

The Social Communication of Saint Basil

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ABSTRACT: It is well known that communication is a “social phenomenon, which involves an intention to send and receive a message” (Fârte 2004), in our case, the social communication to Saint Basil. The complexity of the social communication phenomenon is remarkable. It is a proof of human capacity to express their thoughts, ideas, and feelings of frustration, compassion, and struggle for social survival. With the help of words, man struggles every day, with the social problems he faces, with the depression generated by social problems, he transcends the difference of age, language, culture, color, religion and sex. The dimension of communication in social processes becomes “sine qua non” in our existence (Stoica-Marcu 2013, 128) a remarkable example over time is Basiliad. Saint Basil exhortations into practice the mercy of his sermons social facts confirming the strength of his Christian beliefs (Petcu 2009).

KEYWORDS: St. Basil the Great, Basiliad, social communication, social processes

Introduction

The research topic involves a rich literature, starting from the religious, continuing with the legal and ending with introspections on case studies, comparing the theological model proposed by St. Basil the Great with the secularized view of man. Therefore, the topic involves a multidisciplinary documentation. Beginning in the second half of the fourth century, the history of Christianity records the appearance of the three great Cappadocian Fathers: St. Basil the Great, his brother, St. Gregory of Nyssa, and their good friend, St. Gregory of Nazianzus. The most prestigious of them, Saint Basil the Great, was recognized by others as a common master, both during life and after death (Campenhausen 2005, 151).

Numerous sources have been sent to us regarding the biography of Saint Basil. In addition to his own writings, which include about 350 letters, we also have the eulogies composed by his brother, Gregory of Nyssa, and his friend, Gregory the Theologian, short notes that appear in the epistles and works of the two Gregory, such as and fragments dedicated to him by church historians: Jerome, Socrates, Sozomen, Theodoret and Philostorgius.

Saint Basil the Great was born in 330 (in the opinion of others 329), in Cappadocia, coming from a family famous for nobility, material and spiritual wealth. The basis of his education is the efforts made by his father, Basil, who was a professor of rhetoric at the Neocaesarea in Pontus, son of Saint Macrina the Elder (Coman 1999, 111; Rousseau 1994, 412; Smith 2003, 9-48; Jurgens 1970, 3). After studying at Caesarea in Cappadocia, Constantinople (c. 346-347) and Athens (from 350 to 355-356), mastering and deepening all that was best in pagan culture, he returned to his homeland in 356 and became a teacher of rhetoric.

Many fourth-century clerics, initially Christians, were trained in the schools of antiquity, where they learned dialectics and rhetoric. These arts were also taught by the great Christian catechetical schools of Alexandria and Antioch. Thus, many Christians also excelled in ancient wisdom. The Cappadocian Fathers also belong to this class. Because of these changes, the sermon acquired a much more artistic rhetorical form, also influenced by the Asian rhetorical style. It has become more elegant and systematic. Until the time of Saint Basil the Great, his rhetoric had crystallized directions and strengthened its position in all areas of social life. Rhetoric in the times we are referring to was not a simple literary habit, but much more; it was a way of life (Iorga 2009, 114). However, Saint Basil will soon leave his career as a teacher, in order to embrace the monastic life, but not before being baptized. He made a first division of his fortune to the poor.

In opinion of Liviu Petcu Archbishop Cappadocia practiced disinterested service of brotherly love, which fully confirms the correctness name like a patron of the poor peoples. The great hierarch understood the quintessence of Christian teaching, the fact that this teaching is summed up in love for God and for man. Saint Basil the Great knew how to weave in his soul, like no other, Christian love and mercy, sacrificing everything to the love of the neighbour in need and suffering (Petcu, 2009).

After his many pilgrimages around the world, the second division of his fortune takes place a little later. In 368, when the population of Cappadocia was going through a period of great famine, St. Basil admirably organized social assistance and distributed his wealth to the poor for the second time (Coman 1999, 112).

In the spring of 372, St. Basil expanded his social activity. His interest in the problems of the people was demonstrated by his Epistles (104, 110, 84, 86, 107-109), in which he tried to solve the problems of the miners in the Tavrului mountains, the problems of priests, orphans, criminals, relatives and compatriots. In the autumn of 372, St. Basil was accused by a simple monk of not confessing correctly about the Holy Spirit.

However, the Great Basil, in the spring of 375, completed one of his most important writings, namely, the Word of the Holy Spirit. In the summer of the same year he overcame his many ailments. At the end of 375 and the beginning of 376, when Emperor Valens was in Antioch, the heretics began the offensive against Basil, which they announced had to wait to appear in his defence before the emperor. He did not, and Emperor Valens withdrew.

In his diocese, he distinguished himself in a masterful dogmatic, pastoral and social activity, although most often only his quality as organizer or church administrator was emphasized, his huge literary and dogmatic contribution should not be left in the background.

As a monk and great ascetic, St. Basil was one of the great organizers of monastic life. Unlike the Egyptian hermit style, he conceived the monastery as a common space for prayer, work and study. The solitary lifestyle, according to him, involves the risk of selfishness and contemplation broken by the concrete reality of life. Salvation means by definition the filling of goodness with relationships with others, a continuous increase of communion. The monastic model established by Saint Basil has a strong social extension, serving in the social space. Monks serve each other in the monastic community, but in this way, they serve the entire social community, without remaining isolated in a space outside the world in which they live (Cooper and Decker 2012, XIV, 339. & 110 et seq).

