

## The Revival of the Exegetical Sermon, based on the Inspired Features of Holy Scriptures\*

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### Abstract:

*Being one of the two ways by which Divine Revelation is transmitted, the Bible holds the indisputable primacy in the life of the Church, at least according to theory. The words of God to mankind, written in different times by different authors, dealing with different themes and problems, contains entirely what our Heavenly Father has to convey to the world today (Curtaz 1993, 28-29). Noticing this antinomy, Saint Paul the Apostle conditioned the act of preaching on the study of the Scriptures (1 Timothy 4, 13; Titus 1, 9). Despite such tremendous efforts, nowadays, two millennia after his resounding conversions, we must acknowledge that the confidence of clergymen and the faithful in the authority and validity of evangelical principles is somewhat lower. The present paper aims bringing to your attention the reasoning for which the sixty nine books of the Old and the New Covenant make up together the Book of Books par excellence and for which the foundation of Orthodox sermon will always be the Holy Scriptures.*

### Keywords:

*sermon, exegetical homily, expository preaching, Holy Scriptures, Bible*

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## **1. The features of the books of Holy Scriptures**

### *Universality*

The spread of the gospel covered the whole world. The unity of Holy Scriptures consists in the fact that the sixty-six books of the biblical canon contain a universal message of divine origin. In the sacred texts resides the Word of God addressed to the world, and not just any words made up by the human mind about the Divinity.

Although, individually examined, each scripture was written for a specific purpose, with a specific addressee, or targeting a particular community, the validity and interest of the contents of Bible in its entirety remain the same for all the , of all times, and of all places, until Parousia.

### *Unity*

The diversity of myriads of biblical forms and genres constructs a whole thanks to the singularity of the source and the unity of the message. The Redeemer's personality confers unity to the history of mankind, from the creation of Adam to the Second Coming of Christ. The recapitulative aspect of His sacrifice The recapitulation theory of the atonement expresses dogmatically the all-encompassing efficacy of the supreme sacrifice that the only sinless Man has brought for us, winning us and freeing us all from the clutches of death. Objective salvation came to the world through obedience to the death of the Lord Jesus (Philippians 2, 8), through His blood (Ephesians 1, 7). Thus, in heaven and on earth, we all may be united again in Christ (Ephesians 1, 10), according to the vocation that was granted to us during the council of the Trinity before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1, 4).

The messianic thread also ensures the continuity of the two great parts of Scriptures, the Testaments. Without being able to quote him in his words precisely, I mention here a free discussion with Archbishop Alexander Golitzin, from which I keep in mind an idea to which His Holiness almost reduced his entire theological contribution: between the New and the Old Covenant there is no distinction in their substance, but both of these Laws or periods send a unitary, organic message. The crescendo of the biblical and historical revelation of the Son of God has a natural progression, but without this evolutionary Self-disclosure being

confused with an overriding of Old Testament teaching by Christian tradition. In his position, Golitzin refused to conceive of any kind of *diastēma* [Gap, spaciality, interval (For „διάστημα”, see the works of Saint Gregory of Nysse: *Against Eunomius, Homilies on the Song of Songs, On perfection, The Life of Moses*)] or fracture between the Old and New Laws, or of any tendency of subordinating the Old Testament to the New one. Therefore, the synthesis of the Pentateuch and the prophets is not limited to the norm of retaliation only, and, on the other hand, the Gospels and Apostolic Epistles are tributary to the contribution of the chosen people, through its exponents, from Abraham to the first writer, Moses, and to the Forerunner of the Lord, the prophet John the Baptist. From Genesis to Revelation, the biblical accounts are presented in an organic continuum, as God’s words to mankind. „And every manifestation of the divine word in creation, in history, and in the final fulfillment of salvation, derives from Christ” (Feuillet 1971, 852).

#### *Inspiration*

All the positive attributes of the Bible lean against the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The universality, unity, and timelessness of the sacred texts, which we dwelled upon in this preamble, are also based on the infallibility of the Spirit, Who knows all things, Who teaches us everything, Who guides us into all truth, Who announces things to come (John 14, 26; 16, 13), and Who wants us to have life in the name of the Son (John 20, 31).

