

COORDINATES OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION HIGHLIGHTED IN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze and describe the coordinates of the religious education outlined in the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount is the closest to what could be named Christian manifesto, because it expresses more concisely than any other part of the New Testament teaching, what should be and do a follower of the teachings of Jesus, a genuine Christian. The beneficial effects of religious education as a set of measures systematically applied to the man's skills and abilities training and development, have always been present, since the ancient times, humanity providing children and young people, from a very early age, methods of cultivation, training and education. Closely related to the idea of holiness, our Savior Jesus Christ comes and presents in the Sermon on the Mount, the new "righteousness" to the disciples, righteousness in the educational purpose, in relation to the rightneousses of the Pharisees and scribes.

Keywords: religious education, the Sermon on the Mount, the Old Law, the New Law, righteousness, sanctification, holiness.

Preliminaries

Thoroughly analyzing the public activity of our Savior Jesus Christ, as it was presented in the Synoptic Gospels, we will notice that the most comprehensive statement of the first year of preaching of the Lord is entitled with great expressiveness: *The Sermon on the Mount*.

The extension of *Matthew's Narrative of the Sermon on the Mount* is, in the biblical researchers view, the result of using the mnemonic method, namely the compact presentation of several events of the same kind, even if they were uttered in different circumstances¹.

The Sermon on the Mount is probably the best known of the teachings of Jesus Christ, but possibly the most poorly understood and certainly the least fulfilled. The content of the teachings contained in the Sermon on the Mount expressed a culture completely different from everything that was then present, from everything that was in the past or from what another writer or poet might have imagined. It contained the quintessence of the saving teachings, while providing numerous coordinates of a religious education based both on the love of neighbor and on the practice of moral principles, in accordance with the will of God.

¹ St. Matthew the Evangelist was concerned to deliver all Savior's speeches, that could give His disciples a complete image of His teachings quality. For example in the Gospel of Matthew, in chapter 5: 31-32, the author finds proper to also add a word about divorce (Matthew 5: 31), although in verse 27 of that chapter there was about adultery. We find that the Holy Evangelist Matthew resorted to this supplement as an antithesis, while preserving the harmony of the text. Stelian TOFANĂ, *Introducere în Studiul Noului Testament - volumul II, Evangheliile după Matei și Marcu. Documentul „Quelle” (Introduction to the New Testament Study - Volume II, The Gospels of Matthew and Mark. Document "Quelle")*, (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2002), 175.

The Sermon on the Mount is the closest to what could be named Christian manifesto, because it expresses more concisely than any other part of the New Testament teaching, what should be and do a follower of the teachings of Jesus, a genuine Christian. Its content is the Magna Carta of the Kingdom of God that the Lord Jesus Christ came to establish. It makes goodness attractive and determines human frivolity to be repulsive. It describes the religious coordinates of Christian education, a world of happiness and love that even the most extravagant imagination of humanity could not anticipate. Nothing of what was ever said, written, or sent, can rise to this extraordinary call apotheosis.

The circumstances in which Christ the Lord delivered this oratory exposure is reproduced by the first author of the Gospel, through the words: "Now when Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to Him, and He began to teach them" (Matthew 5: 1), statement of unusual solemnity that comes to highlight people's desire to obey His teaching². Meanwhile, St. Luke the Evangelist, author of the third Gospel, who he presents in his writing this speech, says that previously to the utterance of the Sermon on the Mount, but in the same day, Jesus would have selected His disciples (Luke 6: 12-17). The fact that the Lukan narrative also reminds of selecting the disciples (Luke 6, 13), does not contradict St. Matthew's report, but on the contrary, it achieves it³.

Placed in parallel, the events exposed by the St. Evangelists Matthew and Luke in the content of the Sermon on the Mount, we will find out that the beginning and end are the same, but the text of the sermon written by St. Luke the Evangelist is a summary of the sermon written by St. Matthew the Evangelist.

It is meaningful that the first part of the Sermon on the Mount, the Savior focuses on the Christian virtues as necessary conditions for salvation and as foundation of religious education, while in the second part He announces the reward for practicing these virtues. This was why the Holy Fathers defined the Sermon on the Mount: *The Codex of the New Law* or *the book of the covenant of the new messianic kingdom*⁴, because it really sums up the Christian Decalogue.

