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The art of preaching in the information society

Балаклицький М. А. Проповідницьке мистецтво в інформаційному суспільстві. Найбільш значущими є дві особливості гомілетики в інформаційному суспільстві: 1) технологічна оснащеність / опосередкованість проповіді й 2) змагання проповідників за увагу аудиторії. Технічні засоби обіцяють примноження аудиторії церковного казнодійства. У свою чергу, доступ до нової аудиторії змушує проповідника докладати більше зусиль до того, щоб формувати її мотивацію (с)прийняти почуте.

Ключові слова: *медіа, комунікація, інформаційне суспільство, церква, проповідник, проповідь, православ'я, протестантизм.*

Балаклицкий М. А. Проповедническое искусство в информационном обществе. Наиболее значимы две особенности гомилетики в информационном обществе: 1) технологическая оснащенность / опосредованность проповеди и 2) соревнование проповедников за внимание аудитории. Технические средства сулят умножение аудитории церковной проповеди. В свою очередь, доступ к новой аудитории вынуждает проповедника прикладывать больше усилий в том, чтобы формировать ее мотивацию (вос)принять услышанное.

Ключевые слова: *медиа, коммуникация, информационное общество, церковь, проповедник, проповедь, православие, протестантизм.*

Balaklytskyi M. The art of preaching in the information society. Two features of homiletics have the biggest significance in information society: 1) technological equipment of a sermon, and 2) preachers' competition for the audience's attention. Technological means promise multiplying church sermon's audience. In its turn, the access to a new audience forces a preacher to put more efforts to form this audience's motivation to accept the matters heard.

Keywords: *media, communication, information society, church, preacher, sermon, Orthodoxy, Protestantism.*

The 21th century makes researchers to talk about desecularizing processes: «In the last decades of the 21th century religion ceased to be considered as something able not to exist at all, – the most prominent contemporary Ukrainian scholar of religion remarks, – it goes only about the ways how it will be changing (if it will) and how it will change the world and humanity» [5:14]. Secularization project of Western Europe is now understood rather as an exception confirming the common rule: today's world formed by (mass) media [10] contains unalienable religious component.

Social communications studies cannot be complete without analysis of religious

communication where the central place belongs to different forms of mediated preaching. And when we speak about the specifics of homiletics in the information society, what we compare them to? Post-Soviet area consists of post-atheistic countries. Current state of their religious (Church) sphere stems from two previous periods: a) Russian Empire's mass religiosity being now heavily mythologized with up to opposite modality, and b) Militant secularism of Soviet regime. Let us underline the peculiarities of church eloquence, which became noticeable in the post-Soviet time.

«Obviously the main Ukrainian nation's denominations are Orthodoxy and Protestantism»

[9:2], and we will consider the peculiarities of church eloquence on the material of Russian speaking Orthodox and Protestant preachers' speeches who mostly live in Ukraine.

Homiletics is an art of preaching. A sermon is an admonition, an appeal of a priest / minister / church activist to those who in his opinion are in need of such admonition. Who are in conscious need or – as gomilet feels – in need because of their staying outside of Church gates. Besides a preacher's desire to speak, such an admonition needs a basis, a motive, a credibility. For both Orthodox and Protestant believers such a credibility is as a rule a supernatural source, basically a miracle – a myrrh-streaming icon, the Holy Fire annual emanation in Jerusalem or a Charismatic pastor as a unique anointment carrier. On the more rational, down-to-earth level such credibility for Orthodox believers is the authority of the Church, for Evangelicals it is a God-inspired nature of the Bible.

Social and scriptural sources of authority in Christian preaching can hardly be separated. For mass Orthodox conscience the local priest embodies the voice of the world Orthodox Church whereas the Holy Scripture is almost never considered as a source of spiritual standards. Despite manifesting of belief in «the Bible as it is»¹ Evangelical denominations appear to be a «hermeneutical community» [12] – an editor and a frame of individual perception of biblical text.

