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Orthodox Sermons, read by a Lutheran

Lutherans distinguish between Orthodox sermons on Christ and on the Virgin and the saints. Orthodox often distinguish between sermons at Sundays and at the feasts and on the saints. All these sermons are preached in Communist countries, some of the preachers distinguish sharply between unpolitical sermons and often political speeches and some do not.

In *Bulgaria* Patriarch Kiril has published more volumes with sermons than any other preacher. The first three volumes were published when he was Metropolitan of Plovdiv (1938–53). They are not so much sermons (Bulgarian: *slovo*) as lectures (Bulgarian: *beseda*). They are longer than sermons and not delivered in the usual Orthodox style. Nevertheless, Professor Stephan Zankov called them sermons¹. Professor Todor Todorov called them lectures, but treated them from a homiletic point of view². There is thus some justification for treating these lectures as sermons.

These first three volumes, published in 1943, 1945 and 1946, have the same title, *At the Well* (*Pri izvora*). They contain lectures on selected passages from the Gospels. They treat of Jesus Christ, not of the Mother of God or the saints. Much of the material concerns the relations between the Church and the outside world and deal more with social cultural problems, and with the relations between believers and unbelievers than his later sermons proper.

In volume I one lecture has the heading: “Come and see.” These words are mandatory in the same degree for believers and unbelievers, for those who are indifferent and those who doubt. Even unbelievers and sceptics cannot remain indifferent towards Jesus. Come and see: see how much the spirit of Christ has done for the progress of mankind (I, 150–57).

Without God’s righteousness civilization becomes crudely materialistic. Without the high culture of the soul, civilization loses its positive meaning for mankind. It is transformed into an enormous tissue

¹ Verkündigung und Forschung, Theologischer Jahresbericht 1956/57, Lieferung 3 (München 1959), p. 219.

² Omiletica (Homiletics) III (Sofia 1959) pp. 194–97, and “Homiletic Values in Patriarch Kiril’s Works”: in Godišnik na Duhovnata Akademija (Yearbook of the Theological Academy), Sofia 1954, pp. 1–86.

of matter, entirely lacking in soul (II, 21–23). When man considers his reason to be God's gift, a gift for which he is responsible to God, such an understanding of the responsibility of reason and science is objected to by many people who consider themselves to be the sole protectors of the liberty of science. There is no danger of love limiting knowledge (II, 218–24).

Salvation is necessary to ensure that everything else – learning, technology and art – should not be devoid of meaning (III, 14–17). Knowledge in the hands of evil is transformed into a powerful weapon against man and his culture. What does it profit mankind when society gains many goods, but loses its soul (III, 58–59)? Christ's words must be applied to the problems of peace, economics and culture (III, 84–85). Society is sick and must be cured by following the will of God (III, 95–96).

The fourth volume, *The Word of Life* (Slovo na života 1953), contains lectures on selected passages of the Epistles. As in the preceding three volumes, Patriarch Kiril treats of Jesus Christ, not of the Holy Virgin or the saints. This volume does not deal with the problems of the outside world in the same degree as the preceding volumes. Science and culture are mentioned, but not so much in contrast to the Christian faith.

The last six volumes have a single title *The Way of the Lord* (Put Gospoden). They were published as follows: volume I 1957, II 1959, III 1961, IV 1963, V 1965 and VI 1969. Here we meet typical Orthodox sermons on Jesus Christ, the Mother of God and the saints. They do not deal much with social and cultural problems and contain generally twice as many sermons for Sundays and feast days as sermons and speeches on different occasions. Kiril became Patriarch in 1953; communist hegemony dates from 1948.

Sermons for Sundays are mostly preached on Sundays in Lent. The Sunday before Lent is particularly favoured, treating both fasting and forgiveness. Fasting is one of the means towards the complete discipline of the human personality (IV, 27–30). Repentance and general forgiveness will mean that if you have Jesus before your eyes you will inevitably be indulgent towards others and severe towards yourself, you will love others (IV, 22–24).

Preaching on Good Friday, Patriarch Kiril says that the Son of God suffered and was crucified in order to reconcile men with their heavenly Father. Man's enmity with God was removed by Christ. Jesus Christ cleansed men through his death (IV, 61–62). A sermon on

Easter Day deals with faith in the resurrection as the essence of the whole evangelical teaching (V, 70–71).

