

UNIVERSITATEA BABEȘ-BOLYAI, CLUJ-NAPOCA
FACULTATEA DE TEOLOGIE ORTODOXĂ
ȘCOALA DOCTORALĂ „ISIDOR TODORAN”

***The use of Holy Scripture in sermons in the Romanian
Orthodox Church between 1990 and 2020.***

Summary

Instructor: Pr. Prof. Dr. Vasile GORDON

Doctorand: pr. Anton SAVELOVICI

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Introduction

Purpose of the work.

The choice of the topic of the present study is the result of an intellectual effort of more than two decades, on the Holy Scripture and the service of the Church, as an assistant and university lecturer, at the speciality of Homiletics and Catechetics of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology and Educational Sciences of the Valahia University of Targoviste.

For several decades, in the field of Romanian theological research, the need to focus the homiletic act on the text of the Holy Scripture has been pointed out.

The present study proposes a balanced use of the Holy Scripture in the sermon, a pastoral biblicalization of the sermon. Scripture is the first source of preaching and for any authentic homiletic approach a good knowledge of its content is imperative.

Research methodology.

I have proposed to carry out an analytical and comparative, inter-disciplinary, homiletico-biblical research, anchored in the contemporary world, strictly limited to the period of the last three decades, 1990-2020.

From 1990 to the present, for the ministers of the Church, freedom of expression and technology have created the premises for the exploitation of homiletical potential through electronic recording and the publishing of sermon volumes. The lack of a censorship and validation grid for the 'liberalised homiletic market' has also facilitated the production of a huge volume of 'preachy macula'.

From a homiletical point of view, there are edited (printed/electronically posted) or recorded (audio/video) sermons that make good use of Holy Scripture, but there are also sermons that quote the biblical text inappropriately, excessively, with no connection to the context, or not at all.

Research status.

In connection with the topic I researched, *The use of Holy Scripture in sermons in the Romanian Orthodox Church between 1990 and 2020*, two PhD theses were defended in Bucharest: 1. *The homily as a genre of preaching*. (Paraschiv Constantin, in 2008, under the supervision of Father Professor Nicolae Necula); 2. *Biblical exegesis and hermeneutics in support of Orthodox preaching* (Fr. Popa Ionuț, in 2013, under the supervision of Fr. Professor Vasile Gordon).

The research of sermons, from the perspective of the weight of the use of Holy Scripture, requires, *ab initio*, results that will not satisfy a certain category of preachers, because their oratorical style does not consider a focus on the Holy Scripture, on the person and activity of our Lord Jesus Christ. From this homiletical perspective, many sermons are null and void. Some can be considered religious stories with a claim to spiritual value. Unfortunately, some pulpit addresses, when they are about the sermons of saints (panegyrics), are in fact history lessons, biographies repeated annually, with wooden language.

Note that religious expositions of history can be made, with much oratorical success, by people who are not living members of the Church, or even non-believers. The laziness or spiritual and intellectual poverty of some ministers to offer a living word, with a perspective towards eternal life, but well anchored in the concrete reality of the audience, is a great spiritual damage to the community where these ministers work.

In the work of preaching the Gospel, it is not the scrupulous and one-sided assimilation of secular oratorical methods that will bring missionary success to the Church, but, first and foremost, a re-establishment of theological schools on the foundations of spiritual formation, on which scholastic oratorical training can be "grafted". St John Chrysostom, before he perfected the art of oratory, was a practicing Christian.

Delimitation of research.

The proposed thesis has chronological limits, between 1990-2020, and of an objective nature, conditioned by the impossibility of analysing all the sermons delivered by each author researched.

It should be noted that many of the clerics of the Holy Church, ordained to various levels of ministry, or with various teaching or administrative responsibilities, did not intend to record or publish in volume the sermons delivered at the pulpit or in various circumstances, which is why this segment of homiletical research cannot be covered. Many of them have delivered sermons of real spiritual value. They have not been recorded. Thanks to modern technology there are video or audio recordings of amateur devout Christians. And even so most sermons have not been preserved. Only those present at the time of the sermon benefited from them. The mere testimony of believers about the beauty of some sermons bears the stamp of subjectivity and suffers great depreciation with the passage of time.

