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MULTIDIMENSIONAL VALUE OF EDUCATION AT SAINT
BASIL AND JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

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Abstract

In this research, the author presents the vision of two important Christian authors, that lived in the 4th century of the Christianity, Saint Basil the Great and Saint John Chrysostom, on education. In works such as *The Homilies on the books of the Bible*, *Homilies on the Hexaemeron*, *Homilies on the Holy Spirit* (e. g. Saint Basil) or *Homilies on Family and the Education of children*, *Homilies on Matthew* (e. g. Saint John), both of them are in favour of transdisciplinarity and education. The author emphasises their outlook on this subject and its particularities using the following methods, among others: inductive, deductive and analytical. Works such as the ones mentioned above, but also the research of authors specialised in the life and activity of these Saints are analysed. Moreover, the paper presents the most important aspects of the way in which the multidimensional value of education is reflected in the works of Saint Basil the Great, the Archbishop of Cappadocia, and Saint John Chrysostom, the Patriarch of Constantinople. The actuality of their ideas is reflected in this research, together with the contemporary importance the ideas of the two Saints of the Orthodox and the Catholic Church has for the contemporary society.

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, we talk more and more about the importance of education. Different pedagogues, from various prestigious schools, are trying to find ways to improve the teaching process and to make it into a



complex phenomenon that will help young people acquire as much knowledge as possible and have access to an interdisciplinary teaching.

Useful contributions to solving this issue might come from the past and from some of its happy aspects. Knowing this, we shall try, in this research, to highlight the way in which Saint Basil the Great and Saint John Chrysostom present the multidimensional field of education. These two important representatives of fourth century AD Patristic Theology were educated people (Coman, 2009a, pp. 505-536; Corneanu, 2001, pp. 89-99, pp. 105-113; Corneanu, 2001b, pp. 103-111), and activated in this field or in related sections, their thought being that of finding solutions to convey their teachings and information.

In what follows, we shall try to draw attention to the complex perspective shared by the two authors in their works, be them homiletic (such as *The Homilies on the Hexaemeron* (Saint Basil the Great, 1986, pp. 69-181) and on the Psalms, belonging to Saint Basil the Great the *Homilies on Matthew* or those on the statues, belonging to Saint John Chrysostom (Saint John Chrysostom, 2005, p. 68), or teaching-theological, but also to their correspondence, while also fructifying the opinions of contemporary authors who took interest in analysing their ideas.

Our approach can be useful both for the theological space (be it Orthodox, Catholic or Protestant) and for the pedagogical one given that, for all Christian cultures, the personalities and ideas of the two spaces are very important.

2. Problem Statement

As we have already said in the introductory part, the aim of this research is to investigate the works of Saint John and Saint Basil and to discover in them aspects of actuality and multidimensionality. For our research, we will use the works of these two authors, translated into Romanian, or in their English and French versions.

3. Research Questions

Our research, which is not only a review of literature, even if an important part of it is dedicated to this field, will try to answer questions such as: Are the works of Saint Basil and Saint John useful today, for the theological and pedagogical research? Do the two authors show the manifold dimension of education in their homiletical and theological works? Are their works used enough in contemporary research in the theological space?

4. Purpose of the Study

As it has already been mentioned, the purpose of this research is to review the literature written by the two Saint authors and to highlight the way in which works such as *Homilies on the Hexaemeron*, *Homilies on parents and children* and s. o. reflect the multidimensional value of education.

5. Research Methods

In our research, we will try to use the deductive and inductive method, and to combine it with the analytic one. The first two will be useful for the identification and presentation of the sources of our investigation, while the last one will be used for the analysis of these sources.

