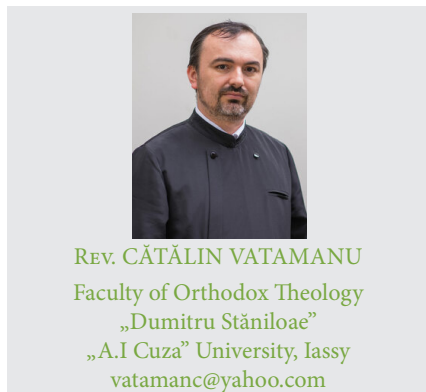


THE BIBLICAL MODEL OF HUMBLE AUTHORITY IN “THE TEACHINGS OF NEAGOE BASARAB TO HIS SON THEODOSIUS”

Abstract

From a methodological point of view, the present research focuses on the fundamental aspects of Old-Testament monarchic theology, identifying them wherever they stand out in *The Teachings of Neagoe Basarab to His Son Theodosius*. The aim of this endeavour is threefold: first, to highlight the excellence of biblical values via direct references to the biblical text, mostly to the Old Testament, second, to underline the high leadership principles of the great ruler in question, as well as the responsibility he bears in mind in conveying them to his successor to the throne, and third, the fundamental goal of this research, namely to highlight the coherence, fluency, harmony and axiology of the text's rhetoric, as an exceptional literary model and treasure of Romanian literature, a testimony and testament, a source and resource for the life of society and the Church over the centuries.



Keywords

Neagoe Basarab, Old Testament, Humility, Authority, Education

Introduction

Conceived as a testament of Ruling Prince Neagoe Basarab to his son Theodosius, *The Teachings* resemble too much a holy scripture for one not to include them, at least formally, in the category of inspired and inspirational, normative and formative literature. Furthermore, by taking these characteristics of the book as a premise for this study from the very beginning, its relationship with the Old and New Testaments becomes more than obvious and worthy of consideration.

The occurrence of biblical themes in *The Teachings of Neagoe Basarab* is striking to the reader who is familiar with inspired literature, which makes for an argument solid enough for some specialists to justify the theory of a monastic author (Panaitescu 1942, 137; Balotă 1969, 271-80). Overlooking the bibliographic details of the great ruler and neglecting, if one may, the issue of the highly debated authenticity of the writing, the evidence of a work of a sapiential, Christian pedagogic nature, a work that ennobles one's character and shapes values, is unquestionable. Of course, all these literary elaborations – which the author of this study construes rather as natural guiding advice from the father to his son, full of sincerity, care, appreciation, watchfulness (and, no doubt, parental vigil, accompanied by prayer to Christ Our Lord and His Most Holy Mother) – stem from the monarch's political and religious experience, which he feels compelled to pass on to his son. In the vein of the biblical imperative *Shema...!* (*Listen...!*), Ruling Prince Neagoe Basarab summons his son to his most important instruction, one where the father can tell him everything, swiftly and sincerely, with the sense of responsibility of a man who has been appointed by God as master and ruler, and who now must enable his son to rise higher perhaps than he ever has.

Faced with such a monument of old Romanian literature, one can only bow with gratitude and respect, seeking to identify the biblical themes therein, to retrieve, restore and reclaim them in contemporary literature and theological discourse. The topic of the authority of the ruler about God and the people whom he was appointed to rule over by divine mandate – and the matter of humble authority in particular – makes the object of the present study, in the hope that, alongside the other prestigious contributions in this volume, it will constitute a homage paid to Ruling Prince Neagoe Basarab upon the commemoration of 500 years after his passing.

The authority of the ruler is granted and sustained by God

In the Holy Scriptures, God's presence requires no mediation. He reveals Himself to man, amid creation, willingly, publicly and privately. The instances when He reveals His authority and sovereignty, often presented in stylised language, are categorical, imposing, nearly always imperatively, the observance and upholding of the sacred words: “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special people to Me above all nations; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.” So, Moses came and called for the elders of

the people and laid before them all these words which the Lord commanded him. Then all the people answered together and said: “All that the Lord has spoken we will do and hearken to!” So, Moses brought back the words of the people to the Lord.’ (Ex 19:5-8).

The Holy Scriptures, understood synthetically as the Torah (‘teaching’), start from the narrative of the creation of the entire cosmos and the establishment of man as a king in its midst, a ruler, by the grace of God, over all that has been created, and include a dynamic open to the undertaking of his salvation. Voivode Neagoe Basarab places this belief at the foundation of *The Teachings*, saying: ‘My beloved son, above all, it is meet that you ceaselessly honour and praise the great and good and merciful Lord, *our wise creator*, both day and night, at all times and in all places. And it is most meet that you glorify Him and magnify Him incessantly, with unbroken voice and unforsaken songs, as The One who *made us* and brought us out of the darkness into the light and from inexistence to existence’ (*The Teachings* 2016, 12). He then adds: ‘Therefore, “let not the wise man boast of his wisdom, nor the mighty of his strength, or the wealthy of his wealth. But let him that should boast”, be he a king, a ruler, a victor, do so for “his growing knowledge of God who *made him*” and let him with fear and trembling execute judgment upon earth.’ It is this awareness of one’s divine origin that immediately gives rise to the following exhortation: ‘Make peace and pray, all of you, for, without such, no man will come to see God!’ (*The Teachings* 2016, 15).

Unlike the Torah, the Hebrew royalty overtly expresses public order, political life, authority, power, and justice. Yet all these biblical values are constantly placed about Him who is the perfect King, namely God. Yahweh is the King. His kingdom in heaven must serve as the model, the example for worldly reigns to follow, hence the awareness of the world’s kings that all authority comes from Above, from the Lord. This is no less than what *The Teachings* say: ‘Be mindful and cautious of the task that God has entrusted to you (...). For naught is yours. (...) Yet, although you are possessed of such, boast not, for you have received them from God, that you may place the sceptre and the standard of your kingdom and reign, with much thanksgiving, as the kings of old have placed their kingdoms into the hands of God the Father, utterly undaunted, with great honour and justness. Thus, by the kingdoms of this transient world, they acquired the everlasting kingdom of heaven and received the crown of blessings from the hands of God. And let not your heart swell, nor pride yourself on the manifold tongues and peoples, for it is from God that comes your power and your victory from the One on high’ (*The Teachings* 2016, 17).

