



# THE CHURCH



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Our faith in God is not just believing in Him as the Supreme Being who rules the Universe but it is a daily experience of our close relationship with Him. He is the "God of men" who is involved in our salvation. Through His infinite love He sent His eternal word to give His life on behalf of men. On the other hand, believers who taste this divine love desire to meet this love with love, as children of God accept God's fatherhood, longing for the eternal dwelling in His glorious bosom. The Church is the spiritual body wherein this mutual love between God and man is declared and practiced. In fact, the church is not a social institution, but it represent "life in Christ "or "communion with the Father in the Son by the Holy Spirit ", or enjoyment of the Grace of God.

## **THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH**

The Church is a subject that stands at the very heart of the Bible, for she is the object of the redemption which the Bible proclaims<sup>1</sup>. God purchased her at the cost of Christ's blood (Acts 20: 28). Understanding the church means understanding the relationship between God and His most beloved creature on earth, i.e., man; the divine plan of salvation, God's fatherhood, the kingdom of Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit, the methods of grace , the meaning of the history of mankind, the destiny of men ...It is through the church that God makes known His redeeming wisdom even to the heavenly host (Eph.3:10).

This deep spiritual view toward the church is declared by the Holy Bible, especially in St. Paul's epistle to the Ephesians. The Alexandrians who enjoyed the membership of an apostolic and well organized church adopted this spiritual concept. According to them, the Church is not a human organization, but a divine fellowship of repented sinners who trust in the savior and enjoy

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<sup>1</sup>Carl F. Henry: Basic Doctrines, 1980, P.241

unity with Him and also unity with each other in Him, through the Holy Spirit.

Alexandria adopted this concept, for many reasons:

a. Throughout almost twenty Centuries the Church of Alexandria had been isolated from politics and had no civil authority, for Egypt was ruled by Rome and Constantinople until the conquest of Arabs. The Egyptian clergymen found no room in the courts of the rulers; however, this did not mean that they struggled for achieving any means of authority, nor that they desired it. Instead they were involved in taking care of the people, and creating good relations with the ruler, but not on the account of the "Faith".

St. Athanasius mentioned in the letter of Hosius, Bishop Cordova, addressed to the Emperor of Constantius, wherein he wrote:

[Be afraid of the day of judgment, and keep yourself pure thereunto. Intrude not yourself into ecclesiastical matters, neither give commands unto us concerning them; but learn them from us. God has put into your hands the kingdom; to us He has entrusted the affairs of His Church; and as he who would steal the empire from you would resist the ordinance of God, so likewise fear on your part lest by taking upon yourself the government of the Church, you become guilty of a great offense. It is written : "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's " Matt. 22:21.

Neither therefore is it permitted unto us to exercise an earthly rule, nor have you any authority to burn incense. These things I write unto you out of a concern for your salvation. With regard to the subject of your letters, this is my determination: I will not unite myself to the Arians I anathematize their heresy. Neither will I subscribe against Athanasius, whom both we and the

Church of the Romans and the whole Council pronounced to be guiltless Emperor , <sup>2</sup>].

St. Athanasius also said: [ The Fathers never thought the consent of the Emperor thereto, nor the Emperor busy himself with the affairs of the Church..<sup>3</sup>].

b. The Alexandrians' view of knowledge (gnosis) as a divine gift constantly granted by the Father through His Son to the spiritual believers, that they may enjoy His divine mysteries, attracted even the clergymen towards practicing contemplation, studying the Holy Bible, worshipping etc...and not towards involvement in church administration.

c. Even before the appearance of the monastic movement in Egypt, the Copts clergymen and laymen practiced ascetic life. Their minds and hearts were more often lifted Of the heavenly kingdom than to the church administration. As I have said before; it is worthy to note that while the whole church administration. As I have said before; it is worthy to note that while the whole church in the fourth century was in danger of secularization, for Christianity had been adopted as the State religion and the Emperor's palace was opened widely to the clergymen, the Egyptian Church attracted the whole church towards the desert, i.e. towards inner life, to practise heavenly life, despising every earthly glory<sup>4</sup>.

J.N.D.Kelly says : [Meanwhile at Alexandria, as we might expect, while the visible Church received its need of recognition, the real focus of interest tended to be the invisible Church of the true Gnostic; the treatment accorded to the early hierarchy was generally perfunctory<sup>5</sup>.]

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<sup>2</sup>Historia Arianorum 44.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid 52

<sup>4</sup>Fr. Malaty: The Coptic Orthodox Church as an Ascetic church, 1986, p.4.

<sup>5</sup>Early Christian Doctrines, 1978, p. 201

## 1. COVENANT PEOPLE OF GOD

The basis of Church life in the Old and New Testaments is the covenant which God makes with men, saying : " For I will ..confirm My covenant with you ... I will set My tabernacle among you, and My soul shall not abhor you. I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be my people " Lev.26 : 9-12. This is God's desire that He dwells among His children as His own portion, that they may also accept Him as their own portion (Ps.142:5).

Covenants were known early among ancient tribes and between individuals to create something like a blood tie which did not naturally exist. Their aim was to put an end to fear of any attack by tribes or individuals near by. Often these covenants had three elements: Oaths were sworn as a sign that gods were witnesses to the covenant; shedding of the blood of animals as a symbol of the slaughter of the perjurer or as a symbol of purifying the two parties; setting up a dinner to share a common meal, i.e., the two parties shared the same food which is the source of life, therefore, they led one life or became one family<sup>6</sup>.

