

Principles of Pedagogy and Virtues in Ancient Christian Education

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Abstract – Education was very important for the Greeks and Romans, especially in the Roman Empire. A man without education was not a benefit for the state, so the Authors from Antiquity were aware of the importance of Pedagogy in the process of Education. A young people from Antiquity sought a combination between physical exercises, intellectual formation and virtues. Christian authors from Antiquity encouraged their students to pick up all that was good from their Pedagogues for their future establishment. The unity and universality of Christian ethics are important; they help a man raised in the spirit of classical education to approach Christianity. A healthy and wise man was important for an Empire where Emperors encourage virtues and classical principles of Pedagogy to be respected.

Keywords – Ancient Education, Christian Writers, Pedagogy, Virtues

INTRODUCTION

Classical virtues were the basis for a solid Christian Education in Antiquity. These virtues were used to underline the principles of Pedagogy in Ancient Education. Important authors from Antiquity, as Clement from Rome, Ignatius from Antioch, Polycarpus of Smyrna, Origen and Clement from Alexandria wrote about the importance of Pedagogy and virtues in the process of Education. Ancient Pedagogy was not rejected in Christianity, but was Christianized. The supreme Pedagogue was Christ, who is referred as Logos, the Word of the Father. A solid education cannot be done without virtues, in order that a good education must be made upon a good foundation, who will endure in time. The aim of this article is to show how the classical principles of graeco-roman education were Christianised.

Classical pedagogy sought to form an ideal type of man, the citizen, as a rational scheme of ethics, supplemented by natural and moral gifts. From this combination should result a love of beauty, a harmoniously developed person spiritually speaking. The ancients sought harmony between physical constitution and form, nobility of spirit, health, wealth, power, and not at least balance. Pedagogy was reserved for free citizens, especially those with a certain level of intellectual training, and was prohibited for humble workers, slaves and barbarians¹. For the ancients, beauty can be seen in wisdom or in goodness, as a key to success to be perceived as a good man. For Aristotle, the conditions of happiness were friends, wealth, political influence,

nobility acquired by birth, beautiful children, beautiful spouse, a good name, etc.²). For Seneca, happiness consisted in having a beautiful and elegant house, a beautiful wife, estates, dinars to trade. Martialus considered as important the fortune acquired by birth, not by labor, rare visits, a healthy body, honesty, friendship, all of these bringing happiness³).

A good and a happy man was the ideal aspiration for ancient ethics and classical pedagogy, taking into consideration compliance with human laws of and observation of models in nature.

The ideal of happiness and good living was difficult to achieve in an ancient society torn by idolatry, egotism, social inequity, corruption, brutality, hedonism and immorality. In addition to these shortcomings, there was fatalism and the belief that destiny is implacable, and man has no power over his life. For ancient man, were important physical health, moral beauty, religious and civic virtues, military courage, political activity, trade, because they constituted the only ethical guidelines in an immoral and unjust world. Philosophy and pedagogy, which could lead to achieving these goals, however, were the appanage of narrow elite, of a privileged minority. With regard to the poor and the slaves, virtues had other values than for the rich, and their conception of happiness was different.

Unlike pagan religion, Christianity is moral in itself. Christian moral theology is far superior to the ancient philosophical ethics. In Christianity, man must follow God, to reach likeness with his Creator. Christ the Savior taught men about the kingdom of heaven and how one can get to heaven by the practice of virtues. Christ is considered the true Teacher, from a Christian point of view. Christian writers of the first centuries considered the Savior a model for presenting Christian pedagogical norms. After evangelical counsels, the Church Fathers sought to talk about practical life of Christians, advising Christians about good behavior in everyday life. Christians have to be reconciled with their own conscience and to behave well with the neighbor. Christian Pedagogy was born on the pages of the Gospel, having as a model the Sermon on the Mount of Blessing, held by Jesus Christ. The good behavior of a Christian, relationships with peers, behavior worthy of someone bearing the name of Christ, are just some of the fruits of Christian pedagogy. In time, the clergy became the best Christian teachers, especially those dealing with instruction of catechumens.

¹) Clement from Alexandria, (Clement Alexandrinul), *Stromate*, II, 21, *Patrologia Graeca* – P.G. 8, 1073.

²) Aristotel, *Ethica Nichomachica*, I, 8, col. Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy, trans. by R. Crisp, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 14.

