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The psychopedagogical aspect of catechesis

Ștefan-Adrian Ghiuță

Theology Faculty, Ovidius University – Constanța, România

stefanghiuta@hotmail.com

Abstract. Catechesis, the most important tool for knowing God, is the act that involves man from the age of awareness until the last moment before meeting God. Catechesis, as an apostolic work, as a mission work, requires knowledge in the field, faith and a pure heart, but also a method of sharing the teaching of the Christian faith, that is, a set of rules to be able to make it as well understood as possible.

Keywords. pastoral, work, faith, priest

When a believer calls the priest "Father"¹, he knows that "parents" answer to God and people for the way they raise their "children", just as each person answers, personally, to people, but, more, to God, that is, he is morally and legally responsible to the State, to society, to the community of which he is a part, for the good and the bad he commits, respectively, for the way he fulfills his duty. From this perspective, no one can do more good or bad than the priest, by the way he fulfills his ministry, he being the first to answer for the social life of his parishioners, but, above all, the first to answer for all that God has given him entrusted to the salvation of his spiritual "sons", because: "...And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes.

For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom Men have committed much, of him they will ask the more." (Luke 12, 47-48).

The priest is defined in the Orthodox Church by the spiritual dimension and therefore, he must distinguish between the state and the spiritual mission because "Clergy is not psychology, spirituality is not carnal life, spirituality is not historicity or history, spirituality is not ethics and manners or mannerisms . Clergy is spirit, and "God is Spirit " (John 4, 24). And we must find the way in which God can now work the work of salvation in every soul that comes to me and that I must bring to Christ".²

¹His Holiness Antonie Plămădeala reminds the priests: "*The priest should not forget: he must be a man of prayer, of meditation, a window to God. If he remains worldly, he leaves the priesthood. The priest must be merciful, good, forgiving, encourage, strengthen, be the father of all, as he is called*". Cf. His Holiness Ph.D.. Antonie Plămădeala, *The Priest in the Church, in the World, at Home*, Sibiu, 1996, p. 13.

²Hieromonk Rafail Noica, *Culture of the Holy Spirit, Reintegration* Publishing House., Alba Iulia, 2002, pp. 43-44.

The first sign by which the *value* and lasting *calling* of an Orthodox priest is distinguished is his *perfection*, that is, *morality* and flawless *holiness* of life, which are required of the priest, first of all *in his capacity as a liturgist, as a celebrant of the holy things*, then *in his capacity as a shepherd, leader and teacher of his spiritual flock, because the priest must be "an example to the faithful with his word, with his behavior, with his love, with his spirit, with his faith, with his purity" (I Timotei 4, 12),* , that is, *to be "blameless" (I Timothy 3, 2), both in virtues and in service to be complete and to have no fault for which he could be blamed by his pastored ones.*³

Undoubtedly, life receives its greatest value through total dedication to the service of God. This ministry is the very life of the priest which is done out of *love*, through *faith* and with *hope*, towards *eternal life*. Following the call and vocation and entering the priesthood is a sign of high consciousness and commitment to God and people, to strive, with time and without time, to be - according to the word of the Savior - truly "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world".⁴

Priesthood has a healing role, through which the priest participates in the healing work of the Savior Christ, the One who took upon Himself human nature to heal it. "According to St. Gregory the Theologian, "this healing is continued by the clergy led by the bishop. "Servants and together workers of this healing are us, the foremost of the others". What is done in the life of the parish (sacramental life, asceticism, deeds of philanthropy and love) is included in the healing work of us, of all"⁵, but, most of the time, pastoral activities are so numerous that life and ministry of the priest become a continuous pastoral activism in which there is no time left for personal spiritual needs, whatever the approach⁶.

Holy Scripture recommends combining *service with spiritual living*. Therefore, it is not useful to choose between *pastoral activities* and *spiritual activities*, but we *must fulfill all pastoral obligations with spiritual living*. In this way, the so-called pastoral "activism" is optimally harmonized with the spiritual "living", as the Holy Apostle Paul teaches us: "Whatever you do, work with all your heart, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing full well that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ." (Colossians 3, 23-24) and "Therefore, whether you eat, drink, or do anything else, do all to the glory of God." (I Corinthians 10, 31-33).

