

## THE MYSTERY OF ALTERITY REFLECTED IN *CHRISTIAN TEACHINGS* (*ÎNVĂȚĂTURI HRISTIANICEȘTI, 1700*)

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**Abstract** The transliteration<sup>1</sup> of the Romanian books printed with Cyrillic characters, a procedure assumed through the research project MCVRO, offers to the readers that are passionate about the old writings, the possibility to discover texts that have an impressive cultural value. The volume *Christian Teachings (Învățături hristianicești)*, published by Antim Ivireanu in 1700, comprises a series of Christian reflections on several problems which are extremely actual. Our attention will be focused on the theme of alterity theorized and applied to the daily realities from that time. The study wishes to emphasize the extent to which the behavioural paradigms proposed by the author may be applied nowadays.

**Keywords** Alterity, Christian teachings, transliteration, paradigm, old books.

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<sup>1</sup> We must mention that all the transliterated texts that will be cited in this study will be given with the graphical signs that are characteristic to the process of transliteration from Cyrillic into Latin. This option for writing offers to a researcher or to a reader that is accustomed to the transliteration rules, the possibility to identify easily the manner in which were written the Cyrillic words that were transliterated. It is extremely difficult to recompose a word written in Cyrillic when it is not rendered according to the transliteration rules. For example, the letter “i” may be represented in four ways, depending on the Cyrillic letters (И – I; Й – Ī; І and İ – Ī) without taking into account the combinations of letters which include “i” (ІЕ – IE; А – ĪA; ІА – IA; Ю – IU). For more details see the chapter *Transliterarea textelor paleografice* from Demir Dragnev and Ion Gumenăi, *Paleografia slavo-română și româno-chirilică* (Chișinău: Civitas, 2003), 82-92 and the chapter *Cînd s-a scris întîi românește* from P.P. Panaitescu, *Începuturile și biruința scrisului în limba română* (București: Academiei Republicii Populare Române, 1965), 57-65.

## Preliminaries

The book *Învățăture hristianicești*<sup>2</sup> was printed for the first time by the metropolitan of the Romanian Country, Antim Ivireanu (1640-1716), in 1700 at Snagov monastery, in the period during which he was the superior of that monastery. The value of this writing was not overseen by the posterity and, therefore, it was reedited in 1823 by another metropolitan, Veniamin Costache (1768-1846). In the preface of the printed edition, he drew the attention upon the fact that the teachings in this book, which gathers the most precious ideas of the Holy Scripture, are all spiritual nurture and delight.<sup>3</sup>

The appreciation of the learned metropolitan for this writing is confirmed from the first pages. The style in which the ideas were presented, the theological profoundness of the content and the actuality of the reflections which refer to concrete situations from the daily life, surprise the reader in a pleasant manner. Even though this book was written more the 300 years ago, its message is very actual. The author succeeds in transmitting the firm message of the Holy Scripture in a gentle manner and with discernment that could not bother the reader today. The theoretical arguments and their contextualization in the daily life of that time may determine even a more rational thinker to accept the ideas presented. One may easily observe the fact that the author does not appeal to authoritarian arguments, but always develops an approach in which the first place is taken by the logical arguments resulted from a common assumed experience. We also observe the fact that is the texts and the biblical episodes invoked by the author as a mark are the most representative.

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<sup>2</sup> For this study we used the edition published by metropolitan Veniamin Costachi in Iassy in 1823. This edition was printed with the blessing and the costs of the hierarch, during the reign of vaivode Ioan Sandul Sturza. Excepting the front page and the following page which present the symbols that appear on the ruler's seal, the only difference in comparison with the first edition is represented by the word for the reader written by the metropolitan of Moldavia. Regarding the alphabet used, it is necessary to mention that in the first edition the classic Cyrillic letters were used (1642-1710), and in the second edition we find the modified Cyrillic alphabet (1710-1814). For details regarding the evolution of the Romanian alphabet starting 1642 see Elena Boian et al., „Digitizarea, recunoașterea și conservarea patrimoniului cultural-istoric,” *Akademios* 32, no. 1 (April 2014): 64.

<sup>3</sup> “The book that you are holding in your hands, my dear reader, cannot be called otherwise, but spiritual nurture and delight. Because its composition is nothing but the most useful Christian teachings and advice for our uncontaminated faith, gathered from the most precious thesaurus of the Holy Scripture. And although I found it old, printed in 1700 in Bucharest, I thought it was particularly important to reprint it in the Typography of our Mitropoly, in Iassy. Hence, my dear, do not think it is too expensive and do not be lazy in reading it if you care (as you should) for your soul”. Veniamin Costache, foreword to Antim Ivireanu, *Învățăture hristianicești* (Iași: Tipografia Mitropoliei, 1823), 4.

