„The Book of Books" in the work of Saint John Chrysostom

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Cet article se fait l'écho de la proclamation par l'Eglise Orthodoxe Roumaine de l'année 2015 comme année commémorative du Saint Jean Chrysostome. Aussi s'est-on donné comme tâche d'analyser la contribution de celui-ci à l'exégèse biblique, sachant que le Livre des Livres représente l'ouvrage le plus important de la religion chrétienne, le livre de chevet de plus de deux milliards de chrétiens du monde entier. Les commentaires de Saint Jean Chrysostome à propos des Saintes Ecritures, d'une grande richesse spirituelle et littéraire, réalisés avec la fidélité et la plasticité d'un fin connaisseur, ont une thématique riche, diverse et très attrayante. Les sujets en sont: l'homme, la vie, l'amour, l'amitié, l'éducation, le travail, la providence divine, la liberté, le destin, le bonheur, etc. Connaître et approfondir la conception du grand théologien et ses méthodes d'interpréter la Bible représentent une aide importante, morale et spirituelle, dans l'activité des prêtres et des croyants de notre Eglise.

Mots-clés: Personnalité patristique, l'exégèse biblique (de la Bible), thématique concernant Saint Jean Chrysostome, le but de l'étude de la Sainte Ecriture, méthodes de recherche de la Sainte Ecriture

> *Motto: „Reading the Holy Scriptures is a great asset. It makes the soul wise, rises the mind up to the Sky, makes man agreeable determines him not to attach his soul to the present world, makes our mind live always Up there, makes us accomplish everything –with an eye to the Master's reward – and also makes us turn towards virtuous deeds with eagerness* " (Homilies 35,1 on Genesis, P.G. 53, 321).

1. Preliminaries

In the course of history, people showed a special interest about books. There were a lot of stages in the evolution of a book: from the ancient clay tables to the beautiful Egyptian papyri, from all, kinds of animal leather to expensive and superb parchments in the 4th century A.D. and at last the paper showed up. The invention of the paper revolutionized the world of the books in a fundamental way. Starting with the 16th century, step by step, the book turned into what find nowadays in a library.

It's a well-known thing the fact that in our life, the book, can be for anyone a good, faithful and reliable friend whose extraordinary purpose is to make a good faithful and reliable friend whose extraordinary purpose is to bring much comfort, support and joy through the ardour and force of the ideas as well as to make us come to maturity, to enrich us with new thoughts and things thus making us capable to live the most beautiful feelings and prepare ourselves solidly for the

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world we live. In this way, the famous scientist Francis Bacon said that "A man is complete only by reading"[1].

Considered a masterpiece of humanity, the Bible, with its great religious value, was also a rich source of inspiration, for the countless artistic creations. Well-known painters, prestigious writers or world know – used – in their work, biblical themes. Milton left us "The Lost Paradise", Dante wrote "Divina Comedia", and the introduction from ,,Faust", written by Goethe, was inspired from the prologue of The Book of Iob. Also, famous composers like Bach, Rossini, Goldmark, Haydn, Mozart, Schuman and others were inspired from the Bible. They turned the subjects from the Bible into exquisite musical pieces of art.

This is why, we gladly notice that famous personalities of universal culture, starting with Parents of The Church, theologians, scientists, philosophers, writers, said memorable deep and soul – uplifting words, about the Bible.

One of these personalities is also Saint John Chrysostom, a great Father of the Christian Church, a valuable man of culture and an eminent commentator of the *Holy Scriptures.*

2. The Life and Work of Saint John Chrysostom

Saint John Chrysostom is one of the brightest faces in the past of the Christian Church and Universal Culture as well. Born in Antioch of Syria (c. 347 A.D.), in a rich and respected family, as the son of general Secundus and pious Antuza, he was endowed with outstanding qualities starting with his first years of life. After a while he cultivated his qualities schools of that time. At the School of scholar Libaniu, from him native place, one os the greatest honest heathens of the time. John studied rhetoric and after that philosophy with most master Andragathius. He became a wise disciple, even wiser than his own teachers, through zeal and talent. We find about rhetor Libaniu that he wanted to give him the leading of the Antioch School. His confession was recorded in the last moment of his life: ,,I wouldn't have chosen someone else but John if Christians hadn't taken him away from me"[2].

The books from his childhood and his youthful years, the study of different sciences, his special religious education offered by his mother, were a guide to him all his life. At the beginning, St. John wanted to attend a law career but, realizing the annoying life from the court, he dedicated himself to a lonely and contemplative life. Having a bright talented mind, he deciphered the mysteries of theology having well- known mentors: Saint Meletie, the archbishop of Antioch and Diodor, the bishop of Tars, and the leader of Antioch School. Appreciated for his rich culture, St. John was ordained deacon (380 A.D.), then priest (386 A.D.).

[1] Francis Bacon, *Despre studiu*, apud Sinclair Ferguson, *De ce să citeşti cărţi bune*, https: dantum.files.wordpress.com/2010/de-ce-sa-citesti-carti-bune.