³) Martialus, *Epigrame*, X, 47, in col. Loeb Classical Library, vol. 95: *Martial – Epigrams*, vol. II, Harvard University Press, 1993, p. 387.

Some Christian writers respected ancient pedagogy, referring to it, because many of the principles of classical pedagogy are also found in Christian pedagogy. Christians behaved differently, according to temperament, the time in which they lived and the Christian community in which they worked. Because of that, Christian authors addressed different categories of Christians. St. Clement of Rome writes as a Jew converted to Christianity, Tertullian is a harsh and stern teacher, a true ascetic, St. Justin the Martyr never leaves his vocation as a philosopher, the unknown author of *Teaching the 12 Apostles* is a moralist, etc. The author of the *Didache* exhibits from the start his conception of Christian life, presenting the readers with two roads: one road of life, in which Christian pedagogy plays an important role and a road of death, which leads to the perdition of our souls. Even if the author is quite brutal, because there is no alternative, he does not speak of a third way, the aim is the moral edification of the readers: “*There are two ways, one of life and one of death, but a great difference between the two ways. The way of life, then, is this: First, you shall love God who made you; second, love your neighbor as yourself, and do not do to another what you would not want done to you*”⁴).

Many Christians Writers suggest an ascetic model of Christian living, as they spoke more to simple, humble Christians, coming from lower social classes. From the Christian point of view, noble ancestry, race, physical beauty, political power and economic wealth were not important things, but they were important for a heathen teacher. For ordinary people, the Christian ideal was not very difficult to achieve. The simple life proposed by Christianity was a part of their daily lives, because they were excluded from the privileges of classical pedagogy.

Unlike an ascetic like Tertullian, who broke away from the Church because he believed that severity is more important than stewardship, Clement of Alexandria, author of a great book about pedagogy, tried to approach the non-Christians too. Within the Christian School of Alexandria, Clement addressed all, taking into account the simple people, the philosophers, the rhetoricians, young, elegant people from good families, luxurious ladies, the followers of Hellenism. They all listened with pleasure to the great Christian philosopher of Alexandria, being fascinated by the principles of Christian pedagogy. Just as wealthy pagan people once took lessons from pagan philosophers and teachers, so in the early centuries, wealthy Christians or wealthy people attracted by Christianity gladly listened to Christian philosophers. Within Christianity, anyone could become a good teacher, if they had a moral life and knew certain principles. Christianity addressed all, irrespective of race, age, social class or intellect, that is why Christian teachers had greater success than pagan teachers. Within the School of Alexandria, we see another phenomenon; the intellectual elites of the pagans come to listen to Christian

principles. The methods and principles of the Alexandria Didaskalion are similar to those of ancient philosophy, so it can be said that Greek education (*παιδεία*) was matched and surpassed by Christian education and pedagogy.

In the *Epistle to the Corinthians*, St. Clement of Rome envisages the salvation of believers in Corinth. Like a good teacher, Clement is aware of the importance of good living, the ultimate goal being to reach the kingdom of Christ: “*Let our whole body, then, be preserved in, Christ Jesus; and let everyone be subject to his neighbour, according to the special gift bestowed upon him. Let the strong not despise the weak, and let the weak show respect unto the strong. Let the rich man provide for the wants of the poor; and let the poor man bless God, because He hath given him one by whom his need may be supplied. Let the wise man display his wisdom, not by [mere] words, but through good deeds. Let the humble not bear testimony to himself, but leave witness to be borne to him by another*”⁵).

Clement of Alexandria seeks to be a teacher, to form his people, according to the image and likeness of God, through the use of reason, which approaches the Logos. Rationality is inherited from Greek philosophy, but it was Christianized, being in close relationship with the Savior, who is the divine Teacher. From these concepts Clement of Alexandria took inspiration for the composition of the first treatise of Christian pedagogy entitled *The Paedagogus*. This paper describes the human personality and inter-human relationships, from a social, religious and political point of view, according to a criterion of balance. Observance of the principles of Christian pedagogy brings health and vigor of body and soul. Clement is committed to a balance in all actions: “*But due proportion, which on all occasions we call as our helper in life, suffices for us*”⁶). The Christian men must suppress their evil passions, and to strive for new man, reborn in Christ, calling the severity, kindness, praise and scolding, but also love. Such education will be strong, creating healthy and happy people⁷).

