
THE PAIDEIA OF SAINT APOSTLE PAUL: THE RELIGIOUS FORMATION AND EDUCATION OF PAUL. REFLECTIONS, PERSPECTIVES AND ACTUALITY

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Abstract

The specialized theological literature on the religious education of the Saint Apostle Paul describes his intellectual and spiritual formation (paideia) from the perspective of the Jewish environment, Hellenistic culture and his religious experience. The present study aims to carry out a descriptive analysis from a biblical, chronological and systematic perspective, taking into account the specialized studies on the religious education and formation that St Apostle Paul acquired from a very young age, having as a paradigm the embodiment of legalism and the religious and moral ideal of his people. A total of 137 articles were evaluated and investigated exhaustively, thus interpreting the information and data that consider the biographical elements, the origin and cultural environment of his personal development, the religious education in the Pharisaic tradition, as well as the cultural influence from the Hellenistic environment of the one who would later become the "Apostle to the Gentiles". All these aspects have constituted and continue to constitute research directions of a certain topicality with a major impact on contemporary education and theology. His striking personality, the originality of Pauline theology, the educational and missionary principles promoted have an objective, dynamic and systemic character, these contributing decisively to the propagation of education in general and Christian teaching in particular.

Keywords: education; formation (paideia); religious formation; Jewish environment; Hellenistic culture; Saint Apostle Paul; educational principles; research directions

Introduction

By introspecting in the history of humanity, we will find that education in general, and religious education in particular, has had a determining role in the broad process of evolution and crystallization of an individual's character. Education and teaching represent an extremely sensitive and permeable field to

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various influences, such as: cultural, socio-economic and even political influences (Orțan, 2012, p. 9).

Religious education represents the systematic and intentional process of spiritual, moral and doctrinal formation of the person, achieved by transmitting the values, beliefs and practices of a religious tradition, with the aim of developing religious consciousness and integrating the individual into the life of a community. Religious education predominantly aims at the formation of character and of personality perfected in love and sacredness. This is the targeted ideal of religious education (Popa, 2017, p. 63).

Education in all its forms aims to develop the full potential of a person and their dynamic connection to the existing reality. This educational process involves paradigms, principles, benchmarks, methods, objectives, all of these aspects being conditioned by the educational ideal (Răducă, 2016, pp. 63-64).

Seen in this perspective, religious education is the process of transmitting and forming values, practices and moral norms with the aim of developing conscious and responsible relationships with the community within which the person is a part. This element is essential, in the context in which religious education gives the person a nuanced way of thinking, thus appreciating the diversity of perspectives and points of view on morality, cultivating dialogue, religious tolerance and intellectual humbleness.

What we note from these introductory aspects regarding religious education is that this type of education is not limited only to the accumulation of religious knowledge, but also includes methods of improvement and moral progress through the spiritual development of the person and through the cultivation of values such as love, responsibility and social solidarity in relation to the past and current stage of social-community life.

Contemporary society seeks directions, orientations and trends of development, but human nature is always the same, with its capacities and possibilities of perception. Most specialists in educational sciences have the firm conviction that education must be able to "create" the human being for an educated society (Marcu, 2012, p. 20). This action involves both the cognitive dimension, namely the acquisition of religious knowledge, and the formative dimension, a dimension that aims to cultivate spiritual experience, moral behavior and personal relationship with divinity, but also with peers.

Theological literature highlights several dimensions of religious education, starting with the cognitive, moral, spiritual and communal dimensions, its role being to form the spiritual identity of the person, to strengthen moral and social values and to integrate the person into the religious community. In other words, religious education is a broad process that combines intellectual, moral and spiritual formation, contributing to the integral development of the person and to the maintenance of religious tradition within the community.

In the following, I will try to present the most important landmarks of the formation (paideia) of religious and secular education of St Apostle Paul (the

name of St Apostle Paul before his conversion to Christianity was Saul - "the desired one") (Mircea, 1995, p. 378), starting from several precise learning objectives of St Paul by investigating some specialized studies.

The research methods used in this approach are specific to a topic of analysis, and the bibliographical sources used are based on the canonical books of the New Testament, direct and indirect sources, as well as apocryphal writings.