At the theological and social level, Basiliad was the model according to which the Church, either the Byzantine or the national ones, was oriented in practical service. In the "golden age" of the Church, St. Basil the Great, who is known as the father and initiator of all settlements known today as the generic name of "Basiliad", both in the "Great Rules" as well as in the "Commentary on the Psalms", he bases the duty of helping his neighbour on the quality of a social being. According to St. Basil the Great, the duty to help one's neighbour results not only from a positive commandment of the divine law "to love one another" (John 13:34), but it is based on the very social nature of man.

Man cannot live alone, isolated from his fellows, but lives with them, and through this very coexistence, he comes to the idea of the need for mutual help of those who live together. This explains the emergence of ideas of solidarity and cooperation between those living in the same social environment. But if in the course of time some came to exploit and oppress their fellows, this did not happen, according to Basil the Great, according to God's will, but as a result of man's decay after ancestral sin, when some unjustly appropriated goods destined by God to be common to all (Zăgrean 1980, 225).

Saint Basil the Great expressed the issue of the rapprochement between the poor and the rich, among others in the following four homilies:

- Homily to the Word of the Holy Gospel according to Saint Luke the Evangelist: "I will spoil my barns and build them more;

- Homily against the rich or the second word against the rich;
- Homily spoken on the occasion of famine and drought;
- Homily that God is not the author of evil (Coman 1945, 5).

The heyday of charity is reached by the amazing philanthropic work of Saint Basil the Great, a model of Christian love and organization. St. Basil the Great organized social assistance in the Church since his pastorate as a priest. He built a complete charitable institution, which remained unique in its own way, even in the history of Christianity. The great social assistance establishment near Caesarea Cappadocia, called Basiliad (Cândea 2010, 67), was founded in 369-370 (Vătămanu 1969, 301) and inaugurated in 374, being invited by St. Gregory of Nazianzus who gave a famous speech on this occasion (Ioniță 1983, 13).

The revolutionary novelty that the creator of Basiliad offers to the society in the fourth century, is that every man, and first of all those who did not have the means of subsistence, not only had the daily bread insured in the Christian society, but found here the possibility of affirming them according to the gifts and inclinations of each one. Through such ideas, Christianity could no longer fear the competition of dying paganism, structured on social discrimination. St. Basil the Great was a preacher of almsgiving, and his actions were widely debated in sermons.

Arguing his earnest exhortations with quotations from Holy Scripture, St. Basil the Great says to his hearers: “We must be merciful and generous; for those who are not like that are condemned” (Plămădeală 1980, 140). Basil the Great also says: “Everything that someone would have more than he needs to live, he is obliged to give, according to the command of the Lord who gave us what we have” (Plămădeală 1980, 140), because “It is appropriate to let us take care of the need of the brethren, according to the will of the Lord” (Plămădeală 1980, 142), but the commandments of the Lord often grieve the rich, because they stop them from useless expenses.

When the Savior Christ commands the young man in the gospel to sell his possessions and give them to the poor, he becomes sad and leaves. “It seems to me that the fate of the young man in the Gospel, as well as of those like him”, says St. Basil the Great, “is like that of a traveller who, in the desire to see a city, eagerly crosses the road to it; Later, however, he stops at one of the inns in front of the city and from the laziness of a little movement, he makes all the effort until then superfluous, depriving himself of the beauty of the city”.

In order to understand Basil's social vision and his approach to matters of wealth and poverty, it is instructive to begin by examining his interpretation of the account concerning the rich young ruler and comparing his interpretation with that of some other early Christian commentators. How to understand Christ's injunction to the young man, “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me”, was a subject of considerable discussion in the early Church said Fr. Paul Schroeder in his work (Schroeder 2008).

Liviu Petcu, in his research, related St. Basil's sermons which describe numerous exhortations to commit mercy even when the addressees of the exhortations do not live an opulent life because there is always someone poorer than them (Petcu 2009):

“If all your subsistence is reduced to one bread and a poor man comes to your door to ask for food, takes out of your pantry that one bread and raising his hands to heaven, he addresses to God this word, as moving as it is noble: ‘I have only one bread, God, danger is before me; but I give, from the little I have, to the hungry brother; help Yourself Your servant who is in danger! I know Your goodness, I trust in Your power! You do not delay your graces for a long time, but divide when you want the gifts! If you speak and work in this way, the bread you give in distress will produce multiple fruits: it will be the germ of a rich harvest, the pledge of your food, the guarantor of divine mercies’ (Homily to drought).”

Conclusions

All this inspires the social character of the problem, both in terms of genesis and amplitude in the social process. From the sociological point of view, does not deny the importance of social communication disorders at individual or group, but only emphasizes the fact, but it is only emphasized, when the very social context in which an individual, a group or a community entered a crisis evolves (Stoica-Marcu 2013, 129). In our case about Basiliad.

So do the people who receive to do the other commandments, but resist when it comes to wealth. I know many people who fast, pray, sigh, show endless piety, but do not take a penny out of their pockets for those in need. What use do they have for the other virtues? The kingdom of heaven does not receive them. “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Oprea 2007, 31). Mercy, as a concrete expression of philanthropy, is the means by which God transforms man’s selfishness into love for his neighbour, so that he may enter the kingdom of heaven.

We all pray for one and one for all and ask for the intercession of the Saints to be saved, as Saint Basil the Great taught us. Through all that he did, in what he thought and wrote, St. Basil imposed today all Christians’ one and the same conduct, namely merciful love of the humble (Petcu 2009).

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