Clement of Alexandria is committed to rules for each daily action, the soul having priority over the body. The unity and universality of Christian ethics are important; they help a man raised in the spirit of classical education to approach Christianity. Clement’s maxims, particularized for the moments of the day, are, along with advice for all cases a Christian can meet during the day, useful to acquire virtues, with the help of rational and natural ethics. If classical education sought to harmonize private life with public life, Christian moral instructions achieve a vaster harmony that includes privacy, civic life and life within the Church, for a person to behave the same in all aspects of daily life. Clement underlined the need for continuity of the deeds; a true Christian should behave the same in any event, be it family, society or the Church. In everyday life, the Christian should be the same as in Church, faithful, restrained, compassionate. A man consistent with himself

⁴) *Didache (The Teaching of the 12 Apostles)*, *Didachia (Învățătura celor 12 Apostoli)-Didache (The Teaching of the 12 Apostles)*, I, 1-2, în colecția *Părinți și Scriitori bisericești – P.S.B.*, vol. 1: *Scrierile Părinților apostolici*, trad. de D. Fecioru, Ed. I.B.M. al B.O.R., București, 1978, pag. 25. English version: *Apostolic Fathers*, ed. By Lightfoot, J. Barber, ed. Macmillan & Co., London, 1889.

⁵) Sfântul Clement Romanul, *Către Corinteni (Clement the Roman, Letter to Corinthians)*, XXXVIII, 1-2, P.S.B. 1, pag. 66.

⁶) Clement Alexandrinul (Clement from Alexandria), *Paedagogos*, III, 9, P.G. 8, 620.

⁷) *Ibidem*, I, 12, P.G. 8, 369.

should not sing obscene songs or deliver frivolous speeches, like pagans, when, shortly before, he prayed in church and sang to God. Clement argues that he who believes that life should be lived just like the pagans, that one is dead for. A Christian should live as if, wherever he is, the Church is with him. True pedagogy is in the Church: “*Now piety is instruction, being the learning of the service of God, and training in the knowledge of the truth, and right guidance which leads to heaven. Now the instruction which is of God is the right direction of truth to the contemplation of God, and the exhibition of holy deeds in everlasting perseverance.*”⁸⁾

According to Clement, the Logos of God is the Teacher of who forms all Christians, teaching them all they need for a good harmonious living. The virtues are necessary for a good spiritual instruction, and each is called to be perfect after receiving talent, respecting certain rules of life: “*the office of the Word, from whom we learn frugality and humility, and all that pertains to love of truth, love of man, and love of excellence. And so, in a word, being assimilated to God by a participation in moral excellence, we must not retrograde into carelessness and sloth. But labour, and faint not. You shall be what you do not hope, and canst not conjecture. And as there is one mode of training for philosophers, another for orators, and another for athletes and another of Christ; so is there a generous disposition, which gives a rule to all our deeds: family, rest, food, sleep, regime and the rest. This education of the Word is not exaggerated but sweet and harmonious*”⁹⁾. Clement managed to harmonize, in part, the ideal of classical education with the ideal of Christian education. He sympathetically contemplated life, giving advice for the most common things, tried to Christianize pedagogy, made a preparation for a new social life, in the sense of mercy and spiritual brotherhood. He spoke in eloquent terms about beauty, trying to spiritualize, supported the practice of virtue, for the health of soul and body. He Christianized the terms of ancient philosophy, talking about Logos. Clement spoke of individual and collective rights, trying to see goodness and beauty in everything, and then relating them all to Logos. In his writing, *Stromata*, he attempted to describe the type of perfect Christian, whom he calls *gnostic*, to distinguish him from the false Gnostics. A Christian Gnostic seeks balance in all, strenuously practices virtues, especially patience, mercy and love. Clement’s principles are largely the principles of sound Christian pedagogy.

The great difference between Christian virtues and Stoic virtues is the existence of the human will, the freedom to want to do good and the awareness of helping your neighbor. Unlike deterministic ancient philosophy that advised the practice of virtues for the good of only one person, Christian authors stressed the importance of communion in the practice of virtue. A practitioner of Stoic philosophy makes a heroic effort to reach inner freedom by virtue, but this effort comes from a pride, which prompts

him to get out of the platitude of daily life and close himself in an inner impassibility. The feelings that may arise from practicing Stoic virtues are not related to people around because the principle of love is missing. Love is the glue that binds virtues to one other and it makes the Christian to want them. So called “non-suffering” of the Stoics is egocentric, because it does not know compassion, being stylized only by intelligence. A virtuous Christian can be likened to a house that has a large opening to the four sides, symbolizing receptivity to pain of others and willingness to help. A virtuous stoic resembles a closed house, with few windows, which remains insensitive to the problems of others. Christian virtues are born out of humility, are based on working with God, while the Stoic virtues refuse God’s help, urging the man to rely on his own forces.

