as Paul writes in every epistle, “Grace unto you, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” Rom. 1:7.*

[Here St. Athanasius clarifies that the grace of God concentrated in His dwelling in us is realized by the Father in His Son. In the following text he clarifies the role of the Holy Spirit in this divine promise].

❖ *Because of the grace of the Spirit, which has been given to us, we abide in Him, and He in us (1 John 4:13)...*

❖ *We, apart from the Spirit, are strangers and distant from God, and by the participation of the Spirit we are knit into God the Head, so that our being in the Father is not ours, but is the Spirit’s, which is in us and abides in us.*

St. Athanasius⁷⁰

II. He grants us the adoption to the Father in His Only-Begotten

⁶⁸ Paed. 1:9.

⁶⁹ Comm. on John, book 10:4; Comm on Matt. Book 12:14.

⁷⁰ Contra Arians 2:42; 3:24.

Son by the Holy Spirit, so that we may receive Him our own Father, and dare do settle in His bosom eternally.

- ❖ *O surpassing love for man! Not as a teacher speaking to his students, not as a master to his domestics, nor as God to men, but as a Father, does the Lord gently admonish His children...*
- ❖ *And how the more benevolent God is, the more impious men are; for He desires us to become sons not slaves, while they scorn to become sons. O the prodigious folly of being ashamed of the Lord!*
- ❖ *The Father of the universe cherishes affection towards those who have fled to Him, and having begotten, them, again by His Spirit to the adoption of children, knows them as gentle ones, loves them, aids and fights for them; and therefore He bestows on them the name of child.*

St. Clement of Alexandria⁷¹

- ❖ [None of the Old Testament writers addressed God as “Father”], perhaps because they did not know the Father; they prayed to Him as God and Lo, awaiting the One Who pours out the Spirit of adoption, not less on them than on those who believe in God through Him after His appearing. Unless indeed Christ did appear to the eye of their minds, and they did gain, being perfected, the spirit of adoption, but did not venture to speak or write of God as Father openly and to all, lest they might anticipate the grace that through Jesus was poured out on all the world, as He called all men to adoption.
- ❖ *The devil was formerly our father, before God became our Father, perhaps indeed devil still is;...if “everyone that com mits sin is born of the devil” we are born of the devil, so to speak, as often as we sin. Such perpetual birth from the devil is as wretched as perpetual birth from God is blessed; and not that I do not say that the righteous man has been born once and for all of God, but that he is so born on every occasion that God gives him birth for some good action. (This perpetual rebirth is true even of Christ) for Christ is the ‘effulgence’ of “glory,” and such effulgence is not generated once only but as often as the light creates it... Our Savior is the “Wisdom of God,” and*

⁷¹ Protrep; 9 Paed. 1:5.

the wisdom is the “effulgence of eternal light” (Wis. 7:26). If then the Savior is always being born... from the Father, so too are you, if you have the spirit of adoption (Rom. 8:15), and God is always begetting you in every deed and thought you have; and this begetting makes you a perpetually re-born son of God in Christ Jesus.

❖ *I think that non can address God as “Father” unless he has been filled with the “spirit of adoption” (Rom. 8:15), and that such a son may address his Father as “Father” to honor Him with regard to the commandment (Mt. 5:44), “Love your enemies... that you may be sons of your Father...” Again everyone who “does righteousness” (1 John. 2:29) is born of God, so born, with the “seed of God in him” (John 3:9). Because he “can sin no more,” he may say “Father... Again, one is born of God not from corruptible seed but through the living and abiding Word of God, as it is written: “As many as received Him, them He gave the right to become children of God... who were born not of blood... but of God” (John. 1:12f). The point of this saying is not to raise us to the level of God's nature, but that He (the Word) gives us to share in His grace, and graciously grants us His own dignity; for He tells us to call God “Father.”*

Origen⁷²

❖ *Men, by receiving the Spirit of the Son, became children through Him.*

St. Athanasius⁷³

[St. Cyril of Alexandria clarifies the difference between Jesus' sonship to the Father and our sonship to Him in his comment on the words: “Therefore God Your God has anointed You” Heb. 1:9, saying:]

❖ *You see that God is anointed by God. For when He became man, remaining what He was, then also, according to our humanity, He is anointed for the apostleship. For His humanity is anointed by the Divine Spirit, but He (the Spirit) did not work as on simple men, like prophets and patriarchs. But the anointing was, as it were, the whole presence of the Anointer.*

The Son is anointed where He came into the world, that is, when He became incarnate. For then He entered into communion with

⁷² Comm. John 19:5; Hom. Jer. 9:4; Hom. Luke Frag 42 on 11:2 [See B. Drewery: Origen and the Doctrine of Grace].

⁷³ Contra Arians 2:61.

creation, uniting the creature to Himself, and anointing the humanity with the divinity, so as to make the two of them one.

❖ *But as for us, even if we are anointed with the Holy Spirit, and possess abundantly the grace of sonship, and are called gods. At least we shall not be unmindful of the measure of our nature. For we are of the earth, and are counted among servants, but He is not one of us, but He is by nature true Son, and Lord of all, and from heaven.*

St. Cyril of Alexandria⁷⁴

St. Athanasius repeatedly clarifies that Christ is the Only Begotten Son of God by nature, but believers become sons by “grace” and by “adoption.”

2. GRACE OF RENEWAL (DEIFICATION)

The Alexandrian, in all their theological views, used to concentrate on the grace of God as a grace of the continuous or dynamic renewal of our nature by the Holy Spirit, who grants us the close unity with the Father in the Son, or the communion with God. In Jesus Christ, not only we receive forgiveness of sins by the Holy Spirit, but also we attain the “new life” which is free of sin as a divine grace. St. Paul speaks of “putting off the old man” or “the old corruptible nature” and putting on “the inner man” or the renewed nature in the Spirit, created after the likeness of God in justice and holiness (2 Cor. 5:21' Rom 8:1). By the divine grace, we became members of the Body of Christ, children of the Father, have the power to practice the saintly life, for we are sanctified in Christ, consecrated to the Father. The believer as a whole, his soul, body, senses, emotions, mind etc. is sanctified as a tool for righteousness (Rom. 6:13).

The Risen Christ is present in the believer's life as a divine gift, granting him inner glorification, as a pledge of the eternal heavenly glories.

This conception of man's renewal of his nature is called “deification,” because of his sharing in the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4), and receiving Christ as our righteousness and sanctification (1 Cor. 1:30).

The Alexandrian theology can be summarized in these words:

⁷⁴ PG 74:961; 77:28.

[*God took our humanity, that man may share His life*], or [*God became man that men may become gods*⁷⁵.]

