



## PREACHING AS COMMUNION. ORTHODOX HOMILETICS AND THE RENEWAL OF CHRISTIAN WITNESS TODAY

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### ABSTRACT

*This article examines the theological and pastoral foundations of Orthodox homiletics through the lens of communion, as the central paradigm of Christian proclamation. In a context, marked by cultural fragmentation, hyper-individualism, ideological polarization and declining ecclesial participation, Orthodox preaching is called to recover its patristic depth as well as its liturgical, sacramental and ecclesial character. The study highlights that the early Church Fathers understood preaching, as an extension of the Eucharistic mystery, where the proclaimed Word and the Word received participate in the life of the Body of Jesus Christ. Drawing on Holy Scripture, patristic sources and contemporary pastoral challenges, the article argues, that preaching is not primarily an intellectual exercise, but an act of ecclesial communion, that mediates the healing and transformative presence of Jesus Christ. The homily becomes a space where divine grace meets human brokenness, fragmented identities are reoriented toward meaning and the faithful are restored to spiritual unity within the Church. Methodologically, this hermeneutic of communion emphasizes incarnational communication addressing mind, heart and body, as well as dialogical preaching, that engages listeners' questions and experiences. The study also examines the use of digital media critically, advocating its pastoral potential while ensuring it does not compromise the liturgical and communal essence of Orthodox life. The article concludes by proposing a renewed homiletic vision, that integrates patristic wisdom with pastoral discernment, theological depth with accessibility and tradition with creative responsiveness. By recovering preaching as communion, Orthodox homiletics can offer a credible, transformative and life-giving witness capable of addressing contemporary anthropological, spiritual and cultural crises in a fragmented world.*

**Keywords:** *Orthodox homiletics; communion; Christian witness; patristic tradition; contemporary pastoral challenges;*

### INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the Orthodox Church has encountered a series of complex cultural, social and anthropological transformations, that profoundly shape the reception and understanding of the Gospel. Modern secularization has redefined moral and existential frameworks, reducing many traditional structures of meaning and authority, while digital hyper-connectivity has altered the ways people communicate, form identity and engage with ideas. These changes challenge the Church's capacity to proclaim the Gospel effectively, as individuals increasingly experience fragmentation in their sense of self, community and spiritual orientation. In this context, Orthodox homiletics is called



not only to preserve its theological and liturgical foundations, but also to respond creatively to contemporary existential realities, ensuring that preaching remains both spiritually authentic and pastorally relevant.

The crisis of personal identity, the erosion of communal belonging and the proliferation of competing cultural narratives have reshaped the very environment in which the Word of God is heard. Today, preaching must contend with attention economies dominated by rapid information flow, superficial engagement and the digital mediation of relationships. These conditions require a homiletic practice that goes beyond intellectual exposition, moral instruction, or rhetorical skill and instead situates the act of preaching within the lived experience of the faithful, fostering both encounter and transformation. The Orthodox homily must therefore be understood as an event of ecclesial communion, where the proclamation of the Word participates in the sacramental, liturgical and communal life of the Church<sup>1</sup>.

This article explores the concept of preaching as communion, highlighting its dual character as both a theological and pastoral reality. It argues that the homiletic act is inseparable from the Church's life and the mystery of ecclesial unity and that its effectiveness depends on its capacity to integrate patristic wisdom, liturgical sensibility and contemporary pastoral discernment. By revisiting the theological foundations of Orthodox homiletics, analyzing the methods and aims of proclamation and reflecting on the contemporary challenges to spiritual communication, this study proposes a vision of preaching capable of addressing modern fragmentation, restoring communal bonds and renewing Christian witness.

Ultimately, Orthodox homiletics, conceived as communion, offers a transformative model for the proclamation of the Gospel today: a model that mediates the presence of Jesus Christ, reorients the human person toward God and neighbor and fosters a credible, life-giving witness within a society marked by dislocation, alienation and cultural plurality. Through this lens, preaching is not simply a didactic act or a ritual formality, but a participatory and relational encounter in which the faithful are drawn into the mystery of ecclesial and divine communion, rediscovering the unity and coherence that modern fragmentation often obscures.