In order to highlight the historical, cultural and religious context of the life and religious formation of Saint Paul, we will also consider historical, literary and archaeological sources. The analysis of these direct and indirect sources will provide us with the opportunity to reconstruct in the most precise and accessible manner the religious and secular formation and education of Saint Paul the Apostle (Preda, 2010, pp. 31-32).

According to the prescriptions of the Torah, the first principles of Jewish religious education were established at home, in the family, under the care of the father and continued at the synagogue school. Here they learned to read, write, calculate and learn from the Law its practical side. The established and recommended program provided: at five years old, reading the Bible, at ten years old, studying the Mishnah, and at thirteen years old, observing the precepts. Here at the synagogue school, as in the family, the Bible was the starting point and the end of all knowledge (Tricot, 1927, p. 13). These educational guidelines planted the connection with the divine in Saul's (Paul's) soul from an early age, so that later he would let himself be conquered by it. Reading the sacred texts, as well as interpreting them, produced the first emotions and the first joys, and as he grew older, his spirit and heart became more and more attached to God. According to the Pharisaic regulations found in the Pirke Abbot of the Mishnah, the first fifteen years of Saul (Paul) must have been related to the education received in the parental home and the synagogue school (Stamatoiu, 2001, p. 38). According to the recommendations provided in the Talmud, at the age of fifteen every male child had to dedicate himself to the study of the Talmud (Tricot, 1927, p. 16) a vast and complex text, central to the Jewish tradition, composed of 42 volumes that included law, ethics, philosophy, traditions and history.

However, being born in the city of Tarsus in Cilicia (Acts 22:3), a cosmopolitan city famous for its renowned schools, Saul (Paul) could not ignore the secular education offered by the schools there, so he mastered both his native language, which was Aramaic, and Greek, speaking both with ease. In parallel, Saul (Paul) also mastered Latin, the official language of the Roman administration (Baslez, 1991, pp. 32-36).

As for secular education, it contained two levels of training: the first was based on writing, reading and music notation, and the second was based on the assimilation of knowledge in the fields of philosophy, rhetoric, grammar, dialectic and mathematics. Being a citizen of Tarsus, he acquired all of this from the most renowned schools in Tarsus (Schnabel, 2004, p. 473), the Greek language developing his thinking with Hellenistic notions, opinions and concepts specific to Greek education and culture.

The assimilation of the Greek language and culture will have a substantial contribution to Paul's propagation of new concepts and ideas, Greek tradition and philosophy being the most representative part of the Greek culture of that time that Paul took over (Jaeger, 2025, p. 24). Moreover, the perspective of Greco-Roman rhetoric, vocabulary and other literary genres resulting from the secular education acquired, will be highlighted in the development and embellishment of the epistolary style found in his later writings (Varga, 2019, p. 32). The methodological requirements of the ancient epistolary genre such as: metaphor (Longenecker, 1990, p. 156), hiatus, occurrences, rhythm (Callan, 2007, pp. 497-502), asyndeton, chiasm, ellipsis, pleonasm, proverbs, reduplication, synonymy, repetition, antithesis, personification, rhetorical question (Bullinger, 1898, p. 910-911), are the positive results of both religious and secular education acquired in the schools he attended. Troels Engberg-Pedersen argues that Paul's later thought has real parallels with Stoicism, not just in the use of a common language (Troels Engberg-Pedersen, 2000, pp. 77-81). The use of classical Greek rhetorical models (Witherington, 2009, pp. 118-122) such as deliberative and epideictic discourse (Mitchell's, 1993, pp. 119-124) demonstrates that Saul (Paul) was raised in a Hellenistic intellectual environment with formal and informal rhetorical training. All these aspects being the result of the education he acquired in the secular schools of Tarsus.

Attracted by Jerusalem, he leaves Tarsus and arrives at a young age in the holy and much desired city, the religious, political, economic and administrative center of the ancient Jewish kingdom. Here in Jerusalem he will complete his studies at a Jewish school with the intention of becoming a rabbi himself, that is, a teacher. At that time, the Jewish schools in the holy city were in full swing, the most famous Pharisaic schools being those of Hillel and Shammai. According to the information found in Saul's (Paul's) own biography, he describes himself as a "Pharisee according to the Law", which leads us to understand that once he arrived in Jerusalem, he would complete his studies in the academy of Gamaliel I (Acts 22:3), Hillel's grandson, where the Torah was the main text of the school curriculum (Becker, 1989, pp. 53-59). Here he would study in depth the prescriptions of the Law and the books of Neviim, which represented the fundamental landmarks and research directions of zealous young people eager to obtain the most complete education possible.