Sometimes we are even surprised the author's manner to identify the most relevant texts that can easily cancel all the attempts of contradicting the ideas presented.

Hence, it is understood the reason for which the anthropological discourse,<sup>4</sup> upon which we will insist in the following pages, is actual and generates behavioural paradigms that can be easily assumed by the contemporary man.<sup>5</sup>

## 1. The biblical premises of the mystery of the neighbour

The mystery of alterity (the mystery of the other, of the neighbour or of the brother) is always related to God and especially to Christ. The one who does not love his neighbour cannot say under any circumstances that he loves God. This reasoning is taken from the Johannian theology.<sup>6</sup> Saint Apostle John states that the love for the other represents the most natural way through which we can express our love for God. The one who does not love his brother and yet he states that he loves God, not only is a liar (1 John 4:20),<sup>7</sup> but is also a sinner (John 13:34)<sup>8</sup>. God asks men to love each other because of the love that they have for Him: "Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister." (1 John 4:21).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> To understand completely the nuances of the anthropological discourse developed within this study it is necessary to mention that the terminology used comes from the theological vocabulary. Therefore, the key-terms that are included within the concept of alterity (neighbor, brother, the other, otherness) are in a relationship of synonymy that sometimes develops to equivalence. To this respect, looking from a biblical perspective, "the other" can only be the "neighbor" or the "brother". We recommend for a better familiarization with these terms the following studies: Ioan Chirilă, "Celălalt, alteritate sau aproapele, *distincții terminologice, repere practice pentru o (posibilă) reformulare a discursului apologetic,*" in *Anuarul Facultății de Teologie Ortodoxă din Cluj IX* (2005-2006), ed. Ioan Chirilă (Cluj-Napoca: Renașterea, 2007), 7-12; Ioan Chirilă, „*Elemente de antropologie biblică: persoană/subiect, sine și suflet,*” *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai – Theologia Orthodox* 54, no 1 (2009): 49-64.

<sup>5</sup> Regarding the state of the human nature in the past, as well as its development until contemporaneity see the perspective proposed by Lajos András Kiss in „Human nature as a social construction,” *Philobiblon* 8, no. 1 (2008): 186-206.

<sup>6</sup> The expression comprises all the teachings about God from the work of Saint Apostle John (The Gospel and the three Epistles).

<sup>7</sup> "Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen." (1 John 4:20).

<sup>8</sup> "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34).

<sup>9</sup> The test through which we can certify our love for God is the love for alterity. S. S. Smalley, "1, 2, 3 John," in *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 51 (Dallas: Word, Incorporated., 2002), 263-

All the spiritual efforts made by man are useless if he does not live in love and he does not offer his love to the other with all his heart. Assuming the Pauline vision<sup>10</sup> from the hymn of love (1 Corinthians 13), the author of this advice states that the perfection and the holiness of man depend on love. Every act, no matter how valuable it is, even martyrdom, is useless and lacking spiritual value if man does not do them out of love for God and his neighbour.

After the biblical argumentation of his discourse on alterity, the author proposes a novel approach of the mystery of the father: “My duty is to love Christ and all those that Christ loves.<sup>11</sup>” In other words, man’s love for Christ must necessarily extend to those that Christ loves, and implicitly, to those with which the Lord identifies Himself (Matthew 25:40).<sup>12</sup> And who doesn’t Christ love? This manner of relating determines, persuasively, every man to love his neighbour. This conditioning may constitute a paradigm with a restoring force for the society nowadays. Even though there are persons that we cannot love or it is hard for us to love them for various reasons, for the love we have for God, it is truly meet to overcome this obstacle and gradually pour our love completely towards the one loved by Christ. “So – the author concludes – it is truly met to love completely my neighbour for Christ loves him as Himself, and even more than himself. If I cannot find something worthy of love in my neighbour, it is enough for me to love him because Christ loves him. This obliges me to love him with all my heart. [...] Be careful to love with all your heart those who Christ loved and to struggle not to bring damage to your neighbour.<sup>13</sup>”

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64. Cf. D. L. Akin, “1, 2, 3 John,” in *The New American Commentary*, vol. 38 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 187.

<sup>10</sup> Through this expression we refer to the perspective proposed by Saint Apostle Paul in I Epistle to Corinthians. For a better familiarization with his vision on love, we recommend W. F. Orr and J. A. Walther, “I Corinthians: A new translation, introduction, with a study of the life of Paul, notes, and commentary,” in *The Anchor Yale Bible*, vol. 32 (London: Yale University Press, 2008), 290-96.

<sup>11</sup> Ivireanu, *Învățăturei hristianicești*, 64.

