



DIVINE LOVE

5



**DIVINE LOVE
AND
PROVIDENCE**



FR. TADROS Y. MALATY

Translated by:
LAILA SOLIMAN

Edited by
MORGAN STAGGERS

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Pope Tawadros II of Alexandria
(118)



**In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit
One God, Amen**

I wrote a book earlier on, how the First Church of Alexandria reflected its ideology regarding Divine providence. Written in English, the book was published in 1987 by the Church of St. Mary in Ottawa, Canada during the time of my ministry there. Dr. Guirgis Kamel translated the text into Arabic and the Church of St. George in Sporting, Alexandria published the resulting book.

Now I would like to write about **Divine Love and Providence**, which refers to other Early Fathers of the Church. In the previous chapter, I spoke of Divine providence and decided not to repeat what was previously introduced.

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Author: Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty.
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1

Divine Providence

1. BETWEEN THE ANCIENT PHILOSOPHERS AND THE EARLY FATHERS OF ALEXANDRIA

Many of the ancient philosophers like Philo, Cicero, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus and others meditated over valid and universal laws, powers and beauty. They believed God cares for the universe. However, it is most likely they assumed God's providence was limited to include only the creation, concluding that after God created the universe He left it behind to its own laws!

Nevertheless, the Early Fathers of Alexandria, who looked at philosophy as a Divine gift that partially proclaims the truth, believed that Divine providence embraced all of creation, especially man. They believed that Divine providence passed the boundaries of time and place and took care of man, even before he was created, when he was in God's mind! This Divine providence still heeds man's affairs and will continue to do so in eternal life or in the coming age.

Divine providence embraces believers and nonbelievers, even the irrational creatures. God's endearment is shown through His abundant grace, through His compassion upon us and through His discipline to us in both pleasant and sad events. Divine providence is but one aspect of Divine grace. The depth of Divine grace is manifested in the incarnation of the Word of God, in His crucifixion and in His ascension to heaven in order to take us to be with Him.

2. CREATURES ARE IN NEED OF THE CREATOR, LIKE THE CHILD WHO NEEDS NURSING

In a magnificent talk, **St. Jacob of Serugh**¹ compared the care of a mother for her baby to the concern of God for man, whom He loves. [Just as a baby needs someone to nurse him in order to exist, the creature needs the Creator so that he may continue to live. If the mother had abandoned the baby at birth, it would have been better for the baby not to have been born.

Perhaps, if the world had been abandoned after creation, it would have vanished and would have been better if it had not existed from the beginning.

God will not forsake the world, as a woman will not forsake her child. Even if she forgets her baby, God will never forget his work. (Heb. 6:10)]

¹ الميمر 27 (راجع أيضًا الدكتور الأب بهنام سوني: الإنسان في تعليم مار يعقوب السروجي، 1995، ص 138-139).



2

Divine Providence and the Universe

1. GOD'S PRESENCE IN THE UNIVERSE

More than once **St. Clement of Alexandria** stressed the highness and integrity of God regarding the universe. Perhaps to explain the gap between the essence of God and His nature on one hand and between the core of the universe and its nature on the other, he said:

- ❖ God of the universe—who is above any talk, understanding and thought—cannot be comprehended by any means because He is indescribable, even through His power!¹
- ❖ God is invisible; He is inexpressible... Therefore, whatever is Divine is not lawful for man to utter... (2 Cor. 12:4; Rom 11:33) The most difficult topic to discuss is the special talk about God².
- ❖ Normally, when man talks about God, his talk is limited and lacks the ability to acknowledge God. I do not mean God's name or essence, for this is impossible. Rather, I mean acknowledging His power and knowledge³.
- ❖ First, understand that God is not confined by dimension. He is beyond time and space, above identification by name, even comprehension⁴.
- ❖ God is one but He is also beyond that one, above the one itself, i.e., He is not subject to a certain number⁵.

St. Clement of Alexandria

While **St. Clement of Alexandria** spoke of the gap between God and the universe, at the same time he proclaimed that God is not far from the world, especially from his finest creatures, i.e. man in particular. God created the universe because of His love for man and as a gift of blessing. With this same desire, He still takes care of the entire universe.

St. Clement of Alexandria believes that the universe is bright evidence of God's providence. In 1971, British theologian W.E.G Floyd wrote that Clement's evidence of the presence of Divine providence – if there was need for proof,—is the use of theological controversy based on the system of the universe and its harmony. He argues that even through a superficial look at

¹ *Stromata* 5:10:65.

² *Stromata* 5:12.

³ *Stromata* 6:18:166.

⁴ *Stromata* 5:11:71.

⁵ *Paidagogus* 1:8:71.



the world, there are evidences that stand against those against the right teaching.¹

St. Clement of Alexandria explained the close relation between God and universe saying: [He, who is far away, has become very close. How marvelous and imperceptible. "**Am I a God near at hand? Says the Lord**" (Jer 23:23) He is very close because of His power (His providence) that dominates everything under His authority. "Can anyone hide himself in secret places, so I shall not see him? (Jer 23:24) The power of God is always there, in contact with us, constantly examining and testing in order to provide us with guidance that works for our good².]

The early 20th century theologian John Patrick says that the perfection of God, as **Clement of Alexandria** believes aligns with the appearance and existence of God and the Divine appearance is not a key element in Clement's understanding³.

Origen also talked about the high and absolute superiority of God⁴, rejecting the idea that God exists in the physical universe in the form of materialistic sense or anything similar. At the same time, he often repeated that the appearance and existence of God is within the assertion of His infinite goodness and His love to human, saying:

[How do we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28) unless the power of God surrounds the universe and controls it?

"Heaven is God's throne, earth is His footstool and through His power, He dominates the whole universe, heaven and earth, said the Lord." (Jer 23:24)⁵]

St. Athanasius, who speaks of the perfection of God, stresses also on His presence, saying, "God is in all and in everything... He contains everything, and with all at the same time."⁶]

The Saint says that God in His goodness and grace is not far from any of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being. (Acts 17:28) However, the relationship between God (the Father) and His Word differs significantly from His relationship with us. The Logos (the Divine Word) is not close to the Father through grace, but He is One with Him in the same essence. He is His Son, consubstantially and eternally. **St. Athanasius** says:

[The Son of God is not a creature, the Son says. "I and My Father are One, the Father is in Me and I in Him." (John 10:30, 10:38)

¹ W.E.G. Floyd: *Clement of Alexandria's Treatment of the Problem of Evil*, Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 36.

² *Stromata* 2:2.

³ J. Patrick: *Clement of Alexandria*, London 1914, p. 73.

⁴ G.L. Prestige: *God in Patristic Thought*, SPCK 1975, 26.

⁵ *De Principiis* 2:1:3.

⁶ *De Incarnatione*, 42.



Therefore, the Logos is in the Father, for He begat Him. Nevertheless, because the creatures are outside Him, so they can be linked to Him, and because creatures are outsiders, they connect with Him voluntarily.

The Son is normally consubstantial with Whom begat Him, but he who is from outside and has become a son, he will be assimilated into the family as well. Therefore, as Moses immediately noted, "For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the Lord our God is to us? (Deut 4:7) Elsewhere it is said: "Am I a God near at hand?" (Jer 23:23 LXX)¹

With respect to the creatures, He approaches them as being outsiders but with regard to the Son, He does not approach Him. He is in Him for He is being His own Son.

The Son is not linked to the Father. He is in Him, He is His partner in Co-existence. Moses says, "You shall obey His voice, you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him." (Deut 13:4) Therefore, what happens with man takes place from outside².]

How marvelous is God's love! We, who were foreigners, abide in God Who is perfect because of His goodness, grace, and Divine providence.

2. GOD'S CARE FOR THE UNIVERSE

God, who appears in His creation, brought it into existence through His grace and His good will! "Nothing is found without His will³." God's will, active and full of grace, still works in creation, tending to it.

Plato and other philosophers believed that Divine providence was confined to the creation of the universe and its strong laws. However, **St. Clement of Alexandria** explained that God is kind and His goodness never stops. Otherwise, He wouldn't be the beneficent God that He is⁴. He says that the universe is like an axe, which has no power of itself, but needs the hand of God to utilize it to do the appropriate work to fulfill the purpose of His existence. [As the axe does not cut down unless it is used by someone, so the saw cannot saw without being used by human hands. Both of them are tools that do not work on their own. Both have material qualities through which the purpose of its work will be reached with the help of the woodcutter using them. This is what is meant by God's providence, where through auxiliary factors, the working power moves sequentially to individual things⁵.

Note when **St. Clement** said, "God rested on the seventh day," it does not mean God stopped working, because this would signify that He stops being

¹ *Contra Arians*, 4:5.

² *St. Clement: Protrepticus* 4:63.

³ *St. Clement Alex.: Paedagogus* 1:8:62.

⁴ *Stomata* 5:14:141, 6:12, 6:16.

⁵ *Stomata* 6:16



God! Rather, this rest was to be fulfilled through His work in the universe to reach its purpose. God, the Giver of blessings, works in us, for we are His beloved creatures. Through His Divine providence, we become perfect in Him and He finds His rest in us.

To conclude, I borrow the words of one of the first pioneers in Coptic monasticism who expressed the presence of God in our spiritual life, saying:

❖ If you look for God in the depths, there you will find Him.

If you are searching for Him in the water, there you will find Him "doing wonders." (Exodus 15:11)

If you ask for Him in the den, there you will find Him between two lions guarding Daniel the Righteous.

If you ask for Him in the fire, there you will find Him rescuing His servants.

If you look for Him on top of the mountain, you will see Him with Moses and Elijah.

He is everywhere, under the earth, above the heavens and inside us too¹.

❖ God reveals Himself everywhere, on mountains, in seas and underneath the depths².

St. Macarius the Great

❖ If God cares for the bulls, how much more He cares for the diligent work of teachers³.

St. John Chrysostom

¹ See Prof. I.M. Kontzevich: *Fifty Spiritual Homilies, St. Macarius the Great, 1974, Homily 12:12-13.*

² *Homily 16:5.*

³ *Homilies on Cor. 21:5.*



3

Divine Providence and Life of Man

God in His love to man, cares for all his life affairs. His care includes everything, even the number of hairs of his head. (Matt 10:30; Luke 12:7) Therefore, it will be appropriate for us to know that everything happens through God's care.

1. DIVINE PROVIDENCE EMBRACES EVERYTHING

❖ What happens to man does not happen out of coincidence, but to fulfill a thoughtful and significant purpose. This purpose extends to care, even for the number of hairs of our heads. (Matt 10:30) It is not excluded from the domain of this Divine purpose—this is not only for the saints but we can say it is also for all humans! This Divine care extends to include two sparrows that could be sold for a copper coin, (Matt 29:10) whether the word of two sparrows signifies a spiritual or literal meaning¹.

Origen

❖ If it was not befitting for God to take care of the least things in our lives, like the hairs of our heads, the sparrow (Matt 10:29-30) and grass of the field, He would have not created them from the beginning²!

St. Athanasius the Apostolic

2. Divine Providence extends to include even animals

❖ Divine providence cares first for the rational creatures but even the irrational creatures benefit from what God meant for the good of man³.

❖ Since God clearly has control, with His mighty power, over the movement of heaven and all that it has, over the earth with what is on it, and over what's in the sea, since He controls the births, the origin of things, food, and the growing of all animals and plants, it would be foolish to close our eyes and not to look up to God⁴.

