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Messages of the Three Holy Hierarchs Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and John Chrysostom for the contemporary world

Assoc. Prof. PhD. Ion Marian CROITORU,
Faculty of Theology and Sciences of Education,
Valahia University of Târgoviște,
ROMANIA
E-mail: ioncroitoru@yahoo.fr, im.croitoru@yahoo.gr

ABSTRACT

The Three Holy Hierarchs Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom, whom the Church honors particularly and under whose protection the large family of Christian theological education, and not just it, has placed itself, year after year, entered the conscience of the Orthodoxy as “equal in habits to the Apostles” and “teachers” or educators “of the world”. Their contribution to the growth of the Church teaching consists in the fact that they formulated a theological word representing, truly, a radical change in the core habits of the man of their time. They did not ignore the human wisdom of various times and, especially, the Greek thinking of the Antiquity, but went beyond this wisdom, reviewing human life based on the evangelical principles. Thus, they highlight that one cannot talk about a Hellenization of the Christian faith or about a Christianization of Hellenism, but about the fact that the Christian faith is founded on the holy-spiritual experience of the grace-based work of the Holy Trinity and is expressed by dogmas and concrete ascetic and liturgical forms, creating a manner of living totally new for the world of those times, a unique experience of the relation of man with the God revealed in the Old and The New Testament, a unique expression of the relation of man with God, with the visible and invisible world, with the society he lives in and with himself. From the Three Holy Hierarchs’ teachings and living one can understand many messages for the contemporary world, such as: “the importance of the ecumenicity of the «Gospel»”; “the unity between contemplation and practice” or, in patristic language, “between the vision of God and action”; “the need for education and the benefit of the permanent spiritual cultivation of man”; “the dynamic, not static, character of the Holy Tradition”; “the service and social mission of the Church”; “the holy-spiritual life stages and the fact of theologizing in the Church”; “the role of repentance in the holy-spiritual life”; “the Holy Mysteries of the Church and their grace-filled work”; “the relation between the Greek philosophy of the Antiquity and the Christian teaching: combination (σύνκραση), synthesis (σύνθεση) or opposition (ἀντίθεση)?”; “the Church and the world” etc. In the celebratory word, which finally took the shape of a study, I have limited myself, on the one hand, only to the brief presentation, with the help of the Lord and of the Three Holy Hierarchs’ intercession to Him, of the first three messages, leaving the rest for other opportunities, and, on the other hand, I have added other little known aspects of the lives of these Holy Hierarchs or in connection with them, all being relevant for the contemporary world.

Keywords: Saint Basil the Great; Saint Gregory of Nazianzus or the Theologian; Saint John Chrysostom; ecumenicity of the *Gospel*; contemplation, practice, education, spiritual cultivation, holy-spiritual life; academic theology; empirical theology.

I. INTRODUCTION

The day of today, 30 January 2018, when we honor the Three Holy Hierarchs Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian or the Theologizer and John Chrysostom, represents, for the Faculty of Theology and the theological higher education of Romania, an opportunity of great celebration, because these three Holy Hierarchs are considered the spiritual protectors of this education, not just in Romania, but in the entire Orthodox Christian world, beginning, for the modern times, with the year 1936, by the decision made in Athens, on the occasion of *The First Congress of the Orthodox Theology Professors* (29 November - 6 December), the main motivation being that the Three Holy Hierarchs represent, for the Orthodox Christian conscience, the model of the missionary hierarchs, knowers of the profane culture and sciences, but, especially, authentic lovers of the unaltered Orthodox Christian faith. This decision was only confirming a practice already met, in one form or another, in the Orthodox Christian world, if we consider, for instance, in the case of the Romanians of the first half of the 17th century, the fact that in the cells of the Monastery of *The Three Holy Hierarchs* of Iași (Jassy) was hosted one of the first institutions with higher education elements of the Moldova of that time, a College (1640), which then became, in another location, *Princely Academy* (1707-1821)¹. It is not impossible for the *Princely Academy* of Bucharest [1675(?)²-1821]³ to have had connections with the celebration of the Three Holy Hierarchs, as the tradition formed in Bucharest and Iași is found, after a certain interruption, at the historic Faculties of Theology of Sibiu, Arad, Bucharest, Oradea, Cluj Napoca or Chișinău, operating in that year 1936, and in the next period⁴.

Actually, in the Greek Orthodox world, under Ottoman dominion or under the dominion of the different Great European Powers⁵, we meet the relation between the celebration of the Three Hierarch Saints and the schools of the Orthodox Christians even since the beginning of the 19th century, not just on the level of the elementary schools but also on the higher education level, as in the case of the Ionic Academy of Corfu or Kerkira Island (1826)⁶, this connection being legalized, after the creation of the Modern Greek State (1821-1830), at the Faculty of Theology of Athens (1843-1844)⁷, from where it also passed on to the Great School of the Nation of Constantinople

* For a first version of this study in Romanian, with the same title, see *Almanah bisericesc. Teologie, cultură, istorie, misiune creștină*, 2019, Editura Arhiepiscopiei Târgoviștei, Târgoviște, 2018, pp. 201-225. Concerning the last Romanian version of this study of mine, see “Mesaje ale Sfinților Trei Ierarhi Vasile cel Mare, Grigorie Teologul și Ioan Gură de Aur pentru lumea contemporană”, in *Revista Românească de Studii Axiologice* 1/2 (2020), pp. 25-46.

¹ Ariadna Camariano-Cioran, *Les Académies princières de Bucarest et de Jassy et leurs professeurs*, Institute for Balkan Studies 142, Thessaloniki, 1974, pp. 84-121 (= Camariano-Cioran, *Les Académies princières*); Ion I. Croitoru, *Ortodoxia și Apusul în tradiția spirituală a românilor. Unitatea Ortodoxiei și apărarea credinței ortodoxe în fața propagandei protestante din secolul al XVII-lea*, vol. I, Editura Cetatea de Scaun, Târgoviște, 2012, pp. 291-293 (= Croitoru, *Ortodoxia și Apusul*, I). It is worth mentioning that *the first form of higher education* in Moldova is considered *the Princely Academy* created by the ruler Alexander the Good in Suceava, after the year 1400 (Croitoru, *Ortodoxia și Apusul*, I, p. 291, note 439).

² On the date when this *Academy* was set up, see Croitoru, *Ortodoxia și Apusul*, I, p. 298, note 501; Camariano-Cioran, *Les Académies princières*, pp. 22-37.

³ Camariano-Cioran, *Les Académies princières*, pp. 20-84; Croitoru, *Ortodoxia și Apusul*, I, pp. 298-300.

⁴ Most of these Faculties were closed in the year 1948, only two of them remaining in operation, but with the title of Institute (Bucharest and Sibiu), during the communist regime. After the fall of the respective regime (December 1989), these historical Faculties were created again, along with other new ones, so that at present, they include 11 Faculties, 3 Departments and a Chair in Romania, see [http://patriarhia.ro/lista-unitatilor-de-
invatamant-teologic-universitar-541.html](http://patriarhia.ro/lista-unitatilor-de-invatamant-teologic-universitar-541.html) (10.09.2018).

⁵ For instance, Corfu or Kerkira Island, to which I am going to refer to the continuation of this study, was under English dominion during the period between 1815 and 1864, and then incorporated in Greece, together with other islands [<https://el.wikipedia.org/wiki/Κέρκυρα> (10.09.2018)].

⁶ Εφη Γαζή, *Ο δεύτερος βίος των Τριών Ιεραρχών. Μια γενεαλογία του «ελληνοχριστιανικού πολιτισμού»*, Εκδόσεις ΝΕΦΕΛΗ, Αθήνα, 2004², pp. 106-116 (= Γαζή, *Ο δεύτερος βίος*).

⁷ Γαζή, *Ο δεύτερος βίος*, pp. 34, 86.

(1865)⁸, after having been adopted first by the University of Athens (1841)⁹. Therefore, the Three Holy Hierarchs have been acknowledged in Greece not just as patrons of the theological education, but also as patrons of education in general (1841, 1911)¹⁰, being stated that *since always, according to an unwritten law, which has existed for centuries, the day of their celebration is considered a celebration of education and of the letters*¹¹. Thus, the day of 30 January has come to be marked by many manifestations, like the participation of the pupils and students in the *Divine Liturgy* and their partaking of the Holy Communion, after due preparation, the uttering of discourses and sermons for spiritual meditation or scientific communications, the listening to the messages transmitted, on the one hand, by the local Orthodox Church primate and the Holy Synod of the respective Church, and, on the other hand, by the Ministry of this domain etc.

Now it is time for this feast to be celebrated also in the academic center of Târgoviște, with Your Eminence's blessing, and I wish to thank you for this blessing and, at the same time, for entrusting me with pronouncing a celebratory discourse, conceived, however, under the form of a study, by which I will try to bring to the attention of those present here¹² several aspects from the teachings of these great hierarchs and teachers of the Orthodoxy from everywhere and of Christianity in general.

From sources founded on the iconographic art, it results that the Three Holy Hierarchs were consecrated as a triad, in other words, co-honored, some time before the 11th century¹³. Yet, during this century, new disputes emerge among *educated and virtuous men*¹⁴ concerning the primacy merited by one of the three Saints, given their teachings and their feats. The dispute had even reached the point that the followers of one of these saints were called Basilian or Gregorian or Johannian, but the Christian world that had remained faithful to the revealed and embodied Truth, namely the Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son and the world's Savior, benefits of His intervention, because, during the time of the emperor Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118), according to the tradition written down in the

⁸ Γαζή, *Ο δεύτερος βίος*, p. 116.

⁹ Γαζή, *Ο δεύτερος βίος*, p. 86.

¹⁰ The decision was made by the University Senate in 1841, and the first celebration took place on 30 January 1842. In 1911, the University, already called National, establishes, in its new Regulations of Organization, its official feasts, on: 25 March, the Annunciation (national feast date of Greece since 1835), and 30 January, the Three Hierarch Saints (Γαζή, *Ο δεύτερος βίος*, pp. 86-88, 104-note 111). It ought to be mentioned that the National University, which in the meantime became Kapodistrian and National University (1932), has two flags: the image of the goddess Athena (1887) and the icon of the Three Holy Hierarchs (1955), see Γαζή, *Ο δεύτερος βίος*, pp. 48-49. However, on the header of the official documents is printed only the profile of the goddess Athena.

