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WORKING THE WORD OF GOD  
IN CHURCH MISSION AND IN EDUCATION,  
AS REFLECTED IN THE WORK OF  
SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOMOS

- summary -

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St. John Chrysostomos remains over the centuries a complex personality, a high-brow inspired by God, endowed with a rare ascetical calling that proceeds from perpetually searching the word of God. He was constantly preoccupied with appropriating the Christian truth and with affirming it in the face of contemporary heresies, while never forgetting the practical needs of his flock, for not in vain was he called „an ambassador of the poor”. Above all he is a lover of the word of God from the Holy Scriptures, which he cherished and studied intensely, winning for himself the prestige of being considered by posterity the greatest Christian exegete ever, and gloriously by his contemporaries even: the greatest utterer of the word of God.

Posterity uniformly recognized the unparalleled merit of the great archpastor of Constantinople, and Christian theology dedicated to him numerous learned studies regarding his work. Referring only to the latest years, Romanian theology performed thorough research on St. John Chrysostomos's doctrine. Yet, Father Professor Ion Bria remarked in one of his studies that Chrysostomic research could go even deeper: namely, that even a theology of the word could be extracted from the work of St. John Chrysostomos<sup>1</sup>. Despite the enormous importance that St. John Chrysostomos placed on the word of God, as well as on the word of man as preacher of God's word, no extended theological study truly took into consideration the value and missionary importance of working the word of God as it appears in the corpus Chrysostomic theology.

This therefore is the incentive of the present dissertation, where we attempt a thorough analysis of working the word of God in Church mission and in Christian education as it appears in the work of St. John the Chrysostomos.

On a different level, as we talk about Christian mission as being “a sending of the Church to the world with a view to universalizing Scripture and integrating man in the Kingdom of God”<sup>2</sup>, we see that labouring the word of God is essential in Church mission. Besides its offering an authentic message for mission and the norms of incorporating and bringing men up as active members of the Church-Body of Christ, the word of God is also a

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<sup>1</sup> Ion Bria, *Teologie și Biserică la Sfinții Trei Ierarhi*, in „Studii Teologice”, an 1971, nr. 1-2, p. 79.

<sup>2</sup> Valer Bel, *Misiunea Bisericii în lumea contemporană*, vol. I – *Premise teologice*, Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca, 2004, p. 15.

bearer of grace which works in man's soul, provoking conversion and faith in those that receive it, after which it actively accompanies the growth of the faithful in the Church, in the image of Christ.

As the ecumenical movement launched itself full scale, serious efforts were made towards the elaboration of a theology for mission. Unfortunately, many erroneous tendencies in perceiving Christian mission appeared in the process, as it was reduced to simple evangelization, or defined only within the limits of its horizontality, that is, of a „secular ecclesiology”.<sup>3</sup> In the face of these tendencies, efforts have been deployed to re-examine the foundations of missionary work<sup>4</sup>, with a view to bringing it up to date, so as missionary theology may benefit from an as precise a vocabulary as possible, and from as precise programmes, also.

In 1936, at the first Congress of Orthodox Theology, which took place in Athens, Georges Florovsky, one of the co-founders of World Council of Churches and a towering authority within ecumenical and academic circles, invoked the need for Orthodox Theology to return to its patristic roots, so as to free itself from the „Babylonian captivity” of Western theology, and so as to recover its own specific terminology and thought.<sup>5</sup> Using this assertion as a starting point, Pantelis Kalaitzidis, at one ecumenical meeting, argued<sup>6</sup> that contemporary thought needs to be consulted critically: patristic thought has to answer stringent contemporary issues and thus to help fashion a modern theology.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, when on the one side working the word of God is essential to Christian mission, and on the other we need to appeal to patristic theology in order for us to be able to develop a true theology for mission, it seems to us that the best model to attain this two fold

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<sup>3</sup> Gheorghe Petraru, *Ortodoxie și prozelitism*, Editura Mitropoliei Moldovei și Bucovinei, Iași, 2000, p. 89.

<sup>4</sup> John Savage, *The Theology of the Christian Mission*, in „*Vox Evangelica*”, nr. 2, 1963, p.71-80.

