

TEO, ISSN 2247-4382
104 (3), pp. 77-92, 2025

Basilian Hermeneutics - Paradigmatic Foundation for Religious Education and Current Christian Pedagogy

Marius Dumitru HANGANU

Marius Dumitru HANGANU

Pentecostal Theological Seminary, Hunedoara, România
Email: marius.hanganu@yahoo.com

Abstract

The major interest in a good understanding and interpretation of the text of Scripture, implicitly determined the outline of a Basilian hermeneutic model, paradigmatic for the generations of theologians who followed him. Through a careful decantation of the methods and principles of interpretation developed by the two great theological Schools of his time – Alexandria and Antioch – Basil the Great, through the exegetical and interpretative methods developed, establishes a center of balance between literalism and allegorism, achieving a truthful apology for the revealed character of Scripture, so contested by some today. Thus, Basilian hermeneutics traces three major directions in terms of methods of interpretation: historical-literal interpretation, anagogic-spiritual interpretation and typological interpretation. Each of these methods of interpretation must be used according to the context and the purpose intended by the Author.

Keywords

Basilian hermeneutics, methods of interpretation, religious education, Christian pedagogy

I. Introduction

Whenever the proper way of relating to Holy Scripture is brought into discussion, especially in the pursuit of a correct understanding, returning to the Church Fathers becomes essential - and Basil the Great has an important voice in this regard. For him, the work of studying Holy Scripture was not grounded in personal motivations. He did not rely solely on his own wisdom or reason, but, guided by the Holy Spirit, he was always convinced that without the illumination granted by God, Holy Scripture cannot be rightly interpreted or applied for the salvation of humankind¹. Unlike modern exegesis, which often contributes to the production of works held to high scientific standards, Basilian exegesis does not primarily seek to satisfy intellectual or scholarly curiosity. Rather, it emphasizes the spiritual and inspired character of Holy Scripture - the only force capable of transforming the souls to whom it is addressed. Firmly convinced that Scripture was written for the edification and perfection of the soul², Basil's exegesis can pursue no other goal than this. For this reason, he urges the faithful "to spend their lives meditating on the divine words of the Lord, so that the soul may be nourished by His saving teaching"³. This exhortation, reiterated throughout his writings, stands as an imperative addressed to Christians of all times: to approach the Word of God with both the mind - fixed attentively on what is written in Scripture⁴ - and the soul, in order to receive the nourishment that the Word provides⁵.

¹ Dumitru ABRUDAN, "Biblia în preocupările Sfinților Părinți", in: *Mitropolia Ardealului*, Anul XXXIV (1989) 6, p. 26.

² Sf. VASILE CEL MARE, "Omilia la Hexaameron, Omilia a IX – Despre cele de pe uscat", in: Sf. VASILE CEL MARE, *Scrieri*, partea I, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, vol. 17, transl. pr. D. Fecioru, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1986, p. 171.

³ Sf. VASILE CEL MARE, "Scrisoarea 296 – Către o văduvă", in: Sf. VASILE CEL MARE, *Scrieri*, partea a III-a, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, vol. 12, transl. pr. Prof. dr. Constantin Cornișescu and pr. Prof. dr. Teodor Bodoage, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1988, p. 581.

⁴ Sf. VASILE CEL MARE, "Omilia la Hexaameron, Omilia a IV-a – Despre adunarea apelor", in: Sf. VASILE CEL MARE, *Scrieri*, partea I, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, vol. 17, transl. pr. D. Fecioru, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1986, p. 115.

⁵ Sf. VASILE CEL MARE, "Omilia la Psalmi, Omilia la Psalmul XLIV", in: *Scrieri*, partea I, p. 287.