## 1. THE THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF PREACHING AS COMMUNION

This chapter explores, in depth, the theological, spiritual and pastoral underpinnings of Orthodox preaching, as a profound act of communion (*κοινωνία*), demonstrating that proclamation is far more than a mere transfer of doctrinal knowledge, intellectual instruction, or moral guidance; it constitutes a living, transformative and relational encounter in which the faithful actively participate in the life of Jesus Christ and the Church. The biblical foundations of preaching reveal that the Word of God is inherently relational, ecclesial, transformative and oriented toward human salvation. For instance, St. Paul emphasizes that faith comes through hearing the Word (*Romans 10:14-17*), underscoring the communicative, participatory and communal dimensions of the Gospel. Holy Scripture portrays preaching, as a vital conduit of divine presence, a channel through which Jesus Christ Himself addresses, heals, instructs, guides and unites His people in truth, virtue and love. From the prophetic proclamations of the Old Testament to the apostolic preaching of the New Testament, proclamation is consistently oriented toward communion, restoration, ethical formation, spiritual transformation and the holistic development of the human person in accordance with God's will. Biblical narratives also illustrate that preaching is inherently incarnational: the Word enters the lived experience of the faithful, engaging both heart and mind, guiding moral discernment and

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<sup>1</sup> Pr. Alexander Schmemmann, *Pentru viața lumii. Sfintele Taine și Ortodoxia*, Ed. Basilica, București, 2012, pp. 121-135.



fostering communal cohesion. Patristic thought further illuminates the nature of preaching as communion, highlighting the integral and inseparable connection between ecclesial life, spiritual formation and proclamation. St. John Chrysostom consistently emphasizes that the effectiveness of preaching depends upon the preacher's personal holiness, moral integrity, theological knowledge and active participation in the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church<sup>2</sup>. The homily is understood not as an abstract lecture or intellectual exercise, but as a living extension of the Church's sacramental and liturgical reality, creating a spiritual space in which listeners can encounter Jesus Christ personally in both Word and Holy Spirit.

Similarly, St. Gregory the Theologian stresses that preaching communicates divine life, grace, wisdom and spiritual vitality, not merely doctrinal propositions, theological abstractions, or ethical imperatives<sup>3</sup>. For the Fathers, authentic proclamation is inseparable from ecclesial authenticity: the preacher must embody the Gospel in thought, word and action, offering a living and credible witness to the transformative power of Jesus Christ in the life of the Church and society. Preaching, as communion, also entails a dynamic and reciprocal interplay between the preacher and the assembly. The faithful are not passive recipients, but active participants in the unfolding of God's Word, contributing through attentive listening, prayerful reflection, sacramental participation and lived response. This relational dimension aligns closely with the Orthodox understanding of the Church as a living Body, in which each member is drawn into unity with God, neighbor and the broader ecclesial community. Theologically, the act of preaching actualizes the ecclesial mystery, reorienting fragmented hearts, guiding ethical and spiritual formation and restoring communal coherence. It engages the whole person, mind, heart and soul, allowing the transformative power of Jesus Christ to permeate daily life, relational interactions and moral choices. Moreover, this vision carries profound pastoral, methodological and cultural implications for contemporary homiletics. Preachers are called to cultivate spiritual depth, liturgical sensitivity, theological precision and pastoral discernment, ensuring that proclamation addresses both the intellectual and existential needs of listeners. Effective preaching fosters genuine encounter, transformation and interior renewal rather than mere cognitive assent, making the homily a living communion, a conduit of divine presence and a means of restoring unity, meaning, moral orientation and spiritual vitality within the Church and broader society. It emphasizes incarnational communication, relational engagement and attentiveness to cultural, social and psychological realities<sup>4</sup>.