The Christian concept of virtues was opposite to the stoic one, just as divine wisdom is the opposite of human intelligence outside of Christianity. The two concepts differ especially morally. Christian virtue reveals to the man the meaning of sin, the idea of salvation, free will, helping him to become better and be closer to God. Christian virtue brings true freedom to the man. Christianity is a religion that brings man freedom, freeing him from the bondage of sin. Origen says that man, endowed with reason, is capable both of praise and punishment, depending on how he uses reason to do good or evil¹⁰⁾. Polemic on the meaning of virtue and salvation will continue between Christians and pagans until the fourth century. Christianity also came into conflict with heresies, because of the concept of free will and the virtues. Heresies, especially the Gnostic ones, tried, sometimes unconsciously, to contaminate Christian religion with pagan elements. Especially in the second and third centuries, Gnosticism supported fatalism, which meant an approach to the pagan concept of destiny. Acceptance of fatalistic enslaving had enormous moral and dogmatic consequences, which gave rise to new heresies. Gnosis followers claimed that salvation is man’s responsibility, interpreting wrongly some Biblical passages and not understanding Christology: “*It is not in our power to save ourselves*”¹¹⁾. Heretics divided people into three categories, distorting the Christian concept: *hylics*, who could not reach salvation; *Psychics*, who can be saved in certain cases; *Pneumatics*, who were saved, being predestined to salvation, for being God’s chosen people.

Against these serious mistakes of Gnostic heretics and against pagans, Christian authors talked about free will and human freedom, sensing that here is the key to understanding salvation and good deeds, here is the difference between the old religion and the new religion. Origen was a great defender of free will, against the pagan idea of fatalism¹²⁾. Virtues make us resemble God, they are born of a courageous struggle of the soul with sins. The most important thing that virtues bring to the soul is freedom, because man is not a slave to sin anymore. Clement of Alexandria speaks of freedom of man, adopted by God, because he came to His likeness through virtues:

⁸⁾ Clement Alexandrinul, *Paedagogos*, I, 7, P.G. 8, 313.

⁹⁾ Ibidem, I, 12, P.G. 8, 369.

¹⁰⁾ Origen, *Periarchon (On the Principles)*, I, 5, I, P.S.B. vol. 8: Origen – *Scrieri alese. Partea a treia*, trad. de T. Bodogae, ed. I.B.M. al B.O.R.,

București, 1982, p. 84. English version: Origen, *On First Principles*, trans G.W. Butterworth, Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973.

¹¹⁾ Ibidem, III, 6, P.S.B. 8, p. 252.

¹²⁾ Origen, *Epistola ad Romanos*, VI, 5, P.G. 14, 1290.

“But the nobility of truth, discovered in the native beauty which has its seat in the soul, judges the slave not by buying and selling, but by a servile disposition. And it is incumbent on us not to seem, but to be free, trained by God, adopted by God. Wherefore we must adopt a mode of standing and motion, and a step, and dress, and in a word, a mode of life, in all respects as worthy as possible of freemen.”¹³). Pedagogy of the Word, Who wants to guide us to salvation, consists in renewing the souls, in reaching perfection. The corruptible nature of man can be transformed into an incorruptible one to sin, reaching non-suffering. All this must be achieved by free will and with the help of virtues: “What is involuntary is not matter for judgment. But this is twofold, -- what is done in ignorance, and what is done through necessity and do not involve conviction”¹⁴).

The unknown author of the work *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, one of the oldest Christian writings, talks at length about virtues, considering that they are a true way of life. The advice that are given exhort Christians to a virtuous life, showing what a virtuous man should not do: “You shall not be double-minded nor double-tongued, for to be double-tongued is a snare of death. Your speech shall not be false, nor empty, but fulfilled by deed. You shall not be covetous, nor rapacious, nor a hypocrite, nor evil disposed, nor haughty. You shall not take evil counsel against your neighbor. You shall not hate any man; but some you shall reprove, and concerning some you shall pray, and some you shall love more than your own life.”¹⁵). The virtues mentioned in the *Didache* are honesty, peace, balance, mercy, good education, gentleness. The author’s words directly address the readers’ souls with great serenity, to persuade them to practice what they hear: “My child, remember night and day him who speaks the word of God to you, and honor him as you do the Lord. For wherever the lordly rule is uttered, there is the Lord. And seek out day by day the faces of the saints, in order that you may rest upon their words. Do not long for division, but rather bring those who contend to peace. Judge righteously, and do not respect persons in reproofing for transgressions. You shall not be undecided whether or not it shall be. Be not a stretcher forth of the hands to receive and a drawer of them back to give. If you have anything, through your hands you shall give ransom for your sins”¹⁶).

