

# **“Redemption – ἀπολύτρωσις” as a saving act highlighted in the New Testament**

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## **Abstract:**

*When we approach an issue that has as main subject the concept of Redemption or the restoration of human nature, we must start from the premise that the Orthodox Church, as a faithful interpret of the Holy Scripture, along the lines of the primary Christian and patristic tradition, highlights and analyzes this concept in its depth.*

*The Holy Scripture emphasizes the concept of Redemption or restoration of human nature, stating that God gave His Son to death for the salvation of the world, because “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life”(John 3:16). It is not an abstract justice nor the need to excuse for an offense to the divine majesty, but only the divine love is the driving force of the willing sacrifice brought by the Son of God on the Cross for the salvation of the world.*

*The Incantation of the Savior, as a beginning of Redemption, defines and determines the whole work of the redemption of the human being, as well as what follows. Incarnation is not only the beginning of the saving act of our Redemption, but the entire history of the salvation of human race and even the whole economy of the Son of God, are based on its redeeming content.*

**Keywords:** *Redemption, Incarnation, salvation concept, Pauline Theology*

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## **Introduction**

The saving work of Christ or the Redemption - ἀπολύτρωσις (Bailly 2000: 233) is “the act done by the Savior Jesus Christ by His sacrifice on the Cross, to take upon Him our sins” (Mircea 1995: 437) and to deliver us from the spiritual bondage. Indeed, the doctrine of Redemption occupies a central place in Christian teaching, Christianity being the religion of Redemption, since according to the teachings of Saint John the Theologian, “... whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin” (John 8,

34), or without the Redemption brought by Christ the Savior, we are the slaves of sin.

Starting from the meaning of the name Jesus, which translates the Hebrew Jeshua – יֵשׁוּעַ and means *God is the Savior*, Redemption means “the salvation of the human race from the bondage of sin and death and its reconciliation with God” (Bria 1994: 335).

Seen in its entirety, the teaching of Redemption is in close relationship with the teaching of the Incarnation, these being linked to the teaching of the fall into sin, because by falling into sin, man lost communion with God, being mastered by the evil and implicitly by sin. Because of this, man could no longer return to God, and could not be saved by his own powers and he was heading towards moral degradation and eternal destruction.

Even if man, by falling into sin, has broken the bond with God, departing from Him, He will not let him down to his own deeds, but in His love for man, he will send “His son, the accomplice of the work of salvation” (Stăniloae <sup>2</sup>1993: 79), to the fullness of time, to redeem the human race from the bondage of sin, and to restore to Him the corruptible body of man, turning him into a state of incorruptibility” (Sf. Chiril al Ierusalimului 2003: 318).

Thus understood, Redemption means the salvation indicated by the Trinitarian communion. It is “the work of the Holy Trinity, its fulfillment and completion belonging to the Son of God” (Mircea 1972: 24), to whom is assigned the name and the quality of Savior or Redeemer.

### **The meaning of the “Redemption” as a concept in the Old Testament**

The promise of salvation made by God to the first men, immediately upon falling into sin and recorded in the Holy Scripture by the words: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Genesis 3, 15) will be kept alive at all times within the chosen people. This hope will be cultivated by the righteous of the Old Testament and then continued even more seriously during the biblical prophets. Being sent by God, the prophets presented in their speeches and writings several aspects of the saving work, portraying it as a new spiritual order, as an act of redemption and righteousness that would be

accomplished both toward the people chosen as well as toward all humanity.

Thus, the desire for salvation will be observed at all times, and will mark the entire existence of the chosen people until it will be fulfilled by the coming of the Messiah as the Son of God and the Savior or Redeemer of the world.