The entire literary activity of Basil the Great is grounded in a profound interest in the reading and interpretation of Holy Scripture. From his extensive written work, only three writings can be classified as purely exegetical: the *Homilies on the Hexaemeron* - a series of nine homilies, the *Homilies on the Psalms* - fourteen homilies on thirteen psalms, as well as ten additional homilies in which he analyzes various passages from Holy Scripture. Nevertheless, a simple reading of Basil the Great's writings reveals that his entire oeuvre constitutes a vast and profound commentary on the Holy Scriptures. *On the Holy Spirit*, the *Letters*, the *Ascetical Works*, the *Moral Rules*, the *Longer Rules*, the *Shorter Rules*, and the *Ascetical Constitutions* - though dogmatic or moral in nature—are all grounded in a strong and abundant biblical foundation.

For Basil the Great, Holy Scripture is the most accessible working tool and an inexhaustible source of inspiration and wisdom. His constant recourse to the biblical text, as well as the use of various passages to explain and argue certain truths concerning the Church's teaching or the edification of the faithful, is a defining characteristic of his work. In the *Hexaemeron*, for example, Basil refers to the biblical text more than two hundred times⁶. This extensive use of Scripture is even more clearly illustrated in the *Homilies on the Psalms*. Although only 13 of the 150 Psalms are commented upon, the reader is taken on a journey through the entirety of Scripture. Basil's commentaries are analyzed within the context of the whole Book of Psalms, then within the broader framework of the Old Testament, and ultimately in light of the entire Scriptural canon. Thus, his assertions are thoroughly grounded in references drawn from all of Scripture, with no fewer than 743 citations⁷.

Relevant in this regard are the words of Professor Iorgu D. Ivan, the translator of Basil the Great's *Ascetical Constitutions*. In the introductory study of this work, he states:

⁶ Petre SEMEN, "Hermeneutică și Exegeză la Sfinții Capadocieni", in: Petre SEMEN, Liviu PETCU (eds.), *Părinții Capadocieni*, Editura Fundației Academice "AXIS", Iași, 2009, p. 60.

⁷ Petre SEMEN, "Hermeneutică și Exegeză la Sfinții Capadocieni", p. 62.

“By following the order in which the Moral Rules are presented and the various aspects that can be considered for each rule, along with the large number of texts from Holy Scripture that aid in their clarification, one clearly discerns Basil’s extraordinary pedagogical tact, his profound knowledge of Holy Scripture, and his technique of correct textual interpretation”⁸.

In this way, Basil the Great demonstrates that there is complete harmony throughout the entirety of Scripture, a full coherence between the truth contained in the Old Testament and that of the New Testament.

II. Basilian Hermeneutics

A major interest in the proper understanding and interpretation of the Scriptural text was one of the defining characteristics of fourth-century Christianity. The religious freedom granted by Emperor Constantine fostered an unprecedented development of the Christian Church and, consequently, of theological educational institutions. Initially, these institutions served to instruct catechumens in the fundamental truths of the Christian faith under the guidance of learned teachers. Over time, however, they became true theological centers, defining for the Church of the early centuries. Two such theological schools stand out by excellence during this period: Alexandria and Antioch. Each significantly contributed to the formation of prominent theologians of the time, while also developing distinct theological directions and specific exegetical or hermeneutical methods.

The School of Alexandria, considered the most renowned and influential school of the early Christian Church, was the cradle of the development of the first systematic presentation of theology and the allegorical method of interpreting the biblical text. The one who undertook the development of this interpretative method was Origen. He held that three senses must

⁸ Sf. VASILE CEL MARE, “Constituțiile Ascetice”, in: Sf. VASILE CEL MARE, *Scrieri*, partea a II-a, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, transl. prof. Iorgu D. Ivan, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1989, p. 29.

be sought in the Scriptural text: the literal sense, accessible to the ordinary person; the moral sense, which is superior to the first; and the hidden, mystical sense, reserved only for those who have spiritually progressed and which can be reached only through allegorical interpretation⁹. In fact, the succession of the three interpretative senses—literal, moral, and mystical—reveals the progression in the understanding of Scripture¹⁰.