¹¹ See Γαζή, *Ο δεύτερος βίος*, pp. 56-62.

¹² The event took place on Tuesday, 30 January 2018, in the Red Hall, Building K of Valahia University of Târgoviște, after the celebration of the *Divine Liturgy* in the Metropolitan Cathedral of the same locality. Celebrant priests were the Fathers Professors of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology and Education Sciences, in the presence of His Eminence Father Nifon, Archbishop and Metropolitan of Târgoviște, of Father Vicar Ionuț Adrian Ghibanu and of some Counsellor Fathers from the Eparchial Centre. The students of the respective Faculty gave the answers from the aisle, and the sermon was pronounced by Father Assoc. Prof. PhD Petre Comșa.

¹³ Π. Γεωργίου Δ. Μεταλληνού, "Η έορτή τών Τριών Ίεραρχών και ή «σύνθεση» Όρθοδοξίας και Έλληνικότητας", in idem, *Στά μονοπάτια τής Ρωμηοσύνης. Σταθμοί στην ιστορική διαδρομή του όρθοδόξου Έλληνισμού*, Εκδόσεις Άρμός, Άθήνα, 2008, pp. 289-290 (= Μεταλληνού, *Η έορτή τών Τριών Ίεραρχών*); Άποστόλου Δ. Καρποζήλου, *Συμβολή στη μελέτη του βίου και του έργου του Ίωάννη Μαυρόποδος*, Ίωάννινα, 1982², p. 165. According to other researchers, the iconographic representation of the Three Holy Hierarchs honoured on 30 January will be consecrated permanently in the Byzantine art towards the end of the 11th century, see Γαζή, *Ο δεύτερος βίος*, pp. 184-185.

¹⁴ *Historia Institutionis ex Menaeis impressis, interprete Nicolao Rayaeo societatis Jesu*, in *Patrologia Graeca* (= PG) 29, CCCXC D (390 D) (= *Historia Institutionis*); Μεταλληνού, *Η έορτή τών Τριών Ίεραρχών*, p. 290, note 13.

*Synaxaria*¹⁵, Metropolitan John of Euchaita or John Mavrópous, considered the last great Byzantine hymnographer¹⁶ and honored as Saint of the Orthodox Church on 5 October, is revealed, in a *vision*, that the three Holy Hierarchs should be honored together. Therefore, Saint John of Euchaita consecrated the celebration of the Three Holy Hierarchs on the date of 30 January¹⁷, he being also the main author of the *Services* and of the *Synaxarion* kept to this day in the *Menaion*¹⁸, in which, among others, is shown: *There is no second among these three; as each carries his eternity, neither seeming the first and defeating the other in honour, but sharing with great joy each other's victory. Because there is no room among them for the impudence of envy, which ruins good understanding*¹⁹.

¹⁵ According to some scholars, the event would have taken place during the reign of the Emperor Constantine IX Monomachos (1042-1055), see Γεωργ. Δ. Μεταλληνός, “Τρεῖς Ἱεράρχαι”, in *Θρησκευτική καὶ Ἠθικὴ Ἐγκυκλοπαιδεία* 11^{ος} τόμος, Αθήναι, 1967, col. 841 (= Μεταλληνός, *Τρεῖς Ἱεράρχαι*); Γ. Τσαμπής, *Ἡ παιδεία στο χριστιανικὸ Βυζάντιο*, Εκδόσεις Γρηγόρης, Αθήνα, 1999, p. 82. It should be mentioned that Father Georgios Metallinós, mentioned in the first bibliographic reference from this note, finally admits the tradition written down in the *Synaxarion*, see Μεταλληνού, *Ἡ εὐροπὴ τῶν Τριῶν Ἱεραρχῶν*, p. 293. On the topic of the date of the respective event, see also Γαζή, *Ὁ δεῦτερος βίος*, pp. 139-note 1, 183-184.

¹⁶ Καρυοφύλλης Μητσάκης, “Οἱ Τρεῖς Ἱεράρχες στὴ Βυζαντινὴ Ὑμνογραφία”, in idem, *Το ἔμψυχον ὕδωρ (Μελέτες μεσαιωνικῆς καὶ νεοελληνικῆς φιλολογίας)*, Αθήνα, 1983², p. 178.

¹⁷ The choice of this date is explained by the fact that in January were honored the three Holy Fathers, Saint Basil the Great on 1 January, Saint Gregory the Theologian on 25 January and Saint John Chrysostom on 27 January, so that Saint John of Euchaita brought them all together on the day of 30 of the same month, see *Historia Institutionis*, in PG 29, CCCXCI CD (391 CD); Ἁγίου Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἀγιορείτου, *Συναξαριστὴς τῶν δώδεκα μηνῶν*, τόμος Γ', Ἰανουάριος – Φεβρουάριος, Θεσσαλονίκη, 1998⁴, p. 188 (= Ἁγίου Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἀγιορείτου, *Συναξαριστὴς. Ἰανουάριος – Φεβρουάριος*); Ὁ Μέγας Συναξαριστὴς τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας, *Τόμος Α', Μὴν Ἰανουάριος*, Αθήναι, 2003⁸, p. 731 (= Ὁ Μέγας Συναξαριστὴς. Ἰανουάριος); *Sinaxar at Slujba Sfinților Trei Ierarhi, Utrenia* (= *Sinaxarul Slujbei Sfinților Trei Ierarhi*), in *Mineiul pe Ianuarie*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 2010, p. 513 [= *Mineiul pe Ianuarie* (2010)] (*Synaxarion* at the *Service of the Three Holy Hierarchs, Matins*, in *Menaion for January*).

¹⁸ Yet enriched, in the course of time, also with the hymnological creations of other authors, see Nicolai Rayaei, *Tractatus praeliminaris de acoluthia officii canonici pro Ecclesiis orientalibus Graecorum in solemni commemoratione trium doctorum Basilii, Nazianzeni et Chrysostomi*, in PG 29, CCCXVI CD - CCCXXV D (316 CD-325 D); *Acoluthia triplicis festi ex Typico, Menaeis, aliisque Ritualibus Graecis impressis, interprete Nicolao Rayaeo societatis Jesu*, in PG 29; CCCXXVI A - CCCXCIII C (326 A - 393 C); P. E. Lamerand, “La fête des trois Hiérarques dans l'Église Grecque”, in *Bessarione* 4 (1898-1899), pp. 164-176; E. Braniște, “Sfinții Trei Ierarhi în cultul creștin”, in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română 1-2* (1958), pp. 171-193; C. G. Bonis, “Worship and dogma: John Mavropous, Metropolitan of Euchaita (11th century); his Canon on the three hierarchs, and its dogmatic significance”, in *Polychordia. Festschrift Franz Dölger zum 75 Geburtstag*, Amsterdam: A.M. Hakkert, 1967-1971, vol. 1, 1967, pp. 1-23; Κωνσταντῖνος Μπόνης, *Ὁρθόδοξος λατρεία καὶ δόγμα. Ἰωάννου, Μητροπολίτου Εὐχαΐτων τοῦ Μαρρόποδος (11^{ος} αἰ.), ὁ Κανὼν εἰς τοὺς Τρεῖς Ἱεράρχες καὶ ἡ δογματικὴ αὐτοῦ σημασία*, Αθήναι, 1967; Μεταλληνός, *Τρεῖς Ἱεράρχαι*, col. 841-842; A. Kazhdan, “Mauropous, John” in A. Kazhdan (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 1991, p. 1319; Daniel Stiernon, “Jean Mauropous”, in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique*, tome VIII, Beauchesne, Paris, 1974, col. 624-626; Παν. Ἴ. Μπρατσιώτου, *Ἡ διὰ μέσου τῶν αἰώνων ἐπιβίωσις τῶν Τριῶν Ἱεραρχῶν*, Αθήναι, 1972²; Ἀποστόλου Δ. Καρποζήλου, *Συμβολὴ στὴ μελέτη τοῦ βίου καὶ τοῦ ἔργου τοῦ Ἰωάννη Μαρρόποδος*, Ἰωάννινα, 1982²; Καρυοφύλλης Μητσάκης, “Οἱ Τρεῖς Ἱεράρχες στὴ Βυζαντινὴ Ὑμνογραφία”, in idem, *Το ἔμψυχον ὕδωρ (Μελέτες μεσαιωνικῆς καὶ νεοελληνικῆς φιλολογίας)*, Αθήνα, 1983², pp. 167-191 (Αθήνα, 2000³, pp. 165-189; Θεσσαλονίκη, 1973¹, pp. 7-30); Ν. Λινάρδου, *Οἱ Τρεῖς Ἱεράρχαι ὑπὸ Βυζαντινῶν ἐγκωμιαζόμενοι*, Αθήνα, 2005; Μεταλληνού, *Ἡ εὐροπὴ τῶν Τριῶν Ἱεραρχῶν*, pp. 292-293.

¹⁹ *Troparul al II-lea, glasul al 8-lea*, of *Cântarea a IX-a* in *Canonul al II-lea al Sfinților at Slujba Sfinților Trei Ierarhi, Utrenia*, in *Mineiul pe Ianuarie* (2010), p. 520. For another English translation, see: *There is no repetition in these three, for each of them beareth the seniority: none is first, but there is a surpassing equality of honor; and they all-joyously credit the victory to each other, for the audacity of jealousy, which corrupteth oneness of mind, hath no place in them (Troparion II, tone VIII, of Ode IX, in Canon II of the Hierarchs, at the Service of the Three Holy Hierarchs, Matins, in Menaion for January)*.

