

BISHOP GRIGORIE COMȘA – A HOMILETIC PORTRAIT

NICUȘOR BELDIMAN*

ABSTRACT. A zealous hierarch and preacher, with a significant contribution to the theory of homiletics and the development of Romanian homiletic literature during the first half of the 20th century, was Bishop Grigorie Comșa of Arad whose life and works, intertwined in an exemplary pastoral paradigm, fully deserve our attention and gratitude. Beside a great number of sermon books, bishop Grigorie Comșa also bequeathed to us *The History of Romanian Preaching* – a 303 – page anthology of homilies and a major source for the field of Practical Theology. It is also a landmark of inter-war culture, as it provides an overview of the medieval and modern church thought. The contribution of homilists is easily identified, as the book is structured according to two criteria: the historical one (by centuries, starting with the first extant records dating from 15th century) and the geographical one (for the three great historical provinces: Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania). The last book to be mentioned was published in 1920. The author does not confine himself to enumerating the books, but provides commentaries on the quality of these sermons. We also note that he presents and describes valuable sermons in manuscript form, who are now known due to the diligent author of this *History*.

Key words: *Grigorie Comșa, The History of Romanian Preaching, sermon manuscripts, homiletic anthology.*

Hierarchs Scholars, Workers In The Romanian Homily Field: A Short Retrospective

The history of the Romanian sermon gives evidence of enlightened clergy who contributed to the preservation and communication of the orthodox faith by their writing, well aware of the importance of the preaching activity of the clergy for the instruction of the faithful.

We deem necessary to mention a few of the hierarchs who developed an intense activity of preaching in the past of our Church. A prominent figure is Varlaam, “the metropolitan-scholar, who offered a new and bright interpretation

* Lecturer, Rev., University of Bucharest, “Justinian Patriarhul” Orthodox Theology Faculty. Email: prnbeldiman@gmail.com.

to the Gospel and a series of lives of saints”¹, in his 75 sermons contained in *Cartea românească de învățătură la duminicile de peste an, la praznicile împărătești și la sfinții mari* (*The Romanian Book of Teaching For All The Sundays of the Year, the Great Feasts of the Church and the Great Saints' Feast Days*), printed in Iași in 1643. St. Anthimus the Iberian (1650 - 1716), the greatest preacher at the end of the 17th century, enriched the Romanian culture with the most refined expression of the spoken word until that moment, by elaborating his lasting *Didahii* (*Sermons*), which place him among the greatest rhetoricians of all times. Metropolitan Andrei Șaguna (1808 – 1873), an exceptional hierarch of our Church, being aware of the importance of the sermon in the spiritual life of the faithful, printed and offered valuable collections of church sermons and interpretations to the Sunday readings to the parish libraries: *Chiriadromionul lui Nichifor Theotoche, cu un adaos de cuvântări pentru sărbătorile domnești și Tâlcuirea Evangheliei în Duminicile Învierii și ale sărbătorilor* (*Nicephoros Theotoche's Kiriadromion, With An Addition of Sermons for the Great Feasts of the Church and the Interpretation of the Gospel for the Sundays of the Resurrection and Other Feast Days*), genuine inexhaustible sources in the homily field.

Their activity was carried forward by Petru Maior, (1756 – 1821), an unwearied champion of the Romanians' rights in Transilvania and an enlightened theologian, the well known coryphaeus of “Școala Ardeleană” (“The Transilvanian School”), who offered the posterity not only historical and philological writings, but also remarkable theological works, including a few sermon books: *Propovădaniile la îngropăciunea oamenilor morți* (*Sermons to the Burial of the Dead*); *Didahii, adică învățături pentru creșterea fiilor* (*Sermons On the Raising of Children*); *Predice sau învățături la toate duminicile și sărbătorile anului* (*Sermons or Teachings For All the Sundays of the Year*). During the same period, bishop Philotheus of Buzău (1805 – 1860) requested that all the clergy in his Diocese, “each one of the priests should choose a topic and develop it into an elaborated discourse in writing”², in order to practice the art of sermon; while bishop Dionisie Romano (+1873), the first honorific member of the Romanian Academy³, enriched the Romanian culture with many books among which: *Principii de retorică și elocvența amvonului* (*Principles of Rhetoric and Eloquence of the Ambo*) made up of three parts; *Modele de elocvență bisericască* (*Models of Church Eloquence*), in which he offers examples of preaching from the Holy Scripture and the Holy Fathers of the Church, as well as *Adunare de cuvinte sărbătorești, funebre și alte ocaziuni* (*A*

¹ Nicolae Iorga, *Istoria literaturii religioase a românilor până la 1688* (București:1904), 160.

² Gheorghe Ionescu, *Viața și activitatea lui Filotei, episcopul Buzăului* (București: 1941), 132.

³ Antonie Plămădeală, *De la Filotei al Buzăului, la Andrei Șaguna* (Sibiu: 1997), 62.

