THE PROVERB IN CHRISTIANITY AND IN THE ROMANIAN CULTURE

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Abstract: *Proverbs are the most known manifestations of popular wisdom. Barely distinguished from maxims and often referred to as popular sayings, the proverbs are meaningful adages which display the manner of being or thinking of a people, the quintessence of expressing a long experience. They express generally human truths noticed in a certain situation, but which can be repeated, thus functioning as examples or parables. Proverbs represent a gift of divine wisdom sown in humans since the creation, and that is why the book "The Proverbs of Solomon" occupies a place of honour among the sapiential books of the Holy Scripture.*

Keywords: *proverbs, wisdom, Solomon*

According to the *Dicţionarul Explicativ al Limbii Române* (*Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language*), the proverb is "a moral, popular teaching born from experience, expressed through an eliptic, suggestive formula, usually metaphorical and rhythmical; saying, adage, paroemia." (*Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language*, 1998, p. 863).

The discipline called 'paremiology' deals with the study or the collection of proverbs, the term being often used in the hymnography of the service books in the Orthodox Church. "The term 'paroemia' extended to all biblical readings used at Vespers because most times those readings are taken from the *Proverbs of Solomon*; that is why their content is full of wisdom." (Pr. prof. Ene Braniște, PhD, Prof. Ecaterina Braniște, 2001: p. 348).

In world literature a special place is occupied by the *Proverbs of Solomon*, a collection of maxims and adages of Jewish wisdom, introduced in the canon of the Old Testament books under the sign of divine inspiration and eventually taken over by Christianity with the inner innovative amendments of the Gospel of Christ (*The Bible or the Holy Scripture*, 2018, p. 787). The Greek term *paroimíai* = proverbs is the Biblical language translation of the Hebrew term *mişle*, the plural form of the noun *maşal* which becomes *proverbiae* (the plural form of *proverbium*) in *Vulgata*, a term that will be annotated in the main European languages. The Romanian versions preferred to translate it as "parables", a term whose semantic evolution led to its actual sense: parable, parabolic.

The *Proverbs of Solomon* are included in the so-called didactic poetry of the *Old Testament* and their literary structure is specific to the genre they belong to. A Biblical proverb is usually formed by a couplet that is two verses linked by an either synonymous or antithetic parallelism. So, through its constitution, the Biblical proverb belongs to the paremiological genre, which means:

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1. It originates from direct observation of immediate reality;
2. It is expressed in a lapidary, plastic, often metaphorical way;
3. It aims for a moralizing effect.

Proverbs are not grouped in rigorous thematic systems, but they rather seem to cover a wide variety of general ideas they accord with through sometimes very distant connections. However, they cover almost every idea related to human morality and social life, everything being measured by the great virtue of wisdom, wisdom which has its origin in God, is learned and transmitted through direct initiation and whose price is beyond any estimation. Not only are the deeds of humans evaluated, but also their results, the joy of the fair person and the punishments that come for the unfair person, the family as a fundamental institution, the relationship between pride and humility, lie and truth, cowardice and bravery, cunning and honesty, laziness and diligence, deception and integrity; the life of the citadel is not ignored with particular focus on the royal institution. One could say that the *Proverbs of Solomon* are just like a meadow with a variety of flowers from which the reader can choose the scents that he or she likes.

Solomon wrote 3000 parables several of which (about 800) form the Biblical book *Proverbs of Solomon* (whose main author - about 90% of the entire book - is Solomon) and 1005 chants (the Bible includes two psalms named after him, Psalm 72 and Psalm 127).

However, Solomon, "carried away by love", "joins" one of the seven nations which are more numerous and powerful than the Israelite, but forbidden by God to the emperors of Israel, and loves foreign women. He has 700 royal empresses as wives and 300 mistresses. In his old age, his wives "turned his heart to other gods" so that it no longer remained devoted "entirely to God like the heart of his father David had been". God gets angry with Solomon because he didn't follow His commands and punishes him by taking his empire from the hands of his son, Rehoboam, and offering ten nations to his servant, Jeroboam I, leaving one nation to his son. To the end of his reign, God creates two enemies for Solomon: Hadad, the emperor of Edom, and Rezon, the emperor of Syria. A detailed portrait of Solomon can be mainly found in III Kings, chapters 1 to 11 and II Chronicles (II Paralipomenon), chapters 1 to 10 (*Ibidem*, p. 479-487).