Yahweh-God is the King of Israel (Ex 19:6; Jg 8:22-23; Is 6:1; 33:17-22; Zeph 3:15; Zech 14: 16-17) and the Davidic kings understand that monarchy is not some eminently historical institution, but a special work of God, through which He communicates with His chosen people, as written in Ps 88:28-36: ‘And I will set up his seed to endure forever and his throne as the days of heaven; if his sons forsake My law, and walk not in My judgments, if they profane My ordinances and keep not My commandments, I shall visit their transgressions with a rod and their sins with a whip. But I shall not turn away My mercy from him, nor allow My faithfulness to fail, nor will I break My covenant, nor alter the words that proceeded from My lips. Once I swore by My holiness: I will not lie to David. His seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before Me and as the moon established forever and a faithful witness in heaven.’ The Wallachian ruler’s awareness of his divine enthronement is clearly expressed, as a testimony and testament, in *The Teachings*, thus: ‘See, my beloved, the great king, who loved us and made us kings on earth as well, just like himself, and it is his will that we are likewise in heaven; and if we so wish ourselves, so shall we be, provided we do good, and so we shall be kings and reign forever. Yet these earthly kingdoms and reigns are in the hand and at the will of God and were given to us so we may labour for good. While the heavenly kingdom is up to our will and God shall give it to us, if only we want it. But do you know who the great and mighty king is? He is the king of kings the lord of lords and the God of gods, who vanquishes the living and the dead and has made all the ages. Therefore, praise him who has taken you out of the earth and made you a son and king of heaven and higher conqueror and commander over nations and people, and made you a ruler on earth, so that you may pass fair judgment on people and judicious judgment on the poor, as the prophet says: “O, God, give Your judgment to the king and Your righteousness to the king’s son.”’ (Ps. 71, 1).’ But mark how beautifully the author transposes biblical and his personal history into the Christological dimension: ‘Yet what king does the prophet speak of? He speaks of Christ the King. You know that “every perfect gift comes down from above, from the Father” upon the king, and the ruler, and the priest, and every man who belongs to God alike. It is therefore that the king’s son, who is the son of God, should judge righteously, for judgment, too, belongs to God and no one else. And you bow down under the mighty hand of God, as the apostle says, as to the maker and king of life and of our age, with all fear and trembling, so that one day He may exalt you and you may live long on a good earth. Now, o kings, understand and be taught, all you who judge the earth, serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with

trembling, receive instruction, lest the Lord be angry with you, and you may perish from the way of the righteous when his fury is quickly kindled. Be angry and do not sin, for what you think in your hearts have remorse in your beds. And again, the prophet says: “In your care are the poor left and to the miserable you are to be an aid”. For the Son of God himself was sent into the world poor, as it is written. And to you God has given the kingdom in this brief world.’ (*The Teachings* 2016, 15-16)

The peace, prosperity, well-being and harmony of the kingdom, on the one hand, and the authority, power, justice and wisdom of the king, on the other, are reflections of how God is to be understood as one who works amid Israel and blesses its people. That is what Ruling Prince Neagoe Basarab wishes to justify when saying: ‘For the kingdom and reign of kings and rulers, which is bestowed upon faithful and righteous kings and rulers, is a heavenly kingdom and reign. And the Lord, the son of God, shall be their king and shall judge the world in righteousness. Therefore, whenever a king or ruler receives a kingdom and reigns, it is by the mercy of God and He bestows it upon whomever He will. For kingdoms and judgments belong to God and it is for this reason that kingdoms are given by God, to judge his people with righteousness, and to impart pain and rebuke on those who have transgressed. For upon no one ever has God bestowed nor to anyone has He given the drive to do evil and unrighteous deeds, nor has He sent to anyone unclean thoughts, nor has God planted insidious cogitations and thoughts into anyone’s heart. For it is still by the devil’s craft that all these are stirred. For it is because of the devil and his urging that all wicked things are done, and not by the ordinance of God.’ (*The Teachings* 2016, 70)

Biblical models of humility and repentance

To make his teachings not merely scholastic, but strongly rooted in the lives of people in the history of sainthood, Ruling Prince Neagoe Basarab invites the reader to discover divine authority which descended from Heaven and materialised in historical experience. The historical summary of the Kingdom of Israel, in the context of divine providence and blessing, should make for a veritable example: ‘And God shall give you the kingdom on earth, and, for your sake, He shall give it to your sons after you, just as God gave the kingdom to Solomon for the sake of David, his father. And you and your kingdom shall be granted old age with honour by God and years shall be added onto your life, just as days and years were added to Hezekiah, the king of the Jews, fifteen years, as has been said. And wherever you may go and whatever foes you may face, you