Joseph Sittler says: [Eastern and Western, is a different way of speaking about the work of Christ. In the West that work is ed upon redemption from sin; in the East it is ed upon the divinization of man. In the West the doctrine central to that work is atonement; in the East the central doctrine is participation, illumination, reenactment, and transformation. In the West the work is reunification. The Western Savior is the Eastern Pantocrator⁷⁶.]

1. **St. Clement of Alexandria** was the first to use the term “theopoein,” i.e. “to divinize⁷⁷.” He believed that sin has introduced an internal! conflict in the nature of man, and it is not part of his nature, though infecting all mankind. We sin without knowing how we do it; it comes from lack of knowledge⁷⁸. The Word of God came as a teacher, granting us true knowledge (gnosis). It is through His teaching He divinizes⁷⁹, granting the gnostics sharing in the divine life.

He repeated the idea of the renewal of our nature in the Incarnate Son of God, as follows:

- ❖ *He had taken upon Him our flesh... He scorned not the weakness of human flesh, but having clothed Himself with it, has come into the world for the salvation of all men.*
- ❖ *O mystic wonder! The Lord was laid low, and man was raised up!*
- ❖ *“Know you not” says the Apostle, “that you are the temples of God?” (1 Cor. 3:16). The gnostic (a believer who has true spiritual knowledge) is consequently divine, and already holy, God-bearing, and God-borne.*
- ❖ *The Word of God became man, that you may learn how man may become god!*

⁷⁵ Fr. T. Malaty: *The Coptic Church as a Church of Erudition and Theology*, Ottawa 1986. p.81f.

⁷⁶ *Essays on Nature and Grace*, Philadelphia 1972, p.52.

⁷⁷ Henri. Rondet: *The Grace of Christ* (tran. by W. Guzie), Westminster, Md, 1967, p.73 n. 38.

⁷⁸ Strom 2:15; Earnest Jauncey: *The doctrine of Grace*, SPCK 1925, p.133.

⁷⁹ Protr. 1, 12. PG 8:64D, 368 A-B.

❖ *He, the Husbandman of God...having bestowed on us the truly great, divine, and inalienable inheritance of the Father, deifying man by heavenly teaching, putting His laws into our minds and writing them on our hearts.*

St. Clement of Alexandria⁸⁰

It is God's grace that renews man's life; but God gives His grace to those who show an earnest desire for it. **St. Clement** says: [*While a man strives and labours by himself to subdue his vicious affections, he can do nothing; but if he manifest an earnest vehement desire to do so, he is enabled by the divine power to accomplish his purpose; for God favours and co-operates with the willing minds*⁸¹.]

II. Jauncey says⁸² that grace according to **Origen**, is not merely enlightenment (grace of baptism), though it is that, but it is also a real participation in the fullness of Christ, a most real union of the divine power, with human choice. **Origen** says [*It is thus that by the unceasing work of Father, Son and Holy Spirit towards us, carried through successive stages of progress, we are able (if it may be so) to behold the holy and blessed life of the saints*⁸³.]

H. Rondet⁸⁴ says that **Origen** sees [*the Spirit as the Source of our regeneration, so that without the Spirit no one can participate in the Father and the Son. Thus, the charity that pours into our hearts by the Holy Spirit makes us partakers in the divine nature*⁸⁵.] He also says: [*The presence of Christ in our souls and the mystery of our union with Him is stressed much more by Origen than by the heirs to his thought*⁸⁶.]

Now, I present some quotations from Origen's writings concerning the role of God's grace in the continuous renewal of our nature:

❖ *For no noble deed has ever been performed amongst me, where the Divine Word did not visit the souls of those who were capable,*

⁸⁰ Strom 7:2:7, 8; Protr 11:3; Strom 7:13; Paedag 1, protr. 11.

⁸¹ Quis div. salv. 21 (df. Strom 7:7); Jauncey, p. 134

⁸² E. Jauncey, p. 142.

⁸³ De. Principiis 1:3:8.

⁸⁴ H. Rondet, p.75.

⁸⁵ De Princ. 1:3:5.

⁸⁶ In Rom. Hom. 5:8; 8:2 (see In Cant 1:4; In Jern. hom 9:1; In Luc. hom. 22:1 etc.).

although for a little time, of admitting such operations of the Divine Word.

- ❖ *If a branch cannot bear fruit except if when it abides in the vine, it is evident that the disciples also of the Word, who are the rational branches of the Word's true vine, cannot produce the fruits of virtue unless they abide in the true vine, the Christ of God...*
- ❖ *“For the Son of Man has come already, but not in His Glory” (quotes Isa. 53:25). He had to come in this way, that He might “bear our sins” and suffer “on our behalf;” for it was not fitting that the Christ in glory should “bear our sins” and suffer “for us.” But, He is coming again in glory after this preliminary preparing of His disciples through that appearing of His which had “no form nor comeliness.” He became like them that they might become like Him, “conformed to the image” (Rom. 8:29) of His glory: since at His first coming He became conformed to “the body of our humiliation” (Phil. 3:21), when He “emptied Himself and took the form of a servant,” He restores men to the form of God and makes them like unto it.*
- ❖ *Thus, knowing that Christ has come, we see that through Him many christs have been made in the world, who like Him, loved righteousness and hated iniquity, and therefore God... anointed them with oil of gladness (Ps. 45:7). But, He, having loved righteousness and hated iniquity more than His companions, did receive the first fruits of this anointing, and as it were, the whole anointing of the oil of gladness. But His companions, each according to his capacity, shared in His anointing. Therefore, since Christ is the Head of the Church, so that Christ and the Church make one body, the oil has gone down from the head to the beard (the symbol of the perfect man) of Aaron, and this oil, going down, reached to the collar of His robe.*
- ❖ *The Son in His kindness generously imparted deification to others... who are transformed through Him into gods, as images of the Prototype... the Word is the Archetype of the many images.*

Origen⁸⁷

- ❖ *If by participation (in the Word) we are raised from the dead, and enlightened, and also, it may be, shepherded by Him and ruled over,*

⁸⁷ Contra Celsus 6:78; 5:12; Comm Matt. 12:9 on 16:27 (B. Srewery); Contra Celsus 6 (PG 11:1417-1240).

since He does away with the irrationality and the deadness in us, in as much as He is the Word and the Resurrection.