<sup>12</sup> “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me’”. (Matthew 25:40). Christ’s love for people is so great that He does not just identify Himself with every humble, insignificant, unheeded or suffering man, but goes to self-sacrifice. He “Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering. [...] But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:4-6). We recommend for a better understanding J. D. W. Watts, “Isaiah 34-66,” in *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 25 (Dallas: Word, Incorporated., 2005), 788-90 and J. N. Oswalt, “The Book of Isaiah 40-66,” in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 385-90.

<sup>13</sup> Ivireanu, *Învățăturei hristianicești*, 64.

To motivate the readers to give the attention required to the love of the neighbour, the author states that this commandment of love comprises the law. The one who loves his brother fulfils all the law and legitimates himself as son of God because, “only love differentiates the sons of God from the sons of devil.<sup>14</sup>”

## 2. Excluding the concept of *enemy* from the discourse on alterity

The Christian teaching does not allow anybody to hate one of his fellows no matter who he is or what he did bad.<sup>15</sup> To this respect Jesus Christ, who loved even those who crucified Him, is offered both as reference point and as model. Hence, the Christian is asked not to distinguish between enemy and friend when he loves. Otherwise, he sins each time he calls God our Father and when he asks for forgiveness. Therefore, the one who does not forgive his trespassers, cannot say he loves his neighbour.

Moreover, the author of this teaching states that “he who hates his enemy, hates himself.<sup>16</sup>” Inspired probably by Saint Apostle Paul who makes men understand that when he loves his woman, he loves himself (Ephesians 5:28),<sup>17</sup> the author takes a significant step towards the construction of his discourse on alterity. By hating his brother, man wanders away from God, denies his filiation, and becomes a sinner. Stepping outside the communion of love, he fills himself with hate and he separates from the sons of God to unite with the sons of evil because “only those who are sentenced to tortures hate each other.<sup>18</sup>” It is unconceivable that two Christians who hate each other to be able to state that they are in communion with God.<sup>19</sup> These hurt and deceive themselves thinking that they are wrapped in the love of the one who defines himself to be Love (1 John 4:8). The lack of love for each other will bring both to death. In this case the author’s warning is extremely firm: “And if those who don’t love their neighbour

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>15</sup> A notable approach of this axiological perspective may be consulted in Vasile FRĂTEANU, “Towards a relational Axiology,” *Philobiblon* 2, no. 1 (1997): 14-31.

<sup>16</sup> Ivireanu, *Învățăture hristianicești*, 65.

<sup>17</sup> In order to understand the manner in which love determines the re-establishing of the primary unity between man and woman, we recommend A. T. Lincoln, “Ephesians,” in *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 42 (Dallas: Word, Incorporated., 2002), 374-80.

<sup>18</sup> Ivireanu, *Învățăture hristianicești*, 66.

<sup>19</sup> “Two Christians who hate each other are not of the same faith. And how is it possible that they hate each other, two Christians who enter the same Church, who eat at the same table, who believe into one Holy Trinity, who hope to get to heaven, and to be together forever, together with Christ and with each other?” Ivireanu, *Învățăture hristianicești*, 65-6.

shall perish, as John the Theologian teaches, what will happen to those who hate, and not only hate them, but also harm them?<sup>20</sup>

In order to convince his readers of the fact that hate towards the neighbours determines the stepping outside communion, the author constructs a discourse from which it results that God will take measures and even defend the one who suffers the effects of hate. First, the author wishes to temper the Christian's wish for revenge through an example which is easy to understand. The one who infuriates and wants revenge is like the dog which attacks those who pass by the yard it defends. Unfortunately for him, some travellers are more powerful than him and can cause wounds. The same is the man who lets himself governed by anger and revenge; he can suffer a lot more if he lets the thought of revenge dominate him.<sup>21</sup>

Besides this perspective who involves the unforeseen, the author wishes to remind the Christian that God assumes the role of judge and implicitly of avenger (Romans 12:19)<sup>22</sup>. Hence, the one who wants revenge against his enemy does nothing else but to substitute himself to the Lord and to assume the right for revenge which is not given to him. "The Lord Himself promises He will avenge, and you don't listen and want to take justice into your own hands? A sinner slave, a good for nothing, you rise above God and try to take His lordship from His hand? And is it this small defamation of the Lord and conviction for yourself?"<sup>23</sup>

In other words, the one who does not love his brother and wishes for revenge, does nothing else but to defy God. Besides the fact that he repeatedly discards the commandments that ask him to love his neighbours, not to hate or hurt them, he finds himself into the ungrateful position of contesting the divine

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<sup>20</sup> Ivireanu, *Învățăturii hristianicești*, 66.

