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THE PARABLES OF JESUS CHRIST. EDUCATION, SYMBOL AND REALITY

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Abstract

As a literary form, the parable is an independent narrative, a unitary whole that expresses by itself a supernatural truth. Parables are similitudes taken from everyday life in nature that plastically reproduce a spiritual reality. Parables have many similarities with fables. However, while fables usually depict some abstract, fantastic, unreal truths from the life of nature or animals, most of the time unrealizable, parables do not have an unreal connotation but are possible events taken from everyday life. Although along with allegory, fable and even metaphors, parables are distinguished by their beauty and originality from all the writings of Holy Scripture, they are not identified with any of the variants that come close to the metaphorical literary meaning. Because the parable is an imagined story, which exposes real facts from human life and activity.

Keywords: parable; choir; Holy Scripture; Jesus Christ; education, symbol;

1. INTRODUCTION

The parable had been encountered a long time before the Savior Christ, both in secular literature and in the Old Testament. Speaking in parables was not foreign either to the ancient Greek literature or to the religious literature of the ancient oriental peoples. Its origin, lost in history, must be sought after in the desire of people to express abstract notions through concrete means, to elucidate a lofty idea with the help of a sensible fact, to preach a lesson by means of a story.

We state that the Orientals and especially the Jews, many centuries before Christ had been used to speaking in parables. This literary style has a precise didactic purpose, being appreciated everywhere for the ease of conveying a teaching. "*And in our times, in the East, the evenings are sometimes extended until midnight, with all the work of the previous day, listening to this storytelling, which are real treasures of beautiful teachings*" (M.J. Ollivier, 1988, 24). The term parable came from the Greek language (*paraboli*), from which it was transferred into the Latin language in the form of a *parabola*, the form under which it then entered the Romanian language. The meaning of the word was derived from its etymology *para-* next to and *boli-* throw. Cicero translated it by *collation-comparison*, and Tertullian and Quintilian by *similitudo*– *similarity* (Eftimie Zigaben, 1933, 297).

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2. THE PARABLE IN RELIGIOUS AND JEWISH LITERATURE

Rabbinic literature preserved many parables and religious or profane writings of other ancient peoples. Buddhist and Talmudic parables have long enjoyed special attention from researchers of Eastern religions. These parables were placed alongside the Savior's parables trying to establish a direct relationship between them. Recently, it has been argued that the Savior's parables are not actual creations, but are total or partial borrowings from the patrimony of rabbinical literature. The problem of the dependence of the evangelical parables on the Talmudic parables is stated by those who disregard the Christian religion, reducing it to a syncretism of the ancient Eastern religions. Their goal is to create a religious system without logic and without the incarnated loving God, sacrificed and resurrected for the salvation of man. It is true that sometimes the evangelical parables can be understood with difficulty, but this in no way supports their lack of importance. Since the first Christian centuries, church fathers and writers studied parables in their desire to explain the teachings revealed by Christ, considering them as catechetical means that bear the seal of the Savior's personality.

The parables of Jesus are unique and full of spiritual meaning for human life. The relationship between the Savior's parables and the rabbinical ones reveals very clearly that the former are clearly superior to the others: "*Therefore, it is not the similarities between the evangelical and rabbinical parables that should amaze us, but on the contrary, if a total difference between them were found, the authenticity of some or others might rightly be questioned*" (Iustin Moisescu, 1945,45). Gospel parables are part of the Semitic category of figures of speech and words, generally known as *mashal*. The existence of some real literary pearls containing parables in Jewish literature before the writing of the books of the New Testament cannot be disputed, but their dogmatic conclusions never go beyond the framework of the old law, while their morals in no way rise above natural morality (E. Kioning, 1907, 360).

3. THE PARABLES IN HOLY SCRIPTURE

Among the books of universal, immortal value, books that constitute major means of spiritual elevation, the Holy Scripture ranks first. Along immense cultural values, for humanity and the redemptive ones for the Christian world, it contains both profound human spiritual values, as well as a revelatory fund absolutely necessary for the salvation of Christians. That is why, even among those who refuse to accept any dogma and do not believe in the divine origin of the Holy Scriptures, there are many who read and study it for the problems found in it regarding the human being and their destiny, the role it played in evolutionary humanitarianism and above all, for the peoples and civilization of the Near East as well as for its artistic-literary content. For Christians, it is the fundamental orientative book in matters of faith, the book of learning, instruction, elevation and soul comfort.