6. Findings

6.1. The multidimensional value of education as seen by Saint Basil the Great

Saint Basil the Great, a renowned and refined theologian of his times, was preoccupied, both in his activity as bishop and in his works, by important aspects of theology. He took a particular interest in education. Schooled at the major centres of the Empire, in Athens and in Constantinople, he would make the following assertion about education: "I believe all sane people will recognise that amongst earthly assets, education comes first, and not only our Christian education, but also the profane one" (Saint Gregory of Nazianz, 1931, p. 128; Corneanu, 2001, p. 95). Saint Basil received the bases of education in his family. His father, rethor in the fortress of Caesarea, took upon himself to teach him profane sciences, instilling the love of studying in him (Fecioru, 2009, pp. 9-43). Later on, he would perfect this teaching in major centres, where he would make wonderful friends with the famous rethor Libanius, with whom he would even have a rich correspondence, sending many young people from Cappadocia to study (Corneanu, 2001b, pp. 313-337). Back to his home town, he would take on his father's position of rethor (Fecioru, 2009, pp. 20) and teach people, which would cause him antipathies on the part of bishop Eusebius of Caesarea, who hated him for being so schooled (Fecioru, 2009, pp. 22). Afterwards, however, he would dedicate himself exclusively to ascetic and episcopal life. His works prove he was versed in pedagogy; his influences can be found even in the thoughts of major Renaissance pedagogues (Mada, 2009, p. 13).

At the base of his outlook on education is the idea that: "man determines his destiny to a major extent through his behaviour" (Mada, 2009, p. 66). Aware of this fact, he shows that education should first have a moral purpose, being directed towards others, towards the relationship with them and towards God (Saint Basil the Great, 2009, p. 10). Man should be educated in order to have major contributions to the evolution of society. The opinion of the Saint is revolutionary even from this point of view.

During his times, Christians had divided themselves in two groups, according to the way in which they understood pagan philosophy and its role. Some were vehemently against pagan philosophy, whereas others supported its unconditioned use. Saint Basil would subsequently adopt a truly moderate approach, showing the importance of pagan philosophy, but insisting on the fact that its teachings should be considered selectively. His words related to Greek philosophy and poetry are a genuine paradigm. For example, this is his opinion on the way in which Christians should relate to Ancient poetry: "You shouldn't entirely hand the helm of your mind to these people, as if it were the helm of a ship, nor to follow them wherever they go, but to receive from them what you know is useful for you and to know what to leave aside" (Saint Basil the Great, 2009a, p. 322; Mada, 2009, p. 9; Coman, 2009, p. 417).

Saint Basil would be just as open with the pedagogical experiences of his times when talking about the importance of self-knowledge in the process of education (Saint Basil the Great, 2009, p. 74;

Vlăduțescu, 2009, pp. 449-455), when advocating athletic exercises which educate the body (Coman, 2009, p. 441) or when talking about the importance of music in the process of teaching the young (Coman, 2009, p. 442). However, he would not completely discard the already classical values, putting emphasis on the memo-technical dimension of education. Thus, for example, in *The Great Rules*, he insists on stimulating students in such a way that they feel motivated to remember certain passages from the content analysed:

"Even the study of sciences should be adapted to the purpose so as to use names from the Scriptures and, instead of stories, to present the history of miraculous events, to teach students about the judgements of the Parables and to award them for remembering names and events from the Scriptures, in order to help them achieve their purpose easily, in a pleasant way and without torture and offences" (Saint Basil the Great, 2009b, p. 62).

Saint Basil would give a new lease of life to the pedagogical knowledge of his times through his constant devotion to the teachings of the Holy Scriptures. Catechetical works such as *On Baptism* (Saint Basil the Great, 2010) or homiletic and doctrinaire works abound in references to pericopes from the Scriptures, which shows, on the one hand, the fact that the author was a connoisseur of this paper and, on the other, that its texts could be used to argument ideas, helping the listeners strengthen their faith. On analysing the aforementioned catecheses and noticing in their content the abundance of texts from the Bible, their translator into Romanian said:

"It is imperative to observe the profound biblical character of the Cappadocian pedagogical endeavour. The entire work (*On Baptism, A/N*) is sprinkled with numerous quotations from the Bible, both from the Old and the New Testament (more than half of the actual text - over 550). Each assertion finds its base, justification and exemplification in the Scriptures. When necessary, the allegorical interpretation of vetero-testamentary prescriptions is used" (Pîrvuloiu, 2010, p. 13).

Nonetheless, his remark is valid for all the Saint's works, which abound in such passages, since the author knows very well the texts of the Scriptures. However, these are completed by rich knowledge of laic philosophy. The *Homilies on the Hexaemeron*, where, as father Teodor M. Popescu mentions, he "unites the science of his time with the teaching of the Church and with moral ideas, in order to provide a classical commentary", are a living proof of this fact (Popescu, 2009, p. 300), greatly admired in the East and in the West, imitated and continued. In the homilies, he gives evidence of a good knowledge of the cosmogonical outlooks circulating during the epoch (Voicu, 1980, p. 70; Giet, 1949, p. 5) and of his capacity to distinguish among them and to highlight, in the jungle of opinions, the Orthodox outlook.