At the feast of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin we are urged to pray to her for salvation, and for God's help to hear and understand the words of Jesus (III, 55). At the feast of the Intercession of the Holy Virgin (Bulgarian: pokrov) Patriarch Kiril preaches one sermon only on the Virgin (on her protection and intercession: III, 70), and another sermon on God the Father and his Son, in which very little is said about the Virgin (IV, 89–93).

Sermons on the feasts of saints are particularly numerous because Patriarch Kiril preaches so often in churches on their patronal festivals. Sometimes the sermon mentions the saint only at the beginning and at the end, sometimes the sermon deals principally with the saint of the day. At the special "Sunday of the Bulgarian saints" all their names are mentioned in detail.

Professor Todor Todorov has published a text-book in three volumes on *Homiletics* (volume I 1956, II 1957 and III 1959). The preacher's personal life is emphasized, he must have special qualities. Among the religious qualities are mentioned the feeling of God's presence, the inclination towards intense prayer, a deep conviction of the truth of the Word of God, love and devotion to the cause of God's salvation, and hope directed towards God which makes the preacher a real optimist (I, 51–52).

Professor Todor Todorov has also published three volumes with the title *Practical Homiletics* (Bulgarian: Praktičeska omiletica, volume I 1963, II 1964 and III 1966). The volumes I and II contain comments on the gospel and epistle for the ordinary Sundays. The largest part of volume III comments on the biographies of the saints. They are written for the clergy, but I read them with all their narratives and episodes from daily life as useful sermons for ordinary people.

As the two first volumes comment on the gospels and the epistles of the whole ecclesiastical year, these "sermons" treat of the power of God, the redemption of Christ and the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit, human sin, repentance, prayer, humility and faith. These "sermons" do not deal much with the Virgin (for instance I, 11), the saints (e.g. I, 138, 258, 259–63 and 268–72) and the Tradition (e.g. I, 191 and 226). The same can be said about volume II. I feel that much more than half of the contents could well have been printed in a volume of Lutheran sermons. Two thirds of volume III deal with different saints on their special days.

In 1971 Bishop Nikolaj, the former principal of the Theological Academy in Sofia, published a volume of Sunday sermons (Bulgarian: *Glas na blagovestieto*). They are formed as themes, usually related to the gospels of a whole year.

I shall quote the first half of the themes and underline the special Orthodox ones: Christ the light of the world, remote from father's house, human ingratitude, salvation of one house, persistence in prayer, pride and humility, the terrible Day of Judgement, love and forgiveness of all, true fasting, Holy Orthodoxy, the first cause of our illness (sin), following Christ, the power of faith, the possibilities of the flesh and the spirit (this sermon deals almost only with *Saint Maria of Egypt*), divine and human glory, life conquers death, the unbelief of an apostle, the women with the ointment, the knowledge of God, the grace of the Holy Spirit (among other things, the seven sacraments), we shall confess Christ (on this Sunday of All Saints the saints are not mentioned), on the following Sunday all the *Bulgarian saints* are mentioned, Christ calls men to follow him, care for body and soul, the virtues of a Roman officer, the possessed and their acts, faith and miracle, the light of the world (mostly about Christ, a little about *saints*), faith in God and its foundations, bodily and spiritual thirst, faith and doubt, the power of faith, divine and human forgiveness... The largest part of these themes and of the contents of the sermons might have been printed in a volume of Lutheran sermons.

In 1943 Metropolitan Nikodim of Sliven and a priest published a collection of sermons for all the Sundays in a year. In 1967 a third edition appeared, "adapted to the demands of a new age" and with two new sections: sermons on feast days and sermons on different occasions³.

Most of the Sunday sermons, on the gospels, resemble Lutheran sermons, only little is said about the saints (for example p. 28, 147, 152 and 162). Christ is the central figure: the risen Christ is the source of life and light in the spiritual world (p. 1). A large part of the people has left the Church and God, some even maintain that Christianity is something evil, that our age is without faith, but Christ's redemption and resurrection have conquered all the powers of evil (pp. 34–38).

Among the 26 sermons on feast days 3 deal with the Virgin's Annunciation, Assumption and Presentation and about ten with the saints.

³ The Bulgarian title is *Nedelnik*.

Metropolitan Sofronij of Dorostol has published a collection of sermons (Bulgarian: *Sbornik propovedi*) in three volumes (I 1974, II 1976 and III 1980)⁴.