Origen

3. GOD'S CARE WORKS PERPETUALLY (WITHOUT CEASING)

St. Clement of Alexandria said that God's goodness is constantly at work; it is like the shepherd caring for his sheep, the king caring for his

¹ *De Principiis 2:11:5.*

² *Arians 2:26.*

³ *C. Celsus 4:74.*

⁴ *C. Celsus 4:74.*



people and the father caring for his kids¹.

Origen says, [God does not ignore anything; He consistently and in every moment does what is appropriate to meet the needs of the world, which is always in flux and subject to change. It is like the farmer who throughout the different seasons of the year carries out different agricultural chores with the earth and its crops. It is the same when God provides care to all ages and at all times.... He provides what the universe needs in a way that no one can truly comprehend its depth except God².]

4. GOD'S PROVIDENCE AND SANCTIFYING MAN

St. Clement explains that Divine providence embraces man as a whole: his body, his mind and his soul. God cares for our bodies and its needs, including food, clothes and health. He cares for our minds to be occupied with kindly thoughts and **in particular, He cares to sanctify our souls, minds, bodies, thoughts and feelings.** God is the true friend of man through His Divine providence; His will and His work sanctify man so that man becomes as holy as His Creator, who is the One and the Holy!

- ❖ "No one is holy as the Lord." No matter how great man could grow in holiness, or in reaching chastity and honesty, he can never reach the holiness of the Lord. God bestows holiness and man receives it. God is the fountain of holiness and man drinks from this fountain. God is the light of holiness and man looks to it!³
- ❖ The work of the Father, which occupies the whole universe, is glorified when every man advances and reaches the highest point of growth through partnership with Christ – "the wisdom," "the knowledge" and "the holiness." Reaching the highest point of growth is fulfilled when man is sanctified, purified and reaches the highest levels of perfection through partnership with the Holy Spirit. Then man becomes more deserving to receive the grace of wisdom and knowledge. He will be free from all types of defilement and ignorance and will reach this point with perfection and in purity. The life given to him by God will become worthy of Him, who wants the life of man to be pure and perfect so then the creature will become qualified for this holy life. In this way, man receives from God the power of eternal existence⁴.
- ❖ God gives more attention to the soul (the place of abilities, feelings and senses) of every man in order for him to become prudent, to attain

¹ *Stromata* 6:17:157, 158.

² *C. Celsus* 4:69.

³ *In 1 Sam. Hom* 2.

⁴ *De Princip.* 1:3:8.



knowledge and practice his wisdom in an appropriate way in the midst of physical life. In this way, his sensations and perceptions become virtuous¹.

Origen

- ❖ Without the help of Divine grace, it would be impossible for man to love holiness and be happy to receive it².
- St. Augustine**
- ❖ Truly, the saints had never said that their works and their personal efforts ensured the road toward progress and perfection in virtue. Rather, they prayed for it before the Lord, saying: "Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; for You I wait all day long. Be mindful of Your mercy, O LORD, and of Your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble His way." (Psalms 25:5; 6:9) Jeremiah said that he discovered this truth itself, not just through faith only but also through experiencing the depth of the nature of things: "O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself. It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps." (Jer 10:23) The Lord Himself says to Israel, "I am like a green cypress tree; your fruit is found in me." (Hos 14:8)³

Abbot Paphnotius

- ❖ The grace and the mercy of God always works within us and for our benefit. When grace abandons us, the work of man and all his efforts become useless. No matter how much man struggles and earnestly tries, he cannot restore his original status without God's help. This saying is fulfilled always in us. By this, I mean, "So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy." (Rom 9:16)⁴

Abbot Daniel

5. DIVINE PROVIDENCE AND DECLARING THE TRUTH

The Fathers of Alexandria worked hard studying the Bible, looking for true knowledge. They perceived that our Savior is the true Teacher of the Truth and the Road and the Gate that leads to truth but He, Himself is the Truth. These fathers sought to declare the truth, to find Divine knowledge "*Gnosis*" as one of the greatest blessings and gifts of Divine providence. Through this knowledge, we learn that the relationship between God and man is not like that between the slave and his master. It is not like a deaf tool in the hand of an artist. "*Gnosis*" imparts Divine knowledge that allows a man

¹ *In Hebr. Hom.* 3.

² *City of God*, 13:5.

³ *Cassian: Conf.* 3; 13. (*See N. & P.N. Frs.*)

⁴ *Ibid* 4:5



to relate to God as a son who confidently and truthfully knows his father or as a bride who enters the bedchamber with her groom where they unite together in thoughts and in heart before becoming one in flesh.

God's providence uses all ways to declare God's mysteries, first through the creation, and then through the natural law that God gave to man. In addition, He talks with us throughout our daily life, empowering us to be in constant contact with Him. God sent Moses' Law and His prophets. Ultimately, the truth Himself descended to our world after He became a Man, to manifest Himself to us and for us, to raise our souls, our thoughts and our emotions to the bosom of the Father through His Holy Spirit.

- ❖ The physical eye is not the part of the body that knows God. It is in fact the mind, which is able to see God because it represents the image of the Creator. Through God's providence, the mind becomes capable of knowing God¹.
- ❖ "God's invisible attributes," (Rom 1:20) which cannot be perceived by the mind, are clearly seen since the world's creation is understood by that which has been made. Jesus' disciples rose above physical matters in this world. However, they did not stop at the limits of visual objects created by God. After consistent mental and intellectual training in the midst of these visual objects to reach proper understanding, they were able to acknowledge the eternal power of God and His divinity. They acknowledged that God, motivated by His love for man, declared His truth and all that could be known about Him. He was not only for the righteous and adorers but to those who did not know anything about piety and pure and immaculate worship. He declares Himself to them so that they may reach the knowledge in accordance with His Divine providence. Those recognize the truth through nature but in the absence of piety and without righteousness... With this knowledge, they will have no excuse before God².

Origen

- ❖ Seeking to know the Law does not happen through persistence in reading but through God's guidance and understanding. For they say to God: "Show me Your ways, O Lord. Teach me Your paths;" (Ps 25:4) "Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your Law;" (Ps 119:18) "Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God;" (Ps 143:10) "He who teaches man knowledge, does he not chastise?" (Ps 94:10)

¹ *C. Celsus* 7:33.

² *Ibid* 7:46.



- ❖ David the Blessed asked the Lord to give him understanding to recognize God's commandments despite the fact that he undoubtedly knew they were written in the book of Law. He said: "I am Your servant; give me understanding that I may know Your testimonies." (Ps 119:125) Certainly, David had understanding given to him by nature as a man. In the meantime, he had God's commandments written in the book of Law. However, he prayed to God to accurately teach him.

His comprehension by nature was not adequate. Thus, he needed God to enlighten his understanding daily to recognize the Law spiritually and to clearly know God's commandments.

The Apostle Paul explained this matter clearly and deeply: "For it is God who works in you both the desire and the power to do for His good pleasure." (Phil 2:13) It is clear that good will and the perfection of our work are fulfilled by being perfect in the Lord! In addition: "For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake." (Phil 1:29) Here Paul announces that accepting the faith and bearing the pain are both gifts given to us from God.

David knew these tenets. Hence, he prayed to God to receive these blessings through His mercy. He said: "Strengthen, O God, what You have done for us." (Ps 68:28) Therefore, we see that, while the beginning of salvation is a gift and a blessing from God, it is nonetheless incomplete. This bestowal should be achieved and fulfilled with His same compassion and continued help.

Abbot Paphnotius

6. DIVINE PROVIDENCE AND ANGELS & RIGHTEOUS AND EVIL ONES

In the first centuries of Christianity, when the world was in the terrible and frightening grip of devils and evil spirits, a question was raised: How do we explain the existence of these fiends, who control humans, in a world dominated by God's care?

The Fathers of Alexandria who tested the blessing of God answered this question. We will reveal briefly the answer in the following points:

A. People choose to become the children of Satan (John 8:44) instead of being children of God by adoption. Since they enjoy being united with him, they willingly enter into a close relationship with Satan. It is our responsibility, not God's responsibility, in choosing God or Satan.

B. **St. Clement of Alexandria and Origen** explained that the devils' plan is to try to cause man to fall, leading him to bondage, and to win him to their side. Nevertheless, God's providence did not leave us unprotected without assistance while we struggle against these demons. He supports us with



angels to guard us, if we accept their ministry to us. (Hebrews 1:14) The angels also lead believers to the heavenly wedding if believers have the desire and the yearning!

C. The Fathers of Alexandria explained that we are not alone in the battle against the devils. The fight is between God Himself and the devils. If we hide in God, He will defeat the devils through us. Nevertheless, if we enter the fight against the devils directly and without the assistance of God, counting on our own power, Satan will quickly defeat us and have control over us. I will quote some of the sayings of the Fathers of Alexandria to clarify their ideas:

- ❖ Orders (groups) of angels were divided over nations and cities, (Deut 32:8 Septuagint) and some of them were tasked to serve individuals¹.
- ❖ God's power sends blessings through the angels, whether the angels are visible or invisible. This method was revealed in the days of Jews, in the laws of Greeks and in the teachings of philosophers².
- ❖ Angels from God support priests and deacons in their ministry on earth, serving Him on earth³.
- ❖ A Gnostic (one who has spiritual knowledge) is always pure (ready) to pray. He prays with a group of angels for he already reached their ranks, keeping their holiness. Although he prays by himself, **choirs of saints are standing with him**⁴.
- ❖ The priest was obliged to remove his crown by the incense altar when entering the second veil. He enters silently, and the name of the (Lord) is engraved in his heart. By taking off the crown and leaving it aside, this act shows that he, who was purified through washing of flesh, has already set aside burdens of the soul... He put aside the light crown when he approached the second veil in the rational world, by the altar of incense, near the servants who offer prayers, i.e., near the angels.

When the soul becomes naked, it is considered like the high priest. It is controlled by the Logos directly... The soul will rise above the teaching of the angels and reach the knowledge and the understanding of things because she is no longer considered engaged but living with the Groom⁵.

St. Clement of Alexandria

¹ Strom. 6:17. (See Strom 7:2).

² Ibid 6:17.

³ Strom 7:1; In Lev. hom. 9:8. (Jean Daniélou: *The angels and their missions according to the Fathers of the Church*, tr. By D. Heimann, Westminster MD, 1982. p. 63).

⁴ Strom. 7:12.

⁵ Excerpt., 27; See also Stromata 7:3. (Daniélou, p. 92, 93).



- ❖ This is the work of the angels: they exercise God's care for the creation, which He brought into existence and put measures to its system.
- ❖ We come to know a group of angels and servants (Heb 1:14) sent by God, the Creator and Maker of the world, where He assigned them by His Word to perform many works and services. God keeps them busy serving the elements, the heavens, the world and what is in it¹.

Athenagoras

- ❖ Christians do not fear the devils. While they do not feel comfortable with the works of devils, they however do not face any harm because they are under the care of the Most High, who has pity on them due to their righteousness.
God sends His heavenly angels to stand by those who deserve to be guarded and protected so that devils will not harm them... We are not under the control of demons. Rather, we are under the power of God of the universe with Jesus Christ who presents us to the Father. According to God's Law, none of the devils has power over things on earth. Nevertheless, it can be said that some people, through their defiance of the Law, divide themselves where some would have no knowledge of God or not live according to His will, and those who are against His divinity. There is also another view: if it is appropriate for the devils to have power over the wicked and punish them, the Word - who takes care of the universe - allows them control over those who are under the authority of sin, not God².
- ❖ If I belong to the Church, no matter how small I am, my angel is free to see the face of the Father. Nevertheless, if I do not belong to the Church, the angel will not dare to do so... In fact, each one of us has an enemy seeking to pull us to his ruler (Satan). (**Origen** says that the righteous angels are more powerful than the devils and are capable of defending us³).
- ❖ If someone accepts the faith, Christ, who redeemed him with His blood, assigns to him a sainted angel who due to his significant purity is constantly watching the face of the Father⁴.
- ❖ "For He shall give His angels charge over you to guard you in all your ways..." (Ps 91:11) The righteous is in need of assistance from God's angels. Then the devils will not strike him, and an arrow that flies at night

¹ Suppl. 24, 10.