<sup>21</sup> "The dog, when he hears people passing by, runs to them without thinking how many they are and if they are stronger than him or if they have knives: and so we often see that instead of hurting them he returns with his head crushed. The same do those who want to defeat their enemies: they never think if their enemy is more powerful than them or if their enemies have companions: and instead of hurting them, they suffer more." Ivireanu, *Învățăturii hristianicești*, 66-7.

<sup>22</sup> "Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: «It's mine to avenge; I will repay», says the Lord". Saint Apostol does not stop to this recommendation but suggests to the Christians in Rome to have a benevolent attitude towards those who upset them. "On the contrary: «If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink»..." (Romans 12:20). By doing this man not only does he not let himself defeated by evil but defeats evil with good. Moo, D. J. "The Epistle to the Romans," in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 788.

<sup>23</sup> Ivireanu, *Învățăturii hristianicești*, 68.

authority<sup>24</sup>. “This is all He asks from you, to let Him avenge. «It is mine to avenge; I will repay says the Lord». When you do not want to listen to Him, but want to do your own will, don’t you defame Him? And why don’t you listen to Him? Is he incapable of revenge? Does He not take care of you?”<sup>25</sup> Moreover, we observe that the author admonishes persuasively the one who has the tendency to revenge and asks him to offer a pertinent answer for the dissatisfaction he has towards God and to present the reason for which the solidarity that He has for his sufferance is not enough, but wants to take the matter into his own hands.

In order to determine the one who did not understand well enough the mystery of the brother that the revenge is not the solution, the author states that God recants the one who suffers, but who wants to revenge and He comes to help the one who is about to be hurt. In this situation, the Christian has to choose: he either does not harm his enemy and he will have God by his side, or he stands against the Lord: “Tell me, do you wish your enemy good or bad? If you suffer disgrace, you will have God on your side against your enemy: and if you trespass the Lord’s commandment, and revenge, he will turn from your enemy’s side against you. What is it that you want? Do you want the Lord by your side or by your enemy’s side? Think what is best, you have to choose one or another.”<sup>26</sup>

This manner of problematization contains within a paradigm that may be assumed by the contemporary man. We note here as well that the author uses a lot different arguments to convince the reader to follow the best way. To this respect, he tries to explain the fact that the tendency to hate the enemies, or even to harm them through revenge, determines the Christian’s alienation from God. Even though he is not aware of this reality, it is possible that when he is warned that God moves to the side of the enemy when he wishes to avenge, to think better if he should listen to his angry instinct or to hold back. A Christian who becomes aware of the fact that through his manner of manifestation stands against God may be determined persuasively to change his behaviour. No matter how much he interferes with his system of thinking, he cannot help but observe that the Lord is the Father of all the people. When a Christian is presented with the situation that through his acts he identifies himself with the *sons of thunder*<sup>27</sup> who asked the Lord to bring fire down to earth over the people who

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<sup>24</sup> Why do Christians and your disciples not listen to you [when you say: love thy neighbour]? Why do they love their glory more than yours? When they were the disciples of Pythagoras, only with this word: He said so: they shut up and listened to their mentor: but why don’t the Christians do the same today?” Ivireanu, *Învățăturii hristianicești*, 69.

<sup>25</sup> Ivireanu, *Învățăturii hristianicești*, 67.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>27</sup> This name was offered to the apostles John and Jacob because of their energetic character, dominated by instinct (Mark 3:17).

did not receive them (Luke 9:52-55),<sup>28</sup> or with one of the workers from the vineyard who reproached the landlord that his price is not fair (Matthew 20:1-15),<sup>29</sup> or with the elder brother who refused to forgive the brother that was lost and found (Luke 15:25-32)<sup>30</sup> he might become aware that he is in deceit, that he forgives whose son he is, that his eye is bad<sup>31</sup> and that it is not the case to avoid calling his brother as such (even though he hates or despises him).

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<sup>28</sup> The two apostles were sent by the Lord into a village of Samaria to ask for shelter. Angry for the refusal, they asked the Lord to bring down fire over the village to burn it down, as a punishment for the humiliation. Jesus Christ reprimands them for their attitude which lacked love and urges them to think better to whom they ask for revenge. He came to redeem the people and the two asked him to judge and convict (Luke 9:52-55). See details in J. Nolland, "Luke 9:21-18:34," in *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 35B (Dallas: Word, Incorporated., 2002), 535-38.

<sup>29</sup> The workers we refer to are the characters of a parable presented by our Lord. He narrates the fact that a landlord hired some workers in the morning to work in his vineyard for a denarius (the usual payment for a day's work). Gradually, the landlord continued to bring workers to the vineyard at noon, in the afternoon and even in the evening when the work was almost finished. In the end he gave each of the workers a denarius. In this situation those who had been working in the morning got angry and reproached the landlord that it is not fair to offer the same amount of money to each of them. Outraged by their malice, the landlord asks them if he did wrong to them by offering less than they bargained for. Because he honoured his part of agreement, the landlord of the vineyard told to the one who had dared to reproach him: "I am not being unfair to you, friend. [...] Take your pay and go. I want to give to the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?" (Matthew 20:13-15). See details in D. A. Hagner, "Matthew 14-28," in *Word Biblical Commentary* 33B (Dallas: Word, Incorporated., 2002), 570-75.