It has become common, especially today, when the great values of the western civilizations are rediscovered, to compare and put the Holy Scripture on the same level with the great books of the religions that once existed or still exist today. First of all, in the Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Assyro-Babylonian religions there were no holy books in the true sense of the word, but only ritual books with an inferior content compared to the Holy Scriptures. The great religious books of Brahmanism, Rigveda, Buddhism, Tipitaka, of the Chinese, Ching or Zend-Avesta, the holy book of Zoroastrianism, the holy books of the ancient Iranians, as well as the Indian Bhagavadgita, are all a conglomeration of writings comprising monastic rules, mythical geography, witchcraft, or the Koran, the religious book of Mohammedanism, much later than the others (7th century after Christ) is basically an imitation of the Holy Scripture. Every time we read, we "read" ourselves, in a way. Even a critical reading is always, according to Umberto Eco, "*a representation and an interpretation of one's own interpretive procedures*" (Umberto Eco, 1991, 249).

The great and unique idea that gives unity to the Scriptures is the mystery of salvation in the person of Christ, the Holy Scriptures representing an inexhaustible source of revealed teachings. Based on the revelation from the Old Testament, we know that God has existed from eternity with all perfections: infinite power, perfect goodness, absolute justice, perfection. The parable is used in the Old Testament as a translation of the Hebrew *mashal* over 40 times and we find it for approximately the same number of times in the New Testament. Usually in the Old Testament, parables mean in a broad sense any comparison or proverb, saying or figurative speech with a prophetic character, a fact that made them not

of particular importance. The value of the Old Testament should not be neglected as the Savior Himself showed. He uses a new method by which he discovers the mysteries of God, whereas through him the divine revelation was fulfilled and ended, he being the Way, the Truth and the Life, the Son and the Word of God. We find a beautiful parable in the book of II Kings (XII,1-9) where the prophet Nathan reprimands David for the transgression committed. Isaiah offers another parable, that of the unfruitful vine known by the song of the unfruitful vine (Isaiah V,1-7). Almost entirely in the Old Testament, but especially in the books of the prophets, metaphors and allegories abound. In the visions of the prophets, the metaphor is used most often (Isaiah X, 33-34). Likewise, the prophet Isaiah portrays in the same style the servant of the Lord as a light of the nations (XLIX, 1-2, 9-13) (Nik. Schleining, 1881,81).

The parables of the New Testament have a specific character. "*The problem of the nature of the evangelical parables can only be clarified on the basis of Aristotle's theories, this is because Greek rhetoric did not influence the Palestinian environment in which Jesus was active. Therefore, the Aristotelian parable, a rhetorical figure of speech - a means of argument in court, should not be confused with the Saviour's parables, didactic figures of speech that seek to clarify and preach a high teaching, through somewhat concrete means*"(Iustin Moisesescu, 1945, 5). The parabolic style has an effective degree of persuasion, addressing and perceptibility, along with Christ the Redeemer, who became an unsurpassed master of this genre. "*In every parable used by Jesus Christ, a moral or religious truth regarding the Kingdom of God or the Church is indicated; they only make sense if the message, the main focus of the comparison, is captured*"(Ioan Bria, 1972, 48).

3.1. Classification of Jesus' parables

The Savior's parables deal with very varied themes, including the activities and occupations of his contemporaries. A classification of the parables is possible both according to the themes they treat and according to the teaching they expound.

According to the content, the parables of Jesus can be divided into five distinct groups as classified by the Western theologian G. Chastand (G. Chastand, 1968, 525):

1. Parables about the kingdom of heaven
2. Parables about grace
3. Parables about prayer
4. Parables about vigils
5. Parables about the future judgment.

According to the content, the parables are divided into two categories: dogmatic and moral.

We also add that regarding the classification of parables, the reason for which they were spoken is not an essential criterion, because not all of them preserve and reproduce the originally announced reason. Regarding the time, the other element of circumstance, it is not possible to state precisely for each parable the moment of its utterance, but "*in general for all the parables it can be said that, according to all probabilities, they were uttered about the middle of the Savior's activity in Galilee*" (V.Gheorghiu, 1925, 308). Referring to the parables of Saint Matthew the Evangelist, we notice their grouping in a unity of time and somewhat also of place. The way in which they are grouped and the connections established between them, preceded by an introductory part and brought to an end with a conclusion supports the idea that they were spoken as indicated by him. "*Since they are not too long, there is no reason from this point of view to spoil the unity of time and place. If we think that they are all in the function of the same idea, the kingdom of heaven, we can admit them from the unity of the theme and the unity deduced from their grouping in one place, all this confirms the continuity in which they are depicted*" (V.Gheorghiu, 1925, 309).