<sup>5</sup> Georges Florovsky, *Weseliche Einflüsse in der russischen Theologie*, in „Proces-verbaux du Premier Congres de Theologie Orthodoxe a Athenes, 29 nov.- 6 dec., 1936”, Ham S. Alvisatos (ed.), Athens Pyrses, 1939, p. 212-213, apud. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, *Between the «Return to the Fathers» and the need for a Modern Orthodox Theology: The Theological Agenda of the Volos Academy*, in „St. Vladimir s Theological Quarterly”, v. 54: 1, 2001, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Paper presented at the WOCATI-ETE/WCC International Congress Volos Academy for Theological Studies, Volos, Greece, June 5, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Pantelis Kalaitzidis, *Between the «Return to the Fathers» and the need for a Modern Orthodox Theology: The Theological Agenda of the Volos Academy*, in „St. Vladimir s Theological Quarterly”, v. 54: 1, 2001, p. 5-36.

aim is the work and person of Saint John Chrysostomos, that is, the holy father of the Church who knew better than anybody what working the word of means and preached it with a fiery tongue that worked miracles within the souls of his hearers. Here is another incentive in the choice of this specific topic for our dissertation.

The main object of our dissertation is identifying and deepening the characteristics of working the word of God as it is imparted to men in various forms.

By searching the work of St. John Chrysostomos we have seen that God works first by means of His word in Holy Scriptures, then by means of the word which is preached – the preacher becoming “the messenger of God”, then by means of the counsel we offer to our neighbour and, last but not least, by means of prayer which, for St. John Chrysostomos, is a true conversing of men with God.

For us to be able to deepen these modalities of working the word of God in the vision of Saint John Chrysostomos we have introduced in the first chapter some necessary information on his activity as preacher of the word of God within the context of the epoch in which he lived. Before addressing himself to his posterity, St. John Chrysostomos addressed himself to people who were his contemporaries, making the word of God work powerfully for them. Therefore we must familiarize ourselves at least on an elementary level, with the epoch of the great Christian preacher and with those who were his teachers, friends and co-workers, and members of his family.

Secondly, by studying the work of St. John Chrysostomos, we have deemed it necessary that we make conspicuous some important facts regarding the work of the word of God, which constitute premises for our subsequent chapters. That is why in the second chapter we deal with the *premises of working the word of God within the framework of His dialogue with man*.

Thus, we have pointed out that ever since Creation, the word represents one of the concrete manners of man’s relating to God, given the fact that man is endowed with the great gift of speech. By means of the word, as concrete expression of His allpowerful will, God brings into existence the whole world as milieu for the loving dialogue that He establishes with man. Saint John Chrysostomos emphatically states that God brings all into existence

„only by means of His word and His commandment.”<sup>8</sup> (lògw ka^ prostēgmati dhmiourgî n),<sup>9</sup> given the allmightiness of Him Who utters the word. Although brought into existence only by means of His simple word, the world, as result of God’s creative power, has no a shade of imperfection. Thus, the finality of God’s spoken word is seen first in the coming into being of the created world, and on the other hand St. John considers that the created world becomes a powerful witness of the efficiency and importance of God’s word, whose action manifests itself continuously in creation, in God’s providence, which fact St. John exemplifies powerfully, as we show in the ensuing chapters. St. John considers of great importance the fact that God, „with each creation, praises that which He has created”<sup>10</sup>. By this – he notes – one can see a humble bending of God towards man, the crown of His creation, a bending which comes from His great love, „so that later on, humankind, instructed by these words, may ascend in mind from creation to the Creator”<sup>11</sup>, in that they contemplate all surrounding creation.

Thus, God addresses His word to His creation which organizes and unfolds according to His commandment, namely, as milieu of dialogue between God and man; a dialogue open to God and directed to man, His rational creature endowed with speech, in which the whole of creation culminates. In this sublime mission which involves the utmost responsibility, man must rationally use the whole of creation as milieu of dialogue between himself and God, himself and his fellow men; and, in the mediation of these relationships, the work of the word of God as an overwhelming importance.

