



## THE PASTORAL AND SOCIAL DIMENSION OF ORTHODOX HOMILETICS: FROM TRADITION TO THE CHALLENGES OF THE MODERN WORLD

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper provides a detailed examination of the pastoral and social dimensions inherent in Orthodox homiletics, emphasizing the nuanced balance Orthodox preachers must achieve between preserving traditional values and addressing contemporary societal challenges. Through an analysis of biblical teachings, patristic writings, and insights from contemporary theological scholarship, the study delves into the unique prophetic role of Orthodox preaching as a guiding force for communities experiencing both spiritual and societal turmoil. The research highlights that the preacher's role goes beyond mere conveyance of doctrine; it includes a responsibility to uphold Orthodox teachings faithfully while also thoughtfully engaging with the complex, evolving moral and social dilemmas that arise in today's fast-paced, modern world. By doing so, Orthodox homiletics not only supports the spiritual growth of the faithful but also provides a framework for moral reflection and social engagement, fostering a more compassionate and resilient community capable of responding to change without losing its foundational values.*

**Keywords:** *Orthodox homiletics; pastoral dimension; social dimension; patristic tradition; globalization; secularization;*

### INTRODUCTION

Orthodox homiletics represents a vast and profound branch of pastoral theology that seeks not only to transmit the Gospel message but also to communicate the teachings of the Church in a manner that resonates with the spiritual and existential needs of contemporary believers. This work explores two core dimensions of Orthodox homiletics: pastoral care, which addresses the individual and communal needs of believers, and social engagement, which calls the priest to actively respond to the ethical and communal challenges within modern society. In today's world, priests find themselves navigating a diverse landscape of social and spiritual needs, urging them to adapt their preaching to remain relevant to their communities. They are tasked not only with guiding believers in their personal spiritual journeys but also with addressing societal issues that affect the faithful's lives.

This includes tackling matters related to social justice, moral ambiguity, and ethical guidance within a rapidly changing cultural environment. Thus, Orthodox homiletics emphasizes a preaching approach that is both rooted in tradition and responsive to the dynamic challenges of the present age, aiming to provide both comfort and clarity amidst the complexities of modern life.



## 1. THE PASTORAL DIMENSION OF ORTHODOX HOMILETICS

At the heart of Orthodox preaching is the call to repent and follow Jesus Christ. Orthodox homiletics draws its roots from patristic teachings, which emphasise the importance of conversion of soul and spiritual life. For example, saint John Chrysostom emphasised that: *"Great is the power of preaching... And just as the spark when it falls on wood kindles wood and kindles wood and kindles more, so also with the preaching of the Gospel"*<sup>1</sup>.

In this sense, the sermon has a dual function: to instruct believers in the right faith and to exhort them to a life in conformity with the Gospel.

The pastoral dimension of Orthodox homiletics is a fundamental element of the priest's mission, at the centre of which is the care for the souls of the faithful and the transmission of the Gospel in a relevant and contextualised way. In this study, we explore the significance of this dimension from biblical, patristic and contemporary perspectives, focussing on how preaching responds to the spiritual and social needs of the community, especially in the face of the challenges of the modern world.

Pastoral preaching draws its essence from Holy Scripture. In the New Testament, the pastoral mission is clearly expressed in the words of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Apostles: *"Go and teach all nations..."* (Matthew 28:19). Preaching is the means by which the Gospel is proclaimed and the priest is the instrument by which God works in people's souls (Romans 10:14-15). Saint Apostle Paul exhorts Church servants to be models of faith and Christian living (1 Timothy 4:12).

The pastoral dimension of homiletics implies that the priest is not just a mere teacher, but that he lays his heart on behalf of those in his care (John 10:11). Saint Gregory the Theologian emphasised the importance of knowing community members, noting that the priest must have discernment in order to know how to spiritually nourish the flock entrusted to him<sup>2</sup>. Pastoral care means the involvement of the priest in the life of the community, the needs and challenges of the faithful.