Collection of Festal Sermons at Burials and On Other Occasions). Besides these ones we shall also mention Metropolitan Veniamin Costachi (1768 – 1846), who printed *Chiriadromionul lui Nichifor Theotoche (Nicephoros Theotoche's Kiriadromion)*, Bishop Neofit Scriban (1808 – 1884), author of *Cuvinte panighirice și moralnice (Commendatory and Moral Discourses)* and *Predici și cuvântări (Sermons and Discourses)*, Bishop Melchisedec Ștefănescu (1823 – 1892), translator of *Șaizeci și patru de cuvinte sau predice ale Sfântului Ioan Hrisostom (The 64 Discourses and Sermons of St. John Chrysostom)*, and others, who illustrated the homiletic literature of their time with an undeniable value.

A prominent figure of a diligent preacher, with a special contribution to the theory of sermon and to the development of Romanian homiletic literature in the early 20th century was Bishop Grigorie Comșa of Arad, whose life and work, built up in a fortunate pastoral paradigm, deserves our full attention and gratitude. If Reverend Professor Dumitru Belu is considered the most prolific author of Romanian homily studies (his prodigious work counting 360 published studies and 330 unpublished), in the same way, Bishop Grigorie Comșa of Arad could be called the most prolific homily author of all times in Transilvania, taking into account his whole publishing activity, mostly his sermon volumes⁴.

1. Bishop Grigorie Comșa – general biographical and bibliographical data

Place of birth, studies, ministry, books and studies of general interest. He was born on the 13th of May 1889 in Comana de Sus, Făgăraș County. His parents, Ana and Gheorghe, offered him a distinguished religious education. He received his early instruction at the school in his native village, where his father was a schoolmaster. After graduating the elementary school, he began the gymnasium in 1900 and after eight years he obtained the graduation diploma in the school year 1907 – 1908. As a result of the education he received in his family, he attended theological studies at the Theology Seminary “Andreian” in Sibiu which he attended for three years. Among other teachers, there was Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan⁵. As a student of this prestigious Theological School he received a diocesan scholarship and thus, attended the Law School in the University of Budapest and after four years he received the title of Doctor in Law on the 8th of May 1915. All along he studied theology in the Theology Department in the same University, and attended Homily and

⁴ Vasile Gordon, *Introducere în Omiletică* (București: Editura Universității din București, 2001), 140.

⁵ Marin Pană, “Contribuția episcopului Grigore Comșa la dezvoltarea omileticii ortodoxe românești”, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* XCI, no. 3-5 (1973): 391.

Church Law studies mostly. Coming back to the country on the 10th of October 1915, he was ordained deacon by Metropolitan Ioan Mețianu. He served in the cathedral in Sibiu for four years (1915 – 1919). Besides, he was editor of the religious newspaper “Telegraful român” for a year⁶, and then, a religion teacher at the gymnasium school in Sibiu for almost two years, then a collaborator at the “Revista teologică”, a secretary of the “Gojdu” foundation and even a deputy in the first Romanian Parliament⁷. In the year 1920 he worked in the Ministry of Arts and Religious Affairs, first as a defender, and then as a general vice-president. He completed his theology studies at the Theology School in Bucharest, where he graduated in 1921, and then, in 1925, he becomes a Doctor in Theology with the thesis *Datoriile preoțimii în fața problemelor sociale (The Assignments of the Clergy Facing Social Problems)*.

As early as his Seminary studies in Sibiu, he was mainly concerned with reading and studying the Holy Scriptures, and he felt a special call for priesthood. Then he dedicated himself to church rhetoric completely. A highly cultivated scholar, he was consecrated a Bishop of Arad on the 3rd of May 1925, and on the 28th of May 1934 he was chosen, together with Bishop Nicolae Ivan of Alba Iulia, a member of honour in the Romanian Academy and the Romanian Writers Society⁸. During his ministry as a bishop he paid a special attention to the teaching vocation of the priest. He was convinced that the duty of the priest is to preach the word of God, with and without time, in order to enlighten the heart and guide the life of the faithful to obeying God’s commandments and teachings⁹. After a short, yet fruitful, ministry in Arad, he died on the 25th of May 1935 at the age of only 46 years old.

For his remarkable contribution to the development of the Romanian theological, mostly homiletic, literature, Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan of Transilvania acknowledged Bishop Grigorie Comșa’s activity on good reasons:

His Eminence Bishop Grigorie Comșa of Arad initiated a lively religious activity in his Bishopric, and he was a lively example of the way it should be done. Endowed with a remarkable gift of preaching, His Eminence taught the word of the Gospel with enthusiasm all over his diocese; yet he also came to help our clergy, offering it his sermons and discourses held on different occasions. These wonderful speeches represent a source of inspiration for each priest and we warmly recommend them to our clergy¹⁰.

⁶ Mircea Păcurariu, *Dicționarul teologilor români* (București: Editura Univers Enciclopedic, 1996), 116.

⁷ Tit Simedrea, “Episcopul Grigorie al Aradului”, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* LIII, no. 4-6 (1935): 263.

⁸ Dorina Rusu, *Istoria Academiei Române în date (1866-1996)* (București: Editura Academiei Române, 1997), 255.

⁹ Grigorie Comșa, “Ordinul circular nr. 3228 din 1 octombrie 1925”, *Biserica și Școala* 41 (1925): 4.

¹⁰ Nicolae Bălan, *Veniți la Hristos* (Arad: 1926), 6.