I. Two preachers of reference for the Church: John CHRYSOSTOM and Gregory PALAMA.

For the subject of my thesis, I set out to use a criterion of reference, easily accepted by contemporaries, and I considered it necessary to investigate how two saints used Holy Scripture in the composition of homilies, namely: John Chrysostom and Gregory Palamas.

I chose saint John Chrysostom because he is the preacher par excellence, unanimously recognized and accepted as such even by a good number of heterodox.

Saint Gregory Palamas is the second choice of reference for research, because he played a decisive role in the life of the Church and a collection of homilies has been preserved from him, which I consider to be representative and up-to-date.

From the analysis of the homilies of saints John Chrysostom and Gregory Palamas it can be concluded that the use of biblical references was common practice in the 4th and 14th centuries.

The hierarchs John Chrysostom and Gregory Palamas used the Holy Scripture as the main source for their homilies. Their homilies are biblical in character, with evenly distributed biblical references.

Both are great connoisseurs of Holy Scripture. They made frequent associations between the verses of the two Testaments.

The two saints frequently emphasized that one cannot know the glory of God by the way of reason or syllogisms but only by authentic life in and with Jesus Christ.

For the two saints, the intellectualist interpretation of Holy Scripture is unthinkable. The two saints make a clear distinction between speaking about God and speaking with God. The homilies of the two saints are inspired by the Holy Spirit. In both saints asceticism and knowledge of Holy Scripture were harmoniously combined. For the two saints, Holy Scripture cannot be investigated by means of profane science.

Many of the homilies of the two hierarchs are exegetical par excellence.

The two saints interpreted the verses of Holy Scripture to address concrete problems of their contemporary pastoral ministry. They did not get caught in the trap of anhistorical exegesis, irrelevant to the audience.

In addition to the isorical-literal meaning of some biblical passages, the two homilets also highlighted the spiritual interpretation of the Holy Scripture.

In the act of homiletics, in order to achieve spiritual shepherding, the two saints had in mind the discovery of the truths of faith.

II. Preachers of God's word from 1990 to 2020 and the books of sermons analyzed:

1) Ioanichie BĂLAN: *Predici la Postul Mare + Predici la praznice împărătești*; 2) Ioan CHIRILĂ: *Scara Cuvântului. Eseuri omiletice. + Ipostazieri ale Cuvântului. Eseuri omiletice*; 3) Daniel CIOBOTEA: *Evanghelia slavei lui Hristos. Predici la Duminicile de peste an*; 4) Petru I. DAVID: *Caută și vei afla*; 5) Constantin GALERIU: *Tâlcuiri la mari praznice de peste an. 22 de modele omiletice + 10 predici de părintele Galeriu la 10 ani de la mutarea sa la cer + Părintele Galeriu. Cuvinte de învățătură*; 6) Vasile GORDON: *Mergând, învățați... Predici pentru toate duminicile și sărbătorile de peste an. Cu un adaos de 10 cuvântări ocazionale*; 7) Cleopa ILIE: *Predici la duminicile de peste an + Predici la praznice împărătești și la sfinți de peste an*; 8) Vasile MIHOC: *Lumina Evangheliei. Exegeze la Evangheliile duminicale*; 9) Mircea PĂCURARIU: *Predici la duminicile de peste an*; 10) Teofil PĂRĂIAN: *Credința lucrătoare prin iubire – Predici la Duminicile de peste an + Sărbători Fericite! Predici la praznice și sărbători*; 11) Stelian TOFANĂ: *Evanghelia lui Iisus. Misiunea cuvântului*.

Motivation for name selection. Why these names and not others.

The main criterion we took into account when we chose the eleven authors for the research was their importance for the life of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

I also took into account that, under the signature of the selected authors, volumes of sermons should be published as recently as possible.

On a secondary level, any author I would have added to the homiletical analysis would have exceeded the recommended limit of 250 pages, as stipulated in the *Guidelines for the preparation, writing and submission of doctoral dissertations*.