The lives of the Three Holy Hierarchs are recalled on their celebration days from the church calendar: Saint Basil the Great (330-379²⁰) on 1 January; Saint Gregory the Theologian (329-390²¹) on 25 January; and Saint John Chrysostom (344/354-407²²) on 13 November (departed to the Lord on 14 September, but because the Feast of the Cross is celebrated on this date, his celebration was moved on the respective date) and 27 January (bringing of his holy relics in the *Holy Apostles'* Church of Constantinople, under the Emperor Theodosius II, son of the Emperors Arcadius and Eudoxia). They lived approximately during the same period, namely in the 4th century and at the beginning of the 5th and *brought to the Orthodoxy the guarantee and brilliance of the holiness of highly educated men, as they knew both the depths of God's teaching from the "Holy Scriptures", inherited from the Holy Apostles, and all the science and philosophy of their time*²³, standing out, at the same time, as *defenders par excellence of the Holy Trinity dogma*²⁴. Actually, the choosing of these three Holy Hierarchs and not of others is attributed to the accuracy of their teaching on the Holy Trinity, to which one can add the role they had in the crystallization of the dogmas of the Church, faced with great heresies in the course of time, but also the frontiers established by them in the Greek thinking of the Antiquity and the Christian faith²⁵, and their number of three, neither more, nor less, is due to the Divinity in three Hypostases or Persons²⁶, so that they are perceived as being *defenders of the Trinity, guardians of the right faith, the three apostles after the twelve*²⁷, *the earthly trinity*²⁸ or *the three most brilliant lights of the Divinity thrice more brilliant than the sun*²⁹. Ecclesiastically, this perception and consecration of their co-celebration were coming in the context of the Schism of 1054, concluding a long period of mutual mistrust between Rome and Constantinople on matters of dogmatic accuracy³⁰, but also of the measures that the Emperor Alexios I Komnenos took for the unity of faith of the Empire, including among them the reinforcement of the

²⁰ Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia between 370-379. His parents were called Basil and Emilia, daughter of Holy Martyrs. They formed a Christian family, having 10 children, of which three became bishops: Saint Basil in Caesarea of Cappadocia, Saint Gregory in Nyssa and Saint Peter in Sebaste. Due to their holy and spiritual life, Saint Basil the Great's grand-mother, Macrina, his parents, his two bishop brothers and a sister (Macrina) came to be honoured as Saints of the Church.

²¹ Bishop of Sasima, between 379-380, then patriarch of Constantinople, elected in 380. He remains here until June 381, when he departs to Nazianzus, where he will stay until 383, then he withdraws to his estate of Arianus and departs to the Lord in 390. His parents were Gregory and Nona. Being a convinced Christian woman, Nona also draws to the Christian faith her husband Gregory, who also becomes Bishop of Nazianzus.

²² His parents were Secundus and Antusa, widowed at 20. Between 381 and 386, he was a deacon in Antioch, where he will get to be a priest, during the period 386-398, then becomes patriarch of Constantinople, between 398 and 407.

²³ "Pomenirea Sfinților Trei Ierarhi și mari dascăli a toată lumea", in *Proloagele*, vol. I (septembrie-februarie), Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe, București, 2011 (= *Proloagele*, I), p. 834.

²⁴ Μεταλληνός, *Τρεῖς Ἱεράρχαι*, col. 841; Γαζή, *Ο δεύτερος βίος*, p. 142. *Because these three Most Holy beacons and teachers have taught us to confess the Holy Trinity and have supported the accurate dogmas by most wise teachings, by persecutions, by dangers and by fights till death and after death (Ὁ Μέγας Συναξαριστής. Ἰανουάριος, p. 734).*

²⁵ Γαζή, *Ο δεύτερος βίος*, pp. 51, 140-143, 146, 148, 186-187, 189-191.

²⁶ Γαζή, *Ο δεύτερος βίος*, pp. 140-141.

²⁷ *Stihira a II-a, glasul al 4-lea*, from *Doamne strigat-am*, in *Slujba Sfinților Trei Ierarhi, Vecernia Mare*, in *Mineiul pe Ianuarie* (2010), p. 497 (*Sticheron II, tone IV, from Lord, I have cried, at the Service of the Three Holy Hierarchs, Great Vespers, in Menaion for January*).

²⁸ *Stihira idiomelă I, glasul al 2-lea*, at *Slujba Sfinților Trei Ierarhi, Litia*, in *Mineiul pe Ianuarie* (2010), p. 499 (*Sticheron I, tone II, at the Service of the Three Holy Hierarchs, Litia, in Menaion for January*).

²⁹ *Tropar, glasul I*, at *Slujba Sfinților Trei Ierarhi, Binecuvântarea pâinilor de la Litie*, in *Mineiul pe Ianuarie* (Menaion of January) (2010), p. 502 (*Troparion, tone I, at the Service of the Three Holy Hierarchs, The Blessing of the loaves from Litia, in Menaion for January*).

³⁰ Γαζή, *Ο δεύτερος βίος*, pp. 146, 182-183, 186.

Church control over education during a period of intense confrontations referring as well to matters of meaning of the Greek philosophy of the Antiquity³¹.

However, I do not wish to draw your attention on the Three Holy Hierarchs' teachings about the Holy Trinity or on the situation of the Byzantine Empire in the 11th century and on the social-political and ecclesial policy of the Emperor Alexios I Komnenos, whom his daughter, Ana, considered, for his attachment to the one Church, as the thirteenth apostle³², nor on the biographic data of these Holy Fathers, although two of them had relations with the Christian world north of the Danube, in other words, with our ancestors, if we consider the episode when the Saint Basil the Great asked for the Holy Relics of Saint Sabbas the Goth of Buzău or the one when Saint John Chrysostom sent missionaries to the Scythes and Goths of the Black Sea and Danube, and the latter's relation with the Saints John Cassian and German. Maybe I will do these studies on another occasion, while for the event of this year I have set myself the aim to put to your heart a few messages of the Three Holy Hierarchs for the contemporary world. It should be mentioned that their messages are many, such as *the importance of the ecumenicity of the Gospel; the unity between contemplation and practice* or, in patristic language, *between vision of God and action; the need for education and the benefit of the permanent spiritual cultivation of man; the dynamic, not static character, of the Holy Tradition; the service and social mission of the Church; the holy-spiritual life stages and the fact of theologising in the Church; the role of repentance in the holy-spiritual life; the Holy Mysteries of the Church and their grace-filled work; the relation between the Greek philosophy of the Antiquity and the Christian teaching: combination (σύνκραση), synthesis (σύνθεση) or opposition (ἀντίθεση)? the Church and the world* etc. Seeing, however, the time reserved for this celebratory presentation, I will content myself only with the brief presentation, with the help of the Lord and of the Three Holy Hierarchs' intercessory prayers, of the first three messages, leaving the rest for other occasions.

II. MESSAGES OF THE THREE HOLY HIERARCHS FOR THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

The Three Holy Hierarchs, whom the Church celebrates particularly and under whose protection the large family of the Christian theological education has placed itself, every year, entered the conscience of the Orthodoxy as *equal in habit to the Apostles and teachers* or educators *of the world*³³. Their contribution to the growth of the Church teaching consists in the fact that they formulate a theological word bringing, in fact, a radical change in the fundamental habits of the man of their time. They do not ignore the human wisdom of various times and, mainly, the Greek thinking of the Antiquity³⁴, but rise above it, reviewing human life based on the evangelical principles. Thus, they show that one cannot speak about a hellenisation of the Christian faith or about a christianisation of Hellenism, but about the fact that the Christian faith is founded on the holy-spiritual experience of the Holy Trinity's grace-filled work and is expressed by dogmas and concrete ascetic and liturgical forms, which form a way of living totally new for the world of those times, a unique experience of

³¹ Γαζή, *Ο δεύτερος βίος*, p. 189. Due to these aspects, it has been affirmed that the ecclesial celebration of the Three Holy Hierarchs, consecrated in the 11th century, functioned as indicator of the relation between *the holy letters*, namely the teaching of the Church, and *the education from the outside*, in other words, *profane or lay education*, but also highlighted the fact that the Church is *the legitimate censor* of this relation (Γαζή, *Ο δεύτερος βίος*, p. 238).

³² Γαζή, *Ο δεύτερος βίος*, p. 145.

³³ *Troparul Sfinților Trei Ierarhi, glasul al 4-lea*, in *Slujba Sfinților Trei Ierarhi, Vecernia mică*, in *Mineiul pe Ianuarie* (2010), p. 496 (*Troparion of the Holy Three Hierarchs, tone IV, at the Service of the Three Holy Hierarchs, Little Vespers*, in *Menaion for January*).

³⁴ They used this thinking for the dialogue with the people and the society of their time, and for exerting their pastoral service, see Μεταλληνού, *Ἡ ἐορτὴ τῶν Τριῶν Ἱεραρχῶν*, p. 303; Βλάσιο Ἰω. Φειδᾶ, “Ἡ Ἐκκλησία καὶ ὁ κόσμος κατὰ τοὺς Τρεῖς Ἱεράρχες”, in *Ἐπίσημοι Λόγοι, πρυτανεία Γ. Μπαμπινιώτη 2000-2003*, vol. ΚΓ' (XXXIII), Ἀθήνα, 2005, pp. 1007-1023; Πρωτοπρεσβύτερος Γεώργιος Δ. Μεταλληνός, “Ἡ κριτικὴ τῆς ἐλληνικῆς φιλοσοφίας ἀπὸ τοὺς Τρεῖς Ἱεράρχες καὶ τὸ ἀληθινὸ νόημά της”, in *Περγαμηνή Β'* (2007), pp. 257-279.

the relation of man with the God revealed in the *Old* and the *New Testament*, a unique expression of man's relation with God, with the visible and invisible world, with the society in which he is living and with himself. All these do not represent fruits of man's reason, consequently, nor of any philosophical system, nor, all the more, of any worldly, secular power, but are the fruits of the holy-spiritual experience of these three great world teachers, being just as many messages, not just spiritual but even revolutionary and challenging for all the epochs and societies. From these messages, as mentioned, for the economy of the time allowed for this academic meeting and, at the same time, of great spiritual celebration, I will highlight just three.

1) First message: *The importance of the ecumenicity of the Gospel*³⁵. A fundamental message of the Three Holy Hierarchs' teachings is the accentuation of *the ecumenicity of the word of the Gospel*. Actually, the Three Holy Hierarchs are teachers of the world not just because their teachings are significant for the whole world, but because by these teachings they want to notify of the ecumenical dimension and amplitude of the Christian faith, when transmitted in its authenticity and accuracy. The Three Holy Hierarchs saw the Christian teaching not as a code of religious and ethical behavior, referring to a certain category of people, but perceived and lived it as a totally new, fundamental word for any man's existence and life, independently of all racial and cultural difference.

