

# **The Priesthood and Worship in the Theology of St. Cyril of Alexandria (I)**

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## **Abstract:**

The study on both parts presents systematically the basic conception of St. Cyril of Alexandria on priesthood and the particularity of the worship brought by Jesus Christ. A crucial role for this approach is taken up by the exegetical reception of the Cyrillic works. Our analysis, in the first part, is taking into consideration, besides this incipient fact, the compositional and functional identity of the High Priest of the Old Covenant, analysed in its specific features combined in the person of the Son of God embodied as the high priest of all humanity par excellence.

## **Keywords:**

St. Cyril of Alexandria; sacrifice; priesthood; iconomy; redemption

## **Holy Scripture – the Germ of Cyrilic Writings... a Theology in the Recovery Stage**

Perhaps one of the greatest negligence in Eastern patristic theology was the lack of reception of the exegetical work of St. Cyril of Alexandria. Regularly included in theology (school) workbooks – almost obsessively limited only in the context of the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus (431) and having at the forefront the controversy with Patriarch Nestorius<sup>1</sup> and the answers given to him in the so-called anathematisms<sup>2</sup> –

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<sup>1</sup> For a thorough theological analysis of the representatives of the Antiochian school, including of Patriarch Nestorius, see especially, Rowan A. Greer, *The Captain of our Salvation*, J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), Tübingen, 1973, 371 p., Daniel Buda, *Hristologia antiohiană de la*

Cyrrillian theology has become nearly a counterpoint, limited to Christological formulas and schemes<sup>3</sup>, perceived in the eastern area as an “Orthodox Christological Handbook”<sup>4</sup>. This especially becomes a sad page in a book of ignorance, since Cyrrillian exegetical work is taken into consideration today. If we consider some simple statistics of Cyrrillian works survived, we notice the biblical shares in the thought and life of this *theologian bishop* therefore, of the ten volumes kept in *Patrologia Graeca* (vol. 68-77), seven (!) of them are exegetical<sup>5</sup> and the highest part of the exegesis of

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*Sfântul Eustațiu al Antiohiei până la Nestorie, (Antiochian Christology from St. Eustace of Antioch to Nestorius)*, “Lucian Blaga” University Publishing House, Sibiu, 2004, 316 p., republished in revised form at Cluj University Press, Cluj, 2012, 409 p.; For an overall exposure of the entire debate in the contemporary vast literature we recommend in particular, John Anthony McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria. The christological controversy its history, theology and texts*, Brill, Leiden, New York, Köln, 1994, 430 p.

<sup>2</sup>PG 77, 120-121. In the Romanian theological literature: N. Popovici, *Începuturile nestorianismului cu specială considerare asupra anatematismelor lui Chiril, (The Beginnings of Nestorianism with Special Consideration on Cyril's Anathematisms)*, Sibiu, 1933, p. 33-36., *Anatematismele Sf. Chiril al Alexandriei (Anathematisms of St. Cyril of Alexandria)*, translation by dr. Olimp N. Căciulă, Bucharest, Printing House of Church Books (316), 1937, 111 p., also appeared in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* no. 3-4/1937, p. 129-155. More recently Nicolae Chifăr, *Istoria creștinismului (History of Christianity)*, vol. 1, “Lucian Blaga” University Publishing House, Sibiu, 2007, p. 369-371.

<sup>3</sup> See in this sense, since 19<sup>th</sup> century, Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, tr. Neil Buchanan, vol.6, New York: Russell and Russell, 1961, p. 174-179. Eduard Weigl, *Die Heilslehre des hl. Cyrill von Alexandrien, Forschungen zur christlichen Literatur-und Dogmengeschichte*, 5,2/3, Mainz: Kirchheim, 1905, XIV, 360 p; Jacques Liébaert, *La Doctrine Christologique de Saint Cyrille d'Alexandrie avant la querelle Nestorienne*, Lille, 1951; etc.

<sup>4</sup> In this sense, from this quasi-Christological reception the patriarch also received the surname “seal of the Fathers”. For an excellent exposition of Cyrrillian theology in analysing several texts, especially related to pre-Chalcedonian Christology, see, Pr. Prof. Ioan G. Coman, „Și Cuvântul trup s-a făcut”. *Hristologie și mariologie patristică, (And the Word Became Flesh. Patristic Christology and Mariology)*, Publishing House of Mitropoly of Banat, Timișoara, 1993, p. 98-125.

<sup>5</sup> Comments that have completely survived on some of the issues or interpretations of some books, passages, episodes, sometimes line by line from the Holy Scripture, are on the books of Pentateuch, St. Cyril of Alexandria, (*De adoratione et cultu in spiritu et veritate, Glaphyra*), then to the prophet Isaiah, to the twelve prophets, to the Gospel of John, to the Gospel of Luke. Slightly more extensive fragments are to the Gospel of Matthew, the Epistle to the Romans, I Corinthians, II Corinthians, and the Epistle to the Hebrews. There have also survived short pieces of commentary on the Books of the Kings, the Psalms, Solomon's Proverbs, the Song of Songs, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, The Acts of the Apostles, the Epistle to James, Peter I, Peter II, John I and Jude.