In the textbook of *Homiletics* for Orthodox theology faculties, for the period 1989-2014, the following authors are mentioned as important in the field of homiletics: Teoctist Arăpașu, Antonie Plămădeală, Bartolomeu Anania and Sofian Boghiu.

His Beatitude Patriarch Teoctist Arăpașu has published many volumes of sermons. The timeliness of the homiletic style of His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel Ciobotea prevailed in the choice of the author analysed in this thesis.

The first editions of the well-known volumes of sermons by Metropolitan Antonie Plămădeală: *Tâlcuri noi la texte vechi* and *Cuvinte la zile mari* were printed in 1989. The fact that they are not of recent date was a reason for evasion.

Under the signature of Metropolitan Bartholomew Ananias, the volume *Cuvinte de învățătură* (2009) was printed, containing 11 sermons and 3 pastoral letters. For a pertinent analysis, the small number of sermons printed is an impediment. Several sermons are edited electronically.

Only one volume of sermons was printed under the signature of Archimandrite Sofian Boghiu, which does not fully reflect his homiletic style.

The reasons for selecting the 11 authors for homiletical analysis are associated with each of them as follows:

- Father Archimandrite Ilie Cleopa is well known for his preaching activity and its missionary fruits. He is included in the list of those to be canonized in 2025;

- Fr. Professor Peter I. David is well known as an outstanding missiologist and missionary, with a rich homiletic activity;

- His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel Ciobotea has the quality of expressing himself concisely, systematically and topically. From the homiletical point of view, he is a model for many ministers;

- Father Archimandrite Teofil Părăian was a much appreciated itinerant preacher in Romania and especially in Transylvania. Several books of sermons and conferences were printed under his signature;

- Father Professor Mircea Păcurariu. In addition to his training as a historian, he also distinguished himself in homiletics;

- Father Professor Vasile Mihoc's volumes of exegetical sermons are appreciated for their textual analysis, which highlights interesting interpretative nuances;

- Father Professor Constantin Galeriu is an itinerant preacher who has travelled beyond the borders of Romania. He was much appreciated among intellectuals;

- Father Professor Vasile Gordon. A specialist, a professor of homiletics, could not be missing from the list of those included. His Holiness has printed volumes of sermons, which contain models for all homiletic genres;

- Father Archimandrite Ioanichie Bălan had a rich homiletical and publishing activity. He is not of the stature of Father Ilie Cleopa, but for a significant period of time he was a voice heard by a certain segment of the population;

- Father Professor Stelian Tofană, as a non-testamentary specialist, has a particular innovative homiletic style, which can be a model of inspiration for other preachers;

- Father Professor Ioan Chirilă. In most of his homiletical essays he has highlighted and valorized the connection between the Apostle and the Gospel of the day. He is the author who also referred to the parables.

Structure of the presentation

For each author, the presentation pattern had the following structure:

- general presentation (biography and homiletical work);
- selective homiletical-biblical analysis of each volume;
- framing of the biblical text.

For the homiletical analysis of the selected authors I tried to find answers to the following questions:

- does the sermon have the Gospel and the Apostle of the day as its support?
- the Old Testament is quoted, but what about the parallel non-testamental biblical texts?
- for eulogies, how and to what extent is the Minerva used?
- how are sermons on major feasts, but on feasts, are they historical-biographical lessons?
- is there a concordance between the Gospel/feast and any practical application for the audience?
- what is the weight of the Bible verses quoted and are they significant?

I have not researched whether each author has been consistent in their use and indication of Bible editions. From the point of view of scholarly accuracy, each author should use only one Bible version to mention, and when, for reasons of exegesis, say, he quotes from another edition of Holy Scripture it would be natural to mention this.

For the accuracy of the analysis I have gone through the texts of the sermons several times.

Some sermon writers have used biblical verses in a balanced and rigorous way. Balanced, because they did not "drown" the sermon with quotations or biblical paraphrases, but evenly distributed and well "articulated" in context. Some authors overused biblical references, in a totally inappropriate way, sometimes without any connection to the paragraph in question.