In summary, the theological foundations of preaching, as communion, integrate Holy Scripture, patristic wisdom, liturgical practice and pastoral experience into a cohesive, robust and multidimensional framework. They provide a model for contemporary Orthodox homiletics that emphasizes relationality, spiritual authenticity, participatory engagement, moral and existential formation and transformative encounter, as essential, for renewing Christian witness, particularly in a fragmented, disoriented and culturally complex world. This framework calls preachers to embody the Gospel fully in life and ministry, ensuring that Orthodox preaching continues to mediate divine presence, restore spiritual unity and offer coherent, life-giving guidance to the faithful amidst the challenges of modernity<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omilii la Postul Mare*, col. Comorile Pustiei, vol. 19, Ed. Anastasia, București, 1997, pp. 23-46.

<sup>3</sup> Sf. Grigorie de Nazianz, *Cuvântări teologice. Cinci cuvântări despre Dumnezeu*, Editura Herald, București, 2022, pp. 132-145.

<sup>4</sup> Pr. prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. 1, ed. a II-a, Editura Institutului Biblic al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1996, pp. 266-279.

<sup>5</sup> Pr. John Behr, *Drumul spre Niceea. Formarea teologiei creștine*, vol. 1, Editura Sophia, București, 2022 pp. 180-197.



## 2. THE LITURGICAL AND ECCLESIAL CHARACTER OF ORTHODOX HOMILETICS

Orthodox homiletics is profoundly liturgical, deriving its identity, authority and transformative efficacy directly from the sacramental, communal and mystical life of the Church. The proclamation of the Word is never an isolated or purely intellectual act; it always occurs within the broader context of the Eucharistic assembly, where the faithful gather as the living and dynamic Body of Jesus Christ. In this sacred context, the homily functions not merely as a separate intellectual, moral, or didactic discourse, but as a living and integral continuation of the liturgy itself, actively participating in the doxological, sacramental and communal dimensions of worship.

The Holy Liturgy provides both the form and the content of preaching, shaping its rhythm, structure, tone, theological depth and even its aesthetic, rhetorical and performative character. This deep integration ensures that the homily remains inseparable from the Church's sacramental life, reinforcing the unity of the assembly, cultivating collective spiritual attentiveness and fostering profound transformation of hearts, minds and souls through the grace of God<sup>6</sup>.

The Eucharistic context of preaching further underscores the inherently relational, incarnational and transformative character of the Word. The preacher functions, as a mediator of Jesus Christ's presence, guiding the faithful into a direct encounter with God in the Holy Liturgy and allowing them to experience the living reality of divine grace. This encounter is deeply transformative, restoring fractured personal and communal identities, nurturing interpersonal and ecclesial bonds and deepening individual participation in the mystery of salvation. By thoughtfully integrating liturgical symbolism, hymnography, iconography and scriptural readings, the homily becomes an instrument that makes the invisible realities of divine life perceptible, experiential, affective and emotionally engaging. In this way, preaching mirrors the incarnational nature of Jesus Christ Himself, who, in assuming human form, sanctifies human existence and mediates authentic communion between God and humanity, uniting the spiritual and material dimensions of life into a coherent vision of participation in divine reality<sup>7</sup>.

Moreover, the liturgical dimension guarantees that preaching is authentically ecclesial, communal and participatory. The faithful are not passive listeners; their attentive prayer, reflective silence, sacramental engagement and active involvement complete the communicative event of the homily. The preacher's role is to facilitate this participation, skillfully connecting the theological, moral and spiritual content of the Word with the lived realities, struggles, joys and concerns of the community. Preaching in the Orthodox context, therefore, embodies a dynamic and reciprocal interplay between Word, sacrament and community, fully reflecting the Church's understanding of salvation, as a relational, communal and incarnational reality, lived in and through the Body of Jesus Christ<sup>8</sup>.