The Old Testament Church looked at Abraham as the father (Patriarch) of the all believers (Gen. 17:4), for he was the first man that enjoyed a covenant with God on behalf of all the people (Gen.17) . His offspring's became the church of God, i.e., the covenant people of God. The New Testament Church which also has Abraham as her father (Rom.4:11,16) , enjoys the true covenant with God in Christ. St. Paul pictured the church as a single olive tree, from which some natural (Israelite) branches had been broken off through unbelief, to be replaced by some wild (Gentile ) branches (Rome. 11:16-24) . These new branches became "Abraham's seed "and the new "Israel of God" Gal.3:29; Rome. 4:11-18; Gal.6:16: Now, the pious men of the Old Testament who accepted the divine covenant joyfully looked at its fulfillment by Mescal (zech.9: 9-12). This has been realized by the

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<sup>6</sup>Fr. Malaty: Christ in the Eucharist, 1986, p.26-32

Incarnate Son of God, who asks us: "Drink of it all, for this is My Blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many, for the forgiveness of sins." Matt.26:28; Luke 22:20;1 Cor. 11:25.

The new covenant which is eternal has the same three above mentioned elements:

- a. Instead of swearing an God's presence among His people. Today, the Incarnate Son of God Himself and not a symbol is dwelling among His people not only as a witness but as the Unique testimony was established as a symbol of God's presence among His people. Today, the Incarnate Son of God Himself and not a symbol is dwelling among His people not only as a Witness but as the Unique Mediator between the Father and men. In Him we are united to the Father, and find a place in His Bosom, and become worthy to inherit His glory. We have become members of Christ's Body, have trust and hope in Him to enjoy the Holy Trinity as ours.
- b. Instead of shedding animal blood that perishes, the Incarnate Son of God offered His Sacrificial Blood, that has the power to raise the dead and grant us eternal life. Christ's Blood is ever effective, present on the altar as a source of sanctification.
- c. Instead of a temporal meal, our Lord offers His Body and Blood as the heavenly Bread that satisfies our spirits, souls, hearts, minds etc. He presents to His covenant people His life giving banquet .

We can say that the New Testament Church , as a "covenant people of God", is in fact a continuation of the Old Testament one, but in a higher and newer level, so that echoing Exodus 19:5f, Hosea 2: 23 ,St. Peter describes her in thorough going Old Testament fashion , as " a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation ,His own people" 1 Pet.2:9. Our Church is ancient , has its roots in the Old Testament, and at the same time is new for it has accepted its newness in Christ by the Holy Spirit.

#### THE CHURCH IS ANCIENT AND NEW :

The Church of the New Testament has inherited all that was the Old Testament's Church to enjoy, not only literary but also spiritually. St. Paul who describes the Old Testament Church , " to

whom pertain the adoption , the glory, the covenants , the giving of the law, the services of God, and the promises" Rom 9:4, confirms that these privileges have been transferred to the New Testament Church , because of her belief in Christ , saying : " Therefore , having these promises..."cor. 7:1..

Origen states:[But do not think that these words are spoken only to that " Israel " which is " according to the flesh" (cf.1 Cor. 10:18). These words are addressed much more to you who were made Israel spiritually by living for God, who were circumcised , not in flesh, but in heart<sup>7</sup>].

St. Clement of Alexandria who proclaims the Church as a continuation of the old one, confirms that she is new in Christ.

He says: [ The new people, in contrast to the older people, are young, because they have heard the new good things<sup>8</sup>]. The church in new in her life in Christ, for she accepts the work of His Holy Spirit who unceasingly renews our thoughts and our life. She also is very ancient, for she was in the mind of God who planned for our salvation, even before the foundation of this world, Origen says:

[ I would not have you suppose that " the bride of Christ (Rev.21:2), or the Church is spoken of only after the coming of the savior in the flesh : but rather from the beginning of the human race, from the beginning of the human race, from the very foundation of the world; I may follow Paul in tracing the origin of this mystery even further, before the foundation of the world. For Paul says," He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy..."Eph,1:4,5.

The Apostle also says that the church is built on the foundation not only of the Apostle but also of prophets(Eph.2:20). Now Adam is numbered among the prophets, and he prophesied the "great mystery in respect of Christ and the Church " when he said; " For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother

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<sup>7</sup>In Exod. Lom7:12

<sup>8</sup>Paed.1:5:20

and shall cleave to his wife and the two shall be in one flesh" Gen.2:24. For the apostle is clearly speaking of these words when he says:" This mystery is great; but I am speaking in respect of Christ and the Church "Eph.5:32. Further the apostle also says :<sup>9</sup>"For He so loved the church that He gave Himself for Her, sanctifying her with the washing of water" Eph 5:32. Further the apostle also says :<sup>9</sup>"For He so loved the church that He gave Himself for her, sanctifying her with the washing of water "Eph. 5:25,26. And in this He shows that it is not the case that she did not exist before. For how could He love her if she did not exist ? without doubt she existed in all the saints who had been from the beginning of time. Thus loving the church, He came to her. And as His " Children share in flesh and blood, so He also was made partaker of these". Heb.2:14 and gave Himself for them. For these saints were the Church, which He loved so as to increase it in number, to improve it with virtues, and by the "Charity of perfection "(col.4:6), transfer it from earth to heaven<sup>9</sup>].