Throughout history the word of God puts on various forms, according to the capacity of understanding and the language of each generation of people. Though often the realities expressed by language are beyond man’s capacity of understanding, St. John Chrysostomos nevertheless exhorts preachers to speak them up according to the hearers’ capacity of understanding, by means of emphasizing the will of God which helps men to progress towards purification and deification. St. John shows in his work that God not only initiates man’s loving communion with Himself by means of the invitation that He addresses through His word, but also maintains this dialogue continuously and progressively, thus offering man new possibilities to know Him, through His word which was addressed to man in the Garden

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<sup>8</sup> Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omilii la Facere I, Omil. III, 2*, trad. D. Fecioru, in „Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești” (PSB), vol. 21, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1987, p. 48.

<sup>9</sup> Joannis Chrysostomi, *Genes. Homil., Homil. III, 2*, în P.G., tom. LIII, col. 34.

<sup>10</sup> Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omilii la Facere I..., Omil. V, 5*, p. 73.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem, Omil. V, 5*, p. 73.



of Eden, and in other various episodes from the Old Testament, through the voice of His prophets, and, towards the end of times, at the Incarnation, through the very word of the Redeemer addressed to us.

The sin of first man caused his estrangement from God and the alteration of God's image in his being, as crown of creation. It also caused a shrinking of his power of speech, of his capacity to converse face to face with God and with fellow man, as St. John Chrysostomos so deeply observes; gradually, this communication could only be achieved only with certain persons especially chosen by God to transmit His will to people.<sup>12</sup>

Redeeming humankind from the bondage of sin and of death meant bringing man, crown of creation endowed with speech and with reason, back into loving communion with his Creator. Thus, while sin determined a diminution in man's power to converse with his Creator, obliging Him to speak to them indirectly, sending them, through the prophets and authors of the Old Testament, "letters as to those that are left in faraway countries, thus renewing as through an epistle the old friendship between us"<sup>13</sup>, the bringing back of man into communion with God, achieved by Jesus Christ the Redeemer, means re-opening the direct dialogue between God and man. He speaks to man again, face to face, communicating to him contents that are essential to salvation. Through Him man finds an even fuller means to fulfill his calling to deification, through a purified and enhanced power to use the word<sup>14</sup>; yet, not just any word, but the word of God addressed to man, because, says St. John Chrysostomos, God did not send to humans a common messenger, but He sent His very Son, that is, "Himself; he sent not even an angel, or even archangel, for putting right whole generations of evil and iniquity nothing less than His very own presence was necessary."<sup>15</sup> Properly speaking – concludes St. John Chrysostomos – "take my body, so as to make room for His word within myself."<sup>16</sup> The words uttered by our Redeemer become possibilities for

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<sup>12</sup> Idem, *Cele dintâi omilii la Facere*, trad. Adrian Tănăsescu-Vlas, Editura Biserica Ortodoxă, București, 2004, p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>14</sup> Idem, *Comentar la Evanghelia de la Ioan, Omil. XXVII, 1*, trad. Gheorghe Băbuț, ediția a II-a, Editura Pelerinul Român, Oradea, 2005, p. 127.

<sup>15</sup> Idem, *Comentariile sau Explicarea Epistolei către Efeseni, Omil. VI*, trad. Theodosie Athanasiu, Tipografia „Dacia”, Iași, p. 52.

<sup>16</sup> Idem, *Cuvânt la Nașterea Mântuitorului nostru Iisus Hristos*, in *Predici la sărbători împărătești și cuvântări de laudă la sfinți*, trad. Dumitru Fecioru, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2006, p. 26-27.

making permanent the dialogic communion initiated by God with man. That is why remaining in loving communion with God demands for remaining in communion with His teaching.<sup>17</sup>

Living in loving communion with God presupposes the duty to bear witness, by means of our own words and deeds, of God's presence, and to speak up His words to all people; thus, our tongue becomes like the tongue of Christ and our mouth like the mouth of the Father, as St. John Chrysostomos says.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, the gift of the word, which is ontologically ours as it differentiates us from the rest of God's creation, postulates the existence of a universal judgement, within which even our words shall be brought to judgement, so as to bring to light whether or not they were fulfillments of the word of God addressed to us.