Volume I contains sermons on the feasts of our Lord and on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday (pp. 7–176), sermons on the feasts of the Virgin (pp. 179–252) and on Sundays before and during the Lent (pp. 255–326). There are 7 Christmas sermons: The Son of God teaches us a true knowledge and praise of God and reconciles us with God, we shall entrust ourselves to God (against Herod) and learn to defend our faith (as Stephen). There are eleven Easter sermons: Christ's resurrection confirms the truth of his words, deeds and suffering and proves his divinity. Without his resurrection no preaching, no Holy Spirit on earth, no church, no salvation and no human resurrection. Most of the sermons on Maundy Thursday (eight) deal with the suffering of Christ as do the sermons on Good Friday (four).

The feasts of the Virgin are her Birth, Presentation (seven sermons), Annunciation (two) and Assumption (five). In a sermon on her Assumption (pp. 218–220) it is said according to Tradition that she loved to walk where Jesus had walked, and prayed for the conversion of the Jewish people and for the building of new churches. At her death she wished to see the apostles round her bed. Her body was taken to heaven. But she did not leave the world as she prays for it.

Volume II contains sermons for each Sunday during the year, 132 sermons as there are several sermons for some Sundays.

Volume III mostly contains sermons on the saints on their annual feast day as fixed in the Orthodox calendar: the saints open our eyes to the spiritual world and show us through the Orthodox faith how to reach salvation. They are the light of the world and the salt of the earth preserving the world from corruption and showing it holiness. Most of the sermons deal in detail with the life of the saint in question, but a few sermons only mention their names and treat of the Bible and the Christian faith.

Patriarch Maksim succeeded Patriarch Kiril in 1971 and has published *On the Field of our Lord* (Bulgarian: *Na Gospodnjata niva*), I 1975 (pp. 507) and II 1981 (pp. 437).

In both volumes there are sections with his sermons, speeches and

⁴ These three volumes could not be bought in the bookshop of the Holy Synod, but only at a special depot of books for Bulgarian “specialists” – on account of the small issue.

greetings delivered at New Year, at metropolitan elections and episcopal ordinations, at ecumenical and peace conferences ... on his visits to foreign Churches, on foreign churchmen's visits to Bulgaria ..., but there is no section with sermons on Sundays and feast days.

In volume I among 175 sermons, speeches and greetings I found two sermons for New Year: Time is God's blessed gift which we shall use for our own perfection and salvation, we shall also be Christ's witnesses, love our neighbour and work for peace on earth. In Palestine Patriarch Maksim preached three sermons on Christ's resurrection, birth and cross – with little reference to the special occasion.

In volume II I found ten sermons for different occasions, nine of which were preached during his visit to North America. These sermons deal with the apostles Peter and Paul, church and prayer, the church as God's house, the Virgin, light and witness, Christ's cross, love and peace, the saints, human faith, love and peace, God's house and humans as the temple of God, God's house and Kiril and Methodius.

These volumes of sermons are what I found during my many visits to Bulgaria during a period of 25 years, 1956–1981.

The following two *Rumanian* volumes make a clear distinction between sermons on Sundays and on the feasts and on the saints. *A Sower went out* (Rumanian: Iesit-a semanatorul), Timisoara 1974, contains sermons for each Sunday in the year (pp. 7–180), sermons at the great feasts (pp. 183–249), and sermons at the feasts of some saints (pp. 252–315).

These sermons are preached by different preachers, most of them living in Banat. The sermons for Sundays mainly cover the common Christian message. Christ's resurrection proves that also we shall rise from the dead and stimulates us to carry out conscientiously what we have to do (p. 7). All the external forms of cult are visible signs of worship in spirit and in truth, but these forms have no worth before God when our soul is full of the stains of sin (pp. 31–32). The descending of the Holy Spirit is celebrated by the whole of Christianity as the founding of the Christian church (p. 46). God cannot forgive our sins when we do not forgive those who sin against us – many believers do good works, not on account of their religious worth, but out of pride in order to be praised (pp. 155–56). Nevertheless there are also special Orthodox traits. The saints are models of spiritual life, they have followed the ideal example of Jesus Christ, and being near to God they are our protectors and intercessors (p. 66). The Orthodox

cult for the dead has fixed special dates commemorating them (p. 117). During the liturgy is performed bloodless sacrifice (p. 174). Many Lutherans will, however, like the Orthodox, stress that salvation depends on a cooperation between God's grace and man's free will.