² Contra Celsus 8:27, 33.

³ Comm. in Matt 13, 28.

⁴ Comm. in matt 13, 28.



won't harm his heart¹.

- ❖ **Hermas**, the writer of 'The Shepherd,' uses the same example: "There are two angels (one is righteous and the other is wicked); they accompany each one of us. When our minds receive righteous thoughts, it is said they come from the good angel. But if we receive opposite thoughts, it is said they come from the wicked²."
- ❖ Each of us is affected by two angels - one for righteousness and the other for defilement. If good thoughts are found in our hearts, there is no doubt that the angel of the Lord is talking to us. Nevertheless, if our hearts receive wicked thoughts, then the evil angel is the one talking to us³.
- ❖ There are angels assigned to perform holy works; they teach understanding of the eternal light, knowledge of God's mysteries and teachings of divinities⁴.
- ❖ If there were people honored because of their service to the evangelists, and if Jesus Christ Himself came with good and pleasant news when preaching the gospel to the poor, therefore it is certain that those servants also were made into spirits by God (Ps 104:4) and they minister as flames of fire. They cannot be excluded to be evangelicals too. (Luke 2:10-11)⁵
- ❖ The angels supported the apostles to fulfill their evangelistic service and to complete their evangelical work⁶.

Origen

- ❖ The angels of the Lord followed Jesus when He was on earth. They witnessed Him when He rose from the dead and they declared His coming, announcing to the angels of virtues to open the everlasting doors. The heavenly powers were surprised and amazed to see Him in flesh. Therefore they cried, "Who is He?" because they marveled at the mystery of the wondrous salvation⁷.
- ❖ Seeing the angels through quietness, peace, and serenity awakens within us joy and glory⁸.
- ❖ Truly, if there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, (Luke 15:7)

¹ *In Num. hom 5:3.*

² *In Luc, hom 35.*

³ *In Luc, hom 35.*

⁴ *In Num. hom. 14:2.*

⁵ *Comm., in Ioan 13.*

⁶ *Comm., in Ioan 13.*

⁷ *Exp. In Ps. 23.*

⁸ *Vita Antonii 35.*



how much joy will there be when there is no sin and when the dead are raised? How much more joy will the heavenly hosts rejoice, and be delighted when they see us praying continuously in our meetings that take place, especially on Paschal Feast?¹

Pope Athanasius

7. DIVINE PROVIDENCE AND THE ROLE OF MAN

I have previously explained the role of man in his salvation, stressing that his positive role does not contradict with being freely given God's blessing and Divine providence. God affirms the role of man for at least two reasons:

A. To confirm the freedom of man to choose, or to have his free will, because his will is a precious gift from God, which without it man would lack his human entity.

B. To confirm the friendship of God with man. God works with man, His beloved, despite that man is incapable of doing any righteous work without God's blessing.

- ❖ Man has the ability to think of everything and to organize everything, knowing that he is cooperating with the grace of God².
- ❖ "Unless the Lord builds the house," (Ps 127:1) such a blessing might be above our capability to choose. The power of God sets the foundation with the builder and works with him until the house is completed, which the builder cannot execute on his own... This is like farming - it yields a bountiful crop as a result of the ability of the farmer to do well, which is part of his authority. However, there are factors not under his authority, where he depends on Divine providence, like having the appropriate weather and adequate rain. Thus, in regard to the goodness that the wise man seeks, man depends on his efforts that he provides voluntarily. At the same time, he also depends on the Divine power that supports those who choose perfect life as a goal. Our choice needs Divine support, not only to achieve dignity and goodness, but also to continue to have it³.
- ❖ Note that we say: Nothing can be done without His providence. We did not say without His will. Much may happen against His will but there is no such thing that can happen without His providence, with which He provides caring. He distributes and divides portions, grants and fulfills everything that happens⁴.

Origen

¹ *Paschal Letters 6:10.*

² *Contra Celsus 4:82.*

³ *Sel. Ps. 4:6.*

⁴ *In Gen. hom 3:2.*



❖ **Jermanos:** Where can we find the freedom of will? How can we deserve dignity as a fruit of struggle if God is the One who starts and ends everything in us regarding to our salvation?

Paphnotius: We acknowledge that God creates opportunities for salvation using several ways. We are able to use the chances given to us from heaven, either seriously or with laziness.

God provides opportunity, like when He told Abraham, "Get out of your country." However, Abraham was one who obeyed and had left already. In fact, the saying "Get out of your country" proved to be an action performed by the one who obeyed. But when God added, "The land I will show you," He showed that the grace of God is one that gives both order and promises.

It is useful for us to make sure that while we practice every virtue with non-stop diligence, we still cannot reach perfection by our own efforts and vigilance. Man's vigor and struggle are not enough to reach the rich gift of grace unless his struggle is protected by cooperation with God and through God's instructions to the heart toward the truth.

Therefore, we have to pray continuously, saying with David: "Uphold my steps in your path that my footsteps may not slip;" (Ps 17:5) "Set my feet upon a rock and establish my steps." (Ps 40:2)

God is the invisible leader of the human heart. He guides our hearts toward virtues, but with our full will. This will consents to deviate toward wicked behavior, whether due to its lack of knowledge of goodness or due to the seduction of desires. This was clear when the Prophet said, "You pushed me violently that I might fall," announcing the freedom of our will. He then says, "But the Lord helped me," (Ps 118:13) showing God's support to our will.

When we fall willingly, we do not perish because God helps us and supports us, opening His hands for us. When the Prophet says, "If I say 'my foot slips,' he means my will slips. When he says, 'Your mercy, O Lord, will hold me up,' (Ps 94:18) he shows that God supports our weakness." He acknowledges that the feet of our faith do not slip, not because of our efforts, but due to the mercy of God on us. Note also, "In the multitude of my anxieties within me (which is certain due to free will), your comforts delight my soul." (Ps 94:19) Alternatively, in other words, he has comforts inside his heart through Godly inspiration. He declares the image of multiple blessings God prepared for those who work in His name. These comforts not only remove troubles from the heart but also give great joy. Further, "Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul would soon have settled in silence." (Ps 94:17) Here the Prophet shows



that due to the weakness of our free will, we end up in hell (place of silence) unless God's support and protection saves us.

This also can be said about full purity, where no one can seek righteousness on his own unless Mercy extends a hand and gives him support when he stumbles and falls at a moment's notice. Otherwise, he would collapse and perish due to the weakness of his free will¹.

Abbot Paphnotius

❖ We need to remember what the Apostle said, "We plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain." (2 Cor 6:1) Those who were called the Lord's brothers need not receive such great godly grace with a spoiled spirit. Otherwise, they will fall from being highly honored from their negligence in executing God's will. Rather, they had to obey the prophet himself, saying, "Therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called." (Eph 4:1)²

St. Basil the Great

❖ What does it mean not to receive the grace of God in vain? (2 Cor 6:1) It means there is no desire to achieve good works with the support of His grace³.

Fr. Ceaserius Bishop of Arles

8. GOD'S PROVIDENCE AND SELF-GIVING

God gives – His creation that He loves – many blessings in this world, as well as in the world to come, for having man united with Him. God wants to give man Himself first before giving him everything. Therefore, the Fathers of Alexandria deemed that God's kingdom is not something we obtain but it is the enjoyment God Himself who lives within us, giving Himself to us. This is all we long for, even in the hereafter — to be united with God.

❖ It is like a bride who is engaged to the groom. She is given many souvenirs and gifts before marriage, e.g., jewels, precious clothes and expensive utensils, but she is not really happy or satisfied until the time of marriage where she becomes one with the groom. And so also is the soul; it is like a bride engaged to the Heavenly Groom, always receiving from the Holy Spirit the gifts of healing, knowledge and revelation, but she is not satisfied until fully united. I mean that it is love that does not change, and does not fail. The love sets free those who long for it. They will be free from any lust or worries. It is like a child who is adorned with pearls

¹ John Cassian: Conf. 3; 11, 12.

² The Long Rules, 34.

³ Sermon 126:5



and precious clothes. When he is hungry, he does not think of what he is wearing. He ignores all of this and focuses only on how to get milk from his mother's breast. Therefore, I beg you to know that it is the same with regard to God's spiritual gifts. Glory be to Him forever and ever. Amen¹.

St. Macarius the Great

9. DIVINE PROVIDENCE AND THE GIFTS

We can touch Divine providence through looking at God's wisdom when He distributes the gifts.

- ❖ God does not give these great gifts to everyone but he gives small gifts to some while not giving them to others. He uses this to build much harmony and love between people so they feel need for each other and to try to get closer to one another².

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ The Lord's gifts that we see among the individuals are not attributed to their eligibility, but rather refer to the kindness of the Lord³.

Fr. Ambrosyaster

¹ *Hom 45:7.*

² *Homilies on Cor., 32: 4.*

³ *Homilies on Cor., 32: 4.*



Divine Providence and Fatherhood of God

Some contemporary scholars try to distort the relationship between God and man, looking at God as an isolated being living in His heaven, far away from our world! He has the desire to rule humanity by any manner, and destroy man's freedom! This opinion completely contradicts the Christian faith because God shows His Divine providence deeply through His benevolence to humans. God is not in need of people's offerings or for them to worship Him but He seeks their hearts and helps them to reach heights in His glory. Therefore, they enjoy and taste His eternal love and demonstrate their kinship to Him. The Fathers of Alexandria explained this ideology in the following points:

1. **St. Clement of Alexandria** says, "We are considered complete strangers according to our nature; we do not have the slightest natural relation with God. However, He loves us and cares for us as a true Father toward His beloved children." He adds:

[God is greater than man in everything... This is the great evidence of God's goodness in His relationship with us. We are complete strangers in nature (with regard to God's nature) even though He cares for us. The affection of animals toward their little ones is a natural instinct; the friendship between similar minds is based on the intimate relationship between humans. Nevertheless, God's mercy is plentiful toward us. We are the ashes; **we are not related to Him by any means.** I do not talk in regard to our essence or nature or even the qualities of the essence but I only mean that we are the work of His will. He who receives the knowledge of the truth voluntarily, through discipline and teaching, God calls him to adoption, **which is the greatest of all!**.]

[How great is the gracious love toward humankind! He talks, not as a teacher to his students or a master to his servants or a god to human, but He like a father advising his children².]

Pope Athanasius also says, [God did not create them just to be human but called them to be His children because He brought them to be His, by the Logos (the Word) that is within us, which is Him. By Him we cry: "Abba, Father..." (Gal 4:6) When the Father sees His Son in people, He calls them sons³.

¹ *Stromata 2:16.*

² *Protrop 9:82.*

³ *Against Arians 2:59.*



2. God in His unlimited love shows Himself in the Old Testament as the Father of the believers. Nevertheless, in the New Testament, the Father sent His Only-Begotten Son to call the believers to hold on to Him by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, they become sons to the Father through adoption. This is the gift of the New Testament, which Isaiah the prophet had previously prophesied, saying, "The Lord God... will call His servants by another name." (Isa 65:15) What is the other name? It must be "God's children."