We thus observe how Saint Basil the Great presents the multiple facets of education in his work. Sometimes a visionary, adhering to the classical outlook on other occasions, he contributes to the revolution of ideas about education during his epoch, through recognising the importance of classical culture, while supporting the synesthetic dimension of education and pinpointing its moral role. The emphasis put on the education received by a young person in the family (Mada, 2009, p. 106), which would later find its place in the outlooks of pedagogues under the phrase "good family upbringing during early childhood", also proves his visionary character and his qualities of a pedagogue.

6.2. The Multifold Value Of Education As Seen By Saint John The Chrysostom

A scholar of the profane science of his times (as we can see from the research on his biography) [18: 13-16], who would completely dedicate himself to Church and to serving it, having a truly exemplary life and leaving behind a rich homiletic work, with a message valid even today (Ritter, 2008, p. 46; Mada, 2007, p. 19), containing pedagogical (Bolocan, 2008, pp. 212-228) and poetical aspects (Heiser, 2008, pp. 251-267), Saint John Chrysostom is, just as Saint Basil, interested in education and in its values (Vasiliu, 2009, p. 569; Corneanu, 2001, pp. 92-93). Making a synthesis of his contribution to this field, father Ioan G. Coman showed that: "In teaching, Saint John Chrysostom recommends for the first time formal steps, guiding himself by a great practical psychological spirit, which honours him and recommends him as an example for us" (Coman, 2009a, pp. 550-551).

His work, rooted in pragmatism, sets the objective of transmitting the truths of faith in a useful, pleasant way, which makes them more easily understood by people. The purpose of his entire preaching activity is to reform the ones listening to him, at the level of life and mentality (Podaru, 2011, pp. 17-57). His speech, often devoid of the depth of Saint Basil the Great's, is nonetheless important and complex, proving the encyclopaedic knowledge of the author.

Unlike the aforementioned Saint, who is very open towards the profane culture and the aesthetic aspects of education, Saint John rather focuses on its moral dimension, this making him "both genuine and profound" (Mada, 2007a, p. 21). To support his ideas, he resorts to daily aspects, thus contributing to strengthening the role of institutions such as family in the process of education (Galeriu, 2009, p. 578). In fact, family and pedagogues, often nursemaids or slaves, had the role of teaching children, which makes the author talk about the importance of the collaboration between the two authorities with a teaching role (Feraru, 2008, p. 444). He insists on showing that, among parents, this task is "mostly for women, since they spend more time at home" (Saint John Chrysostom, 2005, p. 8).

From the point of view of his interest for the text of the Scriptures (Saint John Chrysostom, 2003, pp. 24-25), Saint John resembles the Cappadocian hierarch quite a lot, whereas as far as his approach on classical Hellenic culture is concerned, their opinions differ. First avoiding to make reference to it, but suggesting he does not entirely agree with the values it puts forward, he innovates the pedagogical outlook of his epoch, bringing to the fore the education based first and foremost on Christian values. The motivation of his opinion can be found in the vocation and universal message of Christianity. Thus, according to a contemporary theologian:

"Saint John Chrysostom leaves aside the issue of the attitude Christians have towards education and classical culture, tackled both by his predecessors and by his contemporaries. He outlines a detailed program of moral education and religious teaching. The importance given by the author to Christian education is strongly tied to the universal vocation of Christianity. Since Christianity is meant to spread across the globe, the teaching principles stated by Saint John are valid for the Christians of the entire oikumene" (Feraru, 2008, p. 442).

Aware of the fact that "Christian education means complete conversion to Jesus Christ" (Coman, 1988, p. 22), he finds the base of some immoral or indecent behaviours in the inappropriate education received during childhood. Wishing to prevent such situations, he asks parents to teach their children in such a way that they don't become self-indulgent and know how to be happy with little:

"As rich is not the one who needs a lot of things and money and surrounds himself with much, but the one one who doesn't need anything. In such a way teach your child, teach him this! This is the greatest richness" (Saint John Chrysostom, 2005, p. 68).

