

EVANGELISM
AND THE
SCHOOL OF ALEXANDRIA

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Reverend Father Tadros Y. Malaty has kindly permitted that his books be published in the COeRL. He has requested that we convey that any suggestions or amendments regarding their translation are welcome, and should be forwarded to:
sydneywebmaster@coptic.org.au

FR. TADROS Y. MALATY

COPTIC ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CENTER
491 N. Hewes St.
Orange California

ST. MINA'S COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH
Holmdel – New Jersey

I was asked to speak about “*Evangelism and the School of Alexandria*,” many thoughts came to my mind.

1. **What is the School of Alexandria? And what is its message?**
2. **How did the early Church understand evangelism?**
3. **Evangelism in the different stages of the School.**
4. **Evangelism and the School’s view of the Holy Bible**
5. **Evangelism in its curriculum.**
6. **Evangelism and the School’s view regarding the Church and its tradition.**
7. **Evangelism and the School’s view on philosophy.**
8. **Evangelism and the School’s spirit of joy.**
9. **Evangelism and the School’s spirit of ecumenical spirit.**
10. **What is the advantage of studying “*Evangelism and the School of Alexandria*” when today’s society differs greatly from that of the early centuries?**

The School of Alexandria as a whole is an institution for evangelism, although it was not an organization for preparing missionaries in the modern sense. Evangelism was the heart, the core and the life of the School. It had the power to move hearts of the professors and their disciples to be real evangelizers working in Egypt and overseas. Its curriculum is a symphony of the divine love. The

more we practice the divine love, the more our hearts are kindled with the desire to preach continuously. Nevertheless it had no department for the “*Evangelism Theology*.”

1. SCHOOL OF ALEXANDRIA AND THE FIERY HEART

When we speak about the School of Alexandria we don't mean the literal sense, that is, to think of school buildings or to think of church buildings. The School, in its essence, was the teacher with his flaming heart. He was like a burning coal. Wherever he was, he kindled the hearts of his disciples with divine love. The disciples, in return, were eager for all mankind to share the experience of this divine and fiery love.

Our study of the School of Alexandria has in fact, revealed to us that the early Church of Egypt is a church of evangelism. The Church witnessed that fiery, divine love, which the whole world couldn't quench. That love, raises every man, if possible, to the throne of God.

2. THE CONCEPT OF EVANGELISM IN THE EARLY CHURCH

The Christians of the early Church understood Christianity as a call to salvation. They acknowledged their position as members of the body of the Holy One, Jesus Christ. They also realized the

dwelling of the Holy Spirit within them. With this practical knowledge, the believers continued to preach. It is the pleasure of all believers to continue preaching until all mankind glorify God through the work of the Holy Trinity.

The early Christians didn't have specific plans for missionary work. The church as a whole, clergy and laymen, were considered holy missionaries. For example, **St. John Chrysostom** once said to his congregation, "You are the bishop!" He felt that his message was to prepare everyone for service and evangelism. This proves that every member of the church will continue working for the edification of God's kingdom on earth. That's why **St. John Chrysostom** saw every member in the Church as a bishop. For instance **St. John** looked at the cathedral in Constantinople and noticed that it was very crowded, so he said, "I would be very sad to know that there is even one person in this city who doesn't know how to enjoy salvation." This demonstrates St. John's fiery heart, which is an example of the true believer's heart.

3. EVANGELISM IN THE DIFFERENT STAGES OF THE SCHOOL

This Christian School started as a Catechetical School, where candidates were admitted to learn the Christian faith. The deans were

in fact catechists. Origen described the catechist's functions in more than one of his books. He had both to teach doctrine¹ and to give instructions on the Christian life. "If you want to receive Baptism," **Origen** said², "you must first learn about God's Word, cut away the roots of your vices, and correct your barbarous wild lives and practice meekness and humility. Then you will be fit to receive the grace of the Holy Spirit."

The words of **Origen** revealed that the aim of the early school was to preach among non-believers and to prepare them to enjoy being God's children.