[2] Sozomenos, VII, 2, apud Ștefan Bezdechi, *Sfîntul Ioan Gură de Aur şi Platon*, Sibiu, Tiparul Tipografiei Arhidiecezane, 1945, p. 38.

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The church historian Palladiu, tells us that John lead the Antioch Church more than a decade, a period in which he manifested an exemplary life by living wisely, taking care of the poor the sick and his sanctity[3].

The appellation of ,,*Chrysostom*", namely ,,Golden Words", was given to him by a simple woman of humble origin while she was listening eagerly to his wonderful ardent sermons: ,,Master – she said – or John Crysostome, the well of your sacred teachings grew deeper but the rope of our own mind is short and it can't reach its bottom"[4].

His special merits on the pastoral – missionary field, made him be chosen as archbishop Constantinople (398 A.D.). His exceptional oratorical talent, his zeal as implacable reformer, his pious divine services and religious processions, his special attention for the believers who answered him with fervent love, in one word, all his new work that he initiated and guided with so much devotion, brought down many intrigues and enemies upon himself. Consequently, the great Antioch shepherd and writer was sent twice in exile where he endured persecutions, poverty, sufferings and diseases that brought about his death in the town of Pityum (Asia Minor), on the eastern coast of the Black Sea[5].

His work includes 18 volumes from J.P. Migne's collection which cannot be equalized[6].

St. John Chrysostom left us a tremendous cultural heritage consisting of treatises, homilies and letters. We can remind you several of his written homilies: 67 homilies to Genesis (P.G. 53, 21-580); 58 to Psalms (P.G. 55); 90 Homilies to the Holy Gospel according to Mathew (P.G. 57-58); 88 Homilies to the Holy Gospel according to John (P.G. 59, 23-482); 55 Homilies to the the Acts of the Apostles Acts (P.G. 60, 13 – 384). The climax in the interpretation of the Holy Scripture is considered to be the homilies to the Pauline epistles. (P.G. 60-63).

Further on, I would like to outline and emphasize a few important aspects concerning the ,,Book of Books" (the Bible) in the work of St. John Chrysostom, the Bible being the most published work in the world, the most important writing of the Christian religion and the fundamental book for more than one milliard believers all over the world.

Compared to Demostene, Cicero or Bossuet[7], the brilliant Antioch hierarch, John also named "Chrysostom", due to his remarkable life and his solid knowledge, leaves to the future generation, his writings – precious pearls – which are a remarkable beauty and culture. Aime Puech, a great researcher who studied the work of John Chrystostom for many years, noted the fact that his may of writing is

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[3] Palladiu, *Dialog istoric cu Teodor, diacon al bisericii romane, despre viaţa şi petrecerea Sfîntului Ioan Gură de Aur, episcop al Constantinopolului*, 5, Migne, P. G., 5, col. 19.

[4] *Vieţile Sfinţilor pe luna noiembrie*, Vînători-Neamţ, Mănăstirea Sihăstria, 2006, p. 217.

[5] Dr. Remus Rus, *Sfintul Ioan Gură de Aur-cel mai mare predicator creştin* [citat 14 septembrie 2015] disponibil pe adresa: *www.buciumul.ro.sfantul-ioan-gura-de-aur-cel-mai-mare*.

[6] Aimé Puech, Histoire de la littérature greque chrétienne, tom. III, Paris, 1930, p. 505.

[7] Iustin Moisescu, *Sfînta Scriptură şi interpretarea ei în opera Sfîntului Ioan Hrisostom*, Bucureşti, Anastasia, 2003, p. 183.

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of a classical perfection; the simplicity of his fraternal tone, the naturalness, the insinuating accent, the precision of the concrete examples, the finesse of the moral observations, bring a special charm to his words which go deep into the hearts; he has such an imagination that enables him to give life and color to everything[8]. Among those writings, an important place is occupied by his extremely appreciated commentaries to the books of the Old and New Testament. His homilies distinguish themselves through the beauty of the language, the fluent clear, correct and lively style, the abundance of picturesque images and the beautiful figures of speech, all of them being a delight for the readers. In his turn, the historian and also Christian theologian, Teodoret, bishop of Cirus, (Syria, c. 393 - c. 457 A.D.) said that the hands of the great scholar grew weak according to the laws of nature, but his lyre kept on playing throughout the world because of the charm of his work. Being often copied out, the work reveals itself in a great number of manuscripts and today, it is as actual as 16 centuries ago. The way in which the brilliant saint and writer presented and interpreted the text of the Holly Scriptures, is unique, exceptional, similar to some kind of art, his work being considered to be ,,the paradise of the patristic Christian oratory"[9].