### **Ancients and newness in our life .**

The ancients and newness of our church have their effects on our life, as follows:

a. In proving our faith in the Holy Trinity and God's redeeming work. For we can't accept the Christian faith nor understand its depths except through the Old Testament, especially the prophecies that mentioned it . The Alexandrian Fathers used the Old Testament in their arguments not only with the Jews but also with the Gentiles, philosophers and simple people. Origen in his numerous volumes often uses the Old Testament texts in explaining the Christian faith, dogmas and doctrines.

b. The ancients of the Church opens the door of hope in God who loved us and planned our redemption even before we were formed.

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<sup>9</sup>Comm. on Cant.Cant.2[Bettenson: Early Christian Fathers, 1956 ,p.338-9]



c. The newness of the Church incites us to practice the inner renewal in Christ, not by changing and developing what is outside but by the acceptance of the work of the Holy Spirit within our souls, to say: " Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new ". 2 Cor. 5: 17. St. Clement says: [We are always young, always new: for those must necessarily be new, who become partakers of the new Word<sup>10</sup>.]

## **2. THE MOTHER OF BELIEVERS**

The Jews - as the old " covenant people of God " were proud of their son- ship to Abraham ( John 8: 33f ) as a sign of their right in the covenant with God. For Abraham received from God Himself a kind of fatherhood to all believers at that moment in which God made a covenant with him ( Gen .17 ). The Jews could not conceive their son ship to Abraham spiritually, therefore they could not enjoy the covenant with God ( John 8 ). In the New Testament, the Church receives a kind of " motherhood " to all believers, so that she might beget sons of God in Christ by the Holy Spirit, through preaching the gospel and baptizing those who believe in it. Motherhood of the Church is a right she received from God not to use for practicing authority - especially through her ministers - but to witness to God's Fatherhood.

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Through the motherhood of the church, men can conceive God's loving- kindness. St. Clement of Alexandria speaks of the Church as the Virgin Mother of the Christians, her motherhood is

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<sup>10</sup>Paidagogos 1:5.

correlated to God's fatherhood, through her loving kindness she feeds her children on the Logos as holy milk . She asserts Him as the Educator (*Paidagogue*) and as the " Subject of teaching." He says:

["Their children," it is said, "shall be borne upon their shoulders, and fondled on their knees; as one whom his mother comforts, so also shall I comfort you" Isa. 66: 12, 13. The mother draws the children to herself; and we seek our mother the Church . Whatever is feeble and tender, as needing help on account of its feebleness, is kindly look on, and is sweet and pleasant, anger changing into help in the case of such ... Thus also the Father of the Universe cherishes affections towards those who have fled to Him, and having begotten them again by His Spirit to the adoption of children, knows them as gentle, and loves those alone, aids and fights for them; and therefore He bestows on them the name of child<sup>11</sup>.]

[ One is the only virgin mother . I love to call her the Church ... She is both virgin and mother - pure as a virgin, loving as a mother. And calling her children to her, she nurses them with holy milk, viz., with the Word for Childhood ]

St. Clement states that the ancient Church - as the mother of believers presents the most accurate knowledge<sup>13</sup>.

Finally , the Church in her lovely motherhood, helps her children to carry the Lord's cross joyfully, for she creates an atmosphere of joy even in the periods of persecution. Prisons were changed into places of singing hymns by the confessors, especially on the eve of their martyrdom . The Coptic Icons picture martyrs not in pain or suffering but smiling, waiting their heavenly crowns. In other words, the Alexandrians often look to the Church as the "Community of Joy." According to St. Clement, the Church was

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<sup>11</sup>Paidagogos 1:5.

symbolized by Rebecca which - in his opinion - means "laughter." He says: [The Spirit of those that are children in Christ, whose lives are ordered in endurance, rejoice<sup>12</sup>.]

During the severe attacks of the Arians against the Church of Alexandria, the Council of Sardica sent a letter to our church, wherein it said, let your tribulation be unto for joy ].

St. Athanasius writes: [ He ( Christ ) has brought us from affliction and sighing to the rest and gladness of this feast ( Easter ), a joy which reaches even to heaven . For not we alone are affected by this, but because of it, even the heavens rejoice with us, and the whole church of the firstborn, written in heaven ( Heb. 12: 23 ), you heavens, for the Lord has made mercy upon Israel. Shout, you foundations of the earth . Cry out with joy, you mountains, you high places, and all the trees which are in them... " Is. 44: 23 16]

### 3. THE BODY OF CHRIST

According to St. Paul, the Church is Christ's Body, now growing towards a state of full edification ( Rom. 4: 12 ). For the Church is not merely a school where philosophers or some religious leaders teach ideas just for discussion or education, but she is first of all the spiritual mother that embraces all men to bring forth children of God in Christ . In the Church, Christ Himself as her Heavenly Head - attracts everyone to Himself to make him a member of His Crucified and Risen Body, and to nourish him on His Sacrificial Blood that he might be perfected in Him. Elsewhere St. Clement of Alexandria clearly teaches that the Church is the body of Christ, nourished on His Body and Blood<sup>13</sup>.

The Lord Jesus Christ granted us His Holy Spirit, dwelling in His Church to form her in His likeness, to be worthy of His Body. St. Clement says:

[ When we are baptized we are enlightened;  
being enlightened, we become adopted sons;  
becoming adopted sons, we are made perfect;

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<sup>12</sup>Paidagogos 1:5.