The Church Fathers attached particular importance to the pastoral dimension of preaching. Saint John Chrysostom, considered the Church's greatest preacher, emphasised the need for the priest to deliver relevant sermons that touch the soul of the listener.

*"Priests have but one means, one way of healing: teaching with the word, preaching. This is the instrument, this is the food, this is the best air; this takes the place of medicine, this takes the place of cauterisation, this takes the place of the scalpel. If the priest must burn or cut, he must of necessity use the sermon. If preaching is not able to do this, all else is vain. By preaching we lift up the discouraged soul; by preaching we humble the conceited soul; by preaching we cut off what is superfluous; by preaching we fulfil what is lacking; by preaching we work all the other things that help to heal the soul"*<sup>3</sup>.

Saint Basil the Great also urged that the sermon should be a beacon of light for the lost, calling to repentance and authentic life in Jesus Christ<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omilii la Matei*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1994, p. 540.

<sup>2</sup> Grigorie de Nazianz, *Cuvânt de apărare pentru fuga în Pont sau Despre preoție*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1987, pp. 163-169.

<sup>3</sup> Ioan Gură de Aur, *Tratatul despre preoție*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1997, p. 99.

<sup>4</sup> Vasile cel Mare, *Rânduielele vieții monahale*, Editura Sophia, București, 2023, p. 125.



Orthodox preaching is not only a teaching tool, but also a prophetic one. The sermon must be a call to change, a voice, expressing God's will in the face of contemporary challenges<sup>5</sup>. In the context of secularisation and moral relativism, the priest must offer a prophetic message, based on the perennial values of the Gospel.

In today's world, clergy face complex social and cultural challenges. Globalisation, technology and secularisation put new pressures on the Church and on the way the Gospel message is perceived. In this reality, pastoral preaching must address issues such as individualism, loss of a sense of community and the global moral crisis.

The Church cannot be absent from the dialogue on social justice and the ethical challenges of contemporary times. In his preaching, the priest must address the concrete problems of the community: poverty, social injustice, moral crises<sup>6</sup>.

One of the essential features of pastoral preaching is empathy. The priest must be attentive to the needs of the believers and address those needs from a spiritual perspective. The sermon is a form of pastoral love, which must be delivered with love and understanding<sup>7</sup>. Empathy helps the preacher establish a deep connection with his listeners.

The Orthodox sermon is inseparable from the Divine Liturgy. It finds its natural place within the Holy Liturgy, being an extension of prayer and communion with the Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The pastoral dimension of Orthodox homiletics is essential to the Church's mission, as the priest is called to be both teacher and shepherd of souls. In a world marked by spiritual and social challenges, Orthodox preaching must be a beacon of light and hope, addressing the spiritual and social needs of the faithful.

## 2. THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF ORTHODOX HOMILETICS

*"Man is an organised and social being. And in our community life and in our relationships with one another, it is imperative that we give generously to help those in need"*<sup>8</sup>. The Orthodox Church cannot ignore the social needs of its faithful. In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus Christ spoke about the importance of loving your neighbour and serving those in need (*Matthew 25:31-46*). These are also essential themes for Orthodox homiletics.

Orthodox homiletics is not just a form of theological teaching, but an essential tool for involving the Church in the social life of the community. Orthodox homiletics finds its place in pastoral ministry by addressing not only spiritual problems but also social challenges. In today's context, characterised by poverty, social inequality and suffering, the priest has a duty to address these issues by offering guidance and support. The sermon thus becomes a call to social action, inspired by Christian values, of love and mercy (*John 13:34-35*).

In Holy Scripture, we find many examples, that emphasise the importance of the social dimension of faith. In the Old Testament, the prophet Isaiah proclaimed the importance of social justice. *"Teach yourselves to do good, seek justice, rescue the afflicted, give justice to the fatherless, defend the widow's righteousness"* (*Isaiah 1:17*). Also, in the New

<sup>5</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. 2, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1997, pp. 151-168.

<sup>6</sup> Vasile cel Mare, *Regulile morale*, Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești, vol. 18, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1989, pp. 173-177.