The proverbs or parables of Solomon had a profound echo in world literature, being part of the sapiential books of humanity and occupying a special place in the culture of the Romanian people, being found since the first translations of the Bible. Following the order of the book *The Proverbs of Solomon*, we will try to come up with the correspondent wisdom of the Romanian people expressed through proverbs.

Pride, boast and humility

a) Pride is just a sin: "Haughty eyes and a proud heart— the unplowed field of the wicked—produce sin." (Proverbs 21:4). There is a nation of people "whose eyes are ever so haughty, whose glances are so disdainful". (30:13). "Before a downfall the heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor." (18:12). The Lord opposes the proud: "The Lord tears down the house of the proud, but he sets the widow's boundary stones in place." (Proverbs 15, 25). See the attitude of God regarding the proud people who are mocking: "He mocks proud mockers but shows favor to the humble and oppressed." (Proverbs 3, 34).

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b) - It is better to be sorry for having kept quiet than for having said something.
- An unfair peace is better than a fair judgment.
- Pride comes before falling.
- Death reconciles everyone.

Wisdom, but from God who needs to be looked for, asked for

a) "For the Lord gives wisdom;" (Proverbs 2:6), a wisdom which is in view, not to the ends of the earth, where the fool is looking for it (Proverbs 17:24). Wisdom is like "a rushing stream that keeps flowing continuously" (Proverbs 18: 4). Wisdom is a gift that we have to understand (Proverbs 2:2) and call out for insight (Proverbs 2:3), and cry aloud for understanding (Proverbs 2:3), which has to be looked for (Proverbs 2:4; 18: 15), searched for as for hidden treasure (Proverbs 2:4). "It must not be forsaken and then it will protect us, it should be loved and then it will shelter us, it will give you a garland to grace your head and present you with a glorious crown." (Proverbs 4:5-9).

b) - Before ordering, learn to obey.
- Bend like the cane and the wind will not break you.
- The wise person learns from someone else's mishap, but the inconsiderate will not even learn from his own.

The fear of the Lord represents the wisdom's beginning and instruction

a) The wise Solomon shows "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction". (Proverbs 1:7) and in other verse he says that "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." (Proverbs 9:10). The fear of the Lord is equally the wisdom's instruction (Proverbs 15: 33).

b) - The man disappears like the shadow as soon as he lacks the light.
- The man is like a candle, as he lights, he passes away.
- The sheep hold their head down for fear they might be seen by the wolf.
- The wise man does what he can, not what he wants.

Wisdom and the advice of the Parents

a) The wise man heeds correction, (Proverbs 9:8; 15:31-32; 15:5), advice (Proverbs 12:15; 13:10; 19:20) and he gains understanding (Proverbs 15:31-32), knowledge (Proverbs 19:25; 21:11), wisdom for the future (Proverbs 19:20), adds to his wisdom (Proverbs 9:9). The wise one will even love the mockers (Proverbs 9:8). The teachings of the Parents represent life, "the words of the parents are life to those who find them and health to one's whole body". (Proverbs 4:22). Thus the wise man brings joy to his parents (Proverbs 10:1; 15:20; 23:15; 27:11; 23:24; 29:3) if they correctly used the rod and the reprimand as "A rod and a reprimand impart wisdom, but a child left undisciplined disgraces its mother." (Proverbs 29:15).

b) - Too much kindness shown by the parents leads to the loss of the children.
- He who does not have a child does not have light in his eyes.

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- He who does not obey his parents is not honest and faithful to his friends either.
- If the child does not cry, his mother will not understand him
- Respect your child so that you will be respected in old age, too.
- You will only realise how much you owe your parents when you have a child of your own.

Wisdom and humility

a) Solomon says: "Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil." (Proverbs 3:7). The lazy and the rich tend to consider themselves wise. "A sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven people who answer discreetly." (Proverbs 26:16). Solomon warns that: "Do you see a person wise in their own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for them." (Proverbs 26:12). Generally the man sees many ways to be right for him, but in the end they all lead to death (Proverbs 16:25, 14:12). The wise man is humble, discreet: "The prudent keep their knowledge to themselves, but a fool's heart blurts out folly." (Proverbs 12:23). Solomon urges us to "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding!" (Proverbs 3:5).

b) - Humility is the most beautiful face of wisdom.
- Humility is a scared ego.
- Humility is the precious trait that helps us feel small as we grow bigger and bigger.
- Humility is a peak that less and less people reach.
- Humility is not a mask; it is a shield that protects the heart from the danger of pride.