When we talk about the revealed word, we must understand that it surpasses the limits of temporality and constitutes itself in a criterion of judgement, for each of us shall be judged according to his own exact experience, for "the more one hears yet does not fulfill that which he heard, the more severely is he going to be punished".<sup>19</sup>

In the third chapter, titled *Manners of Working the Word of God*, we analyzed in detail the four principal modes through which the word of God is being worked out.

Talking about Holy Scripture, we started from two fundamental truths, as expressed in the work of St. John, namely that Holy Scripture is the original written expression of God's word because inspired by the Holy Spirit, and that man is honoured with the gift and duty of knowing Holy Scriptures.

The Archbishop of Constantinople considered that "we should have never needed the help of Holy Scriptures, but rather have such a pure life that the grace of the Holy Spirit would have fulfilled the role of Holy Scriptures in our hearts. In the manner in which Holy Scriptures are written with ink on paper, in like manner the Holy Spirit should have been the ink imprinted on the paper of our hearts."<sup>20</sup> But, given that humankind estranged themselves from this grace because of the sin of our forefathers, we must – exhorted he – to start on a new way: the way of Holy Scriptures. This is the way of acquiring the grace of the Spirit, but

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<sup>17</sup> Ioan , *Omil. LIV, 1*, p. 277.

<sup>18</sup> Idem, *Omilii la Matei, Omil. LXXVIII, 3*, trad. D. Fecioru, in „Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești” (PSB), vol. 23, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1994, p. 892.

<sup>19</sup> Idem, *Predicile despre statui II*, trad. Șt. Bezdechi, Editura Sfintei Episcopii a Râmnicului – Noului Severin, 1938, p. 40.

<sup>20</sup> Idem, *Omilii la Matei..., Omil. I, 1*, p. 15-16.

in order for us to obtain this we must especially apply ourselves to daily readings, meditations, and putting into practice of the words of Holy Scriptures; we must use as we properly should this „second medicine”.<sup>21</sup>

For St. John Chrysostomos, reading Holy Scriptures is truly “conversing with God”<sup>22</sup>, its contents being the original message of God<sup>23</sup>, addressed to humans through the Holy Spirit<sup>24</sup>, while searching and putting into practice the word, making it incarnate in our own lives is man’s positive answer to God’s will.

Talking about the work of the word of God by means of Holy Scriptures and about the way in which it does so, we notice two things in St. John’s works, which open up two perspectives of deepening and understanding this work: first, the Person Who talks in Holy Scriptures is God Himself, and thus the efficacy of the message is uncontested; second, the message itself is addressed to each individual believer and thus the word works according to the particular needs of each, thus fulfilling a variety of wants, and answering to a variety of human troubles to which it offers the best counsel, in such a way that man can act according to the will of his Creator.

With St. John God’s work addressed to man as speaking creature works in a twofold manner: Christ our Lord exhorts us „to follow His word both through things that are useful to us, and through things that harm us. Like a wise doctor, He shows to us that we turn ill if we ignore His counsel, and that we recover our health if we take it.”<sup>25</sup>

St. John gives clear and powerful examples to imprint this truth in our understanding, and convince us of the efficacy of this apparently paradoxical situation; he proves that there is no situation whatsoever, no matter how difficult, to which the word of God in Holy Scriptures does not offer the ideal solution, and not because it be the greatest and completest collection of guiding norms for one’s life, but because God works eternally and powerfully through His word.

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>22</sup> Idem, *Cuvânt despre folosul citirii Scripturii (La începutul Faptelor Apostolilor III)*, in *Omilii la săracul Lazăr. Despre soartă și providență. Despre rugăciune, despre viețuirea după Dumnezeu*, trad. Dumitru Fecioru, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2005, p. 333.

<sup>23</sup> Idem, *Omilii la Facere, I...*, *Omil. XV, I*, p. 167.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, *Omil. XII, I*, p. 139.

<sup>25</sup> Idem, *Omilii la Matei...*, *Omil. XXI, I*, p. 272.

While reading or listening to Holy Scripture gives us a direct possibility of benefitting from the word of God, the sermon, or homily, or the preached word in general gives a new possibility of imparting the power of Holy Scripture to the faithful; here the mediator is the person of the preacher proper.