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St. Cyril of Alexandria is conducted before the controversy with Patriarch Nestorius<sup>6</sup>(!).

This started late to arouse attention and interest of a number of scholars in the last half of the twentieth century (perhaps the most relevant, year 1971 when Wilken published his exceptional monograph about Saint Cyril<sup>7</sup> – revival that continues today), and it is an absolutely necessary step, since the Christological implications of his writings were born from a profound and extremely faithful exegesis of Holy Scripture<sup>8</sup>.

In the Romanian space, the most tenacious and also the first theologian who developed the most important Cyrillian exegetical work was father Dumitru Stăniloae. Perceived in liturgical context<sup>9</sup> both in his studies that are created as true theological micro-monographs, and in a series of translations accompanied by extensive explanatory notes and comments<sup>10</sup>, father Stăniloae will make a real programme for

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<sup>6</sup> Already mentioned above. The exegesis from the catholic epistles come from Cyril's other works, lost nowadays and not from the proper commentaries (cf., Claudio Moreschini, Enrico Norelli, *Istoria literaturii creștine vechi grecești și latine II/2. De la Conciliul de la Niceea la începuturile Evului Mediu, (The History of Ancient Greek and Latin Christian Literature II/2. From the Council of Nicea to the Beginning of the Middle Ages)*, translation by Hanibal Stănculescu, Ed. Polirom, Iași, 2004, p. 200.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Louis Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind: A Study of Cyril of Alexandria's Exegesis and Theology*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1971, 257 p.

<sup>8</sup> Opinion found in most authors: John J. O'Keefe, „Kenosis or Impassibility: Cyril of Alexandria and Theodoret of Cyrus on the Problem of Divine Pathos”, *Studia Patristica* XXXII (1997), p. 358-365, here p. 359, 361, 365; Eirini Artemi, „Cyril of Alexandria speaks for God in his interpretation of the Holy Bible”, *Acta Theologica* XXXIV (2014), no. 1, p. 8; 10-12 and next; Robert Louis Wilken, „St. Cyril of Alexandria: Biblical Expositor”, *Coptic Church Review* XIX (1998), p. 30-41; Daniel Keating, *The Appropriation of divine life in Cyril of Alexandria*, Oxford Theological Monographs, Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> The same opinion has Adrian Marinescu, “Patristic criteria and grounds of theology, constant structural elements of Orthodox Theology, and premises for solving today's theological problems (I)”, *Studii Teologice* IX (2013), no. 2, p. 296. In this sense, see also the table at p. 286-287, where St. Cyril in the work of Fr. Stăniloae, *Spiritualitate și comuniune în Liturghia ortodoxă (Spirituality and Communion in the Orthodox Liturgy)*, has an occurrence percentage of 40%, the second place after St. Maximus who occupies 53%.

<sup>10</sup> In particular the studies: Dumitru Stăniloae, „Ființa Tainelor în cele trei confesiuni”, (The Being of the Mysteries in the Three Confessions), *Ortodoxia* VIII (1956), no. 1, p. 3-28; Idem, „Legătura interioară dintre moartea și învierea Domnului”, (The Inner Bond between the Death and the Resurrection of the Lord), *Studii Teologice* VIII (1956), no. 5-6, p. 275-287; Idem, „Legătura între Euharistie și iubirea creștină” (The Bond between Eucharist and Christian Love), *Studii Teologice* XVII (1965), no. 1-2, p. 3-32; Idem, „Teologia Euharistiei”, (Theology

the reception of Cyrillian theology, unprecedented in Romanian theology, unsurpassed until today<sup>11</sup>. Thus, we may say that Cyrillian theology, especially the exegetical one shall become constitutive to theological thought of Dumitru Stăniloae, similar to the one developed from the writings of St. Maximus.

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of the Eucharist), *Ortodoxia* XXI (1969), no. 3, p. 343-363; Idem, „Învățătura Ortodoxă despre mântuire și concluziile ce rezultă din ea pentru slujirea creștină în lume”, (The Orthodox Teaching on Salvation and the Consequences Resulting from it for Christian Service in the World), *Ortodoxia* XXIV (1972), no. 2, p.195-212; Idem, „Dumnezeu este lumină, (God is Light), (I John 1, 5)” *Ortodoxia* XXVI(1974), no. 1, p. 70-96; Idem, „Liturgia comunității și jertfa interioară în viziunea filocalică”, (The Liturgy of the Community and the Inner Victim in the Philocalic View), *Ortodoxia* XXX (1978), no. 1-2, p. 389-399; Idem, „Iisus Hristos, Arhiereu în veac”, (Jesus Christ, the High Priest for ever), *Ortodoxia* XXX (1979), no. 2, p. 217-231; Idem, „Jertfa lui Hristos și spiritualitatea noastră prin împărtășirea de ea în Sfânta Liturghie”, (The sacrifice of Christ and our spirituality by sharing it in the Divine Liturgy), *Ortodoxia* XXXV(1983), no. 1, p. 104-118; etc. Unique studies in their own way on sacrificial spirituality especially related to St. Cyril of Alexandria . Most of these, and not only, were actually written for PhD courses in Bucharest, namely, after the position of Rev. Stăniloae on Ascetic and Mystic was suppressed by the Communist regime.