When identifying the meaning of Holy Scripture, Origen starts from the analogy of a living organism, composed of body, soul, and spirit. For Origen, the meaning of each Scriptural passage is threefold: historical (bodily), moral (soulful), and spiritual (pneumatical). This idea is presented in his treatise entitled *On First Principles*¹¹. However, considering that a strict adherence to literal hermeneutics can lead to serious theological consequences, Origen advocates for the interpretation of Scripture based on its spiritual or allegorical sense¹². On the other hand, the School of Antioch, through its representatives, remains faithful to the historical-grammatical interpretation, emphasizing the identification of the literal sense of Scripture and considering that excessive allegorization can pose a real danger. The system developed by Origen, according to which “not all passages in Scripture have a literal-historical sense, although all may have a mystical spiritual sense”¹³ is based on a dangerous subjectivism that can lead to interpretative exaggerations, constituting a constant source of heretical teachings.

Basil the Great was by no means unfamiliar with these directions established by the Schools of his time regarding the approach to the Scriptural text. He does not categorically reject the use of allegory

⁹ Mircea BASARAB, “Sfânta Scriptură și interpretarea ei în concepția Sfântului Vasile cel Mare”, in: vol. *Studia Basiliana 2 – Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, închinare la 1630 de ani*, Editura Basilica a Patriarhiei Române, București, 2009, p. 267.

¹⁰ Dumitru RUSU, “Metoda alegorică de interpretare a Sfintei Scripturi la Origen”, in: *Altarul Banatului*, XXI (2010) new series 7-9, p. 27.

¹¹ ORIGEN, “Despre Principii”, in: ORIGEN, *Scrieri alese*, partea a III-a, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, vol.8, transl. pr. Prof. T. Bodogae, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1982, pp. 274-275.

¹² Sergiu TOFAN, *Origen, sau Paradigma raportului dialogal dintre filosofie și teologie*, Editura Evrica, Brăila, 1996, p. 107.

¹³ Haralamb ROVENȚA, *Interpretarea Scripturii după Origen*, Tipografia Cozia Sf. Episcopiei a Râmnicului Nouului Severin, Râmnicu Vâlcea, 1929, p. 54.

as a method of interpretation; however, he advocates for caution and moderation, as allegory should be employed only in specific situations - otherwise, it becomes dangerous.

A warning signal in this regard is raised at the moment when, speaking about the creation of the world, he advocates for an interpretation based on the literal meaning of the words. He states:

“I know the laws of allegory; I did not discover them myself but found them in the works of others. Those who do not interpret the words of Scripture according to their proper meaning... interpret them by distorting them according to their own thoughts, just like dream interpreters, who interpret the visions during sleep for their own benefit”. Those who proceed in this manner are driven by a “foolish wisdom” and fail to understand that “He Who does not engage our mind with vain things has ordained that everything written in Scripture serves to build up and perfect our souls”¹⁴.

The continuation of this idea reveals the indignation and disapproval directed toward those who employ allegorical interpretation of Scripture by altering the meaning of the words and using figurative language in order to support their own arguments. Such individuals place their own wisdom above the Word of the Lord.

Although we cannot observe a full application of the Antiochene principles in his work, Basil the Great is an advocate of interpreting Scripture starting from the literal meaning of the text and situating it within the broader context of biblical history. Nevertheless, being convinced that the entire Scripture is inspired by God, the Saint endeavors to penetrate beyond the letter or history to uncover the spiritual meaning of the words. “For him, the object of detailed biblical study is not the letter of Scripture, but the living word that reveals Christ, the Incarnate Logos”¹⁵. In this way,

¹⁴ Sf. VASILE CEL MARE, “Omilii la Hexaameron, Omilia a IX-a – Despre cele de pe uscat”, pp. 170-171.