Yet before he imparts the word of God, the priest must have been himself first imprinted by its work and power. Then, when he is thus chosen and called, the new minister of the word must forever have recourse to the word of Holy Scripture, because, on the one hand, this word constitutes the very message to be transmitted, and on the other hand the holy word works in his soul, teaching him and offering to him the means and manners necessary for the transmission of this word. That is why, in his work, the preacher can never distance himself from the words of revelation.

Through the sermon the faithful are truly partakers in the work of the word of God. Even when to their physical eyes it is the preacher who speaks, in “the eyes of faith” the Person Who speaks is God. The uttered word is not the word of man uttered to another man, but the word of God uttered to man, by means of the man. St. John Chrysostomos always preached with the conscience that the message presented to the faithful is not his own message, but truly the message of God uttered through his mouth, and showed, by the example of various Biblical episodes, that it is God Who speaks through His servants.

God sends His word through His preacher. The faithful receives this word each according to his own needs, finding in it „an appropriate cure”<sup>26</sup> not only in so far the material things are concerned, but especially for recovering the health of the soul, with a view to salvation. Thus administered, the word of God in the sermon touches upon „all the corners of one’s soul” healing it and fulfilling it, cutting off the bad, and nourishing the good. No one remains fruitless upon listening to the word of God, with on strictly necessary condition: receiving and fulfilling the word. Even when God’s word does not have any apparent efficiency, nevertheless it opens in a mindful soul the perspectives of some plausible interpretation of human life and its aim and meaning.

God works also by means of the words that we address to each other, and this holy work can be fulfilled by each of us Christians.

St. John often showed that the redemption of each of us depends even on the words that we address to each other. Those who have benefitted from the work of the word of God

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<sup>26</sup> Idem, *Omilia la Facere I...*, *Omil. VI,3*, p. 80.

in themselves are supposed to “prolong” it, by means of their own words, to the benefit of those around them, according to their needs. Thus the word of God becomes efficient through those who thus become God’s „messengers”, thus enriching their own souls, and the souls of those who hear.

Yet, in order for the word of God to be efficient, spiritual counsel must be powerfully anchored in Scripture, so that the preacher be perceived as “followers of God”.<sup>27</sup> This is a condition for our words to be inspired by God. We must utter the word, says St. John, “in such a way, that people see that they are the words of Christ”.<sup>28</sup> The words “that are visibly Christ’s”<sup>29</sup> are not only those that are faithfully reproduced after the Holy Scriptures, but also those by which we bless the ones who berate us, by which we pray for our enemies, by which we speak with kindness and gentleness, by which we speak unto the edification of our neighbour.<sup>30</sup>

Last but not least, God works in the souls of the faithful by means of the prayers made to Him, which are not at all only human, but human answers that have already benefitted from the work of the word of God. To St. John prayer undoubtedly means conversing with God. To exemplify this, we have had recourse to exact citations from his work: they show St. John’s conviction that God speaks to us in the prayers that we address to Him.

By prayer the word of God works in each soul, and St. John gives the following example: “when by simply telling another about your troubles you feel eased and unburdened by them, how much more will we not feel eased by telling all our troubles to God?”<sup>31</sup>

St. John remarks upon the fact that the work of the word of God in prayer is closely bound to the work of the word of God in Holy Scripture. *If in prayer we address to God our questions and requests, when we read Holy Scriptures we have God answering us*,<sup>32</sup> says St. John. On the other hand, if Holy Scriptures contain God’s promises to man, St. John

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<sup>27</sup> Idem, *Omilia la Matei...*, *Omil. LXXVIII*, 3, p. 892.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>31</sup> Idem, *Cuvânt la Duminica a cincea a sfântului și Marelui Post*, trad. Episcopul Roman Melchisedec (1893), colecție îngrijită de Ignatie monahul, Editura Anastasia, 1997, p. 95-96.

<sup>32</sup> Idem, *Comentariile sau Explicare Epistolei I către Tesaloniceni...*, p. 229.

considers that God fulfills them as a consequence of our prayers.<sup>33</sup>

Of course one can avail of the work of the word of God only by mean of the fruits thereof. In our fourth chapter we systematically exposed the furits of this work, as they appear in the work of St. John Chrysostomos.