Fundamentals of the religious education revealed in the Old Testament

According to the Old Testament order, every Israelite was required to fulfill the Law. Fulfilling the requirements of the Old Law also supposed, among others, the responsibility for the spiritual development as a result of the religious education.

The beneficial effects of religious education as a set of measures systematically applied to the man's skills and abilities training and development, have always been present, since the ancient times humanity providing children and young people, from a very early age, methods of cultivation, training and education⁵. Simultaneously with the education given by the father within the family, the boys were also trained by an educator (omen)⁶.

² Raymond E. BROWN, S.S. Joseph A. FITZMYER, S.J. Roland E. MURPHY, O. CARM, *Introducere și comentariu la Sfânta Scriptură, volumul VIII, Evangheliile Sinoptice, (Introduction and Comment on the Holy Scripture, Volume VIII, The Synoptic Gospels)*, Traducere și prelucrare în limba română de P. Dumitru Groșan, (Târgu-Lăpuș: Editura Galaxia Gutenberg, 2007), 161.

³ Leon ARION, *Comentarii la Sfânta Evanghelie după Matei, (Comments to the Gospel of Matthew)*, (București: Editura Asa, 2007), 143.

⁴ Ioan ZĂGREAN, „Decalogul și Fericirile, călăuze spre desăvârșirea creștină”, („Ten Commandments and Beatitudes, Guidance to the Christian Perfection”), în „Îndrumătorul Bisericesc”, Sibiu, 1982, p. 182.

⁵ Prof. Petria Jenica Vulpeș, „Educația tinerilor și promovarea valorilor creștin ortodoxe în societate” („Youth Education and Promotion of Orthodox Christian Values in the Society”), în volumul Simpozionului

The Old Law paid increased attention to the religious education - לְמִדָּה ⁷, having a particularly important target, and in this respect, family played a major role. Family had a duty not only to ensure material conditions favorable for the development of children, but also to ensure and cultivate a spiritual education. Not to give proper and necessary assistance for the training and education of children and youth was an impiety, first to God and then to society: "An evilnurtured man is the dishonor of his father that begat him: and a foolish daughter is born to his loss. A wise daughter shall bring an inheritance to her husband: but she that liveth dishonestly is her father's heaviness" (Wisdom of Jesus, Son of Sirach 22, 3-4)⁸.

As educational methods specified in the Old Testament we primarily mention the example of parents, who must pay a real importance to the consistency between word and its application in deeds. The education of children and youth consisted of writing and reading initiation, in order to read the Law and the holy books and to know the true wisdom that springs from the fear of God. Education also involves the knowledge of mathematical calculation and the learning the rules of public and private regulations. According to the Old Testament teaching, educating children and young people had an important role, and the educator had to be rough and at the same time aware of his mission⁹. Before the exile, children's education was made by parents and educators and afterwards in public schools.

The appearance of the prophethood on the firmament of the biblical history had a decisive role in this respect. They were chosen and sent by God to correct, rebuke, console, educate and also to proclaim future events¹⁰. They were the keepers of the monotheism who by teachings, rebukes and consolation saved faith and contributed to the fulfillment of the covenant of God with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, being renewed by Moses made in the person of the Messiah¹¹.

We can briefly say that the work of the prophets has a double aspect: a religious one, of keeping faith in one God, and a social-educational one, of achieving a more honest and better moral and social life. In their work, the prophets were guided by the ordinances and commandments contained in the Old Testament, all their activities aiming at fulfilling these rules¹².

But, with the coming of the Savior, education takes on a different connotation, the Saviour being „the educator par excellence”¹³. He proved to be well acquainted with all peculiarities of the human soul.

internațional *Slujire și Educație*, (Cluj-Napoca, Caransebeș: Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană, Editura Episcopiei Caransebeșului, 2016), 337.

⁶ Dumitru ABRUDAN, Emilian CORNIȚESCU, *Arheologie Biblică (Biblical Archeology)*, (București: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1994), 129.

⁷ Emilian CORNIȚESCU, Dumitru ABRUDAN, *Limba Ebraică Biblică, (The Biblical Hebrew Language)*, (București: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 2002), 279.