- ❖ He says, "My servants will be given a new name, an eternal, pure, simple, filial, childlike and real name which will bless the earth..." Truly, those who know Him as a Father, are called simple and blameless children... The Father of the universe shows compassion and tenderness toward those who turn to Him. He gave them a second birth by the Holy Spirit to become children of God. He knows them, has pity on them, loves them (i.e., special love), assists them and defends them. Therefore, He calls them "children¹."
- ❖ The Gnostic (a believer who has spiritual knowledge), due to his love to the only and true God, is truly perfect and a friend of God; he reached the rank to be worthy to be the "son²."

St. Clement of Alexandria

- ❖ It would be appropriate to examine, with fervent care, what is written in the Old Testament in order to find a prayer where God was called "Father." Heretofore, I looked carefully as I could but I could not find even one prayer like this. I don't mean God has not been called "Father," or that those who believed in Him were not called sons or children, but I did not find any prayer that dares to call God "our Father" in a way as the Savior taught us to pray, saying, "Our Father..."

If God is called "Father" and those who were born through the Logos and through believing in Him were called "sons" or "children," (Deut 32:6, 18, 20; Isa 1:2; Mal 1:6) the immutable fact of adoption cannot be seen clearly in the Old Testament.... The Apostle says, "Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave though he is master of all but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father." (Gal 4:1-2)

This took place when the "fullness of the time" had come (Gal 4:4), through the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ where those who longed for God received the adoption. Paul the Apostle teaches, saying, "For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear. but you received the Spirit

¹ *Paedagogus 1:5.*
² *Strom 7:11.*



of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.'" (Rom 8:15) In addition, we read in the Book of John, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name." (John 1:12)

Due to the spirit of adoption, we learned from the Catholic Epistle of John about those who are born of God, "Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; he cannot sin because he has been born of God." (1 John 3:9)¹

Origen

- ❖ We are sons and gods because of the Logos within us. We are within the Son and the Father and considered one in the Son and the Father because the Holy Spirit is within us. The Spirit is in the Word and in the Father².

Pope Athanasius

- ❖ Here there is comfort, if God is the Father. **He will care for us as sons.** As Jesus Christ says, "Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?" (Matt 7:9)³
- ❖ After saying, "We are heirs of God," the Apostle Paul added, "We are **heirs with Christ.**" (Rom 8:17) Note his ambition, trying to bring us closer to Christ. Whereas not all sons are heirs, he showed that we are sons and heirs too. In addition, while not all heirs receive a significant heritage, he highlighted this point by showing we are the heirs of God. Elsewhere, he also showed we could be heirs of God and heirs with His Only-Begotten Son⁴.
- ❖ How wondrous! Look, how amazing the greatness of faith! Behold, the Apostle explained this progressively! Earlier, he showed that faith had made them children of Abraham... Now he proved that they are the children of God too... Then he explained how they received adoption to become children of God: **"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ..."** (Gal 3:27) As long as Christ is the Son of God, and you adopt Christ, you keep Him within you, taking His image. Therefore, you have become related to Him, becoming one with Him in His nature⁵.
- ❖ The Prophet says, "If the mother cannot forget her nursing child, it would be impossible for the Lord to forget humans." It is not meant to compare

¹ *On Prayer 22:1, 2.*
² *Against Arians 2; 25, 24.*
³ *In 1 Tim, hom 1.*
⁴ *In Rom. hom 14.*
⁵ *In Galat., Chapter 3.*



God's love to us with a mother's love for the fruit of her womb but to show that the love of a mother exceeds all love. However, God's love is certainly greater than any mother's love. Therefore, he says, "Can a woman forget her nursing child and not have compassion on the child from her womb? Surely, they may forget. Yet I will not forget you, says the Lord." (Isa 49:15) Think deeply how the love of God exceeds a mother's love...

There are other examples, like **the love of the lover to his beloved**. It is not because God's love is equal to this love; it is just an example of similarity, taking into account the difference... Therefore, David says, "For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him." (Ps 103:11) As the man in his love cares much for the words he says, fearing to utter a word that might hurt his beloved feelings, thus, the Lord says, "My heart churns within Me. My sympathy is stirred." (Hos 11:8). The Lord does not refrain from using this harsh expression to show His love to His beloved...

He likened Himself to the **gardener** who labors diligently for his work... and compared Himself to the lover who feels unhappy if, with one word, he may upset his beloved... He asserted to us that His love is unlike all these kinds of love; it differs as much as the difference between good and evil¹.

- ❖ **"Thy kingdom come...." This is the language of the child who has a righteous mind** not attracted to visual things. This child does not see the present as great, but rushes to our Father in a desire to see things to come (the eternal kingdom). This action comes from a good conscious and a soul that is free from earthly matters².

St. John Chrysostom

GOD'S FATHERHOOD IS EVEN WITH HIS DISCIPLINE

- ❖ Not everyone who is nice to you is a friend, and not everyone who strikes is an enemy....

Love mixed with firmness is better than deceit mixed with cossetting. Taking bread from someone who is hungry might be more beneficial than giving him bread because if this individual getting his needs and does not behave properly, giving him food may lead him to do evil.

Who is he that is able to love us more than God? However, at times God deals with us felicitously. At other times, He tends to intimidate us. He does this for our own good. He often allows painful distress, such as

medicine that might upset us, but in the meantime, He provides palliative treatment in order to comfort us.

He tested the Fathers, even the righteous and the devoted ones, with famines. (Gen 12:10; 26:1; 41:54; 42:1; 43:1) Because He chastens His stubborn people with harsh discipline. He did not take away the thorn of the flesh from the Apostle (2 Cor 12:7-9) even though he asked three times to let it depart. This was in order for God's strength to be made perfect in weakness¹.

St. Augustine



¹ العناية الإلهية للقديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم، ترجمة عابدة حنا بسطا.

² In Matt. Hom., 19:7.

¹ Letter 93 to Vincent.

God's Care for Mankind, As well as for the Church and for everyone

St. Clement of Alexandria says that God, who is full of knowledge, sees everything together in a glance along with every part¹. In His love to humankind, we see "His special care (to each one) and His care in general... for He cares for all²." God's goodness is not an act of contrivance; it is the goodness of personal love³. He cares for all humankind; He takes care of His Church as well as each individual personally. He is not an adversary or an enemy to anyone⁴.

W.E.G Floyd deemed that **Clement of Alexandria** was not ashamed of his theological intellect in regards to God's providence. This intellect was somewhat popular on the ecumenical level amid learned figures who enjoyed excellent educational levels in contemporary Greek and Roman society. Nevertheless, there was a gap between **Clement** and the philosophers of his era. These philosophers deemed that God's providence was limited to the laws of the universe, which meant God established the fixed and unchangeable laws of the universe, like a watchmaker adjusting the time for a device to work automatically. In their view, God is like a Monarch who reigns but does not manage or govern! However, **Clement** declared that God's providence embraces the whole universe, humankind and the Church as well as every human personally. God loves every human.

Floyd says, When Clement talks about God's providence toward individuals, his words come very deep and rich. The man is the **most noblest among** God's creatures **but he is a limited creature, subject to death**. God, in His compassion for the weakness of man, sympathizes with the nature of everyone. **God, in His full knowledge and absolute might, knows the need of every human. He is like a king who governs his people and like a shepherd who tends his sheep. He gives and distributes good things according to everyone's need**. Everything that concerns men is the focus of God's attention; He numbers even his hairs. Also, the least and most accurate movements of man are examined by God, and He keeps track of them⁵.

Origen says:

¹ *Stromata* 6:17.

² *Stromata* 7:2.

³ *Stromata* 1;27; 111

⁴ *Stromata* 712.

⁵ Cf. Floyd: *Clement of Alexandria's treatment of the problem of evil*, Oxford University press 1971, p. 35-36.

- ❖ The number of souls – in our perspective – cannot be counted; the same applies to individuals, for they have countless movements, behaviors, desires, feelings and senses! There is only One who can have control over all of those. Being the best in domination and control, He knows the right times, the proper assistance and when and what to be provided. He also knows ways of training and guidance; He is God, the Father of the whole universe¹.
- ❖ God cares for us every day. He cares for all of us as a group, as well as individuals, secretly and publicly, even when we do not know anything about His Divine intervention².
- ❖ Primarily, all things were made for the benefit of the sensible creature... God is not as described by the Greek philosopher Celsus, who believed that God only cares for the universe as a whole. For in addition to that, God cares for every sensible creature in particular. However, His care for all never fails because even if one part falters, due to the sin of sensible man, God seeks to clean him and purify him, restoring him to the universe³.
- ❖ God's care does not stop at caring for the oxen; it extends further to reach the apostles. For their sake, He said these words: "You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." (Deut 25:4; 1 Cor 9:9)⁴
- ❖ The work of God and His care are above the understanding of the minds of humankind but that does not make it fiction, especially for those who believe in its existence. It is the same for the Divine revelation of the Holy Bible, which exists throughout the text of the Scriptures. It is apparent that, due to our weakness of understanding, we are unable to discover deep and hidden thoughts in every phrase of the Bible. The treasure of Divine wisdom is hidden in poor vessels and among simple words as the Apostle Paul indicated, saying: "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us." (2 Cor 4:7) Therefore, the corruption of eloquence of humankind does not mix with the truth of teaching⁵.

Origen

¹ *De Principiis* 3; 1:14. (In *Philocalia* 21:13).

² *Sel. Ps.* 14:44.

³ *Contra Celsus* 4:99.

⁴ *De Principiis*, 2:42.

⁵ *De Principiis*, 4:1.

God's Providence and Discipline

W.E.G Floyd says that beside the rosy image of God's providence that shows God as the merciful Giver, **Clement** did not forget to show the other image that deals with discipline, where care also is a **disciplinary art**. Man faces discipline for his benefit, and to be an example for others. Reprimand is only a sign of God's fatherhood and goodness of His will; it does not happen from evil intentions. God is good despite threat and intimidation¹.

John Patick says that the controversy stirred by Marcion of Sinope led **Clement** to discuss the relation between Divine justice and Divine goodness². Marcion refers to the justice of God of the Old Testament, portraying Him as violent in His punishment of humans while referring to the goodness of God of the New Testament, Who is compassionate and gracious to humans. **St. Clement** explained that the God of Old Testament is He Himself the God of the New Testament, and that God is compassionate and good in His justice while just in His goodness. Divine punishment is not the outcome of anger, because God truly is just and good at the same time. However, His punishment to humans is not for the purpose of vengeance but always for discipline and treatment. He chastens for three reasons:

1. For the benefit of the individual who is at fault, to transfer him to a better condition, aiming for his salvation.
2. To become an example for others. Through blame and warning, they abstain from committing iniquities.
3. God chastens the sinner who commits iniquity so he would not be subject to judgment because of his sin.

- ❖ Solomon says, "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor detest His correction." (Prov 3:11) How great is God's love to man! He does not talk as a teacher to his students or a master to his servants or as god to human but as a father, the Lord corrects His children³.
- ❖ "God does not hate anything" (Wisd 11:24) or has the desire to destroy anything. Therefore, if He did not hate anything that He created, that indicates He loves His creation. He loves man more than anything else does because man is the most noble among the earthly creatures and he is the beloved creation of God... If someone loves somebody, he will wish

for him the best; therefore, God gives more attention to man...

They say, "If God, who is good, loves man, how could He get angry and punish?" Through punishment (discipline), many human whims are corrected. Reprimand is as a medicine to treat the vagaries of the soul... It is like medicine that melts the hardness of caprices, casting out defilement of life, and breaking arrogance and pride so the patient regains his health and returns to his true humanity¹.