Among the sermons on the great feasts are sermons on the four feasts of the Virgin, her Birth (she is born as other humans), Presentation (she is stainless in body and soul), Annunciation (she becomes the spiritual Mother of all believers) and Dormition (more than all mothers she has watched the Life she has born, the dormition is only mentioned in one line). From a moral point of view the cross means the cleaning from sin, universal love, humility, and the restoration of human nature. When Christ was baptized the Trinity for the first time revealed itself.

Most of the sermons on the fixed days of the saints deal only with the saint concerned. Four sermons treat, however, more of other subjects than the life of the saint: Christian life, culture, love and peace, Christians as light in the world.

Another volume, *Sermons* (Rumanian: *Predici*), Bucharest 1979, contains sermons for each Sunday of a whole year (pp. 9–290), and sermons on the great feasts and on the feasts of some saints (pp. 291–402). All the sermons are preached by Rev. St. Slevoaca who stayed in the USA 1969–77, sent by the Rumanian Patriarchate.

In the following analysis of the sermon themes, the special Orthodox traits are underlined: We shall bear witness to Christ's resurrection showing him in our life, house and work. Faith is a divine gift. In addition to Holy Scripture we have *Holy Tradition* which helps us to interpret Scripture. Whitsuntide is a permanent event, a present blessing in the church. God has created us without our approval, but he cannot save us without our approval, we are able to receive or reject the gift of the divine grace. *The saints* have opened themselves for this grace and cooperate with it, they are proofs of Christ's sanctifying power, intercessors and models for us. The Eucharist is a *bloodless sacrifice*. Faith, love and witnessing have weakened because believers do not sufficiently drink of the spring which is the liturgy. Christ is the living bread: truth, love and life. Fear comes from the lack of faith. It depends to a high degree on parents whether their children become believers or not. God forgives our sins only when we forgive. No layman has the right to interpret Scripture independent of the teaching of the church. Sermons are now heard without interest, the Bible is not read and people are not transformed by the words of Scripture, faith

· and the help of Holy Scripture are needed. Humility can only be learned at the feet of Jesus. At the last judgement God represents justice and not mercy, but he will look for works of love. “In the spirituality of the Eastern Church *icons* occupy a place of secondary importance ... Orthodoxy means the right faith ... Orthodoxy is nothing else than faith in our Saviour Jesus Christ ... who continually works through the Holy Ghost for our salvation” (pp.259–60). True repentance is a complete change of life, a deep grief and a decision to omit sin.

There are sermons for three feasts of the Virgin. The Annunciation: the “cult” of the Mother of God is predicted in Scripture, it increases our love of her Son, through her we have received Jesus, her intercession is powerful as it was in Cana. The Assumption: the Virgin sits beside the throne of her Son and is our heavenly queen, according to Tradition her body has been raised into heaven. The Presentation: tradition says that she as child stayed in the Temple of Jerusalem until the Annunciation, the Son cannot refuse her intercession.

Only six saint-days are mentioned, it is deplored that the church today lacks strong, heroic and fearless souls.

Bishop Vasile Coman has published a volume *Cuvîntari*, Oradea 1980, which among other sections contains sermons for each Sunday (pp. 137–408) and sermons for the feasts (pp. 411–508). Bishop Vasile uses the Rumanian word for speech (*cuvîntare*) synonymous with the Rumanian word for sermon (*predica*).

Here again is an analysis of the themes of the Sunday preaching with the special Orthodox features underlined. All the witnesses of Christ’s resurrection are mentioned. Women have a Christian mission especially in the family, the *Virgin* is merely mentioned. Through the *sacrament of the Anointment* we receive the Holy Spirit. The divine grace conquers sin and creates a spiritual life. Christ is the light of the world. Faith is necessary for the knowledge of God and communion with him. Through the descending of the Holy Spirit we became members of the Body of Christ. On the Sunday of All Saints only the apostles and not the names of the *saints* are mentioned. After the descending of the Holy Spirit the apostles became courageous men. Divine Providence does not limit human liberty. The soul’s ornaments are love, humility and faith. The soul is worth more than the herd of pigs. Love of neighbour contra egoism. Hypocrisy is *infirmity* and pride. Christ is the bread of life. Prayer is connected with faith and love. Prayer and fasting are the Christian weapons. The law of forgiveness.

