

PhD THESIS

**EVOLUTION, PATTERNS AND PARADIGMS IN EVANGELICAL
PREACHING**

Scientific Coordinator

PhD Professor Habilitated, Corneliu SIMUȚ

PhD student

Cornel Adrian MOCAN

The work *Evolution, Patterns and Paradigms in Evangelical Preaching* has as a subject of study the way in which patterns and paradigms have evolved in Romanian evangelical preaching (especially on the territory of Romania). This is a matter of public theology, because preaching is an act of public presentation and proclamation of the gospel. The subject of this paper does not only fall within a certain field of study, but is interdisciplinary. Therefore, it is proposed to use specific means, analysis and theological, historical or even sociological investigation, in order to be able to outline a clearer understanding of the phenomenon of Romanian evangelical preaching.

Therefore, one cannot speak of a monolithic, theological unity in church practice, when trying to define the evangelical space. The evangelical movement is a much more complex phenomenon from a historical and theological point of view, even though this is not the subject of this thesis, but the synthesis made by Alister McGrath may be helpful in understanding some evangelical paradigms. In addition, the purpose of the study is not to clearly delimited in the Romanian evangelical space, that is why it is limited to the three great Romanian evangelical traditions, which form together the Evangelical Alliance.

As a result of the present research, the situation of evangelical preaching in Romania is announced to be an ambivalent one. On the one hand, there is concern about the lack of reaction of evangelical churches. The rapid evolution of society affects the way people respond to messages transmitted through preaching. You can "navigate the wave of change" or you can be "drowned" by it. One cannot question the change of identity or the rejection of the history and tradition of the Church, because they are part of the ethos of our faith and are the ones that laid the foundations of today's Christianity, but neither can one allow "lockdown in the past". Preachers cannot afford to remain static in a dynamic world and society.

Motivation of choice

Evangelical communities have always been particularly marked by the phenomenon of preaching. In the absence of liturgical elements specific to historical churches, preaching is the focus of services from evangelicals. The phenomenon of preaching in the Romanian evangelical communities (and not only) has evolved several phases and situations. Interestingly, although one can speak of an obvious evolution of this phenomenon, there are still communities today where its preaching and approach has remained well preserved in the spirit of the early times. Resistance to change and

evolution has been and has remained in rights in minority communities – be they religious, ethnic or cultural.

Our approach will try to identify the paradigms of the Romanian evangelical preaching, from the strictly guiding and eminently inspired approach of the moment (only to the pulpit), to the appropriation of some principles of rhetoric and hermeneutics necessary for a good public communication of the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. There is also a certain specific terminology that deserves all the attention: preaching with grace, anointing, message from above, divine inspiration, momentary guidance, etc. All these and more are part of the evangelical and especially Pentecostal ethos that builds paradigms and approaches in preaching over time.

It is considered that the subject of preaching from this perspective is an extremely important one. The comprehensive nature of this subject will help evangelical churches in Romania to get to know each other from a perspective that is difficult to appeal to. Such an approach is vital especially in the already mentioned context in which, in an evangelical service, preaching is not only the most important part of the service, but is usually at least half the time of a divine service.

The originality of the research

In the Romanian evangelical space there are no studies regarding the understanding of the phenomenon of preaching from an evolutionary and paradigmatic point of view. Studies (most often translated) are strictly in the area of preaching textbooks or homiletics courses, in various approaches.

A doctoral thesis that takes into account the evolution and paradigm of preaching in the evangelical space falls into the area of public theology. The approach itself is a theological and homiletic path to understand the implications and developments within the community. The way in which preaching is understood and perceived is also related to the assumption of the implications and the appropriation of the public agenda by the evangelical Christian. This study proposes to identify the way evangelical churches think and relate to the call to be salt and light. This study aims to have an interdisciplinary character, so it will represent an important contribution in the field of evangelical theology in Romania. An investigation into preaching takes into consideration both understanding the community from an identity and dogmatic point of view and highlighting the cultural evolution of that community. There is a close connection between the culture of a society and preaching, as E.C. Dargan says: "the link between preaching and the progress of human culture is real and extensive." The same author demonstrates that in the end: "the general course of

events ... the rise and fall of governments ... habits and morals ... arts and sciences" are aspects of a culture to which the act of preaching also relates.