The grouping of parables that Saint Matthew the Evangelist makes may be due to his systematization concerns, although they are not chronologically ordered. Despite the fact that, as a general rule, they were given the name of the parables of the lake, not all of them were spoken in the vicinity of Lake Genizaret, only about half, whereas the others were called the parables of the house, probably from Capernaum, according to the Holy Evangelist Matthew (XIII,1) .

From a thematic point of view, the Savior's parables can be divided into three large groups:

1. Parables concerning the kingdom of heaven.
2. Parables about Christian love.
3. Parables that demonstrate the superiority of Christian morality over the Mosaic one.

From the point of view of teaching and meaning, we can classify them into:

1. Moral-didactic and prophetic parables, which refer to the kingdom of heaven.
2. Parables dealing with the conditions necessary to acquire heavenly citizenship.
3. Parables that Christ spoke towards the end of his earthly life.

As for the number of parables spoken by Jesus Christ, the exegetes say that they are between 33, if we were to analyze only the longest ones, and 100, given that all the utterances with allegorical meaning are included. We can talk about double parables or paired parables. We state that in the first three Gospels we find a large number of paired parables and comparisons in which the same ideas are expressed in different symbols. For example, (Matthew VII, 21-24 compared with Luke VI, 47-49) the fortress built on rock and the one built on sand, (Matthew VII, 16-18 with Luke XVI, 43-44). Most of Jesus' parables have as their central theme the kingdom of heaven, which he made accessible to people through his work.

4. PARABLES, PREFERRED MEANS IN JESUS' SERMON

Although in some circumstances he used ordinary, so-called direct speech (the Sermon on the Mount, for instance), the Savior mainly used parables, a method frequently found among the Eastern peoples. As a term, parable (*paraboly*) means to put things together, to say things in another way.

We list some of the advantages of using the parable:

1. for simple listeners, simple, intuitive stories are easier to remember;
2. through parables sins can be whipped more easily, without those present being touched directly;
3. the parable requires more thinking than direct speech, thus contributing to the sharpening of the mind;
4. the parable gives the opportunity to protect some holy truths or divine secrets.

Let's remember the Savior's words: "It is given to you to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but not to those (Pharisees, n. n.). For this reason I speak to them in parables, so that seeing they may not see and hearing they may not hear and understand" (Matthew, XIII, 13)⁴.

The exegetes have counted 33 parables, which compete in beauty with each other and through which dogmatic truths that exceed the usual power of understanding are discreetly made known. In this sense, we should also remember the pedagogical principle enunciated by the British philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820-1903): "We make the abstract sensible through the known". This explains the presence in parables of pictures taken from all kinds of occupations known at that time in the Holy Land: agriculture, fishing, the family household, common social relations, the manners of the royal house etc. The value of actuality is added to their stylistic beauty and the depth of the homiletic message: any one of them seems to be spoken for us, those of today.

The savior Jesus Christ, knowing better than anyone else the spirit of the Jewish people, at the very beginning of his preaching activity, he used speech in parables to convince his audience. For this reason, when he spoke his first parable, the multitudes of people were not surprised by the novelty of the teacher's speech, but by the beauty of the teaching he preached. The teaching of Christ the Redeemer is done according to all the rules of didactic art, being both psychological and natural, intuitive and pleasant, interesting, active, thorough and sustainable. The teaching of Jesus Christ, concise and clear, exposed most of the time through parables, was transmitted exclusively orally in order to lend itself as little as possible to the philosophical style that leaves room for erroneous interpretations. As the synoptics also tell us, such as Saint Matthew the Evangelist, Jesus Christ sought for his teaching to be understood by the people, who because of their bad dispositions had a hardened heart and a dark mind, did not understand anything of the deeds that the Savior was doing under their gaze, they did not even understand the truth that the Savior Christ was preaching to them.

According to Saint Mark the Evangelist, it seems that the purpose of the Savior Christ's speech in parables was a punishment sent by God to the Jews for their sins, so that they would not understand the saving truth, because their hearts and minds were hardened. Contrary to the Savior's mission in the world and the principle of his goodness, this idea is foreign to Christian teaching. The teaching addressed through parables is a natural complement to the teaching of the Old Testament Scriptures, which helps us to be aware of the love between fellow men, supported by the fact that each person is a bearer of the divine image and is linked by nature to God. From the parables of the Redeemer Christ, we understand

our divine source and color, which descends from God the Father, realized by the Son in the Holy Spirit. The parables show us as sons of the Heavenly God, fully united through the work of the Savior Christ, understanding God through the clarification of faith. Through his teaching, the Savior Christ brought us the new law, which opens the doors of the heavenly kingdom: "*The teaching of Jesus was not transmitted randomly, it was done according to certain methods. The teaching methods used by him are varied, inductive, deductive, analytical, synthetic, all adapted to the moment, but transmissible in all ages*" (IuliuOlariu, 1894, 12).