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3, 16-17).

The assistance of the blessed writers was accomplished neither by spiritual or mental possession nor by automatic dictation. The Holy Spirit works by cooperating with man, not by substitution and depersonalization. Thus, the inspired word is also a human word, subject to historical, cultural, and linguistic temporal conditions (Breck 1999, 41). Therefore, on a certain scale, inspiration is a universal phenomenon, which includes not only the authors of the books of Holy Scriptures, but

also the interpreters of sacred texts. In Orthodoxy, however, the teaching activity of the Church is reliant on apostolic succession, the doctrine formulated by the ecumenical synods and the authority of the diocesan bishop being the pillars on whom the dignity of the prophetic calling is exercised.

*Actuality*

The permanence or timelessness of the teachings drawn from the contents of the Old and New Covenants is based precisely on their inspired character. Because the anointed authors recorded their testimonies under the breath of the Holy Spirit, they were free from error in doctrine and they synthesized exactly those religious-moral norms by which every nation, from every age, would strengthen its charitable connection and communion with God.

From the pages of Scriptures, the Logos speaks to those born at the beginning of this millennium as relevantly and authoritatively as, from Incarnation to Ascension, He had spoken to His contemporaries with His own Mouth. The same Christ verbally communicated Himself to the prophets before the fullness of the time, the same Christ shared Himself in the collection of sacred texts, throughout our era, to all generations that preceded us.

„The Bible... is a breviary of reality” (Belu 2012, 413). The natural, vivid, and objective manner in which the authors of the sacred texts present their testimonies, provides us with an impressive collection of positive examples (to be followed), and of negative ones (to be avoided), respectively. Models of repentance are King David (2 Samuel [We are using the NKJV notation. The correspondent for the Romanian notation in this case is: 2 *Kings*] 12, 15-20; Psalm 50) or Saint Peter the Apostle (Matthew 26, 75), and counterexamples may be Cain the brother murderer (Genesis 4, 8-9), or Judas Iscariot the betrayer (Matthew 27, 3-5). Also, in this regard, life-changing models are Zacchaeus the former tax collector (Luke 19, 8-10) or Saul the former persecutor of Christians (Acts 9, 3-20), and counterexamples may be the unmerciful rich man (Luke 16, 19-23) or the murmurous thief, the one on the left of the cross of Christ (Luke 23, 39). Models of forgiveness are Joseph the Patriarch (Genesis 50:

14-22) or Stephen the archdeacon and the first martyr (Acts 7, 55-60), and counterexamples may be Simeon and Levi, the sons of Jacob and straight brothers of Dinah (Genesis 34, 7-31). Patterns of patience and meekness are Moses the prophet (Numbers 12, 3) or Job the righteous (Job 1, 20-22; 2, 7-10), and counterexamples may be the idolatrous Jezebel (1/3 Kings 18, 4; 19, 1-2; 21, 7-15) or King Herod (Matthew 2, 16-18; 14, 3-11). In the history of mankind of over six millennia, as it is captured in the sacred writings, the inspired accounts portray such varied characters that a preacher could find, during the preparation of his religious speeches, at least one example of a biblical character for every human virtue or vice that exists.

In each generation, the nature of God and the nature of man remain constant. It modifies and adapts only non-essential elements of the epidermis, and only related to people: the conditions and standard of living, the type of education received, the cultural and social context of the residential area, the technological status and degree of accessibility to the respective facilities etc. Beyond these surface fluctuations, the core of a person's being is always defined by the same psycho-physical structure and is animated by the same deep aspirations, over the centuries.

## **2. Interpretation of Holy Scriptures**

The books of Holy Scriptures do not offer a systematic exposition of Revelation, but a chronological, historical one. The reading of the Bible carries the citizen of every age through the entire journey of mankind on this earth. The language and optics of the blessed writers are distinguished by their sincerity, veracity, and their exceptional care to record reality without tampering or addition, without subjective excuses or accusations.