In this sense, Saint Basil the Great affirms that *theology*, namely speaking about God, *should not be limited to one or two people, on the contrary, the "Gospel" of salvation should be preached throughout the whole earth*³⁶. Saint John Chrysostom pinpoints the ecumenicity of the Christian faith in *The Lord's Prayer*, summing up the Church prayer. On the one hand, the request *Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*³⁷ expresses the way of living of the communion in the Church³⁸, so that *nothing may prevent us from reaching the perfect life of the heavenly powers, although we live on earth; because the one who lives here can do everything as if he were there as well*. On the other hand, this request also tells that *just as there, up in heaven, all happens without any obstacle, and the Angels do not accomplish only some commandments, while violating others, but do all of the commandments and they all submit, as they are strong in virtue, doing His word*, in other words, entirely fulfilling His will, as the psalmist says³⁹, *similarly make us, the people, worthy to do Your will not just halfway through but entirely, as You wish*. Because God's Son and the world's Savior Jesus Christ did not say *Your will be done in me or in us, but everywhere on earth, for all deceit to disappear, for the whole truth to be established, for all sin to be abolished, for the whole virtue to return, so that there may be no difference between heaven and earth*⁴⁰.

2) A second message: *The unity between contemplation and practice* or, in patristic language, *between vision of God and action*. From the beginning, we need to emphasize the fact that the term *contemplation* does not mean in patristic language a state of imagination or simple dreaming of a certain thing, but refers to the real vision, with the spiritual eyes, of the uncreated Light, in other words, of God's glory, meaning the experience of God's presence in man's heart, by the work of the mind and of the uncreated divine grace. It is interesting to note that, as man's life gets laicized and secularized, the patristic sense of the Greek term *θεωρία*⁴¹ passed from *the vision of God* to

³⁵ Κωνσταντίνου Σκουτέρη, "Μηνήματα τῶν Τριῶν Ἱεραρχῶν", in *Εἰκοσιπενταετηρικὸν Ἀφιέρωμα στὸν Μητροπολίτη Νεαπόλεως καὶ Σταυρουπόλεως κ. Διονύσιου, Ἀνάτυπο, Ἐκδόση Ι. Μητροπόλεως Νεαπόλεως καὶ Σταυρουπόλεως Νεάπολη, Θεσσαλονίκη, 1999, p. 605 (= Σκουτέρη, *Μηνήματα τῶν Τριῶν Ἱεραρχῶν*).*

³⁶ Saint Basil the Great, *Homilia de hominis structura*, in PG 30, 44 A.

³⁷ *Matthew* 6: 10.

³⁸ Σκουτέρη, *Μηνήματα τῶν Τριῶν Ἱεραρχῶν*, p. 606.

³⁹ *Psalms* 102: 21.

⁴⁰ Saint John Chrysostom, *Commentarius in Santcum Matthaeum Evangelistam. Homilia XIX*, in PG 57, 280; see also idem, *Scrieri. Partea a treia. Omilii la Matei*, translation, introduction, indices, and notes by Fr. D. Fecioru, Col. Părinți și Scriitori bisericești (= PSB) 23, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1994, p. 252.

⁴¹ Etymologically, this term comes from the Greek verb *θεωρῶ*, -έω, for which two etymologies can be found: 1) the combination of the Greek words *θέα* = *landscape* and *ὄρω*, -άω = *to see*, meaning *the fact of seeing a*

contemplation, and from *contemplation* to *theory*, in other words, man becomes *strong* in theory, is a theorist, but ceases to be a liver, more and more. This phenomenon is not just of our epoch, on the contrary, we find it as well in the Three Holy Hierarchs' time, and therefore one can notice their permanent endeavor to prove, by their own life, namely by their own living, the unity between faith and life, between dogma and morals, and between contemplation, in the patristic sense, and practice, in other words, between the vision of God and action⁴².

This unity is summed up in the already classical formula of Saint Gregory the Theologian: *by living you should stand up; by cleansing you should acquire what is clean..., because practice means stepping towards the vision of God*⁴³. This evidences that the Christian teaching does not represent a theoretical-abstract system of values, but accomplishing word⁴⁴, exhorting to care for the soul, but also for the body, by deliverance from all that goes against the acquisition of the quality of citizen of the Kingdom of God⁴⁵. Therefore, man is called to have spiritual premises, according to Saint Gregory the Theologian, to theologize: *it is not for each one... the fact of philosophizing about God, namely of theologizing about God, it is not for everyone; so, this is not easy and of the earthly ones. And I will add that it does not happen all the time, nor to all, nor for everything, but sometimes, to some and for a special thing. Consequently, it is not for all, but only for those tested and advanced in contemplation*, namely in the vision of God, in other words, in the vision of His glory or of the uncreated Light, *and, first of all, of those who have cleansed their body and soul or are cleansing them, in the most appropriate manner. Because to the impure it is not somehow without danger to be touched by the clean One, just as it is not without danger for the weakened vision to be touched by the sunray*⁴⁶. For this reason, Saint Basil the Great's advice is that *we ought not to serve the body except in those absolutely necessary; yet, to the soul, we ought to give what is best, to free it, with the help of philosophy*, in other words, with the support of the holy-spiritual living, *from the relation with the passions of the body, as from a prison, and make, at the same time, also the body a master over the sinful passions*⁴⁷. Because it is a great difference, on the one hand, between those working their salvation, taking into account, therefore, all the details of their life concerning their body and their soul, and, on the other hand, *those taking care of the body, to be as well as possible, but disdain, as something deprived of value, the soul that is using the body, the latter being, by analogy, like people taking care of the tools of their trade, but neglecting the trade that uses these tools*⁴⁸.

The mystery of theology, according to the same Saint Basil, *looks for certainty because of the not-yet-investigated faith*⁴⁹, in other words, this mystery does not rely on un-lived, unexperienced

landscape; 2) the combination of the Greek words θεός = God, god or θεά = divinity, goddess and ὁρῶ, - ἄω = to see, from them deriving, by reference to the Christian faith, *the fact of seeing God*. Therefore, the term θεωρία means, among others, *research, observation with the eyes of a reality*, but also *vision of God*; in the first case, man uses his physical eyes and, in the second, his spiritual eyes (James Donnegan, *A New Greek and English Lexicon*, Philadelphia, 1844, pp. 652, 661; Δ. Δημητράκου, *Μέγα Λεξικὸν ὅλης τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς Γλώσσης*, τόμος Ζ', Ἀθήναι, 1964, pp. 3348-3349; J. B. Hofmann, *Ἑτυμολογικὸν Λεξικὸν τῆς Ἀρχαίας Ἑλληνικῆς*, ἐξελληνισθὲν ὑπὸ Ἀντωνίου Δ. Παπανικολάου, Ἀθήνα, 2009³, pp. 127, 129).

⁴² Σκουτέρη, *Μηνήματα τῶν Τριῶν Ἱεραρχῶν*, p. 606.

⁴³ Saint Gregory the Theologian, *Oratio XX*, 12, in *PG* 35, 1080 B.

⁴⁴ Σκουτέρη, *Μηνήματα τῶν Τριῶν Ἱεραρχῶν*, p. 607.

⁴⁵ In this sense, eloquent are Saint Basil the Great's words: *We uphold that we need to love and follow, with all our strength, what can be useful for the preparation of that life, namely of the eternal life, and let us overlook the things not aimed [at the eternal life], considering them valueless* [idem, *Omilia a XXII-a către tineri*, 2, translated by Fr. Dumitru Fecioru, in Clement Alexandrinul, Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, Sfântul Grigorie Teologul, Fericitul Ieronim, Fericitul Augustin, *Scrieri cu tematică pedagogică*, PSB, Seria nouă 16, Editura Basilica, București, 2016 (= Clement Alexandrinul et al., *Scrieri*), p. 318 (= Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, *Omilia către tineri*)].

⁴⁶ Saint Gregory the Theologian, *Oratio XXVII*, 3, in *PG* 36, 13 CD - 16 A.

⁴⁷ Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, *Omilia către tineri*, 9, p. 330.

⁴⁸ Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, *Omilia către tineri*, 9, p. 331.

⁴⁹ Saint Basil the Great, *Homilia in Psalmum CXV*, în *PG* 30, 105AB.

faith. For this reason, *the dogma*, namely the Church teaching, and *morals*, in other words, the manner of thinking and living in the Church teaching, represents for the Three Holy Hierarchs, according to Professor Constantin Skutéris, *a unity, an ontological agreement between life and faith. The Christian theology and, in general, the Christian teaching*, continues the same professor, *suppose a certain behavior, and the Church life is founded on a certain faith. There can be no correctness of life where there is no correctness of faith and always the Orthodoxy calls unwaveringly and uninterruptedly to cleanliness of life and sanctification of the concrete man*⁵⁰. In this sense, Saint Gregory the Theologian affirms, on the one hand, that man should ascend above his sinful passions and cleanse his mind, before taking on the priestly service⁵¹, and, on the other hand, he who wants to teach others the way to salvation *needs to be he himself clean first, to then cleanse others; needs to become he himself wise first, to then make others wise; needs to become he himself light first, to then illumine others; needs to draw close to God he himself first, to then bring others to Him; needs to be sanctified he himself first, to then sanctify*⁵².

Saint John Chrysostom says that for man to be authentic and for man's light to shine *before men*, according to the commandment of the *Gospel*, it is necessary for his *life to be in harmony with the dogmas, and for the dogmas to preach life. Because faith without actions is dead, and actions without faith are dead*. By this affirmation, referring to man's salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ, Saint John Chrysostom makes a difference between the good deeds done by pagans, who *by nature do the things in the law*, according to Saint Paul the Apostle⁵³, and those done by Christians. In this context, if, as Saint John Chrysostom says, *we have healthy dogmas, but we neglect the life*, namely the living of the dogmas in our life, *then we will draw no profit from the dogmas*. On the contrary, if *we are careful about the life, but we take out from the dogmas even a dot, then this will not be of use for us either*⁵⁴. Consequently, the believer, be he a clergyman or a layman, young or old, man or woman, must have in view the close relation between dogma and manner of thinking and living, between faith and action. This truth is illustrated by Saint Basil the Great in a clear and characteristic manner, likening the unity between vision of God and practice, between faith and behavior, with a house, for whose building the materials needed are actions and vision of God. Saint Basil affirms: *for dogmas and actions can be perceived as a house of each, concerning the dense and unified part of creation [made up] by meanings*⁵⁵. In other words, according to Saint Basil the Great, in this house, where the vision of God and the actions coexist and function together for its stability, foundation is the world's Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. The vision of God and the actions are recognized in the Person of our Savior Jesus Christ, because the Christian life relies on His work, since, in harmony with the same Holy Father, *the dogmas of faith have their foundation and beginning in our Lord Jesus Christ*⁵⁶. Therefore, *actions and vision of God meet and support each other, according to the Three Holy Hierarchs, in the Person of Christ*⁵⁷, Who is the Head of the Church. The Christocentric consideration of the vision of God and of actions, namely the fact that dogma and morals are founded on the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, means that this balance is achievable only in the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. The new man according to Christ is built inside the Church, by the work of the grace of the Holy Spirit. In fact, the meeting between the vision of God and actions is visible in the Church in the persons of the Saints, because the Saints are the ones who attain, by the Holy Spirit, the communion in our Savior Jesus Christ with God the Father, in other words, the deification or the

⁵⁰ Σκουτέρη, *Μηνήματα τῶν Τριῶν Ἱεραρχῶν*, p. 607.