¹⁵ Ilie MOLDOVAN, “Sensul duhovnicesc al înțelegerii Sfintei Scripturi în concepția teologică a Sfântului Vasile cel Mare”, in: vol. *Studia Basiliana 2 – Sfântul Vasile*

through the exegetical and interpretative methods developed by Basil the Great, a hermeneutical model - a living paradigm¹⁶ - takes shape, constituting “a center of balance between literalism and allegorism and a genuine defense of the revealed character of Scripture, which today is so often contested by some”¹⁷.

According to the purpose intended by the Author of Holy Scripture, Basil the Great seeks to identify the correct meaning that can lead us to a truthful interpretation. Depending on the passage under consideration, he attempts an exegesis that may be literal, spiritual, or figurative in character.

III. The Historical-Literal Method

Although he does not categorically exclude the use of allegory in the interpretation of Scripture, Basil the Great considers that it cannot be regarded as a method whose principles should be universally applied to the entire content of the sacred writings. On the contrary, the starting point in this interpretative endeavor should be the identification and definition of the truth expressed, primarily from a historico-literal perspective. According to his theological thought, the exegete's primary concern ought to be the identification of the fundamental meaning of each passage, being convinced that Scripture, inspired by the Holy Spirit, addresses people directly, using accessible and intelligible language. Naturally, the historico-literal interpretation has its own limits when it comes to spiritual realities whose value transcends the letter of the text.

The use of this method of interpretation involves conducting a contextual analysis of the text with a historical character. Based on the conviction that Scripture has a unified nature and that there is an identity

cel Mare, închinare la 1630 de ani, Editura Basilica a Patriarhiei Române, București, 2009, p. 286.

¹⁶ Ioan CHIRILĂ, “Herminia Vasiliană, o paradigmă exegetică vie”, in: *Studia Theologia Orthodoxa*, LIV/2, Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai, Cluj Napoca, 2009, pp. 3-12.

¹⁷ Ioan CHIRILĂ, “Repere pentru o lectură duhovnicească a Sfintei Scripturi în viziunea exegetică a Sfântului Vasile cel Mare”, in: vol. *Studia Basiliiana 3 – Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, închinare la 1630 de ani*, Editura Basilica a Patriarhiei Române, București, 2009, pp. 136-137.

of purpose between the Old and New Testament, Basil the Great seeks to situate the biblical event within the specific biblical history of that context. Thus, in the *Homily on Psalm 28*, while attempting to explain the most appropriate meaning of the terms “exit” and “tent” found in the title of this Psalm, Basil the Great resorts to an analysis “from a historical perspective”, referring to the broader context of biblical history in which the commandments and regulations concerning priests and Levites were given¹⁸. On another occasion, similarly to Psalm 32, Basil the Great elucidates a particular passage after filtering it through the entire history of humanity, from creation to the day of judgment¹⁹.

Historico-literary interpretation also entails a historico-philological analysis of the text of Holy Scripture. In the *Homily on Psalm 36*, speaking about Abimelech, Basil the Great begins his identification of the most accurate meaning from two hypotheses, referring to a passage in the First Book of Kings, chapter 22. Drawing arguments from the tradition and history of the people of Israel, he resorts to a philological analysis of the term *Abimelech* and concludes that, in this passage, the noun does not denote a proper name but has a common meaning, signifying king or emperor²⁰.

Semantic analysis of words constitutes another component of the historico-literal method. Aware of the polysemantic nature of certain terms encountered in the text of Scripture, Basil the Great devotes particular attention to their definition and clarification in order to identify the fundamental meaning intended by the Author. In his effort to explain the act of divine creation, in the *Homilies on the Hexaemeron*, Basil the Great places special emphasis on establishing the literary and grammatical meaning of certain words according to the context in which they are used. Only in this way can a correct understanding and interpretation of the revealed truth be attained. In the first Homily, Basil the Great highlights the importance of a correct understanding of the word *beginning*. Therefore,

¹⁸ Sf. VASILE CEL MARE, “Omilii la Psalmi, Omilia la Psalmul XXVIII”, in: Sf. VASILE CEL MARE, *Scrieri*, partea I, p. 222.