3. The Book of Books

For the wise scholar, the Bible, was the first spelling book of childhood and later, on a guide in everything he undertook being a true source of principles due to his bright missionary and social activity. He always read the Bible, he considered it superior to literary writings and reading it was a way to self – modelling[10]. Its reading is ,,like a harbor not ruffled by waves, it is a wall that cannot be besieged, a glory that cannot be taken by force, an invincible weapon, a good unfoded mood, a perpetual pleasure and any other good thing someone might speak about as well[11]; it is a clear sweet spring with good drinking water, a spring gushing out from under a stone and spreading all over the human being in floods and rivers of virtue[12]; it is a spiritual field where the wisdom and virtue seeds of the Holy Spirit were thrown by writers[13].

3.1. *The Book of Books, a divine – human work.* St. John Chrysostom considered the Holy Scriptures being of divine origin, having words of the divine grace that encouraged the angiograph to write[14]. "The mouths of the prophets –

[8] Pr. Prof. Ioan G. Coman,.*Aspecte ale artei literare în operele Sfinţilor Trei Ierarhi*, în ,,Studii Teologice", nr. 3-4, 2003, p. 82.

[9] Pr. lect. Constantin Corniţescu, *Sfinţii Trei Ierarhi, interpreţi ai Sfintei Scripturi*, în ,,Studii Teologice", nr. 1-2, 1976, p. 84.

[10] Sfîntul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omilia 15 la Ioan, P. G., LIX, 97; Omilia 3 la Geneză; Omilia 2 la Isaia, cap. 7, P. G., LVI, 69*, apud V. Vasilache, *Biblia în Ortodoxie*, M-rea Neamţ, 1939, p. 25.

[11] Idem, *Genes. Hom. XXI, 1, MPG. III,* col. 175.

[12] Idem, in *Psalm. XLVIII, 1, MPG. LV,* col. 513.

[13] Idem, *Marh. Hom. II, 6, MPG. LVII, col. 31*; în *Gen. Hom. XXIX, 1, MPG. LIII,* col. 262.

[14] Idem, *Omilia la Ieremia*, P.G., LIV, col. 519.

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said Saint John – represent the mouth of God[15], and the spiritual values contained in the Holy Scriptures come from God[16].

In the vision of the Great Father, *"The Book of Books"* is the ever – lasting gift "of God's love for people, *"The Testament*", which its worth following, the sacred agreement between God and people in order to become son's according to the divine grace and successors of his eternal kingdom. He compares it to a spring with life giving water or to a treasure with stones of great value, with a gate facing eternity or to garden of flowers. However, the book is better than all. ,,The garden of flowers", he says, is subject to the season changes while the Holy Scriptures are covered with leaves even in winter time thus providing us fruits all year round"[17] .

3.2. *The Book of Books is addressed to all people*. Saint John Chrysostom said that "The Scriptures are the letters sent to people by God"[18]; they are addressed to all humanity from all the times, places and all social categories, irrespective of the cultural level in its spiritual evolution[19]. The saint urged all of us to read and study it in all its depth.

3.3. *The Christian attitude as to the reading of the Holy Scriptures and advice for reading it*. In the time of St. John the Christians showed special attention next to veneration when reading the Holy Scriptures. Many of them, especially the important persons of society had luxury copies, artistically written on parchment; they were kept on book shelves or on desks. Some of them kept them only as ornamental objects neglecting to read or study them. To such people, the hierarch has something to say: ,,What are they meant for? The Holy Scriptures were not given to us to put them aside, on the contrary they were given to us to read them, to meditate on them and thus, to print them in our hearts. Being content to have the commandments written on a beautiful parchment means useless boastfulness". One of the main pastoral concerns of St. John was to make each Christian have a copy of the Bible, not to be kept as a luxury object but to read it because especially the laity avoided the habit of reading[20]. They came with various reasons: ,,What do you say, my dear fellows? You don't read the Holy Scriptures because you are too busy? You have an occupation, a wife and children to feed? I tell you that you need it more than monks. In fact, monks are protected against the attacks of the devil by their way of living life. You, on the contrary, are on the battlefield, you are continuously exposed to new wounds. The reasons for your impatience jealousy,

[15] Idem, *Comentariu la Isaia*, P.G., LIV, col. 110

[16] Idem, *Hom*. În Geneză, I, P.G. 53, 112, apud Louis Meyer, *Saint Jean Chrysostome maître de perfection chrétienne*, Deuxième édition, Paris, MCMXXXIV, p. 302, nota 3.

[17] Idem, *Omilia 15 la Ioan, P. G., LIX, 97; Omilia 3 la Geneză; Omilia 2 la Isaia, cap. 7, P. G., LVI, 69*.

[18] Idem, *Omilia II-a la Geneză*, P. G., LIII, col. 28 apud Arhim. Veniamin Micle, *Citirea şi interpretarea Sfintei Scripturi după Omiliile Sfîntului Ioan Gură de Aur* în ,,Ortodoxia", nr. 2, 1980, p. 277.

[19] Idem, *Omilia a II-a la Geneză*, P. G., LIII, col. 28.

[20] Idem, *Omilia XXXII-a la Evanghelia după Ioan 3,* P. G., LIX, col. 183-193, apud Arhim. Veniamin Micle, *op. cit*., p. 282.