<sup>30</sup> The parable we refer to is that of the lost son. The action has three main characters: a man who had two sons. The youngest of the sons asks for his part of the inheritance and leaves in a distant country to live a luxurious life. After a while, being in need, he returns penitently to his father. But his father gives him back his old status, reconfirms his authority upon the servants and filled with joy, he demands everyone to rejoice for the return of his lost son. The older brother who had stayed home, faithful to his parent, was in the field when his younger brother came home. When he returned, he refused to go inside the house thinking he was being aggrieved. The father comes outside and tells him that everything he has belongs to him (his oldest son) and asks him to rejoice with him and with his lost brother, which the eldest no longer considered to be his brother, but only his father's son. We observe here that the attitude of the elder son was inadequate. His tone, his arguments and the manner of addressing were completely inappropriate (Luke 15:11-32). See details in *Cartea fiului risipitor. O parabolă biblică în șase lecturi pentru omul contemporan*, ed. Ioan I. Ică jr. (Sibiu: Deisis, 1998).

<sup>31</sup> In biblical language, the eye is the mirror of the soul.



### 3. Two models for the restoration of the inter-human relationships inspired by *Învățăturii hristianicești*

The profound understanding of the mystery of alterity implies assuming a responsibility for the brothers,<sup>32</sup> especially for those who need support and for those who do not have a strong faith. To this respect, the author proposes two models of assuming the mystery of the brother which he presents with the help of a virtue and, surprisingly, with that of a passion.

**Mercy.** The mystery of the brother can only be fully understood if we relate it to Jesus Christ. He, who became like us through incarnation confesses that he identifies himself with all those who need the support of their neighbour and assures us that anything we offer to those, we give to him (Matthew 25:40). In this situation, Christ waits to receive through the poor our mercy<sup>33</sup>. The author of these teachings takes this idea and correlates it with the Eucharistic mystery. Jesus Christ offers himself as food to men through the Holy Gifts and wishes to feed himself through our mercy. Hence, the one who has no mercy for the poor, ignores our Saviour. Condemning this lack of sensitivity, the author chides the unmerciful saying: “We feed the dumb animals and we let Christ to famish! What type of thinking is this? What type of reasoning is this?”<sup>34</sup> hence, we may state without hesitation that the mystery of the brother included into the great mystery of Christ includes this aspect of the love for thy neighbour.

Wishing to stimulate the Christian to be generous with their brothers, the author reminds them more than once that Christ will be grateful to them, because he promised that he will not neglect not even the glass of water that someone offers to the thirsty in his name (Matthew 10:42). “And what will Christ

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<sup>32</sup> In father Ioan Chirilă's opinion, assuming the responsibility for yourself and for the others constitutes the premise for the discovery of the Other (of the Lord) within the neighbors and the creation. In the same time, the father underlines the fact that “Christ also reveals to us the responsibility for the human person: the incarnation, kenosis and His sacrifice are in the same time His assumption of the responsibility of the whole humanity before God, and also an impulse of responsabilization of the person for the creation, for his neighbor and for himself.” Ioan Chirilă, Cristian Sonea and Ștefan Iloaie, “Omul în perspectiva întâlnirii cruciforme dintre verticala transcendentului și orizontala imanentului. Repere de antropologie creștin-ortodoxă,” in *Repere patristice în dialogul dintre știință și teologie*, ed. Adrian Lemeni (București: Basilica, 2009), 352.

<sup>33</sup> Saint Augustin thinks that man, in his initial state, was gifted with *arbitrium*, with the capacity to accept or refuse grace. But, besides *arbitrium*, God gave man *voluntas* as *bona voluntas*. To this respect, the Lord waits for man to act and do good to offer a meaning to his existence. And this good is necessary to be bestowed onto the other, be it man or creature. According to Radu Bandol, „*Voluntas* as *liberum arbitrium* at Saint Augustine and three meanings of *Servum arbitrium* at Martin Luther,” *Philobiblon* 17, no. 2 (2012): 408.