The wise man and his words

a) The wise man of Israel shows us that "Sin is not ended by multiplying words, but the prudent hold their tongues." (Proverbs 10:19) and the fact that "the lips of the wise protect them." (Proverbs 14:3). Few and measured words are spoken by the wise man so that "Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent, and discerning if they hold their tongues." (Proverbs 17:28). He will not answer to derision as "Whoever derides their neighbor has no sense, but the one who has understanding holds their tongue." (Proverbs 11, 12). The wise man should answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes. (Proverbs 26:4-5), even if no peace can be made between them. (Proverbs 29:9). "A person's wisdom yields patience; it is to one's glory to overlook an offense." (Proverbs 19:11). "Fools give full vent to their rage, but the wise bring calm in the end." (Proverbs 29:11). "Whoever is patient has great understanding, but one who is quick-tempered displays folly." (Proverbs 14:29). Fools show their annoyance (regarding themselves or the others) at once, but the prudent overlook an insult. (Proverbs 12:16). „Mockers stir up a city, but the wise turn away anger." (Proverbs 29:8). „A king's wrath is a messenger of death, but the wise will appease it." (Proverbs 16:14). The lips that "speak knowledge are a rare jewel." (Proverbs 20:15). „The hearts of the wise make their mouths prudent, and their lips

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promote instruction." (Proverbs 16:23). "The lips of the wise spread knowledge, but the hearts of fools are not upright." (Proverbs 15:7). "The tongue of the wise adorns knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly." (Proverbs 15:2). "The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing." (Proverbs 12, 18).

b) - Advice is vain to the wise man.
- No one asks about a beautiful person, but about a wise and diligent one.
- The wise man learns from the best wisdom.
- Thrift is the greatest gift of the wise man.

Beauty mixed with lack of intelligence

a) "Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman who shows no discretion." (Proverbs 11:22) "Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife." (Proverbs 21:9; 25:24). "A quarrelsome wife is like the dripping of a leaky roof in a rainstorm; restraining her is like restraining the wind or grasping oil with the hand." (Proverbs 27:15-16). "Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and nagging wife." (Proverbs 21:19)

b) - It is the worst thing in the world to live with a nagging woman.
- God please spare me from the fire, the flood and the nagging woman.
- You'd better eat only bread and water than live with a nagging woman.
- It is good to look at the beautiful woman, it is good to get younger with a smart one.

The ideal wife

a) The ideal wife is diligent, housewife, contriver, compassionate, optimistic, inspires trust, is afraid of God and is wise (Proverbs 31:10-31). "A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him well, not harm, all the days of her life. She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands. She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar. She gets up while it is still night; she provides food for her family and portions for her female servants. She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard. She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks. She sees that her trading is profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night. In her hand she holds the distaff and grasps the spindle with her fingers. She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy. When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet. She makes coverings for her bed; she is clothed in fine linen and purple. Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land. She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies the merchants with sashes. She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come. She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue. She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: "Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all." " (Proverbs 31:0-29).

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b) - The woman who handles her home well is an irreplacable treasure.
- The woman who knows to obey her husband makes the moon roll on her pinky finger.
- Without a man it is like without a head, without a woman it is like without a mind.
- The most praised woman is the one who does not say anything.
- The clean woman can be seen from her man's clothes.
- Women are the basis of education in every generation.

Laziness

a) The lazy man is really comfortable: "The lazy do not roast any game, but the diligent feed on the riches of the hunt." (Proverbs 12:27). "A sluggard buries his hand in the dish; he will not even bring it back to his mouth!" (Proverbs 19:24). "A sluggard buries his hand in the dish; he is too lazy to bring it back to his mouth." (Proverbs 26:15). The lazy man loves to sleep "Laziness brings on deep sleep, and the shiftless go hungry. (Proverbs 19:15). "As a door turns on its hinges, so a sluggard turns on his bed. (Proverbs 26:14). "drowsiness clothes them in rags." (Proverbs 23:21). "A sluggard's appetite is never filled, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied." (Proverbs 13:4). "Sluggards do not plow in season; so at harvest time they look but find nothing." (Proverbs 20:4). Poverty and scarcity come over him: "and poverty will come on you like a thief and scarcity like an armed man." (Proverbs 6:9-11, similarly to Proverbs 24:30-34). Then if he has a job he is a nuisance to his master: "As vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so are sluggards to those who send them." (Proverbs 10:26). And he is poor: "Lazy hands make for poverty, but diligent hands bring wealth." (Proverbs 10:4). The lazy man believes himself to be very wise: "A sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven people who answer discreetly." (Proverbs 26:16).

b) - The lazy man has hardly woken up when he wants to bo back to bed.
- A hen who sits will not get fat.
- Laziness looks for work but does not want to find it.
- Laziness makes the mind rot.
- In the working day all my bones ache.
- In the house of the lazy it is always holiday.
- The lazy man is good at three things: eating, sleeping and getting upset.
- In the working day comes the disease of the body.