Being aware that education constitutes a complex social activity that is carried out continuously through a system of actions exercised in a conscious and organized manner, with the aim of developing and forming an integral, active and creative personality, in accordance with the requirements of the time, the educational methods used aimed at the formation of a systematic and continuous education.

As methods of study, rabbinical schools used research (midrash), then extracted doctrine (haggadah) and Jewish Law (halacha). This manner of study aimed at instilling educational principles based on faith, morality and doctrine.

Inseparable from these fundamental elements were notions related to the history of the chosen people.

The erudition that Saul (Paul) acquired at the school of the illustrious law teacher Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) will lead him to affirm with satisfaction that he is a “Pharisee according to the Law” and a member of the tribe of Benjamin, and his zeal for the traditions of his fathers was as evident as could be. Moreover, the Evangelist Luke in the book of Acts 8:3 describes Saul (Paul) as a learned young man from the Hellenistic synagogue in Jerusalem, particularly zealous and fervent defender of the Law and of God’s justice (Rossé, 2016, p. 316). This aspect is also clearly highlighted in the content of his epistles. In almost every epistle, Paul highlights the justice of God (Perrin & Hays, 2011, p. 167). The subtle dialectic, the ingenious and refined exegesis that characterized rabbinic teaching will constitute for the young disciple learning directions that he will focus on and which he will subsequently implement (Stamatoiu, 2001, pp. 42-43).

Following the skills of the Pharisees, but also those of his father, Saul (Paul) also learned manual labor by practicing the trade of tentmaking (Hock, 1980, p. 36-40), probably acquiring these skills from his father during his youth in Tarsus, and later deepening and practicing them during the activities carried out on his missionary journeys.

After completing his studies at the rabbinical school in Jerusalem, Saul (Paul) returned to Tarsus, his hometown, where, together with his father, he carried out the work of making tents in the family workshop.

Without intending to disregard work as a means of subsistence, however, given the erudition acquired in the schools he attended, Saul (Paul) was convinced that manual labor could not constitute the primary objective of his existence. Moreover, the prestige he achieved in the rabbinical school in Jerusalem would lead him to develop and deepen his study of the Torah and meditation.

We do not know under what circumstances he returned to Jerusalem, but Saint Luke, the author of the Acts of the Apostles, first presents him in a context of personal affirmation within Pharisaic Judaism, in order to then recount the miracle on the road to Damascus, a moment that would shake up the personal existence of the Holy Apostle Paul, namely, the call by God and the discovery of Jesus Christ (Preda, 2010, p. 47).

Theological literature interprets the event of the vision and at the same time of the conversion on the road to Damascus as a radical reorientation of his religious education by reinterpreting Scripture in the light of the teachings of Jesus Christ and the transition from Pharisaic zeal to the apostolic mission.

The education acquired at the most important schools of the time would profoundly influence his thinking and writings. His rabbinical education would become the foundation of Pauline theology. Theological argumentation based on Jewish Scripture, the use of Greek legal and rhetorical concepts will constitute

the foundation of the universality of his message. This symbiosis between Jewish tradition and Hellenistic culture explains the originality of Pauline theology.

Theological literature considers that the religious formation and education of St Apostle Paul was very complex. His elitist religious and intellectual education combined the rigorous Pharisaic education with Hellenistic Greco-Roman cultural influences. He integrated into the Judaism of the diaspora, but with Greek instruments (Barclay, 2015, pp. 214-242), so we can affirm that St Apostle Paul is a synthesis between the Jewish tradition and the Greco-Roman culture (Wright, 2013, pp. 78-84).

After the conversion experience, these elements were reinterpreted and became the basis of his later missionary theology. His missionary activity, as well as his writings, having a clear Christian content (Țepelea, 2017, p. 23), will become elements that will contribute decisively to the spread of Christianity among the nations that formed the Greco-Roman world.

In exploring the religious formation and education of St Apostle Paul, we conclude that the Hellenistic and rabbinical education he acquired in the schools he attended has led to the transformation of Saint Paul from a zealous Pharisee into a follower of Christ, emphasizing the value of Christ-centered faith over adherence to the Mosaic Law. We also highlighted the transition from personal achievements to a deep relationship with Christ as a distinctive sign of spiritual maturity (Ștefan, 2023, p. 18). This study offers reflections and perspectives on the religious formation and education of St Apostle Paul, the contrast between his previous and current life (Segal, 1990, p. 13), and as a topical element, their applicability in everyday life.