The current interest of the divine commandments. The steps of Christian perfection are purification, enlightenment and perfection. The cross is a sign of God's love and of human reconciliation with God, the *Virgin* is mentioned. The salvation of the soul. The use of the talents, the work is blessed. Keep the faith through works! The three virtues are righteousness, love and mercy. The Conqueror of death. The Sower is Christ. Help the poor! Not all prayers are granted. The courage of faith. Who is my neighbour? The rich man often forgets God. Gratitude towards God. Sunday reminds us of Christ's resurrection. Christ is both Son of Man and Son of God. The life in Christ. Repentance. Gratitude. Faith is the source of blessedness. Christ in our family life. Humility. Approaching God in faith, hope and charity. God's goodness, returning home. At the Day of Judgement God is both love and righteousness. The Sunday of fasting and forgiveness. On the Sunday of Orthodoxy the Virgin and the saints are not mentioned, but the true Orthodox Church as "our spiritual mother". Christ has *killed* sin and shown mercy towards the sick. Self-denial. The cry of faith. The *sacrament of Penance*. We preach the crucified Christ. Christ predicts three times his sufferings. Christ's entry into Jerusalem. More than 80% of the contents of these sermons might have been printed in a Lutheran sermon collection.

Sermons for the feasts deal with the New Year, the Trinity, Ascension Day, Whitsuntide, Christ's Transfiguration, the Holy Cross, Christmas – and with the Annunciation (through the Virgin God has descended on earth, she stands higher than the saints), Assumption (This sermon, along with others, is missing from the volume) and Birth of the Virgin (we cannot reach Christ without meeting His Mother, the model of the most perfect Christian life) – and with many saints (the sermons almost only deal with the saint concerned).

The Rumanian Patriarch Justinian (1948–77) has published twelve volumes⁵ under the common title *Apostolat Social* with speeches, messages, greetings, letters and articles and with no "sermons for Sundays and the great feasts". Several speeches are delivered on special saints' days. There are some sermons on different occasions. Only one sermon is described with the Rumanian word for sermon (*predica*), as far as I can see. It is preached at the 1900th anniversary of the deaths of the Apostles Peter and Paul (IX, pp.228–33): They have founded our faith and our spiritual house, the church, on Christ's words and

⁵ Just now I have only at hand volumes I–IV and VIII–XII.

"resurrection. We praise them for preaching Christ, his love and peace, in the whole world known at that time, and for their epistles. We *should* live in love with all men and serve God who has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation⁶.

Patriarch Justin (since 1977) has, as far as I can see, not yet published a volume with his sermons, speeches and greetings. I have found no review of such a book in Rumanian periodicals.

Grigore Critescu (died 1961) produced a typewritten textbook on Homiletics (pp. 726) (in the 1950's): "There has never been a religious movement of any importance ... and never a revival of genuine piety ... without increasing the vitality of the sermon" (p. 175). If the Bible remains a *terra incognita* for the preacher, he is a spiritual illiterate. He must read and become absorbed in the Bible, but he must also personally live it. "The prophet represents the only force which can de-Satanize the world and re-humanize man who has become an animal" (p. 197). "The coals from the altar" (Isaiah 6,6) and the tongues of fire have transformed him from a contemplative and hermit man into a militant and heroic one. The preacher should not be occupied with his opinions of his listeners (after the sermon), but with their works. "Without the spirit of love the pulpit is inert and without resonance. In order to know the problems which torment the world the preacher must live in the middle of the world and live in God so that he may solve them". Men must see truth living in the preacher. Incarnate truth sanctifies life, but the sanctified life reveals truth. Truth is not a gift, but it is only won after a severe fight. The sermon should be a source of real life. The preacher must know his own generation and time from within, otherwise he speaks an unknown language and about a lost world. He must live up to the word: "I believed and therefore have I spoken" (II Cor. 4: 13), otherwise the sermon remains remote. Instead of waking believers to new life, it will kill the preacher himself. The preacher must do penance, pray a great deal and never give up studying. "The religious indifference of our time is very often provoked by the rationalism and scholastic intellectualism of our sermons". Sin is not an abstract conception, not a fiction, but a tragic reality in the life of man. Infidelity and atheism attack the foundations of the entire supernatural life, our faith. The preacher of our time must be an apologist⁷.

⁶ I have written an article on "The ecumenical Aspects of Patriarch Justinian's Speeches" in *Diakonia*, Bronx, New York 1979, no. 2, pp. 145-50.

