

**THE TEACHING  
OF ST. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA  
ON THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS  
CHRIST ACCORDING TO  
HIS ADDRESSES  
TO THE PRINCESSES**

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**1. GENERAL REMARKS**

The present article aims to describe St Cyril of Alexandria's theology on the Resurrection as is to be found in his *Dedications to the Princesses* preserved in the minutes of Ephesus with parlor references to Pusey's edition, as this can be more accessible to some researchers. These two Dedications are of extremely high importance as they are Cyril's first attempts to comfort the Nestorian heresy and were used as a weapon to convince the Princesses for the orthodoxy of his doctrinal positions – and they were fully persuaded to the point that Emperor Theodosius, always against him, accused him of interfering in his personal life. In this article there will also be given briefly Cyril's teaching on the Incarnation of God the Word and his death as far as his humanity is concerned, again as exposed in his two *Dedications*, because His resurrection is inseparably linked with the rest of the Divine Economy. Secondary literature or other Cyril's works have been used where some points of the *Dedications* needed clarifying.

## 2. THE INCRNATION

### a. The Enfleshment of Logos

St Cyril notices that the Logos has born from all the ages by the substance of God and Father; he is naturally Son of God the Father<sup>1</sup>: that He really and naturally has derived his existence from the Frather has been noted down by the fact that He has really experienced engendering from the Father<sup>2</sup>. He seats and works together with the Father.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, as the Divine Nature is but one, everything is worked down by the Father throught the Son in the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup> All Three Divine Persons are consubstantial to one another. How the concept of consubstantiality affects the issur of Jesus Christ's Resurrection is business of the next section. Now it is time to examine how the Logos became flesh.

It must be mentioned from the outset that, when Cyril uses the term σαοξ he means Jesus Christ's humanity. His human nature, i.e. flesh united inseparably with rational soul.<sup>5</sup> Cyril stresses the Jesus Christ experienced bearing and took flesh from the blessed Mary.<sup>6</sup> This was the secdord bearing: as Cyril emphasises, he is not other the Son who has been born before all the ages by the essence of God and Father, and other who was born by woman in certain time; but He is one and the same.<sup>7</sup> Cyril stresses tha the unity between the Don and the humanity undertaken by Him is true and calls it *προς σάρκα σύνοδον*.<sup>8</sup>

The Son has assumed body which has soul and is thoughtful and intellectual.<sup>9</sup> Cyril's theory about the human soul provides him an example how the god-head and the humanity were united in the Person of Jesus Christ: the human being consists of both body and soul, interamination and perichoresis taking place between them. So, as the body and the soul are inseparaby united with each other, so is the divinity united with the humanity of Jesus Christ.<sup>10</sup>

That Jesus was born for a second time as a man does not mean that the god-head turned into the humanity. In contrary, he assumed the humanity without

1. Mansi, col. 808, §5//Pusey, 268.

2. *ibid.*

3. *ibid.*

4. *ibid.*, col. 869.872, §51//Pusey, 321.322.

5. Theodorou, 43-48.

6. Mansi, col. 808 §4//Pusey, 267.

7. *ibid.*, col. 808 §5//*ibid.*, 267-268.

8. *ibid.*, col. 805 §2//*ibid.*, 265.

9. Mansi, col. 808 §5//Pusey, 268.

10. McGuckin, 198ff.

suffering any change: even after the incarnation he remained truly God.<sup>11</sup> Cyril stresses that Jesus submitted Himself to the economic emptiness voluntarily<sup>12</sup> not feeling shame into undertaking the categories of the human nature.<sup>13</sup>

Cyril mentions further that the human mind has to be full of thoughts marked by the divine favour in order to understand the biblical testimonies about Christ and realise that He is simultaneously God and man. One should not be surprised by the fact that the Scripture attributes human categories to Jesus but rather to consider narrowly this glory derived from the divinely marvelous power and superiority.<sup>14</sup> Thus, to understand the Scriptures is necessary for one to be deified.

Cyril says that the union of the two natures in Christ is hypostatic. Since the human nature exists only in the person of Jesus, Cyril means here is that this union is «true, real and consistent».<sup>15</sup> The union results in the single adoration of Jesus.<sup>16</sup> In the next section we shall examine closely which is the relation of the Incarnation to the atoning work of Christ. Now, we turn to view the consequences of the hypostatic union, which is of equal importance if we are to understand St Cyril's theology of resurrection.