Research objectives

The purpose of the investigation is to identify an ethos of Romanian evangelical homiletics, in the broader context of evangelical roots. The conceptualization and systematization of some paradigmatic homiletic principles of the Romanian evangelical preaching are important, as well as the identification of typologies. It is attempted to understand the Romanian evangelical preaching, in the context of the science of communication and more specifically as an integral part of the general principles of homiletics. In this regard, it will be studied understanding aspects of art, talent, exercise and explaining the dimension of dramatic art in preaching. From the study on understanding the tandem: preaching and theology, it must be understood in what extent preaching represents a public presentation of evangelical theology and the identification of trends in Romanian evangelical preaching.

Working methods

The work *Evolution, Patterns and Paradigms in Evangelical Preaching* has as a subject of study the way in which patterns and paradigms have evolved in Romanian evangelical preaching (especially on the territory of Romania). This is a matter of public theology, because preaching is an act of public presentation and proclamation of the gospel. The subject of this paper does not only fall within a certain field of study, but is interdisciplinary. Therefore, it is suggested to use specific means, analysis and theological, historical or even sociological investigation, in order to be able to outline a clearer understanding of the phenomenon of Romanian evangelical preaching.

In order to support in a thorough way what it is written, all four classical forms of argumentation will be used, namely: biblical, historical, rational and empirical. The study undertaken by this work uses, as a scientific research process, the method of sociological analyses and biblical exegesis, specific to theological investigation. Also, there are certain aspects, which the proposer of the thesis, as a preacher, observed in connection with the phenomenon of evangelical preaching. Following his personal observation, he has formed opinions, which he wants to verify through the means of sociological analysis, so that later, he can systematize several typologies and paradigms of the Romanian evangelical preaching.

As stated above, the following methodology will be used in this paper, namely, the qualitative one, which includes: analysis and synthesis; also the quantitative one, such as: the interview and the questionnaire.

Methods specific to theological investigation

Methods specific to empirical investigation: Questionnaire and interview

Questionnaire:

Using this approach of an empirical science, such as sociology, we try to understand what the paradigms of the Romanian evangelical preaching are and to outline its typologies. This study uses a questionnaire applied to 2049 respondents. Their profile is outlined as follows:

Personal profile of the respondents: It belongs to an evangelical Christian denomination, because the proposed research refers to the Romanian evangelical space consisting of the three confessions that constitute the Evangelical Alliance in Romania: Baptist, Christian according to the gospel and Pentecostal. It is known that the Romanian evangelical space is more diverse and there may be other movements or churches that fit into the evangelical canons. The questionnaire tries to keep a proportionality report as close to reality as possible.

Of the 2049 responses, the number of Pentecostals who responded is 1,422, the number of Baptists 357 and that of Christians according to the gospel is 270. However, the proportionality of the research is close to the reality in the official statistics of the National Institute of Statistics. Therefore, it is considered that the study is relevant and representative for the Romanian evangelical environment.

The interview is one of the most used methods of qualitative research, being preferred in many cases because it offers the possibility of establishing a direct link between the author of the study and the interrogated social actors, based on direct and unrestrained verbal communication.

In developing the argumentation of our thesis, we also use the interview method, which is applied to a group of 8 representative evangelical leaders. Some of those interviewed have well-known university careers, others excel in church administration and leadership, all of whom are well-known preachers in their communities and have a constant presence on the evangelical public stage. The interview has 24 questions, those interviewed not being obliged to answer all of

them, but only those to which they consider necessary. The interview also offers a great deal of freedom of expression, in terms of the form and extent of the answers.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study analyzed the Evolution, patterns and paradigms in evangelical preaching in general but with applicability to the Romanian space, a subject little known in Romania (and by the Romanians), but a problem that has a primordial value both for those who pastor, preach and for those who live in the evangelical ecclesiological space. Because preaching, as has already been demonstrated in the course of this work, is a fundamental act of vital importance for evangelicals.