2. Homiletic Landmarks

The Presentation of Grigorie Comșa's homiletic work, mainly of his sermon volumes, will emphasize once more his place among the exceptional writers of Romanian homily studies. Thus, among his published writings in this field we mention: *Darurile Duhului Sfânt (The Gifts of the Holy Spirit)* (Arad, 1934), a work containing sermons held on the occasion of the visitation of the faithful on the Feast of the Pentecost; *Haina de nuntă (The Wedding Garment)* (Arad, 1935), a work containing 22 sermons on subjects like: sin, the value of time, the care for the soul, fear of God, God's providence, the Last Judgment, Christian conscience, the resurrection of the dead, eternal life etc. These sermons are distinctive by the accurate plan of the topics, their argumentation with texts from the Holy Scripture and the Holy Fathers and by a clear, discursive language; *Veniți la Hristos (Comest to Christ Thou All)* (Arad, 1926) contains sermons for all the Sundays of the church year, beginning with the Easter Sunday and ending with Palm Sunday; *De la leagăn până la mormânt (From Cradle To Death)* (Arad, 1927) is made up of 51 sermons for the Holy Mysteries of Baptism, Confession, Communion, Unction, Matrimony and for the consecration of churches; *Predici pentru toate duminicile de peste an și alte ocazii (Sermons For All the Sundays of the Year and Other Occasions)* (Arad, 1918). This volume contains 74 sermons of which 29 belong to Rev. Gheorghe Maior, and 45 to Bishop Grigorie Comșa. Their style is short and dense, avoiding exaggeration and superfluous rhetoric. They approach subjects of interest for the real life of the faithful; *Aprindeți darul lui Dumnezeu (Light Up the Gift of God)* (Arad, 1934), a collection of meditations which emphasizes the role of the priest as a preacher of the Gospel. The author insists upon the duty of the priest to be deeply convinced of the eternal truths which he preaches and penetrated by the saving grace of the Holy Mysteries; *Predici la sărbătorile bisericești (Sermons For The Church Feasts)* (Arad, 1925) contains 20 eulogies and thematic homilies for the Great Feasts of the Church: The Nativity of the Mother of God, The Elevation of the Holy Cross, The Venerable Parascheve, St. Demetrios the Myrrh-Gusher, The New Year, St. Nicholas, The Nativity of the Lord, and so on. These sermons are well developed and documented with quotations from the Holy Scriptures and various writers and historians. They contain teachings and exhortations referring to the everyday life of the faithful, with a view to persuade them to adopt a lifestyle which could ease their spiritual progress; *Păstor și turmă (Shepherd and Flock)* (Arad, 1925), a work containing speeches held on the occasion of his ordination as a bishop, as well as on other occasions; *Brazde în ogorul Ortodoxiei (Furrows in the Land of Orthodoxy)* (Arad, 1932). The volume is made up of 10 pastoral homilies and 70 speeches held at funeral services, memorial services, blessing of cultural houses and

monuments of heroes, all of them pointing to various stages of the church life of those days; *Spre zările veșniciei (To Eternal Horizons)* (Arad, 1933), a volume which gathers occasional sermons and speeches, representing a part of his preaching activity; *Flori din grădina sufletului (Flowers From the Garden of the Soul)* (Arad, 1934) is made up of 56 sermons, of which 43 occasional discourses and 13 pastoral sermons.

Besides this remarkable number of sermon books, Bishop Grigorie Comșa left us two volumes of illustrative parables and stories: *Trei sute cincizeci de pilde pentru predici și alte cuvântări*¹¹ (*Three Hundred Fifty Parables and Other Lectures*) and *O mie de pilde pentru viața creștină*¹² (*A Thousand Parables For Christian Life*), as well as *Istoria predicei la români*¹³ (*The History of the Sermon in Romania*), the only book of the genre in the Romanian homiletic literature, which we are going to present below, with respect to its structure and content, pointing out some important aspects analyzed by the author himself.

3. The History of the Sermon in Romania

a) Structure and content

Published at the Church Book Printing House in Bucharest in 1921, *The History of the Sermon In Romania* is not only an anthology of homilies of 303 pages; it is also a landmark-source in the field of Practical Theology. It can also be considered a reference book in the inter-war culture, as it represents a mirror of medieval and modern church thinking. Made up of 7 chapters accompanied by an appendix, the work shows the author's capacity of synthesis and analysis, by appealing to a retrospective excursion into ages and historical lands (e.g. in the Romanian Principalities, in Transilvania), up to early 20th century. We may notice the author's reference, in two separate sections, to the contribution of the Church United to Rome.

In the first chapter, after a short introduction in the 15th century sermon, the author rests upon Grigorie Țamblac's activity, a priest under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople sent to Moldavia, where he held eight speeches in the Romanian language, as it is mentioned by Bishop Melchisedec Ștefănescu, and an occasional sermon held on the 20th of December 1401 in the metropolitan church of Suceava, when he was warmly welcome by Prince Alexander the Good.

In the second chapter, Gheorghe-Grigorie Comșa's *History of the Sermon* shows us the first homily preserved in our homily literature, an obituary, that is

¹¹ Arad, 1928.

¹² Arad, 1929.

¹³ București, 1921.