### **b. The communicatio idiomatum**

According to Cyril the Son allows the flesh and his soul alike to express their sinless passions.<sup>17</sup> The attributes of both the natures, the godhead and the humanity, refer to the Person of Jesus, namely the person of the Son of God the Father.<sup>18</sup> Cyril interprets the Hebr.1.9<sup>19</sup> based upon the exchange of id-

11. Mansi, col. 805 §3//Pusey, 266-267.

12. *ibid*, col. 805 §2//Pusey, 265-266.

13. *ibid*; we have translated as «the categories of the human existence» the phrase *Ἰδίως σκέμματα*. *Σκέμμα* means: subject for speculation or reflexion, and certainly the human categories are subject to speculation and reflexion.

14. Mansi, col 805, §3//Pusey, 266-267.

15. Tsirpanlis, 7.

16. Mansi, col. 685 §6//Pusey, 158. The Fifth Ecumenical Council likewise anathematizes anyone who «οὐχι μία προσκυνήσει τὸν Θεὸν Λόγον σαρκωθέντα μετὰ τῆς ἰδίας αὐτοῦ σαρκὸς προσκυνεῖ, καθάπερ ἡ τοῦ Θεοῦ Ἐκκλησία παρέλαβεν ἐξ' ἀρχῆς» (Records, 591). This teaching is also the nucleus of the thought of the Seventh Ecumenical Council.

17. *ibid*, col. 876-877 §55//Pusey, 327-328.

18. MCGuckin, 181f.

19. «But we see Jesus who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man».

ioms. How has he been made a little lower than the angels who is adored by them and both «seats» and «works» together with the Father, Cyril boldly asks – and he answers: economically. It is the Son himself, and not only his humanity separately, who retires from leading the holy angels; the Son becomes lower than the angels because they are incorporeal and not subject to death, while Christ has body and is mortal. Yet, he, who is lower than the angels in regard to the limitations of the human nature, is adored by them because of his divine superiority.<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, St. Cyril uses very strong expressions to expose his teaching about the exchange of idioms: the one Son is impassible regarding the divinity and passible as regards the flesh.<sup>21</sup> The Father possesses the life naturally in Him, and so He has given to the Son it. Thus, inasmuch as the Son is God and is from the Father naturally, He has in Himself naturally the life. Yet, since He makes a human body his own, he is said to have received the life. So, he makes the life his own, who has made his own the body that he has assumed.<sup>22</sup>

McGuckin attracts our attention to the fact that sometimes Cyril says that Jesus as a man only seemed to pray or to die and so forth. As this scholar points out, in such cases Cyril does not fall in a mere docetism but wishes to stress that though Jesus was limited as a man, yet He was «unlimited as God». Furthermore, in any act of Jesus, the human and divine natures were actively present, both of them. By assuming the limitations of the human nature Christ aimed to transform the corrupted humanity into a deified uncorrupted one.<sup>23</sup>

As will examine further in the next section. Cyril applies the communicatio idiomatum to the event of the Resurrection as well: He died in a human manner but resurrected divinely; He was crucified according to His human nature, but revived as God.<sup>24</sup>

### **3. THE JESUS'S DEATH: ITS RELATION WITH HIS PASSION AND PRIESTHOOD**

Cyril theoretically asks: how would it be possible for the human nature to derive advantage from the death of a man, if of course Emmanuel had been an

20. Mansi, col. 809, 812 §8//Pusey, 269-271.

21. *ibid.*, col. 872-873 §52//*ibid.*, 323-324.

22. *ibid.*, col. 877.880 §56//*ibid.*, 328-329.

23. McGuckin, 216-222; Mansi, col. 824 §18//Pusey, 280-281. *ibid.*, col. 813 §9//*ibid.*, 272.

24. Mansi, col. 824-825//*ibid.*, 281-282.

ordinary, a mere, man; comparing the death of Jesus with that of the prophets and saints Cyril mentions that the death of the later did not give advantage to the human, while Jesus's saved them.<sup>25</sup>

According to Cyril, Adam's Fall imposed defect upon the human nature as well as corruption and death; it was Jesus's work to weaken, exhaust, and nullify, the power and the death. The only way to do this was to suffer death in His own humanity; it was through His passion that He made the corruption to loose its power and abolished death.<sup>26</sup> Cyril's teaching about Jesus's passion has certain implications in regard to His priesthood; the serving and the being served are both ascribed to Jesus, that means to the Word of God (as Cyril says God received the name Jesus when He became incarnate). Certainly, Cyril notices, to be served by the creatures is proper to His being God and Lord ruling the whole created reality. Yet, He himself renders service. For every priest mediates: but, whilst the human priest carries out the sacrifice as servant, He brings it to Himself and through Himself to the Father. Moreover, Christ as a priest celebrates our confession, viz. our faith, clearly expressed by the Council of Nicaea.<sup>27</sup> But the notion of Jesus's priesthood is even richer as we shall see in the next section. Now, it is time to examine the Cyril's understanding of Jesus's sacrifice as offering ransom.