shall still overcome them and tread them underfoot and you shall return once more with great honour and great joy. You shall likewise overcome all the heathens who come upon you and God shall deliver them into your hands; and those that may escape shall return to their lands with great shame and dishonour. Yet, should you not mark me, o, my beloved son, or should you not be mindful of the teachings of God, or should you not do the will and follow the statutes of God, which we have been taught and hear in the Holy Scriptures, but should you begin to act against the teachings of God and commit wrongdoings and anger the Holy Spirit, with whom we were stamped on the day we were cleansed of the sin of our forefather, the first man to be made by the hands of God, and should you besmirch godly things with filthy and abominable deeds that you commit, for your foolishness and unwisdom, take heed that God shall take the kingdom from you and give it to another, who shall do the will and follow the commandments of God. And He shall cut your days short and lessen them, as he shortened and lessened the days of Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli the priest and judge of the Israelites, for they did not take heed of their father's teachings, nor keep the law of God. Thus, their lives met an unhappy end and their souls were lost to them. Yet, should you follow the commandments of God, God shall be your helper in all things, as He was to Samuel the prophet; for he, too, was a judge of the Israelites and God was with him at all times. But should you not do the will of God, He shall take your reign away from you, just as they took the kingdom away from Saul and gave it to David. As for Saul, having angered God, he was utterly racked and tormented by the unclean spirit, and for as long as he reigned, his strife and scourges never ceased and he was distressed by enemies and pagans all his life. And so was he bereft of the nation and the kingdom due to his own iniquities. You, however, should you follow the commandments of God and uphold His law, He shall lengthen the time of your reign, as he did those of his obedient ones, of David, of Hezekiah, of Gideon, who were also judges of the Israelites, and those of many others, who followed the will of God and upheld His commandments. Yet, should you not take heed of the commandments of God, nor mark my teachings, watch and guard yourself, lest you share the fate that befell many kings for their negligence and folly, such as Solomon, his son Rehoboam, and Absalom, and many others, who fell from the grace of God and had their lives shortened and their kingdoms fared ill and were spent.' (*The Teachings* 2016, 22-3) 'Therefore, take discerning and thoughtful heed and mind that, should you break the law and fail to fulfil the commandments of God, so even should you conquer the whole world and all

the kings of this world should bow to you, and should they rise with all their might to aid you, of no use shall that be to you, nor will anyone be able to rescue you. For the Scripture says: “The Lord is the one who holds heaven and earth in his hand, the sea, and all things visible and invisible” and “in the sanctification of His hands, all creation is as a drop of water in a vat”. But should you uphold the commandments of God and strive to fulfil them and to conduct yourself according to the will of God, so even should all the world begrudge you and rise with all its might against you, it shall cause you no damage, nor do you any harm, but rather do all the more harm and damage to themselves, just as once Pharaoh’s armies did, which rose against the Israelites, the people of God, and chased them with enmity and they all sank into the Red Sea like lead. From now on, we must not dwell on that which we have said above but show all briefly and see exactly which of the kings and in what manner they submitted to God and always how they transgressed the law and angered God and how they were tried by the wrath of God and how some of them turned God back to mercy with their repentance.’ (*The Teachings* 2016, 23-4)

King Saul

Fearful and somewhat doubtful of his son’s success, the Wallachian ruler refers to the history of the Israelite monarchy for the very purpose of encouraging his son. As an example, he brings up Saul, who, according to him, ‘was raised out of the dunghill’: ‘See, my son, this king, who was first raised by God from among the poor and elevated by Him and made king on earth, as it is written: “The Lord impoverishes and enriches, lowers and raises, he lifts the poor out of the dust and the dunghill, he raises the needy and makes him lord and conqueror over men and makes him heir to the throne of glory”. Did you see the poor lifted out of the dust and the needy raised out of the dunghill? Did you perceive that he was placed on the throne of glory and honoured with royal honour and God made him a king and a conqueror and a prophet?’ (*The Teachings* 2016, 30). But it is not the dung of the world that represents who a man is, but how unworthy man relates to his fellow human, in his capacity as the image of God. The Wallachian ruler understands that pursuing high values is what elevates man, as opposed to looking to the earth and the nothingness of the world. Our axiology should be based on divine values: “Therefore, let no one be deceived or delude himself thinking that he has some merit in his wisdom and worthiness. For all belong to God and it is from God that they are gifted to men, so that they may give thanks with fear and

trembling, be they a king, or ruler, or boyar, or poor, or needy, let him with much thanksgiving praise God at all times for all that He has given us, for we owe it to God to repay Him for what He has given us and gifted us. So, watch yourselves and labour to obey God well and to reign with Him and so live.’ (*The Teachings* 2016, 30)

King David

God’s providence over the chosen people and the Israelite monarchy is conditioned by obedience to the Law. It is precisely disobedience to the Torah that nullifies monarchical absolutism when it is self-sufficient, as Dt 17:16-17 warns: ‘But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt so that he may multiply his horses, for the Lord said unto you: “You shall not return that way.” Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart be changed; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself. But when King David is above the Law, what he does is displeasing to the Lord: ‘And when the time of mourning was over, David sent and brought her into his house and she became his wife and bore him a son. But what David did was evil in the sight of the Lord’ (2Sam 11:27) and again in the context of the murder of Uriah the Hittite and his sinful relationship with Bathsheba: ‘Why have you despised the word of the Lord by doing evil in His sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and taken his wife to be your wife and killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon. Therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house because you have despised Me and taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife’ (2Sam 12:9-10). This theological idea is wonderfully received in *The Teachings*: ‘So David said to Nathan: “I have done wrong before the Lord my God” and Nathan said to David: “God has taken your sin from you and you shall not die”. You have seen that he was a righteous and holy man and he feared God, yet he fell into the pit of sins. However, whenever he sinned before God, he would labour in repentance to rise and spare no effort and thus he would turn God back towards him in mercy and say: “I have erred before my God!”. And he would also say: “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your great mercy; and, according to the abundance of your compassion, blot out my transgressions!”. Thus did Nathan, too, say to David: “And God has taken your sin from you yet and you shall not die!”’ (*The Teachings* 2016, 32).