St. Clement of Rome writes to the Christians in Corinth, in a letter that he addresses them, about the virtues that should characterize a Christian, knowing that pride and envy led to the division of the Corinthians. Virtues are presented as divine gifts to humans, for their acquisition a spiritual battle is needed, at the end of which the Christians will reach the kingdom of God: “How blessed and wonderful, beloved, are the gifts of God! Life in immortality, splendour in righteousness, truth in perfect confidence, faith in assurance, self-control in holiness! And

all these fall under the cognizance of our understandings [now]; what then shall those things be which are prepared for such as wait for Him? The Creator and Father of all worlds, the Most Holy, alone knows their amount and their beauty. Let us therefore earnestly strive to be found in the number of those who wait for Him, in order that we may share in His promised gifts.”¹⁷). Following St. Paul, Clement speaks of the great virtue of love, his words being inspired by the beautiful hymn of love in the Pauline letter to the same community of Corinth. Talking about virtues, the bishop of Rome believes that the greatest virtue is love, in whose name all people beloved to God were received into the kingdom of heaven: “Let him who has love in Christ keep the commandments of Christ. Who can describe the [blessed] bond of the love of God? What man is able to tell the excellence of its beauty, as it ought to be told? The height to which love exalts is unspeakable. Love unites us to God. Love covers a multitude of sins. Love bears all things, is long-suffering in all things. There is nothing base, nothing arrogant in love. Love admits of no schisms: love gives rise to no seditions: love does all things in harmony. By love have all the elect of God been made perfect; without love nothing is well-pleasing to God. In love has the Lord taken us to Himself. On account of the Love he bore us, Jesus Christ our Lord gave His blood for us by the will of God; His flesh for our flesh, and His soul for our souls.”¹⁸).

The unknown author of the *Second Epistle to the Corinthians* reminds us about the importance of achieving virtues, reward for those who do good being divine peace. The promise of the gifts of God’s kingdom should be an incentive for clean living and good commission: “Wherefore, my brethren, let us do the will of the Father which called us, that we may live; and let us the rather pursue virtue, but forsake vice as the forerunner of our sins, and let us flee from ungodliness, lest evils overtake us. For if we be diligent in doing good, peace will pursue us. For this cause is a man unable to *attain happiness*, seeing that they call in the fears of men, preferring rather the enjoyment which is here than the promise which is to come. For they know not how great torment the enjoyment which is here bringeth, and what delight the promise which is to come bringeth. And if verily they were doing these things by themselves alone, it had been tolerable: but now they continue teaching evil to innocent souls, not knowing that they shall have their condemnation doubled, both themselves and their hearers.”¹⁹). Repentance is important because it brings deliverance of the soul from the bondage of sins. Abandoning evil lusts and pleasures brings God’s mercy. Among the most important virtues, the author of this epistle lists alms, fasting, prayer, and love is greater than all: “Therefore, brethren, since we have found no small opportunity for repentance, seeing that we have time, let us turn again unto God that called us, while we have still One that receiveth us. For if we bid farewell to these enjoyments

¹³) Clement Alexandrinul, *Paedagogos*, III, 11, P.G. 8, 632-633.

¹⁴) Idem, *Stromate*, II, 14, P.S.B. vol. 5: Clement Alexandrinul – Scrieri. Partea a doua, trad. de D. Fecioru, ed. I.B.M. al B.O.R., București, 1982, p. 145.

¹⁵) *Didache, Didahia (Învățătura celor 12 Apostoli)*, II, 3-7, P.S.B. 1., pag. 26.

¹⁶) *Ibiem*, IV, 1-6, pag. 27.

¹⁷) Sfântul Clement Romanul, *Letter to Corinthians, Către Corinteni*, XXXV, 1-4, P.S.B. 1., pag. 64.

¹⁸) *Ibidem*, XLIX, 1-6, pag. 71.