St. Clement of Alexandria referred to the three stages of that school. These three stages explain the evangelism role of the churches.

- ❖ In his first book, "*Exhortation to the Greek (Protrepticus)*," He explained that there were great leaders who chose to devote their lives to bringing unbelievers, or even believers, who had gone astray, back to the church. He also explained the treachery of those who chose to follow the idols and morals set by society.
- ❖ The second book, "*The Instructor (Pedagogus)*," invites those who have accepted

¹ *Against Celsius* 3:15; Jean Daniélou: Origen, NY, 1955, p. 10.

² *In Leirt. Hom* 11:3.

Christian faith to be molded by the hands of our Savior Jesus Christ.

- ❖ The third book, “*Stromata*” shows the life of a person who accepted the faith by the Holy Trinity and how the Lord reveals His will, wisdom, and holy mysteries through His Spirit. It states that this person will sit at the instructor’s feet to understand the virtuous life; and the Lord will carry him to his kingdom as the Heavenly Groom (the Lord) carried His heavenly bride (the human soul).

These three stages revealed the School of Alexandria as a lovely mother. She embraced men to bring them spiritual and mature children of God, real members of the One Church of Christ. It nourished men in its three groups

- ❖ The nonbelievers to discover the divine way for salvation, and to be converted Christianity.
- ❖ The candidates to prepare them for receiving Baptism, or the adoption to the heavenly Father.
- ❖ The believers to grow up and become mature spiritually.

Thus, the three books explain the role of the School of Alexandria in evangelism. The School’s deans and disciples were very eager to see the whole mankind became the heavenly bride, in the likeness of the Heavenly Groom. Evangelism in the School of Alexandria was not only an invitation to accept

the faith as theoretical dogmas, but also, an invitation to the practical life, as members of the body of Christ. The deans of the school had no rest until they saw that the world had become the heavenly bride.

4. EVANGELISM AND THE SCHOOL'S VIEW OF THE HOLY BIBLE

The deans of the School of Alexandria understood the Holy Scriptures as a journey of the soul to heaven. The Fathers of the School loved the Holy Bible. **St. Pantenius**, with his disciples, in the second century, translated it into Coptic. He wrote commentaries on almost all the books of the Bible.

Origen dedicated his life to the study of the Holy Bible. He used to spend most of his nights reading the Bible as he knelt and prayed. His heart, mind, soul and senses were completely consumed by the Holy Bible. This way of life motivated him to preach all his days through his journeys in many countries.

Origen did not ignore the scientific method in studying the Holy Scriptures. His belief was that: the Holy Bible is a personal message addressed to every human being.

He was more involved in calling the whole world to share the eternal glory. Yet there were many, who had the gift of evangelism, but had not

the grace of God. They were not able to touch the heart of man and bring them to attain the unity with the Father, the fellowship with the Son and the dwelling with the Holy Spirit.

5. EVANGELISM IN ITS CURRICULUM

We can discover the Alexandrians' view of evangelism through the characteristics of its theology. For instance:

I. Deification: Many scholars state that the core of Alexandrian theology is ***Deification, or the grace of renewal***. By deification, the Alexandrians mean the renewal of human nature as a whole. We attain it by sharing in the characteristics of our Lord Jesus Christ.. The apostles state that the believer may enjoy “the partaking in the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4), or the new man in the image of His Creator (Col. 3:10). Deification draws the hearts of the Alexandrians away from arguments over definitions of theological terms and towards obtaining divine grace as the enjoyment of the unity with the Father, in His Only-Begotten Son, through the work of His Holy Spirit.

✠ *For this He came down, for this He assumed human nature, for this He willingly endured the sufferings of man, that by being reduced to the measure of our weakness He might raise us to*

*the measure of His power*³.

✠ *The Word of God, became Man so that you might learn froma Man how it may be that man should become god*⁴.

St. Clement of Alexandria

✠ We are deified, not by partaking of the body of some man, but by receiving the body of the Word Himself⁵.

✠ He was made man that we might become gods⁶.