King Solomon

The biblical text insists that obedience to God brings well-being to man and multiplies the days of his life and, in the case of a king's reign, such as Solomon's, his obedience to the Law of God ensures a life of luxury for him (1Kgs 3:11-14). Recalling Solomon's reign, Ruling Prince Neagoie Basarab tells his son: 'Do you see, my son, that God multiplies the days of him who acts according to His will and commandments? But those of him who do not uphold His Law and commandments He lessens and shortens' (*The Teachings* 2016, 34-5). And then, to show that the dignity of the father is not guaranteed to pass onto the sons and that the heredity of the rule does not imply that the heirs would also inherit their predecessors' moral character, the Wallachian ruler once more brings to bear the case of King Solomon and his descendants to the throne, stating a warning: 'Therefore, let no one deceive himself and hold himself great, a king though he may be, or a ruler, or a boyar, or whatever he may be; for all these are given by God, and God can take them away. And to Solomon, again, God gave the kingdom, for it is written: "The Lord swears to David in truth and will not renounce it, saying: 'Of the fruit of your body I will set upon your throne if your sons keep my covenant"''. Yet the sons of David did not uphold the law of God. Therefore, God removed them from their reign as ones who were ungrateful.' (*The Teachings* 2016, 39-40) And again, invoking the biblical sapiential texts in the *Proverbs of Solomon* 19:20: 'Hear counsel and receive instruction, that you may be wise throughout your life' and the parallel texts in Job 22:22, Jr 7:28; Sir 6:24, the author of *The Teachings* urges: 'But now, my offspring, I shall teach you, as Solomon says: "My son, receive the teachings of your father and heed the counsel of your mother, so that you may live forever"' (*The Teachings* 2016, 210).

King Rehoboam

When it comes to the Davidic kings given as examples below, it is natural that the author of *The Teachings* should have no words of praise about them. Starting with the example of the sons of Solomon as the most powerful representation of how children relate to the extraordinary legacy of their father, he brings to the forefront the reign of King Rehoboam, who, after the division of the kingdom of Solomon, would come to rule over Judah. The two brothers, Jeroboam and Rehoboam lacked counsel and, what is more, they proudly neglected the advice of the wise and old, which led to the splitting of the kingdom into the North and the South. 'Therefore,' says the great

Wallachian ruler, ‘he who heeds the counsel of the young and of children shall never rejoice; yet he who heeds the counsel of the old and wise shall not repent. For it has been said: “Ask your father and he will give you good advice and talk to your elders and they will teach you well”. And it is also said: “The man without counsel, he is his antagonist”. That is what Rehoboam did, refusing to heed the advice of the elders and thus he did wrong and became his enemy and corrupter. Ask your father and he will tell you and your wise elders and God-fearing and hold good counsel and they will teach you all that is fitting and worthy to do by the will of God and for the benefit of your body and soul. And, if you mind the counsel of the elders, so shall your foot not trip against stumbling blocks and offences, nor shall it befall you as it did Adam and many others since, who were disobedient. Therefore, my son, honour old age and silver hair and shirk not from their counsel and teaching, nor disregard your mother’s guidance, as Solomon says. Those of your boyars and counsellors of great quality honour and praise and other, smaller and lowerstanding boyars and captains content with good cheer and all the fellows who strive to obey God faithfully and righteously lade with gifts and hasten to raise them and make them boyars, so that they may serve your rule in good faith and fear of God, as true and righteous Christians. And, when passing judgment, pay heed to those counsellors who are good and to those testimonies that are true and faithful. And love all young men as your own and use your words to teach and delight them. Love the old and the young alike, the great and the small, for the love of Christ.’ (*The Teachings* 2016, 42-3)

King Asa

Recalling the trials that befell King Asa and his victory gained through faith in the power and work of God, as written in the Holy Scriptures: “Then the Spirit of God came upon Azariah, son of Oded, and went out to meet Asa and said to him: “Mark me, Asa and all of Judah and Benjamin: the Lord is with you while you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you, but, if you forsake Him, He will forsake you” (2Chr 15:1-2), the author of *The Teachings* goes on to advise: “Therefore, I teach you and tell you, to the best of my skill, and say that he who glorifies God shall be glorified by God in his turn, both here and in the kingdom of heaven; whilst he who does not glorify God, but glorifies his power and wisdom, shall not be glorified by God. For this world has seen many rulers and many of God’s chosen, yet only those who glorified God were glorified by God in His turn, both here, on earth, and above, in His heavenly kingdom.

Yet those who did not glorify God were unaware, as without warning came the wrath of God upon them and all the good gifts were taken from their hands and they were bereft of both this earthly kingdom and the heavenly one and nothing was left of them. So did Asa, the king of old, who did not want to praise God, but praised himself. Therefore, for his conceit, as he would not humble himself, God turned his wrath upon him and sent his angel to take him naked out of his bed in the night and cast him onto a dunghill and there he came to his senses and humbled himself and all would beat him and mock him. Thus, he knew then, he understood that all power and might come from God and he began to weep many tears with manifold sighs and God just barely turned His mercy upon him and forgave him.’ Then, moving on to higher biblical meanings, to the words of Christ Our Saviour in Lk 14:11: ‘For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted’, the author urges: ‘See, my son and you, brothers, how will it go for him who opposes God and holds himself as high and mighty and refuses to humble himself before God! For such a one shall come to be humbled, both here and in the age to come, as the Holy Gospel says: “Whoever humbles himself shall be exalted and whoever exalts himself shall be humbled”. Such shall befall you also, my son, and you, brothers, should you exalt yourselves and swell with pride here, as God shall humble you and nought shall be left of you. Yet, if you humble yourselves before God here, God will exalt you and bring your soul into His heavenly chambers. Thus, do I teach you to do, should you wish to dwell with God’ (*The Teachings* 2016, 153).

King Hezekiah

About the great reformer king Hezekiah, Ruling Prince Neagoe Basarab has words of praise, recalling his and Jerusalem’s resistance against the Assyrian attack of Sennacherib in 701, an example of the resistance of the chosen people against their enemies, through faith and special divine intervention, and an argument for the development of the theology of the inexhaustible Zion: ‘Behold, the angel of God came down onto the camp of the Assyrians and killed 185,000 men of war. And when those who were left rose in the morning, they found so many people all dead. So, Sennacherib returned with shame and scorn. And you, my beloved son, should you be like king Hezekiah in all things, God shall be with you always and shall be your aid in all things, as He was to this king Hezekiah’ (*The Teachings* 2016, 53). Then he adds: ‘O Lord, in this hour, hear me, Neagoe, too, your sinful and wicked servant, the careless and foolish, as you heard Hezekiah in the hour of death! Likewise hear me, Your

indolent servant, for I have no one left to turn to, O Lord, but to the mercy of Your compassion. And do not receive me as You did Hezekiah, but as one of your lowliest of knaves’ (*The Teachings* 2016, 208). About the great Assyrian king, forced to withdraw by the divine providence over Jerusalem and the chosen people, the Ruling Prince Neagoie Basarab exclaims: ‘See, my child, the proud man who rises to heaven, how he fell to hell!’ (*The Teachings* 2016, 54).

