

SYMBOLIC LANGUAGE IN THE WORKS OF SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

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<https://doi.org/10.47433/tv.xcviiiin9-12.29>

Abstract

Through this study we aim to highlight the importance of metaphor in theological discourse and how St. John Chrysostom knew how to turn this rhetorical strategy into an art of expressing the word in the Church. His theological work always starts from the revealed text of the Holy Scriptures, so that, anchored in the teaching of the Church expressed through prayer, he leads the reader towards the moral dimension of the homiletic message. The multitude of metaphors in the homiletic speeches of St. John Chrysostom reveal to us a special way of talking about God. These theological ideas are borrowed from the daily life activities of that period and reflects a special experience of the Christians of the first centuries, for which the theological symbols works as keys to understanding how God works in the history of our salvation.

Keywords: St. John Chrysostom, metaphor, symbolic language, hermeneutics, biblical rhetoric, religious discourse

1. Why do we need a metaphorical language in the theological discourse?

Professor Mircea Basarab states that metaphor is used at the allegorical level of understanding a text, and it has the role of expressing teachings, truths and spiritual realities¹. His explanation is however quite brief, as metaphor is not only a figure of speech used for the transmission of “truths” or “realities”, but it is the way in which new meanings of them are generated. The metaphor borrows meanings from everyday activities of society to project them into theological domain, harder to understand. It can create a meaning about an theological concept, in terms of

¹ Mircea Basarab, *Ermineutica Biblică*, Editura Episcopiei Ortodoxe Române, Oradea, 1997, pp. 32-33.