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restlessness and discouragement are always with you. Your enemy Keeps throwing new arrows against you. Therefore you need to find your strength in the Holy Scriptures"[21]. Saint John himself spent years in a cave around Antioch, learning the texts of the Holy Scriptures by heart. He urges us to dedicate ourselves to reading but also to the detailed study, showing us his instructive – educative intention: ,,We act like pigeons: they put little food into the young pigeons 'beak as long as they remain in the nest, but when they get out of it and they see their strengthened wings, they change the method: they bring in their beak, a seed that they show to them, and when the young pigeons come to take it, their mother let it down, making them, in this way, to pick it up. We do the same we also take in our mouth spiritual food and we call you to give you the solution to your problems, and after you search everywhere, we let it fall for you to get used to think by yourselves[22]. The following question often rises in the Christians 'soul: which parts from the Holy Scriptures must be read by the Christians? Saint John recommends them, but since he himself prefers the books of the New Testament, he also advises the Christians to read them with more perseverance.

3.4. *Recommended methods to read the Book of Books*

a) *Body and soul preparation*. The saint recommends that a woman should cover her head with a veil even if she doesn't usually wear it, in as a sign of inner piety, and the man should uncover it. Then, a soul analysis should be made, the disrespectful thoughts should be banished from the soul so that the whole attention be focused on what you read. Taking into account the reader's effort. God will descend into his soul. He will enlighten his mind and He will reveal to him the divine mysteries[23].

b) *Preliminary reading of the text.* Reading the evangelical pericope that is to be read in the church, is considered-by the Saint-the best spiritual preparation of the Christian for receiving the divine teachings. "Whoever searches after a hidden treasure inside the earth, will never find it, if he doesn't have will and thorough effort"[24].

c) *Rereading and going deeply into the text, after the interpretation of the priest in the Church*. Saint John recommends that "as soon as you got back home, you have to take the Holy Scriptures and together with the wife and kids, you must repeat together the teachings that were given to you"[25], exactly as at school, the way students do their homework, for a better acquisition of the new knowledge.

3.5. *The spiritual fruits when reading the Holy Scriptures.* "It's impossible – the Saint said – for the one speaking to God and also listening to Him, not to gain

[21] Idem, Omilia *III-a la Faptele Apostolilor*, 2, P. G., LX, col 35.

[22] Idem, *De mutatione nom*., I, 4, P. G., 51, 119 .

[23] Louis Meyer, *Saint Jean Chrysostome maître de perfection chrétienne*, Deuxième édition, Paris, MCMXXXIV, p. 315, nota 2.

[24] Sfîntul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Matth. Hom*, I, 6, P. G., 57, 21.

[25] Idem, *În Matth. Hom*. V, 1, P. G., 53, 55 cf. Louis Meyer, *op. cit.*, p. 310, nota 2.

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something good"[26]. The Holy Scriptures protect the Christian against devil's temptations and traps, because that leads to born a repulsion against sin. The Christians, seeing the book feel remorse for their mistakes and also strength in temptations. Saint John clearly exemplifies how the souls full of passions can be radically changed through the work of God's word; as bearer of grace, He can bring conversion within themselves. The Holy Scriptures knowledge strengthens the spirit, cleans the conscience, extirpates the enslaving passions, sows the virtue, rises us above the devil's arrows and brings the best things in the reader's soul.

3.6. *The interpretation of the Holy Scriptures belongs to the Church*. The interpretation of the Bible, can be done only by people trained to do that. It is not an easy task because of the old age of the writings, authors, environment and obviously because of its divine content. That's why, only the church – with the help of well – informed people – has the right to interpret the Holy Scriptures since they are considered to be mainly, church work. Only people endowed with intellectual and moral qualities, can interpret it. The interpreter must have a vast theological and laic culture. He must be familiar with biblical and profane history, archeology and linguistics as well as with the original languages, Hebrew and Greek in which the biblical texts were written. He must also have historical and geographical knowledge in order to understand the causes that led to the appearance of the Holy Books. It is recommended to use the texts in parallel[27]. Still, it is not enough for the interpreter to have only intellectual knowledge he must also have a strong faith in God and a pure soul. Only by having a close co-operation with the divine grace, the work of the interpreter can become fruitful. The Saint considers that it is too dangerous to put your way of thinking above the divine content of the Holy Scriptures because heresies could easily appear. Therefore, the catechetic school in Antioch recommended – as a method of interpreting the Book of Books – the establishing of the historical grammatical meaning of the text and then – if necessary- the revealing of the typical, spiritual or symbolical meaning of it[28].

4. Some Chrysostomian Themes

The remarks of the great scholar about the Holy Scriptures contain captivating, rich and diversified themes.