Objective

Through this study, we aimed to present and analyze quantitative and relevant studies from the specialized theological literature, the field of research targeting the education and religious formation of St Apostle Paul. The studies selected and subjected to quantitative analysis are from the last decades and are classified in several international databases: Ceeol, Erih Plus, Web of Science, Google Scholar. The research of the studies was carried out based on keywords from the above-mentioned international databases, and the quantitative studies were classified according to the scales used in the analysis of the precepts and educational benchmarks to which we referred. In order to avoid redundancy as well as surplus information, the conclusions of the research will be based on the studies considered relevant.

Method

Selection of quantitative studies

An extensive research for relevant scientific studies on the education and religious formation of Saint Paul the Apostle was conducted, using the available

tools of international databases: Ceeol, Erih Plus, Web of Science and Google Scholar. We searched these databases for quantitative studies published between 1980-2025. The keywords included in the literature search process were the following: education, religious formation, Jewish environment, Hellenistic culture, Saint Paul the Apostle, educational principles and research directions. An important stage of the qualitative analysis was the establishment of selection criteria for the inclusion and exclusion of studies identified in the literature. The articles were entered into Microsoft Excel, then sorted by title and author name, with duplicates being eliminated semi-automatically.

Study inclusion and exclusion criteria

The inclusion criteria were the following: cross-sectional and longitudinal studies that analyze the educational principles and religious formation of St Apostle Paul. The exclusion criteria for studies were the following: systematic reviews and qualitative and quantitative meta-analyses, as well as original articles with text published in the authors' native language, studies presented only in abstract, including the English abstract, studies from outside the EU, conference abstracts, as well as studies that rely on item analysis.

Working procedure

Initially, 137 articles were identified in the used databases and subjected to analysis, of which 31 were eliminated before screening (*see* Figure 1), 23 during the screening process, while the remaining 83 articles were reviewed. Following the review, a further 11 studies were excluded for technical reasons, such as poor data analysis and difficulty of reproduction. The remaining 72 articles were re-evaluated, and after re-evaluation, a further 14 were excluded, the remaining 58 studies were included in this analysis.

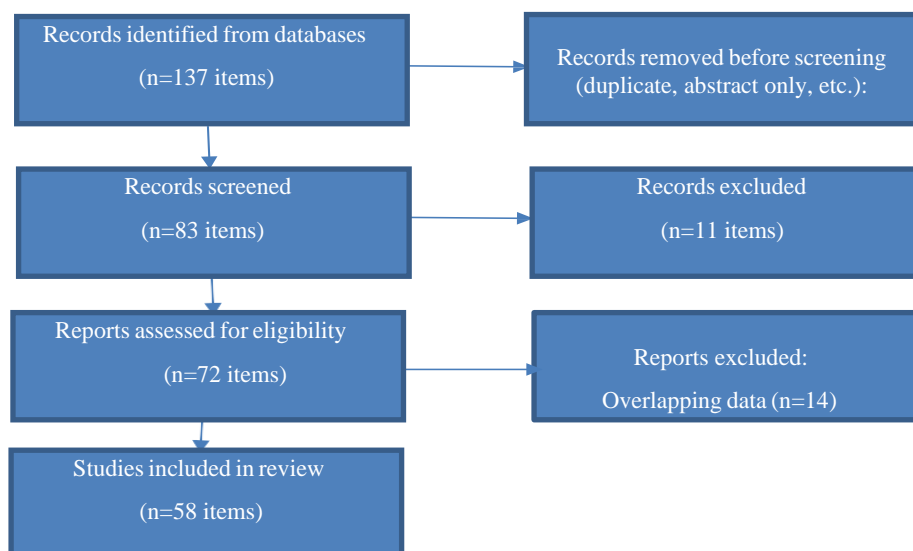


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram of the selection of articles

Results and discussions

The research results and the rigorous selection of studies have outlined two major areas of research: the first in the field of the secular education of St Apostle Paul, and the second in the field of the religious formation and education. In Table 1, we will present the relevant studies in the field of secular education, and in Table 2, we will present the most relevant studies regarding religious formation and education.