Evangelical Christianity, through its simplicity and openness to modern cultural elements, can be a possible answer for the God-seeking man, from the twenty-first century, when technology is developed at a very high level, when access to information is very easy, when obtaining a Christian book or a good Christian article, is at a click away and the physical barriers to communication between people seem to be being demolished. All these technological advancements can be used for easier transmission of the Gospel.

As Albert Mohler said, "We preach because God has spoken," so there is no room for half-measures or improvisations when addressing the subject of preaching. Preaching is a message from God to His people, therefore, it must come from Him, blessed by Him and which, when preached by pastors, bring glory to God. But this truth must not exclude the preparation of the servant. In this sense we recall the assertion with which we began this thesis and we refer here to Paul David Tripp who said: "there is too much mediocrity in the church of Jesus Christ when it comes to preparing pastors for the sermon and then in approaching the presentation of the message", so that the preparation of the messenger who transmits the gospel of Christ must be a deep and high quality one.

The last part of this research contains the conclusion that sums up this work through three important parts: the first presents the trends of Romanian preaching, the second one emphasizes the influences of Romanian preaching, and the last part shows the ethos of Romanian preaching.

THE TRENDS OF THE ROMANIAN PREACHING

"As a result of this research, the situation of evangelical preaching in Romania is announced to be an ambivalent one. On the one hand, there is concern about the lack of reaction of evangelical churches to societal changes. The rapid evolution of

society certainly affects the way people respond to the messages transmitted. It can "navigate the wave of change" or it can go bankrupt "crushed" by it. There is no question here of changing the identity or rejecting the History and Tradition of the Church, because all these constitute the paradigmatic elements of the Christian faith. Also, the Romanian evangelical movement has elements of specificity that are valuable and that define its ethos. But when we talk about the art of gospel communication, it is not productive to "lock in a glorious past." Preachers cannot afford to remain static but confident in Providence must always find a way to present the immutable message of the gospel in a relevant and impactful form.

On the other hand, in a positive sense, preaching remains a fascinating vocation and art. As we have seen throughout the thesis, the Romanian evangelical space is not without the fascination for this art. When it is preached, not only are the words of eternal life spoken, but it is achieved using the personality and creativity of the preachers, in order to let the spoken Word shine. The purpose of inner transformation of people is an essential homiletic aspect, which is why the preaching of the Gospel cannot be lost in a past characterized by thunderous successes, but still remains an indisputable mandate of the Great Commission/Savior, valid until parousia. Therefore, a balanced and optimistic attitude regarding the Romanian evangelical preaching can be maintained, with a few conditions:

- If it ceases victimization and it begins to assume failures in the field of preaching, just as Nehemiah identified with the sins and rebellion of his people (Nehemiah 1).
- If the work will be taken more seriously than it has been until now, when we will proceed to the appreciation of education in general and the theological education in particular, and when there will be time to plan and refine messages with skill and preachers will become ready to step out of their comfort zone, to thrive in excellence, becoming serious about spiritual and moral issues.
- If the church ceases to take quality preaching as such and it will properly sustain dedicated ministers.
- Finally, the encouragement of Jesus' promise, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18), remains valid.
- Preachers are not the ones who work alone on this necessary renewal, but in reality they are merely tools of Providence because the Holy Spirit works in them "willingly and acting to accomplish their good purpose" (Philippians 2:13).

THE INFLUENCES OF ROMANIAN PREACHING

One can talk about a certain Orthodox influence in the Romanian evangelical preaching. In both Catholicism and Orthodoxy, the focus of Sunday service is not preaching, but the liturgy. One of the most influential Catholic theologians of the last century, Henri de Lubac, said: "The heart of the mystery of Christianity is our participation by the grace of Christ in the internal life of the Godhead." In Orthodoxy, one speaks of the concept of deification of man through participation in Christ. Therefore, preaching cannot be dissociated from the administration of godly grace in the liturgy. One of the elements of the specificity of Orthodox preaching is this participation in mystery.