¹⁹ Sf. VASILE CEL MARE, “Omilii la Psalmi, Omilia la Psalmul XXXII”, in: Sf. VASILE CEL MARE, *Scrieri*, partea I, pp. 246-260.

²⁰ Sf. VASILE CEL MARE, “Omilii la Psalmi, Omilia la Psalmul XXXVI”, in: Sf. VASILE CEL MARE, *Scrieri*, partea I, pp. 261-262.

he presents the various connotations it carries in different contexts found in Holy Scripture, for “this word beginning has so many meanings”, yet it is our duty to identify the correct one²¹.

Also in this Homily, we identify another hermeneutical method employed by Basil the Great - the analysis of a specific term or passage through reference to various translations or versions of that passage²². Thus, alongside the text provided by the Septuagint, Basil the Great employs Origen’s *Hexapla*, occasionally citing from the translations of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion²³. He even mentions the first two in the *Homily on Psalm 44*²⁴.

Paying close attention to every detail of the biblical text, Basil the Great considers that nothing in Scripture is superfluous. In his view, every syllable is important. Therefore, he says: “When you read the words of Scripture carelessly, these syllables seem short to you... But if you seek their meaning, then the great marvel of the Creator’s wisdom is revealed”²⁵. The order of words must be carefully analyzed, as it is not accidental²⁶, and the examination of the meaning of certain prepositions or conjunctions should be the concern of a diligent exegete²⁷.

In light of the above, we concur with the statements made by Stephen Hildebrand, who synthesizes Basil the Great’s exegetical approach. Hildebrand identifies two methods employed by Basil in the interpretation of Scripture, both common for his time. The first method consists of a grammatical analysis of the text, which can be interpreted differently

²¹ Sf. VASILE CEL MARE, “Omilii la Hexaameron, Omilia I – La început a făcut Dumnezeu cerul și pământul”, in: Sf. VASILE CEL MARE, *Scrieri*, partea I, pp. 73-77.

²² Sf. VASILE CEL MARE, “Omilii la Hexaameron, Omilia I – La început a făcut Dumnezeu cerul și pământul”, p. 77.

²³ Mircea BASARAB, ”Sfânta Scriptură și interpretarea ei în concepția Sfântului Vasile cel Mare”, p. 265.

²⁴ Sf. VASILE CEL MARE, “Omilii la Psalmi, Omilia la Psalmul XLIV”, in: Sf. VASILE CEL MARE, *Scrieri*, partea I, p. 288.

²⁵ Sf. VASILE CEL MARE, “Omilii la Hexaameron, Omilia a VIII-a – Despre cele zburătoare și despre cele din apă”, in: Sf. VASILE CEL MARE, *Scrieri*, partea I, p. 167.

²⁶ Sf. VASILE CEL MARE, “Omilii la Hexaameron, Omilia a V-a – Despre odrăslirea pământului”, in: Sf. VASILE CEL MARE, *Scrieri*, partea I, p. 120.

²⁷ Mircea BASARAB, “Sfânta Scriptură și interpretarea ei în concepția Sfântului Vasile cel Mare”, p. 284.

depending on punctuation and the division of words. The second method, frequently found among the patristic exegetes, concerns linguistic analysis - the explanation of words and the interpretation of various figures of speech²⁸.

Alongside all these constituent components of the historico-literal method, Basil the Great recommends the use of scientific arguments and secular knowledge, as these can be helpful in understanding Scripture. However, profane thought remains merely a rational supplement to confirm Scripture, never a basis for combination or synthesis²⁹.