So, the concept of Redemption is also met in the Old Testament, but it is embodied in the form of *types*, *symbols* and *images* still unfinished. In fact, the notion of *τύπος* - *type* contains characteristic elements in itself, but they must still be processed and perfected to reach what the type prefigures, that is to say the antitype, the antitype being present in an imperfect form in the type that represents it. At the same time, *the type* can be expressed through a person, an action, an object or an event (Basarab 1997: 46). Typically, the Holy Scripture presents the type through a historical reality, therefore the type is a historical reality of prophetic nature, which contains a reference to the antitype presented, being raised to the perfect fulfillment by the work of the Holy Spirit (Popa 2018: 111). Thus, Adam is presented as *the type* of the One to come, that is, to Christ, “... Adam, who is the image of the One to come” (Romans 5, 14).

In view of these considerations, the idea of Redemption is present in the Septuagint more than 65 times, but has different uses and forms of use:

- a. It is constantly used with reference to the redemption of the people of Israel by God from the Egyptian bondage (Exodus 6, 6);
- b. With regard to the redemption or re-purchase of the firstborn of the special service of God (Exodus 13, 13; 34, 20)
- c. It is also used to redeem something that has been pawned (Levitics. 25, 25; 30, 33) (Barclay 1992: 203)”.

In the present study we will only focus on the idea of Redemption concerning the redemption of the people of Israel from the Egyptian bondage. In this sense the term גָּאַל -ga'al means to deliver, to redeem from slavery, or from death. In the Book of Exodus we have revealed such ideas when Moses is sent again to Pharaoh to ask for the liberation of his countrymen: “Therefore, say to the Israelites: ‘I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you

from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm..." (Exodus 6, 6). The Book of Deuteronomy often highlights the fact that God redeemed them out of the house of bondage and out of Pharaoh's hand:

But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery... (Deuteronomy 7, 8; 13, 5; 15, 15; 24, 18).

The prophet Isaiah, one of the messengers of the Messianic event, presents in his book several aspects of the work of salvation, even speaking of the birth of the Redeemer born of the venerable Virgin, mentioning that his name will be Emanuel - עִמָּנוּ אֵל (Isaiah 7, 14) (Motyer 1959: 25; Lindblom 1957: 56). Thus, if the sin is presented as a decadence or defilement, the salvation means ransom and restoration: "But now, this is what the Lord says: he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine!" (Isaiah 43, 1).

The service of the Messiah and his salvific activity was expressed very suggestively, by the expression: "The Lord's Servant – Ebed Jahve" (Chialda 1939-1940: 211). Through this expression, the person of the Messiah is defined, and especially His saving work that will culminate with the Sacrifice on the Cross as a ransom for many: "...that He hath purged the iniquity of many, and for the sinners hath given His life" (Isaiah 53, 12).

The term גֹּאֵל (goel) is also an epithet given to God as a savior, on the basis of the covenant with His people (Chițescu 1937: 2-12; Chițescu 1959: 99): "May we shout for joy over your victory and lift up our banners in the name of our God" (Psalms 19, 5).

If we were to make an analysis of the idea of ransom in the Old Testament, we find that this idea was announced immediately after the fall into sin, being gradually developed through messianic prophecies, the prophets being meant to constitute a wider picture of the Messiah's redeemer activity, He Who will take upon Him the sins of the whole world.

### **The concept of “Redemption” in the New Testament**

The ontological aspect is the specificity of the Orthodox teaching of Redemption. The neo-testamentary writings outline and emphasize the idea of Redemption, noting that

the period of the act of Redemption begins with the Incarnation of the Son of God, continuing with His teaching activity. It is actually accomplished by the Sacrifice on the Cross as the Archbishop and the Lamb of Sacrifice and ends with His royal service, accomplished by different royal acts (Mircea 1972: 30).

Seen from the perspective of the New Testament, Redemption is a divine-human act and refers to the restoration of man or his return to the state of pre-fall, in this sense and in this sense “Christ gave Himself as Redemption” (Morris 1965: 61).

Analyzing the complexity of the Redemptive work, that is, the exhaustive framework of the Redemption, we find that in the New Testament books there is a set of terms that highlight the idea of Redemption:

λύτρον and ἀντίλυτρον, both terms indicating the *ransom price*, and the act of Redemption is expressed by λύτρωσις and particularly by its compound, ἀπολύτρωσις. At the same time, the redemption action is also verbally expressed by the word λυτροῦν, which means *to redeem* and by his passive λυτροῦσθαι, which means *to be redeemed* (Mircea 1972: 35).