Through His words to man, God:

- reveals Himself;
- gives laws, commandments, or teachings;
- makes promises or announces future events.

Although close to us through the Incarnation, the Word of God remains covered by a veil within Scriptures, as if in a state of kenosis.

Therefore, guided by the Holy Spirit, the Church constantly interprets Him and, contemplating Him in the spirit of faith and unconditional obedience [Congregația pentru cler, *Directoriu general pentru cateheză* 2001, 104], „listens to Him devoutly, enshrines Him religiously, and exposes Him faithfully” (Conciliul Ecumenic Vatican II 1965, 10).

„The hermeneutic bridge between the biblical event and its actualization in the Church consists neither in the preached word nor in the ecclesiastical institution, but in the Person of the Holy Spirit” (Breck 1999, 35). The Helper has carried on the work of objective salvation of the world fulfilled in Christ, in the sense of the contribution that the Paraclete [Comferter, Consolater (gr. Παράκλητος)] has had (still has and will have) over the ages to the personal appropriation of redemption, on a subjective level, by every man, from all times and all places, up to the Parousia.

Providence’s work in the world has been conducted throughout history in the form of three concentric perspectives:

- the historical event itself;
- preaching the soteriological significance of that event, through the biblical author;
- the interpretation and updating of this preaching by the Church for each new generation (Breck 1999, 43).

From Saint John Chrysostom to modern biblical research, exegesis has been guided by the historical-critical and grammatical methodology of interpreting Holy Scriptures, in an attempt to answer questions about:

- the origin of the text (author, time and place of writing);
- the addressees of the writing;
- the purpose of the writing or its function in the life of the community;
- the original form (framing in a specific literary genre and grammatical study) (Breck 1999, 25).

The fundamental principles of the historical-critical method of interpreting the sacred text are:

- *the historical method*, which seeks to elucidate the historical processes that led to the appearance of sacred texts, taking into account at the same time the reception of those texts that address different categories of people living in different spatio-temporal circumstances;

- *the critical method*, which works with the contribution of scientific criteria, as objective as possible, from text criticism to critical study of writing, so as to make accessible to the modern reader the authentic meaning of biblical texts;

- *the analytical method*, which studies the sacred text in the same way as any other script of ancient origin and comments on it (Mircea 2015, 37).

During the Bible reading, for a Christian, the first obstacle to understanding is the act of *translation*. In a linguistic game, the *traduttore-traditore* (Baltra 2021 (contemporary attempt to harmonize the best intentions of the translator with the requirements of a faultless translation)) paronymy brings to mind the difficulty of preserving, through translation, the original meanings of a text. Every language has, on the one hand, various grammatical or structural peculiarities, and on the other, so-called „untranslatable” phrases and expressions. Along with all this, in the path of interpretation also interferes the gap of time, culture and civilization.

In Protestantism, the New Hermeneutics focuses on the function of language in understanding and interpreting divine revelation (Gibson 2005, 20, 24-25). At the same time, feeling the need for more depth, the biblical scholars of the Reformed denominations also became more and more interested in doubling the proper meaning of the scriptural phrases with a mystical, allegorical one. At the linguistic level, deconstructionism postulates that a text cannot be reduced to a single meaning or sense. Thanks to the genius of Origen, eighteen centuries ago, Christian theology already recognized all these essential subtleties. Of course, Reformed denominations seek spiritual nourishment especially in Scriptures, while

Orthodoxy enjoys the unaltered and uninterrupted worship of the Eucharist by apostolic succession.

However, out of a desire to serve the community and to reach the evangelical message as close as possible to the heart of man, Protestantism gives unallowed credit to the listener's personal experience (Radford 2005, 11-12), to the detriment of the authority of Scriptures and the Church. Thus, any common believer becomes a full agent of the act of communication and interpretation of the Word. In ignorance of ecclesiology, some Reformed pastors came to abandon the breath of the Holy Spirit to the latitude of the individual and the profane (Craddock 1976, 157; 1978, 92-95; 1985, 147-148). The title of Fred Craddock's work, *As One without Authority* (1971), says it all about moving the interpretive authority of Scripture from the institution of the Church and its representatives to members of the congregation (Allen 2011, 74), regardless of their training or level of knowledge. Leaving, therefore, too much room for manifestation of subjective opinion, there is a risk of remaining with a diluted theology, exposed to momentary impressions and even self-deception. However, there are also conservative voices in the West, in whose vision the biblical themes and approaches are chosen neither to increase the popularity of the speaker, nor to produce a sensational, amazing effect, but only starting from the sound principles of evangelical preaching, as God has always demanded of His heralds (Kaiser 1995, 6).