Saint John Chrysostom dedicated many of his thoughts, worries and solution to the ***problem of man***, thus, there is no page – in his work- in which he couldn't have debated or tackled one way or another that theme. The holy author is interested in man himself, living on earth, member of society, discontent and aspirations. According to John, man is the supreme value of the world master of creation, irrespective, of the place he occupies in society. Everybody – from the humble to the best – represents a value. The great hierach has the courage to say that man –

[26] Idem, *Omilii la Ioan*, VII, 3-4, P. G., 53, 55; cf. Louis Meyer, *op. cit*, p. 299, nota 2.
[27] Idem, *Omilii la cap. X de la Ieremia*, P. G., LVI, col. 158.
[28] Idem, *Interpretatea Psalmului VII*, P. G., LV, col. 100.

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due to his vocation and qualities – is here on Earth what God is Heaven[29]. The Saint carried on his activity in an epoch of dreadful exploitation, when the world was divided in masters and slaves; the slaves were disregarded up to the point of denial. A part of the population in Antioch, consisted of rich people who lived in shameful luxury, in comfort; they attended never – ending parties. The other part included the bleakly poor who lived in unbelievable misery: hungry, naked, sick, without shelter[30]. In despair, the poor had to sell their children as slaves to the wheat speculators or to send their girls to brothels. Many people mutilated their children from an early age; they deprived them of sight or amputated them a leg or an arm in order to go begging. The Saint fights against that state of things and shows that mankind has as ancestors only one couple of people, all people are equal, they are a single whole and one family. However, if there is any difference among people then, that is the practicing of virtue only[31]. Slavery is a result of sin. The Saint Father gives as an example, a master addicted to drinking and a sober slave saying ,,shall I call the sober man or the drunk man a slave? For one of them, slavery is something exterior to him while for the other one slavery means inner chains [32]. Saint John suggested that the rich should live totally separated from the poor namely, in different fortress towns. The result will be the following: while the town of the poor will lack nothing because they are good at all the trades they need in life, the town of the rich will be subject to destruction because the rich are good at nothing and they are not in the habit of working. The High hierarch fully trusts the faithful Christian endowed with moral strength because he receives help from the divine grace. The perfection we might get to means to imitate Christ, it means to live in love and make it work because ,,God is love" (I John 4, 8).

Saint John Chrysostom describes ***life*** as a stage on which we perform the play of our own life: ,,This life is a theater and dream stage because when the curtain rises from the theater stage, everything disperses, all dreams fly away under the beam of light the same way when it happens to be the end of someone or the collective end – if it happened – and everything becomes a ruin everything perishes and disappears"[33]. Sometimes we forget to be ourselves, we forget to come back to reality and we go deeply into fantasies and dreams. The masks we wear – when the time comes-misrepresent our personality and we forget we are created in God's own image and invited to be like Him in virtue in order to obtain eternal life. Earthly life is compared to a theater performance. The actors step upon the stage wearing masks: one pretends to be a philosopher but he isn't, another pretends to be a king but he isn't, he is just dressed as a king – that's the play – another one

[29] Idem, *Către Stagir* 2, P.G, XLVII, 427; *Omilia* 7 la statui, 2*; Omilia* 2 la Evrei 2.
[30] Idem, *Omilia* 48, 5-6 la *Matei*, P.G, LVIII, 492*; Omilia* 1, 8 *despre Lazăr*, P. G, XLII, 973.
[31] Idem, *Omilia* 5, 2, P. G, LXLII, 487; *Omilia I la Filimon* I, P.G. LXII, 705.
[32] Idem, În *Matth. Hom*. V, 1, P. G., 53, 55 cf. Louis Meyer, *op. cit*, p. 310, nota 2.
[33] Idem, *Tîlcuiri la* Epistola I către Timotei, Omilia XV, p. 172; apud: Pr. Asist. Dr. Liviu Petcu, *Lumina Sfintelor Scripturi, antologie tematică din opera Sfîntului Ioan Gură de Aur,* vol. II., Bucureşti, Basilica, 2015, p. 674-675.

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plays the doctor without having ever taken care of a piece of wood another one plays the slave although he is a free man, the other one plays the teacher not having the necessary knowledge. But when evening comes and the show comes to an end the spectators leave the masks are thrown away. The one playing the King, once gone, becomes again the same blacksmith, the one who was free on the stage, becomes a slave again. The same is with life and death. The world is a theater, human feelings: wealth, poverty, power, obedience, etc, are the masks of an actor. When the performance is over and masks are thrown, the real day will start for the righteous and the deep night for the sinners[34].

Friendship, according to the Holy Father must to have Christ as a model, because He gave his life for His friends (John 15, 13). The Holy Father shows that friendship is the close connection between the one who loves and the other who is loved so that there it will no longer be two distinct persons, but a single man, reinforcing the idea that a friend is another self: "If you have twenty friends, you can see with another twenty eyes, you work with another twenty hands, you walk with another twenty legs. One man can be because of his friends, in many places, at the same time"[35]. In the Saint's conception, if someone has an enemy, than that, enemy is not attacked only by a single person, but also by the other twenty, and then that enemy has to quit, because he is not rejected only by a person, but by twenty. The great preacher had the conviction that "a sincere friend is wanted more than even the light", "Many seeing the sun, are in the dark, but if they are surrounded by friends, they would not suffer any disgust. I am talking about spiritual friendship and spiritual friends who prefer nothing but friendship"[36]. Saint John prefers a friend's wounds, to the willingly kissing of an enemy"[37]. Our friends when praising us, are try to make us be better, enemies even when they praise us, strive to throw us down. Today, a few people treat friendship correctly and authentically. Friendships often starts depending of certain interests. The purpose of friendship has to be the salvation of the soul, only in this way, friendship may become eternal.