King Manasseh

After the positive example of King Hezekiah, the author of *The Teachings* brings to the attention of his son and, through him, to that of us, the readers, the life of King Manasseh, the great idolatrous and prophet-murdering king, during the first part of his reign, and his repentance towards the end. The Old Testament insists on the fact that the political peace of the kingdom is conditioned by the king’s obedience to God, in texts such as Ps 131:10-12: ‘For the sake of David, your servant, do not turn away the face of Your anointed. The Lord has sworn to David in truth and He shall not turn from it: “From the fruit of your body shall I set upon your throne if your sons shall keep my covenant and My testimonies that I shall teach them and their sons shall sit upon your throne forever”’; Ps 88:30-37: “If his sons forsake My law and do not walk in My judgments; if they break My statutes and do not keep My commandments, I shall visit their transgressions with a rod and their sins with a whip. But I shall not turn away My mercy from him, nor allow My faithfulness to fail, nor shall I break My covenant, nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips. Once I have sworn by My holiness that I will not lie to David. His seed shall endure forever and his throne as the sun before me and as the moon established forever and a faithful witness in heaven.” But You have cast off and scorned and rejected Your anointed’; 2Sam 7:12-16: ‘Behold, the Lord tells you that He will make you a house; and when your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, then I shall set up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I shall establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I shall establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I shall be a father to him, and he shall be to Me a son; if he commits iniquity, I shall punish him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men, but I shall not take away My mercy from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before you. Your house shall stand firm, your kingdom shall be established forever before you and your throne will stand forever.’ When referring to King Manasseh’s enslavement by the Assyrian king and the shame that the Lord’s

chosen one suffered there, the author of *The Teachings* stresses his repentance and prayer, which the Church has kept in the Holy Scriptures and the service of Great Compline. ‘And hear, O Lord, my impure prayer, as You heard the prayer of Manasseh when he was locked up by heathens in the copper ox. For, at first, he addressed his impure prayer to the idols, to Artemis and Apollos and Baal, until midnight, but to no avail; and at midnight he awoke as if he had been drunk and mad with wine, and he turned his back to the idols and raised his mind and thoughts high towards God and wept bitter and scolding tears, saying: “Have mercy on me, O God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob!” Thus, for this mere return, for his turning his face towards God and his back to the idols, You, my God, delivered him in that very hour from the copper ox wherein he lay captive. So, as You delivered Manasseh from that great adversity, have mercy on me, the villain, too, O God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob, not according to my innumerable sins, my God, but according to Your great mercy. And, as you have shown mercy to Manasseh, so have mercy on me as well, my God!’ (*The Teachings* 2016, 214).

Christ – the perfect model of humble authority

The Incarnation of the Son of God from the flesh of the Holy Virgin Mary is categorical proof of the Heavenly Father’s all-merciful love: ‘for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life’ (Jn 3:16). The perfect authority of the divinity of the Son is revealed in the very act of emptying Himself, of humility expressed as His descent to a level where man could receive His love, as St. Paul says: ‘Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave and being born in human likeness, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross. Therefore, God also highly exalted Him and gave Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and those on earth and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father’ (Phil 2:5-11).

In the mystery of the Incarnation of the Lord lies hidden the mystery of His sacrifice on the Cross, of His death and Resurrection, for Christ the Lord is not born so that He should become an important historical figure, but so that, by manifesting His divinity from within humanity, He should pull man out of death-fraught history and save him, offering him the Kingdom prepared for him from the very beginning of the

world. Furthermore, this deliverance of humanity could only have been carried out by the Man-God, Who willingly took upon himself the passions, the disgrace, the cross and death. The forgiveness that Christ offers to those who delivered Him to death and crucified Him must be a model for all, but, above all, for a future ruler of a country, who is often tried by the wickedness of the ungrateful: ‘Have we not heard, brethren, the Holy Scriptures never ceasing to testify to how our Lord and God Jesus Christ suffered and what He endured to deliver you from the bondage of labours? How he bore scorn and insults, even their spitting on His cheek, and slaps did He take from that thankless Jewish people. And, faced with that sight, the earth could not endure it, but trembled, while He endured it and did not repay them by the measure of their treachery, nor did He command the earth to split open and swallow them up and deliver them living to hell? Yet even more staunchly did He pray to the Father who is without beginning, saying: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”. And in so doing, He gave you a model of patience and forbearance, so that you might do so in your turn for those who have hated you and done you evil and so that you should not repay evil with evil, nor bear the memory of evil, but have mercy and forgive them, as your Lord Christ did in praying for the thankless and senseless Jews’ (*The Teachings* 2016, 185).

The birth of Christ the Saviour in the poor cave of Bethlehem is proof that God does not seek worldly greatness to reveal His glory, just as we must not be influenced by someone’s social status to do good: ‘Therefore, let you, too, my son, or any other ruler chosen by God, or any of the great boyars, or the small ones, or of the rich, or the poor, let us all learn, brethren, to ever enact the mercy of God and to obey Him. For you see how much good He has done and how deeply He has humbled Himself for us, yet what have we done for Him?’ (*The Teachings* 2016, 196). Biblical wisdom often refers to the virtue of humility and to the fact that it is the one that exalts man: ‘Yet be patient with the humble and do not let him wait for your charity’ (Sir 29: 11). *The Teachings of Neagoe Basarab to His Son Theodosius* highlight the mystery of humble love, the beginning of all virtues: ‘Therefore, we, too, know all these to be good. Yet, all these virtues, where do they come from? They come from our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who has a pure mind, which is the foundation and the fabric of all good things, does not look merely to purity and fasting, to prayer, abnegation and humility, or merely to reach out with his mind and thoughts towards many things and in many ways, but leaves all that behind and raises his mind and thoughts high and enrobes himself in the love of Christ as in a coat of mail. And such a one does not concern himself with the kingdom,