Origen⁸⁸

III. St. Athanasius: R. W. Gleason says: [Athanasius, a very distinctive and speculative theologian, uses *charis* in a somewhat unusual sense: the order or the economy of grace, that new economy which came with Christ, the new globe world order set in motion by God in Christ. Occasionally it means a free gift; more often it means participation in the eternal Word, since to Athanasius this is the way in which we are deified, and we first share in the incorruptibility of God. Although he does not excuse from his notion of incorruptibility the idea of a divine image or participation in the divine nature, he stresses rather on the fact that by nature the Eternal Word is incorruptible. This is, for the Word, the natural situation, and to this He has now been restored. Since we are united in Him, the more natural situation of the Christian is to enjoy heaven, to be impassable and incorruptible. Christianity is always anticipating this normal situation. When man is baptized, he is baptized into the death and into the resurrection of Christ, so that he is already risen from the dead in Christ, already passed through the mystery of death in Christ. The Christian, too, has died to death, to Satan, to sin. Christ is not merely a single individual, but One Who incorporates all of us mystically in Himself. Therefore, we are in principle already risen from death, from sin; have already conquered gloriously even though still in a passable state. There is, however, a period of waiting. The Christian is already numbered among the saints; he is one whose vocation is in heaven, whose conversation should be in heaven, a member of Christ, objectively redeemed. To Athanasius, then, divinization is primarily a share in the incorruptibility of God. This special point of view, is not that common to subsequent tradition. Today we say that man shares in God's nature and because of this will one day be incorruptible. Obviously, in the thought of Athanasius a certain primacy is given to the resurrection of the body⁸⁹.]

H. Rondet says⁹⁰:

[Regeneration, adoption, gift of the Holy Spirit, active presence

⁸⁸ Comm. John 2:2; 1:37.

⁸⁹ R.W. Gleason: *Grace*, London 1962, p.58-9.

⁹⁰ *The Grace of Christ*, p.76.

of the same Spirit in souls and in the Church, identification with Christ through communication or sharing in the divine life - these ideas, none of them absent from Origen's work, come up once again on every page of Saint Athanasius's discussion with the Arians. If we are adopted sons, says Athanasius, this means that there is a son by nature⁹¹. If we are partakers in the Word through the Holy Spirit, this means that the Word is God⁹². If the Word is not God, how can we be divinized?⁹³ Creation has made us creatures of God. Through adoption we become sons, owing to the presence of the Word in us⁹⁴. Moreover, the Son cannot come to us without the Father and the Holy Spirit, and the sanctification brought about at baptism is accomplished through the Son and in the Spirit⁹⁵.]

- ❖ *He was made man so that we might be made gods; and he manifested Himself by a body that we might receive the idea of the unseen Father; and He endured the insolence of men that we might inherit immortality. He Himself was harmed in no respect, as He is impassible and incorruptible and the very Word and God, but He cared for us and saved suffering men, for whom He endured these things by His impassibility.*
- ❖ *He Himself made us sons of the Father, and deified men by becoming Himself man.*
- ❖ *He assumed the body originate and human, that having renewed it, as its Creator, He might deify it in Himself, and thus might introduce us all into the kingdom of heaven after his likeness.*
- ❖ *If God sent His Son brought forth from a woman, this fact causes us no shame, but contrarily glory and great grace. For He has become Man, that he might deify us in Himself, and He has been born of a woman, and begotten of a virgin, in order to transfer to Himself our erring generation, and that we may become henceforth a holy race and "partakers in the divine nature" as blessed Peter wrote (2 Pet.1:4). And "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin, He condemned sin in the flesh (Rom.*

⁹¹ Contra Arian. 3:19; 1:39.

⁹² Ibid. 1:9.

⁹³ Ibid. 1:70; De Incarn. Verbi 54.

⁹⁴ Contra Arian. 2:59.

⁹⁵ Epist ad Serap 1:19,20,30, 4:12.

8:3).

❖ *For being Word of the Father, and above all, He alone of natural fitness was able both to recreate everything, and worthy to suffer on behalf of all and to be ambassador for all with the Father.*

❖ *This is the grace of the Lord, and these are the Lord's means of restoration for the children of men.*

For He suffered to prepare freedom from suffering, for those who suffer in Him;

He descended that He might raise up;

He took on Him the trial of being born, that we might love Him who is Uncreated;

He went down to corruption that corruption might put on immortality.

He became weak for us, that we might rise with power;

He descended to death, that He might bestow on us immortality, and give life to the dead.

Finally, He became Man, that we who die as men might live again, and that death should no more reign over us, for the apostolic word proclaims, "Death shall not have the dominion over us" (Rom. 6:9).

St. Athanasius⁹⁶

IV. St. Cyril of Alexandria: As many Scholars look to St. Cyril's teaching in a way that caps the whole Greek theology of theopoesis "divinization"⁹⁷, I would clarify the main points of his teaching in this respect:

a. St. Cyril, like his predecessors, uses the idea of our sonship to God in order to establish the divinity of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit⁹⁸. We are sons of God by grace, while Jesus is Son by nature⁹⁹. The Holy Spirit divinizes us, and hence He cannot be a creature¹⁰⁰.

b. His theology, like that of his predecessor, St. Athanasius, was

⁹⁶ De Incar. Verbi 54:3; Contra Arian. 1:38; 2:79; Ep.60 ad Adelphium; De Incr. Verbi 7:5; Paschal Ep. 10:8.

⁹⁷ H. Rondet, p. 81.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ In Joan 1:12; thesaurus de SS. Trint. 12; De Tint. dial 2, 4.

¹⁰⁰ Thesaurus 34; De Trint dail 7; In Joan 1:9; 10:4.

in fact soteriological, its aim is the sanctification of man as a whole, or in another way attaining salvation.

Sellers states: [The teaching of Athanasius and the later representatives of the school of Alexandria comes before us as a striking example of the dependence of Christological on soteriological thought. Consequently if we are to appreciate their doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ, we first must consider briefly their doctrine of His Work as Savior¹⁰¹.]

Therefore St. Cyril preached that the Word of God became Man that we may share His life. In Him our nature is renewed and attained victory on sin and on Satan. All that was realized in His life; it was for us and in our name. He says:

[Because of the sin of Adam reigned over all, the Holy Spirit departed, and the human nature fell into evil of every kind. Therefore, it was

necessary that mounting once again by the mercy of God to its original state, it be deemed worthy of the Spirit. Therefore, the only-Begotten

Word of God became Man. To those on earth He appeared with an earthly body, and was made free of sin, so that in Him, and Him alone, human nature crowned with the praises of innocence, might be enriched with the Holy Spirit, and thus reformed for God through holiness¹⁰².]

[Therefore, as we mentioned above, the Son was anointed with the praises of innocence...human nature being illuminated in Him, and indeed made worthy to be allotted a share in the Holy Spirit, Who will not depart as He did in the beginning, but rather will be pleased to dwell in it...¹⁰³]

[Therefore, it was written, "The Spirit came down upon Christ and remained on Him." Therefore, the Word of God is called Christ, the Word who became man for us and like us, and who came in the form of a slave, He was anointed humanly according to the flesh, but He anoints

¹⁰¹ The Council of Chalcedon, S.P.C.K.. 1961, p. 132.

¹⁰² PG 75:1369-1372.

¹⁰³ PG 75:1372.