The great Antioch scholar considered love a fundamental coordinate of existence. For him, love for God and people is not an ordinary word, it is the most vivid and wonderful reality, the only one for which life has to be lived. In the absence of love, all the other qualities doesn't have any value, because they don't promote life and happiness: *"*If there is no love, all other things are useless and they are rapidly subject to decay. Only love can stick everything together; but if there is no love, anything you would like to say, means nothing because everything

[34] *Cum jucăm pe scena vieţii* - Sfîntul Ioan Gură de Aur. [Citat 20 octombrie 2015]. Disponibil pe adresa:www.catehetica.ro.

[35] *Comentariu la Evanghelia de la Ioan*, Omilia LXXVIII, 4, p. 408-409, apud: Pr. asist. sr. Liviu Petcu, *op. cit.*, p. 326.

[36] *Comentariile sau Explicarea Epistolei I către Tesaloniceni*, omilia II; apud: Pr. asist. dr. Liviu Petcu, *op. cit.*, p. 327.

[37] *Despre schimbarea numelor...*, p. 38; apud Pr. asist. dr. Liviu Petcu, *op. cit.*, p. 325.

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collapses...the same happens with the house, thus, if there is no timber in its body, irrespective of how big the walls can be, it will be of no use because there are no bindings. The top or the end of a thing or the crown – in the figurative sense – means the intensity of moral perfection however, the bond of love is the one that unites and keeps those striving for perfection close together; the same way the root keeps both trunk and branches together[38]. In his clear and honest vision, love doesn't have limits. Time and space cannot enclose it. All the other things are submitted to the laws of time, the beauty of the body, the imposing buildings, the orchards, the gardens, everything that springs from the earth, get old, they pass away. Only love itself safe from this inconvenience and far from being faded number of years, it never comes to an end. Love and understanding lie at the foundation of the great the tower of human happiness. All advantages come from the two, like a building with many floors, that are connected to each other. Viewed in terms of value, his words have special importance, because some of today's people after a surrogate love[39].

Saint John Chrysostom's ideas are also, of present interest for ***education,*** all the so as today the educational system loses sight of the importance of religion, grounded on the Holy Scripture, the only source that can offer an adequate guidance for this life but also for the future one. According to the Antioch scholar, education must begin early with childhood. Because, he says "if good-manners are not taught since childhood, if modesty and moderation don't become familiar in youthful years, it man is not protected against avarice at maturity, all the vices of the previous age will gather in a corrupt old age, where no good principle could survive"[40]. There in the early childhood, the temporal as well as the eternal future of man takes shape and becomes steady[41]. The way man is in his childhood the same he will be when be grows up; as the tree which remains upright if someone straighten it will still a young shoot: and if man leaves it crooked, when it becomes hard, it won't be straightened it will split into pieces[42]. The Saint compares the soul to a fortress. The five senses are the gates of this fortress, through which the good or the bad enter the spiritual life. Today, more than ever "the gates of the spiritual fortresses of children" are exposed to some quite big modern temptations, this is why the parent, to the teacher – have the responsibility to teach the child life in virtue, in order to reach and wisdom. Saint John had a positive attitude towards

[38] Sfîntul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omilia VIII, la Coloseni*, p. 94; apud: Pr. asist. dr. Liviu Petcu, *op. cit.*, p. 592.

[39] Zalina Gabriela Neagu, *Genul epistolar - componentă referențială a operei Sfîntului Ioan Gură de Aur*, în „Biblioteca", revistă de bibliologie şi ştiinţa informării, nr. 4, 2015, p. 111-116.

[40] Sfîntul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omilia IX la Sf. Apostol Pavel, I Timotei*, Migne. P. G, XLII, col. 546-547.

[41] Idem, *Despre creşterea copiilor*, apud Pr. prof. dr. D. Călugăr, *Actualitatea ideilor pedagogice în unele lucrări ale Sf. Trei Ierarhi*, în „Mitropolia Ardealului", nr. 1-3, 1974, p. 62.

[42] Idem, *De inami gloria et de educando liberis*, Edit. Fr. Schulte Monasterii Guestfalorul, 1914, par. 23, p. 10, apud Pr. prof. dr. D. Călugăr, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

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profane education contents and underlines "The true Christian must be cultivated man, aware of the great conquests of science, the progress of civilization and human culture …he must have an enlightened faith and he must bring into harmony – inside his personality – faith and the most advanced science of his time"[43].