<sup>13</sup>Paidagogos 1:6: 42.

and becoming perfect, we are made divine.

The very fact that we believe in Him and are reborn is perfection of life. For God is by no means powerless . As His " will " is creation and is called the universe, so His " desire " is the salvation of me and is called the Church<sup>18</sup>]. Origen declares that the relationship between Jesus Christ and His Church is the same as that of the soul and Body, as he says:

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[ We say that the holy Scriptures declare the Body of Christ, animated by the Son of God, to be the whole Church of God, and the members of this body considered as a whole to consist of those who are believers, since, as a soul vivifies and moves the body, which of itself has not the natural power of motion like a living being, so the Word, arousing and moving the whole body, the Church, to befitting action, awakens, moreover, each individual member belonging to the Church, so that they do nothing apart from the Word<sup>19</sup>].

#### **4. A NEW CREATION IN CHRIST**

The " Church " in its essence is a " new life in Christ ". For a believer who receives the membership of the Church becomes a member of Christ's body. His nature is renewed through baptism, and he becomes a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5: 17 ), crucified with Christ and raised with Him out of death into new life ( Eph. 2:1f. ), possessed and led by the Life - giving Holy Spirit( Rom. 8: 9-14). It is the work of the Holy Spirit who acts in the Church of God to sanctification. our souls, bodies, minds, hearts, motions etc... that we might become the likeness of Christ. Origen incites us to struggle ( by the Holy Spirit ) to realize this aim, as he says: [ The Christian must conform himself to the image of Christ; the Christian becomes Christ's spirit when he has attached himself to

the Word and Wisdom of God in all things that in no way is the image and likeness discolored<sup>20</sup>]. He calls the church: [" the assembly of all the Saints].

St. Clement of Alexandria states that the Church is the holy vine, or the holy tree, where the saints, who became a new creation in Christ, together with the heavenly creatures, dwell on its branches. He comments on the parable of the mustard seed (Matt. 13: 31,32), saying: [To such increased size did the growth of the Word come, that the tree which sprung from it (that is the Church of Christ, established over the whole earth) filled the world so that the fowls of the air, that is, the divine angels and lofty souls, dwelt in its branches<sup>14</sup>.]

He declares that the Gnostic ( true believer ), as a member of the Church, aims toward the nearest likeness possible to the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. He says: [ This is the function of the gnostic, who has been perfected, to have converse with God through the great High Priest, being made like the 1 ~ Lord, up to the measure of his capacity, in the whole senesce of God, which tends to the salvation of men, through care of the beneficence which has us for its object; and on the other side through worship, through teaching and through beneficence in deeds... 23] .

[ But I know no one is perfect in all things, while still human, according to the mere letter of the law, except Him alone who For us clothed Himself. with humanity ... We are then to strive to reach manhood ( Eph. 4: 12 ) as befits the Gnostic, and to be as perfect as we can while abiding in the flesh, making it our study with perfect ~o concur with the will of God, to the restoration of what is the truly perfect nobles and relationship, to the fullness of Christ ( Eph. 4: 13 ), that which wholly depends on our perfection. And now we perceive where, and how, and when the divine apostle mentions the

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<sup>14</sup>St. Clement Die Griechescher Christlichen Schrifsteller, 3:226.

perfect man, and how he shows the differences between the perfect: "

The manifestation of the Spirit is given for our profit. For to one is given the word of wisdom by the Spirit; to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith through the same Spirit ... " Cor. 12: 7 - 11.

Such being the case, the prophets are perfect in prophecy, the righteous in righteousness, and the martyr in confession, and others in preaching, not that they are not sharers in the common virtues, but are proficient in those they are appointed ... " But each has his own proper sight of God " 1 Cor. 7: 7- one in one way, another in another . But the apostles were perfected in all. You will find, then, if you choose, in their acts and writings, knowledge, life, preaching, righteousness, purity, prophecy...24].

The members of the church must be sanctified in their thoughts and dreams. St. Clement says:

[So it is said that we ought to go washed to sacrifices and prayers, clean and bright; and that these external adornments and purification are practiced for a sign . Now purity is to think holy thoughts...Sanctity, as I conceive it, is perfect pureness of mind, and deeds, and thoughts, and words too, and in its last degree, sinless in dreams<sup>15</sup>.]

The Gnostics, true members of the Church, accept the divine call of sanctity not in fear of punishment nor for enjoyment of earthly recompense but because they love goodness for itself as they become gods (in image of God). St. Clement says:

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[But he who obeys the mere call, as he is called, neither for fear, nor for enjoyments, is on his way to knowledge (*gnosis*)... It is

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<sup>15</sup>Stromata 4:22.

possible for the Gnostic already to have become god. "I said, you are gods, and sons of the highest" (Ps. 132 6 )<sup>16</sup>.]

Truly, the Church embraces sinners who enjoy the new creation in Christ live in sanctity, but there are some members who do not respond to the Holy Spirit's action. St. Clement states that it is the spiritual church, which is Christ's body; however, some of its members still live like the heathen and are, as it were, its flesh, while those who truly cleave to the Lord and become one spirit with Him form the holy Church in the real sense of the word " .