- ❖ Think deeply - how God, through His love for good and goodness, seeks the repentance of man, and with His plan through silent threat, He reveals His love to him. How is it a silent threat? "I will hide my face from them; I will see what their end will be." (Deut 32:2) Because where God's face is seen, there is joy and peace. But when God's face is hidden, evil takes place².
- ❖ God uses firm and bitter words to discipline, as where Solomon points inclusively to God's love to His sons who comply with His instructions, saying: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor detest His correction. For whom the Lord loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights." (Proverbs 3:11-12)³
- ❖ This is the discipline of wisdom. "For whom the Lord loves, He corrects." He allows pain to happen so to give wisdom and to bring back peace and immortality⁴.

St. Clement of Alexandria

- ❖ If the purpose of chastening sinners was not to guide them, the merciful God would not have to pursue the crime with punishment. But as a merciful father, He "chastens" (Prov 3:11) his children to correct them, and as a wise teacher He gives His lazy students a harsh look in order to save them because the student may think that he is safe with the love of his Lord. Some may take exception to the harsh word "anger," but it is a necessary Divine measure. The speaker in Psalms 6:1 knows that God's anger means the correction of man. It is part of the treatment for the patient and a cure for those who despise listening to His word.

Everything comes from God is good and we deserve discipline....

Everything comes from God that appears to be harsh is in fact for teaching and healing.

God is a Physician, a Father and a Teacher. He is not tough, He is

¹ Cf. W. Floyd, p. 40.

² Cf. John Patrick p. 90.

³ St. Clement of Alex: Protrep. 9.

¹ Paedagogus 1:8.

² Paedagogus 1:8.

³ Paedagogus 1:9.

⁴ Stromata 2:2.



nice.... When you see nations under punishment, as it stated in the Holy Bible, compare spiritual things with spirituals (1 Cor 2:13)... realize that what seems to be tough is in fact sweet¹.

Origen

- ❖ His judgment is just, which is followed by compassion. He is full of jealousy (Exod 34:14), yet He is delightful.

All His Divine care is clothed by grace, and all His mighty work is based on justice.

When He has mercy, justice does not stop Him. However, when He takes revenge, His grace does not blame Him.

Through Him, justice and grace are beautified and both help each other daily while being brightened.

He is merciful and strong. Therefore, He is beloved and fearful to those who are wise.

He is so kind, jealous and adorable. He gets angry with he who turns away from justice. (Deut 29:20) He becomes jealous when the act of sin takes place. However, if He meets humility, He becomes delightful.

If He were not against the wicked (evil), He would not be just, and if He were not merciful to the humble, He would not be sweet and delightful.

What is just is also sweet. So His DAivine care is virtuous and far from fault. (Ps 25:8, Rom 9:14-23)²

- ❖ Sometimes He is patient when He sees sin; He does not prevent the sin; He lets the sin win, as if He did not see it.

Moreover, sometimes, when evil takes place, it ignites His anger against the wicked who did that evil.

There are those who spend all the days of their lives in sin and never meet reprimands or blame,

While another, if he thinks of doing evil, is caught by justice and its sharp sword, striking him with a deadly blow.

Sometimes, His servants suffer from sinners and He does not save them or become jealous to take revenge for them while at other times if one of the righteous is insulted, He begins to condemn the word that is not good...

Isaiah was decapitated and his Lord did not condemn King Manasseh of Judah who ordered this act. When Lot the righteous was insulted, Sodom was destroyed by fire.

¹ Origen: *In Ezek, hom. 1:2.*

² الميمر ١ (راجع نص الدكتور بهنام سوني).



At a certain time, He showed His power in the struggle with Nebuchadnezzar when He controlled the fire for Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to trample over it with their feet. (Dan 3)

At another time, Queen Jezebel (1 Kings 21) threatened one of His chosen prophets (Elijah) and He did not take revenge against her who dared to insult the righteous man.

His wrath is controlled; one time He takes revenge and at another, He is tolerant to vengeance.

Moreover, he who stands to inquire about these matters, he becomes upset and asks, "Why is the treatment is not all the same in all matters?"

Why does He chasten someone who sins yet does not do the same with another? Why is He so patient with one while taking revenge severely against someone else? O clay, how dare you argue with the Potter, saying: "What does He need to do or not? (Rom 9:19-21)

The wisdom of the Most High takes place to take care of the world and through it, everything happens in its due time.

The same knowledge that God used to portray the sun and the moon, He uses to care for the world in trouble.

Whether He disciplines, or is tolerant, it is from His wisdom. Moreover, because He cares for people, it is believed thus.

When He chastens and when He ignores discipline, His purpose is the same, which is to correct people every day.

The world benefits from both ways.

If all actions remain without punishment, who would believe that God rules?

Moreover, if He is to correct every evil committed, people would believe that there is no other world.

If each one who does evil has to pay for his action, and if everyone who does good will be rewarded, one may think that judgment is fulfilled and there would be no other judgment¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ الميمر ١ (راجع نص الدكتور بهنام سوني).

Divine Providence and Evil

The Fathers of Alexandria discussed the topic of Divine providence and its relation with evil. Because of their argument and defense against heretics and Gnostics, they had to answer the following questions:

1. Are the world, material things, the body, birth, marriage, etc. considered evil?
2. How do we explain the temptations that we face and the victory of the wicked in their persecution against the righteous?
3. How to explain the presence of evil in a world ruled by Divine providence?

1. THE WORLD AND EVIL

Gnostics believe that the world, in its hidden truth, is an evil, but the Fathers of Alexandria - especially **St. Clement** - believed that the world is a gift from God to man, overseen by Divine providence. It is the best world that could be found! God loves everything He made while hating nothing. Truly, the world is a bridge on which man passes to eternity to enjoy the heavenly glory. The world is made by God; He is the Beneficent Who never created any evil.

W.E.G Floyd posits that **Clement** agreed with the Gnostics that there is a gap between the Most High and the visible world, but disagreed with them when he believed that the world meets with God Himself without a need for mediators or devils. From one side, through incarnation God entered the world as a human being. On the other hand, through His model, His suffering and His death, He prepared the way to be united with the world by grace. However, the Gnostics believe there has been never a way to find a relationship between God and the world¹.

- ❖ This is the utmost privilege that regulates everything according to the Father's will, using best ways to control the world with a diligent power that never tires, doing everything according to His hidden purposes².

St. Clement of Alexandria

2. THE MATERIAL AND EVIL

St. Clement of Alexandria disagrees with what Marcion of Sinope claimed that the material is evil! On the contrary, Clement says the material is under God's control and that everything God made was good, even riches

and wealth. Wealth is a tool that can be used skillfully in a righteous way. Or the opposite may occur; affluence could serve evil. Christ's words to the rich man in Mark 10:17-31 should not be taken with literal and superficial meaning. We need to understand its deep significance.

- ❖ We should not ignore wealth that might help our relatives.... If you use wealth in a smart way, it becomes useful. However, if you lack wisdom, this will affect wealth. Wealth is just a tool; can you use it the right way? It can be like an obedient servant who walks with you. But if man misuses wealth, it becomes a powerful master causing him to make mistakes.

Wealth is supposed to serve, not to dominate! It has no authority over good or evil! It cannot be blamed and is not allowed to be blamed! But he, who is given the capability to either use it the right way or misuse it, is the one to be blamed and that is because he has free will. Man has the mind and wisdom, he is free to choose how to treat and deal with the wealth given to him. It is not right for the man to destroy wealth but he should get rid of the desires that lead him to misuse it. Therefore, whoever is able to use wealth the right way is good and righteous¹.

St. Clement of Alexandria

- ❖ The Holy Bible talked about riches and possessions in three ways: good richness, bad richness and richness neither good nor bad.

Referring to Psalm 34:10 about bad possessions, it is written: "The young lions suffer want and hunger, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing." And in Luke 6:24 it says, "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation." Severe self-discipline when dealing with wealth is like reaching high to perfection. The Lord says about the poor: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt 5:3) And the Psalm says, "This poor man cried out, and the Lord heard him." (Ps 34:6) Also, "Let the poor and the needy praise Your name." (Ps 74:21)

He, who is worthy to seek and follow great virtue, is the one who possesses the good richness. He is the righteous. David praises him, saying, "His descendants will be mighty on earth; the generation of the upright will be blessed. Wealth and riches will be in his house, and his righteousness endures forever." (Ps 112:2-3) In addition, it is said, "The ransom of a man's life is his riches." (Prov 13:8) And about this wealth, it is written in the Book of Revelation about he who is poor and destitute... "So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spit you from My mouth. For you say, 'I am rich, I have prospered, and I need

¹ Cf. *W.E.G. Floyd: Clement of Alexandria's Treatment of the Problem of Evil, Oxford 1971, p. 74.*

² *Stromata 7:2:8.*

¹ *Quis Dives Salvetur 12, 14.*



nothing.' You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked. Therefore, I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see." (Rev 3:16-18).

There is also the richness, which is not good nor bad. It could be good or bad based on the desire and the personality of the one using it. The blessed Apostle Paul says, "Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do well, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share. Storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." (1 Tim 6:17-19)

The wealthy man mentioned in the Gospel of Luke possessed this kind of richness. He refused to give the needy while poor Lazarus was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs, which fell from the rich man's table. Thus, the rich man was sentenced to be tormented in the unbearable fire and flames of eternal Hades. (Luke 16:19-23)¹

Abbot Paphnotius

3. HUMAN BODY AND EVIL

Many of the Gnostics such as the followers of Marcion and Mani - the founder of Manichaeism - considered the human body as material, evil in its nature, an enemy to the soul and a dark element made by the god of evil or by the god who made the material. Others adored the body, so they considered it, or at least some of its parts, as a god or goddess. Still to others, their god is their belly. (Phil 3:19) Plato sees the flesh as a grave for the soul! On the contrary, the Fathers of the Early Church especially Fathers of Alexandria – except Origen – had a holy perspective about the human body. When the Divine Word became flesh, (John 1:14) He presented to us a new excellent perspective about its physicality. We are not ashamed of it and we do not want to destroy it. Rather, we are proud of it because our Creator Himself shared our human nature and became flesh. The flesh is a Divine gift, so we are committed to care for it and meet all its needs. Thus, the body would be able to cooperate with the soul, with the mind and with all its capabilities. Then man can live in harmony without inner disputes.

A. Flesh is created by the righteous God, who does not create any evil. God does not hate anything – even flesh. He loves all that He created². The

¹ St. John Cassian: Conference 3:9. (See also Conf. 6:3 Abbot Theodore).

² Strom. 3:3:16.



human body declares goodness and providence of God, the Creator. The whole nature of the flesh is from God, the Mighty Creator.

B. The soul owns the body, using it as a tool and a seat¹.

C. The body is a home for the soul. They share the holiness received from the Holy Spirit², and the man as a whole – flesh and soul – will be glorified in the coming age.

D. The harmony of the body is attributed to the righteous desires of the soul and the mind³.

E. The Logos (the Divine Word) took our human body (as the word is meant to give a real and not metamorphic meaning). He took real flesh to declare the holiness of our bodies. He became a man like us, speaking with a human mouth⁴. He did not disdain our body that He took for Himself. It became evidence to prove His appreciation to humanity, its material and the world.