⁵¹ Saint Gregory the Theologian, *Oratio II*, 91, in *PG* 35, 493 BC.

⁵² *Ibidem*, 71, in *PG* 35, 480 BC. Concerning the vision of Saint Gregory, the Theologian on the meaning of *theology* and *theologians*, see also Deacon Prof. Assist. Ioan I. Ică, "Teologie și teologi după Sfântul Grigorie de Nazianz", in *Mitropolia Ardealului* 34/1 (1989), pp. 40-56; for similar studies see *ibidem*, p. 41, note 4.

⁵³ *Romans* 2: 14.

⁵⁴ Saint John Chrysostom, *Homilia II. In creationis principium*, in *PG* 53, 31.

⁵⁵ Saint Basil the Great, *Commentarius in Isaiam Prophetam*, 5, in *PG* 30, 368 A.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁷ Σκουτέρη, *Μηνήματα τῶν Τριῶν Ἱεραρχῶν*, p. 608.

state of gods by grace, which state is simply the undisturbed coexistence between the vision of God and practice⁵⁸.

3) A third message: *The need for education and the benefit of the permanent spiritual cultivation of man.* Although the Three Holy Hierarchs remained faithful to the Christian faith in harmony with the spirit of the *Gospel* and of the Holy Apostles, they turned to good value in the best manner the schools of the time from Caesarea of Cappadocia, Caesarea of Palestine, Alexandria and Athens, and implicitly the Greek classical thinking. Studies preoccupied them so much, as well as inner spiritual training, that a reference point became the case of the Saints Basil the Great and Gregory the Theologian, who, being colleagues in Athens, knew but two ways, one leading to the church and another to school, getting to know deeply the intellectual and scientific richness of their time, and the possibility of the Greek language to express meanings and distinctions, theological and philosophical, of a rare fineness. Saint John Chrysostom also benefited of the Greek education, because in his country, Antioch, where he spent most of his life, he studied at the Greek sophists' schools, knowing very well the Greek dialectics and mentality.

Therefore, remarkable is the fact that the Three Holy Hierarchs did not hesitate to exploit the thinking of the Greek philosophers and turn to good value the richness of the Greek language, without falling in the rationalization of the faith. On the contrary, they acknowledged in the *profane letters*, namely in *the lay or outwardly education, the pre-training for the Christian training and the adequate tool to promote to the intellectual man of their epoch* "the new teaching", spoken of by [Saint] Paul [the Apostle] in Athens, when "his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols (Acts 17: 16)"⁵⁹. In fact, still in Athens, Saint Philip the Apostle told his listeners: *I have come to reveal to you the education of Christ*⁶⁰, as a natural crowning of classical education⁶¹. Consequently, this knowledge of the culture of their time helped the Three Holy Hierarchs, on the one hand, to appreciate and make known the superiority of the Christian faith, and, on the other hand, to formulate, based on their personal experiences, the content of the Christian faith in a perceptible, logical and user-friendly manner to the people of their epoch. If one goes through the Holy Fathers' lives and writings carefully, he will note, among others, that the depth of the expression of their own holy-spiritual experiences and of the approach of the faith problems, caused by the phenomenon of heresies and sects, is in close analogy with the intellectual training of the respective Holy Fathers, yet permanently referred to the living of the holy-spiritual life of cleansing, illumination and deification. This aspect indicates the truth that man is called to participate in the mystery of faith not just with the senses, but also with his power of thinking and reflection, as he has the possibility to cultivate all that is his, namely both senses and feelings, and reason and thinking, by the education received and even choose from this education what is helping him and leading him to the authentic living of the Truth, Who is the world's Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, God's Son⁶².

⁵⁸ Σκουτέρη, *Μηνήματα τῶν Τριῶν Ἱεραρχῶν*, p. 608.

⁵⁹ Σκουτέρη, *Μηνήματα τῶν Τριῶν Ἱεραρχῶν*, p. 611.

⁶⁰ Cf. *Acta Philippi* 3, 3, apud Werner Jaeger, *Cristianesimo primitivo e paideia greca*, La Nuova Italia Editrice, Firenze, 1966, p. 15; Ierom. Policarp Pîrvuloiu, "Studiu introductiv" (= Ierom. Policarp, *Studiu introductiv*), in Clement Alexandrinul et al., *Scrieri*, p. 9, note 1.

⁶¹ Ierom. Policarp, *Studiu introductiv*, p. 9.

⁶² This fact is confirmed as well by Father Dumitru Stăniloae who, commenting on the life and thinking of Saint Maximus the Confessor, affirms: *God communicates Himself to man according to his measure or proportionally to the level man has reached*, which means, of course, not just the intellectual level, but also the spiritual one conjugated to the intellectual one. *This means that God is continually in Himself above any spiritual level of man, yet, by descent, He can make Himself proportional to man, namely He can give to man a gift according to the measure of man. Man makes on each of his levels this double experience: the experience of God accessible to him and the experience of God infinitely greater than everything He is giving to man* (idem, "Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul – viața, scrierile și gândirea teologică și spirituală –", in Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Mistagogia*, translation, introduction and notes by Fr. Professor Dr Dumitru Stăniloae, edition by Fr. Alexandru Atanase Barna, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 2017, pp. 54-55).

The classical example is *the 22nd Homily or Discourse to the young on how they can use beneficially the literature of the Hellenic writers*. The text belongs to Saint Basil the Great and was used especially during the Renaissance, being interpreted as a legitimation and a recognition of the classical culture by the Christian Church, but also represented the first work of Saint Basil the Great published in printed form⁶³. Considered a *small moral treaty in the well-known genius of Plutarch*⁶⁴, Saint Basil the Great expresses in it, among others, the exhortation addressed to the young to read the classical texts and assimilate the culture of the time, but not *without discernment*⁶⁵, to guard, *with all due care, the soul*⁶⁶, considering only those authors and writings in which *they praised virtue or condemned vice*⁶⁷. To consolidate this attitude, Saint Basil the Great uses two examples taken from the surrounding nature: bees collecting pollen and people picking up roses: 1) *Just as other beings delight only in the smell or the color of the flowers, but the bees can take from the flowers also the honey, similarly, here, also, the people who are not looking in such writings only for pleasure and delight, can get from them also benefit for the soul. Therefore, just as in the bees' example, we need to partake of the profane authors' writings. For they neither go without choice to all the flowers, nor try to bring everything they find in the flowers they sit on, but take only as much as it is appropriate for their work, while the rest [is left behind]. We, if we are wise, let us take from those [books] as much as it is appropriate for us and corresponds to the truth, while forsaking the rest*⁶⁸; 2) *And, just as when we pick up roses, we take the thorns aside, similarly, from such writings, let us pick up everything that is useful and let us also keep ourselves safe from what is damaging*⁶⁹. A first conclusion is that *even from the beginning it is appropriate to check each teaching and adapt it to the aim pursued*⁷⁰, namely *the preparation of the other life*⁷¹. The happiness of the respective life is so great that *if someone were to gather with the mind and put together all the happiness since people have been created, he would find that it cannot equal even the smallest part of the goods of that life*⁷².

*It is the Holy Scriptures that lead us to this life, but because it is not possible to understand the depth of the meaning of the Holy Scripture, given the age of the young, ranging from 12 to 15, some of them even Saint Basil's nephews, others members of the community he was shepherding*⁷³, *until then let us put the eye of the soul to work, as in shadow and mirror*⁷⁴, *with other teachings not totally different from ours, imitating the soldiers who do fighting drills on the training field: they, training their hands and feet, acquire a special skill, receiving, in this way, in fights, the reward for their games. Well, we, too, need to think that we are in front of a battle, the most important of all the battles, for whose preparation we have the duty to do and to endure all we can and speak with poets, and writers, and orators, and all the people we can find some benefit from, for the cultivation of the*

⁶³ Ierom. Policarp Pîrvuloiu, "Introducere" la Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, *Omilia către tineri*, p. 316 (= Ierom. Policarp, *Introducere la Omilia a XXII-a*).

⁶⁴ Ierom. Policarp, *Introducere la Omilia a XXII-a*, p. 313.

⁶⁵ Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, *Omilia către tineri*, 8, p. 327. *It is precisely for this reason that I come and advise you, affirms Saint Basil the Great, that you must not give your mind's steering wheel in its entirety to these people, as you would give the steering wheel of a ship, nor should you follow them wherever they take you, on the contrary, receive from them as much as it is of benefit to you and discern what you need to leave aside* (Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, *Omilia către tineri*, 1, p. 318).

⁶⁶ Cf. *Proverbs* 4: 23.

⁶⁷ Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, *Omilia către tineri*, 4, p. 321.

⁶⁸ Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, *Omilia către tineri*, 4, p. 321.

⁶⁹ Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, *Omilia către tineri*, 4, p. 321.

⁷⁰ Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, *Omilia către tineri*, 4, p. 321.

⁷¹ Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, *Omilia către tineri*, 2, p. 318.

⁷² Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, *Omilia către tineri*, 2, p. 318.

⁷³ Ierom. Policarp, *Introducere la Omilia a XXII-a*, p. 313. In relation to his nephews, Saint Basil expresses himself as follows: *By natural kinship, I am, for you, right behind those who gave birth to you and love you just as much as your parents; and, unless I am wrong about you, I think that, looking at me, you will not miss your parents* (Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, *Omilia către tineri*, 1, p. 317).