*divinely with His own Spirit those who believe in Him*¹⁰⁴.]

c. Some Scholars, such as Rowan Greer¹⁰⁵ and others believe that the “deification” gave the way to “one divine nature.”

I would like to explain that we do not believe in one divine nature of Christ, but one united nature out of two. Moreover “deification” according to the Alexandrian theology means the return of man to his original state as an image of God, by participation in the divine nature. It is not a restoration of man's soul, but of his whole human nature, i.e., of his soul, mind, body, will etc.

For example, Pseudo-Macarius the Great states: “*If human nature had remained alone in its nakedness and had not profited by a mingling and a communion with the supra-celestial nature, it would have resulted in nothing good*¹⁰⁶.”

“Deification” does not mean destroying human freedom to enjoy God's will as Greer suggests, but on the contrary it means its sanctification¹⁰⁷.

R.W. Gleason gives an account of St. Cyril's theology of grace in his book “Grace,” saying:

[Cyril of Alexandria uses the term *charis* very frequently, often in the subjective sense of the benevolence of God which justifies us. He uses it also to mean what we call today “the grace of the Head.” Christ is sanctified in His humanity for us; He is the repository of all graces for the entire mystical body. He possesses the grace of the Head, and Christians receive their grace from Him. What we find stressed in Cyril of Alexandria is this: the prime grace received is the Holy Spirit. It is the Uncreated Grace, the presence of the divinity itself. This divine Person comes to impress Himself upon the soul to unite Himself to the soul, and in so doing produces sanctifying grace. It is as if one had a seal with a rose cut in it. The seal itself would be the Holy Spirit, the wax would be one's soul, the rose-image, which arises in the wax, would be created grace. By His self-donation or self-communication, by sharing what He has, God causes in man the created entity that we call sanctifying grace.

¹⁰⁴ PG 75:1372.

¹⁰⁵ Theodore of Mopsuestia, 1961, p. 41.

¹⁰⁶ Hom. 32:6 PG 34:789 AB.

¹⁰⁷ For more details see our book: *The terms Physis and Hypostasis in the Early Church.*

The Greek insist that there is no possibility of created grace in the soul unless the Holy Spirit Himself is present. The kind of causality on the part of God is that which takes place when God gives Himself. Grace is such a unique entity that it could not be produced by the ordinary causality of God. It is something sublime, not only an image of the very nature of God but a share in it].

3. FREE GRACE

Grace is the gift of God offered to men who are unable to attain by their own merits. St. Paul says, “being justified freely by His grace” Rom. 3:24. He forgives man, not because man can do anything to deserve forgiveness, but because He is God of love (Exod. 33:19, Ps. 51:1, Rom. 9:15,16). God does not deal with man according to His own universal goodness. “That in the ages to come, He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God” Eph. 2:7,8.

❖ *None of God's gifts to humanity is made in payment of a debt, but all are of grace.*

Origen¹⁰⁸

This free gift is not granted to men by force, or to careless souls, but it is offered freely to all men, to act in those who seriously desire it. Man has the choice to accept or reject this free grace. J. Patrick clarified St. Clement's opinion in this regard, saying¹⁰⁹:

[If faith was only an advantage of nature, as Basilides maintained, there could be no room for praise or censure in the case of belief or disbelief, for man would be the creature of a natural, or divine, necessity. If men were moved like lifeless puppets by natural forces, the distinction between voluntary and involuntary is superfluous; and the same is true of the impulse, which leads to choice¹¹⁰. From this conception of freedom as absolute, important conclusions in the matter of salvation are drawn. God wished us to be saved from ourselves¹¹¹. Because man is not a lifeless instrument, he must hasten to salvation

¹⁰⁸ Comm. Rom. 22 on 4:4f.

¹⁰⁹ Clement of Alexandria, 1914, 0.145-6.

¹¹⁰ Strom 2:3.

¹¹¹ Ibid 4; 12:96; Ec. Pr. 22.

willingly and of set purpose¹¹². Readiness of mind is our contribution to salvation¹¹³. Faith as well as obedience depends on freedom¹¹⁴. Choice and life are yoked together¹¹⁵. He who sins of his own will makes choice of punishment¹¹⁶. That which is involuntary not judged¹¹⁷. God only requires of us the things that are in our power¹¹⁸. By instruction we are taught to choose what is best¹¹⁹. God Himself has a respect for this freedom, and exercises no compulsion in the matter of salvation. No one will be saved against his will, for force is hateful to God¹²⁰. Man must cooperate with God¹²¹. Those who are foreordained were foreordained because God knew before the creation of the world that they would be righteous¹²². Even, as has already been noted, the argument from the miraculous must not be such as to compel the assent of the spirit of man; for such compulsion were out of harmony with the nature of God and man¹²³. But though God will not compel man, there is a sense in which man may exercise compulsion upon God. The kingdom of God is not for the slack or the sleepers; the “violent takes it by force,” and snatches life from God; for in such conflicts He rejoices to be defeated¹²⁴.]

❖ *God's grace is not given to those who lack zeal in the cause of good, nor can human nature achieve virtue without help from above.*

Origen¹²⁵

4. UNIVERSAL GRACE

God who is love (1 John 4:8) will reveal Himself to all, redeem all, so that everyone may accept Him as his heavenly Friend, his Father and his Lord, and will have a share in His divine life.

¹¹² Strom 7:7;42.

¹¹³ Ec. Pr. 22.

¹¹⁴ Strom 2:3:11; 2:6:26; 2:20:113.

¹¹⁵ Protr. 11:117.

¹¹⁶ Paed. 1:8:69.

¹¹⁷ Stom 2:14.

¹¹⁸ Strom 2:6:26:7:7:48.

¹¹⁹ Strom 1:6:35; 2:16:75.

¹²⁰ Quis div. salv. 10.

¹²¹ Strom 5:4:157.

¹²² Strom 7:7:107.

¹²³ Stah vol. 3, p. 217.

¹²⁴ Quis div. salv. 21.

¹²⁵ Comm. Ined, des Ps. 118:326 [See our Book: Man and redemption, Ottawa 1987, pp 23ff.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His Only-Begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” John 3:16.

“And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world” 1 John 2:2.

“But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean” Acts 10:28.

“They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God” Luke 13:29.

Truly, in the Old Testament God chose for Himself His own people, but it was based on two essential factors:

a. God chose Abraham, for he was the man who believed in Him and obeyed Him, therefore He granted him this promise that God's people are chosen from his offspring.

b. God prepared for the salvation of the whole world by choosing them, sending His Law and prophets for them and at last sending His Incarnate Son born from a Jewish virgin for the salvation of all mankind. Therefore, even in the Old Testament God alluded to this universal grace through the prophets:

“The Lord is gracious and full of compassion... the Lord is good to all and His tender mercies are over all His works” Ps. 145:8,9.