Even if the hermeneutics is not lead according to the taste and preferences of the audience, an act of biblical exegesis is undertaken exclusively *for the faithful* gathered inside the place of worship. The interaction between the homily and the audience will reveal or, on the contrary, obscure the correct understanding of the symbols and meanings of the selected pericope. As the Word of God was explained and applied to those who once heard it from the prophets, the Truth of Revelation and the words of eternal life must be brought to the level, understanding, and need of Christians of our time (Adams 1990, 39). Therefore, the priest will not stop at the first stage of interpretation, that of determining the meaning of an Old Testament or Apostolic writing in its original context,



but will use furthermore this knowledge to expose its current significance for the internal life of the Church, and for the Christian mission in the world.

### **3. Looking into the neighbour's yard: „the expository sermon”**

We point out from the beginning that this chapter is intended neither to promote nor to apologize for Protestant preaching. However, we consider that the right faith is wise and discerning to pick all that is good from every flower, like a Vasilian bee. We clearly state that Reformed preaching is still devoid of the liturgical and sacramental character specific to Orthodoxy. Though, this does not prevent us from paying attention to the level of excellence achieved by Western biblical scholars and the soundness of their study. Because the most prolific preacher does not allow us to ignore the danger of negligence: „Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10, 12).

As the Verbal Incarnation of the Logos, the Old Testament Bible precedes His Incarnation in human body and soul by the conception from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. Using Holy Scriptures as the main source for ecclesiastical orations, the homilist shows that he does not preach himself. At the beginning of the third millennium, the priest does not evangelize his generation, but actualizes the Gospel of Salvation in the hearing of his contemporaries.

The priest who does not draw forth the contents of his sermons from the divine biblical spring, succeeds only in being merely a word reciter, a word that no matter how dighted would become, remains nevertheless hollow and powerless in its effect over the hearts of the hearers (Belu 2012, 412).

Professor Reverend Father Dumitru Belu appreciated that the homilist who, preaching the Gospel, does not capitalize on the resources of the sacred texts, could be likened to an artist who, ignoring natural landscapes and life with its beauties, spends the whole day only in museums and art galleries, trying to find there a subject of inspiration (Belu 2012, 412). The content and form of biblical communication must nourish all three faculties of the spirit (intellect, affectivity, and will) or the entire human consciousness.

It is called an *expository sermon* [Definition based on the cumulative considerations of PhD Associated Professor Mihai Handaric, and Stephen and David Olford, respectively (father and son, biblical scholars and Baptist pastors, founders of the International Institute for Biblical Preaching)] the ecclesiastical lecture whereby a single concept is extracted and presented to the hearing of believers from the biblical text chosen by the homilist, fully respecting the contextual, historical, grammatical, and doctrinal significance of that pericope, with the specific purpose of determining among the audience, by application, a response that would transform the lives of the listeners into the likeness of Christ (Handaric 2007, 92, 95).

Not necessarily as a critique, but at least as a pertinent observation to the expression itself, the following are to be mentioned. A homily, a sermon whatsoever, is always expositive, because it presents and explains in detail a few consecutive verses, a certain concept, or a central idea. Therefore, the syntagma „expository sermon” seems, to a certain degree, to be pleonastic. Of course, when at the center of worship is the preaching of the Word, and when the source of the Eucharistic Word is no longer the Chalice and invocation of the priest, but Scriptures, then the sermon is treated as a last treasure. Consequently, by harassing, defrocking, and anathematizing Zwingli, Luther, and any other outcasted voices of the Reform, the western church threw outside of its court all the followers of the current for moral renewal. Sadly, getting acquainted with the Bible remained the only positive outcome for Protestantism. This is why, when saying „expositional sermon”, they show the Word of the Gospel as the center of their lives, and this is why, in the Reformed churches the Word is proclaimed, not just preached. Nevertheless, the original and thereby oldest expository form of preaching dates before Christ. A typical „d’var Torah” imparted a life lesson (remark the practical character!), based on Old Testament passages, then Talmudic and Midrashic ones.