⁷⁴ Cf. *I Corinthians* 13: 12.

soul. Consequently, just as the painters prepare, first, by some [transformations], the object about to receive the paint and then color it, either in purple, or differently, similarly we, if we want the glory of good to remain in us undeletable, let us initiate ourselves first in profane writings, and then we will understand also the holy and mysterious teachings. And, after having got used to seeing the sun in water, we can turn our eyes also to its light⁷⁵. Therefore, we are dealing with two kinds of teachings, one divine and one profane, and with two kinds of wisdom, one divine and one profane. The difference between them is just as the specific trait of a tree is to be full of ripe fruit, but also the leaves trembling on the branches give the tree a certain adornment, similarly with the soul: its fruit is first of all the truth; yet it is not unpleasant for it to be clothed in the outwardly or profane wisdom (ἔξωθεν or θύραθεν), just as the leaves offer the fruit a shelter and this accomplished aspect⁷⁶. As example, Saint Basil the Great evokes the great Moses, who drew near to the contemplation of “He Who Is”⁷⁷ only after he first trained his mind with the Egyptians’ teachings⁷⁸, but also the wise Daniel, about whom it is said that while he was in Babylon, only after having learnt the Chaldeans’ wisdom well, did he draw close to the divine teachings⁷⁹.

Saint Gregory the Theologian reveals himself, by a part of his *Epistles*, as a careful educator of his blood relatives, manifesting a special care to the children of Nicobulos⁸⁰, the husband of his niece Alypiana, among them standing out the great-nephew also called Nicobulos, to whom he dedicates several *Epistles*⁸¹. From their content, one can distinguish the preoccupation of Saint Gregory the Theologian for the profane and especially moral-spiritual education of Nicobulos and his brothers, recommending them to the most famous professors of the time, rhetors and sophists, and the governors and bishops from the cities where they were studying⁸². Thus, the *Epistles* of Saint Gregory the Theologian addressed to the latter or referring to the education of his great-nephews are structured under the form of a true paideic trajectory, in which we can observe and evaluate the cultural-spiritual evolution of the great-nephews, and, by extension, also of the young, whom the Holy Father reminds that the Christian literature, in general, and especially his writings, have mainly an educative role: *The principal trait of my writings is to be educative by maxims and reflections, where possible. Just as the father of the children of noble lineage is easy to recognize, similarly when it comes to writings; and this happens no less than with the ones who have given birth [and who are recognized] thanks to their corporeal features. Similarly, with mine [with my writings]*⁸³. The profane education specific of the time ought to be combined, according to Saint Gregory the Theologian, with the moral and spiritual one, received in the family and in the Church, for divine grace to be at work in the young person’s life. In this sense, Saint Gregory the Theologian was writing, among others, to bishop Theodore of Tyana, whom he had entrusted his great-nephews, the following: *My beloved Nicobulos’ children are coming in town to learn tachygraphy; watch them kindly and paternally (as no canons are against this) and see that they go to church as often as possible. I intend that, concerning their character, they be modelled according to the shape of virtue, being as often as possible next to Your Perfection*⁸⁴.

⁷⁵ Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, *Omilia către tineri*, 2, p. 319.

⁷⁶ Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, *Omilia către tineri*, 3, p. 319.

⁷⁷ Cf. *Exodus* 3: 14.

⁷⁸ Cf. *Acts* 7: 22.

⁷⁹ Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, *Omilia către tineri*, 3, pp. 319-320.

⁸⁰ Sfântul Grigorie Teologul, *Epistola 157. Către Teodor*, 2, translated by Hieromonk Policarp Pîrvulescu, in Clement Alexandrinul et al., *Scieri*, p. 385 (= Sfântul Grigorie Teologul, *Epistola 157*).

⁸¹ Ierom. Policarp Pîrvulescu, “Introducere” at Sfântul Grigorie Teologul, *Epistole cu privire la educația lui Nicobulos*, in Clement Alexandrinul et al., *Scieri*, p. 379 (= Ierom. Policarp, *Introducere la Sfântul Grigorie Teologul*).

⁸² Ierom. Policarp, *Introducere la Sfântul Grigorie Teologul*, p. 379.

⁸³ Sfântul Grigorie Teologul, *Epistola 52. Către același Nicobulos*, 3, translated by Hieromonk Policarp Pîrvulescu, in Clement Alexandrinul et al., *Scieri*, p. 383.

⁸⁴ Sfântul Grigorie Teologul, *Epistola 157*, 2-3, p. 385.

While Saint Basil the Great referred mostly to the education of the young, as mentioned above, aged between 12 and 15, some of them being also his nephews, who studied at a man of letters (*Grammaticus*)⁸⁵, and Saint Gregory the Theologian to the education of his great-nephews⁸⁶, in exchange, Saint John Chrysostom refers to the moment of the beginning of the Christian education, drafting even a *program of family Christian education* for children, according to which the parents, father and mother, are the first educators or teachers of Christian living and conduct, for which reason the entire education needs to gravitate around the holy-spiritual life, as lived in the Church, according to the divine Revelation organs, the *Holy Tradition* and the *Holy Scripture*. In other words, one has in view the pedagogy of the God's grace-filled work on the child's soul, which soul is *malleable and easily modellable towards good or towards bad*⁸⁷. For this reason, in the second part (16-90) of his small treaty *On vainglory and on how parents ought to raise their children*, which became popular only starting with the 17th century and *represents the first work of Greek literature of the Antiquity dedicated exclusively to the education of children, and the first systematic treaty of Christian pedagogy*⁸⁸, Saint John Chrysostom likens the children's souls at first with *pearls, easy to shape only at first, right after they have been caught*⁸⁹, then with *paintings and statues*, which are realized gradually, yet with no deviation from what we want them to represent⁹⁰.

According to Saint John Chrysostom, the soul of a child is also like a fortified city, recently built and founded, *which has foreign citizens who do not have yet the experience of anything*, and to organize it, laws are needed, even *frightening and tough laws*, which need to be *applied*. This means that the defenders of the laws are the citizens of that city, who teach all the newcomers, regardless of their age, the good living. *Those educated since childhood to live a bad kind of living, when old, are hard to change, yet not unchangeable, because, if they want, they, too, can change. Those [young], however, who do not have the experience of life, yet, will easily receive the laws of the city, and the Christians' legislation is for the good progress of the entire world*⁹¹. To build the city, by which we understand the spiritual building of the soul, one has in view that man's five senses *ought to be the fortified walls and gates of the respective city, and the entire body ought to be as a wall*. Therefore, the gates of this wall are: *the eyes, the tongue, the hearing, the smell and... the touch. By these gates come in and go out the citizens of this city, in other words, by these gates the thoughts are corrupted or straightened*⁹². For this reason, it is appropriate to make for the respective gates *openings and golden locks from God's words*, which means *that we should teach the children to have these [words] ceaselessly on their lips, even when they are on the run, not anyway, nor superficially, nor rarely, but continually*. The gates *should not be covered only in golden leaves, but, on the contrary, should be made thick and solid, worked entirely in gold; instead of ordinary stones, they should have encased precious stones. Lock of these doors should be the Cross of the Lord, made up entirely from precious stones, placed across the doors*. Through these gates should not seep into the city *mixed and corrupt people*, namely any bad thought or *depreciative words*⁹³, but only the Emperor Jesus Christ, because

⁸⁵ Ierom. Policarp, *Introducere la Omilia a XXII-a*, p. 313.

⁸⁶ Sfântul Grigorie Teologul, *Epistola 157*, 2, p. 385.

⁸⁷ Ierom. Policarp Pîrvuloiu, "Introducere" at Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Despre slava deșartă și despre cum trebuie să își crească părinții copiii*, in Clement Alexandrinul et al., *Scrieri*, p. 340 (= Ierom. Policarp, *Introducere la Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur*).

⁸⁸ Ierom. Policarp, *Introducere la Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur*, p. 342.

⁸⁹ Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Despre slava deșartă și despre cum trebuie să își crească părinții copiii*, 20-21, translated by Fr. Dumitru Fecioru, in Clement Alexandrinul et al., *Scrieri*, pp. 352-353 (= Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Despre cum trebuie să își crească părinții copiii*).

⁹⁰ Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Despre cum trebuie să își crească părinții copiii*, 22, p. 353.

⁹¹ Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Despre cum trebuie să își crească părinții copiii*, 23-27, pp. 353-354.

⁹² Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Despre cum trebuie să își crească părinții copiii*, 27, p. 354.

⁹³ All these and any inclination to bad need to be killed *inside, as the bees kill the drones and do not let them get out or buzz* (Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Despre cum trebuie să își crească părinții copiii*, 35, p. 357).

after this city is built, in other words, after the child's soul has acquired education and, consequently, the Christian living, *it is not a man who will live in it, but the Emperor of all Himself*⁹⁴.

The constant exhortation of Saint Joan Chrysostom to parents, by extension, to the parents of all times, is: *raise an athlete for Christ*⁹⁵, moreover, *a philosopher and a citizen of heavens*⁹⁶, which means for parents themselves, father and mother, both a way to receive forgiveness for their sins, but also an overflow of goods from God for the entire family, because who works for the education of his own child, endeavors, in fact, for himself, as, *if you imprint on his soul, still unripe, the good teachings*, in other words, the teachings of the Church, *no one will be able to take them away from him; they solidify like the seal applied on wax*⁹⁷. Yet, then, just as now, namely *in our time, each parent does his best to teach his children the arts, literature, oratory, yet no one is interested at all in educating his soul*⁹⁸. Consequently, it is vital that a child's training in the spiritual domain ought to begin even from his home, in other words, from his family⁹⁹, for the child to have imprinted in himself *the character of a holy man*¹⁰⁰. This is how he will learn and get used to the fact that, for instance, the innocence, namely the state of virginity, *is very useful at marriage, not just for the temperance of the young man but also for that of the wife, because their love will be cleaner; God will be all the more merciful and will fill that marriage of innumerable blessings; moreover, God will make such a man ceaselessly have in his heart love for his wife and be so in love as to never look to another woman*¹⁰¹.