Jesus consecrated His own flesh through suffering as a ransom for the life of all.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, Cyril mentions that Christ offered «himself for all in the place of all, a ransom to God the Father».<sup>29</sup> The offer of this ransom had to do with the «deliverance of all from the power of sin and the devil».<sup>30</sup> It was the Son who wished to offer Himself to the Father, not the Father himself. As well as that, Christ, «because of His philanthropy», offered to all the people their salvation as a gift. For it was impossible for the themselves to buy it.<sup>31</sup> The discussion of this theory lied beyond the limits of the present article. Yet, we have to say that here Cyril presents himself self-contradictory with relation to his whole theology of Incarnation and Passion – for the clearly emphasises the close relation of the Incarnation and the Passion to the sanctification and for-

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25. *ibid.*, col. 685-688 §7//*ibid.*, 158-159.

26. *ibid.*, col. 812-813 §9//*ibid.*, 271f.

27. Mansi, col. 833-836, §26//Pusey, 290-292.

28. Cyril's *Quod Unus Sit Christus*, SC 97, 466 in Koen, *The Saving Passion*, 121.

29. *idem*, in *John 6*, 27, Pusey v. 1, 451 (to be found in Koen, *The Saving Passion*, 126).

30. Dratselas, 82.

31. *ibid.*, 83.

giveness of the sins of all the humans, thus to the justification.<sup>32</sup> In addition to that, he links the justification with the baptism and the Eucharist as we shall see in the second section to which we are turning now.

#### 4. THE RESURRECTION

##### *§1. The Resurrection*

###### **a. The going down into the Hell**

Cyril uses some strong images in order to illustrate the condition of the people before Our Lord's death.<sup>33</sup> These images may well imply the condition of the humans after the Fall, when there was no communion between them and the Holy Trinity. This results from what he says about the vivifying of the fallen man in his *Commentary of John* as exposed by Papapetrou: the quickening of man takes place in Jesus Christ because it is in Him that there is restored the communion between God and man. The Incarnation of Logos is the starting point of such a restoration. In Jesus Christ we regain what we lost when we fell: the life. The life as the sacramental reality of the faith is the communion with God.<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, man was under Satan's dominion: Satan was the lord of the death.<sup>35</sup>

Cyril proceeds to explain the event of the Jesus's going down to the hell again by using images and especially by personalising Hades: Hades is presented as dead whom Jesus robbed from his belongings, that means the dead, who were thus freed from Hades' prison.<sup>36</sup> Jesus weakened himself and allowed his body to have experience of the death in order to make null the power of the devil. Certainly, Cyril says, Jesus's weakness referred to his humanity.<sup>37</sup> In the

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32. It must be noticed that St. Gregory of Nyssa sees Jesus Himself as ransom given by Him Himself to the Satan, in place of all, a concept that involves fight taken place between Jesus and Satan for all the humans' sake. In our opinion this theory is better than Cyril's: the latter's makes, as we see it, no sense common will; the corollary of this is that Father himself wants also this offering, which can lead one to accept the theory of the divine satisfaction.

33. Mansi, col. 877 §55//Pusey, 327-328.

34. Papapetrou, 93-94.

35. Mansi, col. 877 §55//Pusey, 327-328.

36. *ibid.*

37. *ibid.*, col. 876 §54//*ibid.*, 325-326.



hell Christ preached to and freed the dead «and so defeated Satan and his power. Thus the devil was punished».<sup>38</sup> The descent into Hades must be seen as the liberation from hostageship conditions, not from a certain place: as we have seen, what the people lost was the communion with the Holy Trinity – this was the real death. With Jesus Christ they can live again: His going down into the Hell smoothed the path for Jesus's resurrection since it was impossible for him to be under death.<sup>39</sup> So, through the death of his own flesh He led the humanity, the human nature, to the resurrection.