St. Athanasius of Alexandria

The Alexandrian theology concentrated on “*deification*,” to enable us to get in touch with the wonderful love of God. It transforms the depth of man into an icon of God, his Creator, and shares in His divine nature. It does not stop at the depth of the inner man, but expands to the body itself, as if to convert it gradually to its glorious nature. The life of the believer becomes a daily journey to heaven. He **attracts his brethren with him to taste the heavenly life.**

The Alexandrians’ objective in deification is to open the eyes of many believers to explore their potential, so they might not only become an icon of

³ *Quis Dives Salvetur* 37.

⁴ *Protrepticus* 1:8:4.

⁵ *Ep. Ad Maximum*, 61:2.

⁶ *De Incarnatione*, 54:3.

Christ, but also trust in the renewal of mankind. They find their pleasure in evangelism regardless of difficulties. They believe that the ability to preach was a manifest of God's grace in them, and in their brethren. They hope that God will renew and sanctify their souls for his kingdom.

II. Soteriological Theology: Christianity started in Alexandria, Egypt, when Anianus, a cobbler, cried "O One God" as a needle pierced his hand while repairing St. Mark's shoe. St. Mark, the Apostle and Evangelist, healed his hand in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. He then witnessed to the One God whom Anianus believed in, but did not know. St. Mark told the cobbler about God who heals not only our bodies, but also our human nature through His incarnate Word, Jesus Christ. Anianus believed and was converted to Christianity. St. Mark then ordained him as the first Bishop of Alexandria.

St. Mark used the healing of Anianus' wound in the name of Jesus Christ as a starting point to preach the Gospel; he did not reveal God as a notion he believed in, but rather, as the Savior who redeems mankind. We know God, not through theoretical discussions, but through His redeeming deeds. This is the basic principle of the Alexandrian theology until today. God grants us new knowledge, new glorious life and immortality.

Thus, St. Mark truly sowed in our theological soil the seed that has produced fruit throughout all ages. One of these fruits is the close relationship between theological knowledge and salvation. God bestows knowledge, which is not isolated from our salvation. This is clearly demonstrated in the theology of **St. Clement of Alexandria** who usually introduced Jesus Christ as the “*Educator*.”

In his book called *Paidagogos*, “The Educator” or “Instructor,” He speaks of this Divine *Paidagogue* as the “All-healing physician of mankind⁷.” In other words, to **St. Clement**, divine knowledge cannot be separated from our salvation. He firmly believes that “*It is the will of God that we should attain the knowledge of God, which is the communication of immortality*⁸.”

“*The Word ... became Man so that you might learn from Man how man may become god*⁹.”

One of the main features of the School of Alexandria is its **soteriological theology**. That is, a system of theology based principally on the salvation of man. This approach is apostolic. In evangelism the Gospel, the apostles witnessed our Lord Jesus as the “Messiah,” the Savior of mankind.

⁷ *St. Clement: Paidagogos, Book 1, Ch. 2. Section 6.*

⁸ *Stromata: 4:6:27.*

⁹ *Protrep. 1:8:4.*

They were not engaged in theological disputes, but were concerned with men's salvation. Their Christological theology depended on soteriological thought. Jaroslav Pelikan states that early Christians shared the conviction that salvation could not be the work of someone less than the Lord of heaven and earth. The oldest surviving sermon in the early church opens with the words: "Brethren, we ought to think of Jesus Christ as God, as the Judge of living and dead. And we ought not to belittle our salvation, for when we belittle Him, we expect also to receive little¹⁰."

Some examples follow:

- ❖ **Athenagoras** in his "*Plea on Behalf of Christians*" writes to the emperor Marcus Aurelius Antonius (161-180) and his son Commodus, refuting the three charges against Christians. He not only succeeded in defending Christianity but also managed to preach the emperors. It was a great opportunity for Athenagoras to declare the truth to the emperors; and to those who read this *Plea*, to witness evangelical life. **His aim is not only to defend the Christian faith but also to invite everyone to the salvation of Christ.**
- ❖ The Early Church offers no better example of an

¹⁰ 2 Clem. 1:1-2; Jaroslav Pelikan; *The Christian Tradition, vol. 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100 - 600)*, 1961, p. 173.

intellectual Christian than **St. Clement**. He insists that the goal of Christian education is “*practical, not theoretical and its aim is to improve the soul, not to teach, but to train it up to a virtuous, not intellectual, life*”¹¹.