<sup>34</sup> Ivireanu, *Învățăturii hristianicești*, 45.

say when he will see our clothes on him and our bread and silver into the hands of the poor? Indeed, we will stand before him more courageously because we will be helped by the poor, we had mercy for.<sup>35</sup> This image proposed by the author may be used successfully even today. Even though the idea according to which the Lord is mysteriously hidden under the image of the poor will not always motivate us to be merciful, the fact that Christ in his hypostasis of Judge will wear one of the clothes we gave to the poor, can be extremely motivating. This image inspired by the text of the Holy Scripture and developed by the author emphasizes his pragmatism. When you tell a person that the jacket, he offers to the poor will be dressed by Christ, he might stop and think for a while. You cannot offer to the Lord something that you do not need any more and you want to throw away. Hence, the author succeeds through this reasoning to offer not only importance to the act of mercy, but also to offer it more quality when referring to the object that is about to be offered.

In the same time, we are reminded the fact that the gifts and wealth that we possess are not our property. All these belong to the Lord and it is not right to set ourselves up into the position of owners of these goods, but rather we should assume the role of managers of the wealth we have. The meaningless spending of the wealth to the satisfaction of our desires is wrong both before God and the poor. "It is wrong before God because it steals the possession of wealth that He has. It is wrong before the poor because it dispossesses them of the natural food: hence, the one who has no mercy for the poor steals both the lordship from God and the part of the poor."<sup>36</sup> The statements of the author determine the reader to introspection. Which one of us does not feel restraint when someone tells us that a certain act, we do injure God directly? The author's option to choose such reasoning conditions inevitably a change in perspective of the soul who reads or hears these words. Such interventions are not singular. In other situations, as well, the author determines the reader to relate directly to God before taking a decision that may affect in a negative perspective his relationship with the one beside him.

Assuming the mystery of the brother through mercy is not reserved only to the rich. The poor also have their duty to manifest their brotherly love for those who are needier than them.<sup>37</sup> God does not appreciate quantity, but the heart which offers the gift. "It is not right to motivate that we don't have what to offer to the poor. The poor widow gave only two coins to the Church of God and she was praised by Christ more than the rich. Share your bread with the hungry

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>37</sup> A biblical perspective on the two categories of people (rich and poor) focused on several texts from the sapiential writings can be found in Ioan Chirilă, "Bogăție și sărăcie în Proverbe," *Cercetări Biblice* 3, no. 2 (2009): 9-26.

says the Lord. Meaning, if you have only one bread and cannot give it all, offer half of it. It is not right to say to the poor go in peace; the Lord will give you. For the Lord sends them to us: and if we send them back, we defy the Lord's commandment.<sup>38</sup> We observe the fact that the author appeals here to an extremely efficient reasoning to change to good the will of those who are called to be merciful. How can you send back to the Lord the one who is sent by Him so that you do good to him? In other words, he tries to induce the idea that the brothers are waiting for our mercy are always sent by God.

Of what we mentioned so far, we may understand that the poor and those who wait for our mercy are not a burden, but a gift from God. Through them the Lord wants to offer us the Kingdom of Heaven. Do you think that the one who satiated several thousands of people with some bread and some fish cannot satiate those who are hungry?<sup>39</sup> What good was it – the author asks himself – for God to take away prophet Habakkuk miraculously and lead him to Babylon to feed Daniel who had been sitting into the lion's den for several days<sup>40</sup>? The answer is quite simple: "God has the power to help them, but he wants the good to come from us, so that we receive recompense from him."<sup>41</sup>

Regarding the way it is necessary to perform mercy, the author mentions three exigencies: "The merciful man can be recognized after three signs, after his hand, his face and his eyes. After his hand when he reaches out. After his face when he is happy. And after his eyes when he looks to the sky."<sup>42</sup>

When he refers to the hand, the author means the man's generosity. The merciful always reaches out his hand towards the one who asks for help from him. The merciful is generous because the Lord is generous. If he asks the Lord for great mercy, he cannot be hypocritical and measure with two types of measures. Also, he does not look to the man, if he is good or bad, but he looks to

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<sup>38</sup> Ivireanu, *Învățăturile hristianicești*, 48.

<sup>39</sup> Here we refer to one of the most important miracles performed by our Saviour: the feeding of the multitude. With five loafs of bread and two fish, the Lord satiated an impressive amount of people, of which only men were five thousand (Matthew 14:14-21). See details in B. M. Newman and P. C. Stine, *A handbook on the Gospel of Matthew* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1992), 458.

<sup>40</sup> The two characters of this episode from the Bible were in two spots situated at an impressive distance. Habakkuk was in Judea and Daniel was in Babylon. The first of them took food to some people who worked in the field. God sent an angel who took him miraculously to the den where Daniel was staying to feed him (*The history of the dragon and the idol Bel* 40-46). The author of our writing emphasizes besides this totally miraculous fact that God offers opportunities and always expects people to do acts of mercifulness for their neighbours (in this case – the feeding of the hungry).