nor with the reign, nor with the Patriarchy, nor with hierarchs, nor with abbots, nor with any earthly thing, such as we concern ourselves with and labour for, but only loves the Lord God with all his heart. (...) Therefore, so shall we, should we love God with all our heart, see the mercy of Christ bestowed upon us from his victorious right hand, alongside fasting and prayer and purity and abnegation and humility and charity and patience and obedience. For all virtues rest in His hands. Let us therefore not stretch or scatter our minds every which way, but direct them only up towards the merciful God, from Whom proceeds all mercy, so that we may reign together with him unto the ages of ages. Amen’ (*The Teachings* 2016, 116).

Man’s strife against the Lord brings him closer to death and separates him from God’s mercy and love

The Lord Christ’s humble assumption of suffering is the healing of humanity from the Adamic pride of self-sufficient and autarchic knowledge of good and evil. Yet the selling of the Lord by Judas shows that the desire to control the destiny and life of others, as a snare set by him who desires to rule over the heavens, namely Lucifer, is something that tempts man, especially those who hold worldly power and authority, hence the following exhortation: ‘For it is meet that man should serve his God, Who made and wrought him, with fear and trembling. He should likewise serve his ruler, for it is said: “He who goes against his master goes against God Himself”. But who is he that goes against his master? It is that man who schemingly rises against his ruler. And such a one stands in defiance alongside Judas the traitor. For Judas, in his madness and foolish envy, rose and sold Christ, his master and God. Therefore, he was justly judged for his guilty deed, so that he was expelled from among the apostles and from the glory of God, as was the devil. For the latter even showed pride and would be greater than God who made him and said: “I will set my throne above the clouds and I will be God’s match”. Therefore, he turned into a dark demon and was cast out of heaven and now the everlasting fire of Gehenna is what awaits him. Likewise did Adam, the first man, rise to rule and be king and seek to become God on earth, but he was not. For it is God Who bestows kingship and dominion, both on earth and in heaven. Therefore, he was condemned and cast into the darkness of hell, until the coming of Christ, and he was bound with unbreakable bonds. Thus, it is said that Adam himself was bound only until the coming of Christ and condemned to labours, while his offspring will be condemned and cast into the everlasting fire even after the coming of Christ’

(*The Teachings* 2016, 69-70). Furthermore, so as not to remain confined to the realm of ideas and moralising words, Ruling Prince Neagoe Basarab shows his son the example of ‘blessed Barlaam and Josaphat, the son of emperor Avenir’, in the form of a story or narration, concluding: ‘Do likewise yourself as that good and faithful emperor did and you will be exalted in your humility’ (*The Teachings* 2016, 85).

Humility must be accompanied by the other virtues, especially by love, which, according to the great Apostle’s words, ‘suffers long; love is benevolent, love does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. Love does not behave unseemly, does not seek its own, it is not provoked, it thinks no evil. It does not rejoice in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails’ (1Cor 13:4-8). *The Teachings* extol the virtue of humble love, a sign of faith in God and proof of respect for the dignity of man as a fellow image of God: ‘First, have faith, love, and hope in God, for love is greater than all. Thus, besides love, have praise for God, which pleases Him. Furthermore, have humility, too, for so our Lord Jesus Christ teaches his apostles, saying unto them: “Learn from me, for I am meek and lowly in heart”. See, my sons, how desirable humility is since our Lord Himself taught His disciples and said to them: “Be meek and lowly”. So do I teach you, according to the words of the Lord? For, should you be humble, God will teach you, and should you be gentle, God will send His mercy to accompany you’ (*The Teachings* 2016, 132). It is love manifested concretely as acts of mercy that save man’s soul from selfishness and isolation and bring forgiveness for many sins: ‘Therefore, brethren, let us run towards our God and fulfil His will and love His face, lest He may cast us away from before his face when the seals are put in place and lest we be counted with the sinners in hell, like those who loved the face of Satan. But let us run towards God through charity, repentance, brotherly love, purity and pure prayer and bow our faces to the earth and speak thus: “Bow down, my face, to the earth, bow down, for you are dust and to dust you shall return!” And let us raise our minds high towards our God, Who is in heaven, with much mourning and humility, so that we may follow our Lord and say: “Have mercy on us, O Lord, have mercy, for we have done evil and committed many sins before You and we have no one to show us mercy except for You, our God! Therefore, we run to You, O Lord, our God, so that You may have mercy on us”’ (*The Teachings* 2016, 205).

Humility must be accompanied by love, fear of God, fasting and prayer

The danger of sin in man is presented by the author of *The Teachings* using metaphors such as rust and weeds. Just as these take over the soul, so do sins and passions stifle the good in man, killing his soul: ‘For just as rust eats through iron, so does earthly glory eat through man, should he attach his heart to it. And as bindweed or old man’s beard wraps around the grapevine and causes its fruits to perish, my son, so do pride and vanity kill the fruits of the king or ruler. For wise deference comes before all good things. And the source of all passions lies in eating beyond one’s fullness. And the epitome of evil lies in man thinking himself righteous. Therefore, the solution presented at the beginning of the paragraph: ‘He who does not confess his thoughts signals and shows that he is entertaining such filthy vainglory; but he who shall confess such thoughts to his spiritual father shall drive desires away’, meaning that the soul’s kneeling before God as part of the Mystery of Confession must be done with hope of forgiveness and blessing: ‘Trust not in your strength and God’s help shall be with you’ (*The Teachings* 2016, 107).