## **5. THE BRIDE OF CHRIST**

Through the Church believers become a " new creation in Christ ". They are sanctified and cleansed in readiness for the " marriage supper of the Lamb " Rev. 19:7. Christ called Himself the Bridegroom ( Matt. 9: 14, 15; Mark 2: 18-20;

Luke 5: 33-35; Matt. 25: 1-13 ). His bride is the Church, therefore St. Paul speaks of his aim for the church of Corinth: " I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ " 2 Cor. 11: 2. He also likens the marriage relationship to the relationship which must exist between Christ and the Church: " This (marriage unity ) is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church " Eph. 5: 32.

The Alexandrian Fathers, especially Origen in his commentary on the Canticle of Canticles, adopted this evangelic concept of the church, in which they found a genuine basis of relationship between God and man, such as:

a. God as the Heavenly Bridegroom, seeks for our souls not to condemn us but to beautify us by His Holy Spirit in the merit of Jesus blood, as His own Bride. He is not in need of our sanctity or

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<sup>16</sup>Stromata 4:22,23.

worship but He is the Lover of man kind, and so, desires to unite us with Him eternally.

b. Truly He is jealous, for He is the Groom ( Exod. 20: 5; 34: 14, Deut. 4: 25; 5: 9; 6: 15 ), who cannot be in communication with sin, therefore He asks us to be holy as He is Holy ( Lev. 11: 44, 45). Any sin we commit is not so much a breach of the divine law but moreover a crime against love, by sin we break our Groom's heart.

c. God's will is that we become very intimate with Him, accept a close communion and fellowship with Him in Christ, an unbreakable and indissoluble relationship, as we enjoy eternal marriage.

d. The Savior Jesus Christ, as the Church's Groom, sent His Holy Spirit to guide her and to shape her as to resemble and to be in the image of her Groom, qualifying her for the eternal glories.

St. Athanasius says: [ When we drink the Spirit, we are substantially drinking Christ<sup>27</sup>].

St. Cyril of Alexandria says: [ The Holy Spirit is the Life - giving odor of Christ, a living and effective odor, superior attracting a relation to Him in order to take part of God's superior nature<sup>28</sup>]. [ It is solely through the Holy Spirit that Christ is formed in us and imprints on us His own features and so makes the beauty of the Godhead come alive again in the nature of man<sup>29</sup>].

Here, I would confirm that the Holy Spirit does not oblige us to accept His action, but we have to struggle using His power... therefore St. Clement says: [ But we ought to have works that cry aloud, as becoming " those who walk in the day " Rom. 13: 13. " Let thy works shine " Matt. 5: 16, and be hold a man and his works before his face ". For behold God and His works " Is 62: 11. For the Gnostic must, as is possible, imitate God<sup>30</sup>].

## **6. CHRIST'S BUILDING**



St. Paul in his epistle to the Ephesians, pictures the Church as Christ's building, now growing unto a holy temple in the Lord ( Eph. 2: 21f) Origen speaks of the Church as God's spiritual temple, saying: [ The Spirit of Christ dwells in those who bear, so to say, a resemblance in form and feature to Himself. And the Word of God, wishing to set this clearly before us, represents God as promising to the righteous: " I will dwell in them, and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My People " 2 Cor.6: 16(Lev.26: 12;Jer.3:33;32:38,Zech.8:8).And the Savior says: " If any man hears My words, and does them, I and My Father will come to him, and make Our abode with him n John 14: 23 . And in other parts of the Holy Scripture where it speaks of the mystery of the resurrection to those whose ears are divinely opened, it says that the temple which has been destroyed shall be built up again of living and most precious stones, thereby giving us to understand that each of those who are led by the word of God to survive together If the duties of piety, will be a precious stone, in the one great temple of God. accordingly, Peter says " You also, as lively stones, are wake up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God Jesus Christ " 1 Pet. 2: 5 and Paul

also says, " Being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ our being the chief comer - stone " Eph. 2: 20 . And there is a similar hidden allusion in this passage in Isaiah, which is addressed to Jerusalem: " Behold, I will lay they stones with carbuncles, and lay they foundations with sapphires. And I will make they battlements of jasper, and they gates of crystal, and all they borders of pleasant stones. And all they children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of they children. In righteousness shall thou be established " Isa. 54: 11-14. There are, then among the righteous some who are carbuncles, others sapphires, others jaspers, and others crystals, and thus there is among the righteous every kind of choice and precious stone<sup>31</sup>].

Origen could only admire the attitude of the people of God towards building the tabernacle. Everyone was so eager to offer

generously whatever possible ,each according to his ability and resources. He experienced the urge to participate in establishing God's spiritual tabernacle within himself, and said:

[ O Lord Jesus Christ, will you make me worthy to partake in building Your Come, let us build the tabernacle of Jacob's God, Jesus Christ our Lord and adorn it ...

God's dwelling place is the sanctity that we are requested to attain ... Consequently, everybody, can find a trademake for God in his heart. Its ten curtains( E od. 26: 1 ) refer to the fulfillment of the ten commandments. Examining the trademark closely, the purple, the blue, the fine twined linen etc... ... symbolizes the variety of good deeds: Gold refers to faith ~ Rev. 23: 18 ): Silver to preaching ( Ps. 12: 6 ): Brass to patience Timber that does not rot to the acquaintance that the believer gains in the uninhabited wilderness and the everlasting; chastity; Linen to virginity; Purple to loving martyrdom; Scarlet to the brightness of love Blue to the hope in the heavenly kingdom; From all these materials, the tabernacle is built .The soul should have an altar right in the center of the heart . On it sacrifices of prayer and burnt offerings of mercy are offered. Thus, bullocks of pride are slaughtered with the knife of meekness and rams of anger, goats of luxuries and passions are killed.