⁷ Alf Johansen, Theological Study in the Rumanian Orthodox Church, The

Rev. Nicolae Petrescu has published a text-book on Homiletics for the theological seminaries (Bucharest 1977, pp. 280), the first one printed since 1922. It is founded on Scripture, Tradition and the cult and teaching of the Church. The author insists on the culture of the preacher and the sanctification of his life, the preacher must pay attention to current social problems and remember that the preaching of the word of God always at any place is a divine order. Petrescu does not distinguish between occasional “church speeches” and sermons and treats Patriarch Justinian’s speeches from a homiletic point of view (pp. 68–74).

The *Russian Orthodox* preacher who published most volumes with sermons (and as far as I know the only one) is Metropolitan Nikolaj of Krutitsy (Moscow). They were published I 1947, II 1950, III 1954 and IV 1957. Sermons from the first three volumes were translated into French and published by the Russian Orthodox Patriarchal Church in Paris in 1956. They were systematically arranged: 10 sermons for the feasts of Our Saviour, 9 sermons for Sundays (on biblical texts), 6 for the feasts of the Virgin, 10 for the feasts of the saints, 10 on texts from Scripture, 5 on liturgical texts, 6 on theological and 8 on different subjects. As this French systematic edition may have been arranged especially for Western readers I prefer to use the four original Russian volumes which are chronologically arranged and do not distinguish between sermons on Sundays, on the feasts or on the saints.

In the four Russian volumes *Sermons and Speeches* (Russian: *Slova i reči*) the sermons cover two thirds in volumes I and II and only one half in the volumes III and IV. The sermons are always unpolitical, but the speeches often political.

At the last Christmas during the war Nikolaj spoke about “peace”. But he did not mention that Stalin was securing peace by conquering the Nazis. He spoke only about the peace of God: Where is the peace which Christ left on the earth when people fights people. In fact only on the surface of the ocean there is often such a terrible heavy sea and only in a relatively small depth begins the kingdom of quiet and stillness which the storm can never reach. The peace which Christ gave to the earth is above all peace with God and lives in the soul which has given itself to God and loves him. This peace cannot live in humans

Faith Press, London, 1961, pp. 35–39. In 1961 one half of the Rumanian theological textbooks were printed, the other half were typewritten.

• who steadily sin with clear conscience because they think that God forgives all, also when they do not repent (I, 23–24).

These sermons speak often about repentance. Man can, however, be so powerless that he cannot even repent: Lord, open the door of repentance for me! You can easily imagine a wanderer who in the night becomes surprised by a snowstorm on his way to a house where he expects to find refuge. It is very difficult for him to see and walk and when he finally finds the door his frozen fingers cannot open it and he cries: Open the door, I am freezing (I, 76–77).

The sermons deal more with the sufferings of Christ than with his resurrection: “He took on himself the whole weight and the whole abomination of our sins in order to suffer so much for them at Golgotha on the cross and through these sufferings and death gives forgiveness to each repenting sinner” (I, 169).

At the cross Christ indicates the disciple he loves and says to his mother: Behold thy son. “He declares her to be the Mother of his disciple and in his person to be the Mother of the whole of mankind: I entrust to your heart and your love the whole of mankind which is redeemed through my blood... For each sinner who weeps over his sins she is motherly intercession before her Son” (I, 134–135).

“Our Lord surrounded us with a whole crowd of our heavenly helpers and intercessors and we not only ... want to imitate them (the saints) ..., but we also approach them for their blessings and support” (I, 140).

These sermons deal, however, much more with Christ than with the Virgin and the saints.

Volumes II, III and IV are quite like volume I. “Why shall we above all seek God’s kingdom?... If a man in his heart has gained the kingdom of God ... he has everything even if he has no earthly good things – and if he does not find the kingdom of God, he has nothing even if he possesses countless good things of this world” (II, 32). “All that we, as Orthodox believers, have in this life, all that is happy and dear, is given us through the power of Christ’s resurrection, for our faith stands upon this miracle as upon a rock” (II, 265).

“When a man is surrounded by hardships, sorrows and sickness he should remember that nothing happens in his life without the will of God. The believer knows that God visits him through sickness and trials in order to bring him nearer to Himself through these things” (III, 35–36). “When a man forgets to think of the salvation of his soul ... his soul begins to get benumbed and die. His memory retains no

knowledge of his immortal soul, his conscience becomes silent, his heart is not frightened by God's coming judgement" (III, 194). Nikolaj speaks about "our heavenly Father and our heavenly Mother" (III. 47. 50 and 177).