Cuvântarea lui Neagoe-Vodă Basarab la a doua îngropare a oaselor mamei sale Neaga și a copiilor săi Petru, Ioan și Anghelina la mănăstirea din Argeș (*The Speech of Neagoe Basarab Voivode at the second burial of the bones of his mother, Neaga, and his children Petru, Ioan and Anghelina at the monastery of Curtea de Argeș*), held around the year 1519. Another remarkable personality of the 16th century approached by the author is deacon Coresi. He is known by his printing activity which culminated with the two monuments of old Romanian language: *Tâlcul evangheliilor* (*The Interpretation of the Gospels*), 1564 edition, and *Evanghelia cu învățătură de la 1581* (*The Gospel with Teaching*), printed in Brașov. Unfortunately, the first was lost. The second, which is still available due to the philologists Sextil Pușcariu and Alexie Procopovici, contains 65 sermons for Sundays, the Great Feasts of the Church and feasts of the saints, in which Coresi used the language spoken in Wallachia and South Transilvania, which forms the basis of the literary Romanian language.

The third chapter is dedicated to the printing activity in the 17th century. It contains references to the following writings: *Cazania de la Bălgrad* (*The Homiliary at Bălgrad*) (1641), a reprint of that of 1581, *Cazania de la Govora* (*The Homiliary at Govora*) (1642), translated and printed by Hieromonk Silvestru during the reign of Matei Basarab¹⁴, which contains the explanation of the parables at the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee, up to the Sunday of All Saints.

Among all the works of that century, one cannot omit *Cazania lui Varlaam* (*The Homiliary of Varlaam*) (Iași, 1643), printed during the reign of Vasile Lupu, an expression of the unity of nation, language and faith of the Romanians in the three Provinces. It is made up of 76 homilies for Sundays, Church Feasts and feasts of the most important saints. Besides the mere presentation of the work, the Bishop of Arad offers examples of short fragments chosen from sermons in order to emphasize the declared attempt of the author to write for everyone's understanding. Once again, this Homiliary deserves its acknowledgement as an expression of the unity of nation and faith for its being reprinted in Transilvania, at Alba Iulia, under the name of *Kiriadodromion* or *A Evanghelie învățătoare* (*Teaching Gospel*) (1699) with the endeavours of Metropolitan Athanasius¹⁵, soon after its first edition in Iași.

The author mentions further the translation and printing of some older collections of sermons: *Cheia Înțeleșului* (*The Key of Understanding*), "the first book of sermons published in Bucharest" (1678)¹⁶, translated after the Russian original version of Ioanichie Galetovsky, *Sicriul de Aur* (*The Golden*

¹⁴ Gheorghe (Grigorie) Comșa, *Istoria predicei la români* (București: 1921), 30.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

Coffin) (1683), with 15 funeral sermons and *Mărgăritarele lui Hrisostom* (*St. John Chrysostom's Precious Pearls*) (1691). The last is preceded by a preface which makes reference to St. John Chrysostom's homilies. There follows the 46 lectures with short commentaries made by deacon Gheorghe Comșa. This third chapter ends with an emphasis on the "beauty worthy of admiration"¹⁷ of the two funeral speeches, *A Homiliary for the Burial of the Dead* and *Teaching On the Glorification of Man*, which are then reproduced entirely.

The fourth chapter is made up of two sections: The Sermon in the 18th century in the Romanian Provinces, and in Transilvania. Rev. Comșa mentions the contribution of several great scholars of this period with text commentaries and examples. One of them is Metropolitan Anthimus the Iberian, the greatest preacher at the end of the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th century. His *Sermons* are representative works, both for the homiletic ministry and for the Romanian literature, in general. He left us 28 homilies for Sundays and church feasts and 7 occasional speeches printed for the first time in 1866 by Ion Bianu and Constantin Erbiceanu.

Another representative scholar is Metropolitan Jacob Putneanu with his work *Adunare de multe învățături* (*A Collection of Many Teachings*) (1757), followed by Archimandrite Bartolomeu Măzăreanu, the abbot of the Putna Monastery. The author presents his speech held in 1758 on the occasion of the exhumation of St. Steven the Great's holy relics¹⁸.

During the same period, there were published the sermons of the Greek Bishop Ilie Miniat – *Didahii și predici* (*Didahii and Sermons*), *Didahii în Postul Mare* (*Sermons for the Lent*), translated in 1742 by Metropolitan Neofit.

In Transilvania, there was a remarkable activity of Rev. Urs from Cotiglet, Sts. Visarion and Sophrony from Cioara, as well as Samuel Micu Clain. He printed a volume of funeral sermons *Propovădării sau învățături la îngropăciunea oamenilor morți* (*Preaching or Teaching at Funeral Services*) in 1784. The author mentions that Samuel Micu, a representative of the Romanian Enlightenment, left us translations in manuscript of *homilies* written by Sts. Basil the Great, John Chrysostom and Gregory of Nazianzus.

In the fifth chapter, the author makes a full presentation of the homiletic activity in the 19th century. This chapter is structured on five big sections: A. – The Sermon in the Romanian Provinces up to 1850; B. – The Sermon in Transilvania up to 1860; C. – The Sermon in the Romanian Provinces from 1880 to the present; D. – The Sermon in Transilvania from Șaguna to 1920; E. – The Sermon in the Romanian Church United with Rome. As Grigorie Comșa points out, St. Gregory of Nazianzus' *Sermons* and St. John Chrysostom's *The Well and*

¹⁷ Ibid., 61.