Let the soul know how to establish a permanently illuminating lamp stand , right in the holy of her heart 321 Origen calls the Church the " City of God ", for she is " the dwelling of God among His people "( See Rev. 21: 3 ). God builds His Church, as His own city; builds it not with stones but with His own elect believers.

St. Clement states that the holy soul is more excellent temple than any edifice built by man, as he says:

t For it is not now the place, but the assemblage of the elect, that I call the Church. This temple is better for the reception of the greatness of the dignity of God. Now this is the Gnostic, who is of great value, who is honored by God, in whom God is enshrined, that is the knowledge respecting God is consecrated ....

For every being destined to believe is already faithful in the sight of God and set up for His honor, an image, endowed with virtue, dedicated to God 34]

## **7. THE HOUSE OF FAITH**

When the Arians violently entered the Churches while the Orthodox were driven away, St. Athanasius wrote:

t May God comfort you . I know moreover that not only this thing saddens you, but also the fact that while others have obtained the Churches by violence, you are meanwhile cast out from your places . For they hold the places, but you the " Apostolic Faith ". They are, it is true, in the places, but outside of the true Faith; while you are outside the places indeed, but the Faith, within you. Let us consider which is the greater, the place or the Faith. Clearly the true Faith

Good indeed is the place, when the Apostolic Faith is preached there, holy is it if the Holy One dwells there.

But you are blessed, who by faith are in the Church, dwell upon the foundations of the faith, and have full satisfaction, even the highest degree of faith which remains among us unshaken...

However really, then, they seem to hold the Church, so much the more truly are they cast out. And they think themselves to be within the truth, but are exiled, and in captivity, and ( gain ) no advantage by the Church alone<sup>35</sup>].

## **8. THE HOUSE OF SALVATION**

Origen states that there is no salvation outside the Church, the house of redemption. According to him, Rahab ( Josh. 2 ) mystically represents the Church, and the scarlet thread the blood of Christ; and only those in her house are saved . He says: [ If anyone wishes to be saved... Let him come to this house where the blood of Christ is for a sign of redemption. For that blood was for condemnation amongst those who said, " His blood be on us and on our children " Matt. 27: 25 . Jesus was " for the fall and

resurrection of many " Luke 2: 34; and therefore in respect of those who " speak against His sign " His blood is effective for punishment, but effective for salvation in the case of believers. Let no one therefore persuade himself or deceive himself: outside this house, that is, outside the Church, no one is saved ... The sign of salvation ( the scarlet thread ) was given through the window because Christ by His incarnation gave us the sight of the light of godhead as it were through a window; that all may attain salvation by that sign who shall be found in the house of her who once was a harlot, being made clean by water and the Holy Spirit, and by the blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to whom is glory and power for ever and ever<sup>36</sup>].<sup>1</sup>

## **9. THE Community OF LOVE**

The Church as the kingdom of God on earth is a kingdom of love, for " God is Love ", John 4: 16. Love is the language of the Church as an icon of heaven . therefore St. John the beloved disciple says:

" We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love is brother abides in death...

By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us.

And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren ...

Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (John 3: 14, 16:4:7 ,8).

Love is practiced not only in giving generously to others but also in worshipping with one spirit. Every member of the Church worships God in the name of all the Church even in his private room, saying: " Our Father " and not " My Father " . He participates even the heavenly creatures in his worship through love.

St. Clement of Alexandria says:

[ But love ( agape ) is in truth celestial food, the banquet of reason. " It beareth all things, endures all things, hopeth all things. Love never faileth " 1 Cor. 13: 7, 8 " Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God " Luke 14: 15 37].

Origen speaks of the communion of love that unites earth with heaven:[ Now the one great virtue according to the Word of God is love one's neighbor. We must believe that the saints who have died possess this love in a far higher degree towards the ones engaged in the combat of life than those who are still subject to human weakness and involved in the combat along with their weaker brethren. The words, " If one member suffers anything, all the members suffer with it, or if one member glories, all the members rejoice with it " Cor. 12: 26, are confined to those on earth who love their brethren ...

If the angels of God came to Jesus and ministered to Him ( Mat. 4: 11 ), and if we believe that this ministry of the angels to Jesus was not limited to just the short time during His earthly sojourn ... then how many multitudes of angels do you think minister to Jesus to gather together the sons of Israel one by one, and assemble those of the dispersion, and deliver them that are in fear and call upon Him ~38]

## **10. AN ICON OF HEAVEN**

St John says: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (1: 14). The Heavenly One became man and lived in our world, to sanctify our daily life and established His Church - as His heavenly Bride - on earth. From His conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary and until His ascension to heaven we often hear that angels appear as a sign of the openness of heaven towards earth and the close relationship between heaven and earth which has been started. Our Lord, reopened Paradise to men after He was crucified (Luke 17 : 21). Now, as members of the Church of Christ, we live on earth but our hearts must be close to heaven; we have to enjoy heavenly worship especially through the Liturgy of

Eucharist, and participate with the heavenly hosts in their chorus, enjoying heavenly love, joy and peace<sup>17</sup>.