We wish to outline here just *the structure of an expository sermon*, according to the rigors of the preachers of the Reformed denominations: introduction, the sentence of the sermon, the transition sentence, main ideas, secondary ideas, conclusion (Handaric 2007, 91, 169-224).

According to the theory and practice of neo-Protestant pastors, the expository sermon is extremely technical, which could serve, for an orthodox priest, as a model of total commitment and professionalism, and also as a stimulus to intensify the work of biblical research and fulfill the vocation of messenger of the Word of God.

Among the essential elements of the expository sermon, we note:

- the detailed exposition of the chosen biblical passage;
- the selection and exposition of a single central theme/idea from the sacred text (the „sentence” of the sermon links its major divisions with one another and ensures organical unity to the body of the speech);
- the biblical foundations that we are appealing of, the main divisions, and even the secondary ideas must be selected exclusively from the content of the chosen pericope;
- the main concern of the homilist is the sending and application of *the message*;
- by *application*, the teaching conveyed focuses on the listener, for he, finding out the answers he needed, would take steps towards the renewal of his life.

In addition to the expository sermon, in the western space we find two other homiletic genres, somewhat related:

- *textual sermon*, whereby the preacher is not strictly limited to the chosen biblical passage, but is also allowed to search in other places from the books of Holy Scriptures for developing the secondary ideas of his lecture;

- *topical or subjective sermon*, whereby, although the theme is appointed based on a certain scriptural pericope, the development of the main divisions of the speech takes place independently of the source text (orthodox homiletics recognize it as a *thematic* sermon, but the second name given by Western pastors suggests that too much freedom in the choosing of the theme and in the biblical grounds used, when extended to the whole of Scriptures, risks favoring the speaker capping, the mediocrity of exposing, and discretionary tendencies in argumentation).

*Biblical commentary* (verse by verse) and *the reading* of Scriptures are not the same as the expository sermon. They both lack the homiletic

structure, the unitary exposition, the central idea around which to organize, and the application (Batson 2008, 28-29). Also, not even the *exegetical homily* obeys all the rules of writing an expository sermon, but rather seems to harmonize the textual sermon with an expository one.

Modern criticism distinguishes three dimensions of Bible-based preaching:

- *the exposition*, which enshrines the relationship between the sacred text and the preacher;

- *the communication*, which aims at the interaction between the homily and the listeners, the actual act of preaching, using the most relevant means of accurate and current sharing of the evangelical message to the faithful;

- *the application*, that captures the meeting between the sacred text and the ecclesiastical assembly (Banting 2006, 42-44).

These three stages of the homiletical process are not to be placed in opposition or in competition with each other, but, dimensioned and proportionately balanced, they configure together the preaching algorithm.

Related to the expository sermon, we distinguish two planes (dimensions), which are being vital for the effectiveness of the preaching of the Word:

- *relevance* (preacher's purpose);
- *application* (purpose of the sermon).

### **3.1. Biblical and homiletical relevance**

Being a derivative form of the Latin „relevare”, which meant „to have (to create) an effect on something”, the term „relevance” possesses conditional and relational implications. A thing is considered relevant when it produces a significant and demonstrable effect on the subject matter to which it has been related (Bekesza 2018, 10). Fulfilling the requirement of relevance during the sermon, the homilist interconnects the sender of the original Gospel message with the receivers, over the centuries.