III. THE WORK OF MIRACLES

The lives of the Three Holy Hierarchs and their teachings are, therefore, *straighteners of the Orthodoxy*, in other words, the way to follow in the Orthodox Church. For this reason, I wish to bring to your attention three miracles or wonderful deeds of the Three Holy Hierarchs' lives, which miracles can be, in their turn, other messages from them:

1) First, I want to evoke the way Saint Ephrem the Syrian (306-373), celebrated on January 28, learnt Greek, right towards the end of his earthly life, if we consider the fact that Saint Ephrem the Syrian departs to the Lord in 373, and Saint Basil the Great becomes bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia in 370. Saint Ephrem the Syrian, while in the desert, finding out about Saint Basil the Great's actions and teachings, was praying to God to reveal to him how Saint Basil was like. By the Holy Trinity's grace, he saw in his dream a pillar of fire, whose end reached heaven, and heard a voice, saying: *Ephrem, Ephrem, like this pillar of fire that you can see, this is how Basil is*. Ephrem, taking with him an interpreter, because he did not know Greek, went to Caesarea in Cappadocia, where they arrived during the celebration of our Lord Jesus Christ' Baptism. And, watching secretly from a distance, he saw Saint Basil, going in great glory to church. Then, Saint Ephrem told the interpreter: *It seems to me that we have struggled in vain, brother, because this man, being in such a state, is not the way I saw him*.

However, they went in the church, where they sat in a corner, out of sight, and Saint Ephrem was saying to himself: *I am amazed how we, being in the desert and suffering the hardship and heat of the day, have not increased at all, and the latter, being in so much human honor, is pillar of fire*. Yet, Saint Basil the Great was informed by the Holy Spirit about the presence of Saint Ephrem in the church and sent his archdeacon to him, indicating the place where he was, to call him into the Holy Altar. Understanding by the interpreter the hierarch's message, Saint Ephrem answered the one who

⁹⁴ Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Despre cum trebuie să își crească părinții copiii*, 28, pp. 354-355.

⁹⁵ Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Despre cum trebuie să își crească părinții copiii*, 19, 39, 63, 90, pp. 352, 358, 366, 374.

⁹⁶ Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Despre cum trebuie să își crească părinții copiii*, 39, p. 358.

⁹⁷ Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Despre cum trebuie să își crească părinții copiii*, 20, p. 352.

⁹⁸ Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Despre cum trebuie să își crească părinții copiii*, 18, p. 352.

⁹⁹ Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Despre cum trebuie să își crească părinții copiii*, 68, p. 367.

¹⁰⁰ Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Despre cum trebuie să își crească părinții copiii*, 80, p. 372.

¹⁰¹ Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Despre cum trebuie să își crească părinții copiii*, 81, p. 372.

was calling him: *You are wrong, brother, because we are strangers and the archbishop does not know us.* The archdeacon went back to report Saint Ephrem's words to Saint Basil. During this time, Saint Basil was just reading the *Holy Gospel*, and Saint Ephrem is given to see a tongue as of fire speaking by Saint Basil's mouth. Finishing reading, Saint Basil told the archdeacon again: *Go and tell that foreign monk: "Honourable Ephrem, come into the Holy Altar, because the archbishop is calling you!"* Faced with this reality, Saint Ephrem said: *Really, great is Basil, really, pillar of fire is Basil, really, the Holy Spirit speaks by his mouth!* And he asked the archdeacon to transmit to Saint Basil that they should meet after the end of the divine service.

Finally, they met in the *schevophilachion*, namely in the room where the priestly apparels, the Holy Vessels and other precious objects of the church were kept. They spoke with the help of the interpreter, and Saint Ephrem partook of the Most Holy Mysteries from Saint Basil's hands. After the meal occasioned by this special meeting, Saint Ephrem asked Saint Basil to bestow on him, by the work of the Holy Spirit, a gift, namely the gift to speak Greek. Saint Basil agreed to ask for this gift for Saint Ephrem, considering the latter's holiness and the effort he had made coming to Caesarea. They went in the church, where they *prayed for a long time*. Then, Saint Basil said to him: *Honourable Father, why do not you receive the sanctification of priest, being worthy?* He answered to him, by the interpreter: *Because I am a sinner, master.* Saint Basil replied: *O, if only I had only your sins!* Next, he said to Saint Ephrem: *Let us bow down [to God]*. And, kneeling, he put his hand on Saint Ephrem's head and said out loud *The Prayer for the ordination of a priest*. After it, Saint Basil said to Pious Ephrem: *Now command us to stand up. And Greek became clear to Blessed Ephrem and he said in Greek: 'Save us, have mercy on us, raise us, and keep us O God, by Your grace.'* In this way, came to be accomplished the word of the *Holy Scripture, then the lame will leap like a deer and the mute will sing for joy*¹⁰², Saint Ephrem became priest and speaker of Greek. His interpreter was also ordained deacon, and three days later they left Saint Basil the Great heading for their desert¹⁰³. I conclude this miracle by adding that Saint Basil the Great undertook not just a great philanthropic work, but also a rich activity in defense of the Christian faith by writings, which are included in 4 volumes of *Patrologia Graeca* (29-32).

2) Saint Gregory of Nazianzus used, by the work of the Holy Spirit, the power of the word in a convincing manner, so that he gained for himself the appellation *Theologizer*, namely *Theologian*. It is said that he was called to Constantinople, because so many had fallen in Arius' heresy, that only one church had remained Orthodox, the one called *The Church of the Resurrection*. After a long period of discourses and sermons in this church, the state of things changed and in the entire capital there remained only one church of Arius, all the others rebecoming Orthodox. From those sermons, *The Five Theological Discourses* are the most famous¹⁰⁴. In fact, the writings of Saint Gregory the Theologian are divided into *Discourses*, *Poems* and *Letters*, being included also in 4 volumes of *Patrologia Graeca* (35-38).

3) A professor of theology of Thessaloniki, who is a lay man¹⁰⁵, had to give an urgent answer to a very important matter that the Orthodox Church of Greece was being faced with at that time. He could remember that somewhere in a Holy Father he had read something regarding the respective matter, and his memory had retained the name of Saint John Chrysostom. However, he had not been able to identify that passage from Saint John Chrysostom's writings, and, in this situation, he prayed for God to help him, one way or another, to be sure that he will not be wrong with the solution he was going to give to the respective matter. From here, exemplary for me are, on the one hand, the professor's humility, who did not rely only on his memory and intellectual capacity, and on the other hand, his propensity to prayer.

¹⁰² See *Isaiah* 35: 6.

¹⁰³ *Proloagele*, I, pp. 825-828.

¹⁰⁴ Arhid. Prof. Dr. Constantin Voicu, *Patrologie*, vol. II, Editura *Basilica* a Patriarhiei Române, București, 2009, p. 205.

¹⁰⁵ His name is Demetrios Tselengidis.

After he finished his prayer, the telephone rang, and at the other end of the line was, by divine oikonomia, I would add, none other but a famous disciple of Saint Paisios the Hagiorite¹⁰⁶. The two knew each other, and the respective disciple set forth to him the reason that he was coming out of the Holy Mount to Thessaloniki, to solve certain things, and on this occasion he would like to visit him to his home, because they have something to discuss. Great was the joy of the professor of theology, and the moment of their meeting took place in a special spiritual atmosphere, full of emotions and noble discussions. Among them, the professor also put on the table the matter preoccupying him. Saint Paissy's disciple, having the same spiritual propensity and charismata as Saint Paissy, confirmed his solution, and the professor tells him: *I think I have read what you are saying in Saint John Chrysostom, but I can no longer find the respective passage*. The discussion was taking place next to the distinguished professor's library, exactly near Saint John Chrysostom's volumes of the *Patrologia graeca*, these volumes being no less than 18 (volumes 47-64). And as the professor was moving his hand along the respective volumes, not knowing which one to draw out, the respective Father, namely Saint Paissy's disciple, suggested that he should draw the volume next to the professor's hand at that moment. Drawing it out and holding it in his hands, the volume opened exactly at the passage he was looking for, yet whose content had been related just then by the respective Father. The Professor looks at it in awe, while the Father says: *Why are you amazed? The same Holy Spirit, Who was then, is also now*. In other words, the lot of those looking for spiritual perfection and reaching it is the same content of the *Divine Revelation* and, implicitly, of the *Pentecost*, by the personal living or experience of the work of the uncreated divine grace, and the Saints become their contemporaries, just as they, themselves, become contemporaries of the Saints.

IV. SYNAXARION AND ICON

By the above, my intention is also to draw your attention, among others, to two details. When we look in the church calendar or *Synaxarion*, for the day of 30 January, we observe that the three Hierarch Saints are enumerated in this order: Saint Basil the Great, Saint Gregory the Theologian and Saint John Chrysostom. But, if we look at the icon honoring them on 30 January, we observe that, in its classical form, Saint John Chrysostom is in the middle, while the other Holy Fathers are painted on his right and on his left. In other iconographic representations, on the right of Saint Basil we find Saint Cyril of Alexandria, and on the left of Saint Gregory the Theologian is painted Saint Athanasios the Great, too, forming, all together, the *Holy Spirit's harp*, because the five Holy Fathers of the Orthodoxy stood out as defenders of the Holy Trinity dogma¹⁰⁷. The double question emerging, therefore, is: why these differences in the sequence of the three Hierarch Saints or why have the Holy Fathers ordained that Saint John Chrysostom be placed in the middle in the iconographic representation, in between the other Saints mentioned? These answers arose:

1) in the church calendar or the *Synaxarion* of the day, the order is given, as I have personally noticed, by the year when each of these Saints reposed in the Lord, in other words, history is respected and we have the sequence: Saint Basil the Great († 379), Saint Gregory the Theologian († 390) and Saint John Chrysostom († 407);

¹⁰⁶ In a first presentation of this discourse, I made a confusion between this disciple and Saint Paissy the Hagiorite himself, a fact clarified following the meeting with Professor Demetrios Tselengidis in Thessaloniki, on 5 June 2018.

¹⁰⁷ The information is taken from Mr. Spyridon Tsitsigos, Professor of the Faculty of Theology of the Kapodistrian and National University of Athens, on the occasion of the conference *Introduction to Patrology*, held at the Faculty of Theology and Education Sciences of Valahia University of Târgoviște, on Friday, 18.05.2012, the translation being done by us. It is worth mentioning that, up to a certain point in time, Saint Gregory of Nyssa was included in the Holy Fathers' triad next to Saint Basil the Great and Saint Gregory the Theologian, forming the well-known scheme of the three Cappadocian Holy Fathers, but because teaching mistakes have been found in his writings, he was replaced by Saint John Chrysostom, see Γαζή, *Ο δεύτερος βίος*, pp. 189-191, 226-232.