Translated volumes: Sf. Chiril al Alexandriei, Scrieri partea I, *Închinarea și slujirea în duh și în adevăr*, (St. Cyril of Alexandria, Writings Part I, *De adoratione et cultu in spiritu et veritate*), translation, introduction and notes by Fr. prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, in the coll. Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești (Church Fathers and Writers) (38), Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române PH, Bucharest, 1991, 616 p; Sf. Chiril al Alexandriei, Scrieri partea II, *Glafire*, (St. Cyril of Alexandria Writings Part II, *Glaphyra*, (Elegant Sayings)), translation, introduction and notes by Fr. prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, in the coll. Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești (39), Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române PH, Bucharest, 1992, 464 p; Sf. Chiril al Alexandriei, Scrieri partea III, *Dialoguri despre Sfânta Treime*, (St. Cyril of Alexandria Writings Part III , *Dialogues on Trinity*), translation, introduction and notes by Fr. prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, in the coll. Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești (40), Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române PH, Bucharest, 1994, 310 p; Sf. Chiril al Alexandriei. Scrieri partea IV, *Comentariu la Evanghelia Sfântului Ioan*, (St. Cyril of Alexandria, Writings Part IV , *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*), translation, introduction and notes by fr. prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, in the coll. Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești (41), Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române PH, Bucharest, 2000. Quotes shall be made simply by indicating only the short title and page number. The last one is the longest exegetical translated comment (1183 pages (!) and among the most explanatory notes from the entire work of Father Stăniloae, more precisely 2.226 of such notes (!).Cyrillian sacrificial nuances and references also appear in other theological works of Father Stăniloae, which shows striking impregnation of Cyrillian theology.

<sup>11</sup>Except for some translation of the work of the Alexandrian patriarch, Cyrillian theology exegetical in the Romanian territory (except Fr. Stăniloae) has not yet been perceived seriously.

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Some authors say that biblical comments of St. Cyril work in fact as a complementary part or even as a foundation for his controversial treatises<sup>12</sup> as they appear based on interpretations of his exegetical work. According to Daniel A. Keating, the crucial pivot role of St. Cyril in his Christological disputes of the fifth century and his militancy for diplophysite Christology, which were imposed in theological and patristic heritage at the Council of Chalcedon, left his biblical comments<sup>13</sup> in the shade. Norman Russel states that if there had not been the Nestorian controversy perhaps Saint Cyril would have remained remembered as a scriptural exegete<sup>14</sup>.

Our concern aims at the Incarnation theology (in exegetical work) of the patriarch, the implications throughout the redeeming iconomy of the Old Covenant, in particular the one concerning the cultic priesthood. Yet without being able to cover the so-called *sacramental theology* (respectively the two Sacraments, Baptism and Eucharist) of the Alexandrian Bishop<sup>15</sup>, we mention that this represents the relevance or the required application of the theology developed from the whole redemptive iconomy. We could say that “the cultic sacrament” is the iconomy of the Son *in concreto* lowered/embodied in every believer and in all His humanity (the Church).

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<sup>12</sup> Cf., Lionel Wickham, „Symbols of the Incarnation in Cyril of Alexandria”, in: Margot Schmidt and Carl F. Geyer (eds.), *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern and ihren Parallelen im Mittelalter*, Regensburg, Pustet, 1982, p. 45. Opinion adopted by Daniel Keating, *op. cit.*, p. 13, etc.

<sup>13</sup> Daniel Keating, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> Norman Russel, *Cyril of Alexandria*, Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, London and New York, 2000, p. 16.