„Relevance is the heart of preaching” (Bekesza 2018, 5). In order for his presentation to be relevant, the priest carries out while preparing the sermon a process of shaping the eternal truth (Warren 1991, 463) according to the needs of his parishioners and the realities of his time. Relating truth to life involves intertwining a particular biblical social context with the world today. Preaching „in the gap” (Bekesza 2018, 6) designates a concept according to which the priest, through his lecture, has the mission to build a stable bridge between the biblical moment evoked and contemporary culture. The mastery of the homilist consists in the meaningful filling of that temporal and civilizational void.

Relevance delimits the distance that the Word of God travels from the pages of Scriptures to the mind, heart, and deeds of the believer. This does not mean, however, that the Church is so naive to slip into the extreme of absorbing a secularized and decadent agenda. The Bible is already written, thus the moral norms contained in it do not expire, do not allow for reevaluations, do not enter into public debate like human laws do, and are not repealable. The updating of the Word is not to be confused with following the trend or a local cultural current. Therefore, relevance is a two-way street, referring both to the recipients of the Revelation and to the One who reveals Himself. The relevance of preaching is not limited to the abidance of a function of cultural adaptation, but ensures that the communication and communion between God and the peoples of the different eras is maintained. The love of Heavenly Father remains inherently relevant to the truly essential needs and aspirations of man in every age.

### **3.2. Application**

„The application of sermon is not merely an appendage to the discussion or a subordinate part of it, but it is the main thing to be done” (Broadus 1944, 210). Many homilies begin promisingly, depicting the archeology and geography of the Holy Land, exposing various biblical data, but never reaching the listeners by the appropriate accessible and practicable lessons (Lim 2007, 91). The purpose of exegesis in general and

of expository sermon in particular is precisely the application of the contents, and not the display of the speaker's knowledge.

By application we mean the transposition of the teaching received by the members of the audience into the conduct of their daily life. If the relevance describes the process of relating the truth of faith to human life, then the application follows the process of relating the life and deeds of the individual to the confessed truth. Without application, the whole sermon (including memorizing and reciting Bible verses) becomes a banal and monotonous sequence of clichés. Authentic preaching of the Gospel does not resume itself to the repetition of platitudes and impersonal imperatives, but firstly finds the herald himself moved in his heart by the power of the Cross and the Word of God (1 Corinthians 1, 18), which penetrates to the borderline between soul and spirit (Hebrews 4, 12).

In theology, the Word of God is generally referred to as „logos”. Unlike the Greek term, its Hebrew counterpart, „dabar”, appears to be less intellectualized and yet richer in meaning. Being simultaneously word and action, the word „dabar” links the verbal transmission of knowledge (teaching) to its actual accomplishment (Bişoc 2001, 25). Except for Adam, all creation was built by the Word: „For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.” (Psalm 32, 9). Inside the word of the Lord lies an internal dynamism, a power that manifests itself under the rule of imminence and necessity. Language and action, commandment and fulfillment, the effectiveness of the godly words is personal and bears a name above any name, Jesus Christ (Philippians 2, 9-11).

The application is carried out in compliance with the following requirements:

- to conform to biblical truth accurately;
- not to deviate from the original intention of the author and the original purpose of the text;
- be relevant both to the biblical world (of the sacred text) and to the contemporary audience;
- to materialize (itself) by providing examples and practical evidence, so that believers can „visualize” how to implement the teachings received;

- to be intellectually persuasive, emotionally inspiring, and action-driven, so that evangelical principles may flow from the pages of Scriptures and from the mouth of the priest into the life and conduct of the Christian (York and Blue 1999, 73).

„Where the application begins, there the sermon begins” (Batson 2008, 18), Charles Spurgeon postulated. In the light of its social-pastoral dimension, the sermon is a self-exit, it is oriented towards the members of the audience. What distinguishes a sermon from other forms of religious discourse is exactly the ideal it aims at: *a change of (inner) state* of the interlocutor, reflected in the correction of his future behavior [„For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2, 26)]. The exposition of the eldest among the Apostles enlivened, created a strong impression on not less than 3000 men from the public. Eventually, however, the question automatically arose: „Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2, 37), to which Peter had an active response: „Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...” (Acts 2, 38) Only when it contains a calling to action can the sermon be applied, implemented, or put into practice.