In many of his works, and in the treaty *About priesthood* especially, the great hierarch contributes to the awakening and strengthening of priestly consciousness in an overwhelming measure. The author's conception about ***priesthood and holiness***, teaches us that from all kinds of praying, the one of the whole community at the Church, is the most recommended. To be believers who came to the Church to attend only a port of an divine service, Saint John said: "I can pray at home too, but at home I can't hear the sermon and the teaching. You are wrong man! Indeed, you can pray at home also, but you can't pray like in the Church, where the crowd of Fathers is so big … at the Church it's something more than at home namely the understanding and harmony with the others, the bond of love, the prayers of the priests"[44]. Saint John says that priests pray for the entire world, for the people who were before us, martyrs, confessors and priests, for all those dead in Christ, for those who pray for the dead, for those who will came after us[45]. Christians misunderstandings solved sometimes through wars, could be solved through Holy Communion, meaning the union in spirit of all Christians in the past, present and future[46]. The Saint was the greatest preacher of patristic Christianity and one of the greatest of the Christian world. He usually preached once a week, often twice on Sunday and Friday, he kept daily fast, always free, being very well prepared. His sermons were of about 5 up to 90 minutes, sometimes even more, according to the case and the importance of the theme. Sometimes he was criticized for the length or the shortness of his sermons. He explained himself accepted criticism. He thanked his friends who criticized him not because of wickedness but because of love. The one "who praises all, indiscriminately both qualities and flaws, that one does not show love, he only cheat … I don't listen to the enemy, even when he not praises me. I remain faithful to a friend, even when he criticizes me"[47].

Saint John emphasizes – for several times – the importance of the ***Holy Eucharist***. The transformation of bread and wine into the body and blood of our Saviour brings the restoration, namely the complete spiritual renewal of those who receive the Eucharist, a renewal that brings about a deep and organic unity of Christians and Christ[48]. The Eucharistic unity is even today necessary, even more than in the time of Saint John Chrysostom. Some of the Christians lost their sense

[43] Mitropolitul Nicolae al Ardealului, *Cuvînt la comemorarea patronilor învăţămîntului teologic*, în „Mitropolia Ardealului", 1970, nr. 1-3, p. 210-211.

[44] *Despre neputinţa de a înţelege pe Dumnezeu*, 3, 6, Migne, P. G. 48, col. 725.

[45] Pr. Prof. Ioan G. Coman, *Actualitatea Sfîntului Ioan Gură de Aur*, în „Studii Teologice", 1955, nr. 7-8, p. 406.

[46] *Ibidem*, p. 406.

[47] Sfîntul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omilia 3, 1*, *Despre shimbarea numelor*, Migne, P. G. 51, col. 131.

[48] Idem, *Omilia 46, 2, 3 la Ioan*, Migne, P. G. 59, col. 260.

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of unity because many of them don't receive the Holy Eucharist any longer or they receive it at long intervals of time and only rarely together. The high hierarch often insists on the Eucharistic unity and on the meaning of that unity: love and under – standing among Christians.

Saint John Chrysostom cherished ***work*** in a particular way he considered it a duty, of honesty and pride, a spring of spiritual joy, of virtue and wisdom[49]. Laziness lacks honor because it gives birth to sin. The lazy person is unmasked, he compared an animal with human face, without high occupations, hideous at face and heavy with body and soul passions[5050]. Emphasizing the role of labour in human ennoblement, the Saint underlines that when the soul is neglected, that thing become the cause of his collapse[51]. "*Work*, said he, *is engraved on human nature, itself being the main function of life. Work is good for the body and soul: "None of those who practises a job must be ashamed, the other ones who don't have any occupation and they feed themselves for no purpose must flush…Always working to feed yourself is a kind of philosophy: their souls are much cleaner, their minds are stronger, while the one that has no occupation speaks a lot of vain words does a lot of fruitless things, doesn't work anything useful all day long being overwhelmed by apathy… do not despise, therefore, those who earn their food with the hands, but rather bless them for it*"[52]. The real work is not selfish, but social. We don't work only for our own benefit, but also for our interest and benefit. He in common recommends that work should be woven with prayer. It is fit, in the saint's opinion, that all people integrate in that general labor chain as, being a generous act, not a selfish one to share, the goods with as many people as possible[53].

For Saint John Chrysostom, nothing that belongs to the reality of this world escapes ***divine providence (divine care)***. God is the master of life and death. He will not allow righteous suffer or the sinner who brings about a lot of suffering around him, not to receive the proper reward. Most of the times, the reward or punishment, as a result of the committed actions, is given by divinity in this very life. When it doesn't happen in the time of our earthly life, many persons start to criticizing. As an answer to their perplexities, Saint John shows the wise way in which God works through divine dispensation: the attempts that fall on the righteous and sometimes the painful end of their earthly life, only amplify their virtues and multiply the heavenly reward crowns. On the contrary, in the case of sinners, the long patience of God has the purpose to return them from the lawlessness paths; in case that it is ignored, those deserve-much more-the eternal punishments[54]. For the great Antioch, the sufferings and life trials are transient