⁸ Petria Jenica VULPEȘ, „Educația tinerilor și promovarea valorilor creștin ortodoxe în societate”, („Youth Education and Promoting Christian Orthodox Values in Society”), în volumul Simpozionului internațional *Slujire și Educație*, (Cluj-Napoca, Caransebeș: Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană, Editura Episcopiei Caransebeșului, 2016), 337.

⁹ Petria Jenica VULPEȘ, „Educația tinerilor și promovarea valorilor creștin ortodoxe în societate”, ..., 129.

¹⁰ Teodor M. BURCUȘ, „Aspecte sociale în predica profeților Vechiului Testament”, („Social Aspects in the Old Testament Prophets Preaching”), în revista „*Studii Teologice*”, nr. 9-10, 1966, p. 675.

¹¹ Herbert KOSAK, *Credință și istorie în Vechiul Testament, (Faith and History in the Old Testament)*, Berlin, 1956, pp. 67-68; Ștefan SLEVOACĂ, „Aspecte actuale ale predicii profeților Vechiului Testament”, („Social Aspects in the Old Testament Prophets Preaching”) în revista „*Studii Teologice*”, nr. 1-2, 1980, p. 8.

¹² Remus ONIȘOR, „Profeția adevărată și falsă în Vechiul Testament”, („True and False Prophecy in the Old Testament”), în revista „*Credința Ortodoxă*”, nr. 1, 2003, p. 78.

¹³ CLEMENT ALEXANDRINUL, *Pedagogul (The Educator)*, (București: Editura Librăriei Teologice, 1939), 21.

The holiness of the New Law as human perfection

In the presence of His listeners who came from Galilee and other surrounding areas and were on the Kurun Hattin Mount, listeners who mostly were Jews, loyal to traditions and to the Old Law, Savior Christ wishes to clarify His attitude toward the Old Law and at the same time to show its relationship with the New Law preached by Himself.

This statement was the more necessary as some of the Pharisees accused Him of obvious disdain toward the Old Law and therefore Christ the Lord had to be precise, which He will very seriously do: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matthew 5, 17). The argument of our Savior Jesus Christ offered to the listeners, that He had not come to destroy the law, but to perfect its content, indicates the report between the Old Law and the New Law, a report which had as main target the perfection of the Old Law.

The real meaning of this verse relates to the infinitive aorist πληρώσαι¹⁴, derived from the verb πληρόω and has a dual meaning:

- a. the one *to make true*, that is to make a prophecy be fulfilled;
- b. the one *to fulfill, to complete, to fill what is missing*.

By the immediate comparison: "For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Matthew 5, 18), Jesus states the undetermined acronychal character of the authenticity and value of the New Law kind. In this respect the Lord refers to *jot* as to the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet and to *stroke*, as to a minor but distinctive murmur of a letter which is also called κεφαία, which are the two graphic signs in Hebrew and Greek alphabets¹⁵.

As in the Hebrew language, the words being written only with radical consonants without vowels, it could easily happen that someone should have put the wrong vowel before or after a consonant and thus the meaning of the sentence or phrase was distorted. Therefore, in order to preserve the true meaning of the Holy Scripture, every jot and every stroke are important¹⁶, in this respect the Savior wanted to say that no provision in the Old Law, however less important it would be, would be set aside and would not remain unfulfilled before having achieved its purpose¹⁷.

Therefore, we must not overlook the report and the organic link between the Old Law and the New Law. Some commentators rightly state that the two laws have the same objective: they are distinguishable only by their degree of perfection, because according to their organic and intrinsic report, one is rooted in the other. The New Law developed from the Old Law, does not abolish the first, but perfects it, and the link between them is made by the Savior Himself, author of the New Law, that contained the Old Testament prophecies, as well as the Old Law anticipations.

¹⁴ Maurice CARREZ, Francois MOREL, *Dicționar grec-român al Noului Testament, (Greek-Romanian Dictionary of the New Testament)*, Traducere de Gheorghe Badea, (București: Societatea Biblică Interconfesională din România, 1999), 232.

¹⁵ *La Bible, Traduction œcuménique de la Bible (TOB)*- Société biblique française - Les éditions du Cerf, 2010, p. 2315, nota explicativă p.

¹⁶ Leon ARION, *Comentarii la Sfânta Evanghelie după Matei, (Comments to the Gospel of Matthew)*, ..., 160.