<sup>41</sup> Ivireanu, *Învățăturile hristianicești*, 48.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

his need: “Kindness never looks for worthiness, but to famine.<sup>43</sup>” This manner of relating may represent a behavioural paradigm. People hesitate to offer money or food to the needy who are suspect from a moral point of view. Any attempt to identify a motivation that justifies not offering mercy is superfluous. It is right for our eyes to be directed precisely to the need of our brother, not to his virtues. If God looked to our virtue when we ask for help and mercy, how much would we receive? When he fed the multitudes in the desert Christ did not separate the ones who had no virtues! “When we give to the good and the bad, then we follow our Heavenly Father, who lets his rain fall down over the evil and the righteous, and opens his hand and feeds all the creatures in good will.<sup>44</sup>” When man is capable to offer mercy without judging the morality of the other, not only did he understand the mystery of the brother, but he experiments it in a Christ-like manner.

The second exigency is the joyful and radiant face. It is right that the person who offers mercy to have a clear face which heals the sufferance of the other. By this the author tries to suggest that it is not natural that we neglect the dignity of the poor. For this reason, the merciful is not allowed to any type of presentation of his superiority, but on the contrary, he must let the other understand that he in fact is the one who offers more. “The merciful must rejoice in his act to show that he takes more from the poor than he gives: he offers an unimportant thing, and he gains the Kingdom of Heaven<sup>45</sup>.”

By looking to the sky, the merciful offers to his gesture the real meaning. Mercy is done for and in the name of the Lord. Even though the gift is offered into the man’s hand, the one who truly receives it is Jesus Christ. For this reason, the author blest the one who “knows Christ under the clothes of the poor. Blest is the one who knows the voice of the poor as the voice of Christ, and the hand of the poor as the hand of Christ.<sup>46</sup>” At the same time, the author insists on mentioning the fact that mercy for the poor is generated by the divine love. In return, mercy for the relatives, no matter how far or close, is generated by the natural love. Through this nuance it is not discarded the mercy for relatives, but it is underlined again the necessity to recognize our brother into the stranger and needy.

**Distraction<sup>47</sup>.** Drawing the attention upon the devastating effects that those who cause the others to stumble can have on their neighbour, the author

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>47</sup> Distraction is an action through which a man determines a radical change of perspective into his neighbour. The effects that an inadequate gesture or a vicious behaviour have, can easily affect the system of values of the one who is distracted. To this respect, our Lord draws our attention upon the fact that the gravity of a distracting act is so great that it cannot be

does nothing else but to determine the Christian to assume responsibility for the alterity. From his perspective distraction can be caused by three causes: “Firstly there is the bad example: Secondly the bad advice and the bad words: Thirdly the denigration of the good.<sup>48</sup>” Before developing these directions, it is necessary to mention the fact that the responsibility that the author considers determines the conservation of the system of values and implicitly the progress of the society. Even though the perspectives of the author target especially a spiritual dimension, the immediate benefits into the society are obvious.

The warnings presented in the book are extremely severe, which must not astonish us, so long as the stake is salvation or the eternal damnation of our neighbour. “The bad example – emphasizes the author – has thrown into hell more souls than all the righteous and the saint managed to save. If the hell were to open, we could hardly find a soul that would not say that a person or the other took him there. Woe to me!<sup>49</sup>” This perspective should make us think. Our gestures and acts can have a devastating effect upon the lives of our fellows. That is why we should beware being a stumbling reason for our brothers. “The hidden sin hurts only the one who does it, but the common sin hurts everyone. The one who poisons his fountain hurts only the members of his household, and the one who poisons the spring of the city, poisons the whole city.<sup>50</sup>”

On the other hand, the words spoken adrift or with bad intention have a more devastating effect than the bad example. This reality is certified by the Saviour’s attitude who admonishes with surprising firmness Apostle Peter when he advises Him to avoid passion: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me...” (Matthew 16:23). The author wishes to emphasize the fact that Jesus Christ never addressed so severely to anyone. “Here, I urge you to think a little. Christ called Judas the Iscariot, with all his evilness, his friend. «Do what you came for, friend!» He called Herod, with all his fornication, a fox. «Go tell that fox». He called the Pharisee with all their pride, snakes, and brood of vipers: and in another place, sons of the devil. «You belong to your father, the devil: and adrift wicked people and fornicators»: and Peter is not called neither snake, nor

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assimilated to suicide (a gesture which is harshly condemned by the Christian moral): “If anyone causes one of these little ones – those who believe in me – to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come!” (Matthew 18:6-7). For a better understanding of this text we recommend Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur, “Omilii la Matei,” in *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, vol. 23, trans. Dumitru Fecioru (București: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1994), 671-82.