The separation of the priestly ministry into the two dimensions, *pastoral and spiritual*, although improper, is useful, because it clarifies the content of the priestly dignity, which "Far

³ "First, the priest must, just like silver and gold, never sound false, never sound like brass, wherever he may be, in whatever circumstances of life and whatever tasks he may have; he should not have any evil thought or deed, which needs a fire hotter than that on earth. Otherwise, the evil is all the greater, the more people the priest has to lead; because the sin that spreads to many people is greater than the one that is limited to one person". Cf. St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Word of Defense for Fleeing to Pontus or about Priesthood*, in St. John Golden Mouth, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, St. Ephrem the Syrian, *About Priesthood*. Translation, introduction, notes and a foreword by priest Dumitru Fecioru, Publishing House of the Biblical and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bucharest, 1987, p. 219.

⁴ Priest D. Veștemean, *The Inner Life of the Priest*, in the Diocesan Sheet, Year LV, no. 25, Caransebeș, June 21, 1942, p. 1.

⁵ Protopresbyter Professor Dr. Gheorghios D. Metallinos, *Parish - Christ in Our Midst*, trans. Fr. Prof. Ioan I. Ică, Deisis Publishing House, Sibiu, 2004, pp. 66-67.

⁶ The two authors of the *Church Administration* manual (Ioan N. Flocă and Sorin Joantă) were able to find that a difficult problem in pastoral care is that of overloading the priest with tasks. Cf. Ioan N. Flocă, Sorin Joantă, *Parish Church Administration and Legislation*, Sibiu, 2001, p. 51.

*from being a simple **president** of the community or its **mandated one** to proclaim the word, the Orthodox priest is at once God's **envoy** on a mission to the people and the people's **envoy** before God. He is therefore in a double mission, which makes his role also essential: he guarantees to God, through preparation and ordination, the unaltered proclamation of the truth of the Gospel and the fulfillment of the holy things, and he guarantees salvation to people, with the pledge of his own spiritual life".⁷*

According to the canons of the Orthodox Church, the priest is ordained only on account of an altar or a parish, having, therefore, a precise destination, which implies the formation of a bond with that parish, with that altar and with the parishioners entrusted to him for shepherding, for whose salvation he is responsible before God. In the spiritual sense, the *parish* represents "the community or community of believers grouped around one and the same altar or church, around the same priests or, more precisely, around one and the same priest minister of the Mysteries or of worship in general and leader of souls towards salvation"⁸. In this way, the limits of his ministry are outlined and the priest's pastoral attributions are defined.

In order to be able to talk about an effective pastoral work of the priest, in addition to the special theological training, the zeal and dedication to fulfill his priestly ministry as well as possible, we must also have in mind a very good knowledge of the parish, the parishioners and the problems they face⁹.

Speaking only from the perspective of efficiency, the work of the priest is not limited to pastoral work, because people demand the service, but they demand a service with "holiness" that does not come by itself, through appointment to the position, but is acquired through personal perfection, which in turn requires additional time, energy and resources¹⁰. We must be aware that Satan and his demons are always adding problems: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the beginners, against the principalities, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against the spirits of wickedness, which are in the air." (Ephesians 6, 12). It is true, at ordination the priest receives the gifts and graces necessary for his ministry, which, on the one hand, the priest must make visible to the faithful, and, on the other hand, the priest must work towards their multiplication, because any spiritual stagnation means a regression. It happens, however, that our time and resources are limited and no matter how much we want something else, we are obliged to allocate very wisely a certain time, energy and resources for a certain activity, because good results are obtained only through extremely precise administration and optimal of all activities and with a very good and precise allocation of resources, time and energy. Any separation or exaggeration, no matter how small, of these activities in one of the directions attracts dysfunctions that are inevitable due to the obvious disproportion between the needs and the solution possibilities.

⁷ Rev. Lect. PhD. Dan Sandu, *Theology and Practice of Mission in the Church Today. A Comparative Treatment*, in the "Scientific Annals of the University "A.I. Cuza" Iasi" (new series), VIII, University Publishing House., Iasi, 2003, p. 48.

⁸Rev. Prof. PhD. Nicolae D. Necula, *The Parish - the Space for the Priest's Pastoral-Missionary Activity*, in the Yearbook of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology Patriarch Justinian, Publishing House. of the University of Bucharest, Bucharest, 2001, p. 502.