- ❖ **Origen’s** writings reveal that his primary interests lay in the salvation of our souls. Rown A. Greer states¹² the drama of **the soul’s struggle is to return to God**. **Origen’s** views of martyrdom, prayer and Scriptures merge into one vision of Christian life. It is a movement towards a perfect knowledge of God and **perfect fellowship with Him through Christ**.

Through this soteriological attitude, the believer is not involved in theoretical discussion, but has a sincere desire that all mankind might share with him what he practices. The soteriological theology cannot be separated from evangelism. The more the believer attains the blessings of salvation, the more his heart is kindled with brotherly love. At the same time every witness to the Savior, grants the believer a new experience of his salvation. While he serves others, he himself is served. Thus, we can say that our salvation and evangelization are just one action with two integral sides, when one is lost the

¹¹ See Carl A. Volz: *Life and Practice in the Early Church*, Minneapolis, 1990, p. 103, 222; *Paidagogos*, 1:1.

¹² Rown A. Greer: *Origen*, p.28.

other wouldn't exist.

III. The Theological Terminology: Because of the existing worldwide Greek culture, the Alexandrian School used Greek philosophical terms to explain Christian doctrines to gain philosophers and heretics. While the Alexandrians used the philosophical terms, they did not deem them. This is what **St. Athanasius** means when he states that *disputes merely over words should not separate those who think alike*¹³.

The Alexandrian Fathers did not give definitions to any theological terminology because they were interested only in the practice of theology. Benjamin Drewery noticed that he could not find a direct definition for the grace of God through the numerous works of **Origen**. He then deduced that: “if **Origen** had been required to offer a formal definition of grace, he would have responded somewhat as follows:

‘Grace is the power of God freely, but not unconditionally, placed at man’s disposal...’¹⁴”

With this theological perspective, believers

¹³ *Quod non sint tres de (That They are not three Gods).*

¹⁴ *Fr. T. Malaty: The Terms: Physis & Hypostasis in the early church, 1987, p. 4.*

do not emphasize theoretical terminologies, but rather, desire salvation and glorification of all mankind.

6. EVANGELISM AND THE SCHOOL'S VIEW REGARDING THE CHURCH AND HER TRADITION

I. The Church loves all mankind

Origen who was aflame with the love of all mankind **desired the salvation of all men**. When Celsus charged the Christians in believing that God had abandoned the rest of mankind and was concerned for the Church alone, Origen replied that this was not a Christian belief¹⁵.

II. The Church grieves for sinners

The Church together with her Head, Jesus Christ, **grieve ‘till all sinners return to their God**. **Origen** comments on these words, “Truly I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of this vine until I drink it anew with you in the kingdom of My Father” (Matt. 26:29). He explains that, wine, in the Holy Scriptures, is a symbol of spiritual joy. God promised His people to bless their vines, that is, to

¹⁵ *Contra Celsus* 4:28; N.R.M. De Lange: *Origen and the Jews: Studies in Jewish-Christian Relations in Third-Century Palestine*, 1976, Cambridge, p. 76..

grant them abundance of spiritual joy. For that reason, He prevents the priests from drinking wine when entering to the temple: for He wants them to be in grief while the sacrifices are offered on behalf of sinners. Then, when all sinners are reconciled with God, their joy will be complete. **Origen** believes that our Lord Jesus Christ, Himself, and His saints, are waiting for the repentance of sinners; therefore, their joy is not yet perfect.