¹⁹) *Omilia Epistola a doua către Corinteni (Homily named The Second Epistle to Corinthians)*, X, 1-4, P.S.B. 1, pag. 98.

and conquer our soul in refusing to fulfill its evil lusts, we shall be partakers of the mercy of Jesus. But ye know that the day of judgment cometh even now as a burning oven, and the powers of the heavens shall melt, and all the earth as lead melting on the fire, and then shall appear the secret and open works of men. Almsgiving therefore is a good thing, even as repentance from sin. Fasting is better than prayer, but almsgiving better than both. And love covereth a multitude of sins, but prayer out of a good conscience delivereth from death. Blessed is every man that is found full of these. For almsgiving lifteth off the burden of sin.”²⁰).

The unknown author of the *Epistle of Pseudo-Barnabas* speaks of the Lord’s teachings, presenting them in an original way. He reminds us of the *hope of life*, about justice and love, considering them as a beginning of the virtues: “Well then, there are three ordinances of the Lord:

- the hope of life, which is the beginning and end of our faith;
- and righteousness, which is the beginning and end of judgment;
- love shown in gladness and exultation, the testimony of works of righteousness.”²¹).

In an effort to spiritual reformation, Christians must fulfill the statutes of the Lord, appealing to virtues such as faith, fear of God, patience, temperance, wisdom. All the virtues must be practiced out of love, which perfects the good deeds in righteousness: “Seeing then that the days are evil, and that the Active One himself has the authority, we ought to give heed to ourselves and to seek out the ordinances of the Lord. The aids of our faith then are fear and patience, and our allies are long-suffering and self-restraint. While these abide in a pure spirit in matters relating to the Lord, wisdom, understanding, science, knowledge rejoice with them.”²²). At the end of the letter, the author urges readers to practice the virtues, advising them to turn away from bad things. The advice given are intended staying away from sin and living a virtuous life, which is the way to the path of light, which is guarded by the light giving angels of God: “There are two ways of teaching and of power, the one of light and the other of darkness; and there is a great difference between the two ways. For on the one are stationed the light giving angels of God, on the other the angels of Satan. And the one is the Lord from all eternity and unto all eternity, whereas the other is Lord of the season of iniquity that now is. This then is the way of light, if anyone desiring to travel on the way to his appointed place would be zealous in his works. The knowledge then which is given to us whereby we may walk therein is as follows: Thou shalt love Him that made thee, thou shalt fear Him that created thee, thou shalt glorify Him that redeemed thee from death; thou shalt be simple in heart and rich in spirit; thou shalt not cleave to those who walk the way of death; thou shalt hate everything that is not pleasing to God; thou shalt hate all hypocrisy; thou shalt never for sake the commandments of the Lord. Thou shalt not exalt thyself, but shalt be lowly minded in all things.

Thou shalt not assume glory to thyself. Thou shalt not entertain a wicked design against thy neighbor; thou shalt not admit boldness into thy soul. Thou shalt not commit fornication, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not corrupt boys. The word of God shall not come forth from thee where any are unclean. Thou shalt not make a difference in a person to reprove him for a transgression. Thou shalt be meek, thou shalt be quiet, thou shalt be fearing the words which thou hast heard. Thou shalt not bear a grudge against thy brother”²³).

St. Ignatius of Antioch is distinguished by the delicacy of his style, in terms of his advice to the Christian communities in Asia Minor, which he wrote on his way to Rome. In his letter to the Christians in Ephesus, the bishop of Antioch also speaks a little about the virtues through which Christians must distinguish themselves from the pagans. Seeing the good and praiseworthy deeds of Christians, pagans will learn that the Christian spiritual life is a true example: “And pray without ceasing in behalf of other men. For there is in them hope of repentance that they may attain to God. See, then, that they be instructed by your works, if in no other way. Be meek in response to their wrath, humble in opposition to their boasting: to their blasphemies return your prayers; in contrast to their error, be steadfast in the faith; and for their cruelty, manifest your gentleness. While we take care not to imitate their conduct, let us be found their brethren in all true kindness; and let us seek to be followers of the Lord”²⁴). In the same epistle, Ignatius speaks of faith and love, stating that all other virtues flow from them. The purpose of a Christian who is virtuous is a beautiful moral life. Only that way Christians will be known as disciples of Christ, if their life resembles the teachings of the Apostles: “None of these things is hid from you, if you perfectly possess that faith and love towards Christ Jesus which are the beginning and the end of life. For the beginning is faith, and the end is love. Now these two, being inseparably connected together, are of God, while all other things which are requisite for a holy life follow after them. No man [truly] making a profession of faith sins; nor does he that possesses love hate any one. The tree is made manifest by its fruit; so those that profess themselves to be Christians shall be recognised by their conduct”²⁵).