Considering that these terms mentioned above have outlined and emphasized the work of Christ's Redemption or the reconciliation of man with God, we will now subject them a complex analysis.

Thus, the concept of “ransom price” in the Old Testament corresponds in the New Testament to the derivative noun λύτρον. In the classical Greek, the term occurs most often in plural form λύτρα and means *ransom price* or *deliverance price* (Kittel 1999, IV: 329): “Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20, 28; Mark. 10, 45). In the first Epistle to Timothy, the Apostle Paul, to highlight the same aspect, uses a compound of the term λύτρον, respectively ἀντίλυτρον, “who gave himself as a ransom for all people...” (1 Timothy 2, 6). Both terms express the same idea of liberation, salvation, rescue, but with more spiritualistic shades.

The semantic field of the word λύτρον was specifically designed to reiterate the idea that Redemption means the deliverance following the payment of a price or the release on the basis of the payment of the ransom price: “If, however, the ransom price is given to the master, for his soul ...” (Exodus 21, 30; 30, 12; Numbers 35, 31-32). In this context of ideas, the Death of Christ on the Cross is considered “a redemption for many” (Mark 10, 45) (Dalman 1922: 109). This expression, “redemption for many”, does not restrict the Ransom to some people, be they many, but in the Hebrew thought this expression means the totality of mankind (Kittel 1999, IV: 335).

The Redemption Act is also brought to light by the term λύτρωσις. From this term there derive several nouns and adjectives in which the Hebrew root לָגַל - ga'al (Kittel 1999, IV: 397) is reformed. The redemption of Israel in the Lukan vision is defined by the term λύτρωσις and implies an action in which the Son of God will be involved: “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them” (Luke 1, 68).

The characteristic term in the New Testament equivalent to the act of Redemption is ἀπολύτρωσις, εως, ή (Kittel 1999, I: 397), being used ten times in the New Testament books. All its uses regard our “redemption from sin and it is always related to the saving work of Jesus Christ” (Barclay 1992: 204).

The redemption or reconciliation of man with God is made by Christ the Savior and is always in connection with His saving sacrifice: “In him we have redemption (ἀπολύτρωσις), through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace” (Ephesians 1, 7) (McConkie 2012: 493-494). The divine plan of salvation of the human race in which the Redeemer is Christ, and the redeemed the one who receives the forgiveness of sins through His blood is the Christian, is also highlighted in the Epistle to the Colossians: “*In whom we have redemption (ἀπολύτρωσις), the forgiveness of sins*” (Colossians 1, 14). In the sense of Saint John Chrysostom, “the forgiveness of sins means liberation from bondage, and after the redemption from bondage with His blood, it is not possible to ever fall or be mortal” (Sf. Ioan Hrisostom 1905: 25).

The act of Redemption and the forgiveness of sins is indestructibly connected to the unrighteous sacrifice and to the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross:

For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new testament, that through the death suffered to the redemption (ἀπολύτρωσιν) of the errors under the first testament, those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance (Hebrews 9, 15).

Another dimension entrusted to the term redemption ἀπολύτρωσις – is the one about the new relationship that man acquires with God through the grace of Christ through redemption. The Apostle Paul describes the act of Redemption, putting it in connection with the grace that came through Christ: *“And all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption (ἀπολύτρωσεως) that came by Christ Jesus”* (Romans 3, 24). According to the Pauline vision, Saint John Chrysostom in his commentary on this scriptural passage, emphasizes the value of the Redeemer's person, who is not a man but a true God. By the use of the expression ἀπολύτρωσις it is shown that once the people are redeemed, they will never return to temporal bondage (Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur 2005: 53).