[For the saints, when they leave this place, they do not immediately obtain the whole reward of their merits. They wait for us though we may delay, for they do not attain perfect delight as they grieve for our errors and mourn for our sins. Perhaps you do not believe me when I say this. For who am I that I am so bold to confirm the meaning of such a doctrine? But I produce their witness about whom you cannot doubt. For the Apostle Paul is “the teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth” (1 Tim. 2:7). Therefore, in writing to the Hebrews, after he had enumerated all the holy fathers who were justified by faith, he adds after all that, “But those who had every witness through the faith did not yet obtain the new promise since God was looking forward toward something better for us that they might not obtain perfection without us” (Heb. 11:39-40). You see, therefore, that Abraham is still waiting to obtain the perfect things. Isaac waits, and Jacob

and all the Prophets wait for us, that they may lay hold of the perfect blessedness with us.

Therefore, if you are holy you will be delighted when you leave this life. But that delight will be completed when none of the members of the body are missing, you will wait for others just as you were waited for.

As the delight is not completed to you who are members, if another member is missing, how much more does our Lord and Savior, who is “the Head” (Eph. 4:15-16) and the originator of the whole body, consider his delight to be incomplete when he finds one of the members missing from his body. And for this reason, perhaps, He declared this prayer to the Father: “Holy Father, glorify Me with that glory that I had with You before the world was” (John 17:5). Thus, He does not want to receive His complete glory without us, that is, He Himself wants to live in the body of His Church and with His people as in their souls, He can have all impulses and works according to His own will, so that, the saying of the prophet may be truly fulfilled in us, “I will live in them and walk [amongst them]” (Lev. 26:12)¹⁶.]

III. Ceaseless evangelism all over the world

The Church, which **Origen** sees and loves, is

¹⁶ *Homilies on Leviticus 7:2. (See Frs. of the Church)*

the gathering of Christ's disciples who are **scattered over the face of the earth**. That great assembly can never be compared with the rest of the human race. It never ceases to attract those who need belief¹⁷.

From the beginning of the Church, the gospel's message was proclaimed by believers wherever they lived or traveled. In his treatise against Celsus, **Origen** writes, "*Christians do all in their power to spread the faith all over the world. Some of them make it the business of their life to wander not only from city to city but from township to township and village to village, in order to gain new converts to the Lord*¹⁸."

IV. Tradition and Evangelism¹⁹

What is the Tradition that the Church feels obliged to convey to the whole world?

If we return to the apostolic age, we find "**many local church traditions**" that accept various cultures. But all these traditions have one mind, that is the mind of Christ; one spirit, i.e., the Spirit of the Lord, and one aim, i.e., our salvation. For this reason Alexandrian bishops did not hesitate in participating

¹⁷ R. Cadiou: *Origen*, Herder Book Co., 1944, p. 313.

¹⁸ *Against Celsus*, 3:9; Carl A. Volz: *Life and Practice in the Early Church*, Minneapolis, 1990, p. 97.

¹⁹ Fr. Tadros Malaty: *Tradition and Orthodoxy*, 1979 [*Tradition Today*].

with Bishops from Rome, Antioch and Jerusalem, in one service, and on one altar. Although, there are some differences in the details of the rites or traditions, they all share the same spirit, i.e. One Tradition.

All the apostles lived with one opened spirit of evangelism. “For, whereas I was free as to all, I made myself the servant of all, that I might gain the more” (1 Cor. 9:19).

When St Mark preached in Egypt, he spoke about the one Christ; and the Egyptians worshipped through their culture but in true apostolic spirit. For instance, **Coptic hymns** are different from the Syrian and Latin ones etc. All have a quiet and modest spirit; which contain the true dogmatic and spiritual teachings.

The Lights of the House of God, are another example. All the apostolic churches in the world use lights during worship day and night, especially during the reading of the Gospel. This is the spirit of Tradition, which declares that Christ is the Light of the world. Candles in the Coptic, Syrian, Latin, and Greek churches reflect their respective cultures.