Liturgical homiletics also carries significant and practical pastoral implications for contemporary society. In a fragmented, individualistic and technologically mediated culture, the homily functions as a stabilizing, orienting and spiritually formative force, drawing individuals into ecclesial communion, fostering moral and spiritual growth and reinforcing the shared identity, cohesion and mission of the Church. By grounding preaching in the Holy Liturgy, Orthodox homiletics maintains continuity with patristic models and centuries of ecclesial tradition, while simultaneously addressing the existential, cultural and pastoral challenges facing modern

<sup>6</sup> John Meyendorff, *Byzantine theology. Historical trends and doctrinal themes*, Fordham University Press, New York, 1999, pp. 167-189.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Hopko, *The Orthodox faith. Worship*, vol. 2, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, New York, 1992, pp. 56-79.

<sup>8</sup> Pr. John Behr, *Credința niceană. Formarea teologiei creștine*, vol. 2, Editura Sophia, București, 2022, pp. 350-367.



communities. It offers a pathway for integrating faith into daily life, helping the faithful navigate social, moral and spiritual complexities while remaining anchored in sacramental participation<sup>9</sup>.

Ultimately, understanding preaching, as intrinsically liturgical, sacramental and ecclesial, provides a comprehensive and robust framework for a vibrant, participatory and transformative homiletic practice. It affirms that the true effectiveness of the homily does not lie solely in rhetorical skill, eloquence, or persuasive techniques, but in its capacity to mediate the divine presence, cultivate ecclesial unity, restore spiritual coherence and guide the faithful toward authentic, lived spiritual life. In doing so, preaching empowers believers to embody the Gospel meaningfully and consistently in their daily existence, fostering a Church that is alive, united and deeply attuned to the presence of Jesus Christ, in all aspects of human life<sup>10</sup>.

### 3. PATRISTIC MODELS AND THEIR CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

The patristic homiletic tradition offers a rich, multifaceted and enduring foundation for understanding effective preaching in the Orthodox Church. Rooted, deeply, in Holy Scripture, theological reflection and the lived spiritual experience of the faithful, the Holy Fathers articulated a vision of preaching, that carefully balances doctrinal depth, pastoral sensitivity, moral witness and spiritual authenticity. Core criteria, emphasized by the patristic masters, include clarity of expression, theological precision, pastoral empathy, moral integrity and personal ascetic formation. These elements ensured, that preaching was not only intellectually robust, but also spiritually transformative, fostering the holiness, unity and maturation of both preacher and community. The patristic understanding of preaching encompasses a holistic approach in which the Word operates simultaneously on the cognitive, emotional and spiritual levels, making the homily a vehicle for both instruction and sanctification. St. John Chrysostom exemplifies the integration of these principles in a remarkably compelling manner. His sermons demonstrate extraordinary clarity, rhetorical skill, moral urgency and attention to the concrete struggles, fears and aspirations of the faithful. Chrysostom addressed social injustices, ethical dilemmas, spiritual apathy and communal divisions with both theological rigor and pastoral sensitivity, showing that the preacher must inhabit the lived reality of the listeners, without compromising doctrinal truth. His emphasis on personal integrity, spiritual discipline and ascetic formation underscores the necessity of the preacher's own holiness for authentic proclamation. Chrysostom's model remains highly relevant for contemporary homiletics, especially in addressing modern crises of identity, alienation, moral confusion and the fragmentation of communal life<sup>11</sup>.

St. Basil the Great, similarly, provides enduring guidance for preachers. His homilies combine theological sophistication, with profound pastoral concern, for the well-being of the entire community. Basil's approach underscores the necessity of contextualized preaching: the homily responds thoughtfully to the spiritual, social, intellectual and even political circumstances of the audience while remaining firmly grounded in Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition. His insistence on the integration of prayer, liturgy and pastoral care with preaching illustrates the holistic nature of effective homiletics, demonstrating that the homily is inseparable from the broader sacramental and communal life of the Church<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Pr. Alexander Schmemmann, *Introducere în teologia liturgică*, Editura Sophia, București, 2009, pp. 256-267.