- ❖ Those who disdain material and flesh are mistaken. They are not aware that man was created with an erect stature to look and think of heaven and that the senses are given in order to obtain knowledge. Also, members of the body are orderly made for good, not for lust. The body is home for the soul. The soul is most precious to God; the Holy Spirit honored it by sanctifying the soul and the flesh together. The soul became perfect by the perfection of the Savior⁵.
- ❖ The soul intrinsically is not good, just as the flesh is not bad by its nature... God turns everything for good. The soul that chooses gracious life, life that is from God and from righteousness, can turn earth into heaven.
- ❖ There is no way that the Savior might hate humankind, because according to His abundant love, He did not despise the weakness of the human body. Instead, He took it as a body for Himself and came to the world for the salvation of humankind in general⁶.
- ❖ The harmony of the body leads to more understanding, which in turn leads to the goodness of nature.... He, who dedicates himself to a life of righteousness while he is of flesh, will be able to enter immortality⁷.

¹ Paed. 1:8.

² Stromata 4:26:163.

³ Stromata 4:4:18.

⁴ Stromata 7:11:112.

⁵ Stromata 4:26.

⁶ Strom. 7:2:8.

⁷ Strom. 4:4.



❖ Gnostics (i.e., those who experience true spiritual knowledge) are beyond and above pleasure and desires (whims). They know what they are doing. Gnostics are above that of the world¹.

St. Clement of Alexandria

❖ Our bodies, souls, and our spirits are our lyres whose their strings work together in harmony to produce the melody².

St. Jerome

❖ There are those who push their bodies to do unusual effort through abstinence. Those people lack discernment and will find themselves living far away from God!³

❖ To reach complete purity, the soul and the flesh are required to work diligently together in repentance. Both should work together equally and in harmony.

If the mind is given a certain kind of grace, it will be able to fight relentlessly against lusts and receive thoughts of the Holy Spirit with its guidance and comforts. This mind will be able to dismiss the unclean desires that come from the lusts of the heart.

Due to the work shared between the mind of man, or his soul, and the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit helps man to execute the commandments he received. It guides him to drive out all lusts from the soul. It matters not if those lusts came from the soul itself, separate from the body, or they came from the body.

The Holy Spirit teaches man to keep all his body, from head to toe, in harmony: It keeps **the eyes** to look at things with purity. It keeps **the ears** to hearken in peace or to listen to things relevant to peace without delighting in the talk of others, saying fabrications, speaking falsely against others or degrading others. It keeps **the tongue** to utter only with goodness, giving weight to each word, not allowing any unclean or lustful thing to be part of his talk. It keeps **the hands** to move normally so they are raised to pray, and to offer mercy and show generosity. It keeps **the stomach** to set a certain limit for eating and drinking, only to meet the need adequate for the body, not allowing lust and gluttony to pass the limit set for his stomach. It keeps **the feet** to walk in righteousness according to God's will, with the purpose of conducting good works.

Consequently, the whole body becomes accustomed to each good deed, giving itself to the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it gradually

¹ *Stromata*, 2: 22

² *On Ps. 21*.

³ *Fr. Malaty: The Coptic Church... as an Ascetic Church*, 1986, p. 24.



changes until – to some extent – it eventually partakes in the characteristics of the spiritual body that will be given to him in the fair resurrection¹.

St. Anthony the Great

❖ The body did not undermine the glory of the Word! Far from it! The body had been glorified by Him.

Pope Athanasius the Apostolic

❖ The Word became flesh in order to alter our bodies to be spiritual (i.e., the body will carry the characteristics of the spirit where eventually it will dress the image of the second Adam)... and to sanctify the whole body together. For in Him, all first born became holy².

St. Gregory of Nyssa

❖ The human body is a sign of goodness of God and the care of the Creator of the body.

❖ We acknowledge that the nature of the body is entirely from God, its Mighty Creator.

❖ The body is not an evil if it avoids wickedness, i.e. it avoids making mistakes that make him wrong. Man was not made to do evil, but he is the one who found it. Because of both sides of man – body and soul – the beneficent God has made them good. Nevertheless, the man did evil, and therefore became wicked³.

❖ Therefore, I do not ask what went wrong but I say it is insane what the followers of Mani attributed to our bodies, calling the body a "dark element." Be aware that the true teacher preaches to men to love their wives the way they love their bodies, like the love of Christ to the Church. (Eph 5:25)⁴

❖ How could it be possible that the enemy (Satan) created the body if the souls themselves — while controlling the body — take the members of the body as an example of having no hostile divisions? God granted this feature to the body naturally. Therefore, the souls should follow His example and love each other with blessings.

❖ For good reason, the Apostle Paul wrote to the people of Rome, "I beseech

¹ رسالة ١.

² *Contra Eunomius*, 4 PG 45:637AB

³ العفة للقديس أغسطينوس، ٢٠.

⁴ العفة للقديس أغسطينوس، ٢٢.



you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." (Rom 12:1) When we argue that darkness is different than light, and light unlike darkness, and if we offer our bodies as a living holy sacrifice, acceptable to God while we consider our bodies as "dark elements," then our argument will go in vain¹.

St. Augustine

- ❖ Truly, God granted us eyes, mouths and hearing so all these members could serve Him. Therefore, we utter with His words, do His works, sing for Him with perpetual praise and offer Him thanksgiving sacrifices. Our consciences will be completely pure! As the body becomes healthier when enjoying pure air, it is the same for the soul; it enjoys practical wisdom when it lives with such practices. If the eyes of body are to be found in a room full of smoke, wouldn't they be crying all the time. However, if they are to be found in pure air, or in meadows, in fountains or gardens, wouldn't they be able to see clearly and with more peace? It is the same for the eye of the soul. When fed by the meadows of spiritual sayings, it becomes strong and sharp-eyed. But if it walks in the smog of the matters of this life, it will cry constantly and will wail here and later. Therefore, one says, "**For my days are consumed like smoke.**" (Ps 102:3)²
- ❖ We don't want to discard the body but rather lose its corruption. Our body is a burden on us, not because it is flesh, but because it is corrupted and subject to pain. When the new life is present, it removes this corruption. By this, I mean it removes this corruption, not the flesh itself³. I you want to know what kind of body God created first, we need to go to Paradise and look for the man who was created in the beginning. That body was not corrupted or dead. It was like a gold statue that emerged from the oven, shining with brightness, free from any corruption. It did not sweat or feel tired due to work. There was nothing like that to disturb it or be against it⁴.
- ❖ The body itself is not an obstacle, but because of our wickedness, we cannot inherit the kingdom of God⁵.
- ❖ When God created the body it was good. It was not an evil of itself but after sin, nothing good dwelt in it any longer.

¹ العفة للقديس أغسطينوس، ٢٤.

² In *Matth. Hom.* 2:9.

³ In *2 Cor. hom* 10:3.

⁴ *Concerning Statues, homily 11.*

⁵ *Homilies on Corinth., homily 42:2.*



- ❖ We need to live not according to the body, i.e., the body should not be the master of our life. Rather we should let the body be the follower, not the leader. The body should not manage our lives, but should be managed by the law of the spirit¹.
- ❖ I want this body to die so as to not commit the sin. I do not ask for the death of the body but I want the body not to sin again. If a dead body cannot possibly sin, then whoever comes out of the water of the baptism will be clean from sin. Moreover, if you already died in this water, then you have to remain dead to commit sin².

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ If the body is guilty then the Savior came for the sake of sinners. Our Savior said, "I did not come to call the righteous but sinners to repent." (Mark 2:17) This shows the value of the body in the sight of God and that this body is to be glorified... and is in need to be saved³.

St. Justine

- ❖ Do not tell me that the flesh (body) is the cause for sin. If the body is the cause for sin, why do the dead not sin? Because the body does not sin by itself but the soul commits sin through the body. The body is a tool.
- ❖ The Lord took a body that He was not ashamed of because He is the One who formed these bodies. Nevertheless, who told us about this? The Lord says to Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I sanctified you." (Jer 1:5) If He was not ashamed to create the body of man, would He be ashamed of the body in which He hid His divinity? He is the One who creates children in wombs, as Job wrote, "Did you not pour me out like milk, and curdle me like cheese, clothe me with skin and flesh, and knit me together with bones and sinews? (Job 10:10, 11)⁴

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

- ❖ During baptism we say words to deny Satan. The body is not to be denied but we deny Satan to show the necessity of having the Holy Spirit poured into the body. These words of denial do not prevent us from living within the body, for the Apostle himself lived in flesh when he wrote so. He meant to deny the lusts of the body that bring death to man⁵.

¹ In *Rom. hom* 14.

² In *Epis. Ad Rom. Hom* 2.

³ *On the Resur.* 8.

⁴ *Catechetical Lectures, 12:26.*

⁵ *Adv. Haer.5: 10: 2.*



❖ This will not be reached by denying the body, but through the participation of the Spirit, because those to whom he wrote are not without a body. They received the Spirit of God with which we cry out, "Abba Father." (Rom 8:15)¹

St. Jerome

4. GRIEF AND EVIL²

According to the Gnostics, there was no solution in regard to the issue of evil, because there was no explanation to show the cause of the existence of evil in the world. Believers are subject to face sorrows unfairly from their persecutors in a world governed by God, who is Good, Mighty and the Pantocrator, where nothing in the world happened without His good will!

St. Clement of Alexandria and others among the Fathers of Alexandria presented the solution in the following points:

A. The existence of evil does not contradict Divine providence or God's goodness. However, in the presence of Divine providence man enjoys freedom of will, one of the greatest gifts from God. Therefore, God does not keep evil from happening but He does not cause it to happen. The one who chooses evil is accountable for his choice. God is not responsible.

Professor E.F. Osborn of the University of Melbourne says that **Clement** presents the problem and offers the solution with it. It is not the will of the Father for the Lord (the Son) and the martyrs to suffer, but suffering happens with His permission.

In short, the only possible solution is that these matters happen and God does not stop it. This will serve to keep Divine providence and God's goodness. We need to believe that God is not the reason behind our sorrows - it is out of the question. But it is worthy for us to be convinced that God does not prevent those who cause them³. We need to distinguish between what God causes to happen and what happens without God's interference to prevent it. For it is not appropriate for God's providence and His goodness that He causes evil to happen. Yet it also is not consistent with His providence and goodness that evil things take place while He does not interfere to prevent it. God causes good things to happen but evil things happen and He does not stop them.

Thus, without preventing evil from happening, the soul will be condemned according to its freedom of choice and God will not be responsible under any

¹ *Adv. Haer* 5: 8: 1.

² Cf. *W.E.G. Floyd: Clement of Alexandria...; E.F. Osborn: The Philosophy of Clement of Alexandria, Cambridge 1957, chs 6-8*

³ *Stromata* 4:86; 2:286:11.



condition for the evil in our life¹. Our choices and our desires are the reasons behind sin². It does not mean that man willingly chooses evil but he is tempted by the lust that makes him believe harmful things are good and desirable. Nevertheless, we are capable of avoiding this blindness, to choose what is good and beneficial, and to renounce evil imaginations and deception. Despite the active interest of Satan, God from above has made everything to work for good. There is nothing to reject God or stand against Him because He is the Mighty God. The thoughts and works of rebels and the disobedient are only something partial that happens due to their desire to do evil. While this happens as a case of illness, the providence of the universe leads them to a healthy ending³.

A contemporary intellectual says that without the freedom of choice to choose between doing evil or good, man becomes like a puppet with good behavior, or like a sensitive machine, but not like a living being responsible for his own conduct. The world would be best when there are living creatures who have their behavior (with its complete freedom) so that it would not be filled with puppets or machines (that have no freedom of choice)⁴.

B. God does not prevent those who cause sorrows. He gives people freedom of will but He turns their evil choices to goodness. He did not stop the foolishness of the cross but He brought out goodness from it⁵.

