

When the Word Says excerpts from the (incomplete) text

St. Shenoute of Atripe

A. Fragmentary Opening of the Sermon (fos. 1^ra, 1^vb–2^vb: Depuydt, 144)

When the Word says to the ones who belong to the saving prophecy, ‘We saw the Lord and he had neither likeness nor beauty, but rather his likeness was humbled and made sorrowful in comparison with all of humankind,’⁸⁰ let us know [...]

B. ‘If He Had Not’: The Incarnation and the Conditions of Human Salvation

..... If he had not been sorrowful, or if he had not groaned, this gift and this grace would not have been for all the faithful who had acted disobediently so that they might enter into the joy of your Lord. And if he had not suffered in the flesh, then woe to us on account of the sufferings which will happen to us, which will come upon us at the hour when we will give our spirit into his hands. If he had not been hit or if they had not thrown him a board of wood, the shame and the blame for our sins would have multiplied upon us, and they would not have been taken away forever. And if he had not given his back to whips and his cheek to punches, we would not have escaped death and destruction in the day of your judgement. If he had not been rejected, just as he said from his own mouth, ‘It is necessary for the Son of Man to be handed over to the Gentiles, and to be rejected, and to be despised,’ we would not have been reconciled to God. And if he had not been given vinegar when he was thirsty, or if he had not been given gall as his food, we would not have partaken of the food [...]—indeed, it is the true bread, the bread of life who has come down from heaven. Nor would we have obtained this grace, about which he said, ‘Whoever drinks from the water that I will give to him will never thirst, but the water that I will give to him will become in [them] a watery spring, gushing up [to] eternal life.’⁸¹ If

⁷⁷ Lacuna: approx. 12 letters missing.

⁷⁸ Cf. 1 Corinthians 10: 3–4. There is a lacuna of approximately 11 letters missing in the manuscript that I reconstruct on the basis of this biblical reference.

⁷⁹ Lacuna: approx. 16 letters missing (with one tau and one epsilon legible).

⁸⁰ Isaiah 53: 2b–3a.

⁸¹ John 4: 14.

he had not given himself for our sake, we would not have [...] the gi[ft.....], as he said, 'Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.'⁸² If the true light had not come into the world,⁸³ or if the sun of righteousness had not shone forth to us,⁸⁴ evil and the storm would have covered the entire inhabited world. And if he had not raised himself up all at once for the sake of sin, as it is written, his Father would not have looked down on the earth on account of the multitude of the stenches and the filths of the sins belonging to those who inhabited it. And if he had not been found in form as a human being, even though he was God and the Son of God, humankind would not have become equal to angels, especially when one is a celibate among the wise people and discerning children of the holy mother, the catholic church, (the people) who honour God in their true labour. For if the Lord had not done these things (along with all those other things), we would not have salvation at all. These words belong to the Christians whose hope is the Lord Jesus, and do not belong to the heretics, who do not believe in him.

C. An Economy in the Flesh: The Renewal and Perfection of Human Likeness in the Incarnation

... For it will be found that he is clothed with rags, lying in a manger, and the angel will speak with Joseph concerning him, saying, 'Arise and take the child and his mother and go up to Egypt, for Herod will seek after the child to destroy him.' Who is the one who will kill—who is the one who will destroy—the soul of Herod, along with his body, in the fiery furnace? For concerning him these things will be heard in this fashion—indeed, they will be spoken of in this way and they will be repeated concerning him. Namely, that stones will be taken up and thrown at him, and he will be tempted by the devil. And they will seek after him to kill him, and they will say, 'You are mad; it is a demon that is with you!' And they will arrest him and bind him like a thief. And they will nail him to a cross. And they will give him vinegar to drink after he has said, 'I am thirsty.' And they will blaspheme against him, while shaking their heads (at him). And they will insult him in the likeness of all the words that they said. And they will pierce his side with a spear. In this way, therefore, when he came, (p. 148) the Lord of all was humiliated in this fashion, for the prophet said concerning him, 'He has neither likeness nor beauty.'⁸⁵ Yet truly, he asked a question concerning certain things like a man who lacked knowledge: like when he asked the father of the small child when he wanted to heal him how much time it had been since he had reached him, as if he did not know. Like when he asked about Lazarus, 'Where have you laid him?' And also like when he asked his disciples, 'Who is the one who touched my garments?' as if he was ignorant about who it was. And also, like when his disciples sought him and woke him up when he was sleeping on the boat, saying, 'Teacher, teacher, we will be destroyed,' (he responded) as if he did not know that they were troubled or that they were endangered as the

⁸² John 6: 54.

⁸³ Cf. John 1: 9 and 3: 19.

⁸⁴ Cf. Malachi 4: 2.

⁸⁵ Isaiah 53: 2.

windstorm descended on the lake.⁸⁶ O patience of God, establish the place of the wise that they may understand the things which his Christ did according to an economy.

But as for the ignorant, they have acted lawlessly in their asinine nature because they have not known him. As the word says, 'For if they had known him, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.'⁸⁷ Nor would they now have become people who cause a disturbance yet again when they answer, so that they become subject to a reckoning. If they had fallen, as it is written concerning the Lord, 'Behold, he is established for the falling and rising of many in Israel, and as a sign against which they will answer.'⁸⁸ 'For the word of the cross is foolishness for those who will perish,[but] for those who will be saved, God's power and wisdom.'⁸⁹ Thus, the word that the prophet said concerning the Lord says, 'We saw him, and he had neither likeness nor beauty, but rather his likeness was humbled and made sorrowful in comparison with all of humankind.'⁹⁰ Until now, he is foolishness to unbelievers since they do not place their trust in Christ. But to us, the ones who are awake and who stand in faith, he is wisdom. We want our Saviour not to be sorrowful when he sees that the creation of his hands, humankind, has perished.

Consider the pattern of humankind, through whom many things have (indeed) perished, or (consider) of what sort human likeness is. (When you do so) you will understand that, as for the likeness humankind took on when he sinned, along with the shame which resulted, the Lord came to dwell in that likeness for our sake when he became human, in order to bring humankind to its originary state and sinlessness, and to the initial beauty of the soul before it became unclean. Thus he made the soul clean and perfected humanity.

⁸⁷ 1 Corinthians 2: 8b.

⁸⁸ Luke 2: 34.

⁸⁹ 1 Corinthians 1: 18. Here Shenoute cites a series of verses that play on a common verbal theme—namely, that of falling (ⲉⲛ) or perishing (ⲉⲛ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ), two concepts which both utilize the same root verb in Coptic.

⁹⁰ Isaiah 53: 2b.