¹⁸ Ibid., 98.

the Wheat Grains Sharing, were published in the Romanian Provinces in Romanian translation due to the endeavours of Metropolitan scholar Grigorie Miculescu. Another positive example is Metropolitan Veniamin Costachi, who translated and printed the following sermon books "to the benefit of the Romanian people"¹⁹: *Tâlcul lui Teofilact și al celor șapte taine (On the Interpretation of Theophilact and of the Seven Holy Mysteries)*, *Predici la Faptele Apostolilor (Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles)*, *Chiriakodromionul de la 1801 (The Kiriakodromion from 1801)*, and Ilie Miniati's *Didahii*. Among the authors of original sermons printed during this period in the Romanian language, we mention Archimandrite Euphrosin Poteca, whom the author tells us to have published several sermons in *Vestitorul bisericesc (The Church Herald)*, which appeared at Buzău in the years 1839, 1840 and 1841, and then separately in a brochure named *Cuvinte panigirice și moralnice (Panegirical Sermons and Moral Words)* published in Bucharest in 1826.

It is equally important Metropolitan Andrei Șaguna's activity presented by the author in a eulogistic manner, as he offers his clergy Nichifor Theotoche's *Kiriakodromion* reprinted several times together with 26 original sermons, in order to raise their moral and cultural level. After 1860, the future Bishop of Arad, evoked Dimitrie Țichindeal's role in Transilvania and Ioan Papp's sermons entitled *Învățăture morale (Moral Teaching)*. To the end of the chapter he mentions a parenetic speech held in 1832 on the occasion of the consecration of a church in Oradea. The author of the book does not forget to mention the position of the illuminist Petru Maior, not only from a pedagogical and historical perspective, but also from that of church speeches, making a full presentation of his homily books.

Gheorghe Comșa notices the prodigious church activity of the following bishops in the Romanian Provinces after 1880: Iosif Naniescu, Neophit Scriba, Filaret Scriba, Melchisedec Ștefănescu, one of the founders of the Romanian Academy, Visarion Puiu and Iuliu Scriban.

The end of the 19th century constituted an auspicious period of reprinting of older collections of homilies: *St. John Chrisostom's Precious Pearls (1872)*, *The Homiliary of Varlaam (1903)*, *The Great Homily (1903)* by St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Basil the Great's *Homilies (1912)*, as well as publications with a homiletic character: the "Predicatorul" Review (1857) and the "Candela" Review (July 1882, Cernăuți), the most important literary publication in Bucovina. Its first editor and collaborator was Rev. scholar Vasile Mitrofanovich, "professor of strong and deep theological and secular culture, high academics, and a rich didactic and publishing activity"²⁰ to whom we owe the first and most important scientific

¹⁹ Ibid., 128.

²⁰ Nicolae Necula, „Contribuția preotului profesor dr. Vasile Mitrofanovici la dezvoltarea disciplinelor Teologiei Practice”, *Studii Teologice* XL, no. 5 (1988): 103.

treatise in the Romanian theological literature. Unfortunately, it is also the last academic hand-book in this domain printed in Romania²¹.

Another occasional writing is the brochure *Cuvinte către ostași (Words For Soldiers)* (1921), containing 30 lectures, a testimony over time of the manner in which the clergy knew how to inspire the heroes who sealed with their own blood the justice risen for all the Romanians²².

At the beginning of the 20th century, Transilvania brings its contribution to the development of homiletic literature due to Rev. Zaharia Boiu, one of the few writers of original sermons printed and distributed to the clergy in three valuable volumes under the general title *Semințe din agrul lui Hristos (Seeds from Christ's Field)* and to Rev. David Voniga, who printed the brochure *Cuvântări bisericești (Church Lectures)* at Timisoara in 1903 and a homily hand-book at Orăștie in 1906. The author appreciates that Rev. Voniga's sermons "contain a rich material for the church rhetorician, and beautiful examples of life"²³, yet, it also points out to the lack of discourse consistency and fluency.

Besides them, he also mentions Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan of Transilvania, who left to his contemporaries and posterity a series of homilies requested by the events of his time, among which *Cinci predicii pentru timp de război (The Five Sermons In Times Of War)*, published under the title *Îndrăzniți, eu am biruit lumea (Take Courage, I Have Conquered the World)* at Sibiu in 1915. During the same period we notice Rev. Prof. Ioan Lupaș's prodigious activity in Cluj, who published two volumes of sermons entitled: *Mângâiați poporul (Comfort the People)* (Sibiu, 1916) and *Căzut-a Cununa Capului nostru (There Fell The Crown Of Our Head)* (Arad, 1917) "written in a fluent language"²⁴ and largely spread among the faithful in Transilvania.

The sixth chapter, a narrower one, is dedicated to the church press and its relationship with the sermon. If the press had an overwhelming role in the past, after the World War I there was a need for periodical publications which should also contain sermons. The main publications of such kind are presented chronologically: "Vestitorul bisericesc" (Buzău, 1839), "Preotul" (Iași, 1861 – 1865), "Predicatorul moralului evanghelic și al umanității" (Iași, 1864), "Vocea Bisericii" (Bucharest, 1894), "Amvonul" (1892), "Lumina" (Bucharest, 1900), "Viitorul", "Biserica și Școala" (Arad), "Foaia diecezană" (Caransebeș).