#### **4. The relationship between Scripture and science: a choice between the revealed Truth and the scientific hypothesis**

During the existential crises, some of us give up on God’s Word or even on Providence. Personally, at one stage in my life, throughout my theological training, while preparing the sermon, I used to behave like this: although I wasn’t avoiding the biblical foundations, I still did not give them due priority, striving to capitalize primarily on the „scientific” argument. I underestimated the power and necessity of faith, on the one hand, and on the other, I outbid the conquests of technology and modern fields of research. It is understood, therefore, that I was placing human wisdom above divine wisdom, from which the anointed authors of the Holy Scripture’s books got inspired and thus misguided. At the moment, I am paying close attention to Pauline’s finding:

For it is written: «I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent». Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? (1 Corinthians 1, 19-20).

We rush, limiting the author of the *Pentateuch* to the science of his age. How could Moses' closeness to God, the intimacy of a mortal with „The One Who Is” (Exodus 3, 14), be assessed? On Sinai, spending forty days in total asceticism, „the gentlest man on earth” (Numbers 12, 3) was wrapped in the holiness and omniscience of the Most High. About the unspeakable state that the prophet experienced on the mountain of the Lord, Saint Gregory the Bishop of Nyssa dealt in depth in the work *On the Life of Moses* (Gregorii Nysseni 1968; Gregorius Nyssenus 2001; Sfântul Grigorie de Nyssa 1995; Sfântul Grigorie de Nyssa 2021). The testimony of those who saw him just descended from the heights, immediately after the Theophany, is enlightening:

Now it was so, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the Testimony were in Moses' hand when he came down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone while he talked with Him. So when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him... And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face... And whenever the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone, then Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with Him (Exodus 34, 29, 30, 33, 35).

The Maker of heaven and earth „spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (Exodus 33, 11). How, then, are the elements of biblical cosmology or the report of the creation of the world recorded by the Lord's prophet in the pages of the *Pentateuch* received skeptically by the public, while mere hypotheses, purportedly scientific and proven interested, are received as normative and authoritative so lightly? The answer does not honor the human species: for the scarcity or total lack of faith. Even some members of the clergy, although formally declaiming the inspiration of the Holy Spirit under which the hallowed authors wrote, yet by the way they relate to the Bible vs. contemporary science paradox, it turns out that they themselves suspect either the slipping of various



incongruities in the sacred text, either the fact that modern technology outperforms the means of knowledge and information available to Moses and to the writers who followed him.

We strongly postulate that Scripture does not contradict itself and is not being contradicted from the outside, by other sources, because so far no human mind, no independent research has been able to thoroughly prove any error or major deviation from scientific truth, infiltrating the canonical biblical text. A revealed dogma of the Church, a truth of faith confirmed by the ecumenical synods is perennial and steadfast. On the other hand, in human science yesterday's certainty is obsolete today, and today's certified discovery will be refuted by tomorrow's studies or measurements.

Let's refer to some concrete data and evolutions. In 1862, physicist Glasgow William Thomson estimated the age of the Earth at a maximum of 400 million years. At the same time, to justify his theory of species evolution, biologist Charles Darwin already considered this time period insufficient. In 1911, geoscientist Arthur Holmes classified one of the rocks he had measured by radiometric dating as 1.6 billion years old. Therefore, in the second edition of *The Age of the Earth*, published in 1927, discussing geological eras, he proposed the age of 3 billion years for the planet, to later add half more. In 1956, Clair Cameron Paterson will move to the isotopic dating of the uranium lead decay chain from meteorite fragments (<https://www.meteorologiaenred.com/ro/edad-de-la-tierra.html>), finally reaching the Methuselah age of 4.55 billion years (*Age of Meteorites and the Earth*) (Patterson 1956, 230-237). Consequently, what we emend in these lines is the easiness with which each scientist, professor or researcher advances the results of his observation and experimentation work, the haste with which he revises or completely replaces the old hypothesis with the new one, someone else's thesis with his own, always with the claim of definitive precision and absolute scientific rigor.