Dr. Osborn says that God does not stop His opponents from doing evil but "He uses the mistakes of those who dare to commit them against Him, and turns them to work for good." **Clement** quotes Isaiah 5:5: "Break down its wall and it shall be trampled down." This verse refers to a vineyard that produced wild grapes. God did not knock it down but He took away the hedge that protected it! He did not stop animals from stepping on it, keeping in mind that having them trample on the vineyard is an aggressive and destructive action, but He turned these actions into useful results. For He knocked down the wild grapes, took care of the earth by taking away what was bad and used crimes of the enemy against His plantation to work for the good of His vineyard. **Clement** continues, saying that Divine providence is one way to reform and benefit those who test it. There are also other ways where God turns evil to good. Philosophy is a result of theft; it steals Divine wisdom but God turns the theft to good.

The main job for Divine providence is not to allow the evil that comes

¹ *Stromata* 1:84; 11:54.

² *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta, Von Arim, 3:236.*

³ *Stromata* 1:86; 2:55:19.

⁴ *Temmant: Philosophical Theology, Cambridge 1925-30, vol. 2, p. 188.*

⁵ *Stromata* 4:12:87.



from voluntary rebellion to remain useless or unhelpful, or be harmful. That is because God's wisdom, grace and strength do not stop at doing good because intrinsically good is the nature of God, as heat is the nature of fire and illumination is the nature of light. However, the priority for God's work is to reach the good that comes out of evil actions committed by man. God turns everything man sees as evil to work for good, exactly as in the case of believing in God reached through temptation¹.

❖ Everything in the world is well-organized and was put in the right order through providence of God and His wisdom. There is nothing there to be of no use in God's sight, whether good or evil... God did not create evil and if others try to practice evil, He does not stop them in spite of the fact that He is capable to do so! He utilizes evil for necessary purposes. Through those who have done evil, He makes those who are doing good to be famous and known, worthy of being praised and being admired. If evil was to disappear, then what would oppose good? There would be nothing to stand against — it would not be there. And when there is nothing to stand against good, virtue will not shine and illuminate with its dazzling brightness to ensure its superiority. Virtue is not considered a virtue until it is tested and tempted! **Origen** compares Joseph to his brothers, where the sin of his brothers led to the story of Exodus! Likewise as in the story of Balak, Judas Iscariot and even Satan himself, because if Satan was prevented from doing evil, our unintentional struggle against his lusts and abominations would fade and we would have been deprived from completing our struggle. (2 Tim 2:5) Therefore, we would not expect the crown of victory!²

Origen

C. **St. Clement of Alexandria** looks at evil in the world with an educational and disciplinary view. He believes that a person learns a lot from evil, while God through His providence transforms even our mistakes to become treatment and medicine for our salvation, for He is the Lover of mankind. For example, when **St. Clement** debated the Gnostic Basilides, he explained that the martyrs were not punished when they were tormented because of sins they committed. Rather, their martyrdom was due to the sins and the oppression of their persecutors. God does not let martyrdom happen without useful results, for the martyr becomes a saint through the discipline of pain³.

¹ *Stromata* 1:86, 2:55:22.

² *In Num. hom* 14:2.

³ *Stromata* 4:12.



- ❖ If we learn that some of the painful temptations - if it is possible to say so - are as evils caused by parents, teachers and those who discipline us, or even caused by the surgeons who use a scalpel or a sharp knife for the purpose of healing, should we say that the fathers are hurting us? This accusation is not right. God allows evil to harm us for the purpose of reforming and healing¹.
- ❖ In fact, the purpose of temptations that happen to us is to reveal to us who we are and to bring to light what was hidden in our hearts².
- ❖ At least we need to assume that the current temptation happening to us is for the purpose of testing us and for us to examine our love for God. It is written in Deuteronomy: "For the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul." (Deut 13:3; 6:5; Matt 22:27) Therefore, if you are tempted, you must walk behind the Lord your God, fear Him and keep His commandments, especially when you hear His voice. You should remain with Him, for He will take you from tribulation and abide in you. The Apostle says, "Growing is from God." (Col 2:19)³
- ❖ Faith is tested by temptation. When man defeats temptation and stays strong in his faith, he meets another temptation and thus goes from one temptation to another. All the while passing through these temptations, one after the other, he grows in virtues he experiences one by one. This fulfills what is written: "They go from virtue (strength) to virtue (strength)" (Ps 84:7 *LXX*) until the soul reaches its purpose, i.e. reaching the top of virtues, crossing the rivers of God and receiving the heritage promised by Him⁴.
- ❖ If the soul is not seasoned by perpetual temptations, it becomes weak and fragile. Therefore, there is an adage that "every offering should be seasoned by salt." (Lev 2:13)⁵.
- ❖ I believe that temptation gives a kind of strength and self-defense. Temptations are mixed with virtues and there is no virtue appropriate or perfect without temptations⁶.

Origen

¹ *Contra Celsus* 6:56.

² *On Prayer* 17.

³ *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, 6.

⁴ *In Num. hom* 27:5.

⁵ *In Lev. hom* 27:12.

⁶ *In Lev. hom* 27:12.



❖ The patience of Job did not bring any benefit to Satan. Job came to a better situation through his temptations. He benefited because he was able to bear temptations with patience.

Judas also was not exempt from eternal punishment due to his betrayal, although which through it he helped usher the salvation of mankind.

It is important not to look at the result of the work but to the purpose of doing that work.

Let us adhere to this, and be certain that no one can cause evil to anyone unless that other person accepts this evil with spiritual negligence. The blessed Apostle Paul stressed this, saying: "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God." (Rom 8:28) When he says, "All things work together for good," he meant to include everything together, whether they be pleasant or appear to be harmful¹.

Abbot Theodore

W.E.G. Floyd says that through Divine providence, the world carries homogeneity and harmony despite the presence of contraries like hot and cold, dryness and humidity, givers and those who take, life and death, even good and evil... These powers challenge man. Therefore, he would use his power to choose freely.

Origen believes that calamities such as pain and martyrdom are gifts, not evil, and they are given to some of the believers through Divine providence. He says that no one comes to the arena of martyrdom without Divine providence².

God uses martyrdom of His believers as a testimony to attract others to the Christian faith.

❖ Let us learn from the following phrase about the great privilege Christians receive due to persecution, how many special blessings are given, how God becomes the Leader of the Christians and how the Holy Spirit pours abundantly on them. "The grace of God reaches its peak when the hardness of hearts stands against us!" Then we gain peace with God when we suffer the difficulty of pain that comes from human agony... Despite the fact Moses and Aaron enjoyed prominence due to the works they achieved in their life, and despite they were significantly consequential from their normal achievements, the glory of God wouldn't have shone on them if they did not suffer from persecution, troubles and risks, even death! You too who hear me now, do not think that the glory of God will shine upon you while you are lazy and idle³.

¹ *St. John Cassian: Conferences, 6:9.*

² *Exhortation to Martyrdom 34.*

³ *In Num. hom. 9:2.*



❖ Divine providence encourages people to proselytize despite the many obstacles that stand against the spread of the teachings of Jesus in the world. Nevertheless, because God is He who wants to assist the Gentiles through the teachings of Jesus Christ, therefore any plot conducted by people against Christians fails. The more kings and rulers persecute them, the more they increase in number and power¹.

Origen

Abbot Theodore explains two biblical texts. The first: "That they may know... there is none besides me. I am the Lord and there is no other. I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity." (Isiah 45:6-7). The second: "If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people be afraid? If there is calamity in a city, will not the Lord have done it?" (Amos 3:6) He said:

[The Bible uses some phrases that do not translate their original meaning. For example, it uses the word "evils" to give the meaning of "sorrows and tribulations." This is not because these matters are evil or because they carry the nature of evil. But those who experience these matters that work for their good, they look at them as evil.

When Divine judgment talks with people, it uses their human language and emotions. The physician conducts amputation or cauterization for those who suffer from sores so to keep them healthy. However, for those who cannot bear the pain, they see it as evil. The pinprick and the whip are considered useful for the wild horse. Chastening is seen as bitter for those who receive it. The Apostle says, "Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful. Nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." (Heb 12:11) "For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives... for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? (Heb 12:6-7)

Therefore, the word "evils" has been used sometimes instead of "sorrows," as when we read: "Then God saw their works that they turned from their evil ways, and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it." (Jonah 3:10) Also, "For I know that You are a Gracious and Merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness, one who relents from doing harm." (Jonah 4:2) This is to say that He regrets the pain and losses that He allows to happen because of our sins.

¹ *Contra Celsus, 7:26.*



Since another prophet knows that others might benefit from these evils, so he prays for these evils to come upon them for their good and not from envy on his part. He said, "Increase evil on them, O Lord. Increase evil on the greats of the earth." (Isiah 26:15) And the Lord Himself says: "Behold, I will bring evil on them," (Jer 11:1) i.e., sorrows and losses with which they are to be disciplined for their good. Then they come to the end, those who despise Me in their prosperity and richness.

Therefore, we cannot confirm that these calamities are evil in its nature because they work for the good of many people, giving them chances for eternal blessing. Hence, I go back to the question that I was asked and say that all of the things that have been brought through our enemies, it should not be considered as evil because these things themselves intrinsically are not evil or good. At the end, we can say, we do not take these things as the way they were meant to be seen by those who did them in their rage and anger. Rather, we look at it from the viewpoint of those who bear them. If one of the saints happens to be killed, we should not consider that he was harmed but in fact, neither evil nor good has happened to him. Murder is an evil for the evil man while it is rest and release from evils for the good man. "Who rejoices exceedingly and is glad when they can find the grave? Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden?" (Job 3:22-23) The good man does not suffer any loss if he dies. He does not experience anything unusual, but due to the crime of the enemy, he confronts death, which he would normally face in any event. Ultimately one day he will pay the debt of death as inevitable rule, and to gather the greatest of the joyous fruits, and to receive great reward¹.]

¹ Cassian: *Conferences*, 6:6.



Divine Providence and Distress

Some people might wonder: if God seeks the welfare of man, and created the whole world with its potential to meet all of man's needs, why does He allow distress and deprivation to happen?

St. Clement of Alexandria believes the goodness of God does not stop with Him being absolutely good; in His goodness He turns all things to work for my good, my edification and my glory. Even Satan and all his malicious works, God uses them for temporary discipline or to sanction me for my glory and my crown.

God does not take away my temptations, but He allows them to happen. **St. John Chrysostom** explains why:

First: to let you know that you have become more powerful.

Second: to continue to be humble and not haughty of your talents. He permits you to be under stress of temptations.

Third: the wicked Satan may doubt for a moment that you left him, but having tempted you, he will be sure that you have left him completely and escaped from his hand.

Fourth: with temptations, you become greater in power and strength and stronger than steel in your firmness.

Fifth: to obtain clear proof of the treasures promised for you. Satan does not want to fight you unless he sees that you are greatly honored. As an example, in the beginning he tempted Adam because Adam was highly honored. Also, Satan prepared himself for the fight with Job because Job was successful and honored by all¹.

❖ Jesus our Leader allowed Himself to pass through temptations in order to teach His children how to fight².

St. Augustine

❖ We experience sorrows caused by not just our enemies but also by our families and our friends. God allows these things to happen; it is His form of discipline and not to let us down³.

❖ The more temptations we have, the more graces we get⁴.