A special attention is paid to the following publications: "Telegraful Român" in Sibiu (1853), in which there were published numerous homilies

²¹ Vasile Gordon, "Repere importante ale prediciei, în Biserica noastră, de la începuturi, până în secolul al XX-lea – Studiu cu exemplificări", *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* CXIX, 1-6 (2001): 227.

²² Gheorghe (Grigorie) Comșa, *Istoria prediceii la români*, 229.

²³ *Ibid.*, 237.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 240.

and homiletic studies written by bishops and professors of theology; “Revista Teologică”, published in 1907, with a rich homiletic content, and “Biserica Ortodoxă Română”, printed in Bucharest in 1874, containing speeches of distinguished church rhetoricians as Bishop Ghenadie of Argeș, Rev. Spiridon Bădescu, Archimandrite Melchisedec, Bishop Hylarion of Argeș, Rev. Alexandru Mironescu, and others.

After he fully exhibited the history of the sermon from the 15th to the 20th century, the author offers some examples of homilies from the ritual books (*The Menaion* and *the Pentekostarion*) in the last chapter of his book. They constitute an inexhaustible treasure for the beauty of chants, and the teaching and subjects they contain. He strongly urges his clergy to use them as an inspiration for their own sermons.

b). Manuscripts with sermons indicated by the autor in his work

The written Romanian homiletic tradition is linked inseparably to the beginning of church writing in the Romanian territory. It is also intertwined with the beginning of the first schools in the porch of the churches, monasteries or bishoprics. Its apparition is due to a stringent need of writing or copying important speeches, mostly occasional, with which the priest or the chanter inspired their listeners at the great church feasts over the year or tried to comfort them in hard moments, especially at burials. Manuscripts which keep such treasures for the souls of the Romanian faithful of past times, for whom, to be able to read in church, on pages written by hand with ink letters, was a worthy virtue, can be searched in the individual libraries of some bishops and priests, and also in public libraries like the Library of the Romanian Academy and church libraries like those in the Faculties of Theology, Patriarchy, Metropolitanates, Bishoprics and monasteries. Thus, in the Library of the Romanian Academy there are numerous manuscripts which contain an impressive number of sermons. Those dated 19th century inclusively are written in Cyrillic letters, yet not hard to be read. Their research is facilitated by the catalogues made up on this purpose, among which one can notice those printed by I. Bianu and Gabriel Ștrempel, the present director of the Library of the Academy. The last one is the most recent and complete. One should note that “at least 75% of the manuscripts catalogued by Mr. Ștrempel have a religious content. Among which, almost 40% are homilies and sermons, and the most frequent ones, around 25%, are obituaries coming from Transilvania”²⁵.

One of the scholastic concerns of Bishop Grigorie Comșa (Deacon Gheorghe Comșa, at that time) was the real work of research and revaluation of

²⁵ Vasile Gordon, *Biserica și Școala. Analize omiletice, catehetice și pastorale* (București: Editura Cristiana, București, 2003), 19.

these unknown treasures of an undeniable value. Thus, *Istoria predicei la români* (*The History of the Romanian Homily*) is the only book in the ecclesiastic environment which offers them a generous place alongside with acknowledgements and commentaries. Thus, on the basis of the research at the Library of the Romanian Academy and in other different places, as he mentions in the Preface of his work, the author describes the following manuscripts:

The Manuscript of Rev. Grigore from Măhaciu dating 1600, contains a sermon on the Last Judgement; *The Manuscript no. 601*, which, starting with sheet 28, contains 31 sermons at various church feasts: The Ascension of the Lord into Heaven, The Exaltation of the Holy Cross, St. Nicholas, The Presentation of the Mother of God to the Temple, the New Year, The Baptism of the Lord, the Sundays of the Lent, the Easter, The Pentecost, and others. This manuscript dates back from the beginning of the 19th century for it contains the information that Paisios, the abbot of the Dragomirna Monastery, offered the manuscript to Rev. Chifan Popovich from Suceava in the year 1820; *The Abbot Steven's Manuscript* (1720) has 91 pages, bound at the end of a volume called *Cheia Înțeleșului* (*The Key of Understanding*). It contains 12 sermons made up of stories taken from the Holy Scripture, and the language is difficult and inaccessible; *The Manuscript of Rev. Urs from Cotigleti*, a copy of Varlaam's *Homiliary* made after the edition of the *Kiriadodromion at Balgrad* (1699); *The Manuscript of Monk Meletie from Făgăraș* includes 30 sermons on charity, prayer, work, patience, the remembrance of death and the Last Judgment. It is a translation written in Cyrillic letters and dates back the late 18th century. Author unknown.