<sup>10</sup> Pr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Rugăciunea lui Iisus și experiența Duhului Sfânt*, Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 2003, pp. 78-97.

<sup>11</sup> Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur, *Despre preoție*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1998, pp. 127-132.

<sup>12</sup> Sf. Vasile cel Mare, *Despre Sfântul Duh*, vol 12, col. Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești, Editura Institutului Biblic al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1988, pp. 49-74.



St. Ephrem the Syrian offers another valuable model, emphasizing poetic imagination, vivid symbolism, allegorical interpretation and pastoral empathy. Ephrem's sermons engage both the intellect and the imagination, allowing listeners to internalize theological truths experientially and emotionally. His creative use of allegory, metaphor, hymnographic forms and culturally resonant imagery demonstrates that preaching can be adaptively imaginative, effectively communicating eternal truths within culturally specific contexts while fostering a deep, affective and transformative encounter with the Gospel<sup>13</sup>. The relevance of these patristic models extends directly to contemporary pastoral challenges. In a world, marked by fragmentation, hyper-individualism, moral relativism and crises of meaning, the principles exemplified by the Holy Fathers provide practical guidance for preaching that restores coherence, nurtures communal identity, fosters moral integrity and communicates the transformative presence of Jesus Christ. By integrating clarity, doctrinal fidelity, empathetic engagement, moral witness, spiritual authenticity and creative expression, contemporary homiletics can remain faithful to Holy Tradition while responding effectively to the pastoral, existential and cultural needs of today's faithful. Patristic approaches also offer critical methodological insights for modern preachers. They emphasize the importance of understanding the audience, connecting doctrine with lived experience and embodying the Word in personal life. The Fathers' homilies demonstrate that preaching is fundamentally an incarnational act: the Word is proclaimed not merely to inform the mind, but to transform the heart, unite the faithful with Jesus Christ and build communal cohesion. They model a dynamic interplay between instruction, spiritual formation and relational engagement, showing that preaching operates simultaneously on cognitive, affective and moral levels<sup>14</sup>.

Ultimately, engaging patristic models allows Orthodox homiletics to recover both theological depth and practical relevance. The enduring wisdom of the Holy Fathers equips preachers to address contemporary spiritual, moral and existential crises, fostering a ministry that is authentic, transformative, relational and firmly rooted in ecclesial communion. In doing so, the patristic heritage remains an indispensable and vital resource for renewing Christian witness, guiding the faithful and restoring coherence, unity and spiritual vitality in today's fragmented society.

#### 4. CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES TO CHRISTIAN WITNESS

In the contemporary world, Orthodox preaching encounters multiple, interconnected and complex challenges, that profoundly and significantly affect the efficacy, credibility and transformative potential of Christian witness. Cultural relativism, widespread individualism, fragmented patterns of communication, digital saturation and the progressive erosion of ecclesial commitment all contribute to a context in which the proclamation of the Gospel requires renewed theological, pastoral and methodological strategies.

These phenomena do not merely alter the way messages are received; they fundamentally shape human experience, perception, reasoning and understanding, producing profound anthropological, spiritual and existential consequences. Individuals increasingly face profound existential fragmentation, wrestling with questions of identity, meaning and purpose in social and cultural environments where traditional communal and spiritual anchors are weakened, neglected, or entirely absent. The modern human person is often confronted with multiple, competing narratives, ideologies and value systems, that challenge coherent self-understanding, ethical

<sup>13</sup> Saint Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, New York, 1990, pp. 36-49.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Hopko, *Speaking the truth in love. On education, mission and witness in contemporary Orthodoxy*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, New York, 2004, pp. 58-73.