St. Clement of Alexandria states<sup>18</sup> that the earthly Church is a copy of the heavenly one, that is why we pray that God's will may be accomplished on earth as it is in heaven . He also says that the perfect Gnostic, i.e., the spiritual believer practices heavenly life while he is on earth, for he [will rest on God's holy mountain, the Church on high, in which are assembled the philosophers of God, the authentic Israelites who are pure in heart... giving themselves over to the pure intuition of unending contemplation.] He also says: [If you enroll yourself as one of God's people, heaven is your country, God your legislation<sup>19</sup>.]

### **11. AN EVER - YOUNG(~ CHURCH**

The Church of Christ, as the heavenly Church, never became ( spiritually) old but she remains young. In older words, every member of the Church enjoys daily renewal through the work of the Holy Spirit who dwells in his heart. He examines the words, " Your youth is renewed like the eagle's " Ps. 103: 5. Through the days of his life his body may be weakened and becomes hold but he says: " Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day " Cor. 4: 16.

St. Clement of Alexandria says: [Therefore the name "childhood" is for us a life - long season of spring, because the truth abiding in us is ageless and our being made to overflow with that truth, is ageless too. For wisdom is ever fruitful. Ever fixed unchangeable on the same truths, ever constant<sup>20</sup>.]

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<sup>17</sup> See Christ in the Eucharist, 1986, p. 154-158

<sup>18</sup>Stromata 4:8:66.

<sup>19</sup>Stromata 6:14.

<sup>20</sup>Paidagogos 1:5:20.

[You have become old in superstition; as young, enter on the practice of piety. God regards you as innocent children<sup>21</sup>.]

## 12. THE FIRST-BORN CHURCH

St. Clement says: [For this is the first-born Church (Heb. 12: 23), composed of many good children; these are the first born enrolled in Heaven, and hold high festival with so many myriad's of angels. We too are first-born sons, who are reared by God, who are genuine friends of the first-born, who first and foremost attained to the knowledge of God<sup>22</sup>.]

Origen says that when a person is a first - born his brothers who are born after him are not first - born . But in the (church, all believers become first born for they are members of the body of Jesus Christ the First - born.

1. Carl F. Henery: Basic Doctrines, 1980, p. 241.
2. Historia ArianoruJn 44.
3. Ibid 52.
4. Fr. Malaty: The Coptic Orthodox Church as an Ascetic Church, 1986, p. 4.
5. Early Christian Doctrines, 1978, p. 201
6. Fr. Malaty: Christ in the Eucharist, 1986, p. 26 -32.
7. In Exod. Lom 7: 12.
8. Paed. 1:5:20.
9. Comm. on Cant. Can~. 2 I Bettenson: Early Christian Fathers, 1956, p. 338-9]
10. Paed. 1: 5.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid 1: 6.
13. Strom. 7: 15: 92.
14. Paed. 1: 5.

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<sup>21</sup>Protrepticus 10.

<sup>22</sup>Protrepticus 9:82.

15. N. & P. N. Frs., Series 2, vol. 4, p. 121.
16. Paschal Epist. 6: 9.
17. Paed. 1: 6: 42.
18. Ibid 1: 6: 26 [ Thomas Hulton: The Church, 1985, p. 54.]
19. Contra Celsus 6: 48.
20. Comm . on Rom. 7: 7.
21. InCant. 1 ;3.
22. St. Clement Die Griechescher Christlichen Schriftsteller, 3: 226.
23. Strom. 7: 3.
24. Ibid 4: 21.
25. Ibid 4: 22.
26. Ibid 4: 22, 23.
27. Ep. ad Serapioni 19 PG 26: 576.
28. InJoanll :2PG74:452-3.
29. Thesaurus 34. PG. 75: 609.
30. Strom. 4: 26.
31. Contra Celsus 8: 28, 29.
32. Origen in Exod. Lom 13, 9 [ Fr. Malaty: Church, House of God, 1983, ch. 2].
33. In Jer. hom 9: 2; in Jos. 8: 7.
34. Strom. 7: 5.
35. Ep. 29.
36. In Lib. Issu Nave 3: 5 [ Bettenson, p. 336 -7 ].
37. Paed. 2: 1.
38. On Prayer 11: 2.
- 39..
40. Strom. 4: 8: 66.
41. Ibid 6: 14.
42. Prot. 10: 108.
43. Paed. 1 :5:20.
44. Prot. 10.
45. Ibid 9: 82.



## **CHURCH CHARACTERISTICS**

### **1. ITS DEMOCRACY**

One of the important characteristics of the early Alexandrian Church was its democracy, that appeared clearly in its famous school. Admittance to this school was open for all people regardless of their religion, culture, age, sex, etc.

St. Clement clarifies the democracy of Christianity, saying:  
[ So the Church is full of those chaste women as well as men, who all their life have contemplated the death which rouses up to Christ. For the individual, whose life is framed as ours is, may philosophize without learning, whether barbarian, whether Greek, whether slave - whether old man, or a boy or a woman. For self - control is common to all human beings who have chosen it. And we admit that the same nature exists in every race, and the same virtue.

Respecting human nature, the woman does not possess one nature, and the man exhibit another, but the same: so also with virtue ... Accordingly a woman is to practise self - restraint and righteousness, and every other virtue, as well as man, both bond and free; since it is a fit consequence that the same nature possesses one and the same virtue.