Compared to the Earth, we are told that the Sun is 50 million years older, which for any decent biblical scholar should be a cause for concern regarding the soundness of science's claims. This is because the Book of *Genesis* (1, 14-19) clearly states that the two great luminaries were

created by God only during the fourth day of creation – nota bene! – *after* the earth had already sprouted vegetation and various seeds, during the third day. Undoubtedly, the flora did not appear thanks to the beneficent light of the Sun, but was made only by the word of the Creator, before the star of the day existed. So, our children should be taught that, according to the Holy Scriptures, the Earth is older than the Sun, not the other way around. Nevertheless, they don't even hear this in Church anymore. Therefore, biblical optics leaves no room for question: the sun is also the fruit of God's work. The sun only sustains life on earth and does not represent the primary cause of its appearance, so there is no reason to idolize it. Jewish biblical cosmology is geocentric and creationist, obviously, while the secularist perspective has remained stuck in the atheist heliocentric model.

The same stalemate would hold back our reasoning even if we were to consider establishing the distance from Earth to the Sun, which is stipulated today at almost 150 million kilometers. In the second century B.C., Iparh calculated a 7% value compared to the one that has been accepted today. We jump straight to 1761, when, taking advantage of the collinearity – once in a lifetime – of the Earth and the Sun with the planet Venus, at a certain moment of its transit, Jerome Lalande raised up the number to 153 million kilometers. What tools will a French astronomer have had at his disposal a century before the invention of the light bulb, and half a century before obtaining the continuous flow of electric power? How does the current scientific information fit with Moses' will, or with the unthinkable mysteries and knowledge that the „mouth” of the Lord announced to him? This last question I asked remains open, and the answer will be constructed by each of the readers individually, throughout life, as they advance in virtue and cognition.

However, we find it difficult to accept as emanations of truth any statements which are made in fields whose objective is, *ab initio*, the exclusion of the Creator from His creation. We believe in a Personal God, Who brought the world into existence out of nothing. The formal curricula of education are far estranged from the teachings of the Church, and – dare we say it – even from objective reality. For a long time, science has

been guided by hypotheses and mathematical formulas that were filling the blackboards, but were simultaneously ignoring the necessity for replication or verification by experiment. According to the warning of a visionary and a genius like Nicola Tesla, this is the way to project scientific theories that will have nothing to do with the sense of reality, or with the world we live in. The Czech scholar discerned, of course, between science (necessarily provable) and pseudoscience (operating on hypotheses, speculations, and values on a scale that could never be reproduced or ascertained). Thus, for fear that he may have been entirely right, we often recall Pauline's warning:

For it is written: «I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent». Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe (1 Corinthians 1, 19-21).

### **Conclusion**

The religious text could not be found anywhere in a purer and more plenteous state than in the pages of the Bible. „Scripture is... the vademecum of the preaching priest” (Belu 2012, 411), but not as a result of piety, nor on the lack of scientific training of the theology graduates. With the sacred text of the Bible as its background and source of inspiration, the exegetical homily has been the most natural means by which the priest has addressed the faithful participating in the Lord's Supper, since the first centuries. By integrating his sermon into the liturgical framework, the preacher has the opportunity to effectively guide, on a weekly basis, the spiritual course of the parish community that has been assigned to him (Vintilescu 1930, 30, 35, 85, 98).

At the end of the preparatory Confessional prayers [This set of prayers, which are pronounced by the priest before the actual confession of the sins made by the penitent, is called „molitfă” in the orthodox rite], the priest declares himself a mere witness to the confession of the penitent. The Apostles did the same when they preached: „That... which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked

upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life... we declare to you" (1 John 1, 1, 3). The orthodox preacher's appropriate standpoint regarding the proclaiming of the Gospel should be based on the attitude of Saint John the Baptist: „I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before Him... Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3, 28-30). We can only conclude with a question: how do we look to Jesus Christ in our sermon? How does He grow from the homily we hold? Which are the sources and the contents of ideas that have spread Christianity all over the world? The outcome of the Apostles' and the Church Fathers' preaching from the richness of Holy Scriptures are well known. Our work, on the other hand, is still ongoing...

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