“I will also give you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be My salvation to the end of the earth” Is. 49:6.

❖ *God is the Lord not only of the Jews but of all men, though He is more intimately the Father of those who know Him.*

❖ *For “I become all things to all men, that I might gain all men” 1 Cor. 9:22. Since also “the rain” of the divine grace is sent down “on the just and the unjust” Matt. 5:45. “Is He the God of the Jews only, and not also of the Gentiles? Yes, also of the Gentiles: if indeed He is one God” Rom. 3:29,30, exclaims the noble Apostle.*

St. Clement of Alexandria¹²⁶

❖ *Thanks be to God; although the grace of prophecy was confined to Israel, now a still greater grace than all they had, has been poured*

¹²⁶ Strom 6:6:47; 5:3.

out on the Gentiles through our Savior Jesus¹²⁷.

- ❖ *We Christians maintain that “it was the fortune of that people in a remarkable degree to enjoy God's favor, and to be loved by Him in a way different from others;” but this economy of things and this divine favor were transferred to us, after Jesus had conveyed the power which had been manifested among the Jews to those who had been converted to Him from among the heathen¹²⁸.*
- ❖ *Before the advent of Christ God was known only in Judah; (Ps. 76:1) since then the whole earth is the Lord's. Before the advent “fullness” was not to be found anywhere on earth, and most of the earth was... emptiness; since then many would say from among the Gentile believers “from his fullness have we all received...” John 1:16, and thus they themselves they have become His “fullness” - for those who are “empty” of the ordering of the Gospel cannot be the “fullness” of Christ...*
- ❖ *Previously the name (of God) was “great” only in Israel (Ps. 76:1); but since the coming of Christ He is great throughout the entire world¹²⁹.*
- ❖ *My eyes have seen Your salvation, Luke 2:30 - which is Christ,... the salvation not only of the Jews but of all the world... “A light to lighten the Gentile” - Christ is the light of the Gentiles, for He was to bring the light of His teaching to them in their darkness. For now the Father has accepted the people of the Gentiles, giving them a covenant of peace in the salvation that comes to them through faith in Christ. “...the glory of your people Israel,” i.e. glory to Israel, enlightenment to the Gentiles; the latter receive their first teaching, the former the resultant knowledge. The true Israelite, then, is everyone who knows Christ; if a man does not know Christ he is no Israelite, for Israel means the mind that sees God. The “glory” of the Jew, then, is to believe in Christ whom their prophets predicted the glory, that is, of encountering the one they had awaited¹³⁰.*
- ❖ *Let them contemplate then the grace which is through the Son... 1*

¹²⁷ Comm. Matt. 10:22.

¹²⁸ Contra Celsus 5:50 (A.N. Frs., Vol. 4).

¹²⁹ Sel. Ps. 24:1; 47:2.

¹³⁰ In Luc. hom 15 on 2:30 f.

Now, unto all the earth has gone forth their voice, and all the earth has been filled with the knowledge of God (Ps. 76:1; 19:4), and the disciples have made disciples of all the nations (Matt. 28:19), and now is fulfilled what is written, “they shall be all taught of God” (John 6:45, Is. 54:13).

St. Athanasius¹³¹

❖ *The pure Apostles were “spreading among the peoples” (Zeck 10:8), and what was the result? Those who were far away from the divine throne became near, so that Paul the Apostle sent them a letter, saying: “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been made near by the blood of Christ” Eph. 2: 1.*

St. Cyril of Alexandria¹³²

5. REDEEMING GRACE

To understand the divine grace as redemptive we must speak about the Grace of the divine revelation and man's redemption.

¹³¹ Contra Arian. 1; 59.

¹³² In Luc. hom 4.

**THE GRACE
OF
DIVINE REVELATION AND MAN'S REDEMPTION**

The Alexandrian Fathers acknowledged the divine grace as God's Self-Giving to His beloved creature, i.e. man; this cannot be realized except by two integral means, viz. the revelation of God to man and man's redemption.

1. GRACE AS GOD'S SELF-REVELATION

In our book: “God” we notice that God is neither an idea that we believe in, nor a Supreme Being far away in heaven, isolated from our world¹³³, but He is the Lover of mankind. In His love He reveals Himself to men by many means, to attract them to His bosom that they would accept unity with Him.

a. He reveals Himself through His creation (Ps. 19:1)¹³⁴.

b. He grants man natural laws in their hearts to acknowledge Him.

c. As they refused the voice of the natural laws, He revealed Himself through Moses' Law and the prophets (Heb. 1:1,2).

d. At last He granted them His divine grace in its fullness through His Self-Revelation, that was realized by the incarnation of the Son and sending His Holy Spirit.

“No one knows who the Son is but the Father, and who the Father is but the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him” Matt. 11:27 (Luke 10:22).

“The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My Name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” John 14:26.

It is clear that our Trinitarian Faith is correlated to God's Grace or God's Self-Revelation. From the beginning God as our heavenly Father planned for revealing Himself to us through the incarnation of His Only Begotten Son, Who dwelt among us, uniting us with His Father in Him.

¹³³ The Coptic Orthodox Church and the Dogmas, God, 1986, p.1.

¹³⁴ St. Athanasius: Contra Gentes 27,35; De Incarnatione Verbi Dei 11-15.

He spoke to us about the Father not only by words, but through unity with Him and participating in the divine life, and by granting us His mind and understanding (1 Cor. 2:16).

- ❖ *The Word... has appeared as our Teacher, He by Whom the universe was created. The Word Who in the beginning gave us life when He fashioned us as Creator, has taught us the good life as our Teacher, that He may afterwards, as God, provide us with eternal life. Not that He now has for the first time pitied us for our wandering; He pitied us from old, from the beginning. But now, when we were perishing, He has appeared and has saved us*¹³⁵.
- ❖ *“For I am,” He says, “the door” John 10:9, which we who desire to understand God must discover, that He may throw heaven's gates wide open to us. For the gates of the Word being intellectual, are opened by the key of faith. No one knows God but the Son, and the one to whom the Son has revealed Him (Matt. 11:27)*¹³⁶.

St. Clement of Alexandria

- ❖ *But as one cannot be in the Father or with the Father except by ascending from below upwards, and coming first to the divinity of the Son, through which one may be led by the hand and brought to the blessedness of the Father Himself, so the Savior is the inscription “the door”*¹³⁷.
- ❖ *Since the Father is inseparable from the Son, He is with him who receives the Son*¹³⁸.
- ❖ *For there are in the divinity of the Word some help towards the cure of those who are sick, thus respecting what the Word says, “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick” Matt. 9:12; others, again, who are pure in soul and body exhibit “the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is manifested by the Scriptures of the prophets” Rom 16:25, and “by the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ” 2 Tim. 1:10, whose “appearing” is manifested to each one of those who are perfect, and*

¹³⁵ Protrepticus 1:7.