<sup>15</sup> For this topic see, especially for Eucharistic problem, the excellent study by Henry Chadwick, „Eucharist and Christology in the Nestorian Controversy”, *Journal of Theology Studies*, (1951), no. 2, p. 145-164; Lawrence J. Welch, *Christology and Eucharist in the Early Thought of Cyril of Alexandria*, International Scholars Publications, San Francisco, 1994; Ezra Gebremedhin, *Life-giving blessing : an inquiry into the eucharistic doctrine of Cyril of Alexandria*, Uppsala, Univ., Diss., 1977; the excellent monograph by Daniel Keating, *op. cit.*; in Romanian Deacon Prof. Ioan Caraza, „Doctrina Euharistică a Sfântului Chiril al Alexandriei” (the Eucharist Doctrine of St Cyril of Alexandria), *Studii Teologice*, XX (1968), no. 7-8, p. 528-542, republished in *Spovedania și Euharistia, izvoare ale vieții creștine. II. Sfânta Euharistie – arvuna vieții veșnice, (Confession and the Eucharist, the Source of Christian life. II. Holy Eucharist - a Pledge of Eternal Life)*, Basilica PH, Bucharest, 2014, and later Nicolae Moșoiu, „Sarx zoopoiou – Întropare și Euharistie în învățătura Sfântului Chiril al Alexandriei”, (“Sarx zoopoiou” – the Incarnation and the Eucharist in the teaching of St. Cyril of Alexandria), *Revista Teologică XXV* (2015), no. 3, p. 34-59.

### Pre-Incarnational Priesthood

St. Cyril understands Christ's priesthood in relation to His activity during the Incarnation and the priestly ministry of the Son of God in the Incarnation is anticipated by His activity before the creation, respectively in the relationship of God with Israel. Such a development of the Son of God's priesthood guarantees the continuous trajectory of the Son's work on behalf of creation and avoids dissociation between what happened before and what took place through the Incarnation<sup>16</sup>. In *Glaphyrorum in Genesim 2*, this feature appears about the mystery of Christ and history of Israel. He became the Apostle and our High Priest and freed us from the slow tongued law, passing to the beautiful voice of evangelical teachings. The fact that *He was anointed in Priesthood and Apostle by the example of Aaron shows Him to us very clearly*, that was made head and leader of priests and the people<sup>17</sup>.

The priest's mediation function requires consubstantiality with those for which or on whose behalf he intercedes as a priest<sup>18</sup>. In and by the humanity which Christ unites with Himself in the Incarnation, the Son takes upon Himself the priestly ministry in which He is elected and appointed by the Father. Old priesthood was effective only until the time of Christ coming to the world in the form of a servant/slave. The transfiguration of Christ in the presence of Moses and Elijah (Moses serves as a symbol of the Law and priesthood) reveals that the Levitical priesthood was brought to completion<sup>19</sup>.

Therefore, the title "High Priest"<sup>20</sup> is given to the Son during the Incarnation and Incarnation (He does not appear in the world as a meteorite), *colours* (fills) the whole

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<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Douglas Hicks, „St. Cyril on the Priesthood of Christ and the Old Testament”, *Phronema* XXX (2015), no. 1, p. 105.

<sup>17</sup> Glaphyra (abbreviated Glaph.) Gen. 2, PG 69, 88ABC. Furthermore, assuming the kingship and priesthood of Christ was prefigured in Zerubbabel and Joshua, where in Christ the two are taken over by a single subject and brought to perfection. See: Comm. Hagg. 1, 14-15, in St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on Twelve prophets*, vol. 3, apud *Fathers of the Church*, vol. 124, translated with an introduction by Robert C. Hill, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C., 2012, p. 74.

<sup>18</sup>This idea seems to be a constant one in the later Cyrillian opera (cf., Gerald O'Collins, S.J., and Michael Keenan Jones, *Jesus our priest. A Christian Approach to the Priesthood of Christ*, Oxford, University Press, p. 99).

<sup>19</sup> Comm. Is. 7:17 (PG 70, 220D); Comm. Is. 22: 20-24 (PG 70, 517B). Thus, according to J. Douglas Hicks, the priesthood of Christ is to be understood primarily in economic terms (rather than essentialist) (J. Douglas Hicks, *art. cit.*, p. 106). Anti-subordiantianist character of Cyrillian early writings is probably a plausible explanation for Cyril's insistence on that the Son becomes a priest.

<sup>20</sup> See appellations Christ "the priest of priests", etc., in Cyril of Alexandria, *De adoratione et cultu in spiritu et veritate* (abbreviated De ador.), 13, PG 68, 845A.

history of God's relationship with His creation and Israel. Jonathan Douglas Hicks<sup>21</sup>, gives in this sense, a very significant example, referring to a writing instrument. Thus, as the tip of a pen or of a nib, if it is kept long, over pages raised in a book right with the spike, will produce a mark or an ink stain that will turn on all pages below, similarly by the Incarnation all scripture pages from the lowest letter, even those in the pre-event of the Incarnation, are "coloured" or "stained" with sacrificial blood of the Son of God. St. Cyril understands this work of God's Son to take over functions of priestly ministry, which are taken to their culmination point through the Incarnation, in His mission to Israel<sup>22</sup>.