¹⁷ Nicolae NEAGA, „Predica de pe Munte comentată de Fericitul Ieronim”, („The Sermon on the Mount Commented by Sait Jerome”), în revista „*Altarul Banatului*”, nr. 1-2, 1990, p. 10.

The organic relation of the Old Law with the New Law is revealed in Savior's Sermon on the Mount, speech focused on "the holiness and justice of the Kingdom of Heaven", the holiness, the justice and the Kingdom of God being the keywords of this scriptural passage.

In terms of the Sermon on the Mount content, we notice that it is outlined in the Old Testament, the base and center of reference in the expression concerning God's will.

The principles and commandments contained in the Old Testament are fulfilled, perfected and completed by Jesus Christ the Savior. Besides, in the content of the Sermon on the Mount there is outlined a steady fulfillment applied not to the Old Law and to the Prophets, but to their interpretation by the Jews.

Craig S. Keener making a report on the Sermon on the Mount says: "Most of the Jews did not understand the commands in the context of grace, given that the call of Jesus to demonstrate more grace in daily life practice concerned the requirements of the Kingdom of Heaven in the light of grace" (Matthew 6:12 and 14 - 15; Mark 10,15 11, 25; Luke 11.4)¹⁸.

Holiness (*ἀγιότης, ἁγιωσύνη*) as a state of spiritual and bodily purity¹⁹, as a fulfillment and perfection of humanity, underlined in the Sermon on the Mount, is the union of grace with God, that is a union with the Logos, the eternal, with the sense of life and existence. Therein lies the fullness and perfection of personality and human existence.

Holiness as human perfection is the normal state of our soul since we are created in the image and likeness of God; therefore, our holiness is deliberate and desired by God: "For this is the will of God: our sanctification" (I Thessalonians 4: 3).

This condition is expected by God from us, it is required and all His will for us consists of it. And we fulfill His will only if we do what is holy, which sanctifies and enlightens us. It is then when we are sanctified and enlightened. This is possible to accomplish if we always keep ourselves in a holy mood by exercising in grace the virtues of the evangelical ascetics; if we guide on the path of holiness and evangelical light all our thoughts, all our feelings and deeds (I Thessalonians 4: 1-6).

Actually the whole teaching contained in the Gospel is summarized in one commandment of our Savior Jesus Christ to all of us: "Be holy, because I am holy" (I Peter 1: 16). In His unspeakable care, God gives man the possibility of acquiring a state of holiness by the teachings contained in the Gospels, by the same grace, the same truth, the same righteousness, the same life and the same goodness: "Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family" (Hebrew 2, 11). Therefore the Christian way is the "holy way" (Hebrew 8, 8). St. Peter advises his contemporary Christians: "But just as He Who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy (I Peter 1: 15).

The new testamentary commandment is also obvious in this regard: "That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory" (I Thessalonians 2, 12; Colossians 1, 10; Philipians 1, 27).

The teaching contained in the Sermon on the Mount is nothing but a call to people by Jesus, the Son of God, to sanctification and holiness (I Thessalonians 4: 7). Following holiness all together (Hebrew 12, 14), represents the educative rule for all our mutual relations, because no one will see God without it.

The salvation consists of man sanctification by the Holy Spirit. This is a difficult and long ascetic dedication of charismatic sanctity, gained through the evangelical

¹⁸ Craig S. KEENER, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio- Rhetorical Commentary*, Publisher: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, UK, 2009, pp. 161-162.

¹⁹ Ioan MIRCEA, *Dicționar al Noului Testament, (Dictionary of the New Testament)*, (București: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune a Bisericii Ortodoxe, 1995), 471.

commandments work; a personal, inner and relentless effort. God calls us to it through His Gospel (II Thessalonians 2, 12).

The purpose of human life on earth is to acquire the Holy Spirit, as St. Seraphim of Sarov confesses and teaches being inspired by God. That is why the Holy Spirit is called *the Spirit of holiness, the Spirit of sanctification* (Romans 1: 4).

Sanctification of man is manifested as illumination of man by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Pentecost, the day the Holy Spirit is the day of the truth and holiness into the fire. In the Holy Spirit, holiness and light are one and the same thing; It is what happens to the Apostles, carriers of Spirit and to the Holy Fathers. Therefore, the carriers of Spirit are the sole carriers of light and teachers.