¹³⁶ Prot. 1.

¹³⁷ Origen: In Ioann. 1:29.

¹³⁸ Comm. Matt. 13:19.

*enlightens the reason in the true knowledge of things*¹³⁹.

- ❖ *God the Word was sent, indeed, not only as a physician to sinners, but also as a Teacher of divine mysteries to those who are already pure and who sin no more*¹⁴⁰.
- ❖ *We, the eyes of whose souls have been opened by the Word, and who see the difference between light and darkness, prefer by all means to take our stand “in the light” and will have nothing to do with darkness at all*¹⁴¹.
- ❖ *Accordingly, if Celsus was to ask us how we think we know God, and how we shall be saved by Him, we would answer that the Word of God who entered into those who seek Him or who accept Him when He appears, is able to make known and to reveal the Father, Who was not seen (by anyone) before the appearance of the Word. And Who else is able to save and conduct the soul of man to the God of all things save God the Word, Who, “being in the beginning with God,” became as flesh, that He might be received by those who could not behold Him, inasmuch as He was, the Word, and was with God, and was God? And discoursing in human form and announcing Himself as flesh, He calls to Himself those who are flesh, that He may in the first place cause them to be transformed according to the Word that was made flesh, and afterwards may lead them upwards to behold Him as He was before He became flesh; so that they receiving the benefit, and ascending from their great introduction to Him which was according to the flesh, say, “Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer” 2 Cor. 5:16*¹⁴².
- ❖ *...(We believe in) self-revealing God, Who has manifested Himself by Him who by His great power has spread the true principals of holiness among all men throughout the whole world*¹⁴³.
- ❖ *The things that cannot be comprehended by the reason of mortals, because they are vast, beyond human range and far above our*

¹³⁹ Contra Celsus 3:61 (A.N. Frs. vol. 4)

¹⁴⁰ Ibid 4:68.

¹⁴¹ Ibid 8:59.

¹⁴² Ibid 4:68.

¹⁴³ Ibid 8:59.

perishable nature, become by the will of God possible of comprehension by the abundant and immeasurable grace of God poured out on men through Jesus Christ, the Minister of boundless grace toward us, and through the co-operation of the Spirit¹⁴⁴.

- ❖ *Who sees God as Christ sees Him, for He alone “sees.”... “the Father” (John 6:46), and even if it is said that the “pure in heart shall see God” Matt 5:8 it will be beyond question by Christ and spiritual; and... that is why the Saviour was careful to use the right word and say “no man knows the Father save the Son,” not... “See.” Again, to those whom He grants to see God, He gives the “Spirit of knowledge” and the “spirit of wisdom,” that through the Spirit Himself they may see God (Isa. 11:2). That is why He said “He who has seen me has seen the Father” John 14:9. We shall not be so stupid as to assume that those who speak about the physical body of Jesus saw the Father also; otherwise the scribes, pharisees, Pilate... and all the crowd that cried “Crucify... Him” will have done so... Many looked on Him, but none is said “to have seen “ Him unless he who has recognized that He is the Word and the Son of God, and that in Him the Father also is at the same time recognized and seen¹⁴⁵.*

Origen

It is clear that the Alexandrian considered “ignorance” as the first cause of sin, therefore they looked to the Saviour as the Teacher Who have the power to educate the soul and illuminates the mind to attain the “knowledge.” He also sent the Holy Spirit unto His church to reveal the divine mysteries. St. Paul says, “But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God” 1 Cor. 2:10,11.

- ❖ *For he (the Apostle) recognizes the spiritual man and the gnostic (a spiritual believer who has true gnosis of knowledge) as the disciples of the Holy Spirit dispensed by God, which is the mind of Christ. “But the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit, for they are foolishness to him” 1 Cor. 2:14¹⁴⁶.*

¹⁴⁴ On Prayer 1:1.

¹⁴⁵ Comm. Song of Songs, 3.

¹⁴⁶ Stromata 5:4.

- ❖ *For the Spirit searches all things, yes the deep things of God (1 Cor 2:10)¹⁴⁷.*
- ❖ *Even those who claim God as their Teacher, with difficulty attain to a conception of God, grace aiding them to the attainment of their modicum of knowledge; accustomed as they are to contemplate the will [of God] by the will, and the Holy Spirit by the Holy Spirit. “For the Spirit searches the deep things of God. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God” 1 Cor. 2:10,14¹⁴⁸.*
- ❖ *“The Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God” 1 Cor. 2:10... The soul of man cannot search “everything,” and a greater Spirit was necessary within us... That we, by the mingling of this Spirit with us might search along with Him “everything, even...¹⁴⁹”*
- ❖ *(Send me Your light): That is, the light sent out from (the Father) into the mind of those who are called to redemption, the understanding through the Spirit, which leads those who are thus enlightened to God¹⁵⁰.*
- ❖ *Here then the “paraclete, the Spirit of truth, who preceedes from the Father,” ranges, searching for any soul worthy and fitted for His revelation of the greatness of this love which is from God¹⁵¹.*
- ❖ *For if anyone has deserved to participate in the Holy Spirit by the knowledge of His ineffable mysteries, he undoubtedly obtains comfort and joy of heart. For since he comes by the teaching of the Spirit to the knowledge of the reasons of all things which happen - how and why they do occur - his soul can in no aspect be troubled, or admit any feeling of sorrow¹⁵².*
- ❖ *In whatever part of the world he (the Christian even of the common people) prays, but he rises above the universe, “shutting the eyes of sense, and raising upwards the eyes of the soul.” However he stops not at the vault of heaven; but passing in through beyond the heavens,*

¹⁴⁷ Ibid 2:2.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid 6:18.

¹⁴⁹ Comm. 1 Cor. 10.

¹⁵⁰ Contra Celsus 4:95; Sel. Pw. 43:3.

¹⁵¹ Comm. Song of Songs; Prol.

¹⁵² De. Princip. 2:7:4.

under the guidance of the Spirit of God¹⁵³.