IV. The Anagogical-Spiritual Method

Although Basil the Great begins his exegesis with the historical-literal method, he by no means limits himself solely to an understanding based on historical, linguistic, or grammatical analysis. In Holy Scripture, there are numerous passages which, in addition to their literal or somatic meaning, also possess an anagogical, spiritual meaning. Therefore, “if the allegorical meaning suppresses the literal meaning, the anagogical meaning does not suppress it, but accompanies and completes it by adding a higher idea”³⁰. The letter alone does not have the capacity to reveal the full meaning of the Word. Therefore, in the same spirit as the Holy Apostle Paul (2 Cor 3, 6), Basil the Great urges the reader to look beyond the letter, in order to identify the “key” that can open the door to the mysterious understanding of Scripture. This tendency to deepen the mysteries of Scripture beyond the written word constitutes a central feature of patristic exegesis in the fourth century. “We must not remain with the letter”, wrote Gregory of Nyssa in his works, “but move on to the immaterial and spiritual meaning,

²⁸ Stephen M. HILDEBRAND, *The Trinitarian Theology of Basil of Caesarea: A Syntesis of Greek Thought and Biblical Truth*, The Catholic University of American Press, Washington, D.C., 2007, p. 103.

²⁹ A.H. ARMSTRONG, *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1967, p. 432.

³⁰ Constantin CORNÎȚESCU, “Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, interpret al Sfintei Scripturi”, in: vol. *Studia Basiliana 1 – Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, închinare la 1630 de ani*, p. 243.

in such a way that the bodily meanings are transformed into intellect and understanding”³¹.

In his view, limiting oneself to a purely surface-level analysis of the letter results in the loss of the mystical, spiritual meaning that the Author intended to convey. This understanding leads Basil the Great, once the correct grammatical meaning has been established, to focus on a possible interpretation or application related to certain spiritual realities. Because interpreting Scripture is not a purely intellectual activity, but a profound theological practice³².

In such instances, Basil the Great speaks of a second meaning - a secondary, spiritual interpretation. This exegetical method can be identified in the *Homily on Psalm 29*. Speaking about the dedication of the house of David, Basil the Great identifies two levels of meaning in which this expression must be understood: the literal and the spiritual. In the literal sense, the Psalm appears to refer to the temple built by Solomon. But viewed from the perspective of spiritual interpretation, it becomes clear that the Psalm centers on the Son of God. In this passage, we can see how the moment of the Lord Christ’s incarnation is prophetically revealed to us³³.

The ascent from the literal meaning to the *pneuma* of Holy Scripture³⁴ is a key requirement that characterizes Basilian exegesis and interpretation - an imperative that should remain a constant concern for the contemporary theologian. This is the only way through which, behind the words of Scripture, we may discover Christ, the incarnate and revealed Logos. Moreover, by going beyond the historical-literal context, we can come to understand the infinite depth and enduring validity of the Word, which is applicable to every age and every person. Since it was written by the Holy Spirit, says Basil the Great, it is possible “for each of us to draw from it, as

³¹ Sf. GRIGORIE DE NYSSA, *Tâlcuire la Cântarea Cântărilor*, in: Sf. GRIGORIE DE NYSSA, *Scrieri*, partea I, transl. Dumitru Stăniloae, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1982, pp. 114-115.

³² John WEBSTER, *The Domain of the Word*, T&T Clark Theology, 2014, p. 67.

³³ Sf. VASILE CEL MARE, “Omilia la Psalmi, Omilia la Psalmul XXIX”, in: Sf. VASILE CEL MARE, *Scrieri*, partea I, p. 236.

³⁴ Ilie MOLDOVAN, “Sensul duhovnicesc al înțelegerii Sfintei Scripturi în concepția teologică a Sfântului Vasile cel Mare”, p. 286.

from a common hospital for souls, the healing for our own ailment”³⁵. For this to happen, the one who seeks to explain and interpret it correctly must be assisted by the Holy Spirit³⁶.