"If we were to bear the punishment for our sins according to ... God's righteousness, all of us would perish in eternal life... But the Son of God took our sins upon Himself and only He could redeem them through His death at the cross" (IV, 91). "The Holy Church reads at every divine service the word of God, preaches it and demands those who have holy books to read this word at home" (IV, 158).

Metropolitan Nikolaj speaks more about repentance, human holiness, human sufferings, good works, the Virgin, the saints and the church than do Lutheran sermons. Nevertheless about one half of the contents of his sermons might have been printed as Lutheran sermons.

The Russian Patriarch Aleksij (1945–70) published four volumes Sermons, Speeches, Messages, Greetings and Articles: I 1948, II 1954, III 1957 and IV 1963. They contain almost the same sections as the Bulgarian Patriarch Maksim's two volumes and as in Maksim's volumes there are no sections for sermons for Sundays and feasts. Like Metropolitan Nikolaj, Patriarch Aleksij does not draw a sharp distinction between unpolitical sermons and his often political speeches. There are very few real sermons. One sermon in 1941 speaks almost only of the patriotism of the church and the help of God in a righteous cause (I, 43–46). Another sermon in April 1945 tells how the congregations sought God's help during the war (I, 117–18). Besides there is a short Easter sermon in 1947 (I, 159–61). A sermon in 1954 deals with Saint Aleksij whose name the Patriarch has taken (II, 167–68). A sermon in volume IV (pp. 38–40) treats of the Holy Spirit coming to earth: We do not as the apostles hear the noise and see the spiritual fire when we with love and emotion receive the word of God. Our Lord created his Church which is God's fortress for us.

Patriarch Pimen (since 1971) published in 1977 a volume called Sermons, Speeches, Messages and Greetings (pp. 455). This volume contains almost the same sections as Patriarch Maksim's two volumes.

A special section (pp. 93–141) on the Preached Sermon contains 23, often short, sermons. The Sunday sermons are preached on the Sundays in Lent (4) and on the Feast of All Saints (2) which is the first Sunday after Whitsuntide. Patriarch Pimen speaks especially much about repentance and general forgiveness. "The crowd of the saints

“bears witness to the power and the significance of the blessed gifts of the Holy Ghost” (p. 115). Four sermons are preached at the Feast of the Transfiguration of Christ which “shows that the kingdom of God begins on earth” (p. 122) – and two are preached on Good Friday: according to God’s love of the human race the Son of God should teach us to love God and each other and reconcile the human race with the Heavenly Father (p. 139).

Four sermons are preached at the feasts for the icons of the Mother of God and two on the days of two saints. In addition the Virgin and the saints are often mentioned. “A Christian is happy because he has not only an earthly mother, but also a Heavenly Mother” (p. 93). “The Holy Church does not forget the Mother of God ... at the Feast of the Transfiguration ... we feel her protection and motherly love through her icon here” (p. 105). Pimen speaks much about the connection between the church on earth and the church in heaven. Several sermons are preached on different occasions.

Professor Archpriest Aleksandr Vetelev published a typewritten text-book for students at the two Theological Academies on “The Theory and Practice of Preaching” (1949, pp. 359): “Preaching means to dispose the flock to spiritual revival”, the preacher himself having already experienced such a revival (p. 16). The question of the personal qualities of the priest has “in our days received special significance in the eyes of believing people”. Is it worth believing when the guides of faith are not trustworthy persons? (p. 54). The sermon’s holiness and responsibility stands much higher in the eyes of believing people than in the eyes of a careless priest. The priest is called to pray for every one. Such a praying state of mind is able to evoke in his soul a love of God and a love of men, for prayer is communion with God.

Unbelievers do not attend services and believers do not need scholarly arguments in defence of the faith. “Therefore under the present conditions the main opponent of the faith is not the unbelief of the unbelievers, but the weakness and defectiveness of the faith of the believers, the weakness of their moral life, and the sins in their personal, family and public lives” (p. 157). The popular preacher should appeal directly to the conscience of the believer⁸.

Løgstør/Dänemark

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⁸ Alf Johansen, Theological Study in the Russian and Bulgarian Orthodox Churches, The Faith Press, London, 1963, pp. 25–30.