<sup>7</sup> Antonie de Suroj, *Taina iubirii*, Editura Sophia, București, 2009, pp. 35-40.

<sup>8</sup> Vasile cel Mare, *Scrieri dogmatice și exegetice*, Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești, serie nouă, vol. 4, Editura Basilica, București, 2011, p. 405.



Testament, in the *Sermon on the Mount* (*Matthew 5-7*), Jesus Christ emphasises charity and social responsibility. The priest, as preacher, should exhort the community to fulfil these biblical exhortations through deeds of love and justice.

In the parable of the *Good Samaritan* (*Luke 10:25-37*), we see a concrete example of how faith should manifest itself in actions to help those in distress. Just as the Samaritan intervened to help the wounded man, so the priest, through his preaching, has a duty to encourage the community to be involved in acts of benevolence and social support.

The Church Fathers have repeatedly emphasised the importance of the social dimension of preaching. Saint John Chrysostom, known for his vehemence against social injustices, considered that the riches, we possess, are not our own but those of the poor. For saint John Chrysostom, preaching was not just a means of proclaiming theological teachings, but a call to justice and mercy<sup>9</sup>.

Social involvement of Church members is not optional, but an integral part of the Christian mission. Therefore, Orthodox preaching cannot ignore social challenges, but must be a prophetic voice, calling for justice, equity and support for the marginalised.

In a world dominated by social inequalities and moral crises, the social dimension of Orthodox preaching is becoming increasingly necessary. Priests are called to offer spiritual and practical solutions to the problems faced by the faithful, whether it be poverty, discrimination or meaninglessness in the face of modern challenges. Priests need to be aware of the specific needs of their communities and offer, through their preaching, not only spiritual guidance, but also concrete solutions to social problems. Whether it is organising charity work or preaching directly on issues such as social justice, the priest has a duty to offer hope and support to those who are suffering.

An essential aspect of Orthodox homiletics is concern for the marginalised and excluded. In modern times, this means supporting those who are economically, socially or culturally excluded. In his sermons, the priest must be an advocate for the marginalised, calling the community to solidarity and compassion. In this sense, the sermon becomes a call to action, inspired by the merciful love of Jesus Christ for all people, but especially for those in suffering and need<sup>10</sup>.

The social dimension of Orthodox homiletics is not a secondary component of preaching, but an expression of active Christian love in the world. In a society marked by inequalities and social crises, the priest is called to be a voice of justice and compassion. Through preaching, priest offers not only spiritual guidance, but also solutions to concrete community problems. In this way, the Church becomes a place of comfort, support and social transformation, based on the teachings of the Gospel and the patristic tradition of mercy.

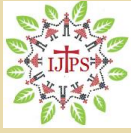
### 3. THE PATRISTIC TRADITION AND ITS RELEVANCE IN MODERN HOMILETICS

Patristic tradition remains a foundation of Orthodox homiletics. Preaching must be the light of the world. This light is not only theological, but also moral, calling the faithful to be "salt and light" in a world, that is moving away from Christian values.

Many Fathers of the Church have played a central role in the formation and development of Orthodox homiletics, for they have left sermons and homilies, that have not only formed generations of believers, but have provided a solid theological framework for

<sup>9</sup> In the paper *Omilii la Matei*, of St John Chrysostom, 69 subchapters are dedicated to the theme of mercy.

<sup>10</sup> Anton Savelovici, "Principii de alcătuire a unei omilii într-o societate globalizată", in: *Globalizare, Religie, Educație*, Valahia University Press, Târgoviște, 2013, pp. 168-177.



pastoral ministry. Preaching, in the patristic vision, is an act not only of teaching, but also of spiritual guidance, which must touch both the souls of believers and the practical aspects of their daily lives.

Over the centuries, the patristic tradition has continued to be a vital source of inspiration for Orthodox preachers. Their teachings have not remained mere relics of the past, but have been integrated into contemporary homiletics, providing answers to the challenges and dilemmas of the modern world.