discernment and relational stability, intensifying the urgency for a preaching, that restores both personal and communal coherence, offering pathways toward wholeness, integration and spiritual resilience<sup>15</sup>. Relativism poses a particular and pressing challenge, undermining confidence in objective moral truths and fostering the widespread perception that all values, opinions and worldviews are equally valid and ultimately subjective. In such an environment, preaching must articulate the unchanging and universal truth of the Gospel with clarity, theological precision, pastoral sensitivity and persuasive authority, offering a coherent, integrated vision of human life grounded in Jesus Christ and oriented toward eternal realities. Fragmented communication, accelerated and reinforced by digital media, social networks, instant messaging and other rapid channels of information, has conditioned audiences to consume knowledge in short, disjointed bursts, often undermining sustained engagement with complex theological, moral and spiritual discourse. Preachers must therefore employ both clarity and creativity, structuring messages to capture attention while retaining depth, doctrinal accuracy and pastoral relevance. Attention to rhetorical rhythm, illustrative examples, narrative strategies and culturally resonant storytelling can help the listener internalize the Word, integrate it into lived experience and apply its transformative power to concrete challenges of life.

The decline of ecclesial commitment introduces additional challenges for authority, credibility and trust. Institutional confidence has eroded in many contexts, rendering audiences more skeptical of hierarchical pronouncements, formal instruction and religious authority. Preachers must therefore embody spiritual authenticity, moral integrity and relational credibility, demonstrating through personal example the transformative power of the Gospel. Personal witness, pastoral empathy and consistency between word and life become indispensable tools for effective preaching. At the same time, engagement with contemporary culture requires discernment, nuance and theological literacy: preachers must navigate prevailing cultural narratives, existential anxieties, ethical dilemmas and social pressures, without compromising Orthodox doctrine or diluting the Gospel message. They are called to negotiate the tension between tradition and modernity, offering guidance, that is both faithful to the Church's teaching and relevant to the lived experience of the contemporary faithful<sup>16</sup>.

Digital technology presents both obstacles and opportunities for modern preaching. While it can promote distraction, superficial engagement, moral relativism and the trivialization of sacred truth, it also allows for innovative forms of catechesis, educational outreach, liturgical enrichment, pastoral communication and spiritual accompaniment. Effective homiletics must carefully balance the benefits of these tools with the imperative to preserve ecclesial, communal and liturgical integrity. Online platforms, multimedia resources, social networks and live-streamed services can significantly extend the reach of preaching, making the Gospel accessible to dispersed and digitally immersed audiences. Yet the Word must remain firmly anchored in the sacramental life, doctrinal framework and liturgical rhythm of the Church, ensuring that technological efficiency enhances rather than replaces spiritual depth, theological authenticity and ecclesial participation<sup>17</sup>.

Ultimately, responding to contemporary challenges requires a homiletic vision, that is profoundly theological, pastorally sensitive, contextually aware, culturally attuned and creatively adaptive. Preaching, in the modern world, is not merely a technical exercise or a matter of delivering information; it is a participatory, relational and transformative act that mediates the presence of

<sup>15</sup> Rowan Williams, *Faith in the public square*, Bloomsbury Continuum, London, 2015, pp. 252-267.

<sup>16</sup> David Ford, *The modern theologians. An introduction to Christian theology since 1918*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2005, pp. 562-587.

<sup>17</sup> Jean-Claude Larchet, *Captivi în internet*, Editura Sophia, București, 2018, pp. 122-138.



Jesus Christ, restores coherence and meaning, strengthens communal and personal unity and nurtures spiritual vitality in the lives of the faithful. By addressing existential fragmentation, navigating crises of authority, creatively engaging with contemporary culture and judiciously employing digital tools, Orthodox homiletics can renew Christian witness, reassert the relevance and power of the Gospel and offer a credible, life-giving and transformative encounter with the living Word of God in today's fragmented, complex and ever-evolving world<sup>18</sup>.