The research field of the secular education of Saint Paul

In the research carried out, we will consider the chronology of events, and for this reason the first study on which we will focus is that of Baslez (1991). This is because regarding the secular education of the Holy Apostle Paul, the aforementioned author refers to the fact that Saul (Paul) acquired the first elements of secular education by assimilating knowledge of the Aramaic language, otherwise his mother tongue, the common Greek language - κοινή, the official language of public life in the city of Tarsus, a cosmopolitan city, with Greek, Roman and oriental (Semitic) influences, and the Latin language as the language used in the administration (Mitchell's, 1993). Other research studies have provided similar information (Troels Engberg-Pedersen, 2000), Schnabel (2004) refers to the renowned schools in Tarsus where Saul (Paul) formed his thinking with Hellenistic notions, opinions and concepts, but Callan (2007) referred to the vocabulary, rhetorical elements specific to the ancient epistolary genre that Saul (Paul) acquired in his hometown. Precise and accessible information regarding the secular education of St Apostle Paul was also provided by Preda (2010). Varga (2019) highlights the fact that the beauty of the epistolary style used later in the Pauline epistles is the result of Hellenistic education and the methodological requirements that he assimilated in the schools he attended.

Another study relevant to the secular education of the one we are referring to is that of (Witherington, 2009) in which Saul (Paul) uses classical Greek rhetorical models, which denotes his formation in a Hellenistic intellectual environment.

Table 1. Studies relevant to the field of Saint Paul's secular education

| Authors | Educational support Measures | Method | Research areas |
|--|--|--|-----------------------------------|
| Baslez (1991) | Elements of the chronology of education in Greek antiquity | Greek rhetorical methods | Educational sciences in antiquity |
| Mitchell's (1993) | Greek and Latin languages as a support as an educational support | Acquisition of general educational skills and study support methods | Educational sciences in antiquity |
| Troels Engberg-Pedersen (2000) & Schnabel (2004) | Developing rigorous, efficient and responsible work strategies | Acquisition of Hellenistic educational notions, opinions and concepts as a study support | Educational Sciences |

Table 1. Studies relevant to the field of Saint Paul's secular education - *continued*

| Authors | Educational support Measures | Method | Research areas |
|---------------------|--|--|----------------------|
| Callan (2007) | Rhetorical elements specific to the ancient epistolary genre | Interpreting religious texts using rhetorical methods | Educational Sciences |
| Witherington (2009) | Deliberative and epideictic discourse | Elaborating an argumentative speech (verbal and written presentation) | Educational Sciences |
| Preda (2010) | Philosophy and rhetoric as educational support elements | Philosophical and applied methods in a didactic context | Educational Sciences |
| Varga (2019) | Rhetorical Figures: Hiatus and Trochaic Rhythm | Methods of transmitting didactic content and intercultural communication | Educational Sciences |
| Jaeger (2025) | Greek paideia | Classical Greek paideia | Educational Sciences |

The religious formation and education of Saint Paul

The analysis of studies published in specialized journals indicates a research orientation towards what the religious formation and education of St Apostle Paul looked like. Thus, from the beginning Becker (1989) refers to this aspect, specifying that the foundation for the religious formation and education of Saul (Paul) was prepared at the academy of Gamaliel I, where the text of the Torah constituted the basic element of the educational curriculum. Stamatoiu (2001) investigates the subtle dialectic, the ingenious and refined exegesis that characterized rabbinic education and which Saul (Paul) adopted. The characteristics of religious education are clearly highlighted in the structure and content of the teachings that reside in the contents of the Pauline epistles (Perrin & Hays, 2011). (Barclay, 2015), notes that Saul (Paul) integrated Greek elements into Diaspora Judaism, which led (Wright, 2013) to state that, based on his studies, Paul is a synthesis between the Jewish tradition and the Greco-Roman culture. However, appreciates Pauline fidelity to the idea of God's justice (Rossé, 2016). As a result of his research (Ştefan, 2023), highlighted the transition from personal achievements to a deep relationship with Christ as a distinctive sign of his spiritual maturity and as a result of the education he received.