In his letter to Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, St. Ignatius gives a lot of advice on leading the believers. At the end of the epistle, Ignatius speaks of how virtues can be acquired by co-work, by serving the neighbor, and not in solitude. Following St. Paul, the Bishop of Antioch compares virtues to the weapons of a soldier in the service of Christ: “Labour together with one another; strive in company together; run together; suffer together; sleep together; and awake together, as the stewards, and associates, and servants of God. Please Him under whom you fight, and from whom you receive your wages. Let none of you be found a deserter. Let your baptism endure as your arms; your faith as your helmet; your love as your spear;

²⁰) Ibidem, XVI, 1-4, pag. 101-102.

²¹) *Epistola lui Pseudo-Barnaba (The Epistle of Pseudo-Barnabas)*, I, 6, P.S.B. 1., pag. 114.

²²) Ibidem, II, 1-3, pag. 115.

²³) Ibidem, XVIII, XIX, 1-4, pag. 135.

²⁴) Sfântul Ignatie al Antiohiei, *Către Efeseni (Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to Ephesians)*, X, 1-3, P.S.B. 1., pag. 160-161.

²⁵) Ibidem, XIV, 1-2, pag. 162.

your patience as a complete panoply. Let your works be the charge assigned to you, that you may receive a worthy recompense. Be long-suffering, therefore, with one another, in meekness, as God is towards you.”²⁶⁾

St. Polycarp reminds Christians of Philippi of the Saviour’s evangelical counsels, urging them to practice virtue and depart from sin. Faith in Christ is to be followed by good deeds and living a clean, to please the Father: *“Now He that raised Him from the dead will raise us also; if we do His will and walk in His commandments and love the things which He loved, abstaining from all unrighteousness, covetousness, love of money, evil speaking, false witness; not rendering evil for evil or railing for railing or blow for blow or cursing for cursing; but remembering the words which the Lord spake, as He taught; Judge not that ye be not judged. Forgive, and it shall be forgiven to you. Have mercy that ye may receive mercy. With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again; and again Blessed are the poor and they that are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of God.”²⁷⁾*

Polycarp addresses all social categories, urging all Christians to be virtuous. In acquiring virtues, an important role occupies keeping the commandments of God, Who searches all the hidden thoughts of the heart: *“But the love of money is the beginning of all troubles. Knowing therefore that we brought nothing into the world neither can we carry anything out, let us arm ourselves with the armor of righteousness, and let us teach ourselves first to walk in the commandment of the Lord; and then our wives also, to walk in the faith that hath been given un to them and in love and purity, cherishing their own husbands in all truth and loving all men equally in all chastity, and to train their children in the training of the fear of God. Our widows must be sober-minded as touching the faith of the Lord, making intercession without ceasing for all men, abstaining from all calumny, evil speaking, false witness, love of money, and every evil thing, knowing that they are God’s altar, and that all sacrifices are carefully inspected, and nothing escapeth Him either of their thoughts or intents or any of the secret things of the heart.”²⁸⁾*

Man is not born virtuous, virtues are born throughout life, by doing good deeds, only if the will wants it. Virtue can be achieved by anyone who wants. Freewill plays an important role in committing good deeds: *“Him God helps, by honouring him with closer oversight.... he inspires those who have made choice of a good life with strength for the rest of their salvation... And as the physician ministers health to those who co-operate with him in order to health, so also God ministers eternal salvation to those who co-operate for the attainment of knowledge and good conduct”²⁹⁾*

Origen makes a connection between freedom and reason, saying that freedom is required by rationality. The great

Alexandrian theologian believes that reason is essential to obtain a true freedom: *“All rational souls have free will and volition”³⁰⁾*. Freedom is important to distinguish good from evil. According to Origen, reason precedes the action of a soul who has free will, then comes freedom, and finally, the will of man makes the distinction between good and evil. Pedagogical education of a man in this order, can make real models of moderation and of Christian living out of the roughest and most libertine citizens³¹⁾. Christian writers of the first centuries speak in the same terms about freedom, while heretics and pagans have a different conception of freedom. Christianity introduced the principle of moral responsibility, which has consequences into the true future and even into eternity, raises human dignity to its true value, he discovers the value of free will, educates it and strengthens its spirit, revealing the secret of immortality. Human existence, his spiritual growth, discipleship in the practice of virtue, discovery of freedom and good aging happen under the sign of moral religious norms.