As the righteous Job said, ‘the fear of God, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding’ (Job 28:28), while the *Proverbs of Solomon* stress the many gifts that emanate from ‘the fear of the Lord’: ‘The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, but fools despise wisdom and instruction’ (1:7); ‘The fear of God is to hate evil’ (8:13); ‘The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding’ (9:10); ‘The fear of God prolongs (man’s) days, but the years of the wicked will be shortened’ (10:27); ‘In the fear of God there is hope of strength (...). The fear of God is a fountain of life, to turn one away from the snares of death.’ (14:26-27); ‘Better is a little with the fear of God than great treasure with trouble’ (15:16); ‘The fear of God is instruction and wisdom and humility is before honour’ (15:33); ‘By love and truth iniquity is atoned for and by the fear of God one departs from evil’ (16:6); ‘The fear of God leads to life and he who has it will abide in satisfaction; he will not be visited by evil’ (19:23).

It is easy to understand how Prince Neagoe Basarab, too, ‘lovingly’ places the fear of God at the foundation of virtues, stating: ‘And above all, my sons, you should have the fear of God lovingly rooted among you. For the fear of God is the mother of all good things. For it is the fear of God that begets fasting and fasting begets purity and purity begets prayer, while prayer begets humility, humility begets love and love is the pillar that upholds all the laws and prophecies’ (*The Teachings* 2016, 218). This

‘begetting’ of virtues from the fear of God strengthens man, who will be like a ship firmly anchored into the shore with ‘many braided ropes’: ‘Therefore, let me remind you, my sons, to join fasting with prayer, as well as fasting and bowed humility and love; and our Lord Jesus Christ will weave all the good things into your laurels. For when a ship is blown by the wind amid the sea, should its rope be made of a single string and should the wind blow it and rock it until the rope snaps, thus shall the ship drown into the depths and sink; while that ship whose rope is braided out of many strings, should it be blown by the wind, the strings shall aid one another, so that the wind cannot break it and it shall draw it out from the bottom and the depths and it shall not be harmed’ (*The Teachings* 2016, 219).

Once again, the author does not remain confined within the boundaries of theological discourse but brings before his reader the faces of those who laboured through fasting, prayer and good works: ‘So keep watch, in fasting and prayer and humility, for prayer and fasting and humility are a great thing. And now I shall show you, my sons, how great and mighty prayer and fasting and humility are. For, by fasting, Moses spoke to the Lord Sabaoth on Mount Sinai face to face, as one would speak to one’s wife, and walked across the bottom of the sea as on dry land. By fasting, Elijah the prophet sealed the heavens so that no rain fell for three years and six months and God took him up to heaven in a chariot of fire. Through prayer and the labour of his body, Paul the apostle ascended while in the body to the third heaven and there he heard unspeakable words, which it is not for man to utter – yet he says that what he heard was only in part’ (*The Teachings* 2016, 220-1). The examples of Moses, Elijah, and St. Paul as role models concerning fasting are all the more relevant in this evocation as they lived in times of adversity: whether it was the Egyptian supremacy and the exodus towards the Holy Land through the Sinai desert, or the reign of the idolatrous king Ahab – a time of drought for the land, but also a spiritual drought among the chosen people – or the difficult history of the Early Church after the Resurrection. All these periods in our horizontal history reveal the *katabasic* work of God descended among mankind.

A ruler must lead a temperate life, devoid of vices

In *The Teachings* of Voivode Neagoe ‘to his son, Theodosius, and other rulers and all. How it is meet for rulers to sit at the table and how they are to eat and drink’, the author calls for moderation as to food and drink, as an expression of inner spiritual balance: ‘My son, I thought it fit that a ruler should sit at the table with his great bo-

yars and his small ones. When a ruler sits at the table, first, his body lusts for food and drink. Then he lusts to make great merry. Yet you, my son, by no means let your mind be fully engrossed into merriment, for man in this world hangs between life and death. Therefore, it is meet that you keep close watch upon yourself and not let your mind be fully engrossed into merriment, nor sorrow either’ (*The Teachings* 2016, 136). Such words bring to mind the Holy Scriptures, which speak of the danger of drunkenness and surfeit: ‘What you hate do not do to anyone. Do not drink wine up to the point of drunkenness, nor let drunkenness accompany you on your way.’ (Tob 4:15); ‘A labouring man that is given to drunkenness shall not be rich’ (Sir 19:1). Saint Paul warns that ‘nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor swindlers shall inherit the kingdom of God’ (1Cor 6:10), while Our Saviour stresses which food is truly life-giving, namely the bread that is offered for eternal life: ‘Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you, for God the Father has set His seal on Him’ (Jn 6:27).

As the head of the administrative apparatus and of the entire people, the Wallachian ruler is the community’s foremost role model concerning virtue, a reflection of God’s dominion, which is why he must avoid the temptation of drunkenness, a killer of the mind and soul, the examples invoked being those of Noah, Lot, Samson, Delilah, Holofernes, Judith and Herod: ‘Should you keep with the foolish and unruly, you shall be foolish and unruly yourself’; ‘Should he have singing and playing at his table, let his mind not be enticed by them’; ‘Do not encumber your body with drunkenness (...), for even should a man have a great mind, he loses it when drunk; should he have stout hands, they are of no use to him’ (*The Teachings* 2016, 137-40).

In an exceptional vein, Neagoe Basarab ends by urging his son to be grateful for all that he receives in life, both good and bad, even warning him as to the possibility that he may never come to rule: ‘Therefore I say, my son, rejoice you not overmuch in the glory of this world, nor be you overly sorrowful, but constantly give thanks to God for everything, even should you find yourself bereft of me. For you are not alone to have come to be bereft and sorrow-laden, but many sons of kings and rulers have been bereft, as is the habit and manner of this world, and many afflictions have befallen them and they have suffered in their kingdoms and reigns at the hand of evil and thankless men, while others never even came to succeed their fathers when they were left behind’ (*The Teachings* 2016, 183). Such awareness of potential political failure serves to heighten the sense of responsibility in the ruler’s son, while at the same time delimiting

and restricting his way of life, as he has a sacred mission both before his father and before God.