Taking into account all that has been discussed in this chapter of our study, we can observe that Basil the Great, following the trajectory established by patristic exegesis until then, advocates for the use of a method in which the two meanings - literal and spiritual—do not exclude one another, nor should they be separated, but rather complement each other and lead to a profound understanding of the revealed word. The necessity of establishing the literal meaning, intended by the Author, is essential but not always sufficient. Where the context allows, the exegete has the duty to discern the spirit behind the letter - the profound, spiritual meaning of the word revealed on the pages of Holy Scripture.

V. The Method of Typological Interpretation

Closely related to the anagogical-spiritual method, Basil’s work also features the explanation of certain passages of Holy Scripture based on typological interpretation. The Church of the early centuries did not abandon the Old Testament writings, considering them to belong exclusively to the people of Israel. On the contrary, it embraced the entire Old Testament, viewing it as belonging to the Church and constituting a prehistory of the New Testament, but understood and interpreted fully only through the light brought by the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. This conception characterized Basil’s exegesis. Frequently throughout his homilies, to explain passages from the Old Testament, Basil the Great resorts to a Christological interpretation, considering that these passages have a dual role. From a historical-literal perspective, they refer to certain events in the life and history of the people of Israel. However, in Basil’s view, these events have a deeper, mystical, and spiritual significance - a

³⁵ Sf. VASILE CEL MARE, “Omilia la Psalmi, Omilia la Psalmul I”, in: Sf. VASILE CEL MARE, *Scriseri*, partea I, p. 183.

³⁶ Petre SEMEN, “Hermeneutică și Exegeză la Sfinții Capadocieni”, p. 61.

typological meaning - because they prophetically speak about Christ and the eternal plan of salvation. By adopting a Christocentric exegesis, Basil the Great advocates the idea that Christ is hidden in the mystery of the ancient writings, and that the primary mission of the exegete is to discover Him and make Him known.

Such an exegetical approach is often found in Basil's writings when he explains various passages related to creation or from the Psalms. However, for illustrative purposes, we will focus on his words in the work *On the Holy Spirit*. Starting from persons or events in the Old Testament, Basil the Great highlights both their historical value and their relevance for the Church of Christ. This typological exegetical approach is always made by establishing a correlation between the mentioned events and certain passages from the New Testament, considered relevant for a fuller understanding. Thus, he speaks of the first Adam as a type of the future Adam (Rom 5,14). The water that flowed from the rock in the desert is a type of the power and life received from God through His Word (Jn 7,37). The rock represents Christ. Then, if we look at the manna in the desert, we see the type of the bread that came down from heaven (Deut 8,3). The serpent lifted up on a pole is a type of the redeeming sacrifice made on the cross. And the examples can continue. Nevertheless, Basil the Great says, the difference between type and fulfillment is as great "as the difference between a dream and reality, and that between a shadow and the image, and the objects existing in reality"³⁷.

Regardless of the exegetical or hermeneutical method employed, Basil the Great does not lose sight of the fact that Scripture was written for the edification and perfection of the soul. Its Author is the Holy Spirit; therefore, proper understanding requires the guidance and illumination of the same Spirit. The unified character of Holy Scripture, viewed through the lens of the unity of purpose between the Old and New Testaments, leads us to the conclusion that "there is one main theme and one message throughout the entire narrative... There is a beginning and an end, the end

³⁷ Sf. VASILE CEL MARE, "Despre Duhul Sfânt", in: Sf. VASILE CEL MARE, *Scrieri*, partea a III-a, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, vol. 12, transl. pr. Prof. dr. Constantin Cornițescu and pr. Prof. dr. Teodor Bodogae, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1988, pp. 46-47.

being ultimately a goal”³⁸. For Basil the Great, both the beginning and the end is Christ. He is the fundamental theme of the whole Scripture. He is the purpose sought by the Author. At all times, the exegete must strive to discover the Person of Christ behind every letter inspired by the Holy Spirit, so as to then present Him as the One who fulfills the old, inaugurates the new, and becomes the ultimate fulfillment of both, of the whole.