St. Cyril explaining Deut. 12: 17-19 understands in the sacrificial work of priests of the Old Covenant, an *imitation* of the Unique Mediator: Christ<sup>23</sup>: only what is sanctified in Christ is holy, therefore through Christ these have all been sanctified. That is why Christ was called by iconomy a bull. For He is the firstfruits of those called to this state. A connection between two sacrifices (Old Testament and Christ) it is by the necessity to be sanctified by blood. This fact gives proximity to God. Moses (Ex. 24) showed it by sprinkling with blood all the people and the land itself and also then young people when offered sacrifices that they have made spiritual ministers of the holy acts. And so *they arrived before the Father* and they presented Him the vigor of understanding and making themselves as an offering<sup>24</sup>. Sacrifice is the means of access to God, a way to come near to the heart of the Father. We have very clearly stated, sacrificial conversion leading to the identity of the sacrificing and sacrifice, respectively the offering brought.

Thus, we may see that in the pre-incarnational sacerdotal theology St. Cyril, the shadow/type becomes fully updated, namely, the total presence of God communicated through an Old-Testament sign is made at that time. God Himself is present. The shadow becomes truth and reality, moreover the shadow is based on the truth as foreshadowing of reality. This can be seen in the episode on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24)<sup>25</sup>. Thus, Moses<sup>26</sup>, on Mount Sinai, approaches the intimate presence of the Father

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<sup>21</sup> Jonathan Hicks Douglas, *art. cit.*, p. 107.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 107.

<sup>23</sup> De ador.13, PG 68, 880B.

<sup>24</sup> Glaph. Ex. 3, PG 69, 521A-C.

<sup>25</sup> Glaph. Ex. 3, PG 69, 524BC. In the Comment to Zechariah, Cyril reflects the apostolic position of the activity of the Son in the Old Testament in the broadest sense possible (see, J. Douglas, *art. cit.*, p. 108).

<sup>26</sup> For the analysis of this key figure in Cyrillian theology see, John Anthony McGuckin, "Moses and the mystery of Christ in St. Cyril of Alexandria's exegesis (I)", *Coptic Church Review* XXI (2000), no. 1, p. 24-32, and the second part, John Anthony McGuckin, "Moses and the mystery of Christ in St. Cyril of Alexandria's exegesis (II)", *Coptic Church Review* XXI (2000), no. 2, p. 98-114.

only through the mediation of the Son (!). Similarly, the blessing through Aaron's hands served as a paradigmatic blessing of Christ's priesthood, respectively a symbolic form, because the path of blessing is Christ; and He is the distributor of eternal goodness; in Him and through Him we are given all from the Father<sup>27</sup>. Thus, Christ is the way and the means of all blessing for humanity<sup>28</sup>. The Son's work in the Incarnation in this regard *continues* with what the Son was in the period before the Incarnation. Although in the Old Testament priesthood was not carried out in fulfillment of the priestly ministry, or a perfected one, yet it led towards the Son, the High Priest<sup>29</sup>. What is new in assuming priesthood that Christ makes through the Incarnation, was His decisive fight with sin, corruption (damage) and death on our behalf<sup>30</sup>.

We could say, *avant la lettre* that the Incarnation is the meaning of creation, *axis mundi*, the goal for which all things were created, respectively their transfiguration in the light of priest's Macro-Sacrifice. St. Cyril's emphasis of pre-incarnation priesthood makes sense to a divine iconomy manifesting in the world and continuing forever. This pre-priesthood highlights the work of divine Logos on His creation, which He shall complete by the *installation* and transfiguration of it.

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<sup>27</sup> De ador. 11, 772CD.

<sup>28</sup> The Son before the Incarnation is involved in priestly ministry, so that by Aaron (the Son) blesses Israel. St. Cyril expresses this thought most eloquently in his meditations on the meaning of the seven facets of the stone in Zechariah 3. The stone is placed before Joshua the high priest, and he is told by the angel of God, to look at it, an important role also having the putting on clean garments with which he was dressed in. The stone, from the cornerstone foundation means according to St. Cyril the foundation of Syon, i.e. Christ looking at everything with many eyes. We can see the text quoted as a reference to the relationship between the priesthood under the Law and the person of Christ (J. Douglas, *art. cit.*, p. 109). In this respect, the priests of the order of Aaron looked over to Christ sending or showing thereby their service to Him, even if the Son was their intercessor with a perfect view and knowledge, he supports/appoints them (Israel priests) until the time of the incarnation. The Son, in coming to the priesthood through the Incarnation, takes on a role He is already familiar with.

<sup>29</sup> J. Douglas, *art. cit.*, p. 110. St. Cyril is in line with the parents who speak of the Son's mission to the people of Israel. He speaks of the mission in terms that underline the continuity of the Son's activity across the entire economy, including the election of Israel. This mission as one in which the Son takes various functions (discovery, affirmation of true worship/cult, intercession of blessing and prayer) has its meaning even more clearly in the Incarnation.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*. For an explanation of incarnation theology of St. Cyril consistent with the theology of Nestorius, see the excellent study by John Anthony McGuckin, "A Synopsis of St. Cyril's Christological Doctrine", *Coptic Church Review* XIX (1998), no. 1-2, p. 42-51. Appeared for first time in St. Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ*, translated with an introduction by John Anthony McGuckin, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, 1995, p. 32-47.