❖ We need to surrender to our Creator and be happy and pleased to accept

¹ *In Matt. hom 13:1.*

² *Sermons on N.T. Lessons 1.*

³ *Homilies on Cor. 9:1.*

⁴ *Homilies on Cor., 26:3.*



what He decides for us. We should acknowledge the Lord's decisions and not dwell on how things appear to happen. Above all, the Lord knows more than we do regarding what is good for us, and what steps are necessary for our salvation¹.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ If the universe will vanish and the shape of the world will change, then why do we wonder when we feel a **significant pain** and when we receive sorrows despite the fact that we are part of His creation? God allows these sorrows to happen, commensurate to our capacity. He will not allow you to be tempted beyond your ability. He also uses temptations to provide you with the means to escape its enticements².
- ❖ The Lord "orders all things in measure and number and weight." (Wisd 11:21) He allows us to be tempted but not beyond our ability. He allows sorrows for those who fight in the path of true religion but He does not allow them to be tempted beyond their capacity. "He gives tears to drink in great measure" (Ps 80:5) to all of those who should be thankful in the midst of their sorrows³.
- ❖ I am convinced that if temptation happens, a single voice pleading for compassion would leave an impact on God, Who is good. He will not keep His mercy far away but will provide you recourse to escape from temptation and the strength to bear it⁴.

St. Basil the Great

- ❖ If we did not have opponents, there wouldn't be a battle or a reward dedicated to the victors and the heavenly kingdom wouldn't be offered to us. "For **this slight momentary affliction** is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure." (2 Cor 4:17) There would be no hope for us in the glorious life to come and no reward for being patient in the tribulations we bear⁵.
- ❖ It is not easy for anyone to receive that **temporary sorrow** unless they have complete love for God in Jesus Christ with the Holy Spirit poured into their hearts⁶.

¹ Homilies on Genesis, 30: 16.

² Letter 139.

³ Letter 219.

⁴ Letter 256.

⁵ In Num. Hom. 14:2.

⁶ Comm. On the Song of Songs.



- ❖ God helps us to rid our sorrows but that does not mean we will be without any troubles. The Apostle Paul says: "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair," (2 Cor 4:8) as if there is no time in this life without distress. With God's assistance, we do not feel we are crushed. "Despair," according to Hebrew linguistic use, means we pass through hard situations that are beyond our will. Being **perplexed** has to do with our free choice. When we are beset by affliction, and fall under its power, then we are truly assailed on all sides yet not crushed¹.

Origen

- ❖ When God wants a man to win and make him great, He first hands him over to temptations to be tested and examined. Then, God shows this man the beauty of the world through blessings this man receives from Him.
When God wanted Joseph to be successful and become the lord of Egypt, what happened that led to a good ending? First, his brothers arrested him, humiliated him and mocked him. They removed his clothes, threw him in a pit where he had no hope of escape and sold him to slave traders. He was a vassal serving lords; the good son of a freeman was enslaved while he did nothing wrong. If anyone sees this evil that befell Joseph, he would never think it happened for good. Nevertheless, God, who knew what needed to be done for Joseph, did not have compassion on him while he suffered from all these evils. He left him to be thrown in the pit, sold to the slave traders and unjustly placed in prison. After all of this, his beauty shone like the sun and his righteousness was clear as gold. His suffering vanished like smoke, he became like a king on top of a ship and he reached the greatness planned for him by God. Joseph was first humbled before he was elevated to his lofty status².
- ❖ In the Lord's Prayer there is phrase "**Lead us not into temptation.**" This is because human nature is weak if tempted... When enemy devils fight man, assistance comes from God. He is like the guard who does not sleep or slumber. Thus, this hidden power keeps humankind safe³.
- ❖ If the physician does not allow the patient to drink cold water, it is because he cares for his recovery. The physician loves his patient but does not allow him to drink in order that he may stay healthy and not become ill with a worse disease.... God, Who is the hidden Physician for all souls, wants to heal all on daily basis with His love. If He takes away from you the temporal effects of clothes and food, He does so for your good. If you

¹ On Prayer, 30:1.

² الرسالة الثانية والثلاثون.

³ راجع الدكتور الأب بهنام سوني: الإنسان في تعليم مار يعقوب السروجي المفلان، 1995، ص 153.



are a laborer, you can see this¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

1. GOD'S PROVIDENCE SURPASSES THE HUMAN MIND WHEN ALLOWING DISCIPLINE ACCORDING TO HIS LONG-SUFFERING

- ❖ When the Most High Lord sees sins taking place yet stays silent, do not think He is not jealous or an avenger. And when He allows tough discipline, do not think His anger caused Him to punish the sin he saw. God is the same with long-suffering patience and with discipline because God never changes².
- ❖ He is patient with transgressors in order to restore them. However, He does not take part with sinners even though He bears them. When He does not rescue the righteous who are abused, He adds to their beauty through their distress. Nevertheless, because you are worried and arrogant, you blame the Wise Manager³.
- ❖ He did not rescue all his servants so that they would share in His glory. He allowed them to die by sword or to be eaten by predatory beasts in order for them to receive the praise, rewarding their patience with distinction and magnificence. He saved some and ignored others in order for His servants to be glorified with Him⁴.
- ❖ With regard to His servants, when they are persecuted He saves one and leaves the other. He saved some from the fire and the animals while leaving others to burn or shunning them to predators. He saved Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego yet left the woman with seven sons without rescue but all eleven are His own. (Dan 3, 2 Mac 7) I wonder why? If He saved all his servants from the plagues, their love would have been less because of the praise... Also, He would be blamed if His servants suffer while none of them are saved. Some will say that God is not there for them, and if He was there, why did He ignore His beloved? Therefore, He rescues whenever He wants so the world can tell there is a Lord Who is with power. To Him, His servants offer loyalty. And in other situations, He allows His servants to endure tribulations so the world can see their

¹ راجع الدكتور الأب بهنام سُوني: الإنسان في تعليم مار يعقوب السروجي الملقان، 1995، ص 24.

² لميمر 1 (راجع نص الدكتور بهنام سوني).

³ راجع الدكتور الأب بهنام سُوني: الإنسان في تعليم مار يعقوب السروجي الملقان، 1995، ص 143.

⁴ راجع الدكتور الأب بهنام سُوني: الإنسان في تعليم مار يعقوب السروجي الملقان، 1995، ص 142.



true love and devotion.

When He allows His servants to suffer, their love grows greatly and He is victorious when He wants to rescue them. Therefore, He did not save all of His servants so He wouldn't be the only one to be glorified... He allows them to die by the sword and by the beasts in order for them to be praised and because they endured suffering for His sake. (Heb 11:33-34)

Accordingly, He saved some and did not save others, so He will be praised and His servants will be praised with Him. When He saves those, He takes all the credit for Himself. However, when He does not save them, He wants them to be glorified with Him.

He has pity on them and allows them to die for His sake so that they are pleased to ask Him to be rewarded. In order for them to be glorified, their love was despised by fire, sword and beasts. (Heb 11:33-34)

And the world would wonder: who are those servants, the servants of God who walk to death for His sake, if it is necessary?

Let the love of His servants win victory all over the earth and He will be glorified through those witnesses.

And they will be blessed because, due to their actions, He is glorified Who is worthy to be exalted and praised¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

2. LOVE OF GOD MAKES OUR PAIN EASY

- ❖ Above all, this is the road in which the righteous walk when suffering for His sake. They do not dwell on what appears to happen to them; they recognize the hidden reason behind it. Therefore, they can endure everything.

Thus was Paul, the teacher of Gentiles. He considered prison, the false accusations, the daily risks and all of these many unbearable difficulties as trifles. This was not because they were actually insignificant but because of the reasons behind these events and what they portended. He believed he should not shrink from facing these threats.

Listen to what he has to say: "For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure." (2 Cor 4:17) Because we anticipate the glory that is prepared for us and the eternal bliss that we will receive, he says we endure these troubles one after the other without any difficulty, considering them of no consequence.

Don't you see that the love of God reduces the severity of the troubles so we do not feel them when they happen to us? Therefore, this blessed man was of course able to endure everything courageously while he was

¹ لميمر 27 (راجع نص الدكتور بهنام سوني).



protected by faith and hope in God¹.

- ❖ The ability to endure these temptations comes through the grace of God, which we receive when we ask for it. God gives us patience and leads us to salvation. Therefore, temptations become bearable².

St. John Chrysostom

3. THE RICH AND THE POOR ARE BRETHREN IN GENDER AND BAPTISM

- ❖ Our father Adam begat all of us, and you too, and both of you are brethren. O you, who are rich, have compassion on your brother. (Matt 23:8) Notice that God has given your brother the same body as yours...

He looks like you, so he is obviously your brother, and it is said, "Do not hide yourself from your own kin." (Is 58:7)

He is not a stranger to ignore, and it is written that you shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Matt 22:39)

If you do not have compassion on he, who is from your flesh when he is poor, be wise and honor the image of your Lord.

And if you do not desire to have mercy on the poor while you represent the image of God, you need to honor this image of greatness.

And if you forget what Moses' book taught you, remember "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Lev 19:18) Also, you should not forget the baptismal, which is your new womb. (John 3:1-21)

Behold, the poor wears Christ as you do, and in the baptismal water both of you are brethren of the Only-Begotten Son. (1 Cor 15:49; Gal 3:27; Matt 23:8)

Do not hide yourself from your own flesh; as it is written, you need to show him respect because he is the image of the Great One. (Is 58:7)

Because he wears the baptism and he is your brother, you therefore need to give him attention lest you be condemned through justice.

O you both, the rich and the poor; you have been made to be part of the world, as two members in one body.

You, the rich one, have mercy in the world. And you, who is poor, take care not to grumble against the Creator.

Let us give glory to the Creator who made the rich and the poor. To Him praise be given by both³.

¹ *Homilies on Genesis 25:17.*

² *Homilies on Cor. 24:1.*

³ الميمر 27 (راجع نص الدكتور بهنام سوني).



- ❖ Behold, here Lazarus walks with Abraham because of his poverty and Abraham is in the kingdom because of his wealth!... Richness and poverty are equal, and he who is wise can handle dealing with both.

The poor should be pleased with what he has and the rich should be merciful... and never arrogant when dealing with the poor because it is a fact that both have the same flesh. They are equals¹.

- ❖ God entered the house of Abraham through the angels. If you ask Him, He will enter your house through the poor².

- ❖ When God created the universe, it was beautiful. The unpleasant things that now occupy it do not belong there. When God made the world, He saw that it was very lovely but these unclean things entered by the serpent... The Creator did not make a place for sin; therefore, we disrespect nature daily when we sin. The evil lust entered into our beautiful nature from outside, causing our nature to live with anxiety and lose its original beauty³.

- ❖ Before Adam committed sin, he enjoyed the great beauty in Eden, which did not need any additional grace. There was no need for Adam to do any work, to do good deeds, to exert any effort or to try to be righteous. It was a new creation, appropriate and impeccable, glorified and filled with the beauty of perfection. It was pure, lacking nothing. And due to this beauty of the universe that God created, He said it was very good, praising His creation. If God sees that the universe was beautiful, how could it be possible to add more of purity and beauty to it?⁴

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ راجع الدكتور الأب بهنام سوني: الإنسان في تعليم مار يعقوب السروجي الملقان، 1995، ص 143-144.

² راجع الدكتور الأب بهنام سوني: الإنسان في تعليم مار يعقوب السروجي الملقان، 1995، ص 164.

³ راجع الدكتور الأب بهنام سوني: الإنسان في تعليم مار يعقوب السروجي الملقان، 1995، ص 168.

⁴ راجع الدكتور الأب بهنام سوني: الإنسان في تعليم مار يعقوب السروجي الملقان، 1995، ص 170.



**Queen Mary & Prince Tadros
Coptic Orthodox Church**

283 DAVIDSONS MILL ROAD
SOUTH BRUNSWICK, NJ 08831

**St. George Coptic Orthodox
Sporting - Alex. - Egypt**

SGE