2) in the icon dedicated to their concelebration, we see Saint John Chrysostom in the middle not because he was given some personal primacy by comparison with the other two Holy Fathers, nor because the yearly ecclesial celebrations cycle dedicated to the Three Hierarch Saints began and ended with Saint John Chrysostom (13 November and 27 January), in between these two celebrations being those of the Saints Basil the Great (1 January) and Gregory the Theologian (25 January), until their concelebration (30 January)¹⁰⁸, nor because the *Divine Liturgy* of Saint John Chrysostom is celebrated the most often along the ecclesial year, but for other two reasons, reinforcing all the others, as well: on the one hand, Saint John Chrysostom was considered the greatest hermeneut or interpreter of the *Holy Scripture*, like no other, and preacher of it, so that *had it not been for this Saint*, as the *Synaxarion* of the day of 30 January highlights, (*although it is boldness for us to say so*) *Christ would have had to come again on earth*¹⁰⁹; on the other hand, Saint John Chrysostom was taken as reconciliatory argument in the disputes and discussions of the time. When, in one circumstance or another, the clergy and the believers of the Church were in some hotter debate, all dispute ceased the moment someone brought an argument from Saint John Chrysostom's teachings¹¹⁰. In fact, I think that it is due to these two reasons that Saint John Chrysostom is the first described in the *Synaxarion* of the day of 30 January¹¹¹.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The Orthodox theology, as holy-spiritual experience of the relation with God, goes beyond all science, by the fact that its subject is multiple: on the one hand, God Who reveals Himself and, on the other hand, man, who ascends, by the work of the uncreated divine grace, to His knowledge, by the method of the hesychast living or of the acquisition of the holy-spiritual life, with its three steps, reminded above, cleansing, illumination and deification. In exchange, regarding the other sciences, the subject is the man investigating and searching, by methods specific to each science, and the object is God's creation. For this reason, when theology was "perceived" or "received" as science, catalogued among the *positive sciences* for its "experimental" and practical character¹¹², and cultivated in the academic environment, it has been called *the highest science*, according, for instance, to the oath of doctor in Theology practiced in the Faculties of Theology from Greece¹¹³, being, at the same time, considered *science in fact and in truth*¹¹⁴, *science of sciences* and *an immense*

¹⁰⁸ According to some researchers, this cycle of celebrations dedicated to Saint John Chrysostom would have constituted the pretext of the dispute arisen among the three Holy Fathers' followers, see Άθαν. Δ. Παλιούρας, *Η ύπερβαση του έφημέρου μέσα από την εικονογραφία των Τριών Ιεραρχών*, Ιωάννινα, 1992, p. 35, note 3.

¹⁰⁹ *Historia Institutionis*, in PG 29, CCCXCII B (392 B); Άγίου Νικοδήμου του Άγιορείτου, *Συναξαριστής. Ιανουάριος – Φεβρουάριος*, p. 189; *Ο Μέγας Συναξαριστής. Ιανουάριος*, p. 732 (from this *Synaxarion* was taken out the note on Saint John Chrysostom's role in the preaching of the *Gospel* and his hypothetical absence triggering the return of the world Saviour Jesus Christ); for the translation in Romanian see also *Sinaxarul Slujbei Sfinților Trei Ierarhi*, p. 514: *so that if it had not been for him*, namely for Saint John Chrysostom, (*although it is boldness for us to say so*), *Christ would have had to come again on Earth* (*Synaxarion* of the *Service of the Three Holy Hierarcs*).

¹¹⁰ Information taken from Mr. Spyridon Tsitsigos, see above note 107. In the same sense, see also Saint John of Euchaita, *In magnas festorum tabulas per modum expositionis*, in PG 120, 1135 A; Ανδρέου Ξυγγοπούλου, "Άγιος Ιωάννης ό Χρυσόστομος, «Πηγή της Σοφίας»", in *Αρχαιολογική Εταιρία* 1942-1944, pp. 1-36.

¹¹¹ Άγίου Νικοδήμου του Άγιορείτου, *Συναξαριστής. Ιανουάριος – Φεβρουάριος*, pp. 189; *Ο Μέγας Συναξαριστής. Ιανουάριος*, pp. 731-732; *Sinaxarul Slujbei Sfinților Trei Ierarhi*, pp. 513-514. To these reasons one can add, according to some researchers, also a certain sympathy of Saint John of Euchaita for the Holy Father whose name he was bearing, namely for St. John Chrysostom, see Ανδρέου Ξυγγοπούλου, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

¹¹² Π. Ν. Τρεμπέλα, *Έγκυκλοπαιδεία της Θεολογίας*, Αθήνα, 1980², p. 137 (= Τρεμπέλα, *Έγκυκλοπαιδεία*).

¹¹³ Pr. prof. dr. emerit Gheorghe Metallinós, "Teologul în slujirea Bisericii", translated from Greek and completions of certain notes by Lect. Dr. Ion Marian Croitoru, in Pr. Ion Vicovan, Pr. Paul-Cezar Hărlăoanu, Emilian-Iustinian Roman (editori), *Teologia academică și responsabilitatea ei în misiunea Bisericii*, Collection *Episteme* 22, Editura Doxologia, Iași, 2016, p. 94 (= Metallinós, *Teologul*).

¹¹⁴ Τρεμπέλα, *Έγκυκλοπαιδεία*, p. 136.

*social conquest of Christianity*¹¹⁵, which means, according to the words of Father Georgios Metallinós, *a social recognition of the Church*¹¹⁶ and of its presence in the academic environment. In this way, theology received, *historically, also the sense of method of getting close to God*, mentioned above, *but also of research and scientific contribution concerning the ecclesial reality and systematic presentation of the Christian faith*¹¹⁷.

The spiritual experiences of the Saints of the Church and its teachings are stored in various *testimonies* (texts, monuments, artistic expressions etc.) of her presence and progress in the world, as *body of the world Savior Jesus Christ*. Theology, as science, under the form of the disciplines included in the curriculum, either at pre-university level, or at university level (bachelor degree, master's degree and doctorate), *investigates, draws conclusions, rehabilitates critically, studies and interprets all these testimonies or draws inspiration from them in the uninterrupted dialogue of the Church with the world*. Therefore, *the part of the historical presence of the Church, which can be researched using the means of science and be perceived rationally, represents the subject of theological scientific research*, this research being important not just for the past of the Church, but also for its present in history¹¹⁸.

This approach of the study of the Church testimonies also includes the education offered in the Faculties of Theology, transmitting to students, on the one hand, knowledge obtained from the theological scientific research fruits, and, on the other hand, giving them guidance in the Church life, namely in the life according to the teaching of God's Son Jesus Christ, as it has been lived and experienced by the Saints, in a society where, more than in other epochs, virtue and cleanliness have been abandoned for the sake of technology and consumerism, and man's quest for spiritual perfection is being replaced by the perfecting of apparatuses and machineries, not for man's benefit, but for economic gain, the latter, namely the apparatuses and the machineries, even getting to be considered more valuable than a man's life.

Therefore, the Church of the world Savior Jesus Christ, namely the Orthodox Church, being *one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church*, walks in the world by the steps of the Saints of yesterday, today and tomorrow. Consequently, the reference to their experiences, which forms the empirical theology, this theology representing the only dynamic and vitalizing reality of the synergy between the academic theology and the Church mission in the contemporary society¹¹⁹, needs to remain a constant of theological education, because *God is not the great absent of man's historical endeavors*, on the contrary, He is present in history and is The One inspiring man¹²⁰. For this reason, the Orthodoxy is *not an epoch of history, but its truth*, because it has a past, but, all the more, a present and a future, and its guarantee is the Church conscience, whose head is God's Son and the World Savior Jesus Christ¹²¹. In this sense, edifying is an apophthegm of the *Egyptian Paterikon*. Abba Isidore of Pelusium stated that *life without a word is naturally more useful than the word without a life. For the life is beneficial even when silent, but the word is a nuisance even when calling out. But if word and life coincide, then they produce one image of the whole of philosophy*¹²², in other words,

¹¹⁵ Ηλ. Β. Οικονόμου, *Αί Θεολογικά Σχολαί εις την διακονίαν της Εκκλησίας*, Αθήναι, 1981, pp. 8, 94.

¹¹⁶ Metallinós, *Teologul*, p. 94.

¹¹⁷ Metallinós, *Teologul*, p. 93, note 1.

¹¹⁸ Metallinós, *Teologul*, p. 95.

¹¹⁹ See my study, from which this last part of this presentation is inspired, with some changes, *Teologia empirică, singura realitate dinamică și vitalizatoare a sinergiei dintre teologia academică și misiunea Bisericii în societatea contemporană* (*The empirical theology, the only dynamic and vitalizing reality of the synergy between the academic theology and the Church mission in the contemporary society*), presented at the International Symposium *The Faculty of Theology: academic status and ecclesial mission*, Craiova, 4-7 October 2017, under print. For another version of this study, with the same title, see *Ortodoxia* 11/1 (2019), seria a II-a, pp. 26-47.

¹²⁰ Κωνσταντίνου Παπαπέτρου, *Πίστη και γνώση*, Αθήνα, 1987, p. 7.

¹²¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 17, 19.

¹²² *Pentru Avva Isidore Pelusiotul*, 1, in *Patericul ce cuprinde în sine cuvinte folositoare ale Sfinților bătrâni*, Col. *Izvoare duhovnicești* 1, Alba Iulia, 1993/1994, p. 107.

of the entire manner of living and thinking according to the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. This teaching has been inherited, preserved, and transmitted in the world by the Orthodox Church. By its Saints, of whom the Three Hierarch Saints Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom, concelebrated today, are an example, the Church has preserved its teaching, in a dynamic form, the accuracy and the authenticity, along the centuries. This fact guarantees the reality of the holy-spiritual life, which bestows on the contemporary man, faithful to the Orthodoxy, the inner transformation and external reference needed and lived in relation with the God revealed and glorified in the Holy Trinity, in relation with our neighbors and with our self, with the entire universe, visible and invisible, for the universal benefit of the society and for acquiring the quality of citizen of God's Kingdom.

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