⁹ Rev. Prof. Ene Braniște, Rev. Prof. Dumitru Radu, *Parish - Normal Framework for Living the Christian Life*, in volume "Missionary Guidance", Publishing House of the Biblical and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bucharest, 1986, p. 753 and the next.

¹⁰In this sense, Saint Gregory the Theologian states: "I must first be clean and then clean others. Let me be wise, to make others wise. Let me be a light, to enlighten others. Let me be close to God, to bring others closer. Let me be holy, to sanctify others". Cf. St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Word of Defense...*, p. 265.

It is said that the main gift with the help of which the priest will be able to face the difficulties that surround him and will help the believers to rise from sin and walk on the path of the True Christ, is the savior word. In this sense, Saint John Chrysostom teaches: *"To face all difficulties, the priest was given no other help than the help of the word. If he is deprived of the power of the word, then the souls of his believers - I speak of the weaker in faith and more inquisitive believers - will have no better fate than the ships eternally threatened by the storm. That is why the priest must do everything to acquire this power, the power to preach". Referring to this very power of the word, Father Cleopa urges the clergy: "First we must preach to others through the example of our lives and then through the word. The word should come out of the experience of our life, that is, from the work, and not the other way around, because only then it has power and reaches the hearts of believers"*.¹¹

The priest works on the souls of the faithful, but he also works on his own soul. A good knowledge of Orthodox teachings is the best foundation for the life of Christians, and, *"The priest must teach his believers the truths of faith, explain the word of the Scripture and preserve or defend them from the wrong and harmful teachings that come from those far from the true Church and her saving faith. He does this mainly through preaching, catechesis and the example of his personal life and that of his family"*.¹²

Conclusions

Let us undertake a serious work of mystagogic catechization of the people, of initiating them into the depth of so many things, which they do not understand in our cult (the order of the liturgy, the symbolism of baptism, the holy place and liturgical objects, etc.).¹³

Also, in order to harmonize *pastoral activism* with *spiritual living*, it is useful for the priest to know the limits of his ministry and to impose them with discernment only for the situations in which it is useful to get involved¹⁴. He is thus able to eliminate all activities that are not sanctifying and saving. And we have an excellent example of this kind of discernment in the holy Apostles when they teach the multitude saying: *"So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."* (Acts of the Apostles 6, 2-7).

Let's not forget for a moment that the moral sensitivity of believers is very acute. They cannot be fooled. They distinguish at a glance the priest as man of prayer, from the priest having nothing in common with this spiritual activity. The priest, more than anyone, must realize, in *letter* and *spirit*, the word of heavenly resonance: *"Pray without ceasing"*¹⁵. In other words, the

¹¹ *Father Cleopa speaks to us*, text edited by Archimandrite Ioanichie Bălan, vol V, ed. III, Sihăstria Monastery Publishing House, 2010, p. 84.

¹² Rev. Prof. PhD. Nicolae D. Necula, *Tradition and Renewal in the Liturgical Service*, vol. III, Publishing House of the Biblical and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bucharest, 2004, p. 269.

¹³ Rev. Vasile Coman, *Parish life*, in "Mitropolis of Transylvania", year (1958), no. 1-2, pp. 123-124.

¹⁴ Hieromonk Rafail Noica makes a very fine distinction in this sense between the zeal of the priest to impose his personal way of service and the fruits of the service that come from God and says: *"Our prayer, as priests, must be in general, and a daily prayer, and perhaps a state of prayer at all times, that God would give us a word, so that not "I" would say a word in "my image and likeness", but "Lord, let me, at least by mistake, say what is necessary for the soul who comes to me!" - that is, even unknown to me"*. Cf. Hieromonk Rafail Noica, *Culture of the Holy Spirit ...*, pp. 48-49.

¹⁵ Priest D. Veștemean, *The Inner Life of the Priest*, in "The Diocesan Sheet", Year LV; no. 25, Caransebeș June 21, 1942, p. 2.

priest works and lives simultaneously, that is, *according to*, and not between, the *letter* and the *spirit* of the Law.

Finally, the discernment necessary to involve the priest only in holy and redemptive services is also justified by the warning of Saint Matthew the Evangelist who says: „*Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.* (Matthew 7, 6).

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