One may notice that Grigorie Comșa narrows down the exposition of these manuscripts containing sermons to short references to the author, time, number and theme of the lectures a manuscript contains, without paying attention to details with respect to their strict content, none being reproduced entirely. For this reason, I considered appropriate for our research and for the sake of exemplification to transcribe and present one sermon with a content that shall be described in the following:

Rom. Manuscript no. 489 (f. 31 – 34): On putting an end to all works in our lives

“And all apprehension in our lives lies in this: always and in all, with all our mind and heart, soul and body, word and deed and thought, let us live in God’s will as much as we can. For as we lived in the vanity of the world and were servants of sins with all our mind and senses, so, as Blessed Philotheus says, let us, who could come closer to a godly life, with all our mind and senses, be servants of the living and true God, of His righteousness and will, obey His holy commandments, and let us depart completely from things unpleasant to God, according to the word of the

Scriptures: “Therefore I esteem all Thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way”. And when you get up, praise God first, then confess to Him, and then these: prayer, chanting, reading, handiwork, and always have a pious mind fixed in the hope of God, doing everything according to His will, not to your vain glory, or for people’s pleasure, knowing that God is always with us. For he is everywhere and fillest all things, for the One Who made the ear can hear everything, and the One Who made the eye can see everything and everywhere. And may his words be according to God, abstaining from grudge, and condemnation, and vain talk, and malice. And accordingly, may he refrain from food and drink, in the fear of God, and mostly in the time of sleeping, with pious inner watchfulness be mindful, for this short slumber is an image of the eternal one, that is, of death, and lying into bed is an image of lying in the tomb; and in all these may we have God in front of our eyes, as David said: “I have set the Lord always before me: because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.” Thus, he who does so is always in prayer. And if someone has a healthy body, it is right to put him to work: to fasting and vigil, hard work or prostrations or handiwork, with diligence, so that he could make the body a good servant of the soul, and be redeemed with the grace of Christ; and if the body is weak, it is right to lead it against its power, and may he never be careless in prayer, both the strong and the weak, and be keen in ascetic labour, and train the mind in fear of God. Ascetic labour should be done according to each one’s strength, while the intellect should be kept in reverence and in God’s hope and love, irrespective of bodily health or sickness. We are also beholden to love our neighbours and show it in words and deeds with the grace of God, and if they be far, may we unite with them in loving thoughts towards them, and dismiss the evil thoughts from our heart, and subject our souls to them in humbleness, and be well pleased to them. If God sees all these in our heart, He will forgive our trespasses and receive our prayers as a good gift, and will fill us with His bountiful mercy”²⁶.

A short analysis. As in the previous case, we have here a thematic moral speech held in a monastic environment, taking into account the abundant advice, mostly with respect to giving up the wrong deeds and leading a life dedicated to “the work of God”. The preacher proves to be a good connoisseur of the Holy Scriptures, invoking several quotations, also appealing to the Holy Fathers when quoting the Blessed Philotheus.

The text is easily readable in spite of the existence of certain incoherent repetitions and sentences. The author points out to God’s providence for us, as He is “the One who is everywhere and fillest all things”, and to His omnipresence “for the One who made the ear can hear everything, and the One Who made the eye can see everything and everywhere”. One may notice mostly some

²⁶ Gabriel Ștrempel, *Catalogul manuscriselor românești*, vol. I (București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1978), 256.

advice regarding the virtues which should characterize Christian life, especially the monastic one, like humbleness, moderation, godliness, charity, fasting, prayer, vigil, handiwork: "And if someone has a healthy body, it is right to put him to work: to fasting and vigil, hard work or prostrations or handiwork, with diligence".

Conclusions

After an analysis of the theological work of Bishop Grigorie Comșa, we can affirm that he brought a special contribution to the teaching activity of the clergy. Thus, in 1925, he emitted an ordinance by which he reminded that "the duty of a priest is to preach unceasingly and scholarly so that his parishioners may leave the church comforted and spiritually renewed"²⁷. By a new order, he asked his clergy to come in front of the faithful with well prepared sermons, and then he requested them to participate in the special rubric in the "Biserica și Școala" review with studies, articles and sermons which should be published a week before the Sunday or the feast days to which they were dedicated, as a useful homiletic source of inspiration"²⁸.

The scholarly bishop was always present among his clergy, trying to stir their interest for a dynamic sermon at all events, "with a sounding voice: a powerful trumpet call to be known, heard and followed by his spiritual sons"²⁹. For him, preaching represented not only a sacerdotal duty, but also a pastoral means of preserving Orthodoxy and the unity of the Church; the ambo is, like the altar, a fundamental place of ministry.

The way in which he held his sermons is obvious in the following description: "His thunder voice shook the vaults and made the air vibrate whenever he served the Liturgy or spoke to the wonder of his faithful listeners or adversaries of our fatherly faith; for he was a feared and arduous rhetorician, who did not miss any opportunity to proclaim an evangelical truth or denounce a human error"³⁰.

Structurally, his sermons are elaborated with great effort and a special care, they are long thought of, lived, made up and laid down on paper before being uttered; never improvised on the spot, but made up thoughtfully and artfully, according to the homiletic and rhetorical norms and rules, according to the spiritual character of his listeners, following the example of the great

²⁷ Grigorie Comșa, "Ordinul Circular nr. 3228 din 1 oct. 1925", *Biserica și Școala* 41 (1925): 5.

²⁸ Grigorie Comșa, "Ordinul Circular nr. 2873", *Biserica și Școala* 35 (1925): 1.

²⁹ Grigorie Comșa, "Ordinul Circular nr. 2873", *Biserica și Școala* 35 (1925): 2.