### **b. The Resurrection**

The Jesus's resurrection has two dimensions, the one interpenetrating the other: trinitarian and pneumatological. Cyril is based upon the oneness of the divinity, the divine nature, thus on the consubstantiality of the Three Divine Persons with one another, and upon the oneness of their activity, their work: every work, which is proper to the Divinity, is carried out by all three Divine Persons, by the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit. So, though it is said that the Father resurrected Christ, Christ was also actively involved in the resurrection of this own body.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, Jesus revived through the power of the divinity, this power which gives life to the dead and brings the non-beings to the being.<sup>41</sup> Here there is brought again to the discussion the matter of the exchange of idioms: Jesus died as a man, but he resurrected as God, having overthrown the power of the death;<sup>42</sup> he was crucified humanly, but he revived divinely; His body must be considered as his, so that there could be said that He was resurrected though He is really and naturally God – He who died and resurrected was one and the same person, Jesus Christ.<sup>43</sup>

Cyril notices also that Jesus has roused divinely because He is life.<sup>44</sup> Actually, it is the Father who is naturally life, and since He is the bearer of the Son, the Son is also naturally life. This brings us again to the theme of the common activity of all Three Divine Persons: though it is the Son who acts the life in those who have need of it, yet He does not act separately from the Father. For He has in himself His Bearer. Cyril illustrates his position by providing the text of John

38. Dratselas, 69.

39. Mansi, col. 873 §53//Pusey, 324-325.

40. *ibid.*, col. 869.972 §51//*ibid.*, 321-322.

41. *ibid.*

42. *ibid.*, col. 685 §6//Pusey, 158.

43. *ibid.*, col. 824-825 §19//*ibid.*, 281-282.

44. *ibid.*

1, 10:

*Believest thou not that I am in the Father and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself; but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.*

Moreover, the Spirit is also acting as Spirit of life;<sup>45</sup> as Cyril remarks, the Holy Spirit is called both Spirit of Christ and Spirit of God and, in order to support his thesis, refers to Rom. 8, 9:

*But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells within you. Anyone who does not possess the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him.*

Cyril stresses that, as the Spirit belongs to both, Christ and his Father, it is unquestionable that even though the resurrection was referring to his humanity it was acted by both the Father and His natural Son, whom the Spirit is own.<sup>46</sup> But, the aforementioned text of Romans is also of remarkable anthropological significance. This brings us to the next paragraph of the section.

## **§2. The soteriological consequences of the Resurrection**

### **a. The Resurrection of the humans**

Cyril stresses the eschatological character of Jesus's Resurrection. The Father gave to the Son those who believe in Him (i.e. Christ) in order to save them in the day of Christ's Second Coming. Through the death of His flesh, Jesus paved the way for the Resurrection of the humans.<sup>47</sup> Jesus Christ is the First-born among the Dead. Because of His rising up, the believers can now imitate Him and be saved through their obedience to Him.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, the Resurrection of Jesus provided the human nature with the ability to resurrect in the Holy Spirit as we are going to see now.

The Resurrection of Jesus is not suffocated in a mere moralism but has certain ontological implications for the humans.<sup>49</sup> Jesus vivifies and resurrects the dead as God; His resurrection delivered the human nature from the guiltiness, and His obedience destroyed the ancient curse.<sup>50</sup> Cyril's terminology seems tru-

45. Mansi, col. 869.872 §51//Pusey, 321-322.

46. *ibid.*, col. 873 §53//*ibid.*, 324-325.

47. *ibid.*, col. 837 §28//*ibid.*, 292-293.

48. *ibid.*

49. Dratselas, 22.

50. Mansi, col. 869.872 §51//Pusey, 321-322.

ly to be legal and moralistic. Yet, we are in the opinion that his thought lies beyond such categories as it can be seen in what we have said about the ontological dimensions of the resurrection and are also going to see in the next paragraph.

Cyril says that through His resurrection we are justified in Christ<sup>51</sup> and further we are justified in Him through our faith in His death and resurrection.<sup>52</sup> As Dratselas points out,<sup>53</sup> the justification in Cyril's thought has two sides, the negative and the positive: negatively, justification means the forgiveness of the sins and positively the divinisation of the humans, that means consecration to the Holy God, or man's preference to do God's Will, in which case implies the sacrifice of man's self.<sup>54</sup> In his *Oratio and Theodosium* Cyril, interpreting ICor. 15, 49 («*and as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly*»), stresses that the image of the earthy is our tendency to sin, hence dying, whilst the image of the heavenly is the image of Christ, the expression indicating our firmly possessing the sanctity as well as our being recalled from the corruption and our restoration in the incorruptibility and life.<sup>55</sup>

### **b. The bringing before the Father**

Cyril proceeds to examine this issue through the Hebr. 8, 1-2:

*We have such a high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of Majesty in heavens. A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle set up by the Lord and not by man.*

Cyril points out that the heavens are the most appropriate place for Jesus Christ to stay, yet, as Papapetrou explains, Cyril does not mean the heavens locally but uses this term as a symbol of the spirituality which is beyond the in-the-world reality, as a metaphysical category of God.<sup>56</sup> Well, Jesus being in the heavens brings to the Father those who believe in Him and have been sanctified by the Holy Spirit, or else by Him through the Holy Spirit. The people are dead for the world, but alive in Christ as vivified by the Spirit. The notion of the bringing before the Father is closely related with His priesthood.