VI. Conclusions

The strong interest in a proper understanding and interpretation of the biblical text has implicitly shaped a Basilian hermeneutical model, which has become paradigmatic for subsequent generations of theologians. Through a careful distillation of the interpretative methods and principles developed by the two great theological schools of his time—Alexandria and Antioch - Basil the Great, through his exegetical and interpretative methods, establishes a balanced center between literalism and allegorism, producing a genuine apology of the revealed character of Scripture, so often contested by some today. Thus, Basilian hermeneutics delineates three major directions concerning methods of interpretation: historico-literal interpretation, anagogical-spiritual interpretation, and typological interpretation. Each of these interpretative methods must be employed according to the context and the purpose intended by the Author. According to Basil the Great’s theological thought, the starting point in any interpretative endeavor should be the identification and definition of the fundamental meaning, using a historico-grammatical approach. The identification of the biblical or historical context, the historico-philological analysis of the text, and the determination of the correct meaning following a semantic analysis of terms are some of the components of this interpretative method. Alongside these, Basil the Great recommends analyzing a passage by appealing to various translations or textual variants. Furthermore, every detail - even a single syllable or preposition - can be essential for a proper

³⁸ Georges FLOROVSKY, *Biblie, Biserică, Tradiție: Un punct de vedere ortodox estic*, Notable & Academic Books, pp. 12-13.

understanding; therefore, all these aspects should constitute the concern of a good exegete.

Although Basil the Great proposes the historico-literal approach as the starting point in biblical exegesis, he does not limit himself solely to an understanding based on historical, linguistic, or grammatical analysis. Thus, without embracing the allegorism promoted by Origen, Basil the Great holds that behind the letter there lies a much deeper meaning intended by the Author. While the allegorical sense suppresses the literal, the anagogical or spiritual sense accompanies and completes it, giving it a different value - this is Basil's conviction. Therefore, the theologian's concern should be to ascend from the letter to the *pneuma* of Scripture. According to Basil, these two senses - the literal and the spiritual - do not exclude but rather complement each other, leading to a profound understanding of the revealed truth.

Closely related to the anagogical-spiritual interpretation, Basil the Great proposes an approach to certain passages of Holy Scripture based on typological interpretation. In Basilian theological thought, there are certain persons or events in Scripture referring to the Old Testament history of God's people that have a dual role. Beyond the meaning determined by the historico-literal context, they possess a much deeper, mystical, and spiritual significance - a typological sense - because they speak about the Person of Christ and the eternal plan of salvation. Basil the Great recommends the use of such an interpretation, but only when the scriptural context requires it.

Analyzing today the life and work of Basil the Great from the perspective of his profound interest in the Holy Word of God, we can observe how the Savior's imperative - "Search the Scriptures" (John 5,39) - became the passion, preoccupation, and ultimate purpose of his life. The same passion, the same preoccupation, and the same goal ought to characterize the contemporary believer, considering that the imperative given by Christ remains unchanged.

Although we do not hesitate to affirm that the entire Scripture is the inspired Word of God, the foundation of the whole Christian doctrine, it is increasingly less studied, delved into, or preached. This is the main

reason why, more often than not, “the theological-missionary endeavor of the Church becomes unconvincing, insufficiently grounded, and, unfortunately, ineffective”³⁹. The solution to such a crisis must involve bringing to the forefront of theological, pedagogical, and ecclesial spaces a new exegetical, hermeneutical, catechetical, or homiletical approach, firmly grounded in the inspired Word of Holy Scripture. In striving to undertake such an endeavor, a return to the Church Fathers is essential, and the example of Basil the Great - his manner of relating to Holy Scripture - is exemplary.

³⁹ Petre SEMEN, “Hermeneutică și Exegeză la Sfinții Capadocieni”, pp. 55-56.