The work of the word of God produces conversion from faithlessness to faith, from sin to virtue, from evil to good. Working the word of God engenders true faith (*In. 6, 68-69; Rm. 10, 13-15, 17; I Pt. 1, 23-25*) and is forever actual, as it shows its fruits in my life here and now, renewing my life and edifying the Church – the Mystic Body of Christ; it makes man become conscious of his state of sin, it chastens this sin and heals the passions of body and soul; it exhorts to virtue, and is like a doubly edged sword in our dialogue with those who live far from the true faith; it propels the martyric calling of the Church and presents it to the world as true milieu of the presence of God among humans.

God's word is a grace-bearing word in the souls of those who receive it. Yet, this happens with a maximum efficiency in the Church, in the community of people bound up by love of God and of fellow man, a community in which the word of God has become incarnate. This is the topic of our fifth chapter: *Conditions for the word of God's martyric efficacy*.

Working the word of God cannot be severed from the ecclesial milieu. For St. John the Church is undoubtedly the place where God lives, and also the place from which He speaks to each of us, according to our particular needs. To prove this St. John gives examples that prove that life in the Church transforms the human soul. The Church receives sinners that liken themselves to beasts by greed, cunning and wickedness, and changes them into grace-bearing humans full of all the virtues.

Also, the Church is an adequate milieu for working the word of God because it is the only divino-human institution able to preserve, interpret and transmit the genuine word of God, and because it perpetuates forever the image of the Heavenly Kingdom and of the future blessedness, which God prommised to those who love Him.

Reading St. John Chrysostomos we become more and more aware that working the word of God must have love at its basis. The importance of this virtue can never be understated, working of the word of God being powerless without it.

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<sup>33</sup> Idem, *Omilii la Facere II, Omil. LIV, 4*, trad. Dumitru Fecioru, în „Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești”, vol. 22, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București 1989, p. 209.

Steeped in love, the words we address to the other become a prolongation of the word of God and instruments of Christian mission: they bear witness of God's love Who calls all to partake of it<sup>34</sup>, they fulfill the things wanting in those who are needy<sup>35</sup>, and, more than anything, they lead men to the Kingdom of God.<sup>36</sup>

By preaching the word of God it is not information that is being transmitted, cold and unrelated to Christian life, but a new way of life is being proclaimed: the life in Christ. That is why an essential condition for the efficacy of the word of God in the souls of the faithful is putting it into the practice of the concrete life of each of us, by each of us, and first of all by the preacher himself. Without it, the preaching of the word remains unauthentic and unfruitful.

In the second part of our dissertation, in chapter the sixth, we presented *Working the Word of God in Education*, starting from the comparison that St. John makes between the soul of child and a fortified city, whose citizens, in our case, the words, come in and go out through the five gates of the senses. Driving home the idea that each word that enters the soul of a child works in the same way as nourishment works for the physical body, poisoning it or nourishing it, St. John places the utmost importance on the effect of the word of God.

The word of God performs a normative function, because through it we receive the laws that govern the city of the soul, and also a didactic function, because in the word of God the student finds always a guide. St. John postulates Holy Scriptures as a teaching contents that is forever actual, and fit for all ages and stages of a man's life. The word of God is always plentiful and acceptable in all circumstances of our life, though it be always one and unchanged: it is so because it represents God's message to each of us.<sup>37</sup>

God sends His word to man, and when accepted, it uncovers to man truths that are hard to perceive by the human mind, supremely: the existence of God and His relating to the whole of creation, in a manner totally devoid of envy or egoism. Not rarely human teachers

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<sup>34</sup> Idem, *Omilii la Facere I...*, *Omil. XXIX*, 5, p. 371.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, *Omil. XIX*, p. 392.

Idem, *Omilii la Matei...*, *Omil. XV*, 10, p. 191; Idem, *Comentar la Evanghelia de la Ioan...*, *Omil. LX*, 5, p. 302; *Ibidem*, *Omil. LX*, 6, p. 304-305.

<sup>36</sup> Idem, *Despre soartă și Providență*, I, in *Omilii la săracul Lazăr...*, p. 170.

<sup>37</sup> Idem, *Omilii la Facere, I...*, *Omil. XV*, I, p. 167.

hide certain mysteries of knowledge from their pupils, wishing to be the only, or one of the very few, knowers of them.