In the unique in European context polyconfessional situation of Ukraine [8] a new, «own» vision of the sacred text, new understanding of religious motives can be (and often is) a reason to switch a confession. Having accented such an authority a preacher introduces him / herself to his / her audience as a mediator, even as an envoy in the name of this authority: he/she is either a representative of priestly hierarchy in Orthodoxy or a cognoscente of biblical text or even a prophet, «the lips» of Holy Spirit in Protestantism.

By «a sermon» in our essay, we will mean an uttered, sounding sermon rather than a written one. Uttered sermon uses more audience's channels of

perception, it is more spontaneous, emotional, and more psychologically loaded.

Two features of homiletics have the biggest significance in information society: 1) technological equipment of a sermon, and 2) preachers' competition for the audience's attention.

Mediatization – technological indirectness – of contemporary Christian homiletics is noticeable in the fact that especially in the Evangelical context [2] preachers strive to record their «live» speeches for sharing among those who was not one of their direct listeners. An audience's virtualization, stratification is taking place: «this sermon is not just for you». A listener can see that in his / her participation in the worship service and perception of such information and reaction to it he / she is not alone. There are like-minded people who can witness the quality of his / her actions, and encourage him / her with the similar answer to what they have heard. A preacher can suggest an audience to share with others not only impressions of his / her speech but also its recorded copies. In such manner, a sermon crosses the borders of a church building. The problem of a recorded sermon is lesser persuasiveness of its message: «this sermon is addressed not only to me». Especially its text variant can seem to be a nondescript fragment of dramatic theatrical action experienced by a direct listener.

It is not already a pulpit (ambo) but a microphone becomes a sacred artifact, which gives the right to proclaim in the name of the Almighty. Sound amplification comes here in the symbolic sense as an analog of a heavenly word. Working cameraman transforms the way of presenting sermon even further. Gomilet faces the necessity to «mind the camera». He / her elaborates an «internal posing». Contrary to the popular opinion, it is not necessarily an affectation or hypocrisy. A preacher is rather aware of additional, second audience's potential so he / she tries to appeal (like it is done in papal epistles) *urbi et orbi* — to the City and to the world.

The researchers speak about three epochs of mediatization [3]. The first epoch is script, the second one is printing. The third one is air, stream communication of radio and television. Post-Soviet churches entered the third epoch in the early 1990s.

One can discuss to what extent post-Soviet countries became a part of global information society since that time. With greater confidence we can notice that since the end of the 20th century local churches got access not only to the printing

¹ To compare: the Internet collection of video sermons by Baptists of Odesa city in Ukraine is entitled ChistoPisanie.com. There is a play of words in the phrase «chisto Pisanie» in Russian. It can be pronounced as a single word «chistopisanie» meaning «calligraphy» – an obligatory subject in primary schools associating with diligent pupils getting good marks. Written as two words «chisto Pisanie» means «sola Scriptura» («only Bible») – one of the main principles of European Reformation. Here the word «chisto» should point to the moral purity, and integrity, ideological solidity of proposed sermons.

but also to TV and radio broadcasting, billboard advertising, the Internet, and to the right to hold mass meetings outside a congregation's buildings.

As a result, an unprecedented (by Soviet times' standards) audience got generalized, fleeting impression of peculiarities of liturgy and homiletics of Orthodox and Protestant churches by means of those communication channels. A communication, even journalistic act, not a religious, spiritual one, took place. Multiplying the audience required the cost of lowering quality of perception of a homiletic message [1].

The second feature of church eloquence in information society is a preacher's competition for the audience. Audience's attention is no longer implied. A listener should be attracted and kept. Physically remote, mediatized audience should be created. And every time it should be re-created again. In post-atheistic context, a preacher, a theologian does not have a predetermined zone of action and influence. Theology «is a guest» [7:92–93]. It is not a listener's loyalty or his / her spent time that matters but his / her attention and / or even imagination.