## 5. RENEWING ORTHODOX HOMILETIC PRACTICE TODAY

In response, to the complex cultural, social and spiritual challenges of contemporary society, Orthodox homiletics requires a comprehensive, systematic and multi-dimensional renewal that integrates theological fidelity, pastoral sensitivity and methodological creativity. The pressing realities of modern life, including cultural relativism, rapid technological change, pervasive individualism, social fragmentation and moral ambiguity, demand that Orthodox preaching adapt in form, method and style, while remaining firmly anchored in Holy Scripture, patristic tradition and the sacramental and communal life of the Church. This chapter proposes concrete directions for revitalizing preaching, emphasizing both the content and the relational, participatory dimension of proclamation, ensuring that the homily functions as a transformative encounter rather than a mere intellectual, didactic, or moral discourse. Central to this renewal is the cultivation of incarnational and relational communication, which engages the whole human person, mind, heart and body and mediates the presence of Jesus Christ in ways, that are concrete, existentially relevant and spiritually nourishing. The preacher becomes a living instrument of God's Word, embodying the transformative message of the Gospel through both word and life, offering the faithful a tangible, experiential encounter with divine grace, that resonates within everyday life and fosters holistic spiritual formation<sup>19</sup>.

Dialogical preaching represents a second methodological priority. Modern audiences come with questions, doubts, anxieties and lived experiences, that are profoundly shaped by fragmented cultural, social and digital environments. Effective homiletics requires that the preacher actively engage these realities through attentive listening, thoughtful responsiveness and empathetic dialogue. This relational approach fosters trust, deepens understanding and ensures that the proclamation is experienced, as a participatory encounter, rather than a mere transfer of knowledge or information. By recognizing, respecting and dialoguing with the contemporary listener's context, dialogical preaching preserves theological depth while remaining pastorally effective, encouraging reflective engagement, internalization of the Word and interactive reception. It transforms the homily into a relational space where Jesus Christ speaks to both individual and communal needs<sup>20</sup>. The integration of digital technologies constitutes another essential dimension of renewed homiletic practice. Digital tools, including social media, video platforms, live streaming, podcasts and multimedia presentations, can significantly amplify outreach, facilitate catechesis and enhance engagement with diverse and geographically dispersed audiences. Yet, their use must remain subordinate to the liturgical, sacramental and ecclesial character of preaching. The challenge lies in employing these technologies creatively and responsibly, ensuring they complement rather than supplant the theological and pastoral essence of the homily. When used wisely, digital media can

<sup>18</sup> Albert Borgmann, *Technology and the character of contemporary life*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1987, pp. 167-189.

<sup>19</sup> pr. prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Spiritualitate și comuniune în Liturgia ortodoxă*, Editura Institutului Biblic al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2004, pp. 56-74.

<sup>20</sup> Pr. Alexander Schmemmann, *Euharistia. Taina Împărăției*, Editura Sophia, București, 2012, pp. 112-135.



extend the Church's witness into contemporary spaces of communication, providing new pathways for relational and incarnational proclamation while reinforcing the participatory and transformative dimensions of preaching<sup>21</sup>.

Formation of preachers is equally critical for effective renewal. Deep spiritual disciplines, sustained prayer, ascetic practices, rigorous study of Holy Scripture and patristic sources and refined pastoral discernment provide the indispensable foundation for preaching that is authentic, credible and transformative. The preacher's own spiritual life, moral integrity, personal authenticity and theological competence are essential tools for conveying the Gospel in ways, that resonate meaningfully with contemporary audiences. Without such formation, even the most eloquent or technically proficient sermons risk failing to foster genuine encounter with Jesus Christ, leaving the faithful unengaged or spiritually untethered<sup>22</sup>.

Finally, the homily should be conceived and framed, as a moment of communal participation, highlighting the ecclesial, relational and sacramental nature of preaching. The faithful are active participants, not passive recipients; their engagement through prayer, reflection, contemplation and sacramental involvement completes the communicative and transformative act of the homily. When these strategies, incarnational communication, dialogical engagement, responsible digital integration and rigorous preacher formation, are combined, Orthodox homiletics is empowered to strengthen the preacher's capacity to communicate the Gospel authentically, effectively and pastorally. Such a holistic approach addresses contemporary cultural, existential and spiritual fragmentation, while fostering personal and communal spiritual renewal, reinforcing ecclesial communion and promoting transformative participation in the ongoing life and mission of Jesus Christ in the Church and the world.