### **Reasons and Elements of the Mosaic Priesthood as Constitutive Factors of Emmanuel's Priesthood**

From the topic of Israelite priesthood (cultic sacrifice and service) St. Cyril develops other related, less pronounced scriptural topics that refer to a whole range of meanings that are centered on the vision of Christ as High Priest of humanity par excellence<sup>31</sup>. The themes are taken from passages describing life, activities, clothing, services at Holy Tabernacle (sacrifices) performed by sacerdotal personnel in Israel. Thus, in Cyrillian reading one could see that all these elements are *pre-incarnation elements of Christ's priesthood*.

#### ***a) The High Priest as a Liberator from Exile***

A theme extended to the High Priest figure of the Old Testament is taken from the status of the priest in his participation in the policies of Israel. In this respect, Cyril develops parallels between the work of priests of Israel, especially those performed by Moses and Aaron. Thus, when the Jewish people got out of slavery in Egypt, both the “legislator Moses” and Aaron, the high priest, led him to freedom. St. Cyril extrapolates these functions on the work of Christ on humanity, because we all have been called to freedom through faith in Christ and have been freed from the tyranny of the devil. Christ was foreshadowed to the Israel by Moses and Aaron, to understand that Emmanuel is at once legislator and high priest and apostle<sup>32</sup>.

The same representative figures, the king (legislator) and priest also appear at the return of the Israel people from the Babylonian captivity, namely Joshua and Zerubbabel. They are in the role of high priest and governor of Judea after their release from the exile in Mesopotamia. Both the governor and the priest are figures interpreted by St. Cyril as *typos* for Christ, carrying out the spiritual liberation from exile<sup>33</sup>, moreover, Christ unites in the same person the two figures and ministries respectively,

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<sup>31</sup>For the analysis and exegetical methods of the Alexandrian patriarch see, Alexander Kerrigan, *Cyril of Alexandria: Interpreter of the Old Testament*, Pontificio Istituto Biblico, Roma, 1952; Steven A. McKinion, *Words, Imagery, and the Mystery of Christ, a reconstruction of Cyril of Alexandria's Christology*, Brill, Leiden, Boston, Köln, 2000; Lois Farag, *St. Cyril of Alexandria, a New Testament Exegete. His Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Gorgias Press, New Jersey, 2007; Ed. Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, *The Theology of St. Cyril of Alexandria. A Critical Appreciation*, T & T Clark, London, New York, 2003; David Cassell, *Cyril of Alexandria and the Science of the Grammarians: A Study in the Setting, Purpose, and Emphasis in Cyril's Commentary on Isaiah*, unpublished PhD thesis, at University of Virginia, 1992.

<sup>32</sup> De ador. 1, (PG 68, 200 A).

<sup>33</sup> Comm. Is. 11: 12-13 (PG 70, 329D).

priest and king<sup>34</sup>. The Savior's, liberator's namesake, Joshua son of Jehozadak (Navi) in Cyrillian reading sends to Christ<sup>35</sup>. Joshua's service that he carries out and especially his activity is amplified in the work of Christ<sup>36</sup>.

These punctual typological references indicate the work of Christ as a High Priest directed to victory and overcoming the exile condition of humanity from the bondage of sin and death. The Son, in His service as a priest transmits to humanity the victory over death and the corruptibility of human nature (cf. De ador. 3). The way the bishop from Alexandria sees the fulfillment of this saving fact is a special one. Thus, St. Cyril makes an allusion to the cities with political asylum regime during the people of Israel<sup>37</sup>. Interesting in Cyrillian reading, the situation is extrapolated to Christ and to the work He performs for humanity. In this sense, the death of Christ as High Priest shows the discharge of hell (Hades), respectively the victory over it. We may say that He defeated the enemy who killed us, He “avenged us”, but moreover, by dying, he (the High Priest) shedding His blood for us, He saved our soul from damnation and from the exile of the world and from the flesh. Also the soul of man (humanity) spent many years in the bosom of death, being released only when Christ died, and descended into hell<sup>38</sup>, or death was defeated when the staff from Jesse's root budded, for Christ has risen and vanquished the pains of death<sup>39</sup>.

### ***b) The Liturgical Garment or Sacerdotal Investment***

*Priestly garments* in the Old Testament in Cyrillian reading send to a number of meanings that find their counterpart in the person of Christ. Furthermore, they are seen in the theology of the Incarnation (embodiment) of the Son of God. In this respect, the garments worn by the priest become a symbol of the body/flesh assumed by the Son of God<sup>40</sup> or His embodiment is seen as an act of coating in an ontological condition, which inaugurates the suffering slave destiny. The length of garments signifies incorruptibility, which makes reference to the intimacy of the union of the flesh, of the human nature with the Divine Logos. Christ thus makes Himself a communicating

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<sup>34</sup> Comm. Haggai, 1, 14-15, FC (The Fathers of the Church) 124, p. 74; Comm. Zechariah 4, 4-6, FC 124, p. 131 and 6, 9-15, FC 124, p. 155.