The same Pauline notion that describes the act of Redemption is expressed in the same epistle, but in another context. This time, the term ἀπολύτρωσις refers not only to the restoration of the human being and to the forgiveness of the committed sins, but also offers a new perspective: the adoption, which also requires a real change of ours, a new life completely different from the one before: *“Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption (ἀπολύτρωσις) of our bodies”* (Romans 8, 23). The same perspective character is devoted to the term ἀπολύτρωσις and in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, where the Apostle of the Gentiles insists that Christ had been made for us wisdom, justification, consecration and redemption: *“It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God that is our righteousness, holiness and redemption (ἀπολύτρωσις)”* (I Corinthians 1, 30) (Barclay 1992: 205).

The complexity of the saving act of redemption beyond this life is anticipating a process that will end and will fully manifest at the Second

Coming of the Lord: “*When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption (ἀπολύτρωσις) is drawing near*” (Luke 21, 28). Redemption is given as a pledge of inheritance: “...*a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption (ἀπολύτρωσιν) of those who are God’s possession to the praise of his glory*” (cf. Ephesians 1, 14), to be implemented by us “by working with faith and good deeds with grace, to make it grow and perfect in us” (Rădulescu 1976: 142). The Apostle to the Gentiles will also refer to this aspect of cooperation with the grace of the Holy Spirit, in the following: “*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption (ἀπολυτρώσεως)*” (Ephesians 4, 30). Saint John Chrysostom testifies in his commentary on Ephesians that this Spirit showed us as royal herd, departed us from all previous deeds, preparing us for the day of redemption” (Sf. Ioan Hrisostom 1902: 143).

The Act of Redemption will be described in the New Testament writings as also expressed verbally. The redemption or deliverance of the “deserted life” (cf. I Peter 1, 18) and of all injustice is an ontological release from death (Hebrews 4, 14), a saving act of the whole being: “*Who gave himself for us to redeem (λυτρώσεται) us from all wickedness...*” (Titus 2, 14) (Evdokimov 2003: 169). Certainly, redemption as a saving act that seeks to restore our lost unity and reintegration into existential harmony by returning to God's image.

Thus seen in the light of the divine plan, the Redemption “restored the world with God, the union of people among themselves, and the innocence from the beginning, abolishing the sin that had destroyed them” (Ghiuș 1998: 51) and bringing liberation from his bondage. This liberation of the robust creature is accompanied by the restoration of its nature, brought to the state of receiving grace and of being “from glory to glory” up to that resemblance that takes the divine nature into itself and allows it to transfigure the cosmos (Telea 2005: 31).

On the whole, we can say that Redemption is like a new creation that represents our reintegration or restoration in the state before the fall, and even the raising above it through the grace (Telea 2002: 199). The fallen man, though wanted the deliverance from this bondage, could not save himself in any way. Hence the necessity of the act of Redemption and restoration of the human being from the spiritual bondage, an act that



goes beyond any imagination, of the value of Him Who does and of the One to whom it is done, that is, of Him Who makes Himself a Sacrifice for our sins and our reconciliation with God.

### **Conclusions**

1. The redemption and deification of human nature are the essential milestones on which the whole history of the salvation of the human race is based, from its creation “*in the image and likeness of God*” (Genesis 1, 27) to its deification.

2. As Adam sinned and did not repent, he departed more and more from God, falling into a spiritual bondage. But it was not only that he could not escape himself from that bondage, nor could he, in any way, have been able to resist it while he was sinning, so that the act of Redemption was necessary.

3. Salvation as a desideratum of human nature can be observed at all times, and will mark the entire existence of the chosen people, until it is accomplished by the coming into the world of the Messiah as Son of God and Savior or Redeemer of the world.

4. From the perspective of the New Testament, the period of the Redemption achievement begins with the Incarnation of the Son of God, continues with His teaching activity, is actually accomplished through the Sacrifice on the Cross, as Archbishop and Lamb of sacrifice and ends with His royal ministry through several royal acts.

5. Redemption as a saving act brings beneficial effects into the world, including: deliverance from spiritual bondage and reconciliation of man with God, restoration of the image of God in us, forgiveness, sanctification, adoption, deification and strengthening through the grace of the Spirit, not to return to the state of spiritual bondage.

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