Although Orthodox Christians across the whole world have one faith and preserve one tradition as a living truth, every local church expresses this one faith in its own language,

liturgical rites, hymns, sacred vestments etc. The church location does not dismiss its own catholicity. In other words, the differences in traditions and detail do not present an obstacle for evangelism.

a. The Orthodox Church, more specifically, the Church of Alexandria, preserved - more than others - the holy Tradition in detail, and in spirit. Our church did not interfere in politics, nor was it influenced by the worldly authority. It maintained its spirituality, and more over, its tradition despite the surmounting obstacles. The monastic movement has kept the tradition of the church in a humble, evangelic and ascetic spirit.

b. We ought to think seriously of what we should offer the world in our preaching. When a French man, for instance, accepts the Orthodox faith, we have to offer him an easy way to worship in an orthodox, apostolic and patristic mind, of his own culture.

In 1976, H.G. Gregorius, the metropolite of Newdelhi, India, in his speech to the Orthodox Church leaders in Melbourne, said that we have to sow Orthodox seeds in the Australian soil, so that tree will be an Orthodox Australian one.

c. As the Church of Alexandria has been opened to the outside world and to thousands of immigrates, the Church must guide and help them to preach the Orthodox way of life to others without

evading from the spirit of Tradition or Rite. It must not close itself to a local community or language but must have an ecumenical responsibility.

Truly, it is the urgent need of the orthodox theologians nowadays. to offer the living Tradition to the universe with an opened heart.

V. Evangelism and the School relationship with the Church

The school of Alexandria was a unique educational institution. The dean was the second man after the Pope. Many deans were chosen bishops or popes of Alexandria. None wished to be elected as Pope, and they never interfered into the church administration. They devoted all their lives to studying, teaching and preaching in humbleness. They, along with their disciples were real ascetics and worshippers of God.

They didn't encounter conflicts in their dealings with the clergy. Even when Pope Demetrius called a synod in Alexandria, and asked **Origen** to leave Alexandria, the latter left without creating any problems .He was a well-known dean, and was popular in Egypt and overseas, but he didn't want to waste his time with problems. In stead he established a new school in Palestine, and refused to return to Egypt after the departure of the Pope, saying that Palestine was more in need of his effort than

Alexandria.

VI. Evangelism and the Church as a heavenly life

The deans of the School of Alexandria aimed to lead everyone to the heavenly Father. Therefore, they themselves were anxious to practice the heavenly life - that they may bear witness to heaven.

St. Clement of Alexandria states that for the Gnostic, i.e., the spiritual believer, the earth is converted to heaven. The Gnostic practices heavenly life while he is on earth. For he “*will rest on God’s holy mountain, the Church above, 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, and God is your legislation*²⁰.”

For **St. Clement**²¹ the earthly Church, is the image of the heavenly one, thus we pray that God’s will may be accomplished on earth, as it is in heaven. It is the ideal Church, or “the heavenly Church,” is more often the subject of Clement’s thought in the *Stromata*²².

²⁰ *Stromata* 6:14.

²¹ *Stromata* 4:8:66.

²² *Stromata* 4:8:66:1; 4:26:172:2; 6:14:108:1; 7:2:29:3; 7:6:32:4; 7:11:68:5; *Lebreton*, p. 917.

Origen states that believers attain this heavenly life through the work of the cross.

[For Christ, “through His blood has made peace with earth and heaven” (Col. 1:20) so that the earthly might have fellowship with the heavenly²³.]

[Just as the sun and the moon are said to be the great lights in the firmament of heaven, so are Christ and the Church in us. Since God also placed stars in the firmament, He also placed stars in us, that is, in the heaven of our heart²⁴.]

Origen comments on the words “...divides the water which is above heaven from the water which is below heaven” Gen. 1:7, saying,

[Therefore, by participation in that celestial water which is said to be above the heavens, each believer becomes heavenly, by elevating his mind to lofty and exalted things, not thinking about the earthly matters but totally about heavenly matters, “seeking the things which are above, where Christ is at the right hand of the Father” (Col. 3:1)²⁵.]