Jesus Christ, as the Holy Scriptures present him, is the teacher of Israel, and with this title, the apostles and the crowds also addressed him (Matthew 14,21-23). But not only the simple masses saw the Savior as "God's teacher, but also many from the wealthy class, who wanted to agonize over their eternal happiness. To these were added the legislators (pretentious and suspicious), the Pharisees (arrogant scholars), the Sadducees (philosophers and ironists), all considering Jesus the teacher of Israel" (Ioan Ghe. Sabin, 1967, 12).

Regarding the form of education, Jesus mainly uses the narrative or achronic one. This form warms the mind and conquers the heart by making the will of its listeners turn to work. As a good psychologist, He knew that the simple crowd is more sensory. That's why he dresses his abstract teaching in a complete garment, in the garment of parables. In this sense, he uses means of intuition and examples such as the parable of the publican and the Pharisee, he places conceit and humility face to face. Parables reveal all the divine mystery. Through his teaching, Jesus Christ wants to prepare the spirit of the Jewish people, so that they can understand, but the goal is also to force them to think, becoming aware of their mission on earth, opening the eyes of their souls to receive the divine mystery. "*Giving up direct speech from which only those around Him could reap the benefits, Jesus, who once said that it is not the healthy who need doctors but also the sick (Matthew 9:12), began to speak in parables to the unbelievers and simple, speaking the language they understood and loved*" (MoisescuJustin, 1945, 9).

We can also find a vision regarding the reason for the expression of His teaching in parables by Christ the Savior in the commentary on the Gospel according to Matthew by Dr. Vasile Gheorghiu. He explains, giving reasons: "*The increasingly serious conflicts in which the Lord enters with the ruling blanket of the people, with the scribes and the Pharisees, demand as imperative as possible that He give another direction to His messianic activity or completely withdraw from public life. The last solution indicated by the visit of the Mother and his brothers, the Lord did not accept it and could not accept it. He was to continue his work until the end of the age, speaking henceforth to the people in parables*" (V. Gheorghiu, 1925, 432).

The allegorical method or the so called speaking in parables was not very common to the Saviour's contemporaries, but it constituted the most suitable form of education for the people since through the examples and figures used it led to real understanding, in agreement with the teachings of the Holy Scriptures of prophetic provenance. The Saviour's new kind of speech caused a natural bewilderment among those around him, and indeed the same bewilderment was caused in the souls of others who listened to him. The answer given by the Savior consists of two parts that intertwine into a single idea. The first part is personal to the Savior, it being preceded by a statement that justifies the explanation given to the parable.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Jesus was not a student of the Jewish theological school. On the contrary, He represented the opposition faced by the scholars of His time. He insisted, however, on the interpretation of the Law and the Prophets, a law that he did not come to destroy but to fulfill (Matthew V, 17), to perfect it, completing what was, in fact, missing in the Old Testament: on the one hand universal, extended love, from compatriots to all nations, and from those close and to relatives on the other; at the same time, total love, to the point of self-sacrifice. This is how the novelty of the Lord's commandment is explained: "*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you...*" (John XIII, 34). Therefore, the novelty lies in Him, as a model of sacrificial love. In other words, whoever loves like Jesus will speak like Him. Jesus is the "Prophet" through Himself, not by a gift from somewhere else.

We can state that the true Christian experience is expressed through the beauty of Jesus' parables and finds a correspondence in the Christian behavior of our days. Nonetheless, we can easily see

that deviations from Christian morality also exist today. All ethical, social and moral issues can be easily noticed when we have internalized Jesus' parables as our benchmark. With the help of parables, we can more easily understand the truths of faith, distinguish truth from lies, good from evil, and especially true religious life, which Christ the Savior recommends. In conclusion, the catechetical activity of Jesus, also expressed by parables, reveals to us the two authentic qualities of the Great Teacher, namely the beauty and power of persuasion. Both abundantly prove that "*Jesus was the first great educator of mankind*", as the scholar professor Simion Mehedinți testifies (Simion Mehedinți 1992, 216).

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