III. The optimal use of Scripture in preaching for three homiletical genres:

(1) Thematic Homilies: 1. 11th Sunday after Pentecost (Parable of the Unmerciful Debtor): *The Power and Value of Forgiveness*; 2. 2nd Sunday after Pentecost (Sunday of the Roman Saints. Call of the First Apostles): *Man's response to God's call*; 3. 8th Sunday after Pentecost (The

Multiplication of the Loaves): *Christian Unity*; 4. Sunday before the Ascension of the Holy Cross: *What it means to take up one's cross*; 5. 5th Sunday after Pentecost (Healing of the two demoniacs in the land of Gadara): *Do we welcome Jesus Christ into our hearts or do we cast Him out?*;

(2) Panegyrics: 1. Ascension of the Lord; 2. The Assumption of the Mother of God; 3. Saint Paraskeva of Iași;

(3) Pareneze: 1. Baptism of a baby; 2. Marriage; 3. Funeral of Mrs. Professor Popa Lavinia.

Conclusions:

Unpublished aspects of the thesis.

The novelty of the thesis consists in the critical analysis of the weight of biblical references, quotations and paraphrases, in the written Romanian sermons, in the period 1990-2020. Of course, such an investigation cannot claim to be exhaustive because the sermons spoken may be slightly different from those written. Also, in the life of any homily there can be an evolution, a change in oratorical style.

A unique element of this study is the possibility of quickly visualizing, in tables, how each homilett used biblical references in each sermon. Thus, one can easily conclude how each homilett related to the Holy Scripture, and the interpretation of the data collected in the table is eloquent, easy and interesting.

Compared to most doctoral theses, a distinctive note of the present research is the smaller number of works and articles cited, especially in the second chapter, which is a novel attempt, in Romanian Orthodox theology. As any pioneering work implies a lack of resources, this work is no exception to the rule. Not to justify the lack of a rich bibliography, but it should be mentioned that the present research, proposed as a doctoral thesis, is an analysis carried out with activity, on a "niche study", which cannot be reinterpreted. Or, in other words, the research results do not need to be argued/confirmed by other analyses.

Main research results.

In the present volume, an analysis of the weight of Holy Scripture in the written sermons of thirteen authors has been presented, two of reference for contemporary homiletics, the holy hierarchs John Chrysostom and Gregory Palamas and 11 authors with sermons published in Romanian.

Some preachers of God's word, in the content of their sermons, have used biblical verses in a balanced and rigorous way. Balanced, because they did not "drown" the sermon with quotations or biblical paraphrases, but evenly distributed and well "articulated" in context. Other authors overused biblical references, in a totally inappropriate way, sometimes without any connection to the paragraph in question.

Some authors of sermon books have probably not had the time to check their texts thoroughly before publication and therefore, in terms of accuracy of quotations and biblical references, they are sometimes deficient.

The authors who have published volumes of rigorously systematised sermons have taken the following editorial principles into account: length and brevity of the sermon, division into sub-chapters, uniformly distributed biblical references in connection with the proposed theme.

Few authors have considered liturgical days with two evangelical pericopes at Mass. In order not to lengthen the content of the sermon, some have limited themselves to simply mentioning the existence of the two Gospels.

Some preachers re-told the Gospel in their own words and inserted a Bible verse. If the sermon is given after the reading of the Gospel, as it is recorded in the Liturgy, and this is the optimal time, what is the point of retelling the Gospel?

Among those who have taken the liturgical texts into account for their sermons, it can be noted that, where appropriate, only one author has used the content of the Parables. Others did not neglect the liturgical texts and used them to embellish the sermon.

Some have emphasized and capitalized on the "added information" they gained from the parallel biblical texts of the Synoptics. Others argued with texts from Christian and secular, modern and or ancient bibliography. Some focused only on patristic literature.

Out of eleven authors analysed, one author, in a few sermons, emphasised and valued the connection between the Apostle and the Gospel of the day. Another author, in most sermons, highlighted and homiletically valorised the connections between the Apostle and the Gospel of the day, from the texts of which he paraphrased extensively.