<sup>48</sup> Ivireanu, *Învățătură hristianicești*, 49.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-1.

wicked or devil, but Satan, who is the superior of devils. Go behind me, Satan. And for what? For you are a stumbling block to me.<sup>51</sup> We need to mention the fact that the intention of Apostle Peter was not a negative one. He simply wished for the Lord to avoid the cross.<sup>52</sup> However, the Lord addresses him as the devil in the context of the temptation in the desert (according to Luke 4:8). In this situation the author asks himself: “So how will they be called before God, those who bring true and willingly distractions: and not in ignorance but in evilness? Indeed, they do not even deserve to be called devils, but worse than devils, meaning the synod of Satan: as they are called by Saint John in the Apocalypse.<sup>53</sup>”

We observe that in this situation the author does not spare his readers either! Why? Because in between there are the souls of those who are not strong enough in their faith and who can lose their salvation because of useless things. Hence, the severity of these warnings is justified, and they must be understood in the context mentioned above. There is no greater thing before God than the soul of a man. “Christ for a soul became incarnate, a slave, poor, suffered for so many years, accepted offenses and then death on the Cross: and you Christian with your word and example causing stumbles, steal from his hands a precious salvation such as this? God dies to resurrect him, and you kill him.<sup>54</sup>”

Reading the text of the section dedicated to distraction we see that the warnings continue. They are addressed to the hierarchs, priests, dignitaries,<sup>55</sup> fathers and mothers.<sup>56</sup> Nobody is absolved of the responsibility involved by the mystery of the brother. The more a person has influence upon his fellows, the more it is necessary to care more for his neighbour. We consider that this is the reason which determined the author to end his discourse on distraction with an

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>52</sup> A similar biblical episode is that in which the wife of Job wishes that he escapes sufferance and for this she proposes him to curse God and die (Job 2:9). But Job remains an “athlete” of the Lord who perseveres in his sufferance. In this hypostasis Job represents an antitype of Christ, as Pope Gregory the Great also mentions in *Moralia in Job*. Nicoleta DABUJA, “Job’s sufferance. An «affection» and several interpretations,” *Philobiblon* 16, no. 1 (2011): 237-42.

<sup>53</sup> Ivireanu, *Învățăturii hristianicești*, 52.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>55</sup> “Oh, Holy Ierarchs! Oh, pastors of the people and boyars! You, who were put by God into the Church to teach his people, with your word and with your acts. It was better for you if you renounced this kind of work than to cause stumbling, however little, to the flock of Christ and to kill those for whom Christ died.” Ibid., 54.

<sup>56</sup> “Oh, fathers and mothers that don’t live a Christian life: it was better if you did not give birth to your children. You did not give life to then, the Lord did, but why do you bring them death, which is an endless death?” Ibid., 54.

urge to penitence and vigilance<sup>57</sup> because nothing is more important for a Christian than his brother with whom he is destined to live on earth and to gain his salvation.

## Conclusions

The transliteration of the Romanian old books which are printed using the Cyrillic letter, offers the reader the possibility to rediscover valuable works of our literature. Within these Christian teachings one may identify several behavioural paradigms that can be applied with no reserve in contemporaneity (they mostly target the relationship with the alterity). Through this it is confirmed the fact that from a spiritual perspective the authentic way of life does not change in its content. The modifications that are noted belong to a great extent to the features of the epoch or of the society in which the Christian principles are applied. Supplementary, the persuasive style, the logic of the argumentation and the pragmatic reasoning used by the author confers it a privileged position amongst the writers gifted with an extremely refined rhetoric. Taking into account that this writing appeared in a religious environment, dominated by the writings in which authority was the key of persuasion (we refer to the books printed at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century), we can only express our joy and recommend the style of writing of the author with the purpose of assuming it. For this reason, we believe that it is extremely important that this procedure of transliterating a book from one type of alphabet to another (in our case, from Cyrillic into Latin) should be extended, maybe within a more ample project of research, to the most representative works of the Romanian literature which are written using Slavonic characters.

Within this study we used only a part of the book. We focused on the contents that refer strictly to the relationship and report between man and his fellows [chapter 21 – *On mercy* (p. 45-7); chapter 22 – *On how man should be merciful* (p. 47-50); chapter 23 – *On distraction* (p. 50-5); chapter 29 – *On the love of the neighbour* (p. 64-5); chapter 30 – *On the love of the enemy* (p. 65-6); chapter 31 – *On the one who wants to defeat the enemies falls in bad things* (p. 66-70)]. We consider that this type of approach, of identification and use of the paradigms may be approached in the case of other actual themes such as: the courage to speak the truth, the use of time and others.

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<sup>57</sup> Think if you did anything that can be called a distraction and ask for forgiveness of your sins, and for the sins of the one you caused to stumble. I, the sinner can hardly offer an answer for my sins and I also bear the sins of the other." Ibid., 55.