To sanctify the men is a liturgy, a liturgy celebrated by God. So, though

51. *ibid.*

52. *ibid.*, col. 824-825 §19//*ibid.*, 281-282.

53. 97-103.

54. Dratselas, 101.

55. ACO 1/1, p. 55.

56. Papapetrou, 1.

Christ is said to celebrate the liturgy, yet He is not an ordinary priest: He is not less than the Father and shares the same with Him glory, as proved by His sitting on the right hand of God.<sup>57</sup> What we are talking about here is precisely the Ascension of Jesus Christ, a direct consequence of His resurrection. As Cyril says, Christ «became the beginning», *the origin* of the Ascension of the new and incruised mankind.<sup>58</sup> But, as we saw, the Ascension of the humans presupposes their sanctification. So, now it is time to examine how they can achieve this goal through the sacraments of the Baptism and the Eucharist.

### c. The Baptism and the Eucharist

Cyril's view of the resurrection of the men is not only eschatological: he sees the resurrection as a radical, ontological, change of the whole being of man. Following the Paul's theology Cyril sees the baptism as entombment and resurrection: in the baptism we have entombed ourselves together with Christ so that, as Christ rose up from the dead, we can follow a new life-style. Cyril stresses here again the concept of the exchange of idioms: we have been baptised, he says, in the death of God the Word, the same who is passible humanly and impassible divinely.<sup>59</sup> Here Cyril stresses the theme of justice: Christ transforms our beings so that we can live a completely new life, brought before the Father as living in justice.<sup>60</sup> Surely, the justice is anything but legalistic here: the Holy Spirit penetrates ourselves, our souls and our bodies, and is going to resurrect us in the Judgment Day.<sup>61</sup> So, the justice here indicates the Christian way of life, which is indeed our personal resurrection, the rising up from the condition of sinfulness, thus shamefulness.

The baptism is the beginning and the inauguration of our sanctification which becomes more and more fuller inasmuch as we follow the way of perfection: the Eucharist is the *sine qua non conditio* for finishing this way, thus accomplishing our goal, the deification. Because of the consubstantiality of the Three Divine Persons, God and the Word carries naturally the grace of the Holy Spirit (actually the grace of the Holy Trinity is but one) and so bestows it upon his own human nature: during his baptism in Jordan, he baptises himself as God providing the

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57. St Cyril, *Epist.* 41, PG 77, 220 in Dratselas, 70.

58. Mansi, col. 873 §53//Pusey, 324-325.

59. ΠΑΟ, 433 §52.

60. *ibid.*

61. *ibid.*, 433 §53.

62. *ibid.*, 410.

Holy Spirit, whilst receiving simultaneously the grace of the Holy Ghost as a man.<sup>62</sup> It is through the reception of this deified body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ during the Holy Communion that we gain the life. For the life is by nature proper to the Holy Trinity, thus to God the Word,<sup>63</sup> and as we have already seen life is the communion with the Triune God. Therefore, resurrected in a new life through the baptism, the Christians can sustain this life, and advance more through Eucharist. Through the Holy Communion the Son «makes us deathless and incorruptible».<sup>64</sup> An ontological change, «a metamorphosis», takes place in the participant; through the Holy Communion he/she communicates with the life, the Logos and is deified. By this way the Son secures «the resurrection of our bodies».<sup>65</sup>

## 5. SUMMARY

Cyril emphasises that all three Divine Persons of the Holy Trinity are united in the community of the essence and the energy. Moreover, he stresses that the Son has really assumed the whole human nature, destroyed the sinful condition in which it was because of Adam's fall, and deified it, a direct outcome of the exchange of idioms.

When Jesus died regarding his human nature, He went down into the Hell where He freed the dead from the diabol, and from where He resurrected. It is through the Resurrection that we achieve the deification provided by the Baptism and the Holy Eucharist. It is also through the Resurrection that we are brought before the Father. Finally, the unity of the Three Divine Persons explains the fact that not only the Son resurrected Himself, but also the other two Persons as well.

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63. *ibid*, 434-435.

64. Chadwick, 153.

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