Clement of Alexandria reveals common virtues of Christianity and pre-Christian ethics. He speaks of the following virtues, which he recommend to Christians: *“Courage, prudence, justice, strength, patience, discretion, moderation and, above all, piety”³²⁾*. Clement argues that these virtues call and condition each other, their practice depending on our will. Practicing virtues may interfere with some aspects of material existence, such as illness or poverty, which do not always lead to achieving virtue. Not all people know how to enjoy the good things that can be made from a disease, through patience. An illness endured with faith strengthens the soul, says Clement, though it weakens the body: *“Do not be afraid during threatening sickness of the companionship of old age, which is called by the years. Even disease will cease if we do the will of God with all your heart. Knowing this, strengthen your soul to the disease. Be brave, as a competitor in the stadium, to defeat fatigue by your force. Do not be depressed either by sorrow, or sickness, or other trouble around you”³³⁾*.

Clement talks about poverty, because it compels the soul to look after the necessary and forget the spiritual duties. A man who is overwhelmed by the cares of poverty will forget that his soul can reach the practice of virtues, the contemplation of God and abstaining from sins. Who does not give all his powers of soul in the service of God, to reach true virtues, will be more attracted to material life³⁴⁾. For the soul to remain free and unconstrained by anything, man must possess a minimum of things indispensable to everyday life, and a wise soul will know how to use them to achieve peace.

Clement sees no harm in doing business, but not for wealth or for the business itself, but to live a modest life and for the body to be cared for, because only then the soul will be quiet, if the body is nursed. A true Gnostic has made his soul a temple of the Holy Spirit: *“A Gnostic will fight all*

²⁶⁾ Sfântul Ignatie al Antiohiei, *Către Policarp (Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to Polycarpus)*, VI, 1-2, P.S.B. 1, pag. 189.

²⁷⁾ Sfântul Policarp al Smirnei, *Către Filipeni (Polycarpus of Smyrna, Letter to Philippians)*, II, 2-3, P.S.B. 1., pag. 209.

²⁸⁾ Ibidem, IV, 1-3, pag. 209-210.

²⁹⁾ Clement Alexandrinul, *Stromate*, VII, 7, P.S.B. 5, p. 498.

³⁰⁾ Origen, *Periarchon*, I, 5, P.S.B. 8, p. 84.

³¹⁾ Ibidem, III, 1, 35, P.S.B. 8, p. 212.

³²⁾ Clement Alexandrinul, *Stromate*, II, 18, P.S.B. 5, p. 153.

³³⁾ Ibidem, II, 14, P.S.B. 5, p. 145.

³⁴⁾ Ibidem, VII, 11, P.S.B. 5, p. 514.

fears, all dangers, is not afraid of death, but defies even poverty, disease and dishonor”³⁵). Our biggest enemies are our passions, arising from the absence of virtues and from neglecting sins. In Clement’s view, the passions are enemies of virtues, against which we must fight all the time, if we want to maintain freedom of the soul and to have peace and quiet³⁶). Whereas sin and passion enslave the soul, virtue gives it freedom, helping it to lead a struggle against all evils. Virtues helps to build beautiful and powerful characters, making the man a true athlete of Christ, in the stadium of battles for acquiring salvation³⁷).

CONCLUSION

Classical pedagogy sought for man ideal type of man, the citizen (Roman or Greek), as a rational scheme of ethics, supplemented by natural gifts and the moral. From this combination should result a love of beauty, a harmoniously developed person spiritually speaking. The ancients sought harmony between physical constitution and form, nobility of spirit, health, wealth, power, and not at least balance. Pedagogy was reserved for free citizens, especially those with a certain level of intellectual training, and was prohibited for humble workers, slaves and barbarians. For the ancients, beauty can be seen in wisdom or in goodness, as a key to success to be perceived as a good man. A good and a happy man was the ideal aspiration for ancient ethics and traditional pedagogy, having a regard to compliance with the laws of human nature and observation of the models.

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³⁵) Clement Alexandrinul, *Stromate*, IV, 5, P.S.B. 5, p. 247.

³⁶) Ibidem, II, 20, P.S.B. 5, p. 165.

³⁷) Ibidem, VII, 3, P.S.B. 5, p. 483.