The treaty containing homilies and speeches on the upbringing of children, which is also the most important of his papers on the subject we tackle, holds many such pieces of advice. In this treaty, the author talks also about the holistic dimension of the teaching process, showing that:

"Education is not only about the intellect or about social and professional habits, but considers man as a complete person; in this context, the material that has to be used by a Christian must be extremely selective and must be accepted only if it is in accordance with the Spirit of Jesus Christ"(Saint John Chrysostom, 2005, p. 13).

Later on, he insists on the role of the model in shaping a future Christian, asking parents to preach the teachings they wish to offer to their children through words and by acting accordingly, as: "the key to educating children doesn't consist of the teachings they are offered, but of the spirit in which they grow up, of the living examples they witness, of the environment where they develop" (Saint John Chrysostom, 2005, p. 72). When referring to education as to a complex process, organised systematically, having the dissemination of knowledge at its centre, the Saint insists on two important aspect, namely the importance of revising the acquired knowledge and the synesthetic dimension of the teaching process. With respect to the former, he makes a comparison with the daily activities of farmers, demonstrating that:

"Just like farmers constantly take care of the seeds they once sowed on the ground and they stir them many times, given that those seeds will be pecked by birds if they don't cut the drills so as to cover the seeds they spread, so will happen to us if we don't cover well what we spread in our mind, as then everything would have been thrown in the wind" (Saint John Chrysostom, 2009, p. 32).

As to the latter characteristic, the Saint talks about it in his homilies on the upbringing of children, showing, on the one hand, that education should stimulate all the senses of the young person and the knowledge that person receives should address each of these senses, thus making the process of learning easier, and, on the other hand, that some of these senses can be disciplined through well done teaching (Feraru, 2008, pp. 446-447; Fecioru, 2009, pp. 463-465).

Therefore, these are the main ideas regarding the analysed subject which can be inferred on reading the work of Saint John Chrysostom. His vision with respect to this subject is visibly complex, the author insisting on the moral value of the entire teaching process, of the role models have in teaching young people, of adapting it according to age and on the value of revising and consolidating the acquired knowledge. Due to the contemporaneity of the information he offers, some of his ideas are valid even today, being used by contemporary pedagogues (Feraru, 2008, p. 455).

6.3.Similarities And Differences Between The Teaching Outlooks Of Saint Basil The Great And Saint John Chrysostom

As you can see from our research, both authors under analysis insist on the multidimensional value of education. With respect to the way in which they relate to the use of the Scripture in the teaching process, which they consider essential, or to the emphasis they put on its moral value, their opinions are almost identical. Likewise, there is a great resemblance between the two with regard to the investigation

of aspects related to the perceptive preparation of the people and to the importance of memory in the process of learning (Saint Basil highlights the memo-technical dimension, whereas Saint John pinpoints the consolidation of knowledge).

Moreover, the two Saints almost agree on the role of initiating the teaching process from an early age and on the role of models. As far as the issue of models is concerned, the difference consists in the fact that, while the Bishop of Caesarea considers it is possible to find examples to follow in profane literature as well, Saint John challenges the value of profane literature, insisting on the role of Christian Spirituality and of its models in shaping the young person. In fact, the big difference between the outlooks of the two authors consists in the fact that, while the former gives credit to Ancient Greek literature, deeming it important in shaping young people, the latter completely denies its role.

However, despite this disagreement, their opinions reveal a complex perception of education and of the teaching process, the two being considered complex phenomena, with multiple facets and with an essential role in shaping Christians.

7. Conclusion

As you could see from our research, the two authors we analysed have a dynamic and partially up-to-date vision on education and on its multiple valences. Resorting in their speeches to society, to family or to similar elements (Coman, 2009a, p. 551), they succeed in bringing new principles to Christian education, when talking about the importance of a well-structured learning process ever since childhood, about the relevance of models, about the synesthetic dimension of the teaching process, about the importance of revising or about the necessity to structure the teaching material differently, according to age, thus fructifying the moral dimension of education and insisting on the fact that its role consist first and foremost in preparing the one who received it for salvation (Şanta, 2005, pp.124-125). Many of the ideas they outlined in the fourth century AD are valid even today (Timiş, 1999, pp.251-260; Timiş, 2003, pp. 174-181), which proves the erudition of the two Saints, their qualities as visionaries, but also their competence in matters of Christian pedagogy.

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