We do not say that a woman's nature is the same as a man's, as she is a woman. For, undoubtedly, it stands to reason that some difference should exist between them, in virtue of which one is male and the other female. Pregnancy and parturition, accordingly, we say belong to a woman, as she is a woman, and not as she is a human being ... As then there is sameness, as far in respect to the soul, she will attain to the same virtue; but as there is difference in respect to the peculiar construction of the body, she is destined for childbearing and housekeeping. " For I would have you know," says the apostle, " that the head of every man is Christ; and the

head of the woman is the man: for the man is not the woman, but the woman of the man. For neither is the woman without the man, nor the man without the woman, in the Lord" 1 Cor. 11: 3, 8, 11...

But as it is noble for a man to die for virtue, and for liberty, and for himself, so also it is for a woman. For this is not peculiar to the nature of males, but to the nature of the good. Accordingly, both the old man, the young and the servant will live faithfully, and if need be die, which will be to be made alive by death. So we know that both children, and women, and servants have often, against their fathers' and masters', and husbands' will, reached the highest degree of excellence...<sup>23</sup>

Now we can summarize the Christian democracy, according to St. Clement in the following points:

a. All human beings are equal for they have the same nature, all have sinned, are in need of the same Savior, and can attain the same virtues.

b. This equality that depends on the same human nature does not cancel the differences between them, for man has his own role that fits his manhood and woman has her own role. This difference creates a kind of integrity in human beings, the male is in need of the female and vice versa.

c. All kinds of obedience that the wife, or the children, or the servants do not weaken the personality of the person, for he or she practices it in the Lord, for the edification of mankind, through his or her breadth of heart and broad-mindedness. If it is misused and the person is obliged to deny his faith or to commit sin he has the right to disobey, suffering even death, as a sign of his love for God.

Finally the Church's democracy appears in the relation between clergymen and laity which I will speak of on another occasion. Here I refer to the following points:

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<sup>23</sup>Stromata 4:8.

a. Origen says: [ He who is called to the episcopacy is called, not to domination, but to the service of the whole church 3 ].

b. Origen asserts that the presence of the people is required in the ordination of a priest, for they elect him 4.

c. St. Clement and Origen spoke of the general ( laity ) priesthood's.

[ Do you know that the priesthood has been given to you that is to say, to the whole church of God and to the believers ? Hear Peter say to the faithful: " a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, an acquired people " 1 Pet. 2: 9. You, then, have the priesthood since you are a priestly race, so you ought to offer to God a sacrifice of praise ( Heb. 13: 15 ), a sacrifice of prayers, a sacrifice of mercy, a sacrifice of purity, a sacrifice of sanctity 6 ].

## **2 . ITS SPIRITUALITY:**

Spirituality is the common element in all aspects of Church life and activities. For the Church who is guided by the Holy Spirit has the power to attract their members towards internal life, or towards the internal kingdom of God that is established within our souls. Those members are called spiritual men although they have their own bodies.

What do we mean by " Spirituality " ? It means that the person is guided by the Holy Spirit, subjecting his spirit, soul, mind, heart, body, senses, energies etc. ... to the Holy Spirit. He becomes as if he were totally spirit, but does not despise his life in the world nor hates his body or refuses worldly blessings. Rather he looks at all these things as gifts granted to Him by the gracious God, not to be a slave to them but to use them for the advantage of his soul and of others.

In other words, through true spirituality, the believer has a sanctified sight to everything. St. Athanasius states that " all things made by God are beautiful and pure, for the Word of God has made nothing useless or improved ] He confirms that the body is

good but sin is committed by our evil will When we have an evil will, the body and the soul are defiled.

St. Clement wrote an essay to the rich men of Alexandria in which he clarified that gold, silver and all riches are not evil things but good if they are used by good men<sup>8</sup>.

Finally, we must acknowledge the church dogmas, canons, worship, history and spiritually for the edification of our souls.

### **3. ITS UNITY**

St. Clement, as a churchman, looks at "unity as a natural characteristic of the Church, who is united with one God, has one Bible and one Faith. He stresses on the Church unity based on the "One Faith," asking us to avoid the heretics for they cause schism<sup>24</sup>.

For St. Cyril of Alexandria, the unity of the Church is derived from " the harmony of true doctrine ~ 10. One of the results of this unity is the harmony of worship that proclaims the true love of believers, acceptable to God the Father ".

Origen looks at the sanctity of every member as a base for the church unity for what a member commits has its bad effects on others. He says: [ a sinner tarnishes the people ... one who commits a fornication or another crime, causes a strain on the whole people<sup>2</sup> ].

25

I wrote about the church asceticism dogma, and I hope that I will write about: the church worship, preaching, tradition, etc... I hope that we all now understand more about the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit that we may enjoy her life and practise our membership in it.

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<sup>24</sup>Stromata 7:17; Paidagogos 1:4.

1. Fr. T. Malaty: The Coptic Orthodox Church as a church of Erudition & Theology, 1986, p.4.
2. Strom. 4: 8.
3. In Is. hom 6: PG 13: 239.
4. In Levit. hom. 8: 5.
5. Strom. 6: 13.
6. In Levit. hom. 9: 1
7. Ep. 48 ad Amun.
8. St. Clem. Alex: Who is the rich man that shall be saved ?
9. Strom. 7: 17; Paed. 1: 4.
10. In Ps. 44: 10.
11. Strom. 7: 6, Prot. chg.
12. In Is. hom. 7. PG 12: 861 ,244.

The English Text is revised by Mrs. Jeane and Dr. Nebbieh Malek