One of the Church's greatest preachers, saint John Chrysostom (347-407), remains a central figure in the development of Orthodox preaching. He is known for his ability to blend profound theology with the social and economic issues of his time. In many homilies, saint John Chrysostom addressed issues of inequality, injustice and mercy. For example: "*He who has pity on the poor, lends to the Lord*" (Proverbs 19:17). Let us lend God mercy, that we may receive from Him, in return, love of mankind. How wise are these words: *He that lends mercy to the poor, lends to God!*

- But why Scripture did not say: He that hath mercy on the poor, giveth to God, but lends to God?

- Scripture knows our greed. It saw that our greed seeks to have as much as possible. That is why it did not simply say: *He who gives to the poor, gives to God*, so that you do not think of almsgiving as a simple exchange of money, but: *He who gives to the poor, lends to God*. If God borrows from us, God is our debtor. How would you have God: Judge or debtor? The debtor has respect for him from whom he has borrowed; but the judge does not shun him whom he has lent"<sup>11</sup>.

For modern preachers, the example of saint John Chrysostom is particularly relevant. In a world in which poverty and inequality are the order of the day, homiletics must respond not only to the spiritual, but also to the social needs of believers. Saint John Chrysostom showed that the message of the Gospel has an immediate and concrete application in everyday life, emphasising the need for charity and social justice.

Saint Gregory of Nazianz (329-390) is another Church father, who significantly influenced Orthodox homiletics. Known for his ability to bring extraordinary theological depth to his sermons, saint Gregory of Nazianz is a model for preachers, who wish to address complex theological themes in a way that is accessible to the faithful. The sermons of saint Gregory of Nazianz are an example of the balance between mystical theology and pastoral concerns. In the homily *Despre teologie*<sup>12</sup>, saint Gregory of Nazianz emphasises the importance of the Word of God in the life of every believer, calling everyone to deepen their connection with God, through prayer and the study of Holy Scripture. This mystical aspect of preaching remains particularly relevant for contemporary preachers, who are called to combine theological depth with the pastoral needs of the community.

Saint Basil the Great (330-379) is known both for his theological contributions and for his involvement in the social life of the community. He was an active preacher, who used preaching as a tool to educate and reform society. In his writings, saint Basil the Great emphasised the need to help the poor and the need for Christian solidarity.

*"Mercy is the greatest virtue, for by it we are likened to God"*<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omilii despre pocăință*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1998, p. 146.

<sup>12</sup> Grigorie de Nazianz, *Cele cinci cuvântări teologice*, Editura Anastasia, București, 1993, pp. 21-50.

<sup>13</sup> Vasile cel Mare, *Regulile morale*, p. 110.





Although they lived in different times from today, the Church Fathers offered teachings, that remain relevant today. Saint Gregory of Nyssa, for example, spoke of the infinity of God's love and the call of every believer to reflect this love in everyday life. In his homilies, saint Gregory of Nyssa emphasised that man's true greatness lies in his capacity to love unconditionally<sup>14</sup>. For contemporary Orthodox preachers, this teaching is particularly important, especially in a world where conflict and hatred are the order of the day. Preaching must be an instrument of reconciliation and love, offering spiritual and moral solutions to the challenges facing the world today.

For modern homiletics, the relevance of the patristic tradition is indisputable. From saint John Chrysostom, who emphasised the importance of social justice, to saint Gregory of Nazianz, who brought mystical theology into preaching, the Church Fathers have provided a solid foundation for contemporary Orthodox preachers. In the context of modern challenges, homiletics must be both a form of theological teaching and a call to social and moral action. By integrating patristic teachings into their sermons, today's priests can better respond to the spiritual and social needs of the faithful, offering a living sermon, that inspires both love of God and compassion for neighbour.