Work

a) "The lazy do not roast any game, but the diligent feed on the riches of the hunt." (Proverbs 12:27). "The appetite of laborers works for them; their hunger drives them on." (Proverbs 16:26). Wherever there is work, there is also a profit: "Those who work their land will have abundant food, but those who chase fantasies have no sense." (Proverbs 12:11). "Those who work their land will have abundant food, but those who chase fantasies will have their fill of poverty." (Proverbs 28:19). All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk

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leads only to poverty. (Proverbs 14:23). “Lazy hands make for poverty, but diligent hands bring wealth.” (Proverbs 10:4). “Diligent hands will rule, but laziness ends in forced labor.” (Proverbs 12:24). “A sluggard’s appetite is never filled, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied.” (Proverbs 13:4). “The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty.” (Proverbs 21:5). “Where there are no oxen, the manger is empty, but from the strength of an ox come abundant harvests.” (Proverbs 14:4). “The one who guards a fig tree will eat its fruit, and whoever protects their master will be honored.” (Proverbs 27:18).

b) - Poverty looks on the window of the diligent man but does not dare to enter.
- Work spares us from three bad things: loneliness, bad deeds and poverty.
- The man does not strike it rich unless he works.
- The hard-earned food has a good taste.
- Work knows no shame.
- God feeds the birds which flap their wings.

The wealthy man and wealth

Wealth is the fortified city of the rich (Proverbs 10:15; 18:11), a high wall (Proverbs 18:11). The rich are wise in their own eyes (Proverbs 28:11), speak harshly (Proverbs 18: 23), rule over the poor (Proverbs 22: 7), have many friends (Proverbs 14:20), do not listen to rebukes (Proverbs 13:7-8). Wealth sometimes brings about arguments (“Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting, with strife.” – Proverbs 17:1), disturbance (“Better a little with the fear of the Lord than great wealth with turmoil.” – Proverbs 15:16) or even hate (“Better a small serving of vegetables with love than a fattened calf with hatred.” – Proverbs 15:17). The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is slave to the lender. (Proverbs 22:7). Wealth, which is ephemeral (“for riches do not endure forever, and a crown is not secure for all generations.” - Proverbs 27:24) is like the eagle that flies off to the sky (Proverbs 23:4-5). It is far below wisdom (Proverbs 3:14), esteem and the fact of being loved: „A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.” (Proverbs 22:1). “Because those who trust in their riches will fall” (Proverbs 11:28); “wealth will be worthless in the day of wrath” (Proverbs 11:4), “dishonest money dwindles away,” (Proverbs 13:11), “An inheritance claimed too soon will not be blessed at the end.” (Proverbs 20:21), “whoever is eager to get rich will not go unpunished.” (Proverbs 28:20).

b) - Whoever is healthy is rich enough.
- It is easy to be rich but it is hard to be happy.
- Wealth ruins the weak.
- The rich man will be more praised.
- Wealth stirs the desires of the thieves.
- The wealth of the rich is the hands of the village.
- Greedy for wealth but foolish.
- The rich man does not believe the needs of the poor.

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By trying to draw a parallel between some proverbs of Solomon and several Romanian proverbs we have noticed that proverbs are the most known manifestations of popular wisdom. Barely distinguished from maxims and often referred to as popular sayings, the proverbs are meaningful adages which display the manner of being or thinking of a people, the quintessence of expressing a long experience. (Petre Anghel, *Proverbul sau zicerea. Ce-o fi aia?* They express generally human truths noticed in a certain situation, but which can be repeated, thus functioning as examples or parables. In the Romanian oral folk literature proverbs are introduced by expressions such as "they say", "old people say", "it is a saying that", "as the proverb goes".

The age of proverbs is hard to determine both in Romanian culture and in other cultures of the world, for they surely appeared as linguistic forms along centuries of existence once with the crystallization of the thought in a spoken language (Lina Codreanu, 2014: p. 59), they are a gift of divine wisdom sown in humans since the creation, and that is why the book *The Proverbs of Solomon* occupies a place of honour among the sapiential books of the Holy Scripture.

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