- ❖ *I think it is the Holy Spirit, in whom is contained every kind of gifts. For on some is bestowed by the Spirit, the word of wisdom, on others the word of knowledge, on others faith; and so to each individual of those who are capable of receiving Him, is the Spirit Himself who made that quality, or understood to be that which is needed by the individual who has deserved to participate¹⁵⁴.*
- ❖ *The Apostolic writings show us how one is taught by the Holy Spirit. For it is “by comparing spiritual truths with spiritual” - collating this passage (of Scripture) with that and bringing together parallel sayings - that as it were the “mind” of Scripture is revealed... This means not merely understanding the “truths of the Spirit” which inspired Isaiah, but gaining possession of that same spirit which “locked” (Isa. 24:22) and “sealed” (Isa. 29:11) the writings of Isaiah. For if the Spirit has not “opened” the words of the prophets, the imprisoned truths cannot be opened¹⁵⁵.*
- ❖ *If a man teaches the same things in the same way that Jesus taught, he speaks not “from his own heart” but by the Holy Spirit¹⁵⁶.*
- ❖ *“Let us have (suffer) pains to avoid being found unworthy of so great and sublime an understanding [viz. the mystical interpretation of Leviticus 24:1], but rather that our soul should first become a “holy place” in which we may receive the holy mysteries by the grace of the Holy Spirit from whom everything that is holy has received its sanctity¹⁵⁷.*
- ❖ *The proper tasks of a priest are twofold: to learn of God by reading and frequently meditating on Holy Scripture, and to teach the people. However let him teach what he has learned from God and not “from his own heart” (Ezek. 13:2) or from human understanding, but the things the Spirit teaches...¹⁵⁸*
- ❖ *(“I opened my mouth and panted [drew breath] because I longed for*

¹⁵³ Contra Celsus 7:44.

¹⁵⁴ De. Princ. 2:7:3.

¹⁵⁵ Comm. 1 Cor. 11 on 2:12-15.

¹⁵⁶ In Exek 2:2.

¹⁵⁷ In Lev. hom. 8:6.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid 6:6.

your commandments”): “He who through his actions has opened his heart, draws in the Holy Spirit who reveals to him the mysteries of God. The “mouth” of my soul is my understanding. Closing this to evil thoughts, I opened it to good ones, and drew in the Spirit of understanding, grace and wisdom. The cost of the grace of the Spirit is the recital and execution of the commandments of God: no sooner is our mouth opened that the Spirit is drawn from heaven¹⁵⁹.

2. GRACE AND MAN'S REDEMPTION

The Alexandrian Fathers, especially St. Clement, did not separate knowledge (gnosis) from redemption, as I have said that they looked to ignorance as the first cause of evil. The person who enjoys the redeeming action of God is called “Gnostic” by St. Clement, which means a person who has spiritual knowledge.

- ❖ *The Gnostic (believer) who has spiritual knowledge or (gnosis) is consequently divine, and already holy. God bearing, and God-borne... He therefore, who has God resting in him will not desire seeking elsewhere. At once leaving all hindrances, and despising all matter which distracts him, he cleaves heaven by knowledge, and passing through the spiritual essences, and all rule and authority, he touches the highest thrones, hastening to that alone for the sake of which he alone knows... For works follow knowledge, as the shadow follows the body¹⁶⁰.*
- ❖ *The succession of virtues is found in the Gnostic, who morally, physically and logically occupies himself with God. The Gnostic must, as far as possible, imitate God¹⁶¹.*
- ❖ *It appears to me that there are three effects of Gnostic power the knowledge of things; second, the performance of whatever the Word suggests; and the third, the capability of delivering, in a way suitable to God, the secrets veiled in the truth¹⁶².*

St. Clement of Alexandria

- ❖ *Whence also it (the soul) gets rid of all the filth of sin which covers it*

¹⁵⁹ Sel. Ps. 119:131.

¹⁶⁰ Strom 7:13.

¹⁶¹ Ibid 4:26.

¹⁶² . Ibid 7:1.

and retains only the likeness of the Image in its purity, then surely this latter being thoroughly brightened, the soul beholds as in a mirror the Image of the Father, even the Word¹⁶³.

St. Athanasius

¹⁶³ Contra Gentes 2:34.

4
**THE GROWTH OR LOSS
OF GRACE**

I have already clarified that the Alexandrian assured that it is the free grace of God that acts in the life of the believer, it is ever acting in his life granting him the good will and the power to practice the ‘new life’ in Christ. Believers cannot by themselves do good without God's grace, and in the same time God who grants man free will as the most noble gift does not work in him unwillingly. He grants him to accept the free grace or reject it. This grace is not something solid or static but always dynamic, ever acting, therefore the believer who accepts it must enjoy continuous growth in grace, otherwise he loses it. Therefore, St. Paul says, “Do not quench Spirit” 1 Thess. 5:19.

Our Lord Jesus Christ who became Man for our sake, and became a representative of all men, received the growth in grace although He Himself is the Giver of grace. It is said, “and Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” Luke 2:52. He came to establish His own Church that we may drink unceasingly from the river of His grace (Ps. 36:8). It is said; ‘and of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace: John 1:16. In Him we have the right to receive His dynamic grace, hoping to attain “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” Eph. 4:13.

As we are here on earth, and have bodies, we are in need every day to practice the grace of God as if it were new every time. Therefore St. Paul used to say to the believers in all his epistles “Grace to you and peace from God...” Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2; Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:20, Phil. 3), not because they lacked grace but they were in need to increase and grow more in grace as St. Peter says (1 Pet. 1:2; 2 Pet. 3:18); or St. Paul himself: “God is able to make all grace abound towards you, that you, always having sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work” 2 Cor. 9:8. St. James also says, “But He gives more grace, therefore He says: God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble” James 4:6.

St. Peter admonishes us to be humble to enjoy more grace (1 Pet. 5:5), while St. Paul warns us not to despise the “Spirit of grace” Heb.

10:29.

Now I mention some quotations from the writings of the Alexandrian concerning the increase and the loss of grace; or kindling and quenching the Spirit.

- ❖ *In His wisdom He makes His graces great to those who show with all their power... that they love Him with all their souls*¹⁶⁴.
- ❖ *This expression (rekindling the lamp, torch or other lights) seems to indicate something like this also in Jacob. As long as he was far from Joseph and received no information about his life, his spirit had failed in him, and the light, which was in him had been darkened, as the kindling has already failed. However when those who reported to him about Joseph's life came, that is those who said that "the life was the light of men," John 1:4 he rekindled his spirit in himself, and the brightness of the true light was renewed in him.*

However because occasionally the divine fire can be extinguished even in the saints and the faithful, we hear the Apostle Paul warning those who were worthy to receive gifts of the Spirit and grace, by saying: "Do not quench the Spirit" 1 Thess. 5:19. The Scripture says of Jacob, therefore: "And Jacob is still living," Gen. 45:28, as if he has experienced something like that which Paul warned against, and has renewed himself through those words which had been spoken to him that Joseph is still alive.

However this also should be noticed, that he who "rekindled his spirit," meaning of course, that spirit which seemed almost extinguished, is said to be Jacob. But he who says: "it is a great thing for me if my son Joseph is living;" Gen. 45:28 as if he understands and sees that the life which is in the spiritual Joseph is great, he is no longer called Jacob, but Israel, he who sees in his mind the true life which is Christ, the true God.