Historically Orthodoxy and Protestantism followed one of two liturgical paradigms described in the Bible. The first paradigm is the service in the Jerusalem Temple; the second is synagogue meetings that go back to post-Babylonian reforms of the high priest Ezra. As Catholicism, Orthodoxy adopted the replacement theology – the Church Fathers' teaching about the global Church as a «new Israel». It is when a local congregation aims to organize the church building and the worshiping service in it following the example of the Jerusalem Temple: a Father (priest) as an analog of the ancient Israel high priest, Eucharist as an analog of a sacrifice, etc. In their turn historic waves of Protestantism – Master Reformation (Anglicanism, Lutheranism, Calvinism), Radical Reformation (Baptism, Mennonism, Adventism), spiritualism (Pentecostalism and Charismatic renewal) – move from Church's image as «a religious professional in a special building» to a synagogue paradigm – non-hierarchical interactive meeting of believers.

Gomilet's competition for listener's attention evolves along one of these two trajectories. It is either attempts to perform a unique action, to make sermon a part of a mystery or a sacrament (the one missed hearing / has not reacted the right way means cannot be saved), or a pursuit to make this influence as if indirect («maybe it is a sermon but maybe not»), betting on creating (illusory) relations with a listener.

These paradigms are intertwined oddly in some preachers' speeches. The characteristic features of ritualization («Temple tradition») in Protestant preaching are following: a preacher's vestment (Protestant preachers' clerical collars instead of usual neckties, neck crosses over the shirt, finger rings); inscriptions in the worshiping hall that stylized as the Old Church Slavonic script; semidarkness penetrated by soffits; candles (seven-candle-stick is quite popular, it is associated with the Temple's Menorah); a soft music improvisation at the start of the sermon and more often at the end.

In his / her turn, one can note the features of secularization (protestantization) of Orthodox gomilets' preaching manner: contemporary Russian language without Byzantine and Old Church Slavonic elements; rude expressions² [4; 6]; deliberately emotional performance; inducing audience's feedback, reaction, (quasi)dialog; emphasized actuality of the message (especially of political topics); stylization: a) youth slang, b) national stereotypes (mass notions about certain ethnic groups), c) subcultures of social stratum (criminals); body language – first of all gestures slightly larger than life.

A gifted (media) preacher is not just uttering certain words. He / she is not just delivering a speech but is playing a piece – mostly one-man show. And is trying to appeal to different channels of perception.

As in any skill, a mastery in church eloquence is characterized by seeming ease in delivering material. A mediatized sermon of «live broadcast», era of immediacy is undergoing inevitable dephilologization, is gravitating toward «second orality» [11]. Basing on script and rational preparations, a preacher seeks to create an impression of improvisation, of an absence of such preparations.

Manner of «familiar talk» is particularly distinguishing for gomilets of recently established Protestant confessions. Here a preaching performance (as if) offhand can be presented as a mark of inspiration, guidance by the Holy Spirit. It

² «There is no hell at all!» Why not when you live in hell! Don't believe? Go to a mirror, look at your gloomy mug. How can the crown of Creation, the highest creation of God have such a gloomy face? Why you so bad? If you're so smart, such a direct, all free, you behold't mean anything to you, you know? Why do you have such a face some unhappy? Because you're in hell, son. You don't know genuine pleasure. You're dead. Everything is hard for you, you nasty, you all suffer. You want somewhere to go, somewhere to sleep. Something to forget. To get drunk, to get pricked, to get away from it. Have you, darling, for a long time in hell, from which the only way out is to God» (archpriest Dimitry Smirnov, Russian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate).

is a post-bookish trajectory: at first, preaching out of the pulpit, then without even a small transparent stand or even without a Bible copy in the hand. Even without referring to the sacred text. Then there is only an experience left – the last bastion of postmodern man.

A sermon can appear as something non-religious at all: a seminar, a lecture, a consultation. But its genre and stylistic mimicry does not

necessary entail the hollowing of its essence. These can be the attempts to overcome the inertia of its perception, to break the stereotyped routine.

Thus technological means promise multiplying church sermon's audience. In its turn, the access to new audience forces a preacher to put more efforts to form this audience's motivation to accept the matters heard.

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