[49] Idem, *Omilia 5 la I Corinteni 6*, P.G., LXI, 47.
[50] Idem, *Omilia 35 la Faptele Apostolilor 3*, P. G. LX, 235.
[51] Idem, *Omilii 5 la I Psalmi 8*, P.G., LV, 234.
[52] Idem, *Omilia 5, 6 la I Corinteni*, P. G. 61, col. 47.
[53] Pr. prof. Ioan G. Coman, *Actualitatea…, op. cit.*, p. 406.
[54] Dr. Florin Toader Tomoioagă, *Suferinţă, providenţă şi cruce la Sfîntul Ioan Gură de Aur*. [Citat 20 octombrie 2015] Disponibil pe adresa: *https://www.uoradea.ro/.*

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stages in man's life being evidence of strength and endurance. That is why he recommends to Christians to face them by faith, hope wisdom and courage. The path, he suggested is salvation perceived as an assumption of personal suffering, having as a model the sacrifice of the Saviour[55].

Another theme Saint John Chrysostom dealt with is ***freedom***. The free will is the one that guides us. We do not depend, how others think, on fate. The good and the evil are within the limits of what we want and don't want. God promised us the Heaven and He put us under His wrath: "And if you want and you listen to Me, you will eat all delicacies on the earth. But if you don't want and you will not listen to Me, you will beaten by sword; because God's mouth said that (Isaiah 1, 19 – 20)[56]. Because He said: "If you want, you will eat the delicacies of the earth, through these words making us the owners of our will. He wouldn't have given laws, advice, if we had been chained by fate. Because we are truly free, sometimes it happens we make this situation worse out of carelessness but we can also improve it by being awake, this is why God prepared that healing, and made us be afraid of His punishment and hope for His kingdom; He puts the blame on us and makes us wisely. Freedom is a gift and a right that was given to us, to walk on the path of virtue, of justice, of obedience and happiness. „*If God hadn't created people with free will*, said he, *all people should have been lither bad and subject to the same passions, as having the same character, or virtuous. But when we see that our fellow men subject us to the same spiritual and bodily needs, don't do what we do, but they govern their nature good sense, they control their anger, they run from hostility, they banish envy, they despise the crazy chase for money, isn't that clear they can achieve that through their own zeal, and by receiving help from the sky?*"[57].

According to Saint John, ***fate*** is in our hands. We can write it, by means of our actions, in the book of eternal life. Fate is considered – by some people – as something prepared for man beforehand without his knowledge, will, fault or merit: „There are people complaining of what they call fate, their bad fate because they consider the others fate good. If it is absolutely necessary to let happen what is written for everyone - says the high hierarch – both for those who work and those who sleep, then the worker of the soil should not yoke his oxen, should not use the plough, should not plough up, should not throw the seed, should not wait for the proper time of the year, should not endure coldness or rain until it stops, the burdens and pains of the seasons…In a word, he should leave aside his worry about the working of the soil, he should stay at home and sleep all the time. And if it is written and preordained for him to do well, then all good things will go inside the

[55] *Ibidem.*

[56] Sfîntul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Despre soartă şi providenţă*, Bucureşti, Editura Institutului Biblic şi de Misiune, 2005, p. 173.

[57] Idem, *Omilii la Facere, omilia XXIII, V*, în col. PSB, vol. 21.

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house without saying. And if Fate had other plans with him, then, even if he worked hard, his efforts and perspiration will be useless"[58].

5. Conclusions

According to those above – mentioned in this study, we can conclude the fact that Saint John Chrysostom experienced and internalized the beauties, the depths and the mysteries of the ***Book of Books*** in his personal life, managing to become a model for the entire humanity.

His mission as servant of the Church was outstanding, because he loved God and people more than anything else, he carried it on with much reverence, ability and knowledge of people and various situations thus, leaving strong and deep traces in every soul.

We cannot estimate the quality of John Chrysostom in terms of the present world: race, wealth, social class but according to his capacity to practice virtue up to point of resembling God. On his way into exile, groups of believers and monks used to welcome him with songs of praise and lighted candles; they were consumed with a desire to see him and soothe his suffering by exclaiming: ,,Had the sun stopped his rays, it would have been more useful than reducing John to silence!"[59].

To be familiar with Saint John Chrysostom's outlook on reading and interpreting the Holy Scriptures, is a strong moral and spiritual support for the activity of both priests and Christians of our ancient Church.

According to the great scholar hierarch, there is a beautiful and constructive, relationship among culture, service and living. Culture, without dedication and feelings, becomes a simple theoretical acquisition that has no direct to our daily life. That is why the Antioch scholar showed special importance to that relationship and in time, he succeeded to be a vivid paradigm – worth following by posterity – whose permanence will not cease because its origin lies in the divine revelation.

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[58] Idem, *Omilii la săracul Lazăr. Despre soartă şi Providenţă. Despre rugăciune. Despre vieţuirea după Dumnezeu.*

[59] *Vieţile Sfinţilor pe luna noiembrie,* Vînători-Neamţ, Mănăstirea Sihăstria, 2006, p. 218.

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