Table 2. Relevant research studies on the religious formation and education of Saint Paul

| Authors | Educational support Measures | Method | Research areas |
|---------------|---|--|---------------------|
| Becker (1989) | Fundamental elements of religious school curriculum | Study methods based on the principles of religious education | Religious education |

Table 2. Relevant research studies on the religious formation and education of Saint Paul - *continued*

| Authors | Educational support Measures | Method | Research areas |
|----------------------|--|---|---------------------|
| Segal (1990) | Narration, as "the essential and archetypal form of the epic" | Didactic communication as a "particular form of educational and pedagogical communication", specific to an act of systematic, assisted learning | Religious education |
| Stamatoiu (2001) | Scientific methods of researching religious education | Dialectics and Methodics - Principles of Religious Education | Religious education |
| Perrin & Hays (2011) | Characteristics of religious education | Expository methods of religious education | Religious education |
| Wright (2013) | Elements of Pauline religious education - synthesis between Jewish tradition and Greco-Roman culture | Direct observation - method of knowledge of religious education | Religious education |
| Barclay (2015) | Integration of Greek elements into Diaspora Judaism | Ability to communicate. Heuristic conversation. | Religious education |
| Rossé (2016) | Expunerea conceptelor religioase | Methods of knowing religious realities | Religious education |
| Ștefan (2023) | Religious values transposed into personal example | Personal example as a pedagogical method | Religious education |

Religious education: reflections, perspectives and actuality

Reflecting on the theme that we proposed for the approach, we can affirm that education is one of the most beautiful concerns that is inalienably linked to the human being. The perspective on education is seen and at the same time present as a red thread in the history of mankind; it cannot be separated from man. Religious education and formation (*paideia*) have been and will remain relevant, this is because where man is present, education must also be present.

In general, education is a necessity for the human being, it is administered from the stages of childhood (Cioară, 2011, p. 187) and has as its primary purpose the development of the intellect, spiritual ennoblement, and finally its perfection.

One of the fundamental directions of education in general is religious education. It is important and topical from a moral, cultural, social-psychological and pedagogical perspective, because it influences all the other components of education from an intellectual, affective and behavioral perspective, being in close interdependence. The vast majority of educators in their education systems give religious education an important role, considering it the classic element of

moral character formation and spiritual perfection of the individual and society (Felea, 1994, p. 246).

J. A. Comenius, in his famous work, "Didactica Magna", states that the ideal of education is to prepare the soul for eternal life, and religious education is the means by which we achieve the perfection of society and eternal happiness in communion with God and our fellow men (Opriș, 2012, pp. 277-279; Popa, 2017, p. 65).

Considering the interdependence between education as a fundamental social phenomenon of transmitting life experience and culture to future generations, and religious education as a systematic process of transmitting moral values, I considered it timely to present some fundamental aspects of what the formation (paideia) and religious education of St Apostle Paul meant.

The education that Paul acquired constitutes a paradigm and a benchmark of symbiosis between two vast intellectual cultures, dominated by Jewish theological rigor and the Hellenistic cultural horizon.

Conclusions

From the above, there are several conclusions that highlight the formative valences of the Jewish and Hellenistic paideia of St Apostle Paul.

Paul's education was distinguished by its complexity and diversity, harmoniously combining the Jewish tradition with the influences of Greco-Roman culture. We could say without fear of making a mistake that his educational formation is a unique cultural synthesis, an aspect that will offer him the opportunity to interact with people from various cultures.

The duality of education, respectively, the ability to communicate, the techniques of Greek rhetoric and logic, the familiarity with the Hellenistic world acquired at the famous schools of Tarsus, combined with the discipline and argumentative rigor of rabbinic education, provided him with a thorough knowledge of the Law, as well as an effective transmission of the Christian message in an accessible and convincing way for the Gentiles.

Therefore, his education was not just a stage of intellectual formation, but the foundation that underpinned his transformation from a fervent defender of the Jewish tradition into one of the most important missionaries, opinion formers, and theologians of early Christianity.

In essence, his education was not limited to theory, but was one of action. The vocation transposed through education demonstrates that grace does not cancel intellectual preparation, but perpetuates it. His educational experience, both secular and religious, became instruments of social inclusion, an ideal bridge of diversity between cultures and educational paradigms of a certain topicality, to which we can relate, thus adapting the educational and religious message to current contexts and different cultures.

Ethics statement

This study was carried out in accordance with the recommendations of Code of Ethics of University of Oradea.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author contributions

The author has made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and has approved it for publication.

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