In the grave, the king is no different from the poor man

Speaking of life's end, Ruling Prince Neagoe Basarab points out that death is a debt all men are bound to pay, but, before that, they must lead a holy life, dedicated to God: 'Consider this, which is a great mystery, and see and ponder! When seeing kings, do not you be deceived, when seeing lords, do not you be amazed, for, once they have departed from this life and been interred, who then can tell who was the mighty king? Besides, death is something no one by any means can escape, but all shall tremble to face its cup. And thus, is he like any other man, fearing and trembling before it. He who was once strong and feared now walks the path like a condemned man; and he who yesterday made the doomed tremble is now completely extinguished, while all his wisdom and might perish' (*The Teachings* 2016, 94). 'Therefore, let us endeavour to bestow charity on all ahead of time before death catches up with us. And all of us, be we kings, rulers, boyars, and servants, come look into the graves and see what you become and tremble! And come you, too, who harbour grudge and strife against one another, behold and see how you are wasted and be reconciled. Peer ever so intently into the grave and see those who lie therein and distinguish which was the king and which are the bones of the ruler. Look upon the terrible and frightful sight and aspect of the bones and say then, of these, which belonged to the king and which to the ruler, or which were of the boyar, or which of the servant, or the rich, or the poor, or the old, or the young, or which was the Moor and which was the fair man? Are they not all dirt? Are they not all dust? Are they not all full of foul stench? Are we not now repulsed by the bones of those whom we once held dear?', 'Behold, as dust they have become, for the dust they were!' (*The Teachings* 2016, 95)

At the Judgment, the king will answer before God

Ruling Prince Neagoe Basarab's testament teachings are dedicated to his son, as well as to all those who would ascend to the throne eventually. Their universal application and prophetic projection ensure the perpetual validity of these sapiential judgments, increasing the sense of responsibility in those upon whom God bestowed the duty of leadership, as one can read in the following lines: 'Therefore shall kings and rulers with great fear and much trembling answer to Christ the Lord for the things

they did during the time of their reigns and dominions, for how they served Him’ (*The Teachings* 2016, 111).

The conclusion of the ruling prince’s teachings turns into an overt blessing upon the life of his son and upon the reign which the great voivode hopes that the former will carry out, for the glory of God. Invoking the divine presence in this testament, as a farewell to life uttered by the ruler and a way of entrusting his son to the divine Father, *The Teachings* attain their pedagogical and soteriological goal, which is that of serving the becoming of man in the Kingdom of Heaven, unto the ages of ages: ‘For now I have forsaken all my wealth and the glory of this world. And my reign vanished like smoke blown away by a swift wind and now my soul’s sole hope lies with the mercy of God and with you, God’s chosen and my beloved brother, whom may Christ the Lord teach to be charitable towards my soul and come to my aid with alms in this time of need for my soul. May our Lord Jesus Christ be merciful to you in this world and, in the next, may He make you worthy to be counted with the good and faithful rulers and kings. And may the seed of your reign grow here and may your soul blossom like the cedars of Lebanon and like the beautiful lily in the kingdom of heaven, unto the ages of ages’ (*The Teachings* 2016, 190).

Conclusions

Having studied the text of *The Teachings of Neagoe Basarab to His Son Theodosius*, the author of the present paper would like to highlight some personal observations, which may serve as a concluding summary of the above discussion.

First, the author finds it necessary that a ‘standard’ text of *The Teachings* should be edited. As for himself, the author has read the edition of *The Teachings of Neagoe Basarab to His Son Theodosius* prefaced by Nicolae Iorga, edited and annotated by Teodor Vârgolici, published by MondoRo, Bucharest, 2016, however, as specified in note 2 of this study, to preserve the originality and beauty of Old Romanian, the texts were cited after https://ro.wikisource.org/wiki/%C3%8Env%C4%83%C8%9B%C4%83turile_lui_Neagoe_Basarab_c%C4%83tre_fiul_s%C4%83u_Teodosie. Having many researchers using texts that are different in form as a reference renders the process of reviewing ideas more complicated and a unified critical approach to *The Teachings* impossible.

Upon researching the text of *The Teachings*, the author of the present paper set out to inventory the texts that refer to biblical sources. Due to textual lim-

itations, the study may be expanded on by subsequent research focused on the fundamental role of the Holy Scriptures in the drafting of *The Teachings*. Thus, identifying as accurately as possible the biblical texts that lay at the foundation of the sapiential statements in *The Teachings* would be of great benefit, as it would highlight the relationship between them and the text of the Holy Scriptures. Furthermore, specifying the biblical references, either within the text itself or in footnotes, would facilitate the dialogue between the Scriptures and Romanian culture/literature.

As previously pointed out, the message of *The Teachings* is not confined to the 16th century and its historical context but must be understood as impactful and valuable to this day and, hopefully, in the future as well. Therefore, it is necessary to retrieve, restore and rediscover the meanings of the political-religious message conveyed by Ruling Prince Neagoe Basarab, as a cultural treasure full of wisdom.

Even though the book is the expression of a political mandate, it has an obvious religious dimension, as its sociopolitical ideas are accompanied by theological and spiritual advice, which turn this royal testament into a pedagogical one, a father's loving legacy to his son. Therefore, it is necessary that *The Teachings* should be read through a spiritual lens and that their sapiential dimension should be highlighted, to outline the important basilic ethics of the Romanian rulers of the Middle Ages.

Ruling Prince Neagoe Basarab is a remarkable personality of the 16th century, who exhibits high spiritual qualities and an exceptional knowledge of the text of Holy Scriptures. Thus, his awareness of humility and obedience to God, born out of the historical experience of Davidic royalty, leads him towards a special responsibility, namely that of highlighting the presence of divine providence in his historical existence, as well as in that of the Romanian people. Furthermore, his frequent references to the revealed texts, the humble authority of the Holy Voivode Neagoe Basarab, and his obedience to Christ the Word, King and Lord, abolishes any understanding of the text along the lines of monarchical absolutism, while promoting and cherishing the dignity of the holy, faithful, pious, righteous man who bears testimony for God.

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