Nine authors have neglected to quote or paraphrase from the Sunday/day Apostle. In a few sermons verses from the Apostle's text were "homiletical material". The most frequently quoted or paraphrased text from the Apostle is the one associated with the Feast of the Holy Spirit's Coming

(FA 2:1-11), which even relates the feast itself. Not all sermon writers referred to the text in question.

With regard to the feasts of the kingdom, not all sermons have quotations or paraphrases from the Gospel of the day. The sermons with the most biblical references from the Gospel of the day are those dedicated to the Lord's entry into Jerusalem. Then, in descending order, the ranking is as follows: the Transfiguration, the Baptism of Jesus Christ at the Jordan, the Nativity, the Annunciation, the Ascension, Pentecost. For the same feast, some authors have published several sermons. While the first sermon contains biblical references from the Gospel of the day, the others do not.

On the feast of the Resurrection, one author composed a well-structured exegetical sermon with 8 quotations from the Gospel of the day (Acts 1:1-17), with translation variants and etymologies, but no reference to the Resurrection. Why is this Gospel pericope read on the feast of the Holy Resurrection? What is the connection with the Resurrection? Of the 11 Romanian authors of sermons analysed, none of them addressed this issue.

On the feast of the Virgin Mary, most of the panegyrics do not contain biblical verses from the texts associated with the feast (Gospel, Apostle, Parables). On the feast of the Entrance of the Virgin Mary into the Church, the sermons contain information taken and processed from the apocryphal text of the Protoevangelium of James, and the liturgical texts, which have a particular beauty and convey the teaching of faith, are not sufficiently exploited.

More than 90% of the panegyrics dedicated to saints do not contain quotations from the Gospel or the Apostle of the Day, but only sermons with biographical value.

As a working method, the preachers of God's word have written and published their books of sermons in the following order of preference: Sundays of the year (Chiriadromion), special Sundays, panegyrics, parables.

There are few authors who have centred their sermons on the Gospel of the day. Fewer still made reference to the Apostle of the Day, or to parallel texts, if any. Some, even with resonance in the life of the Church, have failed in "history lessons" that even non-believers can put together. The duty of the living preacher is to convey words of spiritual power that awaken the souls of listeners to the reality of eternal life.

Difficulties encountered in research.

The tabulation of biblical references required considerable intellectual effort and a lot of time for textual analysis. Theoretically, I would have liked to have researched at least 3-4 times as many books of sermons, but the actual study showed me how painstaking and arduous this is. As this is a scientific work, which is likely to be subject to relevant critical observations, in some cases I even analysed a text 2-3 times. Self-censorship slowed down the process of writing the final text.

Not to be neglected is the responsibility of those who published, because their texts were sources of inspiration for those less versed in the composition of sermons, lazy or constrained by lack of time for preparation. Incidentally, sermon preparation takes a long time. An important factor is the education received in the family, then the knowledge acquired during schooling. Individual study also plays an important role. And a final stage, prior to the preparation of the sermon, is the research of the biblical and liturgical texts at least a few days before the sermon in the presence of the faithful.

Perspectives on the research results.

Analysis of the way Scripture has been used in sermons after 1990 gives us an insight into the tendency of preachers. One can extrapolate what would happen in the next decade. The present research helps to understand how preaching was done immediately after the collapse of the totalitarian communist system. It is true that there is no more realistic way to "measure" how the volumes of sermons were received. The circulation or reprinting of some volumes of sermons is not necessarily an indicator of their value.

For the period 1990-2020, the definitive spiritual evaluation of all sermons will only be known at the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The present study, volens-nolens, has a subjective character, which does not mean that it is the best or definitive and unreviewable. Of course there can be contrary, well-argued opinions, but the question is what are we referring to when we give an opinion? What is the criterion of reference, one's own person, and so everything becomes relative, or do we all relate to the same system of reference?

Surely each author has striven to put together the best sermons so that readers are spiritually nourished. Personal culture, one's own ascetic effort to live the Church's teaching of faith, the socio-human and temporal conjuncture are just some of the important components that contributed to the volumes of sermons under review.

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