#### 4. MODERN CHALLENGES: GLOBALISATION AND SECULARISATION

In the context of globalisation and secularisation, Orthodox homiletics faces new challenges. Preachers are called to witness to Christian values in a world increasingly dominated by moral relativism. Globalisation and secularisation are distinct but interconnected processes shaping the modern context of religious life. Globalisation defines a world in which rapid flows of information, ideas and goods have created a global cultural marketplace. On the other hand, secularisation marks the shift from a society in which religion was a central component of public life to one in which religion is private and marginalised. In the face of these changes, the Orthodox Church is trying to find appropriate responses.

Globalisation has created unique opportunities for the Church to spread the Christian faith through new technologies, such as the internet and social media<sup>15</sup>. However, it also comes with risks, such as religious superficiality and syncretism. In the Orthodox diaspora, for example, believers are exposed to multiple cultures and religions, which can lead to a relativisation of their own religious tradition.

The Church, especially in the Orthodox area, has to respond to the challenges of identity, having to live between preserving traditional values and adapting to new cultural contexts. Inter-religious and intercultural dialogue can be seen as a way of reconciling these two extremes, but also as a danger, if it leads to a dilution of faith.

Secularisation has produced a profound change in the way religion is perceived and experienced in public life. From being an essential pillar of society, religion has been pushed to the margins and is now considered an individual choice. In many Western societies, including Romania, we are witnessing a decline in religious participation, especially among young people. The secularisation of the younger generation does not only imply the decline of religion, but a profound change in the structures of meaning, that underpin religious

<sup>14</sup> Grigorie de Nyssa, *Despre iubirea față de săraci și despre facerea de bine*, Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești, vol. 30, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1998, pp. 444-447.

<sup>15</sup> Anton Savelovici, "Rolul internetului în transmiterea cuvântului lui Dumnezeu", in: *Digresioni necesare*, Editura Napoca Star, Cluj-Napoca, 2021, pp. 141-151.



belief<sup>16</sup>. In this context, Christianity faces a major challenge: how to remain relevant in a world, where secular and individualistic values dominate public discourse. The Church must redefine its mission and find ways to respond to the spiritual needs of an increasingly secular society.

Globalisation and secularisation have a significant impact on Orthodox communities. In many cases, believers in the diaspora face identity dilemmas, as they are exposed to norms and values, that conflict with the religious traditions they have inherited. On the other hand, secularisation has led to a fragmentation of local religious communities. In Romania, although the majority of the population declare themselves to be Orthodox, the number of those who actively participate in the life of the Church is decreasing. This reflects a general trend of distancing from religious institutions, especially among younger generations<sup>17</sup>.

Faced with these challenges, the Orthodox Church has adopted various strategies of adaptation and response. Central to this response is the reaffirmation of traditional values in an increasingly secular and globalised world. The Church emphasises the importance of preserving religious identity, not as a form of isolation, but as a way of offering authentic spiritual alternatives to those seeking meaning in a world dominated by consumerism and moral relativism.

The Orthodox Church has the advantage of a strong and deep-rooted tradition in liturgical and community life. This can serve as a spiritual anchor in an ever-changing world. Of Himself, Jesus Christ said that He is the "*Way, the Truth and the Life*" (*John* 14:6). Since Jesus Christ is immutable, then the Truth does not change with the times, but remains eternal. Because the Church is a living organism, with Jesus Christ as its head, it can provide answers to contemporary challenges, while remaining faithful to its tradition.

Another important dimension of the Orthodox response to the challenges of modernity is the renewal of the pastoral mission. In the face of secularisation, the Church needs to focus on religious education and the involvement of young people in Church life. This involves not only traditional preaching, but also using modern means of communication to reach new generations. The Church can use social media and digital platforms to extend its influence and respond to the challenges of a globalised and secularised society.

Globalisation and secularisation are major challenges for the Orthodox Church, but they can also be opportunities for spiritual and pastoral renewal. By reaffirming its traditional values and adapting its mission to the modern context, the Church can remain relevant and effective in serving the faithful. In the face of these global phenomena, Orthodoxy offers an alternative vision, rooted in tradition, but open to dialogue with the contemporary world.

## 5. HOMILETICS AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

In a world marked by religious pluralism, Orthodox preaching must promote not only the confession of traditional values, but also open dialogue with other Christian confessions and religions.