<sup>35</sup> Comm. Zechariah 4, 4-6, (FC 124), p. 131.

<sup>36</sup> Comm. Haggai 1: 5-6, FC, 124, p.68.

<sup>37</sup> In the case of a murder/homicide (even of unwitting accomplice) there was a protection against the hostility of the family of the deceased, who were seeking to revenge the shed blood (this role was fulfilled by the so-called *goel damah*). Those who sought refuge in such cities (with political asylum regime), were allowed to return home only after the death of the high priest.

<sup>38</sup> De ador. 8 (PG 68, 581 AC) the passage is Numbers 35.

<sup>39</sup> De ador. 10, 673BD.

<sup>40</sup> De ador. 11, (PG 68, 732AD).

vessel with His own incorruptibility and life that He pours into human nature<sup>41</sup>. In a passage, St. Cyril says that the Son's death does not mean the removal of a mitre (symbol of eternal law) nor of garments (body), and the resurrection takes place without losing His priestly garments that He had put on since the Incarnation<sup>42</sup>. It is important to note that dressing up as an act associated with a sacerdotal ritual (such as the one at the tabernacle or temple) is assigned to the Incarnation or equivalent to assuming human nature by the Logos<sup>43</sup>. Thus, dressing up the human nature is tantamount to putting on the garment of High Priest, humanity is the area of Christic priesthood. In a plastic formulation, we may say that the day of the Incarnation/embodiment in the womb of the Virgin at the Annunciation is the feast of ordination of the Son of God Who is ordained High Priest by the Father<sup>44</sup>. For this reason, his destiny is par excellence sacerdotal and exclusively vicarial.

**c) Purity or imitatio Dei in Holiness**

Another subject of the Levitical priesthood and of its related sacrificial system, is their charge with the respecting the cult of purity<sup>45</sup>. In connection with this competence specific to priests to assess epidermal diseases, loss of body fluids, as everything that threatens life, Christ acts in a similar way as a responsible legislator even more as a doctor on our souls. Although we got sick with death and we left God, Christ wants to bring us to the Father, to earn *boldness* and *familiarity* with Him<sup>46</sup> as

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<sup>41</sup> De ador. 11, (PG 68, 744C).

<sup>42</sup> De ador. 12, (PG 68, 816 AC, 824A).

<sup>43</sup>This identification will be part of the vocabulary of other Eastern Fathers, e.g. St. Maximus the Confessor in Ambigua 4. See iconography in The Annunciation (Lady Day), for this topic we recommend the excellent monograph of Fr. Maximos Constat, *The Art of Seeing: Paradox and Perception in Orthodox Iconography*. Alhambra, California: Sebastian Press, 2014, 263 p. + 73 color illustrations (here Chapter II (!) and IV).

<sup>44</sup>Perhaps from these texts, father Stăniloae inspired himself in the analogy that "His sacrifice (of Christ, our note) is the garment that we should dress up in order to be able to go with Him. It is the Christ's red robe, a robe of His purity that becomes ours" (D. Stăniloae, *Legătura între Euharistie și iubirea creștină*, (The Bond between the Eucharist and Christian Love), p.19). This process of "coating" is carried out by baptism (De ador. 11, col. 780 A, in D. Stăniloae, *Legătura între Euharistie și iubirea creștină*, p. 19). Here Stăniloae goes back again to the two points in the process of Christians' personal sacrifice: death to sin and the sanctification through the Spirit of Christ which indicates a purity of proximity for receiving Christ (idea taken from Cyril, De ador. 16, col. 1056 D, in D. Stăniloae, *Legătura între Euharistie și iubirea creștină*, p. 20).

<sup>45</sup>Priests were evaluating and taking decisions about the physical condition of the houses, skin diseases, dispensing the divine economy in accordance with the divine Law, see J. Douglas Hicks, *art. cit.*, p. 97.

<sup>46</sup> De ador. 10, PG 68, 672B; etc.

much as the Father draws us to Himself through His Son. Christ renders us healed to ourselves, alive, after He evaluated (diagnosed) us and cured our sinful condition, so that we may be able to be present clean before the Father as an offering radiating the smell of pleasant fragrance<sup>47</sup>. The purity of the Israelite cult aimed to attract God's presence moreover, to imitate His way to be, and St. Cyril sees it expressed in "evangelical life" in the new worship<sup>48</sup>.