7. EVANGELISM AND THE SCHOOL’S VIEW TO PHILOSOPHY

Alexandria, the cosmopolitan city, was

²³ *Homilies on Leviticus 4:4. (See Frs. of the Church)*

²⁴ *In Gen. hom. 1:7.*

²⁵ *In Gen. hom. 1:2.*

chosen as a home for learning²⁶. Egyptian, Greek and Jewish cultures together with eastern mystic thoughts flourished. The deans of the Christian School didn't allow another culture or philosophy to this area. They didn't want to enter into competition with these philosophies, nor did they want to challenge them. They dealt with philosophers by their broad-mindedness, the openness of their hearts and sincere love. In the second century **Tertullian**, the first theologian of the Western Fathers was attacking the ideology of philosophy as an enemy to faith and philosophers as being enemies of believers. At the same century in Alexandria, **St. Pantenius** insisted to practice his work as the dean of the school putting on the garment of the philosophers. **Origen** states that **Pantenius** attracted many pagan philosophers to the Christian faith. **St. Clement of Alexandria** was the first Christian writer who declared that philosophy is God's method to lead the well-educated people to Christianity. His disciple, **Origen**, was not in accord with philosophy but he insisted on using philosophy to attract the philosophers.

The early Alexandrian Fathers knew how to preach among the philosophers by using their own method. Thus, we have to walk in their steps, by

²⁶ *H. M. Gwatkin: Early Church History, London 1909, vol. 2, p.155.*

preaching others through their own culture. We have to acknowledge their mentality in order to reveal to them faith.

8. SCHOOL OF ALEXANDRIA AND THE SPIRIT OF JOY

For this School, the Holy Scripture is a journey of the soul from earth to heaven. The church is an icon of heaven and a community of joy. Believers are eager to see that men convert to joyful angels. **Therefore, the spirit of joy ruled over the deans and the disciples of the School even in the eras of persecution.**

St. Clement considers the Christian life as an everlasting feast²⁷. To him the true *Gnostic* attains **the new life in Christ as a Festival.**

Origen has the same idea. For him the Christian celebrates the Passover not only during Easter time but **at all times. He feasts** with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth and the bitter herbs of sorrow and repentance²⁸. His life is a Paschal or unceasing feast, full of spiritual joy through repentance. **Origen** says, [*Tell me, you who come to church only on festive days, are the other days not festive days? Are they not the Lord's days?*

²⁷ *Stromata* 7:7.

²⁸ *Contra Celsus* 8:22-3; *Comm. on John.* 10:13.

For **Origen**, “*Every day is the Lord’s Day... Therefore, Christians eat the flesh of the Lamb daily; they consume each day the flesh of the Word, for Christ our Passover has been sacrificed (1 Cor. 5:7)*³⁰.”

Origen comments on the words of the Psalmist: “Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound” (Ps. 89: 15), [*He does not say: “Blessed are the people who practice righteousness,” or “who have the knowledge of heaven, earth and stars,” but “who know the joyful sound!” Sometimes the fear of God grants man a joy...*

*Here blessedness is presented in abundance, why? For all the people participate in it, and all know the companionship in joyful sound!*³¹]

[*Isaac, Scripture says, “grew” and became strong, that is, Abraham’s joy grew as he looked not at those things “which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.” (Cf. 2 Cor. 4:18) For Abraham did not rejoice about present things or about the riches of the world and the activities of age. But do you wish to hear why Abraham rejoiced? Hear the*

²⁹ *In Gen. hom. (Cf. Heine).*

³⁰ *In Gen. hom. 10.*

³¹ *In Jos. hom 7:2.*

Lord saying to the Jews: “Abraham your father desired to see my day, and he saw it and was glad” (John 8:56) in this way, therefore, “Isaac grew”; (Cf. Gen. 21:8) that vision of Abraham, in which he saw the day of Christ, and his hope in Christ increased his joys. And have that you too might be like Isaac and rejoice in your mother the church³²]

St. Athanasius wrote about his teacher St. Anthony the Great: [*Because his soul was free from anxious, his outward appearance was calm. From his joyful soul, he possessed a cheerful countenance, and from his physical movements the condition of his soul could be perceived, as it is written, “When the heart is merry the countenance is cheerful, but when it is sorrowful it is cast down” (Prov. 15:13). Thus, Anthony was recognized, for he was never disturbed, for his soul was at peace; he was never downcast, for his mind was joyous³³.*]