Homiletics, the art of preaching, plays an essential role in transmitting the Gospel message to Christian communities. In a globalised and pluralistic context, homiletics is no longer addressed to a uniform audience, but to an increasingly diverse public. Interfaith dialogue, as an essential component of ecumenism, aims to foster understanding and

<sup>16</sup> Charles Taylor, *A secular age*, Harvard University Press, 2007, p. 45.

<sup>17</sup> Anton Savelovici, "Tendințe și orientări moral-religioase la tinerii post-decembriști. Raportare la învățătura Bisericii", in: *Tinerii și educația religios-morală în contextul provocărilor lumii contemporane. Contribuția Bisericii la cultura universală*, Valahia University Press, Târgoviște, 2016, pp. 493-502.



cooperation between different Christian traditions, and homiletics becomes an important tool in this process. Preachers should address common Christian themes that unite, without compromising the identity of each denomination. In this way, homiletics becomes a privileged place for promoting interfaith dialogue.

The exhortation of the saint Apostle Paul, to the people of Ephesus, to preserve the unity of the spirit and of the faith, can provide a theological framework for interfaith dialogue, underlining that while there are differences between confessions, there is also a common foundation of faith (*Ephesians* 4:3-6).

In his parting words, the Lord Jesus Christ expressed his desire for the unity of humanity: "*that they may all be one; as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be one in us*" (*John* 17:21). This prayer is essential for understanding the Church's role in promoting dialogue and unity among Christians. Preachers are called to preach about unity in a way, that not only unites their own communities, but also encourages cooperation and understanding between denominations.

In the patristic tradition, dialogue and cooperation between Christian communities have been seen as a way to strengthen the common faith. Saint John Chrysostom stressed the importance of dialogue for spiritual growth. In his homilies, saint John Chrysostom stressed the need to find ways of communion with other Christians and to promote love of neighbour<sup>18</sup>.

In the current context, the challenges to interfaith dialogue are diverse. Secularisation, globalisation and religious pluralism complicate the process of preaching, calling for a homiletical approach, that is sensitive to confessional differences, but also firmly rooted in the tradition of the Church. Preachers must be able to tailor their messages in such a way as to promote unity without sacrificing the fundamental teachings of their own denomination.

Homiletics has an essential role in promoting interfaith dialogue, and preachers have a special responsibility in this regard. In an increasingly confessionally fragmented world, homiletics can help strengthen Christian unity, while respecting theological and cultural diversity. By remaining faithful to the patristic and biblical traditions, but also by being open to modern dialogue, preachers can help build bridges of understanding between the various Christian confessions.

## 6. THE ROLE OF PREACHING IN COMBATING CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Orthodox preachers have a prophetic mission to address contemporary social issues from a Gospel perspective. The Church cannot remain indifferent to problems such as poverty, inequality, discrimination, violence, wars or environmental crises. These problems are not only economic or political; they also have a moral and spiritual dimension. In this context, preaching, as a fundamental tool for communicating the Christian message, plays a crucial role in addressing and combating these problems. Preachers have a responsibility to offer not only information, but also solutions based on Gospel values, urging communities to act in the face of these challenges.

Holy Scripture contains numerous passages, which emphasise the importance of social justice. For example, in *Isaiah* 1:17, it is written: "*Teach to do good, seek justice, help the oppressed, do justice to the fatherless, defend the widow.*" These verses make it clear that the Church has a divine mandate to engage in social issues. The Church's teaching on love of

<sup>18</sup> Ioan Gură de Aur, *Tâlcuire la epistolele către Galateni și către Efeseni*, Editura Doxologia, Iași, 2021, p. 95.





neighbour and compassion for the marginalised is found in the preaching of the Lord Jesus Christ and is a model for dealing with social problems (*The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)*). Preachers can use biblical examples to inspire social action, providing a theological basis for tackling contemporary problems.