The mystical, pneumatological element of this approach is sometimes found in evangelical preaching, especially in pentecostal preaching. In evangelical traditionalist environments there is also a certain rhetorical form, very similar to the Orthodox typology. The characteristics of this typology are: sobriety, a certain specific priestly tonality, inflexibility, sacredness and traditionalism. Just as preaching in Orthodoxy is related to the liturgy and the church building, there are also traditionalist evangelical communities in which preaching cannot be imagined outside the walls of the church (or outside the pulpit, the association with the altar in the Orthodox churches, even if it is not explicitly done, it certainly exists). All these influences, however, are not paradigmatic, but only create certain local homiletic typologies.

THE ETHOS OF ROMANIAN PREACHING

From the analysis of the eight interviews, which are to be presented in the Annexes of this paper, some preliminary conclusions emerge. As a result of the data research, we can see some common identical elements of the Romanian evangelical preachers questioned. First, there is their conviction that a life of genuine faith is the fundamental element of a preacher. Practicing Christian virtues, living in the truth of the Scriptures, keeping a living personal faith, all these are absolutely essential for an evangelical preacher. The messenger is therefore himself a message, as the Apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:3: "You are shown to be the epistle of Christ, written by us as his servants, not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tables of stone, but on tables which are hearts of flesh." In the context of scandals

surrounding the morality of some preachers, the fundamental truth that the preacher must live what he preaches must be reaffirmed.

Then another conclusion that emerges from the interview is that the secret of a good sermon is thorough preparation. Unlike the traditional churches in the Romanian space, in evangelical churches, preaching is obviously much better prepared and more consistent (this is also due to its centrality in the Sunday program). This preparation consists of many hours of study in order to be able to logically organize a biblical message, which can then be presented in front of the meeting. All those interviewed said that they organize their material for the sermon on a sketch, so that the presentation could flow logically and eloquently.

A third element that emerges from sociological study is that there are certain aspects that have changed in the preaching of those who answered the questions. These changes are not radical, but only a refinement through maturation and an openness to new generations. The changes relate in particular to the way the sermon is presented and not to its content (stylistics, not sermon theology). This openness to the new in terms of style is a characteristic of evangelical preaching in the traditional Romanian context. The ability to evolve, to change with discernment, to adapt to the times, proves that the Romanian evangelical movement has vitality. Connecting the preacher to the reality of the generations he speaks to, will make the sermon much more relevant. In the context in which the traditional Romanian churches for most of the year are empty, the relevance of preaching makes our churches have a much better participation rate (and where there are preachers with a vocation, the churches are still full).

Fourth, the importance of predicate development through study is evident in all respondents. Just as a good doctor learns all his life, it can be said that a good preacher is always in a learning process. In preaching, capping means death. As collective memory is kept alive by technology through the internet, the preacher is doomed to come up with something new all the time. Therefore, engaging in various educational projects (Bible schools, postgraduate studies, etc.) helps him in preserving the freshness of his message.

Fifth, one can see in the answers given, the importance of mentoring. The fact that these preachers had mentors (they were also mentors) shows how important discipleship is.

Healthy, sustainable growth always takes place in the context in which the preacher is connected to others (in this case, it is about the relationship of organic, living interdependence that must exist in the Church). It is not very hard for a preacher to become a good one, as hard as it is to remain credible and effective over many years. Preaching is also learned from other preachers, to whom it must be viewed aspirationally, with admiration, and who through mentoring can help in overcoming all the challenges of the service (the temptations of popularity, power, finances, etc.).

Sixth, there is one element encountered in all interviews, and that is that the absolute model of preaching is the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, it was tried in the first part of the doctoral report to present, as a saving solution for the crisis of evangelical preaching, the comparison of the current preaching with that of Christ (as we find it in the Scriptures). It remains the only normative standard of preaching.