³⁰ Sandu Stana, "Zece ani de la moartea episcopului dr. Grigorie Gh. Comșa", *Biserica și Școala*, 22 (1945): 166.

preachers of the golden age of patristic literature, by choosing carefully his sources and words. Unlike other Transilvanian hierarchs, Bishop Comșa's speeches are characterized by a limited extension of the content, which "shows an inner burning carefully controlled by the author, and which is gradually transformed into a powerful explosion of ideas, information and irresistible arguments, even for the most passive of listeners"³¹.

As a homily historian, Bishop Grigorie achieved a synthesis of great bibliographical value for the preaching activity of our Church. In his work, *Istoria predicei la romani (The History of the Romanian Sermon)*, the author presents the way in which the teaching of the Gospel developed in our country and the homiletic diligence of the ministers from the 15th to the 19th century. Well documented with manuscripts, old and new homiletic printing, accompanied by the commentary of an authoritative theologian, the work has remained a point of reference of the genre until nowadays; it was used as a hand-book in the Seminary in Buzau for many years.

For the year 1921, the above mentioned work has a varied thematic content and a general view on the continuity of teaching ministry in the Romanian territories, which contributed to both the maintaining of Christian cohesion and the transmission of the idea of national unity from one generation to another. This work is unique with respect to the historical, retrospective approach in the homiletic field up to the year 1921. It is a mirror of the Romanian theological education which was carried on by exceptional personalities.

The critical apparatus down the page shows a work made with accuracy and the diligence of an archivist who inventories not only theological works, but also those of historians like Nicolae Iorga, Ioan Lupuș, Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu, Vasile Pârvan, Timotei Cipariu, and others. Well trained in theology and Romanian modern and medieval literature (Anthimus the Iberian, Sextil Puscariu and Ovid Densusianu), Bishop Grigorie Comșa illustrates an acknowledged fact, at all hyperbolized: by the sermon within the divine cult, the Church in the Romanian Provinces represented not only an institution for social communities, but also a school of Romanian conscience. What Nicolae Iorga represented in the political and university fields at the beginning of the 20th century, whom he frequently quoted, Gheorghe Grigorie Comșa was in the field of the church life and theological education of his time.

The text is easily readable and persuasive for anyone, as it does not abound in neologisms and is written in a coherent, contained and accurate style, which shows a clear thinking and a responsible view on the scope of church activity and the development of theological education.

³¹ Miron Erdei, *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Banat în prima jumătate a secolului al XX-lea* (Oradea: Editura Universității din Oradea, 2001), 43.

We cherish the hope that, in spite of some omissions regarding the analyzed printed writings and aspects of homiletic technique (argument, style, structure), *Istoria predicei la romani (The History of the Romanian Sermon)* represents a real contribution to the Romanian homiletic field, and last but not least, a moment of reflection, an impulse with respect to the continuation of research which could lead to an elaborated work in several volumes.

REFERENCES

- Bălan, Nicolae. *Veniți la Hristos*. Arad: 1926.
- Comșa, Gheorghe. *Istoria predicei la români*. București: 1921.
- Comșa, Grigorie. "Ordinul circular nr. 3228 din 1 octombrie 1921". *Biserica și Școala*, (41/1925): 4-7.
- . "Ordinul circular nr. 2873". *Biserica și Școala*", (35/1925): 1-5.
- Erdei, Miron. *Propovăduirea în Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Banat în prima jumătate a secolului al XX-lea*. Oradea: Editura Universității din Oradea, 2001.
- Gordon, Vasile. *Introducere în Omiletică*. București: Editura Universității din București, 2001.
- . *Biserica și Școala. Analize omiletice, catehetice și pastorale*. București: Editura Christiana, 2003.
- . "Repere importante ale predicii, în Biserica noastră, de la începuturi, până în secolul al XX-lea – Studiu cu exemplificări". *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* CXIX, no. 1-6 (2001): 200-237.
- Ionescu, Gheorghe. *Viața și activitatea lui Filotei, episcopul Buzăului*. București: 1941.
- Iorga, Nicolae. *Istoria literaturii religioase a românilor până la 1688*. București: 1904.
- Necula, Nicolae. "Contribuția preotului profesor dr. Vasile Mitrofanovici la dezvoltarea disciplinelor Teologiei Practice". *Studii Teologice* XL, no. 5 (1988): 102-104.
- Pană, Marin. "Contribuția episcopului Grigore Comșa la dezvoltarea omileticii ortodoxe românești". *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* XCI, 3-5 (1973): 390-400.
- Păcurariu, Mircea. *Dicționarul Teologilor Români*. București: Editura Univers Enciclopedic, 1996.
- Plămădeală, Antonie. *De la Filotei al Buzăului, la Andrei Șaguna*. Sibiu: 1997.
- Rusu, Dorina. *Istoria Academiei Române în date (1866-1996)*. București: Editura Academiei, 1997.
- Simedrea, Tit. "Episcopul Grigorie al Aradului". *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* LIII, 4-6 (1935): 61-65.
- Sandu, Stana. "Zece ani de la moartea episcopului dr. Grigorie Comșa". *Biserica și Școala* 22 (1945): 165-170.
- Ștrempele, Gabriel. *Catalogul manuscriselor românești*. București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1978.