Thus, we can say in a first phase that Cyrillian reflections on Christ's priestly activity, are directly oriented towards human nature, respectively towards liberation, restoration and healing of its corruptibility. St. Cyril is concerned in this respect by the priesthood as renewal of humanity, for the possibility of bringing it, through a life of perfect obedience, to the Father as a pure sacrifice.

#### **d) Sacrifice and Memory**

The notion of priestly sacrifice of Christ has, in Cyrillian theology, a kind of reciprocal movement. Thus, as the Son draws us to the Father to know and love, so the Son also brings into being a new way in which the Father knows and keeps us in His memory<sup>49</sup>.

About this "knowledge" of God about us (His memory of humanity), through the act of registration made by the High Priest as a founding act, St. Cyril says that the registration was done by Moses and Aaron, so that through both of them we understand: Christ, in Moses, as legislator and High Priest. Also by His intercession the enrollment of those men leaders in virtue is made in the divine book<sup>50</sup>. This registration is made *par excellence* through the Incarnation of the Son of God. In this way, this "registration" is for all humanity, for those people who sacrifice their lives to God through virtue, maximizing the communion with all people<sup>51</sup>. About this registration in the divine book, the patriarch resorts to the symbolism of omophorion in particular<sup>52</sup>. The stones that the high priest introduces in the ephod (cf. Exodus 28) as remembrance before the Lord in the Temple services are symbolic (they bring another reality) and also show us how the Son keeps us in His memory before the

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<sup>47</sup> De ador. 15, PG, 980D-981A.

<sup>48</sup> The ritual purity sends to the acquisition of purification and sanctification as a means of access to communion with God through sacrifice and cult prescriptions, namely holiness as a common feature with God by "living in Christ" see for ex., De ador. 10, 689 AB, etc., De ador. 11, 756CD-757C, etc.; for *imitatio Dei* as a holy ritual within the Semitic space, see also Jonathan Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2006.

<sup>49</sup> See De ador. 16, 1024A.

<sup>50</sup> De ador. 4, 312 BC.

<sup>51</sup> See also De ador. 4, 313B.

<sup>52</sup> De ador. 11, 736ABC.

## *The Priesthood and Worship in the Theology of St. Cyril of Alexandria (I)*

Father. The census and selection of Levi's tribe<sup>53</sup> is a distribution in accordance with human limitations, as far as teaching/ giving/ offering to God, then identified with those in the group of the holy Apostles, respectively priests<sup>54</sup> of the New Covenant, the Christians.

According to St. Cyril through the mind of Christ toward us, we are known by God so we are no longer strangers, but *familiar* with Him. The alienation that characterised our existence when we were known as rebellious and disobedient by the Father was deleted by Christ who takes us with Him as fellow-children by grace, carrying us on His shoulders<sup>55</sup> as “the High Priest of our souls” (*arhierous ton himeteron psychon*)<sup>56</sup>.

### **Conclusions**

1. The reception of exegetical writings of St. Cyril of Alexandria is an absolutely necessary approach for shaping and understanding his own theology. The main topics, most of Christological and Trinitarian formulations, related developments, in other words, the maturity of his thought as a theologian, is defined in his exegetical pre-Nestorian work. Any analysis or elaboration on his teaching, must take into account this theology.

2. The exegetical theology of the Alexandrian Father is a typological Hristo-centric one *par excellence*. The Bishop's reading sees Christ in the whole course of events described in the Old Covenant, so that everything taking place in the salvation history (*oikonomia*), from the creation of Adam up to very precise sacrificial rituals, is accomplished in the person and redemptive work of Christ. The emphasis is on the integration rather than on the rejection of these Old-Testament elements of priesthood, so that there is a *gradual incorporation transition*, respectively, increase to fulfillment (as an act of valuing the Aaronic Priesthood) and not a substitute one by total canceling (as historic and economic acts). Aaron, Moses, the law, regulations or sacrificial rituals, sacrifices themselves, garments, liturgical objects, etc have effective constituent values in the sacerdotal iconomy of Jesus Christ and thus in the new worship/service brought by Himself. In other words, Christ' sacrificial garment of High Priest is woven of these items delivered to Moses and Aaron that He dresses up in His redeeming destiny and itinerary in order to create a new man as *son* of God (*Christian*), *familiar* and *known/memorised* by the Father.

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<sup>53</sup> De ador. 13, 845B, see De ador 13, 845C.

<sup>54</sup> De ador. De ador 13, 848AB

<sup>55</sup> J. Douglas Hicks, *art. cit.*, p. 104.

<sup>56</sup> In Ioannis Evangelium PG 74, 480 C. Thus, as we have seen, Cyrillian theology on priesthood includes a number of reasons which, according to Jonathan Douglas Hicks, can be grouped into three broad categories: *a) release from sin, corruption (damage) and death, b) restoration/ regeneration of own cult/worship c) presentation of true God to humanity and the true humanity to God* (J. Douglas Hicks, *art. cit.*, p. 95).