We have also tackled in the present dissertation the effect of the word of God towards the correction of undesirable behaviour with young students: in this case, the word of God has the effect of a whip uprooting sin. We also tackle the tragic absence of the word of God in contemporary education on a general and global scale, which absence, in St. John's view, is one of humankind's greatest and heaviest of sins.

As for St. John Chrysostomos, parents are a child's educators *par excellence*, we analysed more thoroughly this aspect, and emphasised the parents' role in making the word of God accessible to children, as well as made the exposition of the practical advice that St. John offers, so as the very young ones may benefit from the work of the word of God in their souls.

In the last part of the sixth chapter we have stressed upon the aim of education by means of the word of God, showing that alongside practical finalities pertaining to the needs of earthly life, this education especially has in view an eternal aim: reaching the Kingdom of God.

In conclusion, we see that from the work of St. John Chrysostomos we can truly extract a theology of the word of God.

The word of God is grace-bearing, the Holy Spirit works through it in the souls of those who receive it; it produces their conversion, as conversion was produced in those who listened to the preaching of the Holy Apostle Peter at Pentecost: "*Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?*" (F.A. 2, 37), or when he preached in the court of Solomon, when "*Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand*" (F.A. 4, 4), or in Caesarea, when Peter preached, and "*The Holy Spirit fell on all them which heard the word*" (F.A. 10, 44).

Although there are almost 2000 years since the last book of the New Testament was written, although the majority of the Scriptural corpus was addressed to certain clearly defined missionary needs, and addressed to concrete persons or communities, we must always admit, also upon studying the work of the unparalleled St. John Chrysostomos, that Holy Scriptures remains forever, for each of us, the natural modality in which we can meet God. God transmits His word personally to each individual Christian, He guides him towards



fulfilling His commandment, offering him answers to questions that haunt his heart, cutting off the superfluous and filling in what is missing, nourishing and healing, comforting and chastening, and last but not least, calling and demanding from each that he transmit to others the word he has received.

This is an extremely important work, as it shows that Christian mission is not purely human, not the simple proclamation of a set of normative teachings, but that it is a new way of life, a dialogic communion initiated by God, Who is not only the One about Whom we are talking, but especially Him Who communicates Himself to man, whom He calls to dialogue. An ardent proponent of Holy Scriptures' being inspired by the Holy Spirit, St. John always exemplifies that fact that it is not the preacher (even under inspiration) that talks, but God Himself is the One Who speaks through the mouth of the preacher. St. John Chrysostomos assures us that although the word is delivered by Christian missionaries, the Teacher of the Church is forever the Redeemer Jesus Christ.

Likewise, the expositions of St. John Chrysostomos are instimable for contemporary preaching, sometimes infested by the microbe of self-promotion: it teaches the missionary that the words he speaks are not as much his own, as they are and God's, and that he must envisage his missionary work accordingly. He must resist self-satisfaction or self-interest, and must organize his speech in such a manner as to enhance the faithful's possibility of responding to the Word. He thus works towards his own redemption.

St. John's teaching is extremely topical for contemporary education. Like in his times, today also the educational system seems to be missing the fact that the most important educational resource is the word of God. Any book or manual that in one way or another has an educational aim finds itself on a purely mundane vision on life, and that is why its usefulness is limited, and its contents forever subject to change. This shortcoming can only be overcome when we understand education in the manner of St. John Chrysostomos: a natural activity, derived from the parent's or educator's responsibility towards his offspring or pupil, which does not exclude contents of profane education, but which must essentially be steeped in the word of God, the only source which can offer adequate guidance both in this life, and in the eternal Kingdom of God.

Our daily experience as educators in the classroom or at home shows the value of St. John's comparing the child's soul with a fortified city, through the five gates (senses) of which go in and come out good or bad citizens. We live in an era of information where more

often than not we are confronted with noxious, inadequate contents for our children: from which unfortunately we can hardly protect them. Thus, St. John's comparison is all the more adequate: these noxious contents are virtually permanently accessible by any one that presses a button. Yet, the same gates must also help the educator who dedicates himself to rescuing the young souls he is responsible for in the eyes of society, and especially of God.

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