By their holiness, they banish the sin from the depths of the human soul and body, and by the light, they illuminate the way of each man, in order to cross the valley of death to the immortality peace. For the carrier of the Spirit are all bright and clear: life and death, joy and sorrow, the sense of man and world, because he sees through the Holy Spirit reason and meaning to all, as the Apostles at Pentecost do. Baptism "in the Holy Spirit and fire (Mark 1: 8 and Luke 3, 16) is simultaneously holiness and illumination. For this reason, the Baptism of Jesus Christ is called Illumination. Born for the Holy Spirit, by sanctification and illumination, Christians are and remain Christians only in the Holy Spirit and that is why they are called saints.

Closely related to the idea of holiness, our Savior Jesus Christ, in the Sermon on the Mount, comes and presents the new "righteousness" to the disciples, righteousness in the educational purpose, in relation to the rightness of the Pharisees and scribes. The notion of righteousness - δικαιοσύνη biblically relates to the entire content of the divine Revelation, given to all humanity, in order to get to know God²⁰. At the same time, *the righteousness of God* - ἡ δικαιοσύνη τοῦ Θεοῦ indicates the feature or the attribute and the work of God. He is right by nature and works the righteousness that He gives and shares to people as a gift and in the form of working grace, to bring them to the state of adoption and righteousness before our first parents fall into the sin²¹.

Regarding the verse to which we refer in the Sermon on the Mount: "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven..." (Matthew 5: 20), Jesus presents the concept of "righteousness - δικαιοσύνη" as the fact or the work of the right man, following His example, making a clear distinction between the concepts of righteousness perceived by the Pharisees and scribes as representatives of law and what He taught, and the Apostles, as His followers, were also prepared to fulfill²².

The Savior condemns "the righteousness" of the Pharisees and scribes, specifically the erroneous interpretation and practice of the provisions of the Old Law, through a false and arbitrary explanation. They are those who distorted the meaning of the Old Law emphasizing only its formal and external fulfillment. In other words, they ruled intensively only on the letter of the law, while its spirit, from where there should spring the true virtue, despised Him, so they made that the Law became not only unbearable, but sometimes even ridiculous.

²⁰ Gerhard KITTEL, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Translator and Editor, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, D. Litt D.D., volumul II, Δ-H, WM. B. EEDMANS PUBLISHING COMPANY, GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN, 1999, pp. 198-201.

²¹ Ioan MIRCEA, *Dicționar al Noului Testament, (Dictionary of the New Testament)*,..., 140.

²² SF. IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, *Omiliile La Matei – Omilia a XVI, în Scrieri Partea a Treia, (Homilies on Matthew - Homily XVI, Writings Part Three)*, Traducere, introducere, indici și note de Pr. Dumitru Fecioru, (București: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune a Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1994), 201.

This was the reason for which the Savior fought the attitude of the Pharisees and scribes stressing that even the fact that those who would keep alive at the "righteousness" of the Pharisees and scribes level would not enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5: 20). By this statement, the Savior showing His hearers that the new righteousness He teaches, will have to take the leading role in Christian morality, because it is the infallible criterion by which the moral value of actions can be judged. This new "righteousness" is the main topics of the Sermon on the Mount, and its implementation in the life is the highest ideal to which believers are called.

In Baptism and Chrismation man receives from the Holy Spirit the seed of holiness kneading with it all his soul and body by achieving the evangelical virtues. Through the incarnation, the divine-human nature of Christ became *literally* ours, but in the *trans-subjective* manner, while through the Saint Eucharistie it became *objectively* ours, real and personal. Because in the Holy Eucharistie we find fullness and perfection of holiness and illumination. Beyond it (namely beyond the Holy Eucharistie) human nature can not move forward as concerns intimacy and its union with God, because there is nowhere to advance (Hebrew 10.10 to 14; I Corinthians 10, 16 17).

Holiness always acts like a light, the other virtues radiating from it. It is from this truth that the Gospel of Christ lives, both in this world and the angels'. In the *Transfiguration* of Jesus Christ our Savior the model of transformation reveals itself to each of us by holiness into the light (Matthew 17, 2 and Luke 9, 29). Transfigured by holiness, the saints always pour the gracious light rays that spread them forward and of which we can receive the eucharist for acquiring holiness of eternal life.

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