One of the main roles of preaching is to raise community awareness of social issues. Sermons, which address issues such as poverty or injustice, can sensitise members of the community to become actively involved.

Every sermon should have a social education component, helping believers understand how they can act in accordance with Christian values to combat social problems. This may include involvement in volunteer programmes, supporting charities or simply educating the community about social issues.

Preaching can be a catalyst for social action. Preachers can use examples of social-philanthropic activity, organised and coordinated by the Romanian Orthodox Church, as models for applying preaching in action, demonstrating how biblical teaching can lead to concrete changes in society. Likewise, the teachings of generosity and charity, as presented in *Luke 6:38* ("Give, and it will be given to you; a good measure, a good measure, a heaping, a shaking, a laden, and a laden ladder will be poured into your lap; for with what measure you mete, it will be measured to you"), can motivate community members to become actively involved in supporting those in need.

Preaching can be a tool to promote social justice by emphasising the importance of equity and respect for human dignity. In this regard, preachers can use examples from the history of Western Christianity, such as activism, which used preaching as a platform to fight racial discrimination<sup>19</sup>. The saint Apostle Paul exhorts us: "*Do not avenge yourselves, beloved, but give place to the wrath of the wrath spoken by the Lord, for it is written: Vengeance is mine; I will repay.*" (*Romans 12:19*), thus showing that God is concerned for justice. This provides a solid basis for addressing social issues from a Christian perspective.

With the advancement of technology, preaching has evolved, now having digital platforms to reach a wider audience. Using social media to spread social messages and mobilise communities is an opportunity, which preachers can capitalise on<sup>20</sup>. This opportunity also comes with challenges, such as spreading false information or distorted messages. In this context, it is crucial for preachers to be well-informed and to deliver a clear message based on Holy Scripture.

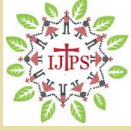
Preaching has the potential to transform communities, by promoting actions of mutual helpfulness and cultivating a culture of love and compassion. It not only encourages social involvement, but also helps to build a united community capable of dealing with social problems<sup>21</sup>. The example of the early Church, which helped orphans and widows, should also inspire modern communities to respond to today's social challenges (*Acts 2:44-45*).

Preaching can play an essential role in combating contemporary social problems. Through awareness-raising, education, mobilisation and the promotion of biblical values, preachers can help create a more just and equitable society. Preaching is not just a form of religious communication; it is a call to action, a call to social responsibility and a tool for change.

<sup>19</sup> Martin Luther King, *A testament of hope. The essential writings and speeches*, HarperOne, 2003, pp. 197-280.

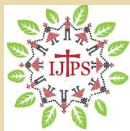
<sup>20</sup> Michael Novak, *The Catholic ethic and the spirit of capitalism*, The Free Press, New York, 1993, pp. 147-151.

<sup>21</sup> Ilaria L.E. Ramelli, *Social justice and the legitimacy of slavery. The role of philosophical asceticism from ancient Judaism to late antiquity*, Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. 121-140.



## **CONCLUSION**

Orthodox homiletics, deeply grounded in both Holy Scripture and the rich patristic heritage, serves as an essential instrument in the spiritual guidance of Orthodox communities. Through its pastoral function, homiletics fosters a deeper connection between the faithful and their spiritual lives, helping individuals internalize and live according to the principles of Orthodox Christianity. Furthermore, the social dimension of Orthodox preaching enables the Church to address the various challenges that arise within an ever-evolving society. This social engagement is crucial, especially as globalization and secularization continue to shape contemporary cultural landscapes. Orthodox preachers are therefore called to adapt their methods, seeking innovative ways to communicate the Gospel's timeless truths in a language and form that resonate with modern audiences. Yet, even as they adapt, preachers must remain unwavering in their commitment to preserving the core teachings of the Church, ensuring that any new approach to preaching strengthens, rather than dilutes, the integrity of Orthodox doctrine. This balance between tradition and adaptability empowers Orthodox homiletics to remain a dynamic and relevant force within both spiritual and societal realms, providing a moral compass amidst the complexities of modern life.



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