This was reflected on the personality of his disciple, **Pope Athanasius the Apostolic**. We see him even in the middle of his crisis he didn't write about his isolation, nor about the grave he hid in. In his writings, he never mentioned his inability to meet his people in Alexandria. He recorded in his agony his view towards his life as **a permanent**

³² *In Gen. hom. (Cf. Heine).*

³³ *Vita Antonii, 67.*

feast. He says that **our feast is Christ Himself!** Wherever he lived, even hidden in a tomb, he still experienced an endless heavenly feast where the Risen Jesus Christ was transfigured inside him. With continuous joy, he never sustained from Jesus' work, attracting plenty through his prayers. He even sent letters to his people asking them to share with him his celebration of the everlasting feast.

In a Paschal Letter, **St. Athanasius** writes:

[The gladness of our feast, my brethren, is always near at hand, and never fails those who wish to celebrate it. For the Word is near, Who is all things on our behalf, even our Lord Jesus Christ, Who having promised that His habitation with us should be perpetual, in virtue thereof cried, saying, "Lord, I am with you all the days of the world" (Matt. 28:20). For as He is the Shepherd and the High Priest, the Way and the Door, and everything to us, again, He is shown to us as the **Feast, and the Holy day**, according to the blessed Apostle; "Our Passover, Christ, is sacrificed" (1Cor. 5:7).³⁴]

The world is not in need of many theoretical discussions, but to be in touch with the joyful heaven. Therefore, the spirit of joy is a living witness to Christianity. Through it, men acknowledge that heaven is at hand through the

³⁴ *Paschal Letters 14:1.*

work of the Holy Trinity.

9. EVANGELISM AND THE ECUMENICAL SPIRIT

No doubt, men can taste the sweetness of our faith in the Holy Trinity through the real Ecumenical spirit. Ecumenism is a spirit that the School of Alexandria spread not by speaking about the unity of churches all over the world, but by practicing it in many ways:

- ❖ The School attracted many foreign students to study theology, especially the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. Those students later became leaders in their churches.
- ❖ The deans of the School were very active outside Egypt, because of their love towards the Catholic Church; they were not looking for any personal prestige nor gaining any political power for their churches. For example Origen traveled to Rome, Caesarea, Arabia, Tyre, etc.
- ❖ The Alexandrian theologians were leaders and pioneers in the Ecumenical Councils.
- ❖ The Coptic manuscripts are proof that the Copts translated almost all the Christian literature existing in the world at that time.

10. THE ADVANTAGE OF STUDYING “EVANGELISM AND THE SCHOOL OF

ALEXANDRIA”

These brief outlines of the School’s role in evangelism will help us to acknowledge our message concerning the evangelism of the whole world.

Evangelism, in its essence, is a gift that we receive from the Fiery Holy Spirit who works in our inner selves. He sanctifies all our energies and talents for the edification of the kingdom of God on earth. We have to imitate those fiery deans by attaining the spirit of evangelism and handling it the new generation as our spiritual disciples

Remarks:

1. We have to clarify the real concept of monasticism. Some writers believe that it is an escape from responsibilities; to live in an atmosphere of grief and sorrow. On the contrary, St John Cassian speaks about our monks as joyful men who ascended to heaven, or as angels living on earth. For example, many pagans were converted to Christianity through the joyful life of Abbot Apollo and his disciples in Upper Egypt.
2. We should revise: our homilies and the curriculum of the Sunday school and youth meetings especially in the following points:
 - ❖ Concentrating on the role of every member

- of the church concerning the evangelism of the whole world.
- ❖ Discovering our status as children of God, being proud of the redeeming work of God and His grace.
 - ❖ Preaching our Orthodox faith, and not our local culture, while respecting the cultures of others.
 - ❖ Clarifying the real concepts of the church and its tradition
 - ❖ Concentrating on the Bible, and finding out God's plan to every one.
3. We should seriously study the different cultures of the world to prepare ourselves to preach the Orthodox faith to everyone.