## CONCLUSION

Preaching, as communion, presents a comprehensive and transformative vision for Orthodox homiletics, emphasizing that proclamation is not a mere intellectual exercise, rhetorical performance, or moral instruction, but a participatory act of ecclesial and spiritual encounter. Rooted in Holy Scripture, the patristic tradition, and the liturgical life of the Church, this approach underscores the inseparable connection between preaching, sacramental worship and the communal experience of faith. By reclaiming the communal and relational character of proclamation, Orthodox homiletics reaffirms the Church's role as a living Body, in which each member participates in the mystery of Jesus Christ and the unity of the faithful<sup>23</sup>. The sacramental dimension of preaching ensures that the homily mediates divine presence, inviting the faithful into an experience of grace and spiritual transformation.

The patristic models, such as St. John Chrysostom, St. Basil the Great, and St. Ephrem the Syrian, illustrate the centrality of moral integrity, theological depth and pastoral sensitivity in preaching. Their example provides enduring guidance for contemporary preachers, demonstrating that effective homiletics requires the integration of spiritual formation, doctrinal fidelity and empathetic engagement with the audience. Liturgical context further enhances this vision. Proclamation within the Eucharistic assembly connects the homily to the life of the Church, making

<sup>21</sup> Clifford G. Christians, *Media ethics and global justice in the digital age*, Cambridge University Press, London, 2019, pp. 23-47.

<sup>22</sup> Stanley S. Harakas, *Living the faith. The praxis of Eastern Orthodox ethics*, Light & Life Publishing, Denver, 1993, pp. 45-73.

<sup>23</sup> John Breck, *Darul sacru al vieții. Tratat de bioetică*, Editura Patmos, Cluj Napoca, 2001, pp. 34-56.



the act of preaching an extension of the liturgical and sacramental encounter. The faithful are active participants and the homily becomes a dynamic exchange in which the Word of God both speaks and is received, producing personal and communal renewal.

Addressing contemporary challenges, such as cultural fragmentation, digital mediation, individualism and crises of meaning, requires methodological creativity and pastoral discernment. Incarnational communication, dialogical engagement and responsible integration of digital tools enable preachers to communicate the Gospel effectively while preserving ecclesial and theological integrity<sup>24</sup>.

Ultimately, preaching, as communion, restores the transformative and relational character of the homily. It enables the faithful to encounter Jesus Christ personally, deepen their unity with one another and participate actively in the Church's mission. This renewed vision, for Orthodox homiletics, offers a credible, life-giving and contextually relevant witness, capable of addressing the spiritual, cultural and anthropological challenges of contemporary society. By recovering the essence of proclamation as communion, Orthodox preaching fulfills its vocation: to make Jesus Christ present, foster unity and guide the faithful toward holiness and mission in the world.

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<sup>24</sup> Pr. John Behr, *A deveni om. Meditații de antropologie creștină în cuvânt și imagine*, Editura Doxologia, Iași, 2017, pp. 34-65.



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## ICOANA CREDINTEI

### Icon of Faith. International Journal of Interdisciplinary Religious Studies

IFIJISR- IISSN 2501-3386; ISSN-L 2393-137X| <https://doi.org/10.26520/icoana>

Frequency: 2 issues/year, with possible supplementary issues.

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Ideas Forum International Academic and Scientific Association (IFIASA) is a cultural-educational organization of distinguished members engaged in academic and scientific research.

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Târgoviște, Dâmbovița,  
Romania

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#### About IJTPS

IFIJISR, is a journal published and promoted at international level by IFIASA in collaboration with members of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology and Education Sciences, "Valahia" University, Târgoviște. Icon of Faith is a Scientific, Open Access journal, with the main aim to promote a high level of Christian Theology in an intercultural context.

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**Publisher:** IFIASA® Ideas Forum International Academic and Scientific Association.