But he is excited not only about the fact that he has heard that "Joseph his son is living," but especially about that which has been announced to him that it is Joseph who holds "dominion over all Egypt," for the fact that his son has reduced Egypt to his rule is truly great to him. For to tread on lust, to flee luxury, and to suppress and curb all the pleasures of the body, this is what it means to have

¹⁶⁴ Exhort. to Martyrdom 2.

“dominion over all Egypt.” And this is what is considered great and held in admiration by Israel.

But if there is someone who should subject at least some vices of the body, but yield to others and be subject to them, it is not said correctly of him that he holds “dominion over the whole land of Egypt,” but, for example, he will appear to hold dominion over one, perhaps, or two or three cities. But Joseph whom no bodily lust ruled, was a prince and lord “of all Egypt.”

Therefore no longer Jacob, but Israel, whose spirit has been rekindled, says: “It is a great thing for me if Joseph my son is living. I will go and see him before I die.” Gen. 45:28¹⁶⁵.

Origen

- ❖ *How, my beloved, our will ought to keep peace with the grace of God, and not fall short, lest while our will remains idle, the grace that is given to us should begin to depart, and the enemy finding us empty and naked, should enter (into us), as was the case with him spoken of in the Gospel (Matt. 12:43-45)...For the departure from virtue gives place for the entrance of the unclean spirit. There is, moreover, the Apostolic injunction, that the grace given to us should not be unprofitable (1 Tim. 4:14)... For when a man despises the grace given to him, and forthwith falls into the cares of the world, he delivers himself over to his lusts... Now the prophet points out the end of such negligence, saying, “cursed is he who does the work of the Lord carelessly” Jer. 48:10. For a servant of the Lord should be diligent and careful, yea, moreover, burning like a flame, so that when by an ardent spirit, he has destroyed all carnal sin, he may be able to draw near to God, Who according to the expression of the saints, is called “a consuming fire” Deut. 4:24; 9:3; Heb. 12:29.*
- ❖ *In the Gospel, He praises those who increased the grace twofold, both him who made ten talents of five, and him who made four talents of two, as those who had profited and turned them to good account; but him who had the talent He cast out as wanting, saying to him, “You wicked servant! ought you not to have put my money to the exchangers? Then at My coming I should have received my own with interest.”. For it is not His will that the grace we have received*

¹⁶⁵ In Exod. hom 15:2,3.

should be unprofitable” but He requires us to take pains to render Him His own fruits, as the blessed Paul says, “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy and peace” Gal. 5:22¹⁶⁶.

St. Athanasius

¹⁶⁶ Paschal Epis. 3:6:5.

5 GRACE AND LIFE

Grace is not a divine gift that is granted to the believers to worship God, but as we have said it is God's Self-Giving to man to enjoy life, not only during worshipping God, but all day and night long wherever he is and whatever he is doing, even when he is eating, drinking, putting on his clothes, sleeping etc.

I would like to talk about the effect of the divine grace in our daily life in a separate book, but now I suffice to mention the following points:

1. Grace is not just a gift, but it is God's Self-Giving, by which the believer gets rid of many problems like the feeling of loneliness.

For even if he or she is alone, he is in the presence of God who continuously grants him Himself. The true believer never suffers from lack of love or from loneliness. Some philosophers asked St. Anthony how can he be pleased in his cave while he had nobody and nothing to comfort him, St. Anthony clarified to them that he never felt lonely for he is in the presence of God that dwelt in his heart by grace.

The true believer also never suffers from the feeling of inferiority that destroys mankind. For the divine grace continuously reminds him of his sonship to God his Father, the Almighty Who governs heavens and earth, therefore all the heavenly capabilities are at his hand, as an adopted son of God and a kingly person¹⁶⁷.

2. St. Clement calls the true believer who practices the divine grace a "Gnostic." One of the essential characteristics of the Gnostic is the perfect "love," through which he enjoys the pledge of "eternity"¹⁶⁸. How? By grace the believer receives God's self-giving to him... He does not only enjoy it but also he himself becomes able to practice self-giving. Through the divine grace believers practice love in its perfect meaning as self-giving not as a commandment they have to fulfill but as their new nature. For by receiving God's love in our life, we become lovers of men also.

¹⁶⁷ Stromata 7:7.

¹⁶⁸ Louis Bouyer: Spirituality of the N.T. and the , 1960, p.274; Srtomata 6:15.

3. The divine grace illuminates our inner sight and renews our thoughts, understanding and conceptions. Here I give some examples:

a. St. Clement of Alexandria believed that God created everything good, therefore He loved everything and hated nothing. By grace we also have God's view to everything, to find that everything in the world is good and beautiful. Evil and sin are strange to the world that God created, therefore we can truly have the same feelings of St. Clement that our world is the most beautiful world that can ever exist¹⁶⁹.

Although we acknowledge that we are foreigners in this world, and that our hearts must be close to the world to come, yet we joyfully live here and have a pleasant look towards this temporal world.

Origen had the same feelings as he said, [*But a Christian, even of the common people, is assured that every place forms part of the universe, and the whole universe is God's temple*¹⁷⁰.]

b. By grace the believer does not despise his body, senses, emotions etc... but he acknowledges the divine gifts granted to him and can be sanctified by the Holy Spirit¹⁷¹.

2. Through grace we acknowledge the continuous presence of God within our soul that grants us unceasing joy. Our whole life changes into endless feast. St. Clement says: [*The (Gnostic's) whole life is a holy festival*¹⁷².], [*Holding festival, that in our whole life, we are persuaded that God is altogether on every side present. We cultivate our fields, praising; we sail the sea... The Gnostic, then is very closely allied to God, being at once graceful and cheerful in all things, graceful on account of the bent of his soul towards the divinity, and cheerful on account of his consideration of the blessing of humanity which God has given us*¹⁷³.]

St. Athanasius in the midst of his tremendous troubles, wrote in one of his paschal letters that Jesus Christ is the true Feast. In other words he was celebrating the unceasing Feast, even while he was in his exile, for Christ the True Feast is present within his heart, granting him

¹⁶⁹ See our book: God's Providence, Ottawa 1987, section 7.

¹⁷⁰ Contra Celsus 7:44.

¹⁷¹ See: God's Providence, section 7.

¹⁷² Strom 8:7.

¹⁷³ Strom 7:7.

grace and joy.

3. The divine grace makes our hearts very close to heaven, granting us the desire to attain the heavenly kingdom not only in the world to come but here on earth, by the dwelling of Christ in our souls. Origen says: [*as long as Jesus Christ, the Divine Word that was in the beginning with God, does not dwell in a soul, the kingdom of heaven is not in that soul. However when one is ready to receive that Word, the kingdom of heaven is nigh at his right hand*¹⁷⁴.]

¹⁷⁴ Comm. Matt. 10:14 on 13:52 [B. Dewery].